

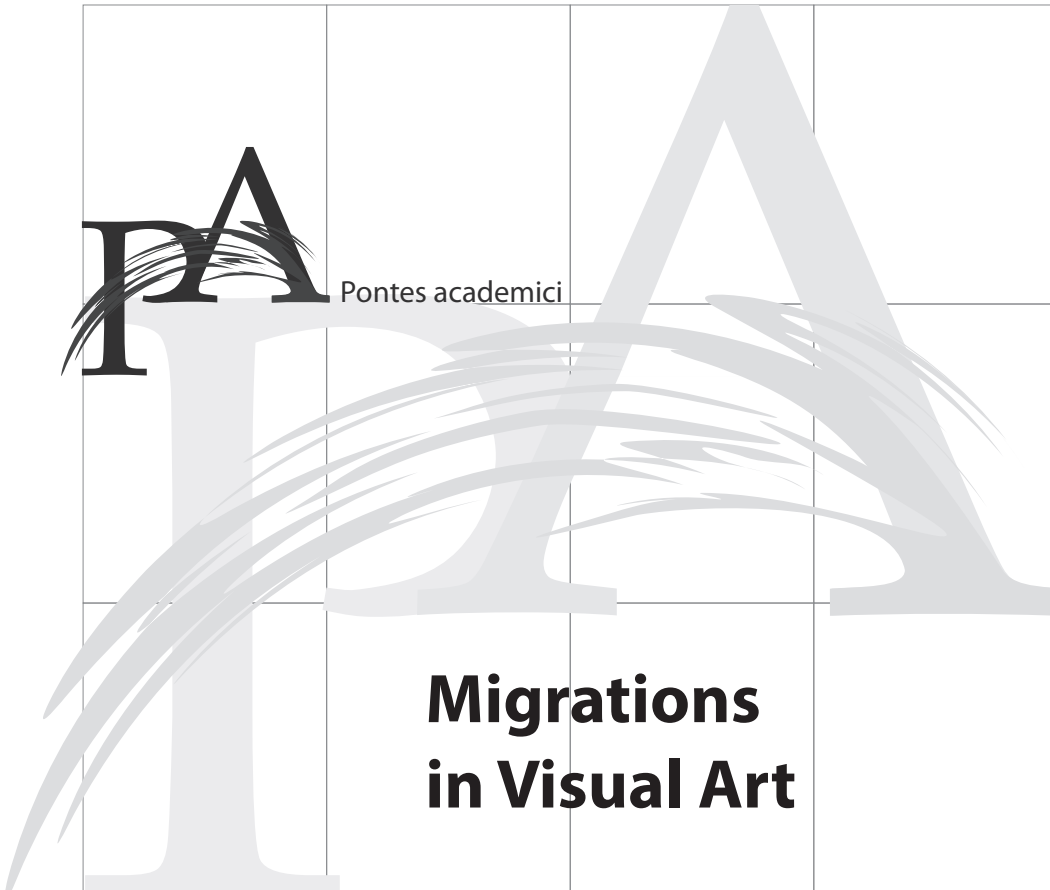
Pontes academici

Migrations in Visual Art

Edited by: Jelena Erdeljan, Martin Germ,
Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, Marina Vicelja Matijašić



УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ
ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

The image features a large, stylized graphic of the letters 'PA' in a serif font. The letters are rendered in a light gray color, with the 'P' being significantly larger than the 'A'. Overlaid on the letters are several dark, expressive brushstrokes that sweep across the composition from left to right. The background is a light gray grid with four columns and two rows.

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The Pontes academici book series

Editors: Jelena Erdeljan, Martin Germ, Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, Marina Vicelja Matijašić

