

Thou Wouldst Grant Forgiveness to Thy Servant: The Function of the Joseph Cycle in the Gallery of the Outer Narthex, Sv Sofija in Ohrid

Elena OTA

Introduction

On the shore of Lake Ohrid, located at the southwestern border of North Macedonia, is the medieval basilica of Sveta Sofija. Having served as the archbishopric seat of Ohrid, the basilica is well known for its sumptuous frescoes adorning the 11th-century naos but not for the rather sober frescoes of the gallery (upper floor) walls of the late 14th-century outer narthex. Although partially faded and effaced, the pictorial programme of this gallery is one-of-a-kind in terms of Byzantine eschatology. The upper southern wall and southern half of the upper western wall are reserved for the Provisional (particular) Judgement, while the northern wall and northern halves of the upper rungs of the west and east walls show the Last Judgement. The remaining lower rungs of the east, south, and west walls represent the Life of Beauteous Joseph, taken from Genesis 37–50.

This study proposes a function of the Joseph Cycle depicted inside the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija. The fact that the two posthumous judgements determining the fate of the dead are shown together for the first time in Byzantine art history makes Sv Sofija a rare testimony to the Byzantine view of the afterlife.

I argue that the Provisional and Last Judgements are represented in a sequence to appease whoever was buried under or commemorated at the blind niche opening at the northern end of the east wall and to maximise the possibility of their soul being saved. The existence of the Joseph cycle reinforces this conclusion. The Joseph cycle was incorporated into the pictorial programme of this space, because the painter of the upper floor regarded Joseph as the prototype of Jesus Christ the Merciful Judge.

To draw the above conclusion, basic facts of Sv Sofija in general and the outer narthex are first outlined. Then this study provides an overall review of the pictorial programme of the upper floor of the outer narthex and a detailed description of each subject depicted in the main space of the gallery. After comprehending the arrangement of subjects in the entire programme, the connection of the Provisional Judgement with the Last Judgement is examined. We then consider the typological relationship between Joseph and Christ's lives within the scope of judgement. I conclude by considering the liturgical functions of the outer narthex and the blind niche at the northern end of the eastern walls, which may have served as a tomb or memorial.

Sv Sofija and its Outer Narthex: Overview

On the shores of Lake Ohrid, stretching across the Albanian border in southwestern North Macedonia, lies an eponymous town. Once the capital of the First Bulgarian Empire, Ohrid was ruled by the Byzantines for over 300 years since 1019. Although the current population is only above 40,000, over 10 Byzantine-era churches remain there.

Sv Sofija Cathedral **[Fig.1]**, which served as the archbishop's seat, is particularly important among the churches in Ohrid. The cathedral was inaugurated in the 10th century by the first Bulgarian Emperor, Boris II (c.931–77, r.969–77). However, following the conquest of the First Bulgarian Empire in 1018 by the Byzantine Emperor Basil II Bulgaroktonos (958–1025, r.976–1025), the cathedral was rebuilt as a three-nave basilica with a narthex **[Fig.2]** under the supervision of Leon, the second Archbishop of Ohrid (d.1056, r.1037–56). Most existing part of the naos and the frescoes date back to Leon's time. Prior to his appointment in Ohrid, Leon was a *chartophylax* of Agia Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople. Therefore, it is easy to imagine that he brought painters and craftsmen from the imperial capital to renovate Sv Sofija. Consequently, the basilica is an extremely rare example of



Fig.1 Sv Sofija, western façade

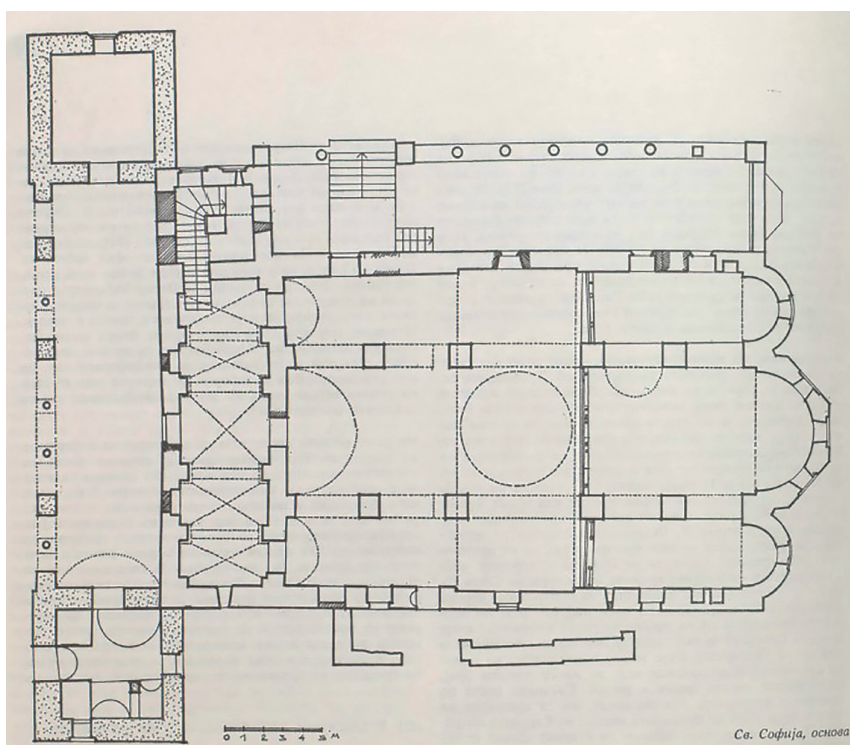


Fig.2 Sv Sofija, plan

an artistic trend in the imperial capital during that time.

While murals of the naos commissioned by Archbishop Leon have drawn the attention of art historians, little is known about those of the narthex. In the 14th century, Gregory, the then Archbishop of Ohrid (r. c.1317–), added a two-story narthex wider than the naos, transforming the former narthex into an inner narthex.⁽¹⁾ Shortly thereafter, Archbishop Nikolaos I (r. 1346–) ordered Ioannis Theorianos (dates unknown) to decorate the gallery of the inner narthex.⁽²⁾ I agree with Cvetan Grozdanov that although there are no records regarding the painter or workshop in charge of the outer narthex, the hands that painted the murals of the inner and outer narthex are identical.⁽³⁾ In addi-

(1) Schellewald, B. (1986), *Die Architektur der Sophienkirche in Ohrid*, PhD thesis, Universität Bonn ,168.



Fig.3 Nikolaos I's portrait

tion, Nikolaos I's portrait **[Fig.3]** remains on the southern facade of Sv Nikola Bolnički ('St. Nicholas of the Hospital') Church (after 16 April, 1337–46).⁽⁴⁾ Judging from the date of this portrait, it is possible that Nikolaos I had Theorianos and his workshop work in the narthex gallery of Sv Sofija.

The only access to the outer narthex gallery is the doorway in the centre of the west wall of the inner narthex gallery. Therefore, it is impossible to reach the gallery directly from the ground floor of the outer narthex; one must first ascend the stairs north of the ground floor of the outer narthex to reach the inner narthex gallery. The northern and southern ends of the outer narthex gallery extend beyond the naos, each of which is crowned with a small dome. These domed spaces and the main gallery are separated by an arcade, forming a small chapel. The entire western wall of the gallery is also an arcade, giving a bright ambiance to the space.

Frescoes cover the entire gallery of the outer narthex **[Fig.4]**. However, they are in poor condition because they have been exposed to sunlight and wind for many years through openings on the narthex's three sides. In addition, the faces of the human figures were deliberately destroyed. This probably occurred during the Ottoman period, although the faces of the figures painted in the inner narthex survived largely intact. However, it is still possible to identify the subjects represented on each wall. The Last Judgement occupies the north wall and the upper-northern

(2) Since its establishment in 1018, the archbishopric of Ohrid was always ordained by Byzantine emperors. Consequently, the seat was constantly inhabited by Greeks, except for the first Archbishop Ioan Debrski (r. c. 1018–37), who was a Bulgarian. Although Ohrid was under the rule of Stefan Uroš IV Dušan during Nikolaos I's tenure, the archbishop's seat was not passed onto the Serbs. On the sword of an angel in the scene of Nathan's Rebuke depicted on the northern lunette of the inner narthex, Theorianos left his autograph 'Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεοφιανός'. By doing so, he clearly paid homage to Michael Astrapas (fl. c.1295–1317)'s autograph 'χείρ Μιχαήλ τοῦ Αστράπα' on St Mercurius's sword in the Sv Bogorodica Periblepta Church which is also in Ohrid. Radujko, M. (2011), 'Ауторски рукопис и историја уметности: живопис спратних одаја нартекса и трема Свете Софије охридске и зидно сликарство Охрида и суседних области', *Zograf* 35, 156.

