

**ARS INIMITABILIS:
THE CHURCH COMPLEX OF ST. LEONTIUS AT VODOČA**

Dedicated to my Professor Petar Miljković-Peppek

Although the domain of historical studies still looks upon Emperor Samuel as a portrait of a controversial ruler, most of all due to the ideological and political residues in the methodological approach of certain scholars¹, the Samuel's era does not generate any unsustainable debates in regard to the creative capacities of the period fulfilled with remarkable aesthetic accomplishments. On the contrary, the individual who bore the name of an Old Testament power figure (Fig. 1), who inflamed this part of the world with his ambition for establishment of an imperial realm and lived up to his dream for a rivalry with the Byzantine ruler, has self-created a portrait of a monumental historic figure with an authentic and productive cultural concept² which has outlived not only the chronological, but the historic boundaries of Tsar Samuel's state, as well. Besides the establishment of a vast territorial estate that occupied a significant portion of the Balkan Peninsula and the successfully managed military campaigns against the Byzantines³, this powerful medieval *autocrator* has commissioned, at least, several religious monuments "adorned" with remarkable architectural, as well as artistic features.

¹ In regard to the efforts of some authorities in the domain of Byzantine studies to give Tsar Samuel a stately reference, one can notice that most of them resulted in association of the Emperor with the title of Bulgarian sovereign, among the first see N. Adontz, *Samuel l'Arménien roi des Bulgares*, Mémoires de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres 38 (1938), pp. 1-63; among the recent – С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава: Обим и карактер*, Београд 1997; on the contrary, the most renowned Byzantine scholar in the domain of historic studies, G. Ostrogorski gives Samuel the title of Macedonian tsar due to the geographic configuration of his state, the center of which was located in medieval Macedonia, cf: Г. Острогорски, *Историја на Византија*, Скопје 1992, pp. 361, 368-369.

² E. Dimitrova, *V. I. Personalities in Medieval Macedonia. Five Paradigms of Supreme Commissionership (11th – 14th century)*, Folia Archaeologica Balkanica III (2015), pp. 603-605.

³ С. Антољак, *Средновековна Македонија I*, Скопје 1985, pp. 432-443; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 60-71. М. Б. Панов, *Византиска Македонија*, in: П. Кузман, Е. Димитрова, Ј. Донев (Ed.) *Македонија. Милениумски*

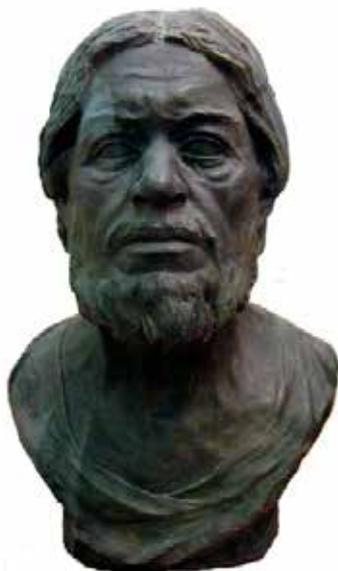


Fig.1 Portrait of Tsar Samuel, forensic reconstruction

Сл. 1 Портрет цара Самуила, форензичка реконструкција

In that context, the basilica dedicated to Saint Achilles (Fig. 2), erected at the end of the 10th century on a small island in the Prespa Lake, with its architectural configuration announces the architectonic exhibitions of the Byzantine builders from the later centuries⁴, while its metaphrasic altar fresco decoration, as we have already shown in one of our previous Niš & Byzantium papers⁵, prefigures the complex theological and painterly concept that would become an inspiration for the Kurbinovo fresco ensemble some two centuries later. Hence, the appearance of the subsidiary chapels which were constructed as separate architectural units framing the main altar and were covered by small domes⁶, in other words - configured as individually shaped constituents of the spatial anatomy of the sanctuary – should be considered as a true novelty with productive and far-reaching consequences for the development of Byzantine architecture in general. The same goes for the fresco painting, which, although devastated and preserved only in remnants⁷, stands for one of the most avant-garde deco-

ration in the period of the Middle-Byzantine painterly production. In that sense, another monument which chronologically originates in the Samuel's era can be enumerated among the distinguished artistic attainments (Fig. 3), although physical devastations, numerous re-building phases, adaptations of the architectural corpus, demolished fresco decor and reconstructive enterprises, have irretrievably taken away the best part of its one time visual, artistic and aesthetic glow.

