

**CREATING HISTORY: EARLY BYZANTINE LITERATURE
AND ITS PRESENTMENT IN XIVth CENTURY
FRESCO PAINTING**

Introduction. The “Akathistos hymn of the Virgin” (Ὑμνος ἀκάθιστος)¹ is a literary-poetic text belonging to the anonymous early Byzantine works² dedicated to celebrating The Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary (Theotokos) and her Divine Son. As a work translated in Old Church Slavic language it belongs to the corpus of Slavic literature grounded on theological and aesthetic principles of early Byzantine literature. The Akathistos hymn realizes its overall esthetics as inter-textual one, through the pre-sign of syncretism, such as: poetry (literary text, language and literary genre), music (liturgy) and painting (fresco painting, illuminated manuscript). On the other hand, since what is examined here is a work belonging to Byzantine literature, it bears the complex Christian theological discourse and hence, the Akathistos hymn is codified as denominator of the high aesthetics of Byzantine inter-textual poetics, which is most of all symbolic. The Akathistos hymn’s poetics is also inter-medial, seen in the frames of medieval art of painting in the Balkans, by means of which this literary work acquires its late (XIVth c.), but new existence as a visual text³, and

¹ Also: “The Akathist Hymn to the Blessed Virgin Mary”. Devotion to the Mother of God became central in Constantinople in the VIth century, when she was taken as the protector of the city. Below in this text just *The Akathistos hymn*.

² J. Thomas & A. C. Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A complete translation of the surviving Founders’ Typika and Testaments*. Washington 2000, p. 1679; See also: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1999; Енциклопедија православаља, vol. II, 2002.

³ In monumental painting we point at: *Panagia Olympiotissa* at Elasson (circa 1304), where the first illustrated Akathistos is found, St. Nicholas Orphanos at Thessaloniki (1315), *Panagia ton Chalkeon* at Thessaloniki (first quarter of XIV century), the church dedicated to Christ Pantocrator in Decani (1343) (Г. Бабић, 1995), Holy Mother of God in Matejče (1348-52) (Е. Димитрова, 1996), Holy Mother of God Peribleptos (1364-5) (Ц. Грозданов, 1980), St. Demetrius– Marko’s Monastery (1376-7) (Ц. Грозданов, 1978), St. Peter at Golem Grad in Prespa (third quarter of XIV century) (Б. Кнежевић, 1966), St. Trinity at Kozija (end of XIV century) (G. Babić, 1973), *Panagia Pantanassa* at Mistra (end of XIV century). In illuminated manuscripts: The Tomićev Psalter (1360-1363) (В.М. Щепкина, 1963), The Munich Psalter (circa 1370) (R. Stichel and J. Ševčenko, 1978; S. Radojčić, 1969; J. Radovanović,

nevertheless keeps its internal aesthetics and simultaneously emphasizes it in the plane of visual art. Such differential aspects open up the polyphonic space for understanding this work simultaneously as literary and visual text, as well as for its interpretation through the necessary methodology of literary and visual semiotics.

Visual semiotics of the Akathistos hymn. The visual semiotics of a literary work represents a special interest for literary science since in this way it not only expands its area of investigation, but also affirms its ability to testify its methodic and methodological tools in the context of another discipline. When we speak of the aspect of the visual semiotics of the Akathistos hymn, then the science of literature consequentially draws its interest also toward that aspect of investigation of this hymnographic work, through its displays in the art of painting (fresco painting). The inter-textual and respectively the inter-medial domain of interest, stresses the polyvalent functioning of language as a system of written signs and in this way dialogizes the functioning of literary text in relation to its reception in another medium.

