“O ΑΣΠΑΣΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΠΕΤΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΥΛΟΥ”
(Once again on the fragment of a fresco in Vatopedi)*

In memory of Nina

As an iconographic theme, the representation of the embraced apostles Peter and Paul appears even in Early Byzantine art and symbolizes the universal Christian ideas of communion, concord and love. Based on its stylistic features, the fragment from Vatopedi can be dated to the very end of the 12th century and most probably belonged to the earliest preserved fresco paintings in the main church.

Key words: apostles, Peter, Paul, Vatopedi, fresco

Part of the fresco with the closely joined heads of the two apostolic koryphaioi from Vatopedi has been known in scholarly circles for more than eight decades.1 It is interesting that the views of two Serbian scholars, Svetozar Radojičić and Vojislav J. Djurić, were crucial in terms of origin, stylistic analogies and the dating of this fresco-fragment, until recently. In the older researcher’s opinion, which was based on an account by Teodosije dealing with the extension and decoration of the Vatopedi refectory,2 the fragment originated from that building, it was linked with the donor activities of two renowned Serbian monks in Vatopedi, Simeon and Sava, and he compared it with the earlier paintings of Djurdjevi Stupovi near Novi Pazar, dating it to the years of the rule of Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203), or to 1197/8.3 The younger scholar challenged the opinion

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1 The fragment was published for the first time in G. Millet, Monuments de l’Athos, I, Les Peintures, Paris 1927, pl. 98–1.

2 Teodosije Хиландарац, Живот светога Саве, ed. В. Даничић, гр. by В. Трифуновић, Београд 1973, 46.

3 S. Radojičić, Die Meister der altserbischen Malerei vom Ende des XII bis zur Mitte des XV Jahrhunderts, Παραγμένα τού Θ’ Διεθνούς Βυζαντινολογικού Συνεδρίου, I, Athens 1955, 434; idem, Мажестри старог српског сликарства, Београд 1955, 6–7; idem, Старо српско сликарство, Београд 1966, 30.
of his teacher, which had long been accepted in scientific circles, and dated the fragment to a broader time period — to the second half of the 12th century — and assumed that except the walls of the refectory, it may have decorated the interior of a parekklesion that may have been dedicated to these two princes of the apostles depicted on it. Later on, with good reason, he also disputed the existence of any stylistic parallels with Nemanja’s painting in Djurdjevi Stupovi. About ten years ago, the respectable professor Euthymios Tsigaridas from Thessalonike wrote about the fragment in Vatopedi on two occasions, firstly, in a luxury two-volume monograph about the monastery and, subsequently, in a catalogue for the Thessalonike exhibition of the Holy Mountain art. He determined the closest analogies to the painting manner of the Vatopedi painter to be the oldest fresco decoration of the monastery τοῦ Αστόμου, in Thessalonike, and the paintings in the parekklesion dedicated to the Virgin and the earlier layer in the refectory of the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos. He categorically refuted that the fragment had originated from the time of Sava and Simeon’s work in Vatopedi in the last decade of the 12th century, and suggested that the date would have been between 1170 and 1180.7

As an iconographic theme, the Meeting of Peter and Paul appeared even in Early Byzantine art. The earliest known example is on a belt buckle of ivory from the 5th century, which was discovered in Castellammare di Stabia, near Naples. The artistic solution of the two embracing figures, which should symbolize unity and concord, may have had its models in Late Roman imperial iconography. The two famous porphyry sculptures of the augusti and caesars embracing, more fragment of his work is preserved in Vatopedi, assumed that except the walls of the refectory, it may have decorated the interior of a parekklesion that may have been dedicated to these two princes of the apostles depicted on it. The artistic solution of the two embracing figures, which should symbolize unity and concord, may have had its models in Late Roman imperial iconography. The two famous porphyry sculptures of the augusti and caesars embracing, from Venice and Rome, highlighted the unity of the tetrarchic authority and the Empire.8 In the Middle Byzantine period, it appeared most frequently on the seals belonging to


5 V. J. Djurić, Fresques médiévales à Chilendar, Actes du XIIe Congrès international d’études byzantines, III, Belgrade 1964, 60.

