The Symbolical Investiture of the Archbishop Basil of Bulgaria at Melnik

Branislav Todić

UDC 75.046.3.033.2(497.2 Melnik) 271.22(163.2)-559

The heretofore variously explained fresco in the apse of the church at Melnik showing the apostle Peter, a bishop and Christ is now interpreted as the symbolical investiture of archbishop Basil. The interpretation is based on iconographic analysis taking into account the other frescoes in the apse as well as on the sources relating to the short-lived union of the Bulgarian (Tarnovo) Archbishopric with Rome. The fresco has been dated between 1204 and 1207.

The church of St Nicholas at Melnik, Bulgaria, is now almost completely stripped of frescoes. They were in place until 1939/1340, when they were removed from the walls and transferred to the Archaeological Museum in Sofia.1 By that time, they had been carefully photographed by N. Mavrodinov, G. Trachchev and A. Strânský.2 The latter discussed them in a few shorter articles and a study,3 while L. Mavrodinova devoted them a monograph.4

The first researchers of the half-ruined basilica found well-preserved frescoes in the east portion of the church and another few here and there on other walls. Their date and ketor remain unknown, but they probably were commissioned by brothers Vladimir and Frangos mentioned in the prayer inscription on the southern pilaster in front of the stos at the time Melnik was under Bulgarian rule (1195–1246). The style of the frescoes, showing features typical of the transition from the late Komnenian to the early thirteenth century, has resulted to the thirteenth century. An even more precise dating, to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, has resulted from paleographic analysis by H. Andreev, K. vêroso a dâmârâ de nea hâte a epanokatastas básilika "S. Ênikas" e ñmêla, Archeologia XXXIII/1–2 (1999) 102–103.5

The inscription has been published many times, with only minor differences in reading. The most accurate reading is by V. Beleviev, Spätreichische und spätleitinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien, Berlin 1964, 170 (No 238), fig. 257, who has dated it to the thirteenth century. An even more precise dating, to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, has resulted from paleographic analysis by N. Andreev, K. vêroso a dâmârâ de nea hâte a epanokatastas básilika "S. Ênikas" e ñmêla, Archeologia XXXIII/1–2 (1999) 102–103.6

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1 Two of them are at the National Art Gallery in the crypt of the church of St Alexander Nevsky, and some, meanwhile cleaned and conserved, are on display at the Archaeological Museum in Sofia, v. L. Prashkova, Noverotevrieda fërëka wërpba S. Nikolaas e ñmêla, Moscow 1991, 930–931.

2 Most of the photographs taken by Trachchev and Mavrodinov are published in: L. Mavrodinova, Prêvovra Sëmës Nikolaas pri Melâa, Sofia 1975, figs. 1, 6, 10–32, while Strânský’s photos are kept at the National Museum in Belgrade.


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7 S. Georgieva, Ëaleologënija a prëovra kânpastas a prëovra "S. Ênikas" e ñmêla, Archeologia XV/2 (1974) 29.


9 Strânský, Les ruines, 423; v. also Andreev, K. vêroso a dâmârâ de nea hâte a epanokatastas básilika "S. Ênikas" e ñmêla, Archeologia XXXIII/1–2 (1999) 102–103 (between 1208 and 1209); only two scholars believe them to be of a later date: Th. Vlachos, Geschichtie der byzantinischen Stadt Melnikon, Thesaloniki 1969, 61 (after 1246), and V. J. Djuric, Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslavien, Munich 1976, 240, note 12 (about 1271).

St Stephen. On the south wall of the prothesis were saints and the Nativity above them. The opposite, north, wall also showed the remains of saints and scenes. In the apse of the diakonikon was the Deesis and, above it, the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple. On the north wall was the mounted figure of St Prokopios, and on the south wall were Judas’ Betrayal and Christ before the Cross. The west façade of the church also displayed a few frescoes.

