

Studenica. An identity in marble

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This paper discusses the nature and inherent symbolics of the material of choice of which the body of the church of the Virgin Euergetis at Studenica was fashioned. In view of Byzantine theological concepts deeply ingrained in this material, concepts which were present and well understood also among the learned theologians of medieval Serbia, this paper presents the implied messages behind such a choice of material as well as the possible theological, ideological and political interpretations and applications of this medium at the time of Nemanja's founding of Studenica and raising of the church of the Virgin therein. It thus questions the theory of its marble facades as simply a case of a Byzantine structure clad in Romanesque garb.

Key words: Studenica, church of the Virgin, marble, iconic presence, Logos Incarnate, Epiphany, triumph of True Faith

The church of the Virgin at Studenica functioned as a sign and a paradigm throughout the Serbian Middle Ages and beyond. Its specific visual identity, defined by its trademark glistening white marble facades, a novel and exceptional sight in the broader milieu of its creation, the Balkans under Komnenian rule around the year 1200, and unique in Serbian medieval art, was, naturally, instrumental in producing and conveying her particular statement, in making her happen. Present before any of the many subsequently and historically/ideologically determined meanings had been read into it, the marble nature of the church, or rather, the nature and inherent symbolics of the marble of which the church was fashioned, is ever enticing to questioning the reasons and implied messages behind such a choice of material as well as the historical interpretations and applications of this medium. Because representation and perception closely interact in any politics of images and both are charged with symbolical energy, which easily lends itself to political use,¹ it is this very issue that encourages us to ask how and why such an identity in marble was construed, what synergetically entwined political, theological and aesthetic principles and historical circumstances were active in shaping it and, ultimately, in perceiving it?

Observed in its theological/ideological/historical context, i.e. the context of Studenica as a New Euergetis, New Constantinople, New Jerusalem, reliquary of the True Cross, and, consequently, primary *locus sanctus* of the Nemanjid dynastic cult, final resting place of St. Simeon, the sprouting

root of the holy Nemanjid family tree, the Tabernacle of the Serbian people,² the issue of her identity in marble assumes a purpose and a meaning which prompts us *per se* to reconsider the widely accepted and (curiously) never questioned theory of the church of the Virgin at Studenica as a Byzantine style structure clad in Romanesque garb. In fact, it appears to us that, in its existence and perception as a symbol, the visual identity of Studenica, and in particular its trade-mark marble body, was essential in constructing and conveying its singular identity and message so wholly steeped in deeply Byzantine theological and ideological concepts. In view of all of the above, we must say that it seems quite implausible and inadequately proportioned to the depth and impact of its role in the history of the Serbian church and state, at whose very source it stands, to assign the marble identity of the church of the Virgin at Studenica to the simple fact that its builders and master craftsmen may have originated from the Adriatic littoral. The marble body of Studenica as an image and iconic presence thus calls for a much more complex approach than the anachronistic formal analysis and search for

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¹ This approach to understanding images expounded in: H. Belting, *Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology*, *Critical Inquiry* 31/2 (2005) 302–319.

² Recently discussed from a methodological approach novel in the study of this endowment of Stefan Nemanja and in the light of re-examining the sources and historical circumstances surrounding its founding by J. Erdeljan, *Studenica. A New Perspective?*, in: *Serbien und Byzanz Tagungsband*, Papers from the Symposium held at the University of Cologne in December 2009, forthcoming; eadem, *Studenica. All Things Constantinopolitan*, in: *ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ, Zbornik radova u čast 40 godina Instituta za istoriju umetnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu*, ed. I. Stevović, Beograd 2011 (forthcoming). Seminal studies on the monastery of Studenica and its *katholikon*, as well as the on the burial and tomb of Simeon Nemanja therein: G. Babić, V. Korać, S. Ćirković, *Studenica*, Beograd 1986; M. Kašanin, M. Čanak-Medić, J. Maksimović, B. Todić, M. Šakota, *Manastir Studenica*, Beograd 1986; M. Čanak-Medić, Đ. Bošković, *Arhitektura Nemanjinog doba. I. Crkve u Toplici i dolinama Ibra i Morave*, Beograd 1986; *Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200. godine*, ed. V. Korać, Beograd 1988; *Osam vekova Studenice. Zbornik radova*, Beograd 1986; *Blago manastira Studenice*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Beograd 1988; D. Popović, *Srpski vladarski grob u srednjem veku*, Beograd 1992, 24–47; eadem, *Svetiteljsko proslavljanje Simeona Nemanje. Prilog proučavanju kulta moštiju kod Srba*, in: eadem, *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Beograd 2006, 27–40; eadem, *O nastanku kulta svetog Simeona*, in: *ibid.*, 41–73.



Fig. 1. Studenica, church of the Virgin, view from the southeast

similarities of its particular constituent parts within the pool of artistic creation of Byzantium and/or the West.

