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**CUIA CULPA?
LAPSES AND MISDEMEANORS OF MEDIEVAL ARTISTS
IN MACEDONIA**

The world of painterly artistic expression is a sphere of the most subtle visualization of sophisticated threads of creative imagination, conceived of invention, elaborated by talent and accomplished in an extraordinary form of absolute authenticity. If we accept the idea that the work of art is a unique complex of concepts and values – a rich and highly nuanced intellectual, as well as emotional experience in which the personal and the social configuration of the painter interact in a dynamic relationship to produce a genuine vision, than the essence of that performance should be the ultimate freedom of expression¹. In other words, the capability of the painter to signify, convey or express meaning through his or hers works of art, as concepts, value or feeling, is rooted in the person's professional experience and cultural code. Confirming, supporting and verifying his or hers artistic creed through their own painterly idiolect, the authors give an undeniable statement to the truthfulness of their commitment, sincerity and devotion.

However, prior to the invention of abstract painting², the artists had to comply with the iconographic parameters of compositional design in order to satisfy the religious or ideological nature of their commissions. In that manner, numerous ways of circumvention of the rigid patterns of iconographic legislation were invented, some of which are extraordinarily and astonishingly imaginative. Treated as accidental shortcomings of painterly experience, unintentional lapses of declined attention or insolent misdemeanours of unrestrained artistic freedom, they mark the career of even the most talented and highly celebrated painters, as labels of their uncompromising and unconventional creative imagination.

¹ On the issue of artistic creation and its role in the society see: H. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkley-Los Angeles-London 1982; A. W. Foster – J. R. Blau, *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, New York 1989; E. Belfiore – O. Bennet, *The Social Impact of the Arts: an intellectual history*, Basingstone 2008.

² On the origin and development of abstract painting see: V. Perry, *Abstract Painting. Concepts and Techniques*, New York 2005; R. van Vliet, *The Art of Abstract Painting: A Guide to Creativity and Free Expression*, Kent 2009.



Fig. 1 St. George in Kurbinovo (1191), Transfiguration
Сл. 1 Св. Ђорђе у Курбинову (1191), Преображење

This can be observed even in the case of the greatest of all the great painters of all times, the astonishing and glamorous megamaster of art - Leonardo da Vinci³. In his master-piece, the fresco painting illustrating the Last Supper in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Gracie in Milan⁴, the Renaissance genius ventures upon what is considered the most innadmissible trespass in religious artistic expression. Namely, in the impeccable compositional design of the scene depicting the moment of the fateful disclosure of the Betrayal, instead of depicting the figure of the young apostle John, who is, by default, supposed to ex-

press the discrete self-suspicion to his master, da Vinci placed an affectionate image of an attractive female next to Jesus, positioned as his closest companion⁵. Creating a fabulous allusion to the esoteric idea of the messianic role, as well as historic destiny of Christ, the great Leonardo has brilliantly shown the manner of utilization of irresistible iconographic misdemeanor for generation of what is, by no doubt, the most authentic artistic vision ever.

In Byzantine painting, such diversions from the verified iconographic canons can be observed as well, although to a lesser degree, due to the institutionalized religious conventions to which the painters were bound by their commitment contracts⁶. However, some of them ventured to transgress the strict iconographic regulation determined by their painting manuels and have stepped in the sphere of imaginative creation of the iconographic design, producing compositional arrangements of a peculiar nature, as well as highly indecipherable substance matter. Boldly deflecting from the officialized standards of

³ A. Tossone – C. Frost, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Complete Works*, Milan 2005; F. Zölner, *Leonardo*, Köln 2010; M. Walter Brockwell, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Whitefish 2010.

⁴ P. Brambillia Barcilon – P. C. Marani, *Leonardo. The Last Supper*, Chicago 2001; A. Tossone – C. Frost, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Complete Works*, 176-190; R. King, *Leonardo and the Last Supper*, New York 2012.

⁵ M. Starbird, *Mary Magdaline: The Greatest Story Never Told*, Lakewood 2009.

