

LATE BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURAL CERAMICS OF EPIRUS AND MACEDONIA¹

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Abstract: The paper provides an overview of the ceramoplastic architectural décor of the Late Byzantine churches of Epirus and areas influenced by Epirote architectural tradition. The wide specific and iconographic vocabulary of the Epirote decoration includes a variety of ornaments made of simple bricks and of specially cut bricks, inscriptions, facing masonry, immured glazed vessels, polychrome tiles, and relief icons. Some of these elements are influenced by the artistic tradition of Italy.

In the last decades of the 13th century, due to the migration of building workshops, the architectural tradition of Epirus spread to other centers of Palaeologan architecture, particularly to Aegean Macedonia – Thessaloniki, Veria, Kastoria, and present-day North Macedonia – Ohrid and Prilep. In each of these centers, the set of decorative elements used is different, which makes it possible to trace the peculiarities of the assimilation of the architectural tradition of Epirus in neighboring regions.

Keywords: architectural ceramics, Epirus, Macedonia, Late Byzantine architecture.

The most striking feature of Late Byzantine architecture is the abundance and variety of façade *décor*. In contrast to the dominant interior with harsh and ascetic façades, characteristic of the Byzantine architecture of previous centuries, in the Late Byzantine period, more and more attention was paid to the church façades. A variety of techniques, shapes, polychrome effects, and active usage of ceramics inserts – all of this gives the façades elegance and lightness, dematerialized massiveness of the walls. Such a feature not only expressed a new aesthetic conception but also provided a tool for identifying more specific processes in the architectural development. The differences in the masonry technique, in the usage of certain

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characteristic decorative elements, clearly reflect the regional originality, and sometimes help to trace the same building workshops.²

The wide specific and iconographic vocabulary of the Late Byzantine façade decoration is based on the use of architectural ceramics. There are simple and special-cut brick ornaments, glazed ceramic inserts, and special vessels that have been arranged in complex, rich decorative programs on the flat wall surfaces. It was the development of a provincial branch of Byzantine architecture, which was not linked with metropolitan tradition, and a significant contribution belonged to the architectural tradition of Epirus. During the Latin occupation of the Empire (1204–1261), the building activity decreased in Constantinople. Intensive construction in the Byzantine Balkans continued in the independent Despotate of Epirus, ruled by the ambitious dynasty of Komnenos Doukas, who wanted to take the throne of the Empire and competed with Nicea, where the imperial court immigrated.³ In the first half of the 13th century, a fairly specific regional architectural school was formed there based on the Middle Byzantine traditions of the pre-Helladic and Helladic schools. Because of close contacts with Italy, which arose due to geographical and family ties, the influence of the Western European architectural and artistic practices was very tangible in Epirus and was combined with the Byzantine traditions.

The problems of the origins and influences of the regional architectural school of Epirus have been studied by professors Panagiotis Vokotopoulos and George Velenis, who have published several enlightening articles and given a brief description of typology, morphology, building techniques, and façade decor applied in Epirus⁴. One can highlight some sustainable hallmarks forming the basis of the Epirote school, such as the predominance of basilicas (especially basilicas with transept and transverse vault instead of a dome), prismatic apses and triangular pediments in the cross arms, special sort of *cloisonné* masonry, compositional asymmetry, a horizontal system of the organization of façades with a frieze-shaped decoration, and characteristic decorative vocabulary including lots of various architectural ceramics.

2 Sl. Čurčić, "The Role of Late Byzantine Thessaloniki in Church Architecture in the Balkans", *Dumbarton Oak Papers*, 2003, Vol. 57, 65–84; Idem. "The Epirote Input in the Architecture of Byzantine Macedonia and of Serbia Around 1300", *Αφείρομα στον ακαδημικού Παναγιώτη Λ. Βοκοτοπούλου*, Αθήνα, 2015, 127–140; J. Trkulja, *Aesthetics and Symbolism of Late Byzantine Church Façades, 1204–1453*, Princeton, 2004; E. Bakalova, "Messemyria's Churches in the Context of Late Byzantine Architecture. Historiographical Survey", *ΣΟΦΙΑ. Сборник статей по искусству Византии и Древней Руси в честь А. И. Комеча*, Москва, 2006, 547–572; С. В. Мальцева, "Пути и формы западноевропейских влияний в архитектуре Сербии XIV–XV веков", *Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства: сб. науч. статей*, Вып. 6, Санкт-Петербург, 2017, 185–196; Idem. "Храмовое зодчество Моравской Сербии и основные направления архитектуры палеологовского периода", *Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства: сб. науч. статей*, Вып. 7, Санкт-Петербург, 2017, 301–320; М. Л. Заборина, "Фасадная декорация палеологовских храмов Салоник: специфика и эволюция локального метода", *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, том 28, №2, 73–88.

3 N. Donald, *The Despotate of Epirus*, Oxford, 1957.

4 G. Velenis, "Building Techniques and External Decoration During the 14th Century in Macedonia", *L'art de Thessalonique et des pays balkaniques et les courants spirituels au XIV^e siècle*, ed. R. Samardžić, Belgrade, 1987, 95–105; Idem. "Thirteenth-Century Architecture in the Despotate of Epirus: The Origins of the School", *Studenica et l'art byzantine au tour de l'annee 1200*, Beograd, 1988, 279–284; Idem. *Ερμηνεία του εξωτερικού διακόσμου στην βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική*. Θεσσαλονίκη, 1984; P. Vokotopoulos, "Art Under the Despotate of Epirus", *Epirus: 4000 Years of Greek History and Civilization*, 1997, 224–229; Idem. "Church architecture in the Despotate of Epirus: The problem of Influences", *Зограф*, 27, Београд, 1998–99, 72–92.

The main reference points in the development of the Epirote School were also noted by Panagiotis Vocotopoulos and George Velenis. In the 1204–1230s, under the first rulers of the Komnenos Doukas dynasty, the Middle Byzantine foundations were still strong. During the reign of Michael II, in the 1230–1260s, the regional architectural tradition was formed. Then, the time of Nikephoros I and his successors, after 1267/8 and till the 1310s, coincides with the revival of the Byzantine Empire under the rule of the Palaeologos dynasty, when features of a new style already appear in the architecture of Epirus. At this time, active migrations of building workshops to the new artistic centers of the revived Empire have begun. The churches with remarkable features of the Epirote School emerge in the territory of modern-day North Macedonia (in Ohrid and Prilep) and Aegean Macedonia (Thessaloniki, Veria and Kastoria). The similarities of these monuments with the architecture of Epirus show the wide area of distribution of the Epirus tradition outside the Despotate during the Palaeologan period.

