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ЗБОРНИК РАДОВА

ВИЗАНТОЛОШКОГ ИНСТИТУТА
LX/II

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REVISITING THE VELJUSA FRESCOES: NOTES ON THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM OF THE SOUTH PAREKKLESION*

The paper discusses the iconographic program of the frescoes in the south parekklesion of the Church of the Virgin Eleousa at the Veljusa Monastery, the foundation of Manuel, Bishop of Strumitza, built in 1080. It focuses on the figure of St. Niphon or, more specifically, the cult and iconography of this saint, whose representations in art are quite uncommon. It considers several images of St. Niphon in Serbian medieval painting that previous research has failed to take into account. Then, it reexamines the view that this saint was the patron of the chapel, especially the claim that one of his visions was painted in the apse.

Keywords: Veljusa, St. Niphon, Christ in Glory/Maiestas Domini, Byzantine art, wall paintings, 11th century

For more than six decades, the Church of the Virgin Eleousa at the Veljusa Monastery near Strumitza has been recognized as a significant achievement of Byzantine architecture and monumental painting of the 11th century. This church, the monastery's katholikon, was most likely erected by Constantinopolitan builders in 1080, and its ktetor, who was buried in the narthex, was “monk Manuel, who became the

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bishop of Tiberiopolis,” as reported in the marble inscription above the west entrance to the church.¹ In addition to its highly distinctive architectural layout in a form of a tetraconch, the earliest frescoes in the Veljusa church, now believed to have been painted between 1085 and 1093, continue to attract the attention of researchers.

Although they had already been noted in the period between the two world wars, research of these wall paintings did not begin until the late 1950s, prompted by the first restoration-conservation campaign in 1958 and the discovery of a number of early frescoes.² The same year, Vojislav J. Đurić presented the Veljusa wall paintings to the international academic community in a report at the Eleventh International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Munich.³ Around ten years later, some important segments in the thematic repertoire of the imagery in the Church of the Virgin Eleousa attracted the attention of Gordana Babić.⁴ Around that time, the second stage in discovering new parts of the original painted program at Veljusa began, i.e., their restoration and conservation. From 1968, this restoration-conservation project was led by Petar Miljković-Peppek. Having begun his research on the antiquities at the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza a few years earlier, this distinguished scholar published new results of the research of the Veljusa frescoes throughout the 1970s.⁵ His years-long efforts were crowned in 1981 with the publication of a monograph on the Veljusa Monastery, which, besides the wall paintings, minutely explored its history and architecture.⁶ Of course, scholarly interest in the Veljusa frescoes did not wane with the publication of Petar Miljković-Peppek’s comprehensive monograph, and they were often discussed over the following thirty years, usually in overviews or synthetic studies. The most recent study on the frescoes in the monastery katholikon was written by Anna Zakharova, who reassesses the Veljusa murals after the latest restoration-conservation works in the context of contemporaneous Byzantine art, focusing on their stylistic characteristics. Seen in a broader comparative context, the personal style of the artists who painted the Veljusa frescoes is juxtaposed with the most important works of Constantinopolitan monumental art of the second half of the 11th century.⁷

¹ Cf. Kaplan, *Retour*, 480, with a bibliography.

² Jovanović, *O Vodoči i Veljusi*, 130–135.

³ Đurić, *Fresques*. Cf. also *idem*, *Vizantijske freske*, 11–12.

⁴ Babić, *Les discussions christologiques*, 376–378; *eadem*, *Les chapelles annexes*, 94–105.

⁵ *Miljković-Peppek*, *Oltarna pregrada*; *idem*, *Za neki novi podatoci*; *idem*, *Novootkriveni arhitekturni i slikarski spomenici*, 5–7; *idem*, *Novi podaci*; *idem*, *Les données*.

⁶ *Miljković-Peppek*, *Veljusa*.

⁷ *Zakharova*, *The murals*. This paper provides an exhaustive list of the literature on the Veljusa frescoes, including works not mentioned here.

Before we come to the principal subject of this paper, at the end of this brief introduction, a few words about a recent and important discovery at Veljusa are due. In 2021, Mirjana Mašnik published previously unknown remains of the later fresco layer in the prothesis of the church, with a depiction of two apostles embracing. According to this author, these murals display stylistic similarities with the wall paintings of Nerezi and Kurbinovo, which led her to date them between 1164 and 1191, cf. *Mašnik*, *Vo manastirov Veljusa*.

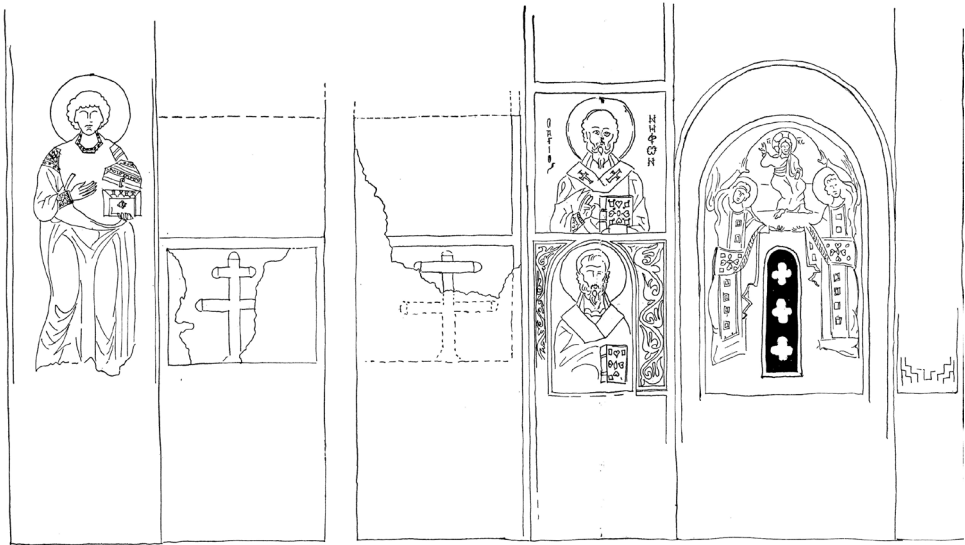


Fig. 1. Veljusa, south parekklesion, the arrangement of frescoes in the lower zones (after *Miljković-Peppek, Veljusa*)

On this occasion, we will focus on the wall paintings in the south parekklesion of the Church of the Virgin Eleousa. The iconographic program of the chapel's frescoes is now reduced to a handful of surviving images. The dome features a bust of Christ Emmanuel, while the apse houses a depiction of Christ in Glory (*Maiestas Domini*). Besides these, the imagery in the chapel includes just three individual figures of saints. The eastern wall features the busts of two hierarchs – St. Niphon and an unidentified bishop. Opposite these two figures, there is a full-length figure of St. Panteleimon, one of the most prominent healer saints. Finally, besides ornamental elements, the repertoire of paintings in the parekklesion also includes two crosses in the passage leading into the main part of the church (Fig. 1).⁸

Although very concise, the described iconographic program has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Moreover, some authors recognized quite distinctive programmatic and iconographic features in its imagery. For instance, Petar Miljković-Peppek largely based his interpretation of the program as whole on the figure of a rarely shown saint – Niphon of Constantiane/Constantia (Fig. 2–3). In fact, he believed this saint to be the patron of the south parekklesion at Veljusa. Understandably, he associated the choice of this saint with the monastery's founder Manuel, believing that he might have been familiar with the very intriguing *Vita* of St. Niphon and that

⁸ The most comprehensive overview of the imagery in the parekklesion is provided in *Miljković-Peppek, Veljusa*, 205–214.



Fig. 2. Veljusa, south parekklesion,
St. Niphon

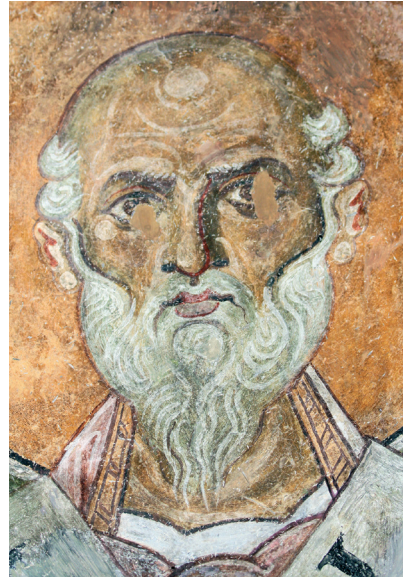


Fig. 3. Veljusa, south parekklesion,
St. Niphon, detail

it left a deep impression on him. Consequently, Petar Miljković-Peppek tried to explain the inclusion of other representations in the same context as the bust of St. Niphon and argued that one of the saint's visions was shown in the apse of the chapel.⁹

In our view, this interpretation of the iconographic program of the south chapel at the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza warrants a more in-depth critical assessment. To that end, we will focus on the representation of St. Niphon or, more specifically, the cult and iconography of this peculiar or even unusual saint, reexamining the view that he was the chapel's patron. Then we will briefly look at the other segments of the thematic repertoire. The closing section of the paper will focus on the theophanic image in the apse.

* * *

Let us begin this contribution to the research of the thematic repertoire in the south parekklesion of the Veljusa church with the figure of St. Niphon. Drawing on the latest findings about the saint's cult and a more comprehensive overview of his representations in art, previous observations about his image at the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza can be supplemented and, to an extent, even corrected.

⁹ Ibid. Elizabeta Dimitrova agrees with Miljković-Peppek's identification of the south chapel's patron, cf. *Dimitrova*, *The Church of the Holy Virgin*, 19.

