

# Colourful sparkles of imaginary vistas: saintly beauty in the eyes of the beholder

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*The article deals with the issue of physical appearance of the saintly images in Byzantine painting and the manners of its conception. In that regard, the paper offers categorization of the portraiture in which different saints receive distinctive aesthetic code appropriate to their type of "attractiveness".*

*Key words: Beauty, Saintly images, Categories of saints, Warriors, Bishops, Holy Healers, Martyrs, Female saints*

Beauty, as a visual determinant of all earthly virtues, has always been a substantial element, as well as a great creative challenge in the painterly artistic expression. The art of the Antiquity gave beauty a divine dimension,<sup>1</sup> while the Renaissance raised it on the pedestal of the superb qualities of humanity, labeling the attractive physical appearance as the most recognizable feature of the visual arts of the era.<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, the profound spirituality of the Christian beholders, both Orthodox and Roman Catholic, gave attention to other issues within the concept of artistic creativity, the domination of which, placed beauty in the spheres of almost confirmative neglect. In that regard, set on the margins of the more significant artistic ideas elaborated in the works of medieval art, beauty has been approached by the painters as a spiritual feature of the saintly images that does not go beyond the ideological matrix of their visual exposition.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it seems that this feature of human representation gained no significant place in the creative efforts of the medieval artists, and, accordingly, no noticeable attention in the papers of the people devoted to examination of medieval painterly heritage.

However, although not in the focus of Byzantine scholars, the depiction of physical beauty of the saintly images was not entirely excluded from the investigation

of aesthetic categories of the medieval painting in the Orthodox East.<sup>4</sup> Since the visual presentation of the holy portraiture in Byzantium was highly dependent on the religious dogma and church canons, the wise bishops, the self-denying martyrs, the devote hermits, the courageous warriors, the modest female saints etc., were always represented within the manner which predominantly expressed their specific spiritual role in the holy mission of Christian salvation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in accordance to the corresponding impression that a member of a certain saintly category was expected to provoke in the eyes of the beholder, Byzantine artists configured diverse painterly manners to represent the most appropriate corporeal outlook for the optimal ideological dimension of the saints.

In that regard and according to the main purpose of our paper – to give an initial background for typological classification of the depiction of physical beauty in Byzantine painting, we are making an attempt to specify several distinctive categories, all of which bear discernible and highly recognizable features of the visual appearance of the saintly portraits in the context of their painterly presentation to the beholder. Based on the canonically verified concepts of design of the sacred portraiture in relation to the role the saintly figures played for the believers,<sup>6</sup> the depiction of different categories of saints had to express the highest possible degree of visual recognition in order to meet the emotional and spiritual needs and expectations of the congregation. Therefore, a catalogue of saintly representations was invented in the structure of which the diverse groups of saints were given their aesthetically verified visual exposition funded upon their historical role, social background and religious function. In order to serve as active and beneficent interlocutors that reveal their true-to-life appearance to the believers,<sup>7</sup> the saints'

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<sup>1</sup> On the representation of beauty as a visual category in classical artistic production cf. R. Hawley, *The dynamics of beauty in classical Greece*, in: *Changing bodies, changing meanings. Studies on the human body in antiquity*, ed. D. Montserrat, London – New York 1998, 37–54.

<sup>2</sup> For some aspects of depiction of physical beauty in renaissance art cf. F. Hartt, D. Wilkins, *History of Italian Renaissance art. Painting, sculpture, architecture*, Upper Saddle River 2011<sup>7</sup>; G. K. Fiero, *The Humanistic tradition III: The European Renaissance, the Reformation and global encounter*, New York 2010<sup>6</sup>; S. J. Campbell, M. W. Cole, *Italian Renaissance art*, New York 2012.

<sup>3</sup> J. Seward, *The beauty and holiness and the holiness of beauty. Art, sanctity and the truth of Catholicism*, San Francisco 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Most recent study of this issue is: M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the male body in Byzantium. Perception and representations in art and text*, New York 2009.

<sup>5</sup> On the depiction of saintly portraits in the course of the Byzantine era cf. E. Kitzinger, *Some reflections on portraiture in Byzantine art*, ZRVI 8 (1963) 185–193; H. Belting, *Likeness and presence. A history of the image before the era of art*, Chicago 1994; G. Dagron, *Holy images and likeness*, DOP 45 (1991) 23–33.

<sup>6</sup> H. Maguire, *Disembodiment and corporality in Byzantine images of the saints*, in: *Iconography at the crossroads. Papers from the colloquium sponsored by the Index of Christian art*, ed. B. Cassidy, Princeton 1993, 75–93.

<sup>7</sup> H. Maguire, *The icons of their bodies. Saints and their images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 5.

images had to be visually defined in regard to their facial exposition, posture, costume and corporal expression.

