

THE CHURCH OF ST. PANTELEIMON IN VELES: ARCHITECTURE, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND CONSTRUCTIVE MATERIALS

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Abstract. *The church of St. Panteleimon in Veles is located in the south of the city. Positioned on the right side of the river Vardar, the church is built on a hilly, inaccessible terrain quite unsuitable and difficult for construction. On this specific site the building is erected, placed on an artificially built terrace. With its size dominates the urban milieu of that part of the city. All her splendor and beauty are especially evident when one enters the nave of this monumental edifice, where one fully experiences her magnificence, architectural perfection of proportions and masterful skill in its complete interior and exterior realization.*

Keywords: *Macedonian Revival, 19th century Macedonian Master Builders, 19th Century Macedonia, Sacral Architecture*

1 INTRODUCTION

From the rich opus of its author, master Andreja Damjanov, the church of Saint Panteleimon in Veles stands out as one of the most splendid works of the period of the revival in the Macedonian art, culture, religion. Employing the basilica type as the base in the realization of the architectural plan and the superimposing of the interior galleries, this building marks the beginning of a new era in Macedonian architecture from the 19th century. Undoubtedly, one of the most significant achievements in the sacral architecture was built in 1840, as evident by the inscription placed below the gallery on the west side. On the south entrance Andreja Damjanov signed himself as the builder of the church.

The church is organized as a three-nave basilica covering an area of 810 square meters however, in its layout it does not represent a typical three-nave basilica. Namely the three-nave naos on both the north and the south side has one extra nave added that function as closed porches, and in fact on the ground floor the architectural plan is solved as a five-nave basilica with clearly differentiated functions. Due to the specificity of the terrain on which the church was built, construction of a west façade was not possible as the church with its western side is attached to a hill. To the east the church ends with three polygonal shaped apses of which the lateral ones are five-sided while the central, the altar apse is six-sided. The highly raised central nave is vaulted with three large domes hidden in the roof structure and completely within the roof of the church. In this way Andreja Damjanov created the system of blind domes that replaced the vaulting with semi cylindrical arches. The side naves however are arched with three-barrel vaults that are transversely grasped by a pair of arcs whose ends terminate at the bottom with a pendant, a type of stalactite considered to be of an oriental influence in the construction of this edifice. The ceilings of the galleries above the side naves are covered with wooden slats, while the upper gallery ceiling on the west side also has somewhat emphasized oriental influences reflected in the frieze of the small, lace like elaborated arcades with pendants.

Andreja Damjanov has in a very skillfully manner delivered his understanding of the inner volume accomplishing it on the principle of superimposing of the galleries. Above the porches (south and north) lie galleries that are overhanging above the central nave and on this floor the church functions as a five-nave structure. On the upper floor the galleries are connected to the one on the west side (the female church), and above it, at the height of the hidden domes of the central nave extends another gallery, with which the building on the west side is elevated vertically on three levels. With this system of superimposing of the galleries, the author sought to achieve a sensational moment in the believer by filling him with a sense of exaltation, ascending and rising him as a Christian to heaven.

The structure is built using combined constructive system of massive masonry and wood where the massive walls are made of stone while the entire vaulted dome construction is wooden. Inside, special attention is paid to the galleries that have adorned plasticity and are decoratively treated combining baroque and oriental forms of decoration. With its size, the interior makes a striking impression. The slender columns, the architectural refinement of the galleries, especially the west side of the nave, the iconostasis and all the other architectural details complement this impression. Decorative ornamentation is used in the decoration of pillars inside the church as well as in the decoration of the exterior of the apse. Damjanov's gift for scenic treating is expressed to maximum in the design of the inner west wall with galleries developing vertically. They are constructed with a complex system of spatial and artistic elements expressed through two baroque balconies, hanging arcades, large and small wooden pillars, carvings, pendants and fences and the east wall with its lavish iconostasis. All this was additionally treated with paintings which give the impression of even greater monumentality.

