
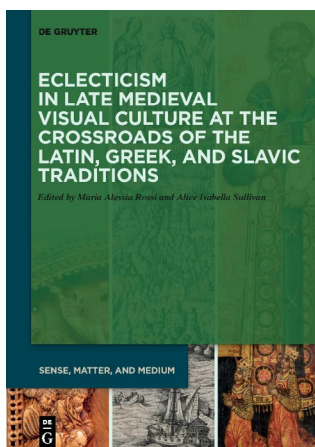


**Rossi, Maria Alessia and Alice Isabella Sullivan, eds.
*Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the
Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions (Sense,
Matter, and Medium 6)*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2022
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Post-, trans-, inter-, cross-, hetero-, semi-, multi-, poli- and numerous other prefixes are employed in today's scholarship to indicate partiality and instability and to coin concepts instrumental for characterizing those manifestations of culture that can be identified by neither a centre, nor an axis. These two negations are indicative of pre-modern culture of Eastern Europe explored in the volume under review herein. With the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the larger Orthodox half of the region acquired shared characteristics of loss and lack, rather than those of focus and direction. The Union of Florence concluded in 1439 in face of the menace of Islam did offer prospects for Christian unity sustaining bi-confessional diversity. However, it attracted Catholics, who expected fellow Orthodox to observe the supremacy of the pope, and repulsed Orthodox, who saw it as removal of dogmatic foundations of the salvific creed. These tensions and anxieties regarding earthly existence as well as salvation in afterlife did not stop artistic activities and contributors of the collected volume have chosen eclecticism as the umbrella notion to name them as well as other trajectories that cultures in Eastern Europe pursued at the closure of the Middle Ages. Focusing on artistic

production and circulation of images within and beyond the region, the volume attempts to provide a dynamic panorama of artworks, whose conception, production, and perception has relied on several unstable references in pre-modern past alike in present day scholarship. The undisputed advantage of this joint scholarly effort lies within acceptance of the state and status of lasting instability that societies, polities, individuals as well as non-human actors experienced during several centuries. What is more, the volume contributes to the construction of conceptual framework that allows situating local artistic outputs along a network of open-ended vectors. In addition, the essays provide vocabulary (even if loaded with prefixes) that highlights singular nuances and shifts binding the functions of artefacts into certain even if loose patterns. Accuracy, conceptual clarity and acceptance of lack as key feature of Eastern European evidence constitute laudatory editorial achievement, for which the work of Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan deserves admiration. The editors succeeded not only to assemble scholars working within various national traditions, but also to provide the book with a structure that offers clear topical cross-sections of the eclecticism explored in its multiple occurrences and through divergent parameters.

The foreword by Ivan Stevović opens the volume with invitation for a trip into visual heteroglossy as discussed in the essays written both from the perspectives of national art histories as well as from much broader framework of global scholarship. Stevović equips the reader with conceptual compass to navigate through religious, confessional, economic, and artistic contact zones and suggests considering diverse artefacts addressed and discussed in the volume as the means of and medium for cultural communication. The editors Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan follow up this line in the introduction by offering Alessandro Dalla Via's *General View of Mount Athos* from ca. 1707 as a metonym for and a key into the complexity of the volume's scope and material. This print serves as a dynamic lens to explore the multiple interactions that it both captures and operates with to provide the notion of eclecticism with visual definition and by the same token to liberate it from connoting stylistic chaos. Hence, eclecticism is understood as amalgamation of approaches and circumstances that transpired in a particular location, named aptly "the agency of places" (p. 12). This localization of the volume's focus dovetails into succinct discussion of scholarship, above all

conceptual vocabulary, urging to consider “the problems and opportunities posed by terms such as ‘hybrid’, ‘influence’, ‘appropriation’, entanglement’, ‘syncretism’, and ‘eclecticism’” (p. 18), the words that beat the intellectual pulse throughout the book. The collection of essays seeks to provide Eastern European artistic heritage with coordinates and thus to inscribe it into global art historical discourse. The polylogue between images, their historical and scholarly contexts, and the reader is based on the principle of translatability of culture as formulated by Homi Bhabba. The greatest challenge of this approach is posed by untranslatability of lack, the most common denominator of the region’s pre-modern culture. The paucity of written sources, fragmentary survival of artefacts, absence of provable connections, scarcity of contemporaneous reflections, deficiency of evidence, shortage of data, lacunae in records, loss of entire cultural strata taken together with the lasting status of periphery of “great” traditions has resulted in quite shallow presence of Eastern Europe in global historiography of art. The farewell to master narrative opened the gates for case studies, to my mind, the most fitting genre for shedding light on singular events which join a plurality only as tendencies or patterns identified in retrospect. The burden to provide structure for instable occurrences is skillfully passed by grouping individual cases under dynamic headings of negotiations, shifts in traditions and iconographies as well as continuities in patronage.