In that manner, the spiritual aura of the saints built upon their deeds for the religious ideas and the purity of the faith was given an appropriate aesthetical imagery encased in the structural elements of painterly expression. Each saintly category was determined by a set of functional displays that addressed the spiritual necessities of the faithful and thus managed to accomplish the precisely designated function by the means of their iconographical configuration. In this system of “sustainable display”,<sup>8</sup> the facial exposition, posture, costume and corporal expression of the saintly images became the main features of their physical appearance and accordingly of their aesthetical impact over the beholder. In that regard and in order to accomplish the goal of drafting a classifying catalogue of physical beauty of religious portraits within Byzantine painterly culture, we will analyze the images of those represented as members of the gallery of saints in the first zone of the painterly ensembles, which, by their position, were located closest to the eyes of the “watching” congregation. Hence, our classification of physical beauty of the saints is based on the aesthetic resonant of the above mentioned elements in their interaction with the religious consciousness of the faithful during the process of visual receptiveness of theological messages.

In our attempt to configure the typological structure of their aesthetic exposure to the faithful, we have chosen the representatives of the most exponential categories of saints, almost inevitably exhibited in the gallery of full-figure depictions within Byzantine fresco ensembles in the period from the second half of the twelfth until the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Since each category of saints is marked by its own aesthetic code which reflects the inner psychological status, i.e. the personality, as well as the outer physical appearance, i.e. the visual attractiveness of the saintly images, our chosen categories of holy personages (warriors, martyrs, physician saints, bishops, hermits, female saints) generate several distinctive typological determinants of sacral looks in the sphere of physical beauty. Their classification in aesthetic units marked by the decisive features of the physiognomy, stance, attitude and temper is based on the utilizable resources of painterly approach towards the canonical depiction of saintly images. Intended to serve as an index of aesthetic labels within Byzantine iconography of portraiture, the categorization of saintly beauty based on the visual inter-dialogue of physical features and psychological chemistry, should reveal the ways of exposition of the holy personages in their virtuous, fleshy, true-to-life appearance to the faithful. Resulting from the functional instrumentation of medieval religious dogma, as well as the magnitude of imaginative expression of Byzantine artists, it discloses the manners of painterly creation of “physical reality” to those dependent on its spiritual impact.

The first category of our classification encompasses the images of *the holy warriors*, who, due to their brav-

<sup>8</sup> On the pictorial and narrative structure in the illustration of the lives of the saints v. C. Hahn, *Picturing the text. Narrative in the life of the saints*, *Art History* 13 (1990) 1–33; eadem, *Portrayed on the heart. Narrative effect in pictorial lives of saints from the tenth through thirteenth century*, Berkeley 2001.

<sup>9</sup> A time span determined by the number of existent fresco ensembles with well-preserved full-figure representations of the saints in the first zone of the decoration.



Fig. 1. *Panagia Olimpiotissa in Elasson, St. Procope and St. Nestor*

ery and uncompromising nature, received the painterly features of masculine and vigorous outlook as a match to the fierce battles they have fought, to the many victories they have won, as well as to the courageous victims they have become in honor of the Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, their anatomy is elaborated boldly and in details, depicted with firm muscular plasticity and a playful silhouette of the drawing.<sup>11</sup> The enforced corporeality, accentuated through the swaying poses or swaggering mobility of the figure,<sup>12</sup> is the dominant element in conception of the warrior representations, which radiates with power and passion of their evident youth, obvious strength and verified courage. In that sense, the holy warriors are represented in characteristic “ready-for-action” poses, manifested through various gestures, while their images are round and juicy, conceived by soft modelling of the cheeks, bright complexion of the face and energetic gaze of the eyes. The suggestive energy of the facial expression of the images of Saint Demetrius, Saint Procopius and Saint Eustatios in the south conch of the church of the Monastery of Hilandar (ca. 1321),<sup>13</sup> as well as the sophisticated dynamics of the facial mimicry of the two military saints painted in Panagia Olimpiotissa in Elason (ca. 1345)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On the iconography of the holy warriors cf. M. Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika u istočnohrišćanskoj umetnosti i o predstavama ovih svetitelja u Dečanima*, in: *Zidno slikarstvo manastira Dečana. Gradnja i studije*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Beograd 1995, 567–626; Ch. Walter, *The warrior saints in Byzantine art and tradition*, Aldershot 2003, 41–135.

<sup>11</sup> Hatzaki, *Beauty and the male body in Byzantium*, 116–134.

<sup>12</sup> Maguire, *The icons of their bodies*, 20–24, 74–80.

<sup>13</sup> M. Marković, *Prvobitni živopis glavne manastirske crkve*, in: *Manastir Hilandar*, ed. G. Subotić, Beograd 1998, fig. on p. 226.

