

**A Bowl Embedded in the Wall of the Chapel  
of the Hagioi Anargyroi in Vatopedi Monastery\***

1. After the death of Stephen Dušan, “Emperor of Serbia and Romania”, his empire was divided up into a number of principalities. One large area, centred on Serres, was initially governed by his widow Helen, and subsequently by Jovan Uglješa<sup>1</sup>. The latter seems to have been an important Serbian figure in the Serres area even in Dušan’s time. In 1365, he became governor of the Serres area. In 1371, he and his brother Vukašin led a Christian army against the Ottoman Turks, who had started to spread into Europe. At the Battle of Černomen (Ormenion) on 26 September 1371, the Christian army was defeated, Uglješa was slain, and the state of Serres collapsed. Uglješa’s territory included Chalcidice and Mount Athos. Serbian interest in the monastic state increased constantly from Dušan’s time onwards, and Uglješa continued his predecessors’ policy towards the monasteries.

2. The Serbian rulers, their families, and the people close to them donated money and land, constructed buildings, and commissioned mural paintings in monasteries both in their own territory and on Athos<sup>2</sup>. Preparing his campaign against the Ottomans, Jovan Uglješa restored relations between the Serbian Church and the Oecumenical Patriarchate (1368)<sup>3</sup>. He was very generous towards Vatopedi Monastery, giving it

\* I should like to thank Mr Ioannis Tavlakis the director of the Tenth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (Mount Athos) for giving me permission to publish the bowl.

1. For the history of the area during the period of Serbian rule, see G. Ostrogorsky, *Serska Oblast Posle Dušanove Smrti* (Belgrade, 1965); G. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium During the Reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan (1331-1355) and his Successors* (Athens, 1995).

2. Ostrogorsky, *op.cit.*, *passim*; Soulis, *op.cit.*, *passim*; D. Korać, “Sveta Gora pod srpskom vlašću (1345-1371)”, *ZRVI* 31 (1992) 5-192; E. Κυριακούδης, “Η τέχνη στη Μονή Προδρόμου Σεργίων κατά την περίοδο της Σερβοκρατίας στον 14ο αιώνα”, *Πρακτικά Επιστημονικού Συμποσίου «Χριστιανική Μακεδονία: Ιερά Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου Σεργίων»* (Thessaloniki, 1995), pp. 265-96.

3. Soulis, *op.cit.*, 172-3.

an annuity of 120 hyperpyra from the revenues of Lake Bistonis (1369) and a vivarium in the lake (1371) and building the monastery's infirmary<sup>4</sup>. In 1371, before the Battle of Černomen, he made a personal visit to Mount Athos<sup>5</sup>.

3. Jovan Uglješa built and frescoed the Chapel of the Hagioi Anargyroi in Vatopedi Monastery around 1370<sup>6</sup>. It is a small, three-aisled, timber-roofed basilica, the plaster on the exterior painted the deep cherry-red so typical of Mount Athos. It has a narthex, a naos, an externally three-sided apse at the east end, and a prothesis and a diaconicon hewn out of the masonry of the east wall<sup>7</sup>. The apse has a blind arch with a double stepped surround in each of its lateral faces, and it originally had a double-light window with a raised surround in its main face, both of which features are common in Byzantine architecture in Macedonia. All but two of the wall paintings were touched up in 1847, but they are thought to reflect the art of Thessaloniki in the second half of the fourteenth century<sup>8</sup>. Uglješa himself is portrayed with the founders of Chilandar Monastery, St Sabbas and St Symeon, who are also held to be the founders of the Chapel of the Hagioi Anargyroi. He holds a model of the long, narrow, timber-roofed chapel in his left hand and proffers it to St Cosmas and St Damian<sup>9</sup>.

4. Korać, *op.cit.*, 127-32; Soulis, *op.cit.*, 174-5. The chrysobull of John Uglješa dated 1363 with a list of his benefactions to certain monasteries on Mount Athos (including the Vatopedi infirmary) is a forgery: K. Χρυσοχοΐδης, "Ελληνικά έγγραφα", in *Σιμωνόπετρα* (Mount Athos and Athens, 1991), p. 264; N. Oikonomides, "Patronage in Palaiologan Mt Athos", in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, edited by A. Bryer and M. Cunningham (Hampshire, 1996), p. 100.

