



The most significant values  
of the cultural and natural heritage

# THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ELEOUSSA AT VELJUSA



Elizabeta Dimitrova



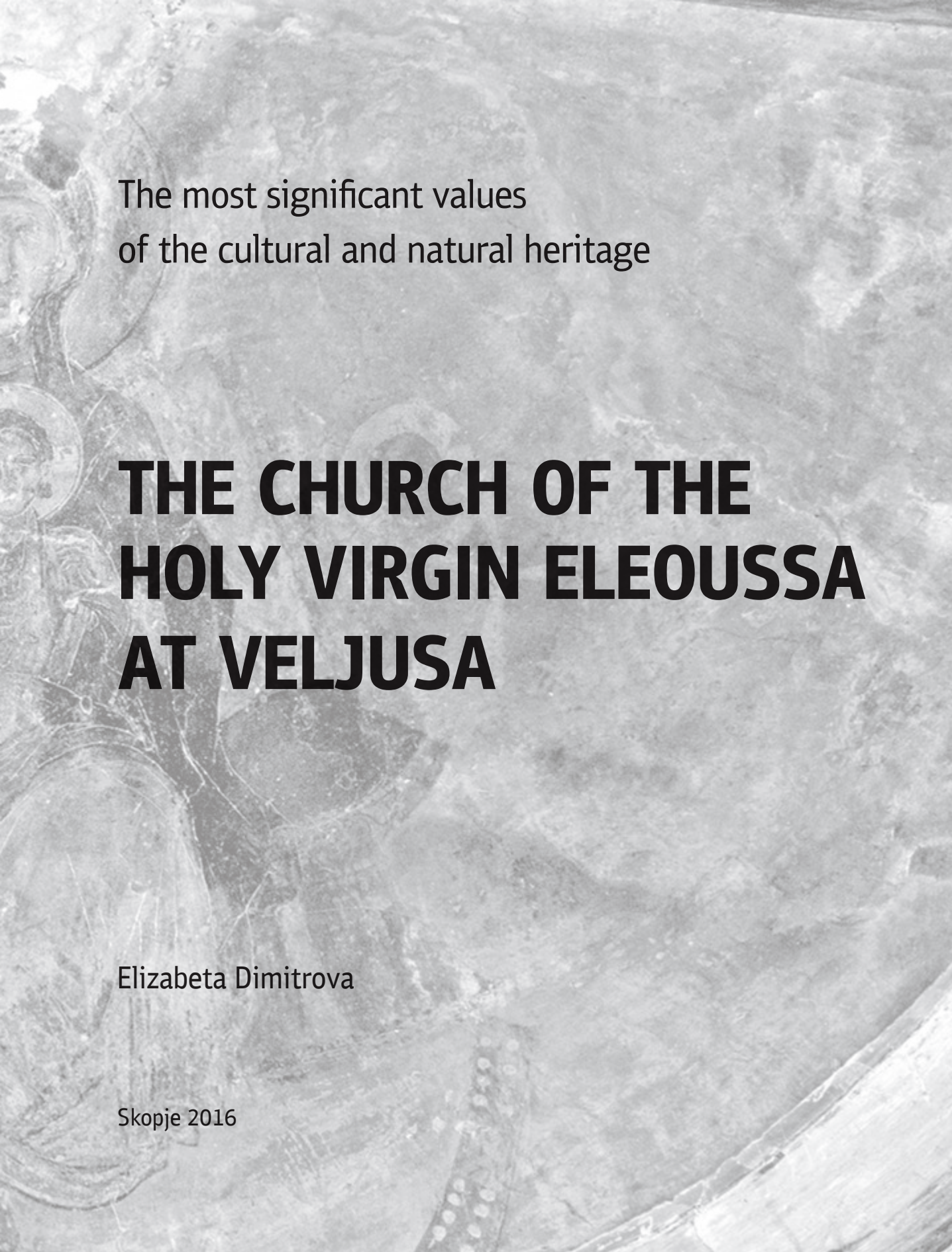






This work has been published  
with the financial support of the  
Government of the Republic of Macedonia



The background of the cover is a grayscale image of a fresco. It depicts the Holy Virgin Eleoussa, shown from the waist up, seated and holding the Christ Child on her lap. The Virgin is wearing a long, flowing robe with a patterned border. The Christ Child is also depicted with a halo. The fresco is set within an arched frame, and the overall texture is aged and slightly mottled.

