Architectural Pluralism at the Edges. The Visual Eclecticism of Medieval Monastic Churches in Eastern Europe

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"A world built at a crossroads could by no means be simply local."
Ivan Stevović[1]

Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, the regions of Eastern Europe—constituting the territories around the Carpathian Mountains and the northern parts of the Balkan Peninsula—have stood at the margins of both the western and eastern Roman Empires.[2] Over centuries, these regions found themselves at the intersection of various cultural and spiritual realms, resulting in the appropriation and translation of select elements from distinct artistic and architectural traditions alongside local developments. This is evident in the ecclesiastical sphere, and in particular in the monastic churches (or katholika), of the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries from regions such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.[3] The pages to follow consider the compound visual and architectural vocabularies of select monastic churches built under princely patronage in eastern European zones of generative creativity during the medieval and early modern periods that reflect contemporary dynamics of cultural contacts in these regions, and also demonstrate the delicate dialogue between the visual and the political dimensions of princely patronage in the ecclesiastical sphere at key historical moments. My analysis relies on the formal and structural features, as well as the spatial articulations of the monastic churches under consideration as I seek to demonstrate, on the one hand, that stylistic pluralism persisted, to various degrees, in the architecture of eastern European churches, and katholika in particular, well into the sixteenth century. On the other hand, this study addresses the notion of architectural pluralism and the issues posed by buildings that display an eclectic visual rhetoric. The examination progresses chronologically and focuses on key monastic churches from Serbia and Bulgaria founded between the late-twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, as well as the architectural developments evident in the Moldavian corpus of ecclesiastical monuments that took on new visual forms beginning with the second half of

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1 Ivan Stevović, "Architecture of Medieval Serbia: Appropriation and Synthesis," Conference paper delivered at the 48th International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, MI 2013), 1.

2 See, in particular, the work of Andrei Pippidi, *Byzantins, Ottomans, Roumains: Le sud-est Européen entre l'héritage impérial et les influences occidentales* (Paris: Honore Champion Editeur, 2006), and Jean W. Sedlar, *E East Central Europe in the Middle Ages, 1000-1500* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

3 Overviews of the medieval ecclesiastical architecture of these regions can be found in Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), esp. 472-505; 612-682; Heinrich L. Nickel, *Medieval Architecture in Eastern Europe*, translated by Alisa Jaffa (New York and London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1983), esp. 37-120.

the fifteenth century. Since Orthodox monasteries founded by royal patrons became during the Middle Ages dynamic centers with spiritual, cultural, political, and economic dimensions, and sometimes even the mausoleum of the original patron and later family members, these sites are a suitable topic for investigation. In fact, it was in the monastic sphere that architectural innovations occurred that were subsequently employed in other types of ecclesiastical monuments.

Stylistic Diversity in Medieval Serbian and Bulgarian Katholika

At the beginning of his reign, sometime between 1166 and 1168, the Serbian Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (*reg.* 1166–1196) built the Church of St. Nicholas at Kuršumlija, on the Toplica River (Figs. 1-2).[4] This Orthodox monastic church, as the architectural historian Slobodan Ćurčić describes it, consists of "a curious blend between Byzantine and Romanesque architectural features that graphically reveals the position of Serbia as a land between the eastern and western cultural spheres."[5] Indeed, the Romanesque barrel vaulted portico flanked by large square towers attached to a rectangular exonarthex at the west end of the church opens, through a narrow entryway, into a domed structure that follows Byzantine, and more specifically Constantinopolitan church building traditions characteristic of the Komnenian era.[6] Beyond the Romanesque façade, the west end of the church comprises an oblong pronaos, or narthex, that leads through a large semicircular arch into the square domed naos. This space, in turn, terminates in a tripartite sanctuary at the east end of the church.[7] The combination of eastern and western architectural traditions in the church at Kuršumlija is indebted in part to the presence in the first half of the twelfth century, especially along the eastern Adriatic littoral, of Romanesque churches such as the famous Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor (Montenegro) (begun 1124; consecrated 1166) (Fig. 3).[8]

Whereas the Romanesque cathedral of St. Tryphon—a domed three-aisled basilica—was likely built initially in a single campaign, the katholikon at Kuršumlija may have been constructed in two phases. The twin tower façade and exonarthex built out of brick and stone postdate the main liturgical space of the church at the east end that here was built entirely out of recessed brick. The supposedly older part of the church measures 14 meters in length and 8 meters in width, with the square domed naos measuring 7.5 meters along the sides and 9 meters in height. It is possible that Stefan Nemanja oversaw both phases of construction, or perhaps he initiated the construction of the façade on the preexisting Church of St. Nicholas that could have been the commission of the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos (*reg.* 1143–1180).[9] Nevertheless, the architecturally eclectic final form of the church was likely celebrated, as it was readapted in another contemporaneous katholikon.

4 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 492-493; Marina Mihaljević, "Change in Byzantine Architecture," in *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration*, eds. Mark J. Johnson *et al*, 102-104; Ivan Stevović, "Historical and Artistic Time in the Architecture of Medieval Serbia: 12th Century," in *Architektura Vizantii i Drevnej Rusi IX - XII vekov: materialy mezdunarodnogo seminara, 17 - 21 nojabrja 2009 goda*, ed. Denis D. Elsin (St. Petersburg: Izdat. Gosudarstvennogo Ėrmitaža, 2010), 149-151.

5 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 493.

6 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 493.

7 To the south of the naos extends a funerary room with a monumental floor tomb. The parekklesion to the north of the pronaos dates to the fourteenth century, to the reign of Tsar Stefan Uroš II Milutin (*reg.* 1282–1321).

8 Kotor came under direct Serbian control in 1186 and served as a link between Serbia and the Adriatic littoral. The cathedral, along with other churches from Kotor of a similar Romanesque type, was executed by the Kotor *protomagister* school and stonemasons workshops. It was from these workshops that the Franciscan monk and architect, Fra Vita, emerged. For the most recent study on the Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor, see Milka Čanak-Medić and Zorica Čubrović, *Katedrala Svetog Tripuna u Kotoru: istorija, arhitektura, arhitektonska plastika i liturgijski nameštaj* [*The Cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor*] (Kotor: Bokeljska Mornarica, 2010); Stanislav Živkov, "Western Influences in Medieval Church Architecture in Serbia and Montenegro - From Romanesque Towards Gothic," *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 7 (2001), 118-119; Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 455-456.