⁶ The existence of Ermeneia testifies to the obligation of the painters to follow the verified iconographic canons proscribed in the handbooks as far as the 17th century, a date of origination of the oldest preserved authentic manual for the artists in the Byzantine cultural sphere, see: *The “Painter’s Manual” of Dionysius of Fourna* (Translated by P. Hetherington), London 1974.

painterly practice, they have created biblical visions “ornamented” with strange details, amazing odds and extraordinary iconographic supplements⁷. Being due to the lack of conventional painterly experience, to the desire for sophisticated iconographic experiments, or to the esoteric background of the authors, the extraordinary visual concepts of some works of art deserve at least a shred of scholarly attention. In that regard, this paper will reveal and try to decipher some of the most exciting examples of unusually and unconventionally designed compositions within the „gallery“ of fresco ensembles, created in the course of the Byzantine period in the territory of present-day Macedonia.

One of the most interesting specimens of non-traditional painterly concept embodied in the genuine program configuration of the fresco arrangement, as well as the finely designed iconographic novelties is the decorative ensemble that adorns the walls of the church dedicated to St. George in the village of Kurbinovo⁸. The enforced dynamism of the drawing, the accelerated mobility of the masses, the glamorous levitation of the forms, the endless whirlpool of the wavy draperies, as well as the fluid energy of the elastic gesticulation of the weightless figures are the main features of the esoteric painterly expression of the masters⁹. Enumerated among the most inventive fresco programmes of the Middle Byzantine period, the sensational Kurbinovo decoration keeps many secrets of its painterly conception in the sphere of iconographic innovations, as well as in the domain of highly unconventional artistic expression. Its encoded system of transposition of visual messages through the esoteric painterly expression of the master, as we have already shown in one of our previous Nis & Byzantium papers¹⁰, creates an enigmatic puzzle consisting of cryptic iconographic novelties “scattered” all over the illustrated motifs. One of the scenes that shares the conspiratorial atmosphere which marks this fresco ensemble is the depiction of the Transfiguration (**Fig. 1**), located or, better to say – dislocated on the western wall of the church interior¹¹. Abandoning the traditional order in the arrangement of the Festal episodes in which the Transfiguration, by Biblical default, should follow the Baptism, this Kurbinovo scene “has moved” ahead, changing its place with the composition of the Raising of Lazarus.

⁷ E. Dimitrova, “The Da Vinci Mode” – *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, Collection of Scientific Works VIII, Niš 2010, 245-257.

⁸ L. Hadermann-Misguish, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de saint Georges et la peinture Byzantine du XII siècle*, Bruxelles 1975, 43-318, 321-551; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Giessen 1963, 276-281; Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Скопје 1992, 51-64, 74-79; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Milano 2006, 64-74; Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност* in: *Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти*, Скопје 2013, 1596-1607.

⁹ Е. Димитрова, *Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново*, Скопје 2015 (in print).

¹⁰ E. Dimitrova, “The Da Vinci Mode” – *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, 249-253.

¹¹ Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Drawings on the pg. 44.



Fig. 2 St. George in Kurbinovo (1191), Transfiguration, detail

Сл. 2 Св. Ђорђе у Курбинову (1191), Преображење, детаљ

Since we all know that the Gospels insist on Christ being transfigured in order to fulfil the messianic task and save the sinful mankind (*Mathew: 17, 1-7; Mark: 9, 2-7; Luke: 9, 28-35*), the quintessential example of which is the bringing back to life the dead Lazarus, it seems that the Kurbinovo painter did not share the biblical notion of the divine nature of Jesus as an essential aspect of his soteriological role. This “ideologic” lapse of the master, which distorted the traditional chronological order of the illustrated events, is confirmed by an-

other iconographic odd, included in the picture. Namely, although the painter has kept the standard iconographic design of the scene with Christ’s figure, flanked by the prophets and depicted in the upper middle section of the composition, as well as the three apostles placed beneath¹², a certain detail in a form of a gesture, speaks in favour of its uncompromising non-conformity. Instead of looking “dazed and confused” by the metamorphosis of his master, the apostle Peter in the Kurbinovo painting straightforwardly salutes Him with a token of his unquestioning approval in a form of an accentuated “sign of the horns” or *mano cornuto* (Fig. 2), well known from the social language of some esoteric fraternities, as well as the ideas of Eastern mysticism¹³. Alluding to the significance of earthly tasks, rather than heavenly missions, it discloses the alternative religious belief of the painter, founded upon the biological origin of Christ and compatible to the historic ideas of western medieval esoterics. Hence, besides the highly significant allusions to terrestrial powers, personified landscapes, as well as mystical energies, interwoven in the iconographic components of other scenes depicting the Festal episodes¹⁴, the Kurbinovo composition of the Transfiguration displays the same painterly character dedicated to iconographic exclusivities, submerged in the complex ideological individuality of

