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THE PROGRAMMATIC CONTEXT OF THE SERBIAN NOBILITY PORTRAITS DURING THE NEMANJIĆ DYNASTY**

ABSTRACT: Portraits of nobility were thoughtfully incorporated into the thematic programme of medieval churches and brought into connection with the representations of patrons, religious compositions, and portraits of contemporaries. Special attention was paid to the custom of joining portraits of noblemen with the figures of sovereigns and ecclesiastical dignitaries in endowments by the members of the nobility. This can be connected to certain older examples of Byzantine art, as well as the ones of that time. In addition, some of the solutions preserved in Serbian painting are unusual and unique in the art of medieval Eastern Christian countries, which indicates the special place of Serbian aristocratic portraiture within Byzantine art and the countries under its cultural influence.

KEYWORDS: Serbia, nobility, programmatic context, portrait, wall painting.

An overwhelming number of representations of Serbian nobility had been preserved in the wall painting during the Nemanjić dynasty and thoughtfully incorporated into the thematic programmes of medieval churches. Namely, portraits of nobles and members of their families were associated with representations of patrons or particularly revered saints, as well as with certain religious compositions, along with figures of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries. In most cases, the representations of nobility were painted right next to the figures of church patrons. Thus, several portraits of the ktetors and members of their families had been depicted in front or near the representation of the Virgin, like in the churches of the Mother of God in Kučevište, the White Church of Karan, Dobrun, and Maligrad on Prespa (PAVLOVIĆ 2021: 32 with literature, Note 2, Fig. 1, 7). Furthermore, next to the representation of St. Nicholas, to whom the church in Psača is dedicated, *Knez Paskač* and *Sebastokrator Vlatko* are depicted submitting the model of the endowment to

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Fig. 1. Church of Saint George in Pološko, former western façade

St. Nicholas, painted in the form of an icon (PAVLOVIĆ 2021: 34 with literature, Fig. 3). In the nave of the Lesnovo, the nobleman Jovan Oliver is depicted beside the representation of the church's patron saint, as well as in the Chapel of St. John the Forerunner in St. Sophia, Ohrid. In the first temple, *Sebastokrator* Jovan Oliver offers his gift to Archangel Michael (PAVLOVIĆ 2021: 32 with literature, Fig. 2), while in the second the same nobleman is portrayed close to St. John the Baptist, accompanied by his wife and sons (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1994: fig. 52; ВОЈВОДИЋ 2010: 73). Finally, an unidentified nobleman on the north wall of the north-eastern bay of the narthex in the Dečani is positioned next to its patron, St. George (PAVLOVIĆ 2021: 38 with literature, Fig. 5), while, on the former western façade of the church in Pološko, (Fig. 1) nobleman Jovan Dragušin and members of his family are gathered around the half-length representation of the same saint (ПАВЛОВИЋ 2015: 109, Fig. 2).

Furthermore, as evidenced by the preserved representations, members of the nobility are shown presenting their gift or prayer to Christ or some other especially revered saint. Hence, the *tepčija* in the Treskavac Monastery is shown offering a model of the endowment to the Lord, represented in the form of the Hand of God, which blesses him from a segment of the heaven, while in the church in Lipljan, an unknown donor is shown in the act of prayer before the archbishop, in whose image we can recognise St. Nicholas (PAVLOVIĆ 2021: 34–35, 42, with literature, note 3, Fig. 4).

Also, there are examples when a certain saint might have been portrayed close to a nobleman in the capacity of the protector as in the narthex in Lesnovo. Namely, St. John the Theologian is painted on the south side of the northeastern pilaster of the narthex, and on the opposite side, the north side of the southeastern pilaster there is St. John the Baptist (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 197–199, Fig. 100, 112).¹ Apart from the narthex, the image of St. John the Baptist can



Fig. 2. Saint Sophia in Ohrid, Chapel of St. John the Baptist, western wall

¹ Some researchers find the rationale for positioning St. John the Baptist and St. John the Theologian as counterparts in Lesnovo in the fact that Jovan Oliver, the ktetor of the temple, and Jovan, the first bishop of Zletovo (portrayed in the southwestern corner of the narthex), had been the namesakes of the aforementioned

