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## CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESEARCH CONCERNING KATECHOUMENA IN SERBIAN MEDIEVAL CHURCHES<sup>1</sup>

The question of the existence of the architectural space named katechoumena or katehoumeneia, together with the questions of its shape, position and functions, has not been scientifically dealt with in the history of architecture for a very long time<sup>2</sup>. Recently this topic became the focus of scholarly interest among several Serbian medieval architectural historians who came to interesting and very different conclusions<sup>3</sup>.

In defining the problem of katechoumena we shall try to review the following:

1. The terminological definition of the institution of the catechumenate and, according to that, the architectural area of katechoumena
2. its form and position within the church together with its function in Serbian medieval architecture.

Etymologically speaking, the term *κατηχούμενος* derives from substantivizing the present passive participle of the Greek verb *κατηχ-έω* which means to be taught about the living word<sup>4</sup>. In Vujaklija's Dictionary, under the heading *kateheza* (from n. lat. *catehisatio* - teaching about the faith in the form of questions and answers) we find the quotation: "teaching for those who would like to turn to the Christian faith<sup>5</sup>." The

1 The present work is part of a wider study that was accepted for the Oxford University Chevening Scholarships programme 2002-2003.

2 G. Millet was among the first to mention this specific architectural area. Cf. G. Millet, *L'ancient art Serbe. Les églises*, Paris 1919, 58.

3 И. Николајевић, *Егзонартекс Дома Спасовог у Жичи*, Студеница и византијска уметност око године 1200, Београд 1988, 447-454; Сл. Турчић, *Смисао и функција катихумена у позновизантијској и српској архитектури*, Манастир Жича, зборник радова, Краљево 2000, 83-93.

4 *κατηχ-έω* – teach, instruct, especially in Christian faith. "κατ'ἡχοῦσα ὑμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ" I Cor, 3:2. Cf. P. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, 732.

5 М. Вујаклија, *Лексикон страних речи и израза*, Београд 1972, 415.

term catechumen thus denotes those who are being taught about the faith<sup>6</sup>. As a Biblical source for this term Lidel Scott's Dictionary states the following quotation: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things"<sup>7</sup>. For the same term (lat. catechumenus) Du Cange says that "id est qui ad baptismum infuitur"<sup>8</sup> and Miklosich makes a parallel review of the terms catechumens in several languages: Greek- *κατηχούμενος*, Latin *catechumenus* and Serbian *катихоумен*)<sup>9</sup>.

As a specific Apostle's inheritance the institution of the catechumenate (lat. *institutio catechumenorum*; fr. *catechumenat*, srp. *катихоуменат*) is of great historical and symbolic importance. It derives from the need of the Christian community not to accept the sinful and those who are to leave the faith. Oral teaching of the faith, as a factor of its preservation, has played a significant historical role especially during the period before 313AD i.e. during times of Christian persecution, when the faith was passed on and preserved only in an oral manner.

What is understood by the institution of the catechumenate is a ritual by which, respecting a number of rules, converts would be introduced to the new faith and given the doctrine by oral teaching<sup>10</sup>. Catechumenate was characterized already around 150AD as a period of fasting, prayer and instruction. In 2<sup>nd</sup> century Tertullian mentions a specific custom, by which the non believer is introduced to the new faith by taking honey and milk before converting to Christianity<sup>11</sup>. The institution of the catechumenate reached classic expression around 215AD as a well defined institution<sup>12</sup>.

When Christianity was acknowledged and during the process of dogmatic establishment the second phase of the institution of the catechumenate came about and determined more precisely. The First Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea in 325AD in its canons number 2 and 14 states the principles of acceptance of the non-believer into the church: "Catechumens are those who are to be taught in the Christian faith so as to be accepted by the church"<sup>13</sup>. They represent trainees, candidates

6 „ό κατηχούμενος τόν λόγον” (Ep.Gal.6.6.); „κατηχημένος τ᾽ν ὁδόν τοῦ Κυρίου ” (Act. Ap. 18.25).