¹² As it is depicted in other painted ensembles created in the 12th century: Nerezi, cf. I. Sinkevic, *The Church of Saint Panteleimon at Nerezi. Architecture. Programme. Patronage*, Wiesbaden 2000, 53-54, St. Nicholas Kasnitzi, cf. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Byzantine Wall-Paintings*, Athens 1994, Fig. 41.

¹³ I. Cooper-Oakley, *Masonry and Medieval Mysticism: Traces of a Hidden Tradition*, Whitefish 1996, 76-100.

¹⁴ Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, 1605.



Fig. 3 Holy Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295), The Prayer at Getsemane
Сл. 3 Св. Богородица Перивлепта у Охриду (1295), Молитва у Гетсиманији

Fig. 4 Holy Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295), The Prayer at Getsemane, detail
Сл. 4 Св. Богородица Перивлепта у Охриду (1295), Молитва у Гетсиманији, детаљ

the master. Portraying the evident interactive communication between the Messiah and his disciple in the moment of the divine metamorphosis, Kurbinovo's Transfiguration testifies to the imaginative energy of the painter originated in the creative roots of his esoteric views, as well as highly rational religious configuration.

The second example chosen to represent the creative deviations of the medieval artists in Macedonia is the explosive painterly panorama of Michael Astrapas and Eutychios in the church of the Holy Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid¹⁵, where the iconographic novelties, permeated with the trenchant hues of emotional suggestibility, disclose the breakthrough of the new aesthetic spirit of the Palaiologan era. The spectrum of visual innovations within the iconographic structure of the scenes,



¹⁵ O. Demus, *Die Entstehung des Paläologenstils in der Malerei*, Berichte zum XI Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongress, München 1958, 30-31; R. Hamann-Mac Lean und Horst Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien von 11 bis zum frühen 14 Jahrhundert*, Giessen 1963, 28-29; П. Мильковиќ-Пепек, *Делото на зоографиите Михаило и Еутихиј*, Скопје 1967, 43-51; Ц. Грозданов, *Црква Св. Климентиј, Охрид*, Загреб 1979, 4-12; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia Lárté medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, 152-161; Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, 1679-1689.



Fig .5 Holy Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295), The Prayer at Getsemane, detail
Сл. 5 Св. Богородица Перивлепта у Охриду (1295), Молитва у Гетсиманији, детаљ

configured by Michael and Eutychios in this ensemble, is usually based upon the piercing energy of the depicted figures, the dramatic rhythm of their gestures, the kinetic dynamism of the various postures and the narrative density of the expressive emotions portrayed with strong light contrasts and exciting clash between the painted nuances¹⁶. However, the most remarkable feature of the innovative painterly language of the masters that defines the fresco ensemble of the Peribleptos church is the dramatic atmosphere of the illustrated events, among which, for the purpose of this paper, we have chosen the composition depicting the Prayer in the Mount of Olives¹⁷ (Fig. 3). Once again, according to the Gospels, the expressive prayer of Jesus at Gethsemane takes place after the Last Supper has finished and Judas had left the feast to betray his master (*Mathew: 26, 36-47; Mark: 14, 32-43; Luke: 22, 39-47*). Correspondingly, the number of the apostles following Christ in the Garden should be reduced by one, compared to those who attended the Last Supper (*Mathew: 26, 20; Mark: 14, 17; Luke: 22, 14*). In other words, if Judas has left the banquet to complete his task of betrayal, the number of the apostles who accompanied Jesus to the Olive Garden should be no more than eleven.

