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THE EARLY NON-FIGURAL MOSAIC PAVEMENTS IN THE METROPOLITAN BASILICA OF PHILIPPOPOLIS IN THRACIA

Abstract: One of the aims of the article is to study the reasons of the re-appearing of opus signinum in the Early Constantinian period, then followed by the disappearing and afterwards the new introduction of the figural representations in the mosaic pavements of the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis from Theodosius I up to Marcian. The observations prove on the base of the development of the mosaic style, its iconography and the connection with the liturgical demands of the period that some workshops of Constantinople have worked in Philippopolis during the Theodosian Renaissance and that Philippopolis has played an important role in Thracia in the development of the Early Christian architecture and the mosaic decoration and by accepting influences both from Rome and Constantinople and the Greek East in the different periods.

Keywords: Metropolitan basilica, non-figural mosaics of 4th-5th century, stylistic development, the influence of Constantinople, the role of Philippopolis.

Introduction

In the period 2015-2020 the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis² in Thracia, now Plovdiv in Bulgaria, had the extremely good chance to be almost fully excavated. Before that, for almost 40 years after its initial and partial excavations in the period 1982-86 and 1990, this basilica and its mosaics were in miserable condition. The old excavations and the documentation were not done properly and did not reveal the highest rank of the monument³. The Foundation

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² This basilica is known so far as ‘the Episcopal basilica’, but since Philippopolis is the capital of the diocese, and the church administration is following the secular one, it is more proper to name this basilica and the bishop of the whole diocese ‘Metropolitan’.

³ For instance, the published old plan was inaccurate and without most of the important architectural and liturgical details and without precise research on the relationship

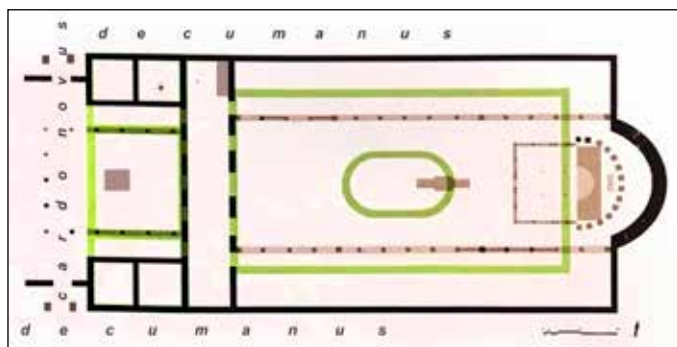


Fig.1. Plan of the preceding pagan building with atrium, peristyle and oval pool, rebuilt later over with the Early Christian Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. After St. Stanev and E. Kantareva-Decheva. The earlier pagan building in green.

Сл.1. План претходне паганске грађевине са атријумом, перистилом и овалним базеном, касније обновљена са ранохришћанском Митрополијском базиликом Филипополиса. По Ст. Станеву и Е. Кантаревој – Дечевој. Претходна, паганска грађевина означена је зеленом бојом.

‘America for Bulgaria’, the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture and the municipality of Plovdiv initiated and supported the new excavations, the sheltering and conservation of the mosaics and the new exposition in situ of this basilica, its mosaics and finds. Due to this decisive help, the basilica was almost fully excavated. Not found was the baptisterium and not excavated were only the northern and southern areas outside the basilica, occupied by the catholic cathedral St. Ludovik, and by one of the main streets of Plovdiv.

Now the basilica received a

detailed documentation, adequate modern conservation and reconstruction with an exposition, showing the history of the place and the basilica in its full grandeur⁴. The three mosaic levels were divided, the earlier ones left in situ, the other ones exposed on the walls and on the second floor of the huge protecting building-museum.

The Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis provides the chance to study the numerous aspects of the Early Christian architecture and decoration not only to the contemporary scientists, but also to the future generations. In this article I will stop the attention only to some of the problems, connected with the mosaic pavements, its technique, styles, dates, and the liturgy, and finely

among the mosaic pavements and the buildings periods and phases, in spite of the favourable circumstances, the big archaeological team and the financial support of the official institutions. For the earlier excavations, the mosaics, and the plan of the basilica of the first researcher with references see I. Topalilov, *On Some Issues Related to the Christianisation of the Topography of Late Antique Philippopolis*, Thrace, *Annales Balcanici*, vol. 1, 2021, 117-121; R. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova. *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, (Wien, 2016), Taff. 140, Abb. 363. In the cited publications of the first excavations the mosaics are not accurately related to the building periods and phases, in spite of the best situation for the archeologist at that time and the thousands of photoes in situ of the now ruined parts of the mosaics, still in ‘private’ procession and not published, although paid by the Archaeological museum in Plovdiv.

⁴ The chance of a new thorough research was additionally supported by the scientific conference on the basilica, organized in 2018 by the archaeologists, conservators, historians etc. The aim was to listen to different points of view and to discuss them as to reveal the date/dates, the plan, the decoration and generally the significance of this monument in the development of the Early Christian architecture in Thracia, the Balkans and the Late Antique world. Unfortunately, the Acts of the symposium remained unpublished.

on its importance in the historical context. In the research I rely on the observations and documentation of the team, especially of the Assoc. Prof. Dr. E. Kantareva-Decheva in the mosaic research and conservation, and of Dr. St. Stanev on the plan and the liturgical aspects⁵. That's why only few preliminary data on the architecture of the basilica will be mentioned in the introduction. The periods and phases cited in my article follow generally the ones of both researchers, with few exceptions, additionally specifying or offering new dates of some pavements.

The pre-history of the place on which the basilica is erected, reveals an atrium and a large rectangular space, occupying two insulae, (fig. 1) with oval pool of significant dimensions (14 x 6.50 m). The first offered proposal that the basilica has replaced the temple of the Roman imperial cult it not acceptable since no plan and finds of the kind have been discovered here.⁶ A spolia, secondary used marble plate in the basilica, possesses a long inscription with the list of 44 members of a Dionysian thiasos in Philippopolis during the rule of Valerian and Gallien.⁷ The architectural remnants and the plan of the building preceding the basilica, especially the atrium and the peristyle with the oval pool, are typical for the urban residences and houses,⁸ and not for the buildings and rooms of cult associations. Besides, since the plate with the inscription is a spolia, its origin namely from the structure preceding the basilica is not certain, and it could be taken from any other place in Philippopolis. An open-air pool, although rectangular, situated outside the baths of Apamea on-the-Oronthes, represented together with the jumping and swimming boys, can be observed on a very rare mosaic (fig. 2), belonging also to the first half of 4th century.⁹ We know also an example of such oval basins, but inside a half-round outer plan of a 4th century-bath built in Odessos¹⁰; also bigger open-air pools intended for fish were excavated in the courts of some urban houses of Augusta Traiana-Beroe.¹¹

⁵ Kantareva-Decheva and S. Stanev (in print), *New mosaic floors in the Episcopal basilica of Philippopolis*, Proceedings of XIV Conference of Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique (AIEMA), (Nicosia, Cyprus, 15-19 October 2018); Кантарева-Дечева Елена, *Нови стратиграфски проучвания на мозайките от Епископска базилика на Филипопол*, Сборник с доклади от международ-на конференция на тема „Наука, образование и иновации в областта на изкуствата“ (АМТИИ, Пловдив, 12 – 13 октомври 2017), Пловдив 2018, 365-372.. My special gratitude to E. Kantareva-Decheva and S. Filiipova for the help during writing of my article..

⁶ I. Topalilov, *On Some Issues*, 119.

⁷ Interview with N. Sharankov in the newspaper Monitor, on 12th of July 2019.

⁸ Topalilov, *op.cit.*, 119.

⁹ M.-T. Olszewski, Houmam Saad, *Pella-Apamée sur l'Oronte et ses héros fondateurs à la lumière d'une source historique inconnue: une mosaïque d'Apamée*, 2018, 365-416.

¹⁰ А. Минчев, В. Йотов, Е. Мирчева, *Късноантична баня и сграда на ул. „Цариброд“ 10 във Варна*, Археологически открития и разкопки за 2020, кн, II, София 2021, No 28.

¹¹ К. Калчев, *Археологически резерват Августа Траяна-Берое*, в: 85 години Исторически музей Стара Загора, Стара Загора 1992, 49-69.



Fig. 2. Apamea on-the-Oronthes in Syria. Mosaic representing a swimming pool in front of the *thermen* of the city. After Olszewski and Houmam.

Сл. 2. Апамеа на Оронту у Сирији. Мозаик са представом базена испред терми (по Олзевском и Хумаму)

The most recently offered hypothesis is that the preceding building of the basilica in Plovdiv was a residence either belonging to Constantine the Great and his family who donated the land, or to the praetor or some distinguished person of the city.¹² In my view, the latter proposal is more plausible since we have no data on the existence of imperial domain and property of Constantine I and his family namely in Philippopolis, and also because south of the agora have been excavated the houses of the elite and the residence of the metropolitan bishop of the diocese.¹³

The basilica is the biggest Early Christian monument in Bulgaria, and one among the most impressive monuments in the Balkans, being long about 86 m and wide almost 39 m. Most probably it is copying the first enormous basilicas of Rome (the Lateran basilica, St. Peter and St. Peter and Paul extra muros), the early basilicas of Constantinople (the first St. Sofia and the first St. Irene, unfortunately not preserved and rebuilt in the next periods), and the ones in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, all from the period of

Constantine I and his heirs. The discovery of such a monumental basilica and its enormous surfaces covered with three mosaic layers have no precedent in Bulgaria. But looking at the relatively recently found enormous basilica in Ostia from the same initial period (figure 3)¹⁴, it may be concluded that in spite of the plenty of literature on the Constantinian period and the Early Christian architecture, we still do not know the real and complete story of its development. The Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis is a new landmark for the Eastern Mediterranean and its connections with Rome and the other Italian Late Antique cities, particularly with the artistic centers in the Balkans, the Aegean islands and Asia Minor. The basilica in Ostia points also to the place of the not found

¹² I. Topalilov, *op. cit.*, 119.

¹³ V. Dinchev, *The Provincial Capitals of the Late Antique Dioceses of Thracia and Dacia*, In: M. Raycheva, M. Steskal (eds.). *Roman Provincial Capitals Under Transition*. Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Plovdiv 04.-07. November 2019 (Sonderschriften Band, 61), Holzhausen – Wie, 2021, 233-254, esp. 144.

¹⁴ L. Lavan, *Public space in Late Antique Ostia: excavation and survey in 2008-2011*, in: *American Journal of Archaeology* 116 (2012) 649-91.

in Plovdiv baptisterium, either from the north or the south side, alongside the longitude of the basilica. Namely here from the north side the baptismal basin has been found.¹⁵

In the I building period the basilica in Plovdiv is three-aisled and one-apse (fig. 11 a). The relics have been housed near the apse, but on a lower level, in the form of the so-called *kyklion/kiklion*.¹⁶ The concrete construction of the martyrial installation is not preserved, because of the lying over it burials of the medieval necropolis. The Christians worshipping the relics were entering the half-round space inside the apse, either looking to the martyrial structure from above, or descending to the lower level for direct observation and contact.

At the beginning the chancel had smaller dimensions, and the colonnades were with free access from the nave. The capitals during this period were Roman *spoliae*. The nave has three entrances and one could enter the aisles by two separate entrances. All the floors at the beginning were covered by mosaic in *opus signinum*. The atrium has three porticoes, and the eastern wall of the fourth portico is forming the western wall of the narthex. A fountain/well existing since the pagan building was also used in the middle of the atrium. The back sides of the atrium are covered with two buildings each with a pair of closed rooms. The previous *cardo* west of the basilica was closed and partitioned by two monumental propyleums from north and south outside the closed area of the previous street from the west (fig. 1). The continuation of the new *cardo* was leading to the residence of the metropolitan (the so-called ‘House of Eirene’), infringing the normal orthodox urban set of the Roman streets.

However, the basilica erected in Philippopolis, the metropolitan city of the province and diocese Thracia in the hinterland of Constantinople, received later at the end of I (phase c) and II building period Constantinopolitan features in its liturgy, liturgical planning and furniture, and its new architectural and mosaic decoration, the latter laid in three successive mosaic layers. During the II and III building periods, the chancel has been rebuilt and enlarged, the ambo in the middle axis installed, the free access to the aisles closed by low brick walls and marble screens, new architectural elements added to the colonnades and the

¹⁵ Н. Шаранков, *Археологически открити и разкопки през 2017 г.*, София 2018, 372, No 3., marble basin of a baptisterium with the name of Macedonius (the known military praetor of the city or unknown to the moment bishop of Philippopolis ?).

