The author gives an analysis of the style of the murals in the Church of the Virgin Eleousa in Veljusa (1080–1093), pointing out the distinctive manner of the outstanding artist, similar in many ways to works produced by the previous generation, such as the frescoes in Saint Sophia in Ohrid. At the same time parallels are drawn between the Veljusa frescoes and works by Constantinopolitan artists of the last third of the eleventh century, including miniatures in manuscripts and the Daphni mosaics. A few additions to the interpretation of the church’s iconographic programme are also proposed.

Keywords: Veljusa, Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Byzantine painting, Byzantine iconography

The Church of the Virgin Eleousa in Veljusa was constructed in the year 1080 by the monk Manuel, Bishop of Tiberiopolis (Strumica), as we know from two inscriptions above the entrances. The building takes the form of a tetraconch with a narthex and a side-chapel on the south. Each of these three parts is topped by a dome. The exquisite proportions, well-developed articulation of the façades, fine profiling of the niches, door and window openings, the use of the concealed course technique and the decoration of the exterior with painted imitation of brickwork – all these features may indicate that Bishop Manuel invited Constantinopolitan builders to Veljusa (Fig. 1).\(^1\)

The study of the murals in the Church of the Virgin Eleousa began back in the 1920s and grew particularly active after the uncovering of the frescoes in the main body of the church between 1958 and 1970.\(^2\) Interest was aroused primarily by the innovative iconographic programme, the details of which were written about by Vojislav Đurić, Gordana Babić and others.\(^3\) The greatest contribution to the study of the Veljusa ensemble was made by Petar Miljković-Pepek. He devoted a number of papers to the edifice, as well as a monograph in which he summarized the results of analysis of the written sources and archaeological work, gave a complete description of the ensemble, set out reasons for dating the original frescoes to the late eleventh century (possibly between 1085 and 1093), proposed a reconstruction and interpretation of the iconographic programme and examined the artistic characteristics of the murals.\(^4\) Elizabeta Dimitrova has

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1 P. Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa. Le monastère de la Vierge de Pitié au village de Veljusa près de Strumica, Skopje 1981, 32–33, 40–41, cit. 1, 2; sl. 1, 2, 253; M. Kaplan, Retour sur le dossier du monastère de la Théotokos Éleousa à Stroumitza, ZRVI 50 (2013) 480.

2 Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 77–127; S. Korunovski, E. Dimitrova, Macedonia. Étude médiévale dal IX al XV secolo, Milano 2006, 47–51; E. Dimitrova, S. Korunovski, S. Grandakovska, Srednovekovna Makedonija. Kultura i umetnost, in: Makedonija. Mileniumski kulturni i umetnički spomenici vo Makedonija od XI do XIV vek, Beograd 1974, 11–12, 180–181, n. 5.

3 M. Jovanović, O Vodoči iVeljusi posle konzervatorskih radova, Zbornik za Štupski narodni muzej 1 (Štip 1959) 131–135; V. J. Đurić, Vizantijske freske u Jugoslaviji, Beograd 1974, 11–12, 180–181, n. 5.

4 V. J. Đurić, Fresques du monastère de Veljusa, in: Akten des XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongresses, ed. F. Dölger, H.-G. Beck, München 1960, 113–121; idem, Vizantijske freske, 11–12; G. Babić, Hristološke naspe u XII veku i pojavih novih scena u apsidah domov parokhi vizantijskih crkava, ZLUMS 2 (1966) 18–20, 25–26; eadem, Les discussions chrétIologiques et le décor des églises byzantines au XIIe siècle. Les évêques officiant devant l’Hétimasie et devant l’Amnos, Frühmittelalterliche Studien 2/1 (Berlin 1968) 376–378, 382–383; eadem, Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines. Fonction liturgique et programmes iconographiques, Paris 1969, 94–105; Ch. Walter, Art and ritual of the Byzantine Church, London 1982, 199–202, 208; A. J. Wharton, Art of empire, Painting and architecture of the Byzantine periphery. A comparative study of four provinces, University Park – London 1988, 116–118; S. E. J. Gerstel, Beholding the sacred mysteries: programs of the Byzantine sanctuary, Seattle–London 1999, 22–23, 37–39, 84–85.

5 P. Miljković-Pepek, Oltarna pregrada manastira Bogorodice Mileostive u selu Veljusi, ZRVI 6 (1969) 137–139; idem, Za neki novi podatoci od proučevanja na crkvama Sv. Bogorodica vo s. Veljusa, KN 3 (1969) 152–158; idem, Najnovi proučevanja na crkvama Sv. Bogorodica Eleousa, Kulturen život 5–6 (Skopje 1970) 24–25; idem, Novootkrieni arhitekturni i slikarski spomenici vo Makedonija od XI do XIV vek, KN 5 (1974) 5–7; idem, Veljusa; idem, Les données sur la chronologie des fresques de Veljusa entre les ans 1085 et 1094, in: Actes du XV Congrès international d’études byzantines II/8. Art et archéologie. Communica-
summarized the main results of previous researches in several surveys and a work of popular scholarship.6

The original murals in the Church of the Virgin Eleousa have survived only fragmentarily. The conch of the main apse is occupied by a figure of the Virgin and Child enthroned. Below is one of the earliest depictions of the Officiating Bishops, two of whom are shown frontally, while two, holding opened scrolls, are bowing to the Hetoimasia that has a Cross, Gospel and the dove of the Holy Spirit.7 The Gospel cycle at Veljusa was probably reduced to the three feasts in the side conches, of which the Presentation in the Temple on the west and the Harrowing of Hell on the north have partially survived, together with fragments of the figures of saints in the arches between the conches.

Placed in the dome is a half-length depiction of Christ Pantocrator in a medallion and then between the windows of the drum figures of a Virgin Orans, John the Baptist, two archangels and four prophets, which represents an unusual combination (Fig. 2). Đurić and some other scholars have interpreted this as a transitional stage, bringing together depictions of the Pantocrator and prophets typical for the eleventh–twelfth centuries with echoes of the Ascension more common in the preceding period. In the New Testament text itself that is already interpreted as a prophecy of the Second Coming, from which they concluded that the group of Mary, John the Baptist and the archangels is an allusion not only to that theme, but also represents a Deesis of sorts.8 Objecting to such an interpretation, Nikolaos Gkioles points out that the depiction of the Virgin and John the Baptist in the dome along with the Pantocrator and prophets was innovative in character as it stresses the divine nature of the Incarnate Word.9

It seems that this is attested to by the texts on the scrolls held not only by John the Baptist, but also some of the prophets,10 which does not, however, exclude an eschatological component. Jeremiah’s scroll traditionally carries a verse from the Book of Baruch (3, 36): Οὕτος ὁ Θ[εὸς] οὐ λογισθήσεται ἔτερος πρὸς αὐτόν· ἐξεῦρεν πάσαν… (“This is our God; no other can be compared to him!”).11 Written on Habakkuk’s scroll

