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THE ICON OF THE HOLY VIRGIN VATOPEDINI
WITH A PORTRAIT OF VOEVODA IOAN RADUL

In this article, the author discusses iconographic and stylistic characteristic of the icon featuring the Virgin Vatopedini with the Hungarian-Wallachian Voevoda Ioan Radul. The icon is treasured in the cathedral church of the Holy martyr Demetrios in Bitola. In more recent times, a new layer was painted over the icon, but not so long ago the icon was restored to its original condition. The inscriptions on the icon reveal that the Voevoda was a “new ktetor” of Vatopedi and also testify the painting was completed on November 28, 1502. The representation of the enthroned Virgin with the infant Christ sitting in her lap, flanked by St John Prodromos and the founder, belongs to the iconography of Deesis. Its stylistic features indicate that in most probability it was the work by a Cretan painter from the Ritzos family.

The cathedral church of the great martyr St. Demetrios in Bitola treasures the icon of the Holy Virgin Vatopedini (Ἡ ΒΑΤΟΠΕΔΗΝΗ), the subject matter and iconography of which have not come into the focus of broader scholarly research to the present time.1 The icon portrays the enthroned Holy Virgin with the infant Christ in her lap, flanked by the standing figure of St. John the Baptist (ἸΩ Ο ΠΡΟΔΡΟΜΟΣ) to the right, and a layman with a crown to the left, bestowing her with a charter scroll. Both are extending their hands in the gesture of supplication. The head of the male figure is surmounted by a text in Greek inscribed in red lettering:

Ὁ ΕΥΣΕΒΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΕΝ Χ(ΡΙΣΤ)Ω ΤΩ ΘΕΩ ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΥΘΕΝΤΗΣ | Κ(ΑΙ)
ΑΥΤΩΚΡΑΤΟΡ. ΠΑΣΗΣ ΟΥΤΩΚΡΩΒΛΑΧΗΣ. ΙΩ(ΑΝΝΗΣ) ΡΑ|ΔΟΥΛΑΣ ΒΟΕ-
ΒΟΔΑΣ. Κ(ΑΙ) ΝΕΟΣ ΚΤΙΤΩΡ.

The most venerable in Christ the Lord, the faithful master and autokrator of the entire Hungaro-Wallachia Ioan Radul Voevoda and new ktetor.

1 The icon was displayed at the gallery of the church of St. Demetrios, which was pillaged in 1991, and since then has been sheltered in a separate room of the parekklesion at the porch. I owe special gratitude to the colleague R. Paligora, an art historian from the Museum and Institute for Preservation in Bitola, who brought this icon to my attention during conservation works, and thus made this study possible.
Below the Virgin’s throne, runs another text in three rows, inscribed in Greek in gold lettering (partially damaged):

† ΕΓΕΓΩΝΕΙ ΤΩ ΠΑΡΟΝ ΕΙΚΟΝ[Ο]ΣΤΑΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ,ΖΙΑ Ε[ΤΟΣ] | ΕΝ ΜΗΝ(I) ΝΟΕΜΒΡΙΟ. ΚΗ. ΗΓΟΥΜΕΝ(Ε)ΒΟΝΤΟ(Σ) ΚΥ(Ρ) ΝΕΟΦΥΤΟΥ | ΑΜΗΝ

This iconostasis was made in the year of 1502, in the month of November 28, at the time of the Abbot Kyr Neophytos, Amen.

The two inscriptions are executed caligraphally in capital letters. The icon, belonging to the proskynetaria type, is large in size: 137 × 92 cm.

The indicated year of the painting and the identity of the portrayed person, however, do not correspond to the style of the painting, which first researchers dated to the 18th century.²

The upper layer of painting is actually re-painted and research indicates that it was created at a much later date. The x-ray examination has revealed the original painting with identical iconography, but with some minor alterations in details beneath the newer layer.³ With regard to its concept, the icon from Bitola is a ceremonial, devotional cult image with an iconography of a Deesis, where the ruler in the image of Ioan Radul is portrayed bestowing a charter to the Holy Virgin Vatopedini with the intercession of St. John the Baptist.

