

Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages

Edited by
Maria Alessia Rossi
Alice Isabella Sullivan

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Chapter 1

The Allegory of Wisdom in Chrelja's Tower seen through Philotheos Kokkinos

Justin L. Willson

Abstract

Solomon's Allegory of Wisdom in Proverbs 9:1–5 afforded medieval craftsmen a sophisticated reflection on building. This essay examines an early 14th century fresco of this allegory from Bulgaria. Intervening in a larger body of scholarship on Byzantine-Slavic relations, I draw on Philotheos Kokkinos's discourse on Wisdom to account for the painter's use of a scalloped dome and choice for how to represent the seven pillars of Wisdom's house and cup of wine. In doing so, I propose using the framework of the "commons" rather than a theory of "influence" to inquire into the conditions that are necessary for any cultural give-and-take. Having adopted an exploratory approach to the commons, I conclude by meditating on how Byzantium (or rather a discourse in Greek) and the Slavic world (or a fresco in Bulgaria) inhabited the commons.

Chapter 2

How Byzantine was the Moscow Inauguration of 1498?

Alexandra Vukovich

Abstract

This essay explores the 1498 elevation of Dmitrii Ivanovich to co-ruler, alongside his grandfather Ivan III (r. 1462–1502). The rite of investiture described in early Muscovite chronicles (the Nikon/Patriarchal Chronicle) has often been viewed as an interpolation of a Byzantine rite (based on that of Manuel II in 1392) and as a step in the shaping of Moscow into a "Third Rome." However, it is clear that certain elements (the cap/crown of Monomakh and barmy, or vestments) were developed from the local landscape of power, one that heavily borrowed from previous contact with Mongol culture. Moreover, the composite nature of the inauguration narrative points to a ceremony developed from a set of disparate sources, including books of rites, local artifacts and rituals. From this perspective, the inauguration ceremony must be viewed as a descriptive text rather than a prescriptive one (such as ordines), one that had the clear political message of promoting Ivan III, his cultural oeuvre, and his political might. The ceremony also carries specific political messages, such as the assertion of sovereignty by Ivan III, who reserved the right to name his successor (bypassing his other children). However, the elaborate and intricate character of the ceremony functioned also to mask the overall lack of consensus and tensions of the latter part of Ivan III's reign. The transfer of Byzantine rituals and regalia to the north suggests the transformation and invention of Byzantine artifacts for local aims and contexts.

Chapter 3

Intellectual Relationships between the Byzantine and Serbian Elites during the Palaiologan Era

Elias Petrou

Abstract

During the Palaiologan period, the Byzantine state was a ghost of its former glory. Surrounded by many new enemies, the Eastern Roman Empire tried to avoid the inevitable fall through an opening to the West and alliances with its neighbors. Although Serbia was Byzantium's main enemy at the Balkan borders, it soon became a valuable ally to Constantinople against the eastern Ottoman danger. Through various marriages between members of the Serbian and Byzantine elites, the two states came closer and maintained a close relationship in intellectual matters for almost two centuries (from second half of the 13th century through the first half of the 15th century). This essay presents and analyzes two important cases of this intellectual exchange in the Balkans, based on historiographical and paleographical evidence. First, the Xenon of the Kral, a charitable institution, -shows the intellectual relationship of Serbia to Byzantium from the beginning of the 14th century. Established in Constantinople by the Serbian King Uroš II Milutin, it included an inn and a hospital. Later it incorporated a school, including a medical school, and a scriptorium. The second case deals with the relocation of the Byzantine émigré George Cantacouzenos Palaiologos from Mystra to the Serbian court in Smederevo around the middle of the 15th century. His valuable personal library of manuscripts transformed the Serbian castle into a small center of Byzantine scholarship, one that attracted the attention of scholars from the Byzantine capital.

