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V. I. Personalities in Medieval Macedonia

Five Paradigms of Supreme Commissionership (11th – 14th century)

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Abstract: *The article is a structural intro into a larger study of khetorial enterprises in Medieval Macedonia as a part of the Byzantine Empire and its cultural sphere. It refers to the role of the commissioners in the construction of Macedonian medieval treasury of representative sacral monuments, as well as to their impact over the social matrixes of cultural development in the period between the 11th and the 14th century. Starting from the notion of the actual social opportunities of the members of the ruling dynasties, the highest nobility circles and the church dignitaries in the spheres of creative utilization of their authoritative potential, the paper examines the impact of the different feudal categories of commissioners over the design, the scope, the artistic code, as well as the contemporary cultural significance of the works of art produced in the course of the Byzantine era in the territory of Macedonia. Having in mind the specific historic circumstances of different centuries, as well as the highly determinant social features of different sacral monuments, the aim of the paper is to give an insight into the typological scale and socio-cultural significance of major medieval khetors in Byzantine Macedonia.*

Key words and phrases: *khetor, medieval endowments, state authorities, nobility, Marko's monastery, Lesnovo monastery, St. Sophia Cathedral, St. Achilles Cathedral, Kurbinovo*

In the domain of medieval cultural history, which, as a research composite, encompasses artistic production, archaeology, history, literature, aesthetics and cultural anthropology, one can enumerate a large group of scholarly challenges highly picturesque according to their contents, as well as inspiring according to the cultural significance. However, the main features of the medieval cultural treasury: architectural concepts, iconographic inventions, painterly currents, aesthetical values etc., are always united in one essential amalgam – the khetorial characters, the personages who, articulating their political power, social reputation, cultural impact, theological erudition, as well as artistic taste, have enabled the creation of artistic legacy of representative sacral monuments, marked by creative innovations and refined visual estheticism. As producers of the artistic enterprises of different scope and diversified importance: local, regional and/or global, through animation of a wider sphere of available creative potential and engagement of masons, iconography designers and painters, they were playing the role of creators of the cultural matrixes in

certain periods maintaining the traditional values in the artistic practice or establishing a background for their transformation in sustainable components of the progressive development of artistic innovations.

Starting from the capacity of the khetorial initiatives, which can be perceived in many different elements of the commissioners' engagement, such are the dimensions of the erected edifices, the painterly qualities of the executed frescoes, as well as the degree of impact of the created work of art over the next generations of architects and painters, and utilizing my methodology for categorization of the medieval creation in appropriate sells, groups, clusters etc., for the reason of its scholarly systematization, I have created a typological scale of the medieval khetors whose endowments are preserved in the territory of Macedonia with a single purpose – to form a picture of their role in the social contribution to the **DAC** principle: definition, attitude and character of the artistic creativity from the mysterious, complex and hyper-potent Byzantine epoch. Therefore, the main determinant in the design of the basic template of the investigation is the social status of the khetorial characters, which is effectuated in the manners, means, scope and nuances of realization of the projects in their production. Hence, I have chosen one representative of each of the socio-cultural categories of commissioners with a purpose of investigation of the reflection of their actual social positions upon the configuration and constellation of the works of art. In that regard, there are five different categories of power-men:

- representatives of the ruling dynasties (emperors),
- state governors (kings),
- authorities of the ecclesiastic institutions,
- members of the highest nobility, and
- commissioners with an unknown social identity.

From the category of Emperors, the **DAC** template selected the powerful Balkan *autocrator*, Tsar Samuel. Although the domain of historical studies still looks upon Emperor Samuel as a dynastic portrait of a controversial ruler¹, His era does not generate any disputes in regard to the creative capacities, as well as the actual creative potential of a period fulfilled with extraordinary artistic attainments. Quite the reverse, the individual who bore the name of a famous Old Testament King, who inflamed the Balkan Peninsula with his ambition for an imperial rule and almost realized his dream for a successful rivalry with the Byzantine emperor, has created a self-portrait of a powerful historic figure with a genuine and most productive cultural concept, the artistic works of which have outlasted not only the chronological boundaries of Samuel's

¹ С. Антољјак, *Средновековна Македонија I*, Скопје 1985, pp. 432-443; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 60-71; М. Б. Панов, *Византиска Македонија*, in: П. Кузман, Е. Димитрова, Ј. Донев (Ed.), *Македонија, Милениумски културно-историски факти*, Скопје 2013, pp. 1182-1193; on the reign of Emperor Samuel, see: С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава: Обим и карактер*, Београд 1997.



Fig. 1 The church
of Saint Achilles at
Prespa
Црквата Свети
Ахилиј во Преспа

state, but its significant historic dimensions, as well. In that context, the architectural configuration of the church of Saint Achilles at Prespa (**Fig. 1**), built towards the end of the 10th century, announces the novelties of the Byzantine builders from the following centuries², while its metaphrasic altar fresco décor prefigures the complex theological and visual concept that would become an inspiration for the Byzantine painters in the centuries to come³. Namely, the appearance of the subsidiary domed chapels, located laterally of the altar and enclosed into the architectural concept of a classical basilica⁴, speak in favor of a well considered architectonic solution which does not differentiate significantly from the traditional matrixes; however, it does not replicate them in a manner which would mean a notorious repetition of the spatial concepts of the sacral edifices built in the past centuries. On the contrary, the basilica ground plan, selected as a symbol of the megaprojects of the most powerful ruling figures from the historic past, is articulated in a *modern* way, with structural elaboration of the sanctuary which acquires a pair of new building units configured in a form of enclosed architectural spaces accentuated with domes, apparently announcing the later monumental projects that will “adorn” Byzantine territory in the period from the second half of the 12th century onwards⁵.

² S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Milano 2006, pp. 34-40.

³ E. Dimitrova, “The Da Vinci Mode”. *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, in: Niš & Byzantium Eight Symposium. The Collection of Scientific Works VIII, Niš 2010, pp. 250-251.

