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THE PORTAL TO HEAVEN
Reaching the Gates of Immortality

During the Middle Ages, mysterious and frightening in their grandeur, filled with expressive spirituality and rich artistic creation, fresco arrangements of inestimable value and unique significance were produced in the territory of present-day Macedonia. In the painted cosmology of the Christian Dogma, expanded on the walls of medieval churches, the luxurious spectacles depict the birth and passion of Christ, the Savior, who dies and resurrects from the dead in order to fulfill his Messianic role and to establish the fundamentals of the Christian church, consolidated by the sacrifices and the glory of his followers and crowned by the devotion of the believers. Descended from the celestial heights of Heaven into the terrestrial world of eagerness and belief, the incarnated God and the great assembly of Christian saints became constituents of the painted programme of the temples, created as a visual oratorio in honor of the predestinated mission for salvation of humanity. Thus, in the context of the idea of structuring the church decoration as a painted replica of the Kingdom of God, the Byzantine temples were adorned with thoroughly elaborated programme of fresco decorations, the beauty of which will celebrate the names of their donors forever. Emperors or kings, noblemen or priests, they engaged themselves as producers of great artistic enterprises, thus leaving an eternal trail of their earthly existence, as well as of their social status, in the ever-changeable world of history. In the cold silence of the medieval temples, among the solemn figures of the Christian principles, their images survive as victorious refugees from the tragic passage of time. Depicted as representatives of the social hierarchy, as well as patrons of the great artistic ventures, within the thoroughly structured arrangements of the donors' compositions, they earned their respectable position in the highest-ranking spheres of the Christian oecumene.

According to the structure of the donors' scenes preserved in the fresco ensembles in the territory of Macedonia dating from the 14th century¹, the time when this part of the painted programme of the churches became visually de-

¹ З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *Кийшиорскиот портрет во сугнојто сликарство во Македонија*, Цивилизациите на почвата на Македонија. Прилози за истражувањето на историјата на културата на почвата на Македонија, кн. 2, Скопје 1995, 214-217

defined in relation to its role for promotion of the political concept and state ideology, we can determine a certain typology of the compositions and specify the conceptual background of their iconographic arrangement. In that regard, the basic disposition of the structural elements in configuration of the donors' scenes, suggests two types of compositions: a horizontal set-up of characters, and a vertical layout of a two-zonal ordering of the figures. On the other hand, the iconographic context, which refers to the specific organization of the structural components of the scenes, implies several different types of representations in accordance to the ideological significance of the depicted arrangement, among which we can acknowledge the following: pictures of the governmental concord, visions of the divine power, and political metaphors. The interrelation of the both mentioned criteria in analysis of the structural concept of the donors' scenes can lead us to certain conclusions about the interdependence of their configuration upon the chronological factor and the historical role of the commissioners, as well as upon the designated location of the composition within the spatial organization of the painted programme.

Thence, the khetorial arrangements, depicted in the foundations commissioned by the ruling dynasty, belong to two sub-types: the basic sub-type or the picture of the donor/donors with the patron saint (Saint George in Staro Nagoričino, southern façade of Saint Demetrius in Marko's monastery) and the up-graded sub-type, in which the donor/donors are included within the Deisis conception (Holy Mother of God at Matejče), or within the iconography of the Celestial Court (interior of Saint Demetrius in Marko's monastery). The khetorial arrangements depicted in the foundations commissioned by the members of the nobility also belong to two sub-types: the first one is the vertical sub-type of a two-zonal disposition (Saint George in Pološko, narthex of Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo), while the second one is the horizontal sub-type: of a basic character or the picture of the donor/donors with the sovereign of the state (Holy Mother of God in Kučeviste, Saint Nicholas in Psača) and of a simplified character or the picture of the donor and the patron saint (naos of Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo).

