

**THE LEGEND OF THE LAST EMPEROR
AND AN UNPUBLISHED ESCHATOLOGICAL SCENE
FROM ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH IN PERHONDI VILLAGE
(ALBANIA, 14TH CENTURY)**

Perhondi village is located some 10 km from Berat. It is known by a number of variants of its name like Perondi, Perondija, Perhondi, Petrohondi, Penderachion, all derived from its medieval name of Pendearchontion (the five archons). The only information about the medieval history of the village and the church that I know has been published is a marginal note from a Greek manuscript from Berat, published by the Bishop of Berat Anthimos Alexoudis at the end of the 19th century. The marginal note says that in 1399 the abbot of the St. Nicholas monastery in Pendearchontion, Daniel, gave the library to Theodore III Musacchia, in order to save it from the Turks¹. In another publication, Anthimos Alexoudis gives information about the village itself and mentions that there is a portrait of the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos Palaiologos (without specifying which one) and of other members of the royal family in the portico below the bell tower². The church or the monastery in Perhondi was obviously related administratively and subordinate to Berat. Throughout the Middle Ages the Berat of today – Belgrad or Beligrad – was an important ecclesiastic and political centre. The city passed into the hands of different states and rulers – Byzantium, Bulgaria, the Latin Kingdom, it was part of the Despotate of Epirus after 1261 and then was incorporated in the Serbian Kingdom after 1345. Belgrad was closely linked with the major port and metropolitan centre of Valona (Aulona in antiquity; today Vlorë), most of its governors were rulers of Valona, Kanina and Berat.

In the first half of the 14th century, the governors of Berat included *protobestiarios* Andronikos Palaiologos (son of Demetrios-Michael and Anna Palaiologina – the eldest son of Demetrios-Michael and grandson of *despot* Michael II), he was governor of Berat and the region for Emperor Andronikos II in 1326 and probably earlier³; *despot* Ioannes Orsinsi (1323-36-7), married

¹ Ανθίμος Αλεξουδης, Κώδικες επαρχίας Βελεγηάδων, Εκκλ. Αλ. 20, 1900, 525-527.

² Ανθίμος Αλεξουδης, Δύο σημειώματα εκ χειρογράφων, DIEE 4, 1892, 275-281

³ D. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros*, Oxford 1957, 242.



Fig. 1. The Church of St. Nicholas in Perhondi. External view.

Сл. 1. Црква светог Николе у Перундију. Спољашњи изглед

to his daughter Anna, later poisoned by her, his son Nicephoros (1347); her second husband John Komnenos Asen (brother of Ivan Alexander; 1350-63). In 1345 Berat passed into the hands of Stefan Dusan and after that – of Stefan Uros (1355-1371).

In the studies of Albanian authors, the St. Nicholas church in Perhondi is present as an architectural monument alone. The church is a single apse, triconch basilica, covered with a pitched roof, the central nave is higher and there is a high bell tower to the west forming a portico. A. Meksi distinguishes three periods of construction: 11th century, 13th century when the bell tower was added, and 13th-14th century.⁴ Only D. Dhamo and F. Thaci mention the murals in Pehondi in the article dedicated to the monuments in Berat, and that as the product of the atelier that worked in St. Clement in Ohrid – an assertion that it is difficult to accept.⁵

Before I go on to the scene that is the subject of the present paper, I shall make a review of the other fragments of painting in the church. The figures of a man and a woman in royal dress can be distinguished in the portico on the northern wall, with St. Mercurius, identified by the helmet, beneath them. Across, on the southern wall, there are two male figures of rulers with Archangel Michael beneath them in the dress of a warrior with helmet. Depiction of Archangel Michael with a helmet is not characteristic of the 14th century, although one

⁴ A. Meksi, *Kishat bizantine të Beratit*, Monumentet 1990, 2, 38, 42.

