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**THE ICONOGRAPHIC AND STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT
OF THE EUCHARISTIC IMAGES IN THE FLOOR
MOSAICS ON THE BALKANS DURING THE EARLY
CHRISTIANITY**

Abstract: The Early Christian period in the Balkans is saturated with profound social, economic and political changes that change the culture of society. This naturally reflects on the Early Christian art system, in the choice of certain Eucharistic scenes, motifs and individual images in the mosaic decoration, in the stylistic characteristics of the mosaic compositions, as well as in their gradual semantic connection with theological Christian concepts.

Keywords: *Early Christian art*, Early Christianity, Balkans, Eucharist, Christian temples, floor mosaics, Fountain of Life

Introduction

The Early Christian art, manifested in the mosaic floor decoration of the basilicas of the Balkans took place in a short period of about three centuries, between 313 and the end of the VI-beginning of the VII century. But this period is full of profound social, economic and political changes that have had a direct impact and change the culture of society. This naturally reflects on the Early Christian art system, on the choice of certain Eucharistic scenes, motifs and individual images in the mosaic decoration, in the stylistic characteristics of the mosaic compositions, as well as in their obligatory semantic connection with theological Christian concepts.

*The Iconographic and stylistic development and distribution
of single images and scenes in the period 313-379.*

The beginning of the period, covering 313-379, is characterized by a strong influence of the Late Antique art, which is expressed mainly in the figural scenes and motifs used, but also in the inherited ornamental-geometric schemes¹.

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Fig. 1. Augusta Trayana, private home, tablinum, mosaic - fragment (foto: A. Mihailov)

Сл. 1 Аугуста Трајана, приватна кућа, таблинум, мозаик - фрагмент
(фото: А. Михаилов)

The style of mosaics from the early decades of this period goes through several periods: the rough Tetrarchy, followed by the classic illusionistic style of the time of Constantine the Great as emperor, sometimes reaching even very expressive verism, modulating images and figures following ancient illusionist principles. It is manifested mainly in the decoration of Christian temples and other religious buildings (Constantinople, Philippopolis, Marcianopolis, Serdica, Stobi, Thessaloniki, etc.), but also in the representative residences to them and in the private homes (Augusta Trayana, Stobi, Heraclea Linkestis, Philippi, Athens, Delphi, etc.). The new is in the entering different figurative meaning of the motives and in their selection, which intensifies with the affirmation of the Christian religion². There is a growing duality, as behind the ancient illusion lies and intensifies the transformed semantics of a conditional image, which will become typical of the Middle Ages. There are mosaics from this period in the basilicas in Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Philippi, Serdica, Mediana, Ulpiana and others.

The mosaic decoration from the first decade of the IV century belongs to the Tetrarch mosaic style³. Different schemes, spectacular optical motifs, pronounced color treatment, complex compositional solutions, a variety of geometric elements, as well as a combination of pagan and christian figurative images⁴ (Augusta Trayana, Constantinople) are used. A new solution to the concept of

¹ V. Popova, *Vons vitae in Late Antique monuments from Bulgaria*, *Studia academica šumenensia* 3 (Shumen 2016), 159-160.

² J. Elsner, *Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art*. *The Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (Oxford 2003), 119.

³ V. Popova, *Monuments from the Tetrarchy and the Reign of the Constantinian Dynasty in Bulgaria*, *Niš i Vizantija XIV (Niš 2016a)*, 155-186.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, 170-171.

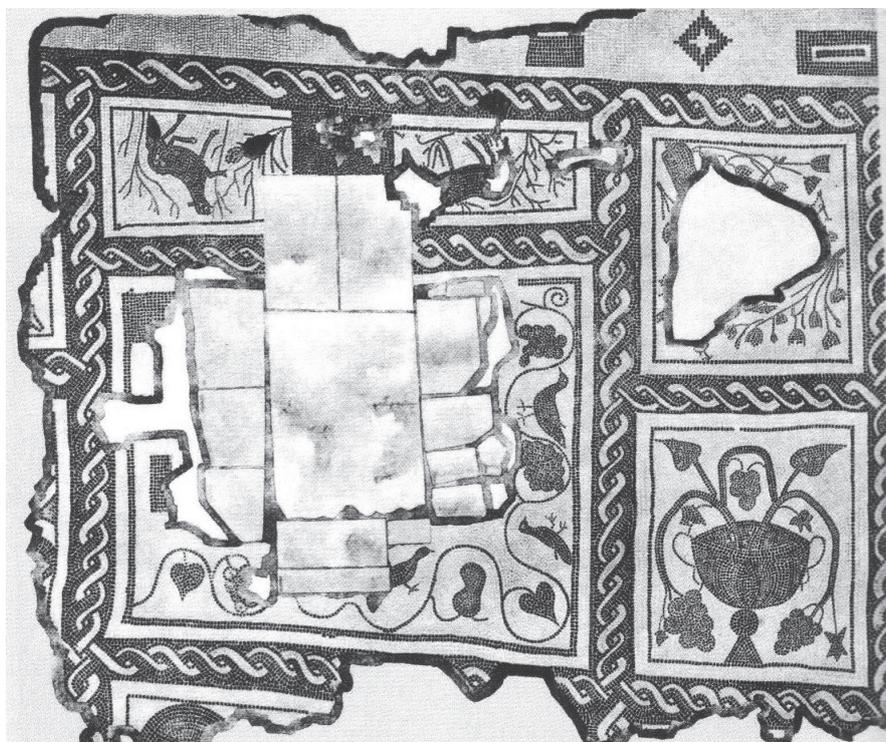


Fig. 2. Serdica, martyrium, early mosaic – scheme (after S. I. Poczovsky)

Сл. 2 Сердика, мартријум, рани мозаик - шема (по С. И. Поцровском)

„mosaic carpet“ appears - very concentrated, enriched and dynamic, which reaches its maturity under the Constantine dynasty. The figural compositions of the last period are balanced, classic in form and complexity, in which a large number of geometric, floral and zoomorphic images are used. There are preferred schemes, for example the orthogonal scheme of hexagons, squares or octogons, or many different schemes used in the same composition (Thessaloniki, Philippi). The color becomes more sophisticated and complex (double and even triple color outlines in the same shape), and the white color almost disappears from the background⁵.

Of course, not all mosaic ornaments from the Tetrarchy have the organicity, balance and high artistic performance of the capital's studios. For this reason, the mosaics from the Tetrarchy mosaic style are not homogeneous. They range from early compositions in which the optical motifs are overshadowed by rudeness and bright colors (Spalato), to impressionist compositions with a complex

⁵ R. Kolarik, *Tetrarchic Floor Mosaics in the Balkans*, La Mosaïque Gréco-romaine IV (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1994), 171-183.