¹⁶ 16 See C. S. Snively, *Golemo Gradište at Konjuh: The Basilica, 2009-2010*, DO Papers 64, 2010. On the *kyklion* see note 11 of Sniveley in the cited article. It is related in its function to the apsidal crypt found in churches in Stobi and Thessaloniki and elsewhere; see C. Snively, *Apsidal Crypts in Macedonia: Possible Places of Pilgrimage?* *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 20.2 (1995): 1179–84; and: *A Type of Underground Cult Place from Late Antiquity: How did it Function?* In *Early Christian Martyrs and Relics and their Veneration in East and West*, International Conference, Varna 2003 (Varna 2006), 163–72. For the *kyklion* see also A. Orlandos, *Η ξυλόστεγος παλαιοχριστιανική βασιλική της μεσογειακής λεκάνης* (Athens, 1952–57), 493–95; and, more recently, I. D. Varalis, *Τα χαρακτηριστικά της εκκλησιαστικής αρχιτεκτονικής της Νικόπολης: παραλληλίες και διαφοροποιήσεις*, in *Νικόπολις Β’*, Πρακτικά του Δευτέρου Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για τη Νικόπολη (11–15 Σεπτεμβρίου 2002), ed. K. Zachos (Preveza, 2007), 1:598–99, and especially note 31.

second and third layer of mosaics laid.¹⁷ In III period a deambulatorium¹⁸ has been erected over the late mosaic in the apse and opus sectile covered the chancel. The deambulatorium was covering only the apse's space, and was not connected directly with the aisles as it is normally. The deambulatorium in Plovdiv is consisting of brick pillars repeating the apse's curve from the inner side, and forming the corridor intended for the processions and worshipping of the martyrial installation from above. At the same time, it may be supposed on the ground of the parallels, that steps have been made for the rituals of the clergy from the west side, leading down to the relics¹⁹. This planning repeats the development of the basilicas with deambulatorium (the so-called 'U-basilicas') further in 6th century, probably during the Justinianic period. In this way, the basilica in Philippopolis reveals the mixture and change of the western/ Roman and the Greek/Constantinopolitan liturgy and liturgical planning. This happens at least three times, following the main historical events in the period 4th – 6th century (the official introducing of Christianity by Constantine the Great; the foundation of Constantinople and the Orthodox policy of Theodosius I, leading to the increasing influence of Constantinople on the liturgy in the Eastern Mediterranean; and finely, the conquering for some period by Justinian I of great parts of Italy, adding them to the Early Byzantium and to the mutual influences between the East and West empires).

A coin of Licinius I was found during the conservation works by E. Kantareva-Decheva²⁰, placed inside the concave surface of a tegula from the pagan building under the first mosaic in opus signinum. The coin looks as occasional find dropped in the debris of the previous building. This is not typical for the coins as 'foundation votive'.²¹ Such coins are usually placed in the mortar of the mosaics, under the doorstep, or in any other special way as to be clearly distinguished as act done on purpose, like the coins in the holes for the legs of the altar table of the martyrrium under St. Sofia.²² This fact means that the basilica in Plovdiv can be dated either during the time of the coin or rather after it's minting as t. p. q., including a longer time. Licinius I was ruling over these lands of the Balkans until his death in 324 and he could theoretically build the first basilica, also since he was the second ruler to sign in 313 together with Constantine I the Milan Edict for Tolerance to Christianity. Was it possible that

¹⁷ Чанева-Дечевска, Станев и Станчев, *Новоразкрити мозайки*, 2021,

¹⁸ Т. Тодоров, *Деамбулаторият в раннохристиянската архитектура IV-VII век*, Автореферат на дисертация, (В. Търново, 2015).

¹⁹ G. Cirrone, *La Basilica della SS. Trinità di Venosa dalla Tarda Antichità al Medioevo*, La Capitanata. Semestrale della Biblioteca Provinciale di Foggia, Anno II, N. 25 (Giugno 2011). Foggia, Biblioteca Provinciale di Foggia, 125-180.

²⁰ Кангарева-Дечева, *Нови стратиграфски проучвания 2018*, 231.

²¹ V. Popova, *Monuments from the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian Dynasty in Bulgaria*, In: M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium XIV*, 157-186.2016: 169-170, with references.

²² Popova V. *The Martyrium under the basilica of Saint Sophia in Serdica and Its Pavements*. –In: M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium XIII*, Niš 2015, 138-140; В. Динчев, *Сердикийската "Св. София"*. По въпроса за причините и датата на появата ѝ, *Базилката Св. София на прехода между езичество и християнство*. Сердика, Средец, т. 7. (2018), 77-78.

the sources reflecting the attitude of the church authorities to Licinius I have belittled and hidden his merit on behalf of the highly estimated and praised Constantine I? It seems plausible because of the well-known historical events: the constant contradictions and two wars between Constantine I and Licinius I in the period 314-324²³, and because in his later years Licinius put an end to his tolerance to the Christians. So, in my opinion the church at that time and later had enough ground to praise only Constantine I for introducing the Christianity equal to the other religions, for the vast building program in Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople etc., continued by his sons and the next emperors of the 4th century. Therefore, more correct should be the second supposition for the coin of Licinius only as t. p. q. for erecting the basilica, but not pointing him as its builder. In such a case the date after 324, the year Constantine I killed Licinius I (after killing also his son), should be taken as the earliest possible one, after which the basilica in Philippopolis has been built.

It cannot be expected that this basilica has been erected simultaneously to the beginning of constructing the enormous basilicas of Rome. However, the process of building the Lateran basilica, that of St. Peter etc. was continuous, from 314-333-349 and continued up to the end of the century and beyond, so at a definite moment the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis was included in this general process. Such basilicas were intended for mass conversion at the beginning of the official Christianity. The tremendous basilica had the same function for the whole province Thracia and the diocese of Thracia. That circumstance and the

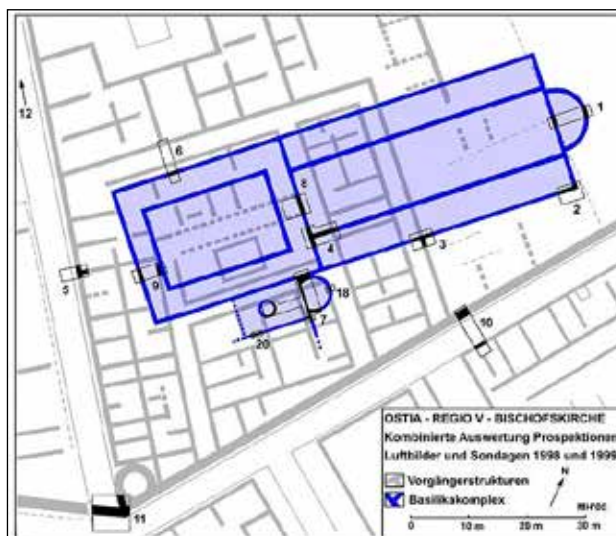


Fig.3. The Early Christian basilica in Ostia from the period of Constantine I. After Lavan, 'Public Space'.

Сл.3. Ранохришћанска базилика у Остији из периода Константина I. (по књизи Л. Лавана 'Public Space').

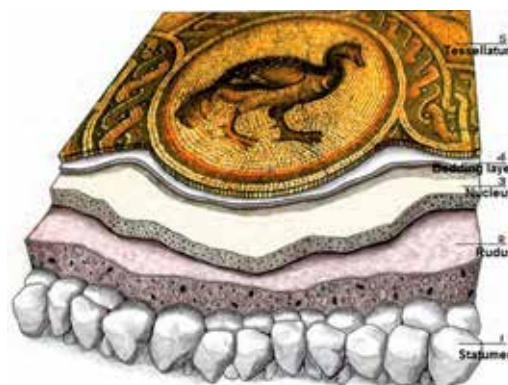


Fig. 4a. Preparatory layers of the usual mosaic. According to 'Illustrated Glossary'.

Сл. 4а. Припремни слојеви мозаика (по: 'Illustrated Glossary').

²³ M. Humphries, *From Usurper to Emperor: The Politics of Legitimation in the Age of Constantine*, Journal of Late Antiquity 1 (2008), 82-100.

Roman influence on its initial plan and liturgy explain its huge dimensions and the forming of the *kyklion*²⁴. However, the opinion²⁵ that the Christianity in the Roman and Late Antique provinces of Bulgaria was tardy and the first Christian buildings here loitered and appeared only in the second half of 4th – 5th century is, in my view, true only for some rural and remote mountain areas²⁶. The erecting of the first official Christian buildings in Thracia and Moesia/Dacia happened maybe in the two decades following 311 (the year of Galerius' Edict of Tolerance) and the Edict of Milano of 313. But now, the I building period of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis should be determined earlier, in the second quarter of 4th century. These are the arguments for the new date: the plan and the enormous surface of the basilica, intended for mass conversion and similar to the basilicas of Rome; the sequence and functions of the layers under and above the mosaic in *opus signinum*; its parallels from the same time in Philippopolis and Serdica; the coin of Licinius I as t. p. q.; the style of the second mosaic level in *opus tessellatum* in the naos and its parallels generally in the first half of 4th century. The known already earliest Christian buildings in Bulgaria and some written sources confirm that around 343, the year of the Council in Serdica, there were already built basilicas and martyria, some inside the cities²⁷. In this way, the erecting of the first monumental basilicas of the type of Philippopolis bound with the conversion, should have happen mainly in the second quarter of 4th century, with t. p. q. 324 and t. a. q. 343.

The next question is if this conversion in Philippopolis either preceded, or was synchronous, or succeeded the foundation of Constantinople, which began in 324, and the celebrations on the occasion of its dedication performed in 330. In all cases the appearing of Constantinople on the map as the New Rome changed the position of Philippopolis in its secular administrative aspect and also its church status, because now the city was in the immediate hinterland of the new capital, quite near to the administrative changes, to all the novelties in the Early Christian architecture, the liturgy and the monumental arts used in the basilicas. This fact should also strongly influence the building and the decoration of the new Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis, especially in its last phase of I period, and during II and III building periods.²⁸ The initial time

²⁴ See also V. Popova, *Early Christian liturgy, electronic encyclopedia Labedia online 2019*.

²⁵ V. Dinchev, *Town and Church in Late Antiquity. Architectural and Urbanistic Dimensions*, Proceedings of the 1st International Roman and Late Antique Thracian Conference. (Sofia, 2018), 357-370.

²⁶ The cities and towns with numerous population and being important administrative and Early Christian centers; the sites with important military units; the ones at the sea littoral, where Christianity has penetrated earlier (including the settlers from Greece, Asia Minor and generally from the East); the ones on the main roads; finely, the sites of martyrdom and martyria, all the listed cases have been involved in the same mass conversion and Early Christian worship.

²⁷ Popova, *The Martyrium*, 2015, 177-179, with references.

²⁸ In my articles written earlier, before the discovery of *opus signinum* pavement in the Episcopal basilica (V. Popova, *The Martyrium*, 2015, 177-178; V. Popova, *On the Date and the Interpretation of the Complex at the Southwestern Gate of Augusta Traiana/Beroe*, *Studia academica šumenensia*, vol. 4. Transition from Late Paganism to Early Christianity in

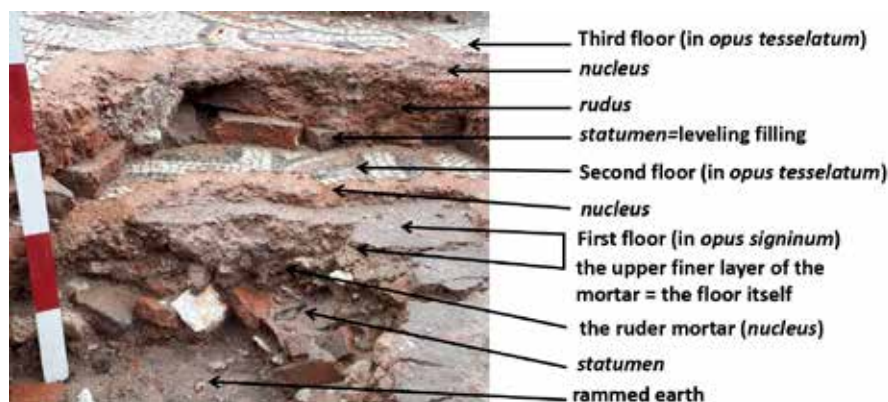


Fig. 4b. The three mosaics one over the other in the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. The earliest is in *opus signinum*, and the next two – in *opus tessellatum*. Photo of E. Kantareva-Decheva, with explanations of the same and additions of V. Popova.