This brief overview of the frescoes once adorning the church of St Nicholas, gleaned from descriptions and old photographs, shows that their programme, and to a lesser extent their iconography, generally conformed to the patterns adopted in the Byzantine art of the eleventh to thirteenth century. A careful study, however, reveals a number of distinctive features, only some of which will be highlighted: the absence from the sanctuary of the Communion of the Apostles and the Officiating Bishops, virtually inevitable in Orthodox churches in the early thirteenth century; the absence of holy bishops from the Melismos in the prothesis; and an unusual scene in the lowest register in the central apse showing the consecration of a bishop, quite lonely in medieval art in terms of both appearance and location. What lay behind these deviations from the established programme and iconography, and what link connects them, are the questions we shall try to answer here.

At Melnik, in the lowest register in the main apse — where, from the eleventh century on, bishops holding open scrolls were shown, at first turned towards the Hetoimasia, and then towards the Amnos on the altar — was painted, above the high-set synthronon, the consecration of a bishop. All the characters depicted belong into a single theme, as observed long ago. The first figure on the north is a facing bishop with long hair and three-pronged beard, whose name has not survived. He holds a gospel in his draped left hand, while pointing to the neighbouring figures with his right. The westernmost figure in the group is the apostle Peter in a chiton, himation and sandals. His identifying inscription has not survived, but he is easily recognizable by his standard portrait traits — wavy hair and short rounded beard. He holds a rolled-up scroll in his left hand, and blesses the neighbouring bishop with his right, almost touching his head with his fingers. Slightly bent forward, the latter also lacks the inscription. His face is badly damaged and the only surviving detail is his long and pointed beard. Similarly to the other bishops, he wears a white sticharion with river-like stripes (potamoi), epitrachelion, polystaurion and omophoros. He does not seem to have been haloed. His arms are crossed, and the right one is slightly raised towards Christ. Jesus Christ, in a dark himation and light-coloured chiton, is standing on a low supedaneum and blessing the bishop.

Photographs are reproduced by courtesy of the Archive of A. Steinski, National Museum, Belgrade.

11 Steinski, Les ruines, 424.
12 Ibid., pl. CXXXVII, fig. 1; Mavrodinova, Сцени Хукоса, figs. 13, 32; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 434, fig. 6.
13 Steinski, Les ruines, pl. CXXXVII, fig. 1; Mavrodinova, Сцени Хукоса, fig. 14; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, fig. 7.
Behind Christ's back is a large three-light window above which are painted two ornamented candlesticks and a two-handled jar accompanied by the inscriptions ἡ χρυσὴ and ἡ λυχνία respectively. At the end, two tablets inscribed with: αἱ πλάθους τῇ θεῷ διὰ πάντας.

The presence of St Peter at Melnik, however, is unusual in at least two respects. Firstly, he is never mentioned in the prescribed Byzantine rite of episcopal consecration. Secondly, this is the only instance of St Peter blessing a bishop from behind or laying a hand on his head. Peter's presence in the scenes of chirotony is exceptionally rare anyway. As a matter of fact, there is a single surviving example in Byzantine art: in the New Church at Tokale Kilise (tenth century) St Peter is shown standing in front of

14 Mavrodinova, Annales, fig. 15; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, fig. 7. Our reading has been enhanced from the photographs from Strinský's archives kept at the National Museum in Belgrade. Strinský, Les ruines, 424, lists: "le livre, la feuille avec l'inscription et deux chandeliers dans lesquels brûle une petite flamme blanche, et une cruche ornamenteal a deux anses dont les contours sont ornés de perles"; and Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 434, cites: "l'amphore contenant la manne céleste, un Livre de la Loi et, entre les fenêtres, deux candélabres-flambeaux".

15 Mavrodinova, Annales, 15–16, fig. 10; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, fig. 8.


Fig. 3. Objects from the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, St Nicholas, Melnik

the other apostles and consecrating the first seven deacons by laying both hands on the first one's head, as recorded in Acts 6, 6. All other examples are related to the West, such as the scenes in the crypt of the basilica at Aquileia and in St Mark's in Venice (twelfth century), where St Peter with a pastoral staff blesses Hermagoras, or on the altarpiece from Count Paolo Gherli Collection (about 1275), where he ordains Veranus as deacon. Other examples of the apostles consecrating the first bishops (Ananias, Mark or Timothy) are also found beyond the Byzantine orbit. The fresco from Melnik is completely lonely even in that St Peter is standing behind the bishop, and not before him as was customary and as shown in all other instances.

