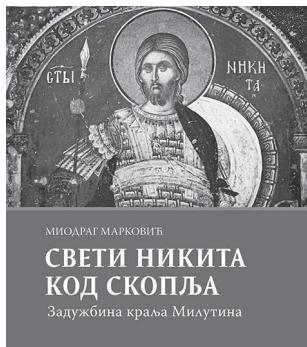


# Прикази књига



Miodrag Marković

*Saint Niketas near Skopje. A foundation of King Milutin*

Službeni glasnik / Institute of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade 2015

375 pages with illustrations (96 color photographs, a great number of black-

-and-white photographs and drawings), lists of abbreviations, sources and secondary literature, summary in English, lists of illustrations in Serbian and English, exhaustive indices (general and iconographical), note on the author

The Church of Saint Niketas near the city of Skopje – a foundation of the Serbian King Milutin and the only extant building of the medieval monastery of the same name – has been the subject of academic research for over a century. A number of studies about the monastery have been published over this period, with Miodrag Marković's contributions being among the most significant.<sup>1</sup> His studies extensively discuss certain aspects of the Church of Saint Niketas and offer conclusions based on the findings of his years-long research. The history and art of Milutin's foundation in Skopska Crna Gora was also the subject of Marković's doctoral dissertation (Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, 2005). His research of this temple is now crowned by his monograph entitled *Saint Niketas near Skopje. A Foundation of King Milutin*. Published in 2015 by *Službeni glasnik* and the Institute of Art History of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, the book is in fact a revised and expanded version of his doctoral thesis.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Marković, *Prilozi za istoriju Svetog Nikite kod Skoplja. Osnivanje manastira – Milutinova obnova – hilendarski metoh*, HZ 11 (2004) 63–128; idem, *Umetnička delatnost Mihaila i Evtihija. Sadašnja znanja, sporna pitanja i pravci budućih istraživanja*, ZNM 8/2 (Beograd 2004) 95–112; idem, *Hilandar i živopis u crkvama njegovih metoha – primer Svetog Nikite kod Skoplja*, Niš i Vizantija 4 (2006) 281–295; idem, *Hristos proklinje smokvino drvo u crkvi Svetog Nikite kod Skoplja*, Niš i Vizantija 5 (2007) 381–392.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, *Manastir Svetog Nikite kod Skoplja – istorija i živopis*, Beograd 2004.

The author offers a comprehensive survey and detailed analysis of all relevant information about the history of the monastery, the architecture and wall paintings of the church and the icons on its iconostasis. The systematically organized and luxuriously designed publication includes architectural drawings, drawings of 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes and photographs of various documents, architectural elements and frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas made by older researchers, both Serbian (Svetozar Tomić, Jovan Hadži-Vasiljević) and foreign (Gabriel Millet) collected over the years by Marković from numerous institutions and private collections. Placed directly beside the text, these illustrations make it much easier for the reader to follow the discussed problems; in addition, the book closes with a large album of color photographs of frescoes taken by the author himself.

The monograph on the Church of St. Niketas opens with the *Foreword* (p. 7–8) and *Introduction* (p. 9–10); in the latter, Marković informs the reader about the church's alternative names and the arguments in favor of accepting the name "Church of St. Niketas near Skopje" as the accurate designation for this foundation of Milutin's. He explains that the emergence of names such as Banjani, Gornjani and Čučer as synonyms for the Church of St. Niketas – all of which have been frequently used in academic literature – was influenced by the geographic proximity of the church to the villages of the same name. In view of the fact that medieval sources refer to the church as an edifice in the vicinity of Skopje, Marković opts for the name "Church of St. Niketas near Skopje" as the most accurate designation.

In the following chapter *St. Niketas in Historiography* (pp. 11–28) Marković extensively discusses not only essays and studies in academic journals and books but also records made by old travel writers and reports from the first field research expeditions. The author offers both a chronological and a thematic overview of older literature, critically assessing the findings of previous attempts at researching the church. To help the reader trace the development of scholarly interpretations of the problems associated with the Church of St. Niketas, Marković splits his historiographical overview into three sections, with each of these sections analyzing contributions on the history, architecture and art of the church. This method provides a coherent picture of the academic results that have

been achieved so far and clearly indicates the degree of knowledge available on each aspect of the monument. At the same time, he concludes that this foundation of King Milutin's had yet to be subjected to exhaustive research and that some questions (such as the dating of the frescoes from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the identity of their ktetor; the wall paintings on western part of the southern façade and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century wall paintings in the dome) had never been studied in more detail.