The visual semiotics of Akathistos hymn shows the cultural basis of the understanding of Christocentric and triad-centric discourse through the image and its historical journey during epochs. This aspect necessarily confirms the work's literary discourse, semiotically situated, which relates to the signification of the common code⁴ that presents the collection of symbols and their meaning in Christological work frames.⁵

The connotative aspect of the Akathistos hymn as hymnographic text owes its first appearance as separate entity to the XIVth century trend in monumental painting in Paleologan style. It is characterized as one of the most intriguing chapters in the development of painting and is marked as the last Byzantine movement or as the golden age of the Byzantine art.⁶ In the period of the so-called "Renaissance of Paleologues" the relation between painting and hymnography is articulated as somewhat complex, yet simultaneously very transparent one. This infers that literature contributes to the enrichment of iconographic programs with new contents, as well as to the enrichment of theory of the image in representing the unrepresentable God:

„Today it is very hard for us to imagine in what immense measure Byzantine church literature has influenced painting giving it not only ideas to treat, but images too.“⁷

1978), the manuscript from the Moscow Synod's library gr.429 (second half of XIV century) (D.V. Lihachova, 1972), as well as the manuscript from the Madrid Escorial's library (second half of XIV century) (T. Velmans, 1972).

⁴ M. Bal, *Double exposures: The subject of cultural analysis*, London 2006, 70.

⁵ *The Akathistos* is a hymn sang in celebration of the Mother of God which is proclaimed only as Θεοτόκος already in the Vth century with the dogma of the Council of Ephesus from 431. From here, in its Christological determination, it is Theotocological.

⁶ Г. Ђорђевић-Бабић, Класицизам доба Палеолога у српској уметности, in: *Историја српског народа*, прва књига, Београд, 1981, 476; П. Миљковић-Пепек, *Делото на зографите Михаило и Еутихиј*, Скопје 1967, 34-38.

⁷ С. Радојчић, Постанак сликарства ренесансе Палеолога, in: *Узори и дела старих српских уметника*, Београд 1975, 131.

Although the oldest iconographic testimonies as a whole date back to the beginning of XIVth century, nonetheless separate iconographic scenes (The Annunciation, the Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, Presentation in the Temple and others) which form its content are known earlier in iconography.⁸ The visual cycle of the Akathistos, as a whole is made of 24 separate visual scenes according to the poetic chants (12 kontakia and 12 ikoi and the proimion). It is significant in this context to mention that the visual display of proimion (or the main kontakion, which by its function is called koukoulion (κουκούλιον[kindliness])⁹ of the source kontakion: Τὸ προσαχθέν μυστικῶς λαβῶν ἐν γνώσει / ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ σπουδῆ ἐπέστη) is very rarely advanced in iconography.¹⁰ The historical part includes the Bible events, which in turn introduce the so-called exordium to (2) the dogmatic one, which has to do the mystery of embodiment and the (3) eulogical part. Our research applies the revised considerations in relation to the tripartite thematic division of the Akathistos which extends this hymn to the plane of interpretation in visual semiotics. Since the historical part of the Akathistos hymn contains the Biblical pretext in literary context, respectively the visual scenes of the hymn related to Gospel stories, it will be quite logical that the visual ensembles in the earliest display of the Akathistos in painting to insert and respectively incorporate the already existing Biblical scenes in the visual art of Akathistos hymn entity, after the rules of iconographic representation in terms of Hermeneia, adding to them a new visual expression at that.

In this sense we could judge in relation to the following conclusions that transcend the old Christian pretext for the Akathistos hymn's lineage (that more logically offers genealogical context of given visual scenes, later incorporated in the Akathistos's visual cycle) and affirm the knowledge devoted to the emergence, development and cult of the Mother of God and the instituting of the Theotokological dogma in 431 at the Council of Ephesus: a) We could talk about only for iconographic emergence of the earliest representations of Christ

⁸ In the earlier science there are indications for the old-Christian lineage of the Akathistos hymn through mentions of iconographic displays of similar appearances in theme and composition. (A. Grabar, *L'iconographie de la Parousie. L'art de la fin de l'antique et du Moyen Age*, I, Paris 1968, 576-581), which stands in relation with the final stanzas of the Akathistos hymn, for example Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome San Vitale in Ravenna and the church of Vlacherna in Arta. The indications concern also the painting of representatives from the people as a new iconographic instance, who, together with the chosen ones (prelates, martyrs, apostles, the celestial army, etc.) celebrate the embodiment of Christ. (For mentions of the old-Christian lineage of the Akathistos, see also: Ц. Грозданов, *Охридско сидно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 129; А. Серафимова, *Поствизантискиот контекст на Богородичниот акатист во припратата на кучевишките Свети Архангели*, in: *Зборник средновековна уметност*, број 3. Скопје 2001, 154.

