The article deals with the problem of chronological determination of three sacral edifices located in the middle, as well as in the highest cultural horizon of the region of Matka near Skopje. Due to the lack of historical sources, as well as preserved portions of the original fresco ensembles, the buildings are dated on the ground of their architectural features and according to the archeological finds discovered in their vicinity. In that regard, the church of St. Kyriake on the highest mountain post of Matka is dated in the first half of the fourteenth century, the temple of St. Archangel Michael at the site of Peter’s Rock in the late twelfth, while the church dedicated to St. Saviour, as a restoration of the later, was repeatedly built in the period between the late thirteenth and the second half of the twentieth century.

Key words: Matka, church architecture, building opus, building technique

The fascinating and ultra-picturesque eco structure of the canyon Matka, grandiose by its colossal dimensions and unique by the spectacular vista of dizzy vertical lines and tamed horizontal layers, is one of the most beautiful natural ambients in the territory of Macedonia and in the wider Balkan region. Configured of hallucinating forms of the fierce rocky structures, as well as of deep blue spheres of the vast water horizon, this windy and moist gorge of the Treska River is enumerated among the most luxurious sights in the natural heritage of the country. The cultural horizon of the sacral edifices created in the territory of Matka, on the other hand, represents a rich panorama of artistic monuments, marked by diverse architectural features and remarkable painterly attainments. Erected with the passionate skill of the anonymous builders, decorated with impressive fresco ensembles and carefully nurtured during times of wars and military invasions, they represent the most persuasive and most vivid witnesses to the historic and cultural past documented on the territory of Matka in the course of the last millennium. Among the dozen monuments created in the medieval and late medieval period, we will pinpoint some interesting remarks about three of them, situated in the middle, as well as in the highest geographic horizon of the region.

The first church that deserves our attention is the one dedicated to St. Archangel Michael at the site of Peter’s Rock, located some 2 km south of the village of Gorna Matka. Lying amidst the terrain abundant in archaeological remnants and surrounded by building structures from different historic periods, this temple is preserved in its original architectural form, manifesting remarkable spatial dimensions of what is considered to be the oldest Christian monument from the medieval era in this region. According to its architectural conception, the church of Saint Archangel Michael is a basilica with quite remarkable dimensions, out of which the walls up to 1 m in height are preserved (fig. 1). It is erected in the middle portion of the flatland plateau at the site of “Peter’s rock” as a central sacral building in the Middle Byzantine epoch, while today is surrounded by additionally configured architectural elements originating from the later medieval period. According to its dimensions, this building can be enumerated among the basilicas with medium size, while according to its spatial organization it belongs to the elaborated ground plans of this architectural type from the last period of its public promotion. The orientation of the edifice is almost regular (east – west), with deviation of 10 degrees in direction towards north. The length of the basilica’s ground plan is 17,35 m, whereat the longitudinal span from the apse to the western wall of the naos is 10,75 m, while the western part of the building is 6.60 m long. The width of the church is 4.90 m, while the thickness of the walls measures 0.80 m.

The church of Saint Archangel Michael as a longitudinal edifice spatially manifested along the axis east-west and functionally divided into two structural parts – naos and narthex. The naos measures 9.40 x 4.90 m, at the eastern part of which an apse has been formulated with a radius of 1.35 m. The narthex measures 6.60 x 4.90 m and is designed with two separate structures, which, within the functional organization of the architectural ground plan, received the roles of narthex and exonarthex. This tripartite division of the basilical plan points to a sacral edifice with a regular liturgical service and testifies to the efforts for a serious protocol in the
structure, as well as in the performance of the church ritual.\textsuperscript{4} On the other hand, the existence of a single apse on the eastern side of the building, being a reference of the single-apse concept in the design of the sanctuary, can point to a basilical ground plan of a compact type, appropriate to the conditions of its spatial location and/or the needs of the church function. The discovery of a massive tombstone with an epitaph written in Old Slavonic language in the central part of the naos doubtlessly refers to the existence of a medieval necropolis in the surrounding of the church walls.\textsuperscript{5} All of this speaks of the possibility that the church dedicated to Saint Archangel Michael, the protector of the righteous souls and the caring physicompossimus, erected in a compact basilical arrangement and accompanied by a medieval graveyard, had a funerary function and was designated for funerary ceremonies.