<sup>14</sup> E. C. Constantinides, *The wall paintings of the Panagia Olimpiotissa at Elasson in northern Thessaly*, Athens 1992, 246–249; G.



(Fig. 1) are the most prominent features of these quintessential examples of painterly display of power and passion in the visual definition of the images of warrior saints.

The golden ochre for the tan, the icy rosy for the cheeks, the silver grey for the shades and the rich ebony brown for the hair are the colors that comprise the most suitable palette to depict the images of the young and energetic warriors. The light beige with brusque accents applied on the image, the pearl cream nuance of his cheeks and the auburn shade of the curly hair of Theodore Stratelates from the painted ensemble of Protaton<sup>15</sup> radiate with decisive energy of his facial expression. Similarly, the face of Saint Mercurios from the naos of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295)<sup>16</sup> glows with the warm shade of wheat for the tan, icy pink for the cheeks and russet brown for the exuberant hairdo supplementing the apparent inner dynamism of his psychological personality. Ready to confront and eager to conflict, the holy warriors stand responsive to any challenge with the accelerated rhythm of their bodies, a pulsating energy of their faces and an energetic outburst of dynamic performance of their postures. The powerful chivalrous elegance of the postures of the military saints depicted in the church of Saint Panteleimon at Nerezi (ca. 1166),<sup>17</sup> the imposing corporeal dynamics of the figures of the holy warriors in the church of Christ Chora in Constantinople (ca. 1320),<sup>18</sup> as well as the noble energetic charge of Saint George and Saint Demetrios in the Monastery of Andreaš near Skopje (1389)<sup>19</sup> are but a few examples of the aesthetic manner in configuration of the vigorous outlook of the military saints. Adorned in shiny armours that reflect the plastic shapes of their powerfully playful corporeality, as well as equipped with weaponry appropriate to their energetic anatomy and dynamic motion, as depicted in the northern conch of the Monastery of Kalenić (ca. 1420),<sup>20</sup> the military saints stand out by their firm attitude, bold stature and relentless enthusiasm. In that regard and due to their sharp movement and uncompromising bravery, the holy warriors can be marked as a category of saintly beauty named *energy and resolution*.

The second group of our typological classification, *the martyrs*, who have proudly sacrificed themselves for the common religious cause, gained the physical characteristics of dignified and elegant pillars of the faith.<sup>21</sup> Usually suffering the courageous death at a young age, they are represented in the full outburst of their ideological determination, manifested through a

Velenis, *L'église Panagia Olympiotissa et la chapelle de Pammacaristos*, Zograf 27 (1998–1999) 103–112.

<sup>15</sup> M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Byzantine wall-paintings*, Athens 1994, Fig. 107.

<sup>16</sup> P. Kuzman, E. Dimitrova, M. Tutkovski, *Ohrid sub specie aeternitatis*, Ohrid 2010, fig. on p. 176.

<sup>17</sup> I. Sinkević, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi. Architecture, programme, patronage*, Wiesbaden 2000, 59–60.

<sup>18</sup> P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami III. The Frescoes*, New York 1966, Figs. 253–257, 261, 264.

<sup>19</sup> J. Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas an der Treska. Geschichte, Architektur und Malerei*, Wien 1997, 192, 193; E. Dimitrova, V. Lilčić, K. Antevska, A. Vasilevski, *Matka. Kulturno nasleđstvo*, Ohrid 2011, 150.

<sup>20</sup> D. Simić-Lazar, *Kalenić. Slikarstvo, istorija*, Kragujevac 2000, Figs. XXIX, XXX, XXXI

<sup>21</sup> On the establishment of the cult of the martyrs cf. V. Limberis, *The cult of the martyrs and the Cappadocian fathers*, in: *Byzantine Christianity*, ed. D. Krueger, Minneapolis 2006, 39–50.



Fig. 2. *St. George in Staro Nagoričino, St. Jacob the Persian*

distinctive range of remarkable stances and accentuated figural gestures.<sup>22</sup> The anatomy of their bodies is elaborated nicely with underlined elegance of the postures that are frontal in the projection, but scenic due to the lively rhythm of the corporeal motion. The mobility of the figure, although not very diversified in the types of action, is portrayed through elastic movements of the bodies and resolute gestures of the upper extremities. With hands in a gesture of blessing and/or with their figures in a stance of a devoted prayer, they stand prepared for their ever-perpetuate sacrifice to be given at the altar of gallantry. Marked by the features of their social distinction through a palette of different costumes, the martyrs display a variety of interesting clothing, from modest robes to remarkably designed garments. From the humbly tailored “day wear” of Saint Andrianos depicted on the western wall of the naos in Saint George in Staro Nagoričino (1316–1318),<sup>23</sup> through the lavishly ornamented cloak of Saint Jacob the Persian executed in the naos of the same church (Fig. 2), to the luxuriously embroidered costumes