⁹ K. Kern, *Pastirsko bogoslovje*, Vrnjačka Banja 2003, 23.

¹⁰ One of the most rare examples are found on the territory of Macedonia, in the church **St. Peter of Golem Grad in Prespa (Кнежевић, Бранка, Црква светог Петра у Преспи**, in: *Зборник ликовне уметности*, п 2. Нови Сад 1966; Ц. Грозданов, *Композиција Опсаде Цариграда у цркви светог Петра на Преспи*, in: *Зборник ликовне уметности*, п. 15. Нови Сад 1979) and in Holy Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (Ц. Грозданов, *Охридско сидно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 1980).

and his mother, ones that do not stand in relationship with the Akathistos's visual cycle. The reason for this that we endorse also as an argument against early Christian lineage of the Akathistos hymn is that before the fifth century there does not exist separate ecclesiastic (theological) attitude on the Mother of God; b) As a second argument we take the discussion directed at the emergence of this hymnographic work in the very inceptions of Byzantine literature (VIth c.) before its first liturgical performance at the time of Emperor Heraklios (the beginning of VIIth century) that reveal its existence in early Byzantine, and not early the Christian stage (I-III c); c) Third, the incontestable argument that the process of influence commences from the field of literature, and not from the visual domain in the context of the Akathistos, **that is in integral relationship** with the development of theological thought, as well as with the development of liturgical process; d) Fourth, the visual entirety of the Akathistos infers the existence of 24 poetic entities (and a koukoulion) included in one integral cycle, and not as a subordinated individual existence of separate scenes related to separate holidays.

Early Byzantine hymnography and its iconographic representation at the dawn of Byzantine art. The data testifying to the late visual emergence of the upright-sang hymn (akathistos) bring a big chronological contradiction: as a literary text the Akathistos hymn belongs to early Byzantine hymnography that represents the golden age of Byzantine creation, and as visual text commences before the dawn of Byzantine art. This larger-than-life contradiction, logically, opens the question: Why so much centuries had to pass from the existence of the literary text of the Akathistos hymn for it to enter a natural communion with its visual representations?

On one hand, researches in Byzantine iconography from Paleologan period reveal that it is inspired by the corpus of church poetry and brings forth new representations in its iconographic agenda. By this it signifies its visual tendency directed at extending and enriching the visual concept in relation to Biblical and hymnographic sources of representative art. On the other hand, the growth in number of visual scenes happens through the maintaining of dogmatic and eulogical aspect of the upright-sang hymn (i.e. the Akathistos), which in turn brings us to the conclusion for direct and entire transposition of theology through the art of painting's literary text, as well as direct influence of the hymn in relation to the qualitative and quantitative aspect of researching this interdisciplinary tie. Of course, the visual embodiment within the art of painting at the time of the Paleologan epoch infer continuity in the ecclesiastic thought from the Ephesus victory in 431, and not the simple following the rules of painting's representation of Biblical events from the Hermeneia. Yet we dare not abandon also the context of Byzantine history and its iconographic representation in the last scenes from the visual part of the Akathistos hymn that concern the first liturgical execution of upright-sang hymn on the occasion of the historical event from 626. We have to emphasize that these scenes contribute just as equally to the enrichment of the visual repertoire from the Paleologan concept as the scenes from the dogmatic and eulogical part.

In this context the painting of the dogmatic and eulogical part of the Akathistos hymn depend first and foremost on the ecclesiastical dogma, the

theological erudition of the painters, the exegetic discourse, as well as on the painter's creative potential, since these scenes does not have their classical narrative (Biblical) pretext as the scene that belongs to the historical part, respectively to those described at the New Testament. This aspect in relation to the way of transposing the literary-linguistic phenomenon in painting represents yet another confirmation for a profound discovery of the connections between the two disciplines, as well as for the reasons for inspiration which the visual art finds precisely in church poetry. This aspectivity contextualizes and justifies the label quality of Paleologan stylistic formation in the general plan of Byzantine art of painting as one of a Renaissance kind.

