

THE SYMBOLIC MESSAGES OF THE MOSAICS IN THE SOUTHERN BASILICA AT PLAOSŃNIK IN OHRID

In the central part of the archaeological site of Plaošnik in Ohrid, beneath the foundations of St. Clement's Church, monumental Southern basilica was discovered (fig.1), and then fully explored and conserved in the period 1999 to 2009¹. The church has a three aisled disposition with a narthex and vestry annexes, baptizing complex on the southwest side and atrium on the north. Almost all rooms of the basilica were paved with mosaics and the best of them are preserved in deaconicon, north annex and in the baptistery of the church. As contrast, the mosaics of the narthex and the northern aisle are preserved only partially, and the mosaics from the central aisle are preserved only in fragments (fig.2). Mosaics arrangements of all rooms in the basilica are with dominant geometrical decoration combined with images of stylized floral or zoomorphic motifs and compositions. Iconographic and stylistic analysis of these mosaics indicate that they were produced in the late 4th until the middle of the 5th century and these dating coincides with the results obtained by studying the contextual archaeological findings².

Part of the mosaic images that are represented in the Southern basilica are with certain symbolic meanings in the Christian world. Here we are going to present zoomorphic compositions of the narthex, deaconicon and baptistery of the church.

Narthex

The central part of the narthex has two dears facing each other standing around cantharos filled with water (fig.3). Different versions of this composition represented in the central part of the narthex, can be found in the Basilica

¹ Detailed descriptions of the Church architecture and mosaic floors see in: M.Тутковски, *Ранохристијанските мозаици од Охрид*, Скопје 2014, 97-121.

² More about iconography and style features of the mosaics, and the dating of the same see in: M.Тутковски, *Ранохристијанските мозаици*, 97-133.



Fig.1. St. Clement's church and the Southern basilica - aerial photo.

Сл.1. Св. Климентова црква и Јужна базилика - аерофотографија.

of Deboj (fig.4)³, the basilicas of Oktisi⁴ and Aretusa⁵, in the narthex of the Great Basilica of Heraclea Lyncestis (fig.5)⁶ as well as in triconchal church of the village Acrini in Greece (fig.6)⁷. It's a scene that illustrates the first verse of David's Psalm 42⁸. Explicit confirmation of this interpretation of the scene can be found in mosaics with identical iconographic concept where the scenes of the

³ М.Тутковски, *Ранохристијанските мозаици*, 69-83, fig. 68, 72.

⁴ В. Битракова-Грозданова, Мозаиците во охридскиот регион и врските со Медитеранот, in: *Цивилизации на почвата на Македонија*, едиција „Историја на културата на Македонија“, книга 2, Скопје 1995. 67-74, сл. 5.

Π. ΑΔΑΜ-ΒΕΛΕΝΗ, *Ανασκόπηση παλαιοχριστιανικής βασιλικής σε θέση ελληνιστικό – παλαιοχριστιανικό χρονών στην Αρέθουσα Θεσσαλονίκη*, vo: *ΑΕΜΘ* 9 (1995), 351-365, fig. 2; A. Karivieri, Floor mosaics in the early Christian basilica in Arethousa: Conservation, Maintenance and Presentation, vo: *Proceedings of the VIIIth conference of ICCM*, Thessaloniki 2005, 191 – 202, fig. 1.

⁶ Г. Цветковиќ - Томашевиќ, Мозаикот на подот во нартексот на Големата базилика, vo: *Хераклеја III*, Битола 1967, 10-32; E. Dimitrova, On the Narthex of the Great Basilica in Heraclea, vo: *Macedonian Review Vol. XXV*, No. 2-3, Skopje 1995; Ead., In Through the Inner Door (The Mosaic in the Narthex of the Large Basilica in Heraclea Lyncestis), vo: *Niš & Byzantium IV*, Niš 2006, 179-188.

⁷ J. P. Sodini, Mosaïques paléochrétiennes de Grèce, vo: *BCHXCIV*, Paris 1970, 731; Г. Цветковиќ - Томашевиќ, *Рановизантијски подни мозаици. Дарданија, Македонија, Нови Епир*, Београд 1978, 27-28.