St Peter's position behind the bishop must mean that the investiture of the unknown bishop is in fact performed by Jesus Christ standing in front of him and blessing. To the best of our knowledge, this is yet another detail which makes the scene from Melnik completely lonely in medieval art. Christ is not depicted in the scenes of episcopal consecration, except for few cases of his ordaining St James, the Brother of the Lord, as the first bishop of Jerusalem, all of a late Byzantine date (cf. below). Therefore, the possibility should be allowed for that Christ such as shown at Melnik might have been borrowed from royal iconography: standing behind the ruler, he performs investiture and by the gesture of blessing lays emphasis on the divine origin of his power.

The rest of the Melnik scene, behind Christ and above the three-light window, shows objects from the Ark of the Covenant: two candlesticks, a stamnos and the tablets of the Law. Not even these items are known from any other scene of chirotony. If the reason for their presence at Melnik remains unknown, the source from which they were borrowed as an iconographic detail can be reliably identified. It should be noted, however, that a carefully written study has shown that in the early centuries of Christianity the Ark of the Covenant was interpreted exclusively in ecclesial and Christological terms, and that such was also the meaning of its depictions in the visual arts. Latin patristic literature has never abandoned this interpretation, owing above all to Isidore of Seville and Bede. Byzantine theologians, on the other hand, began from the sixth century to associate the Ark of the Covenant and its contents with the Virgin, and from the twelfth century this interpretation became prevailing in Byzantine art. Because of the relevance of Kosmas Indi-
kopleustes' Christian Topography (sixth century) to the Melnik fresco, it should be noted that it interprets the Ark in cosmological and Christological terms, and so do the illuminations in its manuscript versions from the ninth (Vat. gr. 699) and the eleventh century (Sin. gr. 1186 and Laur. Plut. IX. 28). The same meaning is conveyed by the depictions of the Ark and its contents in the Byzantine octateuchs of the eleventh-twelfth century (Vat. gr. 699) and the eleventh century (Sin. gr. 1186 and Laur. Pluto IX. 28). The same meaning is conveyed by the depictions of the Ark and its contents in the Byzantine octateuchs of the eleventh-twelfth century (Vat. gr. 699) and the eleventh century (Sin. gr. 1186 and Laur. Pluto IX. 28). The same meaning is conveyed by the depictions of the Ark and its contents in the Byzantine octateuchs of the eleventh-twelfth century whose iconography was influenced by Kosmas' Topography. However, it was already in the early twelfth-century Physiologus from the Evangelic School at Smirna (B-6), which contained excerpts from Kosmas' Topography, that these depictions were supplemented with images of the Virgin and Christ. This iconography was further developed in Byzantine art, invariably carrying Mariological symbolism, but it found no echo in Melnik. The apse at Melnik did show the Virgin above the objects from the Ark, but there was no link between them because they were separated by a horizontal red border; indeed, the Ark was associated with Christ and included into the extensive depiction of the investiture of a bishop. The iconographic origin of the objects depicted can only be traced to the abovementioned illuminations from Kosmas' Topography (Sin. gr. 1186, fo1. 77v and Laur. Plut. IX. 28, fo1. 107r) or to their version from the Smirna Physiologus, where the Ark of Covenant is represented symbolically, between the columns of an arcade, by the jar of manna, Aaron's rod, tablets and a brazen serpent.

This is to say that it is the Ark of the Covenant that was depicted at Melnik: it is not explicitly named as such and is somewhat simplified in comparison with the illuminations, but it is quite closely related to them in iconography and inscriptions.


30 Cosmas Indicopleustes, Topographie chrétienne, I, fig. 8, II, 43-47; W. Wolska, La Topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustes. Théologie et sciences du VIe siècle, Paris 1962, 118, 119, pl. II. Here the tabernacle contains a table, a candelstick (λυχνία), Aaron's rod, a jar (ερυθύμος), tablets (οι πλάκες) and a brazen serpent.