But the reasons for the late visual embodiment of the upright-sang hymn ought to be sought also in the tendencies of the Byzantine empire directed at retaining (preserving) traditional values in the context of Christological-ecclesiastical thought and their further development, and respectively surrounding, as well as in the efforts of new aspirations to conquer their place (heretic movements, wars, iconoclastic era, the implications of the theological schism etc.). In general context, the motivations for the big chronological remoteness of the literary from the visual display of the Akathistos hymn ought to be positioned in the frames of Christological semiotics of culture that throughout the years of Byzantine reign's persistence is characterized, on the one hand, with effort for continuity in view of early Byzantine ecclesiastics in relation to Christological world-outlook – testified and presented in art; and on the other hand, the tendencies at introducing new stylistic-ideological formations directed also at the historical dethronement of the metropolitan center that has dictated influences in the plane of general, respectively universal (Christological) constitution of the world. This, in turn, speaks of Byzantium's weakened positions on the political level that slow down the direct-ratio relation with its activeness in the culture-and-arts domain, since it is just such shaky condition that drives on the maturing and manifesting of new outlooks in Byzantine culture and art affirmed by the western church.

The establishment of the new active center in Nicaea¹¹ as inheritor of the capitol Constantinople brings a message with very high pursuit: to preserve the Byzantine prestige from western influence through the re-actualization of Hellenism in Byzantine spirit, and with this the latter is to be set on the world's stage for the second time.¹² However, in this period (end of XIIIth and the first decades of XIVth century), parallel to the efforts of Byzantium, the development of the new movement in the western world of literature took place, known also as Humanism (and Renaissance), whose impulse represents the ancient case too. We could conclude that the difference is in the fact that the humanist pledges of the Nicaea's courtyard, as a pursuit to regain the Byzantine magnificence world-wide, and the ones of the western world lie in different concepts

¹¹ Theodore II Laskaris (1222-1258) from the Nicaea courtyard created a true scientific center where the most educated persons of the time with various profiles gathered (rhetors, scientists, writers) and were notable for their knowledge in ancient philosophy. According to: Г. Острогорски, *Историја на Византија*, Скопје 1992, 416.

¹² According Г. Острогорски, *Историја на Византија*, Скопје 1992,392-6.

of regeneration, as well as in the conditions for the western movement's impossibility to become a parallel success and in the eastern orthodoxy due to the eastern-Byzantine conservatism

This argument has been reflected in the strong reaction in the 40s of the XIVth century on the side of the church, more precisely from the monks' lines, headed by Gregorius Palamas who fought against the liberalism of G. Akindin, and which represents the result of earlier preparation conditioned by historical events on the dogmatic plane too. This is a period when the roots of monastic reaction were strongly felt through the theological-philosophical system and the mystical-ascetic outlook as the vicious pike against new humanist ideas in Byzantium.¹³ In this hesihasm's momentum, we could see a big argument in relation to the late and first visual displays of Akathistos cycle in the Balkans, which has to do with consolidating the position of eastern theology, in relation to the question of uniatism in the western church and, earlier historically, in the time of the iconoclastic era directed at the defense of visual displays of Christ and the Mother of God.¹⁴ Sure enough, in these frames the consolidation of the eastern perception of Holy Mother is inescapable through the Theotokological aspect raised on the theological-dogmatic level. The entire dogmatic teaching for the Mother of God is expressed in her two names: Θεοτόκος and Ἀειπάρθενος. Therefore the Theotokological aspect is integrative with the essence of the Christological teaching, since it is through the act of embodiment that the double birth of pre-eternal Logos¹⁵ takes place, but without change in its two natures (as opposed to the concept of immaculate conception that will color the western church dogma of God's Mother as Mariological¹⁶), but also in the development of iconographic concepts in representing this literary work in the Paleologan times, and at this plane. The Akathistos hymn is being pictured precisely in this period, in time of strong defense of eastern orthodoxy governed by Athonian circles and the consolidation of its positions in the frames of Byzantine-Christological discourse. Hesihasm, through the teaching of St. Gregorius Palamas, means the defense of the world's image as unification with God, respectively of the uncreated divine light.¹⁷ Hence the reason for strong inspiration in the art of painting in relation to early Byzantine hymnographic works.