If we follow the chronological principle, which represents a solid and almost undisputable basis in the analysis of the two main features of the subject in question - shape and content, due to the unavoidable reflection of the historical circumstances in the iconographic structure and ideological significance of the donors' scenes, we can acknowledge the traditional elements in construction of the pictures, but we also may come across certain components that seem not only less traditional, but can be indicative of the specific meaning of the khetorial arrangement. In that regard, the interactive relationship of the donor with the patron saint in the narthex of the church of *Saint George in Staro Nagoričino* (1316-1318)² is based on the mutual exchange of symbolic gifts between the

² С. Радојчић, *Портрети српских владара у средњем веку*, Скопље 1934, 37-38; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Три догађаја у српској држави XIV века и њихов одјек у сликарству*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 4, Нови Сад 1968, 68-76; Т. Velmans, *Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues*, Art et société à Byzance sous les Paléologues, Venise 1971, 112-113; Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, 118-122; idem, *Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина*, Београд 1998, 55-56

commissioner and his divine benefactor (*Figure 1*). On the northern wall of the narthex, accompanied by Emperor Constantine together with his mother, Empress Helena, the representation of whom appears as an iconographic emblem of the apostolic patronage of the imperial throne, the royal couple proudly present the replica of their khetorial enterprise in hope to win God's mercy through the mediator saint. Contrary to the traditionally passivized posture of Queen Simonida, who participates in the khetorial protocol only by the gesture of her hand, King Milutin and St. George are actively involved in the symbolic interchange of prestigious beneficences. In this "give- and-receive" structured communication of the two main actors in the donors' scene, the Serbian king offers his endowment to Saint

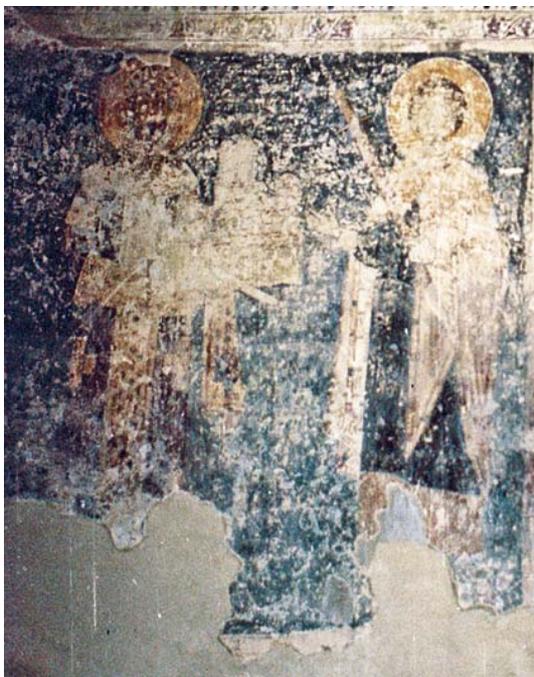


Fig. 1 St. George - Staro Nagoričino (1316-1318) Photo D. Nikolovski

Сл. 1. Св. Ђорђе - Старо Нагоричино (1316-1318). Фотографија Д. Николовски

George, while obtaining the material evidence of the saints' blessing in a form of a sword, as a gift for his victorious venture in the historical event, mentioned in the donor's inscription. Although presenting a weapon to the Serbian ruler as an emblem of the divine character of his conquest, Saint George is not dressed in military attire, but in martyrial costume, which stresses his role as a consolidator of the Christian faith, that bestows eternal life to the generous believers.

Within the concept of the khetorial arrangement in the narthex of the church of the *Holy Mother of God in Kučeviste* (1332-1337),³ due to the limited spatial dimensions of the western part of the church, the donors' scene is depicted on the lateral walls, thus dividing the horizontal row of figures in two parts. The first section of the donors' composition that has been devastated by fire long ago, encompasses the scarcely visible figure of the Virgin with a child represented as a patron saint, next to which the image of the "devout" Marena holds a partially preserved model of the family endowment together with the

³ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Сликарство XIV века у цркви Св. Спаса у Кучевинију*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 17, Нови Сад 1981, 82-84; З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *О кћинијорским портретима у цркви Св. Божородице у Кучевинију*, Зограф 16, Београд 1985, 41-53; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле*, Београд 1994, 115-116, 135

