

# *The Triconch at Tudence: A Short Analysis of the Type in the History of Architecture*

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*Abstract. The term triconch in architecture indicates the space structure composed of a central core to which three conches are attached on three sides under a right angle. The subject of this research is the excavated triconch at Tudence, near Tetovo, its architectural specifics, analogies and doubts in the dating. In addition, this paper gives a brief definition of this architectural type in the history of architecture and shows that the diversity of shapes in which the triconch form is present marks it as one of the most outstanding types in the group of central plan buildings.*

## *1. Introduction*

Defining types is one of the most prolific ways to enrich our knowledge about our heritage, because in the process of classifying various structures, certain categories are established as landmarks, indicating some typical relations that exist between elements. However, there are several approaches to typology, and two ways of classification: one, according to the features that tend to be repeated in similar models afterwards, and the other, according to an ideal model that unites characteristically important features of all structures that are similar in form (DEVILLERS, 1974; PANERAI, 1980). Defining the significant elements of the triconch enables the classification to be based on characteristics different from the most frequently used formal compositions of forms. It appears that the analysis of the triconch spatial organisation is rather complex and that the triconch cannot be typologically determined solely according to a classified collection of examples gathered from the history of architecture. The identification of the basic triconch “type” shows a great dependency on its function, symbolism and

spatial structure. Hence, the typological generalisation of triconch forms can be performed on the basis of Q. de Quincy's definition from the beginning of the XIX century: "The type does not represent the image of a thing it emulates, as much as the idea of an element serving by itself both as a rule and a model... A model is a thing, which must be made as it is, on the contrary, a type is a thing according to which everyone can imagine and create a deed that does not look like its example. When a model is concerned, everything is precise and determined, while a type is more or less ambiguous" (DE QUINCY, 1932). The triconch is, therefore, defined as a form consisting of a central space with an elevated core (with a regular geometric figure in the base), always with apses attached to it on three sides (having circular segments for their bases), topped by a half-dome, the axes of which cross orthogonally.

## 2. *The Triconch at Tudence*

The archaeological site *Crkvishte* is located to the southeast of Tudence, a village near Tetovo, in the Polog region. It was first noted and dated in the Archaeological Map of Macedonia as "late mediaeval church architecture" (AMRM, 1996: 427).



Fig. 1: Tudence, Republic of Macedonia (3-D map by Google Earth, 2010)

More recent research was conducted by professor Viktor Lilchik in 2002, who felt that it was not a mediaeval sacral object, but an early Christian church; leading to a final review in 2004 by a team of experts from the Regional Museum of Tetovo.

The object (Fig. 2) is 14-15 metres long and 9 metres wide, composed of two elements: a narthex and a triconch, widely classifying it as a combined type.<sup>1</sup>

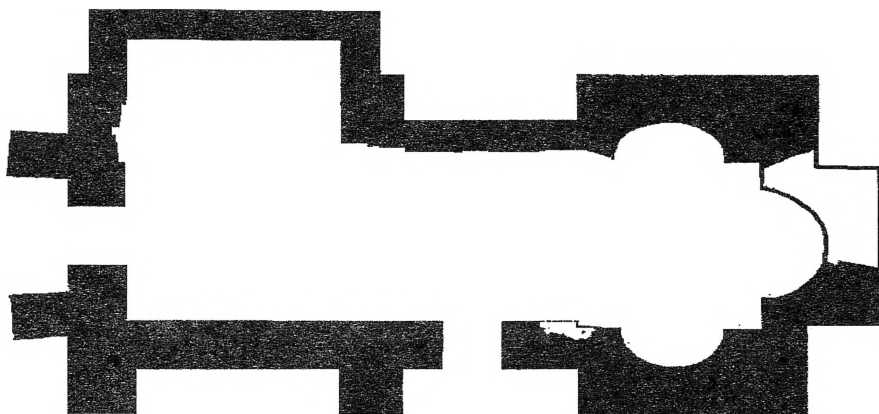


Fig. 2: the Triconch at Tudence, floor plan (LILCHIK, 2003)

The conches are shallow and integrated within the rectangular walls. The main entrance on the west side is formed with vaulted propylaea. The two massive contraforti found on the south part of the narthex support the opinion that a vaulted ceiling existed.

The building is extremely solid, with massive walls, 85 cm - 1 m thick, on average, the exception being the north rectangular wall extension of the narthex, only 60 cm thick.

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<sup>1</sup> Combinations of the triconch and other architectural forms exceed the number of free forms. Because the fourth side is flat, the triconch space offers various possibilities for combinations with other forms. The types in which the triconch is spatially combined with another form (by adding architectural parts or wholes) are constructed in that way, as well as the types where the triconch is wholly fused with another architectural type. See KURTOVIĆ-FOLIĆ, 1997.

The north part of the eastern conch is in ruins, while the eastern part of the north conch, built in secondary opus, points out possible later repairs.

Four fragments of at least two altar slabs with elements of tall, late antique basis, late Justinianic details in the trochile profilation, and a capital of very rudimentary Corinthian, so-called *cubic* type, have been found.<sup>2</sup> These typological elements chronologically set the column (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) from Tudence in the second half of the VI century AD.

Concerning the dating of the church, some doubts exist in connection with the secondary use of parts from late antique roof tegulae in the walls, but the technique of combining the semicircular apse in the rectangular massive wall is quite characteristic of the VI century AD.<sup>3</sup> Besides that, the measurements (35.5 cm x 25.4 cm x 4 cm), as well as the typological characteristics of the most protogenic brick samples certainly correspond to numerous architectural objects from the late antiquity period in the Republic of Macedonia and the region. Although the group of relevant characteristics of the analysed IV and VI century bricks (dimensions, other morphological and physical properties) may vary, the average values have shown distinctive differences between the samples from the IV and VI century (RADIVOJEVIĆ, 2005: 192).

