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EXPLORING THE WALL PAINTINGS OF THE CHURCH OF ST. DEMETRIUS IN TREBINO: ARTISTIC INSIGHTS AND CONSERVATION CONCERNS*

Abstract: This study explores the wall paintings of the Church of St. Demetrius in Trebino (1644), Municipality of Makedonski Brod, placing them within the broader context of post-Byzantine artistic production in the Poreče region. It examines the church's architecture, iconographic program, and stylistic characteristics, emphasizing close parallels with nearby monuments, most notably the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Orevec, which point to the activity of the same painter or workshop. Particular attention is given to the present condition of the wall paintings and the factors that have contributed to their deterioration, emphasizing the urgent need for conservation, restoration, and long-term protection of this cultural monument.

Keywords: post-Byzantine wall painting, Poreče, St. Demetrius, Trebino, Orevec, iconography, cultural heritage protection

The Church of St. Demetrius is located in the village of Trebino, within the Municipality of Makedonski Brod, in the Poreče region (fig. 1). Trebino is also known for its much older church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, dating to the 13th century,¹ which had previously been inaccurately dated in 17th century.²

* The initial data and findings concerning the Church of St. Demetrius derive from the condition assessment carried out by an expert team of the National Conservation Centre – Skopje, appointed by Decision No. 08-262/3 of 25 July 2024. The expert team was tasked with preparing documentation in the field of immovable cultural heritage, intended to serve as Conservation and Protection Guidelines for the new Spatial Plan of the RN Macedonia. The author of this study participated as a member of the expert team.

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¹ Ц. Грозданов, *Курбиново и други студии за фрескоживописот во Преспа*, Скопје 2015 / С. Grozdanov, *Kurbinovo and other studies on Prespa Frescoes*, Skopje 2015, 22, 84.

² Ф. Месеснел, *Топографске белешке о неким црквеним споменицима у Поречу*, Гласник Скопског научног друштва 13, ур. Р. М., Грујић, (Скопље 1934), 171–173.



Fig. 1 The Church of St. Demetrius in Trebino (1644), Municipality of Makedonski Brod, Poreče region. Photo: Jehona Spahiu Janchevska

Сл. 1 Црква Светог Димитрија у Требину (1644.), Општина Македонски Брод, област Порече. Фото: Јехона Спахиу Јанчевска

The church was first mentioned in 1934 by France Mesesnel, who published the donor's inscription together with the recorded year and provided brief descriptions of the architecture and the painted program. He also reported on the severely deteriorated condition of the church, attributing much of the damage to the compromised roof structure, which significantly contributed to the decay of the wall paintings, especially in the vaults and upper parts of the interior.³ A year later, the village of Trebino and the Church of St. Demetrius were likewise mentioned and published by Petar S. Jovanović.⁴ More recently, the author of the present study has made a brief presentation of the wall paintings in Trebino as comparative material in relation to those of the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.⁵

The donor's inscription on the west wall above the entrance, originally written in two rows, is now very damaged (fig. 2).⁶ However, the concluding line (з̄р̄н̄в̄), which preserves the most crucial information, remains legible and indicates the year 1644, referring to both the construction and the painting of the Church of St. Demetrius in Trebino.

In terms of stylistic, thematic, and iconographic features, the church and especially its wall paintings be-

long to the modest yet noteworthy ecclesiastical and artistic production of the post-Byzantine period. It is connected to a recognizable group of churches in the Poreče region, including St. Athanasius in Kovač (1626/27),⁷ St. Archangel

³ Ф. Месеснел, *op.cit.*, 174-175, сл. 4-6.

⁴ П. С. Јовановић, *Порече*, Насеља и порекло становништва, књ. 28, ур. Ј. Цвијић, (Београд 1935), 311-312.

⁵ Ј. Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превозот на забравот – црквата Свети Архангел Гаврил во Ореовец*, *Balkanoslavica* 53(1-2), ур. А. Василески, (Прилеп 2024), 61-89.

⁶ By the time when F. Mesesnel published his notes, the inscription was preserved in a considerably better condition, see: Ф. Месеснел, *op.cit.*, 175.

⁷ Н. Митревски, *Црквата Свети Атанасиј во Ковач, Порече*, Јубилеен зборник – 25 години митрополит Тимотеј, ур. Ц. Грозданов, (Охрид 2006), 309-329.



Fig. 2 Donor's inscription, west wall above the entrance (1644). Photo: National Conservation Centre – Skopje; Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 2 Ктиторски натпис, западни ѕид изнад улаза (1644.). Фото: Национални конзерваторски центар – Скопје; Мишко Тутковски

Michael in Benče,⁸ St. Barbara in Kovač near Samokov, St. Nicholas in Crešnevo,⁹ and St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec (dating to the second quarter of the 17th century).¹⁰

According to its architectural type, the church is a single-nave structure with a barrel vault, externally covered by a gabled roof. It is constructed of crushed stones bounded with lime mortar. The roof, originally covered with stone slabs, is now overlaid with a sheet-metal covering, installed by local residents without prior approval from the competent professional institution for the protection of cultural heritage. Additional evidence of unprofessional interventions is visible in the mortar joints. The entrance to the church is on the western side, while on the eastern side it ends with a three-sided apse. The southern façade is articulated with a niche, a feature commonly found in churches throughout the Poreče region.