5. Soulis, *op.cit.*, 175.

6. V. Djurić, "Freske Crkvice Sv. Besrebrenika Despota Jovana Uglješe u Vatopedu i Njihov Značaj za Ispitivanje Solunskog Porekla Resavskog Živopisa", *ZRVI* 7 (1961) 137; Korać, *op.cit.*, 192; Π. Θεοχαρίδης, "Το συγκρότημα του περιβόλου", in *Βατοπαίδι*, pp. 155-7; E. Τσιγαρίδας, "Τα ψηφιδωτά και οι βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες", in *Βατοπαίδι*, pp. 280-4.

7. See plan, section, and a brief reference in P. Mylonas, "Two Middle-Byzantine Churches on Athos", in *Actes du XVe Congrès international d'études byzantines (Athènes - septembre 1976)*, vol. IIB (Athens, 1981), p. 557, Fig. 13. The figures are republished in *Βατοπαίδι*, Fig. 9, p. 160.

8. Djurić, *op.cit.*, 137-8. Τσιγαρίδας, *op.cit.*, 283-4, suggests a possible redating to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.

9. Djurić, *op.cit.*, Pl. 1; Korać, *op.cit.*, Pl. 10; Τσιγαρίδας, *op.cit.*, 340 n. 4.

4. In the north face of the apse, just above the blind arch, between its curve and the junction of the apse and the east wall of the church, a bowl is embedded in the masonry<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 1). Because the monument has been plastered and painted, it is not possible to say whether this was part of the original design of the church (whether, that is, the cavity was made when the church was built), whether the bowl was built into the wall when the chapel was being constructed or inserted afterwards (a simple matter, because the chapel is so low), or whether the bowl had a surround and if so what form it took.

It is a hemispherical bowl of the Pula type (Fig. 2). The interior is completely covered with white glaze. Blue bands defined by lustre lines divide the cavity into six sections containing alternately a lustre leaf and a stylised bud. The median vein and the outline of the leaf are formed with two parallel lines, and thick oblique veins spring from the median vein. The other three segments are enclosed below the rim by pointed arches formed with a blue band defined by lustre lines. The lustre stalk terminates in a stylised bud, and from its base spring two tendrils, one on either side, which curve and terminate in the middle of the blue bands that define the sections. There is a lustre line around the rim.

On the basis of the shape, glaze, and decoration, the bowl may be associated with Pula ware. The same sixfold division is seen in bowls CE3 and CE4 in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Cagliari (Pula find)<sup>11</sup>, a bowl in the belfry of S. Ambrogio in Varazze<sup>12</sup>, a bowl in S. Maria Novella in Marti (Pisa province)<sup>13</sup>, bowls from the chapel in the Palazzo Chiaramonte in Palermo<sup>14</sup>, a dish in the belfry of S. Ambrogio in Alassio (Savona province)<sup>15</sup>, and a bowl in Santa Casa in Loreto in the Marches<sup>16</sup>.

10. For a colour photograph of the bowl and a brief caption, see *Βατοπαίδι*, Pl. 119, p. 155.

11. Blake, "Pula", Pl. 1/1,2; Porcella, *Catalogo*, p. 183, Nos. CE3, CE4.

12. Blake, "Pula", Pl. 12/12, pp. 370, 372; Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", Fig. 16, No. 27.

13. Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", p. 71, Fig. 11, No. 17; Blake, "Pula", Pl. 15/8, p. 372; Berti-Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate", Pl. 2/4, p. 319; Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*, Pl. II/4, p. 16.

14. Blake, "Pula", Pl. 17/990, 991, p. 373.

15. Blake, "Pula", p. 373, Pl. 18/13.

16. Blake, "Pula", p. 374, Pl. 19/426. For division into segments generally, see Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*, pp. 15-19.

The alternation within the divisions of two motifs more or less similar to those in the Vatopedi bowl (leaf and flower or bud) is seen in bowl CE3 in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Cagliari, the bowl in the Civiche Raccolte d'Arte Applicata ed Incisioni in Milan<sup>17</sup>, the bowls from the chapel in the Palazzo Chiaramonte in Palermo, and in a sherd from Pisa<sup>18</sup>. A stylised leaf adorns bowl CE3 in Cagliari, two bowls in the belfry of S. Ambrogio in Varazze<sup>19</sup>, the bowl in the Civiche Raccolte in Milan, the bowl in S. Maria Novella in Marti, the bowls from the chapel in the Palazzo Chiaramonte, and sherds from Pisa<sup>20</sup>. There are stylised flowers or buds in bowls CE3, CE4, and CE5 in Cagliari<sup>21</sup>, the bowl in the Civiche Raccolte in Milan, the bowls from the chapel in the Palazzo Chiaramonte, the dish in the belfry of S. Ambrogio in Alassio, the bowl in Santa Casa in Loreto, and a sherd from Pisa<sup>22</sup>. Finally, divisions terminating in a point are seen in bowls CE3, CE4, CE5 in Cagliari, the dish in the belfry of S. Ambrogio in Alassio, and the dish in Santa Casa in Loreto.

