



THE CHURCH OF SAINT DEMETRIUS  
(KING MARKO'S MONASTERY)  
AT SUSHICA

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**EDITION CULTURAL HERITAGE**

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**Skopje 2020**

*Publishers*



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1. Marko's monastery, View towards north-west

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**I**n the long history of creation of Macedonian cultural heritage, the name of Marko's monastery is written on one of the most celebrated pages left by mediaeval artistic creation. Established in the dusk of Macedonian Middle Ages, amidst the historical chaos of Ottoman invasion, this monument dedicated to the holy warrior and *megalomartyros* Saint Demetrius has united the metaphysics of the painterly expression and the dark veil of historic tragedy hung over Macedonia in the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Marked by the representative features

2. **Marko's monastery**, View towards north-east







**3. Marko's monastery, View towards south**





of its architectural conception, inventive program context of the fresco painting, as well as fascinating energy of the stylistic expression, the temple of Saint Demetrius is a master-piece of the artistic production in the historic sundown of the Byzantine era. With the remarkable characteristics of the building corpus, the wealth of theological knowledge embedded in the frescoes, as well as the stylistic authenticity of the painterly expression, Marko's monastery is the living proof of the magnitude of artistic habitus in the territory of Macedonia and its extraordinary contribution to the establishment of the mediaeval cultural treasury.

**T**he church dedicated to Saint Demetrius is located south-west of Skopje, in the vicinity of the village of Markova Sušica. In the wonderful landscape and amidst the silent atmosphere of the exotic ecological horizon, near the medieval temple part of the buildings of the one-time authentic church complex, which, besides the monastic quarters, encompassed a refectory decorated with fresco ensemble and auxiliary facilities, have been preserved. Far away from the urban chaos of the metropolis, in the comfortable arms of the untouched nature, the church of Saint Demetrius at Markova Sušica keeps the echo of the dramatic historic moments transformed into the luxurious heroism of its artistic qualities. Visited by many travellers and scholars, portrayed in the works of eminent writers and poets, illuminators and preachers, who, in different time periods, have

#### **4. Marko's monastery,** East facade



resided in the comfortability of the monastic ambience, the church of Saint Demetrius has grown into a rampart of the resistance against the historical disasters, becoming a magnificent treasury of artistic values.



**T**he historic data regarding the establishment of Marko's monastery, encompassed by the commissioner's inscription preserved in the interior of the church, are, to a certain extent, dissonant and ambiguous. Apart from the inconsistency

**5. Marko's monastery**, View towards the decoration of the dome



**6. Marko's monastery,**  
View towards the decoration in the area under the dome

in the content of the information regarding the chronological references, as well as the titular rank of the commissioners, the donor's inscription discloses the fundamental data on the chronological diapason and the functional engagement of the benefactors in the large, as well as ambitious initiative for establishment



of the temple. Written in fresco technique and located above the southern entrance to the church in its interior, the inscription points to the patron saint – Saint Demetrius, the holy warrior as a megalomartyr of Christ, victor and wonder worker, the protective power of whom was, by all means, more than needed



in the dark times of the Ottoman invasion, concurrent with the chronological finale of the commissioners' enterprise. Created in the in the eve of the Ottoman conquest and risen above the abyss of historical catastrophe after the lost battle at the Marica River, Marko's monastery is a majestic citadel of human resistance against the dark edge of historical destruction.

**T**he content of the commissioners' inscription preserved in the church reveals that the erection of the temple dedicated to the holy warrior Demetrius has started in the time of the "God-fearing" King Volkašin, who, together with the members of his family, has initiated the donor's enterprise in the year of 1345. The data referring to the end of the khetorial activities in 1376/1377, associated with the name of the "God-fearing" and "Christ-loving" King Marko, speak in favour of the relatively long chronological diapason between the start and the finish of the commissioners' engagement. Although the tragic outcome of the battle at the Marica River in 1371 could have caused perennial intermission of the works related to the erection of the church complex, the chronological lacuna of twenty-five years which appears in the process of creation of the temple, (building allegedly started in 1345, fresco decoration completed in 1377) cannot be justified only by the intensity of historical events. The manner of execution of the architectural features of the edifice, which clearly points to the consistent activities in the

