

**MARTYR'S ARCHITECTURE IN THE LANDS OF TODAY'S
SOUTHEAST BULGARIA - THRACE DIOCESE, PROVINCE
OF HEMIMONT /3RD- 4TH CENTURY/**

Today's lands of Southeast Bulgaria were the main part of the Roman province Hemimont in Thrace diocese. The new administrative division in the Roman Empire enforced by Emperor Diocletianus, became a basis for the organization of the Christian church during the time of Emperor Constantine the Great.¹ It had a serious basis of early Christian communities arising already in the middle of the 2nd century AD with the settlement of many immigrants from Asia Minor coast, Syria and Palestine.² They also brought the tradition of creating sanctuaries /martyrs/ to Christian saints, who died for the faith, upon which significant Christian centers developed in the following ages.³ In the church annals mentioned legendary martyrs such as Saint Irina in Mesembria /Nessebar/, the first bishop of Apollonia /Sozopol/ and Deultum – Aelius Publius Iulius, etc. For the active construction works in those Christian centers, the findings of the early martyr's architecture were obliterated. During the next two centuries especially wide spread became the cult of the mortal remains of the martyrs and pious Christians influenced by the passion of St. Alexander of Rome. According to it in Thrace, the relics of seven bishops were sanctified and buried officially. Episcopal centers along the coast: Mesembria, Anhialo, and Sozopol, where valuable Christian relics had been kept, were especially attractive for the pilgrims. In the Episcopal registers of patriarch Photius it is mentioned about the legendary martyr in Mesembria of Saint Irina⁴ built in the 6th century AD. The relics of St. Theodor Stratilat were also kept here till the middle of the 13th century, as well as the hand of St. Andrew and the head of St. Sist.⁵ Other

¹ В. Велков, *Градът в Тракия и Дакия през късната античност /IV-VI в./*, София 1959, 96.

² С.Н. Neumann, *Das Martyrion der hi Euphemia zu Istanbul Forsch u Fort*, 1943, 21/22, 215.

³ М. Ваклинова, *Раннохристиянски центрове в Североизточна Тракия сб. Североизточна Тракия и Византия през IV-XIV в.*, София – Сливен 1993, 58

⁴ ГИБИ, 2, С, 87-89.

⁵ В. Гюзелев, *Очерк върху историята на град Несебър в периода 1352-1453 г.*, ГФУ-ФИФ, LXIV, 3, 1970, 57-98



Fig. 1. Early Christian complex near the village of Voden, Yambol Region – general view.

Сл. 1 Ранохришћански комплекс поред села Воден, изглед

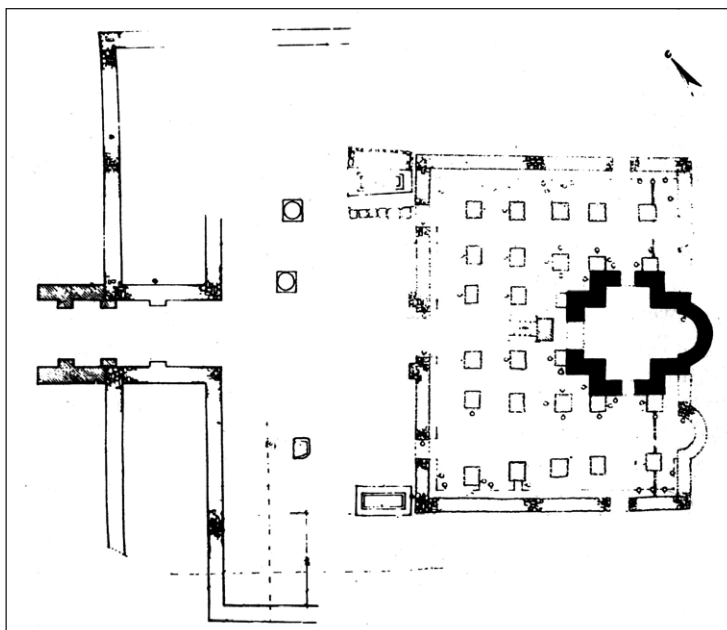


Fig. 2. Lay out of the Christian complex near the village of Voden.

Сл. 2 Ранохришћански комплекс поред села Воден, основа

legendary sources indicate that one of the churches in Sozopol had preserved the relics of St. Zosim who is among the most honored saints in the town even nowadays.

