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THE IMAGE OF RIGHTEOUS JOB IN THE MONASTERY OF ZRZE

Abstract: The subject of the paper is the image of Righteous Job depicted in a medallion on the north wall of the nave in Monastery Zrze. Firstly, we have divided the saint's images in Eastern Christian art into groups which we have then briefly compared to those in Western Christian art, stressing the similarities and differences between them. The aim of the paper is to show and explain the connection of Job's image in Zrze with that of saints and scenes surrounding and opposing him.

Key words: Righteous Job, Monastery Zrze, painter Onouphrios

During the 16th century renewal of frescoes in the Transfiguration church of monastery Zrze, four painted zones were created on the north and south walls of the nave.¹ Only fragments with prophets holding unrolled scrolls remain in the highest painted zone. Beneath them were scenes of the Great Feasts which were destroyed in the 18th century.² They are followed by those of the Passion cycle and Christ's post-Resurrection appearances (only the Threnos and Harrowing of Hell can be seen in the nave today). Medallions with busts of martyrs occupy the second zone, and standing figures the first one.

The image of Righteous Job, which is the subject of this paper, is depicted in the first medallion next to the iconostasis, on the north wall of the nave. Varying thematically, his portrayals are abundant in the west, especially in Romanesque and Gothic Art. Contrary to this, his representations in Eastern Christian Art can be divided into those in which the just man is depicted amongst Christ's ancestors or Old Testament figures; shown in a medallion located near the Passion Cycle or Harrowing of Hell; or within narrative scenes in which he is depicted sitting on a pile of dung, covered in oozing sores festured with

¹ Apart from depicting the frescoes in the nave, Greek painter Onouphrios of Argos also renewed the ones on the vault and in the altar of the church, cf. Б. Бабић, *Фреско-живопис сликара Онуфрија на зидовима црква прилепског краја*, ЗЛУМС 16 (1980) 271-280.

² З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *Историјатот на манастирот Зrze низ натписите и записите од XIV до XIX век*, Средновековната уметност во Македонија, Скопје 2004, 335; eadem, *Манастирот Зrze со црквите Преображение и Свети Никола*, 367.



Fig. 1 Righteous Job, north wall of the nave, Monastery Zrze (16th century)

Сл. 1 Праведни Јов, северни зид наоса, Манастир Зрзе (XVI век)

worms. Examples from the narthex of the Chora Church, Staro Nagoričino, Gračanica, and Lesnovo,³ belong to the first type in which Job is shown with a wreath-like crown on his head, similar to that of a martyr, with a folded scroll in the left hand, while blessing with the right one. Images from the churches of Saint Niketas near Skopje, Saint Elijah in Dolgaec and the monastery of Zrze,⁴ belong to the second type, in which Job is usually shown in a medallion located near the Passion Cycle or the Harrowing of Hell, in which case his image should be interpreted as an allusion to the suffering of Christ, i.e., the Resurrection. Examples from the third group, in which the holy man is depicted while sitting on a pile of dung fully covered with sores, occur abundantly in medieval illuminated manuscripts, while their number in fresco ensembles is proportionally small.

In the nave of Zrze, the bust of Righteous Job *Ο δίκαιος Ιωβ* is represented in a medallion in the second zone. He is turned towards the imago clipeata with St. Alexios the Man of God, next to him, and Christ-Emperor on the throne in the scene of the Imperial Deesis, in the zone below him. Job is wearing luxurious garments and has a richly decorated vaulted crown on his head. A massive red cloak rimed with pearls hangs from his right shoulder. The saint is shown

³ For the example in the Chora church, cf. С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново*, Београд 1998, 65; Staro Nagoričino, cf. Б. Тодић, *Старо Нагоричино*, Београд 1993, 75, 98, сл. 38; for Gračanica, cf. Б. Тодић, *Грачица. Сликарство*, Београд-Приштина 1988, 95, 99, 127, 148; Lesnovo, cf. Габелић, *Лесново*, 63, 65, сл. 48. Job is also depicted among Old Testament figures in the Ascension church in Leskoc and that of Saint Demetrios in Boboševo, cf. Г. Суботић, *Охридската сликарска школа од XV век*, Охрид 1980, 97 and 135.