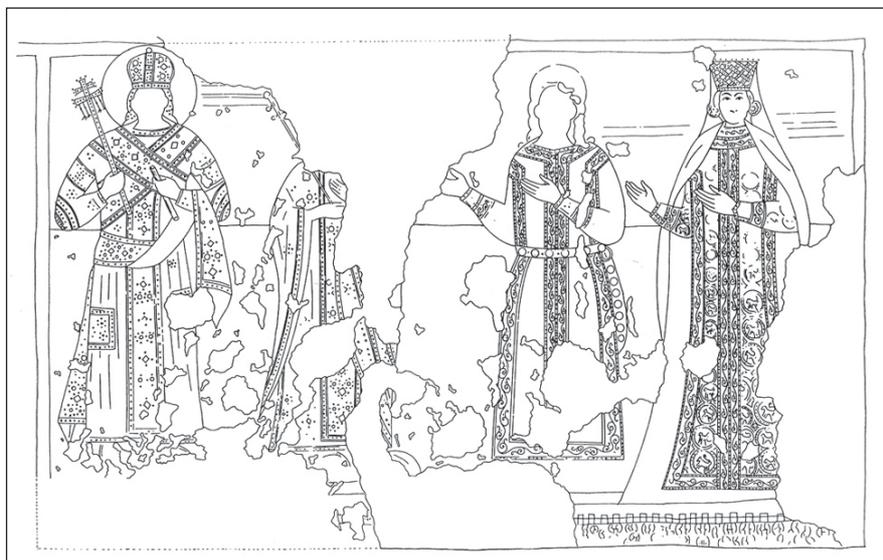


Fig. 2 Holy Mother of God - Kučevište (1332-1337) Drawing according to I. Đorđević

Сл. 2. Св. Богородица - Кучевиште (1332-1337.). Цртеж према И. Ђорђевићу

lost character of the co-donor, located in the space where the decoration is completely destroyed, while the portrait of the young Jovan, son of the ducal couple depicted on the opposite side, is placed as a last figure in the western part of the northern wall. The southern wall of the narthex displays the images of King Dušan and Queen Jelena, escorted by the elegant figure of Duchess Vladislava and her husband, Duke Dejan, whose identity is precisely confirmed by the preserved inscriptions, both depicted in protocolar stances in relation to the royalty (*Figure 2*). Although heavily damaged, we can notice that the ducal pair, depicted on the southern wall, introduces the ruling couple to the patron saint, represented on the opposite side. The reason for the specific division of the members of the donors' composition, in the configuration of which, Marena, as the first mentioned character in the inscription from the naos, and presumably Radoslav, as the second mentioned, are located on the northern wall next to the patron saint, while Duke Dejan and Duchess Vladislava accompany the ruling couple on the southern wall, can be ambiguous. Namely, either the higher social status of the ducal pair provided them with a privileged position next to the sovereign of the state, or Duke Dejan, after marrying Vladislava, commissioned the fresco painting in the narthex, thus completing the khetorial act of the persons who took care of the painted decoration in the naos.

The new concept of structuring the donors' scene in a vertical axis according to the principle of symbolic cascade of privileges, appeared in the church of *Saint George in Pološko* (1343-1345),⁴ where the matrix of the divine investiture reflects the victorious ventures of King Dušan in the conquest of the Byzantine

⁴ Ц. Грозданов - Д. Ђорнаков, *Историјски портрети у Полошком I*, Зограф 14, Београд 1983, 60-66; idem, *Историјски портрети у Полошком II*,

territories (*Figure 3*). Within the thoroughly elaborated iconographic conception of the two-zonal disposition in the depiction of the khetorial ensemble, the idea of the hierarchic structure of the characters caused the elevation of the members of the royal family in the upper level of the composition, above the figures of the donors represented in the lower register, sideways of the church entrance. The monumental image of King Dušan, who receives a sword in token of his prosperous military campaign towards the south, is counterpoised by the figures of the young King Uroš dressed in an identical attire and represented in the same posture as his father, as well as by Queen Jelena, blessed by an angel descending from the skies. The proportional arrangement of the donors' figures in the lower zone, which corresponds to the disposition of the royalty in the upper section of the composition, accentuates the images of the two commissioners of the church, although the model of the edifice is carried by Despotess Marena, due to her efforts to complete the khetorial act of her late son. The appearance of nimbi in the depiction of the donors, represented in the lower zone as feudal subjects of the ruling dynasty can be ascribed to the kin relationship of the commissioners to the royal family, in the symbolic scale of authority, which slopes from the image of Christ through the sovereigns, down to the khetorial characters. On the other hand, the impact of the actual political progress from about 1345 on the iconographic context of the representation, can be noticed in the symbolic gesture of Christ, who blesses the crowns of King Dušan and his successor, within the delicately structured metaphoric divination of the forthcoming outgrowing of the Serbian Kingdom into an Empire.

