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**“THINGS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH, VISIBLE AND
INVISIBLE”: TRIUMPHAL ARCH AT THE WEST FACADE
OF THE MOTHER OF GOD LJEVIŠKA CHURCH IN
PRIZREN. STRUCTURE AND MEANING**

Over the course of years research about the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin and the Serbian Orthodox cathedral of Prizren, Bogorodica (Mother of God) Ljeviška has produced a body of articles about its intelligent iconographic contents (fig.1).¹ What follows is perceptive reading of the west wall through historiography and possibilities of interpretation.

Articulation and conceptual elements of the façade screens are one of the crucial constructive concerns of late Byzantine architecture.² Although severely damaged in March 2004th and November 2005th by Albanian extremists³ there

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¹ Complete historical and historiographical issues about the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin and his times v. В. Станковић, *Краљ Милутин (1282 – 1321)*, Београд 2012 (with sources and bibliography); S. Ćurčić, “Renewed from the Very Foundations“: the Question of the Genesis of the Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren, *Archaeology in Architecture*, eds. J. Emerick, D. M. Deliyannis, Zabern, Mainz 2005, 23-35 (with complete bibliography about history and architecture); J. Павличић, “NOMEN EST OMEN или: значењски потенцијал места – Црква Богородице Љевишке у Призрену“, *Културно наслеђе Косова и Метохије, Тематски зборник од водећег националног значаја, Канцеларија за Косово и Метохију и Универзитет у Приштини, Београд – Косовска Митровица*, 2013, 215 -224.

² В. Кораћ, *Монументална архитектура у Византији и Србији у последњем веку Византије*, ЗРВИ 43 (2006), 210.

³ Ј. З. Павличић, *Заборави и модели заштите: црква богородице Љевишке у Призрену*, Српски језик, књижевност, уметност: зборник радова са IX међународног научног скупа одржаног на Филолошко-уметничком факултету у Крагујевцу (24-25. X 2014). Књ. 3, Уметничко наслеђе и рат & Музика и медији, 2015, 111-124.



Fig.1. Church of Bogorodica (Mother of God) Ljeviška,
photo: Jasmina S. Ćirić

Сл.1. Црква Богородице Љевишке, фото: Јасмина С.
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is one layer related to the subliminal meaning conveyed by west façade of Ljeviška church in Prizren, transmogrified in the idea of triumphal arch. Also called a threshold arch, triumphal arch is tracing its origins to the roman triumphal arch. In Christian context this arch symbolized triumph and the entrance to the glory through resurrection.⁴

Built in 1306/1307⁵ on remains of the older basilica, Ljeviška is a significant Late Byzantine monument, especially if taken in consideration that in the architecture of medieval Serbia for the first time appeared the five-domed construction⁶. Nevertheless, the structure and meaning of the west facade of Ljeviška church were not peculiarly analyzed

in the historiography.

First detailed drawing entitled „West facade of the narthex of the Virgin Mary Ljeviška church“ (fig.2) was published by Alexander Deroko in his distinguished study *Monumental and decorative architecture in Medieval Serbia*.⁷ Decade after (1963) similar drawing was published by Slobodan Nenadović in his book (fig.3) *Mother of God Ljeviška church – its origin and place in the architecture during the Age of King Milutin*.⁸

⁴ S. Ćurčić, *Late Antique Palaces: the Meaning of Urban Context*, *Ars Orientalis* 23 (1993), 67- 90.

⁵ С. Ненадовић, *Богородица Љевишка – њен постанак и њено место у архитектури Милутиновог времена*, Београд 1963, 25; S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans: From Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2010, 644-646. The upper chronological limit for the west compartment is redated to 1308/09. Cf. V. J. Ćurić, *Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien*, Munich 1974, 260, fn.49. For datation from 1306th to 1309th cf. Kosovo: Orthodox Heritage and Contemporary Catastrophe, ed. A. Lidov, Indrik, Moscow 2007, 66.

⁶ It seems that it was neglected the significance of the fact that King Milutin conquered Skopje in 1282th when he returned the area that belonged to his ancestors. By conquering this region, and thus restoring the monastery, King Milutin stressed his own legitimacy. It appears that as the ideological basis of the architectural concept of Ljeviška church should not exclude the geographically closest point, the church of Sv. Panteleimon in Gorno Nerezi. С. Ненадовић, *Богородица Љевишка*, 109. About the origin of lateral domes: Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, 58 – 62. About five-domed elevation in recent Serbian historiography: С. Ђурчић, *Грачица. Историја и архитектура*, Београд 1999, 87 – 120.