The first claim that should be rectified is that Niphon was the bishop of the Egyptian city of Constantiane.¹⁰ For a long time, this identification was widely accepted in hagiological literature and even appears in the most recent textbooks on Byzantine hagiography.¹¹ Indeed, the titles of the earliest surviving manuscripts of his *vita*, those from the 12th century, report that Niphon was the bishop of Constantiane near Alexandria. However, as Sergei Ivanov recently showed, these titles emerged as a result of a groundless abridgement of the details in the text, i.e., a misinterpretation of the report that Niphon was consecrated as a bishop by the archbishop of Alexandria and then dispatched to Constantiane. However, this city was not in Egypt but in Cyprus: known as Salamis in classical antiquity, after an earthquake in 332 or 334, it was rebuilt by Emperor Constantius and renamed in his honor.¹²

According to Ivanov, the saint's *vita*, remarkably lengthy and highly informative,¹³ was compiled in Constantinople after 965, following the liberation of Cyprus from the Arabs by Nikephoros II Phokas, or perhaps after 970, if the claim that one passage alludes to Byzantium's war with the army of Sviatoslav I, Prince of Kievan Rus', which took place that year, is correct.¹⁴ The fact that the memory of St. Niphon does not appear in the Synaxarion of the Great Church (mid-10th century)¹⁵ and later Byzantine calendars also supports this earlier chronological limit for the creation of his *vita*.¹⁶ The earliest calendar memory of the saint, who is likely to have been a fictional character,¹⁷ has survived in a Glagolitic Old Slavonic manuscript – the Codex

¹⁰ *Miljković-Peppek*, Veljusa, 207. In addition, the author incorrectly reports (cf. *ibid.*) that Niphon's birthplace was in Egypt, cf. n. 22 *infra*. In his assessment of Niphon's image, Petar Miljković-Peppek used the edition of his concise *vita* in *Eustratiadis*, 'Ο ὅσιος Νήφων, but did not consult the longer version of the saint's life.

¹¹ BHG II, 153; Auctarium BHG, 142; Novum auctarium BHG, 159–160; *Efthymiadis*, Hagiography, 127.

¹² *Ivanov*, K datirovke; *idem*, Nifon, with a bibliography. Cf. also *idem*, Holy Fools, 168–172.

¹³ *Ristenko*, Materiali, 3–186 (extensive version), 187–238 (concise version). A significant excerpt from the *vita*, with St. Niphon's Vision of the Last Judgment, was reprinted and translated into English in *Marinis*, The Vision. A new critical edition is currently being prepared by Sergei Ivanov, Albrecht Berger and Vasileios Marinis, cf. *Berger*, Einige Bemerkungen, 59.

¹⁴ *Ivanov*, K datirovke, 74; *idem*, Nifont, 259. The *vita* was previously dated to ca 1000 (cf. *Ryden*, Date, 36), i.e., the beginning of the 11th century, cf. *Kazhdan*, A History, 200–203.

¹⁵ Syn. CP. For the date and circumstances of the compilation of the Synaxarion of Constantinople cf. *Luzzi*, Synaxaria, 201–202. The Synaxarion of Constantinople contains no reference to any other saint called Niphon. In fact, as Albrecht Berger noted, that name was not recorded at all before the Life of St. Niphon. Later on, as the same author notes, it appears as the name of a few church dignitaries, cf. *Berger*, Einige Bemerkungen, 56. The choice of that name, at least to an extent, bears evidence to the veneration of St. Niphon because they could not have been named after any other saint. Admittedly, an image of a martyr called Niphon features in some monuments, such as the Gračanica Monastery katholikon, frescoed ca. 1320, cf. *Todić*, Gračanica, 93 (no. 15).

¹⁶ As Sergei Ivanov noted, in the Greek manuscript tradition, a reference to St. Niphon appears only in some liturgical books written in Italy: Ad typica Graecorum, 87; *Ivanov*, Nifont, 260. Cf. also *Luzzi*, Il calendario eortologico, 247. The only known Greek hymnographic text dedicated to St. Niphon was created in Italy, cf. n. 25 *infra*.

¹⁷ *Berger*, Einige Bemerkungen, 56: "Nephon ist ohne jeden Zweifel eine reine Kunstfigur."

Assemanius (Vat. slav. 3), whose menologion includes St. Niphon in the rubric for 23 December.¹⁸ The creation of this liturgical book, probably penned at Ohrid between 986 and 1051,¹⁹ provided the *terminus ante quem* for dating the Greek *vita* of St. Niphon of Cyprus.²⁰

The *vita* informs us that St. Niphon was born in Almyropolis²¹ as the son of a local archon called Agapitos. On the advice of his father's friend, *stratelates* Sabbatios, the eight-year-old Niphon was dispatched to Constantinople to receive an education in the city. After four years of successful studies and gradual spiritual growth, young Niphon, at the devil's enticement, begins to indulge in debauchery and gluttony. As soon as he vanquished these grave bodily sins, a long period of St. Niphon's demonic temptations and struggles ensued, from which he eventually emerged victorious owing to his prayerful perseverance and the aid of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God and the saints. Then, the *vita* describes Niphon's numerous visions and minutely recounts the lessons and homilies he passed on to his followers. The last part of the text narrates how he came to be a bishop, an office he tried to avoid by fleeing Constantinople after having learned in a dream that God had chosen him to become a bishop. Niphon arrives in Alexandria, where, despite his protestations, an archbishop called Alexander appoints him as bishop. After his enthronement in Constantiane, Niphon spent the remaining years of his life caring for his flock, preaching and protecting it from demonic temptations. He learned of his imminent death three days before he died in one of his visions. Shortly before he passed, Niphon received a visit from St. Athanasios of Alexandria, and saints, the Virgin and even Jesus Christ appeared to him on his deathbed.

The Greek *Vita* of St. Niphon was a popular text, judging by the number of surviving copies²² and some – albeit very rare – documentary sources,²³ although some high-ranking clerics had reservations about its contents.²⁴ Besides the extensive and brief versions of the *vita*, cultic writings celebrating St. Niphon are known to have included just a canon preserved in Grottaferrata, Δ. δ. II, fols. 22–27.²⁵

¹⁸ Evangeliarium Assemani II, 266; Asemanievo evangelie, 132 ob.

¹⁹ *Vasiljev*, *Nov podatak*, 13–15.

²⁰ *Ivanov*, *K datirovke*, 74–75.

²¹ This was probably the eponymous harbor city on the Black Sea, in the Danube delta, cf. *Berger*, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 56.

²² The full text of the *vita* has survived in fifteen manuscripts created between the 12th and the 16th centuries, for a list cf. *ibid.*, 57–58, which includes copies of *vita* excerpts, i.e., its later paraphrases (17th–19th century).

²³ Notably, the Will of Eustathios Boilas (1059) mentions, among many other books, the *Vita* of St. Niphon: *Beneshevich*, *Zaveshchtanie*, 227.16; *Lemerle*, *Cinq études*, 25.161; *Ivanov*, *Nifont*, 260.

²⁴ Cf. *Ivanov*, *Nifont*, 260, and n. 28 *infra*.

²⁵ *Analecta Hymnica Graeca* IV, 623–630. Cf. *Berger*, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 57. It should be noted that some manuscripts mention St. Niphon as the author of prayers for the salvation of souls to be judged after death, cf. *Nessleris*, *First-Person Prayers*, 100.

Shortly after it was written, the *Vita* of St. Niphon was translated into Old Slavonic. It made its way to Russia very early on and, in time, became very popular. A fragment of its text was included in the Sviatoslav Codex (1076), and the earliest manuscript of the extensive *vita* was copied in Rostov in 1219, probably from a now lost Bulgarian source.²⁶ There is also a later Russian redaction of the longer version of St. Niphon's life and a third brief one.²⁷ Finally, the *Vita* of St. Niphon was known in medieval Serbia, although its reception in this milieu could hardly rival its popularity in Russia. More specifically, we know of just one, relatively later Serbo-Slavonic copy of the extensive version. It is preserved in a miscellany from the Hilandar Monastery library compiled in 1350–1360.²⁸

The veneration of Niphon of Cyprus is also attested by his representations in art, the most emblematic among them being the one in Veljusa. Petar Miljković-Peppek noted that the bust was a highly distinctive feature of the imagery in the south parekklesion of the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza and believed that there must have been a specific reason for including this saint, which stemmed from the monastery founder's special reverence of St. Niphon. He assumed that Manuel might have been particularly impressed by the accounts of Niphon's ascetic life in Constantinople, his consecration as bishop and the descriptions of his visions.²⁹

Without challenging the view that Veljusa's founder held St. Niphon in special regard, we should bear in mind that the representation in the south parekklesion was painted just a few decades after the saint was mentioned in the menologion of the Codex Assemanius. This is a highly significant piece of information. Seen in this light, the appearance of Niphon's image at Veljusa could be interpreted as a visual testament to the saint's veneration in the Slavic milieu in the territory of Byzantine Macedonia and not just a reflection of the ktetor's devotion to his cult.³⁰

²⁶ Although the Bulgarian *vita* of St. Niphon has not survived, the fact that the saint's memory appears in several Bulgarian liturgical books is quite suggestive. Cf. the memories for 23 December collected from a large body of manuscripts available at http://www.eslavsanct.net/mod_viewdate.php?day=23&month=12; <http://menology.obdurodon.org/readFile.php?filename=F72.xml>, and *Vakareliyska*, An expanded annotated transcription, 528.

²⁷ For the versions of the *vita* in the Russian recension of Old Slavonic cf. *Ristenko*, *Materiāli*, 239–544. Cf. *Tvorogov*, *Zhitie Nifonta*; *Ivanov*, «Zhitie sv. Nifonta»; *Poletaeva*, «Kniga, glagolemaia Nifont»; *eadem*, *Vypiski*; *eadem*, *Zhitie Nifonta*.

²⁸ *Bogdanović*, *Katalog*, 180 (6p. 472), which includes an interesting warning for the reader about the *vita* contents, added on fol. 346^v: *Зри извѣстно сътворяю ѿ сен кннзе преподобнаго Нифонта, ѿ ко скъдно ползъ нмѣеть да ю прочтѣтъ трѣбъеть не цѣлаго расъждения и разъума. Яще ли же такового разъума и състроения бѣдетъ ѿкоже азъ, бѣдно ползovanje приндетъ, рекше пагъбно и брѣдно, понеже развъращѣна естъ ѿт еретниковъ и снцѣвъ раднъ вны нзмѣщѣтъ ю правнаго апостолскою тако значини – ѿ и ѿ и ѿ. On this manuscript cf. also *Gribble*, *Relationships*, 121–125, with a dating to ca. 1360 or slightly later.*

Manuscripts of the Romanian version of the *Vita* of St. Niphon, created relatively late (18th and 19th centuries), have yet to be published, cf. *Bahrim*, *Introducere*, 21.

²⁹ *Miljković-Peppek*, *Veljusa*, 208.

³⁰ *Ivanov*, «Zhitie sv. Nifonta», 502, also notes that the Veljusa image bears testament to the veneration of St. Niphon in Macedonia.