6 Idem, Βυζαντινές θρησκείες του Ουγγρικού, Βεογράδ 1974, 190.

7 Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βασιλεαδίου, Α’, Holy Mountain 1996, 233–235; Θησαυροί του Άγιου Όρους, Thessalonike 1997, 40–41, no 1.1 and 1.2. In the said works, the part of the fresco depicting the head of the saint identified as the evangelist Mark was mistakenly dated to the same time. The manner of modulating the incarnate, the painting of the locks of hair and the nimbus, reveal a painter with an entirely different manner that belonged to the second half of the 13th century. One more fragment of his work is preserved in Vatopedi, in the fresco of the Virgin with Christ enthroned, flanked by two angels.

dignitaries in whose sees there were cathedrals dedicated to the apostles Peter and Paul. Thus, from the 11th century, there are the preserved seals of the archbishop of Kerkyra, Kosmas, the metropolitan of Ankyra, Theophilos, the synkellos of the same name and metropolitan of Tarsos, and of a deacon and papias of Constantinople’s Great Orphanotropheion, but also the seal of Nikephoros, the sebastophoros and doux of Antioch, which can be dated to the years between 1063 and 1067. The representation of two embracing apostles, from this period, are also preserved on one ivory (10th–11th century), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The texts in the manuscripts decorated with miniatures of this scene indirectly point to the literary sources and its additional meanings. Thus, in the 12th century manuscript containing Metaphrastes’ Lives of the Saints for the months of May to August, in the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale, the beginning of the text describing the lives of the apostles Peter and Paul is decorated with a representation of the embracing apostles (Par. gr. 1528 — fol. 47v). In the edition of Symeon Metaphrastes, from the end of the 10th century, one does not encounter the event that represents the narrative basis for this scene. However, it is to be found in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles this author used, which describe the meeting of the most famous of Christ’s followers beneath the walls of Rome. The illustration of this event is confirmed by another miniature from the 12th century, at the beginning of the Athens Psalter (cod. 7– fol. 2r), where the architectonic backdrop behind the two leading apostles symbolize the walls of the eternal city. And while this scene appears as the part of the extensively illustrated lives of the apostles Peter and Paul in the achievements of the Byzantine artists and their followers, who, according to the wishes of their Norman clients decorated with mosaics the Capella Palatina in Palermo (1154–1171) or the basilica in Monreale (after 1185), in Byzantine art strictly speaking, it appears alone, leading one to assume that it had some additional symbolic meaning.

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10 For thorough list of the known examples cf. K. Kreidl-Papadopoulos, Die ikone mit Petrus und Paulus in Wien. Neue Aspekte zur Entwicklung dieser Rundkomposition, ΔΧΑΕ 10 (1981) 339–356; the icon with the apostles embracing, from the Vienna Kunsthistorischen Museum, which represents the pivot of the said work, like in other works by the same author, was erroneously dated to around 1400. The stylistic features of this rather small icon, along with the revetment produced during the same time, attributed it to the rule of the earlier owner, the Wallachian voivoda, John Peter II the Lame (1559–1568) and his son John Vlad, who received the icon as a gift from the Dionysiou monastery on the Holy Mountain.


15 Unless they illustrate canonic texts (as Sacra Parallela — Par. gr. 923, 9th century, or manuscripts of the Acts of the Apostles — Chicago 2400 and Par. gr. 102, 12th century), the apostolic cycles in Byzantium consist only of sermons and the conversion of non-believers, as well as images of
As the illustration of one event from the lives of the apostolic koryphaioi, the appearance of this representation in Metaphrastes’ *Menologion* is quite understandable, but its appearance in a psalter from the Athens National Library draws particular attention. Apart from psalms, this manuscript also contains commentaries on them by St. John Chrysostom and Eusebios of Caesarea. The first author is also portrayed in the miniature found on the back the fly-leaf (fol. 2v), depicting the encounter of Peter with Paul before the walls of Rome: John Chrysostom, seated, wearing a monk’s habit, is writing down the text St. Paul himself dictates to him, and there is a monk present as a witness to this event, while on the wall hangs an icon of the apostle Paul. In the extensive opus of the most prolific Christian writer, in addition to commentaries of individual psalms, one can find homilies dedicated to the two princes of the apostles, and lines that interpret the sense of the Christian embrace ὁ ἁσπασμός and the holy kiss τὸ ἁγιὸν φίλημα, thus, the unusual appearance of the said miniatures, at the beginning of the Athens Psalter, seems clearer.

