

---

*Tsonya Drazheva*

**NEW DATA ON THE GRAPHIC DECORATION OF  
BYZANTINE MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE 13TH-16TH  
CENTURY FOUND DURING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH IN THE PATRIARCHAL MONASTERY OF ST.  
JOHN THE BAPTIST ON THE ISLAND OF ST. IVAN NEAR  
SOZOPOL, BULGARIA**

Island St. Ivan near Sozopol is the largest of five islands along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, and one of the three islands in the bay of Sozopol. It is located on one nautical mile from the old city of Sozopol and has an area of 260 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

The first archeological excavations on the island started back in 1985 to 1994, lead by Prof. Dr. Violeta Dimova and Senior Dr. Bozidar Dimitrov. In 2008, the archaeological research was resumed by a new team of experts: Prof. Dr. Casimir Popkonstantinov Dr. Tsonya Drazheva and Rosina Kostova. The team is focused on exploration of the southern part of the island, where archaeological remains have been found from different ages.<sup>2</sup>

According to the first researchers of the area, this was the location of an ancient temple from the 7<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century BC, which coincides with the foundation time of the ancient colony Apollonia Pontica / nowadays Sozopol. The archaic temple was dedicated to God Apollo the Healer/Physician /Apollo Iatros/. Following the imposition of Christianity in those territories of the Eastern Roman Empire at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> - beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the ruins of the old temple were used as a base of an early Christian Basilica named after the St. Mother of God Kaleosa. It is a tree nave and single apse construction laid in opus latericum. In the following centuries, the basilica underwent many reconstructions and at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a monas-

---

<sup>1</sup> В. Димова, *Църквата „Св.Иван Предтеча“ на манастира при Созопол*, ИНИМ, IX, 1992,53-65

<sup>2</sup> К. Попконстантинов, Ц. Дражева, Р. Костова, *Средновековен манастир „Св. Йоан Продом“ на остров „Св.Иван“ Созопол*, АОР, 2009, 595-599.



Fig. 1 Monastery St. John the Baptist located on the Island St. John near Sozopol, Bulgaria.

tery arose next to the church. In this period the monastery was in the range of the medieval Bulgarian Empire and became one of the most active missionary of Christian culture in Bulgarian lands among the Black Sea coast.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately there is not much information found on this early stage of the monastery existence. Indirect evidence of its large literary activity during the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century have been found preserved in European libraries in a number of manuscripts written in the monastery. The earliest book created here dated up with the tenth century and the most valuable was the novel “Barlaam and Joasaph” from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which is nowadays kept in the Vatican Apostolic Library.<sup>4</sup> The book contains parts with transcription in Old Bulgarian language, which means that here worked Bulgarian monks, focused on translation and copying of books from/to Old Greek, Armenian, Latin and Old Bulgarian.

Severe events in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century on the Balkan Peninsula and the endless wars between Bulgaria and Byzantium and reflect on the development of the monastery. According to the Byzantine author Manuel Phil in 1263 the island was visited by the prominent commander Michail Glavas Tarkhaniotes, who found the monastery quite faltered with only six monks residing there. The commander initiated the construction of a new church in the highest central area of the monastery ground, named after the patron of the monastery - St. John the Baptist. Later on here appeared a second cross basilica with rich decoration. It resembles the type conchal churches, widespread in the Balkans under the influence of the Athos architecture. In plan it is centered, five- conchal building, built in a mixed construction: limestone blocks, alternating with brick layers. The facade is decorated with two-step niches and indentations, adorned with layers of ceramic glazed plates and rosettes, highlighting the arches of the facades. The cornices are made of white marble. Its rich partitioning in the architecture gives to the interior a distinct vividness, which was richly illuminated through the windows of the domes, three apses and conchas. The walls were covered

<sup>3</sup> Гръцки извори за българската история / ГИБИ/, X, 141-142; Б. Димитров, *Созопол, Български средновековни градове и крепости*, 1981,394-395.

<sup>4</sup> Б. Димитров, *Созополските средновековни манастири*, Векове, 1980,1,79.