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Contents

<i>Jelena Erdeljan</i> Introduction.	5
<i>Jelena Anđelković Grašar</i> Imaging the Feminine during the Migration Period on the Territory of the Central Balkans: Transferring Ideas and Ideals.	7
<i>Jakov Đorđević</i> <i>Macabre</i> Goes East: A Peculiar Verse among Funerary Inscriptions of the Orthodox Christians in the Late Medieval Balkans	19
<i>Olga M. Hajduk</i> From Italy do Poland – Case Study of Santi Gucci Fiorentino	33
<i>Martin de la Iglesia</i> Japanese Art in the Contact Zone: Between Orientalism and ‘Japansplaining’.	45
<i>Ivana Lemcool</i> The Zodiac in Early Medieval Art: Migration of a Classical Motif Through Time and Space.	55
<i>Matko Matija Marušić</i> Devotion in Migration: The Employment of Religious Poetry in Thirteenth-Century Zadar and Split	69
<i>Miriam Oesterreich</i> Migrations of the ‘Exotic’ in Early Advertising Pictures: Travelling between High and Low, Here and There, Idea and Thing.	83
<i>Dijana Protić</i> Migration and Usage of the Designers’ Concept <i>Balkan Typeface System</i>	101
<i>Nirvana Silnović</i> Migration of Objects, Ideas, and Meanings: The Case of the Mithras Cult	111
<i>Olga Špehar</i> Sirmium – Thessaloniki – Iustiniana Prima: The Migrations of Late Antique Cults and Architectural Concepts	125

<i>Danijela Tešic-Radovanović, Branka Gugolj</i>	
The Menorah as a Symbol of Jewish Identity in the Diaspora and an Expression of Aspiration for Renewing the Jerusalem Temple	137
<i>Nadezhda N. Točilova</i>	
Transition Style in Scandinavian Art, late 11 th – first half of 12 th Century.	151
<i>Milena Ulčar</i>	
“Guarda che quel Christo, come è magro”: Migrations of the Holy in the Venetian Bay of Kotor.	163
<i>Ljubica Vinulović</i>	
The Miracle of Latomos: From the Apse of the Hosios David to the Icon from Poganovo. The Migration of the Idea of Salvation	175
<i>Branka Vranešević</i>	
Aniconism on Early Christian Floor Mosaics in the Mediterranean.	187
Summaries	197
List of Authors	219
Name Index	221

Jakov Đorđević

Macabre Goes East: A Peculiar Verse among Funerary Inscriptions of the Orthodox Christians in the Late Medieval Balkans¹

Abstract

This paper discusses the inclusion of the characteristic verses from the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead on funerary inscriptions of the Orthodox Christians in the Late Middle Ages. It also discusses reasons for the hostility toward the macabre images in the East, as well as the possibility of interpreting certain Byzantine depictions as the appropriate doubles for the western macabre imagery.

Key words: *macabre, Byzantine tomb, Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, arcosolium, Ostoja Rajaković, intercessory prayer, purgatory, bodily decay*

Introduction

Preparing for one's own death through the meditation of a decaying corpse is a well-known topos, which has a long history that goes back to early Christian times. And yet the physical renderings of this highly unpleasant vision did not come into usage until the end of the 13th century when the mental image finally got its material support in the West.² The Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead was the first fully defined *macabre* theme and already by the beginning of the 14th century it was widely disseminated through Western Europe, both in text and in image.³ It tells a story of three noblemen who encounter three animated corpses as a mirror of their future fate. In the poems⁴ this mirroring is emphasized by the characteristic words which the dead address to the living: "We once were what you are now; you will become what we are

1 This paper contains some of the results achieved in the project no. 177036, supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

2 P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*, London, 1996, 135. Also by the end of the 13th century the figure of cadaverous death was introduced in the apocalyptic iconography, for the image see J. Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague and Death in the Later Middle Ages*, New York 2001, 188.

3 See, for example, P. Binski, *Medieval Death*, 134-138; A. Kinch, Image, Ideology, and Form: The Middle English "Three Dead Kings" in Its Iconographic Context, *The Chaucer Review* 43/1 (2008), 48-81; C. Kralik, Dialogue and Violence in Medieval Illuminations of the Three Living and the Three Dead, in: *Mixed Metaphors: The Danse Macabre in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. S. Oosterwijk and S. Knöll, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011, 133-154.

4 For the text of French poems, see S. Glixelli, *Les Cinq Poèmes des trois morts et des trois vifs*, Paris 1914.

now". It is more than obvious that these words can be identified as *memento mori* warning ("remember that you have to die"). And yet to stop here means not to bring into discussion the ancient social codes which lay at the base of medieval society and which defined relations within communities. One of the core principles was the enduring idea of gift-exchange as a fundamental means of establishing bonds. Every gift required a proper counter-gift without which the imbalance would become intolerable, even threatening to the receiver.⁵ This "formula" was embedded into medieval society and can be discerned in numerous customs. If we look at the story of the Three Living and Three Dead, we will see that the moral lesson could be interpreted as a gift that had to be repaid because, as Jean-Claude Schmitt stated, "in Christian society a dead person could provide no greater service than to invite a living person to prepare for death".⁶ And the duty of every *civilized* man, *i.e.* Christian, was to provide prayer for the deceased. Therefore, prayer could be seen as an appropriate counter-gift.⁷