The church retains a substantial portion of its original wall paintings, although heavily damaged and severely affected by salt efflorescence, presenting considerable challenges for both interpretation and conservation (fig. 3). Moreover, numerous inscriptions have deteriorated to the point of illegibility, while others have vanished completely.¹¹ Despite the current condition, the surviving paintings reveal an iconographic program characteristic of the first

⁸ Idem, *Фрескоживописот во црквата Свети Архангел Михаил во селото Бенче, Порече*, Прилози XLIV 1-2, посветени на Академик Цветан Грозданов по повод 50 години научно-истражувачка дејност. Зборник на трудови од научниот собир одржан во Охрид, 4 октомври, 2012 (Скопје 2013), 187-206.

⁹ С. Цветковски, *Две непознати поствизантиски цркви во Порече од XVII век*, Манастирот Слепче и поствизантиската уметност на Балканот од XVI и XVII век, зборник на трудови, ур. С. Цветковски, (Журче - Демир Хисар 2021), 215-238.

¹⁰ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 61-89.

¹¹ Due to the deteriorated condition of the wall paintings and, in particular, the illegibility of the surviving texts, the transcription of the original inscriptions is not undertaken at this stage of the research.



Fig. 3 Interior of the Church of St. Demetrius in Trebino. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 3
Унутрашњост цркве Светог Димитрија у Требину. Фото: Мишко Тутковски

half of the 17th century, corresponding to the general decorative scheme found in small post-Byzantine churches. The painted program extends through the sanctuary, partially the vault, and the nave, following established compositional norms.

This study also addresses the challenges posed by the current condition of the church, and particularly of its wall paintings, proposing potential directions for further research and conservation efforts. Ultimately, the research aims not only to enhance our understanding of regional artistic practices and production, but also to contribute to the preservation and long-term safeguarding of the area's cultural heritage.

Stylistic, thematic, and iconographic parallels indicate a close connection between the wall paintings of the Church of St. Demetrius in Trebino and those in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec. The striking similarities suggest that the same painter or workshop was active in the region within a relatively short timeframe.

In the conch of the altar apse, the Holy Mother of God is depicted in half-length, holding the Christ Child in a medallion on her chest (fig. 4). She is flanked symmetrically by the half-length figures of Archangels Gabriel and Michael, shown in adoration with covered hands, each enclosed within a medallion.¹² The first register of the altar space presents the *Officiating Church Fathers*. On the left side are St. Athanasius of Alexandria and St. Basil the Great, while on the right side are represented St. John Chrysostom and St. Gregory the Theologian.

In the niche of the prothesis is the depiction of the *Man of Sorrows* (fig. 5). Christ is shown with his head gently inclined toward his right shoulder and

¹² In the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec, the half-length figures of Archangels Gabriel and Michael are not included, cf. Spahiu Janchevska, *Под превезот на забравот*, 65, заб. 16, сл. 3.



Fig. 4 Mother of God with Christ Child in a medallion, altar apse. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 4 Богородица са Христом у медаљону, олтарска апсида. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



Fig. 5 Man of Sorrows, prothesis niche. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 5 Мртви Христос, ниша протезиса. Фото: Мишко Тутковски

his hands crossed over the stomach. Formed as an event and an image under the influence of the liturgical innovations that arose from the Christological debates conducted during the 11th and 12th centuries,¹³ the depiction acquires a Eucharistic meaning, and its designated place is within the altar space, most commonly, from the 13th century onward, in the *prothesis*.¹⁴ The image of the *Man of Sorrows* within the *prothesis* becomes increasingly prevalent during the 14th and 15th centuries and is particularly dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁵ While closely associated with the Liturgy of Preparation (*Proskomedie*),¹⁶ the position of the crossed arms simultaneously conveys a funerary connotation.¹⁷

In the niche of the diaconicon stands the figure of the Protomartyr and Archdeacon St. Stephen. He is depicted as a beardless youth with curly hair and a tonsure, holding a censer in his right hand and a pyx in his left. St. Stephen is clad in a white sticharion with a golden collar adorned with pearls and precious stones, while a red mantle is draped over his left shoulder.

¹³ Г. Бабић, *Христолошке распре у XII веку и појава нових сцена у апсидалном декору византијских цркава*, Зборник ликовне уметности 2, ур. Д. Медаковић, (Нови Сад 1966), 11-29.

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion on the depiction, development, and connection of the *Man of Sorrows* with the liturgical service, see: Н. Belting, *An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 34-35 (Washington, DC 1980-1981), 1-16; D. Simić-Lazar, *Kalenić et la dernière période de la peinture byzantine*, Skopje 1995, 85-99; Eadem, *Каленић: Сликарство-Историја*, Београд 2011, 121-133.

¹⁵ The numerous examples of depictions of the *Man of Sorrows* are summarized in: Н. Митревски, *Манастирот Слепче кај Прилеп*, Прилеп 2001, 45-49 (with earlier literature).

¹⁶ Симић-Лазар, *Каленић*, 131-132.

