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Volume 7

"Boyan Penev" Publishing Center
Institute of Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Sofia, 2009

Vladimir Dimitrov

The Bulgarian National Revival began and developed unsteadily. Its elements took shape under the influence of various factors and covered broad groups of the population. The processes developed differently across the Bulgarian territories, in the towns and villages, as well as among the Bulgarian émigrés. The process was slow and complicated due to political, economic and cultural interactions.

In the early 20th century, Bulgarian researchers were mostly interested in exploring Byzantine and Bulgarian medieval art. Explorations of Bulgarian Revival art were considerably fewer compared to research into the history, literature and culture of the national Revival.

The attention of art historians so far has been focused mostly on the famous zograph families from Tryavna, Bansko and Samokov. To these zograph families and the respective art schools detailed in-depth monographs, collections and conferences were dedicated, and still are.

Rather big and insufficiently explored, however, is the group of zographs whose art researchers consider marked by certain boldness and, despite the numerous technical imperfections and incorrect interpretation of form, their achievements reveal the typical work of popular masters who were never discouraged by any challenges. The present study is dedicated to one such group of artists.

Subject of investigation in this article are mostly the kinship ties of a family of zographs* known under the name of Bundovtsi, who worked during the second half of the 19th century in the South-West of Bulgaria, and the heritage they left behind. Their activities have not been fully explored, and their heritage deserves to be examined closely, although it can never rival the artistic qualities of works by masters from our biggest centers of artistic activity.

The only reference to the Bundovtsi family can be found in Assen Vassiliev. He provides the following brief information on their life and work: "Zographs Mino and his sons Marko and Theofil from Galičnik moved to the village of Kara-

* Zograph (from Greek: zographos): An ecclesiastical artist, church muralist, and often also icon-painter.

kyoi in the region of Seres. The family's name was Bundovtsi." (Vassiliev 1965: 292). A. Vassiliev believes that Marko Minov most probably also had a son, Mina Markov, who worked with his uncle, Theophil Minov, in the monasterial chapel of the town of Hadžidimovo¹, as well as that Marko Minov worked also in Dobrudža. (Vassiliev 1965: 292–293).

In the course of my research on the kinship ties of the artists from the Minov family and the ecclesiastic murals they left behind, I came across new information about the history of this family, which not only provides numerous specifications and corrects mistakes, but also significantly enriches the idea of the life of zographs during the late Bulgarian Revival.

The group of monuments where I have discovered the artists' signatures is located in the South-West of Bulgaria. Despite the fact that in some of these sites the murals are in deplorable state, I believe it would be justified to rank them among the Minovs' works.

While exploring the church in the village of Topolnica, I found out that one of the brothers, Marko Minov, worked in a team with zograph Miloš Yakovlev, originally from the village of Galičnik, Debar region, as the commemorative inscription states, which was also the birthplace of Marko Minov. It turned out that the murals in the St. George church in the town of Sapareva Banya were also painted by Miloš Yakovlev. During my research of this region, which has a rather interesting and still insufficiently explored history, I had the chance to come across a travel essay by Evgenia Kovačeva², from which I learned that she was descendent of Theophil Minov. After contacting the descendents of the family, I was granted access to the family tree, as well as to some new, interesting and extremely valuable information about the family. The family tree was drawn in 1992 by Lilyana Minčeva-Kovačeva, granddaughter of Theophil Minov. In drawing the family tree, she has used information from Assen Vassilev's book *Bălgarski vāzroždenski maistori* [Masters of the Bulgarian Revival], but also from the accounts of her father, the Very Reverend Boris Minev, Rector (born 31.08.1907, died 11.10.1986), and her grandfather, priest Georgi Theophilov Minev (born 03.1882, Karakyoj, died 26.10.1942, Karabunar, Pazardžik region).

The family tree reveals that the forefather of the family was Yakov. He was born around 1800 in the village of Galičnik, Debār region, and lived until about 1870. It is known that he was a zograph from the Debār School, but for the moment being there is now further evidence of churches decorated by him. His wife's

¹ The murals were destroyed by a fire in the 1970s. So far I have not come across any photo of the inscription in this church.

