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**FRESCO OF THE FIFTEEN MARTYRS OF TIBERIOPOLIS
IN STRUMICA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BYZANTINE
ART OF THE LATE 9TH - FIRST HALF OF THE 10TH
CENTURY²**

Abstract: The article deals with the fresco image of the Holy Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica, North Macedonia, in the church dedicated to these martyrs. D. Koco and P. Miljković-Peppek dated the fresco to the turn from 9th to 10th century and associated it with the art of Constantinople. Developing this idea, the author undertakes a closer examination of the fresco painting style in comparison with other contemporary artworks: the mosaic in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, some Sinai icons and illuminated manuscripts. Somewhat later dating in the first half of the 10th century is proposed.

Keywords: Strumica, Fifteen martyrs of Tiberiopolis, Byzantine painting, Macedonian renaissance

The fresco depicting the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica (fig. 1) was discovered in 1973 in one of the vaulted tombs that emerged on the ruins of an early Christian basilica³. The discoverers of this monument, Dimče Koco and Petar Miljković-Peppek, were the first to link the appearance of the fresco with the next stage of the existence of the complex, when a church of the inscribed cross type was built on the ruins of the basilica, and one of the three Early Byzantine tombs that had been inside the church were turned into a

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³ Д. Коцо, П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Резултатите од археолошките ископувања во 1973 г. во црквата «Св. 15 Тивериополски маченици», Струмица, Зборник Археолошки музеј на Македонија VIII-IX (Скопје 1978), 93-96.*



Fig. 1 Fifteen martyrs of Tiberiopolis. Fresco in the Church of the Fifteen martyrs, Strumica. First half of the 10th century. Photo by the author

Сл. 1 Петнаест мученика Тибериополиса, фреска из цркве Светих петнаест мученика, Струмица, прва половина X века, фото: аутор

crypt. According to D. Koco and P. Miljković-Peppek who based their work on the style of painting, the construction of the church, and the creation of the fresco dates back to the end of 9th – beginning of 10th century. The emphasis has been made on the proximity of the architectural features of the church and style of painting to the works of the Constantinople circle. Later, Cvetan Grozdanov compared the iconography of the fresco, archaeological context, and the data in written sources, such as the Menology of the Assemani Gospel (end of the 10th - beginning of the 11th century), in which the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis were mentioned for the first time, and their *Passion* compiled on the basis of some lost Slavic sources by Theophylact of Ohrid in the end of the 11th – beginning of the 12th century⁴. C. Grozdanov suggested that the construction of the new church and the creation of the fresco in Strumica had been connected with events known from the *Passion* of Theophylact, namely the transfer of parts of the relics of the martyrs to Bregalnica under Tsars Boris and Simeon where a church dedicated to the martyrs was built, in which worship was conducted in the Slavic language. The latter circumstance allowed Grozdanov to link these events with the activities of St. Clement of Ohrid (†916)⁵. These assumptions, as well as the dating of the cross-domed church and fresco in Strumica to the end of the 9th – beginning

of the 10th century, were adopted by some other researchers, including Saso Korunovski and Elizabeta Dimitrova in their surveys on the art of medieval Macedonia⁶. Recently some more works dedicated to the cult of the Fifteen martyrs in Macedonia have appeared⁷.

⁴ Ц. Грозданов, *Портрети на светителите од Македонија од IX-XVIII век*, Скопје 1983, 127-137; Id., *Месеџословот на Асемановото Евангелие и постариот монументален живопис во Македонија*, Музејски летопис. Зборник на трудови по повод 65 години “Завод и музеј” — Струмица (Струмица 2017), 14-17.

⁵ Later it was discovered that St Clement was the author of one of the canons dedicated to the Fifteen martyrs. See: И. Велев, *Химнографските состави за светите петнаест тибериополски свештеномаченици: Уште една новооткриена химнографска творба на св. Климент Охридски*, Археографски Прилози 24 (Београд 2002), 111-142.

⁶ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Milano 2006, 21-24; С. Коруновски, Е. Димитрова, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија: Култура и уметност*, Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти, Скопје 2013, 1548-1549, 1553-1555.