Сл. 4b. Три мозаика, један изнад другог у Митрополијској базилици Филипополиса. Најранији је *opus signinum*, а друга два су *opus tessellatum*. Фото: Е. Кантарева- Дечева, са објашњењима и додацима В. Попове

of constructing the basilica can be also dated using the fact that the mosaic in *opus signinum* has been functioning for a definite long period (on this see below). Most probably it coincided with the years of building Constantinople and even with some years after its dedication and the death of Constantine I (324-330-337).

Another indirect proof for the earlier date of the basilica is the silence in the historical and epigraphic sources about the earliest period of this basilica, probably referring to the Arianism of this region, particularly strong in the period of Constantius II. It may be suspected that the reason the builders or the emperors (during whose reign the basilica has been built) to be forgotten, more correctly, their names to be concealed and sub pressed, was the inclination to Arianism, demonstrated openly by Constantius II and by the hesitating attitude of the Valentinians²⁹. The mighty new Orthodox administrative and church politics of Theodosius I also supposedly put the deeds of the previous Arianic emperors into the dark.³⁰ This new policy and political and religious acts of Theodosius I were, on the opposite, eulogized laud to the skies in numerous sources and inscriptions in the whole empire, while the Arianic period in that

the Architecture and Art in the Balkans, Krassimir Kalchev in memoriam, Shumen (2017), 57-96 it was declared that the mass conversion has happened during the period of Theodosius I. That supposition was based on the consideration that the rite included first of all the dominating Arians in the city and in the province to this moment to be baptized again. This problem remains still opened in the period of Theodosius I.

²⁹ The same period of inclination to Arianism and contemporary to Episcopal basilica in Philippopolis decoration occurred in Augusta Traiana/Beroe, where an equestrian bronze statue has been erected probably to Constantius II (V. Popova, *On the Date*, 2017: 79-82). In that case the same silence of written sources can be noticed, and the reasons for it should be identical.

³⁰ I. Topalilov, *On some Issues*, 119.

part of Thracia remained in silence, damned and forgotten. The Orthodox period of the Theodosian dynasty coincides with the decoration of the basilica in Philippopolis with the new and more representative mosaics in opus tessellatum from period I, the second and the last third phase.

The problem with the opus signinum from the initial building period I

The first problem is if the earliest mosaic in opus signinum was a real mosaic pavement or served only as rudus for the next mosaic in opus tessellatum, and when namely the signinum has been laid. If a usual mosaic (fig.4a), it has a preparatory layers (rudus and statumen). But when signinum is used as a real mosaic (fig. 4 b), the problem is different and complicated. The same problem stood in front of the archaeologists of the martyrrium under the basilica St. Sofia in Serdica/ Sofia. Two opinions have been expressed so far: the first one proposed by the excavator K. Shalганov and supported by me considered that the very small in comparison to Philippopolis part in opus signinum had plaid the role of the first floor: it was polished very well, used for a definite period, judging by the darker surface, and only after some time covered with cuts in order to create enough cohesion for the next laid over the signinum mosaic in opus tessellatum³¹. The second opinion belonged to architect St. Boyadjiev and the conservator P. Popov, considering that the earliest level in signinum was only the rudus for the tessellatum mosaic³². The very exact, detailed and important observations of the excavator K. Shalганov have not been taken into consideration at all by these two researchers. The reason was very simple: there exists the axiomatic opinion in the scientific literature so far, that opus signinum has appeared in 2nd - 1st century BC, developing from a simple covering up to a more complex and refined one under the influence of opus tessellatum, and that after 2nd century AD it has already disappeared³³. This opinion excluded any later than 2nd century AD presence of signinum, while the martyrrium under St. Sofia refers to the 4th century.

The recently discovered new pavement in opus signinum, being the first floor level in the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis, is a new testimony, which is categorical and decisive not only regarding this basilica and the martyrrium under St. Sofia, but for the general reappearing of this mosaic technique in Late Antiquity. In the basilica of Philippopolis the archaeologists and the conservators of the mosaics have done the same observations and conclusions

³¹ К. Шалганов, *Нови данни за архитектурната предистория на Св. София*, Р. Гичева и К. Рабаджиев (ред.). Пито̀н. Изследвания в чест на проф. Иван Маразов. (София, 2002), 581-592; V. Popova, *The Martyrium*, 2015: 137-138.

³² Ст. Бояджиев, *Сердика (Serdica). Градоустройство, крепостно строителство, обществени, частни, култови и гробнични сгради през II-IV век*, Р. Иванов (ред.), *Римски и ранновизантийски градове в България* (София, 2002), 164-165; Р. Попов, *Mosaics from the Early Christian Chapel found in the Bases of St. Sofia Basilica: Conservation, Restoration and Exposure*, *The Basilica of St. Sofia during the Transition from Paganism to Christianity*. Сердика, Средец, т. 7, (2018), 306-307.

³³ See the latest research on the technique with references of V. Vassal *Les pavements d'opus signinum: technique, décor, fonction architectural*. Oxford, 2006.

as K. Shalганov on the signinum in the martyrium in Serdica: a very carefully prepared floor, leveled and polished afterwards, used for a definite time as the first floor. The technique opus signinum has also a simpler variant known as cocciopes-to.³⁴ In Plovdiv among the crushed bricks, ceramics and terracotta, there are also included several very small stones in black and white, similar but not identical to tesserae. They are not forming any special design or scheme, typical for the tessellatum technique or its influence on the signinum.

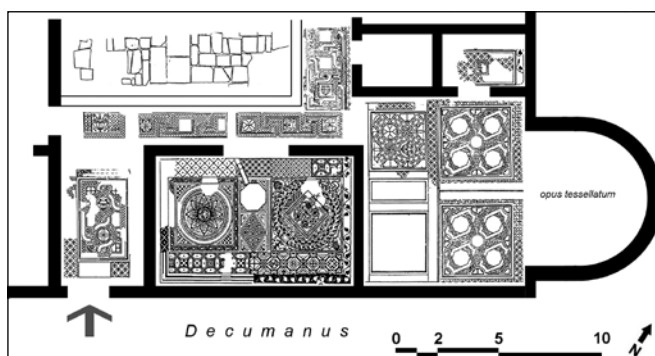


Fig. 5. Scheme of the earliest mosaic pavements in the Episcopal residence 'Eirene' in Philippopolis with the parts in opus signinum and opus tessellatum. Author St. Stanev.

Сл. 5. Схема најстаријег мозаика у Епископској резиденцији „Ирина“ у филипополису са деловима *opus signinum* и *opus tessellatum*. Аутор: Ст. Станев

However, there are several important differences in comparison to the martyrium under St. Sophia. First, the pavement in opus signinum from Philippopolis is covering all the enormous surface of the Episcopal basilica (about 2 000 square m), and this is checked and proved by the 10 soundings made by E. Kantareva-Decheva on every possible spot, free of the later laid mosaics over the signinum. The results have been announced and documented in her important article on the stratigraphy of the mosaics³⁵. In this way, her observations have even more weight than the found small part in opus signinum of the Sofiot mosaic. The second difference, already my own observation (see fig. 4 b), is that the opus signinum technique in Plovdiv is even more refined in some aspects than the opus tessellatum in the next mosaic level (compare the dimensions), concerning the broken terracotta fragments and the marble. They are not only very small, but even much smaller than the tesserae above in the second mosaic level in opus tessellatum, and this fact also demonstrates the qualities of the signinum as a real mosaic floor. The moment the basilica has been built, the signinum quickly laid as the first floor, and the dedication made, the basilica was already functioning.

Third, beneath the basilica there are found the ruins of a preceding pagan building. The mosaicists of the earliest first floor of the basilica had to ram the earth over the ruins of the sanctuary and to prepare the solid statumen and

³⁴ Кантарева-Дечева, *Нови стратиграфски проучавања*; E. Kantareva-Decheva, *The Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria). Conservation of the Mosaic Floor*, The 13th Conference of the International Committee for the Conservation of Mosaics. Barcelona, 2017; Illustrated Glossary. Technician Training for Maintenance of in situ Mosaics. The Getty Conservation Institute and Institut National du Patrimoine Tunis. Musicon (2013), 16-18, the illustrations on p. 18.

³⁵ E. Кантарева-Дечева, *The Episcopal Basilica of Philippopolis*.

rudus for the pavement in signinum. Actually, the layer in signinum consists of two parts: the crushed marble and terracotta pieces of the signinum bound with pink mortar are very carefully laid and leveled on the very surface and generally in its upper part, while in the lower part the ruder mortar with the crushed materials has been just poured out without a definite order. This means that the signinum itself is divided into its own rudus and its own covering floor surface. On the fourth place, if the signinum was not a floor but a rudus for the tessellatum above, both layers should follow one after the other. However, they are separated by a new layer of pink mortar over the signinum playing the role of a new rudus for the tessellatum of the second mosaic level. All these observations reveal very plausibly that the opus signinum in the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis was a real mosaic, the first one in the basilica, and not a rudus made for the tessellata mosaic above it.

The next proof is the fact of the function of signinum as a pavement during the next second phase of building period I, when only the nave of the basilica has been covered for the first time with 'real' mosaic in tessellatum, while the aisles continued to be in signinum. The men in the south aisles and the women in the north one were stepping there namely on the signinum floors during the services and rites, because nothing more existed as a pavement except the signinum. This fact proves once more that the signinum has been used as a pavement not only in I building period, phase 1, but also in phase 2, although only in the aisles.

Very important argument is also the fact that in Philippopolis during 4th – 5th century there are two more examples of opus signinum pavements. The first example comes from three rooms of the the Metropolitan residence, known as Eirene residence (fig. 5)³⁶. The latter is built over a rich house from Late Antiquity, with two additional building periods from the second half of 4th and 5th century. The rooms with signinum are situated next to the rooms, corridors and peristyle, some covered with tessellatum, which denotes that the appearance of signinum is not occasional, not a repair or a bed for a tessellatum above, but playing the role of a real pavement. The second monument with signinum is witnessed in the big still unidentified as function building on Rakovska str. in Plovdiv, also from 4th century. The excavations are still unpublished and I am indebted to I. Topalilov for the data. Together with the martyrium under St. Sofia, the mosaics in opus signinum from Philippopolis, the examples coming from Bulgaria are already four, all from the 4th – 5th century AD. It can be also supposed that the basilica in Buhovo near Serdica, built also at the same period, had initially signinum pavements, replaced later by a brick floor³⁷. V. Ivanova-(Mavrodinova)³⁸, an outstanding archeologist and historian of art, in her re-

³⁶ R. Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016, 174; V. Popova, *The Personification of Eirene from the Episcopal Residence in Philippopolis? Plovdiv*, In: M. Rakocija (ed.) *Niš and Byzantium*, XIX, Niš 2021, 299-324.

³⁷ С. Горянова, *Базилката при Бухово в контекста на раннохристиянските средища около Сердика*, *Базилката Св. София на прехода между езичество и християнство*. Сердика, Средец, София, т. 7, (2018), 59-60.

³⁸ В. Иванова, *Две старохристиянски базилики*, *Годишник на Националния археологически музей*, т. VI за 1932-34. (София, 1936), 300-303.

search has written that the basilica in Buhovo was covered with mosaics, but not mentioning the technique and giving no description of them. In the recent excavations of S. Goryanova, also no mosaic has been found, but this concerns merely the tessellatum technique. At the same time, she is writing about possible brick floor and remnants of pink mortar. This strange fact can be explained by the small remnants left after replacing the original signinum mosaic with brick pavement, and also by the mixing and confusing the technique of signinum similar to the usual mortar used under the brick floor. Indeed, the remnants of mortar with crushed bricks could belong to the initial signinum³⁹.

It should be underlined that all these examples of opus signinum from Bulgaria, except the room in Eirene residence, come from monuments belonging to the first Early Christian buildings after 313, generally from 4th century. At the first stage of building the new Early Christian buildings, the still modest in their possibilities Christian communities in Thracia were not able to decorate them lavishly. Other testimonies for similar decoration with signinum pavement in Late Antiquity descend from an Early Christian martyrrium in Spain⁴⁰, and from various sites in Western Europe when reading carefully the archaeological reports, including also the transition to the Mediaeval period. P. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka in our correspondence also expressed the opinion that in Greece the picture might be similar, however this problem in the country has never been realized and discussed so far.

The tremendous surface about 2000 square m of pavements of the basilica in Philippopolis covered with opus signinum as the first mosaic level allows to see the picture better and to understand why it happened namely at that historical moment. The reason opus signinum to be used was on the first place of economic essence and because of its enough good speed of making a floor. All the efforts have been concentrated on the architecture itself, and at that moment the expensive mosaic techniques were not possible. The usual, banal signinum, without the additional tessellatum-like decoration, was very suitable in this case, because it was cheap, using broken bricks and waste from the marble decoration, sculpture etc., already stored at the site, by which the transport has been also omitted. Besides, the floor could be quickly laid by the technology of signinum, when there is no mosaic scheme to be followed. On the other hand, the earliest architectonic elements of the Episcopal basilica in Philippopolis, columns and Ionian capitals, were only spolia taken from the preceding Roman buildings, a phenomenon very typical for the Constantinian period, seen on the examples from the empire, including Bulgaria⁴¹. At that period the usage of these architectonic spolia and the cheap signinum are phenomena of the same rate.