also be found in the nave of Lesnovo, on the column in front of the iconostasis (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 122–123, fig. 52), as well as in the Chapel of St. John the Forerunner within the Church of St. Sophia in Ohrid, the endowment of the same ktetor *Despot* Jovan Oliver (ГРОЗДАНОВ 1980: draw. 9, fig. 43), which make it clear that the Forerunner was a saint who was particularly respected by the said nobleman. This is equally supported by the representation of the Baptism of Christ (separated from the series of the Great Feasts and placed on the eastern wall of the northern bay of the narthex, close the portraits of the rulers – Emperor Dušan, Empress Jelena, and King Uroš, as well as the portraits of the aristocracy – *Despot* Jovan Oliver and members of his family) and the scenes of John's sermons further above – the Forerunner's Sermon at the Barn and the Forerunner Warns the People, as well as, on the western side of the pilaster, John's Preaches to the Soldiers (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 181–183, fig. 84–86). Furthermore, in the second zone of the western wall of the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in the Church of St. Sophia, Ohrid (Fig. 2), three scenes from the Forerunner's hagiographic cycle had been depicted above the portraits of *Despot* Jovan Oliver, *Despotissa* Ana Marija, their son Damjan, and Archbishop Nikola of Ohrid – the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the Beheading and the Burial of the Body (ГРОЗДАНОВ 1980: 63, 65, Drawing 9).

Beside this chapel, the painted scenes from the patron saint's life in the part of the temple where the ktetors are portrayed are also present in some other churches of nobility. Thus, the narthexes of the Church of St. George in Gornji Kozjak and the Church of St. Nicholas in Psača also exhibit ktetorial compositions. In the former temple, the composition consists of an unknown nobleman, his wife Tihoslava, and their son, and in the latter, *Sebastokrator* Vlatko's family of seven – the first depicts scenes from the life of St. George and the second from the life of St. Nicholas.² A similar situation can be observed in Dečani, where a portrait of an unknown nobleman was found inside the chapel dedicated to St. George, along with the compositions from his hagiographic cycle. In the northeast bay of the Dečani narthex, scenes of the passion and miracles of St. George cover the vault, as well as the northern and eastern walls (ТОДИЋ, ЧАНАК-МЕДИЋ 2005: 402 with literature). The same saint was, in all likelihood, the patron saint of the Serbian aristocratic family whose members built and decorated the Church of the Virgin in Vaganeš (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2013: 20). Devotion to the cult of the great martyr and warrior from Cappadocia had been conveyed in Vaganeš in an unusual way – by inserting an important event from his hagiography at the centre of the portrait ensembles. Namely, the scene of St. George killing the dragon had been placed on the eastern side of the southern wall of the narthex, between the representations of the ktetor's deceased parents and an unknown child on the western side of the same wall and the portrait of the main ktetor Dabiživ and his closest family on the south side of the eastern wall of the narthex (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2013: 20, Drawing 5, Fig. 16).

saints (GABELIĆ 1998: 198, in which one more example has been given of the pairing of the figures of St. John the Theologian and St. John the Baptist in the church of St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki).

² Today, the existence of the hagiographic cycle of St. George in the narthex of Gornji Kozjak is only detected by two fragmentarily preserved scenes (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1994: 68, 71, 88, 107, 139, 174). The depiction of scenes from the patron's life above the ktetor portraits of nobility was not uncommon in the art of the Byzantine world, as evidenced by the example from Udabno in Georgia (EASTMOND 1998: 56).

Solutions preserved in Kučevište, Karan, and Lesnovo bear witness to the custom of connecting the representations of nobility with religious compositions. The scene of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty of Sebaste is depicted above the ktetor composition in the church in Karan (Fig. 3), in the second zone of the northern wall of the western bay (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006–2007: 139–140). Although damaged, judging by the preserved remains,



