

BOOT-GRAFFITI FROM THE MONASTERY OF RAVNA, AND EARLY PILGRIMAGE IN BULGARIA

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Monastic chronicles, foundation charters, rules, and hagiography are the usual sources presenting the role of the monasteries in the religious life of the medieval society. The present study adds an unconventional source – graffiti¹ which reveal one more aspect of the social perception of a monastery – the communication breaking the sacred silence inside the monastic walls.

There are two main reasons to make this choice. First, I became directly acquainted with the graffiti during my participation in the excavations of the Ravna monastery between 1987 and 1990. As a result, I was granted permission to work on this unpublished material. Second, an established tradition already exists in Bulgarian medieval scholarship in the treatment of this type of monument. Although the medieval graffiti were distinguished as a specific archaeological material in the beginning of the twentieth century, they have been introduced as a valuable source only in the 1980s.² The extensive source material has been interpreted in 1982 by Dimitar Ovčarov. His survey is based mainly on material from the first Bulgarian capitals, Pliska and Preslav, which defines the dating of the examined graffito-drawings from the eighth to the eleventh century. They are classified according to the meaning of the images, the subjects, and the styles of representation. Special attention is paid to the origin of the graffito-tradition, which is attributed to the Bulgars. The main point in the analysis is the proof of the value of the graffito-drawings as a visual source, both for the material and spiritual culture. In addition, Ovčarov considers them monuments of medieval popular art and emphasises their communicative, magical, and aesthetic functions. At the same time, two other publications present additional material but do not suggest any new

¹ In the present study, the term “graffiti” is applied according to D. Ovčarov, who borrowed it from the Italian term “graffiti” (i. e. scratched) to signify images scratched into a smooth hard surface with a sharp tool. In addition, I also use the other term created by him *risunki-grafiti* (i. e. graffito-drawings). D. Ovčarov, *Bălgarski srednovekovni risunki-grafiti* [Bulgarian Medieval Graffito-drawings] (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1982), 10.

² The publications of graffiti from the beginning of the twentieth century are listed in Ovčarov, *Risunki-grafiti*, 7-10.

approach.³ However, the increasing interest in the graffito-drawings provoked criticism as to their interpretation. The first, and still the only, critique is made by Rašo Rašev.⁴ He opposes the definition of the graffito-drawings as monuments of popular art as maintained by Ovčarov and understands them in a wider sense as monuments of popular culture in contrast to art that would imply public access and originality.

The aim of my thesis was not to enter into the discussion on the character of the graffito-drawings in general. Rather, it is to present a part of the unpublished material from the Ravna monastery and to explore its potential for a new approach to the study of the lifestyle of the monastery. The crucial point is the examination of the graffiti in their functional context. Thus, the unity of the physical space where the graffiti appeared and the space's function as a monastic site requires an analysis of the reason for the great number of graffiti in the monastery, the variety of graffito-images, and the people who scratched them and their motives in doing so. In order to analyse these aspects, I apply a complex, interdisciplinary method integrating archaeological, historical, and art historical sources.

The following material is part of the third chapter of my thesis "The Silent Communication: Graffiti from the Monastery of Ravna." It is dedicated to one particular image in the graffiti—the image of high boots which are one of the frequent images in the graffito-drawings scratched into the walls of the Ravna monastery (Tables A I, A II, B I, and B II).⁵ I call these "boot-graffiti." Although they were a popular image in early Bulgarian graffiti, their origin and meaning still remain a mystery. Realising that the newly discovered boot-graffiti in Ravna should not be examined in isolation, I attempt a general reinterpretation of the image.

The graffiti of boots were spread in a certain territory belonging to the First Bulgarian Empire (Table 1 and Fig. 1). The area covers present-day northeastern Bulgaria (Preslav, Ravna) and Northern Dobruđa in present-day Romania (Bassarabi, Capidava, Hiršova, Dinogetia-Garvan). The only exception to this area is Chersones, present-day Crimea

³ L. Dončeva-Petkova, *Znatzki vărchu archeologičeski pametnici ot Bălgarija IX-XI vek* [Signs on Archaeological Monuments in Bulgaria from the Ninth-Eleventh Centuries] (Sofia: BAN, 1982); M. Asparuchov, *Srednovekovni risunki-grafiti ot Severozapadna Bălgarija* [Medieval Graffito-Drawings From Northwestern Bulgaria] (Sofia: BAN, 1984), 10-12.

⁴ R. Rašev, "Za chudožestvenoto i kulturno-istoričesko značenie na risunkite-grafiti ot IX-X vek" [On the Artistic and Cultural-Historical Meaning of the Graffito-Drawings from the Ninth-Tenth Centuries], *Problemi na kulturata* 1 (1990): 49-55.

⁵ The indications A and B refer to both the zones from the monastery where the graffiti examined in the present study originated. Zone A covers the church, the central enclosure including the scriptorium and the cells, and the south yard with the refectory and the kitchen. Zone B covers the guesthouse situated outside the southern surrounding wall.

