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**Doctorate thesis**  
**Summary**

**The Macedonean School – Towards a  
Reconstruction of the Opus**



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## Introduction

The monumental painting from nowadays, has too often fallen apart from the Byzantine tradition, specific to the Orthodoxy. Because of the lack of artistic and theological knowledge, of the deliberate ignorance of the iconographic rules from the Painter's Manual of Dionysios, of the lack of valuable models and documentation, of the rush, of the wrong indications and of other factors, the achievements of the Romanian monumental painting of the last several decades are too far from the artistic masterpieces of the last centuries. To this contributed also, the lack of an appropriate documentation, which could be consulted by the painter or the priest from a church that was to be painted. In this context of the repeated failures in the contemporary ecclesiastical painting, the knowledge and the Painter's Manual's rules is absolutely necessary, as well as the understanding of the Byzantine style not as a possible style among others that could reflect the teaching of the church, but as the only one that can fully reveal the Orthodox dogmatic treasury. The Painter's Manual and the Byzantine style must be assumed and appropriated by each painter, up to becoming a second nature, thing that won't lead to artistic monotony or stereotype realisations, as proven by the famous paintings from Moldavia, the Holy Mountain, Serbia or Russia, which, though so different, are yet Byzantine. As Dionysius from Fournas says, it is indispensable for an icon painter the minute knowledge of the great Byzantine works, of the stylistic particularities which differ one painting school from the other, and of the technical and artistic means that allow him to paint in a certain style<sup>1</sup>.

I have analysed in my thesis the most representative works of the Macedonian School, which developed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries' Macedonia, trying to put it in a certain context, also noticing the related achievements before and after this period. Even if the influences of the Macedonian School have reached very far, both in space and time<sup>2</sup>, my presentation follows only the works from the Macedonian area, the similar realisations from other regions being reminded only shortly.

In the first chapter of my work I analysed general issues related to the Macedonian School, I tried to delimitate the area in which this School developed, making a short presentation of the geographic extension and political situation of Macedonia, and of the moment of its flourishing period. Because there isn't an absolute agreement of the art historians on the collocation of "Macedonian School", I also made some terminological notes.

The second chapter of my thesis is consecrated to the listing of some of the most important religious art masterpieces from Macedonia, before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in which can be seen the germs of the Macedonian School that developed afterwards.

In the third chapter, respecting the chronology, I've analysed the works from those areas which constituted the historical unity of the old Province of Macedonia: the Greek Macedonia, the North and North-Western Macedonia, and the North-Eastern Macedonia. The most remarkable artistic personalities whose works I have presented here

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<sup>1</sup> Dionisie din Furna, *Erminia Picturii Bizantine*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2000, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> The masterpieces of the Macedonian School were models for the contemporaries from Russia, Georgia, Italy, but also for the painters from today.

are Manuil Panselinos, who painted on the Holy Mountain and Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie, whose activity developed most of all in the north of Macedonia. I have followed the evolution and development of the religious art seen in its most representative works, trying to make an overview of the most important achievements of the ecclesiastical art of the Macedonian territory that played a certain role in the evolution of the Byzantine style. Of all the branches of the sacred art from the Macedonian territory, I have chosen to present the realisations from the monumental painting, the iconographical painting, and the ecclesiastical architecture; all the references about sculptures, miniatures and illuminated manuscripts are restrained.

In the last chapter of my thesis, I saw which were the characteristics of the new style of ecclesiastical painting that appeared at that time, the Italian-Cretan School, its origins being found in the ending period of the Macedonian School.

Since the bibliographical references about the Macedonian School are very few in Romanian, and the number of the images to illustrate it is even more reduced, I used especially foreign books, some of their texts and information appearing for the first time in Romanian.

Where it was needed, I presented the plurality of the points of view of certain problems that had been interpreted differently in the specialised literature. Then, trying to be as objective as I could, I brought arguments to support one thesis or another. Thus, it can be often noticed in the specialised literature, that the perspective and the content of the iconographical analysis differ depending on the nationality of the author, who cannot help being subjective. The Greek historians of art, for example, ascribe to the painter Manuil Panselinos no less than seven iconographical ensembles (frescoes and icons)<sup>3</sup>, while some Serbian authors are doubting the very reality of the existence of this painter, considering those works to have been painted by some great anonymous artists from Serbia. In this context, the knowledge of some foreign languages and the subsequent access to foreign literature, where I could find different manners of approach, allowed me to hope that I have understood the theme I wanted to study as a whole.

Along with some new information found in these books, I also presented a series of images of Macedonian icons and frescoes of an extraordinary value, most of them unknown in our country, some of them recently restored. Some of the images in my work are copies made from different albums, while others are pictures taken by myself during my documentation trips in Greece (the Church of the Monastery of the Protaton, the Church of Agios Nikolaos Orphanos, the Church Kondariotissa, etc.), these pictures representing scenes or saints that cannot be found in any monograph.

In my thesis, I have tried to bring arguments supporting the idea that both the paintings from the Greek Macedonia and those from the North and North-Western Macedonia can be gathered together in what is called “the Macedonian School”, trying also to underline, beyond the normal differences, the multitude of their common elements.

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<sup>3</sup> Τσιγαριδασ, Ε. Ν, *Μανουιλ Πανσελινοσ, εκ του Ιερου Ναου του Ποτατου*, Αγορευτικη Εστια, θεσσαλονικη, 2003, pp. 17-94.

## Chapter I. General Coordinates

The Macedonian School, one of the oldest known byzantine painting schools, has had an extremely important influence upon the valuable ecclesiastical artistic creations from the Orthodox Church. It's impossible to imagine the history of the Byzantine Art without this glorious chapter, since the Macedonian painting has represented a permanent referring point for the following artistic creations from the Orthodox area. The echoes of the Macedonian school can still be heard today; the most important book of an orthodox icon painter, The Painter's Manual of Dionysios from Fourni, is the one that not only talks about some great artistic accomplishments of the past belonging to the Macedonian style, but which also gives a direction for the present ecclesiastical art, attempting the artistic placement of the icon painter on the coordinates of this school.

I would like to make now some terminological notes. The collocation of "Macedonian School" was introduced for the first time in 1916, by the great byzantinologist Gabriel Millet<sup>4</sup>, and generally designed the entire church painting between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries from the territory of the former province of Macedonia. Other historians, like Viktor Lazarev, offer a more detailed delimitation of the paintings from Macedonia, distinguishing, considering the local characteristics and iconographical influences specific for each zone of the great province, the Serbian school, the Thessalonicean school, the athonite style, believing that putting them together under the same name of "Macedonian School" is wrong and much too uniform<sup>5</sup>. Both points of view are rightful and well contended. However, even if the collocation of "Macedonian School" may not be the most appropriate (once it was proposed, on very logical and valid reasons, that the title of "gothic style" should be replaced by "ogive style", thing that wasn't realized yet), as long as the works of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries from the province of Macedonia (whether it is the Greek Thessaloniki or the Ohrid of the former Yugoslavia) have the same stylistic characteristics, having as purpose the rendering of the dramatics and inner life of the saints, inside a scene full of dynamic, through a vivid palette, in a picturesque manner; so, considering all these, I personally think that the label of "Macedonian School" is well justified.

Moreover, if a comparison is made between some of the prophets painted by Manuil Panselinos (as an exponent of the Greek religious painting) in the church of the Protaton, and the same prophets painted by Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie (as exponents of the Serbian painting) in other churches from the region of Ohrid, we can observe certain surprising resemblances, and more than that, they seem to be the work of one and the same painter. The drawing and the chromatic are, in some of the cases, almost identical, and that proves the fact that these great painters were studying each other as artists, each borrowing from the others the compositions or the expressive elements that corresponded the most with their artistic intentions. This fact of the borrowing, sometimes in detail, of some of the drawings or clothing, cannot remain for us without any consequences, as it refreshes idea that the exponents of the Greek and Serbian painting had very related artistic ideals; in both cases we are talking about the Macedonian School.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kosta Balabanov, *The icons of Macedonia*, Belgrad – Skopje, 1961, pag. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Viktor Lazarev, *Istoria picturii bizantine*, vol. II, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1980, p. 83.

Most of the art historians consider that the frescoes of the churches of Studenica, Staro Nagoricino and Gračanica are some of the most exquisite pearls of the Serbian monumental painting. It is interesting to notice that the painters of the most prestigious Serbian frescoes, Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie, as their names show, but also considering the latest researches in the field, were both Greek, born in Thessaloniki, the city where they grew up artistically. As a matter of fact, even Viktor Lazarev admits that they were responsible for the spreading of the Greek current in the painting field from the north and north-western Macedonia.

Despite numerous resemblances, some of the art historians focus only on the differences between the frescoes in the two regions we are talking about, considering them reasons enough to support the idea that they belong to a different style, a different school. I incline to subscribe to the point of view according to which these differences are unavoidable. That means that, if there are differences not only among the frescoes in the churches of one city only, but also between two works of the same painter, caused by his own artistic evolution or by his changing the manner of working, why shouldn't there be any differences between the paintings of some churches in Thessaloniki and those in Ohrid? The differences are real and natural, but that doesn't mean that, from a stylistic perspective, we are talking about two completely different entities.

These facts represent arguments for the idea that putting together under the same roof the artistic creations of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, both from the Greek Macedonia and the Macedonia under the slave influence, despite the natural differences regarding different regions and decades, is thus justified and corresponds to the reality. During the history, Macedonia represented not only a political unity, but also a cultural one, and had Thessaloniki as its liturgical and artistic center, a city that influenced and contributed the most to the creation of the painting style in the entire region.

One of the first aspects that rises up when analysing the painting from Macedonia and the well-known artistic school that was born here, is the deline of this space. Considering the successive modifications of the Macedonia's borders, which we can find from the beginning of its existence until today, Macedonia must be understood as a cultural and historical unity, and not as a geographical one. During the presentation of the great artistic achievements all over Macedonia, up until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, (the approximate moment of the end of the Macedonian School of painting and the beginning of the Cretan School), I didn't necessarily have in mind its strict geographical delimitations, imposed by the repeated and somehow contextual modifications of its borders; during time, on the Macedonian territory, which we can delimitate only with approximation, continued to exist, beyond the fluctuations of the geographical extend, a fond of common cultural and artistic elements. Due to the fact that the cultural and artistic connections continued to exist independently of the territorial delimitations, though it was necessary to present the limits of Macedonia in every period of its existence, it wasn't taken account rigidly in the analysis of the artistic works, of the extend of Macedonia, strictly at a certain moment in its history. Thus, it was taken account of all the territories that were, once, part of Macedonia, and which were filled with the artistic ethos of the Macedonian School.