Fig. 3. White Church of Karan, northern wall of the western bay

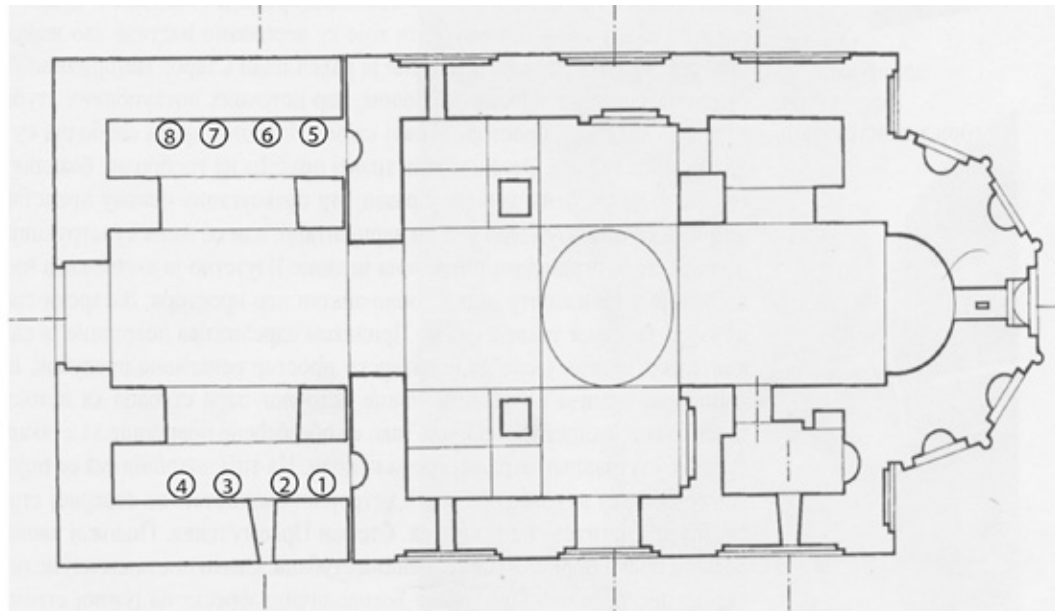
the composition was of monumental proportions and it covered the surface of the upper zone of the northern wall of the western bay.³ In Serbian art of the 14th century, the scene of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty was painted significantly less often than in the previous century.⁴ The appearance of the scene of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty of Sebaste in the fresco painting in the endowment of *Župan* Petar Brajan is explained both by the popularity of that scene in Raška – it was almost regularly depicted in the thematic programmes of Serbian temples of the 13th century – and by the influences from the South. These arrived to Karan from Macedonia, where the cult of the Forty spread forth from Ohrid's St. Sophia, and they could equally be observed in other scenes of the frescoes in Karan (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006–2007: 139–140). Undoubtedly, at the request of *župan* Petar Brajan, the scene of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty of Sebaste was placed above the ktetor composition in the church in Karan (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006–2007: 139–140). Bearing in mind the position that the representation of the collective martyrdom of the Holy Forty usually occupied in the topography of the fresco paintings of Serbian temples, the example from Karan represents a unique solution.⁵ Furthermore, a cycle of the Last Psalms was illustrated in the Kučevište and Lesnovo narthexes, together with the portraits of the ktetors and members of their families. The psalms are part of the funeral liturgy performed in the narthex and their presentation clearly indicates the sepulchral character of those spaces. In Kučevište, where twelve scenes had been portrayed, the psalms occupied the surface of the vault of the narthex, while the Lesnovo cycle, consisting of sixteen compositions (two of which were not preserved) had been the most extensive (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1994: 136; ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 183–189). In the latter temple, they cover the southern vault of the narthex, the south pilasters, as well as the upper zones of the south wall, that is, the southern half of the narthex (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 183–189).

In addition to representations of patrons, particularly revered saints and certain religious compositions, portraits of nobility and members of their families were associated with figures of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries. The depiction of members of the Serbian aristocracy alongside sovereigns and representatives of the church intended to emphasise the social status of the nobility and indicate the awareness of the nobles regarding their position, in relation to both the current ruler and church dignitaries. Thus, several programmatic solutions had been applied in the presentation of their mutual relations and connections on the walls of Serbian aristocratic endowments.

³ Namely, a part of the scene with the figures of a dozen martyrs – with only the lower parts of their bodies visible, including the portrayal of a legionnaire stooping when entering *thermae* – had been painted in the second zone of the northern wall, and the rest of the composition depicting Christ crowning the martyrs was, almost certainly, painted above, in the third zone of the said wall, in the western bay, which has no traces of fresco paintings today.

⁴ As an independent composition in Serbian painting of the 14th century, it exists only in the Lesnovo narthex, while in Dečani and Treskavac it has been given a place within *menologion* (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 206–207, T. LIX).

⁵ It is only somewhat similar to the representation on the western wall of the narthex in Lesnovo, where the monumental composition of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty was found, near the family portrait of *Despot* Jovan Oliver on the north wall. For an example from Lesnovo see ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: 206–207, T. LIX.



- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ① King Dušan | ⑤ Virgin with Christ |
| ② Queen Jelena | ⑥ Marena |
| ③ Vojvoda Dejan | ⑦ Two members of the noble family |
| ④ Vojvodica Vladislava | ⑧ |

Fig. 4. Kučevište, drawing with the disposition of the portraits of the royal couple and the members of the noble family in the narthex

The oldest example of emphasising the supremacy of Serbian rulers in relation to their subordinates from the ranks of nobility has been preserved in the narthex of Kučevište (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 258). *Vojvoda Dejan* and *Vojvodica Vladislava* are portrayed on the western half of the south wall of the narthex, right next to the royal couple Dušan and Jelena, presented on the eastern side of the same wall. On the opposite side, on the north wall of the narthex, there is a depiction of Marena with two other members of the noble family, differently identified, portrayed as submitting the model of the Temple to the Virgin with Christ in her arms.⁶ While a combined solution is presented in the narthex of Kučevište, in which the ruling couple is positioned next to and opposite their subordinates (Fig. 4), in some later churches built by the aristocracy only one of the aforementioned variants is used when connecting these figures. Therefore, in the White Church in Karan, the portraits of the ktetors, *Župan* Petar Brajan and members of his family are located on the north

⁶ For different identifications of figures on the northern wall of the narthex in Kučevište see ĐORĐEVIĆ 1994: 135; RASOLKOSKA-NIKOLOVSKA 1985: 46–50.

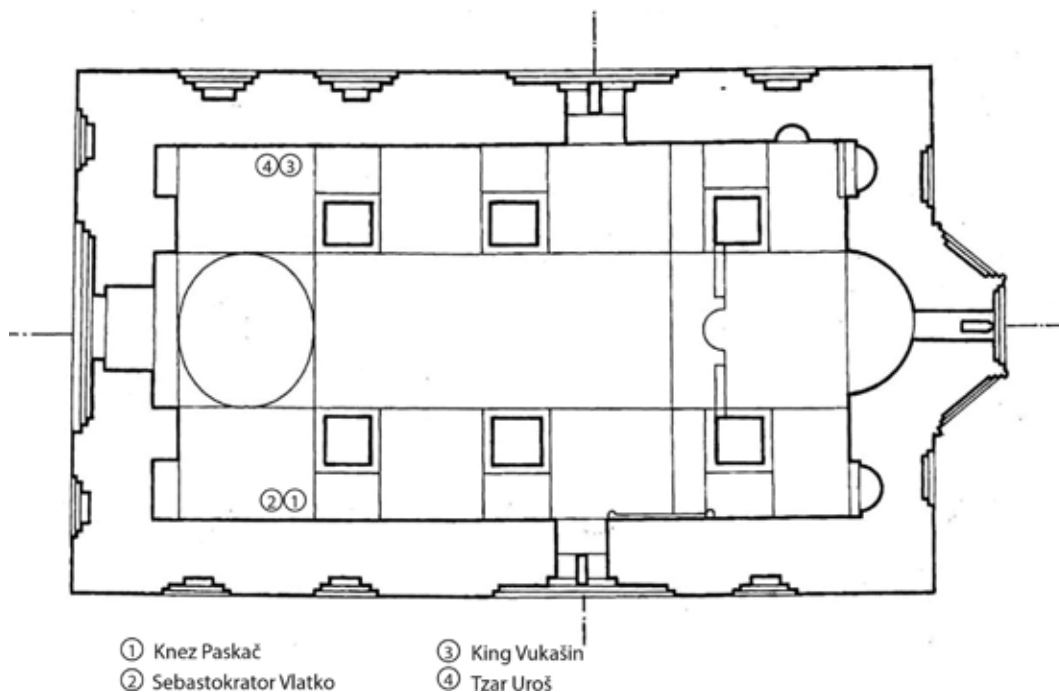


Fig. 5. Church of St. Nicholas in Psača, drawing with the disposition of the portraits of Emperor Uroš, King Vukašin, *Sebastocrator* Vlatko and *Knez* Paskač

and west walls of the western bay, while the portraits of King Dušan and Queen Jelena are positioned on the south side of that area. Unlike the solution from Kučevište, in the church in Karan, the figure of King Dušan is joined by the figures of his ancestors, King Milutin, St. Sava, and St. Simeon (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 259). Furthermore, in the church in Dobrun, *Župan* Pribil and his sons are portrayed on the south wall of the narthex, while portraits of the ruling royal family, Dušan, Uroš, and Jelena are depicted on the north wall, as their counterparts (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1994: 143–144; ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 260). Equally, in Psača, representations of the current rulers and nobles are arranged on opposing walls (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 260). Portrayed on the northern wall of the Temple of St. Nicholas are the holders of state power, Emperor Uroš and King Vukašin, as co-ruler, while on the southern wall of the narthex, there are portraits of the nobles – *Sebastokrator* Vlatko and members of his family (Fig. 5).

Amongst the offered examples, the most complex solution expressing the idea of a multilevel hierarchy of secular power had been accomplished in Psača. The fresco painting in that temple is supposed to portray not only the superiority of the Serbian emperor in relation to the surrounding figures, but the subordination of the co-ruler in relation to the emperor and, at the same time, both their superiority to the *Sebastokrator* Vlatko, *Knez* Paskač, and other members of the ktetor's family as well as the primacy of the *Sebastocrator* in

relation to the *Knez* (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 260–261). On the one hand, the magnified proportions of the figure of Emperor Uroš clearly suggest his hierarchical dominance over King Vukašin,⁷ but equally over the members of the aristocratic class depicted on the opposite side of him. Furthermore, the difference between the *sebastokrator* and the *knez* had been highlighted by placing the portrait of the higher-ranking Vlatko opposite Emperor Uroš, who had been given a place to the right of the icon of the patron saint for this very reason, while the lower-ranking Paskač was placed facing King Vukašin (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 260–261).⁸

Moreover, portraits of sovereigns and nobles in Serbian temples were connected by placing them next to each other and facing each other on the same wall surface. A horizontally developed portrait ensembles with figures of sovereigns and their subordinates arranged next to each other had been preserved in the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid. Those which depict the figures of the rulers and nobles facing each other on the same wall can be found on the southern façade of the Temple of the Virgin in Sušica. Therefore, on the left side of the western façade of the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (Fig. 6) are portrayed the figures of the Serbian Emperor Uroš and the brothers Grgur and Vuk Branković. The hierarchical primacy of the Serbian emperor in relation to the Branković brothers has been expressed by placing Uroš's image directly next to the bust portrait of the patron saint of the chapel, at the centre of the composition (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 261; ПАВЛОВИЋ 2021: 39–40). As it was assumed, a programmatic connection occurred in Sušica, linking the ruler and the nobility by portraying the representatives of the highest state authority and their subordinates, whose identities cannot be reliably determined, to the left and right of the representation of the patron saint in the lunette (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 263).⁹

⁷ The figure of King Vukašin is significantly smaller in size compared to the figure of Uroš and moved to the side, that is, placed behind the sovereign (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 260–261). Such a conclusion is indicated by the fact that the left elbow of Emperor Uroš was painted over a part of King Vukašin's right hand (РАСОЛКОСКА-НИКОЛОВСКА 1995: 44, fig. 1, 2; ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 261).

⁸ On the walls of certain Byzantine and Bulgarian endowments of aristocrats, similar to the discussed Serbian examples, portraits of representatives of the highest state authority were also painted facing their subordinates, for example, in the Boyana Church and the Georgian monuments of Betania and Kintsvi. Thus, portrayed on the north wall of the narthex of the Boyana Church are *Sebastokrator* Kaloyan and his wife Desislava, and across, on the south wall – Emperor Konstantin Tih Asen with his wife Irina (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 262–263 with literature). Depicted on the north wall of the north transept of the churches in Betania and Kintsvi is Queen Tamar, accompanied by her father and son, while the noblemen–ktetors are placed facing them. In the first Georgian temple, this was Sumbat Orbeli, while in the latter, Anton Chqondideli, the first court minister of the queen (EASTMOND 1998: 144–149, 156–164, fig. 69, 74–78).

⁹ Similarly, horizontally developed portrait ensembles depicting sovereigns and their subordinates next to each other and facing each other on the same wall have been preserved in the wall painting of Byzantium and the countries under its cultural influence, namely, in Kurbinovo, as well as in Udabno, Vardzia, and Nabakhtevi in Georgia. Among them, the most interesting solution is found in the church in Vardzia. In the niche on the eastern part of the northern wall of the nave, Queen Tamar is depicted accompanied by her father George III, while behind them, portrayed on the same wall, more precisely in the niche towards the west, is their subordinate *Eristav* Rati Surameli. Equally, in the other two Georgian temples, the portraits of the nobleman–ktetors,



Fig. 6. Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid, the Chapel of St. Gregory, western façade, portraits of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries

The idea of the hierarchy of earthly authority in the aforementioned Serbian temples was presented in the framework of horizontally developed portrait compositions, while in the Church of St. George in Pološko (Fig. 1) and the Temple of Archangel Michael in Lesnovo (Fig. 7) it was conveyed through the vertical structure of the painting. At the top of the western façade of the church in Pološko and the northern wall of the narthex of the Lesnovo temple, the Lord is illustrated as crowning the sovereigns, while, underneath, the members of the highest tier of nobility are portrayed – members of the family of Jovan Dragušin and the *Despot* Jovan Oliver – indicating, in this way, the hierarchy in the relations between the sovereign and his subordinates (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 263–269).