Observed from the methodological approach of the so-called anthropological turn and New Iconology,³ and in the words of Hans Belting, the *what* of an image, the issue of what the image serves as an image or what it relates as an image, is steered by the *how* in which it transmits its message.⁴ In fact, the *how* is often hard to distinguish from the *what*, as it is the very essence of an image. Because of the interchangeable relation between internal and external representations, endogene and exogene or mental and physical images, mediality is not replacable by the materiality of images – as has been the custom in the old distinction of form and matter. The interaction of mental images and physical images is a field still largely unexplored, one that concerns the politics of images no less than what the French call the *imaginaire* of a given society, as it is largely triggered or conducted through the medium (material, technique) of their production.⁵

Moreover, images do not exist by themselves. They are in need of an agent or a medium resembling a body. From early on, humans were tempted to communicate with images as with living bodies and also to accept them in the place of bodies, perceive them as bodies, as substitutes of bodies or body parts.⁶ Through ritual enactment, primarily liturgical in the Middle Ages and driven by desire of achieving unity with God, their media is animated in order to experience images as alive, in order to create their iconic presence.⁷ Images traditionally live from the body's absence, which is either temporary (that is, spatial) or, in the case of death, final. Images replace the body's absence with a different kind of presence. Iconic presence turns the body's absence into what must be called visible absence. Images live from the paradox that they perform the presence of an absence or vice versa. They are present in their media but they perform an absence, which they make visible. Animation, our desire for the image, our interaction often dictated by the politics of the image, means that we open the opacity of a medium for the transmission of images, the *how* to perceive the *what*.⁸

The iconic presence of any church, Studenica as any other, is a *typos* of the God-chosen designated (and designed)

dwelling place or *chora* – the Tent of the Meeting and the Tabernacle, and ultimately, the Body of Christ as Logos Incarnate. Therefore, having in mind the *what* of the church as the *chora* of inscription (*emgraphie*) of the Logos, the *how* i.e. its material structure, the *corpus* of the church building proper, can hardly be regarded simply as a construction circumscribing (*perigraphie*) the (sacred) space designated for liturgy and devotion.⁹ Consequently, its outer faces, or the facades, can hardly be regarded as simply the external material surfaces of walls made of different materials, whether stone, brick or combination of the two (randomly picked, or laid out according to some „fashion“ or „style“) and subject or, rather, subjected to so-called „decoration“ with a program of its own and only loosely, superficially, and not essentially – in *homoioseis* – related to the essence of the church as the *chora tou achorou*. The *corpus* of the church, the building and the congregation within it, being indeed the body of Christ – as expounded in Pauline texts (I Cor. 12) – in unity of interior and exterior image, actually does not or, rather, *is not intended*, despite all its materiality, to veil (as appearance) but rather to reveal (as apparition), its stands as a portal between the terrestrial and celestial realm.¹⁰ It does not need simply to represent but to *make present* the divine Word to the point of actualizing (*enargia*), of *taking place* of the miracle – of the constantly recurring Divine presence i.e. of the Incarnation of the Logos.¹¹

Already the first (God designed) dwelling of the *shekinah*, the Tent of the Meeting and the Tabernacle within it, was, after instructions received by Moses from the Lord which were carried out by Bezalel, one „in the shadow of God“ filled with „wisdom and knowledge“ by which the Almighty had created the world, made of a specially designated number of veils or curtains. Although nominally veiling, their very presence (and visual qualities) actually reveals or demonstrates, testifies of the in-dwelling presence of the Lord

³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, Chicago–London 1986; I. Lavin, *Panofsky's History of Art*, in: *Meaning in the visual arts: Views from the outside. A centennial commemoration of Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968)*, ed. I. Lavin, Princeton 1995, 6 sq; H. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich 2001.

⁴ Belting, *Image, Medium, Body*, 304.

⁵ Belting, *op. cit.*, 304–305.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Belting, *op. cit.*, 307–308. On this phenomenon v. also C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford 1992; N. Isar, *The Vision and Its „Exceedingly Blessed Beholder“: Of Desire and Participation in the Icon*, Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics 38 (2000) 56–72; L. James, *Sense and Sensibility in Byzantium*, Art History 27/4 (2004) 522–537; B. Pentcheva, *The Performative Icon*, Art Bulletin 88/4 (2006) 631–656; eadem, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park 2010.

⁸ Belting, *Image, Medium, Body*, 312–313. Cf. also H. Kessler, *Configuring the invisible by copying the Holy Face*, in: *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, ed. G. Wolf, H. Kessler, Bologna 1998, 129–151.

⁹ On the *chora* i.e. the church as the space of inscription of the Logos cf. M. Tatić-Djurić, *Mistični Logos i njegova slika*, in: eadem, *Studije o Hristu*, Beograd 2011, 9–19. V. also Isar, *The Vision*, in particular *Chora space: inscription against circumscription*, 60–61; B. Pentcheva, *Visual Textuality: The „Logos“ as Pregnant Body and Building*, Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics 45 (2004) 225–238, in particular *The Logos as Building*, 235–236.