**7. Marko's monastery,**  
View towards the  
decoration of the altar





**8. Marko's monastery, The Great Entrance, detail**

erection of the temple, with no intermissions in the implementation of the building process, the inadequately used title of king associated with the name of Volkašin in 1345 (when he was but a nobleman) and in 1377 (when he was already deceased), i.e. the double accentuation of his royal position, as well as the undertaking of the khetorial initiative by King Marko after the Marica battle - can be sublimed in a feasible assumption that the temple has been erected during the reign of King Volkašin (between 1365 and 1371), while the frescoes have been executed after King Marko has succeeded to the throne of his late father and have been completed in 1377.



*The architectural and spatial features of the edifice and the decorative aspects of its exterior*

**9. Marko's monastery, The Great Entrance, detail**

**I**n the history of mediaeval building practice in the territory of present-day Macedonia, the church dedicated to Saint Demetrius occupies one of the most remarkable places of religious devotion. Product of the centuries-long development of the representative tendencies in Byzantine architecture, as well as creation of the sublimed spatial concepts in the configuration of its building matrix, King Marko's temple is marked by the supreme artistic achievements from the closing period of the mediaeval era. Belonging to the cruciform conception in the design of its ground plan, as well as absorbing



**10. Marko's monastery, Dead Christ in the prothesis**

the ambitious models in the application of representative decorative schemes, the temple of Saint Demetrius represents the great finale of architectural trends which have been generated by the Byzantine building practice. With the elaboration of the ground plan, the skilful integration of the spatial components into a unique church organism, the dexterous building technique and the harmonic decorative opus of brickwork patterns, King Marko's temple is the last representative creation of Macedonian architecture, produced in the closing decades of the medieval epoch.



**A**ccording to its architectural characteristics, the church of King Marko's monastery typologically belongs to the cluster of cruciform churches. Within its spatial configuration, a cross-in-square ground plan has been designed. On the eastern side of the edifice, the altar space penetrates into the exterior with a powerful five-sided apse, while on its western side a rectangular narthex has been constructed. The naos and the narthex have been built without a mutual architectural barrier, thus the narthex is completely open towards the main body of the church, enabling the spatial unity in the linkage between the two constitutive parts of the edifice. The placement of the tribelon at the borderline between the naos and the

**11. Marko's monastery, Cycle of the Great Feasts, The Nativity**



**12. Marko's monastery**, Cycle of the Great Feasts, The Ascension and Pentecost

narthex of the church corresponds to the concepts applied in the most representative achievements of late Byzantine building practice, referring to the constructive schemes utilized in the monumental edifices, as it is the example of the church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God in the village of Matejče, near Kumanovo. The integration of the naos and the narthex in King Marko's temple and in the church at Matejče, which also had an impact over the later churches in terms of unification of the structural elements of the edifices built in Macedonia (as it is the example of the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas in Psača) has been a results of the ambitious tendencies



for creation of constructive spatial unity in the composition of architectonic elements.

**I**n regard to the vaulting structures, the church of Marko's monastery utilizes contemporary examples of twin-domed vaulting exposition characteristic of the representative specimens of sacral edifices. In regard to the proportional qualities of the spatial solution, the disposition of the domes above the naos and the narthex in Saint Demetrius temple is similar to the ones acknowledged at the church dedicated to Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo

**13. Marko's monastery, Cycle of the Great Feasts, The Dormition**



**14. Marko's monastery,** Cycle of the Great Feasts, The Dormition, detail

commissioned by the grand duke Jovan Oliver, as well as the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas at Psača commissioned by the feudal lord Vlatko; however, the substitution of the west dome by a shallow calotte at Marko's monastery speaks in favour of a more sublimed model in the conception of the dome arrangement. In that manner, the twin domed matrix of church buildings, characteristic of the khetorial projects of the high circles of nobility, in Marko's monastery has reformed itself into a concept of a dome and a calotte, as an appropriate model of a more compact construction of the vaulting configuration of royal endowments. Hence, the temple of Saint Demetrius has gained a cascade-like elevation of the church exterior

at the level of the vaulting structures, which “ripples” luxuriously through the forms of the “covering” section of its construction. The usage of stone columns instead of bricklaid pillars as supporting elements of the vaulting construction is another component in favour of the more glamorous approach in the conception of the architectural configuration of the temple.

