The idea of mimesis in art theory has been neglected by Byzantine scholars. Reasons for this may lie in the fact that the understanding of the term in Byzantium was very complex and that it changed over time. In the Early Byzantine period and the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, a tendency to use tonal modeling, which was inherited from ancient Greco-Roman art, can still be observed. Starting in the late tenth century they give way to a more linear style. Simultaneously, a change in the understanding of mimesis in theological writings can also be observed. The aim of this paper is to introduce the problem of a mimetic approach in visual arts as a phenomenon in Byzantine culture.

Keywords: mimesis, Byzantine aesthetics, veracity, simulacrum, affinity, theory of images

The concept of mimesis as a phenomenon in Byzantine civilization has so far been mainly investigated by literary historians. They commonly use the term to refer to such practices as the repetition of style and even content rather than using it in its antique meaning, which is related to the method of depicting nature. In turn, art historians are either focused on the relationship between devotional practices, liturgy and ceremonial, or on Christian motifs depicted in art as a catalyst in ritualised re-enactment of biblical events and other imitative actions, or even as a support in contemplation.

The term was introduced more than twenty years ago by Gary Vikan in his study on pilgrimage art. Vikan demonstrated that influences operated in both directions: while ceremonies such as the Triumphal Entry were modelled after iconography, the imagery on the works of pilgrimage art, such as ampullae, tokens and jewellery, diverges from the Gospel account of the event in favour of a setting known to travellers from their own experience and popular beliefs. His observations were accepted by Glenn Peers and they inspired Elisabeth S. Bolman to analyse the frescoes on the walls of a monk’s cell at the Apa Jeremias monastery in Saqqara (sixth to eighth century); according to her, they were meant to assist hermits in the process of assimilation to Christ. Monumental paintings were discussed by William Tronzo, who noticed a mimetic correspondence between rituals celebrated within monastic churches (washing of the feet by the abbot, Baptism and the Holy Communion) and scenes chosen to decorate them in the katholika of Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni and Daphni, as well as with the function of the proskynetaria icons. It led him to the conclusion that liturgical ceremonies followed in form the images on the walls that surrounded the space where they took place. In turn, in his


2 For the ancient idea of mimesis as the reflection of reality cf., e.g., Plato’s Republic, books III and esp. X (imitations as copies of Platonic ideas): Plato, Republic, I–II, ed. Chr. Emlyn-Jones, W. Preddy, Cambridge 2013, 1, 248, 423 sqq; in the context of art, cf. Pliny the Elder, Natural History, XXXV 65–67; cf. Pliny, Natural History, transl. H. Rackham, Cambridge – London 1984, 208–310) on the competitions between Zeuxis and Parrhasius (and ibid. § 68–72, 310–312 on the contour line style of the latter). For the different levels of mimesis in Plato’s writings art historians are either focused on the relationship between devotional practices, liturgy and ceremonies, or on Christian motifs depicted in art as a catalyst in ritualised re-enactment of biblical events and other imitative actions, or even as a support in contemplation.

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6 W. Tronzo, Mimesis in Byzantium: Notes toward a History of the Function of the Image, RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics
There is the impression that the authors of the above-mentioned studies avoid a verbatim definition of mimesis as a stylistic feature in favour of its metaphorical understanding. The term is assumed to designate something beyond the object of art, related rather to worshippers’ reception than to the style of a picture. To the best of our knowledge, no attempt has been made to explore mimesis values as an immanent feature of an object of art, i.e. as being an element of its style. Such an attitude surprises, especially if we keep in mind that the antique understanding of the word was closely tied to the representation of the natural world in art. However, this can be explained by the changes in thoughts on art that occurred in late antiquity.