¹⁰ On the principle of veiling-revealing v. *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing: textiles and their metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. K. M. Rudy, B. Baert, Turnhout 2007. V. also G. Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*, University Park 2004.

¹¹ On the principle of *enargia* cf. M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*, Cambridge 1998, 130–150; eadem, *Editor's introduction*, in: *Rhetoric beyond Words, Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. M. Carruthers, Cambridge 2010, 1–13, in particular 4.

among his Chosen People. As revealed in Exodus 26, the *how* of the Tabernacle and Tent of the Covenant stands in direct relation to its *what* – for the choice of materials, colors, number and order of parts, indeed the material and visual features of all the elements of the *medium*, is dictated by the Lord. Whatsmore, the Cherubim, spirits who serve God, woven in gold on the parochet made of pure linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn dividing the Holy Place from the *Kodesh Hakodashim* and hiding the presence of God from mortals, were, on the other hand, just as much there to demonstrate his almighty power and majesty.¹²

In Christian exegesis, in Pauline and patristic interpretation, as is well known, the *medium* of the Tabernacle veil or curtain, and in particular the parochet, has been interpreted as the Flesh of Christ. In general, the topos of weaving of textiles, curtains in particular, was, especially among the Alexandrian philosophers and holy fathers, employed in explaining the mystery of the incarnation of the Logos as well as the Eucharistic sacrifice.¹³ As opposed to the Jewish tradition, however, in Christian thought the parochet unveils the Divine – as demonstrated at the moment the Temple curtain was torn in half at the moment of Christ's death on the Cross (Mat. 27,51; Mk. 15,38; Lk. 23,45). The topos of Christ-veil, *typos* of the parochet (Hebrews 10, 19–20), or ultimate iconic curtain which functioned as a powerful image paradigm in Judeo-Christian civilization, is visualized in the ninth century miniature in the Vatican *Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes showing the Second coming structured by the Tabernacle as well as in the post iconoclastic marble incrustation *opus sectile* panel showing the *crux gemmata* in a domed edicule flanked by curtains on the western wall of the naos of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, directly above the Royal Doors. Whatsmore, it lies at the core of the concept, function and visual qualities of the catapetasma of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople or the Eastern Christian antependium and of old Russian icon curtains (*peleni*), as well as of the painted representations of textile hangings or veils in fresco decorations of altar and church spaces in general in the Byzantine world whose presence on the walls actually determines their true nature as screens (veils, curtains) at the point of touching and interaction of the sacred and the profane domain.¹⁴

Such an equaling of the parochet with the flesh of Christ is, although the ultimate, still only a segment of the general approach to the didactic, mimetic, apotropaic and dogmatic function of textiles in medieval Christian culture. This is particularly clearly discussed in the fourth century homily of bishop Asterius of Amaseia who spoke of textiles (with gospel scenes) „like painted walls“ and their use not only in church interiors but as personal apparel and as a mode of being „one in Christ“.¹⁵ Wearing clothes with images from the Gospels may have been one way that certain early Christians believed they were mimetically and visually assimilating themselves to Christ's incarnation. The notion that Christians were called to assimilate themselves to Christ through robing had its roots in the first century writings of apostle Paul who often used the metaphor of dress to describe what this assimilation was supposed to look like. Identification with Christ, of which disrobing and re-robing were constituent gestures, is most apparent in the baptismal formula „As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ“ (Gal. 3,27). Putting on the the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13,14) is the path of salvation determining by the Saviour putting on a body in order that