To assess the recognizability of St. Niphon's cult in Slavic environments, we would do well to consider other visual representations of the saint. Admittedly, as Petar Miljković-Pepok observed, St. Niphon was very rarely featured in the art of the Byzantine world. However, the appearance of his image at Veljusa is not as much of an exception as one might be led to believe based on the text of his monograph on the Monastery of the Virgin Eleousa. Namely, there are a few other representations of the saint that the author of that book failed to take into account.³¹ In other words, it is necessary to compile a more comprehensive iconographic dossier on St. Niphon of Cyprus to provide factual evidence for a more reliable assessment of the saint's inclusion in the Veljusa imagery.³²

Firstly, let us look at another representation also created in the territory of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. Admittedly, this example was painted almost three centuries after the Veljusa image of St. Niphon, in the period when this ecclesiastical organization was within the borders of the Serbian state. It is the representation of St. Niphon at the Church of the Holy Archangels (Metropolitan Church) in Kastoria, on the third fresco layer (1359/1360), financed by hieromonk Daniel and painted during the reigns of Simeon Palaiologos, ruler of Thessaly (1359–1370), and his son Jovan Uroš. The bust of St. Niphon was painted in the sanctuary, on the soffit of the arch separating it from the north nave of the church (Fig. 4).³³

To the best of our knowledge, no other church in the Greek ethnic space has a surviving image of St. Niphon.³⁴ Similarly, no representations of the saint appear in Byzantine illustrated manuscripts of menologia and calendars painted in monumental art³⁵ and none are mentioned in painter's manuals.³⁶

Intriguingly, a few representations of St. Niphon have survived in the art of medieval Serbia.³⁷ The earliest among them is in the sanctuary of the Virgin's Church of

³¹ The only analogy Miljković-Pepok mentions is the saint's image at Staro Nagoričino, cf. *Miljković-Pepok, Veljusa*, 208. On the image, cf. *infra*.

³² An overview of St. Niphon's iconography was compiled very recently: *Makhan'ko, Nifont*. However, this overview, which focuses on representations of St. Niphon in Russian art, fails to mention some of the important examples that will be discussed further below.

³³ Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, 28–29 (no. 74), 36, 64, εικ. 33. Cf. *LcI* 8, col. 66.

³⁴ A. Orlandos identified a saint at the Virgin's chapel in the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos (1176–1180) as St. Niphon, and the identification was accepted by some later researchers. Cf. Orlandos, *Η αρχιτεκτονική και οι βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες*, 162–163, πίν. 12, 42–43, 45α–β. Cf. *LcI* 8, col. 66; Skawran, *The Development*, 93, 179, fig. 372. Very recently, however, it was rightly established that it is a representation of St. Sampson Xenodochos, cf. *Starodubcev, Lekar i čudotvorac*, 32, n. 34; *eadem, Sveti lekari*, 151.

³⁵ *Mijović, Menolog; Ševčenko, Illustrated Manuscripts; El Menologio; Galavaris, An Eleventh Century Hexaptych; Koukiaris, Μηνολόγια και Μαρτυρολόγια*.

³⁶ *Medić, Stari slikarski priručnici II; idem, Stari srpski slikarski priručnici III*.

³⁷ Although there were memories of St. Niphon in Bulgarian liturgical books (cf. n. 26 *supra*), as far as we could determine, no representation of him has survived in Bulgarian art. Similarly, no example of his depiction in the art of the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia is known.



Fig. 4.
Kastoria, Church of the Holy Archangels,
St. Niphon

Fig. 5.
Studenica, Virgin' Church, St. Niphon
(photo: Institute for the Protection of
Cultural Monuments of Serbia, Belgrade)



Studenica (1208/1209). At Simeon Nemanja's burial church, St. Niphon was painted in the prothesis, in the second zone of the south wall, above the passage leading into the central part of the sanctuary (Fig. 5). He is shown as a bust in a medallion, like the two bishops next to him, St. Leo of Rome (?) and Babylas of Antioch.³⁸

Based on the available evidence, the next representations of St. Niphon of Cyprus appeared in Serbian art a hundred years later, in the foundations of Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321). The first image in this group is also at the Studenica Monastery, in the Church of Sts. Joachim and Anna, built in 1313/1314 and probably frescoed the following year. At the King's Church, as the chapel is commonly known, St. Niphon is on the soffit of the east arch below the dome, in one of thirteen medallions with representations of bishop saints (Fig. 6).³⁹

In the Church of St. George at Staro Nagoričino, built in 1312/1313 and frescoed in 1315–1318, a half-length figure of St. Niphon has survived as part of a very long line of bishop busts in the central part of the sanctuary, below the Communion of the Apostles and above the Officiating Bishops. The image of St. Niphon is the penultimate

³⁸ *Nikolić*, Konzervatorski natpis II, 63, 77 (cx. 3, no. 5); *Živković*, Najstarije zidno slikarstvo, 58 (no. 38–40), 116–121.

³⁹ *Millet*, La peinture III, pl. 57/4; *Babić*, The King's Church, 90, 93.



Fig. 6.
Studenica,
Church of Sts. Joachim and Anna,
St. Niphon (photo: Z. Jovanović)

Fig. 7.
Staro Nagoričino,
St. Niphon

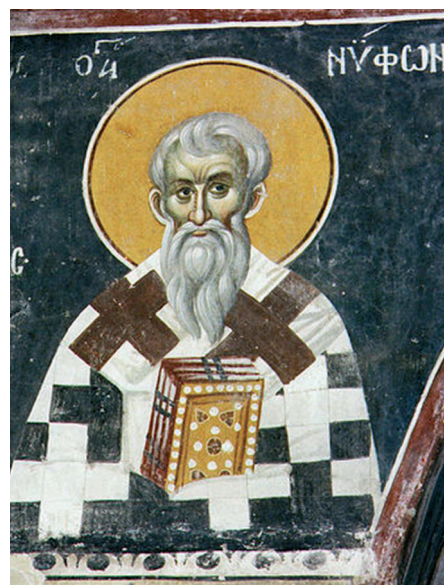


Fig. 8.
Gračanica, naos, St. Niphon
(photo: Blago Fund)



Fig. 9. Gračanica, diakonikon, St. Aberkios and St. Niphon, detail
(photo: Blago Fund)

in the group, on the north wall of the bema (Fig. 7).⁴⁰ Interestingly, beside him is the bust of Eustathios of Thessalonike, whose inclusion can be securely attributed to the painters of the church, members of the Thessalonian workshop of Michael Astrapas, who also painted the saint in some other foundations of King Milutin's.⁴¹

Two representations of St. Niphon have been preserved in the katholikon of the Gračanica Monastery, whose murals were painted around 1320. In the first, he is shown as a full-length figure on the east side of the northeast pillar supporting the dome (Fig. 8).⁴² The second image, another standing figure of St. Niphon, is in the first fresco zone on the north wall of the diakonikon, i.e., the south parekklesion, beside the representation of St. Aberkios of Hierapolis (Fig. 9).⁴³

Finally, a few decades later, a medallion with a representation of St. Niphon was painted on the arch supporting the vault in the naos of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Peć, frescoed owing to the efforts of the Serbian patriarch Joanikije

⁴⁰ Popović – Petković, *Staro Nagoričino*, 21, tab. XXII; Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, 73.

⁴¹ Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, 73; *idem*, "Signatures", 654, Fig. 6; Marković, *Kult i ikonografija*, 289–290, sl. 3.

⁴² Todić, *Gračanica*, 95 [crt. XV M–M, a) no. 5], 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 87 (no. 27), 109.



Fig. 10.
Patriarchate of Peć,
Church of the Holy
Apostles, St. Niphon
(photo: W. Taylor Hostetter)

(1346–1354).⁴⁴ Unlike the abovementioned monuments, St. Niphon was shown at the Patriarchate of Peć in monastic garb, like all other anchorites around him (Fig. 10). Obviously, the creator of this iconographic concept wanted to highlight the ascetic aspect of St. Niphon's personality and not his episcopal dignity.⁴⁵ He could have easily found grounds for such a choice in the detailed hagiographical descriptions of Niphon's ascetic life in Constantinople. Besides, his ascetic feat found its way into the titles of some manuscripts of his Greek *vita*,⁴⁶ and the title of the earliest extant manuscript of the Slavonic version expressly reports that Niphon was "called a monk."⁴⁷

The discussed variant of St. Niphon's representations was particularly widespread in Russia. Dressed as a monk, he appears on several Russian icons painted between the 17th and 19th centuries, including some with illustrations of episodes recounted in his *vita*.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Todić, Patrijarh Joanikije, sl. 10; Đurić – Ćirković – Korać, Pećka patrijaršija, 212 (V. J. Đurić); Tomeković, Les saints ermites et moines, 265.

⁴⁵ St. Niphon is not the only bishop shown as a monk on the arch of the Church of the Holy Apostles. Besides him, St. Ambrose, the famed Bishop of Milan, was also shown in monastic garb. Cf. n. 44 supra.

⁴⁶ Ristenko, Materiāli 3: Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νήφωντος ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει μὲν ἀσκήσαντος, ἐπισκόπου δὲ γενομένου Κωνσταντιανῆς τῆς κατὰ Ἀλεξάνδρειαν.

⁴⁷ Ristenko, Materiāli, 239: Житіє преподобнаго и богоноснаго отца нашего Нифонта, зовомаго мнѣха.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of St. Niphon's iconography in Russian art cf. *Makhan'ko*, Nifont. He reports (cf. *ibid.*, 262) that the earliest Russian representation of the saint has survived at the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of the Snetogorsky Monastery (1313) in Pskov. However, the securely identified figures of holy monks in the church do not include a representation of this saint, cf. Sarab'ianov, Programma. Specifically on the illustrated manuscripts of the Russian version of the *Vita* of St. Niphon cf. *Antonova*, Illiustrativnyĭ cikl.