⁸ “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God”. More about the executions of Psalm 42 in the early Christian period, see E. Димитрова, Четириесет и првиот Давидов псалм – иконографска парадигма на христијанската антика, vo: *Патримониум. МК* 1 – 2, Скопје 2007, 65-78.

deer or the hart around cantharos can be supplemented with written texts from the first verse of Psalm 42. Such a mosaic is executed in the Basilica Urbana's consignatorium in Salona⁹ and in the church of Panagia Hrizopolitisa at Nea Paphos on Cyprus¹⁰. Beside these mosaic images, illustration of Psalm 42.1 followed by the inscription is found on one of the ceramic plates from Vinica Fortress¹¹. The execution of the narthex mosaic of Southern basilica visualizes the first verse of David's Psalm 42, where the deer symbolize the catechumens who yearn to feed on the salvational source of life, and thus, the receiving of the Holy Spirit through the water, gaining new and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This scene pictured at the entrance of the church, in addition to primary baptism connotation, received a specific soteriological significance in the catechumens eyes, that from the world of spiritual darkness and sin are entering in the house of God, seeking salvation for their souls.

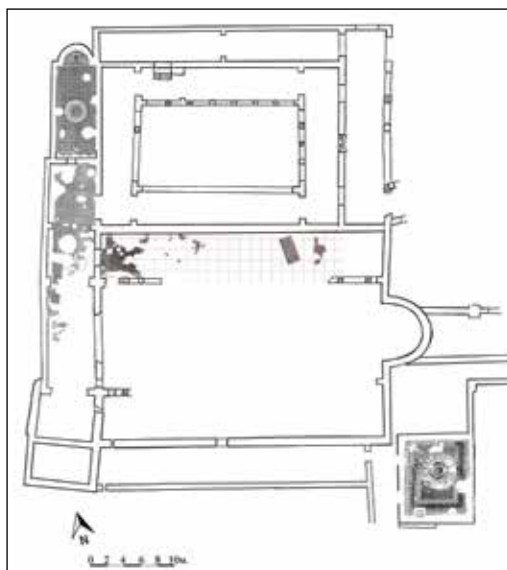


Fig.2. Plan of the Southern basilica and its mosaics.

Сл.2. Основа Јужне базилике и мозаици.

Deaconicon

Mosaics in the deaconicon are created in memory of deaconess Sosia Paula, as we learn from the mosaic inscription which is located in the center of the room (fig.7):

ΥΠΕΡΜΝ / ΗΜΗΣΤΗΣΟ / ΣΙΑΣΠΑΥΛΑ / ΣΤ ΗΣΔΙΑΚ / Ο ΝΟΥ
(Υπερ μνήμης τῆς Σοσίας Παύλας τῆς διακόνου)¹².

In the apse of deaconicon one can see the only zoomorphic composition of this room which can be observed in order to determine its symbolism. The

⁹ F. Bulić, *The ruins of ancient Salona*, Split 1986, 99.

¹⁰ D. Michaelides, *The Early Christian Mosaics of Cyprus*, vo: *BA* vol. 52, no.4 (1989), 192-194.

¹¹ E. Dimitrova, *The Vinica Mystery: The Ceramic Treasures of a Late Antique Fortress*, Vinica 2012, 149-159.

¹² С. Филипова, Примери на рановизантиска пластика и капители од Македонија со аплицирани натписи или букви, во: *Systasis* 7 (2005 год.), (<http://www.systasis.org.mk/arhiva.asp>) 2, foot. 5.



Fig.3. Illustration of the Psalm 42:1 in the narthex of the Southern basilica.

Сл.3. Илустрација Псалма 41 (42):1 у нартексу Јужне базилике.

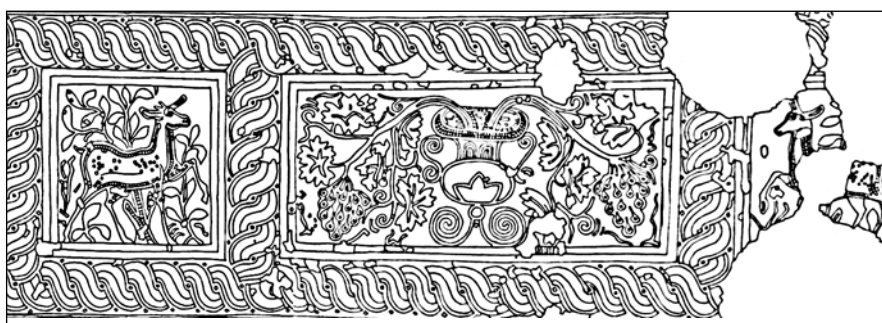


Fig.4. Illustration of the Psalm 42:1 in the narthex of the basilica at Deboj, Ohrid.

