

THE OTHERS, FROM A HORSE. NEW 17TH CENTURY BULGARIAN ICON OF SAINT GEORGE

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Abstract: *In the traditional orthodox iconography of the last centuries, it is easy to find icons of holy equestrian knights riding their spirited steeds defeating fearsome enemies of the faith, horrible legendary animals, or simply roaming their land. Such is the case of Saint George, Saint Demetrius, Saint Menas, ...*

Things happening from the horse should not go unnoticed. One of them is the greater general vision. Another, is the greatest combat power. And yet, that perspective has often been overlooked.

On the other hand, the physical and conceptual distance between good and evil, between us and others, is also greater: the horse separates them.

A 17th century unpublished icon of Saint George is going to be described. A comparative description of the icon, and fundamental elements of the iconography in that time (water, beast, horse, armor, ...) will be considered.

Keywords: *antique icon, Saint George, black horse*

A remarkable characteristic of the human species is its great diversity. Therefore, the opportunity to consider individuals or groups as “the others” is inherent to the species and has been practiced in all times and places. With natural or cultural pretexts: “I am a tall one” (and “the others” are short), “I am a Christian” (and “the others” are Muslims). This is precisely what we are going to consider when presenting this work: the use of a horse to erect oneself above “the others”, in the aim of subduing “the others” in the field of faith.

Things happening from a horse should not go unnoticed. One of them is a greater general vision. Another, the greater combat power. The physical and conceptual distance between good and evil, between us and the others, is also greater: the horse separates them.

If we attend to this issue in Orthodox iconography, as is our intention in approaching it, we realize that in the traditional orthodox iconography of the last centuries it is easy to find icons of holy equestrian knights riding their spirited steeds defeating fearsome enemies of the faith, horrible legendary

animals, or simply roaming their land. Such is the case of Saint George, Saint Demetrius, or Saint Menas. It is also, at a lesser level, that of Saint Theodore, Saint Mercurius, ... and many others, especially if we consider traditions from far away from us.

An exercise of recapitulation on the issue of representations of equestrian characters is appropriate to highlight certain milestones that must show the path that leads us to Orthodox icons. In this sense, and due to its importance, we pay attention to the long political tradition of representing leaders on egregious horses or spirited steeds so that public would marvel at their magnificence and power, abiding by their authority.

The first reference we propose is the Column of Justinian¹ erected in Constantinople in 543 AD. It is a spectacular Roman triumphal column on which the equestrian figure of the Emperor Theodosius I is settled (so, later on, it was appropriated by the Emperor Justinian I). If the equestrian figure is already magnificent in itself, you have to imagine the sensations it could inspire being placed on a column that supported it for 70 m. above ground level, in such a preeminent place: between Hagia Sophia and the Great Palace. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine a more imposing equestrian figure.

Changing register completely, we pay attention to the Dish with the equestrian effigy of Constantius II.² This is a work of a Constantinopolitan workshop, made around the year 350 AD. It displays the imposing triumphant equestrian figure of the emperor who, in turn, is presented with the halo of holiness. Therefore, it is useful as a reference for an equestrian political-religious figure.

It may also be of interest the 6th century wall painting of the Church of Saint Demetrius,³ in Thessaloniki, in which the entry of an emperor in the city is shown. The equestrian figure of the emperor stands out above that of his subjects and his halo equals the height of the famous city walls. It is another good reference for an equestrian political-religious figure.

However, a more subtle and parallel tradition to that of the spectacular equestrian representation of dignitaries, could have had greater implications in Orthodox iconography. We are referring to the images in funerary steles and marble sculptured votive tablets. Given their function, the reasonable size of these stelae perfectly allows comparison with icons from much later periods. The diversity of iconographic motifs is important. Despite this, a large number of these works present images of equestrian figures.⁴ The in-

¹ <https://www.pallasweb.com/deesis/column-of-justinian.html> (21/09/2023)

² Grabar 1966, p. 302, 404.

³ Grabar 1966, p. 183, 400. Discovered shortly before the fire of 1917.