⁴ For Saint Niketas, cf. М. Марковић, *Свети Никита код Скопља*, Београд 2015, 105, 164, 165, 187; Saint Elijah in Dolgaec, cf. Суботић, *Охридската сликарска школа*, 53; for Zrze, cf. А. И. Golac, *The representation of Saint Nicholas the monk and former soldier in the Monastery of Zrze*, *Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности* 45 (Нови Сад 2017) 137-138.



Fig. 2 The Threnos and Harrowing of Hell; Saints Athanasius, Alexius and Job; Imperial Deesis, north wall of the nave in Monastery Zrze (16th century)

Сл. 2 Оплакивање Христа и Силазак у ад; Свети Атанасије, Алексије и Јов, Царски Деизис, северни зид наоса, Манастир Зрзе (XVI век)



Fig. 3 The Baptism of Christ; Saints John Kalyvitis and Nicholas the monk, south wall of the nave in Monastery Zrze (16th century)

Сл. 3 Крштење Христово, Свети Јован Каливитис и Никола монах, јужни зид наоса, Манастир Зрзе (XVI век)

in familiar iconography, as an old man with a round white beard and tidy curly hair of the same colour.⁵ He is holding a cross in his right hand, while the palm of his raised left hand is turned towards the onlooker (fig. 1).

If we are to understand why Onouphrios depicted him in this particular place and in such a way, it is important to mention the frescoes surrounding the saint, as well as the ones opposing him. We have already said that the scenes of the Threnos and Harrowing of Hell are depicted in the third zone, above Job's medallion and that the Imperial Deesis with Christ as Emperor is below him in the first zone (fig. 2). Medallions with busts of saints Alexius and Athanasius the Persian are next to him, and that of John Kalyvitis and Nicholas the monk occupy the first two medallions on the parallel, south wall. The scene of the Baptism of Christ is depicted above the last two mentioned saints (fig. 3), which

⁵ For the iconography of Job, cf. LCI II, 407-414; S. Terrien, *The iconography of Job through the centuries: artists as Biblical interpreters*, Pennsylvania 1996; Walter, *The Iconography of Job*, ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ (2008) 69-72; Православная Энциклопедия, Т. 25, 253.



Fig. 4 Job as athlete, fourth century, Cemetery of Apronianus, Rome. Photo after S. L. Terrien

Сл. 4 Јов као атлета, четврти век, Гробница у Риму. Фотографија С. Л. Теријена

is also important for the interpretation of Job's appearance, as he was, among other things, considered a "prophet of the Christian Baptism" in the Middle Ages.⁶

The story of the pious man is represented in the Book of Job which belongs to the Wisdom Books of the Bible.⁷ He is described as a good and virtuous person who fears God and sees to it that his seven sons and three daughters follow in his footsteps. He lived in Uz and was very rich. Persuaded by Satan, God decides to test Job's faith. So, he permits Satan to rid Job of everything he has, including his children, as long as he does not harm the man himself. When informed of his loss, Job's faith remains intact and he continues to celebrate the Lord (Job 1:21). Upon seeing this, Satan approaches God again, persuading him to let him harm Job this time, believing that he will then surely turn against his Creator. After receiving permission, Satan smote Job with sore boils, forcing him to leave home due to the unbearable stench of the disease. For days Job sat on a pile of dung outside the city walls complaining to his friends, who came to visit and comfort him. Subsequently he is addressed by God who persuades him to repent for what he had said in moments of despair. As a reward for his enduring faith, Job is firstly cured and then awarded with a much bigger fortune

and the birth of three daughters and seven sons.