The temple dedicated to Saint Archangel Michael is built out of broken, partly hacked stones, arranged in horizontal rows and alternated with ceramic material, placed in irregularly designed opus. The stone peaces and the bricks were joined with a bit of mortar, applied in thin layers. The building components are placed carefully, but the building technique displays a number of inconsistencies in regard to the coherence of the execution. Due to the lack of appropriate material, the mixed building opus of the church was supplemented by older elements, originating from the architectural corpus of an Early Christian basilica.\textsuperscript{6} Among them, one can notice imposts, bases of stone columns and cancel fragments. The resourcefulness of the masters builders in solving of the problem with the scarcely available material can be seen in the usage of stone spolia from an ancient pagan temple, built into the lateral walls of the edifice.\textsuperscript{7} Contrary to the slackly work with the building materials, the edifice was covered with neatly molded and skillfully modeled bricks of a “Komnenian” type.\textsuperscript{8} The church mobiliar has not been preserved. The fresco painting has, also, been demolished.

Although the lack of historical sources and written texts is obstructing the precise dating of the church, the architectural features of its composition point to a certain chronology, which can be confirmed only by extensive archaeological excavation at the site. In that context, one should mention the compact architectural ground plan in the design of the basilica, the monolite spatial arrangement of the altar part and the semicircular shape of the apsidal exterior, all pointing to the late twelfth century, as the most appropriate chronological horizon in the execution of the building.

\textsuperscript{5} Lilčić, Matka niz vekovite, 68.
\textsuperscript{6} I. Mikučić, Skopje so okolnite tredini, Skopje 1982, 97.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{8} Lilčić, Matka niz vekovite, 68.
\textsuperscript{9} S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, Macedonia. L’arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo, Milano 2006, 52.
\textsuperscript{10} Dimitrova, Lilčić, Antevska, Vasilevski, Matka, 164.
\textsuperscript{11} Lilčić, Matka niz vekovite, 68.
\textsuperscript{12} Dimitrova, Lilčić, Antevska, Vasilevski, Matka, 165.
\textsuperscript{13} Lilčić, Matka niz vekovite, 70.
\textsuperscript{14} Mikučić, Skopje so okolnite tredini, 96.
The same date is shared by the peace of a sixth century. The same date is shared by the peace of a

Due to the rustic character of its architectural execu-
tion, the church of Saint Savior displays a very modest façade design. On the lateral walls, perforations were open (one on each façade), roughly and unskilfully framed with mortar, while above the west entrance – a semi-circular niche was shaped in order to provide a place for the traditional image of the church patron. The eastern exterior of the temple is designed identically as the other façade surfaces, thus it also lacks any brick-work decoration. The outer line of the tri-
sided apse is monotonous as well, with the exception of the miniature monophore in its center. Only the dado-zone in the exterior of the church preserved up to 0.50 m in height is quite impressive by its execution.

The distinction in the applied material between the
dado-zone and the rest of the edifice, the consistency in the
placement of the stone elements and the greater proportion-
ality of their dimensions, as well as the fact that the dado-
zone is 0.40 m wider than the total width of the facades, clearly point to the older chronology of this part of the archi-
tectural structure of the edi-

The execution of this lower belt of the building’s exterior refers to some of the recog-
nizable features of the architecture from the Post-Byzantine period. This chronology, however, can not be confirmed by painterly references, since it is obvious that the church has not been decorated with frescoes; however, its interior is or-
namented with a number of specimens from icon painting of
contemporary zographs, as well as reproductions of famous works of art from the medieval and post-medieval era. Thus, a comfortable and pleasant ambient is created for the many believers or adventurers, who visit the church on their jour-
neys through the canyon of Matka.

