
Miguel Gallés
(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Departament d'Art i Musicologia)

LIONHEART - NEW POST-BYZANTINE ICON OF SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

Abstract: This paper deals with an unpublished 19th-century Balkan icon whose topic is that of Saint Ignatius of Antioch. Being currently kept in a Barcelona private icon collection, it is an evidence to Tradition that seems worth being described in the present context. It seems appropriate to start with the figure of Saint Ignatius, highlighting three fundamental features from his hagiography that will allow drawing parallels with His Holiness the Serbian Patriarch Irinej. We are going to consider: Church Father, the beasts, and calls for unity. Some milestone works related with the topic are going to be reminded. An approach to highlighted Balkan works is going to be intended. A proper description of the new post-byzantine icon is going to be put forward. And, some final remarks are going to be shared.

Keywords: Post-byzantine, Icon, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Lions

Introduction

Saint Ignatius of Antioch is one of those people known as the *Church Fathers*. That is, one of the relevant characters in the first centuries of the Christian history, responsible for his contribution to the fundamental doctrinal development of the Church. The ultimate foundation of Christianity is understood to be Christ. But the various communities of Christian followers had to elaborate in various ways and by various procedures the bases of that ever living and growing construction that is Tradition.

In the case of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, it also happens that in addition to being an “ideologue” of Christianity, he lived at a time when the apostles did as well. It has been suggested that he could have been born around the 35th year of the Western Christian era and that he died around the end of the first decade of the second century. For this reason, he also receives the qualification of *Apostolic Father*.

It seems beyond any doubt that he was bishop of Antioch, one of the most relevant early Christian communities. However, since the beginning, the diversity of its believers has been great. In such a way that nowadays there are five



Fig. 1. New post-byzantine icon of Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

Сл. 1. Нова поствизантијска икона Светог Игњатија Антиохијског

patriarchs in Antioch¹. This also reminds us of the importance of this geographical region in the history of Christianity and the convulsive circumstances that have always accompanied its groups of believers. It is worth remembering that Antioch was the first place where the disciples were called Christians.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch² was condemned to death in Trajan times accused, presumably, of professing Christianity. In one way or another, the birth of the new faith was a challenge for the Roman authorities. And the discord between communities tightened the rope. Although he was convicted in Syria and could be executed there, his transfer to Rome was ordered. He himself assumed that, as a disciple of Christ, he had to suffer martyrdom: he wished dying for Christ. According to his letters, Ignatius accepted being thrown to the wild beasts. Or, what is more: *by being thrown to the beasts he wanted to triumph over them*. In his Letter to the Romans, he says: “Let me be handed over to the beasts since through them I can reach God.” It is precisely his attitude to the announced martyrdom that earned him another epithet: Theophoros.

That is, God-carrier (**Fig. 1**).

Little is known about the specific circumstances of the martyrdom, beyond what may be imagined, based on all kinds of chronicles and accounts of similar situations. It seems that he was indeed thrown to the wild beasts. Those beasts that iconographic tradition has specified in the lions, which in their natural environment are fearsome predators at the top of the trophic pyramid. So, the most powerful enemies.

It seems that what was left of him - “the hardest parts” - were collected by his brothers in the faith and taken as relics to Antioch. According to Saint John Chrysostom, “once in Rome he reached heaven, he returned to us crowned.”

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_of_Antioch (24/11/2021).

² https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignacio_de_Antioqu%C3%ADa (24/11/2021) The Wikipedia page in Spanish is a true monograph on the life and writings of the saint. Fifty-four footnotes, twenty-seven bibliographic references, and eighteen external links are a good credential for such a purpose. We are focusing on some basic traits that shall take us to underline those features that may be of interest for the iconographic study to be carried out.

It has been pointed out that the diversity of religious confessions, due to their own starting point, due to their geographical origin, or due to the different solutions issued when formulating the confessional essence, took to important disagreements. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that tensions arose in social life and that Saint Ignatius of Antioch had to face them as the Church shepherd he was. In this context, it seems that he distinguished himself by his continuous and committed *calls for unity*. In his letters he defends keeping such unity around the ecclesiastical hierarchy. When watched from nowadays, nothing new (!).

