Two unpublished icons of the Kastoria school

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The paper is dealing with two unpublished icons from the Byzantine museum of Kastoria: Royal door with the Annunciation (nr. 434; ca. 1400) and St. Nicholas with scenes of his Life (nr. 39; the end of 14th century).

The survival of the Palaeologans’ artistic perceptions and forms of art, as well as its artistic wealth and plurality, are the basic elements defining the work of Kastoria’s artists during the second half of the 14th century. These artists exceeded the fragmentation of the artistic process and the variety of perceptions particularly after the fifth decade of the 14th century and highlighted the particularity of the region. It is henceforth a common ascertainement that they allowed an authentic direction to be recognized which was developed upon the acceptance of new contents upon which the movement of the hesychasts and their teaching had a tremendous impact.

The growth of new solutions in the artistic milieu of Kastoria is expressed through epic monumentality on the one hand and the lyric poetic realism on the other hand, both of which are based on mature forms of the Palaiologan renaissance. The ancient proportions of the head and the body remain identical, as do the types, whereas it was essential that the dimensions of the standing figures of saints slightly grow in size and this enlargement induced a different treatment. Broad brushstrokes are used in drawing beards, eyebrows and hair. Large, compact noses are lit up and stressed even more. The educated artists know very well that this painting should not be rich in colours. The carnations are materialised by mild passages from light to dark green and ochre, while they also introduce red on the cheeks in order to recall habits of the second decade of the 14th century. The development of art in the orthodox world is not progressive, particularly in times when brushwork expression does not play an instrumental role. The beauty of painting material and the sense of plasticity are two of its basic fea-

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1 В. Ј. Ђурић, Марков Манастир-Охрид, ЗЛУМС 8 (1972) 152-156.
3 Ц. Грозданов, Охридско зидно сликарство XIV в., Београд 1980, 27.
4 И. Ђорђевић, Зидно сликарство српске власти у доба Неманића, Београд 1994, 147-150.
unified as though it emanates from a source. The way of creation is not supported in the traditional contrast of colours, and the chiaroscuro is achieved by having ochre as its basis for carnation. The artists, accepting progressive creation, pass it through a gradation from the open ochre through olive green to rosette gleams on the face. White paints enter stressed spots of the face above the brows on the top of the nose and above the cheek bones and the sequence is conducted according to the values of classical tradition.

In this article we are dealing with two unpublished icons which were created in Kastoria after the Ottoman occupation of the town (1385 or 1386). However, this occupation does not seem to have influenced artistic creation. The diversity of the Kastorian artists in their ways of expression is impressive and indicates the existence of a powerful artistic centre with great potentialities and indubitable quality.

In the left panel of the bema door, the Archangel Gabriel is depicted standing and turning to Virgin Mary. He is raising his right hand in a gesture of speech delivery, while with his left hand he tries to hold his kirtle. He is wearing a dark blue chiton and a red mantle which is adorned with pearls and reflects an imperial costume. Similar depictions of archangel Gabriel in a royal costume is encountered in the Annunciation scene of three churches of Kastoria: Agios Nikolaos Tzotza, Agios Nikolaos tou Kyritse and Agios Georgios tou Vounou. These are respectively dated from the middle of the fourth decade until the end of the sixth decade of the 14th century.5

In the right panel, the Virgin Mary is depicted in front of a throne without a back-rest turning to the Archangel Gabriel holding her spindle with her left hand and

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5 On these churches cf. Γ. Σίσιου, Καστοριανα μνημεια, Αθηνα 1995, 59-63, 120-123.
stretching out hesitantly her right hand, which hardly emerges from her chiton, in an expression of fear and surprise. Her head is bowed. Her gesture and her raised shoulder render her obedience to the Divine Will. She is wearing a deep blue chiton and a brown maphorion with fimbriated endings. A similar posture of the Virgin Mary can be found in the Annunciation scene of Agios Nikolaos the Petrites (sixth decade of 14th century).

The two panels of the royal doors constitute a modest composition, which concerns only the two individuals. The representation is static, since there is no determination of the place in which the scene occurs, while the usual movement of the archangel is absent and is limited only to raising his right hand with which he blesses.