The lack of historical sources or written data, which
would probably help the construction of an argued
story on the origin of the genuine church of Saint Savior, could be, to a certain extent, substituted by our knowledge gained from literature and travelogues. Hence, we know that in the first decade of the twentieth century, on the location of
present-day temple, there were ruins of an older church and a
great number of architectural elements in a form of chopped stones, molded bricks, decorated plastic components and
carved lintels, scattered all over the terrain. The older scholars made a difference between the robust building opus applied on the preserved part of the south wall of the church that in 1912 was still existent on the site and the relatively delicate execution of the found stone fragments, produced in the spirit of the Byzantine architectural tradition. Thus, one can conclude that the present-day church dedicated to Saint Savior has undergone two phases prior to 1968, which can not be precisely determined; still they can be roughly put in certain chronological boundaries.

In that context, if we take into consideration all the
available components mentioned in the literature or noticed in the course of our terrain explorations, we can reconstruct
the time frame of the architectural activities undertaken on the
flat plateau at the site of Peter’s Rock. Namely, the oldest phase would be simultaneous with the erection of the church
dedicated to Saint Archangel Michael, located in the central part of the terrain and built in the late period of the Komme-
nian epoch, which marks the last bloom of the artistic crea-
tivity within Middle Byzantine chronological horizon. The
easy access to the terrain and the chaotic historic occurrences
of the next century that did not pass by the Skopje area,

are the probable reasons for the demolition of the temple and
for its further religious "hibernation". After the pacification
of the circumstances and consolidation of the real-state and
administrative conditions that brought the new feudal lords and new political authorities on the territory of Skopje and
its surroundings, the site of Peter’s Rock was also included in
the new initiatives for production of religious edifices and
their architectural setting.

It was than, when the old temple of Saint Archangel
Michael was probably neglected to a greater extent in favor
of the new edifice, erected at the distance of 50 m in smaller
dimensions, yet in the spirit of the renewed commissioners’
privileges, as well as the re-established initiatives for un-
tertaking of new artistic enterprises. The exact time of the transfer of the religious performances from the older into the new edifice can not be established without additional data; however, the knowledge on the renewed flourishing of archi-
tectural activities after the Serbian invasion in the northern
parts of Macedonian territory could point to the reinforced architectural production of smaller sacral edifices in the lower
spatial horizons of the canyon Matka, where the site of Peter’s Rock also lies. This hypothetically assumed phase of
the architectural structure of the church of Saint Savior,
which could be chronologically placed in the late thirteenth or the early fourteenth century and has been confirmed by
delicately processed stone elements discovered in the sur-
rounding area, was probably demolished at the beginning of the Ottoman period, when a great number of religious edi-

15 Idem, Tragi na ranohristijanski baziliki okolu Skopje, Godišen Zbornik na Filozofskiot fakultet 7 (33), Skopje 1981, 108.
16 A. Evans, Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum, Part IV: Scupi, Archeology 49/1 (1885) 97.
17 Liščić, Matka niz vekovite, 69.
18 P. Popović, Prilog za studiju stare srpske crkvene arhitekture, Starinar I (1922) 115.
19 Dimitrova, Liščić, Antevska, Vasilevski, Matka, 168.
20 Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije, IV, Beograd 1971, 156; M. Boškoski, Vizantiske imperatori vo Makedonija vo XI i XII vek, Glasnik za Institutot na nacionalna istorija 23/1 (Skopje 2002) 102; idem, Skopje i skopskata oblast od VI do krajot na XIV vek, Skopje 2009, 143–145.
21 T. Tomoski, Skopje od XI do XIV vek. in: Spomenici za sredno-
vekovnata i ponovata istorija na Makedonija, I, Skopje 1975, 59.
22 Dimitrova, Liščić, Vasilevski, Antevska, Matka, 97.
Facing were devastated as a result of the chaotic breakthrough of the new historic era.