**I**n order to obtain certain vivid and exciting visual effects, the masons of the church have given special attention to the decorative aspects of the edifice, as well. The niches, the arches, the lesenae, the cordon belt and the window perforations decorate the flat wall surfaces of temple’s exterior, which has been built in a regular opus encompassing stone and bricks. The horizontal registers in the conception of the building technique, consistently and pedantically applied on all four facades of the edifice, as well as in the treatment of the dome, are compatible with the order and symmetry of the building elements on the exterior, marked by a perfect visual sense in the arrangement of the decorative segments. The system of structural exposition of the constructive components on the facades of the church of Saint Nicetas at Banjani, near Skopje, as well as the one dedicated to the Holy Mother of God at Matejče, in the case of Marko’s monastery is applied with academic consistency whereat the arrangement of architectural construction in the interior is quite visible on the facades of the edifice. The Constantinopolitan model of articulation of





the altar apse with semi-circular niches, which has been also applied on the eastern exterior wall of the Holy Mother of God's church in Matejče, as well as the considerable diapason of vivid brick work ornaments, are more than a testimony to the attentive approach of the masons to the organization and formulation of the facade surfaces of Marko's edifice.

**I**n regard to the masters architects who have erected the church, no data or historic information have been preserved; therefore, their names, social status or national origin are not known. Having in mind the inventively conceived ground plan of the edifice, the arrangement of architectural masses, the dexterous spatial solutions, the precise masonry, as well as the picturesque decorative effects, one can presume that the church of Kings Volkašin and Marko is a work of art of architects with a great experience and a refined taste. Ennobling the church ensemble with a luxurious and pompous outlook based on the cascade-like conception of the building components, as well as the structural sense of decorative elements, they have erected an edifice with rational arrangement of constructive constituents and pictorial energy of ornamental details. The voluminous elaboration of the walls, the skilfully formatted ensemble of vertical elements on the facades and the unpretentious array of brickwork ornaments speak in favour of the "encyclopaedic" education of the masons, who had been well acquainted with the architecture of the representative monuments from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. With

**15. Marko's monastery**, Painting on the south wall

the dexterous and inventive synthesis of the building components, they have created a work of art which reflects the most remarkable elements of the architectonic heritage from the medieval epoch. On the western side of the church, an open porch was added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a donation of the pasha of Skopje – Hamzi, who provided a representative entrance to the sacral space of the medieval temple.

*The conception of the fresco programme,  
the iconographic illuminations and the  
painterly invention of the zographs*

**T**he painted decoration of the church dedicated to Saint Demetrius is one of the most remarkable works of late Byzantine artistic productions, marked by invention in the structure of its program context, original iconographic components, as well as unusually exciting authenticity in the conception of the thematic repertoire. The profound theological erudition of the masters, observable in the design of the program core of the ensemble, as well as the finely constructed arrangement of the liturgical poetry in the visual configuration of the spectacles are the basic elements of the impressive artistic portfolio of King Marko's monastery. The wealth of different iconographic schemes, the inclusion of new thematic contents and the creative freedom of the zographs in the formation of the traditional painterly matrixes – are the main contribution of the authors of the fresco ensemble to the

**16. Marko's monastery,** Painting on the north wall





17. Marko's monastery,  
Busts of the apostles

production of one of the master-peaces in the Byzantine art history of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The painted programme of the church of Saint Demetrius displays a very inventive

thematic content, perfectly included in the spatial arrangement of the temple's interior. The thoughtful disposition of the painterly elements, the creation of original iconographic matrixes for the compositions, as well as the unification of the program components of the painted decoration into an exclusive visual organism spread across the walls of the church edifice, have resulted in creation of an extraordinary fresco ensemble in terms of its thematic features and inimitable according to its aesthetic attributes. The fresco ensemble in the dome, the inventively configured altar decoration, the cycle of the Great Feasts, the illustration of the Passion cycle, the depiction of Christ's public ministry, the Vita of the patron saint, the Hagiography of Saint Nicholas, the authentically designed Menologion, as well as the elaborated composition of the Heavenly Court - are the program components of the fresco painting, marked by genuinely articulated iconographic characteristics in its execution. The same refers to the khetorial arrangement, which includes the historical portraits of the kings Volkašin and Marko, depicted somewhat later than the frescoes in the interior of the church, on the southern facade, above the entrance to the temple.