The nimbi have an exergue plant decor, a habit of Kastorian painters, which is still observed in nimbi of murals since the 11th century. The bema door bear important resemblances with a comparable one from the cave church of the Virgin Mary in Prespa, whose production is believed to have occurred in Kastoria and can be dated to the last quarter 14th century. It was on this pictographic model that the artists of Kastoria relied in order to create royal doors during the 15th century, such as an example from the Kastoria collection (nr. 128/72).
Saint Nicholas, particularly venerated in Kastoria, is portrayed full-length, standing frontally and blessing with his right hand while holding a closed Gospel in his left hand. In this icon, the life and the miracles of the patron saint of the church of St. Nicholas Dragota are illustrated in fourteen scenes. The cycle is interesting because it includes, eclectically, some of the most popular and important episodes reported in the Life of St. Nicholas. The most usual scenes of saint Nicholas’ cycles are the Birth, St. Nicholas is Taken to Scholl, the three ordinations, the Dormition and a number of miracles that the saint conducted during his life or after his death. Unfortunately, the icon, in order to be adapted to the smaller frame of the 17th century church of Saint Nikolaos Dragota, was cut in the lateral sides and thus the scenes are not saved as complete ones.

The cycle begins with the Birth. On the tall bed lies the mother. Two young female forms rush towards her, one of whom can hardly be discerned. Also, the swaddling newborn infant cannot be discerned. The scene, as it is depicted, is one of the simplest existing ones. Normally a larger number of women surrounding the mother of the saint is portrayed. The scene of the infant’s bath (Fig. 7) is depicted below the previously mentioned scene but is omitted in most well-known icons.

The representation “St. Nicholas is Taken to Scholl” follows, which is developed in two episodes. In the first one, on the left, two tall, thin female figures are depicted, one in a rosy dress and the other in a blue one, leading the young Nicholas to the teacher. The teacher is sitting in an armchair holding a walking stick in his right hand and turning to the saint, being ready to receive him. In the second episode, the saint is depicted sitting in a seat in which, besides Nicholas, two other pupils are sitting with their alphabet books and attending the lesson. The representation of the school is often portrayed both in icons and in murals. Usually, the saint is accompanied by a female and more seldom by a male. The teacher is, in most cases, old, whereas the pupils usually sit around him. Behind these three scenes, in the foreground as a background a low single construction can be discerned, which covers the emergence of three other architectural structures. The entirety of these four scenes complete the cycle of the saint’s childhood.

The three ordinations are depicted without peculiarities. In all of them, the saint is portrayed standing to the right with a slight bow and with his hands in an invocating posture, while he receives the benediction of the archpriest. In his ordination as a deacon, he is a young person and is wearing a deacon’s rochet. The archpriest

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ordinating him is behind the chancel table, which is covered with a purple altar-cloth. The ciborium of the chancel table, which is discerned in the background, is semicircular. In the second ordination, the saint is middle-aged and is wearing the canonicals of a presbyter, that is to say, a white rochet, a surplice and a tabard. In his third ordination as a bishop, the Saint is depicted as an older man wearing a bishop’s canonicals. The remainder setting is similar to the two precedent ones.

The miracle of the brothers’ donation happened before he became a bishop. When a resident of Patara, due to sudden bankruptcy, decided to prostitute his three girls in order to support his family, the saint helped him by throwing gold coins secretly into his house. The interior of the house is discerned in the scene, which is conventionally portrayed in three successive levels and the father and the three brothers are depicted asleep. Above the opening of a window the form of the Saint emerges, trying to throw a purse. Inscription: Ο ΠΡΟΜΜΗΘΟΥΣ Μ ΤΩΝ ΠΤΟΧΟΝ ΕΧΩΝ Τ ΤΡΙΣ ΘΥΓΑΤ...