⁴ E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметносѝ*, in: П. Кузман, Е. Димитрова, Ј. Донев (Ed.), *Македонија, Милениумски културно-историски факѝи*, Скопје 2013, pp. 1550.

⁵ I. Sinkevic, *The Church of Saint Panteleimon at Nerezi. Architecture. Programme. Patronage*, Wiesbaden 2000, pp. 23-28.

If we should discuss the manners in which Samuel as an Emperor designed his khetetorial projects in order to reflect his ideological configuration as a ruler, we have to turn our attention to the iconographic configuration of the fresco program executed in the altar space of his cathedral church, devastated by time, yet still vaguely preserved on the wall surfaces of the apsidal conch⁶. In that context, the eight Episcopal thrones depicted as symbolic emblems of the eight dioceses of the Archbishopric see of Samuel's Empire represent a visual paradigm of the uncompromising unity of the ecclesiastic institution and its administrative independence. Inspired by some of the Early Christian iconographic matrixes adapted to the reality of the historic momentum, as well as to the political needs of the rising Emperor, the decorative element of the thrones incorporated into the program concept of the altar, is a bold venture of Tsar Samuel's artists in the sphere of socio-political modulation of painterly clichés. Hence, the canonically established iconographic formulas, as main components of the Byzantine artistic production of the period, have given way to the efforts for innovatively constructed visual solutions which reflect the *contemporary* historic events and promote the political achievements through a thoroughly organized *aesthetical marketing*⁷.

Besides the coherently visualized ideological manifesto of the administrative independency of Samuel's archbishopric, the representation of the *Hetiomasia*, accompanied with verses which refer to the rite of the communion celebrated in the altar⁸ is the second striking iconographic novelty of the painterly décor in Saint Achilles' sanctuary. Depicted in a form of a real altar table prepared for the lay down of the Amnos instead of being pictured in the common shape of a throne, the symbolic image of Christ' redemptional sacrifice in Tsar Samuel's Archbishopric deviates from the established iconographic canon by its visual design, as well as by the explicative character of the accompanying liturgical verses. Moreover, alluding to the sacrificial role of the Savior in his festal participation within daily liturgical service, the Eucharistic verses of Saint Achilles sophisticatedly reflect the notion of the mystical presence of Christ as a corporeal sacrifice, laid on the altar table. Hence, this refined Eucharistic allusion of the depicted *Hetoimasia* from the cathedral church of Samuel's Archbishopric at Prespa could be, by all means, seen as an ideological pre-figuration of the concrete iconographic model formulated in the altar of the Kurbinovo church, as a visual reflection of the sacrificial dimension of Christ's incarnation⁹. In other words,

⁶ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Фрескиите и икониите од X и XI век во Македонија (Во њериодот на Самуил и њо него)*, Културно наследство VI (1975), pp. 40-42.

⁷ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1555.

⁸ Н. Радошевиќ-Максимовиќ, *Један еџиграм из базилике Св. Ахилија на Малој Преспи*, Зборник радова Византолошког института 12 (1970), pp. 9-12.

⁹ L. Hadermann-Misguish, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de saint Georges et la peinture Byzantine du XII siècle*, Bruxelles 1975, pp. 67-74; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Giessen 1976, pp. 280; Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Скопје 1992, pp. 53-54; Sh. E. J. Gerstel,

the powerful political leap of a genuine Balkan ruler, who created himself an Empire and Archbishopric on the territory of the former Byzantine realm, was replicated in the visual sphere through a creative articulation of the tradition with aesthetic innovations marked by transparent ideological messages and long-term cultural impact over the subsequent monuments. Hence, Samuel and his khetorial endowments, through the example of the cathedral church of Saint Achilles in Prespa, fit in the category of works of art that generate new traditional values as a result of creative *etastistic* concepts. In that regard, the bold Emperor who conquered a large part of the Balkans and established a realm of coherent state authority and productive cultural matrixes, can be determined as a commissioner who set the ground for inventively articulated tradition and classified as follows:

traditional by definition / *intentional* by attitude / *etastistic* by character.

From the category of Kings, the DAC template chose the highly mythologized character of King Marko, who, in the course of the dramatic years following the Ottoman invasion, has made the very unpopular, yet highly sustainable political deal with the help of which he has wisely succeeded to maintain the orthodox rule over the territory of Macedonia for a quarter of a century¹⁰. During that time he had managed to commission a number of significant sacral monuments, among which one has to mention the one true master-piece – the church dedicated to Saint Demetrius in the village of Sušica, near Skopje (**Fig. 2**). Despite the noticeable inconsistencies in the execution of the khetorial inscription¹¹, which mentions the names of the kings Volkašin and Marko as donors of the temple with a dose of confusion in regard to their governing titles, this monument, created in the last quarter of the 14th century, represents a genuine artistic testimony to the historic tragedy of Macedonia in the period of the ravaging Ottoman conquest. Architectonically designed during the reign of King Volkašin and erected according to a monolithic building concept with an elegant silhouette, cascade wall surfaces, graceful façade lines, opulent brick work patterns and above all – proportionally configured spatial structure of the edifice¹², the church of Saint Demetrius emanates the refined khetorial taste of the donors from the highest circles of the governing estate. The united spatial solution enclosed within the cruciform ground plan speaks in favor of the desire to build a temple which does not imply an interior segregation of the architectural corpus through formation of a naos and a narthex, but of a coherent internal organization articulated along the longitudinal

Beholding the Sacred Mysteries. Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary, Seattle and London 1999, pp. 91-92.

¹⁰ А. Атанасовски, *Македонија во XIV век*, Тетово 2009, pp. 193-205, 236-243.

¹¹ Н. Ношпал-Никуљска, *За кѡиѡијорската комѡозиѡија и наѡиѡисоѡи во Марковиоѡи манасѡиѡир - село Суѡиѡица, Скоѡиѡско*, Гласник, Институт за национална историја XV (1971), pp. 225-235.

¹² Е. Касапова, *Архиѡекѡураѡи на цркѡѡиѡа Св. Димиѡиѡрија - Марков манасѡиѡир*, Скопје 2012, pp. 55-115.



