On the style of the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes*

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The article attempts to give a thorough description of the style of the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes and to draw analogies for their artistic manner and single figures. They appear to reveal the closest similarity with some miniatures found in Greek manuscripts of the late eleventh century. Several common artistic methods were used in the Bachkovo frescoes and in the monumental painting of that time as well. They also include some motifs, which were well-known to artists of the second half of the twelfth century. The style of the Ossuary frescoes has been correctly described as classical in most of the pertinent studies. All the components of this style took shape already in the late eleventh century; however, it is not impossible that the frescoes were created later, in the twelfth century.

Keywords: Bachkovo Ossuary, fresco, eleventh-century painting, Byzantine art, classical style

The Bachkovo Monastery, originally dedicated to the Theotokos of Petritzos (Theotokos Petritzonitissa) was named after the fortress of Petritzos ('Asenovata krepôst') situated nearby. It is sometimes thought to have been founded in 1083 by Gregorios Pakourianos (Bakouriani), the Grand Domestic (megas domestikos) of the West under the Emperor Alexios I Komnenos. Although, as A. Grishin argues at the beginning of his dissertation, the existence of a monastery at the place can be traced back to an even earlier date. There are good reasons to suggest that it was first established soon after this territory was captured by Basil II in 1018. In the time of Greece, the monastery was taken over by Greek monks. In different times this land belonged either to the Byzantine Empire, or to the Bulgarian State.

The Ossuary is situated on a steep slope of a hill, about 400 metres from the monastery (Fig. 1). It is a two-storey building with an almost rectangular plan. Its north side measures 18.18 m and the west 8.50 m. The south side of the lower storey is embedded into the hillside. It was used for burials, while the upper one functioned as a funerary chapel.

The programme of decoration of the Bachkovo Ossuary has no analogies among the monuments of Byzantine art, which have come down to us. This fact is due to the uniqueness of the building of this kind, i.e. of the church used especially for funerary purposes, decorated with frescoes. Its main subject is the Resurrection of the Dead at the end of time and the Salvation of the Righteous. Only a few scenes are located on the walls of the tiny spaces of the upper church (Fig. 2) and the crypt; at the same time there is a great number of saints, mostly prelates and monks, who are represented as intercessors for the deceased at the Last Judgment. Spiritual insight as an objective of monastic life and a result of the vitae of saints was one of the main aspects of Byzantine theology and art since the early eleventh century. A special inter-times; one of its most recent editions is: P. Gautier, Le typikon du sebaste Grégoire Pakourianos, REB 42 (1984) 5–145.

5. Though some graves were found there too.
6. The iconographic programme of the Bachkovo Ossuary was thoroughly studied and described by A. Grishin (idem, Bačkovo Ossuary frescoes, 41–205) and E. Bakalova (eadem et al. , The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery, 59–103).

3. Bakalova et al. , op. cit. , 10.
4. Ibid. , 29 (V. Kolarova).

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1 A. D. Grishin, The Bačkovo Ossuary frescoes of 1074–83, Canberra 1980 (doctoral dissertation, Australian National University)
5. However its main church dedicated to the Theotokos of Petritzos was built most probably after 1083, when the Typikon of the monastery was composed by Gregorios Pakourianos; Ibid.
2 Ibid., 10. On the Typikon v. also: E. Bakalova et al., The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery, Plovdiv 2003, 17–20 (E. Bakalova). The Typikon of the Bachkovo Monastery has been published several times; one of its most recent editions is: P. Gautier, Le typikon du sebaste Grégoire Pakourianos, REB 42 (1984) 5–145.
Fig. 1. View of the Bachkovo Ossuary (photo: I. Oretskaya)

Fig. 2. The Bachkovo Ossuary, interior of the upper church (photo: M. Yakovleva)
Fig. 3. Fragment of the southern wall of the upper church (photo: M. Yakovleva)