In the orthodox doctrine the teaching of the body and spirit as unity prevails, respectively the Christological principle for harmony and inseparability of human and divine.¹⁸ Hence the fierce reaction of Hesihasts means also returning

¹³ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Делото на зографите Михаило и Еутихиј*, Скопје 1967, 30.

¹⁴ Л. Успенски, *Теологија на иконата*, Скопје 1994, 193.

¹⁵ Архимандрит Алипије и архимандрит Исаија, *Догматско богословје*, 2003, 189-90.

¹⁶ The embodiment does not at all deliver the Holy Mother from the original sin. This would mean her separation from the human kind. See: С. Булгаков, *Православје*, Београд 2001, 129.

¹⁷ Л. Успенски, Леонид, *Теологија на иконата*, Скопје 1994, 195-8.

¹⁸ Ј. Влахов, митрополит, *Свети Григорије Палама како Светогорац*, in: *Православје и мистика светлости: Свети Григорије Палама и пут човековог обожења*, Београд 2003, 100-5.

to early Byzantine ecclesiastical roots in the context of semiotics of Christian world-outlook (IVth-VIIth c.), a time to which the invention of the upright-sang hymn belongs, but also a time marked by activity of church councils that define theological-dogmatic discourse. This is why we consider that the concept of Renaissance in Christological frames does not have to be confined only to artistic novelties in the art of painting that draw from Byzantine hymnography, but Renaissance concerns also the revival of the golden time of hymnographic inventiveness from early Byzantine period and canonicity, in whose frames the invention of the upright hymn (literally the word *akathistos* means “not sitting”) belongs, as well as the importing of the dogmatic-eulogical aspect of painting as a possibility to expand the visual scenes.

Accordingly, we would like to emphasize that the *Akathistos* hymn’s late introduction in the art of painting is not due only to the new painting trends and stimuli from hymnography, but is also due to the discovery, positioning and absorption in theological differences between eastern and western Byzantine church, which are significant factors for why this work that re-discovers the orthodox dogma of the Council of Ephesus (Theotokological, as opposed to the Roman-Catholic Mariological) experience its visual expression so late after its creation. Such semiotic shifting in Christological discourse in the West results in the absence of the upright-sang hymn in visual art, as a result of the dogmatic differences concerning the dogma of immaculate conception.¹⁹ But on the other hand it reveals the continuing endurance of Byzantine hymnography and its anticipation in another medium in eastern Byzantine art.

The humanist implications of the art of painting through the dogma. The promulgation of the Holy Mother dogma at the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431) represent a victory over heretic ideas that were against the non-united god-human nature of Christ, as well as the dogma of hypostatic unity of Christ (from the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, 451),²⁰ personified in the *Akathistos* hymn as literary poetic text, has much more lasting implications for the humanist beginning of Byzantine hymnography and its transposition in the visual semiotics of *Akathistos* hymn scenes rather than, as it appears, not. Namely, the humanist beginning in Christological frames is signified by the very humanization of God.

Through the image and the role of Holy Mother the human’s humanistic dimension is being figured, and it can achieve its highest aim as a victory – it lies in the kenotic beginning which infers opening the path of the divine in oneself and merging with it. A successful example for this is the god-human Christ as the victor of death. His Mother is the first of the human kind that travels, respectively shows (*Hodegetria*) this path for all of the humanity:

The first man is of the earth, earthy;
the second man is the Lord from heaven (1Cor. 15:47)

¹⁹ J. Мајендорф, *Византијско богословље*. Београд, 2001, 77-8; С. Булгаков, *Православље*, Београд 2001, 130.

²⁰ On this question see: G. Ostrogorski (1992), M. Skabalanovic (2004); J. Majendorf (1997); A. Smeman (1994).