In the interpretation of Psalm 140, St. John Chrysostom advises the faithful that a prayer addressed to God must be sincere and pure, from the mouth of the righteous, whose mind has not been desecrated by evil thoughts and acts by injustice. And, he compares it to a kiss but not the αἰσχρά ἢ ἀκάθαρτα, ὅταν δολερὰ καὶ ὑπολυκ like the kiss of Judas, with which he concealed his betrayal, but the kiss with which Paul called on the Corinthian Christians to greet each other — Ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους ἐν φιλήματι ἁγίῳ (I Cor. 16.20), ὡσπερ οὕτε τοῦ Δαυίδ τὸ πρὸς τὸν Ἰωνᾶθαν, ἀλλὰ ἁγιὸν καὶ σεμνὸν, καὶ γνησίας ἁγάπης γέμον about which the apostle Paul speaks in his epistle. The meaning of the quoted verse, which also appears at the end of Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians (II Cor. 13.12), Chrysostom in his 30th homily on this epistle further explains — Τὶ ἔστιν, Ἀγίο; Μὴ ὑπούλω, μὴ δολερό, καθάπερ ὁ Ἰούδας τὸν

the martyrdom of the apostles — Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos (Par. gr. 510 — 880–883), the old bronze doors from the basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome, produced in 1070, in Constantinople, for Pope Alexander II (destroyed in a fire in 1823), the parekklesion above the diakonikon of St. Sophia in Ohrid (around 1100), The Holy Apostles in Constantinople, according to Nicholas Mesaranites (1201).


17 This involves the illustration of an event from the life of St. John Chrysostom, already as the patriarch of Constantinople (398–404), described by his biographer George, the patriarch of Alexandria (third decade of the 7th century), according to which the synkellos Proklos saw an unknown man three times in the patriarch’s cell, whispering something in the ear of Chrysostom while he was writing, who he later recognized in the icon on the wall, as the apostle Paul, cf. F. Halkin, Douce récits byzantins sur Saint Jean Chrysostome, Bruxelles 1977, 142–148; A. Xyngopoulos, Restitution et interprétation d’une fresque de Chilandar, HZ 2 (1971) 93–97. The most learned author among the apostles was considered to be a model and inspiration to St. John Chrysostom, the most prolific of all the Christian writers. The younger writer even dedicated seven of his homilies to St. Paul, as well as numerous orations and commentaries on his epistles — PG 50 (473–514); 60 (583–681) — 63 (9–237).

18 Ibidem 55, 436.
Christ 

and the Christian greeting, 21

is given, symbolizes the word with the human being elevates himself by means of virtue to the first and only Logos, the creator of all words. 25

Contemporaries also recognized these same universal Christian ideas of communion and love in the painted representations of the embracing apostles from later times, if one is to judge by the epigrams of three Byzantine poets. A

