

The depictions of warrior saints in frescoes of 1380 at the Church of the Holy Saviour in Kovaliovo

Whether Balkan masters painted the Novgorod church?

Svetlana Dmitrieva*

International University of Nature, Society and Man, Dubna, Russia

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This article examines the theme of warrior saints in the Kovaliovo fresco cycle, based on the archival photographs and frescoes assembled by the conservators. The analysis of the selection of warrior saints (including the seated figure of St. Demetrios), the arrangement of their figures in the overall iconographic programme, the separate iconographic characteristics of the frescoes and — finally — the style of painting, confirms that the Kovaliovo master-painters were not local nor were they Russian, but it obliges us to reject the theory that the Kovaliovo frescoes resemble the art of the Morava school in Serbia. It is feasible that the Kovaliovo painters came from one of the Balkan centers closely linked to Thessaloniki and, within the tradition of Novgorodian monumental painting, the best Kovaliovo frescoes seem to bear the legacy of their great predecessor, Theophanes the Greek.

Keywords: Kovaliovo, Novgorod frescoes, warrior saints, Battle of Kulikovo, iconographic programme, Theophanes the Greek

The church wall paintings of Veliky Novgorod are particularly important in the art of fourteenth-century Rus'. A significant number of frescoes were painted by masters who had migrated from Constantinople and the Balkan region. Among them was the illustrious Theophanes the Greek and other artists, whose names have been lost.

Anonymous masters were responsible for the wall paintings dated 1380 at the Transfiguration Monastery church in Kovaliovo, near Novgorod, built in 1345.¹ N. P. Sychov supervised the removal of the overpainting from the frescoes in 1910 to 1912 and later, in 1921, thus laying the groundwork for the study of the Transfiguration church frescoes. Uncovering the earlier paint layer allowed us to include this fresco ensemble in the monuments of Medieval Rus'. Thereafter it was mentioned by many scholars in the first half of the twentieth century. They attempted to relate the Kovaliovo painting to various schools of medieval art.² V. N. Lazarev was the first to give a detailed account of the iconographic characteristics and style of these frescoes in a book published in 1947; afterwards the same author devoted a separate paper to the frescoes, where he attributes the painting at the Kovaliovo church to Serbian masters, and specifically to the Morava school of the late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries.³ V. N. Lazarev rated the Kovaliovo wall paintings very highly and initiated the retrieval of the frescoes from the church ruins, which was carried out by a

team of restorers led by A. P. and V. B. Grekov.⁴ Restoration of the original frescoes served as the basis for several articles in the 1980s dealing with the special problems of these wall paintings.⁵ Their general conclusions coincide on the whole with those of V. N. Lazarev.

The changes in interpretation of the Kovaliovo frescoes were connected to a total re-evaluation of painting from the late Palaiologan period. The exceptionally active period in Novgorod cultural life during the second half of the fourteenth century and the flowering of monumental painting at this time were reflected in generalised publications and more specific research.⁶ Interestingly

* Svetlana Dmitrieva (Rechnaya 8, 41980 Dubna, Moscow Oblast, Russia); ru-ds@list.ru

¹ Chronicles tell us that the church was erected in 1345 by a Novgorod city-dweller named Ankif (Onkif) Zhabin (*Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, IV, ch. 1/1, Saint Petersburg 1915, 275).

² G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIV, XV, et XVI siècles d'après les monuments de Mystra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos*, Paris 1960², 484, 632; P. P. Muratov, *Russkaia zhivopis' do serediny XVII veka*, in: *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, red. I. Grabar, VI, Moscow 1915, 182; A. I. Nekrasov, *Velikii Novgorod*, Moscow 1924, 67; idem, *Drevnerusskoe izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo*, Moscow 1937, 158–159; D. Ainalov, *Geschichte der russischen Monumentalkunst der vormoskovitischen Zeit*, Berlin–Leipzig 1932, 61; M. Alpatov, N. Brunov, *Geschichte der altrussischen Kunst*, Augsburg 1932, 182.

³ V. N. Lazarev, *Iskusstvo Novgoroda*, Moscow–Leningrad 1947, 85–90; idem, *Kovalevskaya rospis' i problema iuzhnoslavianskikh svyazei v russkoj zhivopisi XIV veka*, in: *Ezhegodnik Instituta istorii iskusstva*, 1957: *Arkhitektura i zhivopis'* (1958) 233–278 (reprinted in: V. N. Lazarev, *Russkaia srednevekovaia zhivopis'*, Moscow 1970, 234–278).

⁴ For the results of the restoration v. A. P. Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobrazheniia na Kovaleve*, Moscow 1987. Lately, the restorers in Novgorod, under the guidance of Tamara Anisimova, were successful in bringing together some fresco scenes from the Dormition church in Volotovo, 1363, and restorer Tatyana Romashkevich assembled several figures and compositions from the Savior (Transfiguration) church on Nereditsa, 1199. The frescoes of the other destroyed churches — the Annunciation on Gorodishche and the Archangel Michael in the Skovorodsky monastery are not included in these works.

⁵ O. I. Podobedova, *Voinskaia tema i ee znachenie v sisteme rospisi cerkvi Spasa na Kovaleve v Novgorode*, in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Monumental'naia zhivopis' XI–XVII vekov*, Moscow 1980, 196–209; G. S. Kolpakova, *Kovalëvskie freski. Sistema rospisi i ee sootnoshenie s inter'rom*, in: *Novgorodskii kraj. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii "Novgorod drevnii – Novgorod sotsialisticheskii, Arkheologiya, istoriya, iskusstvo"*, ed. V. L. IAnin, Leningrad 1984, 241–250.

⁶ È. S. Smirnova, *Zhivopis' Velikogo Novgoroda. Seredina XIII – nachalo XV veka*, Moscow 1976; L. I. Lifshits, *Monumental'naia zhivopis' Novgoroda XIV–XV vekov*, Moscow 1987, 29–32, 503–508, fig. 180–200.



Fig. 1. The scheme of the painting in the naos (view to the west)



122 Fig. 2. The scheme of the painting in the naos (view to the north)

enough, IU. G. Malkov's articles on frescoes in the Novgorod church of the Nativity at the Cemetery, which is also traditionally included in the group showing "Balkan influences", expressed doubt as to whether the Kovaliovo frescoes could have been painted by Serbian masters.⁷

Over the last few decades, the full significance of the Transfiguration church frescoes has been reassessed in various publications. Jadranka Prolović's monograph on wall paintings at the Church of St. Andrew on the Treska River near Skopje (1388/1389) concludes that they bear a close affinity to the frescoes at Kovaliovo,⁸ while Vladimir Sarabianov notes a similarity between the spiritually charged Kovaliovo images and the school of Theophanes the Greek, at the same time noting characteristics that further relate the ensemble to the culture of Novgorod.⁹

Several problems associated with Kovaliovo frescoes have been only partly discussed in existing literature. Above all these are questions concerning the *ktetors* cited in the main inscription on the church's west wall,¹⁰ and the master (or masters) that headed the workshop (his name was apparently included in the poorly preserved inscription over the door leading into the church from the narthex). Other questions are posed by the rare iconographic types encoun-

⁷ IU. G. Malkov, *Freski tserkvi Rozhdestva na Kladbishche*, Khudozhestvennoe nasledie. Khranenie, issledovanie, restavratsiia 4 (1978) 193–221; idem, *O roli balkanskoï khudozhestvennoï traditsii v drevnerusskoï zhivopisi XIV veka. Nekotorye aspekty tvorchestva Feofana Greka*, in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Monumental'naia zhivopis' XI–XVII vekov*, Moscow 1980, 138–140.

⁸ J. Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas an der Treska*, Wien 1997, 218.

⁹ V. Sarabianov, *XIV secolo: il nuovo incontro con Bisanzio*, in: *La pittura russa*, ed. E. Smirnova, I, Milano 2001, 280–286.