⁷ B. Aleksova, *Loca sanctorum Macedoniae. The cult of martyrs in Macedonia, from the 4th to the 9th centuries*, Skopje 1997, 60-65, 186-193; A. Atanasovski et al. (eds.), *The Cult of the Holy Fifteen Tiberiopolitan Hieromartyrs in the Medieval and the Newer Epoch – History, Culture, Tradition (Materials from the first scientific meeting in honor of*

Fig. 2 St Timothy, St Komasius, St Eusebius, St Theodore. Fragment of the fresco in the Church of the Fifteen martyrs, Strumica. First half of the 10th century. Photo by the author

Сл. 2 Свети Тимотеј, Свети Комасије, Св. Јевсевије, Свети Теодор, фрагмент фреске у цркви Светих петнаест мученика, Струмица, прва половина X века, фото: аутор



In this article, we want to consider in more detail the style of the fresco and try to clarify its place in the context of the Byzantine painting of the late 9th – first half of the 10th century.

The fresco is located on the western wall of the vaulted tomb in the western part of the cross-domed church. This image can be considered as evidence that the tomb was turned into a chapel or martyrion dedicated to the memory of the Fifteen Martyrs⁸. Probably, this room, in which two or three people can be present at the same time, was used for commemoration services to the saints. The fresco is located opposite the descent into the tomb, in the upper half of the wall at the end of the vault, which makes this wall look like an altar apse. Unfortunately, back in the pre-war period, this wall was breached, and a significant part of the ancient masonry and frescoes were lost⁹. The busts of the martyrs were placed in three rows: four in the upper, six in the middle, and five more in the lower. Of the images in the lower row, only the rightmost one is preserved, and the neighboring one is partially preserved. In the middle row, all the images are in a fragmented state. All the surviving semi-figures are scuffed and have numerous losses. Only the two half-figures on the left in the upper row are in satisfactory condition, allowing us to judge the stylistic features of the painting. However, this is quite a lot.

The scale of the images is very small, which makes them look not so much like a fresco, but like an icon located right in front of the eyes of a person who descended into the crypt. The selected iconography also corresponds to the intimate character of the fresco. As the researchers have rightly noted, the busts of the martyrs are to be considered as portraits: the saints are represented as people of different ages and status. Based on information from the *Passion*, Grozdanov identified the four saints in the upper row as Bishop Timothy, Komasius, Eusebius, and Bishop Theodore (fig. 2), who fled from Nicaea to Tiberiopolis in the time of Julian the Apostate. The saint on the right side in the lower row was identified as Deacon Thomas, one of the martyrs who joined

the Fifteen Tiberiopolitan Hieromartyrs held in Strumica from 7th to 9th December 2018 organized by the NI Institute for protection of cultural monuments and Museum – Strumica, Strumica 2019.

⁸ С. Коруновски, Е. Димитрова, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија*, 1553. The attempt of Blaga Aleksova (B. Aleksova, *Loca sanctorum Macedoniae*, 189-191) to assign the fresco to the late antique period was not supported by other researchers, and we can't accept it either.

⁹ Д. Коцо, П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Резултатите*, 94.



Fig. 3 Leo VI kneeling before Christ. Mosaic in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. After 906. Photo by the author

Сл. 3 Лав VI клечи пред Христом. Мозаик у нартексу Аја Софије, Цариград, после 906. године, фото: аутор

the emigrants already in Macedonia¹⁰. This identification seems generally convincing, though some questions raised by the two middle figures in the top row still remain. The *Passion* says that Eusebius was a monk, just as Komasius, who used to be a warrior before becoming a monk¹¹. However, in the Strumica fresco, the second saint from the left is represented in a chiton and a himation, with his right hand he blesses. Most probably in his left hand he holds the Gospel in a purple casing, otherwise it could be the tablion, a rectangular patch on his himation. The third saint, as far as can be judged from the remains of the painting, held a Gospel in his left hand and the cross in his right, he is dressed in a red-brown cassock with an ochre epitrachelion or mantle, which indicates his priestly or monastic rank.