The realm of Byzantine studies owes its knowledge on the historic, social, architectural and painterly features of the church complex of Saint Leontius at Vodoča to the honourable Professor Petar Miljković Peppek⁸, who transformed

културно-историски факти, Скопје 2013, pp. 1182 – 1193.

⁴ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale*, Milano 2006, pp. 34-40.

⁵ E. Dimitrova, "The da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, in: Niš and Byzantium. Eight Symposium. Collection of Scientific Works VIII, Niš 2010, pp. 250-251.

⁶ On the architecture of the basilica of Saint Achilles at Prespa see: N. Moutsopoulos, Η βασιλική του Αγίου Αχιλλείου στην Πρήσπα, Συμβολή στη μελέτη των μνημείων της περιοχής, Α, Β, Γ, Θεσσαλονίκη 1989.

⁷ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Фреските и иконите од X и XI век во Македонија (Во периодот на Самуил и по него)*, Културно наследство VI (1975), pp. 40-43.

⁸ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, Скопје 1975.



Fig. 2 The church of Saint Achilles at Prespa
Сл. 2 Црква Светог Ахилија на Преспи



Fig. 3 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča
Сл. 3 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи

the pitiful remnants of the one-time Episcopal center, eroded by time and left to permanent devastation (Fig. 4), into an attractive architectonic organism (Fig. 5). Besides the reconstruction of the monument, funded upon his long term



Fig. 4 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča in 1953

Сл. 4 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, изглед из 1953. године



Fig. 5 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča

Сл. 5 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи

investigation of the remnants of the building structure and the fresco ensemble, the efforts for revitalization of the shrine the genuine architectural configuration of which should have been adorned with the restored fragments of the original ensemble, as well as the profound analyses of the iconographic and painterly features of the preserved decoration, Professor Pepek has also established the chronological stratification of the Vodoča complex⁹. Based upon archaeologi-

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 19-26.

cal, historic and sociological parameters in the methodological approach, as well as upon the analyses of the architectural, iconographic and stylistic features of the preserved elements of the visual structure of the complex, Pepек's chronological resonance encompasses four phases in the configuration of the church ensemble dedicated to Saint Leontius:

- I phase – Byzantine domed basilica (erected in the period 7th - 9th century)
- II phase – renovation of the Byzantine domed basilica (executed at the turn of the 11th century)
- III phase – erection of the cruciform church to the west of the complex (ca. 1025)
- IV phase – renovation of the church from the turn of the 11th Century (at turn of the 12th century).

In the process of his investigation, Dr. Petar Miljković-Pepек identified the first phase of the complex as a Byzantine sacral structure built in the period prior to the earliest Slavonic cultural activity in Macedonia; he named this edifice *Old Vodoča church* and dated it in the chronological register between the 7th and the 9th century¹⁰. The dating of this first stage of the architectural growth of the complex, which was categorized by Professor Pepек as a domed basilica¹¹, rests on the single analogy discovered by the eminent scholar – the controversial Saint Andrew in Krisei, today called Koca Mustafa Pasha mosque, erected in Constantinople in the course of the Iconoclastic era¹². In spite of the similarities between the so called Koca mosque and the alleged Old Vodoča church visible in the orientation of their ground planes towards the central nucleus accentuated by a monumental dome, these two edifices are not what one could call “partners in comparison”, since the elaboration of their spatial concept is entirely different. Namely, the accentuated structures of the subsidiary altar components of the Constantinople church *versus* the compact character of the prothesis and diaconicon at Vodoča, the penetration of the side aisles of the Metropolitan temple in the spatial configuration of the choir *versus* the classically balanced ground plan of the Vodoča naos, the addition of the luxuriously formatted narthex at the west end of Saint Andrew temple *versus* the modestly shaped west bay of the Vodoča church are only some of the distinctions in the ideological concept of the two edifices. Moreover, there is no archaeological material from the period 7th – 9th century among the excavated findings discovered in the vicinity of the complex, while concurring architectural remnants and/or painterly fragments have not been mentioned in the reports related to the investigation of the site. Therefore, we can only assume that the first phase of the Vodoča chronological chart designed by Professor Pepек remains archaeologically, architecturally and painterly unsubstantiated, and therefore completely unviable.