Contrary the luxurious interior, the exterior of the church is quite simple. The north and south facades are defined by the porch arcades however, the eastern facade is treated with greater attention. Here the apses are made of high-quality limestone that is easy to cut that allowed segmenting these walls with a network of capillaries, blind arcades and niches. The entrance portals are made under the influence of Neo-Baroque and Neo-Byzantine admixtures. Two vaults with a dove above each are placed above the colonnettes framing the portals openings, and over this whole composition there's a niche in which a fresco with the church's patron is painted. In Andreja Damjanov's work certain dose of classical discipline that is particularly emphasized in the clean and precise articulation of horizontal and vertical belts and the established rhythm and dynamics of facade volumes and window openings is evident.

2 ARCHITECTURAL PLAN

The church is designated as a three-nave basilica covering an area of 810 m², however it does not represent a typical three-nave basilica in its plan. Namely, the three-nave naos on both the north and the south side has one more nave added as porch and thus the building on the ground floor is resolved as a five-nave basilica with clearly differentiated functions (Figure 1). Due to the specificity of the terrain on which it was placed, it was not possible to construct a western façade as the building is leaning on the hill that extends on the same, west side of the church.

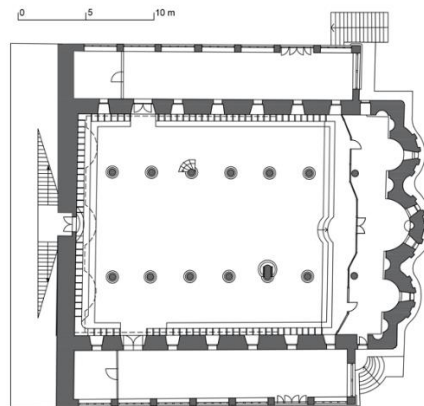


Figure 1. Ground floor (Re-elaborated by Velika Ivkowska; Source: Photo archives of the Institute of History of Architecture and Art, Faculty of Architecture, UKIM, Skopje)

To the east the church ends with three polygonal apses of which the lateral ones are five-sided while the central, altar apse is six-sided (Figure 2).



Figure 2. East façade

The apses, unlike the other two facades, the northern and southern which are plastered and painted, are made with lavish stone decoration. The church has two entrances, one on the south and one on the north side which are accessed through the closed porches on the ground floor. The south and north porch (Figure 3) are raised about 25 centimeters from the surface of the artificially built terrace on which the entire building lies. The dimensions of the interior of these two porches are 17.49 meters in length and 3.5 meters in width.



Figure 3. North porch

The pent roof covering the south and north porch is covered with tiles and is carried by the wall of the upper floor gallery (Figure 4) which on one side is supported by seven stone pillars of the porches that are positioned at a distance of 2.04 meters and have 43cm thickness and the south/north nave wall on the other. The columns are quite modestly elaborated with a square foundation, low base and trapezoidal capital, interconnected with semicircular arcs.

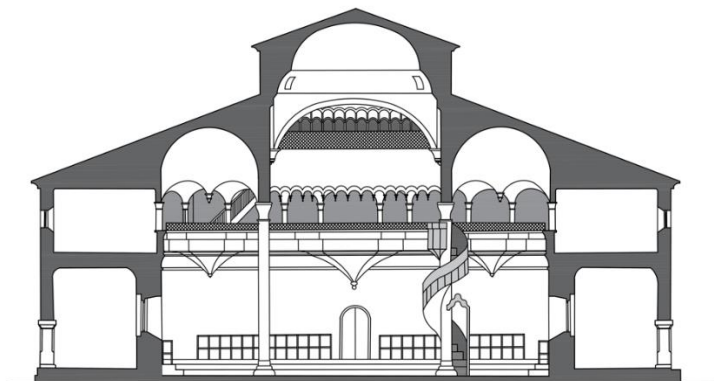


Figure 4. Cross section towards west

The space between the pillars on the porch is closed with glass doors in wooden frames. Above the arches of the porches, on the ground floor in the same plane in height, rises a full wall mass with window openings (Figure 5). To the west of the south and north porch is a 12-square-meter space used for the worshipers' needs. Through the double wooden door on the south wall and two steps, each 25 centimeters high, one enters the naos that is lowered from the level of the porch by 50 centimeters.