19 Ibidem 61, 606–607.
20 Ibidem 6, 428 A; Tertullianus calls it 'the kiss of peace' — osculum pacis, PL 1, 1176 A; PG 33, 1112 AB, 1301 C.
21 About this, v. Παλατσαριος of Clement of Alexandria (around 150 — before 215), ibidem 8, 661 A.
22 See the first letter of St. John Chrysostom addressed to Demetrius the monk, as well as his 78th homily according to the Gospel of St. John, ibidem 47 (398); 59 (426).
23 É. Mercenier, La prière des églises de rite byzantin, I, Chevetogne 19532, 249; R. Taft, The Pontifical Liturgy of the Great Church according to a Twelfth-Century Diataxis in Codex British Museum Add. 34060, OCP 45/2 (1979) 298, VII.3.
24 See also the commentaries on the liturgy written by some other church fathers, such as Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite (around 500) in his Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (chapter three, section eight), PG 3, 437A; Anastasios of Sinai († after 700) in Δόγμα περὶ τῆς Άγιας Συνάξεως, ibidem 89, 940A; or even later in the works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonike (1416/7–1429), ibidem 155, 296–297.
25 See chapter 17 in the Mystagogy of this author, ibidem 91, 693D–695A.
relatively rare iconographical model, showing the apostles Peter and Paul as they kiss each other first inspired John Mauroupolous in the 11th century and then Manuel Philes and, a century later, John Chortasmenos, in the 14th and 15th centuries. The same ideas permeate a later account by the monk Gregory above the miniature in the Apostolos from the second half of the 13th century (fol. 255v), which once belonged to the Lavra of St. Athanasios on Mount Athos, and today is in the collection of the State Historical Museum in Moscow, as well as the inscription in the verses on the fresco in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Ano Divri, in Elis, on the Pelopponnesos, dating from the same time.

A proportionately larger number of representations of embracing apostles Peter and Paul have been preserved from the last two centuries of the Byzantine Empire’s existence. Besides those already mentioned, also known are the following examples in monumental painting: St. Peter in Kastania, in Mani (13th century), St. Demetrios, Makrychori, Euboea (1302/3) and St. Marina, Boutama,  

26 Ibidem 120, 1139–1140.
27 Manelis Philae Carmina, I, ed. E. Miller, Parisiis 1855, 354–355; H. Hunger, Johannes Chortasmenos (ca. 1370 — ca. 1436/37). Briefe, Gedichte und kleine Schriften, Wien 1969, 196. While one can reliably say that the verses of the younger poet were written before an icon of the apostolic koryphaios embracing, the epigram of Manuel Philes is found inscribed on a 16th century icon from the Great Lavra, depicting the same theme, M. Vassilaki, A Cretan Icon in the Ashmolean: the Embrace of Peter and Paul, IOB 40 (1990) 419.
28 Based on the palaeographic features, the note dates from the second half of the 15th century, B. L. Fonka, Η ορθογραφία των χαρτογραφιών του Βενετού, Αθήνα 1911, 120. However, it is interesting that more than four centuries later, when Dionysius of Fournia wrote his Painter’s Manual, he recommended almost identical text to be written beside the embracing apostles, as the one in Elis, cf. M. Meduh, Οι εικονικοί θυσίες της Ευβοίας, ΙΙΙ, Βέροια 2005, 558.
29 N. Drandakis, Η εικόνα της Μεταμόρφωσης των Αγίων Πόλεων της Σικελίας, Πρακτικά της Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, Athens 1976, 219.
30 M. Emmanuel, Οι τοιχογραφίες του Άγίου Αναστρέφθηκε στο Μακρυχώρι και της Κομιάτσου της Θεσσαλίας στον Άγιο Ευστάθιο της Ευβοίας, Athens 2011, 89–90, 173–174, 221. The appearance of this theme on the walls of churches built in the territories that were under a Latin power, is interpreted in the said book as the expression of the wish for peaceful co-existence between Catholic masters and the Orthodox population. This idea fell on fertile ground among researchers and so the embracing apostolic koryphaios were interpreted as the painted symbols of ecclesiastical union, cf. M. Constantoudaki-Kirronilides, Concordia Apostolorum: The Embrace of Saints Peter and Paul, a Palaeologian Icon in Bologna, Byzantium. Identity, Image, Influence, Copenhagen 1996, 5213; the hypotheses even went further, therefore, practically all of the oldest preserved icons depicting the same theme, dated earlier after the fall of Constantinople, despite the different painting manners, were attributed to one master-painter and alleged supporter of the union, an artist from Candia known from written sources, the painter and protopsaltis, Angelos Akotantos. The theme itself was interpreted as a direct reflection of the Florence Union, and the icons were dated to the fifth decade of the 15th century — Vassilaki, op. cit., 405–422; there was also an attempt to shift the idea of reconciliation between the Eastern and the Western Church, expressed through the image of the two apostles embracing, deeper into the past and thus, without much reason, it was recognized in the said epigram by John Mauroupolous — Reptz, op. cit., 160–181.
Epiđauros Limira (end of 13th — beginning of 14th century), while from the centuries that followed the Turkish conquest of Constantinople, a large number of icons displaying this theme have been preserved, which certainly had to have existed in the previous period, judging by the already mentioned epigram by Chortasmenos. From the times of Ottoman rule, preserved examples have also survived of the two apostles embracing in the wall painting of the Holy Apostles in Kastoria (1547), in the Theotokos Zooodochos Pege, near Rethymnos on Crete (around 1550), in the parekklesion of St. George in the monastery of St. Paul on Mount Athos (1552), etc.

