

Elizabeta DIMITROVA

CULTURAL CSI – FOUR CASES OF SOCIO-ARTISTIC INVESTIGATION:
files, exhibits, evidence

Key words: *St. George at Kurbinovo, St. Nicholas at Manastir, St. Niketas at Banjani, St. Demetrius at Markova Sušica, Deacon and Referendarius John, King Marko, King Milutin.*



1. The church of Saint George at Kurbinovo
1. Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново

The article examines the issues of questionable dating of certain Byzantine monuments created in the territory of present day Republic of Macedonia in regard to their architectural assemblage and/or painterly arrangements and seeks for sustainable arguments in the spheres of historic sources, dedicatory inscriptions and creative approaches to artistic subjects.

To go wrong in one's own way is better than to go right in someone else's

F. Dostoevsky

Being defined as an action or a process of formal or systematic examination or research, the term investigation is used in regard to a number of divergent issues and a constellation of many different contexts; although usually associated with criminal cases and/



2. *The church of Saint George at Kurbinovo, false brick work ornamentation*
 2. *Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново, лажниот керамопластичен украс на фасадите*

or forensic practice¹, nominally it can be applied to other spheres of inquiry, such as science, social disciplines and humanities, as well. That is mostly due to its diversified meaning which can be correlated to the activities of interpretation in more than one way (exploration, examination, inspection, research, analysis etc.); thus investigation, as a method of establishment of veracity in any field of scholarly work or practical engagements, is the crucial step towards acquiring knowledge for solving the pending issues and/or unresolved and questionable subject matters. In that regard, the investigative process should be seen as a progression of activities or steps moving from evidence gathering tasks, to information analysis, to theory development and validation, to forming reasonable ground of validity and finally to establishing a solid structure for interpretation of the case in its complexity and with substantial or, at least, sustainable arguments.

However, during that complicated process, some of the steps can (and usually are) quite slippery: missing evidence, unreliable sources, lost traces, false identification, to name but a few. Therefore, one has to be not only experienced and persistent, but also open to new and reliable ideas if aiming to solve the open cases which have been challenging the scholars and practitioners for decades. With the ever increasing sophistication of the equipment utilized in field excavations, archeology might have succeeded

¹ J. J. Rayner, *Re-evaluating the Criminal Investigative Process: An Empirical Evaluation of Criminal Investigations in the US*, Hattiesburg 2014, pp. 41-52.

to ease the process of investigation; art history, on the other hand, still has to rely on human brain and its capacities to unravel the mysterious horizons of imprecise dating, unidentified iconographic subjects, unattributed fresco arrangements, unknown commissioners etc. In that (unfortunate) regard, this paper aims to disclose some of the pending issues in Byzantine painting created in the territory of present-day Macedonia through four relevant cases and four appropriate investigative methods. Each case will encompass the facts, the unresolved issues and the possible resolution.

Case 1 – the church of Saint George at the village of Kurbinovo

File: commissioner – unknown / date of construction – ca. 1190 / date of fresco painting – 1191 / author(s) of the frescoes – unidentified by name.

The church dedicated to Saint Gorge at the village of Kurbinovo occupies one of the most remarkable places in Byzantine art history due to the extraordinary painterly characteristics of its fresco ensemble².

² В. Н. Лазарев, *Живопись XI-XII веков вь Македоний*, Actes du XIIe Congrès international d'études byzantines I, Beograd 1963, pp. 129-131; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Византијске фреске у Југославији*, Beograd 1974, pp. 14-15; L. Hadermann-Misguish, Kurbinovo. *Les fresques de saint Georges et la peinture Byzantine du XII siècle*, Bruxelles 1975, pp. 43-318, 321-551; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Band IV, Giessen 1976, pp. 276-281; A. J. Wharton, *Art of Empire. Paint-*



3. *The church of Saint George at Kurbinovo, interior*
3. *Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново, ентериерот на црквата*

Being the earliest example of the depicted Amnos, which would eventually become the mandatory iconographic matrix for the sanctuaries of Byzantine temples, is more than a testimony for Kurbinovo's prime role in the entire Byzantine artistic creation³. The specific iconographic constellation of the pictures, as well as the esoteric oddities included in the visual character of the Kurbinovo scenes⁴, also speak

in favour of an avant-garde fresco arrangement, permeated with elusively depicted compositional components. The stylistic features of the ensemble embodied through the shivering drawing, elastic kinetic energy of the depicted figures, as well as dramatically playful draperies containing symbolic visual signals⁵ are another authentic quality of the Kurbinovo fresco panorama unseen in the entire development of Byzantine painterly production.

ing and Architecture of the Byzantine Periphery. A Comparative Study of Four Provinces, University Park and London 1988, pp. 123-128; Ц. Грозданов - Л. Хадерман-Мисгвиш, *Курбиново*, Скопје 1992, pp. 51-64, 74-79; Sh. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacret Mysteries. Program of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Seattle and London 1999, pp. 91-92; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Milano 2006, pp. 64-74; E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, Niš and Byzantium Symposium, Collection of scientific works VIII, Niš 2010, pp. 249-253; E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти Т. 3, Скопје 2013, pp. 1597-1607; E. Dimitrova, *Cuia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, Niš and Byzantium Symposium, Collection of scientific works XII, Niš 2014, pp. 301-303; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, *Seven Medieval Churches in the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje 2014, pp. 46-62; E. Dimitrova, *The Church of Saint George at Kurbinovo*, Skopje 2016, pp. 12-25; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, R. Paligora, Ph. Niewoehner, *Seven Churches in the Regions of Pelagonia, Mariovo and Prespa*, Skopje 2019, pp. 11-29.

³ Sh. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacret Mysteries. Program of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, pp. 91-92.

⁴ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mys-*

Exhibits and evidence:

The fresco decoration executed by the Kurbinovo masters is embellishing the walls of a modest religious edifice erected as a single nave temple with quite significant dimensions when the mentioned architectural type is in question. Its structural relation to the cathedral church dedicated to Saint Achilles – the center of Emperor Samuel's Archbishopric located in Prespa, not far away from Kurbinovo, has already been established with substantive arguments⁶. The inter-relation of the painterly programmes visualized in the sanctuaries of both churches in terms of illustrative and explicative consecutiveness has also been noticed⁷. However, Kurbinovo was built in a waste-

teries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting, pp. 249-253; Eadem, *Cuia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, pp. 301-303.