Further, the main part of the book is divided into four sections: *History* (pp. 29–76), *Architecture* (pp. 77–96), *Wall Paintings* (pp. 97–270) and *Icons* (pp. 271–274); with the exception of the last, all of these sections contain a number of chapters, depending on the subject matter addressed therein. As the Church of St. Niketas has been restored and repainted several times since its foundation, the author chose a chronological approach to its history, architecture and wall paintings, providing a continuous and easily accessible survey of all stages in the establishment and history of the church. The body text in each chapter is accompanied by drawings of frescoes and black-and-white photographs of selected scenes, individual figural representations and interesting details, which make it much easier for the reader to understand the discussed problems.

The history of the shrine dedicated to the Gothic martyr from its foundation to modern times is reconstructed and recounted in the first section of the book entitled *History* (pp. 29–76), which is in turn divided into several chapters: *The Main Sources for the Period from the Foundation of the Monastery until 1321* (pp. 31–41), *The Foundation of the Monastery* (pp. 42–50), *King Milutin's Renovation* (pp. 51–53), *The Monastery Estate* (pp. 54–59), *St. Niketas under the Coastal Pyrgos of the Hilandar Monastery in Hrusija* (pp. 60–62), *The Metochion of the Pyrgos of Hrusija* (pp. 63–67), *Under the Direct Administration of the Hegoumenos of Hilandar* (pp. 68–71), *The Period of Turkish Rule (1392–1912)* (pp. 72–74) and *Recent History* (pp. 75–76). In a previous study Marković has already published a detailed consideration and critical reassessment of all available information about the oldest history of the monastery and its first centuries.<sup>3</sup> In this book, however, he also reconstructs the later periods in the monastery's history all the way to the most recent times, including the period when the monastery was governed by the hegoumenos of Hilandar. The first chapter offers a detailed analysis of the charters issued to the Church of St. Niketas by King Milutin of Serbia and the Byzantine emperors Andronikos II and Michael IX; it reconstructs their contents and establishes their date of issue and degree of authenticity. Although these documents from the Hilandar archives have not been preserved in entirety and are extant only in their Serbian translations, they are a valuable source of information about the first centuries in the history of the monastery (pp. 31–41). Based on the information in the chrysobull of Michael IX and King Milutin's charter on the donation of St. Niketas to the Pyrgos of the Hilandar Monastery in Hrusija, as well as the historical data about the region of Skopje and the evolution of the cult of Niketas the Goth, Marković

determines the time of the monastery's foundation and also elucidates the main facts about its existence prior to Milutin's renovation. Namely, he assumes that the monastery of St. Niketas near Skopje was founded by one of the Serbian rulers who preceded King Milutin on the Serbian throne and ruled this region, most likely by the Serbian Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja (pp. 42–50). Having found the monastery in a derelict condition, King Milutin rebuilt the Church of St. Niketas from the ground up. Marković has managed to determine a more precise time frame for this endeavor based on a part of the text from the lost charter about the donation of the monastery to the Pyrgos of Hrusija and the (also lost) royal charter to the monastery: the construction of the church seems to have begun shortly after April 1299 and to have ended by May 1308, when the monastery became a metochion of the Pyrgos of the Hilandar Monastery (pp. 51–53). He has also fully reconstructed the monastery estate and determined the exact properties in the vicinity of Skopje personally gifted by King Milutin to his foundation, as well as those that had been granted to the monastery by his royal predecessors and merely confirmed by him. Using the information about these estates in Milutin's lost founding charter for the Church of St. Niketas, he has identified and located a number of villages that used to belong to the monastery (pp. 54–59). Shortly after the renovation of the monastery and the construction of the Church of St. Niketas, King Milutin decided to entrust the administration of the church of the Gothic martyr and its entire estate to the Church of the Holy Savior on the Pyrgos of Hrusija. His decision was confirmed by Andronikos II, as evidenced by the imperial chrysobull of May 1308 which has been preserved in its Serbian translation (pp. 60–67). Marković also discusses the mutual relations of the Church of St. Niketas, the Pyrgos of Hrusija and the Hilandar Monastery. King Milutin's decision (made in the second half of 1321) to put St. Niketas under the direct jurisdiction of the hegoumenos of the Hilandar Monastery instead of the Pyrgos of Hrusija as an exchange of property is explained in this context; this piece of information has reached us through Emperor Andronikos II's confirmation chrysobull of December 1324 (pp. 68–71). The author traces the later history of the monastery and presents important data about the restoration efforts during the Ottoman rule: in 1484, the 16<sup>th</sup> century and 1846 (pp. 72–74), as well as the conservation and restoration works on the architecture and wall paintings of the church in 1967 and 1979 (pp. 75–76).