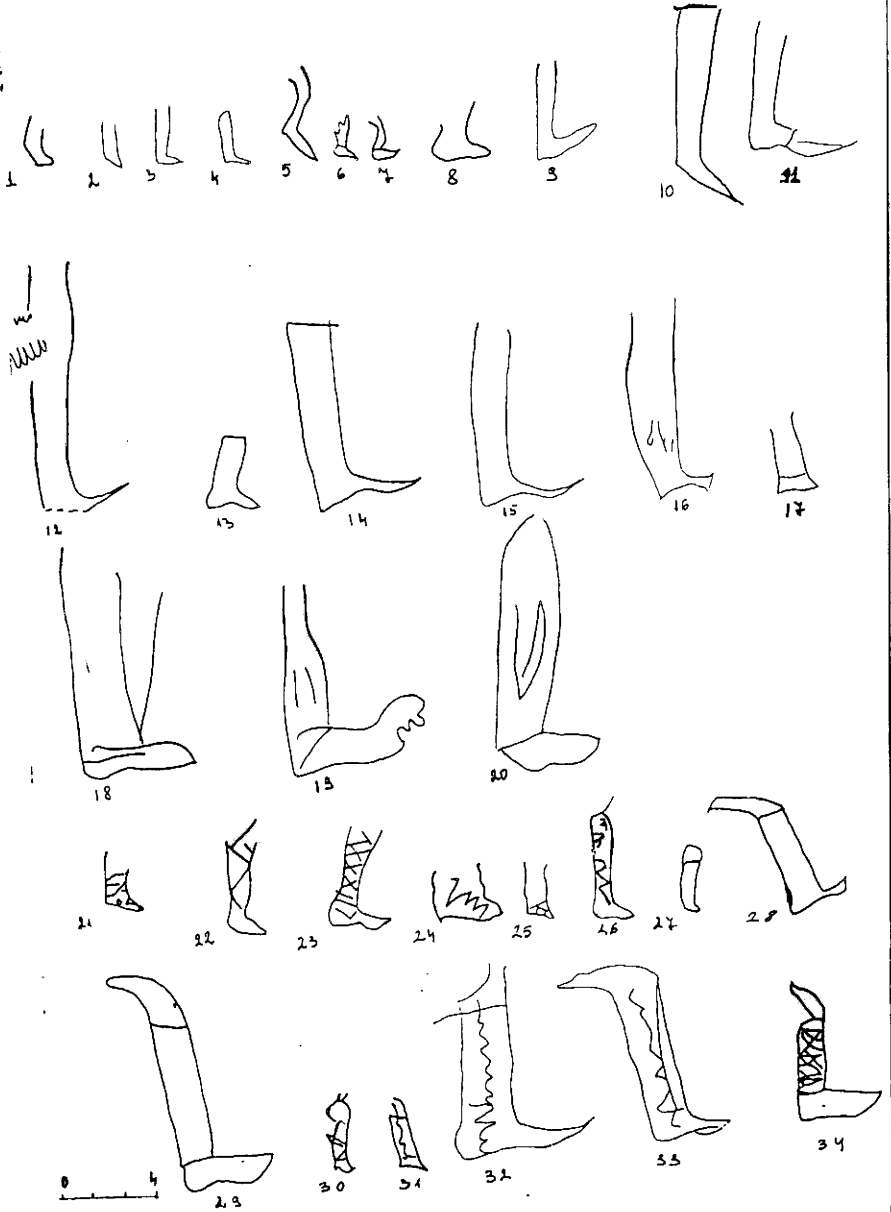


Table A1. Boot graffiti from Zone A of the monastery of Ravna

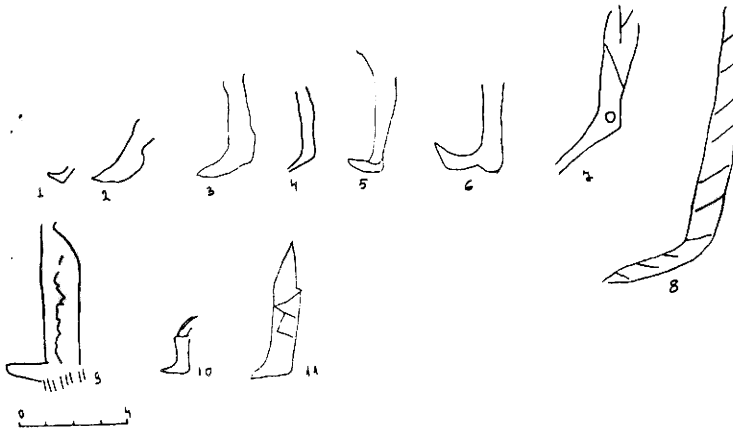


Table A II. Boot-graffiti from Zone A of the monastery of Ravna

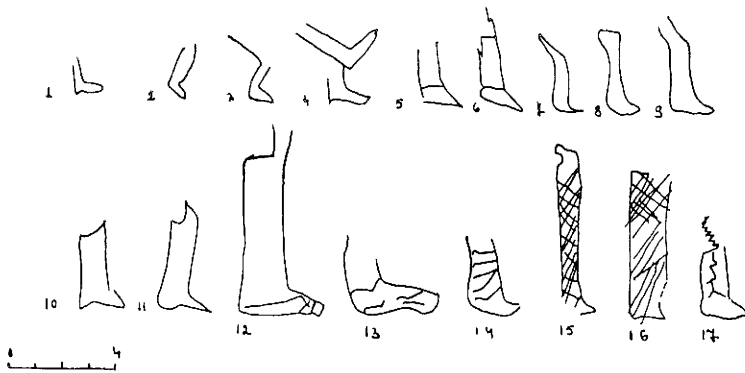


Table B I. Boot-graffiti from Zone A of the monastery of Ravna



Table B II. Boot-graffiti from Zone A of the monastery of Ravna

Place name	Complex	Material			Technique	
		stone	building ceramic	vessels	graffitti	potters' marks
Preslav	fortress	8	3	2	13	
Ravna	monastery	75			75	
Bassarabi	monastery	3			3	
Capidava	settlement			2	2	
Hiršova	settlement			2		2
Dinogetia	settlement			7		7
Chersones	settlement			2		

Table 1. Geographical area of occurrence of the boot-graffiti

(Ukraine).⁶ All the graffiti date from the tenth century. This time frame can be extended at least to the beginning of the eleventh century. Thus, the boot-graffiti can be considered a compact group of images occurring in a delineated territory and in a fixed time.

The predominant number of images appear in graffito-technique on walls and ceramic material, such as vessels, tiles, and bricks (Table 1). Perhaps, the images of boots scrawled as potter's marks (Dinogetia-Garvan and Hiršova) belong to a distinct group. However, the similarity in date (tenth century) between these marks and the boot-graffiti scratched into walls and vessels leads me to suggest that all of them were a product of a similar cultural context. Although a typology and a classification of all

⁶ Ovcárov, "Za sädäržanieto na edin bälgarski rannosrednovekoven simbol" [On the Meaning of One Bulgarian Early Medieval Symbol], in *Bälgarsko srednovekovie. Bälgaro-sävetski sbornik v èest na 70 godišninata na prof. Ivan Dujëev* [The Bulgarian Middle Ages: Bulgarian-Soviet Collection in Honour of the 70th Anniversary of Prof. Ivan Dujëev] (Sofia: BAN, 1981), 294-99; Idem, *Risunki-graftiti*, Tables XXII/1, XXV, LXXX/1, LXXXIX, XC/2, XCI/2. Some of the boot-graffiti from Ravna are published by Ovcárov in *Risunki-graftiti*, Table CXXV; R. Kostova, "Za biblejskija smisäl na edin rannosrednovekoven simbol" [On the Biblical Meaning of One Early Medieval Symbol], in *Bälgarite v Severnoto Prichernomorie* [The Bulgarians in the North Black Sea Region] (Veliko Turnovo: PIK, 1994), 81-101, tables 7-19. For the boot-graffiti from Bassarabi see I. Barnea: "Predvaritel'nyie zametki o kamennyich pamjatnikach Bassarabi" [Preliminary Remarks on the Stone Monuments of Bassarabi], *Dacia* 6 (1962): 297, fig. 4; Idem, "Les monuments de rupestre Bassarabi en Dobrudja," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 12 (1962): 187-207; Idem, *Din istoria Dobrudzei* [History of Dobrudža] 3 (Bucharest: Acad. R. S. R., 1971), 180-233. For the graffito-drawing of boots from Capidava see A. Rădulescu, "Un document Proto-Romania a Capidava," *Dacia* 14 (1970): 316. For the images of boots in the potter's marks from Hiršova see A. Ariescu, "Noi date despre cetatea de Hiršova" [New Data About the Fortress of Hiršova] *Pontica* 4 (1971): 326, fig. 11. For the boot-graffiti from Dinogetia-Garvan see M. Comşa, *Dinogetia* (Bucharest: Acad. R. S. R., 1967), 1:211, fig. 135/39-42. The examples from Chersones are presented by A. L. Iakobson, "Srednevekovi Chersones" [Medieval Chersones] *Materialyi i Izsledovanija po Archeologij SSSR* 17 (1950): 143, plate 17.

known graffiti of boots would be very useful, it is outside of the scope of this study because of the incomplete information currently available.