⁵ Eadem, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, p. 253.

⁶ E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, p. 1577.

⁷ E. Dimitrova, "The Da Vinci Mode". *Unsolved Mysteries of Macedonian Medieval Fresco Painting*, pp. 250-251.



4. *The church of Saint George at Kurbinovo, Virgin with Child*
 4. *Црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново, Богородица со Христос во апсидата*

land area, far from the medieval urban centers and erected with architectural features that can be loosely described as undistinguished and unattractive, even unnoticeable. Yet, the sensational fresco ensemble embellishing the interior of this modest architectural composite encompasses extraordinary iconographic innovations, as well as highly unconventional elements of the artistic expression of its authors. In that regard, CSI is to examine the discrepancy between the non imposing exterior and the ravishingly imaginative visual features of the fresco décor in the Kurbinovo church.

Possible disclosure:

Whatever modest the ground plan of the temple is, the dimensions of its perimeter are not to be taken as small. On the contrary, the length of 15 meters, particularly when one talks about a single nave church, is quite remarkable and it stands for an interior which is spatially undivided by supporting architectural structures and/or partition walls. Also, one has to mention that this unpretentiously configured interior space was accessed by three entrances, i.e. beside the main gate, *by default* positioned in the western wall of the edifice, two additional doors were “opened” in the subsidiary walls of the building, one of which was placed in the mid-section of the southern wall, while the other was “perforated” in the western part of the northern wall. Thereby, the western entrance has been used as an official doorway to the church, while the southern one has led the visitors directly

into the centre of its nave. What is puzzling in regard to the admission of the people who entered the temple is the door situated in the northern section of the edifice, which is elevated in relation to the floor level of the building. Judging by its location, it was most probably used as an entrance to the church from another architectural structure positioned higher than the temple itself. Since no archaeological probes have been done at the site of the Kurbinovo church, one cannot assume what might have been built or attached to the north wall of the edifice. The elevated doorway which served as a passage between the pre-supposed annex and the main body of the temple is a sufficient evidence to the fact that the Kurbinovo edifice was not as modest as it appears today.

Another fact, already confirmed by the scholars, is that Kurbinovo resembles Saint Achilles, the cathedral church of Emperor Samuel – the autocratic ruler of this territory from two centuries earlier - in a proportionally smaller scale. Searching for the intermediate historical link between the two monuments, we do not hesitate to point to the most remarkable token of Tzar Samuel’s reign as an era of political and ecclesiastical independence, as well as to the recognizable historical momentum when the region of Prespa has been the center of a powerful Empire with its own autonomous church organization⁸. Also,

⁸ М. Б. Панов, *Византиска Македонија*, Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти, т. 2, Скопје 2013, pp. 1182-1190.



5. *The church of Saint Nicholas in Manastir*
5. *Црквата Свети Никола во Манастир*

one has to remember that the architectural and artistic novelties invented by the creators of Samuel's cultural heritage, preserved at several sites in present-day Macedonia⁹, have still been displayed to the commissioners of art in the times of weakened social, political and cultural activities at the end of the 12th century, during the reign of Angeloi. The progressive architectural configuration of Saint Achilles cathedral, as well as its avant-garde apsidal painterly arrangement¹⁰ would have probably been the most inspiring for an individual well familiar with the significant historic and cultural attainments and ambitious enough to resume the past legacy in a different, yet recognizable form of artistic imagination in the same geographical region of Prespa.

Unassuming, yet large enough for a single aisle temple; non imposing, yet decorated with false brickwork facade ornamentation¹¹; modest in regard to the architectural plan, yet a recognizable replica of a

⁹ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1564-1565.

¹⁰ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Фреските и иконите од X и XI век во Македонија (Во периодот на Самоил и по него)*, Културно наследство VI, Скопје 1975, pp. 40-42; Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1555-1556

¹¹ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *За некои градителски и сликарски проблеми на црквата во Курбиново, Ликовна уметност 4-5 (1978-79)*, Скопје 1979, pp. 23-24.

powerful building “predecessor”; inconspicuous by its location, yet situated in the formerly significant Prespa region, the church dedicated to Saint George in Kurbinovo, by all means, has more to offer than meets the eye. Moreover, the fresco painting of the temple is everything but traditional and conventional: exciting genre details in the compositions, esoteric insertions in the Biblical scenes, distortion of the common arrangement of the Gospel episodes, exotic implications within the visual narratives, etc¹². The stylistic features of the ensemble, such are: the restless spirit of the forms, the intangible incorporeity of the figures, the lavish vividness of the sights, the elastic movements and fluid energy of the represented characters, the glamorous dynamics of the depicted draperies, the invigorated rhythm of the motion, the untamed swing of pictorial energy, the saturated temperance and the wavy dynamic expression of the spectacles speak in favour of a luscious painterly structure spiced by the restive sparks of an unrestricted and uncompromised artistic imagination. Starting from the notion that the book is usually judged by its cover¹³, in other words that the form is a visual expression of the essence, we might get closer to solve the issue of the alleged discrepancy between the unattractive exterior and the exquisite fresco

¹² E. Dimitrova, *The Church of Saint George at Kurbinovo*, Skopje 2016, pp. 12-20.

¹³it's what's inside that matters....a quote by M. Green



6. *The church of Saint Nicholas in Manastir, Officiating Church Fathers*
 6. *Црквата Свети Никола во Манастир, Литургиската служба на архијереите*

ensemble of Kurbinovo on the ground of the above stated. Namely, if someone has tried to commission a sacral edifice as a replica of a significant building but still unlikeable enough not to attract the attention of everybody, that would be the khetor of the Kurbinovo church. What is inside that building, i.e. the fresco decoration extraordinary in all its visual aspects (programme, iconography, painterly expression, and aesthetic impression) has also not been done for the common congregation¹⁴. In that regard, we assume that if one chooses to commission a temple to be the echo of the “good old times” with an ambition to push forward the progressive legacy from the past, one should do that for himself and those who share the same ideas. That would, by all means, require location distant enough, as well as an exterior unattractive enough for the exclusion of the unwanted ones. This would imply that the highly esoteric oddities, the imaginative cryptograms, as well as the metaphoric wisecracks embedded in the visually exclusive fresco ensemble would have been intended only for the chosen ones.....as it was most probably done in the case of Kurbinovo.