The next section of the book is entitled *Architecture* (pp. 77–96) and discusses this aspect of the Church of St. Niketas. As Marković recounts the history of the church through all stages in its construction and retraces its changes throughout the centuries, this part of the publication is divided into two chapters: *The Church of St. Niketas* (pp. 79–94) and *The Parekklesion of St. John the Baptist* (pp. 95–96). In the former chapter, the author analyzes the foundations, dimensions and spatial structure of Milutin's foundation, minutely describing the material, building technique and façade decoration and presenting his views and conclusions on the origin of the idea and design. The Church of St. Niketas is a cruciform edifice of the cross-in-square type, with an octagonal dome and

the altar space comprising the eastern arm of the cross, a short narrow bay and an apse that is semicircular inside and five-sided outside. The dome is made of clay bricks, while all other parts of the church were built in alternating layers of bricks and ashlar. Its façades reveal the use of the cloisonné technique and the remnants of red-painted mortar, which was meant to imitate bricks in some places. The church features a number of openings and entrances on the west and south sides, while the western, southern and northern façade walls are divided by blind arches that reflect the interior structure of the edifice. Marković suggests analogies for this shape and construction method on the territory of the Byzantine world and believes that the Church of St. Niketas was the work of builders of Greek origin. He supports his view by the fact that the closest parallels to the design of the altar space and the dome in King Milutin's foundation are found in Byzantine architecture in both older and contemporaneous churches (The Church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi; Church of Panagia Olympiotissa in Elassona; and the churches of Thessaloniki such as the Holy Apostles, St. Panteleimon and the Holy Saviour). The author also determines the place of the Church of St. Niketas not only in the context of Byzantine masonry but also in the context of Serbian medieval architecture. He points out that this church represents one of the oldest surviving examples of a domed cross-in-square church in Serbian medieval architecture and suggests that the peculiar design of the sanctuary was soon replicated in a church founded by a noblewoman named Danica in the nearby village of Ljuboten – the Church of St. Nicholas, and partially in the construction of the Church of St. Demetrios in Marko's Monastery and the Church of the Holy Archangels in Štip. Somewhat later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a parekklesion dedicated to St. John the Baptist was added along the southern wall of the Church of St. Niketas in the shape of a single-nave building made of stone and brick. As the parekklesion was demolished in 1928, the author uses the few remaining sources and scarce available information to offer a brief description of its ground plan and materials used in its construction; based on this, he proposes the reconstruction of its original architectural design. In this case too, the stages in the construction process are made easier to understand by the inclusion of floor plans of the church and the parekklesion, as well as section drawings of the edifice and its façades, which are provided beside the body text or on separate pages.

The next section of the book entitled *Wall Paintings* (pp. 97–270) is the largest part of the book. It offers a detailed analysis of the wall paintings made throughout the four stages in the process of painting the church (14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century), clearly differentiating between the oldest layer and the younger layers of frescoes. The topics of the paintings are presented in spatial sections and wall painting zones, while the author's consideration of their thematic program and his iconographical and stylistic analyses are given in separate successive paragraphs. This section opens with a chapter entitled *List of Frescoes with Inscriptions, the Disposition of Scenes and Individual Figures of Saints* (pp. 99–109), which – along with the rest of the book – offers a valuable contribution to understanding the complex topic of the Church of St. Niketas. This

chapter provides a catalogue of all extant scenes and figures, their accompanying inscriptions and the texts on the scrolls in the hands of the saints, as well as frescoes that have been damaged or destroyed but whose former existence has been reliably reconstructed by the author. The list includes both 14<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes and the younger ones painted in the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are distinguished by a different type of lettering. To make it easier for the reader to understand the disposition of the fresco decorations, the author again includes drawings of the wall painting layout and numbers corresponding to the list of compositions and individual figures.

