The Origin and Meaning of Floral imagery in the Monumental Art of Macedonia (4th–3rd centuries BC)

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Macedonian art of the Argead era naturally forms part of the Hellenic artistic heritage. The question of its uniqueness is delicate and for a number of reasons it can't be answered through the mechanical separation of the "Macedonian component" from the Greek. Firstly, because Greek art itself is not something uniform in character or content; and secondly, because there is no sharp boundary (to say nothing of opposition) between Greek and Macedonian in the artistic sphere. There is plenty of evidence, from both excavation finds and written sources, suggesting that, since the end of the 5th century BC, Macedonia actually served as a locus of Greek art – one of those places where it developed under special conditions and environment. From the beginning of the 4th century BC Greek artisans and renowned masters (especially from Athens)[1] come to Macedonia and its royal court "to try their luck, bringing their talents and skills to the North".[2] In time, local ateliers assimilated elements of the Greek artistic language and created their own traditions. However, it is still not easy to answer the question about the local characteristics of Macedonian art in the late Classic/early Hellenistic period. Whereas in architecture specific features manifest themselves quite clearly in distinctive architectural types and forms, the field of pictorial arts offers a somewhat more sophisticated picture. Here, originality is expressed, not so much in the forms (principally and essentially classical Greek) as in their selection, in the preference given to certain themes and subjects, and the appeal to a specific circle of customers – the king and related aristocracy. We can also talk about special "tonality", specific messages and meanings of the images, which may differ from the original ones.

In the Macedonian pictorial world, a very special role belongs to ornamental floral compositions. The phenomenon of their emergence and development should be considered a specific feature of Macedonian art.

1 Lilimbaki-Akamati, Akamatis 2012, 15.

2 Drougou 2004, 31.

Certainly, vegetative ornamentation is widely known as an important part of the Greek artistic language (as well as part of other ancient visual cultures). It is also true that floral motifs very similar to Macedonian can be found on other territories – notably in the art of Thrace and the Black Sea region in the second half of the 4th – beginning of the 3rd centuries BC. However, its function there, as well as in Greece, can be estimated (with rare exceptions) as subordinate, framing, complementing, rather than self-sufficient. In Macedonia, on the contrary, plant motifs frequently acquire exceptional independent value, sometimes growing into large-scale compositions in wall paintings and mosaics. Where they neighbor figurative images, they are perceived as equal or even superior in importance.

The problems related to these ornamental forms of Macedonian art have been repeatedly touched upon by scholars[3] with respect to individual monuments, generally in connection with Macedonian pebble mosaics, where floral motives are widely represented. Nevertheless, it looks like the Macedonian ornamental language and the very phenomenon of its "monumentalization" still requires special study which, to my knowledge, does not exist. Certainly, this brief article cannot claim to completeness of analysis, but simply offers some interpretations and specifies ways of research that have already been outlined by our predecessors.

The famous pebble mosaic by Gnosis from the House of Abduction of Helen in Pella seems to be a good starting point for discourse (fig. 1).[4] Its precise date is still under discussion, but it should probably be defined as the last quarter of the 4th century BC.[5] The central *emblema* depicts a deer-hunting scene. Corresponding motifs of "heroic hunt" are well-

[3] In his fundamental work on pebble mosaics D. Salzmann pays special attention to the floral motifs in connection with Macedonian examples (Salzmann 1982, 49–55); about the function and origins of ornaments (including vegetal forms) in the mosaic art (up to the age of Augustus) see also Ovadiah, 1980, 77–187; M. Pfrommer investigates the subject in the context of metalworking and other minor arts (Pfrommer 1982, 119–190; 1983, 235–285). A.M. Guimier-Sorbets speaks about oriental component in this ornamental language (Guimier-Sorbets 1999, 19–37) and S. Drougou considers them in connection with the purple-and-gold textile from Vergina/Aigai (Drougou 1987, 303–323). In her postgraduate thesis on the famous mosaic of Aigai palace M. Levandi also raises the questions of the origin and meaning of Macedonian floral ornamentation (Levandi 2009, 74–94).

[4] Salzmann 1982, cat. 102, pl. 37, 4.

[5] Salzmann gives the earlier dates – 340/330–320/310 (Salzmann 1982, 107–108), others argue in favor of the early reign of Cassander (Cohen 2010, 30, 309, ref. 64).

Fig. 1. Stag Hunt Mosaic. Archaeological site of Pella. Photo by author

Fig. 2. Finial to state grave for the cavalry fallen in 394/393 BC. Athens, National Archaeological Museum. Photo: K. Nenakhov

Fig. 3.1–2. Floral bordure of Stag Hunt Mosaic.