Surprisingly, as the picture clearly shows, their number in the Virgin Peribleptos scene is twelve¹⁸, which leaves no doubt that the painters included Judas in the picture, although his presence in this event is neither antici-

¹⁶ E. Dimitrova, *On the Dynamics of the Compositional Structures in the Paleologue Painting on the Territory of Macedonia*, Macedonian Heritage 32, Skopje 2008, 4-5.

¹⁷ S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, T. 119.

¹⁸ The condensed group of the apostles is configured around the figure of the apostle Peter, who stretches his right arm towards his brother, Andrew. To the right of Peter, there are five apostles, to the left of him - another three, while in the pictorial space under his figure, three disciples are soundly asleep – altogether twelve. Only one of them, situated in the midst of the group, has no visible facial characteristics.

pated, nor theologically explainable. However, the twelfth apostle, the only one covering his face and hiding his identity (**Fig. 4**), could be no other than the “alleged traitor”, the disciple who, according to the Bible, should have already been gone from the scene (*John: 13, 30*). Since the biblical quotations have been distorted by this peculiar iconographic feature of Michael and Eutychius, we have no other option but to acknowledge their ideological misdemeanour referring to esoteric ideas found in Apocryphal gospels, particularly in one written by Judas¹⁹. Although this Gnostic manuscript dating from the 2nd century²⁰, did not possess the “right arguments” to be included in the official edition of the Bible, it contains exciting narrative elements of the inter-relation between Jesus and his disciple prior to the Passion. As we today know, instead of picturing the Last Supper as a tragic event of dramatic disclosure, this Gospel depicts the Passover banquet as the closing episode of the great conspiracy to effectuate Christ’s teachings through the treasonable role

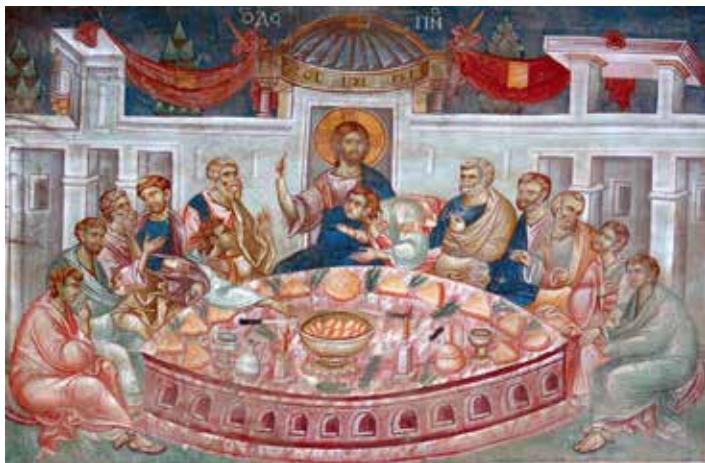


Fig. 6 St. George in Staro Nagoricino (1317/18), Last Supper

Сл. 6 Св. Ђорђе у Старом Нагоричину (1317/18), Тајна вечера



Fig. 7 Holy Mother of God in Kuceviste (ca. 1330), Last Supper

Сл. 7 Св. Богородица у Кучевишту (око 1330), Тајна вечера

¹⁹ B. D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*, Oxford 2006; R. Kasser – G. Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas. Critical Edition*, Washington 2006.

²⁰ In 180 AD, the Bishop of Lyons and one of the greatest theologians of that time, Irenaeus wrote a document in which he expressed his railing against this Gospel, indicating that the book was already in circulation in the late 2nd century. The only preserved copy of the Gospel has been carbon dated to 280 AD, cf. St. Pappas, *Truth Behind Gospel of Judas Revealed in Ancient Inks*, *Live Science.com*. April 8, 2013.