³⁹ Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016, cat. N 56, S. 277, Abb. 512.

⁴⁰ Попова, *The Martyrium*, 2015, 137, note 11.

⁴¹ L. Bosman, *Spolia in the Fourth-Century Basilica Old Saint Peter's*, Rome 2013; И. Досева, *Даровете на верните: за една мозаична композиция в Епископската базилика на Филипопол (IV-V в.)*, В: Годишник на Софийския Университет „Св. Кирил Огридски“. Център за славяно-византийски проучвания „Иван Дуйчев“, т. 102 (21), 2021, 296-311; Иста, *Наблюдения върху ранновизантийските архитектурни детайли - споллии в средновековните църкви в Месемерия-Несебър*, Bulgaria Pontica Medii Aevi VI-VII. Международен семинар Несебър, 28-31 май 2006 год. *Studia in honorem professoris*

The main conclusion from these observations is that at the time of Constantine I and his sons and heirs, when there appeared in Thracia the first official Early Christian buildings, the economic considerations caused the reappearance of opus signinum, especially in the enormous basilicas in Thracia. The concrete historical circumstances for the urgent necessity of a mass conversion were pressing upon the bishops and the Christian communities for a quick building and simple decoration. The kind of materials and techniques used reveals very clearly that at that time the church in Thracia had modest financial possibilities, but great plans, following the church building of Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople. That's the reason for the usage also of spolia from the Roman time in the architectural decoration, and for the cheap and quick mosaic technique of opus signinum, made by a local workshop in Philippopolis in the second quarter of 4th century. The revival of this modest mosaic technique is a sequence of the period of the first mass conversion in Thracia and of the need of quick building and paving the floors in the easiest and cheapest way.

The non-figural tessellata from the Constantinian period up to the end of the Theodosian dynasty. Styles and dates.

The puzzle of the many layers of mosaics, each over the other or laid in the different building periods and its phases is solved by Kantareva-Decheva in her main article on its strathigraphy⁴². While vertically the mosaic layers are three, or in some places even four according to her observations, in horizontal direction and chronologically the picture is much more complex⁴³.

The earliest mosaic in opus signinum has been replaced by the second mosaic level, already in opus tessellatum (fig.6-8), probably at the very end of Constantine I or of the ruling of his sons. At the beginning, the new pavement has been laid only in the nave. Its main role in the liturgy determined the better decoration and the more effective and expensive mosaic technique, while both aisles remained covered for a certain period only with signinum, again because of financial reasons. From the Edict of Diocletian of Maximum Prices is known the difference in the salaries of the different types of mosaicists, and having in mind the vast surfaces, the choice of tessellatum only for the nave at that time, whose cost was higher than of the simple signinum, is quite understandable.

The second mosaic level, for the first time in tessellatum, is of more usual and conventional character of the geometric schemes and motifs and with limited palette. It seems from the recent discoveries of the mosaic in the

Vasil Guzelev, (Буџаџ, 2008), 264-278; S. Petrova, *The Roman Architectonic Decoration Reused in the Christian Buildings of Parthicopolis*, Patrimonium. MK (2017), 137-174.

⁴² Кантарева-Дечева, *Нови стратиграфски проучвания*, 2017.

⁴³ For instance, the naos and the aisles have been covered with the second tessellatum mosaic at the beginning of 5th century, and during the latest period end of 5th- beginning of 6th century new mosaic panels of the third mosaic tessellatum have covered only part of the naos and the apse, the other panels remaining from the previous mosaic compositions.

naos and its reconstruction of D. Stanchev,⁴⁴ that there is only one pseudo-emblem in the main axis (fig. 6). The panel looks too small for the enormous surface, and may contain either a small figural representation, or a building inscription, or non-figural motifs inside. The parallels belong generally to the pre-Constantinian monuments of 3rd, the first half of the 4th century, mainly of I and II Tetrarchy, and of the Constantinian period (Butrint, the bath near Vivari Channel; several extremely important mosaics from Constantinople and Thessaloniki; in Bulgaria the Constantinian residence in Kostinbrod; the domus with the panel with deer and

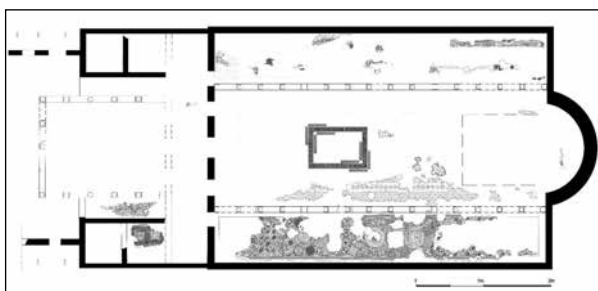


Fig. 6. Plan of the Metropolitan basilica from the I building period with the remnants of the mosaic in opus tessellatum in the naos. After St. Stanev, E. Kantareva-Decheva and D. Stanchev, 'Novorazkriti mozaiki', plus addition of A. Dimitrov.

Сл. 6. План Митрополијске базилике из првог градитељског периода са остацима мозаика у *opus tessellatum* у наосу (по Ст. Станеву, Е. Кантаревој- Дечевој и Д. Станчеву, 'Новоразкривени мозаици', са додацима А. Димитрова)

the Fountain of life in Stara Zagora; the residence southeastern of the agora of Philippopolis; the borders of the second marine with the sea creatures, also from Plovdiv; the mosaic from the eastern thermen in Plovdiv on Tseretelev str.; the mosaic of the villa urbana in Nicopolis ad Nestum, later transformed into residence of the bishop (?); and the Episcopal basilica in Parthicopolis, see fig.12 a and 12 b)⁴⁵. This is the tradition of one or several smaller pseudo-emblems in the central field, surrounded by several borders increasing its width to the periphery, with often met motifs. The prevailing among them are the swastika-meander, the wave pattern, the guilloche, the Solomon's knot on the ground of a figure formed by four peltae, and various geometric figures and plants. The only motif to stand out is the convoluted wave⁴⁶.

However, a new feature is to be observed: the big size of each motif, especially when compared to the dimensions of the impressive monumental nave

⁴⁴ Кантарева-Дечева, Станев, Станчев 2021, *Новоразкривени мозаици*, 1921.

⁴⁵ Dalgiç Örgü, *Pre-Constantinian Floor Mosaics in Istanbul*, J. D. Alchermes, H. C. Evans and Th. K. Thomas (eds.), ANAVHMATA EORTIKA, Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews (2009), 124-130; Idem, *Late Antique Floor Mosaics of Constantinople 2008*; M.P. Raynauld, A. Islam, *Corpus of the Mosaics from Albania*, Volume 1. Butrint intramuros. Ausonius, Bordeaux, 2018, 47-51, fig. 37; П. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Syntagma ton palaiohristianikon psifidotondapedon tis Ellados*, v. III,1, Thessaloniki 1998, pin. 22-25, 29, 31; for Kostinbrod see Pillinger et alli, *Corpus*, 2016: Taff. 262, Abb. 626; Taff. 263, Abb. 630; for Stara Zagora see Taff. 72, Abb. 203 and Taff. 73, Abb. 214; for Plovdiv see Taff. 115, Abb. 309; Taff. 182, Abb. 469 und 470; for Nicopolis ad Nestum see Археологически открития и разкопки за 2020, София, 2021, No 45. М. Ваклинова и Ц. Комитова, *Античен и средновековен град Никополис ад Нестум.*, Сграда 1, 686-689; for Parthicopolis see Pillinger et alli. 2016, Taff. 277, Abb. 670 and Taff. 278. Abb. 67.

⁴⁶ Compare with the one in *Le décor I* (Paris, 1987), pl. 101 c, but in Plovdiv its shaded part is shorter and not so strongly inclined.

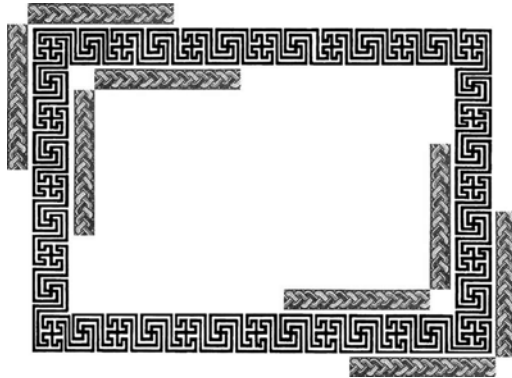


Fig. 7. Reconstruction of the borders around a pseudo-emblem in *opus tessellatum* from the Constantinian period of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. Author D. Stanchev.

Сл. 7. Реконструкција бордура које уоквиравају псеудоамблем у *opus tessellatum* из Константиновог периода, Митрополијска базилика у Филипополису, аутор Д. Станчев

and of the architectural details (fig.13)⁴⁷. Adequately, the dimensions of each tessera are also bigger than the usual ones, as to increase the speed of laying the mosaic. For instance, the four-leaf rosette is as twice big as compared to the banal interlacing circles of the next (second) mosaic level in *opus tessellatum* from end of 5th- 6th century. The mosaicist of the first mosaic level in *tesselatum* has laid a pavement quite adequate to the very huge architecture of the basilica. The size of each mosaic motif is answering the grandeur of the architecture, creating a mighty rhythm and pushing forward the movement of the beholder with a greater speed, unknown to the moment, stopping only in front of the pseudo-emblem/emblems, and finely in front of the chancel. The artisans of the next mosaics in *tesselatum* also adhere to such a choice of big-size tesserae up to the

middle of 5th century, every time submitting to the scale of the basilica. It is logical to suppose that these technological details in the first huge basilicas in the Balkans had one and the same prototype in the earliest pavement mosaics of Rome and Constantinople, the latter ones unfortunately not preserved.

The date of the *tesselatum* in the nave of the Metropolitan basilica in Plovdiv can be determined on the ground of the stylistic features and stylistic phases of the Constantinian period (324-363)⁴⁸. Obviously, the second mosaic floor in *opus tessellatum* of the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv has been laid before the middle of 4th century because of the unity of the composition, the supposed pseudo-emblem and the modest repertoire and palette. If the basilica has been built and decorated in *opus signinum* in the 20s-30s, the mosaic of the naos in *opus tessellatum* could be prepared in the 40s. However, it was very modest and did not answer the magnificent basilica. The next mosaic level in the south aisle and the atrium will do that in the next phase of II period, in the second half of 4th – first half of 5th century.

⁴⁷ The dimensions of the rosettes are as big as the impressive 90 cm, see also Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016: p. 201, Taff. 140, Abb. 364.

⁴⁸ For instance, from the middle of 4th century onwards the unity of the inner field/pseudo-emblem of Philippopolis and the other centers of Thracia, Macedonia and Moesia has disappeared and was replaced by compositions consisting of panels with different schemes in the manner of 'patch-work' (the martyrrium in Serdica, the Eirene mosaic and the Small basilica of Philippopolis, the basilicas of Stobi etc.). This next phase from Late Constantine up Constantius I is often witnessed by coins in the mortar of the mosaic as foundation votive (see Popova, *Monuments from the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian Dynasty*, 157-186). Then appeared also the new classicizing figural art, with a very rich palette, abundance of diverse schemes and motifs, especially vases and ornamental decoration (garlands, rose buds and quatrefoil rosettes (Marcianopol, Tomi, Montana).

Besides the impact of the pre- and the Constantinian mosaic tradition, predominantly geometric and ornamental, the second and also very important reason for the non-iconical representations was the general avoiding of figural images associated with paganism. That's why the figural representations of the basilicas almost everywhere, including Thracia, from a definite period have been excluded, with the exception of vases, plants, the representations of seasons and some marine scenes in Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana-Beroe. It is likely that this phenomenon has been also enforced by the negative attitude to the images or its limitations among some Arians accepting only the representation of the Cross and the Bible. In the Eastern Mediterranean the number of the opponents was significant due to the great concentration of Goths Arians living in their enclaves in the Balkans and Asia Minor and serving as foederati to the Romans; also because of the monophysites and the numerous other representatives of non-Orthodox denominations and heresies in Egypt, Syria, Armenia etc.