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6 Đurić, Vizantijske freske, 12; Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 177; Dimitrova, The Church of the Holy Virgin, 15.
7 N. Gkioles, Ο βυζαντινός τρούλος και το εικονογραφικό του πρόγραμμα (μέσα 6ου – 1204), Αθήνα 1990, 109–120, 210–211.
8 Ν. Ικιολές, Ο βυζαντινός τρούλος και το εικονογραφικό του πρόγραμμα (μέσα 6ου – 1204), Αθήνα 1990, 109–120, 210–211.
9 John the Baptist’s scroll carries a Gospel quotation (Jn 1, 29) traditional for his iconography: Τὸ ὁ ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”). The identification of the figures of the prophets was made by Petar Miljković-Pepek (idem, Veljusa, 178). Here I am reproducing the texts as in the original artist’s version.
10 A.-M. Gravgaard, Inscriptions of Old Testament prophecies in Byzantine Churches. A catalogue, Copenhagen 1979, 62–65; Lj. D. Popovich, Prophets carrying texts by other authors in Byzantine painting: mistakes or intentional substitutions?, ZRVI 44/1 (2007) 233–235.
is a passage from his own prophecy (Hab 3, 3) that is usually associated with the Virgin Mary: Ὁ Θ[εὸ]ς ἀποΘεμὰν ἤξει καὶ ὁ ἅγϊος ἐξ ὀρους κατασκΐου δασέως ("God came from Teman, and the Holy One from the shadowy mountain"). Inscribed on David’s scroll are words from Ps 28, 11: Κ[ύριο]ς ἰσχὺν τῶ λαῶ αὐτοῦ δώσε· Κ[ύριο]ς εὐλογήσει τον λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἑν εἰρήνη ("May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!"). While David is usually depicted with extracts from other psalms. The final prophet, who can only provisionally be identified as Ezekiel on grounds of iconographic similarity, is holding a scroll carrying a text that does not belong to any of the Old Testament prophets: Κ[ύρι]ε ὀ Θ[εὸ]ς ἡμῶν στερέωσον τὸν οἵκον τοῦτον καὶ πρόδεξαι τὰς ἑν αὐτῶ πρὸς… ἀγομέν… ("Lord our God, make firm this house and accept in it to..."). In meaning and lexicon this is close to the words of the canticles used at the Feast of Enkainia, some of which are occasionally found in inscriptions at the base of a dome. This choice of quotations in the scrolls of the prophets is evidence of the founder’s particular desire to link the themes of the Incarnation and the founding of the monastery. The murals in the narthex have not survived, apart from fragments of a medallion, a halo and the inscription IC in the dome. Mišković-Pepek hypothesized that the Ancient of Days was depicted here, which accords logically with the depiction of Christ Emmanuel in the dome of the southern side-chapel. Thus one symbolizes the eternal existence of the Word and the unity of the Holy Trinity, the other the Incarnation. At the same time, the depiction of the Emmanuel in the dome of the side-chapel is testimony to Christ’s human nature, while the depictions in the other two domes attest to His divine nature. Thus, the three images in the domes, Ancient of Days – Pantocrator – Emmanuel, form a sequence that reveals Church dogma about the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity. The programme for the apse is connected with the same area of dogma. Depicted beneath the Virgin and Child there are so-called bishops officiating before a Hetoi-masia, which is in this instance at the same time a symbol of the Holy Trinity and of the Sacrifice of the Incarnate Word of God.

The image of the Emmanuel in the side-chapel correlates not only with the depictions in the other two

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12 S. Sobkovitch, Les préfigurations mariales dans l’art byzantin: évolution des principaux types, Paris 2011 (doctoral dissertation, Paris Sciences et Lettres University) 42, 96–99, 314 et passim. The previous verse from the prophecy (Hab 3, 2) is used just as frequently and has the same typological meaning (v. Gravgaard, *Inscriptions*, 44–46).

13 Gravgaard, *Inscriptions*, 26–34; T. Папамасторахис, Ο διάκοσμος τον τρούλου των ναών της Παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και την Κέρκυρα, Αθήνα 2001, 187–190.

14 Π. Ν. Τραμπλάς, Ακαλούθια και τάξεις εις εγκαίνια ναό, Θεολογία 23/3 (Αθήνα 1952) 377, 383, 387; Παπαμαστοράκης, Ο διάκος, 75.

15 Mišković-Pepek, *Veljusa*, 191–196.

16 Παλαλέκ, Ο βυζαντινός τρούλλος, 72–73, 82–85; A. M. Lidov, "Obrázky Krista v krámové dekorativní i vizantiíské křihistorii posléSkrizmy 1054 góda, in: Drevnerusskoie iskusstvo. Vizantiia i Drevnâia Rus’, K 100-lestiti Andrei Nikolaevičha Grabara (1896–1990), ed. È. S. Smirnova et al., Sankt-Peterburg 1999, 155–177.

17 Gerstel, *Beholding the sacred mysteries*, 37–39.
domes, but also with the composition in the apse of the chapel. Placed there is an unusual depiction of Christ on a rainbow within a mandorla of glory that is being borne upwards by two angels – a theophanic vision, also attesting to the divine nature of Christ and reminding the viewer of the Second Coming. Theophanic visions of the most varied kinds were quite often placed in the apses of churches in the ninth–eleventh centuries, especially, but not exclusively, in the eastern provinces of the empire.\(^{18}\) Yet precisely this version of the scene has no exact analogues in monumental painting.\(^{19}\) Babić and Miljković-Pepek justly compared it with a few compositions close in meaning among miniatures of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.\(^{20}\) The latter suggested that this scene might be a depiction of the vision of Saint Niphon.\(^{21}\) That rarely depicted saint is shown to the left of the apse on the eastern wall of the chapel, above a niche containing a half-figure of another, unknown, saint and opposite Saint Panteleimon. The \textit{Vita}\(^{22}\) of Niphon, which circulated quite widely in the eleventh century, tells of God granting him several visions.\(^{22}\) The

\(^{18}\) C. Jolivet-Lévy, \textit{Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords}, Paris 1991, 335–341; eadem, \textit{La Cappadoce médiévale. Images et spiritualité}, Paris 2001, 93–125; W. T. Woodfin, \textit{A Majestas Domini in Middle Byzantine Constantinople}, CA 51 (2003–2004) 45–53.

\(^{19}\) Vojislav J. Đurić believed this to be an early depiction of the Synaxis of the Archangels, but that hypothesis is difficult to accept (idem, \textit{Fresques du monastère de Veljusa}, 114, 117–118; idem, \textit{Vizantijske freske}, 12).

\(^{20}\) Babić, \textit{Les chapelles annexes}, 101–105; Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 205–206.

\(^{21}\) Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 206–210.