¹⁰ The fresco inscription assembled by the restorers (on the west wall of the naos, above the entrance to the church) names not only the *ktetors* of the church, but also the ruling archbishop of Novgorod and Moscow, Grand Prince Dmitry Donskoy: "В лето 6888 потыписанъ бы(сть) храмъ Г(оспод)а Б(ог)а Сп(ас)а нашего И(исус)а Х(рист)а а при князи великомъ Дмитрии Ивановиче и при въсвоященомъ архиепископе новгородскомъ Алексее а повелениемъ раба Б(о)ж(ь)я Офанасия Степановича и подружи его Марии а съвършисо м(еся)ца августа".



Fig. 3. *St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki*

tered here, some of them unprecedented in Russian art. Several images require identification, and their subject matter has yet to be interpreted. Finally, the stylistic variety of the painting itself and the artistic whole created by the Kovaliovo artistic workshop raise the question where we should place this fresco ensemble in the ranks of Novgorod artworks, and the painting of Byzantine style in general.

The fresco programme of the Kovaliovo church can be reconstructed according to archive photographs and reassembled fragments. This programme resulted from a skillfully made unification of several themes, each closely related to the central semantic emphases of the wall painting. Firstly, we have the Theophany theme revealing the church's dedication to the Transfiguration of Christ and reflecting primary concepts of the late Palaiologan epoch. Old Testament images in the dome and naos, the Great Feasts cycle and its major points of emphasis correspond to this theme. The monastic themes, likewise, are notably large in scale and underlines the monastic character of the ensemble (images of the holy monks in the sanctuary, naos and narthex). Particular attention is paid to the holy women, and also to the warrior saints. The present article will examine the latter theme and on this basis attempt to clarify several questions, as the origins of the painters and the correlation of the fresco ensemble with the contemporary Byzantine art.

The Palaiologan epoch engendered a very specific attitude to the soldiers-martyrs, who had been venerated since early Christian times.¹¹ At this period it becomes more evident than ever before that valour in battle is perceived as the fulfilment of Christian duty, an imitation of feats achieved by the warrior saints. Hopes for a successful outcome to military conflict are linked to their assistance,



Fig. 4. *St. George*

both in prayer and reality, as clearly reflected in early Russian literature.¹² Both Byzantine and Old Russian sources show that during this time worship was an active constituent of martial culture (for instance, the consecration of weapons).¹³ Military *regalia* participated in Christian Feasts.¹⁴ Veneration of the holy warriors increases

¹¹ Many works are dedicated to the representations of the warrior saints in Byzantine Art. For the rich bibliography v. M. Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika u istočnokršćanskoj umetnosti i o predstavama ovih svetitelja u Dečanima*, in: *Zidno slikarstvo manastira Dečana. Građa i studije*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Belgrade 1995, 567–630; idem, *Sveti ratnici iz Resave. Ikonografska analiza*, in: *Manastir Resava. Istorija i umetnost. Naučni skup Manastir Manasija i njegovo doba*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Despotovac 1995, 191–217; Ch. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Aldershot–Burlington 2003.

¹² The author of the prolonged chronicle version of the “Story about the Battle of Kulikovo” correlates the defense of Medieval Rus’ and the feat of martyrs: “Да темже рыданием исполнишася Московци... и на бегі обратишася..., а не помянуша яко мученицы глаголаху друг к другу: братие, потерпим мало; зрима яра, но рай сладок, и страстен мечь, но сладко венчание” (*Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, IV, ch. 1/1, 320). This theme also appears as a refrain in the other texts about the Battle of Kulikovo.

¹³ I. M. Djordjević, *Der heilige Demetrios in der serbischen Adligen Stiftungen aus der Zeit der Nemaniden*, in: *L'art de Thessalonique et des pays balkaniques et les courants spirituels du XIV siècle. Recueil des rapports du IVe Colloque serbo-grec*, red. D. Davidov, Belgrade 1985, 71.

¹⁴ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 587. For example, there is a very interesting description of the army of Dmitry Donskoy coming out of

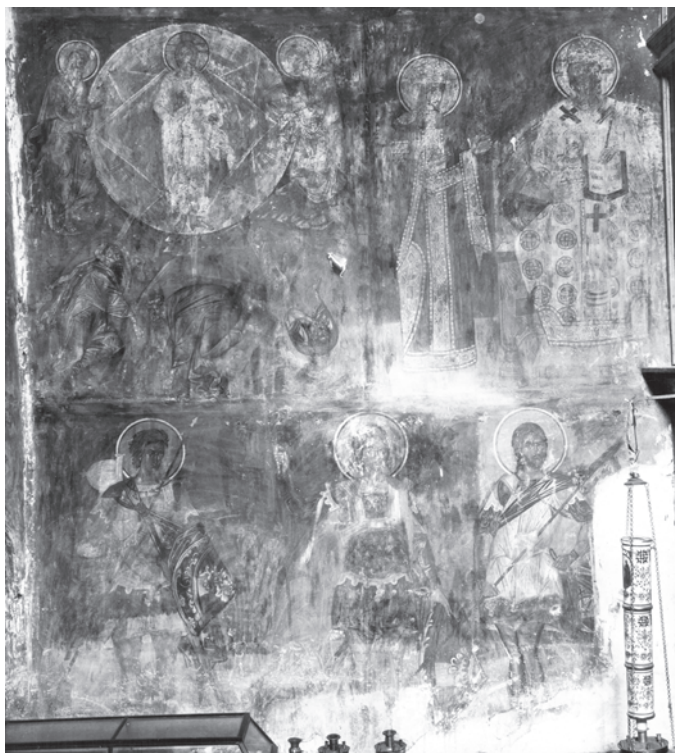


Fig. 5. The warrior saints in the lower zone of the north wall

throughout the fourteenth century: portable icons of the warrior saints accompany soldiers and military leaders on campaigns and often become family relics, many new churches were dedicated to the holy warriors in gratitude for their assistance during battle, and naturally the military theme assumes a far more important role in monumental ensembles of the Palaiologan period than ever before.

An increase in the number of warrior saint figures in wall painting is proof in itself: in most churches their images are combined in multi-figural groups. For example, seventeen warrior saints were depicted at the Church of Christ Pantokrator in the Dečani Monastery (ca. 1345);¹⁵ at the Church of St. Athanasios in Kastoria (1385/1386) eight of the twenty figures in the lower zone were warrior saints;¹⁶ fourteen holy warriors were included in the frescoes at Resava (before 1418).¹⁷ During this period many parish and monastery churches were founded with assistance from the *ktetors*, whose task was to participate in the defence of their towns and regions at the behest of the emperor or prince.¹⁸ It is worthy of note that the artists of the Palaiologan epoch and, above all, Michael Astrapas and Eutychios, liked to leave their inscriptions on the weapons of warrior saints.

The interior of the Kovaliovo church has two contrasting components: a relatively spacious area under the dome, and the corner bays. The square pillars in the church have been displaced towards the side walls and this reduces the dimensions of the side compartments. The semi-cylindrical vaults are open on the eastern side with lofty arches, but closed on the western side by walls. The specific features of the architecture resulted in a clearly defined separation of the central space beneath the dome. The compartments formed in the northwest and southwest corners of the church are almost entirely separate from the central area. Probably designated for solitary prayer, they facilitated a focused state of mind.

The lower registers of the frescoes in the northern and western sections of the church are devoted to the theme of the holy warriors, portraying St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki (middle zone), two warrior saints in the lower zone of the



Fig. 6. St. Merkourios

northwest pillar (fig. 1) — St. George (south side) and St. Nestor (east side), and also three soldier saints on the north wall (fig. 2).

The fresco depicting Demetrios of Thessaloniki (fig. 3) has no analogue in any other monumental cycle painted in Medieval Rus'. It shows St. Demetrios in full battle dress and bearing a sword, enthroned on the military *sella curulis* with the town wall in the background.¹⁹ This image of Demetrios

Moscow before the Battle of Kulikovo: "...архиепископ же благослови его (князя Дмитрия) и отпусти пойти противу поганых татар и дасть ему Христово знамение — крест на челе и посла богосвященный събор свой съ кресты и съ святыми иконами и съ священной водою въ Фроловская врата, и в Никольские, и в Констанстиноеленская, да всяк воин благословен изыде и священной водою кроплен". V. *Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche. Drevnerusskii tekst i perevod*, in: Pole Kulikovo. Skazaniia o bitve na Donu, ed. L. A. Dmitriev, Moscow 1980, 143.