Having touched on the two iconographic versions of St. Niphon's representations in art, as a bishop and as a monk, we will now explore the remarkably intriguing matter of the saint's "portrait" characteristics. In this regard, an outstanding source is the *Vita* of St. Niphon, which explicitly states that the saint bore a striking physical likeness to St. Paul the Apostle, as some scholars have already noted.⁴⁹ Their similar appearance is discussed in the *vita* passage that recounts St. Niphon's consecration as bishop in Alexandria. Before his appointment, Alexander, Archbishop of Alexandria, had a dream in which St. Paul appeared to him and told him to appoint as the bishop of Constantiane a man that looked like him (Paul) but was not bald. Alexander of Alexandria did as he was told. The following day, he took a good look at a picture of St. Paul to help him identify the person that bore a likeness to the renowned apostle.⁵⁰ And indeed, he soon saw Niphon, who did not know that he would be appointed a bishop that day. Alexander spoke to the archdeacon Athanasios (his future successor, who went on to become St. Athanasios the Great), asking him whether he thought Niphon looked like Paul the Apostle. Athanasios concurred, confirming, deeply impressed by a vision he had had, that Niphon was indeed worthy of leading his future flock.⁵¹ The same story appears in the Slavonic translation of the extensive *vita*.⁵² Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the physical similarity of Paul the Apostle and St. Niphon is discussed in some Russian painter's manuals (*hermeneia*). The Stroganov Patternbook (first quarter of the 17th century) notes that St. Niphon has the same face, hair and beard as Paul the Apostle but wears different clothes and is not bald.⁵³ The hagiographical testimony of the two saints' physical likeness should undoubtedly be seen in light of the importance that St. Paul had in Niphon's life. The famed apostle was, in a way, one of Niphon's helpers in his

⁴⁹ *Miljković-Pepek*, Veljusa, 207, 209–210.

⁵⁰ *Ristenko*, *Materiāli*, 169.14–28: ... καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ νυκτὶ βλέπει ἄνδρα τινα τίμιον λέγοντα αὐτῷ· Τίνα ζητεῖς ποιῆσαι ἐπίσκοπον τῇ πόλει Κωνσταντιανῇ;

Ὁ δὲ ἔφη· Ἐν τῷ μὴ εἰδέναι με τίς περίεστιν ἄγιος, δέομαι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν ἄξιον φανερώσαι.

Λέγει αὐτῷ πάλιν ἐκεῖνος· Ἐν τούτῳ δεδήλωκέν σοι ὁ Πατήρ τῶν ὄλων Θεὸς τὸν ἄξιον, εἰ καὶ πρὸ μικρὸν πεφανέρωται· γενοῦ οὖν αὖριον ἔτοιμος μετὰ τοῦ κλήρου ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὅποιον ἂν ἴδῃς ὁμοιοῦντα τῇ ιδέα μου πάρεξ τῆς φαλάκρας, τοῦτον καὶ μὴ θέλοντα ἀπόδος τῇ ποιμνῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Τῇ ἐπαύριον οὖν ἐν ἔτοιμασίᾳ γενόμενος ὁ πατριάρχης ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐσκόπει ἔγγιστα αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐκτύπωσιν Παύλου τοῦ ἀποστόλου, ἑώρα δὲ καὶ τοὺς εἰσιόντας ἐν τῷ ναῷ, εἰ τίνα θεάσθαι ὁμοιοῦντα τῇ εἰκόνι· τῷ τοιοῦτῳ σχήματι γὰρ ἦν ὁ ὀφθεις αὐτῷ κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 170.2–12: Ὡς οὖν εὐσήλωμεν ἔνδον, ἔπηξεν ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος τὸ βλέμμα αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν δίκαιον, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἑώρα τὸν δίκαιον, ποτὲ δὲ τοῦ ἀποστόλου τὸ εἰκόνημα, καὶ ἐν τούτοις θεωρῶν, σφόδρα ἐξενίζετο, καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀρχιδιακόνῳ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ οἶς· Βλέπε, Ἀθανάσιε, τί ὅμοιοι καθαράς ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος Παύλου τοῦ μακαρίου τὸ εἰκόνημα.

Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἀρχιδιάκονος· Φύσει, δέσποτα, εἰκάζει, καὶ φαίνεται μοι ἄξιός ἐστιν καὶ ποιμαίνειν τὰ πρόβατα τοῦ Χριστοῦ· ὅρα γὰρ ἀγγέλους Θεοῦ συνοδεύοντας αὐτῷ καὶ ὁμιλοῦντας· ἄλλ' ὅτι βλέπω καὶ στέφανον ἐκ λίθων τίμιων ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐδὲν ὑπολείπεται τοῦ ἐν ἁγίου Παύλου.

A very similar episode was included in the shorter version of the *vita*, cf. *ibid.*, 209–210.

⁵² *Ristenko*, *Materiāli*, 364–365.

⁵³ ЛНЦЕМ I БРАДОЮ I ВЛАСКИ ПОДОБЕНЪ ПАВЛАС АП(О)С(ТО)ЛАС, РАЗЕВЪ РИЗЫ И НЕ ПЛЪШЕНЪ, cf. Podlinnik *ikonopisnyĭ*, 74. The illustrated part of the pattern book does not include a drawing of St. Niphon.

ascetic feat and a herald of his future service as bishop. Namely, St. Paul appeared to him in a dream, telling him that he would be appointed the head of the Church of Constantinople, which Niphon avoided by fleeing the capital.⁵⁴ As is well known, the physiognomy of Paul the Apostle was standardized early in Eastern Christian art and did not change much over the following centuries. He was usually shown with a high forehead or more or less bald, with brown hair and a relatively short, usually pointed beard, sometimes peppered with white.⁵⁵ Of all representations of St. Niphon listed above, the two images at Studenica are the best match for the typological features of St. Paul's representations. In the older of the two, the one at the Virgin's Church, their likeness is even reflected in the fact that, contradicting the description in the *vita*, Niphon is shown bald, with no more than a few hairs above the ears and on the top of the head, with only his beard slightly longer than on standard representations of Paul the Apostle. St. Niphon's image at the King's Church is not in the best state of repair, and his facial features are difficult to discern. Regardless, it is certain that his sparse hair was also dark, like Paul's, but his beard was slightly whiter than the famed apostle's. The painter of Niphon's image in the Church of Sts. Joachim and Anna seems to have taken into account the information in his *vita* and was careful not to make him entirely bald by painting a lock of hair on the high forehead. The second group of examples includes representations in which St. Niphon was shown with a physiognomy essentially similar to Paul's but with white hair and beard. These are Niphon's images at Veljusa⁵⁶ and Gračanica (naos). Although St. Niphon is not bald at Staro Nagoričino, Gračanica (south parekklesion) and the Holy Apostles in Peć, it is clear that this did not reflect the information provided in his *vita* because, in all three cases, the saint's physiognomy – the shape and length of the beard, i.e., their depiction as white-haired aging men – departs from St. Paul's "portrait" characteristics.⁵⁷ Similarly, at Kastoria, St. Niphon was depicted with dark, graying hair and beard, but this representation was clearly not modeled on images of St. Paul because the shape of Niphon's broad bifurcated beard does not match Paul's usual iconography.

⁵⁴ Ristenko, *Materiāli*, 167–169.

⁵⁵ Lechner, Paulus. Cf. Winkelmann, *Zu einem Malerbuch*, 111, 119–121; *Medić*, *Stari slikarski priručnici III*, 384/385; *Dagron*, *Décrire et peindre*, 155–156.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Miljković-Pepel*, Veljusa, 207.

⁵⁷ Admittedly, the appearance of St. Niphon in the second Gračanica image might have been the result of confusion. As noted above (cf. n. 43 supra), in the south parekklesion of the church, he was placed beside Aberkios of Hierapolis. Strikingly, in this depiction, St. Aberkios' physiognomy is very similar to St. Niphon's appearance in the first image at Gračanica, the one in the naos. This suggests that the inscriptions beside the images of St. Niphon and Aberkios in the diakonikon might have been mixed up. To support this hypothesis, we might add that St. Aberkios was usually painted just like St. Niphon was shown in the south parekklesion at Gračanica – an elderly man with short, often curly hair and a shorter beard. This is attested by the depictions of the bishop of Hierapolis in the Menologion of Basil II, the katholikon of the Daphni Monastery, the King's Church at Studenica, etc. On Aberkios' iconography cf. *Vinogradov et al.*, *Averkii*, 128. The guidelines for painting St. Aberkios in the Hermeneia by Dionysios of Fourna are very terse: "old, with a large beard," cf. *Medić*, *Stari slikarski priručnici III*, 398/399.

It follows from this brief overview of the iconography of St. Niphon's listed images that there was no single iconographic pattern for painting this saint. The hagiographical description of his physical appearance – his likeness to St. Paul – seems to have been taken into account very rarely, and even then, it was not fully implemented. On the other hand, some Russian artists seem to have been much more mindful of this. Namely, Russian representations of St. Niphon usually do not show him as white-haired and old but as middle-aged, with dark hair and beard. Furthermore, in some depictions, he was represented with very similar facial features as St. Paul's but not bald – in other words, just like his *vita* describes him and the Stroganov Pattern-book advises. A notable example is his image in the first miniature (fol. 1) in the illustrated manuscript of the *Vita* of St. Niphon from the third quarter of the 16th century in the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (no. 34.6.61).⁵⁸

* * *

This review of medieval representations of St. Niphon of Cyprus shows that his image at Veljusa is not as much of an exception as Petar Miljković-Pepek believed. That, in turn, suggests that his view that St. Niphon was the patron saint of the south parekklesion in the katholikon must be taken with a healthy dose of caution. In addition to the iconographic analogies for the saint's image and the lack of any confirmation in the sources,⁵⁹ caution is advised because the representation of St. Niphon is not the most prominent in the chapel's iconographic program. Its imagery includes a full-length figure of another saint, St. Panteleimon, which will be discussed below, but a more important place than the position assigned to the bust of St. Niphon was given to the bishop shown in the niche on the eastern wall (Fig. 11).

⁵⁸ For a description of the miniature cf. *Antonova*, *Illüstrativnyĭ cikl*, 64. For a reproduction cf. *Makhanko*, *Nifont*, fig. on p. 265. It should be noted that, following the above-mentioned practice of painting St. Niphon as a monk, he was often shown in Russian art with a koukoulion on his head.

⁵⁹ Miljković-Pepek noted that there was no mention of the parekklesion's dedication to St. Niphon in the written sources about the monastery but assumed that it might have been discussed in the lost part of the monastery's typikon (for the content of the typikon cf. *Miljković-Pepek*, *Veljusa*, 258–272; *Eleousa: Rule of Manuel*). In line with this view, he was inclined to reject the historical authenticity of the present dedication of the chapel to the Holy Savior, cf. *Miljković-Pepek*, *Veljusa*, 207, 208.

