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The Interrelationship of Text, Imagery and Architectural Space in Byzantium

*The Example of the Entrance Vestibule of Žiča Monastery (Serbia)**

In an influential lecture published some years ago that addressed viewer response to Byzantine epigrams, Henry Maguire demonstrated a few of the multifaceted aspects of the relationship between images and text displayed together.¹ One of the examples he discussed was an eleventh-century painting of the Virgin in the Church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa in Asinou, Cyprus (Figure 1). The image was outfitted in the fourteenth century with an epigram consisting of two dodecasyllable verses:

*“How is he who holds together all judgments,
held as a babe in a virgin’s arms?”²*

Maguire pointed out that the verse description does not relate well with the image, which shows Christ neither judging, nor being held in the arms of the Virgin. Rather, in the fresco, the Virgin is shown with both hands raised in prayer, with a medallion containing the bust of Christ Emmanuel superimposed over her chest.

Only when the architectural context and its extended program of imagery are taken into consideration can the content of the lines be said to fit the imagery: the lunette opposite this image, over the western door of the narthex, contains depictions of scenes from the Last Judgment (Figure 2). As Maguire then concluded, “the function of the inscribed verses was not just to describe the image, but to expand upon its context, and to provide a commentary evoking the paradox of the incarnation in relation to the Last Judgment.”³ We have here, then, a rather complex relationship that involves the viewer as a participant, not so much including him in a dialogue with a single image and its accompanying epigram, but instead making him actively participate in an extended theological message contained within a larger spatial context.

This invitation to interact within an architectural space, I would also argue, is a phenomenon that is intrinsically Byzantine (even if it is not exclusively so). And it appears to have been conscientiously adopted by others seeking to emulate this very Byzantine *topos*. I offer such an example here for consideration. At Žiča monastery (Figures 3, 4 and 5), near Kraljevo, Serbia, a fourteenth-century fresco is found in the entry vestibule to the main church of the Ascension, also known as Sv. Spas (Savior), in the east lunette above the entrance to the exonarthex. The scene depicts the so-called Christmas *sticheron*, or hymn (Figures 6 and 7).⁴ The fresco carefully reproduces the visual information found in the hymn, which is sung during vespers on Christmas Eve:

* For their helpful comments and advice in the preparation of this article, I am indebted to Eirini Afentoulidou, Branislav Cvetković, Galina Fingarova, Mihailo Popović, and Lioba Theis.

¹ H. MAGUIRE, *Image and Imagination: the Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response*. Toronto 1996.

² Ὡς πῶς ὁ πάντων συνεχῆς τῶν κριμάτων
βρεφοκρατεῖται παρθενικαῖς ὠλέναις;

See W. H. BUCKLER, *The church of Asinou, Cyprus, and its Frescoes*. *Archaeologia* 83 (1933) 336; MAGUIRE, *Image and Imagination* 13.

³ MAGUIRE, *Image and Imagination* 14.

⁴ V. R. PETKOVIĆ, *Spasova crkva u Žiči*. *Arhitektura i živopis*. Belgrade 1912, 75; S. RADOJČIĆ, *Portreti srpskih vladara u srednjem veku*. Skopje 1934, 34–35; M. KAŠANIN – Đ. BOŠKOVIĆ – P. MIJOVIĆ, *Žiča*. Belgrade 1969, 36, 183, 185, 190–196, figs on pp. 183 and 185; B. TODIĆ, *Srpsko slikarstvo u doba kralja Milutina*. Belgrade 1998 (Engl. trans.: *Serbian Medieval Painting. The Age of King Milutin*. Belgrade 1999) 60–61, fig. 23.

“What shall we offer You, O Christ,
 Who for our sake has appeared on earth as a man?
 For every thing created by You offers thanks to You.
 The angels, the hymn;
 The heavens, the star;
 The Magi, their gifts;
 The shepherds, their wonder;
 The earth, the cave;
 The desert, the manger;
 While we (offer You) a Virgin Mother.
 O Pre-eternal God, have mercy on us!”⁵

All the iconographic elements mentioned in the text of the *sticheron* are depicted in the fresco, allowing for a clear identification of the painting with this hymn. The iconography, including the use of female personifications to symbolize the earth and the desert, keeps close to illustrations of the hymn we know, not just from elsewhere in the Balkans, but, as will be shown later, from Constantinople as well.⁶ In an ingenious use of the architectural/spatial context of the Žiča image, the star mentioned in the *sticheron* is shown in the crown of the shallow arch above the lunette.

The painting in Žiča is accompanied by a Slavic inscription, which frames the lunette. Here, however, we do not find the text pertaining to the depicted image, as we might expect. Instead, the inscription shows the text of another Christmas hymn, one that is not sung at vespers on Christmas Eve, but at the end of matins on Christmas Day. The inscription gives the text of the hymn that in translation reads:

“Today Christ is born in Bethlehem of the Virgin.
 Today He who is without a beginning begins,
 And the Word is made flesh.

⁵ The Slavic text from the menaion from Dečani cod. 37 (1380/90) is reproduced by T. STARODUBCEV, *Sticheron* «What shall we offer you». A description and a painting. *Cahiers Balkaniques* 31 (Nouvelles données sur les peintures byzantines en Yougoslavie) (2000) 22–23, with bibliography p. 23 n. 2; D. BOGDANOVIĆ, *Inventar ćirilskih rukopisa u Jugoslaviji (XI–XVII veka) (Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti, Zbornik za Istoriju, Jezik i Književnost Srpskog Naroda, I Odeljenje, Knjiga XXXI)*. Belgrade 1982, 64, nr. 805; *Μηναία τοῦ ὅλου ἐνιαυτοῦ*, II. Rome 1889, 651. The hymn should probably be assigned to Anatolios, and not to John of Damascus, as is often the case. See P. MIJOVIĆ, *Slikarstvo*, in: KAŠANIN – BOŠKOVIĆ – MIJOVIĆ, *Žiča 190–192*; STARODUBCEV, *Sticheron* 27–31.

⁶ On the iconography of the image in medieval art in Byzantium, in the Balkans and in Russia, see N. V. POKROVSKIĬ, *Evangelie v pamjatnikach ikonografii, preimušestvenno vizantijskich i russkich*. Moscow 2001 (1st ed. St. Petersburg 1892), 178–183, esp. 180–181; J.D. STEFANESCU, *L’illustration des liturgies dans l’art de Byzance et de l’Orient II (Annuaire de l’Institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales III)*, Brussels 1935, 504–506; G. MILLET, *Recherches sur l’iconographie de l’Évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles*. Paris 1960 (1st ed. 1916), 163–169; M.A. ORLOVA, *O formirovanii ikonografii Rozhdestvenskoi stikhiry “Chto ti prinesem, Hriste”*, in: *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Balkany, Rus’* (eds. O.I. PODOBEDOVA [et al.]). St. Petersburg 1995, 127–141; STARODUBCEV, *Sticheron* 21–37.

The earliest surviving depiction of the Christmas *sticheron* is found above the entrance from the narthex into the naos of the church of the Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (1295). Aside from that at Žiča, other examples are found on the western wall in the narthex of the Vlacherne monastery near Arta (end of the 13th c.), on the south wall of the outer north aisle above the entrance to the central naos of the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (1329–1334), and in the prothesis of the church of the Holy Virgin above the village of Matejče (1346–1347). For the extensive literature on these and later examples, see STARODUBCEV, *Sticheron* 23–24, nn. 3–8. But see also H. HALLENSLEBEN, *Die Malerschule des Königs Milutin. Untersuchungen zum Werk einer byzantinischen Malerwerkstatt zu Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts (Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen II,5)*. Gießen 1963, 51–52, 161; R. HAMANN-MAC LEAN, *Grundlegung zu einer Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien (Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen II,4)*. Giessen 1976, 189–193 and (for a destroyed image in Gradac) 341; for the image in Matejče, see most recently and with further bibliography E. DIMITROVA, *Manastir Matejče*. Skopje 2002, 93–97. For the date of the construction of the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, with relevant information for a more precise dating of the frescoes there, see P.I. KUNIHOLM – C.L. STRIKER, *Dendrochronology and the Architectural History of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*. *Architectura* 2 (1990) 1–26. For a Byzantine description of a fresco depicting this theme in a church in Constantinople, see below, p. 107 and n. 37.

*The powers of Heaven rejoice,
And the earth together with the people are jubilant;
The Magi bring the gifts,
The shepherds proclaim the miracle;
While we sing without ceasing:
Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.”*⁷

Although both hymns – the one illustrated and the one presented as an inscription – describe essentially the same event, the painting in Žiča contains iconographic elements, such as the star and the personifications of the earth and the desert, that are not mentioned in the second (inscribed) hymn and that clearly identify the image as an illustration of the first *sticheron*.⁸ Thus, as was found in the case of the image of the Virgin Phorbiotissa in Asinou, we have also here a certain degree of iconographic discrepancy between an image and its accompanying text. Is the reason for this discrepancy to be found – as it was in Asinou – in the imagery contained in the broader architectural context?

The answer to this question is somewhat more complex than was the case for the fresco situation in Asinou, and it requires us to briefly recount the history of the church at Žiča in order for us to better evaluate the significance of influence from Byzantium for the design of the architecture and the iconographic program of the entry vestibule. Žiča monastery was founded after 1207 by two sons of Stefan Nemanja: Stefan, later Stefan Prvovenčani, King Stefan the First-Crowned (1196–1228), and his brother the monk Sava, later Saint Sava (d. 1236). Both figures had close ties to Constantinople.

Sava was educated in the monasteries of Vatopedi and Panteleimonos on Mt. Athos. At Constantinople, he stayed in the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, whose typikon he adapted for the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mt. Athos, which he founded together with his father, Stephan Nemanja.⁹ Later, in 1219, Sava succeeded in gaining the first Orthodox archbishopric for Serbia from Patriarch Manuel I Sarantenos and Emperor Theodore I Laskaris at Nicaea; thus Saint Sava is regarded as the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church.¹⁰

Stefan, who inherited the title of grand *župan* of Serbia from his father, had been married in the early 1190s to Eudokia, a niece of the Byzantine Emperor Isaac II Angelos, and he received the title of *sebastokrator* from Emperor Alexios III Angelos, Eudokia's father. Although Stefan was first granted the title of king by Pope Honorius III in 1217, he quickly realigned his loyalties toward Byzantium after the Orthodox archbishopric was established at Žiča; Stefan was crowned Orthodox King of the Serbs at Žiča in 1221.¹¹

While incorporating certain dominant elements of previous Nemanja architecture, the church at Žiča also reflected even from its inception shortly after 1207 contemporary Byzantine architectural trends. Already with the construction of the church, Sava introduced elements of Byzantine-Athonite architecture to Serbia.¹² And on a visit to Constantinople, Sava negotiated with marble carvers and master painters from the

⁷ BOGDANOVIĆ, Inventar, 64 nr. 805; Μηναία τοῦ ὅλου ἐνιαυτοῦ II 672. For a discussion of the discrepancies between the inscription and the image, see MIJOVIĆ, Slikarstvo 190–194.

⁸ I would also argue that the shepherds' gestures are best identifiable as gestures of wonder, as they are described by the first *sticheron*, and not as gestures of proclamation, as termed by the second text.

⁹ R. JORDAN, The Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, Its Children and Grandchildren, in: Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism (eds. M. MULLETT – A. KIRBY). Belfast 1994, 262. See also J. PARGOIRE, Constantinople: le monastère de l'Évergétis. *EO* 10 (1907) 162–163.

¹⁰ For Saint Sava's *vitae*, see Domentijan, Život svetoga Simeona I svetoga Save, (ed. Đ. DANIČIĆ. Belgrade 1865), and Teodosije Hilandarac, Život svetoga Save, (ed. Đ. DANIČIĆ. Belgrade 1860, repr. 1973). For a modern biography of Saint Sava, see D. BOLENSKY, Six Byzantine Portraits. Oxford 1988, 115–172.

¹¹ St. STANOJEVIĆ, Stevan Prvovenčani. *Godišnica Nikole Čupića* 43 (1934) 1–56; B. FERJANČIĆ, Kada se Evdokija udala za Stefana Prvovenčanog? *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* 8/1 (1964) 217–224. See also, with further bibliography, A. K[AZHDAN] – A.-M. T[ALBOT], Stefan the First-Crowned. *ODB* 3, 1948–1949; S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, Stefan der Erstgekrönte. *LexMA* 8 (1997) 86–87. On Žiča as an archiepiscopal seat, see S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, Žiča kao arhijerejsko sedište, in: Manastir Žiča. Zbornik Radova (eds. M. ČANAK-MEDIĆ – J. KALIĆ), Kraljevo 2000, 11–15.

¹² G. MILLET, L'ancien art Serbe. Les églises. Paris 1919, 56–58; M. ČANAK-MEDIĆ, Arhitektura, in: M. ČANAK-MEDIĆ – B. TODIĆ, Manastir Žiča. Belgrade 1999, 14–15.

Byzantine capital, inviting them to work at Žiča.¹³ Barely a decade after its founding, Žiča became the first patriarchal church of Serbia and was subsequently designated by royal edict as the coronation church of all future Serbian kings.¹⁴ The architecture of the church was modified at this time to accommodate these new functions: a large, two-story, *litē*-like exonarthex fronted by a tower of several stories was added to the west.¹⁵

Around 1290, invaders damaged the church, setting fires that destroyed much of Stefan's and Sava's original painted program, although the building itself was apparently left structurally intact. About two decades later, around 1310, Žiča was restored by King Milutin and his Archbishop Sava III. It is well documented that through his politics, Milutin sought to position himself close to the circle of the Byzantine court, and that through his many ecclesiastical foundations, he wished to emulate contemporary Byzantine artistic currents.¹⁶ At the time of the restoration of Žiča, Milutin renewed the painted decoration in much of the church. Milutin had the entry vestibule under the tower completely repainted, possibly by artists from Byzantium.¹⁷ Žiča monastery's symbolic importance for Serbia's historical, religious and political identity is clear; likewise, the symbolism of the appropriation of artistic and architectural concepts from Byzantine models in a royal Serbian context is crucial.

Although the issue is not yet entirely resolved, most scholars are in agreement that King Milutin's restoration of the Žiča vestibule repeats much of the original thirteenth-century program, at least in the lower zones.¹⁸ Evidently, this program was designed to emphasize the church's function as the patriarchal church and as the official coronation site of the Serbian kings. The prime element of the program is the visual presentation of text: the lateral walls of the chamber show large, painted inscriptions of King Stefan's original endowment charters (Figure 8). In addition to naming King Stefan Prvovenčani and his son Radoslav as the donors of the church, the charters mention the holy relics, church furnishings, gospel books and other ecclesiastical texts that the donors supplied for the foundation of the monastery.¹⁹ Most of the documents' texts comprise long lists of properties assigned to the monastery. Finally, the charters proscribe that all bishops be consecrated at Žiča, and that all royal enthronements be conducted here as well.²⁰

Visually underlining the message contained in the texts of the painted charters, standing figures of the original founders, King Stefan and his son and successor Radoslav, are shown on the east wall, flanking the entrance to the exonarthex (Figure 9). In the apparently few additions he made to the existing iconographic program, Milutin (who was Stefan's great, great, great grandson) sought to affirm his own position as the rightful ruling descendent of Stefan Prvovenčani. Above the door to the exonarthex, in the lunette above the standing figures of Stefan and Radoslav, we find the image of the Christmas hymn. In addition to the iconography of the hymn already described, Milutin integrated images of the new founders into the scene: on the lower left, Archbishop Sava III leads a group of clergy in the service, whereas opposite this group on the right, Milutin himself heads a group of noblemen in a procession.²¹ The image, which incorporates

¹³ Teodosije, *Život* 141; M. VASIĆ, *Žiča i Lazarica. Studije iz srpske umetnosti srednjeg veka*. Belgrade 1928, 35; Đ. BOŠKOVIĆ, *Arhitektura*, in: KAŠANIN – BOŠKOVIĆ – MIJOVIĆ, *Žiča* 95; MIJOVIĆ, *Slikarstvo* 113; ČANAK-MEDIĆ, *Arhitektura* 14.

¹⁴ On the content of the royal charters, see below, and n. 20.

¹⁵ BOŠKOVIĆ, *Arhitektura* 53–104, esp. 89; M. ČANAK-MEDIĆ, *Arhitektura i program eksonarteksa Žičke spasove crkve*, in: *Manastir Žiča. Zbornik Radova* 57–81.

¹⁶ For a discussion, see S. ČURČIĆ, *Gračanica. King Milutin's Church and Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture*. University Park – London 1979, 5–11.

¹⁷ M. KAŠANIN, *Manastir Žiča*, in: M. KAŠANIN – Đ. BOŠKOVIĆ – P. MIJOVIĆ, *Žiča* 35–42; HALLENSLEBEN, *Malerschule* 161–163, 177–180; P. MILJKOVIK-PEPEK, *Deloto na zografite Mihailo i Eutihij*. Skopje 1967, 228, 238.

¹⁸ MIJOVIĆ, *Slikarstvo* 182–199; HALLENSLEBEN, *Malerschule* 161.

¹⁹ On the relics, see especially D. POPOVIĆ, *Sacrae Reliquiae Spasove crkve u Žiča*, in: *Manastir Žiča. Zbornik Radova* 17–33.

²⁰ *Monumenta Serbica. Spectantia historiam serbiae bosnae ragusii (Editiones monumentorum slavicae verteris dialecti)* (ed. Fr. MIKLOSICH, Vienna 1858). Graz 1964, 11–16; Z. GAVRILOVIĆ, *The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in the Painted Programme of Žiča Vestibule*. Further research into the artistic interpretations of the Divine Wisdom – Baptism – Kingship Ideology. *JÖB* 32/5 (1982) 187–188 n. 4 (repr. in: Z. GAVRILOVIĆ, *Studies in Byzantine and Serbian Medieval Art*. London 2001, 76 n. 4). For line drawings of the texts of two charters, see MIJOVIĆ, *Slikarstvo* 184–185.

²¹ The king and the archbishop are identified by inscriptions on the fresco. See S. RADOJČIĆ, *Portreti srpskij vladara u srednjem veku*. Skopje 1934, 34–35.

contemporary, living figures into the iconography of the text of the hymn, is exceptional.²² But it is also an ingenious conceit, with Milutin and Sava III placed inextricably within the scene, acting as indispensable intermediaries between the past, represented by Milutin's ancestors Stefan and Radoslav on the wall below, and the central message of the salvation of humanity through the Incarnation of the Logos, represented in the depiction of the hymn.

Opposite these images to the west, the figures of the apostles Peter and Paul are placed on the intrados of the arch above the western entrance to the vestibule (Figures 5, 10 and 11). They each carry representative objects above their heads: Peter, a model symbolizing the Church; Paul, a book symbolizing the Word. In another clever use of visual typology, the apostles' dynamic stances repeat those of the personifications who carry symbols representing the desert and the manger in the image of the Christmas hymn opposite. Also, the standing figures of Peter and Paul framing the entrance to the chamber echo the figures of King Stefan and his son Radoslav that in their turn flank the entrance to the exonarthex. Together these four standing figures serve visually and symbolically as four pillars providing the foundation for the Church – in a spiritual and religious sense, as is the case with Peter and Paul, book and church model in hand, and in the sense of the specific donors of this particular church, Žiča, as with Stefan and Radoslav.

Through the use of similar visual elements, the interrelationship between the images on the east wall and those in the western portion of the vestibule is continued in the image in the lunette above the figures of Peter and Paul. Here we have an illustration of the parable in which Christ presents a small child to the apostles, telling them “unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Figure 12).²³ The representation of a small child to the apostles is a visual counterpart to the infant Christ held by the Virgin in the Christmas hymn opposite.

The last element of the iconographic program of the Žiča vestibule that remains to be discussed here is the image presented in the vaulted ceiling. The entire barrel vault is used for an illustration of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia (Figures 13a and b). In a clever disposition of the composition within the architectural setting of the entry vestibule, the group of the Forty and the frozen lake they stand on are divided into two halves and placed in the lower portions of the haunches of the barrel vault, with the effect that the viewer standing beneath the vault finds himself actually standing in the midst of the group of Martyrs. In the crown of the vault, the poorly preserved figure of Christ is seen in a medallion distributing crowns that float over the Martyrs' heads.

In several essays on this matter, Zaga Gavrilović has identified symbolic parallels to Christ's baptism in the martyrdom of the Forty when the scene is found as an iconographic element in the schemes of Byzantine monumental programs.²⁴ Gavrilović showed that, in a number of churches ranging from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, the composition of the Forty Martyrs' passion is situated in a symmetrical relationship to the depiction of the Baptism of Christ or to the scenes of Biblical events typologically connected to the Baptism. As she explains, the same parallelisms are found in patristic homilies and in the two kontakia on the Forty by Romanos Melodos, where allusions to baptism are found in the circumstances of the Forty's death.²⁵ These literary references include allusions to the Forty's nakedness, the water of the lake, the light

²² The inclusion of the living earthly and ecclesiastical rulers as the chosen representatives of mankind appears again only later (and in my estimation likely as a direct influence from Žiča) in an image of the Christmas *sticheron* located in the prothesis of the church of the Holy Virgin near Matejče, where tsar Stefan IV Dušan and Serbian patriarch Joanikij II lead the processions. See DIMITROVA, Matejče 96 and pl. 19.

²³ Matt. 18:1–3: ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ προσῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες· τίς ἄρα μείζων ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν; καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος παιδίον ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ εἶπεν· ἂμην λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. On this image in art in Byzantium and the Balkans, see K. WESSEL, Gleichnisse Christi. *RbK* II (1971) 866; HAMANN-MAC LEAN, Grundlegung 187–188.

²⁴ GAVRILOVIĆ, Forty Martyrs ... Žiča 185–193 (GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 75–86); Z. GAVRILOVIĆ, The Forty in Art, in: The Byzantine Saint. *Studies Supplementary to Sobonost* 5 (1981) 190–194 (repr. in GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 70–74); Z. GAVRILOVIĆ, The Cult of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia in Macedonia and Serbia, in: GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 198–216.

²⁵ GAVRILOVIĆ, Forty Martyrs ... Žiča 185–186 (GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 77).

and crowns descending from the sky, the sanctity of the number 40, and other symbolism.²⁶ Further, Gavrilović sees a special emphasis on Divine Wisdom when the depiction of the Forty, imbued with baptismal symbolism, is displayed near an image of the ruler. She equates the wisdom of the ruler and the illumination of his subjects through the rite of initiation as gifts of the Holy Trinity.²⁷

Dominating the small architectural space of the vestibule at Žiča, we do indeed have the scene of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia in the barrel-vaulted ceiling; and images of Kings Stefan and Radoslav flank the door leading into the exonarthex of the church. Furthermore, above this door, in the lunette directly below the image of the Forty Martyrs in the barrel vault, we have the image of King Milutin contained in the depiction of the Christmas *sticheron*. The only element missing thus far in Gavrilović's proposed construct of interpretation appears to be a direct reference to baptism. Can, then, specific baptismal symbolism be found that ties into the other elements of the iconographic program?

Evidently, as Gavrilović has outlined, such symbolism is contained in the inscription that accompanies the depiction of the Christmas *sticheron*.²⁸ As we have seen, the inscription does not offer a correct textual description of the hymn depicted. Also, the hymn depicted in the lunette is sung on Christmas Eve, and not on Christmas Day, when the hymn contained in the inscription is sung. But during the liturgy on Christmas Day, the theme of baptism becomes an important element of the processional entrance, as the Trisagion sung during the regular liturgy is replaced by the singing of the baptismal troparion "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ".²⁹ The hymn of the inscription, the hymn that begins "Today Christ is born in Bethlehem..." is sung directly preceding the processional entrance on Christmas Day. The inscription, then, draws attention to the liturgical moment in which the role of baptism for man's illumination is called upon. In turn, the position of the inscription framing the Christmas hymn containing the image of Milutin reinforces the role – indeed the necessity – of the ruler in the concept of Divine Wisdom. Lines in the inscribed *sticheron* such as

*"The powers of Heaven rejoice,
And the earth together with the people are jubilant;"*

and the closing lines

*"While we sing without ceasing:
Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men."*

are then references that emphasize and explain the presence of the Serbian king and of the archbishop as earthly representatives in the fresco of the Christmas hymn.³⁰ Finally, the depiction of the Forty Martyrs, which literally crowns the entire iconographic program through its placement in the barrel vault of the ceiling, serves to emphasize the importance of divine illumination within the concept of Divine Wisdom. In the Žiča vestibule, then, we have a highly skillful, intelligent, and subtle interrelationship between iconography, text and architectural space.

The major iconographic themes found in the Žiča entrance vestibule are part of a repertoire of imagery that was popular in Palaiologan Byzantium and that was closely connected to iconography found in church painting in Constantinople itself. Despite the paucity of monumental painting from the Byzantine period remaining in Istanbul, an early-Palaiologan image of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia was preserved in the

²⁶ Elsewhere Gavrilović discusses the practice of depicting the Forty in the arches supporting the domes of some churches. She argues that in such cases the image acts as a protective sign meant to safeguard the most vulnerable points of the church architecture. See GAVRILOVIĆ, Cult 202. Gavrilović has also drawn attention to St. Sava's apparent personal devotion to the Forty, attested by his new foundation at the Athonite monastery of Xeropotamou, a church which he had rededicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia. See GAVRILOVIĆ, Cult 206–207.

²⁷ GAVRILOVIĆ, Forty Martyrs ... Žiča 186 (GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 77).

²⁸ GAVRILOVIĆ, Forty Martyrs ... Žiča 189–190 n. 11 (GAVRILOVIĆ, Studies 78–83 n. 11).

²⁹ Gal. 3:27: ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

³⁰ TODIĆ, Serbian Medieval Painting 60.

entrance niche of the church of St. Euphemia at the Hippodrome in Constantinople.³¹ The image there, however, was found not in a barrel-vaulted ceiling, as at Žiča, but as a single image on a flat space of wall. But as Otto Demus has shown, the depiction of the Forty Martyrs in a barrel-vaulted ceiling, with a division of the scene into two halves as at Žiča, had in fact a wide dissemination, from Cappadocia to Serbia.³² Thus, the type of monumental image used at Žiča can clearly be placed in an established Byzantine tradition, and indeed appears to have been the standard one in wall painting from the eleventh to the fourteenth century onward.³³ Although the only evidence remaining at Constantinople is the wall image at St. Euphemia, the broad occurrence of the type of image found at Žiča is an indication that this type of the depiction was developed at Constantinople itself. Furthermore, the placement of the Forty Martyrs in the entrance niche of the church of St. Euphemia is evidence for the use of the theme as a monumental image in the context of an entrance space in Constantinople.³⁴

Today, the illustration of the Christmas hymn is found preserved primarily in medieval church programs in the Balkans.³⁵ But a picture of the hymn that must have been quite well known in Palaiologan Constantinople was to be seen in the Charsianeites monastery in Constantinople, as we know from a lengthy, late-Byzantine literary description of the image there by Makarios (Makres),³⁶ abbot of the Pantokrator Monastery.³⁷ The lost image of the Christmas *sticheron* at the Charsianeites monastery was set up in the narthex or perhaps – as at Žiča – in an entrance porch.³⁸

We have in Constantinople, however, no evidence for the inclusion of living rulers in a depiction of the Christmas *sticheron*. But the presence of the figures of king Milutin and his archbishop Sava III in the fresco of the Christmas hymn at Žiča is at least a visual reflection of the actual Christmas procession that took place in Constantinople. The yearly procession in the Byzantine capital was accompanied by prominent members of the Church and the imperial court. The fresco at Žiča showing Milutin and Sava consequently offers evidence for the appropriation of this type of Constantinopolitan procession in medieval Serbia.³⁹

Turning to the specific architectural setting for the iconographic program at Žiča, a close connection with Byzantium and specifically with Constantinople may at first seem unlikely, since single, axially placed church towers such as that at Žiča are not seen at any of Istanbul's surviving Byzantine churches. Close examination of the architectural, archaeological and historical material, however, reveals some evidence that such towers were indeed part of the vocabulary of late-Byzantine church architecture in Constantinople. A late sixteenth-century drawing of the Pammakaristos monastery in Constantinople by Salomon Schweigger shows a tower of three stories situated before the façade of the main church (Figure 14).⁴⁰ The tower in the drawing appears in a similar disposition to that at Žiča as an element projecting from the west façade of the

³¹ On this image in the church of St. Euphemia, see R. NAUMANN – H. BELTING, *Die Euphemia-Kirche am Hippodrom zu Istanbul und ihre Fresken*. Berlin 1966, 171–177 and pls. 24a and 34.

³² O. DEMUS, Two Palaeologan Mosaic Icons in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection. *DOP* 14 (1960) 96–109, esp. 103.

³³ Other examples include Ohrid (north chapel), Studenica, Sopoćani, Gradac: see DEMUS, *Mosaic Icons* 103 and n. 70. At Lesnovo (mid 14th cent.), the composition is shown in a lunette divided into two halves by a double window. See DEMUS, *Mosaic Icons* 103 and fig. 8.

³⁴ The monumental image of the Forty Martyrs at St. Euphemia was clearly intended to function within the context of the larger painted program of the entrance space of the church. Nevertheless, NAUMANN – BELTING, *Euphemia-Kirche* 173, have argued that the image has an “icon-like” quality, as it was privately donated as a single image, as a donor inscription indicated. Even if this is the case, the translation of a format appropriate for an icon into a monumental context surely carries with it functional consequences transcending those of a portable icon.

³⁵ See above n. 6.

³⁶ On Makarios Makres, see *PLP* 16379, A.M. T[ALBOT], *ODB* 2, 1273.

³⁷ H. HUNGER, Eine spätbyzantinische Bildbeschreibung der Geburt Christi. *JÖBG* 7 (1958) 125–140.

³⁸ Makarios describes the image as being located “in the front” of the church (ἰσταμένης ἔμπροσθεν ἐν τῷ ναῷ), thus indicating a placement of the image in the narthex or in an entrance vestibule. HUNGER, *Bildbeschreibung* 126, offers no interpretation of the meaning of the text here.

³⁹ M. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, Ἡ ἐρμηνεία μίας τοιχογραφίας στὴ Μονὴ τῆς Βλαχέρνας κοντὰ στὴν Ἄρτα. *DChAE* IV 14 (1985–1986) 301–305; TODIĆ, *Serbian Medieval Painting* 60 and n. 61.

⁴⁰ S. SCHWEIGER, Ein neue Reysbeschreibung auss Teutschland nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem. Nuremberg 1608 (repr. Graz 1964), II 118.

church.⁴¹ The tower at the Pammakaristos, now the Fethiye Camii, no longer exists as such, but some of the masonry elements found in the central bay of the present exonarthex have been convincingly identified by Mango as the foundations of the tower depicted in Schweigger's drawing.⁴² Mango dates the surviving masonry of the ground story of the former tower (Figure 15) to the thirteenth or fourteenth century; it was only during a later period of construction that the tower seems to have been incorporated as the central bay of the present exonarthex.⁴³ As Schweigger's drawing clearly shows, the footpaths in the cloister yard leading to the church all culminate at the western entrance to the tower. Thus, in a situation comparable to that at Žiča, the main access to the Pammakaristos church complex must have been through the lower vestibule of this tower. The tower then served not only as a belfry, as is generally acknowledged; the first story of the tower functioned as an entrance vestibule to the church complex.

Although it has received surprisingly little attention in scholarship, the most prominent example of an axially aligned church tower in medieval Constantinople is attested for Hagia Sophia. The tower had been added to the center front of Hagia Sophia between the middle pair of flying buttresses, probably by the Latins after 1204, and was used as a belfry.⁴⁴ Although it had disappeared by the nineteenth century, the tower at Hagia Sophia can be seen in several old views of the church (Figure 16).⁴⁵ Significantly, the belfry's location between the middle pair of buttresses meant that it must have incorporated the existing barrel-vaulted vestibule that is still present today before the central entrance to the church from the west (Figure 17). The buttresses themselves – and consequently the barrel vaults incorporated between each pair of piers – were added to Hagia Sophia during a repair of the church, likely made already in the ninth or tenth century.⁴⁶ Slobodan Ćurčić has argued recently that discrepancies in appearance between the central pair of buttresses and the flanking pair should be attributed to modifications made to the central pair of buttresses for erection of the tower here sometime after 1204.⁴⁷ Although the tower appears to have been added above the existing vaulted vestibule only by the Latins, it was evidently maintained by the Byzantines after they retook Constantinople in 1261.

⁴¹ The exact position of the tower on the west façade is unclear because of the faulty perspective of the drawing. See C. MANGO, *The Monument and its History*, in: H. BELTING – C. MANGO – D. MOURIKI, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul (DOS XV)*. Washington, D.C. 1978, 24. The woodcut printed in Schweigger's report is a reverse image, but for a depiction showing the correct orientation of the Pammakaristos, see the image of the church in the city plan on p. 102 of Book II of Schweigger's report.

⁴² These include the east-west arches and massive west piers of the central bay. The northwest pier still contains a spiral staircase, which today leads nowhere, but which apparently served as the access to the upper levels of the former tower (MANGO, *The Monument and its History* 24).

⁴³ MANGO, *The Monument and its History* 24–25 and the ground plan of the church on p. 2. On this point Hallensleben seems to have misread the chronology of the masonry of the structure. See MANGO, *The Monument and its History* 24 n. 114; H. HALLENSLEBEN, *Untersuchungen zur Baugeschichte der ehemaligen Pammakaristoskirche, der heutigen Fethiye camii in Istanbul*. *IstMitt* 13/14 (1963/1964) 188–191.

⁴⁴ Two sources provide reliable information that the belfry was installed by the Latins. In 1200, Antonios of Novgorod tells us that Hagia Sophia had no bells, and that a small, portable *semantron* was used to call the faithful to prayer. At the beginning of the reign of Andronicus II (1282–1328), however, Pachymeres informs us that bells were used to announce the Patriarch's entrance into the Great Church. See G. MILLET, *L'école grecque dans l'architecture byzantine*. Paris 1916, 135–136; E.H. SWIFT, *The Latins at Hagia Sophia*. *AJA* 39 (1935) 459–462. Recently, Ćurčić has reinforced the argument for the position of the belfry between the middle pair of flying buttresses on the west façade of Hagia Sophia. See S. ĆURČIĆ, *Some Reflections on the Flying Buttresses of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul*. *Sanat Tarihi Defterleri* 8 (*Özel Sayı Metin Ahunbay'a Armağan*) (2004) 7–22, esp. 12–13.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, views published by G.-J. GRELOT, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople*. Paris 1680, illustrations opposite pp. 87, 109, 127, 143. For a discussion, see R. OUSTERHOUT, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul (DOS XLII)*. Washington, D.C. 1987, 108. For reproductions, see R.J. MAINSTONE, *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church*. New York 1988, figs. 138 and 139. See also a drawing of Hagia Sophia from 1686 by Francesco Scarella, reproduced by G. NECİPOĞLU, *The Life of an Imperial Monument: Hagia Sophia after Byzantium*, in: *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present* (eds. R. MARK – A.Ş. ÇAKMAK). Cambridge 1992, fig. 122.

⁴⁶ MAINSTONE, *Hagia Sophia* 104; ĆURČIĆ, *Flying Buttresses* 9. The brick masonry of the barrel vaults is in bond with the masonry of the piers.

⁴⁷ ĆURČIĆ, *Flying Buttresses* 8–9 and 12–13.

Once viewed as imports to Byzantium from the West (as indeed the case of Hagia Sophia would seem to suggest), it is now becoming apparent that towers were indigenous to Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture.⁴⁸ An eleventh-century inscription at the Athos Lavra informs us that the *semantron* there was housed in a tower.⁴⁹ In Constantinople, towers are attested not only for the Pammakaristos and for Hagia Sophia, but also for the Chora church, for the monastic church now known as the Vefa Kilise Camii, and possibly also for the Kalenderhane Camii.⁵⁰ Valuable information that has been thus far neglected in this discussion is contained in the monastic *typika*. The *typikon* of the monastery of the Theotokos Kosmosoteira near Bera, founded in 1152 by Isaac Komnenos, explicitly states that bells were hung in place of *semantra* in the tower of the church there.⁵¹ And a supplement to the *typikon* of the monastery of Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople, probably founded in the last years of the thirteenth century, informs us that this monastery had a bell tower; however, it is not clear whether this tower was attached to the church, or stood free of it.⁵² Most Byzantine belfries were dismantled during the post-Byzantine period, not only because of Ottoman restrictions against the use of bells, but primarily because the towers housing them presented direct visual competition with the minarets of nearby mosques.⁵³

In discussing the evidence for Byzantine church towers, a distinction, however, should be made between belfries situated somewhere off a church's central axis, and single towers positioned axially before the main entrance to the church, such as those attested for the Pammakaristos and for Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, and those found at Žiča and at a number of other churches in Serbia and Greece.⁵⁴ These towers were

⁴⁸ The discussion was opened by MILLET, *L'école grecque* 135–136, who considered the emergence of belfries in Byzantium in the thirteenth century to be the result of direct influence from the Latin West. At the same time, however, he conceded that an eleventh-century inscription from Lavra indicates that “special towers” existed well before the thirteenth century to house the *semantron*, which was used to call the faithful to prayer, and which was hung “à la manière des cloches, sur des tours spéciales” (p. 135). Millet received support for his thesis from G. BOŠKOVIĆ, Note sur les analogies entre l'architecture serbe et l'architecture bulgare au Moyen-Age. Le problème du clocher au-dessus du narthex dans l'architecture des Balkans. *Bulletin de l'institut archéologique bulgare* 10 (1936) 57–74. Similar conclusions were drawn by H. HALLENSLEBEN, Byzantinische Kirchtürme. *Kunstchronik* 19 (1966) 309–311. See also E.V. WILLIAMS, The Bells of Russia: History and Technology. Princeton 1985, 21–24; and the older study by Ch. BARLA, Μορφή και εξέλιξις τῶν βυζαντινῶν κωδωνοστάσεων. Athens 1959. OUSTERHOUT, Kariye Camii 106–110, however, has taken a more differentiated approach to the matter. ĆURČIĆ has addressed the problem in some depth, ultimately concluding that belfries were indigenous to Byzantine architecture. See especially S. ĆURČIĆ, Byzantine Legacy in Ecclesiastical Architecture of the Balkans after 1453, in: L. CLUCAS (ed.), The Byzantine Legacy in Eastern Europe. Boulder 1988, 68–72, with further bibliographical references; also S. ĆURČIĆ, The Architecture, in: E. KITZINGER, The Mosaics of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo (*DOS XXVII*). Washington, D.C. 1990, 65–66.

⁴⁹ MILLET, *L'école grecque* 135.

⁵⁰ For the Chora monastery, see OUSTERHOUT, Kariye Camii 106–110; for the Vefa Kilise Camii, see H. HALLENSLEBEN, Zu Annexbauten der Kilise camii in Istanbul. *IstMitt* 15 (1965) 208–217, esp. 215–217; for the Kalenderhane Camii, see C.L. STRIKER – Y.D. KUBAN, Kalenderhane in Istanbul: the buildings, their history, architecture and decoration; final reports on the archaeological exploration and restoration at Kalenderhane Camii 1966–1978. Mainz 1997, 69–70 and figs. 30 and 32. See also ĆURČIĆ, Byzantine Legacy 72 and n. 63.

⁵¹ Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents (eds. J. THOMAS – A. C. HERO). Washington, D.C. 2000, no. 29, 9 and 11 (p. 802 and p. 804): “I wish the monks to get ready to ring the two bells quite loudly with [their own] hands before the hymnody—I mean the two bells which I hung high up in the church tower, in place of *semantra*” (p. 802). The bells at the monastery were rung in the place of sounding *semantra* on Sundays and feast days: “So on all the rest of the days of the year that are not feast days, let the small *semantron* be sounded first, to call together the monks for the hymnodies, then the large wooden one. On Sundays and on all feast days enumerated, particularly [on the day of] the holy Dormition of the Mother of God, I wish, as was said, for the two large bells hanging quite high up in the tower to be rung loudly, as long as necessary—these being the very bells that I had hung up in fervent faith and in my reverence toward the Mother of God” (p. 804).

⁵² Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, no. 57, 158 (pp. 1567–1568). For the date of the monastery's establishment, see p. 1512.

⁵³ ĆURČIĆ, Byzantine Legacy 68.

⁵⁴ Other examples include the church of Hag. Georgios at Omorphoklissia (E.G. STIKAS, Une église des Paléologues aux environs de Castoria. *BZ* 51 [1958] 100–112, esp. 102 n. 6, figs. A, B, C and pl. 4, fig. 2), the church of Bogorodica Ljeviška at Prizren (S. NENADOVIĆ, Bogorodica Ljeviška. Njen postanak i njeno mesto u arhitekturi i Milutinovog vremena. Belgrade 1963, 135–142), and the church of the Holy Trinity at Sopoćani (V. ĐURIĆ, Sopoćani. Belgrade 1991, 39–41). The tower at Žiča was originally even taller than it appears today. The present, incongruous design of the upper portion of Žiča's tower is the result of a later restoration. See BOŠKOVIĆ, Arhitektura 85–88.

installed not only to house bells; rather, the remaining axially aligned Byzantine church towers were designed to serve multiple functions. Such towers usually housed chapels on a second level. This is the case at Žiča, where the original fresco decoration of the tower's upper chapel, although damaged, is preserved well enough to demonstrate its stylistic reliance on Byzantine models; also, the iconography of the painting in the chapel at Žiča was designed to reflect the church's new function – bestowed on Žiča by the Byzantine patriarch – as the archiepiscopal church of Serbia.⁵⁵ In axially aligned church towers, the role of the vaulted vestibule at ground level that served as the actual entrance to the church complex itself is perhaps the most important element of the tower construct because, unlike the chapel above, anyone and everyone entering the church would pass through this space and be confronted with its decoration. Again, the example of Žiča shows how the vaulted space beneath such towers could be outfitted with a program of imagery designed to emphasize a carefully conceived theological construct, or indeed even a political message appropriate to the designated function of the specific church. Although entrance towers no longer exist in Constantinople today, the presence of towers above the central entrance to the churches at Žiča and at other Serbian monasteries may very well be an indication that this architectural form was consciously adopted from late-Byzantine Constantinople. As such, the remaining Serbian towers could be testaments to a now-lost but once conspicuous and characteristic element of ecclesiastical architecture in the Byzantine capital.⁵⁶

Within the span of about twenty-five years, from its founding in 1207/1208 to the erection of the exonarthex and tower sometime between 1220 and 1234, the architecture of the church at Žiča was continually adapted in order to accommodate a growing multitude of functions. The architectural concept evolved from a relatively simple church designed for religious services and probably as a mausoleum for its founders, to the seat of the new and independent Orthodox archiepiscopate and coronation church for Serbian monarchs, and thus to a place large enough to accommodate church assemblies and state councils. As a result, the architecture of the various parts of the church reflects an increase in the church's prestige and in the diversity of its functions. Continuity with the architecture of older dynastic monuments erected by the founders' father, Nemanja, is apparent, while at the same time many elements never seen before in Serbian architecture were introduced from elsewhere.⁵⁷ A new and prominent element added here was the single, axially positioned entrance vestibule and tower. As I have attempted to show here, many aspects of the iconography of the painted program in the Žiča vestibule can be found again in models used for the entrances to Byzantine churches. Likewise, the architectural context for which the program was designed, namely an entrance vestibule under a tower, may also have been a more common element of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture than is generally apparent today.

The great symbolic importance of Žiča monastery for medieval Serbia's political and ecclesiastical self-perception has long been recognized. But the designer of the iconographic program in the Žiča vestibule did not wish to simply display a political ideology that was already well developed in early fourteenth-century Serbia, as is often argued.⁵⁸ The evidence shows that the designer at Žiča was interested – and skilled – in using contemporary and specifically Constantinopolitan *topoi* for monumental programs appropriate for the

⁵⁵ On the chapel and the iconography and style of its paintings, see MIJOVIĆ, *Slikarstvo* 119–123. For other relevant chapels in Byzantine belfries, see ČURČIĆ, *The Architecture* 66 n. 157.

⁵⁶ In Constantinople and elsewhere, the precedents for towers, and for tall entrance porches axially attached to the facades of churches, may, in fact, be much older than the examples cited here. Excavations conducted by Megaw at the monastery of Constantine Lips in Istanbul turned up evidence for the presence of an entrance porch placed before the central west door of the narthex of the original tenth-century church of the Theotokos. Megaw's reconstruction of the original form of this church shows this porch, which was probably crowned by a barrel vault. See A.H.S. MEGAW, *The Original Form of the Theotokos Church of Constantine Lips*. *DOP* 18 (1964) 295, and reconstruction drawing on p. 293. See also OUSTERHOUT, *Kariye Camii* 107–108. No other examples of such porches are known from the Middle Byzantine period in Istanbul, but a similar porch was found at the church at Dereāğzı in Lycia, a ninth- or tenth-century building strongly influenced by the architecture of Constantinople. See J. MORGANSTERN, *The Byzantine Church at Dereāğzı and Its Decoration* (*IstMitt*, Beiheft 29). Tübingen 1983, 31–32, 92–93, 169, and fold-out 2.

⁵⁷ See BOŠKOVIĆ, *Arhitektura* 53–103, esp. 94–99.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, GAVRILOVIĆ, *Forty Martyrs ... Žiča* 187 (GAVRILOVIĆ, *Studies* 85–86), who has emphasized the display of political ideology here.

entrance situations of churches. And like his Byzantine counterparts in Asinou and elsewhere, he was also attentive to the symbolic and interpretive possibilities of juxtaposing thematically related iconographic themes. One very Byzantine device aiding this concept involved the clever employment of text to establish complex relationships between juxtaposed visual images within a defined architectural space.