After the circumstances improved, the ruined church was rebuilt in a much modest architectural shape and with a much more rustic building technique, the testimony to which is the skillfully created dado-zone, preserved in the lower part of the facades that probably originates from the opulent in sacral architecture seventeenth century, the time when smaller religious edifices arose at the locations of the older medieval temples. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the Post-Byzantine temple found itself located on the estate bought by some of the Muslims living on the territory of the canyon, the edifice was once again demolished, an argument already mentioned in the literature. After the circumstances at this site have changed, at the location of the older temple the contemporary church was erected in 1968, which is the sole whiteness to the centuries-long, persistent survival of the Orthodox faith at a territory marked by the eternal and immortal sacral values. The names of the commissioners, written on the plate located above the entrance, are the last and most relevant historic argument on the almost millennium-long existence and the multiple ktetorial renewal of the church of Saint Saviour.

Two kilometers north-eastern of the site of Peter’s Rock, on the highest post of the mountain range oriented transversally to the flow of the Treska River, the small church of Saint Kyriake is located, today heavily devastated, tragically ruined and preserved only in modest architectural and painterly remnants. Erected by an unknown ktetor in the savage and inhospitable rocky palms of the ridge Osoj, this miniature temple is one of the most difficult to access sacral locations on the territory of Medieval Macedonia. Elevated, as it was noticed by its earliest visitors at a “frightening position”, at a dizzy vertical spot that hangs over the surrounding terrain without any horizontal support, the church of Saint Kyriake is a true example of a sacral edifice situated on a location that aims at the unreachable heights, protected by the horrifying uneasiness of its own geographical ambientum. Situated on the central rocky plateau in the middle of the medieval “town of King Marko”, it represented local sanctuary for its citizens, spiritual refugee for the dedicated believers, as well as save heaven for the brave travelers and adventurers.

The church of Saint Kyriake is erected at the top of a cliff that mounts vertically at the left bank of the Treska River, at its entrance in the gorge. Built on the flat surface of the plateau in the south-eastern part of the urban settlement and erected over the very abyss, hundreds of meters above the hallucinatory landscape of the deep canyon, the church of Saint Kyriake testifies to the thrilling craftsmanship of the architects and represents a remarkable creative achievement in the architectural production of the medieval epoch. Although preserved in ruins and decorated with heavy

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24 Popović, Prilog, 115.
25 Ibid., 116.

Fig. 3. The church of St. Kiriake, eastern arch, south-eastern pendentive and the preserved part of the southern wall

Fig. 4. The church of St. Kiriake, northern façade
In the heavenly horizons

ily damaged fresco painting, it retained the basic contours of its original building and painterly design, which testifies to the ambitious expectations of the khtetor, as well as to the significant attainments of the artistic atelier. Created in the spirit of a monolithic architectural work of art and decorated with skillfully conceived fresco painting, the church of Saint Kyriake is a representative of the recognizable artistic tendencies of the Late Byzantine epoch and of the efforts for creation of attractive, creative and inventive sacral monuments.

According to its ground plan, the church of Saint Kyriake is a cruciform edifice (cross in square design), once covered by a dome. Due to the reduced spatial opportunities, it was erected in a small size and executed as an edifice of a compact architectural type, which implied maximum use of the terrain circumstances in favor of the pragmatic constructive solution. Hence, the total length of the church measures 6.50 m, while the width is 4.05 m. These miniature dimensions of the building were chosen as ideal not only for its spatial exposition, but also for its appropriate ambiental inclusion within the exterior design of the urban structures in the town of King Marko. Located on the city plateau and accompanied by residential objects and other elements of the urban infrastructure, the church represented the main religious point in the settlement, fulfilling the essential needs of its kktor and his fellow citizens.