The spread of the influence of the Epirote building practices in the architecture of the Palaeologan period is an issue that has been extremely poorly studied and is just beginning to be developed⁵. The architectural centers of the Palaeologan era – Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Veria, and this is especially true of the centers on the periphery of the Byzantine Empire, namely Ohrid and Prilep, on the territory of present-day North Macedonia. The difficult path of the formation of the local variant of the Palaeologan style is due to the specifics of the historical situation: during the 13th century, these lands passed from hand to hand between the rulers of Serbia, Bulgaria, the Despotate of Epirus and the Empire of Nicaea. After the restoration of the Byzantine Empire in 1261, these lands remained its part, but in 1282 the expansion of the increasingly growing Serbia began under the rule of King Milutin, who seized the lands north of the Ohrid–Prilep–Štip borderline, and in 1334 the entire territory of present-day North Macedonia becomes part of Stefan Dušan's Empire.

So, the Epirote tradition was only one of the sources of influence, and it is easiest to identify its echoes in the architecture of Aegean and North Macedonia in the late 13th – 14th century on the example of façade decoration. Separate attempts in this direction were undertaken by Slobodan Ćurčić⁶ and Gojko Subotić⁷, who gave some remarks on the kind and iconography of ceramoplastic façade decoration, and established some connections between Epirus, Aegean and North Macedonia. A great contribution belongs to Konstantinos Tsouris, who carefully studied the decoration of Northern Greece⁸. The regional specificity and general trends of Late Byzantine façade *décor* were studied by Jelena Trkulja, who described basic compo-

5 Sl. Ćurčić, "The Epirote Input in the Architecture of Byzantine Macedonia and of Serbia Around 1300", *Αφείρομα στον ακαδημικού Παναγιώτη Λ. Βοκοτοπούλου*, Αθήνα, 2015, 127–140; E. Χατζητρίφωνος, "Το καμπαναριό του ναού του Αγίου Γεωργίου της Ομοφροκκλησίας κοντά στην Καστοριά. Αρχιτεκτονική προσέγγιση", *Αφείρομα στον ακαδημικού Παναγιώτη Λ. Βοκοτοπούλου*, Αθήνα, 2015, 141–154; М. Л. Заворина, «Эпирская традиция в поздневизантийской архитектуре Северной Македонии», *Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства: Сб. науч. статей. Вып. 11*, Санкт-Петербург, 2021, с. 468–479.

6 Sl. Ćurčić, "Articulation of Church Facades During the First Half of the Fourteenth Century", in *Vizantijska umetnost početkom XIV veka*, ed. S. Petković, Belgrade, 1978, 17–27.

7 Г. Суботић, „Керамопластични украс“, *Историја њимењене уметности код Срба I*. Београд, 1977, 44–48.

8 Κ. Τσοῦρις, "Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος των υστεροβυζαντινών της Βορειοδυτικής Ελλάδος", Καβάλα, 1988.

sitional principles and kinds of Epirote ceramoplastic decoration⁹. A new research method aimed at finding hidden narratives and symbols in the brick ornaments has been used by Jasmina Ćirić, particularly in relation to the churches of contemporary North Macedonia¹⁰. All the mentioned works provide some valuable remarks, but there is no attempt to focus specifically on identifying the common in the decorative vocabulary of the 13th–century Epirus and of the architectural centers of the Palaeologan era.

In this paper we want to provide a detailed overview of the various types of architectural ceramics of Epirus and the areas where its architectural tradition was subsequently developed in the late 13th – early 14th centuries – namely in the Southern part (Greek) and the Northern part (Slavic) of Macedonia with such artistic and architectural centers as Thessaloniki, Kastoria, Veria, Ohrid, and Prilep. The focus of this paper will be the iconographic diversity of façade *décor*, while other related issues like its origins, symbolism, and meaning remain outside the scope of our consideration.

First of all, it must be emphasized that almost none of the decorative vocabulary of Epirote tradition was reinvented, but was well known to the provincial Greek line of Byzantine architecture from the Middle Byzantine period¹¹. But it was in 13th–century Epirus where these achievements were accumulated and developed into complex and rich compositions. The set of ceramoplastic patterns generally remained the same but could vary from monument to monument. The abundance and multiplicity of *décor* depended on the financial capabilities of the donors, on the one hand, and on the skills of the craftsmen, on the other hand.

SIMPLE BRICK PATTERNS

Ornaments formed with plain bricks inserted into mortar became widespread (Figure 1). There are many patterns, simple and more complex, which were laid out with extended stripes.

The **meander** was known from the 11th century in Helladic School and also in Constantinople¹². It becomes more complicated in the 13th century, two variations appear – a directional meander, as far example on the east façade of the South Church of the Monastery of Lips in Constantinople, and an undirected one – the simple meander (Figure 2)¹³. The last one was fixed in the Epirote tradition and its sphere of influence. The wide bands of simple meander run along the façades of numerous monuments: the church of St. Basil in Arta (the late 13th century)¹⁴, Kato

9 J. Trkulja, *Aesthetics and Symbolism of Late Byzantine Church Façades, 1204–1453*, Princeton, 2004.

10 J. Ćirić, “Beyond the Wall: Structure and meaning of East Façade of Perivleptos Church in Ohrid”, *Самоиловаѡа држава и Визанѡија: исѡорија, леѡенга, ѡпрагиѡија, наследсѡво. Зборник на ѡрудови од Меѡународноѡи симѡозиум «Деновина Ју-сѡиниан I»*, Скопје, 17–18 октомври, 2014, Уред. М. Панов, Скопје, 2015, 162–172; Idem, “Brick Substance at Zaum Church in Ohrid”, *Patrimonium.MK*, Year 6, №11, 2013, 99–109; Idem, On the Imitation (μίμησις) of Antiquity: Opus Reticulatum at the East Façade of St. John Kaneo Church in Ohrid”, *Niš and Byzantium XVII*, 2019, 271–284.