Fig. 2 The church of Saint Demetrius at Sušica, view from the south
Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица, поглед од југ

axis¹³. In that regard, the monolithic columns placed under the dome are included in the building structure of the edifice not only as costly and much more luxurious supporting elements than the pillars; in a metaphoric sense, they are constructed to support the donation of the old King and its successor – as pillars of the orthodox rule in the closing decades of the existence of the Christian state and its visual culture.

The fresco painting of the church produced by King Marko, as the last orthodox ruler of Macedonian territory, radiates with overwhelming painterly expression, embodying the abyss of the historic chaos that chronologically concurs with the closing decades of medieval Macedonia¹⁴. Thou history looks upon the tragic King as an ambivalent political figure – an obedient Turkish vassal, as well as a brave warrior and keeper of the orthodox traditions, he has managed to successfully play the role of a resolute inter-mediator between *need to do* and *nice to do*, maintaining a fragile territorial peace while commissioning one of the most remarkable fresco ensembles of the Byzantine painterly culture from the 14th century. Besides the distinctively conceived program constellation of the fresco arrangement, marked by exciting iconographic novelties and fierce, passionate and dramatically nuanced painterly expression¹⁵, one

¹³ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1660.

¹⁴ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 201-206.

¹⁵ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1746-1751.



Fig. 3 The church of Saint Demetrius at Sušica, Celestial court
Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица, Небесниот Дворец

of the characteristic features of the visual decoration of the temple is its precisely determined social dimension, accentuated through the donors' composition preserved in the interior of the church¹⁶. Although the image of King Marko seems to be almost unrecognizable due to the devastation of the frescoes, the context of the khetorial arrangement, encompassed by the ceremonial suite of the knights of the Celestial court, is ideologically transparent¹⁷. Monumental by its dimensions, luxurious by the iconographic design and highly protocol by the manner of execution, the khetorial ensemble occupies the entire surface of the lower zone of the church interior (**Fig. 3**).

The extensively configured design of the mentioned commissioners' scene is a reason significant enough for scholars to wonder why there is another donor composition depicted on the southern façade of the church (**Fig. 4**), portraying the kings Volkašin and Marko accompanied by a semi-circular wreath of saintly busts¹⁸. Launching a long lasting and conflicting dispute, the second khetorial arrangement portraying King Marko who holds a massive horn as an allusion to the verses of the Psalm 89: 20 (**Fig. 5**), generated diversified theories: baptismal (King Marko holds the

¹⁶ В. Ј. Ђурић, *Марков манастир - Охрид*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 8 (1972), pp. 133.

¹⁷ *idem*, *Византијске фреске у Југославији*, Београд 1974, pp. 81.

¹⁸ К. Балабанов, *Новооткривени портрети краља Марка и краља Вукашина у Марковом манастиру*, Зограф 1 (1966), pp. 28-29.



Fig. 4 The church of Saint Demetrius at Sušica,
Exterior khetorial arrangement
Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица,
Ктиторската фреска на фасадата



Fig. 5 The church of Saint Demetrius at Sušica, Image
of King Marko
Црквата Свети Димитрија во
Сушица, Портретот на кралот
Марко

horn with the anointment oil in the one-time Baptistry attached to the south façade of the church¹⁹), ideological (King Marko lifts the horn in search of God's protection against the Turks²⁰ or in a search of political recognition by the rivals²¹), ceremonial (the khetorial arrangement marks the Royal entrance to the church²²) etc. However, no one did notice that the khetorial arrangement depicted on the façade, besides being a *doppelganger* to the donors' composition in the interior, lacks the fierce and passionate painterly expression of the fresco painting executed in the naos for one reason and one reason only – because it is not chronologically concurrent with the interior ensemble and originates from a later date, approximately one decade subsequently - in the time of arrival of the Metropolitan John in the Skopje area, around 1989²³. Being a highly

¹⁹ Z. Gavrilovic, *The Portrait of King Marko at Markov manastir (1376-1381)*, Byzantinische Forschungen XVI (1990), pp. 415-428.

²⁰ В. Ј. Ђурић, *Три догађаја у српској држави XIV века и њихов одјек у сликарству*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 4 (1968), pp. 87-97.

²¹ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Представа краља Марка на јужној фасади цркве Светиоџ Димитрија у Марковом манастиру*, in: *Кралот Марко во историјата и во традицијата*, Прилеп 1997, pp. 299-307.

²² I. Sinkevic, *Representing without icon, presence and image of king Marko in the church of St. Demetrios near Susica*, in: *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Volume III, Abstracts of Communications*, London 2006, pp. 317-318.

²³ E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, in: *Niš & Byzantium Fifth Symposium. The Collection of Scientific Works V*, Niš 2007, pp. 379.

respective church dignitary and simultaneously ultra-talented fresco and icon painter, Metropolitan John has ventured to create the eccentric iconographic design of the facade scene, producing an inventive iconographic model for a visual explication of the complex historical momentum.

Namely, although King Marko was never recognized as a monarch by the members of the Serbian nobility²⁴, he became the sole legitimate Christian ruler of the invaded territory after the battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389 and the death of all his political rivals and as such, he succeeded to be the only one who could carry the horn of the Biblical Kings as an emblem of his political sovereignty, as well as of his Godly protected royal throne²⁵. Due to the fact that the commissioners' scene is depicted on the south façade of the edifice, above the entrance, its visual functionality should also not be called into question: it is the portal through which King Marko entered its endowment during the ongoing religious ceremonies²⁶; it is the *triumphant gate* of the orthodox ruler through which he used to transit from the world of ruthless political reality into the sphere of sublime sacral experiences. Hence, the khetorial arrangement executed in 1389²⁷ extrapolates the elements of the historic analyses of the fascinating portrait of King Marko – the vassal King, the unrecognized King, the King without a crown, who has deserved a special place in medieval history not only on the account of his significant political role, but also due to the protocol dimension of his khetorial engagements; having commissioned works of art that reflect the historical events through newly constructed and expressively designed iconographic formulas, he has also deserved the main position in my category of classy khetorial initiatives generated by the external political circumstances. In that regard, the tragic image of the last King standing who maintained the Christian rule through political deals, as well as innovative khetorial initiatives can be determined as a donor of politically committed taste and thus classified as follows:

royal by definition / innovative by attitude / externalized by character.