So, first is detaching the region from today's Greece lying in the northern part of the country, which bears the name of Macedonia and which represented through the city of Thessaloniki and the Holy Mountain, the most important centers of the spreading of

the Macedonian style. Then, there is a part of the old Macedonia that lies on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which I named, for a better differentiation, the Northern and North-Western Macedonia; the rest of the territory that belonged to Macedonia lies at the north of Greece, approximately until the river Maritza, being under the Bulgarian influence, territory which I called the North-Eastern Macedonia<sup>6</sup>.

As far as the delimitation of a chronological perimeter of the Macedonian School is concerned, it includes the period from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>, the works from this period having certain common elements that differentiate them from those that preceded them. We cannot speak of the Macedonian School either before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, or after the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the Cretan painting starts to develop. Likewise, if we consider the personality of the greatest painter of this school, Manuil Panselinos, to be representative for the entire Macedonian painting, the attempt of making a chronology can only consider that the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose works resemble most with his painting, are the ones that define best the flourishing period of the Macedonian school<sup>7</sup>. The works before Panselinos seem to prepare, through an evolution both natural and fascinating, what he and his contemporaries were to fulfill; from this perspective, the period between the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>, belongs to the pre-macedonian period.

In the well-known book of Victor Lazarev, "The History of the Byzantine Painting", we can see that the method he uses combines the iconographical and formal analysis, to which he adds a historical and cultural study and references to the way of thinking at that time. Knowing the historical context (and the situation of the church in the region) during which were made the monuments of Byzantine art, seems to be of great importance, especially because the ecclesiastical art had to subordinate to the theological and dogmatic aspect; the rulers of the church were concerned not only about the dogmatic heresies that appeared along time, but also about the art that, through a wrong manner of artistic interpretation and representation could have potentially reflected them. Just as the Symbol of Faith was the same for the entire orthodox church, so the art had to reflect and illustrate this unique belief. To the unique message of salvation that we can find in the pages of the Bible or at the Holy Fathers, in different forms, formulations or words, corresponds the singularity of the Byzantine style, in which we can distinguish the nuances and specificities of interpretation, appropriation and adaptation of the Symbol of Faith, in different epochs and by different people. Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine empire, was not just the first among the churches (the ecumenical patriarchy), but also the center that guided and gave a direction to the development of the style that was to be named "Byzantine", and which gave the main rules of which the artistic creation in its area of influence was to follow. This was the reason for which I also mentioned in my work the historical and religious context during which the works were made, and the problems that the church confronted in different regions (of Macedonia in this case) and that couldn't help being reflected in art.

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<sup>6</sup> Other references too, use the syntagm of "North –Western and North – Eastern Macedonia".

<sup>7</sup> I consider Panselinos' paintings as an appropriate referring point also due to the fact that they continued to be of reference and constituted models for all the following generations of church painters.

## Chapter II. The Painting on the Territory of Macedonia, before the 13<sup>th</sup> century

- **Historical frame**

Before 1204, the Greek Macedonia was shattered by social changes, destructions and prisoners' takings, and by successive invasions of the Bulgarians lead by Simeon (894-927) and Samuel (989-1018) and suffered the humiliation of seeing its capital falling into the hands of the Arabian pirates (904). Three hundred years later, Thessaloniki, along with Kastoria and Serrhai, were to be captured after the Norman siege (in 1185). For this reason, there are no important accomplishments in the field of cultural activities in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries Macedonia.

This is the period in which the stormiest events in the history of the Macedonian people are taking place, the Macedonians lying now on the Serbian territory; it is the time of the forming of Samuil's kingdom, and the establishment of the patriarchates of Prespa and Ohrid, their first patriarch being David. After the defeat of Samuil's armies and the fall of his kingdom in 1014-1018, the rank of the patriarchates diminished and on the patriarchal chair arrived John (1018-1037), abbot of a slavic monastery on the valley of the river Radica.

However, in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, great personalities like the erudite archbishop of Bulgaria, Teofilact Hefaistos, the metropolitans of Thessaloniki Michailos Choumnos and Eustatios Kataphlores, and others, had contributed so much at the flourishing of the religious architecture and ecclesiastical painting that the churches of Beroia, Edessa, Melenikon, Serrhai, Ayios Achilios, Thessaloniki, The Holy Mountain, Nerezi, Kastoria, Ohrid etc. became models for the following artistic creations in other Balcanic regions, the influences arriving even in Russia, Georgia and Sicily. The frescoes of Nerezi with the accentuated representation of the inner life, those of the monastery of Latomou in Thessaloniki (the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), of the churches of Saint Nicholas Kasnitzes and Anargyrou in Kastoria (the 12<sup>th</sup> century), with their refined and academic style, all these are beyond any doubt referring points for the artistic creations of this period, before the empire was torn apart by the latins and divided in districts and counties.

- **The monumental and iconographical painting**

The creation of the Christian art was a long and nuanced process. Like the system of dogmatic teachings that was formulated during a long period of time, so the developing of Christian art flowed slowly and for many centuries. The Christian art will remove the frame of antic conveyances and will begin developing its own forms and symbols, whose most powerful impulses came from developing the liturgy and its own symbolism.

After the restoration of the icons in 843, the Christianity needed an art that would incarnate the dogmatic principles, so the Byzantine theologists began choosing the most

appropriate representations, making them simpler and coordinating them, extracting the most important scenes. This iconographic system, subordinated to the theological aspect, was formulated in its essential lines, during the Macedonian dynasty (857-1056). Starting now, the tendency towards simplicity begins to appear: solemnity, concise exposure, that does not allow any secondary details. The forms point towards abstraction and the transcendent ideals of Christianity; the spiritualization will reach its maximum<sup>8</sup>.

So, in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a new system of ecclesiastical painting was formed; the basic elements of the Byzantine painting had already consolidated in such measure that no defiance of the canon was acceptable, the religious painting being subordinated to the dogmatic principles. The system will maintain almost unchanged until the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Byzantine iconographical program is connected to the text of an omilia of Saint Fotie. It can be noticed that in this period the painting tends to turn into an easily contemplated system, without the ballast of any secondary details; the iconographical scheme would become generally compulsory in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, its modifications from that time until today being minimum. The iconographical program from that period is almost identical with the one we have today.

The Macedonian dynasty represents a turning point in the evolution of the Byzantine art; this is the time when a radical transformation takes place, a transformation that leads to the elaboration of a classical Byzantine style. It is a quiet period, when the power follows the consolidation of a unique style. The conquests lead to the expansion of the Byzantine influence, and Constantinople, as an artistic centre, gains an absolute predomination upon all the other painting schools. Art has a programmatic aspect, and the religious themes are rigorously arranged. The Constantinopolitan art, which, after many decades gave up under the pressure of folk art, quite quickly counterattacked, taking its inspiration from the Hellenistic tradition, that would allow the removal and the annulment of these unappropriated influences. Instead of the elaborated and rather rude expressionism of the mosaics (from Thessaloniki for example), we can see now an accentuated linear rhythm and a calm, equilibrated composition, which copies the antic Alexandrine models.

There are many copied models during the 10<sup>th</sup> century; art loses in originality, it is much too conservative. It assimilates from the antiquity not just the thematic, but also the painted technique, the characteristic sensuality. The entire Byzantine art from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, was based on neoclassicism<sup>9</sup>. At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, we notice a gradual spiritualization of the form; the icons, the mosaics, the frescoes, had to express a very deep spirituality, a tendency that became possible and logically necessary only after the iconoclasm, otherwise, the ideas about the possibility of representing the divine, being brought back again in discussion. Now the direction of the art is contrary to the tendency towards perfection of the antic ideal of beauty; the liberation from the strict material world and the discovery of the spiritual life is desired, that being possible only through prayers, ascetics, and taking part at the Eucharistic sermon. The seen world was perceived as the reflection of the transcendent world, where the exterior shape is important only as a symbol, seen as a very important intermediary between the two worlds (the sensorial and the spiritual one). The antique models of the Christian painting characterized by sensualism, turned into transcendent forms, images of the abstract ideas

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<sup>8</sup> V. Lazarev, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pag. 220

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, vol II, p. 75.

and notions. Spirituality will prevail for good: the figure becomes immaterial, faces have a severe and ascetic expression, the spatial approach becomes more simple and schematic, picturality is replaced by linearism, chromatic loses its impressionist nuances, becoming compact and with separate colours. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the new artistic trends will grow. This abstract and spiritual style appears as the classic form of the Byzantine religious experience, in which was melted the contradiction form - content, that constituted the iconoclastic dispute; the appropriate form had been found<sup>10</sup>.

## A. THE GREEK MACEDONIA

- The North of Greece, Thessaloniki

Among the most representative churches of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries from the territory of the Greek Macedonia, are the **Church Panagia ton Halkeon – Theotokos** from Thessaloniki (the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), whose frescoes, painted in the transitional style that reunites old and new elements, form an interesting iconographical complex; then, the church **Panagia Mavriotissa**, where can be noticed some new iconographic and stylistic characteristics, whose origins seem to be also in Thessaloniki. It should also be mentioned the frescoes from **Patalemza**, and the fragments of the mural ornaments of the **Church of Saint Demetrius** in Thessaloniki (the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), which represents a rather conventional stylistic direction of the local school, however different from a technical point of view, and which gives new proves for the continuity of the iconographic and artistic traditions in the Balkans. There must also be noticed the **Churches Anargirou** and **Saint Nikolas Kasnitias** from Kastoria. Not many representative icons coming from Thessaloniki and the rest of the North of Greece have been preserved from this period. Those that have reached us are very few and inferior as quality. The technique that prevails is tempera.

