

МОТИВИ  
МОДЕЛИ  
ПОДГОТВИТЕЛНИ  
РИСУНКИ

PATTERNS  
MODELS  
DRAWINGS

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (detail).  
Model notebook of Radu, 18<sup>th</sup> c.,  
Library of Romanian Academy of Sciences  
(mss. no. inv. 4602 et 5307), f. 11r

Притча за блудния син (детайл).  
Тефтер с образци на Раду Зограф, XVIII в.,  
Библиотека на Румънската академия на  
науките (mss. no. inv. 4602 et 5307), f. 11r

*Изкуствоведски времена 2019*

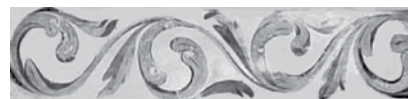
*Art Readings 2019*



# Contents

<b>Model – Image Relation in Christian Art and Its Research. Some Remarks on Treatises on Painting, Model Books and Hermeneiai Zographikes</b> <i>Emmanuel Moutafou</i> .....	9
<b>The Copying of Images: Roman Art Cases from Bulgaria</b> <i>Marina Koleva</i> .....	21
<b>Няколко графити от западната фасада на църквата „Св. Димитър“ в Бобошево</b> <i>Иван Билярски</i> .....	37
<b>Мотивът „строеж на църква за 40 дни“</b> <i>Иванка Гергова</i> .....	57
<b>God’s Punishment for King David’s Census in the Religious Art of the Balkans: Texts, Images and Contexts</b> <i>Margarita Kuyumdzhieva</i> .....	75
<b>Trois cahiers de modèles des peintres roumains du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle</b> <i>Constantin I. Ciobanu</i> .....	91
<b>A Post-Byzantine Sketchbook in the British Museum Library (MS Add. 43868)</b> <i>Kalliopi-Phaidra Kalafati</i> .....	119
<b>Have Working Drawings Contributed to a Common Artistic “Dialect”? Remarks on Sketches and Icons of Local Painting Workshops in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Balkans</b> <i>Andromachi Katselaki – Maria Nanou</i> .....	135
<b>Reproducing Engravings on a Single Icon: The Case of the Theotokos Megaspelaiotissa</b> <i>Ioannis Vitaliotis</i> .....	153
<b>Icon Templates in Religious Art of Imperial Russia. Moscow Old Believers and the Icon-Painting of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century</b> <i>Anna Manukian</i> .....	175
<b>Нови факти за тревненските зографи</b> <i>Маруела Стойкова</i> .....	193
<b>The Evangelists and their Symbols in the Drawings in the Greek Manuscript in Harvard: Houghton Library, Typ 215</b> <i>Alexander Saminsky</i> .....	213
<b>Ἄρατε πύλας (Psalm 23[24], 7-10). The Iconography of Christ Opening Hades’ Doors</b> <i>Ilias Karalis</i> .....	237

<b>Narrative Sequence in the Miniatures of Tsar Ivan Alexander's Gospel Book (British Library Add. MS 39627)</b> <i>Elissaveta Moussakova</i> .....	261
<b>Prototypes, Variations &amp; Artistic Innovation: The Iconography of St John Vladimir on the Interplay Between Frescoes, Icons, Metalwork and Copperplate Engravings</b> <i>Konstantinos Giakoumis</i> .....	277
<b>Необичайно изображение в икона от XVIII век. Подлагане пояса на Богородица</b> <i>Георги Герос</i> .....	297
<b>The Byzantine Representations of the Himation as a Possible Tool for Defining Specific Authorial Features of the Painters? A Connoisseurship Approach</b> <i>Emilija Vuković</i> .....	311
<b>Изображенията на пророк Илия и св. Йоан Предтеча в свода на притвора на Сеславския манастир</b> <i>Мария Колушева</i> .....	331
<b>Pentecostarion-based Scenes at the Church of Podgumer Monastery</b> <i>Maya Zaharieva</i> .....	357
<b>On an Iconographic Version of the Vision of St Peter of Alexandria from the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century</b> <i>Tsveta Kuneva</i> .....	375
<b>Темата „Христос Лоза“ в декоративната програма на един кивот за мощи</b> <i>Дарина Бойкина</i> .....	391
<b>Произведения на светогорски зографи в Рилския манастир от края на XVIII век</b> <i>Александър Кююмджиев</i> .....	413
<b>A Sailboat Sketch: Dating a Constructive Phase of the Old Cemetery Chapel of Pantokrator Monastery, Mount Athos</b> <i>Phaidon Hadjiantoniou</i> .....	439
<b>Visual "Intertextuality": the Use of German Prints in Transylvanian Painting in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries</b> <i>Ciprian Firea</i> .....	455
<b>Ingenium, Inventio, Vis, Facilitas: Western Influences in Post-Byzantine Art and the Question of Imitability</b> <i>Emily L. Spratt</i> .....	471
<b>The Cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia and His Representations at Sofia Churches in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century</b> <i>Vesselina Yontcheva</i> .....	483



