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*Svetla Petrova*  
(Archaeological Museum of Sandanski)

**THE CHANCEL SCREENS OF THE EPISCOPAL BASILICA  
(No 4) IN PARTHICOPOLIS / BULGARIA  
(PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS)**

*Introduction*

The Episcopal basilica (№4) in Parthicopolis (now the modern town of Sandanski in Southwestern Bulgaria) is the biggest one and the more lavishly decorated church of the Late Antique / Early Byzantine city. In the opinion of some scholars, the basilica has been built at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, while others accept that it has happened in the second half of 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. As a result of the development of Parthicopolis in that period and its connections with the vicariate in Thessaloniki, a large-scale building has followed next to the first building period of basilica No 4 and its *baptisterium*, creating a vast Episcopal complex<sup>3</sup>.

The great number of Christians here and the propinquity of Parthicopolis to Thessaloniki have placed its bishopric among the most important ones for the Church in Thessaloniki and its vicariate, respectively for Rome. This was especially true for the region of Middle Strymon valley and for the advancement of Parthicopolis in comparison to the bishoprics around it, especially in comparison to Heraclea Sintica, a rival city to it for centuries<sup>4</sup>. One of the reasons

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<sup>1</sup> A. Dimitrova-Milčeva, V. Petkov. Basilika Nr. 4 (Bischofsbasilika) in der Stadt Sandanski (Sv. Vrač). Vorbericht. – *Folia Archaeologica Balcanica*, I. In Honorem Verae Bitrakova-Grozdanova, Скопје 2006, 403-424.

<sup>2</sup> Ю. Фърков, Епископска базилика в Сандански. – *Арх и Арт. Форум*. Год. XX, 19 (99), 2011, 13.

<sup>3</sup> S. Petrova, On Early Christianity and Early Christian Basilicas of Parthicopolis. – *Studia sull'Oriente Cristiano 161*, Roma 2012, 108-114; S. Petrova, The Early Christian Basilicas in the Urban Planning of Parthicopolis. – *Niš and Byzantium*, ed. M. Rakocija, XIII, 2015, 161-184; S. Petrova, The baptistery of the Episcopal Basilica in Parthicopolis. – *Niš and Byzantium*, ed. M. Rakocija, XV, 2017, 133-152.

<sup>4</sup> N. Sharankov. Heraclea Sintica in the Second Century AD: New Evidence from Old Inscriptions. – *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, 2, 2016, 58-61.

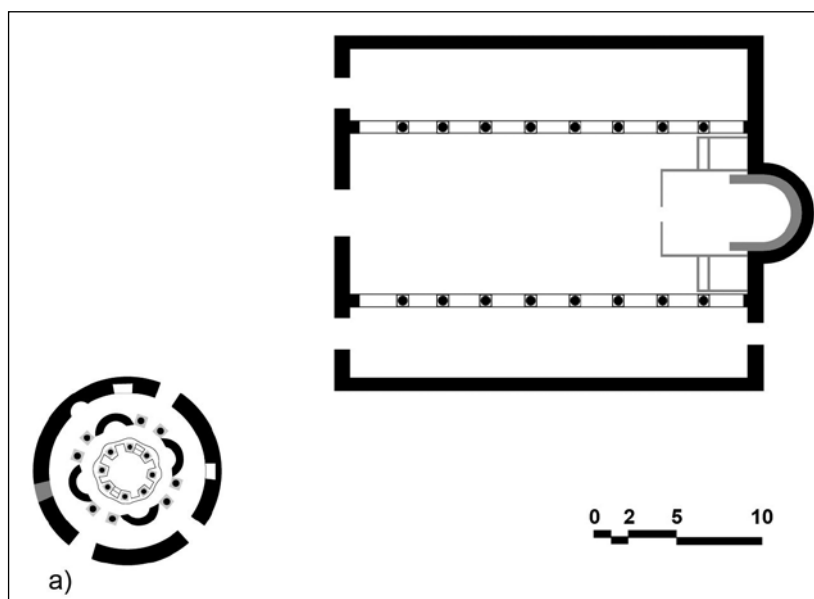


Fig. 1. The first building period of the basilica and its baptisterium. Plan (S. Petrova)

Сл. 1. Први градителски период базилике и баптистеријума. План (С. Петрова)

of neglecting the bishopric of Heraclea in 4<sup>th</sup> century can be understood when reading the inscription-decree from 308-309, revealing the preference shown to the city by the emperor Galerius and the caesar Maximinus, being the most furious persuaders of the Christians at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. Because of this benevolence first the exarchate and later the vicarius in Thessaloniki preferred Parthicopolis on behalf of Heraclea. In my view, the second reason is the great earthquake after 388, destroying Heraclea, and accompanied by a big tidal wave of the river Strumeshnitsa. After 425, a second earthquake has totally swept away the city and it has never recovered after that<sup>6</sup>.

The architecture of the basilicas in Parthicopolis is influenced by its location and by its administrative and church belonging: it is located in the most northeastern part of Macedonia, near the boundary between it and Thrace, also between two dioceses and two prefectures, generally between the Eastern and Western part of the Roman empire, later respectively the Western and the Eastern empire. Here can be found the influence both of the Constantinople church as a result of the short transference of these territories under the ruling of the bishop of Constantinople in the period 388-391, as well as the years pre-

<sup>5</sup> Г. Митрев, Т. Тараков. CIVITAS HERACLEOTARUM. Новооткрит епиграфски паметник с името на античният град при Рупите, Петричко. – *Археология*, 4, 2002, 25-32; Cl. Lepelley. Une inscription d'Heraclea Sintica (Macédonie) récemment découverte révélant un rescrit de l'empereur Galère restituant ses droits à la cite. – *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 146, 2004, 221-231.

<sup>6</sup> Л. Вагалински. Хераклея Синтика. – *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2018 година*, София 2019, 251.

Fig. 2. The pyramidal capital with Latin cross from the colonnade of the basilica (photo S. Petrova)

Сл. 2. Пирамидални капител са латинским крстом из колонеде базилике (фото С. Петрова)



ceding and from the very end of 4<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – under the pope in Rome through his vicariate in Thessaloniki. Nevertheless, apart from the struggle between Constantinople and Rome in this aspect for that boundary part of Macedonia, the presence of the vicariate had a very strong influence and has lend a significant support to Parthicopolis. New current ideas have been accepted from Rome for the plans, the architecture and the liturgy of the Early Christian basilicas.

This can be established also in the Episcopal basilica (No 4) during its two building periods. In the first building period it had three aisles with shortened naos and half-rounded apse, without narthex and atrium (**fig. 1**). The same specific features possess also some early basilicas from 4<sup>th</sup> century in Karanovo – basilica “A”; Targovishte – church 1; Krumovo kale; Montana – the church in the villa 1; Pleven, basilica No 17; Stobi, the Old basilica (by Bishop Budius)<sup>8</sup>. The entrance of basilica No 4 in Sandanski is placed from the eastern side of the south aisle, and this is connected with the liturgy and the access of the male believers<sup>9</sup>. Such entrances have also the Episcopal basilica in Pautalia<sup>10</sup>; in Stobi – the Bishop’s Basilica (by Bishop Philip) and *extra muros* basilica (in

<sup>7</sup> Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Ранно-Християнската архитектура в България IV-VI в.*, София 1999, 247, 193, 221, 214 and cit.lit.

<sup>8</sup> В. Лилчик. *Македонскиот камен за боговите, христијаните и за животот по животот. Доцна антика*, 2. Скопје, 2002, 180 and cit.lit.

<sup>9</sup> Such plan and entrances from many sides relate basilica No 4 with the Constantinople liturgical planning. Prof. V. Popova supposes in an article in print that an entrance existed also at the eastern end of the north aisle. However, the archeologists of the basilica No 4 in the period 1989-2000, A. Milcheva and V. Petkov do not announce the existence of such an entrance or any such visible traces of it.

<sup>10</sup> Ѓ. Иванов. Кюстендилският Хисарлък и неговите старинил – *Известия на Българското Археологическо Дружество*, VII, 1919/1920, 66-123.

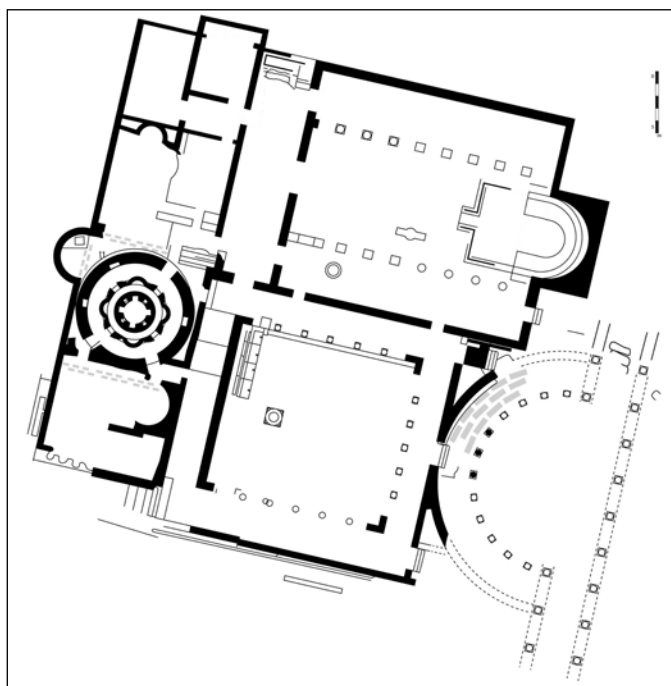


Fig. 3. The second building period of the basilica with the baptisterium and the Episcopal complex. Plan (S. Petrova)

Сл. 3. Други градитељски период Базилике са Баптистеријумом и Епископског комплекса. План (С. Петрова)

Palikura), which has entrances from the east in the north and the south aisle<sup>11</sup>. Two more entrances have been built as well on the south wall of the south aisle of basilica No 4. From the west, three entrances are leading to the almost square naos with both aisles. During the first building period the basilica was one-storied and with a ridge roof. The first plan of the *baptisterium* and its decoration are also related to the first building period.

The architectural decoration from the first building period has been made by reused elements from the pagan buildings erected between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. Only the marble pyramidal impost capitals have been carved especially for the naos colonnades. Its marble is identical to the one used for the colonnettes and some of the chancel screens, also belonging to the first building period. The similarity is strengthened by the identical Latin crosses carved on the visible (front) part of the colonnettes and on the pyramidal impost capitals (fig. 2). The second building period can be related with t. p. q. about 425, when an earthquake has devastated the whole region, including the neighboring Hellenistic and Roman city of Heraclea Sintica. As a result, a part of the floor of the nave in basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis has sunk and the mosaic pavement destroyed. After that, in the second period a new mosaic pavement has been laid, the *presbytery* was enlarged, and new form and new dimensions of the chancel established. In the second period from 5<sup>th</sup> till the first quarter of 6<sup>th</sup> century the

<sup>11</sup> B. Aleksova. *Loca sanctorum Macedoniae. The cult of Martyrs in Macedonia from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries*. Skopje, 1997, 145-154; Лилчиќ 2002, *Op.cit.*, 180 and cit.lit.

