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THE CULT OF THE VIRGIN AND THE LITURGICAL POETRY IN THE FEAST CYCLE AT ST. GEORGES AT POLOŠKO

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In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Divine Liturgy in Byzantium has undergone significant changes with the introduction of several hymns, odes, sticheria and kontakia in which dominated the theme of the Virgin. As a result, the Incarnation of Christ became one of the most developed themes in the Palaeologan Art. This paper examines how the changes in the Byzantine Liturgy and the cult of the Virgin in the XIV century influenced the Feast Cycle in St. Georges at Pološko.

In St. Georges at Pološko¹ is preserved a quite unusual Feast Cycle reach with iconographic particularities². Furthermore, the cycle includes two scenes that do not belong in the cycle: the Presentation of the Virgin and the Threnody, while the episode of the Pentecost is not depicted.

The Feast Cycle begins with the Annunciation depicted on both sides of the apse. The archangel Gabriel announces the good news to the Virgin depicted standing in front of a throne (fig. 1)³. A sig-

nificant place in the scene is given to the throne of the Virgin, decorated with ochre rays that tend to evoke golden reflections. The importance given to the throne in this scene is due to the liturgical poetry in which the Virgin is compared to the “Throne of the Cherubim”, “Throne of Heaven”, “Throne of Great King” and “Fiery Throne of the Pantocrator”⁴. This special treatment of the throne of the Virgin can also be seen in others contemporary churches where the thrones are enriched with a high backrest, pearls and even a baldachin⁵.

The Nativity (fig. 2) is another fine example of the liturgical inspiration. In the middle of the scene is depicted the Virgin and the Child inside the crib. The scene is enriched with the episode of the announcement to the shepherds, the adoration by the angels, the arrival of the wise men, the bath of the new born baby and Joseph.

In the center of the composition we see an element rarely depicted in the Nativity - the Virgin who is pressing her cheek against the Child⁶. This tender gesture of the Virgin is inspired by the liturgical poet-

¹ The church located in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Macedonia, was an endowment of the Serbian noble John Dragušin, buried in the southwest angle of the church. It was decorated between 1343 and 1345. For the monument, see on the last place: A. Popova, *The Acheiropoietos Images in St. Georges at Pološko*, Патримониум. МК, 11, Скопје 2013, 157-164, with previous bibliography.

² For a complete study of the cycle, see: A. Ristovska, *L'Eglise Saint-Georges de Pološko (Macédoine): Recherches sur le monument et ses peintures murales (XIV^e siècle)*, Thèse de Doctorat, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris 2010, 114-158.

³ The Virgin holds in her hands a spindle. For the spindle of the Virgin considered as a symbol of the Incarnation, see: M. Evangelatou, *The Purple Thread of the Flesh: The Theological Connotations of a Narrative Iconographic element in Byzantine Images of the Annunciation*, ed., A.

Eastmond and L. James, *Icon and Word: the Power of Images in Byzantium*. Studies presented to Robin Cormack, Aldershot 2003, 261-79.

⁴ Г. Бабић, *Краљева црква у Студеници*, Београд 1981, 138.

⁵ See the representations of the Annunciation on the XIV century Icon from Ohrid (M. Георгиевски, *Галерија на икони - Охрид*, Охрид 1999, 52-53, fig. 18), the Annunciation in Chilanadar (G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos, Les peintures*, vol. 1, Paris 1927, pl. 65/1-2), in St. Nicholas Orphanos (Ch. Bakirtzis, ed., *Ayios Nikolaos Orphanos. The Wall Paintings*, Athens 2003, pl. 3). For others examples, see: Бабић, *op. cit.*, 138.

⁶ For other examples of this motif, see: G. Babić, *Quelques observations sur le cycle des Grandes Fêtes de l'église de Pološko (Macédoine)*, CahArch, 27, Paris 1978, 177.

ry. During the days preceding the Nativity, liturgical poetry emphasize the idea that the Incarnation of the Logos is a sign of Christ's sacrifice⁷. Thus the hymns sung during the services of the Nativity resemble to the hymns sung during Holy Week. In these verses, the Virgin holding the Child in her arms kisses him seeing his double nature. She is doing that in the same way in the liturgy of Holy Friday and Saturday, when she laments his death and remembers the moments when he was a child and she was kissing him, holding him in her arms. Thus we can understand the iconographic rapprochement between the Nativity and the Threnody, which is particularly evident in the frescoes in St. Georges at Pološko⁸.