Christian authors did not present a coherent attitude towards the veracity of an image. In his polemics with the Gnostics (Contra haereses II 7,2), Irenaeus of Lyon still referred to the category of similarity in the sense established in antique considerations on aesthetics, though he further noted that it was impossible to depict supernatural beings that had no form by means of figures (II 7,7). A greater degree of scepticism was expressed by Lactantius (Divinarum Institutionum Liber II ‘De Origine Erroris’ 2, 6–10), who deemed depictions justified only in the case when the original object was not present; accordingly, in the case of omnipresent God there is no need for them. A less firm attitude can be observed in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s Neo-Platonist work The Celestial Hierarchy (I 3). According to him the spiritual hierarchy can be imitated by means of material art because this is the only way acceptable for our senses. Theodore the Studite referred to this opinion in his letter to his uncle, abbot Plato. In his writings, especially those addressed to iconoclasts, he adopted the Iconophile distinction between the essence of being (oúmia) and its external manifestation (óúmios). Due to this, he was able to eliminate the factor of any accidental lack of resemblance, caused by artists’ insufficient skills. In the third chapter of his anti-iconoclastic treatise he wrote: Even if we grant that the image does not have the same form as the prototype because of insufficient artistic skill, our argument would not be invalid. For veneration is given to the image not insofar as it falls short of similarity, but insofar of as it resembles its prototype.

This theoretical shift towards the imitative function of art corresponded to a change in methods used by Christian artists – i.e. the Pictographic Style observed by Ernst H. Gombrich in the early art of the Christian period. Both phenomena seem to be rooted in the belief


9 Studies related to the Constantinian period, such as M. Wilson Jones, Genesis and Mimesis: The Design of the Arch of Constantin in Rome, The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 59 (2000) 50–77, esp. 65–67, are focused rather on the presence of the phenomenon in ancient art. Accordingly, they are beyond the scope of this paper.


11 PG 7, col. 727–728: O indissimilis, simul astem et blasphemae imaginis! [...] Siigitur dissimilis est imago, malus est artifex [...]; translation into English: What a dissimilar, and at the same time blasphemous image! [...] If, then, the image is dissimilar, the workman is poor [...].

12 PL 6, col. 259–262.

13 Corpus Dionysiacaum, Bd. 2 Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistulæ, eds. G. Heil, A. M. Ritter, Berlin-New York 1991, 8. Cf. the ὑμων ἑρμηνευσην της οὐρανίων ἱεραρχιῶν τινα ωρώματα ἱεραρχίας τελευτάων διδασκει και τας εἰρήμενα ἄλοιπα ἱεραρχίας ὑποτιμά και μορφωτικάς συνθέσεις διαποίκισα παραδεδέχεται. For translation cf. Dionysius Areopagite, The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies, Surrey 1949, 36: “Wherefore that first institution of the sacred rites, judging it worthy of a supramundane copy of the Celestial Hierarchies, gave us our most holy hierarchy, and described that spiritual Hierarchy in material terms and in various compositions of forms so that we might be led, according to each his capacity, from the most holy imagery to formless, unific, elevative principles and assimilations”.

14 PG 99, col. 500–501: Πάνα τούτων τεχνετήν ηώς, ομοιωτας εστιν αν αν ἢ εἰκόνας, και ἐν κατα των χαρακτης τοῦ ἀρχετύπου μυθησθε δικαιος, καθως φησιν ο πολεσ το βας Διονυσι: “...Every artificial image is a likeness of that whereof it is the image, and it exhibits itself, in by way of imitation, the form (character) of its model (archetype), as expressed by Dionysius, learned in divine things [...]; translated into English after C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453. Sources and Documents, Toronto 1986, 173.


that the imitation of supernatural reality is impossible and that only conventional symbols which bear no pretence of resemblance are valid. However, even symbolic art focused on the transmission of meaning had to rely on visual forms familiar to the audience. The issue was well encapsulated by Hans Belting in his discussion on idealism and realism in late antique funerary portraits: The study of nature by necessity involves the question of how nature is understood in a given age. Keeping in mind his words, we will venture into an analysis of the degree and character of imitation and representation in Byzantine art.

A representation of the natural world upon a flat, limited surface of a picture is always a result of a compromise between conventionality and imitation. It is equally determined by the physiology of the human body and external limitations. Due to stereoscopic vision, which allows us to estimate the distance and depth of objects, a picture is perceived as flat and motionless. Limited means of expression, such as line and colour, are available to artists when they want to suggest three-dimensional space.