<sup>12</sup> S. Petrova. The roman architectonic decoration reused in the Early Christian Buildings of Parthicopolis. – *PATRIMONIUM.MK*, т. 15, 2017, 345-384.

basilica is enriched by a narthex and a second floor. The apse was already built inside, an ambo installed, a *prothesis* and *diaconicon* differentiated, also new mosaics replaced the old ones in some parts of the mosaic compositions. An atrium appeared from the south of the basilica and a half-rounded piazza eastern of the latter. The piazza is tangential to the east to the main street for church processions in Parthicopolis with direction north-south (**fig. 3**).

The fragments from the chancel screen were found during the excavations spread in the debris of the basilica or near to the *bema*. There are many small and middle-sized fragments, reported in the publication to be more than 60 pieces<sup>13</sup>. But in only a few cases is it possible to reconstruct the dimensions and decoration of two large screens, belonging to the first, and several scenes on slabs from the second construction period.

In the first publication of the results of the archaeological survey A. Dimitrova-Milčeva considered that the plates originate from an Early Christian sarcophagus and have been secondary reused as chancel screens. The scholar noted that the screens are „made of different types of marble known from the quarries in the region“, but she did not conclude on this ground that these were two different periods in the construction and decoration of the chancel screens. She only supposes that “they are not a product of local stone workshops. Since they are not found in situ, it can be supposed that they are part of the parapet of the presbyterium or of a sarcophagus”<sup>14</sup>. Obviously the author has not paid attention to the great difference in the fracture, structure, colour and manner of carving of the big screens, and of the middle-sized and small fragments.

According to my own observations, there are really two types of marble (**fig. 4**). The first one is with dense and fine-grained structure, with possibility of good polishing, with white colour inside, while the surface nuance is similar to ivory, identical to the marble of the pyramidal capitals and the colonnettes. This is not a marble extracted in the quarries on the territory of Parthicopolis, therefore it cannot be labeled as local. The second type of marble has a very light gray color, almost whitish, and a coarse-grained structure. It is obviously a local marble, extracted from the quarries in Pirin mountain, call by me “The Trajan quarries”, located at the contemporary quarry “Mura” and “Mura-West” at Ilindentsi<sup>15</sup>, to the north and very near to Sandanski.

Unfortunately, several mistakes have been made during the restoration and elevation of the screens, because the conservators did not catch the just

<sup>13</sup> A. Pülz, Some Considerations on the Relief Panels from the Bishop’s Basilica (Basilica Nr. 4) in Sandanski, Bulgaria. – *Sandanski and its Territory during Prehistory, Antiquity and Middle Ages: Current Trend in Archaeological Research. Proceedings of an International Conference at Sandanski, September 17 – 20, 2015*. Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia, 3, Veliko Tarnovo 2017, 231, and 239, fig. 2.

<sup>14</sup> А. ДимитроваМилчева. Сандански (Свети Врач). – (Р. Иванов, ред.) *Римски и рановизантийски градове в България*, София 2002, 281-282.

<sup>15</sup> S. Petrova. Quarries and Workshops in the Territory of Parthicopolis (1st – 6th c. AD). – *Sandanski and its Territory during Prehistory, Antiquity and Middle Ages: Current Trend in Archaeological Research. Proceedings of an International Conference at Sandanski, September 17 – 20, 2015. Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia*, 3, Veliko Tarnovo 2017, 152-169.



Fig. 4. The two kinds of marble used in the chancel: on the left the gray one from the second building period; on the right the white one from the first building period. (Photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 4. Две врсте мермера који се користе за плоче олтарне преграде: лево - сиви грубозрнаст из другог периода преграде. Десно - бела из првог периода преграде (фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 5. Screen 1 with its two panels (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 5. Плоча 1 са своја два панела (фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 6. The apse with *mensa sacra* and *syntrotron* (photo S. Petrova)

Fig. 6. Апсидата с *mensa sacra* и *syntrotron* (фото С. Петрова)

Fig. 7. A view on the *bema* and *solea* with the mosaic in *opus sectile* (photo A. Vassilev, Archaeological Museum Sandanski)

Сл. 7. Део беме и солее са мозаиком у *opus sectile* (фото В. Василев, АМ Сандански)



described difference in the two types of marble used in the two succeeding periods of the chancel screens. Also, as I will demonstrate later in the analysis, they did not grasp the difference in the iconography, the style and the treatment demonstrated in numerous cases on the big screens and the smaller fragments. It can be easily established that when gathering together the pieces of the biggest and partly well preserved screen at the left side of the entrance, the conservators joined to the scenes surely made of the first type of marble small fragments made of the second type and with different stylistic. For instance, the two heads (**fig. 5**) in the left panel of this big *screen 1* from the first chancel, placed high between the altar of Abraham's scene and the young apostle in the right, belong to the second chancel because of the different gray marble, coarse-grained, and also because of the wider and shallower profiled frame. Both heads are wrongly placed here during the contemporary reconstruction of the screen. Such mistakes were made in the other screens as well during the reconstruction and socialization of basilica No 4 in 2016. By simple observation it is obvious that the profiled frames in the two periods of the chancel are quite different: for example, the border made of the gray marble is wider. Finally, the modern background in the missing places is very rude and inappropriate for the good artistic level and smooth surface reminding of ivory on the screen left from the entrance.

#### *The chancel decoration from the first building period*

In the first period, relating probably to the end of the third quarter of fourth century, namely to the time of Theodosius the Great, this sacred space has been separated from the nave by low and straight screens from the west, with entrance in the middle. The *bema* with the *apse* occupies only partly the width in the eastern part of the naos. All the space is raised and limited by a profiled socle with the installed on it chancel screens. The chancel screen is of the low type. The western straight screen wall with an entrance in the middle is

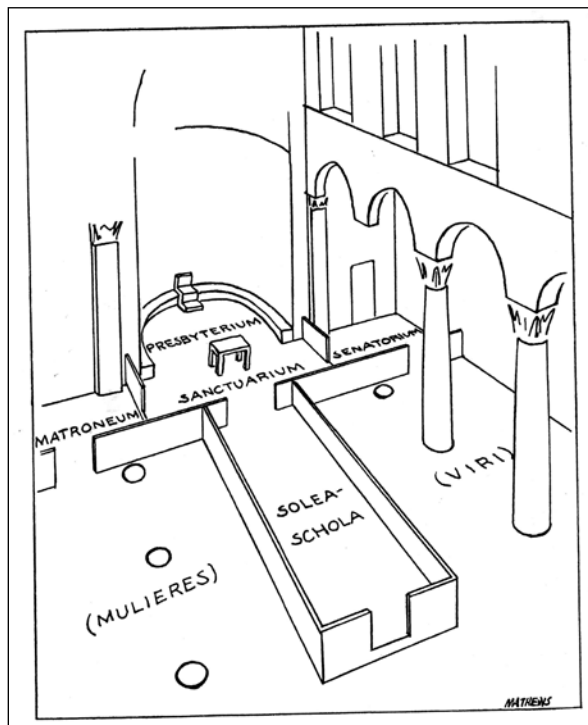


Fig. 8. Ideal chancel arrangement (after T. Mathews, *Early Roman Chancel* 1962).

Сл. 8. Идеално реконструкција олтарне преграде (према Т. Mathews, *Early Roman Chancel* 1962).

similar to some basilicas from the same period<sup>16</sup>. The space behind the screen is occupied by the *mensa sacra*<sup>17</sup> and the *synthronon* of the so-called Greek type (fig. 6). The ends of the seats of the *synthronon* were coming out to the west from the apse, thus encroaching upon the space of the altar. All the bema during the first building period is covered by a polychrome mosaic in *opus sectile* in three colours: white (marble pieces) and blue and violet (argillites pieces) (fig. 7). The scheme is consisting of intersecting circles. Each circle has a small round center and four four-leaf rosettes around it, consisting of a central rhomb and four triangles, part of which is going out of the circle. The scheme is identical to the pavement from the *presbyterium* of basilica “Г” in Dion from the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century and basilica “B” in Nicocolis in Epirus<sup>18</sup>. Two small narrow rooms (fig. 1) are differentiated in the eastern ends of the central aisle, occupying part of its width, from north and south, in immediate proximity to the *bema* with its chancel screens, and between the back walls of the chancel and both colonnades. The floors of the rooms are paved with marble plates.

<sup>16</sup> See A. K. Орландов, *Η ζυλοστεργος παλαιοχριστιανική Βασιλική*. Αθήναι 1994, 509-514; O. Brandt, *The Archaeology of Roman Ecclesial Architecture and the Study of Early Christian Liturgy*. – *Studia Patristica*, LXXI, 2014, 49-52 and cit.lit.

<sup>17</sup> The *mensa* does not occupy the central part of the width of the *presbyterium*, being slightly moved to the south.

<sup>18</sup> Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά, *ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΩΝ ΨΗΦΙΔΩΤΩΝ ΔΑΠΕΔΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΑΣ*, III, ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ-ΘΑΚΗ, μ. Α', πίν. 297 (1.66) ; A. K. Орландов, *Op.cit.*, 260, Εικ. 210.



These rooms should be identified with the so-called *senatorium* and *matroneum* in Rome (fig. 8). The function of both rooms was to “receive” and keep the donations of bread and wine brought by the faithful according to their gender. Although located next to the most sacred space, the bema, the ban formulated in the apostolic rules of not entering it by the laity is abided, since both rooms are not part of the altar<sup>19</sup>. The canon 56 of the Council in Laodicea (363-364) provides for the bishop to enter the apse before the clergy. Because of the existence of the *senatorium* and *matroneum* in the Episcopal basilica, the entrance in the chancel should be only one and from the west.

The observation on the profile of the big panel reveals that the vertical surfaces were profiled not only from the outside, but also from the inner side, even being concaved. That’s not typical for the inner surfaces of any sarcophagus, which remain in that sides always strictly vertically flat and not profiled (fig. 9). In this way, the profile of the screens of basilica No 4 proves that they don’t belong in fact to any original sarcophagus, but that they were specially ordered as chancel decoration.

The next arguments for the thesis that the screens have been prepared just for the chancel and not for the decoration of a sarcophagus are: the long format itself and its dimensions (2.08 m long, 0.80 m high)<sup>20</sup>. In comparison, the usual sarcophagus is 2.38-2.44 m long, high 0.73-1.41 m; finally with another kind of profiled borders, and inner divisions, when they exist<sup>21</sup>.