Сл.4. Илустрација Псалма 41 (42):1 у нартексу базилике код Дебоја у Охриду.

composition consists of a centrally placed cantharos and two lambs drinking water from it. Behind the lambs there are two flowering trees - pear and apple, and below them, a lion and a snake are represented. Lion and snake are depicted on both sides of the cantharos pedestal, at which is written inscription in four registers (fig.8.):

ΚΑΙΚΑ / ΤΑΠΑΤΗΣΙΣ / ΛΕΟΝΤΑΚΑΙ / ΔΡΑΚΟΝΤΑ
(Καί καταπατήσις λέοντα καί δράκοντα)

In translation, this inscription means: The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet¹³, and reproduces the second verse of Psalm 91.13, which fully reads: “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet”. This inscription explicitly determines the scene in the apse of deaconicon as illustration of Psalm 91. Illustrations of this psalm are found at many monuments of Early Christian and medieval period, but the execution in the Southern basilica is for now the only one known

¹³ V. Bitrakova-Grozdanova incorrectly states that the inscription consists written parts of both lines of the Psalm 91:13, as a shortcut to the message. cf. V. Bitrakova-Grozdanova, Lychnidos a l'epoque paleochretienne et son noyau urbain, in: *Niš & Byzantium VII* (2009), 32-34.

as example of a unique iconography, where lambs are treading the lion and the serpent. All other illustrations of this psalm from the Early Christian period depict Christ treading at the lion and the serpent. The oldest representation of Psalm 91.13, which presumably originate from the period before 312, is found on the sarcophagus of Gerona, northeastern Spain, where Christ is stepping on the lion wrapped with snake (fig.9)¹⁴. Very similar execution is derived in the fragment of a sarcophagus (fig.10) which is kept in the Archaeological Museum “Oliveriano” in Pesaro, Italy, which dates from the time after the year 350¹⁵. Later illustrations of the thirteenth verse of 91 Psalm have a slightly different iconography because the lion and the serpent are shown separately under the feet of Christ. Such presentations are pictured on several Early Christian monuments of Ravenna, which date back to the period of the mid to late 5th century. Two of them are executed in relief, whereby one in the forehead decorated marble sarcophagus located in Quadrarco di Braccioforte, (fig.11)¹⁶, the other one is integrated into stucco decoration of the Orthodox baptistery (fig.12), and latest illustration of this Psalm is depicted on the wall mosaics in the chapel of St. Andrea in the Archbishop’s Palace (fig.13)¹⁷.

The symbolism of this scene can be determined by the words of St. Athanasius (293-373), who in his remarks of the psalms said that the 91 Psalm symbolizes the victory of the people of God over all enemies and demons, and



Fig.5. Illustration of the Psalm 42:1 in the narthex of the Great basilica at Heraclea Lincestis.

Сл.5. Илустрација Псалма 41 (42):1 у нартексу Велике базилике у Хераклеји Линкестис.



Fig.6. Illustration of the Psalm 42:1 in the narthex of the church in the village of Acrini, Greece.

Сл.6. Илустрација Псалма 41 (42):1 у нартексу триконхалне цркве у с. Акрини, Грчка.

¹⁴ B. Brenk, *The Imperial Heritage of Early Christian Art*, in: *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium*, (ed. K. Weitzmann), 43, fig. 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43, fig.10.

¹⁶ R. F. Hoddinott, *Early Byzantine churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*, London 1963, Pl. 5c.

¹⁷ D. Mauskopf/Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2010, 190-194, fig. 66.



Fig.7. Inscription in the central part of the deaconicon in the Southern basilica.

Сл.7. Натпис у централном делу ђаконикона Јужне Базилике.



Fig.8. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 in the deaconicon's apse of the Southern basilica.

Сл.8. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 у апсиди ђаконикона Јужне базилике.

further, commenting on exactly the thirteenth verse of the Psalm, he says: "Thou man of God, not only will not suffer any harm, but you will see a multitude of spirits and under your feet and without fear you will trample on their heads"¹⁸. Visualizing the believers as lambs empowered by the sacred spring - Source of life, while using iconographic matrix of the 42 David's Psalm, the author of the mosaic of Southern basilica, symbolically portrayed believers who receive holy water from the source of life, have acquired divine protection, *without fear trample on the heads of demons*, or the lion and the serpent, which introduced the allegorical triumph of the Christ faith.