11 P. Vokotopoulos, “Church architecture in the Despotate of Epirus: The problem of Influences”, *Зограф*, 27, Београд, 1998–99, 72–92; Γ. Βελένης, *Ερμηνεία του εξωτερικού διακόσμου στην βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική*. Θεσσαλονίκη, 1984.

12 J. Trkulja, Op.cit, 64–68; Г. Суботић, Op.cit,

13 K. Τσούρις, Op.cit, 157–162.

14 Α. Ορλάνδος, “Ο Άγιος Βασίλειος της Άρτης”, *Αρχείον των Βυζαντινών μνημείων της Ελλάδος*, 2, 1936, 115–122, 129–130; Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*. Ιωάννινα, 2012, 65–72; Idem, *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα και τα μνημεία της*, Αθήνα, 2002, 125–130.



Fig. 1

Panagia near Arta (mid-13th century)¹⁵, the Red Church in Voulgareli (1293–4),¹⁶ St. Demetrius in Veles (the last decades of the 13th century)¹⁷, St. Demetrius in Prilep (1290s)¹⁸, the Church of Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295),¹⁹ and so on.

There are several examples of double-meander, where the motive is duplicated. The most illustrative is the Church of St. Nicholas Rhodias near Arta (the early 13th century), the Church of St. Basil, Parigoritissa in Arta (the late 13th century)²⁰, the

15 Α. Ορλάνδος “Η Μονή τῆς Κάτω Παναγιάς”, *Αρχεῖον των Βυζαντινῶν μνημείων της Ελλάδος*, 2, 1936, 70–87; Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεῖα της Ηπείρου*, 55–64.

16 Η. Hallensleben, “Die architekturgeschichtliche Stellung der Kirche Sv. Bogorodica Peribleptos (Sv. Kliment)”, *Musée Archéologique de Macédoine. Recueil des Travaux*, VI–VII, 1967–1974, 297–316; Β. Παπαδοπούλου, Η Κόκκινη Εκκλησιά στο Βουργαρέλι της Αρτας. Στοιχεία από τη νεότερη έρευνα”, *Τζουμερκιώτικα Χρονικά*, τόμ. 12, 2011, 185–199.

17 С. Коруновски, *Црковна ѡа архитектура во Македонија во XIII век*. Докторска дисертација, Скопје, 2000, 69–83.

18 В. Ристић, „Црква Светог Димитрија у Прилепу”, *Синџеза*, № 3–4, Крушевац, 1979, 186–199; С. Коруновски, *Црковна ѡа архитектура во Македонија во XIII век*. 153–166; Α.Β. Захарова, Ε.С. Дятлова, „О строителях и художниках, работавших в македонском Прилепе в конце XIII века”, *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, том 28, №2, 46–72.

19 Η. Hallensleben, *Op.cit.*; Ι. Заров, „Архитектурата на манастирската црква Св. Богородица Перивлепта во контекст на тенденциите на византиската архитектура од XIII–XIV век”, *Паџримониум*, 7–8. Скопје, 2010, 161–169.

20 L. Theis, *Die Architektur der Kirche der Panaghia Paregoritissa in Arta, Epirus*, Amsterdam, 1991. Idem. “Die Architektur der Panaghia Paregoretissa”, *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για το Δεσποτάτο της Ηπείρου*, Άρτα, 27–31 Μαΐου 1992, Αθήνα, 1992, 475–493; Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεῖα της Ηπείρου*, 73–94; Idem. *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα και τα μνημεῖα της*, 131–161.



Fig. 2

Church of Peribleptos in Ohrid, and the south façade of the St. Nicholas church in Prilep (1298)²¹.

A simplified version of the meander is the stripes of a **stepped ornament**, which consists of a sequence of right angles resembling steps and is present in the façades of: the Church of St. Demetrius at Kypseli (1216–1310) in Epirus²², the Church of the Holy Apostles (1310–1314) and the Church of St. Catherine in Thessaloniki (1315–1320)²³, and the church of Holy Mother of God Zahumska near Ohrid (1361)²⁴.

Along with the meander, wide friezes of the so-called **herringbone** ornament stretched on the entire surface of façades or adorning the top of the apses were very

21 В.Кораћ, „О цркви Светог Николе у Прилепу“, *Зборник радова Византџолошког института*, №45, 2008, 117–125; Коруневски С. *Црковна архитектура во Македонија во XIII век*, 48–61; J. Ćirić, “Brickwork of St. Nicolas Church in Prilep: Reading the Texture of the Rhomb”, *Days of Justinian I, 4th international scientific symposium*, Skopje, 2016, 148–156.

22 Π. Βοκοτόπουλος, *Η μονή του Αγίου Δημήτριου στο Φανάρι. Συμβολή στην μελέτη της αρχιτεκτονικής του Δεσποτάτου της Ηπείρου*, Αθήνα, 2012; Π. Βοκοτόπουλος, Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Η Βυζαντινή μονή Αγίου Δημητρίου στην Κυψέλη Νομού Πρεβέζης, Πρεβέζα, Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού, 8^η Εφορεία Βυζαντινών Αρχαιοτήτων*, 2007.

23 M.L. Rautman, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, PhD Dissertation, University of Indiana, 1984; N. Nikonanos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies Publ., 1986; Γ. Βελένης, “Οι Άγιοι Απόστολοι Θεσσαλονίκης και η σχολή της Κωνσταντινούπολης”, *Akten des XVI Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongresses, Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1981, vol.32–4, 457–467; E. Hadjityrphonos, “Saint Catherine’s Church in Thessaloniki, Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture”, *Έρως Κτίστης. Μνήμη Χαράλαμπου Μπούρα*. Τ. 1. Αθήνα, 2018, 265–282; М. Заворина, „Фасадная декорация палеологовских храмов Салоник: специфика и эволюция локального метода“, *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, том 28, №2, 73–88.

24 В. Кораћ, *Ћоменици монументалне српске архитектуре XIV в. у Поваргарју*, Београд, 2003, 243–258; J. Ćirić, “Brick Substance at Zaum Church in Ohrid”, *Patriomium*. MK, Year 6, №11, 2013, 99–109.

popular. There are numerous examples: the churches of St. Basil in Arta, Vlacherna near Arta (1224–1230)²⁵, Taxiarches in Thessaloniki (the second half of the 13th century)²⁶, the church of Peribleptos in Ohrid, and so on.