Somewhat different iconographic concept, which was result of the specific political and ideological connotation of the representation, was employed for the same purpose in the donor's scene depicted on the southern façade of the

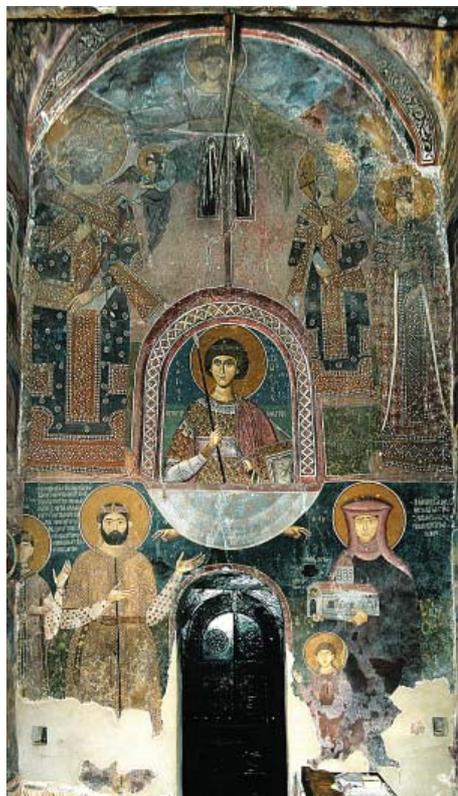


Fig. 3 St. George - Pološko (1343-1345) Photo V. Kiprijanovski

Сл. 3. Св. Ђорђе - Полошко (1343-1345).
Фотографија В. Кипријановски

Зограф 15, Београд 1984, 85-93; idem, *Историјски њорџреџи у Полошком Ш*, Зограф 187, Београд 1987, 37-39; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске власћеле*, 119-121, 147-149

