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# ENTANGLING TEXT AND IMAGE IN SACRED SPACE: VOTIVE MOSAIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM GRADIŠTE NEAR STOJNIK (KOSMAJ, SERBIA)

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# ENTANGLING TEXT AND IMAGE IN SACRED SPACE: VOTIVE MOSAIC INSCRIPTIONS FROM GRADIŠTE NEAR STOJNIK (KOSMAJ, SERBIA)[2]

*Keywords:*
Gradište near Stojnik;
votive mosaics;
floor mosaics;
Late Antique art;
Late Antique architecture;
euergetism.

*Abstract*. On the site Gradište, near Stojnik on the mountain Kosmaj, the remains of a large complex were discovered. It consists of a longitudinal space divided into several units by transversal walls and a rotunda with an apse built into its eastern part. The architectural characteristics of the complex, as well as its overall appearance and dating to the middle of the 4th century, suggest that it was most probably used as a Christian sacred building. Floors covered in mosaics, although very fragmentarily preserved, also testify to this hypothesis. The largest preserved section of the mosaic consists of votive inscriptions intertwined with various geometrical and figural motifs. This paper is primarily dedicated to the research of those votive mosaic inscriptions, although the attention will also be paid to other represented motifs, in order to understand the iconography of the preserved part of the mosaic floor. The position of the mosaics, their votive character, and overall appearance suggest that they were intentionally placed in what was considered to be a liminal space between two parts of the complex, namely in the place that symbolically divided two spaces of various levels of sacrality. Therefore, this paper also examines other important questions in order to properly understand the meaning and importance of *vota* in the sacral space: who could see and read those inscriptions, how the inscriptions communicated to their 'readers', what kind of information they convey about the donors, etc.

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In her notable study dedicated to the Late Antique sacred spaces of the Mediterranean, Ann Mary Yasin (2009) wrote: "The building of the Roman Empire, one may say, began with conspicuous acts of public benefaction by wealthy private citizens" (p. 102). Namely, the creation of the overall public, sacred, and private topography of the Roman Empire certainly relied for the most part on the donations of those who could afford to finance the erection, furnishing, and decoration of various buildings and monuments. The names of those benefactors, whether emperors, members of the imperial family or wealthy individuals, were preserved in different places and recorded by different means—inscribed in stone, on wall- and floor mosaics, in written historical sources, etc. In ancient Rome, such inscriptions could often be found in public spaces, primarily temples and sanctuaries, in the necropolises, and even on the walls facing the streets, but they were also tied to the private sphere since they can be found within domestic spaces as well (Veyne, 1992; Van Minnen, 2000, pp. 453–466; Lomas, 2003; Zuiderhoek, 2011).[3] This practice continued to live during the entire Late Antique period, although some important aspects changed alongside with the religious change and intensive Christianization (Van Minnen, 2000, pp. 466–468; Smith 2003, pp. 144–145). That change can primarily be observed in the fact that the information about the donations mostly concerned the erection and furnishing of Christian sacral buildings as the most important public spaces.

During the Late Antiquity, inscriptions that mention church-ktetors and donors were often placed within the church spaces—on lintels, architraves, capitals (mostly in the form of a monogram),[4] on floor- and wall mosaics, etc. (Шпехар, 2023). When they are a part of a church decoration, inscriptions were often included in complex compositions alongside various images, primarily on reliefs and/or mosaics. Such compositions bear multiple meanings; they primarily testify to the euergetic and philanthropic activities of persons whose

[3] About the fragile boundaries between public and private spheres in ancient Rome, c.f. Wallace-Hadrill, 2016.

[4] For the various meanings of monograms in Late Antiquity, see the detailed recent study by Ildar Garipzanov, c.f. Garipzanov, 2018.

names are recorded by the inscriptions, but they also had commemorative, symbolical, religious, liturgical meanings, etc. Votive mosaics are some of the most common forms of inscribing donors' names within sacred space. One such mosaic floor was found on the site Gradište in the vicinity of the village Stojnik on the mountain Kosmaj and is now preserved as part of the permanent exhibition of the National Museum of Serbia.[5]