<sup>22</sup> As in: Arilje, cf. D. Vojvodić, *Zidno slikarstvo crkve Svetog Ahilija u Arilju*, Beograd 2005, 90, schemes on p. 294–297; Protaton, cf. V. J. Djurić, *Svetogorske ideje u slikarstvu Protatona*, Hilendarski zbornik 8 (1991) 85; Staro Nagoričino, cf. B. Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Beograd 1993, 77; Prohor of Pčinja, cf. G. Subotić, D. Todorović, *Slikar Mihailo u manastiru Svetog Prohora Pčinjskog*, ZRVI 34 (1975) 133; Gračanica, cf. B. Todić, Gračanica. *Slikarstvo*, Beograd–Pristina 1988, Figs. 72, 73; Konče, cf. S. Gabelić, *Manastir Konče*, Beograd 2008, Figs. 47, 49, 53, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Fig. IV.

and stylishly designed “fashion” jewelry of Saint Sozon and Saint Tryphon in the naos of Taxiarches Metropoleos in Kastoria (1359/1360),<sup>24</sup> the catalogue of martyr attires exhibits a remarkable diversity of inventively conceived clothes and accessories.

The images of the martyr saints are shaped with mild curvatures, yet ennobled with decisive expression, appropriate to the consistence of their religious determination. The sophisticated elaboration of the facial lines in the depiction of the portrait of Saint Victor and the refined scale of tonal modellation in the presentation of the facial anatomy of Saint Vicentius in the church of Saint Andreas at Matka,<sup>25</sup> both permeated with delicate spectrum of modular shades are the true specimens of the painterly code for exposition of the specific personal articulation of the martyr saints. The pale ochre for the tan, the mother of pearl rosy for the cheeks and the light green for the shades are the characteristic colors of their facial appearance. These chromatic values refer to the already mentioned fair and pasty image of Saint Andrianos in the Staro Nagoričino church,<sup>26</sup> to the chromatically saturated portraits of the martyrs depicted in the mid-zone on the western wall in Andreaš,<sup>27</sup> as well as to the translucent martyr characters executed on the south wall of the fresco program in the church of the Holy Mother of God in Mateič.<sup>28</sup> Given the features of persons with firm attitudes, portrayed through their sturdy stances and substantial gestures, the martyrs gained a suitable place in our category of saintly beauty named *resolution and distinction*.

The next category – the one of *the holy physicians*, appear as a symbol of corporeal and spiritual health.<sup>29</sup> Engaging themselves in the noble activities of assistance to the ill and underprivileged, committing to the beneficial tasks of medication and dedicating their lives to mastering the curative skills, the holy physicians gained the respect of distinctive members of the Christian society on the ground of their professional devotion, as well as their humane determination. Equipped with the appropriate instruments,<sup>30</sup> as features of the many successful medical treatments they have performed, the physician saints appear as the most representative characters of the charitable Christian virtues. In that regard, they are represented in stable and dignified poses, depicted with careful and tender movements, appropriate to their responsible and reliable occupation. The noble stature of the church patron Saint Panteleimon represented on the eastern wall of the naos in Nerezi (ca. 1166),<sup>31</sup> his graceful corporal dynamic depicted by the elegant movement of the hand, as well as his tender, almost feminine like



Fig. 3. St. Panteleimon at Nerezi, St. Panteleimon

facial appearance is one of the earliest examples of the highly distinctive saintly portrait of the most prominent physician in the iconography of the Byzantine world. Always pictured in frontal positions, the holy physicians display the dignity of their noble profession and the alert of their humanistic dedication.

Their generous characters are portrayed through the gentle composure of the faces, softly modeled with mild curvatures and toned anatomic components. Besides the adorable image of Saint Panteleimon in the Nerezi church (Fig. 3), depicted with fair complexion and luscious facial anatomy, the portraits of the physician saints in the ensembles from the twelfth century display the elegant muscular lines of the facial architecture and its generous expression as represented in the naos of Saint George in Kurbinovo (1191),<sup>32</sup> while in later painting, the medical threesome (Panteleimon, Cosma and Damianos) glow with suggestive facial energy and resolute locomotion, particularly in the example of Saint Nicetas in Banjani (1323/1324).<sup>33</sup> Fawn ochre for the tan, bright rosy for the lips, light brown for the shades and white optical accents to underline the vigilance of the images, are the colors that illuminate the portraits of the physician saints. The pale shades of crystal ecru for the complexion of young Panteleimon and somewhat darker valeur of light beige for the tan of the slightly older Cosma and Damianos<sup>34</sup>

<sup>24</sup> S. M. Pelekanidis, M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens 1985, Figs. 16, 17

<sup>25</sup> Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas an der Treska*, Figs. 89, 90

<sup>26</sup> Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Fig. IV.