Baptistery

Function of baptistery and baptizing rituals are explained in many historical sources, starting with the church's Code Didache by the end of 1st or beginning of the 2nd century, than Apologia of Justin Martyr from mid 2nd century; De Baptismo of Tertullian about the year 200, the Syrian documents Didascalia Apostolorum

and apocryphal Acts of the Apostles by 3rd century, up to the Apostolic Tradition compilation created between the middle and the second half of the 4th century; in the works of Cyprian of Carthage in the 3rd century...¹⁹. In Early Christian texts we can find various allegorical interpretations of baptism and of baptistery. Authors such as St. Augustine and St. Paulinus of Nola, speaks of baptism as being buried with Christ, and St. Ambrose equals the font with the grave,

¹⁸ Атанасије Велики, Тумачење псалама, во: *Благослови, душо моја, Господа - Свети Отци тумаче Псалтир*, Београд 2003, 229-233.

¹⁹ A brief review of historical sources of baptism gives Maxwel E. Johnson, Worship, Practice and Belief, in: *The early Christian world*, vol. I-II (ed. Philip F. Esler), 476-480; detailed analysis and interpretation of the baptismal rites see in: R. M. Jensen, *Living Water: images, symbols, and settings of early Christian baptism*, Leiden – Boston 2011, 127-178.



Fig.9. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 on marble sarcophagus from Gerona, Spain.

Сл.9. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 на мермерном саркофагу из Жироне, Шпанија.



Fig.10. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 on marble sarcophagus from the Oliveriano museum in Pesaro, Italy.

Сл.10. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 на мермерном саркофагу у музеју Оливериано у Пезару, Италија.

and compare the forms of grave and the font²⁰. In the writings of the Holy Fathers baptism is often interpreted as rebirth: St. Augustine sees baptismal basin as the womb of the Mother Church of which we should be born again; Justin Martyr for catechumens going into the baptistery, says that they go to a place where they will be regenerated by the water, and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) for candidates entering into the font says that they are: *like fertilized embryos being placed into the womb. Formed by God's hand, these seeds are transformed from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible*²¹. A similar interpretation of



Fig.11. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 on marble sarcophagus from Ravenna, Italy.

Сл.11. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 на мермерном саркофагу у Равени, Италија.

baptism can be found on the inscriptions of Lateran baptistery in Rome, probably drawn by Pope Leo I (440-461), which states that: *From her virginal womb Mother Church gives birth in the stream to her children, whom she conceives through the breath of God*²². The same inscriptions, equals the baptismal font

²⁰ R. M. Jensen, *Living Water*, 243.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 248-250.

²² P. A. Underwood, *The fountain of life in manuscripts of the gospels*, in: *DOP* 5



Fig. 12. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 in the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna, Italy.

Сл. 12. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 у крстионици Православних у Равени, Италија.



Fig. 13. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 in the chapel of St. Andrew in the Archbishopric palace in Ravenna, Italy.

Сл. 13. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 у капели св. Андреје у архиепископској палати у Равени, Италија.

lion and a snake in a different composition is represented in the apse of the basilica's deaconicon, some labeled as an illustration of the 91 Psalm. As stated earlier in this paper, in the Early Christian epoch there were different conceptions of iconographic illustration of this psalm, and in this regard we should picture the presentation of the lion and snakes from the baptistery, which in reduced form illustrate the thirteenth verse of Psalm 91. The positioning of this

with the source of life, which purges the whole world, and born in that font should hope for the Kingdom of God, because the blessed life does not accept those who are born only once²³.

Indicated texts reveal the symbolism of baptizing act and strive to explain the way that catechumens should pass entering into font which represents the grave of unbelievers, while at the same time, the font represents the womb of the Church, in whose regenerative waters a new Christian will be born, purified of all sins and ready to reach the Kingdom of God. This polyvalent symbolism of baptism is superbly expressed in the sermons of St. John Chrysostom (347-407), who says: „Baptism is death and burial, life and resurrection (...). When we dive head into the water as in the grave, the old man is submerged, completely buried, and when we step out of the water, the new man at the same time appears“²⁴.

Textual interpretations of the baptistery and of the baptizing act are symbolically represented at the mosaic floor in the baptistery of Southern basilica.

