SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COURTYARD OF OSENOVLASHKI MONASTERY «ST. MARY <<(7 THRONES)

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The aim of this study is to analyze the spatial parameters and elements in the courtyard of the Osenovlashki monastery, as well as the genesis and evolution of the spatial scheme and the factors, which have contributed to the final development phase, leading to the present look of the monastery.

Keywords: monastery complexes, spaces, analysis, landscape, history, architecture, traditional lifestyle, culture.

Aim of the study: the aim of this study is to analyze the spatial parameters and elements in the courtyard of Osenovlashki monastery, the genesis and evolution of the spatial pattern, as well as the factors which have led to the final development stage of the monastery.

Object and methods of the study: the object is the yard of Osenovlashki monastery and its elements, which have influenced the development of the spatial plan.

Discussion:
Osenovlashki monastery, known as the Seven Thrones, is located in a picturesque part of the northern Stara Planina mountains, at the foot of mountain Izmerets. The monastery, officially named "Virgin Mary", was built in the beautiful valley of the relatively small river Gabrovnitsa. As the distance from Sofia is 86 kilometres, "Seven Thrones" is a popular destination for weekend tourism.

According to an ancient legend, Osenovlashki monastery was founded in the XI century by brothers Peter Delian and George, the sons of King Gabriel Radomir.

This king became a monk under the name Gabriel and spent the last days of his life here - near the upper reaches of Gabrovnitsa river.

Another legend of Pirot says that Tsar Peter Delyan (Peter II) died at the monastery, which was temporarily the capital of Bulgaria. First abbot of the monastery became a brother of the Bulgarian ruler.

The monastery is better known for its non-temple name "Seven Thrones" because of its unique church. Tradition says that seven boyars created seven villages near the monastery – Osenovlag, Ogoya, Ogradishte, Bukovec, Leskovodol, Jelen and Lakatnik. In the church there are seven chapels (thrones), and experts say that nothing like that can be found anywhere else in Bulgarian Christian religious buildings. The monastery undoubtedly existed in XVI century.

To the North there are ruins of a fortress. Local people call it "Latin kale". Small remains of it (parts of a stone wall) can still be seen if one follows a steep path from the monastery. Today's port of Seven Thrones was in fact taken from these remains.

Another legend says that under Ottoman rule the monastery was destroyed and burned down. Valchan gathered voivodes and decided to rebuild the monastery. Voivodes were seven: Valchan voivoda, priest Martin, Spiros Dimiter, Maleenko Serb, Emin Bey, Ali Bey and Peter. In their honour the church was made with seven thrones.

Saint Sophronius Vrachanski, bishop of Vratsa Diocese has resided and celebrated liturgy in the monastery. His diocese has come to the monastery then.

The monastery was a favourite place of pilgrimage for Bulgarian classic Ivan Vazov, who wrote a poem about it - "Clapp beats". Today it is the favourite monastery of Patriarch Maxim.

Among the special places of the monastery one can find the tomb of the famous Bulgarian children's writer Zmei Gorianin (1905-1958). It is located in the yard behind the church.

Spatial composition: like most Bulgarian monasteries, Seven Thrones is surrounded by the high stone wall, and the church is located in the middle of the courtyard. This is known in our country as the "Athos" development scheme. Moreover, the complex also includes a bell tower and two perpendicular residential buildings, most of which today are rooms for visitors. The belfry has two bells (dating 1799 and 1940) with wooden and metal clappers - the older was taken in 1799 from the remains of the Roman fortress. Relatively small courtyard immediately impresses visitors with its well-kept garden with many flowers, flowering shrubs and old trees, one of which is a century-old redwood. Unfortunately, numerous sculptures of kitschy garden gnomes and elves, donated by visitors are scattered across the courtyard today. These have nothing in common with the Orthodox tradition.

The church itself is no less impressive with its unique design of seven separate altars - something that has no equivalents in other Bulgarian churches.

