



СВЕТИ КРАЉ МИЛУТИН И ЊЕГОВО ДОБА: ИСТОРИЈА, КЊИЖЕВНОСТ, УМЕТНОСТ

Тематски зборник међународног научног скупа

„Краљ Милутин и доба Палеолога:

Историја, књижевност, културно наслеђе“,

Скопље 24 – 26. октобар 2021.

With the blessing of His Grace Bishop of Šumadija
Mr JOVAN (Mladenović)



HOLY KING MILUTIN AND HIS AGE:

HISTORY, LITERATURE, ART

Thematic Collection of Papers from the International Scientific
Conference 'King Milutin and the Palaeologan Age: History,
Literature, Cultural Heritage,'
Skopje, October 24-26, 2021.

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CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE SCENE OF
BAPTISM OF CHRIST IN SERBIAN MEDIEVAL ART WITH
SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE CHURCH OF SAINT NIKITA
NEAR SKOPLJE (AROUND 1324; 1484)

Abstract: The subject of this paper is the motif of the stone slab (cheirograph) in the scene of Baptism in Serbian medieval monumental painting and on icons on which Christ stands and under which he suppresses serpent-like monsters: its iconography, literary sources and meaning (ill. 5). The article represents the first study of the issue of cheirograph in Baptism scenes in Serbian medieval art from its beginning until the end of the art done in the Byzantine tradition (1800). It provides the survey of the chosen examples of this motif and explains the nuances in the meaning of both the Baptism scene itself and its relation to the painted decorations of each monument (ill. 1–4, 6–9). Special attention is given to the motif of the stone slab in the church of Saint Nikita in Skoplje, the foundation of king Milutin (built: 1299/1300 –1308; decorated with frescoes: around 1324; 1484; 1846).

Keywords: Baptism, Serbian medieval art, the church of Saint Nikita near Skopje, monumental painting, icons, stone slab (cheirograph), iconography, meaning.

Introduction and historiography. The church of Saint Nikita near Skopje represents one of the important, and at the same time the last endowments of the Serbian king Stefan Uroš the Second Milutin (1282–1321; built: 1299/1308; decorated with frescoes: around 1324; 1484; 1846). When it comes to the wall painting of this church certain details of the scene of the Baptism of Christ leave space for further research (ill. 5). By their appearance and place in the scene, they bring a special nuances to its iconography, contributing to the general understanding of the scene, that is, to the profiling of the painter's special artistic and symbolic expression. The detail of the scene of Baptism that represents the topic of this article is the motif of a stone slab on which Christ stands and under which he suppresses serpent-like monsters. Although the iconography of the Baptism scene in the church of Saint Nikita as a whole has been extensively examined, the motif of

the stone slab and its origin has not been sufficiently covered by art history scholars and there is no individual study dedicated to it nor there is a paper devoted to the systematic study of this motif in Serbian art. Gabriel Millet photographed this fresco and it was published posthumously in his album edited by Anatoli Frolov.¹ In a comprehensive monograph dedicated to the endowment of the Serbian king Milutin near Skopje that has been recently published, its author, Miodrag Marković, meticulously analyzed the scene of Baptism.² Considering the detail of the stone slab, he pointed out that this motif does not appear in the preserved representations of Baptism during the period of the Palaiologan Renaissance. On the other hand, the frequent appearance of this motif in the Serbian art of the Turkish period in Balkans leads him to the conclusion that it belongs to the second layer of frescoes, done in the 15th century (1484), thus, representing an iconographic novelty, which means that it was not previously depicted on the original fresco layer of the time of King Milutin (around 1324). Considering the origin of this motif, Marković points out that “it should be sought” in the liturgical texts read on the feast of Baptism. We believe that what Marković wanted to point out is to distinguish the nuances of the differences in the appearance of the stone slab motif and the motif of snakes. In this sense, we are of the opinion that the appearance of water snakes is certainly justified by the mentioned liturgical texts, while the stone slab as such is not mentioned in these sources. In other words, as it seems to us, what Marković opines, is that the presence of the water monsters and the motif of the stone slab in the composition of Baptism stand in an “integral” relationship. Apart from Miodrag Marković, several other art historians of Byzantine orientation examined the motif of the rock and snakes below it in Byzantine art (Anastasios Orlandos, Christopher Walter, Panayotis Vocotopoulos, Konstantia Kefala, Smiljka Gabelić, Miloš Živković and others).³ However, the literary source that justifies the presence of the stone slab on which Christ stands in Jordan in Serbian medieval and Byzantine art in general remained unknown and thus unexplained in Byzantine scientific cycles.

The aim of this paper is to explain what exactly the stone slab in Baptism scenes represents, to specify the reasons behind depicting such a motif and, thus, to unfold its symbolism. In this sense, our research is based on the conclusions reached by long-term investigations of Michael Stone, dedicated to the analysis and translations of the Old Testament apocrypha, which will be further discussed. Since the topic of cheirograph is very complex, as well as unstudied, this paper will deal with prominent chosen examples of the cheirograph motif present in Serbian medieval art in wider sense of the word, not only until the fall of Despo-

1 Millet 1962: pl. 52.1.

2 Марковић 2015: 222–223, ill. p. 159.

3 Orlandos 1948: 124, fig. 107; Dufrenne 1966: 28, pl. 13; Walter 1980: 8–25; Vocotopoulos 2003: 617–624; Κεφαλά 2004: 421–433; Габелић 2005: 124 – 125; Живковић 2019: 435–437.

tate, but it will also include Serbian art of the Turkish period done in the Byzantine tradition (1459–1800). The purpose of this paper is not making a catalogue of all the examples of the cheirograph motif; as this field of study is untouched in Serbian milieu, in the future there will also be opportunities for further investigation of this subject. On this occasion we will briefly mention the data about Serbian written heritage concerning the legend of cheirograph and make a list of specific and most significant examples of this motif in the Baptism scenes. We will point to the iconographic peculiarities of the stone motif and the implications that the presence of the stone slab and the snakes below them in Jordan river bring to the painted decoration of the church of Saint Nikita and to the churches analysed in the text, containing the motif of cheirograph in Baptism scene. As existing literary material shows, the appearance of the stone slab motif in the scene of the Baptism of Christ relies on apocryphal texts, rather than on the liturgical ones. Since the studies of the influence of apocryphal sources on monumental painting are very rare, this paper aims to fill the lacuna in bibliography dedicated to this problem, allowing new insights into the better understanding of the iconography and the meaning of the scene of Baptism of Christ, as well as the painted program of Saint Nikita and other Serbian churches as well.