Another important reason for the dominance of the non-figural mosaic pavements was a sequence of the character and demands of the newly created enormous Early Christian basilicas, monumental official palaces and private residences. The very long and vast floors could be easier and more quickly laid and would cost less if covered namely with geometric-ornamental compositions than with figural ones⁴⁹. And it should be also added that the Christian liturgy needed a new way of movement and rhythm in the interior created by the architectural axes, entrances and liturgical furniture (the ambo, the solea and the chancel), but also by the mosaic geometric compartments and its fillers, playing the role of small architectural-structural modules of the floor surfaces and the interior space

The combination of all these factors caused in the Balkans a temporary disappearing of the figural representations in the mosaic art. This special period is determined differently in literature, from the middle of 4th till the beginning of 6th century⁵⁰. However concerning concretely the mosaics in the territory of



Fig. 8. Detail from the border of No 7. Photo E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 8. Детаљ бордуре бр. 7, фото: Е. Кантарева – Дечева

⁴⁹ R. Kolarik, *Mosaics from Antioch: Chronological Implications for other Regions?* in: M. Sahin (ed.), 11th International Conference on Ancient Mosaics Bursa 2009. Istanbul 2011, 519-528.

⁵⁰ P. Atzaka, *La Grèce continentale et ses mosaïques du IV^e au VI^e s.m ap, J.-C.*, in: *Mosaïque antique, dernières découvertes*, Paris 2011, 66-71; Ö. Dalgıç, *Late Antique Floor Mosaics of Constantinople prior to the Great Palace*, Dissertation. Institute of Fine Arts (New York University, 2008; M.P. Raynauld, *A Birds Mosaic at Qalaat Seman*, *Journal of Mosaic Research* (2012), 173-185; I. Topalilov, *The Syrian Influence over the Late Antique Mosaics*

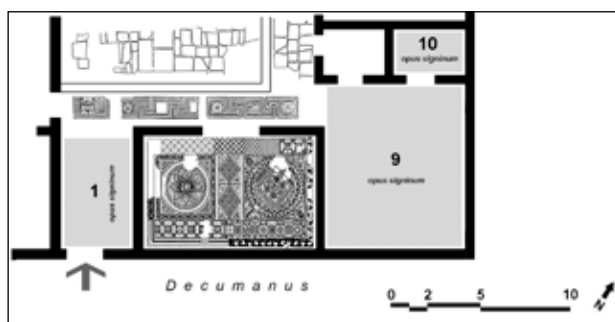


Fig. 9. Pavement mosaic in geometric style from room A in the south portico of the atrium of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis.

Сл. 9. Подни мозаик у геометријском стилу из собе А у јужном портику атријума Митрополијске базилике Филипополиса

Eastern Illyricum, Dacia, Moesia and Thracia, the figural representations disappeared totally after Julian and the Valentinians and have been gradually introduced again only from the period of Late Theodosius I onwards, naturally and presumably under the influence of the changes in Constantinople⁵¹.

Six different styles are represented in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv in the period from the second quarter of 4th century till the middle - beginning of the second half of 5th century. The earliest one is a non-figural composition contain-

ing small panels on geometric background (fig. 9). It is found in room A of the south portico, and the composition is very similar to the mosaic from the Eastern thermen on Tseretelev str. and the composition on Terter str, both in Plovdiv.⁵² The impression is as if these mosaic compositions in room A are inherited in the basilica from the pagan residence existing previously, or laid by the earliest local workshops in the city especially for the basilica, using only the traditional at that moment geometric schemes and motifs.

The second early mosaic composition is the panel found in the south portico of the court/nartex (fig. 10). It may be called 'the style of the thick white outlines', although some of the latter are rather in fine ivory or rather beige nuance. The composition should be read in direction west-east, alongside the portico. The scheme is orthogonal grid of octagons with concave sides in the centre, four circles at the corners of the grid and four spindles between each pair of circles. An enlargement at the west end at the corner contains a partly preserved pseudo-emblem: a big dotted yellow figural representation (?) on the background of bushes or branches⁵³. After the pseudo-emblem, the guilloche

in Philippopolis, Thrace. Hortus Atrium Medievalum 22, 2016, 118-129; St. Westphalen, *Die Basilica am Kalekapi in Heracleia/Perinthos*, Zusammenarbeit mit Nusin Asgari, Akif Isin und Önder Öztürk. Bericht über die Ausgrabungen am Kalekapi in Marmara Ereğlisi 1992-2010. Mit Beiträgen von Beate Böhlendorf-Arslan, E. Arzu Demirel und Jürgen J. Rasch. Tübingen (2016). Istanbul Forschungen 55.

⁵¹ I. Topalilov, *The Impact of the Religious Policy of Theodosius the Great on the Urbanization of Philippopolis, Thrace*, XVI Congressus internationalae Christianae. Constantino e I Constantinidi. Linnovazione Constantinale sue radice e I suoi svilippi. Citta del Vaticano, 2016, 1853-1862.

⁵² Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016, Taff. 182, Abb. 469-470.

⁵³ Only from the west a border with guilloche is laid followed from inside by a second band with triangles, and a third red band of the border is placed only from the east side.



Fig. 10. The whole preserved mosaic composition with the 'thick white outlines' in the south portico of the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv.

Сл. 10. Сачувани мозаик са композицијом са широким белим линијама у јужном портику Митрополијске базилике у Пловдиву

continues alongside the panel and the portico⁵⁴. The first vertical row from inside of the border creates the impression of openness and non-finito, because the inscribed squares are not closed from the south and remain with three only sides, with small ornamental fillings (white branches with hederia leaves and scrolls on dark brown background) placed perpendicular to the border. The fillings of the octagons in the rainbow style are in brown, blue and rarer in red and yellow (chessboard-pattern and serrated figures), either with three-dimensional effect of the rosette (two pairs of pink and green cuboids in perspective, joined at the centre); or a big cross, a rosette of the quatrefoil or the Solomon's knot. The circles contain inscribed crosses of two types: one bigger with equal arms, the second one smaller, inscribed in a red one. The interior of the white spindles is occupied by a similar smaller configuration alternatively in ochre or blue. Every third filling in the most northern preserved axis west-east contains the image of a cantharos with red wine facing the beholder entering the court from west. The vessel is with white outlines, and small colour details of the construction and the decoration. White symmetrical hederia leaves on a dark brown background are hanging down from both its sides.

At the present moment the panel of this style from Philippopolis is the earliest one found in Bulgaria and the starting point for the study. The main problem is its dating: 4th or 5th century? In my opinion, this panel in 'the style of the thick white outlines' is slightly preceding and then for shortly synchronous to the very early phases of the puristic and the geometric styles (see below). In it can be also observed some inherited old motifs of the Roman mosaic art of 3rd

⁵⁴ Outside it, on a dark brownish background a row of small quatrefoils is represented connected with delicate thin filet.



Fig. 11. The mosaic of the basilica of Valerius in Sbeitla. After. P. Burns and Robin M. Jensen.

Сл. 11. Мозаик базилике Валерија у Сбеитли (по: П. Бурнсу и Р. М. Јенсену)



Fig. 12 a -12 b. Two parts of earliest compositions in the naos of the Cathedral basilica of Parthicopolis (basilica No 4). Most probably end of 4th-first half of 5th century. Photo: Archeological Museum Sandanski.

Сл. 12 а -12 б. Два дела најстаријих композиција у наосу катедралне базилике Партикополиса (базилика број 4). Вероватно крај IV - прва половина V века, фото: Археолошки музеј Сандански



Fig. 13. Comparisons among the dimensions of the mosaic tesserae and the mosaic motifs in the earliest pavements in opus tessellatum (the second mosaic pavement) and the next third one, also in tessellatum in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv. According to Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016.

Сл. 13. Упоредни изглед димензија мозаичких тесера и мотива старијих подних мозаика у техници *opus tessellatum* и трећег такође у техници *tessellatum* у Митрополијској базилици у Пловдиву (по Пилингеру и др. *Corpus*, 2016).

– beginning of 4th century, the changing colour background of the Tetrarchy and the puristic style and the pseudo-emblem of the Constantinian period. Still the elements of the rainbow style are not dominant and as if moderately introduced at the beginning of its spread. The almost monochrome palette is very specific and not so impressive, and the repeating images of only cantharoses signify rather the diminishing and disappearing of the figural art than its introducing. In Bulgaria this kind of scheme and style is known only from the mosaic of a Late Antique villa in Filipovtsi near Sofia from 4th century, but only as a border, and again as border from the mosaic of the baptisterium in Tuida from 6th century⁵⁵. Again this style is not very often met in Greece and Macedonia in the second half of 4th – beginning of 5th century⁵⁶, but with a significant increase in the second half of 5th and during the 6th century in North Africa, especially in the basilica of Valerius in Sbeitla (figure 11)⁵⁷. The difference of the later monuments with

⁵⁵ Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 1916, Pl. 67, abb. 191; Taff. 249, Abb. 605.

⁵⁶ P. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Syntagma ton pallaohristianikon psifidoton dapedon tis Ellados*, V. III, meros 2. Makedonia-Thrake. Thessalonike 2017, pin. 82; pin. 159g.

⁵⁷ In the latter the elements of the rainbow style became dominant, the palette very bright and strong, the outlines – categorical and even rude, and the geometric forms (circles

the example from Plovdiv reveals once more the early dating of the latter. In it well visible are the new qualities of the thick white outlines combined with the rainbow elements typical for the mosaic from the second half of 4th – beginning of 5th century in Antioch and the Greek East. The pseudo-emblem and the representations only of cantharoses demonstrate the gradual disappearing of figural art, except the most frequent Early Christian symbols, such as the vessel with wine. The date should be placed between the end of the period of Julian and the first half of the period of Valens and Valentinian, i. e. 363- 373.

The third style in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv represents the final phase of development of the puristic style, in several panels of the south aisle in opus tessellatum (fig. 14, the first part up to the guilloche). It is also a newly created style in 4th century, and its first appearing is related to the early period of Theodosius I, probably around 381-383 in Marcianopolis, but supposedly first created in Constantinople⁵⁸. The level of its artistic treatment, the novelties introduced and the topography of its spread in the hinterland of Constantinople in Thracia (Philippopolis, Augusta Traiana, Kabile and Nicopolis ad Nestum) and in Moesia on the Western Black Sea littoral (Marcianopolis) give enough ground for such a presumption. These were cities not only situated closely to the capital but also with easy reach by land on the main road Via Diagonalis or by ship to the port of Odessos. Only few are so far the examples from Greece⁵⁹, but I suppose that the future discoveries will come mainly from Constantinople itself, Thracia and Moesia, tightly connected with the novelties in the mosaic art of the capital. This is the first non-figural style after the period of the Constantine I to use only one scheme in one room in vast compositions as to attribute unity to the mosaic surface, unlike the previous habit of exploiting many different geometric schemes as patch-work'. The other new qualities are revealed in the splendid classicizing synthesis of opposite or diverse elements (rectangular geometric elements combined with curvilinear ones); the variations of one motif not repeated neither in the exact configuration, nor in the direction of the similar elements; the interlacing circles and the guilloche-like motifs and fillings, significantly increased in number, attributing to quite a new stylistic essence; the limited number of small ornamental motifs like leaf and petals, mainly in the borders or near to them, opposed to the lavishly drawn big compound rosettes in the interior. Typical are only two or three schemes, while the filling motifs are much more numerous and frequent in the repertoire.

Few of the schemes, and on the opposite, numerous motifs, its colours and the changing colour background in each geometric compartment have

and spindles) do not stop in front of each other or gently tangent, but as if flowing into each other. Besides, no figural images are used in this monument from Sbeitla, see J. Patout Burns, Robin M. Jensen, *Christianity in Roman Africa: The Development of Its Practices and Beliefs*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 30 Nov. 2014), p. 148.

⁵⁸ V. Popova, *The Mosaic Pavements of the Episcopal Basilica of Marcianopolis*, in M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium XVII*, 2019, 97-114; Popova V. "Liturgy and Mosaics: the Case Study of the Late Antique Monuments from Bulgaria", *Niš and Byzantium XVI*, Niš 2018, 135-160.

⁵⁹ P. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Syntagma*, V. III, meros 2. 2017, pin. 79 a; pin. 96a; pin. 157G; pin. 249G; pin. 289A; pin. 361; pin. 440-450.



