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THE MARTYRIUM UNDER THE BASILICA OF SAINT SOFIA IN SERDICA AND ITS PAVEMENTS

The basilica of St. Sofia is situated in the center of Sofia, next to the cathedral Alexander Nevski. But in Antiquity this area was extra muros and belonged to the vast Eastern necropolis. St. Sofia was built namely over the martyrium, which has several building periods (T.I). In my paper I am dealing only with the martyrium and its mosaics (the so-called “lower” mosaic”) and do not concern the history of the basilica built over it and its later mosaics (the so-called “upper” mosaic). The basilica over and the martyrium are separated by a layer with coins beginning from Julian to Arcadius.

Different opinions have been expressed almost to the end of last century on the building periods of the martyrium and the date of its mosaics. In the 90-es new excavations were performed, supplying with more exact data about the stratigraphy, the liturgical arrangement and the coins. Nevertheless there still remain some disputable suggestions and unsolved problems.

Undoubtedly the building of the earliest martyrium was not the first act of the cult. But it is hardly believable that in the period of the Tetrarchy the martyr’s tombs in Serdica have been marked by symbols, decoration and arrangement in the way we see in the numerous and vast catacombs of Rome. The reason is that the Roman emperors and caesars of the period, especially Diocletian and Galerius, not only visited occasionally Serdica, but resided here for long periods, even years. At that time Serdica was the center of the province Dacia Mediterranea. Until 311 the persecutions were in its height and the control, including that over the burials, in this middle-sized city was very severe. Nevertheless the places of martyrs executions and burials have been remembered. The first martyrium has been erected namely on such place either in the period 311-313 (following immediately the Edict of Galerius of Tolerance, prepared in Serdica and issued in 311 in Nicomedia from the name of the four tetrarchs, or the edict of Constantine the Great and Licinius in 313 from Mediolano) or a little bit later, with t. a. q. 324, when Constantine became the only emperor.

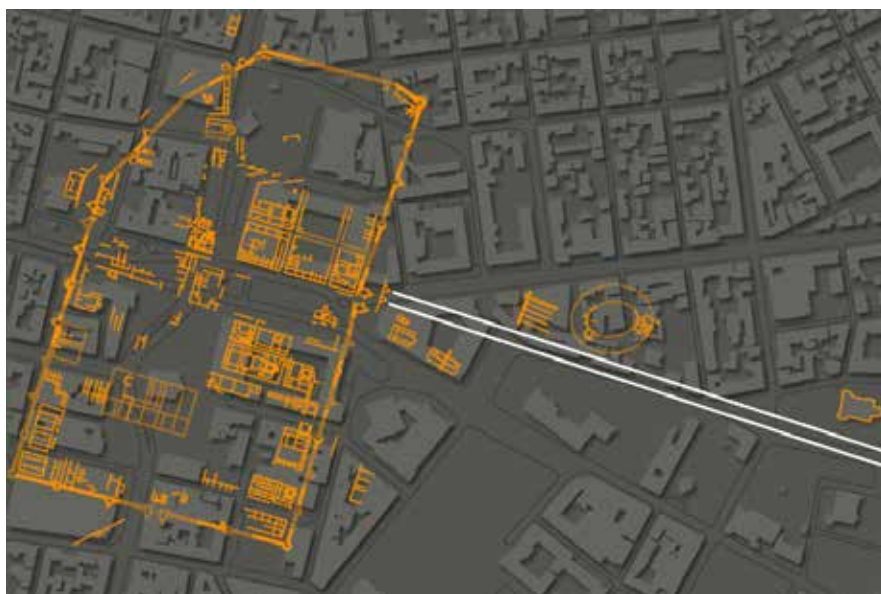


Table I. The Urban plan of Serdica, the supposed martyrrium at the East Gate and the supposed route to Philippopolis alongside St. Sofia. "Stara Sofia" with addition of the author

Табла I. Урбани план Сердике са положајем мартиријума код Источне капије и претпостављеног пута за Филипополис непосредно уз Св. Софију. „Стара Софија“, уредништво аутора

Several monuments from Bulgaria are interpreted as martyrriums¹. The martyrrium in Philippopolis has been built very near to its East Gate². The same topography is to be observed in Serdica, where according to St. Boyadjiev³ another martyrrium has been built, also immediately next to its

¹ A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art Chrétien antique. I. Architecture. Paris, 1946, 77–102; St. Doncheva, *Early Christian Martyria in Bulgaria and its Connection to the Eastern religious Practice*, in *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and their Veneration in East and West* (eds .A. Minchev, V. Yotov.), Varna, 2006; Г. Атанасов, *345 раннохристиянски светци-мъченици от българските земи I-IV в.*, София, 2011; V. Popova, *Two Early Christian Basilicas in the Vicinity of Nicopolis as Nestum*, *Studies in Honour of St. Boyadziev*, Sofia, 1911, 295-312, 273-278, 288

² M. Bospachieva, *An Early Christian Martyrium from Philippopolis*, *Archaeologia bulgarica*, 2 (2001), 59-69. Recently after a carefull examination of the written source it is established that there is no mentioning of martyrs executed namely at the East Gate, see M. Мартинова, Н. Шаранков, *Нови данни за комплекса „Източна порта” на Филипопол*, *Годишник на Регионалния Археологически музей Пловдив*, т. XII (2014), 165f. Nevertheless the usual place for executions in Rome etc. was really immediately outside the city gates and alongside the main routes to the next cities, very obvious at the case of murdering the gladiators and followers of Spartacus for instance. This tradition was probably inherited and continued to the end of Antiquity.

³ Ст. Бояджиев, *Сердика (Serdica). Градоустройство, крепостно строителство, обществени, частни, култови и гробнични сгради през II- IV в.*, in Р. Иванов (ред.). *Римски и ранновизантийски градове в България*, София, 2002, 125-180; Ст. Бо-

East Gate. In reality this was a small church with a baptisterium next to it and no artifacts connected with martyrdom have been found here. In the opinion of the same author the original martyrium is not preserved and we deal with the result of the second building period. In the light of the known up to now data for Serdica it is not clear if there is any connection between the martyrium at the East Gate (the supposed place of execution) and the martyrium under St. Sofia (the place of veneration of two martyrs), or the martyrium at the gate belongs to a third martyr, also anonymous. Since no skeletons have been found in the martyrium under St. Sofia, the dominating opinion since now is that first it was a memoria, later turned to a cemeterial church and two cemeterial basilicas.