¹⁰ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Христијанската архитектура кај Македонските Словени од пред средината на IX век до 1018 година (период на прв културен подем на Македонските Словени)*, Климент Охридски. Студии, Скопје 1986, pp. 227, Fig. 1, 1.

¹¹ Idem, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 20, Fig. 4a.

¹² L. Brubaker, J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclastic Era (ca. 680-850): A History*, Cambridge-New York, 2011, pp. 214.



Fig. 6 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, Fresco fragment from the turn of the 11th century

Сл. 6 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, фрагмент фреске са почетка XI века

The second phase of the Vodoča complex was linked by Professor Peppek with the fresco fragment (Fig. 6) discovered in the eastern portion of the edifice and found in the architectural debris located beside the apsidal wall of the building. Although heavily damaged, the precious remnant of the one-time iconographic program of the temple discloses a part of a saintly image, depicted with a delicate artistic manner and remarkably gracious stylistic features. In that sense, the tonal configuration of the volume, the sophisticated drawing, the rhythmically executed silhouette and the light strokes of the brush in the application of the colours, as main elements of the painterly discourse of the master, directed the experienced and insightful professor in the right course – towards chronological

determination of the painting, as well as of the building structure to which it was originally attached – in the late 10th or early 11th century. Believing that it should be considered as a renovation of the oldest edifice on the site¹³, Peppek named the second phase *Eastern Vodoča church* since its apsidal line represents the easternmost architectural point of the complex (Fig. 7). Stressing the characteristic ground plan of the edifice which reveals its longitudinal projection accentuated with a dome, Peppek acknowledged the extension of the central aisle versus the narrow side aisles and believed that its specific spatial configuration resulted from the respect given to the authentic matrix in the course of the reconstruction of the original temple.

The identification, as well as chronological determination of the third phase, once again resulted from the discovered portions of the fresco arrangement, seriously fragmented, yet preserved visibly enough in the interior of the western part of the complex. A few scenes from the cycle of the Life of the Virgin, altogether with a couple of saintly images (Fig. 8), comprise what can be considered as the oldest fresco ensemble originating from the Byzantine period in the territory of present-day Macedonia¹⁴. Iconographically innovative

¹³ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 20, Fig. 4b.

¹⁴ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, in: П. Кузман, Е. Димитрова, Ј. Донеv (Ed.) *Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти*, Скопје 2013, pp. 1584-1586.

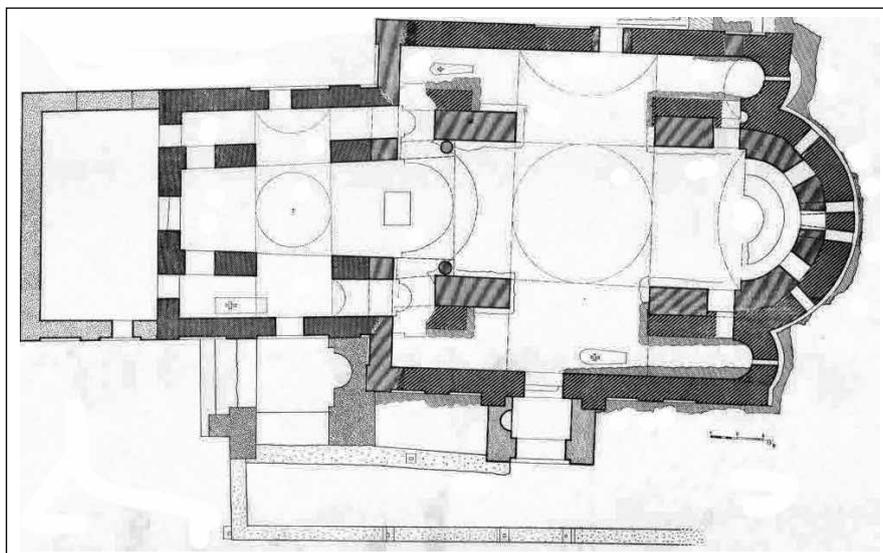


Fig. 7 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, ground plan by S. Korunovski

Сл. 7 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, план С. Коруновског

Fig. 8 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, Fresco from ca. 1025

Сл. 8 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, фреска из 1025. године

in terms of configuration of the compositional matrixes, the scenes depicting the events prior to the Immaculate Conception, although partially preserved, display features of a very distinctive artistic language, as well. In that regard, the sensual energy of the saintly images, the attentive modulation of the anatomic structure of the figures, as well as the luxuriant amplitude of colours directed professor Peppek to search for their chronological identification towards the mid-first half of the 11th century. The temporal reference of ca. 1025 for the creation of the frescoes¹⁵ places the building process of the western part of the Vodoča complex some quarter of a century after the erection of its eastern section. Attempting to explicate the chronological subsequence of this modest by its dimensions and conventional cruciform temple to the older



¹⁵ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Два непознати фрагмента на фреска од Водочката црква*, Зборник. Музеј на Македонија, н.с. 3 (2001), pp. 44-45.