Sometimes the wide stripe of the **stitch pattern** replaces the meander and herringbone on the top of the apses or façades, such as in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki. This pattern borrowed from textiles is also found in a simpler form, reminiscent of cross stitches usually used to fill flat niches, as, for example, on the east façade of the St. Nicholas Orphanos church (the first quarter of the 14th century)²⁷, or in the St. Catherine in Thessaloniki and the St. Theodora in Arta (circa 1270s)²⁸.

Most of the west façade of the Church of St. Theodora is densely filled with several continuous rows of herringbone that resemble vertical zigzags. Thin bands of **zigzags** are another pattern which was actively used in the façades of the Churches of Panagia Bryoni near Arta (1238)²⁹, Taxiarches in Kostaniani (second half of the 13th c.)³⁰ and Taxiarches in Thessaloniki.

In the Church of St. Nicholas in Prilep, a triple zigzag runs along the façades. Below we can see another popular motive – the so-called “**diamond motive**”, which consists of several concentric rhombuses with a small brick square in the center³¹. The layering and pulsation of the pattern and its multiple repetitions impart dynamics to the façades. The same motive can be seen in Parigoritissa in Arta and in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki.

The same “diamond band” crowns the façades of the nearby Church of St. Peter in Prilep extensively dated to the 14th century. The similarity of the decorative motives themselves and the peculiarities of execution suggests that both of those churches were built by the same craftsmen.³²

Similar “diamonds”, but executed in a slightly different manner, appears on the apse of the Church of St. Sava in Veria (after 1334)³³.

As a variation of the “diamond motive”, there are **rhombuses with a cross** in the middle, which are used to fill the blind arches or flat niches, as was the case in the church of the Holy Apostles (the central apse), or to fill the spandrels, such as on the side façades of St. Catherine church in Thessaloniki. The diamonds with crossed ornaments are placed in the ends of the pediments of the Church of Holy Mother of God Zahumska near Ohrid. In a simpler version, where there are only vertical

25 B. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 99–108; Idem, *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα και τα μνημεία της*, 69–86; Idem, *Η Βλαχέρνα της Άρτας*. Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού, Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων, Άρτα, 2015.

26 Α. Ξυγγόπουλος, *Τέσσαρες μικροί ναοί της Θεσσαλονίκης...*, 5–24.

27 Α. Ξυγγόπουλος, *Τέσσαρες μικροί ναοί της Θεσσαλονίκης εκ των χρόνων των Παλαιολόγων*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1952, 29–44.

28 B. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 41–54; Idem, *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα και τα μνημεία της*, 45–55.

29 Π. Βοκοτόπουλος, “Παρατηρήσεις επί της Παναγίας του Μπρυώνη”, *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον*, 28, 1973, Α, 159–168; B. Παπαδοπούλου, *Η Βυζαντινή Άρτα...*, 87–90; Idem, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 127–130.

30 B. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 183–188.

31 Σ. Καλοπίση–Βέρτη, Μ. Παναγιωτίδη–Κεσίσογλου, *Πολύγλοσσο εικονογραφημένο λεξικό όρων Βυζαντινής αρχιτεκτονικής και γλυπτικής*. Ηρακλείο, 2010, 172; J. Trkulja, Op. cit., 44.

32 Α.В. Захарова, Е.С. Дятлова, „О строителях и художниках, работавших в македонском Прилепе в конце XIII века“, 43–49.

33 Π. Παυλίδου, *Η αρχιτεκτονική των ναών της Βεροίας κατά τον 14^ο αιώνα*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2013, 59–63

brick inserts inside rhombuses instead of crosses, this pattern appears on the apse of St. John Kaneo in Ohrid (circa 1270–1280s)³⁴.

In a modified form, the “diamond motive” is found on the west façade of the Church of St. Theodora in Arta. There are rhombuses that visually merge into hexagons forming something like an optical illusion.

Another simple brick motive is the **grid pattern** which consists of diagonally positioned intersecting bricks forming a grid.

On the apse of the Church of St. Sava in Veria, the grid motive can be found in a complicated version with double diagonal brick lines of the pattern and with irregular rhombuses filled with stones³⁵.

The motive resembling a **basketweave** consists of square sections filled with two or three parallel bricks³⁶. It is used to fill blind arches or flat niches, as we can see in the Church of St. Catherine in Thessaloniki or in the Church of the Dormition in Paramythia (the second half of the 13th century)³⁷.

The **checkerboard pattern** is made of small vertical bricks alternating with sections filled with mortar. It is present, for example, on the façades of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki.

The motive of the **right angles** layered on top of each other became popular in Epirus, especially from the second half of the 13th century. It is used mainly to decorate the ends of triangular pediments: from the top, these angles diverge in both directions and descend stepwise. There are numerous examples of such a kind in Epirus: the pediments of the Churches of St. Theodora in Arta, Kato Panagia, the Red Church in Voulgareli, the Church of St. George in Omorfokklisia near Kastoria (1295–1317), the destroyed Church of Panagia at Preventza (the second half of the 13th century)³⁸.

The **sunbursts** are another well-known but not so often used motive. It appears as a circle made of radially arranged bricks. These disks are located on the east façade of the Church of St. Demetrius at Kypseli, on the west façade of St. Theodora Church in Arta, on the east façades of St. Panteleimon and of the Holy Apostles churches in Thessaloniki, and on the dome of Church of St. Nicholas Rhodias.³⁹

There is a unique motive imitating sprouting branches on the north side of the main apse of the Church of Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki. Jelena Trkulja interpreted it as the “**Tree of Life**”⁴⁰ (Figure 3). The Church of the Holy Apostles is the first example of this motive and it was probably an invention of local craftsmen. Later the same pattern appears in North Macedonia – in the Church of Archangels in Štip

34 П. Миљковиќ–Пепек, „Црквата Св. Јован Богослов–Канео во Охрид“, *Културно наследство III*, Скопје, 1967, №4, 67–124; Коруновски С. *Црковна ѓа архитектуре во Македонија*, 84–90, 195–200.

35 Θ. Παπαζώτος, *Η Βέροια και οι ναοί της (11^{ος}–18^{ος} αι)*, Αθήνα, 1994, 181–182; Π. Παυλίδου, *Η αρχιτεκτονική των ναών της Βεροίας κατά τον 14^ο αιώνα*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2013, 59–63.