The left big screen (*plutei*) at the entrance to the chancel is covered with scenes from the Old and New Testament. It is right to place the big screen namely on this place (north side of the west wall of the chancel) because of the poses and the direction of the heads, the eyes’ look and the turns, gestures and movements of the bodies and of the upper and lower limbs of the participants in the scene. Nevertheless, the rest of the frag-

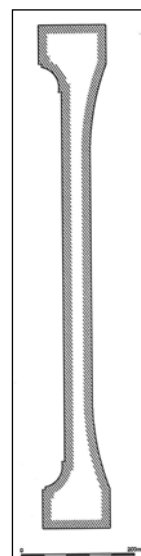


Fig. 9. Cross section of the slabs, sketch (A. Pülz 20017, fig. 3)

Сл. 9. Попречни пресек плоче, (A. Pülz 20017, fig. 3)

<sup>19</sup> T. Mathews place them in the aisles of the churches. See: T. F. Mathews, Early Roman chancel arrangement. – *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 38, 1962, 73-95; T. F. Mathews, *Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*. University Park and London, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971, 87-95. He rejects the identification of the location of men with the *senatorium* and of women with *matroneum*. But following the guidelines in *Ordo Romanus I*, a very late source, men are placed in the south aisle and women in the north aisle (*Op.cit.*, 93). In Mathews, in 5<sup>th</sup> century in Constantinople the faithful are gathering for the liturgy in the naos (T. Mathews, *Early Churches of Constantinople*, 125). The same definition is given in *Testamentum Domini*, a fifth century Syrian source. See: S. Lewis, Function and Symbolic Form in the Basilica Apostolorum at Milan. – *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 28, 1969, 96.

<sup>20</sup> For the dimensions of the screens and separate fragments and the commentary of some scenes see A. Pülz, *Op.cit.*, 231-241;

<sup>21</sup> Ed. by K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century. Catalogue*. Princeton Univ. Press, 1979, cat. No 361, 386, 417, 462; Early Christian sarcophagus from San Justo de la Veda in National Archaeological Museum of Spain (50310). Sizes of Silivri-Kapi slabs: 155-2.08 m length and 0.98-1.10 m height. See: J. G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroglu. Das Hypogäum beim Silivri-Kapi in Istanbul. – *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 36, 1993, 140; R. Couzin, *The Traditio Legis: Anatomy of an Image*, Archaeopress Archaeology 2015.



Fig. 10. Screen 1, left panel from the first chancel. The Sacrifice of Isaac from the Old Testament (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 10. Плоча 1, леви панел прве ограде. Жртва Исакова, (фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 10-a. The Sacrifice of Isaac, detail with Abraham and the altar (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 10-а Исакова жртва, детаљ са Аврамом и олтаром (фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 10-b. The Sacrifice of Isaac, detail with the hand of God in the left upper corner (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 10-б. Исакова жртва, детаљ са Божјом руком у горњем левом углу плоче (фото С. Петрова)

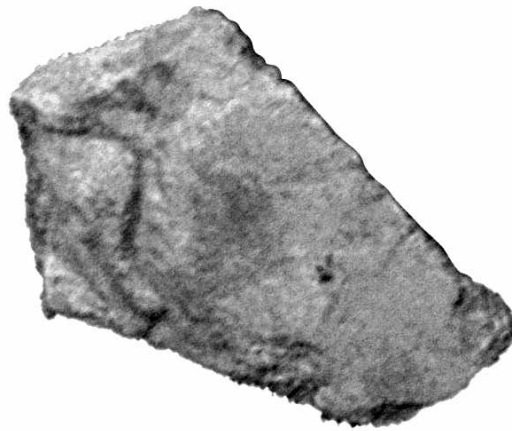


Fig. 10-c. The Sacrifice of Isaac, detail with the back leg of the lamb. (Photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 10-ц. Исакова жртва, детаљ са задњом ногом јагњета (фото С. Петрова)

ments, in spite of its bad state of preservation and smaller dimensions, also supply us with enough data for the subject, iconography and the style of the sculptural decoration. It is clear that the left panel of the screen represents a scene from the Old Testament, while the right one – a scene from the New Testament.

The Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-12) is shown on the left panel (**fig. 10**). First, at the upper left corner should be placed the hand of God the Father stopping Abraham from killing his son Isaac in Moriah. This scene has been identified correctly only by I. Dosseva so far<sup>22</sup>. Only the altar and the torso of Abraham have survived, probably holding the handle of the knife in his left hand. On the screen, only the lower part of Abraham's body is placed in front of the altar, with the folds of the dress falling down vertically; with a girdle (**fig. 10-a**). Isaac probably has been represented on the altar as demonstration of the Asiatic-Hellenistic iconography<sup>23</sup>. In it Abraham is always represented with long *palium*, with the knife in his right hand and face turned to the hand of God (**fig. 10-b**). However in the screen from Parthicopolis his pose is turned to the left, the head pointed up towards the upper left corner with the God's hand, and with the hand of the knife probably in his left hand.

In this type of iconography it is not obligatory the lamb and the forest to be represented, but in our case presumably the lamb is present, judging on the base of a small fragment with small sheep's leg (**fig. 10-c**), erroneously added to the fragments with the *stibadium*<sup>24</sup>. In my opinion, the fragment with the sheep's leg belongs to the first period of the chancel screen, and will be analyze in details below. This fragment should be added to our scene on the ground of the parallels in wall paintings, mosaics, liturgical objects and gold glasses with the representation of the sheep, replacing in the last moment the sacrifice of Isaac. A young beardless man is represented at the very right end of this left panel of the *screen 1*, also belonging according to the marble to the same first chancel. The apostle has fringed hair-style and is represented in the statuary type of *palliatius*, with the body frontally carved, while the head itself is turned towards Abraham and the altar. He is one of the twelve apostles, telling us the story of Abraham as an example of a faithful believer. Probably one more representation of apostle has been depicted behind Abraham, between him and the beardless apostle. According to Genesis 22 two servants are accompanying Abraham and his son to Moriah for the sacrifice. However, the more important images of the apostles are much more suitable for such monumental screen of the chancel and for the chosen solemn style than the two servants.

<sup>22</sup> I. Dosseva also supposes that the plates are from a reused sarcophagus, although the basilica in her publication is wrongly identified as No 2 instead of No 4. She is the first to identify the two scenes from the first big double screen as "The Sacrifice of Isaak" and "The Last Supper". See И. Досева, Паметта за мъртвите: структуриране на сакралните пространства в ранновизантийските некрополи и градове (според паметниците от територията на съвременна България). – (ред. И. Гергова, Е. Мутафов) *Герои Култове Светци*, София 2015, 37-38.

<sup>23</sup> A. M. Smith, The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Christian Art. – *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1922), 163-164.

<sup>24</sup> A. Pülz. *Op.cit.*, Fig. 7 (Fragment 3, on the left).



Fig. 11. Screen 1, right panel of the Eucharist from the first chancel. The Communion with the bread. (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 11. Плоча 1, десна плоча са еухаристије из прве ограде. Причешће са хлебом (фото С. Петрова)

As parallels from the Balkans can be pointed only three examples of sculptural reliefs on the same subject so far: the plate from Silivri-Kapi found in 1988<sup>25</sup>; the fragment of a wooden relief from Bargala<sup>26</sup> found in 2001 and the panel from the first chancel screen from Parthicopolis. But quite numerous are the same scenes in wall paintings in the catacombs, mosaics of the basilicas and the synagogues, the round sculpture and reliefs on sarcophagi and in the decorative arts from the Mediterranean and particularly in Rome from 4<sup>th</sup> century. This popular biblical motif is widely applied both in the Eastern and Western part of the Roman Empire, including too the decoration of the synagogues, the gold glasses, the reliefs in ivory and on metal relics<sup>27</sup>.

The position of the torso and the dress of Abraham, the depiction of the altar, the right position of the hand of God in the left upper corner, the altar

<sup>25</sup> J. G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroğlu. *Op.cit.*, 140-163.

<sup>26</sup> S. Filipova. *Op.cit.*, 221-236.

<sup>27</sup> Of Junius Bassus etc.: J. A. Gaertner, *Zur Deutung der Junius-Bassus-Sarkophages*. – *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 83, 1968), 240-64; A. M. Smith, *Op.cit.*, 159-173; Ed. By K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, cat. No 439-440; R. M. Jensen, *The Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac: How Jews and Christians See Differently*. – *BibleReview* 9, 1993, 42-51; J. Elsner, *Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art*. – *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 93, 2003, 114-128, Pl. XIII; E. Kessler, *Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 18-19.; Ed. by Ed Noort&Eibert Tigchelaar, *The Sacrifice of Isaac. The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations*, Brill 2002.

and the numerous parallels are plausible arguments for the identification of the scene with the sacrifice of Abraham. It can be added also the missing now tree as a symbol of the forest<sup>28</sup>. The scholars studying the iconography of the Sacrifice of Abraham underline that this scene is connected with the liturgy in 4<sup>th</sup> century with close relationship to the Eucharist, by reading Genesis 22 on the Great Thursday before Easter<sup>29</sup>.

This obvious liturgical connection between the scene of sacrifice in the left panel and the Eucharist in the right panel of the same screen is demonstrated very directly. The right panel of this screen is sculpted with a scene from the New Testament<sup>30</sup> with three preserved figures, but they were more in number, unfortunately not all preserved (**fig. 11**). One of them, on the very left in three quarter pose, is Saint Peter. His iconography corresponds to the one known since the 4<sup>th</sup> century: he has a short hair-dress, wrinkled forehead and beard. It can't be certainly defined if he is holding in his right hand the end of his *palliatius*, or a kerchief. He is also stretching his left hand with a small object in it, probably the small communion bread, as if to add it to the content of the vessel or to put it on the *mensa*. There is a big round deep vessel on the *mensa*, either with a lid, or the vessel has a very distinctive profile. A very similar vessel is also represented on the mosaic pavement from the first building period of the basilica<sup>31</sup>. At the bottom of the scene, left of St. Peter (right to the viewer), a second younger apostle with short hair-dress, round face, short beard and straight moustaches is represented frontally.

It may be assumed, that the headless figure in profile from the right side, opposite to Peter and turned to the left, is maybe St. Paul, taking part in the preparation of the communion with bread. The supposed St. Paul is putting his left hand on the vessel, covered partly with the folds of the *palliatius*, taking a small bread or a piece of it from the vessel. Christ, now missing, maybe was represented at the very right of the panel. This scene may be interpreted as a preparation for the Eucharist with the Communion of the apostles, but only with bread and its blessing.