## The Cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia and His Representations at Sofia Churches in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Abstract:** The article follows the development of the cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia from his martyrdom in 1555 to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The iconography of the saint in the monuments of the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> century is similar to that of four saints of the same name: he is represented as a martyr, wearing a chiton and a himation and holding a cross. Images of the saint in military garment appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he was depicted both as a martyr and a warrior riding a horse and began to be signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia. It was only after the Liberation that the saint obtained the iconography establishing itself throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a middle-aged man wearing military attire because of the publishing of a print featuring the saint's image and his vita.

**Key words:** neomartyr, Sofia, churches, iconography, print, vita

Over the centuries under the rule of the Ottomans, Sofia became a centre of feats accomplished by Christians, who were canonised as saints by the Church. In Bulgaria, no other city has as many neomartyrs as Sofia<sup>2</sup>. St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia is among the martyrs who died in 16<sup>th</sup> century Sofia like St George the New Martyr of Sofia and St George the Newest Martyr of Sofia. St Nicholas

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<sup>2</sup> *Gergova 2000: 307-308; Grigorova 2013: 380.*





Fig. 1. Icon 'St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia with scenes of his vita', in the lower right corner is written 'icon painter Vassil P. Radoikov from Samokov, 1882' (photo: Vesselina Yontcheva)

was born in 1510, in Ioannina. Nicholas learned the trade of shoemaking. With the death of his parents, he moved to Sofia, where he had a family. Soon after that he left the city to settle in Wallachia where he enlisted in Mircea Ciobanul's Guard. Later, he came back to Sofia, where in an attempt to convert him to Islam he was deceived by Muslims into circumcision. Despite this brutal act, Nicholas never apostatised from Christianity. For this reason, he was captured, tortured, trialled and brutally murdered on 17 May 1555. His body was burned so that his mortal remains could not be interred<sup>3</sup>.

After his death, the cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia spread quickly. After his body was burned, people rescued bits of his charred bones. One of his close Christian friends succeeded in getting hold of a particle of his skull<sup>4</sup>. The remains were taken to the Church of the Holy Archangels and laid into the coffin of the Holy King Milutin. In this church, a special council was convened by James, Metropolitan of Sofia, and Nicholas was canonised as a saint. The 17<sup>th</sup> May became his feast day. Following the council, particles of the relics of St Nicholas were shared among all Sofia churches<sup>5</sup>. In his autobiography, the bishop Parthenius Pavlović who lived during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an aide to the Metropolitan of Karlovac, testified that Nicholas the New Martyr, who was burned by the Turks because of his faith, was praised in Sofia<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Ivanova 1986: 317-361.

<sup>4</sup> Snegarov 1932: 29.

<sup>5</sup> Rousseva 2015: 93.

<sup>6</sup> Ivanov 1982: 194-196



**Fig. 2.** Preparatory sketch by V. Popradoikov, Sketchbook, Inv. № 1124, Museum of History in Samokov (photo Vesselina Yontcheva)



**Fig. 3.** St Nicholas is praying, icon 'St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia with scenes of his vita', 1882, detail (photo Vesselina Yontcheva)

In 1806, the saint's relics were placed in a specially made silver casket<sup>7</sup>. In the centre of its lid, St George the New Martyr of Sofia and St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia were represented along with their names inscribed to identify those portrayed. The casket was kept in the Church of the Holy Archangels, the centre of the cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia. Ralitsa Rousseva associates this church with an icon of St Nicholas of Sofia represented together with the Holy Archangel Michael and St George the New Martyr of Sofia<sup>8</sup>, which I will discuss in more detail later on. Following the demolition of the Church of the Holy Archangels in 1889–1891, the casket holding the saint's relics was moved to the Church of St Nedelja. Shortly afterwards, Metropolitan Parthenius presented the Church of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia with the reliquary on the occasion of its first patron saint's feast day, i.e. 17 May 1901. In the 1970s, this reliquary was stolen. St Sophia's churchwardens presented the

<sup>7</sup> *Boykina* 2016: 36.

<sup>8</sup> *Rousseva* 2015: 95.



**Fig. 4.** Icon of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia and St George the New Martyr of Sofia (NAIM № 924), Museum of Christian Art at the Crypt of St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral; end of 18<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century (photo Ralitsa Rousseva)

particle of the relics to the church of St Nicholas and it is still kept there. Presently, it is placed for veneration along with particles of St Charalampus' relics next to the ambo.