7 Lidel Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1968, 927.

8 Du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae graecitatis*, Lungduni MDCLXXXVIII, Graz 1958, 620.

9 Fr. Miklosich, *Lexicon paleoslovenico-graeco-latinum*, Vindobonae 1862-65, 284.

10 *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Paris, 1924, 2579.

11 Tertullian, *De praescriptione Haereticorum*, XXXI. 2, Paris 1957.

12 M. Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, N. York, 1979.

13 Еп. Никодим, *Правила православне цркве са тумачењима*, Нови Сад 1895, 217.

for Christianity who are not yet worthy of being baptised and, strictly speaking, do not belong to the church<sup>14</sup>. According to number 2 canon of the same Council, a certain period of time is needed to be taught in the faith<sup>15</sup>. In the earliest period of the existence of this institution, the length of Christian education was not precisely defined. It normally lasted three years during which the candidates were presented to the church leaders by Christian sponsors, tested, exhorted and prayed over at common session with a teacher. Training period was different - the Council in Elvira in the year 300AD defines a period of two years, while in the year 506AD that period was reduced to eight months<sup>16</sup>. This period was transitional, during which candidates were not just instructed in the new faith, literally learning by way of questions and answers, but were renouncing their former habits and preparing to enter the new religious community. The teachings of the new faith also included attendance at the Holy Liturgy, precisely speaking, at those *didactic* parts of it which are the Epistles and Gospel readings. This custom indirectly contributed to the Christian doctrine and learning. Through it neophytes gained the feeling of belonging to a new, Christian community.

Even today the memory of this institution is still present in the Holy Liturgy which is divided into two parts: *Liturgy of the Catechumens* and *Liturgy of the Faithful*. This division derives from the fact that catechumens, considering the fact that they were not baptised, could not be present at the part of the liturgy where the *Holy Eucharist* unfolded. Therefore, to this day, after the Gospel reading and before the *Credo* the deacon's invitation to the "called" is retained<sup>17</sup>. This custom is not just a tradition, but also an indicator of the concern that the church shows for the need to secure the faith from being desecrated<sup>18</sup>.

With the introduction of *pedobaptism* (baptism of children) during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the institution of the catechumenate declines in importance. When Christianity began to dominate, children were baptised straight after birth and hence the need for this institution dimin-

14 *Ibidem*.

15 *Ibidem*.

16 J. P. Migne, *Encyclopédie théologique*, Paris, 1850, 696.

17 After the Little Entrance, reading of the Gospel, the Trisagion hymn and reading of the Epistle a Gradual is sung; the deacon sings the Gospel, having incensed the book; more prayers follow. *Then come prayers for the catechumens, and they are dismissed by the deacon: All catechumens go out. Catechumens go out. All catechumens go away. Not one of the catechumens [shall stay]* (my italics). Cf. Л. Мирковић, *Православна литургија или наука о богослужењу православне источне цркве I*, Београд, 1965, 8-12; Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople. Architecture and Liturgy*, London, 1975, 139.

18 Migne, *op.cit*, 696.

ished. It was applied only to adults. It was still in existence until the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>. In places like in Constantinople, with its numerous population of merchants, trevellers and diplomats, it was still present in 7<sup>th</sup> century, and in some parts of the Latin West up to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

In what way did the connection between the institution of the catechumenate and architectural space of katechoumena arise?

Is it the simple transposition of the term from the institution to a certain architectural area - and if so to which one - or is it a connection which might indicate the function of this area? Maybe this area served as an place for teaching oral doctrine or as a sort of oratory regardless of the fact that the possibility of connecting the architectural concept of katechoumena and the institution of the catechumenate was completely arbitrary<sup>19</sup>. The Greek term *κατηχομένιον* or *κατηχούμενον* (pl. *κατηχομένια* or *κατηχούμενα*, lat. catechoumena, serb. катихуменија) in its essence denotes the area in the cult building (“pars aedis sacrae”) intended for the catechumens<sup>20</sup>. From canons already examined it is clear that there was a special place where the catechumens were located, according to their status as candidates to be accepted into the faith. The first Ecumenical Council held in Nicaea already in canon 14 defines katechoumena as a place where teachings were carried out<sup>21</sup>. St. John Chrysostom in his *Homilies* mentions that catechumens were not allowed hearing the words of the Mystery, which means that the catechumens were not situated within the nave of the church itself<sup>22</sup>. He does not note precisely where the katechoumena would be located within the wider church building.