On the site Gradište, near Stojnik, traces of the Roman *castelum* and civic settlement were discovered at the beginning of the 20th century (Величковић, 1958, pp. 102–108; Борић-Брешковић & Црнобрња, 2015, p. 21; Црнобрња, 2017, pp. 240–244 with older literature). *Castelum* was used by various cohorts during the 2nd and the 3rd century and had a decisive role in the protection of the wide area of the Kosmaj mines. The civic settlement, of the supposed name *Demessum* or *Deumessum* (Dušanić, 1976, p. 154, No. 162), was situated in its close vicinity (Борић-Брешковић & Црнобрња, 2015, pp. 28–31). During later excavations, conducted in the 1950s and 1980s, the remains of an impressive complex were discovered about 80 meters southeast of the entrance to the *castelum*.[6] The complex is oriented E-W (with some deviations), and it consists of a longitudinal section divided into several units and a rotunda east of it (Fig. 1)

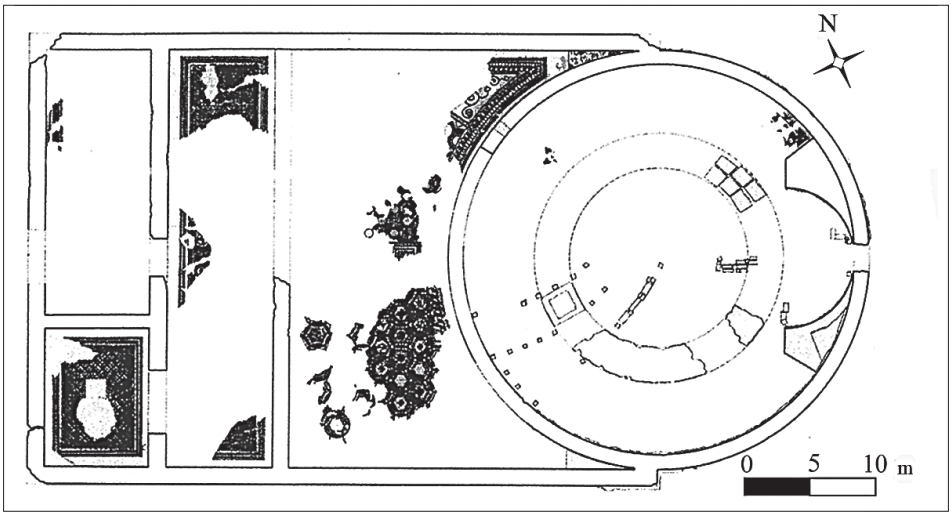


Fig. 1. Ground plan of complex in Gradište near Stojnik on Kosmaj mountain with disposition of preserved mosaics, 4th century (according to Шпехар, 2019, p. 120, fig. 114a)

[5] Inv. nos. NMB 893/IV–896/IV and NMB 898/IV–902/IV.

[6] The measurment of the distance between the castelum and the building with rotunda was conducted during recent site survey in 2015 and 2016, which also showed that the building is in a quite bad condition at the moment, c.f. Црнобрња, 2017, pp. 243–244.

(Црнобрња, 2017, p. 243). The longitudinal section had a total dimension of 17.6 × 14.3 m (Франковић, 2013, p. 300). Although the spatial arrangement of the building is quite complex, it is obvious that the longitudinal part consisted of four smaller units—on the western end of the building were two small spaces separated by a wall oriented W-E, followed by one larger transverse space toward the east, ending in the largest irregular space further to the east, from where one could enter the rotunda. The rotunda had an ambulatory around its central space and quite spacious semi-circular apse inscribed within the eastern part of the ambulatory. Such a complex disposition of various architectural spaces within a single building, as well as its overall dimensions, suggest that it must have had a public role, even more precisely, a religious function.