We got information about the life, deeds, suffering and the martyrdom as well as some of the miracles after the death of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia from three works dedicated to the saint: a vita, a liturgy with a synaxarion and an encomium<sup>9</sup>, known under the title *The Encomium on Sofia New Martyrs* dated from 16<sup>th</sup> c. and dedicated to the Holy New Martyr George of Sofia, the Holy Newest Martyr George of Sofia and St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia<sup>10</sup>.

Most informative of them is *A vita, a story and a tale of the holy and glorious Nicholas the New Christian Martyr, who suffered in the glorious city of Sardica, named Sredets, and of his martyrdom through betrayal*. This

<sup>9</sup> Snegarov 1932: 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ivanova 2015: 61-66.



**Fig. 5.** St Nicholas the New Martyr in the church 'St George' in Veliko Tarnovo, 1616 (photo Ivan Vanev)



**Fig. 6.** St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia in the church of St Nicholas Seslavski Monastery (1616). The saint is presented on the north wall which has been redecorated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (photo Ivan Vanev)

is the most voluminous *vita* in Bulgarian hagiography<sup>11</sup>, commissioned by the Sofia clergy<sup>12</sup> and composed by Matej Gramatik, a man of letters from Sofia, a contemporary of the saint who knew the martyr personally. The original manuscript of Matej Gramatik has not reached us. The *vita* has survived in a single copy of 1564<sup>13</sup>. A note by the copyist on the last page of St Nicholas' *vita* makes it clear that the copyist was Priest Lazar from Kratovo<sup>14</sup>. It has been established that in 1563 Matej Gramatik asked Priest Lazar from Kratovo to copy the liturgy, the *vita* and the encomium on St Nicholas the New Mar-

11 Grigorova 2013: 375.

12 Tsibranska-Kostova 2017: 35.

13 A copy of *Очерки из истории литературных сношений болгар и сербов в XIV–XVII веках* (Санкт Петербург: Типография Императорской Академии Наукъ, 1901) kept at the Church-Historical and Archival Institute, Sofia, and published by Polihronii Syrku, see Ivanova 2015: 63.

14 Snegarov 1932: 1-58.





Fig. 7. St Nicholas the New in the church of St Paraskeve, Breze village, 1882 (photo Ivan Vanev)

tyr of Sofia<sup>15</sup>. Presumably, the earliest text by Matej Gramatik was much shorter, just an account containing no biblical verses, proverbs or other typical of the hagiographical genre additions. That was the reason why the author sent it to the priest from Kratovo, as the latter was well versed both as compiler and editor. The copy of Priest Lazar was sent back to Matthew the Grammarian, who left it for safe keeping in the Church of the Holy Archangels where the relics of the martyr were also held. In 1781, this work along with the *Liturgy of St Nicholas the New Martyr* and the *Encomium on Sofia New Martyrs* as well as the *Liturgy of Apostle Andronicus*, the *Supplicatory Canon to the Most Holy Theotokos* and the *Synaxarion of Hieromartyr Solo-*

<sup>15</sup> Kiselkov 1965: 356.

chonus<sup>16</sup> were bound together by Priest Christo, which is proved by a note on the cover<sup>17</sup>. The new composite volume was titled *A Liturgy of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia* according to the heading of its first part and also because its most important parts told the story of this newest at the time saint of Sofia<sup>18</sup>. This book was kept at the Church of the Holy Archangels well until the Liberation, when it was translated to the nearby Church of St Nedelja.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the composite volume bound between wooden covers was found and published by Polihronii Syrku who was the first publisher and explorer of the book. After Syrku, the book copied by Priest Christo was critically commented by Vladimir Rozov<sup>19</sup> and Ivan Snegarov<sup>20</sup>. The three scholars, who have studied the work, believe that the Liturgy has been composed by an anonymous author. Syrku assumes that it has been written by Sofia hymnographers. His assumption is questioned by Vladimir Rozov who accepts the Liturgy has been composed by 'monks from Zion or Sinai', who attended the canonisation of the new martyr. Ivan Snegarov thinks that their participation in its composition is insignificant, though he also believes that it has been co-authored by several men of letters<sup>21</sup>. The authorship of the Liturgy was conclusively identified by Stefan Kozhuharov, who found that the most important part of the book, i.e. the Canon, was composed by a hymnographer from Sofia, Andrew, who included his name in an acrostic<sup>22</sup>.

There is evidence that a church was erected immediately after the martyrial death of St Nicholas on the spot near the road to Niš, outside the city<sup>23</sup>. In the 1930s though, nothing has survived of it except for the fountain of the holy spring<sup>24</sup>. The fact that the cult of the saint has been strongly established in the memory of the Christian inhabitants of Sofia is also evidenced by an account of his death different

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16 *Snegarov* 1932: 81.

17 *Kiselkov* 1965, 356.

18 *Kiselkov* 1965, 355.

19 *Rozov* 1930, 2005-2019.