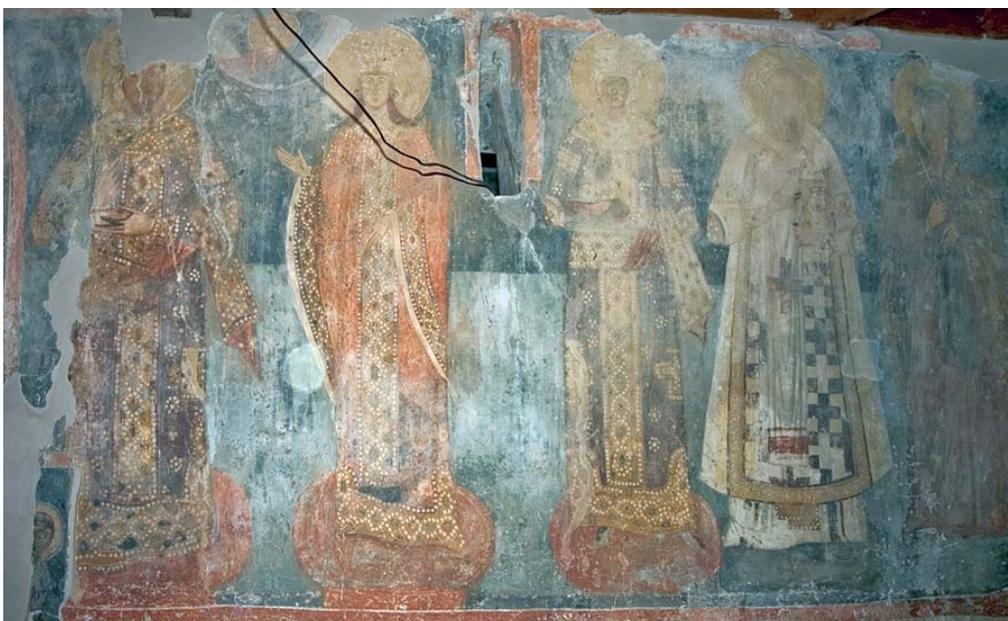


Fig. 4 St. Nicholas Bolnički (1345) Photo D. Nikolovski

Сл. 4. Св. Никола Болнички (1345). Фотографија Д. Николовски

church of *Saint Nicholas Bolnički*,⁵ commissioned by the Ohrid archbishop in approximately the same time as the one in Pološko (*Figure 4*). The royal triad, marked by a perfect balance of the stances and gestures, occupies the central position within the sagaciously conceived and carefully arranged row of figures, the symmetrical organization of which was intended to explicate the idea of harmonization of the current interrelations in the context of King Dušan's political attitude towards the Ohrid Archbishopric. The inclusion of the images of the Serbian princeps, St. Symeon Nemanja and St. Sava that already had a significant tradition of an iconographic manner designed to emphasize the solid unity of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities in the Serbian state,⁶ was employed not only to promote Dušan's political authority in the legal matters of the Episcopal throne,⁷ but also as a subtle mean of an imperial propaganda designated to signify the political advancement of the Nemanjid monarchy. In the same regard, the enlargement of Uroš's figure, as well as the equalization of the postures of both the king and his successor, were the features utilized as a metaphorical announcement of the promotion of the young king into a co-ruler as his father, King Dušan was ambitiously ascending to what was soon to become an imperial throne.

⁵ Ц. Грозданов, *Прилози познавању средњовековне уметности Охрида*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 2, Нови Сад 1966, 207-217; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Три догађаја у српској држави XIV века и њихов одјек у сликарству*, 76-87; Ц. Грозданов, *Охридскојто сивно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 1980, 54-59

⁶ Б. Тодић, *Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина*, 44-52

⁷ Ц. Грозданов, *Охридскојто сивно сликарство од XIV век*, 59



Fig. 5 St. Archangel Michael - Lesnovo (ca. 1343) Photo D. Nikolovski

Л. 5. Св. Арханђел Михајло - Лесново (око 1343). Фотографија Д. Николовски

In the context of the development of iconographic structure of the khetorial arrangements mentioned so far, the donor's scene in the naos of the church of *Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo*⁸ appears to be quite simplified (*Figure 5*). Dated in 1346/1347 according to the date when the commissioner could have obtained the title of sebastocrator from the Serbian tzar, the composition, encompassing only the images of the donor and the patron saint, deviates from the already established concept, in which the feudal subjects are represented in configuration with the sovereign of the state. The absence of the Serbian ruler from the picture is even more surprising if one has in mind the recent crowning of Dušan as an emperor in 1346, an act that was symbolically proclaimed within the iconographic structure of the donors' scenes, depicted prior to Lesnovo. The exclusion of Tzar Dušan's portrait from the khetorial arrangement on one hand and the historical evidence on the opportunistic acquaintance of the donor

⁸ N. L. Okunev, *Lesnovo, L'art byzantine chez les Slaves, Les Balkans*, Paris 1930, 234-235; С. Радојчић, *Старо српско сликарство*, Београд 1966, 144; T. Velmans, *Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues*, 124; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске власице*, 121-122, 154; С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1998, 112-118

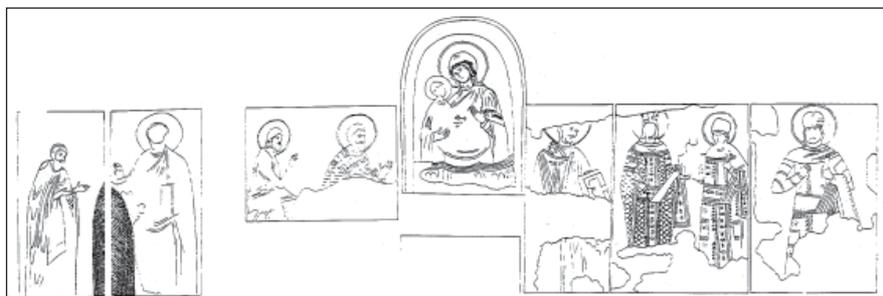


Fig. 7 Holy Mother of God - Matejče (1348-1352) Drawing according to E. Dimitrova