3.3. Funeral akroterion from Phanagoria (350–325 BC). Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. Adapted from Akimova, Tugusheva 2011, 207

Fig. 4. Lyre-shaped patterns in mosaics and architectural akroteria.

4.1. Parthenon akroterion. Athens, Acropolis Museum.
Photo by author.

4.2. Mosaic from the area of Darron's sanctuary. Detail. Pella, Archaeological museum. Photo by author.

4.3. Akroterion from the temple of Hera at Argos. Graphic reconstruction. Adapted from Gropengiesser 1961, pl. 14

Fig. 5. Corinthian capital of the Epidaurian Thymele (360–330 BC). Epidauros, Archaeological museum. Photo: K. Nenakhov

Fig. 6.1. 3-d reconstruction of the roof of the Lysicrates monument in Athens by D. Cawthorne. Source: De Montfort University Open Research Archive https://www.dora.dmu.ac.uk/handle/2086/5938 (accessed on October 16, 2017)

Fig. 6.2. Mosaic from the area of Darron's sanctuary. Pella, Archaeological museum. Photo by author

known in art of the times of Alexander and Diadochi,[6] mainly in a memorial or funeral context. Lush vegetation surrounds this central image. It is certainly not the earliest example of such peculiar plant forms, but it is here where they reach their apex in complexity and sophistication.

This type of floral decor became "omnipresent" in Macedonian art of the late Classical – early Hellenistic times. It is very recognizable due to some specific features. Usually we see a certain set of plants: spiraling shoots, stylized flowers, some of which have real prototypes (roses, lilies, bells, acanthus, araceae or, as in the case of Gnosis' mosaic, crocuses), and some are fantastic composite hybrid forms. Another important trait is the strong intention to achieve a three-dimensional effect. In the "Stag Hunt" mosaic, both ornamental and figural compositions create on the flat surface the impression of depth, thanks to the effects of chiaroscuro and what could be called "perspective drawing".

When and where did this type of representation arise? Scholars connect the origin and spread of this decorative style with different arts (painting, architecture, textiles, vase-painting, and metalworking) and with different territories in the west and east.[7] In Macedonia itself, abundant floral compositions appear no later than the 340s BC in different contexts, with such a high quantity and quality that we can hardly speak about evolution. Rather, it seems, borrowing (or perhaps it is better to say 'external artistic impulses') took place, with further adaptation to fit specific Macedonian requirements, and clearly not from one, but from several sources.

One of these sources – late Attic vase-painting – seems to be very probable. After the Peloponnesian War Attic potters were looking for a market in the north, and not only were the goods exported, but also the artisans themselves travelled to Macedonia.[8] Attic imports in Macedonia and Athenian ceramics in general certainly offer impressive examples of rich plant ornamentation. Among them is a hydria, decorated by an Athenian craftsman (at the beginning of the 4th century BC) and found in the necropolis of Pella, where it served as a burial urn for the remains of a Macedonian aristocrat.[9] The vegetative ornament here is very active:

6 Cohen 2010, Palagia 2000, 136–150.

7 In connection with great painting – Salzmann 1982, 55–58 (the question of relation with vase painting, weaving and other arts is also discussed); toreutic and vase painting – Pfrommer 1983, waving and movement of fabric (with oriental Eastern ruts of exotic ornamental motifs) Guimier-Sorbets 1999, 19–37.

8 Drougou 2004, 31; Lilimbaki-Akamati, Akamatis 2012, 17.

9 Drougou 2004, fig. 6–7.

it fills the entire back of the vase and the side parts under the handles, coming close to the figurative scene. We find similar "behavior" of a floral pattern in another piece of exported Athenian art from the early 4th century BC – a squat lekythos by the workshop of Xenophantos, found at Kerch (ancient Pantikapaion),[10] which may have been a special funerary gift. Along with figurative painting and reliefs, a significant part of the vessel's body is covered with extremely dynamic floral ornament. Its forms and motifs (especially the combination of palmettes and acanthus bush under the handle) are not so far from those of later Macedonian mosaics. However, this ornamentation (like that of the Pella Hydria or later Attic examples of the first half of the 4th century BC) demonstrates little tendency toward three-dimensionality.