Probably every newly arising urban center in the province of Hemimont during 4th to the beginning of the 5th century AD tried to attract pilgrims' attention by the erection of its own Christian sacred places. In the context of those processes began the development of early Christian religious complexes in two of the biggest fortresses in the province of Pamukocastel near the village of Voden, Yambol Region and the fortress Markeli near the city of Karnobat

From particular interest is the religious complex located in the southwest part of the province of Hemimont, today's village of Voden, Yambol Region. It is strategically situated between two fortresses, built to defend the road to Adrianople from the North. They are part of a fortification system known in the Late Antiquity and Middle Age under the name Potamucastel, a city first mentioned by Procopius of Caesarea in his book *Peri ktismaton* ("On Buildings"). (Fig.1) The region is rich in karst landforms and specialist speleologists discovered 9 caves during the archaeological surveys. One of them is included in the Christian complex. This natural cave is transformed into a tomb built for the mortal remains of the martyrs and later used as a foundation for a chapel and basilica. (Fig.2)

The tomb is located in one of the narrow passages of a 9m deep cave, the entrance of which is namely the centre of the basilica's nave, built in the mid 5th century AD. The entrance is shaped with 1.7m height profiled plates. A stone stairway is leading to the button of the cave. The 37 steps with a width of 1.25m are linking different levels of three rectangular stone platforms. The narrow passage to the first platform is overarched with stone masonry, made from local limestone, filled with mortar. This landing is wider than the other two. Two rectangular niches are cut on both of its sides across the central axis, used as burial chambers. (Fig.3.1) The first niche is 70cm wide, 1m deep and has a length of 1.90m; the second is shorter at 1.33m in length. The walls of the chambers are covered with fine plaster, which is engraved with lines imitating square marble facing. The floor is laid with brick tiles, bound by mortar.

In the centre of the first platform is transit to the next level, following the natural slope of the cave. A five-step stairway leads to a second site of brick masonry. In the rock above it, a trapezium-shaped candlestick is hewn for standing torches and candles. (Fig.3.2) Next is the third overarched corridor with a height



Fig. 3.1 Burial chamber on the first landing.

Сл. 3.1 Гробна соба, први ниво

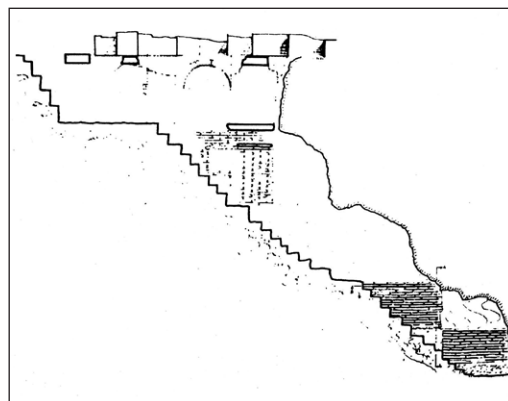


Fig. 3.2 Vertical section of the martyr chamber.

Сл. 3.2 Вертикални пресек гробнице



Fig. 4. Stairway to the martyr chamber.

Сл. 4 Прилаз мртиријуму

of 1.7m, which leads to the bottom most domestic ground that has a rectangular shape and length of 2.8m. The left side is protected constructively with a brick wall to prevent collapse of the stones. At the end of the site, there is 5 stone steps leading to the natural vesicle of the cave, ending with two short galleries. They are shaped with brick masonry also bound with mortar. The first is in the form of a semicircular niche with a diameter of 0.8m and 1.2m high, very well-shaped with a deep entrance to it. The second one is a smaller wedge-shaped gallery. Its entrance is nicely shaped with a brick arch and a diameter of 0.8m. (Fig.4)

The Architectural features of the Christian facility in the village of Voden could be considered similar to the famous martyr sanctuary of John the Baptist in Jerusalem. Lower down at the third platform, inside the cave with two over-arched niches is the place for storing holy relics laid in during the construction works of the martyr. Unfortunately, due to the opening of the cave at the end of the 19th century and illegal excavation, none of the archaeological material has been found for a more precise dating and scientific research.

Archaeological studies of the cross-shaped building over the cave tomb were held in the 1990s under the direction of the late archaeologist Nelly Tancheva⁶ from Museum Yambol. This facility is square shaped with each side measuring a length of 2.75m and four symmetrically formed niches. The central square area is located just above the entrance of the cave tomb. The niche to the East ends into apse (concha) with a diameter of 2.2m. Foundations of the building are preserved up to 0.7m; they are made of limestone and bricks, bound

⁶ Н. Танчева – Василева, *Раннохристиянските комплекси около село Воден*, Североизточна Тракия и Византия през IV-XIV в, София – Сливен, 1993, р.73 – 91.