\(^{22}\) Materialy z istorii vizantiisko-slov'anskoi literatury ta movi, ed. A. V. Rystenko, Odesa 1928, 3–238; V. Marinis, \textit{The vision of Last Judgement in the \textit{Vita} of Saint Niphon (BH\textsc{G} 1371z)}, DOP 71 (2017) 193–228; S. A. Ivanov, “\textit{Zhitie sv. Nifonta}”: slav'ianskiй perevod i grecheskiй original, in: POLYTRPON. K 70-letiiu Vladimira Nikolaevicha Toporova, ed. T. M. Nikolaeva et al., Moskva 1998, 300–512; Nifont, in: \textit{Pravoslavnaia Entsiklopediia} 51; ed. Patriarkh Moskovskii i vseia Rusi Kirill, Moskva 2018, 258–261 (S. A. Ivanov).
depiction of Christ in the chapel apse can indeed be interpreted both as an illustration of one of those visions and as a generalized version of a theophanic vision that should be considered in the overall context of the iconographic programme.

Thus, the iconographic programme of the Veljusa frescoes is idiosyncratic and reflects not only theological ideas that were important for the time, but also the founder’s own considerations. So, what sort of a man was the founder?

Quite a lot is known about Bishop Manuel from the chrysobull that he obtained for his monastery from Alexios I Komnenos in 1085 and the typikon that he compiled some time after.23 From his youth until his appointment to the see of Tiberioupolis (probably already at a venerable age), he lived in the Monastery of Saint Auxentius in Bithynia, in the vicinity of Constantinople. He constructed the Monastery of the Virgin Eleousa with his own personal funds as the place where he would be buried. Miljković-Pepek plausibly suggests that the founder was buried in the arcosolium by the south wall of the narthex.24 In a second chrysobull of Alexios I Komnenos dated 1106, Manuel is referred to as “the former prelate

Fig. 5. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, prophet David (photo: author)

Fig. 6. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, prophet Jeremiah (photo: author)

23 L. Petit, Le monastère de Notre-Dame de Pitié en Macédoine, Izvestii Russkogo arheologicheskogo instituta v Konstantinopole 6 (1900) 1–153; V. Laurent, Recherches sur l’histoire et la cartulaire de Notre-Dame de Pitié à Strumica, EO 33 (1934) 5–27; Miljkovik-Pepek, Veljusa, 33–47, 253–272; V. Mošin, Grčka arhiva na man-

24 Miljkovik-Pepek, Veljusa, 100, 196–205.
and is not mentioned again, from which one can conclude that by that time he was already dead.25

Some of the information from the documents attests to the founder’s erudition, to his interest in theology and art. The typikon that he compiled is written in fine literary language and abounds with references to Scripture, the world of the Church Fathers and monastic writings. Books of this sort figure among the 68 manuscripts listed in an inventory of the monastery’s property drawn up later.26 Some of them would have belonged to the founder, as, apparently, did some of the almost three dozen icons and other works of art: icons including a depiction of the founder, of his patron saints Manuel, Sabel and Ismael, of Saint Auxentius, the founder of the monastery in Bithynia named after him, and of Saint Stephen the Younger, who was a monk there.27

The Bishop of Tiberioupolis is mentioned among those who attended the local Church Council convened in Constantinople in 1082 to deal with John Italos.28 After an investigation that had lasted several years, John Italos was accused, among other things, of teaching incorrectly about the Incarnation of the Word and the unity of the three persons in Christ.29 It is entirely possible that dis-

25 Petit, Le monastère, 28; Miljković-Pepik, Veljusa, 36, 256.
26 The dating of this document is problematic. Scholars’ opinions are divided between two versions – either 1164 (Laurent, Recherches, 23; Miljković-Pepik, Veljusa, 55–64, 283–290; Kaplan, Retour sur le dossier, 487–490) or 1449 (Petit, Le monastère, 13–14, 114–153; Byzantine monastic foundations documents I, 1667–1678).
27 Miljković-Pepik, Veljusa, 235–248, 286, n. 600, 601.
28 F. I. Uspenskii, Deloproizvodstvo po obvinenii Ioanna Italav eresi, Izvestii a Russkogo arkheologicheskogo instituta v Konstantinopol 2 (1897) 62, n. 2; Petit, Le monastère, 7–8, n. 7, 96; J. Gouillard, Le procès officiel de Jean l’Italien: les actes et leurs sous-entendus, TM 9 (1985) 157; Kaplan, Retour sur le dossier, 485.
29 L. Chucas, The trial of John Italos and the crisis of the intellectual values in Byzantium in the eleventh century, Munich 1981, 26–40; John Italos, in: ODB II, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, New York – Oxford 1991,
The discussion of these matters with other Church leaders and experts on theology prompted Bishop Manuel to have his own conceptions set down in the murals of the church that he had built. Interestingly, in both the texts of the typikon and the imperial chrysobull of 1085 he comes across as a conservative, an opponent not only of heresies, but of innovations of any sort, yet the iconography of the frescoes in the Church of the Virgin Eleousa is innovative, even experimental in character.

The church itself, its architecture, decoration and frescoes are the finest testimony to the founder’s grasp of artistic matters, his love of art and his ties to artists from the capital.

All the scholars who have written about the Veljusa frescoes have observed that their style derives from the traditions of art in the second quarter and middle of the eleventh century that they have called “monastic,” “hieratic,” “ascetic” and other terms. In Veljusa this manifested itself primarily in a preference for monumental shapes with a sense of volume. On the other hand, the same authors noted that the ensemble displayed new tendencies that developed further in the twelfth century, such as the combination of painterly modelling with linear stylization techniques and the particular expressiveness of the countenances.

It seems to me that it is both interesting and necessary to develop on these ideas. The Veljusa frescoes are undoubtedly the creation of an outstanding artist that...
on the one hand bears the imprint of his individuality and on the other reflects a whole range of contradictory tendencies belonging to a complex transitional epoch in the history of Byzantine art. For a fuller understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon we need to examine the characteristics of the painting at Veljusa in more detail.

Despite the fragmentary preservation of the murals, it is evident that the scale of the figures and compositions was correlated very well to the architecture. In the small, exquisitely organized space of the church that opens up with four conch-petals to the sides of the dome a monumental stasis reigns, a majestic rhythm. The individual figures are placed widely and without constraint. The compositions in the side conches are inscribed splendidly into their shapes and treated laconically, without superflu-

Fig. 10. Four Gospels from Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, theol. gr. 154, fol. 87v, 1060–1070s, Evangelist Mark (after: Popova, Zakharova, Oretškaia, Vizantiiskia miniatura)
ous details. The figures of the main personages are large and static; their silhouettes can be clearly distinguished. The frescoes in the dome have survived best of all and were recently cleaned of soot once again. The figures of the Virgin Orans, John the Baptist, two archangels and four prophets placed around the medallion containing the Pantocrator give the fullest idea about the artistic characteristics of the ensemble.