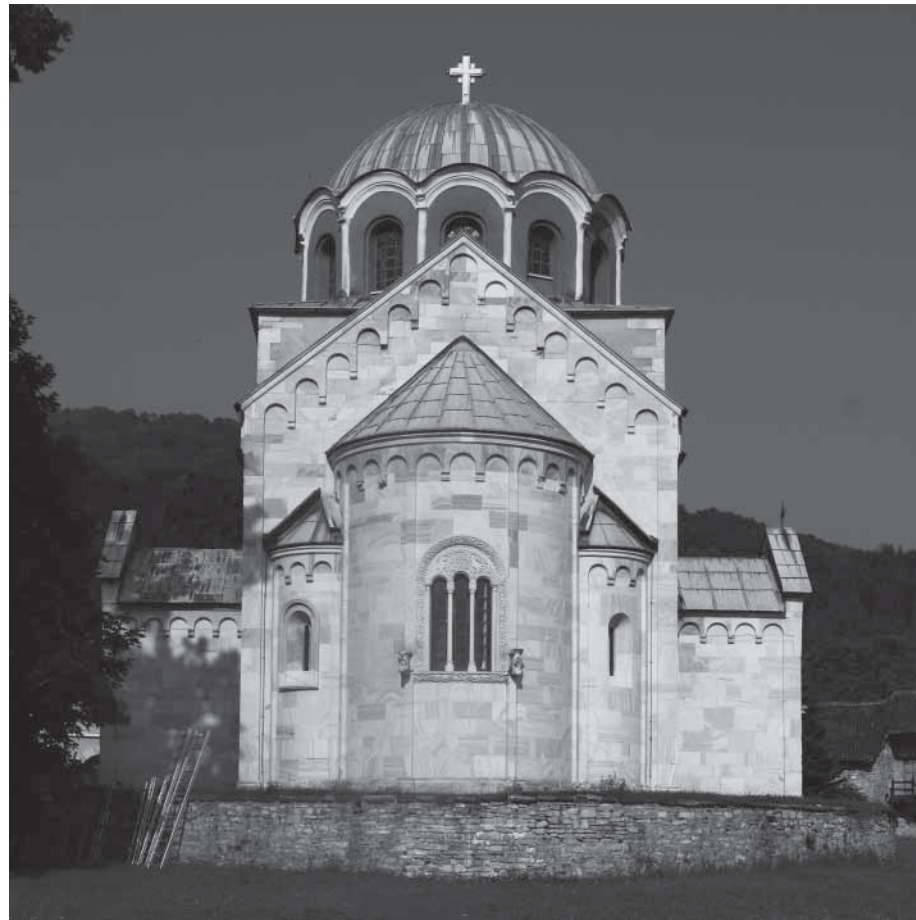


Fig. 2. Studenica, church of the Virgin, view from the east

the body having been woven together with life (Athanasios of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 44,6) should no longer remain in death.¹⁶

The mystery of the incarnation of the Logos, or of putting on a body woven together with life, stands in *homoiosis* with the act of building and in the art of the Byzantine world the body of Christ is often actually realized and visualized as a building.¹⁷ The material particularly well suited as a medium in this enterprise, one whose physical and visual qualities and symbolics, and thus openness to theological interpretation as well, match most deeply and accurately the rhetoric of the parochet screen, i.e. the *how* of the *what* of this building, is marble.

¹² For a comprehensive examination of all the features of the Tent of the Meeting and the Tabernacle v. M. M. Homan, *To Your Tents, O Israel! The Terminology, Function, Form, and Symbolism of Tents in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Leiden 2002, in particular *The Tabernacle: Historicity, Form, Fate*, 129–185.

¹³ A. Lidov, «*Obrazy-paradigmy*» kak kategoriia vizual'noĭ kul'tury. *Ierotopicheskiĭ podkhod k istorii iskusstva*, in: idem, *Ierotopiia. Prostranstvennye ikony i obrazy-paradigmy v vizantiĭskoi kul'ture*, Moscow 2009, 293–305, in particular 296–298.

¹⁴ Lidov, *op. cit.*, passim; idem, *Katapetasma Sofii Konstantinopol'skoĭ. Vizantiĭskie installiatsii i obraz-paradigma hramovoi Zavesy*, in: *Ierotopiia*, 211–225. On analogies between the weaving of the curtain and the flesh of Christ, as demonstrated by iconography of the twelfth century Byzantine icons of the Annunciation v. B. Pentcheva, *Rhetorical Images of the Virgin: The Icon of the «Usual Miracle» at the Blachernai*, *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 38 (2000) 34–55, in particular *Carnal logos or the visible body of Christ*, 43–45.

¹⁵ S. J. Davis, *Fashioning a Divine Body: Coptic Christology and Ritualized Dress*, *The Harvard Theological Review* 98/3 (2005) 335–362, in particular 354–355.

¹⁶ Davis, *op. cit.*, 358.

¹⁷ Pentcheva, *Visual Textuality*, 227, 235 sqq. V. also P. S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Louisville 2004², 173–220 (*Church as the Body of Christ*).



Fig. 3. The marble of Studenica, detail

As attested by texts of numerous Byzantine *ekphrases*, marble as a material and its use in the sacred space of the church, whether as panelling, revetment or construction material, made a very deep impression on the beholders and generated a variety of readings. In the eyes of the authors of *ekphrasis* texts, as well as in those of the beholders yielding to the *perigesis* of their works, the texture, color and patterns of carefully cut marble slabs had vast evocative power, a mystic meaning equal to *acheiropoietai* or images not made by human hand, i.e. to *ex-contactu* imprints of the presence of the Divine Creator of the World.¹⁸ At times they were identified with and visually and verbally formulated as glimpses of nature, landscapes of meadows and woods. In his description of the newly raised structure of Justinian's Hagia Sophia, Prokopios (*De Aedificiis*, I, 1, 59–60) speaks of the building as a vision of nature and relies on the *topos* of marble as a flowering meadow. In the *ekphrasis* composed on the occasion of the second consecration of Hagia Sophia following the first restoration of the dome on December 24th, 562, Paul Silentiarios also compares marble to elements of nature and sees the architectural and sculptural elements of the church interior as either a forest filled with flowers of various color (*verde antico* columns in the naos) or wax and ivory (the alabaster of the ambo) and roses, lilies and anemones (Phrygian marble of the columns separating the naos from the aisles).¹⁹ Moreover, according to the words of this *ekphrasis*, they produce in the beholder the impression of movement, growth, branching, almost as in a living organism. He relies on terms and tropes of animated matter filled with (Holy) spirit. Columns are said to dance, arches between the four central piers to „rise up little by little on well-curved airy paths“, conchs to spring.²⁰