31 Strzygowski, Bilderkreis, 59; Cosmas Indicopleustes, Topographie chrétienne, I, 99; H. L. Kessler, "Pictures Fertile with Truth": How Christians managed to make images of God without violating the second commandment, Journal of the Walters Art Gallery 49-50 (1991-92) pl. 9; Etingof, Образ Иосана, 55, fig. 32.
Poulos rightfully dismissed the view of A. Stransky that the three-quarter view, but only in one part of the apse, and the frescoes, many of which no longer exist. Tony scene at Melnik resembles older patterns, while some of then, based on that identification, to explain other elements modified form so as to fit into the theme. Naturally enough, Veljusa),33 the holy bishops, holding scrolls inscribed with who is consecrating a bishop.

Role of anonymous clerics usually shown in the scenes of chirotony with their hands raised in acclamation,35 This is another element that makes the Melnik fresco completely lonely in medieval art.

Generally and in few particular details, then, the chirotony scene at Melnik resembles older patterns, while some of its elements are borrowed from other themes of Byzantine art. The apostle Peter, Christ and the Ark pop in quite that way, they assumed the role of anonymous clerics usually shown in the scenes of chirotony with their hands raised in acclamation.35 This is another element that makes the Melnik fresco completely lonely in medieval art.

Fig. 5. Melismos, north apse, St Nicholas, Melnik

Chrysostom, Gregory and Athanasios. All four seem to have been portrayed in that place for the first time in St Sophia at Ohrid (about 1054),32 and frontally. In the late eleventh century (the oldest known examples being the church of St John Chrysostom at Koutsovendi and the Virgin Eleoussa at Vejusa),33 the holy bishops, holding scrolls inscribed with liturgical texts, began to turn towards the centre of the apse and the Ammos.34 At Melnik, they are also shown in a three-quarter view, but only in one part of the apse, and without scrolls, but with their hands raised towards Christ who is consecrating a bishop. In that way, they assumed the role of anonymous clerics usually shown in the scenes of chirotony with their hands raised in acclamation.35 This is another element that makes the Melnik fresco completely lonely in medieval art.

The main flaw in Xyngopoulos’s interpretation, besides his many quite freely made assumptions, is in its being based on the descriptions of the rite of episcopal consecration from a late euchologion — Νεκτος (607) from the Patriarchate Library in Jerusalem (fourteenth century) — and a text of Simeon of Thessalonike (early fifteenth century).43 These are accounts of the fourteenth-century and

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32 R. Hamann-MacLean, Die Monumentsmalerei in Serbien und Malestodion vom 11. bis zum fruhen 14. Jahrhundert, Giessen 1963, plan 1, pl. 4; Gerstel, Sacred Mysteries, 83.
33 Walter, Art and Ritual, 199.
35 Walter, Church Appointments, 121–122.
36 Strinsky, Les ruines, 424; pl. CXXX, fig. 1.
37 A. Xyngopoulos, Παρατηρήσεις εις τας τοιχογραφίας του Αγ. Νικόλαου Μελεντίου, Διάθεση της Φιλολογικής Σχολής Θεσσαλονικής 6 (1950) 115–118. This interpretation has been almost generally accepted, cf. Djuric, Byzantinische Fresken, 240; A. Cituțiu, Zidno slikar­stvo Svetoj Pantalejmona u Solunu, Zograf 6 (1975) 17; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 434–436; Mavrodinova, Cersei Huculca, 14–18; Gerstel, Sacred Mysteries, 96–97.
38 Xyngopoulos, Παρατηρήσεις, 116–118.
39 PG 42, col. 409 (Epiphanius of Cyprus); PG 61, col. 326 (John Chrysostom); H. Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, Bruselt 1902, 155; Xyngopoulos, Παρατηρήσεις, 119 and note 1.
40 Xyngopoulos, Παρατηρήσεις, 119 and note 2; Walter, Church Appointments, 110–111, fig. 1; M. Chadrakis, Είδος τῆς Πάνθου, Athens 1995, 139–140, figs. 147–148, assumes that the theme was inspired by later popular literature.
41 Xyngopoulos, Παρατηρήσεις, 121–124.
42 Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 434–436; Mavrodinova, Cersei Huculca, 18–21.
43 PG 155, col. 396 sq; Dmitrievsky, Εικονογένεα, 299.
later rites\textsuperscript{44} and cannot be used in interpreting the practices of earlier epochs and their visual depictions. Ch. Walter found the hypothesis unconvincing, as it failed to explain both the theme and its display in so important a place as the apse. The absence of similar scenes with St James in Byzantine art led him — similarly to Stránský — to reluctantly identify the bishop being consecrated as St Nicholas, based on the legend about the insignia being restored to St Nicholas by Christ, but also by the Virgin. In our turn we also note that the iconography of this legend was different and that the bishop depicted bears no resemblance to St Nicholas whatsoever. This "curious scene" in the apse of the church of St Nicholas at Melnik being completely lonely, Ch. Walter found its interpretation impossible.\textsuperscript{45}

