

# Religious Art in the Bulgarian Lands

## Authors

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## Introduction

The purpose of the course will be to present in detail particular directions of the development of the religious art throughout the Bulgarian lands during the period 11-20 century. The course will start with a theoretical part providing details on selected topics from the scope of developments, which affected the arts evolution locally during the selected period of 10 centuries. The course shall continue with a practical section, which will again comprise of separate chapters, each providing practical information on a respective topic from the relevant chapter from the previous theoretical module. The last part of the course will include an interactive section, where teachers and students will be able to post materials and comments on the subjects discussed in the previous modules.

## Part 1 Art Theory

### Chapter 1: Influence of Byzantine art

Icon-painting comprising of „icon“ and “paint” is a kind of visual art, which is closely related to Christianity and widespread mainly in the Eastern Orthodox world. In ancient times the term „εικών“ („icon“) was used to mark ordinary images (of philosophers, rulers, athletes, courtesans) in order to distinguish them from the images of Gods. In the Christian tradition the term acquired the opposite meaning. According to the legend of king Abgarus, told by bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the archetype of all icons is the linen cloth („Image of Edessa“), with which Jesus Christ dried up his face. This tale confirms the godlike, unearthly origin of the art of icon-painting.

The roots of icon-painting come from the early Christian epoch (3 — 5 century). The most ancient images of that kind are found in the underground galleries (catacombs) inhabited by Christians before the time Christianity was recognized as an official religion in the Roman Empire during the year 313. In the “Priscilla” catacomb an image of breast-feeding Mother of God, which will later transform into the iconographic composition „Milk-feeding Mother of God“, was found. Some ancient topics get reworked and acquire a new interpretation setting the beginning of this new kind of art. The well known genre statue „The good shepherd“ turns into an image of Christ who returns a lost layman into the path of good faith. It is supposed that the image of St George defeating the dragon originates from Apollo’s defeat over Python.

One of the earliest iconographic images, preserved until present times, are created using the encaustic technique. They originate from the Sinai monastery „St. Catherine’s“ in Egypt and date back to the 5 — 7 century. These images still preserve the plastic modeling, which is so characteristic of ancient art. The style, technique, as well as the area from which they originate lead to the traditions of Fayumian portrait.

An important role in the process of the formation and development of icon-painting plays the

dispute regarding the canonic character of these images, which arose in Byzantium during the 8 century. The upholders of icons state that there is nothing heretic in displaying Christ. The adversaries of icons consider them as a kind of idol, and their worshipping as idolatry. The dispute turns into a real war, which continued from the year 726 till the year 843 and had a somewhat political nature. One of the most prominent adversaries of iconography is emperor Leo III Isaurian. During the period of his reign a great number of icons, murals and mosaics were destroyed and replaced by images of crosses, geometrical and flowery elements. Human images were only allowed to be present in secular arts. Adversaries of iconography are also the emperors Constantine V and Theophilus, as well as the Bishop Nicita of Constantinople. Prominent defenders of iconography are John of Damascus and Theodore Studit. The adversaries of iconography are opposed strongly by the ordinary people and a large part of the clergy. As soon as it fails to receive the support of the emperors it is defeated and rejected.

Iconoclasm beliefs are discovered in the ideas of Bogomilism and other heresies denying the sacred nature of icons.

During the age of iconoclasm there exists a brief period, during which the supporters of iconography prevailed (787 — 815). In Nicaea was summoned the Seventh ecumenical council (also known as the council of Nicaea). At this council was specified what is and what is not allowed in iconography. The developed canons were imposed no sooner than the 11 century and form the overall future development of iconography.

Byzantium is the one, which imposed iconographic art, established its main rules, specified its tendencies. By disseminating Orthodox Christianity and imposing its culture over the surrounding peoples, Byzantium also transferred its iconographic traditions. The Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian and Romanian iconography are strongly influenced by Byzantium, which however does not prevent them from developing their own characteristics. Byzantium also influenced the mediaeval Western European art and particularly the Venetian art.

The main stages in the development of Byzantine iconography are:

- Justinian's Renaissance (6 — 7 century)
- Iconoclasm period (8 — 9 century)
- Iconography of the Macedonian dynasty (9 — 10 century)
- 10 — 12 century iconography
- Palaiologos renaissance (13 — 14 century)

Until the epoch of the Renaissance Byzantine iconography strongly influences western art mainly in Italy. The art of Duccio di Buoninsegna from Sienna and the Florentine master Cenni di Pepo (Giovanni) Cimabue is a characteristic example for this. Especially strong is the Byzantine influence in Venice, which maintains close commercial and political relations with Byzantium and Eastern Europe. Here it continues its presence even after the rest of Italian art has turned in a different development direction. The decoration of the exterior and interior of the „San Marko“ cathedral is an excellent example of Byzantine art and iconography.

Bulgarian iconography – appears during mediaeval Bulgarian art with the adoption of Christianity during 864 and has as its original prototype the Byzantine iconography, but occasionally overlaps with existing traditions. The ceramic icons of the culture of Pliska and Preslav. A pane of ceramic plates is used as a base, which is then painted on with bright paints. The means of expression were a flat decorative spot and outlines. The oval lively faces differ from their contemporary Byzantine images. Due to the frailty of the material just a few works of the period have been preserved nowadays in fragments. Among the relatively well preserved works is the period is the icon “St. Theodore Stratilat”.

During the epoch of the Second Bulgarian State there are two main trends in iconography:

national and palatial. The first is connected with national traditions, while the second originates from the traditions of the Tarnovo artistic school and is influenced by the Palaiologos renaissance. Among the most famous examples of Bulgarian iconography from that period are the two-sided icon "Mother of God Katafigius and St. John Theologian" („Poganov's icon") from 1396, „Mother of God Eleusa" — a two-sided icon originating from Nessebar (13 — 14 century), „Mother of God Odigitria" from Nessebar with a rich silver casing.

During the period when Bulgaria was a part of the Ottoman empire, iconography together with the Slavic script and Christianity helped the Bulgarians to preserve their national self-consciousness.

A well-known Bulgarian icon-painter from the 16 century is St. Pimen Zograf.

One of the most often seen characters in Bulgarian icons is St. Ivan Rilski.

Renaissance brings renovation to iconography. The new style is close to national traditions, still observing the genre canons. Bright, lively colors, characters in contemporary attire, kings and patriarchs - saints (a little bit forgotten during the epoch of the Ottoman rule) are among the distinctive marks of the renaissance iconography. New art schools appear: Samokov, Tryavna, Debur and others. Among the prominent icon-painters of the epoch are Zahari Zograf, Nikola Icon painter, Stanislav Dospevski. In contrast to previous periods, the renaissance zograf rarely come from the clergy.

Christianization of Bulgaria during the IX century sets the beginning of regular Bulgarian-Georgian clerical and cultural relations. The earliest known Bulgarian report for these relations is presented in the thorough biography of St. Constantine-Cyril Philosopher. It mentions the "Iberians" among the peoples, which have their own letters (literature) and praise God in their native language. According to the same biography, during the Khazars mission St. Cyril saves from destruction a city, which is besieged by the Khazars. Some authors like Maren Taden (Paris) are of the opinions that the information is actually connected with the siege of Tbilisi by the Arabic leader Bug al Kabir. When St. Cyril and Methodius are at the Olymp mountain in Asia Minor, the Georgian St. Ilarion is there at the same time. Petersburg philologists M. I. Privalova and G. M. Prohorov reach the conclusion that the Glagolhic alphabet is a missionary alphabet, the structure and functions of which are directly related to the clerical Georgian script and other eastern alphabets. Most letters in the Glagolhic alphabet and the Georgian clerical alphabet are very much alike and their number is almost the same, because the "correlative sounds of speech are presented through adaptation of one and the same sign". The letters have a digital meaning in contrast to the Cyrillic, where such meaning is possessed only by the letters taken from the Greek alphabet. The German historian Gotfrid Schram also considers that St. Cyril and Methodius are inspired to create the Glagolhic alphabet by the Georgian alphabet, which is presented to them by St. Ilarion.

In the Zograf's honorary diploma of Tzar Ivan Alexander (March 1342) is stated that the different peoples, including the Georgians, have taken special care for the Bulgarian monastery in Athon.

The legendary take of the Christening of the Georgians, entitled "A tale about how the Georgians became reasonable", is dated October 27 in the earliest manuscript prologues, translated by the brothers from Thessalonica (Cyril and Methodius) and preserved in the south-Slavic transcripts.

The Bulgarian rework of the apocryphal "Words for Sivila" from XIII century places the Georgians second after the Bulgarians and underlines their loyalty to the Orthodox religion: "The second are the Georgians: calm, loving the foreigners, good-natured, kind, loving the priest and curious about God".

There is a great number of similar elements in the Bulgarian and Georgian mural art, but they are due not to direct influences but mostly to their common Byzantine grounds.

Scenes, related to Bulgaria, have been immortalized in Georgian clerical monumental art. In the church of Pavnisius, the murals of which date back to the third quarter of the XII century, is included an iconographic cycle with the miracles and life of St. George. The miracle with the Paflagonian reflects a historic event – the defeat over the Byzantine army at Anchialus and Katasyrtai during 917-918 – despite the fact that such a miracle is connected also with St. Nicholas Mirlikiyski (IV century). A young man from Paflagonia is captured by the Bulgarians and forced to serve a Bulgarian nobleman from Preslav. One day, while he was carrying warm water up the stairs to the second floor of the house, a secret horseman appears and takes him back to his home in Paflagonia. There his parents are currently mourning him, because they consider him dead. The murals and icons present the ex-captive sitting on the saddle of St. George with a towel in one hand and a jug of water in the other.

Bachkovo monastery. During Byzantine reign over Bulgaria, some Georgians, which have advanced in the hierarchy of Byzantium, have occupied leading positions throughout the Bulgarian lands. During the reign of Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118) two brothers with family name Bakuriani, from the principality of Tao-Klarjeti in Southern Georgia, make a carrier in Byzantine lands. According to “Alexiada” written by Anna Comnenus they are both of Armenian origin, but Orthodox in religion. One of the brothers – Abasius – leads one of the Byzantine armies, while the other Grigorius has the rank of sebast and great domestic of the West – leader of the Byzantine armies in Europe). The latter receives as a gift large feudal estates around the Aegean, in Macedonia and Plovdiv. In December 1083 Grigorius founded the Bachkovo monastery and in the following year creates its statutes, which is the first preserved monastic statute. The statute is trilingual – Greek, Georgian and Armenian – and has been preserved through transcripts, because its original has been lost. According to some suppositions Bakuriani establishes the monastery together with blessed Theophilat from Ohrid, but this is not very probably because the latter becomes archbishop much later on during the autumn of 1090. Bakuriani builds three inns and one castle in the village of Stenimahos (today Assenovgrad) for the worshippers. He also builds a castle close to the village of Gorni Voden.

By means of the monastic typic the founder wants not simply to regulate the estates and life of the monks, but also to prevent the overtaking of the monastery by the Greek clergy. The typic states that the monastery is Georgian and only the clerk can be Byzantine. This text was not favorable for the patriarch of Constantinople and this is why the statute is adopted by Jerusalem patriarch Evtimij. Bakuriani was killed during a battle with the Pechenegs close to Plovdiv in 1086, but his will for the monastery to be solely Georgian is kept until the end of the XII century. In the years to follow the monastery is recognized as a literary center. This is the place where the famous Georgian philosopher neoplatonian Joan Petricius (1050-1130) organized his work. During the autumn of 1189 the crusaders of emperor Fridrich Barbarosa plunder the surroundings of the Bachkovo monastery. The cashier of the armies buries in the lands of the village of Gornoslav (close to Plovdiv) a big part of the funds with the hope to protect the money. The treasure is found in the late 1962. It comprises of golden coins and ingots, cut during the time of Byzantine emperors

Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118),

John II Komnenos (1118-1143),

Manuil I Comnenus (1143-1180) and

Andronikos I Komnenos (1182-1185).

The only preserved building from the early ones is the ossuary, built in opus mixtum from freestone and slim bricks. The façade is plastic, separated by blind arcades – a new phenomenon for Byzantine architecture. The plans of the ossuary are also new for the Balkan peninsula and are introduced from the Caucasus. It is built on two floors, the first of which is the bone-vault, while the second is a chapel. The fourteen tombs, which have been dug inside the

floor of the bone-vault show that the ossuary was constructed for the needs of the Bakuriani family only. The chapel has been painted by the Georgian Joan Iveropulec, who presented the figures of St. Joan, Evtimij and Georgi Iverius. In 1199 the region of Plovdiv and the Mid Rhodopes again become part of the liberated Bulgarian state. Georgian influences also settle in the church "St. George" in Asenovgrad, which is also founded by Bakuriani.

The monastery slowly passes from Georgian to Bulgarian hands during the following decades, but it keeps its relations with Georgia until late Middle ages. Thus for example on the silver casing of the famous miraculous icon of Mother of God there is donor inscription from the year 1311 made by two Georgians, residents of Tao-Klarjeti. The inscription says: "This holy icon of the our holy queen Mother of God Petrichka has been plated by teo brothers from Tao, sons of Ignatij, the tutor Atanasius and Okropir for 125 perpers and may a candlestick be placed next to it...". In the scriptoria of the Bachkovo monastery during XV two Georgians of the same name Grigol make a transcript with festive readings following the order of Maharabeli Okrokmaisdze. Later on this monument is transferred to Svanetia (Georgia), which is demonstrated by the preserved correspondence related to the transcript. Now it is kept in the Transcript institute "K. S. Kekelidze" in Tbilisi. During the XIV-XV centuries in a Greek manuscript Stihirar form the XIV century (now preserved in the Central historical and archaeological museum in Sofia) was introduced a Georgian writing probably by the priest Jovan Markozashvili, who visited the monastery in 1702. In the national library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" is preserved a Georgian manuscript, which probably originates from the Bachkovo monastery. It contains a translation of the inscription found in a Bachkovo monastery icon dated back to the 1311.

Greek manuscripts from the Bachkovo monastery have probably been used by Georgian monks. 27 Greek manuscripts from the same monastery, dates from the XI until the XIX century, are preserved in the Church-historical archive and institute at the Bulgarian patriarchy. A rare element with melismatic specimen from the XIII century is of major interest. A stihirar from the beginning of the XVI century is also precious.

During 1706 the Bachkovo monastery was visited by the French traveler Paul Luka. At that time noone is able to read the inscription on the miraculous icon and the memory for its donors is fading away. The monks tell the Frenchman the legend that the icon has been painted by St. Lucas himself and has flown from Georgia to Bulgaria.

During the Russian-Turkish liberating war (1877-1878) the retreating Turkish armies threaten the monastery with arson, but it is saved by military units under the leadership of Georgian officer G. Gremeli. This way Georgians save a monastery founded by their ancestors almost 800 years ago.

## **Monastery of Konstamonitou**

This monastery from Mount Athos is another sacral territory, on which Bulgarians and Georgians communicate. It is situated in the north-eastern side of the Athos peninsula in northern Greece. It is the third monastery established in Mount Athos and replaced a group of hermit cells, known as the laurel "St. Kliment". It is founded around 980-985 by monk St. Joan Iverski, which was previously known as a general of the Georgian king David Kuropalat from Tao-Klarjeti. He becomes a monk in a Macedonian monastery and is then active in another monastery at Olymp – two places where he undoubtedly has communicated with Bulgarians. At the same time the leader of the eastern army Varda Sklir rises against Vasilius II Killer of Bulgars. By 978 he takes over all of Asia Minor and defeats all units sent against him. The same way in which Bulgarian prince Boris I takes off the cassock in order to debacle his son Vladimir-Rassate, Joan the monk was asked by the emperor to return to the battle field. With the aid of tsar David Joan managed to defeat the enemy in 979. He founded the Iverski monastery with the generous donations made by the emperor and the spoils of war.

The monastery of Iver was initially built in the first half of the XI by the Georgian monk St. George Varasvaci and was later restored in 1513. The Iverski monastery is dedicated to Assumption and takes the third place in the hierarchical listing of the 20 Athos monasteries. After the Mongols conquered Georgia the number of monks as well as the size of the donations shrank. Until the year 1357 Iver is still Georgian, but during this year the Constantinople patriarch Calist issues a charter, which orders the monastery to become Greek. When the Kutaist archbishop Timoteus (Gabashvili) visited Athos in 1755, there is not a single Georgian in Iver.

Much later, during the XIX century two prominent Georgian monks – Venedict and Visarion – work and live in the Iverski monastery.

An example for how Byzantium influenced Bulgarian art through its Mount Athos art school is the “Saint Stephan” church in Nessebar /the new bishop’s residence/. The church has initially been devoted to Mother Mary and only later through the centuries it has been renamed after Saint Stephan. According to specialists the church has been painted and ornamented by 3 artists, students of the Crete art-school, trained in Athos. The church has been built during 11 – 13 century, while in the 16 century – during the Ottoman yoke – it was reconstructed to the west, while in the 18th century a narthex was added. During its construction perches, capitals and relieves were added from Christian buildings, which had earlier been destroyed by the Turks. Artistically – it is a typical example of the monumental-decorative Orthodox art of the 16th century, which had been ideologically and philosophically dictated by Athos. The specialists describe the murals and iconographic techniques as Crete art school.

## **Bachkovo Monastery**

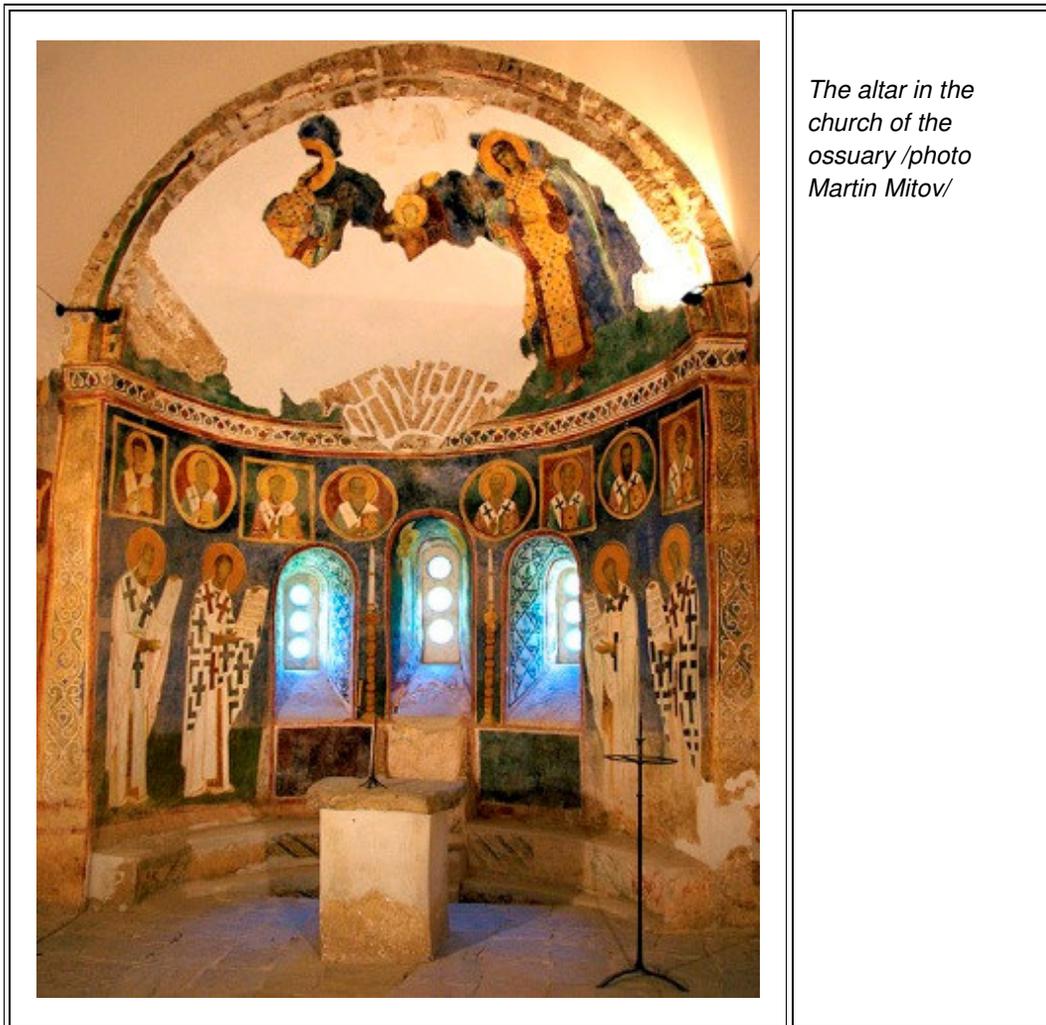
An excellent example of the Influence of Byzantine art on the Balkan and Asian countries is the ossuary at the “St. Mother of God Petrichka” monastery, also called the Bachkovo monastery - the oldest architectural and artistic object created in our lands during the XI century. It is a UNESCO monument. The interest towards the ossuary is quite big, because throughout the world there probably exist only about 10 similar monuments of the time, when burying monks had to be taken outside of the monastery. That is the time when the necessity for creating such architectural objects first appeared. The 14 graves under the floor pavement, which were constructed in advance, are probably not matched anywhere else. This, together with the fact that it has preserved its murals, makes the ossuary extremely valuable.



*The ossuary at Bachkovo monastery*

The most valuable artistic objects at the “Saint Mother of God Petrichka” Monastery, are - “Prayer”, “The vision of prophet Jezekil”, “Avram’s Bosom”, “Resurrection of the dead”, “Eucharist – sacrament with wine and sacrament with bread”, “Baptising of the Christ” The monastery was built during the second half of the XI century. The murals in the ossuary are dated around 1083. During 1018 Bulgaria was conquered by Byzantium and this marked the ending of the First Bulgarian State. The period of Byzantine dominion over Bulgaria lasts for 170 years. The artist according to researchers is Ioan Zograf Iveropulec or Iveropulis. He most probably was of Georgian origin and received excellent education and training, which probably was obtained in the capital, in the spirit of palatial mural art.

Byzantine art – Komnenos style – this style is well known for its conventional images, the hollow-cheeked faces and static postures of which stand out on similarly conventional backgrounds. During the quoted period of Byzantine dominion there are also other valuable monuments, which however remain outside of the territory of contemporary Bulgaria – several churches, including the St. Sophia church in Ohrid /XI century/ - contemporary Macedonia.



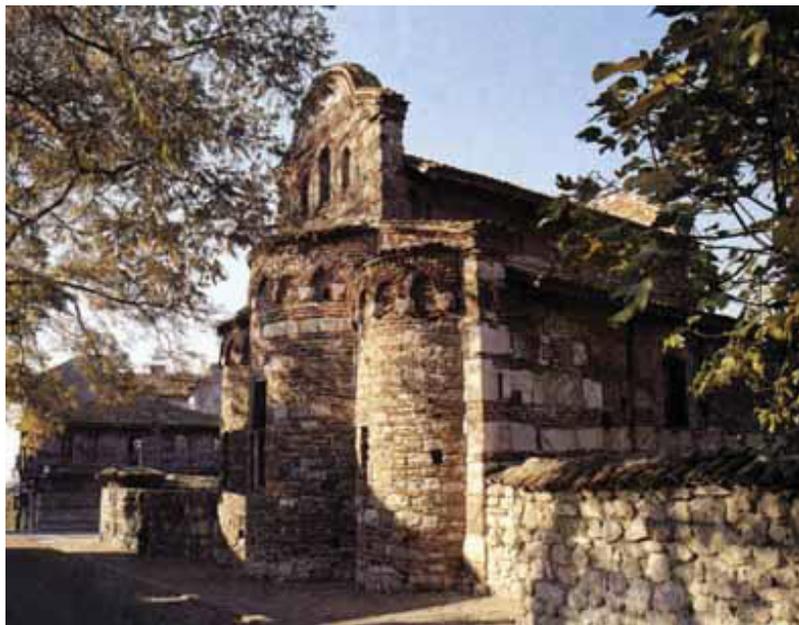
The only preserved building from the construction of the monastery until now is the church-ossuary, which survived after the monastery destruction during the XVI century. Its architectural image reflects the "biography" of the monastery. The presented influence is expressed in the predominantly Syrian and Armenian-Georgian architectural characteristics, as well as influence by middle ages architecture of Caucasus. Similar characteristics of the external wall paintings can be found in a number of buildings in Georgia and Armenia from the XI-XII centuries.

The prominent Russian Byzanthologist Andrey Nikolaevich Grabaru makes a description of the murals in the Bachkovo monastery and dates them back to XI-XII century. Grabaru explains the Byzantine-Georgian style of painting with the history of the Bakurian Georgians who found the monastery.

The Bachkovo ossuary is a bright example of Byzantine art from the Comnenus period and presents a style, which carries change in the manner of presentation of images – the proportions of the figures are quite prolonged, the faces too – the narrow Comnenus noses appear, small mouths and big eye-brows, wrinkles on the faces are schematized – the figures become linearly stylized in order for the images to obtain austerity and spirituality.

## **"Saint Stephan" Church in Nessebar**

Another excellent example of the influence of Byzantine art on the arts of the Balkan countries is the church "St. Stephen" - one of the rarest monuments in our country with well preserved murals from the XVI-XVIII century. Thanks to its preserved architectural image, its iconostasis and mainly its remarkable murals, the "St. Stephen" church is one of the most important monuments of Bulgarian cultural heritage. The site is a UNESCO heritage monument with realism elements, which are early for this period in Bulgaria, and freedom of ornamenting /oriental elements/.



*The "Saint  
Stephan"  
church in  
Nessebar*

The “Saint Stephen” church in Nessebar /the new bishop’s residence/ has initially been devoted to Mother Mary and all scenes in it are thematically connected to the Mother of God, despite the fact that its patron today is St. Stephen. According to specialists the church has been painted and ornamented by 3 artists, students of the Cretan school of icon-painting, probably trained in Athos. According to some researchers the master among them was called Bishop Nicholaos, for whom there are no preserved biographical data. The period of the painting is presented into a ktitor inscription above the south door of the naos - 1599.

Historically – the church has been built during 11 – 13 century. In the 16 century – during the Ottoman yoke – it was reconstructed to the west, and then later - during the 18th century - a narthex was added. During its construction perches, capitals and relieves were added from Christian buildings, which had earlier been destroyed by the Turks.

Artistically – it is a typical example of the monumental-decorative Orthodox art of the 16th century, which had been ideologically and philosophically dictated by Athos. The specialists describe the murals and iconographic techniques as Cretan school.

As far as style is concerned, three masters are established – two worked in the eastern part of the naos /from the Greek “naos” meaning temple – it is a term used in sacral architecture and represents the internal part of a temple/ and one worked in the western part. Most probably the artists were trained in the Athos monasteries, as was the custom back then. The wall paintings and ornaments of the St. Stephen church are connected with metropolitan bishop Hristophor, a trainee of the religious literary school “St. Joan Precursor”, which was active on the island bearing the same name, close to Sozopol. During the Ottoman yoke it managed to preserve for quite a while the traditions of the famous 14th century Turnovo and Kilifarska literary schools. Metropolitan bishop Hristophor was a respected cleric, today known as the Exarch of the Black Sea. This is why he managed to convince the mediaeval rich tradesmen from Nessebar to finance the reconstruction of the ancient church, known today as the new bishop’s residence. He is the man who hired the group of artists who painted the magnificent frescos in the church.

Transnational comparisons can be found between the murals in St. Stephen and images of the same period, preserved in the monasteries of Athos – created by painters from the Cretan school, which due to historical reasons /Crete remained outside of the Ottoman invasion/ had preserved the traditions of Orthodox iconography.

More frescos by the same artists are preserved in Nessebar– in the churches “St. George Small” and “St. Spas” /1609/. The work of these artists follows the rules of Athos, but at the same time the murals in St. Stephan have an image of their own – they are distinctively connected with real life, which sharply distinguishes them from the Athos images. The majority of the compositions present life scenes and during their elaboration realistic motives and elements have been used. The church St. Stephen is an example of how the Byzantine canon has preserved itself and how it has been recreated by the artists from the Athos monasteries and their followers, who painted the entire temple at the end of the 16 century.

## **Zemen Monastery**

Despite the fact that it is one of the most popular Bulgarian monasteries, Zemen monastery “St. Joan Bogoslov” is not among the largest ones and is at present not inhabited by monks.



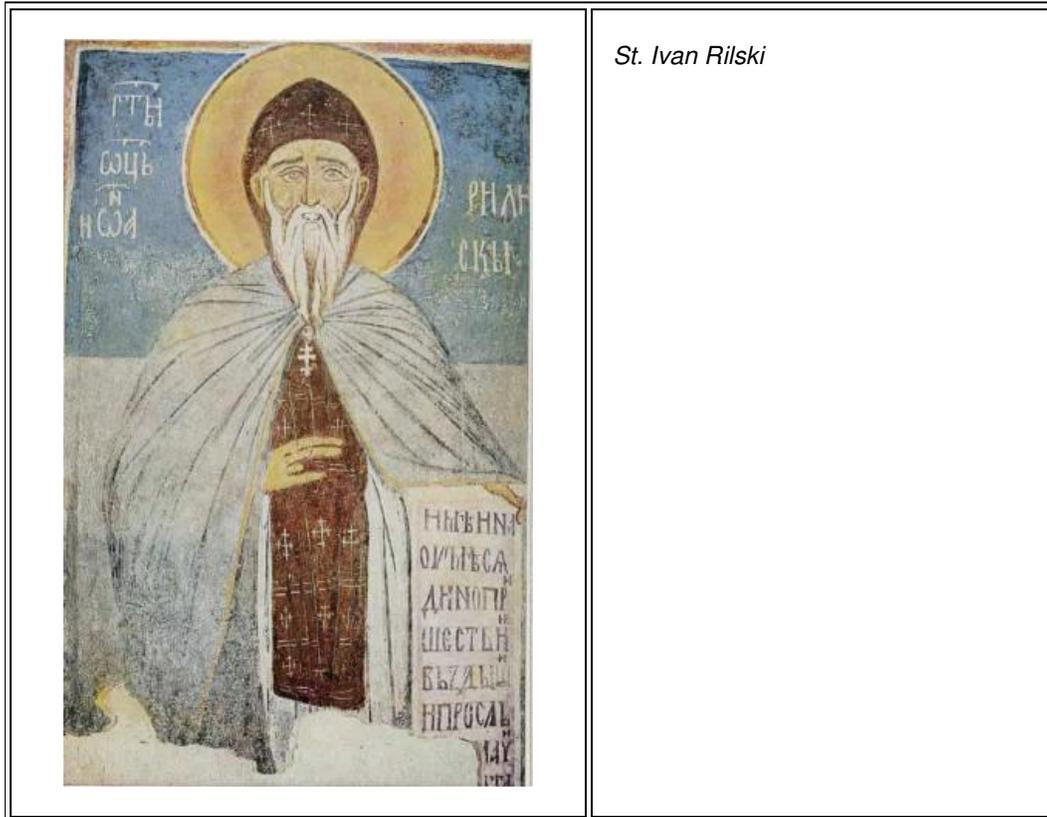
*The church at Zemen monastery*

The monastery comprises of two large connected buildings, a small bell tower and a church in the middle of a large yard. The church is undoubtedly the most valuable of all elements in the complex. It dates back to the 11 century and is one of the few surviving monuments of Bulgarian mediaeval architecture, construction and mural painting. The church is not active and represents an empty cube-like premise built of stone. This cross-dome building, built entirely from freestone, and its cube form with 9 meter dimensions, makes it a remarkable monument of Bulgarian mediaeval architecture – there is no such monument like this church. Together with its exceptional architecture the Zemen church is also well-known for its extremely valuable ancient murals from the period of its last painting, which took place during the 14 century. Very interesting are the altar, made of a solid stone, and the floor, which is made of differently colored marble bits, gathered through donations made by the local population during its construction. Most impressive however are the paintings, which cover the entire surface of the inner church walls and represent a constant gradation of scenes and images from the bible. Most of them are dated back to the 14 century, but the image of St. Anna is the only, which has survived since its construction during the 11 century.



*Portraits of St. Anna and St. Joachim*

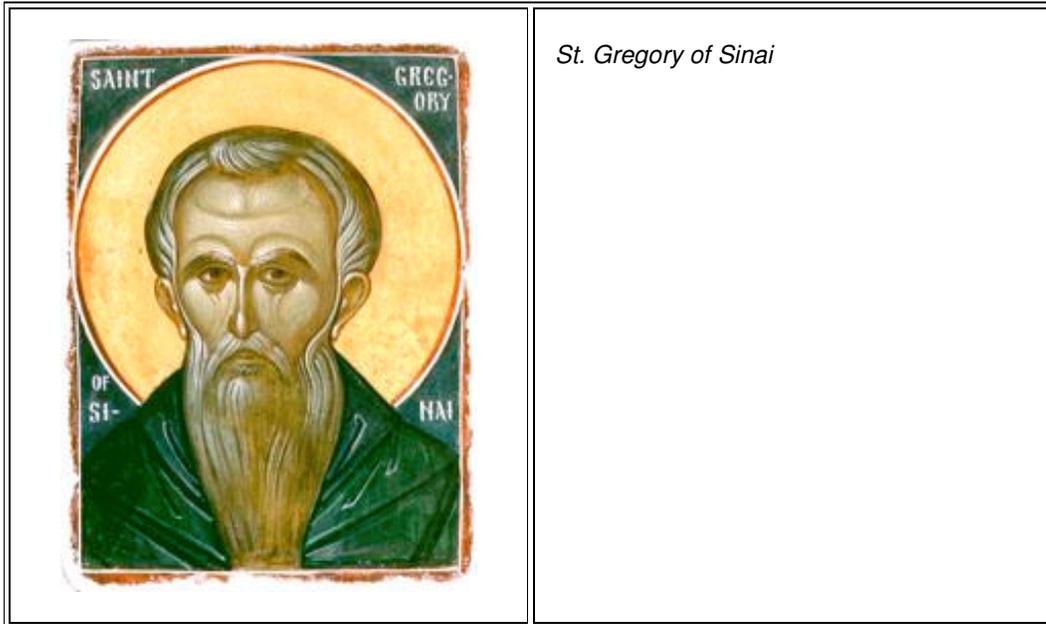
Well preserved are also the images of St. Ivan Rilski and St. Climent of Ohrid, of female saints, of despot Deyan and his wife Doya and others. The church has been declared a national cultural monument and the founders' portraits in the Zemen monastery are the oldest and of greatest artistic value after the images of Kaloyan and Dessislava from the walls of the Boyana church.