Researchers dated the complex to the mid- or the second half of the 4th century (Душанић, 1974, pp. 93–96; Душанић, 1991, p. 219). Therefore, having in mind its appearance and disposition of architectural spaces, it can be assumed that it served as a Christian church. The combination of longitudinal and circular units into one coherent structure, which is a practice very well known in Christian sacral architecture of the time, testifies to this hypothesis (Шпехар, 2022, p. 48). Of course, the most eloquent and paradigmatic examples are the Constantinian churches of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Nativity in Bethlehem. They both combined centrally planned structures with longitudinal basilical forms, whereby basilicas kept their primary liturgical function, while the most sacred memorial spaces of both churches were centrally planned (Krautheimer, 1965, pp. 38–41; Ousterhout, 1990, p. 45; Patrich, 2006, pp. 361–366; Shalev-Hurvitz, 2015, pp. 43–78; Patrich, 2016, pp. 272–275). Although these analogies may seem geographically distant, we must have in mind that, especially in art and architecture, mutual influences between the Holy Land and other parts of the Empire had greater significance in the epoch of Late Antiquity than any local tradition (Shalev-Hurvitz, 2015, pp. 23–24). In the case of the building in Gradište near Stojnik, the longitudinal section did not have the form of the basilica but was a wide single-nave space, divided by transversely placed walls in four already mentioned smaller units. The rotunda is quite indicative, primarily because of the large apse inscribed in its eastern wall, which further strengthens the hypothesis about the Christian sacral function of this building. Such function is also suggested by fragmented floor mosaics consisting of *vota* intertwined with various geometrical and figural motifs, discovered in every room of this complex (Франковић, 2013, pp. 301–302). The floors of the rotunda, more precisely of the ambulatory, were likewise covered with mosaics, although they are very poorly preserved. Its decoration consisted of a bordure made of vines with ivy leaves and a very poorly recognizable geometric pattern in the middle of the mosaic field (Fig. 2) (Франковић, 2013, p. 302). Although the motif of vines and ivy leaves had their origin in Dionysiac themes tied primarily to Dionysus' role of psychopomp, they were accepted by Christians very early and were likewise tied

Fig. 2. Fragment of a mosaic from rotunda, Gradište near Stojnik, 4th century (according to Франковић, 2013, p. 310, fig. 4)

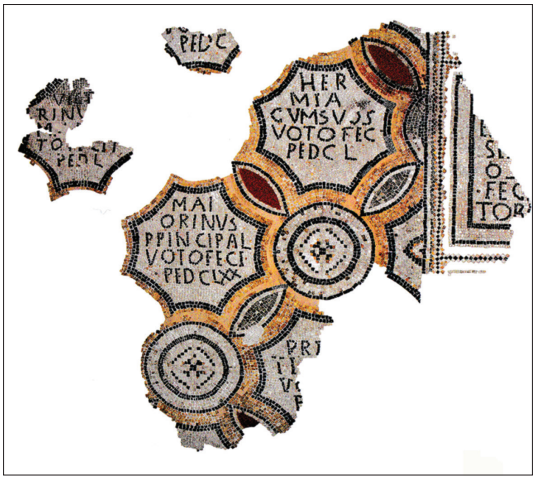


Fig. 3. Mosaics with votive inscriptions, Gradište near Stojnik, 4th century (according to Поповић & Борић-Брешковић, 2013, кат. 84)

to the soteriological character of the new faith (Шпехар & Вранешевић, 2023, pp. 149–151). Therefore, they belong to the repertoire of seemingly religiously neutral motifs, transformed for the purpose of the new religion, which was a phenomenon well-known and often used in Late Antiquity.

The mosaic floor found in the central part of the largest longitudinal chamber, immediately preceding the entrance into the rotunda (Fig. 3) is of special interest here. It is visually divided into octagonal and circular fields and is likewise only partially preserved, but well enough for comprehending its content, iconography, and meaning. All the mosaics were made out of multi-coloured tesserae, with prevailing yellow (golden), red, grey, blue, black, and white tones.

Tesserae were made of stone, terracotta, and glass (Franković, 2008, p. 85). The mosaic in question was divided into fields of different shapes. Octagonal fields had concave-shaped edges and dimensions of 20 to 25 cm (Dušanić, 1976, p. 151). Votive mosaic inscriptions are found within these octagonal fields and were separated from each other by smaller circular fields with cross-like geometric ornaments. This pattern is positioned around one significantly larger rectangular field, placed directly in front of the entrance to the rotunda, which also bears an inscription. The inscription is very badly preserved, but according to the visible letters it can be suggested that it also had the same votive, commemorative, and philanthropic character as those inscribed within octagonal fields. It is proposed that the name of the most meritorious donor was placed in this field and, according to the preserved letters, Slobodan Dušanić (Душанић, 1991) suggested that the person may have been the procurator of the Kosmaj mines (pp. 218–219).