Figure 5. South façade

On the ground floor the naos is architecturally resolved as a three-nave basilica with two rows of six pillars in the internal space and one extra pillar in the altar on which the whole iconostasis is supported on.

The central nave (Figure 6) is 7.34 meters wide and 17.78 meters long measured from the stairs on which the solea on the east lies all the way to the stairs on which chairs for the believers are placed. The altar is elevated from the ground level of the nave on 75 centimeters and through 3 steps one reaches the iconostasis which is set at a distance of 2.00 meters from the edge of the solea with an ambo placed right in front of the Royal Doors. Right behind the iconostasis stand the first two pillars, viewed from the altar apse towards west, which define the basilica type plan of the building. These pillars are not additionally decorated and elaborated. Most probably they were not finished because they are immediately right behind the iconostasis on which it rests (hence they are hidden from it). However, it is precisely these pillars that play an important role in ascertaining the internal structure and the way the other pillars in the nave are built which on the other hand are additionally externally elaborated and decorated.

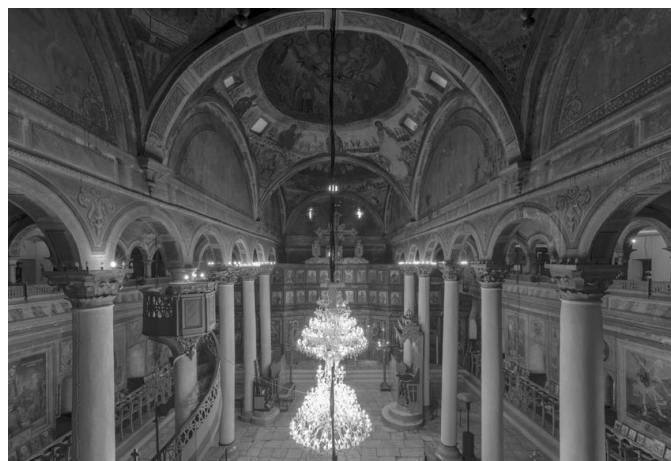


Figure 6. Central nave and view towards the altar

Behind the iconostasis, which lies 2.20 meters from the plane of the east wall, develops the altar space containing the altar apse and two lateral, smaller apses that are 2.40 meters in diameter and 1.15 meters deep. There are two window openings at the altar apse and one on each lateral apse. The central one has a depth of 1.80 meters and a width of 3.80 meters, while the deacon apses are 2.40 meters wide and 1.20 meters deep.

In the corners of the east wall to the north and south there are shallow semicircular niches, those on the east wall are 60 cm deep while those on the north and south 40 cm, all are 90 cm in diameter except that on the south wall with a diameter of 80 cm.

The aisles differ slightly in their dimension measured from the walls to the pillars that separate them from the central nave. The south aisle is 17.74 meters long and 4.25 meters wide while the north one is 17.87 meters long and 4.18 meters wide. There are window openings on the walls on both north and south aisles. These windows are interpolated on the wall so that they come positioned between two pillars of the nave, thus avoiding the possibility that the light entering through them in the nave will be blocked by the placement of the pillars.

On the west side, through two steps leading to a double door, one enters a space containing two pairs of 1.00 m wide single steps leading to the north and south gallery on the upper floor. These stairs are made of stone while the last step leading to the north gallery is made of marble block which is additionally decorated with zoomorphic shapes and a cross placed in a circular rosette.

The complex spatial organization of the interior is emphasized by the side galleries, interconnected with the western gallery above which another gallery is raised. On the north and south wall of the upper floor galleries 6 semicircular windows are placed. At the furthest west point of both north and south wall of the upper floor, there are doors through which one exits from the galleries on the upper floor and through a ramp that follows the slope of the terrain reaches the ground floor of the churchyard.

On the east side of the north and the south gallery there are wooden iconostasis with two rows of icons. On the east wall of these two separate altars there are two semicircular niches above which there is a window with a square opening. On the west side of the gallery there are wooden stairs that lead to the second gallery, which rises at the height of the domes.