Literary source of the iconography of Baptism. The literary source which justifies the presence of the stone slab in the scene of Baptism of Christ in Jordan River is the Old Testament apocryphal story about Adam's cheirograf.⁴ Michael Stone and Nira Stone especially dealt with this topic, mentioning the cheirograph from the church of Saint Nikita as well.⁵ Michael Stone dedicated many years of the research to the Old Testament story of Adam's cheirograph and its various translations, particularly to its Armenian translation, out of which numerous observations and one book emerged.⁶ The legend of the cheirograph connects the events from the time of Genesis, the Nativity of Christ, the Baptism and the Resurrection (the Descent of Christ into hell). Although this legend is known in numerous variants, its essence is the same: after Satan deceived Adam and Eve for the first time, after their fall and expulsion from Paradise, they encountered numerous difficulties on earth. In most variants the difficulty concerns the darkness. After the expulsion, they lost the Paradisiacal light and were left afraid in the darkness. Satan deceived them for the second time, promising them that if they sign the contract with him, he would bring the light. In Serbian and Slavonic versions of the story, the Devil prevented Adam from tilling the soil until he agree to sign a contract pledging the servitude to him.⁷ Adam and Eve having

4 V. the following notes.

5 Stone 2002: 51.i.

6 Ibid (with previous bibliography).

7 Stone 2002: 1–6, esp. 4–5, 119–120; Јовановић 2005: 76.

agreed to this, Satan brought the flat rock and recorded the contract on it. Adam put his “cheirograph” (“rukopisanie”) on the rock testifying that he belongs to Satan. After Adam left his handprint on the stone, Satan rejoiced and placed the rock in the Jordan river.⁸ According to the Armenian version of the legend, being deceived by Satan, Adam and Eve wept and fasted for seven days, after which the Lord sent an angel, who brought a promissory note from God and put it in Adam’s hand, saying, “Do not fear Adam, if Satan has deceived you. He said to you, ‘Until the unbegotten is born’ because I am the unbegotten, whom no one bore. And <he said> ‘the immortal one’ of my divinity, which cannot die. Thus, he took the promissory note from you deceitfully, so that you might remain a prisoner in Satan’s hand, for you are my image. I will not destroy you and I will not leave you in his hand”.⁹ According to the Slavonic and Latin versions of the story, Adam “truly persevered for forty days standing in penitence in the water of Jordan”,¹⁰ while the Serbo-Slavonic version also brings the data that Eve took a large stone, put it below her feet and stood on it in penitence in the water of Tiger, being wrapped in its waters.¹¹ Following the legend, at the time of Christ’s Baptism, the waters of the Jordan turned back and revealed the stone cheirograph, sometimes guarded by demonic serpents or dragons.¹² Thus, Adam and Eve’s subjection to Satan was brought to an end. In line with what has been said, the flat rock on which Christ stands in Baptism scene, in wider sense, symbolizes “the end of sins,” “the end of serving devil” and Christ’s coming in flesh (Incarnation), according to Adam’s words: “Until the unbegotten is born and the unding dies, all my seed will be your servants”.¹³

The legend of the cheirograph and its motifs in Serbian medieval literature (apocryphal origin, manuscripts). Regarding Serbian medieval literature, the copies of apocrypha about the cheirograph, known under the name “The Book of Adam and Eve” bring details concerning the Adam’s contract with Satan which made impact not only on certain works of written and oral tradition, but which influenced the iconography of the Baptism scene in Serbian medieval art. The Old Testament apocryphal story about first humans is in Serbo-Slavonic language preserved in seven copies and two variants – the longer one and the shorter one, dating from the 14th until the 17th century.¹⁴ The story is mostly found in the mis-

8 Stone 2002: 3, 4, pass; Јовановић 2005: 69–89 (76), 90–96.

9 Stone 2002: 68–69.

10 Stone 2002: 13; Јовановић 2005: 76–77.

11 Јовановић 2005: 76.

12 Stone 2002: 4, 22.

13 Ibid: 3, 73.

14 Јовановић 2005: 69–89; Јовановић 2012: 363–373 (longer version); Јовановић 2005: 90–96 (shorter version); on other Slavonic versions, v. Stone 2002: 117–120, pass.

cellaneous collections by rule consisting of non-canonical content.¹⁵ One of the oldest copies of the apocryphal story of Adam and Eve in Serbo-Slavonic dating from the third quarter of the 14th century once formed part of the inventory of the Old National Library of Serbia, but was irretrievably destroyed in the bombing of the library by Germans in 1941 (NBS collection no 104).¹⁶ However, the text was preserved today due to the efforts of Vatroslav Jagić, who published it and Tomislav Jovanović who translated it into modern Serbian language.¹⁷ Savina monastery (Savina No 29) treasures one of the richest miscellaneous collections which includes the “Book of Adam and Eve” from the 14th century with the rare variants of apocrypha.¹⁸ The story of Adam and Eve has been known among Serbian learned circles since the time of Serbian king Stefan the First-Crowned, during the first decades of the 13th century, as testified by the text of life of Saint Simeon by Stefan the First-Crowned. In one passage, the devil is mentioned, who led people to evil, that is, “to sign the contract by which he pushed them to the bottom of the hell’s hiding places”, which is a recognizable allusion to the detail from the apocryphal story about the cheirograph, where devil appears and forces Adam to sign the contract.¹⁹ At the present moment one can only say that the learned Saint Sava of Serbia, the author of the Vita of Saint Simeon of Serbia, was acquainted with the cheirograph motif, but nothing more can be said about how the allusion to it found its place in the mentioned literary work. The motif of “cheirograph” that is “writing” and “handwriting” is also used in some legends of the miracles of the Virgin Mary by Agapios Landos of Crete (nos. 23 and 24).²⁰ Here, one should also point out that the motif of the cheirograph mentioned in the liturgical texts refers to the cheirograph cited in Colossians 2:14 and not to the Adam’s contract with Satan. Thus, it will not be discussed in the present paper and will remain for further research.²¹

Survey of the Representations of Cheirograph in the Baptism Scenes, their iconographical characteristics and origin. The first preserved representations of cheirograph in the scene of Baptism of Christ occur in Serbian art on frescoes at the very beginning of the reign of king and later tzar Stefan Uroš IV Dušan Ne-manjić (1331–1355). The first example of this motif in the scene of Baptism on

15 Јовановић 2005: 41.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid; on the translation in modern Serbian language and the literature of this apocryphal story, v. Јовановић 2012: 363–364.

18 Ibid: 42.

19 Јовановић 2005: 57; Јовановић 2017: 14–17, 17.4 (135–136) .

20 Јовановић 2000; Јовановић 2005: 57; Uzunova 2019: 187–201.

