

THE CEMETERY CHURCH OF ROŽEN MONASTERY

Rožen Monastery is situated on a hill between Rožen and Melnik amidst magnificent mountain scenery. Isolated from busy centres and difficult of access—though rich in natural beauty—this position has proved exceptionally favourable for the monastery's survival up to the present day. Its architecture indicates a relatively early construction date, around the twelfth or thirteenth century¹, but the first written source for Rožen Monastery dates only from 1551². Having studied a great number of Greek documents, the architect Alkiviadis Prepis³ has established that the monastery was originally a dependency with a church dedicated to St George, which was built in the thirteenth century by the Byzantine soldier George Contostephanus Calameas and his wife. According to surviving data from the period up until 1351, in 1309 they presented the dependency to the Georgian Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos, and continued to enrich it⁴. After this area was conquered by

1. On the basis of the construction and the plan, Assen Vassiliev dates the church to about the twelfth century: A Vassiliev, *Ktitorski portreti*, Sofia 1960, p. 88. George Trajchev opines that the monastery was built in 1217 (*Manastirite v Makedonija*, Sofia 1933, pp. 192-3). The opinion that the church dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century is shared by Metropolitan Pimen of Nevrokop ('Roženskija manastir', *Tsarkoven vestnic*, 17 (1962) 14) and Professor V. Pandurski ('Tsarcovni starini v Melnik, Ročenskija manastir i Sandanski', *Duhovna kultura*, 4 (1964) 16-18). Nichola Mavrodinov suggests an earlier date in: 'Tsarcvi i manastiri v Melnik i Rožen, *Godishnik na narodnija musej*, vol. V (1926-1931), Sofia 1933, p. 301. According to Theodoros Vlahos, the monastery was founded in the twelfth century and became a dependency of Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos in the thirteenth (*Die Geschichte der byzantinischen Stadt Melenikon*, Thessaloniki 1969, p. 78).

2. A manuscript of 1551, which is now in the Great Lavra, contains a note by hieromonk Cosma, Abbot of Rožen Monastery. Cf. Alkiviadis Prepis, 'Srednovocovni arhitekturni pametnitsi v Melnik' (unpublished dissertation, Sofia-ITIGA, 1984), p. 63.

3. Prepis, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-64.

4. Donor's act presenting the Church of St George in the neighbourhood of Melnik to Iviron Monastery (according to the writer of the document, Rožen Monastery's church was originally dedicated to St George); royal decree of August 1310 by Michael IX Palaeologus (1294-1320) confirming Iviron Monastery's ownership of the Church of St George in the neighbourhood of Melnik; royal decree of July 1351 by John Cantacuzene concerning

the Ottomans in 1395, the monastery was probably abandoned until the first half of the sixteenth century, when new donors renovated it. The catholicon was originally dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin, and later rededicated to her Nativity: some writers interpret the name Rožen as deriving from the Bulgarian word *roždestvo*, which means 'nativity'⁵. The continuity between the two monasteries connected with Iviron is also confirmed by documents which were presented at the international tribunal dealing with the 'Rožen Monastery case' at the beginning of the century, when it was still a dependency of Iviron⁶.

The cemetery church itself, which is dedicated to the Nativity of St John the Baptist, stands to the north-west of the monastery walls, hard by the cemetery. Its position in line with the setting sun is symbolic of its function as the last terrestrial refuge of the dead monks' souls. It was from here that the monks were sent off to the 'eternal' world, accompanied by prayers for mercy for their sinful souls, psalms, and funeral hymns. An old custom, which the Christians took from the Jews, was followed, whereby their mortal remains were buried, and some time later their bones were exhumed, washed with wine (Christ's blood), and placed in the crypt of the cemetery church, in accordance with the belief that those who die in Christ will be resurrected for eternal life.

In a study written in 1964, Assen Vassiliev states that the cemetery church was built in 1597, basing this view on an inscription he had seen on one of the outer walls⁷. When the church was being restored, no trace of this inscription could be found, and Vassiliev's assertion is contradicted by the inscription in the nave, which runs: Ἀνηγέρθη καὶ ἀνιστορήθη ὁ θεῖος οὗτος καὶ πάνσεπτος ναὸς τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐνδόξου προφήτου Προδρόμου καὶ Βαπτιστοῦ Ἰωάννου δι' ἐξόδου τοῦ πανοσιωτάτου καὶ εὐλαβεστάτου ἐν ἱερομο-

supplementary endowments by Calameas in the Melnik-Goremistika area. Sotirios Kissas, however, is of the opinion that Rožen Monastery became a dependency of Iviron only in the eighteenth century: at the Second Bulgaristica Congress in Sofia in 1986, he reported newly discovered documents, according to which the Church of St George was situated on a river in which case it could not have been Rožen Monastery's original church. Kissas's arguments will be published in the Proceedings of the Congress.

5. Violeta Nesheva, 'Primos kām prouchvaneto na Ročenskija monastir', *Vecove*, 3, Sofia 1983 p. 5. Prepis notes that Rožen Monastery was originally dedicated to the Koimesis and to the Virgin Portaitissa, like the catholicon of Iviron Monastery, and later to the Nativity of the Virgin (*op. cit.*, p. 56).

6. The documents are presented by Des Felini Calameas in *Archives of Rožen Monastery*, Rožen.

7. Assen Vassiliev, 'Izsledvanija na izobrazitelното iscustvo v niacoi selishta po dolinata na Struma', *Izvestija na Instituta za izobrazitelno iscustvo*, 7, Sofia 1964, p. 185.

νάχοις Κου Κου Θεοδοσίου καὶ πρωτοσυγγέλου, ἀρχιερατεύοντος τοῦ πα-
νιερωτάτου καὶ μουσικωτάτου μητροπολίτου Μελενίκου Κου Κου Σιλ-
βέστρου. Ἔτη ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ 1662. Ἐν μηνὶ Ἰουλίου 10.

Regardless of the exact date when the construction of the cemetery church began, its consecration marks the end of the first period of the monastery's history, after which it received the name of 'Rožen'. This period saw the painting of the frescoes on the west and south façades of the catholicon between 1597 and 1611, and probably the first pictorial layer in the narthex of the catholicon⁸. The scarce data for this layer do not allow us to view the cemetery church as a part, probably, of a general programme for the monastery's renovation.

Its architectural plan shows the cemetery church to be a two-storey single-naved structure with an entrance on the north side. Like other churches surviving in Melnik, it was built on a stone plinth⁹. The floor is of brick and the roof of timber. From the nave with altar and the narthex only the first is decorated. The east wall has two apses, one in the middle and one further to the north, corresponding to the two entrances in the wooden iconostasis. The single-naved type of church was still being built in the Byzantine period, and is one of the most common types in medieval Bulgarian architecture: churches Nos 5 and 11 in Trapsiza, St Nicholas's in Kalotino, St Peter's in Berende, St Spiridon's at Spileotissa, and the Church of St John the Baptist at the Monastery of St Charalampos in Melnik are all examples of the type. Nor is the two-storey, single-naved church a rarity: St Nicholas's in Bojana, the cemetery church of Bachkovo Monastery, and the Church of St John the Baptist in Assenovgrad are of this type. The simple plan of Rožen Monastery's cemetery church is in complete harmony with the building's modest measurements and undecorated façade. It is characteristic of most Bulgarian churches built during the period of Ottoman domination.

Since archaeological investigations in the surrounding area have been abandoned, we do not know whether the present building was constructed on the site of an earlier church, as was frequently the case with Byzantine churches¹⁰. Oral tradition has it that other churches also existed in the neigh-

8. Mavrodinov, *op. cit.*, p. 301; Vassiliev, 'Izsledvanija', p. 179.

9. Mavrodinov, *ibid*; Pandurski, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

10. Supernatural powers were attributed to the relics of saints who had been sanctified during their lifetime and had performed miracles in the name of God. A frequent practice was to build a new church over a crypt containing a saint's relics, to ensure its sanctity. The same was probably the case with medieval cemetery churches too.

bourhood of the monastery, but we know nothing of them today.

The fact that the church was dedicated to St John the Baptist is quite understandable if we bear in mind that it was part of the monastery complex and that this saint was honoured both as a hermit and, together with the Theotokos, as the great intercessor before Christ for the souls of the dead. It is in precisely this latter capacity that he is portrayed in the scene of the *Deesis*, which forms the compositional centre of the Last Judgement and is sometimes used as a short formula for it. According to Orthodox belief, the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist are the only human beings to be assigned to the ranks of the angels. In the daily vespers, after the Canticle of Simeon two Odes are sung¹¹, the first of which is a prayer to the Mother of God and the second a prayer to John the Baptist: 'O thou, Baptist of Christ, John, speak for us all before the throne of God in order to save us from our sins, for unto thee is given the power to pray for us'¹². The same text is sung at Great Vespers¹³. On account of his capacity of intercession, John the Baptist was early on connected with the burial rite, since he indicated the only way to salvation¹⁴. One of the earliest examples of the consecration of a cemetery church to John dates from the end of the eleventh century. In the first Russian monastery, which was founded by the hermits Anthony and Theodosius of Petchera in the catacombs near Kiev, the original church was dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin¹⁵; after the construction of a newer and larger catholicon in 1075, the older church was converted into a funerary chapel and placed under the patronage of the Baptist¹⁶. It stood to the north-west of the new church and there was no direct connection between the two. This chapel was decorated in an unusual way: the ancient Russian prayers for the souls of the dead were interspersed with scenes depicting the preparation of the body for its final journey to the grave and the burial ceremony¹⁷.

11. R. Hamann-Mac Lean, *Grundlagen zu einer Geschichte der Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien*, Giessen 1976, vol. I, p. 123.

12. *Chasoslov slovenobulgarski*, Belgrade 1833, p. 68.

13. Martirij Chemer, *Nai upotrebitelnye molitvi*, Plovdiv 1875, p. 17.

14. Luke 3:2-4.

15. *Povest vremenyh let*, I, published by the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, Moscow and Leningrad 1950, pp. 107, 307.

16. M. M. Zaharchenko, *Kiev teper i prežde*, Kiev 1888, p. 101; D. V. Ainalov, *Geschichte der russischen Monumentalkunst*, I-II, Berlin and Leipzig 1932-1933, pp. 24-5, fig. 4, 17.

17. T. Ouspenski, 'Sinodik v Nedelju pravoslavija', *Journal ministerstva narodnago prosveshtenija*, 274, St Petersburg, April 1891, pp. 310-20. The cemetery church was destroyed in 1944 during the war,

The wall-paintings of the Rožen cemetery church do not include the eschatological representations to be seen in the Kiev-Petchera Monastery or Bachkovo Monastery, for instance, where scenes from the Last Judgement still survive in the crypt narthex. The initial impression the frescoes produce as an ensemble is quite different from what the building's unpretentious exterior might lead one to expect. The abundant ornamental motifs on the clothes and the architectural fragments, and the ochre, red, green, and blue on a black background all contribute to a markedly decorative impression. The absence of architectural decoration on the outside is compensated for in the interior by the images which densely cover the walls. When one enters, one is not immediately aware of the real architectural volumes, but of the depicted ones, for the dimness of the artificially illuminated space is continued in the black background to the representations. Owing to this diffusion of the physical into the figurative space, the cemetery church seems more spacious than it actually is. The walls are of scarcely more than average human height, which means that the iconographical programme is disposed chiefly on a horizontal plane. In the central apse, the Mother of God is portrayed as the Platytera and flanked by St Basil the Great in the thickness of the arch on her left and St John Chrysostom on her right. Above the two latter are the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin forming the Annunciation. In the north, prothesis, apse Christ is depicted in the Tomb, flanked by two tetramorphs, and in the thickness of the apse are the Mother of God on the left and St John the Theologian on the right. On the wall above is the Mandylion, and to the left of the apse the Protomartyr Stephen. The Vision of Peter of Alexandria survives in the prothesis at the east end of the north wall, with the young Christ depicted in the upper right-hand section in front of an altar. In the background is a temple with towers on either side. Christ stands under a ciborium and is much smaller than St Peter. On the east wall, at the lower edge of this scene, the mouth of Hell is portrayed swallowing Arius¹⁸. To the right of this scene, below the representation of the dead Christ in the Tomb, is the Prophet Jonah emerging from the whale's mouth after three days in its stomach—just as Christ lay for three days in the Tomb and was resurrected. The surface below the altar apse is covered with imitation marble revetment consisting of straight squares filled with concentric squares done with zigzag lines. The same design also frames the main entrance to the catholicon. The remaining surfaces,

18. Cf. Ivanca Acrabova-Žandova, 'Videnieto na Petar Aleksandrijski v Bulgaria', *Izvestija na bulgarskija archeologicheski institut*, Sofia 1946, pp. 24-34; G. Millet, 'St. Pierre d'Alexandrie', *Mélanges Ch. Diehl*, second edition, Paris 1930, p. 109.

from the Annunciation and the marble revetment, include the south, west, and north walls, up to the Vision of Peter of Alexandria, and are divided into two zones. The lower zone comprises full-length figures of saints and the upper zone the cycle of the Life of the Baptist. The saint's Nativity is on the east wall, his Naming and the Flight of Elizabeth on the south wall, and St John being led by an angel in the wilderness, the Baptist Preaching, the Killing of Zacharias, and the Accusation of Herod are in the nave. On the west wall, to the south of the door, are the Imprisonment of St John¹⁹ and the donor's inscription. To the north of the door are the Decapitation of the Baptist and Herod's Feast. The north wall preserves only St John's Burial and the First Finding of his Head. The zone of saints comprises: the Church Fathers, Gregory the Great and Athanasius of Alexandria on the east wall; Cyril of Alexandria, Nicholas of Myra, Spyridon of Trimitunt, and James the brother of Christ on the south altar wall. On the same wall, in the nave, are the Winged John the Baptist, Constantine and Helen, the hermits Anthony the Great and Sava; and on the west wall are the Archangels Michael and Gabriel to the south of the door, and Paraskevi of Epivat, Catherine, and Kyriaki to the north of the door. Of the three figures on the north wall of the nave, only the military saints Nestor and Artemius are recognisable; in the altar section an unidentifiable fragment of a figure survives.

Although an independent building, the cemetery church functioned as a chapel to the catholicon with the sole purpose of serving funeral ceremonies. This fact also influenced the iconographical programme. The architectural modifications are also worth noting.

In fact, the decoration of the two churches differs not in the basic decorative principles of the Christian church in general (that is, the cosmic-hierarchical, topographical, and liturgical-chronological principles), but only in the subject-matter of the representations²⁰. Thus, owing to the vault's poor visibility, it was left undecorated, and only the upper part of the prothesis and the bema symbolise the 'World Above'. The 'Holy Land' and the 'Terrestrial World' are the areas containing the cycle of St John the Baptist and the full-length saints respectively. The Virgin and Child, as the *Platytera*, occupy the traditional position in the altar apse—a topographical symbol of the Bethlehem cave; this and the Annunciation on either side of the apse are

19. In this scene two episodes are united: 1) two soldiers escorting John to prison, and 2) John behind bars.

20. For an interpretation of the Christian church, cf. Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, London 1947.

both images of the Incarnation and Holy Communion²¹. The role of Man in the Salvation that Theotokos brings out reestablishes the sinful human nature. In their eucharistic sense, the images in the bema are connected with those in the prothesis, which topographically corresponds to Calvary²². The representation of Christ in the Tomb in the apse calls to mind Christ's sacrifice for the atonement of sin, and it is conceptually expanded by the Mandylion above, the sign and testimony of the reality of Christ's incarnation²³. In the ecclesiastical and political sense, the Mandylion, which in 944 was triumphantly returned to Constantinople from Edessa, symbolises the Empire's conquest of the pagan East, and it is possible that in this particular case it serves as an expression of opposition to Ottoman domination in the Balkans²⁴. The scene of Jonah emerging from the whale's mouth after his repentance is one of the first and most widespread prefigurations of the Resurrection. Its position close to Christ in the Tomb indicates that, like Jonah, having expiated their sins through suffering and repentance, sinners will be resurrected, like Christ, to eternal life. Its proximity, furthermore, to Arius in the Mouth of Hell, expresses the belief that the Unitarians of the Middle Ages—who were commonly termed 'Arians'—were destined for Hell. The long-established iconographical formulas were used mainly to illustrate the Liturgy, but also reflect the actual issues of the time.

Although the iconographical programme used for the altar decoration was considerably shortened from the thirteenth century onwards, the frescoes around the altar of Rožen Monastery's cemetery church follow the traditional programme. A more striking difference may be observed in the second zone of the 'Holy Land', where the Christological cycle is replaced by the Life of John the Baptist. Thus, the catholicon dedicated to the Mother of God and the cemetery church dedicated to John the Baptist together form a kind of 'macrogenre' *Deesis* composition.

Positioned in chronological succession along the upper part of the walls, moving clockwise from the south-east to the north-east corner, the cycle of the Life of St John the Baptist describes a circle analogous to the annual cycle of the Church feasts. In this case, the 'cyclical' spatial conception of the

21. Suzy Dufrenne, *Mistra: Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines*, Paris 1970, p. 50.

22. N. T. Crasnoseltsev, 'O drevnih liturgicheskikh tolkovaniyah', *Letopis istorico-philos. obschestva pri Imperat. novorusijskago Universiteta*, IV, Odessa 1894, pp. 178-257.

23. Nicole Thierry, 'Deux notes à propos du Mandylion', *Zograf*, 11 (1980) 17.

24. *Ibid.*

decoration takes precedence over the axial orientation of the architectural space suggested by the building's elongate plan. The scenes from the Baptist's life are also disposed on the walls in accordance with their topographical symbolism. The saint's Nativity is on the east, 'initial', wall; his Sojourn in the Desert and his services to the Christian faith are on the south wall; while the west wall bears the story of his relics and hence the epilogue to his life.

The full-length saints in the lower zone are disposed in a similar way: the liturgists are on the east wall; the patrons of the Church and the hermits are on the south wall; the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, 'custodians of the temple' are in their traditional place near the door; while the three women saints are on the west wall to the north of the door, near the gynaeceum. In each choir, the saints are disposed according to their status and festival in the Church calendar.

The cycle of John the Baptist demonstrates several iconographical peculiarities. For instance, the Nativity is isolated from the Naming Ceremony (Luke 1:60-4), which is typical of the pre-Palaeologan tradition (see Cod. Par. gr. 74²⁵, Cod. gr. 5, Parma, Palatina Libr.²⁶, the Church of St Spas (Saviour) in Nereditsa in Russia, which dates from 1197-9²⁷), but also encountered in later monuments, such as the icon of St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (N. 168, according to Sotiriou)²⁸), and in the Church of St Clement in Ohrid, which dates from 1295²⁹. The scene of Elizabeth and the infant John pursued by soldiers and hiding in the cave which was opened up through her prayers represents the chief part of the composition of the Massacre of the Innocents, an incident which is recounted in the Protoevangelium of James (22:1-3)³⁰. In this case, the painter has selected only the scene which is directly linked with the life of the Baptist³¹. The following scene unites two episodes: the Infant John being Led by an Angel in the Wilderness and the Angel Instructing the Baptist, as one may understand from the figures' poses and gestures. We know of no other monument in which John is portrayed as an infant twice in this scene—usually the second figure is John as an adult,

25. H. Omont, *Évangiles avec peintures byzantines du XI^{ème} siècle*, second edition, Paris 1980, II. 94 b.

26. V. N. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina*, Turin 1967, fig. 244.

27. G. Babić, *Les Chapelles annexes des églises byzantines*, Paris 1969, p. 123.

28. G. and M. Sotiriou, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινῆς*, Athens 1968, p. 152.

29. Babić, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

30. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. I, Oxford 1962, p. 370.

31. In the Cappadocian churches the composition of the Massacre of the Innocents is limited to the Flight of Elizabeth, because there it is part of the Christological cycle.

in accordance with the angel's words to Zacharias at the altar (Luke 1:14-18). The literary sources for this scene are not to be found in the Synoptic Gospels but again in the Protoevangelium of James³² and in the Apocryphal account of the life of the Baptist, which is attributed to a Bishop Serapion³³. An account of the same episode is also to be found in the manuscript of Cadrenus, who probably used an earlier, unknown, source about the life of the Baptist³⁴. The next scene, which shows the saint preaching in the wilderness to a crowd of Jews and soldiers also follows Serapion's text. The Baptist is here depicted during his most active period of preaching, and the scene is connected with the image of the Winged John the Baptist in the zone of saints directly below. The Winged Baptist illustrates the prophecy about God's messenger-angel who will come forth to prepare the way of Christ (Matt. 3:1; John 1:23), a new Prophet Elijah (Luke 1:17) who will proclaim salvation through forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:78). For the same reason that he selects only the Flight of Elizabeth from the composition of the Massacre of the Innocents, the painter omits the Baptism of Christ, despite the fact that it was one of the first scenes to be included in the cycle; it has a much greater theological, ecclesiastical, and historical significance³⁵, but would involve the representation of Christ with John the Baptist, which would contravene the hierarchical principle of not illustrating the Christological cycle in the cemetery church.

Of the Evangelists, only Matthew mentions, very briefly, the Killing of Zacharias (Matt. 23:35), in the incident when Christ accuses the scribes and Pharisees and makes illustrative reference to the killing of Abel and of Zacharias. A much more detailed account is to be found in the Protoevangelium of James³⁶, which was the source for the ever more frequent representation of

32. Hennecke, *op. cit.*, p. 387, 22.3.

33. The Apocryphal 'Life of St John the Baptist', written by the Egyptian Bishop Serapion (385-395), is preserved in Arabic in a Syrian manuscript. Cf. *Bull. John Ryland's Libr.*, 11 (1927), 439-64.

34. A. Xyngopoulos, *Αἱ τοιχογραφίαι τοῦ καθολικοῦ τῆς μονῆς Προδρόμου παρὰ τὰς Σέβρας*, Thessaloniki 1973, p. 34.

35. The parable of the Good Samaritan—an allegory of God's salvation of sinful humankind—helps to explain why the Communion of the Apostles and the Baptism of Christ are not represented in the cemetery church. The Good Samaritan not only saved the fallen man (i.e. mankind saved from death), but also undertook the restoration of the inn, which symbolises the Church. On his return, the Good Samaritan lost two coins, which may be interpreted as meaning that after the Second Coming of the Messiah, for which the relics of the monks are waiting, the necessity for the two sacraments of Communion and Baptism will disappear.

36. Hennecke, *op. cit.*, p. 387, 23.1-3.

the scene both in the Menology, for the feast of the prophet on 5 September³⁷, and in the cycle of his life (where it is sometimes included as part of the Massacre of the Innocents)³⁸. Here Zacharias is depicted after his decapitation, as he is also in the Monastery of John the Baptist near Serres³⁹, whereas in other monuments he is usually portrayed just before the blow falls.

The Accusation of Herod, the Imprisonment of St John, and the Baptist in Prison visually echo the same scenes in the Paris Gospel, Nat. Libr., Cod. gr. 74⁴⁰, but here the last two scenes are united on account of the donor's inscription. The written sources for these scenes are the Gospel of St Mark (6:17) and St Matthew (14:3), while the account of the Decapitation of the Baptist with Salome waiting for his head, and Herod's Feast, where she is dancing with the charger over her head, is to be found in Serapion's text⁴¹. It is very probable that there are other sources too, which are at present unknown. The popularity of these two iconographical types is the basis for this hypothesis: the Decapitation is represented in the same way in Samaria-Sebasta⁴², Dečani Monastery⁴³, the catholicon of Dionysiou Monastery⁴⁴, in an icon from Arbanassi from the end of the seventeenth century⁴⁵, and in another icon from Etropole from the same period⁴⁶. Salome dancing with the head of John the Baptist replaced in the Palaeologan era the so-called 'first dance', which illustrates the Gospel text, is widely encountered in earlier monuments, and shows her simply holding the charger with the Baptist's head according to the manuscript (in Florence, Laurentian Libr., Plut. N. VI, 23, for example)⁴⁷.

37. *Il Menologio di Basilio II* (Bibl. Vaticana), pl. 14.

38. For example in Cappadocian frescoes: G. de Jerphanion, *Les Églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, vol. I, Paris 1925-28, fig. 38,3, vol. III, fig. 182; M. Restle, *Die byzantinische Wandmalerei in Kleinasien*, vol. III, Recklinghausen 1967, p. 454; V. Petkovic, *La Peinture serbe du Moyen Âge*, vol. II, Belgrade 1934, LXXV.

39. Xyngopoulos, *op. cit.*, pl. 37, 41.

40. Omont, *op. cit.*, fol. 98r, pl. 52; fol. 141, pl. 79; fol. 7v, pl. 10; fol. 65r, pl. 49.

41. Cf. note 33 above.

42. J. W. Crowfoot, *Churches at Bosra and Samaria-Sebasta*, London 1937, pp. 36-7, pl. 16b, 16c.

43. V. Petković, *Manastir Dečani*, vol. II, Belgrade 1941, pl. CXXXL.

44. Millet, *op. cit.*, pl. 205/1.

45. L. Prashkov, *Zărcvata Roždestvo Hristovo v Arbanassi*, Sofia 1979, p. 17.

46. T. Metakieva, 'Iconi ot Etropole', *Izkustvo*, 9 (1983) 33 (left).

47. One of the earliest cycles of John the Baptist is to be found in an Alexandrian World Chronicle (A. Bauer and J. Strzygowski, *Eine alexandrinische Weltchronik*, Vienna 1905) dating from around the beginning of the eighth century (cf. O. Kurz, 'The Date of the Alexandrian World Chronicle', *Kunsthist. Forschungen Otto Paecht zum 70. Geburtstag*,

The burial of the Baptist's decapitated body, which is usually depicted wrapped up in white like a mummy, is portrayed with a little church in the background; this may be in Sebasta, where legend has it that John was buried⁴⁸. The two figures carrying him are probably his disciples Andrew and John⁴⁹. In most known representations, they are not carrying the body, but have placed it in an open sarcophagus: for instance in the Baptistry of St Mark in Venice (fourteenth century)⁵⁰, in the catholicon of Dochiariou Monastery (which was frescoed in 1568)⁵¹, and in the Arbanassi icon bearing the cycle of John the Baptist. The last surviving scene of the cycle shows the First Finding of the Baptist's Head by two monks on Mount Eleon; it is the short formula, without the group of witnesses headed by the emperor and the bishop.

As we know, apart from its direct, literal meaning, each biblical passage also has an allegorical one, that is a typological, moral, or mystical meaning. This principle of polysemantic interpretation is preserved when the Holy Scriptures are translated into visual images. Different levels of meaning are consequently discernible in the cycle of St John the Baptist of Rožen. Its literal, representational sense was accessible to everybody, because it was communicated in ways understood by everybody—that is, through the text of the saint's offices, through the inscriptions of the scenes, through the poses and gestures of the various figures and their attributes. But deeper semantic strata were evident only to those devoted to the religious sacraments, to those who knew how to discern them⁵². John the Baptist's intermediate position as the last Old Testament prophet and the First New Testament prophet is rich in theological significance:

1. As an Old Testament prophet, he was considered a prefiguration of Christ. The Nativity of the Baptist in the presence of Zacharias complements that of Christ with the figure of Joseph, although its compositional scheme is in fact the same as that of the Nativity of the Virgin, which is also used for other saints. John's Naming (that is his recognition by the Jews) and the Flight

Residenze Verlag, p. 1722). One can still discern Salome dancing with John's head, but she is not by Herod's table as in our example.

48. Cabrol-Leclercque, DACL, p. 2167.

49. N. Brkić, *Technologia slikarstva, vajarstva i ikonografija*, Belgrade 1968, p. 382.

50. C. Diehl, *Manuel d'art byzantin*, second edition, Paris 1925-26, p. 805, pl. 399.

51. Millet, *op. cit.*, pl. 240/2.

52. The method of double allegorisation is based on Plato's psychological theory about the triple nature of the human being: body, spirit, and soul. The literary sense corresponds to the body, the moral sense to the soul, and the mystic sense to the spirit.

of Elizabeth (that is his persecution by Herod since his birth) correspond to the Circumcision of Christ and the Flight into Egypt respectively. Other shared motifs are John's Sojourn in the Desert and his Preaching to the Jews. Herod's command that John be first imprisoned and then decapitated closely echoes the Judgement of Pilate; John's imprisonment echoes the Way to Calvary, and his imprisonment and decapitation the Crucifixion.

2. As a New Testament figure, John corresponds to the Prophet Elijah (Luke 1:17). He is frequently portrayed with a mantle similar to the one Elijah left to Elisha; and just as an angel woke Elijah by the cave to feed him, so an angel took care of John in the desert.

3. As a hermit and ascetic, John the Baptist served as a moral example to the monks.

4. His depiction with wings reflects his mystical inclusion among the ranks of the angels.

The fact that Rožen Monastery was a dependency of Iviron Monastery and hence imitated its arrangement and decoration does not allow us to draw any further significant conclusions about the group of monuments to which the cemetery church belongs. The frescoes in the Chapel of St John the Baptist at Iviron date from the eighteenth century and differ radically in content and style from those in Rožen's cemetery church. There is just one representation in Iviron's catholicon that gives a strong visual reminder of the Baptist in the cemetery church and this is the Winged Baptist, which dates probably from the seventeenth century⁵³. Their stylistic features connect the wall-paintings most closely with those on the façade of Rožen's catholicon. The volumes of the faces have been treated with less detail, but remain graceful, and are brought out by delicate shading, while the clothes are more linear and stylised. The proportions of the figures are natural and the draperies fall without unnecessary folds. The architectural backgrounds consist of the same architectural elements, grouped in various ways in different scenes to suggest a variety of buildings. Of particular interest is the ornamentation on their façades, as also that on Elizabeth's badspread in the representation of the Nativity, and again on the clothes of the liturgists, Constantine and Helen, Kyriaki, and Artemius. These designs are to be seen in embroideries made in Wallachia for Church rituals in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and also in the clothing in various frescoes: the donors in the narthex of the Church of the Mother of God at Bachkovo (1643), the patriarchs on the north wall of the gynaeceum of the Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanassi (seven-

53. A. Masseron, *Saint Jean Baptiste dans l'art*, Paris 1957, pl. 2.

teenth century), and the figures in the catholicons of Docheiariou and Dionysiou Monasteries⁵⁴. It is complicated to explain the origin of these motifs and how they came to Rožen, but their mere presence here is a sign of the profound modification in the thinking of medieval man which came about with great force during the Renaissance. This is why the frescoes in the cemetery church have an exceptional cultural and historical value: they make it possible easily to follow the transition of figurative conception from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Here the entire treatment of the volumes, the linear stylisation, and the Baroque ornamentation are connected. If the responsibility for the well-thoughtout symbolism of the decorative scheme belongs primarily to the church's donor, Abbot (or Hegumen) Theodosius, the talent of the painter deserves no less attention, for he achieved a satisfactory compromise between the severe requirements of the canon and the exigencies of the period, particularly in the case of this little cemetery church⁵⁵. He also demonstrates a sound sense of psychological nuance and explanatory detail, though to a degree consonant with the norms of medieval convention and restraint: there is no forced emotion in the poses and gestures. These characteristics keep his art within the limits of the medieval tradition, notwithstanding the spatial and representational experimentation evident in some of the compositions⁵⁶. Their essence brings to mind trends in contemporary western art.

No less interesting is the wall-paintings' ideological significance when they are set against the background of the social, ecclesiastical, and political problems of their time. After it fell to the Ottomans, the area around Melnik continued to be a crossroads of material cultural and spiritual influences. Other important centres in the Balkans were Mount Athos, Thessaloniki, Constantinople, and later on Romania. As we know, Rožen Monastery had a scriptorium, in which monks from Bachkovo were taught; which gives us reason to suppose that active relations existed between the two monasteries for ecclesiastical, political, and cultural purposes, chiefly in the struggle against the infidel, in which the monks' nationality was not important. They resisted the Muslims through their devotion to Christian doctrine, which was the only

54. *Istoria artelor plastice in Romania*, vol. II, Bucharest 1970, fig. 58, 220, 224; S. Kisiov, *Bachkovski manastir*, Sofia 1983, pp. 59, 60; L. Prashkov, *op. cit.*, fig. 95, 99, 155; Millet, *op. cit.*, pl. 204/1, 254/3—representations of Romanian donors.

55. It should be noted that the decorative features which first attract one's attention do not contradict the purpose of the cemetery church, but accord with Christians' optimistic faith in the Second Coming of the Messiah and the Resurrection.

56. The quest for depth and perspective is most evident in the Naming of John and Herod's Feast. The compositional centre of both these scenes is a table.

way to assure themselves of God's help. It is precisely in this context that we should interpret the great representation of Jacob's Ladder on the façade of Rožen's catholicon, dating from 1611, as also the exterior decoration of many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Wallachian and Moldavian churches. Rožen Monastery's cemetery church dedicated to St John the Baptist and its catholicon dedicated to the Mother of God together constituted a monumental *Deesis* composition, through which the monks expected their prayers to be heard better.

The representation of the cycle of St John the Baptist obviously had a particular ecclesiastical and political purpose⁵⁷, namely to illustrate the saint's part in man's salvation through his portrayal in the Anastasis composition. The figures of hermits and Christian martyrs who accompany him are also encountered in the decoration of the earliest monastery cemetery churches. Here their traditional and devotional purpose is to place the seal of approval upon the authority of monasticism through the most noted individuals in its long history, whose services to Christianity are compared here with those of Christ's Baptist and Precursor, John, and of Emperor Constantine, who made the Christian faith the religion of the Byzantine Empire. So, without abandoning the doctrinal and canonical character of Orthodox art, the artists who decorated Rožen's cemetery church preserved the position of monasticism in the ecclesiastical hierarchy through the inclusion of certain specific themes in the entire architectural and decorative ensemble. Their basic purpose was to demonstrate the eternality of the Christian religion; the part played by monks in its survival and spread; and the moral and spiritual virtues of the Baptist—Christ's *angelos*, who, as the first hermit and ideal role-model for the monks, through his prayers showed his listeners the way to salvation.

57. According to Gordana Babić, after the end of the thirteenth century, when the liturgical cycle was properly developed, the differences in the pictorial decoration of the nave and the chapels of Balkan churches gradually disappeared (Babić, *op. cit.*, p. 134).



Pl. 1. The south wall of the bema: the Naming of John; the Flight of Elizabeth; Saints.



Pl. 2. South wall: Saints.



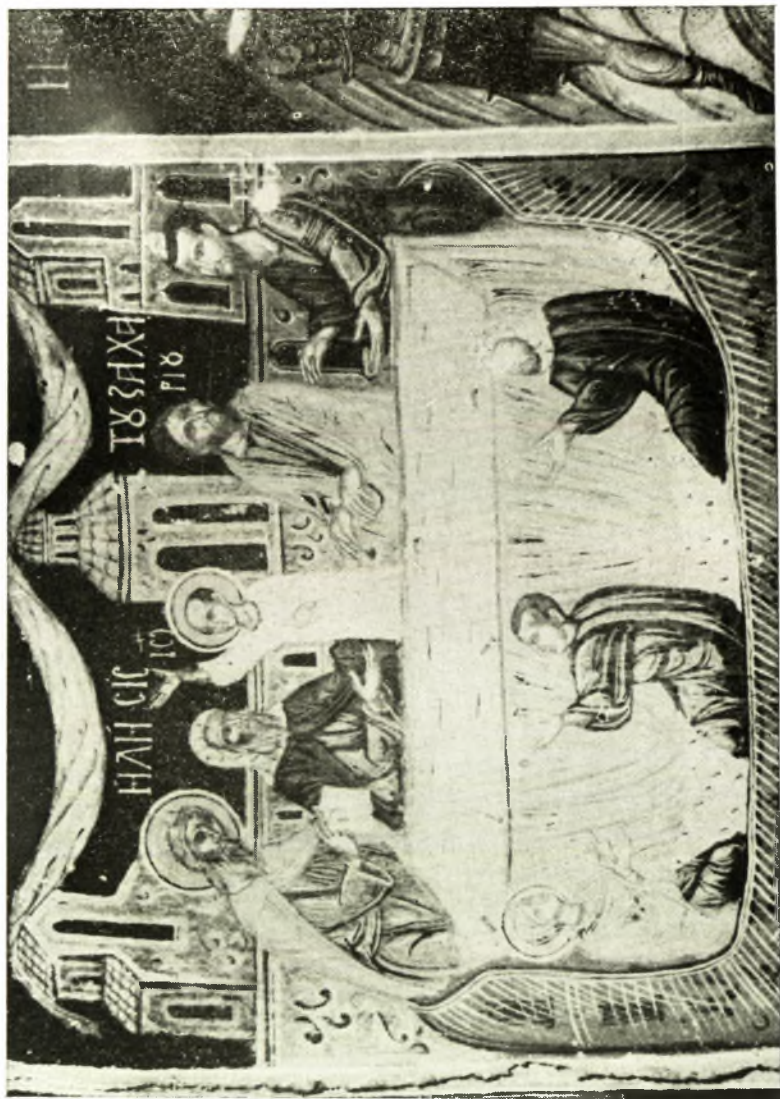
Pl. 3. The Imprisonment of John the Baptist.



Pl. 4. The Nativity of St John the Baptist.



Pl. 5. Arivs and Jonah.



Pl. 6. The Naming of John.



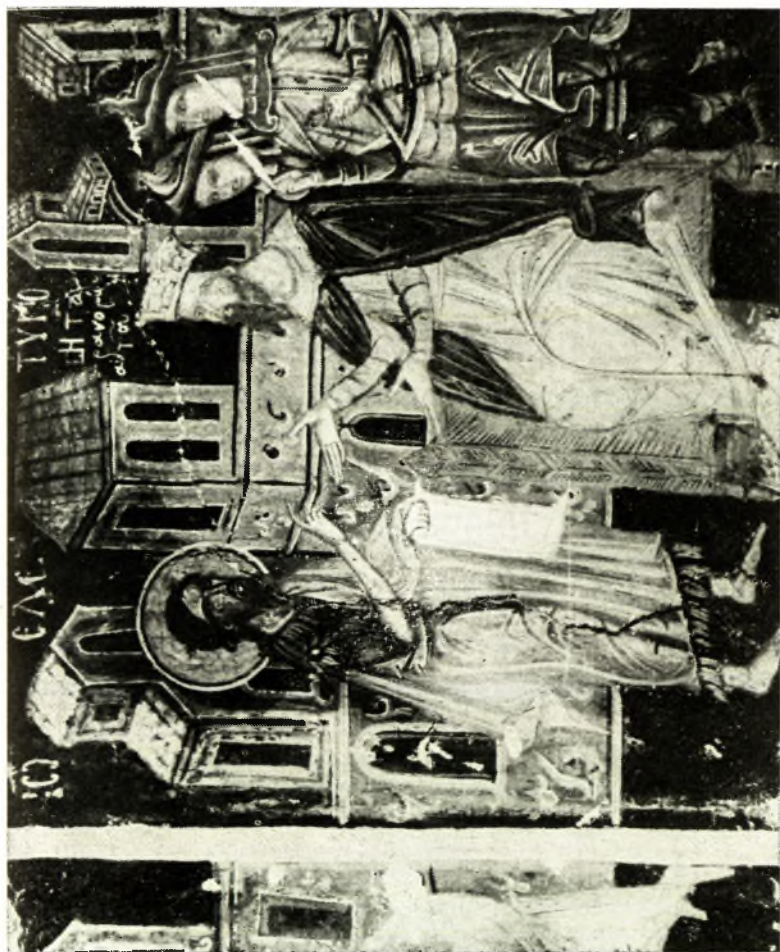
Pl. 7. The Decapitation of the Baptist and Herod's Feast.



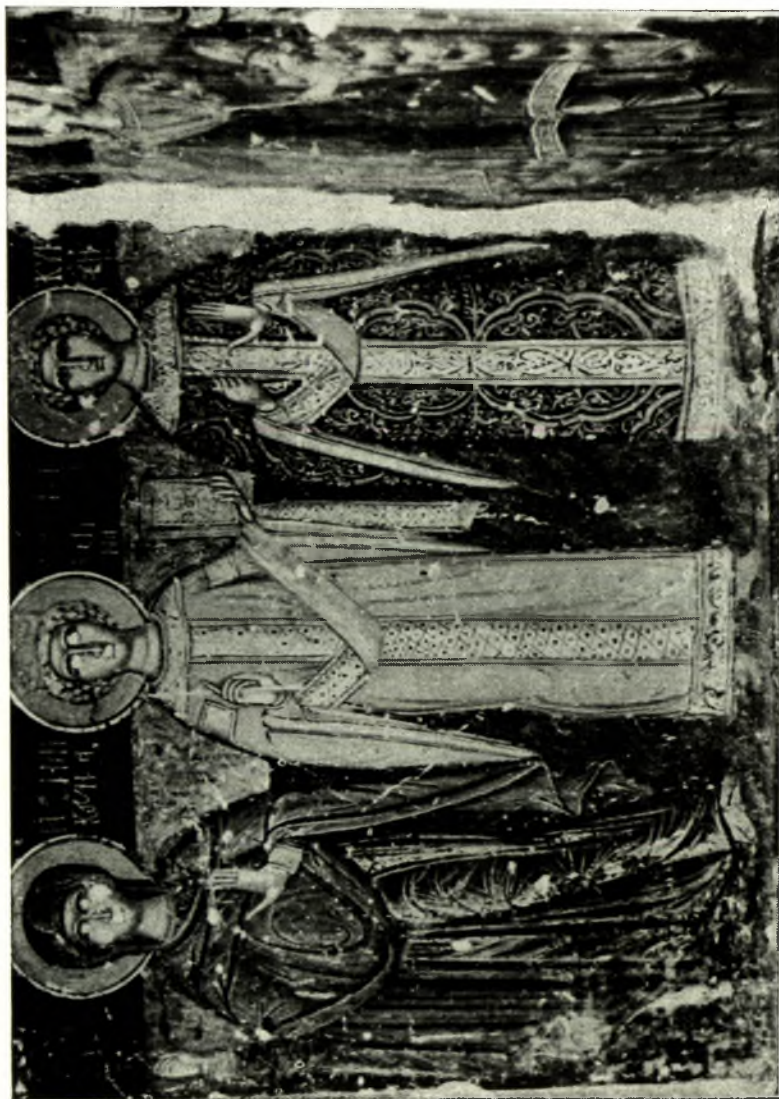
Pl. 8. The Virgin and Child (Platytera) flanked by the Annunciation.



Pl. 9. The Angel Guiding St. John in the Wilderness.



Pl. 11. The Accusation of Herod.



Pl. 12. The three female saints on the west wall.