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на АСОЦИАЦИЯ „ОНГЪЛ“, том 21, год. XV, 2022



**ФОЛКЛОР И РЕЛИГИЯ:
ЕЗИК – ТЕКСТ – КОНТЕКСТ**



София, 2022

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ФОЛКЛОР И РЕЛИГИЯ: ЕЗИК – ТЕКСТ – КОНТЕКСТ

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FOLKLORE AND RELIGION: LANGUAGE – TEXT – CONTEXT

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**MEDIEVAL CHURCH AT THE FOOT OF THE "CAREVI KULI"
(TSAR'S TOWERS) SITE – STRUMICA**

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At the foot of the archeological site "Tsrevi Kuli" – Strumica, more than a decade ago, were recorded remains of a medieval church, which, according to the location, is presumed to have been part of the urban core of medieval Strumica. The space where the sacred building extends is one of the wider terraces on the hill itself, in a dominant position above the city.

With the implementation of the archaeological excavations in (2015–2016) was revealed the full size of the church and the construction phases were followed. In this period were discovered the spatial, architectural and cultural characteristics of the building and the stratigraphic layers and chronology were determined (Fig. 1.)¹.

It's a matter of a one-nave church with high quality of building with good construction material (brick, stone and lime mortar) with dimensions: length 10.20 meters and width 5.90 meters. The building technique of certain parts of the exterior facade is reminded of cloisonné, especially in the part of the three-sided apse (Fig. 2, 3.). The church had three entrances, the main one on the west and two side ones on the south and north side, which according to the needs, in certain time periods, they were closed (walled) (ЦВЕТАНОВ 2017).

The facades of the church are articulated with a system of blind niches, which are an expression of modern building trends. The church was fresco-painted, and this is confirmed by the modest remains of the discovered fresco-painting in situ position, on the western entrance party of the door on both sides, were represented stylized floral motifs. Due to the wall in of the main western entrance, the church itself has a partial preservation of the fresco-painting.

¹ Illustrations to the text are published on pages 441–450. Editors' note.

With the excavation of the church, several construction phases have been ascertained, especially visible with the closing of the western and southern entrance. The western entrance of the church was probably closed with the burial of a church nobleman in a tomb in the western part of the church. The south entrance of the church was closed after the benches were raised next to the inner face of the south wall. In the last decades of its existence, the one-nave church was entered only through the northern entrance.

The tomb is built of brick and lime mortar and is located just below the entrance. The excavations at the tomb have identified several burials, as evidenced by the high concentration of disturbed osteological material. A complete skeleton of a deceased with relatively good preservation, in situ position, was also discovered. It's a question of buried man in an outstretched position with his arms crossed on his chest and oriented west – east, according to Christian canons. Two grave finds were also found in the grave: a silver coin next to the head of the deceased and a silver ring on his right hand. The silver coin is a Venetian grosso, Lorenzo Tiepolo (1268–1275), while the ring according to the shape and technique of making its dated it to the end of the XIII – beginning of the XIV century. This burial is, in fact, the last that was performed in this tomb (Fig. 4.) (Cvetanov 2017: 194–197).

The floor of the mausoleum was made of the same bricks with which the church was built, which another confirmation that the tomb was built in the period when the church itself functioned. From this, we can conclude that if the last burial in the tomb was performed in the late XIII – early XIV century (dated according to the findings), the first burials in the tomb were much earlier, probably when it was built. According to the historiographical circumstances, it would be the first half of the XIII century and the beginning of the second half of the XIII century, and this is confirmed by the paleographic – epigraphic analysis of the epitaph with Cyrillic inscription, which is located on one of the three stone found plates.

Namely, with the archeological excavations in 2015, inside the church next to the south wall, three processed stone plates were discovered, which were used secondarily, in the same level with the floor of the church. The

plates are processed on one side only and it is assumed that the three of them were part of the tomb construction inside the church. On one of these plates, there is a tombstone inscription in Cyrillic alphabet, which is undoubtedly dedicated to a person Jovan / Ivan, a Slav by birth (Fig. 5.). According to the historical context in which we place the plate and the tomb, the first half of the XIII century is a period when Byzantium lost control over medieval Strumica.