Fig. 4. Apse of the upper church (photo: I. Oretskaiia)
Fig. 5. Eastern wall of the narthex of the crypt (photo: M. Yakovleva)

Fig. 6. The Raising of Lazarus. Fresco on the southern wall of the upper church (photo: I. Oreetskaya)

Fig. 7. Unknown bishop. Fresco of the apse of the crypt (photo made before the restoration in the 2000s, from the archive of O. Popova)
est in the images of saints can be clearly observed in the monuments of that time. Their numerous images appear in the mosaic and fresco ensembles of the second third of the eleventh century and in miniatures of menolog-

8 This interest in the images of saints probably resulted from the same factors that influenced the formation of the so-called 'ascetic style' of the 1030s–1040s. Prof. O. Popova believes that one of them could be the sermons of St. Symeon the New Theologian. Cf. O. S. Popova, V. D. Sarab'yanov, Mozaiki i freski Sviatoi Sofii Kievskoi, Moskva 2017, 227.

9 Thus in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Kiev there are about 800 surviving images of saints. These images are the subject of the second

9a and psalters with marginal illustrations.11 Grishin writes that "it is predominantly monastic programme that features heavily relatively obscure monastic saints".12 He

8 More Byzantine illustrated menologia have come down to us from the eleventh century than from any other period.

11 L. Mariès, L'irruption des saints dans l'illustration du psautier byzantin, AB 68 (1950) 153–162.

12 Grishin, Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes, 129.
Fig. 9. The Archangel. Fragment of the fresco in the apse of the upper church (photo: I. Oretskaia)

Fig. 10. The Raising of Lazarus. Fragment of the fresco of the southern wall of the upper church (photo: I. Oretskaia)
attributes it to the influence of Mount Athos, which the brothers Apsios and Gregorios Pakourinoi visited twice, one time in 1074, prior to the re-founding of the Bachkovo Monastery.13

Nevertheless, other images could hardly be included in the programme of decoration of the Ossuary – its space is too small: it was easier and more rational to put the images of saints on the buttresses and in the rather narrow surfaces between them. The same is true for the use of simple and concise iconographic schemes – complex compositions could not be placed on the walls retaining the normal size and the overall harmony of the whole ensemble.

The Ossuary and its frescoes were restored in the early 2000s with the sponsorship of the Foundation Anastasios G. Leventis. Unfortunately, they were not only conserved but also heavily tinted, and to get the idea of their original style and their dating became more complicated.

Most of the Ossuary frescoes were painted at the same time, during the Middle Byzantine period, as evidenced by their style.14 The interior of the crypt is not

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13 Grishin, Bačkovo Ossuary frescoes, 12–13.
14 The second period of work on the Ossuary frescoes is the middle of the fourteenth century. Then some of them, lost or almost lost by that time, were repainted (e.g. the angels and apostles on the south vault of the narthex of the crypt), and those with Tsar Ivan Alexander, Sts. Constantine and Helena, St. John the Theologian (in the upper church), and Gregorios and Apsios Palourianoi and monks George and Gabriel (in the crypt) were painted on the surfaces inside the blocked-up arches of narthexes. On the fourteenth century frescoes of the Bachkovo Ossuary v. G. P. Gerov, О вентиновських кітіорах Bachkovskogo monastyriu, in: О ТСергія до Белого моря. Шорнік статей po srednevekovomu iskusstvu v chest’ E. S. Smirnovoi, ed. M. A.
Fig. 13. Apostles and angels from the Last Judgement. Fresco on the northern side of the wall of the crypt narthex (photo: I. Oretskaia)