² Kovačeva, E. <http://www.slovo.bg/form/> Electronic document. Accessed on the 15th of July 2008.

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name is not known either, but the family tree shows that they had two children, a daughter Katherina and a son Mino (Mina).

Mino was born around 1820, also in the village of Galičnik. A blood feud with Albanians in his native village forced him to move in 1865 to the village of Karakyoï, Seres region (now Kataphyto, Greece), where he died in 1903. Mino was married twice. The name of his first wife was Zoica. She died childless. Mino's second wife was called Zoica too, and with her he had two children, the sons Marko and Theophil Minov.

Not much is known about Marko Minov, the elder brother. Both the dates of his birth and death are forgotten. The family account has it that Marko Minov was twenty years senior to his brother Theophil Minov, and that he died as a result of poisoning with paint. His wife, whose name, unfortunately, is not known, came from the village of Tarlis, Seres region, and belonged to a renowned and interesting family. She was sister of the Metropolitan Bishop of Skopje Theodosius (Vassil Gologanov) and the well-known teacher and folklorist of Tarlis Ivan Gologanov. The Gologanovs' family tree notes that Ivan and Vassil Gologanov had yet another brother, Archimandrite Nikola, Father Abbot of the Bačkovô Monastery³, as well as three sisters: Maria, Magdalena and Anastasia (Bogdanov 1991: 45). Unfortunately, all traces of these branches of the family have been lost, and at this stage I am unable to tell who of the three sisters became Marko Minov's wife.

I will now look closer at the kinship ties of the Minov brothers with members of the Gologanov family, as it seems quite probable that these had a strong impact on the lives of the artists and their social and political views, and is even possible that they played a role in the taking of certain decisions with regards to mural work being done by the two.

Metropolitan bishop Theodosius, with the secular name of Vassil Iliev Gologanov, was born on the 7th of Januray 1846 in the village of Tarlis, Nevrokop area (now Vatitopos, Greece). He was son of Very Reverend Iliya Ivanov Gologanov (circa 1819–1865) and nephew of hieromonk Theodosy Ivanov Gologanov (1800–1889), monk and Father Abbot of the St. John the Forerunner Monastery of Seres. Vassil Gologanov received extensive education, for those times, at a classical (Greek) school in the town of Seres. In 1862 he became a monk under the name of Theodosius, and was ordained hierodeacon. His service continued under the Metropolitan Bishop of Herzegovina, Procopius, to whom he was coadjutor between 1865 and 1867. In 1868 Theodosius became hieromonk in the city of Plovdiv and was ephimerous of the Church of the Holy Virgin. After the foundation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, he became head of the Seres parish in the years 1874–1875.

³ At present, the period when Archimandrite Nikola was Father Abbot of the Bačkovô monastery is not known.

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In 1875, he received the holy title of archimandrite and became vicar of Victor, the metropolitan bishop of Niš, in 1876–1877. In the period following the Russo-Turkish war, from 1878 to 1880 he represented the Exarchate in Carigrad, as during the war and sometime after it, Exarch Yosif I resided in the city of Plovdiv (Maxim 1992: 58). From 1880 to 1885, Theodosius was kapu-kehaya (representative to the Sublime Porte) of the Bulgarian Exarchate. In 1885 he was appointed metropolitan bishop of Skopje, but the *berat*, or ordinance, for his appointment was received not earlier than 1890. While in Skopje, he tried to revive the Oxrid archdiocese and separate the metropolis from the Exarchate by establishing contacts with the Catholic Church. It was for these attempts that in 1892 he was recalled from Skopje⁴. Between 1901 and 1906, he was head of the widowed metropolis of Plovdiv, and between 1912 and 1919 of the Maronia metropolis founded in the newly liberated territories. He was elected acting member (academician) of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1910⁵. When in Seres, he helped Stefan Verkovič collect folk songs in the Marvatean dialect. Bishop Theodosius translated into Bulgarian works by Epictetus, Virgil, Milton and Chateaubriand (Bogdanov 1991: 46). He died on February 1st, 1926, in Sofia.

The other brother of Marko's wife was the elder one, Ivan Gologanov. He was born in 1839 in the village of Tarlis, and died in 1895 in the village of Kruševo (now in Greece). Between 1846 and 1851, Ivan Gologanov received excellent education for those times at the Greek school of Seres, located in the St. John the Forerunner monastery, and then continued his studies, from 1851 to 1856, at the Bulgarian school in Tarlis, where his teacher was Archimandrite Isaiah. Having barely turned 17, he was appointed teacher in his native village, with an annual pay of 1,000 Turkish groshes. In 1865, he also taught in the village of Kruševo, Demirhissar area, and in 1866 was scribe at the St. John the Forerunner monastery. He was also Stefan Verkovich's key informer at the time the former was compiling his collection of folkloric texts, *Veda Slovena*, working for Verkovič from 1867 until 1876. For a short while he was also secretary to his brother, Metropolitan Bishop Theodosius, in Skopje.

One of the Gologanov brothers was for a short period head of the parish in the village of Tešovo (Peltekov 2001: 94). The church there is the most important surviving monument decorated by the two brothers Marko and Theophil Minov, and will therefore be discussed in a separate chapter.

⁴ The activity of Metropolitan Bishop Theodosius in Skopje is insufficiently explored. I assume that there are far too many speculations concerning his name and his activities in the Skopje metropolis.

⁵ Bulgarian Academy of Sciences: Members and leadership. Sofia, 2005, 192.

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According to the records, Marko Minov had a son, Mina Markov, born in Karakyoj and also a zograph. He painted the murals in the apse of the temple of the St. George monastery in the vicinity of Hadžidimovo (Vassiliev 1965: 293-294). This brief information, however, to be found in Assen Vassiliev, is all there is about Marko Minov's offspring and his son Mina Markov.

Theophil Minov was the younger brother. He was born in Galičnik in 1860, and in 1865 the family moved to Karakyoj. He lived in Nevrokop (now Goce Delčev), Bansko, Razlog, Ladžene, and Kamenica. He was also member of the Internal Macedonian Edirne Revolutionary Organization (VMRO)⁶. There is unconfirmed information that he was exiled to the island of Crete. He died in Karakyoj in 1911. His wife Seraphina was born in 1850 in the village of Tarnis, Seres region, and died in 1935 in the village of Karabunar, where she moved with her son Georgi. Theophil Minov's son, Georgi Minov, was a teacher, later to become a priest. He participated actively in the activities of the Exarchate, especially in the period 1912–1919, when the Maronia metropolis existed in the newly liberated territories and Aegean Thrace and the Rhodope Mountains, and, as already mentioned, was headed by Metropolitan Bishop Theodosius, relative of Theofil and Georgi Minov. Father Georgi changed the family name from Minov into Minev, which is the name preserved to the present. Father Georgi Minov (Minev) was teacher in the village of Dorec, Momčilgrad area, in 1900–1901, and in Komotini in 1902 and 1903, where he was also chanter in the local church. Georgi Minev, too, was member of VMRO. On his way to Carigrad to be ordained as priest, he was apprehended in Edirne in relation to the Thessalonica assaults. He died in Karabunar, Pazardžik region, in 1942.

As already mentioned, the forefather of the family, Yakov, had also a daughter, Katherina. The only thing known about her is that she had five children: Leonti, Ivan, Katya, Cvyata, and Hristo. It is this family line that I would like to focus on in greater detail.

Assen Vassiliev's major work, *Bălgarski vāzroždenski maistori*, mentions several muralists named Miloš. Accidentally or not, they all come from Galičnik. One of them was Miloš Arnaudov, who worked in the second half of the 19th c. He moved from Galičnik to Karakyoj to paint icons also in the nearby villages (Vassiliev 1965: 230). According to Assen Vassiliev, the villages where he worked are now located across the border (Vassiliev 1965: 230). The author makes no mention of any monument or village where murals of his had been identified. Miloš trained his son Leontia⁷ (Levčo), who after the Balkan Wars moved to the town of Dupnica (Vassiliev 1965: 230).

