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## COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY OF THE HERACLES' KNOT AND ITS MEANING IN MACEDONIAN MEDIEVAL ART

**Keywords:** *Heracles' knot, protective function, fresco, sculpture, illuminations, Macedonia, Balkans, medieval art*

**Abstract:** *Almost every major world religion has practices or traditions related to the magic of the knot. The symbolism of the knot can be followed within and outside its religious use. In the middle Byzantine period this motif has been used on twin columns, which indicates it has preserved its ancient protective power and received new religious meaning. It goes not only for the Christian but also for Muslim (as proved by the Ulu Mosque in Bursa, 1399) and Jewish temples. Heracles' knot was used in the Christian churches usually within the openings of the sacred space or parts of the floor that approaches the sacral space. It is very common and long lasting in Macedonia -St. Sophia, Ohrid, 11th C. and 14th C., St. George, Kurbinovo (1191), frescoes; window columns from St. George, Staro Nagoričino (11th C.) and Mlado Nagoričino (late medieval period), St. Sophia, Ohrid, 14th C. ambo, and lasts until the 15th C. (St. Kosmas and St. Damian, Ohrid, wooden iconostasis). Sofia national History Museum keeps the Ohrid archbishopric embroidery, purple with gold, with the representation of the Holy Communion of the apostles, where only one frontal column of the ciborium above the table has very large Heracles' knot. It was given as gift to the Archbishop of Ohrid from the Emperor Andronik Paleologos in the late 14th C. There are also iconostases in Serbia that use Heracles' knot (Žiča iconostasis, 13th C.). In the Greek churches Heracles' knot was used in the churches and cities that show influence of Romanesque art (the cathedral of Mystras, churches in Arta, Nafplion, sarcophagus of St. Theodora (empress Theodora, Church of St. Theodora, Arta, and sarcophagi from Thessaloniki) etc. Churches with Heracles' knot on the frontal façade portico can be seen painted in several Byzantine manuscripts (Homillies which shows it was quite common in Byzantium.) Yet, these churches are related to feasts and most important saints in Christian religion. Illuminations also show that the Her-*

*acles' knot was very popular in Byzantine architecture, at least in the 12th C. One of the most famous manuscript with the Homilies on the Virgin Mary was written by James Kokkinobaphos in the first half of the 12th C. and represents the symbolic building of a five domed church inhabited by the Virgin, the Holy Apostles, flanked by two prophets. The four double columns of the western façade of this Church are in the mid portion decorated with Heracles' knot.*

There are many Medieval churches and church furniture, along with decorative sculpture that bear the sign of the knot as a kind of protection from the evil. Some scholars consider Heracles' knot as iconographical symbol and not abstract decorative motif.

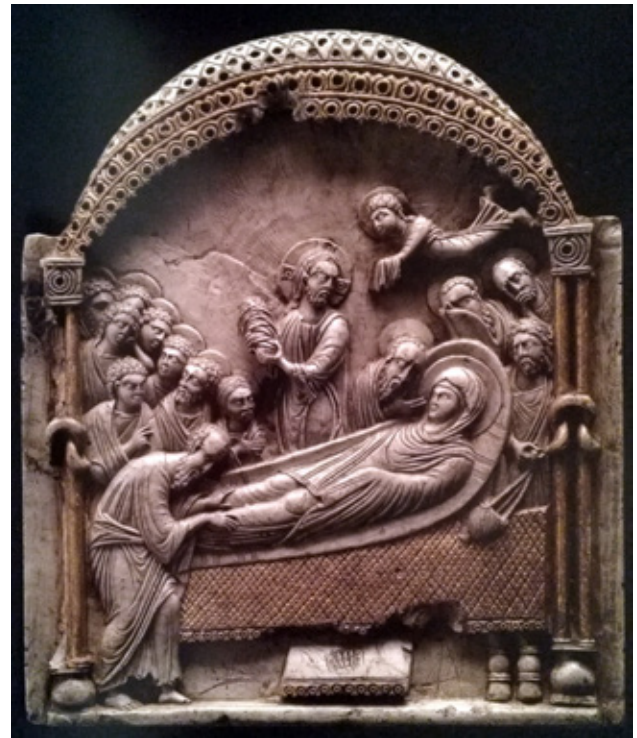
Let us start from the Ancient period. In many cultures the tying or untying of knots marks moments of transition, either from maiden to married woman or from life to death. The untying of knots is sometimes related with the easing of childbirth, or with radical solution of problems (as Alexander the Great did).<sup>1</sup> The marriage-knot or as it is otherwise named the strong **knot of Heracles** (a hero in Greek mythology renowned for his strength and courage, best known for completing his 12 labors) is created by two intertwined ropes. It originated as a healing charm in ancient Egypt, continued to be used in ancient Hellenic cities and colonies, and in The Roman Empire as a protective means, a wedding symbol, and a symbol of bride's virginity.