9 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 492.

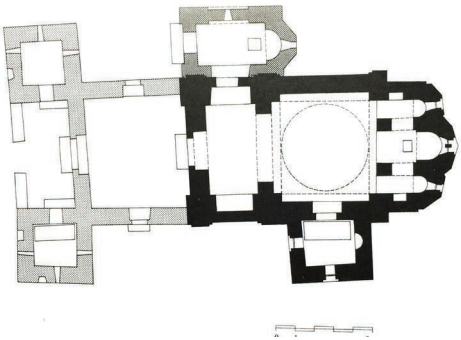

Fig. 1: Church of St. Nicholas, St. Nicholas Monastery, Kuršumlija, Serbia, founded c.1166-1168, view from south-west
Fig. 2: Plan, Church of St. Nicholas

Indeed, the Serbian prince initiated another ecclesiastical building project during the early years of his reign, comparable in planning to the church at Kuršumlija, which suggests that the earlier example was not one conceived in isolation. Scholars credit Stefan Nemanja with the construction of the Church of St. George in the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi, near the medieval Serbian capital Ras (today Novi Pazar), which was completed between c.1166 and c.1170 (Fig. 4).[10] The Church of St. George, extensively damaged during WWI, shares significant formal and spatial aspects with the Church of St. Nicholas, in particular the narthex framed by two large square towers, the domed rectangular naos extended to the north and south by enclosed porches, and the tripartite sanctuary at the east end. The church measures 16 meters in length and 9.5 meters in width (17 meters at the façade, including the twin towers, and 15 meters in the naos with the lateral porches). Although the two monastic churches are analogous in their architectural forms, suggesting that the katholikon at Kuršumlija likely served as a model in the planning process, the Church of St. George demonstrates much more compact planning and arrangement than the Church of St. Nicholas, due in part to the constraints of the monastic milieu for which it was designed and in which it was erected.[11] The katholikon at Djurdjevi Stupovi, however, reveals that the Church of St. Nicholas was not an isolated example in the Serbian cultural sphere of the second half of the twelfth century. Its architectural features and blending of various architectural traditions were readapted in other contexts.

The eclectic visual vocabularies of the churches of St. Nicholas at Kuršumlija and St. George at Djurdjevi Stupovi—bringing together Byzantine church construction traditions (i.e. central dome on pendentives) and Romanesque architectural forms western in conception—suggest, that at least in the second half of the twelfth century artistic and cultural links extended between Serbia and Byzantine centers such as Constantinople, as well as regions in the western cultural sphere, such as Norman Sicily (Cefalù), Apulia (Bari), and perhaps even Hungary (Buda).[12] The buildings retain the spatial scheme required for Orthodox monastic churches, but incorporate features and construction methods characteristic of Western Romanesque ecclesiastical buildings, evident in monuments such as the Cathedral of St. Tryphon from Kotor (Fig. 3), for example. It is very possible, then, that builders trained in western workshops (on

10 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 493-495; Stevović, "Historical and Artistic Time in the Architecture of Medieval Serbia: 12th Century," 152-155.

11 The Church of St. George in the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi demonstrates in fact closer affinities with Romanesque church building traditions, and it was likely built by a workshop trained in the Romanesque tradition, since it was originally constructed entirely of stone and displayed on its facades blind circular arches in the upper sections. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 493-495.

12 Jovan Nešković has considered the impact from Apulia. See Jovan Nešković, *Djurdjevi Stupovi u Starom Rasu* (Kraljevo: Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Kraljevo, 1984). See, also, Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 495: "Geographically and historically closer connections, such as those with Hungary, remain to be examined more thoroughly. The only certainty is that the builders of St. George were brought in from the Western cultural sphere…"

Fig. 3: Cathedral of St. Tryphon, Kotor, begun 1124, consecrated 1166
Fig. 4: Church of St. George, Djurdjevi Stupovi Monastery, Serbia, founded c.1166-c.1170, reconstruction model

the Adriatic Coast and Italy) were summoned to the court of the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja to work on his new projects,[13] perhaps not due to lack of "highly trained builders" in Serbia at this time,[14] but rather as a result of Serbia's outreach and contacts with its neighbors that contributed to new visual and architectural forms taking shape in a new milieu.[15] Moreover, scholars who have considered the visual analogies between the two churches have suggested that "the Romanesque elements stood for Nemanja's turning away from Byzantium at a moment when, contrary to the decree of Constantinople, he won the title of highest authority over Serbian lands."[16] Others, however, have pointed to symbolic meanings behind the massive towers of both monastic churches, tied to the topography of the land and the ideologies of the patron.[17]

Ecclesiastical monuments, and in particular monastic churches, deriving their visual vocabulary from distinct architectural traditions—such as the example presented by the Serbian churches discussed above—survive in other regions of eastern Europe. The Serbian examples date to the Nemanjić Dynasty (1166-1371), but later monuments from Serbia and neighboring regions are similarly eclectic with respect to sources. The same is true of katholika built during the

13 For example, the mastermind behind the katholikon of Christ Pantokrator from Dečani Monastery, founded between 1327 and 1335, was Fra Vita (Vitus), a Franciscan monk and architect from Kotor.

14 A view advanced by Slobodan Ćurčić in his monumental study *Architecture in the Balkans*, esp. 495.

15 The Serbian architecture of the 9th and 10th centuries, and then later of the 12th and 13th centuries, was transformed due to direct contacts with areas from the Dalmatian coast and Italy, with Bishopric centers in Bar (Montenegro) and Bari (Italy), for example.

16 Stevović, "Historical and Artistic Time in the Architecture of Medieval Serbia: 12th Century," 155 and n.38. This coincided with a moment when the Serbian Church was declaring its independence, and Stefan Nemanja's son, Rastko (St. Sava), became (with consent from the Byzantine Emperor and the patriarch), the First Archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church.