Larger circular fields with inscribed hexagons, also with concave-shaped edges, are placed in the southern part of the mosaic (Fig. 4). Although there are large lacunae between various parts of the mosaic floor, different shapes of fields on the two parts could suggest that they were not made simultaneously; if that is the case, one was most probably placed not long after the other. For our study such chronological difference, if it even existed, is of little or no importance. Within some of the hexagonal fields in the southern part of the mosaic floor, votive inscriptions are also inscribed, while within others there are various

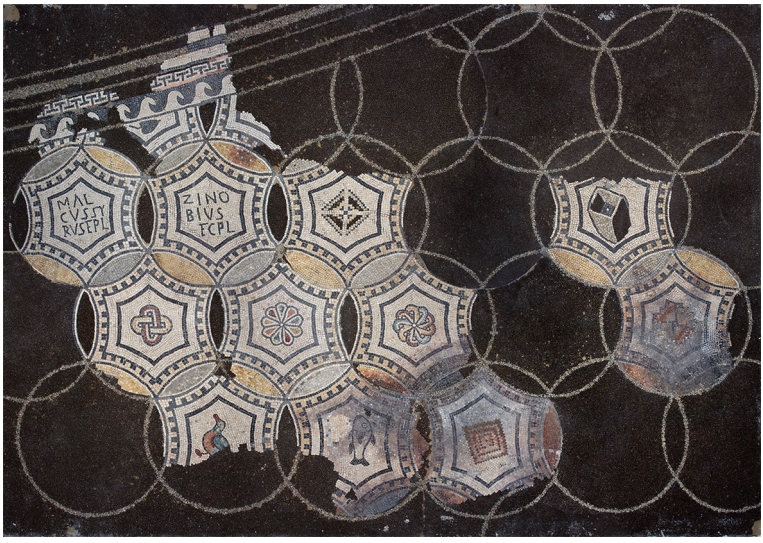


Fig. 4. Southern part of the mosaics with votive inscriptions, Gradište near Stojnik, 4th century (source: http://www.narodnimuzej.rs/antika/zbirka-za-kasnu-antiku-i-ranovizantijski-period-sa-seobom-naroda/)

motifs: knots, rosettes, different geometrical patterns, animals such as birds or fish, etc. Those motifs also belong to the repertoire of seemingly religiously neutral motifs, like the ones on the preserved fragments of mosaics in the rotunda, and they likewise had undoubted Christian symbolism, despite the lack of any direct biblical narrative. Narrative scenes, typical for the previous epoch of Roman Art, were substituted during the 3rd and 4th centuries by visually simpler yet equally eloquent and highly symbolical motifs, some even with magical and apotropaic powers (Maguire, 1994, p. 268; Jensen, 2000, p. 32). This phenomenon, defined by Marija Buzov (2011) as "monumental simplicity" (p. 173), means that simple motifs were used as the substitute for the more complex scenes, at the same time taking over all the monumentality of the previous solutions. Since the same solution was employed on the mosaic carpet in Stojnik, it can be concluded that its overall appearance corresponds to the style typical for the second half of the 4th century, which primarily implies the repetitive patterns which covered large areas (Dunbabin, 1999, p. 177).[7] Although in the case of the Stojnik mosaic, those highly symbolic images were distributed in separate fields, together with the inscriptions they form the same mosaic carpet. Such entangling of images and text, especially of *vota*, enabled the creation of visual codes that convey various primarily theological messages to those that gathered within the sacred space. One very interesting example of the same type of *votum* as in Stojnik, although differently combined, was discovered in the vicinity of the Cathedral of Verona, where two birds were represented above the *votum* and the number of funded feet of the mosaic, within the same mosaic field (Caillet, 1993, p. 81, fig. 66). It testifies that in other parts of the Empire the similar repertoire was used in the same context, although differently combined. In that context, we must also stress the importance of aniconic motifs, also represented on this mosaic—squares, rosettes, and especially Solomon's knot. Although they all have symbolical meaning, symbolizing the earthly Church (square), or paradisiac eternity (rosette), the strongest symbolical meaning is given to Solomon's knot. It was likewise adopted from non-Christian iconography by adjusting Hercules' knot for a new context of the Christian faith, accentuating its strong bonds with the previous Judaic tradition. In Christianity, the motif kept its primary apotropaic function and was associated with the Cross as the instrument of Christ's passion but also of his Resurrection (Maguire, 1994, pp. 267–268; Erdeljan & Vranešević, 2016, pp. 100–102).