The inscription begins with the epithet “the most venerable” followed by the invocation “In Christ the Lord faithful master and autokrator of entire Hungaro-Wallachia” and denotes the depicted Voevoda Ioan Radul, also called a new ktetor (donor). However, he is also signified as the ruler and autokrator (αὐτοκράτωρ), which means a limitless sovereign of a particular country or region. The ecclesiastic title “new ktetor”⁴ suggests a meritorious benefactor of the Church; hence, this was an incentive for producing this icon.

The Wallachian Voevoda is painted after the model of the Byzantine imperial iconography, where emperors are depicted in the act of endowing gifts to the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ.⁵ The addressing form reading “… in Christ the Lord faith-

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² In 1980, an article appeared in a daily paper in tribute of the 15th International Congress of Historical Studies held in Bucharest, where K. Balabanov reported on the identification of the portrayed in the icon from Bitola. It is interesting that this author gave 1503 as the year when the icon was painted, but did not touch the problems of the style. Neither did he mention that the first layer of painting was actually re-painted. Furthermore, the author outlined a supposition that the icon was painted in the court of the Wallachian prince, and subsequently bestowed to the church in Bitola, as a token of the Wallachian-Macedonian relations (K. Balabanov, Ikona so portret na vlaškiot vladetel Jovan Radu IV Veliki, Nova Makedonija, August 12, 1980, 9). The icon is registered by the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments, rec. no. 1021.

³ The complex procedure of removing the re-painted layer is carried out by the academic painter Nevena Veličkovska a conservationist in the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments.

⁴ Those donors who are not the founders of monasteries were called the second or new ktetor, V. Marković, Ktitori i njihove dužnosti i prava, Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor V (1925) 10–103; S. Troicki, Ktitorsko pravo u Vizantiji i u nemanjičkoj Srbiji, Glas SKA CLXVIII (1935) 97.

⁵ Among the oldest donor compositions of this type are three mosaics in St. Sophia in Constantinople. The first portrays the enthroned Holy Virgin and the infant Christ, flanked by two emperors: Jus-
ful” which was common in the earliest donor compositions, became an integral part in later compositions of rulers, and proclaims a need to reinforce the position of the sovereign through of the ecclesiastic establishment and relations with the church. Furthermore, the ideology of medieval monarchies rested on the belief of divine investment on behalf of the ruler. Hence, the “political ideology”, coupled with the central idea of the Lord’s kingdom on earth, created the canon of virtues and activities, which were expected from and had to be performed by the ruler and the “Good shepherd”. He was to be a peace-giving man, the one who feeds the poor, the supreme judge and law giver, an authority on dogmatic questions, the patron of the clergy, protector of true faith, and builder of temples. This idea is conveyed in fresco paintings, charters, minted coins and seals. The bequeathing of material traces during one’s lifetime was the soteriological essence of donorship.

We are entitled to ask who the Hungaro-Wallachian Voevoda Ioan Radul actually was? According to the historical sources, Ioan Radul was the son of Vlad Kalugjerul (Monk). In 1495 he succeeded his father on the throne of Wallachia and remained in power till his death in March-April 1508. Owing to the crisis in the Ottoman Empire, and several peace measures undertaken to consolidate the country, he was privileged to rule in peace. For his country, Radul was an important political, cultural and church reformer. He devoted special attention to cultural and ecclesiastic matters and for this reason was called the “Great”.

We can gain knowledge about numerous endowments of this pious ruler and his family from the surviving charters and donor inscriptions, like the one from Lapušnja Monastery (in the Vidin sanjak) in the region of Timok in Serbia. He was

