



Medieval Wall Painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract

The paper presents introductory research of medieval wall painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the basis for future, more detailed elaboration of this subject. Periodisation is established, showing two groups of wall paintings, the earlier one from the 11th century until the first half of the 13th century, and the subsequent one between the second half of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century. The subsequent group of wall paintings is related to the pro-Catholic orientation of the last Bosnian kings, the strengthening of influence of the Franciscan order, and the presence of Dubrovnik colonies. The wall paintings related to royal residencies in Bobovac and Jajce, the most significant sites of Bosnian medieval art, particularly stand out in the aforementioned group.

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper will present initial research of medieval wall painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the basis for future, more detailed elaboration of this subject.

Today, the monuments of medieval wall painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been extremely poorly preserved. Only a few fragments remained, which can be seen in situ, as well as a few fragments that are stored and exhibited at the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and the Franciscan Museum in Jajce.

Despite the loss of monuments or their exceptionally low preservation status, we have conducted this research so as to save them from total oblivion, to present the localities at which the existence of wall painting has been determined, and to seek to present the basic characteristics of these creations on the basis of literature and the situation in situ.

2. METHOD

The paper is based on works of earlier researchers who were engaged in this subject, or who mentioned wall paintings within the framework of broader research of medieval art in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in monographic presentations of individual localities.

Zdravko Kajmaković was the only one who presented the research of wall painting in the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina in more detail in his book *Zidno slikarstvo u Bosni i Hercegovini*, (Wall Painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina) from 1971, which encompasses the entire legacy of wall painting of this area, from late Antiquity to the 17th and 18th centuries. We find significant data on medieval wall painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the works of Pavao Anđelić, one of the most prominent archaeologists of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1970s, who worked in archaeological research of the royal seats of medieval Bosnian rulers in Bobovac and Kraljeva Sutjeska, and in the area of Visoko. In the Middle Ages, wall painting was one of the most significant forms of fine art expression, which particularly spread throughout the entire Europe with the emergence of Giotto and his followers in the early 14th century.

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Historical sources and archaeological holdings indicate that there were 456 Christian churches in the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina in the medieval period. There is no doubt that many of these churches were painted. The aim of this research is not to prove that medieval wall painting existed in the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather to determine what we can learn about it.

3. MONUMENTS OF MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND THEIR PERIODISATION

The monuments which we have hitherto identified can be divided into two groups, of which the first encompasses monuments dating between the 11th and the first half of the 13th century, while the second one dates between the second half of the 14th century and mid-15th century.

In this periodisation, a gap between mid-13th and mid-14th centuries can be noted, which corresponds to the period of greatest influence of the Bosnian Church in the area of medieval Bosnia. Bosnian Church was the most represented religious community in the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia, and was supported by the majority of earlier Bosnian bans and kings, as well as by the majority of Bosnian dignitaries. During medieval centuries, the Bosnian Church was often accused of heresy in contemporaneous documents and records, which can be related to political requirements and situation in the neighbouring countries; today's researchers have also not adopted a unitary position regarding the heretic significance of the Bosnian Church.

The potential heretic character of the Bosnian Church is associated with iconoclasm, the prohibition of figurative art, which is contrasted with the artistic treatment of *stećci* (stelae), as well as with the presence of miniatures in manuscripts associated with the activity of the Bosnian Church.

3.1. The Role of the Franciscans

In the late 13th century, Franciscans arrived in Bosnia, and thereafter assumed the main and sole pastoral role among Catholic population [1]. The Franciscans had retained this role until the establishment of the Apostolic Vicariate in Bosnia in 1735 [2]. In 1340, the Franciscan Bosnian Vicariate was established, with the seat in Visoko [1]. From the period of reign of King Stephen Tomaš (1443-1461), the Franciscans exerted increasing influence on the court and eventually replaced members of the Bosnian Church as vital operatives in Bosnia's foreign policy [1].

The first Franciscan monasteries were built alongside the colonies of the people of Dubrovnik, who came to Bosnia with the development of mining and trade [2]. In the Middle Ages, the Franciscans built several dozen monasteries and an even larger number of churches in Bosnia [3]. Among Franciscan churches built in that period, we know of two churches in Bobovac, and one in Kraljeva Sutjeska, Bakići near Olovo, Srebrenica, Arnautovići near Visoko (former Mile), Varošić near Vranduk, and Jajce, respectively [3]. Five of the aforementioned churches were monastic, one was burghal (Bakići), and two were court ones (Bobovac and Kraljeva Sutjeska) [3]. Work on the interior renovation of Franciscan churches intensified near the end of the state's independence [4]. Given the numerous subsequent devastations, present-day Franciscan monasteries were mostly renovated or rebuilt in the 19th century; hence, we know nothing of their medieval appearance, as well as of the wall paintings that had probably adorned the monastery churches.