The first image seen by catechumens upon entering the baptistery (fig. 14) is the scene in the round medallion with lion and snake, placed on the right side, in front of the entrance to the font (fig. 15). Illustration of a

(1950), 54-56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁴ М. Елијаде, *Слике и симболи: огледи о магијско-религијској симболици*, Нови Сад 1999, 179.

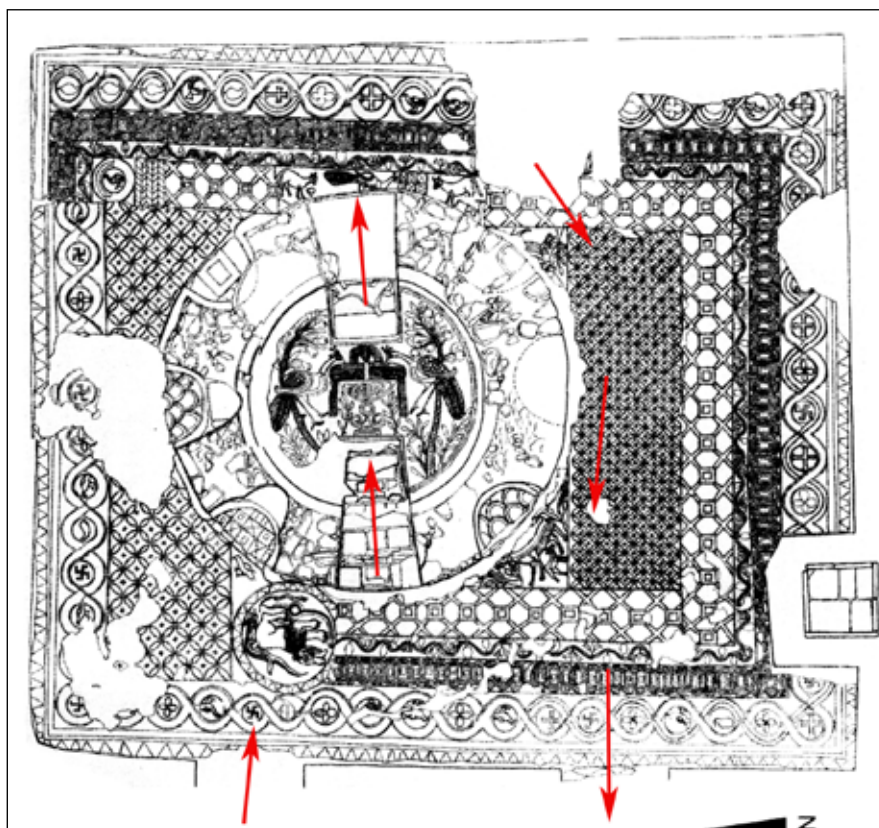


Fig.14 Mosaics in the baptistery of the Southern basilica with marked direction for catechumens and neophytes.

Сл.14. Мозаици у крстионици Јужне базилике и означени правац кретања за катихумене и неофите.

scene in front of the font is crucial for determining its meaning, because, during the baptizing, catechumens encountered a lion and snakes (Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder...) and could literally trample them (...the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet) to symbolize their victory over demons and over the devil. This interpretation of the picture with the lion and snakes, correspond to the actions during the baptizing ritual performed by the catechumens. Before entering in the wholly water, catechumens stood turned to the west - side of darkness, and towards the world of Satan, and three times renounced him, and then three times blow and spit at Him, thus expressing expulsion and scorn towards Him. Only then, the priest could swing catechumens eastward and ask them to confirm that they believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and after that they were prepared for baptism with water²⁵. After renunciation of Satan, symbolically catechumens steps on mosaic image of lion and

²⁵ More about baptizing rituals: В. Лилчиќ, *Ранохристијанска црква*, 72-86.



Fig. 15. Illustration of the Psalm 91:13 in the baptistry of the Southern basilica.

Сл.15. Илустрација Псалма 91:13 у крстионици Јужне базилике.



Fig.16. Illustration of the Psalm 42:1 in the piscine of the baptistry of the Southern basilica.

Сл.16. Илустрација Псалма 41(42):1 у писцини крстионице Јужне базилике.

snakes which are the epitome of evil forces and demons, but no longer able to stop them in their quest for truth and the life²⁶.

