The paper deals with architecture of the one of the most significant churches in the Prilep region that was built in the years around 1280 as a foundation of John, the mega chartoularious of the West. The main focus is on the typological concept of the church, and its' unique combination of a two-domed and two-storied structure. In the survey the particular elements of the church structure are elaborated with a reference to the most striking structures that bear such elements in the architecture of the Byzantine sphere of influence.

Key words: church of St. Archangel Michael in Prilep, Byzantine architecture, memorial church, two domed church, two-storied church, aisleless hall

The monastery church of St. Archangel Michael takes the central place in the monastery complex. It is located on a rocky terrain under the king Marko’s Fortress. The church dedicated to the Archangel Michael takes the central place in the monastery complex. It is laid on a rough terrain with big height differences in northeast-southwest direction. The church walls pattern themselves upon the uneven terrain and they appear in different height, with their foundations always lying on the rocky ground (fig. 1). The church has a plan of a spacious irregular rectangle, with 16.78m and 17.91m in length, in the north and south, and 7.06m and 6.17m in width, in the east and west. It is formed as an elongated structure with unique interior without partitions. The altar space was at the eastern end, whereas towards west, two bays marked with the direction change of the walls were formed in the naos of the church (fig. 2).

The structural system has undergone several alterations in the course of the existence of the building. The fresco painting illustrating the model of the church in the hands of the ktetor John gives us a general view of the structural system of the church in the thirteenth century. From this, we come to a conclusion that the church had two domes. The earliest appearance of churches with such conceptual layout dates from the eleventh century and is on different locations in the Byzantine world. Initially, the appearance of several well-preserved churches from Constantinople is to be recorded, not as much for their role on the appearance of the type, as for the relevance of the fact that this type appeared in the capital (with all the possible implications) at its very beginning and diffusion in the eleventh-twelfth century. These are two smaller constructions – Toklu Dede Meshidi and Bogdan Saray. One of the earliest examples on Greek territory is the northern parekklesion at the Kapnikarea church in Athens. Here, the aisleless hall with a dome has been laid laterally and is dependent on the main church. Still, in the twelfth century already, in many regions in the south Greece, the aisleless hall with a dome can be met as an independent construction, even in a big number of well-preserved examples.

The ground plan and structural system. In a global typological context, the church can be added to the group of aisleless (single nave) hall with a dome. In fact, these groups comprise a close spacious conception in the essence of which lies the intention for creation of a rectangular interior in the ground, with a dome dominating in the structural system.

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The biggest expansion of the type occurs in the twelfth century. With its appearance in the second half of the twelfth century in the regions of Serbia, an important typological pattern had been established. Something similar can be observed in the Bulgarian architecture in chronological span from the twelfth up to the fourteenth century, and whose typological interdependence can easily be established. One of the first representatives of the group is considered to be Church of the Virgin in Stanimaka (Asenovgrad). In a close relation with the previously mentioned one is the church of St. Archangels in Petritzos Monastery (Bachkovo). The execution of the church of St. Demetrius in Trnovo in a variant of an atrophied cross (by joining the pair of pilasters and the western wall together and their lightening with lateral semicircular niches) is going to cause the appearance of a group of churches with a lot of similarities in the ground plans. In Macedonia, a church with similar typological pattern as St. Archangel Michael is the monastery church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Treskavec, as well as several other churches from the fourteenth century.

If all the examples enumerated above are mentioned as a heterogeneous group of churches closely related to the church of St. Archangel Michael, and in the conception of which lies the wish for realisation of a unique, elongated space above the middle part of which the dome rises, then in relation to the structural system formation we notice considerable differences which make the church of St. Archangel Michael particular. That is the way its superstructure is composed. In fact, one of the main characteristics of the aisle-less hall with a dome is the appearance of ground reinforcements in the construction with pilasters. With this, the lower constructive frame, which bears the dome, is formed. Such constructive preparation for supporting the domes was left out in the St. Archangel Michael church. Instead, (excluding the two deviations of the walls where their reinforcement is) the walls of the church are constructed as smooth – flat surfaces.