During this period, there was an advanced decentralization of power and growth of the petty feudal nobility and then the semi-independent feudal principalities of Dobromir Hrs and Dobromir Strez were created.

According to the historical context, the tombstone can be dated after 1230, no later than the period when the Bulgarian emperor Ivan Asen II (1218–1241) conquered Strumica. The Bulgarian medieval empire ruled Strumica until 1246, when the Nicaean emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes (1222–1254) took over Strumica (Матанов 2002: 253; Божилов 1985: 77–92). Since then the Romeians continue to rule Strumica until 1332 when the Serbs conquered the city for the first time (Cvetanov 2017: 197–199; Атанасовски 2009: 46; Матанов 2002: 253; Божилов 1985: 77–92).

The durable inscriptions themselves, placed on stone sand difficult to process, represent historic first-rate sources and, with respect to other types of inscriptions (carved in metal, wood, dry clay, wax, brick, dry mortar, bone etc.), they largely demonstrate an independent and specific evolution. Therefore, this epigraphic material, although usually scarce (similar to our material) can be a benchmark of the time of creation of a specific sacral building, in our case the medieval church on the archaeological locality “Carevi Kuli”. This aspect points to the significance of the paleographic and morphological analyses or resolution of the content of this inscription, although stereotypical and without any profound data at that time. The mentioning of the name Ivan without any title does not lead us to believe that this person was some kind of a nobleman or a ranking clergyman, but we could hypothesize that the deceased was an upper-class citizen (Томовић 1974: 11; Krsteska / Cvetanov 2017: 89.).

The stone slab with the inscription 1 is 66 cm long, 46 cm wide and 4 to 11 cm thick. The letters are 3.4 to 4.6 cm high and the depth of the carving

is 1 to 1.5 mm. The letters carved into the inscribed tombstone resemble the Byzantine Majuscule, a three-line epigraphic system found commonly on inscriptions, especially from the 12th to the 14th century (Krsteska / Cvetanov 2017: 89–94, fig. 7–8).

М(Ѣ)С(Є)ЦА Θ ΜΑΙΑ Θ ΚΑ Δ,(Ъ)НЬ Θ ΠΡῚΣΑΒΗ СЕ
 ΡΑΒЬ Θ В(О)ЖН Θ НВАНЬ Θ ВῚНАΙΑ
 МОУ ПАМ(Є)Ь .

**“In the month of May, (on the) 21st day, died
 the servant of God, Ivan, may his memory
 live forever.”**

In 2021, conservation and restoration works began on the sacred building itself. Within the project “Conservation and restoration of the medieval church at the foot of the archeological site Carevi Kuli – Strumica”, conservation archaeological excavations were carried out. These excavations were intended for the needs of the conservation interventions of the medieval church. The conservation archeological excavation was carried out in the area west of the west wall of the church; in order to free, the exterior of the west wall and the area northeast of the apse because of the temporary illegal building at the location that had been erected (Fig. 6, 7, 8).

With the removal of the retaining wall that was in function of the illegal building, the complete substructure of the eastern part of the church appeared, performed in construction technique opus cementicum with a depth of 0.9 meters (Fig. 9). As part of the clearing of the construction material from the substructure and superstructure, we discovered bearings in the east wall. This fact gives us clues to conclude that the medieval church was built with a hidden Santrach system, also called Semi opus cloisonné cum lignum. The Santrach system starts at the level where the substation ends and is also a leveling layer between the substructure and the superstructure. At a height of 1.00 m, the remains of the hidden San-

trach system were discovered in the south and north walls of the church, while the substructure from the superstructure is separated by means of wooden beams, which follow the direction of the walls, as well as their transverse placement (Fig. 10.).