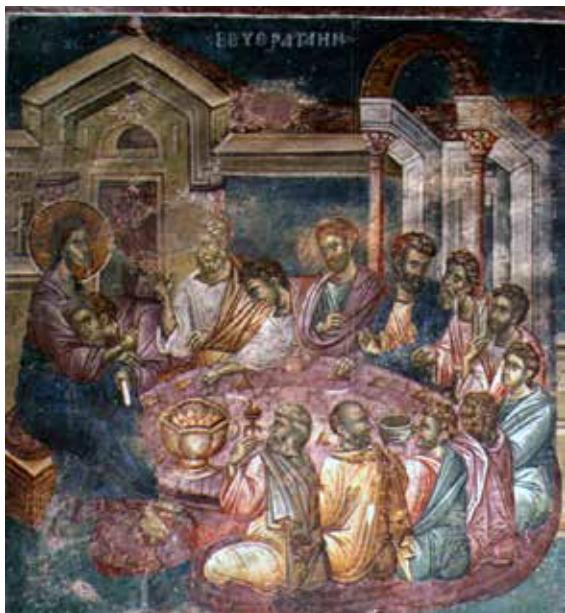


Fig. 8 St. Nicetas at Banjani (1323/24), Last Supper
Сл. 8 Св. Никита у Бањанима (1323/24), Тајна вечера

ence to instructions given by Jesus himself. In other words, this document suggests that Christ planned the course of events leading to his messianic death, while Judas served him by helping to release Christ's soul from its physical constraints²². Thus, the inclusion of Judas' figure in the scene of the Prayer in the Garden of Olives, which is unexpected, as well as exclusive, alludes to the notion of his co-operative engagement in relation to Jesus and his messianic task for salvation of mankind. Although not revealing the facial features of the "traitor" by covering his face with the posture of soundly sleeping man leaning on his forehead²³, the painters did not venture to portray him together with the familiar and easily recognizable faces of the other apostles. However, locating the mysterious image of Judas in the midst of the illustrated scene, as well as in the core of the apostolic group (**Fig. 5**), Michael and Eutychius paid their painterly tribute to the fundamental role of the Jew, who has voluntarily offered himself for the success of Christianity.

The esoteric symbolism of the visual messages nurtured by the painting studio of Michael and Eutychios can be also observed in the fresco decora-

of Judas, who has sacrificed his historic dignity for the immortal glory of his master²¹.

According to the verses of the apocryphal text, as his fateful and beloved disciple, Judas was chosen by Jesus himself for the unavoidable act of treason; therefore he obediently accepted the role of the one who would willingly do the disgraceful task of betrayal in order to facilitate the salvational mission of his master. Hence, this Apocryph contradicts the canonical Gospels which depict Judas as a person who delivered Jesus up to the authorities in exchange for money and portrays his actions as done in obedience

²¹ B. D. Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*, 153-170.

²² "Jesus said to Judas: Look, you have been told everything. Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. The star that leads the way is your star" (*The Gospel according to Judas*: 58).

²³ Which is a very rare characteristic of the iconographic arrangement of this scene in the history of Byzantine painting.

tion of the church dedicated to Saint George in the village of Staro Nagoričino²⁴, where one can acknowledge the final stage of promotion of the perfectly elaborated compositional design, radiating with absolute balance of iconographic components and their symbolic references. The rich repertoire of means of expression, as well as the skilfulness in the process of structuring of the compositional matrixes, reflect the methodical discipline of the painterly discourse which radiates with its pretentious meticulousness. However, the glamorous abundance of selected details and the manner of their organization within the compositional configurations speak in favour of authors who did not refrain from pictorial, as well as ideological upgrading of the depicted views²⁵. The quintessential example that refers to this idea is the depiction of the Last Supper, one of, if not the most proportional visual image of this subject in Byzantine painting, in terms of its iconographic arrangement (**Fig. 6**).

In comparison to other specimens related to this subject²⁶ which show different degree of diversity in the distribution of structural elements placed at



Fig. 9 St. Andreas at Matka (1388/89), Last Supper
Сл. 9 Св. Андреја на Тресци (1388/89), Тајна вечера

²⁴ R. Hamann-Mac Lean und Horst Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien von II bis zum frühen 14 Jahrhundert*, 34-36; П. Мильковиќ - Пепек, *Делојто на зографите Михаило и Еутихиј*, 23-24, 56-62, 190-197; Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, 71-138; idem, *Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина*, Београд 1998, 55-56, 65-68 et passim; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, 161-168; Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, 1689-1699.

²⁵ Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, 1695.