Christ was giving himself the bread and the wine to each of the apostles at the Last Supper, when the sacrament of the Eucharist was established by him. That the bread was the symbol of his body and the wine of his blood is told in

<sup>28</sup> The fragment of the upper left corner of the screen with the God's hand was discovered by me in 2019 wrongly inserted in one not correct elevation of the cancel represented as the second building period. Another wrong element in the same elevation is the marble Corinthian capital with a small column for a high chancel, found by me in 2004 during the excavations of entirely another monument – basilica No 7, at DSK III.

<sup>29</sup> S. Filipova. *The Early Christian Fragmented Wooden Relief from the Site Bargala near Štip*. – Niš and Byzantium (ed. M. Rakocija), XIII, 2015, 227 and note 14.

<sup>30</sup> In the New Testament there are four witnesses on the institution of the Eucharist, connected with the Last Supper: the letter of apostle Paul (1 Corinthians (11:23-25); Matthew 26:26-28; Marc 14:22-24; and Luke 22:17-20p, in which Christ breaks the bread and hands the cup of wine.

<sup>31</sup> It is in a mosaic panel in the naos of the basilica. See: R. J. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova (Hg.), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, Wien 2016, Tafel 287, Abb. 709.



Fig. 12. The Riha paten (564-578) with the double Communion with bread and wine. (after Age of Spirituality).

Сл. 12. Постоље за на-фору „Riha“ (564-578) за двојно причеће са хлебом и вином (према Age of Spirituality)

the Gospel, citing the words of Christ himself. The Communion with Christ is represented in wall paintings, on liturgical vessels and manuscripts<sup>32</sup>, and not on sarcophagi. The sculptural scenes with *stibadium*, which appeared among the Late Antique monuments of late 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. are not considered as Communion, but as one of the many suppers of Christ with the apostles and the ordinary people. The Communion nevertheless is considered iconographic different, although it has been developed from the *agape* and similar feasts of Late Antiquity<sup>33</sup>. On the sarcophagi are sculpted other scenes and not the Communion, for instance “The multiplication of loaves”, “The miracle with the wine at the Cana wedding”<sup>34</sup>, the blessing of the bread and wine at one and the same time, where Christ is in the middle of two flanking apostles, like in a sarcophagus from Rome (*Pio Cristiano Sarcophagus 31551*) and the narrow side of the sarcophagus from Arles<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> *Fractio Panis* in the Greek Chapel in the Catacomb of Priscilla. See: B. M. Craig, *Fractio Panis: A History of the Breaking of Bread in the Roman Rite*, Studia Anselmiana-Rome, 2011; Ed. by K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality ...*, cat. 547; E. Hixson, Forty Excerpts from the Greek Old Testament in Codex Rossanensis (Rossano, Museo Diocesano, S.N.), A Sixth-Century Gospels Manuscript. – *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 67, Iss. 2, October 2016, 507-541.

<sup>33</sup> R. G. Salinero, El ágape y los banquetes rituales en el cristianismo antiguo. - *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie II, Historia Antigua, 23, 2010, 279-305.

<sup>34</sup> The Sarcophagi: of Adelfia; Pio Cristiano Sarcophagus 31551; Sarcophagus of a Couple, Arles; Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid; and others.

<sup>35</sup> The composition from Arles is earlier than the one in Parthicopolis, but shows the iconography of the Eucharist with two apostles and Christ in the middle. See: J. Elsner, Decorative imperatives between concealment and display: The form of sarcophagi. – *Res: Anthropology and aesthetics* 61-62 (Spring-Autumn 2012), 193-195, fig. 12.

In the case of Parthicopolis none of these scenes is represented, but for the first time so far The chancel decoration depicts the Communion with bread because of the large vessel and the missing jug and chalice for the wine. This is only the left (north) part of the Eucharist with bread, placed at the entrance of the chancel. Its correspondence, the Eucharist with the wine, can be found on the screen right (south) of the main entrance of the chancel from the first building period. Both screens, the first one with the bread and the second with the wine, form together one composition, although divided in two episodes flanking the left and the right side of the main entrance to the chancel. Its iconography is the “Communion of the apostles”, in which Christ is twice represented, on the left and on the right side, giving in the first case bread to a group of six apostles and in the second case – wine to the second group of six apostles. This iconography is firmly established as independent in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and known from *Codex purpureus Rossanensis* and from the liturgical vessels from Riha (**fig. 12**) and Stuma<sup>36</sup>. But in Sandanski most probably instead of the six apostles in each screen are represented all twelve apostles, or at least more than six, and because of the broken screens the number of the participants is not clear. Maybe in Parthicopolis we see one of the earlier predecessors of the divided scene of the Communion, but still not in two groups, each consisting of six apostles, but as a crowd like in the earlier compositions with the apostles.

Two separate reliefs from the church in Osenovo near Varna (Odessos)<sup>37</sup> with the representation of chalices and peacocks also underline the importance of this subject and of the scene, also connected with the Eucharist and supporting the interpretation of the screens from basilica No 4 in Sandanski as the Communion of the apostles with bread and wine. The symbolic representation and the lack of human figures are adhering to the Syrian artistic circle, but in them also the New Testament repertory is reflected, although it is more often connected with the Early Christian monuments of Rome.

The subject and the direction of looking towards, of gestures and movements on both panels of the described double screen point that it has been installed left (north) of the entrance. Again according to the same circumstances and arguments can be found the place of the second big screen, namely from the right (south) side of the entrance of the chancel. The new big screen has the same profiled borders and was also divided in two equal panels, left and right, by a vertical border (**fig. 13**).

In *screen 2* the representations are continuing the liturgical narrative from the big double screen 1 (**figs. 10, 11**). From screen 2 is preserved the central and the right upper part with the corner<sup>38</sup>, showing a scene with six well observed apostles and maybe one or two more, unfortunately with almost entirely broken heads<sup>39</sup>. They are presented in the upper and middle registers (**fig. 13**). A bro-

<sup>36</sup> Ed. by K. Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality...*, 611–612, no. 547 (Riha), 593, fig. 82 (Stuma).

<sup>37</sup> И. Досева, Релефите от Осеново. За възможната употреба на лъжички за причастие през V-VI в. – *Acta Musei Varnensis*, VIII-1, 2011, 359-378.

<sup>38</sup> The preserved and reconstructed fragments are actually the upper right of the left panel of *screen 2*.

<sup>39</sup> A. Pülz has entirely different interpretation. He considered it as the right end of the



Fig. 13. Screen 2 from the first chancel. The Communion with the wine. (photo A. Pülz)

Сл. 13. Плоча 2 прве ограде. Причешће са вином (фото: Ал. Пјулц)

ken and almost erased bust and head of apostle has been probably carved at the very corner, but now only insignificant part of his dress can be noticed next to the vertical frame and maybe of the head (?) immediately under the right upper corner.

There are three more apostles on this upper row. The first one from them, next to the just described one, is also with a broken head from which only the chin and the mouth have survived. He has raised his left hand reminding the gesture of *orant*. But the arms are not stretched outside the volume of the body as the *orant* pose requires, but in front of his breast, depicting the arm only from the elbow up with the left hand. Probably this can be explained by the crowded composition in which is each figure is closely fitting to the next one or hidden by it, remaining no space for a real *orant* pose. Such separate gesture of a single hand can be met on the Early Christian sarcophagi as an expression of adoration, but not with two hands. The crowned composition also makes it difficult to determine whose is the second right hand of *orant*, in front of the breast of the next second apostle on the same row – to the latter or to the previous apostle. It seems that the first proposal is more suitable, because, as we shall see below, another case of apostle with *orant* hand is shown on the row below. Returning back to the one on the upper row, it should be noted that this time his head and

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screen, while in reality it is the middle of it. He identifies the end figure from the left as apostle Peter, and interpreted the *oranta* gesture of the four other figures acclamation and blessing. According to him, the whole scene is „The Assembly of the Apostles“, with the standing or sitting on the throne Christ in the center, flanked by two sides by Peter and Paul. On their turn, the latter two are flanked each by five apostles. At the end it is stated that because of the fragmental state of the scene „it is impossible to decide whether the apostles are flanking Christ or a (triumphal) cross standing between the two groups“. The preserved dimensions are ca 70 x 72 cm; the thickness is 13.5 cm. See A. Pülz. *Op.cit.*, 234, fig. 8, fragment 4.



bust are well preserved. The arm hits the empty place between the two apostle heads on the lower row, showing the small horizontal folds of the cloth and of the cuff. The round face has small mouth and hairstyle with straight locks stretching from the bald to the forehead and the ears.

There is a pause between this apostle and the last one in the same row to the left. His head is a little bit bigger than the others, and his separating from them underlines his importance, maybe he is the apostle Peter. The head is represented almost in full profile, except the line of the forehead and his right eye, both shown partly in  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The hairstyle with short fringe and the beard are very curly. He is turned to the main figure in the missing now left part of the composition, most probably to Christ.

The first participant on the row immediately below him is not preserved, and now one can see only the top round outline of his head. The next representation from the left to the right of the viewer is a young beardless face with small part of the neck and the usual hairstyle and face features for a young apostle from the upper row. The third image on this lower row represents an older and bearded apostle, his hairstyle and beard being curly. A raised *orant* right hand is shown immediately under his chin, this time without cuff, but with a longer arm and many small horizontal folds grouped in a left and right column. It is again not quite clear if the arm belongs namely to this apostle or to another one under him, but not preserved. The last apostle on this lower row is also representing the type of the older ones with curly hair and beard. But his pose is different: he is not en face, but in  $\frac{3}{4}$  pose of the head and of the body. The left hand is released down along his body, while the right one is stretched almost horizontally to the left. Because the hand itself is not preserved, the gesture may be either pointing to some person, or an action, or receiving something.

The reconstruction and interpretation of this scene should be connected with the Eucharist for several reasons. The group of at least eight apostles is concentrated to the right side of the composition (of the viewer), and it can be supposed that all twelve were represented here, but not all preserved. Some of them are turned in the decisive compositional points to the left part of the panel where an important action and the most important figure of Christ can be supposed. Several of the apostles demonstrate the gesture of *orant*, and this is a pose accepted during Eucharist in the Early Christian liturgical practice<sup>40</sup>. As a Christian sign, the *orant/oranta* is known mainly from the catacombs and tomb wall painting before and after the Milano edict of 313<sup>41</sup>. The praying figure of the *oranta* has appeared relatively early in the sculptured decoration of sar-

<sup>40</sup> S. Burns, *SCM Studyguide to Liturgy*, London: SCM Press, 2006, 62.