The Zemen monastery murals are exceptional for the Bulgarian monumental art. They emphatically deviate both from the Byzantine and the official Tarnovo art and possess quite archaic features, which draws them closer to the traditions in church iconography from the pre-iconoclasm Orthodox period.

## Chapter 2: Troglodyte Art

Silence as a spiritual practice is the most impressive external manifestation of the method of hesychasm, while the mental purity and stillness are its ideal. The monks who practiced it during the 13-14 century were called hesychasts /from the Greek hesychasmus - "stillness, rest, quiet, silence"/. Thus the entire trend of contemplative clergy in the Orthodox church, which became popular and was disseminated during the period, was called "hesychasm". During the 14 century Gregory of Sinai, a zealous seeker of truth and fighter for moral perfection, tours different monasteries, Scythians and separate hermits throughout Sinai, the deserts of Egypt and Palestine.

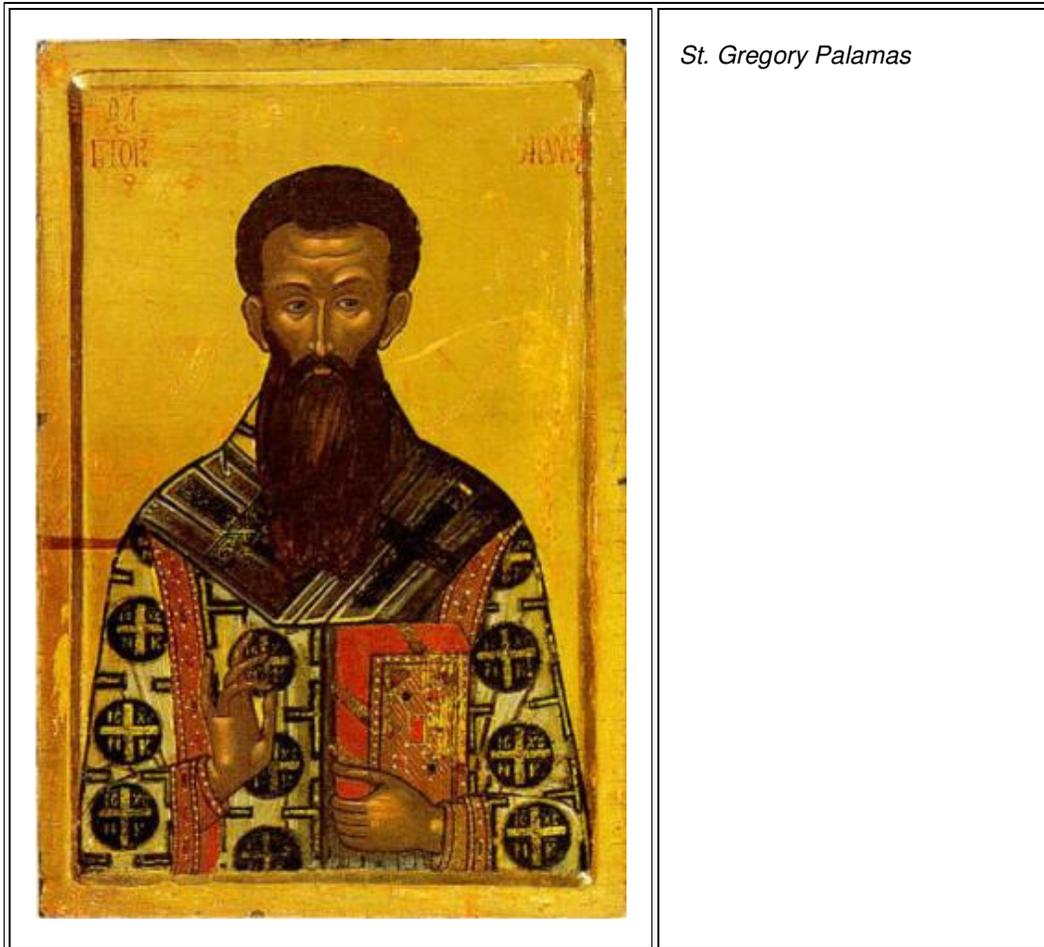


When he finds out about the method, he discovers practicing monks, learns from them, restores its essence and begins to popularize it. When he arrives in Athos he remains misunderstood and unaccepted by the local monks. During that time, a number of Bulgarians, among which Romil of Vidin and Theodosius, who later become patriarch of Tarnovo, become his students. Thanks to the support of the latter, Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander supports the cause of Gregory of Sinai. The tsar donates lands and materials for the construction of a monastery on Bulgarian territory in the area of Paroria, situated on the border between Bulgaria and Byzantium. This is the place where a spiritual school for training monks in the application of the method is established. Students in this school in addition to Theodosius are the future patriarch of Constantinople – Calyst – and a number of other monks from all parts of the Balkans and Byzantium. It thus forms into an international center, which supported the dissemination of the doctrine and the method of the hesychasts. There, in the “Sozopol desert”, Gregory of Sinai develops his famous “Guidelines for the speechless”. A strong dissemination and development of this way of life starts to spread throughout Bulgarian lands – a proof of the blossoming of contemplative monachism during the 14th century are the rock-hewn churches around Ivanovo and the river Rusenski Lom, Aladzha monastery close to Varna, the Kilifarevo school established by patriarch Theodosius of Tarnovo, Gregory Tsamblak and Kiprian a Bulgarian, who later becomes Metropolitan of Kiev and Moscow and disseminated the method there.

After Theodosius at the school, lead by Evtimiy, their training receive bookmen and experienced practitioners, which disseminate the doctrine of the mental self-control throughout other Balkan countries and Russia. Later in his life, Gregory of Sinai is acknowledged and accepted also by the monks in Athos, where the method is disseminated and preserved through the centuries.

Bulgaria has a substantial contribution to the preservation and dissemination of this method mainly in two directions – on the one hand it supports the activities of Gregory of Sinai and on the other hand – supports the schooling of bookmen and clergymen with practical experience, who disseminate the doctrine among the rest of the Orthodox peoples – mainly in Romania and Russia. Broadest dissemination, as a result of the activities of Gregory of Sinai and his students, hesychasm achieves between the 13 and 15 century in Byzantium and the Balkans. During the reign of king Stefan Dushan it is widely disseminated among the monks in Serbia. The term “hesychasm” becomes an expression not only of the practice of the method for self

engrossment and self-control, but also of the entire way of life, manner of thinking and view of life. During the 14th century hesychasm transforms into a separate teaching and doctrine, containing metaphysical, philosophical and pedagogical views and features. Thanks to the active literary and apologetic activities of the bishop of Thessalonica Gregory Palamas, hesychasm is acknowledged by the Orthodox Church as a doctrine. Its teaching on the unearthly and nonmaterial – Godlike – energies was accepted and introduced into the dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church as an official doctrine. At the summoned church councils in Constantinople Gregory Palamas defeats his opponents Barlaam and Akindin. Probably just a few know that the Bulgarians save Gregory Palamas from slavery by buying him off from Turkish captivity.

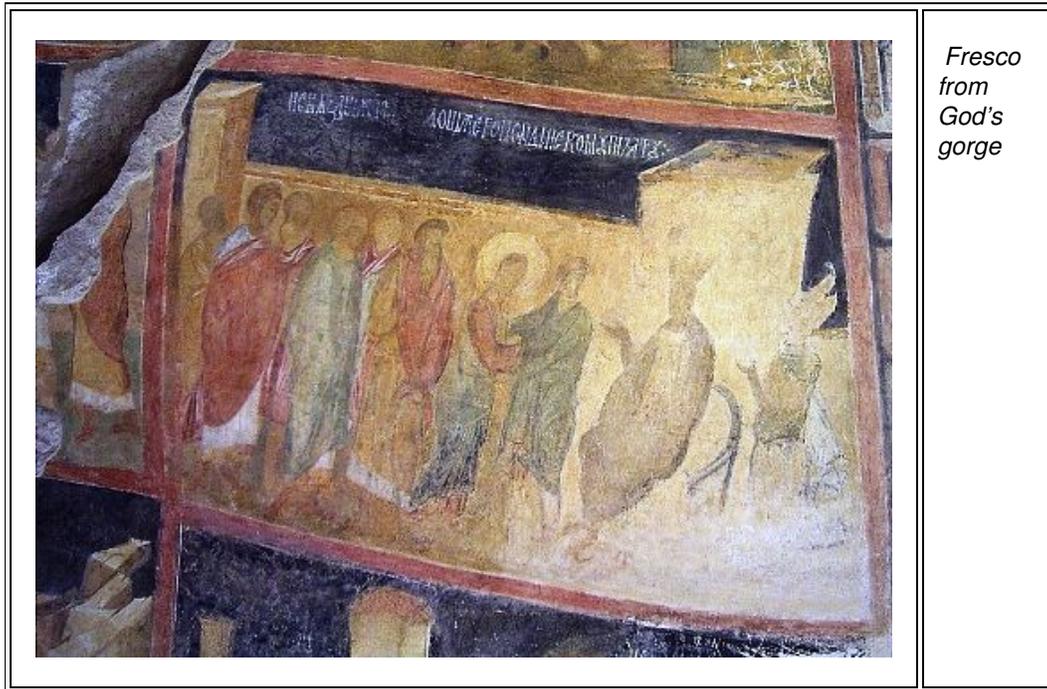


The Muslim invasion of the Balkans puts an end to this development and during the centuries to follow the only big centers where the method is still practiced and taught are situated mainly in Athos and Russia. In Greece, Bulgaria and other Orthodox countries the larger monasteries are gradually wrecked and the monks, followers of this way of life, head for Athos, where they find refuge.

## **Rock Hewn Churches of Ivanovo**

Troglodyte art throughout Bulgarian lands has a strong representation in the form of the frescos at the Ivanovo Rock-hewn Churches and in particular the church in God's gorge /Gospodev dol/, dated as the oldest of all monuments in that area.

This church set the beginning of the monk-community – the artists were monks /hermits, hesychasts/ – who have taken a solemn pledge of silence. The site is recognized by UNESCO. The frescos have strong artistic, style and iconographic characteristics - the appearance of clearer three-dimensional images, the architectural and natural forms become spacey, the figures are sized in accordance with the environment and are presented in motion, there is a strive for presenting the anatomy of the figure – which make them one of the brightest monuments of mid Middle Ages.



*Fresco  
from  
God's  
gorge*

According to professor Assen Vassilev the frescos in God's gorge are from the XII century. They are not precisely dated. The frescos follow the principles of the 3rd and last independent development stage, called Third Renaissance of Byzantine art – the predecessor of the Paleolog style. This style originated from Nicaea after the restoration of the Byzantine empire during the reign of the Paleologs 1241 – 1453. The Bulgarian art of that time gravitates towards the powerful Byzantine culture. In character these frescos are in the Byzantine style of that epoch, but the unknown monk-artists have managed to express their pursuit of national interpretation. The Bulgarian art of that period continues the traditions of the art of the first Bulgarian kingdom. Byzantium dominates in the life of Bulgaria despite the short periods of relative independence of the Bulgarian rulers of that period.

The artists remain within the boundaries of the mediaeval understanding of art: when they treat an object /a figure or landscape/, they use canonized artistic expressions. Despite the flatness of the paintings, an approach inherited from the previous canonistic Byzantine manner, the frescos demonstrate a reversion to the Hellenistic traditions. The inscriptions on the frescos are in Bulgarian language.

Since the rock-hewn churches at Ivanovo as well as the entire monastic complex have been created, maintained and inhabited by monks hesychasts, who have taken a solemn pledge of silence and have retreated voluntarily from life, no transnational influences can be found. In addition to this it is a fact that all the inscriptions on the frescos are in Bulgarian.

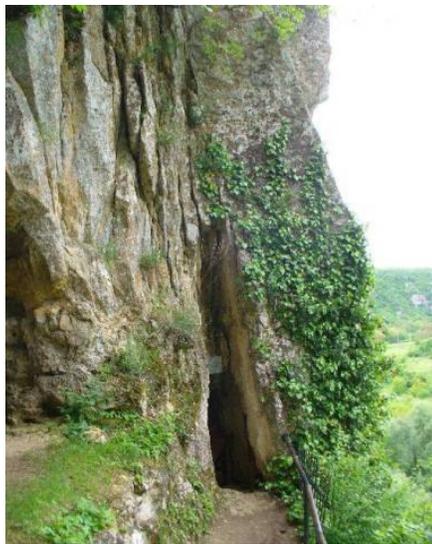
The authors of the frescos at Ivanovo are unknown. The monastic complex had been actively inhabited for approximately 4 centuries by the monk hesychast community, during which time there is an upheaval in the achievements related to the wet fresco technique used by the artists in the different artistic sites preserved here.

## **Ivanovo Rock Hewn Monastery “St. Archangel Michael”**

Everybody knows about the valley of kings near to Kazanlik. Few however know that just a couple of kilometers away from the city of Rousse there is a place, which can easily be called the “valley of Bulgarian kings”. The word is about the unique canyon of the Rusenski Lom river, which was cut by nature more than 120 mln years ago. Nearby is situated the formidable mediaeval fortress Cherven and the mysterious stone crosses near the Nisovo village /these are currently researched, because they are considered to be the graves of knights – tampliers and masons/. The lasrgest rock hewn monastery on Bulgarian lands preserved until present days is situated in the village of Ivanovo.

Even for our perceptions this is a spectacular complex. During the mediaeval times this giant monastic ensemble was known by the name of “St. Archangel Michael”, while today it is called like the village it is situated next to – Ivanovo. The monastery is situated 22 km away from Rousse and represents a complex of churches, cut at different heights in the rocks of the river canyon. According to research data the man-made premises are more than 300. the monastery covers an area of several kilometers down the river. The temples and monk cells were connected by routes and stairs cut through the cliffs.

The beam holes show that the monks were also using wooden constructions in order to move from one place to another. The merciless time has erased from human memory the names of the rock temples. Today people have given them different strange names. Thus for example one of the churches is called the “Collapsed” one, due to the earthquake damages inside it. Another one is called “the Letters” because of the multitude of graffiti and paintings in it. A third one is called «God’s gorge” because of the preserved face of Christ inside. The main and most important monastery church is “St. Mother of God” situated at a height of 38 m.



*Entrance to the church “St. Mother of God”*

According to the available information sources, hermits who have denied secular vanity, inhabited the canyon of the Rusenski Lom river in XII century. According to biographical data the first rock hewn church was created by the Tarnovo patriarch Joakim I, who lived during the reign of Ivan Assen II (1218-1241). The great Bulgarian tsar becomes first founder of the monastery and donates funds for the construction of one of the churches. He puts the beginning of a tradition according to which Bulgarian rulers from the second Bulgarian kingdom give rich donations to the rock hewn monastery.

From one of the inscriptions in "God's gorge" it becomes evident that Bulgarian tsar George I Terter (1279-1292) became a monk and was buried there.

Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) is surely among the most generous donators of the "St. Archangel Michael" monastery. The "St. Mother of God" church preserves an image of the tsar as church donator in full height. The murals present the ruler in ceremonial garments, holding in his hands the rock with the church hewn in it. His second wife Sara – a Jew, who after baptism gained the name of Teodora – is presented next to him. The tsar is presenting his donation to St. Mother of God, which is standing on his other side. The presentation of St. Mother of God clarified the name of the church.

From the mere beginning the monastery in the canyon of the Rusenski Lom river hosted a great number of hesychasts. From the biography of Joakim I it becomes evident that they were about 80 and fed mainly on roots and berries. The ideas of speechless contemplation blossom during the reign of tsar Ivan Alexander, when in Byzantium and Bulgaria the doctrine of hesychasm becomes very popular. The monastery "St. Archangel Michael" becomes one of the centers of this ideology in the Balkan Peninsula. The monastery was most probably visited by that time by the Tarnovo patriarch and leader of the hesychasts in Bulgaria – Theodosius I. This took place during his stay in the nearby city of Cehrvén as was colorfully described in the patriarch's biography.

The donations by the kings allowed the churches to get richly decorated with beautiful murals. The great part of these murals is unfortunately destroyed. Restorers are nowadays literally fighting for each fragment. With great efforts after many years of work a part of the frescos in the chapel "God's gorge" have been saved. In the dome of church is visible the figure of Jesus Christ, blessing human kind. In the altar niche are presented the beautifully painted scenes "Assumption", "Ascension of Christ" and "Descent of Christ in hell".

An undeniable peak in mediaeval art are the well preserved murals in the church "St. Mother of God". Today they are a classical example of the so called Paleolog style in Orthodox art. The compositions are small in size and remind of iconographic art. These are images of different saints, scenes from the life of Jesus Christ, as well as several episodes from the life of St. John Baptist. Exceptional dynamism and strong realism are characteristic for the images, which however are in strict compliance with the mysticism, which is a feature of the entire Orthodox art.

Another interesting characteristic of these murals is the using of a multitude of topics from the ancient art. A strange duplicity in the thinking of the mediaeval Bulgarian is evident here. On the one hand he denies the pagan culture of the Ancient times, on the other hand – he is irresistibly drawn to it. A way out of this problem is to criticize it. Thus the art of the XIV century is invaded by different antique scenes. Thus for example in the scene "Desecration of Christ" painted in the "St. Mother of God" church are presented unique circus games. The same way architectural details in the form of caryatides, antique theatrical masks and sculptures are presented. The artist is even painting the unthinkable for the Orthodox art naked human body.

The art of the zografs from the church "St. Mother of God" proves to be one of the highest peaks in mediaeval Bulgarian art. Just a few decades later the state succumbs under the forces

of the Ottoman invasion. The rock monastery continues to host monks for a while after, but gradually the churches and cells are abandoned. Sometime during the XVIII century comes the late Bulgarian revival and the people from adjacent villages again start worshipping the forgotten holy places.

## Aladzha Monastery

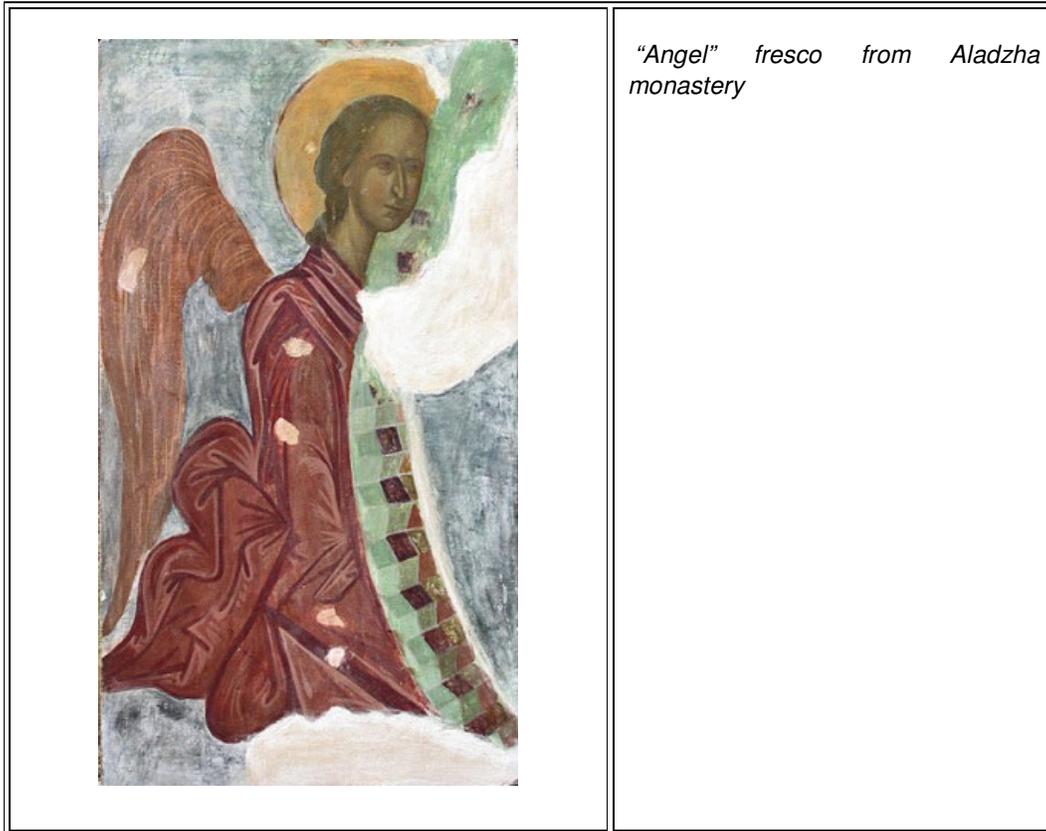
Aladzha monastery is the most famous rock hewn monastery on the Bulgarian Black sea coast. It is one of the many troglodyte monasteries, which existed during the XIII - XIV century.



*Aladzha  
monastery  
from the  
outside*

A great number of these unique cult monuments are found in a large territory comprising of the Balkans and the Near East. In the historical literature there is an opinion that their appearance is connected with the appearance and dissemination of Christianity – it is well known that the cave is among the strongest symbols of the most important Christian mysteries – the birth of Christ and Ascension. This explains the presence of the cave temples in the life and practice of the early monk brotherhoods of the IV - VI century. The rock-hewn monasteries from the middle ages are a continuation of this tradition. Opinions exist that the rock-hewn monastery close to Varna is a part of a large complex of more than 500 similar temples situated on the territory of Northeastern Bulgaria and connected closely to the disseminated through Byzantium and Bulgaria during the XIII – XIV century doctrine of the Godlike energy - hesychasm. Aladzha monastery is a part of a large group of natural caves, which formed themselves in the soft limestone sediments on the bottom of the ancient Sarmatian Sea, which covered the territory of almost the entire Southeastern Europe 12 mln years ago. Situated in a beautiful wooded area 14 km away from Varna it strongly attracted the interest of researches and admirers. Its name is mentioned in literature for the first in the year 1832 in the book of the Russian writer Viktor Teplyakov "Letters from Bulgaria". The systematic research of this old Christian monument started at the end of the last century by the first Bulgarian archaeologists - the brother Karel and Hermenegil (Herman) Skorpil. From the mere start of the century they established the Varna archaeological society and museum, which undertook the responsibility to maintain and protect the monastery. On the initiative of the two brothers in 1912 Aladzha monastery was declared as a national monument and later on – during the year 1957 – after a scientifically sound proposal

made by the National institute for the cultural monuments it was declared a cultural monument of national importance.



Aladzha monastery is among the few troglodyte monasteries in Bulgarian lands where the main premises of the monastic complex are clearly distinguishable – a monastery temple, a church for mass, crypt, kitchen, dining room, monk cells and farm premises. All of these are situated on two levels inside the almost 40 meter high limestone rock.

In the most western part, on level one, right next to the stairs for visitors, is situated the monastic church. In the middle of its eastern wall has been dug in a small altar niche. Similarly to other Orthodox churches from the middle ages, this one was also decorated with murals, but the easy access to them has resolved their fate. Only separate fragments are preserved today and are vaguely visible on the walls. Some extra information on the murals is given by the notes of K. Skorpil and a preserved water-color copy by the artist Milen Sakuzov from the turn of the century. A central place on the eastern wall (inside the altar) was dedicated to the image of the Mother of God. From the water-color copy is visible that she is seated on a high throne, holding with her right arm the holy infant. On the outskirts of the image, and in particular in its lower part, another layer of murals is distinctly visible. The comparative dating of the upper layer takes it back to the XIII – and the beginning of the XIV century. The lower layer, of which just a hand holding a book is visible (probably an image of God all –powerful), is at least from the XI - XII century.

A narrow stone staircase cut in the bottom of the church leads to the other premises on level one. Six monk cells are preserved in the northern wall of the narrow corridor, which begins from the end of the staircase. These were separated from one another and the corridor through wooden barriers. Small niches for icons and other possessions of the monks are visible in the walls.

The end of the corridor leads into a large premise with an irregular form. A small semi-round niche has been cut in its northwestern wall. Small opening on the ceiling prove that a wooden barrier had once separated the room into two parts. The western part (the one with the niche) was the kitchen, while the eastern part was the dining room. The dining room is one of the important premises in a monastery. It possesses a certain harmony, the roots of which can be found in the Last Supper and the common tables of the early Christians.

South from the dining room a short platform leads into a small room, the larger part of which is missing. The remaining semi-round apsis of the eastern wall and the east-west orientation show that this was a small church. Its proximity to the crypt underneath demonstrates that this is a church for mass. It also had a communicative function. A wooden winding staircase was starting from it and through a chimney-like opening was leading into the chapel on level two.

The crypt is situated in the lowest part of level one. The remnants from a brick layer wall prove that it was separated from the outside world and the entrance platform. The mediaeval crypt only had three graves. Their small number presupposes that the broadly spread among mediaeval monasteries practice of exhuming the bones of monks after seven years and, after conducting certain ritual, putting them into a common bone-vault was characteristic also for the Aladzha monastery. The whereabouts of the bone-vault of the rock-hewn monastery are unknown. The remaining two graves have been dug in the entrance platform and are dated from a later period - proven by a silver stamp-ring from the XVIII century, which was found inside one of them.

The second level of the troglodyte monastery represents a larger niche, the eastern end of which hosts the chapel. This is the only constructed premise in the monastery and was used for minor everyday sermons, while the main monastic church was used for the more important and holiday liturgies. Due to the difficult access to the chapel and the collapse of the wooden staircase during the Middle Ages, a part of the chapel original mediaeval murals are preserved. The composition on the ceiling is in the best condition. It represents one of the main scenes in Christianity – Ascension. The style of the painting of the separate figures, the coloring and the ornamentation refer the murals to the XIII - XIV century, which also defines the period of the blossoming of this monastery.

Another group of three level caves is hidden in the dense woods about 800 meters to the northwest. The Skorpil brothers call them the “Catacombs” with analogy to the cult centers of the early Christian societies on the territory of the Roman empire.

The second level is the best preserved one. It comprises of one larger room of unclear purpose and a smaller one next to it, containing five tomb chambers. Two cut in crosses from the early Christian epoch are visible on the western wall of the larger and the eastern wall of the smaller room. Their dating is specified by the etched letters “alpha” and “omega”. The meaning of these letters is: “I (Christ) am the first and the last, the beginning and the end”. On the outer platform of this level there is another tomb and a small entrance, which is almost entirely blocked by collapsed rocks. The other two levels represent natural caves, which were inhabited by the monks.

The tomb, the two cut-in crosses and the discovered findings, are dated back to the IV - VI century – ceramic fragments, coins for the reign of emperor Justinian I the Great (527 - 565) and the parts of a metallic icon-lamp bring evidence that the Catacombs were inhabited during the early Christian epoch (IV - VI).

The remnants of an early Christian basilica, a small fortress and several settlements situated to the east of the Aladzha monastery are dated back to the same period.

The connection between the three monument groups, situated in proximity to one another, is not clear. It is quite possible that the Catacombs, the basilica and the settlements (and may be also the cave dwellings of the Aladzha monastery itself) formed one of the early Christian centers in the Black sea region in the IV - VI century, mentioned in the annals of the prominent Byzantine chronicler – emperor Constantine VII "the Purple-born" (913 - 959). Thus the mediaeval monastery from the XIII - XIV century appears to be a continuation of the old Christian tradition in these lands and together with the Catacombs formed a larger monastic complex.

After the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman yoke at the end of the XIV century, Aladzha monastery, just like many other Bulgarian monasteries, was deserted. The local Christian population however continued to worship and visit the place during the years of slavery, which is proven by the silver stamp-ring from the XVIII century discovered there.

The real Christian name of the monastery is not known. The name "aladzha" has a Persian-Turkish origin and means "motley, many-colored". It was probably assigned to the monastery due to the well preserved murals from the chapel. At the end of the last century K. Skorpil wrote down a legend, according to which the monastery was called "St. Spas". The name comes from Christ – Savior /Savior in Bulgarian means "spasitel"/.

Written evidence for the Aladzha monastery and the other monuments are not discovered. Remaining are only the legends about roaming ghosts of monks and forest gods and a limitless maze of underground labyrinths, hiding enormous treasures as well as probably proofs about the past of this beautiful and mystic place.

## Chapter 3: Ktitor Portraits

The awareness of what is socially useful – the construction of a temple for all members of the religious and ethnic community, a monastery – is characteristic not only for the rich, but also for all worshipers and entire guild organizations, which donate funds for the restoration or construction of temples, for the painting of local village or monastic churches, for the painting of some of the churches in the iconostasis, for the transcription of the liturgical books and gospels, etc. The donators – kings and boyars, monks and abbots, worshipers – whole families and professional associations – have done this for the purpose of saving their souls, saving the souls of their parents on this and the other world, for honoring of the patron saint of the temple.

Researching donations to a certain holy monastery for a specific long period of time can create an opportunity for this process, which took place during Bulgarian middle ages and revival to be recreated and the reasons behind these noble deeds to be revealed.

The tradition during the Second Bulgarian kingdom for presenting Bulgarian rulers with donor charters is well known. Bulgarian tsars were known for generously presenting the monasteries from Mount Athos, as well as other large monasteries throughout Bulgarian lands, such as the Rila monastery, Bachkovo monastery, Dragalevtzi monastery and others, with fields, forests, pastures, entire villages with their inhabitants, rights and privileges. Many feudal rulers made donations, which supported the construction or decoration of village or monastery churches. These deeds were demonstrated through inscriptions placed usually above the entrance of the building, so that the deed and the doer are remembered.

Donor portraits of Bulgarian tsars were decorating a number of churches. Well kept until present days are the portraits of: Tsar Ivan Alexander in the Bachkovo ossuary, in the "Church" – cave in the vertical rocks near the village of Ivanovo; Tsar Ivan Assen II in the Zograf monastery, 1817; Tsar Mihail <sup>22</sup> Assen – in the church "St. Archangel Michael" in Kostur, mid <sup>13</sup> century. These give an idea of the magnificence of the image of the ruler, his expensive garments, his place in the spiritual life of the Bulgarian people. "Such images were supposedly present also in

other churches from the same region. They promoted the generosity and religiousness of the Tarnovo rulers, but also marked the limits of their power" (Bozhkov At., Tarnovo mediaeval art school, issued "Science and art", 1985, page 18).

Among the preserved images particularly awe-inspiring is the portrait of tsar Ivan Alexander painted in the Bachkovo monastery – a bright presence of the donor-ruler, gazing into the future. The donor portrait participated in the sacral space with the power of spirit and the dignity of the spiritual and secular authority.

The inscription on the wall of the lower floor of the Boyana church is a characteristic example of the kinds of information, which are contained in such messages to the future:

"The pure temple of Nikola saint in Christ and Panteleymon martyr in Christ was created and established with the funds, care and great love of sebastocrator Kaloyan, cousin of the tsar, grand-son of St. Stefan King of Serbia. It was painted during Bulgarian kingdom, during the reign of the religious, pure and Christ-loving tsar Konstantin Assen in year 6767 (= 1259)".

The inscription is laconic, but contains precise and thorough information about the donor and his reasons and relation to the constructed temple.

"The images painted during the time of Konstantin Tikh on the order of Kaloyan, are perfectly preserved and cannot fail to provoke admiration due to the artistic achievements and technical mastership of the Bulgarian art school, which Kaloyan turned to. We find in them all the features of the Tarnovo art school (church "40 holy martyr" and the chapels of Trapezitsa)." (Grabaru, A. Boyana church, 1924, page 4).

The art was created by skillful masters from the Tarnovo art school, with the funds but also the attitude of the feudal ruler, which required artistic mastership of painting not just his portrait and the one of his wife Dessislava, but also those of all faces and scenes from the bible. All images are unique and each of them carries its own individuality, emotional presence and vitality.

"Bulgarian murals, including the donor portraits, carry specific features, which differ them to a certain extent from the general appearance of Byzantine art of that period. From 1204 till 1261, during which period Constantinople was subordinate to the Latin empire, the artistic impulse, forming the appearance of art on the Balkan Peninsula, was weaker there. At that time local art keeps blossoming in our lands. Bulgarian artists work and introduce into their works their personal understandings, which to a certain extent deviate from the common Byzantine canons."(Vasilev, A. Donor portraits, 1960, page 9.)

During that period the capital city of Tarnovo imposes itself as one of the most important cultural centers in the Balkans, with a brightly expressed influence of the "art of painting" of the Bulgarian mediaeval architecture, adopted also by Byzantium.