Since most of the preserved frescoes belong to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the author focuses on this layer of wall paintings, providing a detailed and comprehensive overview of it in a separate chapter entitled *Frescoes of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century* (pp. 111–217), which convincingly reconstructs the original thematic and iconographical program of the church, including both the repainted sections of the older layer and the segments with destroyed fresco decoration. To do this, he finds analogies with the frescoes in other King Milutin's foundations (e.g. for the compositions depicting the Christ raising the daughter of Jairus or Christ reading in a synagogue) or bases his identification on the physiognomic features of the images and the characteristic attributes of the saints (e.g. St. Stephen, St. Sozon etc.). Marković always bears in mind that the artists who restored the frescoes of the Church of St. Niketas in 1484 and the wall painter Dičo Krstević in the 19<sup>th</sup> century acknowledged and repeated the old wall paintings to a large extent. The original layer of fresco paintings in Milutin's foundation is considered in the usual order from the dome down (dome, altar, western part of the nave), allowing the reader to trace and grasp the program as a whole. This program, the author points out, is "simple and very well-organized owing to the external structure of the building". The depictions of Christ Pantokrator, Heavenly Liturgy and the prophets in the dome; the image of the Mother of God, the Communion of the Apostles and the Officiating Church Fathers in the altar apse; the cycle of the Great Feasts, Passion of Christ, Miracles and Teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as individual figures of selected saints in the nave of the Church of St. Niketas were all solutions characteristic of wall paintings of the Palaiologan period. However, careful observation reveals a number of unusual features in the choice and disposition of some compositions and holy figures. For example, the author highlights the depiction of both scenes that illustrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ – Descent of Christ into Hades and the Myrrhbearers at the tomb – in the cycle of the Great Feasts; the depiction of the holy saints Constantine and Helena near the eastern part of the church; the connection between the bust of Job the Just and the scenes from the Passion of Christ cycle; the depiction of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, a composition identified based on the fragments in the third zone of the southern wall in the southwestern bay outside of the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin; and the prominent position and joint depiction of St. Simeon Nemanja and St. Sava, the first ktetors of the Hilandar Monastery. The appearance of the last two solutions in the program of Milutin's foundation on Skopska Crna Gora is interpreted by the author as the

influence of the Hilandar Monastery. In addition, the order of the Christological cycles, the depiction of Christ Anapeson and Christ talking to the apostles about the end of the age on the western side of the piers flanking the iconostasis, the position of the cycle of the Miracles and Teachings of Jesus Christ in the nave, diaconicon and western corner bays, as well as the appearance of many monk figures in the lowest zone, according to the author, clearly indicates a programmatic link between the frescoes of St. Niketas and the katholikon of Hilandar. These influences of the Hilandar Monastery on the wall paintings of St. Niketas have already been noted and indicated in Marković's study on the links between the art of the Hilandar Monastery and that of its metochia,<sup>4</sup> but here they are elaborated and explained in more detail. His research of the wall painting program of the Church of St. Niketas is adequately supplemented by iconographical and stylistic analyses. As most of these iconographical solutions were rather common and appeared in many monuments of the Palaiologan period, Marković found the most analogies with the frescoes of the Gračanica Monastery. However, he indicates all similarities and differences between each composition in Milutin's foundation in Skopska Crna Gora and the corresponding depictions in other churches whose wall paintings have been attributed to the same painting workshop. For example, he highlights the depiction of Jesus Christ wearing a sakkos in the Communion of the Apostles scene, the texts on the scrolls in the hands of the prophets (particularly those held by Isaiah and Ezekiel), the unusual presence of the Old Testament prophet David in the Annunciation scene, the layout of the figures in the composition of the Presentation of Jesus Christ at the Temple, the shape of the table and the disposition of figures around it in the Last Supper, and the depiction of St. John kissing the left foot of Jesus Christ in the scene of the Descent from the Cross, etc.

The next section entitled *Stylistic Characteristics* (pp. 198–204) offers an analysis of the stylistic features of the oldest frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas and highlights its similarity with the art of the Palaiologan period. The author carefully examines their compositions, spatial organization, colors and the proportions and volume of figures. The scenes of the Christological cycle are presented as a horizontal frieze with no bordures separating them. In most cases, the compositions are conceptually centered on the figure of Jesus Christ, which is usually positioned in one of the corners of the scene. The purpose of the depicted buildings and/or landscapes is to indicate the location where the scene takes place. While the landscapes have not received much attention, the depicted architecture, with its diverse and abundant elements, shapes and limits the space of the scene. The range of colors is relatively small and includes no more than a few colors in various shades. The proportions of the figures – both those in the Gospel scenes and the individual images of saints – indicate that the artist chose to abandon Classicist models and sought to elongate them and reduce their volume. As the most remarkable feature of the oldest wall paintings in the Church of St. Niketas the author highlights the artist's ability to tie together all participants in the composition. To illustrate this extraordinary skill of the painter, he cites

the scenes of the Dormition of the Virgin, the Marriage at Cana and the Expulsion of the merchants from the Temple. Although all of these scenes include a large number of figures, they are remarkably well-organized, balanced and supplemented by motifs and scenes from daily life.

Based on his detailed analysis of the artistic merit of the wall paintings in the Church of St. Niketas and the stylistic uniformity of the paintings in this church, Miodrag Marković draws the conclusion that all frescoes in this church were done by a single painter. This artist is the subject of the next chapter entitled *Michael, Son of Eutykhios – the Protomaster of the Oldest Wall Paintings* (pp. 204–207). Unlike the older researchers who believed that the wall paintings of the Church of St. Niketas were the work of two painters (Michael and Eutykhios), Marković uses the analysis of the artist's signature on the shield of St. Theodore Tyron to infer that all frescoes in the church were painted by a single artist – Michael, son of Eutykhios (most probably the painter identified with Michael Astrapas). Marković has already presented this view in a study on the activities of these two painters from Thessaloniki and his view has since become widely accepted in academic circles.<sup>5</sup> The chapter on 14<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes of the Church of St. Niketas closes with a number of valuable conclusions about this church. The concise version of the author's observations about the time frame of the wall-painting process of the Church of St. Niketas and the person who commissioned the frescoes, on which the extant written sources offer no information, has already been published<sup>6</sup>; however, the section *The Dating of the Frescoes* (pp. 207–217) provides a more in-depth consideration of the ktetor problem and allows the author to suggest a more accurate dating of the wall paintings. The dating is based on his conclusions drawn from the historical overview provided at the beginning of the book; the fact that there is no portrait of King Milutin in his foundation near Skopje; and the resemblance of the church's program to the fresco ensemble of the Serbian Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. Finally, the author proves that the frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas near Skopje were commissioned by the fraternity of the Hilandar Monastery and that the church was painted around 1324, after having become Hilandar's metochion.

However, the passage of time had ravaged the painted decoration of the Church of St. Niketas, particularly in the vaults and the highest zones of the walls. The ktetor inscription above the entrance on the southern wall suggests that the wall paintings were renovated in 1484. Using the same approach as in the previous part of the book, in the chapter entitled *Frescoes of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century* (pp. 218–258) Marković first discusses the programmatic features of the restored fresco groups, examines the iconography of the parts that had been repaired or painted anew and finally analyses the artistic aspects of the frescoes painted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Carefully differentiating between the older and the younger layer of frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas, in his exhaustive analysis the author shows that the artists who restored the frescoes respectfully treated the 14<sup>th</sup>-century decoration at the church and in many cases replicated the layout and

<sup>5</sup> Idem, *Umetnička delatnost Mihaila i Evtihija*, 95–112.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, *Hilandar i živopis u crkvama njegovih metoha*, 291–295.

iconography of the original wall paintings. Their restoration interventions – both minor and major – are found in some compositions of the cycles of the Great Feasts, the Passion of Christ, Miracles and Teachings of Jesus Christ, and a few individual figures of saints. In addition, the author notes that the artists who restored the frescoes in some cases deviated from the original program, probably following the patron's special requirements. It is precisely these changes in the program that Marković focuses on: the illustration of the troparion of monk Mark of Otranto, as well as the depictions of the Death of Judas and St. Hilarion of Moglena. As for the iconography of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes, the author concludes that in some cases it follows the trends of the art of the previous century (art of the Palaiologian Renaissance period). However, he also notes that a few of the scenes – such as the Repentance of Judas and Judas' Suicide – reveal many elements representative of late Byzantine art. Again, the chapter on the 15<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes contains drawings of these frescoes published for the first time in this book. The author ends the chapter with a discussion of the artist's origin and his search for similar solutions. Based on his detailed analysis of the main characteristics of the creative process used by the artist in 1484, Marković affirms the existing hypothesis about a certain painter from Kastoria as the author of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas, and agrees with the view that the similar painting process of the same artist is noticeable in the katholikon of the Monastery of Great Meteoron at Meteora, which is dedicated to the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, and the Church of St. Nicholas of Nun Eupraxia in Kastoria.

