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**ROSETTES ON MONUMENTS OF MORAVA SERBIA  
AND EARLY OTTOMAN BURSA: ARCHITECTURAL  
DECORATION AS MANIFESTATION OF INTERCULTURAL  
DIALOGUE DURING ONE EPOCH**

*for Adrian Saunders*

Question of origins of rosettes on churches in Morava Serbia (second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> - first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century) has initiated very interesting debate among scholars. Over a century ago complexity of such problematics has been recognized and since then thoroughly discussed by many researchers. Various proposed theses took in consideration Romanesque artistic trends from the Adriatic region and analogies in Islamic, Byzantine and Georgian architecture.<sup>1</sup> Morava rosettes are modest in scope and, most likely, their primary function was not to serve as window openings but to present the most distinguished elements of facade decoration. In some cases, these stone carved ornaments were just partially perforated or even not even perforated at all. For that reason they seem to look more like decorative roundels and, to a certain extent, have similarities with roundels on monuments of Fatimid architecture in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Influence of Romanesque artistic tradition is still evident, especially in positioning of such

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<sup>1</sup> Here we are citing only selected bibliography: M. Vasić, *Žića i Lazarica: Studije iz srpske umetnosti srednjeg veka*, Beograd 1928, 134; A. Deroko, *Monumentalna i dekorativna arhitektura u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Beograd 1953, 217; V. J. Djurić, *Nastanak graditeljstva Moravske škole: fasade, sistem dekoracije, plastika*, Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti I, (Novi Sad 1965), 39 – 42. (with earlier bibliography); J. Maksimović, *Vizantijski i orijentalni elementi u dekoraciji moravske škole*, Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta VIII, (Beograd 1964), 380 – 381; V. Ristić, *Moravska arhitektura*, Kruševac 1996, 131 – 135; S. Čurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere of influence around the middle of the fourteenth century*, Dečani i vizantijska umetnost sredinom XIV veka, ed. V.J. Djurić, (Belgrade 1989), 62; J. Trkulja, *The Rose Window: A Feature of Byzantine Architecture? Approaches to Byzantine architecture and its decoration*, Studies in honor of Slobodan Čurčić, ed. Robert Ousterhout, (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, Vermont 2012), 143-161.

<sup>2</sup> Good example are various decorative roundels on spandrels of the As – Salih Tala'i mosque in Cairo from the 1160. K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim architecture of Egypt, Volume I, Ikshids and Fatimids a. d. 939 – 1171*, Oxford 1952, plates 106 – 107.



Fig. 1 Kalenić, rosette on south facade, 1407 – 18, photo author

Сл. 1 Каленић, розета на јужној фасади, 1407 – 18, фото аутор

elements under decorated blind archivolts (fig. 1). However, application of circular ornaments and openings under the arch or archivolt on building facades has not been reserved only for decoration of Romanesque monuments, but it was widespread in Byzantine and Islamic architecture.

It was noticed by several researchers that positioning of rosettes on Morava churches has relation with application of decorative roundels and oculi on Byzantine monuments.<sup>3</sup> During 14<sup>th</sup> century such architectural trends have been introduced from Byzantine to Serbian lands. Examples are many: St. George at Pološko, St. Archangel Michael at Lesnovo, Marko's monastery near Skopje, Holy Archangels in Kučevište, St. Nicholas in Ljuboten, St. Nicholas Šiševski on Treska, Matejić monastery and St. Andrew monastery at Matka.<sup>4</sup> Since most of these monuments were erected during the first half and around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it seems possible that rosettes on facades of Morava churches have derived from the same artistic tradition.<sup>5</sup> For application of decorative and utilitarian circular elements in Serbian architecture during 14<sup>th</sup> century Vladislav Ristić saw influence of Northern Greece (Arta, Kastoria, Thessaloniki).<sup>6</sup> Slobodan Ćurčić, on the other hand, considered monuments of Lascarid architecture on Chios Island as a potential role model and pointed towards similarities with decoration of Tekfur sarayı in Istanbul.<sup>7</sup>

Local artistic practice also presented important factor in genesis of Morava architectural decoration. There are archaeological evidence that impe-

<sup>3</sup> Ristić, op. cit.; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere*, 62; Trkulja, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> For more information and also other examples in Byzantine architecture see Trkulja, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Ristić, op. cit., 135.

<sup>7</sup> Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere*, 62.