The earliest recording of katechoumeneia is in the hagiography of St. Maxim the Confessor. History tells that he was held captive in the church of St. Theodore in Rhegium<sup>23</sup>, where the emperor’s envoy’s had paid him a visit in the katechoumeneion, part of the church, which could mean the gallery which he had been using for private prayer<sup>24</sup>. Even the Chronicle of Teophan the Confessor mention the katechoumeneion of the Great Church – Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, explaining in his notes that the upper galleries of the church (“porticos superiores ad ecclesiae”) are

19 Mathews, *op.cit.*, 125.

20 P. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 733.

21 Никодим, *op.cit.*, 217-218.

22 I. Chrisostomus, *Epist. II ad Cor. Homilia*, 2, 5 in: J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeco-latina*, Paris 1857, vol. 61, 400. (It will further be quoted as PG).

23 Rhegium is town in Calabria in Italy, today Reggio Calabria.

24 “ἀνέρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν ἐν τῷ κατηχομένιον τῆς ἐκκλησίας”. V. Max. 25, PG 90, 161 A.

what is ment and from here the catechumens had been permitted to follow the service to a limited extent<sup>25</sup>.

Ignatius Deacon in the hagiography of St. Nicephoros also notifies the area, katechoumeneia of the Great Church where the saint has been spending all night. In the explanation he quotes that the area katechoumenon (gr. κατηχούμενον) which is more often mentioned in the plural katechoumeneia (κατηχουμένια) represents either the gallery of the atrium or the upper parts of the temple ("eram autem porticus vel atrium temploipsi praetensum, vel ipsius templi pars anterior"), where the non-baptised were permitted to be, while the mystery was commencing at the altar<sup>26</sup>.

Symeon of Thessaloniki, even though he is an author from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, also mentions the katechoumenia (gr. κατηχουμένια, lat. cathumenia) as part of the narthex. He defines this area as living quarters of catechumens (sedes catechumenorum, catechumenorum domus) and emphasises that those mentioned do not come into contact with the believers so they are clearly differentiated from them<sup>27</sup>.

All these sources from Patrology, as well as the already mentioned canons of the Ecumenical councils, bear witness to the fact that a certain *separated area* existed for the catechumens in the earliest churches, originating from the need that they have to be *partially included* in the Liturgy. All the stated facts mention the gallery and the upper quarters of the church and connect them to the narthex and atrium.

According to what?

The church building is organized as a programme and represents microcosms. This symbolic interpretation of the cult building derives from Christian thought as an echo of the teaching of Dionysius Areopagite and the Mystagogy of St. Maxim the Confessor<sup>28</sup>. It is interesting that katechoumena as an architectural term is first mentioned by the same authors. Was the ritual of entering Christianity symbolically connected with the narthex, a part of the church building which also formed the architectural *intermedium* from the worldly lay sphere into the sacral one, represented by the nave of the church?

In all the churches known to us the gallery above the narthex or atrium was in a way a means of communication with the outer part of the church. Therefore it was probably convenient for these parts to be

25 "σωρεύσαν τὸν λαὸν ἐν τοῖς κατηχουμένιον τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας". Thphn. Chron. 348A, PG 108, 838, n.77.

26 Ignatius Deaconus, V. S. Nicephori, PG 100, 129, n. 25.

27 Symeon Thess, *De templo*, PG 155, 358.

28 A. Grabar, *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age I*, Paris 1968, 71.

the lodging for catechumens because when "the called" (serb. *оглашени*) were called by the deacon to step out the church, the church doors would be closed and the catechumens would be prevented from further participation in the service. Therefore connecting the area for the catechumens with the upper parts of the western part of the church - the gallery above the narthex or atrium - seems not unreasonable.