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# **THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ELEOUSSA AT VELJUSA**

Elizabeta Dimitrova

Skopje 2016

# FOREWORD

## MACEDONIAN CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Over the past 4.5 million years since the creation of Earth, the ancestor of the modern man, “the wise man - Homo sapiens”, appearing on the African continent 150,000 years before this day, quickly settled throughout the territories of the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

His cultural evolution is recorded in the Republic of Macedonia, as well.

While travelling through the prehistoric era of the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, as well as the historical epochs of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, man created civilizations on the soil of the Republic of Macedonia by introducing and using the natural resources. He established the magnificent kingdoms of the Agrianians, Paeonia, Pelagonia, Lyncestis, Macedonia, and the principalities of Deuriopus, Dessaretia and the Penestae.

The Roman Empire, Byzantine, the medieval states - all left a powerful civilizational imprint.

The belief in the natural phenomena, followed by the belief in the many gods, to finally worship our only God - all left indelible cultural traces.

All this enormous cultural and natural heritage of the Republic of Macedonia was subject of the capital project of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, “Publications of the most significant values of the cultural and natural heritage,” carried out by the Cultural Heritage Protection Office.

130 monographs featuring the Archaeological Heritage, Sacral heritage, the Treasures of the churches and monasteries in Macedonia and the Natural heritage were created.

Macedonia - the high forest land in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, as the name suggests, furrowed by the deep valleys of the Vardar tributaries and the river Drim, adorned with the blue - green waters of Lake Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran, with the proud giants Kozuv, Shar Mountain, Korab and Jablanica, Selecka Mountain and other mountain ranges, today lights 130 torches of its own, as well as the world's, cultural and natural heritage; a legacy to preserve, use wisely and pass on to future generations of the Macedonian road to eternity.

Prof. Viktor Lilchikj Adams, Ph.D.



# THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ELEOUSSA AT VELJUSA

Among the most representative monuments of artistic production from the middle Byzantine epoch preserved on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, the church dedicated to the Holy Virgin Eleoussa, located in the village of Veljusa near Strumica, occupies a distinctive, as well as a very significant place. Founded in the closing decades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, endowed with many feudal privileges and numerous precious religious objects, erected in the spirit of the metropolitan architectural matrixes, as well as decorated with an innovatively structured concept of the painted programme, this church is a true representative of the cultural flourishing of the era, marked by visual features of an authentically designed architectural and painterly creation. Its history, its real-estate assets, its feudal status, as well as the wealth of the monastic treasure-house are well known due to the data in the genuinely preserved historical archive of the Strumica temple, kept in the library of the monastery of Iviron on Mount Athos, the feudal metochion of which the church of the Virgin Eleoussa has become in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.



View from the east

The quadri-conchal ground plan of the church, the remarkably decorated facades ornamented with brickwork and polychrome adornment executed in fresco technique, the mosaic floor, as well as the altar screen carved in marble – all of these speak in favour of the ambition of the master builders who were designated to follow the current architectonic schemes generated in the Byzantine capital, reflecting the penetrating impact of the Constantinopolitan building tradition. The fresco painting of the church, on the other hand, is marked by the breakthrough of unique iconographic patterns in the execution of the decorative programme in the altar and the dome that will become creative matrixes for the future development of Byzantine mural painting. Shaped as a reflection of the theological erudition, as well as the specific aesthetic expectations of the khetor, they represent significant transitional models between the earlier and later mandatory iconography in the painting of Byzantine temples. With the dark mysticism of the colours, the tonal modelation of the volume, as well as the accentuation of the drawing in the configuration of the saintly images, the painted decoration of the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa is representative of the expressive spiritual ideals within artistic creativity. The fresco painting executed in the subsequently built exonarthex, as well as on the walls of the south porch of the church, produced in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, belongs to the most significant trends of the mature artistic expression of the Comnenian style; according to the mastery of its execution, it can be enumerated among the works of art which are almost equal to the masterpieces of the painterly practice from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