21 For the rare reference to this term in the liturgical texts dedicated to the feast of Epiphany, see Dečani 45b: fol. 10v. For the difference in meaning between the cheirograph from the Legend of the cheirograph and the one mentioned in Colossians 2:14, see the conclusion of this paper.

the original fresco layer is preserved in the endowment of the nobleman Nikola Tutić, in the **church of Saint Nicholas in Prizren** (1331–1332; fig. 1).²² The Baptism scene is also one of the rare fully preserved frescoes in the church, since its wall paintings have been badly damaged and only fragmentary preserved. Nevertheless, even from these fragments, one can conclude that they were executed under the eye of a spiritually learned person, and that they featured a distinguished iconographic program. Christ stands on the cruciform purple stone amidst river Jordan and blesses its waters with His right hand. The stone consists of two crossed marble slabs, taking the form similar to the gates of hell. In the upper part of the scene is a segment of the sky from which a ray of light spreads on Christ's head with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Three angels are on the right-hand side of the scene, and Saint John the Forerunner is on the left placing his right palm on Christ's head. In the river Jordan one sees streams and the multitude of small red fish. The light ocher shores of Jordan are high and vertical resembling a canyon, forming a strong contrast with the dark blue color of its waters. Chronologically speaking, the first preserved example of the cheirograph in Serbian medieval art is much older than the one in Byzantine art, executed in a quite similar form of a cruciform stone from the corners of which snakes are winding up (1385–1386; Saint Athanasios tou Mouzaki, Kastoria).²³

The scene of Baptism in the church of Nikola Tutić is in many ways iconographically and symbolically linked with the Resurrection of Christ, and particularly and very directly by the use of the cheirograph motif. It is not yet known exactly how the form of the cheirograph took a shape of the gates of hell, but the iconography of the scene itself explicitly indicates that it was influenced by the iconography of Christ's Descent into hell. Generally speaking, it is clear that the cheirograph and the gates of hell are two different motifs with distinct iconography and symbolism, which can also be supported by the fact that they are made of different materials – what in terms of iconography distinguishes the cheirograph and the gates of hell is the fact that the cheirograph is depicted made of stone, while the gates of hell are shown made of wood. The nuances in the interpretation of the meaning of the cheirograph motif are related to the peculiarities of the painted program of each individual monument. The programmatic position of the Baptism scene in the church of Nikola Tutić is unusual, and in addition to the iconography of the scene itself, which also indicates the Resurrection, the fresco is painted on the south side of the western vault facing the scene of Resurrection of Lazarus. In the western vault the figure of Christ the Angel of the Great Council is positioned, which is mentioned in the book of prophet Isaiah, as “to us born child”, who is the “Father of the world to come”, for whom Saint Ephrem

22 Радовановић 1988: 113–114, sl. 37 (with previous bibliography); Ђорђевић 1994: 134, il. 3.

23 Keiko 2001: 210–211, fig. 51; Κεφαλά 2004: εικ. 1, 5.



FIG. 1. Baptism, the church of Saint Nicholas (the church of Nikola Tutić), Prizren, photo: Ivan Đorđević

of Syria states in his commentaries: “He is the God of ages – of this age, whose He is the Creator, Guardian, Life-giver – and of the world to come – as King, as Judge, and as the heritage and the blessedness of the saints”.²⁴ Namely the Baptism scene in the church of Nikola Tutić represents strong anticipation of the future Resurrection.²⁵ As Gregory Palamas (c.1296–1359) states in his sermon, “Christ’s descent into the water and His immersion in it while being baptized foreshadowed His Descent into hell, and coming out of water His resurrection from the dead.”²⁶ The words of the same author further clarify and explain the appearance of the rare figure of Christ the Angel of the Great Council in the western vault of the church. Speaking of the Father’s benevolence, Gregory Palamas states: “since the benevolence is the immediate, gentle and perfect will of God, He is the only One in Whom, is His benevolence (Who is according to the Father’s will), in whom Father rests and Who is perfectly obedient to the Father and Who perfectly pleases the Father as a wonderful counselor, an Angel of Great council (Is 9:6)”, Who is obedient to the Father and creates from the Father, and bestows eternal life on the obedient ones”.²⁷ The words of Saint Gregory Nazianzus (329–390) testify that the figure of the Angel of the Great Council in the church of Nikola Tutić stays in strong connection with the scene of Baptism of Christ, who cites this verse of the book of prophet Isaiah in his sermon of Epiphany (no 38).²⁸ There exists one more symbolic connection between Baptism scene and the figure of Angel of Great Council: the ray of light depicted on the fresco as emerging from the opened heaven is one ray of the Great Light – the light of the Holy Trinity of the age to come.²⁹ The iconography and the symbolism of the motif of sky and its light on the fresco in the church of Nikola Tutić is closely connected to the motif of cheirograph. In accordance with the Gospel text, in the upper part of the fresco there is a segment of a circle symbolizing “the opening heavens”, which Adam had closed for himself and his descendants, just as he had closed the Garden of Eden by the flaming sword.³⁰ The light is the important motif in the apocryph on Adam and Eve, the element which they were deprived of, and which Christ gives them back upon Baptism.³¹ Namely, the feast of Baptism, that is of Epiphany, is also named the feast of Holy Lights (Photisma, that is Lumina).³² This is because Baptism is the beginning of the mystery of Christ,

24 Радовановић 1988: 114; Свети Јефрем 2016: 248–249.

25 Brock 1992: XI.19.

26 Veniamin 2009: Hom. 60/5.

27 Veniamin 2009: Hom. 60/5; 60/20.

28 Migne 1858: 313B.

29 Migne 1858: 357D–360A.

30 Migne 1858: 353A–B.

31 V. supra.

32 Migne 1858: 336.

“the True Light, which gives light to every person who comes into this world”; which realizes the cleansing of the soul, and helps the light which was given to us at the beginning (of our existence), and which we made dark with the sin”.³³

The iconography of the Baptism scene containing the cheirograph from the Tutić’s church is important for this research, not only as the first preserved example in Serbian medieval art, but also as an indicator and confirmation that smaller churches built by noblemen also contained very valuable painted decoration in which every detail was carefully thought out. In addition, the motif of the cheirograph shows that although extremely fragmentary preserved, the frescoes of the church of Nikola Tutić were very learned. Based on all the above-said, it is reasonable to assume that the iconographic conception of the fresco of the Baptism scene in Nikola Tutić’s endowment, as well as its programmatic position, was conditioned by the position of the tomb, which was probably located in the western part of the church.

The second example of the motif of cheirograph in the scene of Baptism in Serbian art is found in the church of **the Mother of God Hodegetria in the Patriarchate of Peć** (1335–1337; fig. 2), the endowment and the funerary church of Serbian archbishop Daniel the Second (1324–1337).³⁴ Due to the 17th century earthquake this fresco is very badly damaged, but it was cleansed recently. It is depicted in two episodes. Many details have been preserved: the sky above the scene, the inscription with the name of the scene, the mandorla of light and the ray with the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove in the medalion, the steep cliffs of the Jordan river, part of its circular streams, the foot of Saint John the Baptist, part of Christ’s torso without perizoma, the part of his right hand, the details of the personification of Jordan and



FIG. 2. Baptism, the church of the Mother of God Hodegetria, the Patriarchate of Peć, photo: Darko Manasić

33 Migne 1858: 336A.

34 Гавриловић 2018: 143–144, sl. 65.

his urn, and finally two red fragments in the river – the detail of the water snakes below Christ's feet.³⁵ The fragments of the stone slab have not been preserved, but it can be concluded with great amount of certainty that it was once depicted here, due to the fact that such water dragons in such position are by rule depicted suppressed by the stone slab.³⁶