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple (fig. 3) follows the episode of the Nativity of Christ. On the one side of the composition is depicted Simeon ready to receive the Child, while on the other side are depicted the Virgin, the prophetess Ana and Joseph. In the church at Pološko, as in other monuments of the Palaeologan period, the Virgin is depicted in the center of the composition⁹. This is due to the many references of the role of the Virgin during the office that day. The liturgy of the fest focuses on the role of Christ as a Saviour, delivered by his sacrifice that was made possible by the Incarnation. An important place is also given to the prophetess Anna. Unlike in older monuments when she was depicted at the margins of the scene in St. Georges at Pološko, as in some other contemporary monuments, she is represented behind the Virgin¹⁰. Once again the liturgy influenced

⁷ Gordana Babić showed that in the two oldest Serbian liturgical books (second half of the XIV century) are introduced for the liturgy for December 28, three Greek sticheria whose verses describe the Virgin holding and kissing the Child, while admiring his tininess and in the same time his role as a sovereign of the Universe, Бабић, *op. cit.*, 139.

⁸ The sacrifice of Christ is also evoked by several other details: the linen of the new born baby evoke the funeral lince of Christ, the shape of the crib - the sarcophagus of Christ. For the relationship between the Nativity and the Threnody, see: H. Maguire, *The Depiction of the Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art*, DOP, 31, 1977, 125-174. On the XIV century examples where the Nativity evokes Threnody, see: S. Gabelić, *Rođenje Hristovo u Čelopeku, Funkcionalno modifikovanje predloška freske*, Patrimonium. MK, 7/8, 2010, 217-230.

⁹ For the important place of the Virgin in the scene in the Palaeologan art, see: I. Sinkević, *Changes in the Composition of the Presentation of the Christ in the Temple in Palaeologan Times*, KN, 28/29, 2002/2003, 36-37.

¹⁰ See for example the representation in Saviour's Church in Veria, (M. Panayotidi, *Les églises de Veria, en Macédoine*, CorsiRav, 22, 1975, 311-312, fig. 4), in Gračanica (Б. Тодић, *Грачаница - сликарство*, Београд-



Fig. 1 The Virgin from the Annunciation, St. Georges at Pološko

this iconographic solution. In the ninth Ode of the liturgy of this feast, the prophetess Anna proclaims the divine nature of Christ and at the same time the valuable role of the Mother “Verily, Anna, the pure prophetess and righteous old woman, confessed God as is meet, thanking the Master openly in the Temple, proclaiming the Theotokos and magnifying her before all present¹¹.” To emphasize the importance of

Приштина 1988, fig. 34), Mali Grad (В. Ђурић, *Мали Град, Св. Атанасије у Костур-Борује*, Зограф, 6, Београд 1975, 48, fig. 43), in St. Athanasius of Mouzaki in Kastoria (ibidem, fig. 42), etc.



Fig 2. Nativity, St. Georges at Pološko

the Virgin proclaimed in these words, the prophetess Anna found her way just behind the Theotokos.

The Presentation of the Virgin occupies the entire lunette under the dome and is one of the largest images in the church (fig. 4)¹². The iconography, the size and the position of the scene show the attention to accord it a place of honor. In the center of the composition is depicted the high priest welcoming Mary, followed by her parents and the virgins. The episode where Mary receives the nourishment of an angel is also included.

The Presentation of the Virgin is not a part of the Feast Cycle. The reason for incorporating the scene in the cycle in St. Georges at Pološko is to be searched in the popularity of the theme of the Incarnation in the XIV century¹³. In the churches of this period the

most important place was given to the episodes of the Nativity and the Presentation of the Virgin. These two scenes obtained an especially important place in churches dedicated to the Virgin¹⁴, but also in the churches dedicated to other saints¹⁵. In the church at

Chilandar on its metochion, Ђурић, *Полошко*, 329-331. The study of the decoration of the church strongly oriented towards the glorification of the Virgin, show that the introduction of the scene in the cycle was not unusual, А. Ристовска, *Живописот на црквата Св. Ѓорѓи Полошки и политичко-црковните промени на Балканот кон средината на 14-от век*, Универзитет Св. Климент Охридски, Научно списание Хоризонти, 7, Битола 2011, 163-179.

¹⁴ See for example the representations of these scenes in Studenica (Бабић, *op. cit.*, 170, 174, fig. 120, 127), in Chilandar (MILLET, *op. cit.*, pl. 74) and in Kučevićište, (И. Ђорђевић, *Сликаство XIV века у цркви Св. Спаса у Кучевишту*, ЗЛУ, 17, 77-108).

¹⁵ See for example: St. Demetrios in Peć (В. Ђурић, С. Ђирковић, В. Кораћ, *Пећка патријаршија*, Београд 1990, 189, fig), St. Nicolas in Ljuboten (И. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањича*, Београд 1994, 146), or St. Nicolas in Staničenje where the Presentation of the Virgin is incorporated in the Feast Cycle (М. Поповић, С.

¹¹ R. P. F. Mercenier, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin*, vol. 2/1, Amay-sur-Meuse 1939, 219.

¹² For the importance of this place of the wall under the dome in the decoration of the church, see: В. Ђурић, *Полошко - Хиландарски метох и Драгушинова гробница*, ЗНМ, 8, 1975, 329, n. 9.