¹⁷ For the position of the hands, see: Н. Maguire, *The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 31 (Washington, DC 1977), 154-155, n. 173; Н. Belting, *op.cit.*, 6.



Fig. 6 St. Sava and St. Blaise, north wall, altar space. Photo: Jehona Spahiu Janchevska

Сл. 6 Свети Сава и Свети Власије, северни зид, олтарски простор. Фото: Јехона Спахиу Јанчевска

In the first zone of the southern wall of the altar space, standing representations of hierarchs were originally depicted, as suggested by the few surviving fragments. Within the frieze of bust-length figures in medallions, only the upper portions of three hierarchs are preserved, while their inscriptions are now illegible. Beyond extensive surface deterioration, the legibility of the inscriptions is further obscured by later interventions, notably the installation of electrical wiring.

On the north wall of the altar, the first register probably featured the *Vision of St. Peter of Alexandria*. Above it, the frieze includes two half-length figures of hierarchs within medallions—St. Sava and St. Blaise (fig. 6). The Serbian saint Sava is portrayed with short brown hair, a tonsure and a broad beard.¹⁸ St. Blaise is shown as a curly-haired elder with a pointed beard, in accordance with his description in the ‘Painter’s manual’ of Dionysius of Fournas.¹⁹ Both holy fathers hold closed books in their veiled hands. Comparable half-length images of these two hierarchs, placed in the same position, appear in the churches of St. Athanasius in Kovač,²⁰ and St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec,²¹ suggesting a shared iconographic model and consistent placement. Immediately beside them is the bust-length figure of the deacon St. Romanos the Melodist, identifiable by his characteristic physiognomy with short brown hair and a rounded beard, accompanied by a legible inscription.

¹⁸ For the developmental phases of the iconography of St. Sava of Serbia, see Д. Војводић, *Путеви и фазе уобличавања средњовековне иконографије светог Саве Српског*, Ниш и Византија XIII, ур. М. Ракоција, (Ниш 2015): 49-73.

¹⁹ М. Медих, *Стари сликарски приручници III, Ерминија о сликарским вештинама Дионисија из Фурне*, Београд 2005, 396-397.

²⁰ Митревски, *Свети Атанасиј во Ковач*, 315, сх. 3.

²¹ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 69.



Fig. 7 Ascension with the Mother of God and the Holy Mandylion, east wall, altar space. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 7 Вазнесење Христово са Богородицом и Светим Убрусом, источни зид, олтарски простор. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



Fig. 8 Three representations, apex of the vault. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 8 Три представе, врх свода. Фото: Мишко Тутковски

The *Annunciation* is depicted on either side of the apse conch. On the northern side, the Archangel Gabriel is preserved, while the representation of the Holy Mother of God is almost entirely destroyed. By contrast, in the church at Oreovec, the same event is rendered as a single scene on the flat surface of the diaconicon.²²

Above the conch, on the eastern wall, the *Ascension* is illustrated (fig. 7). Christ, shown in a double gesture of blessing, is seated on a rainbow within a mandorla carried by two angels.²³ Flanking the conch are seven apostles on the left and eight on the right, a representation that does not align with the Gospel accounts of Mark (16:19) and Luke (24:50-52), which mention the presence

²² *Ibid*, 69-71; Eadem, “*Blessed Art Thou Among Women*”: *The Annunciation as a Single Scene Within the Great Feasts*, ΡΗΤΟΡΙΣΣΑ. Изследвания в чест на проф. Бисерка Пенкова Институт за изследване на изкуствата, ред. А. Тотоманова, (София 2026), 87, 89, ill. 8с.

²³ The textual foundation of the event, which constitutes the principal source for the illustration of the scene, is found in Acts of the Apostles 1:4–11 (П. Симић, *Фреска Вазнесења Христовог у Бијелом Пољу и њена литургијска подлога*, Зограф 6, ур. В. Ђурић, (Београд 1975), 21-24).



Fig. 9 Christ Emmanuel, west part of the vault. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 9 Христос Емануил, западни део свода. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



Fig. 10 Half-length figures of prophets, base of the vault. Photo: Jehona Spahiu Janchevska

Сл. 10 Допојасне представе пророка, подножје свода. Фото: Јехона Спахиу Јанчевска

of only eleven apostles at the Ascension.²⁴ An angel is also included on the southern side of the scene,²⁵ and on the northern side stands the Holy Mother of God, depicted as a witness to the event. Although her presence is not mentioned in the New Testament sources, it holds symbolic significance, representing the Church of Christ remaining on Earth.²⁶ Also noteworthy within the Ascension

²⁴ М. Марковић, *Циклус Великих празника*, Зидно сликарство манастира Дечана: грађа и студије, ур. В. Ђурић, (Београд 1995), 118.

²⁵ The angel is pointed out by: Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 71-72.

²⁶ Б.Тодић, *Најстарије зидно сликарство у Св. Апостолима у Пећи*, *Зборник за ликовне уметности* 18, ур. Д. Медаковић, (Нови Сад 1982), 33-34.

