

Mediated representations after laser scanning. The Monastery of Aynalı and the architectural role of red pictograms

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The monastic settlement of Aynalı is located in Cappadocia, a short distance from the Open Air Museum in Goreme. It is just outside the large semi-circular rock *cavea* constituting the heart of that singular confederation of monastic communities. Possibly the whole area was ruled by a common social structure, in which each core was constantly in touch with the other ones, sharing the need for subsistence and contemplation.

The rooms of the monastery of Aynalı are on two main levels and were excavated around a rectangular court. The Northeast front can be assumed as the main facade: two openings allow people to enter the great room, which is covered by a barrel vault and divided in three parts by two light suspended arches, while a third opening leads to the church through a small vestibule. The church is roughly square, with a large central apse; four large columns divide its space into three naves covered by barrel vaults.

The church and other parts of the monastery follow approximated geometrical rules and are rarely comparable to simple geometric shapes. This would suggest they are the result of an extemporaneous and uncoordinated program of excavation. Conversely, rooms facing the rectangular court seem to share the geometries of traditional architecture. The “traditional form” of such environments, however, is only apparent: in fact even the main hall, although to a lesser degree than the church, is suffering from a sensitive deformation that significantly alters the alleged rectangle of the plant.

The decorations in the church and the main rooms follow the red monochrome type, quite common in this area. This monochrome pictograms show a predominant geometric character and are generally used to describe and highlight the rock-cut surfaces according to those elements which play the figurative role of “architectural constituents” such as columns, pilasters, capitals, architraves and cornices. This kind of depicted decorations have been connected to some sort of apotropaic process of sanctification which was imposed by the need of using those spaces as soon as possible, delaying later the moment of the realisation of the final decorations. But even these pictograms appear the result of a hasty and rough work, their symbolic value and meaning should not be overlooked. In fact, the monochrome painting must be seen as the last stage of the architectural achievement. While in “traditional architecture” the elements of the orders play also the role of describing visual hierarchies and structural behaviours of the parts as well as decorating the key elements of surfaces, in Cappadocian rock-cut architecture this function is played by red pictograms, with the secondary consequence of transforming the architecture itself in a huge representation, a sort of full-scale model to design its final configuration with. But most important is that those paintings have being studied together with the rock surface supporting them thanks to integrated applications of laser scanning and digital photography, as this paper is to describe, in order to contribute to archaeological and historical researches on Cappadocian rupestrian architecture.