The pillars in the nave are connected by semicircular arches above which semicircular niches raise on which a shallow inclined drum with window openings stands. (Figure 7)

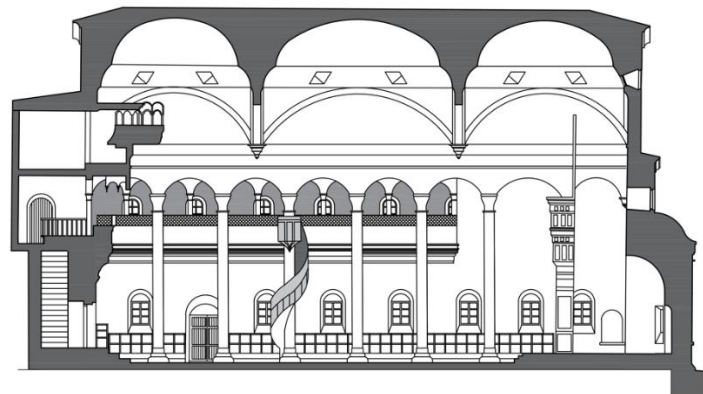


Figure 7. Longitudinal section

The arching of the high-rise central nave is completed with three large domes hidden in the roof structure and completely within the roof of the church. In this way Andreja Damjanov creates the system of blind domes that replaces the surmounting with barrel vaults. The domes lie over nonspecific drums that are quite shallow and cut inwards having small semicircular window openings (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The east and the central dome

The side aisles are covered with three vaulted arches, which are carried on one side on the north and south walls, and on the other side on the semicircular arches connecting the pillars of the central nave. These arches are transversely intertwined with a pair of arches placed between the first and second side aisle bay and placed on the first pillar of the central nave counting from the altar, then on the third, fifth, and seventh pillar, thus grouping two side aisle bay under one barrel vault. The juncture of these double transverse, semicircular arches end at the bottom with a pendant, a type of stalactite that is considered to of be an oriental influence in the construction of this building.

The side naves are covered by a pent roof which also covers the galleries, while the central nave that rises in height above the side naves is covered with roof on four waters over a rectangular basis. The apses are covered with semicircular half domes mounted on drums that are externally decorated.

3 CONSTRUCTIVE SYSTEM

The structure of the building is of combined constructive system of massive masonry and wood. The thick walls are made of stone and brick which are then plastered both from the inside and outside except for the corners of the junction of the south and north façade with the east where the stone outspreads and curves to the roof height of the side nave and east facade with three apses made of hewn limestone. The entire vaulted dome construction is wooden, processed with mesh, plastered and then decorated.

The floor in the naos is made of cut stone blocks. The stairs leading to the first gallery are also made of stone while the floors of the galleries and the stairs leading to the second gallery are made of wooden boards. The roof construction is made of wooden slats that are enclosed in the lower zone with cassette shaped boards and externally covered with roof tiles mounted over the wooden bearing structure.

About the type and the way of constructing the pillars is known from the examination of the condition of the constructing pillars that was made by the Republic Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture in 1975 and the visible cracks that appeared on one of the pillars when it was uncovered that under the cracked mortar was a second layer of mortar, an older one with no visible damage, and with further probing, examinations and interventions it was concluded how the pillars were made. Namely, the core of the pillar is made of wooden shafts that are surrounded by wooden slats around which a rope-hemp is laid as a base for carrying the mortar and shaping the pillar's circular section. The base of the pillars have circular cross section and at the base are 88cm in diameter, have three profiling heights with a total height of 54cm. Above it is the shaft with 50 cm in diameter and height of 5.7 m and there is a trapezoidal capital that is additionally decorated with zoomorphic motifs made of brass with the exception of the capital of the fifth pillar looking from the apse to the west, and in the north aisle where the ambo is placed, which is not additionally treated, but only painted with oil paint.

The ceilings of the galleries above the side aisles are covered with wooden lattices, but the ceiling of the upper gallery on the west side has emphasized oriental influences which are reflected in the frieze composed of small arcades with



pendants. The height of the central dome, measured from the floor of the main nave is 15.50 meters while the other two domes are 15 meters high. The height of the vault above the northern aisle is 9.86 meters, while the height of the southern aisle is 9.99 meters.