⁷ А. Дероко, *Монуменална и декоративна архитектура у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1953, 173, слика 236.

⁸ С. Ненадовић, *Богородица Љевишка*, таб. XXI; Idem, *Рестаурација цркве Богородица Љевишке у Призрену*, Зборник заштите споменика културе III, св. 1 Београд

Nenadović concluded that "if we take a look from the remote vantage the west facade, we are able to see only exonarthex and tower bell which are disturbing richness of the architecture"⁹. Furthermore he concluded that this solution is not unique and not original.¹⁰

On the other side, Draga Panić coauthor of the monographic study about Ljeviška church published 1975th mentioned that "this opened passage of the church, connected with three wide arches, doesn't oblige beholder on the focusing or activating of mind's eye"¹¹.

Vojislav Korać and Marica Šuput noticed that significant label of the architecture is tall belfry in the middle of the facade and that architect created unique solution in the architecture of Late Byzantine world¹².

West facade wide 17 meters (fig.4) was constructed by protomagister Nicholas who used alternation of stone and brickwork in order to reach polychromatic effects.¹³ *Cloisonné* system¹⁴ although not consistently executed, most probably for the first time appeared in brickwork in Ljeviška church. In visual focus of the facade it is possible to differentiate two zones,¹⁵ while third organic component of the facade represents tower in the middle. First zone possess dominant motif of *triumphal arch* (fig.5) while at the edges of the facade are two simetrical pilasters which serve to stress visually contours of wide portal in the center. Tripartite division is employed with the central arch taller than the flanking ones. Structural clarity noticeable on this

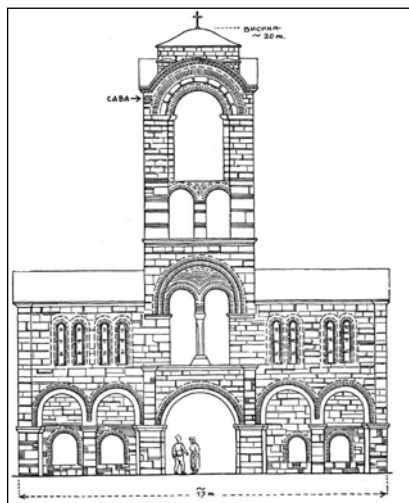


Fig.2. Drawing of the west facade, of Mother of God Ljeviška church in Prizren (after: Aleksandar Deroko)

Сл.2. Цртеж западне фасаде, Богородице Љевишке у Призрену (по: Александар Дероко)

(1958), 39 – 50.

⁹ *Ibid*, 99.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 146.

¹¹ Д. Панић – Г. Бабић, *Богородица Љевишка*, Београд 1973, 39; Cf. S. Ćurčić, *Bogorodica Ljeviška (Umetnički spomenici Jugoslavije)* by Draga Panić, Gordana Babić, *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1977), 632.

¹² В.Кораћ – М. Шупут, *Архитектура византијског света*, Београд 1996, 330 .

¹³ About polychromy in Byzantine architecture: A. Ricci, *The road from Baghdad to Byzantium and the case of the Bryas Palace in Istanbul*, *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive? Papers from the Thirtieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Birmingham, March 1996, ed. L. Brubaker, Ashgate, Aldershot 1998, 131 – 149.

¹⁴ E. Reusche, *Polychromes Sichtmauerwerk byzantinischer und von Byzanz beeinflusster Bauten Sudosteuropas: Überlieferung und Entwicklung einer handwerklichen Technik*, Cologne 1971.

¹⁵ S. Ćurčić, *Renewed from the very foundations: the question of the genesis of the Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren*, *Archaeology in architecture*, ed. J. J. Emerick and D.M. Deliyannis, Mainz 2005, 23-35.

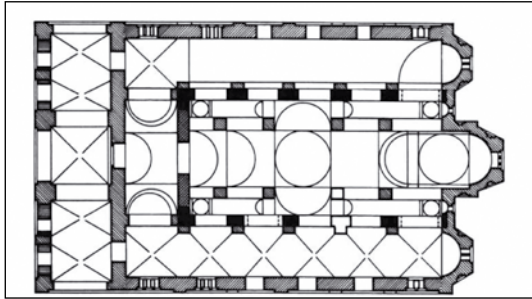


Fig.3. Plan of the Mother of God Ljeviška church in Prizren (after: Slobodan Nenadović)

Сл.3. Основа цркве Богородице Љевишке у Призрену (по: Слободан Ненадовић)

facade is not merely decorative but the expression of highly symbolic values lies behind the articulation and precisely said economy of the facade.¹⁶