Fig. 3. Philippi, basilica of St. Paul, mosaic – fragment (foto: Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 3 Филипи, базилика Св. Павла, мозаик - фрагменат (фото: Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

decorative program (the residence of the Gallery in Serdica) and the concept of „mosaic carpet“, with its abundance of motifs and changing color background (residence in Romuliana)⁶.

The transition to the epoch of the Constantine dynasty is associated with the palace life and imperial taste, which also changed the requirements in all areas of art, including mosaic. This is a the time when mosaic schemes became more complex, balanced and classic⁷. The eschatological ideas of the Early Christianity are increasingly entering the mosaic decoration, but the ancient influences are also visible, which is a good basis for experiments and development in artistic and ideological aspect. It should be noted that this transition is not smooth, but rather sharply transformed through new artistic trends, which speaks of the will and intervention of the emperor himself to change the style and artistic interpretation of the images. The imposition of high artistic requirements runs in parallel with the development of liturgical practice, thus

the mosaic decoration is in semantic connection with the theological ideas of the epoch. This period is characterized by a rich iconographic repertoire, great technical mastery and development of the Eucharistic plots, which from the mosaic studios in the capital also influenced the art of the Balkans (Philippi, Serdica).

In the art from the Valentinian epoch, whose example are the early mosaics of Martyrium under the basilica of St. Sofia in Serdika⁸, the images are treated in a hieratic style, and the non-figurative elements are non-classical - rough, enlarged and disproportionate⁹. But gradually this rudeness in form-building disappears, being replaced by a new tendency characteristic of the Theodosian age.

The iconographic program of the Eucharistic scenes also undergoes significant development and change. The scene Source of Life is most often used in the floor mosaic decoration of the Balkans. At the beginning of the IV century

⁶ V. Popova, 2016a, 160-177.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, 170-171.

⁸ V. Popova, *The Martyrium under the Basilica St. Sofia in Serdica and its Mosaics*, Niš and Byzantium XIII (Niš 2015), 131-150.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 133-134.



Fig. 4. Augusta Trayana, residence under the Post Office, mosaic (foto: RHM Stara Zagora)

Сл. 4 Аугуста Трајана, резиденција испод поште, мозаик (фото: РХМ Стара Загора)

the Source was presented in large panels as a main theme in the mosaic decoration (Augusta Trayana, Philippi). Also, the scene is often part of cosmogonic schemes showing a complete or partial picture of the Christian world and what God created on the 5th and 7th day of Genesis (Augusta Trayana, Philippi). During this period, pagan symbols and images were used in parallel with christian ones. For example, the tablinum of a private home in Augusta Trayana depicts nereids, vessels of wine and the Source of Life. Gradually, at a later stage, the reduction of the used figures begins, until their complete ignoring, when the geometric-ornamental mosaics replace almost entirely the figural compositions, but this is more typical for the next period.

With regard to other images related to the Eucharist, we must also note the presence of the cross and Chrism (Median, Pautalia, Stobi). The Chrism has a predominance as it is additionally connected with the person of Constantine I. These images are always placed in front of both the chancel and the altar¹⁰. This

¹⁰ V. Popova, *Liturgy and Mosaics: The Case Study of the Late Antique Monuments from Bulgaria*, Nis i Vizantija XVI (Niš 2018), 148.



Fig. 5. Marcianopolis, Episcopal basilica, nave, mosaic - fragment (foto: G. Toncheva)

Сл. 5
Марцианополис,
Епископска базилика,
брод, мозаик -
фрагмент (фото: Г.
Тончева)



Fig. 6. Nicopolis ad Nestum, basilica № 2, central nave, mosaic (foto: K. Shestakov)

Сл. 6 Никополис ад
Нестум, базилика бр.
2, централни брод,
мозаик (фото: К.
Шестаков)

once again determines that the inclusion of the most important Early Christian symbols in the decorative decoration of temples is established at the very beginning of the adoption of Christianity as an equal religion.

During this first period, the mosaic art in the cult Christian buildings underwent significant changes in the style and iconography, which was due to the search in the artistic aspect, based mainly on the development and establishment of liturgical practice throughout the empire. In this way, the mosaic decoration serves as an illustration of the connection between the mosaics and the liturgy, as this connection can be expressed in different ways and has a different essence¹¹. For example, the mosaics support and allow the performance of the liturgy through their rhythm, composition, color and individual accents

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, 137-138.



Fig. 7. Odessos, Episcopal basilica, central nave, mosaic - reconstruction (foto: M. Perseng)
Сл. 7 Одеса, епископска базилика, централни брод, мозаик - реконструкција (фото: М. Персенг)

in the key places of the liturgical space. Of course, the mosaic decoration is not always directly related to the liturgy, sometimes it is only a background for the ritual actions, but the mystical nature of the images also supports the spiritual messages of the liturgy. However, in most cases the figural motifs and scenes are the visible symbol or literal repetition of a certain liturgical action. These examples confirm that from this first period the perception of art as an image-mystical projection of God's sacraments is directly manifested in the mosaic as art, inextricably linked with the rest of the artistic decoration and with the whole architectural complex of the Early Christian basilica.

Development and location of the images and scenes with a Eucharistic theme from the epoch of the Theodosian dynasty (379-450).

In artistic terms, the end of the IV century is characterized by changes in style, defining the Theodosian epoch¹². The figural motifs started to get lost, to their complete absence, as the geometric-ornamental compositions became extremely complex and rich. This is due to the development of theological concepts regarding the image and the desire to avoid Pagan reminiscences in art. This also determines the directions in mosaic art, in which geometric elements gradually take precedence over figurative images. For this reason, geometric-ornamental compositions are present in the decoration of Christian religious buildings throughout the Balkans (Thessaloniki, Philippi, Dion, Philippopolis, Zaldapa, Maroneya).

¹² V. Popova, 2016a, 171.

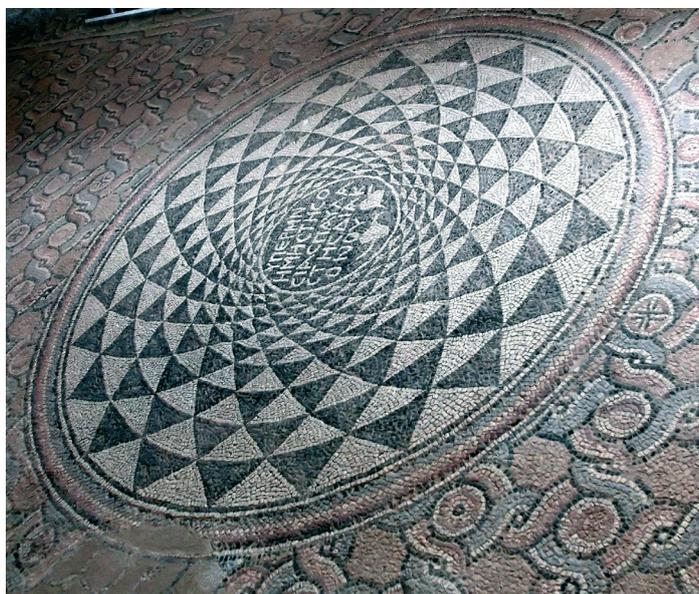


Fig. 8.
Lychnidos,
Episcopal
basilica, diaconicon, mosaic
– fragment (foto:
M. Perseng)

Сл. 8
Лихнидос,
Епископска
базилика,
ђаконикон,
мозаик -
фрагмент
(фото: М.
Персенг)

An example of mosaic decoration in the epoch of Theodosius, in which figural motifs are used in parallel with geometric elements, is the mosaic decoration of the residence under the Post Office in Augusta Trayana. The figurative images are stylized, with clearly and precisely constructed volumes, and the style in which the mosaic is made is the so-called „rainbow style“¹³. There are similar examples in the basilicas of Philippi, Dion and Thessalonica.

