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**PANAGIA TON CHALKEON IN THESSALONIKI AND
CHURCH CONSTRUCTION IN THE 11TH-CENTURY
BYZANTINE THEME OF BULGARIA¹**

Abstract: The Panagia ton Chalkeon, constructed in 1128, serves as a prime example of the regional tradition of Thessaloniki during the Middle Byzantine period. Extensive literature has been dedicated to the study of its architectural features, which are the result of the creative reworking of ideas derived from various sources in Constantinople, on Mount Athos, and directly in Thessaloniki by the Thessalonikian master builder. In this article, we aim to build upon the extant theme by examining the origins and historical significance of the Panagia ton Chalkeon, a unique monument noteworthy for its role as a source of innovative ideas that transcended the boundaries of Macedonia, significantly influencing the architectural development of the Byzantine Theme of Bulgaria.

Key words: Panagia ton Chalkeon, Christian architecture, Byzantine architecture, Archbishopric of Ohrid, Bulgaria.

The Christian monuments of Thessaloniki, the center of Byzantine Macedonia and the second largest city of the Empire, are renowned for their substantial scale, superior craftsmanship, and aesthetic virtues, thus distinguishing them as exemplary works of art. In this regard, the regional distinctiveness of Thessaloniki's architectural tradition, its relationship with Constantinople and the parallel developments in other centers, remain subjects of considerable interest².

¹ This research was funded by the Russian Science Foundation, project no. 20-18-00294-II.

² S. Ćurđić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent (ca. 300 - ca. 1550)*, London – New Haven 2010, 545–577; Idem, *The Role of Late Byzantine Thessalonike in Church Architecture in the Balkans*, DOP 57, 2003, 65–84; Π. Λ. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Οι μεσαιωνικοί ναοί της Θεσσαλονίκης και η θέση τους στα πλαίσια της βυζαντινής ναοδομίας, Η Θεσσαλονίκη μεταξύ Ανατολής και Δύσης, Πρακτικά Τεσσαρακονταετηρίδος της Εταιρίας Μακεδονικών Σπουδών (30 Σεπτεμβρίου — 1 Νοεμβρίου,*



Fig. 1 Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessaloniki, 1028 (photo by S. Maltseva).

Сл. 1. Панагия тон Халкеон у Солуну, 1028. (Фото С. Малтсева)

The limited number and chronological irregularity of the preserved monuments from the Middle Byzantine period have led to a significant controversy surrounding this issue, which is thoroughly examined in the article by Michalis Kappas. The author has summarized the results of many years of research and provided an exhaustive bibliography on the subject³. As it turned out, identifying the features of regional uniqueness in the architecture of the second largest city of the Empire, which developed in line with the cultural life of the capital but with different degrees of intensity at different times, was not an easy task.

The question of local architectural tradition was initially addressed by George Velenis in detail, who also identified an initial manifestation of regional features in the architecture of Thessaloniki during the Middle Byzantine period, exemplified by the Panagia ton Chalkeon (1028)⁴. (Fig.1)

The inscription above the entrance indicates that this church in Thessaloniki, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was constructed in 1028 by protospatharios Christopher, the catepan of Lagouvardia, with his wife Maria and children⁵. The ktetor of the Panagia ton Chalkeon is identified as protospatharios Christopher, the catepan of Thessaloniki and Bulgaria, whose identity is established through a seal dated between 1018 and 1028. The architectural features of the Panagia ton Chalkeon have been the subject of considerable discussion in scholarly literature. One of the most frequently addressed topics is the combination of metropolitan and regional characteristics. It is evident that all

Θεσσαλονίκη 1980), *Θεσσαλονίκη* 1982, 97–110.

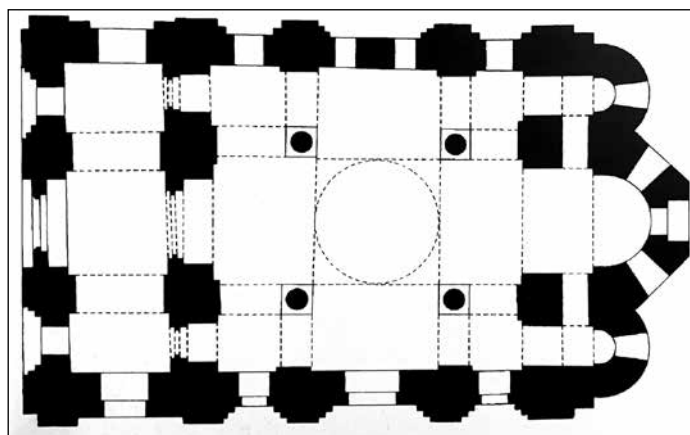
³ М. Каппас, *Архитектурный «идиолект» Фессалоники в средне- и поздне-византийские периоды: сходства и различия с Константинополем, Византий и Византия. Провинциализм столицы и столичность провинции*, Санкт-Петербург 2020, 27–153.

⁴ Γ. Βελένης, *Μεσοβυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Θεσσαλονίκη*, Αθήνα 2003, 16–18, 26–33, 94–97.

⁵ M. Paissidou, *The church 'Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki': a different approach of a monastic institution and its founder*, Siris. Studi e ricerche della Scuola di specializzazione in beni archeologici di Matera 15, 2015, 123 (with extensive bibliography).

Fig. 2. Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessaloniki, 1028. Plan (according to Ćurčić)

Сл. 2. Панагија тон Халкеон у Солуну, 1028. (основа С. Ћурчић)



authors have correctly identified the church as belonging to the Constantinople typology of the inscribed cross with a bema, which was a rare occurrence in Macedonia at the time (Fig. 2)⁶.

Furthermore, the Panagia ton Chalkeon exhibits architectural features that are analogous to those observed in the Constantinople churches of the Middle Byzantine period. The interior and exterior of walls are articulated with pilasters corresponding to the four columns within. The transition from the vault of the eastern arm of the cross to that of the bema is marked by a ledge. The walls are constructed exclusively of brick and feature richly articulated facades with the use of semi-columns. The concealed course technique, which was already employed by the capital's masters of the 11th century and which had previously been observed in the monuments of the end of the 10th century, was also utilized in the Panagia ton Chalkeon.