The oldest known example of the apostles Peter and Paul embracing, performed in fresco technique, is the fragment from Vatopedi. Judging by the size of the fragment, the two apostles were depicted as standing figures in the first zone, like the other preserved examples in monumental Byzantine art. Today, one cannot tell for certain which of the Vatopedi sacral buildings this fragment originated from. It was no longer in situ during Millet’s visit to Mount Athos, in the third decade of the last century. Still, bearing in mind that it was not until the achievements of Byzantine civilization were generally re-evaluated, during the second half and especially towards the end of the 19th century, and an awareness had begun to penetrate into the traditionally reserved monastic communities, such

The fundamental shortcoming in such interpretations is the lack of written sources, on the basis of which the apostles Peter and Paul would be recognized as personifications of the two Christian Churches in the schism. They were both equally revered in the West and in the East. There is no Orthodox church where the painting decoration does not include the two princes of the apostles and, their embrace, as the expression of the universal Christian ideas of communion and love, is far older, as we saw, than the aspirations to reconcile the two churches. The Lyon and the Florence Unions never became accepted in the broader layers of Byzantine society, therefore, there was no reflection of them to be found in the, otherwise, hermetic and conservative world of Byzantine painting.


34 G. Gounaris, Οι τοιχογραφίες των Αποστόλων και της Παναγίας Ρασσούτσας στην Καστοριά, Thessalonike 1980, 78; K. Kalokaires, Αι βυζαντινοί τοιχογραφίες τής Κρήτης, Athens 1957, 137; Millet, Monuments de l’Athos, pl. 193–2. In old Serbian art, this theme appears only once, in the wall decoration of the Church of SS. Peter and Paul in the village of Mušnikovo near Prižren, dating from 1563/4, which researchers believe was painted by Greek artists, A. Davdiov-Temerinski, Concordia Apostolorum: Загръж апостола Петра и Павла, Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности 32–33 (Постизантијска уметност на Балкану, I, Нови Сад 2003) 83–103.

35 The dimensions of this fresco fragment are 50 × 65 cm, and the apostles’ heads closely joined to each other occupy more than three quarters of its surface.
as those on Mount Athos, of the need to preserve such kinds of non-liturgical objects, it would appear most probable that this fresco fragment was taken from the wall of one of the medieval buildings in Vatopedi, precisely during the said period. Considering that in the monastery from that time there was only a wall decoration in two, not very large, domed parekklesia on the upper storey of the inner narthex of the katholikon, one can assume that the fragment with the apostles embracing was detached from the walls at the time when preparations were under way for them to be repainted in 1882.

One detail links the fragment with the apostles Peter and Paul and the oldest fresco painting of the Vatopedi katholikon, dated to the end of the 12th century. This refers to relatively small, yellowish-ochre nimbus that were not gilded, with a broader reddish-brown and a narrower white border around the heads of the chief apostles. The prophets in the naos had the same aureoles, judging by the remains beneath the later gilding, which is clearly visible on the lower half of the nimbus above the shoulders of the prophet Jonah. This similarity suggests that there was a group of painters, in which each painter applied diverse artistic interpretations. While the master-painter from the naos distanced himself with his achievements from the dominant linearism of the previous epoch, the painter who produced the two apostles embracing, held quite different manner. His artistic expression was completely in line with the late Komnenian tradition. But, the once animated expressive line suggesting the internal emotion of the depicted images is here transformed into an empty hard scheme, which, with its emphasized linearity, rather gives the impression of a faithful adherent to an outdated stylistic expression, than of a contemporary of the painters from Nerezi, of Christ

36 The parekklesia are south and north of the katechoumena, dedicated to the Archangels and to the Holy Trinity, and belong to the earliest construction phase of the main church.