⁵ D. Dhamo, F. Thaci, *Piktura mesjetare e Beratit*, Monumentet 1988, 89-95

encounters it even in the 13th century in Geraki, Alkalochori (end-13th century), Lesnovo (1346). The images of St. Mercurius and Archangel Michael can be assumed to be protectors of the church and have an apotropaic function since they are frequently featured near entrances. The dress of the three male figures is similar – dark dalmaticas with golden applications in the lower part and loroi, while the female portrait is in red dress, with a red cloak and golden applications. All four figures step on cushions. The portraits are difficult to distinguish in the upper parts and the forms of the crowns and beards cannot be defined. It is also impossible to distinguish the identification descriptions.

Because of the lack of inscriptions and the almost indiscernible iconographic characteristics of the personages, the identification of the portraits is subject to a future comprehensive study on the church. Here I will only question the assertion of the Bishop of Berat Anthimos Alexoudis that they depict precisely Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos and his family. Obviously, the identification inscriptions were destroyed even at the end of the 19th century since, in spite of his pedantic approach, he hasn't quoted them. Should we compare these portraits with the preserved ktetor portrait of Andronikos II and his family on the outer wall of the church in Apollonia, we shall see quite a number of differences – the dress of the emperor is red, with different decorations, while in the case of the female portraits there is nothing in common whatsoever. The identical dress of the three male figures, characteristic of Byzantine emperors of this and the preceding period, is also a problem.

The arch at the entrance features the partially preserved images of another two saints, one in a short tunic, the other in a dalmatica and cloak thrown over one shoulder; the column right of the entrance probably features Christ, it being possible that Christ and St. Nicholas or Christ and the Holy Virgin faced each other. The side arches also feature fragments of saintly images.

The church is entirely covered with limestone plaster inside and only some fragments have been cleared at this point. The southern wall features the face and figure of an archbishop, quite probably St. Nicholas, as well as two other figures with nimbus, probably from a scene of the Vita of St. Nicholas. On the western wall, to the right, above the entrance, one can discern yet another fragment from a scene, in my opinion when little St. Nicholas was taken to school - there is a figure of a child with a nimbus, with a grown-up standing behind it holding a basket. Some of the standing figures of saints, mainly monks, have been preserved in the nether line. It is possible that the lime plaster may conceal a larger portion of the medieval murals since it can be discerned through it at many places.

The scene on the eastern wall of the central nave, above the arch of the apse, which can be defined most generally as a vision of Last Judgement, is the one that is best preserved. It depicts twelve empty thrones set out in an arch, with Christ Ancient of Days (Ο ΠΑΛΑΙΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ) sitting in the middle. The Hetoimasia is to his right, with a cross with a crown of thorns and a Gospel. Angels with blue nimbus stand behind the thrones. To the left there is also a larger waist-length figure of an archangel (Michael) with a sphere in his hand. In the lower part of the composition, against the backdrop of a rocky landscape, there is a king with a nimbus lying down, with a hand across his chest and



Fig. 2. View to the eastern part of the church.

Сл. 2. Поглед на источни део цркве

an angel who is supporting him with one hand while the other is raised to the skies in an appealing gesture. To the left there are two allegorical figures of winds, with horns that they are blowing. The other two were probably to the right, but only fragments of them remain.

Synthetic images of Theophanic visions are found in religious art even in the early Byzantine period, but their presence in Orthodox art becomes a thematic core in the post-Iconoclastic period⁶. Interest in Theophanic visions was revived again in the Late Byzantine period⁷, related on the one hand to the common interest in ancient themes and on the other – with the trend of concrete visualization of symbolically complicated liturgical texts and images.

Obviously, there are a lot of untraditional and even unique elements in this composition, beginning with the place where it is located. In Byzantine tradition, and particularly in the 14th century, Last Judgement compositions features in the western parts of church space – facades, narthex or the western nave wall. Placement of scenes and images of eschatological content in and above the apse finds its concrete explanation in theological literature. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, the bema symbolizes the throne of the King of the World where He will sit down with the apostles to say: Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Mt 19:28).

Figures of eschatological content (Theophanic visions, Hetoimasia, Deesis and others) above the apse or in it are found in the churches from the early Byzantine period. In Egypt and Cappadocia one most frequently finds Christ

⁶ A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936; A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin. Dossier archeologique*, Paris 1957.

⁷ J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Theophanies-vision auxquelles participent les prophetes dans l'art byzantin apres la restauration des images*, *Synthronon*, Paris 1968, p. 143. A. Грабар. *Източници на византийската живопис от XIII-XIV* in: В: А. Грабар. *Избрани съчинения*. 2. С., 1983, 316-322.



Fig. 3. The Eschatological scene. Eastern wall, above the arch of the apse.

Сл. 3. Есхатолошка сцена. Источни зид, изнад лука апсиде

Enthroned in Glory surrounded by the Tetramorphs. A Theophanic vision is also presented in the apse of Hosios David in Thessalonica. In a number of churches in Italy the pediment above the apse features scenes inspired by texts from the Apocalypse of John and Old Testament prophecies, representing the Heavenly Jerusalem, laudations before the Lamb on the Hetoimasia or just before the throne by the Twenty-four Elders, among others⁸. For example, in the Saints Cosmas and Damian basilica in Rome, Santa Praxade in Rome, San Clemente, St. Paul, etc.

Another quite stable eschatological image is the Hetoimasia, which is found in the apse or on the triumphal arch, most frequently in the churches in Italy, which combines the symbolism of the Holy Trinity and the Last Judgement⁹ - the throne is the invisible presence of Christ, the throne is prepared for Judgement Day (Ps 9:8). Images of enthroned theophanies date even from the Early Byzantine Period not only as part of other visions, but independently as well.¹⁰ Theophany as a throne is a consequence of the decrees of the

⁸ L. Brehier, *Les visions apocaliptique dans l'art byzantin*, *Arta si Arheologia*, 4, 1930 (38-43).

⁹ F. Van der Meer. *Maiestas Domini, Teofanies de l'Apocalypse dan l'art chretien*, Roma-Paris 1938, 238.

¹⁰ F. Van der Meer. *Maiestas Domini, Teofanies de l'Apocalypse dan l'art chretien*, Roma-Paris 1938, 231-255. The author makes a detailed review of the views of the throne and their origin in western and eastern art.



Fig. 4. Detail from the Eschatological scene. Eastern wall, above the arch of the apse.

Сл. 4. Деталъ Есхатолошке сцене. Источни зид, изнад лука апсиде

Third Ecumenical Council (431) and the enthronement of Christ. Hetoimasia is depicted above the apse, in the altar space until the 12th century and sometimes even later in: the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin in Nicaea, at Daphni, in the Palatine Chapel, Montreale, Neredica, and in St. Luke in Phocida and in Grottaferrata combined with the scene of Pentecost. According to Kondakoff, Hetoimasia in respect to apsidal symbolism is an image of Christ in Glory after the Resurrection and an image of the Judge at the Second Coming, while according to G. Millet and O. Wolf Hetoimasia is a symbol of the Holy Trinity and its three hypostases in glory¹¹. In the 14th century this theme left the space of the altar and found place in the context of other thematic scenes, particularly of the Last Judgement, but also frequently in the space under the dome, with the Throne of Glory surrounded by the angel forces depicted beneath Christ.

Here I will refer to another, also unique scene as the closest thematic, but not iconographic parallel from the middle of the 14th century. The eastern wall of the church of St. Nicholas Tzotza in Kastoria, features a rare scene combining the Holy Trinity and the King's Deesis. Christ Ancient of Days and Christ King of Kings on thrones are in the centre, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove is between them and they are flanked by the Holy Virgin Queen of Heaven and St. John the Baptist, as well as two prophets (one of the images is destroyed

¹¹ N. Kondakoff, *Histoire de l'art byzantin*, II, Paris, 1891, 90; G. Millet, *Le monastere de Daphni*, Paris 1899, 85-86; G. Millet, *La dalmatique du Vatican*, Paris 1945, 39-40.

almost completely)¹². Bearing mind the Old Testament prophetic visions which stand at the base of the iconographic images mentioned, it is probable that the one on the side of Christ Ancient of Days is the prophet Daniel, while prophet David is on the side of the Holy Virgin Queen of Heaven. As we know, the scene of the Deesis is a synthesized image of Judgement Day and refers to the events related to the Second Coming and the judgement over mankind. Different as the scene in Kastoria may be, it shows that, albeit rarely, in the 14th century, too, scenes of eschatological content continued to be depicted on the eastern wall above the apse. The traditional image of Deesis, with large waist-length figures, is also presented in the Church of Holy Virgin Eleusa on Mali Grad island (1344/45; 1368/69).

The very featuring of the eschatological composition above the apse of the church in question could be a reminiscence from a quite old iconographic tradition, which is no longer in use in Balkan art. It could also be due to an influence of medieval art in Italy, where various images of apocalyptic and eschatological content have a stable place in the space above the apse, particularly when one considers the stable presence of pro-western influences in church art in Albania. Bearing in mind the scene in the church of St. Nicholas Tzotza, too, however, one could assume that a tendency existed in the 14th century to feature such images above the apse.

Here I will only mention that the tradition to feature a Theophanic vision with Christ, the tetramorphs and prophets above the apse continues in some churches of the Post-Byzantine period on the territory of Albania, as for example the one in Selcan, the Virgin Blachernitissa in Berat, in Kurjan and elsewhere.

The next untraditional element of the Last Judgement in this case are the empty thrones. This is a very rare iconographic variant of the Last Judgement as the usual depiction features the apostles already sitting on the thrones. It was obviously necessary to stress on a concrete, temporal moment of the events, more particularly the one before the beginning of the Last Judgement, when the Throne is prepared but the apostles still haven't taken their seats. This point is developed by Orthodox theology, for example in Sophronius (Pseudo-Sophronius), Ephraim Syrus and Hippolyte of Rome (PG vol. 10, 903), Syriac sermons about the last Judgement.

The curved form in which the thrones have been set could also reproduce the form of the Synthronos in the altar, which also has symbolic interpretation related to the Last Judgement.

The two central thrones, the one on which Christ Ancient of Days is seated and the one on which the Gospel and the tools of torture are placed, are different in form. An interesting artistic solution has been chosen for the Hetoimasia – the throne has a rounded backrest the central part of which is in red and the Gospel, the cross with the crown of thorns and the tools of torture are placed on a blue drapery. The form of the drapery literally follows the folds of the himation of Christ Ancient of Days, so that from afar one gets the illusion of two sitting fig-

¹² Σίσιου Ι. Μια άγνωστη σύνθεση στον Άγιο Νικόλαο Τζώτζα Καστοριάς. Συνένωση δύο σημαντικών θεμάτων της βασιλικής Δέησης και της Αγίας Τριάδας. Αφιέρωμα ετη μνημη του Σωτηρη Κισσα, θεσσαλονίκη 2001, 511-536.

ures in the two central thrones. The absence of a dove – the image of the Holy Spirit – deducts the meaning of the Hetoimasia as an image of the Holy Trinity and designates only the eschatological aspect of the image of Hetoimasia.

In addition to the more general meaning of Christ out of time, in eternity, the image of Ancient of Days as also a concrete relation to the Last Judgement and endorses the double presence of Christ – in heaven and on earth. Here I will not dwell on the appearance and development of the theme of Ancient of Days, the New Testament Trinity, the Father etc. in Orthodox art since this is not the subject of the present paper¹³. The problem of who is the Ancient of Days (Dn 7:9, 22), the Enthroned on Cherubs (Ps 79:2), the Seated on a High Throne (Is 6:1; Rv 4:3), He who is Coming on the Clouds (Rv 1:8) is rather the subject of western theology. According to Orthodox theology, this is the Logos (in the opinion of Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Sophronius of Jerusalem, Anastasius Sinaiticus, Patriarch Germanos). A. Grabar, analyzing the scenes of Theophanic visions, also mentions that the Son of God – God Logos is presented beyond the Incarnation. He emphasizes, in his work on Iconoclasm, that the vision of the Father is taken from revelation of prophet Daniel about the Ancient of days, but depicted with Christ, he illustrates God in his eternity and his ubiquitous, while the separate image of Christ presents him after the Incarnation¹⁴. But here we have image only of the Ancient of days and Hetoimasia.