4. WALL PAINTING FROM THE 11TH CENTURY UNTIL THE FIRST HALF OF THE 13TH CENTURY

From the earlier period of medieval wall painting, dating between the 11th century and the first half of the 13th century, only fragments of wall paintings from Panik near Bileća have been preserved. They were found during archaeological research in 1967, prior to the construction of Grančarevo hydroelectric power plant and sinking of Trebišnjica valley, and are displayed today in the permanent collection of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo [5].



Figure 1. Panik near Bileća, fragment of the wall painting, 12th century (courtesy of the State Museum in Sarajevo)

We have associated the wall paintings from Panik with a group of wall paintings from Dubrovnik and the Elaphite Islands dating from the first decades of the 12th century, which manifest characteristics of Adrio-Byzantine painting, i.e., Byzantine art reworked with newer Romanesque forms [6]. Fragments of wall paintings from this period were found during archaeological research of the Church of St. Stephen near the village of Vruci, near the Spring of Bosna River, where remains can be found of two architectural structures, different from one another by period and building technique [7]. Fragments of wall paintings and stone decorations were found in an older church, dating from the period between the 9th and 10th centuries, which also serves as temporal framework for dating lost wall paintings [7].

The existence of wall paintings is mentioned in the remains of the Church of St. Blaise (Blaž) near Blažuj in Ilidža, which dates back to the 12th century or the early 13th century, and therefore the lost wall paintings can probably be dated accordingly [8].

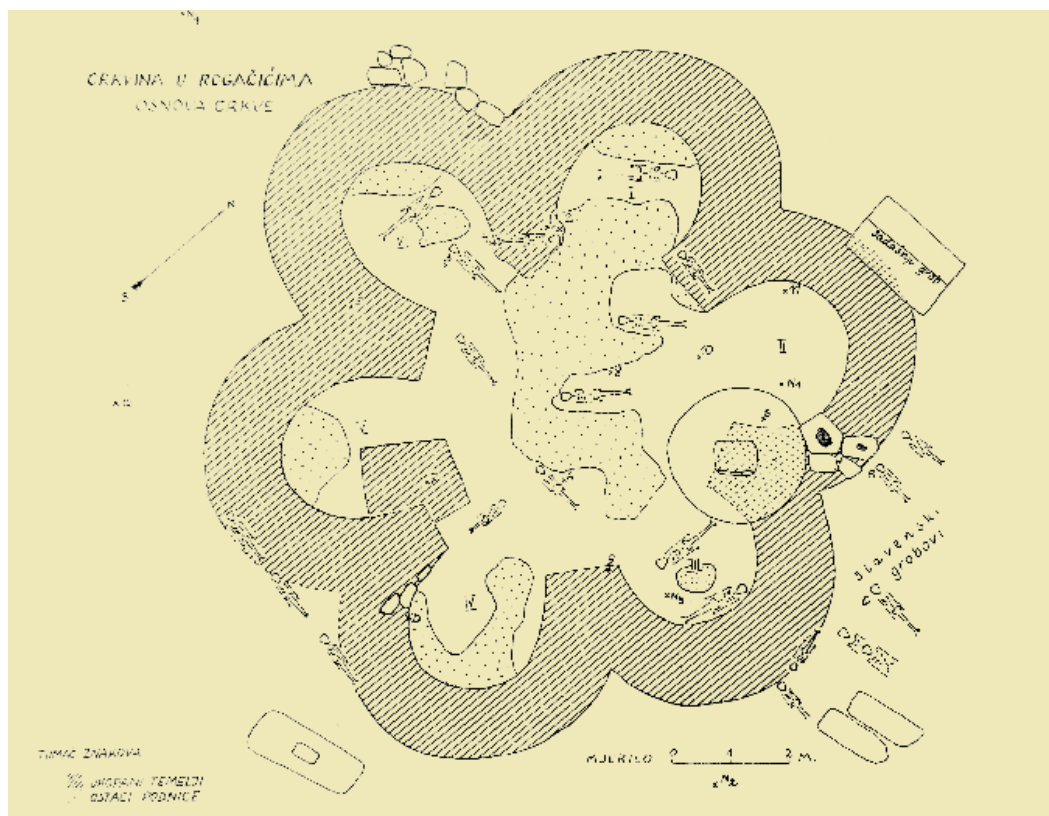


Figure 2. Blažuj, floor plan of the church of St. Blaise, 12th century

In Kolunić near Bosanski Petrovac, there are remains of a single-nave church with a tall bell tower with Romanesque characteristics [4]. The existence of wall paintings in this church has been noted by Petar Mirković in an article from 1889: “Old people have told me that there were inscriptions and fresco paintings, but now time has destroyed and eroded everything, altar stones vanish before our eyes and become piles, as does everything else” [9]. The author quotes a folktale according to which this church was dedicated to St. George [9].



