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Byzantium at Display: Six Mosaic Images from the Age of Justinian I

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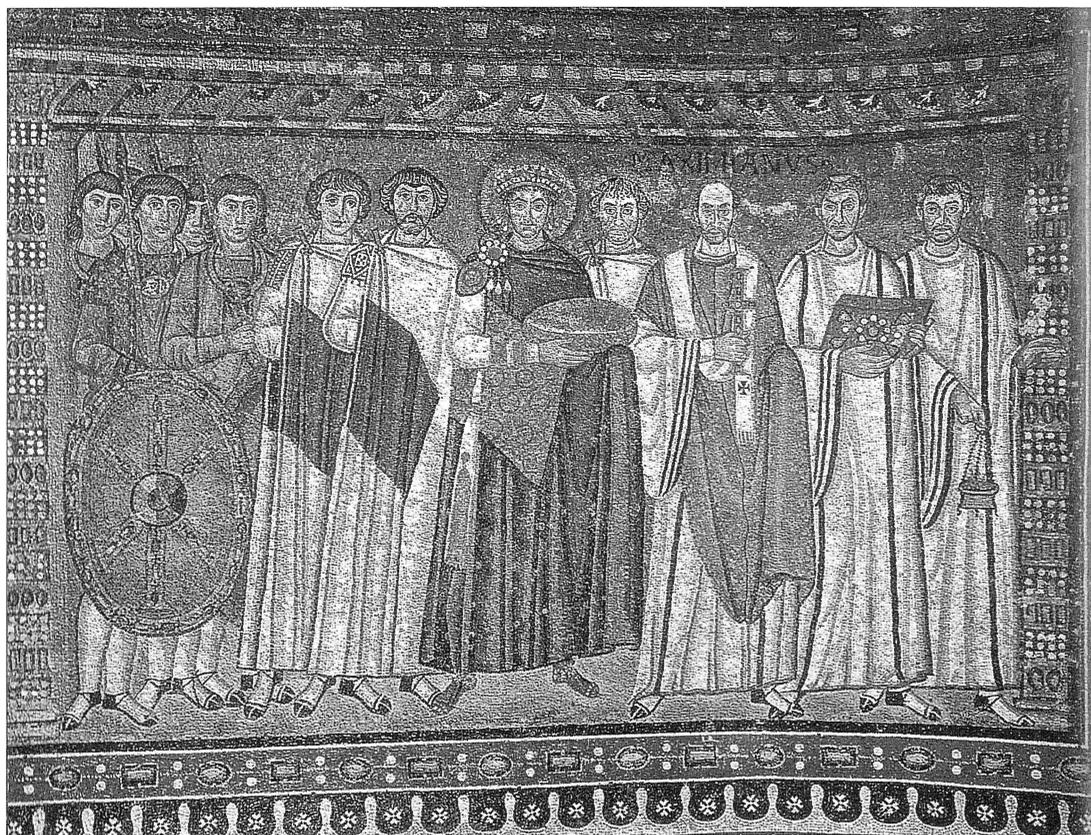
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The reign of the Roman Emperor Justinian I, a person with Balkan provenance and European ambitions, a wise politician, a skilled diplomat, a resourceful military strategist and a generous commissioner of ambitious artistic enterprises, is rightfully entitled to bear the name “the golden age” of Christian Antiquity. Marked by invasive territorial restitution of the Empire, by fundamental reform of public administration, by institutional codification of Roman legislation and by controlled opportunism in maintenance of the church affairs, Justinian era is the true climax of Antique historical ideals, as well as civil preferences at the threshold of the canonically established Byzantine Middle Ages. In cultural terms, Justinianic epoch emanates two fundamental components: the glamorous Antique taste of the aesthetic conception and the metaphoric embodiment of Christian inspiration within the ideological structure of artistic ensembles. In that context, the complex symbolic system of painterly executions funded upon the refined dogmatic allusions in the depiction of Biblical and historic iconography reached its highest level of multi-significant visual explication in the illustration of religious ideas.

The function of that symbolic system, in other words, the degree of its absorption by the beholders was highly dependent on the skill in the construction of aesthetic and didactic composite of the images, i. e. the creative skills in the appropriate visualization of religious messages¹. Therefore, the contemporary analysis of some of the most representative, as well as iconographically most sophisticated mosaic assemblages that originate from the closing period of Christian Antiquity, has to start with their “functional sustainability”, i. e. the possibility of their functional communication with the beholders, which is actually the main role of Christian iconography contrary to the insistence of elderly scholars to interpret them as: visual pamphlets of political issues, literal illustrations of Biblical verses or optical performances of the mystical ideas of elite Byzantine philosophical school. In that regard, we have selected six distinctive examples of representative mosaic arrangements dated *grosso modo* in the period of Justinianic reign.

The first among them is the eternally luxurious Royal epiphany of Justinian

1 Е. Димитрова, *Најсџарније христџијански симболи*, Скопје 1995, 188



Сл. 1 Сан Витале - Равена, Царој Јустинијан I со неговата придружба

Fig 1. an Vitale – Ravenna, Imperial panel of Justinian I

and Theodora in the presbytery of **San Vitale church in Ravenna**² (Fig. 1). Located in the most solemn part of the edifice, the mosaic ensemble of which represents the most elaborated program constellation of the political, religious and artistic fundamentals of the Empire³, the panels with the depicted portraits of the Royalty were interpreted by senior scholars as illustration of the Great Entrance, in which Justinian and his wife, altogether with Maximilian, the Archbishop of Ravenna, participate as members of the liturgical procession⁴ (Fig. 2). The absurdness of such an idea is clearly noticeable in the iconographical configuration of the images, as well as in the precisely conceived and appropriately applied painterly vocabulary of symbolic components. Namely, although the accurate biographer of Emperor Justinian I, the famous Procopius from Caesarea speaks of the eminence, influence and political power of Empress Theodora⁵, she, as well as any other woman in the Christian world, was not permitted entrance into the altar of any sacral edifice, let alone to participate in the festal liturgical ceremonies.