37 This is the latest wall painting in the monastery which was done thanks to the archimandrite Pankratios of Vatopedi, cf. G. Millet, J. Parguiore, L. Petit, Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l’Athos, 1, Paris 1904, 31, no 96, 97.

The earlier views seem to be less likely, v. p. 107–108, because the Vatopedi refectory was reconstructed from its foundations in 1785, while today, the only Vatopedi church dedicated to the apostles is the graveyard church, outside the monastery walls, which was decorated back in 1683, ibidem, 36, 41, nos 117, 135; neither can the monastery’s tradition, recorded at the start of the 1970s, according to which the fragment originated from the parekklesion of the Apostles, situated on the walls north of the external narthex of the katholikon, Theophilos, prohegoumenos of Vatopedi, Χρονικόν περί της ἱερᾶς καὶ σεβασμιᾶς Μεγίστης Μονῆς Βατοπαιδίου Ἁγίου Όρους, Μακεδονικά 12 (1972) 85–86, be considered reliable. There is no data about the time of its erection, it was an integral part of the monastery northern wing dated from the 17th century which was destroyed in a fire on February 9th, 1966, Monή Βατοπαιδίου, Α’, 158–159. The parekklesion was completely destroyed then. Also, one should mention that the representation of the apostles Peter and Paul embracing did not necessarily have to adorn the walls of the churches dedicated to them, as one can see from the aforementioned examples.

38 Б. Милкович, Житија светог Саве као извори за историју средњовековне уметности, Београд 2008, 46–48; apart from the images of the prophets and martyrs preserved on the concaves of the arches in the eastern part of the church, one can attribute to the chief painter and partly repainted, standing figures of the bishops in the first zone of the diakonikon, such as the saints Polyeuktos and Gregory Thaumaturgos (?).

39 Cf. Μονή Βατοπαιδίου, Α’, 237, fig. 196.
the Saviour Αὐτοῦ or Djurdjevi Stupovi near Novi Pazar. The reduced palette and the tonic modulation of this artist’s incarnates also dissociate him from the colorful approach of the leading painters of the seventh and eighth decades of the 12th century. The images of the two apostolic koryphaioi with their rigid, expressionless demeanour are the work of a mediocre, perhaps, elderly artist, who, towards the end of that century, still persevered unwaveringly with his models from the period of the last Komnenoi. Among the few remains of the earliest fresco painting in the Vatopedi katholikon, one can distinguish another hand, the one that produced the image of St. Phokas in the narthex, which belonged to the painter, who, according to his artistic concepts, was in the middle of a developmental path between the two, previously mentioned artists. The possibility that all three belonged to one team of painters, working simultaneously on the decoration inside the church, would simply serve as one more testimony to the widespread practice in the Byzantine world, of allotting tasks in the secondary compartments of more complex architectonic ensembles, such as the Vatopedi katholikon, to less gifted painters. But, it is also evidence of the comprehensiveness of the reconstruction works in Vatopedi, in the last years of the 12th century, by virtue of which the two renowned monks from Serbia, Sava and Simeon, were memorialized in the monastery tradition as its second ktetors.40

40 Милковић, op. cit., 42–66.
стога према уобичајеној прaksi поверено украшавање споредних простора у време замашне обнове Ватопеда која је изведена током последњих година XII столећа, заслугом двојице углеђних српских монаха, Саве и Симеона.
The Athens Psalter, second half of 12th century
The Apostolos, State-Historical Museum, Moscow, second half of 13th century
The Holy Trinity in Ano Divri, Elis, Peloponnesos, second half of 13th century
РАДОВИ СА ТЕМАТСКОМ ОСНОВОМ

„Српско-бугарска узајамност у византијском свету XIII века“