From the aspect of the programmatic position, the scene of Baptism in the endowment of archbishop Daniel the Second, illustrated on the western part of the south arm of the cross, has the composition of Nativity as its counterpart in the east-west axis.³⁷ What is important in this research is that the detail of the stone slab with river monsters strongly determines the symbolic character of the Baptism scene, emphasizing the idea of Incarnation, significant both in the context of the church dedication and the conceptual ideas that Serbian archbishop underlined in the painted program of the church. This is the reason why the some Armenian versions of the apocryphal story about Adam's cheirograph does not bear the name "Adam's cheirograph", but instead "Adam, Eve and Incarnation", and that is why the cheirograph is in that way the synonym for Christ coming in flesh.³⁸ This is exactly the reason why the Baptism scene is set as counterpart to the Nativity scene, as is the case in other monuments, for example in the Monastery of Marko and in the Church of Saint Nikita in Skoplje, where the scene occupies the same position (western part of the vault of the southern arm of the cross), as well as the Nativity scene (eastern part of the vault of the southern arm of the cross).³⁹ It is interesting to note that, the Baptism scene containing both the stone slab and the water serpents is, apart from the Hodegetria church (most probably), illustrated in the Monastery of Marko (1375–1376) and in the church of Saint Nikita in Skoplje (1484).⁴⁰ Thus, complete analogies in terms of iconographic details and positions in the painted program of the Baptism scene with cheirograph from the church of the Mother of God Hodegetria are found in the Monastery of Marko and in the church of Saint Nikita near Skoplje.⁴¹ Namely, as we have already mentioned, the stone on which Christ stands in the Baptism scene and the act of standing on the stone with serpents symbolizes, according to Adam's words from the apocryphal story, the end of serving Satan, the end of being slave to sin, and, simultaneously, Christ's coming in flesh, since the end

35 Гавриловић 2018: 141–144, sl. 65.

36 Cf. for example the Baptism scene from the church of Saint Atanasios tou Mouzaki (Keiko 2001: 210–211, fig. 51) or from Saint Nikita near Skopje, and others (cf. *infra*).

37 *Ibid*: 230/ 95, 97a–b, 243/10.

38 Stone 2002: 73–88.

39 Марковић 2015: 155, 157–159, 107.52b, 53b; Томић Ђурић 2019: 152–158, 161–167, sl. 84, 528–529.111, 113.

40 *V. infra*.

41 Cf. *infra*.

of serving sin matches with the time of Christ's birth: "until the unbegotten one is born and the undying dies, all my seed will be your servants".⁴² The motif of cheirograph thus alludes to Christ's coming in flesh, the idea which is in many ways emphasized in the program of the Hodegetria church.

Also, it should be pointed out that the Jordan river banks in Hodegetria are shown in the form of vertical cliffs.⁴³ Thus, Christ is represented as though in a cave, formed out of river banks, which on symbolical level can be interpreted in several ways. The depiction of the shores of Jordan in the form of cliffs, associates this scene with its counterpart scene – Nativity, what is justified by the sermons of the Byzantine church authors, according to whom Baptism represents "the second Birth". Specifically, when it comes to the appearance of the cheirograph, it is important to point out another interpretation that even more directly connects cheirograph, Adam and Eve – Christ's ancestors in the flesh and the motif of the cave. This interpretation also explains the fact that the appearance of the purple cliffs above the Jordan river corresponds even more completely to the cave of hell, which is prominent part of the scene of the Descent of Christ into hell in the Hodegetria church.⁴⁴ According to this interpretation, the Savior put the garments of skin, which Adam and Eve received after losing their paradisaical garments of light and glory.⁴⁵ The whole aim of the Incarnation – to "re clothe" Adam and mankind in the robe of light (robe of glory) – was accomplished by Christ's Descent into hell. Therefore, in order to remedy the nudity of Adam, the Savior clothed himself with Adam in three successive stages, all three seen as descents of the divinity into three successive wombs: the womb of Mary, the womb of the Jordan, and the Womb of Hades.⁴⁶ This way of interpretation is especially emphasized by the Syrian fathers, and Saint Gregory of Constantinople in his sermon about three births of Savior: the birth in the flesh (from the Virgin Mary), the birth during the Baptism (Epiphany) and in the moment of Resurrection.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the fresco in Hodegetria church is illustrated as counterpart of the scene of Crucifixion in the north-south axis.⁴⁸ Thus, the Baptism scene in Hodegetria church unites in itself both the symbolism of Nativity and of Crucifixion, which is indicated by the presence and the symbolism of the cheirograph motif itself. The words from the composition of Saint John of Damascus (the

42 Stone 2002: 3, 73.

43 On the steep cliffs in the scene of Baptism and their meaning, v. Della Dora 2016: 180.

44 Гавриловић 2018: 153–155, sl. 71.

45 Constans 1995: 180–181.

46 Brock 1992: XI. 12; Constans 1995: 180. Liturgical hymns sung on the feast of Theophany speak of Christ clothing himself into Adam's the garments of the glory, v. Dečani 45b: fol. 11r, 41r.

47 Brock 1992: XI; Migne 1858: 360B–361C; в. и Vojvodić 2012: 137–139.

48 Гавриловић 2018: 230–231/ 97a–b, 101, 242.9, 243.10.

service of Epiphany), explain the relationship between Christ, Adam's renewal, Jordan river and death: „O unoriginate Word, Thou hast buried man with Thyself in the stream, and Thou dost lead him forth new again, that had been corrupted by deception; and the mighty voice of the Father testifieth to Thee ineffably, saying: This is My beloved Son, the child Who is equal to Me by nature“.⁴⁹ Baptism and Crucifixion are depicted as counterparts in many 14th century Serbian churches.⁵⁰ Although literary sources which speak about the symbolic relationship between these two feasts are very numerous, the 60th sermon of Gregory Palamas in a best way summons and explains the presence and the meaning of cheirograph in the church of Serbian archbishop Daniel the Second in a context of the Crucifixion and the Descent of Christ into hell. The said author mystically sees the Baptism as the anticipation of salvation and Descent into hell, through immersion in water and death.

Based on the preserved material, one can conclude that the motif of cheirograph is not very frequent in the 14th century art. Several Baptism scenes from the church of Savior in Dečani as well as from numerous other churches speak for themselves.⁵¹

The motif of cheirograph continues to be depicted in the churches built by Serbian noblemen during the reign of tzar Stefan Uroš V Nemanjić (1355–1371). The fresco depicting Baptism from the church of **Saint George in the village of Rečani near Suva Reka** in Kosovo at Metohia, executed around 1370 can serve as an illustrative example (fig. 3). Although the stone slab on which Christ stands in the Baptism scene in Rečani is not previously mentioned, it is well documented on photographs of the frescoes and their drawings.⁵² Despite the fact that church was burned and razed to the ground with explosives by Albanian extremists in 1999, the preserved photographs, as well as the results of recent studies on its frescoes, provide solid basis on which one can analyze the position and the meaning of the motif of cheirograph in the painted program of this small church. The motif of the cheirograph in Rečani has its specificities, and in its own way indicates that the painter who executed its frescoes and their commissioner were very learned persons. The upper part of the scene is destroyed. The black-and-white photographs show the figure of Christ in perizoma on the right-hand side of the scene preserved to the height of shoulders, His left hand lowered and His right hand raised. The fist of the right hand hasn't been preserved. On the fresco one