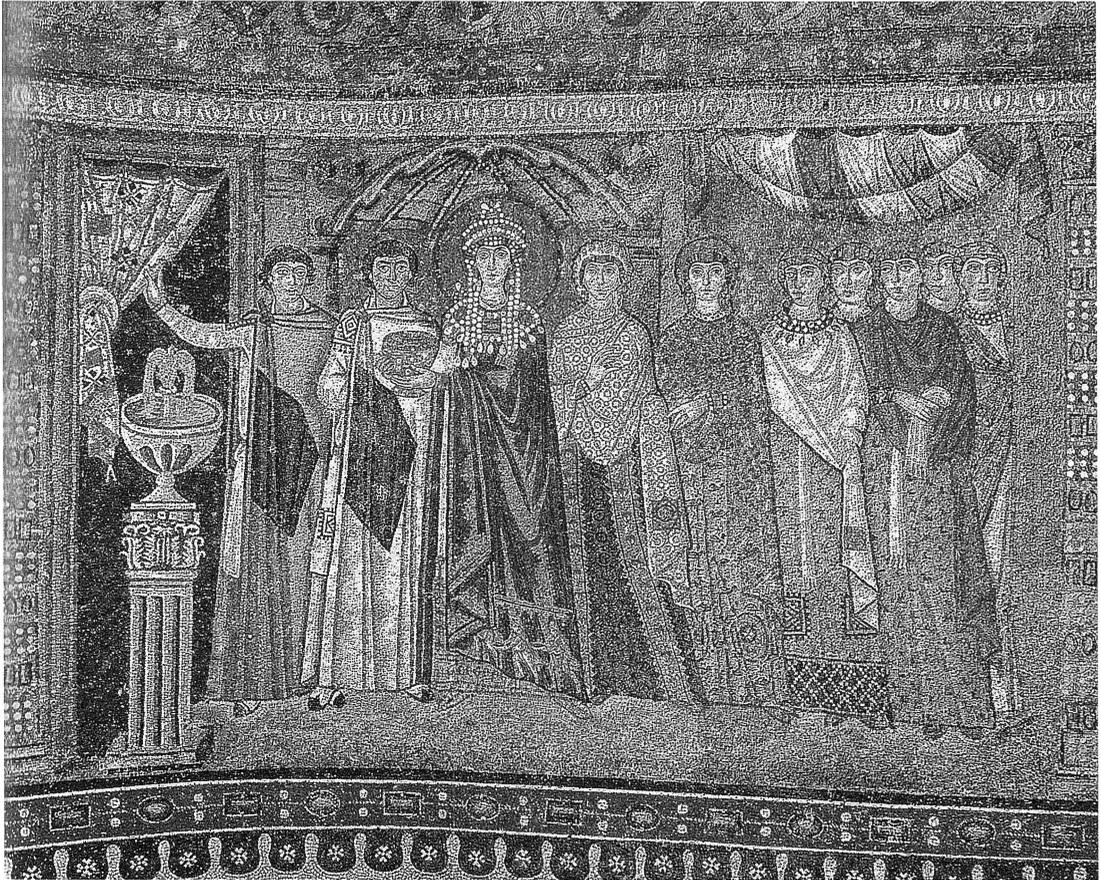
This is confirmed by the very iconographical constellation of both panels that show Justinian and his wife accompanied by their courtiers, whereat they are not located in the same space: the Emperor is depicted in front of the festive golden background of

2 F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna, Hauptstadt der spätantiken Abendlandes I, Geschichte und Monumente*, Wiesbaden 1969, 226

3 E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art In the Making. Main lines of stylistic development in Mediterranean Art. 3rd – 7th Century*, London 1977, 81-87

4 A. Grabar, *L'age d'or de Justinien*, Paris 1966, 157, Pl. 171-172

5 Прокопиј Кесариски, *Тајнаста историја*, Скопје 2008, 67-70



Сл. 2 Сан Витале - Равена, Царицата Теодора со нејзината придружба
 Fig. 2. San Vitale – Ravenna, Imperial panel of Theodora

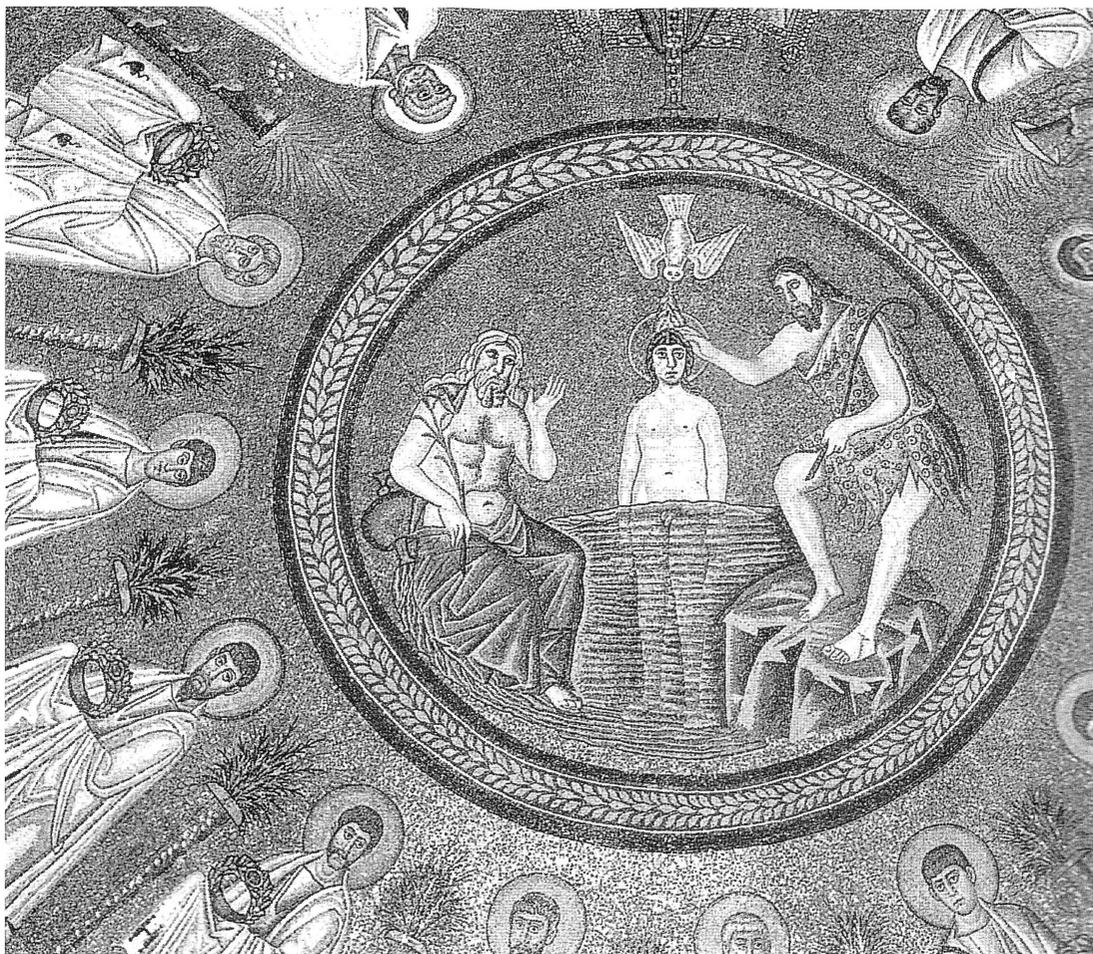
a sacral interior, while Theodora is represented in an exterior, suggested by the marble fountain, in a slight motion allusive of her stepping towards the entrance, marked by a luxuriant curtain⁶. Besides, the royal couple hold glamorous, but empty liturgical vessels instead of discos with the Eucharistic bread and chalice with the communion wine. The depiction of the liturgical receptacles as an allusion to their role in the religious rite suggests offering precious gifts to be used in the Eucharistic ceremony, something which is metaphorically sublimed in the decorative embroidery executed at the lower edge of the elegant Empress' garment with the depiction of the Adoration of the Magi⁷. Finally, the reconstruction of the liturgical rite performed during the reign of Justinian by the reputable Thomas Mathews⁸, clearly demonstrates that in the Great Entrance during the first half of the 6th century the bishop did not participate and therefore, the carrying of the Eucharistic offerings was strictly an obligation of the deacons, while the entrance of the Emperor into the solemn space of the naos was preceded by the gesture of taking the imperial crown off, as a part of the ritual of the First Entrance.

