THE PORTRAITS IN LAPUŠNJA AND ICONOGRAPHY OF JOINT KTECTORSHIP

Church building and founding of monasteries in the Middle Ages were not only sincere expression of one’s religious need, but also a matter with strictly defined legal background. Typika and charters are therefore primary sources on the earliest history of sites and on initial intentions of founders. Such information is often reflected in dedicatory inscriptions, carved or painted above gates or upon the walls. The content of these texts is usually correlated with donors’ portraits. The founders relied on specific iconographic patterns the structure of which in a clear and precise way provided information on who the kttors were. This was achieved by staging individual, group, or family portraits, whilst the painted image of foundation would prominently figure in hands of one, two, or even more persons forming the kttorial focus.

1 On this, see В. Марковић, Ктитори, њихове дужности и права, ПКИФ V (1925) 100-125; С. Троицки, Ктиторско право у Византији и немањићкој Србији, Глас СКА CLXVIII (1935) 57-68. Also, see И. М. Ђорђевић, Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањића, Београд 1994, 13-47.
6 For a very useful survey on images of foundations, see Ч. Маринковић, Слика подигнуте цркве. Представе архитектури на ктиторским портретима у српској и
It is expected that the image of the foundation would be an indispensable feature of any donor’s portrait, but there are instances when for different reasons it does not exist with figure of a ktetor. It mostly happens with new or second ktetors who make refurbishment, renewal, or repainting of an already existing foundation. But there are instances of medieval portraiture that pose serious problems, especially when comprising several figures. It appears that due to technical matters it was not always possible to render each ktetor holding together the church image. However, a special category of donor imagery has been created in Serbian scholarship, regarding the portraits in the monastery churches in Kalenić and Rudenice, where the ruler is shown holding image of the foundation but is not admitted role of ktetor. In both cases there is no information on their earliest history due to loss of charters, typika and of dedicatory inscriptions as well.

vizantijskoj umetnosti, Beograd 2007 (some well known examples are missing from this study, such as Voulgarelli and Sisojevac, while the two illustrations are erroneous, the one for Udabno (sl. 38), actually showing Lavra of St David in Garej, and the one for Zatrupanata crkva in the Russenski Iom canyon (sl. 70), in fact renders the main Ivanovo church). Also, see ead, Ктиторски модели – слика макете или цркве? О неким терминолошким питањима у вези са представом архитектуре на ктиторским портретима, Зборник радова Филозофског факултета у Приштини XXXVI/2006 (2007) 119-131; ead, Founder’s Model – Representation of a Maquette or the Church?, ЗРВИ XLI (2007) 145-153.

7 Cт. Ч. Маринковић, Ктитор са црквом као ликовна представа ктиторског
Although this has been addressed elsewhere, it must be stressed that the portraits in Kalenić and Rudenice are far from being identical and therefore cannot constitute one single category. It is highly probable that in Kalenić the church image was originally shown being held by both despot Stefan and protovestiarios Bogdan, while in Rudenice only despot Stefan holds foundation image. Moreover, the way of interpreting ruler’s portrait with a foundation image as of the sovereign whose role is to be the intermediary between God and founder does not rest on firm grounds. It is not corroborated by the sources and the proposed variant is not only peculiar by itself but has no parallels whatsoever. It means the portraits in both Kalenić and Rudenice should not be taken for granted. Their meaning and form can be successfully explained by the category of joint ktetorship.

In research of this iconography, ktetors’ portraits in the church of Lapušnja have held special place. This much damaged building was partially restored and a number of preserved frescoes have been well documented and copied. The one
still in place is complex ktetorial composition in the north-western corner of
the west bay of the nave, and it was also copied for obvious reasons (fig. 1). The image is made up of four figures, and the two central ones hold the painted image of the church. What this sort of medieval portraiture displays is fairly often found in similar cases of what must be called joint ktetorship, as in Dečani, where father and son, kings Stefan Uroš III Dečanski and Stefan Uroš IV Dušan stand frontally holding the representation of the church, their joint foundation (fig. 2). But even in this church there is one more portrait which is not sustained by any independent data from a charter or a caption. Identity of this nobleman in the chapel of St George is still a matter of discussion among scholars, since it is not agreed whether the person belonged to the Pećpal family the members of which were buried in the very chapel, or was someone else, as

13 On these portraits, see Кнежевић, Ктитори Лапушње, 47-49, сл. 5-6; eadem, Манастир Лапушња, 110-112, сл. 22.
14 The copy (3 x 2,15m) was painted by the conservators Vera Marković and Ivanka Živković in 1970, and is kept in the Gallery of frescoes of the National Museum, Belgrade. My gratitude for the photograph goes to Mr Bojan Popović, MA, the chief of the Gallery of frescoes, Belgrade.
15 Б. Тодић, М. Чанак-Медић, Манастир Дечани, Музеј у Приштини – Београд 2005, 439, сл. 358.
has recently been suggested by S. Gabelić. The main issue here is what does the unidentified nobleman hold in his right hand, is it a bag of money or a reliquary he presents to the seated Christ. In Đečani there is one more figure of King Stefan Uroš III holding the church. Painted in front of templon beam its purpose was to incorporate a number of messages, from the King’s newly established sainthood to his role of mediator for his son and heir. Nevertheless, the image of the church prominently features in this image too, as the most important part of the whole.