Milestone Works Related with this topic

By addressing the iconographic approach, it seems appropriate to propose a first framework considering reference works related to this topic. For this reason, at first, we propose a brief approach to the world of beasts, specifically lions, with which so many characters and patron saints of the Church have grappled.

The first artwork that we would like to pay attention to is well outside the time/topic range that we could be expected to focus on. It is the Gebel el-Arak knife³ dated between 3300 and 3200 BC. Its relevance lies in the fact that an image of an individual between two lions is carved on the back face of the handle - in fact, it is a representation of the Mesopotamian king as Master of Animals - which fits perfectly with those that we will consider throughout this work. This brings to mind that the ancestral topics may develop different fundamental ideas throughout history. It suits perfectly for the purpose.

Another image, this one from the Byzantine world, is the Tree of Life between two lions, Thorakion, Byzantine Museum Athens⁴, late 10th - early 11th century, marble. The singularity of this marble slab image is that the one amidst lions is not a person but a tree. It is not just any tree; it is the Tree of Life. Therefore, flanked by two lions, in the allegorical form of a tree, we guess life. The idea of fierce lions in a vertical position, leaning on their hindquarters, aggressively showing their teeth, clinging to the tree with their front legs, and extending their sharp claws, undoubtedly anticipates the iconographic types that we will see applied to Saint Ignatius of Antioch.

Saint Macarius the Roman⁵, like so many other hermits, lives with those mighty animals and is a reference for those who adopt the option of hermitism in the Orthodox world. In the 18th century icon at Mount Athos (Skete of St.

³ The Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gebel_el-Arak_Knife (24/11/2021) with sixty-four entries/footnotes, and an exhaustive picture collection, is a must. We learned about this artwork through: Cervelló, J., *Narmer: el primer faraón de Egipto*, in: Historia-National Geographic, Barcelona, 2020, 34.

⁴ https://www.byzantinemuseum.gr/el/permanentexhibition/byzantine_world/worship_art/?bxm=977 (24/11/2021).

⁵ A clear image of this icon can be seen at: E. Τσιγαρίδας, *Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους*, Thessaloniki, 1997, 166.

Anna) he is seen modestly covered with his own fur and taking care of the two lion cubs at the entrance of the cave that serves as his shelter. An example of asceticism in an inhospitable natural environment.

In the 14th century images on the life of Saint Gerasimus at the Church of Saint Nicholas Orphanos⁶, we see the saint removing the thorn from the lion's leg and then a scene that shows the legend of the lion and the donkey. In this case, coexistence with a wild animal of these characteristics is added as an exemplary element to emphasize the error of the saint and the fidelity of the animal.

A top reference to Saint Ignatius of Antioch is found in the illumination of the 11th century Menologion of Basil II⁷. The realistic rendering of the scene is heart-breaking. The emphasis is on the martyrdom of the saint. He is seen kneeling on the ground, attacked by lions of great naturalistic realism. The character's blood gushes out profusely from the beasts-bitten body. Nothing to do with the victorious upright character, almost immune to the attack of the beasts, which will be developed on later times.

In the 17th century icon at the Patriarchate of Antioch⁸ we already find the iconographic type that will be common for some centuries. In this case, the lions are presented in reverse position. The one on the right, facing down, as a clear sign of the saint's victory over the beasts. The one on the left, doing his job. Both are red in colour to create the effect of an increased power.

Just to conclude this approach, we should indicate that this topic is not exclusive to orthodox iconography. In the 16th century engraving published in Rome⁹, the saint can be seen kneeling in prayer while he is attacked by multiple animals at the same time. The Roman Colosseum is clearly identified and the allegorical presence of the cross with Simeon of Jerusalem, as well as Clement of Rome thrown into the sea with an anchor tied around his neck, refer us to the universality of martyrdom for Christ since the very beginning.

