

Data on construction and architecture of cult objects in Drino's valley

Ph.D (C.) Melsi Labi

Director of National Historical Museum – Albania

Abstract

Drino's valley is one of the richest areas with cult objects, which are a valuable treasure of our cultural heritage. The first early Christian churches date back to the 4-th century. Their construction is related to the spread of Christianity in the Albanian territory. In the first half of the 5-th century construction has been limited because of the barbarian invasions, and during the second half of the 5-th century and the beginning of the 6-th century Early Christian churches had a wide extension. Early Christian churches were built not only through early Episcopal centres but also in rural settlements. Archaeological discoveries have brought to light a large number of early Christian churches, out of which we can judge the architectural development of that period. A wide use during the early Christian period had the three-nave basilicas and one-nave churches. From what can be judged from the ruins left, the architectonic-decorative treatment of early Christian churches has been very simple. Decorative ornaments were mainly inside the churches (Chalkiá, 1997, 10-11).

Early Christian monuments of the IV-VI centuries, being considered in typological terms are divided into: one-nave basilicas and churches. Early Christian churches were built with simple walls and raw stones, which were related to each other with lime mortar, using a number of bricks. Early Christian builders knew very well physical laws on balance of the columns and arcades. From the chronological aspect, the early Christian churches are constructions of the second half of the 5-th century and the first half of 4-th century.

Keywords: Drino's valley, data, construction, architecture.

Introduction

A special phenomenon of Drino's valley is the flooring of early Christian churches with polychromatic (multi-coloured) mosaics. Most of the early Christian mosaics contain simple geometric motifs, vegetables and animal motifs from the world. Only in two cases in Mesaplik and Antigone are presented anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs (Budina, 1975, 225-228). The vegetable motifs consisted of strawberries, grape vines and leaves, which were symbols of the divine Eucharist. The environmental organization paved with mosaics suit the early Christian church architecture. Early Christian mosaics in that period reached a high level, while the mural paintings have been somewhat limited. Fragments of frescoes were found in Antigone and Paleokastra.

Architectural sculptures are represented by the remains of columns, or pilasters from the iconostasis of the wall elements, etc. In the Early Christian churches around the capitals it are used Korinthos cosmopolitan styles, but we also note the early forms of Byzantine architecture. Besides capitals for columns we also have capitals for pilasters. The iconostases occupied an important place in the architectural structure of early

frame, while on both sides of a window were used two early Christian fence pillars (Figure 15) (Figure 16). On one of the pillars is engraved a cross (Muçaj & Hobdari, 2005, 74-75).

The Church of St. Mary is a basilica with a dome with dimensions 7.50x6.80 meters. The church consists of the central nave and the altar environment. The oldest part of the church in its interior has six round stone pillars, which are linked to each other with mortar and stone capitals. Over the columns pass two arches, which divide the church into three naves. The Naos (shrine) is connected with the narthex on the west side. The church is built of stone bound with lime mortar. The corners of the walls are large stone blocks. On the western gate of the church there are antique decorations. On four columns from the east through a system of arches rises the tambour, which is covered by domes. The tambour of the church (figure 17) (figure 18) consists of several niches curved at the bottom. The niches areas are decorated with brick ornaments. Also at the top of the tambour there is a frame of jagged bricks. On it passes a flat stone frieze. The tambour closes with an outer frame. The church is covered by an extensive vaulted (Gable) roof (Thomo, 1998, 123-126).

The Naos is illuminated by three narrow windows in rectangular shape. The entrance to the Western Wall is located in the central nave of the church. The altar of the church is separated from the central nave by an iconostasis of carved wood (Figure 19) on the east side is located the apse, which is semi-circular and illuminated by a narrow window. The narthex is covered by an archway system. The sides of the narthex are covered with barrel vaulted looking like a quarter-circle (Meksi, 1981, 99-100).

The church of St. Mary in Vllahogoranxi was painted (Figure 20) (Figure 21) in 1622 by Cypriote Onufri (Arapi, 2004, 106-114) and Alivizi (Dhamo, 1978, 229). This fact is confirmed by an inscription on the southern wall of the church. The inscription is damaged because of the falling plaster. Ανακενησθη...? ημων Θεοτοκου κε αυπ(αρθενου Μαριας) /...τατου ημων κிருου.../ οστης αυτης μονης.../μοχθου και εξοδου τον.../(Ο)νουφριου Κηπρεου κε Αληβιζηου.../αγκβ (=1622). "was inaugurated of the Theotokos and the ever virgin the lord ... of this monastery with the efforts and costs of Cypriote Onufri and Alivizi ... 1622" (Popa. 1998, 229).

According to Dhamo frescoes painted by Cypriote Onufri in the church of "St. Mary" in Vllahogoranxi are in balance. There is a tacit agreement between the frescoes with complete red, yellow, green, ochre and blue stains and the inner world of images without dramatic outbursts as those of his teacher Onufri (Dhamo, 1974, 15-16).

Monastery of Spile (holy virgin of the cave) in Saraqinisht

The Monastery of Spile, is located between the villages of Qesarat and Saraqinisht in Lunxheri (Figure 22) (Figure 23). It stands to the right of the course of the Great Stream (Alb: Perroi i Madh), on a terrace under the rock of Spile, at an altitude of about 975 meters above sea level. The monastery was built in the 16-th century with the Saraqinisht nobles' contribution. The income of the monastery was 200 liras per year. The monastery's church is devoted to "Nativity of the Theotokos" and it is celebrated on the 8-th of September (Beduli, 1993, 4).

From the monastery, only the church has remained in good condition, which is cross-in-square with a dome and the internal dimensions are 7.40x6.20 meters. Interior columns are connected through arches between them as well as with the perimeter walls forming square central core, which is covered with a dome on the tambour and into the arms of the cross with cylindrical

vaults. The two eastern angles are covered with spherical cap, while western couples are covered with quadrant vaults. Lighting of the church is made by the windows in the tambour and the ones that are open in the southern and northern wall. The southern entrance is protected by a portico open on three sides with three arches. The church is plastered on the outside. The tambour is octahedral and ends with a frame consisting of three jagged brick shapes. The apse is a five-page one with small niches on each page, on which passes a frame of jagged bricks (Thomo, 1998, 145-147).

An inscription found on the door of the church narthex certifies that it was built in 1634 at the time of the bishop Lord Kalist and the contribution of hieromonks Constantine and Joasaf. Also the church frescoes were painted by Mihal Linotopi (Jakumis, 2003, 209-216) in 1634: + Ανηγέρθηκ(αί) ανεστορήθιώθιοςκ(αί) πάνσεπτοσνάοσζησηπεραγηαςΔεσπινήςυμ/ όνθ(εοτό)κο ύκ(αί) άηπαρθένουΜαρηασκ(αί) άρχιερατεβόντόνύποτούθεοηλεστάτουέπισκόπου Κύρού/ Καλιστουύκ(αί) διασύ(ν)δρομήσκόπουτεκ(αί) έξόδουτόνοσιοτάτόνενηρομονάχης/ Κώνσταντίουκ(αί) Υασόφούκ(αί) τόντιμηοτάτοκ(αί) εύγενεστάτόνάρχόντον...ετεληό/θηγημηνιαυγούστο-Γ-ηποχιρόςΜηχαήλεπιετουσ.¹ The narthex of the church was built in 1659 by an anonymous painter with the contribution of ruler Joan. An inscription above the gate of the narthex says: + Ανηγέρθηκ(αί) ανεστορήθιώθιοςάρτυκασδιάσινδρομήσκ(αί) έξόδουδαπάνηστούε'υγε / ναισάτάως, Κίρουλιώάνου, ήγγυμενέβοντοςΚύρουΠαρθενήου / έτους ΖΕΞΖ (7167=1659). "Was built and painted this divine narthex with the contribution and costs of the multi-noble ruler Lord Joan, in the time of Lord Parthen, year 7167 (=1659)" (Popa, 1998, 236).

The Iconostasis (Figure 24) is divided into three areas, the lowest of which carries the concave-shaped panels inside-written in eight-angled rhombuses, to the upper and lower sides in arch shapes. In all four corners the decorated panels carry floral ornaments. In the second part, the pillars are adorned with vegetable elements, in the sides of which are formed clambering plants. The top of the capitals are crowned with pseudo-columns. In the section over the pillars are highlighted carved shells, which surround a flower in their centre and are supported on the frames, carved like clambering plants with flowers in the centre. In the concave panels of the iconostasis are painted the following prophets: Isaiah, Abacus, Daniel, Moses, David, Solomon, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Five of the prophets hold the scrolls written with texts related to Saint Mary, and three others to Christ.

Some icons from this church are located at the Tirana National Historical Museum funds. During the research work we have managed to highlight these icons: Icon of Christ Pantokrator, inventory no. 5948 and size 49x77 cm. In the icon there is an inscription: ΔέησιςΚονσταντήνουιερομονάχουτούκαθυγουμένου - αμπδ. "Prayer of hegumen hieromonk Constantine 1784" (Popa, 1998, 250). Icon of John the Baptist, inventory no. 6151 and size 123x68 cm. (Figure 26) On the icon is written: ΈτουςΖΡΑΑ (7131=1623) ΑπριλίουΑ. "Year 7131 (=1623) April 1" (Popa, 1998, 230).

The monastery of Spile has a cave in a dangerous place, within which was an old chapel. It was named Holy Virgin of the Cave, because in the cave it was found a rock that discovered a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary. St. Mary's icon is identified with inventory no. 5870 and size 111x69 cm. (Figure 27) on the silver cover of the icon of Saint Mary is written:

+ ΗπαρουσαάγιαηκοναΣπληεοτις(σ)αεβρησκομενησηνδρομητεπατερεσηγουμενεβουντας / ΝαθαναηκεΙλγηγοριοσκεΚοσταντηνοζητημη(ου) αρχοντεςασηνδρομησαντηνγοχε / ριαν (=χορηγίαν) ΚηρΚοτσοκεΚηρΚηριτζυΣηκριατινηεπιχηροσΘεοδορουΛηνοτοσπητι 1765 ηουλη 10.

This holy icon Spileotisa (of the cave) found in Spile was made with the contribution of the elders, hegumens Nathanail, Gregory and Constantine, and the honoured nobles that contributed

¹ "Was built and painted this temple of God, and all-honoured of the over-sacred Our Lady Theotokos and ever virgin Mary and at the time of much god-loving bishop Lord Kalist and contribution efforts and costs of the noted among hieromonks Constantine and Joasaf and many other noble rulers ... (Popa, 1998, 234).

Lord Koço and Lord Qirici Sikriatas, with the hand of Theodor Linotopas 1765 July 10” (Popa, 1998, 243).

In an icon of Christ, (Figure 28) which has been in the Despot throne is written: Ηγουμενεύοντων Κωνσταντίνου ήερομονάχου. Δηξόδου Σεραφήμιερομο / νάχου Κηρηκρέων. Ενέτη 1791 Ηουνήου 18. “In the time of hegumen, hieromonk Costantine. With the expenses of hieromonk Serafin Korfjat. In year 1791 June 18” (Popa, 1998, 632). Also in the icon of Christ is written the signature: ΟΓλυκόζ Ιησούς. “Sweet Jesus”. Currently the icon is located in the National Historical Museum funds, inventory no. 5885 and size 60x93 cm.

Interesting is an icon with many saints (Communion of Saints) (Figure 29) in which is written: Τόνδούλοντου Θεού Δημητρίου Ντέντου Δωξατηνός Βασιλείου Τζάνε Ναγόπουλητης 1828. “To the servants of the Lord Dhimiter Deda from Dhoskat, Vasil Cane from Stegorulli, in 1828” (Popa, 1998, 704). The icon is identified with inventory no. 5555. Among the small icons (Figure 30) placed in the upper part of the iconostasis of the church during research in museum funds we have recorded: St. Matthew, inventory no. 5973 and size 35x79 cm, St. Andrew, inventory no. 5974 and size 35x79 cm, St. Bartholomeu, inventory no. 5975 and size 35x79 cm, Nativity of the Theotokos, inventory no. 5979 and size 35x79 cm, St. Luke, inventory no. 6064 and size 35x79 cm, St. Mark, inventory no. 6065 and size 35x79 cm, St. Mary, inventory no. 6067 and size 35x79 cm and the Archangel Michael, inventory no. 6134 and size 35x79 cm.

References

- Arapi, M. (2004) *Onufër Qiprioti. Ikonografi shekullit të XVI-XVII*, Monumentet, p. 106-114.
- Bowden, W. (2003) *Epirus Vetus, The Archaeology of a Late Antique Province*, Duckworth, London, p. 175.
- Beduli, Dh. (1993) *Manastiret e Mitropolise se Hireshme te Gjirokastres*, Ngjallja, p. 4.
- Budina, Dh. (1975) *Mozaiku i Antigonese*, “Ylli” magazine/VI.
- Budina, Dh. (1977-78) *Mozaiku i trikonkes paleokristiane te Antigonese*, Iliria, VII-VIII, 1977-78, p. 225-228.
- Dhamo, Dh. (1978) *Piktura e Onufër Qipriotit ne kishen e Vllaho-Goranxise*, Studime Historike, N. 1, p. 229.
- Dhamo, Dh. (1974) *Piktura murale e mesjetes ne Shqiperi*, Tirane, p. 15-16.
- Πετρίδη, Ι. (1899-1900) *Ιερά Μονή Τσέπου*, Η Φωνή τής Ηπειρού, p. 352-361.
- Χαεκιά, Ε. (1997) *Η παεσαιοχριστιανική αρχιτεκτονική, Καθημερινή*, p. 10-11.
- Jakumis, K. (2003) *Veprimtaria e piktoreve nga Linotopi ne viset e Kishes Orthodhokse te Shqiperise*, 2000 vjet art dhe kulture kishtare ne Shqiperi, Tirane, p. 209-216.
- Liño, F. (2009) *To Χρονικοτης Δροποης*, Neraida, p. 22.
- Τρίτου, Μ. (1999) *Η Εκκησησαστο Ανατοεικόκατην Αεβανία*, εκδοτικός οίκος “Αδελφών Κυριακίδη”, Θεσσαλονίκη, p. 116-118.
- Meksi, A. (1985), *Arkitektura paleokristiane ne Shqiperi*, Monumentet 2., p. 13-30.
- Meksi, A. (2004), *Arkitektura e kishave te Shqiperise*, Uegen, Tirane, , p. 37-41.
- Meksi, A. Thomo, P. (1981), *Arkitektura Pasbizantine ne Shqiperi (Bazilikat)*, Monumentet, No. 1/ (21), p. 99-100.
- Mujaj, S. Hobdari, E. (2005) *Teqeja e Melanit*, Candavia, Nr. 2, Departamenti i antikitetit te vone dhe i mesjetes, Tirane, p. 72-73.
- Popa, Th. (1998) *Mbishkrime te kishave ne Shqiperi*, Akademia e Shkencave, Tirane.
- Serjani, E. (2008) *Pertej Gurit te Larte te Manastirit te Cepos*, Shqip, p. 28.
- Thomo, P. (1998) *Kishat pasbizantine ne Shqiperine e Jugut*, Tirane 1998, p. 123-126.
- Πουεΐτα, Π. *Επιγραφαικαι Ενθυμήσεις εκ της Βορείου Ηπειρού*, Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών, Αθήναι,