In creating of new architectural forms, Palaeologan builders largely relied on the method of compilation of components.¹⁷ That is *raison d'être* of west façade of Ljeviška as true expression of new understanding of the space in Byzantine architecture and why architect constructed west pair of domes closer to the central dome and thus moved visual focus which resembles on intentionally spoiled symmetry and moving

of domes in Christ the Chora church in Constantinople (fig.6).¹⁸

It is not accidentally that King Milutin restored the old bishopric church in Prizren due to the fact that it represents with its solid tower as the symbol of the pillar of Christianity and all his military achievements until 1299th. In the same time, it is possible to discuss about visual appropriation between Ljeviška and the Constantinopolitan church of the Chora (Kariye Camii), the most celebrated monument of the second decade of the fourteenth century, if not the entire Palaeologan period.¹⁹ Hagia Sophia may have also included the belfry that once stood on axis between the second and third buttresses of the west façade (fig.7), and in any case the constructions at Hagia Sophia would have been more significant visually and politically than the renovation of the Chora which happened after renovation of Ljeviška.²⁰

¹⁶ S. Ćirić, *Articulation of church façades during the first half of the fourteenth century. A study in the relationship of Byzantine and Serbian architecture*. In: Византијска уметност почетком XIV века. Научни скуп у Грачаници 1973, Београд 1978, 18 – 27.

¹⁷ Ibid; R. Ousterhout, *Master builders of Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, 167.

¹⁸ About asymmetry in Byzantine art: B. Cvetković, *Intentional asymmetry in Byzantine imagery: The communion of the apostles in st Sophia of ohrid and later instances*, *Byzantion* 76 (2006), 74-96. In the architecture of Chora church cf. R.G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, Washington 1987, 96; Idem, *Master Builders of Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, 252.

¹⁹ R.G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, 102, 107, 108.

²⁰ About the existence of belfry at the central part of St. Sophia church cf. R. J. Mainstone, *Santa Sophia*, Milano 2009, 123 – 126, 133-134; S. Ćirić, *Some reflection on the Flying Buttresses of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul*, *Sanat Tarihi Dettleri* 8 (2004), 7–22. For buttressing of Hagia Sophia: K.-P. Matschke, *Builders and Building in Late Byzantine Constantinople*, in N. Necipoglu (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople. Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life* (Leiden, Boston, Cologne 2001), 322; J. Varsallona, *The very horizon shook with the noise” Bells and belfries from the West to Palaiologan Constantinople*, *Proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium “Days of Justinian I”*, Skopje 30 – 31 October, 2015, Skopje 2016, 177-183, especially page 180 (with detailed bibliography). For comparisons of Christ the Chora and Ljeviška church: R.G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, 102 (with bibliography).

Fig.4
Drawing
of the west
façade (after:
Draga Panić)

Сл. 4.
Цртеж
западне
фасаде
(по: Драга
Панић)

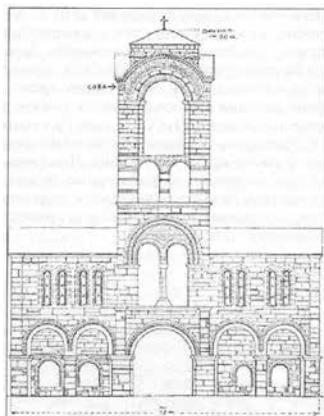


Fig.5 West façade of Mother of God Ljeviška church in Prizren, photo: Jasmina S. Ćirić

Сл.5. Западна фасада цркве Богородице Љевишке у Призрену, фото: Јасмина С. Ћирић

It is worth of mentioning that triumphal arch on the façade (fig. 8) and solid, massive tower in the middle emblemize another one King Milutin's ideological statement.²¹ Such architectural reading and concept with three axis: horizontal triumphal arch, vertical dominant belfry tower, Symeon Nemanja "below" (fig.9) as legitimate link in between epitomize "adventus regnans" of King Milutin, his legitimate rule.²² Ljeviška church contemporary with the Chora preserved potent symbols of the power, and it is for this reason, it may be concluded, that it was given greater emphasis in the political history of King Milutin.²³ King Milutin followed Nemanjić's tradition although the model of the church in his hands is left out from the ktetorial composition (fig.10).²⁴ Visually and politically for King Milutin the closest parallel was depiction which today is not preserved, but it is mentioned in a poem of Maximos Planoudes. Planoudes describes a now lost representation of Christ, Mary, Andronikos II, his son Michael IX and two saints over the entrance to a monastery.²⁵ Those imperial pretensions further manifest themselves in the associations between the imperial mosaics which today do

²¹ С. Марјановић Душанић, *Владарска идеологија Немањића*, Београд 1997, 109, 130, 249.