Highlighted Balkan Works

When considering a second frame of icons, clearly Balkan and more recent, we find a seventeenth century work tagged as "Greek" in the State

⁶ Some images of this story can be found in: A. Ευγγόπουλος, *Οι Τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανός Θεσσαλονίκης*, Atenas, 1964, 62,63 and 95. The eye level two-vignette space dedicated to the saint, as watched in situ, is unique evidence to the landscape naturalism in this type of iconography. The quasi-surgical meticulousness with which the character extracts the lion's thorn is overwhelming.

⁷ A good image of the illustration that corresponds to the martyrdom of Saint Ignatius of Antioch in the famous treatise can be seen in: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ignatius_of_Antioch.jpg (25/11/2021).

⁸ M. Zibawi, *Iconos - Sentido e Historia*, Madrid, 1999, 231. It may be of interest to notice that on the previous and opposite page an icon dedicated to Saint Gerasimus is displayed. The scene that we highlighted in footnote 6 is represented.

⁹ Taken from G.B. Cavalieri, *Ecclesiae militantis triumphi*, Rome, 1585; engraved by Circignani, N., plate n. 8. It can also be seen at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1863-0509-769 (25/11/2021).

Museum of Fine Arts - Pushkin Museum¹⁰. In this icon the saint can be seen in a prayerful attitude, both arms up to the right, while he is being attacked by two red lions - probably an underlining of the fierceness of the animals - being the one on the right in an inverted attack position.

As it has been said above, this would be an iconographic proposal of the saint's victory. The character's attitude is as if addressing the animals indicating that he is leaving for another place and that they have nothing to do with him since he is protected by Christ.

Considering the seventeenth century fresco in the Zerbitsi Monastery¹¹, in the Peloponnese (Greece), we highlight the position of the saint's left hand. Paying attention to other iconographic patterns, the lions are in similar positions as those of the previous icon, though they show a more naturalistic reddish-brown coloration.

Another interesting icon is that of the nineteenth century in the Manov collection (Bulgaria)¹². From a symmetry point of view, it is a symmetrical icon to the previous ones: the saint places his hands in a prayerful attitude towards the left; the lion on the left totally upside down; and the lion on the right perpetrating the attack. Both in red.

The icon sold at Dullaert (The Netherlands) some years ago¹³ displays the two red lions in an upright position while the saint is blessing with his right hand. The left hand shows an "unnatural" position that will be useful to us when describing the icon at hand. The nineteenth century icon of the Melnik region (Bulgaria)¹⁴ is quite similar, from a structure point of view, to the previous one (two red lions in an upright position and the saint blessing with his right hand). The presence of two additional lions around the subpedaneum on which the

¹⁰ It has been related with a Bulgarian or Macedonian workshop. Perhaps painted by Ioannis Apakas, in the early 17th century. It is a quite small icon (27x21 cm), but highly expressive and dramatic. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/56/Ignatius_of_Antiochie%2C_poss._by_Johann_Apakass_%2817th_c.%2C_Pushkin_museum%29.jpg (26/11/2021).

¹¹ On this occasion, the image of the martyrdom of Saint Ignatius of Antioch is to the left of another martyrdom image: the Stoning of Saint Stephen, the Protomartyr. Both vignettes convey a unique chromatic sensation. As if only two ranges of pigments had been used: blue and brown. <https://www.allaboutpeloponnisos.com/en/type/religion/iera-moni-zermpitsis> (26/11/2021).

¹² М. Стойкова, *Небесни закрилници на дома (Колекция Румен Манов)*, Sofia, 2017, 118-120. It is a two-sided first half of the 19th century Tryavna art school icon (Tsanyu Zahariev) in which, on the one hand, Saint Ignatius Bogonosets appears on a distinctive golden background, and on the other, four characters corresponding to Old Testament texts are barely shown.

¹³ We think that it is a first half of the 19th century Bulgarian icon, from the same Tryavna art school as the previous one, more peasant-like style, but with quite similar size (33x23 cm). It can be seen at our presentation in the Nis and Byzantium 20th Symposium, Nis and Byzantium youtube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzxD6MmKXTA&t=797s> (29/11/2021).