## The historic data on the monastic church



The exterior of the church



Among the mediaeval cultural monuments located on the territory of present-day Macedonia, the church of the Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa is a rare example of a sacral edifice the past history of which is quite well known. Due to the precious data encompassed by the inscriptions carved in the lintels placed above the entrances to the naos and to the narthex of the temple, as well as the ones found in the rich archive of documents preserved at Iviron, the history of the Veljusa monastery throughout the long centuries of the mediaeval epoch can be followed quite accurately. In that regard, the stone lintels, originally placed above both portals, precisely determinate the time of the erection of the monastic church, as well as the identity of the khetor, i.e. the person who commissioned the temple; documents from the Iviron monastic library, on the other hand, reflect the rich cultural flourishing of the monastic complex throughout the entire medieval period, as well as the dramatic historical events related to its survival.

On the grounds of the data encompassed by the inscription carved in the marble lintel, which was once situated above the west entrance to the temple, there can be no doubt that the architectural activities related to the erection of the edifice were finalized in the year 1080 under the watchful eye of the former bishop of the medieval town of Tiberiopolis (present day Strumica), Manuel, who, in the course of his monastic days, commissioned the church of the Virgin Eleoussa, thus establishing a powerful spiritual center of the area. His khetorial effort is also expressed in the second inscription carved in a marble lintel, once located above the main entrance to the church in the contents of which the monk Manuel addresses the Virgin celebrating her patronship over his endowment. Erecting an edifice built with remarkable forms, luxuriously structured architectural components and inventively conceived decorative elements, as well as equipped with a great wealth of precious artistic works and various assets, the monk Manuel actually established the space of his eternal rest, commissioning the structure of his tomb in the western part of the temple.

The time of the historical development of the Veljusa monastery is described in the documents preserved in the rich archive of the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos, under whose spiritual and economic rule the Veljusa temple was subdued, together with the entire feudal estate, in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Within this rich data file of historical events and procedural activities, the charts issued by the offices of the Byzantine emperors in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries encompass authentic and valuable information on the earliest history of the monastery and its administrative management; the Typicon of the monastic community, composed by Manuel himself, discloses the strict system of rules and regulations for management of the ecclesiastic, as well as legal organization of the monastic fraternity; the inventory of the monastic estate encompasses a representative list of administrative documents, religious equipment, works of art and valuables possessed by the church treasure-house, while the archival material from the later centuries reflects the administrative organization, as well as economic situation of the Veljusa monastery in the course of the long centuries of its feudal reliance upon the spiritual authorities of Mount Athos.

# The architecture of the church



View from the west



View from the north-east



As a result of the various historic events which occurred at different times in the course of the long centuries of the mediaeval epoch, as well as the dramatic character of the military affairs, invasive army campaigns and natural disasters, the one-time luxurious vista of the monastic building, which can be defined as a product of the refined taste of the khetor and the extraordinary mastery of the skilful builders, is not entirely preserved. Out of the original monastic architectural complex, the elements of which are vaguely described in the written sources, only the architectural construction of the monastic church is preserved, which is one of the most representative building achievements of that time. Although the remarkable glow of the glamorously shaped facade walls as well as the luxurious sparkle of the polychrome aesthetic impression of the exterior have disappeared from the visual composite of the church a long time ago, the Veljusa temple still represents a unique specimen of Macedonian mediaeval architecture that reflects the authentic concepts in the structuring of the ground plan, as well as the spatial scheme of the edifice.