Case 2 – the church of Saint Nicholas at the village of Manastir

File: commissioner – Ioanikios, aka. Akakios (monk) / date of construction – 1266 / date of fresco painting – 1271 / author(s) of the frescoes – the painterly studio of Deacon and Referendarius John.

¹⁴ E. Dimitrova, *Quia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, pp. 301-303.

The Church dedicated to Saint Nicholas in the village of Manastir is the first chronologically precisely determined Byzantine monument in the territory of present-day Macedonia, executed by a well known artistic atelier¹⁵. Although relatively conservative in regard to the iconographic arrangement of the painterly programme, as well as old fashioned in the visual execution of the themes, the fresco decoration of Manastir displays some interesting notions related to the diversity of stylistic approaches of the painters

¹⁵ Д. Коцо - П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Манастир*, Скопје 1959, pp. 37-97; Ф. Баришић, *Два грчка натписа из Манастира и Струге*, Зборник радова Византолошког института VIII/2, Београд 1964, pp. 13-27; R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, pp. 291-295; P. Kostovska, *Reaching for Paradise – The Program of the North Aisle of the Church of St. Nicholas in Manastir, Mariovo*, Културно Наследство 28-29 (2002-2003), Скопје 2004, pp. 67-89; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 141-142; P. Kostovska, *The Concept of Hope for Salvation of Akakios' Monastic Programme in St. Nicholas at Manastir*, Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies Vol. III, London 2016, pp. 289-290; E. Dimitrova, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of scientific works VI, Niš 2008, pp. 194-198, 200-203; E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти Т. 3, pp. 1666-1671; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, R. Paligora, Ph. Niewoehner, *Seven Churches in the Regions of Pelagonia, Mariovo and Prespa*, Скопје 2019, pp. 31-51.



7. The church of Saint Nicholas in Manastir, Officiating Church Fathers, detail
7. Црквата Свети Никола во Манастир, Литургиската служба на архијереите (детал)

commissioned to create the fresco ensemble¹⁶. Diversified enough to encompass all the existing stylistic trends in the region from the second half of the 13th century, the fresco decoration of Manastir can be seen as a painterly manual of the so called artistic pluralism of Macedonian fresco painting in the era prior to the Paleologan revival¹⁷. However, among the various styles visible in the structure of Manastir's fresco panorama, one can notice that the most discernible portions of the ensemble, positioned closest to the eyes of the beholders, have been executed in a manner inventive enough to be given an appropriate and distinctive title¹⁸.

Exhibits and evidence:

In regard to the authorship of the frescoes in Manastir, we can, by all means, rely on the commissioner's inscription stretching along the southern and northern wall of the central aisle of the church, which, in the last portion mentions....*and tearing the church down, he erected from foundation this holy temple and beautified it commissioning its painting with diverse artistic skills and a great number of*

¹⁶ Д. Коцо - П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Манастир*, pp. 91-94; Е. Dimitrova, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, pp. 194-198.

¹⁷ Р. Miljković-Peppek, *Un courant stylistique dans la peinture du XIIIe siècle en Macédoine*, Patrimoine culturel IV, Скопје 1971, p. 23.

¹⁸ Е. Dimitrova, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, pp. 195-198.

*masters with the most modest John, Deacon and Referendarius of the holiest Archbishopric.....*¹⁹. The information given by this inscribed *document* is precise enough to identify the leader of the painting studio engaged to execute the fresco decoration in the church - John, deacon by occupation and a high ranking official within the Ohrid Archbishopric with a position of *referendarius*, i.e. secretary general. As the inscription states, he was commissioned to organize the painters and accomplish the task of decorating the church with fresco ensemble, whereat a great number of artists were gathered to fulfill the donor's requirement for *beautification* of his endowment. That is a fact confirmed by the written source. Hence, CSI is to examine whether John was actually involved in the practical work of frescoing the walls of the church or he was but an authority committed to do the counseling work as the highest possible representative of the Church organization.

Possible disclosure:

As the donor's inscription in the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas states, the temple's interior was embellished with a fresco programme executed with *diverse artistic skills and a great number of masters.*

¹⁹ Ф. Баришић, *Два грчка натписа из Манастира и Струге*, pp. 16-17; X. Меловски, *За натписот од црквата Св. Никола, с. Манастир, Мариово*, Годишен зборник на Филозофскиот факултет 23(49), Скопје 1996, pp. 211-212; Р. Kostovska, N. Popovska, *The Painted Inscriptions in Manastir and Struga Revised*, Patrimonium Mk VIII/13, Скопје 2015, p. 140.



8. *The church of Saint Nicholas in Manastir, Communion*
8. *Црквата Свети Никола во Манастир, Причестувањето на апостолите*

The number of the artists actively involved in the creation of Manastir's fresco decoration has already been detected by older scholars and confirmed with the latest research activities of the younger ones²⁰. Beholding the portions of the fresco ensemble attributed to each of the four authors of the painted decoration of Manastir, one can conclude the following: two of them were addicted to the linear tradition of the 12th century, which speaks of their work in the church as conventional in the expression and old fashioned in the manner of exposition of the depicted subjects²¹; the third one was an extra progressive master well familiar with the artistic trend dedicated to plastic modeling of the forms, the manner of whom can be defined as striking in the visual impression and prominent in the approach to depict monumental figures with vigorous anatomy²². The fourth one, determined by the author of these lines as a painterly mediator between the tradition and the new stylistic trends of the late 13th centu-

ry²³, was the creator of the monumental figures of the holy warriors in the central aisle of the temple depicted with surgically precise drawing, voluminously modeled facial contours of the saintly characters, as well as resplendent military equipment pictured with remarkable imagination for details.