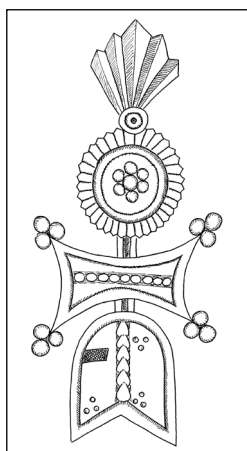


Fig. 2 Heraldic symbol on coinage of Stefan Dušan, around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, drawing author

Сл. 2 Хералдички симбол на кованица Стефана Душана, средина 14. века, цртеж аутор

Fig. 3 Hilandar exonarthex, north facade, built around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century or

around 1380, photo Miodrag Marković

Сл. 3 Ексонартекс католикона Хиландара, саграђен средином 14. века или око 1380. године, фото Миодраг Марковић



rial mausoleum of Stefan Dušan, church of Holy Archangels near Prizren (mid 14<sup>th</sup> century), has been decorated with stone carved rosettes.<sup>8</sup> Various sorts of ornaments in the form of rosette are also appearing, around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, on heraldic symbols of House of Nemanjić and their aristocracy. The first examples of coins with such presentation were produced during the rule of Stefan Dušan (1331 – 1355) (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Slobodan Ćurčić posed that exonarthex of Hilandar katholikon has been erected around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century under the patronage of the same ruler (fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> This, according to Ćurčić, first structure decorated with Morava rosettes remains contraversial topic among scholars since it is often dated around 1380, during the reign of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović.<sup>11</sup> Following Ćurčić's arguments, about ktetorship

<sup>8</sup> Fragments of two rosettes have been discovered. However, it is not possible to presume where exactly they have been positioned on church facades. Moreover, it is not clear if excavated rosettes belonged only to the church of Holy Archangels or perhaps also to the other church (of St. Nicholas) in this complex from the same period. S. Nenadović, *Dušanova zadužbina manastir svetih Arhandjela kod Prizrena*, Beograd 1967, 44 – 46.

<sup>9</sup> For more information see D. M. Acović, *Heraldika i Srbi*, Beograd 2008, 196 – 200. It doesn't mean that these two phenomena are related. Still it is interesting to notice that application of rosettes in the architecture is corresponding with presentation of this ornament on coinage from the same period.

<sup>10</sup> S. Ćurčić, *The Exonarthex of Hilandar: The Question of its Function and Patronage*, *Osam vekova Hilandara. Istorija, duhovni život, književnost, umetnost i arhitektura*, ed. V.J. Korać, (Belgrade 2001), 477 – 488. I would like to express my gratitude to professor Miodrag Marković for providing me with photographs of Hilandar katholikon.

<sup>11</sup> V. Korać, *Outer Narthex*, Hilandar Monastery, ed. G. Subotić, (Belgrade 1998), 159.



Fig. 4 Examples of roundels on Byzantine monuments in Istanbul: a, b. Eski imaret camii (church of Christ Pantepoptes); c. Fethiye camii (church of Virgin Pammakaristos); d, e, f. Gateway of Mangana complex, photo author

Сл. 4 Примери дискова на византијским споменицима у Истанбулу: а, б. Ески имарет цамија (црква Христа Пантепопте); с. Фетхије цамија (црква Богородице Памакаристос); д, е, ф. Улаз у Мангана комплекс, фото аутор

of Emperor Dušan, Jelena Trkulja considered possibility of closer relation between architecture and sculptural decoration of Hilandar exonarthex and imperial endowments in Constantinople.<sup>12</sup>

According to Vladislav Ristić potential origins of decorative roundels in Byzantine architecture are to be found in the capital.<sup>13</sup> Ristić noticed that facades of several remained Byzantine structures in Istanbul are decorated with such type of ornament.<sup>14</sup> These are: Fenari Isa camii (churches of Constantine Lips monastery), Eski imaret camii (church of Christ Pantepoptes), structure incorporated in Marmara seawalls, part of Mangana complex and Fethiye camii (parekklesion of Virgin Pammakaristos) (fig. 4).