- The Holy Mountain

Since on The Holy Mountain the monumental painting is much more bounded to the cult and liturgy than it is in any other places, the monks have always been preoccupied with the artistic and dogmatic quality of the paintings; that is why here have been called the best painters of the time. Before the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (the flourishing period of the Macedonian School), very few examples of frescoes and mosaics have been preserved, most probably because of the disasters, fires, renovations and repainting. The only examples dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century that have been preserved until today are two mosaics from the catholicon of the monastery of Vatopaidi, executed in a luxurious style, representing the Annunciation and the Deisis, and a few fragments of mural decoration from the monastery's refectory (1199), which preserve the heads of three apostles: two heads from the Embracement of Saints Peter and Paul and the head of Marc the Apostle. Fragments of mural painting are also well preserved in the Ravdouchou chelion, and they present the full-length figures of Saint Apostles Peter and Paul. There are few icons in tempera and mosaic-icons preserved from this period (at the

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. I, pp. 258 – 264.

monasteries Great Lavra, Protaton. Xenophont, Stavronikita, Zograf), the monumental painting raising much more interest.

## **B. THE NORTHERN AND NORTH-WESTERN MACEDONIA**

The bishops Climent Ohridski and Naum, both of them sanctified later, were two of the most important church founders of the Northern Macedonia from this period. Even if later events from the history of Macedonia, which I already reminded, show us that those were difficult times, we must not conclude that after the building of the churches by the two saints, no other churches were built anymore.

“The period of the Byzantine power that begins with the fall of the kingdom of Samuil (1018) and lasts until the fall of the Northern Macedonia under the domination of the Serbian feudal state (1282) represents the beginning of the peak of the works of art and thus, one of the richest periods in the history of the portrayals from the Macedonian territory, considering the number of churches, frescoes and icons”, considers Kosta Balabanov<sup>11</sup>. The monumental painting developed especially during the time of the archbishop of Ohrid, Leo (1037-1056), the frescoes from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, like those from Vodocha or Ohrid representing an extremely valuable artistic treasury, that has substantially enriched the Byzantine monumental painting from Macedonia. The most important frescoes from this period, that were painted towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, are those from **Velyusa** (1085-1093), **Vodocha** (1037)- the second layer of painting, **Saint Sophia from Ohrid** (1040-1045)- frescoes that represent the most well preserved iconographical ensemble in the Byzantine art from that period, and the **Church of the Fifteen Martyrs from Tiberiopolis, Strumitsa**. The second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century was a period marked by the beautiful frescoes of **Nerezi** (1164-1168), which represented the peak of the dramatism in the Serbian painting from this period, the frescoes from the **Church of Velyusa** (1165-1170) and the **Church of Saint George from Kurbinovo** (1191). Even if the architecture was profoundly provincial, the fresco painting from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries' Macedonia equalled the most important and beautiful works in the Byzantine Empire.

## **C. THE NORTH-EASTERN MACEDONIA**

After many wars that lasted for half a century, a part of the churches from the western regions of Bulgaria were reconstructed and redecorated. From the 12<sup>th</sup> century and especially from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the interior surfaces of the churches will be divided by many framed compositions; the number of figures is reduced at only some main characters, and the ornamentals are few or missing. It has given up any temporal or spatial localization of the scenes or figures, so that they appear isolated by time and space, this thing being underlined by the blue light or red background. The fine modelling is obviously different from the linear stylization of the late comnenian art, while the curve lines that define both figures and shadows or lights, have already gained an important function, without becoming their own purpose. The colours that have more a

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<sup>11</sup> K. Balabanov, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

symbolic value are harmonized and the intense nuances and powerful contrasts are avoided.

The most important frescoes from this period are those from the church of Batschkovo. Here is what Tschilingirov says in his characterisation of these frescoes: “The figures of the saints are long, dematerialized, faces are long and narrow. The spiritualization and the seriousness expressed by the wide open eyes, give at the same time the impression of a deep concentration. The saints look into our world, to which they had also belonged once, and with which are bond only by some spiritual lines. What characterises them is their solemn retaining, which seems to estrange them from the strong gestures and from expressing the human feelings. Only the lights from their eyes confess their immovable faith and will”. In the representation of the Mother of God, “forms are spiritualised at maximum, the expression is severe, illuminated by the mystery of death, without any sentimental note, even if from it we can read the maternal premonition of the sufferances on the Cross and also a deep compassion. The borders between real and unreal, concrete and abstract, natural and supernatural are annulated: the representation has reached its full autonomy, typical for the orthodox cult image, the icon”<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Tschilingirov Assen, *Die Kunst des christlichen Mittelalters in Bulgarien*, Union Verlag, Berlin, 1978. p. 296

## Chapter III. The Macedonian School; the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries

- **Historical frame**

### *Macedonia under the French rule*

After the collapse of the Byzantine empire, the entire Macedonia became the subject of the French kingdom of Thessaloniki, ruled by the marquis Bonifacio of Monteferrat. Even if they won, the new rulers had to deal with the rivalries between them and with the expansionist tendency of Kaloian and the Bulgarian Tzar Ioanid, who, in 1207, arrived with his army near the walls of Thessaloniki, capturing first Serrhai and taking Balduin, the emperor of Thessaloniki, as his prisoner. The situation became more and more confuse: the Bulgarian state was torn by interdynastic fights, and after the death of Bonifacio, the French kingdom of Thessaloniki fell into the hands of Epirus and of the ambitious Theodor Comnen Doukas Angelos (1215-1230). He was defeated by the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Asen II, in 1230, so that his kingdom contracted around Thessaloniki, and became soon the subject of the new emergent power, the empire of Niceea. In December 1246, Ioannis III Vatatses, after a victorious march during which he captured Serrhai, Melenikon, Skopje, Veljusa and Prilep, triumphaly entered in the city of Saint Demetrios, installing the great Andronic Paleologian as its governor.

Caught in the middle of some expansionist wishes, fights for survival and domination, but also of some attempts of recovering its lost prestige, Macedonia regained the cities of Kastoria, Edessa, Ohrid, Skopje and Prilep. However, the moment of glory was ephemeral, this being the last page of a legend that lasted for more than a thousand years. The nefarious conditions from the empire allowed the Serbians of Milutin to enter, in 1282, deep towards south, and the mercenaries of the catalan society to devastate the peninsula of Halkidiki and Mount Athos (1308); all these catered the fratricide fights between the dynasties of the Paleologians and the Cantacuzins, and gave birth to some social turbulences like the one started by the zealots in Thessaloniki. The last defenders of the cities and the ideals, witnessed the death of Serrhai in 1383 and saw the agony of Dhrama, Zychna, Veroia, Serbia and even Thessaloniki, first in 1395, and once more, for the last time, in 1430.

In such difficult times, the only supporting and referring points of the enslaved population were the glorious past and the culture in which they took refuge in the rough centuries that followed. In the field of the religious art, many churches were build and as many frescoes were painted, the painters of these churches, masters of the palette like Manuil Panselinos, Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie and Giorgos Kaliergis, gaining a mythical aura.

### *Macedonia under the Turkish rule*

Macedonia will confront the Turkish rule, the imposing of the Muslim religion through forced converting to the Islam, the arrival of thousands of Jewish refugees from

Spain a few years after the fall of Constantinopol and the migration of the people of the Slavic and Valahian language. While ruined cities like Thessaloniki, victims of the conquests, were being repopulated with people from every region of the ottoman Empire, others like Yanitsa, were new creations, the population being only of Turkish origin. At the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the village Manastir had 185 Christian families, Veljusa, 222, and Kastoria 938. One century later, Thessaloniki counted 1087 Christian families, and Serrhai 357. In Manastir, Veroia, Serrhai, etc, there was the same number of Christian and Muslims. Few people that spoke the Slavic language, remained in the East of Macedonia; some were in the west and north of the province. In time, Macedonia was divided into smaller sections, of which Western Macedonia was, initially, binded to the sanjak of Skopje, then of Ohrid and Manastir. The Central and Eastern Macedonia, formed separate sanjaks, with the capitals at Thessaloniki and Kavala. The northern parts were given to the sanjak of Kyustendil.

- **The Painting of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries. General Characteristics.**

The art of the Byzantine monumental painting reached its peak at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, fact that coincided, not without reason, with the reign of Andronic II the Paleologian (1282 – 1328)<sup>13</sup>, this flourishing period being known as the Paleologian Renaissance. In this way, Viktor Lazarev noted: “The 13<sup>th</sup> century represents, without any doubt, one of the most interesting and exciting periods in the history of the Byzantine painting. This was the century when the Paleologian style appeared and affirmed through its basic characteristics. So, the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and not the 14<sup>th</sup>, is the one that acquires a great importance in the developing of the Byzantine painting, having the greatest signification in the birth of the Paleologian style”<sup>14</sup>.

Even though, the Macedonian School represents a special style among other painting schools, there too can be made certain distinctions and nuances among the paintings considered to be Macedonian, but coming from different decades or centuries, being also noticed, beyond every basic resemblances, certain differences. Thus, the frescoes and icons of the 13<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into two distinctive groups. The first one includes the creations with a conservative characteristic, that continued to feed on the traditions of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and the second one includes the avangardist creations, that anticipated the 14<sup>th</sup> century’s style. So, the 14<sup>th</sup> century continues and fulfils the tendencies of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Just like the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the 14<sup>th</sup> century too, (the period of the mature paleologian style), knows two periods in its evolution, to which correspond two artistic trends: the picturality and the graphics. Once with the hesychast victory of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the line of the development of the free pictural stye from the first

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<sup>13</sup> Andronic the Paleologian was an emperor whose politics, contrary to the one of his father, Michael VIII the Paleologian, was much better received by the monastic circles. Andronic was a great supporter of the monks in their resistance against the unification between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches.

<sup>14</sup> V. Lazarev, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 167.

half of the century is broken, and now appear the germs and the first signs of a manner that will be defined by the Cretan School.

The artistic creations of the period between the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and which are the most representative and valuable of the Macedonian School, are grouped by certain art historians, in the so called “volumetric style” (a synonym for the paleologian renaissance), this syntagm referring to one of the most important visual characteristic of the frescoes of this period. Unlike the creations of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which we might group, using the same criteria as before, in the monumental style, the ones made now are, indeed, much more volumetric.