All the figures have somewhat heavy proportions, large heads, broad shoulders, powerful arms, long legs with massive thighs and large feet. Even the archangels here do not look like incorporeal beings. They too have strong shoulders and broad silhouettes, emphasized by the spread of the wings. The Virgin Orans and preceding archangels are frozen in solemn poses; the four prophets are presented from a variety of angles and in
different motions (Figs. 2–8). Ezekiel is walking to the right and reading as he goes, unrolling the scroll with both hands and bending low over it. Jeremiah is standing stock still, looking straight ahead and presenting the open scroll in his left hand. David is also showing an unfurled scroll, but his more relaxed pose and less decisive gesture conveys contemplation and reasoning. His right hand is gesturing towards the text; his head is slightly bowed and turned to the left, his gaze directed towards the viewer. The young Habbakuk is shown in contraposto, as is David, but his lithe body is imbued with impatient, dance-like movement. His trunk and head are still turned towards the scroll in his left hand, while his gaze has already turned to the right, following the sweep of the blessing hand on that side. John the Baptist is presented in a similar manner: his gaze is directed towards the worshippers, while his powerful figure is shown taking an energetic step, the direction of which is indicated by the right hand raised in blessing and the unrolling scroll in his lowered left hand.

The artist skilfully employs not only the poses and movements, but also the drapery to heighten the emotional characterization of the personages. With Ezekiel, Habakkuk and John the Baptist, the clothing cascades down, forming diagonals and uneasy clumps with wavy edges. The edges of their cloaks flutter from the rapid movement and hang in the air. In the case of Mary and King David, the drapery falls calmly and majestically, while with Jeremiah it forms heavy conglomerations. The shapes of the folds in the clothing are varied and natural, according with the figures’ movements. Lying at their foundation is strong, confident drawing and classic modelling with gradual lightening of the primary hue and final addition of linear details. The plastic modelling and drawing do not contradict, but rather mutually complement each other.

The monumental treatment of figures and painterly plastic working up of the shapes seen at Veljusa is closest to the murals in the Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, which were probably created by artists from the capital invited by Archbishop Leo in the last years before his death in 1056. There is a strong resemblance to their large, broad-shouldered, big-boned figures shown either in a state of majestic calm or else in energetic motion filled with an inner force. The prophets in the drum at Veljusa can be compared to the apostles from the Ascension or the Eucharist in Ohrid (Fig. 9). In both places the powerful sculptural quality of the abundant, elaborately draped folds heightens the emotional tension.

However, at Veljusa, in contrast to the Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, there is only occasional use of the stylized geometricized shapes of folds and highlights that were characteristic of art in the second quarter and mid-

\[\text{Fig. 14. Church of Panagia ton Chalkeon, Thessaloniki, 1028, angel (photo: Olga Popova)}\]

\[\text{Fig. 15. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, Christ Emmanuel (photo: author)}\]

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34 B. Todić, Arhiepiskop Lav – tvorac ikonografskog programa fresaka u Svetoj Sofiji Ohridskoj, in: Vizantijski svet na Balkanu I, ed. B. Kršmanović et al., Beograd 2012, 119–136 (with earlier bibliography). On painting style v. V. J. Đurić, L’Église de Sainte Sophie à Ochrid, Beograd 1963, V–VII; idem, Vizantijske freske, 10–11, 180 (n. 3); idem, Un courant stylistique dans la peinture byzantine vers le milieu du XV siècle, Zograf 15 (1984) 15–22; O. S. Popova, Freski sobora Sr. Sofi Ohridskoj i iskustvo 40-kh – 50-kh gg. XI v, VV 74 (99) (2015) 212–224.
Fig. 16. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, archangel (photo: author)

Fig. 17. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, prophet Jeremiah (photo: author)

Fig. 18. Church of the Virgin Eleousa, Veljusa, 1080–1093, prophet Habakkuk (photo: author)

Fig. 19. Church of Saint Sophia, Novgorod, 1109, prophet Daniel (photo: author)
dle of the eleventh century. Here both the drawing and the plastic modelling are more natural and finer, which accords with the classic tastes of the early Komnenian period. In the case of Ezekiel or Jeremiah, the elaborate pattern of folds in the himation and the large surfaces that gradually lighten with the subtlest play of half-tones produce the effect of a soft silky fabric, conveying the volume of the rounded shapes of the thighs, knees and forearms. In this respect the Veljusa frescoes are even comparable to the miniatures in some metropolitan manuscripts of the 1060s–80s, such as the portraits of the Evangelists in a Gospel Book (Cod. Theol. gr. 154) in the Austrian National Library in Vienna35 (Fig. 10) or the Lectionary (Auct. T. inf. 2.7) in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.36 The slightly earlier miniatures in the Viennese Gospel represent an astonishingly precise parallel to the Veljusa frescoes not only in the soft painterly modelling of abundant, heaped up drapery, but also in the dramatic, temperamental treatment of the images. Those works are, however, an exception among the other examples of Constantinopolitan book miniatures from the early Komnenian period, which were in general characterized by images of a different type – harmonious, refined and contemplative.

That sort of classic treatment of large monumental forms is found in the Daphni mosaics of the late 11th c. (Fig. 11).37 This statement applies above all to the figures of the prophets in the dome, where the absence of any action and the placement of the separate figures in the broad areas of wall between the windows predisposed towards the appearance of similar static poses, weighty proportions and majestic, sumptuous drapery. However, while in Veljusa such forms contain, as it were, an increased reserve of robustness and conceal tremendous energy within, at Daphni that impression completely melts away due to the difference in scale and colouring. The figures hovering at a great height in the glow of the golden hemisphere of the dome seem lightweight. The light-coloured clothing resembles clouds. Optical effects transform the material reality.

The Veljusa artist, while clearly very familiar with the classic metropolitan style, did not pursue the new ideals. Both the general character of the imagery of his

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35 O. S. Popova, Miniatury grecheskogo Evangeliâ cod. theol. gr. 154 iz Nasional'noi biblioteki Avstrii i nekotorye osobennosti vizantijskogo iskusstva okolo serediny 11 veka, in: V sozvezdii Lʹva. sbornik statei po drevnerusskomu iskusstvu v chest Lʹva Isaakovicha Lifshitsa, ed. M. A. Orlova, Moskva 2014, 370–383.
36 I. Hutter, Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften I. Oxford Bodleian Library I, Stuttgart 1977, 72–75, No. 42, Abb. 275–278.
37 G. Millet, Le monastère de Daphni: histoire, architecture, mosaïques, Paris 1899; E. Diez, O. Demus, Byzantine mosaics in Greece. Hosiou Loukas and Daphni, Cambridge MA 1931; D. Mouriki, Stylistic trends in monumental painting of Greece during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, DOP 34-35 (1981–1982) 94–98; eadem, The mosaics of Nea Moni, 262–266; N. Xartoudas, Βυζαντινή φυλακτική, Αθήνα 1994, 21–22, εικ. 96–124; O. S. Popova, Puti vizantijskogo iskusstva, Moskva 2013, 274–277; M. Panagiotidη-Kasopoulou, Αναζήτησες του ελευθερίου του, ΔΑΦΝΙΩΝ, ΔΧΑΕ 40 (2019) 193–222 (with earlier bibliography).
frescoes and the particular types of faces with their specific expressiveness are to a large extent rooted in the art of the previous generation. Such conservatism was generally quite a widespread phenomenon in the art of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, as scholars have repeatedly noted. The most notable works belonging to this tendency include mosaics in northern Italy, above all those from the first stage of work in Saint Mark’s Cathedral in Venice and Santa Maria Assunta on the island of Torcello, which were probably created by artists from Constantinople. Those mosaics are akin to the Veljusa frescoes in their grand monumental structure, the weighty proportions of the figures and the austere character of the images. One of the chief means of expression in them, however, is graphic stylization, which is not generally characteristic of the Veljusa artist.

The line of continuity connecting the Veljusa murals back to the art of the “ascetic tendency” becomes especially evident when one examines the depictions of the Virgin Mary, Christ Emmanuel and the young saints: they reproduce a type that took shape in the second quarter and middle of the eleventh century (Figs. 12, 13). The heads have a regular round shape that is repeated by the outlines of a luxurious coiffure or veil, symmetrically arched eyebrows, the smooth contours of plump cheeks and chin. The faces have rather heavy proportions: a low forehead, wide cheekbones, straight fleshy noses and massive chins. All the features are large and precisely outlined, which invests them with a particularly powerful expressiveness concentrated in the unseeing, remote look of the huge eyes, the size of which is emphasized by the dark contours of the eyelids and the shadows around them.

While taking this type as a basis, the Veljusa artist experiments boldly with it. In some instances he reproduces a model from the second quarter of the eleventh century almost precisely. For example, the Christ Emmanuel in the dome of the side-chapel is almost indistinguishable from the angels in the Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki (1028) (Figs. 14, 15). He has the same thick eyebrows, chubby cheeks and lips with fancifully curving outlines, and at the same time huge slightly rounded eyes enclosed by dark vel-

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38 V. for example Đurić, La peinture murale byzantine, 168–171; Mouriki, Stylistic trends, 100–102; Popova, The ascetic trend, 189–199.
39 O. Demus, The mosaics of San Marco in Venice I, Chicago–London 1984, 21–42, pl. 9–26, 1–23; I. Andreescu-Treadgold, The mosaics of Venice and the Venetian lagoon: thirty-five years of research at Torcello (I), Arte Medievale 3 (Roma 2013) 193–206 (with earlier bibliography); I. A. Oretskaja, Vizantijskie mosaičisty v Severnoi Italii vo vtoroi polovine XI – nachale XII veka, VV 75 (100) (2016) 157–166.

40 On the eleventh-century wall paintings in this church v. K. Papadopoulos, Die Wandmalereien des XI. Jahrhunderts in der Kirche Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki, Graz–Köln 1966; A. Tsiouridou, The Church of the Panagia Chalkeon, Thessaloniki 1985, 25–53; Ch. Mauropoulos-Tsoumi, Byzantine Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 1993, 104–110; E. Kourtoulidou-Nikolaïdou, A. Tourta, Wandering in Byzantine Thessaloniki, Athens 1997, 177–182.
vety contours with a bottomless gaze from their frozen pupils. This pronounced disproportion in combination with the stylized pattern of highlights on the forehead and rudness on the cheeks, as well as the strong emphasis on all the outlines, invests the image of Christ Emmanuel with a sense of abstraction and significance.

In other cases, the Veljusa artist strengthens the material and sensual components in the images. He brings the proportions of the eyes closer to normal, gives the gazes a specific direction and a definite character and uses slight asymmetry in the line of the brows, lips or shadows to produce a hint of movement (Figs. 16, 17). The actual texture of the painting of the face becomes more corporeal and tangible, while also varying slightly depending on the desired effect. Sometimes the painter employs more thorough and gradual modelling of volume. Often, however, his painting technique grows more pastose, the brushstrokes becoming smooth and flowing in some places, rapid and precise in others. This produces certain illusionistic effects and enriches the emotional content. For example, in the countenance of the right-hand archangel colour reflexes have appeared in the shadows, as well as gliding white highlights on the ridge of the nose, in the corners of the eyes and by the nostrils, along the edge of the upper lip. All this brings animation and immediacy: it seems as if some question is about to slip from the archangel's lips, while in his eyes we detect wonder and excitement. Similar devices have been used in the depiction of the prophet Habakkuk, in which external and internal movement are expressed even more clearly (Figs. 8, 18). His countenance is shown at an angle, with the movement of the eyes seeming to be in advance of the turn of the head: the gaze is strongly off to the side and directed straight at the viewer. In combination with the exaggerated size of the eyes and other facial features moulded with large contrasting brushstrokes, this produces a very powerful impression.

The same bold manner of painting becomes even less constrained in the depictions of the elders. In the image of the prophet Ezekiel, who is shown half-turned, the type used is not so noble-looking (Fig. 20). Frowning bushy eyebrows, squinting eyes, a large fleshy nose with a bifurcation on the bridge, protruding brow ridges and cheekbones, thick lips – all these features convey the tense concentration with which the prophet is reading his scroll. This somewhat coarse expressiveness is matched by a more dynamic painting technique, with contrasting brushstrokes for the highlights, which are reminiscent of the stylized forms of late Komnenian art.

It is interesting that the Veljusa artist, while sometimes resorting to stylization of the shape of highlights, ruddy patches and other elements of the countenances and figures varies their parameters freely. In some cases, he
makes them larger and geometrically regular, as in the art of the second quarter and middle of the eleventh century, in other cases more dynamic and fanciful, anticipating the linear stylization of the twelfth century. Comparisons can be drawn with some of the images on Torcello and in Saint Sophia in Novgorod (1109) with their tense, expressive gazes, but in both those ensembles, drawing plays a much more important role (Fig. 19). In contrast to the painting of the following century, in the Veljusa frescoes linear stylization is only an ancillary device, and that is what sets them fundamentally apart from other works of the archaising tendency around the turn of the twelfth century.

The primary significance at Veljusa belongs to the shapes of the volumes, which carry a powerful emotional charge and not to abstract structures of contours and light rays. The internal sense is embodied rather in the partic- ular expressiveness of the faces with large, active features, in the dynamic way the faces are painted, in the contrasting modelling with colour and light. In this aspect, the Veljusa painting bears most resemblance to the frescoes of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, where many of the images are imbued with very high tension, with a burning, even dramatic quality. Psychological concreteness is produced with the aid of sharp movements and looks, asymmetry in the facial features, deep wrinkles and shadows, contrasting modelling with bright flares of light.

The Veljusa artist was very familiar with these devices and examples, and he drew extensively upon that arsenal. Many of his personages bear a direct resemblance to the frescoes of Saint Sophia in Ohrid. The prophet Ezekiel can be compared with the apostle Andrew from the Ohrid Eucharist (Figs. 20, 21). They are alike in their similar proportions and the shapes of their facial features – rather plain and heavy, with a low frowning forehead and broad cheekbones that are emphasized by the stylized pattern of the highlights and ruddy patches. The keen expressiveness of the sidelong gazes is accentuated by the contrast of shadows and white brushstrokes. The dynamic manner of painting heightens the tension of the images, invests them with a powerful dramatic character, an immense inner strength.

The image of Saint Niphon is treated in the same spirit. His half-figure is painted on the eastern side of the opening between the main body of the church and the southern side-chapel (Fig. 22). Saint Niphon seems gigantic, hanging above the narrow passageway. A similar exaggeration of the scale of the figures can also be seen in Saint Sophia in Ohrid, for examples in the half-length depictions of saintly bishops in the bema. Most impressive of all, however, in the depiction of Niphon are the individuality and the psychological specificity. The saint’s round head looks like a ball, and that resemblance is underlined by the stylized pattern of the grey curls at the temples and the patch of light shining on the bulging high forehead. Otherwise, the facial features appear natural: they are large, but commensurate, with certain individual nuances. The small eyes beneath bushy brows have an attentive gaze. The curves of the attractively outlined bright lips transitions into the asymmetric curls at the tips of the moustache, giving the appearance of a slightly mocking half-smile. The characterization is made sharper by the neat graphic stylization of this motif. In combination with elements typical for the Veljusa depictions, such as broad cheekbones, a short nose with a chubby tip and a full beard, this all gives Niphon a good-natured, even cheerful appearance. Such psychology also has close analogies in Saint Sophia in Ohrid, although in that ensemble a sterner, more austere, at times even gloomy character prevails in the images. This is true, for example, of Saint Eustathius of Antioch, who bears an outward resemblance to Niphon. At the same time, though, his countenance carries a different expression – harsh, even vehement. His brows are not merely frowning, but bend angrily above flashing eyes, while his tight-pressed lips curve as if in disapproval (Fig. 23).

In late eleventh-century art there was undoubtedly also a diversity of physiognomic types and psychological characterizations. This trait manifested itself vividly in the Daphni mosaics ensemble. Researchers have justly writ-

Fig. 26. Church of Dormition at Dafni, Athens, late eleventh c., Pantocrator (photo: author)

41 V. for example I. Andreescu, Les mosaiques de la lagune vé- nitienne aux environs de 1100, in: Actes du XV Congrès international d’études byzantines II/A. Art et archéologie. Communications, ed. M. A. Gavriliis, Athènes 1981, 21, fig. 9; V. D. Sarabjanov, E. S. Smirnova, Istoriia drevnerusskoj zhivopisi, Moskva 2007, ill. 83, 85.

42 Đurić, Vizantijske freske, 10–11; idem, Un courant stylistique, 17, 20; Popova, Freski sobora Sv. Sofii Okhridskoi; Popova, Sarabjanov, Mozaiki i freski, 394–418.
ten about the turning to the heritage of Antiquity and the “humanistic” conception that form the basis of the classic style of those mosaics. In general they are marked by refined mastery, gentleness and striking beauty. The Daphni mosaics predominantly present noble faces, elegant and majestic figures, natural poses and calm movements, a soft sculptural modelling of shapes and harmonious combinations of colours. Yet even in that ensemble one occasionally comes across unattractive faces with irregular features, ones with a deliberately common look, highly individual or even grotesque ones. Among them it is possible to find personages that bear an outward resemblance to the Veljusa images. The prophets Zephaniah, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah and others have the same powerful figures, broad-shouldered and strong, with muscular necks, large heads and thick shaggy locks. The faces, too, are similar with broad cheekbones, low foreheads, heavy chins and large noses. For example, Ezekiel in Veljusa bears a strong resemblance to Zephaniah in Daphni, and also to that ensemble’s Jeremiah with his fleshy humped nose, thick brightly coloured lips, small squinting eyes and lumpy skin (Fig. 24). Yet a superficial resemblance of certain human types and artistic devices does not lead to an identity of content. The prophets in Daphni do not carry that charge of inner energy invested in the Veljusa frescoes. For all their non-classical, even somewhat coarse appearance, their faces are calm, emotionally neutral, serenely aloof, sometimes thoughtful.

In this context, despite certain problems due to the state of preservation, the most indicative comparison is between the two images of the Pantocrator in the domes at Veljusa and Daphni. They look remarkably similar (Figs. 25, 26). They are both placed in identical medallions with rainbow frames and have a traditional iconography. The face of the Pantocrator in Veljusa cannot be described as regular and classically beautiful. It is surprising for its unusual combination of a disproportionately narrow forehead and very large, distinctive, sculpturally moulded features. The abundant hair and beard form an oval frame, into which the chin and its near-symmetrical counterpart, the forehead narrowing towards the top, are “inscribed”. The mobile eyebrows rise high and bend, repeating the unusual shape of the forehead that, following their lead, seems to go into motion, becoming covered with deep furrows with a distinctive drop-shaped fold in the middle. The fork above its bridge emphasizes the sculptural quality of the long fleshy nose. The corners of the large protuberant mouth drop down strongly, continu-

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43 V. n. 37.
44 V. for example Millet, Le monastère de Daphni, pl. VII–IX. Doula Mouriki also noted a certain similarity between the depictions in Veljusa and Daphni (Mouriki, The mosaics of Nea Moni, 263–264).

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45 On the countenance of the Pantocrator in Daphni there have been minor retouchings of losses, the most substantial being on the eyes, especially the right. Nevertheless, the direction of the gaze and even the shape of the pupils accords in general with what existed before the late nineteenth century restoration (R. Cormack, Viewing the mosaics of the Monasteries of Hosios Loukas, Daphni and the Church of Santa Maria Assunta, Torcello, in: New light on the old glass. Recent research on Byzantine mosaics and glass, ed. C. Entwistle, L. James, London 2013, 245–249). In Veljusa, despite the partial losses and abrasions of the paint layer, the design has generally survived quite well, the modelling has done so in places.

46 Mišković-Pepek notes the similarity of the framing of the medallions in Veljusa and Daphni, yet says nothing of the similarity between the depictions themselves. Cf. Mišković-Pepek, Veljusa, 177.
eed by the lines of the moustache and shadows. Togeth-
er with the fixed penetrating gaze of the dark eyes from
beneath the frowning asymmetrical brows, this invests
Christ's countenance with a stern, almost vehement look.
The modelling of the face, the resonant sharp contours of
the eyebrows and lids, the deep shadows around the eyes
and down the sides of the nose all contribute to heighten-
ing the piercing, non-classical character of the image. On
the whole, it impresses greatly with its strength, expres-
siveness and exceptional inner power.

The similarity to the Pantocrator in Daphni is quite
literal. It is obvious in the unusual, recognizable features
of Christ's countenance, to a lesser degree in the content
of the image as a whole. This seems to me to indicate
that both artists reproduced one and the same prototype,
which was probably located in Constantinople. The dif-
ference between the depictions of the Pantocrator in
Veljusa and Daphni is the same as between the prophets
in the two ensembles. In Daphni the expressively shaped
features are devoid of the intensity that is present in Velju-
sa. In Daphni Christ's gaze is directed off to the side; the
furrows on his forehead are not as deep and only roughly
accord with the movement of the eyebrows. The curve of
the mouth is not so rigid. All this softens the look some-
what, giving it a more indeterminate, pensive character.
While in Veljusa the Pantocrator comes across as the in-
timidating Judge, in Daphni he seems to represent Divine
Providence. Meanwhile, the Veljusa Pantocrator appears
more organic and in accord with the spirit of those fres-
coes, while among the Daphni mosaics the Christ in the
dome is comparable only to John the Baptist in the proth-
esis and a few of the prophets. The whole structure of that
ensemble is already directed towards other ideals.

The other depiction of the Pantocrator, in the side-
chapel of the Church of the Virgin Eleousa shows that our
artist was not entirely a stranger to contemporary tenden-
cies in art (Fig. 27). There we can recognize in Christ's
countenance the noble Komnenian type with more regular
and well-proportioned features that is often found in Con-
stantinopolitan book miniatures of the 1070s–80s. Among
the close parallels to this image, I can mention the mini-
ature (Fig. 28) on a page from a New Testament and Psalter
from 1084 in the State Tretyakov Gallery (Inv. No DR-
78).

Yet, for all the similarity of outward parameters, the
Veljusa artist does not strive to invest his image with the
quiet, contemplative character associated with the classic
Komnenian type, preferring a sense of inspired emotional-
ality. His Christ's countenance has some grieving or com-
passionate expression due to the eyebrows raised towards the
bridge of the nose and the characteristic drop-shaped fold
above it. The active S-curve of the seated figure and the legs
that seem to be stepping bring dynamism to the composi-
tion, as do the agitated folds in the clothing.

The deeply personal character of the Theophanic vi-
sion in the apse of the side-chapel is underlined by one
more artistic device. Both the apse itself and the scene
within it are very small in size, which is striking in com-
parison with the gigantic figures of Saint Niphon and
Saint Panteleimon depicted on either side of the open-
ing into the chapel. Alongside them the miniature scene
in the little apse comes across as something precious and
secret, hidden away in a casket or beneath the cover of a
book. It is entirely possible that in this side-chapel Bishop
Manuel wanted to see depicted what had been revealed
to him through prayer, contemplation or reading. In any
event, the association with a book is reinforced by the
composition's resemblance to miniatures of the period. The
identification of this composition as the Vision of
Saint Niphon seems highly probable as the very fact of
the depiction of that saint presupposes that the founder
had a particular interest in this personality and life story,
which was not included in the Synaxarion or hagiograph-
ic collections current at that time.

It is astonishing how neatly both the iconographic
programme and the artistic peculiarities of the Veljusa
frescoes accord with the very rare documentary evidence
we are fortunate enough to have about the founder –
about the conservatism, fastidiousness, theological and
artistic interests of an elderly monk preparing for death
and creating a monastery as a place in which to retire and
then to be buried. Behind that accordance there must
have been mutual understanding, a similarity of tastes
and views, a spiritual kinship between the client and the
artist, although we do not know what the latter's name
was, nor whether he was a monk or a layman.

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47 O. S. Popova, A. V. Zakharova, I. A. Oretškaïa, Vizantiiskaiâ miniatiûra vtoroi poloviny X – nachala XII veka, Moskva 2012, 297, fig. 257.
48 V. n. 20.
49 Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 206–210.
50 Ivanov, “Zhitie sv. Nifonta”, 502; idem, Nifont, 260.
Was he a local, from Ohrid or Thessaloniki, as Petar Miljković-Pepek was inclined to think? 51 The direct connection with the frescoes in Saint Sophia in Ohrid and the Panagia Chalkeon may seem to be evidence in support of such a conclusion, but those ensembles were, most probably, created by metropolitan artists. As we have seen, the Veljusa artist reveals a direct connection with the art of the capital both in the middle and in the second half of the eleventh century. It would be entirely natural for a gifted artist to take an interest in the work of predecessors and contemporaries, to collect visual impressions that became part of his own original style. It is precisely that freedom and assurance with which he combines diverse elements in pursuit of his artistic goals that more than anything argues that this artist could have acquired such rich experience and such high professional skill only in the Byzantine capital, irrespective of whether he was native of Macedonia, Bithynia or some other region.

Devotion to the tenets of art around the middle of the eleventh century may indicate that the Master of Veljusa formed as an artist at that very time, later enriching that period, when an enthusiasm for the classic style reigned in Constantinople. Our artist pursues a course of preserving the inner potential of the art of the "ascetic" type, in part clothing it in new forms, while many other artists belonging to the archaizing tendency of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries reproduce the outwardly recognizable signs of that art while far from always attaining the same richness of content.

Other versions of the preservation of the legacy of the "ascetic tendency" in combination with new trends in the art of the 1060s–80s also existed. In metropolitan painting there was the fairly wide circle of illustrated manuscripts associated with the Monastery of Studious and the scriptorium of the "Copiste de Métaphraste"52 and also the lost mosaics in the narthex of the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea (1065–67).53 Besides that, a fair number of frescoes have survived on the periphery of the Byzantine Empire (in Cappadocia, Cyprus, on other Greek islands and the Balkan Peninsula itself) and beyond its borders.54 Those ensembles are heterogeneous in terms of quality and the use of specific artistic devices, but they are united by a devotion to depictions of a severe, aloof character and a corresponding set of basic means of expression: laconic compositions and figures with little movement, countenances with greatly enlarged eyes, a stylized, schematic treatment of shapes with a predominance of line.

The Veljusa frescoes, however, represent a different version of the style, an extremely rare, if not unique one, judging by the small quantity of contemporary analogues that can be found only among works of the very highest quality. The Veljusa frescoes are testimony to the individual course of an outstanding artist, who interpreted the legacy of the recent past in an original manner. He experiments freely with it, introducing much of his own – above all, the astonishing animation and spirituality that he gives to the whole substance with its tangible, sensual forms.

51 Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, 222.

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52 Popova, Zakharova, Oretski, Vizantiiska miniatiūra, 68–71, 79–82, 336–338.
53 C. Mango, The date of the narthex mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea, DOP 13 (1959) 245–252.
54 N. Thierry, La Cappadocie de l'antiquité au moyen âge, Turnhout 2002, 187–195, fiches 42, 47; A. Stylianou, I. A. Stylianou, The painted churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine art, Nicosia 1997, 53–59; M. Xanthidis et al., Νάξος: Βυζαντινή τέχνη στην Ελλάδα, Athína 1989, 37–39, 47–48, 66–79; Π. Λ. Βοκοτόπουλος et al., Ευρήματα Βυζαντινών τοιχογραφιών. Ιόνια νησιά, Athína 2010, 50–52, 77–109; etc. V. also surveys: Mouriki, Stylianou, J. A. Stylianou, Μονή των Μουριά, Stylistic trends, 93–94, 98–100; K. M. Skawran, The development of Middle Byzantine fresco painting in Greece, Pretoria 1982, 73–81; M. Panayotidi, La peinture monumentale en Grèce de la fin de l'Iconoclasme jusqu'à l'avènement des Comnènes (843–1081), CA 34 (1986) 75–108.
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Цркву Богородице Елеусе у Вељуси, као што је познато, саградио је 1080. године монах Манојло, епископ Тибериополиса (Струмица), који је дошао из манастира Светог Авксентија у близини Константинопоља. Године 1082. он је поменут међу учесницима цариградског црквеног сабора на којем се расправља- ло о Јовану Италу. Нешто касније, 1085. године, Манојло је добио од цара Алексија I Комнина хрисовуљу за свој нови манастир, за који је убрзо после тога саставио типик. Сама та црква – њена архитектура, украс и фреско-сликарство – најбоље је сведочанство о ктиторовој наклоности према уметности и о његовим везама с константинопољском елитом. Као што су проучаваоци исправно приметили, програм фресака Вељусе самосвојан је и не одражава само богословске идеје значајне за време у којем настаје већ и ктиторова властита схватања. Недавно чишћење фресака у Вељуси подстакло нас је да изнова размотримо иконографске и стилске особености зидног сликарства тог храма.

Смештени у куполу, попрсје Христа Пантократора и фигуре Богородице Оранте, светог Јована Крיסטеља, два анђела и четворица пророка чине необично компоновану целину. Неки истраживачи тумачили су је као прелазну sliku која алудира на Вазнесење и Други долазак, док су други указивали на њен ино-вативан карактер у истању божанске природе овај плочене Речи. Према нашем виђењу, та необично састављена целина истиче улогу Богородице, којој је ктитор посветио цркву. Заснивање манастира и призивање Божијег благослава на они што се у њему моле чине други значајан идејни аспект уведен у програм куполе. То је учинило помоћу необично избора текстова исписаних на свицима пророка Давида и другог профете, који је обично препознатан као џезекљ.

Фреске Вељусе несумњиво су остварење изузетног уметника, чије дело, с једне стране, носи печат његове индивидуалности, док, с друге, одражава широк опсег противуречних стремљења што су обележавала његово доба као сложену прелазну епоху у историји византијске уметности.

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Freske Veljuse neсumњivо su ostvarenje izuzetnog umetnika, cije delo, s jedne strane, nosi petat njegovog jednoljubnosti, dok, s drugе, odrazava širok opsеg protivurечних стремљева što su obeležavale njegovu dobnu oblikovanja njegovog dobа kao složenu prелazu epohu u istoriji vizantijske umetnosti.

I opšti karakter slikе i posебni tipovi lika osobene izražajnosti zasnovani su u velikoj meri na rešenjima umetnosti prethodne generacije. Tako konzervativizam bio je uopšte široko rasprostranjen po umetnosti kasnog XI i ranog XII века, što su istraživači u više navrata zapaženi. Među najznacajnija dela koja prihaja na tom umetničkom toku svrstavaju se mozaike katedrale Svetog Marka u Veneciji i Torchele iz oko 1100, ali i freske Svetе Сoфије u Sofiji u Novgorodu, nastale 1109, kao i neke druge. Ti ansamblи слични su freskama Veljuse po zamanoj monotonalnoј strukturi, teškim proporcijama figura i strgom karakteru slikе. Jedno od glavnih sredstava izraz na njima, međutim, jeste grafička stilizacija, koja uglavnom nije osobenost majstora Veljuse.

У Вељуси је главни значај дат облицима волунтена, који носе снажан емоционални набој, а не апстрактним структурама контура и светлосних зрака. Унутрашњи осећај је отеловљен више у нарочитој израђености широких, енергичних црта, у начину њиховог исликавања, у контрастном моделирању бојом и светлом. У том погледу сликарство Veljuse nosi najviše sличnosti s freskama Svetе Sofije u Охриду (pre 1056), gдje je mnogo stava predstava projeve tovom visokom napetosti, vatrenošću, чак dramatičnu. Psihološka određenost ostvarena je pomocu oštrih pokreta i pogleda, asimetrije u crtama líca, dубокim boraма и sенкама, kontrastnim modeloavanje blystavim odblešcima.

У престоничкоj umetnosti позног XI века превладао je klasičistički tok, što se највише испознalo на мозаицима у манастиру Дафи. Ali čak
и у том ансамблу наилази се каткад на представе другачијег типа. Неке од њих, као пророци и Панто-
кратор у куполи, упадљиво су сличне представама у Вељуси. У оба ансамбла Христов лик има продо-
ран некласични карактер и оставља снажан утицај својом силином, израженом и изузетном унутра-
шњом снагом. Сличност је очевидна у необичним, препознатљивим цртама Христовог лица. Ово, из-
гледа, указује на то да су оба уметника користили исти прототип, који се вероватно налази у Кон-
стантинопољу. Неке друге одлике фресака у Вељуси могу бити упоређене с минијатурама у илумирира-
ним рукописима из времена од шездесетих до осамдесетих година XI века, који такође откривају веза-
ност уметника за савремене класицистичке токове константинопољске уметности.

Приврженост начелима уметности из време-
на око средине XI века може указивати на то да се мајстор Вељусе формирао као уметник баш у то доба, 
богатећи касније своју тада успостављену уметничку основу различитим иновацијама. У сваком случају, 
његове фреске изгледају као плод органсог развоја стила заснованог у Светој Софији Охридској у поме-
нутом периоду, када је у Константинопољу владало одушевљење класицизма. Овај сликар следи тен-
денцију очувања унутрашњег потенцијала уметности „аскетског” типа, заодевајући је деломично у нове 
форме, док многи други уметници који су припадали архаизирајућим токовима касног XI и раног XII века 
понављају спољашња обележја те уметности мада су далеко од тога да увек достигну оно исто богатство 
унутрашњег садржаја.