Going a step further and giving even more theological depth to the *empsyche* topos, more precisely, relying on the *naos empsyche* topos, in his twelfth century *ekphrasis* Michael the Deacon speaks of the huge space of the church of Hagia Sophia in terms of pregnancy – thus underlining its theological parallel with the Virgin as the *chora tou achoretou* and the receptacle of boundless divinity.²¹ Moreover, this is augmented and attested by the very nature of marble as the dominant material of which this space is fashioned. Speaking of the Proconnesian marble of the ambo of Hagia Sophia, Michael the Deacon points out that „one of these stones puts on the guise of living flesh, and, whitish in color, displays all over itself what looks like gaping veins of blood“.²² The

acheiropoietos and anthropomorphic qualities of marble were perceived as an enactment, actualization of the miracle of Incarnation, of the Virgin pregnant with Logos, and the Body of Christ. As pointed out in recent studies by B. Pentcheva and G. Peers, visual evidence of such symbolic interpretation of marble as the medium of choice for actualizing the miracle of Incarnation, Virgin pregnant with Logos, and the Body of Christ, the heavenly i.e. earthy abode of *shekinah* is found in the, indicatively contemporary to Studenica, full page author's portrait in *Cod. sin. 339* Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzos.²³ Moreover, churches or sacred spaces fashioned of marble were not just a theological ideal in the Byzantine world of the Komnenian era, the time of construction of Studenica. The actual contemporaneous practice of raising churches in this material-medium is attested by the construction in 1146 of the Virgin Pantanassa on the island of Hagia Glykeria by the hegoumenos of the Pantokrator monastery, the actual ktetor of the mentioned manuscript of Gregory of Nazianzos.²⁴ Whatsoever, according to the account of a Latin pilgrim who visited the celebrated Constantinopolitan shrine of the Virgin Mary at the Blachernai in the second half of the eleventh century, both the basilica and rotunda renovated after the fire of 1069 were made of marble.²⁵

Yet another highly significant symbolic quality of marble is related to its history as frozen waters of primeval creation, the Okeanos. In ancient times the marble that regularly impersonated water was Carystian from Euboea in Greece. Its marine veining „competed with the grey/green sea“.²⁶ By the sixth century, however, it was Proconnesian marble that had largely supplanted Carystian in its power to epitomize the sea. One of the most striking examples is the sixth century floor of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a vast expanse of Proconnesian marble flagstones, traversed only by four green stripes, which conjured a number of marine images in the eyes of the visitors, recorded in their accounts or *ekphrases*.²⁷ In Komnenian times examples of Proconnesian “seafloors” were to be found in the abbey church of Montecassino (1066–1071) and, most impressive of all, in the floor of the basilica of San Marco in Venice (1110–1150) where the massive Proconnesian slabs under the crossing have been known as “il mare” since the seventeenth century,

¹⁸ M. L. Fobelli, *The Imagery of the Heavenly City in Sixth Century Byzantium: Marbles and Images “Not Made by Human Hand”*, in: *Novye Ierusalimy. Perenesenie sakral'nykh prostranstv v khristianskoj kul'ture*, ed. A. M. Lidov, Moscow 2006, 48–53. On *ekphrasis* and the visual arts in Byzantium v. R. J. Macrides, P. Magdalino, *Architecture and Ekphrasis: Construction and Context of Paul the Silentiary's Poem on Hagia Sophia*, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 12 (1988) 47–82; L. James, R. Webb, „To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places“: *Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium*, *Art History* 14 (1991) 1–17; R. Webb, *The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in „Ekphrasis“ of Church Buildings*, *DOP* 53 (1999) 59–74.

¹⁹ M. L. Fobelli, *Un tempio per Giustiniano. Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli e la Descrizione di Paolo Silenziario*, Roma 2005, passim; Fobelli, *The Imagery*, 49–50, with sources.

²⁰ Webb, *The Aesthetics of Sacred Space*, 68–69, with sources.

²¹ Webb, *op. cit.*, 70. For the *ekphrasis* text v. C. Mango, J. Parker, *A twelfth-century description of Hagia Sophia*, *DOP* 14 (1960) 233–245.