(3) Grozdanov, C. (1980), *Охридско зидно сликарство XIV од века*, Ohrid, 79.

(4) Miljković-Peppek, P. (1969), 'О датiranju fresaka ohridske crkve Sv. Nikole Bolničkog' in Đurić, V. ed., *Zbornik Svetozara Radojica*, Beograd, 200.

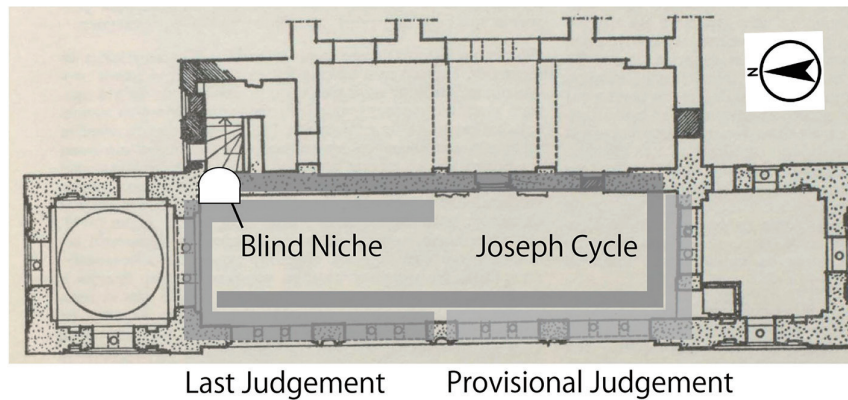


Fig.4 Sv Sofija, plan of the outer narthex gallery and its frescoes

half of the west wall, whereas the Provisional Judgement is placed on the upper south wall and the upper-southern half of the west wall. The *vita* of Joseph begins at the lower tier of the east wall and continues to the south and west walls. On the upper tier of the east wall, only the legs of Christ seated in the centre and the human figures (presumably donors) flanking him were preserved. A major feature of the iconographic programme of the outer narthex gallery is that all walls (except the north) are divided into upper and lower tiers. Among all the subjects, only the Joseph cycle stretches to the east, south, and west walls, occupying nearly half of the total space. This point alone suggests the importance of the Joseph cycle in this iconographic programme.

Sv Sofija is the sole example in the Byzantine sphere that has adopted an iconographic programme that depicts the Last Judgement, Provisional Judgement, and the Joseph cycle. The composition vividly expresses the Byzantine view of the end, thus one might think that previous scholars paid sufficient attention to it. Only four scholars have devoted their work to the gallery of the outer narthex of Sv Sofija: Cvetan Radojčić, Branka Ivanić, Véronique Duer-Petiteau and Aneta Serafimova. Nevertheless, Grozdanov's comprehensive descriptions of frescoes and their detailed drawings are primary for any researcher who wants to investigate Sv Sofija's historical and artistic value.⁽⁵⁾

However, none of the previous studies, including Grozdanov, correctly recognised the significance of this composition, which was the first attempt in Byzantine art to juxtapose the Last and Provisional Judgements. Furthermore, scholars have struggled to understand how the Joseph cycle relates to the Judgement scenes. There is no clear motif for judgement in Joseph's life. Therefore, it is difficult to see the necessity of representing his story along with these two Judgements. In the next section, I provide a brief description of the following four themes: the Last Judgement, Provisional Judgement cycle, Joseph cycle, and Deesis composition flanked by donors at the upper tier of the east wall. I will mainly resort to Grozdanov's drawings for description and analysis because the frescoes have faded away for the most part.

Description of the Frescoes

Last Judgement

The Last Judgement composition is centred on the north wall of the gallery, with wings on the east and west walls [Fig.4]. The focal point of the composition is the north wall, where Christ the Judge and *Deesis* are located [Fig.5]. Christ, sitting on his judgement throne is surrounded by seven angels. The throne floats above the four flaming wheels, as in Daniel 7:9 and Ezekiel 1:4–28. A river of flames flows from Christ's feet and continues toward the east wall. From the viewer's perspective, John the Baptist is placed to the right of Christ and the Virgin Mary to the left, together forming a *Deesis*. On the upper tier of the northern west wall (on the right-hand side of Christ the

(5) Grozdanov (1980), 60–101. In 2019, high-resolution photographs of Sv Sofija and a 3D model based on them were published online by CyArk. Because I agreed with the authority to publish the photographs I took at Sv Sofija in my doctoral thesis only, I use the photographs from the CyArk archive in this paper. 'CyArk (Project: Church of St. Sophia)', <https://www.cyark.org/projects/church-of-st-sophia/overview> (last viewed 12. 05. 24).

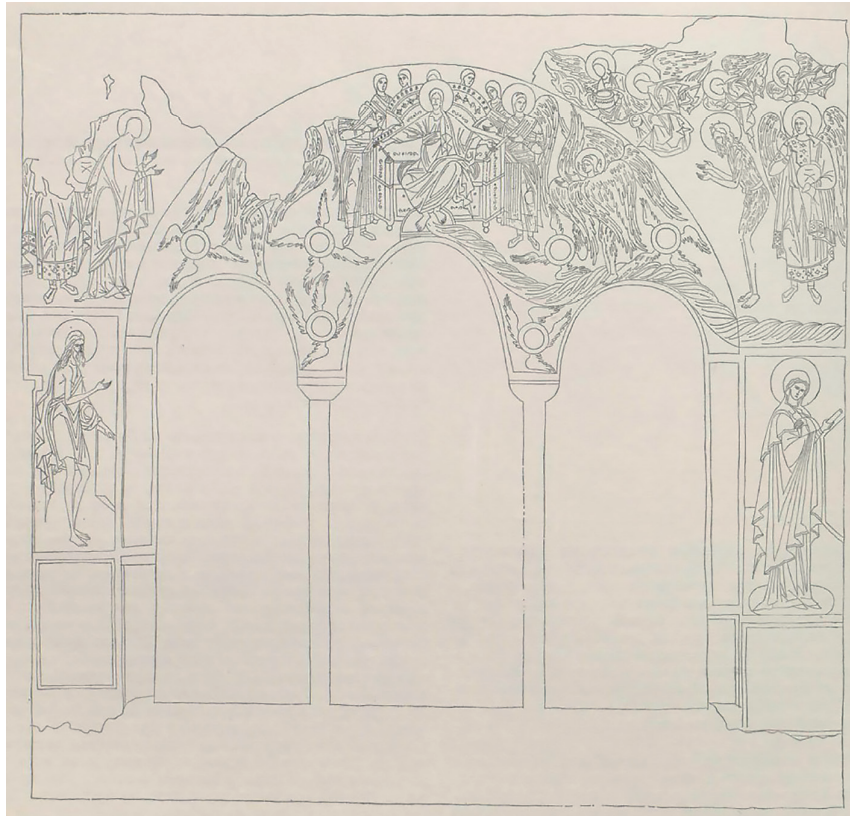


Fig.5 North wall, Last Judgement

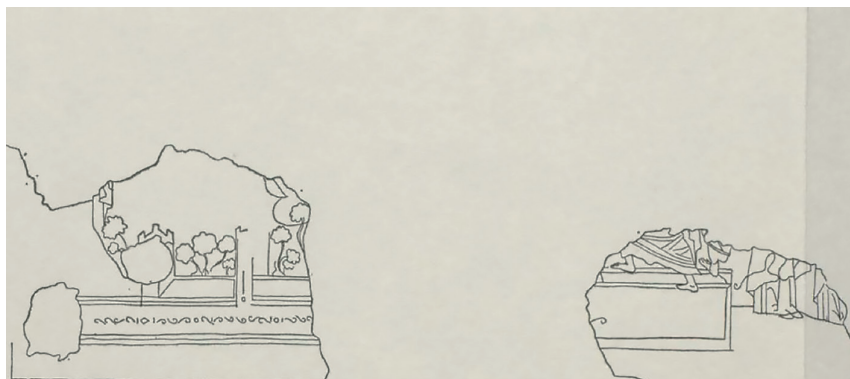


Fig.6 West wall, figures entering Heaven

Judge), parts of the Apostolic Choir, the trees of Heaven, and a wall-like structure surrounding these trees remain **[Fig.6]**. One can discern the legs of a person trying to get inside the wall. This detail might belong to Peter leading the elect into Heaven. Six Apostles are lined up on the upper tier of the northeast wall, with an army of angels behind them. Hell should have been depicted on the wall south of the Apostles, but no traces remain today.