The indication that it was a martyrium can be drawn from the unusual concentration of tombs around it, the so - called burials “ad sanctos” or “privileged” ones.⁴

The two reliquaries, found here, are the most important argument for the identification. It is considered, that their initial function

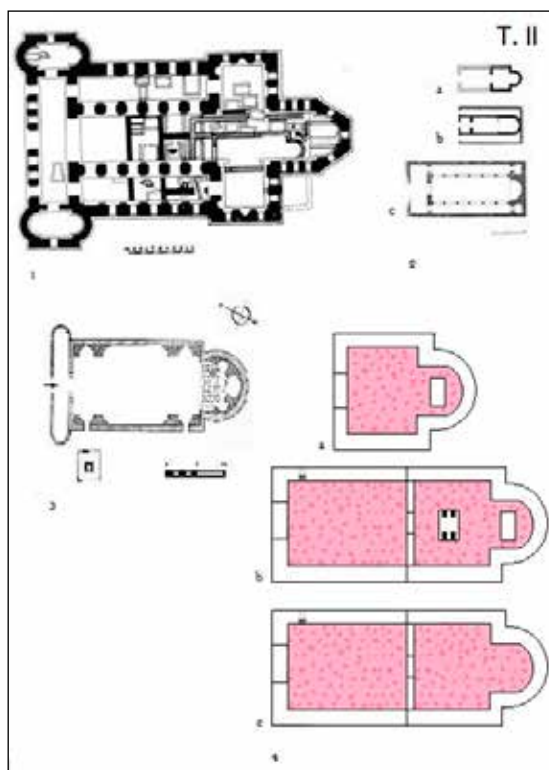


Table II. 1. The Later basilica of St. Sofia with the martyrium under it and part of the tombs “ad sanctos”; 2. The successive development of the martyrium into one-aisled church and two basilicas (after Curcic); 3. The martyrium of Marialba, Spain, with opus signinum pavement; 4. The opus signinum pavement of the martyrium, of the church and before laying the mosaics in opus tessellatum and opus vermiculatum (after Shalганov, with additions of the author)

Табла II. 1. Познија базилика Св. Софије са мартријумом изнад и део гробова “ad sanctos”; 2. Развој мартријума у једнобродну цркву и две базилике (према Ћурчићу); 3. Мартријум Мариалба, Шпанија, патос у техници opus signinum; 4. Opus signinum патос мартријума, црква пре постављања мозаика у техници opus tessellatum и opus vermiculatum (по Шалганову, са додацима аутора)

яджиев, *Християнската гробнична архитектура през II - VI в.*, in Ст. Бояджиев, Н. Тулешков, Ст. Стамов, *Българско архитектурно наследство*, I, София, 1994, 3-27.

⁴ Б. Филов, *Софийската църква „Света София“*, София, 1913; G. Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs: An Art Historical Study of Early Christian Silver Reliquaries*, Oxford, 2008, 133, 142; M. Roberti, *Sepulture privilegiate nelle chiese paleocristiane di Milano*, in Duval Y., J.-Cl. Picard (eds.). *Enhumation privilégiée du IV au VIII siècles en Occident*, Paris, 1986, 157-163.

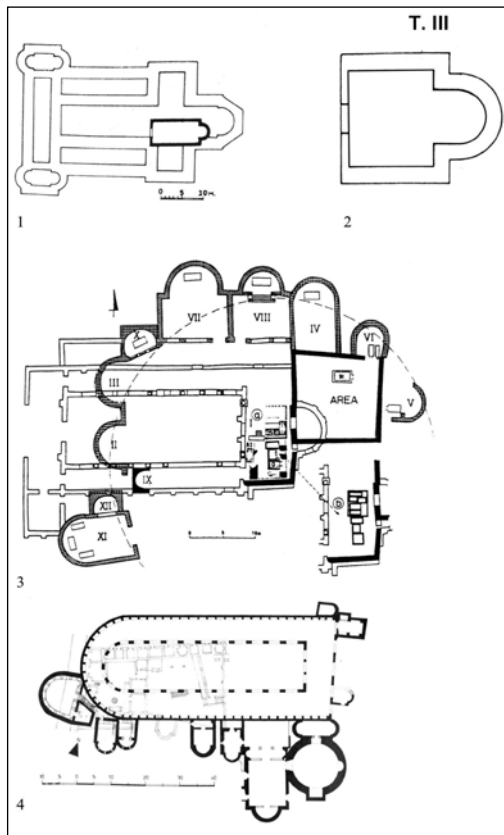


Table III. 1. The position of the martyrium in the space of St. Sofia; 2. The reconstruction of the martyrium with a thin west wall according to the previous authors; 3. The martyrium at Manastirine; 4. St. Agnese in Rome

Табла III. 1. Положај мартријума у простору Св. Софије; 2. Реконструкција мартријума са танким западним зидом, по претходним ауторима; 3. Мартријум Манастирине; 4. Св. Агнеза у Риму

had been different and they had been reused as reliquaries⁵. One can find arguments for it in their modest type, simple ornamental and geometric decoration, in the tiny silver sheet of the first casket and in the hurriedly incised Chi-Ro, made long after its manufacturing. All these are signs of the rapidness for adapting the caskets as reliquaries. The t. p. q. for making the caskets may be even the second half of 3d – the very beginning of 4th CC. After the middle of 4th century onwards the reliquaries become richer in decoration, figurative images and scenes from the Old and the New Testament are introduced and their technique proves to be much more complicated and refined⁶. A third reliquary, dated about the middle of the century from tomb III, built next to the martyrium in the same Eastern necropolis of Serdica, shows this difference⁷ in comparison to both caskets. The decisive change was connected with the development and growing up on a large scale of the martyrial cult and with the time of erecting in feverish haste in Rome and Jerusalem of the basic for Christianity basilicas and martyriums, first by Constantine the Great and his mother Helena, then followed

⁵ A. Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries from Bulgaria (4th-6th century AD)*, Varna, 2003, Cat. No 23 and 24 a

⁶ H. Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare*, Wien, 1971

⁷ H. Buschhausen, *Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia*, 365; Minchev, *Early Christian Reliquaries*, Cat. No 22; Noga-Banai, *The Trophies of the Martyrs*, 11, note 32, fig. 12. S. Čurčić is the only to consider that tomb III is earlier than the martyrium, see S. Čurčić, *Function and Form. Church Architecture in Bulgaria, 4th – 9th centuries*, in *Treasures of Christian Art in Bulgaria*, Sofia, 2001, 47

by the next emperors up to the end of Late Antiquity⁸. From the second half - end of 4th c. the architectural, liturgical and decorative monuments gain much more complicated essence and incomparable artistic level, which is lacking in the case of the first and the second reliquary from the Sofia martyrium.

From all possible architectural forms for the martyrium in Serdica has been chosen that of the small simple mausoleum, with its clear pagan genesis in the time of transition to Christianity. Its modest dimensions in Serdica are most likely connected with that of the concrete burial place and with the surrounding burial fittings, as well as with the modest possibilities of the Christian congregation of the city at that early moment of 4th century. Similar small square-like or slightly elongated mausolea can be found on many places in the Late Roman Empire. The classical examples are demonstrated in Rome and Manastirine, from the second half of 4th -5th CC⁹. But in our case the supposed influence of Manastirine should be excluded, because according to the latest study it dates from the second half of the century, while the earliest period of the martyrium in Serdica is from its first half. The same form of mausoleum-martyrium was accepted in other sites on the Northwestern and Northeastern Balkans¹⁰. Many examples come as well from Ostia, Spain, Asia Minor, Africa, etc.¹¹, part of them belonging to the 4th century too. But it should be stressed, that mausolea with analogical simple plans are missing and generally mausoleums with more complex plans sarkophagi were used very rarely in 3rd-4th century in Serdica itself and its vicinity¹².