The chapter *Frescoes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century* (pp. 259–266) is divided into two parts: the *Parekklesion of St. John the Baptist* (pp. 259–263) and the *Western Part of the Southern Façade* (pp. 263–266), both of which are illustrated by old photographs made by Gabriel Millet and drawings of the frescoes. In the first part of the chapter, Marković reconstructs the original fresco program of the Parekklesion of St. John the Forerunner; as this building was demolished in 1928, the only extant evidence about its existence is found in the notes made by Vladimir Petković in 1925. Taking into consideration all available information and similar solutions found in contemporaneous monuments of a similar type, the author goes a step further and identifies the figure of a saint on the south wall as Apostle Ananias; he also suggests some scenes and figures that, in his opinion, could have decorated the interior of the south parekklesion of the Church of St. Niketas: scenes from the cycle of St. John the Baptist, figures of the hierarchs in the altar, figures of the Holy Virgin and St. Zosimus on the northern and western walls of the nave, and medallions with different iconographical types of Christ in the top section of the vault. Analyzing the choice of the depicted saints, he comes to the conclusion that the program of the parekklesion dedicated to St. John the Forerunner was meant to thematically supplement the frescoes in the church, i.e. that its frescoes depicted scenes and figures not featured in the main church. In the latter part of the chapter, based on the damaged wall paintings the author provides a rough description of the program on the western part of the southern façade, which he believes was once fronted by an open porch. Once again, the

author tries to identify the frescoes that have been preserved in fragments, assuming that the old martyr with a cap represents St. Mardarius. In cases when the available evidence was insufficient to draw a final conclusion, the author indicates some possibilities. Thus Marković suggests that the warrior above the bust of St. Nicholas could represent St. George or St. Niketas and that the standing figures in the lower zone of the lesene, around the west blind arch, seem to represent martyr saints. In view of the fact that the only remaining fresco of the parekklesion is the scene of the Annunciation to Zacharias, the author could do no more than to draw some general conclusions about its iconography and stylistic characteristics. The closest analogy for the stylistic features of the scene of the Annunciation to Zacharias is found in the wall paintings of the churches on the territory of the Patriarchate of Peć which were painted soon after its restoration in 1557 and for the fresco fragments in the western part of the southern façade in the wall paintings of the Parekklesion of St. John the Baptist. In light of all this, the author places the painting of these parts of the Church of St. Niketas in the closing decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas were heavily damaged in the following centuries and due to the efforts of the former priest of Saint Niketas Uroš and a prominent citizen of Skopje named Hadži Trajko Dojčinović, a new restoration campaign was launched in 1846. The following chapter entitled *Frescoes of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (pp. 267–270) discusses the frescoes painted in this last restoration effort. Analyzing the programmatic ideas, iconography and the style of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes, he consistently applies the method used in the previous three chapters. The parts of the church that were now bare – the calotte and a part of the dome drum – were painted in 1846 by Dimitrije Dičo Krstević. The works of this prolific artist from the vicinity of Debar have been the subject of many an academic study, but this book is the first to suggest that it was he who painted the 19<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes in the Church of St. Niketas. The author draws this conclusion based on the stylistic characteristics of Krstević's art and the fact that he also made the icons for the iconostasis. Krstević painted Christ Pantokrator and the Heavenly Liturgy, motifs commonly depicted in the dome, which were also located in this part of the church in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, the author's findings suggest that the artist did make some changes in the program and iconography and replaced the original representations of the prophets Zephaniah and Joel with depictions of the prophets Samuel and Obadiah. Finally, the author concludes that the iconographical and stylistic features of Krstević's paintings in the dome of the Church of St. Niketas share the spirit of his other works and finds their closest parallels in his older works created in the fifth decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Icons painted by Dimitrije Dičo Krstević in late 1846 and early 1847 on the new iconostasis in the Church of St. Niketas are discussed in the last section of the book entitled *Icons* (pp. 271–274). The artist of Debar painted the following despotic icons: Christ Pantokrator, the Virgin with the Christ child, St. Niketas the Goth and St. John the Baptist, with the first three bearing his signature and date of creation. As the iconostasis made in the mid-