Catholic monastery church in the oldest form represented a simplified version of the square located crossed-dome buildings with space allocated to seven iconic parts - cruciform nave and six chapels. With this plan the church was a model for many throne monasteries and temples. The architectural style came to the Balkan Peninsula in XI-XII centuries, when the Bulgarian architecture acquired Byzantine forms known as Armenian-Georgian. This further supports the version of initial construction in the XI century. Of course over time due to numerous fires and demolition the church has completely lost its original...
The temple’s miraculous icon is called “Virgin Birth” and is believed to be brought from the peninsula of Athos by Father Gabriel at the time of erection of the monastery. Aside from the thrones, the massive chandelier called “Horo” can also impress. It is covered by exquisite carvings and paintings of religious subjects. All paintings in the church are over a hundred years old. The monastery also has its own library. Ancient Orthodox books, including the one gifted by the Russian Empress Catherine, can be found there.

The largest construction restoration of the monastery took place in the XIX century. With a renovation in 1868 the church was acquired an open narthex, the white arcade of which brings colour in the yard even today. In 1977 local craftsmen have built an impressive four-storey building on older foundations northward of the church. In 1849 the second floor of this building housed the monk Christopher in the main monastery school. Monk cells are located on the upper two floors around large verandahs named kjoshkove. On the facade of this building facing the courtyard religious and domestic scenes were painted. A second building, at the entrance to the monastery, was built one year later.

The specific location of the monastery, near the rock from the East and construction to the North and Northwest, with the Catholic Church centrally located in the courtyard, is typical for the area development scheme. The Cherepish monastery is conveniently located in the Iskar ravine, skillfully hidden and protected by natural resources (Iskar river and steep rocky slope).

Spatial scheme, dimensions and proportions

The objects in the monastery courtyard are located in a way typical for our lands and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity “Byzantine” scheme: due to the stand-alone and cloistered lifestyle of the monks gathered together only by certain rituals, religious buildings were built in the middle of the yard; residential wings and business premises were built at the periphery.

As already mentioned, there is evidence for the existence of the monastery around XI century, or more accurately in the time of the Byzantine rule. At that time, socio-economic conditions and the coming High Middle Ages, led to the emergence of new features in the construction of the Bulgarian monasteries, which have changed their spatial style appearance mainly in two directions. As a functional organization of the components the Greek scheme can be found almost everywhere: open space in the centre of a fortified courtyard with zoning by...
positioning of the relevant buildings in radial way (from the most to the least important). The Catholic church and some service buildings were located in the central courtyard space: dining room, library, secondary churches, etc., And other buildings occupied the space along the outer contour of the monastery – just like in the Osenovlaski monastery. The schemes with more than one yard are met much more rarely taking into account the specificity of the field.

At that time, the socio-political situation in the country forced people to develop a more closed way of life: settlements were walled, like forts. It certainly can be seen in the planning schemes of monastic complexes. Monasteries already had not only religious but also defensive function, leading to distinct appearance of a fortress with well-expressed decorative yard.

Of course, it was already mentioned that this aspect of the monastery comes from the construction in XVIII-XIX centuries. But anyway it is based on the original preserved foundations and we can assume that spatial parameters of the yard are authentic.

After the field measurements it was found out that the yard has an average surface slope of 4.22%, which is cleverly controlled by the central location of the Catholic Church and bell tower compensating the displacement between three terraces not seen from the entrance to the temple (narthex). Thus, the first impression of visitors is that buildings lay on one surface line.

The courtyard of the monastery has an area of 2637 sq. m.; green areas occupy 1153 sq. m. covering 43.72% of the yard area. The buildings occupy 837 sq. m. covering 32% of the yard area. Paved areas are 647 sq. m. covering 24.54% of the yard area. The reached proportions are well balanced and similar to those used in construction today. Any way, we must admit that they are in absolute harmony with human scales.

The ceilings are 2.5 meters high. The Western monastery guesthouse mostly has two floors with emerging third floor attic near the three-storey but located at a higher level building with monastic cells and school – to the North. Thereby a smooth transition not only in the size the building, but also in the use of the terrain is reached.

The buildings are open to the courtyard. Ornate verandahs (kjoshkove) and balconies (chardaci) with additional facade landscaping make the transition from interior to exterior even more smooth.