Sometimes even the Heracles' and Gordian knots are used as synonyms, which may be related to the image of Alexander as hero like Heracles and also to Alexander's representation on the coins with the lion's skin over his head and shoulders, similar to

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/gr/g/gold\\_diadem\\_of\\_twisted\\_ribbons.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/g/gold_diadem_of_twisted_ribbons.aspx)



1. Ivory triptych, middle section, 10th C.,  
State Library Berlin



2. Steatite icon, Koimesis, 2nd half of the 10th C.,  
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna

the image of the other hero in art. Then we face the main differences between them: Alexander the Great solved the seemingly insoluble problem of the Gordian Knot. Instead of attempting to untie it as everyone else had done, he just split the knot with his sword. Heracles cut off the head of the Hydra, just to have two grow back. On one hand an easy and intelligent solution and on the other: complication of the problem, or never ending story.

Willeke Wendrich points out that in Egyptian funerary literature the term *Tzt* mostly refers to the reef knot which is also the type of knot that is consistently depicted in skeuomorphs. "The rich associations and sign play in the Egyptian language enable the use of the symbol for 'knot' as determinative and even replacement of the verb *Tzj*, 'to lit up, to rise' and the verb *Tz*, 'to create' or 'to build' may even have a closer etymological connection to the concept of knotting."<sup>2</sup> It is interesting here to mention that in Macedonian language the word or sound *Tz* is still in use to denote that one is stressing his astonishment by something done or said by someone else, maybe actually expressing the notion *God help us?*

Some scholars consider Heracles' knot as iconographical symbol and not abstract decorative motif.

<sup>2</sup> Willeke Wendrich, *Entangled, Connected or Protected? The Power of Knots and Knotting in Ancient Egypt* in: Szpakowska, K., editor, *Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams, and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales, Wales 2006, 243-269, 262.

In the middle Byzantine period this motif has been used on twin columns, which indicates it has preserved its ancient protective power and received new religious meaning. It goes not only for the Christian but also for Muslim (as proved by the Ulu Mosque in Bursa, 1399)<sup>3</sup> and Jewish temples.

Pliny in his *Natural History* notes the belief that wounds heal more quickly when bound with a "Heracles knot".<sup>4</sup> Its popularity in Hellenistic jewelry suggests that it was thought to have the power to avert evil. Almost every major world religion has practices or traditions relating in some way to the magic of the knot. The symbolism of the knot can be followed outside its religious use, and was a very common symbol in Medieval and Renaissance love tokens.<sup>5</sup> It was also in use in Byzantium, especially in architectural sculpture and can be traced also in manuscripts with presentation of architecture. The byzantine knotted column has specific associations with those of the temple of Solomon.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Filipova Snezana, "The cult of St George and the political situation in Macedonia in the Middle Ages", *MN16*, (2001), 18-37, fig. 1.

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reef\\_knot#cite\\_note-pliny-9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reef_knot#cite_note-pliny-9)

<sup>5</sup> [http://symboldictionary.net/?page\\_id=2006](http://symboldictionary.net/?page_id=2006)

<sup>6</sup> Joli Kalavrezou Maxeiner, "The Byzantine knotted column", *Studies in honor of Milton V. Anastos*, 1985, 95-103.

This was the first largest building erected by the Israelites and since they had no experience in the practice





3. Steatite icon, St. George, Vatoped Monastery, 12th C.

In the Bible there is detailed explanation of the temple and its architect along with the frontal bronze pillars and capitals.<sup>7</sup> Solomon had two columns placed in front of his temple guarding the entrance to the sanctuary named Jachin and Boaz that according to the Septuagint translates as accomplishment and power.<sup>8</sup> Together, they are supposed to allude to God's promise to David: "In strength shall I establish thy kingdom." The traditional Masonic interpretation has been to take them as a unit. In Kabala the pillar on the right is called the pillar of Mercy, the Pillar on the center is equilibrium (sometimes mildness), while the pillar on the left is called severity. The pillars symbolize the ancient Faus-

of architecture Solomon sought the help of Hiram, the Phoenician king of Tyre. Hiram supplied cedar wood from Lebanon and skilled builders. The Temple showed the characteristics of Phoenicians architecture: details like the pillars called Boaz and Jachin in the forecourt have their exact counterparts in the temples of the pre-Israelite Canaanite population (e.g. the temple of the 20th-19th century BC at Hazor) as well as in much later temples of Baal like the one at Palmyra.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings, chapter 7, sections 13-26.