Following the already established tradition of erecting tri-conchal temples on the territory of mediaeval Macedonia and absorbing the features of the metropolitan building models in the execution, the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa was built as a quadri-conchal edifice in its ground plan that actually represents an elaborated variant of the central typological category of conchal church plans. In that regard, the building is configured of three constitutive elements which compose the spatial configuration of the architectonic solution, joined in a unique constructive organism and united in a skilfully elaborated building unity. The central architectural space of the church has a square shape, framed by four semi-circularly configured walls in the interior and vaulted by an octagonal dome resting on angle pendentives. The absence of supporting elements in the construction of the vaulting is equally due to the reduced dimensions of the interior, as well as the desire for a creation of a compact and coherently organized interior space, all of which resulted in a visual unity of the architectural components that did not hinder the sight of the beholder directed towards the sanctified space of the church altar.

Although small by its dimensions, the sanctuary of the temple enabled the performance of the entire liturgical ritual, while the domed narthex on the western side of the edifice, conceived as a cruciform supplement of a concise type, represented the sanctified location of the khetor's tomb, situated next to the south wall. In the south portion of the building, a small chapel was located, connected with the main body of the church and erected with a square ground plan, covered with a dome and supplemented with two semi-circular apses, manifested in the interior. The altar apse and the north conch of the church can be recognized in the exterior by their five-sided apses, as well as the surfaces enlivened with double niches arranged in two registers, while the south and the west conchs are entirely integrated in the mass of the walls that connects the constructive elements of the edifice; the apses of the south chapel were modelled with a tri-sided shape in the exterior of the architectural ground plan. The dynamic spatial structure of the building concept, which enabled the three-domed exposition of the vaulting in the design of the church exterior, is the basic component of the luxuriously elaborated architectural plan of the mausoleum, erected with the financial means of the distinguished church dignitary of Strumica and shaped with the efforts of the commissioned skilful, as well as experienced builders.

The original shape applied in the representative construction of the Veljusa church was complemented by the genuinely conceived and successfully executed building technique, which makes this monument comparable to the highest achievements of the Constantinopolitan architectural school of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The elements adopted from the capital of the Byzantine building tradition can be seen in the immaculate geometry of the edifice in its ground plan and elevation, as well as the specific building opus – a very coherently executed building system of precisely processed stone blocks and



Decorative ornamentation on the facade

rows of bricks, recessed from the outer surface of the walls. This characteristic building structure of the facades was also complemented by specific brickwork ornamentation, while the execution of the facade surfaces included the polychrome effects applied in a fresco technique, as well, designed to create an impression of a luxuriously shaped decoration made of bricks and sparkling white marble.

The inventive choice of the ground plan, the skilfully executed building technique, the authentically conceived constructive and decorative elements, as well as the polychrome ornamentation of the facades – these are the components that speak in favour of the great khetorial ambitions of the monk Manuel and his desire to create a representative edifice which should surpass all existent accomplishments of mediaeval architecture in this territory. The execution of the marble altar screen and the creation of the luxurious mosaic pavements located in the altar, naos and narthex of the temple, as well as the chapel in the south part of the building, was the finishing touch to the carefully designed interior of the festive memorial sacral edifice, i.e. mausoleum. In the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, to the already existent architectural structure of the temple, objects to the north, south and west side were added; due to the necessities of the liturgical ceremony, a small protessis was erected between the eastern and northern conchs of the original edifice, the south porch was built to encircle the monastic necropolis, while the exonarthex ennobled the entrance part of the church with a representatively organized spatial context. Rebuilt and beautified in the course of the following centuries, these additions testify to the concern and care of many generations of monastic donors for the architectural values of the Veljusa church complex.