The first section “Negotiating Traditions” looks, as the heading indicates, at the processes behind the artistic results. Jelena Erdeljan postulates this perspective in the opening essay on cross-cultural and transcultural entanglement. Erdeljan looks at the Balkans during the period between 1300 and 1550 through the lens of *histoire croisée* bound together as a network of horizontal and vertical familial ties. Exemplified through the case of the Branković family, these seemingly loose family connections function as genealogical continuity manifested through repetitive patterns in donations, foundations, and transfers testified by paintings and inscriptions declaring the link with the Divine. As the concept of entanglement can hardly be held within a case study (even the one which transpires across two and half centuries), the essay reverses the genre of conclusions and instead of closing the case, opens it for further trajectories including investigation of the role that Sephardic Jews played in cultural transfer within Eastern and Central Europe. Staying within the Balkans, Ida Sinkević focuses on architecture of the churches founded by the Nemanjić rulers to become their burial sites. For an art historian of today these buildings emerge as an amalgamation of material and visual associations, the marbles of which allude both to Constantinople and Italy, sculptures converse in Western dialects, while plans and shapes reconfirm Orthodoxy. Importantly, this assemblage of materials and decorations continues for several generations as distinctive feature of Nemanjić foundations as if stating dynastic continuity through exceptionality of its architectural preferences. The issue of dialogical relations between sameness and difference is taken over by Dragoş Gh. Năstăsoiu, whose essay inquires into the motifs for and functions of Byzantine wall paintings commissioned by Catholic patrons in late medieval Transylvania. Paintings of Italo-Byzantine style have been revealed in a number of today’s protestant churches. Originally these Catholic parish churches built quite afar from major urban centres of the Kingdom of Hungary were decorated with murals, whose style associates with Byzantine tradition, iconography is confessionally mixed, and inscriptions are spelled in Latin. While names of commissioners together with their motives have sunk into oblivion, images in which Byzantine-trained painters follow Catholic iconography offer a glimpse into bi-confessional thinking and its visual results. Quite opposite pronouncement has been captured in the Muscovite icon of *The Elevation of the Cross* examined by Elena N. Boeck. This mid-sixteenth century icon displays the ceremony of the Elevation against the background of the Church of Hagia Sophia. Distinguished by a flying buttress supporting the dome of Hagia Sophia the icon makes visual statement about the Muscovite funds given for the reconstruction of this principal Constantinopolitan sanctuary. By doing so, the icon joins the temporal dimension of earthly deeds and eternal celebration of Orthodoxy in a single piece. Theocharis Tsampouras closes the section on negotiations by following the developments of Orthodox art in the Balkans under the Ottoman rule. The essay takes the axiom of hermetic and conservative agendas of post-Byzantine art as a springboard to inquire into deviations from the normative and the repetitive. Finding liberty and individuality in the marginal, the peripheral, and the pragmatic (as the example of copying western prints [p. 148] shows), the essay places the discussion along the vectors of decentralized artistic and visual agencies. While motives from Western and Islamic arts were followed quite eagerly, no clear tendencies in their usages can be established. Hence, the essay concludes that accident can be recognized as the sole principle of artistic employment of ‘borrowed’ motifs.

As the weight of iconography in the discussion on the meaning of images outweighs aesthetic qualities, the essays of the second section “Shifting Iconographies” discuss transformations in visual rendering of devotional subject matter. Ágnes Kriza’s inquiry into the Filioque opens the topic by examining how this “visualization of the invisible” (p. 157) has been manifested on the picture plane. This dogmatic issue is explored by focusing on the place and directionality of the Dove of the Holy Ghost in the representations of the Synchronoi; thus, once again confirming that details and nuances may manifest the essence of the creed. By focusing on the monumental scenes of the Dormition of the Virgin, Krisztina Ilko’s essay takes the reader to the Carpathians and discusses cross-confessional appropriations of iconography from medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Starting with representations of Dormition, the essay traces how this iconography got transformed into and the spread as Assumption. Quite unique testimony of mixing and matching iconographic schemata with the demand of explicit narrative is revealed by the monumental composition of the Last Prayer and the Coronation of the Virgin (1370s/80s) discovered recently in the Cathedral of St Emmeram in Nitra. Vlad Bedros invites the reader eastwards to Moldavia and focuses on the iconographically mixed representations of the Agnus Dei. Rich Moldavian heritage of wall paintings allows close scrutiny of an individual example within the broader context of the inclusion of this motif of Western iconography into mural decoration of Orthodox churches. Sixteen