<sup>8</sup> Kalavrezou Maxeiner, "The Byzantine knotted column", 101.



4. St George Staro Nagorichane, western bifora, 11th C. or late



4a. St. George, western facade bifora

tian motif, for only who respects the boundary, and does not leer at the unknown is guaranteed salvation. They served as a disciplinary measure and marked an impending exclusion.

There are numerous examples of synagogues that employ Heracles' knot usually on door lintels. I will mention the following:

Capernaum synagogue, eastern Galilee, was richly decorated with a variety of symbols, of both a Jewish religious nature and from the Roman and pagan tradition. Above the central door there was an archway whose keystone (5 or 6<sup>th</sup> C.) had a seashell decoration centered in a wreath whose ribbons, tied in a Hercules knot, were held by eagles. Werlin thinks this defaced birds might be doves and not eagles, like in some Christian sarcophagi.<sup>9</sup>

Lintel of the Bet Midrash of Eliezer ha-Qappar, Dabura, northern Golan, depicts in bas-relief two eagles, in the beak of each bird is the tail of a snake. The snakes curve down and toward the center of the

<sup>9</sup> Steve Werlin, *Eagle Imagery in Jewish Relief Sculpture of Late Ancient Palestine: Survey and Interpretation*, Chapel Hill 2006 (M.A. thesis), 46.

panel where they twist into a Heracle's knot, and then form the two halves of a stylized wreath.

Merot, northern Upper Galilee, Eagles-Flanking-Wreath Lintel over doorway of room next to synagogue possibly a “*Bet Midrash*”, the wreath is marked by a narrow, high-relief ring, at the bottom of which is a large Hercules knot. The ends of the Hercules knot curve out and have three-pointed leaves attached.<sup>10</sup>

Synagogue discovered in 1967 in the ruins of the ancient Jewish village of Katzrin, 13 km. n-w of the Sea of Galilee. The older square synagogue A (4th-5<sup>th</sup> C.) was replaced in the 6th C. by a large and elegant trapezoidal synagogue, destroyed in 749. The lintel of the main entrance, has a carved wreath tied in a Hercules knot, flanked by two pomegranates and two amphorae.<sup>11</sup>

Ulu Mosque Bursa (1399) is a large rectangular building, with twenty domes arranged in four rows of five that are supported by twelve columns, decorated with relief knots at two thirds of their length repeated on each side. According to Edmonds, these 12 columns are aimed to make an impression of the almighty and grandiose Lord. The city has been conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1326, who made it their seat. After this year, byzantine sculptors have been engaged at large number of object to make the columns and capitals.