Since the Slavic sources of the *Passion* by Theophylact of Ohrid are unknown, we can assume that they contained some other information about Komasius and Eusebius, or about the monastic tonsure of one of them. However, before the 11th century the warrior saints are usually depicted as martyrs, dressed in a chiton and himation with tablion¹². Perhaps St. Komasius was deliberately presented here as a warrior-martyr, and the usual for martyrs cross was replaced with a blessing gesture and the Gospel, because all the martyrs of Tiberiopolis were preachers. At the top, on the far right, there is a gray-haired Saint Theodore in a purple phelonion with a white omophorion, his face is practically not preserved; he holds the Gospel in his left hand, and points to it with his right. The gospels are also visible in the hands of the two martyrs on the right in the middle row, one of whom is dressed in purple, the other in gray-blue. What was held in the hands of the two martyrs in the lower row identified as deacons Basil and Thomas is now impossible to distinguish; one of them is depicted in purple clothing, the second — in ochre.

¹⁰ Ц. Грозданов, *Портрети на светителите*, 135-137.

¹¹ Θεοφύλακτος Αχρίδος, *Μαρτύριο των Δεκαπέντε μάρτυρων της Τιβεριούπολης. Κριτική έκδοση, απόδοση στα νέα ελληνικά και υπομνηματισμός Ε.-Σ. Κιαπίδου*, Αθήνα 2015, 104.

¹² C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Aldershot 2003, 270-276.

Depicting the fifteen martyrs, the artist emphasized not only the individuality of each saint, but also their unity. The colors of their clothes vary and at the same time create a single color scheme, dominated by purple and ochre, complemented by white, blue, and dark red. A wide red stripe serves as a frame which encloses into one composition the rows of saints in identical ochre halos, in similar frontal poses, with the Gospels and crosses or other attributes in their hands.

St Timothy and St Komasius represented on the left in the upper row are depicted as middle-aged people with dark hair and beards. Both of them bless with their right hands, and in their left hands, they hold the Gospel decorated with a red edging. St Timothy is dressed in a light blue phelonion and a white omophorion. St Komasius wears a similar light blue robe and a purple tunic. The colors of the clothes, the unusual for the iconography of a martyr gesture and attribute,

and the features of his appearance, – all of it makes him look like Christ.

The faces of both saints are painted in a multi-layered technique, similar to icon painting. On the light greenish lining, the artist put layers of ochre and brown; white strokes highlight the bulges of the brow arches, the back of the nose, cheekbones, cheeks, and chin. The shadows around the eyes and nose are slightly enhanced by a denser greenish-ochre tone. The features of the martyr's face outlined in brown contours are determined and firm, whereas the face of the saint looks lighter and softer. This gives an individual character to each image, although the types are similar. Both have a high forehead, broad cheekbones, and a tapering oval face with a pointed chin. Almond-shaped eyes are quite large and widely spaced; the gaze is directed slightly to the side, which is emphasized by the shape of the strokes indicating the whites and pupils. Both saints are depicted with soft and picturesque moustaches and full bright lips, which gives the faces a lively and spontaneous look. The better-preserved image of the martyr is characterized by a very expressive interpretation of thick and dark arched eyebrows. They seem to be slightly frowned, which along with the pursed lower lip and the downturned corners of the mouth gives him a more severe, masculine look. The saint's eyebrows are almost straight, which, together with his averted gaze, adds him a pensive expression. The clear watercolor palette and lightweight painting style, the liveliness of lines and significant degree of freedom in the modeling of forms, the ability to create different accents in the psychological characteristics of images, — all these features add up to a harmonious style that reveals the hand of a good master and corresponds to the main trends of Byzantine art of the late 9th - first half of the 10th century.