In that regard, the arrangement of the Royal portraits, the inclusion of the monumental monogram of Christ and the depiction of the golden liturgical vessels

6 R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, Oxford 2000, 60-61

7 J. Lowden, *Early Christian & Byzantine Art*, London 2003, 133

8 T. F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, University Park and London 1971, 138-147



Сл. 3 Крстилница на Аријаните - Равена, Крштевање Христово
 Fig. 3 Arian Baptistery – Ravenna, Baptism

held by the imperial couple should be seen through the prism of historic – ecclesiastical connotation of the mosaic representations⁹, that suggest the symbolic visualization of imperial confirmation of restored Roman rule over the Italian region, as well as their absolute support to Maximian’s Archbishopric in Ravenna, as the main outpost of Byzantine political and religious authority in the West. Sanctified in 547, a few months prior to the death of Theodora on the June 28, 548¹⁰, the panels with the portraits of Justinian and his Empress are a symbolic historic confirmation of the reconstructed territorial integrity, religious unity and cultural attainments of Roman Empire, the most exclusive product of which is the church of San Vitale in Ravenna.

This is also confirmed by the slightly younger “emulation” of this remarkable iconographic assemblage from the era of Justinian, executed in the altar of the Ravenate basilica San Apolinare in Classe in the period of the eight or ninth decade of the 7th century. In the spirit of the protocolar iconographic matrix designed in the age of the great Emperor, the mosaic panel in the church dedicated to Saint Apoliner - the first Bishop of Ravenna, shows the Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus as confirming the privileges to the temple, accompanied by his courtiers and the actual

9 J. Beckwith, *Early Christian And Byzantine Art*, New Haven and London 1993, 113-116

10 R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, 58; G. Bovini, *Ravenna. Art and History*, Ravenna 2008, 26



Сл. 4 Св. Кузман и Дамјан - Рим, Мозаик во апсидата
 Fig. 4 Sts, Cosma e Damiano – Rome, Apse mosaic

ravenate Bishop - Reparatus¹¹. Although the younger mosaic, due to the awkward execution of the images, as well as the spatial qualities of the composition, lost the ceremonial festivity of the view characteristic of the San Vitale panels, it has still retained the recognizable visual formula for depiction of the courtly ritual known as “*traditio privilegia*”. Executed in another, poorer, less secure and less glamorous epoch, the mosaic of San Apollinare in Classe replaced the luxuriant gifts of the imperial couple in San Vitale with the modest gesticulation of the protagonists, representing the most appropriate iconographic reminiscent of the “gallant” courtly protocol from the most representative religious center of the Ravenate Archbishopric.

Another example of a bad navigation during the journey through the symbolic horizons of Early Christian iconography is the decoration of the dome in the **Arian Baptistery in Ravenna** (early 6th century)¹² (Fig. 3), comprising the medallion with the image of the Baptism of Christ and the apostolic procession directed towards His throne. Starting from his primary professional orientation as a theologian, i.e. liturgicist, Lazar Mirković¹³, when iconographically analyzing this ensemble, takes into consideration only the theological ground of the arrangement, presenting it as a copy of the mosaic executed in the dome of the Orthodox Baptistery in Ravenna. Discussing the direction, the course, the postures and the gestures of the apostolic

11 J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 119-120, Fig. 96

12 F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna, Hauptstadt der spätantiken Abendlandes I, Geschichte und Monumente*, 138

13 Л. Мирковић, *Иконографске студије*, Нови Сад 1974, 88-89



Сл. 5 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс
Fig. 5 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex

figures¹⁴, he neglects the primary iconographic divergence between the two ensembles. Namely, contrary to the Palestinian matrix applied for the depiction of Christ image in the Orthodox Baptistery marked by mustaches, beard and anatomic configuration of a mature male, the neophyte in the Arian Baptistery is represented in an extremely sensual and feminized iconographic variant. Contrary to the clearly accentuated masculine figures of John the Baptist and the personified River god marked by masculine anatomic architecture, heavy beards and hairy chests, the figure of Christ displays elaboration of certain feminine facial and bodily features¹⁵. Although the waves of the river can not hide the gender of the initiate, the sensual lips, the soft facial oval, the narrow shoulders, the swelling breasts and the rounded hips accentuate the feminine side in depiction of Christ image.

In contrast to Lazar Mirković, who, as a conservative orthodox theoretician, considered the mosaics executed in the Early Christian monuments, including the one in the Arian Baptistery in Ravenna, as illustrations of Biblical references absorbed by the actual liturgical practice¹⁶, the tendentiously explicated modellation of the image points to entirely different iconographic amalgam. In that context, absorbing the feministic aspect of pagan Gods, who, in certain constellations, gave birth to their children, symbolized the fertility of the rivers and fields or appeared as generous providers to their followers¹⁷, the image of Christ in the Ravenate Baptistery inherits the symbolic values of the divine life-giving of his antecedents, transformed into the fertile quality of the baptismal water. Symbolizing the well of eternal life acquired through baptismal initiation and deserved via the new birth in the salvational waves of baptismal water, the image of Christ in this exclusive and genuine representation condenses the symbolic significance of the notion of immortal life of the neophytes in the most subtle and authentic manner. Although, confined to the reduced dimensions of the dome structure, the mosaic in the Arian Baptistery resembles the basic iconographic concept of the decorative arrangement executed in the Ravenate Orthodox Baptistery¹⁸, the allusions to the polymorphic nature of Christ¹⁹ and his universal “transpersonality” are the key elements that configure the picture of the one and only creator, provider, protector, benefactor and savior of the entire Christian mankind.