This feature developed significantly stronger in South Italian ceramics in the first half of the 4th century BC. All South Italian schools had their interest in floral decoration, but it is in Apulian vase painting where we find a real boom of original floral ornamentation, treated very similarly to Macedonian monumental art. This closeness was often explained by the influence of Mainland Greece in both Italy and Macedonia. The reverse direction of influences was proposed by F. Villard and discussed by M. Pfrommer.[11]

In the works of the Iliupersis Painter we note a similar interpretation of floral motifs: on a krater in Boston (c. 365–355 BC) the flowers appear to have volume due to the floral calyxes and climbing shoots shown in perspective[12] (this three-dimensional effect would later be strengthened by active use of color). On the neck of the same vase, a female head is depicted in the leaves of acanthus and spiral shoots – one of the earliest representations of this remarkable motif in Italy, which later became prevalent in Apulian vase painting. It also appears at least once in Macedonian wall painting. The interior of a female cist grave found near Aineia is decorated with a painted floral frieze, which includes images of female heads among acanthus leaves (the tomb dates to the third quarter of the

10 Boardman 1989, pl. 340.

11 Villard 1998, 203–221. Prommer speaks about influences of South and Middle Italian decorative patterns on Macedonian art, including ornamental border of the "Stag Hunt" mosaic (Pfrommer 1982, 130–134). He also directly defines the Macedonian tendril decoration as "italianazing" (Pfrommer 1996, 176); the other scholars touching the subject expressed doubts about his proposals (Drougou 1987 P.313, Bokotopoulou 1990, 40—41, Kyriaku 2008, 184—185).

12 Pfrommer 1982, 127; Trendall 1989, pl. 141.

4th century BC).[13] However, Attic parallels have been postulated for this wall painting, and it probably has nothing to do with Apulia.[14]

One other piece of art should be mentioned here, although its location is not South Italy or Macedonia, but exactly between the two, in ancient Illyria. This is the pebble mosaic from Epidamnos (Roman Dirrachium, modern Durres in Albania)[15] dated to the second half of the 4th century BC. It forms a large ellipse, in the center of which a female head in three-quarters, braided by all sorts of plants rendered in perspective, is depicted. Unlike the tomb at Aineia, here we have a compositional scheme that is almost exactly "Apulian", but expanded to a larger area. Most importantly, the interpretation and selection of plant motifs here are very similar to the floral repertoire of the Gnosis mosaic and some other Macedonian floors. The existence of such a work, where the compositional device widely known in the Apulian vase painting appears on a flat surface translated into another material and scale, should be taken into account. It might be an argument in favor of the spread of vegetative ornamentation from west to east, from South Italy to Macedonia (and further to other territories).

However, it is not easy to say how exactly this transfer was carried out. Apulian terracotta vessels were never exported to Macedonia, moreover South Italian vases in general were not widely exported and only a very small percentage of them have been found far from the place of their production.[16]

Nevertheless, it seems like specific forms of Apulian ceramics were known in Macedonia. The funerary marble krater belonging to the monument found on the eastern side of Stenomakri Toumba at Vergina (third quarter of the 4th century BC)[17] should be mentioned in connection with this. Such large kraters originate in Attic tradition. Evidently, at the end of the 5th–beginning of the 4th century BC Apulian artisans imitated and then developed this form to even more elaborate compositions.[18] The general shape and individual features of the Stenomakri Toumba krater go back to Attic ceramic and metalworking. But details such as the swans' heads

13 Brecoulaki 2006, 327, pl.110–111.

14 See Brecoulaki 2006, 330. For parallels in Attic painted marble vases see Koch-Brinkmann, Posamentir R. 2004, Pl. 268─269. Vokotopoulou speaks about combination of decorative elements from Attica and Apulia. Vokotopoulou I. 1990, 49.

15 Guimier-Sorbets 1993, 135–141.

16 Trendall 1989, 9.

17 Kyriakou 2013, 211–247.

18 Trendall 1989, 9–11. See also Kyriakou 2013, 215.

at the handle joints are strongly reminiscent of corresponding forms of Apulian terracotta vessels.[19]

The same ambivalence should be noted in the very tradition of vase-shaped marble gravestones. They are well attested in Attica since the last quarter of the 5th century BC: among Attic marble *lekythoi* and *loutrophoroi* there are examples with rich floral ornamentation in relief or, more importantly, in polychrome painting.[20] But we also have examples from South Italy, specifically Apulia (Daunia region) – the marble krater of Ascoli Satriano, as well as other marble vessels of different shapes that belong to a single funerary complex (including examples with traces of painting).[21] This krater was probably not used as a grave-marker or funerary urn, but together with other marble objects served as equipment for an aristocratic chamber tomb (in the same way as Apulian ceramic vessels), which is suggested by the good state of preservation and "the associative logic that links the artifacts with each other".[22]

In Macedonia itself, besides the example from Stenomakri Toumba, a number of funeral stone vessels, including that from the Great Tumulus at Vergina, have been found.[23] According to A. Kyriakou "the tendency towards colorful ornamentation of marble vases should be traced to Aegae as well".[24] These parallels deserve attention because not only the shapes of the vessels, but also their decorative motifs could migrate from one region to another in the framework of this funerary practice. Note that, in such monuments, the decoration (including floral motifs) displays an intermediate character – it is somewhere between the decor of a ceramic vase prototype (in terms of drawing and principles of composition) and monumental painting (in terms of size and technique).