At the top of the western façade of the temple in Pološko (Fig. 1) Christ Emmanuel places crowns on the heads of King Dušan and his son Uroš, while, through an angel, he places a crown on the head of Queen Jelena and delivers a sword into the hands of King

representatives of the local nobility, had been given a place next to the members of the ruling family (EASTMOND 1998: 56, 101–104, fig. 35–37, 55, 57, color pl. XIII). However, a Byzantine example that combines portraits of sovereigns and the aristocracy placed opposite each other on the same wall surface can be found in Kurbinovo. The portrait on the southern part of the western façade of the Church of St. George, as is believed, represents an unknown nobleman–ktetor, while the figures of Isaac II Angelos and his wife Margareta have been portrayed immediately next to the image of the patron saint in the lunette on the northern part of the said façade, as counterparts to the ktetor (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 263).

Dušan.¹⁰ Portraits of the royal family are placed in the second zone and shown separately, in two groups, left and right of the entrance. The representations of Jovan Dragušin, with his wife, were positioned below the portrayal of the Serbian king, on the northern part of the western façade of the temple, while south of the entrance, under the portraits of Uroš and Queen Jelena are the figures of Dragušin's son and mother, the nun Marija (ПАВЛОВИЋ 2015: 109, fig. 2).

Depicted on the top of the northern wall of the Lesnovo narthex (Fig. 7) is a bust figure of Christ, appearing from a segment of the heaven and bestowing crowns on the royal couple Dušan and Jelena. Portrayed in the upper zone of the northern wall of the narthex is Emperor Stefan Dušan, and to his right, on the western part of the northern wall, Empress Jelena, while, originally, on the eastern part of the same wall, also in its upper zone, there had been a portrait of their son Uroš. The representation of the *Despot* Jovan Oliver had been placed below the portrayal of the Serbian emperor, in the lower zone of the northern wall of the narthex. Depicted below the portrait of Empress Jelena are the figures of the *Despotissa* Ana Marija and her son Damjan, while the image of the older son Krajko is placed below the prior portrait of King Uroš (ГАБЕЛИЋ 1998: fig. 78).



Fig. 7. Lesnovo, narthex, northern wall

The vertical structure of the Pološko and Lesnovo compositions, with the image of the Lord at their summits, at the moment of crowning the sovereigns, and their noble subordinates underneath, indicates the heavenly origin of the sovereign's earthly authority and the degrees of its transmission. Illustrated here, in Pološko and Lesnovo, is the idea of "an angelic hierarchy organised by divine providence" (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 267). The sovereign represents the mediator in the transfer of power from heaven to earth, that is, "the

¹⁰ A solution similar to one in the Church of St. George in Pološko probably once adorned the western façade of the Church of the Virgin in Lipljan. It is assumed that the figures of the ktetors in this church were originally located under the portraits of the ruling couple Dušan and Jelena (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2013: 149–150).

mediator through whom God's mercy and the grace of power descends onto noble subordinates" (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 266). Similarity to the described solutions in Pološko and Lesnovo was found in Byzantine consular diptychs of the 6th century. Figures of high dignitaries had been positioned under the clypeus with imperial portraits, between which the sign of the cross was placed first, and then the figure of Christ himself, thus indicating the heavenly origin of earthly authority (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 269).¹¹

Apart from the figures of the rulers, the portraits of noblemen and members of their families had been associated with representations of ecclesiastical dignitaries. Such examples of Serbian medieval painting have been preserved in the Chapel of St. John the Forerunner in St. Sophia in Ohrid and in the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in the same city. The most powerful nobleman *Despot* Jovan Oliver is portrayed on the western wall of the Chapel of the Forerunner, on the one side, accompanied by family members, and on the other, a church dignitary, Archbishop Nikola (Fig. 8). The head of the Ohrid church, represented frontally with a nimbus, has been placed hierarchically above the *Despot* Jovan Oliver and in front of the said nobleman, his wife, and son, as their mediator and representative before St. John, the patron saint of the chapel (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2010: 73, Fig. 14).¹²