From the category of church dignitaries, the DAC template selected the Ohrid archbishop Leo, a honorable Constantinopolitan intellectual, ecclesiastic diplomat and protégé of the Patriarchal circles to which he officially belonged by duty and position. He was sent to Macedonia, the territory which in the first half of the 11th century was torn apart by the widespread Bogomil *heresy*, in order to restore the orthodoxy with the help of the didactical instruments that have been at Metropolitan's Church disposal. Although the role assigned to the newly appointed archbishop by the actual Constantinopolitan patriarch Michael Kelularios, his own mentor and close

²⁴ Р. Михаљчић, *Тишуле краљевића Марка*, in: *Кралот Марко во историјата и во традицијата*, Прилеп 1997, pp. 31-42.

²⁵ E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, pp. 379.

²⁶ I. Sinkevic, *Representing without icon, presence and image of king Marko in the church of St. Demetrios near Susica*, pp. 318.

²⁷ E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, pp. 379.

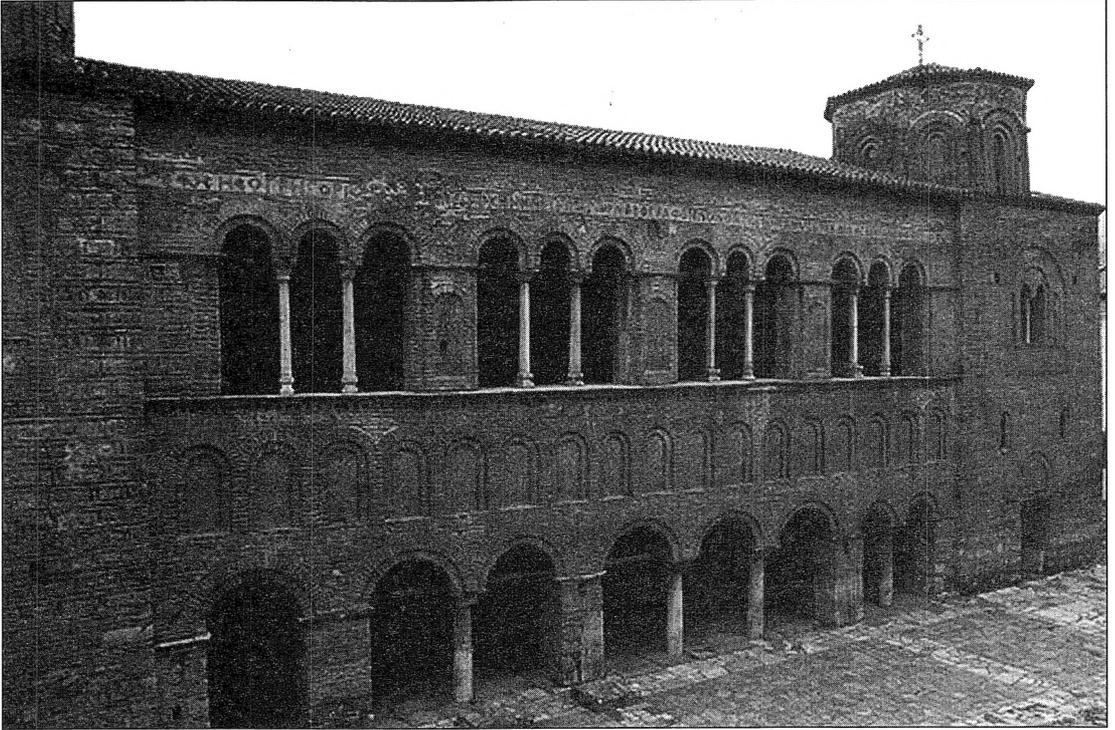


Fig. 6 The church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, view from the west
Црквата Света Софија, поглед од запад

collaborator, was, by all means, a difficult one due to the scope and organization of the Bogomil structures in Macedonia, his khetorial project – the cathedral church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid²⁸ reflects the *sustainable* easiness with the help of which he approached his *re-educative* mission (Fig. 6). The ideological concept of the edifice,

²⁸ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Материјали за македонската средновековна уметност I. Фреските во свештеничките цркви на црквата св. Софија во Охрид*, Зборник на Археолошкиот музеј I (1955-1956), pp. 37-67; Р. Љубинковиќ - М. Коровиќ-Љубинковиќ, *Средновековното сликарство во Охрид*, Зборник на трудови, Охрид 1961, pp. 101-106; В. Н. Лазарев, *Живопис XI-XII веков во Македониј*, Actes du XII^e Congrès international d'études byzantines I, Beograd 1961, pp. 114-121; С. Радојчиќ, *Прилози за историју на најстаријот охридско сликарство*, Зборник радова Византолошког института VIII/2 (1964), pp. 355-381; П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Материјали за историјата на средновековното сликарство во Македонија III. Фреските во наосот и нартексот на црквата Св. Софија во Охрид*, Културно наследство III (1967), pp. 1-25; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Giessen 1976, pp. 224-248; A. Wharton-Epstein, *The Political Content of the Painting of Saint Sophia at Ohrid*, Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik 29 (1980), pp. 315-329; B. Schellewald, *Die Architektur de Sophienkirche in Ohrid*, Bonn 1986; A. M. Лидов, *Образ "Христос-архиепископ" в иконографической программе Софии охридской*, Зограф 17 (1986), pp. 5-21; A. Wharton, *Art of Empire. Painting and Architecture of the Byzantine Periphery*, University Park and London 1988, pp. 105-106; Б. Чипан, *Св. Софија: катедрален храм на Охридската архиепископија*, Скопје 1995; Ц. Грозданов, *Фреските на Св. Софија Охридска*, Скопје 1998, pp. 3-16.

the manner of realization of the architectural structures, the fundamental approach to the iconographic configuration of the painterly program, as well as the explicative character of its execution speak in favor of probably the most effective and certainly the most impressive manner of reaffirmation of orthodoxy in the history of Byzantine visual culture.