Authoritative experts on Spanish lustreware have been discussing Pula-type ceramics a great deal in recent years, and the solitary *bacino* at Vatopedi adds very little to what is already known about the type. To put it briefly, this is a type of ceramic ware that originated in Valencia or the Valencia area<sup>23</sup> in the second or third quarter of the fourteenth century, or possibly early on in that fifty-year period<sup>24</sup>, with a homogeneity of form, glaze, and decoration<sup>25</sup>, and a distribution covering the

17. Blake, "Pula", Pl. 15/1517.

18. Berti-Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate", Pl. 2/7; Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*, pp. 15-16, Pl. II/7.

19. Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", p. 73, Fig. 16, No. 27; Blake, "Pula", Pl. 12/12,18, pp. 370, 372.

20. Berti-Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate", Pl. 2/7, 10, 11; Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*, pp. 15-16, Pl. II/7, 10, 11.

21. CE5: Porcella, *Catalogo*, p. 184; Blake, "Pula", Pl. 1/3.

22. Berti-Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate", Pl. 2/7; Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*, Pl. II/7.

23. Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", pp. 72-3; Blake, "Pula", pp. 371-2; Blake and others, "Valencian Lustreware?", p. 217.

24. Berti-Tongiorgi, *Pisa*, p. 271; Berti-Tongiorgi, in *Ceramiche importate*, p. 14, and "Ceramiche importate", pp. 316, 319, suggest an early date in the fourteenth century based on their own dating of the Pula type (see next note); Blake, "Pula", pp. 372-5: "a core period of c. 1330 to c. 1380 cannot be disputed"; Porcella, *Catalogo*, p. 177: "secondo-terzo quarto" of the fourteenth century.

25. Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", p. 69; Blake, "Pula", pp. 368-71; Porcella,

whole of the Christian and Islamic Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and north-western Europe, though particularly concentrated on the north coast of the west Mediterranean<sup>26</sup>. On the shores of the Aegean, Pula-type ware has been found in Thessaloniki, Miletus, and Ephesus<sup>27</sup>; Spanish lustreware made in the fifteenth century has been found on Lefkada; Spanish lustreware made in the sixteenth century has been found on Mount Athos and Crete<sup>28</sup>; and it should be noted that Spanish ware also circulated elsewhere in Greece (such as Isthmia and Thasos)<sup>29</sup>. For the time being at least, the well-documented Spanish presence in Greece in the fourteenth century cannot be correlated with the circulation of ceramic products from Spain in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These products were brought to the Aegean by the ships of the Italian republics, which had the ascendancy in commerce in the territories of the former Byzantine Empire.

From what I know about vessels embedded in the walls of Byzantine churches, a) they were usually built into the walls when the church was constructed, though they were sometimes inserted at a later date, and b) they either were more or less contemporary with the church and very

*Catalogo*, p. 178; Berti and Tongiorgi propose a more precise, narrower definition of the Pula type in *Ceramiche importate*, pp. 13-23, partic. 14-15, and in "Ceramiche importate", pp. 316, 319. For Blake's objections to this definition and consequent dating, see "Pula", pp. 395, 405.

26. Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola", p. 73; Berti-Tongiorgi, *Pisa*, pp. 270-1; Blake, "Pula", p. 375.

27. H. Philon, "Thessaloniki, Andalusia and the Golden Horde", *Balkan Studies* 26 (1985) 303-6; Blake, "Pula", p. 375. In the fourteenth century, almost the whole of the west coast of Asia Minor was under Turkish control. Ephesus, for instance, was conquered by the Turks of the Emirate of Aydin in 1304 and maintained trade links with Genoa, Venice, and Barcelona: see C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 145-51, 162.

28. Κ. Τσουρής, *Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος των νοτιοανατολικών μνημείων της Βορειοδυτικής Ελλάδος* (Καβάλα, 1988), pp. 103-4; J. Carswell, "Pottery and Tiles on Mount Athos", *Ars Orientalis* 6 (1966) p. 80, Pl. 8, Fig. L.