The first representation of Job, if it is really that of him, was created in the mid-third century AD and is situated on the east wall of the Dura-Europos synagogue.⁸ At the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century, the story of the righteous man frequently appeared in Roman catacombs. During this period physical strength and youth characterize his iconography and there is no evidence of illness or suffering, two traits that will mark his later images. Under the influence of Ancient art, which was still strong at the time, Job was represented as a philosopher in a short tunic while sitting on a bench or rock, or as a muscular athlete resting after he had experienced great physical strain (fig. 4).⁹

⁶ Terrien, *The iconography*, 14-16.

⁷ Job, I-XVII. The version of the Bible text is shorter than the Hebrew original. For older and younger sources of the story of Job, cf. Terrien, *The iconography*, XXXIV, V.

⁸ Terrien, *The iconography*, 3-9, fig. 1.

⁹ *Idem*, 17-23; H. Maguire, *Image and Imagination in Byzantine Art*, Ashgate 2007, 137, fig. 24.

In early medieval Christian art, the story of Job was often represented on sarcophagi and somewhat later in illuminated manuscripts. In accordance with the narrative character of the scene, Job was depicted in moments of sickness while sitting on a pile of dung, complaining to his wife and friends who visited him, and bringing food or comfort. Amongst the oldest examples is the one on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus from 395 AD. Its decoration consists of ten plains arranged in two horizontal lines, one above the other, because certain pairs of scenes are mutually related,¹⁰ due to similar subjects and ideas they communicate. It can be noticed that the intention of the artist was for the scenes to be viewed cross-wise, so that the counterpart of the Arrest of Christ is the scene of Job on the dunghill,¹¹ which confirms the interpretation of Job's suffering as an archetype of the suffering of Christ.¹²

Of multiple examples in illuminated manuscripts, which appeared during the Middle Ages, those from Vatican (MS gr. 749, fol. 25 and MS gr. 1231, fol. 64v), Patmos (MS 171, p. 51), Oxford (MS Barroci 201, fol. 32v) and the Vatopedi monastery (MS 590, fol. 18v),¹³ are of great importance to us, as they represent a snake-like creature tempting the righteous man. In the Oxford and



Fig. 5 Job attacked by a monster, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS gr. 749, fol. 25, first half of the ninth century

Сл. 5 Чудовиште напада Јова, Библиотека Ватикана, MS gr. 749, fol. 25, прва половина деветог века

¹⁰ J. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London 1997, 50-51, fig. 27; L. Sapikowski, *The iconography of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, Journal for Undergraduate Research Opportunities (2007) 1-14, especially 8-9.

¹¹ The author thoroughly explains the conceptual connection between the scenes. Cf. Sapikowski, *The iconography*, 12, figs 1, 2.

¹² The aim of the artist to underline the relation between Job and Christ's suffering is clear if we look at some of the scenes depicting the saint in Western Christian art. The first thing that catches ones attention is the remarkable resemblance between the righteous man and Christ. In some examples, which include musicians, the analogy with the scene "Mocking of Christ" cannot be overlooked. This is especially noticeable in scenes in which the trumpets of the musicians are positioned above Job's head. Cf. Terrien, *The iconography*, figs. 49, 63 и 64. A brilliant example is the scene in which Job is kneeling on the ground and interceding for his friends, because it unmistakably resembles the Prayer in Gethsemane. Another interesting example shows Job with a crown similar to the crown of thorns worn by Christ. *Idem*, figs. 48 and 51.

¹³ These miniatures are described in detail, cf. M. Evangelatou, *From word into Image: The Visualization of Ulcer in Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts of the Book of Job*, Ges-ta, Vol. 48/1 (2009) 19-36. For the Vatican manuscript, cf. I. Oretskaia, *A stylistic Tendency in Ninth-Century Art of the Byzantine World*, Зорпаф 29 (2002-2003) 14-17. For additional examples of Job in illuminated manuscripts, shown with pestering monsters, or Job as king or martyr, cf. Terrien, *The iconography*, 44-61.



