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SOME REMARKS ON THE SECOND MOSAIC PAVEMENT OF THE METROPOLITAN BASILICA IN PHILIPPOLIS, THRACE

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει την προέλευση των εργαστηρίων ψηφοθετών, που συμμετείχαν στη φιλοτέχνηση του δεύτερου ψηφιδωτού δαπέδου της επισκοπικής βασιλικής της Φιλιπούπολης στη Θράκη, το οποίο χρονολογείται στην έκτη με έβδομη δεκαετία του 5ου αιώνα. Η ανάλυση του εικονογραφικού προγράμματος και της τεχνοτροπίας του ψηφιδωτού δαπέδου οδηγεί στη διάκριση τεσσάρων εργαστηρίων: ενός, το πιθανότερο, μητροπολιτικού, δύο επαρχιακών, ισχυρά επηρεασμένων από την καλλιτεχνική παραγωγή της Κωνσταντινούπολης, και ενός τοπικού εργαστηρίου.

The present paper deals with the origin of the mosaic ateliers that were involved in the construction of the second mosaic pavement of the Metropolitan Basilica of Philippopolis, Thrace, dated in the 450s-460s. The analysis of the iconographic programme and of the style allows the identification of four mosaic ateliers: one, probably, metropolitan atelier, two provincial ones, that were strongly, influenced by Constantinopolitan artistic circles, and a local atelier.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα, 5ος αιώνας, επισκοπική βασιλική, ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα, εργαστήρια ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων, Φιλιπούπολη, Θράκη.

Keywords

Late Antiquity; 5th century; metropolitan basilica; mosaic pavements; mosaic ateliers; Philippopolis; Thrace.

Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv, Bulgaria), the capital of the late antique province of Thrace, received its Metropolitan¹ basilica around the mid-4th century. Its dimensions (86.30m long and 38.50m wide) make it the largest Christian basilica so far discovered not only in Philippopolis and in the province of Thrace but also in the whole diocese of Thrace. In fact, it was among the largest basilicas in the Balkan Peninsula. The basilica itself has

three aisles, the central of which has an apse; possibly an exonarthex, which is also identified in the bibliography as narthex, and an atrium surrounded by a colonnade with a couple of rooms at its northern and southern sides (Fig. 1)². The new basilica quickly became a distinctive feature of the provincial capital's christianization. After a new *cardo* connected it directly with the *domus Eirene*,

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¹ Under the term "Metropolitan basilica" is meant not the Constantinopolitan church as usual, but the basilica of the Metropolitan of Late Antique Philippopolis.

² On the basilica and its date, see E. Kesiakova, "Rannokhristianska bazilika ot Filipopol", *Izvestiia na muzeite v Iuzhna Bulgariia* 14 (1989), 113-127. Eadem, *Filipopol prez rimska epokha*, Sofia 1999, 66-75. N. Chaneva-Dechevska, *Rannokhristianskata arkhitektura v Bulgariia IV-VI v.*, Sofia 1999, 253. E. Kesiakova, "Za rannokhristianskata arkhitektura na Filipopol", A. Dimitrova-Milcheva – V. Katsarova (eds), *Spartacus II. 2075 godini ot vustanieto na Spartak. Trako-rimsko nasledstvo, 2000 godini khristianstvo*, Veliko Tarnovo 2006, 146-156. Eadem, "Arkheologicheskoto nabludenie na obekt 'Episkopska bazilika', gr. Plovdiv", *Arkheologicheski otkritiia i razkopki prez 2015*, Sofia 2016, 590-593.

which had been transformed into the *domus episcopalis*³, the basilica also became the new administrative and religious core of the city in the place of the old agora⁴.

The building is a mixture of western and eastern influences in its architecture and interior decoration, respectively. Remains of its decoration consist of two layers of mosaic pavements, which are almost fully preserved, and a few fragments of wall-paintings.

Unlike the second mosaic stratum, the earlier one has not been entirely uncovered, and both are not yet entirely published. Nevertheless, it is clear that the uncovered mosaics in the nave (i.e. the central aisle) and southern aisle which belong to two different phases, shared a focus on a central *emblem* in the nave, of which only the borders are partially preserved and the mosaic construction inscription for which partially in the southern aisle. Otherwise the mosaics in the nave and side aisles consist of geometric motifs (Fig. 2). The abundance of color in the preserved mosaic pavements certainly makes an impression⁵. The mosaic's partly preserved dedicatory

V. Popova, "The Early Non-Figural Mosaic Pavements in the Metropolitan Basilica of Philippopolis in Thracia", M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium Symposium 20*, Niš 2022, 175-210.

³ On the *domus Eirene*, see M. Bospachieva, "The Late Antiquity building *EIPHNH* with mosaics from Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Southern Bulgaria)", *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 2 (2003), 83-105. Yu. Vuleva, "Elitna zhilishtna arkhitektura v diotseza Trakiia (IV-VII v.)", St. Stanev – V. Grigorov – V. Dimitrov (eds), *Izsledvaniia v chest na Stefan Boiadzhiev*, Sofia 2011, 17-56. V. Kolarova – M. Bospachieva, *Plovdiv – grad vurkhu gradovete Filipopol – Pulpudeva – Puldin*, Sofia 2014, 210-226. R. Pillinger – A. Lirsch – V. Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, Vienna 2016, 174-198. I. Topalilov, "On the Eirene mosaic from Philippopolis, Thrace", *Journal of Mosaic Research* 11 (2018), 273-285. M. Ivanov, "Cat. № 7. Mosaic decoration of 'Eirene' building", M. Ivanov – V. Katsarova (eds), *Taste for luxury. Roman mosaics from Bulgaria*, Sofia 2019, 79-89. V. Popova, "The personification of Eirene from the episcopal residence in Philippopolis/Plovdiv", M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium Symposium 19*, Niš 2021, 299-324.

⁴ I. Topalilov, "On Some Issues Related to the Christianisation of the Topography of Late Antique Philippopolis, Thrace", *Annales Balcanici* 1 (2021), 107-158.

⁵ Pillinger – Lirsch – Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, op.cit. (n. 3), 201-203. E. Kantareva-Decheva, "Novi stratigrafski prouchvaniia na mozaikata ot episkopskata bazilika na Filipopol", T. Shekerdzieva-Novak (ed.), *Sbornik dokladi ot Mezhdunarodna nauchna konferentsiia "Nauka, Obrazovanie i inovatsii v oblastta na izkustvoto"*, Plovdiv