# The Fresco painting of the church



Officiating Church Fathers

Due to the massive devastation of the fresco painting and as a result of the multiple conservational enterprises related to the preservation of the fresco decoration, the painted programme of the church is preserved only to a certain extent. Executed in the years after the erection of the edifice, and, according to the modest dimensions of the fresco repertoire, certainly completed by the middle of the eighties of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, it possesses very specific painterly features that point to the appearance of certain developmental trends of Byzantine painting in the domain of the iconographic conception of the themes. Furthermore, within the sphere of painterly expression, the fresco ensemble of the church of the Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa announces stylistic novelties



Saint John Chrysostom from the Officiating Bishops



Officiating Church Fathers (detail)

characteristic of the artistic production of the following century. Despite the massive damages caused to the decorative programme that has embellished the wall surfaces of the interior of the Veljusa temple, which are certainly obstructing the comprehension of the specific program conception of the painted ensemble, the preserved portions of the original frescoes are quite a testimony to the innovative iconographic dimension of the executed arrangement. Complemented with the rationally configured structure of the compositional schemes, marked by the voluminous exposition of the forms, as well as the tonal modus of the painterly handwriting, the iconographic novelties of the fresco painting of the church of the Virgin Eleoussa announce a new epoch in the development of Byzantine mural painting.

The first component of the program innovations in the conception of the painterly ensemble of the Veljusa temple is the decoration of the sanctuary, where, beneath the image of the Virgin as a symbol of the earthly Church, the composition of the Liturgical service of the Church fathers is represented with the depiction of Hetiomasia (the Prepared throne). Although the two frontally depicted church dignitaries manifest a passive approach to the Prepared throne that symbolizes Christ's salvational sacrifice, the other two (Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom) are shown as turned towards the center of the sanctuary, giving a blessing and reading the verses from their unwrapped liturgical scrolls. Thus, although some of the bishops have kept their frontal postures known from earlier iconography characteristic of the monuments from the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, those turned towards the Hetiomasia, depicted in the center of the composition, manifest their active engagement in the performance of the liturgical ceremony. Hence, Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom are reading the verses of their own liturgical services in honour of Christ's sacrifice. In that manner the earlier abstract form of frontal Episcopal images was substituted by more realistic visual content in which the church fathers are shown as officiating and bowing to the Prepared throne – the symbol of Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice. Subliming the elements of the old iconographic matrixes and the new painterly models, the composition represented in the altar of the Veljusa temple traces the way of establishment of the iconographic construction of the scene with the Officiating church fathers, which soon after will become a mandatory thematic decor in the program design of Byzantine sanctuaries.



Christ Pantocrator in the central dome (detail)



Christ Pantocrator in the central dome





Old Testament King David in the drum of the central dome

An example of the transitional iconographic models in the decoration of sacral edifices of this period is also the painted programme of the central dome, vaulting the naos of the Veljusa church. According to the already established program arrangement for decoration of the sacred space of Byzantine temples, in the summit of the central dome the bust of Christ Pantocrator was depicted as the Master of the Universe, the resurrected Saviour of mankind and the One who watches over the faithful in the earthly Church, blessing his followers from the peak of the church edifice. In the drum of the dome, besides the images of the Virgin and John the Baptist as components of the Deisis scene (a shortened version of the Last Judgement) and a pair of angels as representatives of the celestial entourage of the Pantocrator, the figures of four Old Testament prophets were also depicted announcing Christ's incarnation and His salvational mission on behalf of sinful mankind. In that sense, the Deisis scheme,



Image of the Virgin in the drum of the central dome



John the Baptist in the drum of the central dome





Old Testament prophet Ezekiel in the drum of the central dome

which appears as a visual echo of the older iconography of the dome decoration that visualized Christ's ascension, was united with the prophetic figures as a prefiguration of the new system of dome decoration in the painted arrangement of Byzantine temples. Hence, the painting in the dome of the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa, as well as the fresco ensemble in its sanctuary, had a substantial role in the establishment of transitional iconographic models in the program decoration of Byzantine monuments.