¹⁵ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 587.

¹⁶ S. Pelekanidis, M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens 1985, 106–107.

¹⁷ Marković, *Sveti ratnici iz Resave*, 216.

¹⁸ As an example of the obvious parallelism between the military leader — the founder of the church — and the warrior saints, depicted on the walls of his church, we can take the fresco in the Church of the Archangel Michael in the Monastery of Lesnovo (1342–1347). The title of the *ktetor* Jovan Oliver — "Megas Dux" — is written on the shield of St. Demetrios, v. Djordjević, *Der heilige Demetrius*, 72.

¹⁹ Archive of the Institute of the History of Material Culture in Saint Petersburg. Negative II–72506. This fresco has partly been assembled by the restorers.



Fig. 7. St. Prokopios



Fig. 8. St. Artemios (St. Niketas?)

is emphasised not only by the unusual composition but also by its position in the middle rather than lower zone (Gospel scenes occupy this zone on the north and south walls).²⁰ It is not characteristic in other Novgorod churches to single out Demetrios of Thessaloniki from the rank of warrior saints.²¹ These factors together prompt us to consider why the image of this *megalomartyr* is given special attention in the Novgorod ensemble of frescoes.

It has already been established that depictions of St. Demetrios enthroned were already produced in the early Byzantine period and relate to a specific location where he was venerated, the basilica at Thessaloniki.²² In the veneration of Demetrios his protection over military leaders and rulers is particularly important, and images of the saint enthroned are often found on the coins and seals of Byzantine officials and rulers of provinces within the Byzantine cultural area,²³ particularly Medieval Rus'. The iconographic formula of Demetrios enthroned probably reached Rus' from the late twelfth to early thirteenth century, during the rule of Grand Prince of Vladimir, Vsevolod the Big Nest, who assumed the Christian name Dimitry.²⁴ The bulls of Prince Yaroslav Vladimirovich regarding his Novgorod principedom (1181–1184, 1187–1196 and 1197–1199) show that in Novgorod, too, this type of image was known in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Archangel Michael is portrayed on the recto of the bulls, while the verso features St. Demetrios enthroned and bearing a sword.²⁵

The dissemination of various iconographic versions of Demetrios intensified in Palaiologan art as the saint became

²⁰ The fresco representing Demetrios was disposed symmetrically to the fresco of the enthroned prophet Ezekiel (?; the middle zone of the west wall); v. fig. 1.

²¹ In the Church of Dormition in Volotovo, 1363, Demetrios is probably depicted, together with St. George, on the southern arch (G. I. Vzdornov, *Freski tserkvi Uspenii na Volotovom pole bliz Novgoroda*, Moscow 1989, ill. 149), in the Church of St. Theodore Stratelates "on the Spring" (around 1380), the figure of Demetrios is not singled out from other warrior saints on the south wall (v. T. IU. Tsarevskaja, *Rospis' tserkvi Fedora Stratilata na Ruch'iu v Novgorode i eë mesto v iskusstve Vizantii i Rusi vtoroi poloviny XIV veka*, Moscow 2007, 112).

²² Quite possibly, this iconographic formula goes back to the missing sacred image in the basilica of Saint Demetrios in Thessaloniki. The depiction of the sitting Demetrios in relief on the facade in San Marco in Venice (thirteenth century) probably follows the same prototype; cf. O. Demus et al., *Le sculpture esterne di San Marco*, Milano 1995, Cat. 8, 89–90.

²³ Special significance was attached to the veneration of Demetrios in Sirmium and in Bulgaria: the figure of Demetrios is placed on the seals of the Second Bulgarian Empire. The seal of the thirteenth century Bulgarian tsar — Ivan Asen II — represents Demetrios enthroned. The reverse of a gold coin shows Demetrios crowning this tsar and giving him a sword. Cf. P. Schreiner, *Der thronende Demetrius. Iconographie und politishe Bedeutung eines Siegels Ivan Asens II*, in: idem, *Studia Byzantino-Bulgaria*, Wien 1986, 95–104.

²⁴ The famous Russian icon from the town of Dmitrov also belongs to this range (The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the beginning of the thirteenth century).

²⁵ Nine such seals are known, cf. V. L. IAnin, *Aktovye pečati Drevnei Rusi X–XV vekov*, 1, Moscow 1970, 204, tabl. 17, 58.



Fig. 9. St. Helena



Fig. 10. St. Akakios of Sinai

protector of the last imperial dynasty, and he was frequently depicted in this capacity on coins.²⁶ In the monumental painting of the Palaiologan epoch, Demetrios the Great Martyr was portrayed enthroned against a background of buildings in his *Vita* scenes, for instance “The Martyrdom of St. Demetrios” at the Metropolitan Church of St. Demetrios in Mistra (1291–1315),²⁷ and “The Slaying of St. Demetrios” in the Church of the Virgin Ljeviška in Prizren (ca. 1310), where the martyr is depicted against a background wall with two side projections.²⁸ This motif acquires a particularly solemn character in some miniatures.²⁹

In the Kovaliovo fresco we can see a light blue cloth under St. Demetrios’ feet, and at the lower right a dark entity that may represent a scorpion. Judging from an archive photograph, a landscape “hillock” was painted between Demetrios and the town walls. The specific setting and other details indicate that the fresco is based on a hagiographic composition³⁰ that provided the essential features for this image by virtue of the widely-used symbolism (the saint vanquishing evil outside the town walls).

When examining the Kovaliovo fresco we should take into consideration that the martyr was protector not only of the Byzantine emperors, but also of Grand Prince Dmitry Donskoi,³¹ the ruler when the church walls were painted (his name takes precedence in the fresco inscription written on

the west wall).³² But although Dmitry Donskoi is mentioned in the *ktetor* inscription and regarded as the founder of a

²⁶ B. Živković, *Bogorodica Ljeviška. Crteži fresaka*, Belgrade 1991, 61.

²⁷ In the scene of the “Miracle about the scorpion” from the Menologion of Demetrios Palaiologos (between 1322–1340) St. Demetrios, having defeated the scorpion, sits against a town wall (Oxford, *Bodl. gr. th. F. 1*, fol. 54 v); v. Ch. Walter, *St. Demetrios: The Myroblytos of Thessalonica*, *Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1973) pl. 13.

³⁰ Out of all the episodes from St. Demetrios’ Life, the following three are more often connected with architecture: the scenes of his martyrdom (here, the architecture featured the prison), the “Blessing of St. Nestor” and the “Miracle about the scorpion” (the two last scenes were already represented on Middle-Byzantine monuments, for example, on a reliquary from Vatopedi, Mount Athos, from the second half of the twelfth century).

³¹ It is known, Dmitry Donskoi initiated the cult of St. Demetrios. Moscow Metropolitan Alexis in 1369 introduced the practice of a week-long fast before the Feast of St. Demetrios (v. V. N. Beneshevich, *Mitropolita Aleksii “Slovo o novykh postakh”*, in: *Bibliograficheskaia letopis’*, 3, Saint Petersburg 1917, 105–110). This fast reflected the practice of Thessaloniki; it did not spread in Russia, but it may have influenced the establishment of a day commemorating the warriors who fell in the Battle of Kulikovo on the Saturday before the Feast of St. Demetrios (one of the first records about this service is found in a fifteenth century Novgorodian manuscript). V. Arkhimandrit Meletii, *Istoricheskoe opisanie stavropigial’nogo Solovetskogo monastyria*, Moscow 1881, 7, № 10. By that time, the venerated image of St. Demetrios, painted on the “grave board” of the saint, was removed to the Moscow Dormition Cathedral from Vladimir (where it arrived from Thessaloniki in 1197). This image is dated to 1701. The text on a small plate under the icon tells that it was transferred to Moscow in 1380, but E. Smirnova, who studied the icon and its cover carefully, shifts this event to a later time, 1390–1400, the period of Metropolitan Kiprian’s rule, who paid a larger attention to the antiquities of the town of Vladimir; v. E. Smirnova, *Khramovaia ikona Dmitrievskogo sobora. Sviatost’ solunskoi baziliki vo vladimirskom hrane*, in: *Dmitrievskii sobor vo Vladimire: K 800-letiiu sozdaniia*, ed. E. S. Smirnova, Moscow 1997, 229–230.