Attic gravestones of another type provide further possible sources of floral imagery. An early example which demonstrates a rudimentary version of the "Macedonian" floral decor is the finial of a state grave coming

19 Kyriakou 2013, 215 and pl.8.

20 The polychrome floral painting of the lekythos from Copenhagen collection along with other Attic examples is examined in Koch-Brinkmann, Posamentir 2004, 197–208. See also Kyriakou 2012, 185.

21 Bottini, Setari 2009, fig. 1–2.

22 Bottini, Setari 2009, 1. It is also worth mentioning the marble Trapezophoros of Ascoli Satriano (Ibid., fig. 3–5), depicting two griffins praying a deer – the iconography (which is rooted in oriental tradition) frequent both in Macedonian and South Italian art of 4th century BC.

23 Saatsoglou-Paliadeli 1984, 246–247.

24 Kyriakou 2012, 187.

from the area of the *demosion sema* (public cemetery) in Athens (fig. 2).[25] It resembles contemporary elaborate architectural decoration, but includes some particular features: the motif of curls, palmettes growing from acanthus, and especially characteristic cone-shaped buds depicted in perspective. This *anthemion* crowned a lost relief stele, installed over the graves of warriors who died in battle. Such finials were probably not uncommon for military graves.[26] We do not know exactly how the main image on the stele looked, but we can reconstruct or at least imagine it based on similar monuments with battle scenes. The anthemion bears an inscription with the names of 10 cavalrymen who fell at the Battle of Corinth in 394 BC. Among them is Dexileos, whose famous cenotaph was installed on the family funeral plot in Kerameikos. The Dexileos stele represents the deceased as a heroic rider, striking the enemy, and this iconography is characteristic of state military graves.[27] Something similar should have been depicted on the relief surmounted by the floral *anthemion* mentioned above. Thus, here luxurious flower framing is semantically connected with the ideal representation of *andres agathoi*,[28] valorous men who died in battle. It is also worth noting that a good iconographic parallel both for ornamental and figural motifs (but with reference to the mythological heroic subject) we find in the nearly contemporary "Bellerophon mosaic" from Olynthos – one of the direct presiders of Macedonian examples.[29]

Digging deeper into the realm of funerary art helps to extend our circle of analogies. We should note the peculiar structure of floral framing in the "Stag Hunt" mosaic. Its vegetative forms have two sources – two acanthus bushes in the lower left and upper right corners, from which shoots grow and symmetrically braid the central panel, converging to form 12-petal palmettes at opposite corners. Such a structure, albeit in a much more compact form, can be found in the anthemia of Attic grave stelai from the middle of the 4th century BC. Finials of this type can vary in the compound of decorative elements, but always have the same basic pattern: a bush of acanthus from which sprouts grow ending with a palmette.[30] Among them, we have especially sophisticated and rich floral

25 Boardman 1995, pl. 121.

26 R. Stupperch gives one other contemporary example from Piraeus Museum (Stupperch 1994, ref. 27 with literature).

27 Stupperch 1994, 94.

28 The usual denomination in Athens for those fall in battle (Ibid.)

29 Salzmann 1982, 99, cat. 78, pl. 13.

30 Möbius 1929, 28, 88.

compositions, like the funeral akroterion of Attic work from Phanagoria at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (fig. 3).[31] Of course, with the Gnosis mosaic we are dealing not with the crowning element, but with the frame. However the set of elements here is generally the same.

We find similar structures in monuments of a larger scale, namely in architectural temple akroteria. In order to evaluate this compositional similarity we should refer to another group of Macedonian pebble mosaics – the purely ornamental floral floors such as those from Vergina (palace of Aigai) and the later examples from Pella.[32] They demonstrate a somewhat different concept than the border ornamentation of the "Stag Hunt". Here we see the same elegant and elaborate vegetation, but it takes the form of lyre-shaped modules growing from a central rosette. The centric scheme and peculiar forms resemble the intricate ornamental constructions found in Attic and Apulian vase-painting (under the handles). We also have similar centric compositions in earlier mosaics.[33] But in all of these cases there is one key difference – the center of the composition (often a rosette) is isolated from the remaining ornamental area by means of a circular frame. In Macedonian mosaics, however, all elements are connected and conform to a single development, from center to periphery.

It should be noted that the earliest large-scale compositions of this kind were created outside Macedonia, on Peloponnesus. The ornamental mosaic of Sicyon is considered to predate the oldest Macedonian piece by 10 or 20 years.[34] This, in particular, led many scientists to believe that floral ornaments in Macedonian mosaics and wall paintings originate in Peloponnesus and even to associate their invention with the name of the Sicyonian painter Pausias.[35] Without delving into detail, we simply note that Pausias was indeed interested in the depiction of flowers and achieved perfection "ad numerosissimam florum varietatem",[36] but his

31 This sculptural piece of outstanding quality dates back to the 350–325 BC. Akimova, Tugusheva 2011, 206.

32 Vergina: Levandi 2009, 57–116, fig 1. Pella: Lilimbaki-Akamati 1987, 455–472, fig. 94.2; Lilimbaki-Akamati, Akamatis 2003, 63, fig. 83.

33 For example in the room 9 (andron) of the House of Mosaics in Eretria the central square field of mosaic encloses two concentric circles. The outer is decorated with set of alternated palmettes and lotuses and the inner one contains eight petals rosette, which marks the center. This pebble mosaic dates back to the first third of 4th century BC (Salzmann , cat. 37, p. 90, pl. 26, 1–4).

34 Salzmann , cat. 118. P.112, pl.20.

35 The view was made for the first time by M. Robertson (Robertson 1965, 82–83).

36 Plin. NH 35.125.

compositions can hardly serve as a model for decorative pebble mosaics (at least of the aforementioned centric type). Considering what we know about Pausias' painting, his "stefanoi" had to be more illusionistic and nature-like in their appearance (probably something closer to the depiction of garlands in later Hellenistic and Roman painting), while the images of flowers in the mosaics – with all their three-dimensional characteristics – look decorative and far from real. Behind their unrestrained richness we can easily feel strict "architectonic" geometry, and their structural elements look similar to architectural decorative forms. Thus, if we separately examine one of the segment modules of floral mosaic compositions from Pella (wonderful examples of which come from the area of the Sanctuary of Darron[37]), we notice a remarkable similarity with a certain type of architectural akroteria (fig. 4). The closest and the earliest parallel is the Parthenon's central akroterion, which is more than a hundred years older than the Macedonian pieces.[38] Nevertheless, in the Pella mosaics mentioned above we see nearly the same basic design and refined taste to cross-cutting details – a lyre-shaped form culminating in a palmette with elegant scrolls. This makes one suspect that it was not painting, but architectural decoration of a particularly sophisticated design which provided the impetus for the emergence of such floral compositions.

Scholars have already pointed to architectural parallels in connection with Macedonian mosaics.[39] But it seems that we can talk about the wider impact of architectural floral imagery on the ornamental language of the epoch. The 4th century BC was a time of active introduction of complex plant forms into architectural décor. They can be found in the capitals of the newly invented Corinthian order, in the elaborate simas and rich ornamental akroteria represented mostly by monuments of Peloponnesus (notably Arcadia and Argolis).[40] Moreover, from the mid-4th century, the sense of complexity, depth, a more naturalistic interpretation of plant motifs and, at the same time, fantasy and refined sophistication in architectural décor noticeably increases. To sense this notable tendency, we need only to compare the Corinthian capitals of the earlier *tholos* in Delphi to those of the Thymele in Epidaurus. In the earlier Delphi capitals (about

37 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1987, 472, fig. 94.2; Lilimbaki-Akamati 2003, 63, fig. 83.

38 Palagia 2005, 253–254, pl. 75, 91.

39 See Levandi 2009, 84.

40 Among the most impressive samples are decorative cymai of the Temple of Asklepion at Epidaurus and the temple of Hera at Argos (Boardman 1995, pl. 7), floral akroteria of Epidaurian Tholos and Athenaion at Tegea (see Gropengiesser 1961).

380 BC) ornamental forms (acanthus, central palmette and curls) are treated as rather abstract, regular and flat, and the capital in general looks compact and monolithic. In the capitals of the Thymele (about 360–320 BC) the central scrolls facing inwards have a pronounced three-dimensional character as well as a large araceae flower above them. All of these forms have their own volume independent to a certain extent of the capitals' body. Note also the special "perforating" quality of the angular tendrils with the tiny sprouts with buds (fig. 5). Such ornamentation seems very close to what appears in Macedonia as a drawing/painting on a flat surface with its not real but illusive three-dimensionality.

