ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

Summary :

Two layers of a non-figural painted decoration have been fragmentarily preserved in the church of Karşıbecak at Avçilar (Matiane). The symbol of the cross holds a prominent position in the program, referring to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. The choice and the arrangement of the decorative motives place the church within the "Graeco-oriental" school (7th – early 8th century). The dedicatory inscriptions of the church bear witness to the intellectual level of the donors.

Date

7th – early 8th century

Geographical Location

Cappadocia, Avç ilar (prev. Matiane)

---

1. The church of Karşıbecak – present condition

It is a double church, cut on the base of a conical rock, on the site of Karşıbecak at Avçilar of Cappadocia. The north church is bigger, barrel-vaulted, with an entrance opened on its northern side. On the western side of the nave there is a deep arcosolium. The area of the apse was wider in the first place, but its east end has been destroyed and walled up. The south church is smaller in dimensions and was probably used as a burial chapel. The nave is square, with a flat ceiling, while the apse has not been preserved, since its triumphal arch has been walled up.[1]

2. Painted decoration – iconographical program

The church of Karşıbecak displays two layers of frescoes, with a probably small chronological distance between them. Both of them bear non figural decoration. The second layer has been applied upon the plaster. In some points, where the plaster has fallen, parts of the first layer of the church decoration have been exposed, painted directly on the rock. Although the church must have been entirely covered with frescoes, only a few of its wall-paintings are still preserved today. These still existing frescoes are found in the area of the bema, on the vault of the nave of the north church and on the flat ceiling of the south chapel.

2.1. First layer of wall-painting

The initial decoration of the church seems to have consisted of crosses and some decorative motives engraved on the rock and painted over with red and at some points with green color. This non-figural decoration directly on the rock appears in many cave churches of Cappadocia and it is believed that it was executed probably by the same craftsmen who had cut the church on the rock. Such initial decoration was often covered up at a later stage, by a layer of plaster functioning as a substratum for the execution of the iconographic programme of the church, as in this case.[2]

2.2. Second layer of wall-painting

The wall-paintings of this layer have been executed upon a layer of plaster. As far as its present condition allows us to discern, it is a non-figural decoration. At the top of the apse of the northern church a big jeweled cross is depicted in a mandorla. This mandorla is composed by concentric circles and by the aureole that surrounds the cross, whose frame is decorated with chalices with trifoliate flowers, placed near each other at a short distance. Around this central decorative

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

element extends the ground of a repeated cornucopia motif, from which a vine tree grows with bunches of grapes. Below this zone extends another, purely decorative register with heart-shaped motifs.

On the intrados of the triumphal arch the fragment of a wall-painting is preserved, with interlaced circles inside which small crosses are enclosed. The front of the triumphal arch, towards the side of the main nave, run two dedicatory inscriptions – each one corresponds to one of the two layers of painting decoration.

On the barrel vault of the nave of the north church, a big jeweled cross is depicted, like on the apse, on a ground of repetitive cornucopias. This central decorative element is framed by a frieze of Maltese crosses enclosed in interlaced circles. Similar is the decoration of the flat ceiling of the south chapel as well.[3]

2.3. Iconographic remarks

The theme of the jeweled cross enclosed in a circular aureole, a vision with eschatological and triumphal meaning, implies the redemptive sacrifice of Christ and His presence, as well as a reminding of the Second Coming. Its use for the apse decoration has early Christian origins and is connected with the central meaning that the symbol of the cross, a symbol of salvation and victory of Christ over death, has for the mystery of Holy Liturgy. The repeated motive of cornucopia from which a vine tree with grapes stems refers to the life-giving power of the cross and to the Holy Liturgy.