¹³ V. Ђurić considered that the introduction of this episode in St. Georges at Pološko was due to the influence of



Fig 3. Presentation of Christ in the Temple, St. Georges at Pološko

Pološko which iconography is strongly oriented towards the glorification of the Virgin Mary and her role in the Incarnation, the appearance of this scene is not surprising.

The cycle continues with the Baptism of Christ (fig. 5). In the center of the composition St. John baptizes Christ, standing in the Jordan, while the Holy Spirit descends from above. In the upper part of the scene is depicted the source of Jordan. On the side of the river we see the floating drapery of the partly hidden sea monster.

In the monuments contemporary to the church at Pološko in Jordan are often depicted the personifications of the Ocean and the river Jordan¹⁶. They are inspired by Psalm 113 (114) read at the service of the feast of Epiphany¹⁷. In St. Georges at Pološko the personification of the Jordan is not depicted while we only see the tip of the sea monster. This rare motif

Габелић, Б. Цветковић, Б. Поповић, *Црква Светог Николе у Станичењу*, Београд 2005, 145-146, fig. 64).

¹⁶ See for example the Baptism in Protaton (Acheimastou-Potaimanou, *Greek Art, Byzantine Wall-painting*, Athènes 1994, fig. 101), in St. Georges in StaroNagoričino, (Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, 101-102), in St. Nicholas Orphanos, (Bakirtzis, *op. cit.*, pl. 29), etc.

¹⁷ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/1, 143-199.

is in fact a literal illustration of the same Psalm 113 (114): “*The Sea saw and fled*”¹⁸.

The Raising of Lazarus is the last scene on the south wall (fig. 6). Christ is blessing Lazarus, followed by a group of apostles. Lazarus is depicted shrouded in his tomb while two men untie his bandages. At the extreme right a person carries the slab of the tomb. Behind the hill are depicted the Jews. Martha and Mary kneel before Christ.

The Raising of Lazarus is an event mentioned in the offices of the Holy Week¹⁹. Apart from its liturgical context, it is also a subject with a clear

¹⁸ This rare motif can be found in Studenica (Бабић, *op. cit.*, fig. 99), in the Church of the Resurrection in Veria (Panayotidi, *op. cit.*, 312-313, fig. 5), in the narthex of Ljeviška (Д. Панић, Г. Бабић, *Богородица Лјевишка*, Београд 1975, fig. 31), in the narthex of Staro Nagoričino (П. Ј. Поповић, В. Р. Петковић, *Старо Нагоричино-Псача-Каленић*, Београд 1933, pl. XV/1.), in the church of Virgin Eleusa in Prespa (P. Thomo, *Byzantine Monuments of Great Prespa*, J. Burke, R. Scott, ed., Byzantine Macedonia: Art, Architecture, Music and Hagiography: Papers from the Melbourne Conference July 1995, Melbourne 2001, fig. 227) and an icon from Ohrid dating from the late XIII century (Георгиевски, *op. cit.*, 38-39, fig. 11).

¹⁹ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/2, 124.



Fig 4. Presentation of the Virgin, St. Georges at Pološko

eschatological meaning as it is considered as a prototype of the Resurrection of Christ and thus as an expression of a hope of a personal resurrection²⁰. In this context, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned in the prayers of the commendatio animae, and later in the Orthodox Church as part of the burial service²¹. By representing the Resurrection of Lazarus above the tomb of Dragušin the painter has clearly demonstrated the idea that at the end of time Christ will resurrect Dragušin for eternal life in the same way he raised Lazarus.

The Transfiguration is depicted on the west wall (fig. 12). Christ in the mandorla is blessing with his right hand and holds the scroll in his left. From his both sides are depicted Elijah and Moses. In the lower part of the scene the apostles are projected onto the ground. In the XIV century this scene is strongly influenced by the Hesychast movement that resulted

in a special treatment of Christ's mandorla²². The representation of the scene in St. Georges at Pološko shows that the painters were not concerned with the Hesychast movement.

In the next scene we see Christ entering into Jerusalem accompanied by the apostles. Outside the gate of the city are depicted men, women and children²³. This scene is accompanied with an inscription taken from the Gospel according to Matthew XXI, 16, red in the liturgy of Palm Sunday:

NE EK TOY CTOMA TOC NIPIQN K(AI) [ΘΗ] ΛΑΖΟΝΤΟΝ [ΚΑ] ΤΙΠΙΤΙΟ Ε ΝΟΝ ("You made sure that even children and babies praise thee"²⁴). The Entry into Jerusalem is facing the tomb of Dragušin. In this manner is once again emphasized the funerary function of this part of the church. In the works of the Fathers of the Church, the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem is considered as a reference to

²⁰ On the theological interpretation of the Raising of Lazarus as a prototype of Christ's resurrection, see: Д. Поповић, *Српски владарски гроб у средњем веку*, Београд 1992, 38, with bibliography.