<sup>27</sup> Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas an der Treska*, Figs. 83–86.

<sup>28</sup> E. Dimitrova, *Manastir Matejče*, Skopje 2002, 192.

<sup>29</sup> A. Kazhdan, N. Patterson Ševčenko, *Kosmas and Damianos*, in: *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium II*, ed. A. Kazhdan, Oxford 1991, 1151; A. Kazhdan, N. Patterson Ševčenko, *Panteleimon*, in: ODB III, 1572–1573.

<sup>30</sup> Maguire, *The icons of their bodies*, 44–46.

<sup>31</sup> Sinkević, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi*, Fig. XLIX.

<sup>32</sup> C. Grozdanov, L. Haderman-Misgviš, *Kurbinovo*, Skopje 1992, Figs. 23, 24.

<sup>33</sup> E. Dimitrova, *The Church of Saint Niketas, village of Banjani*, in: *Skopje: seven monuments of art and architecture*, Skopje 2010, fig. on the p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> C. Grozdanov, *Ohridskoto zidno slikarstvo od XIV vek*, Ohrid 1980, 48.





Fig. 4. *Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid, St. Clement*

reflect the delicate psychological scope of warm cordiality in the chromatic resonance of their portraiture. Acting as benevolent healers of the poor and miss-fortuned, the holy physicians, due to their attentive outlook and considerate characters, belong to our category of saintly beauty marked by the features of *distinction and generosity*.

In our categorization of physical beauty in Byzantine art, *the bishops*, as members of the most respected church entourage, were represented as noble and erudite leaders of the faithful.<sup>35</sup> Wise and well educated, experienced and highly respected, the great church fathers of Eastern Christianity gained the visual features of passionate preachers, enduring teachers and honorable advisers of the believers. In that regard, they are represented in strictly festal stances, full frontal when depicted as portraits, or in three-quarter processional poses, when members of the Officiating liturgical service.<sup>36</sup> In both cases, the statures of their figures are imposingly ceremonial and ennobled with the dynamic energy of the motion, determined by the harmonious and well balanced rhythm of their movements. Depicted with the noble glow of their sophisticated spirituality, the images of the Episcopal authorities are given the suggestive gaze of the eyes as a primary facial feature to match the ever-watchful nature of their religious devotion. The distinguished portrait anatomy of the image of Saint Clement depicted in the church of Saint Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295)<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> H. Buchthal, *Some notes on Byzantine hagiographical portraiture*, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 62 (1963) 81–90.

<sup>36</sup> Maguire, *The icons of their bodies*, 53–57, 78–80.

<sup>37</sup> Kuzman, Dimitrova, Tutkovski, *Ohrid sub specie aeternitatis*, fig. on p. 130.



Fig. 5. *St. Nicholas in Psača, St. Spyridon*

designed with playful plastic configuration of the facial components, as well as the fiercely energized portrait dynamic in the presentation of the image of Saint Blasios in the sanctuary of Marko's monastery (1376/1377)<sup>38</sup> stand on the pedestal of the most convincing executions of bishops' characters in the painterly production of the Byzantine epoch.

This persuasive facial outlook, displayed by the mentioned portraits from Peribleptos (Fig. 4) and Marko's monastery, appropriate to their authoritative role for the faithful, is also achieved through the accentuated plastic configuration of the facial anatomy, which wrinkles and ridges to display the golden age of their sophisticated spiritual wisdom. Delicately nuanced with the warm hues of golden ochre for the toned muscular shapes, as well as soft green shades for the linear "stripes" of their facial patina, both images of the church fathers display the noble "iconographic" accords of their mature countenance. Rich in the plastic shapes of the facial masses and saturated in the colors applied, the bishops' images are permeated with the energetic expression of deep emotional suggestibility. Gray ochre for the tan, olive green for the shades and snowy white for the hairs and beards are the colors that commonly picture the respectable leaders of the church institution. The dramatically pale chromatic resonance of the facial configuration of Saint Spyridon from the painted ensemble of the church of Saint Nicholas in Psača, synchronized with the calm spiritual tonality of his psychological portrait (Fig. 5) is but an example of the specific manner of depiction of serene generosity of the holy fathers. The same features of bishops' portraiture refer to the images of the archpriests in the Officiating Church Fathers composition in the altar

<sup>38</sup> V. J. Djurić, *Vizantijske freske u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 1974, fig. 89.



of the church of the Holy Trinity in Sopoćani,<sup>39</sup> where the solemn postures of their figures, the festive stances of their ceremonial bow, the delicate composure of their facial mimicry, as well as the harmonious coloristic spectrum of their chromatic definition are united in a picture that celebrates the remarkable painterly standards in the depiction of attentiveness, prudence and devotion. Marked by the suggestive visual patina of their wisdom large-heartedly given to the faithful, the bishops receive their place in our category of saintly beauty determined as *generosity and maturity*.

