AN OVERLOOKED REPRESENTATION OF THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE IN THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF SUCEAVA. LITERARY SOURCES AND ICONOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

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Noting the unprecedented representation of the Sufferings of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in the naos of the old metropolitan church of Suceava, in a place that was generally dedicated to the holy emperors Constantine and Helena, accompanied by holy martyrs, the present article aims to explain the painters' decision to change the almost canonical iconographic syntax of the western wall of the naos, as elaborated in the Moldavian mural painting of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Martyrdom of the Forty and its message in the reconfigured iconography of the naos of the metropolitan church are compared to earlier representations of the same topic in monumental programs of the Balkan and Byzantine region. Finally, the research addresses the literary tradition related to the Forty Martyrs – an essential component of their cult -, which proved to have played an important role in the reception of the image in the sixteenth century mural painting of Saint George church in Suceava.

Keywords: The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, iconography of the Moldavian churches in the 15th and 16th centuries, liturgical books, the panegyric of Saint Basil of Caesarea on the Forty Martyrs.

By portraying the founder and his family offering the church to Christ on the west wall of the naos, on the right side of the entrance, the painters of Moldavian churches were following a practice firmly established in the local artistic environment from at least the fifteenth century onwards. Alongside this symbolical dedication – image comprising the founder and his family, Christ, and the patron saint of the church, – another representation, just as common as the previous one, was placed to the opposite, left side of the entrance. The Byzantine emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, holding the Cross between them, parallel the votive image in almost all Moldavian churches dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In spite of preserving unique evidence about the founders and the date of their patronage, the west wall of the naos turned out to be a vulnerable area in many of the old Moldavian foundations serving as parish churches in the later centuries. In order to facilitate the access of a greater number of people into the

naos, and to offer a better visibility upon the place where worship was taking place, the dismantling of the wall between the naos and the narthex became a current practice starting with the late eighteenth century[1]. By 1796, the former metropolitan church of Suceava had been subjected to a similar kind of intervention, which reconfigured its interior, destroying important parts of its original fresco program.[2]

In this process of widening the access into the naos, the two extremities of the west wall were kept in place, thereby shaping a large entrance arch between the naos and the narthex (Fig. 1a, 1b). Thus, the scene that is the focus of our study has been saved from being completely destroyed. In spite of its fragmentary state of preservation – with more than half of the composition missing[3] – the scene originally placed on the west wall of the naos, on the right side of the entrance, may be identified as the collective martyrdom of the forty Roman soldiers of the XII Fulminata Legio, on the lake of Sebaste, in the year 320. Its established iconography, which has been transmitted with only few minor changes from the Early Christian period down to the late Middle Ages and later, makes it unmistakable among other martyrdom images in Byzantine art.

The essential features of the scene have been preserved in the frescoes of the metropolitan church (Fig. 1a, 1b). In the upper part of the composition, Christ blessing the martyrs from above with both his hands is still visible, and closely resembles the most widespread prototypes of this image in later Byzantine painting.[4] The diadems handed out by Christ, are arranged in a semicircular shape in the upper part of the composition, half of which can still be seen. The group of Martyrs, stripped of their clothes, aiding one another to stand straight on the frozen lake, complete the lower half of the composition. Among the clustered bodies, some recurrent postures, like the upward-looking heads, or inclined bodies of soldiers leaning in search for support, can still be recognized.

[1] Many churches built in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries suffered this type of intervention at different moments in time. Among them are the Ascension church of Neamț monastery, St. Nicholas church Popăuți, now in the town of Botoșani, the church of the Dormition in Baia, St. Nicholas church from Coșula, Botoșani. Others, in spite of being used as parish churches, preserved their original form. It is the case of St. Elijah church near Suceava, and of St. George church in Hârlău.

[2] According to the information in a later dyptich ("pomelnic") of the church, dating from 1805, there were other changes that occured at the same time, including a new window piercing the wall close to the newly installed iconostasis. The church did not belong at that time to the monastery of St. John the New. This was to happen only in the nineteenth century, with a transitional dependence (between 1866–1905) on the monastery of Dragomirna: Caproșu, I., *Biserica Sfântul Gheorghe din Suceava [The Church of Saint George in Suceava]*, București 1969, p. 12.

[3] The fresco has not yet been cleaned. The whole western part of the naos remains under a thick layer of smoke and dirt, after the restoration works stopped in 2005.

[4] Although the right hand of Christ has not been preserved, the gesture of his left one and the frontal rendering of his bust indicate what the missing side would have looked like.

THE PLACE OF THE MARTYRDOM OF THE FORTY IN THE ICONOGRAPHIC SETTING OF THE OLD METROPOLITAN CHURCH

The representation of the Martyrdom of the Forty in the metropolitan church of Suceava strikes the viewer, above all, because of its unusual position, outside the Synaxarion. The Martyrdom of the Forty became the regular illustration for the main feast of March 9th, when the liturgical calendar started to replace the hagiographical cycles in the narthex of Moldavian churches, at the beginning of the sixteenth century[5]. There is no other example in Moldavian mural painting to present the image removed from this context, that we know of.

The scene was allocated an exceptional place inside the church of Saint George. It was originally painted in the lower register of the naos, within the row of full-length saints, along with the most venerated military martyrs, eremites and monks. Moreover, it forced the translation of the Holy Emperors from their established place near the entrance, to the east pier of the blind arcade on the south wall, that is more towards the centre of the naos, thus making space for the introduction of a new thematic segment in the immediate vicinity of the entrance (Fig. 2a, 2b). Although the remaining place near the entrance was wide enough to allow for the figures of Constantine and Helena to be painted there, a double representation of the Holy Emperors in the naos, on the same iconographic level, would have been unusual and, from our knowledge, unprecedented in the Moldavian church painting of the time.

This change of iconographic syntax in the metropolitan church becomes worthy of attention if we take a look at the other contemporary examples, which consistently applied a scheme that became "canonical" in the local artistic environment during this period. In the church of Saint Nicholas of the Probota monastery, painted just before the metropolitan cathedral of Suceava, and by the will of the same founder, the prince Petru Rareș, the votive composition and the Byzantine Holy Emperors dominate the central iconography of the west wall of the naos[6], which is completed by the figure of Saint Barbara, standing on Constantine's left side (Fig. 3) In Părhăuți, a boyar church founded in the first half of the sixteenth century, the position of Saints Constantine and Helena has been

[5] In St. Nicholas church of the Probota monastery, the Martyrdom of the Forty can be seen on the east wall of the narthex, between St. Theophylact of Nicomedia, celebrated on March the 8th , and St. Codratus of Corinth, celebrated on March 10th. The same sequence of scenes is represented on the barrel vault of the burial chamber in Moldovița and on the Southern wall of the burial chamber of Dobrovăț (For the last one, see Ecaterina Cincheza – Buculei, "Menologul de la Dobrovăț (1529)" [The Menologion of Dobrovăț (1529)], *SCIA*, Tom 39 (1993), p. 30 and the accompanying drawings of the iconographic program). In the metropolitan church of Suceava, the scene corresponding to March 9th is painted inside the arch of the west window on the south wall, in the outer narthex.

[6] The complete iconographic program of the church was published in Maarit Elo; Oliviu Boldura, *The Restoration of the Probota Monastery: 1996–2001*, UNESCO, Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation of the World Cultural Heritage, Paris 2001.

maintained on the right side of the entrance, as a pendant to the founder's portrait[7]. In the church of Dobrovăț (1529), Constantine and Helena, holding the Cross between them, stand next to Saint Nikita, in the lower register of the west wall[8]. In the Dormition church from Baia (1535–38), the princely founders and the Holy Emperors are granted the same places they had been given before, except that in this case they are accompanied by two eremites[9]. In the church of Humor monastery (1535)[10], Constantine and Helena stand between Saint Pahome and Saint Barbara (Fig. 4)[11], while in Moldovița (1537), they are accompanied by Saint Paisie, who appears to be turning his right hand towards them. Finally, in Arbore (ca. 1540), the votive composition and the Holy Emperors, accompanied by two military saints, flank once again the entrance door in the naos[12]. The earlier programs, dating back to the end of the fifteenth century, only provide more evidence to establish the appearance and persistence of this iconographic practice in the later ones. (Fig. 5)[13]

[7] For the iconographic program of the church of All Saints in Părhăuți, see Constantin Ciobanu, "Date noi referitoare la programul iconografic al bisericii Tuturor Sfinților din Părhăuți" [New Data on the Iconographic Program of the Church of All Saints from Părhăuți], published on http://www.medieval.istoria-artei.ro, with a printed version in *Arta, Seria Arte Vizuale, Arte Plastice, Arhitectură*, Chișinău, 2012.

[8] For illustration, see Vasile Drăguț, *Dobrovăț*, București 1984, fig. 6, fig. 27, 28.

[9] With its frescoes remaining unrestored and badly preserved up to the present, the Dormition church in Baia as a whole remains an insufficiently researched monument. No special attention has been paid to it so far. Only a brief description appears, for example, in I.D. Ștefănescu's study dedicated to the iconography of Moldavian mural paintings of the epoch (I.D. Ștefănescu, *Évolution de la peinture religieuse en Bucovine et en Moldavie depuis les origines jusqu'au XIe siècle*, Paris, 1928 p. 167).

[10] Vasile Drăguț, *Humor*, București, 1973, p. 18, and illustrations. The frescoes of the Dormition church are now completely restored, and new iconographic data came to light, for example the identity of the saints in the lower register of the naos.

[11] Both figures have been previously associated to the iconography of entry spaces in Moldavian mural painting. Moreover, the representation of St. Barbara in the proximity of the entrance is not unusual among the mural programs of the Byzantine and Balkan regions. Her figure can be seen, for instance, alongside the Saint Archangel Michael in the church of Agios Athanasios tou Mouzaki (Kastoria), opposite those of Constantine and Helena, figured at the right side of the entrance door.

[12] The restoration works are now completed and the iconographic program has been recently published in a new monograph dedicated to the monument: Corina Popa, Oliviu Boldura, Maria-Magdalena Drobota, Anca Dina, *Arbore: istorie, artă, restaurare* [Arbore: History, Art, Restoration], București 2017, p. 77, 83.

[13] On the narrow north section of the western wall of the naos in Pătrăuți (1487), the Holy Emperors are depicted alone. In Bălinești (around 1500), Constantine and Helena are depicted in the central area of the north half of the west wall of the naos, between Saint Procopius and St. Eustathios. In the fifteenth century murals of St. Elijah church near Suceava, the Holy Emperors are depicted next to Saint Paul, one of the favourite figures in the Byznatine iconography of the entrance are. In Moldavian churches it is usually depicted together with St. apostle Peter, guarding the entrance door leading to the naos, on the east wall. An exception to the rule can be, however, noticed in the church of Voroneț monastery, where the image of the Holy Emperors is absent altogether from the naos.

THE IMAGE OF CONSTANTINE AND HELENA HOLDING THE CROSS

The image of the Holy Byzantine Emperors Constantine and his mother Helena, holding the Cross between them, is very popular and can be frequently found near the entrance door in late Byzantine and post-Byzantine Orthodox churches of the Balkans. Choosing to represent it in this place, the painters of Moldavian churches, as well as those of late Byzantine mural ensembles, were repeating an option that had much deeper roots, being strongly connected to the evolution of the cult of the Holy Emperors in the Byzantine world, which led not only to the development of their standardized iconography, but was indirectly responsible for establishing the place of this image within monumental programs.

Anointed by God to be the first Christian emperor, great defender of the true faith during his lifetime, Constantine was attributed exemplary features, that quickly made him a patron and a model for later Christian emperors. Before, as well as after the iconoclast era, the essentially theological cross found in church decoration since the early Christian period, as a symbol of Christ's victory over death, and a guarantee of universal salvation, was complemented by the victorious cross seen by Constantine in his vision, before the battle against Maxentius.[14] The representation of the cross inscribed with formulas inspired by Constantine's vision, as recorded by Eusebius[15], and later with the standardized device IC XC NI KA, spread into the iconography of Christian church decoration, on portable objects, and imperial coinage.[16]

Although it is not known precisely when Constantine and his mother Helena entered the hierarchy of saints, the cult of the Holy Emperors became combined with that of the True Cross at an earlier date, as proved by the integration of both narrations – Constantine's vision of the victorious sign, and the discovery of the

[14] The famous apsidal cross of the Agios Basilios church (Mustafapaşa, Cappadoce), accompanied by the inscription: ΣΗΓΝΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΚΟΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ [Σίγνον τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου] is an example often cited by art historians as a clear evidence of Constantine's political triumph being adapted to a theological context. The word ΣΗΓΝΟΝ, "the saving sign" recalls the expression by which Eusebius of Caesarea describes the Cross in Constantine's vision. For a discussion related to the cross as symbol of the victorious emperor, see André Grabar, L'empereur dans l'art byzantine. Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'empire d'Orient, Paris, 1936, p. 33–39. For further commentaries on the iconographic topic, see Christopher Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint, with associated studies*, Leiden, 2006, p. 40.

[15] The episode is described by Eusebius in his first book of Constantine's Life. See Jacques Paul Migne, Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca, Volume 20, Tomus secundus, 1857, Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eusebii Pamphili Caesareae Palestinae episcopi, Opera Omnia que existant*, De vita beatissimi imperator is Constantini, Liber primus, 422, Caput XXVIII.

[16] Material evidence dates back to the sixth century: Chr. Walter, "IC XC NI KA: The Apotropaic Function of the Victorious Cross", in Chr. Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 140–141.

True Cross in Jerusalem by his mother Helena[17] – in the liturgy of the feast of the *Exaltation of the Cross*.[18]

However, new emphasis was put on this joined worship after iconoclasm. Among the saints, Constantine and Helena were the first to be visually associated with the sign of the cross after the dispute over the use of religious images came to an end.[19] The "typical scene" representing Constantine and his mother holding the Cross summarized their biography and was, without doubt, as formulated by Christopher Walter, an "ideological expression of the place of the Cross in their lives".[20] The True Cross, which was widely venerated even in the iconoclast period, had to be recovered by the iconophiles who aimed to justify its veneration as a symbol of Christ's Passion, and not outside this historical context[21]. Against this new theological background, both Constantine and Helena were providing a guarantee for the authenticity of the relic, and the image came to be associated with the Holy Emperors in more and more visual instances.

[17] The legend of Helena discovering the True Cross emerged sometimes after Eusebius' narration of Constantine's life. It was reported by Saint Ambrose in *De Orbitu Theodosii Oratio*, P.L. 16, 1385–1406 A.

[18] They are referred to in the *Menologion of Basil II*. See Chr. Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 44–46. The liturgical celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross in Jerusalem contained the two narrations together since the fourth century. See Natalia Teterniatikov, "The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena. A Study in the Light of the Post-Iconoclastic Re-evaluation of the Cross", *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 18 (1995), p. 170–171 and note.13/p. 171.

[19]Their image flanking the cross emerged in iconography at an earlier date. Besides literary sources attesting sculpted and painted portraits of the emperors, made during their lifetime, (Mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea in the *Life of Constantine* and *Oration in Praise of Constantine*), the earliest material testimonies of the iconographic type of Constantine and Helena in the presence of the Cross - even though the figures are not identified by inscriptions - seem to be the two reliquaries discovered in Isauria, and in the Bulgarian village of Iabalkovo, respectively, both dating from the fourth century: Chr. Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 37, fig. 210, fig. 211. One of the earliest Middle Byzantine representations of Constantine (his head only being preserved) and Helena (supposed to be the highly deteriorated figure opposite to him) has been discovered in the mosaics of the room over the vestibule, on the vault of the south bay, in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (dated by R. Cromack in the 70's of the ninth century). The room was used for ceremonies, including for the beginning of the procession on the feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross. If it could be identified with the small *Sekreta* of the church, it would have housed the relics of the true cross. See Robin Cormack, Ernest J.W. Hawkins, "The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp", *DOP* 31 (1977), p. 230–231, p. 235–251, figs 46 and 47.

[20]Chr. Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 98.

[21] This argument is developed by Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena", p. 169–170, with further references in Alexander Kazhdan, "Constantin imaginaire", Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great, *Byzantion*, 57 (1987). The icon and the Cross were to be venerated according to the same principle. Arguments in this respect were, however developed even earlier. The pre-iconoclast anti-Jewish treatise attributed to Leontios of Neapolis (writing between 630–640) included a comprehensive justification of the veneration of the True Cross and the use of images, as a response to the Jewish criticism of Christians regarding the veneration of the cross. Leslie Brubaker, John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850): The Sources*. An annotated survey with a section on *The Architecture of Iconoclasm: the Building*, by Robert Ousterhout, Ashgate, 2001, p. 252–253, 268–272.

Following this argument, Natalia Teteriatnikov reconsidered the various visual contexts in which the image of Constantine and Helena with the Cross appears during the early and middle Byzantine period. The discussion in the art historical field, conducted most often upon the political value that the True Cross acquired in association with Constantine's iconography, was offset by the data resulting from the research. The placing of the Holy Emperors in church decoration followed different patterns, some of which could be explained only if related to the places of the isolated cross found in church decoration during the previous centuries.[22] This could, for example, explain the presence of the Holy Emperors holding the Cross before the main apsis or even inside[23], near the prothesis,[24] or near the water basin in some middle Byzantine Cappadocian churches[25], where the real cross was connected to liturgical practices and even exerted an apotropaic function. These evidences symbolically subordinate the figures of the emperors to the image of the True Cross, to the extant where – as Natalia Teteriatnikov suggests –the scene could be called, instead, „The Cross held by Constantine and Helena". Christopher Walter himself concludes, based on the evidence of Cappadocian mural ensembles – which counterbalance the lack of monuments in the other regions of the Empire in the same period – that the "strategic" position held by the image of the Holy Emperors in church decoration could be associated with its ultimate apotropaic function.[26]

[22] Significantly, the image of Constantine and Helena was decorating the twelfth century mosaic dome of the Holy Sepulcre in Jerusalem, now disappeared: N.Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross", p. 177, *apud*. H. Duckworth, *The Church of the Holy Sepulcre*, London 1922, p. 243–245 ff.

[23] Constantine and Helena appear frequently near the apsis in Cappadocian churches. Among the earliest, post-iconoclast representations is the one in the Holy Apostles church, in Sinasos, Mustafapasa (See Guillaume de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantine. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, Texte, Tome II. 1, Paris, 1936, p. 65–66 and G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Planches I, Paris, 1925, pl. 150.1). Other representations can be found in Elevra n. 3 (Mustafapasa), from about 950 (Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce: un siècle après G. de Jerphanion*, Paris, 2015, p. 197) in St. Archangel Michael (Cemil) church, from the thirteenth century (C. Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce*, p. 212, G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome II.1, p. 128 ff.) in Tokalı II from 950–960 (G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome I.2, p. 316 and Planches II., pl. 85.1; C. Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce*, p. 74). For a comprehensive description underlining the place of the Holy Emperors in Cappadocian art, see Chr. Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 46–52. In the Pigeon-House church, Tchaouch In (Çavuşin) Constantine and Helena are integrated in the row of saints painted in the main apse of the church. See Guillaume de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome I.2, Paris, p. 522–525.

[24] Constantine and Helena are represented near the prosthesis in the eleventh – century frescoes of chapel 21 of Göreme. See G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome I.2, Paris, 1932, p. 474–475, and G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province* Planches II, Paris, 1928, pl. 133.3; N. Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross", p. 177–178. References to the cross cut into the *prosphora* by the celebrant are made in the *Historia ecclesiastica*. See Chr. Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 145.

[25] A noticeable example in this regard can be found in the Cappadocian church of Yılanlı Kilise (İhlara valley) from the second half of the eleventh century. See Chr. Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great*, fig. 39; N. Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross", p. 178, fig. 8)

[26] Chr. Walter, *The iconography of Constantine the Great*, p. 52.

The wish of Christian rulers to identify themselves with Constantine never disappeared.[27] From Russian to Bulgarian or Serbian monarchs, all have left visual testimonies in this regard. A group of frescoes in the narthex of the upper church of the ossuary of Bačkovo monastery were commissioned in the fourteenth century by the Bulgarian ruler and devoted patron of the monastery, Ivan Alexander. The two niches remodelled in the side walls of the existing eleventh century narthex, display an explicit association of the Byzantine emperors Constantine and Helena holding the Cross, painted in the southwest niche, with Tsar Ivan Alexander, whose impressive figure, crowned by angels, occupies the opposite, northwest niche in the west part of the narthex.[28] This remarkable image immediately recalls Ivan Alexander's illuminated Psalter (Sophia, Bulgarian Academy of science, codex n. 2), and the words by which he is compared to Constantine "…this Tsar, in his faith, and piety, in his kind heart came as a new Constantine among the kings with the victorious cross as his sceptre…"[29]

The persistence of the different practices related to the icon of Constantine and Helena holding the Cross can be noticed in a great number of churches in the territories found under Byzantine rule or in its sphere of influence. The numerous monuments of the small town of Kastoria, dating from the early to the late medieval period, of which only three will be mentioned here, show as many influences and traditions in this respect.[30] Among the oldest churches of the town, the Agioi Anargyroi basilica preserves a representation of Constantine and Helena from its first layer of paintings (probably around 1000). The Holy Emperors have been placed on the north wall of the narthex, in the northeast corner, near the door, facing the isolated portrait of a donor in supplicant posture. The significant detail in this case is given by the funeral character of the representation[31], further

[27] The relationship of Byzantine emperors with the relic of the True Cross, in the period after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, when relics of the Passion, including fragments of the True Cross, spread into Western Europe, was discussed by Anthony Eastmond in "Byzantine Identity and relics of the true Cross in the Thirteenth Century", A. Lidov (ed.), *Eastern Christian Relics*, Moscow, 2003. With an excursus on the previous centuries, A. Eastmond pointed out how, encouraged by the division of the Empire, the claim to parts of the Holy Relic corresponded to a claim of authority, expressed by the other Christian rulers, from Georgia to Armenia, Nicaea and Trapezunt to Bulgarian and Serbian monarch. Relics of the True Cross were donated by the Nemanić family to the monasteries of Studenica, Žiča, Sopoćani, and Peć. See A. Eastmond, "Byzantine Identity and relics of the true Cross", p. 210–215.

[28] See Elka Bakalova, Vera Kolarova, Petar Popov, Valentin Todorov, *The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery*, Plovdiv, 2003, p. 117–123, fig. 19/p. 102, fig. 20/p.103, pl. 85, 86.

[29] *Apud*. E. Bakalova *et alii*, *The Ossuary*, p. 120.

[30] In the course of the centuries, the town was ruled not only by Byzantines, but, temporally, also by Bulgarians, Albanians, Normans, and Serbian rulers, being finally conquered by the Ottomans at the end of the fourteenth century. For the history and artistic heritage of the town in the Middle and post-Byzantine period, see Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Η πόλη της Καστοριάς τη βυζαντινή και μεταβυζαντινή εποχή (12ος – 16ος αι.): ιστορία, τέχνη, επιγραφές*, Athens, 1997.

[31] The portrait is identified by the name "Constantine", the same inscription informing that he no longer lives. See Stylianos Pelekanidis, Manolis Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens, 1999, p. 22–24, p. 29/fig. 6, p. 38.

iconographic evidence belonging to the same layer of paintings indicating the use of this part of the narthex as a burial place. The painters of Panaghia Mavriotissa (end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century) placed the Holy Byzantine Emperors on the east wall of the narthex, which is dominated by the large composition of the Last Judgment (Fig. 6). However, at the right side of the entrance, in the same register, pairing the Holy Emperors, the Baptism of Christ was added at a later date, on a new plaster, an identical red border framing each of the compositions to highlight them out. [32] A parallel could be drawn between the cross held by the two emperors, and the ritual of baptism, in which the cross plays an essential part. The intentions in the case of the church of Agios Athanasios tou Mouzaki (1384/85) are, however, more easily to be deciphered.[33] The Holy Emperors wearing precious imperial gowns stand to the left side of the entrance door in the naos, to which a narthex was later added. Opposite, the Saint Archangel Michael and Saint Barbara complete the selection of figures. (Fig. 7)

A similar approach, which, in addition, introduces the most important local saints, former Serbian prince Stephen Nemanja and his son Saint Sava into the iconography associated to the entrance in the naos can be seen in Jan Oliver's foundation, the church of Saints Archangels in Lesnovo. On the west wall of the naos Saints Simeon and Sava along with Saint Apostle Peter, flank the left side of the entrance in the naos, while Saint Apostle Paul followed by Saints Constantine and Helena oppose them to the right side[34].

To these examples, one could add the many occurrences of the Holy Emperors in the late Moldavian programs, which clearly illustrate the twofold perspective one can distinguish examining the iconographic itinerary of the representation of Constantine and Helena holding the Cross, along centuries of art within the Byzantine empire and its Balkan neighbours. As a pendant to the founder's votive image, which most often is the prince of the country himself, the icon of the Holy Byzantine Emperors in the Moldavian iconography of the sacred space is consistently understood in the wider context of an entrance-related iconography.

The liturgical office of May 21st calls Constantine and his mother Helena "Equal-to-the-Apostles", Constantine himself being compared during the service to

[32] S. Pelekanidis, M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, p. 66–81 and fig. 13, fig. 14/p. 79.The Baptism scene, painted on a new plaster was probably added the last third of the twelfth century. For the dating of the different phases of decoration, see also Ann Wharton Epstein, "Middle Byzantine Churches of Kastoria: Dates and Implications, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (1980), p. 202–207.

[33] The frescoes were commissioned by the founders of the church, Theodoros and Stoia Mouzaki, members of the ruling Albanian family of the Mouzakes, together with the ieromonk Dionisos. The entire decoration stands out through its new stylistic and icongraphic approach, which suggests connections to important artistic centers like Thessalonike. E. Drakopoulou, Η πόλη της Καστοριάς, p. 74–75, 95–97. See also S. Pelekanidis, M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, p. 106–107, and fig. 8/p. 114.

[34] Nikolai Aleksandrovich Okunev, "Lesnovo", *L'art byzantin chez les slaves. Les Balkans*. Premier recueil dédié a la mémoire de Théodore Uspenskij, Paris Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1930, II, Paris, 1930, p. 233, p. 261 (sch. III, 14).

Saint Apostle Paul, for both were "chosen" by Christ to triumph in the name of the cross and to reveal the sign of victory to others: *From God you received the sceptre, Constantine, to be the first king of Christians. For you were shown the sign of salvation, the one hidden in the earth, with which all the pagans you have put under the foot of the Romans, with the invincible weapon of life-giving Cross* (Glory, 8 Tone)[35]. As for Helena, she is worshipped as one who resembles the angels, after fulfilling her supreme role in discovering the relic of the True Cross: *You have joined, Helena, the angelic hosts, serving God with your very deeds* (Ode 5, Irmos).

Holding the most venerated relic and invincible sign of the True Cross, the figures of the Holy Emperors in the metropolitan church of Suceava, although moved further into the naos, still occupy a privileged position in relation to the overall thematic arrangement in the naos. On the front side of the central north pier, which penetrates into the central area (today obstructed by the pulpit), they continue to occupy a strategic position, securing a symbolic threshold, halfway between the entrance and the sanctuary. We cannot, however, overlook the proximity, whether intentional or not, of the procession to Golgota, which unfolds above the iconic depiction of Constantine and Helena. The cortege, which extends over the entire length of the northeast part of the wall (in the tympanum of the blind arcade) is lead by the two thieves carrying their own crosses (in the same line with the Holy Emperors), followed by Simon of Cyrene, who bears on his shoulders the cross on which Christ is to be crucified, the one that Helena will later discover in Jerusalem, the future relic of the True Cross.

The four large blind arcades formed on every side of the two apses, along the main transversal arches of the naos are exceptional elements in Moldavian ecclesiastical architecture. Common features of South-Slavic architecture, from where they irradiated in Wallachian church architecture[36], these areas significantly enlarged the naos of the metropolitan church of Suceava, creating an additional space to which painters had to adapt, searching for new topics to represent. Since the former metropolitan church in Suceava is the only example of its kind preserving its mural decoration, we no longer have the possibility to compare its iconography to contemporary local examples.

[35] Translation by the author, after the Romanian version of the Menaion.

[36] They are considered to be reminiscences of the cross-in square vaulting system – with a central dome supported by four pillars – which in Serbian architecture were gradually withdrawn from the centre of the nave, until reaching the north and south side walls of the church, forming blind arcades. While Wallachian founders strongly adhered to this model, there are only four churches built in Moldavia during the reign of Stephen the Great and his successors that use these specific architectural elements in their plan: the metropolitan church in Suceava, the churches in Borzești and Războieni, and the Ressurection church from Piatra Neamț. See Gheorghe Balș "Influence du plan serbe sur le plan des églises roumaines", *L'art byzantin chez les Slaves*, II, p. 277-294.

THE SYNAXIS OF THE ARCHANGELS

Placed inside the frame of the northwest arcade, adjacent to the Passion of the Forty and bordered to the right by the Holy Emperors, the large representation of the Synaxis of the Archangels[37] is another les common occurrence of the fresco program of the metropolitan church. Unfortunately, the centre of the composition was destroyed in the nineteenth century, when a second door was cut into the south wall of the naos, in order to shorten the path of worshipers towards Saint John the New's reliquary.[38] We can assume that the Archangels were depicted holding either a medallion showing Christ-Emanuel, or a globe inscribed with Christ's monogram. The absence of any evidence regarding the original fresco allows for further suppositions, as earlier examples in Byzantine art were even more diverse.[39]

The impressive composition of the Synaxis reproduces a subject found in the upper parts of the dome, around the Pantocrator, as part of a descending row representing witnesses of the incarnate Christ.[40] It is the place traditionally dedicated to this image in the iconography of Moldavian churches. Outside this context, the Synaxis can be found in the painted Menologion of the narthex or

[37] The inscription running in the upper part of the composition, which could have provided more information about the scene is, unfortunately, too damaged to be read, just as are the two inscriptions painted on the scrolls held by the monks flanking the composition on the pillars of the blind arch. On the Eastern pillar, one can hardly read the letters "**сѫ҃ы є**" as the initials of the figure's name. They could perhaps indicate the presence of Saint Ephrem.

[38] The intervention was part of an extensive restoration project, coordinated by architect Karl Romstorfer, between 1904 and 1910: I. Caproșu, *Biserica Sfântul Gheorghe din Suceava*, p. 12–13. Today the door still offers a quick access to the corner where St. John the New's reliquary is located. The initial position of the reliquary was, nonetheless, on the opposite wall. Its present location fully obstructs the votive composition, deployed at the junction of the Western and Southern walls of the naos.

[39] Christ Pantocrator could also appear as an image enclosed in medallion. Moreover, there are examples such as the lost Dormition church in Volotovo, near Novgorod, where angels held globes which were interpreted as mirrors – a hypothesis that finds a strong support in pseudo-Dyonisos the Areopagite's description of the angelic hierarchy receiving and reflecting downwards, to one another, the light of God they contemplate. Zaga Gavrilović proposes a similar reading for the angels figured in the Anastasis composition at Dečani. See Z. Gavrilović, "Discs Held by Angels in the Anastasis at Dečani", *Byzantine East, Latin West. Art-Historical Studies in Honour of Kurt Weitzmann*, ed. Christopher Moss, Katherine Kiefer, Princeton University, 1995, p. 226–227.

[40] Representations of the Synaxis appear, for instance, on the barrel vault of the church of Saint Nicholas in Bălinești. A typical image of the Synaxis, representing the hosts of angels holding globes with Christ's monogram is multiplied in the drum of the dome in Saint Nicholas church in Popăuți. Individual representations of angels and archangels, holding the same globes in their hands are gathered in the large domes of Probota and St. George church in Suceava. The painters of the large cupola of the church in Arbore opted for a more differentiated approach. The hosts of angels painted around the Pantocrator hold an impressive variety of images, enclosed in medallions. Christ is successively depicted as Pantocrator, Emanuel, Great Priest and Angel of Great Council, The Holy Gost in the form of a dove, the Hetoimasia throne, the symbols of the sun and the moon, as well as the *orant* Theotokos, are alternatively depicted in the hands of angels, echoing the entire history of salvation.

burial chamber, illustrating the feast of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, celebrated together with other Bodiless Powers, on November 8th.

Since contemporary monumental programs in Moldavia place the Synaxis close to the symbolical apex of the vertical axis of the church, dominated by the image of the Patocrator, instances in which the image is, on the contrary, fixed on the west-east horizontal axis of the church leading into the sanctuary can be found in several mural programs across the Balkans.[41] An example we can compare to the one in the metropolitan church in Suceava appears in the church of Žiča, in Serbia (Fig. 8). Even though it belongs to the earlier, non-developed iconographic type of the Synaxis, we shall note that the impressive, iconic-like representation of the two archangels holding the medallion of Christ-Emanuel, is placed on the west wall of the naos, on the right side of the entrance door. A closely similar formula can be seen in Saint Andrew church, on the river Treska in Macedonia, dating from 1389. The Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, both holding discs in their hands, are painted on the west wall of the naos, on each side of the entrance, "mirroring" the opposite Incarnation image in the apsis[42]. In Staro Nagoričino, on the other hand, the large figures of Michael and Gabriel, wrapped in imperial loros, with the discos of Christ-Emanuel in their hands, were moved to the eastern half of the naos, on the right side of the sanctuary apsis[43]. An even more explicit connection to the image of the Theotokos holding Christ is shown in the church of the Anastasis of Christ in Veroia (1314–1315), where two archangels holding an oversized medallion with the bust – figure of Emmanuel are painted just above the enthroned Mother of God, in the tympanum of the east wall (Fig. 9).

The Synaxis of the Archangels is perhaps the icon most frequently associated with the iconophile advocacy of the cult of images. A pagan triumphal image at its origins, representing winged genies holding a portrait or an *imago clipeata*, it was transformed by early Christian art in the representation of floating angels supporting a medallion of Christ[44]. It is believed that its iconography underwent a final transformation during the iconoclast century, when the image of Emmanuel (the incarnated Christ child) became the centre of the composition[45]. Being

[41] For a complete repertory of this image in Byzantine mural painting, see Anastasios Papadopoulos, *Η συνάξη των αρχαγγέλων στη μνημειακή βυζαντινή ζωγραφικήμ*, Doctoral thesis coord. by Athanasios Semoglou, Thessaloniki, 2009 Aristotle University. p. 52 ; pl. XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX.

[42] Jadranka Prolović, *Die Kirche des Heiligen Andreas an der Traska. Geschichte, Architektur und malerei einer palaiologenzeitlichen Stiftung des serbischen Prinzen Andreaš*, Wien, 1997, p. 194–196.

[43] Branislav Todić, *Staro Nagoričino*, Belgrade, 1993, p. 77; Anastasios Papadopoulos, *Η συνάξη των αρχαγγέλων*, p. 54 ; pl. XXXI, XXXII.

[44] Agnès Glichich, *Iconographie du Christ-Emmanuel. Origine et dévelopment jusqu'au XIVe siècle*, Paris, 1990, p. 18–26. For the image in the context of iconoclasm, see also A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin. Dossier archéologique*, Paris, 1957, p. 252–254.

[45] For a discussion concerning the origins of the iconography of Emmanuel and its post-Iconoclastic development, see. Agnès Glichich, "L'Emmanuel et l'Incarnation", in *Iconographie du Christ-Emmanuel*, p. 2–80.

virtually assimilated to an icon, the image of Christ Emanuel held by angels created a visual parallel to the discourse of Orthodox theologians.[46]

The presence of the Synaxis of Archangels in front of the sanctuary is echoed by the prayer of the Entry, spoken by the priest before stepping for the first time into the sanctuary through the Holy Doors: *O Master, Lord our God, who hast appointed in the heavens ranks and hosts of angels and archangels unto the service of Thy glory: With our entry do Thou cause the entry of the holy angels, serving and glorifying Thy goodness with us.*

In relation to the opposite door, the one leading into the naos, the Synaxis of the Archangels or its simplified version of Archangels Michael and Gabriel holding the image of Emanuel, announces before the beholder the message of the entire program of the naos, that is the Incarnation of Christ. Moreover, we may observe that, as an image historically and semantically related to the victory of the Orthodoxy, the Synaxis has been assimilated by the iconography of the entrance area, along with emblematic images of the Triumphant Church, as, for example, Constantine and Helena holding the Cross or the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

The martyrdom of the Forty, together with the Synaxis of Archangels are the main iconographic innovations introduced in the iconography of the entrance area by the painters of the metropolitan church and their advisors. Like the Synaxis, the Martyrdom represents an isolated option in the local artistic context. For comparison, one has to move therefore towards the wider artistic sphere of the Balkan Peninsula and even beyond.

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF BYZANTINE AND BALKAN MONUMENTS

From its Early Christian origins until later in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the cult of the Forty Martyrs spread, together with the image of their famous martyrdom, on a large geographical area: from Cappadoce and Constantinople to Southern Italy, Cyprus, the Balkan Peninsula, and the Northern Danubian countries. The significant number of shrines dedicated to them in the imperial capital, as well as the visual testimonies related to the Forty, suggest that their cult found strong support in the high Byzantine society from the very beginning of their introduction into the hierarchy of saints. [47] The association of the

[46] Although its first known representation (The steatite icon of Archangel Gabriel holding the medallion of Emmanuel, in Bardini Museum, Fiesole) dates back to the eleventh century, a growing interest towards the theme of the angelic hierarchy and its relevance in justifying the use of images is attested in the commentaries of the iconophile theologians. Literary evidence, along with the iconographic features of the composition, indicate the Synaxis as an icon emerged on the background of the iconoclast controversy. See A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*, p. 252–254.

[47] Nine shrines dedicated to the Forty Martyrs are reported by Raymond Janin in Constantinople and its vicinity during the Early Byzantine period: R. Janin, "Les Églises byzantines des saints

Forty Martyrs with the most esteemed warrior saints, as in the eleventh-century ivory-triptych in Saint Petersburg (Hermitage Museum) attests to their popularity and status of great military martyrs.[48] Their assimilation to warrior saints becomes even more explicit if we look at their very rare full-length representations in the Pigeon House church, Tchaouch In (Çavuşin), in Cappadoce.[49]

Even though they are most often identified by their iconic group image, representing them enduring the sufferings of martyrdom on the frozen lake of Sebaste, there has been a constant interest in developing and preserving the individual portraits of the Forty in Byzantine artistic tradition.[50] This preoccupation to distinguish them as individuals is also reflected in the liturgical service held on their annual feast day. Each of their names is called during the liturgy of March 9th, in order to fully focus their intercessory power towards those who remember and worship them.[51]

militaries", *Echos d'Orient*, t. 34, nr. 177 (1935), p. 64–70. Additional evidence of their veneration among the Byzantine aristocracy can be found in the artistic field. See, for example: Otto Demus, "Two Palaeologan Mosaic Icons in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection", *DOP* , 14 (1960), p. 89–119, with a discussion on the portable mosaic icon with the martyrdom of the Forty of Sebaste, in the Dumbarton Oaks collection. The small number of such works of art, as well as technical and stylistic details, strengthens the hypothesis that mosaic icons were produced by special order, in a small number of workshops, the subjects themselves being reserved to Christ, the Theotokos and widely venerated saints.

[48] References and commentary, in O. Demus, "Two Palaeologan Mosaic Icons", p. 97. For the dating of the ivory in St. Petersburg, see David Talbot Rice, "The Ivory of the Forty Martyrs at Berlin and the Art of the Twelfth Century" in *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 1963, p. 275–279.

[49] The paintings are assigned to the reign of the Byzantine emperor Nicephoros II Phocas, dating from around 963–969. In the northern apse (the *prosthesis*), the reigning sovereigns, Nicephoros II Phocas and Theophano, together with Nicephoro's father (Bardas Phocas) and his brother (Leon Phocas) are identified by a dedicatory inscription and, respectively, by the individual inscriptions of their names. Martyrs from the group of the Forty are painted in the apse, next to St. Constantine and Helena (see *supra* nt. 23). Others, belonging to the same group, are painted in the row, on the walls of the nave. They are all identified by names. See G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome I.2, p. 522–529 and G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Planches I, pl. 138.2, 142.3, 1.

[50] Besides the numerous examples found in monumental decoration programs, a number of which will be mentioned below, the manuscript tradition also retains some important clues of this attempt to keep the memory of the Forty alive. Portraits of twenty of the Forty Martyrs have been preserved, for instance, in one half of a double illumination in a Syriac Gospel lectionary from the thirteenth century, from the vicinity of Mosul, today in the Vatican Library (Vat. syr. 559, fols. 93v–94r). See O. Demus, "Two Palaeologan Mosaic icons", p. 101 and fig. 5. The manuscript Paris, Gr. 476 from the first half of the tenth century contains many works by Basile of Caesarea, including, his panegyric of the Forty Martyrs, as part of a significant corpus of homilies. A 25 verse poem mentioning 20 of the martyrs' names was added later in the fourteenth or fifteenth century on the folio opposite to the beginning of Basil's homily. See Dom David Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, "Un court poème des Quarante martyrs de Sébaste dans le Paris, Gr. 476", *Scriptorium*, Tome 3, No. 1, 1949, p. 52–58.

[51] The names of the Forty Martyrs are recorded in the first literary testimonies mentioning them: the account of their *Passion* and their *Testament* (Διαθηκη τῶν ἁγίον καὶ ἐνδόξον τοῦ Χριστοῦ τεσσαράκοντα μαρτύρων τῶν ἐν Σεβαστείᾳ τελειωθέντων): G. Nathanael Bonwetsch (ed.), *Die Apokalypse Abrahams. Das Testament der vierzig Märtirer*, in N. Bonwetsch, R. Seeberg, *Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche*. Leipzig, 1897. The *Synaxaria* of the Constantinopolitan Church are far more shorter in rendering their deeds than the other sources, but some of them mention

The assimilation of the Forty with *protective signs* by the iconography of the sacred space has been already emphasized[52]. In the tenth-century frescoes of Tokale kilise in Cappadocia, the Forty Martyrs are represented in several well-marked places on the upper walls of the nave, both as half-portraits, encompassed in medallions, and as full-length figures.[53] Half-portraits of martyrs are often represented on the arches supporting the dome of Byzantine churches. Sometimes they are identified as the Forty of Sebaste, as in the church of the Phorbiotissa in Asinou (Cyprus)[54]. Most likely, this was an iconographic option widely used in monumental programs, transmitted over the centuries. In the case of the church known as Molivoklisia (1541) in Karyes (Mount Athos), medallions containing the portraits of the Forty Martyrs are displayed on the four arches supporting the central dome of the cross – in – square naos.[55] For the same reasons, the Forty were painted at the base of the cupola in the fourteenth – century churches of Lesnovo

the martyrs' names (Hippolyte Delehaye, *Synaxarium Ecclesiæ Constantinopolitanæ e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi adjectis synaxariis selectis*. (Propylœum ad Acta sanctorum novembris, Bruxelles, 1902, col. 521–524). An interesting parallel may be done with the stone slab inscribed with names belonging to the Forty Martyrs, followed by the exclamation "Pray for us", discovered by Svetozar Radojčić in the region of Temnić (in Pomoravlje, Serbia). The stone is now preserved in the National Museum of Belgrade (S. Radojčić, "Temnićki natpis. Sujeverice srednjovekovnih graditelja o čudotvornoj moći imena I likovna sevastijskih mučenika", *Zbornik za likovne umetosti* 5, Novi Sad, 1969. A transcription of the inscription is available in Zaga Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia in Macedonia and Serbia", *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian medieval Art*, The Pindar Press, London 2001, p. 209.

[52] A significant detail brought into discussion by Z. Gavrilović, tracing the idea of the Forty as protectors of the sacred space back to the early ninth century, is the testimony of patriarch Eutychios of Alexandria about the reconstructing of the church of the Annunciation in Jerusalem. Eutychios reports that after the dome church collapsed in the ninth century, patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem had a dream, in which he saw forty men supporting the dome. Z. Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs", p. 209, *apud* H. Vincent, F.M. Abel, *Jérusalem. Recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire*, II, Paris, 1914, p. 224, 244.

[53] Full length figures of the martyrs are distributed in the two opposite tympanums of the south and north walls. Other, encompassed in medallions, are placed between the arches of the colonnade in the nave, as well as in other parts of the nave. G. de Jerphanion transcribed the names identifying the portraits of the martyrs, and compared them to the corresponding names recorded in the *Passion* of the Forty, in the *Testament* and the *Sinaxarion* (the two versions published by H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium*, March 9th). See G. de Jerphanion, Tome I.2, p. 313-316, and the planches 71.1, 71.2. Further corrections and adnotations to the transcriptions have been made by Catherine Jolivet-Levy, See C. Jolivet-Levy, *La Cappadoce*, p. 74, 75. Further examples can be seen in the church of Saint Théodore, Pancarlik Kilise, Ügrüp (G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome I.1, and G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, Tome II.1, p. 25–26 and *Planches* III, Paris 1934, pl. 147.1, 147.2), in the funerary chapel Emin kilise/Mavrucan n 2 (thirteenth century), the martyrs are painted in medallions, arranged in two rows on the border of the ceiling, where an impressive composition of the Pentecost was represented.

[54] Their portraits framed in medallions belong to the fourteenth century fresco layer, following the previously twelfth century iconography. See A. Weyl Carr, A. Nicolaïdès (eds.), *Asinou Across Time*, p. 251–254, fig. 6.26–6.29.

[55] Nicolaos Tutos, George Fousteris, *Ευρετήριον της Μνημειακής Ζωγραφικής του Αγίου Όρους. 10ος – 17ος αιώνας / Corpus de la peinture monumentale du Mont Athos, 10e–17e siècle*, Athens 2010, p. 229, p. 230/ fig. 5.16, nr. 19–58.

(1341–46) and Matejč (1356–57)[56], as well as in the Akathist chapel of the Dionisiou katholikon, painted around 1546/7. [57]

The widespread belief in the effectiveness of their intercession is proved by the existing side chapels dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in the early and middle Byzantine churches.[58] These additional worship spaces sheltered secondary cults, which spread along with a specific iconography.[59] The eleventh-century cathedral of Saint Sophia in Ohrid is a representative example in this regard. The scene of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste crowned by Christ, which occupies the conch of the north side chapel (prothesis), was originally part of a developed cycle of images illustrating the main episodes of the hagiography of the Forty.[60] Both Zaga Gavrilović and Gordana Babić suggest a direct Constantinopolitan influence upon Ohrid during the Byzantine domination, which brought about the cult of the Forty in the region.[61]

Frescoes of the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs in Syracuse, dated within the range of the ninth to eleventh centuries, demonstrate an even more intense devotion to the martyrs, one that has flourished on a cultural and historical background marked by the presence of the Muslim threat in the region. The mural program of the church has been given a new interpretation by Glenn Peers, who analysed it in the particular historical and religious context of medieval Syracuse. For the Christian congregation that commissioned the decoration of the church, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, painted along the transversal vault of the underground Oratory, were – as formulated by Glenn Peers - representations of "the corporate nature of

[56] Zaga Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs", p. 198–216, p. 208.

[57] N. Tutos; G. Fousteris, Ευρετήριον, p. 249, p. 250/fig. 6.2, nr. 15–54.

[58] One of the earliest preserved mural representations of their martyrdom can be seen in the Oratory of the Forty Martyrs, an adjacent chapel in the Santa Maria Antiqua church in Rome, the main apsis of which preserves a fresco representation of the sufferings of the Forty, dating back to the seventh or eighth century, while the same orant martyrs are portrayed in a row on the North wall of the chapel.

[59] See André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2ème volume, *Iconographie*, College de France, Paris, 1946, p. 100-102 and the study dedicated by Gordana Babić to the relationship between the iconography and the function of the side chapels in Byzantine churches: Gordana Babić, *Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines. Fonction liturgique et programmes iconographiques*, Paris, 1969.

[60] Today, along with the apsidal martyrdom image, only four scenes representing events that occurred after the martyrs' death can be seen on the south wall of the chapel: Gordana Babić, *Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines. Fonction liturgique et programmes iconographiques*, Paris, 1969, p. 110–121.

[61] The scene of the Forty of Sebaste can be found also in other churches of the region: in St. Leontion church, near Vodoča, located at the foot of the Belascia mountain, which was depending in the eleventh century upon the archbishop of Ohrid, the Eleousa church from Veljusa (near Vodoča). G. Babić, *Chapelles annexes*, p. 117; Z. Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs", p. 202–205; The representation of the group of martyrs in the frescoes of Vodoča, with their convoluted body postures, shows close similarities with the ivory icon in the Bode Museum, which is a tenth century Constantinopolitan work. See : Krastju Ivanov Mijatev, "Les 'Quarante martyrs' fragment de fresque a Vodoča (Macédonie)", in *L' Art byzantin chez les Slaves*, p. 102–109, pl. X.

the Church itself". They became, in other words, symbols of the resistance of the Christian community against the pagan rulers.[62]

Separated from the beginning from the narrative cycle illustrating their hagiography, and disseminated through icon versions, the scene representing the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste receiving their crowns from Christ was treated in Byzantine art as an independent composition, easy re-contextualized in church decoration programs. This perception of the martyrdom scene in relation to the other scenes of their Passion is evident in an illuminated Greek Psalter, dating from the eleventh or twelfth century (Vat. Barb. Gr. 372), where the well-known scene of the martyrs on the frozen lake was treated as if it were a painted icon enclosed in a frame, thus contrasting the other scenes of the cycle, scattered across the margins of the text.[63]

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the representation of the Martyrdom of the Forty had a significant number of occurrences in the decoration of churches spread over the territory of the Serbian Kingdom. The image has long been attracting the attention of scholars, who explained its popularity in the artistic environment of medieval Serbia in relation to the rich homiletic and hymnographic tradition employed in the worshiping of the Martyrs[64]. The baptismal symbolism, already contained in the data of their collective martyrdom,[65] was emphasised even more in the homilies dedicated to the Forty by Cappadocian fathers[66]. On this basis, the Martyrdom of the Forty and the Baptism of Christ were frequently paired in iconographic context.

Following the example of the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, with its related iconographic programs of the side chapels – the northern one, dedicated to the Forty Martyrs and the southern one, presenting a narrative cycle of the Life and activity of John the Baptist – similar, theologically elaborated programs appear in

[62] Glenn Peers, "Finding Faith Underground: Visions of the Forty Martyrs Oratory at Syracuse", in Colum P. Hourihane (ed.), *Looking beyond: visions, dreams, and insights in medieval art & history*, Princeton University, 2010, p. 104, fig. 3/p. 87, fig. 7, fig. 8/p.88.

[63] G. Babić *Les chapelles annexes*, p. 117–118, fig. 86/p. 119.

[64] Z. Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs", p. 198–216.

[65] The martyrdom is narrated by their anonymous Passio: O von Gebhardt (ed.), *Acta martyrum selecta*, Augsewählte Märtzreracten und andere Urkunden aus der Verfolgungszeit der christlichen Kirche, Berlin (1902), p. 171–181.

[66] Among the most eloquent examples in this respect are the homily composed by Basil of Caesarea, the two homilies of Gregory of Nyssa, and the hymn composed by Romanos the Melodist, who took over this motive from Saint Basil. The text of Basil of Caesarea's homily was published in J. P. Migne, *PG* 31, 508–525, J.P. Migne, *PG* 46, 749–756. All homilies are available in a new English translation by J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, and B. Dehandschutter, *'Let Us Die that We May Live" Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine ans Syria (c.AD 350–AD 450)*, London and New York, 2003). For Romanos the Melodist see Paul Maas and Constantine A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica*. *Cantica Genuina*, Oxford 1963, p. 487–495; 495–505. For a commentary on text, see R.J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist*, University Press of Florida, 1995, p. 196–199.

the north and south transepts of Serbian churches painted in the thirteenth century. Studenica is one of the examples that has been carefully examined in the light of these observations[67]. The representation of the Forty of Sebaste enduring martyrdom, covers the surface of the barrel vault of the southern transept. The scene of King David's Penitence, painted in the tympanum opposite to the figure of the deserted soldier, illustrating the well-known episode of the Passion of the Forty, occupies a privileged place within this abbreviate program. Instead of relating the Maryrdom of the Forty to the Baptism scene, the painters have chosen a series of Old Testament scenes to cover the walls of the opposite northern transept. Among the fragmentary preserved scenes, one can distinguish the prophet Elijah taken up in a chariot, the Sacrifice of Abraham and the Martyrdom of the Three Hebrews. The converging of all these various images of martyrdom, penitence and exemplary faith, indirectly related to baptism, can be partially explained by their common origin in the Triodion, the 40 days preparatory period, awaiting Christ's Resurrection. A similar conception stays behind the iconographic programs of Morača[68], Mileševa (1220–1228)[69] or Sopočani (1260)[70], all of them preserving the scene of the Sufferings of the Forty Martyrs, as an essential component of the iconographic configuration in the two transepts adjacent to the nave.

Serbian *ktetors* and their advisers have, nevertheless, exploited these analogies even further, in the less canonical context created by the narthex or the exonarthex preceding the nave of their royal foundations. The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste are in this way included in more elaborated, ideologically founded programs of which the portraits of the royal founders are part of. The fourteenth century decoration of the porch preceding the church of Zič̆a and that of the narthex of the Saints Archangels church of Lesnovo, are important exponents of

[67] The paintings were restored in the second half of the sixteenth century (1568), but they reproduce the previous, thirteenth century iconography. For a comprehensive and comparative analyse of the iconographic program of the two transepts, see Zaga Gavrilović, "Frescoes in the Vestibules of the Church of the Virgin at Studenica. Iconographic Programme and Symbolic Meaning", *Studies in Medieval Byzantine and Serbian art*, The Pindar Press, London 2001. For the disposition of the scenes, and for the complete iconographic program of the nave see: Richard Hamann-Mac Lean, Horst Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedoniei vom 11. bis zm frühen 14. Jahrhundert*, Bildband, 1963, Plans 9, 10.

[68] The current frescoes, dating from the sixteenth century (1547) reproduced the iconography of the original decoration dated in the first half of the thirteenth century. The Martyrdom of the Forty on the frozen lake are represented in the northern choir, thus creating a parallel to the Baptism cycle in the Southern choir.

[69] The Martyrdom of the Forty was painted on the vault of the Northern transept, but only a fragment of this composition has been preserved. In the opposite, southern transept, the images of the penitent king David and the Martyrdom of the Three Hebrews appear once again. See R. Hamann-Mac Lean, H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei*, Bildband, Pl. 12, 13.

[70] The Forty Martyrs are painted on the vault of the northern choir, while the Hospitality of Abraham and the baptism of Christ occupy the same position in the southern choir. For the complete iconographic program, see: Branislav Živković, *Sopoćani: les dessins des fresques*, Monuments de la peinture Serbe médiévale, 3, Beograd, 1984, pl. V/p. 18, pl. VI/p. 19.

this group of monuments, as they provide developed programs assigning key position to the image of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.[71]

In the church of Zič̆a[72], the fresco representing the Forty Martyrs covers the barrel vault of the porch of the church, which is surmounted by a tower. This is the main entrance in the church as it precedes even the outer narthex.[73] The program of the porch includes two other important scenes besides the Martyrdom, namely the Christmas Sticheron, with Archbishop Sava III and king Milutin as part of the composition, in the eastern tympanum, and the scene illustrating Christ's words „Unless you become as little children" (Mt. 18,3), in the opposite, western tympanum. The actual proximity between the Forty Martyrs and the royal portraits is replaced by a series of thematic interferences in the domed narthex of Lesnovo[74]. The Martyrdom of the Forty is placed in the upper half of the western tympanum – which it shares, significantly enough, with the analogue image of the Parable of the Ten Virgins – while the investiture scene of king Dušan and his wife by Christ is painted in the upper part the north side wall of the narthex (Fig. 10). Unique representations of the four Church Fathers as sources of wisdom dominate the central part of the narthex from the four pendants of the Pantocrator's dome. Saint Basil himself is pictured in the northeast pendant, writing at his desk, in front of a cruciform fountain, echoing the image of the Mother of God "Source of life"(M̃P Θ̃Y Η ΠΗΓΗ ΤΗC ΖΩΗC) on the east vault of the same room.[75] Zaga Gavrilović has examined these programs and interpreted them in several of her studies, in relation to the political ideology of the Serbian Medieval state. She is considering the ideas of "baptism", in the large sense, and that of "kingship" – crossing not only the programs of Zič̆a and Lesnovo, but also the one in the narthex of Dečani – in the light of the Byzantine notion of "Divine Wisdom", which is nothing else but

[71] Zaga Gavrilović, "Kingship and Baptism in the Iconography of Dečani and Lesnovo", in *Studies in Medieval Byzantine and Serbian art*, p. 125–145 and Zaga Gavrilović, "The 'Forty Martyrs of Sebaste' in the painted programme of Žič̆a vestibule. Further research into the artistic interpretations of the Divine Wisdom – Baptism – Kingship Ideology", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 1982, p. 185–193.

[72] The church was built around 1217 by Stefan Stephan Provovenčani – King Stephen the First Crowned – 1196-1228 and by St. Sava, being designated in 1219 as the first Serbian autocephalous archbishop and the coronation site of Serbian kings. The decoration in the porch belongs to the restoration phase which took place in the years 1309–1316 under the auspices of King Milutin and Archbishop Sava III.

[73] The church was built at the beginning of the thirteenth century by Stephan Provovenčani and Saint Sava. The paintings in this room were restored between 1309–16, the works being commissioned by Archbishop Sava III and Milutin: Z. Gavrilović, "The 'Forty Martyrs of Sebaste' in the painted programme of Žič̆a", p. 185.

[74] The decoration was completed in 1349, three years after the the frescoes of the naos were finished.

[75] For an extensive description of the program of the narthex, see N. Okunev, "Lesnovo", p. 236–259, and pl. XXXVIII (the Forty Martyrs), and Smiljka Gabelić, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд, 1998, пп. 155–201. For the Church Fathers, see pl. XXXVIII, XXXIX, fig. 74–77. The Mother of God "Source of life, pl. XLV.

the light of the Incarnate Logos descending upon both the baptised man and the emperor.[76]

Even though there is little evidence to be drawn from Mount Athos regarding the scene of the Martyrdom of the Forty represented outside the Menologion, the monastery of Xeropotamou offers an example worth mentioning. It is the fresco-icon of the Martyrdom of the Forty of Sebaste, placed in a niche inside the old gateway to the monastery. The Archangels Michael and Gabriel, as well as Cherubims, frame the composition.[77] The frescoes are dated in 1660/1 by a votive inscription placed under the figurative register, but the choice to represent the image of the Forty in this place must be related to the previous dedication of the monastery to the Forty Martyrs. This happened in the twelfth century, under the patronage of Saint Sava of Serbia. From his will, the newly built monastery of Xeropotamou, previously dedicated to Saint Nikephoros, was consecrated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.[78] Just like their portraits, displayed on arches or at the base of the dome, in order to protect what is the core structure of the Church, their group image appearing in the passage leading to the monastery is meant to secure the very first threshold on this route.

Finally, we may observe that the common place for the Martyrdom scene of the Forty in three Cypriot churches, painted in the twelfth century, is again the west half of the naos. The most famous of them is painted on the north wall of the west bay in the Panaghia Phorbiotissa church in Asinou[79], which was built and decorated at the beginning of the twelfth century by a local magistrate, either for his own use, or in order to serve as the katholikon for a monastery.[80] Since the narthex was added to the single nave church of Asinou sometime later in the twelfth century,

[76] Zaga Gavrilović, "Divine Wisdom as Part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology. Research into the Artistic Interpretations of the theme in medieval Serbia. Narthex Programmes of Lesnovo and Sopoćani", *Studies in Medieval Byzantine and Serbian art*, The Pindar Press, London 2001, p. 44–69, and the related study "The Humiliation of Leo VI the Wise. The Mosaic of the narthex at St. Sophia, Istanbul, *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 1979, p. 87–97.

[77] N. Tutos; G. Fousteris, Ευρετήριον, p. 333, p. 334/fig.9.1 and 9.1.11.

[78] Mirjana Živojinović, "Ktitorska delatnost Svetog Save", Sava Nemanjić – Sveti Sava [Saint Sava, Histoire et tradition], Belgrad 1979, p. 15–24, *apud.* Z. Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty Martyrs", p. 104.

[79] It is part of the original twelfth century fresco program. The twelfth century frescoes in the naos have been covered in multiple phases with new layers of paintings. In the thirteenth century, the church underwent restoration works involving structural changes, which led to it being repainted with frescoes that did not necessarily repeat the original ones. Andreas Stylianou, Judith Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine Art*, second edition 1997, A.G. Leventis Foundation, Nicosia, Cyprus, p. 117–126. For the thirteenth and fourteenth century fresco layers in the central bay of the naos, and their relation to the original program of the church, see A. Weyl Carr's contribution in: Weyl Carr and Andréas Nicolaïdès (eds.), *Asinou Across Time, Chapter six*, p. 211–302.

[80] The particularity of which is given by a tenth century painted epigram (attributed to John the Geometer), inscribed on the background of the main scene; the inscription recalls the martyrs' sufferings. See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, "The metrical Inscriptions in the murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa", in Annemarie Weyl Carr and Andréas Nicolaïdès (eds.), *Asinou Across Time: studies in the architecture and murals of the Panaghia Phorbiotissa*, Cyprus, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2012, p. 70–72.

the western bay [81] – originally less evidently separated from the central one – was acting as an entry space, and was already decorated at the time the addition was made. The Martyrdom scene is part of the original twelfth –century program, just like the painted icon of the Byzantine emperors Constantine and Helena holding the Cross, facing the Martyrs of Sebaste in the opposite niche of the west bay (Fig. 11). Similar representations of the Forty appear in two other monuments of the same period. The first one belongs to the church of St. Joachim and Anna from Kaliana (probably from the beginning of the twelfth century)[82], and occupies the same place as in Phorbiotissa, namely the northwest niche of the north wall. Finally, in the cross-in-square type church of Saint Nicholas of the Roof (Agios Nicolaos tis Stegis) from Kakopetria, the large fresco icon, belonging to the early twelfth century, is displayed on the west wall of the naos, towards its south end. (Fig. 12)[83]

What becomes evident after examining the different practices regarding the image of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in monuments of the Balkan region is, on the one hand the Byzantine legacy of a special veneration of the Forty[84], the images of whom continued their itinerary through the various artistic media in the Orthodox world. There must have been a strong belief in their apotropaic function, as proved by the key-positions they were assimilated to in monumental programs. The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, as underlined by Zaga Gavrilović "were believed to be endowed with the same protective power as other *signs*, such as the cross, the revolving discs of the Logos, or the images of Christ on the Mandylion and Keramion often placed in the most sensitive parts of the church building".[85]

According to the literary tradition, they were embedded with the virtues of the ones who were baptized in Christ. A number of times in the second homily he uttered in Sebasteia, Saint Gregory of Nyssa alludes to these exceptional qualities of the Forty: *Beautiful to the angels, beautiful to the powers above the world but hateful to the demons and those who clung the demons' interests, were these men*. Then he asserts the same idea even more clearly: *In reaction to all of this only one*

[81] Athanasios Papageorgiou, "The architecture of the church of the Panaghia Phorbiotissa", in A. Weyl Carr, A. Nicolaïdès (eds.), *Asinou Across Time*, p. 53–54.

[82] The church from Kaliana is a later construction, into which the north wall, and possibly also the apse of a former church, destroyed in the fourteenth century, have been incorporated. The large fresco of the Forty Martyrs belongs to the earlier church, that is believed to have been a domed church of the type of Asinou. See Andreas Stylianou, Judith Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine Art*, Nicosia, Cyprus 1997, p. 107–109.

[83] A. Stylianou, J. Stylianou, Judith, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*, p. 53–54, p. 59–60.

[84] About its employment in church iconography of the Byzantine churches of Constantinople we know quite a few things. The lost representation of the Martyrdom of the Forty in Euphemia church in Constantinople was an important clue in this case. See Hans Belting, Rudolf Naumann, *Die Euphemia-Kirche am Huppodrom zu Istanbul und ihre Fresken*, Berlin, 1966. p. 86, 89 (fig. 56). The fourteenth century fresco of the Forty martyrs in the narthex of St. Apostles church in Thessalonik could be also mentioned, as a product of an urban artistic centre, that could have been followed in other monuments.

[85] Z. Gavrilović, "The Cult of the Forty", p. 210.

word was heard, namely 'Christ', as he was confessed in the saints' mounths, This was a blow to their opponents, this was a spear-point aimed at the Enemy.[86]

On the other hand, the common ground provided by both the historical bounds and the geographical proximity some monuments or groups of monuments share, seems to be the answer for those situations in which artists gave a different interpretation to this particular martyrdom image. Choices regarding the position of the scene in the church were determined in many cases by the architectural particularities of the monuments, although the symbolism of the sacred space was highlighted in iconography according to the same principles.

The painters of the metropolitan church of Suceava understood to develop in the western area of the naos a sequence of topics with an important tradition of representation in Byzantine art, and a well-defined relation to the symbolic topography of the sacred space. However, it is not the narthex that the painters of the Moldavian metropolitan church have chosen in order to represent the Martyrdom of the Forty, as one would have expected, but the west wall of naos, next to the large representation of the Synaxis of the Holy Archangels.

Because one cannot trace back the program of the metropolitan church of Suceava to local customs, as it was the case for many of the Balkan examples brought into discussion, we will further examine the possibility that the painters and their theologian advisers have also interacted with the most common liturgical sources linked to the Forty of Sebaste.

THE PANEGYRIC OF SAINT BASIL OF CAESAREA AND THE FRESCO OF THE FORTY MARTYRS IN THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF SUCEAVA

The anonymous *Passion*[87] and the *Testament* of the Forty, known as the *Διαθῆκη*,[88] both dating back to the fourth century, are the earliest written evidences of the martyrdom of the forty Roman soldiers, recorded to have happened in the time of the emperor Licinius, in the town of Sebasteia, in Lesser Armenia. Both writings contain literary motifs that are believed to have been taken over and developed by later authors.[89]

Beside these primarily anonymous accounts, the cult of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste was enriched by an important homiletic tradition, mostly composed later in

[86] See. J. Leemans et alii, *Greek Homilies*, p. 101.

[87] *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 1201. Other Greek versions of this text are listed in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, 1201, p. 168.

[88] The Greek text is available in N. Bonwetsch (ed): *Die Apokalypse Abrahams. Das Testament der vierzig Märtirer*; O.von Gebhardt (ed.), *Acta martyrum selecta*, p. 166–170 (see supra footnote 51),

[89] Meanwhile the Legend of the Forty is a narrative account of their sufferings and death by freezing in the town of Sebasteia, the Διαθῆκη, which is considered to be an authentic contemporary writing, reports their unanimous wish for their relics to be gathered and buried together, so as to remain united after death, as they had chosen to be in their sacrifice.

the fourth century, but also after this date. Orations delivered by Basil of Caesarea[90], Gregory of Nyssa[91], Ephraem the Syrian[92], Sever of Antioch[93], as well as the two *kontakia* composed by Romanos the Melode[94] in the sixth century are among the most important literary works dedicated to the Forty of Sebaste in Byzantine literature. Some of these works have gained a larger popularity than the others, after being introduced in service books, as readings for the liturgy of the Martyrs celebrated, according to the Orthodox liturgical calendar, on March 9th, during the Great Lent period.

The liturgical books copied in Moldavia build up an important, although limited source of information regarding the cult of the Forty. Both the *Passio* and the *Testament* are attested in manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, copied in Moldavian monasteries, many of them in the scriptorium of Neamț. The *Testament* of the Forty, although a less frequently encountered text was recorded in the codex MS BAR 298, dating from the first half of the sixteenth century, which is a miscellany comprising a corpus of sermons, teachings, lives of saints, even prophecies of the Old Testament and some liturgical services.[95]

The liturgy of the Forty Martyrs held on their annual feast day is included in the Menaion of March. It may also appear in different anthologies based on the main service books. The sixteenth century Antologhion (MS BAR 115) is an example of this kind. The manuscript comprises liturgies of the annual feasts from September to March, including the service of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste on March 9th, followed by the liturgy of the Annunciation (on March 25th) which marks the end of the book[96].

Of greater interest, however, are the Slavonic *lectionaries* copied in monastic libraries. They consist of sermons, hagiographical writings and other useful readings to be delivered over the year, with the indication of the corresponding month and day. The majority of the *lectionaries* that include the month of March indicate as readings for the feast of the Forty, both their Passion and the panegyric composed by Basil of Caesarea in their honour. Considering the available manuscripts, dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the pairing of the

[90] The text of Basil of Caesarea's homily is available in Migne, *PG* 31, 508–525, and in a new English translation by J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, and B. Dehandschutter, *Greek homilies*, 2003.

[91] Gregory of Nyssa delivered two orations on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, PG 46, 749–756.

[92] *Laudatio A. Ephraem Syro, Encomium in sanctos quadriginate martyres* (Assemani, S.P.N., Ephraem Syri opera Omnia, II, grace.-lat., Romae 1743, 341–356), *apud. BHG* (1909).

[93] *PO* 37,1 (1975), 6–l and *Les Homiliae cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche* / traduction syriaque de Jacques d'Édesse (suite). Homélies XVIII à XXV / éditées et traduites en français par M. Brière et F. Graffin.

[94] P. Maas and C.A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina*, Oxford 1963, p. 487–495; 495–505.

[95] See P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrisele slave din Biblioteca Academiei R.P.R*, Vol. I, 1959, nr. 298, p. 397–399.

[96] P P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. I, p. 142.

two texts appears to have been transmitted as a standardized structure in all these books.[97]

The Slavonic codex 153 in the Library of the Romanian Academy, a *lectionary* copied in the fifteenth century in the monastery of Neamț is a typical example. The manuscript comprises the anonymous text of the *Passion* of the Forty of Sebaste (**мѫченїе стѫ҃ъ мѫченикъ м҃ иже въ севастїи моученыїхъ** ("The Sufferings of the Holy Forty Martyrs, who suffered in Sebaste"), followed by the homily of Saint Basil of Caesarea (**иже въ стѫ҃ъ wц҃а на,его архїепй(с)к҃па ккса҃рїе каппадокїискые, василїа великааго· похвалное стм҃ь м(ч)нкwмь четыридесѥтимь**, "Of our father among the saints, Basil the Great, the Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadoce, Praise of the Forty Martyrs").

Even though it is not sure what precisely made the panegyric of Saint Basil more popular than other sermons on the same topic, the pairing of the Passion with Basil's homily was a common place of Slavonic liturgical *lectionaries* since the early medieval period, as attested by the well-known Bulgarian *Codex Suprasliensis*. Assigned to the tenth century, the Bulgarian *lectionary* is one of the first old Slavonic examples of this kind. Both the anonymous narration of the Martyrdom of the Forty, and the sermon composed by Saint Basil in praise of them are included in the Menaion-like organized manuscript, as the only lectures for the day of March 9th.[98]

Compared to the narration of the *Passion*, Saint Basil's sermon delivered in Caesarea, on the occasion of the Martyrs' feast, embraces a different kind of approach, conforming to the literary genre he adopts. His rather abstract view on the story of the Forty has been already been commented on.[99] Basil's omission of the very place of their martyrdom has been interpreted as deliberate, though it is a common feature of homilies to avoid, for example, the real names of the persecutors involved in the story.[100] The legend is neither temporally nor

[97] St. Basil's praising discourse preceded by the hagiographical narration of the Forty martyrs was identified in the following manuscripts: BAR 150, which includes on fol. 311v–316 the narration of the sufferings of the Forty, followed by the Sermon of Saint Basil (fol 316–322): P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. I, p. 197–198; BAR 153 (fifteenth century) from Neamț monastery (fol. 153v–161r and 161r–171r): P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. I., p. 212; BAR 304 (fifteenth century), which comprises the *Passio* of the Forty (160v–166v), followed by the tenth homily of Saint Basil (166v–172v): See P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. II, p. 31; BAR 305 (fifteenth century), with the Passio (f. 155–159v) followed, as in the previous examples by St. Basil's Oratio in praise of the Forty (f. 159v–165v): See P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. II, p. 37; SB II285: Ion Radu Mircea, *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie. Auteurs byzantins et slaves*, Sofia 2005, p. 35; Dragomirna 1773/684 (beginning of the fifteenth century) the Passio on pages 274v–280 is followed by the Oratio given by St. Basil the Great (f. 280–286): See I. Iufu, *Manuscrise de la mănăstirea Dragomirna*, p. 131. An exception is the Sbornic BAR 152 where only the Passio of the Forty has been included, f. 186v–191, v. P.P. Panaitescu, *Manuscrise slave*, Vol. I, p. 205.

[98] Digitalized edition on http://suprasliensis.obdurodon.org/pages/supr042r.html. First published by F. Miklosich in *Monumenta linguae palaeoslovenicae e codice suprasliensi*, in 1851.

[99] See the interpretation of Raymond Van Dam in R. Van Dam *Becoming Christian. The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia*, 2003, p. 132–140.

[100] Neither are these information to be found in St. Gergory of Nyssa's sermons. The preacher, omits to mention the name of the city where the martyrdom took place, which was the same city where

geographically situated by Saint Basil.[101] On the contrary, the *Passion* of the Forty begins from its very first line with the naming of the ruling emperor Licinius (308–324)[102], and of the governor of Sebaste at that time, Agricolaos.[103]

Like other similar types of panegyrics, Saint Basil's had an explicit exhortatory purpose.[104] His goal was to instil the believers the wish to *imitate* the martyrs, by spiritually resembling them: *Bless the martyred sincerely, so that you become a martyr by choice, and end up being worthy of the same rewards as theirs, without persecution, without fire, without blows*."[105] As the forty soldiers of the imperial army delivered themselves to death in order to defend their faith, the other Christians should contemplate the martyrs' sacrifice and strive for a comparative level of holiness, seems to suggest Saint Basil, who addresses his audience in order to motivate each of the present man towards acts of virtue. For that reason, the self-sacrifice assumed by the Forty is presented in Basil's homily as exemplary and universal: *Let us say that they were without a city, or that they were citizens of the world*. (…) *After all, the city of martyrs is the city of God* (Hebrew 12, 22).

An overall ecclesiological message runs through Saint Basil's speech while invoking the Forty: *Bounteous benevolence, unsquandered grace, ready help for Christians, a church of martyrs, an army of trophy-bearers, a chorus of those giving praise. (…) They were forty, sending up a unanimous prayer*, which culminates in the paraphrase of Christ's words, evoked by the Gospel of St. Matthew (18: 20), *Where there are two or three gathered together in the name of the Lord, there He is in the midst of them. But where there are forty, who doubts the presence of God?*[106]. Their solidarity in martyrdom features the Christian community itself: *They had one soul in different bodies, in one simultaneous*

he was about to deliver his homily. The introduction into the story is "there was a unit of soldiers present in the vicinity of a neighbouring city, in order to provide protection against the attacs of the barbarians for the whole population." See J. Leemans, *Greek homilies*, p. 98, translated from the edition by O. Lendle; GNO X, 1/2, 137–42 and 145–56.

[101] For a general discussion, see J. Leemans *et alii*, *Greek Homilies*. For an analysis in the field of comparative literary studies, see Karlin-Hayter, P. (1991) "Passio of the XL Martyrs of Sebaste. The Greek Tradition: the Earliest Accounts", *Analecta Bollandiana* 109, 249–304.

[102] Who was in that period, Constantine's rival to the ruling of the empire.

[103] The Passion in the MS 153, begins as follows: **Вь врѣмена Ликїнна цара, бѣ гонкнїе велїе на хр(с)тїаны · и вьси иже бл҃гочстывнѣ живѳщеи ѳ х(с)ѣ, ноудими бѣхѳе жертѣти идоломь · Агрикола҃ бл<а>(д)чствоующ҃ пагоубномоу и соуровом҃ вь истиноу, и готовом҃ кь дїавольском҃ слоужен҃ю,** "At the time of emperor Licinius, there was great persecution against Christians, and those who lived a blessed life in Christ were obliged to offer sacrifices to idols. [And] Agricolaus who was governing, [was] truly a dangerous and cruel [man] and ready to serve the devil" (MS 153, fol. 153v, r.7–13)

[104] For a summary of the general features of the genre, see P. Allen, in J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, B. Dehandschutter, 'Let Us Die that We May Live'. *Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350 – AD 450)*, Routledge 2003, p. 22–37

[105] The English translations are from P. Allen, in J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen, B. Dehandschutter, 'Let Us Die that We May Live'. *Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350 – AD 450)*, Routledge 2003, p. 67–77, after PG 31, 508–526.

[106] J. Leemans et alii, *Greek homilies*, p. 75.

breath and thought of faith. The threat of the Last Judgment, invoked by one of the soldiers, when asked to reject his faith, is another powerful topic related to the same idea. It underlines the single aim a true Christian has in his life: *I desire one gift – the crown of righteousness. (...) I fear the punishment of ghenna. That fire is fearful for me.*

Considering these aspects – the martyrdom of the Forty as an universal paradigm of steadfastness in faith and fear of Judgment, and the parallel between the martyrs and the Christian community as a whole – it becomes more evident why the panegyric delivered by Saint Basil in Caesarea was introduced in the usual liturgical books, along with the text of the *Passions* of the Forty, as if it were its main exegesis. Interpreted in the light of Saint Basil's panegyric, the scene of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste enduring together the sufferings of freezing in the open air, becomes an expressive icon of the indivisible Christian community. Its representation in the metropolitan cathedral of the country, in the naos more precisely, where the community gathed in order to attend the liturgy, is thus fully justified. Continuing to read Saint Basil's homily, we shall further highlight some detail aspects in the Martyrdom scene of the metropolitan church that are close to the text of the homily.

The parallel between the sacrifice of the Forty and the Baptism is indirectly expressed in Basil's homily, by paraphrasing the words of Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians (4:22)[107] *Let us give thanks to you, Lord, as we cast off sin together with this garment. Since we put on clothes because of the snake (cf. Gen 3:21*), let us take them off because of Christ. (…) The passage continues the idea by introducing a comparison with Christ's Crucifixion, but without directly mentioning it. It evokes instead the episode of the division of the clothes: *Our Lord also took his clothes off. What greater suffering can a slave have [than to] suffer what his Master did? I should say that we were the ones who took off the clothes of the Master himself (cf. Matt 27:28). I mean that this was that shameless act of soldiers – they took off his clothes and divided his garments (Matt 27:35). So let us delete the written charge against us by our own efforts*.[108]

A striking detail in the frescoes of the metropolitan church of Suceava recalls the parallel drawn by Saint Basil. It can be noticed in the vertical alignment painters created between the Martyrdom of the Forty and the sequence of the division of Christ's clothes in the Passion cycle, that unfolds above. The diadems which the Martyrs are awarded follow the semicircle shape of the symbolic heaven from which Christ comes out blessing them. It is an unusual manner of representing the diadems, which we could not find elsewhere in Byzantine iconography, neither in monumental decoration, nor in icons depicting the scene.[109] The diadems' shape is mirrored in the semicircular architecture of the platform on

[107] "Let us put off the old man who has been corrupted through his desire for error" (Eph. 4:22).
[108] J. Leemans et alii, *Greek homilies*, p. 72.
[109] Usually the diadems are pictured descending in two parallel rows upon the martyrs' heads.

which one of the soldiers is sitting, preparing himself to divide Christ's tunic. The compositional relationship between the two scenes is so obvious, that it can hardly be unintentional. It corresponds to the rhetorical principle of the allegory that was used in sermons, and which, as Mary Cunningham defined it, "explored a more universal message beneath the letter of a text, unusually associating this with personal salvation or spiritual illumination"[110]. This is just one of the several Gospel quotations and paraphrases in Saint Basil's speech that would have been very familiar to the Christian audience, attending the liturgy.

The proximity between the Forty Martyrs and the Synaxis of the Archangels in the painting of the metropolitan church recalls not only the content of the oration of Basil of Caesarea, but also the liturgy of the Forty itself.[111] Using a common rhetorical means, that of direct speech, Basil developed long dialogues in his panegyric, between the soldiers and their persecutor, on the one hand, and between the martyrs themselves, on the other. In the midst of the torment, the Forty were encouraging each other by foreshadowing their future condition: *Let our foot burn, so that it may continually dance with angels*[112] (…) Towards the end of the oration, Saint Basil remembers the audience of their effective intercession power: *Becoming a spectacle for the world and for angels and human beings (1 Corinthians 4:9) they raised the fallen, they strengthened the ambivalent, they doubled the desire of the pious*.[113], an idea with which he concludes his exhortation: *O holy chorus! O hallowed battalion! O unbroken fighting order! O common guards of the human race! Good companions in times of anxiety, helpers in prayer, most powerful ambassadors, stars of the world, flowers of the churches*, adding that *The sight is worthy of the army of angels, worthy of patriarchs, prophets* (…).[114]

The iconography of the western part of the naos in the metropolitan church of Suceava exceeds the standard patterns of the contemporary Moldavian programs, by taking the scene of the Martyrdom of the Forty out of the context of the liturgical calendar. All the other representations of the Martyrdom of the Forty in

[110] For a discussion on Byzantine preaching and its exegetical dimension, see: Mary B Cunningham, "The Interpretation of the New Testament in Byzantine Preaching. Mediating an Encounter with the Word", in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, D. Krueger, R.S. Nelson (eds.), Dumbarton Oaks Research Collection, 2016, p. 191–203. For the same subject in the context of hagiographical writings Derek Krueger, *The Hagiographers' Bible. Intertextuality and Scriptural Culture in the Late Sixth and the First Half of the Seventh Century*, *ibidem*, p. 177–189.

[111] "Holy forty armed soldiers of Christ, undergoing your trials, by fire and by water you have passed, and have shown yourselves together inhabitants of the angels, with whom pray to Christ for those who by faith praise you for you." (Liturgy of the Forty Martyrs, Troparion, Tone 1), Translation by the author, after the Romanian Menaion.

[112] J. Leemans et alii, *Greek Homilies*, p. 73.

[113] J. Leemans et alii, *Greek Homilies*, p.76.

[114] The same idea is formulated by Gregory of Nyssa in his second homily on the Forty Martyrs: "what a spectacle was on that occasion displayed for the angels in the world of men", J. Leemans et alii, *Greek Homilies*, p. 76, p. 102.

Moldavian mural painting are fixed in the well-known sequence of the Menologion, where their iconography was much simplified, by omitting the upper part of the composition, which in fact corresponds to a theophany: the man who was to guard the soldiers, finding himself in the warm bath-house next to the place of the martyrdom, had a vision in which he saw Christ crowning the Martyrs. There were only thirty nine diadems, because he himself was about to complete the number of the Forty, after one of the soldiers, unable to endure the torments anymore, deserted the group.[115]

Given the many aspects of the iconographic representation of Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, it seems that the painters of the metropolitan church – like the painters of other monuments in the Orthodox world – were familiar to the homily of Saint Basil. This was very likely to be so, as Saint Basil of Caesarea was privileged among the authors who composed homilies and hymns in praise of the Forty Martyrs. While his sermon accompanies the Legend about their sufferings in liturgical books, being thus part of the main literary corpus associated with their liturgy, his figure may occasionally appear in church decoration next to their Martyrdom scene, as in the example provided by the poorly preserved frescoes of the baptistery of Saint Sophia cathedral in Kiev. Next to the scene of the Forty enduring martyrdom on the lake of Sebaste, displayed on the south wall, before the sanctuary apsis, there is a figure of a bishop painted on the pillar of the triumphal arch, which an inscription identifies as being Saint Basil.[116] In the Cappadocian church of Tokale kilise II, scenes ilustrating the episodes from the Life of Saint Basil are painted along the walls of the church, which is known to comprise a complete series of individual portraits of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste.[117]

When the scene of Martyrdom of the Forty was "taken out' of the context of the liturgical calendar, and brought into the naos of the metropolitan church, it must have caused some impact on the viewer. When Saint Basil is addressing the Christian congregation of Caesarea, at the beginning of his speech he talks about "*The facts which the historical account presents by being listened to, [and which] the painting silently portrays by imitation. In this very way* – he continues – *let us too remind those present of the men's virtue, and as it were by bringing their deeds to their gaze, let us motivate them to imitate those who are nobler and closer to them with respect to their course of life*. As the celebration of the Forty Martyrs took place once a year, their icon would constantly remind the faithful who attended liturgy in the country's metropolitan church, of the exemplary behavior of the Forty Christian soldiers.

[115] J. Leemans et alii, *Greek Homilies,* p. 73–74, O. von Gebhardt, *Acta Martyrum Selecta*, p. 177–179 (VIII–IX).

[116] See N. L. Okunev, *Крещальня Софийского собора в Киеве* [Baptistery of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev], Petrograd, 1915, p. 14–19, and pl. I, II.

[117] See G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, p. 313–318 and C. Jolivet-Lévy, *La Cappadoce*, p. 73–80.

Fig. 1a. Saint George church, Suceava: fragment of the scene representing the Sufferings of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, unknown eremite figure, and fragment of the Synaxis of the Archangels.

Fig. 1b. Saint George church, Suceava, niche of the north wall: Synaxis of the Archangels.

Fig. 2a. Saint George church, Suceava, north-west corner of the naos.

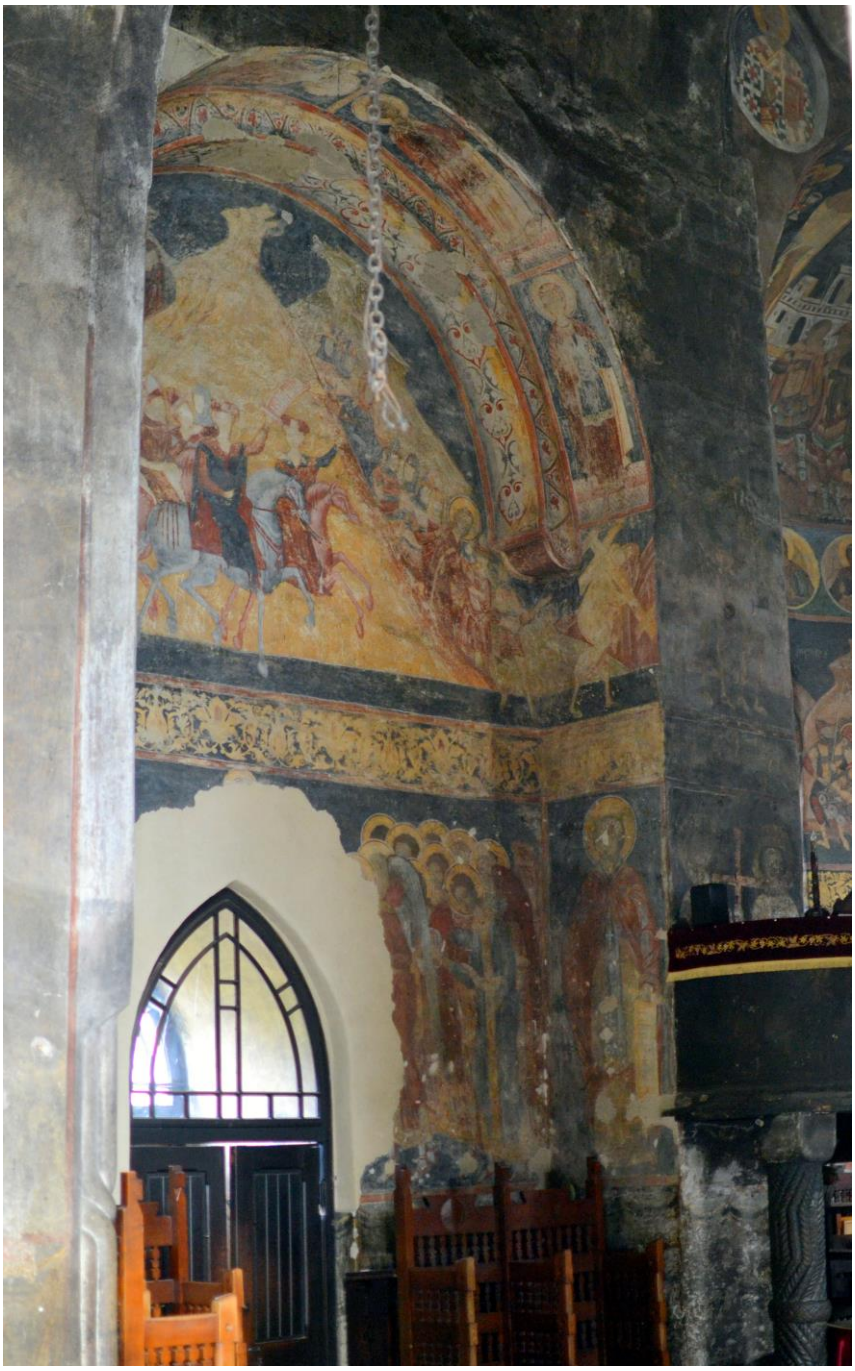

Fig. 2b. Saint George church, Suceava, north-west niche of the naos, with St. Constantine and Helena on the front of the pillar, behind the pulpit.

Fig. 3. Saint Nicholas church, Probota monastery, west wall of the naos.

Fig. 4. Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Humor monastery,
right side of the west wall of the naos.

Fig. 5. Holy Cross church, Pătrăuți, west wall of the naos.

Fig. 6. Panaghia Mavriotissa church, Kastoria, east wall of the narthex.

Fig. 7. Aghios Athanasios tou Mouzaki church, Kastoria, west wall of the naos.

Fig. 8. Church of the Saviour Žiča, Serbia, right side of the west wall of the naos.

Fig. 9. Church of Christ, Veroia, east wall of the naos and sanctuary apse.

Fig. 10. St. Archangels church, Lesnovo, Macedonia: The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste and the Parable of the Ten Virgins in the western tympanum of the narthex.

Fig. 11. Panaghia Phorbiotissa church, Asinou, Cyprus,
north-west corner of the naos.

Fig. 12. Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis church, Kakopetria, Cyprus: The Sufferings of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste on the west wall of the naos.