In regard to its architectural matrix, the temple dedicated to Saint Kyriake is single-naved and composed of a central bay with dimensions: 2.40 x 2.40 m, originally covered by a dome. Today, the only testimony to the existence of the dome are the remnants of the pendantives in the eastern part (fig. 5), as well the spatial design of the ground plan, which displays the construction of a bay in the area under the dome, accomplished by reduction of the width of the lateral walls of the edifice. On the ground of the church’s dimensions, as well as on the ground of the data found in older-date literature, the dome was cubical in the exterior and its angles were strengthened by stone collonetes. The dome rested on pilasters, constructed over the lateral walls, as well as on the arches, partially preserved on the eastern side. Hence, one can suppose that the small dome dominated over the central part of the church, while to the east and to the west of it, the architectural space was covered with narrow barrel vaults, located transversally to the longitudinal axis of the edifice. To the east, the sanctuary was formulated with tri-sided apse in the exterior, while in the interior of the temple, two miniature niches laterally of the apse, enabled the function of a prothesis and diakonikon.

When the remnants of the edifice come to question, one can notice that the north wall of the edifice along its full length, the southern half of the apsidal conch, the southern wall up to the point where the western cota of the central bay ended and a small portion of the western wall in its northern line, are preserved out of the original architectural structure of the church. The highest point of the preserved building structure, which is a part of the genuine eastern arch under the dome, can be

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27 Popović, Prilog, 116.
28 Lilić, Markov grad – Matka, 286.
29 Popović, Prilog, 116.
building vista. Erected in a form of a small cubus covered by a cubical dome and enclosed by rustically executed facades, it successfully resisted the savage winds of destruction from the high, almost frightening position of its spatial location. Although the interior of the temple does not contain any ktesatorial inscription, the organization of the ground plan and the manner of the applied building technique unambiguously point to the first half or the middle of the fourteenth century. On the pick of the dome a bronze cross was once positioned measuring 0.40 m. which, after the demolition of the vault portions, was brought to the Church Museum of the Skopje Metropolitan eparchy.31

The fresco decoration applied on the walls of the church is devastated to a great extent, mostly due to the demolition of the dome and the damages done to the wall structures. As a result, only small portions of the original painting are preserved, mainly in the eastern part of the edifice. Out of the genuine fresco ensemble designed for the decoration of the interior, one can see parts of the altar arrangement, fragments of the compositions depicted on the lateral walls, as well as several saintly images, recognizable in the eastern parts of the north and south wall surfaces. These preserved portions from the painted decoration are highly damaged and pale, whereat the pictures are visible only in silhouettes. According to the degree of demolition, it is clear that after the destruction of the vault structures, the atmospheric conditions caused erosion to the painterly pigment, which could indicate that the colors were applied on a dry surface. Hence, the massive devastation of the painterly structure comes as no surprise, since the al secco technique is highly sensitive to the atmospheric moist, as well as to the drastic amplitudes of aerial climate.32

Out of the genuine painterly program in the temple, one can see that a part of the composition depicting Officiating Church Fathers is preserved on the semi-circular surface of the apse, in which the bishops attain the ceremony in honor of the sacrificed Christ. Although the preserved elements are not sufficient for a complete reconstruction of the scene, the dimensions and the position of the bishopric figure in the southern part of the apsidal wall imply a chamber format in the execution of the Liturgical Service, appropriate to the spatial opportunities, restricted by the modest diameter of the altar apse. On the pilasters west of the sanctuary, the figures of two stilties are depicted, the signatures of whom are highly devastated, thus, the inscriptions verified in the older-date literature are no longer readable. Represented on the top of their pillars, carefully decorated with geometric ornaments, the two well-respected representatives of this saintly category gained significantly festal location within the painted decoration of the temple.33 The saintly busts, depicted above them in the second zone of the fresco arrangement, due to the heavily damage caused to the decoration, can not be identified. In the upper zone of the northern wall, one can barely see the

seen at the height of 4.12 m, while the preserved walls of the temple are 0.70 m in width and were composed of shopped stone peaces, joined with mortar and alternated with ceramic material of older, antique provenance. The building opus was organized in horizontal rows, with serious deviations from the regularity in the execution. The preserved parts of the original walls do not display brick-work decoration; the only remnants of architectural elaboration are the thin lesenea that reflect the interior design on the facades of the edifice. Also, it is noticeable that the northern wall was perforated twice and the two windows were placed one above the other.

