

ILLYRIAN-ARBERIAN AND THE EARLY INHERITANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN CULT

Pajazit Hajzeri¹, Qazim Namani², Emin Sallahu³

UBT College - Institution of Higher Education, Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning

{Pajazit Hajzeri, pajazit.hajzeri@ubt-uni.net}

Kosova Institute for the Protection of Monuments

{Qazim Namani, qazimmamani@hotmail.com}

Kosova Institute for the Protection of Monuments

{Qazim Namani, emin_sallahu@hotmail.com}

Abstract

The social, political, economic, and cultural circumstances that existed at that time in the Arab world brought one of the most emblematic figures in the entire history of mankind, Jesus Christ (Messiah). Jesus Christ was born as the savior of evil and the abandonment of many idols, and in their name, the impoverished population was mistreated, violated, and enslaved to the point of inhumanity.

The period in which Christ lived involved two different religious worlds, the Jews on the one hand and the pagan Romans on the other. Both of these religious worlds were going through ideological turmoil at the moment when great changes were expected. Jesus Christ was born in the period of the emperor Augustus and died in the period of the emperor Tiberius. He brought another image to the religious spiritual world, which, of course, had its roots in the Jewish religion, but at the same time broke away from it and continued an autonomous path in itself.

With the birth of Jesus Christ, a new religion was born, which began to spread even in the Illyrian - arboretum regions, a religion that is embraced by this population, which, in addition to preaching, also takes on the role of distribution and cultivation in various parts of Illyria and wider.

Keywords: Faith, monotheism, Christianity, basilica, cult

1 Introduction

The birth of Christianity was a white omen for humanity, and something new in the course of human history, and the belief in one god (monotheism).

The monotheistic preaching and the support that the poor masses gave to this person (Jesus Christ), who were numerically larger at the same time, was unacceptable from the Jewish world on one side, and from the Roman world on the other.

This fact was not only not accepted by the Jews, but, on the contrary, the Jewish counter-response began towards Christ, who, according to them, was "abusing" the name of God (Lekbello, 2007. p. 161). On the other hand, the Roman regime did not allow a belief that did not suit the empire's stature to spread in the territories controlled by it. With this pretext, all Christians were enemies of the empire, who were persecuted, imprisoned, mistreated, condemned and killed to prevent the spread of this new cult.

2 The first works of Christian art

The first works of early Christian art from c. II - III were simple and modest. These first realizations began to be created in the lands of Asia Minor. The catacombs are the first Christian cemeteries from this period.

Catacombs were monumental underground cemeteries, where people also performed religious rituals hidden from the Roman regime of the time. The most characteristic and best-preserved catacombs so far are found in the province of Cappadocia, Turkey.

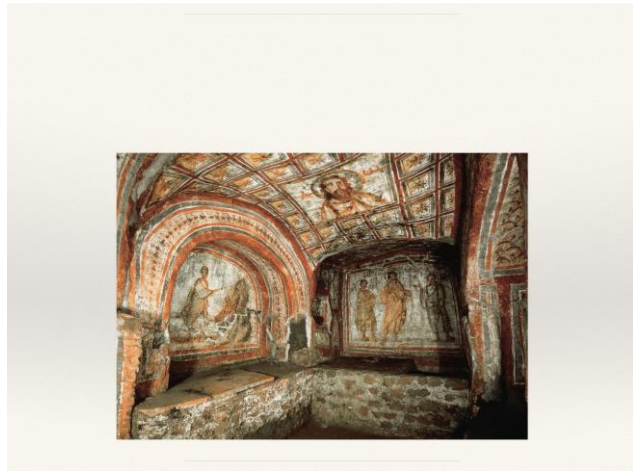


Figure 1, 2. The interior spaces of a catacomb.

The art that was built in the first centuries of Christianity, in the territories of the Roman Empire, is called Paleochristian Art and responds primarily to the basic needs that Christian communities had for the preaching of the Holy Message.

