Παρατηρήσεις στις μορφές των χορευτών στη σκηνή του εμπαιγμού του Χριστού στο Staro Nagoričino

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n the wall-painting of the Mocking of Christ, in the church of St George at Staro Nagoričino (1316/7), the mockery involves dancing children, of which there is no mention in biblical accounts of the theme (Fig. 1). The children appear bending sharply at the knee and raising both arms, from which trail long sleeves (Fig. 2). As Svetozar Radojičić demonstrated, various elements of the imagery of the Staro Nagoričino Mocking were inspired by secular events, such as court ceremonies or public ridicule of defeated enemies. A number of representations of the Mocking of Christ depict Christ as a mock king, based on Hellenistic tradition. In Byzantium, musical elements were a part of the customary punishment for criminals – punishments were carried out to the sound of trumpets and musicians made noise to torment criminals. Thus the children here can be seen as a cruel parody of court entertainers acclaiming an emperor. One wonders, however, what their funny, exaggerated gestures and long flapping sleeves are intended to signify. This study examines paper is why the striking feature of the dancing children was included in the Staro Nagoričino Mocking, considering in particular the specific meanings of their appearance and costume.

Musicians and dancers had been introduced into representations of the Mocking of Christ by the late eleventh century. Two examples are found in two Sinai icons dated to the eleventh-twelfth century. One is a panel for the month of February with scenes of the Passion of Christ on the reverse. The other is a panel with five images of the Mother of God and scenes of the Miracles and Passion of Christ (Fig. 3). Though badly damaged, both scenes feature a kind of parody of Byzantine court ceremonies, depicting a dancer

1 G. Millet and A. Frolov, La peinture de moyen âge en Yougoslavie, III, Paris 1962, pl. 88, 23, B. Todić, Staro Nagoričino, Beograd 1993, 110-13, figs 63-65. The event, also known as the Crowning with Thorns, is mentioned in Matthew 27:27-30, Mark 15:16-19, and John 19:2-3. I am grateful to Prof. Ch. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi who offered me generous advice, and to Prof. L. Mavrodinova for valuable references on this subject and the photograph of the Mocking scene in the Zemen Monastery. I would also like to thank Prof. S. Kalopissi-Verti and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.


4 A. Grabar, La peinture religieuse en Bulgarie, Paris 1928, 240, note 4; Koukoules, op. cit. (n. 2), III, 203. We see how Michael Anemas, after his plot against Alexios I failed, was tortured with scornful songs (Alexiad, XII:5-6). See B. Leib (trans.), Anne Commune. Alexiade, III, Paris 1945, 73.


6 The earliest known Byzantine image of the Mocking of Christ is found in the Georgian Typikon (Tbilisi, Cod. A-648, fol. 39v) of 1030. Christ appears as a reigning emperor clad in the chlamys with tablion. An arm band inspired by the ἱρίς, an Islamic badge of office, is attached to his right sleeve. Neither musicians nor dancers are depicted in the scene. See G. Alibeguliev, Hudožestvennyj prinicip illustrirovanija gruzinskoj knigi XI-čadá XIII vekov, Tbilisi 1973, 41-2, fig. 17.b.


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wearing a full-length tunic with long sleeves beside the frontal Christ and a soldier kneeling before him. A drummer and a man blowing his horn at Christ appear in the latter panel.

In the Florence Gospels, Laur. VI.23, fol. 58r (Mat. 27:27-30), on the other hand, the Mocking is represented as a procession, which is juxtaposed to the procession to Calvary in the lower strip; Christ, led by a dancing youth, becomes a subject of spectacle. This seems to convey a similar notion to that conveyed in the Way to Calvary, that is, Christ on the road to sacrifice is paralleled with the triumphal procession that follows God’s triumph (Col. 2:15).