Fig. 4 Angel. Fragment of the mosaic in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. After 906. Photo by the author

Сл. 4 Анђео, фрагмент мозаика у нартексу Аја Софије, Цариград, после 906., фото: аутор



Fig. 5 St Timothy. Fragment of the fresco in the Church of the Fifteen martyrs, Strumica. First half of the 10th century. Photo by the author

Сл. 5 Свети Тимотеј, фрагмент фреске у цркви Светих петнаест мученика, Струмица, прва половина прва половина X века, фото: аутор

Researchers have noted that the style of the fresco in Strumica resembles the Constantinople illustrated manuscripts of the late 9th century¹³, such as the homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (gr. 510) from the National Library of France and the Christian topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes (Vat. Gr. 699) from the Vatican Library¹⁴. Indeed, as we will show later, the author of the fresco was guided by the metropolitan samples, and many elements of his style date back to this era. The Constantinople art of that time was the initial stage of the Macedonian Renaissance, the period when the classical style based on imitation of ancient models has been formed. In the miniatures of these manuscripts, the desire for a more lifelike image is embodied in complex compositional structures with developed architectural and landscape backgrounds, in which the characters dynamically act. Their figures are shown in a variety of movements and angles, confident drawing and plastic modeling reveal the voluminosity of forms. However, of the numerous miniatures of the two magnificent manuscripts, only a few images that have the character of an icon (such as the images of Christ in the prophetic visions on f. 39v, 43r, etc¹⁵. in the manuscript Vat. Gr. 699) can be compared with the Strumica fresco. They reveal only the most general similarity of face types and the principles of multi-layered pictorial modeling of the form, which will remain in the miniatures of the following decades.

From the metropolitan monumental painting of that period, only separate mosaics of Hagia Sophia have been preserved. D. Koco and P. Miljković-Peppek¹⁶ cited as the analogy to the Strumica fresco the images of saints in the tympana of the Hagia Sofia nave (late 9th c.), in which the classical style becomes more monumental and powerful¹⁷. The majestic figures of the saints are presented in stable poses, the vestments fall in large beautiful folds. They are clearly outlined with dark and light lines, and on the light garments, a signifi-

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¹³ Д. Коцо, П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Резултатите*, 95.

¹⁴ K. Weitzmann, *Die Byzantinische Buchmalerei des IX. und X. Jahrhunderts*, 2. Aufl., Wien 1996, 2-7; L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium. Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge 1999; Ead., *The Christian Topography (Vat. gr. 699) revisited: image, text, and conflict in ninth-century Byzantium*, Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: in Honour of Sir Steven Runciman, ed. E.M. Jeffreys, Cambridge 2006, 3-24; M. Kominko, *The World of Kosmas: Illustrated Byzantine Codices of the Christian Topography*, Cambridge 2013, 227-230.

¹⁵ See: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.699 (accessed on January 25, 2021).

¹⁶ Д. Коцо, П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Резултатите*, 94-95.

¹⁷ C. Mango, E.J.W. Hawkins, *The Mosaics of Saint Sophia at Istanbul. The Church Fathers in the North Tympanum*, DOP 26 (1972), 1-41.

cant part of the surface is filled with whitespace in the shape of triangles, stripes, and rays of white light. The contours and geometrized spots of colors form a strong frame of figures. The faces with large features also outlined with clear contours have a frozen and detached expression, full of significance and inner concentration. None of this reminds us of the tremulous and inspired painting style of the artist who painted the images of the martyrs in Strumica.

This fresco is not similar to the mosaics, which most researchers also refer to the end of the 9th century, of the dome of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, either¹⁸. On the one hand, the mosaicists mastered the techniques of the classical style perfectly, which is evident in the precise, expressive drawing of draperies and the ability to depict figures in complex angles. On the other hand, the style of these mosaics is generally dominated by the abstract principle. The composition is put into an abstract scheme with a central medallion surrounding the figure of Christ and ray-like figures of the apostles in light clothes, with symbolically treated trees between them. The figures of angels and apostles themselves, clad in shining white robes, are also depicted schematically. With all the variety of types and angles, angular movements and halted poses acquire an exaggerated, unnatural character. The dominant value in the construction of the form is the drawing itself, which is characterized by an incredible diversity. The line almost completely replaces the plastic modeling of volume, and geometrized spots of light displace the color: blue, greenish, maroon clothes become almost entirely white. The faces with enlarged, wide-open eyes and as if chopped, rough features bring sharper, non-classical expressiveness. The central images of the Mother of God and the blessing Christ, seated in the mandorla of Glory, have an emphatically hieratic character. Their figures are treated even more conditionally, with noticeable violations of proportional relations. Enlarged hands and heads emphasize gestures and glances which take on complete detachment and concentrated expressiveness. The faces are depicted symmetrical and motionless; all their features are enhanced by wide bands of greenish shadows.