Fig. 14. Apostles and angels from the Last Judgement. Fresco of the western vault of the Church of St. Demetrius in Vladimir (photo: A. Zakharova)
spacious, it fits a human figure. The walls are divided into separate zones and panels with ornamental or simple red bands (Fig. 3). These compartments follow the architectural structure of the building. Human images are almost life-sized and usually slightly elongated, while few of them have much more elongated proportions. According to the data adduced in Grishin’s dissertation, the proportions in the frescoes of the Bachkovo Ossuary are, as a rule, from 1:7 to 1:8,\(^{15}\) except the images of the archangels in the conch of the upper church (Fig. 4) and that of the Penitent Thief on the east wall of the crypt narthex (Fig. 5).\(^{16}\) The figures correspond in size to the pictorial space; single images and scenes are always perfectly inscribed in it. Compositions of the scenes are simple and easy to perceive. In the upper church, the Gospel scenes are placed into the painted trifoliate arches (Fig. 6), which have the same outlines as the one molded in relief, framing the entrance from the narthex to the naos. Owing to this device and to the painted ciboria in the centres of the compositions of the Communion of the Apostles and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, their inner balance is emphasized\(^{17}\) (Fig. 8). The scenes are mostly static; movements of the protagonists (when shown) are quiet, measured, solemn.

Figures are treated three-dimensionally but look weightless; they have small feet and hands. They are dressed in free-flowing clothes with flexible folds that follow the body structure. The clothes also seem weightless, as if they were made of silk, permeated with light, not discuss the proportions of specific figures, like Grishin, but generally they are claimed to be 1:8, 1:9 and 1:10 (eadem et al., *The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery*, 112–113). Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the figures in the frescoes are only slightly elongated.

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which plays on their surface forming fine designs. These designs do not seem entirely artificial and do not follow their own inner laws that can often be observed in monuments of the late twelfth century. The modelling mainly corresponds to the conception of daylight; the light builds forms, makes them three-dimensional, and at the same time weightless.

Postures are natural and graceful. The faces are oval with medium-sized regular features, in most cases drawn during the last restoration campaign. If we assume that these recent re-paintings more or less follow the original design, some preliminary observations can be made. The faces belong to the traditional Komnenian type with crooked noses; elderly and middle-aged people have high wrinkled foreheads and a thoughtful, somewhat detached or slightly anxious facial expression (Fig. 7). Some faces have a more distinct, severe or tragic expression, but most are neutral and calm.

Based on the manner of treatment of faces, four groups of images can be distinguished. The first, which includes the images of the archangels in the conch of the upper church (Fig. 9), the deacons in the niches near the apse and, probably, also the saints in the apse, and a group of the Righteous advancing towards the Gates of Paradise in the Last Judgement in the crypt. In these images their three-dimensionality is emphasized, the chiaroscuro modelling is strong with smooth colouring (unless these characteristics are the result of the recent restoration). The second group includes most of the images and, perhaps, all the scenes in the upper church. Here we find mostly oval faces with fine features, less three-dimensional, with mainly graphic treatment (e.g. the red strokes on the cheekbones to show blush (Fig. 10) similar to reddish parallel lines on the cheeks of the Empress Eirene in the mosaic in the south gallery of St. Sophia in Constantinople). The images of the Virgin with angels and the Penitent Thief on the east wall of the crypt and Ezekiel's Vision in the Valley of Dry Bones on the west wall of the naos belong to the third group (Fig. 11). The painter who created these images made them relief, working in a pastose, loose manner. Another artist was responsible for the images in the apse of the crypt. They are more expressive and ascetic (Fig. 12); on the faces painted by this artist there are sharp white brushstrokes, reminding those of late twelfth century works of art, like the frescoes in the churches of the Annunciation on lake Myachino ('in Arkazhi'), the Savior on Nereditsa, in the refectory of the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos etc., but their character is still somewhat smoother, and the brushstrokes themselves look smaller and better follow the forms than in the frescoes of the late twelfth century.18

Architectural structures and pieces of furniture were painted in a flatter and more abstract manner. There are few details except for the figures, with only those shown that are necessary to interpret the scenes.

The colours used are not very numerous: red, blue, golden ochre, various tints of green, purple, umber, and white. The painters used primarily chiaroscuro modelling, sometimes combined with dark, mostly brown lines and spots in shadows, and white strokes on the lighted surfaces. Generally, the colouring is not very bright; the colour spots, especially green and red ones, tend to alternate.

A. Grabar has justly described the style of the Bachkovo frescoes as 'classical'. There is nothing exaggerated or grotesque about it; lucidity, lack of sophistication, proportionality and harmony are accentuated in them. It is by no means an easy task to find close analogies for them in Byzantine painting, and this fact has caused heated debates about their dating.20

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18 This method of treatment that we often come across in late twelfth century Byzantine painting had already been used in miniatures of the late eleventh – early twelfth century, for instance in the images of the Evangelists in the Tetraevangelia [Moscow, State Historical Museum, Syn. gr. 518; BAV, gr. 358; Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 27 (=341)] and Gospel Lectionary (BAV, gr. 1156); in the images of the Church Fathers in the manuscripts of the Panoplia Dogmatike by Euthymius Zigabenus (BAV, gr. 666) and (Moscow, State Historical Museum, Syn. gr. 387).

19 A. N. Grabar, Rospis tserkvi-kostnitit Bachkovskogo monasteryi, Izvestii na Bŭlgarskii arkheologheski institut 2 (1924) 41.

20 Works of Byzantine art, in which the classical style prevails, are sometimes difficult to attribute to one or another specific narrow period, unlike those, where painters used more expressive approaches. The periods of circulation of these or those ‘unclassical’ methods are, as a rule, limited and known to scholars, while the classically treated images were always in demand, especially in the eleventh and twelfth
Probably the first to propose the late eleventh century dating for the Bachkovo frescoes were B. Filov and N. Mavrodinov. It was accepted by several other Bulgarian scholars; among them were Boschkov, Krestev and Zakhariev. This dating of the Bachkovo frescoes was affirmed by D. Mouriki at the XVI International Congress of Byzantine Studies and is adduced in her famous article, where she refers to Grishin’s dissertation. O. S. Popova writes: ‘… to the late eleventh but no later than the first half of the twelfth century”. The opinion about the dating of the Bachkovo frescoes to the late eleventh – early twelfth century has been orally expressed by my colleagues L. I. Lifshits, B. Penkova, and D. A. Skobtsova.

In 1924 A. Grabar dated the frescoes to the middle of the twelfth century, but later changed his mind to c. 1100, or sometime after 1083. L. Mavrodinova suggested the middle of the twelfth century as a possible date of their creation. A. Xyngopoulos compared the fresco with the Theophanic vision in the Bachkovo Ossuary and the late fifth century mosaic in the Church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki and attributed the former

1074–83 in the article: S. Grishin, Literary evidence for the dating of the Backovo Ossuary frescoes, in: Byzantine papers, ed. E. - M. Jeffreys, A. Moffatt, Canberra 1981, 90–100.

27 O. S. Popova, Freski Dmitrievskogo sobora vo Vladimiré i vizantiiskaié zhivopisi XII veka, in: eadem, Problemy vizantiiskogo iskusstva: mozaiki, freski, ikony, Moskva 2006, 371, 375, n. 33.

28 Grabat, Rospis’ têrkvi-kostnitsy.

29 Idem, Byzantium: Byzantine art in the Middle Ages, London 1966, 75; idem, L’art byzantine au XIe siècle, CA 17 (1967) 263.

30 L. Mavrodinova, Sur la datation des peintures murales de l’église – ossuaire de Backovo, in: Ἀρμός. Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Ν. Κ. Μουτσόπουλο 2, Θεσσαλονίκη 1991, 1121–1140.
to the twelfth-century painter from this city. In a recent paper G. Gerov argues that the frescoes were painted in the 1150s–1160s.

V. N. Lazarev dated them to the second half of the twelfth century, though he pointed out that ‘faces are shaped with broad and smooth brushstrokes, in which there lacks the emphasized linear stylization so typical of the murals of the second half of the twelfth century’. In her dissertation first published in 1977 and reprinted in 2003 with addenda written after the restoration of the frescoes, E. Bakalova proposed the dating to the 1170s. T. Velmans accepts the dating suggested by E. Bakalova and offers a comparison of the Bachkovo frescoes with the so-called second style of Nerezi, which she defines as ‘antiquisant’. In a recently

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31 A. Xyngopoulos, Thessalonique et la peinture macedonienne, Athens 1955, 15–23.
32 Gerov, Osobennosti fresok XII i XIV vekov Bachkovskoi tserkvi-kostnitsu, 30–31.
33 V. N. Lazarev, Istoriia vizantsiiskoizhivopisi, Moskva 1986, 108.
34 Bakalova et al., The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery, 104–116 (E. Bakalova).
35 T. Velmans, Rayonnement de Byzance, Paris 2006, 144.
published article ‘Once again about the artistic relations between Vladimir and Thessaloniki’, O. E. Etingof states that the frescoes should be dated ‘to the period between the creation of the murals in Hosios David and in the St. Demetrius church in Vladimir’.36

This diversity of opinions bears evidence to the absence of an easy and unambiguous decision of the problem without additional historical data.

One of the arguments adduced by scholars in favour of the second half of the twelfth century dating is the use of painted architectural elements which delimit compositions and figures in the upper church, and the use of rectangular and round frames for busts of saints. Such architectural divisions created with pictorial means were widespread in the twelfth century ensembles: in Nerezi, Đurđevi Stupovi, Kourbinovo etc. Nevertheless, in mosaics these decorative divisions were often, if not always, used since the Early Byzantine period and it is possible that even in fresco painting they could have appeared already in the eleventh century or earlier. Busts inscribed in rectangular frames can be observed in the frescoes of St. Sophia in Ohrid (1037–1056) and in the mosaics of S. Giusto in Trieste (c. 1100). Such images similar to icons hung on a wall are found in the marginal psalters.37

36 O. E. Ėtingof, Eshche raz ob izuchenii khudozhestvennykh svizhej Vladimira i Fessaloniki v kontse XII veka, in: Makedonii – Rim – Vizantiia: iskusstvo Severnoi Greiki ot antichnosti do srednikh vekov, ed. N. N. A. Nalimova, T. P. Kishbali, A. V. Zakharova, Moskva 2017, 158–159.

37 In manuscripts created shortly after the mid-eleventh century – the Theodore and Barberini psalters – the frames are both round and rectangular, while in those of the ninth century they are only round.
In the ensembles of the second half of the twelfth century belonging to the classical trend, such as the frescoes of the Church of St. Demetrius in Vladimir, we observe less interest in rendering three-dimensionality, more inclination towards graphic treatment and linear sharpness of images, sharper contrasts and a sophisticated design of lights on the faces and clothes (if compared to the smoother modelling in the works of art of the late eleventh century). Probably, some resemblance of the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes with those in Vladimir is partly due to the poor state of preservation of both and to the similar colouring in the images of angels and apostles in the compositions of the Last Judgement in both churches (Ill. 13, 14). With the works of art executed in the so-called dynamic style of the late twelfth century the Bachkovo frescoes have much less in common.

The search for the methods of dematerialization of forms that had started in Byzantine art at least in the early sixth century – and E. Bakalova writes that it is a point of resemblance between the Bachkovo and Nerezi frescoes – continued more intensively after the Macedonian Renaissance, and especially in the second quarter and then in the second half of the eleventh century. Thus, many methods of depiction of the ethereal and spiritual were known to artists by the early twelfth century and were being further developed until the end of the century.

Some similarities between the faces in the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes and those in the Church of St. Pantaleimon in Nerezi occur, but the stronger stylization of the latter makes us perhaps rather think of the use of the same facial types by the artists of both ensembles. Their stylistic treatment differs quite noticeably. I was able to find two cases of real resemblance of the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes and the monuments of the second half of the twelfth century. One of them was adduced by E. Bakalova in her article of 1973, which deals with the similarity in the elaboration of folds and partly of the posture of an angel in the scene of the Baptism in Bachkovo (Fig. 15) and Đurđevi Stupovi (Fig. 16). However, their design in the latter church is somewhat sharper and more contrasted, and the posture is less natural and more strained. Another work of art that should be mentioned here is an icon of the Virgin Eleusa (Agiossoritissa) in the Museum of the Monastery of Agios Neophytos near Paphos in Cyprus (1183) (Fig. 17), which resembles the image of the Theotokos in the crypt apse (Fig. 18), but the image in the icon looks more tragic and expressive.

No monument that has come down to us from the second half of the eleventh century – early twelfth century can be attributed to Constantinopolitan painters according to documentary evidence. The highest artistic level of some of them (mosaics in the Daphni Monastery, the frescoes of the Cyprus churches of Panagia Phorbiotissa tis Asinou, Panagia Theotokos in Trikomo, Panagia tis Amasgou and St. John Chrysostom at Koutsovendis) allows us to propose a hypothesis about the metropolitan origin of the artists who worked there. These works of art belong to the classical trend, but do not reveal a noticeable similarity with the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes. At the same time monuments created in this period in various

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38 E. Bakalova, Freski tserkvi-grobnit Bachkovskogo monastyri i vizantiiskai zhivopisi XII veka, in: Vizantii, Istoriche slavienne i Drevnaia Rus’, Zapadnaia Evropa, ed. V. N. Grashchenkov et al., Moskva 1973, 223.
parts of the Byzantine world – in Veljusa, Venice, Trieste, Ateni, and not far from Bachkovo, in Patalenitsa – are remarkable for some local peculiarities, which make them quite noticeably different from the Ossuary frescoes. Although sometimes some points of resemblance may be drawn [e.g. in the images of the Righteous walking to the Gates of Paradise in the mosaic on the west wall of S. Maria Assunta in Torcello and on the narthex wall in Bachkovo; modelling of faces of angels in the Ateni fresco (Fig. 19) and in the one from the Ossuary (Fig. 20), etc.], the closest analogies to single features and images of the Bachkovo frescoes can be found in Byzantine miniatures of the late eleventh century.

In the miniatures of Greek manuscripts there are many figures with elongated or even considerably elongated proportions, as for instance in the Menologion (British Library, Add. 11870), the Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus (Bodleian Library, Canon. 103) and the Tetraevangelion [Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, gr. Z. 27 (=341)]. Bright strokes of light on the clothes, which make them weightless and create the impression of a fabric permeated with light, can be observed in a number of manuscripts from the

Fig. 22. Sts. Hannah and Samuel. Miniature in the Psalter and New Testament (Dumbarton Oaks, Ms. 3), fol. 75 © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC
end of the century: in the illustrations of the Tetraevangelia (BN, gr. 64) and (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, cod. 5), the Gospel Lectionary (BAV, gr. 1156), etc. We see these bright lights on the clothes even in monumental painting, such as the mosaics of the Cathedral of San Giusto in Trieste.

The image of the Theotokos on the vault of the crypt narthex (Fig. 21) may be compared to the image of Hannah with Samuel in a miniature of the Psalter and New Testament (Dumbarton Oaks, Ms. 3), fol. 75 (Fig. 22) of c. 1084. Her image in the lunette of the narthex looks similar to that of Sophia in the last miniature of the same manuscript (fol. 269v). The image of Christ in the scene of the Distribution of Wine on the south wall of the upper church resembles His image, which type had probably taken shape several decades earlier, in the Gospel Lectionary (EBE, gr. 2645), fol. 166v, and the Evangelists’ portraits in the Tetraevangelion (Great Lavra, cod. 15), fols. 3v, 122v or 321v. The profile image of Paul the Apostle in the scene of the Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 23) resembles somewhat his image in the miniature of the Dumbarton Oaks codex (fol. 269v) (Fig. 24). The image of an aged apostle in the scene of the Raising of La-

39 A. Grishin also adduces the miniatures of the Dumbarton Oaks manuscript as analogies to the Bachkovo frescoes, although he compares not so much single images as the treatment of folds, proportions of figures, and their postures (idem, Bačkovo Ossuary frescoes, 225). He argues that these miniatures reveal the greatest resemblance to the Bachkovo frescoes (ibid., 230). The manuscript was published in: S. Der Nersessian, A Psalter and New Testament manuscript at Dumbarton Oaks, DOP 19 (1965) 154–183. It can now be studied from the electronic database of the Harvard University: https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:44659780$1 [14.05.2019]

The image of the Theotokos and the portraits of saints are also comparable to those on the icon of the Crucifixion with saints in the margins in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. This icon executed in the classical style like the Bachkovo frescoes has been variously dated by scholars – from the early twelfth to the late twelfth century.

40 O. Popova has suggested that the manuscript was decorated with miniatures in the third quarter of the eleventh century [eadem, Grecheskî kodexs vtoroi poloviny XI v. v Natsional’noi bibliotèke Grestîi (cod. 2645), Vizantil’ski Vremennik 101 (2017) 174–187] but it seems that a late eleventh century dating is not impossible.
zarus (Fig. 10) is similar to the Evangelists’ portraits in the Tetraevangelion (Iviron Monastery, cod. 56) (Fig. 25) and in the Gospel Lectionary (EBE, cod. 2645), fol. 45v (Fig. 26). The facial types, especially those of the elders who are shown in the Bachkovo Ossuary frescoes as similar to sages or philosophers, can be found in many miniatures of the late eleventh century.41

Thus, the frescoes of the first layer in the Bachkovo Ossuary have no close analogies among works of Byzantine art. Their predominantly classical style and re-paintings made during the recent restoration make the problem of their dating even more convoluted. It seems that almost all (if not all) of the artistic methods used in them were known to artists already in the late eleventh century; they can be observed in a number of miniatures of that time. However, it is possible that the frescoes were created later, in the twelfth century, when Byzantine artists repeatedly applied the classical approach to the treatment of images.

In 1114 the Byzantine army led by Alexios I Komnenos was stationed in Plovdiv, where its main purpose was the struggle against the heresies of the Paulicians and Bogomils and the strengthening of the emperor’s power in the Bulgarian lands. Fighting against the heretics with their allies the Pechenegs, Gregorios Pakourianos was killed in battle. An image of Alexios Komnenos was painted on a south-west pillar on the lower storey of the monastery church of the Archangels; according to a legend, he was its ktetor.42 Taking into account the close ties of the monastery with the Byzantine court, it can be hypothesized that the political situation in the monastery in the late eleventh – early twelfth century could have contributed to the arrival of Greek painters from Constantinople, while very little is known about the events of the second half of the twelfth century.

41 In a fresco transferred from the church of St. Theodore in Houlou to the Ecclesiastical Museum in Paphos there is a similar facial type in the fresco showing John Climacus (c. 1100).

42 Cf. Gerov, O ventěnoomykh ktitonky Bachkovskogo monastyri, especially 72–79.
Анаlecta Bollandiana 68 (1950) 153–162.

Sur la datation des peintures murales de l'église – ossuaire de Backovo, in: Арм. Тиме́тикст та́мос стон катхедре́тт Н. К. Му́тсо́поулос 2, Θεσσαλονίκης 1991, 1121–1140 (Mavrodinova L., Sur la datation des peintures murales de l'église – ossuaire de Backovo, in: Arms. Timētikos tomos ston kathēgēt N. K. Moutsopoulos 2, Thessalonīkis 1991, 1121–1140).

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Попова О. С., Grecheskie kodeks ritoroi poloviny XI v. v Natsionalnoi biblioteci Greцii (cod. 2645), Vizantiiskii Vremennik 101 (2017) 174–187.

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