Namely, he erected his cathedral on the location of an older shrine, where the archpriest of Samuel's church has resided several decades earlier²⁹, thus demonstrating his determination not to change radically the traditional values of the institutional forms of the Ohrid diocese. In that context, he has kept the already existing perimeter of the older edifice, which, being a remnant of the etatistic concept of Tsar Samuel's temple, was constructed as a classical basilica. That is the exact reason why at the ground floor Saint Sophia church produces itself as a basilica with all its spatial components: longitudinal axis, monumental silhouette, elaborated tripartite altar space and a transept included into the constructional organization of the ground plan. However, Archbishop Leo, who was a Constantinople native, as well as a representative of the leading ecclesiastical structures of the Patriarchate, would have been a traitor of his own ideological views had he agreed to commission a basilica, a typological category which has been completely abandoned as a preferred ground plan in the metropolitan sacral architecture. Hence, while working on his khetorial project, archbishop Leo operated with the manner of a *reasonable compromise* which has united the local tradition and the metropolitan trends, thus above the basilical perimeter a cruciform domed edifice was constructed with subsidiary chapels on the second floor and a two-story narthex³⁰, as a manifestation of the respect for the traditional values upgraded with the contemporary qualities of the metropolitan architecture.

The fresco painting executed in the Ohrid cathedral transforms the contemporary theological disputes of Constantinopolitan archpriests into innovative constituents of the painted program, representing a manual for visual didactics, the only one of that kind in the history of Byzantine artistic production. The thoroughly arranged program configuration of the altar décor (**Fig. 7**) funded upon the notion of the cathedral character of the Saint Sophia temple (through the depiction of the liturgical ornate of the incarnated Christ)³¹, the subtly designed Eucharistic scenes which radiate with the powerful aura of the Constantinopolitan dogma (through the image of Christ who personally blesses the leavened bread)³², the depiction of the religious unity through the performative role of historic portraiture³³ etc., as components of the painted program,

²⁹ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 28.

³⁰ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметносћ*, pp. 1565-1568, Figs. on pp. 1566, 1567.

³¹ А. М. Лидов, *Образ "Христѡа-архиерея" в иконографической програме Софии охридской*, pp. 5-21.

³² S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 53, Fig. on pp. 54.

³³ R. Hamann-Mac Lean, H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien vom 11. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert*, Giessen 1963, Fig. on pp. 5.

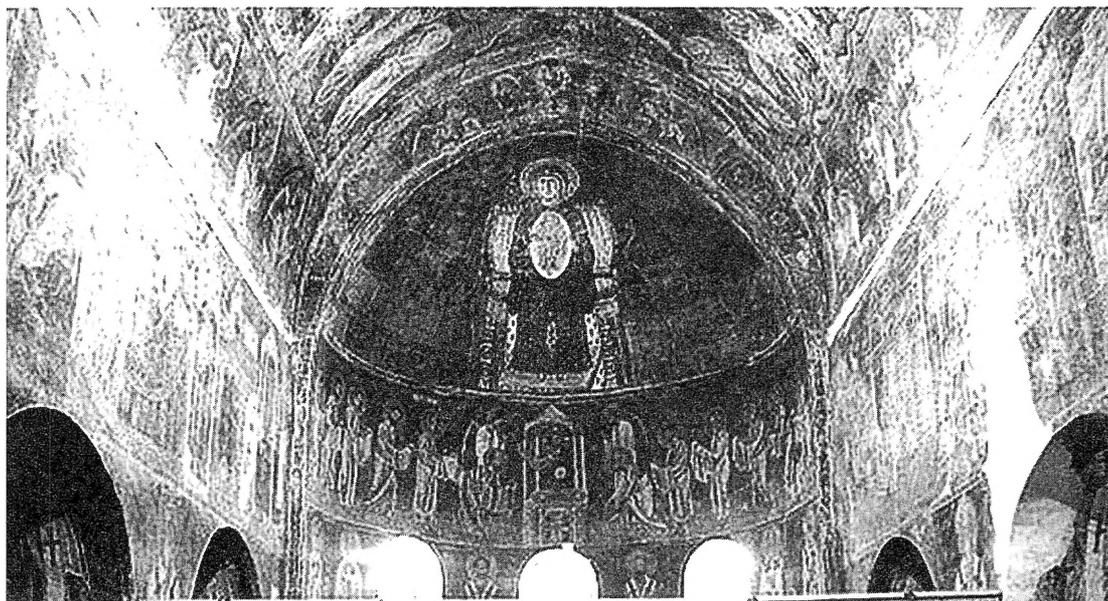


Fig. 7 The church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, view into the altar décor
Црквата Света Софија, поглед кон олтарот

clearly show that Byzantium had a much bigger problem than the Bogomils in the *irreconcilable differences* with Rome that would result in an *unconditional divorce* just a couple of decades later, the consequences of which would be much more difficult for the Byzantine party than for its *former religious partner*.

Among the numerous examples, which, within the visual didactics of Archbishop Leo sublime the intentions to give the local congregation the right religious direction, i.e. the direction of the restored and upon Constantinopolitan principles founded orthodoxy, the illustration of the Liturgical service of Saint Basil the Great is particularly interesting³⁴. Within the structural design of the scene, located next to the main apse, Saint Basil, accompanied by the priests and the deacons, reads the verses from the scroll, bowing to the symbols of Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice placed on the altar table, while in the space behind his figure, a group of faithful attentively follow the liturgical service (**Fig. 8**). Performed by its author and his clergy in the altar of a domed church and attended by a group of citizens who stand in front of the massive wall structure of the naos, it seems that the ceremony takes place in a very precisely defined spatial context of the depicted religious edifice. Having in mind the dome as an element of the original building of Saint Sophia from the time of Archbishop Leo³⁵, it seems permissible that the scene portrays the altar of the Saint Sophia church in Ohrid as a location of the festal performance of the orthodox liturgy in its genuine form. If one should accept the possibility of such didactic approach to

³⁴ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, pp. 246-248.