Christ *Pantokrator*, Virgin *Paraklesis*, and John the Baptist

The blind niche opening at the north end of the lower tier of the east wall is filled with an image of Christ *Pantokrator* **[Fig.7]**. Christ is seated on a box-shaped seat; his right hand is raised in a blessing gesture, and his left hand holds an open Bible. Letters in the open pages of the Bible were deliberately destroyed. Above the shoulders of Christ there is an epithet in Church Slavonic which reads ‘праведин сѣдна (The Righteous Judge)’. This epithet, deriving from Psalm 7:12 ‘God judges ever true (ὁ θεὸς κριτὴς δίκαιος)’, is commonly seen on late Byzantine icons depicting Christ *Pantokrator*. A very similar Christ *Pantokrator* accompanied by the epithet ‘The Terrible



Fig.7 Christ *Pantokrator*

Judge (Ο Φοβερός Κριτής)’ is located on the south pier of the east wall in the narthex of Lesnovo Monastery’s *katholikon* (dedicated to Archangel Michael, 1346–49).⁽⁶⁾

The blind niche is located just before the Joseph cycle and intrudes slightly into the feet of the Apostles. Furthermore, no corresponding blind niches were found in the gallery, let alone at the south end of the same east wall or north end of the opposite west wall. Therefore, this blind niche gives the viewer an abrupt impression. However, the arc of the blind niche is framed by the river of fire, so it is clearly not a later addition, but a structure that was in place from the beginning. The figure of the donor, which is often expected within a worship image, such as this one, is absent.

John the Baptist and the Virgin *Paraklesis* are squeezed into a narrow strip of the wall at the left and right ends of the lower tier of the north wall [Fig.5]. The Virgin *Paraklesis* holds a scroll with scripts in alternating black and red ink in every one or two lines, which its content is difficult to decipher. It appears that nothing was written in John the Baptist’s scroll. Although John and the Virgin are on the north wall, they belong to the same group as Christ *Pantokrator* painted in the blind niche. The sign of blessing by Christ’s right hand clearly corresponds to the Virgin’s intercession. He is the one who responds to the Virgin’s plea for the sake of humankind, or of a particular person, upon the Last Judgement. The Baptist also extends his hands toward Christ and joins the Virgin in supplicating. In other words, the three constitute an irregular *Deesis* composition at the north-eastern corner of the gallery [Fig.8].

The Provisional Judgement Cycle

The upper tier of the southern half of the west wall and the connecting upper tier of the south wall are devoted to scenes from the Provisional Judgement, forming an L-shaped area [Fig.4]. The cycle begins at the top of the

(6) Bartlett, G. (2020), ‘What’s in a Name? Images of Christ inscribed with Epithets in Middle and Late Byzantine Art’, PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 59.



Fig.8 Outer narthex gallery, north-eastern corner

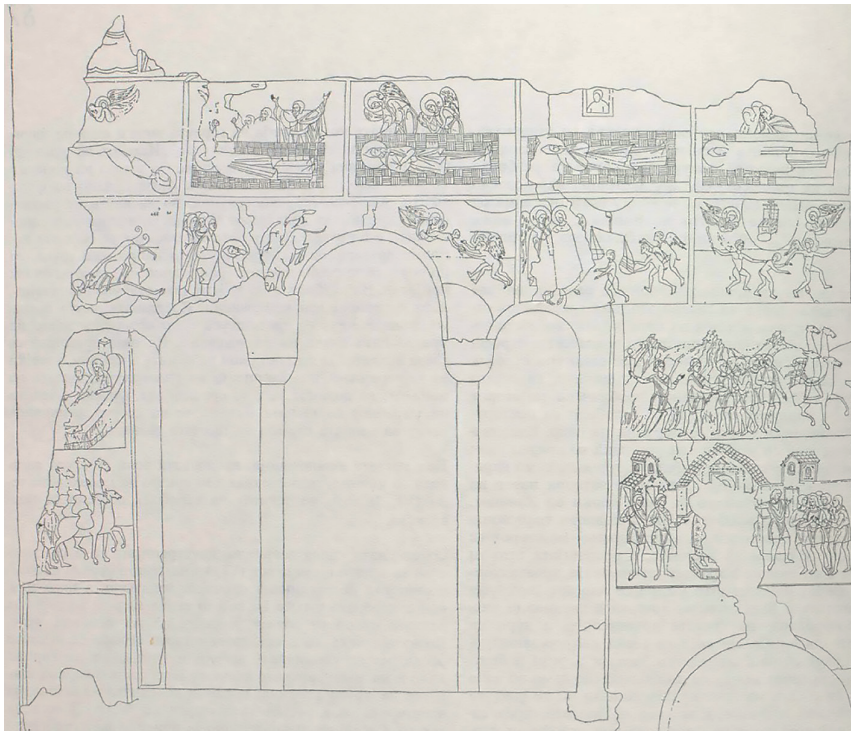


Fig.9 South wall, Provisional Judgement

arcade opening on the south wall [Fig.9] and the narrative continues horizontally to the right. As we reach the west wall [Fig.10], the narrative changes direction and continues vertically.

A total of 23 scenes were observed from this cycle. Although not exposed to direct sunlight, its west wall is in particularly poor condition. The contents of all the 23 scenes are described below. Scenes in which the pigments had completely fallen off were marked as 'unknown'. Other scenes which were difficult to identify are marked with question marks in brackets.

1. Monks gathering at a monk's deathbed



Fig.10 West wall, Provisional Judgement and the Joseph Cycle

2. The dying monk praying to an icon
3. Angels receiving the monk's soul
4. Monks mourning over the dead monk
5. Disposition of the dead monk's body (?)
6. Monk's body being eaten by stray dogs
7. Passers-by watching the monk's body being eaten by stray dogs
8. Monk's soul passed on to demons from angels
9. The weighing of the soul
10. Monk's soul being beaten by demons with clubs
11. Unknown
12. Monk's soul praying to the icon of the Virgin while tortured by demons in Hades
13. Unknown
14. Monk's soul captured by demons
15. The Virgin standing before Hades
16. The souls of the dead and the Rich Man
17. Male saints in supplication of the monk's soul
18. The Virgin in supplication and the monk's soul prostrating before her
19. Monk's soul praying from Hades
20. Female saints in supplication of the monk's soul
21. Unknown
22. Monk's soul being delivered from Hades **【Fig.11】**
23. Monk's soul and the Virgin before Christ (?) **【Fig.12】**

Just above the first scene, 'Monks gathering at a monk's deathbed', traces of a red border and part of a bed-like object can still be seen. This suggests that another set of scenes belonged to this cycle. It is certain that this cycle is the most extensive among any examples depicting the Provisional Judgement.

In the upper tier of the arcade opening on the south wall, four scenes display a dying monk on a straw mat. In the lower tier, the monk's body is abandoned outdoors to be eaten by the dogs.⁽⁷⁾ Subsequently, the monk's soul is subjected to the 'Weighing of the soul' (scene 9). In this scene, the divine balance hangs from the sky and tilts to the right. Although effaced, one can still notice the devils trying to intervene in a pile of scrolls on the right scale. Thus, it can be understood that the monk's soul was initially found guilty.

Turning to the west wall, the southern half shows the monk's soul in Hades (scenes 10–14), and the northern

(7) Svetozar Radojčić was keen enough to point out the similarity of this image to the so-called '*Kusōzu* (pictures of the nine stages of a decaying corpse)' in medieval Japanese art, although admitting that 'the actual relationship between them cannot be proved'. Radojčić, S. (1961), "Чин бивајемо на разлученије души од тела" умонументалном сликарству xiv века, Зборник радова византолошког института, 7, 50; esp. note. 17. On the *Kusōzu*, see Yamamoto, S., Nishiyama, M. (2015), eds., *Kusōzu. The Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse: The Art and Literature of Decomposition*, Tokyo.