It is exactly this loneliness of the scene, and a series of its curious details, that should take our thinking in a different direction. This primarily goes for the unexpected presence of the apostle Peter, which has not attracted much attention, but also for some other parts of the scene which, being unknown to the iconography of such themes in Byzantine art, call for reconsidering the view that the Melnik scene does not step out of the Eastern Orthodox framework and that it even communicates clear anti-heretical messages.\textsuperscript{46} Stránský was the only to make a cursory and unsubstantiated remark that "la présentation de saint Nicolas à Christ dans l’autel montre les influences de Rome,"\textsuperscript{47} which Xyngopoulos and Mavrodinova simply discarded without any explanation.\textsuperscript{48}

That Stránský was on the right track seems to be confirmed by a few other details: the absence of two central scenes in the sanctuary, Communion of the Apostles and Officiating Bishops, from the Great Schism of 1054 the most important visual expression of the Orthodox dogmatic and liturgical tenets in Byzantine churches;\textsuperscript{49} Melnik shows the Melismos, but in the apse of the prothesis\textsuperscript{50} and reduced to the Christ Child covered with an aer, on a simple bed, and two deacon angels. Obviously, the church fathers were deliberately omitted, given that the Orthodox rite of consecration of the holy gifts required their presence.\textsuperscript{51} The absence of themes otherwise compulsory for a Byzantine church, the Melismos without bishops, and the presence of St Peter at the consecration of a bishop, show clearly enough that Melnik’s programme and iconography depart from the Byzantine tradition, and under the influence of Roman Catholic doctrine.

Explanations may be sought for in political and ecclesiastical developments in Bulgaria in the early thirteenth century. It is well known that between 1199/1200 and 1207 there was an intensive correspondence (preserved almost in its entirety in the Regesta Vaticana) concerning union between Rome and the church in Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{52} Negotiations were motivated by the aspiration of pope Innocent III (1198–1216) for an eastward Roman Catholic expansion and the Bulgarian tsar Kaloyan’s (1197–1207) to secure from Rome the crown for himself, and the patriarchal title for the archbishop of Tarnovo. Without going into a detailed political account of the negotiations,\textsuperscript{53} we shall remind that in late 1204 Kaloyan subordinated the Bulgarian church to Rome by his chrysobull,\textsuperscript{54} which was then confirmed by archbishop Basíli’s oath.\textsuperscript{55} Kaloyan’s sudden death before the walls of Thessalonike on 8 November 1207, the reaction of his successor Boril (1207–1218) and the proclamation of the Synodikon of Orthodoxy at the Council of Tarnovo on 11 February 1211, marked the end of union with Rome, although it formally continued until 1232.\textsuperscript{56} At the Council of Tarnovo, almost all bishops who had supported archbishop Basíli’s union now took sides with the Orthodox bishops.