²² E. Kantorowicz, *The "King's Advent" and the enigmatic panels in the doors of Santa Sabina*, Selected Studies, New York 1965, 37 – 77; M. Mc.Cormick, *Eternal victory, Triumphal rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge 1986; P. Dufraigne, *Adventus Augusti, Adventus Christi: recherche sur l'exploitation idéologique et littéraire d'un ceremonial dans l'antiquité tardive*, Paris 1994; J. M. Featherstone, *Δι' ἰσθμῶν : Display in Court Ceremonial (De Cerimoniis II,15)*, The Material and the Ideal: Essays in Mediaeval Art and Archaeology in Honour of Jean-Michel Spieser, éd. A. Cutler – A. Papanastasiou, Leiden, 2007, 75-112. Cf. С. Марјановић Душанић, *Владарска идеологија Немањића*, 109, 130.

²³ В. Станковић, *Краљ Милутин (1282 – 1321)*, 140 – 142.

²⁴ Д. Панић – Г. Бабић, *Богородица Љевишка*, 58 – 64.

²⁵ С. Wendel, *Planudea*, BZ 40 (1940), 427.

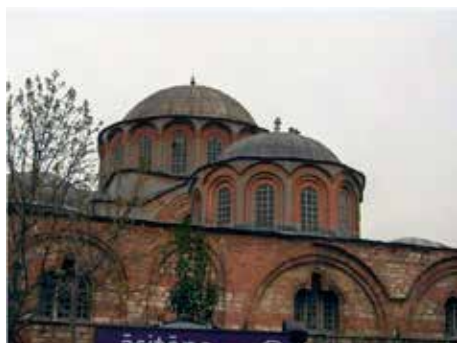


Fig. 6. Asymmetrically positioned domes, Christ the Chora church in Constantinople, photo: Jasmina S. Ćirić

Сл.6. Асиметрично позициониране куполе, црква Христа Хоре у Цариграду, фото: Јасмина С. Ћирић



Fig. 7. Second and third buttresses of the west façade, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, photo: Jasmina S. Ćirić

Сл.7. Други и трећи контрфор западне фасаде, Св. Софија у Цариграду, фото: Јасмина с. Ћирић

not exist, Ljeviška church and the royal imagery of Constantinople.²⁶ Lineage of the Holy Nemanjić dynasty, their God blessed continuity is shown in Ljeviška church in by complex network of interactions between architecture and fresco programme. Symeon Nemanja, depicted as the monk in the gesture quite similar to Symeon Stylites, is depicted with raised hands. Having in mind that stylites and their iconography is connected with pillars, it is easy to establish link between Symeon Nemanja as the pillar of Nemanjić dynasty, pillar of true faith and pillar of the church additionally mentioned in two inscriptions in the church.²⁷

King Milutin is mentioned in the inscription executed in brick on the east façade as great-grandson of Nemanja, as follows:

“I Stefan Uroš King in Christ God Faithful King of Serbia and Pomorje, great grandson of Saint Simeon Nemanja, and son in law of the Greek Emperor, Lord Andronikos Palaiologos, have renewed the church of the Holy Mother of God Ljeviška from the very foundations”.²⁸ Intention of his portrait and juxtaposition with other portraits fits also with the iconography of the tower bell and intention of representing of Milutin as the one and only King of Serbia, son in law of Andronicus II Palaiologus.²⁹

²⁶ For the perception of Constantinople as sacro-imperial source cf. C. J. Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy in an Age of Decline*, Cambridge University Press, Cornwall 2014, 325 – 326 (with bibliography).

²⁷ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Свети столпници у српском зидном сликарству средњег века*, ЗЛУМС 18 (1982), 41-52.

²⁸ С. Ненадовић, *Богородица Љевшика – њен постанак и њено место у архитектури Милутиновог времена*, Београд 1963, 25; Д. Панић – Г. Бабић, *Богородица Љевшика*, 58 – 59.

²⁹ М. Чанак-Медић – Б. Тодић, *Богородица Љевшика*, Нови Сад 2015, 152-153.