⁴ We take as reference all those that can be visited in the National Archaeological Institute

terpretation of the phenomenon long anticipates the struggle between good and evil, in which the equestrian character has the advantage attributed to the powerful horse. It would be said that an invocation to the force of good passes through an equestrian character.⁵

The scope of the phenomenon of equestrian characters in Christian iconography is not exclusive to Orthodox heritage. It is a well-known and widely spread phenomenon. The various confessions efficiently appropriated the various equestrian figures to ensure the desired thaumaturgic effect. As a proof of this we refer to the imposing mural painting of Saint James in the Battle of Clavijo, in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna.⁶ The enormous dimensions of the wall painting give the holy knight an imposing appearance, difficult to achieve from other conceptions. Furthermore, this work serves as a syncretic model of everything that has been said (political model - civil/funerary model - Orthodox model - Latin model). Elements of all these models can be recognized in it.

Even when paying attention to the closest environment, we confirm a certain current validity of the status recognition model (hence, differentiation from “the others”) based on the equestrian topic. It is enough with thinking of the traditional San Juan Festival, in Ciudadela, Menorca, Spain. They hold a series of events in which the stars are riders and mounts. One of them (Caragol) consists of riding, with the horse with its front legs in the air, through a square

with Museum, Sofia, Bulgaria. Based on our visits, we highlight: Grave Stele, Horseman, Abdera, Greece, 2nd - 1st centuries BC. (Bulgarian Cultural Heritage Foundation); Heros the Horseman and Epona, Hurlers (Augusta), Vratsa region, 2nd 3rd centuries AD. (the rider we are interested in is the one in the figure above, he seems to be facing a snake coiled in a tree in front of him); the elegant figure of a horseman riding at the pace, Heros the Horseman Apollo Kitharoedus; or the elegant stele of Heros the Horseman riding on a snake that he seems to step on with his foot, which is so reminiscent of much later icons, such as the one presented in this paper. A similar stele (made of much more porous material and, therefore, less refined) can be enjoyed in the Regional History Museum, Silistra, Bulgaria.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Tiron (22/09/2023): *The “Christianization” of the Thracian horseman iconography can be traced to the Cappadocian cave churches of Göreme, where frescoes of the 10th century show military saints on horseback confronting serpents with one, two or three heads (Dragon Slaying)*. Although the statement can be disputed, what seems to be a proven fact is that there was an iconographic process of “Christianization” of the Thracian knights. If there were parallel or contributing processes, that is another question.

⁶ Maestro della Crocefissione Campana (previously, Pseudo Jacopino), Bologna, first half of the 14th century, Saint James in the Battle of Clavijo, fresco transported to new support, s.n.i., between the year 1315 AD. and the year 1320 AD. Provenance: Bologna, Church of Saint James the Great; deposited in the Pinacoteca in 1958. Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Italia.

full of people.⁷ Another (Carotades), consists of riding (full gallop) in parallel, two riders in friendly competition,⁸ also through a large crowd that encourages them. And, another, is a contest of a special skill (Ensortilla) in which the rider must thread a small ring from the galloping horse.⁹ It should be noted, in all cases, that the interaction of public with riders and their mounts is extremely close. Therefore, the role is highly shared, with clearly differentiated roles: the riders with their mounts, and “the others.”

We should not miss the opportunity that the second kind of contest (Carotades) is offering. Even though it is a competition, the image of the two riders riding at a gallop, hugging each other (which is unnatural from the point of view of the horses' anatomy), draws powerful attention. And, it takes us to a well-known iconographic topic: that of the pairs of holy horsemen riding together¹⁰ (Fig. 1). It is a topic that allows for a much greater development than the mere quotation made in this paper. However, it had to be mentioned since these are paired equestrian warrior saints¹¹ and, therefore, the category of “the others” is emphasized by contrasting not one, but two characters. The new contrast is, thus, more striking.

Christian-Orthodox equestrian warrior saints

Since the goal of bringing to mind stories about images of equestrian, political or civil knights, in a broad geographical context, confirming a present validity of the principles that support them, is to specify the process in Orthodox icons, the attention is going to be paid to the evolution in the precise context of the Christian-Orthodox equestrian warrior saints. Without the intention, even the possibility, of being exhaustive, a starting point is proposed to give an idea of the antiquity of this process. Then, through some milestones of Orthodox icons, as well as various more recent icons, the extension of the phenomenon is going to be suggested.