Five scenes illustrate the history of the three generals, which bears a direct relation to the salvation of the three innocent people from death in Myra in Lykia. The history of the three generals, which is the most ancient miracle of saint Nikolaos, exists in all texts concerning the Saint’s life. The narration includes two miracles: the salvation of the three innocent people of Lykia from the executioner’s sword and the release of the three generals from prison by Konstantinos. In the icon, the following episodes have also been selected and depicted: the salvation of the men of Lykia, the appearance of the saint to Emperor Konstantinos, the three men in prison, the release of the three men by Konstantinos, the gift offer by the generals to the saint. In the first scene of the salvation of the three men, they are discerned in a slight bow waiting for the executioner’s blow. He is standing behind them with his sword raised, which in turn has been seized by the Saint. The inscription in the preserved part exhibits: Ο ΑΓΙΟΣ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΡΥΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΤΡ... In the second scene of Konstantinos’ dream the saint is depicted wearing an archpriest vestiture. The king is sleeping on a tall luxurious bed, whose section around the pillow has been destroyed. The place the event occurs is a structure resembling a palace. Inscription: ...ΟΣ ΠΤΑΝΕ ΤΕ ΤΩ ΒΑΣΕΙΛΙ ΚΑ ΤΟ ΟΝΑΡ. The third scene, of the prison, is depicted having the building as a background and the three imprisoned ones in the foreground. Inscription: ΟΙ ΤΡΙΣ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΦΡΟΥ... In the fourth scene the generals are released by Konstantinos. Inscription: ...ΤΙΝΟΣ ΑΠΟΛΥΩΝ ΤΟΥΣ ΤΡΕΙΣ ΤΕ ΑΝ-ΔΡΑΣ. In the fifth scene, at the right bottom, the three generals offer gifts to Saint Nikolaos.
In the left bottom compartment a scene from the maritime miracles of the saint is depicted. Inscription: ...

**KOΛΑΟΣ ΡΙΟΜΕΝΟΣ ΤΟ ΠΛΟΙΟΝ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΗ.** Here we have the miracle during the voyage of the saint to Jerusalem.

In the last picture, occupying the center-bottom section of the icon, the Dormition of the saint is depicted (Fig. 8).

The icon of Saint Nikolaos bears many resemblances to three icons of the same subject from the Kastoria museum, published by N. Zias: nr. 430 (from the church of Saint Nikolaos of nun Eupraxia, Fig. 9), nr. 350 (from the church of Saint Nikolaos the Petrites, Fig. 10) and nr. 207 (from the church of Saint Nikolaos in the enoria of St. Thomas). The estimated dating of the icon nr. 430 to the beginning of the 15th century was questioned by Manolis Chatzidakis who dated it to the end of the 15th century and compared it to a mural of the painter Xenos Digenis in the monastery of Myrtia in Aitolia.

Actually, we know six icons with the same subject originating from the churches and the collections of Kastoria and dating from the middle to the end of the 14th century. The churches are: the Saint Nikolaos Tzotza (1346), the Saint Nikolaos tou Kyritze (sixth decade of the 14th century), Saint Nikolaos the Petrites (sixth decade of the 14th century) and Saint Nikolaos Dragota (last decade of the 14th century). The mentioned icons originated from the chancel screens of these churches and had an honorary position due to dedication of the churches to St. Nicholas.

The intense activity of Kastoria’s artists at this era created the iconographic type of St. Nicholas icon, which is repeated later during the 15th century. For example, we could cite the icons of Saint Nicholas from Ptelea, Koρytsa (Albania), and of the Museum of Skopje.

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14 Ε. Τσιγαρίδας, Φορητές εικόνες του 15ου αιώνα του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου της Καστοριάς, in: Διεθνές Συμπόσιο – Βυζαντινή Μακεδονία (324-1430μ.χ.), Θεσσαλονίκη 1995, εικ. 11.
16 Ε. Δρακοπούλου, ο. ε., 36, εικ. 4.
Две иконе костурске школе

Јанис Сисиу

Костурске сликарске радионице наставиле са својом делатношћу и после доласка града под турску власт. Рад тих радионица може се пратити у зидном сликарству и иконопису. Поједини споменици у Костуру живописани су крајем XIV и почетком XV века, што показује да није било прекида у стварању. То су цркве Свети Никола ту Драгота и црква Света Три мученика (Гурија, Самон и Авив). Чланак је посвећен двема иконама које су повезане с тим храмовима. То су икона с ликом светог Николе из цркве Светог Николе ту Драгота и царске двери из цркве Свете Тројице.

Обрасци за иконографско решење царских двери из цркве Света Три мученика јесу сличне представе Благовести које се налазе у црквама Светог Николе ту Додза, Светог Николе ту Кирици и Светог Ђорђа ту Вуну. Иконе сличне представи светог Николе настајале су у Костуру од средине до краја XIV века.