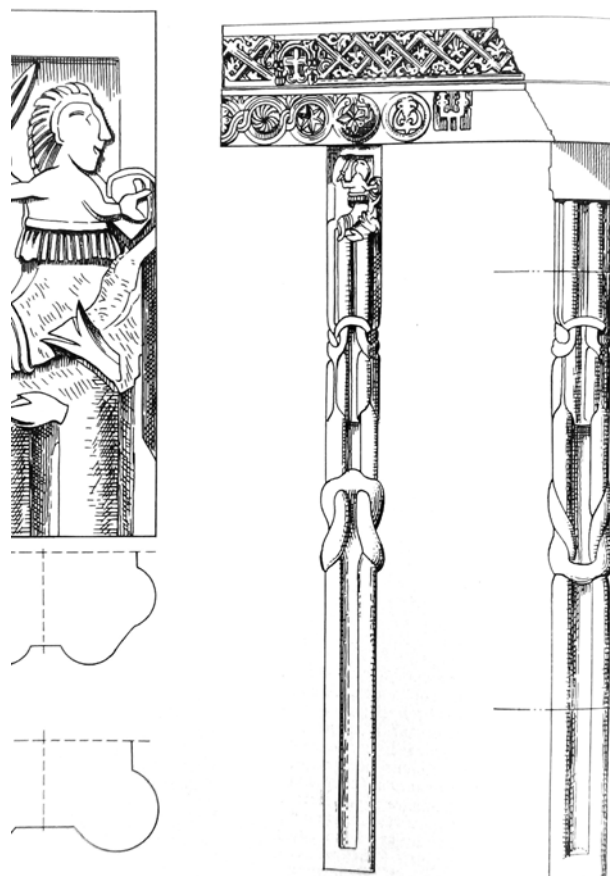
The examples with art works bearing Heracles' knot from Macedonia<sup>12</sup> are numerous (to mention here only the decorative sculpture – window columns from St. George, Staro Nagoričino (11<sup>th</sup> C.) and Mlado Nagoričino (late medieval period), frescoes from the apses of St. Sophia in Ohrid (11<sup>th</sup> C.) and St. George, Kurbinovo (1191), ciborium of the ambo of St. Sophia in Ohrid (around 1314), wooden altar screen from St. Kosmas and Damian in Ohrid (15<sup>th</sup> C.). There are examples from Greece (the cathedral of Mystras, churches in Arta, Nafplion, sarcophagus of St. Theodora (empress Theodora), Church of St. Theodora, Arta, and sarcophagi from Thessaloniki etc.)<sup>13</sup>, where the knot is applied on western and apsidal facades' windows, on altar screens, frescoes depicting altar front plates, and sarcophagi (no such findings exist in Macedonia). It is also present on ci-

<sup>10</sup> Werlin, *op.cit.* 17, 35.

<sup>11</sup><https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Archaeology/Katzrin.html>

<sup>12</sup> Filipova Snezana, “The cult of St George”, 18-37.

<sup>13</sup> Theoharis Pazaras, *Προταση αναπαραστασης του Αμβωνα της παλαιας μητροπολης στη Βεροισ, 251–254, Μουσείο Μπενακη, Αθίνα 1994; Α ασκαρινα Μπουρα, Ο Γλιπτος Διακοσμος Τωσ Ναωσ τισ Παναγιασ στο Μοναστερι τωσ Οσιοσ Λουκα, Αθίνα 1980.*



5. Mistra Metropolis, iconostasis, columns, late 13, early 14th C.

boria of ambos, in both countries, dated in the 14<sup>th</sup> C. The place of this symbol on columns may be related to the columns of the old Jewish temple of Solomon, and its frontal columns. Such churches with Heracles' knot on the frontal façade portico can be seen painted in several Byzantine manuscripts. The knot is knitted on the precious altar table screens of St. Sophia in Ohrid, today part of the permanent exhibition of the National Historical Museum of Sophia, as well on the marble ambo ordered by Archbishop Gregory in the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> C. on the columns that hold the ciborium of St. Sophia in Ohrid.

In the fresco painting we find this knotted column as part of the ciborium over Christ the lamb from St. George, Kurbinovo, and here even three columns are presented which may be related to the biphora that was placed in the middle of the scene thus used to become part of the painted ciborium, or it points to the Holy Trinity? Such columns with knots are painted above the patron saint in the fresco program of St. Athanasius from Mousaki, Greece (1386/7). Here the knot is repeated twice on each double shaft.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>[http://www.kastoriacity.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=405&limit=1&limitstart=4](http://www.kastoriacity.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=405&limit=1&limitstart=4)





6. *Holy Communion, St. Sophia Ohrid, apse, 11th C.*



7. *Christ lamb, St. George, Kurbinovo, 1191, apse,*

Not only the frescoes in the altar apse, but also the church cloths that decorated the altar of St. Sophia or St. Clement in Ohrid, kept in the Archaeological Museum in Sophia bear the Heracles' knot. After an exhibition hold in Moscow in 2003, several more cloths and embroidered icons come to light, given as gift to the archbishopric of Ohrid from several Byzantine emperors. No 64 of this catalogue shows embroidery, purple with gold, with the representation of the Holy Communion of the apostles, where only one frontal column of the ciborium above the table has very large Heracles' knot. It was given as gift to the Archbishop of Ohrid from Andronik Paleologos in the late 14<sup>th</sup> C.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This catalogue was very difficult to find and I thank here Mr. Alexander Musin for the Russian Academy of Science and Arts to send me its digital scanned version. The exhibition was hold in the State Historical Museum in Moscow. See Христианское Искусство Болгарии, 1.10.-8.12. 2003 Москва, page 61, fig. 64.