29. T. Gregory, "Local and Imported Medieval Pottery from Isthmia", in *Atti del Seminario "La ceramica nel mondo bizantino tra XI e XV secolo e i suoi rapporti con l'Italia"* (Certosa di Pontignano (Siena), 11-13 marzo 1991) (Florence, 1993), pp. 302-4; V. François, *La Céramique byzantine à Thasos*, Études thasiennes XVI (Paris, 1995), pp. 113-15. There are occasional references in the literature to Spanish pottery in Arta, but from what I know of the pottery circulating in Arta in the late Byzantine period, Spanish lustreware at least has not been found in excavations at Arta.

recently made or predated the church by some decades. So we cannot precisely date either the church from the pottery or the pottery from the church, though each offers a chronological *terminus* which is useful for dating the other. In the present case, there is no reason to assume that the bowl dates to *ca.* 1370. Personally, I would date it to around the mid-fourteenth century, bearing in mind the dating proposed for the Pula find and the pottery connected with it.

The Vatopedi *bacino* adds one more item to the known group of Pula ware, contributes to the discussion of the dating and spread of the type, and adds one more church to the list of Byzantine monuments with mural pottery.

5. The custom of ornamenting Byzantine churches with pottery embedded in the walls appeared in the eleventh century in southern Greece. It moved up to Epirus probably after the thirteenth century, and isolated examples are found in Thessaly, Corfu, and Lefkada in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries<sup>30</sup>. No Byzantine church with mural pottery has yet been found in Constantinople, the areas under direct Constantinopolitan influence, or Asia Minor. In Macedonia, the only church with embedded vessels is the catholicon of Vlatadon Monastery. The catholicon<sup>31</sup> and its frescoes<sup>32</sup> are dated to 1360-80. Three vessels survive. According to Helen Philon, a fragment of a bowl of the Pula type dates from "the late 14th century", though she does not rule out its attribution to "an earlier period"<sup>33</sup>. The other two vessels are "ceramic products of the Golden Horde Khanate"<sup>34</sup>, and she proposes a mid-fourteenth-century dating for them. Philon gives a satisfactory explanation for the presence of these vessels in the Thessaloniki church, suggesting, with regard to the Spanish vessel, that "different ethnic and

30. Τσουρής, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-16.

31. P. Vocotopoulos, "Church Architecture in Thessaloniki in the 14th Century: Remarks on the Typology", in *Recueil des rapports du IVe Colloque serbo-grec (Belgrade, 1985)*, «*L'Art de Thessalonique et des pays balcaniques et les courants spirituels au XIVe siècle*» (Belgrade, 1987), p. 114; Chrysanthi Tsioumi proposes a dating in the period 1351-71 in *Byzantine Thessaloniki* (Thessaloniki, 1993), p. 163, and "c. 1360" in "Blatades Monastery", *Thessaloniki and its Monuments* (Thessaloniki, 1985), p. 125.

32. Tsioumi, *Byzantine Thessaloniki*, p. 167; Tsioumi, "Blatades Monastery", p. 127.

33. Philon, *op.cit.*, pp. 303-6; Blake and others, "Valencian Lustreware?", p. 216.

34. Philon, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-12.

religious minorities” and “the Genoese especially”, who lived in the Empire’s second capital, engaged in commercial and other exchanges with both East and West, and she does not exclude the possibility of the Khanate vessels’ being the votive offerings of an Orthodox pilgrim<sup>35</sup>. Publications to date indicate that archaeological investigations have not located similar ceramic products in Thessaloniki in quantities suggestive of commercial distribution. So the Vlatadon bowls seem to be isolated cases, and if this picture is not contradicted by future finds then they must be regarded as very exceptional exotic votive offerings.

The case of the Vatopedi chapel postdates that of the Vlatadon catholicon; it is the second and, so far, last in Macedonia, and the only one on Athos. Publications relating to Mount Athos make no mention of any Byzantine monument with mural ceramics. So it follows that the custom, which did not touch Constantinople, Thessaloniki, or Macedonia in general, did not affect Athos either, the art of which was chiefly dependent on these centres. I would suggest that whoever decided that the bowl should be embedded in the wall of the Vatopedi chapel was directly inspired by the decoration of the Thessaloniki catholicon, which was being built and decorated at about the same time. It also seems likely that the Pula-type bowl came to Vatopedi from Thessaloniki.