The artistic concept of gradual elimination of figurative images, to their complete absence, reaches its apogee in one of the styles without figurative images or with their limited presence. This is the puristic style, which is a new phenomenon in the development of mosaic art and part of the non-figurative trend of the Late Antiquity, when the illusionist system was abandoned, borrowed from Ancient art¹⁴. The main dominant schemes are: the octagonal, orthogonal and circular system (the Episcopal basilica of Marcianopolis, the Episcopal basilica of Zaldapa, the Episcopal basilica of Philippopolis from the second construction period, basilica № 2 of Nicopolis ad Nestum, basilica № 1 of Kabile). Attention is focused on the rhythm due to the change of individual elements and colors, which is why this style is ideal for concentrating on the liturgical actions of the bishop and his clergy¹⁵.

The puristic style went through several stages of development - while at first the figural images were completely ignored (the Episcopal Basilica of Marcianopolis), 20 years later they were reintroduced, albeit only in key places

¹³ V. Popova, A. Lirsch, *Corpus of Late Antique and Early Christian Mosaics in Bulgaria* (Verlag der ÖAW 2010), 9.

¹⁴ For this style See V. Popova, 2019, 105-109; В. Попова, 2011, 295; В. Попова-Мороз, 1997, 11.

¹⁵ V. Popova, 2018, 140-141.

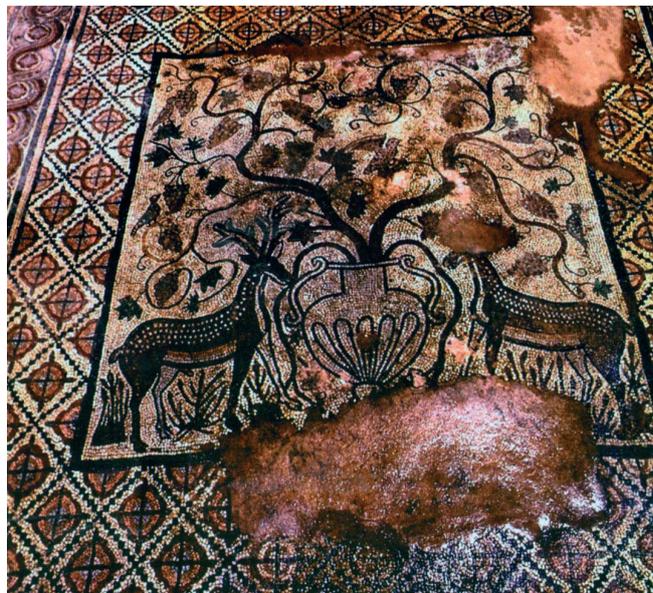
Fig. 9. Oraiokastro, suburban vila, triclinium, mosaic – fragment (foto: П. Аσημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 9 Ораиокастро, приградска вила, триклинијум, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: П. Асимакопулу-Атзака)



Fig. 10. Арапуа (near Durres), early christian basilica, chapel, mosaic (foto: S. Hidri)

Сл. 10 Арапија (близу Драча), ранохришћанска базилика, капела, мозаик (фото: С. Хидри)



in and around the chancel, and along the axes of movement of the clergy. The figurative representations include ancient vessels - cantaros, chalices and amphorae, and in the case of the basilica of Kabile they are not in the nave, but in the narthex due to the supposed path of the deacons carrying the necessary vessels. It should be noted that the puristic style is observed mainly in the mosaic monuments in Thrace, Hemimont, Rhodope, Europe and Moesia II, and only in the Balkans figural inclusions disappear completely (Marcinopolis, Zaldapa).

Taking into account the development of theological thought, geometric-ornamental compositions are used in the art decoration of temples throughout the empire and remained until the end of the period under consideration. These



Fig. 11. Pula, basilica of St. Maria Formosa, south nave, mosaic (foto: Ž. Ujčić)

Сл. 11 Пула, базилика св. Марија Формоза, јужни брод, мозаик (фото: Ж. Ујчић)

new directions in the stylistic and iconographic construction of the mosaic decoration during this period also reflected on the figural images, which gradually began to be introduced again. In the aniconic mosaics from the time of Theodosius I, the Source of Life and the Vine are only separate figural images against the background of a geometric-ornamental composition¹⁶.

It should be emphasized that once the figural repertoire is reintroduced, in most cases these scenes are lost, „sunk“ between the other images. This new artistic approach to modeling, depicting and interpreting images shows the final abandonment of the previous illusionist system, borrowed from Antiquity, which led to the creation of a new type of floor compositions. In them the figural motifs are presented in separate panels or in a composition, without a frame between them (the Euphrasian basilica of Porentos, the basilica of Dion, the basilica of Salona, basilica № 7 in Pautalia, the basilica on Jambaz Tepe of Philippopolis). In this way, the main stage, which carries the Eucharistic messages, disintegrates into separate images (Philippopolis, Heraclea, Pautalia), and in one decoration can be present vessels with wine or water, a peacock, a Source of Life, a Vine, etc.

The traced mosaic compositions show that the artistic and aesthetic directions in mosaic art at the end of this period passed into the elegant and extremely artistic style of the Theodosian dynasty, called *fine*¹⁷. Before reaching it, however, it should be noted that the mosaic art of the early Theodosius I differed from the fine style in the palette and was closer to the Valentinians and the

¹⁶ Eadem, 2016, 148.

¹⁷ V. Popova, 2019, 109.



Fig. 12. Heraclea Lyncestis, Episcopal basilica, nartex, mosaic - fragment (foto: M. Perseng)

Сл. 12 Хераклеа Линкестис, Епископска базилика, нартекс, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: М. Персенг)

period of Constantine I, indicating that it first passed through the influence of previous periods, and a little later acquires the typical and sophisticated style in its palette. Examples of this fine style are the mosaic monuments from the basilica of Sirmium, the basilica of Heraclea, the Episcopal basilica of Philippopolis, the suburban villa of Oreokastro and others.