Chapter 4

An Unexpected Image of Diplomacy in a Vatican Panel

Marija Mihajlovic-Shiple

Abstract

The Icon of St Peter and Paul in the Vatican Treasury was sent by the Serbian Queen Jelena as a diplomatic gift to Pope Nicholas IV at the end of the 13th century. The icon has generated much speculation among modern researchers regarding its proposed recipient and the identification of some of the figures represented in its lower register. This essay explores possible reasons for a diplomatic gift from a Serbian queen to a Latin pope. It contextualizes the iconography of the lower register of the icon in its contemporary historical background and the queen's possible motives for commissioning this gift. Drawing on primary sources such as hagiographies, letters, frescoes, and icons, the essay considers the extant evidence. It draws on secondary sources, and discusses and analyzes current hypotheses and possible interpretations of the icon. The essay demonstrates that diplomatic correspondence not only was based on written documents but also

was exercised through careful consideration of the visual vocabulary of the commissioner that would also have been readable and familiar to the recipient. In the process, it shows that the lower register of the panel represented the duality of the queen's and her sons' political aspirations and that, in its carefully selected iconography, it addressed the sociopolitical issues, cultural interaction, and biconfessional circumstances in the Adriatic region during the 13th century.

Chapter 5

Byzantine Heritage and Serbian Ruling Ideology in Early 14th-Century Monumental Painting

Maria Alessia Rossi

Abstract

The 14th century was a turning point for the Serbian Kingdom. In particular, Milutin's reign (r. 1282–1321) was a time of military expansion, wealth, and religious fervor. During the first years of his reign he enlarged the frontiers of the Serbian Kingdom, at the expense of the Byzantine Empire. In 1299, however, a peace treaty was signed between Milutin and the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II (r. 1282–1328), which concluded with the marriage between the Serbian King and the Emperor's five-year-old daughter Simonis. This union sanctioned a change in Serbian policies and opened the door to the so-called cultural byzantinization of Serbia. The geographic proximity, the numerous diplomatic missions, and the newly developed family ties between the Byzantine Empire and the Serbian Kingdom allowed for literary and artistic exchanges. This essay challenges the idea of an overwhelming Byzantine cultural presence in the Serbian artistic production, suggesting instead a fluid, multicultural, and multifaceted relationship between these neighboring territories, one in which the Byzantine heritage was appropriated and transformed to shape a local visual rhetoric of identity. In order to address these issues, the essay focuses on Christ's miracle cycle in monumental decorations. The sudden proliferation of this iconography in both Byzantine and Serbian territories in the early Palaiologan period suggests a link between the regions. The essay discusses similarities and dissimilarities, showing how this iconography was transmitted, exchanged, and altered in order to convey different meanings in different contexts. More specifically, a twofold interpretation of the treatment of the miracle cycle in Serbian churches is offered, stemming from the desire to prove a shared Byzantine heritage and, at the same time, a need for innovation as a means to express a new ruling ideology.

Chapter 6

Dečani between the Adriatic Littoral and Byzantium

Ida Sinkević

Abstract

This essay discusses the unique combination of Byzantine and Western, Romanesque and Gothic features evident in architecture and sculpture of the Church of Christ Pantokrator, the katholikon of the Dečani Monastery in Kosovo. It maintains that such a combination is a consequence of multiple factors that ranged from aesthetic preferences to the political desires and ambitions of the people involved in its erection: the archbishop, the royal patrons, and the master builder. Moreover, the paper also considers broader geopolitical and social circumstances as factors in these multiple artistic decisions and their implications for our understanding of local style, both for this monument and others in Serbia.

Chapter 7

Triconch Churches Sponsored by Serbian and Wallachian Nobility

Jelena Bogdanović

Abstract

Architectural activities of remarkable quality continued to thrive north of Byzantium under the sponsorship of Serbian and Wallachian nobility long after the fall of Byzantium and occasionally even in territories under Ottoman rule. Triconch domed churches, which have been enduring examples of Middle Byzantine architecture and especially of monastic architecture on Mount Athos, shaped notions of an Orthodox Christian identity shared by Serbs and Wallachians, as opposed to the Islamic architecture of the Ottoman Turks. This essay highlights the architectural experimentations and plastic treatment of triconch churches built by Serbian and Wallachian nobility within and beyond the territories of their domains as pervasive statements of cultural, religious, and familial identity. It questions established narratives about the autonomous national development of the so-called Morava-style churches and their linear influence on churches in the principality of Wallachia. By enlarging the discussion about the territorial and chronological domains of the triconch churches built by Serbian and Wallachian nobility between ca. 1350s and 1550s, this essay shows that a narrow focus on national divides has obscured more robust geographical and temporal exchanges of architectural principles and practices in the development of Byzantine and post-Byzantine architecture.