20 *Snegarov* 1932, 1-58.

21 *Bujuklieva* 2008: 5 [author's summary of dissertation].

22 *Kozhuharov* 2004: 259-278.

23 *Ishirkov* 1912: 26.

24 *Penev* 1935: 52.



**Fig. 8.** Free standing icon from the church of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia. Signed by Vasil Popradoikov, dated March 1891 (photo Vesselina Yontcheva)

from that in the vita, which has also gained currency<sup>25</sup>. *Paisius of Chilandariou* also mentions St Nicholas among the martyrs who died heroically in Sofia<sup>26</sup>.

All evidence indicate that immediately after the saint's death, a cult of him began to develop. His feast day was set and a liturgy and a vita were composed<sup>27</sup>. Another important element of a developed cult is also present: the saint's representations in art<sup>28</sup>, which were painted not only at the churches in Sofia, but also outside the city. Between ca. 1560s and the 1620s, images of the saint, signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, occurred at the Catholicon of St John of Rila Monastery of Kurilo<sup>29</sup>; the Church of St Nicholas, the village of Strezovce in the region of Kumanovo (1606); the Church of St Theodore Tyron and St Theodore Stratelates<sup>30</sup> (1614), the village of Doburisko; the Church of St George in Veliko Turnovo (1616) (**Fig. 5**)<sup>31</sup>. At all these churches, the saint, signified as Nicholas the New Martyr, is represented as a beardless, wearing a chiton and a himation and holding a cross. According to Victoria Popovska-Korobar no occurrences at the medieval monuments are known of representations of the saint wearing armour<sup>32</sup>.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the saint signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr was depicted as a young warrior and at the Chapel of the Holy Trinity of the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God in Arbanassi<sup>33</sup>. A saint signified as Nichola the New is represented at the south wall of the loft of the church of St George in Arbanassi. He is depicted as a young martyr<sup>34</sup>. St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia is represented with a short black beard and in military garb together with St George

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25 *Temelski* 2000: 31.

26 *Hilendarski* 1972: 197.

27 *Stoyanov* 1981: 165.

28 *Gergova* 2015: 54-55.

29 The figure is in a medallion, in the fourth register (from top to bottom) on the south wall of the naos, see *Pandurski* 1975: 8, 10, ill. 6.

30 The saint is represented in the first register on the north wall (arcade) of the south nave and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Kuneva* 2012: 36.

31 The saint is represented in the fifth register on the west wall and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Gergova, Penkova* 2012: 59.

32 *Popovska-Korobar* 2006: 114.

33 *Gergova* 1999: 1, 12, 13; *Corpus* 2006: 95.

34 *Sapundzieva* 2015: 225.

the New Martyr of Sofia on the lid of the casket for relics from the Monastery of German<sup>35</sup>. Of the same period is also the icon of Theotokos Eleousa with the Holy Trinity and saints from the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God, Sofia<sup>36</sup>. In the second register (from bottom to top), to the left of the central area, St Nicholas and St George the New Martyrs of Sofia are depicted. The saint under consideration is represented as a middle-aged martyr with a short black beard.

The fact should be taken into account that there are several saints known under the name of St Nicholas the New Martyr: St Nicholas the New Martyr of Vounenis (his feast day falls on 9 May), who was martyred in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century; St Nicholas the Venerable New Martyr Voivode (24 December); St Nicholas the New Martyr of Ioannina (17 May), popularly known as 'of Sofia', who died in 1555; St Nicholas the New Martyr of Metsovo (16 May), who died in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and St Nicholas the New Martyr of Karpenissi (23 September), who was martyred in 1672<sup>37</sup>. At the monuments between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the iconography of all the five saints is almost similar, upholding the established representational tradition: the saint is depicted beardless, wearing a chiton and a himation and holding a cross. Impressively, in that period there are no images of a Saint Nicholas signified as 'of Sofia'. I suppose the hypothesis that the martyr of Sofia is depicted in some of these monuments, having in mind both the origin of the painters and the commissioners and the close geographic proximity of these monuments to Sofia, where at that time his cult was the most widespread<sup>38</sup>. In some instances, there are conflicting opinions about who of the saints has been represented. Such is the case with an image of the saint at the Church of St George in Veliko Turnovo, which in Bulgarian art history is generally accepted as a representation of the martyr of Sofia<sup>39</sup>. Taking into account the Greek origin of the icon-painters who made the murals, Maria Kolusheva claims that the very popular across Epirus and Thessaly St Nicholas the New Warrior Martyr or St Nicholas the New Martyr of Vounenis was represented<sup>40</sup>.

35 *Genova* 2001: 11, ill. 13.

36 *Paskaleva* 1981: 86, 87.

37 *Popovska-Korobar* 2006: 112, 113; *Sapundzhieva* 2015: 226.