Following the triumph over the demons, catechumens have continued their path in the font respectively to their grave, where after the ritual death of a pagan, a new Christian is to be born. At the bottom of the font is symmetric image of two peacocks facing each other that are drinking the water flowing from central mounted cantharos (fig.16). In Early Christian art, allegorical presentations of peacocks are linked with resurrection and immortality²⁷, starting from explicitly expressed ideas of the Holy Fathers, such as St. Augustine, who believed that the flesh of peacocks does not putrefy, or Isidore of Seville (560-636), who suggests that it is difficult to cook peacock since its flesh will not decay²⁸. In the baptismal font of the Southern basilica, peacocks portrayed as they drink of God's wellspring or of the Source of life, symbolize their acceptance of the Christian faith that will provide them with eternal life. Thus, this illustration is associated with illustrations of 42. Psalm and its primary baptizing connotation. The connection of Psalm

42.1 with baptizing liturgy is verified with many illustrations from the Early Christian period²⁹, and arguments for it are found in many historical sources:

²⁶ The scene of Psalm 92:13, in the chapel of the Archbishop's Palace in Ravenna, where Christ defeated demons (the lion and the serpent are shown under his feet) is holding a book in his hands inscribed with text from the Gospel of John 14:6 reads: „I am the way and the truth and the life“.

²⁷ More about symbolism of the peacock in Early Christian art see: Е. Димитрова, *Најстарите христјански симболи*, Скопје 1995, 113-124.

²⁸ R. M. Jensen, *Living Water*, 274.

²⁹ Е. Димитрова, *Четириесет и првиот Давидов Псалм*, 65-78.



Fig. 17. Illustration of the lambs and the peacock in the baptistery of the Southern basilica.

Сл.17. Илустрација јагњади и пауна у крстионици Јужне базилике.

St. Augustine in his comments on the Psalms, wrote that catechumens solemnly sang 42 Psalm while walking towards the baptistery to express their yearning for spring that washes our sins, just as the hart is longing for water sources³⁰. Liturgical book *Liber Sacramentorum* (*Sacramentarium Gelasianum*) dated between 6th and 8th century, also teach catechumens to sing 42 Psalm on their way to the baptistery, or to sing the prayer that contains the first verse of the psalm: “Almighty and ever-living God, look with favor on the devotion of your people at their second birth, who like the deer drawn to the fountain of water, grant that in baptism their thirst for faith may sanctify their souls and bodies”³¹. Peacocks from baptistery of the Southern basilica symbolizes the catechumens who, after their ritual death in the font, with help of regenerative baptismal water, will resurrect and thus acquire a new and eternal life in the kingdom of God.

The first image that newborn Christians would see on their way out of the Southern basilica’s font, are two lambs facing each other and a peacock among them (fig.17). The image of the peacock, symbolically is showing their resurrection and immortality acquired after the exit of the baptismal font and the presentation of lambs symbolized believers who follow The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ³². The best interpretation of these scenes we could find in the words of Paulinus of Nola, who says that the newly born Christians are as lambs brought up from their bath and led by their shepherd into the church. Similar interpretation is given by Aurelius Prudentius (348-after 405), who combines the texts of Psalm 42 with Psalm 23 in his description: “There that shepherd waters the sheep in the icy cold font - the ones that he perceives to pant after the fountains of Christ”³³. Hence the opinion that the author of this mosaic wanted to show

³⁰ St. Augustin, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (translated by: T&T Clark), in: *NPNF1-08* (ed. P. Schaff), Michigan 1892, 275.

³¹ P. A. Underwood, *The fountain of life*, 51-53; R. M. Jensen, *Living Water*, 253.

³² More about the symbolism of lambs in early Christian iconography see: E. Димитрова, *Најстарите христјански симболи*, 67-94.

³³ R. M. Jensen, *Living Water*, 255.