Conversely, researchers have repeatedly highlighted the distinctions between the Panagia ton Chalkeon and its contemporaries in Constantinople, particularly in terms of technique and other compositional and stylistic elements. These include the completion of the arms of the cross with triangular pediments, the small size of the single-light windows, and so forth. Consequently, Greek researchers G. Velenis and M. Kappas have proposed that this church represents a rare example of the architectural tradition of Thessaloniki⁷. They saw the distinctive characteristics of local originality in the irregular use of the concealed course technique, the articulation of the facade with niches, and a few rare motifs. These include the combination of the central faceted and lateral semicircular apses and two tiers of windows in the drum of the main dome, which is perceived as a conscious reproduction of the forms of the Church of St. Sophia

⁶ Γ. Βελένης, *Μεσοβυζαντινή ναοδομία στη Θεσσαλονίκη*, Αθήνα 2003, 16–18, 26–33, 94–97; P. L. Vocotopoulos, *The Role of Constantinopolitan Architecture during the Middle and the Late Byzantine Period*, JÖB 31/2, 1981, 555–558, 561; Α. Ξυγγόπουλος, *Ο ναός της Θεοτόκου των Χαλκείων*, Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς Β', 1918, 562–567; M. Paissidou, *The church Panagia ton Chalkeon*, 121–133.

⁷ Γ. Βελένης, *Η αρχιτεκτονική Σχολή της Μακεδονίας*, Σηναξη, 63, Ιουλίου-Σεπτεμβρίου 1997, 51–52; M. Καππας, *Архитектурный «идиолект» Фессалоники*, 135–137.



Fig. 3. Church of St. John the Theologian of the Zemen Monastery, mid 11th century. (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 3. Црква Св. Јована Јеванђелисте у Земену, средином 11. века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Маљцева)

in Thessaloniki. Recent publications supported and enriched this point of view, particularly through the work of Anna Zakharova⁸. She has studied the peculiarities and construction methods of the monument, tracing the synthesis of Constantinople characteristics and Athonite specifics in the arrangement of the two-story narthex. Additionally, she has succeeded in exposing the uniqueness of the monument and delineated the logic of its formation in Thessaloniki. Her research has persuasively demonstrated that the Panagia ton Chalkeon exemplifies the creative integration of concepts from various sources in Constantinople, on Athos, and within Thessaloniki itself.

In this article, we aim to build upon the existing theme by examining the origins and historical significance of the Panagia ton Chalkeon, a unique monument from the 11th century located in Thessaloniki. This monument is noteworthy for its role as a source of innovative ideas that transcended the boundaries of Macedonia, significantly influencing the architectural development of the Byzantine Theme of Bulgaria.

By the 11th century, the large-scale construction that typified the late antique and early medieval periods had ceased in the northern regions of the Balkans⁹. However, a shift in the regional dynamics emerged in the early 9th century. In 809, under the leadership of Krum, the Khan of Bulgaria (796-814), the campaign resulted in the loss of Serdika, the administrative center of the northern regions, to the Byzantines¹⁰. Subsequent to his victory over

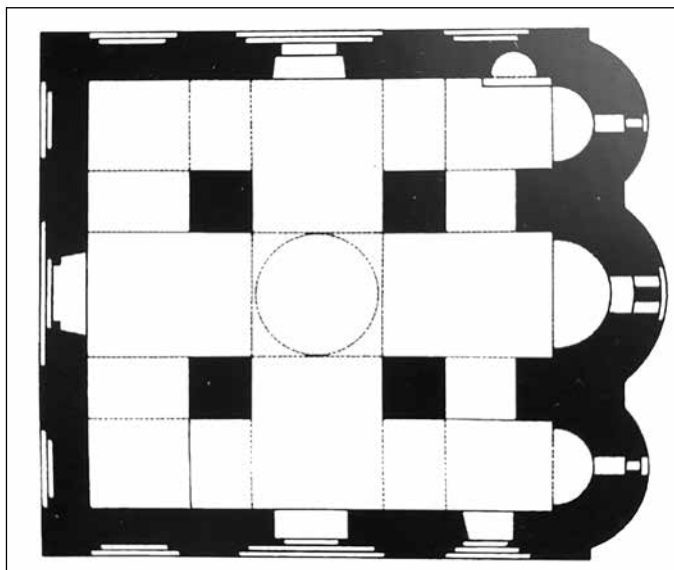
⁸ A. Zakharova, *Once Again on the Originality of Byzantine Architecture in the 11th Century: The Church of Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki*, *Deltion of Christian Archaeological Society* 43, 2022, 81–94.

⁹ Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Раннохристиянската архитектура в България V–V в.*, София 1999.

¹⁰ А. Данчева-Василева А, *История на Средновековна София IV–XIV век*, София 2017.

Fig. 4. Church of St. John the Theologian of the Zemen Monastery, mid-11th century. Plan (according to Ćurčić).

Сл. 4. Црква Св. Јована Јеванђелисте у Земену, средином 11. века, Бугарска. (основа С. Ћурчић)



the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus I (802-811) in 811, the Bulgarian forces captured Thrace and most of Macedonia, and by the 10th century, they had established dominion over a substantial portion of the Balkans. However, the cultural and administrative epicenters of the Bulgarian state, including its religious institutions and artistic milieu, were primarily situated in the eastern regions, such as Pliska and Preslav¹¹. Following the adoption of Christianity from the Byzantine Empire under Tsar Boris in 864, significant architectural developments occurred, with the involvement of master builders from Greek and Dalmatian architectural centers¹². These developments subsequently migrated to the southwest, reaching the Ohrid and Prespa regions¹³.

¹¹ С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава – обим и карактер*, Београд: Византолошки институт САНУ, 1997, 73–132.

¹² Г. Атанасов, *От епископия към самостойна патриаршия на Първото Българско царство в Дръстър (Силистра). Историята на патриаршеския комплекс*, София 2017; Н. Мавродинов, *Старобългарското изкуство: Изкуството на Първото българско царство*, София 1959; Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура на Първата Българска държава*, София, 1984.