Fig. 2 Tetraevangelie from the 16th century (*Bulgarian National Library Sofia*); and a double sided bronze seal for ornamental breaks of the passages in the books.

entirely with murals. Unfortunately they are preserved only very few traces, mainly in construction embankments. The naos was covered with marble flooring and separation for the church singers next to the north and the south wall. The altar consists of three parts with height over 2 meters for the conchas. To the west the premises developed in a tripartite narthex and a wide exonarthex in which were discovered the tombs of two prominent men.

The gallery and a bell tower were built on the north side. In north and west of the monastery St. John the Baptist, a wide courtyard was formed, paved with stone and bounded by the long monastery building in an L-shape. This was a monastic dormitory and guesthouse for special visitors. The hegumen's premises close the monastery complex in the southwestern part of the yard. It had two floors with a large reception hall from the east and the abbot's own dwelling with a private bathroom. Despite the devastation and the plight of the structures the luxurious planning in the building's interior is still noticeable even today. This is not accidental matter because the monastery St. John the Baptist had a special place in the politics of Constantinople Patriarchate and its mediation in the relations between Byzantium and Bulgaria. In the following centuries this monastery became the biggest literary center on the West Black Sea coast and was attended by numerous religious leaders, Byzantine and Bulgarian rulers, and behind its walls was negotiated over major interests and religious issues.

In 1303 the monastery sheltered the deposed Patriarch of Constantinople John XII Cosmas, who was born in the city of Sozopol. In the following year the Bulgarian Tsar Todor Svetoslav Terter returned the Southern Black Sea coast within the borders of the Bulgarian state. After his arrival in Sozopol, he visited the monastery of St. John the Baptist for a special meeting with the former patriarch. In return of the expensive gifts and privileges which the tsar gave to the Bulgarian monastery, John XII Cosmas used his influence in Constantinople and managed to arrange a dynastic marriage between Svetoslav Terter and the Byzantine princess Theodora. The ecclesiastical marriage is concluded in the



Fig. 3 Bronze seal for decoration of metallic hardware.

church of St. John inside the monastery, which was declared “royal”, ie endowed with the direct patronage of the Bulgarian rulers and later the Byzantine emperors.<sup>5</sup>

In the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century monastery of St. John the Baptist has grown rapidly and its area reached 260 ha which included many fields, vineyards, forests and quarries. Its central part was surrounded by a massive stone wall. A deep well, built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century still provide enough water for the daily activities of the monks.

In 1363 the monastery received a “golden stamp charter” by Emperor John V Palaeologus, which confirmed his possession of land estates in the vicinity of the village St. Nicholas (nowadays Chernomorets) and of the monastery St. Kirik and Julita (on the island of the same name, joined today with the mainland pier). With the same “golden stamp charter” to the monastery of St. John was transmitted the Armenian monastery of the Holy Apostles, which was located in the eastern part of the peninsula around homonymous chapel in Sozopol.

In this period the monastery attracted many monks which followed the expansion of the monastery wings in the north and northeast for the monastic dormitory. The most precious cultural heritage of this spiritual center is its library - scriptorium, in which between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century the monks

<sup>5</sup> ГИБ, X, 204-205.