³² Notably, thirteen Dmitry Donskoi seals have been found in Novgorod with an image of St. Demetrios standing with a spear and shield; cf. I. Anin, *Aktovy pechati Drevnei Rusi*, 1, tabl. 417–422.

²⁶ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 589. Cf., also, J. Sabatier, *Description générale des monnaies byzantines frappées sous les empereurs d’Orient depuis Arcadius jusqu’à la prise de Constantinople par Mahomet II*, Paris 1955, 246–269, pl. LX–LXII; D. R. Sear, *Byzantine Coins and Their Values*, London 1987, 442–479.

²⁷ On this fresco, the figure of Demetrios is beneath a painted arch. To the right of the saint’s figure a mountain is depicted; v. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Byzantine Wall-Painting*, Athens 1994, pl. 94.



Fig. 11. An Archangel



Fig. 12. Prophet Aaron

Novgorod church dedicated to St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki,³³ his relations with the independent Republic of Novgorod were always tense (as they were with other Moscow princes).³⁴ It is therefore probable that the image of Demetrios of Thessaloniki was emphasised in Kovaliovo for a different reason. As already stated, Demetrios was highly venerated in the Balkans, where the saint's figure is present in almost all fresco ensembles.³⁵ Such attention paid to his image was conditioned by the Balkan region dependence on the most important fourteenth-century cultural and historical centre — Thessaloniki.³⁶

The role of Thessaloniki extended to the political, cultural and artistic spheres. Fresco painters often travelled to the Balkan cities and monasteries from Thessaloniki.³⁷ Thus, since the iconography of the Kovaliovo fresco is of Thessalonician origin, and since the saint is singled out from the ranks of warrior saints and the composition is placed in the zone of the Gospel scenes, it is possible that the Kovaliovo masters belonged to one of the Balkan centres closely linked to Thessaloniki.

The significance of the St. Demetrios image in the Kovaliovo wall paintings is underlined by the presentation beneath this fresco of the warrior saint Nestor,³⁸ whose figure can only be reconstructed from the remaining fragments. Nestor is depicted as a young warrior and framed, like other saints of the lower zone on the west pillars, in a Byzantine arch painted to look like marble (fig. 1). It is known, this grouping of figures representing St. Demetrios, his servant Lupus and Nestor was based on the iconography of the ciborium at the basilica of St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki, where the ciborium gates probably showed Nestor and Lupus in military attire.³⁹ Episodes with the

participation of Nestor become an almost integral part of the hagiographic cycles devoted to St. Demetrios. Moreover, abbreviated versions give preference to the scene where St. Demetrios is pictured enthroned, blessing Nestor.⁴⁰

³³ *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, III, ch. 4, Moscow 1841, 93.

³⁴ Let us remember, for example, the confrontation between Dmitry Donskoy and Novgorod several years later, after painting of Kovaliovo church: the Novgorodians, after Dmitry's refusal to parley, burned the wooden buildings in twenty-four monasteries near the town (among them Kovaliovo is mentioned). V. *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, IV/1, 344. Cf., also, V. L. IAnin, "Chërnyi bor" v Novgorode XIV–XV vekov, in: *Kulikovskaia bitva v istorii i kul'ture našei Rodiny*. Materialy iubileinoi nauchnoi konferentsii, red. B. A. Rybakov, Moscow 1983, 102–103.

³⁵ Djordjević, *Der heilige Demetrius*, 69.

³⁶ As we know, the image of St. Demetrios was often accompanied by an inscription emphasizing his origin. We can find it both in the Balkans and in Russia [for example, in the Church of St. Nicholas in Prizren, 1331/1332 (Djordjević, *op. cit.*, 68, 71), or on an icon from the Russian Museum, Saint-Petersburg, depicting Demetrios in military dress, standing with a bow and with his sword drawn (I. A. Shalina, *Pskovskie ikony XIV–XV vv. iz sobraniia GRM*, in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Pskova i iskusstvo pozdnevizantijskoj epokhi*, Moscow 2008, 176–177, il. 9, 10; A. A. Turilov, *Zametki o paleograficheskoj datirovke nekotoryh pskovskikh ikon XIV–XVI vv.*, in: *ibid.*, 212)].

³⁷ V. J. Djurić, *Solunsko poreklo resavskog živopisa*, ZRVI 6 (1960) 115–121.

³⁸ Unfortunately, only a little part of his figure (which was fully preserved at the beginning of the twentieth century) is shown on the photograph, which is kept in the archive. But the restorers assembled a large part of this fresco, which confirms the identification made by N. P. Sychoy; v. Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobrazheniia na Kovaleve*, shema p. 53.

³⁹ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 610. About the juxtaposition of Demetrios' and Nestor's images v., also, Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art*, 227–229.

⁴⁰ For example, the reliquary encolpion in the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos, from the second half of the twelfth century. Later, the figure of St. Nestor could be included even in the compositions, which are not connected with the hagiographical scenes (e.g. the icon from the



Fig. 13. Prophet Elijah



Fig. 14. Prophet Joel

In Byzantine fresco cycles of the Palaiologan epoch the figure of St. Nestor is often placed next to that of St. Demetrios, for example in the Church of St. George in Staro Nagoričino (1316–1318),⁴¹ the Church of the Virgin at Kučevište (ca. 1331)⁴² and the Church of St. Demetrios at the Monastery of King Marko near Skopje (1376/1377),⁴³ or it is included in the hagiographic cycles of the patron saint of Thessaloniki (the Metropolitan Church at Mistra,⁴⁴ Dečani).⁴⁵ In Serbian frescoes St. Nestor is occasionally depicted among the Great Martyrs (at Resava).⁴⁶ In Novgorod the figure of St. Nestor has been preserved in the wall paintings of the Church of St. Theodore Stratelates (the dedication of the church demanded a particularly comprehensive assembly of warrior saints), although here the warriors are painted on different walls of the church (north and south).⁴⁷

Richly decorated arches on the painted columns with foliate capitals frame not only St. Nestor, but also another warrior located on the south side of the northwest pillar. The young soldier-saint bears a sword and shield decorated with a crowned heraldic lion (figs. 1, 4).⁴⁸ No records have survived with the name of the saint, but judging from the fresco iconography the Kovaliovo painters included another holy warrior, almost mandatory in the fresco cycles of the Palaiologan period — St. George. As we know, SS. George and Demetrios are represented or described as commanders of the heavenly host in many Palaiologan paintings and literary works. It is they that lead the row of saints accompanying the Holy Virgin in many compositions of “The Celestial Court” (e.g. Zaum, Monastery of King Marko). These warriors frequently appear in Novgorod icons. According to the Novgorod Chronicle they came to the aid of Russian armies in the year when the Kovaliovo frescoes were painted, during the Battle of Kulikovo: “...When the

battle had lasted nine whole hours true believers beheld that the angels and the entire host of warrior saints came to aid the Christians; they saw the warrior George and the glorious Demetrios, the saints Boris and Gleb, of the same names as the Grand Princes; there too was the Archangel Michael, commander of the force of heavenly warriors ... the godless Tatars were felled by the fear of God and by the Christian arms. And the Lord God lifted our Prince on high, after granting him victory over the foreigners...”.⁴⁹

Hilandar Monastery, from the second half of the seventeenth century, represents the enthroned Demetrios with a half-drawn sword in the middle, and to the left — the small figure of Nestor; on the icon in Recklinghausen, from the end of the sixteenth century, St. Demetrios is depicted standing, dressed as a martyr, and to the left — is also the small figure of Nestor).

⁴¹ B. Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Belgrade 1993, fig. 47.

⁴² This church, decorated probably by the Greek painters, represents near St. Nestor, the other companion of St. Demetrios — his servant St. Lupus; v. I. M. Djordjević, *Slikarstvo XIV veka u Kučevištu*, ZLUMS 17 (1981) 99.