¹⁴ It is a medium size icon in Saint Athanasius of Alexandria Church, in the town of Vrania, painted in 1836. It can be seen at: Л. Койнова-Арнаудова, *Икони от Мелнишкия край*, Sofia, 1980, 89.



Fig. 2. Detail. The Saint's head, greyish hair, eye bags, rounded white beard and pronounced moustache.

Сл. 2. Деталъ, светителѣва глава, седа коса, подочъаци, брада и наглашени бркови



Fig. 3. Detail. Lion's head, whiskers, manes, and claws.

Сл. 3. Деталъ, лавља глава, бркови, гриве, канџе.

character is located stands out. A similar case, in a simplified version, is that of the icon of the Troyan Monastery (Bulgaria)¹⁵.

Finally, we'd like to point out different works to show the diversity that this iconographic type displays at the considered lapse time¹⁶.

Description of the icon

The icon is 32x22.5 cm. The saint is flanked by the two lions as in the just discussed icons of its time. He looks up at the blessing hand sticking out to the right of the image. From this hand light radiates to illuminate the character. He is dressed in the proper episcopal attires. The two beasts climb on him, sinking the teeth at his shoulders. The colour of these animals is yellow in both cases. The saint opens his arms in a way to welcome his destiny. The unnatural position of his right forearm and hand is well worth to be noticed.

The head (**Fig. 2**) sports a thick greyish hair that frames a face in which the eye bags clearly indicate the advanced age of the saint. In addition to a bountiful rounded white beard and a pronounced moustache. The medium size aureole highlights the whole head.

¹⁵ It can be found in: А. Божков, *Българската икона*, Sofia, 1984, 231.

¹⁶ Saint Ignatius in Plataniotissa, <http://churchesingreece.blogspot.com/2015/01/saint-ignatius-of-antioch-saint-or.html> (29/11/2021); in Rila monastery, https://www.orth-photo.net/photo.php?id=76126&id_jezyk=1 (29/11/2021); in both previous frescoes the two red lions are standing up. Saint Ignatius in a 14th century fresco from the Holy Monastery Panagia Sumela, Trebizond, Turkey <https://greekorthodoxreligioustourism.blogspot.com/2015/10/h-timia-k.html> (29/11/2021); in unknown church <https://prayerofsaintephrem.blog/2012/09/21/reflections-from-the-church-fathers-st-ignatius-of-antioch/> (29/11/2021); in both previous frescoes one of the lions is standing up and the other is upside down. In the Sumela case, they are both red. In the other case, they are both brown.

Lions (**Fig. 3**) show off sharp claws that emphasize the fierceness of the attack. Also, whiskers and long manes from which small ears protrude. Saint Ignatius' blood spills from their jaws during the attack. Their hind legs grasp the martyr in order to carry out the deadly attack (**Fig. 4**).

As indicated in some of the previous cases, the right hand falls down in an unnatural position (**Fig. 5**). This can be used to establish certain relationships that may help in putting this simple icon into context.

The background landscape is neutral: a flat ground with little vegetation. Nothing reminiscent of the original Roman Colosseum.

Inscriptions were made on the board to explain who the saint is and when the work was carried out: ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰγνάτιος. / ο Θεοφόρος. εν ἐτ(ε)ι 1878 δεκεμβρίου 20 / δηά συνδρομής πάντων. τῶν ἐυσεβῶν χριστιανῶν; St Ignatius Theoforos (God bearing).

In 1878, 20th of December, with the support of all the devoted Christians¹⁷.



Fig. 4. Detail. The lion on the right, full-length, carrying out the attack.

Сл. 4. Детал, лав на десној страни у нападу



Fig. 5. Detail. The right hand falls down in an unnatural position.