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10 In the Memorial of the Monastery of St. Panteleemon on Mount Athos it is stated that he paid for the annual meal. Mention is also made of the members of his family: his grandfather Vlad Drakul and his grandmother the nun Eupraxia, his father Vlad (later monk Pahomie) and his mother lady Rada (later nun Samonida), his wife Katalina and the brothers Vladul and Mircea, cf. P. P. Panaitescu — D. Mioc, Documenta Romaniae historică, B. Țara românească, vol. I (1247–1500), ed. Ac. Rep. Soc. Rom., București 1966 (№ 263).
11 As donors of the church of St. Nicholas (1501) are indicated “in Christ Lord faithful kyr Ioan Radul voevoda, ruler of the entire Hungaro-Wallachia and the great parakalab, župan Gergina, …, prince
a contemporary of the last Serbian despots (in Srem) from the Branković family.\textsuperscript{12} As a result of good neighboring relationship, in 1505–1506 he gave shelter in Wallachia to the hieromonachos Maksim Branković (the former despot Djordje Branković) entrusting the governing of the Wallachian metropolitan to him.\textsuperscript{13} The founding of a print shop headed by the monk Macarius the Serbian was associated with the activities of Ioan Radul. He was also known for supporting the Monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos during the period when the monastery was in financial problems, which is confirmed in the annual balance for meals, and registered in charters of 1497 and 1498. On that occasion, in memory of elder and younger members of his family,\textsuperscript{14} he bestowed gifts on the brotherhood. The renewal of the Monastery of St. Prochor of Pčinja was likewise associated with the endowments from Wallachian voevodes. In the monastery’s \textit{Memorial} from 1495 the Branković family (\textit{kyr} Vuk, Angelina and her children Djordje, Jovan and Mara) is mentioned together with the Wallachian rulers Ioan Vlad Kalugjerul and his wife Maria (his second wife), and the humble \textit{kyr} Ioan Radul with his wife Katalina.\textsuperscript{15}

Let us return to the icon from Bitola. The basic idea of this ceremonial cult picture was to celebrate the personality of the ruler-\textit{ktetor} by bringing him in connection with Deesis, and, with regard to the thematic sense, to achieve a balance with the Church through the images of Christ, the Holy Virgin and St. John the Baptist on one side, and the pious ruler on the other, who is portrayed in the gesture typical of the medieval man of his rank. Focused on her role of the Mother of God, the Virgin is depicted on a wooden gilded throne without a backside, on two oval pillows. She is gently holding the infant Christ. Under the \textit{maphorion} she is wearing a blue vestment, while her head is adorned with a \textit{kekryphalos} (wimple). The upper portion of the \textit{maphorion} is embellished with a gold band with three leaf lillies and gold tassels falling on the left hand and on the rims. The Virgin is wearing red shoes placed on a red pillow and the gilded \textit{suppedaneum}. The infant Christ, comfortably sitting in his mother’s lap, gives blessing to St. John the Baptist with his right hand and to the Great Voevoda Radul with the left. The application of highlights on the pale ochre ground of the \textit{himation} and over a bluish-white undershirt is impressive as an expression of his transcendental essence.

\textsuperscript{12} For the protection of the frontiers of the Hungarian state from Turkish conquests after the death of the despot Vuk Branković (1485), King Matthew Hunyadi Corvinus selected the elder son of the blinded Stefan Branković, Djordje Branković (1485–1495) who with his authority was supposed to gather Serbs who fled under Turkish pressure. Together with his mother Angelina and brother Jovan, Djordje Branković arrived in Srem in 1486. Prior to this, he had been invested with the title of despot and family property, cf. Ferjančić, \textit{op. cit.}, 199, 200, 201; M. Timotijević, Sremski despoti Brankovići i osnivanje manastira Krušedola, ZLUMS 27–28 (1991–1992) 133, 135, 136; Dj. Sp. Radojičić, Srpsko-rumunski odnosi \textit{¶çÇ–¶çÇÇ veka}, \textit{Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu Ç} (1956) 18.


\textsuperscript{14} Radojičić, \textit{op. cit.}, 17–20.

\textsuperscript{15} S. Novaković, Pišinski pomenik, Spomenik SKA XXIX (1895) 3–10.
The elongated figure of St. John the Baptist is simply garbed in an olive-green *himation*. The saint stretches his hand towards the Virgin in a gesture of supplication. The shape of his head is executed almost to perfection, with the standard hairstyle and curly beard falling in strands. The figure of the Great Voevoda is placed slightly behind the throne. In a discreet manner, he is offering three charter scrolls displaying a visible ruler’s seal. This is a portrait of a stout middle-aged man, with a short dark beard and moustache, and long wavy chestnut hair falling on his shoulders. He has a broad forehead and large, piercing eyes, and a straight nose, designating an educated intellectual. He is wearing an open gold crown on his head adorned with precious stones and pearls, resembling the crowns worn by European (Hungarian) kings in this period. He is vested in luxurious court attire, a long sleeveless straight tunic with buttons on the front, made of green fabrics embellished with golden double headed eagles. Fur runs along the bottom of the tunic, and a fur trimming adorns the neckline and the sleeves of the undergarment, which is garnished by dark red flowers. This is a realistic portrait of a noble and pious ruler. The figures are rendered against a gold setting, while the floor is painted black in the lower register.