Fig. 6 The Story of the Mandylion. Icon from St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. Mid-10th century (after: K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons*, Princeton 1976, vol. I, pl. XXXVI).

Сл. 6 Прича о Мандилиону, икона из цркве Св. Катарине на Синају, средина X века (по: К. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons*, Princeton 1976, vol. I, pl. XXXVI).

¹⁸ C. Bakirtzis, E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou, C. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi, *Mosaics of Thessaloniki. 4th-14th century*, Athens 2012, 241-295; R. Cormack, *After Iconoclasm — forwards or backwards?* The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited. Papers from the 2014 Symposium at the Courtauld Institute of Art, A. Eastmond, M. Hatzaki (eds.), Athens 2017, 105-111; C. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi, *Hagia Sophia. The Great Church of Thessaloniki*, Athens 2014; O.C. Попова, *Мозаики в куполе церкви св. Софии в Фессалониках*, Византийский временник 104 (2020), 261-272.



Fig. 7 St Paul. Miniature from the Homilies of St John Chrysostom. National Library of Greece, Athens, cod. 210. First quarter of the 10th century. (after: A. Marava-Chatzinicolaou, C. Toufexi-Paschou. *Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece*, Athens 1997, vol. 3, pl. 46).

Сл. 7 Свети Павле, Минијатура из Омилија Светог Јована Хризостома, Национална библиотека Грчке, Атина, cod. 210. Прва половина X века (по: А. Marava-Chatzinicolaou, C. Toufexi-Paschou. *Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece*, Athens 1997, vol. 3, pl. 46).

It is the non-classical, linear principle that prevails in the end of the 9th – first half of the 10th century provincial monumental painting. Such are the numerous and highly varied frescoes of the cave churches of Cappadocia¹⁹, as well as the few fragmentary frescoes in the Balkans and on the Greek islands²⁰. It is to this style that other surviving fragments of frescoes in Macedonia, which do not form a coherent group, are adjacent. Probably the earliest frescoes in the Church of St. Andrew in Peristera, built in 871, are generally similar to the Cappadocian ensembles of this time²¹. The fresco of the Ascension in the apse of the Rotunda in Thessaloniki are similar to the mosaics of the Church of Hagia Sofia in the same city²². The frescoes of the first layer in the Church of St. Stephen and the Church of the Taxiarchs in Kastoria were dated differently by the researchers, though within the second half of the 9th – 10th centuries²³. The Strumica fresco does not reveal any points of contact with any of these ensembles.

In the first half of the 10th century, the Constantinople style of painting further develops classical trends. A peculiar combination of different styles is represented by the mosaic in the narthex of Hagia Sophia (fig. 3), which researchers also called in connection with the image of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis. The mosaic represents the enthroned Christ, the images of the Mother of God and the an-

¹⁹ R. Cormack, *Byzantine Cappadocia: the Archaic Group of Wall-Paintings*, *Journal of the Archaeological Association* 30 (1967), 19–36; N. Thierry, *La Cappadoce de l'Antiquité au Moyen-Age*, Turnhout 2002, 143–168; A.В. Захарова, *Искусство X века: Константинополь и Каппадокия*, *Византий и Византия: провинциализм столицы и столичность провинции*, А.Ю. Виноградов, С.А. Иванов (ред.), Санкт-Петербург 2020, 158–165.

²⁰ M. Panayotidi, *La peinture monumentale en Grèce de la fin de l'Iconoclisme jusqu'à l'avènement des Comnènes (843-1081)*, *Cahiers archéologiques* 34 (1986), 75–83.

²¹ X. Τσιούμη, *Η ζωγραφική στη Θεσσαλονίκη τον 9ο αιώνα*, Πρακτικά συνεδρίου – εορταστικές εκδηλώσεις προς τιμήν και μνήμην των αγίων αυταδελοφών Κυρίλλου και Μεθοδίου των Θεσσαλονικέων, φωτιστών των σλάβων, Θεσσαλονίκη 1986, 403–410.