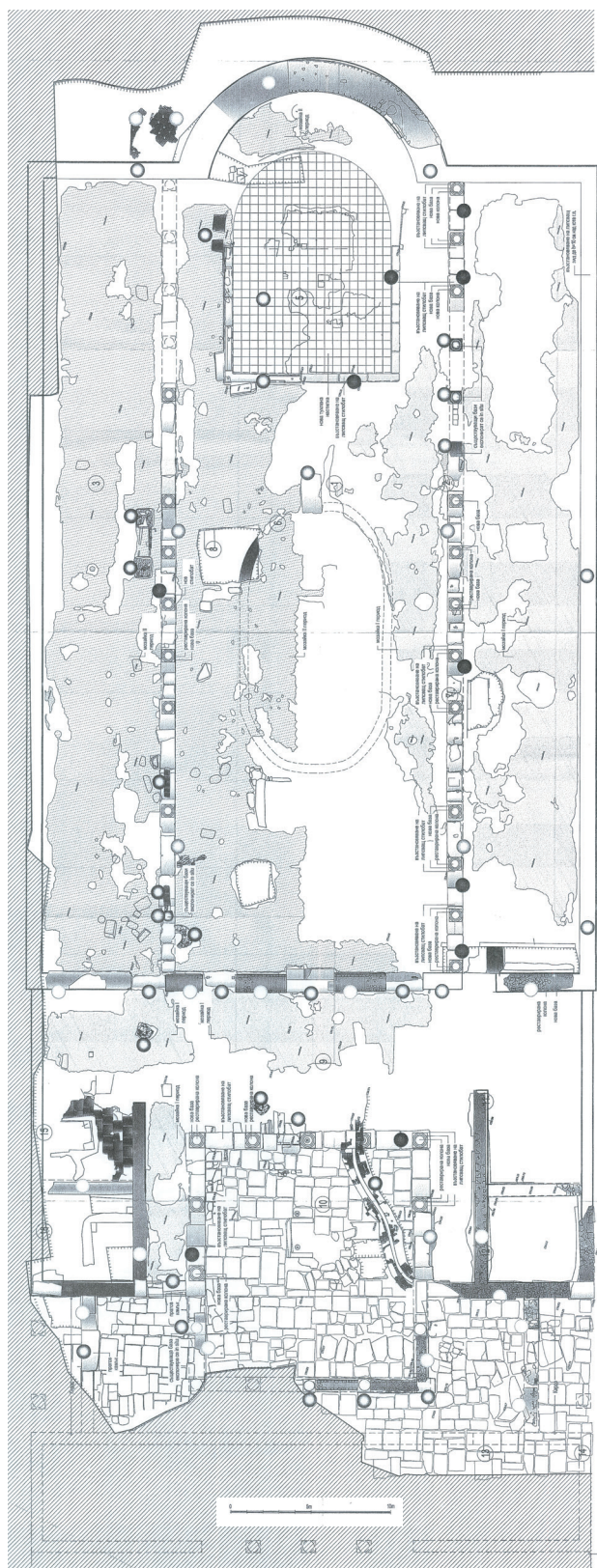


Fig. 1. Philippopolis, Thracia. The Metropolitan basilica. Plan.

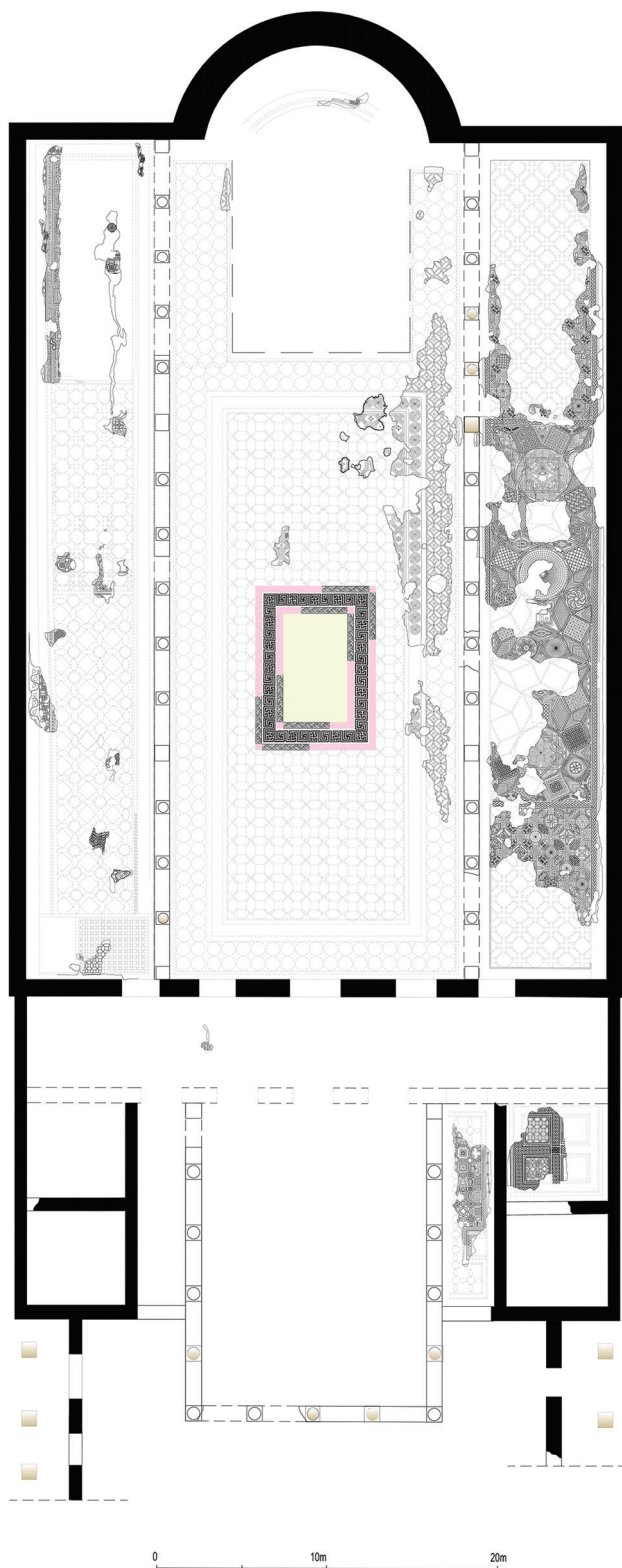


Fig. 2. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The first mosaic pavement (drawing).

inscription originally noted the name of Philippopolis' metropolitan bishop [---]κιανοῦ (probably [Μαρ]κιανοῦ) or [Λου]κιανοῦ) during the reign of Theodosius I (347-395)⁶ (possibly in his early years)⁷ and so provides the date of the first mosaic pavement itself.

Given the incomplete preservation of the aforementioned mosaic pavements, it is unsurprising that most of the studies concerning the complex are dedicated to the mosaic pavements of the second period that have been fully discovered. These studies discuss the mosaics' date, iconography, parallels, and the identification of the mosaic ateliers that were involved in the creation of the mosaics⁸. It is therefore not the intent here to discuss all of these matters, but it should be noted for this study that the later additions to the basilica's decoration mostly concern the mosaic pavements, their construction and iconography;

2017, 365-372. Eadem, "Novi mozaechni podove ot Episkopskata basilica na Filipopol", T. Shekerdzieva-Novak – K. Buradzhiev – D. Dzheneva – V. Kolev (eds), *Proletni nauchni chetenii* 2018, Plovdiv 2018, 208-209. E. Kantareva-Decheva – St. Stanev – D. Stanchev, "Novorazkriti mozaiki ot Episkopskata basilica na Filipopol (2019-2021)", T. Shekerdzieva- Novak – G. Lardeva – D. Dzheneva – L. Petkov (eds), *Godishnik na Akademiia za muzikalno, tantsovo i izobrazitelno izkustvo "Prof. Asen Diamandiev"* Plovdiv 2020, Plovdiv 2021, 24-29. Popova, "The personification of Eirene", op.cit. (n. 3), 299-324.

⁶ N. Sharankov, "Epigrafski otkritia prez 2015 g.", *Arheologicheski otkritia i razkopki prez 2015 g.*, Sofia 2016, 969-970.