**W**ithin the program concept of the painting, in the summit of the dome of the church one can see the monumental image of *Christ Pantocrator*, depicted with a suggestive gesture of blessing and a luxuriously ornamented Gospel Book in



**18. Marko's monastery,** Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos I

his hand. Below his representation, the figures of the angels have been depicted in floating motion with royal dignity of Christ's heavenly guard, while in the drum of the dome, the Old Testament prophets have been pictured as protocolar heralds of the salvational appearance of the expected Messiah. The portraits of the four evangelists Mathew, Mark, Luke and John have been represented on the pendentives in an iconographic design which refers to the notion of their gospels being the essential literature about the life of Christ, his deeds and miracles, enclosing the thematic context of the painted ensemble in the dome. Although the *Celestial liturgy* has not been included in the decoration of the dome, it has not been abandoned from the

program concept of the fresco arrangement of the church; its dislocation from its usual place in the dome to the lowest register of the altar apse has resulted from the thoughtful unification of the liturgical elements in a unique thematic scheme, located in the space where the actual liturgical performance of the church dignitaries has been taking place. In that context, below the impressive figure of the Virgin and the scene of the *Communion of the apostles*, Christ, dressed in an archbishopric garment, accompanied by angels in diaconic service, as well as followed by the *Officiating church fathers*, blesses the Eucharist, performing the festive ceremony of the *Great Entrance*. *Christ's dead body*, laid on the table in the niche of the prothesis, symbolizes His sacrifice given for the salvation of humanity which has been commemorated in the ritual of the

**19. Marko's monastery, Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos IV, Kontaktion IV**







**20. Marko's monastery, Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos IX**

Great Entrance. In that manner, the opening and the closing act of the solemn liturgical ceremony in the sanctuary of Marko's monastery have been united into a sole ritual in which, the soteriological role of Christ, as well as its significance for the design of church performances, have been celebrated.

**H**ighly inventive structure of the compositional schemes can also be seen in the exposition of the cycles dedicated to the life and deeds of Christ, arranged in the upper registers of the church decoration. In that regard, the composition of *Nativity* has been located on the eastern side of the southern vault, the scene of the *Presentation in the temple* has been situated



on the surface of the southern tympanum, while the spectacle of the *Baptism* – on the western half of the southern vault. The composition illustrating the *Resurrection of Lazarus* can be seen on the southern half of the western vault, while in the northern half of the western vault one can notice the scene of the *Transfiguration*. The scene of the *Crucifixion* has been situated on the western half of the northern vault, the composition showing the *Myrrophores at the Tomb* has been depicted on the surface of the north tympanum, the *Harrowing of Hell* has been pictured on the eastern half of the northern wall, while the scenes depicting the *Ascension*, as well as the *Pentecost* have been depicted on the surface of the eastern vault. Besides the common arrangement of the

**21. Marko's monastery, Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos XI**



**22. Marko's monastery,** Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Kontakion XI

scenes displaying the most significant events related to Christ's soteriological mission for the mankind, the illustration of these festal events located in the area under the dome has been supplemented with the mini-cycle dedicated to the Slaughter of the innocents, depicted in the fourth register of the painted decoration – on the south wall of the naos. Associated with the composition illustrating the *Nativity* and depicted as a thematic extension of the evangelic tale of Christ's birth, the massacre of the innocent newborns in Bethlehem, ordered by the paranoiac King Herod and realized as a planned execution of the newly born "King of the Jews", alludes to the historic dimension of the biblical event in a most authentic way.