The complexions of visages are painted in dark ocher and with olive-green shadows, blush on the cheeks, and meticulous thin white steaks as facial highlights. The bluish-white handkerchief in the Virgin’s left hand — a symbol of grief, is a favored detail especially by the Athonites. The oval pillows painted in green and red, trimmed by a thin gold line, the halos of the Holy Virgin, the infant Christ and St. John the Baptist adorned with floral impressed motives — a six petal flower with stems, are characteristic features of Italo-Cretan icons from the 15th century. The folds on the garments are accomplished in a pure geometric manner and by grading light thin stripes. The crimson color (κρίμιζι) achieved by special technology, as well as olive green, white, black, gold, ocher hues and cinnabar, were the colours most frequently employed by Cretan painters.

The icon from Bitola, possessing high artistic criteria, bears close resemblance to basic features of the Cretan school from the second half of the 15th century: a strict, almost static, composition, meticulous drawing, distinct images, harmonious colours combined with gold and exquisite technique, recall the tradition of the Palaeologoi. Cretan painters favored monumental compositions, with serene grandeur and timid gentleness. However, the icon from Bitola displays a decline in de-

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16 The decorative motifs of gold double headed eagles the fur trimming around the neckline are found on a donor composition of a somewhat recent date (last quarter of the 16th century) is repoted on the painted doors of the Monastery of Iviron. According to A. Xyngopoulos the composition portrays Radu (1611–1623), the son of the Wallachian Voevoda Michnea II (1577–1583), who had stayed in Iviron but was educated in Venice (A. Xyngopoulos, Portraits inédits de deux Vôôvodes Valaques, Actes du XIVe Congrès international des études byzantines à Bucarest, II, Bucarest 1975, 647–649, fig. 1; Treasures of Mount Athos, Thessaloniki 1997, 146–147, fig. 2.80).

17 N. M. Chatzidakis, From Candia to Venice. Greek Icons in Italy, 15th–16th Centuries (Venetiae quasi alterum Byzantium), Athens 1993, figs. 9, 22, 23, 25.

18 Dj. Mazalić, Kritska škola i njezinu primjerci u Sarajevu, Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini XLIX (1937) 73.

picting perfect anatomy — the Virgin has slouchy shoulders, the bodies are extremely elongated, and the head of the donor is larger than natural. On the basis of the style and the period when it was created, the icon can be said to be close to the comprehension of the painter Nicholas Ritzos (1482–1503, died in 1507 at latest), mainly due to the great resemblance with the signed icon of the Deesis treasured in the museum of the Old Church in Sarajevo.\(^{20}\)

The portrait of Radul the Great was completed in 1502, certainly at the Monastery of Vatopedi when the aforementioned abbot Neophytos was its head.\(^{21}\) The supposition that the painter Nicholas Ritzos may have stayed for some time on Mount Athos is a very plausible one. Unfortunately, due to the considerably damaged condition of the lower part of the icon, the signature of the author has not been discovered. This diminishes the possibility to ascribe this work to the workshop of the painter Nicholas and his father Andrew Ritzos.

According to scholars, the only known portrait of Ioan Radul from Lapušnja, surviving in a severely damaged condition, is a posthumous representation dating from 1510.\(^{22}\) In comparison to it, the depiction of the Hungaro-Wallachian Voevoda on the icon from Bitola is invested with a unique portrait value and expresses the splendor and wealth of this aristocrat, in the period when he was at he peak of his economic and political power.

The concept, subject-matter, artistic and stylistic features of this icon, as well as its Athonite provenance, distinguish this work as an exceptional specimen, but also as a valuable document for Byzantine history.