From the painted decoration of the naos of the temple, only two compositions, depicted on the semi-circular surfaces of the conchs, are preserved. On the surface of the northern conch, i.e. choir, the scene depicting the Harrowing of Hell is executed as a symbolic illustration of Christ's resurrection, showing Christ as descending into Limbo in order to save the righteous from the underground jaws of Hell. In that regard, besides the common representation of Adam and Eve, the ancestors of mankind, as well as the Old Testament Kings who await the redemption, the Veljusa scene encompasses a certain extraordinary iconographic element. Namely, beneath Christ's feet, where the broken doors of the hell are situated, there is the usual figure of the devil as a traditional symbol of the vanquished evil, but only in Veljusa the devil's figure has been portrayed together with his doppelganger, most likely as an iconographic reflection of the attitude towards the theological concept of the dualistic religious movements that were intensively spreading in the territory of medieval Macedonia. In the western conch, one can see the composition of the Presentation of Christ in the temple, out of which only the figure of the Virgin is preserved, as well as a small portion of the marble ciborium that represents the interior of the synagogue in which Christ was brought for circumcision. The location of these compositions in the conchs of the temple speak in favour of the certain arrangement in the



Image of an Angel in the drum of the central dome





The Vision of Saint Niphon in the south chapel



The Vision of Saint Niphon in the south chapel (detail)

illustration of the reduced cycle of the Great Feasts, which was executed on the walls of the naos according to the already established iconographic scheme of its depiction.

One cannot discuss the demolished decoration once executed in the narthex due to the massive devastation of the painting, but we have to mention that in this part of the temple, where the tomb of the founder was located, the khetorial arrangement was most probably depicted. Despite its later dislocation to the niche above the entrance to the exonarthex, where in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new donor's fresco was executed, the discovered arcosolium shaped next to the south wall of the narthex can be the only appropriate space for a festal depiction of the khetor's portrait, executed



The Vision of Saint Niphon in the south chapel (detail)





The Virgin with the Child in the apse



View towards the altar

within the authentic fresco ensemble from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. Completely destroyed, together with almost the entire decoration of the narthex, the donor's composition has obstructed the common speculations on behalf of the iconographic structure of the scene, which, most probably, encompassed the images of the khetor, the patron, as well as the supreme state authority. The damage caused to the later khetorial fresco, which should have followed the painterly model of the earlier representation, does not allow the accurate determination of the specific conception of the authentic donor's depiction, executed next to the tomb of the Veljusa temple benefactor.

From the fresco decoration of the south chapel, dedicated to the North African bishop Niphon, several representations are preserved. In the summit of the small dome, the image of Christ Emanuel was depicted as a symbolic character of the incarnated Christ who has come down to earth in order to suffer for the sins of mankind; thus, the image of Christ in the iconographic variant of Emanuel symbolizes the sacrificial lamb laid at the altar of primordial sins, as well as the announced Saviour, incarnated and prepared for the salvational mission that would save humanity. Out of the saintly images executed on the walls of the chapel, one can recognize the portraits of Saint Panteleimon, the famous healer, depicted with a compassionated look, gentle facial appearance, firm figure and medicinal kit, as well as the image of the patron – Saint Niphon, representative of the Alexandrian church of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, depicted in a bust, with a noble portrait, gracious gesture of blessing and luxuriously embellished Gospel in hand. Next to his portrait, in the apse of the chapel, the scene of his Vision, described in the Vita of Saint Niphon, was represented illustrating the event when the saint has seen Christ in a glowing aura carried by angels as an announcement of his death. Thus, the mausoleum character of the temple was emphasized by the eschatological dimension of the illustration of the most striking hagiographic moment from the Vita of the saint, as an example of the supreme devotion to the ascetic ideals of the khetor's "*exemplum imitationis*".