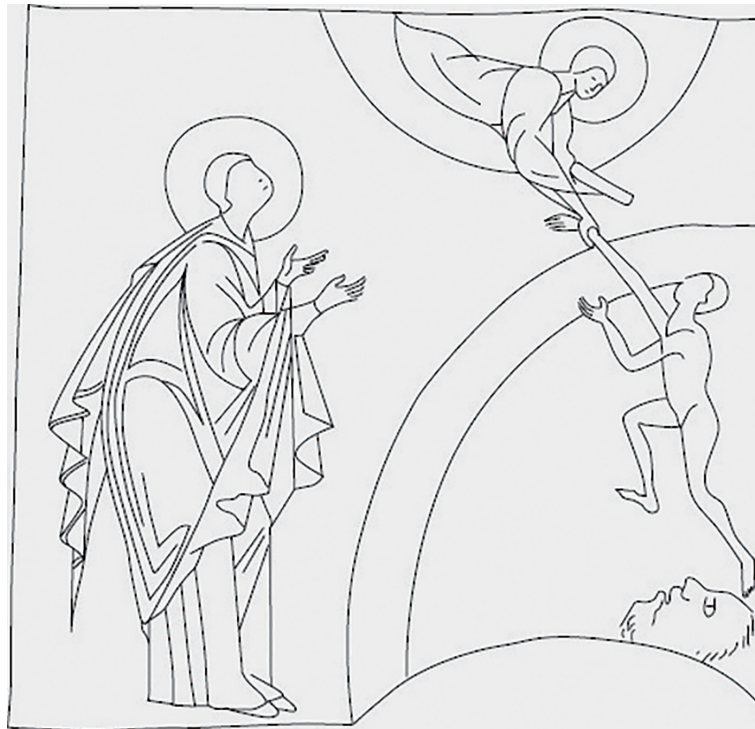


Fig.11 Monk's soul delivered from Hades

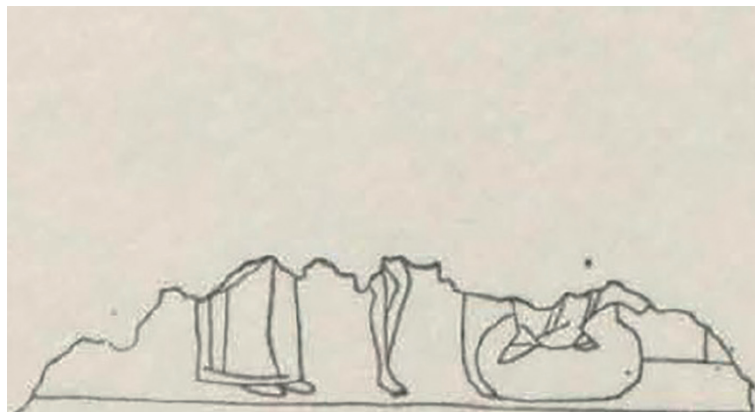


Fig.12 Monk's soul and the Virgin before Christ (?)

half shows the monk's soul saved with the aid of the saints and the Virgin Mary (scenes 15–23). Scene 15, 'The Virgin Standing Before Hades', is of particular interest. Although it is difficult to identify the content of this scene clearly, the legs of a figure wearing a long robe, likely the Virgin Mary, stand on the left side. In front of the Virgin is a wall-like structure which indicates the realm of Hades. In apocryphal texts, such as the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*, the Virgin descends to Hades to save the suppliant's soul.⁽⁸⁾ 'The Virgin Standing Before Hades' is a unique iconography among the four examples of the Provisional Judgement cycle. The cycle concludes with scenes in which the monk's soul is pulled out from Hades by Christ (scene 22), and the monk's soul with the Virgin Mary standing before the seated Christ (scene 23). The salvation of the monk's soul is clearly shown in these two scenes, which is another major characteristic of the Provisional Judgement cycle of Sv Sofija.

(8) *Apocalypsis Mariae* (Clavis apocryphorum Novi Testamenti 327). Baun, J. (2007), *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha*, Cambridge, 391–400.

The Joseph Cycle

The Joseph cycle wraps the lower tiers of the east, south, and west walls **[Fig.4]**. His story commences at the right of the blind niche opening at the northern end of the eastern wall **[Fig.13]** and proceeds clockwise, finally ending at the northern end of the west wall, just to the left of Christ the Judge. The contents of all 22 scenes from the cycle and their locations in the gallery are listed below.

1. Joseph's dream (Gen 37: 5–8)
2. Joseph telling his dream to his brothers and Jacob (Gen 37: 5–10)
3. Joseph asking the whereabouts of his brothers (Gen 37: 15–17)
4. Joseph being captured by his brothers (Gen 37: 23–24)
5. Joseph's brothers slaughtering a goat (Gen 37: 31)
6. Joseph rescued from a pit (Gen 37: 28)
7. Joseph in jail (Gen 39: 20)
8. Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41: 1–7)
9. Pharaoh's banquet (Gen 40: 21)
10. Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41: 15–36)
(Doorway leading to the inner narthex)
11. Joseph and Asenath's marriage (Gen 41: 45)
12. Joseph being appointed premier (Gen 41: 37–44)
13. Joseph sharing a ride with the Pharaoh (Gen 41: 43)
14. Jacob ordering his sons to travel to Egypt (Gen 42: 2)
15. Joseph's brothers travelling to Egypt (Gen 42: 3)
16. Benjamin and the silver cup (Gen 44: 12)
17. Judah accounting for the silver cup before Joseph (Gen 44: 16–34)
18. Jacob being informed the existence of Joseph (Gen 45: 25–28)
19. Jacob travelling to Egypt (Gen 46: 1–27)
20. Reunion of Jacob and Joseph (Gen 46: 29–30)
21. Jacob's death (Gen 49 :29–33)
22. Joseph's death (Gen 50: 22–26)



Fig.13 East wall, northern corner

Although it is difficult to determine the exact number, as many parts of the fresco have fallen off, it seems that the cycle originally consisted of approximately 30 scenes. The scene of Joseph being thrown into a pit by his brothers (Gen 37:24) and his denial of Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:12) must have been depicted in the missing parts.

In other instances, the Joseph cycle was incorporated into church decorations at the west and north narthex of the Basilica of San Marco in Venice (13th century) and the west wall of the narthex of the *katholikon* of Sopoćani Monastery (dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin, 1255). Although the Basilica of San Marco in Venice boasts the largest cycle using three domes and one lunette to represent 35 scenes, Sv Sofija ranks second. In the opening scene, Joseph dreams of his brothers' grain sheaves bowing down to his sheaves. The same scene is also found at the beginning of the oldest Joseph cycle known to date, the *Vienna Genesis*.⁽⁹⁾ Whereas the cycle ends with Jacob's Death in the *Vienna Genesis* (p. 48), Sv Sofija includes the scene of Joseph's death. Overall, the Joseph cycle in Sv Sophia differs significantly from that of *Vienna Genesis*, which concentrates on Joseph's journey to Egypt and his brothers' attempts to travel there. Neither does Sv Sofija resemble San Marco in the selection of scenes and motifs. In Sv Sofija, the narrative does not always follow the book of Genesis. It can be inferred that the Joseph cycle in Sv Sofija was not designed to be faithful to Genesis but to express a particular doctrine or soteriological view.

Taking advantage of the fact that the cycle spans the east, south, and west walls, the artist created an arrangement that highlights the morphological similarities between the images depicted on the east and west walls in the Joseph cycle. For example, the first scene, 'Joseph's dream', located at the north end of the east wall, and the 22nd scene, 'Joseph's death', located at the north end of the west wall, opposite each other, have similar forms in that both depict the main character, Joseph, lying on a bed. Similarly, the eighth scene, 'Pharaoh's dream', is similar in form to the opposite scene, 'Jacob's death', in that it features a figure lying on a bed. The twentieth scene, 'Reunion of Jacob and Joseph', which is directly opposite the twelfth scene, 'Joseph being appointed premier', both have two characters facing each other. However, I have thus far not been able to find a theological correspondence in the morphological similarities between these scenes.

The Donor Portraits on the Upper Tier of the East Wall

Unfortunately, most frescoes covering the upper tier of the east wall have fallen off, leaving only the legs of human figures [Fig.14]. The central figure is seated on a throne, with the Virgin Mary on the left and a bishop on the right. The other figures wear a *divitission* and stand on a purple cushion. Grozdanov identified the central seated figure as Christ, the figure standing to the second right of him as Serbian king Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (1308–55, r.1331–55), who conquered Ohrid in 1334, and the two figures on the left of Christ as queen Jelena of Bulgaria (1315–74, r.1332–55) and her son Stefan Uroš V (c.1336–71).⁽¹⁰⁾

Miloš Živkovic was right when he pointed out that the three figures in the centre compose an irregular *Deesis*.⁽¹¹⁾ There is no doubt that the seated figure is Christ and the standing figure left to him is the Virgin. However, the appearance of the figure on the right of Christ is clearly different from that of John the Baptist. A long *omophorion* hangs from his chest and an embroidered *epigonation* is attached to the right side. The vestment forming an arc before his chest and dropping back from his shoulders is the *phailonion* exclusively worn by the higher clergymen. There are examples of *Deesis* in which John the Baptist is substituted by another figure, such as in the narthex of Sv Panteleimon Church in Nerezi (1164), in the south façade of Sv Gjorgji Church in Kurbinovo (1191), and in the lunette above the main portal of the western narthex of San Marco in Venice (mid-13th century).⁽¹²⁾ In the case of Sv Sofija, we are unable to identify the mysterious figure in the same manner as in these churches because the basilica

(9) Zimmermann, B. (2003), *Die Wiener Genesis im Rahmen der antiken Buchmalerei: Ikonographie, Darstellung, Illustrationsverfahren und Aussageintention*, Wiesbaden.