Fig. 11 Nativity of Christ, south wall, altar space. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 11 Рођење Христово, јужни зид, олтарски простор. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



scene is the inclusion of the *Holy Mandyllion*, an element frequently found in post-Byzantine churches when placed in the altar space.²⁷ Its presence here underscores the idea of the Incarnation, while its integration into the Ascension scene symbolizes Christ's bequest of the Mandyllion to his followers as testament of his presence on earth and divine-human nature.²⁸

At the apex of the vault, three representations are depicted, although they have suffered considerable damage (fig. 8). On the eastern side, the half-length figure of the Ancient of Days was once shown, while Christ Pantocrator most likely occupied the central position, as suggested by the surviving fragments. The best-preserved image is located on the western half of the vault and, based on the visible features and the remaining letters of the accompanying inscription, can be identified as Christ Emmanuel (fig. 9).²⁹

At the base of the vault, half-length figures of prophets holding inscribed scrolls were originally presented (fig. 10). The figures on the south side of the vault are now completely destroyed. Those on the northern side are preserved to a slightly greater extent; however, their identifying inscriptions and the texts on the open scrolls are largely illegible. Despite this condition, several figures may be tentatively identified, including the Prophet Zechariah the Elder, Prophet Moses, and King Solomon. Particularly recognizable among them is the Prophet Noah, depicted holding the Ark, as well as a half-length representa-

²⁷ More on the *Holy Mandyllion*, its significance, location, and particularly its connection with the *Ascension of Christ*, see: J. Спахиу Јанчевска, *Црквата Свети Никола во Топличкиот манастир*, Скопје 2021, 65, 88-89 (with examples and literature).

²⁸ С. Пејић, *Мандилион у послевизантијској уметности*, Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности 34-35, ур. Д. Медаковић, (Нови Сад 2003), 84, 87.

²⁹ The image in Trebino is identified by: Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на забравот*, 74.



Fig. 12
Presentation of
Christ in the
Temple, south
wall, nave. Photo:
Jehona Spahiu
Janchevska

Сл. 12 Сретење
Господње, јужни
зид, наос. Фото:
Јехона Спахиу
Јанчевска



Fig. 13 Baptism
of Christ, south
wall, nave. Photo:
Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 13 Крштење
Христово,
јужни зид, наос.
Фото: Мишко
Тутковски

tion of St. John the Forerunner.³⁰ A comparable selection of prophets, accompanied by analogous textual references, is found in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.³¹

The scenes from the Great Feasts cycle extend across the upper zone of the altar space and the nave. They are rendered in a traditional and widely established iconographic manner, yet they also display certain distinctive features, and subtle iconographic peculiarities. On the south wall, the first scene is the *Nativity of Christ*, presented in accordance with the fully developed and long-established iconographic model that incorporates all the recognizable elements

³⁰ Prophet Noah and Prophet Moses in Trebino were identified by: Ibid., 75, n. 75.

³¹ Ibid., 74-75.

and narrative episodes (fig. 11). At the center of the composition is the semi-reclining figure of the Virgin Mary, turned toward the manger in which the swaddled Christ Child lies, with the ox and the donkey nearby. Although the upper part of the scene suffered the most damage, perhaps one angel announces the news of Christ's birth to a young shepherd (Luke 2:9-12), while another greets the three Magi bringing their gifts. In the foreground, the bathing of the Infant Christ is shown, and in the right corner is the contemplative figure of Joseph, engaged in conversation with a shepherd (Psalms 71:11; Matthew 2:11).³²

The scene is followed by the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, composed symmetrically with the protagonists arranged around the central baldachin, which enhances the balance and solemn character of the event (fig. 12).³³ On the left side stands the Holy Mother of God, followed by Joseph, who carries two doves in his veiled hands. The Christ Child is in the arms of Simeon the God-receiver on the opposite side. Behind him stands the Prophetess Anna, holding an open scroll in her left hand, inscribed with the words concerning the predestined role of the Infant "to be the Creator of heaven and earth".³⁴ This iconographic formulation, including the text on the Prophetess Anna's scroll, recurs in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.³⁵

In *the Baptism of Christ*, Christ occupies the central position, standing on a pedestal from which serpent-like creatures emerge (Psalms 73(74):13).³⁶ On the left riverbank, St. John the Forerunner steps forward, extending his right hand to baptize Christ, while on the opposite bank a group of angels stands with veiled hands (fig. 13). Notably, the dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit is absent, as are the personifications of the Jordan River and the Sea within the water.³⁷ The scene is supplemented by the inclusion of the tree and the axe, visual references to the metaphor found in Matthew 3:10 and Luke 3:9.

³² Ibid., 75, n. 76.

³³ On the iconography of the scene and its evolution, including its spatial configuration and arrangement of figures, the variants in which Christ is held either by the Holy Mother of God or by Simeon the God-receiver, as well as the prophetic gesture of Anna, cf. D. C. Shorr, *The Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple*, *The Art Bulletin* 28:1, (1946), 17-32; G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, Vol. 1, New York 1971, 90-94; H. Maguire, op.cit., 261-269; I. Sinkevič, *Changes in the composition of the Presentation of Christ in the temple in Palaeologian times*, *Културно наследство* 28-29, J. Тричковска, Скопје 2004, 33-38.

³⁴ For the origin of the text in church poetry, cf. Марковић, *Циклус Великих празника*, 109. The text is also recommended in the 'Painter's manual' of Dionysius of Fourna: Медић, *Стари сликарски приручници III*, 261.