The theme of the glorified jeweled cross (in a mandorla) survives on the apses of the Cappadocian churches, partly because of the tendency towards non-figural decoration during Iconoclasm, until the 9th century; and is characteristic, among others, of a small group of churches in Cappadocia of the 7th and the early 8th century that according to N. Thierry contitute the "Graeco-oriental" school, in which Karşıbecak is included. In fact, the same theme on the apse appears in Mezarlar altı kilise of Avçilar and in Saint Stephan at Çemil, which belong as well to the "Graeco-oriental" school, as well as in church 5 of Güllü Dere and in the church of Stylites Niketas at Kizil Çukur. The ground of repeated cornucopias is replaced in other occasions by floral motifs, as for example chalices with trifoliate flowers that surround the crosses of the apse on Mezarlar altı kilise and on Saint Stephan at Çemil, as well as the cross on the ceiling of the narthex of the church of Stylite Niketas at Kizil Çukur.[4]

3. Dedicatory inscriptions

There are two dedicatory inscriptions on the church of Karşıbecak, which are located on the same spot of the north church: both of them run the front of the triumphal arch to the side of the main nave, and each one belongs to a different layer of wall-paintings, so as the later inscriptions covers the previous one.

The oldest one is an uncial (majuscule) dedicatory inscription and it has been written in red paint on the rock. It is an invocation from which small parts of the beginning and the end are preserved. It has been recorded, however, by Jerphanion, who had published the inscriptions of the monument. The existing at the time of Jerphanion text was transcribed as follows:

+ Νικήτας καὶ Εὐδοκία σὺν τῇ γονῇ βοῶσίν σε Χ(ριστ)ὲ ὁ Θ(εὸς) [τῶν δυ]νάμεων...ξ ... ... ααςιν...βο...λ...σου +

Niketas and Eudokia with (their) daughter are praying to you, oh Christ, the God of Powers... (ἀ)ξ(ίους ἡμ)ᾶς (ποίησον τῆς βουλῆς σου;) [=make as worthy of your will?]

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

Niketas with his wife Eudokia must have provided the money for the cutting on the rock and the initial decoration of the church of Karşıbecak, since it was not unusual for the craftsmen who cut the church on the rock to add a first, linear non-figural decoration inside the church. Although the large part of the inscription had already been destroyed making it difficult to draw a conclusion, Jerphanion saw on the expression «ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Δυνάμεων» an allusion to the Book of Psalms.

After the walls have been covered with plaster, a second inscription was engraved, at the same spot, which is however preserved in a highly fragmentary condition because of the partial collapse of the plaster. This second inscription is a painted and uncial inscription as well. The surviving text is transcribed as follows:

… νεον … μονα … … Χ(ριστ)ὲ ἀξίου(ς) ἡμᾶς ποίησον τὸ[ν εὖν]οιόν σου(;) απ...

This inscription, which is contemporary with the main iconographic program of the church, actually imitates the expression of the older inscription, that of Niketas and Eudokia. It was probably a dedicatory one as well, maybe of the donor of the second layer of frescoes. No evidence is preserved about the donor, but he was perhaps a monk (μονα…).

In the church there are four more inscriptions as well, all of them contemporary with the wall-paintings of the second layer, with a content that derives from liturgical texts.[5] The literary inscription of Niketas and Eudocia, in combination with the rest of the inscriptions of a liturgical content, is revealing of the intellectual level of the donors.

4. Date

Thierry classifies the church to the so-called “Graeco-oriental” school, and as a consequence dates it to a period before Iconoclasm, to the 7th- or the early 8th century. This date, which Jolivet agrees on, is opposed to the older one of Jerphanion, who, judging by the non-figural content of the decoration and the absolute lack of holy personages, dated it to the period of Iconoclasm, and specifically to the early 9th century; Lafontaine-Dosogne falls in with this view in an article of hers referring to the iconoclastic iconographic programmes of the Byzantine churches.[6]

---

1. de Jerphanion, G., *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin* (Paris 1925-1942), I, 2, p. 504-510 and Thierry, N., “Matériaux nouveux en Cappadoce (1982)” *Byzantion* 54 (1984), p. 318-320.

2. See Jolivet-Lévy, C., “Le riche décor peint de Tokalı kilise à Göremme”, *Histoire et Archéologie. Les Dossiers* 63 (1982), p. 67, and Wharton-Epstein, A., *Tokalı Kilise. Tenth Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia* (Washington D.C. 1986), p. 10.

3. For the wall-paintings of this church see Thierry, N., “Matériaux nouveux en Cappadoce (1982)”, *Byzantion* 54 (1984), p. 320, and Jolivet-Lévy, C., *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords* (Paris 1991), p. 71.