¹³ Ν. Μουτσόπουλος, *Εκκλησίες της Καστοριάς, 9ος–11ος αιώνας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1992; Н. Мавродинов, *Старобългарското изкуство. Изкуството на Първото българско царство*, София 1959; Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура на Първата Българска Държава*, София 1984; С. Мучай; С. Джуери; И. Ристани; А. Пентковский, *Средневековые церкви в долине Шуицы (Южная Албания) и славянская епископия свт. Климента Охридского*, *Slovēne. International Journal of Slavic Studies* 3/1, 2014, 5–42; А.М. Пентковский, *Почитание святителя Климента в Охриде в X–XI вв.*, *Старобългарска литература* 48, 2013, 79–113; С. В. Мальцева, *Монастырская архитектура круга святых Наума и Климента Охридских в контексте храмового зодчества Первого Болгарского царства и архитектурных традиций византийских провинций IX–XI вв.*, *Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства* 10, под ред.: А. В. Захаровой, С. В. Мальцевой, Е. Ю. Станюкович-Денисовой, Москва – Санкт-Петербург 2020,



Fig. 5. Church of St. Sofia in Ohrid, beginning of the 11th century, North Macedonia. Eastern façade (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 5. Св. Софија у Охрид, почетак 11. века, Северна Македонија. (Фото С. Малцева)

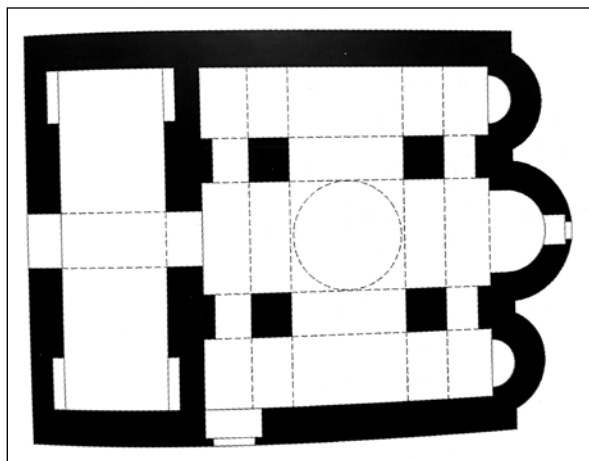


Fig. 6. The church of St. Germanos on Prespa, end of the 10th – beginning of the 11th century. Plan (according to Ćurčić)

Сл. 6. Црква Св. Германа на Преспи, крај 10 - почетак 11 века, Грчка. (основа С. Ћурчић)

After the defeat of the First Bulgarian Kingdom by the Byzantine Emperor Basil II (976-1025) in 1019, an important ecclesiastical and political initiative was the establishment of the Archdiocese of Ohrid, which was called to serve the numerous Slavic-speaking population in the vast territories united under Byzantine rule¹⁴.

The archdiocese consisted of 31 dioceses whose jurisdiction stretched from Ianina in the south to Syrmium (Sremska Mitrovica) in the north, from Durostorum (Silistra) in the east to the Adriatic coast in the west¹⁵.

During the period of the first Ohrid archbishops, John of Debar (1019–1037) and Leo of Ohrid (1037–1056), construction projects emerged in various locations throughout the Balkan Peninsula. The extensive scope of renovation 809–828.

¹⁴ H. Gelzer, *Der Patriarchat von Achrida*, Leipzig 1902; Б. Прокић, *Постанак Охридског патријархата*, Глас Српске Кралјевске Академије 90, Београд 1912, 175–267.

¹⁵ И. Снегаров, *История на охридската архиепископия. От основаването и до завладяването на Балканския полуостров от турците I*, София 1995; А. Н. Деллкар, *Архиепископство Ахридѡν κατά τον Μεσαίωνα. Ο ρόλος της ως ενωτικού παράγοντα στην πολιτική και εκκλησιαστική ιστορία των σλάβων των Βαλκανίων και του Βυζαντίου*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2014.

and building activities, extending to areas beyond Ohrid, resulted in the convergence of artisans from different regions. This exchange fostered a diversity of creative ideas and architectural techniques, contributing to the rich and varied architectural landscape¹⁶.

In the central and southern dioceses of the Ohrid Archdiocese, the principal architectural milestones of the region can be identified¹⁷, while in the northern regions, the names of the clients are often unknown, the dating is inaccurate, but the architectural quality is often high¹⁸. The structures of particular interest are situated in the western regions of the modern Bulgaria, where, prior to the restoration of Byzantine presence in the 11th and 12th centuries, there was virtually no active architectural development¹⁹.

In the context of Byzantine-era church construction and the activity of the Ohrid bishopric, the Church of St. John the Theologian of the Zemen Monastery (Fig. 3) is among the earliest buildings in the region. Prior to the discovery of fragments of wall paintings, dated around the middle of the 11th century, researchers had attributed the church to the 14th century²⁰. The architectural composition of the inscribed-cross square church (measuring 9×9m) is primarily composed of hewn stone, with minimal inclusions of recycled brick, particularly evident in the decorative outlines of archivolt of the facade niches. The integrity of the building's composition, in addition to its cubical volume, is accentuated by the absence of a narthex and three semi-circular apses, which protrude seamlessly beyond the eastern facade. The slender silhouette of the church is accentuated by a cylindrical, elongated drum with two rows of windows and niches. This distinctive architectural element bears a resemblance to analogous features found in monuments from a similar historical period, such as the Church of St. John the Baptist in Nessebar (late 10th century)²¹. This church also features a four-column inscribed-cross configuration, lacking a narthex, with semicircular apses and a long cylindrical drum, pierced by windows, and adorned with a 'necklace' of small niches. An additional, even more vivid ex-

¹⁶ А. В. Захарова; С. В. Мальцева, *Художественные традиции и церковно-политическая идеология в искусстве Македонии в эпоху создания Охридской архиепископии*, ВВ 106, Москва 2022, 174–199 (with references).

¹⁷ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 394–412.

¹⁸ М. Бичев, *Архитектура Болгарии с самых древних времен до конца XIX века*, София, 1961; Кр. Миятев, *Архитектурата в средновековна България*, София 1965; Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура на Първата Българска държава*, София 1998; Н. Мавродинов, *Старобългарското изкуство: Изкуството на Първото българско царство*, София 1959; М. Ракоција, *Црква Св. Јована изнад Горњег Матејевца и њена архатична триконхална основа*, Ниш и Византија 18, Зборник радова 800 година аутокефалности Српске цркве (1219–2019): црква, политика и уметност у Византији и суседним земљама, Ниш 3. – 5. јун 2019, Ниш 2020, 121 – 158.

¹⁹ С. В. Мальцева; А. А. Фрезе, *Строительство в Северной Македонии в период возвращения под византийское владычество*, Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства 11, под ред.: А. В. Захаровой, С. В. Мальцевой, Е. Ю. Станюкович-Денисовой, Санкт-Петербург 2021, 422–436.

²⁰ Л. Мавродинова, *Земенската църква. История, архитектура, живопис*, София 1980, 15–22; S. Ćurčić *Architecture in the Balkans*, 483–485.

²¹ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 332.