If one should try to find other examples of this painterly procedure, one has to look for stylistic analogies in the fresco ensembles created in the 70ties and 80ties of the 13th century, i.e. in the period which is in close chronological approximation to the date of origination of Manastir's frescoes. In that regard, the greatest similarities can be found in the depiction of the saintly figures within the fresco arrangement of the church dedicated to Saint Archangel Michael in Prilep from ca. 1275²⁴. However, this stylistic correlation cannot be confirmed with substantial arguments, such as donor's inscription with data related to the authorship or, even better, the author's signature. In the domain of easel painting, however, there is one representative example, which, to our knowledge, can be of a great assistance in solving the case of authorization of the handsome soldiers depicted in

²⁰ Д. Коцо - П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Манастир*, pp. 91-92; П. Костовска, *Црквата Св. Никола во с. Манастир* (unpublished doctoral thesis), Скопје 2008, pp. 436-460.

²¹ Д. Коцо - П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Манастир*, p. 92; П. Костовска, *Црквата Св. Никола во с. Манастир*, pp. 438-439; Е. Димитрова, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, p. 195.

²² Д. Коцо - П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Манастир*, p. 96; П. Костовска, *Црквата Св. Никола во с. Манастир*, pp. 450-455; Е. Димитрова, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, pp. 201-203.

²³ Е. Димитрова, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, pp. 195-198.

²⁴ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Живописот и прилепските зографи*, Прилеп и прилепско низ историјата, Прилеп 1971, p. 101; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L' rte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, p. 146.



9. *The church of Saint Niketas at Banjani*
9. *Црквата Свети Никита во Бањани*

Manastir – the icon with the image of Saint George from Struga²⁵. Executed in 1266/1267, the icon picturing the young military official depicted with meticulous exposition of the facial volume, firm bodily structure, as well as lavishly ornamented garment, bears an inscription which says: *Devout gift from the pious deacon with a rank of referendarius who has religiously depicted your holy image in diverse artistic accomplishments. It stands in Struga of Ohrid. John prays with devotion. It was painted by the hand of zograph John in the summer of 6775, ind. 0A*²⁶.

Although a little bit puzzling for mentioning the name John twice in a row, once in a context of a praying donor and second time referring to the author of the donation, this inscription reveals much more than it is initially supposed to. Namely, it is quite clear that this written prayer is authorized by *the pious deacon with a rank of referendarius*, the same one mentioned

in the commissioner's inscription in the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas in Manastir, which states that this character has gathered many talented artists to execute the painted decoration. If this individual has "gathered" artists, he could be, by all means, determined as the leader of the painterly studio that accomplished the frescoes in the church. If he, as the inscription attests, conducted the work on the frescoes done by several artists, he could easily be one of the authors since the leader of the atelier was supposed to give directions to his colleagues in regard to the iconographic and painterly features of the ensemble. Being a deacon, he could have done this task much more efficiently than a layman²⁷, which, in Macedonian art of the Middle Ages would not have been a single case (Metropolitan John, the Painter from late 14th century - to name but one person known for being a high church official and an artist at the same time). The stylistic correspondence between the image of Saint George from Struga and the representations of the holy warriors pictured in the central aisle in Manastir is more than a testimony to the participation of the same artistic person in the execution of both frescoes and the easel work of art²⁸. Hence, one

²⁵ P. Miljković-Peppek, *L'icône de saint Georges de Struga, oeuvre de peintre Jean*, Cahiers Archéologiques XIX, Paris 1969, pp. 213-221; Idem, *L'art de l'icône en Macédoine médiévale*, Trésors médiévaux de la République de Macédoine, Paris 1999, p. 60.

²⁶ X. Меловски, *Натписот од 1266/67 година на иконата на Св. Ѓорѓи од Струга*, Пелагонитиса, Битола 2003, pp. 149-155; P. Kostovska, N. Popovska, *The Painted Inscriptions in Manastir and Struga Revised*, pp. 141-142.

²⁷ S. Kalopissi-Verti, *Painters in Late Byzantine Society*, Cahiers Archéologiques 42, Paris 1994, p. 147.

²⁸ П. Костовска, *Црквата Св. Никола во с. Манастир*, p. 471; E. Dimitrova, *Seven Streams. The Stylistic Tendencies of Macedonian Fresco Painting in the 13th Century*, p. 197.



10. *The church of Saint Niketas at Banjani, Dormition*
 10. *Црквата Свети Никита во Бањани, Успението*

can possibly conclude that it was the icon of Saint George (1267) executed in a “progressively traditional” stylistic manner to be the aesthetic *trigger* which enabled Deacon and Referendarius John to continue his painterly career in the 70ties of the 13th century.

Case 3 – the church of Saint Niketas at the village of Banjani

File: commissioner – Uroš III Milutin (ruler/king) / **date of construction** – 1300 / **date of fresco painting** – 1322/1323 / **author(s) of the frescoes** – Michael Astrapas.

The church dedicated to Saint Niketas near the village of Banjani is considered to be the last fresco arrangement created and signed by the great painterly master – Michael Astrapas²⁹. Done in the gold-

²⁹ H. Hallensleben, *Die Malerschule des Königs Milutin*, Giessen 1963, pp. 29-30, 54-56, 121-127; R. Hamann-Mac Lean und Horst Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien von 11 bis zum frühen 14 Jahrhundert*, pp. 31-32; П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Делото на зографите Михаило и Еутихиј*, Скопје 1967, pp. 188-190; B. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin*, Belgrade 1999, pp. 83-86, 134-137 et passim; E. Димитрова, *За мизансценот и за кулисите. Сцени од ликовната драматопеја на македонското средновековно сликарство*, Македонско наследство 29, Скопје 2006, pp. 29; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 168-172; E. Димитрова, *За динамиката на композициските структури во палеологовското сликарство на македонската територија*, Македонско наследство 32, Скопје 2008, pp. 10-11; Eadem, *Spiritual Architects – The Construction of Architectural Backdrops in the Work of Some Painting Studios from the 14th Century*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of scientific works VII, Niš 2009, pp. 235-236; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, V. Pjovska, *Skopje. Seven Monuments of Art and Architecture*, Skopje 2010, pp. 24-35; E. Dimitrova, *Pretty Colours: Chromatic Analysis of the Palette of Some renowned 14th Century Fresco Painters*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of scientific works X, Niš 2012, pp. 347-348; E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1699-1706; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, *Seven Medieval Churches from the Republic of Macedonia*, pp. 102-117; M. Марковиќ, *Свети Никита код Скопља. Задужбина краља Милутина*, Београд 2015, pp. 99-217.