²¹ The link between the story of the raising of Lazarus and the funerary function of the western part of the church is evident in several Serbian churches, Ibidem., 38, with bibliography.

²² On the influence of the Hesychast Movement on the decoration of the churches, see: A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: the Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood (New York) 2005, 158-160, 209-235.

²³ The children are mentioned all through the liturgy of the Palm Sunday, Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/2, 71-92.



Fig. 5. *Baptism of Christ, St. Georges at Pološko*

the entry in the heavenly Jerusalem, and at the same time the descent of Christ into Hades. This analogy is based on the motif of the gate that is in a same time the door of the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. The gate of Jerusalem also suggests the gates of Hades broken by Christ during his descent to the underworld²⁵.

The entry of Christ into Jerusalem occupies a significant place in the offices of Holy Monday. The Eschatological meaning important for our problem proves especially in the first Lauds of Matins of Holy Monday, which ends with the words of Christ addressed to the apostles: *"I am no longer going to the earthly Jerusalem to suffer, but I am going to My father and your Father; to My God and your God; you shall go with Me to the heavenly Jerusalem in the Kingdom of Heaven"*²⁶.

²⁴ Ibidem, 69-92.

²⁵ S. G. Tsuji, *Destruction des portes de l'Enfer et ouverture des portes du Paradis, à propos des illustrations du psaume 23, 7-10 et du Psaume 117, 19-20*, CahArch, 31, 1983, 13-15.

The cycle continues with the Threnody. In the middle of the scene the Saviors' body is exposed on the shroud. The Virgin is holding him in her arms approaching her cheek to his face. The apostle John is holding his left hand while Joseph is kneeling at his feet. A holy woman laments his death. On the right side of the scene, we see an episode rarely included in the Threnody: Nicodemus preparing the tomb of Christ²⁷.

Although Threnody belongs to the Passion Cycle in the Palaeologan period we can see a certain independence of the scene, and even its detachment from the Passion Cycle. The importance given to the Threnody is due to the liturgy. During the Holy Week the Threnody is mentioned several times, even if it is not mentioned in the Gospels²⁸. The introduction of Threnody in the Feast Cycle in St. Georges at Pološko

²⁶ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/1, 104.

²⁷ Ц. Вълева, *За един иконографски вариант на сцената Оплакване от XV век*, Ниш и Византија, 6, Ниш 2008, 263-272, with examples and bibliography.

²⁸ B. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting, the Age of King Milutin*, Belgrade 1999, 138. In the western part of St.



Fig 6. Raising of Lazarus, St. Georges at Pološko

can also be explained by the funerary destination of the church. The Threnody is included in the cycle in a way that does not follow the chronological order. By representing it before the Crucifixion painters have placed it in the western bay of the church, emphasizing once again its funerary destination.

The Crucifixion occupies the entire northern lunette under the dome (fig. 9). This episode is distinguished not only by its size, its location, but also by its unique iconography. In the middle of the scene is represented the crucified Christ. The cross of Christ, planted in the ground, enters through a cave and pierces the body of Hades. On both sides of the cross on the arches of the dome are represented the two thieves crucified with Christ. Under the cross are depicted Saint John, the centurion and the Virgin supported by two women. The Virgin shows with her left hand towards a woman, naked to the waist, sitting under the cross.

Demetrius in Peć are painted the Threnody and the Women at the tomb, which is explained with the funerary destination of this part of the church, Ђурић, Ђирковић, Кораћ, *Пећка нампујаршија*, 189-190.

The motif of the Hades pierced by the cross is a rare but known motif in the Byzantine iconography from the tenth century. It is featured on the Crucifixion of the famous Byzantine ivory kept in the Metropolitan Museum²⁹. A long inscription complements the representation of Hades in St. Georges at Pološko: ΤΕΚΝΗΑ ΜΟΥ ΞΙΛΙΝΗ ΜΕ ΛΟ (γ) ΧΕΙ ΕΚΕΝΘΗΣΕΝ ΑΦΝΟ ΤΗΝ ΚΑΡΔΙΑ ΜΟΥ Κ (ατ) ΤΕΤ (αραγ) ΜΑΙ ΤΑ ΕΝΔΟ ΜΟΥ ΠΙΟΝΟ ΤΗΝ ΚΙΑΥΑΝ ΜΟΥ ΑΛΓΟ (“O my children, Who has fixed a nail in my heart? A wooden lance has suddenly pierced me and I am being torn apart”).

²⁹ M. E. Frazer, *Hades Stabbed by the Cross of Christ*, Metropolitan Museum Journal, 9, 1974, 153-161. A similar iconographic solution of the defatted Satan can be found in some representations of the Anastasis. On a Georgian icon (XI-XII century), Christ with his cross stabs Satan, A. Javakhishvili, G. Abramishvili, *Jewellery and Metalwork in the Museums of Georgia*, Leningrad 1986, fig. 135, 149. The same motif is depicted in the de Daphni monastery (XI century), A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis. The Making of n Image*, Princeton 1968, fig. 85, etc.