17 Stevović, "Historical and Artistic Time in the Architecture of Medieval Serbia: 12th Century," 155.

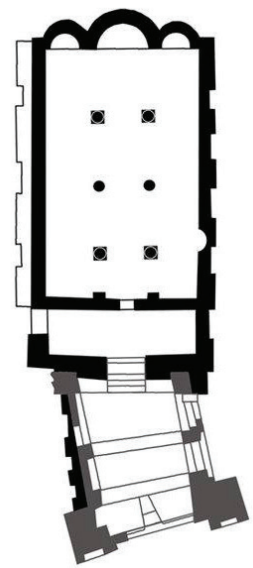

Fig. 5: Church of the Forty Martyrs, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, founded 1230
Fig. 6: Plan, Church of the Forty Martyrs

Second Bulgarian Empire (1186–early 15th c.),[18] as is the case with the Church of the Forty Martyrs from Veliko Tarnovo, built by Tsar Ivan Assen II (*reg.* 1218–1241) to serve as his royal mausoleum and mark his victory at the Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230 over Theodore of Epiros, ruler of Thessaloniki (Figs. 5-6).[19] The katholikon of the Forty Martyrs, and the fortified monastic complex that surrounded it, became one of the most important and emblematic monasteries in Tarnovo – the capital city of the Second Bulgarian Empire, settled along the steep banks of the Yantra River. The city served as a cultural and political center, and also as the seat of the Patriarchate (established in 1235). Like other monuments from Tarnovo, the Church of the Forty Martyrs – "the Bulgarian national shrine *par excellence*"[20] – "displays at once idiosyncrasies of local style, as well as affinities with developments in other regional centers."[21]

The initial church of Tsar Assen II took the form of a three-aisled basilica, measuring 11 by 16 meters, with the nave and each of the aisles terminating at the east end in semicircular apses.[22] An iconostasis set between the two rectangular and eastern-most interior piers of the church separated the naos from the altar area. In the decades following completion, the church was expanded toward the west by an oblong narthex, measuring 3.5 meters in width, that contained the tomb of Tsar Assen II. During the fourteenth century, the church was further expanded

18 I am particularly interested in churches built under Bulgarian auspices, and so generally after 1186, as opposed to those built under direct Byzantine patronage that occurred soon after the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire in 1014. See Nickel, *Medieval Architecture in Eastern Europe*, 44-64.

19 Ćurčić, "Function and Form," 58-59; idem, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 478. Archaeological investigations were carried out at this site in the 1970s. See also Konstantin Totev, "'The Forty Holy Martyrs' Tsar's Church and the Monastery the Great Lavra in the Capital Tunovo: The results from the Latest Archaeological Excavation Works," *Arheologija* 42, 1/2 (2001): 30-44.

20 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 478.

21 Slobodan Ćurčić, "Function and Form: Church Architecture in Bulgaria, 4th–19th Centuries," in *Treasures of Christian Art in Bulgaria*, edited by Valentino Pace (Sophia: Borina, 2001), 59.

22 The lateral aisles were used primarily for burials, as customary with such spaces in Byzantium.

toward the west, as well as laterally, to the north and south. It received a large exonarthex (the north side of which marked the new entrance to the church), as well as arcaded lateral porticoes along the north and south facades, shorter in height than the rest of the church. The visually impressive west façade of the exonarthex—displaying overlapping rounded arched niches and possibly even a bell tower rising over the central axis, "as a crowning section of a large pediment"[23]—was designed so as to amplify visually the basilica-type structure of the church.[24] The west façade was also incorporated into the fortification wall of the monastery; thus, it was set at a slight angle to the orientation of the rest of the church building.

The basilica form of the Church of the Forty Martyrs is coupled with Byzantine building techniques. Indeed, alternating bands of multiple courses of brick and stone make up the façade and exonarthex of the katholikon—a construction technique widely employed in Bulgarian church architecture of the fourteenth century and derived from Constantinopolitan building traditions.[25] The stylistic diversity of the church of the Forty Martyrs may have emerged as a desire on the part of its original founder and then later patrons to mark in a visually striking manner a monastic church that carried great religious prestige for its founder, later patrons, and the Bulgarian state. As Ćurčić writes:

> Complex arrangements in which conventional church cores were enveloped by narthexes, subsidiary chapels, belfries, and other features, often resulting in picturesque, asymmetrical agglomerations, appear in Bulgaria only on an exceptional basis. The Church of the Forty Martyrs in Tarnovo in its final medieval form, for example, can be invoked as one of these exceptions.[26]

Exceptions of this nature are telling, however, and reveal ways in which Bulgaria was redefining itself at this moment. The visual eclecticism evident in the Church of the Forty Martyrs emerged out of the patron's aspirations, yet also served as a reflection of a more politically dynamic stance of Bulgaria between the cultural spheres of the East and the West in the initial decades of the thirteenth century—at a moment when the Second Bulgarian Empire was emerging as a dominant power in the Balkans.

Whereas in Serbian and Bulgarian monastic churches from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries the Western architectural and stylistic forms appear mainly on and around the western facades of the buildings and are evident in the general exterior shapes of the monuments, the monastic churches constructed north of the Danube River display western architectural and decorative forms alongside Byzantine and local developments of a distinct visual valence. The katholika built from the fourteenth and through the sixteenth centuries in the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia likewise reveal affinities with both western and Byzantine church building traditions but differ in their eclectic conception from the earlier Serbian and Bulgarian architectural examples. The more direct contacts that extended between Wallachia and Moldavia and neighboring regions such as Transylvania, Hungary, and Poland, may explain the diverse architectural idioms of ecclesiastical and secular monuments from these regions that incorporate western architectural forms alongside Byzantine and local building traditions with various results. The examples that follow come from the Moldavian cultural sphere of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. They present the most intriguing counterexamples to the Serbian and Bulgarian monuments discussed above.