In turn, our eyes’ structure, similar to lenses, causes our gaze to focus on one vision plane, while others remain blurred as part of peripheral vision. Due to this fact, a picture that renders sharply all objects, including those that belong to the background, is commonly perceived as artificial. This problem makes us aware that a genuine pictorial effect cannot be achieved by merely reproducing the shapes of individual details. In imitating space, painters have to keep in mind that forms, light and shadow should be used in a way that is accepted and properly understood by viewers. As Ernst Gombrich has shown in his studies on illusion in art, in different periods, the degree of resemblance and conventional forms varied; it was determined by the time, place and artistic milieu. If we agree that artistic convention, which facilitates visual transmission to the beholder, is an important element of style, then we also have to acknowledge the attitude towards the faithful depiction of nature as its component.

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While looking for mimetic tendencies in Byzantine figurative art, at the very outset it seems logical to turn attention towards scientific illustrations of nature, because of their documentary character, which expectedly resulted in the veracity of depictions. As a civilization which heavily relied on normative manuals, Byzantium handed down to us a significant number of illustrated physical treatises. One of the most famous among them is the luxurious edition of Pedanius Dioscurides’ De materia medica (Περί ὑλῆς ἰατρικῆς), probably made in the imperial scriptorium at Constantinople around 512; it is now held by the National Library in Vienna (Cod. med. gr. 1). According to the inscription in the inner frame of the dedicatory miniature (fol. 6v), the book was commissioned by the inhabitants of the suburb Honoratia and presented to the patrikia Juliana Anicia as a gift for the founding of a church in this district. The main part of the codex consists of Dioscurides’ herbal arranged in the alphabetical order, but at the end, minor supplementary texts were also added: anonymous Carmen de viribus herbarum (fol. 388–392), paraphrases of Nicander of Colophon’s texts on snakes, insects and remedies to their venoms: Therakia (393r–437v) and the Alexipharmaka (438r–459v), both written by Euteknios; as well as anonymous paraphrases

20 Three facsimile editions of the codex have been published so far: Dioscurides. Codex Aniciae Julianae pictus illustratus, nunc Vindobonensis Med. Graecus 1, ed. M. I. De Karabacek, intr. A. De Pre-
of Oppian’s poem on fishing – *Halieuktika* (fols. 460r–473r) and Dionysius’ *Ornithiaka* (474r–485v).\(^{24}\)

The text *De materia medica* is accompanied by 383 mostly full-page miniatures of various plants. Generally, they are depicted minutely with proper proportions, colours and accurate modelling based on tonal contrasts. Even an untrained botanist can easily recognise the most popular plants without reading the accompanying texts. However, the question arises whether such a high degree of veracity is a result of sharp observation and the technical skills of sixth-century artists or rather a consequence of the simple reproduction of earlier, antique models. Although the Vienna Dioscurides is the earliest surviving example of this type of book, scholars have no doubt that it followed an earlier tradition of illuminated herbals. Already Charles Singer pointed out that miniatures in Julian’s Anicia codex had been copied from much earlier originals, probably an item of *Rhizotomicon* attributed to Crateus of Pergamon (121–163 BC)\(^ {25}\).

The existence of earlier illustrated texts about plants is confirmed by surviving fragments of papyri with drawings (though they are rather sketchy in nature)\(^ {26}\) and references by Pliny and Cassiodorus\(^ {27}\). Evidence that earlier patterns were indeed used is also provided by the Vienna Dioscurides. The original text of the treatise was supplemented by notes from the writings of other ancient authors: those of Crateus and Galen. On several pages (fols. 25v, 34r), they are accompanied with smaller miniatures that present variants different from the main illustration, and they were undoubtedly borrowed from the same codices from which the quotations were taken.\(^ {28}\) In turn, some full-page miniatures – e.g. papilionaceous flowers on the stems of the garlic plant (*moly*) on fol. 235v – show unnatural details, probably introduced by a copyist who misinterpreted the model drawing (Fig. 1). Various approaches to realistic details are also evident in subsequent parts of the codex. *Carmen de viribus herbarium* is illustrated with a single representation of a coral accompanied by an antique personification of the sea. The miniatures that accompany the *Theriaka* paraphrase are small, schematic and also repetitive. Their details often fail to provide sufficient information for the identification of particular species (Fig. 2).\(^ {29}\) On the other hand, the prose paraphrase of Dionysius’ poem is illustrated with twenty-four miniatures of various birds that are so detailed (though rather small) as to allow accurate identification. The two remaining paraphrases have no illustrations at all, but in the text of the *Alexipharmaka*, the scribe left nine blank spaces, undoubtedly intended for miniatures. The reasons for not filling them remain unknown, but a possible explanation could be that the copyist was unable to find a proper manuscript to serve as a model.\(^ {30}\) These differences indicate that artists, while working on the Vienna Dioscurides, used several codices with illustrations of varying artistic quality and factual accuracy of miniatures.