The overall conception of the design and execution of the building emanates simplicity and compactness of the architectural matrix. Small by its dimensions and rational by the spatial qualities, pragmatically conceived and materially organized in horizontal rows, with serious deviations from the

Fig. 6. The church of St. Kiriake, the patron saint

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pale remnants of the composition, once identified as the Crucifixion.\textsuperscript{38}

The best visible peace of the fresco painting that decorated the walls of the church is the portrait of the patron saint, represented in the central part of the southern wall, in the second zone (figs. 6–7). Although the signature written beside her image is completely wasted, the typological characteristics of the depiction are relatively well preserved, reflecting the recognizable vista of St. Kyriake, discovered in a number of other monument in the territory of the Balkans. Depicted in an elegant stance and dressed in luxurious attire that reflects her noble origin,\textsuperscript{39} she holds her martyrial cross in the right hand, while with the left she finely expresses her sacral feeling to the believers at their approach towards the sanctuary. On the long dress she wears, one can notice execution of a rich ornamental decoration with an emulation of luxurious embroidery in golden color. The red color of the dress, the yellow geometrical fields in shape of rhombs and the stylized floral motives of lilies fill the soft, palatal fabric with the glamorous glow of the Byzantine “couture”. In the upper part, the dress ends with a peace of cloth that covers her neck, luxuriously decorated with large pearls, while on her head, St. Kyriake wears a crown made out of two metal rings, crisscrossed on the forehead and attached to the firm fabric underneath. Under the crown, there is a light, brightly colored veil, running down St. Kyriake’s shoulders and covering her hair.

The image of St. Kyriake, depicted in the church in King Marko’s town at Matka, reflects the typological features in the presentation of this martyr saint in the fresco painting from the fourteenth century, displaying notifying similarities with her other portraits found in the monuments on the territory of Macedonia. In that regard, according to the visual characteristics of the crown, her portrait from Matka finds analogies in the image of St. Kyriake depicted in the narthex of the church dedicated to the Mother of God in the village of Kučevište (1332–1337),\textsuperscript{40} in her portrait represented in the naos of Saint George in Gorni Kozjak (ca. 1340),\textsuperscript{41} as well as in the image of the same saint in the narthex of the temple dedicated to the Virgin in Mateić (1348–1352),\textsuperscript{42} while the luxurious attire of the patron saint of Matka has its parallel in the dress of St. Kyriake depicted on the northern wall in the naos of Saint George in Polotko (1343–1345).\textsuperscript{43} In that sense, the portrait of St. Kyriake from her temple in Matka could be compared with the depictions of this saint in the fresco painting of the monuments from the first half of the fourteenth century, in which she was represented within the gallery of lady saints. However, due to her role of a patron and titular saint of her church in King Marko’s town, her image in the fresco decoration of Matka glows with much more remarkable distinction of the spatial, as well as iconographical elements in comparison to the other mentioned monuments. Unfortunately, the components of the jewelry, noticeable in her images in the other monuments from the fourteenth century, due to the massive demolition of the frescoes in the church of Saint Kyriake, have become completely unrecognizable.