The portraits of Kings Stefan Uroš III Dečanski and Stefan Uroš IV Dušan in Đečani reflect not only their joint ktetorship but also complex situation behind building of the church, since it was started by the former and finished by the latter. The joint ktetorship, whether the one of simultaneous or successive members, could be represented in a simple way with both figures holding image of the church, as in Dečani, or each ktetor can be shown holding the image of the church himself, as at Oshki, in Georgia. The families related by blood had also made joint foundations, as at Påča, where the two main male members are depicted holding image of the church under the floating icon of the patron, St Nicholas. In a similar way, in Ramača the church image is also held by the two figures, a priest and a nobleman who were possibly but not surely relatives, since all data on these men and their foundation

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16 С. Габелић, Слика властелина у Дечанима, На траговима Војислава Ј. Ђура, ур. Д. Медаковић, Ц. Грозданов, Београд 2011, 195-211.
17 И. М. Ђорђевић, Представа Стефана Дечанског уз олтарску преграду у Дечанима, Саопштежа XV (1983) 35-143.
19 И. М. Ђорђевић, Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањића, 172-173, сл. 21.
are lacking (fig. 3). However, the very position of the image may cause uncertainty regarding the issue of ktetorship, especially in such cases as at Mateič, where it is held by Empress Jelena and her young son, while the Emperor is shown slightly apart from them, as if portrayed only in his sovereign capacity. On the other hand, in Ravanica the church image is held by the reigning couple, though the endowment charters are signed by Prince Lazar only.

According to recent findings, successive ktetorship has been detected in the portraits in the monastery Gradac. It is argued that the joint ktetorship expressed in the image as holding together the image of the foundation means that Queen Jelena finished the building of the church which her late husband had previously begun. Conversely, when the ktetorship issue is concerned, one must not neglect data offered by the imagery itself. It is clear both with the portraits in Gradac and the portraits in Kalenič as well. Though it is not possible to ascertain whether protovestiarios Bogdan was originally shown holding the image together with Despot Stefan, the additional sources and the way Despot’s right hand is lifted high while the scepter unusually rests in his left hand, point

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20 Т. Стародубцев, О времени живописа цркве у Рамаћи, Пад српске Деспотовине 1459. године, ур. М. Спремић, Београд 2011, 147, сл. 2.
22 М. Бело́вић, Раваница. Историја и сликарство, Београд 1999, 50-51, пр. I, II.
23 Б. Тодић, Сопоћани и Градац. Узајамност фунерарних програма две цркве, Зограф 31 (2006-07) 59-76.
to conclusion that the image of the church was indeed held by both of them (fig. 4). Subsequently incised inscription into the Despot’s suppedion which states that all of the represented figures were ktetors, corroborates what is said above since it most probably reflects data from destroyed documents of the monastery archive. The political agenda, rooted in personal relationship of the two, had made possible this complex image in Kalenić. Appearance of Bogdan’s brother in the fresco is certainly influenced by the fact that Bogdan was childless which is also corroborated by the newly found correspondence between the Ottoman Sultan and Bogdan, kept today in Xeropotamou.

Something similar must have been the case in Rudenice too. There the childless noble couple and the two ruling brothers are shown joined in common donors’ image (fig. 5). The recently discovered inscription incised beside the St Paul’s figure states that the church was regarded as “the desert”, which fully accords with the eremitic accents of the murals, both the number of holy monks and hermits, and details such is prominently positioned fresco of the Pentecost above door of the nave. Moreover, special place given to St John the Baptist points to him as the original patron. Grouping of the nobles and rulers in the southwest angle of the nave has recently been put in appropriate context due to discovery of remnants of the caption with the white background that originally contained either text of the foundation charter or dedicatory inscription.