(10) Grozdanov (1980), 190–93.

(11) Živkovic, M. (2012), 'Српски владарски портрети у Григоријевој галерији Свете Софије у Охриду и њихов програмски контекст', in Krstanovic, B. et al. eds., *Византијски свет на Балкану*, v. 1, Beograd, 189.

(12) Sinkević, I. (2000), *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage*, Wiesbaden, 67; Hadermann-Misguich, L. (1975), *Kurbinovo: les fresques de Saint-Georges et la peinture byzantine du XIIe siècle*, Bruxelles, 283–85, Figs 151, 153; Demus, O., Kessler, H. (1988), eds., *The Mosaic Decoration of San Marco, Venice*, Chicago, 123–26.

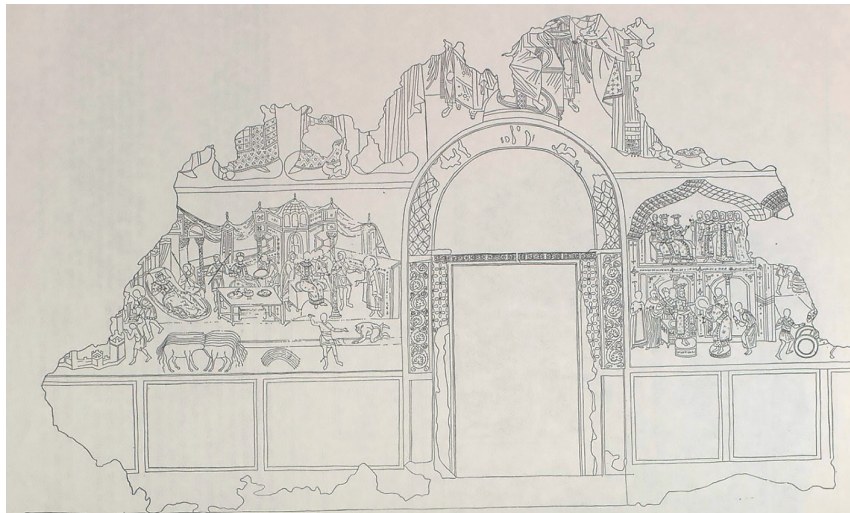


Fig.14 East wall, central part

is not dedicated to a saint.

Judging from the scarce evidence, the candidate for this figure is either Clement of Ohrid or Nicholas of Myra. *Deesis* compositions with Nicholas of Myra instead of John the Baptist are known from the *diakonikon* of the *katholikon* of Sopoćani Monastery (1255) and the lunette above the portal of the narthex of the Domnească Church (1364–77, dedicated to Nicholas of Myra) in Curtea de Argeș.⁽¹³⁾ Considering it was likely Archbishop Nikolaos I who commissioned the frescoes of the outer narthex gallery, he possibly chose to paint the eponymous saint as his two-fold portrait.⁽¹⁴⁾ However, the attire of this mysterious figure largely differs from that of Nikolaos I depicted in the southern part of the east wall of the inner narthex gallery.

The Provisional and Last Judgement as a Unified Vision

Having explained the subjects on each wall of the gallery, I would like to proceed to consider the effects generated from the relationship of these themes. To begin with, I will focus on how the Provisional and Last Judgement cycles relate to each other and, together, form a unified vision of the afterworld. The main feature of the Provisional Judgement cycle is that the soul subjected to it is damned once (scenes 10–14) but saved at the end (scene 22). The soul's salvation is emphasised in scene 18, in which the Virgin is in direct contact with the deceased's soul. This scene could be compared to the image right beneath it, the 'Reunion of Jacob and Joseph' from the Joseph cycle (scene 20) in terms of form and meaning. Morphologically, both scenes are composed of two figures facing each other. Semantically, the two scenes represent the realisation (or sign) of a long-awaited event. The soul waiting in Hades for the Second Coming of the Lord desires to receive the Virgin's visit as a consolation. Her visit to Hades itself does not reassure future salvation, but certainly gives courage to the poor soul. On the other hand, reuniting with Jacob was Joseph's earnest wish, having separated from his father by his brothers. Here, the Joseph Cycle plays its role as a reinforcement of a *typos* in common, if not as a prefiguration.

Joseph as a Type of Christ the Merciful Judge

In the previous section, we assumed that the Provisional and Last Judgements were incorporated into the iconographical programme with an eschatological intention. However, the Joseph Cycle remains to be interpreted in connection with these two judgements. Can we also say that the Joseph Cycle was chosen with the intention of presenting a comprehensive view of the other world?

Joseph is not necessary the most important among the many figures appearing in the Old Testament. Unlike

(13) Musicescu, M., Ionescu, G. (1967), *The Princely Church of Curtea de Argeș*, Bucharest, 16–18.

(14) Živkovic (2012), 189.

David and Solomon, he does not descend directly from Jesus Christ. However, he was often portrayed in early Byzantine art because his life was perceived as a prefiguration of the Saviour's life. The aforementioned *Vienna Genesis*, the contemporary *Cotton Genesis*⁽¹⁵⁾ (British Library, Cotton.Ms.Otho.B.VI, 5/6th century), and the ivory-covered *Throne of Maximian*⁽¹⁶⁾ (Ravenna, Archiepiscopal Museum, middle of 6th century) are examples. However, these materials do not provide a good comparison to the Joseph Cycle in Sv Sofija because they are not monumental.

Veronique Deur-Petiteau assumed that the Joseph Cycle in Sv Sofija conveys the authenticity and superiority of the ruling Serbian dynasty.⁽¹⁷⁾ Joseph, who seized power alongside the Pharaoh and wisely ruled Egypt, was seen as a spiritual mirror of the kingship. According to her, following Grozdanov's view that the donors depicted on the upper eastern wall are Stefan Dušan and his family, Stefan Dušan applied Joseph's story to appeal that he was as sovereign and righteous as Joseph was. If the upright figure second to the right of *Deesis* was truly Stefan Dušan as Deur-Petiteau thinks, it is probable that the scene right under his feet 'Joseph being appointed Premier' (scene 12) was deliberately placed to display and justify his authority. Nevertheless, the reason why Joseph Cycle is depicted on the south wall along with the Judgement scenes still needs to be explained. Moreover, we cannot dismiss Branislav Todić's remark that not the whole of Joseph's story, but his portrait alone would be enough to fulfil his role as an ideal ruler.⁽¹⁸⁾

Even more interesting is Blanka Ivanić's theory that the iconographic programme of the gallery represents the liturgy held on Holy Monday. According to Ivanić, the subjects depicted in the gallery were taken from scripture read on the same day.⁽¹⁹⁾ The *Lenten Triodion* does credit a sermon on Joseph for the Matins and another sermon on the Withered Fig Tree (Mt 21: 18–20) as the ninth canon for the Matins of Holy Monday.⁽²⁰⁾ In addition, the 'Canon on the Leaving Soul' traditionally attributed to Andrew of Crete is read for the Great Compline of the same day. This canon then developed into the 'Service for the Leaving Soul' which was accompanied by a series of illustrations depicting the Provisional Judgement in Leimonos Monastery, cod. 295.⁽²¹⁾

Indeed, people should contemplate death and repent during Holy Week. It is an ideal time in the year to reflect on one's doings in the light of Joseph's piety and to think about death by hearing to the 'Canon on the Leaving Soul'. It should also be noted that Joseph's fall into a pit was alluded to Christ's sojourn in the tomb after his crucifixion. Joseph, who prefigured the Saviour's resurrection, is a figure fit to be worshipped during the Holy Week, yet his story plays only a partial role in the liturgy of Holy Monday. Therefore, it is difficult to explain why Joseph's story covers a larger portion of the gallery in Sv Sofija. It is also strange that other components from the liturgy of Holy Monday are not included in the gallery's iconographic programme, such as the Withered Fig Tree which Ivanić gave specific weight to her theory. Consequently, we are unable to understand the function of Sv Sofija's outer narthex gallery in connection to the liturgy of Holy Monday.