Even though we encounter neither the depiction nor the poem of the Three Living and the Three Dead in the East, it is interesting to note that by the second half of the 14th century certain tombs of learned monks and nobles on the Balkans started to incorporate the famous verses amidst the lines of their inscriptions.⁸ The most intriguing one is the tomb of Ostoja Rajaković in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (fig. 1) because it is the only surviving example among the funeral monuments that has the figural representation beside the characteristic inscription. It is actually a typical painted Byzantine niche tomb, *i.e.* an arcosolium, designed for a member of an aristocratic family.⁹ The deceased is shown in his lavishly embroidered garments approaching the Virgin seated on

5 P. J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca 1994, 78.

6 J.-C. Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, Chicago 1998, 75.

7 The tale of the grateful dead illustrates this point most eloquently – a man who was accustomed to pray for the souls of the dead while passing through the cemetery was saved by those very dead when he was attacked by his enemies. For the story, see K. H. Broekhuijsen, *The Legend of the Grateful Dead: A Misinterpreted Miniature in the Très Riches Heures of Jean de Berry*, in: "Als Ich Can": *Liber Amicorum in Memory of Professor Dr Maurits Smeyers*, ed. B. Cardon, J. Van der Stock and D. Vanwijnsberghe, Leuven 2002, 213-230. On prayers in relation to the idea of gift-giving, see J. Đorđević, *Made in the skull's likeness: of transi tombs, identity and memento mori*, *Journal of Art Historiography* 17 (2017), 1-19.

8 These tombs are enumerated and only briefly analyzed in Д. Поповић, *Прилог познавању средњовековних надгробних плоча у манастиру Сопоћани, Новопазарски зборник* 7 (1983), 39-52, 46-49; and ead., *Градачки надгробни натписи, Саопштења* 24 (1992), 51-62, 54-56.

9 For painted byzantine niche tombs, see S. T. Brooks, *Commemoration of the Dead: Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration (Mid-Thirteenth to Mid-Fifteenth Centuries)*, Ph.D. diss., New York University 2002.

throne with the young Christ on her knees. Gestures of the nobleman suggest his prayer and the gestures of the divine persons imply their acceptance of the deceased. While nothing is quite unusual with the fresco, the inscription above reads: "The servant of God Ostoja Rajaković, Ugarčić of old, kinsman of king Marko and son-in-law of Zhoupan [Andrea] Gropa, passed away in 6888 [1379], in the month of October on the tenth day, in the third indiction. And you, my beloved brethren, from you who read I do beseech, redeem [pray for] this servant of God, *for you can become as I am, and yet I can never be as you are.*"¹⁰ The characteristic words from the Legend are employed here in order to enhance compassion toward the deceased, which would result in prayer for his salvation. The same use is attested to in the West on numerous contemporary funeral monuments.¹¹

Even though we do not encounter the tale of the Three Living and the Three Dead in the East and even though the phrase *I once was what you are now, and you will become what I am now* is not particularly creative so that it could not have had several unrelated places of origin,¹² it is its creative manner of employment in devotional context that suggests the migration from West to East: here too the words did not function as a simple warning, but as a plea for the intercessory prayer. However, the strange thing is that despite the fact that these words act as an obvious trigger for the mental image, among the orthodox Christians in the Balkans one does not find the macabre imagery. Why?

Byzantine *Macabre*?

Byzantine iconography actually had its share in visualizing the bodily dissolution. A considerable number of Last Judgment representations contain amidst the punishments of the damned the torment named "the worm that never sleeps" implying that the newly resurrected bodies of

10 "Престави се раб божији Остоја Рајаковић, по гулама Угарчић и суродник краља Марка, зет жупана Гропе, лета 6888, месеца октомврија десетого, индиктиона трећег. А вас молим, братијо моја вољена, који читате, простате раба божија, пошто ви можете бити као ја, а ја пак као ви никада." (*Стари српски записи и натписи*, ed. М. Павић, Belgrade 1986, 76). I would like to thank prof. Jelena Erdeljan for helping me with the English translation.