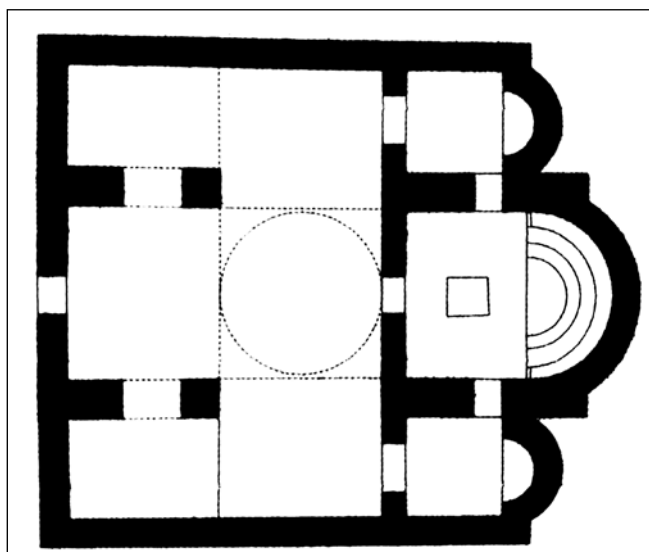


Fig. 7. Church of the Virgin Mary in Peshkëpi e Sipërme, second half of 10th century, Albania. Plan (according to Ćurčić)

Сл. 7. Црква Св. Богородице у Пешкопи у Сиперми, друга половина 11. века, Албанија. (основа С. Ћурчић)

ample is the Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki (1028), where two rows of large single windows of the drum and deep semi-circular niches of the western domes are similar in configuration to the church in Zemen. However, the authenticity of the large single niches with brick edging in the upper register of the drum at the Zemen church is not confirmed with certainty. The facades of the Zemen church reveal traces of multiple repairs, as a result of which the corner compartments, together with the side apses, were raised and united by a common cornice²². The absence of the fresco layer above the lower row windows from the inside of the drum indicates that the upper part of the structure was either significantly modified or completely rebuilt.

The spatial configuration of the Zemen church is characterized by a division of the nave and altar into nine cells of similar size, facilitated by four square pillars. This arrangement creates a sense of structured regularity, suggesting a square plan (Fig. 4). Such a church configuration emerged in the Balkans during the 10th century, though it was not prevalent. A more widespread configuration of inscribed-cross churches is that distinguished by rectangular outlines of the plan and a more pronounced three-nave division of the interior with longitudinally oriented cylindrical vaults of the corner cells. The vaults are supported by four substantial rectangular pillars, which accentuate the longitudinal orientation of the space. These pillars divide the lateral chambers from the wider central square, as observed in the church in Vodoča near Strumica across all three phases from the late 10th century to the end of the 11th century²³ and in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Nessebar of the late 10th century²⁴.

The articulation of the facades in Zemen utilizes a composition of three blind profiled arches, with a raised central one. The outer outline of the arches is

²² Л. Мавродинова, *Земенската црква*, 9.

²³ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Комплексот цркви во Водоча*, Скопје 1975, 72.

²⁴ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 332.

Fig. 8. Church of the Virgin Mary in Peshkëpi e Sipërme, second half of 10th century, Albania. Eastern façade (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 8. Црква Богородице у Пешкопи у Сиперми, друга половина 11. века. Источна фасада, (фото С. Малцева)



laid out exclusively in stone, while the inner archivolt appears to be striped with alternating stones and bricks. It is noteworthy that the contours of the arches on the western, most decorated, facade have thin brick outlines separating the arch from the wall. Analogous techniques have been observed in the edifices of the pre-Helladic school, where stone predominates in the masonry, as evidenced by the churches in Gavrolimni and Peshkëpi.²⁵ This tradition persists in the monuments of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the 11th century (church in Drenovo, mid-11th century)²⁶. A notable instance of this technique can be observed in the central apse of the Church of St. Sophia in Ohrid, where the arches of the single windows are adorned with double brick edging. A similar brick edging is also present on the stone architraves of the windows in the upper tier aisles on the eastern facade of St. Sophia (Fig. 5).

The church of St. Germanos on Prespa, dating to the late 10th century, bears a close analogy to the Zemen church, also featuring a square plan and square pillars.²⁷ However, a notable distinction emerges when comparing the two churches. The church on Prespa is comparatively smaller and possesses smooth facades, exhibiting a more simplified construction method. The geographical context of the church of St. Germanos, situated in northwestern Macedonia, is noteworthy for its proximity to Epirus, a region where this architectural typology with a square plan and square pillars is widely recognized.²⁸ (Fig. 6).

²⁵ Π. Α. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Η εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική εις την Δυτικήν Στερεάν Ελλάδα και την Ηπειρον. Από τον τέλος του 7ου μέχρι του τέλος του 10ου αιώνας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1992, 74–85.

²⁶ B. Ćipar, *St. Sophia. The Cathedral Church of the Ohrid Archbishopric. A Chronology of the Architecture*, Skopje 1996, 147; S. Ćurđić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 400–401; С.В. Мальцева; А.А. Фрезе, *Строительство в Северной Македонии*, 422–436.

²⁷ А.Чилингиров, *Църквата „Свети Герман“ до Преспанското езеро*, Берлин 2001; S. Ćurđić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 332–333.

²⁸ Π. Α. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Η εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική εις την Δυτικήν Στερεάν Ελλάδα*.



Fig. 9. Traces of plaster with imitation brickwork on the eastern facade in Zemen, mid-11th century. Bulgaria (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 9. Трагови малтера са имитацијом зида на источној фасади у Земену, средином 11. века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Малцева)

Fig. 10. Dormition Church in Labovë near Gjirokastër, Albania, second quarter of the 11th century, fragment of masonry (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 10. Зидање источне фасаде цркве Успења Богородице у Лабову, друга четвртина 11. века, Албанија. (Фото С. Малцева)



An exemplary instance of a square layout and facade decoration program is the bishopric of Dropolis (presently identified as the Church of the Virgin Mary in Peshkëpi e Sipërme, Albania) erected during the First Bulgarian Empire in the 10th century.²⁹ (Fig 7). This large church features a square layout with balanced distribution of space within, showcasing a shallow semi-circular apse and a high cylindrical drum. The Church of the Virgin Mary in Peshkëpi exhibits notable parallels with the church of the Zemen monastery, particularly in the layout of the apse and the drum. A comparative analysis of these two churches reveals additional parallels in their architectural features. Both churches are constructed of stone, with minimal chaotic inclusion of bricks in the masonry, a characteristic of the pre-Elladian architecture of Epirus.³⁰ Bricks are found in the form of thin outlines on the drums, in the framing of archivolt, and in the junction between windows and niches. The rare motif of the drum girdle, characterized by its double-layer of bricks, bears a striking resemblance in the aforementioned churches. The eastern facade in Peshkëpi and the western facade in Zemen feature crosses of brick, a common element in Greek monuments, particularly in the western regions (Fig 8). Three crosses are also present on the central apse of St. Sophia of Ohrid, along with the masonry, which consists of blocks of rough limestone, and the stone archivolt above the windows.