4 DECORATION

Three apses made of precisely carved limestone are positioned on the east façade. Due to the possibility of the limestone as material to be handled with ease the apses are decorated and rastered with a network of capitals, blind arcades, niches and end with profiled cornice (Figure 9).



Figure 9. The central apse

The altar apse is six-sided made in limestone that is easy to model. It is divided with seven pilasters that lie in the lower zone on rectangular pedestal with a square section over which the pilasters extend up to 80 cm in height where they are cut with a horizontal cornice with a semicircular section that extends horizontally towards the two lateral apses. These pilasters towards the cornice are connected with semicircular arches that form the profiled cornice under the apses' roof. The pilasters in the upper zone have small capitals with a square section, and above them are semicircular shallow niches formed by the arcs connecting them. The other two lateral apses are elaborated in the same way but because they are smaller are five-sided and divided with six pilasters. Above the cornice, formed by the semicircular arches connecting the pilasters, five-sided drums are raised that carry the roof of the lateral apses, and at the same time raise it to the height of the roof of the central one.

These drums are six-sided, formed by seven shallow pilasters semicircular closed. In the formed fields imitations of window openings are painted. In the central, altar apse, in the space between the pilasters in the upper zone shallow semicircular niches are placed with two window openings located in the second and fifth field formed by the pilasters. Above the two niches of the altar apse are decorative crosses made of limestone in shallow relief and colored in blue. The same niches appear at both lateral apses except that, since the apses are five-sided, in the middle field window opening closed with frames is placed, while the remaining four fields of the apses are enriched with shallow niches. Above these windows decorative cross also made of limestone and colored blue is placed.

The rest of the wall mass extending over the apse is painted white with the exception of the corners where there is a part of the stone from which the walls were built as a form of decoration. The assumption that this decoration may have occurred at a later time by simply removing part of the facade cover is excluded because, after thoroughly analyzing the building and specifically this detail, it is obvious that the stone was left unworked at the time of building



because it extruded out of the vertical surface compared to the rest of the plastered façade surface mass. If a part of the facade plaster was removed later, in order to show these stone parts of the walls, it should have been few centimeters pulled from the plaster plane as removed, and not extruded as is the case here so it is easy to conclude that the eastern portions of the façade and the apses were finished with limestone, and the rest of the façade mass to the east, that is, the apse roofs and the east wall of the elevated central nave were plastered and painted. However, on the north and south sides in the altar zone from the outside, it is noticed that the mortar from the façade is extruded from the plane of the stone wall, so it may be assumed that in this area the mortar was likely removed later in order to achieve additional decoration in this part of the south and north facade of the nave although the very angles of the eastern facade with the north and south of the nave have been treated and semi circularly cut to the roof at the height of the half domes of the apses on the southern facade.

On the eastern facade above the apses there are three openings. At the head of each nave of the interior, and at height of the attic space of the upper floor galleries. The side windows of this façade that are positioned in the galleries are drawn back from the plane of the east façade towards the west up to the plane of the platform on which in the interior the altar space is raised. They have a four-leaf clover shape and illuminate the small altar spaces that are positioned on the upper galleries. On both side naves of the east façade identical windows are placed. In square fields windows in the shape of a cross are placed and are smaller in size than the window placed on the central nave of the east façade above the dome of the apse. Since the central nave is higher than the lateral ones, which is legible on the eastern façade, also here below the dome space three windows are placed of which the central one is higher because it is placed on the angled drum of the first dome, while the two lateral ones are set in the semicircular niche that closes from inside the central nave right above the semi dome of the altar apse. These windows also are in the shape of a cross.

The eastern facade on the north and south porches on the ground floor is closed with one glass door in a wooden frame with a semicircular arch, identical to the rest of the window doors of the porches. Above these doors on the east facades of the upper galleries four-leaf clover windows are opened. The corners of the east facade of the upper galleries with the north and south facades are colored with horizontal lines in gray and brown color.