⁷ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiestas_patronales_de_Menorca#/media/Archivo:Fiestas_Jaleo.jpg (22/09/2023)

⁸ <https://www.minurka.com/fiestas-de-sant-joan-de-menorca-2023/> (22/09/2023)

⁹ <https://menorcaaldia.com/2018/06/24/video-asi-se-atrapa-una-ensortilla/> (22/09/2023)

¹⁰ When mentioning this topic, we can start from very early images: Bormpoudaki 2017, 144. In the picture the image of the Mounted Saint George and Demetrios from the Church of Saint George Sfakiotis at Diavaide, Pediada Province, dated to the end of the 13th/early 14th century, can be seen.

¹¹ In this sense, it is essential to approach the topic from the perspective of adelphopoiesis (pronounces two men, not related by birth, as brothers for life): Rapp 2016.



Fig. 1 Saints George and Demetrius, Greek icon (?), tempera and gold on wooden panel, 1872, 24x17.5 cm, Barcelona private collection. Unpublished.

Regarding the beginnings, it has already been indicated (footnote 5) that the discussion could be open. To demonstrate that item, expanding the time frame indicated in that note for this phenomenon, the frescoes of Bawit (Egypt) are cited, being dated to the 6th or 7th centuries. The first corresponds to the Holy Horseman Sisinnius piercing the right breast of a demoness.¹² Most of the features that will characterize this large group of iconographic types seem to have already been drawn up. Perhaps the most surprising thing is both the name of the holy equestrian knight and the fact that the character pierced by the spear

¹² Coptic art. Bawit, monastery of Saint Apollo, chapel XVII, west wall. The holy horseman Sisinnius pierces the right breast of a demoness. 6th – 7th centuries. Wall painting. Grabar 1966, p. 179, 400.



Fig. 2 Saint Menas, Bulgarian school (?), tempera and gold on wooden panel, 1849, 59x41cm. Barcelona private collection. Unpublished.

is a demoness. The second corresponds to Saint Phoibammon.¹³ In this case, the saint holds a crown with his left hand while, behind him, an angel brings another crown to him. He wears a diadem over his abundant classic hair. Both the name of the holy equestrian knight and the good state of conservation of

¹³ Coptic art. Bawit, monastery of Saint Apollo, chapel XVII, west wall. Saint Phoibammon. 6th – 7th centuries. Wall painting. Borgia & Elefante 2022, p. 221.

the work regarding the rider and the angel are surprising. The fact that the two saints are less known on the northern shore of the Mediterranean undoubtedly has to do with the fact that they are North African saints. This sea being a true cultural border that separates believers who profess the same faith.

In order to cite some milestones and illustrate the diversity, as far as Orthodox icons are concerned, we proceed with the presentation of a small selection of them.

Since Saint George, a saint of universal veneration, probably is in the first place in the ranking, the renowned icon of Saint George in the Museo di Icone dell'Istituto Ellenico, Venezia, Italy, is proposed.¹⁴ It is a refined icon in which the generous background gold contrasts with the bright colors of the white steed and its chivalrous rider. The red of Saint George's cloak, the saddle, and the dragon's wings act as a counterpoint.

Another notable icon of Saint George, as an equestrian warrior, in the Bulgarian context, is that of the National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia, Bulgaria.¹⁵ In addition to being the oldest icon of this equestrian warrior saint in Bulgaria, it is characterized by its extreme length. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, the head of the saint is at an enormous distance from the snake (evil, "the others"), solemnly emphasizing the fact of being a knight: a fascinating iconographic prodigy.

With an equivalent preponderance, or a little behind, it is Saint Demetrius the character most often represented as a knight. As an example, a typical Bulgarian icon from the 19th century is presented.¹⁶ The holy knight of Thessaloniki rides a red horse and pierces the defeated Ottoman warrior with his spear. The height of the horse, the fact that it vigorously raises its front legs leaning backwards, the disproportionately large trapezoidal body, the fact that it runs over the ground at a certain height, and the position of the saint above the horse, make the Ottoman soldier (evil, "the others") to be lying on the ground clearly defeated.

The list of holy knights continues with Saint Menas. This saint, of North African origin, became highly venerated in the Balkans. The icon that is shown (Fig. 2) presents the mature character (a differential element in this iconographic type) riding on a magnificent white steed, armed with a very fine spear, in a

¹⁴ Saint George, late 15th century, 82.5x65.5 cm, Museo di Icone dell'Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, Venezia. Kazanaki-Lappa 2009, pp. 48–49.