²⁹ *Idem.*

³⁰ *Idem*, 199–213.

The presence of these elements suggests the possibility of the involvement of craftsmen from the western regions of Greece in the construction of these components of St. Sophia.

In the central apse of the church in Zemen, there are traces of the original rose-colored plastering, a widespread decorative style of the 11th century³¹. The plaster exhibits imitation masonry with applied red pigment ornaments resembling the letters Ж, К, Т, etc. (Fig. 9). Such decorative masonry with brick elements resembling the letters Ж, К, Т, etc., is a notable feature of numerous 10th - 11th-century monuments in the Kastoria and other neighboring regions.³² Of particular interest is the presence of analogous „letters“ in the masonry walls of the Dormition Church in Labovë near Gjirokastër, Albania (second quarter of the 11th century).³³ (Fig. 10) This church features a square plan, lacking a narthex, with three semi-circles of apses and an elongated cylindrical drum, bearing resemblance to the Zemen church. The typology of that cross-domed church with a bypass differs from the one in Zemen. However, the square plan, the shape of the drum, and the similarity of certain decorative elements link these two structures. The painting on the apse of the Zemen church appears to emulate the decorative masonry with letter-like motifs found in the churches of Kastoria and Labovë. The Kastorian master builders are believed to have come to this site from Ohrid, where they were actively involved in large archbishop's commissions.³⁴ They took part in the erection and decoration of this outstanding architectural project, largely reproducing the typology and interior compositions of the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki or may be some Constantinopolitan structures³⁵. As demonstrated in the recent study conducted by A. V. Zakharova, the Deesis fresco uncovered on the gallery of the Labovë Church dates back to the middle of the 11th century,³⁶ which corresponds in time to the painting of

³¹ S. Mamaloukos, *Treatment of the Facades with Inscribed and Painted Architectural Forms and decorative Features in Mid Byzantine Architecture*, Архитектура Византии и Древней Руси IX–XII веков: материалы международного семинара: 17–21 ноября 2009 года в Государственном Эрмитаже, Санкт-Петербург 2010, 74–88.

³² N. Μουτσόπουλος, *Εκκλησίες της Καστοριάς. 9ος–11ος αιώνας*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1992; A. Zakharova, *On the 10th–11th century Churches in Kastoria and Related Buildings: The Problems of Attribution and Dating*, Niš and Byzantium 21, Ниш 2023, 159–176.

³³ Π. Α. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Η εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική εις την Δυτικήν Στερεάν Ελλάδα*, 86–92, 194–196, 201; A. V. Zakharova, *Some Observations on the Church of the Dormition in Labovo (Albania) and its Murals*, Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 41, 2020, 157–172.

³⁴ A. Zakharova, *On the 10th–11th century Churches in Kastoria and Related Buildings: The Problems of Attribution and Dating*, Niš and Byzantium 21, Ниш 2023, 159–176; A. В. Захарова; С. В. Мальцева, *Художественные традиции и церковно-политическая идеология в искусстве*, Византийский Временник 106, Москва 2022, 174–199.

³⁵ Φ. Καραγιάννη, *Επισκοπικοί ναοί της μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου. Το παράδειγμα της Μακεδονίας (Διδακτορική διατριβή)*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2006.

³⁶ A. В. Захарова, *О недавно раскрытой фреске с Деисусом в церкви Успения Богородицы в Лабово*, Вестник сектора Древнерусского искусства. Журнал по истории древнерусского искусства 2, Москва 2020, 33–45; A. V. Zakharova, *Some Observations on the Church of the Dormition in Labovo (Albania) and its Murals*, Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 41, 2020, 157–172.



Fig. 11. Plastering of the eastern facade with imitation of masonry in Great Basilica of Butrint at the Ionian coast, end of the 10th century, Albania (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 11. Малтер источне фасаде са имитацијом зидања велике базилике у Бутринту, крај 10. века. Албанија. (Фото С. Малцева)



Fig. 12. Fragment of the altar barrier of the Church of St. John the Theologian in Zemen, mid-11th century, Bulgaria (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 12. Фрагмент олтарске преграде цркве Св. Јована Јеванђелисте у Земену, средина 11. века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Малцева)

the first layer in Zemen.³⁷ The development of ceramoplastic decoration that covers the apses, the walls and the drums in the churches of that period, and also the imitation of such decoration in painting or scrtching on plaster is anticipated in the Great basilica of Butrint at the Ionian coast.³⁸ An examination of the sections of the ancient apse that underwent renovation in the 10th century revealed an ornamental arrangement analogous to the elements of the ceramic decoration of the Kastorian churches and facades in Labovë, including tiles with characteristic lines scratched diagonally. (Fig. 11) It is plausible that the traces of zigzags, faintly perceptible on the facades in Zemen, constituted a variation of similar painting.³⁹

Another detail of the Zemen church suggests a connection with the master builders of the western Greek coastal regions. During the restoration of the church, on the eastern strand of the southern wall, an additional passage to the

³⁷ Л. Мавродинова, *Земенската църква*, 15–22.

³⁸ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 309–310.

³⁹ Л. Мавродинова, *Земенската църква*, 9.

diakonikon was constructed, and a marble slab with a relief ornament in the form of a palmette was placed in the threshold of the doorway. (Fig. 12) The palmette wattle motif is known to have a wide prevalence, yet the stylistics of the relief from Zemen bear a stronger resemblance to the carvings found along the Ionian and Adriatic coasts. A particularly close analogy can be observed in the church of Panagia Trimitou from the latter half of the 10th century. (Fig. 13)⁴⁰ It is plausible that the fragment in question at Zemen is also part of the missing altar barrier and was reused in the construction of the opening of the southern pastophorion.

The Zemen church is likely one of the projects that was realized under the patronage of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Construction artels were likely well-acquainted with the architectural traditions of the Western Greek regions and with features such as stone masonry technique with the arbitrary addition of a small amount of bricks, a square plan with square pillars, a combination of smoothly projecting semi-circular apses and cylindrical drums, decorative brick elements in the form of crosses on the facades and letter-like motifs, and stone ornamental carvings. The Zemen church, erected likely in the mid-11th century, exemplifies the architectural traditions of the western Greek regions of the 10th century. Its design, characterized by a square layout, slimmer proportions, and structural articulation of the facades, utilizes blind stepped arches to reveal the church's internal structure. Conversely, if the decoration of the drum with large single niches in the second tier was part of the original design, it clearly reproduces the features of the drum of the Panagia ton Chalkeon (1028), which, as previously mentioned, has been identified as a key monument of Thessaloniki for the 11th century.