The main characteristics of the first steps of Christian architecture are not at all related to the greatness of Roman art forms, a concept that will change when the objective factors are intertwined with the subjective factors in the process of the birth of a new Christian architecture.

It should also be mentioned that Christian Art "owes" in some way to Roman architecture. This aspect is noticed especially in the second phase, because the later Christian basilicas, as the initial basis, take the typology of the Roman basilica, more or less as happened with Rome until it created its independent language in art, the same happened with Christian art.

Paleo-Christian architecture is initially a simple architecture connected exactly by the essential needs that the believers had, a neutral architecture we can say, that knew how to respond to the spiritual life without many ornaments and precious materials. (K. Lekbello, pp. 161, 163).

The Christians had to choose the forms for their temples from the encyclopedia of Hellenic and Roman architecture, having nothing to do with either the independence of Greek meditation or Roman scenography. They chose what was vital to them, in both previous experiences, bringing together the Greek human scale and the Roman consciousness of inner space. (Bruno Zevi, 2013, pp.84,85).

In the Illyrian territories, the ritual of Roman polytheism was the same as the Greek ritual, embraced by the Illyrian slave-owning society, at first, for the performance of the ceremonial, the inherited temples were used, making small adjustments to them. (A. Meksi, and others, 2016, p. 163).

Paleo-Christian buildings, known to this day in Albania, are a few. The Basilica of Elbasan and the church in Lin, as well as the baptistery of Butrint, with their developed architectural treatment and they're not small dimensions, are monuments that prove that the level of civilization in Albania does not lag behind other provinces of the same cultural sphere. (B. Strazimiri, and others, 1973, p.4).

Christianity in the territories of Illyria is one of the oldest in all of Europe. Saint Paul himself testifies to this, when in the Letter sent to the Romans, among other things, he says: "Thus, from Jerusalem to Illyricum I have spread the Gospel of Christ". (Zef Mirdita, 1998, p. 145). So, according to historical data, Christianity began to be preached and spread in the Balkan countries of Illyria by St. Paul himself, the disciple of Christ, one of his 12 apostles. (Mark Krasniqi, 2002, p. 34). It is likely that the Diocese of Durrës, ancient Dyrrhachium, was founded around 58 AD, so from the time of Sh. Paul. For this year some hagiographical traditions testify to a bishop named Caesarius, one of the "72 disciples of Jesus Christ". (Mark W. E. Peters, 2010, p. 15).

The Christian faith began to oppose paganism from the beginning. This is well described in the biography of Saint Hilarion written by the Illyrian philosopher Saint Jerome. Saint Jerome, among others, writes that Saint Hilarion, upon reaching Epidaurus (year 365), strangled the snake Baos. With this, Christians are freed from great evils. This legend, by the well-known English archaeologist, Arthur Evans, is taken as the personification of the strength of Christianity against the pagan faith. (Fejaz Drançolli, 2011, p. 56)

The spread of Christianity and belief in one god, monotheism, is opposed to Roman polytheism, as evidenced by the persecution and persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. For this, mostly, we have noted during the reign of Hadrian (117 - 138). (C. Truhela, 1931, p. 8). At this time, the two Dardanian martyrs, Flori and Lauri, were also persecuted. The Christian martyrs, Flori and Lauri, after suffering and torture, died and were buried in the ancient Illyrian city, Ulpiane, near Pristina.



Figure 3. Cemetery in Ulpiana

Throughout the 1st - 3rd centuries m. K. the persecution of Christians was a painful event and during this period no sign of Christian life was to be manifested in public. This was strictly prohibited by the Roman state, which enforced the death penalty in the opposite case. However, this political and religious nature against Christians could not prevent the organization of Christian communities in secret. (Lekbello, p. 164).