<sup>41</sup> J. G. Deckers & H. R. Seeliger & G. Mietke, *Die Katakomben "Santi Marcellino e Pietro"*. Repertorium der Malereien. Roma sotterranea cristiana 6. Città del Vaticano. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1987; J. G. Deckers & G. Johannes & G. Mietke & A. Weiland, *Die Katakomben "Anonima di via Anapo"*. Repertorium der Malereien. Roma sotterranea cristiana 9. Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1991; N. Zimmermann, *The healing Christ in early Christian funeral art: the example of the frescoes at Domitilla catacomb/Rome*. – S. Alkier & A. Weissenrieder (eds.), *Miracles Revisited. New Testament Miracle Stories and their Concepts of Reality*. SBR 2, Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter 2013, 251–274.

cophagi of 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>42</sup>. Almost everywhere this scene is placed in the center and represented by a woman<sup>43</sup>. In some later sculptural monuments are shown man *orant* and woman *oranta*, each in a separate panel<sup>44</sup>. Among the fragments in basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis is found a head with the arm of *oranta*, unfortunately in a very bad state. However, its time (from the first or second chancel) or place on the chancel screens are unknown. It is a pity that the slides of it are not readable because of the generally very broken piece and its erased surfaces.

In this way, screen 2 may represents the Eucharist, when Christ is giving the Communion to the twelve apostles. It should be reminded that on right panel of screen 1 was also represented the Communion, obviously that with bread. Screen 1 begins with the scene of the Sacrifice of Isaac, and at the beginning of the Eucharist namely this episode from Genesis 22 is read. So we can be sure that both panels of screen 1 relate to the Eucharist, but only to the Communion with the bread, and because of the compositions and the poses, looks and movement of the participants this screen is most probably installed left/north of the main western entrance of the chancel. The screen 2 should be imagined also in two panels and installed on the right/ south side of the main entrance of the chancel. There are two possible reconstructions of all compositions and scenes left and right from the main entrance of the chancel from the west. According to the first proposal, screen 2 is also divided in two panels. To the left panel with the scene of the Sacrifice of Isaac from screen 1 should correspond a panel of screen 2, also with biblical character – perhaps the scene Moses receiving the Tablets of the laws (Exodus 24:12-18). And to the panel with the Eucharist with bread from *screen 1* should answer the panel with Eucharist with wine from screen 2. According the second proposal, Christ was probably represented twice, once on the right panel of screen 1 with the bread, and for the second time on the left panel of screen 2 of the first chancel, where Christ is at the left and the apostles at the right of the first (left) panel of screen 2.

According to the second possible reconstruction, the scene is accompanied by a *mensa sacra*, without or with a *ciborium* over it, next or behind to Christ, known from similar scenes on the liturgical vessels of 6<sup>th</sup> century and in *Codex purpureus Rossanensis*<sup>45</sup>. If this furniture and liturgical vessels have

<sup>42</sup> The sarcophagi: Santa Maria Antiqua (270); of Sabinius (310-320); of Marcus Claudianus (330-335); See: G. Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, München 2000; P. Zancker, B. Ch. Ewald, *Mit Mythen Leben. – Die Bilderwelt der römischen Sarkophage*, München 2004, Abb. 232. J. Elsner, *Decorative imperatives...*, fig. 5.

<sup>43</sup> B. Klein, *Christliche Ikonographie und künstlerische Tradition in der Sarkophagplastik der ersten Hälfte des 4. Jahrhunderts.* – Koch, Guntram (Hrsg.): *Akten des Symposiums „Frühchristliche Sarkophage“*. Marburg, 30.6. - 4.7.1999. Mainz am Rhein 2002, (Sarkophag-Studien ; 2), 145-152, Taf. 52.2; Not the same is the situation with the wall paintings. The representation of Noah and of apostle, both in the *orant* pose can be found in the catacomb of Domitilla.

<sup>44</sup> From Silivri-Kapi (Istanbul). See: J. G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroğlu. *Das Hypogäum beim Silivri-Kapi in Istanbul.* – *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 36, 1993, 147-151, Tafel 7, a, b.

<sup>45</sup> E. Hixson, *Forty Excerpts from the Greek Old Testament in Codex Rossanensis (Rossano, Museo Diocesano, S.N.), A Sixth-Century Gospels Manuscript.* – *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 67, Iss. 2, October 2016, 507-541.

been presented, Christ from the left side should be turned to and in the process of giving the wine from the *mensa*, helped by a jug and chalice, to the sitting at the right side of the panel twelve apostles. But now we see only the end group of them and surely, some of them, now missing, were ahead and nearer to Christ. It may be represented only the altar with the vessels, as to correspond to the altar/ the *mensa* in the scene of the Communion with bread on *screen 1*.

The example in Parthicopolis is the earliest, as far as I know, for such doubling of the Eucharist and separating it in two scenes. In this way the Eucharist scenes from the first chancel of basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis may be among the predecessors of the later iconography of the doubled Communion known from 6<sup>th</sup> century and the medieval period.

This panel reveals the work of a second sculptor. Another important observation is the fact, that the poses of the apostles are diverse, well placed in depth and movement. The chancel probably copies an original from another basilica, whose decoration has disappeared. The lost decorations may be due to the fact that in Rome and Constantinople the old churches and basilicas have been many times rebuilt and decorated from 4<sup>th</sup> century on.

Most probably the dense white marble obtaining the nuance of ivory after polishing, was the material for the screens of the low chancel from the first period, of the columns for montage of the screens, of the plinthus forming the surface of the presbyterium and the pyramidal impost capitals with incised Latin cross, all from the first chancel. This white marble seems to be import made by Italian workshops or workshops under the influence of Italy. The fracture and structure of this white marble is not identical neither to the local marble in the area of Middle Strymon, nor of the so-called Sivetski marble from the quarries around Prilep in North Macedonia, nor to the marbles in Greece like the one from Pentelicon and Thasos, or to the white marbles from Asia Minor quarries where are prevailing the very hard ones. Namely the colour and the structure of the white marble of the first chancel of basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis enable to connect it with the Italian ateliers of stonemasons or with the Adriatic quarries. This supposition is confirmed by the iconography, the style and the treatment of the reliefs on the first chancel screens and to conclude that the screens and the architectonic details for the first building period have been ordered in some Italian workshops or in some ones in Western Illyric. The connection have been most probably realized by the help of the vicariate in Thessaloniki as expression of its benignancy to the eparchy of Parthicopolis received it with gladness. The variants and differences in the iconography of the scenes in comparison to the traditional subjects in art were



Fig. 14. The colonnette with Latin cross on the front. The first and the second chancel. (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 14. Оградни стуб са латинским крстом на предњој страни. Први и други период олтарне преграде (фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 15. Prophet Isaiah (?). The corner element of the so-called high chancel from the second period (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 15. Пророк Исаија (?). Угаони елемент такозване високе ограде из другог периода (фото С. Петрова)

probably due to the local development of the liturgy and the adequate choice of representations, of the intervention of the, vicarious in Thessaloniki and bishop and the clergy of Parthicopolis, also maybe to the wish of the ktetor Anthimus to build a basilica, compared in his inscription poetically with the beauty of the Solomon's Temple.

#### *The chancel construction and its decoration from the second building period*

The new chancel from the second period has been removed ca. 0.50 m to the west, north and south. In this way, the surface the bema is occupying has been increased. Because of this change, the new bema has stepped over the damaged by the earthquake in 425 mosaics from the first building period. This fact has lead, to the addition of a new marble border wide 0.50 m to the already existing mosaic in *opus sectile* in the apse. During the second period a *solea* and *ambo* have been built for the first time in this basilica, and the floor of the newly created *solea* also paved with almost square marble plates with side ca. 0.50 m. The *senatorium* and the *matroneum* have been also abolished. Judging by the traces on the plinthus of the *presbyterium*, there were opened new entrances to the chancel from the north and the south.

Unfortunately, the reconstructed and installed recently chancel does not respond to the original scheme and structure of the ancient builder from the second building period. The preserved pillars (colonnets), on which the screens have been installed, are the same in both periods. They are rectangular, except maybe the square ones at the angles<sup>46</sup>, with plain surfaces, ending with a half-sphere. The front surface is decorated with a Latin cross, with enlarging ends (fig. 14). In the second period with the second chancel, built after the earthquake of 425, the half-spheres have been reworked and transferred to strongly stylized

<sup>46</sup> Only one colonnette with rectangular form and a Latin cross on its plain surface survived.

bases for installing on them of the monolithic small columns, probably ending with Corinthian capitals. They supported the cornice of the so-called high chancel, typical for the period from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>47</sup>. The high chancel had probably curtains over the screens and a cornice crowning the upper colonnade.

The fragment from the corner part of the cornice is made of gray marble, from the so-called Trajan's quarries of Parthicopolis at the modern village of Ilindentsi. That proves also that the high chancel is locally made and belongs to the second period (**fig. 15**). In the corner a face of an elder man with short beard is carved, almost as round sculpture. His face is flanked from both sides by many leaves, maybe as symbol of a forest. A lamb is also depicted to the right. This symbolic representation is often to be seen in the Early Christian / Early Byzantine art, for instance in a sarcophagus from St. Peter's basilica in Rome, as the sacrifice of Christ. The male face depicts the image of some prophet, for instance Isaiah, shown in some mosaics of Ravenna<sup>48</sup>. When sculpturing his general character and the form of his lips, beard and hairstyle, the master tried to approximate the iconography of the representations from the first chancel, visibly most of all to Christ from the biggest and restored screen (No 1). The same gray local marble is used for several fragments of the screens, one of which is the wrongly installed in the left screen from the first chancel. All the new representations on the screens from the second chancel are made of this local marble, when the chancel from low one was rebuilt into high one, together with the second mosaic pavement and the added *ambo* and *solea*.

However, the old screens of the chancel from the first period have been reused and reinstalled on the new chancel in the same front places. Concerning the new plates of the second chancel, they have been placed from aside, i. e. from the north and south side to the second chancel. However, the style and the subject of the decoration from the first period have been generally preserved in the second period.

Partly preserved is the decoration of the *screen 3* from the new chancel with the possible representation of Ioannes. He is young and beardless, the hairstyle with straight locks reaching to the shoulders. He is standing and holding a high jug and a conical chalice in each hand, preparing for the Eucharist in the Last Supper (**fig. 16**). The bottom of the jug is put on his palm, while the four fingers are clasping it frontally. He is looking to the right, probably to the center of the panel. There the upper body's parts of three more probably apostles are placed, with different poses of the heads<sup>49</sup>. The first apostle after Ioannes (from left to right) is in profile, with a wanton beard and hairstyle covering the ears (**fig. 16-a**). A bearded man, also in profile but to the left and another beardless

<sup>47</sup> The creation of the new space in front of the altar, namely of the *solea*, as well as the new form and dimensions of the chancel and its architectonic, i. e. the high chancel. It is proved that in the church building in the western part of the Roman Empire it appeared already in the last decades of 4th century. See:

<sup>48</sup> J. Dresken-Weiland, *Mosaics of Ravenna: Image and Meaning*, Schnell & Steiner 2017.

<sup>49</sup> The place of installation of this screen should be on one of the back long sides, the young man should be turned in direction to the back entrance.