²² *Ibid.*, 239.

²³ Pentcheva, *Visual Textuality*, 229–230; Peers, *Sacred Shock*, in particular *Gregory of Nazianzus as Twelfth-Century Paradigm*, 59–76.

²⁴ Pentcheva, *Visual Textuality*, 225, 236.

²⁵ Eadem, *Rhetorical Images*, 47.

²⁶ In general, in antiquity and the Middle Ages rocks and gems were perceived as frozen liquids. For this quote of Ennius, and a detailed examination of the symbolics of marble floors in antiquity and the Middle Ages v. F. Barry, *Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, *Art Bulletin* 89/4 (2007) 627–656, in particular 632.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 633.

quite possibly after a much older tradition.²⁸ This aquatic quality of marble, a more opaque cousin of crystal, granted also its reception as a form of ice – water frozen by primordial cold which, when polished, recovers its original light in a surface slick – suggesting that light, the active principle of the Logos, was frozen into its very fabric.²⁹ It could thus be directly identified with the Jordan and the Epiphany which had taken place in its midst.³⁰

In view of all of the above, it appears that the *how* of Studenica was logically a perfect match for its *what*. Namely, at the time of its founding, the above mentioned *acheiropoitos* qualities and symbolic meaning of marble as the material of choice for the body of this specific structure, particularly in view of the physical similarities in color and texture between Proconnesian marble and stone from Radočelo quarries used to build Nemanja's church, white marked by grayish-blue veins, must have been highly communicative and efficient in conveying an iconic presence of the Logos Incarnate, of the Virgin pregnant with Logos, of the very mystery of the Incarnation. Considering the historical circumstances of the day, this must surely have been perceived as the ultimate sign of prevalence of True Faith against (Bogumil) heresy and therefore answered perfectly what appears to have been the primary purpose behind the raising the Virgin Euergetis church at Studenica, indeed of the founding of the monastery as a whole.

This act was in all probability deeply correlated to the mutually significant bond between Nemanja, from the very beginning of his rise to power, and institutions representing Byzantine power in the Balkans in the latter half of the twelfth century – first and foremost the Archbishopric of Ohrid. It is interesting to note that, chronologically, according to the sources, the Vita of St. Simeon by Stefan Prvovenčani, the founding and building of Studenica issued directly after the Council convened at Ras against Bogumil heretics, called by Nemanja and held in the presence of bishop Eustatije of Ras, whom the sources refer to as “his own archiereos”.³¹ It is highly significant to note that surpressing Bogumil heresy was among top priorities of the diocese of Ohrid already during the office of archbishop John Adrian Komnenos, close relative of emperor Manuel I.³² By calling together this council and by the fierce slaying of the enemies of Orthodoxy and Byzantine *taxis* which ensued, Nemanja would, thus, be once again confirmed as a soldier of tue faith, a “holy warrior”, a new St. George slaying the dragon of heresy – displaying the very virtues for which he was recommended by John Adrian Komnenos to the emperor Manuel I upon their meeting in Niš several decades earlier. Therefore, it appears that Studenica could indeed have been founded by Nemanja, in correlation with the interests of the bishops of Ras with whom he had noticeably good relations, as an axial point in establishing the triumph of Orthodoxy against the Manichean heresy of the Bogumils on the territory of the Bishopric of Ras.³³

Whatsmore, the very toponym of Studenica is essentially associated with the symbolic core identity of marble as the frozen, still waters of the primeval Okeanos of All Creation which, in turn, are associated with both the cult of the Virgin and the True Cross, both inextricably woven into the essence of Studenica. Whatsmore, its identity in marble could clearly visualize the effect of the Epiphany, or Christianization in general through Baptism, when, at the submersion of the Cross – in place of, originally, Christ himself in the waters of the Jordan – the waters stand still and demons



Fig. 4. The marble of Studenica, detail



Fig. 5. The marble of Studenica, detail

of the deep are destroyed.³⁴ In the case of Studenica, those demons could well have been the “beasts” mentioned in the opening sentence of the Vita text of St. Simeon Nemanja written by his son, St. Sava.³⁵ Within the given set of historical conditions surrounding that particular act, they could be identified with the Bogumil heretics over whom Nemanja

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 630.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 635.

³⁰ On the mystery of divine light filling the waters on Epiphany v. S. Cristoforetti, *Il fiume, la luce e l'albero della Croce*, in: *L'albero della Croce prima, dopo, nell'esilio e nell'Islam*, ed. R. Favaro, Roma 2003, 29–47.

³¹ Stefan Prvovenčani, *Život i dela (podvizi) svetoga i blaženoga i prepodobnoga oca našega Simeona*, in: *Spisi svetoga Save i Stevana Prvovenčanog*, ed. L. Mirković, Beograd 1939, 169–222, on the founding of Studenica in particular 184–187.