*Bacini* have been embedded in the apses of a number of Byzantine churches: the Kaisariani and St Theodore’s in Athens; St Catherine’s on Nisos Peritheias, Corfu; the Panagia Katholiki in Gastouni; the Panagia in Merbakas; and the Churches of St Barbara in Erimos, the Saviour in Gardenitsa, and the Taxiarch in Glezou in the Mani. In the Panagia in Merbakas they are seen beside the arched surrounds of the windows in the apses, as also in various other places. There is an obvious desire for symmetry here. In the Vatopedi chapel, by contrast, the inclusion of this single bowl in the apse wall is asymmetrical and rather awkward; but asymmetry and awkwardness are by no means unusual features of Byzantine architecture. In this particular case, there are two possibilities: either the *bacino* was the only one in the chapel and was placed here because this spot is visible from most of the monastery courtyard; or the bowl was not the only one and at least one more should be sought under the plaster on the chapel walls.

35. Philon, *op.cit.*, pp. 313-15.

6. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, ceramic vessels were built into the walls of many Athonite buildings, including chapels, cell wings, and towers. Although it was a common practice and has been commented on (with accompanying photographs) in works on the history of monastic or Athonite architecture and Athonite folklore, no explanation of it has been offered<sup>36</sup>. The only specialised study of ceramics (vessels and tiles) on Mount Athos regards it as a result of the influence of secular architecture in Greece and Asia Minor (houses) or Ottoman architecture (mosques and palaces)<sup>37</sup>. Although this vogue in post-Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture in general has not been studied at all, I should say that the immured vessels on Mount Athos do not reflect a revival of old customs (because no such tradition had ever developed) nor the influence of contemporary Greek and Ottoman secular architecture or mosque architecture. I believe it was introduced in this period by workshops that were familiar with the latest preferences in the post-Byzantine architecture on nearby islands, such as the north Sporades, and in more distant areas, such as Thessaly and Epirus. Throughout the post-Byzantine period, Orthodox churches on the Greek mainland and islands were very often decorated with pottery, often to an excessive degree.

36. H. Brockhaus, *Die Kunst in den Athosklöstern*, p. 284; A. Ουλάνδος, *Μοναστηριακή αρχιτεκτονική*, 2nd edition (Athens, 1959), p. 37; Μ. Κορδώσης, “Αγιορείτικη μοναστική ζωή και λαογραφία”, offprint from *Ηπειρωτική Εστία* (1976), p. 16; Π. Θεοχαρίδης, Π. Φουντάς, Σ. Στεφάνου, *Ελληνική παραδοσιακή αρχιτεκτονική: Άγιον Όρος* (Athens, 1991), p. 23, Fig. 12, p. 28, Fig. 30.

37. Carswell, *op.cit.*, p. 79.



### Abbreviations

- Βατοπαίδι: Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου: Παράδοση - Ιστορία - Τέχνη*, vol. I (Mount Athos, 1996).
- Berti-Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate": G. Berti and E. Tongiorgi, "Ceramiche importate dalla Spagna dell'area pisana dal XII al XV secolo", in *Toledo*, pp. 315-46.
- Berti-Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate*: G. Berti and E. Tongiorgi, *Ceramiche importate dalla Spagna nell'area pisana dal XII al XV secolo* (Florence, 1985).
- Berti-Tongiorgi, *Pisa*: G. Berti and L. Tongiorgi, *I bacini ceramici medievali delle chiese di Pisa* (Rome, 1981).
- Blake, "Ceramica medievale spagnola": H. Blake, "La ceramica medievale spagnola e la Liguria", in *Atti del V Convegno internazionale della ceramica (Albisola, 31/5 - 4/6/1972)*, pp. 55-105.
- Blake, "Pula": H. Blake, "The Ceramic Hoard from Pula (prov. Cagliari) and the Pula Type of Spanish Lustreware", in *Toledo*, pp. 365-407.
- Blake and others, "Valencian Lustreware?": H. Blake, M. Hughes, T. Mannoni, and F. Porcella, "The Earliest Valencian Lustreware? The Provenance of the Pottery from Pula in Sardinia", in *Everyday and Exotic Pottery from Europe c. 650-1900: Studies in Honour of John G. Hurst*, edited by D. Gaimster and M. Redknap (Oxford, 1992), pp. 202-24.
- Porcella, *Catalogo*: M. F. Porcella, "La ceramica", in: Pinacoteca Nazionale di Cagliari, *Catalogo*, vol. I (1988), pp. 177-202.
- Toledo: Segundo coloquio internacional de cerámica medieval en el Mediterráneo occidental (Toledo, 1981)* (Toledo, 1986).



*Fig. 1. Mount Athos, Vatopedi Monastery. Chapel of the Hagioi Anargyroi. The apse and the east wall from NE. Photo I. Papangelos.*



*Fig. 2. Mount Athos, Vatopedi Monastery. Chapel of the Hagioi Anargyroi. Pula type bowl in the east wall.*