The strengthening of the Theme of Bulgaria in the region prompted the Byzantines to return to their old towns, including Ulpia Pautalia (medieval Velbuzd, now Kyustendil). This town was founded and flourished in Roman times due to its strategic location at the crossroads from Serdica to Thessalonica and to Philippopolis (Plovdiv). The town's development around the fortress, its reconstruction following periods of devastation, and its continued existence until the end of the sixth century are well-documented. The church, dedicated to St. George, in Kolusha near Kyustendil (Fig. 14), is notable for its architectural innovations that were previously unseen in the region. The exact identity of the patron and the circumstances surrounding its construction remain uncertain. Earlier researchers had dated it to the 13th century. The iconography of the painting, featuring a prominent image of St. Nicholas of Myra on the northern pre-altar pillar, suggests an initial dedication to this saint.⁴¹ The frescoes, which contain Greek inscriptions and were dated by Liljana Mavrodinova to the beginning of the 12th century (between 1105 and 1114), are notable for their state of preservation.⁴² During the most recent restoration of the church, which was

⁴⁰ Π. Λ. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Η εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική εις την Δυτικήν Στερεάν Ελλάδα*, II. 18.

⁴¹ Я. Митов, *Средновековната църква «Св. Георги» в Кюстендил*, Кюстендил 2016.

⁴² Л. Мавроудинова, *Още за средновековната църква в Колуша – Кюстендил (Ктитори, светец-покровител и дата на сградата и на първите два стенописни*

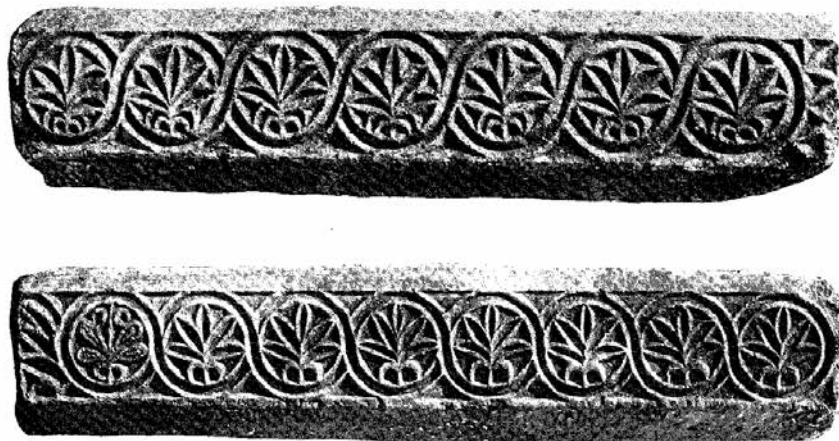


Fig. 13. Fragment of the altar barrier of the Panagia Trimitou (according to Vokotopoulos)

Сл. 13. Фрагменти олтарске преграде цркве Панагија Тримиту, Грчка. (Илустрација по П. Вокотопулосу)

completed in 2004, fragments of an earlier layer of painting were discovered in the altar. These fragments provided a basis for the restorers to attribute the time of construction of the church to the 11th century.⁴³ Mavrodinova posits that the church was erected during the reign of Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1067-1071)⁴⁴. Slobodan Ćurčić dated the church in Kolusha to the 12th century, suggesting the involvement of master builders from the Byzantine capital city.⁴⁵

The architectural forms of the church in Kolusha closely resemble those of the Zemen monastery, originating from Ohrid and Epirus. However, it also exhibits a number of features that diverge significantly from the work of the master builders from the 11th-century Ohrid Archbishopric.

The features that bring the church in Kolusha closer to the old traditions of the 11th century, in particular to the church in Zemen, include the general typology of the inscribed cross with square pillars without narthex (7×11m) (Fig. 15), the preservation of the composition of three semicircular apses, characteristic of the 10th and 11th centuries, articulation of facades with blind two-stepped arches, and decoration of brickwork crosses and zigzags, which in this case is supplemented with ceramic inserts in the form of „dots.“ The photograph, which records the condition of the monument before restoration, documents the presence of these features, thereby confirming the authenticity of the decora-

слож), Известия на Исторически музей – Кюстендил 14, Кюстендил 2007, 12–13.

⁴³ А. Мазакова, *Проучване, реставрация и експониране на средновековните стенописи в църквата „Св. Георги“ – Колуша, Кюстендил*, Известия на Исторически музей – Кюстендил 14, Кюстендил 2007, 19.

⁴⁴ Л. Мавродинова Л. *Още за средновековната църква в Колуша*, 14.

⁴⁵ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 412–413.

tive elements⁴⁶. It is noteworthy that in Kolusha, akin to Zemen, the archivolt trims of windows and niches are exclusive to the western facade. The archivolts of the Church of St. George in Kolusha feature thin joints, emulating the distinctive characteristic of the masonry of Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki. Notably, it is only above the entrance door on the western façade of Panagia ton Chalkeon that we encounter an archivolt constructed with the use of concealed course and outlined by bricks. In light of the research conducted by G. Velenis, a plausible explanation can be posited for the utilization of the arch edging in the western portal of the Panagia ton Chalkeon⁴⁷. This explanation pertains to the challenges encountered by Byzantine builders in transitioning from conventional brickwork to a system with a concealed course. Primarily, these challenges were related to the alignment of horizontal brick rows on wall surfaces with the radial rows that constitute the archivolts. The construction of arches with large diameters presented particular difficulties, as the number of brick rows required for their completion increased with the size of the arch.

Kappas identified the distinctive architectural elements of Thessaloniki, noting that the technique of edging the facade arches with brick was a hallmark of regional specificity⁴⁸. He emphasized that this detail was not observed in any monuments of the Middle Byzantine period in Constantinople or its surroundings⁴⁹. Concurrently, within the context of the Macedonian territories, arch edging emerged as a prevalent design solution, serving to accentuate the architectural composition of the window opening against the backdrop of the prevailing wall masonry, even prior to the emergence of the concealed course technique. An illustrative example of this phenomenon is found in the repeated motif on the facades of the Church of St. Sophia in Ohrid. It is plausible to hypothesize that the initial encounter between the local tradition of arranging arches and the metropolitan practice took place during the construction of the church of Panagia ton Chalkeon, subsequently adopted by the master builders in the western part of the Theme of Bulgaria.