en years of his age and career, the decoration of St. Niketas does not display any iconographic novelties or visual oddities characteristic of his earlier works of art³⁰; still, Michael Astrapas’ painterly energy glows with its potential charge and creates biblical spectacles full of dynamism and visual tension. Academically correct in the execution of the pictures,

³⁰ E. Dimitrova, *Cuia Culpa? Lapses and Misdemeanors of Medieval Artists in Macedonia*, pp. 304-309.



11. *The church of Saint Niketas at Banjani, Deposition from the Cross*
 11. *Црквата Свети Никита во Бањани, Симнувањето од крстот*

traditionally bound to the painterly premises of the Paleologan style and deeply inspired by the manner of classical order in the compositions, Michael Astrapas in Saint Niketas has completed the three decades long career as a leader of the painterly studio established by his father³¹.

Exhibits and evidence:

Known as the court painter of King Milutin, Michael Astrapas, altogether with his associates, has executed some twenty fresco ensembles owing to the logistic and financial support of his benefactor³². Although, only five of them has been firmly attributed to his fresco studio on the ground of the preserved inscriptions (completely or partially)³³, his painter-

ly idiolect is highly recognizable in, at least, a dozen other monuments created during the reign of the Serbian monarch (1282-1321)³⁴. Hence, if we take a look at the chronological spectrum of King Milutin's endowment in Banjani, we will find that, according to historical sources, Saint Niketas was founded in 1299/1300, a date confirmed by official charters issued by Byzantine Emperors³⁵. The investigation of the fresco painting related to its dating, on the other hand, points to the year of 1322/23 as the most appropriate chronological reference to the creation of the decorative ensemble in the church³⁶. Hence, CSI is to examine the time gap between the date of the building of the edifice and the momentum of its fresco decoration which spans over more than two decades.

³¹ М. Марковић, *Уметничка делатност Михаила и Евтихија. Садашња знања, спорна питања и правци будућих истраживања*, Зборник Народног музеја – Београд XVII/2, Београд 2004, pp. 109-110.

³² Е. Dimitrova, *The "X" Colours. The Artistic Ateliers, the Stylistic Handwriting, the Palette Range and the Appliance of Science*, Balkan Symposium on Archaeometry. Science Meets Archaeology & Art History. Book of Proceedings, Ohrid 2008, pp. 9-10.

³³ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Пишуваните податоци за зографите Михаил Астрапа и Евтихиј и за некои нивни соработници*, Гласник на Институтот за национална историја 1/2 Скопје 1960, pp. 151-158; В. Todić, *'Signatures' des*

peintres Michel Astrapas et Eutychios. Fonction et signification, *Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Σωτήρη Κίτσα, Ωεσσαλονίκη* 2001, πп. 646-650; М. Марковић, *Свети Никита код Скопља. Задужбина краља Милутина*, pp. 204-206,

³⁴ В. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin*, pp. 227-260.

³⁵ В. Мошин и Ј. Славева, *Манастирот Св. Никита во Скопска Црна Гора и хиландарскиот пирг Хрусија*, Споменници за средновековната и поновата историја на Македонија I, Скопје 1975, pp. 286-292, 319-323; F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453*, IV, München-Berlin 1960, pp. 118, 298-300.

³⁶ М. Марковић, *Свети Никита код Скопља. Задужбина краља Милутина*, pp. 207-217.



12. The church of Saint Niketas at Baŋani, *Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple*
 12. Црквата Свети Никита во Бањани, *Изгонувањето на трговците од храмот*

Possible disclosure:

The fact that the fresco decoration of the church of Saint Niketas does not display an image of its commissioner, King Milutin, a person proud of his royal portraiture³⁷, strongly pointed to the chronology of the painterly ensemble after 1321 a couple of decades ago. Recent investigations established even more precise date of the execution of the frescoes in the temple in 1322/1323³⁸. Hence this would be the closing date of the project which, according to the preserved historic documents, has started in 1300. Namely, *after finding it devastated on the territory of his Kingdom, Milutin renovated the monastery dedicated to Saint Niketas*, which is confirmed by the charter issued in 1299/1300³⁹. Several years later, the king issued another charter according to which he donated his endowment to the newly founded pyrgos of Chilandar monastery in times convenient for enlargement of Milutin's religious center on Mount Athos; the date of this, second charter, has been established in 1307/1308⁴⁰. That would imply that the catholicon of Saint Niketas monastery was probably

built by this date⁴¹, i.e. the renovation of the main body of the monastic complex was done prior to the act of its donation to Chilandar's coastal tower. In these circumstances, one could assume that King Milutin's main reason for the renovation of Saint Niketas was the necessity to enrich/extend the feudal estate of Chilandar monastery, more precisely - to ensure the financial independence of the pyrgos rather than the intent to establish a religious center in the newly conquered Macedonian territory.

If we go back to the career of master Michael Astrapas, who left his patronymic signature on the southern wall of Saint Niketas church⁴², and try to trace his professional whereabouts in the period 1300 – 1324, our quest should look like this: he most certainly worked on the frescoes of the Holy Mother of God Ljeviška temple in the period around 1309-1313⁴³; prior to this date nothing can be argued by signatures or inscriptions; in 1314, Astrapas was already in the church dedicated to Sts Joachim and Anne in Studenica⁴⁴ where no inscriptions or sig-

³⁷ B. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin*, pp. 52-60.

³⁸ M. Марковић, *Свети Никита код Скопља. Задужбина краља Милутина*, pp. 216-217.

³⁹ В. Мошин, Л. Славева, *Манастирот Св. Никита кај Скопје и хиландарскиот пирг Хрусија*, p. 313.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 312-315.

⁴¹ М. Марковић, *Свети Никита код Скопља. Задужбина краља Милутина*, p. 53.

⁴² Ibidem, 204-207.

⁴³ Д. Панић, Г. Бабић, *Богородица Лјевишка*, Београд 1975, pp. 9-27.

⁴⁴ Г. Бабић, *Краљева црква у Студеници*, Београд 1987, pp. 20-21.



13. The church of Saint Demetrios at Sušica
13. Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица

natures have been preserved, as well; however, the painterly manner, i.e. the process of execution of the frescoes shows too much similarities with the style displayed in Staro Nagoričino (authorship confirmed by signatures); in 1315, Michael Astrapas executed the fresco decoration of the catholicon of Saint Prochor of Pčinja monastery⁴⁵, where a signature with his Christian name is preserved to this day; in the time span 1316 – 1318, the great painter was engaged in King Milutin's endowment in Staro Nagoričino⁴⁶ (signatures preserved on two locations - in the naos and in the passageway from the naos to the narthex of the temple); having finished the ensemble in the church of Saint George in Staro Nagoričino, Michael Astrapas proceeded with his professional pathway to Gračanica and accomplished the monumental repertoire in the church dedicated to the Annunciation in 1319-1321⁴⁷. Leaving aside some fresco arrangements that are still unattributed, yet, according to our perception, might take place among those authorized by master Michael Astrapas through future investigations, we can easily conclude the following: in the period between the donation of Saint Niketas to Hilandar's pyrgos in 1308 (when the church was probably completed in terms of architectural struc-

ture) and 1321 (when King Milutin, the khetor of Saint Niketas temple, died), Michael Astrapas was constantly and continuously engaged in execution of fresco ensembles all of which were commissioned by the Serbian monarch.

If we now try to sublime the data regarding the history of Saint Niketas monastery given by historical sources and those linked to the career of Michael Astrapas, the author of Saint Niketas' frescoes, confirmed by investigations of renowned art historians, we will end up with the following results: Saint Niketas monastery has been donated to the Hilandar's pyrgos in 1308, a point in time when the catholicon of the monastic complex was most certainly erected as an architectural unit; master Astrapas has been engaged in creation of fresco ensembles commissioned by King Milutin in the time span between 1309 and 1321; in October 1321 King Milutin died whereat his commissionership relative to Saint Niketas *de jure* and *de facto* ended; Michael Astrapas left his signature in Saint Niketas church, confirming the authorship of the frescoes in the temple; in 1321 Saint Niketas' legal status was changed, in other words – from a feudal estate of Hilandar's pyrgos, it became a property of Hilandar's monastery and came under its direct administration⁴⁸; the dating of the frescoes

⁴⁵ B. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin*, p. 319.

⁴⁶ Idem, *Staro Nagoričino*, Београд 1998, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁷ Idem, *Грачаница. Сликарство*, Београд – Приштина 1988, pp. 69-74.

⁴⁸ В. Мошин, Л. Славева, *Манастирот Св. Никита кај Скопје и хиландарскиот пирг Хрусија*, pp. 347-350.

in Saint Niketas has been chronologically specified in 1322/1323⁴⁹. These are the facts substantiated by documentary files, which could push forward the less substantiated, yet highly probable premises: after the execution of the fresco decoration in the katholicon of Chilandar monastery has been completed in 1321⁵⁰, the Chilandar's fraternity, being the immediate administrator/owner of Saint Niketas, commissioned the frescoes in the temple entrusting the job to the favourite painter of King Milutin – the renowned master Michael Astrapas. Having created at least dozen fresco ensembles under the patronage of the Serbian monarch in the period 1309 - 1321, Astrapas accomplished his, most probably, last artistic work in Saint Niketas under the auspices of the new proprietors of King Milutin's endowment. In that regard, he has reached the conclusion of his long and prosperous painterly career shortly after the death of his royal benefactor.

Case 4 – the church of Saint Demetrius at the village of Markova Sušica

File: commissioner – Demetrius Volkašin, King Marko (rulers/kings) / date of construction – ca. 1345/1346 / date of fresco painting – 1376/1377 / author(s) of the frescoes – members of an Ohrid city atelier.

The church dedicated to Saint Demetrius at the village of Markova Sušica, known as the Marko's monastery, is enumerated among the most aristocratic foundations in the territory of Macedonia and belongs to the extraordinary stylistic manner of deeply emotional painterly expression⁵¹. Work of art of a painterly atelier origi-



14. The church of Saint Demetrius at Sušica, interior
14. Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица, ентериерот на храмот

⁴⁹ М. Марковић, *Уметничка делатност Михаила и Евтихија. Садашња знања, спорна питања и правци будућих истраживања*, pp. 106.

⁵⁰ М. Марковић – В. Т. Хостетер, *Прилог хронологији градње и осликавања хиландарског католикона*, Хиландарски зборник 10, Београд 1998, pp. 207-209

⁵¹ Н. Ношпал-Никулска, *За ктиторската композиција и натписот во Марковиот манастир – село Сушица, Скопско*, Гласник на Институтот за национална историја XV, Скопје 1971, pp. 225-235; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Марков манастир - Охрид*, Зборник за ликовне уметности 8, Нови Сад 1972, pp. 131-160; Z. Gavrilović, *The Portrait of King Marko at Markov Manastir (1376-1381)*, Byzantinische Forschungen XVI, Amsterdam 1991, pp. 415-428; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Представа краља Марка на јужној фасади цркве Светог Димитрија у Марковом манастиру*, Кралот Марко во историјата и во традицијата, Прилеп 1997, pp. 299-307; S. Korunovski - E.

Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, 201-206; I. Sinkević, *Representing without icon: presence and image of king Marko in the church of St. Demetrius near Susica*, Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies vol. III, London 2006, pp. 317-318; E. Димитрова, *За мизансценот и за кулсите. Сцени од ликовната драматопеја на македонското средновековно сликарство*, pp. 22-26; Eadem, *The Portal to Heaven, Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, Niš & Byzantium Symposium, The Collection of scientific works V, Niš 2007, pp. 378-379; S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, pp. 201-206; E. Димитрова, *За динамиката на композициските структури во палеологовското сликарство на македонската територија*, pp. 16-19; Eadem, *Spiritual Architects – The Construction of Architectural Backdrops in the Work of Some Painting Studios from the 14th Century*, pp. 241-245; E. Dimitrova, G. Velkov, V. Пјовска, *Skopje. Seven Monuments of Art and Architecture*, pp. 48-59; E. Dimitrova, *Pretty Colours: Chromatic Analysis of the Palette of Some renowned 14th Century Fresco Painters*, pp.



15. The church of Saint Demetrios at Sušica, highest zones of painterly decoration

15. Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица, највисоките зони на фрескодекорацијата

nated in Ohrid's cultural milieu⁵², the fresco panorama of Marko's monastery radiates with the ravaging rhythm of artistic handwriting, severe distortion of expressively modeled forms, as well as overwhelming psychological charge of the depicted scenes. With the tempestuous whirlpool of bodily motions, intensive gesticulation of the saintly figures, suggestive facial expressions of the represented characters, the masters of the painted decoration in the church at Sušica have created a panorama of dramatic tension⁵³ which sparkles across the walls of the temple as a colossal picture of an unavoidable historic tragedy.

349-350; E. Dimitrova, S. Korunovski, S. Grandakovska, *Sredновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, pp. 1744-1754; E. Dimitrova, *V. I. Personalities in Medieval Macedonia*, *Folia Archaeologica Balkanica* III, Skopje 2015, pp. 605-609.

⁵² В. Ј. Ђурић, *Марков манастир - Охрид*, pp. 131-160.

Exhibits and evidence:

The tragic connotation of the fresco painting in the catholicon of King Marko's monastery was, by all means, related to the massacre committed at the River of Marica, as well as the bloody aftermath of this fatale battle⁵⁴. The chronological consecutiveness of the military disaster from 1371, which had changed the historic destiny of the entire region, as well as the creation of the painterly panorama permeated with visual tokens of mortal fear and resounding intimidation, is more than evident and inevitable in the frescoes of the temple. Confirmed by the commissioners' inscription, the year of 1376/1377 as the date of the finalization of the project, i.e. execution of the frescoes⁵⁵, probably coincides with the establishment of the vassalage of King Marko, although some more experienced scholars think otherwise⁵⁶. What is more intriguing than the issue of when King Marko did become a vassal to the Ottomans, is the other chronological reference encompassed by the donors' inscription, namely that the erection of the church has started in 1344/1345⁵⁷, *in the age of the pious king Volkašin, to be completed during the reign of King Marko (1376/1377)*. In this complicated chronological and titular mixture of terms encompassed by the khetorial inscription in Marko's monastery, CSI is to examine why the project was carried out in such a long period that covers more than three decades.

⁵³ S. Korunovski - E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia L' rte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, 205-206.

⁵⁴ Ц. Грозданов, *Маричката битка, вазалитетот на крал Марко живописот на Марковиот манастир*, Предавања на XIV меѓународен семинар за македонски јазик, литература и култура (Охрид 1991), Скопје 1992, pp. 118-120.

⁵⁵ Н. Ношпал-Никулска, *За ктиторската композиција и натписот во Марковиот манастир – село Сушица, Скопско*, pp. 225-235; Eadem, *Марковиот манастир – монумент како документ низ историјата*, Споменници за средновековната и поновата историја на Македонија I, Скопје 1975, p. 405.

⁵⁶ Ц. Грозданов, *Маричката битка, вазалитетот на крал Марко и живописот на Марковиот манастир*, pp. 118-120.

⁵⁷ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Представа краља Марка на јужној фасади цркве Светог Димитрија у Марковом манастиру*, p. 301.

Possible disclosure:

As it is well known, the political career of the family of King Marko as immigrants from Herzegovina began in the age of Emperor Dušan and reached its climax with the coronation of King Volkašin in 1365. Being a courtier during the reign of Stefan Dušan, Volkašin gained a certain amount of feudal power, but prior to 1350 he is only known as zhupan in the area around Prilep and only later, around 1360 as a chelnik, a title given to the middle class of nobility⁵⁸. In 1364 or 1365 he became a despot, shortly before he was crowned as a monarch and co-ruler to the Emperor Uroš⁵⁹. Although the continuous advancement of his political career cannot be brought into question, according to the historical sources one has no reason to doubt that Volkašin received the crown in 1365 and only then became a King, i.e. official monarch of the Serbian state due to the inability of Emperor Uroš to successfully govern his realm as did his father, Dušan, in his own time. Hence, Demetrius Volkašin was politically active as a king in the period between 1365 when enthroned, and 1371 when, on September 26, 1371, he died in the battle at the River Maritsa – a date that we will all remember as the Day D, which changed the course of European history.... and not in a good direction.

If we now turn our attention to the commissioners' inscription in the catholicon of Marko's monastery, we will notice that the title of king associated to the name of Volkašin is mentioned twice⁶⁰: once in connection to the renovation and beautification of the temple done by the *devout King* and his family (1376/1377) and second time (further in the inscription) in relation to the beginning of the erection of the monastery *in the days of the Christ-loving king* (1344/1345). Of course, in those *days*, Volkašin was only a nobleman who has just started to climb the stairway to the ultimate political power and was, most probably, administrator of the Skopje area⁶¹, where the erection of the monastery has just *started*. In that regard, nor 1376/77, neither 1344/45 can be coupled with the reigning title of Volkašin as a king since he was crowned in 1365 and died in 1371, which means that only in that particular chronological interval he could have been entitled as a monarch. Hence, the title of king attached to the name of Volkašin is only

⁵⁸ Г. Острогорски, *Серска област после Душанове смрти*, Београд 1965, pp. 13- 14.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 12.

⁶⁰ П. Миљковиќ-Пепек, *Непознат трезор икони*, Скопје 2001, p. 13.

⁶¹ М. Б. Панов, *Византиска Македонија*, p. 1225.