Fig. 6 Job on the dunghill and The Last Judgement, narthex of the church of Saint Nicholas on Yaroslav's Courtyard in Veliky Novgorod, Russia (12th century)

Сл. 6 Јов на буњишту и Страшни суд, приправа цркве Светог Николе у Новгороду, Русија (XII век)

Vatopedi manuscripts the disease which Satan sends to torture Job is depicted in the form of a two headed dragon-like beast which is biting the man's feet and head.¹⁴ These images are interesting for us because they represent a parallel with the triple temptation endured by St. Nicholas the monk, who is, in Zrze, depicted in a medallion on the wall opposite from Job. They are connected by the triple temptation embodied in the three snakes held by the monk in Zrze,¹⁵ i.e., a three-headed beast in the Vatican (fig. 5) and Patmos manuscripts.¹⁶ But, even though a parallel between the stories of the two can be drawn, it is St. John Kalyvitis who is represented across from Job, and not monk Nicholas. We find the main reason for such a layout in the idea of endurance caused by the loss of great riches by both saints – John of his own will and Job as a decision of God. For the same reason, St. Alexius is depicted next to Job, as he too had given up his fortune, choosing to live like a poor man until the end of his earthly days.¹⁷ With that said, we can clearly see that the four medallions closest to the iconostasis are occupied by saints who are "martyrs of conscience".¹⁸

The third and most common scene in illuminated manuscripts is the one where Job sits naked on a pile of dung, alone, or in the presence of three friends,

¹⁴ Evangelatou, *The Visualization of Ulcer*, 29-30, figs. 8 и 9. The literal depiction of illness which attacks the saint from head to toe can be interpreted by the words: "(Satan) smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Book of Job, II, 7). And while a two headed animal is pestering Job in the aforementioned manuscripts, Satan himself is the one who attacks him in the relief of the Gothic portal of the Chartres cathedral. His right hand is lowered onto Job's head while he is holding the man's left foot with his other hand. Cf. Terrien, *The iconography*, fig. 31.

¹⁵ Golac, *The representation*, 127-142, fig. 1.

¹⁶ Walter, *The Iconography of Job*, fig. 1, 2; Evangelatou, *The Visualization of Ulcer*, 22-23; figs. 1, 2, 3.

¹⁷ For saints John Kalyvitis and Alexius, cf. Д. С. Павловић, *Представе Светог Алексија Божјег човека, светог Јована Каливита и светог Јефросина Повара у византијском и поствизантијском зидном сликарству*, ЗНМ XXI-2 (2014) 53-89.

¹⁸ For the appearance of this category of martyrs next to the iconostasis, cf. В. Ј. Ђурић, С. Ћирковић, В. Кораћ, *Пехка патријаршија*, Београд 1990, 220; V. J. Djurić, *Les conceptions hagiologiques dans la peinture du Protaton*, X3 8 (1991) 85.



Fig. 7 Job on the dunghill, east wall of the narthex in Gračanica (14th century)

Сл. 7 Јов на буњишту, источни зид припрате, Грачаница (XIV век)

his wife, tempted by Satan or in a combination of two or more given examples. In Western Christian Art this theme was especially popular in the Late Gothic and early Renaissance period, during which Job became a patron of lepers and musical gilds, an intercessor for the sexually loose and eventually, for syphilitics.¹⁹ Throughout this time his images were frequently made in ivory and sculpture, depicted in manuscripts, on canvas and frescoes. On the contrary, there are only three such scenes in Eastern Christian Medieval fresco ensembles known to us. The first is found in the Exodus chapel in the Bagawat necropolis,²⁰ the second in the narthex of the church of Saint Nicholas on Yaroslav's Courtyard in Veliky Novgorod (12th century) and the third, on the east wall of the narthex of Gračanica.²¹ A common characteristic of the last two examples is the positioning of Job's scene close to that of the Last Judgment.