³⁵ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 77.

³⁶ This depiction is interpreted as a symbolic and allegorical triumph over evil. For a more detailed discussion of this motif, see: П. Костовска, *Симболичкото значење на претставата на Христовото крштење во црквата Свети Никола во Варош, кај Прилеп*, *Balkanoslavica* 26-27, Прилеп 1999-2000, 39-58; Eadem, *Програмата на живописот на црквата Св. Никола во Варош кај Прилеп и нејзината функција како гробна капела*, *Зборник за средновековна уметност на Музејот на Македонија* 3, ур. В. Поповска-Коробар, (Скопје 2001), 62-63.

³⁷ This has been noted by: Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 77.



Fig. 14 Raising of Lazarus, south wall, nave. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 14 Васкрсење Лазарево, јужни зид, наос. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



Fig. 15 Hospitality of Abraham, west wall, nave. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 15
Гостољубље Аврамово, западни зид, наос. Фото: Мишко Тутковски

The final scene on the south wall is the *Raising of Lazarus*. On the left, Christ approaches accompanied by the apostles and he blesses with his right hand (fig. 14). In front of him should be the sisters of Lazarus, of whom only one is partly preserved, while on the opposite side is the resurrected Lazarus in his sarcophagus. Beside the sarcophagus, one young man lifts the lid. The miraculous event unfolds in front of the gathered crowd at the gates of Bethany. An analogous compositional arrangement can be observed in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.³⁸

The upper semicircular surface of the west wall is occupied by the *Hospitality of Abraham* (fig. 15),³⁹ a scene that scholar Mesesnel mistakenly identified as the Last Supper,⁴⁰ likely due to the similar appearance of the table and the arrangement of the figures, an ambiguity that itself reflects the profound

³⁸ Spahiu Janchevska, loc.cit.

³⁹ The correct composition was identified by Ibid., 79.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ф. Месеснел, op.cit., 175.

Eucharistic connotations inherent in the subject.⁴¹ The composition illustrates the Old Testament episode described in *Genesis* 18:1–16, wherein the patriarch Abraham receives the three divine visitors at his dwelling by the oak(s) of Mamre, an event long interpreted in Christian exegesis as a theophanic revelation of the triune God.⁴² At the center of the scene, seated at an oval table, is the angel hieratically emphasized through frontal presentation, dominant scale, and a cruciform halo inscribed with the letters O ω N, a Christological marker that identifies him with the divine hypostasis of God and underscores the theophanic and revelatory character of the event.⁴³ To his left stands Abraham, offering a dish, while Sarah is positioned to his right, holding a vessel, both shown in reduced scale. The two remaining angels are arranged symmetrically on either side of the table, completing the composition.⁴⁴

As one of the most theologically charged subjects of Christian art, the *Hospitality of Abraham* functions as a visual articulation of the doctrine of the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity, in which the Old Testament narrative is transformed into a dogmatic image of Trinitarian unity.⁴⁵ At the same time, the scene bears a pronounced liturgical dimension, as it prefigures the Eucharist and anticipates Christ's sacrificial offering. In this way establishes a typological link between the Old Testament theophany and the New Testament mystery, a reading particularly emphasized in contexts where the scene engages broader eschatological or programmatic concerns.⁴⁶

The narrative continues on the north wall with the scenes of *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (fig. 16). Christ, riding on a white donkey, approaches the city gate, followed by the apostles. At the head of the apostolic group stands Peter, who gestures with his raised left hand. To the right rise the walls of Jerusalem,

⁴¹ M. Alpatov, *La Trinité dans l'art byzantine l'icone de Roublev*, Études comparatives, Échos d'Orient 26, (1927), 150–186; L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, II/1, Paris 1956, 134–137; V. Lasareff, *La Trinité d'André Rublov*, Gazette des Beaux-Arts 54, (1959), 282–300; Z. Kádár, A propos des représentations de la Philoxénie d'Abraham sur les mosaïques des Ve–VIe siècles, Зограф 6, ур. В. Ђурић, (Београд 1975), 5–7.

⁴² S. Kalopisi Verti, *Die Kirche der Hagia Triada bei Kranidi in der Argolis (1244)*, Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 20, München 1975, 165–181; И. Салтыков, *Иконография „Троицы“ Андрея Рублева*, Древнорусское искусство XIV–XV вв., ред. О.И. Подобедова, (Москва 1984), 80; Г. Смиљка, *Циклус арханђела у византијској уметности*, Београд 1991, 62–65.

⁴³ Е. Димитрова, *Манастир Матејче*, Скопје 2002, 110–112.

⁴⁴ Н.В. Малицки, *Къ исторји композицији ветхозавѣтної Троицы*, Seminarium Kondakovianum II, (Prague 1928), 35–36.

⁴⁵ M. Altripp, *Die Rezeption trinitarisch interpretierter Texte des Alten Testamentes in der byzantinischen Kunst*, Зборник радова Византолошког института 53, ур. Љ. Максимовић, Б. Крсмановић, (Београд 2022), 251–265. For a detailed discussion of the scene, its sources, theological interpretation, iconographic features, function, continuity and change, examples, and the extensive scholarly literature, see: М. Куюмџиева, *Ликът на Бога. Изображенията на Света Троица в православно искусство*, София 2020, 159–1911.