In the 4th century BC, round structures – the *tholos* and its modifications – became of particular importance as an architectural type. Among other things, this led to the emergence of a special kind of floral akroterion crowning the round building. One of the finest examples is the spectacular akroterion of Epidaurian *tholos*.[41] It has an elegant lyre-shaped core similar to that of the Parthenon, but is surrounded with entire thickets of fantastic vegetation, which makes the composition more suitable for a circular structure.

The akroterion of the Lysicrates Monument in Athens, more modest in size, but no less elaborate in form, is another significant example. This miniature *tholos* made of Pentelic marble was a highly extravagant private dedication to Dionysus made by a representative of the Athenian elite for victory in the Great Dionysia (334 BC). Unlike the Thymele, the roof of the Athenian monument partially survived and can be reconstructed on the basis of different visual sources.[42] This roof is of interest as a single composite unit. Its conical surface was decorated with leaf ornaments (leaflets diverge from the center) and is enclosed in a frame of two decorative rims (simas) – an inner circle with waves and an outer one with palmettes.[43] Above the roof is a complex floral akroterion rose. In its upper part sprouts and flowers grow from the lush acanthus bush. Hanging down, they formed three "branches", with spiral tendrils superimposed and penetrating through each other. From the base of the pedestal three spiral shoots diverge along the surface of the roof and reach the frame

41 For the architectural details and reconstruction of the tholos at Epidaurus see Roux 1961, 131–150.

42 For architectural analysis see Bauer 1977, 204–227, fig. 5 - 10 (and his reconstruction with the statue inside); details of the roof : Amandry1976, 71–79, fig. 42–45.

43 H. Bauer reconstructs both simas as waves running in the opposite directions (Bauer 1977, fig. 9).

of running waves. So here, we are dealing with a complex three-dimensional composition in the round, akin to some ornamental floral floors in Macedonia (fig. 6).

Again, the question arises of how exactly the architectural forms were transferred to the flat format? Can we speak of direct imitation or are we to suppose a kind of transitional medium (for example architectural drawings[44])? It seems probable that refined floral images were used in Macedonian architecture, since some examples have survived.[45] It might be also important that in Macedonia we have examples of direct imitation of architectural plastic forms (even akroteria specifically) in monumental painting. Among other examples one of the most remarkable is the decoration of the tomb at Aghios Athanassios, which dates back to the last quarter of the 4th century BC.[46] Some architectural forms of its polychrome façade – e.g. the pediments and akroteria – are imitated in trompe-l'œil painting. By means of chiaroscuro, the impression of volume is created and the illusive painting almost convinces us that these architectural elements are real. At the same time the "realistic" forms are complemented with some purely decorative ones, impossible in real architecture, such as thin tendrils hanging in the air with fragile lilies at the ends. The final effect is very close to what can be seen in the floral images of "Stag Hunt" and other mosaics.

To summarize our observations, it seems reasonable to distinguish three artistic traditions connected with three regions – Attica, South Italy (Apulia) and Peloponnesus (especially Argolis) – as the possible sources of vegetal ornamentation in Macedonia. Here, the same interest in

44 About the phenomenon of architectural drawing and its role in the ancient visual culture see Corso 2017. It's possible to imagine that the specialists who wrote about architecture provided their texts with illustrations, including decorative details. In this connection the treatise by Theodorus of Phocaea about the tholos of Delphi is coming to mind. A. Corso notes that even genre of 'free' architectural drawing for artistic reasons could exist (Ibid. 1); see interesting example of drawing on papyrus dated around 140 AD, where two columns supporting the architrave and frieze decorated with shoots of acanthus are represented (Ibid. 43, pl. 21).

45 We can remember akroteria of the Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia with their "strong chiaroscuro effect, produced by the deep relief of the leaves and the triangular tongue-heart at its center" (Rhomiopoulou 2000, 32, fig. 26–27). It's also worth mentioning the luxurious anthemion kept in the National Archaeological Museum of Kavala (no. Λ 319) which A. Corso supposes to be central akroterion of propylon of Kasta Tumulus (see infra).

46 Brecoulaki 2006, 263, pl. 90–102, Tsimbidou-Avloniti 2006, 321–331, pl.2.

complex floral compositions with pronounced three-dimensional effects appeared a bit earlier and developed in parallel with Macedonia, finally culminating in the emergence of the trend in art of the late 4th–early 3rd centuries BC, which included other territories such as Thrace, the Black Sea region, and Asia Minor. We can also talk about several fields of art which may have directly or indirectly stimulated the development of vegetative ornamentation in the monumental art of Macedonia. These include vase painting, with the closest parallels in Apulia, painting on marble vessels of Attic and probably South Italian inspiration, and sculptural non figural decoration (anthemia) of funeral stelai, most widely represented in Attic art. Finally, we see architectural decoration, especially akroteria, of which the earliest analogies can be found in Attica (and later on Peloponnesus). It is highly likely that architectural-sculptural forms (including floral décor) were actively imitated in monumental wall painting.[47] This transformation of an architectural element into a picturesque one could have affected the stylization and representation of floral images in other arts (especially mosaics).[48]

It is difficult to choose the most important of all of these formal artistic sources. We are obviously dealing with a peculiar feature of Macedonian art – its synthesizing, "cosmopolitan" character and openness to artistic influences of various origins.