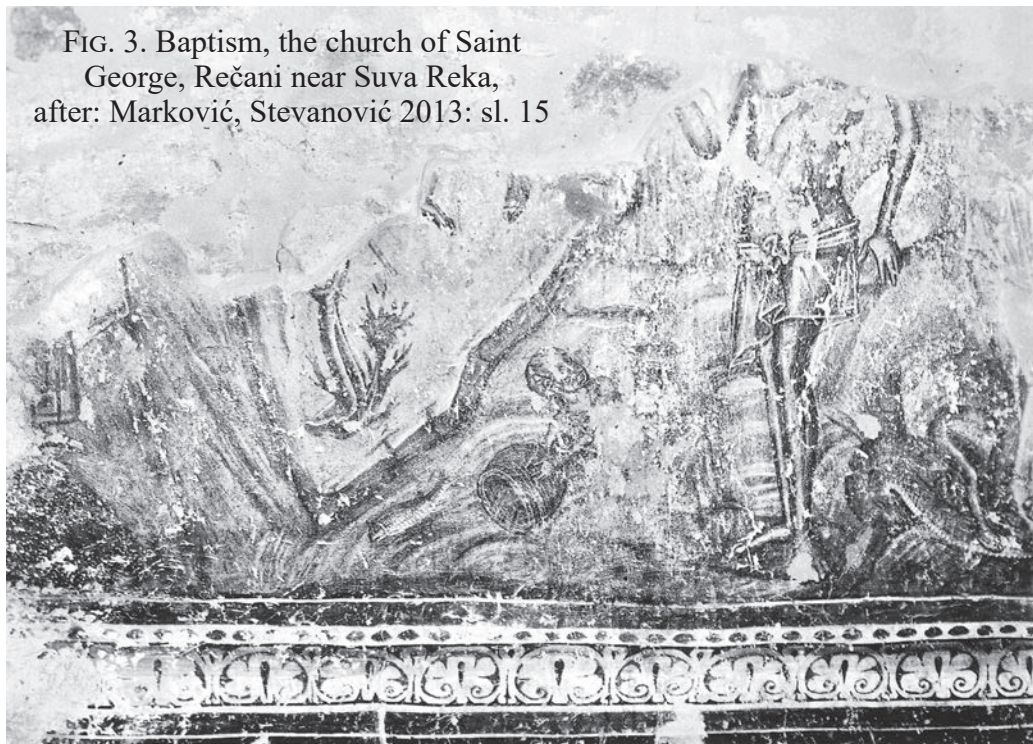
49 Dečani 45b: fol. 17v.

50 For examples v. Томић Ђурић 2019: 164–165.

51 V. Тодић, Чанак Медић 2005: sl. 207 (south portal, sculpture), 281 (detail of the Tree of Jesse, fresco), 290 (Great feasts, naos, fresco).

52 On the scene of Baptism of Christ in Rečani, v. Стевановић 2013а: 98–100; for the photograph of the scene with cheirograph and its drawing, v. Стевановић 2013а: sl. 28; Марковић, Стевановић 2018: 34/III.2.2, sl. 15.

FIG. 3. Baptism, the church of Saint George, Rečani near Suva Reka, after: Marković, Stevanović 2013: sl. 15



can notice a part of the left bank of the Jordan river with a tree and an ax handle, the well-known allusion to the Last Judgment (Matt 3:10). Above it is obviously the foot of Saint John the Baptist. The Jordan river has clearly seen streams. It abounds in details, containing fish, the personification of Jordan with an urn (left), the naked personification of the Sea riding on a monster (right) and finally the stone slab on which Christ stands. Cheirograph has smaller dimensions when compared with the same motif in the church of Nikola Tutić. It also has different shape. Here the artist depicted flat square stone slab of very small size, just enough so that Christ can stand on it.

In recent study of the wall paintings of the Rečani monastery, the conclusion has been made that its painted program contains the pronounced figures of the righteous, the Christ's ancestors according to the flesh.⁵³ Such a programmatic idea is completely in line with the appearance and the meaning of cheirograph in the scene of Baptism. Namely, Saviour put on a body in order to accomplish the deed of deliverance of Adam and mankind from sin. The liturgical service of the feast of Epiphany brings the data about this: "Having shone forth from the Virgin as the flower of David, Christ hath come to the streams of the Jordan to wash sins of our first father away in the waters. Dance thou, O Adam! Be glad, O Eve! Let heaven rejoice! And let the people say: Blessed art Thou Who hast come! O

⁵³ Стевановић 2013b: 25–36.



FIG. 4. Baptism, the church of Saint Demetrius, the Monastery of Marko, after: Tomić Đurić 2019: sl. 89, detail

our God, glory to Thee!”⁵⁴ The scenes of Christ’s death and Passion were set as counterpart to the scene of Baptism,⁵⁵ next to which the place was reserved for the Raising of Lazarus, today only partly preserved (the south wall of the western bay).⁵⁶ Above the scene of Baptism, the composition of Christ’s Presentation to Temple was once almost certainly positioned as a counterpart to the scene of Resurrection (Angel on the Tomb), as for example in the church of the Mother of God Hodegetria in Peć, Saint Nikita near Skopje or in the Monastery of Marko.⁵⁷ The symbolic connection of the Baptism and Christ’s death on the Cross and relating events was explained by the holy fathers of the church.⁵⁸ Based on the above said, we can conclude that the cheirograph, which in a special way indicates the connections and symbolical focus in the painted program of the churches, is in Rečani church to be seen as a consequence of its funerary purpose, as is the case with the painted program of the Nikola Tutić’s church. Anonymus painter and the commissioner of the frescoes, thus, connected the motif of cheirograph with the Incarnation, the Death of Christ and the Resurrection. The apocryphal legend states that Adam and Eve were under the burden of sin and served Satan until Christ’s Incarnation, that is until the moment of His birth, and His death: “Until

54 Dečani 45b: fol. 17v.

55 Стевановић 2013a: 106; Марковић, Стевановић 2018: 40/V.2.

56 Ђорђевић 1994: 180 (with previous literature; here is written by mistake that the scene is found on the south wall of the northern bay instead of the southern bay); Стевановић 2013a: 100–101; Марковић, Стевановић 2018: 32/III.

57 V. Гавриловић 2018: 139–141, 152–153, sl. 64, 230–231. 96, 102; Marković 2015: 103, 107, 108.49a–b; 158–160; Томић Ђурић 2019: 158–161, 187–190, sl. 84, 96, 98.