The South and the North Façades are identically elaborated and decorated. On the ground floor there are porches formed of seven square stone pillars set at a distance of 2.04 meters and a thickness of 43 cm. The columns are quite modestly elaborated with a square section, low base and trapezoidal capital, interconnected with semicircular arches. The space between the pillars on the porch is closed with glass doors in wooden frames. Above the arches of the porches, on the ground floor, in the same plane, rises a full wall to which the south and north gallery with window openings are located. The facades note that these windows are not arranged under any rhythm or symmetry following an analogy of the porches beneath them, since their placement does not correspond to the pillar grid and the grid of the arches of the porch on the ground floor. On the inside of the galleries these windows have an 80cm light opening and a 135cm inner opening. The parapet measured from the gallery floor has a height of 95 centimeters, then tilts at a 45-degree angle to the wall and reaches a height of 120 centimeters, ending at the upper horizontal with a semicircular arch.

On the ground floor of the north and south wall of the side aisles, oriented to the closed porches windows that illuminate the ground floor of the nave through the light coming from the two side porches to the north and south are positioned. These windows are 120 cm high and 70cm wide, mounted on a 170cm parapet, measured from the floor of the nave which then cuts to a height of 210cm on the wall which is 100cm thick. They are enclosed with metal bars and glass and are mounted on a wall. The upper zones of the windows are semi circularly arched. From the outside to the porches these windows have a decorative, profiled limestone frame. As the central nave rises above the side aisles, six windows are placed, which are actually the windows placed on the shallow inclined drums of the semi domes. They are completed in a circular field with cross-shaped openings.

On the north and south facades of the nave in a section not covered by porches, which corresponds to the altar space of the interior is a wooden door with a semicircular frieze made of stone. On the floor of the north and south façade of the far west side, there is also a wooden door leading directly out of the building where through the earthen ramp cut into the terrain one reaches the ground level of the churchyard.



In the church special attention is paid to the elaboration of the portals that contain vegetal relief plastic combined with zoomorphic plastic. Baroque forms are visible presenting meticulous and precise stone carving. The profiles are pedantically completed just like the various depictions of fantastic animals. The entrance portals, north and south, are treated in relief with neo-Baroque and neo-Byzantine origins. Above the colonnades framing the openings are two curved S vaults with a dove on each, and over this whole composition a niche is sculptured where the fresco of the church patron is placed. Damjanov engraved his name on the southern portal with the following text:

МАНСТРО АНДРЕЈА ЦОПРАВИ ЦРКВАТА

In the interior, special attention is paid to the decoration of galleries which are richly plastic and decoratively elaborated and are a combination of baroque and oriental forms of decoration. The interior is skillfully designed with a two-story gallery to the west. The emporium of the galleries is richly profiled with colonettes, arches and friezes of painted decoration between the floors and all in a colorful composition of stone in pink, ocher and brick incarnate. With its size interior gives an imposing impression with its slender columns, rich architectural elaboration of galleries, especially the west side of the naos, the iconostasis and the remaining architectural details. This decorative ornamentation is used in the decoration of the pillars inside the church as well as in the decoration of the exterior of the apse.

Damjanov's gift for stage design is expressed to the maximum in the creation of the western wall with the galleries rising vertically. They are made of a complex system of spatial and artistic elements expressed through two baroque bent balconies, small arcade rows, large and small wood carved colons, large pendants, fences, etc. and the east wall with its imposing iconostasis. All this was additionally treated with painting which gave the impression of even greater monumentality.

In terms of the typology of forming the architectural plan typologies specific for the 19th century is that in this era, the era of revival, large-sized basilicas are built. The basic architectural type of plan is the three-nave basilica with porches on the ground floor and upper floor galleries. During the analysis of the architectural plan of the church of St. Panteleimon in Veles it can be concluded that Damjanov inherited the three-nave resolution of the plan specific for the church building in Macedonia and the Balkans in the 19th century, which means that he does not introduce any novelty, but uses what is already present and specific of these regions.

The church of St. Panteleimon in Veles is built as a three-nave structure with clearly defined functions. What is characteristic about it, unlike all the other churches from Damjanov's opus as well as from the works in the Balkans is that the main access to the building is through the north and south porch as the church has no western facade. The reason for this is the specificity of the terrain on which it was built, which is why the whole building to the west is attached to the hill below which the plateau on which the church is built is located. This moment has in fact been imposed as reason that the church does not have a western façade, and from this way of overcoming the natural obstacles and finding a constructively favorable solution for the construction of a large church temple confirms Damjanov as educated and skilled builder capable of handling every kind of problem and give an adequate solution.