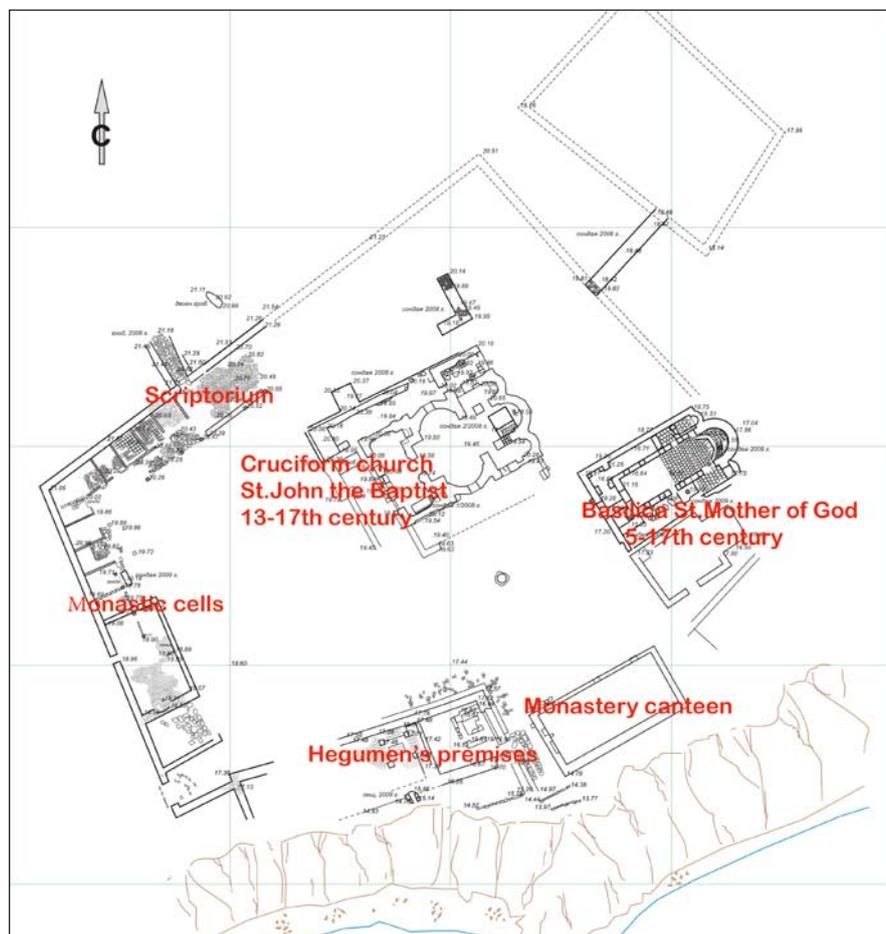


Fig. 4 Map of the archaeological survey during 2009.

wrote and copied many books ordered and purchased from other monasteries and libraries. In the scriptorium worked very highly educated monks and master artists in design and decoration of handmade books. Files from the monastery books copied during the 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century in the scriptorium contained information about the Turkish invasion in the Black Sea region.<sup>6</sup>

For the period 1482-1623, many discovered patriarchal documents, travel accounts notes in monastic books etc., evidenced that at this time, the largest monastic dormitory in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula was located in the Sozopol Monastery of St. John the Baptist. This allowed the monastery to become a big publisher of liturgical and secular literature as well as an active propagator of the Christian culture.

<sup>6</sup> K. Konstantinides, *He Apolonia, Sozopolis nyn kaloumene*, Thrakika, III, 1932, 165-167.

Monastic literary activities have been still undertaken during the first centuries of the Ottoman rule – between the 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. So far there has only been found 45 manuscripts written in the monastery St. John the Baptist, which are now scattered in various libraries around the world: in Sofia, Athos, Vatican City, Athens, Moscow, Michigan /USA/, the Royal Library in Sweden.

In 1623 the monastery was pillaged in fighting between the Cossack pirates of the Northern coast and the Turkish fleet. The surviving monks, scholars were housed on the island of Halki near Istanbul. After this event the monastery perished existing.

During the 2009 archaeological survey of the ruined remains of the monastic scriptorium, there was valuable evidence found about the technology of construction and decoration of manuscripts during the 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century: tools for making leather and metal parts of the book covers, silver and copper sheets for decoration and other items related to the work of monks - calligraphers.

Objects of a high interest are two rectangular stamps from bronze with deep engraved floral motifs, which correspond typologically and contentwise to the Byzantine decoration system of that period. However, there is a difference in dimensions and use of stamps.

One of the stamps has a length of 7.6 cm and dimensions of the rectangular print 2.7 x 1.6 cm. Backside of the handle is very worn out from the constant blows it was bearing, which points out its purpose for decoration of metal edges over the book's leather covers. Leather treated with special pre-softened tannins for greater elasticity has been stretched over a wooden frame. Followed the placement of metal strips and which were decorated with ornaments printed on the metal surface by rapidly hammering on the stamps handle. This deep relief permanently fixed the metal strips on the leather surface.<sup>7</sup>

The second stamp is 8 cm long, but has smaller dimensions on the rectangular head. On the top of the cylindrical handle there is also engraved ornament - a small cross. Traces of dark red powder paint remained on the stamp's surface. Perhaps this subject has been used for decoration of the pages with colourful details or to separate the passages (portions) in the text.<sup>8</sup>

Similar findings have not been found in any other archaeological surveys in Bulgaria so far. Their finding in the monastery of St. John the Baptist, near Sozopol is an opportunity for further studies on the decoration of the preserved books written there. Comparative analysis of the archaeological finds will provide new data on the use of ready-made models for decoration of manuscripts in the Byzantine tradition during 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century.