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26 Цветковић, Руденице и Каленић: „двојна”, „група или сукцесивна ктиторија?”, 84-92, сл. 3-8.
Fig. 7 King Giorgi III and Queen Tamar, Vardzia
Fig. 8 Eristav Rati Surameli, Vardzia
Fig. 9 Portraits of ktetors, Lapušnja
Taking into account the sheer size of the now lost area it most likely provided important data on the monastery at the same time explaining the joint position of the portraits, and especially the fact that the ruler holding image of the church is facing the area with the now lost text of the inscription. Joint ktetorships have not been rare, and rulers’ participation in donations to eremitic shrines have also been common. Therefore, the image of the Rudenice church in Despot Stefan’s hands should be understood in terms of his personal role in either founding or building of the monastery, which does not oppose the fact that the nobles are actually labeled as ktetors. The damaged captions beside the figure of the woman are the only information preserved, but the analogies in Mark’s Monastery and in Vardzia do support conclusion that Rudenice was joint foundation too. The damaged donors’ and royal portraits, painted in the western part of the northern wall of the narthex in Mark’s Monastery, render King Mark along his parents who are shown holding image of their foundation, though it was only him who had the church frescoed. In Vardzia there is a similar situation. The historical data display that the church was begun by King Giorgi III, and was finished by the ruling Queen Tamar, who is shown with the image of

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28 For these badly damaged portraits, see more recently B. Cvetković, Sovereign Portraits at Mark’s Monastery Revisited, IKON. Journal of Iconographic Studies 5 (2012) 185-187, fig. 4.
the church (fig. 7). The captions beside the third portrait in Vardzia, of eristav Rati Surameli, inform us that it was him who provided finances for painting the church (fig. 8). These examples prove that there have been various nuances in rendering ktetors, but that it could not be possible to represent a person holding the church image and who was not related to its building or decoration.

Variety of ktetorial portraits appears only subtler with such examples as those in the Bachkovo ossuary and Kokkini Ekklesia in Voulgarelli. In Voulgarelli, portraits of brothers Theodoros and Ioannes Tzimiskes are shown with their wives, but only the former is rendered with the church image in his hands, which accords well with data from dedicatory inscription where he features as the ktetor though, it must be said, this text is far from being completely preserved. On the other hand, portraits of brothers Gregorios and Abasios Pakourianoi in the Bachkovo ossuary are much more clear since the monastery’s Typikon reveals that Gregorios’ brother Abasios had already been dead at the time of the monastery’s foundation. Moreover, the Pakourianos Typikon specifies modes of commemoration of the main ktetor’s brother and provides data with ‘prehistory’ of the monastery’s founding, explaining Abasios’ presence not only in donor composition but in the endeavour as a whole. It is also important to note that the editor of the last edition of the Typikon misinterprets the portraits in that he

29 Цветковић, Руденице и Каленић, 92-94, сл. 10-11.
30 Kalopissi Verti, op. cit., 32, 54-55, fig. 15, 87-88. For the site, see В. Н. Пападопулоу, Η κόκκινη εκκλησία στο Βουλγαρέλι της Αρτας. Στοιχεία από τη νεότερη έρευνα, Ηπειρώτικα χρονικά 42 (2008) 323-345.
31 For portraits of the Pakourianoi, see E. Bakalova, V. Kolarova, P. Popov, V. Todorov, The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery, ed. E. Bakalova, Plovdiv 2003, 122-123, fig. 10, Pl. 39.
states that the Pakourianoi brothers hold together the image of their foundation, while only Gregorios does it and Abasios raises hands in prayer. It is very significant to stress analogy between Vardzia and Bachkovo since the second keteors of the ossuary, the monks George and Gabriel, though unknown from other sources, are regarded as those who had the building decorated.

The portraits in Lapušnja obviously belong to the category of joint keteorship with all the elements needed: joint holding of the church image, extended membership and connection between royalty and nobility (fig. 9). But what most of all other examples lack, despite bad condition of the fresco in Lapušnja, is the exact information on keteors provided by the text of the dedicatory inscription painted on the west wall of the nave above the entrance door. This text states that the church of St Nicholas was built by Duke Radul the Great and Ghergina, the Duke’s uncle and high court dignitary in 1501, and that it was painted much later by the local noble Bogoje and his wife Mara, only in 1510. The portraits of Bogoje and Mara have been depicted on the north