STRATIGRAPHY, TYPOLOGY, AND TOPOGRAPHY

In most of the cases, many other drawings and inscriptions were made before and after the engraving of the boots. It means that they appeared during the most active period of the monastery, from the last decade of the ninth century to the 920s.⁷ In addition, the buildings where the boot-graffiti were made can establish the dating (Table 2). The church (1),⁸ scriptorium (2), the buildings in the south yard (9,12), and the guest-house (19) had already existed in the beginning of the tenth century and were in active use at least until the 970s.⁹ As to the typology of the boot-graffiti from Ravna, the main conclusion is that they belong to the group of boot-graffiti that appeared in eastern Bulgaria in the tenth century. They can be described as high boots or supple leather strapped shoes (Tables A I, A II, B I, B II) although there are some examples that look like low shoes or sandals. Regarding the shape of the boots, we can also mention a distinctive group with a knee-piece. The zigzag and crosswise nicks in most of the boots appear to be decoration but are more likely representations of straps or laces.¹⁰ Consequently, two main kinds of boots can be distinguished: strapped and non-strapped.

New and very important information, however, can be gained from the topography of the boot-graffiti in the monastic complex (Table 2). The topography indicates the absence of the boot-graffiti in the west, north, and east yards. Thus, the density and the location of the boot-graffiti can be explained as follows: they were made by a group of people who entered the monastery from the small south gate (18), stayed in the guest-house (19), and were allowed to walk only in the south yard. Then, using the connecting passage (10) in the south range of the atrium, the visitors had access to the church. During their stay in the monastery, they were not allowed to enter the atrium from the official west entrance, to visit the intimate north yard, or to pass the east part where the abbot's house (or the residence) (13) was located. These people were outsiders not belonging to the monastic community. Therefore, for the first time, we can gain a relatively clear idea about the makers of the boot-graffiti.

⁷ P. Georgiev, "Istorijata na Ravnenskija manastir" [The History of the Ravna Monastery] *Epochi* 2 (1993): 64.

⁸ The numbers refer to the legend in Fig. 2.

⁹ Georgiev, "Istorijata," 65-66.

¹⁰ Ovčarov, "Za sādārzanieto," 296.

types / area	orientation		zigzag strapped	cross-wise strapped	non- strapped	knee-part
	left	right				
church	7 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11	32 1-26, 28, 30-34	9	3	20	7
scriptorium	2 4, 8	1 29	—	2	2	1
south yard	2 6, 10	1 27	—	1	8	2
guesthouse	12	18	4	6	20	6
Total	23	52	13	12	50	16

Table 2. Topography of the graffito-images of boots (numbers refer to tables AI, A II, B I, and B II).

PAGAN OR CHRISTIAN ORIGIN

The strange image of boot-graffiti attracted scholarly attention in the 1960s, provoking a continuing debate. Ion Barnea made the first attempt at interpreting the boots depicted in the quarry and cave churches of Bassrabi (Romania). According to Barnea, the boot-graffiti were drawn in place of human figures which would have been much more difficult to represent.¹¹ However, a hypothesis for the symbolic meaning of the image of boots appeared very soon afterwards. Maria Comša believes that the boots in the potters' marks from Dinogetia-Garvan were magic signs stemming from nomadic origin.¹² The interpretation of the boots as pagan symbols has been developed by Ovčarov. Using the graffiti mainly from Preslav (Bulgaria), he concluded that the image of boots reflected different aspects of proto-Bulgarian pagan practices, such as shamanism and magic practice, which would provide success in hunting and war.¹³

Graffito-drawings dating from the period in which Christianity was established in Bulgaria (ninth-tenth centuries) always provoke interpretations, both in the pagan and Christian sense. The boots are

¹¹ Barnea, "Predvaritel'nyie zametki," 297.

¹² Comša, *Dinogetia*, 215.

¹³ Ovčarov, "Za sādāržanieto," 294-299.

not exceptions, and according to Petre Diaconu, they are Christian symbols signifying Christ's washing of St Peter's feet.¹⁴ In my 1994 article I supported this opinion and developed it further, arguing that the boots in the graffiti as well as in Christian art were non-canonical symbols of Christ.¹⁵

However, in the meantime, I have refined my interpretation which is now based on a more complex analysis of the graffiti, supported by further research. In the revised hypothesis I regard the graffiti of boots as signs made by pilgrims. This identification is quite logical if one takes into consideration a common practice of pilgrims. Generally, pilgrims would bring to a holy place the images of eyes, feet, and hands, which represented affected parts of the body that needed healing.¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine that so many lame people wandered in the region of eastern Bulgaria and visited the monastery at the same time. Therefore, I suggest that the boot-graffiti were made by a distinctive group of pilgrims passing through Ravna in the first half of the tenth century as they returned from a trip to the Holy Land. Concerning the image itself and its meaning, I suggest that the origins can be traced back to the iconographic version of one biblical episode: Moses before the Burning Bush.

THE BOOTS OF MOSES

The Burning Bush episode is frequently depicted in Christian art. Its illustration produced an iconography in which the image of footwear appeared and became a constant element. With regard to this representation, two main questions can be investigated: what is the function of the footwear imagery and what is the symbolic meaning?

The key phrase in the biblical text where God says "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is Holy ground!" (Exod. 3:5)¹⁷ became the essence of the iconography of the Burning

¹⁴ P. Diaconu, "Représentations de la jambe humaine sur certains monuments archéologiques des Xe-XIe siècles," *Dacia* 19 (1975): 268.

¹⁵ In the article I present several weak points in the "pagan" thesis. First, boot-graffiti, if connected with nomadic soldiering, would be found in Pliska, Drăstăr (Durostorum), and other early Bulgarian fortresses. But in these places we do not find any traces of them. Second, they cannot be proven to be a pagan protective sign because they do not exist on earlier (more clearly pagan) monuments preceding the ninth century. Third, the boots are not depicted as an attribute of shamans in the graffiti-drawings. Kostova, "Za bibleiskija smisäl," 99-101.

¹⁶ G. Vikan, "Art, Medicine and Magic in Early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* [henceforth: *DOP*] 38 (1984): 67.

Date	Type of representation	Monument	Bibliographical references
3d c.	fresco	Catacomb of Via Latina, Rome	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 46, 47.
6th c.	mosaic	St. Catherine's Basilica, Mt. Sinai	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 42.
6th c.	bronze cross	Forty Mart. Chap., St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai	K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross", fig. 4.
6th c.	mosaic	San Vitale, Ravenna	O. Demus, <i>Byzantine Art and the West</i> , New Jersey, 1977.
880-886 AD	miniature	Homilies of Gregory, Paris, Gr. 510	K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross", 386.
9th-10th c.	miniature	Bible, Vat. Cod. Reg. gr. 1	D. T. Rice, <i>Byzantine Art</i> , London, 1968, 253.
12th c.	miniature	Greek Octateuchs: Vat. Cod. gr. 746; Vat. Cod. gr. 747	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 44, 45.