Christianity, against the bloody and terrible persecutions it suffered during 250 years and the heavy morals it imposed on its believers, became a religion, not only of the small but also of the intelligentsia and the upper classes. This, with its institution, the Church in this time of crisis and catastrophe, moral and spiritual decadence, becomes the real reason for the life and death of all structures, especially those who have suffered and been persecuted. The Church now, after the period of persecution, emerges purified and

strengthened, enjoying the period of tolerance in the time of Constantine, to become a pillar of the continuity of the culture and social institutions of the ancient world. (Mirdita, p. 143)

Figure. 4. Sarcophagus in Mitrovica

The archaeological findings of the case by foreign researchers and local researchers prove that the material traces of the Paleo-Christian culture in the territories of Kosovo can be found in the c. II, and from here, going up to the c. III – XI, interesting announcements have been discovered in Graçanicë, Lypian, Veletin, Drërstenik, Nerodime, Prizren, Pejë, Suirçin, Shtime, etc. (J. Drançolli, 2003, p. 28).

With the spread of Christianity in Illyria and especially in Dardani, the need arose to build the first shrines, but which have little difference from the previous shrines erected in the Roman period in these regions.

Roman society during the II - III century m. K. was no longer using the cremation of the dead body, while the burial of the dead required special land, where the bones could be placed. Wealthy families used the sarcophagus or mausoleums, while the population began to occupy vacant lands within the city. (Drançolli, pp. 164, 165).

In the II century m. K. in Naples, Syracuse, Rome, and in North Africa, in which the conditions allowed, these communities built large necropolises for the burial of bodies, by digging the ground in depth they created galleries, which were placed one above the other. (Drançolli, p. 165). Such a necropolis was located in Lushte, on the third kilometer of the Mitrovica - Pejë road. Meanwhile, the necropolis in Bërnica e Poshtme marks the end of the Bronze Age culture and the birth of a new civilization known as the "Halshtat" culture, which has left behind a whole series of monuments. (P. Hajzeri, 2021, pp. 35, 36)

The first paleo-Christian buildings in Dardani were simple with one side and three sides, of the basilica type, in the Municipality of DD, Harilaq, Prizren, Graçanica, Pejë, Ajnoc of Kamenica, etc. The basilicas of this time were covered with a roof or a vault. The first motifs of Christian Illyrian art were also related to pagan mythological art. So, here we are dealing with an interweaving, synthesis of pagan art with new Christian art.



Fig. 5. 6. Basilica in the DD Municipality, as well as the plan of the basilica

This phenomenon has been observed both in architecture and in plastic decorations, sculptures and paintings in general in the arts (F. Drançolli, p. 19).

Already around 200 AD, Christianity is consolidated and the forms of the cult seem well-completed.

In the Constantinian period, in many important centers there was not a single church, but two, located at a very close distance between them. In this case it is about the so-called "double cathedral" phenomenon (in fact, the term cathedral, to indicate the bishop's church, comes into use only starting from the 8th century). Such a construction concept spread to regions of the Empire that were at great distances from each other. (Giani Luca Potesta, Giovanni Vian, 2012, p. 78).

The organization of the Dardanian church, considering the proximity, the convenient connections of commercial circulation and above all, the apostolic origin of the church of Thessalonica, it would be natural for the bishopric of this center, especially at the beginning, in earlier times to take care also for the believers in Dardani. (Gaspër Gjini, 1992, p. 29). Understandably, the metropolitan of Thessalonica was also their first metropolitan, because under his leadership church affairs were carried out in Dardani. With this assumption, the church of Thessalonica should be considered as a co-founder of the Dardanian church, because at that time, the bishopric of Rome had not yet reserved for itself the right to establish dioceses. Thus, after increasing the number of believers, when they would create skills for the formation of ecclesiastical provinces, then they would also acquire their own metropolitan. (Genesis, pp. 29, 30).

In the Council of Nice, convened by Constantine the Great in 325 AD, the first true Ecumenical Council was convened, recognized by Catholics, Orthodox, Evangelicals, by all Churches, without any exception. At the request of many bishops and Pope Liberi, among the 318 fathers in the gathering, there were Ozius from Cordova, Nicholas from Smyrna, Jacon Athinas, later bishop of Alexandria, we also find the signature of the bishop of Dardania, "Dacus Dardaniae". (Genesis, p. 30).