²⁶ As in: Holy Mother of God in Kuceviste, cf. И. Ђорђевић, *Сликарство XIV века у цркви св. Спаса у селу Кучевишту*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 17, Нови Сад 1981, 92, Fig. 12; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Fig. 125, Saint Nicetas at Banjani, cf. Б. Тодић, *Српско сликарство у доба краља Милутина*, Fig. 72; E. Dimitrova, *The Church of Saint Niketas – Village of Banjani* in: Skopje. Seven Monuments of Art and Architecture, Skopje 2010, Fig. 4; Holy Mother of God at Mateic, cf. Е. Димитрова, *Манастир Матејче*, Скопје 2002, 139-140, Fig. 34; Saint Andreas at Matka, cf. J. Prolovic, *Die Kirche des heiligen Andreas an der*



Fig. 10 St.
George in Staro
Nagoricino
(1317/18), Last
Supper, detail

Сл. 10 Св.
Ђорђе у Старом
Нагоричину
(1317/18), Тајна
вечера, детаљ

the table of the banquet (**Figs. 7, 8, 9**), the Last Supper in Staro Nagoričino is anything but spontaneous in the conceptual manner of its execution. The opening scene of the Passion cycle represents one of the best examples of the entire painted ensemble in the church in achieving a firm, as well as perfectly balanced compositional scheme, delicately structured by the interaction of the dramatic act and the architectonic backdrop. The thoughtful arrangement of the actors, the unbreakable cohesion of their postures and the dramatic rhythm of the depicted action, as well as the compactly designed scenery depicted in a form of classically nuanced backdrop, almost reached the immaculate perfection in visualization of the story portrayed in the Evangelic event. The delicately balanced arrangement of the apostles divided in two separate groups, all coloured by the refined spectrum of vivid, yet dignified gesticulation in front of the inconspicuously designed architectonic scenery, fascinates with the theatrical spirit of a well-planned ceremonial drama²⁷. Moreover, if we turn our attention to the visual configuration of its structural conception, we will notice the sophisticated numerical order of its immaculate iconographic equilibrium. Twelve niches for the twelve apostles and their mutual role in the holy plot folded at the dinner table and fulfilled in its aftermath; two pitchers of wine for the two groups of the disciples, depicted on either side of the table surrounding their master and listening to his instructions; two chalices for the toast of the two conspiratorial parties; two candlesticks as a token of the two divisions that should carry out the common assignment.

Treska, Wien 1997, 147-151, Fig. 28.

²⁷ E. Dimitrova, *On the Mise-en-scene and the Backdrops. Scenes from the Dramatopee of the Macedonian Medieval Painting*, Macedonian Heritage 20, Skopje 2006, 11, Fig. 2; eadem, *The Staging of the Passion Scenes: A Stylistic Essay. Six Paradigms from the 14th Century Fresco Painting*, Зограф 31, Београд 2006 - 2007, 115.

However, in this perfectly arranged iconographic design, based upon the principles of exact proportions, something seems to be very odd. Instead of looking at Christ, the words of whom are about to reveal the identity of the one designated to the task of treason (*Mathew: 26, 21; Mark: 14, 18; Luke: 22, 21; John: 13, 21*), the two young apostles sitting in the two juxtaposed groups, are gazing at each other, making almost identical gestures with their hands (**Fig. 10**). Although familiar with the Gospel quotations about the inquisition of the apostles in the matter of the possible traitor (*Mathew: 26, 21-25; Mark: 14, 18-20; Luke: 22, 21-24; John: 13, 21-26*), the painter depicted John and Judas as if they are interactively competing for that “malicious duty”. Having in mind the biblical verses related to the Crucifixion and the events in its aftermath, when John is said to have fully participated in all post-mortem activities (*John: 19, 26-27*), it seems that the picture of the Last Supper in Staro Nagoričino alludes to the crucial roles of the two young disciples, assigned by their Master in person. Thence, the Passover banquet is portrayed as excusable meeting of the company, with the sole purpose of final casting before the beginning of the Passion, with Judas carrying out the betrayal, while John taking care of all its consequences. Crowning the picture with the resolute figure of Christ, positioned in the cross-section of the iconographic symmetry of the scene, the painter has created not only an illustration of the biblical motif, but also a vision permeated with profound Pythagorean, as well as mystical symbolic significance²⁸.