Another problem in the case of Serdica is about the place of entrance and the thickness of its west wall¹³. The proposal in the earlier publications of enter-

⁸ P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago, 1981

⁹ H. Bradenburg, *Roms frühchristliche Basiliken des 4. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1979, 60-78; See the recent opinions on the initial data of the martyrium in Manastirine of B. Brenk, J. Dresken-Weiland, N. Duval, *Zwei Berichte über die Entwicklung des Martyrererkultus in Manastirine (Salona)*, *Antiquité tardive*, 9 (2001), 381-397

¹⁰ O. Ilić, *Early Christian Ecclesiastical Monuments in Settlements and Forts in the Area of Niš*, in *Niš and Byzantium*, VIII (2010), 111-126, fig. 4; E. Snively, *The new basilica at Goliamo Gradište, Konjuh: A sixth century Christian Church in the Province of Dardania*, *Niš and Byzantium*, IX (2011), 187-202, fig. 9; Атанасов, *345 светци-мъченици*, обр. 40, 58

¹¹ N. V. Fiocchi, *Reflessi topografici e monumentali del culto dei martiri nei santuari paleocristiani del territorio Laziale*, in *Martyrium in multidisciplinary Perspective*, Memorial Louis Reekmans (eds. R. Lamberings, Van Deun), Leuven, 1995, 197-234; *Lucrezia Spera. Distribution and monumental typologies of the sanctuaries in the suburbs of Rome in late antiquity and in the early mediaeval period*, in: *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and their Veneration in East and West* (eds. A. Minchev, V. Yotov.), Varna, 2006; F. López Cuevas, *Culto Martirial y Autorrepresentación en el mundo funerario a través de algunos ejemplares hispanos*, in: *Arte, Archeologia e Historia* 18 (2011), 125-132

¹² Ст. Бояджиев, *Християнската гробнична архитектура*; К. Шалганов, М. Иванов, *Новооткрит късноантичен мавзолей в кв. Лозенец в София през 2001 г.*, В: Spargacus II. 2075 години от въстанието на Спартак. Трако-римско наследство. 2000 години християнство. В. Търново, 2006, 314-325; St. Boyadjiiev, *L'architecture du mausolée de lozenetz et sa orrélation avec ceux de la mæsie et la thrace*, in: *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and their Veneration in East and West* (eds. A. Minchev, V. Yotov.), Varna, 2006

¹³ Филов, *Софийската църква*; С. Покровский, *Новооткрытая мозаика в ба-*

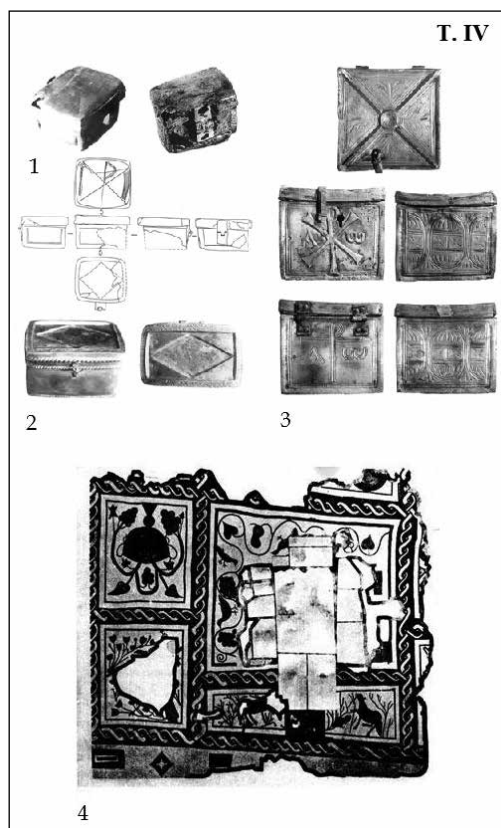


Table IV. 1. The reliquary with Chi-Ro from the martyrrium; 2. The reliquary No 2 from the martyrrium; 3. The reliquary from tomb III next to the martyrrium; 4. The preserved part of the cancel mosaic

Табла IV. 1. Реликвијар са Христовим монограмом из мартријума; 2. Реликвијар број 2, из мартријума; 3. Реликвијар из гроба III непосредно уз мартријум; 4. Сачувани део мозаика олтарске преграде

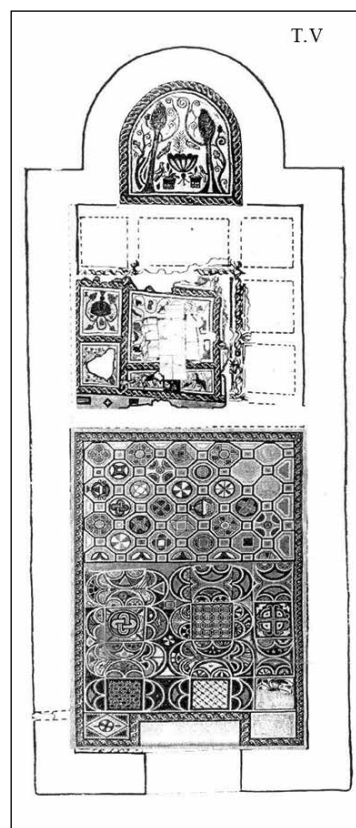


Table V. Drawing of all mosaic composition of St. Boyadjiev

Табла V. Цртеж композиције свих мозаика, по Ст. Бојаџијеву

ing from the south now is relinquished, together with the idea, launched earlier by Boyadjiev, of a deep apse with mensa at the open like in Manastirine. The thickness of the west wall in the reconstructed plans up to now is too thin in comparison to the rest of walls and in the initial mausoleum it should be equal (or almost equal) to the thickness of the other walls. The entrance is in the middle of the west side, judging by the parallels and the place of the mensa from

зилике „Св. Софии“ города Софии, Seminarium Kondakovianum, V (1932), 243-249; Ст. Бояджиев, *Софийската църква Св. София*, София, 1967; Ст. Бояджиев, *Раннохристиянската църква „Св. София“ в София*, в Ст. Бояджиев, Динова-Русева, *Раннохристиянският храм Света София*, София, 1996, 7-41; G. Fingarova, *Die Baugeschichte der Sophienkirche in Sofija*, Wiesbaden, 2011

the next building periods. There are three possible variants: either the mensa was simple and narrow, drawn to the east and leaving enough place for the movement of the venerating crowds, or it didn't exist at all; or the most probable variant considers both reliquaries placed in a sarcophagus or a kind of container with smaller dimensions, fitting the apse's dimensions.