³⁵ S. Korunovski – E. Dimitrova, op. cit., pp. 29-30



Fig. 8 The church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, Saint Basil Officiating
Црквата Света Софија, Службата на свети Василиј Велики

the illustration of the first ever represented scene with the depiction of the liturgical rite conducted by Saint Basil, than it becomes clear that by placing the ceremony within the cathedral of Saint Sophia, Archbishop Leo intended to accentuate the significance of orthodox rite for the believers' benefits of Ohrid church diocese. This symbolic interrelation of the orthodox faith, manifested by the depiction of the genuine religious ceremony and its symbolically specified performative location in the Ohrid cathedral, is the true paradigm of Leo's ideological approach towards configuration of visual didactic instruments, which show respect to the local tradition, accentuated with the ultimate religious principle of the Byzantine Metropolis. In that regard, the ambitious Constantinopolitan church dignitary whose primary role was to restore the orthodox belief in the significant and influential Episcopal see of Ohrid, can be determined as a commissioner who labeled the local tradition with the trademarks of the Byzantine Capital and classified as:

didactical by definition / attentive by attitude / metropolized by character.

From the category of feudal noblemen, the DAC principle chose the politically mega-potent, charismatic and hyper-attractive lord Jovan Oliver, a controversial *social celebrity* from the mid-14th century³⁶. His political pragmatism, which had a clear manifestation in the processes of opportunistic change of parties for a personal benefit, has been also reflected in his khetorial project, as shown by the church dedicated

³⁶ А. Атанасовски, *Македонија во XIV век*, pp. 112-120.

Fig. 9 The church of Saint Archangel at Lesnovo, view from the south-west

Црквата Свети Архангел Михаил во Лесново, поглед од југо-запад



to Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo³⁷. The elegant and graceful sacral edifice, which, according to its proportional, spatial and constructional qualities resembles a royal donation and can be easily compared to the *inconspicuous visual restraint* of the Marko's monastery³⁸, reflects Jovan Oliver's social advancement in the course of the fifth decade of the 14th century by its architectural context and aesthetical merits. The remarkably conceived naos, erected in the time of the khetor's intensive struggle for acquisition of prestigious feudal titles and marked by the refined visual articulation of the facades, has been complemented with a luxuriously designed narthex marked by the features of the lavishly executed portico facades, when his endowment was promoted to a high church administrative seat of a Bishopric³⁹. Hence, the *bicameral*, two-domed and two phased edifice of Jovan Oliver in Lesnovo sublimates the highest privileges of social and ecclesiastic dignity into a unified and lavishly executed architectural organism (**Fig. 9**).

The same refers to the fresco decoration, which, in the naos of the temple radiates with vivaciousness and dynamism, while in the narthex glows with the noble nuances

³⁷ N. L. Okunev, *Lesnovo, L'art byzantine chez les Slaves, Les Balkans*, Paris 1930, pp. 226-235; С. Радојчић, *Лесново*, Београд 1971; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле*, Београд 1994, pp.153-157; В. Кораћ - М. Шупут, *Архитектура Византијског света*, Београд 1998, pp. 349-351; С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1998, pp. 51-154; S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 122-124, 190-196; Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметносћ*, pp. 1652-1654, 1733-1740.

³⁸ S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L, arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Figs. 92, 93.

³⁹ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметносћ*, pp. 1652-1654,



Fig. 10 The church of Saint Archangel at Lesnovo, Commissioner's scene in the naos
Црквата Свети Архангел Михаил во Лесново, Киторска фреска во наосот

of academism and mysticism⁴⁰. Executed by two different painterly ateliers in a time span of several years, the ensembles arranged in the two constitutional parts of the Lesnovo church represent a genuine effort to create a painterly panorama abundant in iconographic details, bold in the infusion of visual novelties and exciting in the manner of designing the esthetic expression. However, the most sensational element of the fresco decoration of the Lesnovo church is the khetorial scene in the naos⁴¹, which, if analyzed in comparison to the complex iconographic structure of the donors' scenes depicted in the 14th century, comes as a surprise by the simplicity of the iconographic constellation (**Fig. 10**). Previously dated in 1346/47 according to the date when the commissioner could have acquired the title of sebastocrator from the Serbian tsar Dušan⁴², the Lesnovo donor's composition, encompassing only the portrait of Jovan Oliver and the patron saint, deviates from the already established concept in which the feudal subjects are represented in configuration with the sovereign of the state⁴³. Hence, the exclusion of Tsar Dušan's portrait from the khetorial picture could be easily assigned to the historical evidence on the diplomatic collaboration of the Lesnovo

⁴⁰ С. Габелић, *Манасѿир Лесново. Исѿорија и сликарсѿво*, pp. 144-152, 213-216.

⁴¹ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарсѿво срѿске власѿеле*, pp.154; С. Габелић, *Манасѿир Лесново. Исѿорија и сликарсѿво*, pp. 112-118.

⁴² С. Габелић, *Манасѿир Лесново. Исѿорија и сликарсѿво*, pp. 117.

⁴³ E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, pp. 369-378.



Fig. 11 The church of Saint Archangel at Lesnovo, Image of Jovan Oliver
Црквата Свети Архангел Михаил во Лесново, Портретот на Јован Оливер

commissioner with the usurper of the Constantinopolitan throne, John Kantakuzenos in 1342-1343⁴⁴, as well as the opportunity that the title of sebastocrator was bestowed on Jovan Oliver by the Byzantine regent in person. Hence, Tsar Dušan is absent from the khetorial arrangement due to the fact that the giver of the title is the Byzantine emperor himself, who, being a foreigner, was not eligible to become a mandatory element of the portraiture in the composition. All of these shift the chronological determinant of the khetorial arrangement, as well as the painterly decoration of the Lesnovo naos from 1346/7 to 1342/43⁴⁵ and enables the handsome sebastocrator Jovan Oliver to be the only element of the social constellation of the khetorial ensemble in his endowment.