On the ground of our insight in the existent literature and its illustrative contribution, it can be stated that the portrait of St. Kyriake in the church at Matka was a part of the kterior’s composition, depicted on the southern wall (fig. 8).\textsuperscript{44} However, due to the long-term neglect of the building, the part of the painted decoration applied to the west of the patron saint’s image, where older scholars located the depiction of the commissioner with the church model, has been demolished.\textsuperscript{45} Because of that, the effort for any reconstruction of the kteriorial arrangement or its conception, which would lead to more serious analysis of the sociologic features of the church of Saint Kyriake is no longer possible. The lack of kteriorial inscription or genuine written documents, are also in favor of the highly mysterious historical dimension of the temple and of its financial patrons. The data on the real-estate ownership of the nobleman Bojko over the region of Matka,\textsuperscript{46} as well as the chronological concurrence of its

\textsuperscript{38} Ljubinković, Crkva Svete Nedelje, 96.
\textsuperscript{41} Djordjević, Zidno slikarstvo srpske vlastele, 139.
\textsuperscript{42} E. Dimitrova, Manastir Matejeve, Skopje 2002, 224, T. LVII.
\textsuperscript{43} Djordjević, Zidno slikarstvo srpske vlastele, 149.
\textsuperscript{44} Popović, Prolaz, 116.
\textsuperscript{45} Ljubinković, Crkva Svete Nedelje, 99, sl. 6.
\textsuperscript{46} Lj. Stojanović, Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi, 1, Beograd 1902, 29, br. 66; J. Hadži-Vasiljević, Skoplj i njegova okolina, Skopje 1930, 458; G. Tomović, Morfologija cirililčkih natpisa na Baškaranu, Beograd 1974, 56.
Fig. 8. The church of St. Kiriake, the ktetor’s composition (drawing: P. Popović)

territorial authority over this important strategic location with the closest painterly analogies of the church’s fresco decoration, are not sufficient references to the ktetorial attribution of the fresco painting in the temple to this powerful and respectable aristocrat.

In regard to the painterly features of the fresco painting executed in the temple, one can discuss their quality solely on the ground of the badly preserved parts of the decoration, which give small evidence to the program concept, as well as to the stylistic characteristics of the frescoes. However, the preserved parts indicate the basic structure of the fresco decoration, which, besides the dome arrangement (demolished due to the collapse of the vaults) and the altar program with the portion of the Liturgical Service, included also the illustration of the Great Feasts in the upper zone of the walls, the saintly busts in the middle register and the gallery of saints in the lowest horizon of the ensemble. Due to the modest spatial capacity of the church’s interior, the exposition of the Festal cycle was, most probably, reduced to the modest spatial capacity of the church’s interior, the gallery of saints in the lowest horizon of the ensemble. Due to the modest spatial capacity of the church’s interior, the exposition of the Festal cycle was, most probably, reduced to eight scenes, out of which, the heavily damaged parts of the Crucifixion (northern wall), as well as a small fragment of an unrecognizable composition depicted in the central part of the southern wall are preserved. On the pilasters, as main supportive elements of the edifice, the images of the stilties were depicted with their symbolical role of uncompromising pillars of the faith, while on the most festal position on the southern wall – the patron saint was represented as accepting the ktetorial gift in a shape of a church replica from her generous donor, the image of whom has been lost long ago in the merciless abyss of destruction and oblivion.

The stylistic features of the painting point to a master with a precise drawing and clearly formulated contour, whose painterly procedure was based upon the firm mod-

elation of the shapes and large formats of the depicted scenic components. In the execution of the saintly figures, he employed an elegant stature of the personages, dressed in rich fabrics, depicted with broad strokes and skillfully ornamented decorative elements. Although the fragmentarily preserved images and compositions do not help to see his approach to the structuring of the facial features of the saints, nor the manner of configuration of the dynamics and dramacity of the illustrated events, one can clearly notice the painterly energy of the zograph, manifested in the precisely modeled figural anatomy, as well as in the pictorial freshness of the applied pigment. These stylistic characteristics of the painting on one hand, and the mentioned analogies with the monuments from the first half of the fourteenth century on the other, doubtlessly point to the first decades of that century as the most adequate period for the origination of the fresco painting in the church of Saint Kiriake. The data on the reference to this temple in the charter of King Milutin issued to the monastery of Saint George Gorgos in Skopje (from the year of 1300) also speak in favor of the assumption for the chronological determination of the church in the first decades of the fourteenth century. The choice of the architectural ground plan of a compact cross in square, the manner of construction and the elaboration of the facades with narrow lesenes reflecting the inner spatial structure of the edifice, are additional references to the probable chronology of the church of Saint Kiriake that belongs to the opening decades of the fourteenth century.