What common features do all of these supposed sources of inspiration share, and what could they say about the meaning behind Macedonian floral images? It appears that, in all cases rich vegetal ornamentation has had some fundamental association with an abundance of divine and miraculous nature, probably as an allusion to sacred gardens (*kepos*), the

47 Besides the Tomb at Aghios Athanassios, we have some other examples among which the Tomb of Judgment where sculptured polychrome friezes on the façade neighbor with painted metopes. This using of chiaroscuro effects (sufficiently advanced here) makes impression of a true relief, at least at certain distance. As H. Brecoulaki notes "it seems reasonable to wonder why the decorator of the tomb preferred to evoke a false impression of reality by pictorial means rather than use real reliefs as he did for the composition of the frieze" (Brecoulaki 2006, 204–207, 215, pl. 75).

48 It's also worth noting that mosaics of a bit later time also incline to imitate architectural details, which can be transformed into a self-dependent type of framing ornamentation. The most obvious example we find in rows of dentils imitated in three-dimensional manner which form the borders for figurative fields in Hellenistic and Roman mosaics of different periods (see for instance "Alexander Mosaic" in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples).

place of residence and epiphany of a deity (it suffices to recall how floral akroteria "sprouted" through temples' roofs).[49]

Of course, such a basic association, as well as particularly sacred and respectable statues of vegetal imagery, can be traced back much earlier than the late Classical/Hellenistic periods. But what we see now is actually far from the conventional symbolism of palmettes, rosettes and lotuses of Archaic and High Classical times. These new floral forms acquire an exceptional vital energy and biological cogency, the likes of which had not been seen before (certainly since the Aegean Bronze age). While retaining their sacral aura, these beautiful images become very sensual, having turned into objects of admiring meditation.

The example of the Epidaurian Thymele is of particular significance. The total lack of figural sculpture in its decoration looks intentional; instead, a choice is made in favor of sensuous vegetative forms, which carry "a global symbolic message of regeneration and life".[50] In connection with this, it seems logical to recall the round floral mosaic from Pella. It belonged to one of the round structures found at the city, which was associated with the worship of local healing hero-god Darron.[51] So this Macedonian *tholos* with its "vegetative floor" might have some common features with the Epidaurian one (and its floral carvings) in terms of function and symbolism.

We can distinguish through many instances the direct connection between floral images and the funerary sphere, sometimes with heroic connotations. In Macedonia itself, floral ornamentation often appears in the context of a funeral. Among early examples are the floral decoration of the throne in the Eurydice Tomb at Aigai (dates back, most probably, to the middle of the 4th century BC)[52] and the painting in the Tomb of Aineia mentioned above.

In Greece this association of extraordinary vegetation with the afterlife is most clearly expressed in literature since Homer. Although Homeric ἀσφοδελὸν λειμῶνα is not yet a place of paradise, later antique commentators understood it as a "blooming meadow" and "fragrant fields of Elysium".[53] Pindar presented this theme in several brilliant passages. In his Olympian 2, written for the victory of Sicilian

49 Calame 2002, 45.

50 Ridgway 1997, 48.

51 Lilimbaki-Akamati, Akamatis 2012, 13.

52 Brecoulaki 2006, 53–56, pl. 3–5.

53 Reece 2007, 389–400.

tyrant Theron of Acragas in a chariot race (476 B. C.), the Islands of the Blessed, where the best souls dwell, are described.[54] This view of the afterlife is abound with fantastic floral images: "…where ocean breezes blow around the Island of the Blessed, and flowers of gold are blazing (ἄνθεμα δὲ χρυσοῦ φλέγει), some from splendid trees on land while water nurtures others. With these wreaths and garlands of flowers they entwine their hands…"