Therefore, the miniatures of Anicia’s codex cannot be treated as an example of straightforward artistic imitation of nature, but rather as the repetition of ancient pictorial formulae. This observation may be generally extended to other Byzantine illuminated herbals executed in the following centuries. Over time, the style of drawings only slightly changed. An example of fairly high fidelity to an ancient prototype is the early seventh-century Naples Dioscurides (Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale; *Ms. Suppl. gr.*

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\(^{26}\) E.g. the fragment with miniatures of comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) and a kind of mullein (*Verbascum sp.*) on the so-called *Johnson papyrus* (ca. 400 AD) discovered in Antinoe (Egypt) in 1904 and presently held by the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine (B. 29111), cf. J. C. Anderson, *The Fragment of an Herbal*, in: *Age of Spirituality*, 205 (No. 178); Raphael, Blunt, *The Illustrated Herbal*, New York 1979, 17; L. Brubaker, *The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana*, 189–214.


\(^{28}\) Brubaker, *The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana*, 191–194, figs. 6–8.

\(^{29}\) An attempt to identify various kinds of reptiles depicted in the Vienna manuscript is presented in Z. Kádár, *Survivals of Greek Zoological Illuminations in Byzantine Manuscripts*, Budapest 1978, 45–46.

\(^{30}\) Brubaker, *The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana*, 200–201.
Fig. 3. Dioscurides, De materia medica. Codex Neapolitanus ex Vindob. gr. 1, Italy? ca 625, fol. 42r the german iris and wood violet (iris germanica, viola odorata) (after Dioscurides Neapolitanus)

28; olim Ms. ex. Vindob. gr. 1), probably made in Italy.31 Although its illustrations follow the same presumed model as Anicia’s codex, they were derived independently and rendered even more naturally (Fig. 3). Additionally, in the Naples manuscript, 409 illustrations arranged in pairs occupy the top half of each of the 172 folios, rather than being full-page miniatures as in the Vienna Dioscurides.32 A tendency to simplify and a stiffer, linear style occurred only under the influence of Iconoclasm in manuscripts from the eighth and tenth centuries (Paris Dioscurides, Par. gr. 2179, late eighth century; Morgan Dioscurides, New York, Pierpont Morgan MS M 652, done between 925 and 975).33

The antique light-and-shadow modelling recurs in miniatures in Nicander’s Theriaka and Alexipharmaka (Par. suppl. gr. 247), but its presence cannot be associated with the accuracy of transmission. The Codex was made in Constantinople in the second half of the tenth century. Artists depicted human bodies in a manner that resembles antique reliefs, with muscles suggestively outlined with shadows and accurate proportions, but animals and especially plants were rendered conventionally and without care for details despite the informative function of the book. They are hardly recognizable and can be identified only due to the accompanying inscriptions. A similar approach to rendering the human body can also be observed in slightly earlier illuminations in the codex which contains a collection of surgical manuals of Apollonius of Kition (the commentary to the Hippocratic treatise On Dislocations: Περὶ ἀφθῶν πραγμάτων) and Soranus of Ephesus’ On Bandages (Περὶ ἐπίσκεψιον). The manuscript was made for the Constantinopolitan physician Niketas around 900 and until the fourteenth century it remained in the local hospital near the church of Forty Martyrs.36 Scholars generally agree that miniatures depicting various medical treatments, being meant for educational purposes, repeated earlier formulae unknown to us.37 However, in the modelling of figures and in the decorative arcades framing the compositions (Fig. 4), the trained eye of an art historian can discern the influence of what is known in Byzantine culture as the Macedonian Renaissance.38 This revival of ancient traditions influenced both