⁷ I. Topalilov, "Contra arianos in Late Antique Thrace", *LABedia: Encyclopedia of the Late Antique Balkans, 4th-5th c.*: <https://www.labalkans.org/en/labedia/religion/christianity/contrarianos-in-late-antique-thrace> (last consulted on 10 April 2022). Popova, "The Early Non-Figural Mosaics", op.cit. (n. 2).

⁸ See above notes 2 and 5. See also I. Topalilov, "The Mosaic Pavements of the Bishop's Basilica in Philippopolis, Thrace. Chronology and workshops (Preliminary report)", G. Trovabene (ed.), *Atti Convegno Associazione Internazionale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique 2012*, Venice 2015, 591-600. Idem, "Local Mosaic Workshops in Late Antique Philippopolis, Thrace: Some consideration", L. N. Jiménez (ed.), *Estudios sobre mosaicos antiguos y medievales*, Rome 2016, 185-187. V. Popova, "Fons Vitae in Late Antique monuments in Bulgaria", *Studia academica Šumenensia* 3 (2016), 154-198. I. Topalilov, "The Mosaic pavements in Philippopolis, Thrace, in 6th c. CE. Some considerations", *Journal of Mosaic Research* 13 (2020), 259-262. Idem, "The Impact of Constantinopolitan Liturgy on the Mosaic Pavements in the Christian Basilicas in Thrace during the Second Half of 5th c.", *Journal of Mosaic Research* 14 (2021), 301-318.

no significant architectural changes are observed as a whole with the exception of the limited area of the *presbyterium*⁹.

At ca. 2.000m² in total coverage in the naos, exonarthex and atrium, the pavements of Philippopolis' Metropolitan basilica without a doubt required the contemporary work of several mosaic ateliers that can be identified on site by details of style, manner, colors and artistic quality. For example, it has been suggested that at least one Syrian, two Constantinopolitans, and one local Philippopolitan mosaic atelier worked on the basilica's mosaics. Despite significant advances in scholarship on this topic, however, some questions still remain open and others need clarification, especially regarding the ateliers' identification. Thus, the goal of this short study is to offer a brief discussion of the problems concerning the identification of the mosaic ateliers responsible for the second mosaic program of Philippopolis' Metropolitan basilica.

As mentioned, it has been suggested that Syrian mosaicists worked on the basilica's pavements. E. Kesiakova assumes that the prevailing "ornamental-geometric motifs and geometric figures filled with images of birds, [are] one style and trend in mosaic art characteristic of the East from the second quarter of the 5th century"¹⁰. She also believes that "motifs are strictly geometric and often repeated. The geometric shapes are traced very precisely with a straight line and a compass, in which consecutive squares, circles, rhomboids, rectangles, triangles, hexagons, and octagons, filled with various elements, are formed. In this regard, one cannot but see the strong influence of Syria and the Middle East, where the same corporative compositions are found and follow the same aesthetic trends"¹¹. She therefore arrives at the conclusion that "the mosaicists from Philippopolis have drawn their inspiration and creative charge from the trends and the fashion of the Middle Eastern ateliers" and that as the biggest urban center in Thrace, Philippopolis attracted many craftsmen, including mosaicists from the Near East¹².

⁹ Kantareva-Decheva – Stanev – Stanchev, "Novorazkriti mozaiki ot Episkopskata basilica", op.cit. (n. 5), 29-33.

¹⁰ E. Kesiakova, "Mozaiki ot episkopskata bazilika na Filipopol", St. Stanev – V. Grigorov – V. Dimitrov (eds), *Izsledvaniia v chest na Stefan Boiadzhiev*, Sofia 2011, 176.

¹¹ Ibid., 193.

¹² Ibid., 194-195.

Although plausible, this idea has been questioned recently in scholarship. It is possible that there was a near eastern community in Philippopolis, and some motifs such as the dots placed in the angles of the octagon of the central image in the exonarthex, which shows a peacock fanning its tail, finds parallels in contemporary Syrian mosaics¹³. As a whole, however, the details of the Philippopolitan basilica's mosaic decoration mostly parallel those in other mosaics in the city as well as those in examples in northern Greece around Thessaloniki and Constantinople. Thus, among the closest parallels in their details are mosaics at Akrine¹⁴, Maroneia¹⁵, Amphipolis¹⁶, and Thessaloniki¹⁷.

In fact, the similarities between the mosaics in the Philippopolitan Metropolitan basilica and those in the Near East associates the Thracian metropolis with a certain *κοινή* that played a crucial role in the decorative repertoire of mosaic pavements with its common style that dominated mosaic iconography around the eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the 5th century. This repertoire would have been transferred to Philippopolis indirectly rather than directly through Constantinople¹⁸. Moreover, Constantinople's adherence to the

¹³ I am indebted for this observation to D. Parrish. On the Syrian mosaics see most recently, K. Abdallah, *Inventaire des mosaïques romaines et byzantines de Syrie du Nord. La collection du musée de Maarrat al Nu'man* (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique 213), Beirut 2018.

¹⁴ Topalilov, "The Mosaic Pavements of the Bishop's Basilica in Philippopolis", op.cit. (n. 8), 592. P. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Σύνταγμα των παλαιοχριστιανικών ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων της Ελλάδος*, III. Μακεδονία-Θράκη, 2. Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Μακεδονίας και της Θράκης (εκτός Θεσσαλονίκης), Thessaloniki 2017, 306-310.

¹⁵ Topalilov, "The Mosaic Pavements of the Bishop's Basilica in Philippopolis", op.cit. (n. 8), 592, 593, 594-595. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Μακεδονίας και της Θράκης*, op.cit. (n. 14), 395-404.

¹⁶ Topalilov, "The Mosaic Pavements of the Bishop's Basilica in Philippopolis", op.cit. (n. 8), 592. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Μακεδονίας και της Θράκης*, op.cit. (n. 14), 368-371.

¹⁷ All parallels of the details of the mosaic pavement of the Metropolitan basilica are discussed in Topalilov, "The Mosaic Pavements of the Bishop's Basilica in Philippopolis", op.cit. (n. 8), 591-600 and therefore no further comment is needed here on this matter.

¹⁸ I. Topalilov, "On the Syrian influence over the mosaics in Philip-



Fig. 3. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement. Exonarthex, central panel with a peacock surrounded by birds and vases.

Syrian Antiochian liturgy may reveal one of the ways by which these motifs reached Philippopolis through the mosaicists coming from Constantinople. The specific mosaic iconography might have also reached Philippopolis through the Western Asiatic coastal cities and the Aegean islands as the mosaic pavement that embellishes the mosaic of the *aula* of the possible *Episcopeion* at Philippopolis was made by a mosaicist from the island of Cos. The imposition of a new iconography in the second mosaic pavement of the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis in the third quarter of 5th century may be regarded as part of the process of the provincial capital adhering to the metropolitan liturgical circle¹⁹.

Thanks to a huge project that aimed to explore and restore the mosaics of the Metropolitan basilica (2016-

popolis, Thrace in 4th-5th c.", *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 22 (2016), 121-122.

¹⁹ See Topalilov, "The Impact of Constantinopolitan Liturgy", op.cit. (n. 8), 301-318.