### *3. The Triconch in the History of Architecture*

The fact that many forms, which developed and improved later on, first appeared in prehistory, led to an attempt to identify the triconch archetype in the megalithic cult structures in Malta and Gozo (Tarxien, ca. 2400 BC; Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, ca. 2600 BC; and Ggantija, ca. 2800 BC).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The same profilation has been seen in the late antique presbytery columns from the VI century AD, such as the ones from the sites *Pokrvenik*, Resen and *Suvodol*, Bitola.

<sup>3</sup> As found in the Konjuh rotunda, dated ca. mid-VI century AD. See DŽIDROVA, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> See AQUILINA, 1984. In the north of Sardinia, there is a nuraghi Zura with a triconch interior arrangement; see PERROT-CHIPIEZ, *Histoire de l'art dans l'Antiquité*, Paris.

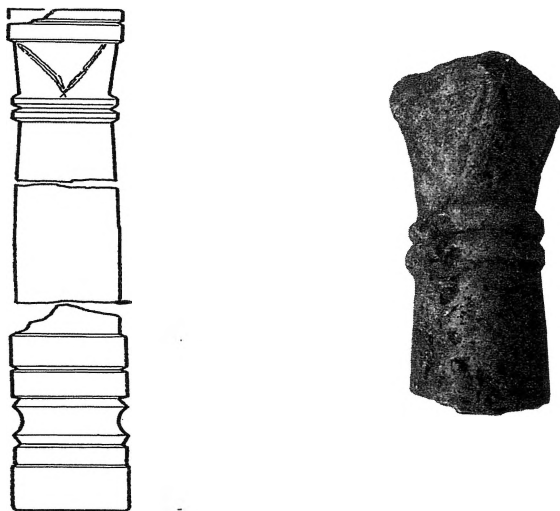


Fig. 3 and Fig. 4: the altar slab from Tudence

Among these examples and clearly designed triconchs from the early centuries AD, there is, however, a time discontinuity. There is still no available evidence concerning the forms from which the triconch may have developed, in the oldest civilizations between the Tigris and the Euphrates, along the Nile or in ancient Greece (FRANKOFORT, 1970; STEVENSON SMITH, 1981; MAZARAKIS AINIAN, 1989). In all probability, the search should begin during the reign of Augustus in Rome, when curved and polygonal architectural forms came into use more frequently (WARD-PERKINS, 1981). The process of breaking conventional right-angled forms and shaping of the triconch could have moved in two directions. In the first case, chambers acquired very deep niches, which finally broke through the side-walls, transforming them into apses and widening the interior. In the second case, three independent exedras were added in certain places next to the central building. The organic connection of the apses and the central structure was the next step in defining a new building type. Therefore, it may be concluded that the triconch, as well as the tetrachoras, pentachoras... decachoras emerged from the basic form of centrally planned structures.

According to the general typology of architectural structures, the triconch, together with other multiconchal structures, belongs to a combined type of central structures. From the Roman period, the triconch and tetra-

conch developed almost simultaneously. The tetraconch has several features that determine it as a building of central plan (i.e., symmetry along all the axes). It cannot be proved with certainty that tetraconchs seemingly appeared first, or that triconchs derived from them with the removal of the fourth apses. On the contrary, as some of the oldest triconchs were completely without a fourth side, i.e. completely open, it may be concluded that the triconch and the tetraconch must have been two different types with independent, but similar ways of development (KURTOVIĆ-FOLIĆ, 1997: 476).

#### *4. Conclusion*

Analysing the available examples from different periods and various regions throughout the history of architecture, we can conclude that the development of the triconch was almost certainly induced by functional requirements and symbolic reasons tending to spatially united structures of monumental expression, no matter how large the structure really was. In time, this type became closely connected to the settled layers of symbols and memories of them. They are, above all, the cult of the dead and immortal god-like characters, which was materialised through various cult and burial structures (mausoleums, heroons, martyriums and memories), and the cult of a celestial power executed through the figure of the ruler in numerous ceremonies and rituals held in tricliniums, throne and ceremony halls (GRABAR, 1946; KRAUTHEIMER, 1942). The basis for all the discussions concerning the symbolism, meaning and usage, as well as the triconch typology, is the simplest, elementary type, which can be seen as a foundation for all the other more developed forms and type variants.

Early Christianity has engaged the type of triconch in many of its ensembles, mostly used in its combined form. Such are the churches in Egypt (the Monastery of Apa Bane, the White Monastery, the Red Monastery, the Monastery of St. Pachomius, Dandara, Deir al-Matmar, Deir Abu Matta) and Israel (the Church of Nativity, Bethlehem).

The territory of the Republic of Macedonia has several examples of central plan buildings from the IV to the VI century (not counting the facility buildings – baptisteries), namely, the Tetraconch Church in Ohrid, dated in the second half of the V century (БИТРАКОВА-ГРОЗДАНОВА, 1975: 22-66), the Rotunda in Konjuh, dated ca. mid-VI century (DŽIDROVA, 2006: 177) and the Triconch in Tudence, dated, as described above, in the second

half of the VI century, which makes it exclusive as the earliest triconch that has been found so far.

The evolution of the type continues with a hiatus of nearly three centuries, until the appearance of the triconchs in the Ohrid region: in Zlesti, Gorica and Izdeglavje, along with the monasteries of Clement and Naum, all dating from the end of the IX and the beginning of the X century (КОЦО, 2008: 1080).

The triconch is an architectural form existing continually through a long period of time up to now, although not always in the same geographic regions and certainly not always equally represented throughout the ages.

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