4. Jolivet-Lévy, C., *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords* (Paris 1991), p. 46, 71. See Thierry, N., “Matériaux nouveux en Cappadoce (1982)”, *Byzantion* 54 (1984), p. 320.

5. For the inscriptions of the church see de Jerphanion, G., “Inscriptions Byzantines de la région d’Ürgúp en Cappadoce”, *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l’Université St.-Joseph* (Beyrouth) 6-7 (1913), p.343-348, and *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin* (Paris 1925-1942), I, 2, 504, inscr. no. 82.

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

6. Thierry, N., “Matériaux nouveux en Cappadoce (1982)”, *Byzantion* 54 (1984), p. 320, and Jolivet-Lévy, C., *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords* (Paris 1991), p. 71. Cf. de Jerphanion, G., *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin* (Paris 1925-1942), I, 2, p. 505, and Lafontaine-Dosogne, J., “Pour une problématique de la peinture d’église byzantine à l’époque iconoclaste”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), p. 330.

Bibliography :

- **de Jerphanion G.**, *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin, 2 vols.*, Paris 1925-1942
- **Jolivet-Lévy C.**, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l´abside et de ses abords*, Paris 1991
- **de Jerphanion G.**, "Inscriptions Byzantines de la region d’Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de l’ Université Saint-Joseph (Beyrouth)*, 6-7, 1928, 305-400
- **Thierry N.**, "Matériaux nouveux en Cappadoce (1982)", *Byzantion*, 54, 1984, 315-357

Glossary :

apse

An arched srtucture or a semi-circular end of a wall. In byzantine architecture it means the semicircular, usually barrel-vaulted, niche at the east end of a basilica. The side aisles of a basilica may also end in an apse, but it is always in the central apse where the altar is placed. It was separated from the main church by a barrier, the templon, or the iconostasis. Its ground plan on the external side could be semicircular, rectangular or polygonal.

arcosolium

(lat.) A tomb carved out of a wall (solium) with an arched niche (arcus) above it.

barrel-vault

vaulted, semi-cylindrical construction used often as roof.

bema

The area at east end of the naos in Byzantine churches, containing the altar, also referred to as the presbetery or hierateion (sanctuary). In these area take place the Holy Eucharist.

Horn of Amaltheia (cornucopia)

(also known as the horn of plenty) In Greek mythology, Amaltheia was the goat who breast-fed the child Zeus. When he accidentally broke one of her horns while playing, he turned it into a golden one, which would give to the holder whatever that he wished for. In antiquity, the Horn of Amaltheia was a symbol of plenty and prosperity. It was adopted by the Christians endowed with connotations of the Providence, hope and compassion.

iconographic programme

The elaboration and arrangement of wall paintings in a Byzantine church, according to unwritten rules. For example, the customary depiction of Christ Pantokrator on the dome.

interlaced circles

Decorative motif of successive adjoining circles, sometimes adjoined to each other by knots. It was often used to form a frame, while each circle may frame a bust, a scene or other motifs.

intrados, soffit

The internal surface of an arch or barrel-vault.

Maltese cross

A cross with four equal "V"-shaped arms, joined together at their tips; that way each arm has two points.

non figural (anti-iconic) decoration

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

Decoration which consists only of geometrical and floral motifs. This kind of decoration was widely spread in the tombs of the Early Byzantine period and during Iconoclasm. In this case it is reffered to as anti-iconic, since the iconoclasts rejected icon veneration and prohibited any depiction of the human figure of Christ, Virgin Mary, the saints and angles.

triumphal arch

(Rom.:) A structure in the shape of a monumental archway, built to celebrate the victory of a Roman general or Emperor.
(Byz. Archit.) The arch formed above the Horaia Pyle (Royal Door), which frames the curve of the conch of the apse and separates the bema from the nave.

Quotations

Dedicatory inscriptions

1. The oldest dedicatory inscription

(majuscule script, in red paint, runs the front of the triumphal arch of the north church to the side of the nave)

+ Νικήτας καὶ Εὐδοκία σὺν τῇ γονῇ βοῶσίν σε Χ(ριστ)ὲ ὁ Θ(εὸς)
[τῶν δυ]νάμεων...ξ ... ... ααςιν...βο.....λ...σου +

Jerphanion has established it as follows:

+ Νικήτας καὶ Εὐδοκία σὺν τῇ γονῇ βοῶσίν σε Χ(ριστ)έ...
[Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τῶν δυ]νάμεων [ἐ]ξ[έγειρον εἰς συνάντη]σιν [ἡμῶν καὶ;] βο[ή]θ(ειαν) δούλ(ου) σου.

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la région d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph (Beyrouth)* 6-7 (1913), p. 343, no. 61, and *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin* (Paris 1925-1942), I, 2, p. 504, inscr. no. 82.

2. The second dedicatory (?) inscritpion

(on the same spot, majuscule script, in red paint, upon the plaster that covered the previous inscription)

… νεον … μονα … … Χ(ριστ)ὲ ἀξίου(ς) ἡμᾶς ποίησον τὸ[ν εὖν]οιόν σου(;) απ...

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la region d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce" *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph (Beyrouth)* 6-7 (1913), p. 343, no. 66.

Inscriptions with liturgical content

(painted, in red paint, upon the plaster of the walls, contemporary or later than the second dedicatory inscription)

1. [+ Μεθ'ημων ο Θεος γνω]τ εθΝΪ Κ(αι) ηΤ[α]σΘΕ ΩΤΗ ΜΕΘ ΪΜΟΝ ο Θ(εο)ς
[επακ]ΟΥσαΤε [ως ε]πυ εσΧΑΤΟΥ ΤΪC ΓΗC ΟΤΪ Μ[εθ᾽ ημ]Ο[ν] ο Θ(εο)ς
ΗCΧΥΚοΤες ΗΤΑCΘε οΤΪ Μ[εθ᾽ ημων] ο Θ(εο)ς
ΕΑΝ ΓΑΡ ΠαλΪΝ [ισχυ]σηΤε ΠαλΗΝ ΪΤΗΘΪCΕCΘΕ ΟΤΗ ΜΕΘ ΪΜΟΝ [ο θ(εο)ς]
[. . . . .] ΧΥ βουΛΕΥCΗΪς [δ]ϊACΚ(ε)[δ]ΑCΪ Κ(υριο)C ΟΤΪ ΜΕΘ ΪΜΟΝ Ο Θ(εο)C 5
+ Κ(αι) ΛΟΓ[ον ον] εαΝ ΛΑΛΪ[σ]ΕΤΕ Ου ΜΪ ΕΝΜΪΝΪ [οτι μεθ᾽ ημων ο θ(εο)ς]
ΤΟΝ [δε φοβ]ΟΝ ΪΜΟΝ ΟΥ ΜΪ ΦΟΒΪΘΟΜεν [ουδ]Ε [μ]Ϊ ΤΑΡΑΧΘΟΜΕΝ ΟΤΪ ΜΕΘ ΪΜΟΝ ο θ(εο)ς
Κ(υριο)Ν ΔΕ ΤΟΝ Θ(εο)Ν ΪΜον [αυ]Τ[ο]Ν αγΪ[ασ]ομεΝ Κ(αι) αΥΤΟς εσΤε ηΜΪΝ ΦΟ[β]ος ΟΤΪ μεθ ϊ[μων ο] θ(εο)ς
[κ(αι) εα]Ν γ[?] εΠΥ α[υ]Το [ωμεν πε]πυθ[ο]Τ[ε]ς ΕCΤΕ ΪΜΪ[ν εις α]γ[ι]ασΜΟΝ ΟΤΪ ΜεΘ Ϊμον ο [θ(εο)ς]

+ Μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς γνῶτε ἔθνη καὶ ἡττᾶσθε ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
ἐπακούσατε ὥς ἐπι ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς

Authoring : *Vasiliou Anastasia*
Translation : *Λουμάκης Σπυρίδων*
For citation : *Vasiliou Anastasia , "Cappadocia (Byzantium), Avç ilar, Church of Karşıbecak, Wall Painting ", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8594>

ἰσχυκότες ἡττᾶσθε ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
ἐὰν γὰρ πάλιν ἰσχύσητε πάλιν ἡττηθήσεσθε ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
[. . . . .]χυ βουλεύσης διασκεδάσει Κύριος ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς 5
+ Καὶ λόγον ὃν ἐὰν λαλήσετε οὐ μη ἐν ἡμῖν ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
τὸν δὲ φόβον ἡμῶν οὐ μη φοβηθῶμεν οὐδε μη ταραχθῶμεν ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
Κύριον δὲ τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν αὐτὸν ἁγιάσομεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται ἡμῖν φόβος ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς
καὶ ἐὰν γ(ε;) ἐπὶ αὐτὸ ὦμεν πεπυθότες ἐστὲ ἡμῖν εἰς ἁγιασμὸν ὅτι μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ὁ Θεὸς

It is a prayer from the liturgy of the Great Apodeipnon (that is celebrated on the evenings during the Lent), inspired by the text of Isaiah 8.9-14. The inscription runs the highest part of the south wall and the north wall of the north church, starting from the south. It was written in a continuous line – the verses in the transcription have been defined by Jerphanion, based on the liturgical text.

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la region d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph* (Beyrouth) 6-7 (1913), p. 344-5, no. 62.

2. ... Μ ε ΧΪΡΕCΟΥ ΔΪΑΠΕΤΕΤΑΜΕΝΕ ΠΡΟC Κ(υριο)Ν CΤΕΝΑΓΜΥC ΑΛΑΛΗΤΥC Κ(αι) ΔΑΚΡΥCΗΝ CΥΝΠΑΘΪας υΠΕϱ ΪΜΟ[ν]

αἱ χεῖρές σου διαπετεταμέναι πρὸς Κύριον στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις καὶ δάκρυσιν συμπαθείας ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν

The inscription runs the first of the three successive arches on the south wall. The phrase «στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις» comes from Paul's epistle to the Romans 8.26.

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la région d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph* (Beyrouth) 6-7 (1913), p. 346, no. 63.

3. ... ... Τ(ο)Υ Θ(εο)Υ ΪΜΟΝ ... ... ΪΝΑ ... ... ΤΟΥC ΕΛΠΙΖΟΝΤΑC ΗCΕ+ΤΟΝΥΝ [...]

... ... τ(ο)ῦ Θ(εο)ῦ ἡμῶν ... ... ἵνα ... ... τοὺς ἐλπίζοντας εἴς σε + τὸ νῦν (?) ... ...

The inscription was above the second of the three arches on the south wall. The last third of the inscription is extremely illegible and no words are discerned. According to Jerphanion, the cross almost at the center of the inscription indicates that there were actually two separate liturgical texts.

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la region d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph* (Beyrouth) 6-7 (1913), p. 346, no. 64.

4. + τ](ο)ῦ θΕ(ο)ῦ εΑΘΟΤΟC ΕΤΥΜΥ CΥΝ[?]ελΘΟΜΕΝ CΥΝ ΑΤΟ ΪC ΤΟΝ ΓΑΜΟΝ οC ΓΑΡ ΥΚΤΗΡΜΟΝ ΔΟΡΟΝ Ο Θ(εο)C ΠΑCΗΝ ΔΟΡΪΤΕ ΤΟΝ ΑΠΘΑΡΤΟΝ CΤΕ[φ]ΑΝ[η?]ΟΝ +

+ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἑαθότος ἕτοιμοι συνέλθωμεν σὺν αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν γάμον ὅς γαρ οἰκτίρμων, δῶρον ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς πᾶσιν δωρεῖται τὸν ἄφθαρτον στέφανον+

The inscription was above the third arch on the southern wall. The first part was inspired by Matt. 25.10, and the second by the 1 *Cor.* 9.25.

de Jerphanion, G., "Inscriptions Byzantines de la région d'Ürgúp en Cappadoce", *Mélanges de la Faculté oriental de l'Université St.-Joseph* (Beyrouth) 6-7 (1913), p. 347, no. 65.