16. The church of Saint Demetrios at Sušica, Dormition

16. Црквата Свети Димитрија во Сушица, Успението

honorary in both cases, most likely due to the commissioner's desire of King Marko to keep the memory of his predecessor as a legitimate antecedent of his own royal throne⁶².

In that respect, the time gap of more than thirty years - between 1345 and 1377, i.e. opening and closing date of the project, seems even more unacceptable. Such a wide chronological distance between the start and the finish of the enterprise could be explained only by intermissions of a large scale such are military disasters or death of the characters involved in its implementation, both of which coincide in 1371, when King Volkašin was killed in the battle at Marica; hence, his unfortunate faith could, by all means, explain the prolongation of the project's activities between 1371 and 1377, when the painted decoration commissioned by King Marko was completed, which is confirmed by the donors' inscription

⁶² E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven, Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, p. 379.

executed in fresco technique. On the other hand, no intermissions have been detected in the building of the edifice⁶³ which would cause significant delay of the erection process. Moreover, the architectural structure of the catholicon of Marko's monastery seems to have adopted some components of the spatial concepts of the churches in Matejče and Psača built in the 50ties of the 14th century⁶⁴, i.e. much later than 1344/45. Therefore, one can only accept that the temple was built subsequent to 1365⁶⁵ when Volkašin was officially bearing the title of king, and after a break due to the death of the monarch/commissioner, as well as the disadvantageous circumstances caused by the Ottoman invasion, was fresco painted by King Marko in 1376/77. Of course, the date referring to 1344/45 cannot be excluded from the inscription as chronological information, which, to our opinion can be associated to the establishment of the monastery as a real estate that should be eventually built and *beautified* in a form of a family endowment on the feudal property of the nobleman Volkašin. As an act of religious backup to his political administration over the Skopje region, the establishment of a monastic institution with all its prerogatives would have been the most appropriate confirmation of his ambition for further advancement of his aristocratic career. Being chronologically linked to the time when Volkašin officially became King Dušan's courtier,

the date 1344/45 actually denotes the beginning of the successful social climbing of an insignificant foreign settler up the stairs leading to the powerful royal throne.

If we keep in mind the most influential quote of the forensic science: "Context is everything" authorized by Professor Nick Fennimore, we do not have to go very far from the main principle utilized by methodology in social sciences and humanities, as well. Namely, the interdisciplinary approach which examines the big picture before establishing the constricting frames of the smaller ones is always better than the other way around. Therefore, in order to investigate the *actual* function of the Kurbinovo church, the *role* of Deacon and Referendarius John in Manastir, the *non creative* time gap in Saint Niketas temple, as well as the *non consistent* data preserved within the commissioners' inscription in Marko's monastery, we have to coordinate the historic evidence, social circumstances, written sources, visual data, artistic analogies and our own research experience, utilizing the interdisciplinary method, comparative analysis and contemporary bibliography. Even then, some of the *cases* can go cold for decades; some others are far from being indecipherable, one just cannot see the forest simply because one stares too much at the trees.

⁶³ Е. Касапова, *Архитектурата на црквата Св. Димитрија – Марков манастир*, Скопје 2012, р. 300.

⁶⁴ Е. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, р. 1660.

⁶⁵ Е. Касапова, *Архитектурата на црквата Св. Димитрија – Марков манастир*, р. 302.

Елизабета ДИМИТРОВА

**АРТФОРЕНЗИКА ВО ЛИКОВНИТЕ СПОМЕНИЦИ: ЧЕТИРИ СЛУЧАИ НА
СОЦИО-УМЕТНИЧКО ИСТРАЖУВАЊЕ**
(досијеа, сведоштва, докажен материјал,)

Резиме

Иако форензичките истражувања вообичаено се поврзуваат со случаи на крими настани од по-сериозен карактер во различни научни подрачја (полициски истраги, судска медицина, криминална психологија, дигитални науки, банкарски процедури), нивните методи за следење на трагите, идентификацијата на приоритетните задачи, проценката на достапниот материјал, анализата на постоечките податоци и синтезата во третманот на сите релевантни фактори кои се однесуваат на проблемот што е предмет на обработка, се прифатливи и применливи и во проучувањата на хуманистичките дисциплини. Поаѓајќи од идејата за интердисциплинарниот приод како најсоодветна истражувачка алатка во постапките за утврдување на прецизната хронологија, авторската атрибуција или причините за неконзистентноста на податоците во ктиторските натписи и историските записи, отворивме неколку “нерешени” случаи во ликовната продукција на македонското средновековие. Притоа, појдовме од расположливите податоци (историските пишани сведоштва), ги анализиравме елементите релевантни за решавање на постоечките проблеми (зачуваните ктиторски натписи) и ги вклучивме сите достапни материјални сведоци кои можеа да дадат аргументиран придонес во разоткривањето на нерешените случаи (компаративни примероци, аналогии и

хронолошки совпаѓања). На тој начин дојдовме до определени солуции во однос на: до сега недетерминираната функција на црквата Свети Ѓорѓи во Курбиново, која, со своите скромни архитектонски одлики и со фасцинантното фреско-сликарство, претставуваше пример на визуелна дискрепанца во однос на екстериерните vis-à-vis ентериерните карактеристики; артифициелно создадената енигма околу улогата на Ѓаконот и референдар Јован во креацијата на фрескоаранжманот во црквата Свети Никола во Манастир; навидум непремостливиот хронолошки јаз помеѓу архитектонската артикулација и ликовната декорација на црквата Свети Никита во Бањани и долгата временска амплитуда во имплементацијата на проектните активности поврзани со Марковиот манастир. Иако супстанцијалните докази во било кој од наведените случаи (Курбиново, Манастир, Бањани и Сушица) се далеку од доволни за нивна конечна хронолошка, социо-историска или социо-културна разврска, нашите истражувања потврдија дека форензичките методи применети врз деликатното ткиво на средновековните ликовни споменици во Република Македонија се не само оперативни ефикасни; во неизвесните и често загадочни услови на работа во доменот на нашето културно наследство, тие се неопходни и, без сомнение, повеќе од неопходни.