⁴³ Here St. Nestor and St. Lupus are depicted as martyrs-orants near the horseman — the patron of the church; v. N. Nošpal-Nikuljska, *Novonastanite istoriski uslovii vo Makedonija izrazeni na edna kompozicija od freskite vo Markov manastir. Božjite znamenija prineseni na dar sv. Dimitrije*, Zbornik na Arheološki muzej na Makedonija 6–7 (1967–1974) 171–180, shema p. 177.

⁴⁴ M. Chatzidakis, *Mystras: the medieval city and the castle*, Athens 1981, 20.

⁴⁵ J. Radovanović, *Heilige Demetrius: die Ikonographie seines Lebens auf den Fresken des Klosters Dečani*, in: *L'Art de Thessalonique*, 79, Abb. 4, 5.

⁴⁶ Marković, *Sveti ratnici iz Resave*, 196.

⁴⁷ Tsarevskaja, *Rospis' tserkvi Fedora Stratilata*, 110–111.

⁴⁸ The restorers assembled his figure and the details of his shield, v. Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobrazheniia na Kovaleve*, ill. 17, 18, 19.

⁴⁹ *Novgorodskaja chetvertaia letopis'*, in: *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, IV/1, 320.



Fig. 15. *Prophet Jonah*

The military theme at Kovaliovo continues with the depictions of three warriors in the lower zone of the north wall (figs. 2, 5). In the western part of the north wall, one can distinguish a young warrior (fig. 6), bearing in his right hand a spear that crosses the figure and, in his left, a shield turned sideways; a sheathed sword hangs at his left side. The warrior wears armour over a short tunic and across his breast the mantle is tied in a knot. The entire figure is caught in graceful motion. Behind his shoulders hangs a helmet crowned with a royal lily — the only detail that indirectly indicates the saint's identity.⁵⁰ As distinct from other armaments (spear, sword and shield), helmet is infrequently depicted among the saints' equipment in Byzantine frescoes of the Palaiologan period. Most often it is St. Merkourios that wears a helmet.⁵¹ In the case of other saints, helmets are a very rare feature.⁵² Scholars have noted that the image of a helmeted St. Merkourios comes from a classical prototype (the Roman Mercury-Mercurius, patron of commerce, traditionally wears a winged helmet).⁵³ Possibly for this reason the warrior saint Merkourios is helmeted in numerous monuments of Palaiologan art.⁵⁴

A fresco in the centre of the lower zone of the north wall shows another, unidentified young warrior saint dressed in a short tunic under armour that forms a characteristic quadrangle over his breast, with a mantle cast over the left shoulder and behind his back. In his right hand the warrior holds a spear while his left rests on a shield standing upright on the ground. Under the lower edge of his mantle we detect the outline of a sheathed sword (fig. 7).⁵⁵ From the iconography — a young soldier with wavy hair that reaches halfway down his neck, the ends hanging in two semicircular locks — this is probably St. Prokopios.⁵⁶ The hair is depicted exactly the same way in images of St. Prokopios at Dečani,⁵⁷ the Church of the Holy Apostles at Peć (ca. 1346)⁵⁸ and Resava.⁵⁹ This identification



Fig. 16. *St. Catherine*

⁵⁰ Negative III-8343; Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobraženiia*, ill. p. 26, 42.

⁵¹ On the iconography of St. Merkourios cf. G. Kaster, *Merkurius von Cäsarea* in: *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 8, Freiburg im Breisgau 1976, 10-13; Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art*, 101-109.

⁵² For example, in Lesnovo St. Prokopios has a helmet. But it must be emphasized that the painter of the church in Lesnovo evidently liked to depict helmets: in addition to Prokopios he also depicted a helmet on the head of the archangel Michael, cf. S. Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo. Istorija i slikarstvo*, Belgrade 1998, sl. XXIX, LXIV, LXIII.

⁵³ B. Combet Farnoux, *Mercurio*, in: *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica, classica e orientale*, 4, Roma 1958, 1031-1035.

⁵⁴ For example in the frescoes in Staro Nagoričino (Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, fig. 60), in Lesnovo (Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo*, fig. XXIX), in the south choir of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Peć (V. J. Đurić, S. Čirković, V. Korać, *Pečka Patrijaršija*, Belgrade 1990, fig. 139), in Dečani (Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 621, fig. 5); in Resava (B. Živković, *Manasija. Crteži fresaka*, Belgrade 1983, shema IV). The iconography type of St. Merkourios (as a rule, he is represented as a young man with short hair) confirms our identification, though sometimes he is depicted as a middle-aged man with a short beard (in Peć, Dečani, Ravanica, Resava).

⁵⁵ Negative III-8343. Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobraženiia*, 53, ill. 30.

⁵⁶ On the iconography of St. Prokopios v. È. S. Smirnova, *O pervonachal'noi kompozitsii i ikonograficheskoi programme serebriannogo oklada XI veka ikony "Apostoly Petr i Pavel" iz Sofijskogo sobora v Novgorode* in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Vizantiia, Rus', Zapadnaia Evropa: iskusstvo i kul'tura*, Saint Petersburg 2002, 95, prim. 9; Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art*, 94-101.

⁵⁷ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, figs. 47 and 48.

⁵⁸ Đurić, Čirković, Korać, *Pečka Patrijaršija*, fig. 139.

⁵⁹ Todić, *Manastir Resava*, fig. 110.



Fig. 17. St. Niketas the Confessor
(the hegoumenos of the monastery of Medikion)

is supported by the location of the figure among the warriors close to St. Demetrios.⁶⁰ St. Prokopios is one of the most venerated warrior saints of the Palaiologan epoch, together with the commanders of the heavenly army St. Demetrios and St. George.⁶¹

The eastern section of the north wall shows a middle-aged warrior with a small beard and long hair (fig. 8).⁶² Restorers have identified the figure as St. Theodore Stratelates. However, numerous examples of frescoes from the Palaiologan period show that Theodore Stratelates was customarily depicted with short, sometimes curly hair and a beard slightly parted in the middle (e. g. in the southern choir of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Peć,⁶³ the Church of St. Demetrios at Ohrid (ca. 1375),⁶⁴ Ravanica (1385–1387),⁶⁵ Kalenić (ca. 1420),⁶⁶ and Resava.⁶⁷ The Kovaliovo warrior has his hair parted on his forehead into two long locks that hang behind his shoulders, and his beard is unparted. As correctly observed by L. I. Lifshits,⁶⁸ this iconographic type is more reminiscent of images portraying St. Niketas or St. Artemios, warriors similar in appearance to the depiction of Christ the Saviour.

Distinguishing these two warrior saints by their iconography is rather complex. Both are usually shown with a short beard and long hair [according to a painter's manual (*hermeneia*), St. Niketas should be painted with "beard and hair as for the Saviour"].⁶⁹ It would appear that the Kovaliovo martyr bears a greater resemblance to St. Niketas, but we cannot rule out the possibility of identification as St. Artemios.⁷⁰

Thus, the selection of holy warriors in Kovaliovo corresponds almost entirely to the Byzantine hierarchy of the warrior saints: George, Demetrios, Nestor, Merkourios, Prokopios, Niketas (Artemios?). As for composition, the row is headed by the seated St. Demetrios, with St. Nestor and St. George, the warriors traditionally linked to him, below. All

the Kovaliovo warriors belong to the rank of *megalomartyrs* (except St. Nestor), their names are mentioned first in the list of warrior saints on the proskomide and in numerous hagiographical sources and literary works.⁷¹ The standards bearing their image were carried on Christian feast days (St. George, St. Demetrios, St. Prokopios, the two St. Theodores).⁷² As a sign of gratitude for their assistance in battle, many churches were dedicated to the most venerated warrior saints: St. George, St. Demetrios, St. Theodore, St. Prokopios and St. Niketas.⁷³ These warrior saints were most often included in church wall paintings of the Palaiologan epoch.