Still, how we are going to explain such simplification in the layout, in contrast to the complex superstructure. This simplification, to some extent, surpasses the stereotype of the way the dome is placed above the central bay in the other typologically related churches. Sometimes this procedure of avoiding the pilasters is seen in correlation with the painting and the wish to form even wall surfaces, suitable for rep-

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6 St. Nicholas in Kuršumlija, Đurđevi Stupovi near Ras, Studenica (Korać, Jednobrodna crkva, 83–85).
8 Chaneva-Dechevska, Arhitekturini osobenosti, 151; Mijatev, Arhitekturata, 180.
9 The newest investigations have asserted that the monastery church in Treskavec, in its first constructive phase had had the same form as the core of the present church, which means that, typologically it belonged to the churches with atrophied Greek cross with a dome; this phase globally dates from the twelfth-thirteenth century; cf. E. Kasapova, Arhitekturata na crkvata Uspenie na Bogorodica – Treskavec, Skopje 2009, 81–101.
10 St. Athanasius in Modrište, St. George in the Pološko Monastery, St. Nicholas Šiševski etc.
representation of the painting programmes. If this change of the standard structural system is exclusively in relation with the typologically related solutions, then the appearance of such modified structural systems is something that occurs frequently in the vaulting of the narthex or the U-shaped annexes, most frequently at the churches in Constantinople, and not only there, though.

With solution like this, the structural system at the church of St. Archangel Michael is composed of wide transversal arches and massive walls at the northern and southern side. The placement of domes at the ambulatory churches is visually close, although this is not the case from a static point of view. Due to the lower perimeter cover, the lateral parts under the arches, which bear the dome, are enclosed by walls, thus giving the impression of the walls supporting the dome at the lateral sides. The domes rose above the constructive base formed in this way at the St. Archangel Michael church. Unfortunately, both of the original domes at the church of St. Archangel Michael do not exist today, i.e. there is only one reconstructed dome above the western part of the church that exists, but there is no doubt, (according to the remnants of the upper parts at the western part, as well as the way the church is presented in the hands of the kitor, painted at its western wall) that the church had superstructure with two domes. In this way, the most significant characteristic of the structural system of the church of St. Archangel Michael in Prilep as a two-dome building was formed (fig. 2).

The placement of two domes at the Byzantine churches is done in two variants and that is with one dome each above the naos and the narthex of the churches, as well as with the placement of two domes above the rectangular space above the naos. Both variants are met at the oldest and perhaps the most significant prototype for their further diffusion. That is the Pantokrator monastery (Zeyrek Kilise Camii) in Constantinople. Here, even in the oldest church dedicated to Christ the Pantokrator, two domes appear, placed above the naos and the narthex. Only a decade later, at the same monastery complex, the arrangement with two domes was repeated, but this time, they were placed above the unique rectangular space at the youngest, middle church of the complex, dedicated to St. Archangel Michael (fig. 3).

In the context of the review of the two-dome churches, the church at Mesopotamon (Albania), dedicated to St. Nicholas, should be included in this analysis. Formally, four domes, placed above the square space above the naos, appear at this church. But, the appearance of the two apses at the eastern part, the completion of the pair of leaned roofs above them, as well as the grouping of the domes in higher or lower domes in the east-west direction, at the exterior, give the impression as if there are two elongated two-dome constructions joined together by one of their sides. At first sight, from a typological point of view we notice that the church of St. Nicholas in Mesopotamon is unique and it does not have any direct parallels with other Byzantine churches. But, if we were to define this church from a typological point of view, then the term “domed” church would be the most adequate, which is also appropriate for the description of the St. Archangel Michael church. The similarities between the two churches, apart from the general terminological suffix, are noticeable in some separate aspects of their structural system. In that way, at both churches, the domes in the joint were borne on the wide common arches. The only difference being that at Mesopotamon, a more daring construction is applied in the layout, with the placement of one central pier in which the interior arches join together.
defined as “naos under the dome”, and which was the most frequently used in the Roman and early Christian architecture as a model for the memorial architecture i.e. in the construction of mausoleums.21 There is a confirmation for these tendencies at the multi-domed churches, which were intended for mausoleums.22 In that direction, the transformation of the katholikon in the Blacherna monastery in Arta towards the middle of the thirteenth century, from basilica into a domed church is indicative, if we take into the consideration the fact that the church was a mausoleum belonging to the despotai of Epirus from the Komnenos-Doukas family. However, the most significant representative of the multi-dome church as a model for a mausoleum is, surely, the monastic complex of the Pantokrator monastery, the mausoleum of the Komnenian dynasty. This is particularly true for the middle, two-domed church dedicated to Archangel Michael, in which the sarcophagi were found. Its direct influence as a model for a mausoleum has already been noticed at several churches: the church of Virgin in Studenica,23 the parekklesion in Chora and in its unusual combination of a dome with domical vault.24

By no means, the church of St. Archangel Michael in Prilep should be added to these churches. There are several elements that are in favour of this assertion. First of all, this is reflected on the appearance of the two-domed superstructure, composed above the unique rectangular space (a very specific composition), as well as on the same structural frame of the domes, i.e. with common wide arches as a base from where they rose. These anticipations for the church of St. Archangel Michael are completely in favour of the material evidence about the existence of a chapel in the substructure of the western part of the church contemporary with its upper parts.25 In that way, the roots of the concept of the church and its upper two-domed structure as a cemetery church are completely clear.