2020), not only was the whole second mosaic pavement uncovered, but some observations were also made on its different phases of construction. According to the results of the archaeological excavation, the second pavement has at least three phases. The earliest phase includes the installation of mosaics in the exonarthex and the rooms in the atrium. During the second phase, the construction of the pavement in the whole naos was made, and during the third and final phase, the panels on the northern and southern side of the presbytery were laid. They are dated between the end of the 5th and beginning of the 6th century²⁰. Although the dates of the phases proposed by E. Kantareva-Decheva still need clarification, it is most likely that the installation of the new mosaic floor decoration started after 447, following the Huns' invasions of Thrace, and continued through the second half of the 5th century²¹.

²⁰ Kantareva-Decheva, "Novi stratigrafski prouchvaniia", op.cit. (n. 5), 369-372.

²¹ Popova, "Fons Vitae", op.cit. (n. 8), 164. Eadem, "The Early



Fig. 4. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Roman house. A fragment of the mosaic pavement, first half of the 3rd century.

Without a doubt, the focal point of the new mosaic in the exonarthex is the central panel with the image of a peacock fanning its tail in the center of an octagon surrounded by images of birds and vases (Fig. 3). The mosaic pavement in the exonarthex has already been discussed in several ways²². The highly refined and artistic style especially seen in the drawing of the birds and the astonishing abundance of colours make the pavement elegant and unparalleled among the mosaic pavements of the Metropolitan basilica itself, or even in Philippopolis at that time. In fact, this kind of high-quality mosaic seems so far to be an isolated example in the provincial capital that appeared all of a sudden and for a short period of time.

Indeed, the style of the birds in the basilica's mosaics resembles that found in another mosaic pavement in Philippopolis dated to the first half of the 3rd century

Non-Figural Mosaics", op.cit. (n. 2). See also Topalilov, "The Mosaic pavements in Philippopolis", op.cit. (n. 8), 260.

²² See V. Popova, "Liturgy and Mosaics: The Case Study of the Late Antique Monuments from Bulgaria", M. Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium Symposium* 16, Niš 2018, 138-140.

(Fig. 4)²³, which might imply that the mosaic in the exonarthex was made by a local mosaic atelier with traditional experience. At the same time, however, it should be noted that during the two centuries that separate the two mosaics, mosaic style and iconography changed significantly. This is especially the case in the last quarter of the 4th century – first half of the 5th century, when the motifs of the mosaic pavements in both public and religious buildings in Philippopolis became entirely geometric. It is more likely, then, that the style of the basilica's mosaics indicates the work of a travelling mosaic atelier that was heavily influenced by work at a center where this highly artistic and colorful style was preferred. As such a center still remains unattested in Thrace in the 5th century, I would not be surprised if the mosaicist came from an atelier that belonged to the metropolitan circle or even from the metropolis itself. This explanation makes the most sense given the Constantinopolitan influence on the basilica's earlier mosaic pavement²⁴ and the high artistic quality of the later mosaics, which matched that of the mosaics at Constantinople²⁵.

An important issue concerning the mosaic in the exonarthex is the place and orientation of the peacock image. By its location, it seems that the figural panel preceded the central entrance of the three leading to the nave; geometric panels preceded the other two entrances. The central entrance was unquestionably intended for the bishop. The peacock's orientation toward the east, i.e. toward the naos, may be explained by the desire of the bishop to salute the Christians²⁶ who gathered in the atrium on certain occasions before entering the naos in

²³ Kesiakova, *Filipopol prez rimskata epokha*, op.cit. (n. 2), 155.

²⁴ See for this Kantareva-Decheva – Stanev – Stanchev, "Novorazkriti mozaiki ot Episkopskata basilica", op.cit. (n. 5), 23-34.

²⁵ On the mosaics in Constantinople, see Ö. Dalğıç, *Late Antique Floor Mosaics of Constantinople prior to the Great Palace* (unpublished PhD dissertation), New York University, New York 2008. Eadem, "The Corpus of Floor Mosaics of Constantinople", F. Daim – J. Drauschke (eds), *Byzanz – das Römerreich im Mittelalter* (Monographien des Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum 84/3), Mainz 2010, 127-134. Eadem, "Early Floor Mosaics in Istanbul", G. Sözen (ed.), *Mosaics of Anatolia*, Istanbul 2011, 223-235. Eadem, "The Triumph of Dionysos in Constantinople. A Late Fifth-Century Mosaic in Context", *DOP* 69 (2015), 15-48.

²⁶ Popova, "Liturgy and Mosaics", op.cit. (n. 22), 139.



Fig. 5. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement. South aisle, middle panel with the the *fons vitae* surrounded by two birds, plants and flowers.

a procession. Also, given the fact that the Philippopolitan bishops were appointed by Constantinople –as we can observe in the case of Sylvanus at the beginning of the 5th century²⁷– we may assume that the same practice took place at Constantinople. Mosaicists sent to Philippopolis would thus have made the corresponding updates to the mosaic program of the Metropolitan basilica’s exonarthex.

As mentioned above, the naos received a new mosaic floor in the second phase of the second mosaic pavement.

²⁷ *Socratis scholastici Ecclesiastica historia*, 7.36, 37, ed. R Hussey, E Typographeo Academica, Oxonii 1853, 818-822.

In the nave and side aisles, this new pavement consists of a three-panel composition of figural, geometric, or mixed motifs. The focus of the mosaics in the aisles is on the middle panel, which holds a *fons vitae* scene with two peacocks resting on both edges of the fountain (Fig. 5). The rest of the panels are geometric; they contain various figures, except for the entirely geometric third panel in the north aisle (Fig. 6). As for the nave’s mosaics, the first panel is filled with elaborate geometric designs that contain more than 70 images of various species of local birds (Fig. 7). The other two panels are entirely geometric (Fig. 8).