In terms of administrative and ecclesiastical organization, areas of Albania were included in the prefecture of Illyricum, in the provinces of Old Epirus with Nicopoia as the metropolis, New Epirus with Dyrrah and Prevalitana with Shkodra.

The three above metropolitan areas were administered by the Pope of Rome, through the Vicar of Thessaloniki (Thessaloniki). (A. Meksi, 1985, p. 13). Such a thing continued until the year 484, when, on the occasion of the schism of the patriarch Acasis (471 - 489), Thessalonica and all the provinces of Illyricum aligned themselves with Constantinople, continuing throughout the reign of the emperors Zeno (474 - 491) and Anastas (491 - 518), who put great obstacles in the relations with Rome. The vicariate was formally reinstated under the emperor Justinian (527 - 565), who in 535 shared this function with the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, together with Thessaloniki. (Mexico, pp. 13, 14). Meanwhile, Rome also exercised power directly over them. Since that time the metropolis of Prevalitana (Shkodra) depended on Justiniana Prima. (L. Thalotzy, C. Jireček, E. Šufflay, 1913, doc. 32).

The officialization of Christianity (Edict of Milan in 313), also highlights the construction of Christian cult monuments. The early buildings of the Christian cult, from the beginning of the century. IV took as a model two of the most useful types in Roman architecture, basilicas and buildings with a central plan.

During the century IV - V ecclesiastical organization in Illyria took off so much that only in Dardani 5 - 7 bishoprics were established. These were organized according to the administrative division of the Roman Empire. (J. Drançolli, p. 28).

Basilicas were buildings with a social character more suited to cultic purposes for the time. Their characteristic is the construction with a nave, among which the central, larger and higher, two apses on the shorter sides, where the entrance was made from the longer side. They were covered with roofs on wooden

trusses (called the Hellenistic variant, because it was used more in the Hellenistic world) and with vaults (oriental variant).

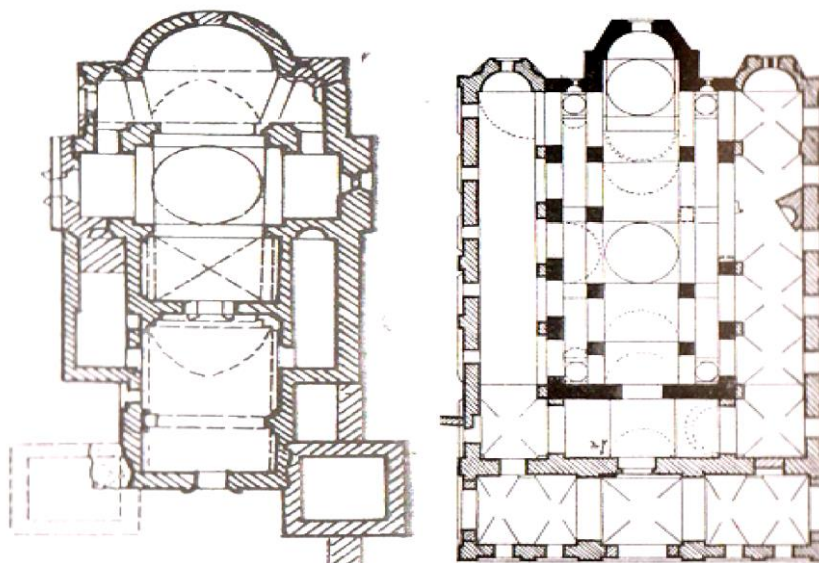


Fig. 7. 8. Basilicas, Banjska, Mitrovica and Basilicas, Saint Prena, Prizren

The changes made by the builders of these basilicas crystallized during the middle of the century. IV, was the construction of a single apse on the eastern side where the altar was placed, the entrance from the western side, through a narthex (parasalle), this was preceded in large basilicas by an open courtyard with columns (atrium), as well as a series of auxiliary premises necessary for the cult (diakonimun, prosthesis, catechumen, baptistry). (A. Meksi and others, p. 201).

Basilicas compose the largest number of constructions because they are easy to build and can be given any size.