If for the monumental style, exposed to a strong oriental influence, are characteristic the abstract principles of the representation, and the separate parts of the work (the figures, the architecture, the rocks), combined in an order of purely decorative independence, that ignores the laws of the empiric realities, as far as the volumetric style is concerned, the artists tend towards an optical unity of the image. They are trying to offer a unitary construction of the space, putting the figures and the architecture in an indissoluble connection. Typical for the first style is the insufficient depth of the composition; in the second one can be noticed the tendency towards the third dimension. In the monumental style, the landscape is extremely concentrated and sober: the rocks, extremely simplified, seem like flat backgrounds, and the simple buildings are reduced to some basic types. In the volumetric style, the landscape becomes more complex: new architectonic form appear, that very often are due to the Hellenistic prototypes. The buildings become more volumetric and different, the curves and sinuous lines being more and more used; rocks lose their graphic aspect and turn into overlapped volumetric blocks. In the first style analysed here, the monumental and static figures prevail, usually disposed frontally, with clothes that fall harmoniously. In the second style, they become smaller and smaller, moving more freely, with their clothes blowing in the wind. The linear clothes, once completely flat, seem to gain some relief. Gradually, the manner of working changes, too: the strokes become stronger and wider, the chromatic scale is more complex and enriched with softer tones. So, we can notice, as a characteristic of this period, the development of the pure picturesque elements<sup>15</sup>.

The iconographic paintings of the 14<sup>th</sup> century will cover the entire walls of the church, from the floor to the ceiling, masking the structural function of certain forms. The frescoes are disposed in overlapped registers, that form continuous paintings, or a series of different closed scenes, separated by a red frame. Diminution of the surfaces of the scenes, but also the small sizes of the buildings, give the interior of the church a special intimate character. The quantity of the themes that decorate the church, has considerably increased, comprising also cycles that illustrate the childhood of Christ and life of saints.

The iconographical programme knows some innovations, as well, becoming much more complex. It is underlined especially the mystical, spiritual essence of the divine service, thus appearing a series of new composition of liturgical character. Symbolic and allegoric themes appear, hard to understand at first sight. Often and often, dramatic episodes and details that give iconography an obvious vivacity are painted. Unlike the art of the previous period, the art of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries expresses the dramatism and the extreme freedom. The innovations from here were taken to the Western art, and not

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

the other way. The mural paintings of a paleologian church gives the impressions that it is formed out of a grate number of independent icons. Thus, not without reason, in the paleologian art, the iconographical painting has such a great importance.

As the icons are concerned, in this period we can find many icons that represent a series of independent images, from the enlarged Deisis or the Great Feasts, which began to decorate the iconostasis with more and more registers. A special place is occupied by the hagiographical icons. In the centre lies the figure or semi-figure of a saint, and on the margins, scenes from his life. The need to represent multiple episodes from the saint's life, would determine the painters to withdraw their themes from literary and sometimes apocryphal sources. Thus, the iconographical painting proves less rigid; figures are moving in a much freely and vivid way, the narration is full of details withdrawn from the real life. These tendencies are not very strong in the Greek icons where can be seen a stronger attraction towards the ideogram and the iconographical scheme; however, the scenes of these icons also reflect a more freely treatment of the theme.

In the icons, as in the frescoes, everything becomes from now on dynamic: the material of the clothing are blowing, the gestures of the figures are accentuated, their movements become more free, the architectonical forms are serried and the architectonical backgrounds are characterised by curve and interrupted lines. The human figures, the architectonical backgrounds and the scenery melt into a single ensemble, to the construction of which, the precision of the proportions has a great contribution. Figures are smaller and the space gains in depth. The features of the faces become softer, the expression less severe. Often, the episodes look like scenes from real life. The palette changes too, becoming more refined, more delicate. The preponderant colours are blue ceruleus and greenish yellow. Thus, a more free and picturesque style is affirming, with a humanist tendency, that, at the same time, is not a realistic one, but aims to the purest transcendentalism. Iconography keeps its unchanged, rigid form, the figures still lack weight and volume, the architectonical constructions keep looking like some fantastic backgrounds. Only the interiors that closes the figures in an empiric and real ambient are missing. Even in this conclusive phase of its development the Byzance remains faithful to its artistic beliefs.

As for the mosaic-icons are concerned, the main centre of their manufacturing is Constantinople. Made of extremely small pieces, these icons must be numbered among the most exquisite works of the Byzantine art.

The Macedonian painters, with their great talent in rendering the faces, manage to give a distinctive ethos to each of the hundreds of portrayals. "The figures are volumetric, in their rendering being used bright, vivid colours; the gestures are impressive. The restless military saints are dressed in their splendid armours. The old saints, sadly look upon us from the land of perfection, somehow condemning us for our sins. The scenes contain backgrounds common in the paleologian era, with elaborated architectures. The composition are agglomerated, with all the figures moving in the vast space, interpreted in its striking depth. Finally, this whole impressive ensemble of faces - so striking through its dimension, vividness and abundance of forms, through its shining, lively and phantasmagorical chromatic - renders a sense of grandeur, that also shows a certain grace, where necessary", says Kosta Balabanov<sup>16</sup>. The mark of the Macedonian School

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<sup>16</sup> K. Balabanov, *The icons ...*, p. 13.

consists in the realism of the painting of the figures, not only in the rendering of the exterior features, but also in the interpretation and the reading of the inner world.

Even though it had a great influence over the artistic culture of Italy, Byzance suffered no influence. “Conservative, proud, closed in itself, it couldn’t and didn’t want to break up with its traditions. Even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Byzance, art continues to be part of a severe theological system, totally conditioned by the authority of the Church. The Macedonian painting does not start off on the path of realism, but instead continues to keep its strictly religious, transcendent and spiritual character. Even though, beginning with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzance elaborated a new style, it doesn’t formulate, as in Europe, a new perspective of the world.”<sup>17</sup>

## A. The Greek Macedonia

- The Northern Greece, Thessaloniki

- a. *The monumental painting*

From the 13<sup>th</sup> century Thessaloniki, there have been preserved numerous examples of Macedonian art, both in the field of ecclesiastical architecture and the monumental and iconographical painting.

One of the first Macedonian churches in Thessaloniki is **Panagia ton Halkeon**, with its cross-in-square plan, having four columns, architectural type that appeared for the first time during the Macedonian dynasty<sup>18</sup>. From the painting that once covered the entire building, only few fragments have been preserved, most of them dating from the second quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, but also from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, these frescoes forming together a harmonious iconographical complex.

Another church decorated in this period is the **Church of Osios David**, belonging to the **Monastery of Latomou**, a building that occupies a very important place in the history of architecture, since it constitutes an early example of a domed church, a kind of precursor of the cross-in-square type. The interior decoration consists of mosaics and mural paintings, dated in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It should also be mentioned here the **Church of Saint Pantelimon**, another cross-in-square church, once completely frescoed, dated in the transition period between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, have been preserved in Thessaloniki the **Churches of Saint Ecaterina** and of **The Twelve Apostles**, buildings that share many architectural and iconographical resemblances, and which are among the most remarkable Byzantine monuments from Thessaloniki. These two churches belonging to

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<sup>17</sup> V. Lazarev, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 264.

<sup>18</sup> Ioannis Touratsoglou: *Macedonia: History, monuments, museums*, Ed. Ekdotike Atena, Atena, 2000, p. 102.

the composite type, having a cross-in-square plan, with a central dome and four smaller domes in its corners, and columns inside the nave. The paintings, dated in 1310 – 1314, preserved, unfortunately, only fragmentary, are some of the most refined and valuable paleologian frescoes from here. Moreover, in the Twelve Apostles mosaics, the new Macedonian painting style acquires its full expression, reason for which some of the art historians consider these mosaics as the main example of monumental painting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century's Thessaloniki, representative for the entire paleologian art.

We must also mention the **Church Achiropiita**, a construction from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, painted during the Macedonian school, well known for its icon not painted by man of the Mother of God that lies inside.

From the first years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century dates also the frescoes from the **Chapel of Saint Euthymios**, from the Church of Saint Demetrius, frescoes of great value, painted by the great Manuil Panselinos and another unknown collaborator. The small dimensions of the chapel couldn't offer the artists large surfaces on which they lay their compositions; however, these small dimensions didn't stop them from making the highest quality painting. Because of the bad state of conservation, the mural painting from the chapel of Saint Euthymios are not well-known. Yet, their high artistic quality puts them among the exquisite creations of the Paleologians.

Renowned for its very high quality frescoes is the **Church of Saint Nicolas Orphanos**, belonging also to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The church is reached decorated with frescoes of a great value, dated in 1310 – 1320, the period of the highest flourishing of the Paleologian art in Thessaloniki, and which are preserved almost entirely. The whole interior is covered with a great variety of iconographical cycles. As it was used in the mural painting of the time, the scenes are grouped in horizontal registers. The frescoes whose author is unknown, but who is supposed to have been the same one who painted in the Athonite Monastery of Hilandary, proposed here some iconographical solutions which were followed and taken as models until nowadays. Here seems to have been represented for the first time, Jesus Christ in His polistavros liturgical clothes, inside the scene of the Communion of the Holy Apostles.

Some very rare iconographical themes can also be found in the frescoes from the **Gallery of Gregory**, from the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, painted by the disciples of Ioan Theorianus.

Another important church from this period that can be found in Thessaloniki, is the very small **Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour**, built in 1330, with a cross-in-square plan, and a very large dome, compared to the reduced dimensions of the chapel. "The mural paintings that adorn the interior of the walls, and which are dated around the years 1360, offer us, through their unique technique, a precious testimony of the unknown artistic creations from the Thessaloniki of the middle 14<sup>th</sup> century, revealing us the thematic and the spiritual orientations of the painting of this decade."<sup>19</sup>

Other frescoes that are worth mentioning are the ones from the **Church of the Vlatadon Monastery**, one of the most representative churches from Thessaloniki, built over the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century on the place from where the Apostle Paul preached to the inhabitants of the city.

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<sup>19</sup> *Monuments of Thessaloniki*, Molhos Editions, Thessaloniki, 2003, p.16.