The next discussion, which can be followed in literature, is about the interpretation of opus signinum of the first and the second martyrrium¹⁴. The black-and-white photos, made at the moment of their opening, are of very bad quality and cannot be used. The question raised is if this is the statumen of the future mosaics from the third building period or it is a real floor covering. One of the basic argument against interpretation it as a mosaic in Serdica since now is that opus signinum is to be met only in Late Republican- Early Imperial times (2nd c. BC – 2nd century AD). But the excavations in the last 50 years made possible the revision of this widely-spread contention. It is true only in the part of those embellished mosaics in signinum, which imitate or even include opus tessellatum and opus vermiculatum, with schemes in the form of grills and sets, geometric and ornamental motifs and even figurative images¹⁵. But the rest of monuments in signinum demonstrate very simple and banal decision without any additional techniques and decoration. This is the "basic" signinum, which can be met in monuments from 4th -5th century on the Balkans and elsewhere, including the floor of the martyrrium in Marialba in Spain¹⁶. In Sofia too is applied the most simple, common, cheap and quick for making signinum. According to the excavations of the residential house Eirene in Philippopolis rooms No 9 and 10 from the latest period (5th century) were also covered with signinum, while all the other rooms have the usual tessellatum and vermiculatum mosaics¹⁷. These examples show very clearly, that in Late Antiquity the basic technique of signinum as a mosaic covering went through a new revival and was transmitted to the Early Mediaeval churches of Europe.

The other arguments for signinum being a statumen for the real mosaic over, supported by St. Boyadviev and G. Fingarova, also can be attacked. If the signinum in Serdica is a mosaic, it should have and really has the same recommended rudus and statumen. During the excavations in the 90es in the martyrrium from the first and second period was found a layer of stones, put vertically (the rudus), followed by the mortar, made of mixture of lime, sand and powder of bricks and tegulae (the statumen). Finally on this surface is laid the nucleus with the specific red colour, with small stones and pieces of broken bricks/tegulae. They are not scattered occasionally, but put very carefully, on some places in regular rows, in order to create the proper surface of the mosaic covering. Except that K. Shalganov observed that the surface of the nucleus is blackened, which

¹⁴ Шалганов, *Нови данни*, 582- 584 и 585-591; Бояджиев, *Сердика*, 164 f; Fingarova, *Die Baugeschichte*, 36-50

¹⁵ V. Vassal, *Les pavements d'opus signinum: technique, décor, fonction architecturale*, Oxford, 2006

¹⁶ F. López Cuevas, *Culto Martirial y Autorrepresentación en el mundo funerario a través de algunos ejemplos hispanos*, in: *Arte, Archeologia e Historia* 18 (2011), 125-132

¹⁷ M. Bospachieva, *The Late Antiquity building EIPHNH with mosaics from Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria)*, *Archaeologia bulgarica* 7,2 (2003) 83-105

T. VI



1



2



3

Table VI. Restorated parts of the west composition and details

Табла VI. Реставрирани делови западне композиције и детаљи

could happen because of the usage of candles during relatively enough long period of existence of the floor namely as a mosaic surface. The excavator also describes a smoothed and strongly polished surface, which again is a sign of a real mosaic, not of its statumen. All these observations and some others, which will be concerned a little bit later, prove that there really existed several (not only two in the opinion of Fingarova) periods of the early martyrium and it was twice covered by signinum as a mosaic.

The first martyrium does not impress with its exterior and interior and probably has not received any support neither of the state nor of the city council. It was a modest outfit, probably on a private burial place of one of the Christians of Serdica and was erected in the shortest time. The lower and the upper signinum were made, because the martyrium's builder had been in search of quick, easy and cheap mosaic covering. In this way the local members of the community could take advantage of the freedom to profess the Christian faith in the second decade of 4th C.

And because of the non-typical for the city form of mausoleum one can ascertain some influence, most probably from the West Balkans and Italy. The new for Serdica plan could be accepted because of the desire of the community and its bishop to obtain a martyrium similar to the places providing with glorious examples of martyrdom.

The second period of the martyrium led to the building of a small elongated one-aisled church, which took the place of the previous mausoleum and its court. The west mausoleum's wall was demolished and in the previous west space a cancel was placed, not found itself, but with very clear traces of it. There was already enough space for the mensa, supported by 4 small columns, which on their turn were attached to a marble plate. As it is accruing, this part was raised (bema) a little bit over the rest of the day surface, a kind of podium. It was oriented north-south, in the entrance axis and nearer to the west. According to the parallels, the transennas were open-work, either with scales or with diagonal set of railing. Certainly both reliquaries were still objects of veneration, but it is not clear if they have been removed from the apse to beneath the mensa.

The covering with signinum excluded the cancel, which was covered with marble slabs. The t. p. q. was probably 324, when Constantine the Great defeated Licinius I and became the only emperor. Licinius I was in charge of these lands, but at the end of the Second Tetrarchy he made a step backward from Christianity, so the atmosphere in Serdica before his defeating and death was not auspicious for the transformation of the mausoleum - martyrium into a church. It can be supposed on the base of the concentrations of tombs around and especially from the coins and the third reliquary, found in one of them, that the t. a. q. was 337, the year of Constantine's death. The changes demonstrate that the initial martyrium-mausoleum already didn't satisfy the needs of the growing Christian community in Serdica and didn't correspond to the spirit of the advanced 4th century. But still the new church was modest in its decoration, in spite of the fact that in liturgical aspect its plan is clearer.

According to Shalganov the mensa was demolished, the reliquaries laid in the so-called small tomb.camera next to the podium and the surface covered with the second opus signinum because of the anti-Christian politics of Julian the Apostate. A temporary end of the martyrion's functioning was put in this way. I have several objections against such an interpretation. First of all they concern the coins which were found in three of the holes of the demolished mensa's legs. The coins belong to Constans, Constantius II as August and Julian as Caesar. At the moment of their mutual ruling (355-361) Julian still had no power to return back paganism and to demolish Christian churches. Except that he was governing in the West, while Constantius II was acting in the Eastern part, including Serdica, which he had visited several times, one of it in connection with the disarmament of Vetranton in the field of the city¹⁸. So, in my opinion, the coins have been put in the holes for another purpose, according to the tradition to put good foundations when erecting a new building, a new period in it or laying a new mosaic. The coins had the symbolic meaning of richness, success and Good Fortune. In ancient monu-



Table VII. Colour reconstruction of P. Popov of the two panels in the west composition

Табла VII. Реконструкција боја, по П. Попову и два панела западне композиције

¹⁸ В. Велков. *Градът в Тракия и Дакия през късната античност*, София, 1959, 33, 59

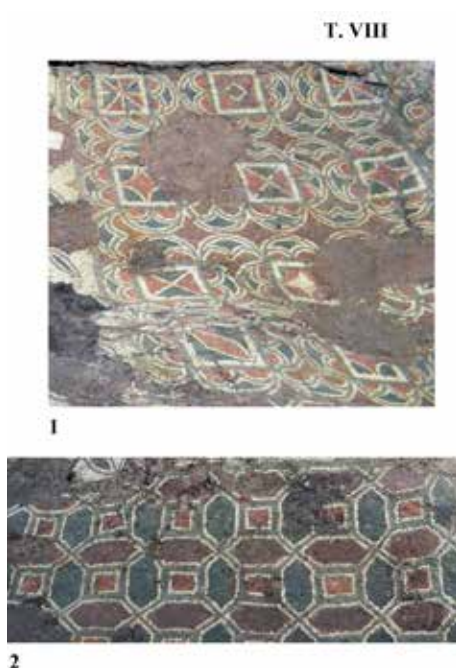


Table VIII. The House of Felix in Serdica.
Details of the mosaic schemes

Табла VIII. Кућа Феликс у Сердици. Деталј
мозаичких схема

ments from Bulgaria such coins, still into currency (in satisfactory or even good state of preservation), are found during excavations at the real foundations of walls or in the layers under the mosaic surface¹⁹. These coins are not dropped occasionally, but put on purpose in order to mark the new beginning as Good Luck signs. So they have nothing to do with a forcible demolishing of the martyrrium.