11 See K. Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Berkeley 1973, passim.

12 The fate of the buried body is same everywhere and it should not be surprising that we find variations of the characteristic words from the Legend on Roman tombs, as well as in the 6th century Arabian poetry (see *ibid.*, 25). This does not mean that these examples influenced each other, but that they drew on the common human experience.

the unrighteous will suffer eternal decay.¹³ This was usually rendered as a heap of skulls placed in an enclosed space that resembles an open tomb.¹⁴ Yet the most eloquent are some late examples like the one in Visoki Dečani monastery (fig. 2) where agonized bodies are immersed in stone, almost as in a sepulcher, and covered by worms.¹⁵ It actually echoes composition of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, which might have had some influence in its creation, but almost certainly in its perception. Relying on cognitive studies we may assume that the viewer might have transferred the experience of uneasiness gained in front of the well-known scene into similar compositional forms, reinforcing his consciousness of represented somatic tension.¹⁶ Still, while the worm that never sleeps is quite direct in its meaning, there are other representations which indicate bodily dissolution as well, only in a subtler manner.

By the late Byzantine period a person had been long understood as a psychosomatic unity where body was a necessary part for the completeness of the self.¹⁷ Even though this is acknowledged in theological writings, where this idea was argued in various ways bearing different implications,¹⁸ when it comes to iconography, traces or echoes of this rather important notion haven't been noticed yet by today's scholars. However, codex Dionysiou 65 can provide the perfect example. This psalter, designed for private devotion and dated to the first half of 12th century,¹⁹ cherishes one particularly informative miniature (fol. 12r) for the purpose of this discussion

13 This is one of the four torments that await sinners as mentioned in the Bible (Mark 9:44, 46, 48; Isaiah 66:24). Some examples of this scene are enumerated in P. A. Underwood, Third Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Frescoes in the Kariye Camii at Istanbul by the Byzantine Institute, 1956, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), 236-265, 256-257.

14 For the image, see N. P. Ševčenko, Images of the Second Coming and the Fate of the Soul in Middle Byzantine Art, in: *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. R. J. Daly, Grand Rapids 2009, 250-272, 252, fig. 14.1.

15 For the Last Judgment scenes in Dečani monastery, See A. Давидов-Темерински, Циклус Страшног суда, in: *Зидно сликарство манастира Дечана: грађа и студије*, ed. В. Ј. Ђурић, Belgrade 1995, 191-211, especially 206. Similar composition of the worm that never sleeps can be found in Chora monastery. See S. Der Nersessian, Program and Iconography of the Frescoes of the Parecclesion, in: *Kariye Djami*, Vol. 4, ed. P. Underwood, New York 1975), 305-349, 329.

16 For the cognitive approach in art history, cf. P. Sheingorn, Making the Cognitive Turn in Art History: A Case Study, in: *Emerging Disciplines: Shaping New Fields of Scholarly Inquiry in and beyond the Humanities*, ed. M. Bailar, Houston 2010, 145-200; and H. Roodenburg, The Visceral Pleasures of Looking: On Iconology, Anthropology and the Neurosciences, in: *New Perspectives in Iconology: Visual Studies and Anthropology*, eds. B. Baert, A.-S. Lehmann and J. Van den Akkerveken, Brussels 2012, 211-229.

17 N. Constanas, "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream": The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), 91-124, 115, 122.

18 *Ibid.*, passim.

19 G. R. Parpulov, Texts and Miniatures from Codex Dionysiou 65, in: *Twenty-fifth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts*, College Park 1999, 124-126.