When considering votive inscriptions on the mosaic from Gradište near Stojnik, we must emphasize they all have the same form—they consist of the name of the donor, the title if they had one, and the number of feet of mosaics donated by each individual. Some of them have preserved words *voto fecit*, which

[7] About the magical powers given to some aniconic motifs when repeatedly represented in Christian context, c.f. Maguire, 1994, pp. 269–272.

undoubtedly testify to their votive character. Each donor has their name written within the individual mosaic field. Among others, we can read the names of Hermia who donated the funds for the mosaic *cum suos* – most probably with the members of the family,[8] as well as names of Malcus Syrus, Primitianus (?), Victorinus, Zinobius, and two persons whose names are followed by their titles – Maiorinus principal and Theodulus lentiarius. Maiorinus had the highest rank among those whose names were preserved since his title of principal clearly suggests he was an imperial administrative officer, most probably the magistrate of some nearby town (Душанић, 1976, pp. 100–103; Goddard, 2020, p. 314). On the other hand, the term *lentiarius* is not entirely clear, although analogies from other parts of the Empire suggest he may have been a local merchant in linen (Woodward, 1926; Душанић, 1976, p. 99). What is more important, clearly Greek Christian name of Theodulus likewise suggests the Christian character of the entire complex.[9] Therefore, there can be little doubt that the building in Gradište near Stojnik had a sacral function in the Christian context. We can assume that it was at least used for communal gatherings of members of the local Christian congregation, although the apse in the rotunda suggests that it acquired liturgical function as well. Even the disposition of variously shaped mosaic fields, with frames composed of continuous waves and meanders, represents a classical model that intertwined figural and non-figural motifs, selected, combined, and adjusted to fit the new context of the Christian sacred building—the church.

In order to properly understand and interpret these mosaic inscriptions, we need to take a step toward understanding their place within the building. The described floor mosaics with votive inscriptions were placed in the central part, in front of the entrance into the rotunda. Such placement enabled the fulfilment of their primary function—to be visible and readable and to save the inscribed names and prayers of the donors for eternity (Killerich, 2011, p. 46). This is one of the crucial distinctions between pre-Christian religions and Christianity. Namely, although floor mosaics with inscriptions could likewise be found in non-Christian temples of the official Roman religion, their function and meaning are quite different in many aspects. Temples of the official Roman religion were not primarily intended for gathering of a large number of people, since most sacred rituals, such as sacrifices, were performed on altars outside the temple. Their inner space during the rituals was primarily intended for the god/goddess to whom the temples were dedicated, as their only 'inhabitants', as well as for

[8] Generic formulas like this one were comprehended as substitutes for listing family members that contributed to the matter and were common during the Late Antiquity, c.f. Killerich, 2011, p. 56.

[9] Slobodan Dušanić noted that four out of seven preserved names were of eastern origin, namely Greek or Sirian (Hermia, Zinobius, Theodolus, Malcus), c.f. Душанић, 1976, p. 96.

the priests who performed those rituals. Therefore, the inscriptions within the temples were intended primarily to be seen by the divinity, not by the priests or worshipers. As such they had an exclusively votive role. On the other hand, the church, the temple of the Christian God, although likewise comprehended and treated as 'God's house' was also a communal space filled by worshipers during the rituals (Lipka, 2009, pp. 103–116). Such role of the church also implies greater visibility of every visual element of its architecture, furnishing, decoration, as well as inscriptions, which also influenced and determined the position of those elements. One eloquent example can be seen in the Basilica of Chlef in Algeria, where the donor's inscription was oriented so that it can be read when facing an altar (Yasin, 2010, pp. 48–49). Mosaics in Stojnik had the same orientation, so they must have been well observable to those gathered within the largest longitudinal space, as well as to those entering the rotunda. Such a position suggests that they were located in what should be a liminal zone that separates two architecturally different spaces. The spatial arrangement of the building suggests that those were also spaces of various levels of sanctity. Namely, from the times when Christian churches started to appear as large public buildings intended for numerous congregations, one of their primary characteristics was the accentuation of horizontal sacrality (Caseau, 2022, pp. 23–32). It implies different levels of holiness visible in the spatial organization of the Church building—from the atrium through the naos and to the altar as the only space that was physically separated firstly by wooden railings and later by carved stone altar/chancel screens, delineating the space not accessible to worshipers. Since the disposition of architectural spaces in Late Antique churches somewhat vary, depending on the function of each church, horizontal levels of sacrality could differ. In that context, the most sacred focus of the building in Stojnik should be the apse, while the rotunda should be comprehended as the second sacral focus, whose nucleus most probably was at the center of the rotunda itself (Shalev-Hurvitz, 2015, p. 22). Its shape and mosaic decoration consisting of motifs with clearly funerary and soteriological character (namely vines with ivy leaves) suggest that it may have been tied to some saint cult.[10] To this testifies the fact that centrally planned structures as part of the sacred complexes mostly had the function of *memoria*, as is shown by the already mentioned and most prominent examples of Constantinian churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It is mostly accepted today that such practice is inherited from the Late Antique imperial mausolea, although their function multiplied according to the needs of Christianity. Except for the earlier commemorative function and a role in celebrating the cult of the individual—primarily of the emperor and later of the saints—Christian *memoria* became centres of pilgrimage and acquired the role of gathering the worshipers during rituals performed to celebrate important