Fig. 14 a-14 b. The panels in the puristic style in the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica in Plovdiv. General view and details E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 14 а-14 б. Панели у пуристичком стилу у јужном броду Митрополијске базилике у Пловдиву, генерални изглед и детаљи (Е. Кантарева – Дечева)

been inherited from the Tetrarchy, with prevailing bright colours (red and yellow). This connection with the earlier mosaics of 4th century is clearly revealed in the Episcopal basilica of Marcianopolis, and is typical for the Early Theodosian time. Later in the panels in the puristic style in the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis (fig. 14 a-14 b) from the end of 4th – beginning of 5th century, the palette changes to the

more refined pastel one (in several nuances of brown, mainly light and dark, followed by the ones in blue, green and red). Other newly introduced elements, already on a great scale, are the ones in the ‘rainbow style’ and the fillings of every free geometric unit with peltae, scrolls, guilloches, kymation (double guilloche), small circles, the motif of silver-plate, lotus and very small units of the schemes (like poised concave square inscribed in a square etc)⁶⁰. The big rosettes are of almost ten different types: star of 8 lozenges, inscribed in circle and then both in the octagon; shield with a kind of rosette in rainbow style, as if windswept; a compound rosette placed directly in the octagon; a rosette of eight radial petals, with beveled edges, and in different colours; circle and saltire quatrefoil inscribed in a square⁶¹, etc. Represented are also many smaller oval and round geometric elements with thick white outlines, typical for the style of the panel in the court of the basilica.

Even the very listing of all these elements in the manner of vacuum horri shows how many changes have been made in the puristic style at its final phase of development. The classicizing balance of opposite elements is almost gone under the pressure of the big geometric figures of the scheme and the big rainbow fillers, some variants of them quite new for the style. Generally, the influence of the so-called ‘geometric style’ of Antioch and the Greek East⁶² known first of all as ‘the rainbow style’, is felt in the pastel last phase of development of the puristic style, demonstrated by the puristic panels from Plovdiv. However, they are not copying directly the style of Antioch and generally of Syria (see

⁶⁰ For similar mixture of styles and the dominance of the rainbow style see other mosaics from Bulgaria in Pillinger et alli, Corpus, 2016: Taff. 12 und 13, Abb. 28; Taff. 91, Abb. 248; Taff. 95, Abb. 259 und 261; Taff. 96, Abb. 262.

⁶¹ See parallels in C. Balmelle, M. Blanchard-Lemée, J. Christophe, J.P. Darmon, A.M. Guimier-Sorbets, H. Lavangne, R. Prudhomme, H. Stern, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque II*, pl. 289a-e; on the shield see Pl. 327b and 326c; the rosette consisting of a quatrefoil petals and four bi-lobbed ones, in the centre with a Maltian cross.

⁶² Kolarik 2011, with references.

and compare with fig. 15)⁶³, but in my view offer the very bold, not proportional and already gigantic enlargement of each compartment, new elongated proportions of the separate schemes, enrichment to the utmost of the repertoire, abundance of variations of the motifs, and a new fine pastel palette. The artistic level is splendid, the execution extremely precise and the richness of the motifs really striking. On many places the geometric figures inscribed in each other may reach four in number; there is no free place without fillers, and no white background is left, every element and every spot has bigger and smaller fillers against the changing colour background.

These mosaics differ predominantly on the ground of its proportions of the schemes and its highest artistry from the majority of pavements made by the local Balkan workshops in Thracia, Makedonia and Dacia. Most probably the initial puristic style from the beginning of the 80es and its final metamorphosis from the end of the 4th century have been created in the workshops of Constantinople. From there the new metropolitan puristic style has been introduced in the provincial basilicas in the diocese of Thracia because of its splendid artistic qualities, the geographic nearness of the cities to Constantinople and the strong impact of the religious and cultural politics on the art and the mosaic decoration during the rule of the Theodosian dynasty. At that period Constantinople was no more a temporary place similar to a military camp in which the emperor to stop, as it often happened in the period from Diocletian to Valentinian. At the period of Theodosius I, the city was his constant dwelling, with its lavish architecture and worthy decoration of his constant palace and the new architecture. This was a new deliberate building mosaic program for Constantinople in the so-called 'Theodosian Renaissance', thanks to which and to the sculptural monuments, the city received quite a new image, also due to the very careful attitude to the church building and decoration⁶⁴. Although there is a caution that not everything in Constantinople was of high quality, in the described period of Theodosius the mosaic and the sculptur-



Fig. 15. The mosaic pavement of the synagogue in Apameia. The main composition with the mosaic inscription. After Google.

Сл. 15. Подни мозаик у синагоги у Апамеји. Главна композиција са мозаичким натписом (по: Google).

⁶³ I. Topalilov, *The Syrian Influence*, 118-129.

⁶⁴ I. Jacobs, *The Creation of the Late Antique City. Constantinople and Asia Minor during the 'Theodosian Renaissance'*, In Jacobes I. (ed.), *Production and Prosperity in the Theodosian Period*, Leuven-Wallpole, MA, 2014, 113-164. .



Fig. 16a – 16 b - 16 c. Mosaic panels in *opus tessellatum* with the mosaic bishop's inscription in the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. General view made by dron. E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 16а – 16 б - 16 ц. Мозаички панели у *opus tessellatum* са мозаиком епископског натписа у јужном броду Митрополијске базилике Филипополиса, генерални изглед из дрона, аутор: Е. Кантарева - Дечева

al arts were demonstrating always in the capital and the neighboring Thracia its highest artistic level, with no exception. This influenced particularly the novelties in the mosaic art. At that period, it is very difficult to find a mosaic with a low quality or old-fashioned, including 20 years before and 20 years after the beginning of 5th century, the period of the 'Theodosian Renaissance'. Namely because of its novelties and high metropolitan quality and the centralized policy of Theodosius on the church affairs, the puristic style, its repertoire of motifs and the stylistic treatment, although revealed so far in a limited number of sites and monuments found not far from Constantinople, had a strong influence on the mosaics in the next styles from the Late Theodosian period (the second quarter of 5th century) to the end of Late Antiquity at the beginning of 7th century. However, this is valid, as it will be shown below, for the long exploitation not of the schemes, but only of the abundance and variety of motifs created or developed further by the puristic style.

It should be paid special attention to the fact that in the mosaics of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis up to the second half of 5th century are used tesserae namely of different stones and not smalti⁶⁵. The lack of smalti in the pavements of the earlier tessellata mosaic levels in Philippopolis and in Parthicopolis/Sandanski also points to the work of a very experienced metropolitan mosaicists at the head of the mosaic workshops. They were capable of achieving the same effect of polychromic richness, as if made by the help of smalti⁶⁶. Generally, the mosaicists working in Philippopolis, Parthicopolis and also Nicopolis ad Nestum were in

a very favourable position of having at disposal the local quarries in the moun-

⁶⁵ Е. Кантарева-Дечева, *Технико-технически проучвања на подовите мозајки од Епископската базилика на Филипопол*, Пролетни научни четенија (Пловдив, 2018), 230-239. According to the laboratory analysis, one nuance of the green stone tesserae descends from one of the hills of the city itself, while the other colours come from the Rhodops situated immediately south of the city and the Thracian plain. This mountain is very rich in white marbles, in other colours suitable for the mosaic pavements, and even of half-precious and precious stones.

⁶⁶ A similar usage only of stone tesserae in the mosaic pavements can be found in basilica No 4 (the Episcopal basilica) of Parthicopolis, where only the wall mosaics in the baptisterium have smalti (Pillinger et alii. 2016, 289-290). The coincisness of both situations in these cities surely can be explained by the long existence of numerous quarries respectively in the Rhodops and in the Pirin mountain, supplying the mosaic workshops of Philippopolis and Parthicopolis with several kinds of white and colour marble and other colour stones.

Fig. 16b. The same as 16 a, but drawing (according to Dosseva 2021).
The fillers of the big circles and figures are done incorrectly.

Сл. 16б. Иста као 16 али у техници цртежа (по досева 2021).
Испуне и велики кругови су изведени нетачно

tains Rhodopes, Pirin and Slavyanka/Ali Botush, with very rich nuances of almost each colour, especially regarding the rarer and more appreciated blue and green ones. Nevertheless, later from the middle - end of 5th century in Philippopolis, as well as in Parthicopolis, the smalti have been introduced, and even pre-fabricated ‘cakes’ are found in the second city⁶⁷. In Nicopolis ad Nestum the smalti are used in the pavement and probably in the conch- and the vault-mosaics of basilica N 2.⁶⁸ At the present state of research, the explanation can be that later at that time the role of the smalti technique became dominant, together with the easier way of supplying with half-manufacture glass⁶⁹.

The fourth new style in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv is represented by the big composition in the central and eastern part of the south aisle (excluding the panel in the puristic style). The scheme is among the most complex one in the so-called geometric/rainbow style. Three very big octagons are marking the central axis of the south aisle, in each of them a big circle is placed with different decoration (fig. 16 a - 16 b). In the first octagon two squares are interlacing, the second one poised and concave. A cantharos with hanging leafs is represented in its centre (fig. 16 c- 16 d). The corners are occupied by convoluted peltae, loops and plant fillers: the continuations of the inner square are looped around the outer square forming 16 very small circles on the periphery of the big circle⁷⁰. In the second big octagon a shield is inscribed made of polychrome squares in contrasting colours appearing as chessboard pattern in the form of interlacing ogives in the rainbow palette; the filling in the round centre of the circle, partly preserved, is in the form of a small rosette. The third big octagon contains inscribed big circle with the shield of two squares, the first one poised, the second one looped as a wreath around it. All geometric elements are represented by cables in two different types of colouring. The centre of the circle is occupied by an irregular octagon divided into different by their colour radial



⁶⁷ Glass pre-fabricated ‘cakes’ have been also found in Parthicopolis. See V. Popova, *Late Antique Glass Workshop in Parthicopolis*, In: E. Nankov (ed.). Papers of the American Research Center in Sofia 284-367.

⁶⁸ Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016, Taff. 269, NN 646, 647, 649 and 650.

⁶⁹ The latter could be only heated and coloured additionally, by that simplifying the preparation of smalti in one only furnace instead of three ones in the earlier periods. See the references in Popova, *Late Antique Glass Workshop*.

⁷⁰ This scheme of composite pattern in a circle with a wreath of loops is a new variant still unknown in *Le décor II*, pls. 288, 379, 398-399.



Fig. 16c. Detail with one big circle with a vase, detail. E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 16ц. Деталъ са једним великим кругом и вазом, Е. Кантарова – Дечева



Fig. 16d

compartments forming rosette. The circle and the loops are very big, even rude in comparison to the gracious and fine ornamental fillers, and treated as to achieve a three-dimensional effect.

The surface around all three octagons is occupied by tightly attached to each other and to the octagons squares, triangles, lozenges and smaller circles. They and the decoration inside them are arranged symmetric to the main axis. The triangles are of three dimensions. The decoration of the initial central triangle in the middle of one short border is the only with its convoluted pelta and plant motifs. The smallest and the middle-sized triangles are filled with other floral motifs, and the biggest ones with shaded stepped continuous meander in the rainbow style. All the lozenges are decorated either in the same style⁷¹; with the three-dimensional effect of adjacent parallelograms in two different colours, reminding chevrons; or with the motif of unusually refined silver-plate. The small circles placed almost symmetrically in the scheme, are either equal in size or slightly different. Its fillers are also

either identical or variants of one and the same decoration. They are filled with wreath-like patterns in a circle either around a circle or concave octagon⁷²; with composite patterns of a square inscribed in a circle, with a circle in the centre, appearing as a concave poised square and looped in a double way around the first one⁷³ etc.

The squares contain different decoration, from the most conventional to some quite new and very unusual schemes. Among the often met ones are the scales whose upper and lower halves are in different colours; the complex guilloche; the running-pelta pattern, in two different colours; variants of the zig-

⁷¹ Chessboard -pattern of lozenges, see *Le décor II*, Pl. 202a and g; This scheme of composite pattern in a circle with a wreath of loops is a new variant still unknown in *Le décor II*, pls. 288, 379, 398-399; on the chevrons of this type see Pl. 203f.

⁷² At least of five different types similar but not identical to *Le décor II*, Pl. 308a, Pl. 309, a and c, some loops as cables, others as rainbow-pattern.

⁷³ Similar but not identical to *Le décor II*, 396a and b.

zag rainbow pattern of adjacent parallelograms with the three-dimensional effect; chessboard-pattern of lozenges with adjacent parallelograms in four repeating colours; the style of ‘silver dish’ etc. Here we see a new synthesis of all these already well known motifs and styles, united by the proportions, different manner of treating and the fine palette. In some cases they remind the rude folklore textile of the type of sackcloth from ancient times to our days; and finely the interlacing circles forming the four-leaf rosettes⁷⁴. Among the rare motifs is the marvelous unitary rosette of four lilies⁷⁵; the most interesting and met for the first time in Philippopolis are the squares with two variants of orthogonal patten imitating the wooden intarsia made of dark and light brown square pieces or in the form of double ax, mainly with three-dimensional effect.