As we may notice, remaining examples with analogous decoration in Constantinopolitan architecture are few. However, Byzantine practice of depiction of circular ornaments on building facades continued during late medieval period in the region not so far from the capital. During 14<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman Bithynia (nowadays Bursa Province) many structures have been erected under the influence of Late Byzantine architecture.<sup>15</sup> In several cases it is possible that Byzantine architects and artisans were employed to work on these projects together with Ottoman master builders.<sup>16</sup> Early Ottoman structures in Bursa region were composed as synthesis of earlier Seljuk architecture and decoration of facade in Byzantine manner.<sup>17</sup> Beside recognizable Byzantine building technique on facades of these pious foundations there are various depictions of decorative roundels, similar to those on monuments in Constantinople. They are appearing on following structures:

<sup>12</sup> Trkulja, op. cit., 158.

<sup>13</sup> Ristić, op. cit., 135, footnote, 332.

<sup>14</sup> ibidem, 134.

<sup>15</sup> R. Ousterhout, *Ethnic identity and Cultural Appropriation in Early Ottoman Architecture*, Muqarnas, Vol. 12, (1995), 48 – 62; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere*, 66 – 67.

<sup>16</sup> M. Tunay, *Masonry of Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman periods*, Zograf 12, (Belgrade, 1981), 76 – 79; Ousterhout, op.cit., 53.; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere*, 66 – 67; S. Çağaptay, *Frontierscape: Reconsidering Bithynian Structures and Their Builders on the Byzantine – Ottoman Cusp*, Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World 28, (2011), 166 – 168.

<sup>17</sup> Ousterhout, op.cit., 53.





Fig. 5 Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa, 1339 – 40, photo author

Сл. 5 Гази Орхан Бегова џамија у Бурси, 1339 – 40, фото аутор

Fig. 6 Roundels on Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa: b, c. lateral facades; a, d. facade of portico, photo author

Сл. 6 Дискови на Гази Орхан Беговој џамији у Бурси: b, c. бочне фасаде; a, d. фасада трема, фото аутор



Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa (mosque of Orhan Bey), Nilüfer Hatun imaret in Iznik (charitable foundation of Nilüfer Hatun), Seyyid Mehmed Dede zaviyesi in Yenişehir (tekke and charitable foundation), Yıldırım Darüşşifası in Bursa (hospital of Sultan Beyazıt I), Gülçiçek Hatun türbesi in Bursa (mausoleum of Gülçiçek Hatun), Lala Şahin Paşa türbesi in Mustafakemalpaşa (mausoleum of Lala Şahin Paşa), Timurtaş camii (mosque of Emir Timurtaş paşa) and Muradiye medresesi (madrasa of Sultan Murad II), both in Bursa.<sup>18</sup>

Architectural decoration of Early Ottoman monuments in Bithynia presents important analogy for further understanding of Palaeologan architecture. Very interesting example is Gazi Orhan Bey camii which was erected in 1339-40 by Orhan Bey, second ruler of the Ottoman dynasty (fig. 5). Mosque was damaged in 1413 and then restored in 1417 and 19<sup>th</sup> century, but most of its wall construction today is original.<sup>19</sup> It has been suggested both by Ćurčić and

<sup>18</sup> S. Kalfazade, *Erken Osmanlı mimarisindeki tuğla rozetler hakkında*, Sanat tarihi araştırmaları dergisi, cilt: 1, sayı: 1, (İstanbul 1987), 12.

<sup>19</sup> D. Yavaş, *Orhan Gazi külliyesi, Bursa'da XIV. yüzyılın birinci yarısında inşa edi-*

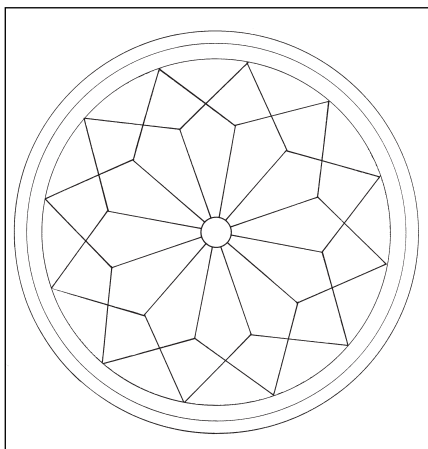


Fig. 7 Roundel on facade of portico of Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa, drawing author