31 Until the early eighteenth century, the manuscript was held by the Augustine monastery of San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples. In 1718, the Habsburgs plundered it for the Viennese Court Library. After the conclusion of the peace negotiations after World War I, in 1919, the codex was returned to the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples. Its date and origin were hypothetically established on the basis of a palaeographic analysis solely (presence of the maiuscola biblica typical for the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries and for Western manuscripts) by G. Cavallo, Introduzione, in: Dioscurides Neapolitanus. Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, ms. ex Vindob. gr. 1, Commentario, eds. C. Bertelli, S. Lilla, G. Orosino, Graz – Rome 1992, 5–6. This opinion was accepted by other scholars: A. Touwaide, Le traité de matière médicale de Dioscoride en Italie depuis la fin de l’empire romain jusqu’aux débuts de l’école de Salerne. Essai de synthèse, PACT – Journal of the European Study Group on Physical, Chemical, Biological and Mathematical Techniques Applied to Archaeology 18 (1992) 275–305, here 283; M. Collins, Medieval Herbs. The Illustrative Traditions, London 2000, 52.


35 La Collezione chirurgica di Niceta (Firenze, Biblioteca Medica Laurenziana, Plut. 74.7). Tradizione medica antica a Bisanzio, ed. M. Bernabò et al., Roma 2010; cf. also Weitzmann, Studies, 33–34, 140–141, fig. 116.

36 Codex Niketas was held by the library of the Orphanage of Alexius Komnenos on the Acropolis of Constantinople, and later by that of the Hospital of the Forty Martyrs. Between 1492 and 1495, the Greek scholar John Laskaris purchased it in Crete for Lorenzo de’ Medici. By 1530 it belonged to Giulio de’ Medici (Pope Clement VII), who loaned it back to Laskaris for a proposed and never completed edition of the medical and surgical texts contained in the manuscript. The original Codex Niketas was later acquired by Cardinal Nicolas Rudolfi, and is now held by the Laurentian Library, Florence (Codex LXIV, 7), see V. Nutton, Nicetas Codex, in: The Classical Tradition, ed. A. Grafton et al., Harvard 2010, 638.


38 The term was first used to refer to the classicalization of style by K. Weitzmann, The Joshua Roll: A Work of the Macedonian Renais-
Plants are usually lined up in a row at the top of the page in groups of two or three. The painter captured only their essential features without paying attention to shadows and details (Fig. 5). The degree of convention is so high that identification is usually possible only due to inscriptions and the accompanying text. On the contrary, human figures were painted quite effectively and despite a pronounced linearity, light and shadow were used to suggest their volume.

The anticlassical tendencies in eleventh-century painting also determined the artistic expression of another illustrated treatise on the natural world, namely the poem On Hunting (Cynegetica), written by Pseudo-Oppian and dedicated to Emperor Caracalla. Codex Marcianus gr. Z 479, produced in a Constantinopolitan scriptorium around 1060, is the oldest and the only known illustrated Byzantine copy of the text.41 Nevertheless, the majority of modern scholars agree that the miniatures generally follow a lost antique model, arguing, on the one hand, that the original must have had illuminations because the text would not have been fully understandable without them,42 and, on the other, that minor discrepancies in narration indicate that the artists relied on an earlier set of images.43 While the problem of earlier sources will probably remain

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41 Facsimile edition: Tratado de caza y pesca, Oppiano Cynegetica, Valencia 1999; colour illustrations were also published by I. Spatharakis, The Illustrations of the Cynegetica in Venice: Codex Marcianus Graecus Z 139, Leiden 2004. There are two later, post-Byzantine copies of the Venetian manuscript: Par. gr. 2736, written probably in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century, and Par. gr. 2737, written by Angelo Abergikios in Paris between 1535 and 1569.


43 Spatharakis, The Illustrations of the Cynegetica in Venice, 206–212. It is noteworthy that only I. Furlan, La ilustración de los Cynegetica, in: Tratado de caza y pesca, Oppiano Cynegetica, Valencia 1999, 42–52, et passim, claims that the illustrative cycle was invented for this particular manuscript.
unsolved, it should be noted that the images of nature are not faithful. Anatomic details are shown conventionally and they conform to an overall linearity of style. In turn, the linear style did not affect very precisely depicted details of dress, both male (hunters and soldiers) and female (e.g. Medea’s hat and the dress on fol. 47r, Fig. 6). Both phenomena are in line with the change in eleventh-century painting, already noted by Christopher Walter, who has drawn attention not only to the simplification of modelling but also to the enrichment of iconography, which is not irrelevant for our further discussion. This mechanism can also be observed in later illuminated manuscripts that contain physical writings: the lost manuscript of *Physiologus* (Smyrna, Theological School, B 8; eleventh–twelfth centuries) and *Hippiatrica*.