Сл. 7. Св. Богородица - Матејче (1348-1352.). Цртеж према Е. Димитровој

with the usurper of the Constantinopolitan throne, John Kantakuzenos in the time of his greatest political rise in 1343⁹ on the other, can point to the possible conclusion of the case, i. e. the probability of immediate interference of the Byzantine ruler in the promotion of Jovan Oliver into a high-ranking feudal lord. Still, whatever the reason was for such a decline from the already established concept of the donor's scenes in the highest nobility endowments, the khetertorial arrangement in the narthex of the church, painted in 1349,¹⁰ reveals the hierarchic subjection of the commissioner and his family to the divinely verified authority of the Serbian ruling dynasty (*Figure 6*). The impeccable proportionality in the disposition of the figures in regard to the vertical inter-relation of the characters depicted in the two-zonal iconographic structure of the composition is more than a casual indication of the political coherency, as well as of the legally established feudal privileges in the substantial social system of the Serbian Empire.

In the fresco ensemble of the church of the *Holy Mother of God at Matejče* (1348-1352),¹¹ the festal assembly of the principles of the Serbian state and the Patriarchate, encompassed by the donors' composition, reflects the imperial character of the endowment, whereat the enclosure of the khetertorial arrange-

⁹ С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, 30; Б. Тодић, *Највише уз Јована Оливера у наосу Леснова. Прилог хронологији лесновских фресака*, Зборник радова Византолошког института 38, Београд 1999/2000, 379-381

¹⁰ N. L. Okunev, *Lesnovo*, 245; С. Радојчић, *Портирети српских владара у средњем веку*, 55-56; idem, *Старо српско сликарство*, 147; T. Velmans, *Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues*, 95; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске власице*, 122-124, 159-160; С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, 167-172

¹¹ Н. Окуњев, *Грађа за историју српске уметности 2. Црква Свете Богородице - Мајечич*, Гласник Скопског Научног Друштва VII-VIII, Скопље 1930, 109; idem, *Портирети краљева-кнежеви у српској црковној живописи*, *Byzantinoslavica* II/1, Прага 1930, 90-91; С. Радојчић, *Портирети српских владара у средњем веку*, 59; Е. Димитрова, *Манастир Мајечиче*, Скопје 2002, 185-189; eadem, *On the new dating of the fresco ensemble of the church of the Holy Virgin in Matejče*, *Balkanoslavica* 30-31, Прилеп 2002, 95-103; eadem, *Кнежевска композиција и ново датовање живописа у цркви Свете Богородице у Мајечичу*, *Зограф* 29, Београд 2002-2003, 181-190



Fig. 8 St. Nicholas - Psača (1365-1371) Photo V. Kiprijanovski

Сл. 8. Св. Никола - Псача (1365-1371). Фотографија В. Кипријановски

ment by the Deisis scheme, reveals the funereal character in conception of the painted programme of the church (*Figure 7*). The slightly unconventional configuration of the ruling family within the donor's composition, which caused much confusion in the analyses of the elder scholars, is not due to its execution in the period of Uroš's reign, but is the result of his formal administration of the territory¹², where his mother, Empress Jelena decided to erect her colossal mausoleum. Therefore, the empress as a donor and her son as a governor of the region hold the model of the temple, while Emperor Dušan provides the scroll, as a supreme ruler of the continuously growing orthodox state. This type of a khetorial ensemble understandably implied the inclusion of the image of Patriarch Joanikije, as a head of the church institution, whose role is to enhance the notion of the unbreakable cohesion of political power and ecclesiastical rule within Serbian Empire. The depiction of his portrait next to the representation of the Virgin Hodegetria as a patron saint of the church is far from being accidental; as a person who crowned Dušan an emperor, he gestures towards the image of the patron recommending the khetors and their God-blessed imperial

¹² Љ. Максимовић, *Порески систем у ђрчким областима српског царства*, Зборник радова Византолошког института 17, Београд 1976, 102; М. Благојевић, *Идеја и стварност Душановог царевања*, Историја српског народа I, Београд 1981, 533-534; Н. Григора, *Византијски извори за историју народа Југославије VI*, Београд 1986, 271