Similar examples of iconographic misconduct can be found in quite a number of painted arrangements adorning the walls of the churches of Byzantine Macedonia in the period from the early 11th to the late 14th century. The contextualization of the iconographic novelties included in the painted arrangement of the altar decoration in the church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid (ca. 1040)²⁹, the delicate configuration of the mystical alphabet of cryptic symbols within the stylistic vocabulary of the Kurbinovo painter (1191), the “copy right” markings of certain subject within the fresco repertoire of the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas in Manastir (1271)³⁰, the esoteric background of the commissioner’s portraiture in the church of Saint Archangel Michael in Lesnovo (1342-1343)³¹, as well as the above discussed examples of “unintentional” deviations from the verified iconographic cannons of Byzantine painterly culture contribute to the idea of a greater diversity of creative invention in the sphere of ideological conception of visual expression. Possibly unnoticed by the commissioners and obviously neglected by the scholars, they stand as witnesses to the creative ventures of the inventive painters and testify to their alternative religious ideas, as well as to their bold and unrestrained artistic imagination.

²⁸ P. Critchley, *Pythagoras and the Harmony in all Things*, <<http://independent.academia.edu>>, 2011.

²⁹ E. Dimitrova “The Da Vinci Mode”. *Unsolved Mysteries of the Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, 246-248; eadem, *Црквата Светија Ѓорѓи во Курбиново* (in print).

³⁰ Е. Димитрова-С. Коруновски-С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и умейност*, 1666-1671.

³¹ E. Dimitrova, The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the gates of Immortality, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, Collection of Scientific Works V, Niš 2007, 373-374; eadem, “The Da Vinci Mode”. *Unsolved Mysteries of the Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, 253-257.

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КОМЕ ПРИПИСАТИ ГРЕШКЕ?
„ПРОПУСТИ И ПРЕКРШАЛИ“ СРЕДЊЕВЕКОВНИХ УМЕТНИКА
У МАКЕДОНИЈИ

И поред постојања строгих иконографских правила у сликарским приручницима, византиски мајстори су у одређеним случајевима одступали од уобичајених начела и представљали „чудне“ визуелне детаље у оквиру препознатљивих композициских решења. На територији данашње Македоније, ови иконографски „прекршаји“ могу се приметити у више сликаних ансамбла, тако да смо за овај рад изабрали само неке од најинтересантнијих. Први пример је сликана декорација цркве Светог Ђорђа у Курбинову (1191), где је десетак сцена добило мистичне детаље непознате дотадашњем византиском сликарству, док су драперије светитеља усковитлане у бројне траке, слова и знакове, разумљиве једино аутору и њиховом наручиоцу. У контекст тог тајног језика, композиција Преображења открива један од тих неочекиваних иконографских „украса“ у виду наглашеног покрета апостола Петра који поздравља Христа знаком познатим као „mano cornuto“, елементом присутним у гестикулацији средњевековних езотеричних братства. Други пример је фреско програм цркве Св. Богородице Перивлепте у Охриду (1295), ауторски рад пионера византијског „модернизма“ - Михаила Астрапе и Еутихија. У сцени која приказује Молитву у Гетсиманији, уместо стандардни број од једанаест апостола, колико је, према јеванђeosким текстовима, остало уз Христа након што је Јуда отишао да преда свог учитеља, сликари су представили свих дванаест и тиме укључили и лик „издајника“, који је према њима, као и према тексту Јудиног апокрифног јеванђеља, и „у издаји“ остао одан свом лидеру. Трећи пример је сликани ансамбл цркве Св. Ђорђа у Старом Нагоричину (1317/18), где су сликари из атељеа Михаила Астрапе приказали Тајну вечеру као симболични визуелни еквилибриум питагорејских елемената у чијем је центру представљена мистична интеракција између Христа и двоје младих апостола, Јована и Јуде, као алузија на подједнаки значај оба ученика у Христовој мисији Спаситеља.