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44 We omit cases, in which the limited knowledge of an artist caused mistakes; e.g. a hippopotamus depicted as a horse (verbatim ἱπποπόταμος = river horse) in Christian Topography (XI 9) by Cosmas Indicopleustes, (Cod. Laur. Plat IX 28, fol. 268v; Cod. sinai. gr. 1186, fol. 202r), see Cosmas Indicopleustes. Topographie chrétienne, ed. W. Wolska-Conus, Paris 1973, 333, figs. 4–5.


46 Ch. Walter, Expressionism and Hellenism, 286: “For those who concentrate their attention on the survival of Hellenism, the answer is clear. The Macedonian ‘Renaissance’ was a ‘peak’, while the eleventh century was a ‘valley’, a ‘period of estrangement from the classical tradition’. Yet such a proposition is reversible. In terms of iconographical development, the eleventh century was a ‘peak’ and the Macedonian ‘Renaissance’ a ‘valley’.”

47 The codex was destroyed in the Smyrna fire of 1922; however, it had been published before destruction, see J. Strzygowski, *Der Bilderkreis des griechischen Physiologus, des Kosmas Indikopleustes und Oktateuch: nach Handschriften der Bibliothek zu Smyrna*, Leipzig 1899, 71–110, figs. I–XXIII, idem, *Der illustrierte Physiologus in Smyrna*, BZ 10 (1901) 218–222; O. Demus, *Bemerkungen zum Physiologus von Leidensis Vossianus graecus Q 50*; mid-fourteenth century and *Par. gr. 2244*; late fourteenth century. The last example is especially noteworthy because it still follows the mid-Byzantine pattern despite its late date.

It seems that contemporaries were aware of this change. For example, Michael Psellus wrote about it in one of his homilies: *That painting proceeds exactly according to the law of art is clear from its use of color, as a wise man has observed. But what is admirable here lies rather in the fact that the icon is full of life and nowhere lacks movement. If one lets one’s eyes rest successively on different parts, one can see them change, grow larger, and move […] Thus the dead man seems to be alive, yet one sees precisely what is dead – the body. To be sure, the elements of such painting can also be found in artless icons, namely […] the impression of life in the color of the blood and the impression of death in the pallor. But there they are imitated from models and copies of copies. Here, however, the impression does not arise from the composition of colors, but from the nearness of living nature, which is not moved by art. One can hardly imagine how the icon could come into being in such a form. As its beauty resides no less in the contrast than in the harmony of the parts and limbs, so the painting shines with such beauty, although it is not a phenomenon of nature.*

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Although this living painting is built up from the skillful composition of such parts, the appearance of life goes beyond such means. The icon lives on the one hand from the fact that it imitates [life] from art, and on the other in that it does not merely copy it but reproduces it in spirit through the influence of grace. What use now is Plato’s comparison of images with shadows? I would not compare this icon with any other painting, even if one were to discover images in the ancient manner or even its archetype. I should no more wish to do so if [painters] of our time or of the recent past depicted such apparitions anew. This icon, I say, resembles exactly the appearance of Christ when he stood facing Pilate and was condemned by him at the desire of the clamoring people [with the words: Ecce homo]. Thus he is shown in a very similar manner in the icon. I shall not, therefore, call into doubt that a higher power guided the hand of the icon painter and the understanding of the one who executed it, to the true prototype. He is shown in a very similar manner in the icon. I shall of the recent past depicted such apparitions anew. This icon, I should no more wish to do so if [painters] of our time or artists worked independently in reproducing external realia, information may be provided by images of human-made artefacts that were changing with time. They allow us to identify cases when tendencies towards representation of the visible world overpowered the imitative Hellenism in style. In order to render new shapes, it was not necessary to resort to light-and-shadow modelling which results in an illusion of space and depth. A simple contour suggesting the shape was less ambiguous than attempts to create an illusion,51 and because of that it was suitable to describe an object. In that sense, in some moments of its history, Byzantine art seemed to be closer to the philosophy of Egyptian hieroglyphs, which were meant to represent and not to imitate. In such a system, an illusionistic resemblance to the model was sacrificed at the altar of clarity and explicitness.