Apart from the fact that, as previously mentioned, it unites the portraits of the sovereign and his subordinates, the portrait ensemble on the western façade of the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid (Fig. 6) along its southern part, also includes depictions of church dignitaries on the right side of the same wall, the Archbishop of Ohrid Gregory II, the Bishop of Devol, and Jovan, the archimandrite of the Monastery of St. Clement (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 283; 2010: 62, Fig. 15; ПАВЛОВИЋ 2021: 40). The head of the Ohrid church is hierarchically subordinated to Emperor Uroš, as well as to Vuk and Grgur Branković, in position and stance, which indicates by the fact that in the Chapel of St. Gregory in Ohrid's Virgin Peribleptos the hierarchical priority of secular authority in relation to the ecclesiastical had been shown, in principle, that is, in relation to church dignitaries of different rank (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2010: 61–62).¹³

¹¹ As was recently assessed, the ktetor composition in the vestibule of the main entrance to the Treskavac Monastery could have served as a model for the vertically composed portraits ensembles in Pološko and Lesnovo (МАРКОВИЋ 2014: 83–84, note 51).

¹² The depiction of the Ohrid archbishop next to the image of *Despot* Jovan Oliver has been analysed in different ways: first, Archbishop Nikola had "a role in the creation of the chapel", that is, "a role in the formation of the chapel" (ГРОЗДАНОВ 1980: 62, 64), and further, that "in Saint Sophia, *Despot* Jovan Oliver, together with the Archbishop of Ohrid, Nikola, built his endowment", also, that it was "the result of some sort of agreement between Jovan Oliver and Archbishop Nikola", as well as that the arrangement of the persons represented within the ktetor composition "was decreed by the archbishop, himself" (ЂОРЂЕВИЋ 1994: 124, 157, 158).

¹³ A similar solution that connects the portraits of sovereigns, noblemen, and archbishops is preserved in Byzantine painting, in an older monument, the Temple of St. George in Kurbinovo. The difference is that on the western façade of the Kurbinovo church, the nobleman-ktetor had been depicted next to the Ohrid Archbishop Jovan Kamateros, on the same side of the façade, while the royal couple had been placed opposite them, on the northern part of the said façade (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 263, 290; 2010: 68–69). A portrait of one archbishop, with an image of the temple in his hands, also adorns the façade of the Church of St. Nicholas Čelnički, as a counterpart to the portraits of members of a certain noble family, which, along with the previously mentioned



Fig. 8. Saint Sophia in Ohrid, the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, western wall, portraits of Despot Jovan Oliver, Despotissa Ana Marija, their sons Krajko and Damjan, Archbishop Nikola

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Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the presented examples. The representations of the ktetors—noblemen were painted in the immediate vicinity of the patron saints of the temples (Kučevište, Karan, Dobrun, Pološko, the Lesnovo nave, the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in St. Sophia in Ohrid, the narthex of Dečani, Maligrad on Prespa), while the depiction of patron cycles above or near the portraits of nobility had been equally frequent (Gornji Kozjak, the chapel in the narthex in Dečani, Psača). Furthermore, certain saints and/or scenes from their hagiographies were depicted and emphasised in the thematic programmes of several temples in the capacity of the ktetor's personal patron, that is,

examples from Kurbinovo, the Chapel of the Forerunner in St. Sophia, and the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos testifies to the custom of a joint display of the representatives of the church and members of the nobility in the painting of the Ohrid-Prespa region (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2010: 72, Note 142). The author thanks prof. Dragan Vojvodić for indicating the example from the Church of St. Nicholas Čelnički and for the provided photograph of the façade of that Ohrid temple.