³² J. Kalić, *Srpska država i Ohridska arhiepiskopija u XII veku*, ZRVI 44/1 (2007) 197–208, in particular 206.

³³ The founding of Studenica in the light of historical events and political ties between Nemanja, the Komnenian administration and the emperor Manuel I himself, recently discussed in detail in: Erdeljan, *Studenica. A New Perspective?*, with sources and bibliography.

³⁴ Cristoforetti, *op. cit.*, 35. In apocrypha, both Jewish and Christian, and even in the folk legends of the late Middle Ages among the Slavs, Jordan is often identified as either a stream or the source of Okeanos; B. Lomagistro, *Il simbolismo della croce nella tradizione slava medievale*, in: *L'albero della Croce*, 121–160.

³⁵ «Naš sveti manastir ovaj, kao što znate, bilo je ovo mesto kao pusto lovište zverova.» («Our holy monastery, as you know, this place was like a derelict hunting ground of beasts.»), translated from Serbian by J. E.); Sveti Sava, *Žitije Svetog Simeona Nemanje*, in: *Sveti Sava. Sabrana dela*, ed. Lj. Juhas-Georgievska, Beograd 2005, 165.

celebrated victory immediately prior to the founding of Studenica, as *miles Dei* battling against the forces of the dark on behalf of the Bishopric of Ras and Archbishopric of Ohrid.

Such a contextualization of marble in the process of planning, constructing and perceiving the visual identity of the Euergetis church at Studenica was possible because it was based on ancient and highly sophisticated readings of symbolic qualities of this material present in Byzantine mineralogy and employed in ekphrases of sacral buildings.³⁶ Highly significant in attempts to understand the true purpose and meaning of marble facading of Studenica are not only the general meanings assigned to this material but even more precisely the almost exact physical similarities in color and texture between stone from Radočelo quarries and Proconnesian marble – white marked by broad grayish-blue bands – of which, *nota bene*, the most prominent trade mark Constantinopolitan landmarks and sacred spaces were fashioned. In Studenica, as in Constantinople, the anthropomorphic allusion of this material, simulating human flesh and veins, as well as the effect of flashing of white marble, was used to visualize the ultimate truth as the reflection of the Light of God, light uncreated unto light uncreated, the Virgin through which shines the True Light of the World which, through the cross as its *signum*, is the *vexillum* of triumph over all evil and demons of the deep. The fusion of image (Crucifixion on the western wall, dominating the entire naos), relic (particle of the True Cross as part of Nemanja's pectoral kept at Studenica) and iconic presence of Logos Incarnate (marble body of the church) revealed the sense of proximity of Christ and the salvation Christ promised.³⁷

Demonstrating the proximity of Logos Incarnate and of salvation through becoming one in Christ, through the holy sacrament of Baptism, i.e. the *what* communicated by the *how* of the church of the Virgin Euergetis, must have been a high priority in raising Studenica – not only from the point of view of general Christian eschatological thought but also as part of the strategy of declaring, theologically, the supremacy and eternal triumph of True Faith over heresy and ultimately, politically and ideologically, of the formal organization and structure of the Byzantine church, in the guise of the Archbishopric of Ohrid and the Bishopric of Ras, over the institutions of the Bogomils. As such, this purpose was part of the broader agenda and one of the high priorities of the Komnenian administration in the Balkans and throughout the Empire, from the times of Alexios I and his trial against their leader Basil, at the close of which, as recounted by Anna Komnene, the heretic was burned at the stake.³⁸ A crucial constituent element of this struggle against heresy, naturally, was the political use of images. In Byzantium, this goal, as well as the congruent goal of promoting the Komnenian dynasty as «guardians of Orthodoxy», was most efficiently achieved by the spread and political use of the iconographic schema of the Virgin orans with the hovering medallion of Christ Emmanuel on her chest, the type of Virgin Blachernitissa of the “usual miracle”. This image type, which first appeared on coins and seals in the second half of the eleventh century, coinciding with the era of religious disputes, was promoted on a grand scale in monumental public art and placed in the apses and above the doors of the narthexes of a number of churches in the Byzantine world, thereby confronting the believers with the central issue of Orthodox dogma. By passing underneath its outstretched

arms they would confirm, even literally, their embrace of the keystone of Orthodox dogma which it represented.³⁹ This precisely was the case in Studenica where the image of the Blachernitissa graces the lunette over the door separating the narthex from the naos of the church of the Virgin Euergetis.⁴⁰ Highly indicatively it was part of the program of decoration produced in 1208/1209 or, more precisely, together with the huge Crucifixion painted on the other side of the same wall, on the western wall of the naos, the key element of visual rhetoric which presented the theological premises and concepts of St. Sava ever focusing on constant sustenance of Orthodoxy which the emerging autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church shared as agenda with the Byzantine church and, more specifically, with the Archbishopric of Ohrid from which it had, in a manner of speaking, inherited the task of guardian of True Faith on the territory of its formation.⁴¹