Still, there are more elements, which even more illuminate the conception of the church of St. Archangel Michael as a cemetery church – mausoleum. That is its two-storey structure (fig. 2).26 The appearance of a significant group of two-storey churches can be observed in the medieval architecture of Bulgaria.27 The well-known ossuary in the Bachkovo monastery, the ossuary, an exterior view from the west.

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21 It is assumed that the Constantine’s lost mausoleum (so called Small St. Archangels) could have been the pattern in the forming of the octagonal construction at the monastery church Nea Mone at Chios; cf. Ch. Bouras, Nea Moni on Chios: history and architecture, Athens 1982, 133, 139–145.
23 Šuput, Gottesmutterkirche, 135.
26 A. Grabar, Bolgarskie tserkvi-grobnitsy, Izvestiia na Bugarskii arheologicheski institut 1 (1921/22) 103–135; N. Brunov, K voprosu o bol-
ovo monastery, the ktetor of which was the high Byzantine official of Georgian origin, Gregory Pakourianos, is an introduction to the appearance of the two-storied churches as a model for mausoleum in the Bulgarian architecture (fig. 4). Recently, there has been an opinion that the church of St. Archangels in the same monastery, which is of similar type and of two storeys, was constructed as a cemetery church of the ktetor Gregory and his brother. It is assumed that they, as eminent ktetors, were not buried in the common monastery mortuary (fig. 5). According to some historical data, the Philippopolis (Plovdiv) district, where two more cemetery churches are located, was given as a present to the ktetor of the Bachkovo monastery to rule in it, by which it is possible that the two-storied monastery churches influenced the churches of the Virgin (fig. 6), and St John the Baptist in Asenovgrad. At the western part of the church in Bojana, in 1259, the two-storey domed construction was added, planned as a mausoleum of the ktetor’s family, the sebastokrator Kaloyan (fig. 7).

The comparison between the St. Archangel Michael church and the Bulgarian cemetery churches reveals many common elements in their planning and structure. At first place is, of course, their two-storied structure, which is very rare in the Byzantine architecture. It is assumed that such two-storey composition as a model for a cemetery church in the Bulgarian architecture could have been conveyed from the Caucasus (Armenia and Georgia), where we can find a significant number of two-storied churches. In fact, the main incentive in the forming of the two-storey composition in Armenia is considered to be the fact that the Armenian Church most firmly forbade the burial of the remarkable people in the very cult building. Otherwise, it is possible that through the personality of Pakourianos (who is considered to be of Georgian origin) and his monastery where the oldest two-storey cemetery church was constructed, the impact of the two-storey church as a model for a mausoleum, to have appeared. An indirect confirmation for this is the fact that most of these churches were discovered exactly in this monastery and its wider surrounding (Asenovgrad).

However, the ossuary of Bachkovo can also be placed in a global context of the multi-storey monastery ossuary, which is an accompanied element of the medieval monasteries. The best evidence for this is the appearance of the two-storey monastery mortuary of St. Luke in the Nea Mone monastery on Chios. This mortuary is considered to have been created during the building campaign in the monastery in the eleventh century, which means it was built at the same time with the Bachkovo monastery (1083) or even earlier. The appearance of cemetery monastery churches with two-storied structure has been noticed at several more medieval churches. In addition, we cannot forget the fact that at many medieval churches, small crypts with relics, which were placed under the floor of the churches, have been found. This tradition, indirectly, can also point to the treatment of these crypts, if there were factual possibilities, particular and larger space to be developed for them. In the context of this, the connection among the two-storied structures at the above-mentioned churches, as an indicator on their function as burial, is undisputable. But, it is noticeable that the two-storied structure at all these churches is combined with the terrain conditions or with some functional requests.

In that way we are going to start with the church of St. Archangel Michael in Prilep. Mostly, its two-storey structure is due to the terrain conditions, i.e. it is clearly emphasised at

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Fig. 5. Bachkovo monastery, church of the Sts. Archangels, an exterior view from the northwest.

Fig. 6. Asenovgrad, church of the Virgin, an exterior view from the south.

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its southern and western façade, whereas at the eastern and northern facade, the two-storey construction does not exist at all. The case with the ossuary in Bachkovo is similar, whereas the two-storey structure at the Virgin church of Petrich is skilfully embedded in the defensive fortress of Asenovgrad. It is a different situation at the church in Bojana and the St. Archangels church in the Bachkovo, where their lower floor served also as a hall (communication), which was the entrance to the older churches.