Postscript:

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 during the archaeological research under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Dr. Tsonya Drazheva, in the earliest church of the medieval monastery of St. John the Baptist built in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, a sealed RELIQUARY was found preserving relics of a saint. An inscription on the supporting stone box attests that these are relics of the

<sup>7</sup> *Българския средновековен град, технологии, 1992, 69-70.*

<sup>8</sup> А, Джурова, Християнската култура в средните векове, *Към въпроса за графичната украса на ранните гръцки ръкописи от Охрид, 2008, 238-258.*

monastery's patron St. John the Baptist, laid in by the sacra mensa. This finding confirms the importance of the monastery as a major Christian center in the South-eastern Balkans.

Џоња Дражева  
НОВИ ПОДАЦИ О ГРАФИЧКИМ УКРАСИМА ВИЗАНТИЈСКИХ РУКОПИСНИХ  
КЊИГА ТОКОМ XII-XVI В. СА АРХЕОЛОШКИХ ПРОУЧАВАЊА  
ПАТРИЈАРШИСКОГ МОНАСТИРА „СВ. ЈОВАН КРСТИТЕЉ“ НА ОСТРВУ СВ.  
ИВАН КРАЈ СОЗОПОЛА

Острво „Св. Иван“ поред Созопола је највеће острво у Црном мору. Ту се још средином V в. издигла ранохришћанска базилика, око које се током следећих векова развија велики хришћански центар на Црноморском приморју – манастир Св. Јован Крститељ. У част ктитора манастира средином XII века била је изграђена друга крстокуполна црква са богатим декоративним украсима. Током следећих векова манастир привлачи многе монахе и постаје најважнији књижевни центар источног дела Балканског полуострва. У манастирској библиотеци (skriptarium) радило је много високообразованих монаха-књижевника, који копирају боголужбене књиге, животописе и праве преводе са грчког на бугарски. То манастиру пружа могућност да заузме веома значајно место у ширењу хришћанске културе. Најраније штампана књига у манастиру, датира из X века, а највреднија, роман „Варлаам и Јоасаф“ из XII века, данас се чува у Ватиканској апостолској библиотеци. Плодотворна књижевна активност манастира се продужава и у првим вековима османске владавине. Токо 1623 г. Манастир је потпуно изгорео у пожару који је био последица борбених сукоба између козачких гусара са северне црноморске обале и турске флотиле. Досада је откривено само 45 рукописних књига, писаних у манастиру Св. Јован Крститељ, које су данас расуте по многим библиотекама широм света: Софије, Свете горе, Ватикана, Атине, Москве, Мичигена (САД), Краљевске библиотеке Шведске.

Током 2009. г. при археолошким истраживањима остатака страдалог у пожару манастирског скриптаријума откривени су драгоцени докази о технологији израде и украшавања рукописних књига у периоду XII –XVI в.: инструменти за израду кожних и металних делова корица од сребрних и бакарних лимова за декоративни оков, као и неки Предмети везани за делатност монаха –калиграфа. Највеће интересовање изазвала су два правоугаона бронзана жига са дубоко угравираним флоралним мотивима, који по типологији и садржају одговарају византијском декоративном систему из тог периода. Слични налази нису откривени у досадашњој бугарској археолошкој средини. Функција им је била различита. Један од њих коришћен је за декорацију металних кантова кожних корица књига, а овај други за декоративно дељење-прелом текста, што је чинило књигу разумљивијом са становишта њеног садржаја.

P.S.

При археолошким истраживањима 29. августа 2010 под руководством проф. д-р Казимира Попконстантинова и н.с. Џонија Дражева на најстаријој цркви у средњевековном манастиру Св. Јована Крститеља која је изграђена почетком V века, откривен је реликвијум са очуваним моштима свеца. Натпис на пратећој каменој кутијици доказује, да су то мошти покровитеља манастира Св. Јована Крститеља, одложене при полагању sacra mensa. Ово откриће потврдило је велики значај манастира као важног хришћанаког средичта у Југоисточном делу Балкана.