Fig. 8. Middle zone of the façade of Mother of God Ljeviška church in Prizren, photo: Rémi Terryn

Сл. 8. Средишњи регистар западне фасаде цркве Богородице Љевишке у Призрену, фото: Реми Теран



Fig. 9 Symeon Nemanja, fresco above the west portal, view from the narthex, photo: Rémi Terryn

Сл. 9, 9а. Симеон Немања, фреска изнад западног портала, изглед из нартекса, фото: Реми Теран

Third important part of the interpretation of the façade is the floor of exonarthex, precisely said dedication of the parecclesions to St. George and St. Demetrios. That is architectural transposition of prominent exponents of the *ecclesia militans*.³⁰

King Milutin as ruler of Serbia is defender of faith also militarily. St. George and St. Demetrius are intermediaries between God and the King, by their help Milutin's conquests were achieved. Triumphant character of the façade, old and new themes in the poetic way is stressed with the impressive entrance in the church.

Triumphal gateway retained royal aura translated into the tower façade, acquiring the symbolism of the gate of Heaven.³¹ Façade is threshold leading from the terrestrial life to the eternity beyond, to enter this higher realm one passed through the west portal where is depicted Christ true Door (fig. 11).³²

³⁰ About the idea of *ecclesia militans* in Byzantium cf. M. Bogisch, *Qalat Seman and Resafa/Sergiopolis: Two Early Byzantine Pilgrimage centers in Northern Syria*, Byzantino-Nordica 2004: Papers Presented at the International Symposium of Byzantine studies held on 7-11 May 2004 in Tartu, Estonia, ed. I. Volt, J. Päll, Tartu 2005, 5. About the warrior saints: C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Ashgate 2003; M. Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika u istočnokršćanskoj umetnosti i o predstavama ovih svetitelja u Dečanima*, in: *Zidno slikarstvo manastira Dečana. Građa i studije*, Beograd 1995, 567-630; E. Russell, *Demetrius, the Military Saint of Byzantium: Cult and Worship in the Middle Ages*, Tauris 2010.

³¹ J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1974, 98; C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, London 1986, 89; V. Dimitropolou, *Giving gifts to God: Aspects of Patronage in Byzantine Art*, A Companion to Byzantium, ed. L. James, London 2010, 162.

³² X. Barral I Altet, *Les images de la Porte comme un Livre ouvert à l'entrée de l'Église*, Reading images and texts. Medieval images and texts as forms of communication, eds. Marielle Hageman, Marco Monsert, Brepols 2005, 527-528.



Fig.10. King Milutin, ktetorial portrait depicted on the north side of the east wall of narthex, photo: Rémi Terryn

Сл.10. Краљ Милутин, ктиторски портрет на северној страни источног зида нартекста, фото: Реми Теран



Fig.11. Christ true Door, fresco above the portal between narthex and naos, of Mother of God Ljeviška church in Prizren, photo: Rémi Terryn

Сл.11. Христос права Врата, фреска изнад пролаза између нартекса и наоса, црква Богородице Љевишке у Призрену, фото: Реми Теран

Such an understanding of the wall filled with triumphal arch and iconography of the structural units of the church presupposes seeing the church from an eschatological perspective. From the perspective of faith, the church is understood as a sign and an anticipation of that fellowship between God and humans which will be brought about by the forthcoming Kingdom of God.

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„ШТО ЈЕ НА НЕБУ И НА ЗЕМЉИ, ВИДЉИВО И НЕВИДЉИВО“: ТРИЈУМФАЛНИ ЛУК НА ЗАПАДНОЈ ФАСАДИ ЦРКВЕ БОГОРОДИЦЕ ЉЕВИШКЕ У ПРИЗРЕНУ. СТРУКТУРА И ЗНАЧЕЊЕ

Артикулација зидне површине као и концептуални елементи фасаде представљају кључне упоришне тачке византијске архитектуре крајем XIII века. Западна фасада цркве Богородице Љевишке у Призрену садржи доминантан тријумфални лук у средини који је додатно акцентован тзв. „акведукт“ системом изнад. Начин на који је изведено петокуполно решење од нарочитог је значаја за перцепцију архитектонске слике призренског храма. Како се не би нарушавао визуелни наротив западне фасаде, протомајстор Никола је конструктивно приближио средњој куполи западни пар купола. На тај начин је постигнут ефекат наротивности централног регистра и целокупне западне фасаде као геометријске слике тријумфалног лука, а тако и отелотворења идеје тријумфа ктитора. У раду се додатно указује на интерпретативне хоризонте западне фасаде, пре свега повезаност ктиторског портрета и Симеона Немање изнад западног портала као симбола стуба вере на који се значењски ослања и хоризонтална оса храма са параклисима посвећеним Светим ратницима.