How should one interpret the Joseph Cycle in Sv Sofija? I assume that Joseph in this Cycle prefigures Christ as the Merciful Judge. Joseph's life resembles Christ's in several respects: for example, both are beloved by their fathers.⁽²²⁾ Joseph's brothers became jealous because he was his father's favourite son. Like Christ, Joseph was also a shepherd who renounced temptation, was sold by his closest one, and was looked down on regardless of his innocence **[Table.1]**.⁽²³⁾

(15) Weitzmann, K., Kessler, H. (1986), *The Cotton Genesis: British Library Codex Cotton Otho B. VI*, Princeton (NJ).

(16) Tsuji, S. (1968), 'La chaire de Maximien, la Genèse de Cotton et les mosaïques de Saint-Marc à Venise: a propos du cycle de Joseph', in Grabar, A. ed., *Synthronon: Art et archéologie de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, t. 2, Paris, 43–51.

(17) Deur-Petiteau, V. (2015), 'Trois cycles de Joseph entre Orient et Occident: Venise, Sopocani, Ohrid', *CahArch* 56, 140.

(18) Todić, B. (1995), 'A Note on the Beauteous Joseph in Late Byzantine Painting', *DChAE* 36, 89.

(19) Ivanić, B. (1990), 'Чин бивајем на разлучије души ош шела у Светој Софији у Охриду', *Зборник Матице српске за ликовне уметности* 26, 82–84.

(20) Mary, M., Ware, K. (1978), *The Lenten Triodion*, London.

(21) The main body of this 12th century manuscript kept in the Ag Ignatios Monastery in Leimonos of Lesbos Island is the *Psalter horologion*. The aforesaid 'Service for the Leaving Soul (ἀκολουθία εἰς ψυχορραγοῦντα)' accompanied with a set of Biblical Odes was added in the end of the 13th century. This manuscript is the first witness to an illustrated 'Service for the Leaving Soul'.

(22) Fabre, P. (1921), 'Le développement de l'histoire de Joseph dans la littérature et dans l'art au cours des douze premiers siècles', *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 39(1), 194–95.

Table.1 Similarities in Joseph's and Christ's Lives

Joseph	Christ
Beloved by his father Jacob (37: 3)	Beloved by God the Father
Lived as a shepherd (37: 2)	The people's spiritual shepherd
Sold by his brother Judah (37: 26)	Sold by his disciple Judah Iscariot
Renounced Potiphar's Wife (39:7–13)	Renounced temptation in the desert
Imprisoned by slander (39:16–20)	Executed without guilt
Revealed himself to his brothers (45: 4)	Resurrected and revealed himself to his disciples
Sent to Egypt by divine will (45: 5, 8)	Fled to Egypt by divine will
	Sent to this world by divine will

* Chapters and sections of the Genesis are in parentheses. Dr Miekko Kezuka has pointed me out that the revelation of Joseph's true identity to his brothers was possibly regarded as a prefiguration of the revelation of the resurrected Christ to his disciples, especially to Thomas. I hereby thank Dr Kezuka for this comment.

Joseph's own words admitting God's will that he was sold to Egypt and had to serve foreigners (Gen 45: 5, 8) must have been found by typologists as a perfect correspondence between Joseph and Christ. Although Christ performed many deeds in his life on earth, it is reasonable to think that not Christ's life in general, but his specific character, is emphasised in Sv Sofija's Joseph Cycle because it was combined with the Provisional and Last Judgement.

The *Deesis* composition placed at the apex of the Last Judgement on the north wall of the gallery will give us a clue. Because the other main themes depicted in the gallery are both judgement scenes, it is obvious that this *Deesis* is the keystone of the iconographic programme. When we look at Christ seated in the centre of *Deesis*, we tend to imagine him as a strict judge who blames every sin. However, we should not forget that he could be both a stern judge who convicts and a merciful judge who forgives. When we look at Joseph's life with Christ's two opposing qualities in mind, we realise that Joseph matches Christ's soft and merciful qualities.

It was Joseph's brothers who approached him with evil thoughts and treated him badly. One day, they plot to kill him and bury him in a pit, although Ruben, the eldest brother, opposes the plot. Instead, the brothers stripped Joseph of his coat and threw him naked into a pit. One of the brothers then proposed selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite merchants who just passed by. It is divine coincidence that the brother who proposed selling Joseph and the disciple who sold Christ to Sanhedrin were both named Judah.⁽²⁴⁾ Joseph was sold for twenty shekels of silver and taken to Egypt. The brothers smudged Joseph's coat with goat blood and showed it to Jacob in innocent air. Jacob, having seen the blood-stained coat of Joseph, believed that 'some wild thing' has devoured his most beloved son and mourned over his death.

While his father was in agony, Joseph, with the protection of God, gradually rose to power in the Pharaoh's court. He interpreted the Pharaoh's mysterious dream as an omen of famine and was entrusted the right to rule the Kingdom in return. Egyptians survived the famine thanks to Joseph's wisdom; however, the famine reached the Levant and caused Joseph's family to suffer. Having nothing to eat, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for grain. Upon arrival, they had the audience of the now-premier Joseph but did not recognise that he was their long-lost brother.

Instead of punishing them severely, Joseph forgave his brothers twice regardless of their attempts to murder him. The first pardon was given after Joseph met his brothers for the first time in Egypt and could not resist revealing his identity (Gen 45). To his brothers, who were shocked to discover that the very man before them was Joseph, he says, 'I am Joseph, that brother of yours whom you sent away to be sold as a slave in Egypt. And now, do not

(24) Ioannes Chrysostomos (Ps.), *De Ioseph et de castitate* (CPG 4566). PG 56, 590. Today, the clerestories of the basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano are decorated with stucco reliefs by the sculptor Allesandro Algardi (1595–1654), showing the Christological cycle on the south side and corresponding episodes from the Old Testament on the north side. According to Pierre Fabre, the themes of each stucco reliefs rely on the original mosaic installed in the early Christian period. Nowadays, the 'Betrayal of Judah' is paralleled with 'Joseph sold by his brothers'. Fabre (1921), 196.

take it to heart; waste no regrets over the bargain that brought me here [...] It was not your design, then, it was God's will that sent me here' (Gen 45: 4–8). Joseph, who had to flee to Egypt with nothing in his hands because of his brothers' bad will, nevertheless exempted them because he saw the divine will working behind the events.

In the text of Genesis, just before Joseph's first pardon was inserted, is the episode of Benjamin and the silver cup (Gen 44). In this episode, Joseph's men discover a silver cup secretly placed into Benjamin's sac by Joseph. Joseph then plays a trick on them and suspects that his brothers are robbing him of the cup. Ephrem the Syrian turns the trial of the brothers into a court filled with Egyptian juries in his lengthy sermon, *On the Sold Joseph*.⁽²⁵⁾ After the brothers have accounted for their doings in concern of the silver cup, taken over by fear against Joseph they say 'so the trial concludes, the time of our perishing, when our mouths will made shut has come [.....] this is the decisive point of our fate'.⁽²⁶⁾ By alluding the trial over the silver cup to the Last Judgement, Ephrem effectively maximises the impact of exemption that Joseph would give to his brothers immediately after.

The second pardon from Joseph to his brothers is given upon the death of Jacob, who came to Egypt seeking help. Fearing that Joseph would burst the grudge which he had endured when his father was alive, the brothers sent the following message to him:

'Our father, before he died, laid a charge on us. We were to say to thee in his name, Forget, I pray thee, the crime which thy brethren committed, the cruel wrong they did thee. And it is our prayer too that thou wouldst grant forgiveness to us, the servants of the God thy father served.' (Gen 50: 16–17)

Hearing his brothers' plea, Joseph responds:

'Do not be afraid; who am I, that I should oppose my will to God's will? You thought to do me harm, but God turned it all to good account; I was to be raised up to greatness, as you see, for the saving of a multitude of people. Do not be afraid; both you and your children shall still have maintenance from me.' (Gen 50: 19–21)

Christ the Godhead is the only one who can exempt sinners and make them righteous, turning evil into good. In the sphere of Christian typology, the brothers begging Joseph for forgiveness could be understood as a *typos* of the laity who craved to be forgiven, and Joseph forgiving his brothers as Christ acting mercifully on the day of the final judgement.

Joseph's life can be briefly summarised as the story of a man who was once symbolically dead but came back to life and forgave wrongdoing [Table.2].