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23 Ćurčić, "Function and Form," 59. Georges Bošković has looked at the links between Bulgaria and Serbia with regard to the use of belfries, and has proposed western sources for their development. Georges Bošković, "Note sur les analogies entre l'architecture serbe et l'architecture bulgare au Moyen-Age. Le probléme du clocher au-dessus du narthex dans l'architecture des Balkans," *Izvestiia na Bulgarskiia arkheologicheski institut* 10 (1936), 57-74; Slobodan Ćurčić, "Architecture in the Byzantine Sphere of Influence around the Middle of the Fourteenth Century," in *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost sredinom XIV veka*, edited by Vokislav J. Durić (Belgrade: Jedinstvo, 1989), 64, n. 67.

24 For a hypothetical reconstruction of the exonarthex, see Stefan Bojadžiev, "L'église des Quarante Martyrs à Tarnovo," *Études balkaniques* VII/3 (1971): 143-158.

25 Ćurčić, "Architecture in the Byzantine Sphere of Influence around the Middle of the Fourteenth Century," 65.

26 Ćurčić, "Function and Form," 60.

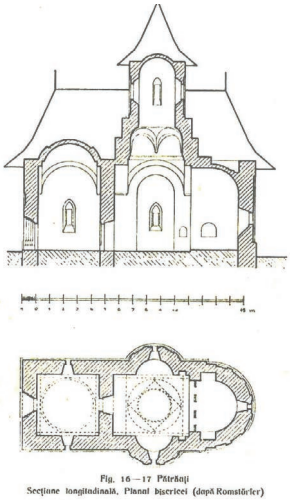


Fig. 7: Church of the Holy Cross, Pătrăuți Monastery, Moldavia, founded 1487
Fig. 8: Elevation and plan, Church of the Holy Cross, Pătrăuți Monastery

The Visual Eclecticism of the Moldavian Corpus

During the second half of the fifteenth century, Moldavia's throne was occupied by one of its most notable rulers: Prince Stephen III "the Great" (*reg.* 1457–1504), whose leadership transformed the principality into a bastion and protector of the Christian faith. Under Stephen's strong and determined leadership, and as a result of his long and prosperous rule during which Moldavia experienced extended periods of internal economic, political, and religious stability, the art and architecture of the region flourished. This was to prove particularly true in the ecclesiastical sphere. In fact, it was the architecture and the spatial solutions of the numerous monastic churches built under Stephen's patronage that took on a distinctive visual and symbolic vocabulary that demonstrated Moldavia's contacts with its neighbors, while presenting, in part, a response to the political and military crisis that was overtaking the Balkan Peninsula and eastern Europe at this moment as the Ottoman Empire was steadily advancing westward.[27]

Between 1457 and 1487 Stephen engaged in an extensive project to fortify heavily Moldavia at key sites, initially in anticipation of, and then in response to, the Ottoman campaigns in the region. After three decades of extensive civic and military building campaigns, Stephen turned his attention toward the building of ecclesiastical sites throughout his principality, taking the form of monasteries, churches, and chapels. In 1487, between June 8 and 13, construction began on two significant edifices—the Church of St. Procopius in Bădeuți (Milișăuți) and the Church of the Holy Cross at Pătrăuți Monastery (Figs. 7-8). Quite modest in size—in fact the smallest of all of Stephen's churches—the churches at Bădeuți (Milișăuți) and Pătrăuți consist of a square pronaos and a triconch naos above which rises a tall, slender tower. Although the church at Bădeuți (Milișăuți) unfortunately no longer survives—having been destroyed by the Austrian army in 1917 during WWI—these two churches serve as a benchmark in the history of Moldavian monastic church architecture as they mark the beginning of an expansive period of church building in Moldavia under princely patronage.

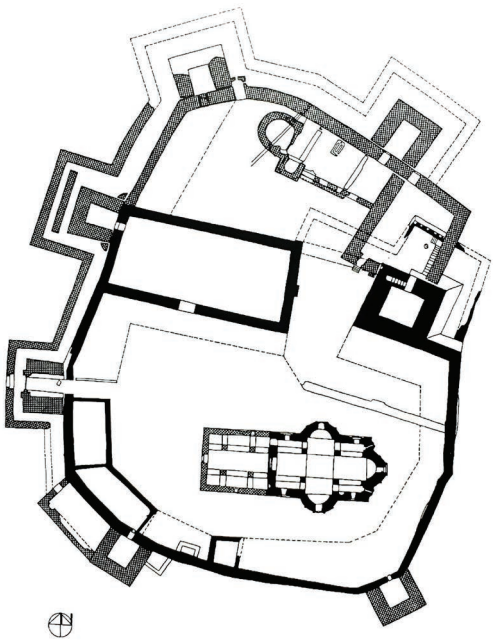
27 On the topic of the visual eclecticism of Moldavian ecclesiastical architecture from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Nickel, *Medieval Architecture in Eastern Europe*, esp. 83-120; and, most recently, Dragoș Năstăsoiu, *Gothic Art in Romania* (Bucharest: NOI Media Print, 2011), 30-49; Alice Isabella Sullivan, "Western-Byzantine 'Hybridity' in the Ecclesiastical Architecture of Northern Moldavia," *Romanian Medievalia: Thraco-Dacian and Byzantine Romanity of Eastern Europe and Asia Minor*. The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, New York 12/13 (2015), 29-49.

Fig. 9: Moldoviţa Monastery, Moldavia, aerial view

Judging from the extant dedicatory inscriptions written in Church Slavonic, the Moldavian churches from the second half of the fifteenth century onward were generally built between the months of April and September, and consecrated shortly thereafter. This ensured the completion of at least the church proper before the start of the harsh winter months, common to the mountainous regions of the Carpathians, such as Moldavia. Once the katholikon was complete, the surrounding buildings were erected, including the cells of the monks, the living quarters of the abbot or abbess, the princely house, the treasury, and the refectory with other auxiliary rooms and cellars below. Since the Moldavian monastic communities carried out a semi-eremitic life that emphasized silence, prayer, temperance, and humility, the church and the refectory, the second largest building in the monasteries, served as the main common meeting places for the monks and nuns and were thus the largest buildings in the monastic complex.