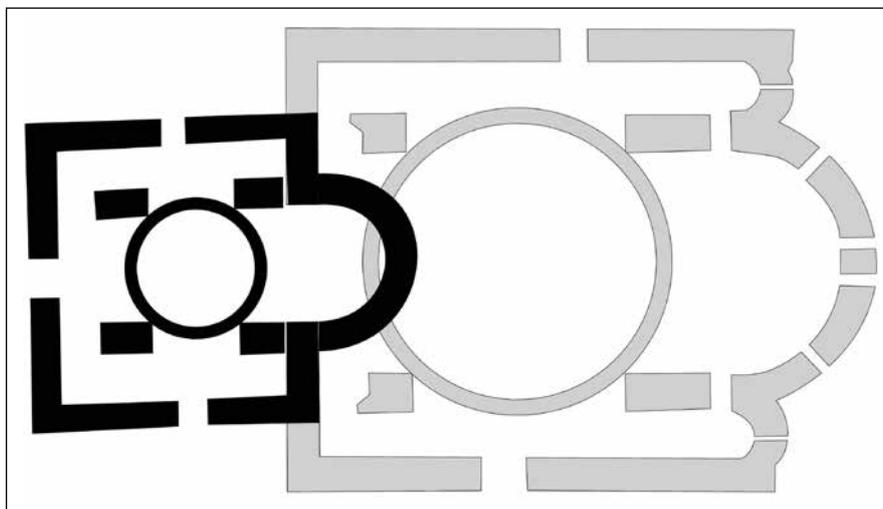


Fig. 9 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, architectural projection of the Western church (drawing by A. Pešev)

Сл. 9 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, Архитектонска пројекција тзв. Западне цркве (цртеж А. Пешева)

Eastern church (Fig. 9), Miljković-Peppek launched two ideas as an “excuse” for the deviation from the unique and eternally lawful Byzantine canonical rule – always to respect the original location of the shrine in the course of its architectural renovation.

Namely, since the *Western church* does not coincide with the authentic perimeter of the Eastern temple and it seems that it has been moved a bit to the west, Professor Peppek came up with the following ideas:

- either the commissioner was a layman with insufficient knowledge of the sacral rules of Byzantine architecture and therefore did not have enough experience in the patronage of religious edifices, or
- as a true Byzantine character has tendentiously disregarded the location of the original shrine, manifesting his obvious disrespect to the edifice from the time of the bitter Byzantine enemy, the Emperor Samuel¹⁶.

Although these hypotheses could be taken into consideration due to the immense experience of Professor Petar Miljković related to many different aspects of Byzantine architecture (historic, chronological, social, aesthetic etc.), I will try to approach this issue from a different perspective in order to give another solution to the problem of the so called anti-canonical phase in the composition of the Vodoča church complex. My disagreement with the respected Professor in regard to the reasons for the alleged *anti-canonical demeanour* of the commissioner of the western church is twofold:

- first of all because according to the historic and social investigation of the Byzantine era, the commissionership was a privilege of the social, as well

¹⁶ П. Миљковић-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 37-38.

as intellectual elite well familiar with ecclesiastic rules of architectural and artistic enterprises¹⁷

• and secondly, starting from the notion of the historic events related to the period in question, I would have too much of a doubt that anybody would have spent time and energy to invent an effective way in order to ideologically or religiously harm the enemy who was defeated and overpowered so long ago¹⁸.