The members of our next beauty class, the representatives of *the hermitic category* were given the look of ascetic tribunes in “silent” combat for the purity of faith.<sup>40</sup> Slender and exhausted by the outlook of their figures and mature and well experienced by the looks of the images, the eremites are one of the most impressive group of saints, due to the nearly “exhibitionistic” appearance of their self-tortured bodies. Anorexic in the contours and stiff in the gestures, rigid in the modelling and static in the postures, the hermits glow expressively with their ever-fearful determination of the most dedicated followers of Christ.<sup>41</sup> Rude in nature, yet ennobled with supreme inner tranquility, they occupy one of the most interesting places when physical beauty of the saints is in question. Namely, the wrinkled anatomy of the images, the pale complexion of the faces, the extensive hairiness of the figures, the slackness of the bodily muscles and the dehydration of the loose skin, can hardly belong to any category of attractive physical appearance. The saturated ecru with warm auburn shades applied to accentuate their sunburned tan, the deep wrinkles that configure the ascetic facial anatomy, the rigid pose of devoted prayer, as well as the fixed gaze of their deep-set eyes are the main features of the hermits’ “aesthetically imposing” outlook when represented in half-length figures, as in the case of the image of Saint Euphrosinos depicted in the church of Saint George in Kurbinovo (1191).<sup>42</sup>

However, the sophisticated ascetism of their long-term excruciated figures and the expressively shaped anatomy of their aged faces, that display their everlasting restraint of all earthly pleasures, deserve human admiration, or even divine reverence. Extra skinny in the shape of the figural exposition and dressed in garments made of rough fabrics tailored to a minimum extent or overgrown with thick hair which covers the entire bodily anatomy, the hermits display the remarkable humility of their appearance, as well as of their inexhaustible religious devotion. The composition of Saint Paul of Thebes dressed in a loose garment roughly woven of cheap linen and Saint Makarios of Egypt covered in bodily hair that waves as an animal fur, depicted in the Bačkovno monastery (turn of the twelfth century), is a quintessential example of specific representation of hermitic twosome in the history of Byzantine painting.<sup>43</sup> In the cases of foursome, painted in the later period, the “dress code” abandons the modest



Fig. 6. Panagia Olimpiotissa in Elasson, St. Makarios

garments in favour of simple perisomae, yet keeps the characteristic bodily hair as the most “fashionable” way of clothing of the hermitic cause devotees. The four anorexic figures depicted on the northern wall on the second floor of the narthex in the cathedral church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid (ca. 1346),<sup>44</sup> as well as the matching characters painted on the western wall of the temple dedicated to the Holy Mother of God in Mateič (1348–1352)<sup>45</sup> display not only the specific carnal traits, but the common spectrum of chromatic values characteristic of hermitic images, as well.

In that regard, the pale and translucent ochre for the tan, the light brown for the shades, the row white for the hairs and beards, as well as the sun-bath grey for the bodily anatomy, are the colors that match the ecstatic spirituality of the ones devoted to eremitic life. In some cases, as in the image of Saint Makarios from the church of Panagia Olimpiotissa in Elasson (ca. 1345), the reddish hair and beard of the hermit is combined with the heavy grey nuance of the bodily “cover” of hairs in the chromatic diapason of the representation (Fig. 6), while in others the hairiness of the figure is completely matched with the tonality of the bushy hair and impressively long beard, as in the portrait of Saint Onuphrios from Saint Archangel Michael church in Prilep (ca. 1275) (Fig. 7). Depicted in their noble and, through great temptations, reached adulthood and represented as

<sup>39</sup> Idem, *Sopoćani*, Beograd 1991, Figs. 38–43.

<sup>40</sup> On the depiction of the hermits in medieval art cf. P. H. Ditchfield, *The Arts of the Church: Symbolism of the saints*, London 2004<sup>2</sup>, 121–125.

<sup>41</sup> On the role of hermitic devotion cf. J. E. Cooper, M. J. Decker, *Life and society in Byzantine Cappadocia*, Basingstoke 2012, 113–115.

<sup>42</sup> Grozdanov, Haderman-Misgviš, *Kurbinovo*, Fig. 29.

<sup>43</sup> E. Bakalova, V. Karageorghis, L. Leventis, *The ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery*, Plovdiv 2003, Fig. 68.

<sup>44</sup> E. Dimitrova, S. Korunovski, S. Grandakovska, *Srednovekovna Makedonija. Kultura i umetnost in: Makedonija. Mileniumski kulturno-istoriski fakti*, Skopje 2013, fig. on the p. 1723.