Fig. 7. Entry into Jerusalem, St. Georges at Pološko

This text with which Hades is complaining to the little winged devils flying around the cave is a part of the hymn of Romanos the Melodist: “The Triumph of the Cross”³⁰ and the sermon attributed to St. John Chrysostom entitled: “Tribute to the Holy Cross”³¹. The text is also included in the liturgical office of orthros the third Sunday of Great Lent, when the week dedicated to the glorification of the Holy Cross begins³². The painter inscribed these verses in a corrupted form that he knew through the liturgical tradition.

Under the cross is also depicted the Virgin who is pointing towards a woman, naked to the waist, tearing her hair in despair and collecting the blood of Christ

³⁰ Romanos le Mélode, *Hymnes*, vol. 4, ed., J. Grosdidier de Matons, Sources Chrétiennes 128, Paris 1967, 286.

³¹ PG 62, col. 748. The text inscribed on the fresco and the text of the hymn show small differences. In the original version Hades is addressing his servants and powers, while in the church at Pološko to his children.

³² These few verses are part of the oikos sung after the sixth ode of the canon of matins. *Triode de Carême*, translation P. D. Guillaume, Parma 1993, 255.

in a container. In the Byzantine art under the cross of Christ can be represented the allegorical figures of the Church or the Synagogue, or the two themes together, collecting blood and water that flow from Christ’s side. These representations are inspired by the troparion sung on Good Friday that suggests that blood and water fell from the wounded side of Christ on the Church, compared to paradise: “*From Your life-bearing side, O Christ, a fountain flows forth as from Eden, giving drink to Your Church as to a living paradise*”³³. In the case mentioned, the literary allusion is the establishment of the Church of Christ. In the church at Pološko the painter, inspired by the first stanza the Orthros of Holy Saturday introduced in the iconography the metaphor of Eve: “*New life for Eve, o Savior, flows from your opened side. Through her I was banished from the tree of life; today she is*

³³ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/2, 183.

³⁴ *ibidem*, 225.

³⁵ Z. Gavrilović gave the hypothesis that this personification represents the Waters of Mara, described in the hymn of Romanos the Melod. The fact that the personification of the waters of Mara can’t be found in the medieval



Fig 8. Threnody, St. Georges at Pološko

redeemed, with all her sons”³⁴. To distinguish it from the Church, the painter represented Eve as Mother Earth³⁵.

The textual source for the two unusual details in the Crucifixion can be found in the homily of St. John Chrysostom “On the Cemetery and the Cross” (De coemeterio et cruce) recited on the Holy Friday. In this homily is described the victory of Christ over the devil by the use of the same weapons by which the devil won: “Instead of Eve, there was Mary; instead of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the cross of the Lord and instead of Adam’s death, the death of Christ”³⁶.

In the episode of The Women at the Tomb (fig. 10), two women stand embraced, frightened at the appearance of the two angels. One of them is probably the Virgin recognizable by the stars on her

art and the fact that the theme of the Virgin as a new Eve is repeated several times in the church bring us to conclusion that this personification is Eve, Z. Gavrilović, *Eve or the Waters of Marah at Pološko?*, Zograf, 25, 1996.

³⁶ Бурић, *Полошко*, 336, PG 49, 1859, col. 396.

maphorion³⁷. The angels show them the tomb with the empty bandages. The sleeping soldiers are shown in the right part of the scene.

The presence of the Virgin in this scene in the monuments of the Palaeologan period and later results from the theological atmosphere after 1300 when a great importance was given to the Virgin and her role in the Incarnation³⁸. The episode of the Women at the tomb is not regularly included in the Fest Cycle. By depicting this scene next to the Anastasis the resurrection of Christ was depicted twice. Both events are included as well in the office of Holy Saturday³⁹. The decision of the painter to redouble the Resurrection

³⁷ On the stars that decorate the maphorion of the Virgin, see: G. Galavaris, *The Stars of the Virgin, An Ephra-sis of the Mother of God*, Eastern Churches Review, 1/4, 1967/1968, 364-369.

³⁸ On the representation of the Virgin in this scene in the Palaeologan art, see: N. Zarras, *La tradition de la présence de la Vierge dans la scène du « Lithos » et du « Chairete » et son influence sur l’iconographie tardobyzantine*, Zograf, 28, 2000-2001, 113-120.

³⁹ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/1, 217.