In the church of Saint Nicholas in Novgorod, the fresco in which Job is depicted on a dunghill covered with boils, while his wife offers him bread and water on a plank, has been greatly damaged. Fragments of the Last Judgment

¹⁹ Terrien, *The iconography*, 107-145.

²⁰ Тодић, *Грачаница*, 165; М. Martin, *Observations on the Paintings of the Exodus Chapel, Bagawat Necropolis, Kharga Oasis, Egypt*, Byzantine Narrative: Papers in honour of Roger Scott, ed. by J. Burke with Ursula Betka, Penelope Buckley, Kathleen Hay, Roger Scott & Andrew Stephenson, Melbourne 2006, 246.

²¹ For the church of Saint Nicholas in Veliky Novgorod, cf. Православная Энциклопедия, Т. 25, 246-253; for Gračanica, cf. П. Мијовић, *Царска иконографија у српској средњовековној уметности* (III), *Старинар* н.с. XXVIII-XXIX (1977-1978), Београд 1979, 83-89, 106-108, сл. 1; Тодић, *Грачаница*, 90, 107, 164, 165.



Fig. 8 Christ-Emperor and High-Priest, north wall of the nave, Monastery Zrze (16th century)

Сл. 8 Христос Цар над царевима и Велики архијереј, северни зид наоса, Манастир Зрзе (XVI век)

fresco are in its proximity and the remains of images of sinners coiled by snakes can be seen above the scene with Job. The legs of a sea-beast and the lower part of a figure - possibly Satan - mounting it, remain in the same zone as the sinners, not far from them (fig. 6).²²

In the narthex of Gračanica the scene of Job on the dunghill is situated in the higher zone of the east wall, between Christ the Light of the world, in bust, noted as the Fearsome Judge and the Old Testament scene – Prophet Elijah slaughtering the priests of Baal.²³ A naked Job is sitting on a pile of dung and it looks as though he is addressing his wife.²⁴ She is standing not

far from his feet, holding a plank with some bread and water which she offers him, while covering her nose with her left hand to protect herself from the stench of his sores (fig. 7). The Last Judgment is depicted on the opposite wall. The proximity of the two scenes should be sought in the idea of general resurrection proclaimed in the Second Coming of Christ. This is best recognized in the book of Job, in his fifth reply to his friend Bildad: "As for me, I know that my vindicator lives and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust. This will happen when my skin has been stripped off, and from my flesh I will see God". The saint finishes his speech with the words: "know that there is a judgment".²⁵ The same idea can be recognized in monastery Zrze, which is why Job has been represented above the Deesis. In the aforementioned scene from Zrze, Christ the Emperor of Emperors and Great Priest *c(a)rq c(a)remq i g(ospod)q gospodemq i velikQ<i> erei* is depicted in lavish garments and has a vaulted crown on his head (fig. 8).²⁶ He is blessing with his right hand while holding an open book

²² In the story of Job the beasts Leviathan and Behemoth, a hippo and crocodile, are mentioned. For the examples in which Satan rides one of the two beasts, cf. Terrien, *The Iconography*, 44-45, figs. 9, 10, 11.

²³ Мијовић, *Царска иконографија*, 103, сл. 1; Тодић, *Грачаница*, 90, 107, 164-165.

²⁴ For the explanation of Job's gestures, cf. G. Von der Osten, *Job and Christ: The Development of a Devotional Image*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 16, No. 1/2 (1953), 155-156.

²⁵ The proximity of Job in a medallion and the cycle of Christ's Passion can also be noticed in the church of Saint Niketas near Skopje. Cf. Марковић, *Нукета*, 164-165.