Chapter 8

Moldavian Art and Architecture between Byzantium and the West

Alice Isabella Sullivan

Abstract

Situated at the crossroads of the Western European and the Byzantine cultural spheres, the principality of Moldavia developed under princely patronage new visual forms in art and architecture during the 15th and 16th centuries. Local assimilation of selected elements from distinct visual traditions became most evident in the painted and fortified Orthodox monastic churches built in the region initially under the patronage of Stephen III “the Great” (r. 1457–1504), and then with support from his illegitimate son and heir, Peter Rareș (r. 1527–38; 1541–46). The Church of the Annunciation at Moldovița Monastery offers an exceptional case in point for the development of Moldavian monastic art and architecture during the initial decades of the 16th century. The *katholikon* at Moldovița—representative of the Moldavian corpus—displays an eclecticism with respect to artistic and architectural sources. Whereas its layout, organization, and ritual customs readapt Greek Orthodox examples alongside local developments, distinct architectural features reveal Western Gothic prototypes. The extensive mural cycles in multiple registers that wrap around the whole of the church both inside and out derive primarily from Byzantine models, but they also include historical narratives adapted to address contemporary local anxieties about a perceived Ottoman threat to the region’s political independence and religious identity. The distinctive architecture and iconographic program of the *katholikon* at Moldovița, as elsewhere in Moldavia, express complex social and religious politics. These buildings also elucidate processes of image translations, the transfer of artistic ideas, and the particular dynamics of cultural contact in a region that developed at the crossroads of different traditions and that took on a central role in the continuation and refashioning of especially Byzantine models in the decades after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Chapter 9

The Byzantine Tradition in Wallachian and Moldavian Embroideries

Henry David Schilb

Abstract

Although the corpus of Moldavian embroideries of the 14th through the 16th centuries is famously large, thanks especially to the patronage of the Stephen III of Moldavia (r. 1457–1504), a smaller sample size survives from Wallachia. There are, nonetheless, general features of the Wallachian examples that are distinctive enough to allow us to attribute a textile at the Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University Bloomington to Wallachia. Aspects of style and technique used in the Bloomington textile closely resemble

an embroidered veil given to the Cathedral of Argeş by Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512–21). The iconography is similar to a 14th-century wall painting at the Church of Saint Nicholas at Curtea de Argeş, and is closer still to a 16th-century icon from Curtea de Argeş. Considering this evidence, it is possible to attribute the embroidered textile in the Eskenazi Museum convincingly to Wallachian patronage and production.

Chapter 10

Rethinking the Veglia Altar Frontal from the Victoria and Albert Museum and Its Patron

Danijel Ciković and Iva Jazbec Tomaić

Abstract

This essay for the first time elaborates the hypothesis on Bishop Ivan II (episcopate recorded from 1358 to 1389) of Krk (Croatia) as the donor of the Veglia Altar Frontal. The embroidered altar frontal was originally made for the high altar of Krk Cathedral and is now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The artwork is the most valuable example of Gothic Venetian embroidery, executed after a preparatory drawing by the most important artist in 14th-century Venice—Paolo Veneziano. Based on a stylistic comparison with a series of Paolo's works and an analysis of the chronology of Krk's bishops, it is possible to conclude that the altar frontal was made after a commission by Bishop Ivan II at the beginning of his episcopacy, most likely in the sixth decade of the 14th century. Redating the altar frontal at the Victoria and Albert Museum to Paolo's late artistic phase (re)opens the question of the master's possible sojourn on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. The commission of the luxurious altar frontal for Krk Cathedral is viewed within the complex historical circumstances of the mid-century in the western Balkans. The impression is that during the years-long tense political situation between the Hungarian-Croatian King Louis I of Anjou and the Venetian Republic, patrons from eastern Adriatic towns continued to acquire works of art in Venice, regardless of the political affiliation of their communes. Finally, this essay highlights the importance of cataloguing the seemingly small number of remaining examples of Venetian Gothic embroidery, as well as the need for their valorization in the wider European context.