The donor portraits in the temple of the Zemen monastery – those of Despot Deyan and his wife Doya – express the calmness and self-esteem of self-confident people, "who speak with the signs and words of their time", with a strong Bulgarian presence, expressed through the detail. The feud ruler marks his connection to the national beginning, which alienates him from the Byzantine model.

The rock slits, which hosted a number of hermits in the caves up the canyon of the river Iskar close to Karlukovo, as well as those along the canyon of the river Rusenki Lom next to the village of Ivanovo, preserved the memory of the miracles of the monks. "It was a custom for the affluent local residents, and mainly the boyars, rulers of the lands, to donate specific amounts for building a certain "holy place" – a chapel or a church – and when the donor was the tsar himself – an entire monastery." (Mavrodinova, L. Rock slits at Karlukovo, 1985, issued by "Bulgarian artist", page 7).

In the church of the Kremikovtzi monastery "St. George Victorius", above the door in the

western wall of the naos – there were the donor inscriptions are places, the writing says: "In memoriam to donor Father Christofor and Antonia 1799". The names of the donors, who paid for the painting of the large icons of the iconostasis, are also listed together with the year, month and date, and their place of birth. Their deed must be remembered and followed by others. The money donated for art – for murals and for iconography – are as important as those donated for the construction of the temple. The images of saints and apostles, of gospel writers, of Christ all-powerful and the Mother of God establish the connection between the worshiper and the invisible, the life beyond.

The renovation of the "St. George" church in the Kremikovtsi monastery at the end of the IX century represents a stage in the existence and development of the holy place, which continued the tradition in Bulgarian art from XIII – XIV century. Boyar Radivoj, a representative of a certain stratum in Bulgarian society, which had managed to preserve its wealth and status in the social life during the first century of Ottoman yoke, seeks ways for expressing its religiousness and eagerness to revive the spiritual life of the ethnos in the Sofia eparchy. "This is why the donation made by Radivoj, the donor of the Kremikovtsi church, is actually a continuation of the tradition under the new conditions.... The donor composition does not specify the names of the presented faces, but only the names of their diseased children." (Paskaleva, K. The "St. George" church in the Kremikovtsi monastery, "Bulgarian artist", 1980, page 44).

In the "Zograf screed", developed in the period 1527 – 1728, among the donors "Monastery Kremikovtsi. Gregory" is specified. The monastery, represented by the monk from Samokov – Gregory, participates as an entity in the donor process. This means that in 1672 when the monk Gregory visits the Zografski monastery, Kremikovtsi monastery had an opportunity to make a donation for the Bulgarian monastery in mount Athos.

The act of donating has a line of continuity – the tsars, the boyars, the high clergy from the time of the free Bulgarian state were replaced by monks, abbots, entire monasteries, rich tradesmen, entire guild associations, and even ordinary worshipers – family couples, fathers and sons, entire families.

The donor portraits, which are often positioned in the antechamber of the temple, on the visitor eye-level, "humanize" the sacral space, integrate the real person, the worshiper, within the biblical scenes. The donor portraits in the antechamber create a specific atmosphere, which has a strong influence and expresses through the art of admiration, the gratefulness for the charitable deed of the donors, who did not spare funds for the construction and decoration of the home of God, which turns into a home for everybody. And when during the last centuries of Ottoman yoke there are no more Bulgarian feuds and affluent boyars, sympathy for the tradition is demonstrated by the residents of nearby villages and small towns, who create with joint efforts what is of use for everyone – a temple as a spiritual pier, a rescue island, a place for unity and hope. By opening its gates for rituals and holiday liturgies the church is immediately perceived as an inseparable part of the life of the local community. When during the XV<sup>222</sup>-XVI<sup>2</sup> century the Ottoman ruler allows the Christians to build their own churches with domes, the cult building stood out among the rest of the buildings in the settlement, together with the minarets of the mosques, it draws the gaze, creates a feeling for unity inside the society. The invested funds have a material representation, which has to be remembered. The man does not pay in order to be remembered but becomes a part of the process of continuity and development. It is important the name of the donor, the year and even the month of the donation to be specified. Thus the deed turns into a model for the following generations, for which the church has act as a spiritual niche, which preserve the national memory alive, which educates, unites and purifies the human spirit, protects the nationality and the sense for ethno-cultural identity.

The group donor portrait, which encompasses the images of several donors, connected by a joint aim – reconstruction and decoration of the temple – gives the sacral space a special influential force. The donation, gathered by a larger group of worshipers, is connected into a donor composition with the image of Christ who blesses, with open arms above the donors. The power of the national memory, the place and role of the ordinary person, who set aside some money for the common good is visualized in two group portraits – the first in the church "St.

Nikola” close to the village of Kalotino /Ō<sup>2</sup>V century/ where two men, a woman and 3 children are presented, and the portrait in the church “St. Theodore Stratilat” in the village of Dobursko.

## Boyana church

The object is the church founders’ portraits – ktitor portraits - at the Boyana Church – the portraits of sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Desislava, as well as those of Tsar Konstantin Tikh Assen and Queen Irina. The author is currently being identified by researchers – according to the latest research the name of the artist is probably Vasilius Zograf.



*Fresco portrait of Desislava, the wife of sebastocrator Kaloyan /donors of the church/*



*Fresco portrait of Tsar Konstantin Tikh Assen and Queen Irina /donors of the church/*

Period: Byzantine art, Turnovo art school. According to the ktitor inscription, placed on the northern wall of the second section of the church, the second layer art is dated as of 1259. At that time, over the first layer of paintings, an unknown group of artists placed a new layer of frescos and painted both floors of the second section of the church. The Boyana church owes its worldwide fame mainly to the frescos from the year 1259, which present the exceptional achievements of Bulgarian mediaeval culture. In their greatest part, the recreated more than 240 images are with marked individuality, convincing psychological characteristics and vitality. The art follows the canon for decorating Christian temples, established with the decisions of the Seventh ecumenical church council, which took place in Nicaea in 787.

During the middle ages – the period of the first Bulgarian kingdom, in the area of Sredets there were 35 fortresses and establishments. The protected area covering the northern and western slopes of the Vitoshka Mountain included two main fortresses – Sredets and Pernik. Between these two fortresses there was a connection going through Momina skala /Mama's rock/, which was a main part of the Boyana fortress. Sredets was the main center of an important military and administrative area and had a strong communicational importance. Around the city there were three concentric circles with fortress walls. The first included the fortifications on the slopes of the Vitoshka Mountain. One of these fortifications was Boyana. In the context of the history of the mediaeval art of the Christian east, the frescos in the Boyana church are the only representative monument from the years of Latin dominion /1204 - 1261/. In the context of the history of Bulgarian mediaeval art, these frescos belong to a period of its development, during which the direct Byzantine influences cease, due to the dropping off of Constantinople as artistic laboratory and the Bulgarian artists take up an individual direction of development.

The Boyana church is well known in Bulgaria and abroad mainly for the high artistic values of the frescos from the year 1259, which generally follow the decorative system and iconography of the Byzantine art of the XI – XII centuries. As a style and mixed fresco-tempera technique the murals in the Boyana church are very close to the murals in Turnovo from the XIII century. The Boyana church murals are created by an unknown for the time being artist – a Bulgarian, who worked in the style of the Turnovo art school. With their vital, humanistic realism they are a Renaissance phenomenon at its culmination phase in the context of the common-European art. These murals are among the best representatives of mediaeval fine art in Europe during the XIII century. According to experts, the unknown master from Boyana is related to the art school of the so called Paleolog renaissance (XIII-XV century). The style of the artists influenced by this tendency, which embraced Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, gradually broke away from the ascetic images and strived for realism and freshness of the artworks. The technique of the Boyana frescos is explained in detail at the following location: <http://www.izkustvo.net/техниката-на-боянските-стенописи/>

The mediaeval art of the Christian east was generally named as a Byzantine one. Within its framework equivalently falls the Bulgarian art of the XII, XIII and XIV centuries. The Turnovo art school is not a "provincial" art school, but it modified a style, within which, regardless of the common stylistic, thematic and technical marks, which relate it to the art of Byzantium, there are significant characteristic differences. The murals elaborated within this style carry elements, characterizing the Bulgarian life, culture and history. Here we find a similarity with the kitor portraits from the rock-hewn churches in Ivanovo from the previous century.

The Boyana church has been painted during 1259 – almost a decade before the birth of the founder of the western Renaissance – Giotto. Regardless of this, the frescos of its interior are, if not renaissance, very innovative. This is the reason why parallels between the art of the Boyana master and the later period in Byzantine art called Paleolog renaissance can be made. The murals in the church have signs of three-dimensional representation, very clearly expressed emotions, depth and individuality and not just with the saints but also with the ordinary people. Quite impressive is the mural depicting Sr. Nikola saving the sailors. The sea in this mural is painted in a unique for the mediaeval times way. The waves have depth, as do the faces of the people. We cannot still speak of real renaissance. According to Prof. Ovcharov orthodox art was going in a quite different direction. The Boyana master did not break the canon. The church canon was specifying what to be presented where and he was following these rules. The master however went beyond the limitations of the mediaeval thinking by presenting the man, the saints, the rulers and the entire world in a more modern light. The names of the artists remain unknown. The Boyana master expression is collective for the entire team, which painted the church and acquired their artistic skills in the Turnovo art school. The murals have distinguished artistic merits, perfect artistic technique, psychological depth, complexity and realism. Boyana is the only entirely preserved monument of the Turnovo art school of the XIII century. According to

the opinions to a number of prominent experts, the well-known murals of the Boyana church have specific importance in the development of the mediaeval Bulgarian and European fine arts.

Recently the inscription “I, Vassilij, wrote (painted)” was discovered. It has been made with charcoal over the rough coat of the church, which two or three days after its placement is covered by a second layer of fine coat, which remained until the year 1980. This means that the inscription was made by one of the artists and not by someone else. It has been specified long ago that the frescos of the year 1259 have been created by three and not by tens of artists as some scientists were supposing. After the commission for painting the church had been given, according to tradition no one had access to the church until the frescos were done. This means that the signature definitely belongs to one of the three artists.

The name “Vasilij Zograf from Subonosha Sersko village” is present in the Boyana beadroll - an official list made by the Bulgarian mediaeval orthodox church containing names of Bulgarian tsars and patriarchs, which should be mentioned during official service. The fact that the name of an artist from a village appears together with the names of great figures, and which is missing from other church beadrolls makes it obvious that the painting of the Boyana church was his merit. Since only his name is present in the Boyana beadroll we draw the conclusion that he was the main artist – the man we call the Boyana master.

Vasilij zograf is assumed to also be the author of two other works – an icon from Ohrid /1260/ and an icon from a Seres monastery. The Boyana master managed to work with exceptional for that time realism and new for the middle ages humanistic aesthetics. The focal point is the man – smart, kind, compassionate. He is depicted in the figural scenes “Crucifixion”, “Las supper”, “Transfiguration” and others and especially in the multiple presentations of images of Christ, depicted in a different role, state, age. In the register of standing saints the Boyana master creates a rich portrait gallery of secular, spiritual and military faces where together with the carefully depicted psychological characteristics is also notable the individual physical beauty. Special interest as works of art with historically-documentary importance stand out the portraits of tsar Kosntantin Tikh Assen (1257-77) and queen Irina as well as the portraits of sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Desislava elaborated in the narthex. The figures in the portraits are presented at full height, in official postures and garments, with royal and sebastocrator honorable marks. Kaloyan is presented with a model of the church built by him in his hands. The faces are lively and vivid with psychological depth.

## **The Church at Zemen Monastery**

This monument of a church is very popular owing both to the striking architectural approach and to the magnificent murals dating back to the 14th century. When the church was last restored fragments of the first mural layer were uncovered; experts said stylistically it belonged to the 11th century. The murals of the second layer have been dated to the 14th century; they have been skilfully done so as to be in line with the architectural ideas and their execution; the scenes and images and their distribution in the mural space strictly correspond to the laws of iconography and to the ecclesiastical canons of how to paint a Christian temple in fresco.



*Zemen  
monastery  
church*

There is an inscription in Middle Bulgarian above the portraits of the main church donors; it says the frescoes have been done thanks to the aid of Despot Deyan and his spouse Doya. These two images have proved to be of incalculable historical, artistic and ethnographic value. The unknown artist has done his job perfectly: they look so alive, their features are so expressive. To illustrate a point we can compare them to another pair of portraits - those of Sebastocrator Kaloyan and his spouse Desislava, donors of another celebrated old Bulgarian church, the Boyana church (1259) near Sofia, considered to be a unique monument of immense cultural value; it is also on the UNESCO cultural heritage list. Experts believe that the Zemen portraits come second only to the Boyana ones as being among the oldest images of secular persons in the medieval Bulgarian art possessing exceptional aesthetic merit.

The icon-painter's style is predominantly decorative, based on linear designs; he has mostly used dark brown, almost black lines that form ovals, faces, conveying the feeling of flatness and warm variety of colours; the lack of nuances is obvious. His images look very much alive, the maestro's gift and his love and flair for reality do credit to his art. One of the oldest icons of St. Ivan Rilski (of Rila), founder of Rila Monastery, is to be found here and it is in a good condition. The painter's work covers almost all the major Gospel subjects. A number of scenes picture glimpses of daily routines in detail and this once again illustrates the painter's true feeling for the realities of life. There is one example that is rather telling in this respect: a scene called "Forging the Nails for the Cross" and connoisseurs say it is exclusive in its originality and execution.

In their style and iconographic characteristics the Zemen church murals belong to the archaizing current in the Bulgarian medieval painting. And no doubt they also belong to the most fascinating production of the Bulgarian monumental painting in the 14th century.

## **Kremikovtsi Monastery**

An excellent example of ktitor portraits in Bulgarian art is the group church founders' portrait in the church at the Kremikovtsi Monastery.



*The church at Kremikovtsi monastery*

The work follows the spirit of the Tarnovo art school. Certain sources state that in 1493, with the blessing of bishop Kalevita, the rich boyar Radivoj got permission to restore the old church of the Kremikovtsi monastery - St. George. During the conquest of Sofia by the Turks in 1382, they destroy the monastery built during the second Bulgarian kingdom, first ktitor of which was Tsar Ivan Alexander. Boyar Radivoj restored and decorated the church in memoriam to his children Todor and Dragana who died during the epidemics of 1492. The burial of these children was discovered during excavations in 1987.

It was founded during the 14th century, again probably due to Tzar Ivan Alexander, when 14 monasteries known as the "Sofia Mount Athos", were erected around Sofia. Destroyed in 1382, it was among the first monasteries to be restored later - in 1493 the buildings were restored, and St. George's Church was erected – sole survivor today. On the outside, the church is small and insignificant, like all the "semi-legal" buildings of those dark times. As compensation however, the murals (partially preserved today) turned the interior into a glittering gallery. The spirit of the aristocratic Turnovo School is alive here.

The falling of Bulgaria under Ottoman yoke at first stops the development of Bulgarian art culture. During the second half of the 15 century however a period of certain political and economic stabilization of the Bulgarian population and an upheaval of the monasteries mainly in southwestern Bulgaria starts. This creates an impulse for the big art traditions of Tarnovo art school /13 – 14 century/. The link presented underneath leads to an article by a Macedonian researcher, according to which the artists from the Kremikovtsi monastery are representatives of the Kostur art school.

The complex consists of two perpendicular residential buildings, an old church and a new church. No doubt, the older church, which represents a relatively small, oblong building, is of the biggest interest in terms of its historical value. The church was built in 1493 (later renovated in 1611) and it is that period that its frescoes date to. Most of the wall paintings have been (and are still being) restored to survive to present days. These are created entirely in tune with the Bulgarian tradition of the Middle Ages. The bulk of the frescoes are painted against a dark background, against which the images of saints stand out. The composition with the church's patron, St George, on top of a white horse with his long spear stabbed into the dragon, is particularly impressive.

One can notice differences in the styles of the wall paintings in the entrance and the main hall, which suggests the contribution of various artists to the internal decoration. The new church (1902) is a nicely looking building, which keeps the relics of the monastery – The Kremikovtsi New Testament of the Middle Ages (1497) with beautiful calligraphic scripts, and a wooden iconostasis dating back to the 17th century.

The residential buildings, which are more than 250 years old and the foundation of which represents a simple construction of intertwined branches, were entirely repaired in the last few years. This monastery is considered to be one of the most valuable cultural monuments of the Middle Ages to be found on the Balkan peninsula. The monastery is located about 3km away from the quarter of Kremikovtsi, up in the lower parts of the Balkan mountain.

In accordance with all the considered characteristics by means of comparative analysis, we assume that the anonymous master could be an individual who belonged to the painting workshops which are credited for painting the church of St. Nicholas of the nunnery Eupraxia in Kastoria. We suppose the painter worked in Brajčino soon after the year 1486 and before 1493, when the decoration of the church in Kremikovci was completed, in which he most likely took part as a member of another large workshop.

Regarding the origins of the style of the 'master from the 1480's', the paper articulates an opinion that they should be traced not only in the long painting traditions of Kastoria and Ohrid, but also in the collaboration of the masters and the spread of their works in these two important centers of the Ohrid Archbishopric.

As far as the artist' experiences in Brajčino, they relate to the wall paintings from the late 15th century in the Monastery church of St. Paraskeve – Brajčino. The Monastery of St. Paraskevy is located above the village Brajčino, on the east shore of Lake Prespa in the Republic of Macedonia. In accordance with the incomplete donor's inscription this one-aisle church with a pitched roof was built and decorated at the same time. Reparations came around 1800, when rebuilding was done on the longitudinal walls and the narthex (without fresco decoration).

The fresco paintings from the 15th century are preserved on the west facade, and on the east and west wall of the naos.

The decorative program in the interior was common for the small type monastery churches without narthex.

From the old edifice, on the corner of the outside southwest wall visible are remains of figures, a monk and a man in laymen's attire facing eastward.

The iconographic program of the west facade is interesting for the scenes which encompass the patrons niche: a reduced Last Judgment (Royal Deesis, Hell and Paradise, where the monk Pahomios above the gate is depicted in prayer) and the equestrian figures of St. George and St. Mena. A parallel for the rare iconography of St. Mena with the tamed beasts is found in an unpublished icon, which most probably was painted in the last quarter of the 15th century, and is kept presently on the iconostasis of the church of Panagia tou Apostolaki in Kastoria.

The coloring is again respectfully solemn, the drawing elegant, to the point of exquisiteness, the figures are lofty and exalted.

The artist of the Kremikovtsi Church was no blind imitator of traditional methods. In the overall composition of the murals, he introduced a new element, which renewed the art of the time, and became traditional. This is the richly ornamented frieze of the waist-length figures of saints and martyrs, introduced for the first time, which separated the "classic upright saints" from subject scenes diversifying and enriching the general picture.

## Chapter 4: Transcript Manuscript Art

The Old-Bulgarian manuscript is dated back from 1344 – 1345 – the reign of Ivan Alexander. This period is declared as the Second Golden Age of Bulgarian art /the first one was during the reign of Simeon. In the capital of the Turnovo kingdom of that time operates the Turnovo art school, as a result of which are created exceptional manuscript cultural monuments, some illustrated copiously with miniatures. This is the peak in the development of mediaeval Bulgarian miniature.

Ivan Alexander is one of the most important figures in the history of the Balkan peninsular during the 14 century, which to a great extent is due to his flexible dynastic policy. Just like John Kantakouzenos, the tsar had preferences towards the hesychasts – Theodosius of Turnovo and his supporter Romil of Vidin. St. Theodosius of Turnovo, who is probably related to the royal family, becomes chief aid to the prominent hesychast St. Gregory Sinait /Palamas/. He meets twice with Ivan Alexander on his behalf. In “the royal city of the Bulgarians – Turnovo, second after Constantinople” he fights the heresies as leading accuser of adamits, followers of bogomilism, the doctrine of Varlaam and Akindin and the Judaists. Two councils (during 1350 and 1360) had been summoned by the tsar against the latter. With the help of the tsar, Theodosius builds the monastery St. Trinity close to Turnovo.

The trade relations with Venice, Dubrovnik and Genoa, as well as the cultural life during the reign of Ivan Alexander are flourishing. The literary and artistic schools in Turnovo continue the old Bulgarian traditions. From the private royal library are preserved: the Laurentian collection of Ivan Alexander 1348., Kuklen Psalter, also called “Pesnivets”, as of 1337, the richly illustrated Tetraevangelia of Ivan Alexander (1355–1356), now exhibited in the British Library, London, Apostle with interpretations, two transcripts of the Trojan tale and others. Ivan Alexander had been praised several times by the Byzantine patriarch Calist in the “Pesnivets”. The tsar is a great supporter of literature and arts and makes many donations to churches and monasteries. He also establishes new ones. According to a legend, he established 14 new churches only in the Sofia region. During his reign Turnovo literary and art schools mark their peak.

The 14 century is the time of literary upheaval in Bulgaria. During this period the Tarnovo literary school, in which old-Bulgarian manuscripts, remarkably decorated with miniatures are created, is quite active. Together with their development is developed and established a new branch of the Tarnovo art school – painting miniatures as parts of the books ordered by the court. This is the time of Tsar Ivan Alexander – the greatest ktitor in Bulgarian history.

Miniature fine arts, which started its development in Bulgarian art from the end of the IX century / beginning of X century, reached its development peak in XIII-XIV century. Among the most important Bulgarian monuments of this artistic kind except of the Tetraevangelia of Ivan Alexander, preserved in the British museum, is the illustrated manuscript of the Bulgarian translation of Manasses chronicles (Cod. Vat. Slavo 2), the Tomich Psalter and other.

### Manasses Chronicles

Example for transcript/manuscript art in Bulgarian lands is an old-Bulgarian transcript of the Manasses Chronicle – preserved in the Vatican library. Author unknown. The original chronicle was produced by Constantine Manasses - a Byzantine chronicler who flourished in the 12th century.

The works of art in the transcript are miniatures illustrating the Vatican translation of the Manasses Chronicle.

The Vatican specimen is the only Slavic transcript, which is decorated with miniatures illustrating biblical, military and historical events, realized with bright colors and comprising of

complex multi-figure compositions and various style elements. It is one of the most brilliant manuscripts in the general Orthodox mediaeval culture.



One of the miniatures in the manuscript "John I Tzimiskes conquers Preslav and Basil II conquers Pliska"



One of the miniatures in the manuscript "Alexander the Great and Ptolemy I Soter attacking"

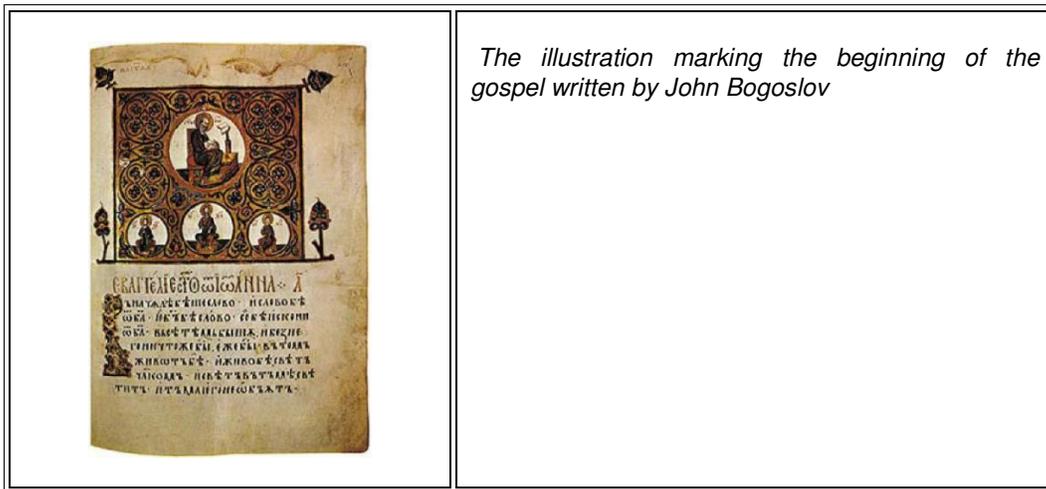
The artists who worked on the miniatures in the transcript of the Manasses chronicles /they are supposed to be two/, follow the rules of Byzantine art. Traditional Byzantine is also the applied technique – gouache with various colors and use of golden paint. The work style of the artists is very similar to the works found in the London Four Gospels /Tetraevangelie/. There are no personification evidences however and no one can state that the two works are created by the same authors.

Manasses chronicle encompasses events from the creation of the world until the beginning of the reign of Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118). The translation is not in verses and was done in the period 1344-1345 following the orders of Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) and has 19 additions related to the Bulgarian history. The text of this object /the Vatican copy/ is the only of all Slavic transcripts, which has been richly illustrated with 69 miniatures. The most precious part of this manuscript are the chronicle “glosses”, related to events from Bulgarian history, which are missing from the Byzantine original. 10 of the miniatures occupy full pages – in the beginning, middle and end of the text. In general, their plots are connected with biblical and eastern history, the Trojan war, the Roman, the Byzantine and the Bulgarian history. Some represent the relations between the Bulgarians and the Russians – the christening of the Russians and the invasion of the Kiev prince Svetoslav in Bulgaria /967 - 972/. 25 of them are not directly related to the text. Of great interest are the explanatory notes under the miniatures, which have not been made by the transcriber /as the practice was/, but by the artist – the miniaturist. Later, in the Vatican library, their translations in Latin have been added.

## The Four Gospels

Tetraevangelia of Ivan Alexander or the Four Gospels of Ivan Alexander (transliterated as Chetveroevangelie na (tsar) Ivan Aleksandar) is a 14th century illustrated manuscript Gospel Book in Middle Bulgarian, prepared and illustrated during the rule of Tsar Ivan Alexander in the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. The manuscript is regarded as one of the most important literary treasures of the medieval Bulgarian culture and arguably the one with the greatest artistic value.

The manuscript, currently housed in the British Library (Add. MS 39627), contains the text of the Four Gospels of Matey, Marko, Luca and John Bogoslov illustrated with 366 (or 352, depending on the grouping) miniatures and consists of 286 parchment folios, 33 by 24.3 cm in size, later paginated with pencil. Folio 74, most likely the one where the miniature illustrating the Judgement Day scene was, has been cut and stolen in modern times. Each of the four gospels in the manuscript starts with an image of the respective evangelist.



The manuscript was written by a monk named Simon in 1355–1356 following the orders of Ivan Alexander. It is not certain whether Simon also illustrated the Tetraevangelia or simply was a copyist and calligrapher. The handwriting of the manuscript shows definite similarity with the Manasses Chronicle (1344–1345), another product of the Tarnovo Literary School of the time. The manuscript was initially plated with gold, gems and pearls, but part of this plate later disappeared and was replaced with the current one.

After the fall of Tarnovo to the Ottomans in 1393, the manuscript was transported to Moldavia possibly by a Bulgarian fugitive. It spent a number of years there and was later bought on the orders and with the resources of Prince Alexandru cel Bun, which is evidenced by a red-ink marginal note on folio 5.

The later fate of the manuscript until its arrival in the Mount Athos monastery of Agiou Pavlou (St Paul) is uncertain, but the document was recorded as part of the monastery's collection in the 17th century. English traveller and collector Robert Curzon (later Baron Zouche), who visited the monastery in 1837, was given the Tetraevangelia as a present by the abbot. This saved the manuscript from being destroyed by the fire that burnt down the whole monastery and its entire collection in the end of the 19th century.

Curzon released an inventory of his collection of manuscripts in 1849, thus marking the first time the Tetraevangelia was presented to the scientific world. Direct work with the original was, however, impossible, which caused speculation, supposition and rumours related to the manuscript.

After Curzon's death in 1873, his entire collection was given to British Museum in 1917 by his daughter Darea, which enabled more detailed scientific research of the document. When the British Library was created in 1973, it was transferred to it.

## **Chapter 5: Tarnovo art school**

The fine-arts of the Tarnovo art school is a major trend in Bulgarian fine-arts during the 13 century - 14 century. It took the name of the capital city and main cultural center in the Second Bulgarian State - Tarnovo. Despite the fact that it follows the main traditions of the Paleolog Renaissance, Tarnovo fine-arts carry some unique characteristic features, which create grounds for considering it as a separate art-school.

Depending on whether it serves as a wall decoration of Christian temples or it is an easel artwork the Tarnovo fine-arts can be divided conditionally in two kinds: mural art and iconographic art. During archaeological excavations were found too few traces of mosaic decorations, which shows that this technique was not popular throughout Bulgaria.

Tarnovo art-school continues to influence the religious and secular art in Bulgaria until the end of the 17th century. An example for this are the famous Arbanassi churches, the art of which is considered as a bridge between the middle ages /Tarnovo school/ and the revival art /Tryavna school/ in Bulgaria.

For the first time in Byzantine art, tempera is widely applied for the murals of the Tarnovo art-school. This technique allows the artist to work slower than with the fresco, while its colors are brighter and richer and allow more additional shades. The fresco is not entirely neglected though. It is used in the famous Ivanovo murals and in the chapel of the tower of Hrelyo in Rila monastery.

The murals in the churches of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom cover the entire free surface – the walls, the arches, the pillars, the pilasters, the vaults, the absis. They are situated in horizontal belts in compliance with the canons of iconography. The first belt includes figures of saints, which are usually standing above a high painted plinth, which is one of the characteristic features of the art-school. The painting of the plinth often imitates colored marble panels. The selection of the presented saints depends on the preferences of the donors and the general thematic of the murals.

Typical for the Tarnovo art school are the multiple images of warrior-saints. In the boyana church for example there are ten. Frequently met is the image of St. Dimitur of Thessalonica, patron of the Asen dynasty, which is very popular in Bulgaria during the 13-14 centuries.

The donors are presented in the narthex. Thanks to the practice of painting the images of the donors we now witness the portraits of many noble Bulgarians from the middle Ages. Boyana church preserves the faces of tsar Konstantin Asen, queen Irina, sebastovrator Kaloyan and his wife Dessislava. In the Bachkovo monastery ossuary is presented tsar Ivan Alexander, while in the church in the village of Dolna Kamenitsa are preserved not one but 11 portraits: despot Mihail, (son of tsar Mihail III Shishman Asen ), his wife, an unknown feudal lord, presented twice with a model of the church in his hands, his wife and children, as well as two priests. Images of warrior-saints are frequently met also on the preserved mural details at the bases of the churches in Trapezitsa.

The psychology and nobility of the portraits in the Boyana church give grounds to some researchers to recognize them as heralds of Renaissance.

The pilasters and the arches were often decorated with medallions with waist-size images of saints. Such are the ones preserved in the church “St. Peter and Pavel” in Tarnovo.

Together with the traditional “Passions of the Christ” and “Holiday cycle” in the second belt, “Christ Pantokratoros” in the dome and “Mother of God with the infant” in the absis, specific scenes and images can also be found. In the narthex of the church “Holy forty martyrs” in Tarnovo was presented the image of St. Ana breast-feeding the little Maria and St. Elisabetta breast-feeding little Joan /the second one unfortunately does not exist any more.

The iconographic type Galaktotrophousa was a predecessor of the widely-spread images of Madonna with the infant Christ in Western Europe. Although it was canonical, that scene was rarely used in the Byzantine Iconography. In the 35 calendar scenes from the same church some of the characters were painted with contemporary garments. The large number of images of Jesus Christ in the Boyana Church makes an impression: Pantokrator (All-powerful); Emmanuel (Young man); Evergetes (Blessing); Mandilion; Keramidion and the unique image Christ Ancient of Days in which He is depicted as a white-bearded Old man.

There are original themes in the Transfiguration of God Chapel in the Hrelyo Tower situated in the Rila Monastery. In the dome is depicted the composition “Sophia-Great Wisdom of God” and in the narthex “Psalms of David”. The scenes “Musicians” and “Horo” are especially interesting because they represent the cloths and the way of living of the Bulgarians during the 14th century. Although there are relatively few preserved monuments of the Tarnovo art school, they refute the popular opinion that the religious murals are inveterate and that they are inappropriate for artistic imagination.

The archaeological research shows that some of the public buildings in the Tsarevets palace were also richly decorated with mural paintings. Unfortunately the few remaining fragments are not enough for the themes to be determined.

## Monastery St. Nikola – Arbanassi

The frescos “Christ great archangel”; “Transfiguration of Christ”; 12 scenes from the life of the Mother of God in the monastery “Saint Nicholas” in Arbanasi, created by an unknown author, follow the tradition of the XVI century art and the Turnovo art school. This monument is a representative of the so called Arbanassi art school, which is a follower of the Turnovo art school and a predecessor of the Tryavna art schools.

Historically the monastery is dated from the end of the epoch of the developed Turkish feudalism and the beginning of its decay. Artistically – this late-mediaeval art is influenced by the monk style of the Athos monasteries, but at the same time the murals demonstrate the formation of a national self-awareness.

The period of training of the artists coincides with the historical – late Turkish feudalism, during which time the training of the amateur artists /zografs/ happened either at the Athos monasteries or under the influence of objects painted according to the rules of Orthodox religious art. The art of the Arbanassi artist is anonymous.

Just like the rest of other Arbanassi churches built during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, “St. Nicholas” was destroyed in 1393 when sultan Boazid conquered the capital city of Turnovo. The church was reconstructed 300 years later and today represents the chapel “St. Iliya”, which is a part of the contemporary “St. Nicholas” monastery. At that time Arbanassi is already going through an economic and spiritual upheaval, many wealthy tradesmen, connected with Athos, live there. Their aesthetic tastes and knowledge are high and their influence and support probably brought to the region some of the best traveling artists in Bulgaria.