²⁶ For the image of Christ as Emperor of Emperors and Great Priest, cf. Ц. Грозданов, *Исус Христос цар над царевите во живописот на охридската архиепископија од XV-XVII век*, *Живописот на охридската архиепископија*. Студии, Скопје 2007, 333-357;

with a text from the Gospel of John (John 18:36), in the left. The text indicates that Christ's kingdom is not of this world and announces his Second Coming and final triumph. The connection between Job and Christ in this scene will be clearer if we keep in mind the praxis of certain medieval painters to depict the saint with regal attributes,²⁷ as he was sometimes recognized as Jobab, member of the Edomit monarchy.²⁸ Also, Job was sometimes represented as a priest, which must have been known to painter Onouphrios.²⁹ Apart from his connection with Christ, a parallel between Job and St. John the Baptist, above whom he is depicted in Zrze, can also be drawn. Already in the sixth century Job had been considered a prophet of new life,³⁰ and it is well known that baptism symbolizes rebirth, which is what brings the two together. This idea is best recognized in the example from the Baptistry in the Basilica of San Marco in Venice (c. 1350) where St. John the Baptist, who is receiving a vestment from an angel, is named Job in the inscription above the scene.³¹ Zographos Onouphrios must have been familiar with the solution of the mosaic scene from San Marco and was so impressed by it that he placed the image of Righteous Job above that of St. John the Baptist in the Monastery of Zrze.

As a learned archpriest from Elbasan, who had spent time and worked in Venice on a few occasions, the zographos Onouphrios was surely aware of the complex and layered symbolism of the image of Job. Keeping that in mind, we can notice his aspiration towards pointing out each and every one of them to the viewer. This is why he had depicted the saint near the cycle of Christ's Passion, as they are linked by the idea of suffering and endurance. By positioning him below the scene of the Harrowing of Hell, he has underlined Job's role as a forerunner of the Resurrection, and the Baptism of Christ opposite from him, to show us that Job is also a "prophet of Christian baptism". For the same reason, he depicted the prophet of new life above the figure of St. John the Baptist. And finally, by choosing to represent the busts of saints Alexius and John Kalyvitis in medallions next to and opposite him, Onouphrios has accentuated the righteous man's willingness to accept, without question, the

idem, Една варијанта на представата на Христос цар над царевите и голем архијереј во поствизантиската уметност, Живописот на охридската архиепископија. Студии, Скопје 2007, 357-376; М. Томић Ђурић, Идејне основе тематског програма живописа цркве Светог Димитрија у Марковом манастиру, Београд 2017 (непубликована докторска дисертација), 592-604; С. Vapheides, Sacerdotium and Regnum in Late Byzantium: Some Notes on the "Imperial Deesis", American Journal of Art and Design, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2017, 81-83.

²⁷ Terrien, *The Iconography*, 45-50; figs. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

²⁸ Also, Job has been known to be ascribed with regal characteristics in some Hebrew poems. Terrien, *The Iconography*, 45.

²⁹ In Jerome's "Preface to the Book of Job" the just man is depicted as a king with a bowl in his left hand, in which he seems to carry holy bread and a cruciform Host. Cf. Terrien, *The Iconography*, 45, fig. 12. During the sixteenth century, a great number of sculptures of Job as a priest have been created in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, *idem*, 149.

³⁰ *Idem*, 90.

³¹ *Idem*, 90-92, fig. 44.

fate which had befallen him, while saint Nicholas the monk and former soldier has been positioned diagonally from Job to remind us of his confrontation with temptation.

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ПРЕДСТАВА ПРАВЕДНОГ ЈОВА У МАНСТИРУ ЗРЗЕ

Лик једног од најпрепознатљивијих светих у хришћанској уметности приказан је у манастиру Зрзе на северном зиду наоса, у првом медаљону поред иконостаса. За разлику од великог броја тематски различитих представа светог на западу, његове представе се у источнохришћанској уметности могу поделити у три групе. Будући да је био упознат са вишеслојном симболиком представе праведног Јова, зограф Онуфрије нам је, добро осмишљеним распоредом програма око и наспрам светог, на њих суптилно и указао.