The chronological determination of the fourth building phase of the Vodoča complex resulted from the dating of the youngest layer of medieval frescoes in the period of the late 11th century (Fig. 10), preserved in a devastated condition in the apse, with a manifested energy of an accentuated linearism. The sharp treatment of the contours, as well as the imposing facial energy of the four images of archbishops represented on the apsidal wall, associated with the painterly manner of the fresco masters of the Virgin *Eleoussa*



Fig. 10 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, Fresco from ca. 1090

Сл. 10 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, фреска из око 1090. године

church in Veljusa¹⁹ point to a more precise chronological reference of the frescoes and the building structure in the period 1085-1090. Determining the fourth phase as a renovation of the older, Eastern church²⁰, Pepек correctly pointed out the two components of distinction in the spatial matrix of the authentic temple and its restoration done a century later. The first one is the tendency towards

¹⁷ R. Cormack, *Patronage and New Programs of Byzantine Iconography* in: The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers, Washington D. C. (August 3 – 8, 1986), New York 1986, pp. 609-638; A. Cutler, *Art in Byzantine Society: Motive Forces of Byzantine Patronage*, *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31 (1981), pp. 759-787; S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Patronage and Artistic Production in Byzantium during the Paleologan Period*, in S. T. Brooke (Ed), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261 – 1557)*, New York – New Haven 2006, pp. 76-97.

¹⁸ Emperor Samuel died of a cardiac arrest in October of 1070, after the tragic defeat of his army in the battle at the Belasica Mountain; four years later the Byzantine rule was restored on the territory of the former Empire, cf. М. Б. Панов, *Византиска Македонија*, pp. 1194-1195.

¹⁹ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 49; *idem*, *Велјуса. Манастир Св. Богородица Милостива во селото Велјуса крај Струмица*, Скопје 1981, pp. 218-219; Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1587.

²⁰ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 20

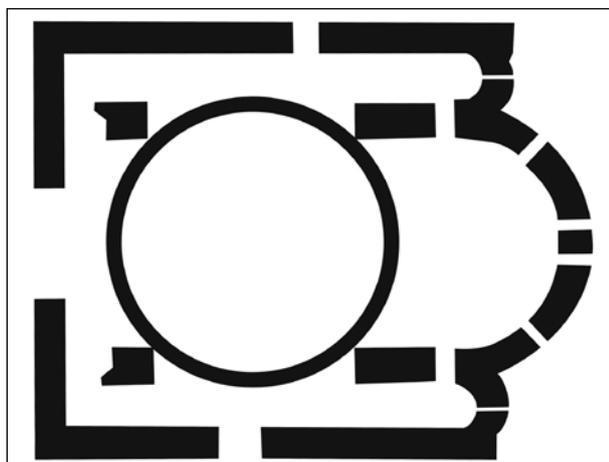


Fig. 11 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, Architectural projection of the Eastern church (drawing by A. Pešev)

Сл. 11 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, Архитектонска пројекција тзв. Источне цркве (цртеж А. Пешева)

the reduction of the space between the pillars, which resulted in the subsequent reduction of the diameter of the new dome, while the second is the reduction of the radius of the new apse, whereat, although the new edifice coincides with the authentic perimeter of the original church, it shows certain abbreviations of the spatial lines projected in the reduction of the apsidal wall. The incentive and always lucid Peppek, who saw the fourth phase of the complex as a spatial “shrinkage” of the tissue of the Eastern Church²¹, named it *Middle Vodoča temple*, since its architectural nucleus appears between the two edifices – the old Eastern and the “displaced” Western.

Due to the fact that no historic data from the medieval period are preserved on behalf of the Vodoča bishopric, the compound edifice remained un-attributed, in other words its building phases could not be linked with certain historic personalities. However, the recent investigations of the architectural features of the Vodoča ensemble may throw some new light over the issues of the chronological, as well as spatial articulation of the complex. Namely, according to the preserved portions of the perimetral walls belonging to the Eastern Church, which originates from the time of Tsar Samuel (Fig. 11), as well as according to the remnants from the massive pillars in the interior, one can notice that we are dealing with a very ambitious architectural enterprise. It is an edifice with a complex typological structure, which can be seen as a transitional architectonic matrix between the so called “shortened basilica” and the cruciform ground plan that represents a sample of the genesis of the cross-in-square type in the Byzantine architecture²². The diameter of the dome - exceeding 7 meters - points to a massive vaulting structure which, according to its dimensions, can be linked to the so called domed basilicas originating in the time of the Emperor Justinian²³ and associates the edifice with a master builder with extraordinary knowledge in statics and epic taste in the elaboration of the spatial qualities of the architectural organism.

²¹ *Ibidem*, Fig. 3

²² S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale*, pp. 46.