⁶ I haven't found any document proving his membership in VMRO.

⁷ The name should be pronounced 'Leonti', although it is written in the objective case (Leontia). See (Vassiliev 1965: 230).

Another namesake artist was Miloš Iliev who painted the church in the village of Macakurovo, later Gjurgevo, which today is a district in the town of Sapareva Banya (Vassiliev 1965: 291).

In his book *Bălgarski sveci v izobrazitelnoto izkustvo* [Bulgarian Saints in Figurative Art] Assen Vassiliev mentions yet another Miloš: Miloš Yakovlevič. According to Vassiliev, he, together with Marko Minov, painted the church in the village of Topolnica, mentioning in the commemorative inscription that he came from the village of Karakyoï. (Vassiliev 1987: 35).

The analysis of the information provided by the eminent researcher of Bulgarian Revival art reveals certain inconsistencies which deserve special attention. In Assen Vassiliev's view, the artist who painted the church in Sapareva Banya was Miloš Iliev. It should be noted that Assen Vassiliev saw the murals before they were cleaned, as their restoration was completed only in the 1990s. The examination and analysis of the murals show that they can be added to the group of mural monuments in the village of Topolnica, painted, as the inscription indicates, by Miloš Yakovlevič and Marko Minov.

In Assen Vassiliev's note on the Topolnica church, the artist's name is written as "Yakovlevich" (Bulgarian *Яковлевиц*), although the inscription preserved clearly contains no *ch* ending (the Bulgarian letter *ч*), and in fact could never have had such ending. The commemorative inscription has been preserved to the present, and in very good condition, therefore the artist's name clearly reads as *Miloš Yakovlev* (Bulgarian *Милош Яковлевъ*). Bearing in mind that this text was published after Assen Vassiliev's death, it is most probably a matter of technical error while the book was prepared for print.

The comparative analysis of all records and known monuments allows for the conclusion that the artists behind the three different names – Miloš Arnaudov, Miloš Iliev and Miloš Yakovlevič – were actually one and the same person, Miloš Yakovlev. Zograph Miloš Yakovlev was born in Galičnik to move later to Karakyoï. He was married to Katherina and had a son named Leonti. Miloš Yakovlev died in 1892 while working on the murals in the church of the village of Rupite (former Širbanovo). This information about Miloš Yakovlev and his family makes one think that it is quite possible that Miloš Yakovlev was Yakov's son-in-law having taken the name of the prominent zograph family to which his wife belonged, the more that the artists were kin to the well-known Gologanovs.

* * *

Following the above detailed discussion on the genealogy of, and kinship ties among the zographs, next I will attempt to classify their works using several criteria of importance for a more detailed examination of the mural compositions, the changes in the artists' views and the role of the ktitors (church donors).

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The first classification criterion is authorship. Some churches bear precisely dated commemorative inscriptions. In others, the inscriptions are damaged and illegible, or most probably, never existed. With such monuments I will resort to an analysis of style in order to determine the author.

The second classification criterion are the architectural features of the temple. Some of the murals are to be found in temples marked by more complex architectural design, which also calls for a more sophisticated iconographic program. Others are hosted in smaller buildings, which results in a simplified iconographic program.

The third criterion is the financial standing of the commissioning parties, that is, the settlements where the artists worked. As mentioned above, some murals were painted in the Principality of Bulgaria, while others in the years following the Treaty of Berlin and the Kresna-Razlog uprising in the Ottoman Empire.

The family tree revealed that the family from produced four generations of zographs. So far there has been no information concerning any murals or icons by Yakov and Mino, the first-generation zographs. No other evidence, apart from what the family tree provides, has been found of Yakov, the forefather. His son Mino was portrayed by his sons Marko and Theophil in one of the window recesses in the St. Demetrios the Myrrh-streamer church of the village of Tešovo, Goce Delčev area. This church was painted entirely by the two brothers, its initial decoration most probably being the work of Marko Minov alone. Apart from Tešovo, their signatures can also be found in the Holy Virgin Giver of Life church of the village of Kapatovo, Melnik area (1888), as well as in the church of the village of Bagrenci, Kyustendil region, bearing the name of the Slavonic enlighteners Sts. Cyril and Methodius (1889). To these signed works I'd add two more where the inscriptions are illegible or nonexistent. The issues of the attribution of the works and their style are discussed in detail in a separate chapter.