¹⁵ St George, late 15th–early 16th c., 125x65.3 cm., National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia, Bulgaria. Parpulov 2020, p. 72.

¹⁶ Saint Demetrius, tempera and gold on wood panel, Church of Saints Peter and Paul, Devene, Vratsa region, Bulgaria. 1843–1844, 98x67 cm. Private collection, Barcelona. Savova-Kasabova 1977, fig. 34; Gallés 2020, p. 278.

beautiful, perfectly structured landscape. In the celestial sphere neither Christ nor his Hand appear, only rays of vital energy emerging from it giving meaning to the gold in the background that occupies almost half of the available space behind the saint. His greatness does not require the physical presence of “the others” which is understood without further indications.

The next equestrian warrior saint is Saint Eustachius. The icon proposed as a reference is the one found in the Museo di Icone dell’Istituto Ellenico, Venezia, Italia.¹⁷ It is a large icon that shows the holy knight at the moment of his conversion after he had a vision of a cross while hunting a stag and heard a divine voice. His features correspond to those of a middle-aged character and, as in the previous case, his magnificence does not require the physical presence of “the others” which is understood without further indications.

From this point on, the legion of holy knights is made up of many characters who do not seem to have achieved the wide recognition of the previous ones. A couple of them are cited as examples of the phenomenon: Saint Procopius and Saint Theodore.¹⁸ Although many others could be cited, especially if we consider Christian traditions from far away from us.

A different case from all the previous ones is that of riders on chariots pulled by more than one animal, especially horses. Greater distance (in the sense of authority) from “the others” is associated with them, whether due to political or military power: the authority of a leader from a chariot is, if possible, greater; in case of a war chariot, it is associated with greater power.

In this sense, we propose a couple of images that can illustrate and even expand this intuition despite the fact that, strictly speaking, they are not Christian-Orthodox equestrian warrior saints. Firstly, as a precursor image that anticipates the model, we propose the relief of Dionysus driving a chariot pulled by two bulls in the Dumbarton Oaks Collections¹⁹. In this work the divinity of the god is reinforced by placing him in a chariot pulled by bulls. The way that those bulls look reinforces the idea by showing them powerful and fierce while they pull the chariot in which the character is sitting. Even the wheels contribute to giving a feeling of strength, expanding the overall feeling.

¹⁷ Saint Eustachius, early 16th century, 126x80 cm, Museo di Icone dell’Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, Venezia. Kazanaki-Lappa 2009, pp. 50–51.

¹⁸ An interesting icon of Saint Procopius, 18th century, can be seen in the Ecclesiastical Byzantine Museum of Mytilene, Greece. One of the most remarkable icons of Saint Theodore (whether Tyron or Stratilat), is the 9th/10th century one in Saint Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai, Egypt: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Tiron#/media/File:St_Theodor_&George_Sinai_9-10th_century.jpg (23/09/2023)

¹⁹ Coptic art. Egypt. Pediment: Dionysus driving a chariot pulled by two bulls. Mid-5th century. Dumbarton oaks Collections, Washington. 114x113.9cm. Grabar 1966, 245 & 402.

The second proposal aims for a qualitative leap. It does not refer to a rider on his mount, but rather refers to an elegant chariot drawn by two horses. And, it does not refer to a chariot drawn by two horses on the surface of a ground trodden by humans, but rather it refers to a chariot that moves thunderously through the skies. In this case, the prophet Elijah ascends to heaven and the distance from “the others” becomes infinite: a cosmic abyss separates them (Fig. 3). It would be said that humans, represented by Elisha,²⁰ remain, while Elijah moves towards integration into divinity.

To complete this panorama, an example that could represent a dynamic in the opposite direction to what has been said until now is presented: getting off the horse would mean getting closer to “the others” (in this case, the condition of sinful human nature). It is the case with the great icon of the Deisis with donors which is kept in the Museo di Icone dell’Istituto Ellenico, Venezia.²¹



Fig. 3 Prophet Elijah (two fields), Bulgaria, tempera and gold on wooden panel, 19th century, 31.5x22.5 cm. Barcelona private collection. Unpublished.

²⁰ 2 Kings 2: 7–15.