<sup>45</sup> Dimitrova, *Manastir Matejče*, Fig. LV.





Fig. 7. St. Archangel Michael in Prilep, St. Onuphrios

human symbols of the ultimate religious innocence, the eremites belong to our category of saintly beauty marked by the features of *maturity and purity*.

On the other hand, the female saints, according to their hagiographies, were depicted in two different manners: *as nuns and as wealthy and glamorous lady aristocrats*.<sup>46</sup> In the first case, they embody the humble and god-fearing female gender, represented in subservient stances and modest monastic clothing.<sup>47</sup> Due to their status of convent inhabitants and, accordingly, of persons renounced of all laymen benefits, the holy nuns are depicted with a minimum of elements in regard to their physical appearance and social features.<sup>48</sup> In that sense, the anatomy of their figures is purposely hidden beneath the loose robes, while their gestures are reduced to the obedient motion of a prayer. The calmness of the serene faces and the graceful movements of the elongated fingers are the only features that display feminine attitudes, which can be determined as physically attractive and visually likable. Liberated from any emotional residue of their

<sup>46</sup> On some biographies of female saints in Byzantium cf. *Holy women of Byzantium. Ten saints' lives in English translation*, ed. A. M. Talbot, Washington 1996. On the sociological aspect of female saints in Byzantium v. P. Halsall, *Women's bodies, men's souls. Sanctity and gender in Byzantium*, Ph.D. Fordham University 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Maguire, *The icons of their bodies*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> On the role of the depicted female saints in the painted ensembles v. Sh. E. J. Gerstel, *Painted sources for female piety in Medieval Byzantium*, DOP 52 (1998) 89–111.



Fig. 8. St. George in Pološko, St. Paraskeve and St. Barbara

earthly life that could distort the peaceful architecture of the facial tranquility, the holy nuns reflect only the inner beauty of their souls, manifested through the calm silhouettes of their facial, as well as corporeal appearance.

Dressed in dark garments and represented in static postures or in poses with minimum elements of corporal motion, the three nuns depicted on the south portion of the western wall in the church of Saint George in Kurbinovo<sup>49</sup> display less attention given to the design of their images in comparison to all other saintly categories mentioned above. The same refers to the portraits of the female monastics executed in the church of Saint George in Pološko (1344/1345), whose calm countenances and rigidly configured ceremonial gestures do not reveal anything beyond the formal stature of a modestly structured female saint (Fig. 8). The standard approach to the construction of their “visual image”, as well as the commonly exposed manner in the presentation of the portrait traits of Saint Sosana, depicted in the paraklession of the church of Saint Constantine and Helena in Ohrid (ca. 1400),<sup>50</sup> are some of the specific elements of embodiment of monastic beauty within the category of female saints. With the application of pale ochre for the tan, light brown for the shades and non-striking, darker colours for the robes, the holy nuns appear as symbols of a non-imposing spiritual elegance dedicated to the ideals of complete devotion to Christian virtues, thus fitting in our classification of saintly beauty defined by the features of *purity and grace*.

In the case of representation of the saintly figures of the *lady aristocrats*, the images radiate with feminine graciousness and tender physical attractiveness.<sup>51</sup> Tall and slender, elegant and graceful, beautiful and charming, they comprise all characteristics of desirable outlook in terms of facial, figural and fashionable appearance. Fair in the exhibition of the images, thin in the presentation of the bodies and modern in the display of the couture, the pictures of the female saints belonging to the category of nobility, radiate with facial charisma, figural energy and accentuated social potency. The luxurious garments ornamented with embroidery and decorated with precious stones, the elegant

<sup>49</sup> Grozdanov, Haderman-Misgviš, *Kurbinovo*, Fig. 27.

<sup>50</sup> G. Subotić, *Sveti Konstantin i Jelena u Ohridu*, Beograd 1971, 52.

<sup>51</sup> On the role of ladies in the Orthodox Church cf. E. Ganouri, *The lives of women saints in the Orthodox Church*, Athens 2009.





Fig. 9. Sts. Constantine and Helena in Ohrid, St. Catherine



Fig. 10. Sts. Peter and Paul in Berende, St. Kiryake

silhouettes of the figures and the lively “demeanor” of Saint Barbara, Saint Kiryake and Saint Catherine depicted on the north portion of the western wall in the church of Saint George in Kurbinovo,<sup>52</sup> are the basic features of one of the earliest examples of creation of a group of attractive characters within the gallery of female saints.