The exclusion of Tsar Dušan portrait from the khetorial ensemble in the Lesnovo naos on one hand, and the opportunist political advancement of Jovan Oliver, as well as the mysterious origin of this highly influential and extremely wealthy immigrant, on the other, certainly point to the specific social background of his feudal career as a nobleman. In that context, the exclusive painterly design of his khetorial portrait

⁴⁴ Б. Тодић, *Нашијис уз Јована Оливера у наосу Леснова. Прилоџ хронологији лесновских фресака*, Зборник радова Византолошког института 38, Београд 1999/2000, pp. 379-381.

⁴⁵ E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, pp. 374.

from 1342/3 should be taken into serious account as a significant component in the disclosure of the *enigma* named Jovan Oliver. Although his image, nuanced with facial attractiveness and equipped with lavishly executed garment could be approached in a number of different ways of research, the DAC principle selected the element with the most substantiating clue in regard to the undisclosed social dimension of the handsome commissioner. Namely, on the façade of the church model held by the donor, one can notice the cryptic signs which embellish the western exterior of the architectural replica⁴⁶. Unknown to the architectural design of Byzantine church facades, these unique visual symbols, executed in a form of floral decorative patterns (**Fig. 11**), can be identified only among the cryptograms from the secret catalogue of emblematic iconography of the knights Templar⁴⁷. Although no confirmation of this hypothesis alluding to the links of the Lesnovo khetor with the Western knights can be found in the historical sources or surviving documents, his well known social, political and financial power, as well as his highly appreciated diplomatic ambiguity, speak in favor of an individual much closer to the western sustainable opportunism than to the Balkans' political conservatism⁴⁸. Hence, the khetorial character of Jovan Oliver, visually manifested through accentuated grace, vanity and crypto-graphics, deserves the main position in the category of commissionership marked by the emblematic vocabulary of esoteric symbolism. In that regard, the opportunistic feudal lord who served multiple parties for personal benefit can be defined as a commissioner of an inter-dependent aesthetical status and classified as:

distinctive by definition / imposing by attitude / esoteric by character.

From the category of khetors with unknown social identity, the DAC pattern chose an individual who has produced a work of art that can be determined as modest, as well as luxurious by its visual configuration, picturesque, as well as mystical by its painterly expression, explicative, as well as elusive by its iconographic design, narrative, as well as symbolic by its ideological definition. Such ambiguity is even more surprising when one has in mind a work of art from the canonically imposing Byzantine period; however the above mentioned features can be detected in an artistic *product* from the 12th century cultural production, i.e. in the church of Saint George at the village of Kurbinovo⁴⁹. Although the devastation has washed away the image of

⁴⁶ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, pp. 256, Figs. 14, 15, 16.

⁴⁷ M. A. Leinart, *The Iconography of the Knights Templar*, University of Sheffield 2002, Ch. 4

⁴⁸ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, pp. 256.

⁴⁹ В. Н. Лазарев, *Живопись XI-XII веков в Македонию*, Actes du XII^e Congrès international d'études byzantines I, Beograd 1963, pp. 129-131; L. Hadermann-Misguish, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de saint Georges et la peinture Byzantine du XII siècle*, Bruxelles 1975, pp. 43-318, 321-551; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Giessen 1976, pp. 276-281; A. Wharton, *Art of Empire. Painting and Architecture of the Byzantine Periphery*, pp. 123-125; Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*,

the donor once depicted in the company of the Byzantine ruling couple and the Ohrid archbishop and situated on the western façade of the temple⁵⁰, one should not doubt his highly respected social ranking, which, judging from the architectural features of the edifice and particularly the iconographic odds of the fresco program, should be looked for in the category of feudal noblemen rather in that of church dignitaries⁵¹. Regardless of his undisclosed historic, as well as social identity, the aesthetic determinants of his extraordinary khetorial project accomplished in the Kurbinovo church speak in favor of an individual characterized by unconventional demand and extremely bold artistic vision. In that context, although modest in dimensions, the architectural configuration of the temple, i.e. the ground plan, the spatial organization, the building technique and the exterior design have already been pointed out as elements of the idea that the Kurbinovo church was created as a smaller replica of the *non-distant* Saint Achilles cathedral, as the most representative sacral edifice in the Prespa region⁵². Emulating the ideological concept of Tsar Samuel Archbishopric in a smaller scale and proportionally diminished size, the Kurbinovo temple can be seen as a 12th century example of the chronological echo which reflects the heroic architectural past of the Prespa region.

However, the church of Saint George at Kurbinovo has acquired the title of one of the most exquisite monuments of the Komneni era due to the extraordinary features of its painterly décor, marked by iconographic invention and lavish visual expression. If one should summarize the most significant contribution of the Kurbinovo ensemble to the Byzantine artistic treasury in just a few items, these would certainly be: the origination of the Melismos concept, the symbolically illuminative constellation of the scenes, as well as the dynamic whirl of kinetic energy of the master's artistic handwriting. In some of our earlier papers, we have discussed the ideological background of these novelties⁵³, in this occasion we will just point out the social dimension of their painterly significance. Namely, if we try to look for an analogy of the Melismos scene in the creative realm of Constantinople, as suggested by most of the scholars⁵⁴, the failure is inevitable since in the Byzantine capital no surviving scene, visualizing the theological

Скопје 1992, pp. 51-64, 74-79; Sh. E. J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries. Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, pp. 91-92; S. Korunovski – E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale*, pp. 74-81; Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1576-1577, 1597-1607.

⁵⁰ Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Fig. on pp. 49.

⁵¹ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1599-1600.

⁵² S. Korunovski – E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale*, pp. 52.

⁵³ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, pp. 249-253; eadem, *Cuia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of scientific works XII, Niš 2014, pp. 301-303.