Figure 3. Kolunić, near Bosanski Petrovac, the remains of the Romanesque church

5. WALL PAINTING OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 14TH CENTURY AND THE FIRST HALF OF THE 15TH CENTURY

The wall paintings related to royal residencies in Bobovac and Jajce stand out in the second group of wall paintings, which encompasses the period between the second half of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century. Small fragments can be seen in situ, and a few fragments are stored at the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and the Franciscan Museum in Jajce.

The period of flourishing of culture and art in medieval Bosnia started from the coronation of Tvrtko I as King in 1377, and lasted until the advent of Ottoman rule in 1463 [10]. The construction and painting of Catholic churches in the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia is related to the presence of Dubrovnik colonies, the pro-Catholic orientation of last Bosnian kings, and the strengthening of influence of the Franciscan order [4].

Tvrtko's court in Kraljeva Sutjeska was oriented towards Gothic art of the Littoral, which continued in the period of his successors [4]. In the first half of the 15th century, last Bosnian rulers and also some of the feudal lords definitively converted to Christianity [4]. Stjepan Tomaš and Stjepan Tomašević, the last two rulers on the Bosnian throne, explicitly declared themselves as Catholics and invited artists from Split and Dubrovnik to their court in Bobovac [4].

Bobovac and Jajce, seats of medieval Bosnian kings and dignitaries, are the most significant localities with monuments of medieval art, at which significant findings of wall paintings have also been found. Bobovac as the royal residency and Jajce as the seat of Duke Hrvoje Vukčić Hrvatinić, an influential Bosnian dignitary, and later the residency of the Bosnian king, stand out by their quality of architecture and sculpture. Judging by the preserved fragments, we can assume that the wall paintings were also of equally high artistic quality.

5.1. Court Chapel in Bobovac

In the court chapel in Bobovac, fragments of wall paintings are found in the lower zone of the north wall. These fragments have been extremely poorly preserved; the fragments preserved in the permanent collection of the National Museum in Sarajevo provide better insight into the characteristics of wall paintings. The funerary chapel of Bosnian kings in Bobovac was initially built for the cult requirements of the court and the fort's garrison during the reign of Ban Stephen II (1292-1353). In the first decades of the 15th century, it was converted into a funerary chapel of the royal family [3]. On the basis of heraldic markings, we can conclude that tombstones and tombs belong to kings Ostoja, Tvrtko II, and Stjepan Tomaš [3].



Figure 4. Bobovac, fragments of the wall paintings (courtesy of the State Museum in Sarajevo)

The chapel of the royal mausoleum in Bobovac is single-nave with an apse. In subsequent adaptation, the earlier quadrangular apse was turned into a polygonal one [11]. The sanctuary was vaulted, probably by a ribbed arch, while the roof construction above the nave was probably wooden. [11] Found fragments of architectural plastics demonstrate abundance, diversity, and impeccable quality of workmanship [11].

Earlier researchers determined that the church's entire interior had been painted [4], [11]. Two layers of wall paintings, an older and a newer one, have been found [11]. Pavao Anđelić, head of the archaeological research of the chapel, notes that during excavations, more than two thousand fragments of plaster with painted fragments have been discovered, while only five to six square meters of painted surface have been preserved on the walls [11]. All of the preserved wall paintings are mostly parts of a red monochrome tapestry that was painted in the lower part of all walls [11].

On the segment of the composition at the right from the doors, Pavao Anđelić discerns legs and tail of a figure in motion, which he considers as probably belonging to "Lucifer," and concludes that the Last Judgement was probably depicted there [11].



Figure 5. Bobovac, the court chapel, 15th century (photo RR, 2019)

In the upper part of the walls, Pavao Anđelić notes human figures, vegetative motifs – stand alone or framed in strips – geometrical motifs in the strips, and architectural representations [11]. Parts of aureoles painted in gold are visible in fragments with figurative illustrations. As regards incarnates, a single, albeit damaged unit has been found (the face of a saint), several fragments of eyes, the forehead of a figure with wavy hair, and fingertips [11]. Pavao Anđelić notes that the painter was truly a master in depicting plasticity, which he achieved with fine, delicate shading [11].

Zdravko Kajmaković dates the emergence of wall paintings in the period of reign of Tvrtko II, between 1430 and his death in 1443 [4]. Due to high quality of the wall paintings, as well as the close relations of the Bosnian court with Dubrovnik, Zdravko Kajmaković believes that the author of the wall paintings is to be found in the circle of masters of the Littoral, such as Dujam Vušković, painter from Split, or Đivan Ugrinović, painter from Dubrovnik, who maintained contact with Bosnia in the late 14th century and the first half of the 15th century. [4].

Đivan Ugrinović, late-Gothic painter from Dubrovnik, decorated the walls of manors of Bosnian dignitaries Radoslav Pavlović and Sandalj Hranić (1427-1428); in the summer of 1429, he travelled somewhere in Hum, to Sandalj's court [4], [12]. The tradition of collaboration with Hum hinterland was also continued by Đivan's son Stjepan Zornelić, who admitted the young Petar Milisav Miljanović from Dabar in Herzegovina into apprenticeship [13].

Dujam Vušković painted the Chapel of St. Domnius in the Split Cathedral in 1429 [4]. Đivan Ugrinović sent his son Stjepan into apprenticeship to Vušković as this was probably the most renowned workshop in the Littoral at the time [4], [12], [14]. Several years prior to his death in 1453, Vušković admitted as apprentice in his workshop a boy from Bosnia named Stjepan, son of Dragić Medošević from Grahovo [4], [12].

5.2. Church of St. Mary in Jajce

In Jajce, fragments of wall paintings have been found on the north wall of the Church of St. Mary, and smaller fragments are stored in the Franciscan Museum.

St. Mary's in Jajce was a Franciscan monastery church that was not mentioned by written sources until the first decades of the 15th century [2]. It is single-nave with elongated sanctuary, rectangular apse, and sacristy on the south side [2]. The bell tower by the church is known as St. Luke's tower and was probably built in the late 15th or the early 16th century [12], [15]. In 1528, the church was partially expanded and converted into the Mosque of Sultan Suleyman I. After a fire in 1832, it has not been restored and remains out of function ever since [3].

During archaeological research in 1961, it was determined that the Gothic edifice developed with the adaptation of an older Romanesque church [3]. According to data quoted by Pavao Anđelić, on the preserved walls and individual stones found in the ruins, fragments of wall paintings have been discovered, part of which belong to the older Romanesque church, and the other part to the newer Gothic church [3].



Figure 6. Jajce, church of St. Mary with the tower of St. Luke (photo Mario Periša, 2019)

Zdravko Kajmaković mentions Martin Petković from Jajce as the possible author of the wall paintings. In the spring of 1431, he was admitted into three-year apprenticeship at the workshop of renowned painter Blaž Jurjev Trogiranić, who was then in public service of the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik Republic) [4], [12]. Seven years later, Martin was recorded as independent painter in Split, where he lived at the time. Together with a man named Ivan, he carried out works on the wooden choir in the Franciscan Church in Split, after which his name is not again mentioned in documents [4], [12].

5.3. Church of St. Gregory in Kraljeva Sutjeska

Other localities from this period, at which lost wall paintings have been recorded, are also related to the Bosnian royal court or the activity of Franciscans.



Figure 7. Kraljeva Sutjeska, the remains of the church of St. Gregory (photo RR, 2018)

Fragments of painted plaster have been found in the remains of the Church of St. Gregory in Kraljeva Sutjeska, which served as the chapel of the royal court [3]. The church was single-nave with a rectangular apse; archaeological research has revealed two phases of construction [11]. Wooden ceiling was situated above the nave, while the stone arch, made from carved blocks of sinter, was found in the apse [11].

Pavao Anđelić notes that traces of reddish and blue paint have been found on several fragments of plaster, but nothing could be determined regarding the ornamental or figurative motifs to which they could have belonged [11]. Several fragments of flat-surfaced stained-glass panels with arched sides have also been found, which indicates that the church windows were filled with multi-coloured stained glass [11].

5.4. Church of St. Nicholas in Arnautovići near Visoko (Mile)

In Arnautovići near Visoko, there are remains of the Church of St. Nicholas. The village of Arnautovići is identical to the medieval settlement of Mile, known as the site at which Bosnian state assemblies were held. The church was founded by Bosnian Ban Stephen Kotromanić II; next to the church, there was also a Franciscan monastery [3]. During archaeological research, it was ascertained that King Tvrtko I had been buried here, and it is also believed that this is the resting place of Ban Stephen II. Historical data indicate that this was also the coronation church of Bosnian kings [3].



Figure 8. Arnautovići near Visoko (Mile), the remains of the church of St. Nicholas, 15th Century (photo RR, 2018)

The Church of St. Nicholas was built in mid-14th century, and was demolished in 1698 or 1699 [3]. During the construction of the new Šamac-Sarajevo railway, one of the temporary tracks of the narrow-gauge railway was crossing the structure itself [3]. Krno Misilo notes that the remnants of wall paintings have been discovered on the west wall of the church and above the doors leading to the sacristy [10].

5.5. Crkvine near Vesela Straža, near Bugojno

The fragments that have recently been found at the locality of Crkvine near Vesela Straža, near Bugojno, can also be associated with the abovementioned period. The existence of wall paintings has been ascertained during archaeological research in 2014, which was reported by Ante Škegro, Ajla Sejfuli and Marko Čorić in a paper from 2017 [16]. The majority of wall paintings have thereupon decayed due to adverse weather conditions and inadequate protection; hence, we have photographs and the following description of the existing state to testify thereof.

Frescoes, made up of uneven red and white rectangles framed by dark-blue strips, have been observed on the entire wall from the east entrance to the north room, to the entrance from the north room into the central

one, as well as on the east side of the same entrance. A cross with arms of equal length, with a light-green square in its centre, has also been observed on this side of the entrance, amid rectangles painted in red [16].

Authors of the paper note that repeated devastation does not allow for a more precise dating and definition of the structure in Crkvine [16]. On the basis of the structure's measurements, the structure of its walls, the ornamentation of the doorframe and lintel, and the remnants of wall paintings, the authors conclude that this structure belonged to the uppermost classes of the political elite of Bosnia and Hum [16].

Due to the structure's incompleteness, the authors believe that it was renovated in turbulent times, and speculate that this could have taken place in the period of Vladislav Vukčić Kosača (around 1427-1490), the last pre-Ottoman ruler of Uskoplje [16]. They find the confirmation for the hypothesis of Vladimir Vukčić Kosača being the commissioner of the conversion of this structure and the production of wall paintings in the motif of red and white rectangles from the north room, in which they find similarities with the motif on the shield of Grand Duke herceg Stipan Vukčić Kosača as represented in the Fojnica Armorial [16].



Figure 9. Fragments of the wall paintings in Vesela Straža, near Bugojno, 15th Century. (from the article: Škegro, A., Sejfuli, A., Čorić, M. (2017). *Crkvine u Veseloj kod Bugojna u zapadnom dijelu srednje Bosne, Hercegovina*, 3, 117-151)

As one of the possible builders of the structure in Crkvine, the authors suggest Juraj Gradomilović, a native of Vesela Straža, who was an apprentice (since 3 April 1455) in the Split workshop of Andrija Aleši, a Gothic-Renaissance builder, and it is also assumed that he participated in the construction of the royal town of Jajce [16], [17], [15]. As the possible author of wall paintings in Crkvine, they suggest Dragić Medošević, a native of Bosansko Grahovo, who was a painting apprentice at the workshop of Split painter Dujam Vušković from 1453 until 1457 [16], [18], [19].

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have tried to present an overview of the monuments of medieval wall painting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the researchers conducted so far. Monuments of medieval wall painting in

Bosnia and Herzegovina are extremely poorly preserved, and this review is an attempt to preserve them from complete oblivion.

We proposed the periodization of hitherto known monuments, which we divided into two groups. The first group includes monuments from the 11th and the first half of the 13th century. The second group includes monuments from the second half of the 14th century and mid-15th century. There is a gap between mid-13th and mid-14th centuries, in the period that corresponds to the time of the greatest influence of the Bosnian Church, whose activities are associated with iconoclasm, i.e., the ban on displaying religious content on wall paintings.

We supplemented the review of the works of previous researchers with field research by touring, documenting and photographing the most significant monuments. The attached photographs of the remains of medieval buildings and fragments of wall paintings should provide an insight into a part of the rich Bosnian medieval heritage.

The presented results of earlier researchers, their discoveries, insights, knowledge, hypotheses and conclusions, represent the basis for further research. The obtained results should be placed within the context of the more recent studies of Bosnia in the medieval period, as well as within the more recent studies within the broader regional and European context, in order to gain full insight into wall painting in the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina in medieval centuries.

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