the saint whom the noblemen particularly revered (St. John the Baptist in the temple in Lesnovo and in the Chapel of the Forerunner in St. Sophia in Ohrid, then St. Nicholas in Lipljan) or in the capacity of a family patron (St. George in the Church of the Virgin in Vaganeš). Some solutions are unique in all of Serbian painting, and beyond, such as the introduction of the cycle of the Last Psalms into the thematic programme of the narthexes in Kučevište and Lesnovo, and the representation of the martyrdom of the Holy Forty of Sebaste above the ktetor composition in the White Church of Karan, undoubtedly at the request of the *Župan* Petar Brajan. Portraits of aristocrats and members of their families were associated with figures of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries. Such examples of Serbian medieval fresco painting have been preserved in a significantly larger number compared to those of Byzantine wall painting and the countries under its cultural influence. Therefore, Serbian medieval heritage represents a rich and valuable source of programme solutions applied when illustrating the relationship between sovereigns and their subordinates, on the one hand, and church dignitaries and noblemen, on the other. When it comes to joining ecclesiastical dignitaries with figures of nobles, they were depicted next to members of the aristocratic class and facing them on the same wall surface (the chapels of St. John the Forerunner in St. Sophia in Ohrid and St. Gregory in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in the same city). However, a significantly larger number of examples have been preserved in the Serbian medieval wall painting that point to the custom of associating secular dignitaries with the figures of nobility. With the exception of a few examples, patterns known in Byzantine painting and the art of Eastern Christian countries had been applied in illustrating the relationship between the sovereign and his subordinates. Judging by the preserved representations, the figures of sovereigns and their subordinates were placed on opposite walls (Kučevište, Karan, Dobrun and Psača), next to each other, or one opposite the other on the same wall surface (Kučevište, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid and Sušica), as well as one above the others (former western façade in Pološko and the narthex in Lesnovo), thus forming horizontally or vertically developed portrait ensembles. One of the main characteristics of the Serbian aristocratic painting was precisely the expression of subordination of the nobleman and his family members to the ruler. The gratitude and loyalty of the nobleman–ktetor towards the sovereign had been the main reason for emphasising the portraits of the rulers in endowments built and painted by their subordinates (ВОЈВОДИЋ 2006: 273–275). The portrait ensembles in Pološko and Lesnovo, characterised by their vertical composition, emanate the teaching of the ideal, graded hierarchy of authority granted by God. Through the sovereign, as an intermediary in the transmission of dignities from heaven to earth, that power is transferred to nobility, as was explicitly expressed in the presentations in the aforementioned churches. Lacking any surviving similar compositions in Byzantine monumental art, these two examples demonstrate the originality of Serbian fresco painting. Apart from that, the special and unique solution in Serbian aristocratic painting during the period of the Nemanjić Dynasty had been preserved on the façade of the Chapel of St. Gregory in the Church of Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid by depicting Emperor Uroš, his subordinates, and church dignitaries

of different ranks on the same wall surface while, at the same time, emphasising the hierarchical primacy of the ruler in relation to all the surrounding figures.

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ПРОГРАМСКИ КОНТЕКСТ СРПСКОГ ВЛАСТЕОСКОГ ПОРТРЕТА
У ДОБА НЕМАЊИЋА

Резиме

Највећи број српских властеоских представа сачуван је у зидном сликарству у доба Немањића и промишљено уклапан у сликани програм средњовековних цркава. Портрети племића довођени су у везу са представама патрона или посебно поштованих светитеља, те са религиозним композицијама и портретима савременика. Посебна пажња у раду је посвећена обичају придруживања портрета властелина ликовима световних и духовних достојанственика у задужбинама припадника племићког слоја. Када је реч о придруживању црквених достојанственика ликовима племића, они су приказивани покрај припадника властеоског сталежа и наспрам њих на истој зидној површини (параклиси Јована Претече у Светој Софији у Охриду и Светог Григорија у Богородици Перивлепти у истом граду). Са друге стране, ликови актуелних владара и припадника властеоског сталежа постављани су на наспрамним зидним површинама (Кучевиште, Каран, Добрун и Псача), те једни покрај других или једни наспрам других на истој зидној површини (Кучевиште, параклис Светог Григорија у Богородици Перивлепти у Охриду и Сушица), као и једни изнад других (некадашња западна фасада у Полошком и припрата у Лесову), творећи тако хоризонталне или вертикалне портретске целине. Једно од главних обележја српске властеоске слике било је управо исказивање потчињености властелина и чланова његове породице врховном владару. Придруживање портрета племића ликовима владара и црквених достојанственика имало је аналогије у појединим старијим и оновременим примерима у византијској уметности. Ипак, такви примери су у живопису средњовековне Србије сачувани у знатно већем броју. Стога српско средњовековно наслеђе представља богат и драгоцен извор програмских решења примењиваних приликом илустровања односа између владара и њихових поданика, с једне, те црквених достојанственика и властелина, с друге стране. Осим тога, поједина решења сачувана у српском сликарству су особена и јединствена у уметности средњовековних земаља православног

света, што указује на посебно место српског властеоског портрета у оквиру византијске уметности и земаља под њеним културним утицајем. С тим у вези важно је истаћи портретне целине у Полошком и Леснову, будући да су оне особене по компоновању дуж вертикале и исказују учење о ступњевитој хијерархији власти проистекле од Бога. Преко суверена, као посредника у преношењу достојанстава с неба на земљу, та власт се преноси на властелу, како је то експлицитно исказано на представама у поменутиим храмовима.

Кључне речи: Србија, властела, програмски контекст, портрет, зидно сликарство.