Also the cult of St. Theodor may be related to the knot, as illustrated by the relief plate from Vinica, where the holy soldier is represented bearing the dragon shaped flag with the dragon tail shaped as knot. 15 years ago when writing about the Cult of St. George, I have pointed to several tombs and larnaxes from Greece (the one from St. Theodor in Serres), that are related to the cult of St. Theodor or St. Theodora (empress Theodora), Church of St. Theodora, (Arta), sarcophagus that contain knotted columns under which the saint is represented or the cross on which Jesus has been crucified.<sup>16</sup> Also in Mani one of the medieval churches dedicated to St. Theodor contains decorative sculpture with arch made of knotted columns that inscribes the leaved cross. From the bishopric of Volos comes an example of column used as spolia to function as door jamb at the main portal

<sup>16</sup> Filipova, "The cult of St George", fig. 12, 13.



8. Little Holly Doctors -Mali Sveti Vraci Ohrid, 15th C.

of the church, thus accenting the role of this motif and symbol of protection.<sup>17</sup>

The relation of the cult of St. George and St. Theodor and the knot of Heracles' may lie in their image of brave deity, killing the evil-personified in the dragon. Even their coat of arms on shields in medieval Byzantine frescoes (St. Panteleimon, Nerezi, Skopje, 1164) and icons (13<sup>th</sup> C. icon originally from Kostur-Castoria, exhibited in Byzantine Museum, Athens, and another 14<sup>th</sup> C. icon from Georgia) some-

<sup>17</sup> On the possible reading of the Heracles' knot as twin positive and negative pillars of existence, Maker and Redeemer, Strength and Beauty, Severity and Mercy etc. there are many articles and sources that cannot be all cited here since this article does not deal with the meaning of the symbol in all the possible contexts and religions. The glory of Heracles' strength and his knot may be also seen in the way carpets are made in the village of Hereke, a unique weaving center located at the northern edge of Izmit Bay, near Istanbul. The name "Hereke" comes from "Herakles" (Hercules). In ancient times there was well-known fortification. For the latest study of the knot in the Ancient period and the relation of Heracles knot and the knot of Alexander the Great see the article of Ann M. Nicgorski, 'The magic knot of Heracles, the propaganda of Alexander the Great and Tomb II at Vergina', in *Heracles and Hercules, Exploring a Graeco Roman Divinity*, Classical Press of Wales, 2005, pp. 97-128.



8a. Left column, iconostasis, Mali Sveti Vraci, today in the Museum of Ohrid

times are identical: two red and two green fields of a rounded or elongated shield.<sup>18</sup>

More than thirty years ago Kalavrezou began citing the examples in her article on the Heracles knot with the apsidal fresco in Macedonia, from Hagia Sophia in Ohrid, fresco in the altar with the Holy Communion (early 11<sup>th</sup> C. which makes it the earliest fresco example), and the columns of the ciborium of the ambo reused for the ciborium of the minbar (14<sup>th</sup> C.) of the same church<sup>19</sup>, iconostasis of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople, the iconostasis and the wall icon frames from Chora in Constantinople (12<sup>th</sup> C.), remnants of sculptural decoration of Panaghia church next to Hosios Loukas that belonged to two large icon frames<sup>20</sup>, on the wall icons of Protaton on Mt. Athos, framing arches of two mosaic icons on the pilasters of the church Porta Panaghia in Trikala, Thessaly (1285).

There are a lot of fragmented stone decorative sculpture from the Byzantine Museum in Athens that were not known to Kalavrezou when she published her article, where knotted columns usually inscribe a leaved cross, to mention only inv. no. 213, 221 (columns-11<sup>th</sup> C.), epistles, plates and other kind of

<sup>18</sup> Filipova, *Kommenos Heraldry and Fresco Painting in Macedonia*, *MN* 36-37, (2010), 101-124.

<sup>19</sup> Nor she neither Theoharas Pazaras knew there was another more column found in the church that has same type of capital and is made of the same material when they published their articles. See Theoharis Pazaras, *Προταση αναπαραστασησ του Αμβωνα της παλαιασ μητροπολης στη Βεροισ*, 251-254. I have photographed this piece 15 years ago in the depot of the church St. Sophia in Ohrid and this indicates there was probably another piece of furniture (ciborium over altar table?) or there were two more knotted columns that were originally part of the ambo ciborium somehow lost or damaged and replaced by other two?