The first inscription-bearing monument is the St. Nicholas church of the village of Červen Breg, Dupnica region (1883). The inscription there is severely damaged and beyond identification. The analysis of the style is based on several partially revealed images. Most of the murals have been plastered, and if professional restoration is undertaken, the inscription could be uncovered and identified. The other argument which justifies the attribution of this work to the zographs are certain features of the iconographic program used in the church.

The second temple in which no traces exist of any donor or commemorative inscription is located in the village of Dolen, Nevrokop area, and is named after St. Nicholas (1887). The *Encyclopedia of the Pirin Region* attributes the murals there to Mino, Marko and Theophil Minov. Being quite unable to surmise the arguments on which the author/s of the entry have based their article, I can definitely claim

that none of their references mentions any such thing. Of course, style and iconographic features may undergo certain development, but without a single work signed by either Mino or Theophil, I could not state with full certainty who is the author of the murals. I do assume that Theophil's contribution in this case is more significant because a twenty-two-year-old artist, especially when he has the relevant professional experience, would be capable of accomplishing such a task.

Marko Minov worked also in a team with his uncle Miloš Yakovlev. The commemorative inscription on the temple St. Nicholas in the village of Topolnica, Dupnica region (1883) mentions both artists as the authors of the murals. I also suspect that the two of them worked together in the St. George church in the village of Zlatolist (former Dolna Sušica), Melnik area. Neither donor inscription, nor traces of one are to be found in the church, the murals being covered by a thick layer of soot, with only a small area being cleaned some twenty years ago. Comparing the Zlatolist murals with those in the other temples, I can assume that they are the work of zograph Marko Minov. The author of the entry on the Zlatolist church and the author of the entry on murals in the *Encyclopedia of the Pirin Region* (the names of the authors were not mentioned, therefore, it is possible that the author is the same) claim that the murals were painted by Theophil Minov. In 1876, however, Theophil Minov was only 11, and it would be unlikely for the church donors to entrust him with such a serious task. The possibility should not be excluded that part of the murals on the western wall, which are inferior in quality compared to those in the naos, could be the work of young Theophil or another unknown artist. It is possible that Theophil assisted his brother Marko, twenty years his senior, but I refuse to accept that there is a chance of such a big work being commissioned to him alone. Comparing the murals in Zlatolist with those in other churches signed by Miloš Yakovlev, I presume that he, too, must have contributed to the decoration of part of the temple's emporium⁸, but let me underline once again that most of the murals are covered with soot which renders their attributing quite difficult.

The group of monuments under discussion contains also three churches decorated entirely by Miloš Yakovlev, Marko and Theofil Minov's uncle. The earliest monument decorated by master Miloš is to be found in the highland village of Belyovo, Melnik area. With few exceptions, the mural paintings in the St. Athanasius church (1872) have been preserved in a very good condition.

The other temple where Miloš Yakovlev worked unaided is St. George in the town of Sapareva Banya (1883). He came here most probably after completing the murals in Topolnica in the same year, and he and Marko separated, the latter heading for Cherven Breg.

⁸ Emporium: In ecclesiastical architecture, an inside balcony overlooking the naos, meant in the past for women during service. Today, it is the place of the church choir, or a reserved area for believers during major services.

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In 1892, Miloš Yakovlev worked on the murals in the Dormition of the Holy Virgin church in the village of Rupite (former Širbanovo), Petrich area. The inscription in the church tells that Miloš Yakovlev most probably died while working on the murals, as the church was left only partly decorated⁹.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that all three churches in the Dupnica region, that is, in the liberated Principality, were decorated in the same year, 1883. Immediately after having completed his work in Bulgaria, Marko Minov, together with his brother Theophil, started working on the murals in the St. Demetrios church in Tešovo. Miloš Yakovlev's traces were lost until 1892.