Regarding the innovations that did not exist in the 11th century in this northern region of the Balkans, we note the technique of masonry mainly made of spolia early Byzantine brick, laid with a concealed course, except for the cobblestones of the plinth; the faceted drum with semi-columns at the corners, carrying an overhead arcade over profiled windows and niches in each face, with imposts in the base of the arches; deep stepped profiling of windows and arched niches on the facades; a double protruding dogtooth frieze encircling all

⁴⁶ Н. Мавродинов, *Еднокорабната и крстовидната църква по българските земи до края на XIV век*, София 1931; С. Ангелов, *Акценти от културната история от Кюстендил и Кюстендилско*, Известия на исторически музей – Кюстендил 20, Кюстендил 2019, 285.

⁴⁷ Γ. Βελένης, *Ερμηνεία του εξωτερικού διακόσμου στη βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική, Διατριβή*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1984, 65-106.

⁴⁸ М. Каппас, Архитектурный «идиолект» Фессалоники, 138.

⁴⁹ For rare examples of the use of this technique in Constantinople's architectural practice, see: С. В. Мальцева; А. А. Фрезе, *Осмысление константинопольских строительных практик в архитектуре Македонии и соседних земель в XI-XII веках*, Византийский Временник 108, Москва 2024, 263–284.



Fig. 14. Church of St. George in Kolusha, 2nd half. 11th century. Bulgaria (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 14. Црква Св. Ђорђа (Св. Никола) у Колуши, друга половина 11. века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Маљцева)

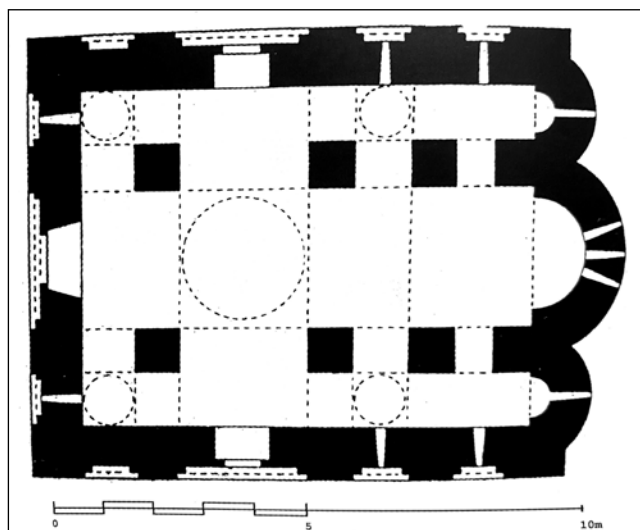
the compositional elements of the building; an unusual triple altar window, as if assembled from three single ones, as it happens on faceted apses. An important new element, harking back to the metropolitan architecture, is the appearance of the bemas, due to which the plan acquired a more elongated form than a square. At the same time, square pillars are preserved, the side aisles become narrow, and their corner cells are completed with domical vaults - another new element for the architecture of the northern Balkan provinces. In the interior, cornices appear at the base of the drum, the vaults of the arms of the cross, and on the pillars at the level of small arches, which also finds parallels in monuments oriented on metropolitan architecture.

Ćurčić proposed the involvement of master builders from Constantinople in the construction of the church of St. George (St. Nicholas) in Kolusha⁵⁰. This viewpoint is not endorsed, as the architectural composition of the church contains few distinctly Constantinopolitan elements. Some characteristics, such as the presence of bemas and cornices, a concealed course, and masonry of arch elements without brick lining, are by this time observable in other regions. The nearest artistic hub to which the ancient Roman road led from Kolusha was Thessaloniki, which was under the influence of Constantinople. The architectural innovations observed in Kolusha, including the arrangement of the altar with the bema, the design of the windows in the central apse, the incorporation of dome vaults in the corner compartments, the masonry technique, and the distinctive style of the facades, were already evident in the renowned church of Thessaloniki. The architectural design of Kolusha clearly exhibits the initial impulse of the innovations found in Panagia ton Chalkeon, which in this case have undergone a process of simplification and reinterpretation. This influence

⁵⁰ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 412–413.

Fig. 15. Church of St. George in Kolusha, 2nd half. 11th century. Bulgaria. Plan (according to Ćurčić)

Сл. 15. Црква Св. Ђорђа (Св. Никола) у Колуши, друга половина 11. века, Бугарска. (основа С. Ћурчић)



is evident in the design of the drum, which features a superimposed arcade on columns, and in the composition of the side facades, divided by flat niches with two-step profiling. The central niche is particularly notable for its increased height and width, and it is cut through with pairs of windows.

Another indirect evidence of a reflection on the architectural forms of the Panagia ton Chalkeon may be the presence of false gables above the tympana of the arms of the cross. However, the modern Kolusha gables were the result of a crude restoration that violated the possible proportions of these elements. An old pre-restoration photograph (late 19th century) published by Mavrodinov shows that none of the gables have survived, but it seems that there is a fragment of vertically rising masonry on the southern side of the tympanum of the western facade⁵¹. The quality of the photo does not allow us to be sure that there are good reasons for such a reconstruction. However, the significant similarity of other features of the architecture of the church in Kolusha and Panagia ton Chalkeon, as well as the popularity of similar pediments or tympana over the cross arms (Sapareva Banja, Nerezi, Kuršumlija) in other monuments of the 11th century and 12th century, allows us to assume the possibility of the existence of a false pediment in Kolusha.

In the same Kyustendil region, 60 kilometers east of Kolusha, there is a diminutive Church of St. Nicholas in Sapareva Banja.⁵² (Fig. 13) The ktetor of the church remains unknown. As with Kolusha, the construction of this church is situated within the Roman and early Byzantine city of Germanica, a region that maintained its popularity throughout history due to the presence of thermal springs and its advantageous geographical location. It is plausible that the patron of the Church of St. Nicholas was a member of the Byzantine military aristocracy. Bulgarian historiography has proposed a wide range of dates for the

⁵¹ Н. Мавродинов, *Еднокорабната и крѣстовидната църква*.

⁵² S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 403–404.