38 *Sapundzhieva* 2015: 231.

39 *Gergova, Penkova* 2012: 59.

40 *Kolusheva* 2016: 109.

On an icon of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia of unknown provenance, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is now kept in the collection of the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Sofia<sup>41</sup>, the saint is represented as a martyr with a short black beard. This is the earliest known to me image, where St Nicholas the New Martyr is signified as ‘of Sofia’.

Since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cognomen ‘New’ has been increasingly added to ‘of Sofia’ in the representations of the saint. Images of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are extant at the catholicon of the Seslavtsi Monastery<sup>42</sup> (1616, repainted in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.) (**Fig. 6**); the Church of St Nicholas in the village of Lokorsko<sup>43</sup> (1834); the Church of St Parasceva in the town of Breznik<sup>44</sup> (1841); the Catholicon of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Rila Monastery<sup>45</sup> (1842-1844); the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, Monastery of Iskrets<sup>46</sup> (1843); the Church of St Demetrius in Godech<sup>47</sup> (1844, repainted in 1897); the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, Monastery of Trojan<sup>48</sup> (1847-1849); the Church of St Demetrius, Monastery of Podgumer<sup>49</sup> (1848); the Church of St Parasceva in the village of Breze<sup>50</sup> (1882) (**Fig. 7**). In the majority of these monuments the saint is signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of

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41 *Gergova, Gatev, Vanev* 2012: 27, 82, 546.

42 For unknown reasons, possibly because of a damage to the paint layer, some of the representations on the north wall were repainted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the saint under consideration among them signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, see *Corpus* 2018: 218.

43 The saint is represented above the west window on the south wall and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, see *Kuyumdzhiev* 2018a: 247.

44 The image is depicted in the second register on the south wall and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, see *Stoykova* 2018: 318.

45 The saint is represented together with St George the New Martyr of Sofia and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, see *Kuyumdzhiev* 2018: 463.

46 The saint is pictured full-length, young, beardless, holding a martyrial cross, in the third register on the east wall of the narthex and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Kuyumdzhieva* 2018a: 542.

47 The saint is depicted full-length, young, beardless, holding a martyrial cross, in the second register on the south wall and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr. It should be noted that his image, along with other images in this area of the church, has been repainted ca. 1897, see *Stoykova* 2018a: 557.

48 The saint is interpreted together with St George the New Martyr of Sofia in the north choir loft and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Popova* 2018: 660.

49 The saint is represented together with St George the New Martyr of Sofia above the east window on the south wall and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Zaharieva* 2018: 720, 721.

50 The saint is pictured over the door on the west wall of the narthex and signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr, see *Kuyumdzhieva* 2018: 736.

Sofia with the exception of the Monastery of Iskrets, the Church of St Demetrius in Godech and the Church of St Petka in Breze, where he is signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr. The saint is represented as a warrior riding a horse only at the churches in Breze and Breznik.

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Nikola Obrazopisov depicted St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia in the Church of St Parasceva, the village of Dren; in the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God, the village of Saparevo; in the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, the town of Samokov; in the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, Panagurishte<sup>51</sup>, as well as in the Catholicon of the Monastery of Lozen<sup>52</sup>. In 1871, the saint was depicted also at the Church of St Nicholas in the village of Belotintsi, region of Vidin<sup>53</sup>. The murals at the church were made by Hieromonk Macarius<sup>54</sup>.

Of special interest is the icon from the Museum of Christian Art at the Crypt of St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, dated to the late 18<sup>th</sup> or the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and featuring jointly Saint Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, the Holy Archangel Michael and St George the New Martyr (**Fig. 4**). Ralitsa Rousseva has proved that the icon has been painted for the Church of the Holy Archangels in Sofia<sup>55</sup>, which explains its unconventional composition: the patron saint of the church is central to the icon, surrounded by the saints whose relics are held there. On the icon from the Crypt Museum he is portrayed precisely as in his vita, a middle-aged warrior<sup>56</sup>. In the church that the icon was commissioned for a copy of the saint's vita is kept written by priest Lazar from Kratovo. It could be logically to assume that the commissioners of the icon, who were in direct contact with the Church of the Holy Archangels, the centre of the cult of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, were fully conversant with the saint's vita, telling that dur-

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51 *Gergova* 2006a: 243.

52 The saint is represented as a middle-aged martyr, wearing a white dalmatic and signified as 'of Sofia', see *Mardi-Babikova* 1969: 18.

53 The saint is depicted as a martyr, signified as St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, see *Mardi-Babikova* 1971: 4.

54 *Gergova* 1983: 13-15.

55 *Rousseva* 2015.

56 The earliest representation of the saint as a warrior is at the Chapel of the Holy Trinity, the Monastery of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God in Arbanassi, where he, however, is depicted as a young man, see *Gergova* 1999: 1, 12, 13; *Corpus* 2006: 95.