Despite the massive devastation of the fresco repertoire, which, in certain portions of the Veljusa temple is completely destroyed, the iconographic novelties and the specific conception of the scenes, founded upon the profound theological erudition of the khetor, as well as his desire for the construction of authentic painterly models, speak in favour of the extraordinary significance of the fresco arrangement executed in the khetorial endowment of the former church dignitary. The program design of the ensemble is based on the: iconographic novelties in the conception of the altar decoration and the painterly design of the central dome; the reduction of the Festive cycle in accordance to the dimensions and features of available space within the church interior; the accentuation of the multi-fold role of Christ in the salvation of the faithful by the illumination of the three images of the Saviour within the tri-domed architectonic articulation of the temple; and the illustration of the specifically selected eschatological motifs, and these represent the most distinguished feature of the creative contribution of the Veljusa fresco arrangement to the development of Byzantine artistry. Being chronologically situated at the beginning of a developmental process in the structure of the program components, as well as iconographic matrixes of Byzantine mural painting, the fresco ensemble of the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa represents the most precious stage of the evolution of canonical matrixes of medieval visual aestheticism.





The painting in the south conch

The stylistic features of the fresco arrangement that has embellished the wall surfaces of the interior of the Veljusa temple are far from being less significant than the iconographic features of the painted repertoire. Although devastated to a great extent, the painted decoration of the church still glows with the delicate diapason by means of expression that reflect the atmosphere of theological ideals. The highly noticeable drawing skills, the immaculate modelling of the forms, the effort for accentuation of all details in the painterly exposition of the themes, as well as the sophisticated coloristic gamut of the fresco ensemble executed in the Veljusa church speak of highly talented master painters who were able to satisfy the refined taste of the khetor Manuel and to embellish his representative endowment with remarkable artistic qualities. The great talent and the solid education of the fresco painters are particularly visible in all the structural components of their painterly expression, marked by precisely conceived drawing, voluminously vivid execution of the forms, as well as the darkened palette of hues encompassed by the refined coloristic diapason of the tonal resonances.

The pedantic modelling of the images and figures, the tonal approach to the configuration of the volume in the depiction of the scenes, as well as the specific nuances that visualize the pictorial expression of the saintly portraits – these are the most characteristic features of the artistic handwriting of the Veljusa masters. Sparing no effort to show their best drawing skills, they allowed the penetration of the new stylistic trends in their artistic expression, particularly noticeable in the execution of the images, whereas the strengthened role of the line has influenced the appearance of certain decorativeness in the presentation of the saintly images. Emphasizing the strengthened dynamism of the linearistic approach in the execution of the preserved saintly





The painting in the west conch

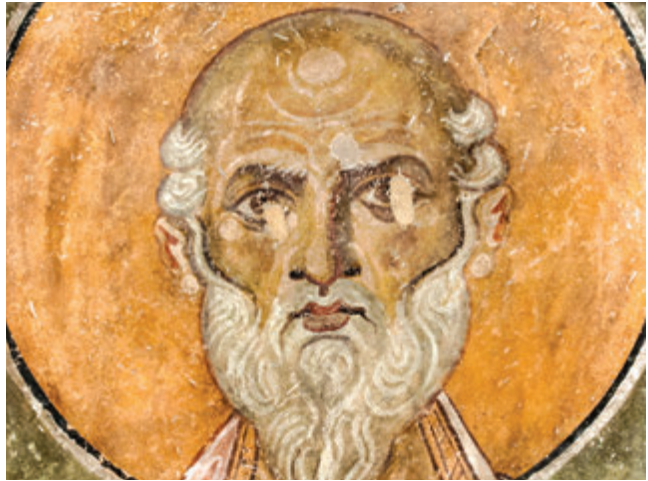


The painting in the north conch





Saint Niphon



Saint Niphon (detail)

portraiture, especially in the depiction of the facial contours of the suggestively represented characters, the Veljusa painters have anticipated the most recognizable features of the artistic trend of the following century. Being devoted to the principles of the thoroughly organized painterly structure of the representations, as well as the coloristic gamut of darkened hues and deep sonority of cold nuances, the Veljusa fresco painters have created an ensemble that reflects the sophisticated artistic taste of the khtetor and his monastic spirituality.