The mosaics in the nave and southern aisle have

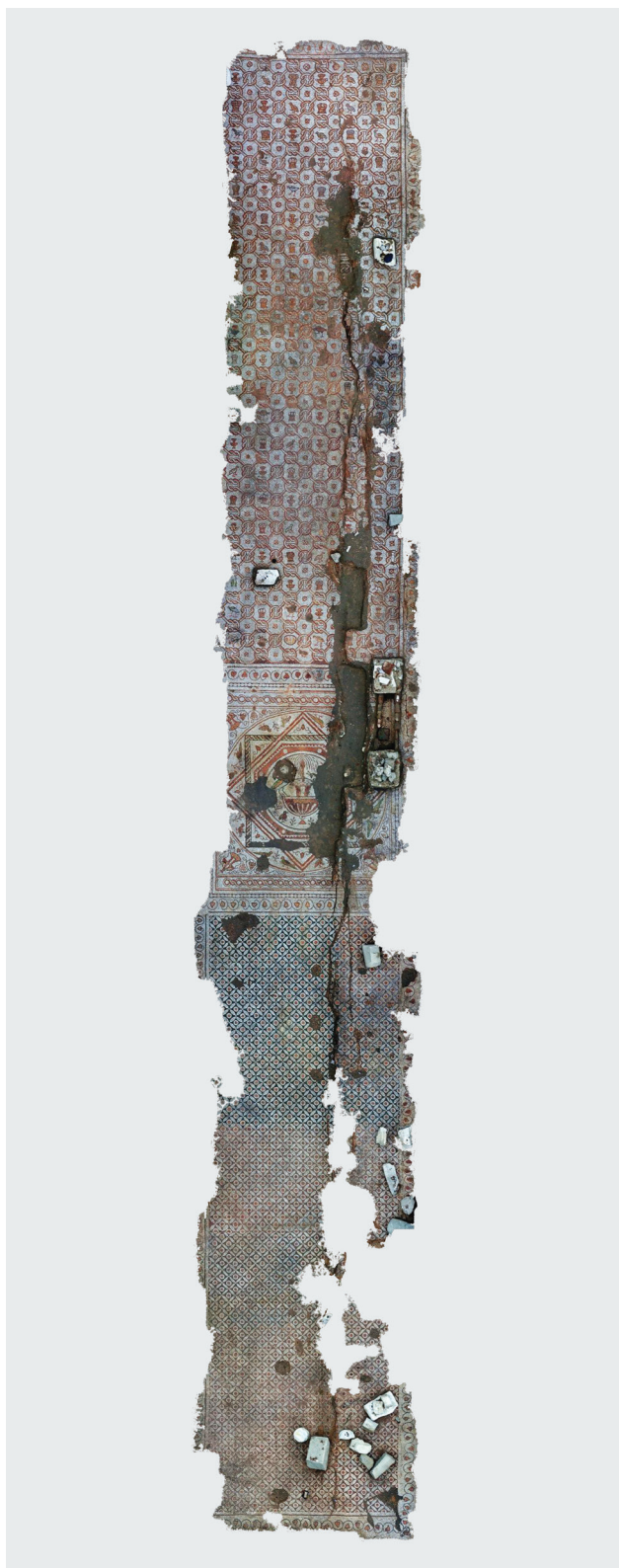


Fig. 6. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement. The north aisle.



Fig. 7. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement, the nave. A detail from the first panel.

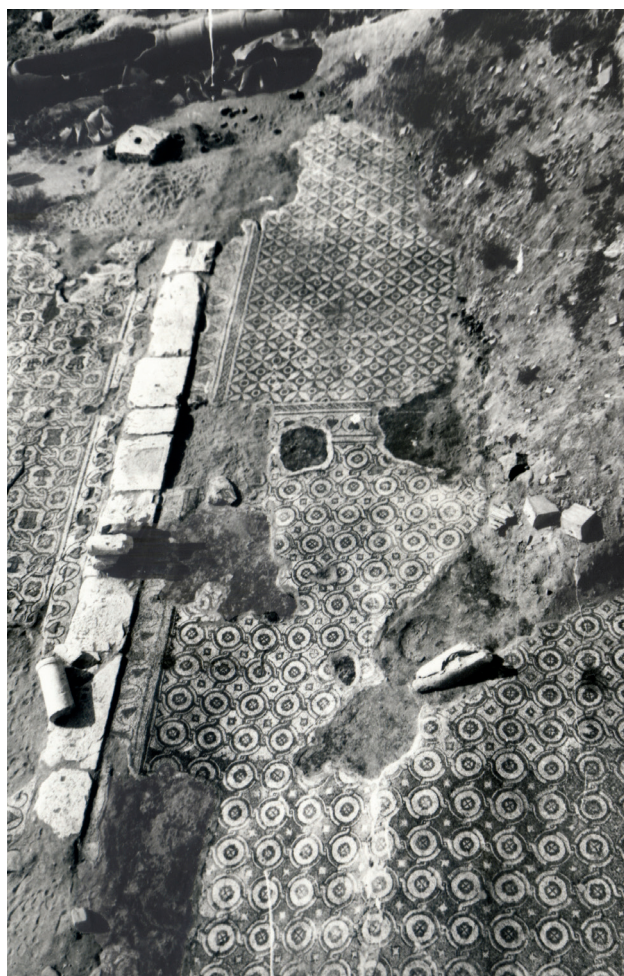


Fig. 8. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement. The nave, geometric panels.



Fig. 9. Philippopolis, Thrace. The Metropolitan basilica. The second mosaic pavement. The south aisle. A detail of the western panel.

already been discussed, while the northern aisle's mosaic still awaits full publication and analysis. E. Kesiakova observes that the tesserae used in the northern aisle are smaller and of higher quality in comparison to those in the nave's mosaic and that the different style reveals the work of at least two teams of mosaicists²⁸. In the entire south aisle and the figural panel in the nave, V. Popova distinguishes the work of two mosaic ateliers –still archaeologically unattested at Constantinople– that belonged to the metropolitan circle or were strongly influenced by the metropolis²⁹. The similarity in iconography and style between these mosaics and those in the bath in Qalaat Seman, which were made by a metropolitan atelier and have a similar date, are arguments in favor of this assumption³⁰. This similarity can be seen to reveal one of the issues pertaining to the mechanism of the

Constantinopolitan impact on liturgical life in Thrace³¹.

When comparing the mosaics in the side aisles with that in the exonarthex of the Philippopolis basilica, one can easily observe the significant differences in style and artistic execution. Although picturesque, the new mosaics in the naos are quite distinct from the abundantly colored, smoothly shaded, and finely executed panels in the exonarthex; the former involve more linear drawing and sharper colors. These features are especially observable in the figural panels, in which the birds are presented more linearly and even to some extent schematically. They display the use of fewer colors when compared to the birds presented in the central panels, which may be explained by the intention of the mosaicists to focus attention on the central part of both aisles (Fig. 9). Nonetheless, the sharp contrast between the mosaics in the naos and exonarthex raises the question of whether the

²⁸ Kesiakova, “Mozaiki ot episkopskata bazilika na Filipopol”, op.cit. (n. 10), 196-197.

²⁹ Popova, “*Fons Vitae*”, op.cit. (n. 8), 165 note 41.

³⁰ Ibid., 164-165.

³¹ See the discussion in Topalilov, “The Impact of Constantinopolitan Liturgy”, op.cit. (n. 8), 301-318.

former were produced by a Constantinopolitan atelier or were simply profoundly influenced by the metropolis.

As already mentioned, based on archaeological excavations the mosaic pavements in the exonarthex and the naos represent two phases. Since the 450s-460s have been proposed in the literature for their construction³², it seems that the interval between the two phases was short. The complete change in style and color diversity between them leads one to wonder if the mosaicists who made the second mosaic pavement in the naos belonged in fact to a metropolitan atelier. If they did, it would seem that they did not represent one of the best ateliers in the metropolis or that this work reflects some sudden changes in Constantinopolitan mosaic art at that time, which seems unlikely to my mind.

There is, however, another possibility that has been suggested in the literature. As mentioned above, the mosaics in the side aisles have a parallel in the mosaics in the aisles of the basilica of Herakleia (ancient Perinthos) on the Propontis, which was built between 450 and 480³³. The similarities between them led St. Westphalen to believe that they were produced by a Thracian atelier³⁴. Indeed, some iconographic similarities are apparent, but there are discrepancies in details and in the compositions as a whole that suggest that the mosaics in Philippopolis' and the basilicas of Herakleia were rather produced by two different ateliers that followed the same iconographic program in their own individual way. Since the mosaic at Herakleia seems closer in manner and execution to Constantinopolitan mosaic art, it can be suggested that the mosaics in Philippopolis are the work of itinerant ateliers based in Thrace but influenced by Constantinople and capable of producing Constantinopolitan prototypes in Thrace's urban centers.

The itinerant character of the mosaic ateliers that made the mosaics in both aisles in the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis can be indirectly deduced through a curious fact. As is mentioned above, the northern aisle's third panel is entirely geometric, which is in sharp contrast to the other panels here. Given the

symmetry observed between the panels in both aisles, it seems that the mosaic in the northern aisle remained incomplete for some reason and that the whole pavement was completed by other mosaicists who might have not been very skilled in the execution of figural mosaic. Perhaps the first mosaicists left Philippopolis, and the completion of the basilica's mosaic pavement fell to the mosaicists of another atelier. In short, the mosaics in both aisles reveal the work of two different mosaic ateliers that were itinerant and operated in Thrace influenced by Constantinople and the circle around the capital. If they were Constantinopolitan, they certainly did not represent the best class of the imperial capital.