The attention is focused on: Christ great archangel in the eastern part of the vault; 12 scenes from the life of the Mother of God; 6 scenes from the life of Christ. The art presented at the chapel is very different from the art presented in other Arbanassi churches from the same period. The plot registers are 4 instead of the usual 2. Palmet friezes separate the horizontal registers in stead of medallions. Many of the gospel plots presented are rare for the region at that time. The unknown artist had great professional artistic background, he is well acquainted with the gospel topics and eloquently creates complex artistic compositions. The images are plastically modeled through lights and shadows and reflect the different ages of the presented persons. The colors are rich, clear, with precise and effective combinations. The architectural decoration takes up an important place. The nature scenes take up less space and the landscapes are stylized. There are no inscriptions with the name and time of the decorations.



*Christ great  
Archangel  
/Photography  
provided by Dr.  
Stoycho Shishkov/*



*Fragments from the 12 scenes from the life of the Mother of God /Photography provided by Dr. Stoycho Shishkov/*



*Scene from the life of Christ / Photography provided by Dr. Stoycho Shishkov/*

The paintings in the chapel of the church "Saint Nicholas" are very different from the ornaments of the rest of the churches existing during Ottoman yoke. The plot registers are 4 instead of the usual 2. The decoration scheme is considerably changed. Gospel scenes are a rarity.

## **Boyana, Ivanovo, Zemen**

Mediaeval art during the 13 – 14 century is the period of classical Bulgarian art. The existence of the Second Bulgarian State coincides with the gothic century Ducento -13 century, with the Italian Proto-renaissance Trecento – 14 century, with the Byzantine Paleolog Renaissance – 14 century.

The quick development of Bulgaria during the reign of the Asen dynasty during the 13 century as well as during the reign of the Terters and Ivan Alexander during the 14 century leads to a peak in artistic culture and the development of the national art school.

The style of the murals evolves from archaic monumentality to a more varied thematic and artistic presentation. This is also supported by the Bulgarian artists who enriched the fresco technique by combining it with a tempera technique for painting with organic solvents, which create a more complex, rich and flashy coloring. This is one of distinctive features of the Tarnovo art school, impressive examples of which are the churches in Boyana and Ivanovo.

Boyana church, despite its canonic positioning of the images and scenes, according to the opinion of many specialists, is the work of an artist with a new, local, more realistic style, different from the dominating the 12th century spiritualistic Byzantine style, which is characteristic for its conditional linear-flat drawing.

The fact that during the beginning of the 13th century Bulgarian lands are under the dominance of the Latin empire, which removes the direct influence of Constantinople and Thessalonica on our art, supported this development of national art. Within the established niche Bulgarian artists immediately create their own scenes, esthetics, originality, realism; Slavic emotionality can be felt. This is the Bulgarian Proto-renaissance.

Bulgarian artists achieve the unknown during those days portrait individualization; they paint many warrior saints and donor portraits in the churches.

Their realistic approach is expressed also in the proportionate drawing, the consecutive development of the modeling, the opening of space, the richer colors.

All of this clearly visible from the murals in the Boyana church.

Another bright example for the development of the national Tarnovo art school are the Ivanovo rock-hewn churches, but this time object for our consideration is the one called the "Church"– 14 century.

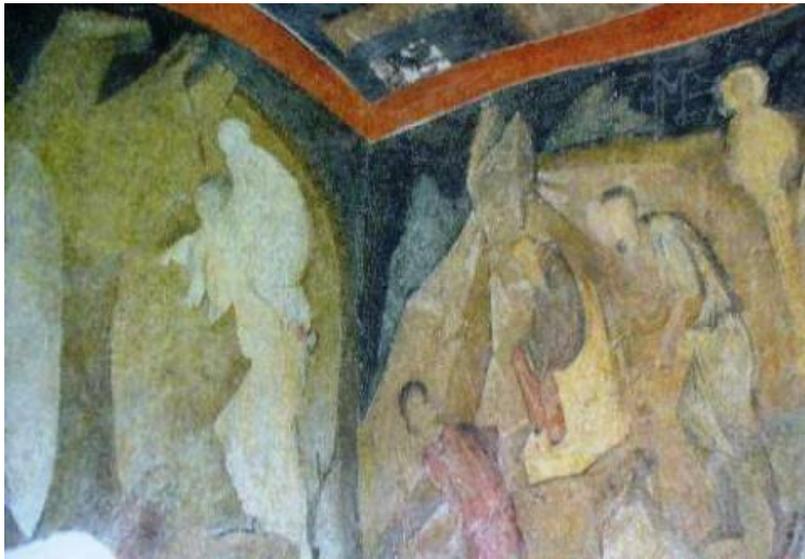
The funds for its painting were donated by Ivan Alexander.

The gospel scenes inside this church are brave compositions, which also use the space which is quite new for the period.

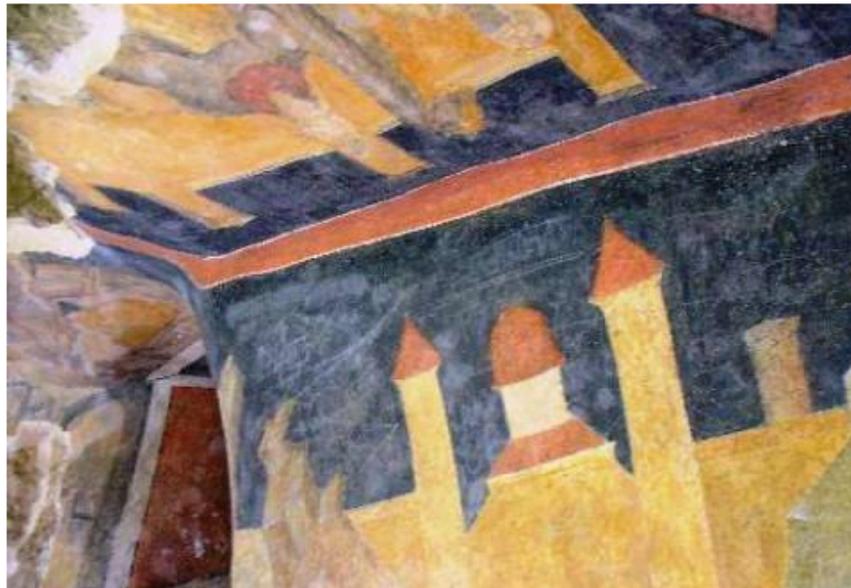
The portraits of saints are remarkable for their deep psychology. Strong characters appear.

All of this has an even stronger influence because of the sense of harmony and richness of the colors used by the artist.

The general perceptions of the church is one of ethereality. According to specialists the Ivanovo "Church" is the work of masters from the Tarnovo art school.



*"The Church"  
interior*

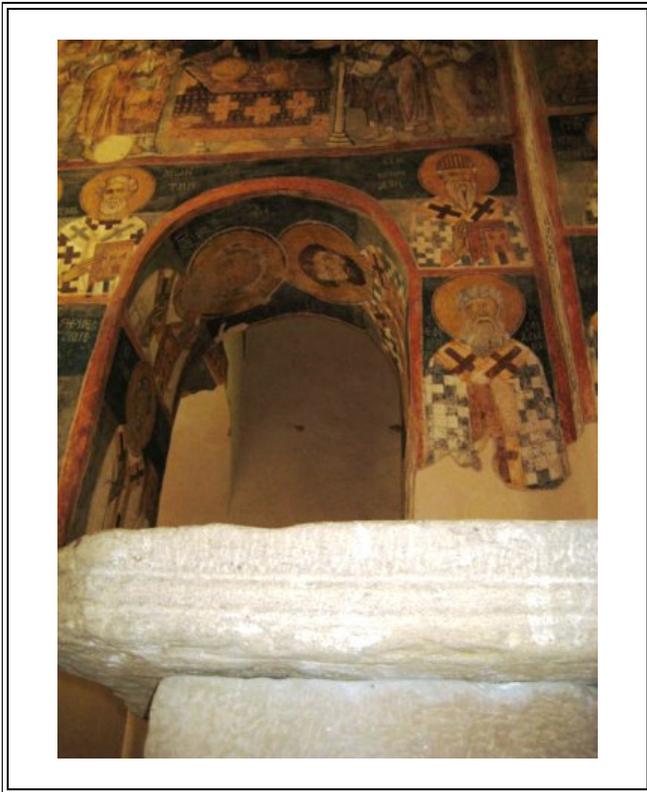


*"The Church"  
interior*

Zemen monastery can serve as a counterpoint of the official Tarnovo art school on the one hand and as a second tendency in the general artistic process on the other hand. It is a monument from the same period, but it is decorated in a different more national and at time naïve style. It is the best preserved proof of the existence during that same period of a national art school with different, more archaic art characteristics, but with richer thematic perceptions and freedom.



*Interior of the church at Zemen monastery*



*Interior of the church at Zemen monastery*

## Chapter 6: Bulgarian Renaissance

Taking advantage of the privileges given by the Ottoman rulers (being exempt from some taxes and Turks being forbidden to settle down in the city of Tryavna and also considering that their land is scarce and unyielding, the people of Tryavna diligently set to develop different kinds of crafts and this soon led to the fast development of the city and enriched its citizens.

This is why the city was called Altun Tryavna, which means Golden Tryavna. This name remained for many years.

Its peak in the development of arts and crafts Tryavna reached during the revival period, which left a rich cultural heritage. During this period of nation wide awakening and bloom, the city turned into a center of quickly developing construction, engraving, icon-painting – famous talented artists, craftsmen, builders created remarkable pieces of art and culture. The main factors for the blooming of these arts and crafts in Tryavna are several: the abundance of wood material and stone, the scenic landscape and the nature of the mountain, the proximity of the ex-capital of the country and the traditions of Trunovo art school, and, which is most important, the rich unique souls of the local people. According to the specialists the art of the Tryavna masters is so abundant and unique that the presence of a complete Tryavna art school is indisputable. This art school is the largest of all revival ones and has the biggest territory. Art works created by Tryavna masters can at present be found in more than 500 cities and villages throughout Bulgaria!

Characteristic of this art school is that the artists created predominantly icons and very rarely murals.

The schools, bridges, churches, clock-towers, murals and icons, iconostases and wood-engravings created by the Tryavna masters spread their fame for about two centuries not just in Bulgaria, but also in Serbia, Walachia, Turkey, Persia, Austria and Russia.

The Tryavna art school started up and developed as a part of the crafts, which blossomed here – construction, wood carving, painting. The skills are passed in the families – from father to son – and have been preserved for ages.

The Tryavna art school in comparison to the Samokov art school works mainly with icons and in close connection with wood carving (iconostases orders). Murals are rarely created by Tryavna artists and they are not considered characteristic for this regional art school.

The Tryavna art school is characterized as unique, with multitude of different artists' styles /images, colors, compositions/, which make it easy to distinct from the Bansko and Samokov art schools.

The zografts from the Samokov and Bansko art schools were trained in the monasteries of Athos, while the Tryavna masters are similar to the naivists, they took and processed with great fantasy elements from the western European, Russian and Balkan fine arts, still preserving their personal touch. The Tryavna masters were very popular and sought – they worked throughout the entire Bulgarian territory, including the territories of the masters from Samokov and Bansko art schools. True icon painting drops off with the advance of humanism in European art. Due to its unaware backwardness, Bulgaria becomes the last “fortress” of real icon-painting in the first half of the XIX century. The last true masters of sacral fine arts are Dimitur Tomov Ikonomov from Bansko, Dimitur Hristov from Samokov and Joanikij papa Vitanov from Tryavna. All three of them have been born in the end of the XVIII century.

## The icon-painters from the Vitan family

Prominent representatives of the Bulgarian Renaissance are the icon-painters /zografs/ from the Vitan family. Of greatest interest are: Papa Vitan the Elder author of "Icon of Christ" - 1798, presented in the Architectural museum - Sofia, "Icon of Mother Mary" and "St. Nicholas" - church museum – Sofia; and Papa Vitan Junior /author of "Icon of Mother Mary" and an "Icon of Archangel Michael" – presented in the church "St. Archangel Michael" in the city of Tryavna/.

The Vitan zografs were trained in the principles of the Tryavna art school during the Bulgarian renaissance. Tryavna art school is the largest religious art school, which functioned for 2 centuries – from the end of the 17th until the end of the 19th century. This is the time of the ottoman reign during which crafts bloom in the small Balkan mountain cities. This is the beginning of the Bulgarian revival.

There are tens of icon painters from the Tryavna art school. The Tryavna artists have created classical post-Byzantine and revival masterpieces.

The names of 70 famous icon-painters from several large painter-families – Vitanovski, Minchevski, Zahariev, Pop Dimitur Kunchevski and Venkovski – are well known today.

The most prominent of them are Vitan Tsonkov the Elder (born 1760), whose icons of Christ /1798/ and Mother of God /1807/ are preserved as valuable relics in the National archeological museum in Sofia; Simeon Tsonyuv Vitanov (born around 1768), one of the best representatives of the Tryavna art school, whose icon "St. Nikola" is preserved in the same museum; Vitan Koyuv Junior (born about 1791) is recognized as the most talented face-painter of the Vitan family; Tsanyo Zahariev Junior (1840-1902) is a prominent member of the Zahariev family and in his icons we find images of the real world; Simeon Tsonev-Monata (1851-1881) was a very good artist with many broad interests – he was the first one to bring a photo camera to Tryavna.

Our culture will always cherish the works of the famous Tryavna masters who have perfectly reflected in their art the new spirit of the epoch and the big Revival ideas.

The most prominent carvers from the Tryavna wood-carving art school are:

Dimitur Oshanetsa (born around 1780), who supported by his journeyman Ivan Bochukovetsa built in 1804 the house of the tradesman Hristo Daskalov. This house is transformed in a museum of carving and painting arts.

Vitan Koyuv Mladi was not only a painter but also a famous carver, whose iconostasis in the church "St. Archangel Michael" is a unique piece of carving art;

pop Koyu Vitanov (1821-1891) carved the bishop's throne in the same church – a unique monument of carving art;

Gencho P. Marangozov (1881-1956) is one of the most gifted local carvers – his masterpiece is the iconostasis in the church "St. Kiril and Methodius" in Sofia, as well as many busts, bas-relieves, friezes, which today fill in the exposition at the Tryavna museum.

Famous are also the Tryavna master-builders, who were the first to create the image of the XIX century Bulgarian Revival house.

The Vitanov's family from Tryavna is among the oldest and most famous Bulgarian families of zografs /painters/ and carvers. According to family annals the first master was Vitan Karchov, who studied in the monasteries of Athos and worked during the first half of the XVII century.

None of his works are documented though. He trains his offspring and thus the craftsmanship passes from father to son. Two generations later, at the end of the XVIII century, the brothers Vitan the Elder, Koyu and Simeon Tsonyuvi and Georgi Dimitrov present their art. They train their sons Yoakin papa Vitanov, Dosyu and Simeon Koyuvi, who on their part pass the skills to their heirs. Some of the latter are remarkable wood-carvers.

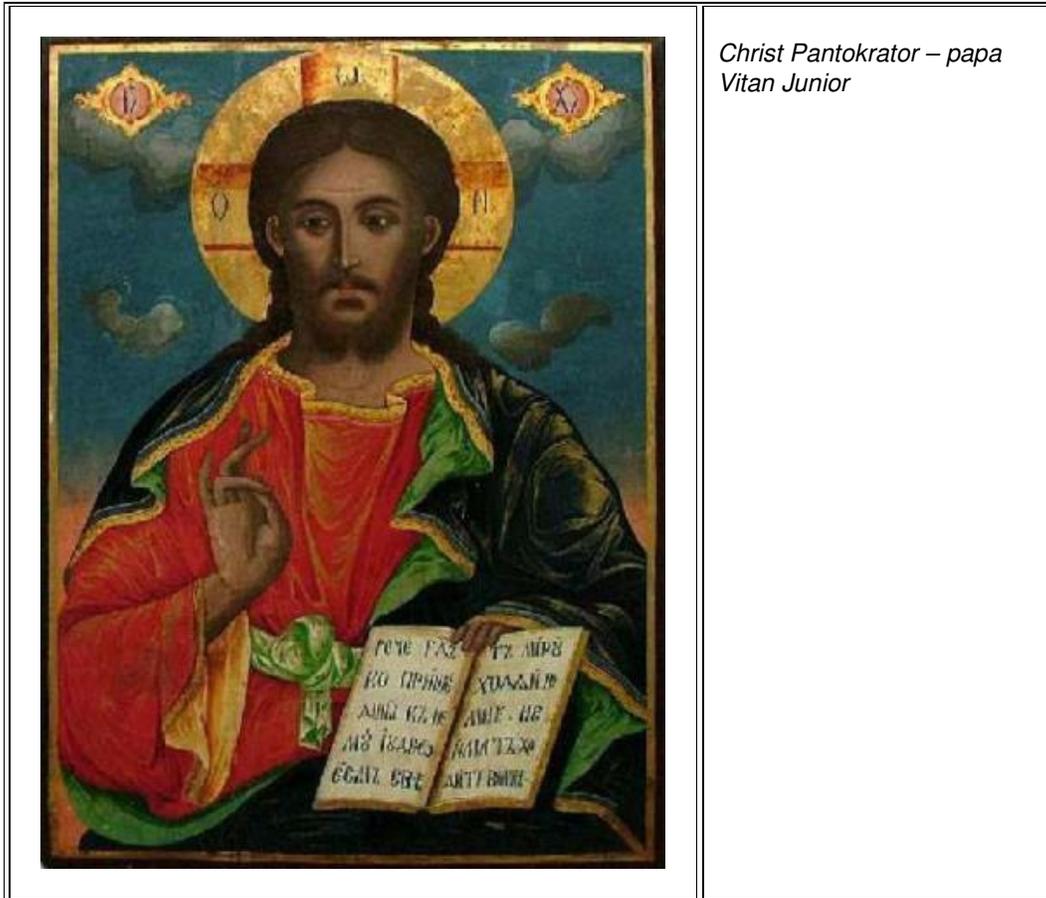
The style of these authors distinguishes them from the art of the other schools – Deburska, Samokovska, Banska and all the others.

The early representatives of the family /papa Vitan the Elder/ used ancient style approaches in their art. Gradually their heirs changed their views and linger away from the family icon-painting traditions.

The works of the Vitan masters are distinguished by their professionalism, sense of colors and harmony, human facial expressions and bright interest towards the world around, which is presented as a background in their icons, as well as open to the innovations, which reach Bulgaria through Athos, the adjacent countries, Russia and western Europe.



*Christ  
Pantokrator –  
papa Vitan the  
Elder*



*Christ Pantokrator – papa Vitan Junior*

## **The art schools of Samokov, Debur, Bansko**

The Debar artistic school from the 18-19 century, appeared and developed in the town of Debar and the surrounding villages: Galichnik, Gari, Lazaropole, Osoy, Trebishte, Tresonche. Since all of these settlements are situated in the historical area Reka, the school is also known under the name Galichko-Rekanska. A third name under which it is known is Miyashka after the regional name of the local Bulgarians - miyaks. No specific data on the founders and the establishment of the Debar artistic school are preserved, but there is some evidence that some of the mastership works of art and carving are dated from the 18th century. In time the skills were passed on to the next generations in Debar and influenced also the local construction and architecture. The family communities of local carvers and icon-painters developed within the atmosphere of general cultural upheaval during the Renaissance. Some of the representatives of this art school were trained in Athos and Italy.

Among the famous Debar art families are Galichnik, Ginkovski and Fruchkovtsi with representative Makrij Negriev, and among the carving families – Filipovtsi from the village of Gari with most prominent representatives the brothers Peter, Marko, Jovan and Josef Filipov. Other well known names from the Debar artistic school are Dicho Zograf, usta Velyan Ognev, Evstatij Popdimitrov from Osoy, Petr Pacharov, Simeon Maksudski from Trebishte, Anton and Dimitur Stanishevi from Tresonche. Part of the same school are also some artists from Krushevo, Prilep, Strumitsa and Stip.

The heritage of the Debar artistic school comes in two main directions — painting and wood-carving.

The art of Debar artistic school comprises a heritage of thousands of icons, painted during more than a century in many churches and monasteries. It carries the characteristics of the sometimes naive renaissance art with its fluctuations between the old iconographic traditions and the urge for the creation of a new style.

Naivety is characteristic for also for the rest of the renaissance art schools – Tryavna art school, Samokov art school and Bansko art school, the last two of which influence greatly the Debar artistic school. In the region of Debar were created many works of craft, primitives, which were not assigned to the heritage of this school, despite that they are bearers of some of its style features.

In the wood-carving field the Debar artistic school has achievements, which are considered among some of the most valuable works of the wood-carving craft on the territory of the Balkan peninsula. Some of the style characteristics of the wood-carving from Debar are naivety in the old-testament scenes and final ornamentation with images from the flora and fauna.

Together with the dogmatic Christian symbols, the masters from Debar artistic school entwine in their work also wine, oak and acanthus leaves, rosettes and less frequently fruits.

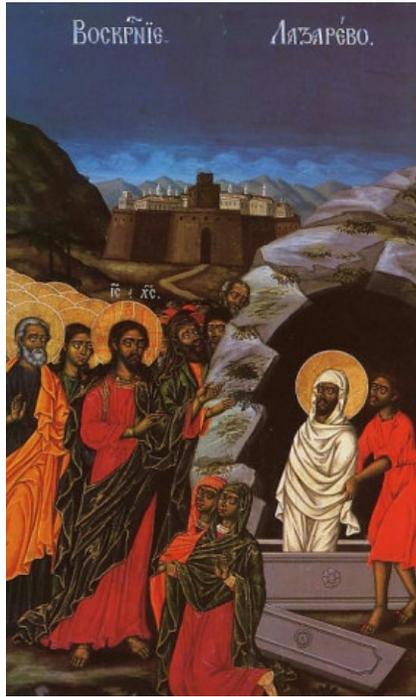
Among the famous works of the wood-carving art from Debar artistic school are the iconostases in:

- Monastery “St. Ivan Bigor” from the beginning of the 19 century;
- The Lesnovo monastery “Archangel Michael” from the year 1814;
- The church “Assumption” in Pirdop from the year 1819;
- The church “St. Spas” in Skopje from the year 1825;
- The church “St. George” in Prizren from the year 1829;
- The church “Assumption” in Pazardjik from the year 1840;
- The church “St. George” in Oryahovo from the mid 19th century;
- The church “St. Nikola” in Krushevo;
- The church “St. St. Theodore Tiron and Theodore Stratilat” in the region of Dobur.

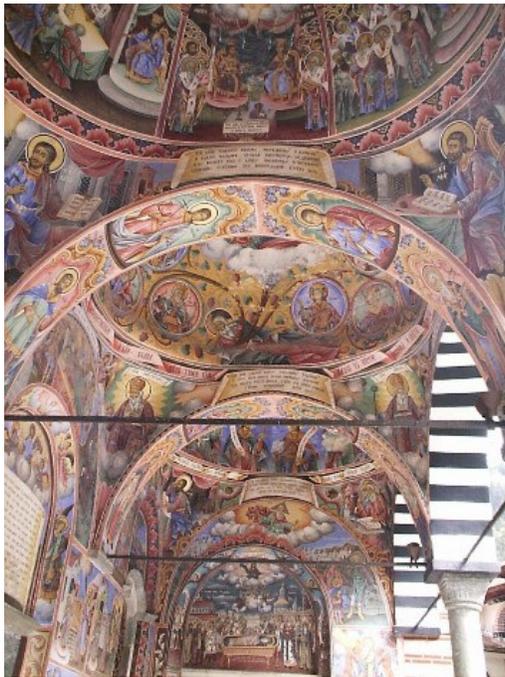
Founder of the Bansko artistic school is Toma Vishanov (Molera).

It is supposed that during the end of the XVIII century he spends some time studying in Vienna, where he is influenced by the modern trends in the European art of that time. The art school he established develops mainly in the field of monumental art and iconography.

Toma’s son Dimitur Molerov and his grand-son Simeon Molerov work in this area. Dimitur Molerov paints the walls of the church in the cloister “Pchelina”, the chapel “Archangel fair” and the two side chapels of the central church of Rila monastery.



*"Lazarus' resurrection" a mural by Dimitur Molerov from the church "St. Archangel Michael" in Osenovo, near Bansko*



*The richly decorated ceiling of the Rila monastery main church "The Nativity of the Virgin"*

The monumental art of the Bansko art school from the last decades of the XIX century is one of the most interesting examples of the folklore tendency in the religious art throughout the country. At that same time the Bansko art school in contrast to the other art schools of the epoch continues to live as a typical renaissance phenomenon until the Balkan war.

Of similar importance for the development of the Bulgarian art culture is the Samokov art school. It reaches one of its greatest achievements in the area of painting.

at the end of the XVII century the local artist Hristo Dimitrov returns from Vienna where he has acquired skills in modern art academies and establishes a private art school. This is actually a house school, in which are mainly taught his sons – Zaharij Zograf and Dimitur Zograf. Later on from the same family comes Stanislav Dospevski – one of Dimitur Zograf’s sons. During the 40s of the century the Samokov art school is joined by Ivan Obrazopisov and his son Nikola Obrazopisov. They work in the Rila monastery and decorate the walls of the central church and the separate chapels with magnificent portraits and compositions, thus defining the level of the official Bulgarian art.



## Chapter 7: On the verge of two epochs

The title of this chapter “on the verge of two epochs” is not accidental. It concerns the transition to secular art in Bulgaria and the strong relations with the religious roots and the traditions established centuries ago. The chapter will cover the achievements of the founder of secular – Zahari Zograf – art-representative for 19th century – and the world-known Vladimir Dimitrov the Master – art-representative for the 20th century – as well as the work of other artists, reviewed through the prism of the religious art-roots. But let’s first consider the historical processes, which take place in Bulgarian art during the period.

First we have to mention the most important social event – the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman yoke, which brings many changes also in the sphere of the arts. By the time of the Liberation Bulgaria and its art are of a renaissance type – which is a way for protecting and preserving national self-consciousness. There are just a few exceptions in relations with Europe and the European art tradition and these are several Danube cities, the strongest of which is Rousse, which even during the Ottoman yoke hosted wealthy tradesmen – Bulgarians, who traded with European countries. That is where the European art tradition managed to enter our lands and the Bulgarian modern was established. There are also several Bulgarian artists – the most prominent of which being Nikolay Pavlovich – who received their academic education in Europe and Russia.

1896 when in Sofia is opened the Painting school, is the year of the organic finalization of the Renaissance period. This period was called post-liberation and it does not include a characteristic change of the artistic life in the country. During this period together with the academic-realistic traditions introduced from abroad continue to live the renaissance iconographic and traditions and practice. The end of the 19th century can be perceived as a conditional limit after which the zograf family tradition and art education ceased to exist. Secular art exhibitions start being organized, which push the official by that time religious arts entirely out of the mind of the society. Painting from the period is characterized as typically secular with development of all art genres. Aesthetically it has an academic spirit, professionalism and perceptible demonstrations of individualism.

The place of the renaissance artist Zahari Zograf here is related to the fact that regardless that he is brought up in the spirit of the renaissance iconographic tradition in his father's fellowship, he is the first who crosses the border between religious and realistic art. This can be seen in a number of art-works created by the famous artist and enlightener, because in them in addition to the traditional gospel, apocalyptic and founder/donor portraits can also be found portraits of tsars, freedom fighters and Bulgarian saints /such as Cyril and Methodius and their students/. His art-works also introduce the landscapes, architectural interior, the natural and everyday life motives – this is why this is the earliest manifestation of Bulgarian secular realistic art.

In addition to this Zahari Zograf is a student of the enlightener and teacher Neophit Rilski – a cleric who is also a renaissance type scholar – which predetermined the philosophy of the artist – painter for life.

Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master is one of the first graduates of the national academic art school, but also a person with deep Christian roots. We should not also forget that he started work during the time when the revival traditions are still quite strong and the artifacts and attributes of art around him are the icons and the church murals. In time his philosophy changes – he becomes a follower of Tolstoyism, but this is a direction for deepening of the Christian and humanistic visions of the great artist.

Very interesting is the connection between the Master and another great painter of that time – Boris Georgiev. Andrey Protich /art analyst/ says: "That, which brought them close at their first meeting, could only be their apostle-kind devotion to art". The Master is very interested by the ideas of Tolstoyism, while Boris Georgiev is a follower of Nicholas Roerich and Rabindranath Tagore, which points to their shared pantheistic view of the world. When their paintings are compared, what strikes is their common humanism and the different approach in achieving this. The Master does it through folklore and color, Boris Georgiev through wonderful realistic paintings and mystic plots. Regardless of this difference between them – one of them being

strongly connected to his Bulgarian roots, while the other being a cosmopolitan – they are both quite famous not just in Europe, but also in America.

## Zahari Zograf's portraits

In brief we will present the biography of Zahari Zograf – the last great icon painter and the first secular artist, through the work of whom Bulgarian art crosses the bridge from its Renaissance period to realism. With his appearance - a person with creative self-consciousness – Bulgarian painters start regarding themselves as artists, not just icon painters. Zahari Zograf comes from a famous artistic family – his father Hristo Dimitrov and his brother Dimitar Zograf are both well known and acknowledged icon painters.

Zahariy Hristovich Dimitrov (1810–1853), better known as Zahari Zograf (or Zahariy Zograf) is arguably the most famous Bulgarian painter of the Bulgarian National Revival, noted for his church mural paintings and icons and often regarded as the founder of secular art in Bulgaria due to the introduction of everyday life elements in his work.

Zahari Zograf was born in the town of Samokov in 1810 and was taught by his brother Dimitar Zograf, with whom he later worked together, as his father died early. A spiritual student of Neophyte of Rila since 1827, he became an equal partner of his brother at the age of 21 in 1831, i.e. he was proclaimed a master.

His best known icons are those of the SS Constantine and Helen Church in Plovdiv, the Church of the Theotokos in Koprivshtitsa, as well as a number of monasteries. Zahari Zograf's best known frescoes are those in the main church of the Rila Monastery, in the chapel and the St Nicholas church of the Bachkovo Monastery, the Troyan Monastery and the Monastery of the Transfiguration. He painted three mural portraits of himself in the latter three, a move that was regarded as controversial during the time.

Zahari Zograf lived and worked on Mount Athos between 1851 and 1852, where he decorated the outer narthex of the Great Lavra. He also did several church donor portraits in his later years, also leaving a large number of unrealized sketches after his death from typhus on 14 June 1853.



*Self-portrait of Zahari Zograf*

## Vladimir Dimitrov the Master's portraits

The emergence of the movement "Native art" in the beginning of 20 century is the link between Christian and folk traditions in Bulgarian Renaissance art.

As a resistance to the academism in art, the manifest of national art turns the artistic quests to folklore, traditions and the rural life. Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master is the most prominent representative of this trend. He becomes world-known while still living and has a unique distinctive style, which is exemplified through his series of portraits and paintings from the village of Shishkovtsi. The artist is active during the beginning of the XX century until the end of the 40s.

Here is a short biography of the artist:

Vladimir Dimitrov — the Master (1 February 1882 - 29 September 1960), was a Bulgarian painter, draughtsman and teacher. He is considered one of the most talented 20th century Bulgarian painters and probably the most remarkable stylist in Bulgarian painting in the post-Russo-Turkish War era. His portraits and compositions have expressive color, idealistic quality of the image and high symbolic strength.

Vladimir Dimitrov was born in Frolosh, near Kyustendil and started his career as a clerk. In 1903 he enrolled in the School of Drawing in Sofia where he was called the Master (Maistora) for the first time. In 1922 he met the American John Crane in Rome and sold him much of his work for the next few years.

Vladimir Dimitrov was a strong artist who included bright colors within his art and today we consider his artwork a fauvist type rather than an expressionism set.

Maystora Peak on Greenwich Island in the South Shetland Islands, Antarctica is named for the painter.

His artistic work can be divided in the following stages:

1910-1920: paints in the traditional realistic style prevalent in Europe at the time. During this period (1912-1917), he participated as "war painter" in both the Balkan Wars and First World War. It is probably due to this war experience that he becomes imbued with the spirit of Tolstoyanism.

1920-1930: creates the painting now called "The Bulgarian Madonna".

1946: joins the Communist Party.

He accepts the communist ideals as propinquity to ordinary people and harmonic life; life in conformity with the laws of nature. This however does not change his artistic views.

Some of the most important moments in the Master's artistic biography, which also form his philosophical views are given below.

During the period 1903 – 1910 he enrolled in the School of Painting, Sofia - painting section. Among his lecturers were such prominent artists as Zheko Spiridonov (modelling), Anton Mitov

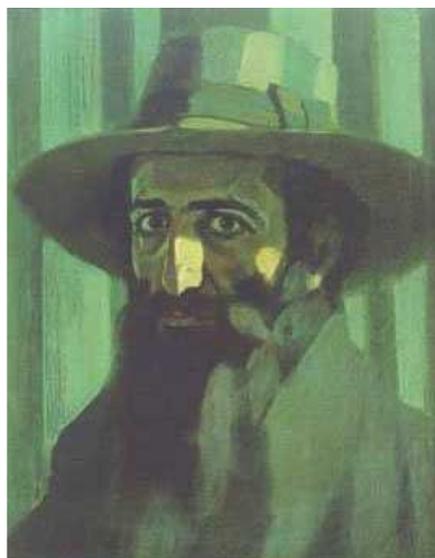
(History of Art), Petko Klissourov (drawing), Mrkvicka (painting). His teachers are the creators of professional art education in Bulgaria and the first post-liberation artists – followers of the academism. Characteristic for the period is the upheaval in fine arts in Bulgaria, which now are professionally based. The ruling style is that of realism.