The actual *function* of this area in the earliest period does not seem clear. If it is terminologically connected with the institution of the catechumate it is not certain precisely what purpose it served:

1. area from where the "called" could follow the permitted part of the service
2. area for educating in the faith apart from the service or
3. (in a wider sense) a place where the catechumens sojourned in general (*domus catechumenorum*)<sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to note what happened to this area when the class of catechumens disappeared. What new function was appointed and why the old name was kept?

The term for the architectural area *katechoumena* (κατηχομένιον, κατηχούμενον, κατηχουμένα) stays the same even after 7<sup>th</sup> century and the disappearance of the social class of catechumens, as well as its location in the western part of the church. But was it possible (and how?) to connect these functionally heterogeneous areas and to pin point their exact shape and function? Numerous later sources do not allow us to come to a single conclusion.

We find mention of *katechoumeneion* or *katechoumenia* in several Byzantine *Typica* from different periods. Chronologically the earliest example that has come down to us is that of the so-called Testament of Athanasios the Athonite for the Lavra Monastery dated after 993. In it the *katechoumeneion* is mentioned as a place where his testament would remain secret until his death<sup>30</sup>. The *Typicon* of the Constantinopolitan monasteries of Lips and Bebaia Elpis both from the first half of 14<sup>th</sup> century, also mention the *katechoumena*. The former as a place for the relics of St. Irene that "are found in the convent, and in any one [of these churches] in the *katechoumenia*"<sup>31</sup> and the latter, as a part of building "including the church itself without the *katechoumena*"<sup>32</sup>.

29 Mathews, *op.cit.*, 126.

30 *Testament of Athanasios the Athonite for the Lavra Monastery*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 35, *Dumbarton Oaks* 2000, 272.

31 *Typicon of Theodora Palaiologina for the Convent of Lips in Constantinople*, *op. cit.*, 1267.

32 *Typikon of Theodora Synadene for the Convent of the Mother of God Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople*, *op.cit.*, 1563.

Is it possible then to name all the upper and secluded areas of church parts connected with some special ritual – katechoumena? A more precise definition of its shape could lessen the confusion in this field.

### *Katechoumena*<sup>33</sup> in Serbian Medieval Churches

The functions of some parts of the church building in Serbian medieval, as well as in Byzantine architecture, were determined by the Typica. In the beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> century the first Serbian Archbishop Sava reformed monastic life in Serbia and introduced two Typika: Chilandar<sup>34</sup> and Studenica Typicon<sup>35</sup> both modified versions of the Typicon of the Theotokos Evergetis Monastery in Constantinople<sup>36</sup>. Those Typica do not contain specific services for narthexes nor do they mention any kind of katechoumena. The first such Typicon was the Nicodemus translation of the Jerusalem Typicon from the 1319. It describes precisely the rituals in the narthexes – vespers, litanies, panehides, handing out of charity, gifts to the poor, baptisms. What is important to us is that in the frame of narthexes the katechoumena are mentioned as the place where the priests gathered after the election of a bishop<sup>37</sup>.

The earliest example of the katechoumena as an architectural space in Serbian medieval architecture is the one no longer preserved, in Žiča monastery. This example is further important because it is based on a written source, the life of Archbishop Arsenije. According to this text it was from the katechoumena („катихуменија”) in Žiča that the first Serbian Archbishop Sava observed his successor Arsenije officiating in the church<sup>38</sup>. Many authors supposed that the location of this katechoumena was on the upper floor of the exonarthex which was opened to the church by a wide window above the main church door<sup>39</sup>. Some of them even suggest the reconstruction of the upper floor of Žiča's narthexes as

33 In Serbian language the term katechoumena came recently into usage. The older term katechoumeia today is considered archaic. Cf. И. Николајевић, *op. cit.*, 448.

34 *Хиландарски типик*, приредио Д. Богдановић, Београд, 1995.

35 *Студенички типик*, приредио Т. Јовановић, Београд, 1994.

36 *The Theotokos Evergetis and eleventh-century monasticism*, ed. By M. Mullet and A. Kirby, Belfast 1994.