Thus, it appears that the identity in marble of the church of the Virgin Euergetis at Studenica may not have appeared because of the technical prowess of skilled stone masons and sculptors from the Adriatic littoral (although we do not and should not dispute and refute their participation in the actual process of creation of the building) but as an embodiment of Byzantine concepts deeply ingrained in this material and expounded and lauded in numerous ekphrases, concepts which were obviously present and well understood also among the learned theologians of medieval Serbia. Insight regarding the perception of marble in the Serbian milieu is gleaned from the works of Domentijan and Teodosije who speak of „marble more precious than gold“ – whatsmore very indicatively when speaking of Nemanja's tomb at Studenica.⁴²

³⁶ A. Mottana, *Storia della mineralogia antica. I. La mineralogia a Bisanzio nel 11. secolo D.C.: i poteri insiti nelle pietre secondo Michele Psello*, Rendiconti Lincei. Scienze fisiche e naturali, 16/4 (Roma 2005) 227–295.

³⁷ On this principle, combining the effect of image, relic and iconic presence v. Peers, *op. cit.*, 21. On Nemanja's pectoral v. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Vladarski znaci Stefana Nemanje*, in: *Stefan Nemanja – Sveti Simeon Mirotočivi. Istorija i predanje*, ed. J. Kalić-Mijušković, Beograd 2000, 77–87, on the translation of the relic and the pectoral to Serbia p. 81 (with sources).

³⁸ *Christian dualist heresies in the Byzantine world, c. 650–c.1405. Selected sources*, ed. J. Hamilton, B. Hamilton, Manchester 1998, 175–179; J. Stojanov, *Skrivena tradicija u Evropi. Tajna istorija srednjovekovne hrišćanske jeresi*, Čačak–Beograd 2003, 146–150.

³⁹ On the political use of this image type in Komnenian times v. Pentcheva, *Rhetorical Images*, 50–51. It is highly significant to note that the famous and widely venerated icon of the «Usual Miracle», used and distributed by members the Komnenian dynasty for the purpose of promoting their status as «guardians of Orthodoxy» against the contemporaneous assaults of both Neoplatonic teachings, embodied in the activities of John Italos, and the Manichean heresy of the Bogomils who contested the dogma of the Incarnation, was housed in the marble building of the rotunda in the Blachernai complex; *Ibid.*, 47. On Komnenian rulers as «guardians of Orthodoxy» against any form of heresy P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel Comnenos, 1143–1180*, Cambridge 1993, 316–412; V. Stanković, *Komnini u Carigradu (1057–1185). Evolucija jedne vladarske porodice*, Beograd 2006, 218–222.

⁴⁰ M. Tatić-Djurić, *Les icônes de la Vierge à Studenica*, in: *Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200. godine*, Beograd 1988, 193–203, in particular 198.

⁴¹ On two sermons of St. Sava given at Studenica and Žiča on True Faith v. A. Jevtić, *Bogoslovlje i duhovni život u Studenici*, in: *Osam vekova Studenice. Zbornik radova*, Beograd 1986, 103–105; idem, *Bogoslovlje Sv. Save – Žička beseda svetoga Save o pravoj veri*, in: *Sveti Sava–Sava Nemanjić. Spomenica povodom osamstogodišnjice rođenja, 1175–1975*, Beograd 1977, 117–180.

⁴² B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save kao izvori za istoriju srednjovekovne umetnosti*, Beograd 2008, 125, with sources.

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Студеница. Идентитет у мермеру

Јелена Ердeљан

У раду се разматрају природа и инхерентна симболика изабраног материјала од којег је саздано тело цркве Богородице Благодетељнице (Евергети-де) у Студеници. Имајући у виду византијске теолошке концепте који су били дубоко уткани у сврху његовог коришћења у сакралној уметности, као и на схватање тог материјала изражено у бројним екфрасисима и трактатима о минералогiji – концепте које су прихватили и учени теолози у српској средини у средњем веку – у раду се указује на могуће поруке исказане таквим избором материјала, као и на теолошка, идеолошка и политичка тумачења његове примене у време кад је Стефан Немања основао манастир

Студеницу и у њему подигао цркву посвећену Богородици. Мермерни идентитет Студенице сагледан је са становишта њеног значаја и значења као симбола тријумфа истините вере над јереси, иконичног присуства оваплоћеног Логоса и божанске епифаније, у контексту опште платформе и циљева деловања комнинске администрације на Балкану – посебно Охридске архиепископије и Рашке епископије – у чијем је остваривању ктитор Студенице Стефан Немања био дубоко ангажован. Стога се у раду поставља питање о одрживости до сада прихваћеног становишта о Студеници као византијској структури једноставно заоденутој у романичко рухо.