In his "Letter of Consolation to Apollonios" Plutarch, describing the post mortem destiny of pious souls, cites Pindar.[55] In this quotation we hear once again about "meadows red with roses" and the incense-tree with golden fruits. Plutarch himself uses similar images when speaking about the initiatory experience, which is related to the experience of death. In his text the soul (likened to the one being initiated) is wandering in the darkness without direction, and then reaches a point where it is received by "pure places and meadows" (τοποι καθαροι και λειμώνες).[56] In Aristophanes' "Frogs" the ghosts of Eleusinian Initiates sing about roses and meadows full of posies, where a happy afterlife is given to the blessed.[57] Finally, we should mention the texts of the so-called Gold Tablets (often labeled as "Bacchic" or "Orphic") found in burial sites of different regions (Southern Italy, Crete, Lesbos, Thessaly) including Macedonia.[58] In these mystical texts containing instructions for the soul's journey to the Underworld the motif of "floral paradise" is glimpsed as well – the ultimate destination of the soul is often imagined as a blossoming meadow, "Persephone's odorous fields".[59]

These otherworldly landscapes and eschatological visions of Greek literature, and the special role of magic vegetation, perfectly correlate (if not directly relate) with the floral imagery present in Greek funerary art. Scrolls of fantastical plants on the necks of Apulian vessels resemble Pindar's "chains and garlands" which enwreathe (ἀναπλέκοντι) the hands

54 Pind. Ol. 2. 73–75.

55 Pind. fr. 129, 3 Maehl.

56 Plut. fr.178 Sandbach. On this passage see Mylonas 1961, 264; Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 97.

57 Aristoph. Ran. 449–454.

58 Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008; on the relationship of Gold Tables with Dionysiac or Orphic mysteries and discussion on this issue see Torjussen 2005, 287–305.

59 See Tablet L 8, 5–6 from Thurii and L13 from Pherai (Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 174).

of the blessed.[60] The floral finials of 4th century BC grave stelai – what are they, if not dramatic signs of "phyto-morphic" immortality?

We can assume that Macedonian funerary art carried a similar message. One vivid example is the painting of the Tomb of the Palmettes at Lefkadia, which was once connected with the fragment from Pindar mentioned above.[61] In this remarkable tomb, floral painting is placed on the vault of the antechamber and assumes the role of the dominating motif. Six huge palmettes on a pale blue background alternate with fantastic water lilies. Three-dimensionally depicted, enormously enlarged flowers of unrealistically bright colors inspire a feeling of ethereal vision. Obviously, this is how the world outside the real, the fantastic landscape of the afterlife, with "wonderful light" and "pure places and meadows", could be represented.

How this theme should be related to the "Stag Hunt" mosaic and other Macedonian floral floors, which were not placed in tombs, but in the dining rooms (*andronoi*) of Macedonian palaces? Integrated into the everyday life of Macedonian elite, they were seen and admired by the community during the feasts. These idealized "flower carpets" marked places of happiness and ideal aristocratic leisure. At the same time (we suspect) they could refer to some *locus amoenus* in Hades or Elysium or the Islands of the Blessed, where the souls of great heroes enjoy "privileged happiness usually reserved for the Gods".[62]

In the House of Dionysus in Pella there is another famous mosaic with a lion hunt scene. It has a poorly-preserved floral border similar to that of the "Stag Hunt" mosaic.[63] With respect to both depictions it was suggested that they represent not hunters in general, but quite specifically Alexander and his associates, possibly Crater and Hephaestion.[64] If this is the case, the real hunters on the mosaics are already dead, and the viewers (the par-

60 About iconography of flowers in Apulian vase painting and their semantics in connection with eschatological themes see Kifishina 2016б 52–62.

61 Rhomiopoulou 2000, 32. About this unique decoration see also Schmidt-Dounas B., Rhomiopoulou K., 2010; Rhomiopoulou, Brecoulaki 2002,107–116.

62 Se Calame 2002, 47 and his remarks about "meadows of death".

63 Salzmann 1982, cat. 98, 105–106, pl. 30–31.

64 See Cohen 2010, 31, Moreno 2002, 63; 2004, 61–69; For the "Lion Hunt" the link with the Craterus dedication at Delphi was suggested. Based on this the hunters were suppose to be Alexander and Craterus. Also identification as Alexander and Hephaestion is possible. See Cohen 2010, 31, 76–77. About pro and contra in those interpretations – Ibid, 314, ref. 39–41.

ticipants of the feast) recognize them as not belonging to this world. And at the same time, they are "initiated" to a new life in an unearthly mythical dimension, which is indicated by the flower frames. They appear in these frames as a kind of epic vision of the world beyond, where heroic effort gives eternal reward and guarantees a blissful afterlife. We can use the words once said of Pindar's poetry: these images are for one "who stands on the solemn verge, beyond which lies an immortal, heroic future".[65]

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[65] The words belong to Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve and come from his commentary on Pindar's Olympian odes published in 1885. URL: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0101:text=comm:book=O.:poem=2 (accessed 17 September, 2017).

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