In the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was built the **Church of the Profet Elijah**. The catholicon of the former monastery from here is one of the most complex structures created by the Byzantine architecture from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, combining the features of the monastic architecture from the Mount Athos with the ones from the local ecclesiastical architecture from Thessaloniki. The frescoes from this churches, painted sometime between the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, is one of the last achievements of the Macedonian School.

There also are two churches built and painted in the Macedonian style in the city of Mystra. One of them is the **Church of Hodegetria Apendiko**, a building whose plan is both individual and interesting, combining the plan of a basilica with the cruciform one. The anonymous painters which had painted in Apendiko, and whose origin should be searched in Constantinople, left here some of the most valuable frescoes from the entire 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The other church from Mystra is the one from the Metropolitan, church dedicatd to **Saint Demetrios**. Its architectonic plan combines the basilical type with three naves, at the inferior level, with the one of a cruciform church with five domes at the higher level. The mural decoration of this metropolitan church, dated in 1270 – 1285, shows a very inhomogeneous style. Nevertheless, the variety brought here by the different iconographical schools that characterise these frescoes, offer this church a special place in the history of the Byzantine art, the paintings offering a kind of panoply of ancient styles, which anticipated some of the best Macedonian works.

Thessaloniki, the liturgical centre of the Byzantine empire, shelters one of the most exquisite and prestigious Macedonian icons. The iconographical painting from this period, illustrated by a rather great number of works, proves to be qualitatively superior to any other region from Greece. Some of these icons can be found in different churches, but most of them are being grouped in the Museum of the Byzantine Civilization and the Museum of the Monastery of Vlatadon.

Among the numerous icons sheltered in the halls of the Museum of the Byzantine Civilisation, the one that attracts our attention the most is the icon of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, dated in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and which is an iconographical type never seen in the Macedonian painting. There can also be admired inside this museum another extremely beautiful icon representing the Virgin with the Child, also painted around 1300.

- The Holy Mountain. Manuil Panselinos

- a. *The monumental painting*

The athonite monumental painting reached its peak towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during the flourishing period of the Paleologian Renaissance. We could see in the beginning of this chapter the characteristics of this extraordinary painting school which developed then. There were many famous workshops of the Macedonian School; above all was the workshop of Manuil Panselinos.

The name of this painter, who had a decisive contribution in the developing of the Byzantine monumental and iconographical painting, gained a mythical aura in the athonite tradition. This fact is important, since it constitutes a hint of the importance of a high quality painting made in the orthodox Byzantine world; a great artist or an icon painter was looked upon as a great hero, sometimes outgrowing in fame even great fathers.

All the information about Panselinos, come from the Painter's Manual, which was written at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the well-known monk Dionysios, born in Fourná, and who lived on the Holy Mountain in the first half of the 18 century. The uprightness of the tradition and of the information regarding the origin of Panselinos, is confirmed also by the fact that his art can be framed in the style of other works of the time, which can be found in Thessaloniki, Veroia, the Holy Mountain, Ohrid and Central Serbia, and which were painted in a style very closed to the one of the Monastery of the Protaton<sup>20</sup>, in which Panselinos had worked without any doubt. "Examined" in the artistic context of his time, Panselinos presents himself as the most famous exponent of the painting school from Thessaloniki, during its flourishing period, at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Panselinos was compared by the art historians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, impressed by the beauty of his mural paintings, with Giotto and even with Rafael, comparison that places him in the pantheon of the great painters of all times.

The recent researches allow us to complete today the picture concerning the artistic personality of Panselinos. The researchers ascribe to Panselinos and his workshop, seven iconographical ensembles and fragments.

Thus, the oldest fresco preserved from Panselinos is the fragment from the Great Lavra, representing **Saint Nicholas** or **Saint Teoctist**; the rest of the composition is missing. This portrait is a work of a high artistic expression, being one of the most remarkable from the entire activity of Panselinos.

The frescoes of the **Monastery of the Protaton** are the most important works of the great master. This frescoes are the only ones unanimously ascribed to Panselinos, all the frescoes and icons being ascribed to him in comparison with the paintings from here. The Church of the Monastery of the Protaton, with its architectonic plan, outgrown for that time and rather unusual for the Holy Mountain, a basilica with a transept, will offer the artist great surfaces that will allow him to easily extend his compositions. Panselinos used this advantage in the best way possible, managing not just to give unity and coherence to the entire decoration, but also to defeat the difficulty of adapting the iconographical programme that was thought for a domed church, to the surface of a basilica. The iconographical programme was inevitably adapted and sometimes changed, as it was required by the shape of the walls. The greatest part of the church decoration has been preserved. However, the deterioration of the mural paintings in the upper section of the walls, in the corners and in other areas, don't allow us to create a complete image of the entire iconographical programme.

As Tsigaridas says, "the main characteristic of Panselinos's paintings, represents the memorialist character of his compositions, which are symmetrical and equal, the narrative character of the rendering of the scenes, the correlation of the positions and movements, the pictural rendering of the bodies, which can be also noticed in the

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<sup>20</sup> The frescoes from the Protaton are usually superior in quality and composition, so they are supposed to be anterior (1209) and to have served as models for the frescoes from Ohrid.

feminine shapes, the way of rendering some anatomical forms of the faces, the influence of the old Hellenistic art, the depth in the rendering of the architectural background, but also the dramatism and realism visible in this iconographical representation full of a profound spiritualism”.<sup>21</sup>

The personality of Panselinos comes to us as a figure half mythical, half historical. His work, as it has been preserved in Protaton, is representative for an entire epoch, and for an entire school: the Macedonian one, Panselinos being the permanent Byzantine artistic source from which had fed both his collaborators and contemporaries and the generations that followed him. “The frescoes from the great church of the Protaton, turn Panselinos into the supreme exponent of the Macedonian school, and his work into something without equal.”<sup>22</sup>

Manuil Panselinos also painted the **Chapel of Saint Euthymios** from the Church of Saint Demetrios in Thessaloniki, but I have already spoken about it in the presentation of the Macedonian churches from Thessaloniki.

Based on the stylistic analysis, the Greek art historians<sup>23</sup> believe that the frescoes from the **exonarthex of the catholicon of the Vatopaidi Monastery** also have Panselinos as their author. The frescoes from Vatopaidi present several resemblances with those from the Protaton, in what concerns the manner of the rendering of the scenes and the iconographical connection between them. Also, the manner of rendering the clothes and the figures, presents numerous analogies with the painting from the Protaton, Considering these aspects, it is very likely that the painter from here would be Panselinos himself or one of his colleagues. In the second possibility, this other painter must have taken some elements from the style of the master of the Protaton, but with an excessive tendency, often too unnaturally, but yet very expressive. The obvious noblesse of the frescoes of the Protaton is easily lost especially in the group portraits<sup>24</sup>. The differences that can be noticed between the Protaton and the Vatopaidi, might be due to the ten years distance that is supposed to have existed between them, or to the different artistic execution of the artist and his workshop. Along with the frescoes from the Protaton the most prestigious Macedonian athonite paintings remain those from Vatopaidi.

Along with the frescoes from the Protaton, the Great Lavra and Vatopaidy, Dionysios also ascribed to Panselinos the **Catholicon of the Pantokrator Monastery**, which is yet, very unlikely to have belonged to him, considering the long period of time that had past since his first frescoes (1300 – 1370). Despite the information we have, there cannot be made a firm chronological reconstruction of the panselinian opus, since only in Vatopaidy there is a precise date: 1312.

Aside from the paintings of Manuil Panselinos, the works of the Macedonian School can also be admired in the **Monastery of Hilandari**, also on the Holy Mountain, painted around 1320. The exquisite frescoes that cover the entire church, seem to be the work of a painter from Thessaloniki, probably the same one who painted the Church of Saint Nicholas Orphanos. Some art historians agree that in both churches were painted by

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<sup>21</sup> Τσιγαριδασ Ε. Ν., *Μανουιλ Πανσελινος, εκ του Ιερου Ναου του Ποτατου*, Αγιορειτικη Εστια, Θεσσαλονικη, 2003, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ξυγγουλοσ Ανδρεασ, *Μνημειακη ζογραφικη του Αγιου Ορους*, Νεα Εστια, 1981, p. 43.

someone from the workshop of Mihail Astrapas and Eutyhios, the author being an extremely talented painter, probably a former disciple on the site of the great masters. Macedonian frescoes are also preserved in some of the monastery's chapels.

The characteristics of the Macedonian School were preserved more or less in every fresco and icon from the Holy Mountain, until the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the quality of the painting began to diminish.

*b. The iconographical painting*

The hieromonk Dionysios of Fournas notes in many places of his Painter's Manual that Manuil Panselinos didn't paint only frescoes, but also icons; Dionysios also mentions that he himself learned the ecclesiastical painting by somehow imitating the icons of Panselinos<sup>25</sup>. This reference to the activity of Panselinos as an icon painter, completes the oral and written tradition, which ascribed to Panselinos some portable icons from the monasteries of Vatopaidi, Hilandari, Great Lavra and Prodromu<sup>26</sup>.

Based on the athonite tradition and the last years' researches, there are seven icons from the Holy Mountain ascribed to Panselinos and his workshop. First, there are the icons from the iconostasis of the Monastery of Hilandari, probably made around 1293, of which have been preserved the despotic icons of Christ and the Virgin, and the feast icon of the Presentation to the Temple. Then, there must be reminded the two icons from the iconostasis of Vatopaidi, representing Saints George and Demetrios, but also the icon of Jesus Christ Pantocrator, from the same monastery. It is also attributed to Panselinos an icon of Saint Demetrios and a mosaic icon of Saint John the Evangelist, both from the Great Lavra and dating from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The last one, along with other mosaic icons from Athos, made later, but also belonging to the paleologian period, are of small dimensions, but with an exquisite work, with very small pieces of mosaic, having oftenly a gilded background.

Based on these icons ascribed to Panselinos, some uncertain, some fully certain, his style proves to be one of a slow evolution, with a permanent and firm understanding of the classical prototypes, even contrary to the vehement and frequent changes of stylistically procedures of his contemporaries and equals, Mihail and Eutihie<sup>27</sup>, his works continuing to amaze until today.

Besides the icons of the great Panselinos, on the Holy Mountain there are also many others, probably of the same value, that fascinate, through their art, the eyes and the hearts of the believers. Most of them can be found in the Vatopaidi Monastery.