– the image of a soul trapped in Hades (fig. 3). A figure of a naked man representing the soul, with arms tied behind his back and skin covered in sores, is violently set as a captive in a cave above which the figure of Christ is shown with the gesture of benediction. The foul flesh is characteristic for the representations of those in great suffering and physical pain and by looking at the soul, images of Job and the beggar Lazarus (from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus) can easily come to mind. These two are particularly telling because while the Book of Job played an important role in understanding the future resurrection of the body, the later parable was of key importance in constructing the Christian imagination of the afterlife. It should also be noted that caves in Byzantine visual culture quite often alluded to entombment. One need only look at a few examples of the Raising of Lazarus, Entombment of Christ, or even Nativity scenes with their poetic allusions between cradle and sepulcher to acknowledge the equivalence of the dark stony entrances with the burial places. Of no less importance are the monks' cells usually depicted as rooms set in caves, *i.e.* under earth, and therefore imagined as a grave's womb. This was convenient indeed considering that a person was ritually dying for the society by taking a monastic oath, living from then on in a liminal space between the two worlds.²⁰ An illuminated manuscript of John Climacus' *Heavenly Ladder*, Vat. gr. 394, illustrates this liminality in great detail by showing monks set in caves and devoted to their purifying penance.²¹ Especially reviling is the first miniature on fol. 46r (fig. 4) following the passage describing the most repulsive bodily mortifications.²² The "holy criminals", as these anchorites are called in the fifth chapter, are visualized here as animated corpses with only a thin layer of skin covering their bones. Their act of cleansing is described as similar to the process which a buried body has to undertake in earth, implying thus that the putrefaction of flesh is simultaneous with the purification of the soul. It is also indicative that the fifth chapter of the *Heavenly Ladder* resembles otherworld journey narratives.²³ Following this train of thought, the captured soul in Dionysiou 65 can be easily equated not only to the inhumed body, but to the decaying corpse. And yet for the overall meaning of the miniature the figure of Christ is

20 S. T. Brooks, *Commemoration of the Dead*, 137; N. Constan, *The Middle State of Souls*, 123. Cf. R. C. Finucane, *Sacred Corpse, Profane Carrion: Social Ideals and Death Rituals in the Later Middle Ages*, in: *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. J. Whaley, London 1981, 40-60, 44-45.

21 On Vat. gr. 394, see J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, Princeton 1954, 47-87; and for the relevant miniatures, see *ibid.*, fig. 83-93.

22 For the English translation of the passage, see: *ibid.*, 62.

23 I am grateful to Saskia Dirkse for pointing this to me.

crucial. His gesture unequivocally suggests the positive outcome and the soul's eventual liberation. Indeed, though only sporadically mentioned in theological texts,²⁴ it was believed that before the Last Judgment, when the final decision will be made, the dead could be delivered from the depths of Hades.²⁵ Therefore, the emphasis on bodily suffering must have invited the viewer to connect the soul's fate with the fate of the corpse buried in the ground, paralleling again bodily dissolution with the soul's cleansing.

In the perambulatory that surrounds the chapel dedicated to St. George at the top of the homonymous six-story tower, belonging to the Chilandar monastery, the two walls of the chapel's façade were painted in the 13th century with scenes devised from the kanon for "He Who Is at the Point of Death".²⁶ This text is written in first-person narrative and describes experiences of a dying man and his journey to the depth of Hades where he will eventually be imprisoned.²⁷ The story on the chapel's southern façade is organized in two registers and should be followed from the upper left to the lower right with one interruption since the final scene of the kanon is actually depicted as the last image of the upper register instead of the lower one.²⁸ However, this peculiarity in the narrative flow can be understood if we realize that the corresponding upper and lower scenes could be observed simultaneously – the upper recounting the body's journey to the grave, and the lower the soul's journey to Hades (fig. 5). It should be noted that the body eventually does not end up buried in earth, but, as a special sign of penance,²⁹ is thrown away to be devoured by beasts (fig. 6). Digestion is an ancient symbol of bodily dissolution, in both the East and the West,³⁰ and here it corresponds to the soul's captivity in Hades. On the other hand, for this very symbolism the idea of digestion was also

24 Obviously this belief raised up problematic questions for theologians. Cf. V. Marinis, "He Who Is at the Point of Death": The Fate of the Soul in Byzantine Art and Liturgy, *Gesta* 54/1 (2015), 59-84, 74. Generally speaking, byzantine views on the afterlife cherished numerous traditions intertwined and scattered, sometimes even contradicting each other, but truly pregnant with the potential of finding various ways of salvation. They began taking somewhat firmer shape only in theological debates with the Latin Church. N. Conzas, *The Middle State of Souls*, 94.

25 Cf. V. Marinis, *The Fate of the Soul*, 78.

26 For the chapel of St. George, see Б. Тодић, Фреске XIII века у Параклису на Пиригу Св. Георгија у Хиландару, *Хиландарски зборник* 9 (1997), 35-73.

27 On the kanon, see V. Marinis, *The Fate of the Soul*. For the full English translation of the kanon's text, see *ibid.*, 80-84.

28 Б. Тодић, Фреске XIII века, 59-60.