The changes that were made to the basilicas of antiquity led to a new perception of the interior space. The interior already has a dynamic longitudinal axis, which corresponds to the direction of movement from west to east, from the entrance to the altar, and which is underlined by the rhythm of the arcades on the columns or pilasters

The basilicas that were built in our country are mainly of the variant with roofs made of wooden rafters, the result of the ancient tradition and the connection with Rome. (A. Meksi and others, p. 201).

Basilicas were more suitable constructions for cult buildings. They were light in construction and could hold a large number of worshippers. As is known, by the builders of late antiquity, the basilicas of the Roman period, changes were made to the entrance on the western side, between a narthex and an open courtyard (atrium), leaving only the eastern apse where the altar environment is also created, as and several auxiliary premises for the cult (diaconicon, prothesis, catechumen and baptistry). They are usually divided by arches over pilasters or columns into three naves. (A. Meksi, p. 16).

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With the invasion of the barbarians, the ecclesiastical map of Dardania also changed. During this period, episcopal and archbishopric seats suffered great damage, such as: Skopje, Justiniana Prima, Justiniana Secunda, Nishi, and Remesiana. During these upheavals, ties with the Papacy were also severed, to be

severed for a longer time, especially after the middle of the century. VIII, when Eastern Illyricum was annexed to Constantinople. (J. Drançolli, p. 29).

The later constructions of the Christian cult were the monasteries and medieval churches, which are subject to daily politics, falsifying and appropriating the "myth of the Battle of Kosovo" to justify the "cradle of Serbism" in Kosovo.

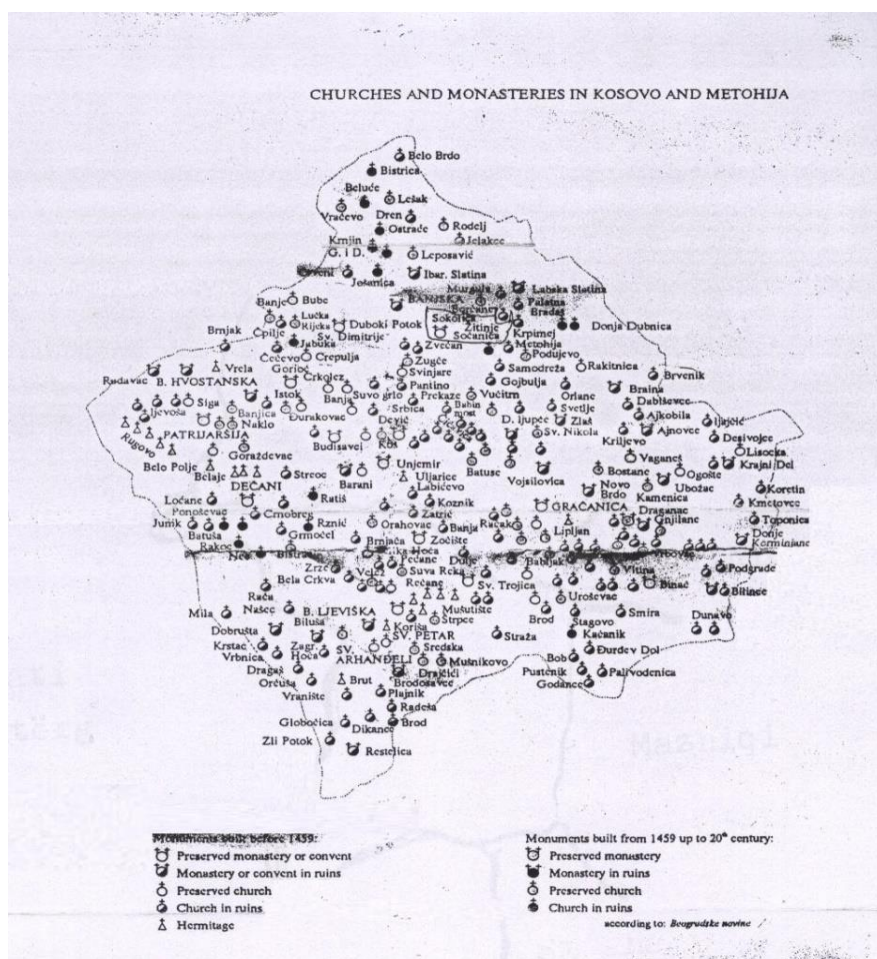
On this basis, guided by the politics of the day, the pro-Serb concept of the monuments of the Christian cult was built, the number of which is very impressive, for which the territory of Kosovo, according to them, preserves extraordinary values. (J. Drançolli, 2004, p. 66).