Interesting conclusions can be drawn when we observe the arrangement of warrior saint figures in the iconographic programme of the Kovaliovo church. The positioning of the row of warrior saints on the north wall was traditional for the fourteenth century art and has numerous parallels in the Balkans and Novgorod. Figures of the holy warriors are located in areas close to the altar in the lower part of the naos in many Serbian and Greek fresco ensembles. In Serbia their

⁶⁰ The paired images of St. Demetrios and St. Prokopios are known from the Middle Byzantine period. In Novgorod, their figures are painted side by side on the south wall of the Church of St. Theodore Stratelates on the Spring; cf. Tsarevskaia, *Rospis' tserkvi Fedora Stratilata*, 113.

⁶¹ For example in the prayers of the canon "for the King and his Army" (composed by Philotheos Kokkinos, the patriarch of Constantinople), the people call upon Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, Nicholas, the Archangel Michael and the warrior saints – Prokopios, Theodore, Merkourios and Eustathios. Cf. G. M. Prokhorov, *Gimny na voinskie temy epohi Kulikovskoi bitvy*, Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury 37 (1983) 290–291 (the text includes the translation of this canon into Russian, dated by 1407).

⁶² Negative III–8343. Grekov, *Freski tserkvi Spasa Preobrazheniia*, ill. 29.

⁶³ Đurić, Ćirković, Korać, *Pecka Patrijarsija*, fig. 139.

⁶⁴ C. Grozdanov, *Ohridsko zidno slikarstvo XIV veka*, Belgrade 1980, fig. 171.

⁶⁵ Marković, *Sveti ratnici iz Resave*, 201, fig. 11.

⁶⁶ D. Simić-Lazar, Kalenić. *Slikarstvo, istorija*, Kragujevac 2000, fig. XXIX.

⁶⁷ Marković, *Sveti ratnici iz Resave*, 201, fig. 12.

⁶⁸ Lifshits, *Monumental'naia zhivopis' Novgoroda XIV–XV vekov*, 505.

⁶⁹ *Ikonopisnyi podlinnik svodnoi redaktsii XVIII veka*, red. G. D. Filimonov, Moscow 1976, 152. But, on the whole, in the painting of the second half of the fourteenth century, there are more analogies with the Kovaliovo image of St. Niketas: besides Resava, we have an image that is very close in Dečani (Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, fig. 11), and also in the Church of St. Andrew on the Treska River (Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas*, Abb. 88).

⁷⁰ About the iconography of these warrior saints v., also, K. Kaster, *Niketa der Gote*, in: *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 8, 42–43; U. Knoben, *Artemius von Egypten*, in: *ibid.*, 5, 253–254; Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art*, 191–195, 231–234.

⁷¹ The *synaxarion* of the Serbian Gospel Lectionary of the Prince Miroslav (ca. 1185) mentions St. George, St. Demetrios, St. Prokopios, St. Eustathios, St. Niketas, St. Nestor, St. Menas, and St. Theodore Stratelates, cf. Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 600.

⁷² In Byzantium, it was common to use the emperor's standards during the religious feasts in fourteenth century (Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 587). Warrior saints were depicted on the fourth and on the fifth standard (St. George as a horseman). The sixth standard was divided into four parts, depicting St. Demetrios, St. Prokopios and the two St. Theodores. The stories composing the cycle about the Battle in the Kulikovo Field also contain evidence of the depictions of the saints on Russian standards. "Князь же великий, поим с собою брата своего князя Владимира и литовские князи и вси князи русские и воеводы, и взяв на высоко место, и увидев образы святых, иже суть въображени въ христьянских знамених, аки некии светилници солнечнии светящиеся въ время ведра; и стязи их золоченыя ревути, простирающиеся, аки облаци..." (cf. "Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche", 177).

⁷³ Marković, *O ikonografiji svetih ratnika*, 600.

images were often placed in the choir (e. g. at Ravanica, Nova Pavlica, Ljubostinja, Kalenić, Resava), and where there was no choir, on the north and south wall (e. g. at Ramaća, Koporin).⁷⁴ At the same time priority in placing the warrior saints figures was given to the north wall of the naos adjacent to the prothesis and usually including the scenes of Christ's Passion in the upper zones. In the Novgorod Church of St. Theodore Stratelates, the figure of an unknown young warrior in the northern part of the prothesis acts as a continuation of the row of warrior saints on the north wall of the naos. Hence, the positioning of warrior saints figures among the frescoes of the northern part of the church is connected to the unchanging dedication of the north wall to Christ's; the martyrdom of the holy warriors has been compared with this victory.

However, another theme can also be seen at Kovaliovo. The Passion cycle located above the row of warriors on the north wall comes to an unusual conclusion — it ends with the compositions of the "Transfiguration" and "Upon Thy Right Hand Did Stand the Queen". This ending to the cycle reveals the full meaning behind the fresco programme, which reflected essential concepts of the late Palaiologan epoch. The correlation between the composition "Did Stand the Queen", included in Russian monumental wall painting for the first time, and the warrior row beneath it (the warriors on the north wall and St. Demetrios have their faces turned to the altar and towards this composition) calls to mind a composition widespread at this period — "The Celestial Court". In some ensembles this theme included images of Christ and the Virgin as in the composition "Did Stand the Queen", and also the row of saints, who are led by the warriors [Church of the Dormition at the Monastery of Treskavec (ca. 1340),⁷⁵ Monastery of King Marko,⁷⁶ the Church of St. Nicholas at Nira near Skopje (ca. 1380)].⁷⁷ In the Kovaliovo church, the row of warrior saints ends on the north wall under the composition "Did Stand the Queen", while St. Demetrios enthroned is presented in the same zone and immediately beside some important scenes of the Great Feasts (with the "Transfiguration" on the right side). Although depicting a version more traditional for Novgorod, it is possible that the artists wished to convey the semantic correlation of the warrior-martyrs and the Royal Deesis. Thus, the row of holy warriors is dynamically turned towards the image of Christ the High Priest, the semantic focus of the frescoes in the church as a whole.

Many iconographic characteristics of the Kovaliovo warrior saints indicate that their painters had a detailed knowledge of the monumental fresco cycles in Byzantium and the Balkans. These include the classical details on the armaments, such as the crowned lion framed with a decorative pattern on St. George's shield and the mascaron in profile derived from the classical head of the Gorgon Medusa, a device that would terrify any approaching enemy, on the shield of St. Merkourios.

Armament decorations with the classical prototypes are not customary attributes of a particular military saint. Similar decorations can be seen on the shields of various holy warriors, for example the lion motif on the shield of an unknown warrior embellishing the west pillar of the Sopoćani Holy Trinity church (ca. 1265),⁷⁸ or another unknown warrior at the Church of the Virgin Ljeviška.⁷⁹ Moreover, the mascaron decoration of armaments was more common than the crowned lion motif in the second half of the fourteenth century. Analogous masks in profile appear on the

shields of St. George at Lesnovo,⁸⁰ St. Theodore Stratelates on the southern choir of the Holy Apostles church at Peć,⁸¹ St. Theodore Teron in the Church of St. Andrew on the Treska River,⁸² St. Demetrios in the fresco at the Monastery of King Marko,⁸³ and in the icon of the same saint from this monastery, dated ca. 1400 (now at the Museum of Macedonia, Skopje).⁸⁴

In the early Palaiologan period classical motifs were increasingly used in fine art and literature. The tradition was passed on to painting in the second half of the fourteenth century. These motifs, whether the heraldic lion or the more frequent image of a human face, for example on St. George's shield in a mid-fourteenth century Byzantine icon at the Byzantine Museum in Athens,⁸⁵ are found in images of the most highly venerated warrior saints. This was the practice at Kovaliovo, too. Notably, no such detail has been preserved, for instance, in the extensive row of warrior saints at the Church of St. Theodore Stratelates in Novgorod.

Some of the warriors at Kovaliovo and also a number of other figures are depicted beneath arches supported by columns painted to look like marble: St. Nestor and St. George, and also an unknown prophet (Isaiah?) and unknown holy monk (Barlaam?) on the east and north sides of the southwest pillar. The motif is drawn from a very early source. Clearly, at the cusp of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, there was renewed interest in an already existing tradition — an arch framing the figures of the most venerated saints, often patrons of the church. The importance of such frescoes was closer to that of a venerated icon. An example of this can be seen with the figure of St. Niketas at the Church of St. Niketas in Čučer near Skopje (after 1321).⁸⁶ In Staro Nagoričino the templon gate is flanked by two fresco icons of the Virgin and St. George (also, the patron of the church), placed beneath moulded, decorated arches on relief columns; this unusual iconostasis is continued by images of the Virgin and Christ Pantokrator, also beneath arches, on the west sides of the pre-altar pillars.⁸⁷ In the Church of the Virgin

⁷⁴ The arrangement of the figures of warrior saints in the Morava churches is analyzed by M. Marković (*Sveti ratnici iz Resave*, 196). Cf., also, M. Radujko, *Koporin*, Belgrade 2006, 227–229.