⁵⁴ Г. Бабић, *Христолошке расправе у XII веку и појава нових сцена у айсидалном декору византијских цркава*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 2 (1966), pp. 11-30; L. Hadermann-Misguish, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de saint Georges et la peinture Byzantine du XII siècle*, pp. 67-74; Sh. E. J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries. Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, pp. 45-47.



Fig. 12 The church of Saint George at Kurbinovo, Transfiguration
Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново, Преображението

ideas explicated at the church councils in relation to Christ' redemptional sacrifice, has been detected so far. Yet, not so far away from the Kurbinovo temple, the preserved altar decoration of the cathedral of Saint Achilles could easily hold the clue of the *know-how* in the transposition of textual religious messages into the medium of iconographic illumination. Inspiring enough for an individual dedicated to creative transformation of ideological patterns, it established the grounds for a long-term exploitation of *soon-to-be mandatory* iconography in the decoration of Byzantine sanctuaries. Utilizing the fruitful legacy of the regional cultural history, the Kurbinovo master has invented an eternal iconographic design for the global development of Byzantine visual artistry.

Besides the earliest representation of the Melismos as the main trade mark of the Kurbinovo painting, the unusually dynamized saintly figures, the associative components of the represented scenery of the compositions, the crypto signs scattered all over the wavy surfaces of the garments, as well as the glamorous vibe of aristocratic elegance are the visual constituents of a painterly concept that is exclusive by inspiration, alternative by invention and extravagant by impression. The inclusion of alternatively conceived "ornaments" into the standard iconographic skeleton of the scenes, as shown by the pictures of Annunciation, Nativity, Harrowing of Hell and Ascension, to name but a few⁵⁵, can be observed as a painterly exclusive approach to

⁵⁵ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1605.

the visual configuration of the Evangelic subjects as much as an ideological instrument for construction of aesthetically extravagant vistas, permeated with genuine structural details. Furthermore, the esoteric references to alternative belief, which can be identified in the iconographic details of the composition depicting the Transfiguration⁵⁶, are a strong testimony to the individual painterly character of the master, as much as to the unconventional social character of his patron (**Fig. 12**). Although, at a certain aesthetic level, we might look at these iconographic *inconsistencies* as exotic components of an extraordinary painterly vision, they cannot be excluded from our evaluation of the creative taste of the commissioner, which is, by default, underlined by the artistic features of his endowment⁵⁷. Hence, the iconographic oddity of the Transfiguration, as well as the visual peculiarities of other Kurbinovo scenes, should be equally attributed to the bold deflection from the officialized standards done by the painter and to his unrestrained imagination sustained by the donor.

The same refers to the maelstrom of the wavy draperies of the depicted saintly figures, which, besides being interpreted as an instrument for representation of the inner emotional agitation of the characters, could be also seen as an appropriate medium for transposition of the cryptic messages of the painter's esoteric handwriting⁵⁸. What was their primary purpose is and will remain an open issue; yet their systematic arrangement, the optical consistency, as well as their well-balanced visual cohabitation speak in favor of a goal far more sustainable than generating isolated elements of sophisticated aesthetical expression. The geographical situation of the Kurbinovo church, located far from the urban centers of the region, the architectural modesty of the edifice, the alternatively configured iconographic program of the frescoes, the esoteric artistic idiolect of the painter, as well as the illuminative cryptography of the visual messages - all point to the idea of a personal shrine of a khetor, immersed in the spiritual depths of his own religious comfort. Hence, the sensational Kurbinovo decoration with its encoded system of painterly expression can be determined as khetorial enterprise categorized as:

alternative by definition / *avant-garde* by attitude / *mega-inventive* by character.

⁵⁶ E. Dimitrova, *Cuia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, pp. 301-303, Fig. 2.

⁵⁷ On the spiritual, as well as social and political background of the commissionership, see: P. Hirschfeld, *Mäzene. Die Rolle des Auftraggebers in der Kunst*, München-Berlin 1968.

⁵⁸ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painters*, pp. 251-253.

V.I.P. Личности во Средновековна Македонија

*Пет парадигми за врвни ктиторски проекти
во периодот XI-XIV столетие*

Резимé

Средновековните ктитори, т.е. личностите кои артикулирајќи ја својата политичка моќ, општествениот углед културното влијание, теолошката ерудација и уметничкиот вкус, го овозможува создавањето на богатата културна ризница на репрезентативни сакрални монументи, исполнети со творечки иновации и префинета визуелна естетика, се суштинскиот амалгам на она што го сочинува креативниот кластер на уметничката продукција: идејниот дизајн, архитектонските концепти, иконографските инвенции, ликовните трендови, естетските вредности итн. Како продуценти на уметничките потфати од различен опфат и значење (локално, регионално, глобално), со анимирањето на пошироката сфера на креативниот потенцијал преку ангажманот на неимари, иконографи и зографи, тие стануваат и креатори на културните матрици во определени епохи преку креативното одржување на традиционалните вредности во творечката практика, или создавајќи бекграунд за нивна трансформација во одржливи компоненти на прогресивниот развој на уметничките тенденции. Поаѓајќи од категоризација на средновековната креација поради нејзина систематизација во проучувањето, трудот нуди типолошка скала на средновековните ктитори чии дела се зачувани на македонската територија, со цел, да се добие појасна слика за нивната улога во социјалниот прилог кон ДСК факторот (дефиниција, став и карактер на ктиторскиот продукт). Во тој контекст, избран е по еден репрезент од секоја од социо-уметничките категории на ктитори, со цел, да се види рефлексијата на нивните реални општествени позиции врз конфигурацијата и констелацијата на уметничкото дело во нивна продукција. Оттука, од категоријата на автократори е избран царот Самуил со црквата на Свети Ахилиј во Преспа, како негов донаторски прилог; од категоријата монарси – кралот Марко со црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица; од категоријата на црковни авторитети – охридскиот архиепископ Леон со неговиот катедрален храм Света Софија во Охрид; од категоријата на високото племство – феудалниот моќник Јован Оливер со Лесновскиот манастир, и од категоријата на ктитори со непознат социјален идентитет – анонимниот продуцент на црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново.