

# ПРОБЛЕМИ НА ИЗКУСТВОТО

ТРИМЕСЕЧНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА ТЕОРИЯ, ИСТОРИЯ И КРИТИКА НА ИЗКУСТВОТО

ART STUDIES QUARTERLY

ИНСТИТУТ ЗА ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА ИЗКУСТВОТА  
ПРИ БЪЛГАРСКА АКАДЕМИЯ НА НАУКИТЕ – СОФИЯ

1  
ISSN 0032-9371

ГОДИНА 51-ва 2018

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Списание „Проблеми на изкуството“ е рецензирано издание на Института за изследване на изкуствата. Ръкописите се приемат в редакцията на списанието или на електронния адрес. Ръкописите трябва да отговарят на изискванията на редколегията, които се намират на сайта на института. Ръкописи не се връщат.

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**I корица**

*Триптих поменик от Кремиковския манастир, края на XVI в., фото Иван Ванев*

**First cover**

*Triptych beadroll, Kremikovtsi Monastery, the end of 16th century, photo Ivan Vanev*

## SUMMARIES

### **„BY THE HAND OF THE SINFUL ZOGRAF”. ONCE AGAIN ON THE ICON PAINTERS IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN TIMES**

*Margarita Kujumdzhieva*

The present text is an attempt to outline different aspects of several more general problems concerning the process of creating paintings in this historic age with its technological and above all social dimensions. What do we know about the way the painters in the Balkans worked, how did they get their knowledge, and how they have perfected their skills, how well their work has been valued and what was their status in society? We still have few answers to these questions as historians, but they consistently captivate specialists interested in Orthodox art. In this article some of these questions are revisited, and the scarce data from the material preserved in Bulgaria is supplemented with what is known as a result of the study of Orthodox art from 15-17th c. in the Balkans.

The study comments on the term „zograf” in Cyrillic written sources, remark on the importance of the painters and the character of their work in the Byzantine era, summarizing data known from the previous publications on the subject. The main part of the article is devoted to the period 15-17 c. The attention is paid to statistics such as the approximate number of known names of masters in the Balkans based on the preserved icons and frescoes signed. These examples are many times more than those in the previous era, yet, the icon-painters of the Balkans continued to show their humility and piety, adding to their names words like „sinful”, „unworthy”, or „servant of God”. The text examines what is known about the organization of the work process and the training of icon-painters in the late Middle Ages. It is underlined that, unlike the large number of documents in the state archives in Dubrovnik and Venice, as well as the rich written sources from Russia, we have scarce written information on the subject in the Balkans. We acquire data mainly from donors’ inscriptions preserved in frescoes and icons, invocation or other type of inscriptions, and in rare cases

from notes in manuscripts, in bead-rolls, or from epistolary or travel literature of the period.

Some historical and cultural conditions in the Balkans are commented, which resulted in certain specifics, such as people identifying themselves in confessional rather than in ethnic terms, as well as the great mobility of the icon-painters, the work in teams, sometimes of mixed origin – Greek and Slavonic, and frequent proficiency in several languages. During this period, many of the icon-painters are representatives of the lower levels of the church hierarchy, which suggests that they are distinguished from the illiterate and uneducated population. In rare cases, besides icon-painters, they are also men of letters, and the best masters have been able to make icons and frescoes, and at the same time to transcribe and decorate books. The text remarks on some other specifics of painters’ work: the dependence on seasons and climate conditions, the preservation of the practice to pass the craftsmanship on to a close family circle. In addition, some technical and technological features in the execution of murals are discussed, as well as the use of preliminary drawings, models and painters’ manuals and the formation of the painters’ iconographic repertoire.

In conclusion, the text draws attention to the state of the material preserved in Bulgaria and in particular to the problem of the attribution of a large number of wall paintings, icons and wood-carved items to St. Pimen of Zograf in previous studies, which is not sustainable due to the lack of facts and serious scientific arguments on the matter.

### **TO THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND TERRITORIAL LIMITS OF THE KASTORIA ARTISTIC CIRCLE OF 15TH-16TH CENTURIES**

*Tsveta Kuneva*

The subject of the publication – the works of the Kastoria artistic circle of 15th-16th centuries – has been analyzed as an important phenomenon in the cultural life of the period by the Balkan art historians from the 1970s

on. Despite that the problems posed by these monuments are still not fully clarified. After the field studies carried in a number of Balkan painting works under the project of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences „The Roads of Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria” and on the basis of the new scientific publications on the monuments under consideration we pose one of the principal questions on the topic: the question of the chronological and territorial limits of the Kastoria artistic production of 15th-16th c. It has been only sketched in the literature to date.

This study is an attempt to arrange the dozens of monuments of the Kastoria artistic circle of 15th-16th centuries into groups conditionally separated depending on their chronology and similarities between one another. By this arrangement we get to the conclusion that the work of the Kastoria studios of the period is almost exclusively within the limits of the historical area of Macedonia and the last two decades of the 15th century and the first thirty years of the 16th century. The earliest dated works, i.e. the Old Katholikon of the Great Meteoron and parts of the murals in Saint Nicetas near Čučer [Banjane] date from 1483/4, and the latest work, i.e. the Church of St. Saviour (Sveti Spas) in the Chebren monastery was created in 1532/3. In the 16th century, a number of painting teams were formed by Kastoria masters’ students and heirs. Subsequently, the influence of the patterns imposed by the Kastoria artistic production was strong as late as the end of the 17th century all over the Balkan Peninsula.

### **KRATOVO’S DEVELOPMENT AS A CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CENTER IN THE SECOND HALF OF 15TH AND IN 16TH CENTURIES**

*Maya Zaharieva*

The article traces out Kratovo’s development as a cultural and artistic center in the second half of the 15th and in 16th centuries. The analysis begins with a historical part presenting the main reasons for the flourishing of the

town and its importance in the Ottoman Empire. The personality of Mara Branković and her role as a patron and protector of the Balkans have an important part in its development in the second half of the 15th century. The text also presents the significance of Kratovo as one of the main literary centers in the post-Byzantine period and some aspects in the propagation of the cult of the Balkan saints. A group of monuments of monumental painting attributed by a number of researchers to the Kratovo artistic center is also analyzed.

In 15th-16th centuries, Kratovo becomes one of empire's big commercial centers which contributes to its transformation into a center of a number of men of letters and clerics. In this period the cultural life is concentrated in monasteries and churches situated in the western parts of the Ottoman Empire. The reason for that is the political and economic development of the region, on the one hand, and, on the other, the proximity to Serbia which was still an independent state until the middle of the 15th century. In the second half of the 15th century, the need to preserve the Orthodox centers arose on the Balkans. This tendency is clearly visible from the stated historical data, which emphasize the important role of Mara Branković for the realization of a number of political and religious events related to the support for the Orthodox centers on the Balkans. She preserved the traditions inherited from the Middle Ages by which the monasteries developed some cults of the Balkan saints and the veneration for their monasteries. The moving of John of Rila's relics from Veliko Tarnovo to the Rila Monastery is one of the most important events in the second half of the 15th century. Several decades later the cult of the Balkan saints intensified after St. George of Kratovo [St. George the New of Sofia], St. Nicholas the New of Sofia and St. George of Sofia the Newest died as martyrs.

The contacts of Kratovo with other important and strategic centers in the empire influence the town's cultural life. An example of that is, first and foremost, Mount Athos, a center attracting icon-painters and men of letters over the entire post-Byzantine period, and also Sofia. Local feudal lords who developed the artistic and literary activity in the region by their donations are another important factor.

### **THE MURALS FROM THE DRAGALEVTSI AND KURILO MONASTERIES OF THE END OF 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THEIR ARTISTIC CONTEXT** *Biserka Penkova*

The article examines four monuments of painting dated in the last years of the 16th century from the district of Sofia. They have been mentioned in the literature but have not been specially examined in relation to the work of one icon-painting team.

In 1990s the murals of the second layer in the naos of the Dragalevtsi monastery were removed from the walls and carried onto a new base. On the basis of the preserved fragments and the documentation of the restorers one can reconstruct their initial location and their iconographic program. Some images of prophets are preserved into medallions on the vault and underneath them there are full-length bishops, followed by scenes from the Christological cycle follow. A frieze of medallions with the images of martyrs used to run underneath, and some full-length saints were depicted in the lowermost register.

The partial restoration of the murals in the naos and the altar of the church of the Kurilo monastery from 1596 over the past couple of years has enabled one to compare them to the fragments from the Dragalevtsi church and to demonstrate that the two monuments belong to the same icon-painting team. They follow the same system of allocation of the murals on the walls, the same iconographic schemes and stylistic peculiarities.

The Kurilo murals are characterized by a greater diversity in the scenes and the use of exquisite ornamental motives. They are the work of two icon-painters who worked together but one can easily discern their hands: the one who worked in the arch is more negligent and expressive while the other one is more precise. He has a rather icon-painting manner and maybe he was the leading one. The murals in the Kurilo monastery deserve a separate study which will not become possible until they are fully revealed and restored.

In 1595, before he painted the Kurilo church the lead icon-painter painted the hagiographic icon of Saint John the Baptist which is today in the collection of the State Historical Museum in Moscow, and the triptych beadroll for the Kremikovtsi monastery. Both monuments are published but have not been

studied in relation to the murals from the Dragalevtsi and Kurilo monasteries. The analysis shows a number of stylistic and iconographic similarities and demonstrates that they are the work of the same team. So far one cannot tell where that team was formed but one can certainly trace out the development of at least the lead artist in later monuments such as the churches in Zervat, Dobarsko, the Slivnitsa Monastery and the Seslavtsi Monastery.

### **THE CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION IN ZERVAT, ALBANIA**

*Maria Kolusheva*

The article presents a church in the area of Northern Epirus, today's Southern Albania that is little known in the literature. The church was built in several stages as the year of 1582/3 written on the western façade should be accepted as the final date of its erection. The kretor's inscription in the naos witnesses the year when the murals were laid, the year of 1605/6, as all residents of the village contributed to the paintings. The frescoes in both the naos and the narthex were made then. The two icon-painters, Mihail and Nikola, left their names in the inscription. Today there are no icons preserved in the church because they were stolen in 2010. We draw information about them from photographs in several publications.

On almost all images there are partial upper layers of painting which were not removed upon the restoration of the frescoes. The program of the mural ensemble is preserved in its entirety and presents an extremely rich iconographic repertory. There are numerous scenes from different cycles: of the Great Feasts, the Passion, the Post-Resurrection appearances of Christ, the Acts and the Miracles of Christ, scenes dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, Old Testament episodes, and others.

The murals have been attributed by a number of Greek authors to the famous icon-painter Mihail of Linotopi. The identity of the second icon-painter, Nikola, has not been commented on save for the study of T. Tsambouras. The author thinks his paintings are close to the Linotopi studio and attributes to him several icons originating from the church itself and from other churches in Northern Greece.

Getting familiar with the murals on the site allowed us to make some impor-

tant observations, which give a new meaning to the suggestions made so far. Probably the frescoes were laid in two stages. The work was assigned to two icon-painting teams led by two masters. One of them worked in the entire altar section, the eastern *transept* and the eastern section of the central aisle. The other one painted the central and the western parts of the three aisles as well as all murals in the narthex. The boundary between the two areas of work is easily noticeable and can be traced out in the bottom two registers of the naos. The differences in the two parts are both stylistic and paleographic. The participation of Mihail of Linotopi as the chief icon-painter as suggested by some researchers, is not confirmed. Probably he participated as an assistant to the chief master who worked in the western part of the naos and in the narthex. The person who led the mural painting work in the altar and in the eastern part of the naos may be identified as one of the masters who did the frescoes in Dobarsko and in the Seslavtsi Monastery.

**LINGUISTIC AND PICTORIAL PARALLELS: OBSERVATIONS ON THE INSCRIPTIONS OF A GROUP OF MONUMENTS FROM THE LATE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURY IN THE BALKANS**

*Tsvetan Vasilev*

The article aims to present some observations on the language features of a group of monuments that most probably belong to the same art circle. In this context the analysis of linguistic data serves as an essential supplement to the stylistic analysis of the murals and could be used as a tool for a more complete description of the artistic production of one studio. The analyzed examples are mostly texts from the scrolls held by prophets and saints from the following monuments: Dragalevtsi Monastery of the Holy Mother of God (second layer of painting), Kurilo Monastery of St. John of Rila (1596), Seslavtsi Monastery of St. Nicholas (1616), Slimnitsa Monastery of the Virgin (1607), the Church of St. Theodore of Amasea and St. Theodore Stratelates (1614) in the village of Dobarsko, and the Church of the Assumption (1606) in the village of Zervat.

In all monuments listed above the inscriptions are of the mixed type (Cyrillic and Greek); their examination is

based upon as many linguistic aspects as possible: orthographic, phonetic, morphological and syntactical. This methodology allows for a greater reliability of the conclusions drawn.

From the orthographic aspect, as regards the Cyrillic inscriptions there are noticeable similarities in the writing of the Yat vowel, the letter <ѣ>; usage of a specific combination of two superscript characters borrowed from the Greek language have also been observed.

Parallel Cyrillic inscriptions from the scenes of the Last Supper, the Gethsemane Prayer, the Resurrection of Lazarus and Nativity of Christ are examined; also, Cyrillic inscriptions written on the scrolls of Anna the Prophetess on all monuments with the exception of the church in Zervat where the Greek inscriptions predominate considerably. Other identical inscriptions include those on the scrolls of St. Paul of Thebes in the Seslavtsi Monastery and in the church in Dobarsko, of the prophet Jonah from the Kurilo Monastery, the Seslavtsi Monastery and the church in Dobarsko, of the prophet Balaam from the church in Zervat and the Slimnitsa Monastery. All inscriptions are examined on the morphological, syntactic and textual levels, revealing that two spelling standards have been used in them simultaneously: Serbian and Middle Bulgarian.

As regards the Greek inscriptions parallel texts from the scrolls of St. Euthymius the Great from the churches in Zervat and Dobarsko, the Slimnitsa Monastery and the Seslavtsi Monastery as well as two hymnographic texts from the Octoechos inscribed on the images of St. John Damascene and St. Cosmas of Maiuma are examined.

The results of the study show that the comprehensive approach that combines a linguistic and a stylistic analysis is the most appropriate for the adequate determination and definition of the characteristics of this art circle of monuments in which similar iconographic and textual patterns are realized.

**MORE ON THE RECONSTRUCTIONS, STAGES OF PAINTING AND PRESERVATION OF THE CHURCH AT THE MONASTERY OF SAINT JOHN OF RILA NEAR KURILO**

*Ivan Vanev*

The murals from the church at the Monastery of Saint John of Rila near

Kurilo have been the object of a number of publications but the problems concerning their protection have remained outside the researchers' attention. The article attempts to trace out the reconstructions and the works related to the protection of the church, which, together with the studies during the most recent conservation interventions, provide new data about the history of the monument.

The first pieces of evidence were published by Vasil Kanchov in 1902 and they deal with the revealing of the murals and the ktetor's inscription on the western wall and in the naos. The National Archaeological Museum in Sofia has an important contribution to the protection of the church: it led the strengthening of the building in 1940. In 1960s and 1970s the care of the monument was associated with the activity of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage. The conservation projects prepared in that period also aimed at revealing the murals of 1596 but as a matter of a conjunction of circumstances they were not realized. The projects for the building's conservation were not realized as well. The conservation of the murals was resumed in 2012. Currently, the 1596 layer in the naos of the church is almost entirely uncovered. During the last stage of the conservation the Kostadin Valyov's murals were also revealed on the northern part of the altar with an inscription of 1829. This discovery has important significance not only for the history of the monument but for the creative work of the painter of Samokov as well. It turns out that the discovered fragments are his earliest precisely dated wall paintings.

The last conservation interventions provide new evidence about the history of the monument but also pose different ethical problems for the specialists: one of them is the protection of the already removed murals of the painter Theodor dating from the mid-19th century. At this stage of research, the question concerning Kostadin Valyov's murals remains unsolved. They cover the 16th-century layer from the northern part of the altar and the western facade of the old church. To a great extent, these problems are related to the absence of an overall program on the church's protection. However, there is no doubt that the studies of this important monument must continue, as well as the efforts for its preservation.

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