<sup>20</sup> Laskarina Buras thinks the delicate and perforated vine scroll and the double knotted colonets recall Komnenian rather than Macedonian dynasty icon frames. See *Λασκαρινα Μπουρα, Ο Γλυπτος Διακοσμος Του Ναου τισ Παναγιασ στο Μοναστερι του Οσιοσ Λουκα*, 132, fig. 175.





9. *St. Gregorius Theologos, Homilies on the Virgin Mary, by James Kokkinobaphos, 1/2 of the 12th C., National Library of Paris*

sculpture -175, 177, 209, 255, 272, dated in the 11, 12-13<sup>th</sup> C.<sup>21</sup> They mostly come from Athens churches that are dedicated to various saints, and from Mani published by Laskarina Buras.<sup>22</sup>

Also the publications that came out of print in the last 2 decades show how many more examples can be added which points to a very popular motif. Probably it was *must have* decoration in every important church with high class patrons.

Kalavrezou mentioned only a few examples from Europe and Russia: the Split Cathedral, relief of the Annunciation in the campanile (13<sup>th</sup> C.); Würzburg cathedral with two columns, now placed before the entrance to the baptistery that originally flanked the main portal of the church; fragmented icon with St. Theodor, Demetrius and Philip, now in Hermitage, where the saints are separated by knotted columns, St Marc basilica, Venice - spolia column from the roof, and silver reliquary with Christ and four Martyrs.<sup>23</sup> I can add to these examples the spolia transennae used

<sup>21</sup> Μαρια Σκλαβου Μαυροειδη, *ΓΛΥΠΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟΥ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ*, (catalogue), Athens 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Λασκαρινα Μπουρα, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Kalavrezou Maxeiner, "The Byzantine knotted column, 97.



10. *Homilies on the Virgin Mary, by James Kokkinobaphos folio 3v, Constantinople, 1 half of the 12th C. National Library of Paris*

at San Alipio facade door of St Marc basilica, Venice, where 5 transennae have been reused joined by 3 columns with double shafts with knots in the middle.

The earliest medieval examples of Heracles' knot in Byzantium seem to come from ivory sculpture-Berlin State Library, triptych, central panel with Christ, applied on the throne legs (10<sup>th</sup> C.)<sup>24</sup> steatite icon with Koimesis, 2/2 of the 10<sup>th</sup> C., Kunst Historisches Museum, Vienna and manuscripts (Menologion of Basil II of around 1000, the page with the side columns of the architecture around St. Melania the younger, then comes the illumination from the 12<sup>th</sup> C. representing the church of the Holly Apostles in Constantinople, with five domes, with the images of Christ in majesty, apostles, Virgin Mary; here we see four double columns knotted with Heracles' knot. We can add here Dobreišo Tetraevangelium, National Library of Sophia, 13<sup>th</sup> C., page with St. Marc and the symbolic architecture above him with three arches that originally comes from Macedonia. To this manuscript we can add one coming from Tbilisi (The Vani Gospel, orig-

<sup>24</sup> Чудотворна Икона в Византии и Древне Руси, collection of articles, editor А.М.Лидов, Маргис Москва 1996, С. Смирнова, "Спас Злата Риза", 159-182, illus. 8.





11. *Vani Gospel, Constantinople, folio 3v, 1200, National Manuscript Centre, Tbilissi*

inally from Constantinople, folio 3, around 1200)<sup>25</sup>, and the page from Codex par. Gr. 1208, fol. 3v, 12<sup>th</sup> C., Paris, Nationale Library, with the Ascension; and the illustration of Saint Gregory writing his Homilies, Miniature from a 12<sup>th</sup> C. from the codex 339, fol. 4v, from Sinai, Monastery of Hagia Aikaterine.<sup>26</sup>

As for the icons, there are several with saints represented under arch, looking like real architectural columns, as it was the case in the fresco paintings. The earliest steatite icon with knotted columns that support the baldachin under which St. George is depicted can be dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> C., from the treasury of Vatopedi Monastery of Athos<sup>27</sup>. This feature is very common in the 11<sup>th</sup> C. steatite icons.<sup>28</sup> Yet, even in the 15<sup>th</sup> C. we can see Christ enthroned under arch with Heracles' knotted columns (Mistra, Museum, inv. no. 1166).<sup>29</sup>

The protection, and healing is also a service provided by the Holy Doctors, St. Cosma and St Damian (Sveti Vrači, Ohrid, wooden iconostasis of the

<sup>25</sup> *Byzantium*, ed. By Robin Cormack and Maria Vasilaki, London 2008, fig. 289, page 332.p

<sup>26</sup> *The Splendour of Orthodoxy*, 41, ill. 15, 189, ill. 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Op.cit.*, 496, ill. 301.