[10] One must have in mind the popularity of the local Singidunum cults of saints Hermilus and Stratonicus, c.f. Шпехар, 2022.

dates tied to the saint to whom they were dedicated, but in some cases also during the liturgy. Therefore, their size was bigger than the size of standard Late Antique mausolea. The centrality of memorial buildings also implies the symbolical meaning of eternity, inherited from ancient cultures, architecturally shaped by the circle as a perfectly symmetrical form.

Another very important aspect of the mosaics in Stojnik that must be taken into consideration is the role of the donors whose names are inscribed within the building. Katherine Dunbabin (1999) noted that mosaic inscriptions like those in Stojnik suggest that funds were raised from the members of the congregation for a project which they couldn't control (p. 324), in this case, the making of the mosaic carpet. The common assumption is that they personally had very little to do with the final appearance of the mosaics they partially financed, except for the fact that the amount of collected funds resulted in the number of feet written in the inscriptions. Dunbabin (1999) suggested that the donors could also choose the text of the inscription, while the entire programme was determined by the highest local church dignitary (p. 325). Those were primarily bishops, as well as priests in smaller rural areas, who were the most respected authority in this matter (Caner, 2020, pp. 269–271). The reason for this lies in the fact that the appearance, furnishing, and decoration of the churches had to convey strong religious and theological messages, which were in a way controlled by the clerics. The homogeneity of the mosaic with votive inscriptions in Stojnik suggests the same possibility, with maybe one exception—only the most meritorious donors, like the procurator of the Kosmaj mines, could have an active role in the appearance of the mosaic they partially donated. Others most probably had a passive role, but it doesn't change the fact that their names were likewise inscribed within the sacral space.

It is obvious that votive inscriptions bear a lot more meanings than those strictly formal because each text within sacral space must be observed in adequate architectural, religious, liturgical, cultural, social, and iconographic contexts. To quote Ann Mary Yasin (2009) once again: „We need to consider Late Antique churches, therefore, not only as ritual and sacred spaces, but also as epigraphic environments, as spaces that engaged their users through the medium of writing" (p. 101). It means that inscriptions within the sacred space were means of social communication between named donors and those that read or maybe only saw those inscriptions. Namely, we must stress that, although the text on any inscription is primarily aimed at those that can read, it also had a very strong effect on those that couldn't, because the message they convey was not exclusively verbal, but also visual. People of Late Antiquity indeed comprehended inscriptions in such a manner, which is testified by a statement of a rich Roman senator, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, whose family had a long-lasting line of influential individuals, that his name on a seal was more intended to be understood (*intellegi*) than to be read (*legi*) (according to Garipzanov, 2018, p. 1). Therefore, for words to be

better understood—*intellegi*—various visual means were employed. Greg Woolf (1996) rightly pointed out that most Roman inscriptions used images and words together in order for words to gain fuller and less ambiguous meaning (p. 27). Roman inscriptions placed in public, primarily in the sacral context, were the most eloquent means to convey a message about the euergetic virtue of their donors, despite their religion. Christianity changed the context of those inscriptions, but not their cultural, social, and symbolic values, nor their value as the means for public promotion of euergetism of those individuals. Therefore, the role of those inscriptions was not only votive, although that certainly was their main function, but also euergetic and social, since it communicated to the large number of people gathered in the sacred space of the church (Goddard, 2020, pp. 315, 320).