Because of avoidance of heretical deviations, as for example depiction of the Father whom it is impossible to portray, inscriptions were attached to the Ancient of Days identifying his with the second, liable to portrayal image of the Trinity – Jesus Christ. The adoption of the image of Seated on a High Throne for Christ is also confirmed in the miniature in a Psalter (Par.gr. 510, fol. 67), which features Christ in a medallion on a throne with angels around him, Isaiah to the left and an inscription “Ο ΚΑΘΗΜΕΝΟΣ ΕΠΙ ΘΡΟΝΟΥ ΥΨΗΛΟΥ”. After the middle of the 14th century, gradually but unequivocally, the visual interpretation of Ancient of Days shifted to the Father (or Old Testament Sabaoth) and regardless of the fact that they were not canonical in Orthodox art images of his began to appear¹⁵.

The examined image of Ancient of days, in this iconographic context, can be assumed as illustration of Ο ΚΑΘΗΜΕΝΟΣ ΕΠΙ ΘΡΟΝΟΥ ΥΨΗΛΟΥ (Is. 6:1; Rev. 4:2) and Ο ΚΑΘΗΜΕΝΟΣ ΕΠΙ ΤΩΝ ΧΕΡΟΥΒΙΜ (1 Kings 4:4; Ps. 79:1-2; Ps. 98:1). These texts are one of the main verbal sources of the Theophanic visions. The scenes of Theophanic visions with Ancient of Days just their verbal sources have emphatically eschatological aspect. It is directly declared on a miniature from the Psalter (Vat. Gr. 752, fol. 27v) with inscription “Η ΔΕΥΤΕΡΗ ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑ” (the Second Coming)¹⁶.

¹³ В. Лазарев, *Ковалевская роспись и проблема южнославянских связей в русской живописи XIV века*, В: Русская средневековая живопись. Статьи и исследования, М., 1970, 234-278.

¹⁴ А. Грабар, *Источники на византийската живопис от XIII-XIV в.*, 321.

¹⁵ Ц. Грозданов, *Охридското Сидно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 1980, 162-164.

¹⁶ S. Tsuji, *The Headpiece Miniatures and Genealogy Pictures in Paris*, Gr. 74. D.O.P. 1975, 192.

In the church of the Ascension in Neredica (1199), Christ Ancient of Days is depicted in the arch before the altar.

Although quite untraditional, what is unique is not the place where the composition is featured but its overall iconography. In spite of the numerous unusual elements in its upper part, one can quote parallels, albeit not identical, but for the story depicted in the lower part one cannot quote a single, even approximate parallel.

The Legend of the Last Emperor

The main question is what the composition in the lower part is and who the sleeping king is. It cannot be assumed that the artist himself invented such a composition, and that placed above the apse, but we should look for the original verbal source, which should also be popular enough. The figure is one of a young beardless man, with a nimbus without a cross, dressed in a dalmatica with a gold breastplate, with a high crown made of three segments at the front. Should one assume that this is Christ the King who has descended on Earth then one cannot find an explanation why he is lying down and “sleeping”, and why he doesn’t have a cross on the nimbus. According to part of the eschatological texts, particularly in the Revelation of St. John the Theologian, when the Throne is prepared Christ comes down to earth with his army. In all the variants, however, Christ is King with his army, not sleeping on the ground.

This image could depict the witness to the vision himself, presented in an ecstatic pose at the moment when he receives the vision of Judgement Day. The nimbus indicates that this is a saint or a prophet, or at least the veneration of that saint or prophet. In such compositional variants Orthodox art features the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel, St. John the Theologian and so on. Interpretation is also made difficult by the combination of a crown, i.e. king, but one that is beardless. These two characteristics cannot be combined in iconography on principle.