37 *Никодимов типик*, приредио Ђ. Трифуновић, Београд, 2005.

38 „Неколико времена проведе овај блажени држећи божанствену цркву, а преосвећени кир Сава свагда га посматраше својим очима од своје катихуменије (*my italics*) која је тако место, на коме стојаше да је добро могао видети све што је чињено унутра у божанственој цркви.” Архиепископ Данило Други, *Животи краљева и архиепископа српских*, Београд 1988, 160.

39 М. Васић, *Жича и Лазарица*, Београд, 1928, 39-45; А. Дероко, *Монументална и декоративна архитектура у средњовековној Србији*, Београд, 1953, 75, сл. 132.

a *number of rooms* with different functions that can be named under one single name: *katechoumena*<sup>40</sup>. The example of *Žiča* is, without doubt the most important one. According to different authors all the other upper floor rooms, that are supposed to be *katechoumena*, in later Serbian medieval architecture, especially during 13<sup>th</sup> century, were modelled on it: in the monasteries of *Mileševa*, *Theotokos Hvostanska*, and *Sopoćani*<sup>41</sup>.

In the architecture of the *Virgin Hvostanska* one can find the first influences of *Žiča*. During the second phase of its construction, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of 13<sup>th</sup> century, two bell towers on its west side were added. There are good reasons to presume that, on the upper storey between them was the *katechoumena*<sup>42</sup>. V. Korać underlines a parallel between *Žiča* and *Theotokos Hvostanska* monastery emphasising that they are similar to the Mt. Athos monasteries of *Great Lavra*, *Vatopedi* and *Iviron*, and that they could have the same function: chapel, library or cell<sup>43</sup>. According to him these areas came into existence in Serbian medieval architecture within the frame of a wider reform undertaken by first Serbian Archbishop *Sava* when he organised monastic life in Serbia according to the example of Mt. Athos<sup>44</sup>.

The same case one can find in the construction of *exonarthex* in the monastery of *Mileševa*. Although there are some spatial differences between them, *Mileševa's* church plan and spatial structure are based on those of *Žiča*. According to the reconstruction of V. Korać the upper floor of the *exonarthex* also constituted a space for *katechoumena*<sup>45</sup>.

In her study of bell-towers in Serbian churches O. Kandić views these areas as a functional connection between the bell-tower and the church building itself<sup>46</sup>. According to that she presumes the existence of such a space on the upper floor of *Sopoćani* *exonarthex* too<sup>47</sup>. She also indicates that it's interesting to note that in the painted programme of the tower

40 М. Кашанин, Ђ. Бошковић, П. Мијовић, *Жича*, Београд, 1971, 71, сл. 84, 1.

41 В. Ђурић, *Рашко и приморско градитељство*, Историја српског народа I, Београд, 1981, 392-393.

42 В. Кораћ, *Богородица Хвостанска*, Београд, 1976, 121; В. Ђурић, *op. cit.*, 393.

43 В. Кораћ, *op. cit.*

44 В. Кораћ, *Св. Сава и програм рашког храма*, in: *Св. Сава, историја и предање*, Београд, 1979, 231-244.

45 В. Кораћ, *Милешевска спољна припрата и њен одјек у архитектури Трнова*, Између Византије и Запада, Београд, 1987, 190.

46 О. Кандић, *Куле и звоници уз српске цркве од 12. до 14. века*, Зборник за ликовну уметност Магице српске, 14, Нови Сад, 1978, 63.

47 В. Ђурић, *Сопоћани*, Београд, 1963, 40, и 184-185, н. 46; О. Кандић, *Првобитни изглед спољне припрате са звоником у Сопоћанима*, Саопштења XX-XXI, Београд, 1988/89, 55; О. Кандић, *Истраживање архитектуре и конзерваторски радови у манастиру Сопоћани*, Саопштења XVI, Београд, 1984, 7-31.



chapel in Žiča one can find representation of Daniel the Stylite, the same patron as for the chapel by the katechoumena in the monastery of the Patriarchate of Peć.