Table.2 Similarities of Sequence of Events in Joseph's and Christ's Lives

	Joseph	Christ
Death	Thrown in a pit in an attempt of killing	Dying on the cross ⁽²⁷⁾
Resurrection	Saved from the pit	Resurrected three days after
Exemption	Forgave his brothers who tried to kill him	Will forgive the people upon Last Judgement

First, Joseph was almost killed, not at his fault, and was thrown into a pit, leaving the rest of the world to think that he had died. This is a prefiguration of Christ's death on the cross and his entombment. Joseph is then rescued from the pit and rules the foreign land in his master's place. Christ's Ascension and his reign over the Heavenly Kingdom are prefigured here. Finally, the 'resurrected' Joseph forgives his brothers who once betrayed him. This

⁽²⁵⁾ Ephraim Syros, *De Iosepho vendito* 9. 1. Lamy, T. (1882), ed., *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, Mechelen, 582. On the content of the sermon see under heading 'Sermons on Joseph' at 'Syri.ac' <https://syri.ac/ephrem> (last viewed 13.05.24).

⁽²⁶⁾ Ephraim Syros, *De Iosepho vendito* 9. 3.

⁽²⁷⁾ Ephraim Syros, *De Iosepho vendito* 1. 19.

could also be understood as a prefiguration of Christ forgiving the people from his throne of judgement. In short, Joseph and Christ resemble not only the events that happened in their lives but also the sequence of those events, resurrecting and then forgiving.

As the remaining frescoes tell us, it is only the first pardon by Joseph depicted in the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija (scene 17, lower tier of western part of south wall). However, it is possible that the second pardon was also depicted on the second pier of the west wall from the north but did not survive over time. This pier is located between scene 21, 'Jacob's death' and scene 22, 'Joseph's death'. Joseph's second pardon is the only event between these two scenes that deserves to be depicted. If the second pardon was indeed shown here, its correspondence to the scene immediately above is worth noting. Although exfoliated, the hem of the robe worn by a standing figure can still be seen on the wall above the second pier from the north. This standing figure is different from the Twelve Apostles attending the Last Judgement. Its identity could be one of the elects led by Peter in Heaven, since what seems to be Peter's foot on the edge of Heaven's wall is depicted to the left of this standing figure. A portrait of the donor may have been included in the choir of the elect. It is not a mere coincidence that the scene of the elect entering heaven was located on the same vertical axis as Joseph's second pardon.

On the assumption that Joseph was perceived as a type of Christ the merciful judge, it is reasonable that the Joseph Cycle is represented along with the two Judgement scenes in the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija. A question that remains to be answered is why an iconographic programme centered on salvation and exemption should be installed in a bright, colonnaded space on the upper floor of a narthex.

With domes at both the northern and southern ends, the outer narthex of Sv Sofija falls into the category of a so-called twin-domed narthex. According to Slobodan Ćurčić, this type of narthex was popular only in the late-Palaiologan Balkans.⁽²⁸⁾ A few edifices, such as the *katholikon* of Hilandar Monastery on Mt Athos (1320) and the Prophitis Ilias Church in Thessaloniki (14C), are major examples of these narthexes.⁽²⁹⁾ Ćurčić has classified the function of the twin-domed narthex into three categories: 1. Commemoration of the saint, 2. Commemoration of a deceased monk; and 3. Commemoration of the donor.⁽³⁰⁾ Since a monk's soul is the subject of the Provisional Judgement represented on the south and west walls, Functions 2 and 3, especially 3 seems most suitable for the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija.

Other churches with Joseph Cycles, such as San Marco in Venice and the *katholikon* of Sopoćani Monastery, do not have a twin-domed narthex structure. However, the Joseph Cycle is located on the western side of the narthex in these churches. The iconographic programme of the narthex of the *katholikon* of Sopoćani Monastery is of special interest. Built in 1255 by the Serbian king Stefan Uroš I (1223–77, r.1243–76), the *katholikon* of Sopoćani is about a century older than the outer narthex of Sv Sofija, but its Joseph Cycle was designed to have a similar function as that in Sv Sofija. The east wall of the narthex is covered by images of the Last Supper, seven ecumenical councils, and other councils called by Stefan Nemanja (1113–99, r.1166–96).⁽³¹⁾ On the south wall is the Tree of Jesse and the Joseph Cycle is on the west wall. The Last Judgement is depicted on the north wall. To the best of my knowledge, the Joseph Cycle was coupled with the Last Judgement for the first time here in Sopoćani. For this reason, we should carefully analyse Sopoćani's iconographic programme.

To comprehend its iconographic programme, one must remember that Sopoćani was planned by Stefan Uroš as a sepulchre of himself, his mother Anna Dandolo (d.1258, r.1217–28) and the patriarch Joanikije I (d.1279, r.1272–

⁽²⁸⁾ Ćurčić, S. (1971), 'The Twin-Domed Narthex in Paleologan Architecture', *Зборник радова Византолошког института* 13, 334.

⁽²⁹⁾ Its origin as the monastic community of the Serbians dates back to 1198, but the *katholikon* was fully renovated by Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1253–1321, r.1281–1321). Mylonas, P. (1986), 'Remarques architecturales sur le catholicon de Chilandar', *Хиландарски зборник* 6, 17–18. The theory that the Prophitis Ilias Church was built as the *katholikon* of Nea Moni Monastery in 1360–70 was called into question by Thanassis Papazotos. Its current attribution to the prophet Elijah is based on a misconception that Saraylı Camii, which the church was referred to as a mosque, should be the corrupted form of Saint-Elie. Papazotos, T. (1991), 'The Identification of the Church of "Prophitis Elias" in Thessaloniki', *DOP* 45, 121.

⁽³⁰⁾ Ćurčić (1971), 339.

⁽³¹⁾ The drawings published in Živković (1984), 26–27 best represent the details of each fresco.



Fig.15 *Katholikon* of Sopoćani Monastery, north wall

76).⁽³²⁾ The left corner of the north wall under the Last Judgement depicts a scene of Anna's deathbed, located precisely above her cenotaph **[Fig.15]**.⁽³³⁾ The image of Joseph mourning at Rachel's tomb from the Joseph cycle on the west wall seems to align with Anna's funeral monument. Joseph's mother Rachel died when she gave birth to her second child, Benjamin (Gen 35: 16–19). The painter of Sopoćani depicted Joseph stopping by at Rachel's tomb on his way to Egypt. He leans over her sarcophagus-shaped tomb and weeps at losing her. However, such details cannot be found in the text of Genesis, which briefly tells that Rachel was buried on the way to Ephrath (Gen 35: 19–20).⁽³⁴⁾ The scene of Joseph mourning at Rachel's tomb is absent from other Joseph Cycles in Ohrid and Venice.

If Stefan Uroš intended to liken himself to Joseph the righteous, Rachel would be the prototype for his mother, Anna Dandolo. Although simplified, Rachel's tomb depicted in the fresco somehow resembles Anna's sarcophagus-shaped cenotaph. Radivoje Ljubinković, who tries to decipher Sopoćani's iconographic programme based on the *Life of Stefan Nemanja and St Sava* written by the monk Domentijan the Hilandarian (c.1210–, d. after 1264), assumes that the image of Joseph mourning at Rachel's tomb is related to the visit paid by St Sava to his father's tomb in Studenica Monastery.⁽³⁵⁾ The *Life of Stefan Nemanja and St Sava* is indeed a work from the time of Stefan Uroš, but there is no need to use it as a basis for understating the iconographic programme of Sopoćani since Stefan Nemanja and St Sava are not its proprietors nor buried in it.⁽³⁶⁾

However, one cannot admit that the Joseph Cycle in Sopoćani also functions as a prototype of Christ the Merciful.

⁽³²⁾ The reason Stefan Uroš excluded his father Stefan II Nemanjić (1165–1228, r. 1196–1228)'s tomb from Sopoćani should be that Stefan Nemanjić was buried in the *katholikon* of Studenica Monastery soon after his death. On the initial burial plan by Stefan Uroš, see Todić (2006), 59–68.

⁽³³⁾ As for medieval tombs found in the areas of the Balkans which had strong connections with the Byzantine empire, the sarcophagus on the floor is a mere cenotaph. Instead, human remains were interred under the floor beneath the sarcophagi. See the perspective drawings of medieval Serbian tombs found in churches offered by Popović, M. (2007), 'Les funérailles du ktitor: aspect archéologique', in Jeffreys, E., Haarer, F., Ryder, J. eds., *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21-26 August, 2006, v. 1: Plenary Papers*, Aldershot, 99–130. However, there are some exceptions such as the real sarcophagus containing the body of Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (1285–1331, r. 1321–31) which is installed in front of the iconostasis of the *katholikon* of Dečani Monastery.