Table 3: *Moses loosening his shoes*

Bush scene. However, from the very beginning of its establishment, the iconographic interpretation was continuously reproduced in two versions. The distinctive feature of one version is the narrative approach which represents Moses loosening his sandal. The earliest example of this can be seen in the third-century fresco in the Christian catacomb of Via Latina in Rome (Fig. 3).¹⁷ The later examples following this tradition represent Moses in a variety of poses (Table 3 and Fig. 4).

The second version is less narrative, and the gesture of loosening the footwear is reduced to the level of an object (image) which signifies the result of the action: a pair of removed boots or sandals appearing to the side of Moses. The earliest example of this iconography, dating from the third century (244-245 AD), can be found in Jewish art. This example is a panel at the upper right part of the western wall in the Dura Synagogue (Syria), in which a pair of high boots fastened with leather straps is depicted between Moses and the burning bush (Fig. 5).¹⁸ However, all the later examples of this tendency in the depiction of the Burning Bush scene belong to Christian art (Table 4

¹⁷ Other references in the Bible regarding this episode can be found in Exod. 4:17; Mark 12:26; Luke 26:37; Apoc. 7:35.

¹⁸ K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes in the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), fig. 46.



Fig. 3. Moses removing his sandal, Via Latina, Rome



Fig. 4. Moses before the burning Bush, St Catherine, Mt. Sinai (according to K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes* fig. 24.)

Fig. 5. Moses before the Burning Bush, Dura Synagogue (according to K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes* fig. 24.)

and Fig. 6-9). It appears that the second iconographic version can be considered an "abbreviation" of the first, narrative version and is made for practical reasons. In this respect, I subscribe to Kurt Weitzmann's opinion that "condensation, omission and abbreviation" were principles "that all artists who turn a broad narrative scene into a high format had to apply."²⁰ Nevertheless, I cannot agree that the

Date	Type of representation	Monument	Bibliographical references
224-245 AD	fresco	Dura Synagogue	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 41.
6th c.	mosaic	St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 42.
9th c.	miniature	Vat. Cod. gr. 699, fol. 61v, Cosmas Indicopl.	E. R. Goodenough, <i>Symbolism</i> , pl. 94.
10th c.	miniature	Paris Psalter, Cod. gr. 139	E. R. Goodenough, <i>Symbolism</i> , pl. 95.
11th c.	miniature	Cod. gr. 1186, fol. 101v, Cosmas Indicopl., St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai	K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, <i>The Frescoes</i> , fig. 43.
11th- 12th c.	miniature	Psalter, Dumb. Oaks, Cod. 3	V. N. Lazarev, <i>Istorija vizantiskoj ž ivopisi</i> [A History of Byzantine Painting], Moscow, 1981, table 39.
1085 AD	miniature	Codex Višegradensis	<i>Mittelalterliche Buchmalerei</i> , table 16.
1300- 1399 AD	miniature	Vat. lat. 1960, fol. 52v, <i>Satirica Historia</i>	Video Collection, Vatican Library.

Table 4. Moses has already taken off his shoes

replacement of the gesture of the removal of the shoes by a pair of footwear (boots or sandals) in monuments from different periods is caused only by the necessity to reveal as much as possible about the biblical scene in a limited space.

The frescoes in Via Latina and Dura indicate that in the third century two independent and equally valid iconographic versions were already established. An example of this co-existence would be the miniatures in the illuminated manuscripts of the Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes, dating respectively from the ninth (Vat. Cod. Gr. 699, f. 69v) and the eleventh centuries (Mt. Sinai, St Catherine, Cod. 1186, fol.

¹⁹ The full bibliography of the extant literature concerning the frescoes in the Dura Synagogue can be found in the article by J. Gutman in *Reallexikon der byzantinischen Kunst* [henceforth: *RBK*], ed. Kl. Wessel (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1963) 1:1230-40. In the present analysis I take into consideration the study which summarises most of the opinions and gives a complete interpretation: E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Graeco-Roman Period*, vols. 9-11; *Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue*, Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York: Pantheon Press, 1964). A criticism of the method of analysis applied in the study is suggested by E. J. Bickerman, "Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue: A Review Article," *Harvard Theological Review* 58 (1965): 127-151.

²⁰ Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Frescoes*, 54.

101v-Fig. 6). Weitzmann analyses some features of the iconography of these miniatures, such as the fusion of two biblical scenes (Burning Bush and Giving the Law) and the figure of Moses as a shepherd, and supposes an archetype even earlier than Dura. To be more precise, he claims that in the third century both Jews and Christians knew and used a manuscript of the Septuagint illustrated in Hellenistic style.²¹ In addition, somewhat earlier than Weitzmann, Erwin R. Goodenough, noting the impressive similarity between the miniatures and the Dura frescoes, also assumes the existence of an original which represents the Burning Bush and the Giving the Law scenes in one composition. In this composition the image of boots alone was depicted instead of the gesture of their loosening.²²

Thus, going back to the question concerning the function of the footwear imagery, we can assume that already in the third century, the idea of replacing the gesture of the removal of the footwear with the image of a pair of shoes or sandals produced a particular “abbreviated” iconographic version of the Burning Bush scene

In this context, the pair of boots or sandals came to be a crucial image emphasising the key phrase in the biblical text (Exod. 3:5). Consequently, the next step in the survey would be to look for the symbolic meaning of this image.

The meaning of the removal of shoes in Exod. 3 is given in verse 5: “... for the place where you are standing is Holy ground!” In fact, God’s order refers to an ancient custom inherited also by Jews: footwear was taken off indoors and in sacred areas. For instance, in a passage in the Old Testament, it is said: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God” (Eccles. 4:17).²³ In addition, the Burning Bush episode itself in the Divine story adds a specific nuance to the function of the gesture of loosening the shoes. In the Old Testament the Burning Bush scene is considered to be the call of Moses to the political and spiritual task of saving the Israelites. And if this interpretation explains the corresponding panel in the Dura Synagogue, then the Christian iconographic mode would be derived from the idea of Moses as a precursor of the Messiah and a prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the appearance of God to Moses at Mount Horeb (Sinai) is considered an epiphany preceding Christ’s epiphanies.²⁴ Hence, the representation of Moses loosening his sandal

²¹ Ibid., 35-36.

²² Goodenough, *Symbolism*, 112.

²³ Other meanings of the gesture in the Bible are as follows: possession (Ruth 4:7), humility (Mark 1:7), disgrace (Deut. 25:9 sq.). *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, ed. A. de Vries (London and Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1974), 421.



Fig. 6. *Cosmas Codex*, Cod. gr. 1185, fol. 101v (according to K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes* Fig. 43)

could not be regarded solely as an illustration of the execution of God's order. The gesture stresses the experience of the epiphany in being naked (barefoot) before God. The image of the boots (sandals) replaces the gesture, adopts its meaning, and, therefore, functions as a symbol of the experience of an epiphany, or in a broader sense, as a symbol of piety.