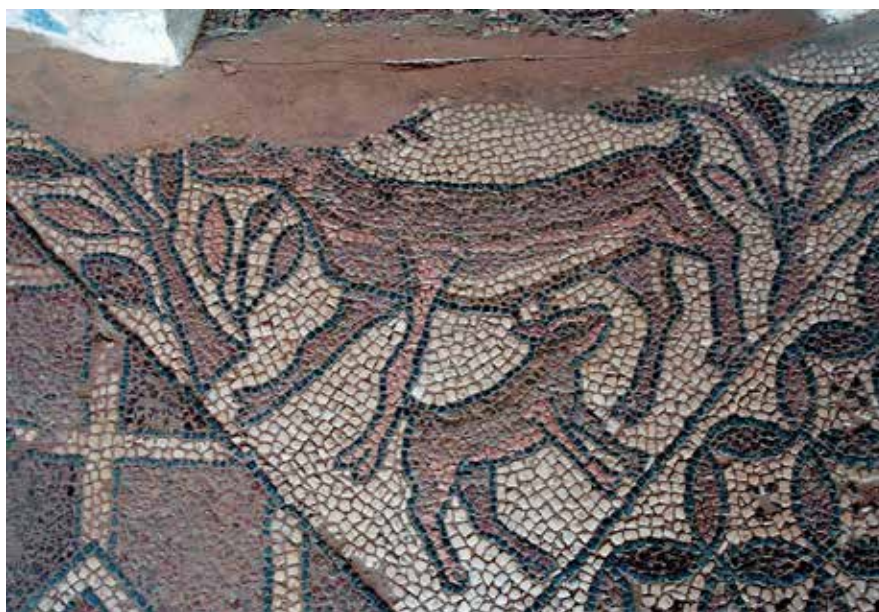


Fig.18. Illustration of the deer feeding the doe in the baptistery of the Southern basilica.

Сл.18. Илустрација Кошуте која доји срну у крстионици Јужне базилике.

symbolically newborn Christians after receiving the holy water of the fountain of life gaining divine protection, or becoming part of the flock of the Good Shepherd - Christ.

On the way to the exit of baptistery, catechumens encountered two more representations, placed on the south side of the font. The first image that is pretty damaged, probably a deer was displayed, and the second image illustrates hind milking little doe (fig.18). Even in the pagan world, breastfeeding is a symbol of resurrection and immortality: In Egyptian mythology, milk helped the gods to resurrect every day, and pharaohs were breastfed from Goddesses to become immortal. A similar interpretation of breastfeeding could be found in Greek mythology, where Hera breastfed Heracles with milk of immortality³⁴. In the early Christian world, the use of milk is directly related to the baptismal rites. The descriptions of St. Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12-14, milk is shown symbolically as spiritual food for the young, who still cannot submit hard food which is intended only for adults who know how to distinguish good from evil. In Early Christian literature, are preserved more texts in which newborn Christians are described as newborn babies, regardless of their age³⁵. Considering the symbolism of milk as spiritual food for young believers and identification of neophytes with newborn babies, in the Early Christian era the practice was created that all newborn Christians are given milk and honey, along with their First Communion. This practice is

³⁴ Ž. Ševalije, A. Gerbran, *Rečnik Simbola*, Novi Sad 2004, 581-583.

³⁵ R. M. Jensen, *Living Water*, 147-148.

confirmed in the writings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Zeno of Verona (300-371), John the Deacon (about 500), the compilation *Apostolic Tradition* and the liturgical book *Leonianum sacramentorum*³⁶. In a letter sent by John the Deacon to the aristocratic Senarius, in order to explain the process of baptism and initiation, he is discussing the importance of milk and honey, which indicates that the holy cup with milk and honey is given to newly baptized with holy communion in order to understand that they started their way to the promised land, same as small children fed with milk and honey³⁷. In the writings of the church fathers we perceive another associations with milk: Zeno of Verona invites the catechumens in regenerative font filled with milky fluid, and at the same time he is equating the font with the womb of the virgin mother, where the new people are formed and brought to birth³⁸; St. Cyprian of Carthage speaking of the mother - Church, says ... *of her womb we are born , of her milk we fed*³⁹.

Starting from associative interpretations of milk and breastfeeding in the Bible and in Early Christian literature, we can interpret the scene of hart and fawn, which cioncidentally is displayed exactly at the exit of the Southern basilica's baptistery. Fawn who wants to breastfeed the hart, allegorically presents newborn Christians as babies who had just started to go to the Promised Land and to feed with milk or with spiritual food that gives the mother Church.

Seeing the artistic motifs and scenes showing the mosaic of the baptistery, we assume that the intention of the author was allegorical to show the only way for catechumens to walk in order to triumph over death and become part of Christ's flock.

Symbolic images of the mosaics from the Southern basilica undoubtedly served as a letter for illiterate and as such were generally accepted and known in the Early Christian world. Early Christian *pictorial letter* was intended to educate people in the Christian faith, and through the images, the Church showed the right path to the believers.