For our part, we might add that the only written indication of the special veneration of St. Niphon at Veljusa – admittedly, not entirely explicit – might have been the fact that two monks that lived in the monastery bore the name Niphon: the ecclesiarch and *oikonomos* whose signatures are at the end of the monastery's inventory, cf. *Miljković-Pepek*, *Veljusa*, 289, 290; *Eleousa Inv.*, 1674. This document, which, among other things, lists the monastery icons and books, contains no indication of the special veneration of St. Niphon. This is even more suggestive because the mentioned *brebion* includes valuable testimonies on the ktetor's fondness for other saints. Namely, among the 35 listed icons, some can be directly associated with Manuel of Strumitza with a fair degree of certainty, first and foremost, the icon of Sts. Manuel, Sabel and Ismael (cf. *Miljković-Pepek*, *Veljusa*, 286; *Eleousa Inv.*, 1671), which Vojislav J. Đurić believed to have been commissioned by the ktetor given that the first of these three Persian martyrs was his namesake and that they were martyred in Chalcedon, a city not far from the Monastery of St. Auxentios, where Manuel lived as a monk before he came to Macedonia, cf. *Đurić*, *Fresques*, 119; *idem*, *Vizantijske freske*, 11. Cf. also *Miljković-Pepek*, *Novi podaci*, 223. Furthermore, the inventory reports that an icon of the patron of this monastery in Bithynia, St. Auxentios, stood on the original altar barrier of the Veljusa katholikon, cf. *Miljković-Pepek*, *Novi podaci*, 224; *idem*, *Veljusa*, 286, n. 601; *Eleousa Inv.*, 1671.



Fig. 11. Veljusa, south parekklesion,
unidentified bishop saint



Fig. 12. Veljusa, south parekklesion,
St. Panteleimon

Sadly, not a trace of the inscription with his name has survived next to the image of this saint. He wears episcopal vestments and blesses with one, partially damaged, hand, and holds a codex with ornate covers in his other, covered hand. The saint has a long face framed by a white, pointed beard and white hair. Miljković-Peppek identified him as Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria (314–328), drawing on the abovementioned report in the *Vita* of St. Niphon that Alexander of Alexandria chose him to serve as the bishop of Constantiane.⁶⁰ Other scholars have been much more cautious in identifying this saint. In his review of the paintings in the Veljusa chapel, Vojislav J. Đurić describes this image as an unidentified saint,⁶¹ as does Anna Zakharova.⁶² An additional argument against the claim that he is Alexander of Alexandria is that this hierarch was very rarely painted in Eastern Christian art and almost exclusively appeared in some depictions of the First Ecumenical Council, which he attended.⁶³ Finally, since the physiognomy of the saint is too generic to secure a definitive identification, it seems most reasonable to let the matter rest.

⁶⁰ Miljković-Peppek, Veljusa, 209–210.

⁶¹ Đurić, Fresques, 114.

⁶² Zaharova, The murals, 40.

⁶³ Dečanske freske, 38; *Gracianskii – Lukovnikova*, Aleksandr; *Medić*, Stari slikarski priručnici III, 434/435.

* * *

The representation of another saint, located opposite the bust of St. Niphon, is no less intriguing and suggestive for assessing the overall concept of the chapel's program and determining its possible purpose. Namely, a full-length figure of St. Panteleimon (Fig. 12) stands on the northern side of the western wall, beside the passage leading from the chapel into the main church.⁶⁴ St. Panteleimon's image at Veljusa has all the distinctive iconographic features of this healer saint. He is a beardless youth, with short, thick, curly hair, dressed in a white tunic with elaborate embroidery on an ochre background and a blue-purple cloak over it. In his left hand, he holds a half-open box with four vials and, with his right hand, points toward the box with medical supplies.⁶⁵

St. Panteleimon, a megalomartyr from Nicomedia in Bithynia, lived during the reign of Emperor Maximian (250–310). His name appears in the Synaxarion of the Great Church in the rubric for 27 July.⁶⁶ Panteleimon was the son of a wealthy pagan called Eustorgius of Nicomedia and was taught Christianity by his Christian mother Eubula. While studying medicine with the distinguished doctor Euphrosinos, he became the physician of Emperor Galerius (258–311). He was baptized by the presbyter Hermolaos, who had introduced him to Christ's faith. Panteleimon openly confessed his faith and was martyred. His relics were revered at the site of his martyrdom, Nicomedia, and were later translated to Constantinople, where several churches and monasteries were built in his honor. The earliest representation of St. Panteleimon in the visual arts dates to the 5th or 6th century and is found on a healing scene carved onto a terracotta tile discovered in North Africa.⁶⁷ Later on, in his numerous depictions, widespread across all artistic media, he was usually shown young and beardless, with thick curly hair, most commonly in a tunic and cloak and often with a ribbon around his neck falling down the front. He routinely has the attributes of his calling and holds a lancet or scalpel in one hand and a box with medical tools in the other. Sometimes, he has a cross in one of his hands, the sign of his martyrdom, or a scroll.⁶⁸

Petar Miljković-Peppek associated the inclusion of the figure of St. Panteleimon in the south chapel at Veljusa with his premise about the chapel's dedication to St. Niphon and his attempt to find inspiration for almost the entire program in the text of the saint's *vita*. In the case of St. Panteleimon's image, this author tried to explain his inclusion by hagiographical reports of Niphon's care of the sick, especially once

⁶⁴ *Miljković-Peppek*, Veljusa, 210, cx. VII, T. XV, sl. 68; *Starodubcev*, Sveti lekari, 77.

⁶⁵ On medical instruments in representations of holy physicians cf. *Pajić*, Predstave medicinskih instrumenata; *Starodubcev*, Sveti lekari, passim.

⁶⁶ Syn CP, 847.11–848.30; *Starodubcev*, Sveti lekari, 52–86.

⁶⁷ *Gerstel*, Tiles of Nicomedia, 176–177. For the earliest known representation of St. Panteleimon in wall painting, very recently dated to the early 7th century, cf. *Konstantellou*, The earlier wall paintings, 113–115, Pl. XIII/5, XIV/8.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Starodubcev*, Sveti lekari, 52–86.

he became the bishop of Constantiane, whose impoverished and ailing citizens he anointed with oil and nursed to health, and with the alleged miraculous powers of Niphon's relics, believed to have healed many incurable diseases after his death.⁶⁹

We would argue that this interpretation of St. Panteleimon's image is unacceptable. The history of his cult, briefly outlined above, makes it clear that this was one of the most popular healer saints, whose representations were almost routinely included in the imagery of Byzantine churches by the time Veljusa was frescoed for the first time. Therefore, we see no reason whatsoever to associate the inclusion of the famed holy physician's figure with the details recounted in the *Vita* of St. Niphon. If there were indeed some special reasons for including his image in the thematic repertoire of the south parekklesion, however, they should perhaps be sought in the fact that holy unmercenaries were believed to possess protective or apotropaic powers. The Church also celebrates them as wonderworkers who fought against evil and demons.⁷⁰ In other words, healer saints were highly venerated in the Byzantine world and considered personal protectors. Furthermore, they were often shown in churches as the ktetor's intercessors in prayer.⁷¹ This allows us to consider the possibility that St. Panteleimon might have been included in the imagery of the Veljusa church at the initiative of the founder, who might have seen him as a protector during his lifetime or an intercessor with God when the moment of absolution and salvation drew near. Such reasoning would have been fully in line with the concept of the overall program of the church and its pronounced eschatological-soteriological character.

In any case, the prominent position and format of St. Panteleimon's image speak of its considerable importance in the ensemble. Moreover, we should not rule out the possibility that this was the figure of the saint to whom the south parekklesion of the Veljusa katholikon was dedicated.

* * *

Unlike the previously discussed representations, the programmatic place and meaning of the image in the dome does not require a reexamination on this occasion because it has already been explained in scholarship. It is a bust of Christ Emmanuel, set in a medallion on a green background and framed by geometric and floral ornaments (Fig. 13).⁷² Christ is shown frontally, with a scroll in his left hand and blessing with his right. He is dressed in a white chiton and dark-brown himation. As is well known, the image of young Christ highlights the reality of his incarnation and redemptive sacrifice. Hence scholars have insisted on a link between Christ Emmanuel in the dome of the chapel with the images featured in the other two domes of the church – the bust of Christ Pantokrator in the naos and Christ the Ancient of

⁶⁹ *Miljković-Peppek*, Veljusa, 210.

⁷⁰ *Radujko*, Koporin, 230; *Đurić*, Les conceptions, 56–62.

⁷¹ *Gerstel*, Tiles of Nicomedia, 178–179.

⁷² *Miljković-Peppek*, Veljusa, 193, sh. V, sl. 63.



Fig. 13.
Veljusa,
south parekklesion,
Christ Emmanuel

Days, the painting that probably graced the hemisphere of the narthex dome. The programmatic interconnectedness between these three images of Christ – for which numerous parallels can easily be found in Middle Byzantine art and later – suggests that the creator of this solution wanted to express several aspects of Jesus Christ by iconographic means. While Christ Emmanuel alludes to the First Coming and the beginning of the history of salvation, the images of Christ Pantokrator and the Ancient of Days suggest the eternal aspect of divine existence.⁷³

* * *

An unusual scene in the south chapel has also attracted scholarly attention. A depiction of the Theophany or a Vision of Christ in Glory (Fig. 14–16) is on the eastern wall, in the apse. The central part of the composition is occupied by a blue-gray darkened oval mandorla with the Christ Pantokrator seated on thin horizontal lines of a rainbow.⁷⁴ With his right hand raised high, Christ blesses and, in his left, holds a rolled-up scroll. The mandorla is supported by two archangels – probably the two most famous ones, Michael and Gabriel – standing upright and wearing long white tunics with jewel-encrusted imperial *loroi*.⁷⁵

⁷³ *Miljković-Pepel*, Veljusa, 191–196; *Gkioles*, Ο βυζαντινός τρούλλος, 82–83; *Dimitrova*, The Church of the Holy Virgin, 19; *Lidov*, Obrazy Khrista, 155–177; *idem*, Rospisi monastyrja Akhtala, 54–61; *Zakharova*, The murals, 39.