The mild modellation of the images, the gracious contours of the bodies and the luxuriously designed costumes, altogether with the elegant motion as well as gentle facial expression, result in the most desirable form of a human beauty in the esthetic horizon of Byzantine painting, as displayed in the irresistibly beautiful portrait of Saint Catherine in the church of Saints Constantine and Helena in Ohrid (ca. 1400) (Fig. 9). Glowing ochre for the tan, silky pink nuances for the cheeks, pale rose tones for the lips and a great palette of colours for the glamorous clothing, are the features of the chromatic diapason for the depiction of the sophisticated beauties of Christian religion. The refined complexion of the aristocratic ladies depicted in the church of Saint George in Pološko (1344/1345),<sup>53</sup> the noble facial expression of the feminine characters represented in the temple dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul in Berende (mid-fourteenth century) (Fig. 10), as well as the luxuriously adorned female saints executed in the fresco painting of the Holy Mother of God in Mateič church (1348–1352),<sup>54</sup> are some of the representative references for the creation of some of the

most beautiful appearances in Byzantine painterly culture. Ennobled with the features of tenderness and kindness, dressed in colourful clothing and adorned with precious jewelry, they stand proud in the fresco ensembles of Byzantine churches as representatives of our last class of saintly beauty named *grace and fashion*.

In sum, although far from being a dominant or most perceptible component of the painterly concepts of Byzantine art, physical beauty has gained a significant role in the ideological determination of the saintly categories, appropriate to the social rank and religious mission of the depicted personages. In that regard, the exuberant youth and untamed triumphant temper of the holy warriors, the resolute determination and distinctively dignified character of the martyrs, the attentive vigilance and humanistic determination of the physician saints, the suggestive temper and sophisticated charisma of the bishops, the uncompromising corporeal aescetism of the eremites, the tender and graceful modesty of the nuns, as well as the fashionable and extravagant styling of the lady aristocrats, become features of their distinctive physical appearance. Radiating with charm and passion, glowing with energy and distinction or impressing with courtesy and gracious manners, the saints have not only dedicated their lives to the belief, but have also given their most presentable appearance to the magnificent vision of Christianity.

<sup>52</sup> Grozdanov, Haderman-Misgviš, *Kurbinovo*, Fig. 28.

<sup>53</sup> D. Čornakov, *Pološki manastir Sveti Georgi*, Skopje 2006, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Dimitrova, *Manastir Matejče*, Fig. LVII.



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## Обојене искре замишљених изгледа: светитељска лепота у очима посматрача

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Физичка лепота приказаних светитеља, то јест лепота њиховог лица и тела, никада није имала средишње место у истраживањима водећих византолога, иако је анализа визуелних одлика ликова и фигура у средњовековном сликарству православног Истока била део многобројних научних студија и радова. У том контексту одавно је прихваћено да је начин идеолошког конципирања и визуелног представљања светитељских ликова у Византији био у потпуности зависан од религиозне догме, као и од црквених канона утемељених још у ранохришћанском периоду. Ипак, захваљујући деликатном приступу византијских сликара особеном и веома сложенем естетском поретку различитих светитељских категорија, остварено је значајно сведочанство о начинима успостављања карактеристичног сликарског кода за приказивање њиховог „атрактивног“ физичког изгледа. У раду је дата схема категоризације типолошких одлика у приказивању физичких елемената светитељских представа, која одражава њихову појавну привлачност у очима верника, посматрача. Према тој схеми, *свeтiи рaтнiци* се, због своје храбрости и бескомпромисног јунаштва, одликују мужевношћу и енергичним изгледом и припадају категорији коју обележавају *енeргичностi* и

*йoжрiтiвoвaнoстi*; *мученици*, који су се поносно жртвовали за хришћанство, добили су изглед поносних и елегантних стубова вере и сврстани су у категорију повезану с *йoжрiтiвoвaнoшћу* и *oдвaжнoшћу*; *свeтiи врaчи* се у византијском сликарству појављују као симболи телесног и духовног здравља, те су на основу тога припали категорији утемељеној на *oдвaжнoстi* и *вeлiкoдушнoстi*; *aрхијeрeји*, чланови најпоштованијих црквених кругова, приказивани су у сликаним програмима као племенити и учени предводници верника, а красе их, у складу с тим, особине *вeлiкoдушнoстi* и *зрeлoстi*, док су *йyстiинoжитeљи* добили изглед аскетских трибуна у „тихој“ борби за чистоту вере, обележеној *зрeлoшћу* и *чистoћoм*.

Када је реч о светитељкама, оне су – на основу података из житија – приказиване на два начина: као *мoнaхињe* и као богате и гламурозне *дaмe йлeмкињe*. Оне из прве групе, повезане са *чистoћoм* и *блaжeнcтвoм*, показују скрушен богобојажљив темперамент жена предатих вери. Ликови припадница друге групе зраче женственом грациозношћу и деликатном физичком привлачношћу, што им даје обележја *блaжeнcтвa*, али и *cтiлa*.