

Cosmologic Representations on the Late Antique Mosaics from Bulgaria

Bulgaristan'daki Geç Antik Çağ Mozaiklerinde Kozmolojik Temsiller

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Abstract

The article traces the cosmologic structure and its separate components, reflected on the Late Antique mosaic pavements from the ancient provinces of present-day Bulgaria. Distinguished are three basic historical periods of development. The observations reveal that these lands were receiving ready cosmogonic structure's schemes after the act of cosmogony from the big artistic centers of Italy, Greece, Asia Minor and North Africa. For several reasons, the cosmologic structure and the components of the Late Antique mosaic pavements from Bulgaria are not full, but limited and adapted, with many missing figural representations in the mosaic pavements and the tomb wall paintings, differently to the Western and the Eastern Mediterranean. This is considered a kind of proto-iconoclasm, due to the influence of heresies and the concrete historical, religious and artistic development. The joyful picture of the Christian Universe changes and disintegrates after the Justinianic period, and the previous Order and Harmony, including the place of each sphere and cosmologic element, is already not fixed, but in free mixture with other figural and symbolic images. The old cosmologic picture comes to its logical end and is replaced by a new one after the beginning of 7th century.

Keywords: Cosmological elements, Late antique church and house mosaic pavements, missing figural representations, heresies.

Öz

Bu makale, günümüz Bulgaristan'ının antik vilayetlerinde bulunan Geç Antik Çağ mozaik döşemelerine yansıyan kozmolojik yapının ve onun ayrı bileşenlerinin izini sürmektedir. Üç temel tarihsel gelişim dönemi ayrı edilmiştir. Gözlemler, bu toprakların kozmogoni eyleminden sonra İtalya, Yunanistan, Küçük Asya ve Kuzey Afrika'daki büyük sanat merkezlerinden hazırlanan kozmogonik yapı şemalarını aldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çeşitli nedenlerden dolayı, Bulgaristan'daki Geç Antik Çağ mozaik döşemelerinin kozmolojik yapısı ve bileşenleri, Batı ve Doğu Akdeniz'den farklı olarak, mozaik döşemelerde ve mezar duvar resimlerinde birçok eksik figürlü temsil ile tam olmayıp, sınırlı ve uyarlanmıştır. Bu durum, dine aykırılıkların ve somut tarihsel, dini ve sanatsal gelişimin etkisiyle bir tür proto-ikonoklazm olarak kabul edilir. Hıristiyan Evreninin neşeli resmi İstianianus döneminden sonra değişir, parçalanır ve her kürenin ve kozmolojik unsurun yeri de dahil olmak üzere önceki Düzen ve Uyum zaten sabit değildir, ancak diğer figüratif ve sembolik imgelerle serbestçe karışır. Eski kozmolojik resim mantıksal olarak sona erer ve 7. yüzyılın başından sonra yerini yeni bir tanesine bırakır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kozmolojik unsurlar, Geç antik kilise ve ev mozaik döşemeleri, eksik figürel temsiller, dine aykırı düşünceler.

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The problem of the cosmologic picture reflected in the pavement mosaics of the Late Antique provinces in the Central and Eastern Balkans, is tied with the figural art. There exists a peculiarity in the Late Antique pavement mosaics from the provinces Dacia Mediterranea, Moesia II, Scythia, Thracia, Rhodope and Macedonia I concerning the figural art. With several exceptions, it is totally missing during part of the Constantinian period and especially in the earlier Theodosian times (Popova 2019). The figural images appeared again in the Late Theodosian period, predominantly as separate Christian symbols (Popova 2022b:188-205, and the references), increasing in number and widening the repertoire of the figural representations up to the middle of 6th century. Except that, one can never observe God or connected with him figural representations not only on the mosaic pavements, but also on the wall paintings of the numerous Early Christian/ Early Byzantine tombs from Bulgaria, with two exceptions - the tomb wall paintings from Philippopolis with two wonders of Christ, and God's personification as Eirene on the pavement mosaic of the metropolitan's residence in the same city.¹ This situation is quite different from the catacombs in Italy and most of the Early Christian sepulchral art elsewhere, where during the first half - the middle of 4th century can be observed some narratives and separate scenes and personalities from the Old and the New Testament (Pépin 1964; Grabar 1988; Wolska-Conus 1990; Fiocchi Nicolai et al. 1998; Jenott - Gribetz 2013). In the opinion of the researchers, the exceptions representing figural art in the LA provinces of Bulgaria are due to the presence of itinerant mosaicists from Asia Minor, Greece and Italy, who were creating quite different and richer in figural art monuments from the local masters.² However, differently from the floor mosaics and the tomb wall paintings, the image of God, the Holy Virgin, the apostles, saints, martyrs and the scenes from the New Testament etc. have been depicted, although rarely, on the wall paintings of some basilicas, baptisteries, martyriums and churches on the territory of Bulgaria.³

In the pavement mosaics and the sepulchral wall paintings God is not represented not only in the action of cosmogony itself, creating the visible and the invisible world, but generally. It is obvious that the mosaicists of pavements and the painters of tombs have worked with and have represented only the results of the cosmogony, with the almost entire cosmologic structure or its separate components. This situation is quite different from the most significant theological and artistic centers of Italy, Greece, Asia Minor and North Africa, where the cosmogony and cosmology is an often subject in the Early Christian literature, philosophy and theology, appearing, although not so frequently in comparison to the written word, in the figural art (Kitzinger 1954; Pépin 1964; Grabar 1988; Maguire 1990; Jenott - Gribetz 2013). It seems that in the LA provinces of Bulgaria there existed a kind of proto-iconoclastic trend for a long period. The reasons for this proto-iconoclasm deserve a special study, nevertheless I will

1 The tomb with the wonders of Christ was discovered in 2012, but unfortunately it is still not published, although at the moment it is the only one of the kind in Bulgaria. On Eirene see Popova 2021, with references on the previous publications.

2 The decoration of the church buildings themselves in Bulgaria from LA is found only in fragments. In the case of the Red church in Perustitsa, the initial paintings are even covered with a later layer. These circumstances do not allow to restore the whole scheme and to evaluate its peculiarities. Most probably, some of the church decoration schemes reveal the same peculiarities as in the pavement mosaics and tomb wall paintings. However, it is supposed that the usual orthodox schemes are present in the church decoration.

3 See the representations from the basilica from Byala; in the church from the village of Khan Krum; in the basilica from the village of Voden; from the basilica 1 in Kabile; from the martyrrium of Perustitsa (Pillinger et al. 1999: taf. 9 abb. 45 taf. 57 abb. 43-44, and on the front cover; taf. 58 abb. 60; taf. 27-28, 61-63; Yotov - Minchev 2018: pl. 3).

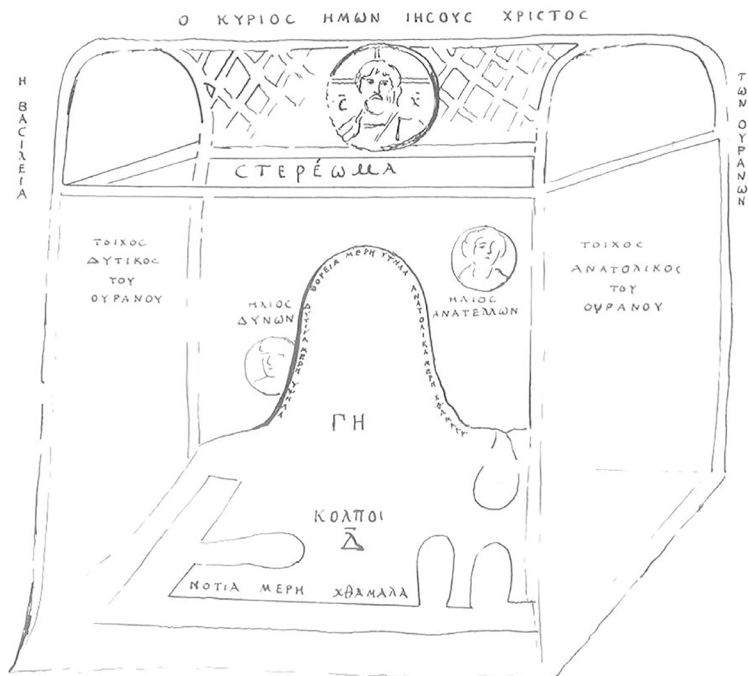
stop the attention to them below, in the attempt to describe the complexity of the problem.

Three different periods can be determined in the development of the LA mosaics of Bulgaria concerning only the presence of a rich cosmologic picture or its separate scenes and elements. The first period begins in the second decade of the 4th century, immediately after the issuing of the first ever Edict of Tolerance of Galerius to Christianity in 311, and the Edict of Milan of Constantine I and Licinius I in 313. This first period lasts to the ascending of Theodosius I on the throne in 379. The second period concerns mainly the period of the Theodosian dynasty from 379 up to the middle of 5th century. The last third period begins after the middle of 5th century, and contains the second half of 5th century, all the 6th century and the very beginning of 7th one, when the Barbarian invasions ended with the creation of new states on the Balkans.

The Cosmologic Picture During I Period

The difficulty of showing the cosmologic picture on a pavement mosaic consists in the fact that it cannot demonstrate the vertical structure with all spheres in a three-dimensional way (Fig. 1), but only in the form of a two-dimensional floor decoration. Nevertheless, the different spheres of the Christian Universe have been separated and denoted on the floor mosaics in a definite order. Each panel or border with figural art had a strict place and has been depicted in a definite sequence, answering to the vertical and horizontal structures, to the place of the different terrestrial, water, and heavenly spheres with its creatures and symbols; to the four horizontal world directions and to the left and the right one; finally, to the new 'omphalos' of the Christian Cosmos with God and his entourage.

Figure 1
The structure of the Early Christian universe described by Cosma Indicopleustes. According to Wolska-Conus 1990.



To the I period can be related the mosaics of a domus erected in the central part of Augusta Traiana-Beroe, the present-day Stara Zagora (Figs. 2-3) (Popova 2022a: 335-6 figs. 1-2). The owner of the domus has ordered a relatively complete picture of the Universe on the floor of his tablinium (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 79 abb. 221-222; taf. 78 abb. 219; taf. 77 abb. 215-216; taf. 78 abb. 218). But while earlier the river Oceanus was encircling the Terra/the Earth, now on the opposite,

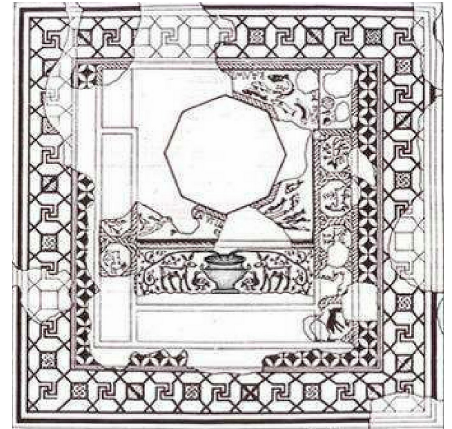


Figure 2
The mosaic pavements of a Late Antique domus on Stoletov bul. In Augusta Traiana-Beroe, now Stara Zagora. The state now, in situ. Foto: Archive of the Regional Historical Museum in Stara Zagora.

Figure 3
Reconstruction of the whole composition of the domus in Stara Zagora. Authors: St. Goshev, with additions (in the right part of 'The Fountain of Life') of V. Popova and A. Dimitrov.

the Water in the form of octagonal piscine is encircled by panels with terrestrial representations. The piscine was a real and constantly functioning element of the urban houses, bringing cool and freshness in the very hot in summer Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana-Beroe (Popova 2016: 158-160). At the same time, the edges of the piscine covered with mosaic guilloche and the close to them representations of fish and a cancer were covered with drops, slashes and a slight layer of water from the fountain spout, creating an illusionistic 'marine' for the two mosaic nereids and the numerous water creatures (Figs. 4a-b). Being a monument of the transitional period from paganism to Christianity, the mosaic

Figure 4a
The part with the left nereid from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

Figure 4b
The part with the right nereid from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. Photo: A. Dimitrov.



pavements of the domus demonstrate features of both of them. The nereids, earlier riding on the backs of mythological sea-monsters, now are swimming freely among usual but also impressively shown fish. The previous illusionistic treatment by delicate and diverse colour nuances in opus vermiculatum of the

nude bodies are now dropped out and replaced by a ruder and schematic design in tessellatum technique, omitting important details, changing the proportions (especially in the hands and legs and its fingers), and reaching to obvious mistakes in rendering the forms. The volume is shown only by thick repeating lines in one only colour, or by almost monochrome streaks and spots. Even the hair-dress is represented by rude and straight long locks.

But while the bodies of the nereids are clumsy and schematic, the water creatures reveal, separately or together, diverse poses and configurations in well done compositions, and a very picturesque colour treatment (Figs. 4a- 5). The mosaic

Figure 5

The fish, the cancer and the welcoming mosaic inscription around the piscine from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.



inscriptions are welcoming the guests in the usual Roman manner. But unusual for these lands are the two panels with fruits and exotic eastern vegetables cucurbits (Figs. 6a-b). These are xenia for the owners and their guests, and together with the pairs of animals (Figs. 7- 8a-b) on the outer border symbolize the four seasons of the year. In them the dog is chasing wild animals, from which are preserved the wild goat, the hare, the wild boar and the doe, shown against scattered roses.

Figures 6a-b

two panels with xenia from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. Foto A. Dimitrov.





Figure 7
The western border with pairs of animals from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

Figures 8a-b
The doe from the eastern border and the wild boar from the western border of the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.



Most of the outer borders with geometric-ornamental schemes (Fig. 5a) contain usual pagan geometric and ornamental fillings, but unexpectedly also two rare for that period representations of a chalice with the Eucharistic wine and a cross patée (Popova 2021) placed among the small-scaled images, and denoting openly the Christian belonging of this owner. The main scene, ‘The Fountain of Life’ (Fig. 9) reveals the notion of the highest celestial sphere of the Paradise, and symbolizes the Christian god and the joyful life of the believers there (Popova 2016: with references). It seems that in the empty now panel below the pseudo-emblem (Figs. 1-2, 9), the text of psalm 42,1 or another supposedly suitable mosaic inscription has been laid, but later lost. This is maybe not only the earliest known in official Christianity cross of the kind, but also the earliest



Figure 9
The central scene with ‘The Fountain of Life’ from the mosaics of the domus on Stoletov bul. In Stara Zagora, in situ. Photo: A. Dimitrov.



Figure 10
The general view of the tomb with a mosaic, kline and wall paintings from Diocletianopolis, now Hissarya, in situ. Archive of the Archaeological Museum of the town.

official monumental scene of *vons vitae*, with two deer flanking a vessel with fresh water for the thirsty soul, referring visually to psalm 42,1, and symbolizing the Christian faith, the victory over death, and the joyful eternal life in the Paradise of the righteous man. The crater (Popova 2016: 158-160, 168-169) with two flanking deer and two water birds is framed from both ends by branchy vine scrolls with green leaves and heavy grapes, an illusion also to Christ, his sacrifice in order to save the mankind, and the new official Early Christian religion. The scene as design and proportions is obviously heavy and not elegant. But the representations are remarkable with its rich palette and colour treatment, and are among the best examples of the immediate post-Tetrarchic style of Constantine I and Licinius I, preceding the first manifestation of the classicizing trend of the former after 324.

The Ocean is shown too in two other marine scenes from the same I period (Pillinger et al. 1999: no 38: 48-50 taf. 24-25, 60). The first one belongs to a villa suburbana near Serdica, in the present-day quarter Filipovtsi of Sofia (see also Попова 2010). It depicts a harbour, part of the fortress with its masons, and its main gate, probably of the lower part under der marine pharos. But its upper part, namely the pharos itself, is not shown. The marine landscape represents two ships and many fish distributed around the piscine. It is very near to the Western samples of mosaics both in the marine scene and the geometric-ornamental panels. The second superb mosaic from Philippopolis (Pillinger et al. 2016: no. 42, 220-227 taf. 160 abb. 415 taf. 161-163) is a splendid figural pseudo-emblem with very tiny tesserae of *vermiculatum* technique, surrounded by a splendid geometric-ornamental border in the *tesselatum* technique. Unusual for these lands is the colour background revealing the Mediterranean Sea with its extremely rich fauna, flora and the mythological erotes, shown either in boats or riding on a dolphin. The pseudo-emblem is not typical for the local workshops neither in its iconography, nor in its style and very fine technique. It is made by an itinerant master coming from the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus or North Africa, where one can meet marinas with the colour background and very similar to a real emblem marine scene in *opus vermiculatum*.

A very interesting tomb (Figs. 10-11a-b) with purely geometric mosaic from the beginning of 4th century has been found in the environs of Diocletianopolis/



Figures 11a-b
Two fragments from the wall paintings of the tomb with mosaic from Hissarya. Archive of the Institute of History of Art in Sofia.

Hissarya (Pillinger et al. 1999: 48-51). The non-figural essence of the mosaic allows to determine only the not-well-preserved wall paintings as forming the cosmologic structure, consisting of imitation of marble revetment in the lower part (the terrestrial sphere), and scattered flower motives in the upper one, as if the Elysium garden. In the middle or the second half of the same century, the tomb has been additionally supplied by a brick kline covered with illusionistic

painted imitation of textile, and also additionally decorated by a painted cross (?) in a wreath on the vault. Because of the presence of the mosaic and the kline, this tomb is also foreign for the lands of Roman and Late Antique Thracia. Such monuments can be met in Greece (for instance Corinth), the islands and Asia Minor (Anemurium etc.). The comparison with the furniture and decoration of a house with a floor mosaic is only illusive, because the ritual of the last sepulchral feast in the tomb unites the terrestrial sphere of life with the invisible sphere of death and Afterlife. This is a specific case containing also cosmologic elements at the moment of transition of the soul from the lower to a higher sphere in accordance to the adequate beliefs of paganism on the place of the Elysium, or of Christianity in the Paradise. Both beliefs are reflected alternatively in the tomb decoration and its cosmologic structure, demonstrating the change from paganism to official Christianity in one and the same monument belonging to the 30-es of 4th century.

In the mentioned cases of rich and unknown for these lands cosmologic picture, it has been made on the order of very learned clients and by talented not local masters, coming from famous artistic centers with long traditions in representing either a big synthetic picture of the Universe, or its also lavishly depicted separate cosmologic components. Most often in the LA monuments from Bulgaria the personifications of the seasons can be met in the anthropomorphic form of a women dressed in a classical tunica. Such is the woman from the rich residence or villa urbana (rather elite residence) of a magistrate in Marcianopolis from the period of Constantius II according to the found coin in the mortar under the mosaic (Pillinger et al. 2016: no 8: 54-64 taf. 24 abb. 59; taf. 25 abb. 62-63). The second season from a house in Serdica II (Pillinger et al. 2016: no. 68: 318-310) is the personification of summer as woman with three wheats partly preserved over her right side (Fig. 12). It is a pity that the central representation and the other three seasons have not been preserved in both monuments from Marcianopolis and Serdica II, in order to reconstruct the whole pseudo-emblema with its central representation. Another iconography of the Seasons lavishly symbolized by fruits and vegetables, with couples of birds around, is shown in the receiving room of the residence near the agora of Philippopolis (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 114 abb. 307).

It is under question the interpretation of the scene from the residence in Ratiaria: Orpheus with the animals, or the Golden age, or the Paradise (?), because many of the representations are not preserved (Pillinger et al. 2016: no. 20: 100-105). In all cases, the picture of the highest sphere in this mosaic was among the richest ones because all the animals have been represented, including the elephant. But it seems that except the Ratiaria nosaic and the one from the domus in Augusta Traiana, generally in the LA residences and urban houses the picture of the earthy sphere is adapted and limited, and only few repeating elements of the seasons as anthropomorphic busts or fruits are used in the mosaics, while many other figural components are omitted, differently, for instance, from the cosmologic mosaics of the LA provinces of Mediterranean, for instance the seasons in Centelles (Abura 2015).

In the Christian cult buildings of I period in 4th century can be observed a specialization of the topics like in the supposed martyrium under St. Sophia in Serdica (Динчев 2014; Pillinger et al. 2016: no 65: 300-315). The apse mosaic (Fig. 13) dated in Late Constantinian - Early Valentinian period shows the symbolic garden of the Paradise, in the center with two doves on a vase, a variant copying the famous drinking doves of Sosos/Sosus of Pergamon. Two other birds



Figure 12

The mosaic with the personification of Summer from Serdica II, now Sofia, kept in the funds of the Regional Historical Museum of Sofia. Archive of the Institute of History of Art in Sofia.

Figure 13

The apse mosaic of the martyrium under St. Sophia in Serdica, now Sofia, in National Archaeological museum in Sofia. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.



below are tearing violently the branches and its leafs growing out of two baskets. This is a kind of transformation of the Fountain of Life, using not the usual cantharos with the flanking deer and birds, but the Hellenistic prototype with the doves. Similar motifs are used also on one of the vaults of Santa Constanza in Rome. Nevertheless, the main meaning is the same 'quenching one's thirst' as in psalm 42,1 of *vons vitae*. The two cypress trees in the Serdician martyrium are borrowed from the sepulchral art as symbol of the martyr's death, and the two tendrils of vine, very thick and rude, enclose the central scene with the Fountain of Life, as general picture of the Paradise with the everlasting life and pleasure. In this Christian cult mosaic, the cosmologic theme of death, Anastasis, Paradise and everlasting life is developed by the help of the martyrdom on the base of Hellenistic prototype, developed further and transformed in the typical Early Christian way.

The Cosmologic Picture During II Period

The second period during the rule of the Theodosian dynasty has three phases concerning the cosmologic picture. During the earliest first one (the 80es of 4th c.), the official basilicas (like the Episcopal basilica of Marcianopolis and a recently found modest mosaic from Philippopolis) have no figural representations, except scarce plant motifs and rosettes (Popova 2019; Топалилов 2022; BozhinovaTopalilov 2022). The general scheme and its fillings are geometric-ornamental in the same phase in the new Theodosian 'purustic' style, and the palette is very bright and warm. In the second phase (the 90es) have appeared separate symbols as vases with vine trellises like in basilica No 2 in Garmen (Pillinger et al. 2016: no. 74: 337-346), and birds in front of branches with leafs, as in the cathedral basilica (No 4) of Parthicopolis (Op. cit., No 78: 354-356).

For the first time the Hell is denoted by a snake, eaten by a water bird like in the same basilica (Popova 2022a: fig. 14a), and the Paradise, shown behind the railing, with its blossoming flowers at the background and three symbolic vases of the Eucharist and *vons vitae* at the front, as in the Episcopal basilica in Odessos (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 10 abb. 19). The palette changes from very bright and warm up to very fine and delicate, more balanced or even pastel, as in Odessos and the metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis (Popova 2022b: 195-196). At the end of the Theodosian period during the third phase, the representations connected with the Eucharist, the other Sacraments and the rituals like the peacock with other birds, vases and flowers in the nartex in front of the entrance of the same basilica in Philippopolis (Topalilov 2020a; Popova 2022b: 206 fig. 19b), are preferred instead of the usual earthy figural cosmologic elements.⁴

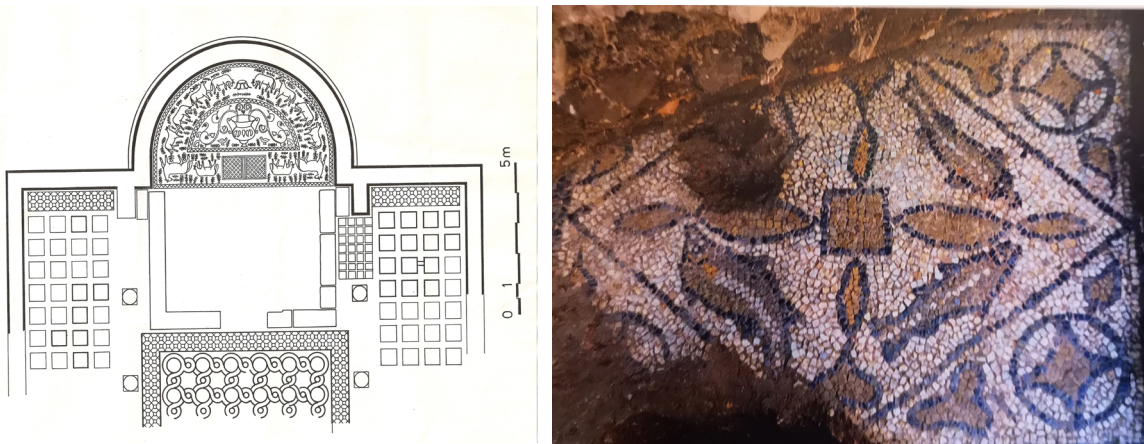
The previous strict order, subordination of the cosmologic spheres and the steady fixation of its place begins its gradual disintegration at the end of the Theodosian period. This is demonstrated by the mosaics of basilica No 7 (the basilica of Bitus) from Pautalia in Dacia Mediterranea (Fig. 14). Instead of being around a pool/piscine/fountain, as usually in Thracia, in Pautalia, the representations of four fish (Fig. 15) are placed in the south aisle (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 351 abb.

Figure 14

The general schemes of the mosaics in the basilica No 7 (the basilica of Bitus) from Pautalia, now Kyustendil. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

Figure 15

The fish from the south aisle in basilica No 7 (the basilica of Bitus) from Pautalia, in situ. Photo: V. Popova.



863; taf. 355 abb. 874). The small-sized and nor representative fish configuration submits to a center, and denotes the four horizontal directions of the world, very similarly to a mosaic from Sardes, but without the round ocean (Fig. 16). The Pautalian fish are torn out not only from the centrally positioned ocean, but also of the adequate place in the whole picture of the Universe. They are placed in the south aisle's composition of geometric-ornamental character, mingled among a lot of Early Christian symbols, geometric forms and near to the mosaic donator's inscription of Bitus. This means that at the end of the Theodosian period the previous rules of fixed place of each sphere of the Universe already did not exist in the mosaic pavements. Such observation on the mixture of the representatives of the different spheres in the later periods has been made long ago by G. Cvetković-Tomašević (1978).

One more important event was connected with the cosmologic mosaics from the period of Theodosius I and his heirs. From the end of the century, the synagogues have been closed, even some transformed to Christian churches (Kolarik 2014), and this happened too to the synagogue in Philippopolis. Its mosaic representations show the main Jewish liturgical vessels and objects



Figure 16

A mosaic from a LA house in Sardes. Photo: Google.

⁴ This is the symbol of the battle between the Darkness and the Light, also with other connotations, descending from very ancient times, and transformed in Christianity in the combat between God and devil. See Wittkover 1939.

(Pillinger et al. 2016: 239-248 taf. 174-178). The monument demonstrates two earlier mosaic donators' inscriptions referring to 3rd century, when the synagogue has been built and the first mosaic laid; a representation of a golden menorah in a marvelous classicizing style from the middle - the second half of 4th century; and geometric-ornamental compositions from the first half of 5th century, when the synagogue stopped its functioning and was transformed to Early Christian basilica.⁵ The cosmologic components in it, similarly to the Christian martyrrium in Serdica, are focusing only on the sacred sphere of God through the liturgical vessels and symbols in the most essential from liturgical aspect places of architecture.

In the official residences and the private houses of II Theodosian period, one can meet again the case of itinerant mosaicists from Asia Minor and Syria, with unusually richer cosmologic picture of the Universe. Many facts prove that the residence mosaics under the modern post-office in Stara Zagora (Fig. 17) are made

Figure 17
General plan and the mosaic schemes of the receiving hall and the biconch of the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora. According to Pillinger et al. 2016, with additions (the reconstruction of the biconch mosaics of V. Popova).



5 Its recent dating in the period of 5th and even 6th century (Kolarik 2014: 122) seems not plausible both because of the classicizing and not manieristic essence of the style of the menorah mosaic, the anti-Jewish politics of Theodosius I and the dates of the edicts of his heirs against the Jews. That's why namely the period of Theodosius I and Arcadius mark the end of the synagogue's existence and its transformation into a Christian church, and the earlier making of its menorah mosaic.

by a Syrian workshop. The residence was supposedly belonging first to the praetor of the city, but at the end of 5th - 6th century maybe to the bishop.⁶ Its mosaics from I building period have been laid at the end of 4th - beginning of 5th century. The main hall, most probably with stibadium in the apse, has monumental rectangular room, with the typical U-like cross composition (Fig. 18) (Pillinger et al. 2016:



Figure 18
Drawing with the general mosaic schemes of the receiving hall in the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

138-147 taf. 88-100). The composition is very well deliberated and every place is filled with adequate scheme, but in a balanced way, far from vacuum horri, in dependence of the geometric form and frame, the basic classical principles of non-absolute symmetry, with rich variations of each scheme, motif and colour. The four world directions and the four seasons are represented in it in the form of different kinds of garlands wrapped by diverse ribbons, flowers and fruits rising from the central Blätterkelch (Figs. 19a-b). Well preserved is the red background



Figures 19a-b
The U-compositions with the allegories of the seasons from the receiving hall of the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

⁶ There exist different interpretations on the owner and the building periods. See Pillinger et al. 2016: no 31: 138-140, 146-147; Topalilov 2022.

of all U-forms, but only the symbol of Autumn can be seen better in the vine trellis with red grapes. At the corners are shown three cantharoses with 'The Fountain of Life' and one with the Eucharistic wine, all the vessels (Fig. 20) with a central pinia cone instead of the spout of the fountain (strobilion), and with two flanking birds of different kinds (including the rare depicted in this iconography parrots), perched on the vine branches with grapes. The representation in the very center is not preserved. The outer border from one side is unusual colonnade consisting of alternating red and black marble columns.⁷

Figure 20

A cantharos with the wine branch and grapes from the receiving hall of the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.



Figure 21

A mosaic from Sardes with the cosmologic structures, now in the Manisa museum. Photo: Google.

The pagan bodies with their flesh from the mosaic with *vons vitae* in Augusta Traiana have been omitted, together with the representations of animals. We can compare also the mosaic from the aula of the residence to another mosaic, coming too from Sardes, and now in the Manisa museum (Fig. 21). In it the anthropomorphic illusionistic code is also lacking, but the animals and birds still stand for each sphere: heaven and ether are symbolized by the eagle in the center; Water by the sea mythological creatures; Earth, the four seasons and the four horizontal directions by the pairs of animals and the four birds at the corners. Still no Christian notions are directly shown in this mosaic. The next step in the development of the cosmologic picture has been done in the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora where the figural representations are limited further and the Christian vision of the Universe is demonstrated by the symbols. Here all the representations are not illusionistic sculptural, but flat, decorative and very picturesque. The terrestrial sphere is represented by the expensive flatly treated colonnade, by the four horizontal directions of the U-forms, and by the plant-and-birds' symbolic codes of each season, in synthesis with the Paradise, symbolized by *vons vitae*, the Eucharistic motif of the wine in a vessel and the Christian vine trellis with grapes. It is obvious that the flat geometric-ornamental decoration prevails, and for the first time in such a cosmologic composition, dominate the main symbols of the Christian faith, the Christian vision of the Universe's structure and the Christian symbols, also as apothropeions for the well-being of the magistrate, his family and the city.

⁷ The colonnade may have really existed carved of the expensive red porphyry/or red granite, and of the black so-called Lucul's marble descending from the island of Melos. See Sharankov 2011: 98.

Nevertheless, the change in omitting the anthropomorphic and animal code is not resulting in loss of representativeness and artistry, because of the extremely lavish composition, the richness of schemes and the numerous variants of motifs' design and its colours. This is one of the best LA mosaics not only among the ones with cross U-scheme, but generally. The Early Christian symbolic language is used as the main media in the cosmologic picture. On the second place is the decorativeness of a refined, almost palatial type, the classical colour combinations, and the colour background in the U-forms. To it contributes as well the pavement mosaics of the biconch room,⁸ made of expensive white and colour stone plates in opus sectile (Figs. 17, 22-23). The scheme and the



palette of the preserved mosaic in one of the horseshoe parts of the biclinium is very similar to a mosaic in opus sectile from Apameia (see Balty 1981). Most probably they both are made by one and the same workshop from Apameia or close to it mosaic atelier, having in mind the iconographic and technic closeness, but also one epitaph from Philippopolis.⁹ On the third place should be mentioned the architectonic allusions not only in the colonnade of the façade, but also in the obvious similarity to a centric cupola building installed on four solid corner supports, and with four arches between each pair. In this way, the general mosaic scheme on the floor is thought to be adequate to the real or imagined architectural structure, and by that to the vertical cosmologic structures of the Christian Universe, in gradation upward. In this monument we meet a perfect synthesis of architecture, Early Christian cosmologic vision and mosaic decoration.

Figure 22

The opus sectile mosaic in the square room of the biconch next to the receiving hall of the residence under the Post-office in Stara Zagora, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

Figure 23

The mosaic in opus sectile from Apameia. According to Balty 1981.

8 It seems that because of the presence of the stybadium in the aula, the usual triclinium placed aside is deprived of one of its conch and turned to biclinium. It may serve the women from the praetor's family, while all the men were lying on the stibadium.

9 The constant artistic, economic and political ties with the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt are well witnessed in the historical and epigraphic sources from Bulgaria and by the direct import of artistic production and manufacture (for instance marble and glass items). Some high magistrates descending from Asia Minor bear the name of Asiaticus etc., or point directly their origin from the cities in Asia Minor (Popova 2016: 174). In Philippopolis and the closely situated Augusta Traiana-Beroe and Diocletianopolis and this area of Thracia are found mosaics, architectonic elements, imported from Asia Minor marble architectonic elements, portraits and sarcophagi, imported glass vessels, medallions and manufactured glass, and many epigraphic evidences for the constant trade with the cities of Asia Minor and Syria and the presence of sculptors, artisans etc. from these remotest lands. Concretely, In the epitaph of Maxim from Philippopolis is said that he was a poet and citizen of Apameia, who has won many poetic competitions, including Kendrisia Pythia in Philippopolis, by that winning 'the love of Thrace and of the whole world'. Probably after that the poet has chosen to live namely in Philippopolis to the end of his life. See Sharankov 2007: 143 fig. 7.

The very close similarities in all aspects among the two mosaics from Augusta Traiana-Beroe (the one with 'The Fountain of life' and the earlier mosaics of the residence) with the two pointed mosaics from Sardes and the opus sectile mosaic from Apameia prove the foreign Asia Minor - Near East origin of the mosaicists. Except the examined to the moment mosaics made by this Eastern workshops, one can add as well the mosaic found in situ during building of the Modern Historical Museum of Stara Zagora (Fig. 24a), which is the first sample in Bulgaria of such compound scheme of 9 interlacing differently coloured circles, typical mainly for some mosaics from Israel (Fig. 24b). Most probably the appearance of the tomb with a mosaic floor and the concrete type of kline in Diocletianopol in Thracia is also an imported idea of a sepulchral monument with cosmologic components from Greece or Asia Minor.¹⁰



Figure 24a

A part of the mosaic found during the building of the Regional Historical Museum of Stara Zagora. Now covered in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 2016.

Figure 24b

The mosaic composition of the Samaritan Museum in Jerusalem. Photo: Google.

Two monuments with wall paintings from the Theodosian period should be compared with the pavement mosaics, because of its fuller cosmologic picture and the lack of the representation of God and scenes from the Old and the New Testament. The first one is the tomb with the archangels from Serdica (Pillinger et al. 1999: no 51: 69-72), and the second one is the tomb from Osseno (Op. cit., no 4: 13-16). The Serdician monument (Fig. 25) is the only tomb to represent

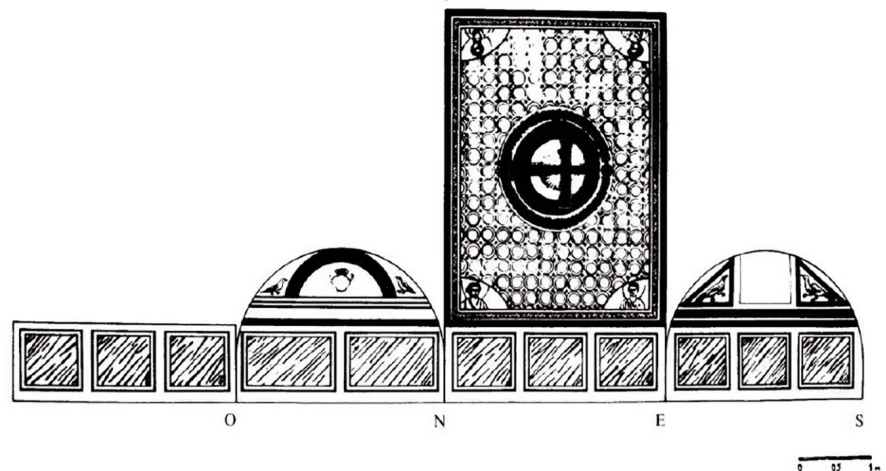


Figure 25

Drawing with the general schemes of the wall paintings in the tomb with the archangels from Serdica, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 1999.

¹⁰ Tombs under an artificial hill (tumulos), with dromos and similar plan of the chamber are well known in the Thracian culture since the Classical period onward. But in Hissarya it is rather copying a Greek example from LA.

anthropomorphic forms, namely the Archangels on the ceiling, with the cross in the center, standing in the different opinions either instead of God, or as his Second Coming, or as a cosmic sign, or as apothropeic sign, or symbolizing even several meanings together. This scheme surely copies a painted or mosaic monument, which either has not survived, or still is not found. In all cases, the tomb with the archangels is an exception for the Central Balkans, and created under the influence of a theologian concept of a big artistic center. Much fuller from the studied aspect is the Ossenovo tomb near Varna (Fig. 26a-b), where

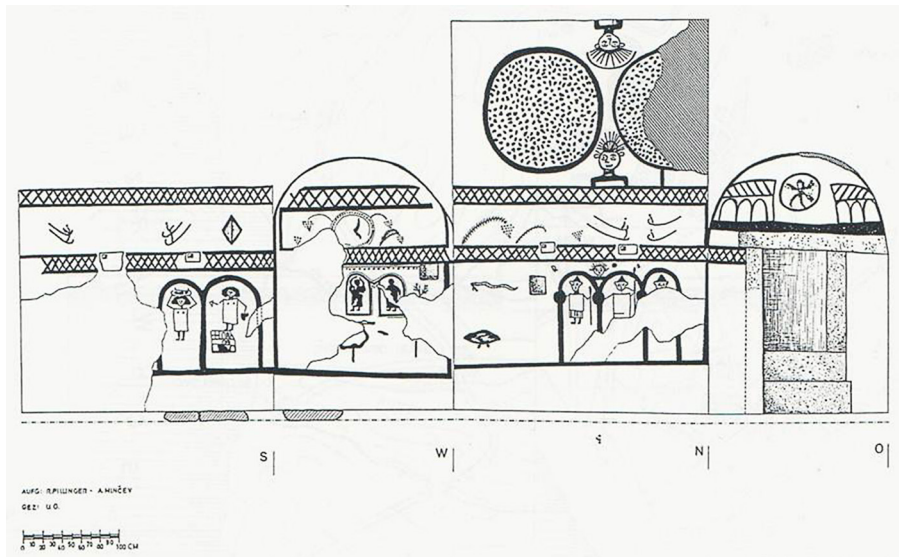


Figure 26a
Drawing with the general schemes of the wall paintings from the tomb in Ossenovo. According to Pillinger et al. 1999.

Figure 26b
Detail from the wall paintings from the tomb of Ossenovo, in situ. According to Pillinger et al. 1999.

a supposed Gothic military chieftain has been buried (Popova, in print, in the edition ‘The Goths in the Balkans’). In it can be found one of the richest cosmologic picture representing the sun and moon, several skies, the vertical and horizontal distribution of the different spheres and elements, with rich figural compositions and representations. The battle between the Devil and God represented by personifications of two animals, is among the rare images in LA provinces of the Central and Eastern Balkans. It should be pointed out that some researchers determine that Cosma Indicopleustes displays namely a Nestorian picture of the Universe. In spite of a similar cosmologic picture, it is a problem to identify the structure of the tomb paintings in Ossenovo with the Nestorians. It seems more plausible to connect it with the Goths-Arians. Similar structures on other tomb paintings and the naïve childish way of treatment and design can be met on the in Crimea Peninsula (Fig. 27a; see also Zavadskaya 2013), and on the Low Danubian Limes (Fig. 27b), in the area from Sirmium to Naissos/Naissus, obviously also relating to the Goths-Arians, living there (see Rakocija 2015).

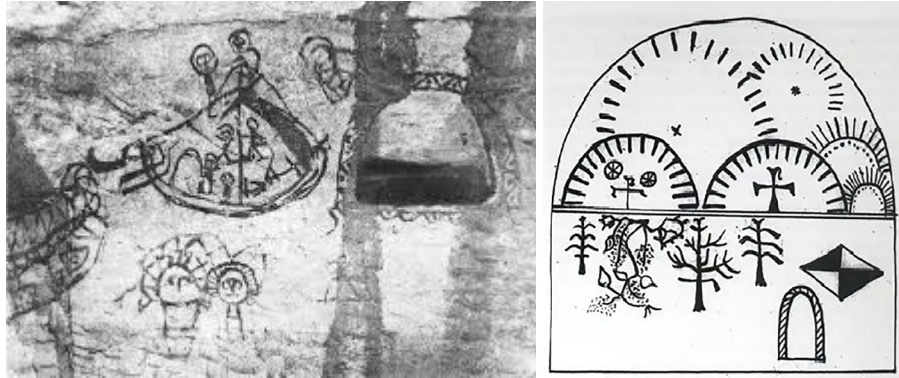


Figure 27a
A Late Antique tomb painting from Crimea with the sun and the moon at the front. According to Zavadskaya 2013.

Figure 27b
A Late Antique tomb painting from Naisos with the heavenly sphere. According to Rakocija 2015.

The data on any Gnostic, Nestorian and other heresies in the Central and Eastern Balkans, spread by the Syrians, Armenians and Egyptians settlers, artisans, bishops, monks, hermits etc. is still poorly known, or still only supposed, without sure evidences. Better are witnessed the Arians and the struggle between the Monophysite emperors and the Orthodox bishops in the studied areas.¹¹ Namely Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana are known as the strongholds of Arianism in 4th century, but namely in these two cities are found the richest cosmologic mosaic samples, different from the local mosaics. We have enough grounds to suspect that some of the specifics in the representations created by the local masters have been caused namely by the latter two heresies, while the better and richer monuments have been created by itinerant mosaicists from Italy, Greece, the Greek islands, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and among the Jewish diaspora in the Balkans, because of the administrative affiliations and the constant economic, trade, cultic, religious and cultural connections. The perfect net of roads in the Roman and the Early Byzantine empires also helped for the mobility of the craftsmen and the iconographic, stylistic and technical exchange among the even remote provinces.

The Cosmologic Picture During III Period

The last third and very long period from the second half of 5th up to the beginning of 7th c. reveals several phenomena concerning the cosmologic scenes and elements, and valid throughout the whole period.

The first feature is the further specialization of the apse, the chancel and the baptisterium mosaic decoration. i.e. the most important for the Eucharistic liturgy and the other rituals architectural elements. Up to the moment, the apse of the basilica of Bitus is the only one from the third period with figural repertoire, while the rest of monuments are either not excavated, or not preserved, or covered by opus sectile aniconical decoration. The later apse mosaic in the basilica of Bitus in Pautalia (Fig. 14), laid in the Justinianic period, represents the twelve lambs-apostles in the Paradise, among the blossoming flowers of the garden (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 359 abb. 887-888; taf. 360; taf. 889-890).¹² The apse mosaic of the basilica of Bitus reflects the strong influence of the wall and conch mosaics of Italy on the pavement mosaics in the Central and West Balkans revealing that most of its local churches had no possibility of ordering wall mosaics, but only pavements. The apse is the most holy part of each Early Christian building in horizontal direction, compared to the structure of the Christian Universe, so the placing of the picture of the Paradise there (instead on the walls or the vault) was logical. This fact plus the authority of Constantine the Great who introduced officially the Crismon (the Chi-Ro sign), also explain why the important symbols and cosmologic elements have been placed namely in the apse (Popova 2022a: 345-346 figs. 21-22), and on many pavements in front or in the chancel itself, in spite of the prohibition to put sacred images on the floor, and to concentrate the mosaic decoration namely in the most important in liturgical aspect places.

The second feature is that the cross, some other Christian symbols and the psalm citing stand instead of the image of God, his sphere and the most holy ones in the vertical direction. Three images are arranged in very formal compositions in the tomb paintings, with the cross in the middle and two symmetrical birds

11 Topalilov 2020b; Topalilov 2022, with references on the literature and the sources, especially on the Arians on p. 281; Топалилов 2019.

12 The important central elements between both left and right group of the lambs have not been preserved, and the possible reconstructions offered are several: a cross, a Crismon, a central Lamb-Christ on the omphalos, the four rivers of the Paradise etc.

or animals aside. The former richness of the previous two periods gives place to schematic-symbolic signs, except in the period of the Justinianic Revival. Especially schematic became the symbols at the last quarter of 6th century, consisting only of crosses in the tomb paintings. The Christian symbols replaced the previous earthy cosmogonic ones (animals, birds, fish) and pagan mythological representations. The cross and the other Christian symbols have already become universalia, capable of expressing many cosmologic and theological meanings, and by that at the end of LA the figural cosmology comes to its new essence, almost mediaeval, not ancient.

The third common feature during the third period is that the western part of the aisle is associated with the sphere of the Earth and the Ocean (Maguire 1990), so the created by God terrestrial and water creatures are depicted namely here. In most of the pavements, the birds are mixed with the branches, or fish and liturgical vessels (Figs. 28-29).¹³ All representations are of one and the same size, in spite of the fact that the liturgical vessels and symbols are of basic



Figure 28

Panel with birds in basilica No 4 of Parthicopolis, now Sandanski, in situ. Photo: S. Petrova.

Figure 29

Part of the panel with birds and fish from the basilica of bishop Ioannes in Parthicopolis, now Sandanski, in situ. Photo: S. Petrova.



importance, and previously in the first and second studied period are shown more monumental. The classical example is the composition with many birds in different poses, either single, in pairs, in the nest, in cages etc. in the Metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis (Fig. 30) and many other basilicas from the last third



Figure 30

A composition with birds from the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis, now Plovdiv, in situ. Photo: E. Decheva-Kantareva.

¹³ This general idea has been worked out in details and schemes by G. Cvetković-Tomašević 1978, and later the place of the terrestrial and oceanic spheres described brilliantly by H. Maguire 1990.

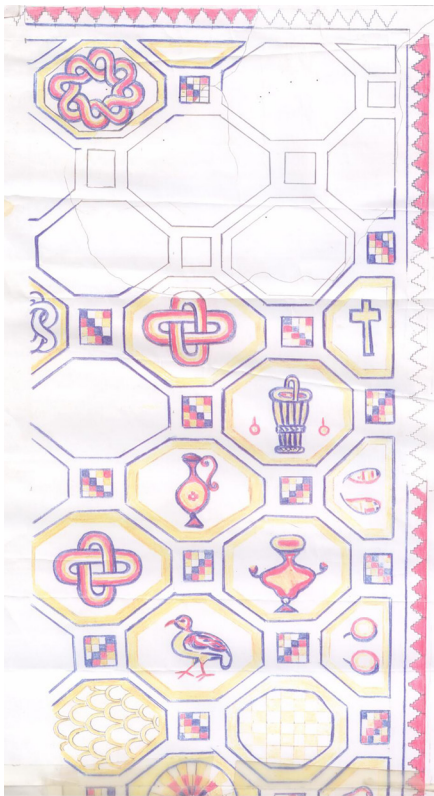


Figure 31
Part of the mosaic from Late Antique villa urbana in Stara Zagora, removed to the Regional Historical Museum. Drawing of K. Kalchev.

period (Boev 2018). Such koine of visual mixture and the loss of the previously fixed places of the different spheres can be observed also in the pavements of the private domuses in Philippopolis and AugustaTraiana (Pillinger et al. 2016: taf. 20; taf. 304-305; taf. 315-316; taf. 102-103; Topalilov 2020a: figs. 22, 24), including even craft tools, fruits etc. (Fig. 31). These facts witness of the final disintegration in the third long period of the previously clear cosmologic picture of the world in the lands of Thracia, Macedonia and Dacia Mediterranea.

The last general feature of the third period is the specialization on definite images, combinations of fauna and flora representations (birds and baskets, or birds and fish with branches and flowers) in each province. For instance, very rich is repertoire of the workshops shown in the basilicas of Parhicipolis in Macedonia I (Popova 1981; Boev 2020). It consists of definite types of water birds and freshwater fish and liturgical vessels (Fig. 29), probably due to the numerous rivers and big lakes on the way down to the Aegean Sea. But in the metropolitan basilica of Philippopolis the fish is totally missing: in the pavements of the 3rd layer only the birds are represented, while in the last fourth ones they are together with baskets. At the same time, the seashore cities of Greece demonstrate mosaics with sea fish and the sea fisherman.

The ornithologists guess on the pavements many modern species, but also such ones that already do not exist (Boev 2018; Boev 2020). It is also established that by the trade of animals, birds and fish, the habitation of some of them has been changed since Antiquity, and moved from Africa and the Near East to the north of the Mediterranean and even to the South and Central Europe. The most obvious case is with the parrots, but also with other exotic birds, fish and desert animals. This means that man has begun to change the world from ancient times, acting like God, and moving and putting the plants, animals, birds and fish in quite a new milieu and new areas of the earth, not habitual to them to that moment. This was a new although small-scaled cosmogonia in reality, created not by the Christian god, but by the Late Antique man. Concerning the LA pavement mosaics, this has widened the picture of the terrestrial and ocean/fresh water-sphere, showing exotic species either not common for the Balkans, its images copied from the pattern books (of the type of scientific descriptive illustrated catalogues), or moved really here by very complex trade routes from South Africa and the Near and Far East to the Mediterranean basin and Europe.

So up to the middle of 5th century, the figural motifs are introduced first in a full volume (see also the personification of Eirene in the residence of the metropolitan of Philippopolis, Popova 2021). But after the Justinianic period, the figural art diminished significantly to formal signs-universalia. In both cases the new repertoire of the third period is a koine of mosaic iconographic language not only in the Late Antique provinces of Bulgaria, but generally in the Eastern Mediterranean (on the Balkans, on the Aegean islands and in Asia Minor and the Near East).

The Reasons for Omitting the Figural Art in the Central and Eastern Balkans

In the next passages will be made the first ever attempt to explain why the mosaicists (and the painters) in the ancient provinces of the Central and Eastern Balkans were borrowing ready, adapted and not full cosmologic representations for the Christian Universe, not depicting the act of cosmogony, and avoiding figural images, especially in anthropomorphic form.

1. The main explanation is very obvious: these lands in pre-Roman times had no monumental arts of the kind of sculpture and mosaics. The Thracian Classical and Hellenistic arts were mainly decorative and representative, serving the Thracian king's aristocratic ideology and cults, with the very special view on the Afterlife and the rituals of its achieving (Marazov 2005). In the Thracian art dominate the animals' representations ('the animal style') and the ornament. The anthropomorphic form penetrated slowly in the Thracian art by the Hellenization, demonstrating coarse and adapted volumes, disproportions and ornamental treatment of any possible details. The same process has been repeated once more in the Roman times with the Romanization, but this time the monumental arts advanced easier and in more types and spheres, including the introduction of mosaic art. The first mosaic pavements appeared at the moment of urbanization of the previous Thracia, which had been included in the Roman empire in 46 AD and turned to several Roman provinces. This process happened most of all at the end of 1st - beginning of 2nd century in the public and cult buildings, the private villas urbana and the big sub urbana domains. The local mosaic workshops have been created from the second half of 2nd century onward. All the mosaic art was borrowed from the Roman culture with the help of Italian masters, but also with the help of itinerant Greek and Asia Minor mosaicists working in the Balkans. While they delivered the best samples of their figural mosaic art, the local masters preferred the geometric-ornamental compositions, even in the 4th century (see Topalilov 1922; Topalilov 2016). This explains why the rich and more complete figural cosmologic visions appeared in the LA provinces of the Central and Eastern Balkans as foreign product, different from the mass aniconical local monuments.

2. The second reason is hidden in the fact that up to the Tetrarchy the local Christian ecclesias were not so active and the penetration of Christianity here was weaker and slower in comparison to the Near East, Asia Minor, the cities and towns alongside the Via Ignatia road, the Western Balkans, in Rome and generally in Italy. The persecutions during the Tetrarchy in the Balkans revealed that the Christians were mainly in the Roman army, in most cases of non-local Thracian origin, also from the milieu of the craftsmen-settlers and the artisans from Greece, Asia Minor, and rarely from some local aristocratic and magistrates' families. Except the names of some bishops descending from the diocese of Thracia and taking part in the church affairs in Rome and Constantinople, the only famous names of theologians are belonging to Ulifila/Wulfila (who lived in in Novae and Nicopolis ad Istrum), to Niceta of Remesiana and to Domnion, the bishop of St. Sophia in Serdica, thought to be the spiritual mentor of Justinianus I (Динчев 2014: 57-58). The data on Niceta of Remesiana and his baptizing, teaching and writing to the last pagans in the Rhodope mountains is confirmed by the very impressive discoveries in Perperikon. But in comparison to Greece, Asia Minor and Italy, no other bishops and theologians in the studied lands have created or developed any influential teaching on the complex problems of Christianity, including the cosmogony and cosmology. This was reflected in art which was taking advantage only of ready imported images, borrowing iconographies, more or less complete picture and separate components of the Christian Universe and God, developed in the biggest theological and artistic centers of the Mediterranean. The two capitals, Rome and Constantinople, and also Thessaloniki, Athens and many other famous and active theological and artistic centers were sending constant impetuses on the diocese of Thracia and Illyricum, including the visions on the pavements and the not preserved, but existing wall cosmologic mosaics (Pépin 1964; Grabar 1988). The influence of

the Eastern representations and the Western Italian ones can be followed better in the liturgy itself (Топалилов 2016), and obviously in the tomb painting, distributed on the walls and the ceiling/the vaults clearly into three zones (Pillinger et al. 1999). The Hell is not shown, but denoted as if under the plinthus or near to it; the middle terrestrial sphere with the humans, and all the gifts of earth and ocean created by God, the four horizontal directions, four seasons etc.; the heavenly one with several skies (3, 7, or 9, depending on the source and the ancient author), with the sun, moon and stars; then follows the garden of the Paradise, and above all is God. He is not shown neither in the tomb wall paintings, nor on the pavement mosaics, but symbolized through the archangels, the Paradise garden, its railing, the liturgical vessels and the Cross/Crismon. So, the kind of the cosmologic picture appearing in Illyricum and Thracia was parallel to the picture given also in the tomb wall paintings, and borrowed from the same theological, cosmologic and iconographic sources of art.

From this aspect, the territory of the ancient provinces of Bulgaria is not monolithic. In the western provinces (both Daciae and Macedonia I), in Ratiaria, Bononia, Storgosia, Pautalia, Serdica and Parthicopolis in the first studied period can be observed a very strong influence generally of Italy. The schemes and iconographies of the monuments of Rome, Ravenna, Aquileia and Milano, and also of the Latin language are obvious. Generally, the forming of the papal vicariate in Thessaloniki played a decisive role for the early development of the official Christianity in the LA provinces of Bulgaria, for the influence here of the initial Roman liturgy, and for the forming of Thessaloniki into the most important artistic and theological center in North Greece and Southwestern Balkans. Through the cosmologic visual tradition of the Italian artistic centers and concretely of the papal vicarius in Thessaloniki, the representations of the universe of the kind of St. George in Thessaloniki and generally the pavement monuments of Western Bulgaria have been created. Especially strong is the influence of the Italian wall and vault mosaics on the pavement mosaics in the apse compositions and on the repertoire of the baptistery pavement mosaics. In these cases, we also see the influence in the repertoire and style of the Italian monuments on the pavement mosaics of the cited western provinces of Bulgaria. This combination of the tradition of the leading Western artistic centers with the efforts of the newly appeared ones in the LA provinces of Bulgaria reveals new but quite limited proto-iconoclastic variants of the cosmologic picture of the Early Christian universe.

On its turn, Constantinople and its liturgy, architecture and art played a decisive role for Thracia, Rhodope, Haemimontus, Macedonia I and Scythia officially after the Chalcedonian Council in 451, but in fact already from the period of Theodosius I onward. The mosaic pavements of the cited provinces are closely connected with the official monuments of Constantinople, still not found or not preserved, and this fact is important as reflection of the development and forms and style in the capital. In the Balkan provinces can be also distinguished the presence of metropolitan mosaic workshops or its influence on the local mosaic pavements, expressed in its excellent palace style, the richer repertoire, the treatment, palette and sometimes even technically (Popova 2022b).

3. Most probably the Arian trend of the Constantinian dynasty and the Valentinians, with the exception of the time of Julian, also played a definite role in the limited not only cosmologic, but general lack of figurative art in the pavement mosaics up to the end of the earlier Theodosian period. The official Christianity began namely during the period of Constantine I, and some areas of

Thracia are known as Arianic (Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana). Arianic was also the Gothic population of Novae on the Danube, Storgosia etc. in present North Bulgaria, especially in the second half of 4th century. In part of the Arianic Christian art also dominated the non-figural representations. It is very interesting that namely in Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana-Beroe can be observed the rich figural exceptions in the pavement mosaics. In this case, from one side it can be accepted that in 4th century in Thracia there existed a kind of tolerance among the representatives of the different Christianities. But on the other hand, it seems more plausible that it may be a reaction of the more learned magistrates, rich owners and craftsmen-settlers from Greece and Asia Minor to the demands of the Arianic bishops at that moment, either there has been appointed a new praetor or magistrate, supporter of the classicizing mosaic figural art. Except the Arianism, other heresies as the Monophysites, the Gnostics, the Nestorians etc. (Barnard 1974; Solovieva 2010) continued from 4th till the end of LA, and this also had its reflection on the strong limits and in some periods, even prohibition of the figural art.

4. The concept of the church building as representing the Early Christian Cosmos is the next important circumstance playing a new decisive role in the development both of the pavement and the wall and vault mosaics from the period of the Constantinian rule onward. Most of the Christian figural representations were moved by the new concept from the floor to the walls, conchs, ceilings and vaults. In this situation, the representations in the west part of the aisle should denote the earth and the ocean with its flora and fauna; the ambo was the mountain, the walls and the columns – the church fathers. The chancel, the conch, the apse and the vault in gradation symbolized the celestial sphere, the heavens, the paradise and the supreme sphere of God with his entourage. In this way, after the end of the first period, the pavement mosaics could not represent the complete cosmologic picture, but only its terrestrial and oceanic or fresh water-parts, with the seasons, the four horizontal directions, the most important of them now in direction to the East, to Jerusalem and upward, to the supreme sphere of God.

5. The politics of Theodosius I toward the church, aiming to restore the Orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed after the long dominance of the Arianism and some other heresies, was the next important historical circumstance. Namely during his early reign, the figural representations disappeared totally, because there have arisen quite new requirements to the vast surfaces of the church buildings, imperial palaces, residences and public buildings. There appeared the necessity of creating unity of the mosaic surface and the church space in concordance to the Early Christian liturgy, rites and cosmologic vision. For the first time united mosaic surface in the churches has been created with the usage of purely ornamental-geometric compositions, formed by the module consisting of equal and repeating geometric schemes with inner fillings, treated more or entirely flatly. They create not a 'patch-work' of different and not fitting each other schemes in one room like in the previous periods, but one scheme in one room (or in the important part of it), with accents following the movement of the serving priest to the chancel, to the stops in front of the ambo, the chancel, the altar, the crypt, of the laity to both aisles etc. In fact, the first samples appeared earlier, in the period of the Tetrarchy,¹⁴ when the new style formed a module

14 The first successful attempts have been done already in the period of the Tetrarchy according to the opinion of P. Assimacopoulou-Atzaka in all the late volumes of the *Corpus of mosaics of Greece* and in her later articles. The new decisions have been demonstrated by the mosaics in the palace of Thessaloniki and the palace of Romuliana, and further developed in the church architecture namely in the Theodosian period.

with a flat non-figural filling and colour and changing background. The newly created puristic mosaic style during the time of Theodosius I, without any figural representations or with few only Early Christian symbols (connecting the horizontal/the floor sphere with the upper spheres of Heavens, Paradise and God), continued and developed further this new decision of the flat and united mosaic surface answering the new demands of the Christian religion. In this way they got rid of the pagan nude representations, with few exceptions: the mythological winds, seasons and months and its attributes in the form of xenia (animals, flowers, fruits and vegetables) or farm and craft activities typical for each season. Thus, the main aims of the Christian religion, its liturgy and rituals have been fulfilled, and a new synthetic style and treatment created. In it each sphere of the universe has obvious boundaries, and there is Order and Fixation in the place and in the succeeding of the different spheres created by God, habitations etc.

6. From the Valentinians to the end of the Theodosian dynasty, prohibitions have been proclaimed the holy symbols and images not to be represented on the floors, in order not to be stepped over and profaned. In the studied area they are usually some exclusions, especially in the milieu of the Arians. But generally the rules have been followed, because they further fixed the place of each sacred scene or sign of the cosmologic sphere. The change happened further in 6th century, when, for instance, the cross appeared on the pavement mosaics in some Justinianic basilicas and on the coins, copying the symbolic of the Sepulchral in Jerusalem. By that the sacred sphere with a kind of a new omphalos, the Heavenly one answering the earthy Jerusalemic one was denoted in the general cosmologic picture. By that the Christian symbol finely replaced the previously used earthy representations as anthropomorphic forms, animals, birds, fish, fruits and vegetables, standing for each sphere. The Christian sign became capable of expressing all meanings, representing each level of the cosmologic structure.