Сл. 7 Диск на фасади трема Гази Орхан Бегове џамије у Бурси, цртеж аутор

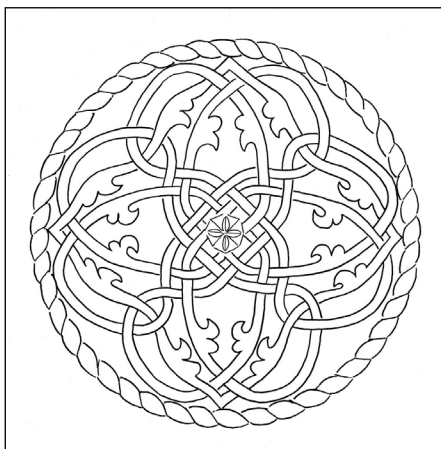


Fig. 8 Kalenić, rosette on north and south facade, drawing author

Сл. 8 Каленић, розета на северној и јужној фасади, цртеж аутор

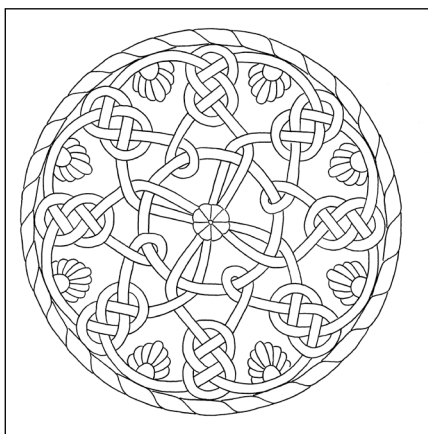


Fig. 9 Milentija, reconstruction of rosette from National museum in Belgrade, end of the 14<sup>th</sup> beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, drawing author

Сл. 9 Милентија, реконструкција розете из Народног музеја у Београду, крај 14. почетак 15. века, цртеж аутор

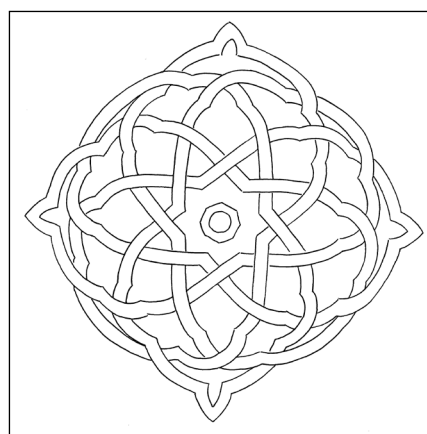


Fig. 10 Al-Aqmar mosque in Cairo, geometrical ornament on facade, 1125, drawing author

Сл. 10 Ал-Акмар џамија у Каиру, геометријски орнамент на фасади, 1125, цртеж аутор

Ousterhout that Byzantine builders, or Ottoman artisans trained in Byzantine building workshops, have been involved in the construction of Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa.<sup>20</sup> There are several decorative roundels on facades of this

*len ilk Osmanlı külliyesi*, İslam ansiklopedisi, cilt 33, (2007), 388; Çağaptay, op.cit., 168.

<sup>20</sup> Ousterhout, op.cit., 53.; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Byzantine sphere*, 66, footnote, 83.

mosque. Four are situated on spandrels of portico and three on lateral facades (fig. 6). One roundel on lateral facade is placed under the archivolt in a similar manner like Morava rosettes. However, not all of them are executed in the same form. The main distinction can be established between roundels on lateral walls of the mosque and front facade of portico. Those on lateral facades were conducted in the fashion which is close to the examples on Fethiye and Eski imaret camii in Istanbul (compare fig. 6.b,c and fig. 4.b,c). Two roundels even have a cross shaped motif in the center that is indicating direct influence of Byzantine prototypes. Ornaments on main facade of portico are different. One pair is executed in Byzantine manner, without cross motif in the centre, but with radiating elements of brick and stone (fig. 6.a). Remaining two roundels are more original creations and they might have been carried out by the Ottoman artisans (fig. 6.d). These circular ornaments are made in intarsia technique with, perhaps, combination of bricks in different colour that are creating geometrical pattern (fig. 7).<sup>21</sup>

Roundels in the Early Ottoman architecture have two important characteristics. Firstly, they are distributed as individual motifs and not as part of larger decorative vocabulary of facades.<sup>22</sup> Also, appropriation of these ornaments on Ottoman monuments led towards establishment of specific aesthetics. They were made from painted bricks and sometimes combined with other materials, common in Ottoman art, such as ceramics.<sup>23</sup> This is the case with some roundels on Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa and Nilüfer Hatun imareti in Iznik. Moreover, Gazi Orhan Bey camii in Bursa has several types of “brick rosettes” which might indicate that different artisans were employed to work together on their execution. Beside potential participation of Byzantine artists it has been suggested that Mamluk workers might have been employed to work on front portico.<sup>24</sup> To sum up, circular ornaments of Gazi Orhan Bey camii might be interesting testimony how on just one structure these decorative elements have evolved from popular Byzantine models to Ottoman visual expression.