⁽³⁴⁾ Todić names a sermon written by Ephrem of Syria as a source, but without its title nor its invention number in corpora of theological writings. I failed to gather more information on this sermon since the reference Todić gives is a book titled Творения иже во святых отца нашего Ефрема Сирина published in 1849 by an anonymous editor in Moscow, which seems extremely difficult to refer to.

⁽³⁵⁾ Ljubinković (1967), 217–19.

ful Judge. This is because among the persons to be entombed in Sopoćani, only Anna was buried in the narthex and the image of Joseph forgiving his brothers was never depicted. Nevertheless, it should not be dismissed that the Joseph Cycle is presented with the Last Judgement in a narthex which contains a tomb. Presumably, the Joseph Cycle in Sopoćani helps to appease and to save the soul.

For the Salvation of the Soul: The Blind Niche at the East Wall in the Overall Iconographic Programme

Unlike in Sopoćani, there is no burial facility in the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija at first sight. Its bright and open-air upper floor, not to say its ground floor, would not be the ideal space to bury someone having not enough depth for a pit.

Once again, I would like to draw attention to the blind niche **[Fig.7]** opening at the northern end of the east wall. As confirmed previously, Christ *Pantokrator* painted in this blind niche faces the Virgin *Paraklesis* on the adjacent eastern end of the north wall. The Virgin *Paraklesis* is a motif commonly found at funeral facilities. In Lesnovo, where Christ *Pantokrator* ‘The Terrible Judge’ is represented on the south pier of the outer narthex, the Virgin *Paraklesis* on the opposite north pier has a somewhat funeral function. Together, the images flank the passageway into the naos, which makes people walk through the very space where the mother’s plea is addressed to her son. Regarding that Lesnovo Monastery was renovated by the *despotes* Jovan Oliver Grčinić (c. 1310–56) to serve as his mausoleum, it is an interesting example in comparison to the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija.

The Virgin *Paraklesis* of Sv Sofija forms an atypical *Deesis* composition, together with John the Baptist at the western end of the north wall and Christ *Pantokrator* in the blind niche. Thus, there are two *Deesis* images around the north wall, another subject favoured in funeral chapels.⁽³⁷⁾ In addition, there is only one blind niche on the east wall. These facts lead us to think that this blind niche originally had a commemorative/funeral function, such as the decoration of a tomb once below it or as a focal point of a service in the memory of the deceased.

Tombs with shallow blind niches, often found in Palaiologan churches, developed from arcosolium tombs. Until the middle Byzantine era, arcosolia were larger in width than in height because they had to accommodate a sarcophagus. Naturally, the arcosolium had a depth corresponding to the sarcophagus it contained. A typical arcosolium tomb is the founders’ tomb [early 11C, **Fig.16**] from the *katholikon* of Vatopedi Monastery.⁽³⁸⁾ During the Palaiologan period, people began to bury the bodies under the floor, so the funeral monuments above it no longer had to depend on the structure or size of the burial chambers. This is presumably why blind niche tombs made with fewer toils came into fashion. Blind niche tombs often do not leave traces of the burial chambers on the floor.⁽³⁹⁾

The floor along the east wall of the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija, including the part below the blind niche, was already dug out, leaving no trace of the burial chamber. In addition, contrary to most funeral blind niches which show human figures all the way to the floor, the lower part of the blind niche in Sv Sofija is penetrated by a decorative band that imitates marble stretching over the entire east wall. No other tombs placed in a gallery of a narthex are known. However, when it comes to a tomb installed in the upper floors of an ecclesiastical building (not limited to narthexes), the tomb of the Venetian Doge Enrico Dandolo (1107–1205, r.1192–1205) in the southern gallery of Ag Sophia Cathedral or the ossuary inside the Sv Đorđe tower of Hilandar Monastery would provide a comparison. We cannot assert with certainty that the blind niche in Sv Sofija as a funeral monument, but we should not dismiss this

⁽³⁶⁾ To the founder Stefan Uroš, Stefan Nemanja is his grandfather and St Sava his uncle. Stefan Nemanja was then buried in Studenica and St Sava in Mileševa Monastery. Both figures were revered by later Serbian kings as men of virtue, although it is rather unreasonable to interpret the whole iconographic programme of Sopoćani in light of their *Lives*.

⁽³⁷⁾ On the function of the *Deesis* and its iconographical development, see Masuda, T. (2014), *Byzantine Church Decoration*, Tokyo, 165–98. In Japanese.

⁽³⁸⁾ Pazaras, T. (1998), ‘The Tomb of the Founders’, in Vatopaidi Monastery, *The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi: Tradition, History, Art*, v. 1, Athos, 180–82.

⁽³⁹⁾ For example, the tomb of the founder Pachomios (d. c. 1322) in the north-west chapel of the Vrontochion Monastery’s Odigitria (Afendiko) Church, and the tomb of Manuel Laskaris Hadjiki (d. 1444/45) in the Pantanassa Monastery’s *katholikon*, both located in Mystras.



Fig.16 *Katholikon* of Vatopedi Monastery, founders' tomb

possibility.

The plea of Joseph's brothers 'and it is our prayer too that thou wouldst grant forgiveness to us, the servants of the God thy father served', echoes directly as the petition of the soul which hopes to be delivered through the iconographic programme of the outer narthex gallery. Since it is located on the left-hand side of Christ the judge of the north wall, the viewer who stands in front of the blind niche (or the soul of the corpse buried beneath it), first starts their journey in the afterlife as a sinner. Leaving the blind niche, the viewer/soul follows the story of Joseph narrated on the eastern wall. Upon reaching the south wall, the Provisional Judgement begins in the upper tier, following Joseph's deeds in the lower tier. The sequence continues to the upper-west wall, where the soul is damned into Hades after the Provisional Judgement. On the other hand, on the lower west wall, Joseph's brothers who were granted his first pardon are hurrying their way home to tell Jacob that Joseph is alive. The soul's journey ends here, just above Jacob's death, being rescued from Hades by Christ's hand. I have already mentioned that this saved soul was most probably accepted in Heaven which is depicted immediately next to this scene. Joseph's story continues slightly further to the northern end of the west wall, where he draws his last breath. It is natural that Joseph dies on the right-hand side of Christ, since he is the mirror of mankind.

The viewer's/deceased's soul starts its last journey from the northern end of the east wall, goes around the gallery clockwise, and reaches the foot of Christ the Judge, sitting at the north wall. Joseph, as a type of Christ the Merciful Judge, accompanies the course of the viewer's or the deceased's soul throughout the gallery. I assume that the mastermind behind this iconographic programme incorporated the Joseph Cycle with Judgement scenes to ensure the salvation of the viewer's/deceased's soul. This conclusion can be drawn when we comprehend the Joseph Cycle within the scope of Christian typology and the function of the space in which it is placed.

Conclusion

The above study leads to the conclusion that the Joseph Cycle in the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija was depicted with the intention of likening Joseph to Christ the Merciful Judge. The cycle was incorporated together with the Provisional and Last Judgement Cycles for the first time in the history of Byzantine art. I assume that the reason for the establishment of such an iconographic programme is centred on the blind niche situated at the northern end of the east wall of the gallery. If the presumption that this blind niche once served as a funeral monument is correct, the three main themes represented in this iconographic programme show a comprehensive and wishful view

of the afterlife which ensures the salvation of the soul.

The question then arises as to who was buried under or commemorated in the blind niche. This question is indispensable for the identity of the donor who commissioned the frescoes of the outer narthex gallery of Sv Sofija. Judging from the very few clues available, the strongest candidate for the donor is Nikolas I, the Archbishop of Ohrid. However, we currently lack historical evidence to prove that the figure commemorated in this gallery is also him. While I must acknowledge the limitation of art historical measures, new findings in historical records concerning the Archbishopric of Ohrid are expected in the future.

Figure References

Figs.1, 3: Photo taken by the author.

Figs.2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 14: Grozdanov (1980).

Fig.4: After Grozdanov (1980), 61, altered by the author.

Figs.7, 8, 13: 'CyArk (Project: Church of St. Sophia)', <https://www.cyark.org/projects/church-of-st-sophia/overview> (last viewed 22. 07. 2024). The photos used to build the 3D model can be downloaded from the link provided under the tab 'Open Heritage'.

Fig.11: Marinis, V. (2017), *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art*, New York, 120.

Fig.15: Screen shot from 'Blago Fund, Monastery Sopocani', <https://www.blagofund.org/Archives/Sopocani/VR/> (last viewed 22. 07. 2024)

Fig.16: Pazaras (1998), 180.