Furthermore, the image of the pair of shoes (boots or sandals) absorbs the main idea of the Burning Bush episode and becomes an "emblematic" image for the "abbreviated" iconographic mode of the Burning Bush scene. The most indicative example would be the composition of the miniatures from the *Cosmas Codices* (Fig. 6) in which only the figure of Moses as a shepherd, the pair of boots, and the burning bush signify the narrative of Exod. 3:1-6. In addition, in the *Psalter* miniature of Moses at Mount Sinai (Fig. 7), the removed sandals and the burning bush remain the only indication that the two scenes are combined.

However, the image of removed shoes exceeds the framework of one particular scene and functions as a symbol in a more general sense. For instance, the appearance of the removed boots or sandals in the context of the episode of Giving the Law cannot be regarded simply as a result of its mechanical combination with the Burning Bush scene. The tradi-

²⁴ The term "epiphany" is used to signify the appearance of the divine Epiphany (ta *Epifaniva), also called τα τεοφανικά, celebrating the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, gen. ed. Al. P. Kazhdan (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:713-14; K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Sinai," *DOP* 17 (1963): 390.

tional relationship between the two scenes, whether they are rendered separately (Dura, Fig. 8) or are fused (Cosmas Codices-Fig. 6, Paris Psalter-Fig. 7), stems from the identity of the place (Mount Sinai) as well as from the similarity of the symbolic interpretation. Concerning the interpretation, on the one hand, by receiving the Tablets, Moses becomes a mediator of God's Law to the Chosen People. On the other hand, this act is considered to be the second epiphany which precedes the epiphany of Christ identified as the new Moses, who had given the new law.²⁵ Thus, we can suggest that in the given examples, the pair of removed footwear refers to both the Burning Bush and the Giving the Law scenes as a symbol of the experience of epiphany.

THE ARCHETYPE

However, concerning the origin of the removed shoes in the Burning Bush scene, one more question should be raised: why in some cases is the footwear depicted as a pair of boots and yet, in the others, as a pair of sandals? The text provides the first starting point. In the Greek translation of the Bible, two words which mean "shoes" are used. The first term *juvujpodhvματα*, *-atoV*, *-tov* is used primarily in the Septuagint to refer to 'shoe', 'sandal', 'boot' (Exod. 3:5; Luke 3:16). The second term *sandavlion*, *-tov*, meaning 'sandal', is common in the New Testament (Mark 6:9).²⁶ Clearly, the iconography of the Burning Bush episode reflects the dichotomy of the term *ujpodhvματα* which is used in Exod. 3:5. For example, in the Cosmas Codices the removed boots are inscribed with the word *ujpodhvματα*. However, in the illustrated Octateuchs (Table. 5), the removed footwear is a pair of sandals. One can suppose that the use of both kinds of shoes in the abbreviated representation of the Burning Bush scene depends on the understanding of the word by the artists. Nevertheless, the fact that the earliest appearance of the image of boots was in a Jewish monument indicates that the Greek term could not point to the iconographic origins of the image. In this case, what is the origin of the image of boots in the Dura frescoes?

There are two possibilities. One of them has already been explored

²⁵ Weitzmann and Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross," 390.

²⁶ E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, ed. G. O. Verlag, (Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1992), 118, 978. The Old Bulgarian translation of the Bible also reflects both distinctive words: to the term *ujpodhvματα* corresponds the word *ñäiñäü* (*Ostromirovo evangelie*, Exod. 3:5, Luke 3:16, Matt. 3:11), and the term *sandavlia* is translated with *ñäiñäëþ* (*Ostromirovo evangelie*, Mark 6:9). See I. I. Sreznevskij, *Slovar' drevnerusskogo jazyika* [Dictionary of the Old Russian Language] (Moscow: ANSSR, 1989), 261-262.

Date	Monument	Types of footwear
244-245 AD	Dura Synagogue (fresco)	high boots
6th c.	St. Catherine's Basilica, Mt. Sinai (mosaic)	sandal
9th c.	Vat. Cod. gr. 699, fol. 61v	high boots
10th c.	Paris Psalter, Cod. gr. 139	sandals
11th c.	Cod. gr. 1186, fol. 101v, St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai	high boots
11th-12th c.	Psalter, Dumb. Oaks, Cod. 3	sandals
1085 AD	Codex Višegradensis	short boots
1300-1399 AD	Vat. lat 1960, fol. 52v	high boots

Table 5. Types of footwear



Fig. 7. Paris Psalter, Cod, gr. 139, fol. 422v (according to E. R. Goodenough, Symbolism)

by scholars who draw parallels with the types of footwear worn in biblical times.²⁷ Thus, Goodenough quotes Epiphanius' remarks on the dress of the Pharisees and emphasises the description of their shoes as high boots (laced *krepis* or *calceus*). In fact, Goodenough claims that the described shoes, often worn by Roman officials, correspond to the boots, shown beside Moses as he stood barefoot before the Lord. Generally, they are used as the distinctive status marker of the chief figures in Dura frescoes.²⁸ There is another interpretation of the boots as *calige rusticae* which were worn by farmers and shepherds. Since Moses was a shepherd in the beginning of the Burning Bush episode, the boots are considered his common attribute.²⁹ Certainly, they can be considered an attribute, but to whom does it belong: to Moses as a shepherd or to Moses as a prophet?

For example, David is rendered as a shepherd in the famous bucolic scene in the Paris Psalter (Gr. 139, fol. 1v), and he wears high boots composed of strap-work, which look like a high sandal of fleece legging above bare feet.³⁰ Consequently, we can conjecture that in the Dura frescoes where Moses is already represented as a prophet in a white robe, the boots beside him signify his previous status as a shepherd. But why, in the sixth-century mosaic in St Catherine's Basilica in Sinai, is Moses also dressed as a prophet taking off sandals, but not boots? And moreover, why in the illustrated Octateuchs, is the pair of removed shoes which should signify the shepherd's status of Moses, a pair of sandals and not of boots? Analyses of footwear fashion in biblical as well as in the later medieval period have not been able to answer this question conclusively. In one case though, the depicted shoes themselves reflect in some sense the eleventh-century fashion as it is in the case of the Codex Višegradensis (Fig. 9).³¹

The second possibility for finding the origins of the boot-image could be to look for the iconographic prototypes. The parallel use of two kinds of shoes in the "abbreviated" iconography of the Burning

²⁷ Sandals were the common type of shoes in biblical times although laced or strapped boots were worn by Assyrian and Roman soldiers.

²⁸ Goodenough, *Symbolism*, 171-172.

²⁹ This interpretation has been suggested by C. H. Kraelig and later supported by K. Weitzmann, providing an example with the traditional footwear of David in his iconography as a shepherd playing the harp. Weitzmann and Kessler, *The Frescoes*, 34. However, the Greek word *καλιγία*, *καλήκη* means low slippers and could not refer to any boots such as those represented in the Dura frescoes and Cosmas Codices.

³⁰ *RBK*, 3:445; *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1: 796.