<sup>28</sup> Kalavrezou Maxeiner, "The Byzantine knotted column, note 3, 101.

<sup>29</sup> *Byzantine and post byzantine art, (catalogue)*, Ministry of Culture, Athens 1986, 31, figure 18.



12. *Porta Sant'Alipio, St. Marks' Basilica*



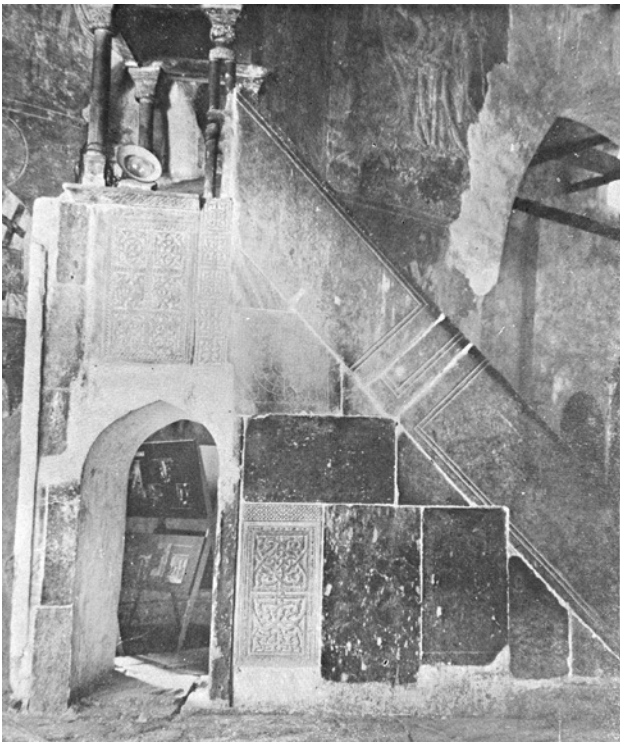
13. *Abbazia di Chiaravalle Milano, Cloister, Knot columns, year 1135*

church, 15<sup>th</sup> C.), which is the only known to me late wooden iconostasis in the Balkans.

Identical coat of arms represented on the shields of St. Theodor Stratilat and Nestor from St. Panteleimon church in Nerezi, Skopje, has been represented on the shield of St. George on an 13th C. icon from Kostur (Kastoria), today in the Byzantine Museum of Athens. It is evenly divided into four fields of the shield, two green and two red colored.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Filipova Snezana, *Medieval paintings in Macedonian Churches and applied arts as the echo of the Heraldic Society*, *Culture of memory in East Central Europe in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period*, Conference proceedings, Poznan 2008, 277-287. *Ibid.*, *Studies in the Heraldry in Macedonia*, Makedonika Litera, Skopje 2015.





14 St. Sophia, Ohrid, ambo, early 14th C., ciborium with applied Heracles' knot on the column

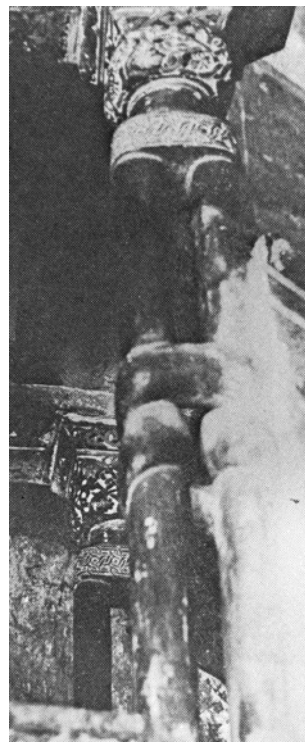
#### Meaning

For Kalavrezu, Heracles knot became iconographical symbol, instead of abstract decorative motif and was not part of the standard vocabulary of Byzantine decorative motifs. In the mid Byzantine era according to the usage and place of the knotted columns it was implicated that the knot has not only preserved the ancient protective power but received a new religious meaning.