²¹ Deisis with donors, 1546, 119x89 cm. Museo di Icone dell’Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini, Venezia. Kazanaki-Lappa 2009, pp. 224–225.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

At the base of the icon, occupying an important strip of the pictorial field, the donors are shown dismounting from their horses in order to properly venerate the divinity. In the case of the one on the right (the Western influence is evidenced here), even kneeling. Thus, renouncing the “horse effect” that has been presented.



Fig. 4 Saint George, Bulgaria, tempera on wooden panel, 17th century, 22x17 cm. Barcelona private collection. Unpublished.

Description of the unpublished icon of Saint George

This is a small icon of Saint George (Fig. 4). This suggests its private devotional use or its specific use on specific dates (icons kept on the altar for festivities, or icons in different places in the temple to promote the veneration of a specific saint). It is characterized by a fairly basic chromatic range in which the red co-

lour stands out, which is used for the frame, the upper background, harnesses and reins of the horse, and (in a slightly lighter tone) the character's cloak and shoes. Most of the background is indicated in yellow on which white lines are drawn with the intention of giving it greater luminosity. The set of clothes worn by the holy knight is also yellow. The rest is made in dark tones: black and blue for horse and pond; and brown for the dragon.



Fig. 5 Detail. Face, breastplate, and shield. The youthful character of the character is evident.

The horse (which rides to the right) is not the elegant white horse more common among icons dedicated to this saint, but is a spirited shiny black (!!!) steed. The blue gradients and the fine white stripes give the animal a shine in line with the intended spirited character. Above its front legs a certain topographic relief is suggested. Below him is the entire pond in which the dragon is found in the form of an enormous snake that embodies the figure of evil and all those who adhere to it: “the others.”

The holy warrior's garments follow previous models and may be useful for dating the icon. His classic armor stands out (the Saint wears a breastplate) and, especially, the design and shape of the shield (decorated with white pearls) on his left side just below the shoulder. If we also consider its position, the whole set takes us to post-Byzantine iconographic models from previous centuries.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

The face (Fig. 5) with delicate youthful features, perfectly shows the master's skill. The Saint sports profuse curly hair and looks to the viewer's right. The pronounced eyebags, the design of the nose, the chin, as well as the rest of the face, are convincingly executed. Without a doubt, it is the work of a good icon painter, perhaps also a miniaturist. A large yellow halo delimited by a white line frames the whole head. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any trace of gold in it. This leads us to modest goals/possibilities.



Fig. 6 Detail. The beast, in the form of a coiled snake, turns against the saint and violently shakes the waters.

The beast, in the form of a coiled snake, turns against the saint and violently shakes the waters. The fact that it is a snake and not a dragon will allow establishing parallels that may help to locate the work. St. George's long spear penetrates the horrible animal's mouth, decapitating it, making it stick out its tongue, or perhaps blood. This spear, despite its fineness, shows elegant spiral strokes that denote the miniaturist effect mentioned above. The snake shows a brown hue and some transverse black strokes that may make think of a Balkan whip snake (*Hierophis gemonensis*).²²

The specific way of executing water (Fig. 6) will be another parameter (in addition to shield-breastplate design, black steed, and snake) to place this work in space and time. The characteristic blue bands on a dark background (in this

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkan_whip_snake (04/10/2023)

case, black), gently undulating, festooned with fine white brushstrokes (one, two, or three, depending on the authors/works), will be decisive in knowing the chronology and the area of execution of this icon. And that is the research line that we are going to follow.

Following the trail of waters

To enjoy various options for comparison, not only icons of Saint George will be considered, but attention will also be paid to other iconographic types in which either water or structures comparable to water are represented. In this sense, icons of the following types will be taken into account: Baptism of Christ (river), Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (pond), Ascension of the Prophet Elijah (river), beards (!!!) of different characters, and Saint George (pond). The case of beards, as a pictorial structure comparable to water, turns out to be a surprising²³ and useful resource.

Following the proposed order, the first icon we pay attention to is a Baptism of Christ which is preserved in the National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia.²⁴ This icon anticipates the standard that will be followed in the next centuries, especially in the 17th century, to process the waters. The effect of the Jordan River produced in this way turns out to be very dynamic and striking. This is, certainly, an ingenious solution to trigger that kind of impact. This icon should be considered a fundamental piece of the process.

An icon that seems to follow the general pattern of the previous one is that of a Baptism of Christ in the National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia.²⁵ The waters in this icon, without showing the turbulent and dynamic appearance of the previous icon (the Jordan River seems to flow much quieter), look very similar to those of the icon of Saint George described above. The resemblance is not only noteworthy, but it draws powerful attention.

Another icon of Baptism that fits very well in this set is the icon of the Baptism of Christ preserved in the National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia.²⁶ The intention is once again to provide the waters with a good dose of turbulence and swirls, on a background of a lighter blue tone.

²³ The skins/furs dressing Saint John the Baptist may also be a reference, mostly those painted in the 17th century. But, in order not to exhaust the topic, we will not consider them for the moment.

²⁴ Baptism of Christ, 14th – 15th century, National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia. Pandurski 1977, fig. 17, & 388; Böhler et al. 2007, fig. 3 & B-1

²⁵ Baptism of Christ, first half of 17th century, from Gorna Oryahovitsa, tempera and gold on wooden panel, 33.5x24.5 cm. National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia. Paskaleva 1987, fig. 76 & 183.

²⁶ Baptism of Christ, 17th century, tempera and gold on wooden panel, 42x35 cm. National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia. Bozhkov 1984, fig. 124, & 108, 190.

To close the Baptisms chapter, a somewhat different icon from the previous (Bulgarian) ones is proposed: the Baptism of Christ in the Protaton of Mount Athos.²⁷ The design pattern of the waters is in line with the previous ones. In this case, they are once again quieter, as in the icon of the National Gallery.

We proceed to consider an interesting icon on the Forty Holy Martyrs which is kept in the Museum of Macedonia, Skopje.²⁸ As indicated above, the context in which the scene takes place is a pond. Three strips of surface with water can be seen: an upper one, which surrounds the saints from above; and two lower ones, of which the lowest one is entirely water. Overall, this is the case in which the waters most closely resemble those of the icon described. Even due to the partial presence of varnish on them in both cases. By properly manipulating the photographs (correcting sizes, and taking appropriate samples), the level of resemblance is striking.

Another useful iconographic type referencing the icon of Saint George is that of the Ascension of the Prophet Elijah. The waters of Jordan river can provide useful information. Such is the case of the icon on the Fiery Ascension of the Prophet Elijah in the National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia.²⁹ In this icon, waters flow quietly showing a pattern similar to that of the icon that has been described. It is worth highlighting the marked dark background that defines the river in this work.

Surprisingly, one of the working lines when comparing water patterns with those in the reference icon has turned out to be the elaboration of the beards of those characters whose iconographic type requires such an item. In certain cases, the resemblance draws powerful attention. Since in this case the number of references that provide this kind of information can be so numerous, only a paradigmatic case that provides the necessary information will be considered, both to exemplify what is being explained, and to approach the intended geographical and chronological focus. It is about the beard of Saint Athanasius in an icon that is preserved in a private collection in Barcelona³⁰ (Fig. 7). The soft undulations of the beard's hairs, especially the two lower rows, recall the placid

²⁷ Baptism of Christ, 1611, Protaton (Mount Athos), 76x38 cm. Vassilaki 2004, fig. 80, 162.

²⁸ The Forty Holy Martyrs, first quarter of 17th century, tempera and gold on wooden panel, 31.2x22.3x2.1 cm. Museum of Macedonia, Skopje. Popovska-Korobar 2004, fig. 77, 269. If it were not for the fact that this icon is fundamental in establishing kinship with the one described, it would also be worth considering that of the Baptism of Christ in the same collection (fig. 73, 266). It points out in a similar direction.

²⁹ Fiery Ascension of the Prophet Elijah, 16th – 17th centuries, 90x53.5 cm. National Church Museum of History and Archaeology, Sofia. Bozhkov 1984, fig. 419, 468 & 448; Parpulov 2020, fig. 77, pp. 166–167.

³⁰ Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, Bulgaria, early 17th century, tempera on wooden panel, 76.5x47.5 cm. Private collection, Barcelona. Gallés 2019.

waters that have been discussed, even with some whirlpools. The comparison with the third cited icon of the Baptism of Christ (footnote 26) is very suggestive.

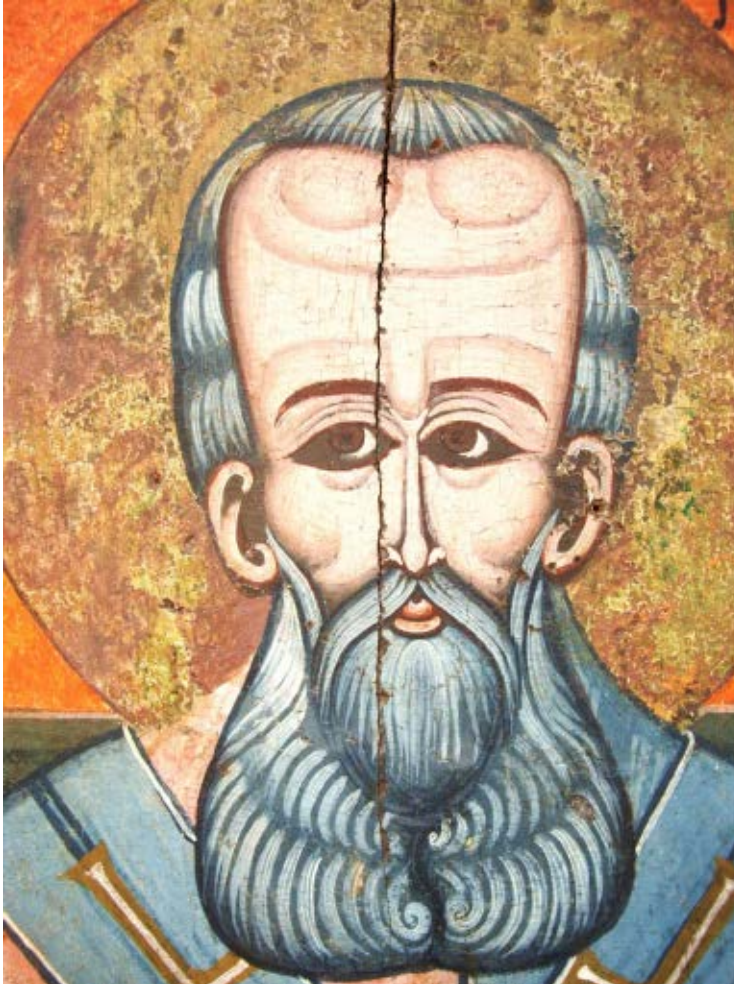


Fig. 7 Detail. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, Bulgaria, tempera on wooden panel, early 17th century, 76.5 x 47.5 cm. Barcelona private collection.

To conclude, we proceed to consider three icons, specifically of Saint George, that point out in the direction that has been outlined in the previous works. The first is the icon of Saint George slaying the dragon, in the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens.³¹ It is an icon in which the colour of the horse stands out: a greyish colour that seems to be the result of looking for a black

³¹ Saint George slaying the dragon, Northern Greece, 1623/24, 106x63 cm. Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens. Acheimastou-Potamianou 1998, fig. 69, pp. 224–225.

colour in which fur's shine ends up giving this result. In any case, if we also consider the general structure of the icon, the proportions of the upper and lower backgrounds, the breastplate and the cloak of the rider, the arrangement of the relief, and the style and structure of the pond waters, the pattern seems common. In this case, the dragon is the one that clearly differs: it is not a snake but a winged dragon like beast. It would be a reference icon for the work we have been considering.

The next icon is the icon of Saint George slaying the dragon, in the National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia.³² This icon shows the typical white horse riding to the right. The most remarkable thing, for the purposes of this paper, is both the structure and style of the pond waters, and the fact that the beast is a brown snake very much in line with that of the work at hand. Both elements perfectly allow comparison.

And, the last icon, is an icon of Saint George the dragon Slayer, in the National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia.³³ This icon is proposed as a contrast, for the period, within the line that has been followed. The horse is greyish white, and rides to the left. The beast is a dragon with red wings, and only the water in the pond vaguely resembles that of the icon that has been described. Otherwise, a magnificent artwork.

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³² Saint George slaying the dragon, 1667, Church of St. George, Kremikovtsi Monastery, near Sofia, tempera on wood, 87.5x61.5 cm. National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia. Velmans 2005, fig. 54, 88; Paskaleva 1991, pp. 162–163.

³³ Saint George the dragon slayer, 17th century, Veliko Turnovo region, tempera on wood, 74.5x48 cm. National Gallery, Museum of Christian art, Sofia. Ручева 2016, pp. 234–235.

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