

Church No. 10 on Tsarevets hill in Veliko Tarnovo:

Architecture, construction periods, and date (Abstract)

Evgeni Dermendzhiev

Church No. 10 adjoins the Western Curtain Wall of the main citadel of the capital Tarnovgrad, some 310 m away from the Main Gate (Fig. 1, 2). Until now, no complete and detailed study of the church has been published.

Architecture. Church No. 10 is built of split stones on white mortar, with external strengthening timbers and foundations up to 2 m deep (Figs. 3-10). Only on the façades, there are belts of three courses of bricks. The floor is paved with multicoloured marble mosaic. The thickness of the walls is 1 m and the preserved height is 3.50 m. The northern wall is 11.50 m long, and the southern one is 12.30 m long. In the middle of the southern wall, there is a walled up entrance, 1.30 m wide. The eastern wall is 9.60 m long (Figs. 7-8). On the outside, it has a step-like plinth, with the façade rising above it. The plinth under the three-sided apse is semicircular, with 5.20 m outer diameter (Fig. 9). On the inside, the apse is semicircular, 2.50 m in diameter, flanked with small pilasters (Fig. 2). In the apse, the flooring of large stone slabs is partially preserved.

The western wall is 9.60 m long, with two entrances, each one 0.80 m wide (Figs. 9-11). In front of them, a 1.30 m wide corridor is hewn in the masonry of the Western Curtain Wall. In the middle of the church, there are four solid masoned

pillars (Figs. 2, 3, 5, 7, 9). In the interior of the church, nine stone tombs were built, measuring 1.50/2 m by 0.50/1 m, 0.60 m deep (Figs. 2, 3, 5, 7). In both inner western corners, two rectangular chambers were built (1.45 by 1/1.30 m, 1-1.40 m deep) (Fig. 2). Later, a two-partite narthex (12.10 m long and 3.60 m wide) was built to adjoin the church from the north (Fig. 2). It was constructed of split stones on white mortar, with walls 0.75-1 m thick.

First Building Period (Fig. 12). The church is 14.20 m long, the apse included, and 9.60 m wide. It was a cross-in-square church, with dome that stepped on the two pillars next to the altar in the eastern part and two pillars in the western part. It had one apse with no separate narthex. The interior of the naos is 8.65 m long and 7.45 m wide. The floor is of stone slabs, and its level in the apse is 0.25 m higher than in the naos. The church had one entrance from the south and two from the west. The two western entrances were accessible only from the platform of the Western Curtain Wall. One could descend into a corridor that was hewn in thickness the curtain wall, with two single-flight staircases of nine steps each. The corridor with the staircases and the part of the Western Curtain Wall above them were most probably covered with barrel-wedged vault that stepped on the battlements in the front. The arrangement of the accesses to the church indicates that it did not have a

separate narthex. There is no direct evidence about the layout of the façade, the decoration and the interior of the church.

Second Building Period (Fig. 14). The second period is related to the dismantling of the church to a height of 1.50 m above the foundations. Then, it was transformed into a church-tomb with semiunderground crypt. For the purpose, the flooring in the naos was removed and the earth was excavated to a depth of 1.10 m, except for the apse and the altar. An inner wall was built to support this higher ground. The southern entrance was walled up and a semiunderground crypt was created, in which 9 graves and 2 chambers were constructed (Fig. 14, 1). The ceiling of the crypt was raised with about one meter above the initial floor of the church and was built of wooden beams, planks and mortar. The crypt was accessible only from the west, through the original entrances. The naos of church No. 10 almost preserved its original interior layout (Fig. 14, 2). The floor of the altar was leveled with the floor of the naos.

When the church was rebuilt, no changes were made in the construction that carried the roof, except for the two western pillars that were replaced by two marble columns (Fig. 14, 2). The vaults, the dome and the roofs were made of travertine blocks and roof tiles. The facades were embellished with decorative niches and glazed ceramic elements. The walls inside were painted. The floor was paved with

multicoloured marble mosaic. It remains unclear when the narthex from the north was built – if it was constructed simultaneously with the reconstruction, or it was added later.

The specific link of Church No. 10 with the Western Curtain Wall by means of the access to the battlements indicates that it was meant to service the officers and the soldiers of the capital's garrison. In this case, the church would be dedicated to one of the warrior saints: the archangels Michael and Gabriel, St. Demetrios, St. George, St. Theodore Tyron, St. Theodore Stratelates, or St. Minas.

With the newly-constructed semiunderground crypt, Church No. 10 became a funerary church. This new function of the former military church provides grounds to suggest that boyars and generals, related to the king's army and the defense of the capital Tarnovo, were buried here.

Date. Most probably, Church No. 10 was built in the first half of the 14th c. (Fig. 12). Later, in the second half or the late 14th c., it was thoroughly reconstructed with the construction of the semiunderground crypt and became a two-storey funerary church (Fig. 14). The hypothesis about the creation of an urban monastery around the church was not supported by the evidence. The church was demolished in the late 14th or the 15th c.