²³ R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Harmondsworth

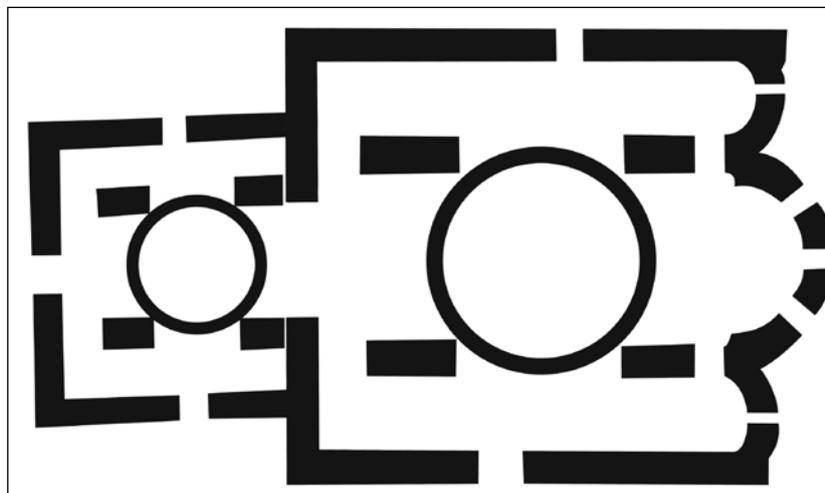


Fig. 12 The church of Saint Leontius at Vodoča, Architectural projection of the Renovated Eastern and Western church (drawing by A. Pešev)

Сл. 12 Црква Светог Леонтија у Водочи, Архитектонска пројекција обновљене Источне и тзв. Западне цркве (цртеж А. Пешева)

The sophisticated typological configuration of the edifice, the ambitious spatial elaboration and, particularly, the monumental dome structure which covered almost three quarters of the building's interior refer to optimal khetorial capacities, most certainly belonging to an individual from the highest social circles of the era at the turn of the 11th century. If we refresh our memory that when commissioning the cathedral church of Saint Achilles in Prespa, Emperor Samuel chose the ground plan of a classical basilica, with clear reminiscent of the oldest Early Christian Episcopal centers²⁴, than the selection of the domed basilica in Vodoča, as an evocation of Justinian's sacral edifices, could be easily seen as a preferable architectural priority of Samuel's social elite. In that context, I would not exclude the idea that the domination of the dome over the architectural corpus of the Vodoča temple, which is a kind of exclusive building element of the era, could be associated with the possibility of an immediate khetorial initiative of the Emperor Samuel in person; in other words, with the authoritative aspirations of a powerful Balkan ruler, who would not refrain from projecting his imperial ambitions in commissions that resemble the works of art created by his great predecessors. Hence, the powerful political career of the autocratic Balkan ruler who has established a realm competitive to the Byzantine reign over the Peninsula and created a representative catalogue of

1965, pp. 179-182; Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1564.

²⁴ E. Dimitrova, *V. I. Personalities in Medieval Macedonia. Five Paradigms of Supreme Commissionship (11th – 14th century)*, pp. 603.

aesthetic innovations marked by transparent ideological messages²⁵ could be seen as a distinctive historic achievement replicated in genuine khtetorial projects with remarkable architectural features.

The ambitious architectural model of the Vodoča church did not last very long and was most probably devastated during Samuel's defeat by the Byzantine army in 1014. A decade or so later²⁶, in the course of the peaceful historic circumstances, the new commissioner with an unknown identity, obviously wished to renovate the monumental church preserved in remnants. By erecting the so called Western church which, according to the preserved portions of the fresco ensemble, was most probably dedicated to the Virgin, the khtetor has achieved his purpose, although the renovation did not follow the appropriate Byzantine cannons for a restoration of an older shire. Having in mind the architectonic qualities of the Eastern temple, i.e. the coherent ground plan of the edifice, as well as the "remarkable attributes" of its vaulting, the deviation from the traditional sacral rules did not occur because the donor did not have a knowledge in the matter or because he wanted to manifest a mockery towards the works of art from Tsar Samuel's era²⁷; rather because he simply could not find an architect who would be able to renovate the exclusive edifice of his predecessor, a building with an enormously large dome that covered the interior with a visual integrity much more accentuated in comparison to other middle-Byzantine cruciform edifices.