Much the same image occurs in a contemporary miniature in the Vatican Kings gr. 333, fol. 46r, which illustrates the dancing David leading the triumphal procession of the Ark to Jerusalem (II Kings 6:14). This is especially interesting in relation to the interpretation of the old and the new sacrifices as symbolizing the expiation of sins stressed in the old covenant, which was fulfilled in the self-sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:15). We may wonder whether a typological allusion between the Old Testament Ark and the sacrifice of Christ prompted the creation of an analogous dancing figure in the Florence Mocking. It should be noted that the dancers in these works share common elements: fitted long-sleeved costumes and dance poses with the right hand raised, the left stretched downward and the face turned slightly to the back. These elements are frequently encountered in representations of dancers in Middle Byzantine art.

In the extensive Passion cycle of the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century, the course of events was elaborated to create a link with Holy Week Services, in which Christ’s sufferings, and consequently hope for Resurrection, were particularly stressed. The pictorial emphasis of the Mocking of Christ directs the focus onto Christ’s dignity under the humiliation; a large crowd is taunting him, gloating over his misfortune and making noise in mockery. How conspicuous this intention was rendered is demonstrated by the presence of a musical ensemble as well as of soldiers in full armor. Helmeted soldiers are already present in the Mocking of Christ illustrated in the Cilician Armenian Gospels of ca. 1270, Erevan Mat. 7651, fol. 79. According to Andreas and Judith Stylianou’s study of Cypriot wall paintings, soldiers in full armor and fighting gear arrayed in the Betrayal of Christ allude to the Crusaders rather than to Roman soldiers and may reflect Byzantine animosity to the Crusades and Western hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean. If the armed soldiers in the Betrayal were to hold such an allusion, the helmeted soldiers in the Mocking, in the Cilician Armenian Gospels, would too. The scene shows a concern for more intricate treatment of narrative elements with the participation of musicians and a dancer.

9 T. Velmans, Le Tétraevangile de la Laurentienne: Florence, Luse. VI.23, Paris 1971, fig. 118. A similar dancing figure is seen on fol. 160r for Luke 22:63, in which Jews take Christ before Pilate (ibid., fig. 262). One difference is that the dancer’s sleeves are not long enough to cover the hands.
14 Armed soldiers also appear in the Mocking scenes of other Cilician Armenian Gospels of the thirteenth century, such as Walters 539, fol. 195 (Mathews and Sanjian, op.cit. (n. 13), fig. 172b) and Freer 32.18, p. 319 (S. Der Nersessian, Armenian Manuscripts in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1963, 36, fig. 125).
incorporating aspects of Byzantine, Western and Islamic art. The standing Christ, exposed to public display, relies on Byzantine iconography, but is nevertheless rendered as a sorrowful Christ with his head bowed, which suggests Western influence. In the foreground, a female dancer performs an acrobatic dance; this baladine-like appearance is Western\(^{16}\), while turbaned musicians squat on the ground in oriental fashion. The emphasis on soldiers is also observed in the Mocking of Christ in churches such as the Panagia Perivleptos at Ochrid, 1294/5 and St Nicholas at Prilep, 1299. In spite of its position in a rather narrow space above the arch, the Ochrid Mocking is crowded by helmeted soldiers, suggestive of the tense atmosphere before an execution\(^{17}\). Musicians are placed among the soldiers; two horn-blowers herald the public ridicule, and others play cymbals, a flute and a long drum (dauli), which were popular instruments in the Balkans\(^{18}\). What is interesting about this scene is that no dancer joins in the ridicule of Christ. The preference for images of armed soldiers over dancers is observed in two other Mocking scenes in the region of Macedonia. Soldiers are aggressively involved in Christ’s torment in the Mocking in St Nicholas at Prilep\(^{19}\). Christ is encircled by armed soldiers, some of them wearing helmets that extend down the back of the neck\(^{20}\). Christ is attired in a sumptuous purple mantle with a golden tablion, but his bare feet identify him as a false king. The soldier on the left is raising his hand, as if to strike Christ, while two other soldiers, one on either side of Christ, are insulting Christ by blowing horns close to his ears. A similar figure blowing a horn at Christ already existed in the twelfth-century Sinai Mocking (Fig. 3).

The motif can also be observed in the mid-thirteenth century Tuscan version of the Mocking of Christ\(^{21}\). Compared with the late thirteenth-century versions of the Mocking scenes, the number of armed soldiers decreases in St Nicholas Orphanos at Thessaloniki, ca. 1310-20, which is presumably an endowment of King Milutin\(^{22}\). While soldiers appearing before and after the Mocking scene are in full armor, just two soldiers, who are kneeling ceremoniously before Christ, are depicted wearing armor, but without helmets. A particularly interesting detail is the musicians: two men are blowing buisines (Medieval trumpets) instead of horns, and a drummer is wearing a pleated skirt that is probably of Western derivation. This may reflect the painter’s i-

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17 P. Miljković-Pepek, Deloto na zografite Mihailo i Eutihij, Skopje 1967, 48, sch. II. I would like to thank Mrs. D. Bardzieva for kindly providing me with the photograph of the Ochrid Mocking.


19 Millet et Frowou, op.cit. (n. 1), III, pl. 24.2. P. Kostovska, “Programata na živopisot na crkvata Cv. Nikola bo Varoš kaj Prilep i neizinata phinkcija kako grobna kapela”, Zbornik Srednovekovna Umjetnost 3 (Skopje 2001), 50-77, esp. 67. I am grateful to Mrs N. Radošević for kindly sending me this article.

20 This type of a helmet is not common in Late Byzantine art. Nevertheless, a similar helmet can be found in the Metropolis at Mystras. See M. Chatzidakis, Mystras. The Medieval City and the Castle, Athens 1983, fig. 20 (Soldier from a scene of the martyrdom of St Nestor): A. Babuin, “Later Byzantine Arms and Armour”, A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour (ed. D. Nicolle), Woodbridge, Suffolk 2002, 97-104, fig. IX-11.

21 Derbes, op.cit. (n. 14), 96, fig. 56.

interest in contemporary habits, in which Western manners were often adopted. Indeed, specific details taken from Western fashion frequently appear in late thirteenth-century art.

The church of St George at Staro Nagoričino was built by the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282-1321) in 1312/3, after the victory of the Serbian army, which was sent to help the Byzantines against the Turks in Asia Minor. Its interior was decorated by the Thessalonikan painters, Michael and Eutychios in 1316/7. The Mocking of Christ is placed on the north wall of the naos and is framed by a red strip (Fig. 1). The painters created a sense of space by placing numerous characters in various positions across a basically flat surface. A high wall of the praetorium is set in the background, behind which the tops of cypress trees are visible. The representation of the Mocking at Staro Nagoričino is highly dramatic: synthesizing the silence of Christ, the vigorously portrayed crowd, resounding musical instruments, gestures and costumes. Christ, who is emphasized by his height, stands at the centre of the scene, facing the viewer. His tranquil figure puts the viewer in mind of the suffering servant who shuts his mouth (Isa. 53:7), referred to during Holy Week Services, while his shabby half-sleeved tunic and the musical mockery seem to be a visual explanation of Psalm 68:11-13, sung during the Ninth Hour on Holy Friday: “I put on sackcloth for my covering; and I became a proverb to them. They that sit in the gate talked against me, and they that drank wine sang against me.” Most remarkable is the difference from other works in that armed soldiers are absent; instead children, in a parody of soldiers kneeling before the king, have been placed in the foreground (Fig. 2). Not only is the scene much enhanced by the presence of these children, but their theatrical postures contrast effectively with the serenity of Christ.

The question now needs to be asked why the dancers here are depicted as children. S. Radojičić supposes that the inclusion of children is inspired either by mime performances, which had replaced antic comedies, or by religious theater like that of the West. He remarks that in the Passion play at Dubrovnik under Venetian protection, the role of masked Jews was performed by children, while the main actors in religious performances at Florence were also children. Serbia and Dubrovnik maintained close diplomatic and cultural contacts in the fourteenth century.

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24 For example, the donor’s wife, Dessislava, in the church of Sts Nicholas and Pantaleimon at Boyana (A. Grabar, *L’église de Boïana*, Sofia 1924, 2nd ed. 1978, pl. 1) and the Samarian woman in the Peribleptos at Ochrid (Parani, op.cit., pl. 239) are portrayed in a Western-style mantle secured by crossed strings.
27 Radojičić, op.cit. (n. 2), 174-5.
less, the influence of medieval religious plays in the iconography of the Staro Nagoričino Mocking requires further discussion 29.

The following interpretation proposed by Anne Derbes might interest us. Referring to the Old Testament prototype of the suffering Christ, Job, Derbes argues that the musical intrusion by the children may allude to the torment of Job 30. Job, for instance, curses in response to his friend, Zophar: “They remain as an unfailing flock, and their children play before them, taking up the psaltery and harp; and they rejoice at the voice of a song” (Job 21:11-12) 31. Similar musical intrusion is described in Job 30:1-9: “But now the youngest have laughed me to scorn, now they reprove in their turn ... But now I am their music, and they have me for a byword”.

Whether the children at Staro Nagoričino are to be understood as having a negative connotation of the wicked may depend upon how they look. In his “Ο χορός παρά Βυζαντινοίς”, Phaedon Koukoulès argues that dancing with a swinging handkerchief indicates mockery 32. Could the flapping long sleeves of the children, which create a sense of movement and flow, have such an implication (Fig. 2)? The image of dancing children with floppy sleeves, which to Eastern eyes evoke the characteristic aspect of dancers in the East, seems to be the key to the specific meaning of the children.

The major symbolic feature is the tight-fitting long-sleeved clothing, which reminds us of that worn by nomadic peoples in the Eurasian Steppes, where cultural interactions along the trade routes linking northern China, Central Asia and the Black Sea shores occasionally resulted in similar customs and artistic tastes 33. Even though long-sleeved garments are well known in the art of ancient Persia from the earliest times 34, there is no pictorial evidence that they were used as a costume of dancing figures.

In ancient China, on the other hand, the long-sleeved dress was considered characteristic of dancers. A Chinese philosopher, Han Fei (d. 233 BC), tells of this custom by citing a contemporary proverb: “If you have long sleeves, you’ll be good at dancing” 35. Already in earlier known representations of dancers, on bronze vessels of the Eastern Zhou period (771-221 BC), these figures wear robes with tight-fitting long sleeves and antler-like headgear which suggests an influence from the nomadic North. The dancers on a bronze ladle (yi) of the late sixth to the mid-fifth century BC, in the collection of the Seattle Art Museum, display such characteristics (Fig. 4) 36.

30 Derbes, op.cit. (n. 14), 305-7. Asserting that music had a specific role connoting mocking in the Old Testament, James Marrow argues that trumpeters appear frequently as agents of ridicule in the Passion scenes of both Byzantium and northern Europe in the thirteenth century and later. J. H. Marrow, Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study on the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative, Kortrijk 1979, 153-4.
31 A Commentary on Job by Olympiodoros, Vat. gr. 1231, of the thirteenth century, has the illustration to Job 21:11-12 on fol. 285v (PG 93, col. 225B), as well as at Bishapur (Ghirshman, op.cit., pi. 196), and on bone plaques from Olbia in the northern Black Sea region, dating to the first-second century AD (ibid., pls 351, 352).
33 M. Sullivan, “Pictorial Art and the Attitude Toward Nature in Ancient China”, ArtB 36 (1954), 1-19, fig. 6; C. Weber, Chinese Pictorial Bronze Vessels of the Late Chou Period, Ascona 1968, 49-70, fig. 21c. The pictorial bronze vessels of that time show a wide range of subjects taken from ritualistic life in the culturally-hybrid upper class of northern China. The image of long-sleeved dancers is also represented in other materials. See, for example, a brocade body shroud with dancers and animal patterns of the fourth-third century BC from tomb 1 of Mashan in Hubei (The Golden Age of Chinese Archaeology. Celebrated Discoveries...
The dancer with long sleeves or scarves was a favourite subject in the art of succeeding periods. What is interesting is that dancers of Iranian origin, brought to China from Central Asia, were also depicted swinging long sleeves, as seen in the feasting scenes on stone relief panels of the Eastern Han period (AD 25-220): dancers appear wearing knee-length belted tunics with long narrow sleeves, trousers and Phrygian caps with diadems ending in long ribbons flowing in the wind. Later, the carved panels of a Sogdian funerary couch, which was made when nomadic kingdoms flourished in the North, around the sixth century, portray two dancers dressed in girded short tunics with long fitted sleeves and trousers, which reflect the contemporary fashion of Central Asia. We see a number of works with court attendants, entertainers either Chinese or non-Chinese, costumed in long narrow-sleeved dresses in the art of the Sui-Tang period (AD 581-907). An excellent example are the dancers in Chinese popular performance scenes depicted on flipping bows in the Shoso-in at Nara, of the eighth century, which show a vibrant mixture of cultures, manners and customs (Fig. 5). The long-sleeved costume was adopted in the representation of Tibetan dancers produced in Dunhuang in western China under Tibetan occupation (AD 781-848). This motif came to be known in the art of the Near East around the tenth century. A dancer depicted on a slip-painted ceramic bowl from Nishapur in eastern Iran, that is, Khurasan, is one such example (Fig. 6). It is important to recall that the Byzantine Empire was confronted by the Seljuqs in the eleventh century. By this time, Turkish tribes from areas surrounding China had moved into Central Asia (where the Islamization of Iranian-speaking peoples had progressed), and continued their expansion westward, pressing Byzantium’s eastern frontiers. Byzantium had from early in its history been in constant conflict with its nomadic neighbors. Further, continuous warfare as well as diplomatic contact with the Islamized Turks, that is the Seljuqs, resulted in a strong presence of the Turkish people in Byzantine territory. In addition, Turkish mercenaries and military corps settled in Byzantium in the service of the...
Byzantine armies from the period following the Byzantine disaster at Manzikert in 1071. It is in this period that the long-sleeved dancer emerged in Byzantine art.

Though archaeological evidence has demonstrated that long narrow-sleeved garments were worn in the sphere of Byzantine influence already in the six-seventh century, the representation of such clothing only became popular from the eleventh century onward. Byzantine artists portrayed in long narrow-sleeved clothing not only dancers, but also subordinate characters in narrative scenes, for example, a youth covering his nose in the Raising of Lazarus and court attendants before an emperor. An earlier representation of this fashion occurs in the scene of the Sacrifice of Abraham, painted ca. 1050 in St Sophia at Ochrid, where a boy beside an ass is depicted wearing a short tunic and hiding his left hand inside long-fitting sleeves, reminiscent of Iranian manners. Around that time, one of the earliest images of dancers with long narrow sleeves appears in the scene of David and Musicians in the Vatican Psalter of 1059, Vat. gr. 752, fol. 3r. The long-sleeved dancer also featured in works with both sacred and secular subjects of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in particular. A bone casket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art shows a dancing youth swinging long sleeves next to a turbaned oriental-style warrior with baggy trousers – this combination must bespeak the Byzantines’ taste for fun. For example, an eleventh-century bone casket...
ket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art represents a dancer swinging long sleeves next to a turbaned oriental-style warrior with baggy trousers – this combination provides exotic tone. The motif of the dancer with long sleeves or scarves was prevalent both in the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds as a subject of pleasure. A variety of artifacts of the Fatimid period (909-1074) as well as of the Seljuq period of Iran (1038-1194) depict dancers in this manner. So, too, Byzantine metal objects intended for gifts to allied rulers, Christian and Muslim, were frequently adorned with enchanting subjects – fantastic creatures and feasting scenes with dancers swinging long sleeves – imagery preferred beyond the boundary of faith.

At the same time, it should not go unnoticed that outlandish headgear and costumes were often used to depict pagan deities or infidels in Byzantine tradition. For example, a tight-fitting cap taken from Western fashion is used as multi-valent headgear worn not only by laborers and musicians, but also by persecutors of Christ, such as Pilate or the Roman executioner. This could also be the case for the long narrow-sleeved costume. When the long-sleeved dancers come into the Mocking iconography, artists might have infused them with the negative implication of eastern infidels. Interestingly, we encounter a further indication of the negative aspect of this costume in the art of Spanish Christians, in the Beatus manuscripts. The Last Judgement in the Urgell-Beatus of the last quarter of the tenth century, Museo Diocesà de La Seu d’Urgell, Num. Inv. 501, fols 184v, 185r, as well as in the Facundus-Beatus of 1047, Madrid, Bbl. Nac., Vitr. 14-2, fols 250v, 251r, represents the condemned in Hell wearing long narrow-sleeved tunics, which could be the sign of infidels, that is Muslims.

Turning our attention to the children in the Staro Nagoričino Mocking, it should be said first of all that the imagery of children in Late Byzantine art was more than just a motif to amuse the eyes. Children are frequently included in crowds, witnessing the manifestation of the divinity of Christ, such as...
the Baptism and the Entry to Jerusalem. Even though children at times tended to be comic characters, in part through posture and movement, they are not always depicted as innocent onlookers. Children, at a particular time, became wicked, as seen in the figure of a boy annoying the legs of an ass in the Entry to Jerusalem, in the Omorphi Ecclesia in Attica, dated to the second half of the thirteenth century55. Moreover, in the Passion cycles children appear to be depicted with specific features, such as tight-fitting caps or turbans, which create an impression of pagan identification56. In these respects, it is tempting to suggest that the children positioned at the feet of Christ at Staro Nagoricino are not depicted merely to enliven the scene as genre, but serve as eastern others who cannot discern the Redeemer. Their dress of oriental flavour and their jocular gestures were especially suited for expression of the evil character of the children.

It was during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that Mongol dominance heightened the movement of armies, people, and ideas across Eurasia. Of great importance for Byzantium was that Turkish tribes of western Asia were forced to move into Asia Minor57. By the early fourteenth century the Ottomans advanced into western Asia Minor, while the Black Sea regions were taken over by the Mongols. Under these circumstances, eastern elements might have come to be treated more consciously in art. Aside from this speculation, the fact remains that the motif of children with ridiculous gestures and floppy sleeves was frequent in depictions of the Mocking in the Balkans after Staro Nagoricino58.

56 This detail is observed especially in the works of Michael and Eutychios. For instance, a turban is worn by a boy spreading the cloak in the Entry of Jerusalem at Staro Nagoricino (Millet and Frolov, op.cit. (n. 1), III, pl. 82.2) and a boy servant in the Wedding at Cana in St Nickitas at Cučer wears a tight-fitting cap (ibid., III, pl. 38).
57 The Mongols accelerated their expansion westward by absorbing Turkish tribes into their military and internal administration. For a general history of the Mongols, see D. Morgan, The Mongols, Oxford 1986.
58 Long-sleeved dancers are depicted in the Mocking of Christ in the following churches: Athos, Hilandar Monastery, Katholikon, 1318-21 (G. Millet, Monuments de l’Athos, I. Les peintures, Paris 1927, pl. 73.2). The Mocking scene was overpainted in 1804); Cučer, St Nikitas, ca.1320 (R. Hamann-Mac Lean and H. Hallensleben, Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien von 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert, Giessen 1963, fig. 223. The Mocking scene was overpainted in 1483/84); Zemen Monastery, St John the Theologian, second half of the fourteenth century (L. Mavrodinova, Zemenskata Carkva, Sofia 1980, 78, 80, figs 53, 54, 56); Ivanovo, Crkvena, mid-fourteenth century (M. Bizev, Stenopisite v Ivanovo, Sofia 1965, pl. 39); Markov Monastery, St Dimitrios, 1388-89 (G. Millet and T. Velmans, La peinture de moyen âge en Yougoslavie, IV, Paris 1969, pls 95.173, 98.178).

Sources of photographs
Fig. 1: after New History of World Art 6 (ed. E. Takahashi), Tokyo 1997. Fig. 3: after Cučer und Spieser (see n. 8). Fig. 4: after Weber (see n. 36). Fig. 5: after Treasure of Shoso-in (see n. 39). Fig. 6: after Kunstschätze aus Iran (see n. 41).
Η σκηνή του Εμπαιγμού του Χριστού, που εικονίζεται στο ναό του Αγίου Γεωργίου στο Staro Nagoričino, περιλαμβάνει και μορφές παιδιών που χορεύουν. Τα παιδιά εικονίζονται με έντονα λυγισμένα γόνατα και με υψωμένα τα χέρια, από τα οποία κρέμονται οι μακριές χειρίδες του ενδύματος τους. Δεν έχει ακόμη εμφανευθεί πλήρως αν αυτό το εντυπωσιακό χαρακτήρα των παιδιών μπορεί να θεωρηθεί απλώς ως εμπνευσμένο από την εθιμοτυπία της αυλής ή από τη διαπόμπηση ηπειρών.

Όπως συμβαίνει στις παραστάσεις του θέματος κατά τον ύστερο 13ο και τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα, ο Εμπαιγμός στο Staro Nagoričino δίδει έμφαση στο μαρτύριο του Χριστού και κατά συνέπεια στην αξιοπρέπεια του εν μέσω των χλευασμών. Από αυτή την άποψη, η θεατρική στάση των παιδιών έρχεται σε εντυπωσιακή αντίθεση προς τη γαλήνια μορφή του Χριστού. Ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζουν οι μακριές και στενές χειρίδες που κρέμονται και που στα μάτια ενός ανθρώπου της Ανατολής παραπέμπουν στη χαρακτηριστική εμφάνιση χορευτών από την Ανατολή.

Μία έρευνα στις εικονογραφικές πηγές του μοτίβου του χορευτή με μακριές και στενές μανίκια αποκαλύπτει ότι πρώιμα παραδείγματα εντοπίζονται στην τέχνη της αρχαίας Κίνας από τα τέλη του 6ου έως τα μέσα του 5ου αιώνα π.Χ., αν και ενδύματα με στενές και μακριές χειρίδες εμφανίζονται στην τέχνη της Εγγύς Ανατολής καθώς και στους λαούς της στέπας ήδη από τους πρώιμους χρόνους. Ωστόσο, τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα η μογγολική επέλαση οδήγησε στη μετακίνηση των τουρκικών φύλων προς τα δυτικά, αποτέλεσμα της οποίας ήταν η οθωμανική προέλαση στη Μικρά Ασία. Κάτω από αυτές τις συνθήκες τα ανατολικά στοιχεία ίσως έχουν περισσότερη συνειδητή αποδοχή. Από αυτή την άποψη είναι ελκυστική η υπόθεση ότι η απεικόνιση των παιδιών που χορεύουν στα πόδια του Χριστού στην παράσταση του Staro Nagoričino δεν αποσκοπεί απλώς να ζωντανέψει τη σκηνή με στοιχεία της καθημερινής ζωής, αλλά και να στιγμίσει τους απίστους από την Ανατολή, που δεν είναι σε θέση να αναγνωρίσουν τον Σωτήρα. Επιπλέον, ο πονηρός χαρακτήρας των παιδιών εξαίρεται με τις ανατολικής έμπνευσης μακριές και στενές χειρίδες των ενδύματων τους, καθώς και με τις αστείες χειρονομίες τους.