The establishment of orthodox Christianity as the only official religion in the empire during the reign of Theodosius the Great naturally reflected in the mosaic decoration, in the motifs and scenes used, as well as in their location in the basilicas. The development of new artistic principles can be compared to a large extent with the resolute rejection and prohibition of Pagan cults. In this way, after the gradual return of the figural motifs in the iconographic programs, they acquire an increasingly pure, symbolic character. The images are reduced in an artistic aspect in order to elevate to apotheosis the symbolic presence of God in them. Overcoming Pagan cults, however, does not bring with it the unity of the church. The Monophysite and other teachings, especially Arianism, which were condemned by the Council of Nicea, continued to spread, especially in the Balkans¹⁸. The influence of Arianism on artistic decoration also affects mosaic decoration. An example of this is the mosaic monument from Storgozia.

¹⁸ И. Божилев, *Византијският свят*, София 2008, 218.



Fig. 13. Thebes, building with an unidentified function, mosaic - fragment (foto: Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 13 Теба, зграда са неидентификованом функцијом, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: П. Асимакопулу-Атзака)

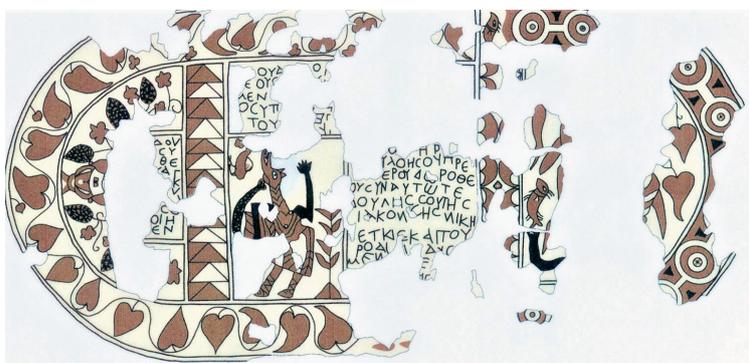


Fig. 14. Antigoneia, early christian basilica, mosaic - scheme (after Dh. Dhamo)

Сл. 14 Антигонеја, ранохришћанска базилика, мозаик - шема

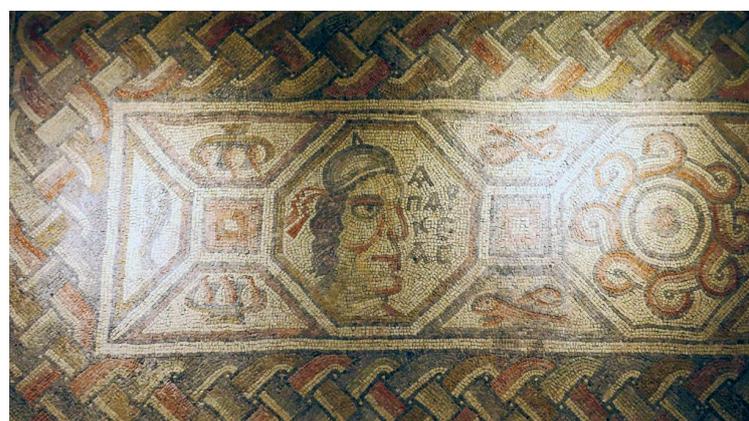


Fig. 15. Mesaplik, early christian basilica, north nave, mosaic - fragment (foto: E. Polimeri)

Сл. 15 Месаплик, ранохришћанска базилика, северни брод, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: Е. Полимери)

In front of the chancel is a composition in which the Chrism is present, repeated four (or even five) times to the mosaic inscription of Psalm 42. The Chrism, respectively the cross, as the main Christian symbols, is avoided to be placed on the floor, with small exceptions, such as here. There may be various reasons

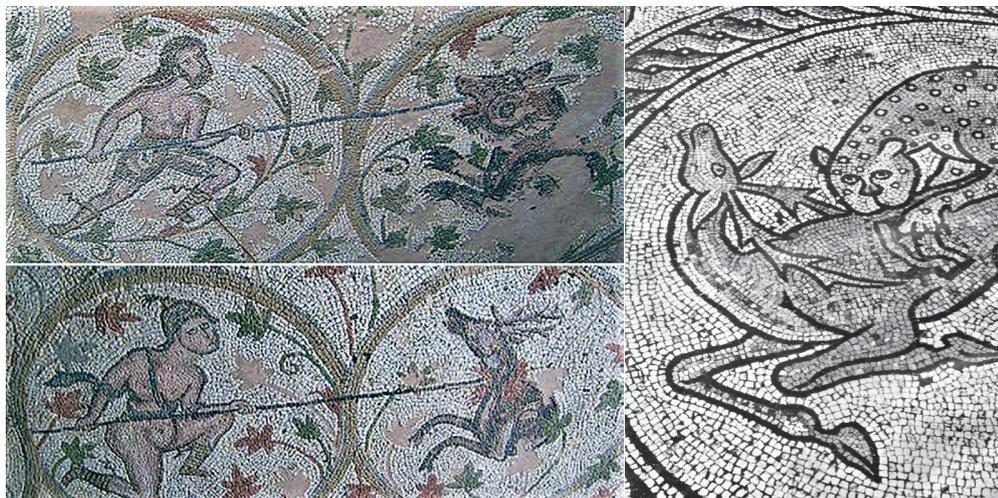


Fig. 16. Nicopolis, basilica A, transept, mosaic - fragment
(foto: E. Kitzinger)

Сл. 16 Никополис, базилика А, трансепт, мозаик -
фрагмент (фото: Е. Китзингер)

Fig. 17. Delphi, early christian basilica,
nave, mosaic - fragment (foto: Π.
Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 17 Делфи, ранохришћанска
базилика, наос, мозаик - фрагмент
(фото: Π. Асимакопулу-Атзака)

for placing the Christogram on the floor, but in this case it is most likely under the influence of Arianism as it has been established in the area that the Goth-federates have settlements¹⁹.

As we have mentioned, the axes of the liturgical movement in relation to the chancel are also emphasized by the mosaic decoration. In mosaics with a predominant geometric-ornamental essence, such as the mosaic in the basilica № 1B of Kabile, the main axes of movement of the clergy in the process itself are emphasized by the scheme, composition, rhythm, palette and individual accents. They support and assist in the perform of the Holy Eucharist²⁰. In a formal aspect, the mosaic decoration serves as an artistic background associated with the mysterious spirit in the basilica during the sacrament, and the figurative inclusions (cantaros, amphora) are the visible symbol of the Sacrament. In the mosaic under consideration, the vessels are placed in the narthex, which can be connected with the actions of the deacons bringing the vessels into the chancel, with a kind of reminder and preparation for the expected Holy Communion, which will take place in the sacred space of the altar. Other similar examples are the basilica of Democrat of Demetrias, the basilica of Paleochora in Maroneia, the basilica of Veriya and others.