From what is known, the nature of the union was primarily hierarchical and canonical. The Bulgarian church did become subordinate to Rome, but dogmatic, liturgical and ritual issues are generally believed to have been left for a later phase of negotiations.\textsuperscript{57} There are sufficient indications, however, that Innocent III raised these questions straight away. Namely, the pope permitted chiasm to be prepared according to the Roman rite,\textsuperscript{58} and the Bulgarian archbishop, metropolitans and bishops were anointed because of the Orthodox rite according to which they had been consecrated did not involve anointing.\textsuperscript{59} The pope authorized his legates to rectify spiritual affairs in Bulgaria and to instruct the metropolitans, clerics and people in the Petrine doctrine ("eius sequamini doctrinam et formam, cui Dominus totius ecclesie magisterium contulit et primatum").\textsuperscript{60} Archbishop Basíli himself requested of the pope to introduce the church order ("ut dispenses et adimpleas ordinem ecclesiasticum") and to instruct him in anointing, baptism and other matters.\textsuperscript{61} The pope added: "si forsitain dubitaveris, cum a te fuerimus requiris, fraternitatem tuam plenius instruamus."\textsuperscript{62} Undoubtedly, archbishop Basíli received instruction not only


\textsuperscript{45} Walter, Art and Ritual, 132–133 and note 94.

\textsuperscript{46} Xyngopoulos, Παποφυγματοτατικά, 128; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 436; eadem, Света Никола, 18–21, 51–53.

\textsuperscript{47} Stránský, Les ruines, 426. Western influences are Stránský’s explanation for the image of pope Leo in the nave and the candlesick and jar in the apse (ibid., 426–427).

\textsuperscript{48} Cf. note 46 above.

\textsuperscript{49} A. Lidov, Byzantine Church Decoration and the Great Schism of 1054, Byzantion 68 (1998) 383–389, 392–397. The introduction of these scenes into the programme of Byzantine churches used to be explained differently, cf. Babic, Discussions christsologiques, 368–396; Walter, Art and Ritual, 184–189, 198–217.

\textsuperscript{50} Stránský, Les ruines, 424, pl. CXXXVIII; Mavrodinova, Nouvelles considérations, 428–429, fig. 3; Mavrodinova, Света Никола, 21–23, figs. 16–17; Walter, Art and Ritual, 212–213.

\textsuperscript{51} The theme may be connected with the epiclesis prayer (S. Salaville, Epiclese, in: Dictionnaire de théologie catholique V, Paris 1931, col. 194–300), i. e. the invocation of the Holy Spirit to consecrate the offering gifts (cf. Walter, Art et Ritual, 209, note 227; idem, The Christ Child on the Altar in the Radioslov Narhese: A Learned or a Popular Theme?, in: Studenica et l’art byzantin autour de l’année 1200, Belgrade 1988, 219–220). The epiclesis is not known in or recognized by the Roman Catholic Church.


\textsuperscript{54} Izuelev, Преписката, 43–44.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 45–46.

\textsuperscript{56} It was as early as 19 April 1213 that pope Innocent III invited the primate of Bulgaria to attend the Lateran Council in 1215 (Izuelev, Papstum und Bulgarien, 44; I. Bozhilov, Селските етюди по средновековна история, Sofia 1995, 181–182).

\textsuperscript{57} Zlatarski, История, 206–207; Petrov, Учител, 56.

\textsuperscript{58} Izuelev, Преписката, 38.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 38–39.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 33, 51–52.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 43.
from the pope, but also from cardinal Leo and other papal legates in Bulgaria. It may be assumed, therefore, that it was their intervention that led to the omission from the fresco programme at Melnik of typically Orthodox themes, and to the creation of the curious scene of a bishop being invested by Jesus Christ through the mediation of St Peter.

