

# A Case of Power and Subversion? The Fresco of St. Anna Nursing the Child Mary from the Monastery of Zaum<sup>1</sup>

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If nursing, in addition to being a biological act, is invested with a symbolic spiritual value, then to have it depicted in an icon or in a fresco is not as surprising as it would appear at the first sight. Many specialists – among them Mary B. CUNNINGHAM,<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth S. BOLMAN<sup>3</sup>, and Zuzana SKALOVA<sup>4</sup> – have interpreted the nourishment *Theotokos* offered to Jesus as being similar in nature to that which He himself offers to humankind, as stated in John 6:35: ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.’ However, there has been a dispute in the literature as to whether Mary *Galaktotrophousa* (*Mlekopitateľnitsa* in the Slavonic version) image was as central to Byzantine iconography as were other types of icons, for example, those of Christ *Pantokrator*, the Virgin *Hodigitria*, and of various saints. H. HALLENSLEBEN<sup>5</sup> and V. N. LAZAREV<sup>6</sup> believe that it was not. In this context, the latter author, referring to the moment when the nursing scene was created,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a reworking of the paper “Seeing beyond the canons? The fresco of St. Anna nursing the infant Mary from the Monastery of St. Zaum, Ohrid, 1361” presented at the 43rd Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, ‘Byzantium Behind the Scenes: Power and Subversion’, 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> March 2010, Birmingham.

<sup>2</sup> M. B. CUNNINGHAM, *Divine Banquet*, in: L. Brubaker – K. Linardou (eds.), *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19). Food and Wine in Byzantium: Papers of the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Aldershot 2007.

<sup>3</sup> E. S. BOLMAN, *The Coptic Galaktotrophousa Revisited*, in: *Abstracts of Papers: Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies in Leiden, 27 August-2 September 2000* (Leiden, 2000). See also her Fellowship Report on-line, *Dumbarton Oaks*, 2004/2005. BOLMAN is currently writing a book entitled *The Milk of Salvation? Gender, Audience and the Nursing Virgin Mary in the Eastern Mediterranean*. This is based on her doctoral dissertation *The Coptic ‘Galaktotrophousa’ as the Medicine of Immortality*, the University of Bryn Mawr 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Z. SKALOVA, *The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa in the Coptic Monastery of St Anthony the Great at the Red Sea, Egypt: A preliminary note*, in: K. Ciggaar – H. Teule (eds.), *East and West in the Crusader States: Context – Contacts – Confrontations: Acta of the Congress Held at Hernen Castle in September 2000* (= *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 125), Leuven – Dudley, M.A. 2003.

<sup>5</sup> H. HALLENSLEBEN, *Lexikon der christl. Ikonographie*, III, 1971, col. 173.

<sup>6</sup> V. N. LAZAREV, *Studies in the iconography of the Virgin*, *Art Bulletin* 20 (1938) 25-65.

comments: “Such radical reworking of the *Virgo lactans* type in Coptic art did not satisfy the strict and intolerant Byzantines, remarkable for their extreme conservatism. This is especially true of the Constantinople court, where a puristic taste flourished and every attempt to enrich the traditional repertory was looked at askance...”<sup>7</sup> Anthony CUTLER counters by affirming that *Maria lactans* was “not only a beloved image from no later than the ninth century but also one cultivated in the heart of the capital.”<sup>8</sup> The examples I will present throughout this article provide evidence towards such a point of view; some of them date from the very beginning of Byzantine art. CUTLER settled the controversy between Oskar WULFF<sup>9</sup> and Auguste HEISENBERG<sup>10</sup> on the issue of the seventh or eighth century *Galaktotrophousa* fresco in the ‘Pantokratos Cave’ at Latmos<sup>11</sup> by convincingly disproving the theory that this image was not a Byzantine one;<sup>12</sup> similar paintings existed before Latmos.

But how did it come about that female saints (in addition to the *Theotokos*) were also portrayed feeding their children, as St. Anna is in the frescoes from the Monastery of Holy Mary Zahumska, Macedonia (1361), fig. 1 a, b,<sup>13</sup> and St. George Church, Kurbinovo (1191), fig. 2 a, b, or St. Elisabeth is in the manuscript from Vatican below (early twelfth century), fig. 3 (it depicts scenes from the Life of St. John the Baptist<sup>14</sup>)? An answer – albeit probably partial – will be provided below, but before proceeding, a preliminary question needs to be answered. That is: In which way are depictions of female saints nursing in Byzantine iconography relevant to a power-subversion discussion?

To this latter question two answers can be given: 1) obviously, patronage is involved in the commissioning of these images, and usually the patrons are in positions of power; 2) the iconographic canon itself is the expression of some form of power.

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<sup>7</sup> V. N. LAZAREV, *Studies in the iconography of the Virgin*, 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> A. CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations*, London 2000, 168; what is now chapter 8 in his book, pp. 164-189, was published under the same name – *The Cult of Galaktotrophousa*, in: *Byzantium and Italy*, in: *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 37 (1987) 335-50.

<sup>9</sup> O. WULFF, *Der Latmos*, Berlin 1913, 196-98, fig. 122.

<sup>10</sup> A. HEISENBERG, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 23 (1914-1919) 336.

<sup>11</sup> A. CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations*, 168. See also G. MILLET, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile*, Paris 1916, 627; V. N. LAZAREV, *Studies in the iconography of the Virgin*, 26-65.

<sup>12</sup> M. B. CUNNINGHAM, *Divine Banquet*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> C. GROZDANOV, *La peinture murale d'Ohrid au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Ohrid 1980. A black and white reproduction exists in this book, fig. 75; caption on the page following the figure (no numbers on any of these pages). The colour reproduction here has been sent to me by L. Kumbarovski, an alumnus of the Byzantine Department of Belgrade University, who works now in Ohrid, Macedonia. I am deeply grateful to him for all his help.

<sup>14</sup> MS Vat.Gr.1162, fol.159r. C. STORNAJOLO, *Miniature delle Omelie di Giacomo Monaco e dell'evangelario gr. Urbinate*, Rome, pl. 67. Cutler shows that the corresponding miniature in Paris, B. N. Gr. 1208, is essentially identical; A. CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North*, 175.

It will become evident from the answer to the first question that although I will make reference to powerful patrons, the focus of this article will be more extensively on the notion of power as embodied in the canon.

Certainly the images above are illustrative examples of the fact that the *typicon* of Byzantine church art has always allowed for creativity. That in spite of the widespread opinion emphasised, among others, by Eunice DEUTERMAN MAGUIRE and Henry MAGUIRE that in Byzantium, “The very legitimacy of the holy image depended upon its adherence to tradition and its supposed accuracy in reproducing the prototype.”<sup>15</sup> In the context of this discussion a question arises: Did the painters themselves ever dare to stretch the canon to the limits, or were such situations invariably a matter of patronage? (I am using here the past tense, but I could as well use the past perfect since some of the matters discussed here are still of concern for contemporary icon and fresco painters of Byzantine inheritance.) I shall argue that both factors were important in the circumstances examined here: the creativity of the artists as well as the taste of the patrons. The latter authors point out that “the pleasure of contradicting authority was an element in the Byzantine reception of unofficial imagery.”<sup>16</sup> Was it also occasionally the case with official and liturgical art in Byzantium? It might seem that acts of subversion from within happened each time when an artistic innovation has occurred. But was this really the case? I shall attempt to prove that Byzantine icon-painters, and those in all areas of the Empire’s influence, managed to be inventive/creative while remaining within the very canon of the official religious art of icon and fresco painting. An invention – albeit in liturgical art – is not necessarily subversive; it can be made in the spirit of the canon.