36 Σ. Καλοπίση–Βέρτη, Μ. Παναγιωτίδη–Κεσίσογλου, *Op. cit.*, 165.

37 Α. Πασάλη, “Η Μεγάλη Παναγιά στην Παραμυθιά Θεσπρωτίας”, *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 19, 1996–97, 69–393; Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 229–232.

38 Π. Βοκοτόπουλος, “Ο ναός της Παναγίας στην Πρεβεντζα στη Ακαρνανίας”, *Byzantium. Tribute to Anreas N. Stratos*, Athens, 1986, I, 251–275.

39 Κ. Τσούρις, *Op.cit.*, 139–140; J. Ciric, “Solar Discs in the Architecture of Byzantine Constantinople: Examples and Parallels”, *International Symposium in Honour of Emeritus Professor George Velenis*, Thessaloniki, 4–7 October 2017, Αθήνα, 2021, 583–597.

40 J. Trkulja, *Op. cit.*, 189–190.



Fig. 3

(1332) and in the Church of St. Nicholas in Čhelopek (circa 1337–1347).⁴¹ Thus, this makes it possible to assume that, among other builders, the building workshop from Thessaloniki worked here.

Among other things, the type of masonry construction called *opus spicatum* (literally “spiked work”), which was already known in ancient Rome, was also used as a

⁴¹ В. Кораћ, *Ћоменџи монументалне српске архџтектуре XIV века у Повардарју*, 81–108; С. Габелић, *Челойек. Црква Св. Николе (XIV и XIX век)*, Београд: Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, 2017.

decorative element in Epirus.⁴² It could fill the tympana of the blind arches, as on the south apse of Kato Panagia near Arta, or narrow vertical space between pilasters as, for example, on the north apse of the Church of Taxiarches in Thessaloniki. It could also stretch with a wide frieze along the entire façade, as we can see on the south façade of the Church of St. Demetrius in Prilep.

In addition to ornaments, **brick dedicatory inscriptions** on the façades were also laid out. This is a very characteristic feature of the Epirus 13th-century architecture. Such inscriptions contain information about the donors, dates, and dedication of the church. They have been preserved in a number of Epirus churches: on the ends of the transept in Panagia Bryoni, Kato Panagia, St. Demetrius at Kypseli, on the west façade of the Church of Panagia at Preventza, and also on the west façade of the exonarthex of St. Sophia in Ohrid.⁴³ In abbreviated form, as monograms, they are present on the west façade of the exonarthex of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, on the main apses of the Churches of St. Cyricus and Julitta (1330–1351) and of St. Sava (after 1334) in Veria⁴⁴.

SPECIALLY CUT BRICK ORNAMENTS

Another kind of ceramoplastic decoration is typesetting ribbons of specially cut brick ornaments. This is a characteristic feature of the Greek branch of Byzantine architecture known from previous centuries. In Epirus, this type of decor was especially popular during the Michael II era (1230s–1260s). On the longitudinal side of a wet brick, a certain pattern was carved out, and then dried curved bricks were immersed into mortar one by one forming thin bands⁴⁵. There are several basic patterns: S-shaped, imitating a twisted rope, key-shaped, the disepsilon (in the form of a double Greek letter 'epsilon' – 'ε'), and a pattern resembling beads (a chain of several circles with holes in the middle) (Figure 4). The latter is quite rare and can be found, for example, in Kato Panagia near Arta, in the Holy Apostles and in St. Catherine in Thessaloniki. All the others mentioned can be found in large numbers and variations in the Kato Panagia, in the exonarthex of the St. Theodora (1270s), in the Parigoritissa (1294–96), in the Vlacherna, in the church of St. Basil in Arta.

In the Church of St. George in Omorphokklisia near Kastoria,⁴⁶ on the top of the east façade, there appears an interesting and rare motive – a pigtail of intertwining S-shaped bricks.

It is worth mentioning separately a rare kind of ceramoplastic decoration close to the *champlevé* enamelling technique: a complex ornament is cut out on the face of

42 Σ. Καλοπίση–Βέρτη, Μ. Παναγιωτίδη–Κεσίσογλου, *Op.cit.*, 173.

43 М. Злоковић, „Старе цркве у областима Преспе и Охрида”, *Сѡаринар*, 1925, 115–149; B. Schellewald, *Die architektur der Sophienkirche in Ohrid*, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn, 1986; B. Cipan, *St. Sophia – The Cathedral Church of the Ohrid Archbishop. A Chronology of the Architecture*. Skopje, 1996.

44 Θ. Παπαζώτος, *Η Βέροια και οι ναοί της (11^{ος}–18^{ος} αι)*, 178–181; Π. Παυλίδου, *Η αρχιτεκτονική των ναών της Βεροίας κατά τον 14^ο αιώνα*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2013.

45 J. Trkulja, *Op. cit.*, 59–61; K. Tsouris, *Op.cit.*, 117–138; P. Vocotopoulos, “Church architecture in the Despotate of Epirus: The problem of Influences”, *Зораф*, 27, Београд, 1998–99, 72–92, 87–88; Г. Суботић, *Op.cit.*, 47.

46 D. Nicol, “Two Churches of Western Macedonia”, *Byzantinischen Zeitschrift*, 49, 1956, 96–105; Кисас, *Оморфоклсија. Зигне слике цркве Свеѡиої Ѓорђа код Касѡорије*, Београд, 2008.



Fig. 4

the ceramic tile. Such tiles were found in the Epirus churches – in the Pantanassa and in the Vlacherna⁴⁷, but they are absent in Macedonia.

CERAMOPLASTIC VESSELS

The use of ceramic vessels that were made of clay specifically for architectural decoration is of particular interest. First of all, there are quatrefoils and rarely cup-shaped round vessels, called “*phialostomia*” in Greek⁴⁸. These are small ceramic vessels with four-leaf shaped necks that were made of wet clay and molded by hands. Such blanks are dried in the sun, baked, and then inserted into fresh mortar with the narrow side down and the open curly spout outward⁴⁹. These quatrefoils are lined with long courses and usually used to outline semicircular arcs of windows or flat niches, in arcades on dome drums, or laid out in even stripes (Figure 5). Such decoration looks elegant and bright and creates shadow accents that emphasize significant elements on the wall surface.

The vessels themselves can be glazed or painted. An excellent example can be found in the Church of Panagia Sikelia in Chios dated to the 13–14th centuries, where multi-colored glazed quatrefoils (green, yellow and red) have been preserved.