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<sup>25</sup> Dionisie din Furna, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Σοτηριου, Μ., *Η Μακεδονική σκόλυ και η λεγομένη σκόλη Μιλουτιν*, Δελτιο Ηριστιανικν. Αρχεολογικησ Εταιρειασ, περ Δ, τομ Ε, 1969., p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Manolis Katsidakis, *L'evolution ...*, p. 19.

## B. The Northern and North-Western Macedonia

### a. The mural painting

For the Byzance and all the Balkanic countries, the 13<sup>th</sup> century represents the moment of some very important events, which also reflected, one way or another, in the art of the Northern and North-Western Macedonia. The medieval Serbian state, under the rule of the king Stefan Milutin, enlarges its borders in 1282. Using its own riches, but also the ones acquired after the incursions inside the territory of the Byzance, king Milutin started a very intense construction activity, building new churches and restoring the destroyed ones. Thus, the 13<sup>th</sup> century is one of the most favourable periods for the monumental and iconographical painting. The very well preserved frescoes from Ohrid and the numerous icons preserved until today in a very good shape, allow the analysis of the basic characteristics of the medieval painting's development, not only in Macedonia and the Balkans, but also on the territory of the entire Byzance, and they also allow us to form a chronological vision over the painting from this period, and to understand the development of new concepts in the iconographical painting.

The high level acquired by the painting from the North and North-Western Macedonia was possible through the contribution of some people both from the court of the Serbian kings, and the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Even from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Archbishopric had a cultural referent charged with the maintaining of good relationships between the Archbishopric and the four workshops of ecclesiastical painting that could be found at that time in Ohrid. Without the constant help of the church authorities, painters as Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie would have never had the opportunity to paint such masterpieces as the Church of the Holy Virgin Peribleptos.

In the first decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century were painted the frescoes preserved only fragmentary of the small **Church of Saint Erasm of Bec**, near the Lake Ohrid, the work of a talented local painter.

Also in this period were painted the frescoes from the **Church of Saint Nicholas from Manastir**. The artistic view of the painters that worked here is completely archaic, belonging to the art of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The measure of the presence of the comnenian style's tradition in the works of a great number of painters from the last decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is best illustrated by the frescoes of the Church of **Saint Ioan Bogoslovul from Kaneo**, on the borders of the Lake Ohrid. The iconographical programme is deeply connected to the one of the Church Peribleptos from Ohrid, the painters definitely coming from the artistic circle of the master Ioan Theorianus.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most important Serbian churches, built in the architectonical style of the Raska School, is the **Church of the Mileseva Monastery**. The only nave lays from the west to the east. Inside, the dome elevates on few arches, in an ladder form arrangement. The first layer of frescoes was made in 1230, this 13<sup>th</sup> century painting being considered as "one of the most remarkable accomplishments of the entire European

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<sup>28</sup> Σοτηριου Μ., *Η Μακεδονική σχολή και η λεγόμενη σχολή Μιλουτιν*, Δελτίο Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, περ Δ, τομ Ε, 1969., p 84.

painting from that period”<sup>29</sup>. There is also a second layer of painting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These frescoes were destroyed in a fire, but saved, through their existence, the previous frescoes, much more valuable.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century painting from the territory of Macedonia ends with the frescoes of the anonymous painter of the **Church of Saint Nicholas, from the village Varos**, near Prilep. The chromatic of the frescoes, on one hand, as well as the tendency of rendering the faces in a caricatured manner, reveals the psychology of a provincial painter, that is trying to paint not only certain biblical themes, but also to underline his own position concerning the content and the final impression made by the painting upon the believers.

Even if it is not dressed with expensive marble on its exterior walls, neither with rich reliefs at the windows and the portals, the **Church of the Holy Trinity from the Monastery of Sopocani** shelters inside it one of the most exquisite painting collection of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Among the three layers of painting inside the church, the oldest one is dated in 1273 – 1274, being also the most valuable. “What makes Sopocani so special, is, above all, that wonderful synthesis of classical creative energy and Christian sensibility, a subtle combination between the worldly and spiritual life, between real and unreal, between the intellectual objectivity and the subjectivity of the inner life. There is nothing inharmonious at Sopocani; everything is a part of a whole, whose beauty cannot be altered by anything, not even by a cruel colour, a forced gesture or a striking light, that can make a shape seem rigid, because the painter of Sopocani was one of the most subtle and sophisticated chromatologists from the old Serbian painting, an artist capable to find the most refined possible chromatic harmonies, and to bathe his paintings in a light that seems to have been filtrated through a foggy veil”.<sup>30</sup> His simplified drawing gives every shape and gesture a special charm. In Sopocani, the most important constitutive element of the painting, the line, the colour and the volume, are brought together in a perfect harmony, powerfully transmitting the message of the subject and of the artist.

### *The Churches Painted by Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie*

Many researchers of the paintings of Mihail and Eutihie, try to find answers about their birth place, their education and activity, before their arrival in Ohrid. Because of the lack of written documents, it's impossible to determine with precision even their birth place. The stylistic analysis of the frescoes from the Church of the Holy Virgin Peribleptos (the first one painted by the two masters), along with other proofs, made most of the researchers to come to the conclusion that the education of these painters was connected to the city of Thessaloniki, in which lived and worked at the same time the well-known painters Manuil Panselinos and Giorgos Kaliergis.

In 1295 was built in Ohrid the **Church of the Holy Virgin Peribleptos**, that shelters some of the most well preserved frescoes of that time, not only from Macedonia, and which have as their authors, Mihail Astrapas and Eutihie. In the Church Peribleptos from Ohrid, the two masters of palette painted very rare compositions, some of them even unique in the Byzantine art, proclaiming, at the same time, the iconography of the new

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<sup>29</sup> V. Djuric, *Srpska dinastija i Vizantija na freskama u manastiru Milesevi*, rev. Zograf, nr. 22/1992, p.17.

<sup>30</sup> Olivera Kandic, *The Architecture and the Painting of the Church of Sopočani*, Serbian Unity Congress, 1998, P III, p. 2.

era. Thus, the Vision of Saint Peter of Alexandria is painted for the first time in the Vestry, and is present there since then. The representation of the ceremonial clothing of the bishops, the sacos, as they appear in the case of the bishop of Ohrid, Saint Constantine Cabasila, is the oldest of this type. Also, there are very many scenes connected and dedicated to the life of the Holy Virgin. The frescoes of Peribleptos contain elements that speak about an intense search for some new ways, some new modalities of representation that contain more realism and, at the same time, more interior dynamic. Painters try to suggest the depth and, where they succeed, they create the impression of the third dimension, which gives the entire composition a whole new aspect, that of a narrative space in which the known biblical events are developing. Mihail and Eutihie solved this special problem better and better with every composition.<sup>31</sup>

Another church whose frescoes were painted by the workshop of Mihail and Eutihie is the **Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Ljevisa from Prizren**. Through adapting the church's architecture that we can see nowadays to the older church on which it was built, one of the most beautiful Serbian medieval buildings was created, which was not made according to another church, but after an original plan. The church is a combination between the initial plan of the three aisled basilica, and the one of the cross-in-square church with five domes, an exterior vestibule and a bell tower with two floors. The variety of the constructive elements used in the reconstruction of the cathedral of Prizren can be easily seen in the interior arches that follow the available space. However, the real beauty of the architectural forms and textures is most obvious in its façade, a richness unknown until then in the Serbian architecture. As for the painting decoration is concerned, the church preserved two layers of fresco: the first one, from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the second one from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>; both of them have been damaged once with the transformation of the church into a dzami. Here, the thessalonicean painter had the occasion to prove his exceptional talent and experience acquired along the years.

Also, in the **Church of the Saviour from Zica**, decorated at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, can be found some frescoes of great value. These frescoes were executed too by the hand of the master Astrapas, between the years 1309 – 1316<sup>32</sup>. There are also two other layers of older painting that constitutes two different entities.

**The Monastery Studenica**, which is considered the mother church of all the Serbian churches<sup>33</sup>, was built between the years 1196 – 1235, being dedicated to the Presentation to the Temple of the Mother of God. The church has only one nave and one dome. At the Eastern end is the three-sided aisle of the sanctuary, and the narthex is oriented towards the West. To the North and to the South ends, there are two other chambers. In 1230, an exonarthex was added, that combined the roman style with the Byzantine one. The meeting of these two styles had as a consequence the birth of a special architectural style, known under the name of Raska School. The artistic achievements of the sculptures from here, are due to some masters coming from the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Here have been preserved frescoes painted in three different periods,

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<sup>31</sup> V. Djuric, *Les etapes stylistique de la peinture byzantine vers 1300. Constantinople, Thessalonique, Serbie*, The International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Thessaloniki, 1995, p.8.

<sup>32</sup> V. Djuric, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Korak Vojislav, *La peinture murale du monastere Studeniča*, Beograd, 1976, p. 23.

between the years 1209 – 1325. The oldest frescoes that can be found inside the church are one of the highest achievements of the entire Serbian art. There should be also noticed the portrayals of the leading family, grouped in the donors' scene and the genealogy of the Nemanja dynasty, the composition of this theme changing and evolving from one church to another.

The **Church of Saint George from Staro Nagoricino** shelters one of the masterpieces of the Byzantine painting from all times, the frescoes from here belonging to the same workshop of Astrapas. These paintings are counted among the best preserved frescoes from all times<sup>34</sup>; that's why it is possible to read and follow the whole iconographic programme. The church has a cross-in-quadrangle plan, and is covered with a large central dome and four smaller domes in the corners. The analysis of these frescoes tells us about the great changes that appeared in the style of Astrapas' team, in comparison with their activity from Peribleptos. By following the new tendencies of the monumental painting of that time, in several years they succeeded to reach the same stylistic results as their contemporaries who lived and worked in Constantinople and Thessaloniki.

The next church painted by the two masters (some say that is their last one) is the **Church of Saint Nikita from the village Banjani**.