It can be an indication that, sometimes the idea for a two-storey cemetery church could have emerged from the specific conditions and needs at specific objects. In accordance with such variations we can also add the data that burial findings haven’t been found at some of the churches, which means that the idea for a memorial church couldn’t have meant and factual burial of the person for whom that function of the church was allocated. In that case, the space takes over the role of a parekklesion in which, from time to time, a memorial service was held in honour of the remarkable ktetor. Most probably, such services were more rarely held and were attended by a small number of people, which explains the weak connection between the floors at these churches. Namely, there wasn’t a church of the type where massive stairs were composed as a connection. Instead of that, wooden stairs were used.

In the frame of the similarities of the church in Prilep with the group of Bulgarian two-storeyed memorial churches, is the notice that the biggest number of them is composed as elongated buildings with a dome. However, what makes the difference between the group of churches and the St. Archangel Michael church is the appearance of the two domes in the second one. Even the appearance of the two domes at St Archangel Michael cannot be compared with the globally similar conception of the Virgin of Petrich, where a belfry appears at the western part as a second vertical accent. That means that the sources of the superstructure and the appearance of the two domes, as we have previously pointed out, should be sought in the architecture of Constantinople, i.e. in the most significant mausoleum of the Byzantine architecture – the middle church in the Pantokrator monastery, a church with the same inscription as the one in Prilep, and dedicated to archangel Michael. Even the appearance of the two-storey structure can hide some older model from Constantinople, because, no matter how much someone insist that the two-storied structures at the Bulgarian churches originate from Caucasus, the example of the Virgin of Petrich and the appearance of the basket-wave pattern and particularly of the pendant triangles on its eastern facade, reveal certain Constantinopolitan influences.

At the end we can conclude, that the church of St. Archangel Michael in Prilep is a complex construction, in the planning and composition of which many different segments have been included. Still, in their essence, the wish for building a church – mausoleum has always been intertwined; no matter if it concerned its unusual two-storey structure or its more unusual composition as a two-domed church. Such concept was, surely, an act and request of the ktetor – the megas chartoularious John (fig. 8). As a high Byzantine official, he had certainly stayed in Constantinople from where he brought the main conceptions for his memorial church.

![Fig. 7. Sofia, Bojana church, an exterior view from the south.](image)

![Fig. 8. Prilep, church of the St. Archangel Michael, the lower chapel, a fragment of the wall painting.](image)

35 Burial is not recorded at the churches of Virgin of Petrich and St. Archangels in the Bachkovo monastery. The church St. Archangel Michael can be included in these examples, since according to the reports from the conservation works there were not funeral findings in the substructure of the church.


37 About conveying the influences from Constantinople through the ktetors in: P. Vocotopoulus, The Role of Constantinopolitan Architecture During the Middle and Late Byzantine Period, Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik 31/2 (1981) 559.
У прегледним радовима у којима је проучавана архитектура цркве Светог арханђела Михаила у Прилепу

У раду је анализиран је типолошки концепт једнообродне цркве са две куполе. Он свакако има исходните у једнообродној једнокуполној цркви с тешким умношавањем купола изнад главног простора. Особеност цркве Светог арханђела Михаила јесте то што се куполе ослављају непосредно на зидове, без употребе инспирата за јачање структурног система. Најбоље паралелу за такву матрицу примењену на цркву у Прилепу налазимо у средишњој цркви манастира Христа Пантократора у Цариграду. Као царски маузолеј та је црква била инспирација
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за многе грађевине гробне намене у ширем византијском културном кругу.

Друга одлика прилепске цркве јесте то што у њеном западном делу постоји мала капела испод пода наоса. На тај начин та се грађевина укључује у посебну категорију двоспратних храмова. Најближе паралеле постоје у црквама пловдивске области и Софије (Света Богородица у Асеновграду, Свети арханђели у Бачкову, западна црква у Бојани). Неке од њих, без сумње, биле су гробне цркве ктитора. Сличности с прилепском црквом нису у међусобној повезаности већ у заједничком моделу за двоспратне структуре гробне намене.

На крају анализе типологије цркве Арханђела Михаила у Прилепу закључује се да је то веома сложена грађевина, у чијем се планирању преплићу многи елементи структуре са симболичким или утилитарним аспектима, али у основи свих тих елементата лежи идеја изградње цркве маузолеја. Та је идеја свакако била повезана с ктитором – велиkim хартуларијем Јованом. Као висок чиновник он је свакако добро позвао дела цариградске архитектуре, па је одлучио да неке аспекте престоничке меморијалне архитектуре угради и у свој маузолеј – цркву Светог арханђела Михаила у Прилепу.