The quatrefoil vessels are found only in two monuments of Epirus, both belonging to the middle – second half of the 13th century. In Parigoritissa of Arta, the quatrefoils were used both in the first (mid-13th century) and in the second (1294–96)

47 Β. Παπαδοπούλου, *Η Βλαχέρνα της Άρτας*. Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού, Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων, Άρτα, 2015, 67–73.

48 Σ. Καλοπίση-Βέρτη, Μ. Παναγιωτίδη-Κεσίσογλου, *Op.cit*, 168.

49 J. Trkulja, *Op. cit*, 50–59.



Fig. 5

construction phase – on the east façade and on the drums of the domes. Some of these quatrefoils retain fragments of the original green glaze⁵⁰.

The “*phialostomia*” are absent in Thessaloniki, but they adorn the prismatic apses of the Church of St. Sava in Veria and the apse and the dome of the Peribleptos Church in Ohrid. In North Macedonia, this motive was especially popular in Prilep, where it is abundantly used in the Church of St. Nicholas, on the west façade of St. Peter and Paul Church, as well as on the dome of St. Demetrius Church. In the Church of St. Nicholas, the quatrefoils are also used to lay out crosses on the side façades.

The question of the origins of such kind of decor is not clear. Various hypotheses have been made: the appearance of the “*phialostomia*” was associated with Middle Byzantine monuments of Bulgaria, Constantinople, or with Islamic tradition. But the most correct seems to be the assumption of K. Tsouris, who proposed that decoration with ceramoplastic vessels was adopted from the Middle Byzantine architecture of southern and probably northern Greece – it was strictly provincial tradition that flourished during the Late Byzantine period after Constantinople ceased to be a leading artistic center and “trendsetter”⁵¹.

There is another type of “*phialostomia*” that was not so popular: the vessels have a round cup-shaped face instead of quatrefoil. They are well known in the Late Byzantine churches of Bulgaria, especially in Nesebar,⁵² sometimes in Greece, but never found in Epirus and its sphere of influence.

50 V. Papadopoulou, K. Tsouris, “Late Byzantine Ceramics from Arta: Some examples”, *La ceramica nel mondo Bizantino tra XI et XV secolo ei suoi rapporti con Italia*, *Atti del seminario Certoza di Pontignano (Siena) 11–12 marzo 1991*, Firenze, 1993, 241–261, 243.

51 K. Τσοῦρις, *Op. cit.*, 72.

52 E. Bakalova, “Messemvria’s Churches in the Context of Late Byzantine Architecture. Historiographical Survey”, *ΣΟΦΙΑ. Сборник статей по искусству Византии и Древней Руси в честь А. И. Комеча*, Москва, 2006, 547–572.

The other mode of the ceramoplastic-immured vessels is **glazed bowls**. The tympana and pediments of the churches were decorated with vessels of the open type with a nearly flat or vertical rim. Such type of decoration was well-known in Italy as “*bacini*”.⁵³ Unlike the “*phialostomia*” mentioned above, which was specially made for architectural decoration, this was ordinary ware. Byzantine ceramics ware is very diverse and there are lots of types differing in technical characteristics⁵⁴. Such kind of decor was known in Greece in the 11th century and was actively used in the Peloponnese, eastern and central regions, and almost never found in South and North Macedonia⁵⁵. In Epirus, it appears only in the 13th century and is represented by several monuments. The ceramic immured bowls are very fragile and poorly preserved, often their presence can only be judged by the circular notches in the masonry.

In one of the earliest monuments of the Epirus school, the Church of St. Nicholas Rhodias, the inserted bowls adorn the tympanum of the dome on the four main sides. But all of them are of different times; some of them replaced the original ones during the reconstruction. Only five partially preserved vessels are original: there are vessels of open type with simple sgraffito covered with green glaze.⁵⁶

In the Church of St. Theodora, both pediments contain the immured bowls, as can be judged from the preserved round recesses. Only one bowl has survived in the south quaternary blind arch. It is about 10 cm in diameter and belongs to the so-called “Zeuxippus Ware”. This group includes vessels of very high quality mainly of Constantinopolitan production: there are monochrome ceramic vessels with very thin and strong walls, with sgraffito of varied motives (floral ornaments, concentric circles, birds, human figures, beasts) and covered with a thin transparent glaze. Zeuxippus ware were the highest quality ceramic products of the 13th century.⁵⁷ The bowl in the St. Theodora is decorated with engraving concentric circles placed in the center and has a slightly yellowish glaze. It is dated to the late 12th – early 13th century and probably derived from Constantinopolitan workshops.⁵⁸

In Vlacherna, the immured bowls were placed in the gables of the east, west and south sides of the church, where they flanked the windows. Basically, only traces of them have survived. In the pediment of the west cross-arm in Parigoritissa only the notches from five plates schematizing the cross have also been preserved.⁵⁹

In the Church of the Dormition in Molyvdoskepastos (14th century), some ceramic plates in the gables of the transept have been preserved. They are made of pinkish clay, with sgraffito, green and red painting and covered with a transparent yellowish glaze. They date to the 13th – 14th centuries and originate from Italy⁶⁰. There are two bowls on the south gable: one of them has two fish opposite each other, a floral

53 A. Yangaki, “Immured Vessels in Churches on Crete: Preliminary Observation on Material from the Prefecture of Rethymnon”, *Δελτίον της χριστιανικής αρχαιολογικής εταιρείας*, 34, 2013, 375–384.

54 A.H.S. Megaw, “Glazed Bowls in Byzantine Churches”, *Δελτίον της χριστιανικής αρχαιολογικής εταιρείας*, 4, 1965–1965, 145–162.

55 K. Τσούρις, *Op. cit.*, 95–116.

56 K. Τσούρις, *Op. cit.*, 99–101.

57 A.H.S. Megaw, “Zeuxippus Ware”, *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, Vol. 63, 1968, 67–88.

58 K. Τσούρις, *Op. cit.*, 96–97; V. Papadopoulou, K. Tsouris, “Late Byzantine Ceramics from Arta ...”, 1993, 245.

59 K. Τσούρις, *Op. cit.*, 96–97.

60 K. Τσούρις, *Op. cit.*, 104–107.



Fig. 6

motive and interlace in the edge, and the other one shows a bird (Figure 6). On the north gable, there are four such bowls but with a simpler pattern.⁶¹

This type of decoration was not so common outside of Epirus during the Palaiologan era. In Aegean Macedonia such bowls are found in the relatively late monuments – in the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos (14th century)⁶², and in the Catholicon of the Vlatadon monastery, built in 1351–1371⁶³: the bowls were used on the façades of the ambulatory and have been preserved on the south façade.