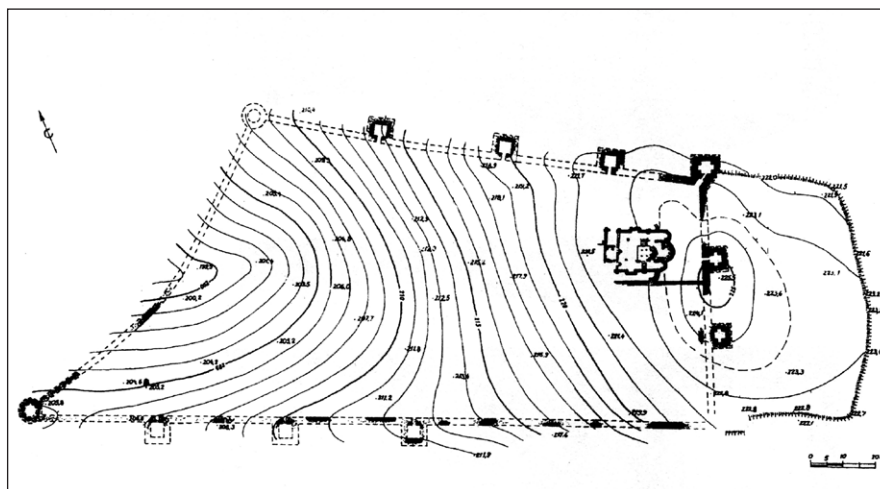


Fig.5. Lay out of Markeli fortress, near the city of Karnobat.

Сл. 5 Тврђава Маркели поред Карнобата, основа

by mortar, similar to the constructions inside the cave. Based on archaeological findings and comparative analysis with similar monuments, Ms. Tancheva dated the building of this martyr at the beginning of the 4th century and in particular around 325AD - a significant year for the formation of new theological teachings introduced to the cult of the dead. New requirements in liturgy gave their impact on the development of crypto-Christian architecture.⁷

Excavations uncovered more about construction stages of the late Christian complex. A basilica with three apses was built in the middle of the 5th century. The building was fitted inside the central nave martyr and was repeatedly refurbished in the following centuries due to the dynamic events in that part of the Balkan Peninsula. Archaeological evidence indicates that at the end of the 11th century, the old Christian complex has become a monastery, which was maintained until the middle of the 14th century and later destroyed during the first Ottoman incursion.

As a result of archaeological studying of Markeli fortress near Karnobat during 1989 – 94, a big Christian complex was revealed in the well-fortified part of the fortress.⁸ (Fig.5) It was initiated by the construction of a martyr at the end of 4th – the beginning of 5th century AD (Fig.6)

The martyr is situated on the highest terrace at the northeast end of the fortress.⁹ A great part of its structure is under the level of the terrain and is situated in premises hewed in the rock with dimensions of 3,8 x 4m and a height of almost 2m. Its walls inside are tiled with construction of half bricks. From north and south are formed two stone staircases with nine stairs each, 1,2m wide. In the

⁷ V.H. Baumann, *La Basilique a martyrium*, Dacia. 16, 1972, fig.1-7.

⁸ Ж. Аладжов, *Крепостта Маркели – някои стратегически и хронологически бележки*, София - Сливен 1993, 118 – 124.

⁹ Ж. Аладжов, *Мартириума в Маркели*, История на културата в Карнобатския регион, 2002, p. 207-209.

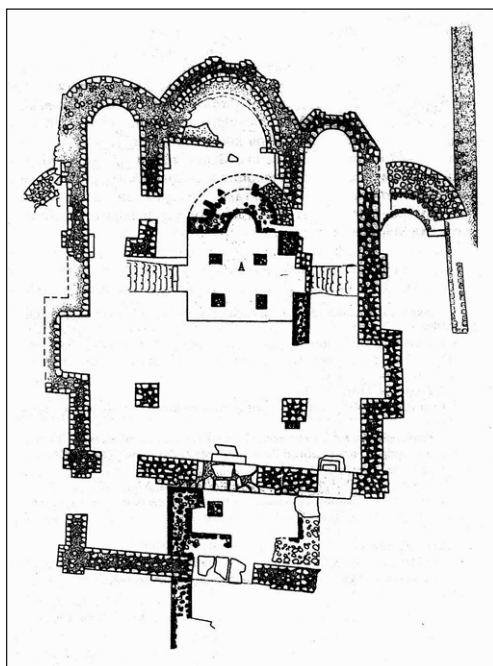


Fig. 6. Lay out of Christian complex in Markeli fortress, near the city of Karnobat.