The portrayal of medieval aristocrats was not uncommon, especially when portraits were created in the monasteries where the nobles were founders or second ktetors. It is known that Wallachian-Moldavian voevodes, starting from Ioan Radul IV the Great and his family, especially Neagoe Basarab,\(^{23}\) Petru Raresh with his successors,\(^{24}\) until Constantine Brankoveanu (late XVII and early XVIII century), were


\(^{21}\) In the archive records of abbots of Vatopedi Monastery, the abbot Neophytos is mentioned in the year of 1506, and certainly this is the same person mentioned in the icon from Bitola. Cf. The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi. Tradition, History, Art, Mount Athos 1998, 62 (\textit{K. Chryssochoidis}); for a useful review of this book see \textit{J. Čokrevski-Filip} in: Zbornik za srednjovekovnu umetnost 3, Skopje 2001, 281–293.

\(^{22}\) \textit{Knežević}, op. cit., 48.

\(^{23}\) The Monastery of Dionysiou treasures two icons with images of him and his son Theodosius, and one of him with St. Niphon from the 16th century (cf. Treasures of Mount Ahtos, 103, figs. 2.37, 2.38). Neagoe Basarab was married to Milica-Despina, the daughter of Jovan Branković. The entire family of the Voevoda can be seen on the frescos of the monastery church of St. Nicholas at Curtea de Arges from 1526 (Art Museum, Bucharest) the work of the painter Dobromir from Trgovište [cf. \textit{C. Nicolescu}, Princesses Serbes sur le trône des Principautés Roumaines — Despina Milita de Valachie, ZLUMS 5 (1969) 97–117, figs. 3, 4; cf. also \textit{A. Grabar}, Srednjovekovna umetnost istočne Evrope, Novi Sad 1969, 109]. The fresco possesses a ceremonial aristocratic feature, and, although considerably differs in spirit from the icon from Bitola, they both express power, beneficence and reverence.

\(^{24}\) Alexander IV Lapusheanu is painted as the \textit{ktetor} with both of his sons on the frescos in the Monastery of Docheiariou (1568). The addressing form repeats the same formulation from on the icon with Ioan Radul \textit{ΕΝ ΧΩ ΤΩ ΘΩ ΕΥΣΕΒΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΥΘΕΝΤΗΣ ΠΑΣΙΣ ΜΟΛΩΒΑΛΧΙ(ΑΣ)}:
all patrons of arts. During this period, thanks to the favorable cultural and artistic climate, works of exceptional value were created.25

The kktor-ruler composition with the portrayal of the Holy Virgin is not rare. The Holy Virgin on the icon from Bitola bears the name Vatopedini,26 and refers to the Virgin Esphagmeni, a name given according to the legend when an impious deacon wounded the picture of the Virgin with a knife, and the blood came oozing from her cheek. The iconographers recorded the event.27 The image of the Holy Virgin on the icon from Bitola is severely damaged on the right cheek, and this has prevented us from determining the sign of suffering. In referring to the depiction of St. John the Baptist, his presence next to the Holy Virgin in context of Deesis composition is justified. However on this particular icon it may have another connotation, namely, to emphasize the Monastery of Vatopedi as a place where among the many holy relics the finger of this saint is kept.28

What kind of relationship did Ioan Radul have with the Monastery of Vatopedi and why is he supplicating assistance from the Holy Virgin Vatopedini? It is common knowledge that the Athonite monasteries, Vatopedi among them, had metochia in the Byzantine princedoms of Wallachia and Moldavia, and the pious Wallachian Voevodes generously bestowed gifts on them. They donated precious liturgical objects, living and universal symbols of Christendom, and in subsequent times testimony to the struggle against Ottoman rule.29 However, it remains unascertained to which of the Wallachian metochia the charter of Vatopedi refers. The Voevoda had

IΩΑΝΝΟΥ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΒΟΙΒΟΔΑ ΚΑΙ ΚΗΤΗΛΩΡ ΤΗΣ… [cf. M. Garidis, La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450–1600) et dans les pays sous la domination étrangère, Athènes 1989, fig. 171].