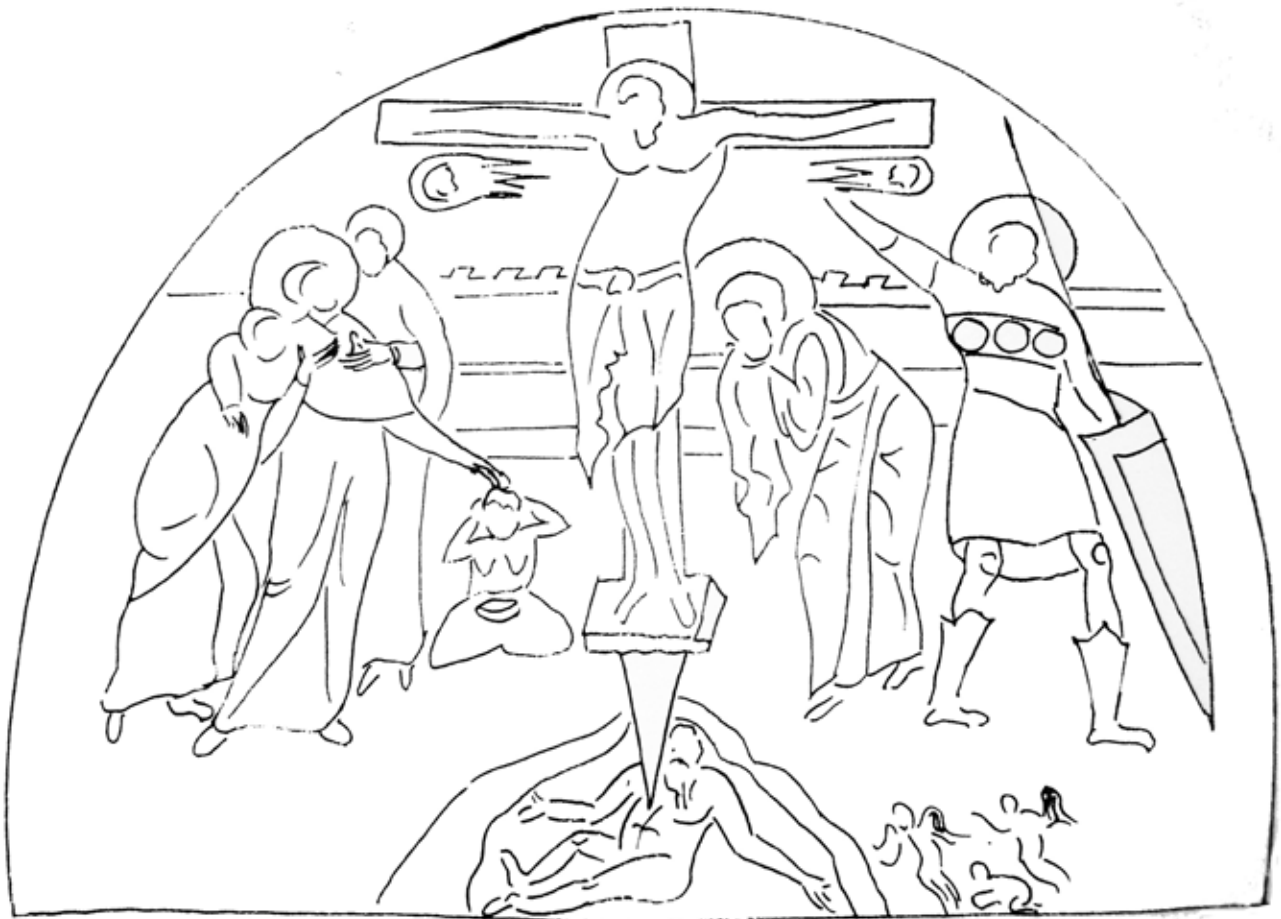


Fig. 9. Crucifixion (From :G. Babić, *Quelques observations sur le cycle des Grandes Fêtes de l'église de Pološko (Macédoine)*, *CahArch*, 27, Paris 1978, 172, sch. 1)

of Christ in the Feast Cycle was most likely motivated by the funerary character of the church⁴⁰.

The Feast Cycle ends on the north wall with the episode of the Descent into Hades (fig. 11). In the middle of the composition Christ is depicted pulling up Adam and Eve placed symmetrically. Under Christ the gates of hell are broken. On the left we can see King David and John the Baptist and on the right the King Solomon and the young Abel holding his crook.

This symmetrical solution where Christ pulls out the first parents simultaneously, the most popular at the Palaeologan period and later, is a result of the contemporary development of the cult of the Virgin⁴¹. Giving a significant role to Eve, painters wanted to emphasize the antithesis between the one whose sin condemned humanity and the Virgin Mary, the New

Eve by which humanity was delivered from this sin. It is an idea developed by the Fathers of the Church included in the hymns sung during celebrations of the Virgin⁴².