Fig. 16. Screen 3 from the second chancel. Preparing for the Eucharist in the Last Supper. (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 16. Плоча 3 из друге преграде. Припрема за евхаристију Тајној вечери (фото: С. Петрова)



Fig. 16-a. Screen 3 with detail from the Apostles (photo S. Petrova)

Сл. 16-а. Плоча 3, детаљи са апостолима (фото: С. Петров)

young apostle are represented to the right of him. Between the two bearded images one can see a hand pointing to the first bearded apostle, immediately presented to the vessel Ioannes is holding. The badly preserved remnants of representation over the head of the beardless apostle at the right end prompts the possible presence here of one more personage holding another high vessel with high neck similar to the jug of Ioannes. The treatment of this scene in a relatively high relief is similar to the screens from the first chancel, but made in a ruder manner.

Fig. 17. Screen 4 from the second chancel. The stibadium with The Supper at the house of Simon the Leper (reconstruction and photo S. Petrova)

Сл. 17. Плоча 4 из друге преграде. Stibadium са Вечером у кући Симона Проказаног (реконструкција и фото С. Петрова)



Fig. 17-a. Detail with Maria from screen 4 (photo S. Petrova).

Сл. 17-а. Детаљ са Маријом из плоча 4 (фото: С. Петров)



Fig. 17-b. Screen 4. Detail only with the head of Maria (photo S. Petrova)

Сл. 17-б. Плоча 4. Детаљ са Маријином главом (фото: С. Петрова)



The *screen 4* consists of four fragments from the lower part with the frame; two from the center and two from the left and right end of the composition. The longitude is 1.08 m. Thus supposing that it decorated one of the back sides either of the north or the south back entrances to the cancel. The screen has a profile frame with dimensions known from the other screens belonging to the second chancel (**fig. 17**).

The lower partly restored part of the screen, whose has maximum preserved height 0.49 m<sup>50</sup>, has at both ends two carved representations. At the left one the face of a kneeling and veiled woman is shown, with the upper part of her body clad in her mantle (**fig. 17 a-b**). Her head is almost touching the legs of a wrapped in *palium* man, half-lying and half-sitting on a *stibadium* towards the viewer. At the right lower corner another man is sculpted in a complex  $\frac{3}{4}$  pose, half-sitting and half-lying on the right end of the *stibadium*, this time with his back to the viewer. He has a short hairstyle with visible only the left ear, and is wrapped by a *palium*. His face is quite battered and erased. It can be observed only the palm and the fingers of his right (?) hand, almost horizontally represented.

After my own autopsy six more fragments can be added to the described representations of the same scene, adding to its narrative<sup>51</sup>. It concerns a picture representing a Christian feast at a *stibadium*.

Again in the right part a second man in the same complex pose is shown over the man in the lower corner. A concave groove is beginning behind the back of the man with the stretched forward hand in the lower right end of the screen. After that the groove is widening and climbing up in order to differentiate the possibly existing other scenes from the man at the hindmost part, right of the *stibadium*. His face is quite battered and erased nevertheless one can observe a well formed chin, the lips and the cheeks. The eyes are big and with marked pupils, placed in also big orbits. The hairstyle, most probably the beard too, is represented by slanting grooves. His right hand is pointing to figure next to him from the right side<sup>52</sup>. In his left hand he is holding a cone-like beaker. A massive ring is to be seen on the finger clasping the beaker in its lower narrow part. This man is leaning on his left elbow to the schematically represented *stibadium* with half-round form<sup>53</sup>. The master has incised two visible and preserved parallel lines. They show the *stibadium* in form of a wide half-round band, leaving the impression of its *non finito*, not represented in a sculptural way, but only graphically.

<sup>50</sup> See dimensions at A. Pülz, *Op. cit.*, 232, fig. 6.

<sup>51</sup> In the publication of A. Pülz (*Op. cit.*, fragment 3) two more fragments are integrated to the scene at the *stibadium*, but in reality they do not belong to it.

<sup>52</sup> Now the existence of this figure can be established by the traces of breaks over the depiction and her right hand.

<sup>53</sup> Scenes with banquets around *stibadium* are represented in reliefs and on sarcophagi in Rome: See the text above. In these monuments the form of the *stibadium* is rather half-moon-like, the surface of the *stibadium* being furrowed diagonally. The *stibadium* from the Ankara monument is also furrowed in the same way and direction, as well as in some catacomb wall paintings of this kind.



The main representation of the next man to the one with the ring is missing and only the place of the broken head remained, part of his body and his right hand placed on the end of the *stibadium*. The fourth relief of a man left of this hand and in the left part of the *stibadium* is also missing. From it only his right hand is preserved, very schematically sculpted on the *stibadium*. It should be connected with the representation of the very left lower end of the *stibadium*, namely with Christ. The whole scene should be identified with the supper six days before Passover in honor of Christ, arranged in the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany after the resurrection of Lazarus<sup>54</sup>. Maybe the relief with the latter has been carved at the right lower corner. The woman at the left corner in such case should be identified with his sister Maria who after "...taking a liter myrrh of pure and precious nard, anointed the legs of Jesus, and with her hair wiped them, and the house was filled up with the aroma of the myrrh" (John 12:1-3). This is a scene from the New Testament, attended by Christ, Lazar and his two sisters Maria and Marta, the latter serving the guests (John 12:2). Marta possibly was represented on the screen from Parthicopolis behind Christ and over the kneeling Maria. At the opposite end to Marta may be depicted a servant from the house of Simon the Leper. He should be identified with the bearded man with ring on his left hand, a sign for his higher social status. Ioannes, the beloved pupil of Christ, is supposed to be placed between Christ and Simon, but only the right hand on the *stibadium* survived from Ioannes. This scene is different from the Last Supper, because other participants take part in it, except the apostles. But identical in the Last Supper and in the Supper in the House of Simon the Leper is the composition around the *stibadium* and the place of Christ at the very left lower end of it.

The analogies in sculpture show Christ in the scenes at a *stibadium* not in the center, but at the very left end. This scene is widely spread on plates and sarcophagi already from the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century: from Ankara<sup>55</sup> (fig. 18-1), the sarcophagus of Baebia Hertofila<sup>56</sup> (fig. 18-2) and the one in Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican<sup>57</sup> (fig. 18-3). The same subject is also often met in the paintings in the Balkans – the Tomb of Tomis (Constanța, Romania)<sup>58</sup> and on many Early Christian mosaics<sup>59</sup> (fig. 18-4, 5). The closest parallel for the three figures around the *stibadium* in Parthicopolis is the relief with also three representations from Ankara. Identical is also the vessel Christ is holding and the way the hands are put on the end of the *stibadium*. The putting of the hands on the *stibadium* and the increased number of apostles-participants in the scene can be observed on the sarcophagi, wall paintings and mosaics. Even later in the 5<sup>th</sup>

<sup>54</sup> The name of the host, Simon the Leper, is told in Matthew 26:6 and Marc 14:3. In the Gospel of Luca 7:36-40 is told of him and the supper in his house mentioning the name of Simon the Pharisee.

<sup>55</sup> From the vicinity of Ankara, Turkey, Honolulu Museum of Art.

<sup>56</sup> N. Himmelmann, *Typologische untersuchungen an römischen Sarkophagreliefs des 3 und 4 Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein, 1973, 47c.

<sup>57</sup> N. Himmelmann, *Op. cit.*, Tafel 47b.

<sup>58</sup> K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet. Images of Conviviality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, Pl. XIII.

<sup>59</sup> R. G. Salinero, *Op. cit.*, 287, fig. 3.



Fig. 18. *Stibadium* representations: 1. The relief from Ankara; 2. The sarcophagus of Baebia Hertofila; 3. The sarcophagus in Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican; 4. The Tomb painting in Tomis; 5. The mosaic from the basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo.

Сл. 18. Преставе у стибadiumу: 1. Релефиз из Анкаре; 2. саркофаг Ваебиа Hertofила; 3. саркофаг у Museo Pio Cristiano у Ватикану; 4. Фреска у гробници у Томису; 5. Мозаик из базилике Sant' Apollinare Nuovo у Равени

century this subject and the same scheme are used in the Early Christian art in East and West. The representations from the second chancel in Parthicopolis are more schematic, the relief is lower, and, of course, more provincial.

Gathering together all the listed bigger parts and smaller fragments and reconstructing the scene around the *stibadium*, it became possible to count the dimensions of this screen. The general height should be about 0.80 m, equal to the other screens both from the first and the second chancel.

*Screen 5* is the only with preserved lower parts with legs. The representations on the screens both from the first and second building period of the chancel show the figures in long dresses covering and entirely hiding the lower part of their legs<sup>60</sup>. This is an essential difference in comparison to the numerous sarcophagi and the reliefs from Silivri-Kapi, in which the legs can be observed either as feet or almost to the knee and a little bit higher. To the moment the only one fragment with legs (**fig. 19**) comes from the lower right corner of a screen from basilica No 4 from the second period, still without concrete provenance in the scheme. Three lower parts of figures are represented on this fragment. The representation at the very right lower corner seems to be sitting on a chair and

<sup>60</sup> In the doubled big chancel screens with profiled borders, the latter is not carved at all on the lower horizontal part. Because of this, the folds of the dresses of the participants are reaching the very end of the screen.

Fig. 19. Screen 5 from the second chancel. Detail from the lower right part with legs.

Сл. 19. Плоча 5 из друге преграде. Детаљ доњег десног дела са ногама (фото С. Петрова)



turned to the left towards the two figures turned to him, i.e. to the right. Their feet are shown as if sunken in the frame. Their dress is a short tunic, with bare legs with the muscle of the calf formed by an arc-line incised line.

The screens from the second period when the chancel has been reworked from a low to a high one, copy to some extent and add to the subjects from the first period, by leaving the two front plates from the first chancel and sculpturing the new screens installed at the side entrances of the chancel. The difference between both chancels is expressed in many things: in the gray local marble used instead of the imported white one; in the wider frames and profiles of the screens, although keeping almost the same general dimensions of the first period (longitude and height); the slight differences in some iconographies, in the style and the treatment of the representations. In the first chancel the eyes are quite closed, with heavy upper and lower lids, the chins slightly up-tilted, and the hairstyles arranged in equal supple deep grooves. Differently, the representations made of the gray marble from the second chancel reveal their widely opened eyes, with pupils and hidden under the heavy arched eyebrows, related to the post-Theodosius I time. The hairstyles are with uneven grooves in its depth and direction, although there is effort of the sculptors to approximate the mastery of the iconography on the first chancel screens.