Numerous examples more or less contemporaneous and analogous to the one from Stojnik can be found all over the territory of the Roman Empire, although ways of inscribing donors' names could vary. For example, below Euphrasiana in Poreč, several layers of votive floor mosaics were discovered, which belonged to older Christian sacral buildings that previously existed in the same spot. It is interesting to note that some inscriptions had information about the donor or donors, as well as the number of financed feet of mosaic, while several preserved examples had also a formula *pro voto* or *pro salute* (Caillet, 1993, pp. 295–303; Buzov, 2011, pp. 179–181). Although each donor often gets their own mosaic field with the name, donors' names could also be listed on the same mosaic panel. One such list of fourteen donors, starting with the name of a local deacon, can be read on the floor mosaic of the Late Antique basilica discovered below Florentine cathedral and dated to the late 5$^{th}$ or the first quarter of the 6$^{th}$ century (Caillet, 1993, pp. 27–30, figs. 14–15; Yasin, 2010, p. 52). This well-preserved panel enabled researchers to even count the surface of 145m$^2$ that was covered by mosaics thanks to the funds invested by the listed individuals (Caillet, 1993, p. 28). There are also cases when the donor's name is incorporated within the donor's portrait scene. One very eloquent example is discovered in the basilica in Kissufim in Israel, where the female donor is literary represented dropping the coins from her hand (Dunbabin, 1999, p. 325; Yasin, 2010, pp. 52–53, fig. 13). Yet, there are examples that further complicate the interpretation of relation between the text and the portrait in ktetorial context, as can be seen on the example of the Basilica in Aquileia. On the floor mosaic in the southern hall of the basilica, the portraits, most probably of *clarissimi viri*, members of the city élite, were represented in variously shaped medallions (Fig. 5) (Goddard, 2020, pp. 305–310). Although one must be very cautious when defining the role of represented individuals, one of the possible explanations for the appearance of their portraits within the church space is that they may have financed some activities tied to the basilica, maybe even the placing of floor mosaics in the said hall. On the other hand, almost half of the floor mosaics of the northern hall in Aquileia were commissioned by one person, a certain Ianuarius, whose name we know

Fig. 5. Donor's portrait from the southern hall of Basilica in Aquileia (source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaico_pavimentale_della_basilica_di_aquileia,_313-350_dc._ca._05_ritratto_di_donatore_02.jpg)


Fig. 6. Donor inscription of Ianuarius, the northern hall of the Basilica in Aquileia (source: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Aquileia_Basilica_-_Ausgrabungen_Mosaik_5.jpg)

due to the inscription (Fig. 6) (Lizzi, 1990, p. 164; Caillet, 1993, pp. 129–140, figs. 101–110; Goddard, 2020, p. 304). His name and role in the furnishing of the northern hall are, thus, made recognizable in the traditional way.

Although the example of Basilica in Kissufim exemplifies how text and portrait function the best when placed together, in the ktetorial and sacral context the inscriptions were the most common way of accentuating donors' efforts. Through their donations, deserving individuals came into indirect

contact with the divine, most often by the mediation of a local saint (Yasin, 2010, p. 57). It is therefore quite irrelevant whether their accomplishment was recorded in words, in images, or in words and images concurrently.[11] But it *was* important to be recorded somehow, preferably in words, because from the earliest days of the Church, the names of deserving dignitaries and worshipers written on the floor mosaics were also the substitution to verbal invocation of their names. One of the best proofs that this was the case is provided in the late 4th century by the pilgrim-nun Egeria. She informs us that each day, during the daily service held at the centre of the Anastasis Rotunda in Jerusalem, the bishop would read the names of meritorious individuals for all to hear (Aetheria/Egeria 24.2; Shalev-Hurvitz, 2015, p. 34). Although we cannot positively state that the names of persons from the inscriptions in Stojnik were read during the services or communal gatherings in this building, we can certainly claim that their names were intended to be seen in the sacred space, becoming visible to God as well as to the worshipers. For those donors who were recorded in such a manner, it was equal to the vocal invocation of their names. Thereby, the inscriptions would enable their deeds to be recognized for eternity. In contrast to the pre-Christian votive inscriptions, for Christian donors the heavenly 'prize' was at least as important, if not even more important than the earthly praise of their surroundings. This phenomenon lasted throughout Late Antiquity, which is testified by numerous donors' portraits in the heavenly environment and among saints' figures in the 6th-century church apses (Yasin, 2010, p. 39).