The connection between the mosaic decoration and the liturgical action is categorically confirmed by the mentioned examples. In addition, they show that during the epoch of the Theodosian dynasty the liturgy itself became more

¹⁹ V. Popova, 2016, 150.

²⁰ V. Popova, 2018, 141-142.



Fig. 18. Pautalia, basilica № 7, apse, mosaic - fragment (foto: P. Popov)

Сл. 18 Пауталија, базилика бр. 7, апсида, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: П. Попов)

complicated, which reflected in the compositional construction of the mosaics. It should be noted that the end of the reign of Theodosius I in political plan was marked by the final division of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires²¹. At first, this decision was not decisively reflected in the mosaic decoration, but over time the stylistic differences intensified and the influences in them were established much more categorically. This is evident both in the stylistic features and in the figural scenes and motifs used. However, the main feature of the mosaic decoration in Christian religious buildings is that they finally acquire stylistic and compositional characteristics, fully adapted to Christian theology²².

The changes from the second half of the 5th century until the coronation of Justinian I in 527.

This period was marked by extremely many military conflicts, internal strife and barbarian invasions²³. All these riots also affect the art decoration of the basilicas, the choice of themes and individual elements in the iconographic programs. This is especially characteristic of the reign of Zeno, when the end of the Western Roman Empire, due to its conquest by Odoacer, who in 476 was proclaimed king of Italy²⁴. The end of the period, during the reign of Anastasius I, was also marked by political crises, which also affected the church life. The support of the emperor of the monophysites himself led to clashes and even a revolt in Constantinople²⁵. All these riots also affect the artistic decoration of the basilicas, the choice of themes and individual elements in the iconographic programs.

²¹ Theodosius the Great divided the empire through a political-administrative decision, which divided power between his two sons - Arkady and Honorius. See И. Божилов, 2008, 62-63.

²² V. Порова, 2016, 169.

²³ И. Божилов, 2008, 134.

²⁴ H.-W. Haussig, *A History of Byzantine Civilization* (Thames & Hudson 1971), 73-74.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, 96.



Fig. 19. Butrotum, baptistery, mosaic - fragment (foto: S. Muçaj)

Сл. 19 Бутрум, крстионица, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: С. Муцај)

The established iconographic programs of the Source of Life, the Vine and the vessels with wine or water continue to be used, but there is an increasing complication of the scenes (the Episcopal basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis, the basilica of Scampa). The plots of mixed type - Source and Vine (Aretusa, Arapya) appear more often, as well as the participation of many additional figures in them - smaller birds and animals, architectural liturgical elements and others (Octisi, Argos, Scampa). In this way, the mosaic decoration acts as a symphony of images, in which the main images directly related to the Eucharist are supported by additional scenes and motifs, which also speaks of the complication of the liturgical process. In addition to the peacock, more intricate motifs and scenes are included, such as birds flanking a fruit basket or a plant motif. An image of two birds flanking a fruit basket is present in the mosaic decoration of the basilica of St. Maria Formosa in Pula, and birds around a plant motif - a twig, a flower, etc. - are presented in the Episcopal basilica of Particopolis; the basilica № 1 of Nicopolis ad Nestum; a building with an unidentified function in Corinth; the Episcopal basilica of Mikrevo and others.

The iconographic program also includes hunting scenes, which have their prototype in the Ancient art system, where the triumph of the strong over the weak and the role of the aristocracy as an arbiter strengthen the position of the elite in Late Antique society²⁶. In the context of Christian values, these scenes are transformed into the cyclical concept of seasons and the time in Christianity.

²⁶ Similar scenes are presented in the mosaic decoration of the Falcon's Villa in Argos. See G. Åkerström-Hougen, *The Calendar and Hunting mosaics of the Villa of the Falconer in Argos. A Study in Early Byzantine iconography* (Athen 1974), 122, No. 3.



Fig. 20. Delphi, early christian basilica, central nave, mosaic – fragment (foto: Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 20 Делфи, ранохришћанска базилика, централни брод, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: Π. Асимакопулу-Атзака)



Fig. 21. Molai, early christian basilica, central nave, mosaic – fragment (foto: Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά)

Сл. 21 Молаи, ранохришћанска базилика, централни брод, мозаик - фрагмент (фото: Π. Асимакопулу-Атзака)

According to some interpretations, they are a symbol of the inevitable and predestined collision, in which one animal (deer, bull, etc.) creates an allusion to sacrifice, to the necessary sacrifice in the name of God, and the other animal that attacks (lion, dog, etc.), is a symbol of the destructive forces of death²⁷. The sublimated picture represents the struggle of the Life and Death, the Sacrifice and the Resurrection desire, the sacrifice necessary for the Salvation of the soul, but above all this scene, of deadly conflict, is the personification of the Resurrection, using the pre-Christian symbolic meaning of sacrifice²⁸. Such plots are present in the basilica of Hermione; in a building with an unidentified function in Thebes; in the Episcopal basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis and others.

In the mosaic decoration of this period, an increasing influence of frescoes and wall mosaics from Italy began to be noticed. An example of this is the mosaic decoration of the chapel of Arapyra. The scene presents a Shepherd and a flock in a pastoral landscape, which has similar iconographic features to the well-known Good Shepherd scene. This image is present in many Christian tombs and catacombs near Thessaloniki, undergoing many transformations, defined and related to the texts of the Old and New Testaments. The main difference with the monument from Arapyra is in the specific images of the shepherd, as well as in the accompanying figurative images. It is the iconographic features that determine that the composition of the monument in Arapyra does not represent the Good Shepherd, but a biblical story, probably described in the Old Testament. The symbolism of the Eucharist is also emphasized by the scene Source of Life, but the whole picture must be interpreted in sync. In this way

²⁷ G. Champeaux, *Introduction Au Monde Des Symboles* (Zodiaque 1966), 42-43.

²⁸ G. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford 1971), 22.

the specific liturgical function of the mosaic decoration will be determined, as well as the symbolic messages it carries. It should be noted that the stage is not placed around the chancel, but in the chapel of the basilica, which means the performance of liturgical activities in this part of the temple.

Tracing the mosaic decoration from that time, it is impressive that the geometric-ornamental mosaic compositions with separate figural inclusions (the basilica of Janavara in Odessos, the Episcopal basilica of Stobi) are used in parallel with compositions with predominance of the figural motifs in them (Episcopal basilica of Philippopolis, basilica B of Bilis, the Episcopal basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis). Above all, the figural motifs finally return to the mosaic compositions, developing both in stylistic-iconographic and semantic aspect. For example, the mosaic decoration in the Episcopal basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis shows how the Fountain of Life scene, which was initially housed in the chancel or next to its barrier, is in this case represented in the exonarthex, and is even multiplied. This is an indicator of the change in the performance of the Eucharistic sacrament, which in turn affects the type, size and place of the symbolic images associated with it. In addition, the mosaic decoration has a magnificent and extremely rich iconographic program, which contains images conveyed picturesquely, with rich color construction, with dense volume and proportional shapes. The classical symmetrical distribution of the mosaic schemes and their figurative fillings, as well as the high level of interpretation and execution are examples of the influence of the Constantinople artistic circle²⁹. The images in the mosaic decoration of the Episcopal Basilica in Philippopolis are treated in the same way³⁰. In contrast, mosaics with lower artistic qualities are also observed, in which the figural motifs are constructed schematically, even disproportionately (Lin, Antigonea, Mesaplik). This process is normal, given the large territory of the empire, as well as the mastery of the individual studios, as those with great artistic achievements work in the main administrative and ecclesiastical centers.