⁷⁴ On the mandorla in Byzantine art cf. *Todorova*, Visualizing the Divine Mandorla, 287–296.

⁷⁵ On representing archangels in imperial costumes cf. *Parani*, Reconstructing the Reality of Images, 42–50.



Fig. 14. Veljusa, south parekklesion, Christ in Glory

Researchers have proposed different interpretations of the image in the chapel's apse. Vojislav J. Đurić identified it as the Synaxis of the Archangels, an iconographic theme that appears in several 14th-century monuments: the monasteries of Žiča, Dečani and Mateič and an engraving in the Cetinje Octoechos from the late 15th



Fig. 15. Veljusa, south parekklesion, Christ in Glory, detail



Fig. 16. Veljusa, south parekklesion, Christ in Glory, detail

century. Admittedly, Đurić noted that, unlike other representations of the Synaxis of the Archangels, which usually show a youthful Christ, his image at Veljusa matches his usual portrayal in Ascension scenes.⁷⁶ The same iconographic detail led Gordana Babić to disagree with Đurić's view. She pointed out that the Synaxis of the Archangels usually includes a bust of Christ Emmanuel in a medallion carried by archangels and not Christ Pantokrator seated on a rainbow, blessing and holding a scroll, like at Veljusa.⁷⁷ She also noted that the earliest representations of the Synaxis of the Archangels, from the 11th and 12th centuries, were quite different from 14th-century ones, citing the miniature in the Menologion of Basil II (Vat. gr. 1613, fol. 168), from the late 10th or early 11th century, illustrating 8 November, the feast day of the Synaxis of the Archangels. The miniature includes a frontal figure of Michael the Archangel vanquishing demons and holding a labarum with the Trisagion Prayer written on it. In other words, Christ does not appear in this composition at all.⁷⁸ In another Vatican manuscript (Vat. gr. 1156, fol. 266 r.), we find an illustration for the same date but with a depiction of the

⁷⁶ Đurić, *Fresques*, 117–118. Victor N. Lazarev accepted this interpretation, cf. *Lazarev, Zhivopis XI–XII vekov*, 132.

⁷⁷ Babić, *Les chapelles*, 101.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Cf. *El Menologio*, 168.

Miracle at Chonae titled the Synaxis of the Archangels.⁷⁹ In view of its chronological proximity to these two miniatures, Gordana Babić concluded that the Veljusa composition did not represent the Synaxis of the Archangels, proposing that this was a vision of Christ in Glory shown in a mandorla carried by angels.⁸⁰

Petar Miljković-Peppek partially agreed with Gordana Babić's interpretation, concurring that this was a composition of the Theophany. However, he insisted on narrowing down the possible subjects of the composition in question. As noted above, he thought that it represented the Vision of St. Niphon. In other words, he argued that the image in the chapel apse should be seen in the programmatic context dictated by the representation of this saint, whom he believed to be the patron of the chapel. Therefore, he tried to find the underpinnings for the iconography of the composition in the apse in hagiographical texts on this saint. More specifically, he had in mind St. Niphon's vision in which Christ appeared to him and informed him that he would die in three days.⁸¹

Tempting as this interpretation is, it cannot be accepted without reservations. First of all, caution is advised here because, iconographically, it is impossible to establish a firm enough link between the text and the image. According to the account of the vision he had three days before he died, St. Niphon saw a fiery, ornate throne surrounded by rays of light and countless bodiless powers. In fact, in this vision, Niphon never saw Christ but, a bit later, heard his voice from the throne.⁸² Therefore, this miraculous sight does not match the image in the apse, in which Christ sits not on a throne but in a mandorla held by two archangels rather than surrounded by many bodiless powers – by no means trifling differences. Admittedly, Michael the Archangel does later appear in Niphon's vision as his guide through heaven,⁸³ but this is still insufficient evidence to accept Miljković-Peppek's identification of the scene. Neither do the opening lines of Niphon's rather lengthy vision of the Last Judgment match the iconography of the Veljusa image. They recount that the Holy Cross, carried by angels, appeared in the sky and Christ walked in front of it. Then it tells that Christ appeared in the clouds, again on a fiery throne (ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν, καθήμενος ἐπὶ θρόνου φλογεροῦ καὶ ἐπηρμένου); later on, the “Great Judge” sits

⁷⁹ Babić, *Les chapelles*, 101, fig. 65. Cf. *Duić-Serdar*, *Ilustracije*, 37, 78–79. For the iconography of the Synaxis of the Archangels and its evolution cf. *Gabelić*, *Ciklus arhandela*, 54–58.

⁸⁰ Babić, *Les chapelles*, 104.

⁸¹ *Miljković-Peppek*, *Veljusa*, 209.

⁸² *Ristenko*, *Materiāli*, 178.18–29: ...ὁρῶ ἑμαυτὸν ὡς ὅτι εἰσῆλθον πρὸς βασιλεία εὐπρεπῆ καὶ ὠραία σφόδρα ἐν οἷς ἦν θρόνος πυρὸς φοβερὸς καὶ ἀέρι ἐστηριγμένος καὶ σοφία πολλὴ ἐκκέχυτο ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ θεῖον αἴλον κρονηδὸν περιίπτατο αὐτῷ μαρμαριγαί τε καὶ λαμπυρόνια διεδίδοντο ἐξ αὐτοῦ εἰς τοὺς κύκλῳ ἐστῶτας, στέμματα βασιλικά καὶ χριστότης μεστὰ πολυπλασίως περιῆσαν αὐτῷ, καὶ δόξα Κυρίου ὡς ἀπαύγασμα δόξης· χαρακτήρ δέ τις ἀφραστός ἐπαναπέπαιτο ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ ἐκείνῳ ἐξ οὗ ἔσταζεν εὐωδίας γλυκασμὸς πολυποίκιλος, ἧτις καὶ διέτρεφεν τὰς οὐρανίους δυνάμεις· χίλια γὰρ χιλιάδες παρειστήκεισαν αὐτῷ, καὶ μύριαι μυριάδες ἐλειτούργουν αὐτῷ· Niphon then heard a voice coming from the throne, i.e., Christ's words to Michael the Archangel, cf. n. 83 infra.

⁸³ *Ristenko*, *Materiāli*, 178–179.

on the ever-ready throne (Hetoimasia) [ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς ἐτοιμασίας].⁸⁴ The Last Judgment vision does not offer adequate grounds to identify it as the textual source that inspired the theophanic image in the apse of the south parekklesion.⁸⁵ Finally, none of the descriptions of Jesus Christ in Niphon's remaining visions matches his appearance in the Veljusa fresco.⁸⁶

Given the lack of alignment between the visions described in the *Vita* of St. Niphon and the iconography of the scene in the apse of the south parekklesion, we must remain cautious of positing a direct link between them. Admittedly, the possibility that one of St. Niphon's visions was shown at Veljusa cannot be completely ruled out, especially because his bust was painted next to this composition, but it could be unreservedly accepted only assuming that the painter did not think it necessary to follow the textual source in all of its characteristic details. Of course, such an approach to identifying the iconographic theme would be methodologically unsound. In other words, in the absence of specific similarities with the corresponding passage in the *Vita* of St. Niphon, there is no reason to identify the image in the south parekklesion of the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza any differently than many other scenes known as Christ in Glory (*Maiestas Domini*).

Representations of Christ in Glory testify to his divine nature and remind the viewer of the Second Coming.⁸⁷ The composition combines elements from different apocalyptic and prophetic visions in which Christ is represented as one of his iconographic types, as Emmanuel, Pantokrator or the Ancient of Days. To illustrate such a theme, Byzantine artists borrowed models from various iconographic representations of the Theophany, mostly from the iconography of the central episode in the Ascension composition or depictions of the Last Judgment.⁸⁸ Images of the Last Judgment appeared in the Early Byzantine period, but they were usually shown symbolically. Their more complex form developed later, in the 10th century, when it became very popular.⁸⁹ Biblical visions of God received their iconographic

⁸⁴ *Marinis*, *The Vision*, 213.

⁸⁵ It should be noted that the Vision of the Last Judgment might not have existed in the earliest versions of the *Vita* of St. Niphon, those from the 11th century, because it does not appear in Slavonic translations, cf. *Ivanov*, *Nifon*, 259. In other words, it is by no means certain that the excerpt in question was included in the version that Manuel of Strumitza might have been familiar with.

⁸⁶ On visions in the *Vita* of St. Niphon cf. also *Timotin*, *Visions*, 289–291; *Cupane*, *The Heavenly City*, 58. Suggestively, the excerpt recounting St. Niphon's deathbed vision does not specify in which form the Savior appeared to the saint, stating only that Niphon and others who were present felt a pleasant scent and heard the voice of God, cf. *Ristenko*, *Materiiali*, 184.35–185.1–13.

⁸⁷ On representations of Christ in Glory cf. *Van der Meer*, *Maiestas Domini*; *Ihm*, *Die Programme*; *Woodfin*, *Maiestas Domini*, 44–53.

⁸⁸ The feast of the Ascension probably began to be celebrated separately between 380 and 430 AD, cf. *Dewald*, *The Iconography of the Ascension*, 277–319. The depiction of the Second Coming (*Parousia*) is rooted in sections of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 24, and Mt. 25:31–34).