Erected at the peak of the rocky landscape, which with its vertical position challenge the dizzy depth of the aerial abyss and decorated with compactly designed and skillfully executed ensemble, the church of Saint Kiriake was elevated in the “Wuthering heights” of King Marko’s town as an immortal symbol of the faith and a secure retreat for its inhabitants. Protected by the watch tower, today called King Marko’s windmill – located on the highest spot of the rocky structure of the ridge, the church of Saint Kiriake represented a precious sacral edifice in the vast and safety region of the canyon of Matka. A work of art of well educated masters builders, who erected the temple over the edge of the abyss and creation of skilful and inventive zograph, the church of Saint Kiriake in King Marko’s town is a wonderful little piece of heavenly sanctity, brought down in the rocky palms of medieval Matka.

34 Ljubinković, Crkva Svete Nedelje, 98.


36 R. Krauthemer, Early Christian and Byzantine architecture, Harmondsworth 1965, Fig. 404; A. Rashenov, Mesembrijski türkvi – Églises de Mesembria, Sofia 1932, 90–98; A. Orlandoos, Η Μονή της Κάτω Πναγίας, Αγγίλια των Βυζάντιων μνημάτων της Ελλάδος, 2 (1936) 75–77; C. Mango, Byzantine architecture, New York 1976, Fig. 308.
У небеским висинама
Три средњовековне цркве у региону Матке код Скопља

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Меѓу десетинама цркви које се налазе у региону Матке код Скопља посебну пажњу приConnectionFactory храма у средњем и највишем географском појасу тог подручја.

Прва од њих јесте посвећена Светом арханђелу Михаилу на локалитету Петрова стена, два километра јужно од села Горње Матке. То је најстарији средњовековни хришћански споменик у региону, пра- ма одлика градње и археолошких налазима датован у касни XII век. Реч је о баштилијској грађевини с нартексом, чији су зидови сачувани до висине од једног метра. У цркви је пронађен богат археолошки материјал. Међу важније налази спада масивна погребна стела са епиграфом исписаним на црвеновелкоменском језику, пронађена у средишњем делу наоса. Та стела, као и други архео-лошки налази, упућују на постојање средњовековне некрополе и говори у прилог претпоставци да је црква Светог арханђела Михаила, заштитника праведних душа и брижњивог психолога, имала фунерарну функцију и да су се у њој обављали погребни обреди.

да, па је поново саграђена током XVII века, о чему говори одлично очуван сокл са обележјима постгрозантијске архитектуре скопске области. Почетком ХХ века, пошто се нашао на имању досељених муслимана, храм је поново страдао, да би 1968. године (како стоји у ктиторском натпису) последњи пут био подигнут. Та грађевина сачувана је до данас.

Трећа црква налази се два километра од локалитете Петрова стена, у највишем делу планинског појаса, на централном платоу у гв. Марковом граду. Посвећена Светој Недељи и саграђена у облику уписаног крста са жетог типа, та је црква представљала главни религиозни пункт у поменутом насељу, у којем је живео и њен непознати ктитор. Иако је од архитектуре преостало врло мало (поткуполни лук на источној страни, два источна пандантифа, бочни зидови до висине од једног и по метра), сачувало се и нешто живописа (Литургијска служба у олтару, лик свете Недеље на јужном зиду), а он својим стилским обележјима упућује на могуће датовање сликарства храма у прву половину XIV столећа.