This is why we want to emphasize that through the Akathistos hymn as early Byzantine literary text and through its embodiment as a visual text in XIVth century it is for the second time that the realization of this kenotic process is personified. Namely, it is not by coincident that *hesihasm* experiences its Renaissance in this specific and crucial instant, not only as a resistance against new tendencies from the west as humanization of the spiritual, but most of all as suggested practical mode that the humanist dimension is already deeply rooted in Byzantine thought the image of Christ and through the Christological model of Holy Mother's image.

Therefore we locate the second most probable reason for the representation of Holy Mother's image in the frames of visualizing the Akathistos hymn, namely, its visual transposition from literature is intensified in this historical period and iconographically contributes for the Biblical events and theological thought for them not only to become closer with the wider publicity, that is, for the displays to more easily communicate with the people, but they also become a visible act of the humanist sympathy with religious-theological messages.²¹ Thus the emergence of Akathistos cycle acquires its socio-cultural meaning, and in the image of the Holy Mother the stress goes on to her historical and anthropological role as integrator of the human (humane) with the divine.

Old Slavic literature and the art of painting in Byzantine Macedonia. The representation of literary works for the first time through the example of the upright-sang hymn as a novelty in XIVth century iconographic cycles speaks of the key and extraordinary role of medieval literature in Macedonia as a conduit of Byzantine's totality of visual, literary-linguistic, creative and theological plane. This, on the one hand, concerns the strengthening of Slavic-linguistic dimensions in literature through the presence of translations of Byzantine hymnography and their positioning in the domain of visual art, through the Akathistos hymn's example, on whose visual scenes there appear Slavic insignia of the introductory verses from each stanza.

On the other hand, the Akathistos hymn's late introduction in the art of painting speaks of the necessity to search, faced with the Latin influence, for new ways and forms of continuing the Byzantine value grounded in to the tradition of orthodox theology, for supporting anew the theological dogma as a high apology through the painting. This indicates that in the land of Byzantine Macedonia a kind of Renaissance takes place that finds its source in early Byzantium, through the visual representation of early Byzantine hymnography, namely through Old Church Slavic insignia of the upright-sang hymn. Through the confrontation of *hesihasm* – which experiences its Renaissance in the XIVth century – with the Varlaamites' rationalism, an animation of early Byzantine literature occurs, thanks to its visual embodiment. Through the Akathistos hymn's example in the art of painting in Byzantine Macedonia we can exactly affirm the source of the new creative-spiritual mechanism. Through painting, it simultaneously signifies the stylistic improvement of literary text, the painting's transcription of the genre, namely, the iconographic editing of early Byzantine

²¹ С. Грандаковска, Умножена книжевна приказна: Библиски текст, нерешки мајстор, италијанска ренесана и македонска современа поезија, во: *Портретот на сликата*, Скопје 2010, 62.

hymn through its translation in Old Church Slavonic. This reveals that the space of Byzantine Macedonia in the XIVth century shows the avowed current as a synthesis of Athonian spiritual tendencies, of the Byzantine Metropolis, of the resistance against western influences, but also of its reaction through a lens of legitimate originality as the source-center for actualizing these tendencies through Slavism.

Especially interesting is the Akathistos hymn's path as an early Byzantine work in the corpus of translated medieval literature and its influence as a translated work on visual art, not only from the aspect of aesthetics, but from the wider social-political and dogmatic context. Such extraordinary example is represented by the Akathistos from the painting in the church of St. Demetrius in Marko's Monastery in the village of Sušica nearby Skopje where: on individual visual compositions the introductory verses from the hymn are written in Old Church Slavonic.²² Even though there are other examples of visual cycles of the Akathistos hymn in medieval painting in Macedonia with Slavic insignia²³ (for example, the church dedicated to The Holy Mother of God in Matejče), nevertheless we take the example with Marko's Monastery as paradigmatic since all visual scenes are preserved, and by this are susceptible to comprehensive analysis in the poetic-visual plane through semiotic (literary and visual) methodology as necessary.