After 1918 the strongest art movements becomes the newly formed “National art”. This time it was rather a question of the recreation of the actual Bulgarian spirit and form. It meant a search for something specifically Bulgarian in the types and scenes, a discovery of lasting values in the Bulgarian psychology as it had been manifest for centuries on end. It also meant a return to styles, types, plastic metaphors, expressive deformations or, to put in a nutshell, a rejection of naturalism and a sui genesis approach to the language of modern art.

The Master was the most outstanding figure in this process of return to native values. Early in the twenties he produced a series of pictures which revealed the elements of a new plastic syntax capable of expressing the national spirit in art.

In its core the Master's art is unique. Transnational influences cannot be sought even only to due to the fact that he rejects academism. At the same time he is well acquainted with the art of Europe, because he does a lot of traveling during his artistic career. By knowing the traditions, he creates a Bulgarian product of European value. In the beginning of his artistic path, he predominantly paints portraits of intellectuals and of his relatives and friends (of Buchvarov, Alexander Teodorov-Balan, Nikolay Liliev, Ivan Mrkvicka, "My mother") and landscapes ("At the old fountain", "Midday resting herd" and others) in an academic style close to those of his teachers.

During the Balkan War and the I World War he is an artist in the Rila division of the Bulgarian army. In many paintings he depicts the Bulgarian participation in these wars and the life at the front - "Wounded", "Close to Belasitsa", "Handicapped", "At the front of Struma river", "In Skopje 1916", "Coming back from the front" and others. As a result of these events his life takes a new turn and he focuses on humanism and beauty, to the perfection and harmony in the life of the ordinary person.



*Self-portrait*

## Boris Georgiev

Boris Georgiev's biography is a fascinating tale, which he will express through paintings, created during almost half a century. His life is full of travels, which are not just Bohemian wanderings, but clearly realized searches for something noble, a never ending longing for what is good and beautiful. This longing provides him with impulses to roam and become acquainted with many countries around the world and from there to draw plots for his magically influential art. The artist will say later himself: "Being aggrieved from living in the epoch of ultimate materialism and derogation of the sacred values, I sought recluse in the life of a wanderer. I traveled through all continents in order to get to know the art and history of human civilization, to research the customs and morals of the peoples, to enjoy the miracles of nature and to search for friends."

Born on Nov 1, 1888 in the city of Varna, Boris grows up in a poor craftsman family. His father, Georgi Haralambiev from Svistov, had moved to Varna long ago. He is a fur-dresser, but the subsistence of the family is hardly sufficient. Due to this he also tries other professions, but something is always slightly wrong. We do not know what his exact motives when he left for Russia during 1902 were. Boris is 14 years old at that time and has just finished his elementary education in his home town. He leaves his parents, his two sisters Dechka and Katya and his brother Fillip for Petersburg. The father settles there as a tailor in the Children's cadet corps and Boris continues his education in high-school.

Two years of training in Munich with outstanding masters follow. "I devoted myself with passion and faith to studying and for many years assimilated the tough grammar of art, in order to be able to express in a harmonious form the texture of the universe." His main teachers however are the Italian renaissance painters.

After he settled in Munich, Boris Georgiev decides to go to Italy for the summer vacation – a country, which has been attracting him with its rich spiritual values since his child years. Due to a lack of money he is forced to walk the big distance between Munich and Naples. Later on the artist will travel to other European countries the same way, in order to learn from the greatest artists of the past. He is also longing to get to know the morals and customs of foreign peoples not only from the books, but also through a direct contact with life. During his younger years he undertook his walking trips with a bag on his shoulder and a roamer's staff. This he crosses Europe from Norway to Spain and travels through France, Italy and Switzerland. He makes a tour around the northern shores of Africa with a steam-boat. The manners in Morocco, the hunger and poverty leave him with a depressing impressions. For the artist himself however poverty and hunger become constant companions. During his wanderings, when he settles somewhere for longer periods, he is forced to undertake various crafts, some of which he learned in Russia. He works as a carpenter, fitter in a garage, piano tuner. These side occupations, which provide the artist with some funds, and the difficulties and distresses connected with them cannot break his faith in the good. Later on he will say: "It so happened that my road was the one a wandering dreamer, who passes through life without any practical purposes, from one place to another, with his dreams, happiness and sorrow, anathemized from the practical and "respectable" people as a strange person and adventurer, whose greatest solace was the contemplation, the direct contact with nature and the intimate spiritual friendship with people."

This longing for wanderings remains to rule over his soul. His travels broaden and deepen his artistic skills, and saturate them with new ideas and dynamics of time.

Boris Georgiev does not stay in Paris for long. As in Petersburg and Munich, here he painfully lives through the conflicts between the person and the environment and feels very lonely. The large city repels him. The city and the street were never an object for recreation for him. The rhythm of a large mechanized world with a strong flow of motion and bustle of people, depresses the tender contemplative nature of the artist. "I can't walk on the stone paving of the city. I feel an inner necessity to contemplate the sunrise and sunset and to listen to songs of the birds. I could not be able to work in the cities. In the mountain the person feels the elevated nature, which lives in the depths of his soul. "

In the mountains of Trentino, in the area of Val Sugano, where the artist spends time in seclusion, arrives his younger sister Katya. The shepherds of Monte Lefre accept wholeheartedly the artist and his sister in their environment and help them to build a house from stone and wood. Both of them live like hermits there. Contemplation of the endless mountain ranges with their year-long snow caps, dark forests and deep gorges awakens within Boris Georgiev a fresh poetic view of the world and gives an impulse to his art. His works express a well hidden sorrow.

A personal drama is added to all these sufferings – the loss of the beloved sister, who dies in Florence at the age of 19. "The greatest grief in my life is the separation with Katya. She left me to continue my earthly trip accompanied constantly by her bright soul." These worried experiences leave a deep mark on his art.

Even in 1921, when Boris Georgiev brings his family to Bulgaria, he displays some of his artworks in Varna. There he meets an enthusiastic youth, who later on becomes a great admirer of his art. This is the future writer Vicho Ivanov. The two have many common interests. In addition to art, they also converse about music, which they both love passionately. They also probably discuss Indian philosophy and poetry. Vicho Ivanov is very interested in India and in particular Rabindranat Tagor, whom he will later dedicate his inspired articles. In 1925 he already is in Sofia attracted as a collaborator of the new magazine Hiperion, established in 1922. Its first editors are the critic Ivan Radoslavov and the poet Teodor Trayanov. The name of the magazine is proposed by Trayanov after the title of a book by the German romanticist Friedrich Hoelderlin. This magazine propagates the art of the symbolists. Even during the first years interesting articles on poetry, fine arts and music are presented through it. Ludmil Stoyanov presents the artwork of Boris Georgiev in his article "The tragedy of fine arts". Boris Georgiev sends letters and materials from Italy for the Venetian international exhibition. He also creates the project for the cover of Hiperion. Some of his works are reproduced there, together with works by Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master, Vasil Zahariev, Sirak Skitnik, Boris Denev and others. Thus Boris Georgiev is drawn inside the circle of Hiperion. He meets and makes friends with many prominent representatives of the creative intelligence. He creates portraits of some of them. He meets Ivan Radoslavov, Nikolay Liliiev, Teodor Trayanov, Podvurzachov and others. Some of them often visit café "Tsar Osvoboditel" where they have a reserved table. The interesting conversations about poetry and art strongly attract Boris Georgiev and he becomes a part of the company.

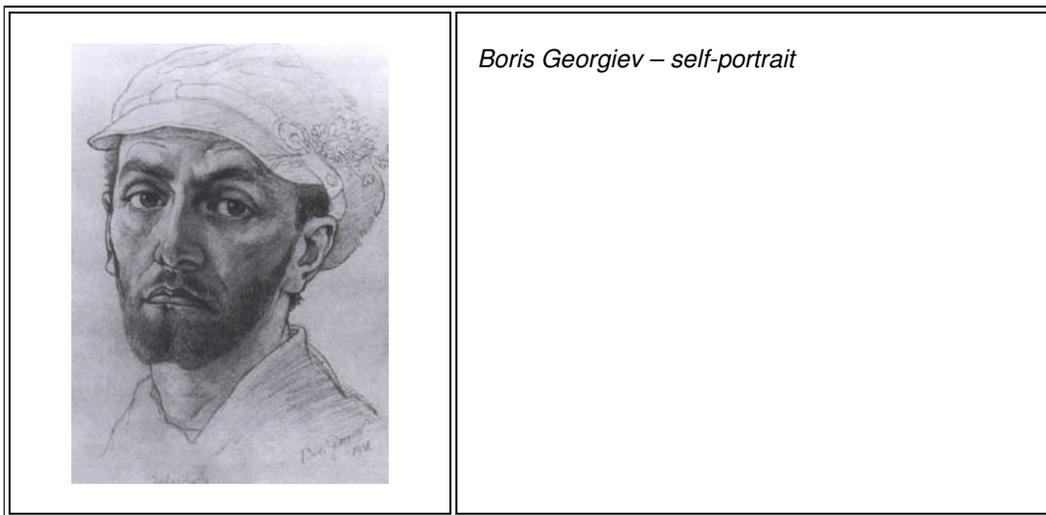
His friendship with Teodor Trayanov is the strongest. This is due to their common understandings of the world and art, as well as their criteria for the ethical, their hostile behavior towards treachery, hypocrisy and the philistine morals of those times. On the other hand there is a closeness in their artistic inventions. They both long to express their spiritual values. The

theme about the fight between the forces of good and evil determines the emotional rhythm of the work of both artists.

Some of Boris Georgiev's early works are close to the atmosphere of the symbolic poetry and especially Trayanov's verses of that time. They give off a feeling of loneliness and longing for wandering.

It is not accidental that Teodor Trayanov dedicated some of his verses to Boris Georgiev. "The poet appreciated Boris Georgiev very much and had dedicated to him the cycle "Hymns of Spring", he had organized and facilitated his exhibition. He felt very close to his artistic spread and effusion. He loved him. The friendship of the two drove them to spend time together every time the artist was in his home country." (V. Balabanova, Teodor Trayanov, 1980)

During the same time the Master has already made his exhibition in Sofia manege without success and without selling a single painting. Boris Georgiev's exhibition in Sofia is also met with certain mistrust. It receives quite contrasting evaluations. "Some irresponsibly glorified the artist, while other at first timidly and then boldly denied him" (Sirak Skitnik, Boris Georgiev's exhibition, magazine Hiperion, 1922, issue 3, page 155). Where does the contrast between these evaluations come from? Mainly from the fact that the separate critics come from different lines of aesthetic thinking during the epoch. Some still support academism. Others are focused on recognizing the newer tendencies in art. Others are connected with the aesthetics of symbolism.



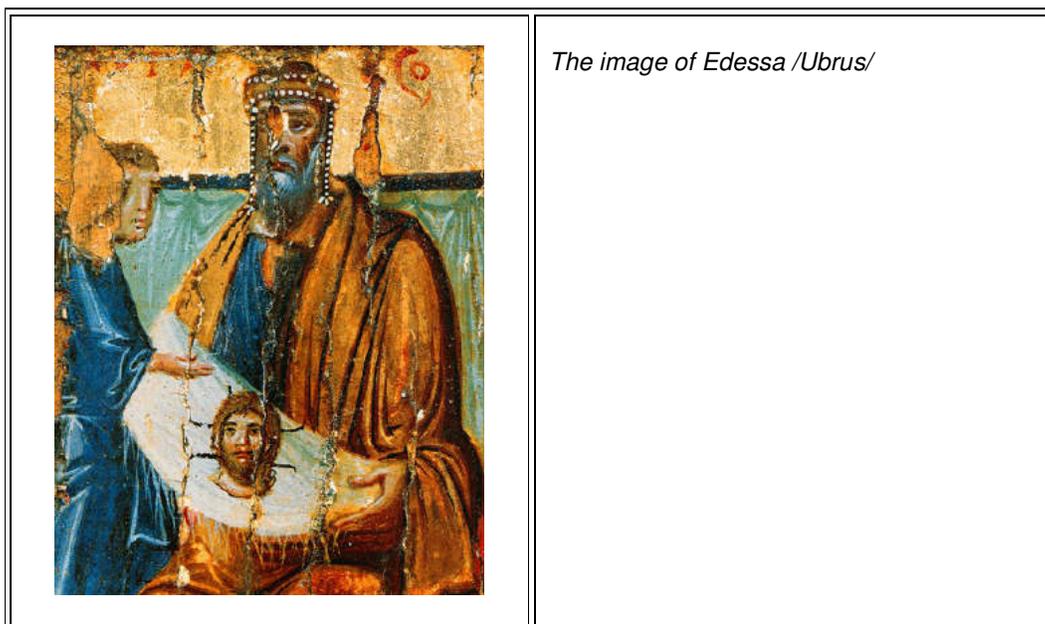
## Part 2 Practice of Art

### Chapter 1: Canonic plan for painting murals

The Byzantine iconographic canon was formed during the 5-6 century, in the period of early Byzantine art and was accepted as a doctrine after the iconoclasm disputes during the 8-9 century. Its focus are the principles about image /John of Damascus, Theodore Studit/, according to which the visual image should serve as a mystic connection between the worshiper and the holy prototype – God or saint. The prototype necessarily creates its visible image the same way God has created the visible and the invisible world. These are the ideas lying at the

base of the decorative system of the Byzantine temple /commonly valid since 9 century/, i.e. the rules for positioning of the images within the church interior. This line of positioning symbolizes the eternal church and each of the images inside it and each presented plot /patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints, biblical scenes and liturgical compositions/ have a special place in the continuous hierarchy, which ends with the dome, where the image of Christ is presented. In addition to this, in order to achieve identity with the prototype the image has to bear a continuous resemblance, i.e. to carry the characteristics of the saint or the holy event, which are eternal and unchangeable. This is the root for the necessity of iconographic canons – special rules, which specify the number of the faces, the composition, the types of the faces, the postures, the gestures and the coloring. The following of these rules was supported by the development of guidelines – *ermynes* – which are used by also by the Bulgarian *zografs*. They contain specific directions for the positioning of the plots within the church, a description of the scenes and saints, drafts of iconographic schemes, paint recipes.

The most important icons for the Byzantine art are – the four images of Christ – the Image of Edessa /the towel, which preserved his image/, the Tile /the roof-tile, which saved the image of Christ/, Christ Emmanuel – God with us, Christ Ancient of Days – Christ presented with a long white beard; the 12 big church holidays. All of these were created on the basis of gospel tales.



For the monuments of Bulgarian mediaeval art, following the Byzantine canon, is in force the following positioning of the art inside churches:

- altar space /apsis, arches, etc./ - Mother of God surrounded by archangels; four church fathers, facing the altar niche; a dome – God all-powerful; under-dome space – the four gospel writers, the four images of Christ;
- then comes a belt with scenes from the life of Christ – the 12 big church holidays;
- Assumption is usually presented on the western wall;
- the lowest belt is dedicated to saints standing at full height. This is where the founder portraits are usually presented.

In the art of the middle ages the icon has always been connected with the canon – the rules through which harmony between the cult architecture, cult arts and their symbolic meaning is achieved. Thus for example the dome is a symbol of the sky and this why that is the place where God all-powerful is presented. The canon also presents the exact meaning of the cult

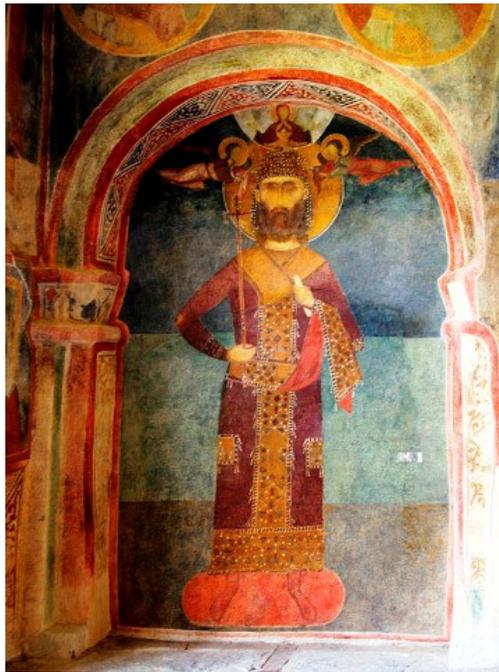
object – a monastery church, a family chapel, a tomb-church, iconostasis, all the things forming the interior and exterior of the church.

The canon being both a reflection of the dogma and a guide in the field of Byzantine art leads to preferences to certain images in comparison with others. This often creates the appearance of specific styles, most important for the Byzantine culture of which are the Paleolog and the Comnenus styles.

The artistic norms and canons of Byzantine art are commonly valid for the Orthodox peoples, which after the adoption of Orthodox Christianity pass under the influence of Byzantium. The same is true also for the Bulgarian mediaeval art. But as is with the different art-schools, the separate monuments have specifics, which are a kind of deviation from the Byzantine canon. This deviation takes the form of selection of plot, color shades in iconography, preference to some saints in contrast to others /for example presentation of national saints/, which makes the connection with the specific social environment and epoch.

## **Bachkovo monastery**

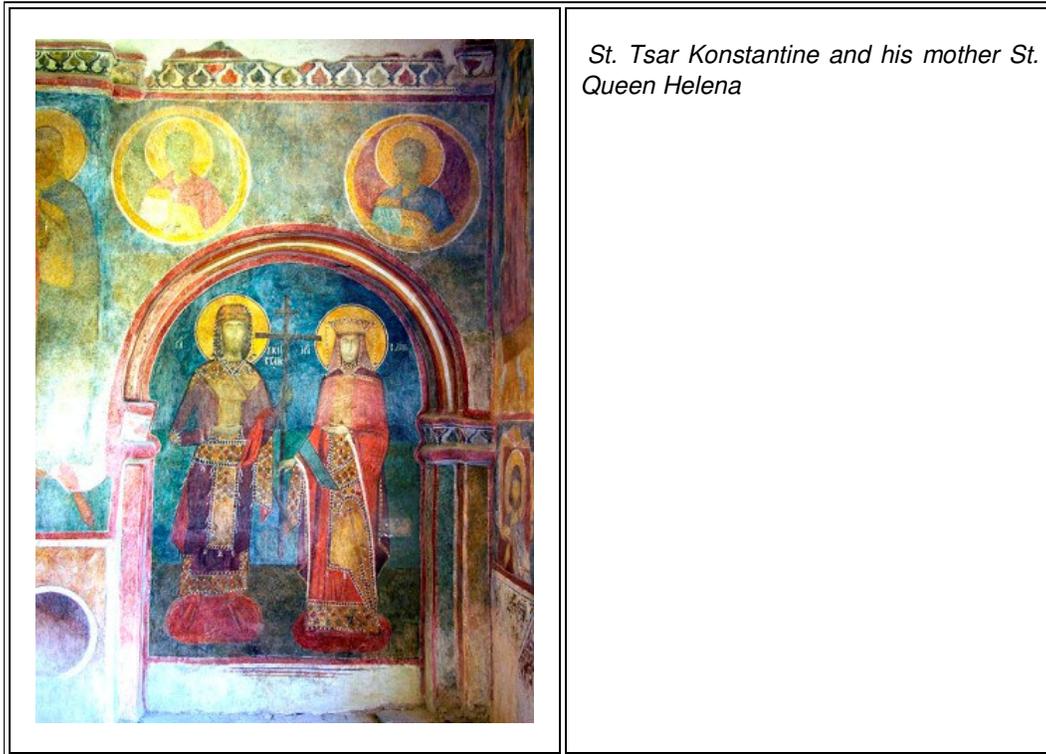
The only preserved portrait of Tsar Ivan Alexander /from a later period/, as well as the founder /kitor/ portraits of the brothers Grigorij and Abazij Bakuriani – Georgian proxies of the Byzantine emperor Alexios Comnenus can be found in the narthex of the upper floor of the ossuary. During its construction, the ossuary was painted by another Georgian – zograf Ioan Zograf Iveropulec (Iveropolis – from the Iveron monastery built in Greece by Georgians during 1084.



*The preserved portrait of Tsar Ivan Alexander from the ossuary narthex /photo Martin Mitov/*

He most probably was of Georgian origin. During that period Georgia and Armenia were among the most important Byzantine provinces, which presupposes his excellent education and training, which probably he obtained in the capital, in the spirit of palace mural art – he is an example of a perfect muralist. Mural art of that time reflects total monumentalism, in which the figures are monumental regardless of their sizes. Another example of this are the portraits of St.

Tsar Konstantine and his mother St. Queen Helena again from the narthex of the ossuary /see image below, photo Martin Mitov/.



The whole idea and representation of the murals is an example of a very serious religious culture. The themes are fundamental for Christianity and in particular the life of the monks. The ossuary is not casually or simply decorated, it is painted professionally with great attention to detail.

It is extremely valuable and its importance is more than national, particularly for those researchers who study the Middle ages and Byzantium.

The location of the murals in the ossuary strictly follows the Orthodox canon, according to which on the semi-cylindrical vault and on the four walls is presented the large composition of Doomsday, comprising of a multitude of separate compositions - "Prayer", "The vision of prophet Jezekil", "Avram's Bosom", "Resurrection of the dead", "Eucharist – sacrament with wine and sacrament with bread", "Baptising of the Christ". The main expression tool is the stylized line, which leads to flat treating of the forms and lack of three-dimensional images and spaces in the compositions. The architectural elements in the backgrounds are two-dimensional, with fantastic and strange proportions, which additionally mark the surrealism of the images. In its character, this art is didactic and spiritual / transcendental.

The positioning of the murals in the ossuary follows the adopted canon. In the lower antechamber on its four walls /with the exception of the founder portraits, which were painted later during the 14 century/, as well as on the arch, is presented the composition of the judgment day. Inside the bone-vault, in the upper end of the apsis is the Deesis scene. Underneath there is a medallion with images, the arch around the apsis is richly ornate with carpet motives and marble. There are visible remains of figures of standing saints on the walls, positioned in two lines one above the other.

Among all other images the face of Mother of God stands out in Deesis. It is the most perfect image of this kind. An impressive visual – demonstrating the ability of the artist to create a connection between the form, the colors and the shading and to give them psychological meaning – this is why this image is one of the best works of art from the end of the 11 century. By using paints, underlining of the eye-shadows, the cheek-bones and the oval, the artist creates an image of grief without using a grimace for the purpose. This complex image, perfectly matching the atmosphere of the tomb, has not lost its charm even today.

The other composition – the vision of prophet Jezekil – is also very lively painted and at the same time presents a rarely used plot for that time.

The judgment day composition, placed in the lower level in the ossuary, is also quite valuable, because Bachkovo holds one of the earliest versions of the plot, which later on evolved substantially. From all the works of art before the end of the 11 century it is impossible to draw a parallel between this plot and any other plot even from Constantinople.

Another common plot, usually painted in the apsis prothesis, here is split into two parts – Eucharist. On the southern wall is the Sacrament with wine, while on the northern – is the Sacrament with bread.

As far as the style is concerned, the art in the ossuary characterizes the Comnenus style, which carries late reflections from the antique artistic renaissance from the previous 9 – 10 century. These are mixed with the spiritualism of the Comnenus style. The ossuary is the only mural monument from the epoch, with images presented in other places by mosaics – e.g. San Marko, Venice, and other venues.

The ossuary has many eastern elements, which are characteristic for the local arts during all times. The means of expression of the local art-school are composed, refined and a sense of proportion. The colors are realistic, bright and characteristic for the epoch. The painting technique is fresco.

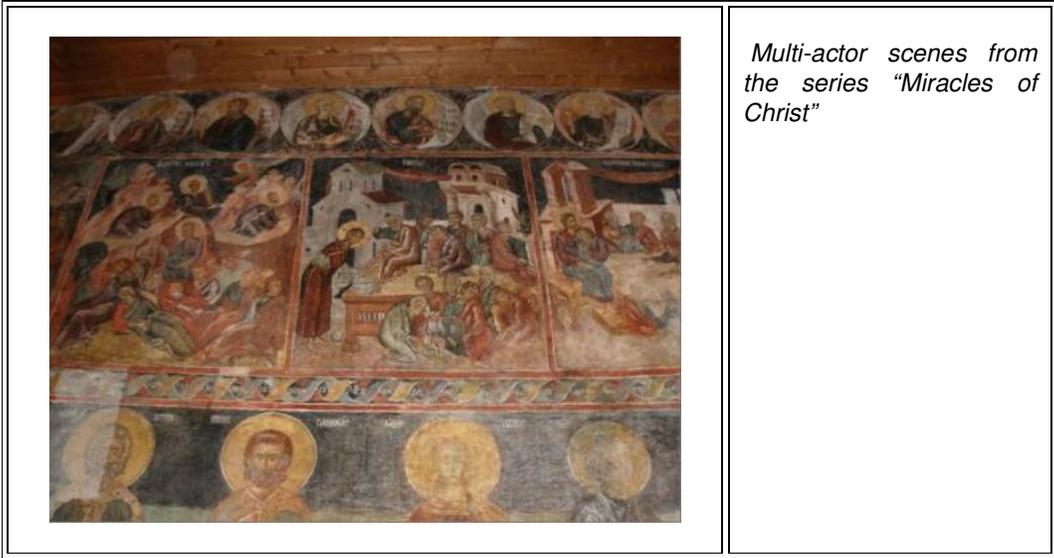
## **“Saint Stephan” church in Nessebar**

The scenes presented on the walls are 258, while the faces – more than 1000. Almost all compositions are thematically related to the Mother of God. Here are some them – “Mother of God with Baby Christ on a throne”, the mother of God hymn “For you he rejoices...”, “Assumption”, “Introduction of Mother of God to the church”.

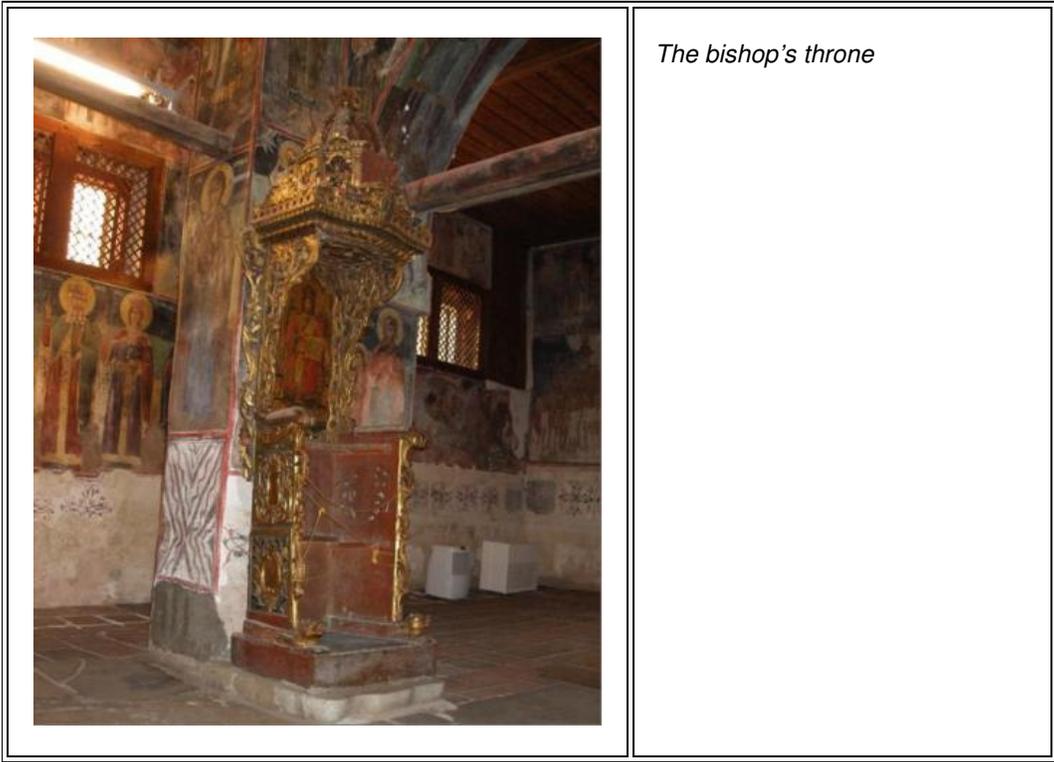
The scenes from the cycle of miracles of Christ are presented in a whole consecution according to the gospel legends – Christ healing the physically and mentally ill, resurrects the dead, calms the storm at sea, helps the rich catch of fish, etc. The healing compositions are many, which is described with the healing qualities of the Nessebar beach. The presented murals are an example of how the Bulgarian painters managed to connect the gospel plots with the natural, historic and economic characteristics of the place they work in – they make an artistic interpretation of the canon.

Later /XVIII century/ on the eastern side of the narthex was painted the scene “Judgment day”.

The church is rich with frescos. The frescos are dated by the founder’s inscription /1599/, which is located above the entrance door. Multi-actor scenes from the series “the miracles of Christ” defend the idea that the Mother of God is an intermediary between the Son of God and the human. The realism of the icon-painting masters finds expression in a part of the compositions with life scenes.



The iconostasis, dated from the XVI century, is wooden, frugally ornate with shallow engravings. This iconostasis had three lines, but only two of the registers are preserved today. The presentation of the apostles has been done according to the XVI century tradition – on a single board. The faces of the apostles, Mother Mary and John the Baptist, from the central scene "Prayer" are presented under the relief arches. Christ is painted in the size of an icon. The architraves and the pedestals of the iconostasis are ornate in the characteristic oriental style "Tulip". The bishop's throne and the pulpit /XVIII century/ are interesting with the shallow engravings of large floral motives as well as with the oval painted fields – gold-plated and polychromed.



As is obvious from the painted scenes and faces, the thematic program of the murals is very rich. It includes the cycles of the great holidays, the passions of the Christ, scenes from the deeds of Christ, the morning Sunday gospels, a number of Mother of God scenes, scenes from the old testament and so on.

Among the rarely seen topics are the heavenly liturgy, the killing of the infants, the temptation of Christ in the desert, the panorama of the island of Patmos, entitled Apocalypsis of St. Joan Bogoslov and others.

In the lower registers, among the other painted saints, is presented a rare image of St. Onufri.

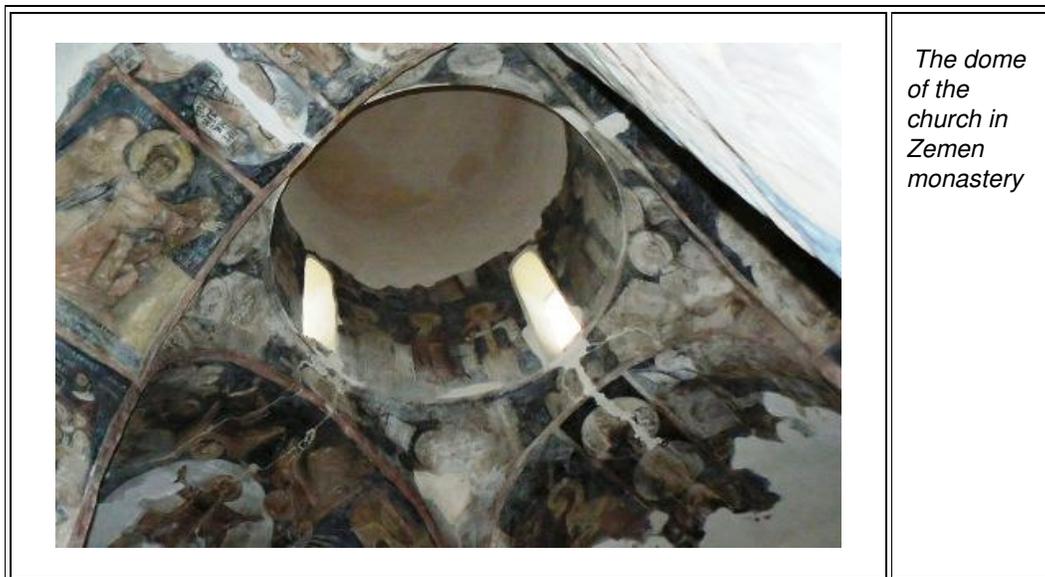
The murals were created by experienced zografts /painters/, who were acquainted in detail with the contemporary arts of Crete and Athos.

## Zemen monastery

The Zemen murals represent the only preserved example of the second trend in Bulgarian national art, which in contrast to the official /Tarnovo one/ is called national.

In the clearly organized inner space the murals are positioned as follows:

Up in the dome is presented Christ Pantokratoros /not preserved/, and on the round highly positioned cylinder in two lines are presented 12 angels and 12 prophets with unfolded square scrolls in their hands. On the arches between the under-dome pillars are visible angels, Mandylion and Keramidion. In the altar absis is presented the Mother of God with the infant, while on a lower level is presented a frieze with the images of the church fathers.



The arches of the main cross are decorated with the holiday cycle, scenes from the passions of the Christ. The lowest register includes figures of saints, as well as the founder portraits of Deyan and Doya, the portrait of the founder Vitomir and another portrait of a boy.