From all the above mentioned, it is obvious that votive mosaics that recorded names of donors and benefactors, entangled with simple motifs of seemingly religiously neutral character, were a global phenomenon. Examples similar to the one in Gradište near Stojnik were found all over the Roman Empire. Therefore, they can be understood as a very good example of the so called 'glocalization'—accepting the global phenomena in a local context and adapting them to the needs of the local public and local population. In the case of Stojnik mosaics, those phenomena included the overall repertoire of used motifs as well as recording donors' names on inscriptions. Religiously neutral motifs became the visual codes that clearly suggest that they are intended to be understood by the Christian population—to be read as symbols of the new faith, but also as very specific symbols of resurrection, salvation, and perpetual life in Paradise—vines, ivy leaves, bird, or Solomon's knot for example. Their function was additionally accentuated by fields with *vota*, short texts that mention, celebrate, and at the same time pray for, the benefactors and donors, who contributed to the erection, furnishing, and overall appearance of the complex. Bestowal of votive gifts is a pre-Christian practice, used to communicate with the divine—to thank, to ask for something, or simply to pray. Chronologically closest Roman *vota* could vary

[11] About the close relationship, in some cases even identification, of word and image in Byzantine art from Late Antiquity onward, c.f. Maguire, 1981, pp. 10–12.

in character—most often they were in the form of votive figurines, countless of which were discovered throughout the Mediterranean Basin, but they could also be the entire temples, like for example the temple of Mars Ultor in Rome the erection of which is the fulfilment of Augustus' *votum* (Zanker, 1988, pp. 194–195), or could be in the form of inscriptions on altars, stone slabs, reliefs, mosaics, etc. Yet, the non-Christian inscriptions were not standardized like those typical for the Christian population during the Late Antiquity (Woolf, 1996, pp. 27–28). Christians often used almost identical or very similar formulas to express their prayer and vow, which confirmed the ecumenism of the new faith and very strong ties between various Christian congregations in all parts of the Empire. Mosaics in Gradište near Stojnik should also be perceived in this context as they are the expression of a very specific cultural phenomenon typical for the Late Antique Christianity, when images and words were intertwined and entangled in order to show how theological teachings, visualized by various images, and very personal donor inscriptions, form together one complex system of visual codes, seen and at the same time very well understood by both literate and illiterate members of the local congregation. Having all that in mind, it is hard not to comprehend the complex from the site Gradište near Stojnik as the Christian church. Although it is, to some extent, architecturally atypical, the overall disposition of architectural spaces and above all its mosaics, definitely leaves little room for doubt about its Christian character.

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## Преплитање текста и слике у сакралном простору: вотивни подни мозаици из Градишта код Стојника (Космај, Србија)

### Резиме

На локалитету Градиште код села Стојник на Космају откривен је пространи комплекс који се састоји од лонгитудиналног простора издељеног на мање просторне јединице попречним зидовима, и велике ротонде на његовом источном крају, у коју је на истоку уписана полукружна апсида. Имајући на уму изглед овог комплекса, његов просторни распоред, али и датовање у средину IV века, с правом се помишља да је у питању хришћанска сакрална грађевина. То додатно потврђују подни мозаици, који су фрагментарно сачувани у готово свим деловима комплекса, при чему су најбоље очувани вотивни подни мозаици са натписима пронађени на самом улазу у ротонду. У питању су мозаички натписи који су укомпоновани са различитим геометријским и фигуралним мотивима у већи мозаички тепих. Реч је о мотивима који, премда немају потпуно јасну хришћанску симболику, представљају најчешћи репертоар у раној хришћанској уметности, чији је циљ да са што мање нарације заправо искажу многа значења у хришћанском контексту. Тако се јављају представе птице, рибе, мотив Соломоновог чвора, розете и други геометријски мотиви итд. Сами натписи садрже имена дедиканата и број стопа мозаика који је финансирао свако од њих. Међу њима се посебно истиче име принципала Мајорина, припадника царске администрације, као и хришћанско име лентијарија Теодула, што је посебно важно у контексту разумевања хришћанског карактера не само мозаика већ и читаве грађевине. Положај мозаика унутар зоне која се сматра лиминалном, односно која је на самом улазу у ротонду, такође има велики значај, јер су у питању натписи који је требало да буду добро видљиви како би испунили своју најважнију функцију – да комуницирају са онима који их читају, али и да комуницирају са Господом посредством (вероватно) локалних светитеља, како би имена приложника остала запамћена у вечности.

*Кључне речи:* Градиште код Стојника; вотивни мозаици; подни мозаици; касноантичка уметност; касноантичка архитектура; евергетизам.