²² E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, A. Tourta, *Wandering in Byzantine Thessaloniki*, Athens 1997, 64, 69, fig. 72–75; E. Τσιγαρίδας, *Θεσσαλονίκη. Η ζωγραφική στους ναούς της πολέως (9ος–15ος αιώνας)*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2021, 73–76 (in print).

²³ N. Siomkos, *L'église Saint-Etienne à Kastoria: étude des différentes phases du décor peint (X^e–XIV^e siècles)*, Thessaloniki 2005, 125–132.

gel in medallions on the sides, and the kneeling emperor, who is usually identified as Leo VI; the mosaic is associated with the conflict that followed his fourth marriage in 906²⁴. If in the figure of the emperor the graphic interpretation verges on perfect schematism and the expression of the character reaches the grotesque, in the images of the enthroned Christ, the Virgin, and the angel in medallions, the mosaicists resorted to a softer and more balanced style. The figure of Christ is endowed with a regal majesty, which corresponds to a somewhat enlarged, but quite correct proportions and a solemn, but quite naturally transmitted pose. Unlike the emperor's robes, Christ's robes form many soft folds, not only outlined, but also modeled with a variety of lines, strokes, and gradations of tone. The type of Christ's face is similar to the mosaics of the late 9th century, but it is much less abstract and more vital. There is no complete symmetry, the features are outlined with softer and more agile lines, the volume modeling is made not only with shading and highlighting, but also with color.

An even more picturesque interpretation distinguishes the face of the angel in the medallion (fig. 4). The face and cloth are almost of the same tone, which makes it seem that the angel's clothes and face are equally flooded with bright radiance. The color of the olive himation and the blue chiton, on which the silver cubes of smalt sparkle, is visible only in a few lines of folds. The face has much more coloring. The main cream tone in many places is replaced by strokes of light pink blush or solid spots of shadow, gathered from cubes of shades of light green, olive, and beige passing into each other. The lines of raised eyebrows, the eyes narrowed and looking to the side, the nose with slightly dilated nostrils, as if they breathe, are outlined in light brown contours. The mouth seems to be slightly open, its shape generally only outlined by a few strokes of light olive, brown, and red cubes. The lush hair seems to be filled with air, the ends of the ribbon that pulls the hairs together flutter on the sides of the head. The archangel seems ready to turn after the movement of the eyes, which corresponds to the direction of the colored strokes of the blushes and shadows, as if light glides over the face. The image of the angel is full of movement and inspiration, a sense of flight and radiance. Such a free, almost impressionistic painting style will become quite widespread in the metropolitan art of the first half of the 10th century.

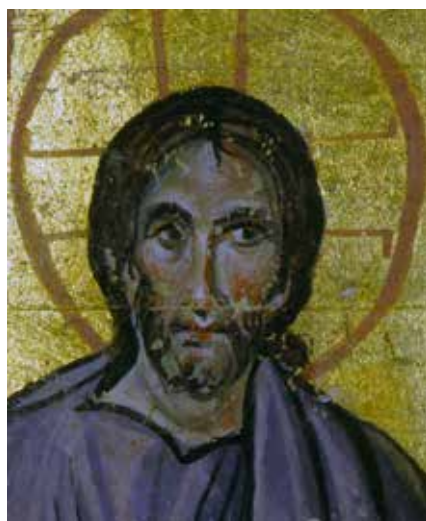


Fig. 8 Christ. Fragment of the miniature from the Lectionary of Trebizond. St.-Petersburg, National Library of Russia, cod. gr. 21, f. 10v. Third quarter of the 10th century. Photo © NLR.

Сл. 8 Христос, фрагмент минијатуре из Трапезунтског лекционара, Ст.Петербург, Национална библиотека Русије, cod. gr. 21, f. 10v. трећа четвртина X века, фото © NLR.

²⁴ T. Whittemore, *The mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul, Preliminary Report on the First Year's Work 1931-1932: The Mosaics of the Narthex*, Paris 1933; E.J.W. Hawkins, *Further observations on the narthex mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul*, DOP 22 (1968), 153-166; N. Oikonomides, *Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia*, DOP 30 (1976), 153-172.