The most important representation is placed in a square under the second octagon, right in the middle axis of the south aisle, surrounded by the ends of 4-pointed saltire star (fig. 17 a and fig. 17 b). Two of the points are in the rainbow style, one has delicate white scroll filler on blue ground and the one preserved right below the square has the representation of a red glass with white scrolls uprising from it, again on a blue ground. In the square, a tabula ansata is represented, all in red colour, in contrast to the brown-blue-green palette of the whole mosaic composition. The tabula is placed on a low heavy column in white in the middle and two nuances of blue at both ends as to achieve the three-dimensional effect. The column is flanked by two very elegant vessels, the en-



Fig. 17a. Mosaic panels in opus tessellatum with the panels with th buildinge mosaic inscription in the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. General view made by E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 17a. Мозаички пане са *opus tessellatum* и панели са натписом из јужног брода Митрополијске базилике у Филипополису, генерални изглед по Е. Кантаревој – Дечевој



Fig. 18 a and 18 b. Relief with liturgical vessels from the synagogue in Magdala and the mosaic panel with the liturgical vessels in Lod.

⁷⁴ On this guilloche see Le décor II, Pl. 399a; on the running-pelta pattern Le decor I, Pl. 222e.

⁷⁵ Similar to Le décor II, Pl. 256f; on the parallelograms see Le décor I, Pl. 203f; on the lozenges Le décor I, Pl. 202g.

tirely preserved one from the right side filled with red wine. The second only partly preserved vessel is shown with bigger proportions, and its content is not sure, maybe was full of oil. Such representations are connected with the liturgy both in the Judaism and the Early Christianity and may be observed first, for instance, in the sculptural decoration of the synagogue in Magdala (fig. 19 a), in the well-known mosaic representation of the liturgical vessels of the Temple of Solomon, and in the mosaic of Lod (fig. 19 b)⁷⁶. Gradually different vessels for wine, oil etc. appeared also in the mosaic pavements and wall mosaics, including the Balkans.

The tabula contains a mosaic inscription with the word ‘bishop’, together with his name, only partly preserved. This is the building inscription demonstrating the power and the responsibilities of the bishop during whose time the mosaic floor has been laid. The way the inscription is shown in the middle of the south aisle in tabula ansata supported by a column, reminds the grandiloquent inscription at the base of the obelisk of Theodosius I in Constantinople and other solemn official sculptural and mosaic inscriptions of the time of Arcadius, who in fact has completed the erecting of these official monuments begun by his father. The usage of columns in the official sculptural monuments with imperial portraits (busts and statues) and in the mosaic decoration, again using the column, is typical both for the Roman and the Early Byzantine periods of Rome and the Early Byzantium. The column not only symbolizes the church, but it contains the paidea of the ancient culture, in which the column is among the most often used element. S. Leatherbury⁷⁷ proves that the inscription represented in this way, in our case being included in a double architectonic frame (tabula ansata and column), is not only to be read, but obtaining materiality and becoming a material monument. The mosaic lettering is also remarkable, all the dimensions and proportions perfect, and the red colour underlying the importance of the bishop and his responsibility for the mosaic decoration of the south aisle. Among the Roman and Late Antique mosaic inscriptions of the type from Bulgaria, this is the most representative one, again pointing to the connection of this mosaic workshop to Constantinopolitan official imperial prototypes.

The inscription is placed in the aisle intended for men, and not in the north one intended for women. The right male side, adequate to the south aisle, is the important one in the Christian religion, including the direction of the processions outside and the rites and movements in the interior of the churches. It seems that this notion was one of the reasons the south aisle to be considered as more important also in Philippopolis from liturgical point of view, observed also for

⁷⁶ R. Talgam, *Unearthing a Masterpiece: A Roman Mosaic from Lod, Israel*, in Expedition volume 55, number 1, March 2013, Penn Museum.

⁷⁷ S. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity. Between Reading and Seeing*, Routledge, 2019; *Ib.*, *Framing Late Antique Texts as Monuments: The Tabula Ansata between Sculpture and Mosaic*, In: A. Petrovic, I. Petrovic, E. Thomas (eds.). *The Materiality of Text: Placement, Presence, and Perception of Inscribed Texts in Classical Antiquity. Studies in Greek and Roman Epigraphy*. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 380-404; *Ib.*, *Writing, Reading and Seeing between the Lines: Framing Late Antique Inscriptions as Texts and Images (*uncorrected proof*)*, In: V. Platt and M. Squire (eds.), *The Frame in Classical Art: A Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 544-582.

instance in its so-called Small basilica⁷⁸, with a slightly richer mosaic decoration in the south aisle. This fact is probably denoting a connection with the rite of the ‘Small Entrance’, when the diakonikon is erected in the south aisle or attached namely to the south side of the basilica and its court (see below). Also for the first time in Philippopolis



Fig. 18 a and 18 b. Relief with liturgical vessels from the synagogue in Magdala and the mosaic panel with the liturgical vessels in Lod.

can be observed a very good example of the developed “rainbow style”, not only in the composition itself, but also around the borders of the mosaic inscription and the star containing it.

The repertory and the treatment of the schemes and separate motifs are quite different from the other mosaics of Philippopolis. Combined with the panel with inscription, the liturgical vessels and the column supporting the tabula ansata, the pavement has obtained a solemn metropolitan essence. The treatment of each motif is very monumental, demonstrating the significance of the basilica in this period, the already clearly expressed pride, self-confidence and status of the bishop, who has adorned the aisle with a splendid and costly mosaic decoration, most probably laid by Constantinopolitan workshops⁷⁹. This pride and status of the bishop are generally unknown in cities of 4th century, except in the most important cities as Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. The change happened gradually from the Council of Constantinople in 381 up to the Chalkedonian Council in 451, generally in the period of the Theodosian dynasty and of Marcian. Officially, the church (and the emperor) in Constantinople could decide independently from the pope in Rome all their problems in the Balkans only beginning from the decisions of the Chalkedonian council, because in the western and central part of the Balkan provinces up to that time ruled the vicarius and the vicariate of the Roman pope in Thessaloniki. However, the Episcopal mosaic inscription from Plovdiv, its solemn and metropolitan iconography and excellent style proves that the change has occurred

⁷⁸ Pillinger et alli, *Corpus*, 2016, Taff. 164, 168-170.

⁷⁹ In that period (see Gerdzhikova, Z. (in print): *Bishops and Their Power*, Proceedings of the Workshop Creation of the Late Antique World on the Balkans, 10-12.11.2018, Sofia) the bishops in the Balkan lands were called just priests, they had still modest church properties and possibilities at disposal and could help the church building still in a very modest way. In the next 5th century their status changed radically: they appear already as dignified and important persons in the life not only of the church, but in every aspect of the economy and even politics of the settlements. They are called already bishops and archbishops, obtaining impressive official possibilities and responsibilities for church building, social and economic activities and even political interferences.



Fig. 19a. The panel with the paon in the nartex of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis. General view. E. Kantareva-Decheva.

Сл. 19а. Панел са пауном у нартексу Митрополијске базилике у Филипополису, генерални изглед (по Е. Кантаревој – Дечевој)

earlier than 451. It seems that since the Council of Constantinople, the patriarch and the emperor already used to appoint Orthodox bishops in Thracia instead of the previous Arianic ones, like that one in Philippopolis, by their will and independently. Therefore, from historic and stylistic point of view, the mosaic with the episcopal inscription probably belongs to the end of 4th - beginning of 5th century (end of Theodosius I- the period of Arcadius or the early years of Theodosius II, who ascended the throne in 407). The influence of the mosaic decoration and new style of the capital Constantinople is quite obvious in the panels of the puristic style and the panels with the mosaic building inscription, most probably laid by Constantinopolitan mosaic workshops.

Also very important as explanation is the reason why the mosaic inscription is not at the usual place at the official entrance to the basilica, in the nartex or at the threshold of the nave. It is quite possible that namely this part of the atrium/court or the nartex-like space has been covered previously with the earliest building mosaic inscription of the first Arianic bishop or even of emperor (Constantine I or Constantius II) as builders of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis and its first real floor in opus tessellatum (the second mosaic level). Probably during the Early Theodosian period, the first Orthodox bishop, responsible for the mosaic decoration of the south aisle, who left his name on the mosaic inscription, commissioned that the Arianic mosaic inscription in the nartex should pass through damnatio memoriae, causing its mutilation and replacement by a new mosaic panel, on its turn replaced by the fourth mosaic with the paon from the middle of 5th century (on it see below).

In the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis, the mosaics in both styles (purist and geometric/rainbow ones) are united very successfully in synthesis by the mutual guilloche border, similar palette because the stone tesserae come from one and the same quarry (proved by the laboratory petrographic analyses), and some identical compartments and motifs: the fillings in the rainbow style, the floral ones, the textile ones, the guilloche ones and the imitation of wooden intarsia and folklore textile. During the Early Theodosian time these were two different styles: one mainly of classical essence, with a balance of orthogonal geometry and curvilinear motifs, with bright palette; the second one predominantly geometric and linear, with clearly outlined geometric schemes, compartments and fillers. But later the repertory gradually became similar and borrowed from each other. This was a phenomenon known predominantly from

sculpture, in which copying and combining elements from different monuments became the main feature. The same happened in the mosaic art, with mixture and combination of many different styles in one mosaic. The difference is the good synthetic result, not a pale copy of the original. The puristic style managed to create from the pagan inheritance further development in a united mosaic surface, dependent on the liturgy, the architectural axis and the degree of sacredness towards the chancel, altar and vault. The total disappearing of figural images during the period of Theodosian rule and its new and partly introducing as symbols in the most important parts of the liturgy and the rites at the end of the Theodosian period, seen from the mosaic with the Paradise from Odessos,⁸⁰ reveals the role of this period for the Orthodoxy and the newly created principles of mosaic decoration, demonstrated in only few monuments of Thracia, Moesia and Macedonia. In all cases the enrichment is to the utmost in the variants, the complexity of each motif, and the colouring. The white ground perished entirely replaced by the total colour one; the outlines of the gigantic already compartments and of some round and oval elements has become much thicker now as to be easily 'read', as a sequence of lessons of 'the style of the thick white outlines'.

Another reason for uniting the both panels in the south aisle relating to the two different styles was the tremendous surface to be covered. It was a difficult task to lay quickly with mosaics such a huge basilica with one and the same scheme, and by one and the same workshop. More adequate tactics has been chosen to invite two or more workshops to work on separate panels and finish in shorter period the covering of all surfaces. Apart of the technical aspect of the need of quick preparing the pavement, the Theodosian period demonstrates a constant strive to create schemes, styles and technology of laying attributing to the unity of the surface and the liturgical space, a specific rhythm of movements and stops in front of the places where the liturgical rites have been performed. The mosaic compositions played for the first time after the mosaics with emblems and the Tetrarchy the role of structural elements in the space of liturgy, because they were one whole, not a mixture of a 'patch-work', but covered with equal geometric and ornamental schemes and motifs, entirely deprived of figural images or with limited number of some basic Early Christian symbols in the most important places of the floor and the liturgy. In this way, the accents of the decoration have been concentrated on the chancel, the solea and the ambo through the entrances, the axis of movement, the gigantic size and colour of the motifs and the created rhythm by all combined factors.

After this aim has been fulfilled, the symbolic figural images (the Fountain of Life, the Tree of Life, the flora and fauna of Earth and Ocean, the Paradise etc.) have been introduced again on a greater scale. But in the Orthodox Balkan sites the sacred Biblical scenes and the representations of Christ, saints and martyrs, crosses and even donors usually, with few exceptions, do not appear on the floors, only on the wall mosaics and wall paintings, differently from the Eastern provinces.

⁸⁰ Pillinger et alli, *Corpus* 2016, Taff.7-10, Abb. 15, 18 and 19; Taff. 11, Abb. 22.



Fig. 19 b. The panels with white circles flanking the panel with the paon in the Metropolitan basilica. After Google.

Сл. 19б. Панели са белим круговима који фланкирају панел са пауном у Митрополијској базилици (по: Google)

The panel with the paon from the narthex and its flanking compositions from the period of Marcian.

Finely at the very end of the Theodosian period or more probably during the time of Marcian, the new fifth mosaic style appeared in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv (fig. 19- 19 b)⁸¹. It is demonstrated by the two partly non-figural - partly figural compositions flanking the central one with the magnificent paon, surrounded by many other birds, liturgical ves-

sels and rose buds. According to the observations of Kantareva-Decheva, this is even the fourth mosaic laid at one and the same place in the so-called narthex, right in front of the doors to the naos. However this space is very special: the fourth (eastern) portico of the court is lacking, also lacking is the usual western wall of the narthex. In these circumstances, the place is playing the role of the narthex, and thus shortening the great longitude of the whole complex of the basilica with atrium. When erecting the basilica over an earlier pagan building, by omitting the real western wall of the narthex and the fourth (eastern) portico of the atrium, this proper solution has been adapted. It is known also from several basilicas in Thracia and Greece, and for instance, from the Eastern basilica in Xanthos⁸².