The constructive Santrach system of buildings in the Middle Ages enters the chronological framework of the XIII–XIV century. The hidden Santrach system is not typical for the medieval construction on the territory of Macedonia. The builders in the Middle Ages, except using lime mortar as a binder, strengthened the walls with a constructive Santrach system. In order to protect the beams from caries, they do not break out on the facades of the building, but are hidden by the facade of the building. During the excavation, due to the poor preservation of the walls, we were not able to conclude whether exist vertical beams that should be connected to the horizontal ones, similar to the Santrach systems in the medieval fortifications of the XIII and XIV century. This system has existed until today in the rural construction of the mentioned area, connected with the slab layer. At certain distances in height, wooden beams are placed horizontally along the two faces of the wall, and are connected to each other with short transverse beams – klepa. Today we call this system rotisserie, and in Turkish – santrach. The late medieval walls built in this way have remained preserved on the ground to this day. The bearings from the destroyed beams are visible. They regularly appear in the more important details – towers, gates, angular breaches of the wall, but also of the interior buildings. The walls were built of stone with lean plaster, but they are fully reinforced with beams fitted on both sides of each wall (Микулчиќ 1996: 74–76).

Conservation and restoration works on the building are performed in accordance with the basic project. In the first phase in the period May–July 2021, conservation and restoration works were performed on the walls of the building (Fig. 11–14.). Before we start with the conservation, the dehydrated construction material is removed and then the walls are cleaned and washed. After the created conditions, conservation and restoration of the walls was performed, following the old opus on the outer face of the walls in Semi opus cloisonné cum lignum and opus incertum and opus testaceum in the inner face of the walls.

In the second phase of conservation, which began in October 2021, the bench was restored and the tomb was preserved. Also at this stage, the tomb was covered with the discovered monolithic plate found during the discovery of the tomb. With the archaeological excavations have not revealed any remains of the floor, so it will be solved with yellow sand, placed on PVC foil, after previously leveling the floor (Fig. 15–18.). The drainage of the church from the atmospheric water was solved by placing a hidden plastic pipe in the space of the apse with the floor level and through the beam bearing in the east wall it goes out of the building in the manhole next to the church.

With the conservation and restoration of the medieval church, further destruction of the building was prevented, and the city of Strumica received another cultural content for presentation to the wider cultural audience.

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**СРЕДНОВЕКОВНАТА ЦРКВА ВО ПОДНОЖЈЕТО
НА ЛОКАЛИТЕТОТ „ЦАРЕВИ КУЛИ“ – СТРУМИЦА**

Душко Цветанов

НУ Завод за заштита на спомениците на културата и Музеј

Струмица

Трајче Нацев

Универзитет Гоце Делчев – Штип

Република Северна Македонија

Резиме

Средновековната црква, лоцирана е во подножјето на археолошкиот “Цареви Кули“ Струмица, на околу 200 м североисточно од фортификацијата. Црквата претставува дел од урбаното јадро на средновековна Струмица, изградена покрај една од комуникациите кои воделе до тврдината “Цареви Кули“.

Во трудот се презентирани, резултати од археолошките истражувања, изведени во 2015 и 2016 година и конзерваторско реставраторски работи кои започнаа во 2021 година.

Клучни зборови: Средновековна црква, истражување, конзервација, реставрација, Струмица.

Илюстрации към статията на Dushko Svetanov and Trajche Nacev – „Medieval church at the foot of the ”Carevi kuli“ (Tsar’s towers) site – Strumica“, стр. 293–299.



Fig. 1. Panorama of the medieval church, after archeological excavations.



Fig. 2. Detail of the construction technique Semi opus cloisonné cum lignum on the east wall.



Fig. 3. Preserved remains of blind niches on the south wall.



Fig. 4. Tomb in the nave of the medieval church, after archeological excavations.