14 *ibidem*, 89

15 Th. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton, 2003, 134-135

16 Л. Мирковић, *Иконографске студије*, 70-80

17 M. Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, London 1961, 18-22

18 S. Kostof, *The Orthodox Baptistery of Ravenna*, Yale University Press, 1965, 55-6

19 R. M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, London and New York 2002, 124-128



Сл. 6 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс (деталј)
 Fig. 6 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex (detail)

The apse mosaic executed in the basilica dedicated to the noble physicians Cosma and Damianus, **Sancti Sancti Cosma e Damiano in Rome** (ca. 526-530)²⁰ (Fig. 4) is another example of unintentional “divergence” from the precise interpretation of its iconographic constellation due to “tiny” mistakes in the perceptibility and analysis of the compositional elements and their symbolic meaning. Although the multiple restorations of this altar ensemble devastated the stylistic coherence and the painterly idiom of its execution to a great extent, they had almost no impact over the iconographic concept of the depiction, which belongs to the category of “dogmatic visual structures” designated for apsidal decoration of the temples²¹. The magnificent figure of Christ flanked by the portraits of the commissioner, the titular saints and the apostolic Princes and accompanied by the zoomorphic symbols of the disciples, is a highly recognizable program concept for decoration of the festal altar space in the representative church edifices during Justinianic reign. However, the baptismal connotation of such ensembles is not always mandatory²², while typological references of the depicted characters, according to the Manuel of Byzantine iconography²³ are not *by default* the most appropriate method for identification of the ideological background of the composition.

Namely, although the colossal image of the Resurrected Christ in the center of the scene bears the features of the “Palestinian” type, while the portrait of St. Theodore is dressed in a garment with “oriental” features²⁴, the iconographic concept of this composition derives from the characteristic Roman program matrixes, designed for decoration of the apsidal space of Christian temples. In that context, the two images executed in the subsidiary apses of the Mausoleum of Santa Constanza in Rome²⁵, the

20 W. Oakeshott, *Mozaici Rima od trećeg do četrnaestog veka*, Beograd 1977, 81-84, T. XI-XIII

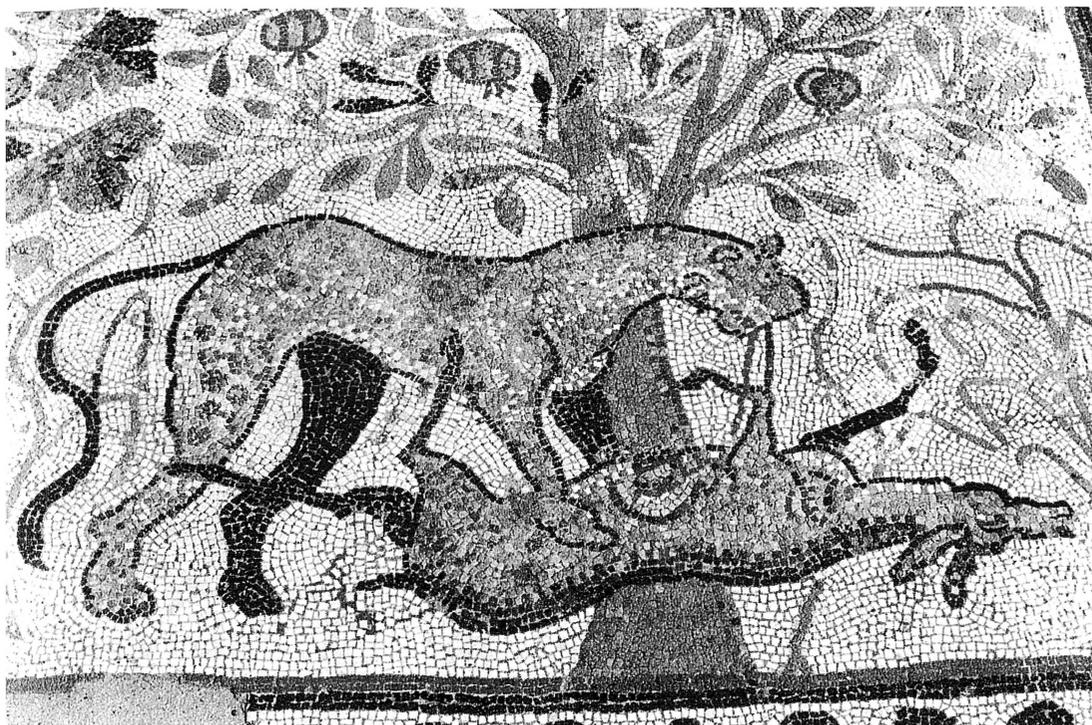
21 R. M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 109

22 J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 125

23 H. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies. Saints and Their Images In Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 21-22

24 J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 126

25 H. Stern, *Les Mosaïques de l'église de Sainte Constance à Rome*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* XII (1958), 206-208



Сл. 7 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс (детал)
 Fig. 7 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex (detail)

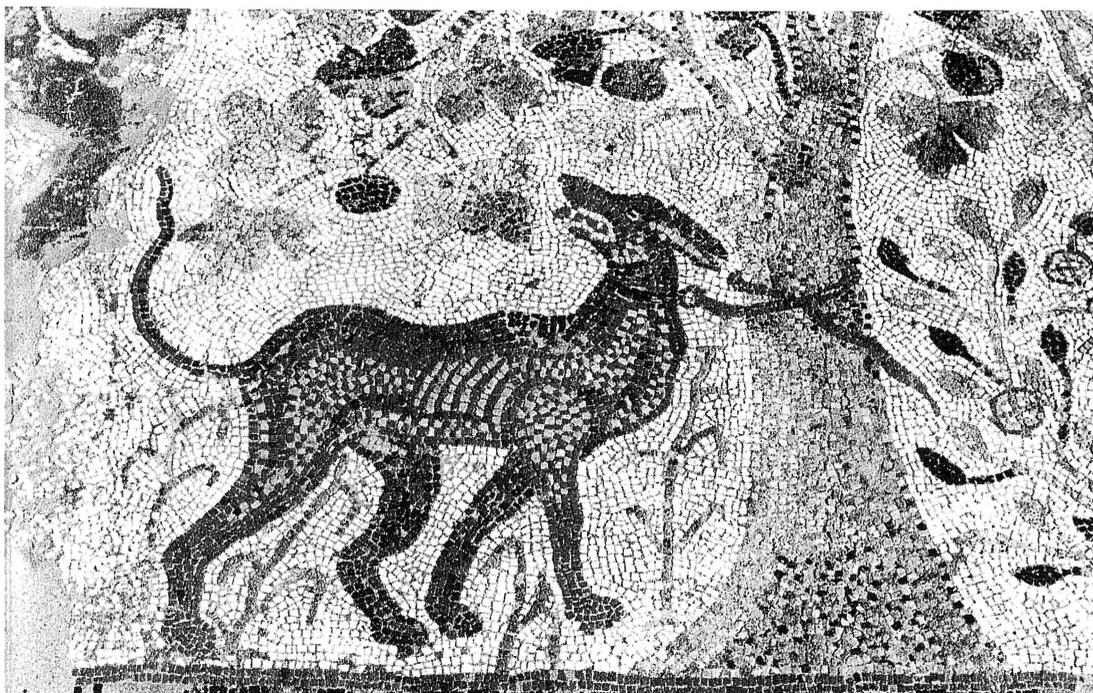
altar mosaic in the chapel of San Aquilino at San Lorenzo in Milan²⁶ and the impressive mosaic vista in the apse of Santa Pudenziana in Rome²⁷, all conceived according to the principle of the recognizable iconographic constellation in the depiction of “*traditio legis*” are solid confirmations to the Roman/Italian provenance of the iconographic matrix in Sts. Cosma and Damianus. The inclusion of the phytomorphic symbol of the Palm and the zoomorphic emblems of the Lamb and Phoenix, the “levitation” pose in the depiction of the Resurrected Christ and the depiction of the martyr crowns in the hands of the titular saints are more than a simple symbolic direction to the sotheriological – eschatological conception of the executed mosaic. In that sense, the inclusion of the image of St. Theodore depicted as a counterpart to the commissioner’s portrait of the pope Felix IV is not a testimony to the influence of the Byzantine iconographic matrixes²⁸, rather an homage to the saint and protector of the late Theodoric on the estate of whom the church of Sts. Cosma and Damianus was erected²⁹. Thus, the altar mosaic executed in the temple dedicated to the noble Physician saints is the most elaborated iconographic version of the “apsidal dogmatic visual structures” from Justinianic times, in the constellation of which, the donor’s concept, the memorial code and the theological idea are sublimed in a unique symbolic configuration with sotheriological explication and eschatological connotation.