If it was really forcible, the Christians should take out the reliquaries from the camera and place them back (under the mensa?) after the death of Julian, but it did not happen ever. The impression is that the Christians were not in a hurry and under violent pressure when they “buried” the reliquaries. Just on the opposite – they had enough time and without hurrying prepared very carefully the containers and the “tombs” for them. It looks like as a usual altar “tomb” of hidden type, put a little bit aside²⁰.

In my opinion the careful “burying” of the reliquaries represents the so-called “sacred resting”/”deponierung” of the relics, known mainly from pagan examples (cult statues and inventory of sanctuaries). But there exist too resting of Christian objects, for instance the columns and the mensa sacra of the recently excavated basilica from the earlier period in the town of Biala near Varna²¹. They were not reused in the church from the new building period, but very carefully buried immediately outside the apse.

¹⁹ A coin of Constantine I, struck after 319, was found in the mortar of a mosaic from Montana (G. Alexandrov, *Montana*, Sofia, 1981). A coin of Constantius Chlorus, also from the mortar, dates the mosaic with the seasons from the residence in Marcianopol (A. Minchev, *The “House of Antiopē” - A Late Roman Residential House with Mosaics (Devnya, Bulgaria)*, in: *The Roman and Late Roman City*, Sofia, 2002, 245-252; several coins of Constantine I and his sons were found too in the mortar of the mosaic from Constanza (V. Kanarache, *The mosaic-floored edifice of Tomi*, Constanza, 1967). In the mosaic of Eirene a coin of Constantius II from the mortar has been unearthed too. It impresses that part of the examples are from the end of 3rd to the second half of 4th century and that among them are not only single examples, but also several coins, which means they had not been occasionally lost.

²⁰ F. Glaser, *Frühes Christentum im Alpenraum*, Graz- Wien- Köln, 1997, Abb.12a

²¹ В. Йотов, А. Минчев, *Късноантична крепост до нос Св. Атанас до град Бяла*, Варненско, АОР през 2009, София, 2010, 284

Next problem is how Julian's attitude toward Christianity and the Church was reflected on the martyrium in Serdica. What he really did was to restore the pagan cults, without prohibiting Christianity. Even if he intended to do it, he lived and ruled as a sole emperor too short to maintain it. His policy was also to restrict strongly the possibilities of the rich Christians in their state career and of the bishops in their economic and legal acts by depriving them of the state stipendium and of the right to administer private justice. In that sense his reign was unfavourable to the Christian Church. But in my opinion not the policy of Julian led to the demolishing of the martyrium's cancel, but some radical change in the Christian church of Serdica. The result was an entirely new interior, with real mosaics, a new cancel and newly brought relics. They may be a sequence of the election of a new bishop with ambitious plans. It is obvious that after the old relics had been buried, new ones have been brought on their place, otherwise the church could not function without dedication. The new bishop built a new cancel for the new relics and covered all the church with mosaics. The coins show the moment when the preparations began by demolishing the mensa sacra and the other liturgical installations and by burying the old reliquaries.

The change should be connected with the new phase of development of the cult of the saints. It followed the appearance of the obligatory rule to put relics already under the altar's mensa, and not only of local saints, a practice up to that time, but of important and "fashionable" ones. The mode began in Constantinople, because the new capital was lacking of relics, especially in comparison to Rome. This was the end of veneration of both anonymous for us martyrs of Serdica and their spontaneously emerged local cult, replaced by the cult of another martyr. In the 80 es of 4th century the predilection for local martyrs in the West returned back, but the case of Serdica with the second relics was earlier, in the middle of the century, following Constantinople with non-local saints. We can imagine the pompous procession of "translatio" of the new relics in Serdica, lead by the new bishop, in Late Constantinian time, most probably of Constantius II, judging by the mentioned already coins.

There was no need for making new foundations for the new mosaics, because now the first and the second signinum could be easily reused in the capacity of rudus and statumen. The observation of Shalganov on the numerous cuts done for better cohesion with the most upper mosaic layer (the nucleus) is a categorical proof for the initial function of the second signinum at the beginning as a real mosaic cover and only secondary as a statumen. No master would first polish the surface of the second signinum almost to a glass condition if it was not intended for a real mosaic. Also no mosaicist would make then so many additional strikes/cuts on the same ready for walking surface, if its function hasn't been changed.

The mosaicists began their work, but managed to lay down only the two west panels. Probably the work was temporary stopped and postponed for many reasons, one of them the possible waiting for better days in the period 361-363 of Julian's reign. After his death most likely other masters continued with the mosaics in the cancel and in the apse, generally in the period between 363 and 378 of the Valentinian dynasty. There exist an indirect argument for the early date of the west panels. A new mosaic was excavated in the center of Sofia in the

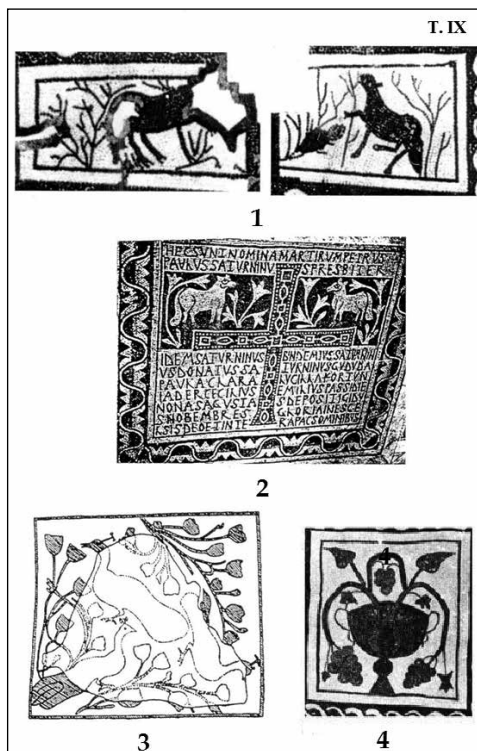


Table IX. 1, 3 and 4. Different panels from the cancel mosaic; 2. The mosaic from the martyrium in Uppenna

Табла IX. 1, 3 и 4. различити панели мозаика олтарске преграде; 2. Мозаик мартријума у Упени

so-called House of Felix²². Some of its schemes, motifs and colours are quite similar to the west panels of the martyrium. The coins from the House of Felix are generally from the middle of 4th century. The resemblance of both monuments allow to affirm for the first time the work of one and the same workshop in Serdica in the period 350-360.