Returning to the initial question referring to the presence of female saints in Byzantine iconography, one can begin an answer by saying that frescoes or icons representing them nursing, such as those in figs. 1-3, were certainly not painted as early as those representing the Mother of God in the same setting. However, these saints are the object of Hermeneias in scenes referring to the birth of their children.<sup>17</sup> This type of ‘Grammar’ has

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<sup>15</sup> H. MAGUIRE – E. DAUTERMAN MAGUIRE, *Other icons: art and power in Byzantine secular culture*, Princeton – Oxford 2007, 158.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Dionisie din Furna, Erminia picturii byzantine*, Bucharest 2000 (St. Anna on p. 138; St. Elisabeth, on p. 168). *Dionysius of Fournas manual, Ermineia tis zografikis technis*, has been translated into English and published as *The Painter’s Manual*, Redondo Beach, California 1989. A new bilingual edition (Greek and Serbian) was published recently by M. MediE (ed.), *Njrdč nečęrdnęč d’dčo÷ičoč*, vol. 3: *Ldčičjř i nečęrdnęčęč alřničiręř Ačiičnęjř čc Oodił*, Belgrade 2005. The Hieromonk Dionysius of Fournas was a painter and writer who lived between ca.1670-1746. From 1701 he lived on Mount Athos. He considered himself a disciple of Panselinos, even though he lived much later than the latter. He gathered the material for the above mentioned *Manual* during 1729-1733. See the Preface of the Romanian edition, p. 13.

been used throughout the entire history of Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography, including our times.<sup>18</sup> Probably the most famous among them is a manual by Dionysius of Fourna, a collection of comprehensive instructions for painters, including, among other information, many ‘recipes’ for mixing pigments to obtain particular colours, details regarding the way in which the holy persons are to be depicted, and also the content and positioning of any inscriptions to be added. The author gathered sources dating from the tenth to the eighteenth centuries<sup>19</sup> and put them together as a book in 1733; many editions have been published since. No evidence has been discovered about when the references to St. Anna and St. Elisabeth were first included in this volume. Moreover, even when the instructions in these manuals indicated the respective birth scenes (of the *Theotokos* and of St. John), they did not expressly state if the mothers in these scene were to be depicted in the act of nursing or not. Therefore, each icon-painter has chosen to represent them in their own way or in that ordered by their patrons. But in general, with reference to other icons (usually the ‘royal ones’), the Hermenias go into sufficient details, as figs. 4-6 demonstrate.

Certainly, even in the cases where female saints are depicted in the act of nursing, the spiritual aspect involved in doing so is retained. After all, their children became the pillars of Christianity at least in part because their mothers were the perfect channels through which the heavenly nourishment has reached them. When these women perform apparently mundane gestures they actually remind us of the permanent connection between the two worlds – the divine and the human. When our corporeal and other activities belonging to our daily life in ‘flesh and blood’ (and milk) enter the icons, that shows how the materiality of our bodies themselves – as actually that of any other thing – encroaches on the sacred.

The icons and frescoes depicting ordinary aspects of life are a reflection of their creators’ faith and courage. The icon-painters must be faithful people; the Church’s councils required them to be so.<sup>20</sup> But their

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<sup>18</sup> Nun Juliana (M. NICOLAEVNA SOCOLOVA), *Truda Iconarului*, trans. In Romanian E. Țăvga, (The original title in Russian is *Trud Ikonopisca*, Sviato-Troitskaia Serghieva Lavra 1995), Bucharest 2001, 117, 123 and CAVARNOS, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography*, vols. 1-2, transl. A. Popescu, Belmont, Mass. 1993, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> SÂNDULESCU-VERNA, in: *Dionisie din Furna, Erminia picturii byzantine*, Cuvânt de la±??murire, 7.

<sup>20</sup> One such council/synod is the Stoglav – The Hundred Chapters Council – held in Moscow, 1551. Its works establishes the rules in the life of an icon painter. See *Le Stoglav ou les Cent chapitres*, E. Duchesne trans. in French, Paris 1920. The original Russian text of *Stoglav* was edited in Moscow in 1890; it was called like that at the time because its decisions were divided into one hundred chapters. Leonid OUSPENSKY, in *Theology of the Icon*, points out that there are some errors in the French edition “due to the translator’s lack of knowledge about iconography”, E. Meyendorff transl. into English, vol. 2, Crestwood, N.Y. 1992, 291, footnote 7.

courage (and sometimes that of their patrons) intervenes when their sacredly-informed personal touch is felt within their work. The iconographic canon issued under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit allows for this.

The icon-painters – and sometimes other creators too – have considered their art as a way of expressing the interconnection between the heavenly and the human, from time to time ‘uplifting’ the mundane by including it in icons, as it is the case with the representation of nursing scenes. Perhaps the fact that there existed “an increasing stress on the maternal qualities of the *Theotokos* by the end of the period of iconoclasm, both in texts and in images”,<sup>21</sup> as noted by Ioli KALAVREZOU, is a proof of that.

A *prima facie* reading of the nursing act of St. Anna (and also of St. Elisabeth) can be done by pointing out the obvious parallels and connections with the similar theme referring to the Mother of God; the same interpretation of a biological act in the key of the sacred is valid in each of these cases. This is in direct consequence of the fact that every aspect of the reality around us can be seen as having a religious or spiritual value.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, there is a specificity in the particular scene of *Anna lactans*: in most of its representations all the ‘protagonists’ involved are women – St. Joachim only appears in a single fresco from St. George Church, Kurbinovo.

All of this is paradoxical since the first icon on the rare topic of St. Anna nursing, dated to the twelfth century, has survived in

Vatopedi Monastery, on Mount Athos (fig. 17) and other early representations of Mary *Galaktotrophousa* have also been preserved here; as it is known, the Greek holy mountain is an exclusively male environment – hence the paradox.?? Given the fact that the concept of filiation through the maternal line, even though strong in the Jewish tradition, does not seem as widespread in Christianity, the presence of nursing icons there might be a kind of compensatory development. (I doubt however that, if asked, any monk living on Athos will respond with such a sophisticated explanation; the respective state of affairs – if my conjecture is valid – has happened unconsciously.) An alternative explanation for the relatively high concentration of visual representations of nursing scenes in the churches there might simply be that, because of its remoteness from the world, the mountain provides a favourable milieu for the preservation of icons and frescoes, including those representing rare subject-matters, and so they have survived within its monasteries in higher numbers than anywhere else.

The fresco of St. Anna nursing Mary as an infant introduced at the beginning of this text, fig. 1, can be considered as one example of the concretisation of the relation between the heavenly and the human. My work focuses on the respective image in the context I have outlined so far and, more-

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<sup>21</sup> I. KALAVREZOU, *Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became “Meter Theou”*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990) 165-172 as interpreted by M. B. CUNNINGHAM, *Divine Banquet*, 237.

<sup>22</sup> I owe a great deal of the ideas expressed here to discussions with Gratiela Necju, ??u of Exeter University.

over, intends to assess how it fits into the broader discussion on power and subversion. The fresco was painted in 1361 on the walls of the Holy Mary Zahumska church, which is located by Lake Ohrid in southern Macedonia. For long time it was believed that it portrays the Mother of God nursing the child Jesus because such an image was more known in Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography. I will present here a short history of the representation of breast-feeding in icon painting, firstly showcasing the Virgin.

### **Mother of God *Galaktotrophousa***

Icons representing the Mother of God *Galaktotrophousa* or *Mlekopitateknitsa* in Eastern Christendom have become increasingly known, as for example, those from Simonopetra and Hilandar monasteries on Mount Athos, figs. 7, respectively 8; that from the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki (painted on Mount Athos by Makarios I from Galatista; BEI 542; 18<sup>th</sup> century, 100x71 cm), fig. 9, and that made on copperplate and kept in the same museum in northern Greece (BX247), fig. 10. Among the scenes depicting the *Theotokos* in fresco, those from the church of Omorphi, Aegina, fig. 11 and from PeE, fig. 12 are best preserved and studied.<sup>23</sup>

There is even a religious feast dedicated to Mother of God *Galaktotrophousa* in the Christian Orthodox calendar, which is celebrated on the 12/25 of January.

More and more publications on these and similar frescoes and icons have come out, and new ideas and interpretations of the nursing scenes have been proposed; some of this material will be presented here.