In the churches the most frequent position of the applied on sculpture or painted Heracles' knot in architectural context is related to the iconostasis, proskinetaries and the altar, along with the apsidal and western façade windows. So, it is the line that separates the nave and the altar, then the façade of the temple, outer façade of the altar=cancel that closes the holiest space of the church. The function to protect from evil, according to Kalavrezou, can be seen also by the usage of the knot at the iconostases, usually on columns that are part of an arch or separate the main icons of the altar screen. Its occasional usage on the apsidal windows denotes the function to protect the holy space from the outer world with which it communicates through these openings.<sup>31</sup>

Macedonian examples of Heracles' knot on window columns of the western church façade placed in the niche between the door and the central window, above the main entrance to the church (where the

<sup>31</sup> Joli Kalavrezou Maxeiner, "The Byzantine knotted column", *Studies in honor of Milton V. Anastos*, 1985, 100.



14a, detail of the knot from the ciborium of the ambo, St. Sophia, Ohrid

saint or the feast to which the church has been dedicated is represented) show also direct link of

this ornament with the saint. In our case it is twice church dedicated to St. George -protector, defender. Some images of St. George made in Constantinople, along with some of the other holy warriors, are represented in full armor with a cloak that has a knot on the mid of his breasts. The Ancient meaning of this motif has been kept in Byzantium and there from may have been transferred to Romanesque art in the West where it was believed to have magic power.

Willeke Wendrich concludes that in Ancient Egypt the connotation of knots and knotting is almost entirely positive. "Although binding usually requires tying, it is extremely rare to find explicit mention of knots or knotting in a context of threat."<sup>32</sup>

Probably Heracles' knot motif, frequently used in all visual arts was "must have" decoration in every important church with high class patrons (like the patron of St. George, Kurbinovo<sup>33</sup>, who was relative to the Byzantine Emperor, while the archbishop of St. Sophia, Ohrid, patron of the ambo and ciborium of the cathedral along with the added exonarthex in 1313, was also coming from Constantinople). St. George in Staro Nagoričani is also related (at least legendary- its first phase), to the byzantine Emperor Roman Diogen of the 11<sup>th</sup> C. and its main phase or partial reconstruction, building and fresco painting in the early 14<sup>th</sup> C. to the Serbian king Milutin (1253-1321).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Willeke Wendrich, *Entangled, Connected or Protected? The Power of Knots and Knotting in Ancient Egypt*, 262.

<sup>33</sup> Cvetan Grozdanov, Lidia Hadermann Misguich, *Kurbinovo*, Makedonska Kniga, 1992, Skopje.

<sup>34</sup> Branislav Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Beograd 1993.

Снежана ФИЛИПОВА

## КОМПАРАТИВНА МЕТОДОЛОГИЈА НА ХЕРАКЛОВИОТ ЈАЗОЛ И НЕГОВОТО ЗНАЧЕЊЕ ВО МАКЕДОНСКАТА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНА УМЕТНОСТ

### *Резиме*

Во Византија, а со тоа и во Србија и Македонија во средниот век веројатно мотивот на хераклов јазол во визуелните уметности бил декорација што се преферирала и била вообичаена во секоја важна црква изградена од ктитор кој бил припадник на високата класа или роднина на владеечкиот император, односно цар. Византиската уметност го задржала старото значење и употреба на мотивот и можно е одтука да се префрлило на Запад и нашло иста примена во романичката уметност. Дури и еврејската уметност на раниот прв милениум, како и исламската уметност односно објекти на кои работеле византиски мајстори го познава овој мотив (Улу џамијата од Бурса од 1399 г.). Според некои истражувачи тоа е врзано со бронзените столбови на фасадата од Соломоновиот храм, наречени Јахин и Боаз. Во Македонија како примери на овој мотив употре-

бен во својство на заштита од зло на бифора од западна фасада или иконостас, односно во фрески од апсида ќе ги наброиме црквите Св. Ѓорѓи во Старо и Младо Нагоричино (западна бифора), истоимената црква во Курбиново (апида, фреска со Поклонување на Христос Агнец, насликани столбови од цибориј), како и Света Софија во Охрид (насликана врата од простор под олтарската маса од Поклонение на Архиерите, ½ на 11 век, како и столбче од цибориј на амвонот од почетокот на 14 век). Најстарите зачувани византиски примери се од илуминации и слонова коска од 10 век. Така нашите примери што датираат од почетокот на 11 и од 12 век покажуваат рано следење на оваа практика, а најдоцните се применети на цибориумот на амвонот од Св. Софија, Охрид во почетокот на 14 век и во Св. Кузма и Дамјан во 15 век, на дрвениот столб од иконостасот..