The newly built cancel didn't survive too and only several marble slabs show its configuration. It was probably a little bit bigger, than the previous one, with ciborium and even maybe turned in the direction east-west. The cross-like marble slabs under the altar on the floor hide the broken surface after the next and last demolishing of the cancel, caused either by the Goths' invasions at the end of 4th century, or simply because it hindered with its height the making over of the level of the new basilica in 5th century. A fragment from a small pillar with specific decoration was probably a part of a low cancel screen. The other fragment of a capital²³, a spolia from the times of the Severi, is too big to be included in the screen and probably used in some

of the colonnades of the next basilicas on the same place. Because of the small distance the place of the cancel could not be used later as confession or a crypt for the basilica over.

But before erecting this late basilica over in the period of Arcadius, judging by the coins in the stratigraphic layers, the one-aisled church-martyrium with mosaics was replaced successively by two more basilicas with three aisles on the same level and on the same place. Thus the martyrium was included in these cemeterial basilicas. The newly "translated" relics to the church-martyrium replaced the old ones, but still it was a martyrium, judging by the iconography and meaning

²² М. Иванов, *Археологически проучвания на обект „Подлез под булевард „Княгиня Мария Луиза“ град София*, Археологически открития и разкопки през 2011 г., София, 2012, 318 сл.

²³ I am indebt for the definition to Dr. Svetla Petrova.

of the apse mosaic, bounded to the subject of martyrdom. But while the newly laid mosaics kept a direct connection with the new relics and with the martyrdom and its subject-matter, the upper mosaic from the 5th century already lost it.

There are many arguments for dating differently the three mosaic compositions of the martyrium (the west composition with two panels, the cancel mosaic and the apse mosaic). First of all it happened because of the supposed break during Julian's unfavourable rule; on the second place is the very possible change of the mosaic workshop; the last explanation for the difference among the three mosaic compositions is the slow and difficult raise of funds from donors, which lead respectively to a slow and gradual advancing of the mosaic covering towards east, made in different times and different "mode". These suggestions can be supported by the iconographic and stylistic analysis, which clearly demonstrates that the apse mosaic was laid later or even it is the latest composition, the west mosaic – the earliest one and the cancel mosaic most probably was created either in the time between them or even after the apse.

Both panels of the west composition are united by a common border and a similar range of colours²⁴. But their schemes and fillings are quite different, maybe as products of two masters. The first scheme, consisting of squares with peltae around them, is rare, very impressive with its plenty of decorative and floral motifs and scarce representations of small birds. The scheme is very similar to the decorative scheme of the reliquary in tomb III. The background is coloured and together with the richness of fillings is typical for the mosaics of the second half of 4th century in Bulgaria²⁵. At the same time the scheme of the second panel is more banal, nevertheless also with rich colours, colour background and different geometric motifs inside octogons. The drawing in the book of Filov (here t.) does not give the proper idea of the style. Recently several parts and a big panel are brought back after restoration in situ in the martyrium under St. Sofia. The separate units of the scheme, geometric or floral, are with quite big dimensions, very colourist, with the predominance of bright blue, green and yellow small tesserae, not balanced by the red ones in the few parts with birds and flowers. In the other parts of geometric essence the palette is balanced upon the green and the red/brown. Differently from the good colour treating, the outlines of the figures and floral motifs are rather schematic, decisive and even rude, with the predominance of the white thick ones, easily read. All the surface of each geometric unit is filled up to the last cm, a kind of vacuum horri. This richness and the plenty of different fillings, also the quick change of the schemes in the most west panel are the main features of the style.

The cancel mosaic is known only by some drawings and by old black-and-white photos with bad quality and strong close-up, not sufficient for analysis²⁶.

²⁴ Boyadjiev was the first to reconstruct the missing mosaic parts around the threshold in the most west panel.

²⁵ See the early period of Eirene in: M. Bospachieva, *The Late Antiquity building EIPHNH with mosaics from Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria)*, *Archaeologia bulgarica* 7,2 (2003) 83-105; about the exact date see V. Popova, *The Mosaics of the Residence called "Eirene"*, in: *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, Wien (forthcoming).

²⁶ Покровский, *Новооткрытая мозаика*,

It consists of squares and an irregular rectangle at the entrance of the cancel. The figural images are big and schematic in combination with small floral motifs. The entrance begins with two confronting lambs eating stems and with the most important, but unfortunately not preserved inscription, except several letters, probably with the names of both martyrs or another standard for a martyrism formula. The iconographic parallel from Uppenna's later mosaic shows a cross between the lambs,²⁷ which could eventually be shown in Serdica too, but unfortunately it is not preserved. The other images in the squares are a peacock, rinceaux, vineyard scrolls, a chalice, etc. They form a concentric composition subjected and oriented to the mensa in the center and respectively bound to the liturgical acting around it. All the images are symbols of different Christian beliefs and sacraments, but without connection among them, just scattered. The only accent is put on the lambs and the inscription at the entrance of the cancel.

The apse mosaic comprises the most important martyrial symbolic and, on the contrary, its elements are organized in a solemn and strict composition²⁸. In this it differs strongly from the cancel mosaic. A luter is placed in the center with two doves and a palm branch, repeating schematically the old genre motif of Sosius' drinking doves²⁹. This scene was so popular in Antiquity, that it was copied many times in wall paintings and mosaics, even by mechanical birds, which could whistle, sing and drink water from the vessel under the hydraulic force. A special attention is to be paid to the form of the vessel in Serdica, which should be a luter, the original vessel in Sosius' scene, used for washing and bathing in Greek and Early Roman art. It could be put on high leg/support, on special ring or on tripod. In Late Antiquity the original form is rarely shown, its body often acquires cannelures under the influence of the phiala and the cantharos. The leg/support either disappears or is influenced by other vessels. The luter in Serdica is really a strange mixture of several vessels: the body is with the cannelures of late antique luter variants, it has the apple of a chalice, but instead of the cone stand below three extremely schematic dashes are depicted as if this is a stand for amphora.

The presence namely of luter speaks of an iconographic archaism, because in Late Antiquity this kind of vessel appears rarely in art, replaced by the cantharos and the chalice. Already in 4th century the mosaicist in Serdica did not know any kind of proper support for the luter, judging by the depicted three

²⁷ В. Попова, *Хронология и стил на мозайките под софийската „Св. София“*, Сердика Средец София, т. 5 (2010), 163-164; V. Popova, A. Lirsch, *St. Sofia, in Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, Wien (forthcoming)

²⁸ В. Попова, *Хронология и стил*, 161-169

²⁹ Попова, *Хронология*, 163; for the form of this vessel, very near to the ancient phiala in its upper part, see form A and the classification of some of its decoration in form A and B in П. Стойчев, *Фиала мезомфалос в Тракия*, София, 2009. The luter/luterion was used for bathing and washing in Antiquity and for purification rituals in Judaism and Christianity, see R. M. Jensen, *Ablution, Initiation and Baptism: Late Antiquity and Judaism*, v. 3, Berlin-Boston 2011, 1684; see λουτήρ, λουτήριον in A Greek-English lexicon, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott. Revised and augmented throughout by Sir H. S. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars. With a revised supplement. Oxford, 1996., 1061; A Patristic Greek lexicon, edited by G. W. H. Lampe. Oxford, 1961, 812.

funny sticks below its body. This means also that the master was copying not directly some fine book with patterns and exact images, but a bad artisan copy of a copy and this fact is very symptomatic for his artistic level. The outlines and the drawings in general are rude and not exact, but the colour treatment is incomparably better. Very impressive is the treatment of the vineyard scrolls, similar to that of the sarcophagus of Constantina. in Santa Constanza, extremely heavy, dense and rude.