In their layout, organization, and ritual customs, the Moldavian monasteries model Greek-Orthodox and Slavic monastic communities. Like the medieval monasteries founded by Serbian rulers from the late-twelfth to the mid-fifteenth centuries,[28] the Moldavian monasteries served as centers of cultural activity and artistic production, princely mausoleums, and also participated in political and economic matters related to the governing body. The monasteries, therefore, met the spiritual needs of the monks, the laity, as well as those of the state. In this regard, the Serbian and the Moldavian examples, although separated by two centuries, present "a deliberate departure from the Byzantine experience, where the political views of the monks and those of the state, or

28 The Serbian monastic churches of the so-called "Morava School" (c.1375–c.1450) that took shape in a period of Ottoman conquest in the Balkans are characterized by tall medium-sized buildings with elaborate exterior decorations. These katholika present a typological and stylistic unity in individual monuments and across the corpus that "reflected the direct impact of Mount Athos on architectural developments in Serbia." See Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 671-680, n. 244 (for additional studies on the topic). Moreover, the dynastic cult was strong in Serbia throughout the late medieval period in large part due to the initiatives of the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (*reg.* 1166–1196) who was the founder (*ktetor*) and patron of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 488: "…Hilandar Monastery came into being through the endeavors of Stefan Nemanja and his youngest son, Rastko. Having abdicated from his position as grand župan of Serbia in 1196, Nemanja retired to the Holy Mountain to become a monk. Nemanja, with the help of Rastko, then already a monk by the name of Sava, devoted the energies of the last three years of his life to the creation of a Serbian monastery with the blessings of the Byzantine Emperor, Alexios III. Following his death in 1199, Nemanja was first buried in the katholikon of Hilandar, from where Sava solemnly transferred his remains to Studenica in 1206 or 1207. Thus, Studenica acquired another important dimension of its spiritual superiority—a palpable link with Athos, and thereby with the entire Eastern Orthodox ecclesiastical world."



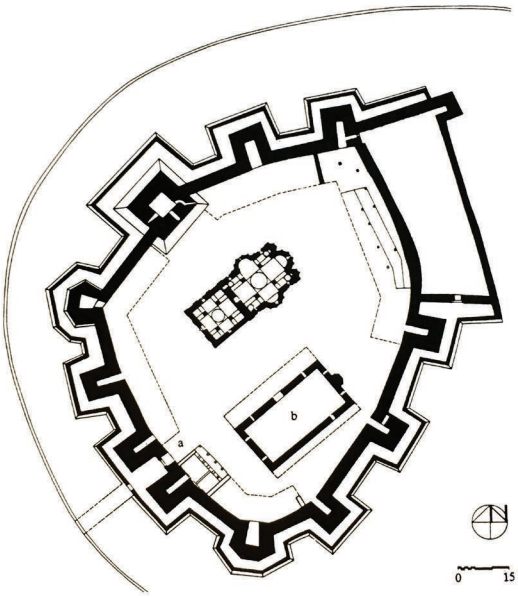


Fig. 10: Studenica Monastery, Serbia, aerial view
Fig. 11: Plan, Ravanica Monastery, Serbia, founded c.1375
Fig. 12: Plan, Manasija (Resava) Monastery, Serbia, founded 1406-1418

for that matter of the official Church, were not always on the same track," as Ćurčić has explained with regard to the Serbian monastic movement of the twelfth century.[29]

The Moldavian monastic sites reveal strongest affinities with the Byzantine monasteries from Mount Athos—the peninsula in Greece celebrated as the oldest still extant eastern Orthodox monastic community. Twenty monasteries, once under the direct jurisdiction of the Patriarch in Constantinople, make up the Orthodox community on the Holy Mount. In both the Athonite monasteries and those from Moldavia, the church is the central feature of the community with the ancillary buildings arranged in a square or rectangular format around it (Fig. 9). This rectilinear arrangement of the monastic complex follows that of early Byzantine-Orthodox monasteries as exemplified by the monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai (founded between 548 and 565 by Emperor Justinian following the death of his wife Empress Theodora). Similar monastic establishments with rectilinear arrangements survive on Mount Athos and date to the late-tenth century. An apt comparison could be drawn between the Great Lavra on Mount Athos and Moldoviţa Monastery in Moldavia.[30]

This particular monastic organization, however, differs from the circular or polygonal layout of the Orthodox monasteries of the Balkan region, as is the case, for example, at Studenica Monastery in Serbia, begun in 1186 (or possibly as early as 1183) and completed in 1196 by the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (*reg.* 1166–1196) (Fig. 10).[31] Serbian monastic complexes, in fact, from the end of the twelfth century onward, began displaying polygonal organizations with the katholikon at the center of the compound, as is the case at the monasteries of Ravanica, founded c.1375 (Fig. 11),[32] and Manasija (Resava), founded between 1406 and 1418 (Fig. 12).[33] This observation suggests that there existed much more direct points of contact between the Moldavian monastic communities and those of the Byzantine world, without regions of the Balkan Peninsula—such as Serbia and Bulgaria, for example—serving repeatedly as points of mediation of artistic and architectural forms between these two distant cultural centers. In fact, the monastic communities on Mount Athos provided this direct point of contact for Moldavia and other regions of the Balkans, such as Serbia and Bulgaria.[34] In particular, traveling monks facilitated the direct transfer of ideas and cultural goods between these distant Orthodox monastic communities.

Individual churches built in Moldavia during the second half of the fifteenth century, under Stephen's patronage, introduced new architectural forms that were further developed, and even consolidated in individual monuments, in the churches commissioned by his illegitimate son, Peter Rareş (*reg.* 1527–1538; 1541–1546).[35] These churches in their layout, modes of

29 Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 652.

30 Prior to attaining its current large size, the Great Lavra was smaller and its original enclosure may have been rectilinear, with four sides and fortified projections on at least two of its corners. Ploutarchos L. Theocharides, "Recent Research into Athonite Monastic Architecture, Tenth-Sixteenth Centuries," in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism,* edited by Anthony Bryer and Mary Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1996), 211, for a diagram of the general plan of the Great Lavra, see 207.

31 On the relation between the Serbian and Byzantine monastic traditions, see Svetlana S. Popović, *Krst u krugu: arhitektura manastira u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* (Belgrade: Prosveta), 1994, 60-65, 475-486 (for an English summary). Cited in Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 487, ns. 282 and 283.

32 The architecture of Ravanica Monastery and its katholikon are discussed in Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 632-633, 674, 678-680, 788.

33 For a discussion of the foundation and architecture of Manasija (Resava) Monastery, see Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 633-635, 680-681. For a hypothetical reconstruction of Manasija Monastery, see Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 634, fig. 739.

34 On Moldavia's direct contacts with the monastic communities on Mount Athos, see Petre Ş. Năsturel, *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains: Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIVe siècle à 1654* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1986). For the architectural influence of Athos in regions of the Balkans such as Serbia and Bulgaria, see Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 410, 555-556, 609, 653, 671-674, 682, 787-794.

35 Another aspect that distinguished Peter's projects from those of this father were the hundreds of brightly colored exterior murals completed at key sites throughout Moldavia mainly during his first reign (1527–1538). The mural cycles set in multiple registers on the exterior of these churches—today in various stages of preservation—are a distinguishing feature of Peter's ecclesiastical commissions.

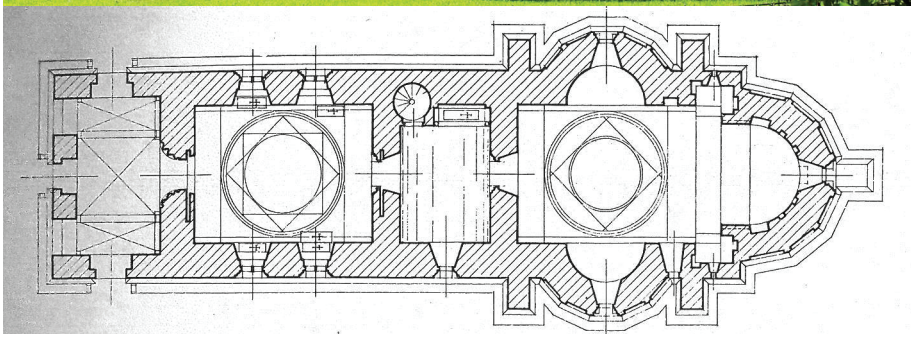


Fig. 13: Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery, founded 1532, view from south-east
Fig. 14: Plan, Church of the Annunciation, Moldoviţa Monastery

construction, spatial solutions, and particular architectural and iconographic features, integrate, and also reinterpret, Byzantine, Slavic, and western Gothic church building traditions alongside local developments. A case in point is the Church of the Annunciation at Moldoviţa Monastery, founded in 1532 (Figs. 13-14). The ground plan of this katholikon and others like it, transforms an earlier Byzantine, and in particular Athonite, monastic layout. Referred to as an *elongated triconch plan*, the Moldavian church layout as it evolved by the first decades of the sixteenth century, and as exemplified by that found at Moldoviţa, consists of an either opened or closed barrel vaulted exonarthex at the west end. The exonarthex opens through a small doorway into a domed (or sometimes double-domed) rectangular pronaos with four large windows, two along each of the north and south walls. This space, in turn, leads through another small entryway into the so-called burial chamber (*gropniţă*), also covered by a barrel vault. This room, with a smaller window on the south wall, gives access through another small entrance to the naos of the church where the liturgical ceremonies are celebrated. The naos comprises a central rectangular space with two lateral semicircular apses, extending to the north and south. Each apse is covered by a semicircular dome and each has one central window opening of the same dimensions as the window(s) found in the

burial chamber. The side apses are often semicircular on the interior and pentagonal on the exterior. Above the central space of the naos rises a slender tower, cylindrical on the inside and multi-sided (usually octagonal) on the outside, with four rectangular windows oriented in the cardinal directions. The circular tower sits on two or three eight-pointed star bases supported, in turn, by a series of so-called 'oblique arches' that comprise of overlapping arches and pendentives set at an angle to the vertical that diminish the span of the vault under the dome. Towards the east end of the church extends the altar area, or chancel, semicircular on the interior and eight-sided on the exterior, which is separated from the naos by a series of thick arches and a large carved and gilded iconostasis with painted icons in multiple registers. Immediately beyond the iconostasis, to either side of the apse, two smaller spaces each illuminated by a small window are found to the north and south: the Proskomedia to the north where the holy vessels are stored and the offerings are prepared before being brought to the altar, and the diakonikon to the south where the liturgical vestments are kept. The interior of the church comprises thus a longitudinal progression of spaces of different dimensions and serving diverse functions that grow progressively darker as one approaches the altar area. While devoid of much natural light, these elaborately and extensively painted religious spaces would have been animated during liturgical ceremonies by the flickering light of candles, the burning incense, and the singing from the choirs of monks and nuns assembled there.

From the exterior, however, the particular interior division of the church into multiple rooms is not easily discernible. The shape of the roof, on the one hand, indicates this internal division with sections draping each segment of the building separately, contributing to the particular silhouette of the monument. The exterior buttresses also demarcate the interior division of the church. Moreover, a row of shallow arched niches sunken into the wall located in the upper sections of the façade wrap around the whole of the church, while taller arched niches demarcate the naos and altar area of the church, defining the three polygonal apses. The tower also features a row of smaller niches around its upper section, while taller sunken arcades are found below. These motifs on the tower—the miniature buttresses and the niches—replicate on a smaller scale their larger counterparts located around the main body of the church.

Whereas some of the features of the Moldavian monastic churches present unmistakable links to Byzantine church building traditions, others follow Gothic models predominant in church architecture from western Europe.[36] For one thing, the mode of construction of the churches, using mainly quarried stone, emulates the building techniques found in western Gothic civic and religious buildings.[37] The large three-tier buttresses, unknown in churches of the Slavic-Byzantine type, have precedents in Gothic buildings as well, as is the case, for example, at the Church of Saint Michael from Sopron, Hungary, founded in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The subdivisions of the roof, evident particularly in the Moldavian royal monastic commissions of the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries also present a solution derived from Gothic architecture.[38] Saxon churches from Transylvania, such as the Church of the Virgin Mary from Biertan, for example, have partitioned roofs with individual sections covering the chancel and the nave separately. The large lancet windows of the exonarthex and the pronaos in the Moldavian monastic churches of the early sixteenth century in particular, with trefoil cups surmounting

36 On the topic, see Gheorghe Balș, "Influence de l'art gothique sur l'architecture roumaine," *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie Roumaine* 15 (1929): 9-13; Hermann Fabini, "Le chiese-castello della Transilvania ed i monasteri fortificati Ortodossi della Moldavia in Romania," *Castellum; revista dell'Istituto italiano dei castelli* 46 (2004): 7-22.

37 Moldavia's neighbor to the west, the region of Transylvania, had churches built in a similar fashion. Saxon colonies that settled throughout Transylvania at this time, in which churches were built following Gothic models, existed also in Moldavia, in the cities Rădăuţi, Baia, Chilia, and Siret, for example. Vasile Drăguţ, "Introducere. I. Arhitectura religioasă, pictură murală," in *Monumente istorice bisericești din Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* (Iaşi: Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Sucevei, 1974), 10. The Catholic presence, in the context of which monuments of a Gothic type first appeared, was strongly felt in Moldavia during the second half of the fourteenth century. In 1370, for instance, a Catholic episcopate was founded in the city of Siret. See Carol Auner, "Episcopia de Siret (1371-1388)," *Revista catolică* (1913): 226-245.

38 On this topic, see, most recently, Paraschiva-Victoria Batariuc, "Acoperişul bisericilor din Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI," *Ars Transilvaniae* 14-15 (2004-2005): 13-22.

quatrefoil oculi tracery in the upper sections, are also of a Gothic type, as are the large interior *Schulterbogenportale* leading from one space to the next. These distinctive window and door framings and the varied window tracery are characteristic of fourteenth and fifteenth century Gothic buildings in central and western Europe.[39]

The political and military situation in Moldavia in the decades following the events of 1453 was problematic and precarious, to say the least, as the region sought to defend itself from the Ottoman attacks and oppose their advances into Europe.[40] Successes on the battlefront and alliances with the Christian powers of western Europe (although at times only in theory), helped the Moldavians under Stephen's rule, and then later under the direction of his illegitimate son, Peter Rareş (*reg.* 1527–1538; 1541–1546), to preserve the hope that, perhaps, one day Constantinople itself could be liberated from Ottoman control. In these struggles, Moldavia emerged as a significant geo-political and economic power that sought to align itself with its western, Christian neighbors.[41] The principality served, in fact, as the eastern-most Christian frontier for Europe. Although the agents of exchange and translation remain elusive, perhaps the Gothic features predominant in the Moldavian monastic churches built beginning with the second half of the fifteenth century, under Stephen's patronage, could take on a symbolic valence and be explained in this larger, politically- and militarily-infused context.

Architectural Plurality

The interior spaces of medieval Orthodox katholika had to be properly designed for Orthodox monastic use, creating the religiously appropriate environment for liturgical celebrations. Therefore, the architectural forms and spatial solutions with roots in various church building traditions and adapted in the monastic churches built in regions of the Carpathian Mountains and the Balkan Peninsula—such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Moldavia, for example—did not take away from the prescribed form and function of the religious buildings. Rather, the Romanesque and Gothic forms supplemented visually the predominantly Byzantine structure and form of the churches. These western features may have been adapted for practical and/or symbolic reasons, and also in response to certain desires on the part of the patron and his counsel, and the community at large.

The eclectic visual nature of the monastic churches discussed in this article does not present a synthesis of various artistic and architectural elements drawn from distinct church building traditions. This is not a synthesis *per se*. These churches, rather, readapt and translate select elements in order to fulfill certain needs. Distinct, indeed, from the cultures of western Europe

39 Johann Josef Böker, *Architektur der Gotik: Bestandskatalog der Weltgrößten Sammlung an gotischen Baurissen (Legat Franz Jäger) im Kupferstichkabinett der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* (Vienna: Verlag Anton Pustet, 2005). Numerous Gothic drawings preserved in the Graphic Collection of the Akademie der Bildenden Kunste in Vienna provide apt comparisons. A few relevant examples include: the elevation drawing of a portal frame with uninterrupted profiles and a tympanum, southern German, 1446 (16.996); the drawings of tracery windows, c.1465, attributed to Laurenz Spenning (17.004 and 17.004v); the drawing of a four-part tracery with trilobes and quadrilobes connected, as executed (with slight variations) at Spišský Štvrtok, attributed to Laurenz Spenning, c.1456 (17.016 325); the elevation drawing of the porch of the former chapel of Saint Maria Magdalene, situated south-west of Saint Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, c.1460 by Laurenz Spenning (17.026).

40 For a recent historical study in English, see Jonathan Eagles, *Stephen the Great and Balkan Nationalism: Moldova and Eastern European History* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

41 On Moldavia's relations with regions of western Europe during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Şerban Papacostea, "Relaţiile internaţionale ale Moldovei în vremea lui Ştefan cel Mare," *Revista de istorie* 35 (1982): 607-638; Corina Nicolescu, "Arta epocii lui Ştefan cel Mare: Relaţii cu lumea occidentală," *Studii şi Materiale de Istorie Medie* 8 (1975): 63-99; Dumitru Ciurea, "Relaţiile externe ale Moldovei în secolul al XVI-lea. Consideraţii de ansamblu," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie şi Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol"* (1973): 1-47; Radu Constantinescu, *Moldova şi Transilvania în vremea lui Petru Rareş: relaţii politice şi militare (1527-1546)* (Bucharest: Direcţia Generală a Arhivelor Statului din Republica Socialistă România, 1978); Liviu Pilat, *Între Roma și Bizanț: Societate și putere în Moldova (secolele XIV-XVI)* (Iași: Editura Universităţii "Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 2008).

and those of the Byzantine world, in which the artistic production evolved, one might argue, in a more homogeneous fashion and in relation to more direct trends and principles, the Slavic lands south of the Danube River (Serbia and Bulgaria in particular), and the Romanian lands around the Carpathian Mountains (especially Wallachia and Moldavia), continually found themselves throughout the medieval period "at the junction, at the point of collision of very different civilizations."[42] Therefore, the artistic and architectural production of these regions is unprecedented in its *modes* of synthesis and translation of different elements, as well as in the affinities it shares with quite distant and distinct cultures. This visual eclecticism, then, is not a direct synthesis nor a form of hybridity, since a hybrid, in the most straightforward definition, implies two purities that are mingled, and this is not the case with these examples. In a more nuanced sense, on the other hand, as Thomas Da Costa Kaufmann explains, a hybrid is "the sign of an attempt to reconcile forms of cultural exchange, with attendant aspects of both assimilation and resistance."[43] In this regard, the phenomenon of cultural contact and translation is a give and take, with elements and meanings accepted, rejected, and transformed dependent upon the new context(s) and the motivations of the patrons, the artists, and the larger communities. The architectural plurality evident in medieval monuments from eastern Europe should be approached from a scholarly standpoint precisely with these considerations in mind.

Although it is important to address the aspects of medieval monastic church architecture from the regions discussed here and their affinities with earlier Byzantine, Slavic, and Gothic traditions, among others, the element of the local should not be forgotten. Especially with regard to the Moldavian material—but also true of the Serbian and Bulgarian corpus—synthesis and translations between old and new, domestic and foreign, aristocratic and popular traditions all come into play in the development of what we may refer to as a regional type of monastic architecture that took form and prevailed following critical historical moments: in Serbia this was marked by the emergence of the powerful and politically driven Nemanjić Dynasty (1166-1371), and later Lazarević Dynasty (1371-1427); in Bulgaria this period was marked by the formation of the Second Bulgarian Empire that reinvigorated the region from various standpoints; and in Moldavia the decades (and even century) that followed the fall of Constantinople yielded new architectural forms that presented a particular kind of response to the crisis of 1453 and to the emergence of the Ottoman Empire as a dominant force in south-eastern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, and the western Black Sea regions.

Although the monastic churches discussed in this article display stylistic diversity and also unity across the corpus from a given geographical and temporal standpoint, the definition of "the corpus" is regionally grounded and historically contingent, and thus eludes classification in a type of "school." Scholars have sought to identify and classify the characteristics of a "Moldavian School"[44] of religious architecture, as well as of a "Morava School"[45] in Serbia, to name but two examples, but these coined concepts are abstract and problematic, and also derived from a narrow methodological standpoint.[46]

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42 Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile lui Ştefan cel Mare* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1926), 11: "...țările noastre, spre deosebire de cele apusene unde artele au evoluat într-un mediu mai omogen și în relație cu regiuni de tendință și principii apropriate de ale lor, țările noastre se găsesc la confluența, la punctul de ciocnire al unor civilizații foarte diferite." / "...our regions [Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia], unlike western European regions where the arts developed in a more homogeneous fashion and vis-a-vis regions with similar [artistic] principles and tendencies, our [Romanian] territories are at the junction, at the point of collision of very different civilization."

43 Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 114.

44 Paul Henry, *Les églises de la Moldavie du nord des origines à la fin du XVIe siècle. Architecture et peinture* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1930), esp. Chapter 2 "Pătrăuţi et les origines de L'école architecturale Moldave du XVe siècle".

45 Gabriel Millet, *L'ancien art serbe: les églises* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1919), esp. Chapter 3 "L'école de Morava."

46 For a critical discussion of this issue, with regard to Serbian architecture, see Stevović, "Historical and Artistic Time in the Architecture of Medieval Serbia: 12th Century," 146-147.

Therefore, I would propose that examining the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Moldavian corpus of ecclesiastical monuments as the products of their particular historical moments and in light of cultural interactions between the respective regions and other cultures with which they established contacts—be it political, economic, military, or cultural—rather than as if existing in isolation, could yield new and exciting insights. This cultural plurality, primarily facilitated through objects and people traveling from disparate places, resembles the eclecticism evident in the artistic production of other critical centers such as Moscow, Venice, Cyprus, and Crete, as well as more under-studied regions such as Georgia and Armenia—prominent centers that, too, forged certain connections with the Byzantine world and with the cultures of western Europe at various moments throughout their histories. The approaches of scholars such as Michele Bacci,[47] Holger Klein,[48] Thomas Dale,[49] and Maria Georgopoulou,[50] among others, who have critically considered the compound visual character of Venetian and Cretan art, as well as the art and architecture of Cyprus after the Fourth Crusade in particular, in an effort to encourage a rethinking of notions of style, iconography, eclecticism, and function, serve as models for future investigations of the medieval monastic churches from East European regions. These ecclesiastical monuments display visual and stylistic diversity with respect to sources that requires a rigorous scholarly framework for adequate future study.

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47 Michelle Bacci, "Some Thoughts on Greco-Venetian Artistic Interactions in the Fourteenth and Early-Fifteenth Centuries," in *Wonderful Things: Byzantium through Its Art*. Edited by Antony Eastmond and Liz James. Farnham UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013, 203–227; idem, "Some Remarks on the Appropriation, Use, and Survival of Gothic Forms on Cyprus," in Byzantine Images and Their Afterlives. Essays in Honour of Annemarie Weyl Carr, edited by Lynn Jones (Farnham UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 145–168; idem, "Veneto-Byzantine "Hybrids": Towards a Reassessment," Studies in Iconography 35 (2014): 73–106.

48 Holger A.Klein, "Zwischen maniera greca und maniera italiana. Das Regensburger Gnadenbild und seine künstlerischen Vorbilder," in *Die Alte Kapelle in Regensburg, Arbeitshefte des Landesamtes für Denkmalpflege 114* (Munich: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 2001), 93–110; idem, "Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West," Dumbarton Oaks Papers 58 (2004): 283–314; idem, "Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, ca. 1200–1400," in San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice, edited by Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), 193–225.

49 Thomas E.A. Dale, "Cultural Hybridity in Medieval Venice: Reinventing the East at San Marco after the Fourth Crusade," in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, edited by Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 2010), 151-192

50 See, for example, Maria Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage," *The Art Bulletin* 77, 3 (1995): 479-496.

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