29 The same motive is present in the *Heavenly Ladder*, J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder*, 62.

30 C. W. Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York 1995, 186-199 and *passim*.

embedded in the obese figures of Hades, personification of the underworld and death itself, often found in Byzantine tradition.³¹ Hence, cleansing through decomposition is implied in the tower of St. George too and salvation is guaranteed this time by the image of the Virgin's intercession in the last image of the upper register (though the halo around the soul's head anticipates it through the whole journey as well).

Still, for the present discussion one detail of the devouring scene deserves special attention – the group of men praying for the soul of the departed monk. They are the passing strangers moved to prayer by the horrific sight, just as the dying man hoped for in the *kanon*.³² Throwing body to be eaten by beasts as an accessible spectacle to the accidental viewers is the way of securing sincere prayer intertwined with the expression of profound humbleness of the dead. Therefore, these men can be considered the perfect doubles for the readers of Ostoja Rajaković's inscription, readers who were supposed to encounter the mental image of the same sort and thus be encouraged to pray for the departed nobleman. The humbleness is embedded in the inscription of Ostoja Rajaković too through the deliberate opposition between his proud belonging to noble houses and the pitiful state he is enduring after death. This principle is an important part of numerous western funerary monuments, especially *transi* tombs crowned with the representation of a decaying corps as the ensuring vehicle that the harsh meaning will be transmitted.³³ But the question remains: why were the aforementioned visual formulations of bodily suffering unsuited for the tombs in the East when their rendering in *arcosolia* would have enhanced further the desired notion of the deceased in need for (intercessory) help? On the other hand, the general lack of the western macabre imagery in the East, in spite of the fact that the similar sentiments can be found in Byzantine visual culture, might also be considered as curious.

Same Image, Different Meaning

To get a full understanding of Ostoja Rajaković's tomb one should take a closer look at the images of *arcosolia* in general. By trying rough classification, two types of representation are to be expected: the first group is

31 Cf. A. Eastmond and L. James, Eat, drink . . . and pay the price, in: *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19) – Food and Wine in Byzantium*, eds. L. Brubaker and K. Linardou, Aldershot 2007, 175-189, 179-182.

32 Perhaps passing strangers, seeing the bones dragged by dogs, will be moved by compunction and cry: help, mistress, the soul of this wretched body. (VI.4. as in V. Marinis, *The Fate of the Soul*, 82).

33 K. Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol*, 48-83.

made of portraits of the deceased men and women positioned in relation to Christ, the Virgin and other saintly figures, sometimes even accompanied by their still living relatives, whereas the second encompasses elaborate funeral scenes with the deceased represented as lying on a catafalque. While the first group is more prominent, the latter is found, it seems, in arcosolia belonging to persons whose cult was expected to be established.³⁴ Thus, being the images of the (new) saints whose cults were supposed to be instigated at the places of their burial, it might have seemed convenient to represent them similar to the usual ending depictions of saints' vita cycles, i.e. funeral scenes. In turn, this connection would prompt the viewers to identify the represented dead body on the catafalque as an incorruptible relic, a relic which is actually buried below the very scene of arcosolium. Whatever the case may be, this discussion goes beyond the scope of the present paper and deserves further investigation. Because Ostoja Rajaković's tomb belongs to the first group of arcosolia, the analysis here will be focused on them.

By looking at those images a few patterns become obvious:³⁵ the deceased is usually represented as approaching Christ, whether seated on a throne, or shown as a child on his mother's lap. Sometimes the deceased is led by the patron saint, his protector even in death, or Archangel Michael, the one in charge with the weighing of souls. Donor compositions are very similar to these scenes in arcosolia, which is not surprising taking into account that the act of donation was perceived as a votive gift intended to ensure future salvation.³⁶ The Virgin is always represented as accepting the deceased, and Christ's gesture is always that of benediction. On many examples Christ and the Virgin bear certain epithets that, interestingly enough, do not necessarily coincide with the iconographic types and icons to which they belong.³⁷ While Christ's epithet "the merciful" (ὁ ἐλεήμων) emphasizes his loving nature toward humans, it simultaneously identifies him as

34 Cf. C. Walter, Death in Byzantine iconography, *Eastern Churches Review* 8 (1976), 115-127, 120-122; B. Cvetković, The Living (and the) Dead: Imagery of Death in Byzantium and the Balkans, *IKON* 4 (2011), 27-44, 30.