The **Monastery of Gracanica** found near the village of Lipljan from Kosovo, is one of the last monumental foundingscitorii of the Serbian king Milutin Nemanja. Built in 1321, the monastery, now dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, constitutes the peak of the Serbian medieval architecture in the spirit of the Byzantine tradition. The church of the monastery Gracanica is built after a double cross-in-square plan, one inside the other. If at the floor level the plan of the church is rectangular, in the upper ones it developed into shapes that articulate in volumes that climb up towards the central dome. In the centre of the building there is a cross inscribed, with four free pillars crowned by a dome, that derives from a square basis. Above the space between the arms of the cross, four smaller domes give a pleasant aspect to the entire complex. So, the double vaults intersected at two levels, along with the central dome and the other four domes at the ends as correspondents, represent the skeleton of the entire structure. In the church of Gracanica have been preserved three layers of painting. The oldest frescoes of this church, painted in 1321, are of an extraordinary value, and constitute the culminant point of the monumental painting from the Serbia of the period of King Milutin. In the dense iconographical program, with small and numerous scenes, there are certain particularities, consequence of the fact that the painters took their inspiration also from some apocryphel sources, from apocryphal writings. Here can be seen illustrated the Minei for every day of the year, in this form appearing only in the church of Saint Nicholas Orfanos from Thessaloniki, from where the painters must have come too. The mural decoration from Gracanica, work of the masters Mihail and Eutihie, lead to the passing of the ecclesiastical painting into a new period. In Gracanica too, the divine origin of the founders' dynasty is illustrated in some representations of their genealogy, being noticed here the composition that repeats the iconographical scheme of the arboreal of Jesse.

The **Patriarchal Church from Pec**, near Hvosono, is the last building in which can be found frescoes ascribed to Mihail and Eutihie. The future monastic centre from

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<sup>34</sup> Branislav Todic, *Staro Nagoricino*, Beograd 1993 (prikaz), 23/1993, p. 53.

Pec, developed around a very old church, to which the archbishop Nicodim and even Saint Sava added new structures. At its southern part, the adjacent church of the Holy Virgin Hodigitria was built, and at the south of this one, the chapel of Saint Nicholas was added. Then, in the northern part of the catholicon was built the church of Saint Demetrios, and along the facades of the three adjacent churches, a monumental exonarthex was risen, with a tower above it. The frescoes from inside the church rise up to the level of the greatest achievements of the Macedonian painting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

*The followers of the painters Mihail and Eutihie*

Around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, near the village of Kuceviste was built the **Church of the Presentation to the Temple of the Mother of God**. By all probabilities, a fire destroyed the largest part of the frescoes. The stylistic analysis of the paintings inside the church indicates the hand of a master and one or two assistants, that knew very well the manner of painting of the workshop lead by Mihail and Eutihie.

Approximately during the same years, an anonymous founder restores the old **Church of Saint George from Gorni Korjak** and demands that a new layer of frescoes be made over the paintings from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that here worked the same painters that had worked at the church from Lesnovo.

In the bishopric **Church of The Holy Archangels from Lesnovo**, can be found frescoes that belong to a pictural ensemble preserved rather well until today. Even though, at first sight, these paintings might be perceived as a realisation that started from a unique iconographical program, a more attentive analysis of the paintings from the church, reveal certain differences that are the result of the fact that here had worked many painters with distinctive pictural approaches.

One of the jewellerys of the Serbian medieval civilization is the **Monastery of Decani**. This Byzantine treasury constitutes the best preserved Serbian iconographical inheritance, considering the number of scenes, the artistic achievements and the resistance against time. The construction of the church, one of the greatest Serbian medieval foundings, began in 1327, being trusted to some constructors from the Adriatic coast. The largest church in the early Serbian architecture, demanded also, the largest ensemble of mural painting in the world of the Byzantine art. On the surfaces of the high walls, the vaults and the arches, there are hundreds of scenes and thousands of characters, in small or big thematic sequences, in which the Incarnation of the Son of God is revealed, the history of the Christian church is exposed and its dogmas are being rendered. The twenty cycles, of which only the Sinaxary had 365 illustrated days, and the Genesis, forty six scenes, as well as the hundreds of saints rendered bust or full-body, contain many rare or even unique images in the Byzantine painting<sup>35</sup>. The painting of the frescoes from the church of Pantocrator lasted for ten years. The decoration of the expensive interior was a great challenge for the master painters, since they hadn't had the chance before to create such a complex and sophisticated composition, and they had to keep in mind the maintaining of the coherence and interrelationship of all component parts. On the other hand, the work of great dimensions brought together many groups of

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<sup>35</sup> Bihalji – Merin, Oto: “*Byzantine Frescoes and Icons in Yugoslavia*”, 1960, art. ND 943, B 513, p.3

anonymous painters, who had to coordinate their way of working, and who managed to give unity to the painting from the entire church and to create a real masterpiece.

Other damaged Macedonian paintings, yet interesting through their approach, can be found in the **Monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi**. The iconographical program from here was ingeniously adapted to the architecture of the church.

The **Church of Saint Peter from Korisa** was also built in this period, church that is now in ruins, but there still can be discerned fragments of painting.

Near the Lake Ohrid there are many churches that shelter smaller or larger fragments of Macedonian painting. It's the example of the **Church of the Holy Virgin from Zaum**, inside of which we can see frescoes full of spontaneity and refinement.

The frescoes from the **Church Mali Sveti Vraci**, were unfortunately lost forever, because the building was recently destroyed through dynamite.

Other churches that have frescoes that are worth mentioning are the **Church of the Holy Virgin Bolnicka**, with good quality paintings, the **Church of Saint Demetrios**, the **Church of the Monastery of Saint Clement the Old** and the **Church of the Holy Virgin Celnika**, all of them lying on the borders of the Lake Ohrid.

In the Ohrid region can be also found another type of churches that give a certain specificity to the place: the cave-churches, all painted in frescoes: the **cave-church of Saint Erasm**, of **Saint Steven** and of the **Holy Virgin Pestanska**.

#### b. *The fresco-icons*

This interesting interfering domain, visible in some older churches even from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, can be met also in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It's about those images painted directly on the wall in the fresco technique, but which through dimension, positioning and the way of trying to render some elements specific for the icon as the margins and the metallic hanger, with its specific texture, were following the imitation and the creation of the impression of a portable icon, painted on wood. Such fresco-icons were painted on the columns of both sides of the iconostasis from Peribleptos, today lost, near the iconostasis from the Church of Saint George Dyasoritis (representing the Mother of God Pelagonitisa and Saint George), and in the Church of Saint Nikita from Banjani (Saint Nikita).

All this fresco-icons show the fact that they were associated and bound to the iconographic painting, and that the icons worked on wood in the technique of tempera were the products of the same painters' workshops. There also are cases when some painters were more attached to the iconographical painting, which can be considered as a specialised branch in the field of painting. Regarded more attentively, their work indicate a tendency towards a more precise and perfectionist modelling<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Hadermann L. Misguich: "*Les etapes stylistique de la peinture byzantine vers 1300. Constantinople, Thessalonique, Serbie*", The International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Thessaloniki, 1995, tom III, pp 23 – 26.

### *c. The iconographical painting*

In the field of the iconographic creation, the 13<sup>th</sup> century abounds in such a great richness and stylistic variety, that every icon virtuously represents a unique style.

In the Serbian Macedonia few icons have been preserved, especially from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. There is no doubt that the churches were richly decorated with icons, and that these icons could have been found most of all on the iconostasis. In the life of Saint Sava, Teodosie writes that the saint asked for some icons “to the very talented painters from Thessaloniki”<sup>37</sup>, the icons representing saints in full length: the Mother of God, etc. Perhaps, in the beginning, the icons were brought from Constantinople and Thessaloniki. Gradually, the local workshops of painters began to form. The icons from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> from the monastery of Hilandari, ascribed by some historians to the Serbian painters, are, however deprived of those tangible distinctive signs that would allow them to be considered as the works of the Serbian artists.

However, beginning with the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in Serbia can be seen more often icons that reveal their sure belonging to the Serbian school. More often appear the portrayal types. There is a special interest in portrayal in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This proves that the Serbian painters, more than the Greek ones, their contemporaries, were attracted to the real world.

A study of the frescoes of the church of Peribleptos from Ohrid, the work of the famous painters Mihail and Eutihie, raises, among other things, the problem of the icons. Though a certain number of ohridian icons were ascribed to them, the despotic icons of the Mother of God Peribleptos and the Saviour, that could also be ascribed to them based on the style criteria, are not counted among them. To Mihail and Eutihie or to the painters in their circle, are ascribed the following icons: Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mathew, the Doubting of Thomas, the Resurrection, the Baptism, the Birth of the Lord, the Presentation to the Temple, the Ascension, the Dormition of the Mother of God and Christ on the Golgotha<sup>38</sup>.

Many of the Macedonian icons from the Serbian Macedonia are being kept in the Museum of the Monastery of Peribleptos in Ohrid.

## **C. The North-Eastern Macedonia**

### *a. The monumental painting*

The study of the monumental painting of the second Bulgarian empire meets great obstacles, many questions remaining unanswered. The fragments of the paintings found speak too less about the entire ensemble. The chronology of the works of art preserved

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<sup>37</sup> B. Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

raises also, many questions. Only the year of the apparition of the mural painting from Bojana (1299 or 1259) is clearly proved by an inscription.

The most important monuments of the medieval Bulgarian painting preserved until today, are the frescoes of the cave-church of Saint John the Baptist from the Archangel's Monastery from Ivanovo, and from the Church of Bojana.

The Bulgarian art (from the period of the second Bulgar kingdom) reached its peak only in the second third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, once with the apparition of a new generation of artists, who had assimilated the inheritance of their predecessors, but followed new paths, new ideals, process that also took place in Serbia. This opinion is supported by the latest researches of the monumental paintings recently discovered, of an exquisite quality.

The first beginnings of this glorious period of the iconographical painting are found in the fragments of the frescoes from the destroyed churches on the hill Trapesiza in Veliho Târnovo from to the last decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup>, belonging to a chosen court art.

Gradually, the mosaics from the church no. 9 in Târnovo and the traditional fresco technique step away, being replaced, by a mixt technique, that consisted in the more frequent employment of the tempera colours in painting the churches; thus, the style and technique differences between the monumental, iconographical and miniature paintings diminish. This assimilation is also based on the fact that the same artist took very different works, like the ornamentation of the liturgical books, the iconographical and mural painting and the wood sculpture. The chromatic palette is bright, abundant and finely nuanced, contributing to some totally new artistic affirmations.