If the scholars are right and Byzantine decorative roundel presents predecessor of Morava stone rosette, in the context of Morava architecture evolution of this ornament has been far more complicated. Discs made of brick and stone were transformed into stone carved rosettes flanked with decorated archivolt, similar to those in Romanesque architecture. This complete change of aesthetics was guided by several factors: local building tradition, desires of patrons, provenance of employed workshops and synthesis of local and imported artistic trends. It seems that crucial change occurred at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century when Byzantine sculptors were among the artisans who worked on monuments built under the ktetorship of king Stefan Milutin.<sup>25</sup> In such intercultural environ-

<sup>21</sup> However, pattern composed in a similar manner is depicted on the ceiling of pulpit of St. Sophia in Ohrid dated in 1317. A. Grabar, *Sculptures Byzantines du Moyen Age II (XIe – XIVe siecle)*, Paris 1976, plate CXXXVI b.

<sup>22</sup> Kalfazade, op. cit., 14-17.

<sup>23</sup> ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Çağaptay, op. cit., 171 – 172.

<sup>25</sup> Good examples are Hilandar katholikon and Banjska monastery. Melvani thinks about possibility that king Milutin hired two groups of sculptors. One group that conducted

ment, where local carving tradition has crossed path with imported Byzantine trends, the foundations of later Morava sculpture were generated. Moreover, study of depicted motifs is leading towards a similar conclusion. Based on their composition and iconography Morava rosettes can be divided into the following groups: wheel type rosettes, rosettes with enclosed palmettes, rosettes with floral motifs, rosettes with geometrical patterns and rosettes with combined geometrical and vegetative motifs.

Quite intriguing for further analysis are rosettes composed of combined geometrical and vegetative motifs since this type of ornament presents important characteristic of Morava sculpture in general. Similiar decoration was popular during Late Byzantine period in Byzantine manuscript illumination and on carvings in Macedonia and Thessaly. Robert Nelson, who studied composition of ornaments in Palaeologan manuscripts, posed that some elements of arabesque have been introduced from Islamic to Late Byzantine iconography.<sup>26</sup> Several other scholars also pointed toward interaction of Late Byzantine and Islamic art that has resulted with unique iconographic solutions in sculpture and wood carving. For repertoire of such generated ornaments they have used terms like koine, Byzantine arabesque and Byzantine cufic pattern.<sup>27</sup> We may say that iconography of Morava sculpture follows analogous visual expression as ornaments evident on carvings in Macedonia and Thessaly around the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> Particularly close analogies are motifs depicted on wooden portal of church Panagia Olympiotissa at Elasson, as well as decoration of capitals of former Cathedral in Veroia and pulpit of St. Sophia in Ohrid.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned, these trends were incorporated into Serbian art during the reign of king Milutin and exemplified in sculptural decoration of Hilandar katholikon and church of St. Stephan in Banjska monastery. They have remained popular around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century since various combined geometrical and vegetative motifs are depicted on wooden shrine of his son, Stefan Uroš III (ca. 1343).<sup>30</sup> However, manuscript illumination has to be taken in consideration as part of recognizable artistic tendencies during this epoch.<sup>31</sup> „The importance of symmetry, geometry, unified design and lively rhythm” are principles of ara-

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anthrophomorphic and zoomorphic figures in Romanesque style and other that was familiar with geometrical and vegetative carvings in Macedonia. N. Melvani, *Late Byzantine sculpture*, Turnhout 2013, 100.

<sup>26</sup> R. S. Nelson, *Palaeologan Illuminated Ornament and the Arabesque*, Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte, Band XLI, (Wien – Köln – Graz 1988), 7 – 22.

<sup>27</sup> M. Šuput, *Vizantijski reljefi sa pastom iz XIII i XIV veka*, Zograf 7, (Beograd 1977), 40 – 43. (with earlier bibliography); E. C. Constantinides, *The Wall Paintings of The Panagia Olympiotissa at Elasson in Northern Thessaly*, Vol. I, Athens 1992, 62 – 63.

<sup>28</sup> Šuput, op. cit.; Melvani, op. cit., 99.

<sup>29</sup> For decoration of wooden portal of Panagia Olympiotissa at Elasson see Constantinides, op. cit., 59 – 66; and for sculpture in Western Macedonia see Melvani, op. cit., 99.