*Portrait of despot Deyan*



*Portrait of despot Deyan's wife  
- Doya*

The center of the large ensemble are the scenes from the passions of the Christ. They follow in a continuous frieze with no demarcation, which accentuates the chronological sequence and the clear narration. This composition principle originates from the pre-iconoclasm tradition and has been applied both in the eastern and western tradition during the first century A.C. during the 10 – 11 centuries there are no narrative cycles in the Byzantine art, but such are present throughout Italy and France /the western tradition/ as well as to the east – in Cappadocia. The Cappadocian art with its anecdote element is similar to the apocrypha literature. The Zemen ensemble demonstrates many relations with this monk and national art.

The old tradition is used not only in the composition, but also in the iconographic decoration of the Zemen monastery.

Of great interest is the scene presenting the preparation of the nails for the crucifixion, which is found nowhere else in the entire monumental art of the east and the west, nor in the apocrypha art. It is only present in two transcripts from the 13 – 14 centuries – French and English. The illustrations in these transcripts are different. The Zemen “preparation of the nails” is the first labor scene presented in Bulgarian art.



A number of other iconographic features possess an archaic character, which takes them back to the pre-iconoclasm epoch /the straight scrolls/, to monuments from the 4 – 6 century /Annunciate/, to Syrian, Coptic and Latin images /Baptizing/, to the murals in Cappadocia /Crucifixion/, to the mosaics of Ravenna and Rome, etc.

The style, archaic iconography and the attachment to the tradition characterize the Zemen murals as monuments of the national art, of which Zemen is the only preserved example. This does not make them an isolated and accidental phenomenon, and at the same time it cannot be

denied that the sphere of the national art trend is the domain where different traditions and influences meet and assimilate in the best way and find their expression.

Apart from this, Cappadocian art has influenced Byzantium, which is strongly connected with Bulgaria during the 14 century, which is the time of painting the Zemen passions of the Christ /narrative cycles appear in Byzantine again during the 12 century, while in the epoch of the Paleologs these appear often – they are also present in the Balkan art/.

## **Chapter 2: Technology of the mural creation of the frescos at the Ivanovo rock-hewn churches –**

Fresco (Italian: A fresco) is a type of mural painting on plaster used throughout the world since early times, but especially known from its high development in Italy during the Renaissance; hence the use of Italian terms to describe the technique. The definition of fresco is: "The art of painting on fresh, moist plaster with pigments dissolved in water. A painting executed in this way."

In its essence, fresco or fresco painting is an application of natural mineral pigments to a surface, on which a following chemical reaction takes place:



Calcium Hydrate (burned lime stone or marble mixed with water) combined with carbon dioxide resulting in the formation of Calcium Carbonate - lime stone, marble. It is like "Painting with molten Marble".

Those elements naturally surround mankind from the beginning of time. Calcium Hydrate was at first found in the moist lime stone walls of the caves and later in the plaster walls and ceilings of the buildings. The paints are prepared from natural pigments made of minerals, earth oxides and clays, mixed with water. Painting in Fresco results in a painting being a part of the newly formed stone/wall rather than being a "film on a surface".

This fact makes fresco the only pure "organic" or "green" method of painting - no solvents, glues or man-made materials are used. It is also the most permanent method of painting which does not fade, flake off, etc. The aged crumbling look of old frescoes is a result of the damage to the wall surface, not the painting. Recently cleaned frescoes by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel are an excellent example of the permanence of the medium.

Fresco painting is a direct product of the desire of our species to communicate by visual means when the "words are not enough or do not yet exist" and a desire to "leave a mark". A "Primal Graffiti" of our ancestors (wall paintings in Neolithic limestone caves) that have evolved into the Grand medium of the Empires and Nations.

With earliest known examples from over 40,000 ago, fresco painting is the most practiced method of painting present in every culture and utilized by every known civilization for decorating of the most treasured environments, palaces, public places. It is said that fresco painting is the logical link between architecture and decoration.

During the Renaissance Fresco was regarded as "The Mother of All Arts" and this statement is as relevant today as it was then. Every culture and its paintings in particular is greatly influenced by fresco. Prior to "printing age" public buildings and common places, decorated with wall paintings (frescoes), were the only sources from which people and artists specifically could learn about current painting techniques and styles as well as about the art techniques of the

past - unearthed painting of Pompeii that survived centuries underground due to being true frescoes is just one example of that.

Visual reference provided by Frescoes led to overall development and refinement of the painting, drawing and composition techniques themselves. The magnificent frescoes of the Renaissance are the great example of the levels to which fresco painting has enabled artists to refine the art of painting.

In fresco the artist has a relatively short period of time to complete the painting while the chemical reaction is taking place, which is generally 6-12 hours (large works are done in sections proportionate to the area that can be completed in a day). Fresco is a challenging medium - it does not allow for errors or corrections and requires adequate level of the artistic and technical skill. Due to this fact paintings done in fresco are mainly created by the most significant artists of the time and consequently found in the most treasured environments.

Being present in our lives from "the beginning of time" fresco paintings became the most recognized works of art throughout the world. Every culture and every nation does identify with the monuments of the past as their cultural roots. If the monument carries a painting it is most likely a fresco simply because that will be almost a requirement to last through the centuries or millennia.

## Rock Hewn Churches of Ivanovo

The church in God's gorge /Gospodev dol/ is the oldest from the complex of rock-hewn churches in Ivanovo. It is a cave with size 3,5 X 5 meters additionally carved by monks and ornamented in al fresco style /wet fresco/. The ceiling is similar to a vault while the surface of the walls is uneven. The frescos on the vault are best preserved – just like all the rest they also carry inscriptions in Bulgarian. The "Mandylion" and "Keramidion", i.e. Christ Ubrus and St. Keramida can be found on the ceiling. Further to the east are the large figures of St. Nikola and St. Spiridon – with white garments, long bodies, large clothing folds, which additionally underlines monumentality.



*Fresco depicting  
"St. Nikola and  
St. Spiridon"*

The colors are exquisite, the pale-pink faces of the saints are modelled with touches of very carefully graded brown and green. The frescos are done in deep colors. The careful placing of the paints in order for good harmony to be achieved is quite distinct. In general they are excellent representations of the great mastership, tender modeling of the faces, the use of clean and deep tones, the careful allocation of color-shades, and their exquisite and harmonious combining. These murals are not a reflection of the capital city art, but are Tarnovo art itself, only demonstrated in the isolated caves of Ivanovo.

The large composition “Descent into Hell”, which is also presented on the vaulted ceiling, has archaic iconography. Above the smashed gates of Hell with a large and bright halo is presented Christ while pulling Adam from the casket. Christ is presented in strong motion. His garment emphasizes the direction of the motion, the hiton flutters and intensifies the dramatics of the scene. Floating attires such as these are common for the late 12 century /as in this case/, but combined with eager gestures such as in this example images of the kind are characteristic for the art of the 13 – 14 centuries. In the remaining compositions “Assumption”, “Ascension of Christ”, which are very badly preserved, the main tonality is visible.



According to the latest research the murals are developed in the al fresco technique – wet fresco, regardless of the fact that under their present seriously damaged condition the technique might have been considered to be tempera. The separate sections between the images have a lime base, which is evidence that the paintings were introduced over a fresh /wet/ plaster coat.

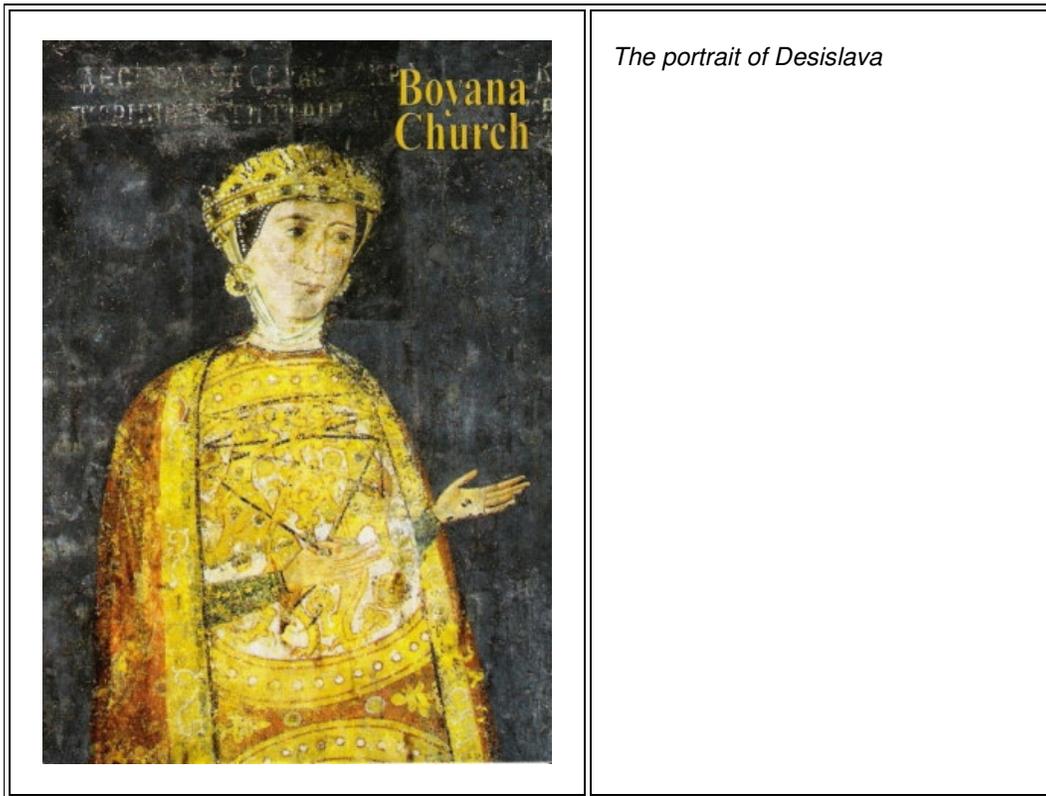
### **Chapter 3: Composition and gestures of the female ktitor /donor/ portraits**

According to the Byzantine canon for painting churches, the figures of the saints are static. This reflects on the figures of the donors, represented in a number of Christian churches. Within these specific art-objects the figures of male donors replicate the canon to a great extent. They cannot be presented in motion, since Christ is not. Orthodox religion is a manly religion. This is why developments in breaking the canonic models can be sought in the representation of the female donor figures. With these the painter was not forced to obey the strict rules and had the opportunity to liberate his imagination and express his artistic visions, to follow the creative impulse, intrinsic for artists.

## Boyana church

The realistic features of the murals in the Boyana church are mainly demonstrated through the four portraits, which decorate the walls of the tomb. Two of them represent Tsar Konstantin Asen and Queen Irina – historic characters. The other two presented figures - sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Dessislava - are not historical and we understand their social status only from the fact that they were donors. Within the boundaries of traditional postures, gestures and attributes compulsory for the donors, the master from Boyana introduced elements, which break the statutes and introduce new features to the characters. Independently from the garments, which are contemporary and not conditional and give away rank, the postures also disclose hierarchy.

The king and queen are presented frontally, i.e. typically, while Kaloyan and Dessislava are turned  $\frac{3}{4}$  to the right. The heads of the rulers have halos – an attribute of the saints – thus they are not simply at the top of the secular, but also the heavenly hierarchy. The donors have only tiaras. The most surprising feature however is the gesture of the female-sebastocrator with her right hand. Her thumb is pulling the lacing holding the edges of her mantle.



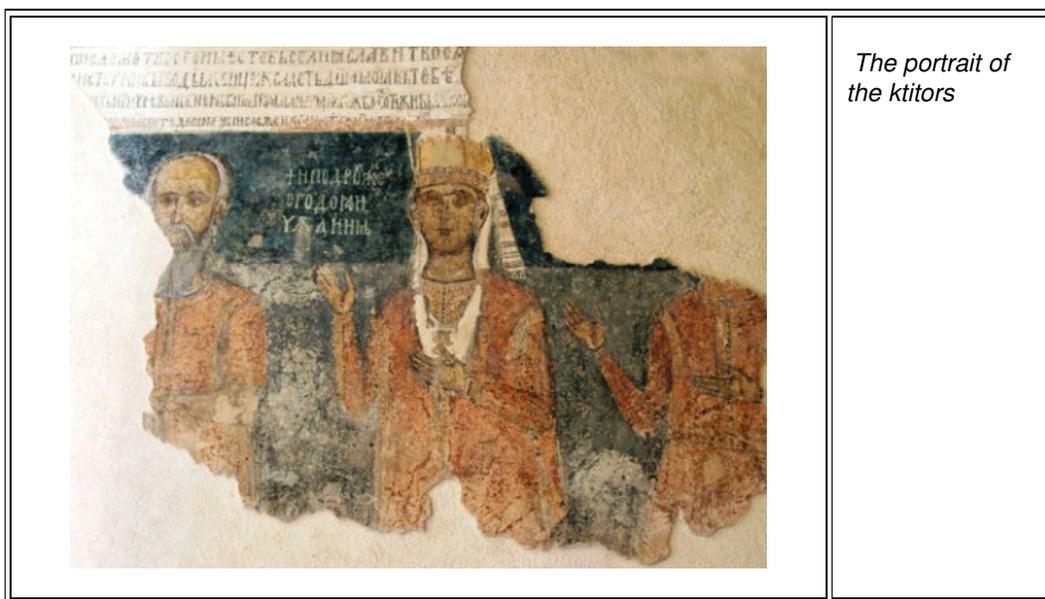
This gesture and the typical for gothic art bending of the body in an S-line are well known in Byzantine iconography, but are customary for the western European art of the 13th century. This image is compared to Edith of the Meissen cathedral and Reglindis in Naumburg cathedral – both representing female-donors painted in the same period – mid 13th century. The gesture is secular and fashionable and is probably well known to the elite of the capital of the Latin empire – Constantinople /Bulgaria is under Latin dominion during that time/. The fact that the Bulgarian female-sebastocrator has adopted this gesture point to a certain coquetry, which did

not escape the eye of the artist. Thus the artist makes a contrast between the saint Irina and the worldly lady Dessislava.

The postures, gestures and attributes were after all used mainly for social characterization of the models. Individualization is presented in the faces. This is where the master has achieved the depth of psychological interpretation, which places him among the first portrait-painters. The four portrait faces encompass the entire amplitude of the motion of the soul regardless of hierarchy – the penetration of the character of the models is clearly visible. The master's sense of perfect beauty we find in Dessislava's lips, which are curved like the bow of Apollo.

## Church at Zemen Monastery

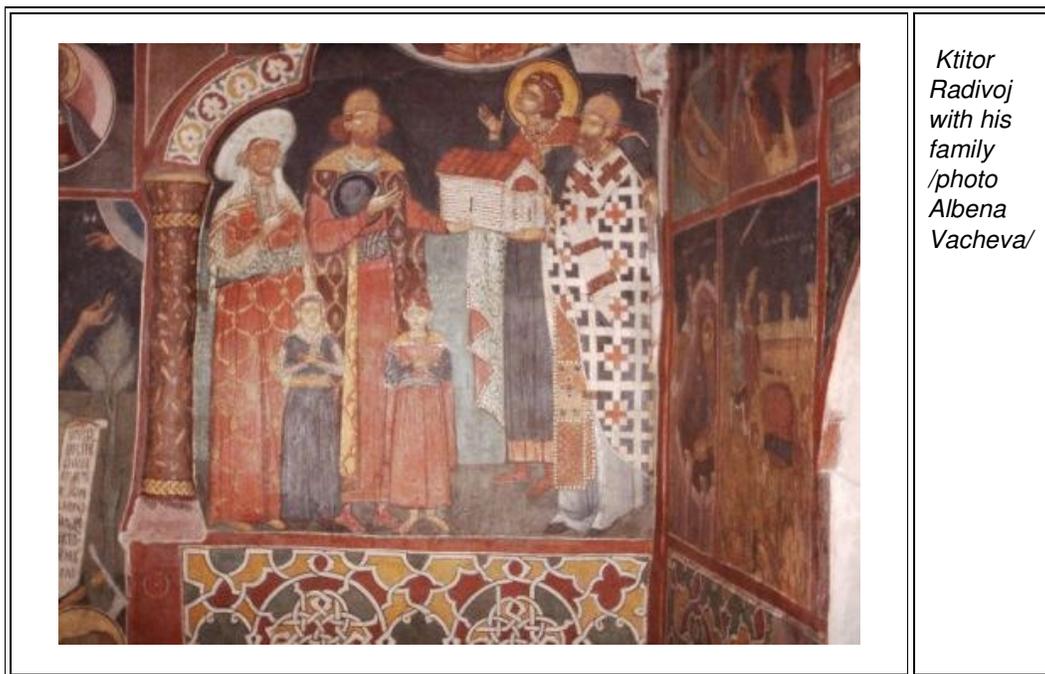
The primitiveness of the artistic means used for the decoration of the Zemen monastery does not exclude the creation of images with bright personal characteristics. Such are the donor portraits presented here. The southern wall presents the group portrait of the family of despot Deyan, his wife Doya and their children /2 or 3/ - the latter almost entirely corroded by the moisture.



The figures are lined frontally next to each other. Despite the schematic treatment of the face of the despot, it most certainly possesses a portrait character without a trace of desire for beautification or idealization – portrait of an old person. The realism of the portrait is in his psychological contents, and not in the artistic tools, which are quite conventional. The same conventional tools are applied in the portraying of Doya. Here however we can spot the desire of the artist to idealize the young female-despot by introducing features, related to the popular perception of beauty – joined arched eye-brows, thin nose, very small mouth and a beautiful neck. The simplified treatment of her facial features makes their interrelation even more visible, by imposing it in the impression from the portrait. It is sufficient for us to see the way, in which the truncated by the head-cloth oval of the face sits upon the long neck and to follow the lines of the figure, which are similar to those of a delicate vase, or to compare the horizontal facial elements – the lines of the eye-brows, the mouth etc. – with the vertical ones – the pearl earrings, the nose, the thread on her bosom – in order for the representative character of this image to be understood. No other painting among the donor portraits from the Bulgarian middle ages, but the portrait of female despot Doya from Zemen, is created with a deeper perception of the tectonics of the human face.

## Kremikovtsi monastery

The most important part of the mural decorations is the group ktitor portrait – eastern part of the northern wall of the antechamber. Radivoj is presented not simply as a ktitor, but as a man honored to make contact with God. Together with Radivoj, his wife and their two diseased children – Todor and Dragana – presented is also the Sofia bishop Kalevit.



Instead of a schematic ktitor scene a unique genre painting, which is found in no other church of that time in Bulgaria, is created. When presenting secular faces the artist is demonstrating strong realism. He pays special attention to the coloring and beauty of the garments of that time. The presented scene in this portrait does not fall within the themes presented in the rest of the monastery and for the first time in Bulgarian art instead of a schematic scene we have a genre painting.

The multi-figure donor portrait, presenting the family of the local notable Radivoj together with his wife and their two children is situated on the northern wall of the antechamber of the church. The composition shows him handing the model of the church through the hands of the Sofia bishop Kalevit to the patron saint St. George. In memoriam of their children Todor and Dragana, diseased in the month of August in 1493, boyar Radivoj restores and decorates with his own funds the church of the monastery above the village of Kremikovtsi, in order to strengthen and invigorate the spirit of the enslaved Christian population in the area around Sofia. The donor portrait is a unique work of art – an emotional “tale”, which presents the entire family – the donor who hands a model of the church – constructed and decorated; his wife and the two diseased children. The patron saint – St. George – accepts the model as an advocate before Christ. Next to him is presented the figure of the Sofia bishop Kalevit. The composition ends with the face of Christ who blesses. The mediaeval tradition of the XIII-XIV century is distinct. The attires, the postures, the emotions of the separate characters, the unity of the narration and the decorative system are all point to a hereditary master-artist, who expressed the vitality of artistic tradition from the time of the free Bulgarian middle ages under the new circumstances of the historical period.

The female figure in this composition completes the thoroughness of the shown plot – the donating of the church, which is expressed with the gesture of the stretched out hand. It is intended not so much to point towards the church model, but to caress the diseased children. This hand is similar to the dove, which takes the spirits of what is most precious to her in heaven. She blesses. The face of the woman shows the grief of loss, but also compassion for her husband and his blessed deed.

## **Chapter 4: Technique for drawing and shaping of manuscripts**

The custom to decorate the texts of manuscript Bulgarian books with ornamental and figural motives dates way back in time. Even the first monuments, written in the Glagolhic alphabet, demonstrate the urge of the transcriber to verify and decorate the text with beautifully painted header letters. Later under the influence of foreign prototypes – mainly Byzantine – for opulent decoration served main starting and ending letters with ornamental motives from the flora and fauna, painted miniatures of human figures, sometimes even multi-figure compositions with biblical, gospel and historical plots. Such manuscripts, sometimes decorated with gold, silver and precious stones, were considered real treasures.

Old Bulgarian writers and artists – miniaturists – acquired great skills and refined esthetical sense of combining the proportions of the shrift and the miniatures within the limits of the page. Even the art of writing letters was known to few, called Grammatiks. They had to be well acquainted not only with the language, but also with the peculiarities of the paper and the parchment and the way for preparing the ink. The creation of a manuscript was the collective work of a writer – a calligrapher – and an artist – a miniaturist. The writer used to leave blank spaces for ornamental decoration and miniatures.

Regardless of the expensive golden decoration of the covering, the content was considered more precious – the calligraphically inscribed text and the miniatures. An important place in both monuments takes the floral ornament – branches with leaves, palmettos, tulips, figs, wines – entwined images, which we find in the starter vignettes and in the frames. The interlaced work, resembling entwined straps and ribbons, has an old origin – it is customary for the Celts, the northern peoples, Byzantium, the Coptic ceramics.

Teratologic motives also appear – these have Iranian origin, but were introduced to the Bulgarian monuments from the middle ages through the art of Byzantium.

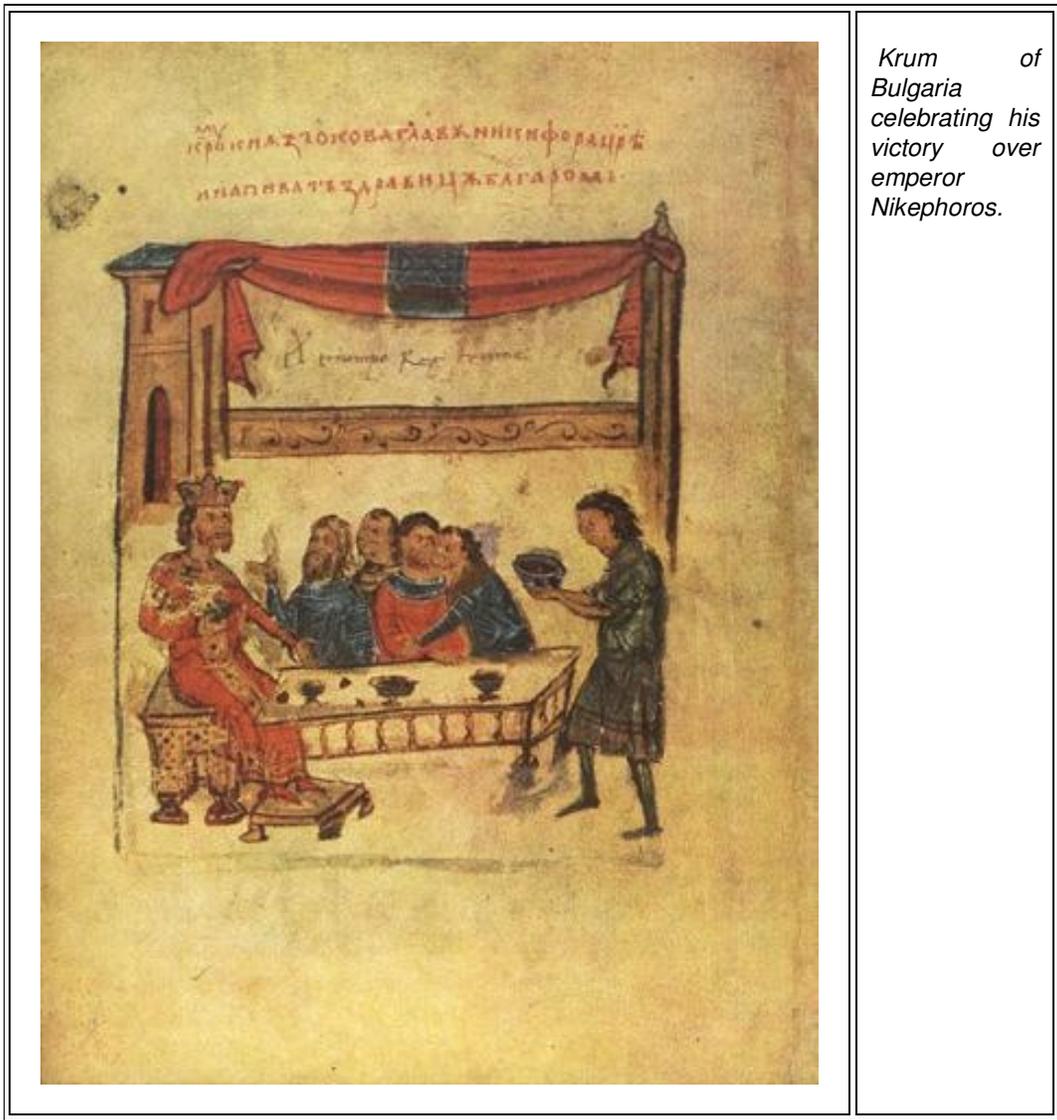
An important element are the carefully painted miniatures with figural compositions. They are richer than the icons and the murals where the human figures are frozen and follow the strict canon. In some of manuscripts – like in our two monuments – we find portraits of historical faces, contemporary to the miniaturist – such as those of the tsar and his family. We sometimes also find a portrait of the artist, presented while working.

As far as spelling, method of text presentation and illustration of the two monuments, they undoubtedly belong to the palatial art school of the miniaturists, which probably operated in Tsarevets /today's Tarnovo/, influenced by Byzantine art.

### **Manasses chronicles**

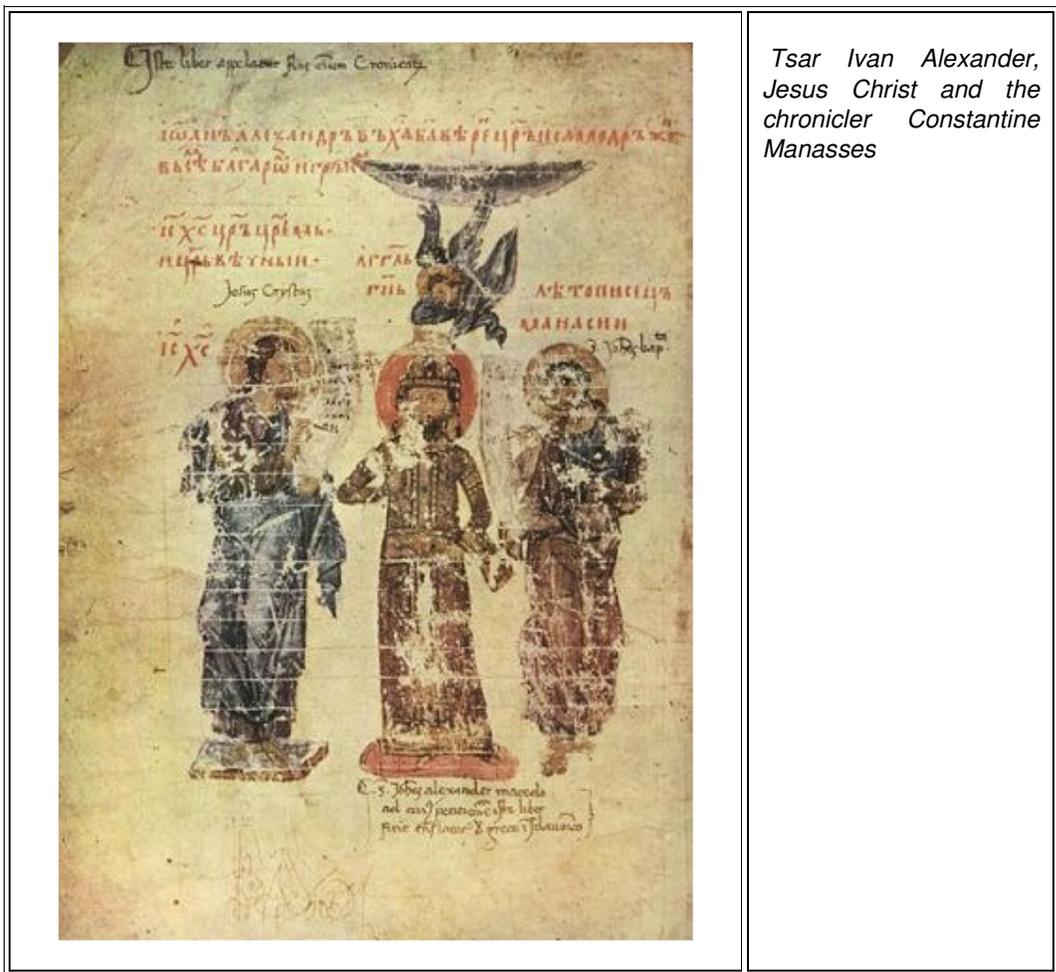
The miniatures are complex multi-figure compositions and contain multiple and various elements: conventionally presented natural landscapes /mountains, seas, hills, rivers/;

architectural motives /palaces, cities, churches, fortresses/; human figures /naked body – Adam and Eve, men, women, rulers, warriors, clergymen, workers, sailors/; war-ships. The rulers are presented in Byzantine emperor garments from the XII – XIV century. In the miniatures illustrating historical war-scenes, different military attires and weapons are illustrated, while the horses are painted carefully, realistically, always in motion. Only Alexander the Great's horse - Bucephalus – as his name implies - is painted with a bull's head /the artist allowed himself this allegory/. Unaware of the laws of perspective, through the straight drapery of the roofs of far-away buildings, the artist shows that the action is taking place in a room and thus presents an interior. The Bulgarian tsar Krum is also presented in such a context, at a feast with his boyars after the defeat over Nicephorus.



The miniatures are elaborated in cover paints and gouache. Predominant in the palette are the intensive colors – red cinnabar, blue, light and dark green, ochre, light violet. The text is written in dark brown ink.

The miniatures are 69, 10 of which are painted over the whole page – at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. In this translation of the Manasses Chronicle, along with the miniatures made following the Byzantine prototype (44 in total) the most interesting are those presenting events from Bulgarian history. Among them is the portrait of Tsar Ivan Alexander by whose order the transcript is created. On his right stands Christ, facing the Tsar and writing on a parchment, on the left – Manasses, also writing his annals. This composition is very impressive not just because of its grandeur, but also because of the free movement of figures, the harmony of colors and the written in red cinnabar explanatory notes.



*Tsar Ivan Alexander, Jesus Christ and the chronicler Constantine Manasses*

Another impressive element of the Chronicle is the scene where the Tsar's son is dying. In that scene the tsar and the queen (tsarina) are holding white towels – a sign of mourning in the eastern tradition. In the background architectural scenery is presented Tarnovo – the capital – over which a flying angel carries the soul of the dead boy to heaven. The same goes in the rest of the miniatures.

The Vatican transcript of the Manasses Chronicle, with its exquisite calligraphy with large print, and the skillful placement of graphic elements on the parchment, with the remarkable compositions and vivid range of colors (probably result of the work of two artists) is a prominent memorial not just of the medieval Bulgarian art, but also of Christian art in general.

## The Four Gospels

Another prominent memorial of Old Bulgarian miniature art of painting is the richly painted Tetraevangelia of Ivan Alexander (Four Gospels of Ivan Alexander - now exhibited in the British library and also known as the London Tetraevangelia). It contains 286 parchment folios, illustrated with 352 miniatures made with gouache paints.

The miniatures, mainly illustrations to the text with different sizes, in which old Eastern and Syrian painting traditions can be recognized, were recreated, together with the Byzantine conclusions.

They all belong to one and the same iconographic cycle; they all are made with the usual technique of Byzantine miniature – gouache slacked paints – cinnabar, cobalt, dark brown, lubricous green, dark violet, wine-red, violet, chrome–orange. These were also used for making more color combinations, while golden paint is used not only in the halos of the saints, but also in the heads of the trees, the architectural buildings, the ornaments and folds of the clothes – by outlines and shades, for making a greater impression.

Each of the gospels has a big golden painted ornament at the beginning, in the middle of which is the image of a certain Evangelist. The miniatures most of which are put into the text are painted in a conventional way by a skillful hand. Often one and the same composition contains several scenes, which took place in different places. The action takes place lively and naturally, the movements of all figures are presented laconically, naturally and spontaneously. The miniatures were created by several artists, who, probably together with the re-writer calligrapher – the monk Simon – worked in the palatial scriptoria of Ivan Alexander in Tarnovo.

A precious material for the appearance of the portrait genre in the old Bulgarian fine-arts are several miniatures with portraits of the tsar and his family, such being also found in the Manasses Chronicles. There are two such portraits in the London Tetraevangelia – a portrait of the tsar, Queen Theodora and their sons Ivan Shishman and Ivan Asen and an emblematic portrait of despot Konstantin, despotica Kera-Tamara and their daughters Keraca and Dessisalva.