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33 Jordan, op. cit., 509.
34 For this assumption on portraits of the second keteors, see Bakalova et al., op. cit., 123, fig. 10, Pl. 40.
35 The site was visited in June 2012. For the photos I am indebted to Prof. Dr Miodrag Marković.
36 For reading, transliteration and photograph of the inscription, see G. Balș, O biserică a lui Radul-cel-Mare în Serbia la Lopușnja, Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, anul IV (1911) 194-199, esp. 197, fig. 14; Кнежевић, Ктитори Лапушње, 38-39, сл. 2.
37 For reading, transliteration and calque of the inscription, see Кнежевић, Манастир Лапушња, 89-90, сл. 4.
part of the west wall (fig. 10). The figure of Duke Radul is undoubtedly the one with the royal crown, holding the church image together with local noble Bogoje who had the church frescoed. The earlier scholarship on Lapušnja identified the figure standing behind the Duke as his wife, Duchess Katelina. What makes this hypothesis dubious is that the figure is rendered bare-headed, while the ruler’s consort must have been shown wearing a headdress or crown similar to the one worn by the Duke. On the other hand, Katelina is not mentioned in the dedicatory inscription and therefore her figure amongst the ktetors’ portraits should not be expected, especially since Radul had already been dead by the time. Conversely, it is only Ghergina’s likeness that complies with the persons represented and mentioned in the dedicatory inscription (fig. 11). His being bare-headed is in full accordance with the way the Rumanian boyars were usually represented.

It was already noticed by Branka Knežević that the royal portraits in Lapušnja differ much from portraits of Radul and Katelina in the monastery church of Govora (fig. 12). It is therefore beyond doubt that the Duchess must have had crown on her head on a royal portrait, as can be seen on the west wall in the narthex of Govora, where Katelina steps behind Duke Radul who is himself shown holding the image of the church together with the abbot Paisie.

The relevance of portraits as related to written sources comes to the fore especially regarding direct pictorial analogies, as the ones drawn between Rudenice and Lapušnja. The position held by Despot Stefan’s brother and co-ruler Vuk is identical to the one of Ghergina. What must be borne in mind is number of possibilities of the royal contributions to the newly founded monasteries, from direct founding to donations, as can be witnessed by dedicatory inscription in the monastery church in Lipovac. This important text is literally composed of excerpts from two separate documents, namely the act of establishing of the koinobion, and donation act by the ruling brothers, Stefan and Vuk of the Lazarević dynasty.


39 Кнежевић, Ктитори Лапушње, 47-48; eadem, Манастир Лапушња, 110-112.

40 Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, 135-136, 140, figs. 1.3-1.6, 2.3, 5.8.

41 Кнежевић, Манастир Лапушња, 110-112.

42 For this portrait, see Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, 76, 147, fig. 9.3. Also, see: C. Giurescu, *La 450 de ani de la moarte lui Radu cel Mare, domnul Țării Românești (1495-1508)*, Biserica Orthodoxă Română 3-4 (1958) 367. For the monastery, see R. Florescu, *Le Monastère de Govora*, Bucarest 1965.

43 Б. Цветковић, Манастир Липовац. Прилог проучавању, Научни скуп
Compared to the portraits in Vardzia which have been differently conceived from the ones in Lapušnja, it is clear that to reach correct conclusion on kτετορ’s portraits, the crucial data are to be found in written sources. Though express almost identical situation with both joint and successive kτετορship, figures of kτετορs in Vardzia and Lapušnja are distinct in the way the kτετορship is depicted. In Vardzia the image of the foundation is held only by Queen Tamar, though the sources say it was King Giorgi III who started its building. Following from behind, Rati Surameli is shown with arms raised in prayer, but the very caption informs us his figure is painted because he payed the frescoes. In Lapušnja the four joined figures around the image of the church reflect full content of the ketorial inscription. Therefore, the portraits in Lapušnja are close to the figures in Rudenice, in that the aristocratic couple joins the rulers in the ketorial act. Therefore, if looked at closely, the portraits of donors in the Middle Ages do stand for a reliable body of data. In that sense, to use modern categorization on the intricate but apparent language of art, its political immediacy and ideological structure these should not be taken without being aware that it were professionals who made them, that it was at all times ‘politically correct’, and that its audience was always massive. Therefore, to say that the image of the church may be shown being held by a non-kτετορ is either misinterpretation or overinterpretation.
Извори о Каленићу из уништене манастирске архиве указују на исти закључак.
Пажљивије испитивање портрета у Лапушњи показује да се насликани ликови у потпуности подудају са подацима из ктиторског натписа и да уз војводу Радула стоји Герзина, његов ујак наведен у натпису као један од првих ктитора уз војводу Радула, а не војводина жена Кателина, која се у натпису и не спомиње. Чињеница да је реч о фигуре која је приказана гологлава додатно указује на закључак да је реч о Герзини, с обзиром на то да су у влашком и молдавском сликарству племићи представљани на овај начин, без покривала за главу, док су жене владара неизоставно сликање са крмама које су аналогне оним које носе владари, као што је случај и на примеру Лапушње. Податке у ктиторском натпису да цркву Св. Николу у Лапушњи подига 1501. године војвода Јован Радул и паркалаб Герзина, аслика 1510. године локални кнез Богоје са женом Маром дословно преносе ктиторски портрети у којима су око сликање представе задужбине окупљене поменуте четири личности.