Images of the Cross and the Chrism continue to be found during this period, although not often. For example, in the apse of the basilica in Mikrevo depicts Chrism, and its placement there probably reflects the time when it was not yet forbidden, as an exception to this rule or an anachronism.

The mosaic monuments in the basilicas of Scampa, Antigonea and Mesaplik have intricate and unusual iconographic programs. The additional figural motifs in the composition in Scampa, in addition to Psalm 42, are also related to Psalm 104, which also speaks of the complication of the liturgical process³¹. The basilica of Antigonea presents an elliptical mosaic composition,

²⁹ E. Dimitrova, *In Throught the Inner Door (The Mosaic in the Narthex of the Large Basilica in Heraclea Lyncestis*, Niš and Byzantium IV (Niš 2006), 182-183.

³⁰ R. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova., *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens* (Wien 2016), 227-238.

³¹ Between the leaves are various birds pecking at the grapes, and above the vessel is a waterfowl and a rabbit eating grapes. Two human figures - a man and a woman, flank the chalice. The man is wearing a white long-sleeved tunic tied with a red belt, holding a grapes in his right hand and a towel in his left. The woman on the right is wearing a white dress and is also picking grapes.

divided into three panels - rectangular central and two semicircular at the ends. The two sides represent the Source of Life and the Creations of the Ocean, and in the center is a figural scene without an analogue so far - a human figure with the head of a dog and a large snake around it³². According to M. Zeko, this is St. Christopher, who caught a snake with one hand and swung to strike it with the other. The plot can be interpreted in a more general sense, such as the struggle between the good and evil, the faith and temptation and others. Another anthropomorphic image is presented in the basilica of Mesaplik. It depicts a man in profile, with hair falling freely to his shoulders, tied with a red ribbon, and on his head with a helmet. On the right is an inscription in Latin - APAKEAS³³. Various assumptions are given to identify the image that connect it with: the personification of the North wind; the god Abraxas, revered by the Jewish community; the builder of the basilica; monk and others³⁴. Above all, however, these anthropomorphic images show the influence of artistic trends coming from Northern Italy on mosaic art in the provinces of the Western Balkans. Although stylistically, the mosaic decoration of Antigonea differs from these influences in that it is extremely schematic, formalized, with reduced volumes, disproportionate and even rough. Therefore, we can specify the dating of the mosaic decoration of this monument and date it rather to the end of VI - beginning of VII century.

As we have repeatedly emphasized, mosaic decoration is a reflection mainly of the liturgy during the period in which it is traced. During this period, in addition to mosaic decoration, which is built symmetrically and clearly establishes the axes of movement, in some basilicas in the decoration there are a variety of motifs and scenes, placed strictly thoughtfully in the interior. This speaks of a change in the movement during the performance of the liturgical rite. Apart from the central and lateral axes (basilica E of Bilis, the Episcopal basilica of Philippopolis, the Southern basilica of Farosa), the basilicas from this period also have an asymmetrical one, which is not reflected in the layout of the basilica, but only in the mosaic decoration (the basilica on Tirsos of Tegea, the basilica of Antigonea).

These iconographically and stylistically diverse examples show the exceptional variety of techniques, interpretation, construction, motifs and scenes used, as well as their location in the temples, in the mosaic compositions of this period. This transitional period of major political changes is also reflected in the mosaic decoration, which intertwines Eastern with Western artistic influences, pagan symbols with Christian messages, but the main leading feature is the return to figurativeness in iconographic programs, but now completely different from the ancient principles of shaping. Spirituality has completely pushed materiality into the images and they act as spiritual messages related to St. Sacraments.

³² Dh. Dhamo, *Anthropozoomorphic Antigonea Mosaic Picture, Monuments* (1981), 150-152.

³³ Dh. Budina, *Antigonea Paleocrystalline Triconic Mosaic, Illyria VII-VIII* (Prishtina 1977-78), 226.

³⁴ D. Komata, *Bazilika paleokristiane e Mesaplikut, Iliria XIV* (Prishtina 1984), 198.

*The new style and choice of place from the epoch of Justinian I.
The role of the emperor and his epoch for the culture of Early Byzantium.*

With the reign of Justinian I, many changes take place in the political, administrative and cultural life of the empire. The main goals he pursued, in his policy as a statesman, were two: to restore the empire to its former integrity and to impose Orthodoxy throughout the empire³⁵. The second goal is related to the unification of the Eastern and Western Churches, as under Justin I, but under pressure from the future emperor Justinian I, the schism over the Western Church came to an end. Moreover, during this period, not accidentally called the „century of Justinian“, the establishment of the Orthodox Church as an institution with a huge role in the life of the empire is confirmed by the huge construction of Christian religious buildings³⁶. All these processes of unprecedented prosperity and development in the artistic life of the empire are reflected in mosaic art. For these reasons, the high artistic achievements that marked this time are called „Justinian’s Renaissance“, because behind all this is the inspiring figure of the emperor himself.

The examples from the mosaic monuments in the Balkans show an extremely high achievement in terms of the art and technical qualities of the mosaics, but we are also witnessing a refined theological idea behind their making. For example, the mosaic decoration of the Basilica of Dometios in Nicopolis has a magnificent iconographic program, saturated with many Eucharistic messages. The figural motifs are proportional, voluminous, very picturesque, and the color is rich and influential. The style of mosaics is a great representative of the high artistic achievements in mosaic art during the Justinian dynasty³⁷. It is a harmonious combination between the Ancient heritage and the already established Early Christian system. It is also an example of how a certain image used in Ancient art was given a Christian interpretation without arousing discourses about its Pagan nature. Such figurative images are common in mosaic ornaments from the Greco-Roman period, and their iconography was adopted and spread in the Eastern Roman Empire in the IV-VI century. Parallels can be made with mosaics from Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, and similar compositions have been found in Antioch. In the Balkans, such compositional solutions, schemes, filling motifs and figural images correspond to the mosaic decoration of the basilicas in Nea Anhialos, Klapsi, Athens, Tegea, Thessaloniki, Amphipolis, Heraclea Lyncestis, basilica № 7 of Pautalia and others. It should be emphasized that the technical execution of the mosaic decoration is extremely precise, supported by the high artistic mastery of the mosaicists, making the decoration one of the best examples from the period of Justinian’s Renaissance.