<sup>30</sup> D. Popović, *Shrine of King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski*, Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557), ed. H. C. Evans, (New York 2004), 114-115, no. 59, with plates.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson, op. cit.; Direct influence of manuscript illumination on iconography of Morava sculpture has been suggested by Svetozar Radojčić. S. Radojčić, *Stare srpske minijature*, Beograd 1950, 32.



besque that, according to Nelson, were transmitted to Byzantine manuscript ornament.<sup>32</sup> These features are also noticeable in iconography of Morava rosettes (figs. 8, 9). Interlace patterns of two Kalenić rosettes (figs. 8) are composed in such fashion that they might be associated with complex Islamic designs, such as those on mosque of Al-Aqmar in Cairo (fig. 10).<sup>33</sup>

We may conclude that both artistic phenomena presented in this paper came to be as a result of cultural interaction that corresponded with other aspects of life in late medieval society in Eastern Mediterranean. Decoration of facades on monuments of Ottoman Bursa, as it was shown by earlier scholars, had predecessor in Late Byzantine architecture. In the Ottoman context, Byzantine roundels were sometimes made from other materials than brick or stone, so they could be appropriated to earlier artistic tradition. Provenance of employed workshop probably had significant role in this process. However, until the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, in more or less modified form, they have remained important visual mark on facades of Ottoman monuments in Bursa Province. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Serbia popular Romanesque sculpture, traditional decoration of Nemanjić mausolea, has integrated new Byzantine artistic models. Roundels and oculi, that were still in use elsewhere, in the region of Morava got unique interpretation in stone. Study of iconography of these decorative elements is revealing relation with features of Late Byzantine ornament in manuscript illumination and carvings in Macedonia and Thessaly. This topic requires further insight, especially its connection to Islamic ornament which is evident in Late Byzantine decorative art and pointed out by Robert Nelson. It remains obscure if application of such elements on building facades had exact meaning for kettors of monuments. From the point of view of the artisans who use to work on these projects, appropriation of imported ornaments was opportunity to experiment with new iconographic features. Through synthesis with traditional artistic forms and materials they were able to create unique visual expression which is evident on monuments in both of these regions.

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РОЗЕТЕ НА СПОМЕНИЦИМА МОРАВСКЕ СРБИЈЕ И РАНООСМАНСКЕ  
БУРСЕ: АРХИТЕКТОНСКА ДЕКОРАЦИЈА КАО МАНИФЕСТАЦИЈА  
ИНТЕРКУЛТУРАЛНОГ ДИЈАЛОГА ТОКОМ ЈЕДНЕ ЕПОХЕ

Розете на фасадама цркава моравске Србије (друга половина 14 - прва половина 15. века) представљају једно од најистакнутијих обележја њихове богате архитектонске декорације. Стога је ова тема често изучавана у науци, а о пореклу моравских розета временом су представљане различите тезе. Аналогije за такву врсту орнамената

<sup>32</sup> Nelson, op. cit., 17.

<sup>33</sup> Creswell, op. cit., plate 83, b.

стручњаци су проналазили како у хришћанској, тако и у исламској уметности. Изгледа да се данас већина истраживача слаже да специфична архитектонска пластика цркава моравског региона може да се анализира и у контексту позновизантијске уметности.

У науци је установљено мишљење да моравске розете представљају деривате декоративних циркуларних елемената који се јављају у склопу декорације фасада византијских споменика у Цариграду, северној Грчкој, Хиосу и Несебару. Византијска пракса украшавања црквених фасада дисковима од камена и опеке, посебно наглашена током позног средњег века, манифестовала се и у раноосманској архитектури. У региону Бурсе постоји више османских грађевина, насталих током 14. и у првој половини 15. века, на чијим се фасадама налазе представе сличних декоративних елемената. У појединим случајевима претпоставља се да су византијски градитељи и мајстори учествовали у изградњи ових споменика. Значајан аргумент за такву тезу представља начин обраде фасада, алтернацијом камена и опеке, по систему карактеристичном за позновизантијску архитектуру.

У овом раду се апропријација византијске фасадне орнаментике у моравској и раноосманској архитектури анализира као једна од последица интеркултуралног дијалога епохе. Кроз укрштање византијских трендова са традиционалним техникама и материјалима уметници су успели да формирају уникатну декоративну форму на фасадама споменика у оба региона.