**B**elow the Festal cycle, the history of Christ's Passion and His public ministry has been illustrated. The scenes depicting the *Expulsion of the merchants from the temple*, the composition showing *Christ and the Samaritan woman*, the *Healing of the blind born*, the *Healing of the dropsical man*, *man with the withered arm*, *woman with the issue of blood*, as well as the rest of the scenes encompassed by the cycle of Christ's public ministry located in the upper zones of the decoration, have been represented as a testimony to the divine and inexhaustible power of the Messiah in his assistance given to the sick and helpless people. The cycle of the Passion, on the other hand, which comprises the traditional compositions with the depiction of the *Betrayal of Judas*, the

**23. Marko's monastery, Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos XII, Kontakion XII**





**24. Marko's monastery,** Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos XII

torture and the *Crucifixion*, has been inspired by the cantations sung within church services in the course of the Passion Week, adopted by the painters due to the many details in regard to the notion of Christ's sacrifice. The compact visual design of the scene depicting the *Last Supper* in which Christ's figure is surrounded by the anxious images of the apostles, the dynamically energized scene showing the *Prayer at Gethsemane*, the dramatically "unfurled" composition of the *Betrayal of Judas*, the theatrically designed visual structure in the execution of the *Mocking*, as well as the fiercely dynamized illustration of the events taking place at Golgotha, resound in the church interior of Marko's monastery



with the powerful echo of biblical tales related to the exalted tragedy of Christ's sacrifice. The half-length images of the dead Christ and the Virgin Mary overcome by a bitter outburst of maternal pain have been depicted above the columns supporting the dome as one of the most remarkable examples of inventively designed iconographic concept in the depiction of the *Lamentation*. Represented as a program counterpart to the scene of *Annunciation*, the event which celebrates the beginning of Christ's incarnation, the mentioned images of Christ and Virgin Mary enclose the cycle of the Passion, i.e. the story of Christ's sacrificial suffering for the benefit of the sinful mankind.

**25. Marko's monastery, Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin, Oikos X**



**25.1. Marko's monastery,** Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin , Kontakion XII, detail

**I**n that regard, the Passion cycle, in a thematic sense, is associated with the register of the depicted Menologion (Church calendar), which stretches along the walls of the temple starting from the diaconicon via the southern, western and northern walls of the interior, ending on the eastern wall of the prothesis. According to its iconographic structure unknown to the earlier medieval painting, the illustrated Menologion in Marko's monastery is represented in a form of a wreath of vine in the calyxes of which the half-length figures of numerous martyrs have been arranged as a belt, appropriate to the liturgical order of services in the course of the

orthodox calendar. Represented in the register above the zone in which the Passion cycle has been depicted, the illustrated Menologion stresses the significance of Christ's sacrifice, as well as the sacrifices given by His most devoted followers from the heroic past of Christian religion. Depicted as a visual commemoration of the tragic days from the dawn of the Christian era, the Menologion celebrates the images of the most courageous defenders of the faith and gives credit to the martyr death of the most venerated heroes of the Christian Church.

**I**n the second register of the painted decoration of the temple, the stanzas of the Akathistos hymn of the Virgin have been illustrated – the most festal hymn of Byzantine liturgical poetry which celebrates Virgin Mary and her role in Christ's incarnation. Depicted in twenty four scenes and arranged along the walls of the altar, naos and narthex of the church, the painterly synopsis of the Akathistos cycle encompasses the historic, dogmatic, as well as the laudatory context of the textual matrix and visualizes the verses of the hymn with a playful compositional structure of the scenes filled with picturesque iconographic details. The pictorial iconographic exposition of the compositions in the fresco decoration of Marko's monastery is also characteristic of the depicted hagiographic cycles dedicated to the patron saint – Saint Demetrius, as well as to Saint Nicholas, executed in the western portion of the church, elaborated



with numerous narrative elements and inventive painterly solutions. The miraculous deeds, the exciting events and the salvational enterprises, depicted in the vitas of the two cultic characters from the early times of the establishment of Christian faith, have been illustrated with a great deal of dexterity in the transposition of the textual sources. The remarkable theological erudition of the zographs and their creative “addiction” to the literary sources, can also be seen in the representation executed in the blind calotte above the narthex, which has been inspired by the liturgical canto of the great church poet Cosma of Jerusalem; it depicts the image of Christ the Logos, the soon to be incarnated saviour of humankind, surrounded by angelic guard of celestial beings. Giving blessing to the altar table of godly wisdom, He calls upon the faithful to feed themselves with the sweet fruits of Christian ideas transformed into immortal ascension of all of Christ’s devoted followers.

**I**n the lowest register of the decorative programme in the church, the illustration of the 45<sup>th</sup> Psalm of King David has been executed, sung in the glory of Lord’s Anointed, besides whom “did stand the queen in gold of O’phir” (Book of Psalms, 45: 9). The depiction of the solemn verses composed by the Old Testament poet, who goes into rhapsodies about the heavenly King, has been configured as a whole register illustrating the *Heavenly Court* that stretches along the walls of the naos and the narthex

**26. Marko’s monastery,** The Heavenly Court, detail





27. Marko's monastery, Christ the Logos in the calotte above the narthex

of the church. It encompasses the figures of Christ and the Virgin dressed in glamorous attires, the image of John the Baptist, the portrait of the psalmodian David, as well as some twenty portraits of holy warriors and other individuals depicted in costumes of courtiers. The complex iconographic elaboration of the *Heavenly Court* in Marko's monastery, which occupies the entire first zone of the painted decoration in the temple, includes the khetorial arrangement depicted on the north wall of the narthex, as well. The inclusion of the portraits of the kings Volkašin and Marko and the queen Elena within the biblically inspired configuration of the *Heavenly Court* has been, by all means, instigated by the prayers read in the medieval court protocols on the account of coronation ceremonies, bearing a refined painterly allusion to the necessity of God's protection of the government's throne.

*The painterly expression of the zographs  
and their authentic painterly idiom*

**T**he painted decoration of the church of Saint Demetrius is a work of art of the leader of the Ohrid painterly atelier which, in the 70ties of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, has created the most expressive fresco ensembles in the town and its vicinity. The fresco arrangements of the subsidiary chapels of the church of the Virgin Peribleptos, the churches of the Virgin Bolnička and Virgin



**28. Marko's monastery,** Patron Saint Demetrius on the west façade

Peštanska, as well as a portion of the fresco painting executed on the northern wall of the Saint Sophia cathedral in Ohrid reveal the artistic evolution of the talented painter who, before accepting the engagement in Marko's monastery, has formulated his painterly expression permeated with voluminous severity of the forms, anxious dynamics of the drawing, vertiginous optical effects, as well as exciting coloristic contrasts of the palette. Disciple of the great painter John Teorianos and a zograph who has built his career in the urban ateliers of the Archbishopric see, the anonymous author of the fresco painting in Marko's monastery is one of the most remarkable personages in the artistic development of the late Byzantine epoch.

Inclined to experimentation with painterly components and passionately devoted to exposition of explosive emotions within the sentimental atmosphere of the scenes, he has spread the wings of his creative imagination across the walls of Marko's monastery as a powerful triumph of eternal artistic values that hover above the dark abyss of historical transience.

**T**ogether with his associates, the anonymous zograph of the church of Saint Demetrius has created the painted decoration of the temple utilizing the invasive artistic energy of his painterly performance. Although one can notice some differences between the execution of the scenes in the upper registers of the fresco ensemble and the ones depicted in the lower zones, the leading zograph of the artistic atelier has made a great impact upon his assistants with the specific features of his painterly temper, untamable in its brutal outburst of intensive dynamic resonance. The nervous play of the lines, the invasive voluminosity of the forms, the inflamed energy of the movements, as well as the anxious tension of the agitated postures are the basic elements of his approach to the creation of the dynamic syncope within the expressive visual context of the compositions. The monumental psychological resonance in the creation of the emotional unrest of the depicted characters, the disrhythmic tonality of their motion and the fierce distortion of the carnal gestures of the saintly figures in Marko's monastery