35 On these type of arcosolia images, see S. T. Brooks, *Commemoration of the Dead*, passim; T. Παπαμιστοράκης, Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τη μέση και ύστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο, *Δελτίου ΧΑΕ* 19 (1996-1997), 285-304. One should also consider byzantine funerary panels as part of this same context, cf. K. Marsengill, Imperial and Aristocratic Funerary Panel Portraits in the Middle and Late Byzantine Periods, in: *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration: Studies in Honor of Slobodan Ćurčić*, eds. M. J. Johnson, R. Ousterhout and A. Papalexandrou, Farnham 2012, 203-219.

36 Cf. T. Παπαμιστοράκης, Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις, 292 and especially 259-296.

37 S. T. Brooks, *Commemoration of the Dead*, 114-118.

the judge.³⁸ The Virgin's epithets, on the other hand, celebrate her as the great intercessor.³⁹ Thus Christ the Judge and the Virgin intercessor both indicate that images in *arcosolia* actually represent the moment of judgment when the fate of the deceased will be decided. There are even some rare images where the scene is set amidst a flowery garden foreshadowing the positive outcome of the judgment, just like the gestures and epithets do.⁴⁰ Hence, the context of *arcosolium* is devoted to the Last Judgment ideas and every image in this context would be understood in relation to those ideas, suggesting salvation. Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that the macabre imagery, as well as any of the discussed Byzantine representations for that matter, with their stress on decay would have been perceived in the context of *arcosolium*, the Last Judgment context, as the images of the hell torment the worm that never sleeps because of their essential similarities. They would have condemned the deceased to the irrevocable punishment destined for the unrighteous after the general resurrection and, therefore, would be highly undesirable.

Purgatory – Dividing Line

Appropriating Legend's words and rejecting the accompanying image may also be discussed in a broader context that can shed new light on the general hostility toward the macabre imagery in the East.

Today we know that the outbreak of the Black Death in the middle of the 14th century had nothing to do with the emergence of macabre representations.⁴¹ While they could have been intertwined in specific contexts with the fear of the plague,⁴² their origin should be sought in the last decades of the 13th century,⁴³ the time when laity was ever more introduced to the new patterns of devotion characteristic for monastic communities through the missionary work of mendicant orders, and the time when beliefs in purgatory started to get firmer boundaries and harsher limitations in church teachings. Numerous popular tales of animated corpses

38 Ibid., 114.

39 Ibid., 118.

40 Ibid., 110-111.

41 See E. Gertsman, *Visualizing Death: Medieval Plagues and the Macabre*, in: *Piety and plague: from Byzantium to the Baroque*, eds. F. Mormando and T. Worcester, Kriksville 2007, 64-89, especially 78-85. On the Black Death, see remarkable article by Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *The Black Death: End of a Paradigm*, *The American Historical Review* 107/3 (2002), 703-738.

42 E. Gertsman, *Visualizing Death*, 84.

43 See n. 1.

which roamed around attacking the living, and even worse, helping them so that they could not have been easily interpreted by the Church as demonic possessions, stood in deep opposition to Christian teachings on purgatory and resurrection of the body.⁴⁴ The role of macabre imagery in taming such ill-suited beliefs, which has too often been overlooked, should not be underestimated.⁴⁵ The story of the Three Living and the Three Dead was a tale with breathtaking elements and yet was in absolute harmony with the official church understandings of the afterlife:⁴⁶ the dead were physical apparitions from purgatory and their bodily decomposition manifested their *purifying pains*.⁴⁷

It is quite possible that this is the main reason why we do not encounter macabre imagery in the East. Purgatory was one of the steppingstones in the process of conciliation between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church as attested to by the Second Council in Lyon and the Council in Florence.⁴⁸ This would explain why macabre iconography was never employed even in devotional manuscripts designed for personal use in the East, manuscripts where the ideas of contemplating one's own death were clearly

44 See N. Caciola, Wraiths, Revenants and Ritual in Medieval Culture, *Past & Present* 152 (1996), 3-45.

45 The insistence on corpses as apparitions from purgatory is attested in more than one version of the poem and it was those poems that found the particular appeal with the nobility. Interactive character of the western transi tombs can be also observed in this particular context for it performed the same encounter as in the Legend. The tomb's cadaverous image with its inscription given in direct speech appeared before the viewer as a ghost from purgatory or a good revenant who was passing through the purgatorial pains. See J. Ђорђевић, Лепота лобање: Посмртни остаци обичних мртвих у култури и визуелној култури касног средњег века, in: *Језици и културе у времену и простору IV / 1*, Novi Sad 2015, 43-54, 51.