⁴⁶ А. Гавриловић, *Прилог проучавању сцене „Гостољубља Аврамовог” у источнохришћанској уметности–програмско-симболички аспект сцене*, Етноантрополошки проблеми н. с. год. 19, св. 2, ур. Д. Антонијевић, (Београд 2024), 599–613.



Fig. 16 Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, north wall, nave. Photo: National Conservation Centre – Skopje

Сл. 16 Улазак Христов у Јерусалим, северни зид, наос. Фото: Национални конзерваторски центар – Скопље

forming a square, within which the crowd awaits Christ's arrival. The scene is further enriched by the presence of children, one of which offers food to the donkey, while another spreads his garment beneath its feet. In the crown of the palm tree stands a child cutting branches with a small axe, as yet another ascends the trunk. An identical scene can be found in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.⁴⁷

The next scene is *the Crucifixion of Christ*. To the left stands the Holy Mother of God, accompanied by four women, while on the right side is the apostle John, behind whom stands the centurion Longinus, his gaze directed toward Christ and his right hand raised in testimony (fig. 17). In the upper portion of the composition, flanking the Cross, are the personifications of the Sun and the Moon. The background is defined by partition walls from which defensive towers rise.

Immediately following it is the scene of the *Myrrh-bearing Women at the Tomb* (fig. 18). At the center of the composition is the sarcophagus, upon which only the linen cloth remains, the very shroud in which Christ had been wrapped according to ancient Jewish custom. Seated on the marble lid is an angel clad in white, holding a scepter in his left hand and directing his right hand toward the empty tomb. Beside the grave stands another angel, pointing to the place where the Lord had lain. From the left, six haloed Myrrh-bearing Women approach in a pyramidal arrangement: three figures occupy the foreground, while the remaining three are suggested solely by their halos. In front of the tomb rests a group of sleeping soldiers, slumped over their shields and spears. A closely related compositional scheme is found in the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 79.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79, n. 85.

Fig. 17 Crucifixion of Christ, north wall, nave. Photo: Jehona Spahiu Janchevska

Сл. 17 Распеће Христово, северни зид, наос. Фото: Јехона Спахиу Јанчевска



In Eastern Christian iconography, the scene of the *Myrrh-bearing Women at the Tomb* signifies the Resurrection of Christ and conveys the same theological meaning as the *Harrowing of Hell*,⁴⁹ thereby forming part of the Eothina (Resurrectional) Gospel cycles.⁵⁰ In the post-Byzantine period, the scene is enriched with an additional angelic figure,⁵¹ following the Gospel accounts of Luke (24:4) and John (20:12–13). Another variable element is the number of represented myrrh-bearers. Although Matthew (28:1) and Mark (16:1) mention two and three women respectively, in our case six women are shown.⁵² The Mother of God may also appear among them, a presence contrary to the Gospel tradition, but emphasized by St. John Chrysostom, and later by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos and Gregory Palamas.⁵³ Their writings, particularly those of the

⁴⁹ Н. В. Покровский, *Евангелие въ памятникахъ иконографіи*, С. Петербургъ 1892, 392-398.

⁵⁰ More extensively on the Resurrectional Gospels: С. Петковић, *Манастир Света Тројца код Пљеваља*, Београд 1974, 59-60; N. Zarras, *The Iconographical Cycle of the Eothina Gospel Pericopes in Churches from Reign of King Milutin*, Зограф 31, ур. Г. Суботић, (Београд 2006-2007), 95-112 (with literature).

⁵¹ Cf. А. Серафимова, *Кучевшики манастир Свети Архангели*, Скопје 2005, 69 (with examples).

⁵² According to the *First Jerusalem Manuscript* (1566) and the Book of Priest Danilo, also known as the *Second Jerusalem Manuscript* (1674), the names of the seven Myrrh-bearers are known: Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Mary and Martha, Mary of Cleopas, and Susanna (or Sosanna/Suzanna), see: М. Медић, *Стари сликарски приручници II*, Београд 2005, 384-385. All seven Myrrh-bearers are likewise listed by name in the 'Painter's manual' of Dionysius of Fourna: Idem, *Стари сликарски приручници III*, 431.

⁵³ Zarras N., *La tradition de la présence de la Vierge dans les scènes du "Lithos" et du "Chairete" et son influence sur l'iconographie tardobyzantine*, Зограф 28, ур. И. М. Ђорђевић, (Београд 2000-2001), 113-115.