The appearance of the katechoumena in 14<sup>th</sup> century Serbian architecture in the Theotokos Ljeviška in Prizren<sup>48</sup>, the Patriarchate of Peć<sup>49</sup> and in Gračanica<sup>50</sup> is due to Late Byzantine architectural influences. Relatively small rooms above narthexes, an „upper floor room“ in Theotokos Ljeviska and Gračanica are so similar that they are almost replicas<sup>51</sup>.

The existence of the katechoumena in the Peć Patriarchate is based on the second written source preserved in the old Serbian literature, which mentions it. The well known and often cited quotation from the Life of Archbishop Danilo II states: „(...) and there he made a bridge („помост“) on it in height that is named katechoumena which will serve for him to go to the holy church”<sup>52</sup>. According to this source two reconstructions of the upper part of the exonarthex of the Peć Patriarchate were proposed: one presuming the existence of the katechoumena above the eastern of the two central bays of the exonarthex<sup>53</sup>, and the second, based on recent archeological investigation, that the katechoumena was placed along the whole upper storey and represented a very large hall<sup>54</sup> as in Žiča<sup>55</sup>.

Attempting to unite all the different aspects of the purpose and function of the katechoumena in Serbian medieval churches V. Đurić states

48 In Theotokos Ljeviška the disposition of the space of the upper room is very similar to that in the Athos monastery of Great Lavra. Cf. G. Millet, *Recherche au Mont Athos*, BCH 29, Paris, 1905, 73-92.

49 М. Шупут, *Архитектура Пећке Патријаршије*, Зборник за ликовне уметности Матице српске 10, Нови Сад 1977, 45-67; М. Чанак-Медић, *Архиепископ Данило II и архитектура Пећке Патријаршије*, Зборник Архиепископ Данило II и његово доба, Београд, 1991, 295-309; М. Чанак-Медић, *Архитектура прве половине XIII в. II*, Београд, 1995, 15-87.

50 This place in Gračanica Slobodan Ćurčić (*Грачаница, историја и архитектура*, Београд-Приштина 1988, 57) calls the *room on the upper floor*. Author of the study of painting, Branislav Todić calls this space katechoumena presuming that that indeed was its function. This hypothesis is based on the analysis of the fresco decoration, the so-called frescoes with yellow background, that form part of the unbroken stylistic chain dating back to Studenica monastery and through the whole of 13<sup>th</sup> century (*Грачаница, сликарство*, Београд-Приштина 1988, 134-135).

51 Сл. Ђурчић, *op. cit.*, 112.

52 „А ту начини помост по њој у висину што се зове катихуменија (**my italics**) по којима је ишао архијереј у божанствену цркву“. Данилов ученик, *Живот архиепископа Данила II*, Београд, 1989, 112.

53 М. Шупут, *op. cit.*, 45-67.

54 М. Чанак-Медић, *Архиепископ Данило II и архитектура Пећке Патријаршије*, 295-309.

55 И. Николајевић, *op. cit.*, 453.

that they were used as lodges of sovereigns and later as cells of clerical dignitaries and that by virtue of their elevated position they had derived from Early Byzantine church galleries in circles associated with Constantinople<sup>56</sup>.

Although the exact function of the katechoumena in Serbian medieval architecture still remains unclear, as well as its form that varies from spacious room(s) as in Žiča or even in the Patriarchate of Peć, through much smaller rooms in Gračanica and Theotokos Ljeviška, it is clear that it provided space for physical seclusion from the nave of the church whilst being at the same time a part of it. Was it conceived for the usage of sovereigns or hermits as in the enkleistra of S. Neophitos in Paphos in Cyprus, as was supposed by Sl. Ćurčić<sup>57</sup>? This is still to be investigated. What is certain is, and all the authors agree upon that, is its location in the upper storey of the narthex or exonarthex with the opening for direct communication with the nave of the church.

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56 В. Ђурић in: *Историја српског народа I*, 391.

57 Сл. Ђурчић, *Смисао и функција катихумена у позновизантијској и српској архитектури*, 84-86.