In the variety of additional scenes that permanently enter the iconographic program of the Christian religious buildings, continue to be used: images of various birds, animals and sea creatures representing the Creations of the Earth and Ocean (the basilica of Klapsi, basilica A of Nicopolis); and hunting scenes (basilica A of Nicopolis, the basilica of Delphi). But during this period, the plots

³⁵ И. Божиллов, 2008, 64-65.

³⁶ A. Grabar, *L’age d’ore de Justinien* (Paris 1966), 38-39.

³⁷ E. Kitzinger, 1951, 110-113.

representing the seasons and months stand out more and more. These calendar scenes are also borrowed from Ancient art³⁸. In the Early Christianity, they served mainly to show prosperity, through the cycle of rural life, and associated this ideal with the patron, the guarantor of the monument itself or, more generally, of the institution itself, which in this case is the Church³⁹. In this context, this adds an additional semantic level to their reading, as in addition to the spheres of the Earth and the Ocean, they also connect with the authority of the clergy, through their privileged role in the liturgical procession. Some authors interpret the presence of calendar themes in the cult Christian buildings as emphasizing the „christianization of time“, in which traditional holidays, marking the important moments of the year, give way to Christian holidays and celebrations controlled by the clergy⁴⁰. Of course, these cycles can be given a different reading, as the seasons and related holidays are born of God, and their calendar remains unchanged. This means that their essence is preserved but they receive different names. Examples of such scenes are found in the mosaic decoration from the end of the previous period (the basilica of Tirsos in Tegea), but in the Justinian epoch they are much more common (a building with an unidentified function in Thebes; the basilica of Delphi).

The return to Ancient art principles, which is a characteristic feature of this epoch, is visible in many mosaic compositions, such as the basilica of Delphi, basilica A of Nicopolis, the Southern basilica of Justiniana Prima, a building of unknown origin in Thebes and others. The anthropomorphic images, representing the personification of the months (Delphi, Thebes), of hunters and fishermen (Nicopolis, Bilis) and of a shepherd (Justinian Prima), are constructed precisely, proportionally, voluminously, in dynamic poses and with a classical drawing of the figures. However, these images cannot be confused with the Ancient ones, as the selection of symbolic groups and the spiritual presence behind the material form speak of an enriched Christian culture of new recognizable theological suggestions for the cyclical following of the seasons in the Christian conception of the Time.

During this period, into the mosaic decoration of the Western and Central Balkans intensified the artistic influences coming from Northern Italy⁴¹. An example of this is the mosaic decoration of the basilica № 7 in Pautalia, which is a magnificent combination of technical craftsmanship and artistic techniques⁴². The composition in the apse is balanced, with a harmonious and proportional combination of the individual elements, and the figural images are interpreted through the classical principles of drawing, proportions, symmetry and color nuance. In the reconstruction assumes the use of Christ as the personification of Jesus and the lambs of the Apostles, with parallel mosaics from the Basilica

³⁸ W. R. Caraher, *Church, Society and the Sacred in Early Christian Greece*, dissertation (The Ohio State University 2003), 177.

³⁹ Π. Ασημακοπούλου-Ατζακά, *Τα παλαιοχριστιανικά ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα του Ανατολικού Ιλλυρικού* (Θεσσαλονίκης 1984), 399-402.

⁴⁰ W. R. Caraher, 2003, 178.

⁴¹ E. Polimeri, *Epirus Nova në periudhën paleokristiane dhe Bizantine (Shek. IV – XI)*, dissertation (*Universiteti i Tiranës* 2017), 151-152.

⁴² V. Popova, 2018, 153.

of Sant' Apollinare in Classe and the Mausoleum of Gala Placidia in Ravenna⁴³. This is one of the factors that determine the influence of the Western liturgy in this area. In the Balkans, similar figurative images and symbolic groups are found in the mosaics of the basilicas in Storgozia, Mikrevo, Butrotum, Bilis and others.

The image of the Good Shepherd, which is presented in the Southern basilica of Justinian Prima, is also inspired by these influences. It is located in the eastern part of the central nave and we must emphasize that such images are extremely rare in the floor mosaics and are placed mainly on the walls and domes of the basilicas. The image of the Good Shepherd is influenced by the Late Antique art, where in mosaics, murals and sarcophagi often feature an image of a shepherd, usually accompanied by a lamb and a dog⁴⁴. This plot brings idyllic suggestions with the meaning of support, protection and well-being in the present and the afterlife. In Christianity it is perceived as the personification of Salvation and of the Savior himself - Jesus Christ⁴⁵. In this way, the scene of the Good Shepherd is connected with the Christian dogma of the Resurrection and the Kingdom of God and can be relate to anything related to these messages - self-sacrifice, redemption, immortality, Eternal Life and others⁴⁶. The scene Shepherd and flock in a pastoral landscape continues to be used with similar plots presented in the mosaic decoration of basilica B and Basilica C in Bilis.

In the iconographic programs during this period, related to the scene Source of Life, there are already established types. These are: the classic iconographic type - a vessel from which grows a vine (Kitros, Nikiti); vessel flanked by deer and doe/two deer, with birds added (Solina); a vessel flanked by birds (Lychnidos); along with the deer and the fountain, there are also birds pecking grapes or the leaves of the vine, sometimes scattered flowers (Edessa); drinking birds and deer (Lychnidos, Bilis); The Source of Life in combination with a centric geometric mosaic scheme (Amphipolis) and others. The above examples show the great variety of types and subtypes used, but what unites all the compositions is the concept of unity among diversity. In other words, it is the spiritual message that is leading the artistic image.

The tendency to place the Eucharistic themes not only in the chancel and the apse, but also in other areas of the basilica, continues. The temples are richly decorated and in addition to large panels with figural plots located in the most sacred spaces, there are also separate figural images, alone or as filling motifs, in the narthex, exonarthex, annexes, atrium and others (Nicopolis, Bilis, Antigonea). In this way, the Eucharist is not emphasized only in one big scene, but is multiplied in many smaller ones, which are placed next to other motifs (Klapsi, Nicopolis, Sparta). This emphasizes that in the epoch of Justinian I the old established formulas were used in parallel, along with the entry of multiple

⁴³ J. Poeschke, *Mozaiken in Italien 300 – 1300* (Hirmer 2009), 112-123.

⁴⁴ J. Awes-Freeman, *The Good Shepherd and the Enthroned Ruler: A Reconsideration of the Imperial Iconography in the Early Church*. *The Art of Empire: Christian Art in its Imperial Context* (JSTOR 2015), 176-177.

⁴⁵ А. С. Уваров, *Христианская символика. Символика древнехристианского периода* (Санкт-Петербург 2001), 131, 175.