26 It is known that the Athonite monasteries venerated the miraculous icons of the Virgin, the monastery of Vatopedi has seven: the Virgin Vematari ssa or Ktitorisa, the Virgin Paramythia, the Virgin Espaghmeni (Εσφαγμένη), the Virgin Anthiphonetria, the Virgin Eleouvrtissisa, the Virgin Pyrovoletria and the Virgin Pantanassa. The Monastery of Docheiariou venerated the Virgin Georgo pókkoos (“swift to succour”), the Monastery of Pantocrator that of the Virgin Yerondissa, the Monastery of the Great Lavra the Virgin Oikonomissisa, the Monastery of Hilandar the Virgin Tricherousa, the Monastery of Iviron the Virgin Portaitissa, cf. The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 118–128 (G. Matzaridis).


28 Ibid., 123.

29 Jorga, Istorija Rumuna, 166–169; The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 89–96 (F. Marinescu); N. Jorga, Byzantium after Byzantium, Iași–Portlad 2000. The Monastery of Vatopedi had special relations with the Serbian church, and from its foundation was closely connected with Hilandar. The first endowments are associated with the founders of the Nemanjić family, Simeon and Sava [Domerti], Život Svetog Save i Svetog Simeona (translated by L. Mirković), Beograd 1938, 271; S. K. Kitsas, Predstava svetog Save kao ktitora manastira Vatopeda, ZLUMS 19 (1983) 185–199; according to the preserved Slav archives, Vatopedi received gifts of king Dušan (1346 — and 1348), the Despot Jovan Uglješa (1369 — and 1371), and Despot Stefan Lazarević (1417), the great čelnik Radić Postupović (1432), Lazar Branković (1457) and others [The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 632–637 (C. Nihoritis)].
doubtlessly stayed at the Monastery of Vatopedi where the portraying took place. Icons of this kind generally remained in monasteries, though it is likely that the Voevoda secured the transportation of the icon from Mount Athos to the Wallachian principedom. However, the voyage was in vain and it remains an enigma under what circumstances the icon had arrived in Bitola (or, possibly, at one of the neighboring monasteries).

Mirjana M. Mašnić

ИКОНА БОГОРОДИЦЕ ВАТОПЕДСКЕ СА ПОРТРЕТОМ ВОЈВОДЕ ЈОВАНА РАДУЛА

На иконе превлађују церемонијални дух даривања који се махом везује за средњовековне владарске портрете. Јован Радул IV Велики (1495–1508), син Влада Калуђера (Монаха), био је реформатор у својој земљи и пријатељ српских деспота из куће Бранковића. Поред портрета Јована Радула у Лапушњи у Србији, за који се сматра да је настао након његове смрти, портрет на икони Богородице Ватопедске најрепрезентативнији је и најочуванији портрет ове историјске личности. Он приказује владара у пуној физичкој и духовној снази, одељеног у раскошну дворску одежду. Јован Радул има дугу равну тунiku од зелене тканине, без рукава, која се спреда закопачава, украшена уоквиреним златним двоглавим орловима; испод тунике је плуза декорисана тамноцрвеним цветовима. Црте лица указују на образовану и проницљиву личност.

Битољска икона има високу уметничку вредност, а стилски је блиска сликарским начелима критске школе из друге половине XV века. Одликују је строга и статична композиција, беспрекоран цртеж, изразитост лица, складне боје у
комбинацији са златном и савршенство технике. Присутне су и одређене анатомске деформације (Богородичина спуштена рамена, издуженост тела или пре- велика глава ктитора). Сликарство иконе и време њеног настанка упућују на стилска схватања критске радионице Андреје Рица и његових следбеника. Треба претпоставити да је икона Богородица Ватопедске настала у манастиру Ватопеду у време када је игuman био повремени господин Неофит. Није познато како је доспела у Битељ.

Влашке војводе даривале су не само манастире у Светој Гори већ и у Србији и Македонији, а на основу објављених докумената познато је о каквим је поклонима реч. Портрет војводе Радула надмашује друге својом свежином и лепотом. Историјска и уметничка вредност битољске иконе представљаће изазов за даља истраживања и тумачења.