In deciding on the iconographic program to be used in a Christian temple, a role was played by the artists' personal preferences, dictated by a strong national feeling, but also by western influences, as well as the complex social conditions. The size of the building and its architectural features were also taken into account. The iconographic approach to a church has to do both with the liturgical ritual and the architectural features of the temple. It is in view of this indispensable relation that the second criterion I have chosen to classify the monuments will be the architectural features of the church buildings.

In the eyes of a Christian, a church building reflects the idea of the structure of the Universe. "The aim of ecclesiastical architecture is to erect sacred premises where liturgical acts, *posledovania* (sequences), are to be performed, as per the main ecclesiastical law, the canon" (Koeva 2002a: 39). The decorative pattern of a church is closely related to the sequences performed there; it visualizes the liturgical themes, as Bisserka Petkova puts it. "The mural decoration of an orthodox temple is perceived as a union of idea and composition" (Penkova 1991: 32–42). The iconographic system which took shape from the 9th to the 11th century distinguishes three cycles: dogmatic, liturgical and historical. The position of each cycle is determined in accordance with its symbolic meaning. The higher parts of the temple symbolize the Heavens; therefore, dogmatic scenes are depicted there. In the altar, the holy liturgy is served; therefore, this is the place for liturgical scenes to be depicted. The lower parts symbolize the Earth, and there historical scenes, as well as standing saints are represented. Murals in the narthex are didactic in nature and meant for the broader public.

During the Revival, significant changes in the pattern used in the decoration of ecclesiastical buildings were introduced. Unfortunately, these changes have not been systematized and studied in depth yet. Certain traditions were preserved, but at the same time innovative features were added, distinguishing this pattern from

⁹ Presently fully decorated, however, part of the murals dating back to 1982. The sextons say that before that, all there was were "bare walls".

the ones existing in the previous centuries. Historical developments and social changes resulted in the emergence of new characters and scenes. Modifications in the type of ecclesiastical building resulted in a modified thematic repertoire in line with the new spatial features.

Due to the great variety of the churches, some of them are beyond comparison with other monuments, and will therefore be discussed separately.

The monument with the most interesting architectural features is the St. Demetrius church in the village of Tešovo. Its construction began in 1841, and was completed in 1871 when a dome and a belfry with a clock were added, and the gallery on the second floor was expanded. The structure of the building is complex and massive, with three naves, two galleries, a baptistery and an ossuary. The temple is entirely covered with murals, however, part of them destroyed by fire and human negligence. The architectural specifics of the Tešovo church has drawn the interest of architecture historians, as this is the only one of its kind to be included in the jubilee edition of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences *Pravoslavni hramove po băglarskite zemi (XV – sredata na XX v.)* [*Orthodox Temples in Bulgaria (15th to mid 20th c.)*] (Koeva 2002b: 273).

Another monument to be considered separately in architectural terms is the St. Nicholas church in the village of Topolnica. As the date inscribed on the building shows, it was built in 1856 (Vassiliev 1987: 35). This date is also the sole evidence of the construction of the church, as the record book has been lost. The local legend has it that at the time when the church was constructed, one of the villagers refused to take part in the construction work. His fellow villagers, however, made him carry stones, as the entire village population was supposed to contribute to the construction of the church.

The body of the building is seamless and monumental. For its construction, both rough and processed stone (quadras) were used, alternating with baked bricks. The church has a two-slope roof and is not plastered, except for the western wall which is covered with murals. The construction is massive, with extremely thick walls (1.16 m), which can carry the full weight of the equally massive vault. The walls end with a yoke-shaped cornice. To the east and west, the cornice is transformed into yoke-like arches, typical of the temples of the Revival period. The vault has an elliptical outline, forming a hardly visible flat plafond in the middle. The church has no narthex. This makes the interior and the murals as monumental as the outside of the building is. Over most of the windows U-shaped arches can be seen on the wall surface. The eastern wall of the church is decorated with a rosette and two isosceles brick crosses like the ones in the south wing of the Rila Monastery and the St. Petka church in the town of Trăn, both built by master Milenko (Vassiliev 1965: 679–682, 688). These, as well as other features, allow for

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the assumption that the builder of the church was most probably the same master Milenko, who, as he himself stated, was born in the village of Blatešnitsa, Radomir area (Vassiliev 1965: 688). The impressive dimensions of the church make the mural decorations seem quite monumental. The temple is fully decorated.