58 Vojvodić 2005: 124.

the unbegotten is born and the unding dies, all my seed will be your servants".⁵⁹ Apart from theological texts, the illustrations of the marginal psalters clearly indicate the reasons of juxtaposing the scenes of Baptism and the Christ's Passion on the Cross and their symbolical connection. The confrontation of these themes also accentuates the reality of Christ's human nature, underlined by the nakedness of Saviour, as well as the triumphant victory over death, which also brings them into symbolical connection with the cheirograph.⁶⁰ In addition to already mentioned, several other elements testify to the profound and strong symbolical relationship between Baptism, Christ's Passion on the Cross and the meanings related to cheirograph. Namely, in the scene of the Descent of the Cross, Adam's skull and a pair of bones were once depicted under the Cross.⁶¹

During the reign of Mrnjavčević dynasty, the cheirograph was also depicted on frescoes. One very illustrative example is shown on the Baptism fresco in **the church of Saint Demetrios in the Monastery of Marko**, the endowment of Vukašin Mrnjavčević and his son Marko (1376–1377; fig. 4).⁶² Here, under Christ's feet, both the flat stone slab and water dragons have been preserved. Actually, here the water dragons encircle the stone. In Nikola Tutić's church the cruciform marble stone is shown, in Hodegetria church the stone has not been preserved, and in Rečani church the Baptism scene is illustrated with the small flat square stone slab. What is characteristic for this scene in the Monastery of Marko is that the mentioned details are painted in grisaille, completely immersed in the Jordan streams, which are also accentuated in this composition as well as in all the previous ones. The iconography of this scene corresponds to the previously mentioned examples. According to the detail of the raised head and his gaze toward the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove, the raised hand and opened palm, the fresco is similar to the same theme in the Nikola Tutić's church in Prizren.⁶³ As the position of the Baptism scene in the painted program of the church of Saint Demetrius in monastery of Marko corresponds to the eponymous scene in the church of the Mother of God in the Patriarchate of Peć, there is no need to consider it again. However, we will point out that the multi-layered cheirograph motif in the Monastery of Marko, offered the possibilities of different interpretations and that it was strongly linked to the the figures of Christ's ancestors

59 Stone 2002: 3, 73.

60 Corrigan 1992: 81–90; Corrigan 1995: 46–49.

61 Стевановић 2013a: 106; Марковић, Стевановић 2018: 40/V.2.

62 On this fresco v. Томић Ђурић 2019: 161–167, sl. 89 (the stone slab on which Christ stands is not directly mentioned, but it is stated that the painter of the Monastery of Marko has chosen "the older solution, which the painters of Thessaloniki introduced in Serbian wall painting", Ibid: 164. By this, the author obviously means the iconographic solution with snakes swimming in the water present, for example, in the churches of Rhodes [the end of the 13th century], cf. Κεφαλά 2004).

63 Cf. supra.

according to the flesh, depicted in the altar area.⁶⁴ In that respect, the meaning of the cheirograph is related to the meaning of the same motif in Rečani.⁶⁵

In the Moravian churches the Baptism scene is not properly preserved and does not allow the analysis of the motif of cheirograph. The scene is often found in the highest painted registers of churches, while the lower part of the scene is destroyed, as for example in the church of Saint Nicholas in Jošanica monastery.⁶⁶ However, although the motif of cheirograph is absent from the preserved painted ensembles, one should assume that this motif has not disappeared.⁶⁷

Unlike the Moravian period, the Turkish period offers the abundance of the material for the study of cheirograph. The cycle of Great Feasts belonged to the thematic of each, even the smallest church,⁶⁸ while the motif of cheirograph was very popular in this period. In addition, during the Turkish rule, the cheirograph also appears on numerous icons, which are far better preserved than those from the period of the Serbian autonomy. On this occasion we mention only several examples: the icon of Baptism in the Nikoljac monastery (16th century), the icons depicting Baptism in the Dečani treasury (1600–1650), three icons of the same topic from the Piva monastery, one icon of the same feast from the Holy Trinity monastery near Pljevlja (second half of the 16th century), the icon of Saint John the Baptist in the Patriarchate of Peć (second quarter of the 17th century), the icon of Baptism from the iconostasis in the Annunciation monastery in Kablar (1634–1635), the icon of Baptism from the iconostasis of the Old Orthodox Church in Sarajevo (around 1674) and the vita icon of Saint John the Baptist by Radul in the monastery of Dobrun (1675–1676).⁶⁹

However, having in mind the particular aim of this paper, we will here list the specific and prominent examples done in fresco technique and note their characteristics and significance. As it is already said, the cheirograph motif is very often found in Serbian art during the period of the Turkish rule.⁷⁰ One of the early examples is the cheirograph from **the church of Saint Nikita near Skoplje** (fig. 5).⁷¹ This fresco has been preserved in two layers. The upper part is dated to the period of the beginning of the reign of Stefan Uroš the Third of Dečani (1322–1331; around 1322–1324). The circular segment of the sky with the Hand of God sending the dove of the Holy Spirit, the upper part of Christ's body including His right arm and the upper part of perizoma with a knot, the figure of Saint John the

64 Томић Ђурић 2018: 89–106.

65 V. supra.

66 Cvetković 2018: 88 (crt. III.12), 116, sl. 16.9.

67 Радужко 2006: 182–183, crt. 34, sl. 48, 504/IX.

68 Петковић 1965: 69.

69 Пејић 2014: sl. 36; Матић 2017: sl. 56, 57, 337, kat. sl. 41, 79, 237, 249, 359, 360.

70 Суботић 1980: crt. 7, 33, 42, 49; Живковић 1986: 21; Марковић 2015: 223.

71 Stone 2000: 163; Stone 2002: 51.i; Марковић 2015: 159, sl. str. 159, 222–223.



FIG. 5. Baptism, the church of Saint Nikita near Skopje,
photo: Miodrag Marković

Baptist, the upper left part of the Jordan river surface, the river banks, the heads of angels and the part of personification of Jordan belong to it. The second layer was done in 1484. The lower part of the fresco belongs to it: part of Christ's left arm, part of the Jordan river surface with streams, fish, the lower part of Christ's perizoma, His legs, the lower part of the figures of angels, the lower part of the Jordan river right bank and the cheirograph itself.

As we have already said, regarding the fresco of Saint Nikita near Skopje, Miodrag Marković pointed out that the motif of the rock with snakes in the scene of the Baptism originates from the second layer of frescoes – that it was painted for the first time in 1484, representing thus the iconographic novelty of the Turkish period.⁷² However, various and numerous elements support the assumption that the cheirograph guarded by snakes could have been already illustrated in the last endowment of King Milutin on the first fresco layer, during the reign of his son Stefan Uroš the Third of Dečani (1322–1324). Although this hypothesis can not be unquestionably proven, in our opinion it seems reasonable and probable, especially if we assume the role of the Athonite monk and later Serbian archbishop Daniel the Second (1324–1337) in influencing and taking care of the decoration of Saint Nikita church and its details.⁷³ Namely, this assumption can be supported and strengthened by the fact that the motif of cheirograph is illustrated in the Baptism scene in his own endowment, the church of the Mother of God Hodegetria in the Patriarchate of Peć.⁷⁴ The fact that the frescoes in the church of Saint Nikita show iconographical and programmatic peculiarities, present in the Serbian wall painting for the first time, and that they also show certain differences in relation to the wall painting of the remaining corpus of churches built by King Milutin would also support such an assumption. If we accept the hypothesis of the presence of the cheirograph in Saint Nikita at the beginning of the 14th century, in that case the Baptism scene from this church would represent the first example of that motif in Serbian medieval art in general. Having in mind the fact that not a single fragment of the lower part of the scene has been preserved, one cannot with absolute certainty prove this assumption. Still, taking into account some other factors, this assumption seems very probable. Even if we leave aside the fact that there are no preserved illustrations of the cheirograph in the remaining corpus of monuments built by King Milutin, the interval of time between the execution of the frescoes in Saint Nikita and in the church of Nikola Tutić in Prizren, where the first preserved example of the cheirograph in Serbian medieval art on the original fresco layer is found, is very short (around

72 V. supra.

73 On the possible role of Daniel the Second in influencing and taking care of the fresco decoration of the church of Saint Nikita in Skopje, v. Марковић 2015: 216–217.