Therefore, the honest commissioner with an unrevealed identity decided to rebuild the old church by erecting a much modest architectural structure of a cross-in-square ground plan accentuated by a dome, the diameter of which measured barely 2,5 meters²⁸, migrating to the west of the original church and leaving the possibility to another donor to take care of a worthy restoration of the Samuel's temple in its authentic form (Fig. 9). As the analysis of the building structure of the Vodoča complex clearly show - that has never happened, although towards the end of the 11th century, the Eastern Church, once again, became a subject of another commissioner's initiative, a phase confirmed by the preserved perimeter walls and the pillars supporting the vaulting system. This time, the new donor insisted on honoring the original spatial lines of the edifice, whereat the contours of the authentic walls were encompassed in the renovation plans; however, the massive upper structure of the original building with the dome measuring 7 meters, was once again too ambitious for the new architects, as well.

Thence, the diameter of the new dome was reduced to 5 meters²⁹, which resulted in the displacement of the pillars and reduction of the radius of the apsidal wall, so that the older apse remained without a proper function, except

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 603-605.

²⁶ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча (дел од проектот за конзервација и реставрација на Водочкиот комплекс)*, pp. 20-23

²⁷ *Idem*, *Два непознати фрагмента на фреска од Водочката црква*, pp. 45.

²⁸ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1569.

²⁹ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale*, pp. 46.

for being a witness to the exclusive architectural achievements of Tsar Samuel's era and its ambitious commissioners³⁰. At the same time, the modest Western church, which was a migrant of the original Eastern temple, became a narthex of the revitalized shrine, so not only the Samuel's temple has undergone a relatively dissent renovation, it simultaneously gained a narthex (Fig. 12) and most obviously became a real architectural complex (Fig. 7). With its historic stratification, as well as the building configuration, the Vodoča architectural ensemble not only emanates the autocratic ideas of the artistic creativity of Tsar Samuel's realm, moreover, it most probably reflects the mega-dimensional aesthetic principles of the khetorial individuality of the Emperor himself. Bold as a statesman, uncompromising as a sovereign and inventive as a creator of cultural matrixes, Tsar Samuel's character is much more than a significant medieval person in the historic legacy of the Balkans.

Елизабета Димитрова

ARS INNIMITABILIS: КОМПЛЕКС СВЕТОГ ЛЕОНТИЈА У ВОДОЧИ

Црквени комплекс Светог Леонтија у струмичком селу Водочи ушао је у сферу византијских студија захваљујући еминентном Професору Петру Миљковићу-Пепеку, који је, и поред недостатака писаних података, истражио историјско-социјалне, градитељске и ликовне одлике наведеног споменика. У том је контексту, Професор Пепек први установио хронологију грађења самог комплекса и дефинисао четири фазе његовог настанка, настојећи да, у том тренутку, да најлогичнију интерпретацију сукцесивног подизања једног од најкомплекснијих архитектонских аранжмана на територији средњовековне Македоније. Ипак, најновија истраживања градитељске структуре Водочког ансамбла указују на могућу ревизију неких ставова поштованог професора који се односе на постојање и датовање појединих фаза, као и на одређене проблеме везане за ктиторски ангажман њихових продуцената. У том смислу, пажљивом анализом археолошких координата, грађевинске структуре и сачуваних фрагмената сликарства храма Светог Леонтија, установили смо да је он подигнут у три наврата, т.ј. да се најстарија фаза Пепекове хронолошке таблице (црква из периода VII-IX века) не може доказати као постојећа. Осим тога, разлог за одступање од традиционалних правила византијске сакралне архитектуре који су налагали да се приликом обнове храма мора поштовати локација оригиналног светилишта, нарушених приликом подизања тзв. Западне цркве (око 1025 г.), према нашем мишљењу, не може се тражити, како је тврдио Пепек у незнању ктитора или у манифестацији његове одбојности према продуценту старијег храма. Напротив, полазећи од специфичних одлика оригиналне тзв. Источне цркве која је имала монументалну куполу изнад наоса, сматрамо да нови ктитор није био у могућности да нађе довољно вештог архитекта који би могао да понови „ремек-дело“, свог претходника. Зато је и изградио омању цркву на западној страни, омогућивши на тај начин неком другом ктитору да понови импозантни подухват из прошлости. Типолошке одлике те оригиналне грађевине са огромном куполом, као и датовање откривеног фрагмента живописа у рани XI век, упућују на могућност да је ктитор Источне цркве Водочког комплекса можда био и сам цар Самуило.

³⁰ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1569.