The dating of the panel with the paon is important for the time of its flanking panels as well. This type of scheme is repeating the one with the Episcopal mosaic inscription in the south aisle; also many compositions in the rainbow style from Syria and separate fillers from Greece and Bulgaria. The central shield with its golden ground around the paon is representing a golden cabochon of a jewel, additionally adorned on the periphery by green emeralds surrounded by a circle with white pearls and red granates at its base. This is the beginning of the new bejewelled style, which becomes dominant in the second half of 5th century (in Rome even earlier), and continues up to the post-Justinianic period in the 6th century. The new style is reflected in the richest palette of the paon,

⁸¹ See Pillinger et alli, *Corpus* 2016, Taff. 159, Abb..413.

⁸² For Bulgaria see the basilica in Messembria and the one in Kabile in Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016: Taff. 59, Abb. 166 and Taff. 61, Abb. 175; for the basilica in Epidavre see Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Syntagma* 1987, part 2; pin. 48; for Xanthos see Raynaud M. – P. *Corpus of the Mosaics of Turkey. V. 1 Lycia-Xanthos, The Eastern Basilica*, Ulugdag, 2009.

the surrounding birds, the rose buds and the liturgical vessels. In the figural part of the composition, the classicizing trend is featuring, however with an increase of formality, stronger decorativeness and also with much stronger heaviness and materiality, typical also for the portrait sculpture of the Late Theodosian period and that of Marcian⁸³.

This contrast between the shining central bejewelled shield with the paon surrounded by the other figural representations and the relatively modest side panels with white circles has been looked for on purpose, as to grasp the attention immediately to the picturesque paon and its central position. It should be paid special attention that the paon is turned not to the west to the Christians in the narthex, but to the east, i.e. facing namely the bishop turned to the crowd. The reason was that this place in front of the central entrance with door to the nave and two more side entrances leading also to the nave, was important for the acclamation of the bishop by the Christians and the crowd gathered in the atrium/court, and also in the so-called 'Small Entrance'. During the rite, first the deacon was taking the Bible from the diakonikon and bringing it to the bishop who was standing in the narthex, or, as it is our case, in the place instead of it, in front of the central door to the nave. The obvious connection of the symbolic figural mosaic image, its place, size and colour and very special golden cabochon should be especially underlined in this concrete case, because it is a classic example illustrating the connection mosaic representation – the Early Christian liturgy and the other rites.

The orthogonal scheme of both panels flanking the paon includes grid of rows of big tangent circles with small squares in the intervals⁸⁴. Hourglasses are formed from all sides between the neighboring circles. The size of the circles really impresses together with the simpler and almost monochrome palette in many places, especially in comparison to the richest panel with the birds and their dimensions. The fillers of the circles are very similar to the ones used in the puristic style, but represented predominantly in the brown-golden palette with rarely used red and black. Except them, dispersed are baskets with fruits and liturgical vessels, but at least five rows far from the border between the cabochon the paon, as to stand out the latter and attract the attention. The figural images in the side panels, the baskets and the cantharoses, appear together for the first time in the lands of Thracia, as we have seen already, after the earlier mosaic of the Episcopal basilica of Odessos from the end of 4th – beginning of 5th century. This combination of baskets of the fruits of Earth and the liturgical vessels with the wine of God precedes the latest mosaics of the

⁸³ The latter, although not descending from this dynasty, was married to Pulcheria, the sister of the dead previous emperor Theodosius II. Marcian continued the same politics initiated and helped in many cases by the empress, especially towards the Orthodoxy, and initiating the organization of the Chalkedonian Council. On the portraiture of this period see K. Fittschen, P. Zanker, *Katalog der römischen Porträts in den Capitolinischen Museen und den anderen kommunalen Sammlungen der Stadt Rom*. 1. Kaiser- und Prinzenbildnisse, Text and plates. Mainz: von Zabern, 1985, cat. No 127 (Honorius?); Fittschen K., P. Zanker. Band III / Textband: Kaiserinnen- und Prinzessinnenbildnisse - Frauenporträts. [2 Bd.]. 1983, Cat. NoNo 179-181 (end of 4th- beginning of 5th century).

⁸⁴ Le décor I, Pl. 144e.



Fig. 20. The north-western mosaic composition of the nartex with scales and the spolia of a pagan altar in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv. After Google.

Сл. 20. Северозападна мозаичка композиција у нартексу са спOLIјом из паганског олтару у Митрополијској базилици у Пловдиву (по: Google)

Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis and the numerous mosaic pavements from Greece, North Balkans and the Near East from the second half of 5th - 6th century. The white circles and its golden fillers are featuring the style: the white background is dominating, from time to time replaced by the light brown background of the squares and the fillings in the same palette. The style of the white big circles is several times represented by several variants of the scheme in some Early Christian monuments from Thracia⁸⁵, Greece and Xanthos⁸⁶.

The probably latest sixth in time non-figural mosaic is placed in the northwest of the nartex of the Metropolitan basilica. The pavement

represents scales modestly outlined by the red colour, and a little bit amorphous from stylistic point of view, which features a late date. The altar is pagan, used as spolia and demonstration of the victory of Christianity, nevertheless more rare because of the pagan content of the inscription.⁸⁷ Usually such inscriptions are placed in a way to be hidden and not read, or even stepped over, like the tomb Roman stele in the atrium of basilica of bishop Ioannes in Parthicopolis⁸⁸.

Conslusions

The observations on the six different styles in the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis show that the figural repertory began its diminishing and disappearing at the end of the second third of 4th century. The sources were different in style as non-figural, only geometrical, or with few vases and plants (the first mosaic in opus tessellatum, the panel in room A, the panel in the south portico in 'the style of the thick white outlines' and disappeared entirely during the Early Theodosian period at the beginning of 80s (the early phase of the puristic style in the Episcopal basilica of Marcianopolis)⁸⁹. Up to the end of 'the Theodosian Renaissance' in the second phase of the puristic style from the end of 4th – the very beginning of 5th century, the figural images have been re-introduced, first

⁸⁵ Pillinger et alli., *Corpus*, 2016, Abb. 463-464 (the basilica on Djambaz-tepe from the second half of 4th century); Taff. 99, only the hourglasses from the scheme (from the residence under the post in Stara Zagora from the end of 4th-beginning of 5th century).

⁸⁶ Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Syntagma*, v. I, pin. 250-253.

⁸⁷ Н. Шаранков, *Археологически открити и разкопки през 2017 г.*, с. 371, No 1 (pagan altar from end of 2nd –beginning of 3rd century).

⁸⁸ Pillinger et alli., *Corpus* 2016, Taff. 291 (the path of stones in the atrium).

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.*, Taff. 32-37; V. Popova, *The Mosaic Pavements of Marcianopolis*, 97-114.

as limited number of separate Early Christian symbols (the pavements of basilica N 2 in Nicopolis ad Nestum, the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis, the Metropolitan basilica of Odessos), than as whole scenes and new elements and stylistics of the non-figural compositions in the first half of 5th century (the Paradise garden of the Episcopal basilica of Odessos, the residence under the Post in Stara Zagora and the basilica in Cabile)⁹⁰. Essential new feature of the second period is the dominance of the rainbow elements and the quick mixing of the geometric style with the puristic one and the one of 'the thick white outlines' etc. Up to the time of Marcian, the figural images again became dominant, flanked by half-figural compositions like the surrounding panels of the paon in the Metropolitan basilica of Plovdiv. Here both the figural and non-figural parts represent the new stylistic development of the mosaics.

When compared, the observed mosaics in different or mixed styles show the inherited in the schemes and motifs iconographic and stylistic non-figural elements from the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian period, and the novelties and the further developed ones in the period from Theodosius I to Marcian. The mosaics of the latter period represent the summit of non-figural and figural pavements, but also of wall mosaics, having in mind the mosaics of Thessaloniki, Rome and Ravenna. This can be seen very clearly comparing the mosaic of the synagogue in Apameia and the shield with the paon from Plovdiv (fig. 15) and other mosaics from Syria. The scheme is one and the same, but the rich composition, variety of motifs and colours in Apameia look modest, with equal schemes with smaller proportions, but still preserving in some places the white background in spite of the colour one, and with a more simple palette, not so fine and pastel as in Plovdiv and compared to the supposed Constantinopolitan mosaic workshops. This is due to several main differences: the enlargement of the geometric compartments and its new proportions, the richest palette, the abundance of fillers motifs, the synthesis of different styles, the vacuum horrori, when every spot is covered with a decoration, and the calligraphian design of each motif.

It can be observed that the puristic style had left a significant offprint on the bejewelled style of the period Late Theodosius II - Marcian, but only in the iconography of the non-figural motifs. The size of the circles, the colouring of the fillers and the changing white and golden ground is featuring the newly created style, a little bit ruder and simplified in comparison to the south aisle of the Metropolitan basilica, a 'barock-like' style in the half-figural panels suitable to underline the figural representations in the bejewelled style of the paon. This is the real end of the puristic and the rainbow styles, although separate echoes of them in the iconography of individual motifs will sound up till the end of Late Antiquity in the Balkans.

With the advancing of time it impresses, especially towards the end of 4th century, that the invited workshops demonstrate the best artistic qualities, the richest repertoire and polychrome mosaics treated in a metropolitan way. Unfortunately, the mosaics of that time in Constantinople have perished, but the pavements of Philippopolis from the same period are showing very obvi-

⁹⁰ Pillinger et alli, *Corpus*, 2016, Taff.10-11; Abb. 18; Taff. 63-65; Taff. 89.

ously what was happening in the capital in the mosaic art and the decoration of the basilicas. This was a very successful period in creating new mosaic styles capable of covering tremendous surfaces, creating the impression of the space unity and tightly connected with the liturgy concerning the rare figural representations, the Early Christian symbols and the mosaic building inscriptions. At that period Philippopolis was as if 'the small Constantinople' for Thracia and the interior of the Balkans, serving as media for delivering the new styles west of the capital. The scale of the Metropolitan basilica in Plovdiv, the plan and its mosaic decoration are striking, this is a new page in the mosaic research of the Early Christianity and Early Byzantium, true and reliable evidence of the artistic processes in the capital and the interior of Thracia. The role of Philippopolis for Thracia and even for Moesia in the artistic aspect can be compared to a great extent to the role of Thessaloniki for North Greece and Macedonia. The abundance of first-class mosaic monuments or monuments with interesting iconography and style, copying the not preserved ones in Constantinople, and the constant appearing recently of new mosaics in Philippopolis reveal its important role in the development of the mosaic art from Constantine to Marcian, for the important changes in the repertory, style and liturgy of the province Thracia and the diocese Thracia. The mosaic floors are also important evidences for the novelties and the not preserved monuments in the capital and open entirely new pages in the research of the ancient mosaic art, architecture and Early Christian/ Early Byzantine liturgy.

Вања Попова

(независни истраживач)

РАНИ НЕФИГУРАЛНИ ПОДНИ МОЗАИК У МИТРОПОЛИЈСКОЈ БАЗИЛИЦИ
ФИЛИПОПОЛИСА У ТРАКИЈИ

У раду се разматра неколико питања у вези са нефигуралним мозаицима датованим у 4. и 5. век. Први део је у вези са појављивањем *opus signinum* у позној антици у неколико градова Тракије, углавном у Филипополису и Сердици и околини. Потреба за брзим покривањем површине од 2000 квадратних метара базилике услед недовољних средстава довела су до употребе ове технике. Из економских разлога први *tesselatum* је коришћен у наосу, а после свега неколико година базилика је покривена типичним раноконстантиновским схемама са псеудоамблематиком и конвенционалним мотивима. Једина разлика су веће димензије мотива а веће димензије сваке тесере су најнепосредније везане и за димензије базилике. Други проблем који се разматра у тексту везан је за нестанак фигуралних представа, осим неколико ранохришћанских симбола. Овде се разматрају четири стила, два стила нестају већ у IV веку, а појављују се фигуралне слике у V веку. Друга два стила створена су у Цариграду по свим приликама, а утицали су на мозаике у Тракији и Мезији. Геометријски стил је присутан у Филипополиса, дело је цариградских радионица. Тзв. теодосијевска ренесанса у Филипополису приказује да је град представљао важан центар у позној антици, као и да се улога Тракије може упоредити са улогом Солуна за Македонију и северну Грчку. Мозаички натпис из Митрополијске базилике показује да је нова улога Филипоља почела раније него што се сматрало, по свим приликама већ од 381. године.