⁴⁶ J. Awes-Freeman, 2015, 159-195.

motives due to the disintegration of the main stage. It should be noted that the auxiliary motifs and scenes are placed in the central and western part of the church, and in the eastern direction, towards the chancel, the images become more and more directly connected with the liturgy and accordingly loaded with more Eucharistic symbolism. This turns the artistic decoration in the temples into an extremely rich aesthetic spectacle with spiritual messages in the whole spectrum of Christian theology. In addition, this tendency reinforces the impression of the increasing complexity of the liturgical process and the specific movements of the clergy, which include, in addition to the central and side naves, also the auxiliary rooms of the basilica

In the search for and use of Ancient art principles in mosaic ateliers during the Justinian epoch, a new dimension of Christian figurative language was reached. In perfect synthesis with the art mastery that formally builds the images is the theological message that makes the scenes meaningful, inspired by God. It is here that the word and the image join hands, building the magnificent picture of God's creation and of the Salvation that comes from Jesus.

*The iconographic and stylistic development and the arrangement
of the Eucharistic images and scenes from the Post-Justinian period
to the end of the VI-beginning of the VII century.*

The period after Justinian's rule on the Balkans was associated with catastrophic earthquakes and the invasions of the Avars and Slavs and the devastation associated with them, which is a reflection of the overall situation in the empire⁴⁷. At the beginning of the VII century, the situation became even more complicated, as the empire experienced an extremely severe political and economic crisis. Constant military conflicts and attempts to preserve its integrity led to the decline of temple construction, and of course this reflected on the mosaic decoration. Due to the barbaric destruction, the mosaics preserved from this period are few and it is difficult to establish the transition and the stages through which the mosaic art passes. The preserved scenes show a reduction of the classical art techniques from the time of Justinian the Great. The compositions are far from the artistic achievements of the previous period, the images are constructed schematically, some even roughly and disproportionately. An example can be given with the image of an eagle, which is used very rarely. As a separate image it originates from pagan times, as a symbol of Zeus/Jupiter, Sarapis, Sabazios and other Eastern and Jewish male deities⁴⁸. In the Early Christianity it was transformed into a symbol of the victory of the Christian faith, of the higher Celestial sphere and of the domination. It is observed in mosaic monuments from the Justinian epoch (the basilica of Delphi; the basilica of Patra), and its iconography is almost heraldic, the image is constructed three-dimensionally, proportionally and picturesquely. If we make a comparison with similar images

⁴⁷ H.-W. Haussig, 1971, 226-227.

⁴⁸ W. R. Caraher, 2003, 173.

from the Post-Justinian period, we will find significant differences, which are expressed in a highly generalized interpretation of the images, and the general suggestion is for a formalized and heraldic mosaic art.

Mosaic monuments from this period are preserved in Molai, Hermione, Caesarea and Justinian Prima. In the basilica of Molai in the figural scenes there are a number of images: a rabbit and a bull (cow), located one above the other; an eagle with outstretched wings, holding a fox in its claws, and around it a smaller eagle and two roosters at the bottom; an eagle with outstretched wings, which has caught a rabbit, and around it a smaller eagle, two fish and two roosters in the lower area, etc. All scenes have the qualities listed above, in addition, the color scheme is monotonous, and the compositions - without a pronounced compositional axis. In Hermione the same character of the mosaic decoration is observed⁴⁹, as the presented scene Source of Life is interpreted extremely dryly and anti-classical. The other scenes (two peacocks around a palm tree and around them vines with leaves and bunches; a goose that caught a snake (fish?) with another bird behind it, as well as two peacocks in the upper area; an eagle with outstretched wings caught a smaller bird, etc.) have the same artistic characteristics. It should be noted the dynamics in the scenes, which is due to the linear structure of the images and the special rhythmicity, a consequence of the drawing, and not to the movement of the presented birds and animals.

These examples again emphasize that this last stage in the development of mosaic decoration in the Early Christian period on the Balkans in artistic terms is emphatically schematic and the images act more as a symbol-sign than with their artistic qualities. This last stage marks the end of the Eucharistic theme, which began in the church Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. This manifestation in art continued in the following periods, and during the Middle Ages it acquired aesthetic characteristics that marked the whole epoch. The iconographic and stylistic analysis of the mosaic monuments confirms that there are several main art centers in the Balkans, which are at the same time the main administrative and ecclesiastical ones. Such are Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Nicopolis, Philippopolis, Marcianopolis, Lychnidos, Dirahion and others. The iconographic programs realized in their mosaic ateliers spread to other centers, influencing the imposition of certain scenes and motifs. This does not mean that there are no differences in the smaller centers, but they are not so definite and do not become widespread.

The multi-layered nature of cultural processes during the Early Christian period is clearly evident in the monumental arts and specifically in the mosaics, manifested in the syncretism of the images and the combination of the formal principles with the symbolic spiritual messages of Christianity. The desire for immaterial depiction of religious - theological sacraments and feelings is often intertwined with the illusionistic borrowings of classical art, as an element of the Ancient cult of images, which are apparently inherited in the Early Christian art. The transcendence of the Christian worldview is reflected in the art of the age, through the gradual neglect of material, sensory influence and natural pro-

⁴⁹ J.-P. Sodini, *La Sculpture Architecturale à l'Époque Paléochrétienne en Illyricum*. Studia di Antichità Cristiana 1 (Rome 1980), 164.

portions. In this way, the naturalistic, earth-based and sensory-evoked Ancient art is replaced by another, accessible to the spirit, timelessly and far from the foreseeable impressions art. This change is a decisive turn in the history of art. New art is born, on content and form, different as artistic issues, as well as in the means for their solution. It is born of the spiritual substrate of Christian faith and is an expression of the new perception of the world.

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ИКОНОГРАФСКИ И СТИЛСКИ РАЗВОЈ ЕВХАРИСТИЈСКИХ СЛИКА
У ПОДНИМ МОЗАИЦИМА НА БАЛКАНУ ТОКОМ РАНОГ ХРИШЋАНСТВА

Ранохришћански период на Балкану засићен је дубоким социјалним, економским и политичким променама које мењају културу друштва. То се природно одражава на ранохришћански систем уметности, у избору одређених Евхаристијских сцена, мотива и појединачних слика у мозаичном украсу, на стилским карактеристикама мозаичких композиција, као и на њиховој постепеној семантичкој повезаности са теолошким хришћанским концептима. Вишеслојна природа културних процеса током ранохришћанског периода јасно се очитује у монументалним уметностима и посебно у мозаицима, манифестујући се у синкретизму слика и комбинацији формалних принципа са симболичким духовним порукама хришћанства. Трансценденција хришћанског погледа на свет огледа се у уметности доба, кроз постепено занемаривање материјала, чулног утицаја и природних пропорција. На овај начин, натуралистичка, заснована на земљи и сензорно изазвана древна уметност замењује се другом, доступном духу, ванвременском и далеко од предвидивих утисака. Рођено је из духовног супстрата хришћанског учења и израз је нове перцепције света