What he will first apply in his church in Veles, something we will encounter for the first time in his, as well as in the works in the Balkans, is the formation of a second, western gallery set above the western gallery on the first floor. This innovation is specific and characteristic of Damjanov, it is his recognizable element, the product of his talent. For the first time he will produce such a gallery at the height of the domes only for this building and will not repeat it in any of his later works.

What is novelty from a functional point of view and as an element is only seen in this church is the positioning of the stairs that lead to the galleries on the upper floor. He places them in a separate area on the west side forming a kind of narthex accessed from the central nave. He sets two pairs of stairs that lead straight to the upper north and south gallery. This element as an original one for the first time will appear in this church.

Regarding the spatial organization, Damjanov follows the already present model of organizing three nave basilicas. The only difference here is that the space on the ground floor does not function on the west side from the outside but from the inside by building a closed narthex on the west side of the main nave which is used to establish connection



with the upper floors, i.e. the north, south and west galleries. Also, a novelty in the functional organization is the appearance of two sloping ramps which through doors on the north and south walls of the galleries on the first floor lead out of the building and connect it with the churchyard on the ground floor. This element in the functional organization of the space appears only in the church of St. Panteleimon. Neither before nor later in the work of Damjanov, we will not encounter such way of external connection of the upper galleries with the exterior. Although the appearance of these ramps was caused by the conditions of the terrain, Damjanov could have not build ones at all. Here we see his skill in building a church building, which for its time was also a building where attention to the aspects of environmental architecture was paid. Damjanov adapted to the natural conditions, did not destroy the natural configuration of the terrain, but on the contrary skillfully incorporated it in the whole spatial, constructive and functional composition and stood out as an architectural virtuoso, a kind of forerunner of today's landscape architecture.

The structural system and building materials of the nineteenth century are specific and identical for majority of the buildings. Damjanov creates his structures in standardized spans that are already skillfully designed. The wall masses are built of stone while the pillars, domes, drums and pendants are made of wooden construction. Ropes were placed around the wooden beams around the pillars and plastered above, while the flat surfaces were made in the same way, by placing plaster on wooden slats. Damjanov builds the floors on the ground floor from stone blocks, while the floors of the galleries on the upper floors are made of wooden planks.

Specific for the decoration of the facades is that Damjanov for the first time, in addition to the main, altar apse, will equally decoratively treat the smaller deacon apses from the outside. The decorative handling of these apses is made of limestone, however this decoration with thin pilasters and a wreath of bows will also be applied on the other two apses in this building. A novelty in the construction of the apses is that above the polygonal wall of the two smaller and lower apses he places a segmented drum on which he draws imitations of window openings. He will apply this element for the first time here, and the reason for its appearance was primarily from a constructive aspect. Namely, with the help of these drums Damjanov raises the roofs of the two smaller apses and aligns them in height with the roof of the altar apse and in that way allows the roof to extend in the same horizontal plane, also allows continuity of the cornice of the three apses in the same horizontal line. This element also complements the originality of the builder.

The appearance of blind domes erected on a shallow inclined drum is the innovative element of Damjanov that he will apply for the first time here and further on he will continue to implement this way of elaborating the domes in the remaining works of his first phase. He will end using this element in his second phase yet these types of blind domes will be found in many other churches in Macedonia.

With all said and elaborated, the place of the Church of St. Pantelejimon in Veles is more than evident. Here Damjanov showed his knowledge, innovation and all of his creative potential. He used inherited elements from the tradition but thanks to his talent he also introduced original elements, some of which he will continue to use, and some of which he will only use in this church. In that way, Danjanov will determine its place within the frame of his opus as well as in his work in the Balkans. It is one of the capital works of the revival, a work marked as a source of innovation, a work evident by its uniqueness and originality. He builds the church of St. Panteleimon in Veles and with he rises himself to the heights of the Balkan architecture. It, like his other buildings, in its structure contains elements that are the key to connecting the variously upgraded experiences of the epochs and offer an answer for the way of their creative upgrading to the point of designing a recognizable building language.

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