³¹ *Mittelalterliche Buchmalerei in Sammlungen Volksdemokratischer Länder*, ed. G. Reimann and H. Büttner (Berlin: E. A. Seemann, 1981), 17-18, table 16. The Codex is a Gospel made for King Wratislav in 1085. Its style reflects the tradition of the Bohemian school in book illumination from the 11th c.



Fig. 8. Giving the Law, Dura Synagogue (according to K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes* fig. 74.)

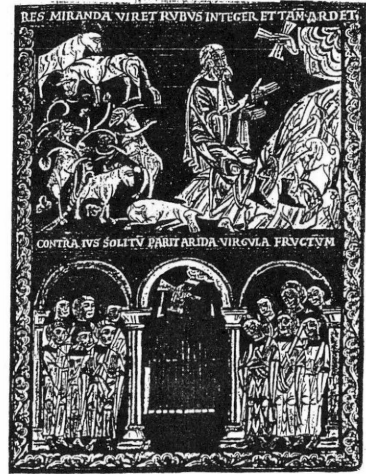


Fig. 9. Codex Višehradensis, Ms XIV, A13, NUB, Prague (according to *Mittelalterliche Buchmalerei*, table 16)

Bush scene indicates the existence of two iconographic prototypes—sandals and boots. I will examine only the iconographic prototype of the boots. This direction for investigation is suggested by one silver plate dated from the sixth century and attributed to the so-called “Byzantine antique.”³² The plate renders Athena judging the contest between Ajax and Odysseus over the weapons of Achilles, which are depicted by three basic elements: a helmet, a suit of armour, and a pair of boots (Fig. 10). Though V. Zaleskaja relates some details of this composition to a popular sixth-century poem, the stylistic analysis undoubtedly points to influence from Hellenistic Greek heritage.³³ In support of this suggestion, I offer an earlier example for this image: a ceramic vase dating from 490 BC. On the vase Odysseus is shown giving the weapons of Achilles to his son Neoptolemos, and again they consist of three elements: a helmet, a suit of armour, and knee pieces (*knemides*) instead of boots. The appearance of the boots on the sixth-century silver plate seems to be a reflection of Roman military fashion. In this case, however, the more important question is how the image of

³² For more information on this silver plate see K. Weitzmann, “Survival of Mythological Representation in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and Their Impact on Christian Iconography,” *DOP* 14 (1960): 67-69; V. N. Zaleskaja, “Vizantijskaja torevtika V veka” [Byzantine Metal Works From the Fifth Century], *Vizantijskiji Vremennik* 43 (1982): 131.

³³ Zaleskaja, “Vizantijskaja torevtika V veka,” 132.



Fig. 10, Silver plate, Ermitage, No 279. (according to V. Zaleskaja, "Vizantijskaja torevtika")

boots in this Hellenistic context can be related to the earliest representations of the boots in the Burning Bush scene in Dura.

Although there are external similarities, my emphasis will be on the internal relations between both Hellenistic and biblical images of boots. There are two main aspects to the internal similarities. The first aspect refers to the strong Hellenistic influence in the Dura frescoes. The second aspect is derived from the first one and concerns the meaning and the function of the boot-image in Hellenistic artistic tradition. Based on the given examples from the fifth century BC and the sixth century AD, I suggest that the images of *knemides* or the boots as well as the other two elements of Achilles' weapons are attributes of the hero. These three elements represent the hero's figure as an embodiment of the tripartite vertical division of the world.³⁴ Moreover, the selection of these particular objects (especially the footwear) stresses the status of their owner as a mediator. For instance, the gold sandals with wings are the main attribute of Hermes, the messenger of the Gods; and, moreover, even Achilles has the epithet "fleet-footed."

What is important for this study is the analogous position of Moses as mediator in the previously mentioned biblical scenes. In the scenes where Moses is before the Burning Bush, when he is listening to God, and when he is receiving the Tablets of Law, he is acting as a hierophant, as a mediator between the people and God. Thus, according to this identification, the removed boots can be considered Moses' attribute as a mediator. This identification coincides perfectly with the interpretation suggested of the image of the removed shoes as a symbol of the experi-

³⁴ Iv. Marazov, *Vidimijat mit* [The Visible Myth] (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1994), 34-36.

ence of an epiphany because every epiphany is nothing more than a supernatural communication between God and his Chosen People.

To conclude, the image of boots in the Burning Bush scene in the Dura frescoes and later monuments stands out as an “abbreviation” of the significant gesture of loosening the shoes. This replacement of the gesture with the shoes became possible through the traditional consideration of the boots as an attribute of a hierophant-mediator. Therefore, concerning the subject of the present study—boot-graffiti—the most important question is whether the function and symbolical meaning of the graffiti can be compared with that of the boots in official Christian art.

THE BOOTS OF THE PILGRIMS

By paying careful attention to the location of the monuments which render the Burning Bush scene, we will discover that four of them belong to the art of St Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai: the mosaic above the triumphal arch in the monastic basilica, the bronze votive cross in the chapel of Forty Martyrs, both dating from the sixth century, and the two illustrated manuscripts of Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes from the ninth and the eleventh centuries.³⁵ The pronounced preference for this subject together with the Giving of the Law has already been explained by the importance of Mount Sinai as *locus sanctus*.³⁶ Already at the end of the fourth century, Sinai was described as a pilgrimage place in the *Itinerary* written by Egeria, a nun from the western Mediterranean area who travelled as a pilgrim to the Holy Land in 381-386 AD. What is more important for the present survey is that the location of the Burning Bush place stimulated the *loca sancta pictures* of Sinai.³⁷ To be more precise, it was not the Burning Bush itself that was of greatest concern but rather its interpretation as a symbol of the virginity

³⁵ Weitzmann, “The Mosaics in St Catherine’s Basilica on Mount Sinai,” in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 518; with I. Ševčenko, “The Moses Cross,” 387.

³⁶ During the reign of Constantine the Great (327-337 AD), the Sinai peninsula was included in the province of Palestina Tertia, and in this way the Moses’ mountain was administratively attached to the pilgrimage places of the Holy Land. A legend points to Helen as a founder of the first chapel at Mount Sinai built in 327 AD on the place where Moses saw the Burning Bush. Following Procopius (*De aedificiis*), it is accepted that the monastery at Sinai was founded by Justinian I (525-565 AD) and was dedicated to the Mother of God. Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta* and the Representational Arts of Palestine,” in *Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, 34.

³⁷ The term *loca sancta pictures* is used according to Weitzmann, meaning “souvenirs in various media, but foremost icons which combined representations of biblical events with specific elements of a holy site.” Weitzmann, “*Loca Sancta*,” 40.

of Mary (ἡ βάρτο=Βάρτο Μωσεῶ=rubus igneus).³⁸ Thus, the twelfth- and thirteenth-century icons of the frontal-standing Virgin holding Christ in her arms and inscribed ἡ βάρτο are considered typical *loca sancta pictures* of Sinai, which were produced in local workshops as votive gifts or pilgrim's souvenirs.³⁹ Moreover, Weitzmann thinks that the scene of Moses before the Burning Bush was also a theme of a locus sanctus picture and points to some Palaeologian icons. Nevertheless, the earlier depiction of Moses taking off his sandal on the sixth-century bronze votive cross, a votive gift to Sinai monastery, provides a previous establishment of this *locus sanctus picture*.⁴⁰

It follows, thus, that the Burning Bush scene, interpreted either as an epiphany or as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary, belongs to the subjects of Byzantine pilgrimage art. Perhaps, the miniatures in the Cosmas Codices cannot be included in this special group of monuments. However, I suspect that the "abbreviated" version of boots was derived from this type of official work and was applied in various Sinai souvenirs (e.g. metal votive crosses).