To justify the invasion of Kosovo, since the c. XIX, Serbian historiography, together with the Serbian anthropological school of Jovan Cvijic, made many speculations about the question of appropriation of the monuments of the Christian cult. In this aspect, the state circles of the Kingdom of communist Yugoslavia were also included. Speculations and manipulations about the appropriation of cult monuments intensified especially after 1981 and continue even today. (J. Drançolli, 2000, p. 144).

Even in the region of Mitrovica, as in many places in Kosovo, in the 90s, the construction of many Milosevic churches began on the foundations of early churches in Serbian settlements. These churches are from the same period as the church on the campus of the University of Pristina, a regime which did not choose a place, but built where it was needed.

The churches in the district of Mitrovica built at this time were; the ones in Zveçan, Vallq, and Cerajë, while, after the end of the 1999 war, they built the church in the north of Mitrovica, while the church in Bugariq (Serbovc) was built in Lama e Vlahia between 2009-2010. What attracts the most attention is that, according to the registration of all monuments of Kosovo, during the years 1956, 1968, 1986, and 1993, it appears that, from the all-inclusive fund of cult monuments, nearly 2/3 are evidenced within the monuments of the Serbian Orthodox cult, 25 mosques, 29 monuments of the Byzantine rite cult, which were appropriated by the Serbs, or Serbian churches and monasteries were built on their ruins, since the c. XIII to the present day. Meanwhile, according to the above statistics, only three Christian Catholic churches were registered, which are today in ruins (J. Drançolli, p. 145).

The truth is different, from the results of the field, in every village (we are talking about the villages of Shala e Bajgora, Mitrovica), where you go it is almost impossible not to meet toponyms and microtoponyms, related to the belief of the Catholic cult in a past historical. The most frequent toponyms and micro toponyms found in the field are; Church Walls, Church Meadow, Church Towers, Church Crown, Church Field, Church Field, Church Yard, Mojstir Hill (Monastery), and many other names related to the Christian cult, while the population is 100 % of the Islamic rite.



Figures. 9. Map of Christian cult monuments in Kosovo

Although the region is pure in terms of religious affiliation, these designations are preserved with fanaticism and pride, calling them "holy places because they belong to the faith of our ancestors," as the people call them.

The most outstanding achievements in the architecture of the Christian cult belong to the c. XIII - XIV. Despite the influences from Byzantine and Western European architecture, they have some features that distinguish them from the former.

Two thousand years of Christianity for Albanians is a whole history. Christianity among Albanians is not of a foreign origin, because it was not spread by Greek or Latin missionaries and, much less, by the Slavs, but it took root, as in many Mediterranean countries, by the apostles and their disciples since the apostolic period. (Kolec Topalli, 2000, p. 403), were known as messengers and saviors, connecting and relying on a single god, which was Christ.

Conclusion

The birth of Christianity also gave way to a style of building art known as Christian building art. Considering the course and development of sacral constructions in a long period of time over 2000 years, these works should have a great treatment and care from state institutions in their protection and care all over the world.

This religion brought, among other things, various constructions that were dedicated to this faith, among the first (before Christianity was formalized) the catacombs, to the basilicas as the first objects (after the formalization of Christianity), then churches, cathedrals, monasteries, the chapels, and many accompanying

objects dedicated to this religion, and a very large part of which have reached our days, it is very necessary to preserve and maintain them, using them, among other things, to raise the level of tourism cultural which is getting bigger day by day everywhere.

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