On the other hand, the term mimesis, understood already by Vikan as the repetition of motifs known to the artist from an environment contemporary to himself, seems to be more accurate in the case of Byzantine art, which focused on the function of a representation rather than on illusionistic imitation. This statement leads us to the conclusion that in order to offer a proper answer to the question formulated in the title of this paper, we should not ask how, but rather what Byzantine artists depicted. To illustrate the phenomenon, we will cite two examples related to military equipment, though it should be borne in mind that the broad area covered by the study of the history of Byzantine dress, including monks’ robes,52 ecclesiastical garbs53 and female dress,54 offers numerous examples.

The first example is the stirrup as a novel motif in Byzantine iconography. This device for horsemen was unknown in antiquity and due to this fact the riding technique was different from that commonly used in the Middle Ages. The Romans used the so-called horned saddle, and they embraced the horse’s neck with their knees. This way of mounting a horse can be seen on numerous antique artefacts, where the position of riders’ legs clearly indicates the lack of stirrups. Stiff metal hoops fastened to leather straps were introduced as late as the fifth century AD in the North Korean kingdom and during the following one hundred years they were transferred by steppe tribes to Europe.55 The earliest examples in Europe appear

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pear in sixth-century Avar graves in the territory of modern Hungary. \(^{56}\) In the second half of the same century, the *skala*, i.e. steps that make mounting on a steed easier, were mentioned for the first time by Emperor Maurice in his *Strategikon*. \(^{57}\) A depiction of stirrups appears already in an icon from the Sinai Monastery showing St. Mercurius on horseback killing Emperor Julian (Fig. 7). Approximately dated to the ninth century, this is probably the earliest representation of this element in European art. \(^{58}\) After


\(^{58}\) K. Weitzmann (*The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*, The Icons, vol. I. *From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton 1976, 78–79, No. B 49), points out similarities with ninth- and tenth-century Coptic manuscripts, brings the object into relation with the local school, and based on that suggests that it should be dated to the tenth century. His opinion was accepted by G. Galavaris, *Early icons at Sinai*, in: Sinai, *The Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. Manafis, Athens 1990, 97, fig. 11 on p. 143, and J. Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre*, 1187–1291, Cambridge 2005, note 797 on p. 637. On the contrary, L.-A. Hunt (*Christian Art in Greater Syria and Egypt: A Trptych of the Ascension with Military Saints Reattributed*, Al-Masāq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean 12 (2000) 1–36; here 22–25) suggested that this object could have been made in the first half of the thirteenth century. The period of Iconoclasm, the motif became widespread in Byzantine figurative art and in later periods horsemen were always depicted with stirrups (Fig. 8). \(^{59}\)

Another example is the so-called kite-shaped shield. This form of protection appeared in Europe probably before the mid-eleventh century. In his late-twelfth-century manual, the Ayyubid military theoretician al-Tarsusi still opposed the kite-shaped shield used by European knights to the Arab rounded turs. \(^{60}\) Depictions of the kite-shaped shield appear in Byzantine art already on the pages of the *Theodore Psalter* made in 1066 at the Studios scriptorium (Brit. Add. 19352) \(^{61}\) and in early illuminated *Occtateuchs* (Vat. gr. 747; see also *Book of Kings*, Vat. gr. 333 dated before 1063). \(^{62}\) This type of


\(^{62}\) E.g. Vat. gr. 747, fols. 173r, 221v, 222v, 223r–v, 224r–v, 225r, 243r, 247v; Vat. gr. 333, fol. 32r, cf. J. Lowden, *The Occtateuchs. A study*
shield also became popular in the iconography of warrior saints, where they replaced the traditional rounded or oval form. The meticulously painted shields on the walls of the late Comnenian churches in Nerezi (1164) and Kastoria (St. Nicholas tou Kasmitzi, ca. 1175; Sts. Anargyroi ca. 1192) should be listed among the most spectacular examples. The shield of St. Theodore Teron on the north wall of the naos in the church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi is a particularly impressive example of drawing inspiration from real military equipment. Its field, which is white with a gilded horizontal band, is filled with a heraldic representation of a lion standing on two back paws (Fig. 9). The same motif appears on a wooden shield dated to ca. 1200 AD, held by the Landesmuseum in Zurich (Fig. 10). The object has been traditionally associated with the Crusader’s milieu and it could have been owned by the fifth Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Conrad of Thuringia (ca. 1206 – 24 July 1240). If so, the artefact would be in fact later in date than the representation; however, it may be assumed that similar shields with this popular heraldic motif also existed in an earlier period and that Byzantine artists could have come in contact with them already at the Westernized court of Manuel I.