If the witness to the vision himself is depicted then it is most logical to assume that this is the prophet Daniel, although it is difficult to explain the crown instead of the Jewish cap characteristic of his iconography. His prophesy lies at the basis of the texts and images interpreting the subject of Judgment day. Such also is the text that describes the image of Ancient of Days (Dn 7:9, 22). The motif of the Dream of the prophet Daniel became an individual theme and one that was quite popular in Byzantine and Old Bulgarian literature. In church art, the “sleeping prophet Daniel” began to be depicted in some Judgment Day compositions as late as the 15th century, and that as a secondary story, a detail in the large composition. One could assume that in this case we have a variant of Daniel’s Dream and the angel that interprets it. Unlike all scenes of Judgment Day, however, where he is a secondary element of composition, in this case he is the main, dominant one. The images of the four winds also have the Book of Daniel as their primary source, although they are also present in many of the popular “apocryphal” works. In Byzantine iconography, they are usually depicted as angels, but in this case we have another iconographic variant that relates

them to the reminiscences of antiquity in Palaiologan art. They are depicted as winged figures blowing long curved horns and their bodies end with conically wrapped draperies. The face of one of them is expressive – with excessive mimics, cheeks blown out to the extreme, as well as bearing strange eastern features – slanted eyes.

Another assumption is that we could possibly have the image of prophet David, who is also related to the vision for, as we mentioned above, it is precisely the Psalter that is one of the linguistic sources one of the Ancient of Days (Enthroned on Cherubs). In a number of medieval miniatures King David is related to the image of Ancient of Days. His iconography permits him to be painted both young and old, but there is no image of his as witness to a vision of Judgment Day, such as the scene discussed undoubtedly is.

Here I will also mention a hypothesis in respect to the identification of this image. The Legend of the Last Emperor or of the Emperor-Liberator spread in medieval literature in the Byzantine world, as well as in the West, in a variety of forms and in many cases related to different concrete historical individuals and locations¹⁷. The texts in which the theme of the last emperor was developed are different: the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodios of Patara and the *Vision of Daniel (Daniel-Diegesis)*; the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Andrew Salos, the *Chrismoi* of Leo the Wise, the *Vita* of St. Andrew the Fool. The motif is developed most comprehensively in the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodios of Patara, the image we are discussing may be closest to the *Chrismoi* of Leo the Wise.¹⁸ The text was finally compiled c. 1200, the oldest Bulgarian manuscripts in which the motif of the Last Emperor appears date from the 13th century as part of different works, the emperor in some cases being identified with Boris-Michael. This is not by chance since an emperor by the name of Michael, most frequently identified with Michael III, appears in Byzantine literature of this type. In turn, it is identified with King Arthur or Friedrich II, among others, in the Latin variants.

Generally speaking, the story is the following: the story of a king who is believed to be dead or to have fallen asleep in a mountain or a cave, hidden in the sea or underground, but at a difficult time for his people he wakes up, leaves his tomb and saves his subjects. His awakening is accompanied by divine intervention: he is called upon by God or is wakened up by an angel. The period of his rule is one of peace and plenty (32 years). But his reign is not eternal like that of the Messiah. In some of the literary variants, he goes to Jerusalem and places

¹⁷ A. A. Vasiliev, *The Emperor Michael III in Apocryphal Literature*, *Byzantina metabyzantina*, vol. I, 1946, 237-248; Alexander, *Apocalyptic Tradition; Byzantium and the Migration of Literary Works and Motifs*. The Legend of the Last Roman Emperor, In: *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*, N. S., 2 1971, 47-68; Reinink, *Die Syrische Apokalypse*, p. XXXV-XXXIX, 60-61; Reinink, *Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser*, In: *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages*, Louvain, 1988, 82-111 /*Mediaevalia Louvaniensia*, Series I, *Studia* 15/.