26 A. Grabar, *Programmes iconographiques à l’usage des propriétaires des latifundia romains*, Cahiers Archéologiques XII (1962), 394-5

27 G. Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma*, Rome 1967, 55-76

28 J. Beckwith, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 125-126

29 R. Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City*, Princeton 1980, 75



Сл. 8 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс (детал)

Fig. 8 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex (detail)

The fourth example of a master-piece from the time of Justinianic rule is the wonderful mosaic panorama arranged on the floor of the narthex of the **Episcopal basilica in Heraclea Lyncestis** (turn of the 6th century)³⁰ (Fig. 5), a specimen that was chosen by Gordana Tomašević as a paradigm of the illustration of cosmological principles of Cosma Indicopleust and according to which, it represents the Christian cosmos through its four ideological constituents: the Kingdom of Heaven through the central symmetrical scene, the Paradise through the vegetation, the Earth in a shape of zoomorphic images, as well as the Water depicted through the elements of maritime fauna located on the edge of the composition³¹. At the same time, according to the already mentioned scholar, the illustration of this highly complex philosophical idea derives from the older, pagan notion adjusted to the Christological principles in the definition of the sacral world of religious concepts³². However, Gordana Tomašević did not make an attempt to explain why this complicated iconography is presented in the narthex of the basilica, a space dedicated to the catechumens instead of being executed in the naos, where the believers used to dwell, since they, after participating in the holy mysteries, were the only ones educated sufficiently to comprehend the refined messages of cosmological theories.

30 И. Микулчиќ, *Хераклеја. Антички град во Македонија*, Скопје 2007, 118

31 Г. Цветковиќ-Томашевиќ, *Мозаикој на подот во нартексој на големајта базилика. Опис. Стил. Иконографија. Символизам. Техника. Мајеријали. Конзервација*; Хераклеја III, Битола 1967, 48-63; eadem, *Une mosaïque du Ve siècle de Hérakléa Lynkestis et la question de la formation du style de l'art médiéval. Symbolisme et son reflet sur le style*, Actas del VIII Congress international de arqueologia cristiana, Barcelona 1969, Barcelona 1972, 567-580; eadem, *Mosaïques paléochrétiennes récemment découvertes à Hérakléa Lynkestis*, Notices préliminaires, La mosaïque gréco-romaine, Colloques international II, Vienne 1971, Wien 1975, 389-390; eadem, *Рановизантијски подни мозаици*, Београд 1978, 87-93

32 Г. Цветковиќ-Томашевиќ, *Рановизантијски подни мозаици*, 87-89



Сл. 9 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс (детал)
 Fig. 9 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex (detail)

The answer to this question might be hidden in a less biased theory, which should start from the tasks of the iconographic concept in its communication with the believers, as well as from the symbological connotation of the compositional structure in the frames of which, the pagan and the Christian component are joined in an entirely different manner.

Namely, the catechumens, i. e. the pagans who wanted to be Christianized were, by no means, acquainted with the elements of the pagan iconography, the constituents of which could be used for the transmission of Christian lessons with the help of the old and already recognizable form. On that account, in the center of the composition the most elaborated version of the Psalm of King David 42 was represented (Fig. 6), a scene that illustrates the essential significance of the baptismal immersion for the blissful destiny of Christian believers³³. The substitution of the baptismal spout from God's font with the branched grapevine signifies the link between the Old Testament verses and the allusion in the Gospel of John referring to Christ's soteriological mission for salvation of mankind, commemorated in the Eucharistic rite³⁴. The resurrectional features of the scene shaped in the symmetrically arranged doves as symbols of the celestial exaltation of the souls and the peacocks as expressive emblems of the achieved immortality, nuance the illustration of the Biblical verses with the triumphant tone of the idea of eternal life, acquired through the baptismal regeneration and Eucharistic offerings³⁵. Thus, the depiction of the Psalm 42 in this representation, through the interaction of the iconographic components, grew into a symbolic picture of the Christian church that, through the rite of the Holy sacraments, grants the followers with everlasting life in Heaven.

33 E. Dimitrova, *On the Narthex of the Great Basilica in Heraclea*, *Macedonian Review* 2-3 (1995), 108-109; eadem, *In Through the Inner Door (The Mosaic in the Narthex of the Large Basilica in Heraclea Lyncestis)*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of Scientific Works IV, Niš 2006, 181-182

34 E. Dimitrova, *Coloured Dogma: The Mosaics of Heraclea Lyncestis, A New Interpretation*, In: *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, London (21-26 August 2006), Vol. III, London 2006, 315
35 E. Димитрова, *ЕсхајолоШкиите йораки на ранохристијанската уметност во Македонија*, Религиите и религиските аспекти на материјалната и духовната култура на почвата на Република Македонија (Ед. МАНУ), Скопје 1996, 152



Сл. 10 Епископска базилика - Хераклеја Линкестис, Нартекс (деталј)