Christ Emmanuel in the south chapel



The preserved fragments of the frescoes that once embellished the walls of the exonarthex, as well as the south porch (second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), although insufficient for a precise iconographic analysis of the depicted repertoire, are marked by the great mastery of the authors and their extraordinary painterly qualities. Despite the massive deterioration of these frescoes, the remnants of which have been preserved to a minimum extent, one can notice that they were executed as a supplement to the interior decoration in the times of the functional architectural enterprises from the beginning of the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century; according to their stylistic features, they speak in favour of an exclusive painterly achievement whose creator is far from being unknown within the artistic production on the Macedonian territory. On the grounds of the preserved portion of the composition with the depiction of the ermite



Saint Panteleimon

Onophrius, the image of Christ who most certainly belonged to some of the Evangelic illustrations, the figure of the unidentified character whose posture suggests affiliation to the synoptic iconography, as well as the portrait of the unidentified bishop, one can recognize a work of art of a supreme master with a glamorous energy of expression and refined technique of execution. The precise and slightly floating drawing, the dynamic vividness of the lines, the perfect balance of the compositional masses, as well as the inconspicuous movements of the depicted figures – these are the main features of his creativity which is well integrated in the contemporary painterly trends of Byzantine artistic production from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and stand next to the extraordinary artistic products of the mural painting of this era. Attributed to the leading painter of the church of Saint Panteleimon at Nerezi (near Skopje) and placed on the pedestal of the best achievements of the middle Byzantine epoch, the fresco decoration of the Veljusa porch, although modest by the dimensions of the repertoire, has touched the creative heights of the colossal artistic execution.





Saint Onophrios in the southern porch

Established in the times of relatively stable historical events and the advantageous economic situation towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa has endured throughout difficult and cruel centuries that were to come. Shaped with authentic architectural forms ennobled by luxurious facade ornamentation and embellished with the mystical sonority of a decorative programme with profound theological and iconographic meaning, the Veljusa church originates in the times of the establishment of representative architectural models, as well as the formation of the characteristic patterns of Byzantine iconography. Although the temple has managed to preserve only some portions of the one-time glamorous vista, transformed into a more modest architectural appearance due to the massive restoration and which

has lost the largest part of its authentically executed painterly decoration, the church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa reflects the most representative artistic trends which, under the impact of the leading Byzantine artistic centers, have flourished on the territory of mediaeval Macedonia.

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***Published by***

Cultural Heritage Protection Office  
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia

***For the publisher***

Prof. Viktor Lilchikj Adams, Ph.D.

***Editor***

Kate Antevska

***Author***

Elizabeta Dimitrova, PH.D.

***Translation from Macedonian***

Elizabeta Dimitrova, PH.D.

***English translation proofread by***

Jason Bradford Miko

***Photos***

Mishko Tutkovski

***Graphic design and printing***

DATAPONS SKOPJE

***Copies***

500



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Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia  
Cultural Heritage Protection Office

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација

Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

726.54.033.2(497.742)

930.85(497.7)

DIMITROVA, Elizabeta

The church of the Holy Virgin Eleoussa at Veljusa / Elizabeta  
Dimitrova ; [photos Mishko Tutkovski]. - Skopje : Cultural Heritage  
Protection Office, 2016. - 28 стр. : илустр. во боја ; 25 см. -  
(The most significant values of the cultural and natural heritage)

Foreword: Macedonian cultural and natural heritage / Viktor Lilchikj;  
стр. 6. - Библиографија: стр. 25

ISBN 978-608-4549-37-6

а) Црква "Св. Богородица Елеуса" - Струмичко б) Културно наследство  
- Македонија  
COBISS.MK-ID 101577482