Мишко Тутковски
СИМБОЛИЧНЕ ПОРУКЕ МОЗАИКА У ЈУЖНОЈ БАЗИЛИЦИ
НА ЛОКАЛИТЕТУ ПЛАОШНИК У ОХРИДУ

На локалитету Плаошник у Охриду, испод темеља Климентове цркве Св. Пантелејмона, откривена је монументална Јужна базилика која је у потпуности истражена и конзервисана у периоду од 1999 до 2009. године. Црква има тробродну диспозицију, нартекс са бочним анексима, ђаконикон, баптисмални комплекс на југозападној и атријум на северној страни. Готово су све просторије базилике биле прекривене мозаичним подовима, који су најбоље очувани у ђаконикону, северном анексу и у крстионици. Насупрот њима, мозаици у нартексу и у северном броду су

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 148-149, foot. 348.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 147-148, 251.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 249.

сачувани само делимично, док се од мозаика који су украшавали централни брод цркве, очували једино фрагменти и остаци мозаичне подлоге. Мозаични аранжмани у свим просторијама базилике имају доминирајућу геометријску декорацију комбиновану са представама стилизованих флоралних или зооморфних мотива и композиција. Иконографске и стилске анализе ових мозаика указују на датовање у периоду од краја IV све до средине V века, што се поклапа са резултатима добивеним проучавањем контекстуалних археолошких налаза.

Циљ овог рада је декодирање симболичних порука представљених на мозаицима у нартексу, ђаконикону и у крстионице цркве.

У централном делу нартекса представљене су две афронтиране кошуте око кантароса испуњеним водом. То је сцена која илуструје први стих 42 Давидовог Псалма, у коме кошуте симболишу катихумене који жуде за спасосним извором живота преко кога се стиче нови и вечити живот у Царству Божјем. Ова сцена, приказана код улаза у цркву, поред примарне баптисмалне конотације, поседује и сотериолошки значај у очима катихумена, који из света духовне таме и греха, улазе у Божји Дом тражећи спасење за своје душе.

У апсиди ђаконикона постављена је композиција која се састоји од централно постављеног кантароса из кога извире вода, а са обе стране кантароса представљена су два афронтирана јагњета која пију воду. Јагањци газе на лава и змију поред кантароса изнад кога је исписан натпис који репродукује други стих Псалма 91:13. Аутор овог мозаика симболично је приказао вернике у облику јагњади, које су примањем свете воде са Извора живота стекли Божју заштиту, те без страха газе главе демона т.ј. главе лава и змија, чиме је алегоријски представио победу Христове вере.

На мозаицима приказане су неколико симболичних слика које су у корелацији са баптисмалним обредима и порукама које се катихуменима биле преношене у току чина покрштавања. Прву слику коју би катихумени угледали у крстионици претстављала је лава и змије, т.ј. илустрацију Псалма 91:13. Након што би се одрекли Сатане, катихумени би прегазили лава и змије као оличење злих сила и демона, тако да они више нису могли да их ометају на њиховом путу ка Истини и Животу. Након победе над демонима, катихумени су продужавали свој пут у писцини, т.ј. у њиховом гробу, где се након ритуалне смрти паганина, требао родити нови хришћанин. На дну писцине, приказана је симетрична слика са два афронтирана пауна око кантароса. Пауни симболишу катихумене који су након своје ритуалне смрти у писцини, помоћу регенеративних баптисмалних вода васкрсли и тако стекли нови и вечити живот у царству Божјем. Прва слика коју би новорођени хришћани видели након изласка из писцине била би представа два јагњета који на симболичан начин приказују новорођене хришћане што су након примања свете воде са Извора живота стекли божју заштиту т.ј. постали део стада доброг пастира - Христа. На путу према изласка из крстионице, неофити су наилазили на представу кошуте која доји малог срндаћа. Дојење, т.ј. млеко је представљало симбол васкрснућа и бесмртности, док је употреба млека била непосредно повезана са баптисмалним обредима, јер је у ранохришћанској епохи постојала пракса да се свим новорођеним хришћанима дају млеко и мед заједно са њиховом првом причести. Представа малог срндаћа којег кошута доји, симболично приказује неофите (бебе) који су управо кренули ка Обећаној земљи и почели да се хране млеком, т.ј. духовном храном коју даје мајка - Црква.

Симболичне су слике, представљене на мозаицима у Јужној базилици, без сумње служиле као писмо за неписмене, те су биле општо прихваћене и познате у ренохришћанском свету. Ранохришћанско је *сликовито писмо* имало за циљ да васпитава људе у хришћанском духу управо помоћу слика, којима је Црква показивала прави пут верницима.