churches, whose painted interiors feature the Agnus Dei, are seen as a sign of consolation appreciated by the devout awaiting for the End of Time expected to come in 1492. Nazar Kozak expands the geographical breath of the volume by inquiring into the “itineraries” of the representations of the Akathistos Hymn in the post-Byzantine world. The mapping of the iconographic types of the Hymn does provide both – widely accepted patterns as well as reveal specificity of Southern and Northern versions for visualizing the Hymn. In line with best examples of rhetoric, Mateusz J. Ferens turns over the travels of iconography by examining the provenance and the circulation of the image of the crucified monk. Regarded as a manifestation of the sacrificial essence of monasticism the image appealed to Athonite and other Balkan communities and entered the *Hermeneia* by Dionisios of Fourná to be inscribed into art history as very special development of post-Byzantine iconography. Although further research has proven that the image bears its roots in medieval German manuscripts, most curious part is the attraction that the figure of the True Monk had on itinerant monastic artists of the eighteenth century. The entire section flows elegantly through the visual carriers of devotional meanings and their transformations across time and confessions to finally pose the question about those upon whose will and with whose resources these images were made. Therefore, the last, third section “Patterns of Patronage” assembles inquiries on commissioning arts for the Church. Understandably, most of the evidence on patronage informs about commissions of the elites; however, even accounts on the deeds of the monarchs seldom include specific motives for ordering an artwork. This silence is especially astonishing in the case of Byzantine murals commissioned by King Ladislaus II Jagiełło for Catholic churches in Poland. Marek Walczak addresses the most outstanding of these commissions – the interior paintings of the Holy Trinity Chapel in Lublin Castle and focuses on two portraits of the neophyte king. Although the identification of these portraits is based on heraldry and location within the chapel, records do not inform us about stylistic and iconographic choices behind these royal commissions. Hence, the comparison between King Ladislaus’ II conversion and subsequent Christian deeds and the life the emperor Constantine may offer a key to broader meaning of the portraits on the chapel walls. Typological thought and numerous representations of Constantine do offer extensive material for comparison, yet the question whether these associations are products of the past or the present minds, remains open.

With a focus on Epirus, Christos Stavrakos’ essay reveals patronage as a means to maintain social bondage. Numerous inscriptions testify to foundations, constructions, embellishments, renewals, additions, and enlargements of churches to house Christian brethren. Among the usual formulae of these texts excelling on piety of donors and painters, they also inform about mundane matters, such as circumstances under which a painting was executed or relations with and loyalty to earthly lords. Traceable into early modern period, these inscriptions not only reveal patterns of patronage, but also testify to their continuity despite dramatic political changes. The focus on Albania in Gianvito Campobasso’s essay is a prize for a scholar striving for a fuller panorama of Eastern European culture. Medieval Albanian wall paintings emerge as *maniera greca* akin to Apulian examples, “which integrated Italian methods with Greek iconography” (p. 317) to fit into realities of the seafarers. Prayers constituted substantial part of safe travel and familiar shores proved the efficacy of heavenly protection. Stylistically diverse as diverse were the people traversing the Adriatic, the votive paintings testify to devotional bondage transpiring across the sea and along the Christian shores. Votive imagery not only punctuated maritime routes, but also emphasized exceptionality of religious sites. Focusing on luxury endowments to Mount Athos –the spiritual centre of politically decentralizing late Byzantine world– Dimitrios Liakos reassesses donations to the “national” monasteries by Serbian, Wallachian, and Moldavian dignitaries. These gifts are seen not only as precious items and costly structures, but above all as tokens of Christianity waiting for the empire to return from exile. The volume closes with a promise for continuity by addressing a controversy between striving for earthly power and securing heavenly mercy. Ovidiu Olar’s essay asks whether richly embroidered cloths were meant to cloak earthly sins of powerful donors. The shallow grounds for legitimate succession were compensated with the means of visual rhetoric and luxury materials. Their figures were displayed at the forefront of precious veils, angels placed crowns on their heads and highest epithets were pronounced when actual power was lacking. Relying on ceremony and pageantry as a means to strengthen unstable political position usually contributes more to the arts than politics. Similarly, Wallachian rulers evoked angelic agency for the desirable to become visible if not real. Today, these efforts look as a fertile start for a new tradition, which got abrupt and reached us as curious episode of patronage.

Throughout the pages of this formative book, one encounters a scholarly endeavour to transform abrupt evidence into a case study and to establish patterns of cultural activity in Eastern Europe. The volume’s major contribution is the construction of a panorama of culture produced with multiple references; a panorama that crosses numerous absences not only via conceptual bridges made of thorough arguments and supported by well fitted prefixes, but also by very thorough bibliographies and enviable indexes. Should the illustrations be given a larger scale, the book would also excel in visual heteroglossy. Withal, a pleasure to read and cherish for further reference, this intellectual endeavour informs us about a region that still calling for further research, and invites for changes in the semantics and pragmatics of scholarly concepts.