⁸⁹ *Millet*, *La Dalmatique du Vatican*; *Brenk*, *Die Anfänge*, 106–126; *Angheben*, *Les Jugements derniers*, 105–134; *Jolivet-Lévy*, *La Cappadoce médiévale*, 270–276; *Ševčenko*, *Images of the Second Coming*, 250–272; *Meyer*, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, 71–86.

interpretations in the pre-Iconoclast period, and so images of Christ in Glory appeared on frescoes and mosaics already in the Early Byzantine period. The earliest surviving representation is in the Church of Hosios David at the Latomos Monastery in Thessalonike and probably dates from the mid-5th century. The apsidal mosaic features a youthful Christ seated on a rainbow in a bright mandorla. He holds an unrolled scroll in one of his hands and blesses with the other. The symbols of the four evangelists carry the mandorla. The scene takes place in a craggy landscape, with the witnesses of the event standing in it. This is most likely the vision of Ezekiel the Prophet (Ezek. 1:4–28).⁹⁰ While the mosaic at Hosios David depicts Christ as a young man, in one of the earliest surviving icons at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, from the 5th or 6th century, Christ in Glory is shown as white-haired and old. Christ the Ancient of Days sits on a rainbow, blessing with one hand and holding a Gospel book in the other. The mandorla surrounding him is spotted with stars and carried by four cherubim. The inscription around the icon names its donor, a man called Philochristos, who directly pleads with his savior, asking "for salvation and pardon of the sins of your servant."⁹¹

With the triumph of the Iconophiles, theophanic visions of various kinds were quite commonly shown in apses of churches from the 9th to the 11th centuries and were especially widespread – but not limited to – the Empire's eastern provinces.⁹² In this period, the image of Christ in Glory appeared in several forms. One of the most common examples was a concise version of the Last Judgment, which usually combined the Second Coming and Judgment Day and included the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist flanking the enthroned Christ, with other bodiless powers beside him.⁹³

Christ in Glory also appeared in the imagery of churches in Constantinople. From drawings made by Cornelius Loos in the 18th century, we learn that the eastern part of the ceiling of the south gallery at Hagia Sophia had a mosaic of Christ Pantokrator carried by cherubim, seraphim and ophanim. The entire scene was framed by a rainbow-colored frieze.⁹⁴

Another depiction of Christ in Glory was painted in the apse of a church in Constantinople. According to a preserved epigram by the 10th-century Byzantine poet John Geometres, dedicated to the katholikon of the Studite Monastery in Constantinople, the apse of this church contained a representation of the enthroned

⁹⁰ Mathews, *The clash of Gods*, 114–115; *Pentcheva*, *Imagined Images*, 139–153.

⁹¹ *Holy Image*, *Hallowed Ground*, 46–47.

⁹² *Lafontaine-Dosogne*, *Théophanies*, 135–144; *Jolivet-Lévy*, *Les églises*, passim; *Zakharova*, *Formirovanie*, 263–265.

⁹³ *Davidov Temerinski*, *Ciklus Strašnog suda*, 193.

⁹⁴ The scene was probably still visible in the 19th century, judging by the drawings of the Fossati brothers. Cyril Mango dated this image to the late 9th or early 10th century, cf. *Mango*, *Materials*, 29–35; *Woodfin*, *A Majestas Domini*, 48–49. On the hierarchy of the bodiless powers, cf. *Gabelić*, *Ciklus ar-handela*, 17–20.

Christ flanked by the Mother of God and John the Forerunner. Although the church is believed to have been built in 450, the mosaic in the apse mentioned by the poet was made in the 9th century, after the victory of the Iconophiles. André Grabar noted that the iconographic theme of the vision of God was closely associated with the triumph over Iconoclasm, illustrated by a picture reflecting the Iconophile emphasis on visions as proof of God's visibility.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, there are few surviving monumental images of Christ in Glory that match the iconography of the one in the south chapel at Veljusa. Hence scholars tended to look for parallels in miniatures in manuscripts.⁹⁶

For instance, on a miniature from the tetraevangelion in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (Bibl. Laur. Plut. VI 23, fol. 34v), Christ Pantokrator blesses and holds a scroll while sitting on a rainbow. This image draws on the text of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 24, 30). In this case, the vision precedes the Last Judgment because God does not appear in it as a judge seated on a throne.⁹⁷ Several other miniatures of Christ in Glory have been mentioned in connection with the Veljusa image.⁹⁸ The iconographic type of the Savior they employ is almost always the same or very similar: usually, it is the Pantokrator seated on a rainbow surrounded by bodiless powers. Other details can vary, such as the number of heavenly powers, their garments and the presence of the prophets or the Mother of God and John the Forerunner.

And yet, none of the known analogies corresponds closely enough to the iconography of the image in the south chapel at Veljusa. Unlike them, a chronologically close comparative example that has so far remained unnoticed is quite a good match: the miniature in the manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus from St. Panteleimon's Monastery on Mount Athos (Cod. 6, fol. 5v, 11th century). This is, in fact, an illustration of St. Gregory's Second Easter Homily, in which he touches on the Vision of Habakkuk. The headpiece at the beginning of the text shows, on a golden background, a mandorla with Christ seated on a rainbow represented by two golden lines. He holds a scroll in one hand and raises the other in a blessing gesture. The mandorla is held by two angels dressed in imperial costumes with scepters in their hands. Behind the mandorla, the heads of four more angels are visible, and they, unlike the two in the foreground, wear chitons and himations. The composition is framed by a border filled with floral motifs. Outside the headpiece, on the left margin, Habakkuk stands in front of an edifice, facing Christ in Glory and raising his left arm toward his face (Fig. 17).⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Grabar, *L'iconoclasm*, 242–244.

⁹⁶ Babić, *Les chapelles*, 101–105; *Miljković-Pepok*, Veljusa, 205–206.

⁹⁷ Babić, *Les chapelles*, 104, fig. 68; *Miljković-Pepok*, Veljusa, 206. For the dating of the manuscript to ca. 1100 cf. *Velmans*, *Le Tétraévangile*, 12–13.

⁹⁸ Cf. n. 97 *supra*.

⁹⁹ *Galavaris*, *Illustrations*, 209, fig. 138; *The Treasures II*, 353, fig. 297; *Miljković*, *L'illustration*, 108, fig. 4; *Lukovnikova*, *Obraz Hrista-Angela*, 70.



Fig. 17. Mount Athos, St. Panteleimon Monastery, manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, cod. 6, fol. 5v (after Treasures of Mount Athos)

The iconography of the miniature from St. Panteleimon's and the appearance of the Veljusa fresco are quite congruent. In both cases, Christ was shown in the same iconographic form, the only difference being that, in the Athonite manuscript, his head and body face right. More importantly, two archangels in imperial costumes flank the mandorla in both examples.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, the miniature from the manuscript kept at St. Panteleimon's Monastery is the closest – albeit not an identical – analogy for the image in the apse of the south parekklesion at Veljusa. That, however, is not to be taken as grounds to infer that the Second Easter Homily by Gregory of Nazianzus was illustrated

¹⁰⁰ The two archangels holding Christ's mandorla and the heads of the two angels peeking out behind it were also represented in the Paris Gregory (Coislin 239, fo. 6r). There, however, Jesus Christ was shown as Emmanuel, cf. Galavaris, *Illustrations*, fig. 181; *Miljković*, *L'illustration*, 108. *Lukovnikova*, *Obraz Hrista-Angela*, 70. The prominent position of the two archangels reminds one of the place in Habakkuk's Vision in the Septuagint (3, 2), which mentions the Lord between two living beings, which some Christian interpreters identified as angels (cf. *Bucur*, ἐν μέσῳ δύο ζώων γνωσθήσῃ). However, it should be noted that the two mentioned miniatures show the heads of the remaining angels, behind the mandorla. On the other hand, some other representations of Habakkuk's Vision include just two angels but dressed in chitons and himations, cf. *ibid.*, 199, fig. 7.1.

at the foundation of Manuel of Strumitza. It seems most reasonable to conclude that Christ in Glory was depicted at Veljusa without insisting on a specific textual source, as much as this identification might seem too general. The first and foremost reason for our reticence is the fact that illustrations of this homily in Byzantine art were not iconographically standardized. In the earliest known example, a miniature in the 9th-century manuscript from the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (Cod. Gr 510, fol. 285r), Habakkuk stands on the right and points to the vision of a young angelic creature surrounded by the rays of the mandorla and the Hosts of Heaven. Gregory of Nazianzus stands beside Habakkuk and gestures in wonder.¹⁰¹ In line with the text, Christ was also shown as an angel in some later examples of the same iconographic theme.¹⁰²

* * *

In the south parekklesion of the Virgin's Church in Veljusa, the earliest known image of St. Niphon, bishop of the city of Constantiane in Cyprus, has survived. The inclusion of this saint in the concise program of the chapel bears evidence to the early emergence and strength of his cult in this area. At the same time, we cannot rule out the possibility that his inclusion in the chapel was a sign of the special veneration the monastery's founder, Manuel of Strumitza, had for St. Niphon. In later periods, St. Niphon was shown almost exclusively in Serbian and Russian art. In an attempt to contextualize his bust at Veljusa, examples created in the territory of medieval Serbia are particularly important – the representations of St. Niphon at the Virgin's Church of Studenica, the King's Church in the complex of the same monastery, the *katholika* of Staro Nagoričino and Gračanica, and the iconographically unusual image of St. Niphon at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Peć. Taking into account Serbian representations of St. Niphon, which have remained almost unnoticed in earlier considerations of the saint's cult and iconography, the inclusion of his image at Veljusa cannot be treated as much of an oddity as earlier scholars tended to believe. Hence, we must remain cautious about the view that St. Niphon was the patron of the south chapel at Veljusa, even more so because the depictions of some other saints were assigned even more prominent positions. This is particularly true of the full-length figure of St. Panteleimon. Consequently, the previously unchallenged opinion that the parekklesion apse features one of St. Niphon's visions cannot be unreservedly accepted, primarily because the image does not match the corresponding passages in the *Vita* of St. Niphon. Furthermore, the painting in question is iconographically most similar to another iconographic theme – the illustration of the Second Easter Homily by Gregory of Nazianzus from a manuscript now in the library of the Athonite monastery of St. Panteleimon.

¹⁰¹ *Brubaker*, *Vision and Meaning*, 205–207; *eadem*, *Politics, Patronage, and Art*, 10; *Der Nersessian*, *The Illustration*, 201.

¹⁰² Cf. *Miljković*, *L'illustration*; *Lukovnikova*, *Obraz Hrista-Angela*.

As for the general characteristics of the chapel's program, i.e., its link with the imagery in the central part of the katholikon, it should be noted that the main part of the thematic repertoire displays a clear focus of Veljusa's founder on the notions of absolution and salvation – a strong eschatological-soteriological slant.¹⁰³ The complex relationship of that program with the dogma of incarnation, sacrifice and redemption was emphasized through some new iconographic contents that made their way into the imagery of Byzantine churches precisely during the period when Manuel of Strumitza had his foundation frescoed. The eschatological-soteriological overtones of the paintings in the main part of the church seem to have been reflected, at least to an extent, in the imagery of the south chapel. It is not unreasonable to assume that the program was adapted to suit the intimate character of the space, revealing the personal religious concerns and needs of Veljusa's learned founder.

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¹⁰³ Cf. *Milanović*, Ever Ready Throne, 1079–1109.