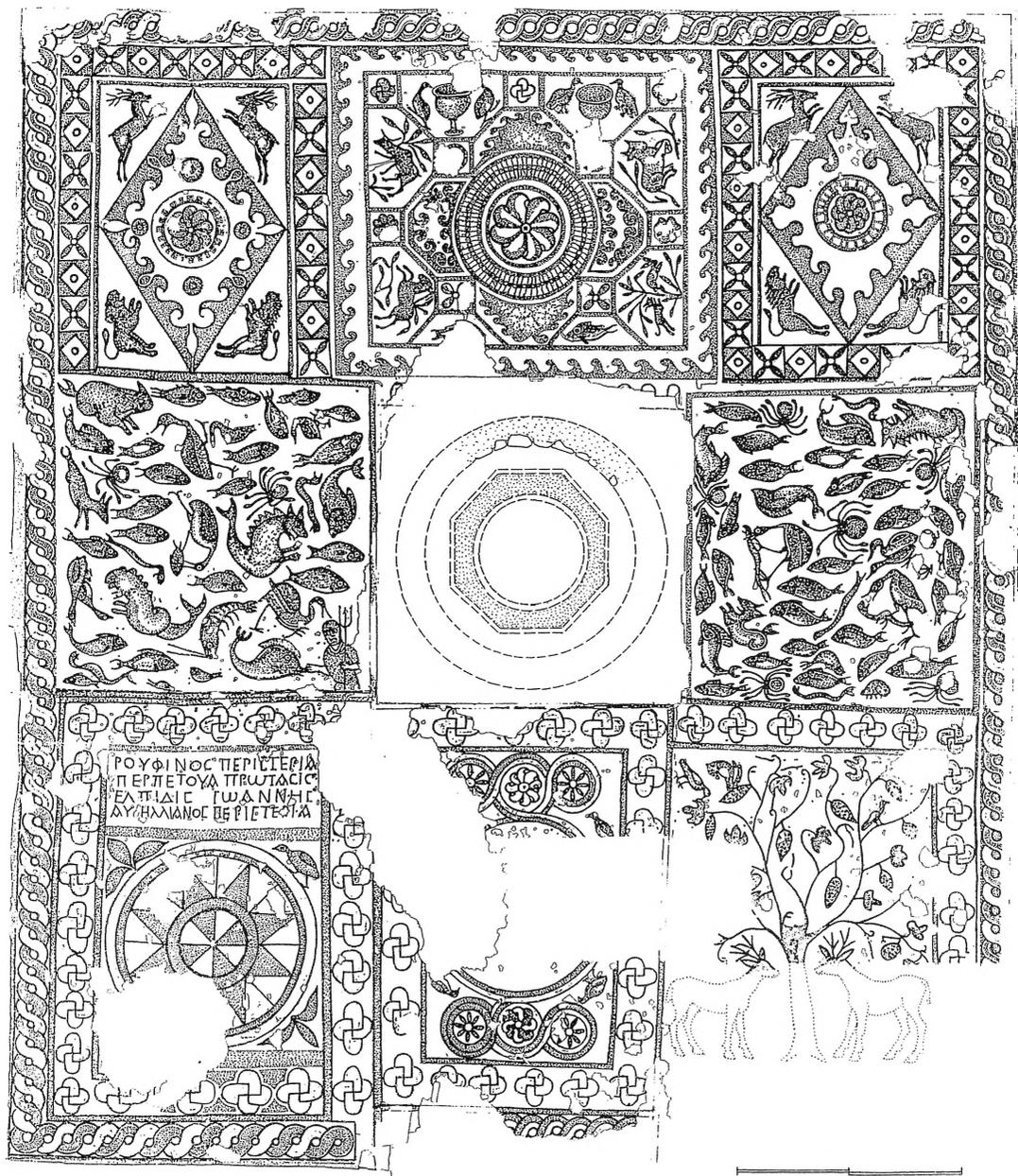
Fig. 10 Episcopal Basilica – Heraclea Lyncestis, Narthex (detail)

The iconographic constellation of the scenes depicted in the side portions of the mosaic display underlined eschatological character. Symbolizing the corporeal death through the recognizable allegorical image of a panther devouring an antelope (Fig. 7), the sequence in the southern section of the representation is supplemented by the picture of an overpowered and tied dog, that, in the context of the funereal connotation of the motif, visualizes the image of the mystical demon of Death – Behemoth (Fig. 8), a Christian replica of the fearsome Cerberus, watcher of the gates in the Kingdom of the dead³⁶. Contrary to the emblematic character of Death in the southern section, in the northern part of the Heraclea mosaic the idea of the inevitable clash between the two symbolic antipodes is illustrated (Fig. 9) - the bull predestined for sacrificial offering and the resurrectional significance of the invincible vigor of the lion, shaped in a powerful picture of Resurrection. Supplemented by the image of the wild goat (Fig. 10) as an iconographic allegory of the sinful deprived of everlasting rejoice in Paradise³⁷, the scene in the northern section of Heraclea mosaic visualizes the eternal battle between life and death, depicts the symbolic interaction between the sacrifice and resurrectional desire and reflects the idea of the sacrificial offering given for the salvation and the celestial privileges.

In the context of the theory on the functional symbolic of the narthex, which, in the frames of the basilical ground plane of Early Christian edifices was conceived as a narrow water barrier, i. e. a Christian replica of the Pagan river of souls, the location and orientation of which represented the passage from the outer, pagan world into

36 E. Dimitrova, *In Through the Inner Door (The Mosaic in the Narthex of the Large Basilica in Heraclea Lyncestis)*, 185