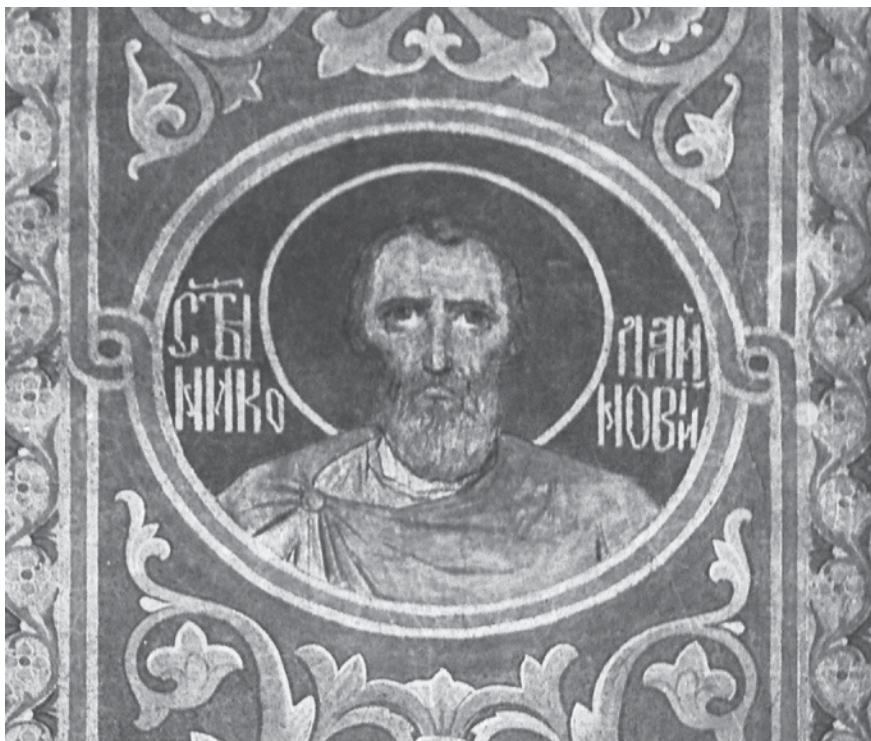
Fig. 9. Mosaic of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia and St George the New Martyr of Sofia in St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Hristo Berberov, 1911 (photo Vesselina Yontcheva)

ing his years in Wallachia, Nicholas joined Mircea Ciobanul's guard. Probably that was the reason why the saint began being depicted as the warrior he was in a certain period of his life, rather than as a martyr.

Ralitsa Rousseva suggests that if this icon had belonged to the Church of the Holy Archangels, it should have been widely known in the 19<sup>th</sup> century so that serving as an iconographic model<sup>57</sup>. I would question this hypothesis, for if the icon had served as an iconographic model, its unconventional composition would have been used as a prototype. Besides, as seen above in the saint's representations of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has to be taken into account that he is depicted as a warrior only in the churches of Breze and Breznik, and again only in these two churches as a beardless young man riding a horse. All this comes to prove that the iconography of the saint, represented according to his vita as a middle-aged man wearing armour was established much later, i.e. after the Liberation in 1878, when his vita and image gained more widespread currency.

<sup>57</sup> Rousseva 2015.





**Fig. 10.** St Nicholas the New, StAlexander Nevsky Cathedral, Tzeno Todorov, 1913  
(photo Vesselina Yontcheva)

It was after 1878 that St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia was made the patron saint of the officers and the patronal festival of the newly established Military School in Sofia was to be celebrated on the day of his martyrdom. In 1890, a decision was made to build a wooden chapel in the immediate vicinity of the holy spring. Six years later, the construction of the present church began.

The burial place of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia is one of the few known interments of a Bulgarian saint. The place where his body was dragged and burned on 17 May 1555, the so-called Turnitsa location owned by Hajji Pavel Bonev and his wife Ekaterina Hajipavlova was not a built-up area. Only a boulder indicated the martyr's gravesite<sup>58</sup>. In 1890, the landowners donated the plot to the newly consecrated wooden chapel. Back then the churchwardens built a baldachin and a fence. The feast day of the patron saint has been celebrated ever since May 1892. On the night of 16 May holy wa-

<sup>58</sup> *Temelski* 2000: 40.

ter sprinkling ceremony was performed on the site where the martyr was burned. On the next morning a service was held at the chapel. In 1969 a small chapel was constructed on the gravesite of the saint in a small yard in what is now 126 Tsar Simeon Street<sup>59</sup>.