Fig. 9 St. Nicholas - Psuća (1365-1371) Photo V. Kiprijanovski

Сл. 9. Св. Никола - Псача (1365-1371). Фотографија В. Кипријановски

throne. On the other hand, the figure of St. Stephen the Protomartyr, who was traditionally seen as a holy protector of the Serbian state and its rulers, confirms the holiness of the dynasty, strongly manifested in the well-established cohabitation of the imperial court and the Orthodox Church. Executed in the period of the greatest political and cultural rise of Dušan's monarchy, the khetorial arrangement in Matejče is the most representative example of the iconographic design for picturing the supreme concord of the Serbian Empire.



Fig. 10 St. Demetrius - Marko's monastery (1376-1377) Photo D. Nikolovski

Сл. 10. Св. Димитрије - Марков манастир (1376-1377). Фотографија Д. Николовски

In the church of *Saint Nicholas at Psača* (1365-1371)¹³, the commissioner's family proudly present the khetorial enterprise to the Serbian tzar and his co-ruler, depicted on the opposite wall of the narthex (*Figures 8 and 9*). The idea of almost a decade earlier execution of the donors' scene than the date strongly suggested by the portraits of the two sovereigns, as well as the presupposition that the original image of Empress Jelena was covered by the portrait of King Vukašin in the time of his enthronement,¹⁴ although tempting, should be considered with great precaution. Besides the hardly acceptable thought of depiction of Tzar Uroš's mother as a nun, which would have been incompatible with the long tradition of Nemanjid historical portraiture, the identical stylistic features of the artistic manner in the execution of both Tzar Uroš's and King Vukašin's images as a testimony of one and the same painterly discourse, are more than serious contradictions to the mentioned hypothesis. Although the historical evidence on the true identity of the two donors who hold the model of the church accompanied by their spouses and the auspicious offspring is still

¹³ V. R. Petković, *Portreti iz Psače*, Narodna Starina XX, Zagreb 1929, 202-203; Н. Л. Окуневъ, *Портреты королей кийиоровъ въ сербской церковной живописи*, 91-93; П. Поповић - В. Р. Петковић, *Сѣјаро Наџоричино - Псаџа - Каленић*, Београд 1933, 52-54; С. Радојчић, *Портрети срѣпскихъ владара у средњемъ веку*, 60-61; F. Kämpfer, *Die Stiftungskomposition der Nikolauskirche in Psača - Zeichentheoretische Beschreibung eines politischen Bildes*, Zeitschrift für Balkanologie X, 2, München 1974, 39-61; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство срѣпске власиеле*, 117-119, 172-173; З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *О историјскимъ портретима у Псаџи и времену њиховоџ насѣјанка*, Зограф 24, Београд 1995, 39-51

¹⁴ З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *О историјскимъ портретима у Псаџи и времену њиховоџ насѣјанка*, 39-43



Fig. 11 St. Demetrius - Marko's monastery (ca. 1389) Photo D. Nikolovski

Сл. 11. Св. Димитрије - Марков манастир (око 1389). Фотографија Д. Николовск

missing, the specific iconographic feature of the image of St. Nicholas depicted in a form of an icon and placed between the portraits of the two commissioners, is certainly an indication of his role as a venerated family patron.

The context of the two donors' compositions in the church of *Saint Demetrius in Marko's monastery* (dated in 1376/1377)¹⁵ is much more com-