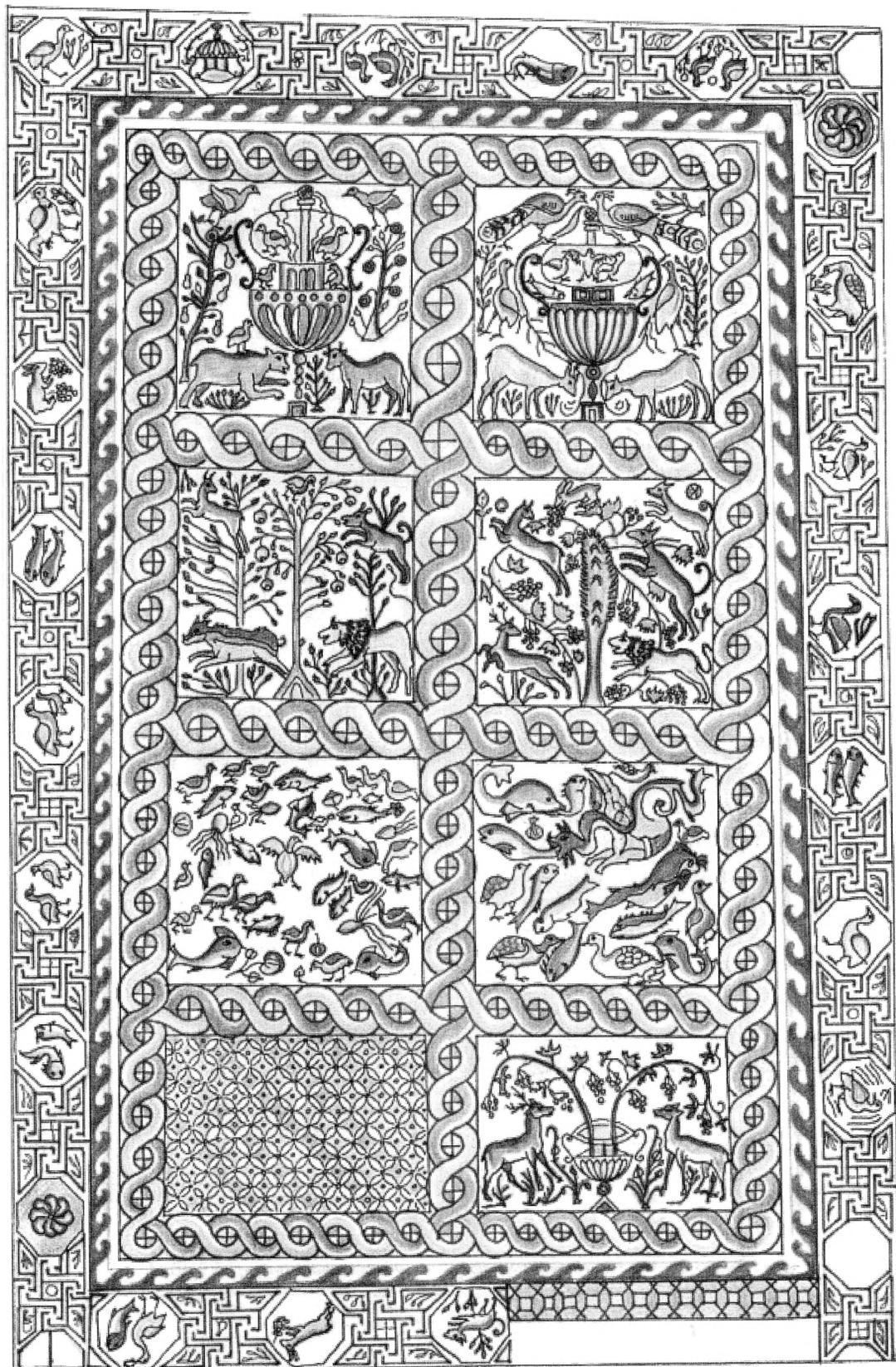
37 *ibidem*, 184



Сл. 11 Палата на Перистерија - Стоби, Трпезарија
Fig. 11 Palace of Peristerias – Stobi, Triclinium

the consecrated Christian space through the ritual of Baptism³⁸, the Heraclea mosaic grows into a metaphoric picture of Christian dogma. Within the thoroughly conceived and sagaciously organized compositional matrix of the scene, the visual emblems of the older belief are transformed into symbolic components of the new religious idea, reflected in an iconographic panorama filled with recognizable optical messages. The images of the grapevine, the antelope, the lion and the bull, the panther and the wild goat, once associated with the cult of Dionysus, the pagan victor over death, in Heraclea became elements of the new and profoundly elaborated conception for a symbolic

38 В. Лилчиќ, *Ранохристијанска црква*, Скопје 2003, 37; idem, *Early Christian Narthex – the Antique River of the Souls*, *Macedonian Heritage* 23 (2004), 77-80; idem, *The Symbolism of the Basilica*, *Macedonian Heritage* 24 (2004), 40-44



Сл. 12 Епископска резиденција - Хераклеја Линкестис, Трпезарија
 Fig. 12 Episcopal Residence – Heraclea Lyncestis, Triclinium

vision of Christian salvation³⁹. Encompassed by a frame allusive to the water barrier that the narthex symbolizes anticipating the baptismal significance of the River of Jordan, the composition consists of three main elements, linked by scenery characteristic of the depiction of the Garden of Eden. In that regard, the scene in the southern section of the mosaic symbolizes Death, the one in the northern part is an allusion to the passage from the earthly death towards the immortal life in Heaven through Christ's benevolent sacrifice and His resurrection, while the central motif visualizes the Rebirth, the beginning of the new life acquired through the baptismal regeneration and earned through the mystical union with the Savior in the ritual of the Holy Eucharist.

The next example that represents yet another argument against the theory on the cosmological character of Early Christian iconography is the mosaic pavement that decorates the Triclinium of the **Palace of Peristerias in Stobi** (turn of the 6th century)⁴⁰ (Fig. 11). Moreover, it is visually highly unconvincing due to the degradation of its iconographic configuration in separate structural units, which contributed to the loss of the basic symmetrical concept of cosmological image. Besides that, due to the lack of floral symbols, one can not recognize the element of Heaven⁴¹; accordingly there is not any depiction of the Cosmos. On the contrary, the eight iconographic segments of the decorative arrangement are bearers of the same idea for transmission of dogmatic lessons through the illustration of Old Testament Psalm 42 as an ode sang in honor of God's mercy and the restless quest for the salvational Well of faith⁴². Within this mosaic ensemble, the depiction of the deer in the illustration of the Psalm also includes the motif of the Tree of Life, which substitutes the central motif of the cantharos. In such iconographic conception, the baptismal water from the Well of God is transformed into a stem abundant in juicy fruits that symbolizes the resurrection, the salvation and the Paradise, where the souls of the believers end their journey, following the Christian lessons and consuming the Eucharistic offerings⁴³.

Included within the wider arrangement of the decorative programme of the triclinium, the depiction of the Psalm of King David 42 sublimates the idea of exaltation of the Christian soul through the salvational immersion into the baptismal water, which, in the middle zone of the decoration, is represented by the elements of the water world. Liberated from earthly temptations depicted by two symmetrical compositions of pairs of lions hunting stags⁴⁴, it prepared its journey towards the heavenly embrace of immortal life. Although the strict symmetry in the arrangement of the iconographic components, characteristic and almost mandatory in the Early Christian times is abandoned in favor of the abundance and variety of the structural design of the compositional unity, the symbological core of the mosaic ensemble did not lose anything of its visual conception, nor of its theological significance. In the context of the symbolic connotation of the

39 E. Dimitrova, *From the Image of Cosmos to Painted Dogma: Heraclea Lyncestis – mosaic pavements*, *Macedonian Heritage* 27 (2006), 12

40 И. Миклучиќ, *Сџобџи*, Скопје 2003, 178

41 Г. Цветковић-Томашевић, *Рановизантијски џодни мозаици*, 44-45

42 E. Dimitrova, *Art And Ritual In the Episcopal Centers of Macedonia Paleocristiana. The Floor Mosaics And the Illustrated Dogma*, XV Congreso Internacional de Arqueologia Cristiana (Toledo 8-12 September 2008), Toledo 2008, 83

43 *ibidem*, 83

44 E. Димитрова, *ЕсхаџолоШкиџе џораки на ранохристијанската умејносџ во Македонија*, 152

composition, the quest for God's well fulfilled with the salvational waves of baptismal water is depicted as acquiring of God's mercy, which will forgive the sins, rinse the bitter temptations and reward the patience of the believers with resurrectional life in Heaven.