74 V. supra.

10 years).⁷⁵ From that point of view there is no obstacle for accepting such an assumption. For example, the situation with the Baptism scene containing cheirograph motif in the church of the Mother of God in Studenica is different. Here, this motif is illustrated for the first time during the renovation of the frescoes in 1568.⁷⁶ Several factors lead to this conclusion, making it much more probable. First, the preserved examples of this motif dating from the beginning of the 13th century are not recorded; second, the time interval between the execution of the first preserved motif of cheirograph in Serbian art and the fresco in Studenica is too long (1208/1209–1331/1332–1568). In the case of Saint Nikita this time interval is very short, which leaves the assumption that the cheirograph once had belonged to the original fresco layer much more probable. The comparison of the iconography of the Baptism scene in Saint Nikita and its details with the preserved examples of Baptism scene containing the motif of cheirograph and dating from the 14th century also speak in favor of such a possibility – all other constant details that are usually depicted on the 14th century frescos including the cheirograph are illustrated in Saint Nikita (the gestures of Christ, the streams of Jordan, its vertical and high cliffs). The fact that the appearance of the snake-like demons corresponds to the same motif from the Poganovo monastery (1499; fig. 6), could mean that the painter followed trends of its own time in the way he repainted the same motif. The iconography of the living world in the Jordan river would also support the assumption that the cheirograph once formed part of the original fresco. Namely, in this regard the absence of various and numerous animals in Saint Nikita, which are by rule present in the wall painting of the Turkish period since its beginning (including the fresco from Poganovo as well) deserves special attention.

The appearance of the cheirograph and its expansion in Serbian art during the Turkish rule deserve special study. In any case, regardless of the time of the execution of the detail of cheirograph in Saint Nikita, what is important in this research is that the detail of the stone slab with monsters determines the symbolic character of the Baptism scene emphasizing the idea of the Incarnation and that analogies for such an iconographic solution are found in the Hodegetria church in the Patriarchate of Peć and in the Monastery of Marko. In this sense, everything which is said for the cheirograph in the endowment of Serbian archbishop Daniel the Second also applies to this fresco – its deep symbolism is interwoven with relevant scenes set as counterparts to the Baptism scene.⁷⁷

Among very numerous examples of the cheirograph motif represented by the rule in the Baptism compositions forming part of the cycle of the Great Feasts,

75 On the cheirograph from the church of Nikola Tutić, v. supra.

76 Живковић 2019: 435–437, sl. 78, 375, 376.

77 V. Supra.



FIG. 6. Baptism, the church of Saint John the Theologian, Poganovo Monastery, 1499, photo: Miodrag Marković

during the period of the Turkish rule, three representative examples stand out. They are painted in the most significant Serbian spiritual centers and they are similar to each other, revealing the work of the same painting workshop. These are the cheirographs in the monastery of Mileševa (probably around 1560–1568; fig. 7), in church of the Mother of God in Studenica (1568; fig. 8) and in the narthex of the Patriarchate of Peć (1565; fig. 9).⁷⁸ While in the first two monuments, the cheirograph is shown in the scene of Baptism which belongs to the cycle of Great feasts, in the Patriarchate of Peć the same motif forms part of the same scene pertaining to the Menologion cycle (Jan 6), as is the case for example with the scene from the church of Saint Nicholas in Pelinovo (1717–1718) as well.⁷⁹ All these examples show profiled rectangular marble stone slab of larger dimensions below Christ's feet and the characteristic marbled veins forming the texture resembling the honeycomb. Numerous aggressive snakelike water monsters are shown rising menacingly from below the stone and the Jordan river is depicted vividly with fish, crabs, the personification of Jordan river, and various aquatic animals. Cheirograph is present in the Baptism scene in the church of Saint Nicholas in Nikoljac (around 1570), while one of the best-known and

78 Петковић 1965: 119, 125, 129–131; Петковић 1995–1996: 128–129, sl. 5; Живковић 2019: 435–437, sl. 78, 375, 376.

79 Шево 2010: sl. 40.



FIG. 7. Baptism, the church of Ascension of Christ, Mileševa monastery, around 1560–1568, photo: Anđela Gavrilović



FIG. 8. Baptism, the church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Studenica, photo: BLAGO Fund



FIG. 9. Baptism, the nartex of the Patriarchate of Peć, Menologion cycle, photo: William Taylor Hostetter

most representative examples is the cheirograph in the nartex of the monastery of Gračanica (around 1530).⁸⁰ In the 17th century the motif of cheirograph continues to be depicted in the manner it was depicted in the previous centuries. One of the typical examples is the Baptism scene in the church of Presentation of the Mother of God in Zavala, where Christ stands on the cheirograph suppressed by demonic snakes (1619).⁸¹

In Serbian monumental painting of the 18th century cheirograph is present in many churches. It is especially popular on the Holy Mount Athos where it was illustrated in numerous parreclisions of the Chilandar monastery: in the parreclision of Saint Demetrios (1779), the parreclision of Saint Sava of Serbia (1779), the parreclision dedicated to Saint John of Rila (1740) and the parreclision dedicated to the Birth of the Mother of God (the end of the 18th century), just to mention few most notable examples.⁸²

80 Millet 1916: 199, fig. 171; Петковић 1978: sl. 6; Тодић 1988: 252, sl. 121; Lafontaine Dosogne 1989: 53–56, n. 53; Stone 2000: 151–152, n. 10 (= Ead. 2002: 22, 85).

81 Zdravković, Skovran 1959: 42 (Sh. I), 48.34.

82 Ракић 2008: sl. 26, 27, 95, 108; Шево 2010: sl. 22, 35, 92.