19<sup>th</sup> century has since been dismantled, the original arrangement of Dičo's icons was unknown. However, using Gabriel Millet's old photographs and some of the other iconostasis by the same artist, Marković has reconstructed the original disposition of the icons and has contributed to the – hereto fragmentary – knowledge about the iconostasis in the Church of St. Niketas. The section discussing the icons ends with his analysis of the iconographical and stylistic characteristics of Krstević's icons, concluding that they reflect the usual style of his works. He particularly focuses on the icon of Theotokos Hodegetria which was once located at the Church of St. George in Banjani and is now kept at the Museum of Macedonia in Skopje. Marković accepts the view of older researchers that this was one of the despotic icons in the Church of St. Niketas, but rejects the view that it does not share the stylistic traits characteristic of the works of Michael and Eutychios and in contrast indicates the iconographic and stylistic similarity between this icon and the frescoes of the famous artists from Thessaloniki. The monograph on the Church of St. Niketas ends with the lists of abbreviations, sources and secondary literature (pp. 275–288), an album with 96 color photographs, a summary in English (pp. 337–342), lists of illustrations in Serbian and English (pp. 343–362), exhaustive indices (general, pp. 363–370; iconographical, pp. 371–374), and a note on the author (p. 375).

Based on the above, we can safely conclude that the book *St. Niketas near Skopje – A Foundation of King Milutin* by Miodrag Marković is a comprehensive and systematic monograph about this church. The book offers thorough analyses of various aspects of the church: its history, architecture, the thematic and iconographical program of its wall paintings, their stylistic characteristics and the icons of the church iconostasis. Drawing on his experience as a researcher and his analytic skills, the author first recounts and interprets the oldest history of the church dedicated to the Gothic martyr and the restoration of the church under King Milutin; he particularly focuses on examining and explaining the complex relationship between the Church of St. Niketas and the Pyrgos of Hrusija, discussing several charters pertinent to the reconstruction of the monastery's history. He discusses at length the oldest layer of the wall paintings, as well as the painting of new frescoes in three restoration campaigns. The frescoes were painted in four stages and are discussed here separately

and extensively, with their characteristics and meanings summarized and explained.

Rising to the methodological demands of contemporary scholarship, this book provides not only a detailed description and analysis but also reproductions of the complete fresco decoration of the Church of St. Niketas. The author has updated his interpretations of the thematic program with new, different conclusions; supplemented his iconographical analysis with discussions of hereto overlooked compositions and individual figures; and has placed its stylistic characteristics in the context of Byzantine art. Furthermore, he has revealed the ktetor, painter and dating of the oldest layer of wall paintings in the Church of St. Niketas, as well as the origin of the artist who restored the frescoes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the identity of the artist who painted the frescoes in the dome in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Using extant wall paintings, old photographs and analogies with similar monuments, Marković has not only reconstructed the original appearance of damaged representations and figures, but has also convincingly identified the ones that were hereto unknown. He has found the closest analogies in older and contemporaneous works of a similar type both in Eastern Christian monumental art and Serbian wall paintings in Milutin's other foundations, indicating works that were used as models for some solutions. Finally, he has determined the place of the Church of St. Niketas in the context of Serbian medieval art and Byzantine culture, offering a comprehensive picture of this monument. This book offers an important contribution to the study of the history, architecture and art of this foundation of King Milutin's and is certainly indispensable to all researchers of this church. At the same time, it will be very useful for all future attempts at studying not only this church but also 14<sup>th</sup>- and 15<sup>th</sup>- century art in Serbia and other countries under the Byzantine cultural influence. The book's artwork (architectural drawings, drawings indicating the layout of wall paintings, drawings of the wall paintings from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) and photographs (black-and-white illustrations, color album) provide important documentary evidence about the church and, together with its modern design, give it the exclusivity and quality befitting of a contemporary academic publication.

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