The listed six reasons seem to be the most important ones for the development of the limited, adapted and proto-iconoclastic repertoire in the cosmologic representations on the LA pavement mosaics from Bulgaria. In the time they may coincide, but also succeed each other independently. The result is inseparable fusion of them, strengthening the proto-iconoclastic trend from 4th up to the middle of 5th century. However, from then to the Justinianic period the figural art has been re-introduced on a great scale, with accent on the apse, conch, wall and vault. The floor is left for the creatures of the terrestrial and water spheres, represented only up to the entrance of the cancel and the new side rooms, oratoriums and chapels. The fixed places of each sphere already do not exist, and a new visual language of 'koine' repertorium has been created in the two final periods. The symbols, the figural representations and the cosmogonic elements are mixed in it, without order. During the second and third period the typical repertoire is created for some provinces, as the river-birds and river fish in Macedonia or a mixture of baskets, fish, birds, cages, nests etc. At the end of 6th –beginning of 7th century, the cosmologic earthy representation gave place to the formal Christian signs capable of expressing the formal picture of the Christian world.

Conclusions

Very different artistic influences and masters have been involved in representing the cosmologic picture in the studied provinces: Italian and Eastern masters, Goths and many other Barbarian representatives and non-Romans as the Jews of the diaspora and from Palestine. Most often when the cosmologic picture was fuller and richer, they were Syrians from the Near East and Greeks from Asia Minor. At the same time in LA, the local masters were using either aniconical floor mosaics or limited separate cosmologic elements, most often the seasons in anthropomorphic form, xenia or pairs of animals. The vegetables, fruits and the fish and other marine creatures are also preferred. The masters were descending from different religions and denominations reflected on the world-view and the figural art. The crossed artistic influences and the belonging to different religions of the clients and the artisans have strongly complicated the cultural processes concerning the figural art, especially the difficult as iconography and schemes cosmologic picture. The result is that it looks like as a branchy tree, concerning both the number of participants and the complexity of borrowing, understanding, transmitting and making its own copy of Pagan, Early Christian, Syrian, Jewish, Barbarian, Arianic, Monophysite etc. world-view by different cultures on different levels.

Generally, it can be distinguished the influence of the Italian LA mosaic strongly expressed in the whole 4th century, and after 451 mainly in Dacia mediterranea, in the supposed mosaic of Orpheus from Ratiaria, the harbour scenes along the exedra in the villa of Filipovtsi, in the apse mosaic of the martyrium of Serdica and the apse mosaic of the basilica of Bitus in Pautalia. The Greek, the Syrian and Near East influence was traditionally strong in the lands of Thracia, especially Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana and the Black Sea littoral, especially Odessos, from the second half of 4th century increasing its intensity and strength of influence. Namely its mosaics reveal the almost full cosmogonic picture, rich figural and non-figural art, good technique, and some LA mosaic masterpieces. Also traditionally, one among the many South and Eastern Mediterranean mosaic workshops with specialization on marine scenes with rich fauna and mythological participants has created the marina with erotes from Philippopolis.

The cosmologic notions and art during the Constantinian, Theodosian, Justinianic and Post-Justinianic period were the main stages of creating new world-view and expressing its cosmologic components. After the accept of Christianity as official religion and till the end of the Theodosian dynasty, new rules have been created according to the new concept of the church building as symbol of the Christian Universe. The pavements were deprived of the holy scenes and representations, and only the terrestrial and water ones could be placed on the floors of the churches, with the flora and fauna of the Earth and the Ocean and the seasons, months and seasons' farm activities could be shown. The new aims of creating united surface for the Early Christian liturgy without the fleshy pagan representations have caused the appearance of the mosaic module and almost the total lack of figural art and of the cosmologic picture for a certain period. In the middle and late Theodosian period, the figural code passed through a gradual further transformation omitting the animal one, leaving only the birds and the floral one. The Pagan Underworld or the Early Christian Hell are rarely symbolized as battle between two animals or between bird and snake. God and the sphere of heaven is also never shown on the floor but symbolized in the most imported from liturgical aspect parts. The accent in the floor mosaic decoration is put on these parts and the joyful picture of the Paradise with its pleasures

and everlasting life. The Christian symbolic language has replaced up to the end of 6th century the figural one and changed to a formal non-figural one. In the tomb wall painting we can see also the Earth symbolized by the plinthus imitating marble or similar wall revetment. The hell is never main, and its rarely representatives in the form of snakes etc. are small-scaled and lost in the scheme.

Generally, only in rare cases we can see a rich cosmologic picture, it is almost always limited, without the winds, the four rivers, the months etc., compared with the contemporary mosaics from Italy, Greece, Turkey and Albania. The subdivisions on macrocosm and microcosm are also generally missing in the LA pavement mosaics and tomb murals in Bulgaria, because the figurative art in the anthropomorphic form is often lacking at all or episodically represented. This phenomenon can be traced well also in the tomb wall paintings in the Balkans and reveals one and the same iconographic, visual and theological sources. Some of them are obviously connected with known heresies, others with the presence of itinerant masters from some big artistic centers, third ones with the official prohibitions.

In the third period the boundaries among the spheres and its fixed places finely disappeared, the representations became mingled and spread everywhere, equal in size and position to the important Early Christian symbols. They were in mixture, in a kind of koine, with specifics in each area or province. On the base of the figural art and the more or less full cosmologic picture, in the Balkans can be distinguished the Macedonian group, the Western group of Dacia Mediterranea and Dacia Ripensis, the Constantinople group with its hinterland in Thracia and Rhodope, the Western Black Sea littoral-group, the Goth's group, spreading from Crimea up to the cities on the Lower Danube etc.

The only different period was that of Justinian I, when the emperor conquered back Italy for some period, and one can observe the same vision of the universe in the Western Empire and the Early Byzantium. Then the liturgy was changed by many novelties; the demands to it changed too; the Latin was dominating naturally in the official spheres everywhere, while the Greek was prevailing in the Eastern parts of the Balkans in the everyday life. The new period created a new brilliant picture of the world, but it was a picture created for the emperor and the aristocracy in Constantinople by the flattering authors like Procopius in his official works. In reality, the time of Justinian I was accompanied and followed by periods of great crisis in the general vision of the universe, differently to the official position, with numerous natural disasters, constant Barbarian invasions and waves of plague. The Justinianic 'Renaissance' of arts and architecture was marking only the last upsurge before the final falling of many lands, part of Early Byzantium, under the constant and non-stoppable invasions and catastrophic earthquakes.

At the end of 6th - the beginning of 7th century, all these circumstances caused demographic, economic, military and partly political catastrophe for the second time after the death of Valens. In this connection, at that period the world-view on the Cosmos and the contemporary very dynamic and dangerous times has changed, and the previous harmonious image has been ruined. In the first and the second studied period the whole cosmologic picture was picturesque, jolly, optimistic, with the Christian spirit of enjoining the fruits and the beauty of the paradise, eternity and timeless. God, although invisible, is mystically blessing the living and the resurrected persons. This is an idealistic and naïve joyful image, not full as structures and its succeeding, omitting the real presence of God, with no presence or small presence of the Devil and the personification of

the Demons.

Immediately after the Iustinianic period, the art in the Balkan has changed, it became more formal, schematic, heraldic, with the dominance of the Christian signs and almost without pure figural representations. The figural images disappeared again in significant part of the mosaic pavements of the basilicas, replaced by ornamental-geometric opus sectile and pure geometric compositions in opus tessellatum. The subject of the Crucifixion with painful moods has been introduced generally in art, and there disappeared the joyful perception of the Christian narratives and the world-view. The previous naïve picture was replaced by heavy or schematic formal compositions.

In the aspect of cosmogony and cosmology, the provinces of Thracia, Macedonia, Dacia, Scythia etc. have been receiving actors in the drama, while Byzantium and Italy were the donors. But even Byzantium and Italy with its millennium classicizing culture and arts could not develop it further at the end of Late Antiquity. In this Late period, the mass invasions of many foreign tribes, people and new political-military unions changed the actual picture of the contemporary and very dynamic period. The limited or depicted only by crosses cosmologic picture of the universe proves that the Central and Eastern Balkan lands could not develop it further, this was its natural limitation. Only the beginning of the new Early Medieval period could create a new picture on the ground of the synthesis of the Late Antique culture and the newly appeared tribes and people in Europe. The East Roman Empire, now known as Byzantium, also had to go through a total transformation of its culture and art, enriched by the new barbarian Asiatic, European and Near-Eastern cultures. That historical changes and the existence of heresies explain the limits and the proto-iconoclastic trends of the Roman and Late Antique periods in the Central and Eastern Balkans not only in the cosmologic picture, but generally in the whole Late Antique art and culture.

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