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## Graffiti drawings in the church of Archangels of the Metropolis in Kostur (Abstract)

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This article discusses 33 graffiti on the southern façade of the church of the Archangels of the Metropolis. The church was built in the 9th and 10th centuries as a tripartite basilica, with a nar-

thex added at a later stage. In its initial shape, the church was 6 by 10 m. According to some authors, the architectural specifics of the church make it similar to five basilicas in Pliska, the basilica of

St. Achilleios on the island with the same name in the Little Prespa Lake, one basilica in Great Preslav, and to the church of St. Stephan (the so-called New Bishopric) in Nesebar. This article provides an overview of the hypotheses about an earlier sanctuary beneath the church, with the respective evidence. Regarding the church's architecture, the ground plan is discussed, as well as the brick decoration on the walls and the reuse of earlier pagan and Early Christian elements: three antique stone blocks, marble columns, etc. A sign on a brick is illustrated, so far insufficiently commented on by experts; it is shaped like an arrow and closely resembles a Proto-Bulgarian symbol.

Analysis is offered of several layers of murals. The first one dates from the 9th and 10th centuries, the second from the 13th century, the third from 1349, and the fourth from 1436-1439. The graffiti were drawn on top the last layer, applied to the southern façade of the church. They are of diverse and intriguing subjects and several depictions of sailing vessels are of particular interest: a caravel, a carrack with a Spanish flag, a cog, and several smaller boats. The detailed images of the ships provide grounds to presume that the artists were well-acquainted with the construction of the vessels; they could have been sailors. For this reason, the depictions are of particular importance for studying the construction of the sailing vessels of the period. Some authors presume that depicting a ship was equal to a prayer in order to obtain God's protection in stormy seas. In addition, the images of sailing vessels could be regarded as Christian symbols that represented the temple as human salvation. Such depictions are attested on murals

in other churches as well. There are also numerous drawings of animals: horses, a dove, and three fishes. They reflect the everyday life of the people, but carry also meaning as Christian symbols (dove, fish). Horsemen are depicted as well as human images. There are a few drawings that are related to the Christian iconography: a depiction of the Holy Cross, of Archangel Michael and of another, unknown saint. Impressions from Christian iconography and religious motives drove the authors to draw the above-discussed graffiti. The act itself was probably a prayer by the author to God or to a saint. Symbolic signs form a separate group: pentagrams and hexagrams, 'grids' and interlaced designs as well as crosses. Of particular importance is the graffiti of Archangel Michael with two noble figures. It is a copy of the scene on the western wall of the church depicting probably Tsar Michael II Asen of Bulgaria (1246-1256) and his wife. The inscriptions above the painted portraits of the donators are only partially preserved, provoking various interpretations among scholars.

The graffiti on the southern façade of the church of Archangels of the Metropolis are a rich source for the history and the culture of the region of Kostur. They belong to period from 1440 to the 17th century and narrower dates are proposed here for some of them. They are useful for studying sailing vessels, symbols (crosses, solar images, grids), and the reflection of church art in the minds of the people of that time. Some of the graffiti have parallels in Northwestern Bulgaria, Southern Dobruja, Kyustendil, Plovdiv, and in the scriptoria of the churches of St. Sophia and Our Lady Perivlepta in Ohrid.

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