¹⁸ V. Istrin, *Revelation of Methodius of Patara and Apocryphal Visions of Daniel in Byzantine and Slavo-Russian Literature*, *Чтения в Обществе Историй и древностей российских*, Москва 1897-98, кн. I-IV.

his crown on the cross in Calvary and the Cross ascends to heaven. According to apocalyptic literature, his reign ended with the coming of Antichrist whose kingdom, in turn, ends with the Second Coming of Christ.

In the apocryphal *Vision of Daniel* (*Daniel-Diegeese*) one reads: “And the king shall die for seven years and shall lie down unto this year. By the will of God he will rise from the grave as if from sleep. And shall be transformed into a young man, with a cast in one eye, whom people shall think was dead. Thus he shall rule the kingdom 33 years”

Another variant is found in the *Revelation* of Pseudo Methodios of Patara: “The king of the Greeks, i.e., the Romans, will come out against them in great anger, roused as from a drunken stupor like one whom men had thought dead and worthless. He will go forth against them from the Ethiopian sea and will send the sword and desolation into Ethribus their homeland, capturing their women and children living in the Land of Promise.”

This legend is described in great detail in the *Vita* of St. Andrew the Fool: “On the beginning of the end. In the last days God shall resurrect a king from down low and he shall go forth with great justice and shall prevail in every battle and shall enrich the poor. ...” This is followed by a scene of life in wealth and peace on earth for 32 years. Then comes a period of kingdoms of evil and lawlessness, which will anger God and befall the Earth, then comes the kingdom of Antichrist, then the time of Judgment Day.

This legend became particularly popular as the legend of the “Emperor petrified” (μαρμαρωμένος βασιλιᾶς) and developed further with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 but was based on the *Chrismoi* of Leo the Wise. This is a Greek version of the Emperor from the Mountain related to folk legends involving Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos as the last Byzantine emperor. When the Ottomans conquered Constantinople an angel led Constantine and hid him in a cave (tomb) near the Golden Gate where he turned him to marble, after which the angel awoke him again. The Turks also knew the secret but could not find the place. When God willed, the angel would awaken the emperor, give him the sword and Constantine would defeat the Turks. This legend was popular right until the 19th century.¹⁹

This eschatological concept is typical of the Byzantine age but its roots can be found even in ancient literature – in the legend of the Golden Age as a political ideal from the Hellenic tradition coming from the East and in Judean eschatology related to the coming of the Messiah “at the end of days”. The Judean belief in the Messiah was adapted by medieval eschatology and deepened under the influence of the Byzantine Emperor Saviour – the last Byzantine emperor was an earthly messiah who would create the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth before the end of days. His appearance, his personality and his reign are described in numerous versions.

The legend of the Last Emperor who puts his crown in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Calvary began to be illustrated during the Post-Byzantine period as concrete illustrations to *Chrismoi* of Leo the Wise, the most represen-

¹⁹ D. Nicol, *The Immortal Emperor. The Life and legend of Constantine Palaiologos, last Emperor of the Romans*. Cambridge, 1992.

tative of these being the illustrations of Georges Klontzas²⁰. As to the medieval period, however, I do not know of images – frescoes, icons, miniatures – that have been inspired by this story so popular in literature.

In the scene from Perhondi we are discussing the identification of the image of the “sleeping” king with the Last Emperor could also explain the presence of the empty thrones, since his story pertains precisely to a moment from the end of days but before the Last Judgment.

In the Palaiologan age, general eschatological moods became particularly powerful, on the one hand as a reaction to the historical situation and on the other – under the influence of Hesychast ideas, and one finds their implementation even in literature and church art. The reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos occasioned various legends of visions and prophesies, which were also described by chroniclers of later days.

The appearance of the scene under discussion may be assumed as a confirmation of the dominant presence of the eschatological ideas related to the apprehensive expectations of the End in the 14th century. Regardless of the variety of possible interpretations, it doubtless also stresses the eschatological theme with the importance of its location – above the apse, as well as with its impressive dimensions, which obviously dominated the space in the church.