CERAMIC ICONS AND TILES

Sometimes simple unglazed or glazed ceramic tiles were used for decoration. It could have been long belts of small triangular tiles, as in the Church of St. Demetrius at Kypseli. There are miniature round **ceramic tiles** with traced crosses in the central part of the west façade of the Church of St. Theodora in Arta. Glazed colored sgraffito tiles with geometric flower-like patterns incorporated in flat niches of the south and east façades in the Church of St. Catherine in Thessaloniki, which probably were a product of the local workshop⁶⁴.

The **opus reticulatum** technique was widespread in Epirus and also in North Macedonia. This is decorative facing masonry, which represents a grid of small squares of stone and glazed or unglazed tiles arranged diagonally in a checker-board pattern (Figure 7). It was known back in Roman times and gained particular popularity in the Middle Byzantine period, mainly in Greece⁶⁵. In Epirus and North

61 B. Παπαδοπούλου, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου*, 189–200, esp. 192–195.

62 P. Androudis, “An Unknown 14th Century Golden Horde Bowl (Piyala from the Monastery of Vatopedi, Mount Athos, Greece)”, *Niš i Vizantija*, 15, 2017, 209–216.

63 Α. Ξυγγόπουλος, *Τέσσαρες μικροί ναοί...*, 49–62; Γ. Στογιόγλου, *Η εν Θεσσαλονίκη Πατριαρχική Μονή των Βλατάδων*. Θεσσαλονίκη, 1971.

64 E. Hadjistryphonos, “Saint Catherine’s Church in Thessaloniki, Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture”, *Ἡρώς Κτίστης. Μνήμη Χαράλαμπου Μπούρα*. Τ. 1. Αθήνα, 2018, 265–282, 275–278.

65 Γ. Συδοτιή, *Op. cit.*, 44; J. Trkulja, *Op. cit.*, 40–43; J. Ćirić, “On the Imitation (μίμησης) of Antiquity: Opus Reticulatum at the East Façade of St. John Kaneo Church in Ohrid”, *Niš and Byzantium XVII*, 2019, 271–284.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Macedonia, especially in Ohrid, it is found in numerous monuments, becoming an integral part of the architectural design of Epirus from the second half of the 13th century, during the reign of Nikephoros I. Wide bands of *opus reticulatum* run along the façades of the so-called Red Church in Voulgareli near Arta, of Parigoritissa in Arta (Figure 8), in the exonarthex of St. Sophia and on the façades of the Peribleptos and St. John Kaneo churches in Ohrid, as well as in the church of St. Demetrius in Veles. As a filling of flat niches, *opus reticulatum* is used on the apses of the church of St. Nicholas in Prilep, of St. Demetrius at Kypseli, and of the Savior in Veria (1314–15) in Aegean Macedonia.

In the Church of St. Basil in Arta, the *opus reticulatum* band on the east façade looks very elegant; it is made of glazed polychrome green, white, yellow, and terracotta color ceramic tiles, which is associated with the work of Italian craftsmen⁶⁶.

The pediment of the Church of St. Basil is decorated with two immured ceramic glazed relief icons of Crucifixion and of the Three Hierarchs (Figure 9). There are small reliefs (about 30×40 cm) made of red clay, painted and glazed. The iconography of Crucifixion is standard and quite simple: in the center on the cross is the Savior, on the sides, there are mourning Mother of God and St. John. The frame, the cross, the Calvary, and the garments are painted with green glaze, the bodies with white one, sometimes the clay shines through, and a pinkish tint is obtained. The eyes, eyebrows, and hair are dark-brown. St. John's clothes are also covered in dark-brown glaze. In the molding of figures, there is striving for naturalism, emotions are

66 P. Vocotopoulos. "Church architecture in the Despotate of Epirus...", 1998–1999, 81; K. Τσοῦρις, Op. cit, 76–95; V. Papadopoulou, K. Tsouris, "Late Byzantine Ceramics from Arta ...", 1993, 256.

absent. This work is alien to the purely Byzantine tradition and more connected with Italian art, with Tuscany.

For the icon of the Three Hierarchs, the same colors and techniques were used, but it is much worse preserved.

These icons area is a unique case in Byzantine architecture. The researchers suggest they have more in common with Italian tradition and were made by Italian craftsmen in Arta. The dating of these icons is not completely clear and is widely determined as the 14th century.⁶⁷

Thus, the overview presented above shows all the variety of types of architectural ceramics inherent in the Epirus architectural tradition. With a stable set of techniques and elements, we can also trace certain preferences in façade decoration at different chronological stages in the development of architecture in Epirus. So, for the architecture of the first Komnenos Doukas – of the first thirty years of the 13th century, laconic decoration is characteristic. During the reign of Michael II (1231–1268), when the architectural school of Epirus was formed, decorative programs became more complex, abundant, and varied. The ceramic vessels, the simple brick, and spatially-cut brick ornaments were used, and Western European, especially Italian, influences increased. In the third period of development, during the reign of Nikephoros I and his successors (1268–1297), the *opus reticulatum* and meanders became popular.

After the restoration of the Byzantine Empire, the Epirus architectural tradition was transplanted to neighboring regions – in Aegean and North Macedonia, with the migration of building workshops and was assimilated there. According to the review, we should note that in different artistic centers individual elements were selected and developed, which became characteristic of the assimilation of the Epirus tradition in a particular center. So, in Thessaloniki, the ornaments made of simple brick are actively used, but the special-cut bricks and “*phialostomia*” are completely absent. In Veria and Kastoria, the ceramoplastic decoration is laconic. In Ohrid, wide stripes of *opus reticulatum* and meanders, as well as ornaments made of simple bricks were actively used, but immured vessels and special-cut bricks have never been found. In Prilep, the decoration is rich and picturesque, using a variety of ornaments, quatrefoils, wide abundant friezes of *opus spicatum* and meanders.