Fig. 18 Myrrh-bearing Women at the Tomb, north wall, nave. Photo: Mishko Tutkovski

Сл. 18 Мироносице на Христовом гробу, северни зид, наос. Фото: Мишко Тутковски



Fig. 19 Harrowing of Hell north wall, nave. Photo: Jehona Spahiu Janchevska

Сл. 19 Силазак у Ад, северни зид, наос. Фото: Јехона Спахиу Јанчевска

latter two, exerted a strong influence on the Palaiologan era painting.⁵⁴ Under the impact of Palaiologan art, the inclusion of the Holy Mother of God among the myrrh-bearers persisted throughout the post-Byzantine period.⁵⁵

In *The Harrowing of Hell*, Christ is depicted clad in white chiton and himation, standing above the shattered gates of Hades (fig. 19). In his left hand

⁵⁴ The inclusion of the Mother of God among the *Myrrh-bearing Women at the Tomb*, as well as in the scene of the *Appearance to the Myrrh-bearers*, is interpreted as a visual expression of the exceptional veneration accorded to her during the fourteenth century, cf. *Ibid.*, 115-119.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 119-120 (with examples).

he holds a cross, while with his right hand he pulls the forefather Adam out of the sarcophagus. Behind Adam, on the left, rises a group of Old Testament kings and prophets, with King David and King Solomon positioned in the foreground. On the right, Eve stands in the sarcophagus, with her veiled hands raised in a gesture of prayer, followed by the ranks of the righteous led by St. John the Forerunner. Beneath the broken gates of Hades is the ruler of the underworld, Beelzebub bound in chains.

The cycle ends with the *Dormition of the Mother of God*, depicted in its traditional placement in the second register of the west wall (fig. 20). Christ is represented holding a swaddled infant in his arms, symbolizing the pure and righteous soul of his mother. The composition further includes two angels, two hierarchs holding Gospels, the assembled groups of apostles, and the episode featuring the Archangel Michael confronting the heretic Jephonias in front of the bier.

Beneath the scenes of the Festal Cycle is the zone featuring half-length saintly figures enclosed within medallions, now severely damaged and largely unrecognizable. The southern wall most likely featured Saints Nestor and Procopius, along with another, for the moment unidentified saint with white hair and a pointed beard. Subsequently, three holy women are also depicted, the first one in maroon dress, the second one is a crowned female saint, and the third one is identifiable as Saint Thecla. On the north wall, a female saint wearing a white veil is presented, followed by another crowned figure, possibly St. Barbara. Next to them is St. Julitta, turned toward her son, St. Cyricus. Further along are the Holy Unmercenaries Cosmas, Damian, and Panteleimon, recognizable by the tweezers and medicine boxes they hold. At the end of the sequence, another half-length figure is represented, probably a monastic saint. By comparison with the Church of St. Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec, a similar selection of saints appears to have been adopted in Trebino as well, albeit with a slightly modified arrangement.⁵⁶

Beneath this zone, in the first register, are full-length standing figures of saints, now heavily damaged. On the south wall, next to the iconostasis, if one originally existed, it is likely that St. Nicholas was depicted, possibly occupying the position typically reserved for the church's patron saint. As a protector and a wonderworker, St. Nicholas holds an eminent place in the celestial hierarchy, immediately after Christ and the Holy Mother of God, and was widely venerated as a swift intercessor and rescuer in times of trouble and misfortune. During this period, his cult enjoyed exceptional esteem, and numerous churches were dedicated to him.⁵⁷ St. Nicholas is frequently represented either alongside the patron saint or in place of the patron,⁵⁸ which appears to be the case here, as well as in the related churches of St. Archangel Michael in Benče,⁵⁹ and St.

⁵⁶ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 81.

⁵⁷ М. Пурковић, *Светитељски култови у старој српској држави према према храмовном посвећивању*, Богословље XIV/2, ур. Д. Стефановић, (Београд 1939), 166-168; С. Петковић, *Зидно сликарство на подручју Пећке патријаршије (1557-1614)*, Нови Сад 1965, 68.

⁵⁸ С. Петковић, *op.cit.*, 68.

⁵⁹ Митревски, *Свети Архангел Михаил*, 191



Fig. 20
Dormition of
the Mother
of God, west
wall, nave.
Photo: Mishko
Tutkovski

Сл. 20 Успење
Пресвете
Богородице,
западни ѕид,
наос. Фото:
Мишко
Тутковски

Archangel Gabriel in Oreovec.⁶⁰ The procession of saints on the southern wall has been entirely lost, while on the southern half of the western wall Saints Paraskeva and St. Kyriaki are depicted. On the northern half of the western wall are Saints Constantine and Helena, shown with the True Cross between them. On the northern wall, on the basis of the surviving fragments, the depiction appears to have included warrior saints dressed in patrician attire.

The wall paintings in the Church of Saint Demetrius in Trebino exhibit many of the stylistic and iconographic characteristics typical of ecclesiastical art from the first half of the 17th century, particularly those found in the churches of the Poreče region. According to the stylistic characteristics and the consistency of the painterly expression, we believe that the wall paintings in Trebino were executed by a single principal master, whose identity remains unknown. His artistic language is defined by a certain degree of schematization, with elongated, slender and proportionately balanced figures, conveying an overall sense of harmony. In the treatment of facial features, a certain routine is evident, as the same physiognomies recur frequently, typically with large eyes and pronounced dark pupils, although lacking in expressive depth. Nevertheless, the painter attempted to introduce subtle variation through selective alterations in physiognomic features. The drawing functions primarily to outline and define contours. The chromatic range is limited, consisting of a narrow spectrum of tones dominated by brown, ochre, terracotta, red, olive green, and grey. Subtle movements of the figures are suggested through variations in the positioning of heads, posture of the bodies, and limbs. The painter appears to have pursued a restrained and balanced arrangement of figures, contributing to the overall symmetry and compositional harmony. The individual depictions and scenes are characterized by their simplicity, with a reduced number of figures and a deliberate avoidance of excessive detail or ornamentation.