It was this variant of the metropolitan style, in our opinion, that guided the author of the Strumica fresco. This is indicated by the comparison of the image of St Timothy and the mosaic of the angel (fig. 4, 5). Of course, the difference in technique, scale, and quality makes such a comparison conditional. And yet, in the Strumica fresco, we see a similar approach to the form: without a clear stereometric construction of the volume typical of the miniatures of the metropolitan manuscripts of the late 9th century and without the schematic graphic constructions that dominated the mosaics of Constantinople and Thessaloniki at that time, but with a freer pictorial interpretation. Moreover, in the very nature of the images of the martyrs of Tiberiopolis, there is an obvious tendency to greater emotionality and psychological specificity, which is outlined in the mosaic of the narthex of Hagia Sophia.

The development of this trend can be seen in a number of icons of the first half of the 10th century, such as „The Washing the Feet“, „St. Zosimas and St. Nicholas“, „The Virgin with St. Cosmas and St. Damian“, „The Virgin with St. John the Baptist and St. Nicholas“, „The History of the Mandyllion“ (fig. 6) from the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai²⁵, in the staurotheke from the Museo Sacro in the Vatican with images of Christ, the Virgin, the archangels, the apostles Peter and Paul on the inside, as well as the images of the Crucifixion, and St. John Chrysostom on the sliding lid²⁶. These are the works of small format, with painting executed in a rich, loosely manner, with an open brushstroke and bright colors, without gradual careful modeling of surfaces. The figures seem light and flexible, the facial features and lines of the draperies look as though sloppy sketched.

The same tendencies have been also found in the miniatures of metropolitan manuscripts, such as the homilies of St. John Chrysostom from the National Library of Athens (gr. 210), of the first quarter of the 10th century²⁷(fig. 7), the Leo Bible from the Vatican Library (Vat. Reg. gr. 1) of the second quarter of the 10th century²⁸, the Trebizond Gospel from the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg (Greek 21, 21a) of the third quarter of the 10th century²⁹, etc. All these miniatures were made in a similar picturesque manner with open strokes

²⁵ K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai. The Icons*, Princeton 1976, vol. I, 83-99, pls. CVIII-CIX, CXI, CXIII-CXV.

²⁶ R. Cormack, *Painting after Iconoclasm*, 151-153; H. Evans, W.D. Wixom (eds.), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era. A.D. 843-1261*. New York 1997, 76-77.

²⁷ A. Marava-Chatzinicolaou, C. Toufexi-Paschou. *Catalogue of the Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts of the National Library of Greece*, Athens 1997, vol. 3, 57-69, figs. 45, 46.

²⁸ C. Mango, *The Date of Cod. Vat. Reg. Gr. 1 and the «Macedonian Renaissance»*, Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia, Institutum Romanum Norvegiae 4 (1969), 121-126; S. Dufrenne, P. Canart (eds.), *Die Bibel des Patricius Leo. Reg. gr. I B*, Zürich 1988.

²⁹ E.M. Schwartz, *Das Lektionar von St. Petersburg: vollständige Faksimile-Ausgabe im Originalformat des Codex gr. 21, gr. 21 a der Russischen Nationalbibliothek in St. Petersburg*, Graz-Moskau 1994; A. Zakharova, *The Trebizond Lectionary (cod. gr. 21 and 21a, Russian National Library, Saint-Petersburg) and Byzantine Art after the Macedonian Renaissance*, ДХАЕ 29 (2008), 59-68; О.С. Попова, А.В. Захарова, И.А. Орецькая, *Византийская миниатюра второй половины X – начала XII века*, Москва 2012, 112-144.



Fig. 9 St Komasius. Fragment of the fresco in the Church of the Fifteen martyrs, Strumica. First half of the 10th century. Photo by the author

Сл. 9 Свети Комасије, фрагмент фреске из цркве Светих петнаест мученика, Струмица, прва половина X века, фото: аутор



Fig. 10 St Timothy and St Komasius. Fragment of the fresco in the Church of the Fifteen martyrs, Strumica. First half of the 10th century. Photo by the author

Сл. 10 Свети Тимотеј и Свети Комасије, фрагмент фреске из цркве Светих петнаест мученика, Струмица, прва половина X века, фото: аутор

and colorful spots, rich highlights, rapid lines and strokes often only barely outlining the forms. The radiant light colors, the absence of gradual modeling or solid lines, and the vibrant picturesque surface give these works airiness and inspiration. This corresponds to the nature of the images, which are often endowed with vivacity, spontaneity, and elation.