46 The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead fulfilled as a moralizing tale all aspects that a good medieval exemplum should aim for. And yet it was its emphasis on (re)establishing bonds with the dead that was crucial for its success among the late medieval nobility who adapted it into a number of different devotional contexts. See A. Kinch, *Image, Ideology, and Form*.

47 See J. Ђорђевић, Лепота лобање, 49-52; id., Made in the skull's likeness, 2-6. For manifestations of the soul's state in the afterlife on the corpse, cf. also C. W. Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, 295-296; P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, New York 1982, 360.

48 It is important to bear in mind that while the delivered western arguments on purgatory at those councils seem to represent a unified notion on the afterlife, it becomes obvious that it was far from reality when we encounter some contemporary beliefs and practices in other sources. The councils actually represent only the development of the favorable official notion by the Latin Church. That is why only the purgatorial fire was discussed. Cf. fol. 113v of the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry in order to see different possible purgatorial pains also present in contemporary beliefs (among which are those of the buried bodies as well). On the other hand, the same is true for the Orthodox Church. It is not by chance that Mark Eugenikos failed to mention the tradition of the aerial toll-gates. However, this does not mean that other western notions could not have been known in the East (*i.e.* the Legend's implication) as a product of dynamic encounters and interactions (especially in the Balkans). Still, this is a subject for a separate study. Beside the pivotal book of Jacques Le Goff (*The Birth of Purgatory*, Chicago 1984), see also the intriguing discussion on purgatory in B. Newman, On the Threshold of the Dead: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women, in: ead., *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*, Philadelphia 1995, 108-136.

present.⁴⁹ While the words of Ostoja Rajaković's inscription demonstrate a certain affinity to western practices – the verse from the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead was used with the same purpose of inspiring prayer for the deceased – the absence of the suitable image in the East should again suggest familiarity with all meanings which the image of body in a state of decay bore in the West.

In conclusion, while the verse from the poem of the Three Living and the Three Dead was appropriated to be used in the same *creative* way as it was in the West, the explicit image of a decaying body was rejected because it was understood to promote the doctrine of purgatory.



Fig. 1: Arcosolium tomb of Ostoja Rajaković, the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid, 14th century (Photo by: Miloje Đorđević)

⁴⁹ For example in the *Serbian Psalter*, now in Munich, one can see on fol. 2r the image of bones in the open tomb, but never the very dissolution of body.



Fig. 2: *The worm that never sleeps*, Dečani monastery, 14th century (Photo by: Miloje Đorđević)



Fig. 3: *The soul trapped in Hades*, cod. Dionysiou 65, fol. 12r, 12th century (from: S. M. Pelekanidis et al., *The Treasures of Mount Athos: Illuminated manuscripts*, vol. 1, Athens 1974)



Fig. 4: The ascetic penance, Vat. gr. 394, fol. 46r, 11th century (from: J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, Princeton 1954)

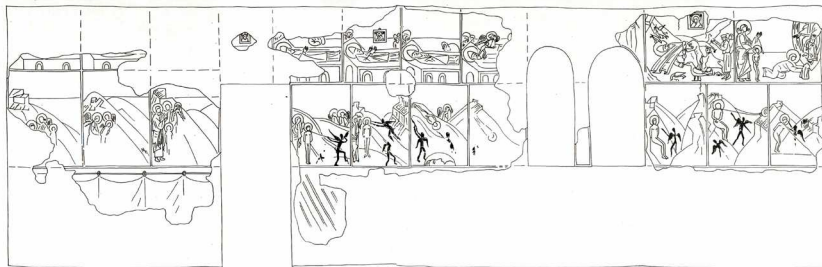


Fig. 5: Kanon for He Who Is at the Point of Death, St. George chapel in the tower of St. George belonging to Chilandar monastery, 13th century, drawing of the chapel's southern façade by B. Živković (from: Б. Тодић, *Фреске XIII века у Параκлицу на Пиргу Св. Георгија у Хиландару*, Хиландарски зборник 9 (1997), 35-73)



Fig. 6: The devouring scene, St. George chapel in the tower of St. George belonging to Chilandar monastery, chapel's southern façade, 13th century (site: <http://www.monumentaserbica.com/mushushu/story.php?id=52>)