The Akathistos hymn of the Virgin which is integral in the painting's content in the St. Demetrius Church in Marko's Monastery, historically belongs to the second half of XIVth century and represents a true example of the general and complex medieval ideology. We point out this argument with particular importance since it indicates the firm position of Slavic language in literature and painting alike. In this context we indicate also the Archbishopric cause that through this element points out a self-governing status in relation to the Byzantine courtyard. The inscriptions in Slavic language on the Akathistos's visual scenes in the Marko's Monastery indicate the general current in the development of Slavic writing in Byzantine Macedonia from the second half of XIVth century and in view of the Slavic-Byzantine institutional aspect. On the other hand, this speaks of the self-governing aspect of the Ohrid Archbishopric in relation to the metropolitan courtyard, but also for the self-governance in the Skopje episcopate in this frames (to which the Marko's Monastery belonged) that was in close communion with the Ohrid Archbishopric:

„By the time of the second half of XIVth century, Slavic church language takes sway in the Archbishopric office, which did not remain without resonance in the fresco inscriptions.“²⁴

This moment is of extraordinary importance since it indicates two significant arguments: on the one hand, it underlines the self-governance of Skopje

²² The inscriptions in Slavic language in the visual cycle of the Markov Monastery's Akathistos, which began in the confines of the Serbian medieval state, follow the Raška editing with glagolitics [јусово писмо]. See: Грозданов, Цветан, *Охридско судно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 1980, 92.

²³ In relation to the published inscriptions from Markov Monastery, see: Ј. Мирковић и Ж. Тагић, 1925.

²⁴ Ц. Грозданов, *Охридско судно сликарство од XIV век*, Охрид 1980, 91.

episcopate raised to the rank of bishop's residence and in this we conceive the political and church surrounding of Byzantine Macedonia, and the other argument is conceived in the most probable, so-called literary aid, that the painters received in writing the inscriptions,²⁵ since Marko's Monastery is significant scriptures' center. In view of this we could conclude that the visual representation of the upright-sang hymn in Marko's Monastery has multifold meaning: it shows the age-old path of hymnography through its later visual displays and at the same time emphasizes the role of hymnography in its power in creating iconographic displays; it testifies to the transmission of early Byzantine hymnography through translated literature in Old Church Slavic and hence its application in iconography on the territory of Byzantine Macedonia; through the presence of translated Byzantine literature in Slavic language what is indicated is not only the transmission of Byzantine domination in the land of Byzantine Macedonia but also the genealogical journey of Jewish, Hellenistic, apocryphal heritage in the sources of Byzantine literature and painting.

The visual display of Marko's Monastery's *Akathistos* addresses the visual novelties in XIVth century that relate to the humanist dimension of painting. As an illustration, we turn to the visual display of IV kontakion from the upright-sang hymn of Marko's Monastery. The press-mark is almost effaced. It should read: БЪЮ ВЪТРОЪ ИМЪА ПОМЫШЛЕНІИ. Here, the spiritual struggle of Joseph is portrayed, whose visual dramatics is stressed through a strongly designated gesticulation, as signification of the reproaches he directs at Holy Mother. They stand one against the other,²⁶ Joseph on the right, Mary on the left. Mary is portrayed in a posture with the right hand up high negating the reproaches that she has conceived from the Holy Spirit, and her left hand points toward Joseph. He, on the other hand, is situated in an open gesticulation with the right hand, and in the other holds a prop, cane. His feet, being visibly astraddle, represent a visual sign functioning as to enrich the dramatics of the visual narration which concerns Joseph's doubt about the immaculate conception.

The decision for this visual scene most explicitly reflects the tendency of Paleologan style, when expressivity is used as a way to emphasize the humanist dimension of the figures represented, as a way to get near the viewer to the code's signification of the message. Joseph and Mary are semantically important figures, and according to the iconic principle we notice the occurrence of a concession in relation to the rules of painting, since they are portrayed in motion, and not in repose. Turned one against the other with strong gesticulation, they form a center of dynamics in the internal plan, which in turn provokes the active role of the viewer.