In the Trebizond Gospel, the desire to enhance the dramatic, mystical effect led to the appearance of tension in some miniatures, which was atypical for earlier works, but common for the art of the second half of the 10th century. This is not the case in the surviving images of the Fifteen Martyrs in Strumica. However, the types of faces and artistic techniques are very similar to the miniatures of this manuscript, as noted by D. Koco and P. Miljković-Peppek, without specifying the dating of this manuscript within the 10th century³⁰. Thus, the image of the martyr from Strumica can be compared with one of the images of Christ in the Trebizond Gospel (f. 10v)(figs. 8, 9). They were made in a similar picturesque manner and, in general, are alike in character - focused, immersed in thought. Individual features are also similar: high-arched, thick eyebrows, the soft full mouth with the wide notch above the upper lip, wide-set slightly asymmetrical eyes that look away. Some other images from the Trebizond Gospel (for example, the apostles from The Washing of the Feet, f. 6v) painted in a similar sketchy style with expressive lines and strokes that sharpen the spontaneity of emotions conveyed through facial expressions can also be compared with the

³⁰ Д. Коцо, П. Миљковић-Пепек, *Резултатите*, 95.



Fig. 11 Apostles. Fragment of the miniature from the Lectionary of Trebizond. St.-Petersburg, National Library of Russia, cod. gr. 21, f. 6v. Third quarter of the 10th century. Photo © NLR.

Сл. 11 Апостоли, фрагмент минијатуре из Трапезунтског лекционара, Ст. Петербург, Национална библиотека Русије, cod. gr. 21, f. 6v. трећа четвртина X века, фото: © NLR.

Strumica martyrs (figs. 10, 11). The bright shining tone, watercolor gamut, and fading, even trembling drawing give these images a thrill and emotionality.

Thus, the stylistic analysis of the fresco of the Fifteen Martyrs of Tiberiopolis in Strumica has confirmed the opinions expressed earlier that the artist who created it was inspired by the metropolitan models. Taking into account the analogies discussed above, we propose to focus on a broader dating of the fresco to the first half of the 10th century. This does not contradict the data of written sources and indicates the development of the cult of the Fifteen Martyrs in Strumica during the 10th century and the artistic ties of southwestern Macedonia with Constantinople at that time.

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ФРЕСКА ПЕТНАЕСТ МУЧЕНИКА ТИБЕРИОБОЛИСА У СТРУМИЦИ У
 КОНТЕКСТУ ВИЗАНТИЈСКЕ УМЕТНОСТИ КАСНОГ IX ВЕКА – ПРВЕ
 ПОЛОВИНЕ X ВЕКА

Рад је у вези са фреском Светих петнаест мученика Тибериополиса у Струмици у Северној Македонији. Фреска је насликана у гробници на ранохришћанском налазишту на којем је касније изграђена црква уписаног крста, док је гробница претворена у крипту. Д. Коцо и П. Миљковић - Пепек открили су ову фреску 1973. године и датовали је у крај IX века и почетак X века. Такође, указали су на цариградске изворе ове фреске. Надовезујући се на наведене податке аутор текста испитује подробније фреску, као и стил извођења. Од укупно петнаест попрсја, сачувана су у целости једино два попрсја светих мученика. Паралеле са уметничким делима датованих у крај IX века нису толико изражене. Емотивни карактер фреске ближи је класичним тенденцијама које су биле присутне у Цариграду у првој половини X века. Фреска из Струмице може се упоредити са мозаиком у нартексу Аја Софије, као и са неким синајским иконама и књижним илуминацијама (cod. 210 из Националне библиотеке Грчке, cod. Reg. gr. 1 Ватиканске апостолске библиотеке, cod. Gr. 21 Руске националне библиотеке). Стога струмичка фреска представља важан пример уметничких веза између Цариграда и теме Македоније у првој половини X века.