The Belyovo church is undated, but its architectural features suggest that it can be dated approximately around the first half of the 19th c. It has a very plain design, with a single nave and no colonnade, although the absence of columns makes the murals seem monumental despite the small size of the building. The colored cassette ceiling completes the interior. The murals in this church are best preserved, which also contributes to the overall impression.

The remaining six churches where the masters from Galičnik worked all belong to the same type of three-nave pseudobasilica with wooden cassette ceiling over the central nave and semivaults. They are located in the villages of Zlatolist (1857), Dolen (1834), Kapatovo (1887), Rupite (last quarter of the 19th century); without semivault in Červen Breg (1874); and big-sized, with a huge dome and three smaller internal cupola in Bagrenci (1885). The iconographic programs in these churches are considerably simplified and similar. In the semivaults, the evangelical cycles are depicted (Zlatolist, Dolen, Kapatovo and Rupite), while the walls are decorated with the images of saints related to the earthly life of the Church. A small dome, whose dimensions are completely out of proportion with those of the church itself, was built in Zlatolist. This is the only church dug deep into the ground, which is probably due to its proximity to the seat of the local bey (Turkish governor) in Melnik. In Dolen, Kapatovo, Rupite and Červen Breg, belfries were erected. The belfry of the church in the village of Dolen has a clock over the main (west) entrance to the temple. All of these churches are typical of the ecclesiastical architecture of the middle and second half of the 19th c. Their facades lack in stone ornaments or other decoration.

According to the third principle which I have chosen to categorize the monuments, church-building experienced an upsurge during the 19th century, and especially after the Crimean War. Some of the more well-off settlements could afford to build churches even before the war. Mural decorations were usually possible several decades after the church had been constructed.

The churches in Belyovo, Zlatolist, Tešovo (decorated in two consecutive years due to the big size of the building), Toplonica, Červen Breg and Dolen are fully covered with murals. These villages were much more prosperous; mining, mine processing and cattle-driving were developed there. The population of the villages of Sapareva Banya, Kapatovo, Bagrenci and Rupite (former Širbanovo) subsisted on traditional farming, which was low-productive and ensured negligible income.

Among those fully covered with murals, the Topolnica church stands out as the one that was decorated with a significant delay in time, being bigger and with a more complex architectural design. Why the church of the relatively well-off village was decorated twenty-seven years after its construction was completed? This is most probably due to the fact that Topolnica was the only large-scale farming village, where, although a school had been founded as early as 1856, the parish was quite weak until the Liberation.

Two of the buildings were decorated immediately after their completion. These are the churches in the villages of Kapatovo (1887/1888) and Bagrenci (1885/1889). In these two temples, icons painted by the two zographs are also preserved, and so is the iconostasis decoration in Bagrenci. The churches are not fully decorated, and the murals there belong to the zographs' later works. My assumption is that Marko and Theophil Minov were invited to work on the iconostasis, without which, as the Orthodox tradition rules, the temple can neither be consecrated, nor can start functioning. Therefore, they painted additional murals to partially decorate the churches in Kapatovo and Bagrenci.