As we can see from the above-said, in Serbian monumental painting in the Byzantine tradition, different variants of the stone cheirograph have been illustrated: this stone motif could be depicted in the form of rectangle slab or cross (in the form of the door of hell) or it could be illustrated with snakes (below or next to it) or without them. The dimensions of the stone could vary, as well as its color, its texture and its shape. They all represent iconographic variants of the same subject, while the nuances in symbolism of each cheirograph are dependent on and in accord with the scenes adjacent to Baptism scene. The exclusive presence of snakes in Jordan without marble slab might as well refer to the Legend of cheirograph, because in some variant of the Legend it is stated that Christ trampled the serpents.⁸³ Still, one can not say that exclusive presence of snakes without the marble slab in Jordan is cheirograph. In spite of snakes being part of the Legend of the cheirograph by the term cheirograph is meant the rock. The serpents and similar water monsters are also mentioned in Psalm 73 [74] and in the liturgical texts of the feast of Theophany.⁸⁴ These stay in line with the meaning of the cheirograph, although they alone do not represent the marble cheirograph as such. However, although the iconography and meaning of the snakes from the Legend and the ones mentioned in the liturgical texts and depicted without a marble slab directly below Christ's feet are quite similar, the literary source justifying their presence in the scene is different and the link between these sources, that is between the motif of snakes from the Legend of cheirograph and the ones mentioned in liturgical text, has never been made. On the other hand, snakes guarding the cheirograph form part of the cheirograph

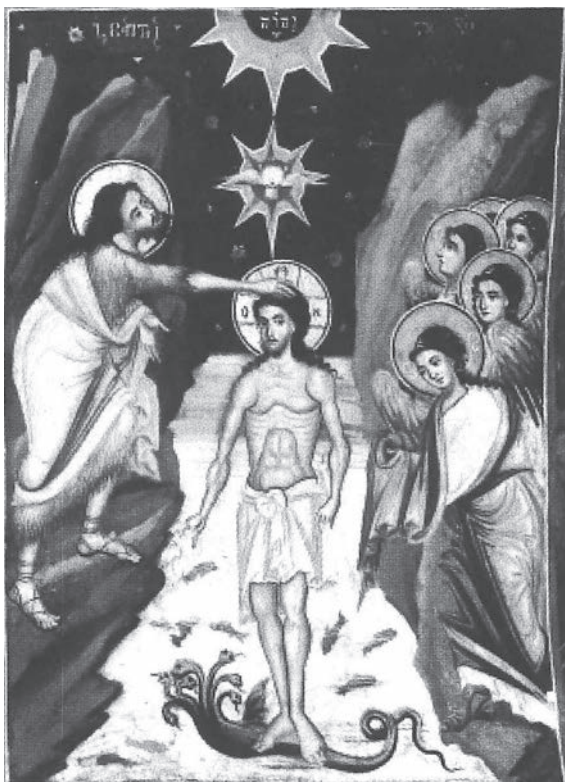


FIG. 10. Baptism, the hermitage of Saint Savva the Sanctified, Karyes, Holy Mount Athos, after: Ševo 2010: sl. 92

83 Stone 2006: 205 [159].

84 For the mention in the Psalm see Stone 2000: 151–152, n. 10; Vocotopoulos 2003: 617–624; Κεφαλά 2004: 423; Габелић 2005: 124–125; for the mention of snakes in the liturgical texts dedicated to the feast of Theophany, see note 2 of this paper.

iconography. They represent an avoidable part of the most common form of the cheirograph, which occurs in Serbian art of the Turkish period. The number of monsters depicted could also vary from none and two, to six and even more. In general, most often the artist depicted six or seven snakes.

When the motif of cheirograph in both literature and visual arts is concerned, in the conclusion one should also stress that despite the fact that certain traits of the meaning of the cheirograph from the Legend and the cheirograph mentioned in Colossians (Colossians 2:14) are same, there exists a clear difference between them. First, in spite of representing homonyms in Greek, these terms denote two different things and can not be used interchangeably. Namely, the “cheirograph” from the Legend is the contract with Satan, while the “cheirograph” mentioned in Colossians is the “bill of indebtedness”.⁸⁵ What is more significant, the cheirograph from the Legend is smashed at the time of Baptism, while the cheirograph mentioned in Colossians is annulled or erased at the time of Crucifixion.⁸⁶

In conclusion, we can also say that the complex motif of cheirograph provides the possibilities of multi-layered and polysemic interpretations in Serbian medieval art. It is without doubt that the said motif offers much room for further research and analysis. Still, for this occasion we have listed crucial examples that by their presence in the scene additionally explain the nuances in meaning of both the Baptism scene itself and its position in the painted program of the relevant monuments, and which better explain and shed new light on the meaning and position of the cheirograph in painted program of the church of Saint Nikita near Skopje. In conclusion, one may also observe the quite intriguing fact that the cheirograph motif is found in Serbian monuments and that it, to my present knowledge does not occur in preserved monuments of Byzantine art and especially of the art of the Byzantine capital. Therefore, one may assume that the cheirograph motif might found its way to Serbian art in two ways: through the influences of the now destroyed monuments of Constantinopolitan art or through the medium of oriental influences still surviving and existing in Serbian medieval art in first decades of the 14th century.⁸⁷ These two hypothesis does not necessarily need to exclude each other. Also, having in mind the fact that the highly learned Athonite monk Saint Sava of Serbia, the first Serbian archbishop (1219–1236) introduced this motif into Serbian literature, one can with certainty say that the highly learned Athonite monk, the heguman of the Chilandar monastery and later Serbian archbishop Daniel the Second is responsible for introducing the same motif in Serbian art.

85 Stone 2002: 6–9, 103–110.

86 Stone 2002, 8.

87 For the oriental influences in Serbian medieval art of the 12th and 13th century, see Стародубцев 2016: 261–267.

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PRIOLOG PROUČAVANJU SCENE KRŠTENJA HRISTOVOG U SRPSKOJ SREDNJOVEKOVNOJ UMETNOSTI SA POSEBNIM OSVRTOM NA SCENU KRŠTENJA U CRKVI SVETOG NIKITE KOD SKOPLJA (1324; 1484)

Predmet ovog rada je motiv kamene ploče (hirografa) u kompoziciji Krštenja Hristovog u crkvi Svetog Nikite kod Skoplja, zadužbini srpskog kralja Milutina (1342; 1484): njegova ikonografija, literarni izvori, značenje i razlozi slikanja (sl. 5). Hristos je na kompoziciji prikazan kako stoji u Jordanu na kamenoj ploči pod kojom gazi zmijolike nemani. U radu se ukazuje posebna pažnja različitim varijantama delâ apokrifne književnosti, koja predstavljaju literarni izvor koji opravdava pojavu ovog motiva u kompoziciji Krštenja, razmatraju se uticaji različitih varijanti ovih dela na ikonografiju scene Krštenja u srpskoj umetnosti. U radu je ukazano da motiv hirografa predstavlja mermernu ploču različitih oblika i boja uz koje su češće prikazane zmijolike nemane, a katkad je motiv izobražen samo u formi kamena. Rad je takođe posvećen dubljim razlozima njegove hirografa u sceni. U njemu se motiv hirografa u srpskoj umetnosti kao fenomen sistematski analizira po prvi put u širokom vremenskom rasponu od XIV do XIX veka (sl. 1–4, 6–9). Ono što je najvažnije, u radu se značenje ovog motiva analizira u skladu sa programskim mestom scene Krštenja u navedenim spomenicima.