¹⁵ Л. Мирковић - Ж. Татић, *Марков манастир*, Нови Сад 1925, 35-45; К. Балабанов, *Новооткривени портрети краља Марка и краља Вукашина у Марковом манастиру*, Зограф 1, Београд 1966, 28-29; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Три догађаја у српској држави XIV века и њихов одјек у сликарству*, 87-97; П. Мијовић, *Царска иконографија у српској средњовековној уметности II. Traditio legis у Марковом манастиру*, Старица н. с. XXII, Београд 1971, 82-90; Н. Ношпал-Никлуљска, *За књижевност и композицију и насликање у Марковом манастиру - село Сушица, Скопје*, Гласник, Институт за национална историја XV, Скопје 1971, 225-235; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Марков манастир - Охрид*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 8, Нови Сад 1972, 133-137; idem, *Византијске фреске у Југославији*, Београд 1974, 80; Z. Gavrilović, *The Portrait of King Marko at Markov manastir (1376-1381)*, *Byzantinische Forschungen* XVI, Amsterdam 1990, 415-428; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Представа краља Марка на јужној фасади цркве Светог Димитрија у Марковом манастиру*, *Кралот Марко во историјата и во традицијата*, Прилеп 1997, 299-307; I. Sinkević,

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ПОРТАЛ ПРЕМА РАЈУ
Досезајући улаз у бесмртност

Према структури ктиторских композиција, сачуваних у оквиру фреско аранжмана из XIV века на територији Македоније, у периоду када је овај део сликане декорације храма постао визуелни промотер политичког концепта и државничке идеологије, може се установити одређена типологија поменутих сцена и констатовати појмовна потка њиховог иконографског аранжмана. Специфична организација структуралних елемената приказаних композиција, као и међузависност њихове конфигурације од хронолошког фактора и историјске улоге ктитора, омогућује препознавање неколико различитих типова донаторских ансамбала, међу којима се издвајају: слике владарске слоге, визије Богом додељене моћи и политичке метафоре. На основу диспозиције структуралних компонената у конфигурацији донаторских представа, ктиторски аранжмани приказани у задужбинама владајуће династије припадају у два подтипа: базични подтип или слика донатора за патроном (Свети Ђорђе у Старом Нагоричину, јужна фасада Марковог манастира) и надграђени подтип, у којем су донатори укључени у Деизисну концепцију (Богородичина црква у Матеичу) или у иконографску структуру Небеског двора (наос Марковог манастира). Ктиторски аранжмани представљени у задужбинама чланова феудалне властеле такође припадају у два подтипа: вертикални подтип двозонског распореда (Свети Ђорђе у Полошком, нартекс Светог Арханђела Михаила у Леснову) и хоризонтални подтип: базичног карактера или слика донатора са сувереном државом (Богородичина црква у Кучевишту, Свети Никола у Псачи) као и поједностављеног карактера или слика донатора са патроном храма (наос Светог Арханђела Михаила у Леснову).

Пратећи хронолошки принцип у анализи двају основних елемената у концепцији ктиторских слика: облик и садржај, у свакој од њих откривамо одређене иконографске финесе које говоре у прилог специфичног идеолошког значења представе. Неке од ових финеса могу упућивати на прецизније временско одређивање сликаних аранжмана у задужбинама са још увек "проблематичном" хронологијом. У том контексту, суптилна иконографска нијанса у приказивању Христовог лика који благосиља круне краља Душана и краљевића Уроша у Полошком (1343-1345), индикација је утицаја актуелног политичког прогреса српског суверена од око 1345. године на идеолошки контекст представе, у оквиру деликатно структурираног метафоричког нагвештаја о прераштању Душановог краљевства у царство. Одсутност Душановог лика из ктиторске фреске у наосу Леснова (1346/1347) могућа је индикација политичке нелојалности Јована Оливера и његовог опортунистичког "коке-тирања" са узурпатором византијског престола у времену његове највише моћи око 1343. године. Постојање двеју ктиторских композиција у оквиру сликане декорације Марковог манастира (1376/1377), свакако указује на различити датум њиховог настанка, нарочито због сасвим могуће атрибуције фасадне фреске митрополиту Јовану у времену његовог доласка у Скопску област (нешто пре 1388/1389.), као и због специфичног иконографског детаља окованог рога у Марковој десници, који би могао бити симболични знак легитимитета његовог краљевског престола после кобног слома српске властеле под Турцима. Без обзира на различита тумачења сложеног иконографског контекста ктиторских представа, као и њихове хронолошке детерминације, донаторски аранжмани приказивају портрете оних који су тријумфално преживели историјски заборав. Оне су портал према вечној слави за историјске великане, који су надживели столећа помоћу свог племенитог доприноса величанственом наслеђу хришћанске ликовне културе.