**29. Marko's monastery,** Khetetoria fresco on the south façade

fresco painting produce a magnificent visual oratory dedicated to the religious sacrifices and the real, historical suffering, as well. The inconsolable mother Rachel who mourns over her brutally slaughtered newborns, Christ who prays ecstatically amidst the unfriendly rocky landscape of Gethsemane, the expressive image of the Virgin depicted in front of the hacked-like silhouette of the cave

in Bethlehem in the scene of the Nativity, as well as the dramatically unfurled figure of the angel who welcomes the three wise men in one of the episodes of the Akathistos Hymn of the Virgin – are but a few examples of the explosive artistic expression of their authors. Submerged into the fierce turbulences of the expressive painterly execution, they have created the theatrical fresco ensemble of Marko's monastery highly appropriate to the dramatically nuanced historical heroism of King Marko's reign.

*The façade painting and the khetorial arrangement above the “Royal entrance”*

**O**n the western facade of the church, in the lunette situated above the main entrance, traditionally designated for the depiction of the patron saint, Saint Demetrius is represented, dressed in festive militant attire, holding a weapon and riding a potent horse. As a patron of the temple and protector of all its privileges, Saint Demetrius receives Christ's blessing while the angels are descending from the skies, caring his militant insignia and a martyr wreath as features of his character of a fireless cavalier and a meritorious heavenly warrior. On the southern facade of the church, above the side entrance to the temple, the second khetorial arrangement has been depicted, encompassing the portraits of kings Volkašin and Marko. The gemination





of the khetorial arrangement in the interior of the church with the one represented on the facade, as well as the depiction of “the horn of the Old Testament Kings” in King Marko’s right hand as an illustration of the 89<sup>th</sup> Psalm of King David, are the elements that clearly speak in favour of a subsequent chronological date of creation of the facade composition in comparison to the one depicted in the interior of the temple. Represented in 1389, the facade khetorial arrangement is a kind of a visual confirmation of the royal legitimacy of King Marko, who, after the tragic battle at Kosovo Polje, has remained a sole Christian ruler of the territory conquered by the Ottomans – confirmed by the Old Testament horn, as a biblical symbol of king’s anointment. Contrary to the compatibility of the painterly features between the execution of the portrait of Saint Demetrius represented in the lunette on the western facade and the fresco ensemble depicted in the interior of the temple, the khetorial composition executed on the southern facade shows entirely different stylistic qualities. The energetically constructed image of King Marko, the voluminous effects in the treatment of the forms, as well as the warm gamut of the palette of colours, are the most recognizable features of the painterly handwriting of Metropolitan John, a high church dignitary and the greatest zograph from the end of Macedonian Middle Ages. Being engaged in more than one khetorial enterprise launched by the royal family, on the southern facade of Marko’s monastery he has depicted the energetic portraits of the two legendary rulers

**30. Marko’s monastery,** The portrait of King Marko on the south facade

thus creating the last historical composition in the heroic artistic *finale* of the medieval epoch.

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Publisher  
**CALAMUS**  
"Partenij Zografski" 3b,  
1000 Skopje, R. Macedonia

*Translated into English by*  
Elizabeta Dimitrova

*Graphic design & prepres*  
Darko Nikolovski

*Origin of illustrations*  
Misko Tutkovski

Skopje 2020



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www.kalamus.com.mk

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација  
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

726:271.2-523.6(497.711)  
75.052:271.2-523.6(497.711)

DIMITROVA, Elizabeta

The church of Saint Demetrius (King Marko's monastery) at Sushica  
[Електронски извор] / Elizabeta Dimitrova ; [translated into English by  
Elizabeta Dimitrova ; origin of illustrations Misko Tutkovski]. - Skopje  
: Calamus, 2020. - (Edition Cultural heritage)

Начин на пристапување (URL): <https://www.kalamus.com.mk>. - Текст во PDF  
формат, содржи 52 стр., илустр. - Наслов преземен од екранот. - Опис на  
изворот на ден 19.03.2020. - Библиографија: стр. 50-51

ISBN 978-608-4646-30-3

а) "Свети Димитрија", манастир (Маркова Сушица) -- Архитектура б) "Свети  
Димитрија", манастир (Маркова Сушица) -- Фрескоживопис

COBISS.MK-ID 112423178

ISBN 978-608-4646-30-3