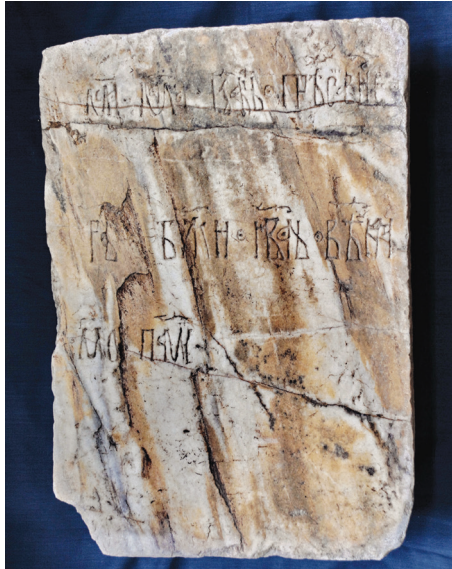


Fig. 5. The stone slab with Cyrillic letter inscription.



Fig. 6. Detail of construction technique opus incertum on the west wall.



Fig. 7. Detail of the construction technique opus testaceum on the north wall.



Fig. 8. East wall of the medieval church, after the removal of the temporary building.



Fig. 9. Retaining wall, in front of the east wall, after closing the fugue.



Fig. 10. Wooden beams from the Santrach system, at the east wall of the medieval church.



Fig. 11. North wall of the medieval church after conservation and restoration.



Fig. 12. South wall of the medieval church after conservation and restoration.



Fig. 13. East wall of the medieval church after conservation, restoration and partial reconstruction.



Fig. 14. Western wall of the medieval church after conservation and restoration.



Fig. 15. Sitting bench after conservation and reconstruction.



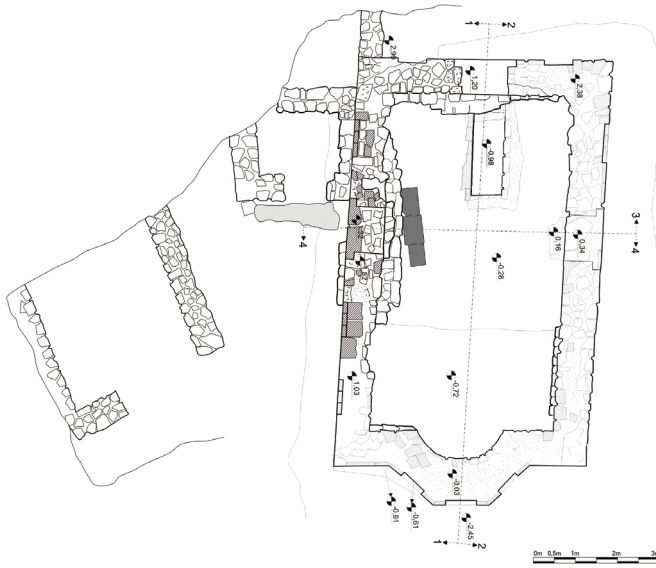
Fig. 16. The tomb in the medieval church, after conservation and restoration.



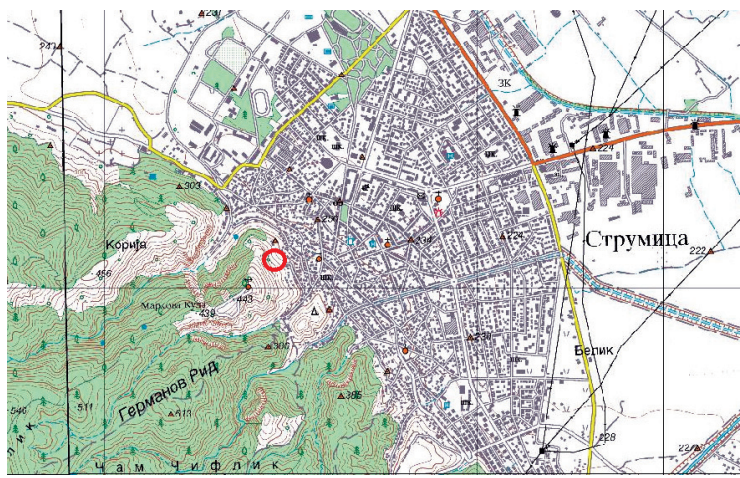
Fig. 17. The floor in the medieval church after settling the floor.



Fig. 18. Panorama of the medieval church, after completion of conservation, restoration and partial reconstruction.



Plan: The basis of the medieval church.



Map: Topographic map.