The scene of the Ascension of Christ is depicted on the east wall. In the upper register of the scene Christ, enthroned on a rainbow is upheld by two angels. In the lower register is depicted the Mandyion surrounded by the Virgin and two angels. One of the angels point to the sky and holds in his left hand a scroll containing the promise of Christ's return to earth (Acts of the Apostles I, 11): [A]NΔ[P]EC | ΓΑΛΙΛΑΕ | Η ΤΙ Ε<C>ΤΙ | [ΚΑ]ΤΕ ΒΛΕ | ΠΟΝΤΟC | ΗC ΤΟΝ ΟΥ | ΠΑΝΟΝ (*Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?*). This inscription, as well as the Mandyion introduced for the first time in this manner in the church at Pološko, evokes the Second Coming of Christ. The funerary character of the church influenced this iconographical solution that emphasizes the eschatological sense of the composition⁴³.

⁴⁰ These two scenes are often depicted above the tombs in Byzantium and Serbia, Поповић, *op. cit.*, 37-38, with examples and bibliography.

⁴¹ Although the first example of this solution dates from XIII century, it becomes dominant and very popular in the Palaeologan art, Der Nersessian, *op. cit.*, 320-321, with examples and bibliography.

⁴² Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/1, 82-83, 92, 94, 99, 217, 350, R. Laurentin, *Court traité de théologiemari-ale*, Paris 1953, 37-39.



Fig 10. Holy women at the tomb, St. Georges at Pološko

The Dormition of the Virgin is deployed on the west wall of the nave (fig. 12). Behind the funeral bed Christ holds in his arms the soul of his mother represented as a swaddled infant. He gives the Virgin the last kiss, ο ασπασμος. Around the funeral bed are gathered the apostles two bishops and two hymnographers. In the lower part is the episode of the attempted desecration by the young Jew named Jephonias. In the upper part of the scene is represented the Assumption of the Virgin.

The last kiss is a part of the funeral rite described in an apocryphal text called: “*Narrative by St John, the Theologian and Evangelist, concerning the Dormition of the All-Holy Theotokos and How the Undeified Mother of Our Lord Was Translated*”⁴⁴. The last kiss in the Byzantine art is also represented as a part of the funeral service in scenes depicting the death or funeral of various people⁴⁵.

⁴³ For the representation of this scene in the church, see: Popova, *op. cit.*, 160-163.

⁴⁴ A. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la T. S. Viergedans la tradition byzantine du VIe au Xe siècle. Etudes et documents*, Paris 1955, 232-233.

⁴⁵ See for example, a miniature from the XIII century Georgian manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Na-

zianzus, Babić, *op. cit.*, 169, fig. 10. See also the post-Byzantine image of the Dormition of St. Ephrem the Syrian in the Catholicon of St. Nicholas Anapavsas (1527) in Meteora, where a monk gives the last kiss to the saint, M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Byzantine Wall-Painting*, Athens 1994, fig. 166- 167.

One of the bishops depicted in the scene holds an open book with the words taken from the funeral liturgy: ΜΑΚΑΡΙ(ΟΙ) ΑΜΟΜ(ΟΙ) (*Blessed are the righteous*)⁴⁶. In St. Georges at Pološko are also depicted two melodists: St. John of Damascus and Cosmas-Maiuma. Saint Cosmas of Maiuma carries on his scroll verses of the Troparion of the Third Ode of the Canon, which he composed in honor of the Virgin and sung in the matins for the feast of the Dormition: ΔΙΜΟC ΘΕΟΛΟΓΩΝ ΕΚ ΠΕΡΑΤΩΝ ΕΞΙΨΟΥC ΑΓΓΕΛΩΝ ΔΕ ΠΛΙΘΙC ΠΡΟC ΤΗΝ CΙΟΝ (*A company of Theologians from the ends of the earth and a multitude of Angels hastened to Sion at an all-powerful command, that they might fittingly*

zianzus, Babić, *op. cit.*, 169, fig. 10. See also the post-Byzantine image of the Dormition of St. Ephrem the Syrian in the Catholicon of St. Nicholas Anapavsas (1527) in Meteora, where a monk gives the last kiss to the saint, M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Byzantine Wall-Painting*, Athens 1994, fig. 166- 167.

⁴⁶ The same words are also inscribed on the book of the bishop represented in the Dormition in Lesnovo, C. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1998, 82.



Fig 11. Descent into Hades, St. Georges at Pološko

minister at thy burial, O Sovereign Lady)⁴⁷. On the scroll of St. John of Damascus we read the verses of the first Irmoi of the fifth Ode sung at Matins of the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple: ΕΞΕΚΤΙ ΤΑ ΣΙΜΠΙΑΝΤΑ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΣΕΙΠΤΗ (ΕΙΣΟΔ)Ω COV (*The whole world was amazed at thy venerable entry: (for thou, O Virgin who hast not known wedlock, thyself a Temple most pure, hast gone within the Temple of God, bestowing peace upon all who sing thy praises)*)⁴⁸.

The Dormition by its size and its iconography shows the desire of the artist to give it a special significance. The importance of this scene of death is understandable, given the funeral nature of the church and the fact that the Dormition is represented in the western bay of the church near the tomb of Dragušin. Furthermore it contributed to the glorification of the Virgin in the Feast Cycle.