Fig. 16. Church of St. Nicholas in Sapareva Banja, 2nd half of the 11th century, Bulgaria (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 16. Црква Св. Николе у Сапаревој Бањи, друга половина 11. века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Маљцева)

monument, spanning from the 12th to the 13th century⁵³. Ćurčić placed it in the same historical period as the Church of Kuršumljia, though he did not specify a precise dating. The architectural design of the church, characterized by its compact structure, square plan, and wide dome, employing the concealed course technique, evokes associations with the church of St. Nicholas in Kuršumljia (Toplica), which was constructed in the 1150s to 1160s⁵⁴. However, a comparative analysis of these two monuments reveals that the observed similarities are limited to certain architectural elements. With the exception of the typology, the architectural program of the church in Sapareva Banja finds its closest analogies with the program of the church in Kolusha. It also lacks a narthex, has one round apse, and the same extensive profiling on the facades as in Kolusha, which differs significantly from the flattened elements in Kuršumljia. The rich arcade on columns with impostes on the drum, in combination with the alternating narrow windows and deep niches, exhibits a full correspondence to the morphology of the Kolusha church, while bearing no resemblance to the large windows of the drum in Kuršumljia. The composition of two single windows inserted into the timpana of the side facades of the Kolusha church is reproduced in Sapareva Banja on a different scale, transforming into an original composition of blind twin arches with ledges and a third one hanging above them, which does not exceed the surface of the wall. The false triangular gables in Sapareva Banja rise above the vaults on all four facades, apparently repeating a composition similar to that of the church in Kolusha. All elements of the facades in Sapareva Banja are accentuated by a double dogtooth frieze, a feature that is also present in the Kyustendil church. Even the stone socle at the base of the lower rows of brick masonry completely repeats the same feature observed in Kolusha. The arched elements of windows and niches in Sapareva Banja are constructed with

⁵³ Кр. Миятев, *Архитектурата в средновековна България*, София 1965, 190; Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Църковната архитектура на Първата Българска държава*, София 1984, 104.

⁵⁴ S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 404.

bricks with thin joints, contrasting with the thick joints of concealed course masonry of the walls, mirroring the style observed in Kolusha.

Finally, it is important to note that, just as in the Kolusha church, the tympanum arch of the western facade is the only one with a characteristic brick edging. This brick edging is modeled after the Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki, where this motif is also found only on the western facade. We therefore assume, albeit tentatively, that the Church of St. Nicholas in Kolusha and the church in Sapareva Banja with the same dedication may be the products of the same construction atelier. Consequently, the time of construction of these two churches, in Kolusha and Sapareva Banja, is constrained to the date of appearance of the model in Thessaloniki (1028) and the time of the first layer of paintings discovered by restorers in the apse of the church in Kolusha, i.e., before the first half of the 12th century, when the second layer of frescoes appears in the interior.

Our hypothesis is that these two churches, which exhibit a high degree of architectural similarity despite their differences in typology and size, are derived from the architectural tradition of Thessaloniki centered on the Panagia ton Chalkeon. Furthermore, we posit that the architectural program of the Kolusha church and the typology of the church in Sapareva Banja, which is conducive to the construction of small domed churches, would serve as models for local builders in west of modern Bulgaria. The fundamental design principles of the cross-domed church of compact type will be maintained, while the morphology will undergo simplification. For instance, the wide twelve-sided drum in Sapareva Banja would be transformed into a cylindrical one with a significant reduction in diameter and elongation of proportions in the construction of the Church of St. Theodore Stratilates in Boboshevo (Fig. 13).⁵⁵ This church is widely dated in Bulgarian historiography from the first quarter of the 11th century to the 14th century. Concurrently, the stepped pilasters of the faceted drum found in the Church of St. Nicholas in Sapareva Banja underwent a transfer to the round drum, thereby signifying the variability and provinciality of the



Fig. 17. Church of St. Theodore Stratilates in Boboshevo, end of the 11th – beginning of the 12th century, Bulgaria (photo by S. Maltseva)

Сл. 17. Црква Теодора Стратилата у Бобошеву, крај 11 века, Бугарска. (Фото С. Маљцева)

⁵⁵ В. Миков, *Црквата "Св.Тодор"*, Известия на Археологическия Институт 5, 1928–1929, 33; Кр. Миятев, *Архитектурата в средновековна България*, София 1965, 190; Д. Панайотова, *Црквата Св. Тодор при Бобошево*, Известия на Института за изобразителни изкуства 7, 1964, 101.

continuation of such an architectural tradition. The concealed course technique, which was preserved in the vaulted elements, would involve the incorporation of a substantial amount of rough stone.

The tradition of Thessaloniki, which was adopted in these areas following the construction of the Panagia ton Chalkeon, continued in a simplified version through local artisans. Concurrently, all the aforementioned monuments, oriented on the Panagia ton Chalkeon and reproducing its individual features, were constructed by regional artels, independent of the master builders of the church in Thessaloniki. The influence of the Panagia ton Chalkeon tradition is evident in the design of the drum of the church in Zemen and is still preserved in many features of the church in Kolusha, including the concealed course technique, which is one of the hallmarks of the architectural tradition of Thessaloniki. The poor preservation of 11th-century monuments in Thessaloniki allows only a rough estimate of the influence of the Panagia ton Chalkeon on subsequent monuments in Macedonia (the church in Olynthus), and in the lands subordinate to the Archdiocese of Ohrid. The church in Thessaloniki exhibits a distinctive synthesis of Constantinopolitan, Athonite, and Thessalonian characteristics, thereby transcending the conventional boundaries of Byzantine aesthetics and disseminating the innovations of metropolitan architectural practice to the northern regions of the Byzantine Theme of Bulgaria. The northern regions of the Balkans, which were actively engaged in the 11th century with Ohrid and Thessaloniki, became a site for experimentation, combining architectural elements from different regional traditions.

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ПАНАГИЈА ТОН ХАЛКЕОН У СОЛУНУ И ЦРКВЕНО ГРАДИТЕЉСТВО
У ВИЗАНТИЈСКОЈ ТЕМИ БУГАРСKE У 11. ВЕКУ

Панагија тон Халкеон је изграђен 1128. године у другом по величини граду Византијског царства и представља пример регионалне традиције Солуна у средњевизантијском периоду. Постоји огромна литература посвећена проучавању архитектонских карактеристика ове цркве, што доказује да је овај споменик резултат креативне разраде идеја солунског мајстора које потичу из разних извора у Цариграду, Атосу и непосредно у Солуну. У овом чланку желимо да наставимо тему и да пратимо како је ово јединствено дело, црква Панагија тон Халкеон, једини познати споменик Солуна из 11. века, постало извор за даљу имплементацију оригиналних идеја и ван Македоније током 11. века, а посебно је утицало на архитектонски развој византијске теме Бугарске.