Despite of the open plan, the yard

Fig. Pilgrimage yard, monastic yard and farmyard

is cleverly blocked and structured with aligned bell tower, Catholic Church narthex and whimsical "colonnade" – vine. These form three main sub-spaces quite typical for late Monastery design, namely: pilgrimage yard which we enter immediately after arrival - the space directly beneath the guesthouse, situated in front of the church; small monastic courtyard located northward of the church narthex and provisionally separated from the pilgrimage yard by the line arcade of the church and the vine "colonnade", separating the small paved area in front of the monastery school and the building of the monks from the side access to the narthex of the monastery temple; a kind of a farm yard behind the temple - to the East, with the service entrance, outbuilding adjacent to the entrance and tombs of monks and eminent personalities, including the children's writer Zmei Gorianin.

The three sub-spaces in the yard cover: pilgrimage yard - 52%, the monastic yard - 16% and the farm yard - 32%. This means that the buildings and the yard are almost equally divided based on the needs of the incoming pilgrims and monks inhabiting the monastery.

Vegetation: LDifferentiation of sub-spaces is clearly evident in the garden furniture and especially in the placement of decorative trees and shrubs. It is obvious that decorative plants, as well as the majority of paved areas are concentrated in the pilgrimage yard, perhaps because it is designed for outside visitors. Here once can find highly decorative, durable paved areas, ornamental trees and shrubs, numerous pots of geraniums, nasturtiums and begonias, even an Aloe and fountain donated by pilgrims; in


Fig. Location of decorative plants in the courtyard
the past - painted verandas (chardaci) today are covered with wrap-remontant plants. Unfortunately, today the yard is dotted with many kitschy figurines like turtles, garden gnomes and mushrooms. This significantly affects the overall impression of the complex. Three redwood trees in the yard, and that outside the courtyard were also donated by eminent visitors. One of the three comes allegedly from the late XIX century, and was planted personally by Prince Ferdinand.

Along with many potted plants in the front - pilgrimage yard is greatly covered with flowering plants. It is full of chrysanthemums and hydrangeas, which make the space look extremely friendly. Moderate use of large impressive plants (three redwoods and a cypress) on one hand creates the feeling of stateliness and grandeur, and on the other – does not violate human scales and divide the space into subspaces.

Vegetation of the monastic courtyard is quite moderate. It is almost entirely covered with pavement of gneiss. Here the vegetation is mostly presented by vine and Parthenocissus, which form a barrier between the monastic courtyard and the pilgrimage. Here one can find small plots with nasturtiums and geraniums and a circle in the pavement in front of the North entrance to the narthex filled with geraniums, which are often used in church services.

Monastic yard has rather transitory nature being located between the well decorated pilgrimage yard and the farmyard that lacks any vegetation. It has a ruling walnut tree, lawns and small plots northward of the church. The border between the monastic courtyard and the farmyard is occupied entirely by Helianthus hirsutus.

Conclusions
The analysis has led to the following conclusions:
1. Monastery structure, and in particular the organization of the yard is heavily influenced by the period of construction, reconstruction or major repairs in the monastery complexes. Osenovlashki monastery is an example: built in the XI century in accordance with the typical for our land "Athos" development scheme; over the years the basic space has evolved into a three dimensional scheme natural for the Renaissance - with pilgrimage, farmyard and monastic yard.
2. Since most of the monasteries in Bulgaria have similar fate (repeatedly demolished and burned down), we can conclude that currently existing monasteries rarely retain their original appearance. The construction schemes shown by them are mostly a product of the Renaissance.
3. Since vegetation and architectural elements most often have high decorative effect, mainly in reception areas and pilgrimage yards, we can conclude that the ordinary Bulgarian was in many respects (modest outlook and lifestyle) formed by the style and amenities of the monastery complexes. The monastic complexes have long been the most important public buildings, and the opportunities they had, formed a unique, distinctive style of landscaping carried by pilgrims to their homes. In this regard, we can conclude that monasteries have had a significant impact on organization of yards in single family houses during the Renaissance.

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