Even though according to the iconic rule the semantically important signs are painted frontally to the viewer in order to stimulate the discourse of prayer,

²⁵ A larger number of painters worked at the Marko's Monastery, post probably five of them, but V. Guric (В. Ђурић Марков манастир-Охрид, in: *Зборник ликовне уметности*, бр. 8, књига Дејана Медаковића, Нови Сад 1972, 137-141)) confirms that the painted *Akathistos* in the altar setting and the cella is the work of the second group of masters. Their coming to Skopje alerts that the city is one of the metropolitan cities of the Serbian rulers of this time of the kingdom, but also one of the strongest literary and arts centers.

²⁶ Е. Б. Громова, *История русской иконографии Акафиста*. Москва, 1997, 265.

and that they are represented immovably²⁷, however, such perspective restructuring of this scene is put in the context of the real posture of figures in a spatial situation. In a theological sense, one that expresses the discourse of Paleologan tendency of XIVth century, and according to isihastic interpretation of strong gesticulation as expression of attachment, for St. Gregorius Palamas:

„Detachment dose not consist in undoing the passionate share, but to be moved from bad to good ... In other words, the unity with God’s thought does not kill passionate forces of the soul but transforms them, it sanctifies them. These transformed emotions of the soul, the expression of the innermost agitations of the soul personify one of the features that characterizes the sacral art of this epoch.“²⁸

Final observations. Through the central interest of this work: the relationship between early Byzantine hymnography, through the example of “Akathistos of the Virgin” and her late display in the art of painting, namely, its visual display in XIVth century in Marko’s Monastery nearby Skopje we have pointed out the inter-medial and inter-textual relationship between the text and the painting. We have instituted the main parameters through the following aspects: literary and visual semiotics, ideological-theological and stylistic aspects in relation with the political circumstances in early Byzantium and Slavic culture on the Balkans in XIVth century. In this way we have pointed out the transmission of early Byzantine literature (IV-VII c.) through translated literature in Old Church Slavic, especially in the early phase (IXth -XIth c.) and its influence in the formation of new visual contents (XIVth c.) and the enrichment of liturgical and social life among Slavs on Christo-centric basis. On the other hand, we have put a stress on the linguistic, visual and historical novelties that bring translated old-Slavic literature in its early phase and its civilizational and cultural-historical value formed on the beginnings of Byzantine discourse and its way of interpreting the world. Furthermore, we have emphasized the affirmative gesture of old Slavic literature by way of it leaving its authentic seal in concert with the historical and cultural and art-related circumstances in the Balkans and the new humanist tendencies in the West.

Translation from Macedonian to English: Stanimir Panayotov

²⁷ K. Moran, *Singers in late Byzantine Slavonic painting*. Leiden, 1986, 112.

²⁸ Л. Успенски, *Теологија на иконата*, Скопје 1994, 196.

Софија Грандаковска
КРЕИРАЊЕ ИСТОРИЈЕ: РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКИ ПЕРИОД
И ЊЕГОВЕ ПРЕДСТАВЕ У ЖИВОПИСУ XIV ВЕКА

У фокусу интереса овог текста је веза између рановизантијске химнографије, на примеру „Акатиста Пресветој Богородици“, тачније, његовог превода на старословенски језик и његове касније презентације у живопису из XIV века у Марковом манастиру поред Скопља. Интермедијална и интертекстуална веза између текста и слике сагледани су кроз следеће аспекте: књижевне и визуелне семиотике, историјски, идеолошко-теолошки и стилистички аспекти у вези са историјско-политичким приликама у раној Византији и словенској култури на Балкану у XIV веку. Притом смо указали на трансмисију рановизантијске књижевности (IV- VII века), преко преводне књижевности старословенског језика, кроз рану фазу (IX -XI века) и њеног утицаја на формирање нових ликовних садржаја (XIV век), као и обогаћивање литургијског и социјалног живота Словена на христоцентричној основи. С друге стране, стављен је акценат на језичким, ликовним и историјским новинама које доноси преводна старословенска књижевност у њеној раној фази и њеној цивилизацијској и културно-историјској вредности формираној на начелима византијског дискурса и начина интерпретирања света. Одатле, словенска књижевност и њене ликовне представе су оставиле свој аутентични печат сагласно историјским и културно-уметничким приликама на Балкану и новим хуманистичким тенденцијама на Западу.