#### **1a. Literary sources referring to Mother of God *Galaktotrophousa***

CUNNINGHAM has examined the theme of *Theotokos*, who, like her son, came to symbolise a source of spiritual nourishment in Byzantine homilies and hymns. Whereas Christ himself is represented as the

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<sup>23</sup> In this image, the Mother of God is identified by the letters ἸΝ ΕΘ = Ἰβδὸς Ἐὰνύ. I am grateful to Dr. Havlíková Lubomíra for indicating to me V. J. Djurić, S. Čirković and V. Korać's book, *Pećka patriarshija* [The Serbian Patriarchate], Belgrade 1990. This source rightly designates the figure as being *Theotokos*; for a long time it was believed to depict St. Anna nursing and this misinformation circulated accordingly in the literature. O. BIHALJI-MERIN and S. MANDIA (the latter is the author of the plate captions), in *Byzantine Frescoes and Icons in Yugoslavia*, London 1960 (the original was published in Munich in 1958), mentions this fact on p. 9. He also says, on p. 38, that "we know now" that "it is the Mother of God nursing the child Jesus". The note on the plate reproducing the image states: "The Virgin and Child with an Angel, 14th century"; fig. 38 (black and white) in that book. When I checked the website of the Patriarchate of Pec not long ago (<http://www.srp-skoblago.org/Archives/Pec/>) St. Anna was mentioned as being depicted there.

food of life or bread from heaven, Mary is conceived either as *his* source of nourishment, or as the vehicle/receptacle through which the sustenance that is Christ reaches humanity, or sometimes, as the receiver of nurture herself. The foundation for any representation of Christ being fed with milk is in the Gospel (Luke 11:27). CUNNINGHAM indicates that preachers and hymnographers consistently stress the relationship of the Virgin to her Son, thereby limiting her salvific role. Nevertheless, whether as the source of nourishment or as its mediator, the Virgin Mary was increasingly viewed as an essential link in the relationship between God and humankind. An idea foreseen in the Old Testament through images such as the jar containing *manna*, the table in the tabernacle, and the oven in which the offering for Yahweh was baked, the connection between nourishment and the incarnation of Christ was adopted by eighth- and ninth-century homilists and hymnographers.<sup>24</sup> Metaphors involving food – one has only to think of Christ as bread, the true vine (John 15.1), the living water (John 4.14) and so on – are recurrent in the Gospels, especially in that of John. Z. SKALOVA draws attention to one of them in Denise KIMBER BUELL's work<sup>25</sup> which reminds the reader “that in the Near East... the nurses still call the first flow of milk *manna*, which is, in the case of Christ the child, the metaphor for the Divine Logos”.<sup>26</sup> (BUELL analyses ideas from Clement of Alexandria's *Paidagogos*<sup>27</sup>). CUNNINGHAM also indicates a rich bibliography on the topic of nursing seen as a spiritual act, from which I have included some titles below.<sup>28</sup>

A similar interpretation of the act of nursing is provided by BOLMAN. During the academic year 2004-2005 she conducted research on the topic of Mary nursing for a project at Dumbarton Oaks. According to her on-line report concerning that research, BOLMAN tried to demonstrate that there is a gap between the biological act of nursing, on the one

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<sup>24</sup> CUNNINGHAM, *Divine Banquet*, 326.

<sup>25</sup> D. KIMBER BUELL, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy*, Princeton 1999, 159ff.

<sup>26</sup> Z. SKALOVA, *The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa*, 244. See also S. P. Brock and S. Ashbrook Harvey (transl.), *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, Los Angeles 1998.

<sup>27</sup> *Clement of Alexandria, Paedagogus* 1.6, PG 8, Paris 1857-1867, 300-301.

<sup>28</sup> H. WYBREW, *The Orthodox Liturgy: the development of the Eucharistic liturgy in the Byzantine rite*, London 1989, esp. 90-101; J. MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Theology: historical trends and doctrinal themes*, New York 1979, 201-211; Bonifatius Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* V (= Patristische Texte und Studien 29): *Opera homiletica et hagiographica*, Berlin 1988, 548 (1), lines 4-7; B. E. Daley, S.J., tr., *On the Dormition of Mary: early patristic homilies*, Crestwood, NY 1998, 231, and P. BROWN, *The Body and Society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in Early Christianity*, London 1990, 221. Other interesting studies of the relationship between food and medieval spirituality include C. WALKER BYNUM, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the religious significance of food to medieval women*, Berkeley 1987, and B. A. HEINISCH, *Fast and Feast: food in medieval society*, University Park, PA 1976.

hand, and the social constructs on that topic, on the other. More on the same topic will be included in her book *The Milk of Salvation? Constructions of the Nursing Virgin Mary in Eastern Christian Art* that, according to BOLMAN's (also on-line) CV, is in progress.<sup>29</sup>

This will be a development of her doctoral dissertation in which, according to SKALOVA who read a copy from the author, BOLMAN concludes that "nursing should be understood as spiritual".<sup>30</sup>

The latter scholar also points out an aspect not treated before in the iconography of the Virgin nursing, which I touched upon above. She states that, "In a move that seems counterintuitive to us, most of the Egyptian Christian exempla were designed for the male, monastic viewer, as wall paintings and manuscript illuminations. They read it as a metaphor for the eucharist, emphasizing Christ's divinity... I have confirmed that the *Galaktotrophousa* fits within a larger pattern of events that demonstrates the fullness of Christ's human nature, and therefore represents the opposite of the Coptic construction of the same subject."<sup>31</sup>

In this context, BOLMAN's paper "The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited", should be also mentioned, particularly the explanation she gives for the presence of images depicting the Mother of God nursing in a male environment:

Drawing from Egyptian Christian texts which equate milk with flesh, blood and the eucharist, and which explain that God is the source of the Milk in the Virgin Mary's breasts, the *galaktotrophousa* reads as a metaphor for Christ's flesh and blood and for the consumption of these substances. It is the *logos*, and the Medicine of Immortality. This interpretation of the nursing image is amplified by the physical setting for these wall paintings, and the ritual practices of the Coptic baptismal eucharist.<sup>32</sup>

She refers here to the wall-paintings from the small cells in the monasteries at Bawit and Saqqara to which we shall come back succinctly later, but her explanation has a wider validity than in the case of this particular Coptic context.

There is another facet of the matter to which SKALOVA draws attention and on which I commented earlier: despite the fact that there were the women who turned to the Virgin and sometimes even to her icons for help,<sup>33</sup> her images were always con-

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<sup>29</sup> BOLMAN, *Fellowship Report on-line*.

<sup>30</sup> SKALOVA quoting BOLMAN's typescript of the book *The Milk of Salvation? – The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa*, 240, footnote 20.

<sup>31</sup> BOLMAN, *Fellowship Report on-line*, Dumbarton Oaks 2004/2005.

<sup>32</sup> BOLMAN, *The Coptic Galaktotrophousa Revisited*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Within the substantial bibliography on the miracle-working icons of the Mother of God the most known works are by R. CORMACK, *Miraculous icons in Byzantium and their powers*, *Arte Cristiana* 76/1-2 (1988) 55-60 and D. and T. TALBOT-RICE, *Icons and their Dating. A Comprehensive Study of their Chronology and Provenance*, London 1974; on p.16 the authors relate a powerful story referring to the fifth century mosaic in the Church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki. I have mentioned some examples of such icons in E. ENE D-VASILESCU, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Icons and Iconographers in Romania*, Saarbrücken 2009, 95-96.

ceptualised and painted by men, even her most intimate representations, such as the *Galaktotrophousa*.<sup>34</sup> The situation is changing today, when women also have taken up icon-painting.

SKALOVA points out the liturgical and literary sources in which the visual renderings of the nursing Mother of God are grounded. According to her, these icons “were inspired by the sixth-century Byzantine *Akathistos* hymn, which hails her in rich metaphors borrowed from the Old Testament. *Agape* for the Virgin Mary also moved Coptic composers of hymns to write the Theotokia and homilies, which in turn inspired icons... In the icons painted in the Nile Valley during the Middle Ages, the Virgin’s images are based on various literary and liturgical sources, early Christian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Greek, Latin and Syrian in origin”<sup>35</sup>; the researcher indicates that some of them have been translated into Arabic.

### **1b. Icons and wall-paintings of Mary *Galaktotrophousa***

One can detect two important ‘waves’ in the depiction of the Mary *Galaktotrophousa* motif. One lasted from the second to the ninth century, and the other one from the twelfth to the fifteenth century; today very rarely we see this theme represented in an icon (a twenty first century example exists in the church of St. Ispas in Belgrade).

Lucia LANGENER<sup>36</sup> and, among other specialists, Yvette LABRECQUE, V. TRAN,<sup>37</sup> Hildreth YORK, and Betty L. SCHLOSSMAN<sup>38</sup> find the origins of this image in the iconography of pre-biblical times. Mary was often seen as a successor of Isis, especially when represented in the act of nursing. Professor Thomas F. MATTHEWS is working at the moment on a book which refers, among others, to this connection.<sup>39</sup>

Gian Paolo BONANI and Serena BALDASSARRE BONANI affirm that illustrations of *Maria lactans* are to be found among the murals from the Catacomb of Priscilla (c. 166-250 AD);<sup>40</sup> in their work the identification of a seated

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<sup>34</sup> Z. SKALOVA – G. GABRA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, London 2001, 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> L. LANGENER, *Isis Lactans, Maria lactans: Untersuchungen zur koptischen ikonographie*, Altenberge 1996.

<sup>37</sup> V. TRAN TAM TINH – Y. LABRECQUE, *Isis lactans: Corpus des monuments grécoromains d’Isis allaitant Harpocrate*, Leiden 1973.

<sup>38</sup> H. YORK – B. L. SCHLOSSMAN, *She Shall Be Called Woman: Ancient Near Eastern Sources of Imagery*, *Women’s Art Journal* 2/2 (Autumn 1981-Winter 1982) 37-41. See also LCI, vol. 3, 1971, 158.

<sup>39</sup> T. F. MATTHEWS, an unpublished book written during his Leverhulme Grant which he spent in Oxford.

<sup>40</sup> G. P. BONANI – S. BALDASSARRE BONANI, *Maria lactans: ovvero l’atto teologico dimenticato* (= *Scripta Pontificiae Facultatis Theologicae „Marianum“*, 49), Rome 1995, 5.

woman first offered by G. WILPERT<sup>41</sup> and V. N. LAZAREV is perpetuated.<sup>42</sup> The ceiling above one of the tombs in this catacomb depicts a woman breast-feeding a child – presumably it represents Mary and Jesus; this particular painting has been dated around 225. KALAVREZOU comments on it by saying that it is not certain that it really depicts *Theotokos*, but undoubtedly a mother with a child.<sup>43</sup>

CUTLER argues that ‘if we accept as unproven’<sup>44</sup> the interpretation of the nursing Mother of God in the Priscilla Catacomb, then the first Christian depiction of the *Galaktotrophousa* occurs on a marble krater found in Rome (now in the Terme Museum there), which H.-G. SEVERIN mentions in his work.<sup>45</sup> It has been carved of Bithynian stone by Constantinopolitan masters. The reliefs of its uppermost register represent the Virgin seated frontally while being approached by the Magi; she is depicted opposite Christ among the apostles. It dates probably from the time of Valens (364-378), an estimate based on its similarities with objects made in the same period. From a later time, there are examples in the two Coptic monasteries that have already been mentioned: Apa Apollo and Ama Rachel at Bawit and Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara whose walls were painted in the sixth-seventh centuries.<sup>46</sup> The same environment has produced the image of the nursing Mother of God from the tenth-century illumination in a Coptic MS in the British Library, London (MS Oriental 6782, fol. 1v and New York, Pierpont Morgan Libr. MS 612, fol. 1v, by the Master Isaq<sup>47</sup>). Two seals made in the third quarter of the eleventh century have been preserved – one belonged to Romanos, the Metropolitan of Kyzikos; it has been created sometimes after 1054 and before 1079.<sup>48</sup> With the child Christ represented in a more upright position than in the previous example, another seal survived; it was the property of a certain Michael Ophrydas.<sup>49</sup> The owner is described on the reverse as *vestes* (the

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<sup>41</sup> G. WILPERT, *Le pitture delle catacomb ll*, Rome 1903, pls. XXI, XXLL.

<sup>42</sup> V. N. LAZAREV, *Studies in the Iconography of the Virgin*, 26-65.

<sup>43</sup> I. KALAVREZOU, *Images of the Mother*, 165-172.

<sup>44</sup> A. CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations*, 168.

<sup>45</sup> H.-G. SEVERIN, *Oströmische Plastik unter Valens und Theodosius I*, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 12 (1970) 211-252, figs. 2, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Z. SKALOVA, *The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa*, 250.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 250-251, with a reproduction of the image on p. 257, fig. 3b.

<sup>48</sup> V. LAURENT, *Corpus des sceaux de l'Empire byzantin*, V/1, Paris 1963, no. 353; cf. G. ZACOS, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, Bern 1984, no. 879, where the type of Virgin is identified as the *Platytera*. There is a reproduction of this seal also in CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North*, 165, fig. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Leningrad, Hermitage Museum, no. M-8043; this is also reproduced in CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North*, p. 165, fig. 2 and described (as depicting *Galaktotrophousa*) in *Iskusstvo Vizantii v sobranijach SSSR*, II, Moscow – Leningrad 1977, no. 802, but wrongly assigned to the twelfth century.

judge of the velum and the imperial notary of the ephor); Psellos characterises him as a “silly old man.”<sup>50</sup> (Another judge Ophrydas – no other identification is given – lived one generation later).

SKALOVA presents an icon of the *Galaktotrophousa*, fig. 13, that she considers being ‘not conclusively dated’, but as presumably the oldest Coptic painting on wood panel.<sup>51</sup> She advances the thirteenth century as a hypothetical period for this work on the basis of stylistic similarities in the rendering of the faces of Mary, Christ, and of the Archangels with previously-dated frescoes and manuscript illustrations; the scholar describes these faces as being “European of the Romanesque era, except for the far-seeing oriental eyes, which are, nevertheless, rendered with a ‘Gothic’ mystical touch”.<sup>52</sup> This manner of using colour and lines has parallels in mediaeval manuscripts, especially Syrian, such as the Resurrection in a lectionary (British Library, Ad. MS. 7170) written in Syriac *estrangela* script which is dated 1216-1220 and attributed to Mar Mattai (St. Matthew) Monastery, near Mosul in Northern Iraq.<sup>53</sup> The Coptic icon flagged by SKALOVA is part of the iconostasis of the old church in the Coptic Monastery of St. Anthony the Great in Egypt, near the Red Sea. In this icon, Jesus (with an adult appearance), while holding the breast of his mother with his right hand, offers the Eucharistic bread to the beholder with the other hand. Because of this gesture, SKALOVA considers the act of nursing in this scene as having a strong spiritual significance.

The type of Mary nursing image was known also in Western Europe; it is difficult to advance a certain date, but it seems that from the point of view of its origin it could be an independent development. CUTLER draws attention to a commonsense reality: “just as most women do not need to learn to suckle their young, so most men and women, Greek, Italian and others, did not need to ‘learn’ from each other to sponsor such pictures.” He continues by saying that any “supposed *vaet-vient* of ‘influence’ can conceal not merely art historical truths but also the humanity that underlines artistic creation, even when it is images of God and his mother that are being created.”<sup>54</sup> A selection of

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<sup>50</sup> K. SATHAS, Ἰαὸάέϋιέêϐ Ἀέâêùèýêç, V, Paris, 182.31.

<sup>51</sup> Z. SKALOVA – G. GABRA, *Icons of the Nile Valley*, 71, caption to fig. III. 15. This icon is the subject of the chapter *The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa in the Coptic Monastery of St. Anthony the Great at the Red Sea, Egypt: A preliminary note*, in: K. Ciggaar – H. Teule (eds.), *East and West in the Crusader States: Context – Contacts – Confrontations II* (= *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, 92), Leuven 1999; it is reproduced there on p. 259, fig. 4b.

<sup>52</sup> Z. SKALOVA, *The Icon of the Virgin Galaktotrophousa*, 247.

<sup>53</sup> H. C. Evans – W. D. Wixom (eds.), *Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York & Yale University Press 2004, cat. no. 254.

<sup>54</sup> CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North: Papers on Cultural Relations*, 168.

the most known works of art representing the subject of the Virgin nursing in this part of Europe includes: *Madonna del latte* by Paolo di Giovanni Fei (c. 1345-c. 1411), Siena; an ivory statue from the old collection Jouenne à Lisieux, in Rouen, and a water colour by William Blake (1757-1827), *The Repose of the Holy Family on the Flight into Egypt*, in which the Virgin nurses the child Jesus; today in a private collection in America (figs. 14, 15, and 16). But there is a multitude of painted works on this topic; among them those of Lorenzetti (first third of fourteenth century), Pisano (1360), Pinturicchio (1492), Ghirlandaio (1494), Carnach (1509), and Dürer (three, created between 1512 and 1520); the image exists also in the illumination of Amesbury Psalter, which dates from the thirteenth century.

### Images of St. Anna nursing the child Mary

The iconographic motif of St. Anna nursing the infant Mary is an interesting variant on the theme of the Virgin *Galaktotrophousa*, as it is that of St. Elisabeth nursing the child John (the Baptist).<sup>55</sup> As noted earlier, *Anna Galaktotrophousa* is a subject not very often treated in iconography. Oskar WULF and Michael ALPATOFF's book *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei* and that by Jacqueline LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*<sup>56</sup> are the most well known sources to deal with this subject-matter. Both these books refer to and reproduce the icon of St. Anna nursing from Vatopedi Monastery, fig. 17<sup>56</sup>; they also touch on the idea of subversion in church art. CUTLER, in *Byzantium, Italy and the North Cultural Relations*,<sup>57</sup> speaks about literary sources and frescoes (at Kurbinovo, fig. 2 and Mistra, fig. 19) focusing on St. Anna.

Christine STEPHAN, in her book *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble: die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche* on the liturgical art in the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, makes a reference to an image of *Anna lactans* on the South wall, fig. 18. The frescoes in that church were painted between 1310 and 1314, but in 1520-1530 they were whitewashed and the golden *tesserae* of the mosaics were hammered down. After the liberation of the city in 1912 the church was restored (mainly in 1940-1941), and again after the earthquake of 1978; now Christian services take

<sup>55</sup> The two saints are depicted together in a fresco found in the Church of the Forty Martyrs at Trnovo. S. PELEKANIDES, Ἐάόδñßá. I. Ἀçæáíðéíáß, Thessalonike, 1953, pl. 101b; A. GRABAR, *La peinture religieuse en Bulgarie*, Paris 1928, 104-106; the drawing in fig. 20 represents this fresco.

<sup>56</sup> O. WULF – M. ALPATOFF, *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei in Kunstgeschichtlicher Folge*, Leipzig, 1925, p. 57. The icon is reproduced in their book (fig. 18) and also (with the acknowledgment of the source as being Wulf and Alpatoff's book) in J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, vol. 1, 43, fig. XII. A colour copy of this mosaic icon is in E. Tsigarides (ed.), *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi*, Mount Athos, 1998, vol. 2, 370.

<sup>57</sup> CUTLER, *Byzantium, Italy and the North*, especially 175-176 and 181, fig. 6 there.

place there. The reference in Stephan's book says: "Today, you can still recognise the figures of Anna, who is holding Mary on her knees and breast-feeding her."<sup>58</sup> GROZDANOV and HADERMANN MISGUICH reproduce the above-mentioned fresco of SS. Joachim and Anna from the church in Kurbinovo in which St. Anna standing is nursing Mary, fig. 2 at the outset of this article. Also CUTLER presents Anna *Mlekopitatehnitsa* image in his above-mentioned chapters<sup>59</sup>, and so does Ioannis SISIOU with respect to a fresco from St. Stephen Church, Kastoria, fig. 20.<sup>60</sup>

Otto DEMUS suggests, in his *The mosaic decorations of San Marco, Venice*, that the cycle 'The Life of the Virgin' from the decorative programme visible in this cathedral today (in the South transept) may have survived from the eleventh or twelfth centuries; in any case, he said that "all later mosaics of the interior are substitutions for earlier ones."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, even if this Marian cycle comes from the twelfth century, it may be a replacement of one from the previous hundred years. (Generally speaking, the earliest mosaics to have survived in this cathedral until today belong to the eleventh century.<sup>62</sup>) If that is the case, the 'Life' might have been created between 1063 and 1084, the latter being the year of the consecration of the church – or at least of one of several, because DEMUS thinks that more than one took place.<sup>63</sup> He believes that this consecration, which is the first, "would probably have concerned the main altar," and "if this is true, it may mean that the first decoration of the main apse was completed in 1084".<sup>64</sup>

58 "Zu erkennen sind heute noch die Figuren von Anna, die Maria auf den Knien hält und ihr die Brust", C. STEPHAN, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble: die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche*, Worms 1986 (digitalised in 2009), p. 3 (39), fig. 40 in the respective book. This figure is mentioned on p. 202.

59 CUTLER, *The Cult of Galaktotrophousa in Byzantium and Italy*, 165, reproduction on p. 174, fig. 3.

60 J. SISIOU, Ἡ ἱερά ἑορτή τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀννῆς τῆς Βρῦση, in: *Niš i Vizantija [Niš and Byzantium]* VII, 273-291; there the image of St. Anna is on p. 290, fig. 8. See also N. SIOMKOS, *L'église Saint Etienne à Kastoria*, K.B.E. Thessaloniki 2006, 212-265.

61 O. DEMUS and H. L. Kessler, eds., *The mosaic decorations of San Marco, Venice*, Chicago – London, 1988, 11.

62 O. DEMUS, *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 3; here the author mentions a chronicle which gives 1063 as the date of this new beginning, but he does not provide any other detail. I am currently working on a project funded by the British Academy on the circulation of the nursing motif along *Via Egnatia* and in Venice (the latter, not far from the Western end of this historical route, constituted a centre of artistic activity and influenced the cultural traffic on the Egnatian Way). I hope my research will identify the source mentioned previously (the chronicle), but even more important will find out what the first decorative programme in San Marco looked like.

63 *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 3.

64 *Ibidem*, 3.

The eleventh century mosaics are supposed to have been finished by the time of the 1084 consecration because it was the most important one. ??They constitute the decorative programme which I think might have contained the 'Life of Mary'. Usually this cycle has Anna – sometimes, though not often – nursing within it. DEMUS also says that the Master who made the mosaics in the second San Marco church (there have been three churches on that site<sup>65</sup>) was brought by the Doge Domenico Selvo (1071-1084) from the Byzantine capital,<sup>66</sup> that the chrysobull of 1082 giving to Venice “a virtual trade monopoly in the eastern Mediterranean...might have facilitated the influx of Byzantine artists and mosaic material”,<sup>67</sup> and also that Venetian “artists seems to have received their training in Byzantium” around the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>68</sup> This might mean that the Byzantine masters – or even local mosaicists trained in Constantinople – who participated in the construction of San Marco came/returned with a church model, and DEMUS openly speaks about “the connections of San Marco with the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople, of which San Marco is, if not a copy, at least an imitation”.<sup>69</sup>

Given all the information above, it is clear that he is talking about the third church of San Marco, but the similarity goes further back in time: “As early as 1100, the church was compared to the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople (now destroyed), and there is no doubt that San Marco shared essential features with its sixth-century model; the cruciform shape,

<sup>65</sup> O. DEMUS – W. DORIGO – A. NIERO – G. PEROCCHI, *Patriarchal Basilica in Venice. San Marco. The Mosaics. The History. The Lighting*, Milan 1990, 17.

<sup>66</sup> O. DEMUS, *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> O. DEMUS et al., *Patriarchal Basilica in Venice*, 18-19.

five domes, barrel vaults, and four-legged piers”.<sup>70</sup> But, he adds “It is equally evident that there are quite important differences [between these two churches].”<sup>71</sup>

In spite of the issues discussed above, because of the fact that the substitutions DEMUS spoke about, “partly change the [initial] program”<sup>72</sup> and because of various other changes in time (mosaics which “came down to us in a truncated and much-altered form” which today “can hardly reflect the original program”<sup>73</sup>), at the moment one cannot say with certainty if a cycle of the Life of the Virgin was made in the eleventh century and if so, whether it contained an image of St. Anna nursing or not. However, as Western examples of representations of St. Anna feeding her child, David R. CARLIDGE and James Keith ELLIOTT, in their *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*,<sup>74</sup> provide us with two later works which are to be found in San Marco. These authors show that, as a part of the cycle ‘Life of Mary’ represented in its mosaics which can be seen there today (but dated to the eighteenth century), in the south transept, scene no. 10 depicts *Anna lactans*.<sup>75</sup> The same cycle is represented in sculpture in this church – scene no. 11 carved on the front-left pillar of the high altar’s ciborium shows Anna nursing the child Mary.<sup>76</sup> If that scene – as a part of the cycle of Mary’s childhood – was the subject of the initial decorative programme in San Marco (as copied from the *Apostoleion* also?), perhaps that is, at least partially, the reason the cathedral in Venice perpetuated this motif in its later decoration.

CARLIDGE and ELLIOTT indicate as the literary sources for the imagery referring to Anna *The Protoevangelion of James* (6:3, 3.1-4.2, and elsewhere)<sup>77</sup> in Eastern Christianity, and Pseudo-Matthew’s Gospel in the Christian West, but these are not the

70 O. DEMUS, Preface. *The mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Chicago – London 1984, vol. 1, ix; O. DEMUS, *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 5. *Apostoleion* (The Church of the Apostles) in Constantinople was built by Justinian in 550 as a replacement for the original church founded by Constantius II (337-361).

Gregory Nazianzen describes the first church, that of Constantius, as “the seat of Christ’s disciples/having been hewn into four parts”, in *Carmen de insomnia Anastasiae*, 59-60. It is assumed that the second *Apostoleion* church, built over the ruins of the first one, has the same cruciform shape. M. MAAS, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* says also that the Justinian church was cruciform and had many domes, p. 63. See also E. LEGRAND, *Apostoleion*, *Revue des Études Grecques* 9 (1896) 32-65; G. DOWNEY, *The Builder of the Original Church of the Apostoleion at Constantinople. A contribution to the criticism of the Vita Constantini attributed to Eusebius*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6 (1951) 51-80, and J. LANSLOWNE, *Echoes of the Fourth-century Apostoleion in Late Antique Italia Annoraria*, in: *The Byzantinist; the Newsletter of the Oxford Byzantine Society*, Issue 1 (Spring) 2011, 4-5, 15.

71 O. DEMUS, *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 5. See also LANSLOWNE, *Echoes of the Fourth-century Apostoleion*, 4.

72 DEMUS, *The mosaic decorations of San Marco*, 5.

74 *Ibidem*, 11.

75 O. DEMUS et al., *Patriarchal Basilica in Venice*, 17.

76 D. R. CARLIDGE – J. K. ELLIOTT, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, London 2001, 33.

77 CARLIDGE – ELLIOTT, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, 33.

78 *Ibidem*, 35.

79 A. Smith Lewis (ed. and trans.), *Apocrypha Syriaca: the Protoevangelium Jacobi*

and *Transitus Mariae* [The Protoevangelion of James and the Life of Mary], in: *Studia Sinaitica*, No. 11, London 1902. J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, vol. 1, Brussels 1964, 15-16, discusses the apocryphal *Protoevangelion of James* (a modern name given by the French orientalist Guillaume Postel in 1564.) The apocryphal was written in Greek in the second century and it has been very well preserved on *Papyrus Bodmer V* dating from the beginning of the fourth century. MS. *Parisinus gr. 1468* calls the manuscript Ἀγία ἄειος ἰαμβὰς οὐδὲν ἄλλο εἰδόμενον ἐὰν ὑμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκείνης ἐξέσῃ ἡ ἀληθὴς ἱστορία. Lafontaine-Dosogne mentions as an important contribution to the study of Mary's life the work of C. von Tischendorf (ed.), *Evangelia apocrypha: adhibitis plurimis codicibus Graecis et Latinis*, Lipsiae 1876.

only ones. In both St. Anna and St. Elisabeth's cases the paradox of barrenness/fecundity constituted the object of wonder that was expressed in writing as well as in paintings. Patriarch Photios comments with reference to Anna, implying that when it comes to the human relationship with God (as when it comes to God in general), nothing is impossible:

How can dried-up breasts gush with streams of milk? For if  
old age is unable to store away blood, how can the teats  
whiten into milk what they have not received?<sup>80</sup>

Romanos the Melode, in the sixth century, celebrates this fact both in the refrain of his hymn dedicated to Mary's Nativity: "The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and the nurse of our life" and in the hymn from the Infancy Gospel addressed to God:

Who hath visited me and taken away from me the reproach of mine  
enemies, and the Lord hath given me a fruit of his righteousness...  
Hearken, hearken, ye twelve tribes of Israel that Anna giveth suck.<sup>81</sup>

(James of Kokkinobaphos comments along the same lines in his undated work with reference to Elisabeth and the birth of the Baptist.<sup>82</sup>)

Very few other materials – especially from amidst those pertaining to iconography – treat the topic of Mary's childhood in either Byzantium or the West. Moreover, even when they do so, the scene of Mary being nursed is usually omitted, and only some particular moments from the 'Life of the Virgin' that involve her parents are represented, such as her Nativity (but without the nursing scene within it), the Dedication to the Temple, the First Steps,<sup>83</sup> etc.

As mentioned, the fresco representing *Anna Mlekopitatelnitsa* in Zahumska Monastery, Ohrid, was identified as such only after the cleaning of the walls and a careful restoration. The contributions of the specialists A. NIKOLOVSKI, T. STAMATOSKI,<sup>84</sup> and Cvetan GROZDANOV<sup>85</sup> played

<sup>80</sup> Homily IX. 4, trans. C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, Cambridge, Mass. 1958, 166.

<sup>81</sup> P. MAAS – C. A. TYPANIS, *Sancti Romani Melodi cantica*, Oxford 1963, 276. 6-7, 280. 6-7. Quotes from M. Carpenter (trans.), *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, vols. 1-2, Columbia, Miss. 1970-1973. I follow here CUTLER and his sources, *The Cult of Galaktotrophousa in Byzantium and Italy*, 174-176.

<sup>82</sup> James of Kokkinobaphos, PG 127, 696A.

<sup>83</sup> For example, a mosaic in Kariye Djami, Istanbul depicts the Virgin's first steps, c. 1320, in: D. R. CARTLIDGE and J. K. ELLIOTT, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, p. 28, fig. 2.6. There is also a fresco in Nerezi Church which represents Saint-Panteleimon, the Nativity of the Virgin and the Presentation to the Temple. S. KORUNOVSKI – E. DIMITROVA, *Macédoine byzantine. Histoire de l'art macédonien du IXe au XIVe siècle*, Paris 2006, trans. A. Cirier (Italian edition, Milan 2006), 67-69, caption p. 67, fig. 46.

<sup>84</sup> A. Nikolovski – T. Stamatovski (eds.), *Kliment: Ohridski: studii*, Odbor za Odbeleževanje na 1100 godisnina od doaganjeto na Kliment vo Ohrid i formiranjeto na Ohridskata škola za slovenska kultura i pismenost, Skopje 1986.

<sup>85</sup> C. GROZDANOV, *La peinture murale d'Ohrid au XIVe siècle*.

an important role in the correct assignation of its subject. This monastery (fig. 21) is considered by the locals to be a *metochion* of the Monastery of St. Naum because of its reduced size (The two monastic sites are not far from one another; a short trip by water separates them). St. Zaum is uniquely located on the south-eastern side of the Ohrid Lake, some 20 km from the town of Ohrid, near Trpejca village; it can only be reached by boat.

The plan of the church is cruciform with a dome surmounting the central part. The blind arches divide its three-sided apse. The original plan behind this ensemble has not been completely understood. Since the forecourt and some parts of the building have disappeared over time, this will probably never happen.<sup>86</sup> The painting in St. Zaum was done in 1361, the year of the consecration of the church. In general, the frescoes in are damaged and their setting next to the water has not helped their preservation. However, the recent and the on-going restoration allows the viewer to recognise some of the figures on the walls. In the first register Christ, The Holy Mother, **Saints Clement, Naum, and other saints more problematic in their identification are depicted life-size. The second band on the wall??** shows scenes from the life of the *Theotokos*; an innovative approach is noticeable in this close-up fresco in which the newly-born Mary is very clearly breast-fed (not all such depictions are as clear as this one). On the northern wall the *Deisis* is represented. The eastern side of the former *parvis* is covered with a scene showing Jesus Christ and His Mother in royal garments. There are also portraits of SS Peter and Paul, as well as of SS George and Dimitrios wearing clothes specific to the local nobility. This is how GROZDANOV mentions the image of St. Anna from Zaum, among the others depictions there: “On the North wall, facing the pendant representing Jesus as the Supreme Judge, one can find: Anna nursing the infant Mary, John the Baptist, and the Virgin and the Child on a throne, all very close to the dividing wall of the sanctuary”.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of the fact that today the frescoes are severely damaged, the skilfulness of the icon painter can still be appreciated. According to NIKOLOVSKI, ΔORNAKOV and BALABANOV, in all these compositions the painter manifests a sense of spontaneity and a refined taste; he uses pure and warm tones and a vivid colour variety. Given these features, they distinguish the fresco Master of the church St. Bogorodica of Zaum from his contemporaries who worked in Ohrid.<sup>88</sup> It is assumed that the artist

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 196.

<sup>87</sup> “Faisant pendant à Jésus Juge Suprême se trouvent sur le mur nord: Anne allaitant l’Enfant Marie, Jean le Précurseur, et la Vierge? l’Enfant sur un trône, tout près de la cloison du sanctuaire.” C. GROZDANOV, *La peinture murale d’Ohrid au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 197.

<sup>88</sup> A. Nikolovski – D. Δornakov – K. Balabanov (eds.), *Spomenici na kulturata na Makedonija*, [The cultural monuments of Macedonia], Skopje 1961, 246-247. There are two images of the church in this book: on p. 246 (black and white; a bird-eye view), and on p. 247 a colour image.

gained his painting education in Thessaloniki. GROZDANOV points out that some of the frescos from the *narthex* of this church were mentioned by Pavel N. MILJUKOV as early as 1899<sup>89</sup> and also later by Gabriel MILLET,<sup>90</sup> but the entire composition has never been analysed in detail before.

There are two stories of the foundation of the Monastery of the Holy Mary Zahumska. One is the local legend which affirms that the king's (the 'tsar's) daughter was visiting the Monastery of St. Naum when a storm began. The monks tried to stop her from going back to Ohrid that day, but she did not listen to their advice. Her boat suffered serious damage and only in the last moment did she escape. As a token of gratitude to God for sparing her life, she built a monastery at the place where managed to save herself and named it 'zatum', which means 'think again'. NIKOLOVSKI, ΔORNAKOV, and BALABANOV believe that the 'tsar' thought to be the founder of the church would have been Grgur, the brother of Vuk BrankoviE (died October 6, 1398) and the son of Branko MladenoviE who was Ohrid's *sebastokrator* (died before 1365).<sup>91</sup> The inscription above the entrance door of the church (figs. 22 and 23) does not mention a lady as the founder of the church, but mentions a 'tsar' Grgur. It translates:

This divine and all-holy church was erected from the foundation in the name of the Most Holy Theotokos of Zahumska [to commemorate] the death of the most pious *kaisaros* Grgur. This was written by his holiness the Lord Bishop of Devol, Gregory, the protothron, during the reign of Stephen Uroš, in the month of August year 6869, from Christ year 1361, Indiction 14.<sup>92</sup>

In what follows I will present the second story, as told by historians. It is important to mention both accounts because, in their own way, they

<sup>89</sup> P. N. MILJUKOV, *Christianskije drevnosti zapadnoj Makedonii*, in: *Izvestija Russkago archeologiEeskago instituta v Konstantinopole*, Sofia, iv, 1899.

<sup>90</sup> G. MILLET, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIV, XV, et XVI siècles: d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*, (drawings S. Millet), Paris 1960.

<sup>91</sup> A. Nikolovski – D. Δornakov – K. Balabanov (eds.), *Spomenici na kulturata*, 246-247. Vuk BrankoviE was a Serbian medieval nobleman who created a semi independent feudal state in present day south and southwestern Serbia (including Kosovo and Metohija), the northern part of present day Macedonia and northern Montenegro. His state was known as *Oblast BrankoviEa* (Realm of BrankoviE) or simply as *Vukova zemlja* (Vuk's land) which he held with the title of *gospodin* (lord, sir). After the Battle of Kosovo (1389) Vuk was briefly de facto most powerful Serbian lord.

<sup>92</sup> Prof. Ralph Cleminson kindly provided me with the following alternative translation: "The divine and most sacred church of the Most Holy Mother of God of Zahumlje was raised on its foundations at the expense of the most blessed Caesar Grgur, benefactor, and was decorated by Lord Gregory, the Most Reverend Bishop of Devol and protothronos, benefactor, in the reign of Stefan Uroš, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 6869, the 14<sup>th</sup> indiction."

lead to the same conclusion with regard to this particular representation in the context of the discussion on power and subversion.

The monastery of the Mother of God Zahumska (or St. Bogorodica Zahumska) was built, as shown above, in 1361 in what was then the Serbian Empire, during the reign of Stephen Uroš V (1346/1355-1371) from the Nemanja family.<sup>93</sup> As noted in the dedicatory inscription, the donor of the architecture was indeed a 'tsar' Gurgur [Grgur] – as the legend also has it. The painting was commissioned by Bishop Gregory of Devol who, in the inscription above, is called by the title *protothron* ('first throne' – the first among the leaders of the Church in the area). Devol was an old Episcopal See, known at that time as a centre for the instruction of the Slavs through the work of SS Clement and Naum. Bishop Gregory was one of the most influential clerics in the Ohrid Archbishopric towards the middle of the fourteenth century; from 1345 he became one of the protectors of the Monastery of the Mother of God Peribleptos in the town (in that town)??.<sup>94</sup> The fact that the office of *protothron* is attached to Bishop Gregory's name for the first time in the inscription translated above indicates that Simeon (Siniša) Uroš (d. c. 1370)<sup>95</sup> was in charge of Kastoria – whose bishop was by tradition the *protothron* of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. (Kastoria, a town situated 140 km from Ohrid, was held by the Serbians between 1331 and 1380). Simeon was the emperor's paternal uncle who broke from Serbia to become the ruler of Epirus and Albania in 1348, but had to retreat to Kastoria in 1356 when Nikephoros II Orsini, the despot of Epirus, conquered Thessaly. Simeon's presence in Kastoria was the reason this position temporarily passed to the Bishop of Ohrid, Gregory. No name of an Archbishop of Ohrid is mentioned in the inscription from Zaum Monastery. In GROZDANOV's opinion this absence is a proof that the church was built in the Eparchy of Devol, and not in that of Ohrid, and he mentions the hagiography of St. Naum and more recent sources as supporting such a view, which he regretfully does not list.

The existence of another depiction of St. Anna nursing in Kastoria – in St. Stephen Church – might be another argument to support this hypothesis. At the moment this image, fig. 20, is officially dated only vaguely as belonging to the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. Because

<sup>93</sup> M. LASCARIS, *Deux Chartres de Jean Uroš, dernier Némanide (Novembre 1372, Indiction XI)*, Byzantion 25-27/1 (1955-1957) 277-323. Regarding Stephen Uroš I have consulted S. KORUNOVSKI – E. DIMITROVA, *Macédoine byzantine. Histoire de l'art macédonien du IX<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 2006, trans. from Italian A. Cirier (Italian edition, Milan 2006).

<sup>94</sup> M. RAUTMAN, *Aspects of Monastic Patronage in Palaiologan Macedonia*, in: S. ΔurEiE – D. Mouriki (eds.), *The Twilight of Byzantium*, Princeton 1991, 53-74.

<sup>95</sup> C. GROZDANOV calls Simeon (Siniša) Uroš a Paleologue in *La peinture murale d'Ohrid au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 196. Simeon was Dušan's half-brother. He is a Paleologue because he was the son of King Stephen Uroš III DeEanski of Serbia by his second wife, Maria Palaiologina, the daughter of the despot John Palaiologos, a grandson of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos.

Zahumska and St. Stephen are at a reasonable distance from one another and both contain a representation of the rare topic of St. Anna nursing, an accurate date attributed to the fresco in St. Stephen church would help to identify its founders and to establish whether these two contemporaneous churches had the same patrons; perhaps also whether they were painted by the same artist(s) and who he/they was (were). In any case, it is logical to assume that the church of St. Stephen was decorated before 1380 when the Serbians lost the control over the town and after 1356 when Simeon (and Bishop Gregor) were associated to it.??

Regarding the visual representation of St. Anna nursing, there are two possibilities: either this motif was already depicted in St. Stephen Church when Archbishop Gregory was in Kastoria, he saw it there, and duplicated it in St. Zahumska (if he left Kastoria after 1361), or the latter church had commissioned its depiction before the Archbishop's departure from Ohrid (for Kastoria) – where he then propagated it (despite the fact that he does not appear anywhere as a founder of St. Stephen Church). The latter scenario seems more probable, but in either event it is very likely that the same masters painted both St. Zahumska and St. Stephen churches. I hope the research I am undertaking in this region will improve dating and thus clarify the issue.

In this context we shall also consider GROZDANOV's opinion that the donor of the architecture in Zaum, the so-called tsar Grgur, who was in power in 1361, is not Grgur Branko's son and Vuk Brankovic's brother, as the oral tradition had it, but a 'tsar' Grgur Golubovic, ruler of the Devol region. The latter is mentioned in a letter from 1347 and in a charter of concession given by Stephen Dušan IV (1331-1355) for the Holy Archangels Church near Prizren.<sup>96</sup> This Grgur was originally from Zahumlje – this might be the reason the monastery was named Holy Mary Zahumska. In additional support for his proposal that Grgur Golubovic was the founder of Zaum Monastery, GROZDANOV relies on Đorđe Sp. RADOJ»IA's argument that Grgur BrankoviE of Ohrid never held the title of tsar.<sup>97</sup>

The patrons' involvement in the artistic process, which has always been an indication of wealth and social status and a means of personal expression, is also very much a manifestation of the mentality predominant in a parti-

<sup>96</sup> Holy Archangels Church and monastery near Prizren was built between 1343 and 1352. The Founding Charter issued by Stephen Dušan endowed it with 93 villages, an iron mine in Toplica, fertile land and vineyards. Also the revenue from the rich Prizren market belonged to it. Cooking oil arrived from Bar and fish from Lake Skadar and Lake Plav. The document indicates also the names of the craftsmen: master builders Petros, Vojislav, Srdan, Nos and Vojihna. The monastery housed from its beginning no less than 200 monks. Its first abbot, Metropolitan Jacob, was responsible for the construction. The monastery's estate stretched from Mt. Sara to the Adriatic Sea. Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Raska and Prizren' website at <http://www.kosovo.net/esarhangel.html>. I am still trying to find the charter mentioned on the website.

<sup>97</sup> See more on the historical context of the period in –. Sp. RADOJ»IA, *Y nřeičē iaeřočēř qř noč-řičē iřjňalňečjčē cdrřčēř* [From the deep clouds to the brightest rays], *Letopis Matice srpske* 377/6 (Novi Sad 1956, June) 583-601.

cular historical period. The benefactors often stamped their seal on works (or sometimes even appeared in the works themselves; not only that the founders of most Orthodox churches had their and their families' portraits on the walls, but in some cases the artists – even when they were monastics – placed themselves among the holy figures<sup>98</sup>). On other occasions the founders added dedications to Christ, to the Virgin, and to various saints on or inside buildings constructed in their honour; this was a means of taking over and forming an intimate relationship with the sacred.<sup>99</sup> Images and inscriptions immortalize the name and memory of those who commissioned edifices and/or their decoration. Perhaps such a rationale was at work in the case of the patron who ordered the frescoes in St. Zahumska Monastery.

In the Ohrid area St. Anna is especially revered. When I visited the Monastery of St. Naum in 2008, on the occasion of the International Congress of Slavists, I was able to notice this myself. Icons of the saint holding the infant Mary on her lap in the same way in which the Mother holds the Child Jesus, such as that in fig. 25, were sold in the shops around this monastery, a few kilometres from the place where Zahum Monastery is located. This is where the legend of the king's daughter was created and has survived until today.

Since the cult of St. Anna has developed to such an extent in this small geographical area, one can see why Prof. GROZDANOV and other researchers did not have any doubt that the holy figure painted on the walls in Zahumska Monastery is St. Anna.

Saints and holy people were called upon, among other things, “to offer up efficacious prayers (much more likely to be heard than those of his [or her] petitioners, because of his [her] standing in the court of heaven)”.<sup>100</sup> Since St. Anna is considered a good intercessor for people facing difficulties with having children, historically, whenever possible, a benefactor praying for such a purpose erected a church dedicated to this female saint. Knowing this fact, it seems that either Grgur BrankoviE or Grgur GoluboviE's wife (not daughter) ordered a church to be built in which this saint was to be represented as a nursing mother. (Of course,

<sup>98</sup> The iconographer who painted the church of *Polovragi* Monastery, Romania in the seventeenth century, Archimandrite Ioan, portrayed himself within the fresco in the *pronaos*, V. MICLE, *Mâna+stirea Polovragi*, Craiova 1987, illustration and caption p. 41. Another example of such an iconographer is P,rvu Mutu (1657-1735), who painted himself in the church of FilipeŃti, Prahova County at about the same time (1692), M. DIACONESCU, *Biserici s,i mâna+stiri ortodoxe*, Bucharest 2006.

<sup>99</sup> A. CUTLER, *Art in Byzantine Society: Motive Forces of Byzantine Patronage*, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/2 (1981) 759-787.

<sup>100</sup> J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Introduction*, in: J. Howard-Johnston – P. A. Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, Oxford University Press 1999, 3.

most of the time, constructing or endowing a monastery/church has been a matter of prestige or safety in times of trouble,<sup>101</sup> but this church was too small to serve any of these purposes). Grgur Branković is somehow forgotten as a historical figure and the fact that he did not have children might have contributed to this (i.e. their prayers were not answered). After their father – Branko – died, his younger brother, Vuk Branković, who had three sons, created a semi-independent feudal state in present Serbia. Therefore, I tend to believe that the Grgur mentioned as a founder of Zaum Monastery is from the Branković family. On the other hand, there are not many data – and even fewer of a personal nature – about Grgur Golubović.

In any case, both the legend and the history confirm that a local rich ruler was involved in the erection of the church of the Monastery of Holy Mary Zahumska. As representatives of aristocratic families with educated taste, the patrons used their power and wealth to choose a very skilful master to paint the church. Whether consciously or not, the artist perpetuated in his work both meanings of the nursing act: the biological as well as the spiritual.

In answer to the question posed at the outset of this article as to the determining factors in the decoration of the church of St. Mary Zahumska – in “stretching the canon” – it has become evident that both the creativity of the artists and the taste of the patrons were important, but it is difficult to assign relative weights to these factors. It should also be concluded that in this particular case the painting was not a radical innovation; it just represented a rare visual motif. The situation here cannot be generalised to all churches because sometimes the patron’s role is more prominent, and at other times that of the artist.

The person who, in the second case of my hypothesis, might have also painted the church in Kastoria and included St. Anna in both churches’ decorative programmes, was not being ‘subversive’; on the

101 H. BUCHTHAL – H. BELTING, *Patronage in thirteenth-century Constantinople: an atelier of late Byzantine book illumination and calligraphy*, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 16, Washington, D.C. 1978; R. CORMACK, *Icons et société à Byzance*, Paris 1993, 91; S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Patronage and artistic production in Byzantium during the Palaiologan period*, in: S. Brooks (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, New Haven 2007, 76-97; E. KITZINGER, *Artistic Patronage in Early Byzantium*, in: *Settimane di studio del CISAM*, Spoleto 1992, vol. I, 3-55 (on the role of the artist and the limits of the power of patronage); idem, *Studies in Late Antique, Byzantine and Medieval Western Art*, vol. I, London 2002, 573-598; M. MULLETT, *Aristocracy and patronage in the literary circles of Comnenian Constantinople: Letters, literacy and literature in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2007, art. VIII; N. OIKONOMIDES, *Patronage in Palaiologan Mt Athos*, in: N. Oikonomides, *Society, culture and politics in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, art. XXV, 120; M. RAUTMAN, *Aspects of Monastic Patronage in Paleologan Macedonia*, in: S. ΔurEiE – D. Mouriki (eds.), *Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire*, Princeton 1991, 53-74.

contrary, he tried to contribute to the accomplishment of his lord's wishes (even by introducing a theme which was not very common in iconography). He was both obedient to the wishes of his patrons and also to the iconographic canon. Therefore, his painting of *Anna Mlekopitateknitsa* fresco was not a subversive act. Moreover, even if St. Anna nursing scenes were painted in Zaum for the first time – which, we have noticed, is not the case – and were an innovation, that would still not have been considered a breaking away from the iconographic rules because such a depiction is still within the limits of the canon, which allows for a certain degree of flexibility.

Also, the canon's regulating power, which was arguably stronger in Byzantium than in any other culture, was challenged from time to time through, among other factors, the occurrence of new iconographical types. But, as just mentioned, such a novelty in iconographic domain is to be expected. In the particular case of St. Anna nursing, its first representation in the eleventh or twelfth centuries was an innovation, but not more than that.