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ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ ФРЕСАКА ВЕЉУСЕ: БЕЛЕШКЕ О ИКОНОГРАФСКОМ ПРОГРАМУ ЈУЖНОГ ПАРАКЛИСА

Већ више од шест деценија Црква Богородице Елеусе у селу Вељуси код Струмице сматра се значајним остварењем византијског градитељства и монументалног живописа XI столећа. Ту цркву, заправо католикон манастира, саградили су, по свој прилици, цариградски мајстори 1080. године, а њен ктитор, који је сахрањен у припрати, био је „монах Манојло, који је постао епископ Тивериопоља“, како је наведено у мермерном натпису постављеном изнад западног улаза у храм. Поред веома особеног, тетраконхалног архитектонског склопа, посебну пажњу истраживача привукле су најстарије фреске цркве у Вељуси, које су, како се данас обично сматра, израђене између 1085. и 1093.

У овом раду пажња је посвећена зидном сликарству јужног параклиса Цркве Богородице Елеусе. Иако веома сведен, тематски репертоар живописа те капеле садржи неке изразите иконографске особености. Тако је аутор монографске студије о Вељуси Петар Миљковић-Пепек засновао своје тумачење програма, у највећој мери, на лику једног веома ретко представљаног светитеља – Нифонта из Константијане (сл. 2–3). Заправо, поменути аутор је сматрао да

је он био патрон јужног параклиса у Вељуси и, сасвим разумљиво, довео светитеља у непосредну везу са личношћу манастирског ктитора Манојла, верујући да му је Житије Светог Нифонта могло бити познато, те да је на њега оставило дубок утисак. Миљковић-Пепек је и присуство других светитељских представа настојао да доведе у везу са појавом лика светог Нифонта. Сматрао је, штавише, да је у апсиди капеле представљена управо једна од визија тог светитеља.

По нашем мишљењу, изложено тумачење иконографског програма јужне капеле у задужбини Манојла Струмичког треба подвргнути детаљнијем критичком преиспитивању. Најпре ваља имати у виду чињеницу да је култ Светог Нифонта, чије је необично занимљиво грчко житије написано, по свој прилици, у Цариграду после 965. године, имао нарочитог одјека у словенским срединама. Први календарски помен светитеља сачуван је у глагољском Асеманијевом јеванђељу (Vat. slav. 3), у чијем је месецослову Свети Нифонт поменут у рубрици за 23. децембар. Помени Светог Нифонта појављују се, затим, и у ћириличним бугарским литургијским књигама, док његова памјат у грчким синаксарима уопште није евидентирана. Штавише, о популарности Светог Нифонта међу Словенима упечатљиво сведочи чињеница да је његово пространо житије убрзо по настанку преведено на словенски језик, највероватније у Бугарској. Преко те верзије, до данас несачуване, Нифонтово житије је веома рано доспело у Русију, где је с временом постало изузетно популарно. Оно је било познато и у средњовековној Србији, премда о томе сведочи само један, сразмерно касно настао, српскословенски препис опширне верзије, сачуван у зборнику из библиотеке Манастира Хиландара, састављеном 1350–1360. године.

У светлости наведених података, а без намере да до краја оспоримо мишљење да је ктитор Вељусе нарочито поштовао Светог Нифонта, треба имати у виду чињеницу да је представа о којој је реч наликана само неколико деценија пошто је исти светитељ поменут у месецослову Асеманијевог јеванђеља. То је веома значајан податак. Посматрана у његовом светлу, појава Нифонтовог лика у Вељуси могла би да се тумачи и као својеврсно уметничко сведочанство о поштовању тог светитеља у словенској средини на тлу византијске Македоније, а не само као показатељ ктиторове привржености његовом култу.

У контексту препознатљивости култа Светог Нифонта међу Словенима могу се тумачити и друге ликовне представе тог светитеља, којима у ранијим истраживањима није била посвећена одговарајућа пажња. Карактеристично је, наиме, да су готово све оне настале у двома словенским земљама – Србији и Русији. Изузетак је у том погледу само једна друга, много млађа представа Светог Нифонта с подручја Охридске архиепископије, она у Цркви Светих арханђела (Митрополија) у Касторији (сл. 4), наликана 1359/1360. Треба, међутим, приметити да се у то време Касторија налазила у оквиру српске средњовековне државе. Када је реч о српској уметности, најстарија представа Светог Нифонта сачувана је у олтару Богородичине цркве у Студеници, осликане 1208/1209. године (сл. 5). Следи, потом, неколико његових ликова у задужбинама краља Стефана

Уроша II Милутина: студеничкој Цркви Светих Јоакима и Ане (сл. 6), Старом Нагоричину (сл. 7) и Грачаници (сл. 8–9). Коначно, неколико деценија касније, медаљон са ликом Светог Нифонта, приказаног у обличју монаха (сл. 10), добио је место на потпорном луку свода наоса Цркве Светих апостола у Пећи, осликаном залагањем српског патријарха Јоаникија (1346–1354). Уз српске, сачуване су и многобројне ликовне представе Светог Нифонта у руској уметности, посебно у иконопису XVII–XIX века, као и илустровани рукописи његовог житија.

Појава лика Светог Нифонра у Вељуси не представља, дакле, тако изразит изузетак као што је сматрао Петар Миљковић-Пепек. Из тога даље следи да се према његовом гледишту да је управо Свети Нифонт био патрон јужног параклиса католикона мора задржати прилична резерва. Уз набројане иконографске аналогije, па и недостатак било каквих изворних потврда, на опрез наводи и чињеница да се лик Светог Нифонта не налази на најистакнутијем месту у иконографском програму капеле. Значајније место припало је представи неидентификованог архијереја у ниши на источном зиду (сл. 11). Уосталом, ни представа једног другог светитеља, која се налази наспрам попрсја Светог Нифонта, није ништа мање занимљива за проучавање укупне замисли програма капеле и одређивање њене могуће посвете. Реч је о стојећој фигури Светог Пантелејмона (сл. 12) на северној страни западног зида, поред пролаза из капеле у главну цркву. Истакнута позиција, па и формат те представе, говори о њеном приличном значају у оквиру програма као целине. Не треба, стога, уопште искључити могућност да је посреди фигура светитеља коме је био посвећен јужни параклис католикона Вељусе.

Посебну пажњу привлачи необична сцена у апсиди на источном зиду параклиса (сл. 14–16). Иако су је неки од првих истраживача идентификовали као представу Христа у слави, Петар Миљковић-Пепек је инсистирао на њеној још прецизнијој идентификацији. Он је веровао да је посреди илустрација једног одломка из Житија Светог Нифонта, то јест визије у којој му се јавио Христос, саопштавајући му да ће за три дана умрети. Изложено тумачење је веома привлачно, али се оно, према нашем мишљењу, ипак не сме безрезервно прихватити. На опрез обавезује, пре свега, чињеница да, строго иконографски посматрано, у датом случају није могуће успоставити довољно чврсту везу између текста и слике. Наиме, према опису визије коју је имао три дана пред смрт, Нифонту се тада указао ватрени, богато украшен престо, окружен светлосним зрацима и небројеним мноштвом небеских сила. Нифонт заправо, у том сновиђењу није видео Христа, већ је чуо његов глас са трона. Реч је, дакле, о чудесном призору који не одговара представи у апсиди, на којој је, уместо на трону, Христос приказан у мандорли, коју не окружује мноштво небеских сила, већ је држе само двојица арханђела. У питању су, дакле, нимало занемарљиве разлике. Коначно, ни у осталих неколико Нифонтових визија Исус Христос није описан онако како изгледа на представи у Вељуси. Када се има у виду назначено несагласје између описа визија у Житију Светог Нифонта и

иконографије представе у апсиди јужног параклиса, онда се мора задржати опрез према гледишту о њиховој непосредној међузависности. Истина, могућност да је у Вељуси приказана једна од визија Светог Нифонта не може се сасвим искључити – нарочито због чињенице да је његово попрсје насликано поред композиције о којој је реч! – али би се она могла без икакве оградe прихватити само под претпоставком да сликар није сматрао за потребно да уважава текстуални предлогак у погледу свих карактеристичних појединости. Разуме се, међутим, да такав поступак идентификације иконографске теме о којој је реч не би био методолошки ваљан. Другим речима, у одсуству довољно конкретне сличности са одговарајућим одломком из Житија Светог Нифонта, нема разлога да се представа у јужној капели задужбине Манојла Струмичког идентификује другачије од многобројних других представа познатих под називом Христос у слави.

Представе Христа у слави сведоче о његовој божанској природи и подсећају посматрача на његов Други долазак. Засноване на комбинацији елемената из различитих апокалиптичких и пророчких визија у којима се Христос приказује у једном од својих иконографских типова, било као Емануил, Пантократор или Старац Дана, представе Христа у слави појавиле су се још у рановизантијској уметности. Победом иконофила, теофанијске визије најразличитијих типова су прилично често представљане у апсидама цркава између IX и XI века, посебно, али не искључиво, у источним провинцијама Византијског царства. Нажалост, мало је сачуваних монументалних представа Христа у слави из овог периода који одговарају иконографији представе у јужној капели у Вељуси. Стога су јој истраживачи најчешће тражили паралеле у минијатурама рукописних књига. Па ипак, ниједна од до сада уочених аналогија не одговара у задовољавајућој мери иконографији представе у јужној капели Вељуси. За разлику од њих, један раније незапажен, а фрескама Вељусе такође хронолошки близак компаративни пример у приличној мери јој је подударан. То је минијатура у рукопису Хомилија Григорија Богослова из Манастира Светог Пантелејмона на Светој Гори (Cod. 6, fol. 5v, XI век). Реч је, заправо, о илустрацији Друге васкршње хомилије Светог Григорија, у којој се он осврће и на Визију пророка Авакума (сл. 17). Та минијатура је најближа, иако не и сасвим истоветна аналогија за представу у апсиди јужног параклиса у Вељуси. На основу те околности, нисмо, међутим, склонили да закључимо да је и у задужбини Манојла Струмичког илустрована Друга васкршња хомилија Григорија Назијанског. Сматрамо да је најразложније остати на становишту да је у Вељуси насликана представа Христа у слави, без инсистирања на њеном конкретном текстуалном предлошку, колико год да је таква идентификација можда исувише уопштена.

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