⁷⁵ S. Radojčić, *Staro srpsko slikarstvo*, Belgrade 1966, 153, fig. 55.

⁷⁶ L. Mirković, *Da li se freske Markova manastira mogu tumačiti žitijem sv. Vasilija Novog?*, in: idem, *Ikonografske studije*, Novi Sad 1974, 273–293.

⁷⁷ But it is important that, as a rule, in this composition warrior saints have rich court garments.

⁷⁸ B. Živković, *Sopoćani. Crteži fresaka*, Belgrade 1984, 21.

⁷⁹ D. Panić, G. Babić, *Bogorodica Ljeviška*, Belgrade 1975, 76, fig. 30.

⁸⁰ Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo*, fig. 62.

⁸¹ Đurić, Ćirković, Korać, *Pečka Patrijaršija*, fig. 139.

⁸² Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas*, Abb. 108. We find this tradition not only in the area of Byzantine influence, but also in post-Byzantine art. St. George also has a similar shield on the Sinai diptych, dated to the second half of the eighteenth century; cf. *Sinaï, Vizantiia, Rus'. Pravoslavnoe iskusstvo s VI do nachala XX veka. Katalog vystavki*, red. O. Badleï, È. Briunner, IU. Piatnitskiï, London–Saint Petersburg 2000, 23.

⁸³ P. Ivić, V. J. Đurić, S. Ćirković, *Esfigmenska povelja despota Đurda*, Belgrade 1989, fig. 32.

⁸⁴ P. Miljković-Pepel, *An Unknown Treasure of Icons*, Skopje 2001, 23, sl. I, V.

⁸⁵ M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών*, Athens 1998, 58, fig. 15.

⁸⁶ *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 8, col. 42. We can also remember the earlier example of this tradition — the fresco in Nerezi, 1164, representing the figure of St. Panteleimon, the patron saint; cf. V. J. Đurić, *Vizantijske freske u Jugoslaviji*, Belgrade 1975, 13–14, tabl. V.

⁸⁷ B. Todić, *Srpsko slikarstvo u doba kralja Milutina*, Belgrade 1998, fig. 28.

Ljeviška, the same motif is used for figures in the lower zone on the other pillars (e. g. the iconography of the St. George, painted under an arch adorned with palmettes on the west side of the southeast pillar, is similar to that of the Kovaliovo fresco). This motif was obviously widespread in the Balkans: arches are placed above the figures of saints in the refectory at the Hilandar Monastery on Mt. Athos (the frescoes from seventeenth century).⁸⁸ The mastery of the marble imitation and also the counterbalanced base and elaborate capital of the Kovaliovo arches call to mind the best Byzantine models. At the same time, an important characteristic of the Kovaliovo frescoes style is retained: despite the many Byzantine prototypes, this painting blends well with the Novgorodian tradition (figures beneath arches have been preserved in the Church of St. George at Staraya Ladoga and also in the Church of the Holy Saviour at Nereditsa).⁸⁹ Hence, the use of classical details on the armament, as well as the architectural elements of the frescoes, which are not typical for other Novgorod frescoes from the second half of the fourteenth century, show yet again that the Kovaliovo fresco painters had some knowledge of Balkan art.

All these facts prompt a new approach in deciphering the origin of the artists working in the Kovaliovo workshop. As we have seen, the numerous and sometimes unusual for Novgorod iconographic features of the wall paintings confirm that the Kovaliovo masters were not local and not Russian, but migrants. There are a number of parallels consistent with the Thessalonician art tradition, but not directly related.

This is also indicated by the analysis of the inscriptions on the Kovaliovo frescoes. Unfortunately, no information has been preserved regarding the origin or name of the master who headed this workshop. In a half-lost inscription over the door to the church from the narthex the phrase "...инъ писа" ("...painted") cannot automatically be interpreted as a direct reference to the artist's nationality ("Serbian" — "сербинъ", "Greek" — "гречинъ", etc.). It could well mean, for example, "Константиъ писа" ("Konstantin painted this"); by the way, such an inscription was preserved on a costume detail of a holy warrior in the north choir at Ravanica.⁹⁰ It should be observed that the space before the end of the inscription seems intended for several words. According to Anatoly Turilov, who examined the inscriptions on the Kovaliovo frescoes at our request, the specifics of orthography exclude the possibility that the master was of Serbian or East Bulgarian origin.

Analysis of the stylistic features in the Kovaliovo wall paintings leads us to similar conclusions. Firstly, it obliges us to reject the theory that the Kovaliovo frescoes resemble the paintings of the Morava school in Serbia, an interpretation posited for a while in various publications. A comparison of Novgorod church frescoes and Serbian fresco ensembles shows that Kovaliovo is almost devoid of figures that seem detached or self-absorbed. All the saints actively interact with the beholder, conveying a sense of inner composure and unwavering strength in spiritual endeavours (fig. 10). Here the military theme is expressed as the visual manifestation of an arduous battle with evil, a characteristic theme in Orthodox culture during the second half of the fourteenth century. It should also be noted that the treatment of St. Demetrios and the other warriors as victors against spiritual as well as corporal enemies precisely reflects the overall tone of the Kovaliovo paintings, which were after all monastic despite their iconographic and stylistic variety. This circumstance played an important role in the formation of the

iconographic programme: twenty-six figures of monks, hieromonks, stylites, nuns, anchorites and anchoritesses can be found in the naos, narthex and even the sanctuary at Kovaliovo — an impressive number for a small church, even when compared to extensive Serbian cycles (e. g. sixteen at Lesnovo). The monastic character of the ensemble becomes the basic and unifying tonality of the frescoes: the monks are depicted in a state of intense inner activity, with scrolls whose inscriptions reflect the stages in their battle against the spiritual enemy (fig. 10).

The unity of the Kovaliovo ensemble is in many ways defined by this state of high spiritual intensity. On the other hand, the paintings in the Morava churches have another resonance that could be described as paschal, a sense of the celestial harmony of an inner world, of peace and detachment from any external or even internal struggle.⁹¹ The classical structural balance, the juxtaposition of bright localised tints and the typology of the imagery distinguishes also Kovaliovo from frescoes in other contemporary Novgorod churches connected to southern Slavic masters — the exquisitely elegant frescoes in the Church of St. Archangel Michael in the Skovorodsky Monastery with their delicate colours and sentimental tone, and the weighty monumental images addressed to an inner realm in the Church of the Nativity at the Cemetery.

Within the tradition of Novgorodian monumental painting the best Kovaliovo frescoes seem to bear the legacy of their great predecessor, Theophanes the Greek (the Church of the Transfiguration, painted in 1378). In some images (primarily in the dome and the altar areas) the sculpturally accurate foreshortenings, a sense of the anatomical structure of the human body, and also the swift brushstrokes indicating flashes of mystical light on the faces and forming locks of hair and supple clothing contours, create a feeling of inner dynamics with outer quiescence that is similar both in the technique and intonation of the images to frescoes by Theophanes the Greek (figs. 11, 12, 13).⁹² Of course, the painting of the illustrious Byzantine master has its own unique qualities: a sense of might, grandeur, scale, laconic brevity and the bold lines of an esquisse. One of the most significant differences between the two fresco ensembles is that the wisdom of vision from an empyrean realm and a certain detachment in the saints of Theophanes the Greek's frescoes run counter to the solidity and earthly tensions of the Kovaliovo images. However, the fresco ensemble created by the great Byzantine artist just two years before the painting of Kovaliovo undoubtedly played a role

⁸⁸ Z. Rakić, *Zidno slikarstvo XVII veka*, in: *Manastir Hilandar*, ed. G. Subotić, Belgrade 1998, 264.