In light of these facts, the bishop is likely to have been a contemporary of the union events. Namely, as has been shown, this can be neither St Nicholas nor the apostle James; and this is unlikely to be the bishop of Melnik, because such a dignitary is mentioned neither in the correspondence between Innocent III and the Bulgarians nor anywhere else in the early thirteenth century. Therefore, this should rather be archbishop Basil, not only because of the role he played in the union affair, but also because the investiture is being performed by Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter. Another clue pointing to archbishop Basil is the figure of St Basil the Great at the head of, and somewhat apart from, the holy bishops on the other side of the apse. Archbishop Basil had, of course, been consecrated according to the Orthodox rite, and in 1204, the year of his appointment as archbishop and primate of all Bulgaria and Vlachia, the procedure was supplemented by anointing and the bestowal of the pallium and other usual insignia of Roman Catholic prelates. In the name of the pope, the ceremony was performed by cardinal Leo. Given that the ceremony in the fresco is being performed by the apostle Peter in the name of Christ, the scene is painted and understood as the symbolic investiture of a new primate.

Such a scene, with its iconographical elements borrowed from earlier Byzantine art and somewhat modified, demonstrates the origin of spiritual authority in Christ, which now, through the apostle Peter, is being invested into archbishop Basil. Apparently, the exact source of this composition and its meaning may be identified: the privilege of pope Innocent III to the archbishop of Tirnovo sent from Anagni and dated 25 February 1204.

The pope begins the privilege with an exposition of Christ as the beginning of all hierarchy: "Rex regum et Dominus dominantium, Iesus Christus, sacerdos in eternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech, cui dedit omnia paternum munus." Christ established St Peter as his deputy: "Summum apostolicum sedes et ecclesiae Romane pontificem, quem in beato Petro sibi vicarium ordinavit", thereby bestowing on him primacy and all authority, which is extensively elaborated by Innocent III in his privilege. The apostle Peter is transmitted to his successors the authority conferred upon him by Christ. Accordingly, as a successor in the Petrine primacy, pope Innocent assumes Peter’s role and care for the Bulgarian people ("cum ex precepto Domini oves eis pacere teneat, populus Bulgarorum et Blachorum, qui multo iam tempore ab uberibus matris sui alienate fuerunt, in spiritualibus et temporalibus paterna sollicitudine providere velint.") which gives him the right to appoint Basil as primate of the Tîrnovo church: "Te quoque in regno Bulgarorum et Blachorum primatem statuimus et ecclesie Tri­novitane presenti privilegio auctoritatem concedimus pri­matie." The privilege contains various instructions as to the coronation of the tsar, the consecration of bishops, anointing, baptism, confirmation etc.

Whether of his own volition or instructed by cardinal Leo, archbishop Basil decided to depict at Melnik not the usual scene but a more extensive symbolic representation of his investiture as primate of Bulgaria, probably encouraged by Innocent III’s privilege. In its extensive intro-