* * *

The liturgy has influenced the Feast Cycle in St. Georges at Pološko by enriching the scenes, introducing a number of inscriptions and rare or unique iconographic solutions. It is a fine example how painters sought new iconographic formulas trying to bring closer the celebration of the Liturgy and the decoration of the church. The glorification of the Virgin and her role in the Incarnation echoes almost every scene in this cycle. On the other hand due to the funeral character of the church all the scenes in the cycle that evoke death and resurrection are subjected to special treatment. Finally, the funeral destination of the church is the reason why almost all inscriptions are borrowed from the offices of the Holy Week and particularly the offices of the three days preceding Easter.

⁴⁷ Mercenier, *La prière des églises* 2/1, 300.

⁴⁸ Ibidem., 77.



Fig 12. View of the west wall: Dormition and Transfiguration, St. Georges at Pološko

КУЛТОТ НА БОГОРОДИЦА И ЛИТУРГИСКАТА ПОЕЗИЈА ВО ВЕЛИКИТЕ ПРАЗНИЦИ ВО СВ. ЃОРЃИ ПОЛОШКИ

Резиме

Во 14 век Боженствената литургија во Византија претрпела значителни измени збогатувајќи се со низа кондаци, оди и стихири посветени на Богородица. Поради тоа Христовата инкарнација, како и улогата на Богородица во истата, била една од најпопуларните теми во палеологовскиот период. Овој труд има за цел да покаже како се одразиле промените во византиската литургија и култот на Богородица во 14 век врз циклусот на Великите празници во црквата Св. Ѓорѓи Полошки.

Циклусот на Великите празници во црквата е многу интересен. Составен е од четиринаест епизоди од кои две не му припаѓаат на циклусот, Богородичиното воведение и Оплакувањето, додека пак Симнувањето на Св. Дух не е претставено. Сцените се збогатени и со мноштво литургиски текстови.

Влијанието на црковната поезија се забележува уште во првата сцена од циклусот. Инспирирани од стиховите во кои Богородица се споредува со Небесен трон, Трон на херувимите или пак Огнен трон на Пантократорот, сликарите ја претставиле Богородица во Благовештението како стои пред голем златен трон. Новите трендови во уметноста се забележуваат и во Воведението Христово, каде што централно место им е дадено на Богородица и на пророчицата Ана. За разлика од претходните векови каде што пророчица Ана била сликана на маргините од сцената, во Полошката црква, како и во некои други цркви од палеологовскиот период, сликарите ја претставиле веднаш зад Богородица. Ваквото решение имало за цел да укаже на зборовите на пророчицата, читани за време на литургијата, во кои се слави улогата на Богородица во инкарнацијата.

Раѓањето Христово и Распетието претставуваат прекрасен пример како се претопиле литургиските текстови во иконографски решенија. Во Раѓањето Христово Богородица, приближувајќи го својот образ кон новороденчето, ја навестува Христовата жртва и Оплакувањето. Во Распетието, пак, е насликан реткиот мотив на поразениот

Ад, кој прободен од Христовиот крст им се оплакува на малите ѓаволчиња што го облетуваат. Сцената е збогатена и со идејата за Богородица како нова Ева, која претставува составен дел од литургиските текстови читани за време на Богородичните празници. Под Христовиот крст е насликана Богородица, која со својата рака покажува кон алегориската претстава на Ева. Истата идеја е претставена и во Христовото слегување во пеколот каде што важното место што и е доделено на Ева укажува на антитезата меѓу неа, чијшто грев го осудил човештвото, и Богородица, преку која човештвото било ослободено од тој грев.

Култот на Богородица е исто така и причината поради која во циклусот е вклучена и сцената на Воведението Богородичино, која заедно со Успението претставува една од најголемите композиции во црквата. Успението го заокружува овој циклус, воедно потврдувајќи го важното место на Богородица во него. Од двете страни на Богородичиниот одар двајцата химнографи св. Јован Дамаскин и св. Козма Мајумски во рацете ги држат свитоците на кои се испишани стиховите што и ги посветиле на Богородица. Од друга страна, пак, поради тоа што црквата била изградена како мавзолеј, свое место во сцената нашле и елементи од погребната литургија. Тоа пред сè е мотивот на последниот бакнеж, кој Христос и го дава на својата мајка, како и почетните зборови од погребната литургија испишани на свитокот на еден од архијереите во композицијата. Мавзолејскиот карактер на црквата е и причината поради која сцените во западниот травеј имаат изразит есхатолошки карактер, додека, пак, сите сцени што ја третираат смртта се одликуваат со посебен третман: Оплакувањето, Распетието и Успението.

Великите празници во Св. Ѓорѓи Полошки претставуваат прекрасен пример како сликарите од палеологовскиот период изнаоѓале нови иконографски решенија, обидувајќи се што повеќе да ги приближат литургијата и декорацијата на црквата.