The psychological characteristic of the faces comes first, fact that determines a change in the typology of the saints, and the study of the nature gains a role more and more important role.

The churches hewed in stone from the **Monastery of Ivanovo**, are situated near the city of Ruse, this monastic complex owing a part of its fame to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century frescoes kept in five of the churches from here. The frescoes from Ivanovo, constitute some very rare examples of the Bulgarian medieval art, in which can be met "brand new compositional laws for the middle ages, that follow the empiric knowledge. The individual human figures don't even reach half of the painting's height, so that the relation between them and the gigantic rocks or the fantastic scenery, seems very close to the reality. The individual figures also changed the relation between them; they are not referring anymore to a unique, formal and ideal-spiritual centre, but they form, in the very middle of the composition, independent groups, that represent scenes separated among them from the space and time point of view. Inside the compositions are very few architectural sceneries, that tend in every direction and especially towards the unstable axes and directions"<sup>39</sup>. Even the canonical schemes complied to the intention of the artist.

Contrary to the antique tendencies that appear in the monumental painting and the architecture of the Bulgarian School from the capital, in other works of art from the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, can be noticed a strong tendency towards traditionalism in what concerns the technique, the iconography and the style. An example is the mural painting from the small **Church in the cemetery from Bernde**, near Sophia, where some

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<sup>39</sup> A. Tschilingirov, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

iconographical renewals are also visible. On one hand, one can find in these frescoes some very stylised and geometrical forms, representative for the popular interpretation of the comnenian style. On the other hand, the scenes and the figures from Bernde are marked by an expressive dynamism and a lyric and melancholic expression, particularity which, together with the light palette and the somehow psychological approach of the figures, predominate in the paleologian painting of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The classic style of the monumental painting from Bulgaria has a great expressive power and a very high artistic level, in the mural decoration of the **Church of Saints Nicholas and Pantelimon from Bojana**, built in 1259. The painter that worked here used the old iconographical scheme, but also introduced a new typology, this being the most important innovation of this mural painting. In the frescoes from Bojana, the most important things that appear are the repentance, the forgiveness, and especially, the surrounding love, as it appears exemplified in the worldly life of our Saviour<sup>40</sup>. For the master of Bojana, Christ is no longer the severe Judge who reigns in the domes of the Byzantine churches, but the first among humans, in Whom are found all the virtues and the ideals of the human kind. He is the kind and gentle Saviour, as He is painted on the dome and in the sanctuary. Through the mural paintings of Bojana a new typology of saints is created, saints who appear in a human rendering. The chromatic palette becomes richer, and the abstract symbolic values of the colours are being now replaced by a natural rendering. The possibilities of the a fresco technique are enriched both through the supplementary execution a secco, and the technique of the refined transparent colours.

The unfavourable external conditions from the last third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century - the invasions of the Tatars, the dynastic misunderstandings – influenced the cultural life of the Bulgarian capital and its area of influence. The developing of the art was stopped during many centuries and continued again barely in the first two decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in a modest rhythm. The end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century knew a removal from the characteristics of the Macedonian School, that were replaced by those of the new Cretan School. The approach full of life of the exterior features and the rendering of the structure, along with the psychological construction of the figures, created a more austere iconography. The figures become now taller, thinner and bounded, with a characteristic ascetic noblesse.

#### *b. The iconographical painting*

During the second Bulgarian empire, the iconography was, as the monumental painting, during a flourishing period. Though only few works have reached us that can be dated and localised precisely, their artistic quality and the variety of the themes and different ways of expression, prove the greater and greater importance of this kind of art.

At the same time, the works of art, coming both from the eastern regions, and the south-western regions of Bulgaria, keep, along with the archaic composition, the severe monumentality and the expressionism of the former epoch.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century there can be noticed almost everywhere an essential change of the artistic means and of the style. From the very beginning of the century, the lighting manner was imposed (as a sign of a perfect technique), so that the convex parts seem

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 351.

more plastically painted, through the employment of some thin lines of white. The clothes are treated with the same attention, so that they receive plasticity; through them the dynamic of the gestures can be transmitted to the rhythmic drapery.

At the same time with the Italian art of the Trecento, and yet independent of it, we can notice an exaggeration of the feelings in the renderings; through the deformation of the figures and the expression, an intensification of their effect is obtained<sup>41</sup>. These tendencies can already be seen in the works of the late 13<sup>th</sup> century (the Mother of God Gorgoepicos on the bilateral icon from Venebar); this tendency grows during the next century and becomes a characteristic of this period.

From the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the influences of the paleologian art are more and more noticeable in the icons of the South-Western Bulgarian School, especially in Macedonia, where there was an indirect connection with the Byzantine cultural centres. These influences can be seen most of all in the bilateral icon from the monastery Poganovo, which is considered to be one of the most distinguished works of the late paleologian art and which is characteristic for the vast assimilation of the artistic means and features of the style from the Balkans, in the period before the Turkish rule.

With these considerations I have reached the end of my presentation of the Macedonian frescoes and icons, the creations made from now on in Macedonia, slowly growing apart from the characteristics of the school that I spoke about.

#### D. Technical aspects

Most of the icons from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century are painted in the technique of tempera, with egg, but there are also works made in the technique of the mosaic, with very small tessers. The icons painted in tempera are usually gilded with the bolus technique, for the other once being used a specific glue.

As for the mural painting, in the churches from Macedonia we can find the “a fresco” technique, and very rarely the mixed technique. The painting made only “a secco” are missing.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 355.

## **Chapter IV. The End of the Macedonian School. The beginning of the Cretan School**

From the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the Balkanian Peninsula starts the ottoman invasion. The final conquest of Macedonia ends up in the first decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Once with the arrival of the ottomans, the Archbishopric of Ohrid kept a part of its organisation, even if it was eliminated. The known painting workshops, even before the fall under the Turkish rule, had to move in the neighbouring countries, especially in Serbia, considering that doing so, they would be able to continue their artistic activity. The last years researches, reveal that not all the painters and workshops had left their country; in the first decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century they continued their activity especially by painting icons, but also succeeding, in the second half of the century, to paint some small churches from villages which were far from the eyes of the Turkish authorities. There were times when the ottoman authorities had forbidden even this small artistic activity, so that the ecclesiastical painting from the territory of Macedonia flopped to a level without previous.

On the territory of the Greek Macedonia, it happened approximately the same. The period of foreign occupation, but also the lack of some great artistic personalities, made that in the main artistic centres, Thessaloniki and the Holy Mountain, would be painted icons and frescoes of a rather high quality, but not as high as the ones made in the paleologian era. The Cretan painters were the ones who responded to the appeal of remedying the penurious art from the northern Greece, being well equipped for this task. In the Crete occupied by the Venetians, painters not always of local origin brought the iconography to a high level; they created a base for the large scale painting, and for a rather well developed icons export, which turned Crete into the most important artistic centre of the Orthodox world from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Cretan painters who came on Athos, adapted and organised the iconographical programme for some very vast surfaces, in some churches much bigger than the ones from Crete, in whose decoration they didn't involve.

Under the hesychast influence, a more idealistic style will be formed; the motion, once accentuated, was replaced by a relative stativity; the faces acquire again a more severe and solemn expression. The carnation is treated from now on through dry and thin lines, often from a graphical point of view, and no longer through the known free light blemishes which could be met in the Macedonian painting. The perspective quests from the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, were gradually replaced by schematic compositions, going towards a flat surface. In most of the icons and frescoes, some kind of retained attitude appear. This last phase of the painting evolution from the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, should be considered as a special form of the Byzantine academism, marking the beginning of the end of the Byzantine artistic civilization.

The flash is treated with an accentuated dryness, and in stead of the juicy spots of light, a clear colour is used for lighting, which gradually binds with the shadow by some gradual transparencies. This manner of working reaches to its maximum development in

the metropolitan icons from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which represent the closing phase of the evolution of the metropolitan painting. The graphic and thin line prevail, the images are austere and dry, the compositions are intentionally rigid<sup>42</sup>. In the Cretan painting, the interpretation of the artistic images becomes very complicated, the theological symbolism making it hard to access for the contemporary man.

In the Cretan icons and frescoes, the characteristics of the Macedonian school had been left behind: the picturality was replaced by graphics, the volume, by a more flat approach, the dramatism by the more retained attitude and the exterior reflection of the feelings, by a spiritual introspection. The hesychast movement, to which must be related the Cretan painting, left its print in the way of emphasising the spiritual world.

The Macedonian School was to be brought back by Dionysios from Fournas, who, even though he wasn't a very important artist, had a considerable influence over his contemporaries. Together with other few painters, he tried to work in the specific manner of the Macedonian School, inspiring himself from these most famous frescoes of Panselinos from the Protaton, the influence of these paintings being obvious in his works. In the Painter's Manual, Dionysios shows himself as an enthusiastic disciple of Panselinos, advising his disciples, also, to let themselves influenced by the ethos of the Macedonian masterpieces.

As long as the icon painter from then and from now is first of all referring to the Painter's Manual, the direction that it indicates in the field of the ecclesiastical painting, mustn't be neglected, since it proposes the works and the artistic level of the Macedonian School as a necessary etalon which we all should have in mind.

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The fact that we live in a civilisation of the image is a reality that nobody can deny; and if that's the way things are, in such a context, which other manner – from many possible – of representing God could seem more appropriate, if not the Macedonian one, in which the divine message comes to us expressed in such a striking way, and with a strength, spontaneity and expressivity without equal? In a world so defined and sometimes suffocated by the visual, could another type of religious image interpellate the believer with such power? Probably not. The Macedonian icon, more than any other one, surprises the spirit, shocks the sight. In no other period, the Byzantine painting showed more strength and picturality as much as during the flourishing period of the Macedonian School; in no other period the saints from the icons were more full of burning faith, and the iconographical presence of God, so real and imminent, as then. The level reached in that period by the ecclesiastical art, especially in the field of the monumental painting, was hardly reached again. That was the period in which seems to have been written the most fascinating pages from the entire history of the Byzantine painting, known as “the Macedonian School”.

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<sup>42</sup> . Lazarev., *op. cit.*, p 74.

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