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65 This is tentatively also allowed also by Bohdilov, Cédez emódo, 168 (‘Could some oral agreements not be hiding behind these documents, possibly mediated by cardinal Leo?’).
67 The pope sent the pallium to the metropolitans of Velbuzhd and Preslav and the bishops of Braniščevo, Skopje, Pírzen, Niž, and Vidin, and they were anointed according to the Roman Catholic rite.
69 Vlachia featuring in the titles of tsar and archbishop suggests that Bulgaria extended north of the Danube and absorbed some Vlachian areas.
70 Ibid., 35.
71 Ibid., 36.
72 Ibid., 38.
73 It is not known how exactly the ceremony at Tîrnovo looked like. In a letter to the pope, Basil describes his being induced a primate by cardinal Leo: ‘... et portavit universam plenitudinem patriarchalis dignitatis et parasit · unna, mihi a vestra magna sanctitate fuerunt delegata; tradidit simul et anulum et privilegium et scripta et instructiones. Et precepta vestra sanctitas unxit me cum aeternitate, mihi benedictos, et consecravit me in patriarcham meam novembris septimo die’ (Duychev, Prapokata, 34–39. Basil received the privilege together with the ring, epistles and instructions, and was anointed and established as primate on 7 November 1204).
74 Duychev, Prapokata, 34 and 37.
75 Ibid., 35.
76 Ibid., 36.
77 Ibid., 38.
78 It is not known how exactly the ceremony at Tîrnovo looked like. In a letter to the pope, Basil describes his being induced a primate by cardinal Leo: ‘... et portavit universam plenitudinem patriarchalis dignitatis et parasit · unna, mihi a vestra magna sanctitate fuerunt delegata; tradidit simul et anulum et privilegium et scripta et instructiones. Et precepta vestra sanctitas unxit me cum aeternitate, mihi benedictos, et consecravit me in patriarcham meam novembris septimo die’ (Duychev, Prapokata, 67). For basic information on episcopal consecration in the Roman Catholic Church, v. P. de Puniet, Consécration épiscopale, Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie III/3, Paris 1914, col. 2579–2604.
80 PL 54, col. 145 (Leo the Great); P. de Puniet, op. cit., col. 2602. During the ceremony a passage was from Matthew (16, 16–19) on Peter’s faith and primacy was also read.
81 The pope articulated a similar idea in yet another place: ‘Verum in Novo Testamento Christi ase ipse majores at minus sacerdotes instituit’, PL 217, col. 777 and col. 778–779.
82 In eleventh and twelfth century painting Christ as a priest was tanscribed: D. Aynalov, Novyi ikonografičniy obraz Hrista, Scni-
was depicted in front of or in the Ark of the Covenant, certainly according to the Epistle to Hebrews (5–10, especially 9, 11–12, 24–25), in order that his role as a high priest would be clearly shown.\(^7^9\) Models for the Ark of the Covenant were found in earlier Byzantine iconography. Other elements of the composition were also modified to suit the subject. The posture of archbishop Basil and the entire investiture resemble the usual scenes of episcopal consecration, the only exception being the apostle Peter introduced into the scene as Christ's vice who, in the words of Innocent III, had been given the authority and responsibility to initiate others into the legacy he had been entrusted with. Finally, the church fathers, introduced long before into the programmes of the apses of Byzantine churches, assume a new meaning here, their poses and raised arms substituting those acclaiming a new bishop. Standing apart from the group is St Basil the Great, undoubtedly as Bulgarian archbishop's namesake and patron saint. All this resulted in a curious scene the singularity of which only becomes explainable if viewed against a background of union between the Bulgarian and Roman churches. Hence it should be dated between 1204 and 1207, as Melnik's other frescoes.

The union was too short-lived — a few years — to have been able to make itself felt more strongly in art, even at Melnik. The omission of some distinctly Orthodoxy compositions seems to suggest that it impinged upon certain dogmatic and liturgical aspects. The Bulgarian side does not seem to have intended a complete break with Orthodox practices; to judge by the words from tsar Kaloyan's bull, all clergy in his country will be subordinate to Rome, but they will "teneant legem consuetudinem et obsequutionem, quas tenuerunt beate memorie imperatores totius Bulgarie et Vlachie prisci illi nostri predecessores et nos eodem modo vestigia eorum imitantes".\(^7^9\) This appears to find support in a letter of Demetrios Chomaten, bishop of Ohrid (1204). Referring to Bulgarian bishops, he says that, despite their link with Rome, they are not heretics but Orthodox, consecrated according to the Orthodox rite.\(^8^0\) The Synod of the Ohrid Archbishopric, however, was much harsher, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate had never revoked its condemnation of Basil's action. Not even Basil seems to have renounced Orthodoxy altogether. In the aftermath of these events, he withdrew to Mount Athos and he died there.\(^8^1\) This may be the reason that the scene at Melnik showed a symbolical investiture, general and neutral enough to be acceptable both for the Roman Catholic and for the Orthodox, rather than Basil's literal consecration by the papal legate cardinal Leo. And this may explain why the fresco was not destroyed or repainted in 1246, when a Greek bishop entered the city and the church of St Nicholas.

\(^7^9\) As far as we know, the only representation of Christ in the Ark of the Covenant in the Byzantine world is painted in the monastery church of Zarzma, Georgia, in the fourteenth century, cf. Walter, *Art and Ritual*, 214 sq.; T. Papamastorakis, *Η ιερορροή του Χριστού — Μεγάλου Αγιασμού*, ΔΧΑΕ 17 (1993–1994) 67–76.