The chosen motives and the way they are executed reflect the aesthetic orientations of the architectural centers and help to determine the different building workshops from Epirus that worked here. However, our survey is just an attempt to approach a complex problem. The question of the influences, as well as the question of the builders, is complicated and must become a goal for further research on the spread of the architectural tradition of Epirus in neighboring regions, where façade decoration is just one of the aspects.

67 K. Τσοῦρις, Op.cit, 76–95; V. Papadopoulou, K.Tsouris, “Late Byzantine Ceramics from Arta ...”, 1993, 254–259; G. Mastrotheodoros, K. Beltsios, Y. Bassiakos, V. Papadopoulou, “Two Unique Byzantine Immured Lead-glazed Relief Ceramic Icons and Related Tiles from the Church of St. Basil in Arta, Greece: Investigation and Interpretation of Materials and Techniques, *Archeological and Anthropological Sciences* 10, 2018, 2059–2074.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Collage of some simple-brick ornaments of Epirus and Macedonia: stitch-pattern, step pattern, meander and herringbone, zigzags, “diamond motive”, basketweaves, sunburst, checkerboard, step descending, hexagons.

Колаж од неких једноставних орнамената са опека Епира и Македоније: мотив бода, степеначаста шара, меандар и рибља кост, цик-цак, „мотив дијаманта”, плетена корпа, сунце, шаховница, силазне степенице, шестоугао.

2. Arta. Church of St. Nicholas Rhodias, early 13th century, view from the southeast, pseudomeanders (photo: Maria Zavorina)

Арта. Црква Светог Николе Родијског, почетак 13. века, поглед са југоистока, псеудомеандри (фото: Марија Заворина)

3. Thessaloniki. Church of the Holy Apostles, 1310–1314, so-called “Tree of Life” pattern on the central apse (photo: Maria Zavorina).

Солун. Црква Светих Апостола, 1310–1314, такозвана шара „Дрво живота“ на централној апсиди (фото: Марија Заворина).

4. Arta. Kato Panagia, mid-13th century, fragment of the south end of the transept, the chains of special-cut bricks (from up to down: S-shaped, key-shaped, disepsilons) and donators’ inscriptions (photo: Maria Zavorina).

Арта. Като Панагија, средина 13. века, фрагмент јужног краја трансепта, ланци од посебно резане опеке (од горе на доле: облик слова S, облик кључа, дисепсилони) и донаторски натписи (фото: Марија Заворина).

5. Prilep. Church of St. Nicholas, 1298, fragment of the south façade, immured quatrefoils (“phialostomia”) (photo: Maria Zavorina).

Прилеп. Црква Светог Николе, 1298, фрагмент јужне фасаде, узидани четворолисти („фиалостомија“) (фото: Марија Заворина).

6. Molyvdoskepastos, Church of the Dormition, 14th century, immured glazed bowls from the south façade (B. Παπαδοπούλου. *Τα Βυζαντινά Μνημεία της Ηπείρου, Ιωάννινα*, 2012. Σ. 194 / V. Papadopoulou. *The Byzantine Monuments of Epirus*. Ioannina, 2012, p. 194)

Моливдоскепастос, црква у спаваоници, 14. век, узидане глазиране посуде са јужне фасаде (B. Παπαδοπούλου. *Τα Βυζαντινά Μνημεία της Ηπείρου, Ιωάννινα*, 2012. Σ. 194 / B. Παπαδοπούλου. *Византијски сџоменици Ёйируса*, Јањина, 2012, стр. 194)

7. Thessaloniki. Church of St. Catherine (1315–1320), fragment of the east façade, glazed sgraffito tiles (photo: Maria Zavorina)

Солун. Црква Свете Катарине (1315–1320), фрагмент источне фасаде, глазиране зграфито плочице (фото: Марија Заворина)

8. Arta. The Church of the Parigoritissa (1294–96), fragment of the east and north façades, the band of opus reticulatum (photo: Anna Zakharova)

Арта. Црква Паригоритиса (1294–96), фрагмент источне и северне фасаде, трака opus reticulatum (фото: Ана Захарова)

9. Arta. Church of St. Basil, the late 13th century, the gable of the east façade, ceramic icons (photo: Svetlana Maltseva)

Арта. Црква светог Василија, крај 13. века, забат источне фасаде, керамичке иконе (фото: Светлана Малцева)

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Резиме: Обиље и разноврсност фасадног декора упечатљива је одлика касновизантијске архитектуре. Посебна улога у формирању нове естетске оријентације ка архитектури овог доба припада Епиру: за време латинске окупације (1204–1261), када је Цариград као архитектонски центар изгубио своју консолидациону улогу, интензивна изградња на византијском Балкану настављена је у Епирској деспотовини која је задржала своју независност. У првој половини 13. века, на основу средњовизантијске традиције предхеладских и хеладских школа, формирана је регионална архитектонска школа, која је постала један од главних извора за архитектуру палеолошког периода (1261–1453).

Карактеристична особина епирске архитектонске традиције је обиље различитих декоративних елемената у спољашњем изгледу зграда. Широко типолошки и иконографски арсенал архитектонског декора заснован је на употреби разноврсне керамике. Најједноставнији украси били су постављени од једноставних плинфи: то су степенаци и шавовски орнаменти, плетенице и мреже, цик-цак траке, украси у облику шиљака („рибље кости“), сунчани дискови, украси у облику ромба, псеудомеандери. Сложенији каиши резаних опека постали су ферквентнији: дисепсилони, украси у облику кључа и слова S. Активно су се користиле керамичке посуде уграђене у зид – фиалостомије и глазиране чиније. Посебне манифестације западноевропског утицаја, наиме италијанска уметничка традиција, такође су карактеристичне за Епир. Конкретно, глазиране керамичке рељефне иконе и фризи од полихромираних глазираних плочица на источном фронту цркве Светог Василија у Арти повезани су са радом италијанских мајстора.

Након обнове Царства, епирска архитектонска традиција, заједно са сеобом занатских радионица проширила се и на друга средишта палеолошке архитектуре – у Македонији: у Солун, Верију, Касторију (Костуру), Охрид и Прилеп. У сваком од ових центара, систем декоративних елемената који је коришћен је другачији, што омогућава праћење особитости асимилације епирске архитектонске традиције у Македонији.

Кључне речи: архитектонска керамика, касновизантијска архитектура, Епир, Македонија.