Based on parallels with the mosaics in the basilica of Herakleia, the other atelier that made the figural panel in the nave is also assumed to have been based in Constantinople³⁵. The significant difference from the mosaic in the exonarthex may imply that in this case we are dealing with the work of a Thracian atelier that was influenced by Constantinople rather than a metropolitan atelier. Unlike the ateliers that made the pavements in both side aisles of the Metropolitan basilica, it seems that this one was also involved in the mosaic decoration of some other religious buildings in Philippopolis in the third quarter of the 5th century, such as the suburban monastery (?) close to the East Gate³⁶.

Despite the uncertainty concerning the origin of the ateliers that made the mosaics in the naos and exonarthex of the Philippopolitan basilica, it is certain that they created mosaic pavements following the same iconography that was expressed not only in the capital of the province of Thrace Philippopolis (and possibly at other cities in the province) but also in the urban centers of other provinces in the diocese of Thrace, such as Odessos and Herakleia (the capital of the province of *Eurōpē*)³⁷. If this is indeed

³² Popova, "Fons Vitae", op.cit. (n. 8), 164.

³³ St. Westphalen, *Die Basilica am Kalekapi in Herakleia/Perinthos. Bericht über die Ausgrabungen von 1992-2010 in Marmara Ereğlisi* (Istanbuler Forschungen 55), Tübingen 2016, 27-77.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109 note 149.

³⁵ Popova, "Fons Vitae", op.cit. (n. 8), 165 note 41.

³⁶ On the complex, see I. Topalilov, "Neue archäologische Forschungen in Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgarien): Ein spätantikes (frühchristliches) Gebäude in der Alexander Puschkin-Straße", *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 13 (2007), 37-62. On the mosaic, see Pillinger – Lirsch – Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, op.cit. (n. 3), 254-257.

³⁷ On the parallels between the mosaic in the southern aisle of the Philippopolitan Metropolitan basilica and that found near the village of Schkorpilovtzi, Odessos territory, see A. Minchev, "Dve

the case and given the discrepancies in details between the mosaics in these centers that suggest the work of two different ateliers, there seem to have been itinerant mosaic ateliers at work across the diocese of Thrace that were influenced by Constantinople and followed the iconography of prototypes in the capital.

Besides the figural panels, the mosaic pavement in Philippopolis' Metropolitan basilica consists also entirely of geometric panels that include the second and third panels in the nave, the *deambulatorium* in the apse, and the western panel in the northern aisle, which is identical to the third panel in the nave (Fig. 8). These geometric panels differ from the rest in their manner of execution; they are made from bigger tesserae, which may be due to the needs of the geometric iconography. This difference certainly raises the question of the origin of the mosaicists who produced these panels. Were they locals who were unskilled in making figural mosaics, or were they simply following a certain prototype in Constantinople? It is certain that these panels did not follow the mainstream trend in mosaic pavement art since they were produced at the same time as the figural panels in the aisles. To once again bring in the example of Herakleia's basilica for comparison, its mosaic program avoids entirely geometric panels. The archaeology of Plovdiv may also shed some light on the matter.

It seems that geometric patterns were preferred for the mosaic pavements made in Philippopolis in the late 4th – mid-5th century. Indeed, numerous discovered mosaics indicate that at that time the city was a center for artistic and mosaic production. However, a clear distinction can be made between the geometric and figural mosaics produced in the city. As has already been noted, the latter are all attributable to travelling mosaicists while to my mind the geometric mosaics should be considered the production of a local atelier or ateliers.

For example, the figural mosaic in the *domus Eirene* with the image of the personification of Eirene is assumed to be the work of a mosaicist from the island of Cos. The other figural scene, which is marine in theme, cannot be attributed to a local atelier, although the frame

of the *emblema* does seem to have derived from other mosaics in Philippopolis³⁸.

However, the next embellishment of the *domus Eirene*, which covered the vestibule, the southern and east porticus of the atrium, and the triclinium and can be dated to the very end the 4th or beginning of the 5th century, consisted of the installation of entirely geometric mosaics that sporadically included the image of a vase. The developed state of geometric mosaic motifs attested in the *domus Eirene* is very indicative of the prevailing taste for mosaic development in Philippopolis during the period under consideration, as it was in fact the *domus episcopalis* at that time.

Unsurprisingly, geometric motifs were fully employed in mosaic pavements that were made elsewhere in Philippopolis in the beginning of the 5th century. Such additional examples include the partially discovered mosaic at Dzambaz tepe, which is thought to have decorated a Christian basilica³⁹, and a mosaic in a newly discovered triclinium or *aula* in the lowland⁴⁰. Based on the lack of high artistic skill and elegance, non-accurate execution, badly composed schemes and limited color diversity, we may conclude that both mosaics are products of one or more local ateliers. This trend, which is not local but empire-wide, is to be observed at its best in the Metropolitan basilica's first mosaic pavement, which was entirely geometric except for the *emblema* in the nave⁴¹. It has been suggested that the whole surface of the basilica's floor was covered with mosaics in the course of two phases before the beginning of the 5th century⁴². Given the fact that the iconography of the mosaic

rannokhristianski mozaiki s iztochni motivi ot Varnenska oblast", D. Ovcharov (ed.), *Khristiianskata ideia v istoriata i kulturata na Evropa*, Sofia 2001, 59; Kesiakova, "Mozaiki ot episkopskata bazilika na Filipopol", op.cit. (n. 10), 179.

³⁸ On the mosaic, see most recently Pillinger – Lirsch – Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, op.cit. (n. 3), 220-227. On the frame of the *emblema*, see I. Topalilov, "Local Mosaic Workshops", op.cit. (n. 8), 183-188.

³⁹ On the mosaic, see most recently Pillinger – Lirsch – Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, op.cit. (n. 3), 248-249.

⁴⁰ The mosaic is still unpublished, but a photo of it can be found in E. Bozhinova – K. Stanev, "Arkheologicheski razkopki na ul. "Leonardo da Vinchi" № 13, Plovdiv", *Arkheologicheski otkritia i razkopki prez 2019*, kniga 2, Sofia 2020, 788, fig. 3.

⁴¹ On the *emblema*, see Kantareva-Decheva – Stanev – Stanchev, "Novorazkriti mozaiki ot Episkopskata basilika", op.cit. (n. 5), 23-34.

⁴² Kantareva – Decheva, "Novi stratigrafiski prouchvaniia", op.cit. (n. 5), 369-372.

pavements that decorated the public buildings in Philippopolis served as the prototype for those in the private houses⁴³, we may assert that the geometric mosaics in the Metropolitan basilica were the main catalyst for the spread of the geometric trend in mosaic art in the city. So, without denying the possibility that figural mosaics were produced during that period, given the above observations it seems to me that local ateliers “specialized” in geometric decoration. Thus, I would not be surprised if the geometric panels in the nave, in the northern aisle under consideration, and in the *deambulatorium* of the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis were in fact the work of one or more local mosaic ateliers.