In 1882, in the time of the earliest wooden chapel, erected on the site where the saint was tied to a willow tree and stoned to death<sup>60</sup>, the churchwardens decided a big vita icon to be assigned to a skilled painter<sup>61</sup>. Vasil Popradoykov from Samokov was commissioned to do the work (**Fig. 1**). Seven of his sketches of hagiographic scenes for the icon are now kept in his sketchbook at Samokov History Museum (inv. no. 1124). Anna Roshkovska has published four of these drawings attributing them to Stanislav Dospevski<sup>62</sup>. The sketchbook though, assembled and donated to the Museum by Vasil Popradoykov's son, Dimiter Radoykov in 1939, explicitly mentions that these are scenes from the life of the saint and the icon belongs to the Church of St Nicholas in Tri Kladentsi residential area in Sofia (**Fig. 2**)<sup>63</sup>.

The vita icon by Vasil Popradoikov is now kept in the altar of the church and is brought out each year on 16 May for an outdoor liturgical supplicatory procession. It bears an inscription in the lower right end: *'Painted by Vasil P. Radoykov from Gorni Samokov, 1882'*. In the central area of the icon St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia is depicted full-height and holding a martyrial cross in one hand and a spear in the other, surrounded by *scenes from his life, chronologically following the events from his vita*. The 'account' begins from the upper left end proceeding to right very much like a text. Above each scene its number and title are inscribed: 1. *The Trade of St Martyr Nicholas of Sofia*, 2. *St Martyr Nicholas Opiated through Deceit and Circumcised*, 3. *St Martyr Nicholas Praying before the Image of the Saviour* (**Fig. 3**), 4. *St Martyr Nicholas Before the Judges*, 5. *St Martyr Nicholas in His Cell Visited by Acquaintances*, 6. *St Martyr Nicholas Led to the Place of His Martyrdom*, 7. *St Martyr Nicholas Stoned to Death by His Torturers* and 8. *St Martyr Nicholas Thrown into the Fire*. The new church, which construction has

59 The chapel was designed by architect Stefan Kunev and painted in 1979 by Nikolai Rostovtsev and Alexander Sorokin.

60 *Sprostryanov* 1906/1907: 27.

61 *Temelski* 2000: 41.

62 *Roshkovska* 1994: 11-17.

63 Sketchbook of Vasil Popradoikov, inv. no. 1124, Samokov History Museum.

not yet begun when the icon was painted, is represented beneath the central image of St Nicholas.

In 1897 the churchwarden N. Krapchanski, in an attempt to raise funds for the construction of the new church, suggested the Popradoykov's icon to be printed on paper and sold to the public by retail. It was Ivan Dimitrov, rather than the painter of the icon, who took to making the print in full compliance with the painting. In 1898, 10,000 copies of the print were released. I found such a copy at the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God in Obelia residential area, Sofia, and at the Church of St Andrew the Protocletus in Opulchenska Street, Sofia. Consequently, lithographic copies of the icon came out<sup>64</sup>. Such a copy is found in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Konstantin Velichkov Boulevard, Sofia. Thus, Popradoykov's icon became a 'prototype' for the painters working in the period after the Liberation.

In 1879 St John of Rila Ministerial Fraternity in Sofia published a small book *Vitae of the Saint and Right-believing King Boris-Michael of Bulgaria; St Cyril and St Methodius; St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, the Holy King Constantine and His Mother Helena and St George the New Martyr of Sofia*, authored by a cellarer Todor Mitov<sup>65</sup>. The churchwardens of the new Church of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia, who found it impossible to reissue the saint's vita in an attempt to raise funds for its construction, were presented with 3,000 copies of this book<sup>66</sup>. By distributing the book and the print in an attempt to receive donations, both the story (though abridged) and the image of the saint were promoted. All later representations of the saint, which I will discuss in more detail later on, adhere to the iconography established after the Liberation.

The Church of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia has a total of four icons that are from the period under consideration: the patron saint's icon from the iconostasis; an icon without a fixed place, positioned next to the ambo, and one on the proskynetarion in the south area, next to entrance to the church. The vita icon by Vasil Popradoykov is kept in the altar. The icon without a fixed place next to the ambo

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64 Vasiliev 1987: 217.

65 Paskaleva 2002: 214.

66 Temelski 2000: 58.



**Fig. 11.** The killing of St Nicholas with stones, plinth belt of the iconostasis of the church St Trinity in Sofia, Petar Kushlev, 1945 (photo Vesselina Yontcheva)

was described by Hristo Temelski in his book about the Church of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia as made by an unknown painter<sup>67</sup>. The icon, however, is signed in the lower right end by Vasil Popradoykov and dated in the lower left end '1 March 1891' (Fig. 8). The icons from the iconostasis and the proskynetarion were made in 1923/24 by a team led by Gospodin Zheliazkov including Stefan Ivanov, Hristo Berberov, Ivan Dimitrov and Apostol Hristov<sup>68</sup>.