*On some main problems of the decoration of the first and the second chancel*

One of the main problems concerning the chancel screen decoration from Parthicopolis is the possible artistic center. In my view, these are not the sculptors from Constantinople, although it is the second center producing Early Christian sarcophagi. However, it is not in marble, which is rare<sup>61</sup>, but in lime-

<sup>61</sup> G. Koch names the limestone plates determined as Early Christian sarcophagi of Constantinople as „pseudo-sarcophagi“. See: G. Koch, *Early Christian Sarcophagi outside of Rome*. – *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*. Edited by Robin M. Jensen, Mark D. Ellison, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018, 57.

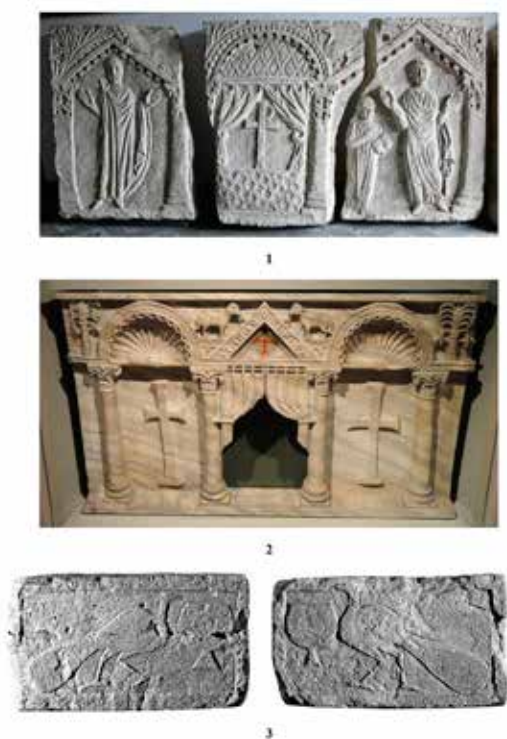


Fig. 20. The supposed front plates of chancels from:  
 1. The Hypogeum in Silivri-Kapı, Istanbul (after A. Kateusz); 2. The chancel from Ravenna, in the Cleveland Museum (after Age of Spirituality); 3. The front screens from the church in Ossenovo, near Varna/Odessos (after I. Dosseva).

Сл. 20. Претпостављени изглед преграде: 1. Хипогеум Силври-Капı, Истанбул (А. Катеуш); 2. Преграда из Равене у Cleveland Museum (Age of Spirituality); 3. Плоче са преграде црквице у Осенову, Варна / Одессос (аутор: И. Досева)

stone. At the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century the quarries on the island of Proconessos, not far from Constantinople, supply with marble predominately the new Early Christian center Ravenna. In the same period additionally many new workshops have been developed outside Rome and Italy: in the western provinces of Gallia, Spain and on the territory of contemporary Germania<sup>62</sup>. Beyond doubt, the subjects connected with the Old and the New Testament, so popular in Rome in the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>63</sup>, have been transferred to the ateliers of Ravenna and the other local ones. The white marble, the subjects, the iconography and style and the treatment of the first chancel decoration of basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis reveal its connection with the tradition of Rome and the Italian-Adriatic workshops.

The chancel screens with scenes from the Old and the New Testament from the first and the second building period / the first and the second chancel of the Episcopal basilica in Parthicopolis raise the most important problem: are they reused plates of sarcophagus / sarcophagi or in fact they have been carved especially for the first and the second chancel?

Really, the majority of biblical scenes have been represented on series of sarcophagi mostly coming from Rome and the other cities of Italy, Spain and France, and related already from the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> – the first decades of 4<sup>th</sup> till

the 6<sup>th</sup> century, for instance the sarcophagus from Marceille. But there are some essential differences between a sarcophagus's walls and the chancel screens:

1. The dimensions of the sarcophagi are more or less canonical: In comparison, the usual sarcophagus is 2.38-2.44 m long, high 0.73-1.41 m; finally with another kind of profiled borders, and inner divisions, when they exist.

<sup>62</sup> G. Koch, Op.cit., 56.

<sup>63</sup> However, at the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century Rome stopped the production of Early Christian sarcophagi and was no longer the artistic center for it. See Dresken-Weiland, Christian sarcophagi in Rome. – *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*. Edited by Robin M. Jensen, Mark D. Ellison, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018, 51.

At the same time the dimensions of a chancel screen depends on the general width of the naos; on the fact if it occupies the whole width or only part of it according to the concrete form of the chancel; on the dimensions and the number of the entrances to the chancel. The known dimensions of the chancel screens in ancient Macedonian province, Thrace and Moesia I are varying and are the following: 1.00-2.00 m.<sup>64</sup>

The chancel screens are generally less in longitude and in height in comparison to the long sides of a sarcophagus.

2. In most early Christian sarcophagi from Rome, the long sides of a sarcophagus are enlarging in a trapezoidal shape, where the extension is at the top, to the lid. The chancel screens are always rectangular, as it is in both chancels of Parthicopolis.

3. The sarcophagi have flat borders decorated with floral motifs, the inner side is straight (equal). The chancel screens have profiled sides both from outside and inside, polished also from both sides. The inside of a sarcophagus is not polished from inside or can be only rudely flattened.

4. There are common themes for many scenes from the Old and the New Testament independent on the function of the sculptural monument (sarcophagi, relics, tombs, doors, liturgical vessels etc.). This may be Pilatus washing his hands, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the scene of baptism of Christ by Ioannes; The Last Supper; Traditio legis etc. But the Supper at the house of Simon is met only in the second chancel decoration of basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis and is not to be met on sarcophagi, which means a special choice and order, and not a re-usage of a sarcophagus' long side.

On the ground of these four reasons we can look at the problem of the Early Christian chancel decoration in another way. It can't be taken as *axioma* any longer that all plates with biblical scenes originate from sarcophagi. This is a problem for the scholars studying the Early Christianity, relating the sculptural figurative decoration particularly of the chancel screen in the period 313 p. q. – up to the end of Late Antiquity. For this period it is generally considered that the round sculpture and relief were replaced by ornamental-geometric decoration and some basic symbols like the cross, the Chi-Rho, birds, vessels etc. However, the screen from Parthicopolis, as well as the plates reused in Silivri-Kapi Hypogeum in Istanbul<sup>65</sup>; one of them is supposed to be from the second St. Sofia in Constantinople<sup>66</sup> may lead to another observation when analysed in details. The opinion of the researchers so far on the screens from Parthicopolis (A. Milčeva and A. Pülz) and on plates from the Hypogeum at Silivri-Kapi (J. G. Deckers and Ü. Serdaroğlu) according to its architectonic and figurative decoration is that in them have been reused plates / sides of sarcophagi, with borders

<sup>64</sup> From Oreshe (Nicopolis ad Nestum) – A. Milčeva, *Eine frühchristliche Basilika aus dem Dorf Oreše im Gebiet von Nikopolis ad Nestum (Westrhodopen, Bulgarien)*. – (R. Harreiter et al., eds.). Acta XIV Congressus internationalis archeologiae christianae (Wien 19-26.9.1999) I. Cita del Vaticano – Wien, 2006, 527-535.

<sup>65</sup> J. G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroğlu. *Das Hypogäum beim Silivri-Kapi in Istanbul*. – Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, 36, 1993,

<sup>66</sup> A. Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women. Hidden Leadership*. London 2019, 162, Fig. 7.2.

decorated with floral motifs. In the case of the plates of Silivri-Kapi the authors do not touch the problem of the origin of its plates, only saying in their publication that “*The iconography: the cross surrounded by the triumphal wreath, the monogram of Christ, the monogram cross and the variants of these motifs are often met among the majority of symbolic representation on Late Antique sarcophagi and chancel screens*”<sup>67</sup>. Ally Kateusz also does not concern the place and the function of the relief from Istanbul, only supposing that it comes from the second St. Sofia<sup>68</sup> and belongs to a sarcophagus.

Generally, the decoration in Silivri-Kapi is typical for the Late Antique/ Early Christian/ Early Byzantine sarcophagi with biblical representations: Moses receiving the Tablets of the law<sup>69</sup>; the Sacrifice of Isaac<sup>70</sup>; scenes with oranta etc. While the plates may really originate from such sarcophagi, in my opinion the wall of the supposed by these two scholars main sarcophagus (Hauptsarkophag)<sup>71</sup> probably can be related to a chancel screen, and not to a sarcophagus. The dimensions and the architectonic arrangement of the plate itself are the ground for such statement since the dimensions, are not characteristic neither for a long nor for a short wall of a sarcophagus. Another difference with both plates with Moses and the Sacrifice of Isaac, which more surely belong to a sarcophagus, is that the long wall possesses a profiled border, traditional for the chancel screens with geometric decoration, crosses and separate figurative motifs spread in the period 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century – birds, *cantharoses* etc. It should be determined in my view as a screen of a chancel made of Proconnessian marble. There is a significant number of the known examples from Thrace and generally the Balkan lands of chancel screens and capitals decorated with a wreath or circle with inserted in it labarum/ *Chrismon* /cross<sup>72</sup>. A similar representation to the *Chrismon* from Silivri-Kapi with two flanking candlesticks and two candles is the wall painting from tomb № 4 in the Eastern necropolis of Serdica<sup>73</sup>. The candles on candlesticks are known in the Balkans from relatively early times, for instance from the tomb in Silistra dated in 350-370<sup>74</sup>. The plates on biblical subjects in the Hypogeum of Silivri-Kapi only reveal its re-usage not in the context of a church decoration, but in a secondary sepulchral context.

<sup>67</sup> G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroglu, *Op.cit.*, 155.

<sup>68</sup> Ally Kateusz, *Op. cit.* 161.

<sup>69</sup> G. Deckers, Ü. Serdaroglu, *Op.cit.*, Tafel 7-c.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, Tafel 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, Tafel 9 a, b.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 156 and note 54. For the territory of Bulgaria see more: И. Досева, *Ранновизантийските олтарни прегради в Тракия и Дакия*. – Проблеми на изкуството, 3, 2002, 9-18; И. Досева, *Конструкция и декорация на ранновизантийските олтарни прегради в контекста на църковния интериор (според паметниците от територията на съвременна България през IV-VI в.)*. – Проблеми на изкуството 3, 2005, 20-29; С. Петрова, *Архитектурната украса на раннохристиянските базилики в околностите на Никопол на Места*. – сб. Добруджа, 32, 2017, 233-252.

<sup>73</sup> Dated at the end of 4-5 c. See: R. J. Pillinger, V. Popova, B. Zimmerann, *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Wandmalereien Bulgariens*, Wien 1999, 62-64 and cit.lit.

<sup>74</sup> V. Popova, Durostorum (Silistra), - *Corpus*, 1999, 22-28 and cit.lit.