⁸⁹ V. N. Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski XI–XV vv.*, Moscow 1973, il. 220, 227; V. D. Sarab'ianov, *Tserkov' Sv. Georgija v Staroi Ladoge. Istoriia, arkhitektura, freski*, Moscow 2002, ill. 22, 23, 43, 44, 68, 86.

⁹⁰ Đurić, *Vizantijske freske*, 94.

⁹¹ The lyrical intonation in Palaiologan art created a monolithic trend — both in stylistic and chronological sense. We must remember, that the frescoes of Kovaliovo were painted much earlier than the frescoes of the Morava churches (the wall painting of Ravanica date back to the years 1385–1387).

⁹² Unfortunately, the most of frescoes of this type decorated the upper compartments of the church. That is why the images, which inspired N. P. Sychov and V. N. Lazarev, can be seen practically only in archival photos. This part of the painting includes the figures of prophets and angels in the dome of the church. But we also have some images of excellent quality in the low zones of the painting — and the restorers could assemble them. For example, we can mention the image of the "Man of Sorrows", and the figures of St. Constantine, St. Helena and some other saints.

in the formation of the wall paintings at the Transfiguration monastery near Novgorod.

The character of the Kovaliovo wall paintings can be defined as the artists' attempt to reproduce superb classical archetypes, but with some very original features of their own invention. Even in the best frescoes — for example, in the images of the prophets Elijah, Jonah and Joel — there is a sense that the form of the classical model has shifted, and this is expressed particularly in the accentuated physiognomy (faces at a three-quarter angle have a broken outline, and the faces of male figures are elongated with sharply prominent cheekbones; figs. 15, 16). But this characteristic applies even more to another group of images: among them, several Gospel scenes in the naos and narthex, saints such as St. Merkourios, St. Catherine and St. Niketas the Confessor (fig. 17). They are marked by fragmentation of the fine white lines on the faces, a certain dryness and schematism in the facial features and apparently "bulging" eyes. The variety of artistic techniques and diverse methods of depicting the image undoubtedly complicate any attempt to find the tradition that guided the Kovaliovo painters within the late Palaiologan art.

Hence the stylistic features, details of the iconography and paleography of the inscriptions confirm the Balkan origin of, at least, some members of the Kovaliovo workshop, who were undoubtedly familiar with traditions from the most important centres of the Byzantine art. As we know, the historical situation in the Balkans during the 1370s was characterised by the active migration among various categories of the population including diverse artists and craftsmen between the Greek and the Slavic territories. After the Battle of Maritsa in 1371, the general instability of the states that remained on the southern Slavic territories caused many painters to seek fertile soil for their art further north, particularly in Novgorod. This explains the amplitude of Novgorod wall painting in the last third of the fourteenth century, including the frescoes in the churches built several decades earlier. According to the research of G. Majeska,

this period (1373–1382) saw unprecedented number of travels between Byzantium and Rus.⁹³ Many of the migrant masters brought to Novgorod their own traditions, almost always a reflection of Byzantine cultural centres.

It is not only important to determine what specific centre the Kovaliovo painters originated from, but also to ascertain how freely they could enter a different national culture in the context of the fourteenth century. As we have seen, the Kovaliovo frescoes (considering the ensemble as a whole) clearly inherited a certain stylistic influence from Theophanes the Greek. The iconographic programme easily fits into contemporary Russian culture, which reflected the country's spiritual uplifting and a concentration of forces at the time of the Battle of Kulikovo. The Slavic artists that created the Kovaliovo fresco ensemble brought their own tradition to Novgorod, but instead of mechanically reproducing their art, they organically contributed to the culture of this city in northern Russia. The combination of iconographic elements (at times, the new to Russian art in detail, but forming an unique ensemble) shows that the creators of the programme were highly educated, while the best Kovaliovo images reveal the author's advanced understanding of both the general spirit of the times and local artistic tastes. All this points to a deep-reaching unity in the Slavic culture of the fourteenth century. In one artistic workshop masters of diverse origins could freely work together without weakening the monolithic character of the fresco ensemble. The Kovaliovo frescoes are proof of a level of cultural and spiritual affinity among the Slavic peoples that is hard to imagine in the modern world, of a time when artists could work in various and sometimes widely dispersed centres in the Orthodox Christian world, while at the same time conserving their own traditions and retaining the local artistic micro-climate.

⁹³ G. R. Majeska, *Russo-Byzantine Relations 1240–1453: a Traffic Report*, in: *XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Major papers*, Moscow 1991, 27–51, scheme on page 34.

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Представе светих ратника на фрескама из 1380. године у Спасовој цркви у Коваљову

Да ли су мајстори са Балкана осликали новгородску цркву?

Светлана Дмитријева

Црква Спасо-Преображенског манастира у Коваљову код Новгорода саграђена је 1345, а осликана 1380. године. Срушена је у Другом светском рату, али су рестауратори успели да спасу знатан део њених фресака. Виктор Н. Лазарев посветио је том живопису засебан чланак у коме је фреске Коваљова убројао у круг српске уметности, приписавши их моравској школи с краја XIV или почетка XV века. У публикацијама написаним последњих деценија поново је отворено питање порекла фресака Спасо-Преображенског храма. У овом чланку ауторка разматра једну важну тему коваљовског живописа — тему светих ратника — и покушава да на основу ње расветли неколико питања посебног и општег карактера (порекло мајстора и однос сликаног ансамбла са савременом византијским делима).

Како показују истраживања, поштовање светих ратника непрекидно расте током целог XIV века. Једно од сведочанстава је увећавање броја њихових представа у живопису цркава. Значај примера и заступништва светих војника, који се одразио и у византијским и у руским текстовима (нарочито у делима „Kulikovskog циклуса“), допринео је томе да се представе многобројних, богато наоружаних светих ратника појаве не само у градским, но и у манастирским фреско-ансамблима.

Размештај фигура мученика-ратника у Спасо-Преображенском храму следи у то време прихваћену традицију, у складу с којом се оне првенствено сликају на северном зиду наоса, који се граничи с протезисом и често укључује делове циклуса Страдања. Међу представама светих ратника у Коваљову, које заузимају доњу зону северног зида и северозападног ступца, могу се препознати фигуре св. Георгија, св. Нестора, св. Меркурија, св. Прокопија и св. Артемија (или св. Никите?). Избор светих ратника скоро сасвим тачно одговара византијској хијерархији св. ратника. Представа св. Димитрија издвојена

је посебним положајем (у централној зони) и иконографијом (седи на ратничкој *sella curulis* с исуканим мачем под зидовима града који штити). Та фреска нема аналогије у другим монументалним циклусима средњовековне Русије. Њена иконографија сведочи о томе да су мајстори Коваљева могли припадати једном од балканских центара тесно повезаних са Солуном.

Многе особености иконографије светих ратника (антички детаљи наоружања, распоред фигура под мермерним луковима) указују на то да су њени творци детаљно познавали монументални живопис Византије и Балкана.

Наведене чињенице разлог су да се изнова приступи проблему националног састава коваљовске радионице. С једне стране, особености живописа потврђују да мајстори Коваљева нису били из Новгорода и Русије, него дошљаци са стране. Ипак, анализа стилских особина живописа оповргава мишљење о сличности живописа Коваљова с делима моравске Србије. Јединство коваљовског ансамбла у многоме је одређено стањем високе душевне напетости свих приказаних личности, док у живопису моравских храмова звучи другачија, више пасивна интонација рајске хармоније унутрашњег мира, лишена било какве спољашње, па чак и унутрашње борбе. На исти закључак упућује и анализа натписа коваљовских фресака. По мишљењу Анатолија Турилова, особености правописа у њима искључују српско и источнобугарско порекло мајстора.

Најбоље коваљовске фреске, које су део традиције новгородског монументалног живописа, пре наслеђују особине Теофана Грка. На неким ликовима осећање за анатомску структуру људског тела и брзина потеза, који истиче блеске мистичне светлости на ликовима, стварају осећање унутрашње динамике, слично фрескама Теофана Грка.