Of course, it should be borne in mind that depicting objects known to artists from everyday life does not necessarily mean copying them from nature. It may be supposed that artists rather reconstructed things from

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63 Grotoński, Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints, 232–234, figs. 30e, 33–34, 40, 45b, 48a–d.


memory, thereby turning their creations into ideal copies of the Platonic "Supreme Being".

These examples suggest that a closer look at details which at first sight may seem irrelevant can reveal interesting aspects of artists' attitudes towards the real world. Recent developments in the study of Byzantine material culture and archaeology create a new field of comparative research for Byzantine art historians. Along with the long-investigated problem of the reception of antique heritage, the issue of the originality of medieval Greek art and artists' attitudes towards the real world seems to be a promising field for further research. The observations presented in this paper do not exhaust the phenomenon of imitative tendencies in Byzantine art. The custom of placing depictions of marble slabs, curtains or even "artificial" bricks on the walls of Middle and Late Byzantine churches seems to be interesting and worthy of further exploration.66 However, the aforementioned topic goes beyond the scope of this paper.67


List of References – Reference List


Anderson J. C., Alexakis A., the walls of Middle and Late Byzantine churches seems to
Подражавање класичног или представљање. Мимезис у византијској ликовној уметности као дериват стила

Пјотр Л. Гробовски

Схватање мимезиса у византијској култури до сада се као предмет истраживања појављивало у филолошким студијама, док је у литератури из области историје уметности и естетике ређе разматрано. Неколико историчара уметности (Пирс, Болман, Троццо, Барбер, Мегвајер) прихватало и употребљавало појам који је увео Гард Викан, али се њиме првенствено описује Барбер, Мегвајер) прихвата и употребљава појам који исто тако важи за Теодор Студит разматра непотпуност уметничке гит, Герман I) мења се у време иконоборства, па тако лионски, Лактанције, Псеудо-Дионисије Ареопагит, Герман I) мене се у време иконоборства, па тако.
су Vienna и Naples Dioscurides, а исто тако и њихове копије настале у X веку (Morgan herbal, MS M 652) и други приручници из истог периода (Theriakia, Par. suppl. gr. 274; On Dislocations, Laur. Plat. 74.7), још следе претходнике из прошлости, примењује се да примери из XI века показују драматичну промену у начину представљања стварности. Реч је и даље о текстовима класичних писаца (Athonite Dioscurides, Lavra W 75; Cynegetica, Marc. gr. Z 479; Physiologus, olim Smyr. Theol. B8; Hippiatrica, Leid. Voss. gr. Q 50; Par. gr. 2244), али су минијатуре изведене без жеље за верним приказивањем детаља, због чега су неупотребљиве као извор обавештења. Предмети описани у текстовима приказани су у поједностављеном облику.

Чини се да је такав приступ нашао одраза и у једној од Пселових Проповеди. Упркос традиционалном стилу свог времена, он је говорио о појави живе иконе, која у великој мери подсећа на модел (Христос пред Пилатом).

Да би се објаснило ново схватање мимезиса, чини се да је прикладио сетити се Виканове дефиниције, која даје предност описном задатку уметности у односу на илузионистичко подражавање. За уметнике који су тежили да искажу познавање предмета јасни облици били су значајнији од покушаја стварања илузије. У уметности средињовизантијског и позновизантијског доба постоје многи примери приказивања различитих употребних предмета. У раду су разматрана два примера: узенгије које су Авари донели у Европу у VI веку и које се на иконама представљају од IX века и штит у облику сузе који је ушао у употребу у првој половини XI века и нашао своје место у сликарству већ након неколико деценија.