The pagan meaning water=life here was transformed in the Early Christian Fountain of Life³⁰. Nevertheless it was placed not alone, but in combination with the Garden of Paradise, symbolizing the idea of Afterlife, and with the Victory of the Christianity, embodied by the palm branch of martyrdom.

This is one of the earliest examples of the Fountain of Life and it should be added to the already known early monuments together with a mosaic from Augusta Traiana/ Stara Zagora in Bulgaria from the beginning of 4th century and a wall painting from Via Livenza in Rome from the second half of the same century³¹. The iconography and the style of the apse mosaic belong to an entirely new kind of hierarchical composition, developed in the Late Constantinian period and in that of the Valentinians in official portraiture, imperial sarcophagi, in the mosaics of Rome, the sepulcral wall paintings, etc. It is a heavy, very schematic, rude, mighty and frozen style, without details, far from the classicistic treatment

³⁰ P. Underwood, *The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospel*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, V (1950); T. Velmans, *Quelques versions rares du thème de la Fontaine de vie dans l'art paleochretienne*, *Cahiers archéologiques*, 19 (1969), 24-43

³¹ V. Popova-Moroz, *Christian and Pagan Art of 4th C. in Bulgaria*, *Miscellanea Bulgarica* 5, Wien, 1987, 263; В. Попова, *24 древни мозайки*, София, 1988, 28; L. Usai, *L'ipogeo di via Livenza*, *Dialoghi di archeologia*, 6 (1972), 363-412



Table X. 1. The apse mosaic. 2. A mosaic from Tunis, exposed at the Getty museum
Табла X. 1. Мозаик апсиде; 2. Мозаик из Туниса, Гети музеј

The rest of motifs, used in the apse mosaic, have also undergone through similar transformations. In all the Antiquity the cypress tree is represented in sepulchral monuments as an allegory of death, but in Serdica it is applied in the vision of the Christian Paradise. Unusual too is the fact that in the Garden of Paradise only the cypress trees are shown and not the listed in the Bible and the depicted in wall paintings and mosaics³³ other trees with different connotations. The vine scrolls are also used in the repertory both of pagan and Early Christian monuments, reflecting the corresponding ideas of Afterlife. But it is only in the church-martyrium of Serdica that the cypress trees and the vine scrolls are represented together as symbols of Death, Resurrection and Salvation in the Early Christian understanding³⁴. In this unusual scene, stretching over a relatively small apse, are revealed very complex Early Christian notions and idyllic poetic cosmogony.

One can hardly find in the 4th century art such a complex combination of two scenes (the symbolic “landscape” of the Early Christian Paradise and the Fountain of Life) and of 5 more images (two pairs of vine scrolls-cypress trees and birds-full baskets, plus the palm branch in the luter and the birds on it). At the present moment the apse mosaic looks without parallels, nevertheless there exist several monuments with similar general composition and similar separate motifs. A mosaic from Tunisia in the Getty museum possesses almost an identical to Serdica composition with two flanking olive trees at the ends, treated in the same stylistic manner, in spite of the very strange, probably satirical subject-matter³⁵. A luter with a wheatear inside is depicted on the earlier wall mosaics of Acheiropietos in Thessalonika³⁶. The iconography of the apse mosaic was not a local creation in Serdica and the master has just repeated an original from an important and influential artistic and theological center.

Several reasons could explain the unusual combinations in the apse mosaic, on the first place the cross-influence of the Balkans, being between East and West. Especially the period of Tetrarchy and Constantine the Great opened for the Balkan provinces entirely new horizons, because the rulers already stayed not in the remote Rome and not only visited the cities, but inhabited a constellation of residences from Trier to Nicomedia and Antiochia, with all the sequences of their presence. The exchange of artistic ideas now became faster and easier and the influence of the leading monuments of Rome, Thessalonika and a little bit later of Constantinople, from the Constantinian period onwards, became gradually stronger and stronger. The Garden of Paradise obtained a vision compared to Old and New Testament texts and to funerary prayers. Solemn lunette compositions with Christ, St. Peter and Paul, flanked at the ends with palm trees, with lambs below and the four rivers of Paradise were repeated in

³³ M. C. Carile, *Imperial Palaces and Heavenly Jerusalem: Real and Ideal Palaces in Late Antiquity*, Moscow, 2002, 16f; E. Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou, *From the Elysian Fields to the Christian Paradise*, in *The Transition of the Roman World* (eds. L. Webster and M. Brown), 1997, 128-142, Pl. 38

³⁴ Попова 2010, 165-167; Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou, 130

³⁵ *Stories in Stone* (Getty Villa Exhibitions), Oxford, 2006

³⁶ K. Raptis, *The Mural Decoration of Acheiropietos Basilica Revisted*, Niš and Byzantium, XII (2014), 101-114

the mosaics and wall paintings in the north of Italy, Hungary and of the Western Balkans³⁷. The mosaic workshops in North Italy and the Western Balkans relayed/translated the influence of the wall mosaics of Rome in pavements too and the process spread all over the Central Balkans, including Serdica. But the copying here in the floor mosaics was reduced to a kind of funeral-bucolic repertory without human images. The more we move to the Eastern Balkans, the more the adaptation and reduction of such figurative compositions is revealed. For instance in the wall paintings of Nish remained only the images saints from Niš, flanked by palm branches³⁸. From Serdica and up to the Black sea, with 10 exceptions only among more than 180 wall paintings and mosaics, no human images appear and here the adaptation reveals in the iconography of symbolic plants-and-birds-and-vessels compositions. At one side this phenomena can be accepted as backwardness by attaching to the old symbolic images of the secret Christianity from the 3rd century. At the other side the figurative images already are intended to cover predominantly the walls and the vaults. And finally in the Eastern Balkans their lack can be accepted as a presage the future eastern iconoclastic art.

The apse mosaic in the Sofia martyrion is a relatively early monument, created between the influences of East and West and a forerunner of the future development without figures of the Christian personages. Especially interesting in that sense is the iconography of the Fountain of Life. Well-known is its middle and late history, beginning with the period of emperor Zeno in 5th century, with the cult of Virgin Zoodoxos Pigi, developed in the monastery in the suburb of Constantinopol³⁹ and used up to the end of 14th century in Byzantine icons and wall paintings. After the fall of Constantinopol this iconography was continued in the Orthodox art of the Balkans and Russia. In it the fountain is always present, often attended by two cypress trees and the Virgin and the Child are inside the vessel, while sacred persons, rulers etc. encircle them. In the Serdica martyrion we have an earlier archaistic and different iconography, a predecessor of the 5th century Fountain of Life, placed in the centre of Paradise, without human images and without the cult of the Virgin.