⁶⁰ Спахиу Јанчевска, *Под превезот на заборавот*, 82.

Based on the existing documentation and our own observations, only basic preventive measures have been undertaken to date at the Church of Saint Demetrius in Trebino by the competent institution responsible for the protection of this immovable cultural heritage. This is evident from the remnants of gauze strips, once applied to the wall paintings as a temporary protective measure. The current condition to a great extent is a consequence of multiple compounding factors: the structural instability and displacement of the stone roof slabs, combined with persistent atmospheric water infiltration. Further damage has been inflicted by unprofessional interventions carried out in the absence of qualified supervision and in contravention of established conservation principles and standards. Equally detrimental has been the absence of timely and systematic protective actions, which has left the monument increasingly vulnerable to progressive decay.

Among the main types of damage observed include widespread pulverization of the paint layer in areas affected by accumulated grime, particularly in the upper zones. This reflects a weakened layer, with pigment lost as dust. Flaking and detachment of the paint surface, often in the form of scales, are also present. Cracks are visible in both the preparatory and pictorial plaster layers, with several areas showing separation between them, primarily due to moisture or water infiltration. Extensive surface contamination (as dirt) and high salt concentrations affect large sections of the wall paintings. Structural damage is evident as well, including deterioration of both base and pictorial plasters. Additionally, the horizontal tie beams have completely rotted away, leaving only their openings. The primary cause of these various forms of degradation is the significant moisture penetration through the compromised roof structure.

The deterioration of the architectural structure and, in particular, the wall paintings of the Church of Saint Demetrius in Trebino poses a serious risk of further degradation and the potential irreversible loss of original architectural and pictorial elements, along with the historical and artistic values inherent in this immovable cultural heritage. In light of this, the implementation and undertaking of urgent conservation measures is imperative, not only to prevent additional damage, but also to protect the monument from unregulated or unqualified interventions. Furthermore, thorough conservation and restoration would enable a more accurate and complete identification of the depicted saintly figures.

Given the church's current condition and the urgent need for immediate protective action, it is essential that the National Conservation Centre – Skopje prioritizes its inclusion in the forthcoming annual funding programs administered by the Macedonian Ministry of Culture and Tourism. At the same time, supplementary funding sources would also be greatly welcomed. Securing financial resources through these mechanisms is crucial for carrying out the necessary conservation and restoration activities.

Accordingly, the most appropriate procedures and measures would include the following:

Conservation research: Undertaking of thorough conservation research as a preparatory phase for the development of comprehensive conservation and

restoration projects, encompassing both the architectural structure and the wall paintings. The projects should define the principal guidelines and propose specific measures for subsequent conservation and restoration interventions.

Conservation and restoration interventions: The execution of immediate protection, namely conservation and restoration work on both the architectural structure and on the wall paintings.

Preparation of a revaluation report: The preparation of a detailed revaluation report (elaborate) for the Church of Saint Demetrius in Trebino, with the objective of formalizing its designation as cultural heritage. This report should determine the appropriate classification of its significance and propose a corresponding protection regime, in accordance with the current Macedonian Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage or the forthcoming legislation presently in development.

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ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ ЗИДНОГ СЛИКАРСТВА ЦРКВЕ СВЕТОГ ДИМИТРИЈА
У ТРЕБИНУ: УМЕТНИЧКИ УВИДИ И КОНЗЕРВАТОРСКИ ИЗАЗОВИ

Црква Светог Димитрија у селу Требино, на подручју општине Македонски Брод, поуздано је датована у 1644. годину захваљујући делимично сачуваном ктиторском натпису. Њено зидно сликарство представља скромно, али значајно остварење поствизантијске црквене уметности у области Пореча и може се довести у везу са широм групом истовремених споменика сличних стилских и иконографских обележја.

Црква је једнобродна грађевина са полуобличастим сводом и двоводним кровом, која се на истоку завршава тространом апсидом. Олтарски простор рашчлањен је мањим нишама за проскомидију и ђаконикон, док се улаз налази на западној страни. Упркос једноставном архитектонском решењу, унутрашњост храма чува значајан део живописа.

Иако су зидне слике у великој мери оштећене и захваћене солима, сачувани делови јасно сведоче о иконографском програму типичном за прву половину XVII века. Живопис обухвата олтарски простор, свод и наос и следи утврђене композиционе принципе карактеристичне за мање поствизантијске храмове, уз извесне локалне особености. Изражене стилске, тематске и иконографске подударности са живописом цркве Светог Арханђела Гаврила у Ореовцу, датоване у другу четвртину XVII века, указују на делатност истог сликара или радионице у овом региону у кратком временском раздобљу. Ове везе доприносе бољем разумевању регионалних уметничких токова и сликарске продукције у посматраном периоду. Истовремено, рад указује на значај очувања овог споменика и наглашава потребу за његовом конзервацијом, рестаурацијом и дугорочном заштитом као важног дела културног наслеђа Пореча.