In conclusion I would like to underline the important role played by the zographs from this artistic family in the Bulgarian society of the late 19th c. The monuments preserved and known so far have revealed that their creative activities can be traced within a time span of twenty years, between 1871 and 1892. This is one of the most important periods in Bulgaria's modern history. It begins with the election of the first Bulgarian Exarch on the 16th of February 1872; an event commemorated by the inscription over the entrance of the St. Athanasius church in the village of Belyovo. At the time when the zographs were working actively, Bulgaria finally obtained its freedom following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878. All of this had certainly left a mark on the choice of scenes and saints to be depicted in churches right after the Liberation. Nor should the fact be overlooked that it was precisely during that period that a relative of Marko, Theophil and Miloš – the Metropolitan Bishop Theodisius (Vassil Gologanov) – was acting as substitute for the newly elected Exarch Yossif in Carigrad, only to be granted later one of the most important sees in the Bulgarian Exarchate: the Skopje metropolis. The fact should also be noted that in the years of work of the zographs from Karakyoï, the lands where they worked were also the most disputed ones in the struggle between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate, as well as among Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and the Uniate movement, which had emerged earlier on. In these lands, vigorous activities were also undertaken by the propaganda services of Greece and Serbia. It should also be noted that a relative of the artists, Ivan Gologanov, was one of the main collectors of the texts to be included in *Veda Slovena*. This collection, which is one of the very few works to have provoked a particularly prolonged and heated debate with their very publication, and which, in

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Prof. Ivan Šišmanov's words, was "the first Bulgarian book of worldwide significance", was certainly known to the artists.

Although the Bulgarian Revival saw a considerable upsurge in the construction and decoration of public and ecclesiastical buildings, the opportunities for zographs were very limited. The artists' kinship ties played an important role in the selection of zographs by the local parishes.

The information and evidence presented of the work of the artists from the long-forgotten Minov family, which has also been one of my tasks here, will fill in some of the existing gaps in the history of ecclesiastical art in this interesting and barely explored region of Bulgaria.

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About the author . . .

Vladimir Dimitrov graduated from the Art History program at New Bulgarian University (2005). Assistant prof. at the Department of History of Culture in the same university (since 2006). He teaches General History of Art, Byzantine Art, Art and Culture of the Italian Renaissance, Art and Culture of the Bulgarian Revival, and Iconography. His publications are in the field of the art of the Bulgarian National Revival and preservation of cultural heritage. He has specialized at the University of Florence, Italy. He has

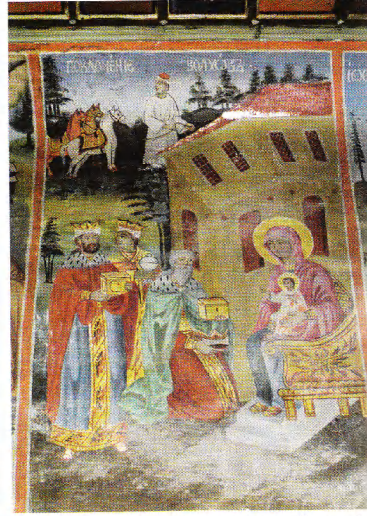
VI. Dimitrov

taken part in the following projects: "Mount Athos in Bulgarian culture and letters", "Annotated bibliography of art history in Bulgaria", "Miraculous icons and pilgrimage: medieval and modern practices", and he is member of the Bulgarian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

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1. St. Demetrios Church in the village of Tešovo, Goce Delčev area: Mino, Marko and Theophil Minov.



2. St. Athanasius Church in the village of Belyovo, Melnik area: Adoration of the Magi



3. St. George Church in the village of Zlatolist, Melnik area: The Dream in the Gethsemane Garden and Judas' Treachery.



4. St. Nicholas Church in the village of Topolnica, Dupnica region: St. Vassa of Sofia (Thessalonica), St. George of Sofia, St. Alexander Nevsky and Tsar Ivan Shishman.



5. St. George Church in the town of Sapareva Banya: Unmercenary Physicians (SS Cosmas, Damian and Pantaleon)



6. St. Nicholas Church in the village of Doren, Goce Delčev area: Elevation of the Holy Cross.



7. SS. Cyril and Methodius Church in the village of Bagrenci, Kyustendil region: An angel and inscription from the fresco Holy Virgin Mistress of Angels.

8. St. Nicholas Church in the village of Červen Breg, Dupnica region: Doomsday



9. Holy Virgin Church in the village of Rupite, Petrič area: Holy Virgin Odigitria



10. Holy Virgin Giver of Life Church in the village of Kapatovo, Petrič area: Parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus