ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

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Ενας σέρβικος μύθος του Αγίου Αποστόλου Τίτου και η αντανάκλαση του στην τέχνη

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St. Titus, whose name was borne by our dear, prematurely deceased colleague Papamastorakis, was a disciple of the apostle Paul. Paul sent him a pastoral epistle and appointed him the first bishop in Crete to ‘set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city’ (Titus 1: 4-5). The cult of St. Titus spread from the city of Gortyna, the ancient seat of the Archbishopric of Crete. It was probably there that, by the 8th century, an extensive legend of Titus had been created. The legend firmly tied him to Crete by birth, various activities and miracles, and helped spread his popularity further afield.1 Namely, by the 10th century the legend had already been included first in the Byzantine and then in the Slavic synaxaria, and read on the saint’s feast day on the 25th of August.2 That St. Titus enjoyed great reverence in Crete is obvious from his many images in the island’s medieval churches.3 He was depicted on the side walls of the sanctuary as a full-length figure, always as an elderly bishop clad in a phelonion and omophorion, holding a gospel book in one hand and blessing with the other.4 He was usually shown

Keywords
Middle Ages, Serbia, iconography, holy apostle Titus.

2 H. Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, Brussels 1902, col. 921-924.
4 This iconographic type is in sharp contrast to his descriptions as young and beardless in the painter’s manuals: M. Medić, Stari slikarski priručnici, vol. II, Belgrade 2002, 174-175, 380-381, 508; vol. III, Belgrade 2005, 390-391 (parallel texts in Greek and Serbian).
in company with the Cretan archbishops Cyril, Andrew and Myron. On one occasion, in the apse of the church of St. Anne in the village of Amari (1225), he was shown with St. Andrew, both clad in polystavria and with unfolded scrolls, celebrating the liturgy around the altar, while the church of St. John the Baptist in Kritsa (1389/90) shows him in a similar manner, but as the last in the row of holy bishops.

St. Titus was rarely depicted beyond Crete. One of such portraits was painted on the wall of the church of St. Nicholas in the village of the same name near Monemvasia in the 2nd half of the 13th century, while the farthest known point is the church of St. Simeon the God-receiver in Novgorod, where his image dates from the 2nd half of the 15th century. It is reasonable to assume that he was more often shown in association with the theme of the assembly of the Seventy Apostles. The trouble, however, is that the earliest surviving examples of the theme, such as the churches of the Virgin Hodegetria (ca. 1320) and Pantanassa (ca. 1420) in Mistra, either do not show all of the apostles or their names have not survived, which makes it impossible to know whether St. Titus was among them. In post-Byzantine wall painting, on the other hand, his presence among the Seventy is unquestionable, as evidenced by the published 16th- and 17th-century monuments.

He was depicted in the same manner as the other apostles, usually a bust enclosed in a medallion, but always clad in bishop’s vestments.

Apart from the portraits quoted here, the Orthodox world, especially its post-Byzantine period, will certainly yield more images of St. Titus, even though they are not likely to change the established fact that he was portrayed almost exclusively in Crete. This is understandable given that the apostle Titus was the founder and first bishop of the Cretan church, which is why he was also depicted as a bishop. His presence in Cretan painting is a typical reflection of a local cult such as found across the Byzantine world. By portraying their founders or distinguished representatives, local churches emphasized their own place in the Orthodox oikoumene and their canonical status.

Among the Cretan images of St. Titus, the one in the church of St. Anne in Amari (1225), showing him celebrating the liturgy with St. Andrew of Crete, has drawn particular attention. This particular image has been bound to arouse the interest of researchers for the simple fact that a similar composition involving local bishops has been recorded in only two more places: in the prothesis of the Holy Apostles at the Patriarchate of Peć (ca. 1270) and in the chapel of St. Demetrios at Dečani (1337/47). Stella Papadaki-Oekland suggested early on that the portrayal of two Cretan bishops in St. Anne’s was not an accident and that they must have been introduced at the request of the kioter, probably hieromonk Michael Varouchas. Chara Konstantinidou further elaborated on the fresco, explaining it in the light of the local situation during the Venetian occupation of the island: the depiction of Sts Titus and Andrew would have been meant to emphasize the apostolic origin of the Archbishopric of Crete, which continued to be an inseparable part of the Orthodox church.

We do agree with her view that the increasingly frequent portraits of the Holy Apostles at the Patriarchate of Peć (ca. 1270) and the church of St. Demetrios at Dečani (1337/47).

5. Gallas Wessel Borboudakis, op.cit., 201, 219, 270, 284, 432; Spatharakis, Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, op.cit., vol. I, 226, 237-238; id., Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, op.cit., 73, 163. It is probably St. Titus in company with Sts Andrew and Myron. On one occasion, in the apse of the church of St. Anne in the village of Amari (1225), he was shown with St. Andrew, both clad in polystavria and with unfolded scrolls, celebrating the liturgy around the altar, while the church of St. John the Baptist in Kritsa (1389/90) shows him in a similar manner, but as the last in the row of holy bishops.


portrayal of local Cretan prelates conveyed ‘Orthodox-Greek’ and ‘anti-Latin’ messages, even though we believe that the issue should be looked at against a broader historical background. Namely, the old polemic between Rome and Constantinople over the concept of apostolicity and primacy was rekindled immediately after the Latin conquest of the Byzantine capital in 1204. Letters and omissions of the patriarch John Kamateros, of Nicholas Mesarites, his brother John, and other known and anonymous polemists, reiterated the old Byzantine view of Christ’s exclusive primacy and of the equality of all apostles, and consequently of the equality of all ecclesiastical sees they had established. The Byzantines produced a new argument against the primacy of the apostle Peter, as articulated by the Mesarites brothers: the significance of the mission accomplished by the apostles was incontestable, but it had not been them but their seventy disciples who had been the first bishops of certain cities. It was probably not a coincidence that, a little later, the Seventy Apostles began to be portrayed as a separate group in Byzantine churches. Nor was it a coincidence that from the 13th century on the founders or the most distinguished representatives of the Cretan, Athenian, Serbian and other local churches increasingly frequently figured in the Melismos scene, the most important liturgical scene in an Orthodox church. The antiquity, canonicity and continuity of these autocephalous churches were equally expressed by their frontally portrayed bishops. In Crete, these were Titus, Cyril, Andrew and Myron, portrayed many times, either together or individually, in the sanctuaries of local churches.

The Archbishopsric of Crete was among the rare local churches that could claim authentic apostolic origin. It is characteristic, however, that St. Titus was not portrayed as an apostle in the area under its jurisdiction. The only departure from the pattern, around the year 1300 – in the church of Christ the Saviour in Meksla, St. John’s in Panagia and the church of the Virgin in Saitoures – is his portrait accompanied by an unusual inscription, ΙϹΑϹΙΟϹΤΟΛΑΟϹ ή ΤΡΙϹΑΠΟϹΤΟΛΑΟϹ ΚΡΗΤΙΚΗϹ (Thrice Apostle of Crete), the epithet normally attributed to the first Christian emperor, Constantine. Despite the unusual title, St. Titus was depicted in the usual manner, as a bishop, not an apostle. The emphasis was on his being the first bishop of Crete, and, if he was shown together with Cyril and Andrew, the image expressed the continuity of the autocephalous Cretan church since St. Titus. St. Titus enjoyed no particular veneration in Serbia, except that he was regularly commemorated on the 25th of August, when his vita based on the Cretan legend was read. He was not portrayed in Serbian wall painting until the 15th century, not even within the menologia. It has been suggested that his image was included in the menologia at Dečani (1337/47), where an apostle holding a scroll seems to have been painted under or around the 25th of August, but the fresco is so damaged that any identification is highly conjectural. What seems more likely is that he used to be painted as one of the Seventy Apostles, a theme introduced in Serbian churches from the beginning of the 14th century. However, as these early examples of the theme are in a poor state of preservation and lack inscriptions, their iconography may be only assumed to have reiterated the contemporary Byzantine models, which is to say that they were regularly shown as bishops, clad in phelonia and omophoria. Such portraits, apparently of only some of the Seventy, can be found in Žiča (ca. 1310), on the arch between the naos and the sanctuary, and in the church of St. Stephen at Banjska, on the arches under the dome in the naos. They seem to have been somewhat more numerous in the prothesis and diaconicon of Matejić (ca. 1350), and few at Staro Nagoričino (1315/7) and Gračanica (1319/21). Their portraits are in a better state of preservation in only two early 15th-century churches: the Kalenić monastery church of the

17 Ibid., 290 291.
19 Spatiharakis, Dated Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, op.cit. (n. 3), 25 27; Id., Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, op.cit. (n. 3), vol. I, 228, 274, 326; vol. II, 38, n. 55, 312.
23 Todić, Serbian Medieval Painting, op.cit., 321, 323, 334, 335; E. Dimitrova, Manastir Matejić, Skopje 2002, 106 107, 120 122 (at Matejić, they wear episcopal polystavria, which is quite unusual).
Virgin (ca. 1420), where their busts are set in stylized vines around the apse,24 and the Resava monastery church of the Holy Trinity (1415/8), showing them in the second register in the sanctuary. In Resava, they are shown in the same manner as in Banjica, enclosed in medallions in rainbow colours, clad in phelonion and omophoria, holding closed gospel books and blessing, while the names of the churches they founded or administered as bishops are inscribed next to them.25 The Seventy Apostles with the inscriptions similar to those in Resava were also painted in the Virgin Hodegetria in Mitro. Among the Seventy in Resava there survives the portrait of St. Titus ‘of Gortyna’26 as a young man with a small beard, pretty much in keeping with the descriptions contained in the painter’s manuals.27 The group of the Seventy Apostles continued to be painted in Serbian churches in the 16th and 17th centuries according to the earlier model, which means that they were shown as bishops. The number of apostles varied, depending on the available space, but nowhere were all seventy depicted. In the Morača monastery church (1574) they were shown in the naos and the sanctuary;28 in the Trinity monastery near Pljevlja (1592), enclosed in medallions in rainbow colours on the arches attached to the northern and southern walls of the narthex under the dome;29 in the Hopovo monastery church of St. Nicholas (1608) their busts are in the upper portions of the piers supporting the dome in the naos.30 Only some of them are also designated as bishops, and quite exceptionally their places of origin are also quoted. St. Titus is nowhere among them. His portrait can be found only in the narthex of the Patriarchate of Peć (1565), but among the busts of saints apparently arranged according to the liturgical calendar.31 This catalogue of churches appears to suggest that St. Titus did not hold a place of prominence in Serbian painting, which is true, but only for the period until the 15th century. As early as 1415-1418, in the Resava monastery church, a foundation of despot Stefan Lazarević, this Cretan, or Gortyna bishop (which is how he was designated) was given a central place among the Seventy Apostles alongside St. Stachys of Byzantium (Fig. 1). His prominence in Resava would be of little consequence had he not been granted an even more distinguished place in Kalenić (ca. 1420), a foundation of the despot’s protocols Bogdan. As we have seen, of the Seventy Apostles painted on the sides of the pilasters around the apse, only ten portraits have survived in lower zones. They are shown in phelonion and omophoria and without gospel books. Their busts are set in acanthus scrolls, and above them are their names and saintly epithets, which have survived for Thaddeus, Cyril (?), Prochorus, Trop hymus and, as it seems, Crispus. St. Titus was set apart and painted next to them on the western side of the southern pilaster, above St. Spyridon from the Melismos scene. St. Titus (СТЫ ӨНТБ) is shown frontally, full-length, clad in a sticharion, epitrachelion, epigoneion, phelonion and omophorion, blessing with his right hand, and holding an ornate gospel book in the left. He is short-haired and barely bearded (Fig. 2).32 Only a few more bishops were painted in a similar manner in the sanctuary of Kalenić, among them St. Eleutherius on the northern pilaster.

St. Titus was even more conspicuously set apart from the rest of the Seventy at Morača in 1574. The painters who decorated the naos and the sanctuary33 with frescoes for the second time took a quite free approach to the portrayal of the Seventy; some were placed in the sanctuary, others...
on the arches in the naos; some occur twice or mixed with other bishops. The rule they followed, however, was to add the title of bishop to the names of those in the sanctuary, while all those in the naos were enclosed in medallions and designated only by name.

St. Titus is the only to have been set apart and depicted differently. He was placed in the first register, on the west side of the south-western pilaster, next to the repainted ktetor scene involving prince Stefan Vukanović and second ktetors, hegoumenos Thomas and knez Vukić

34 Cf. Petković, Morača, op.cit. (n. 28), 45. It was then that the portraits of the Seventy Apostles were painted for the first time.

35 Cf. n. 28 herein.

36 Many bishops from the group of Seventy Apostles were painted in the prothesis of Morača after 1616 as well. On them and their significance see B. Todić, “Srpski arhiepiskopi na freskama XVII veka u Morači. Ko su i zašto su naslikan,” Manastir Morača (ed. B. Todić D. Popović), Belgrade 2006, 97–100.

Fig. 1. Resava. St. Titus of Gortyna, 1415-1418.
Vučetić, for whom the Virgin intercedes with Christ enthroned (Fig. 3). In the southern transept, not far from St. Titus, are the twelve apostles, probably modelled after the 13th-century frescoes. They hold gospel books and are designated by their names and the title of 'holy apostle.' St. Titus, a frontal full-length figure, is blessing with his right hand and holding an ornate gospel book in the other. He is clad as a bishop, in a sticharion, epitrachelion, phelo-
The well-preserved inscription reads: CTЬI ΑΠCЛЬ ΘИТЬ (holy apostle Titus). It should also be noted that Titus is the only bishop among the standing figures of saints in the naos, apart from St. Sava of Serbia, painted with St. Simeon (Nemanja) in the northern transept.

Why did St. Titus rise to such prominence in Serbian 15th- and 16th-century monuments, first indicated in Resava, strengthened in Kalenić and strongly emphasized in Morača? The question is even more interesting because St. Titus was never portrayed – or at least there is no reliable evidence that he was – in Serbian art before the 15th century. Except for Crete and a single example in the Pelo-ponesus, and even there in the sanctuaries of churches, he was never painted in the lowest fresco register in the naos, as he was in Morača. The question, therefore, is: were these Serbian examples not reassertions of the significance of Titus as the apostle and first missionary to Crete?

The question may seem inappropriate considering that the Serbian church obviously was not of apostolic origin and that it based its autocephalous status on St. Sava who had canonically established the archbishopric in 1219. For that reason, from the early 13th century he was often depicted in Serbian churches, alone or with his successors, and was sometimes designated as the first archbishop. Lined up next to each other, frontal figures clad in festal vestments and accompanied by formal titles, the archbishops painted on the walls of the naos or narthex testified to the longevity of the Serbian church and the continuity of episcopal authority within it. When introduced into liturgical scenes and joined to other holy bishops, above all into the Melismos scene in the sanctuary, they were meant to assert their belonging to the Orthodox community which always, everywhere and in the same way offers service to God. Old Serbian art knew of and readily used both iconographic patterns of depicting its bishops, and in that it was no different from other parts of the Orthodox world. The Serbian church had never officially claimed apostolic origin, as it did not have one. If it called St. Sava an apostle, it did so in most general and symbolic terms, to emphasize that he was a successor of the apostles and their accomplishments. It also took up the Orthodox stance that all the apostles shared equal credit for establishing Christ's church on earth, which was the reason why the apostles were often – especially in the 13th century – depicted as a separate group in its churches.
Towards the end of the medieval period, however, there arose a legend which ascribed the Christianization of the Serbian land to the apostles themselves and an especial role in that to St. Titus.40 Traces of the legend survived in chronicles and genealogies, compilations usually lacking the original documentary value but exceptionally important for understanding the period in which they were created, between the 2nd half of the 14th century and the end of the 16th.41 The legend of the evangelization of the Serbian land by the apostles should be related to the legend about the descent of the founder of the medieval Serbian dynasty, Stefan Nemanja, from the emperor Constantine the Great. This legend, inspired by the Slavonic versions of John Zonaras’ Chronicles, arose in the reign of despot Stefan Lazarević (1402-1427),42 which is also the time when the image of the holy apostle Titus first appeared in Serbian art. This does not seem to be a mere coincidence. The genealogies and chronicles were widely read, as evidenced by some twenty transcriptions made until the 18th century, and it has been demonstrated that they influenced literature and the visual arts, of which we have already written.43

The legend appeared for the first time in the Chronicles of Peć, dated to the 14th century. Its introduction relates that Christianity was spread in the Serbian land by the apostles themselves; later on, its negligent rulers let many heresies thrive, and it was not until the grand župan Stefan Nemanja that the heresies were uprooted and the Orthodox faith firmed up in all of his land.44 The chronicler describes Nemanja as a new beginning – Nemanja ushered in the age of the Orthodox rulers who completed what the apostles had begun. Genealogies of a somewhat later date expanded the legend from the Peć Chronicle and linked it to the apostle Paul’s disciple Titus, even ascribing the building of the church of Sts Peter and Paul at Ras to him. One of these, the so-called Pejatović Genealogy, was reliably created in the reign of despot Stefan Lazarević, as it contains the story of Stefan Nemanja’s descent from the emperor Constantine. Reordering the sequence of historical events, it relates that Nemanja, having conquered the neighbouring tribes, was baptized “in the church of Sts Peter and Paul at Ras, which had been built by Titus the apostle.” The Ruvarac Genealogy (1563-1584) reiterates the story: “Nemanja was baptized in the midst of the Serbian land, in the church of Sts Peter and Paul, which had been built by Titus the apostle, Paul’s disciple, because the Serbian land had been Christianized by the apostles.”45 The Dečani Chronicle, in reference with the appointment of first bishops by St. Sava, also says that one of them was appointed “to the ancient Raška [Rascia] church of the holy apostle Titus.”46

The legend of the early spreading of Christ’s teachings in the Serbian land by the apostles, created in the 14th century, could have easily been linked to St. Titus at the beginning of the following century because it was known from the Second Epistle to Timothy (4:10) that this disciple of Paul’s had also preached in Dalmatia, which was adjacent to Serbia. The attribution of the church of Sts Peter and Paul at Ras (Fig. 4) to Titus is also explicable. From the 15th- and 16th-century perspective, this church dating from about 90047 was the oldest church of the Serbs and the first seat of the Bishopric of Raška (documented from 1020), where Stefan Nemanja had been baptized according to the Orthodox rite (which is a fact). It was only natural, then, to link the church to the beginnings of Christianity in the region and to the apostle Titus. The creation of the legend sometime in the early 15th century allows us to explain the first appearance and iconographic type of St. Titus in Serbian wall painting by it.

44 Stevanović, Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi, op.cit., 62 64; Radojičić, “Doba postanka i razvoj starih srpskih rodoslova,” op.cit., 22;
45 Stevanović, Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi, op.cit., 46, 53. On the dating of these texts see Radojičić, “Doba postanka i razvoj starih srpskih rodoslova,” op.cit., 30 and 34.
46 Stevanović, Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi, op.cit., 194.
His earliest surviving portrait, in the monastery of Resava, belongs to the saint’s usual type within the group of the Seventy Apostles and is designated, as all the others, by the name of his ecclesiastical seat in Crete. However, the placement of his portrait and that of St. Stachys of Constantinople in the middle of the apse suggests that, to those who commissioned the frescoes, St. Titus might have been more important than the others. A few years later, at Kalenić, he was set apart from the other apostles, who were shown bust-length, and he was given a prominent place next to the apse and a formal appearance. The identifying inscription omits the reference to Cretan Gortyna, and his counterpart becomes St. Eleutherius, bishop of Illyricum. Finally, St. Titus’ portrait in Morača was moved down to the first fresco register and accorded a place of honour next to the ktetor scene. Titus is shown as a bishop, but the inscription accords him the title of apostle, unlike anywhere else either before or after, except for Crete, where he is designated ‘thrice apostle’ a few times. Such an inscription associated St. Titus with the twelve apostles painted in the southern transept, but he remained distinct from them both by his place within the fresco programme and by his episcopal paraphernalia.

In that way, St. Titus’ portrait in Morača came quite close to the saint’s Cretan images. Given that there could not have been any direct link between Crete and Morača, we believe that the similarity resulted from a strange coincidence of St. Titus’ apostolic role: a real one in Crete, where he was thought to be the first bishop in Gortyna, and an imagined one in Serbia, where he was ascribed the credit of christianizing the Serbian land and of building the first episcopal church at Ras. The legend probably arose in the early years of the 15th century, more likely at the court of despot Stefan Lazarević than at the patriarchate. At no time did it deny or diminish the significance of St. Sava of Serbia as the first archbishop, nor did it intend to. It was
never officially accepted, the legend nonetheless left a
trace in Serbian chronographic literature and religious
art, which we have tried to bring to light and explain. After
the 16th century St. Titus would seldom appear on the
walls of Serbian churches, and simply as one of, and in no
way distinct from, the Seventy Apostles.

intended to emphasize the earliest, if imagined, apostolic
period of Christianization of the Serbian land, the effects
of which had slid into oblivion over time and were re-
newed and completed by the grand župan Stefan Neman-
ja and his son, St. Sava, who ushered the Serbian people
into the Orthodox community. Of limited duration and
ΕΝΑΣ ΣΕΡΒΙΚΟΣ ΜΥΘΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΥ ΤΙΤΟΥ ΚΑΙ Η ΑΝΤΑΝΑΚΛΑΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΣΤΗΝ ΤΕΧΝΗ

Οι παραστάσεις του αγίου αποστόλου Τίτου εντοπίζονται σχεδόν απολυτικά στο νησί της Κρήτης. Σε σπάνιες περιπτώσεις που απεικονίζεται εκτός της νησίκας αυτής ο Άγιος Τίτος, επίσης, απεικονίζεται ευρύτερο και πιο συμβολικό επίπεδο, προκειμένου να τονίσει ότι ήταν διάδοχος των αποστόλων και συνεχιζόταν τη διαδοχή τους σε αυτήν την κρητική ωραία. 

Το αγίο Τίτος δεν έχαιρε ιδιαίτερα τιμής στη Σερβία, εκτός από την πολιτική του μνημείων της 25 Αυγούστου, την ημέρα του. Κατά τον 14ο αιώνα, η επιγραφή του Άγιου Τίτου στο ναό των Εβδομήκοντα Αποστόλων, επιγράφηκε κατά τους Εβδομήκοντα Ολοκλήρωση την ημέρα του, επειδή αυτό έπραξε σε ευρύτερο και πιο συμβολικό επίπεδο, προκειμένου να τονίσει ότι ήταν διάδοχος των αποστόλων και συνεχιζόταν την κρητική. 

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τού αποδίδει τον τίτλο του αποστόλου, χωρίς κανένα σχετικά, παλαιότερο ή μεταγενέστερο, περάσειμα, εκτός από την Κρήτη, όπου ορισμένες φορές επιγράφεται ως ΤΡΙΣΛΑΨΟΣ.

Με αυτόν τον τρόπο, η παράσταση του αγίου Τίτου στη Μοράχα πλησίασε τις απεικονίσεις του αγίου στην κρητική ζωγραφική. Δεδομένης της μη ύπαρξης άμεσων επαφών μεταξύ Κρήτης και Μοράχα, θεωρούμε ότι η ομοιότητα προέρχεται από μια περίεργη σύμπτωση του αποστολικού ρόλου του Τίτου: ενός πραγματικού στην Κρήτη, όπου θεωρείται ότι αποτελεί τον πρώτο επίσκοπο της Γόρτυνας και ενός ιδεατού στη Σερβία, όπου του αποδόθηκε ο εκχριστιανισμός των Σέρβων και η ανέγερση του πρώτου επισκοπικού ναού στο Ras. Περιορισμένης διάρκειας και χωρίς να έχει ποτέ αναγνωρισθεί επίσημα, ο μύθος άφησε το σημάδι του στη σερβική χρονογραφική λογοτεχνία και στη θρησκευτική τέχνη, την οποία προσπαθήσαμε να φέρουμε στο φως και να την ερμηνεύσουμε.