Сл. 6 Хришћански комплекс у тврђави Маркели, осново

center of the east wall is formed an apse with width of the opening also 1,2m and a depth of 0,6m. (Fig.7) The preserved brick construction of the concha affords an opportunity for reconstruction of its silhouette in its whole height. In the middle of the premises are preserved the foundations of four free, built with bricks and mortar, 0,65m wide poles. Those are the supports of the cruciform vaulted cover, which has taken the load of the over-ground part of the outfit intended for requiems.

Archaeological findings on the terrain are sufficient to assume that the cover was cruciform vault. The semi-cylindrical vaults over the stairs and the apse crossed over the central room so that a small cupola was formed over the four built poles. The graphic restoration of the martyr is a work of Prof. Architect Stephan Boyadjiev.¹⁰ (Fig.8)

Dismembering of the inner room of the martyr was in conformity with its function to take at a definite moment a stream of pilgrims in front of the sacred relics. For that purpose the area between the couple of poles, situated along the symmetrical axis with north-south direction is the real walk line which was one-way. Getting down into the crypt and going out of it is possible using both single armed stairs along the north-south axis. The two steps of each stairways were hewed in the rock and stack by about 1,8m out of the space of the land /terrestrial/ chapel. The main object of the pilgrimage – the sacred relics of the martyr had been possibly kept inside a sarcophagus situated in the room between the east couple of poles and the apse.

Land part of the martyr was formed as a small chapel. Although it almost repeats the square surface of the crypt it has a bit prolonged rectangular form, conformable to the rock terrain. A wide semicircular apse is preserved in the central part of the east wall and opposite is situated the opening of the door.

¹⁰ St. Boyadjiev, *Early Christian Martyrium in Markeli and mediaeval churches laid on its relics*, History and culture of Karnobat Region, 2002, p. 215-216.

Fig. 7. East
apse of the
martyr.

Сл. 7 Источна
апсида
мртиријума
унутар тврђаве
Маркели



Because of deeply destroyed walls in height, variants are possible in the reconstruction of the cover of the chapel. The director of studies Senior Research Associate Jivko Aladjov thinks that it entirely repeats that of the crypt – two crossing crosswise semi cylindrical vaults, forming a small cupola.

However, in architectural reconstruction Prof. Stephan Boyadjiev assumes that the walls of the chapel are not thick enough and because of that they cannot take the cruciform vault cover. In his opinion land part of the martyr bears two slope wooden cover.¹¹ It was lighted up through two windows, one in the middle of the apse and the other one – over the door.

The stairs were protected in their upper part with additional space of two longitudinal wings, also covered with two slope roofs going under the level of the under-roofing cornice of the central cover. Each wing was closed with a single door, barring the access to the crypt.

In that form the religious outfit was probably preserved till the second quarter of the 6th century AD¹¹, when it was partially destroyed most likely during barbaric invasions. Very soon along with the serious construction of the fortification system of the fortress was built a big three-nave basilica covering completely

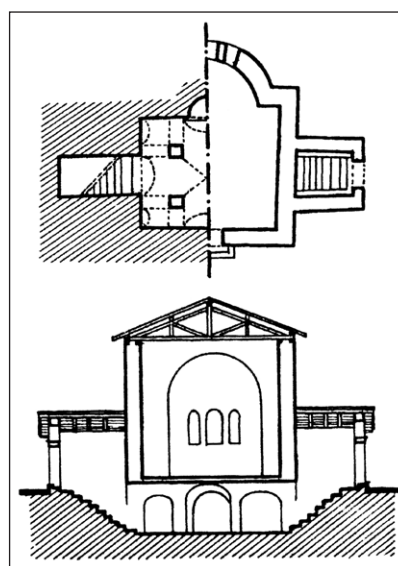


Fig. 8. Graphic reconstruction of the
Christian complex in Markeli fortress,
near the city of Karnobat.

Сл. 8 Графичка реконструкција
хришћанског комплекса у тврђави
Маркели

¹¹ Ts. Drazheva, J. Aladjov, D. Momchilov, *Martrium of Karnobat fortress Markeli*, Varna, 2003, International conference on crypto Christian culture.

the earlier martyr. It ended in the east with three-apse altar area conformable to the place of the crypt, which was included in the space of the new temple. However, there is access to the crypt only by the south stairs, which coincided with the opening between the bema and the diaconicon. It was closed by a movable slab entirely on the level of the floor. Most likely the getting down into the crypt happened only in connection with taking out the sacred relics, which were laid in front of the church altar for adoration on the patron saint's day.