One of the boot-graffiti strongly suggests the existence of such kinds of votives. For example, this particular pair of boots is scratched on the tenth-century amphora from Capidava (Fig. 11). The boots are one element of a composition consisting of a cross engraved around the mouth of the vessel, a Greek alphabet from Α to Ω, and a name ΠΕΤΡΕ (?) scratched under the cross.⁴¹ The boots are scratched into one of the arms of the cross, and in the other three arms, the following formulas are inscribed: ΜΘ, ΝΗ, ΚΟ. The letters ΜΘ are a ligature of μήτηρ θεοῦ—Mother of God. In spite of the mistake in ΚΟ which should be read as ΚΑ, the formula ΝΗΚΑΩ ("I am the Victor") is recognisable. However, its first part, the initials ΙC ΧC, is missing, and according to A. Rădulescu they are replaced by the boots.⁴²

Previously, I concurred with this suggestion.⁴³ Nevertheless, on the

³⁸ The consideration of the Burning Bush in the sense of Immaculate Conception can be traced in Byzantine exegesis (Ephrem the Syrian, Gregory of Nyssa) as well as in the later homilies and prayers used in the liturgy of the feast of Annunciation. *Lexikon der Christlichen Iconographie*, ed Er. Kirschbaum (Herder-Rom-Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1989) 1:510; *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, ed. Angelo de Bernardino (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1983), 2:col. 2319-2323. In addition, let me repeat that the first patron of the Sinai monastery was the Mother of God, and only after the eleventh century when the relics of St Catherine were brought there was the name was changed.

³⁹ Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta," 38-39.

⁴⁰ Weitzmann and Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross," fig. 4.

⁴¹ Except for Rădulescu, the other publications exclude the image of boots from the composition. My attention was drawn to this fact by K. Popkonstantinov whom I wish to thank.

⁴² Rădulescu, "Un document Proto-Romania a Capidava," 316.

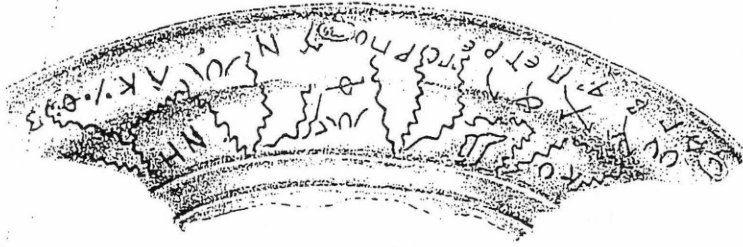


Fig 11. Amphora from Capidava, Romania (according to A. Rădulescu, "Un document")

basis of more extensive research and further analysis of the sources, I have revised my conclusions in certain areas. The formulas on the cross appear to mark a rough scheme of the Burning Bush scene and contain the main elements: the Burning Bush (MΘ) and the removed shoes (the boots). In this case, the boots do not function as a "pictorial formula" replacing the name Jesus Christ (IC XC) but function rather as a symbol of piety. The unsuccessful attempt to add the formula IC XC NH KA seems to be a result of mixing different types of inscribed crosses. Therefore, I suggest that the graffito-cross on the amphora of Capidava can be regarded as a replica of one of them. Furthermore, the appearance of the image of boots, together with common formulas and particularly with MΘ, leads me to suppose that such crosses with the "abbreviated" Burning Bush scene existed in the tenth century.⁴³ However, we should be aware of the fact that, except for the example of Capidava, the image of boots in the graffiti exists outside of any iconographic scheme. Thus, can we apply to the boot-graffiti the interpretation of this image in Christian art?

The answer to this question can be found in two main aspects: the combination of the boot-graffiti with other images and the context of the place where they were made. Examining the first aspect, I take into consideration only those combinations which were clearly made by one single hand. The most frequent combination was that with crosses, and this appeared mainly on the walls of the church (Fig. 12, 13). The cross as such is a symbol of Christ's Passion, and in a wider sense it can be considered a symbol for Christ's appearance on earth in general. Another common combination was that with Greek alphabets (Fig. 14, 15). Perhaps, the alphabets can be regarded as an exercise and demonstration

⁴³ Kostova, "Za biblejskija smisāl," 85-88.

⁴⁴ On the one hand, the similarity of the zigzag strapped boots in the graffiti to those in the miniatures in the Cosmas Codices also indicates a certain iconographic origin. On the other hand, the variety in the types of the boot-graffiti shows that the outer appearance was not the most important feature of the image.

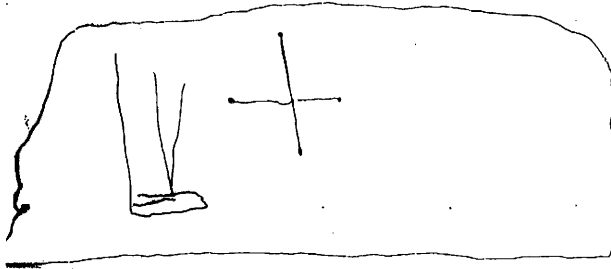


Fig. 12. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

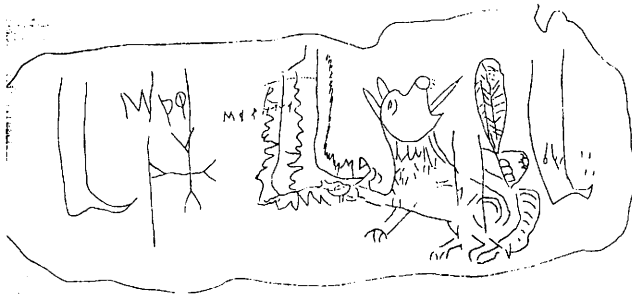


Fig. 13. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

of primary literacy.⁴⁵ However, in particular cases, such as Fig. 14 in which the word TPIC (three) requires the alphabet to be repeated three times, I suggest that the alphabet refers to another biblical image of Christ revealed in Rev. 1:8: " 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'"⁴⁶ The combination with a ladder (Fig. 16) is quite interesting although it is an isolated case. The image of the ladder in Christian symbolism originates from Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12-7) and is interpreted as a prefiguration of Christ showing the way to God.

Clearly, in these three types of combinations the boot-graffiti are made as a symbol of piety. Furthermore, I suggest this symbolic interpretation in general for the boot-graffiti. In other words, I "read" them as an expression of a simple prayer: "O, my Lord, I am here, naked before You, and I am praying for Your help and protection."