All its complex combinations and symbolic meanings put the apse mosaic on a special place among the Early Christian monuments. Its relatively early and established by the coins date from Late Constantinian – Valentinian times also contributes to its prominent role as a witness of the process of transformation of pagan iconography into Christian one in several directions. Firstly, it shows an archaic and rare variant of the Fountain of Life with luter; secondly,

³⁷ G. Trovabene, *Primitive decorazioni musive degli edifice cristiani e succetive trasformazioni*, Niš and Byzantium, VI (2008), 75-98; Z. Magyar, *The World of Late Antique Sopianae: artistic connections and scholarly*, Niš and Byzantium, VII (2009), 107-118

³⁸ M. Rakocija, *Once again on the ancient christianity tomb painting with figural representations in Niš*, Niš and Byzantium XII, Niš 2014, 49-70; M. Rakocija, *Paintings of the Crypt with Anchor in Niš*, Niš and Byzantium, VII (2009), 87-106

³⁹ T. Velmans, *L'icôgraphie de la "Fontaine de Vie" dans la tradition byzantine à fin du Moyen Âge*, in: A. Grabar et al. (Éds.), *Synthronon. Art et Archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1968, 119-134; T. Стародубцев, *Чудотворная икона в Византии и древней Руси*, Зограф, 33 (2009), 117-118

the rest of the images are also in unusual combinations, on the first place the scene of Paradise with the Fountain of Life. The complexity of this apse composition in the Serdica martyrion reflects the existence of an influential and very important for the development of Early Christian and Byzantine art prototype, lost or with still not traced properly genesis.

The choice of the architectural form of mausoleum for the first martyrion in Serdica, its later transformations into a small church and then into two more basilicas follow the analogical processes in East and West. But the martyrions in Rome, the Western Balkans, Thessalonika and Constantinopol during the time of Constantine the Great most probably influenced stronger Serdica than any other centers. This happened because of the strong reverberation of the Diocletian's persecution on the Balkans, the extreme popularity of the numerous martyrs here, the closeness in time and territory and the building activity of Constantine and his family. At the same time the martyrs of Serdica had only a local meaning and unfortunately remained anonymous for us. The earlier mausoleum-martyrion of Serdica never reached the significance of the martyrions of Rome, Manastirine and Thessalonika. Probably at that time the important funds and significant efforts were concentrated upon other Early Christian monuments inside, not outside Serdica, but *intra muros* and especially on the official residence and the bishop basilica. The recent excavations found a very big apse of a basilica in the center of Late Antique Serdica⁴⁰, where probably the bishops of East and West gathered together to take part in the Church Council of 343-344, which led to the division between the Orthodox and the Arianic bishops and to their two separate councils in Serdica and Philippopolis..

The way the martyrs under St. Sofia were venerated at the beginning was modest, until the covering of the church-martyrion with pavements. The paradox is that namely at that moment, when the church was embellished, the old relics were buried for ever and new ones were brought for dedication and veneration. The mosaic program of the cancel and especially of the apse is connected with the martyrdom, but of the new relics. Since the new building and decorative period with t.p.q. 355-361 was connected with the dedication of the church and the basilica with the new relics, this program was devoted to a new "famous" martyr, following the example of Constantinople and most probably not from Serdician. In that connection it should be stressed the role of the bishops of Serdica in the period from the middle of 4th century onwards, when the mausoleum-martyrion was turned to a church-martyrion and later in two basilicas. The unique complexity of the apse mosaic in its iconographical and symbolical archaism places the martyrion among the well dated and important monuments of the Early Christian art.

⁴⁰ Иванов, *Археологически проучвания*, 118

Вања Попова
МАРТИРИЈУМ И ПАТОС ИЗНАД БАЗИЛИКЕ СВЕТЕ СОФИЈЕ У СЕРДИЦИ

Мартиријум изнад цркве Свете Софије у Сердици налази се ван зидина града, међу гробовима источне некрополе из римског односно позноантичког периода. Изузев повезаности путева између источне капије, града и мартиријума (пут који води према Трајановој капији и Филипополису), постојала је још једна веза међу њима: прва је место егзекуције а друга поштовања мученика.

Мартиријум је по свим приликама изграђен у периоду од 311 – 313., а извесних адаптација је било и 324. године. Основа мартиријума понавља структуру маузолеја. Диспозиција гробова у непосредној близини мартиријума и два реликвијара пронађених током последњих ископавања. Налази указују и на намену грађевине. Реликвијари су врло вероватно израђени крајем III и почетком IV века. Првобитно нису били намењени похрањивању реликвија. На мањем реликвијару је накнадно урезан Христов монограм. Остаци скелета у непосредној близини грађевине ипак нису дали поузданијих података.

Из писаних извора нема прецизнијих података у вези са мученицима из Сердикe, стога, евентуални идентит пронађених гробова остаје још увек непознат. Реликвијари су врло вероватно чувани у саркофагу мањих димензија, који је својим димензијама могао бити похрањен у сразмерно мању апсиду. Друга могућност је да су реликвијари били посебно истакнути, непосредно испред апсиде.

Постоји вероватноћа да су уломци камене пластике били пласирани у апсиди, што потврђују делови мермера нађени *in situ* у патосу. Наиме у патос је евидентиран метални новац: један из периода Констанса, други Константија II, тј. времена када је постао цар и Јулијана Апостата (355-361). Фрагментни камене пластике указују и на првобитно постојање циборијума. У најранијем периоду патос мартиријума је био израђен у техници *opus signinum*, са јасно издвојеним деловима куда се ходало. Ова техника је заживела крајем IV века али у нешто скромнијој изради. Касније је овај слој патоса употребљен за нове мозаике у техникама *opus tessellatum* и *opus vermiculatum*. Аутор такође расправља о евентуалним разлозима полагања реликвијара у мартиријум. Закључено је да је врло вероватно у питању акт похрањива моштију, а да уметање новца у патос не би требало тумачити као антихришћански поступак Јулијана Апостате како се раније сматрало. Наиме, наведено је да је постојала пракса уметања новца у патос. У раном хришћанству се веровало да овај обичај доноси срећу и просперитет. Будући да је Сердика добила новог епископа у Константиново време, отуда је временом дошло до *translation* моштију познатих светитеља – мученика. Други мозаик је откривен у кући Феликс у центру Сердикe. На том месту је пронађен новац из IV века.

Неке од схема, боја и генерално говорећи стил наликују сличној композицији у мартиријуму. Оба мозаика су дело искусног мозаичара, очигледно рад исте радионице. Мозаик из мартиријума се састоји од два регистра, а по свим приликама у његовој изради су учествовала двојица мозаичара. Мозаик у апсиди уобичајен је за уметност овог периода: представа Раја и Извор Живота са архаичном, сведеном иконографијом. Стил израде рефлектује утицаје позноконстантиновке уметности, као и уметности из времена Валентинијана. Због такве иконографије али и новца уметног у патос не може се са прецизношћу одредити тачан период израде мозаика у апсиде.