The basilica constructed on the martyr is with the same construction and decorative formation of the walls as in the martyr. The new building which is a bit later than the martyr was built in way to ensure encircling covered areas to access to it from north, west and south. Both side shoulders outline the cross, symbolizing martyr's death. The grouping of the other premises around the peculiar center of the cross creates a strictly symmetrical along the longitudinal axis building in the 6th century AD. So the building comes as well closer to the herons and mausoleums from which it descends. That plan is used most often after the time of Emperor Constantine the Great in Old Christian sepulchers and mausoleums.

After the 6th century the monument took on the following appearance: in the center – a martyr with an access, open from north, west and south and closed to the altar on the east. A corridor formed by crossing of naves and the area in front of the altar forms the access to it. Similar monuments are known from the village of Voden, Yambol Region; the village of Kanyuh, Macedonia; Dinogecia – Nikulicel, Romania, etc. In all these cases it is the rectangular frame round the central main body, its cruciform structure that gives it the impression of a martyr.

The construction of the martyr is assigned to the end of the 4th century AD and its widening to the end of 5th – the beginning of 6th century, but not after the time of Justinian the Great /527 – 565AD/. Within these borders, the religious complex in the fortress Markeli originated as martyr's and carries a variety of east marks of religious construction.¹²

Both Christian complexes - near the village of Voden and the fortress Markeli near the city of Karnobat arose as memorials and bear many similarities with the cult architecture in Asia Minor and Egypt, developed from Constantinople in the 5th century. With their cross formed plan and compositional elements, as well as the use of natural cavities and a cave for crypt, they enrich the knowledge about crypto - Christian architecture not only on the territory of the province Haemimont but also in the whole Balkans Peninsula. Records give account of more martyrdoms built within the most Early Christian churches in the capital of Byzantium Constantinople,¹³ which has affected heavily the nearby Balkan territory¹⁴ diocese Thrace and Haemimont province.¹⁵

¹² J. Aladjov, *Place called Markeli*, Bishop Constantine's readings, 4 /sent to press/.

¹³ A. Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, Paris 1948, p. 98.

¹⁴ E.J. Darrouses, *Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Paris 1991.

¹⁵ Ц. Дражева, *Епископските центрове по Южното българско Черноморие V-XV в. – центрове на християнската култура*, ИНМБ, т. 4, Бургас 2002, 203

Expansion of both monuments was made according to the changes of Byzantine liturgy at the end of the 5th century, which requires a central plan of the temple, a place for clergy in the middle of the church and more space for procession related to the martyr. Architectural changes of Christian complexes after the end of the 11th century are closely connected to the development of monasticism and pilgrimage.

Цоња Дражева

МАРТИРИЈАЛНА АРХИТЕКТУРА У ЗЕМЉАМА ДАНАШЊЕ ЈУГОИСТОЧНЕ
БУГАРСКЕ/ДИЕЦЕЗА ТРАКИЈА, ПРОВИНЦИЈА ХЕМИМОНТ, III-IV ВЕК

Данашње земље југоисточне Бугарске биле су основни део провинције Хемимонт у диоцези Тракија. Нова административна подела коју је наложио Диоклецијан, у време Константина Великог постала је основа и за организовање хришћанске цркве. Она је имала солидну основу коју су чиниле хришћанске општине настале још средином II века, када су се ту населили многи досељеници са малоазијског приобаља, Сирије и Палестине. Они су са собом донели и традицију изградње светилишта (мартријума) хришћанским свецима који су умрли за веру, а на основу којих су се у наредним вековима развили значајни хришћански центри. Због активног грађевинарства у овим хришћанским срединама, подаци о раној мартријалној архитектури нису очувани.

Хришћански комплекси код села Воден и тврђаве Маркели код Карнобата настали су као меморијални и садрже низ обележја култног грађевинарства у Малој Азији и Египту, који су се развили у Константинопољу у IV веку. Својим грађевинским планом у облику крста и композиционим елементима, коришћењем природних шупљина и пећина за гробнице, оне обогаћују крипто-хришћанску архитектуру не само на територији провинције Хемимонт већ и на Балкану. Писани извори говоре нам о таквим мартријонима, изграђеним у већини ранохришћанских цркви у престоници Константинопољу, што је неоспорно имало јак утицај на најближе балканске територије - диоцезу Тракија и провинцију Хемамонт.

Ширење ова два споменика је синхронизовано са променама у византијском богослужењу крајем V – VI века, што је изискивало централни план храма, место за духовност у средини цркве и више простора за процесии повезане са мартријумом. Архитектонске промене на хришћанским комплексима при крају XI века повезане су са развојем монаштва и поклонства.