The last mosaic specimen, executed in the **Triclinium of the Episcopal residence in Heraclea Lyncestis** (first half of the 6th century) (Fig. 12), which sublimates the features of the two already mentioned ensembles: the one decorating the narthex of the Episcopal basilica at the same site and the other from the Palace of Peristerias in Stobi, is also a highly unconvincing argument in favor of the idea of cosmological impact over the conception of mosaic pavements⁴⁵. In that regard, the disposition of constitutive elements in the design of the edge and the outer frame of the ensemble resembles the model of organization of the compositional frame of the older mosaic, executed in the narthex of the Heraclea Episcopal church⁴⁶. However, the degradation of the unique iconographic structure into separate structural units of the program concept of the mosaic, formulated as square sections, resulted in visual division of the sublimated symbolic context of the depiction in different images with baptismal, Eucharistic, soteriological and eschatological significance, as in the example of the mosaic pavement in Peristerias' residence in Stobi.

In that sense, the baptismal connotation of the executed decoration is accentuated by the double representation of the Psalm of King David 42 with the images of the zoomorphic symbols at the Well of life-giving water, located in the eastern part of the rectangular chamber. In one of these examples, in the concept of which the deer and the doe drink the water pouring at the foot of the cantharos stressing the baptismal initiation of the believers, the affronted peacocks in the upper part of the scene are depicted as allusion to the luxurious landscape of the Garden of Eden, sublimating the resurrectional dimension of the illustrated motif. The scenes of animal chase depicted in the next two square fields of the decoration in the Triclinium and the sublimated "marina" landscape with water creatures fulfilling the further two square sections, illustrate the idea of earthly temptations and the escape from corporeal death through the salvational significance of the water element⁴⁷. Thus, the baptismal component in the illustration of the theological core is upgraded with the visual illusions to the universal dimension of salvation through the soteriological waves of the baptismal water.

On the other hand, the Eucharistic component of the decoration is sublimated in the depiction of the only illustration of the Psalm of King David 42 in the western part of the chamber, depicted in its genuine iconographic variant. Symbolizing the Holy Eucharist of Christ's followers and the most solemn ritual of the Church through inclusion of the motif of the grapevine stemming from the cantharos, this scene grew into a true allegory of the Communion of the believers, who drink the generous nectar of Christ's Passion⁴⁸. Representing the believers who drink the salvational blood of the Crucified shed on the cross of Golgotha and transformed into a communion wine in honor of Christ's suffering on Good Friday, this variant in the illustration of the

45 Г. Цветковић-Томашевић, *Рановизантијски подни мозаици у Епископском двору у Хераклеји Линкеситис*, Београд 2002, 77-79

46 E. Dimitrova, *From the Image of Cosmos to Painted Dogma: Heraclea Lyncestis – mosaic pavements*, 17-18

47 eadem, *Coloured Dogma: The Mosaics of Heraclea Lyncestis, A New Interpretation*, 314

48 eadem, *Есхатолошки и пораци на ранохристијанската уметност во Македонија*, 150

42nd psalm sublimes the eschatological expression of the depicted motif. Thus, in the specific iconographic assemblage of the decorative arrangement in the Heraclea Triclinium the fundamental messages of the faith are visualized through the idea of the Holy sacraments that, defeating death, bestow immortal life on the believers in the celestial peace of heavenly eternity.

* * *

Besides the fictional attraction of older theories, which, starting from the idea of the mandatory transfer of Metropolitan painterly matrixes in the provincial artistic production, were in a constant search of ecclesiastic pamphletism or elite religious propaganda, the representative works of art from the epoch of Emperor Justinian still remain an exciting inspiration for the scholars. Marked by the luxurious illustrativeness in the explication of historic messages, as well as by picturesque exposition of didactical lessons, the mosaic ensembles created in the Episcopal centers located far from the Metropolis generated authentic iconographic models for absorption of the religious practice in the sphere of visual creation. The social dimension of the mosaic panels in San Vitale which radiate with the idea of ecclesiastical and imperial Concordia of Byzantium, the subtle symbolic idiom in the dome arrangement of Arian baptistery, the complex iconographic constellation of the apse mosaic in Sancti Sancti Cosma e Damiano in Rome and the refined theological composite of the mosaics in Heraclea and Stobi, the metaphoric picturesque of which illustrates the Christian sacraments, speak in favor of the iconographic preferences of church dignitaries in the border areas of Emperor Justinian's state. Abandoning the patent models and traditional matrixes and rejecting the standard ideological principles of the Metropolitan's school, they enabled the blossom of original creative ideas and artistic invention in the highly fertile medium of mosaic production.

Резиме:**Византија на дисплеј:
шест мозаични претстави од времето на Јустинијан I**

Епохата на императорот Јустинијан I е обележана со гламурозниот антички вкус во естетскиот приод кон уметничката концепција, како и со пречистената ортодоксна инспирација во иконографската структура на мозаичните ансамбли. Во тој контекст, комплексниот симболички систем на уметничката изведба, базиран врз рафинираните догматски алузии во илустрацијата на библиската и на историската иконографија, го достигнува врвот на повеќезначната визуелна екпликација во презентацијата на религиозните идеи. Наспроти размислувањата на постарите истражувачи коишто ја протежираа теоријата за доминантна рефлексija на Цариградските теолошки идеи и иконографски матрици во својата интерпретација на мозаичните аранжмани, ние се обидуваме да го свртиме вниманието кон попродабочените начини на истражување на ремек-делата од уметничката продукција на VI век. Во таа насока, ја истакнуваме социјалната димензија на портретите на царот Јустинијан и царицата Теодора во Сан Витале во Равена, чија улога е да ги претставува територијалниот интегритет, религиозното единство и културниот просперитет на Ромејската империја. Исто така, укажуваме на рафинираниот иконографски концепт на Христовата биполарна визуелна појава во Аријанската крстилница во Равена, наспроти идеите за неговата стандардна библиска интерпретација и литургиско значење. И покрај упатувањата на некои истражувачи на Цариградското извориште на апсидалната декорација во црквата Св. Кузман и Дамјан во Рим, нејзината иконографска констелација и постоечките паралели ја откриваат карактеристичната “западна” матрица во експозицијата на симболичните пораки. Конечно, рафинираниот теолошки асамблаж на композициските елементи во изведбата на мозаичните павименти во Стоби и Хераклеја Линкестис, чија метафорична пиктуралност ги илустрира христијанските сакраменти, а не високопарните филозофски идеи на христијанската космологија, сведочат за автентичните иконографски модели во екпликацијата на религиозната догма. Напуштајќи ги традиционалните стандарди на иконографскиот израз карактеристичен за Византиската престолнина, овие ремек-дела на уметничкото творештво овозможиле процут на оригиналните креативни идеи во репрезентативната и високобуџетна сфера на мозаичната продукција.