*Tsar Ivan Alexander and Queen Teodora with their sons Ivan Asen and Ivan Shishman*



*Portrait of despot Konstantin, despotica Kera-Tamara and their daughters Keraca and Dessisalva*

## **Chapter 5: Preservation of the Christian traditions of the Tarnovo art school in Arbanassi under the conditions of Ottoman presence**

Presenting detailed historical references on Arbanassi is necessary in order for the way of preserving the Christian traditions during the Ottoman yoke. This preservation is reflected not only in the artistic monuments, but also in some ethnographic traditions, which were specific for Arbanassi, as well as in the manner of house building. Everything was focused on confining life within the house and the family. The churches were built small in size, but in all Arbanassi quarters, in order for the people to feel comfortably within their Christian community. Under the conditions inside this community, during the 17 – 18 centuries was formed the Arbanassi art-school, which was a follower of the Tarnovo art-school /which geographically speaking is quite logical considering the closeness of the village to Tarnovo, which is 4 – 5 km/ and a predecessor of the Tryavna art school /Tryavna is about 50 km away – an important crafts and trade oriented settlement.

In the conditions of the late and deteriorating Ottoman feudalism started the formation of a national self-consciousness and a revival of the artistic traditions. During the 17th century

images of ancient philosophers and writers, characteristic for the European classicism and education started appearing in the Arbanassi churches. During the 18 century a number of talented and trained artists started developing individualism and a style of their own. They continue painting portraits of secular donors.

The ancient village of Arbanassi is situated on a high plateau with a view of the hills of Tsarevets and Trapezitsa, 4 km away from Tarnovo. Characteristic for it are the monumental houses and churches with rich interior decoration, carving and wall arts created during the XVI-XVII centuries. These unique monuments of our architectural and artistic heritage are the reason for Arbanassi to be a frequently visited place not only by tourists, but also by scientists, archaeologists, historians, architects and artists. During the year 1921 the village was declared a resort with a decree of the king, and later on in the year 2000 – a “historic settlement” of national importance.

The annals of Arbanassi start with the earliest written document – the firman of Sulejman the Magnificent from 1538, with which he grants the lands of the present settlements of Arbanassi, Lyaskovets, Gorna and Dolna Oryahovitsa to the grand vizier Rustem pasha, son-in-law of the sultan. Within the firman the four settlements are mentioned under the collective name of Arnabud Karielari. Other details about Arbanassi are found in the notes of Pavel Dzhordzhich from the 10 Jan 1595 to the Transylvanian prince Sigmund Batori. The catholic bishop of Sofia – Peter Bogdan Balishich – who visited Tarnovo in 1640 also mentions Arbanassi. He specifies that up in the mountain there is a city, from where the entire Tarnovo is visible and which has about 1000 houses.

The lack of other written documentaries give rise to different opinions and proposals about the origins of the name and population of Arbanassi. Some consider that the village was inhabited by Bulgarian boyars, who came with their villagers from the western boundaries of the country after the flashy defeat of tsar Ivan Asen II at Klokochnitsa on 9 March 1230, when he also conquers the land of Arbanassi. During the middle ages Arbanassi was called Arbanassi lands. Rakovski mentions that after tsar Ivan Asen II married the daughter of the imprisoned Kir Todor Comnenus, he moved several Greek families to Arbanassi.

During 1859 the Tarnovo teacher A. P. Granitski makes a translation of the Tarnovo guidelines, issued by Hamamdjiev in Constantinople. This guidelines say: „to the east, half an hour away from Tarnovo, is situated the village of Arbanassi (Zagorie)... inhabited in ancient times by Bulgarian boyars and noblemen, with 2000 residents...” This teacher from the revival period, born in Kotel, precisely defines not only the name of the village, but also the origin of the population “inhabited in old times by Bulgarian boyars”. A richer documentary material (transcripts and annalist notes from church books) is left from the XVII and XVIII century. It shows that Arbanassi reaches the peak in its economic development during the half of the XVII century and stays in this state until the end of the XVIII century. This is when the village had 1000 houses and its population comprised of outstanding trade families. The main source of income for the local population was cattle breeding. The crafts were also developed. Silkworms were also bred here. Four manual water-wheels were producing silk, which was exported for Constantinople and Italy. Wine growing is also characteristic for the region. The best wines were situated around the Balakova fountain, Orelcheto, Kamuka, Chukata. The tradesmen from Arbanassi were well known and sought throughout the entire empire. Many of them were selling even in Baghdad, India and Persia. They were selling meats, fat, hides and other goods, and on their way back were bringing silk, velvet, spices, herbs, etc., which they sold not only in their shops in Arbanassi, but also in Tarnovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Popovo and other places.

Proofs of the economic welfare of the people of Arbanassi are both their houses and the five churches, which were built during the upheaval of the settlement. At the end of the XVIII century as a result of the attacks of kurdjali during 1792, 1798 and 1810 the village was plundered and burnt, and the plague epidemics and cholera put an end to what had survived the attackers and fires. The richest tradesmen migrate to Walachia and Russia. After 1810 Bulgarians, coming down from the Elena and Tryavna Balkan, start moving into the village again. The previous glamour and economic upheaval were however never reached again, considering also the fact that Gyultan Hatt-i Sharif took from the year 1839 took away the privileges of the village. After the Crimean war the development of petty crafts in Arbanassi ceases to exist almost entirely. During several centuries Arbanassi was a fortress of Hellenophilia. The Greek language, which is official here, the famous Greek school as well as the church liturgies in Greek did not influence the national self-consciousness of the local population. The participation of the people of Arbanassi in a number of uprisings, organized in Tarnovo is meager, but still proves the existence of the Bulgarian spirit in the village. The history of Arbanassi is rich and the names of the local people are present in the heroic annals. What is left until present days however and strikes us with its beauty, skills, taste and which best reflects the epoch are the 144 houses with preserved interior decoration and the 2 monasteries.

## **The Arbanassi House**

The dispute about the development of the Arbanassi house is not smaller than the one about the name and origin of the village. The house evolved and perfected itself in accordance with the social-economic situation in the village and acquired a unique appearance, which is not matched in any other Bulgarian settlement. The opinions of researchers of the Arbanassi house relate to the two main opinions about the origin of the village. The arguments that this is a purely Bulgarian house prevail. The surviving houses prove that the oldest ones (the stone houses) are similar to the Tarnovo boyar houses. Two houses of the kind are preserved – the one of Hadji Pop Panayot and the one of chorbadji Georgi. Constructed entirely from stone, they represent small fortresses with inner staircases. For outside protection they have strong stone sentry boxes and for the night watchman – niches. The windows are small with iron bars. The second type of houses are big with thick stone bases, the second floor is frame-built and whitewashed.

These houses do have terraces and bow-windows.

The third kind of houses appear during the late XVIII century. These houses have an open balcony with no windows, closed with wooden shutters, which open towards the garden. Humble and strong in appearance, with no balconies and verandahs, with iron-bars on the windows and firmly cased outside doors, the Arbanassi house strikes with the richness and luxury of its inner environment. The lower floor is built from stone, with arched entrances, leading into large stables, cellars and hideaways. Here is the lodging of the guard and the servants. Two staircases lead to the second floor – a main one and a staircase for everyday use. The second floor hosts the living room, a winter and summer sleeping-room, a room for the young mother, a kitchen, a bathroom and a cellar. The rooms are situated on the two sides of a corridor. Attractive in the Arbanassi house is its interior design – the wood-carvings on the ceiling, the doors, the windows, the cupboards, the gypsum decoration of ceilings, the friezes. All of this is a proof of the artistic mastery of the builder. There are no big differences in the positioning of the interior elements. The variety comes from the richness and diversity of the decorations, which is evidence not only of the taste and skills of the builders, but also of the wealth of the owners.

The Arbanassi house is organized in a way, which made it livable without having to go out, except for water from the well in the yard, for a very long time. Each Arbanassi house is surrounded by thick stone-walls. Each house had a hide-out. This speaks of the insecurity of the times, during which lived the inhabitants of this village. The yard of the Arbanassi house is entered from a large two-winged thick oak gate, infringed with stone pillars and covered with a four-sloped roof. The gate also has a small door for constant connection with the street. A small knocker, which hits an iron panel, is attached to it. Very interesting are the large Arbanassi fountains with their big eaves. These are the Kokonska and the Pazarska fountains. The first one is situated right outside the Kostancalievata house and was built in 1786 by Mehmed Said Aga. On its frontal part stands a stone inscription with relief letters in old-Arabic language. The translation of the inscription says: „Whoever watches it and drinks will have light in his soul and eyes”. From the preserved houses of greatest interest are the two museum houses – the Kostancalievata house and the Hadjiilievata house.

**Arbanassi churches** Together with the Arbanassi house and fountains of great interest are also the seven Arbanassi churches, which are among the most remarkable monuments of Bulgarian art from the period XIV-XVIII century. These churches are: “Birth of Christ”, „St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel”, “St. Dimitir”, “St. Atanas”, „St. George”, „St. Mother of God” and “St. Nikola”. The last two were later turned into monasteries. Architecturally the churches are single-room, single-apsis, with semi cylindrical arches under a two-eave roof. They are constructed from stone, the windows are small and with iron bars. The floors are paved with square bricks. The Arbanassi churches include two separate sections – a male (to the east of the main altar and the iconostasis) and a female one (to the west). There usually is a gallery to the north ending into a small chapel. All churches have murals. The murals in these churches are a good example of the development of arts during the period of transition to the art of the Bulgarian revival and its connection with the capital of the Second Bulgarian State – Tarnovo.

lgarian revival and its connection with the capital of the Second Bulgarian State – Tarnovo.

## **Arbanassi Churches**

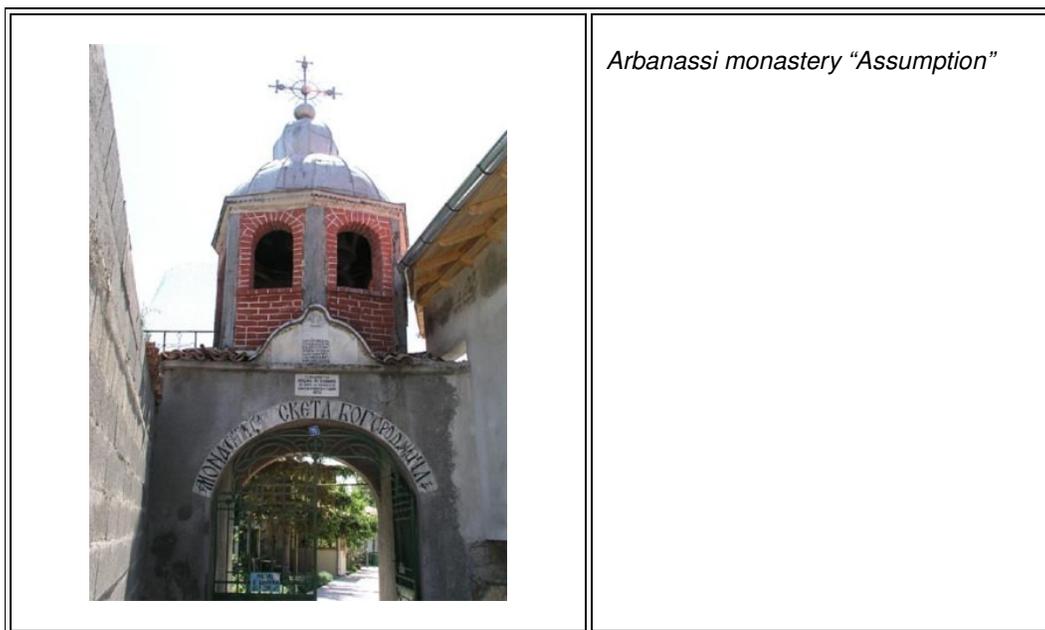
The remaining 6 Arbanassi churches are included in this chapter and in the information on the monastery “St. Nikola”, presented in detail, in order to demonstrate that the monastery St. Nikola was not an isolated art phenomenon, but a consistent part of the tradition for preserving the Christian self-consciousness of Bulgarians during the period of the Ottoman yoke. The fate of all 7 Arbanassi churches is the same with small differences. They are traditionally painted, following the influence of the Athos monasteries, which is a tendency during the 16 – 18 century. This Greek influence can be considered as an act of resistance to the Ottomanization during the Ottoman yoke and is considered as a positive tendency in Bulgarian art. The national elements and the philosophical themes, which shine from the walls of the otherwise small Arbanassi churches are a step towards the Bulgarian renaissance, which is already eager to step in – the Tryavna art school.

The Arbanassi art school is therefore a transition between two large epochs within the history of Bulgarian art.

## **Arbanassi monastery “Assumption”**

This is the second monastery situated in the village of Arbanassi, together with the “St. Nikola” monastery. It is smaller and built in the northwestern part of the village. It represents a complex

comprising of a church, living quarters and a chapel. During the first years of the Ottoman yoke it was active and wealthy, after the ravages of the kurdjali however it declines and is deserted. Not until 1680 was built the new monastery church, which preserved until present days. It is a low, single bodied, single absis, prolonged building with two antechambers. The spacious chapel “St. Trinity” is situated in its northern part. The church is holding the miraculous icon “The three-handed St. Mother of God”. During 1716 the Toryan monk Daniel builds living quarters and restores the activities of the monastery. In 1762 the church and the chapel are again renovated and decorated with murals. Regardless of the fact that they have grown darker from the time and the fumes of the candles, these murals have preserved their artistic values until present times. The ancient relief icon of the Mother of God – cast with silver – is also very previous. A bell-tower has been built at the entrance of the monastery. The monastery has been declared a monument of culture and is at present an active one.



## The Church “Birth of Christ”

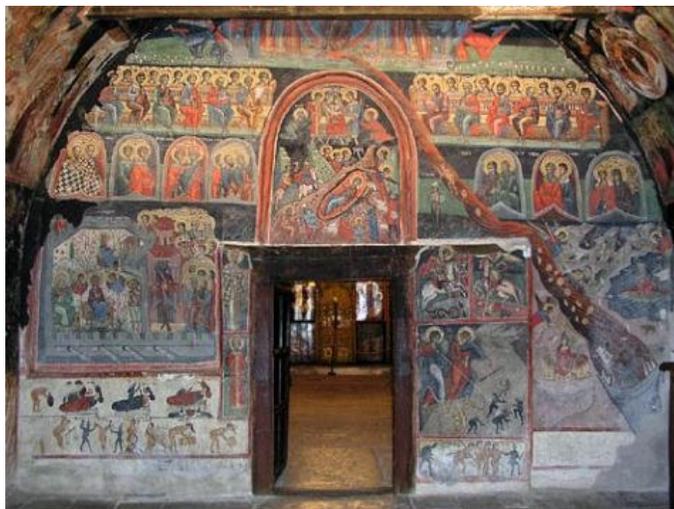
The church “Birth of Christ” in Arbanassi is today the oldest, most interesting and largest in size. It was probably built during the XV century. In its oldest version it was small with one room and an external absis. During the first half of the XVII century it was broadened to the west with a separate female section and a closed narthex. To the north it has an open arcade, ending to the east with the chapel “Joan Baptist”. During the year 1632 the northern wall of the arcade was walled up and turned into a dining gallery.

The inner space of the church was painted entirely by unknown Bulgarian masters. Three mural layers are visible. The oldest layer is from the XV-XVI century. Preserved from this layer is the composition Judgment day. Parts of this oldest art-layer were also discovered on the walls of the naos and altar in the men’s section. The narthex, the dining gallery and the chapel have been entirely decorated during 1632-1649. The latest decoration of the female section took place in the second half of the XVII. The church “Birth of Christ” was built, broadened and

decorated with the funds of the wealthy Arbanassi tradesmen. The names of the donors can be found on the wall murals at different places in the church.

The murals in the gallery and the female section of the chapel represent a detailed month and day calendar with scenes and saints. Next to the entrance of the chapel, to the left, is presented the wheel of life.

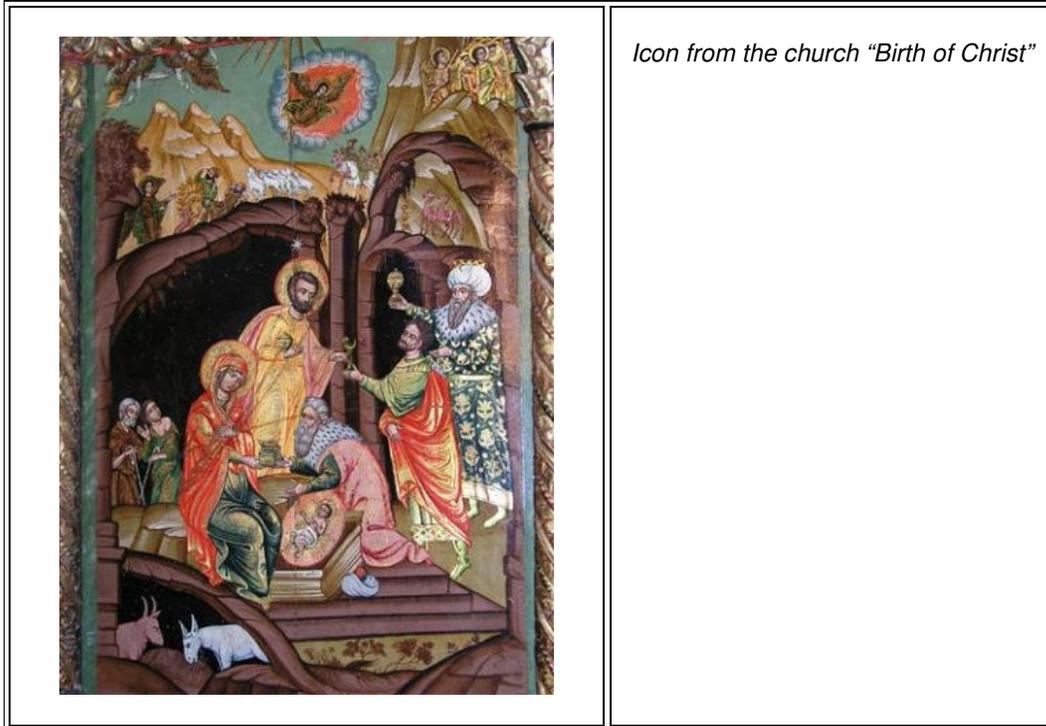
The murals in the naos present the life and passions of "Joan Baptist". The iconostasis there is the work of master-carvers from Tryavna.



*Entry to the church "Birth of Christ"*



*Interior of the church "Birth of Christ"*



*Icon from the church "Birth of Christ"*

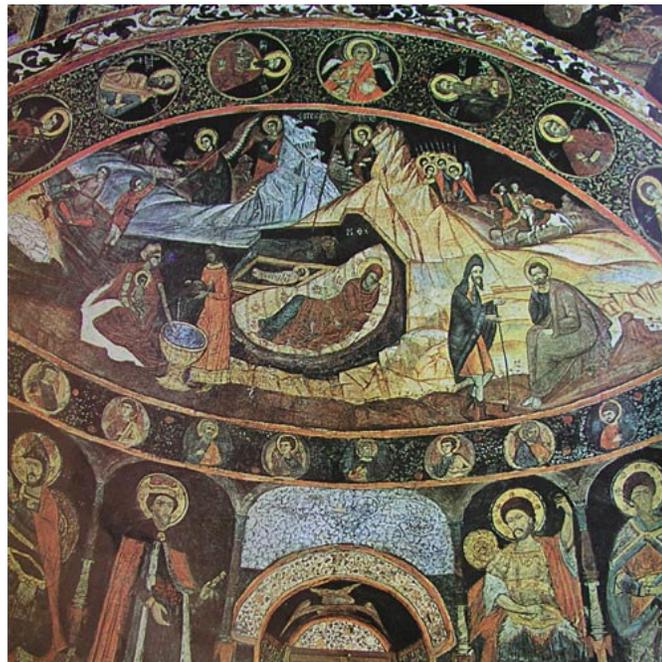
#### **Church "St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel"**

The Church "St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel" is situated in the southeastern part of the village and is constructed on the grounds of an old mediaeval church. Three construction stages are visible – the middle of the XVI century (its eastern part, its present naos), 1760 (the narthex from the west) and the end of the XVIII century (the gallery to the north). A connection to the construction traditions of the Second Bulgarian State (the Tarnovo churches) have been demonstrated through the arched niches decorating the outside walls. In its eastern part the gallery ends with the chapel "St. Paraskeva". The murals are very interesting. They reveal the relations with the traditions of the Tarnovo art school and the general trends in the art from the XVII-XVIII century. Remnants of the oldest painting layer are preserved on the northern wall of the altar absis. The second layer was painted during the middle of XVII century (the altar and the naos) was probably created by two zografs /painters/. All figural scenes in the naos, the images on the zenith of the vault and the transverse arches and all paintings in the altar were done by the master zograf. The murals are impressive with their monumentality and pure lines. Some scenes have been painted by the other zograd on the basis of linear drawings previously prepared by the master (the scene "St. Prophet Iliya in front of the cave" on the southern wall).

According to the inscription above the northern wall, the murals on the vault and the walls of the narthex were developed in 1760 by the masters Michael from Thessalonica and George from Bucharest. The gallery and the chapel "St. Paraskeva" were not decorated with murals. The new church iconostasis from 1813 is preserved. It is the work of carvers from the Tryavna art school. It was burned and renovated in its right part during 1834. The icons presented on it are dated to the XVII-XVIII centuries.



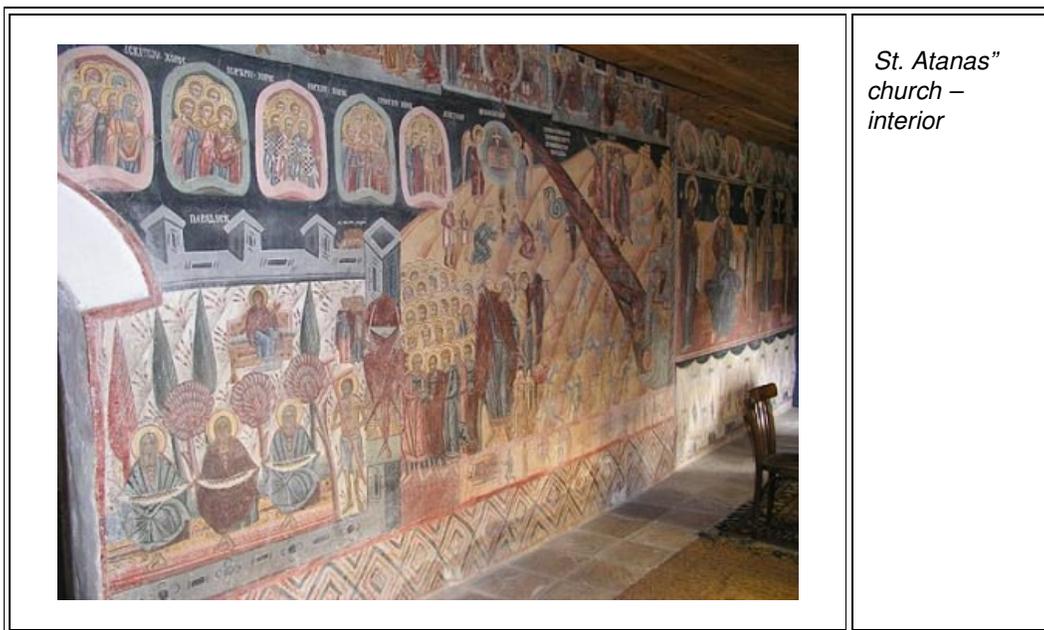
*"St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel" church – exterior*



*"St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel" church – interior*

### Church ‘St. Atanas’

The Church ‘St. Atanas’ is the smallest in size church in Arbanassi. It was built during the second half of the XVII century in the northeastern part of the village. The chapel ‘St. Haralambi’ is constructed in the southern part of the church. The entire church has been painted. There are several art layers dated from the XVII and the XVIII centuries. The murals from the narthex, the altar and the naos are from 1667. The chapel was painted by teacher Tsoyu and Nedyu during 1726, which is stated in an inscription on its southern wall. The compositions ‘Judgment day’, with its untraditional positioning of the scenes, and the rarely seen ‘Old testament Trinity’ are very interesting. There is a number of grave stones with inscriptions in Greek from the XVII и XVIII centuries in the courtyard of the church.



*St. Atanas”  
church –  
interior*

### Church “St. George”

The church was built during the second half of the XVII century – the year 1661 is specified in an inscription on the altar and the upper rim of the stone frame of one of the northern windows. Teachers Hristo and Stoyu created the art in the naos of the church during 1710. The church has an interesting iconostasis, parts of which are dated back to the XVI. **Church “St. Dimitur”** It is one of the oldest churches in Arbanassi. It is situated in the old center of the village, close to the church “St. Archangels”.

After the Liberation and until the earthquake from 1913 it is a central parish church. It was painted during 1612 and 1794. On its eastern wall, high above the absis, the rarely seen scene “Tree of Jesej” is presented. Fragments of an older art-layer are preserved in the chapel “St. George”. Specialists refer them to the XIII-XIV centuries. The church iconostasis has a gilt carving. Gravestones with stone carving and inscriptions in Greek from the XVII – XVIII centuries are found in the northern part of the year.



*St. Dimitar church - exterior*

## **Chapter 6: The personality of the zograf icon-painter.**

The word “zograf” has a Greek origin and means artist – to be more precise, a zograf is a master who paints icons and murals. Until the Liberation in 1878 Bulgarian artists were called zograf and with some this term even remained as a family name as is the case with Dimitar Zograf and Zahari Zograf sons of the founder of the Samokov art school Hristo Dimitrov. The Bulgarian monastery on Athos – “St. Martyr George Zograf” is also called Zograf monastery, due to the legend that the icon of the patron St. George self-painted itself.

It was a regular practice for the zograf to receive their training from older masters – usually fathers, brothers and relatives – and to use templates in their work. In addition to images and scenes from Christian mythology, zograf also painted donor portraits, with which they break the dogmatic rules. Sometimes, when they only paint faces and icons, they are called face-painters or icon-painters – such an artist was Nikola Obrazopisov, whose family name in translation means “face-painter”.

During the period of the Renaissance the zograf art was considered as a craft just like wood-carving and goldsmith. It is important to notice that from this moment on Bulgarian artists come out of anonymity and start signing and dating their works. This is a sign of a bright artistic self-consciousness and self-confidence, which was not typical for the previous generations of artists.

The Tryavna zograf served the needs of the poor Bulgarian communities mainly in Northern Bulgaria, this is why their art was focused on icon-painting. Despite the fact that they work during more than 2 centuries and go through some evolution towards easel painting, these artists preserve their style and even reflect to some extent the archaic style of the Athos art school, brought from the founder – Vitan Karchov.

The representatives of the Bansko art school which existed from the end of the 18th century until the beginning of the 19th century are painters and wood-carvers. Their paintings are different from those of the Samokov and Tryavna art school because of the artistic interpretation of the images, as well as the compositions and the colors. The zografts from Bansko work in southwestern Bulgaria. Their most important works can be found in the Rila monastery. They introduce in the common church iconography secular and historical themes and create very strong mural donor portraits. They are skilled painters with a perfect technique.

The Debur art school – 18 – 19 century – develops in Debar and its surrounding areas, which today is outside the boundaries of Bulgaria. There are no specific details on its founder and its beginning, but the discovered works are strong proofs of the mastership of some of the zografts. With time distinct family zograf groups were formed and presented the achievements of different families. These authors travel far and their art does not remain within the boundaries of the region. Some of the zografts even study in Athos and Italy, which is reflected in their art. They possess a good novel skill for presenting the plastics of the human figure in biblical scenes; an urge for creating realistic images. Whether their art is very refined or nationally primitive, it carries the features of Renaissance art.

The Samokov art school was formed at the end of the 18 century. The Zografts from local families such as Dospevski, Obrazopisovi, Zografski create murals and icons following the tradition of the Athos art school, by observing the iconography and technique of the post-Byzantine art. New themes and images consonant with the epoch and the Renaissance spirit of Bulgarian enter their works – morally-didactic scenes and galleries of images of Bulgarian and Slavic saints. The influence of the western styles – mainly baroque – is demonstrated through individual ornamentally-decorative systems. There is an urge towards the modern and European trends and this urge is expressed mainly through the introduction of new themes. The images also evolve from generalized to vigorous faces. The bright and fresh colors with predominantly warm shades and a distinctive feature of this school.

The Samokov zografts are among the greatest masters of iconography and monumentality of their time and a proof for that are their works from the Rila monastery.

## **The icon-painters from the Vitan family**

The Vitanov's family from Tryavna is among the oldest and most famous Bulgarian families of zografts /painters/ and carvers. According to family annals the first master was Vitan Karchov, who studied in the monasteries of Athos and worked during the first half of the XVII century. None of his works are documented though. He trains his offspring and thus the craftsmanship passes from father to son. Two generations later, at the end of the XVIII century, the brothers Vitan the Elder, Koyu and Simeon Tsonyuvi and Georgi Dimitrov present their art. They train their sons Yoakin papa Vitanov, Dosyu and Simeon Koyuvi, who on their part pass the skills to their heirs. Some of the latter are remarkable wood-carvers.

The style of these authors distinguishes them from the art of the other schools – Debar, Samokovska, Banska and all the others.

The main difference between the Tryavna art school and the remaining revival art schools should be sought in the fact that the Tryavna artists are mainly focused on icon-painting and not on mural-painting. The reason for this is not the lack of fresco skills, but is rooted in the objective conditions of the epoch. Since these artists worked mainly in the villages of Northern Bulgaria, where people were very poor, there were no rich donors to fund the decoration of

entire churches. The churches on the other hand were small and poor with insignificant iconostases and small icons.

The lack of work in the sphere of mural painting however proved very useful for these artists to develop a new comprehension of style as far as the composition, the drawing of the face and the combining of the colors in icon-painting is concerned. Thus the Tryavna zograf icon-painter gets an opportunity for a development, which differs him from the zograf from the other icon-painting schools.

We will examine the personality of Joanikij papa Vitan – one of the last great icon-painters of the Tryavna art school, Bulgaria and the world.

Real icon-painting, one of the greatest artistic possessions of mankind of all times, falls in captivity, when its homeland – the territory of the Eastern Roman Empire is conquered by the Ottomans. This process starts in VII century and ends in XV century. The empire dies, but the icon continues to live thanks to the great tradition of the church. The death of real iconography happens later and not under the pressure of the Islamic conquerors, but under the influence of the western European spirit: the humanoid god, "humanism", egocentrism, new-paganism, Renaissance and their reformation and revolution successors. The secular spirit enters Russia (especially after Peter I), Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Walachia (especially after the XVIII century).

Due to its backwardness in the recreancy Bulgaria – without realizing it – becomes the last castle of true icon-painting during the first half of XIX century. The last true icon-masters are Dimitur Tomov Ikonov from Bansko, Dimitur Hristov from Samokov and Joanikij Papa Vitanov from Tryavna. The three are from the same generation, born at the end of the XVIII century.

Joanikij was supposedly born somewhere between 1790 - 1795. He is the son of the great Tryavna portraitist papa Vitan and a nephew of his brother Simeon Tsonyuv, whose art he is most closely related to. The earliest dated art-work of the young artist is from 1814, but even before that he worked in the iconographic atelier of the Vitanov family.

In 1815 he already participates in the development of the iconostasis of the Gabrovo church "St. Joan Predtecha". After that we find many of his art-works in the tens of churches in Sevlievo ("St. Iliya", 1819), Gabrovo ("St. Trinity", 1820), Tryavna ("St. Archangel Michael", 1820), Sliven ("St. Nikolay", 1831; "St. Dimitur", 1832; "St. Sofia", 1836), Sokolski monastery (1833), Veliko Turnovo ("St. Nikolay", 1837), Kilifarevski monastery (1843), Kazanluk ("St. Joan Precursor", 1846), in the churches of the Entchovtsi village from the region of Tryavna (1848), in the village of Buchukovtsi from the region of Dryanovo (1849), Elena ("St. mother of God", 1851), Dryanovo ("St. Nikola", 1852), the monastery "The seven thrones", at the monastery close to the village of Sotirya and others.

In most of these cases he painted entire iconostases with tens of images from the royal, apostle and holiday lines, holy gates, crucifixes, etc. – hundreds of icons from a large opus, which is still expecting its researchers. There are very few known details about the life of the Tryavna icon-painter, while at the same time there is ample information about the painter in the multitude of his artworks. They help us to trace the travels of the artist through Bulgarian towns and monasteries. On the other hand the icons are a living proof of the route of the icon-painter. He failed to leave us a self-portrait, but each icon he created is a spiritual portrait of his soul.

One of his latest works is dated from the year 1853. Until the very end of his life the Tryavna master painted divine images and probably died in peace in front of his last icon. In the annals of pop Jovcho from Tryavna we read: "1853, 24 March was presented Joanikij Pop Vitanov". The artist dies on the eve of the angel-holiday St. Annunziati.