Сл. 5. Детал, десна рука у неприродном положају

Final remarks

Finally, we will focus on a small number of icons that have an important iconographic relationship with the one just described. The fresco of the exonarthex of the Albanian Church of Saint Nicholas in Voskopojë (1721)¹⁸ has a very similar iconographic pattern. Saint Ignatius is dressed in the attire that identifies him as a bishop and with his gaze directed to the heavenly hand that appears to the right of the image. The two lions on either side of the saint in identical position. Arms and hands outstretched and ready to accept the destiny that the

¹⁷ We are indebted to Dr. Alexandra Trifonova, Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies "Prof. Ivan Dujčev", for helping with the inscriptions.

¹⁸ It can be found at: <https://www.gettyimages.ie/detail/news-photo/porch-of-the-church-of-st-nicholas-voskopoja-albania-18th-news-photo/150621014?adppopup=true> (29/11/2021).

saint has been proposed. The only substantial difference is the coloration of the two lions: the one on the left, red; and the one on the right, of a lighter colour in accordance with that shown by these animals in their natural environment. In the same way, a fresco whose origin we have not been able to establish yet¹⁹, shows exactly the same pattern as the previous case. The only differences are that the colouring of the beasts' furs is changed sideways (symmetries topic?²⁰) and, above all, the extraordinary position of both hands, especially the saint's right hand.

And, to conclude, a 19th century Bulgarian icon from the Tryavna School²¹, similar to the first fresco we have just considered, with the difference that the saint looks to the left, where Grace comes from, and the hands are somewhat grotesque. Similar to the sophisticated Mount Athos engraving shown in the same work²².

Мигел Галес

(Независни Универзитет у Барселони, Одељење уметности и музикологије)

ЛАВЉЕ СРЦЕ- НОВА ПОСТВИЗАНТИЈСКА
ИКОНА СВЕТОГ ИГЊАТИЈА АНТИОХИЈСКОГ

Нова поствизантијска икона из 19. века са представом Светог Игњатија Антиохијског налази се у приватној колекцији у Барселони. У раду је представљена хагиографија Светог Игњатија Антиохијског. Посебно се подвлаче паралеле са животом Његове Светости Патријарха српског г. Иринеја. Три фундаменталне фигуре се разматрају: Бог Отац, звери и позиви за јединство. У раду се посебно разматра стил ове иконе, као и одговарајуће референце и везе са фрескама, иконама. Разматра се иконографски фиверзитет типичан за Светог Игњатија Антиохијског кроз време.

¹⁹ To have a look at it: https://toeilhtarion.blogspot.com/2018/12/blog-post_83.html (29/11/2021).

²⁰ This brings us to a very suggestive point: the use of sketches to paint icons as well as frescoes. It is easy to understand that the widespread use of those devices, more or less transparent, in which after intensive use it was not obvious to recognize the faces of the paper, could lead to the frequent phenomenon of symmetry in certain iconographic types. In this sense, the paper of M. Castiñeiras, *Oxford, Magdalen College, MS. Gr. 3: Artistic Practice, Byzantine Drawings and Mobility in Mediterranean Painting around 1200*. Arte Medievale, Roma, 2015, 87,93 is especially relevant. The one of E. N. Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*. Thessaloniki, 2016, 60 points out the sequence Angelos-Ritzos-Theophanes. L. Ouspensky, *La théologie de l'icône*. Paris, 2003, 271-272 develops the Russian context. M. Didron, *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne grecque et latine*, 1845 is the famous Hermeneia - painter's manual - of Dionysius of Fournas that was the reference book when we added a Prophet Elijah icon to the catalogue of Dionysius workshop (M. Gallés, *Some additions to the catalogue of the workshop of Dionysius of Fournas. An icon of the Prophet Elijah opens fire*, Thessaloniki, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/381309100>). And Maria Vassilaki, *Working Drawings of icon painters after the fall of Constantinople*. Benaki Museum, 2015 is a reference book for anthivola/working drawings/painting patterns.

²¹ It can be found in: А. Божков, *Българската икона*, Sofia, 1984, 228.

²² It can also be found in: А. Божков, *Българската икона*, Sofia, 1984, 231.