⁴⁵ K. Popkonstantinov, "Dvuzični nadpisi i abecedari" [Bilingual Inscriptions and Alphabets From the Monastery of Ravna], *Izvestija na Narodnija Muzej Varna* 20 (1986): 79.

⁴⁶ For example, there was the practice, especially in the West, of inscribing alphabets on the floor of churches during their consecration. Gošev, *Glagoličeski i kirilski nadpisi IX-XI vek* [Glagolitic and Cyrillic Inscriptions from the Ninth to the Eleventh Centuries] (Sofia: BAN, 1961), 61.



Fig. 14. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

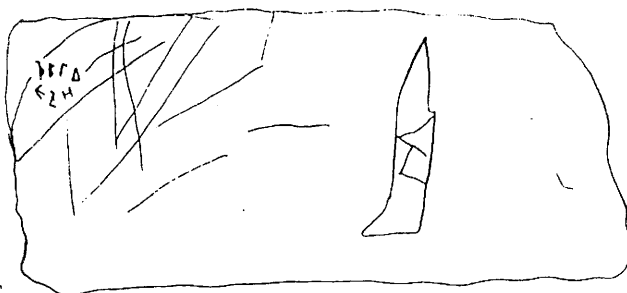


Fig. 15. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

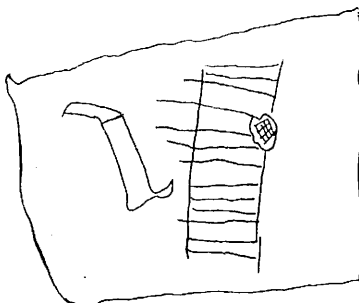


Fig. 16. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

Concerning the context of the place of appearance, it should be noted that the boot-graffiti exist in five settlements (Preslav, Capidava, Hiršova, Dinogetia-Garvan, Chersones) and in two monasteries (Ravna and Bassarabi). They are scratched either on walls or on ceramic vessels (Table 1). Analysing the numerical representation of boots on separate blocks in Ravna, we can see that usually a single block has only one image of a single boot. Even in cases when two or more boots are depicted on one block, they cannot be considered combinations but groups of single boots made by different hands (Fig. 17). There are only a few examples where I can suggest that pairs of boots were scratched. Thus,

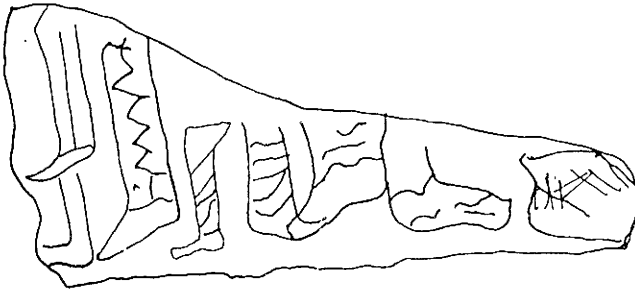


Fig. 17. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

on the basis of these data as well as on the variety of the kinds of boot-graffiti, we can assume that they functioned not only as a symbol of piety but also as personal signs of worship. In addition, the practice of scratching images of boots on vessels implies that they were also considered a strong apotropaic sign.

Moreover, concerning the context and the area of appearance of the boot-graffiti, I can add yet one more argument supporting the idea of their pilgrimage character. The geographic points where the graffiti of boots are located trace a route which has as its southernmost point Preslav (Bulgaria) and as the northernmost Chersones (Ukraine). In the northern section, the route strictly follows the lower flow of the Danube river, and throughout this entire distance it runs parallel to the north-western coastline of the Black Sea. It should be mentioned that the map of this route does not coincide with the road linking the capital Preslav with the territories to the north of Danube.⁴⁷ It is likely, therefore, that the creators of the boot-graffiti followed their own road, and that road was a route of pilgrims.⁴⁸ Two crucial places on it were the monasteries of Ravna and Bassarabi. Their identification as pilgrimage centres is sufficiently substantiated by the numerous inscriptions containing names, short notes mentioning the stay in the monasteries, and simple prayers.⁴⁹ Furthermore, I believe that Ravna and Bassarabi were stations for pil-

⁴⁷ The shortest way passed through Drăstăr (Durostorum) following a section of the Roman Via Viminatium-Constantinople. G. Škrivanič, "Roman Roads and Settlements in the Balkans," in *Historical Geography of the Balkans*, ed. Fr. W. Carter (London-New York-San Francisco: Academy Press, 1977), 128.

⁴⁸ It is intriguing to note that as a centre of St Phocas' cult, Chersones was the northernmost point in the early Byzantine pilgrimage route crossing the Balkans. Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington D. C. : Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 4, Fig. 2.

⁴⁹ Popkonstantinov and O. Kronsteiner, "Altbulgarische Inschriften," *Die Slawische Sshprachen* 36 (1994): 75, 77, 81, 83 (Bassarabi), 219, 227, 233 (Ravna).



Fig. 18. A graffito-drawing from the Ravna monastery

grims returning from their travel to the Holy Land. Indeed, Ravna is situated on the road linking the central part of medieval Bulgaria with Thrace and Constantinople.

Summarising the present attempt to interpret the graffito-images of boots in Ravna, I draw the following conclusions:

1. The tenth-century boot-graffiti from Ravna monastery as well as from Preslav, Bassarabi, Hiršova, Capidava, Dinogetia-Garvan, and Chersonses were made as personal signs of worship with protective power.

2. The boot-graffiti were scratched by a distinctive group of pilgrims who in the first half of the tenth century passed through the northeastern part of Bulgaria, visiting the Ravna monastery.

3. The pilgrims probably adopted this symbol during their pilgrimage to the Holy Land and particularly to Sinai. There, the image of boots was popular as a symbol of experience of epiphany and piety, being derived from the "abbreviated" iconography of the Burning Bush scene, a typical *locus sanctus picture* for Sinai.

Although it is impossible as yet to determine who the pilgrims were, it is certain that no ethnic identification could be applied to the makers of the boot-graffiti. On the one hand, the interpretation in the Christian sense avoids a relation to proto-Bulgarian beliefs.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the images of boots with names (e.g. ΧΟΦΙΗΑ) could not be used for general conclusions. Moreover, the monastery of Ravna and the other locations of boot-graffiti were accessible to people of many different ethnic origins.

Another difficult question concerns the status of the pilgrims. In my previous work I suggested that they were travelling monks.⁵¹ However,

⁵⁰ Ovcárov, "Za sädäržanieto," 297-299.

⁵¹ Kostova, "Za biblejskija smisäl," 87.

the topography of the boot-graffiti in Ravna shows that they were made by outsiders who had access only to the guesthouse, the south yard, and, from there, to the church. Therefore, I now suggest that the authors of the boot-graffiti were laymen although monks may also have been among them (Fig. 18).

Convincing or not, and certainly disputable, the present interpretation of the enigmatic image of the boot-graffiti has at least the heuristic value of demonstrating how one particular group of graffiti reveals the transmission of an image from the context of Christian iconography to pilgrim's symbolism. Moreover, such a study may be useful in reconstructing the routes of pilgrimage and the communications between the civil centres and the monasteries in tenth-century North Balkans.