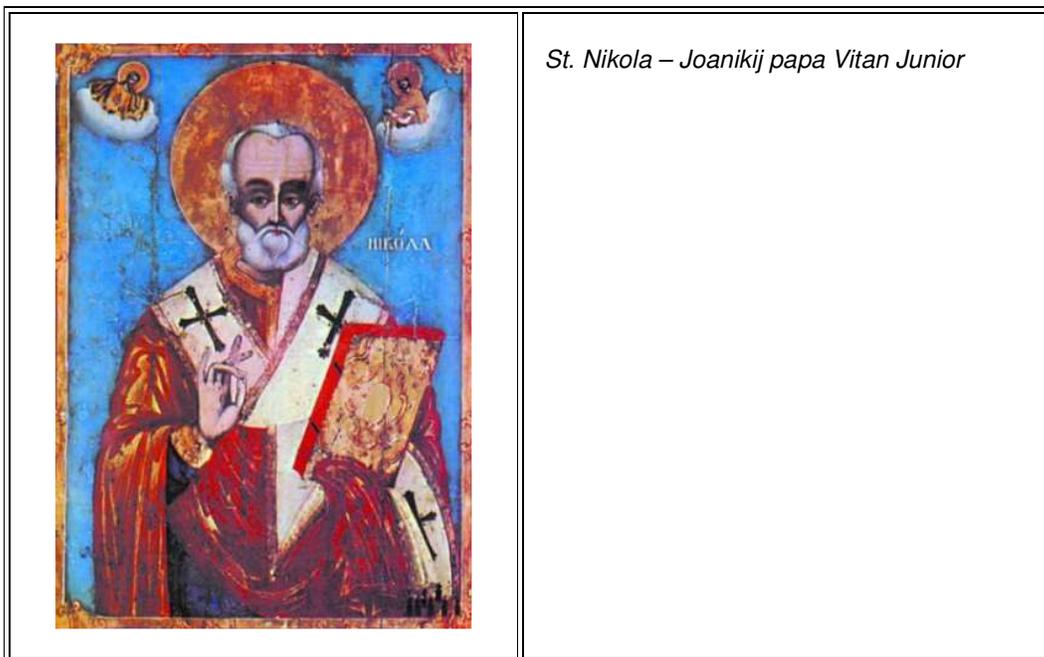
In his fundamental work "Bulgarian renaissance masters" Assen Vasilev writes: "I was not able to gather details about this skillful and active artist". A vague legend states that Joanikij was a monk "who painted icons with great zeal and diligence". Vasilev throws off this legend: Joanikij was not a monk. We now have documents which prove that he was married and had at least one child.

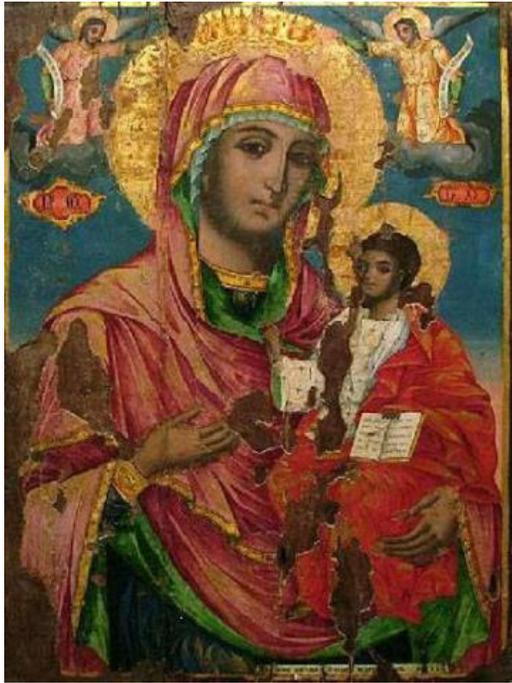
In this lack of details and the monk legend there is something very indicative: the Christian modesty and humbleness of this great icon-master.

True icon-painters are those, for which it is hard to "gather information". The egocentrism and the urge for fame, which is so characteristic of the western Renaissance, are strange to them. The first Bulgarian representative of the egocentric art direction is the Samokov artist Zahari Hristovich. There is ample information on his short life, supported by at least 4-5 self-portraits in ceremonial postures. Such "masters" are the favorites of art critics and writers. It is not an accident that several books have been written for Zahari Zograf and that his face was decorating Bulgarian banknotes.

For Joanikij on the other hand, not even a large article, not to mention an entire book, exists. There is no research of his art. It is about time for us to accept the through that the humble and quiet icon-painters were the true ones and their self-denial is not a pose, but a realistic estimation of their own work.

When the icon-painter is a real one, he knows that he is not the author of the icons that come from under his arm. The church, the legend is. When the icon-painter is a real one, the author of his icons is the Holy Spirit – this was the belief of one of the greatest Tryavna artist.





*St. Mother of God with Christ –  
Joanikij papa Vitan Junior*



*St. George – Joanikij papa  
Vitan Junior*

## The art schools of Samokov, Debur, Bansko

### Zografs from different art schools: Bansko art school

Toma Hadjiikonov Vishanov is a Bulgarian artist and zograf from the revival period. He was the founder of the Bansko wood-carving and art school at the end of the XVIII and the beginning of the XIX century. Her most prominent representatives are his son Dimitur Molerov and his grand-son Simeon Molerov. Bansko has good reasons to be proud with its zografs, who were born and worked there. Both Toma Vishanov and his son Dimitur Molerov are artists from a high class, who managed to avoid, each in his own way, the advancing processes of decline in Orthodox art.

We have to specify what is characteristic for the representatives of this zograf family from Bansko – a real phenomenon – Toma Vishanov /the father/ creates a style, which is both progressive and complicated for his time, and strange and hard to apprehend for his contemporaries. Considering the conservative taste of his contemporaries, his son Dimitur Molerov is forced to make a step back and paint in the tradition of Athos. ut while the art of Toma Vishanov maintains the interest of the researchers with its extraordinary features, the deed of Dimitur Molerov stays in the shadows, regardless of the fact that he is one of the best Bulgarian and Balkan zografs of the XIX century. Separate moments from his long artistic life are well-known, but between the year 1816 when he paints icons in the church of the village of Leshko and the year 1861 when he creates his last known icons in the church St. Trinity in Bansko, he surely created many other works, which are waiting to be discovered and interpreted. The gap in our knowledge of the work of Dimitur Molerov in the period 1816 - 1832 is enormous.

From the published memoirs of the zograf's grand-son Dimitur Georgiev Molerov, it becomes clear that Dimitur Molerov together with his son Simeon worked in Shkodra and on the island of Crete. The hope that some Bulgarian researcher will set to discover the works of the two artists from Bansko is weak. It is also not very probable that Albanian and Greek researchers will undertake this task. The family memoirs have preserved information that Dimitur Molerov has gone to paint in Belgrade, on the order of prince Milosh. It is not written however when this happened.

Alone or together with his son, Toma Vishanov took part in the painting of many churches and monasteries in his home-town Bansko ("St. Mother of God", "Christ Ubrus", "St. Trinity", "Assumption"), in the Rila monastery ("Canopy of Mother of God", anchoress "St. Luka"), the churches in Razlog, Dobrinitshte, Osenovo, Kyustendil, Boboshevo and other places throughout Southwestern Bulgaria.



*A detail from an icon by Toma Vishanov (Molera) "St. John Baptist"*

### Debar artistic school

One of the many representatives of the Debar artistic school - Makrij Negriev Blajev also known as Makarie Fruchkovski a descendant of one of the oldest families in the school – is a wood-carver and zograf.

He was born in the big miyak village Galichnik. He is a son of the wood-carver Negrij Blajev who teaches him how to develop his talents and skills. Makrij Negriev created many iconostases throughout Central Macedonia. At first Negriev works as a helper of Peter Filipovich - Garkata. During the years 1824-25 under the leadership of the latter he joins the development of the iconostasis of the “St. Spas” church in Skopje. Among the stylized flora of the iconostasis the masters carve their self-portraits and make an inscription underneath.

“First master Peter Filipovich from Gari, Makrij from Galichnik. Bulgarians from the region of Debar 1824”. During the same time Negriev works on ceiling wood-carving in the town-hall of Hamzi pasha in the village of Bardovtsi, from the region of Skopje. Happy with the quality of the master’s work, the pasha rewards Negriev and assigns him the task to make the carvings in the Charshi mosque in Pazardjik. During 1829-1835 Makrij Negriev works on the carvings in the Bigorski monastery. Afterwards he separates from Filipov’s carving group and starts to work independently. His work is the iconostasis in the “St. Nikola” church in Pristina.

There are no exact details about Negriev’s life during the following approximately 30 years, but it is supposed that he was busy carving capitals in church pillars. According the year 1856 Makrij Negriev decorates the capitals of the pillars in the antechamber of the Sofia church “St. Sunday” with a special mixture of lime, cotton and olive oil, caller kjuljum. It is supposed that the capitals and the iconostasis of the Pazardjik church “Assumption” and the Plodiv church „St. Sunday”, as well as the decoration of several Turkish buildings is his work. The different sources point toward different years of death for Negriev – during 1859, after 1862 or during 1863).

### Samokov art school

The Samokov art school is represented by the Zograf family, the head of which is Hristo Dimitrov. The history of the family is presented in greater detail because it is very important for the artistic traditions of the renaissance and the family meaning of art. The focus is placed on the figure of Dimitur Zograf – son of the founder, brother of the famous Zahari Zograf and father of one of the best late-revival and first secular artist – Stanislav Dospevski.



*Dimitur Zograf “St. Nikolay”*

The portrait painter Dimitur Hristov – son of Hristo Dimitrov (1796-1860) – is one of the main pillars of Bulgarian iconography during the XIX century. But he also one of the most underestimated ones. Nowhere throughout the Bulgarian lands, not even in his home town Samokov is even a single street or school named after him. There are no monuments. No monograph, no books.

All serious researchers of Bulgarian icons acknowledge his great class and know that he is better than his younger and more zealous brother Zahari. Still everyone writes much more about Zahari Zograf.

Little is known of the life of the artist. Born in 1796 he studies the craft in his father's workshop. When the father dies in 1819 Dimitur is already a finished master and immediately undertakes the management of the icon-painting atelier, as well as its relations with monasteries, donors and architects. We will often see the son working in the same places and with the same architects from the same families as his father.

Assen Vasilev explains the character of master Dimitur like this:

"He was a very modest and self-controlled person, with no desire for fame, not even finding it necessary to sign his icons, while Zahari Zograf left his signature almost everywhere and sometimes even painted his portrait on church walls. The views of Dimitur Zograf not to point out his persona and name make the work of the researchers of his art very difficult." The art-critic concludes with grief: "Many of his artworks will remain perfectly unknown". These words were written 40 years ago and the decades that passed confirm their truthfulness.

As a rule (with very few exceptions) Dimitur Zograf did not sign his icons and murals. Which presents a technical difficulty before the researchers. Still these difficulties can be overcome if the spirit and style of the author are fathomed. The quality of the icons is a proof of who their author was.

After the death of Hristo Dimitrov only Dimitur makes such exquisite icons in the Samokov art school. This "perfection" of his icons continues until the end of his life.

Dimitur's younger brother – Zahari - is his student. He definitely received his training in the workshop of his older brother, who factually substituted the missing father during the period 1819 - 1830. A note dated from 1831 states that the two brothers work almost as equals – from the bargained price Dimitur receives 4 shares, while Zahari – 3.

Assen Vasilev narrates that: "After the death of their father, the two brothers start independent work", but at that time Zahari is still only 9 years old. This unintentional inexactness of Vasilev is indicative of the fact that the early art of Dimitur Zograf was not researched and remains unknown. It is undoubtedly large in quantity and excellent in quality. One of his icons from the year 1820 shows him as a completed master.

During 1822 Dimitur marries Hristiana, the daughter of a prominent nobleman from Samokov. They have seven children: Zaphir (1823), Nikola (1828), Atanas (1831), Zaharij (1834), Ivan (1840), Domna (1843) and Pavel (1847).

Zafir will later become a graduate of St. Petersburg art academy and will change his name to Stanislav Dospevski. Nikola, Zaharij and Ivan will also become icon-painters and under the influence of academism will adopt the name Dospevski.

As far as Zaphir's will to acquire academic training in Russia, it is known that Dimitur "did not approve of that and refused to give his consent until the mother stepped in". It is clear why the ambitious mother wanted to send her son to Russia, but why was the father reluctant to do so at first.



*Icon "St. Mother of God" by Stanislav Dospevski*



*"St. John Baptis" icon by Stanislav Dospevski*



*Stanislav Dospevski – self-portrait*



*Stanislav Dospevski - portrait of his father Dimitur Zograf*

Hristo Dimitrov had a rich collection of engravings of western European artists, which Dimitur Zograf inherited. He becomes well acquainted with the fame of these models and how different they are from the iconographic tradition. He borrows some decorations, themes and compositions. In his essence however he remains deeply loyal to the Orthodox icon.

During his entire life Dimitur only creates Orthodox church art: icons and murals. This however is not due to lack of other skills. On the contrary, he was definitely tempted to be the “first” to transfer the prestigious western model. His brother Zahari and his son Zaphir succumb to this temptation and actually manage to become famous. As a real nobleman Dimitur Hristov stands up for his choice and remains loyal to the icon.

During the beginning of the 50s of the XIX century, the master sustained two simultaneous blows. His son Zaphir left to study in the Russian academies, while his brother Zahari Zograf left for Athos instead of the previously invited Dimitur, in order to decorate the outer narthex of the Great Laura “St. Atanasius”. Whether this was a betrayal we do not know. The spiritual aristocrat Dimitur Hristov has never spoken a bad word about his brother. There is no data about him making any comments about the Athos event.

There are few known facts about the life of Dimitur Zograf, but we know and have what is most important: his icons and murals, which are hundreds and can be found in all corners of today’s Bulgaria and Macedonia – Samokov, Karlukovski monastery, Berkovitsa, Troyan monastery, Skopje, Plovdiv, Pleven, Veles, Stip, Kratovo, Lokorsko, Novoselci, Rila monastery, Kriva Palanka, Vratsa and other places. Each of his works is a portrait of his soul.

Dimitur Zograf never made self-portraits. The features of his face have been preserved by the brush of his son Stanislav Dospevski. The portrait matches perfectly everything we know about the character of the person. His eyes are very smart and at the same time serene. The face is bright as if lighted from an inner shining. It is considered that this oil portrait was made after the death of the father.

## **Chapter 7: Appearance of secular art and influence of the Bulgarian Renaissance art on the art of the 20ties and 30ties of the XX century**

The appearance of secular art in Bulgaria has its roots in the art of the Bulgarian renaissance, as is manifested through the art of artists such as Zahari Zograf. An important aspect of the art of the 20 and 30 years of the XX century is that a big part of the artists get inspiration from and maintain a close relation with the art of the Bulgarian renaissance.

Here we will examine the developments of portrait art. It started at the end of the 19th century and the process continued during the first 3 decades of the 20th century. In a social plan this development supports the establishment of a bourgeois, which is able to order and pay for its portraits. In addition to this Bulgarian artists create many portraits of intellectuals, politicians, etc., which are exhibited at traditionally organized exhibitions throughout the country. Artistically, in contrast to the renaissance portrait art, realistic painting manages to fathom deeper the character and the spiritual life of the portrayed person.

We could claim that Bulgarian portrait painters develop their skills in this exact direction – to learn how to present the inner life of the portrayed person better than their predecessors. Many of them of course follow some general requirements of the iconographic style – full face – the image, the static of the figure, the decorative system, etc.

It is the same with the portraits created by Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master /the ones he creates during his long voluntary seclusion in the village of Shishkovtsi/ - his peasant women have the radiation of Madonnas, while the decorative background /fruits, flowers/ and the national costume replace the attributes of the saint. These elements are the artist's trade-mark and artistic style. The general impression and perception from the series of portraits is the radiance of kindness, harmony and humanism, which are deeply inherent for the artist and are an expression of his life philosophy.

These portraits integrate in a sentimental way the Master's pride with his Bulgarian origin as well as his patriotism. Anger and fury do not contradict sentimentality. It can be transcendental both in the Master and also in Boris Georgiev (the first recognized Bulgaria as the heart of the world, while the other – India). All waves, colors and shades of sentimentality go through Bulgarian art and literature. Sentimentality becomes an island of a different reality and a different vision of the world and its development, towards his own nation and its experiences, towards himself personally. The artists want to see the entire nation on this "island of the blessed".

During the 40s of the XIX century Zahari Zograf painted on the church walls the portraits and dresses of Plovdiv dames "ala madam Rekamie" with sensual precision and anxious strokes better suited for a saloon or album art. The dames obviously agitated the heart of this physically gentle and elegant in style "most worthy among the zografs". He sends them mercilessly to the flames of Judgment day together with their memorable spouses, under the influence of some other kinds of heart excitement – his anger with the sluggishness of the wealthy to open the Bulgarian school in Plovdiv. Thus Bulgarian art steps firmly on the road to social understanding of the world.

## **Zahari Zograf's portraits**

Portraits hold a significant share in the art of Zahari Zograf. We will scrutinize them here, despite the fact that chronologically the artist does not fall within the 20-30 years of the 20th century, in order to demonstrate the roots of Bulgarian tradition in portrait painting.

Zahari Zograf started his art as a simple zograf /painter/ from the Samokov art school but developed in an upward direction during his entire carrier. His main work is connected with creating murals at churches and monasteries and icons. Gradually, starting from ktitor /founder/ portraits, he passes on to easel painting. He creates his famous self-portraits and also the portraits of prominent citizens. Landscapes become more often present in his work – as an educator he is deeply connected to nature and science. His compositions become freer and richer in folklore and national elements. The artist allows his rich fantasy to guide the brush eloquently in the pursuit of more artistic masterpieces.

As an icon-painter he introduces a new artistic method. He preserves the frontal character of the composition, but introduces individual presentation of the characters. His main mean for expression is the color, with which he shapes up size and form. His icons praise life and in practice he paints the portraits of his contemporaries.

Zahari Zograf is the author of the first easel portraits. He is the first who uses oils – until then are used fresco and tempera techniques. He is the first who paints from nature – in the church murals – these are the ktiitors and through them he passes on to the secular portrait. The first portrait he paints is the one of his teacher Neophit Rilski /1838/ - the painted image matches perfectly the face of the original model.

Zahari Zograf is the author of the first self-portrait where he has presented himself with a brush in hand and his face in the center of the painting. The light is scattered, there are no sharp shades. The portrait has a hidden psychological elements and spontaneity.

The portrait of Christina Zografska was intended to be a parade one – the posture, the exquisiteness of the garments, the facial expression, the abundance of golden jewels point exactly to that. The fabrics are materially tangible, the face is real, with no extra beautifications.

«Portrait of a girl» is innovative too – it has been painted in acrylics. It is entirely secular. The model has a complete character and with this piece of art the artist decisively alienates from the flat image and successfully resolves more complex art tasks.

It is a fact that Zahari Zograf possessed a very rich collection of western European engravings, among which there are precious renaissance models. This collection is not just a rare collection fact but also a proof of the great professionalism of this remarkable master.

The rich artistic heritage of Zahari Zograf is a precious contribution to the national cultural heritage, because it represents an important moment in the transition from religious to secular art in Bulgaria. This approach in the master's art is an achievement of realism in Bulgarian art.



*"Wheel of life" – a mural by Zahari Zograf in the church of the Transfiguration monastery, close to Veliko Turnovo, 1850.*



*Secular portrait of the teacher and mentor of Zahari Zograf – Neophit Rilski*



*A detail from "Apocalypse" in the gallery of the church of the Troyan monastery, 1848*



*Portrait of Christina Zografska*

## **Vladimir Dimitrov the Master's portraits**

The Master, noble in character and influenced by Tolstoyanism, was very far removed from the whole atmosphere of wild bacchanalia and artificially inflamed jingoist exaltation to which not a small part of the Bulgarian intellectuals had become prey. A real humanist, he did not fail to see and portray the tragedy, but he recorded it not in the scenes in which bitterness and hatred had poisoned the mind, but in those hours of endless, exhausting marches or brief pauses, when man turned to his inner self, to his past, to his land.

After the wars, great changes became apparent in the Master's aesthetics and style. They were linked with the movement for a return to native art, evident in all fields of creative endeavour in Bulgaria. It was not a question of a return to the old traditions from an external point of view by solving a thematic problem centred around the simple representations of Bulgarian peasants and portrayal of ethnographic details; such methods had been adopted by Bulgarian artists soon after the country's national liberation.

After the wars he strengthened his position as an artist rejecting academism in fine arts. During 1922 he presents the paintings from his cycle "Harvest", with which he sets the beginning of his own style, differentiating him from all other painters. During 1923 he works in Italy, while from 1924 till 1951 he lives in the village of Shishkovtsi, close to the city of Kyustendil, and conducts exhibitions both in Sofia and other cities as well as in the nearby villages – Shishkovtsi, Divlya, Rujdavitsa and others. During this period the topics of his works are mainly connected with the people and nature in the area of Kyustendil: "Lasses" (around 1925-1935), "Sisters from the village of Divlya, close to Radomir" (around 1928-1930), "Palm Sunday", (ok. 1928), "A girl from Kyustendil" (around 1930-1935), "Harvester" (1930-1935), "A girl with apples" (around 1930-1935), "A harvester from Shishkovtsi" (1935), "Harvesters at noon" (around 1935-1938), "Diggers" (around 1935-1938), "A village girl among the poppies" (1935-1938) and many others. He never changes his style and vision of life and art or switches the topic of his work until the end of his life.

The Master's portraits are mainly characterized like this:

- the colour scheme assumed a heightened decorative value, he employed spectrally pure hues, making full use of complementary contrast by destroying the local colouring of the object.
- the general chromatic scale and texture, by means of which the figures he represented in the foreground and in the background - their milieu and their spiritual affinity and participation, determined a sui generis pantheism.
- the likeness of a girl or a peasant woman set against a fragment of natural surroundings (in which flowers or fruits seem to symbolize the abundance of the Bulgarian land) assumes a deeper meaning than a plein air portrait.

These portraits suggest the universal link between man and nature, a unity in which the spiritual is reflected in the material and vice versa. Man and nature appear as modifications of one and the same cosmic substance possessing a single soul and pulsating with the same rhythm as part of the eternal world rotation.

Another and no less important stylistic and plastic change could be observed in the decorative rendering of the background, when a second plane is added to the composition and second plane shows no spatial depth. This signified a break with the academic tradition of the Renaissance linear and aerial perspective, bringing the Master's work closer to the plastic experiments of modern European artists and making it akin to the aesthetics of the Bulgarian popular icon painters of the past.

Thus the Master found the right path of a return to the native: a path of creating an art which is modern in form and is related in spirit to the old traditions of Bulgarian decorative art. The iconographic basis of this stylistic change made the artist set up several fundamental requirements before his art.

Thus, the Master's paintings can be declared iconic /in the sense of static and frontal positioning of figures/ and colorfully expressionistic.



*Vladimir Dimitrov the Master  
"A village girl among  
poppies"*



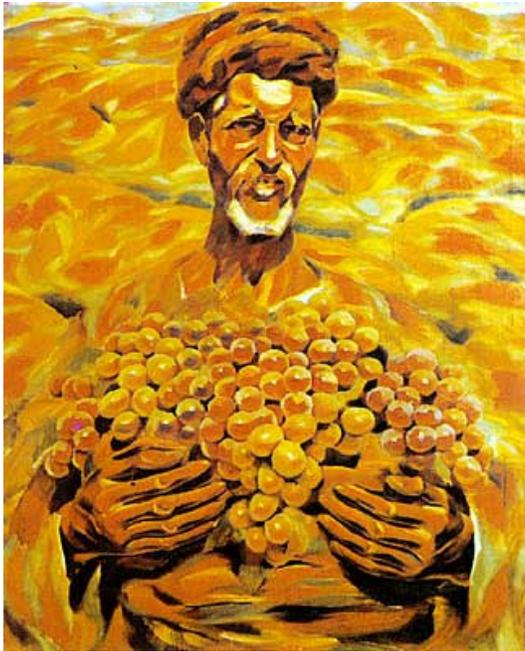
*Vladimir Dimitrov  
the Master  
"Harvester"*



*Vladimir  
Dimitrov the  
Master  
"Grand  
mother with  
grand-  
daughters"*



*Vladimir Dimitrov the Master "Girl with apples"*



*Vladimir Dimitrov the Master  
"Peasant with grapes"*



*Vladimir Dimitrov the Master  
"A girl from Kyustendil"*

## **Boris Georgiev**

Boris Georgiev is a Bulgarian artist, born in Varna in 1988. He is one of the most famous Varna artists, known all over the world. He has traveled to India, Brazil, Italy. He has studied art in Varna, Sofia and Saint Petersburg. He moves with his family to Russia, where they live a harsh life, suffering privations. His father was sick and Boris had to help in providing for his family. Boris, who painted by observing everyday occurrences and who created a pastel portrait of his father, showing his abilities and future success, was put to the test. He starts to make fashion sketches and profiles of customers of different restaurants around the city. Even though this was not a constant practice it filled the budget of the family. A small sketch of an elegantly dressed woman is an example of his work in that period. His first contact with the world of art is made at the early age of 10. He found a richly illustrated book with paintings from Italian Renaissance. With hungry eyes the boy devours the beauty of Botticelli's paintings, the spiritual height in the images of Fra Beato Angelico, the powerful lines of Leonardo. This book evokes the interest of the boy towards Italian art and he dreams to see Italy from this moment on. He says: "I felt I am an artist by vocation from early childhood...when I had the chance to see the geniuses and immortal art works of Renaissance I understood that art is an eternal value, beyond time and fashion". Probably Boris Georgiev visited the museums of Saint Petersburg and made copies of famous Renaissance paintings in order to study "the basic grammar" of art – an expression he frequently uses later in his life.

His connections with Nicolas Roerich, a person of many talents, probably were not created just by lessons in the Academy. The example of the artist, philosopher, poet and scholar – Roerich plays a vital role in the spiritual rise of Boris Georgiev. He is drawn to the pantheistic views of

his master, to his interest towards the secrets of the Universe and the existential questions of life. Later a common state of mind can be seen in these two artists, they have common interests to pervade in unknown and rise above doubts and hesitations in search of world harmony. According to the pantheistic views of Nicolas Roerich everything in nature has a soul – grass and flowers, all silent creatures. This influence will find its reflection in many of Boris Georgiev's art works, even without any resemblance in the artistic and plastic concepts of the two artists. However this idealistic philosophy about the world does not break their connection with life. Their common ideas have clear aims – to serve the mankind through Good and Beauty, through apostle devotion to art.

During 1909 – 1910 Boris Georgiev is in Munich, where he takes lessons from Angelo Jank, one of the founders of the Secession (Jugendstil) and from Peter von Holm, a prominent master of graphics. Angelo Jank is a representative of the impressionistic school in Germany, which was in its apogee during the studies of Boris Georgiev. From Jank and von Holm the Bulgarian artist adopted the confidence of the lines, which is an important means of expression in his art work.

The artist settles to live in Italy where he creates some his most remarkable works of art. His companion during his roaming around the world is his sister. She dies young but he often presents her in his paintings as an ethereal shadow. His first mature works, which have reached us, were born in Val Sugano. They are the fruit of a young but formed talent and carry the signs of his uniqueness. A constant model for these small paintings is his sister, about whom he says: "In her remarkable spirituality she was a creature not of this world." Boris Georgiev always presents her in the open, in the background of an Alpine landscape. The painting, in which she is standing on the doorstep of their shepherd's house, deeply covered under snow, is called "White symphony" or "Winter". In "Ave Natura" the young girl is kneeling in a contemplative moment. With this girl's image the artist presents the purity and amazement of a child, facing the mysteries of life, full of humbleness and thoughts. In "My sister" the girl is leaning on a simple shepherd's fence. The dominating feeling in this work is the dreamy contemplation, which carries a feeling of loneliness and separation from the world of men. Some critics see in the fence "a symbol of a threshold, through which the soul cannot pass."

After the death of his sister the artist creates the "The wanderer and his sister" ("A lonely wanderer in the world"), which later became one of his most famous works.

The early works of the artist, which disclose his understanding of noble spirituality, are lyrical. A subjective beginning lies at their ground. They are also biographical, confessing. It is not accidental that he names them "Pages of my life". What is paradoxical in these poetic, gentle images, which awaken our thoughts with their hushed moods? Why are they at the same time strange and real?

In the complex way of art-work creation Boris Georgiev does not imitate or represent the visible world. This world acquires a new self-valued suggestion in his works. Boris seeks his style in clear idea-artistic tasks and pure artistic feelings. Due to this he finds those forms of expression, which are adequate to his understanding of the world. He is enchanted and fascinated by the unlimited power of nature. This turns his contemplation into an organized spiritual activity. From there comes the strain of thought, which synthesizes the feelings and transforms the images into symbols of the endless and the infinite. We can sense the deep harmony between the artist and nature, which rules over his soul and creates inspiration and will for creativeness, in the generalized silhouette lines and the gentle, calm rhythm, as well as in the coordination of the colors.

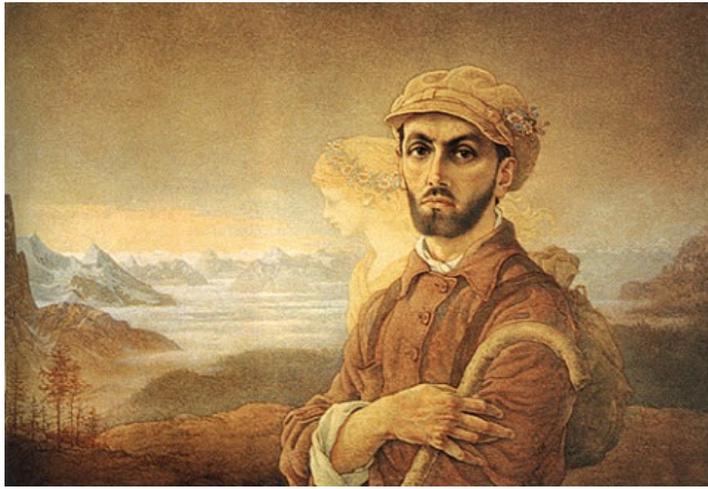
During 1922 Boris Georgiev crates three portraits of Teodor Trayanov. They were done in the poet's home on Gladstone street. All traces are lost of one of them. The other, quite damaged, was in Vienna where the poet lived for several years with his family. Restored and in a relatively good state it carries the inscription: "To the good friend Todor, from B. Georgiev", Sofia 1922." Rich psychological shades are achieved in the interpretation of the face. The artist's imagination and his emotional connection with the model always played an important role for the introspection of the human state and feelings.

The pure feeling of a clean line and semi-transparent half-tones also has an important meaning for the convincing characteristics of the image. It is not hard to sense the insight of the artist, who managed to present through the lowered eyelids a hidden sorrow. For the lowered eyelids under which the pupils are hardly visible Ludmil Stoaynov says: "They look like wells full with the visions of a very strange and tragic spirit." (Quoted from the book of V. Balabanova, Teodor Trayanov, 1980)

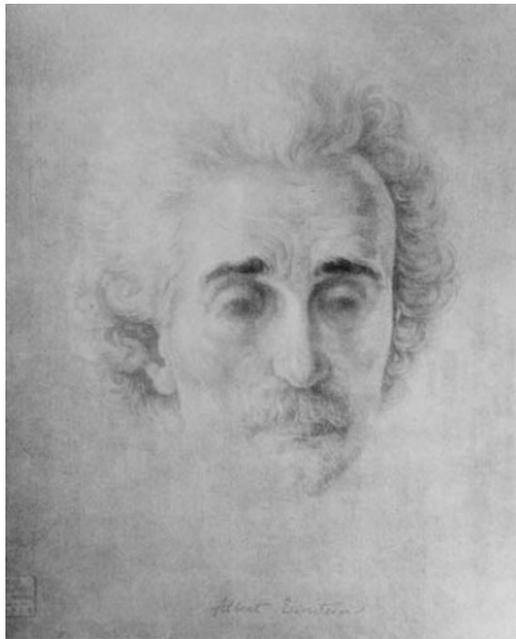
During 1922 in Bulgaria Boris Georgiev creates the portrait of the artist Vladimir Dimitrov – the Master, called "Earthquake" /this and other portraits and paintings by the artist can be seen at a flash image gallery available at: <http://www.borisgeorgiev.com/>. This image of the Master expresses the terror from a natural disaster. But the metaphor here is more than obvious – presented here is the moral collision of a spiritually pure person with the corruption of the bourgeois world. But what connects these artists? Andery Protich says: "What connected them after they first met was only their apostle dedication to art". The similarity of their understandings comes from their pantheistic attitude towards the world. One is tightly connected to his Bulgarian roots, while the other is a cosmopolite in his topics. Both of them work from the position of morality and human virtues.

Ludmil Stoaynov pays special attention to Boris Georgiev's art. By affirming his paintings he speaks of bringing the images to "seraphim purity, merging them with the elevated, which gives a feeling of eternity". The author continues "In this ingenuous art there are elements of Messianism in the purest meaning of the word." and concludes "Without entering into conflicts with the classical art, he makes a turning point and introduces a new feeling of contemporary art." (L. Stoaynov, Tragedy of painting, magazine Hiperion, 1922, issue 3)

During 1923 Boris Georgiev organizes his first individual exhibition in Varna, in the building of the Girls' highschool – currently hosting the Archeological museum. In order to stress on the fact of his origin, Boris Georgiev signs his canvases "Boris Georgiev di Varna". Even when he dies in 1962 in Rome the same inscription is placed on his gravestone. For a long time the artist is forgotten in Bulgaria. During 1990 with a decision of the city council in Varna, the art gallery is renamed after Boris Georgiev. A large brass sculpture of Boris Georgiev, created by Varna sculptor Kiril Yanev, is placed in the entrance.



*Boris Georgiev "The wanderer and his sister"*



*Boris Georgiev "Einstein"*