The case with the supposed long side of a sarcophagus found in 1988 near the Theodosian wall in Istanbul (Silivri-Kapi Hypogeum) is even more curious. Obviously the front side of a chancel is depicted, with the cross in the middle and the curtains partly covering the railing of the chancel. The general outline is rectangular, the *plinthus* very narrow, but the upper part crowned in a very rich and heavy way. It consists of a central half-rounded gable and two flanking triangular ones from both sides, repeated by *denticular* band from below. The three gables are supported by four columns with rich Corinthian capitals of a new type? Generally, the whole structure is unusually rich in the architectonic aspect, and treated in a very classical way as well. Not only this side of the decoration is unique, but also the two portraits of a man and woman in the poses of orante. They both are obviously of high status demonstrated by their dresses, the form of the shoes, the fibula of the man and their place flanking the altar with the cross in the center. They are interpreted by researcher of this monument Ally Kateusz as the portraits of Theodosius II and his sister Pulcheria, being his regent until his full age<sup>75</sup>. The story of Pulcheria is not less interesting than the considered wall of a sarcophagus with the representations of her and her brother, the young emperor Theodosius II. The small boy besides Pulcheria with the opened Gospel probably is helping her by reading the necessary texts in the liturgical ritual.

According to the written data, the story happened during the time Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople. He dared to stop physically and with words Pulcheria (at the age of her 15) from her habitual right to enter the altar for the liturgy, because women were not allowed to do it. He also, according to the written data, took out of the altar her portrait, which is said to be placed there. Later Nestorius was dismissed, while Pulcheria had her best years ruling instead of her brother. Finally Pulcheria however, there followed difficult years for her, when he married. At the end she also married very late, in spite of the public vow of virginity, and ruled after the death of her brother and her husband. Her merit was also in fixing finally the way the orthodox Christians should make the sign of the cross.

The opinion of Ally Kateusz about this “sarcophagus” belonging to the second St. Sofia in Istanbul relates to the period 424-428, the first year of completion of the second St. Sofia, and the second one the year of dismissing of Nestorius by the Ephessian council. The lavish architectonic structure in a rectangular format, copying a chancel, the official portraits of the imperial couple, the written sources about the events make quite possible that this was the portrait of Pulcheria under question in the altar, when Pulcheria, probably as donator together with the emperor, her brother, were represented on it. It is launched already the idea that the mosaic portraits of Justinian and Theodora and their retinue in the liturgy of San Vitale in Ravenna has followed namely this earlier tradition of Pulcheria and Theodosius II. But for a short period Nestorius stopped the development in this direction by throwing out the “por-

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<sup>75</sup> A. Kateusz, *Op.cit.*, 161-163. G. Deckers and Ü. Serdaroğlu consider the small figure of the child of the man and the woman (*Op.cit.*, 148).

trait” of Pulcheria, which means the front facade of the chancel of St. Sofia and probably ordered a new one. That would explain the “burial” and good state of preservation of the chancel screen of Pulcheria and Theodosius II.

Of course, this interpretation can be only a speculation, but even if the wall found near the Theodosian wall in Silivri-Kapi Hypogeum is a far reflection of the real chancel of the second St. Sofia and the story of Pulcheria and Nestorius, we can find in it a very essential core. It is that the figural representations, including portraits of the ruling emperor’s family, have been included on the chancel screens in the first half of 5<sup>th</sup> century only in obligatory connection with the liturgy. This connection is quite obvious in the first and second chancel of basilica No 4, almost of the same time, but not with the same iconography and the high Constantinopolitan style. The sculptors of the first chancel are Italian or artists under the Italian influence from the Western part of Illyricum. The second chancel’s masters are much more provincial and on a lower level, but copying again the Italian examples. But both samples of the court liturgical art in Constantinople and of the Roman apostolic and biblical tradition were created for the Balkan churches in one and the same period of the Theodosian dynasty in Byzantium and between the pontificates of Siricius (384-399) and Xystus Tertius (432-440) in Rome; at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> – middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century. In both of them and in the supposed chancel screen from Silivri-Kapi there were real figurative scenes (with the Pulcheria and Theodosius II taking part in the course of the liturgy) and in Parthicopolis with scenes from the Gospel and the Bible, also connected with definite texts read during the liturgy.

It is necessary to connect the limestone plates from Constantinople, some of them determined by G. Koch as “pseudo-sarcophagi”, the plates made of Proconessian or Italian marble in Ravenna, the plates with reliefs from Osenovo (**fig. 20**) and the ones from Parthicopolis with the screens which from the very beginning have been carved for the chancel and are not secondary used walls of sarcophagi. They are covered with liturgical vessels or figurative scenes representing the Communion. The specific preference of the choice of representations and the kind of stone used point to the local peculiarities of the area, the artistic center and workshops of such production. In the fifth century concerning the screens from Parthicopolis, this is Constantinople, Rome, Ravenna and the Adriatic all of them influenced to a definite extend the workshops in the Macedonia and Illyricum. A newly appeared center came into being in the Syrian provinces of the Oriens.

### *Conclusion*

The screens of the first chancel of basilica N 4 (the Episcopal one) of Parthicopolis reflect the repertory, iconography and style in the art of Rome itself on the theme of the Early Christian liturgy, Christ, the apostles and parallel to some biblical scenes. The screens of the second chancel are made of the local gray marble, repeating the scenes and the iconography of the first chancel screens. They differ by their smaller size, the schematic treatment and the quality, although reminding the iconography of the previous chancel, generally very



near or identical to the Roman production, iconography and style. Because of the bad state of the second chancel, it is impossible to find the exact place of each fragment. However, it is clear that the new screens of the second chancel have been placed from both sides of the chancel and not on its facade. The fact that the first chancel was made in a Roman workshop and the second one was local, but copying the Roman iconography and style, shows that although rare, the chancel in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Macedonia and Thrace could be covered with figurative scenes from the Bible and the Gospel. The examples of Parthicopolis, Silivri-Kapi Hypogeum, of Ravenna in Cleveland museum, of Osenovo and the chancel screen from the supposed second St. Sofia in Constantinople point to the necessity of another view on the sculptural decoration of the chancel in the lands under the Roman church administration and its influence still in 4<sup>th</sup> century in that part of Macedonia.

Many figurative monuments from Rome, Ravenna, Naples, Arles and other West Christian centers can be compared as the closest analogies, while the examples from the East have another stylistic and are very rare. We know that since the second half – end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century the Roman vicariate in Thessaloniki has great influence in this part of Macedonia in architecture, for instance in the *baptisterium* of basilica 4, copying the Lateran and similar ones. Now we see the influence of the Roman sculptural production with the cult of St. Peter and Paul on the chancel decoration of the same basilica in its two periods.

In my view, it is time to look more precisely at the arguments for a new interpretation of the chancel decoration of basilica No 4 in Parthicopolis not as reused walls from some Early Christian sarcophagi, but as real screens. The main arguments of the scholars for taking them as parts of the sarcophagi are the biblical representation and the notion that the chancel decoration in the West and East in the fifth century is already non-figurative. The previous sculptural representations of the apostles and Christ in the scenes of the New Testament from the 4<sup>th</sup> century disappeared and were replaced by mosaics, wall paintings and relief decoration on the reliquaries, chalices and other liturgical objects and official ivories. It seems that in the case we assume the Parthicopolis' chancels as anachronism, we can find the reason of its appearance in the constituting of the vicariate of the Roman church in Thessaloniki and the revival of the previous repertory of the glorious Constantine period. Also archaism is the gestures of *oranta* in the screens of the first chancel and the copying of the iconography of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when it is considered that the saints became a dominant theme instead of the apostles.

However, except the general tendency in the 5<sup>th</sup> century the chancel to be covered with non-figurative motifs, only with symbols, there have been restored the sculptural tradition of showing figurative scenes in round sculpture and reliefs. In that aspect we should remember the golden representation of Christ baptized by Ioannes in the earliest baptisterium of the Lateran basilica and also the several fountains in the court of St. Peter in Rome with round sculpture and reliefs. Maybe there were more examples of the figurative decoration in sculpture in Rome and generally in Italy, but they did not survive and have been replaced by the next symbolic decoration, and the sculpture remained figurative only in sarcophagi. It is quite possible that namely the latter can witness the

forgotten second trend of figurative chancel decoration in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century. The period of Theodosian dynasty seems to support this kind of decoration, including the imperial portraits as donators, always connected with the liturgical ritual. The choice of appropriate images and scenes connected with the liturgy for the chancel reliefs is also quite obvious in the examples from Rome and all the workshops, producing chancel screens and Early Christian sarcophagi in Western and Central Europe and in the parts of Illyricum under the rule of the Roman pope and the *vicarious* of Thessaloniki.

From the end of the Theodosian dynasty's rule in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> century and till that of Justinian, the sculptural figurative decoration of the chancel has really disappeared. But the tradition of figurative decoration with liturgical scenes was continued by the art of Justinian and Theodora in the wall mosaics, remaining as sculptural only on some ambo decoration, liturgical vessels, doors, relics and regalia in precious metals and ivory. The figurative sculptural decoration almost disappears from the chancel screen and in the case of Parthicopolis is rather the last episode of its revival in the fifth century. The Episcopal basilica and its chancel barrier have been destroyed during the invasions of the Avars and the Slavs in 577/578. The remains, still standing after these events, have been finally demolished to the ground by the big earthquake at the end of 6<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> century.

*Светла Петрова*

(Археолошки музеј Сандански)

ПЛОЧЕ СА ОЛТАРНЕ ПРЕГРАДЕ ЕПИСКОПСКЕ БАЗИЛИКЕ (БР. 4)  
У ПАРТИКОПОЛИСУ/БУГАРСКА (ПЛЕНИМИНАРНЕ ОПСЕРВАЦИЈЕ)

Неки од фрагмената плоча откривених током археолошке студије истражени су, и предложено је да су упитању делови саркофага. Место где су откривени, близу апсиде Епископске базилике, као и постојање две различите структуре мермера од којих су израђене плоче, указују на то да су то плоче са олтарне преграде, а не делови саркофага. Дефинисана су два периода - први са плочама од белог мермера, када је облик канцела прав, са улазом са запада. Други период олтарне преграде припада првој четвртини 5 века, након земљотреса. Промењена је форма у облику слова „П“ додавањем нових плоча од сивог мермера; додају се нови улази на северној и јужној страни. У првом периоду канцел је низак, а у другом периоду такозвани високи канцел. Представе на плочама (*plutei*) из оба периода имају призоре из Старог и Новог завета - жртву Исакову, Евхаристију, и још много тога. Плоче са нижег канцела израђене су у италијанским атељеу под утицајем Рима. Плоче из другог периода рађене су у локалним атељеу, чувајући начин израде, иконографију и видљиво понављајући неке сегменте из првог периода. Цео епископски комплекс заједно са градом, замро је после велике аварско-словенске инвазије током 577/578. године. Остаци комплекса заједно са градом коначно су уништени великим земљотресом крајем 6 и почетком 7. века.