One could assume hypothetically that here we have a unique variant of a synthetic eschatological vision where the subject of the Last Emperor whom the angels awaken before the Second Coming is also illustrated.

In terms of style, the work is executed at a very high level and has come out of the hands of well-trained *zographoi*. In terms of geographical location, the closest parallels dating from the 14th century can be found in the Refectory in Apollonia (1328) and the Holy Trinity in Berat (first quarter of the 14th century), but the painting in Perhondi is different from both of these. It is possible that several ateliers of a different style operated in Berat and in the region in the first quarter of the 14th century, but it seems to me more probable that the painting in Perhondi dates from a slightly later period – I would say around the middle of the 14th century.

²⁰ Jeaninne Vereecken – Lydie Hadermann-Misguich, *Les Oracles de Léon le Sage illustrés par Georges Klontzas*. La version Barozzi dans le Codex Bute. Institut Hellénique de Venise and Bibliothèque Vikelaiia d’Hérakleion. Oriens Graecolatinus 7. Venise 2000.

Ралица Русева

ЛЕГЕНДА О ПОСЛЕДЊЕМ ЦАРУ И ЈЕДНА НЕОБЈАВЉЕНА ЕСХАТОЛОШКА СЦЕНА ИЗ ЦРКВЕ СВ. НИКОЛЕ У СЕЛУ ПЕРУНДИ (АЛБАНИЈА, XIV ВЕК)

Црква св. Николе у Перундију (близу Берата) је тробродна базилика са једном апсидом, покривена стрмим кровом, са високим звоником који на западној страни формира трем. А. Мекси издваја три периода градње: XI век, XIII век када је дограђен звоник, и XIII-XIV век.

У цркви је најбоље очувана сцена на источном зиду средишњег брода, изнад апсидалног лука, која се може најопштије дефинисати као визија Страшног суда. Сцена приказује дванаест празних престола постављених у луку, а у средини седи Христ старац данима. Са његове десне стране је Хетимасија, са крстом на којем је трнова круна и Јеванђеље. Иза Часног престола стоје анђели са плавим ореолима. На левој страни је и већа допојасна слика архангела (Михаила) који држи сферу у руци. У доњем делу композиције, са позадином у виду стеновитог пејзажа, лежи краљ са ореолом, држећи руку на грудима, а анђео га једном руком придржава док му је друга подигнута ка небу у молећем гесту. С леве стране су две алегоричке представе ветрова, са роговима у које дувају. Друга два ветра су вероватно била на десној страни, али је од њих сачуван само фрагмент.

У овој композицији очигледно има доста нетрадиционалних и чак јединствених елемената, као што су место на којем се налази, празни престоли и друго. Главно питање је шта представља композиција у доњем делу и ко је успавани краљ. Уколико је насликан сам сведок визије, онда је најлогичније претпоставити да се ради о пророку Данилу (мада је у том случају тешко објаснити круну), јер се његово пророчанство налази у основи текстова и слика које интерпретирају тему Страшног суда, као и у тексту који описује представу Старца данима. Друга претпоставка је да то може бити лик пророка Давида, који је такође повезан са визијом Старца данима.

Овде ћу, такође, поменути и претпоставку везану за идентификацију ове слике. Легенда о последњем цару ширила се у средњовековној књижевности како по византијском свету тако и на Западу, добијала је различите форме и била је доста популарна. Може се претпоставити да овде имамо јединствену варијанту синтетизоване есхатолошке визије у којој је насликан и Последњи цар којег анђели буде пре Другог дошања Христовог. Изједначавањем лика “уснулог” краља са Последњим царем може се такође објаснити присуство празних престола, јер се прича о њему директно односи на дане непосредно пре Страшног суда.

Што се тиче стила, ово дело је изведено на веома високом уметничком нивоу и потиче од руку вештих зографа. По мом мишљењу, слика у Перундију датира из средине XIV века.