The decoration of an imposing monument such as the Metropolitan basilica in Philippopolis with new mosaic pavements was of great importance for the local Christian community and its bishop. By replacing the old mosaic pavement that was preserved almost intact in the aisles and exonarthex, the new one brought a new message to both local and visiting Christians concerning the major socio-political changes that society in Philippopolis underwent in the middle to third quarter of the 5th century. One message, for example, was that the Christian bishop played a newly expanded role in society, which is underlined by the central panel in the exonarthex’s mosaics. The changes to the mosaic pavements in the basilica’s exonarthex and aisles also highlight these spaces’ inclusion in the new liturgical practices that came from Constantinople. The articulation of a central position in the exonarthex through new mosaic decoration, from which the bishop could address the laity gathered in the atrium, contrasts sharply with the bishop’s dedicatory inscription that was built into the mosaic floor in the center of the southern aisle in the previous period. Whether it reveals the new importance of the Philippopolitan metropolitan bishop is unclear, but this is very likely. The proper images and designs executed in an elegant style, possibly following metropolitan prototypes and with the expertise of mosaicists invited

⁴³ See for this in Topalilov “The Mosaic pavements in Philippopolis”, op.cit. (n. 8), 257-279.

from Constantinople, would have been a prominent manifestation of the local bishop’s newly elevated status.

The replacement of the old mosaic pavements with new ones can be regarded as part of a program that spread in the provinces under direct Constantinopolitan influence, like those in the diocese of Thrace. This program was most likely inspired by an unidentified yet metropolitan prototype, and the mosaic decoration may be regarded as another aspect of Constantinople’s influence on life in Philippopolis. This is an influence that is reflected in every aspect of life –political, religious, economic, and social– especially from the reign of Theodosius I onward⁴⁴. We may assume that this phenomenon can be found in other provincial capitals and important urban centers in the *dioecesis Thraciae*, *dioecesis Pontica* (in both parts –Asia Minor and the Northern Black Sea coast), and *dioecesis Asiana*, all of which were closely linked with the metropolis. Constantinople’s influence on the mosaic pavements of Philippopolis’ Metropolitan basilica place these decorations in a broader artistic context that is not confined by the limits of local and regional traditions but belongs to an Empire-wide, unifying Christian tradition.

⁴⁴ See for example the case with the *porta triumphalis*, I. Topalilov, “*Porta triumphalis* in Late Antique Thrace”, N. Kanev (ed.), *Ruler, State and Church on the Balkans in the Middle Ages. In Honour of the 60th Anniversary of Professor Dr. Plamen Pavlov*, Part 1 (Acta Mediaevaliae Magnae Tarnoviae 1), Veliko Tarnovo 2020, 304-324 (in Bulgarian).

Illustration credits

Fig. 1: Zh. Tankova, “Arkheologicheskoprochvane na obekt ‘Episkopska bazilika’ gr. Plovdiv”, *Arkheologicheski otkritiia i razkopki prez 2016*, Sofia 2017, 324 fig. 1. Fig. 2: Kantareva-Decheva – Stanev – Stanchev, “Novorazkriti mozaiki ot Episkopskata basilica”, op.cit. (n. 5), 27 fig. 4. Fig. 3: <https://www.enjoy-plovdiv.com/en/blog/great-basilica-of-philippopolis> (last consulted on March, 5, 2021). Fig. 4: Kesiakova, *Filipopol prez rimskata epokha*, op.cit. (n. 2), 155 fig. 10. Fig. 5: Pillinger – Lirsch – Popova (eds), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, op.cit. (n. 3), pl. 258, fig. 409. Fig. 6: Elena Kantareva-Decheva’s Archive. Figs 7, 8: Elena Kesiakova. Fig. 9: Popova, “Liturgy and Mosaics”, op.cit. (n. 22), 159, pl. VII.1.

ΜΕΡΙΚΕΣ ΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΗΣΕΙΣ ΣΤΟ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟ ΨΗΦΙΔΩΤΟ ΔΑΠΕΔΟ ΤΗΣ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΙΚΗΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗΣ ΣΤΗ ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥΠΟΛΗ ΤΗΣ ΘΡΑΚΗΣ

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της επισκοπικής βασιλικής στη Φιλιππούπολη (σημ. Ploudiv, Βουλγαρία) της Θράκης (Εικ. 1), η οποία ήταν η μεγαλύτερη στην πόλη, την επαρχία και τη Διοίκηση Θράκης, αλλά και μία από τις μεγαλύτερες της εποχής της στη βαλκανική χερσόνησο. Τα εν λόγω ψηφιδωτά ανήκουν στο δεύτερο στρώμα κάλυψης των δαπέδων της βασιλικής και καλύπτουν επιφάνεια έκτασης 2.000 περίπου τ.μ. (Εικ. 3, 5-9). Περιλαμβάνουν τον κυρίως ναό, τον νάρθηκα και χώρους του αιθρίου. Φιλοτεχνήθηκαν την έκτη-έβδομη δεκαετία του 5ου αιώνα, από διαφορετικά εργαστήρια ψηφοθετών, σε τρεις φάσεις, με μικρή χρονική απόσταση μεταξύ τους. Έχει προταθεί ότι οι ψηφοθέτες ανήκαν (α) σε ένα συριακό εργαστήριο, (β) σε δύο άλλα που ήταν κωνσταντινουπολίτικα ή εντάσσονταν σε μητροπολιτικούς καλλιτεχνικούς κύκλους, και (γ) σε ένα τοπικό εργαστήριο. Παρόλο που η σχετική με το ψηφιδωτό δάπεδο έρευνα έχει προοδεύσει ιδιαίτερα, χάρις στο μεγάλο πρόγραμμα αποκατάστασης της βασιλικής, ορισμένες απόψεις εξακολουθούν να χρήζουν αποσαφήνισης, ενώ κάποια ερωτήματα παραμένουν ανοικτά. Ένα ερώτημα αφορά στην ταύτιση των εργαστηρίων, οι ψηφοθέτες των οποίων έλαβαν μέρος στο έργο. Για παράδειγμα, είναι πλέον σαφές ότι η συριακή επίδραση –αν υπήρξε τέτοια– ασκήθηκε έμμεσα από τους ψηφοθέτες ενός κωνσταντινουπολίτικου εργαστηρίου στο πλαίσιο της κοινής καλλιτεχνικής αντίληψης που κυριαρχούσε στην εικονογραφία των ψηφιδωτών γύρω από την ανατολική Μεσόγειο στο δεύτερο μισό του 5ου αιώνα.

Η ανάλυση των δεδομένων που επιχειρούμε εδώ, οδηγεί στην ταύτιση ενός, τουλάχιστον, μητροπολιτικού, δύο επαρχιακών –ισχυρά επηρεασμένων από την καλλιτεχνική παραγωγή της Κωνσταντινούπολης– και ενός τοπικού εργαστηρίου. Για όλα υπάρχουν εύκολα αναγνωρίσιμα χαρακτηριστικά, τα οποία τα διακρίνουν ως προς την τεχνοτροπία, το πλούσιο χρωματολόγιο και την απόδοση της μορφής. Έχει προταθεί ότι

το δάπεδο στον εξωνάρθηκα ήταν αναμφίβολα προϊόν μητροπολιτικού εργαστηρίου (Εικ. 3). Το ψηφιδωτό αυτό αποκαλύπτει τη σημασία της νέας πρακτικής του επισκόπου να στέκεται στην είσοδο του εξωνάρθηκα, για να απευθύνεται στους πιστούς που συγκεντρώνονταν στο αίθριο. Το ίδιο έργο αντιπροσωπεύει την επανεισαγωγή εικονιστικών θεμάτων στη Φιλιππούπολη για πρώτη φορά μετά από μισό αιώνα.

Η περίπτωση του ψηφιδωτού στον κυρίως ναό είναι πιο σύνθετη (Εικ. 7, 8). Αποτελείται από τρία διάχωρα στο κεντρικό και στα πλάγια κλίτη, τα οποία διακρίνονται για τη μείξη εικονιστικών και γεωμετρικών θεμάτων, ορισμένα από τα οποία εμπεριέχουν πτηνά. Τα εικονιστικά διάχωρα βρίσκονται στο μέσον των κλιτών και στο ανατολικότερο τμήμα του κυρίως ναού, δίπλα στο πρεσβυτήριο. Η σύνθεση στα κλίτη (Εικ. 5, 6) είναι έντονα συμμετρική, με την παράσταση της πηγής της ζωής (*fons vitae*) στο κεντρικό διάχωρο και λαμπρό γεωμετρικό διάκοσμο με αγγεία, πτηνά και ένα καλάθι στα ανατολικά διάχωρα, σε αντίθεση με τα δυτικά, όπου δεν υπάρχει συμμετρικός σχεδιασμός. Επιπρόσθετα, η σύνθεση στο βόρειο διάχωρο είναι εξ ολοκλήρου γεωμετρική, όμοια με εκείνη του τρίτου διαχώρου στο κεντρικό κλίτος.

Βάσει μελετών άλλων γνωστών ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων της Φιλιππούπολης, τα οποία χρονολογούνται στα τέλη του 4ου –μέσα του 5ου αιώνα (Εικ. 4), τα εξ ολοκλήρου γεωμετρικά διάχωρα αναγνωρίζονται πιθανότατα ως έργα ενός τοπικού εργαστηρίου, ενώ τα εικονιστικά φιλοτεχνήθηκαν από δύο περιδεύοντα εργαστήρια που εργάστηκαν στη Διοίκηση Θράκης. Έτσι, η αρχαιολογική έρευνα στη Φιλιππούπολη έχει αποκαλύψει ότι όλα τα εικονιστικά ψηφιδωτά που χρονολογούνται στην προαναφερθείσα περίοδο, πρέπει να αποδοθούν σε περιδεύοντα εργαστήρια. Ειδικότερα, τα γεωμετρικής θεματολογίας ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα που κόσμησαν ιδιωτικά και θρησκευτικά κτήρια, θα πρέπει να προσγραφούν στην παραγωγή

ενός τοπικού εργαστηρίου, το οποίο χρησιμοποίησε ως πρότυπο τα γεωμετρικά ψηφιδωτά της επισκοπικής βασιλικής. Τα κύρια επιχειρήματα για αυτήν την ταύτιση βασίζονται στην απουσία καλλιτεχνικής ικανότητας και κομψότητας, στην αδέξια εκτέλεση, στην κακή σύνθεση των θεμάτων και την περιορισμένη χρωματική ποικιλία, στοιχεία που χαρακτηρίζουν αυτά τα ψηφιδωτά έργα, και τα οποία βρίσκονται σε έντονη αντίθεση με τα ψηφιδωτά της επισκοπικής βασιλικής.

Παραμένει αβέβαιο αν τα άλλα δύο εργαστήρια, τα οποία είναι ευδιάκριτα στα εικονιστικά διάχωρα των πλάγιων κλιτών και του κεντρικού κλίτους, ήταν όντως μητροπολιτικά, αλλά, ακόμη και αν ήταν, δεν ανήκαν στα πιο αξιόλογα. Είναι πάντως σαφές ότι ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα φιλοτεχνούνταν στα κύρια αστικά κέντρα της διοίκησης, όπως στις επαρχιακές πρωτεύουσες Φιλιππούπολη και Πέρινθο, και επέλεγαν μια συγκεκριμένη εικονογραφία, η οποία τόνιζε εκείνα τα σημεία των βασιλικών που ενέπιπταν στο λειτουργικό τυπικό της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Είναι, επομένως, εύλογο να υποθέσουμε ότι το πρότυπο αυτής της νέας εικονογραφίας βρισκόταν στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, σε μνημείο όμως που δεν έχει εντοπιστεί ακόμα. Αυτή η εικονογραφία διαδόθηκε κατόπιν σε άλλες επαρχιακές πρωτεύουσες και σημαντικά αστικά κέντρα, όχι μόνο στη Διοίκηση Θράκης, αλλά ακόμη στην Ποντική (και στα δύο μέρη, στη Μικρά Ασία και στις ακτές της βόρειας Μαύρης θάλασσας) και επίσης στην Ασιανή, περιοχές που ήταν στενά συνδεδεμένες με τη μητρόπολη.

Η διακόσμηση ενός εντυπωσιακού μνημείου, όπως η επισκοπική βασιλική στη Φιλιππούπολη, με νέα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα ήταν μεγάλης σημασίας για την τοπική χριστιανική κοινότητα και τον επίσκοπό της. Αντικαθιστώντας το προγενέστερο, που διατηρούνταν σχεδόν

πλήρως στα κλίτη και στον εξωνάρθηκα (Εικ. 2), το νέο δάπεδο μετέφερε ένα μήνυμα στους χριστιανούς της περιοχής και τους προσκυνητές σχετικά με τις μείζονες κοινωνικοπολιτικές αλλαγές που γνώρισε η Φιλιππούπολη στα μέσα και στο τρίτο τέταρτο του 5ου αιώνα. Για παράδειγμα, ο νέος ρόλος που είχε πλέον ο χριστιανός επίσκοπος στην κοινωνία, υπογραμμίζεται από το κεντρικό διάχωρο στο ψηφιδωτό του εξωνάρθηκα. Η διαμόρφωση μιας κεντρικής θέσης στον εξωνάρθηκα, μέσω του ψηφιδωτού διακόσμου, από την οποία ο επίσκοπος θα μπορούσε να απευθύνεται προς τους πιστούς που συγκεντρώνονταν στο αίθριο, έρχεται σε έντονη διάσταση με το περιεχόμενο οικοδομικής επιγραφής, την οποία είχε εντάξει ο προκάτοχός του στο μέσον του δαπέδου του νότιου κλίτους κατά την προηγούμενη περίοδο. Είναι πολύ πιθανό αυτή η ιδιαίτερη αλλαγή στο πρόγραμμα των ψηφιδωτών της επισκοπικής βασιλικής –σε συνδυασμό με το κομψό στυλ των νέων ψηφιδωτών, τον διαφαινόμενο προσανατολισμό σε μητροπολιτικές τάσεις και την εκτέλεση από έμπειρους ψηφοθέτες– να υπογραμμίζει μια αναβάθμιση της σημασίας της θέσης του επισκόπου της Φιλιππούπολης. Χωρίς αμφιβολία, λόγω της επίδρασης της Κωνσταντινούπολης τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της επισκοπικής βασιλικής της Φιλιππούπολης εντάσσονται σε ένα ευρύτερο καλλιτεχνικό πλαίσιο που δεν περιχαράκωνεται στα όρια τοπικών και περιφερειακών τάσεων, αλλά ανήκει σε μια αυτοκρατορική, ενοποιητική χριστιανική παράδοση.

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