Two depictions of the saint are preserved at St Alexander Nevsky

<sup>67</sup> Temelski 2000: 87.

<sup>68</sup> Temelski 2000: 86, 88; Katsarski 1966: 58.

Cathedral: the one made by Tseno Todorov<sup>69</sup> is on the north curve of the arch, between the northwest pillar and the column to the west of it (**Fig. 10**) and the other one is a mosaic icon above the north door to the northwest corner of the building, made by Hristo Berberov, where the saint is depicted together with St George the New Martyr of Sofia (**Fig. 9**).

In 1945, Peter Kushlev made the iconostasis of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Slatina residential area of Sofia. Among the many scenes from the Bulgarian history he introduces there, the Stoning to Death of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia was represented on a panel in the south zone of the iconostasis (**Fig. 11**)<sup>70</sup>.

The images of the saint commissioned for Sofia churches after the Liberation suggest that at the time, the iconography of St Nicholas the New Martyr of Sofia has already been established in conformity with the historical credibility of his vita, with his age and the garments of the period. He was represented as a bearded middle-aged man, his hair tucked behind the ears, wearing military garb and a cloak over his armour, holding a cross in his right hand. This iconography is very different from the earlier representations that have adhered to the typology of the homonymous saints. Indeed, the earliest image of the saint, where he is represented according to his vita, is the icon at the Museum of Christian Art at the Crypt of St Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, dated to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In neither of the monuments that dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the Liberation the saint is depicted as a middle-aged warrior. Chronologically, the next similar representation is on the vita icon of 1882 by Vasil Popradoykov. The icon-painter from Samokov possibly modelled his icon on the image of St Nicholas the New Martyr on the icon from the Crypt. As for the painters working after the Liberation, who firmly adhered to this iconography, they undoubtedly were influenced by the image on Popradoykov's icon, rather than on that from the Crypt Museum.

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<sup>69</sup> Petrov 2011: 84.

<sup>70</sup> The saint is depicted in profile, tied to a tree, and on the left side a Turk is about to throw a stone at the martyr. On his right side, the fountain is painted to symbolise the holy water spring on the place of his martyrdom, see Angelov 1992: 78.

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## Култът към св. Никола Нови Софийски и неговите изображения в софийските храмове от края на XIX – първата половина на XX век

Веселина Йончева



Св. Никола Нови Софийски е сред мъчениците, които загиват геройски в София през XVI в. заедно със св. Георги Нови Софийски и св. Георги Най-нови Софийски. Роден през 1510 г. в Янина, Никола усвоява общарския занаят. След смъртта на родителите си се премества в София, където създава свое семейство. Скоро след това напуска града и се установява във Влашко, където постъпва в гвардията на Мирчо Чобан. След известно време се завръща в София, където, в опит да го приобщи към исляма, мюсюлманите с измама го обрязват. Въпреки този брутален акт Никола не се отрича от християнската вяра. По тази причина той е заловен, измъчван, съден и жестоко убит на 17 май 1555 г. Тялото му е изгорено, така че тленните му останки да не могат да бъдат погребани.

Култът към св. Никола Нови Софийски се развива бързо след смъртта му. Един от приближените му християни успява да се добере до частица от черепа му, а след като тялото му е изгорено хората събират останките от изгорените кости. Мощите са занесени в църквата „Св. Архангели“ и поставени в ковчега на св. Крал Милутин. В този храм, на специален църковен събор, свикан от Софийския митрополит Яков, Никола е провъзгласен за светец – календарната му почит е поставена на 17 май.

Сведения за живота, дейността, страданията и мъченическата смърт, както някои чудеса, извършени след смъртта на св. Никола Нови Софийски, получаваме от три произведения, посветени на светеца – житие, служба със синаксар и похвална беседа, която всъщност е посветена на тримата софийски мъченици от XVI в.: Георги Нови Софийски, Георги Новешки и Никола Софийски.

Веднага след смъртта на светеца започва да се развива и култът към него. Определена е дата за празник на светеца, написани са служба и житие. Изображения на светеца се появяват не само в храмовете в София, но и извън града. В тези ранни изображения светецът е представен като младеж в мъченически одежди, сигниран като Никола Нови. В средновековните паметници не са известни примери, в които светецът да е представен във военни доспехи. От XVIII в. датира най-ранното изображение на светеца, представен като воин, какъвто е бил за известен период от живота си според негово жизнеописание.

Трябва да се има предвид, че с името св. Никола Нови са известни няколко светци – св. Никола Нови от Вунени, св. преп. Никола Нови Воевода, св. Никола Нови от Янина, добил популярност с прозвището си Софийски, св. Никола Нови от Мецово и св. Никола Нови от Карпениси. В паметниците от XVI до XVII в. иконографията и на петимата до голяма степен се припокрива – следва установената традиция на изобразяване – светецът е представен голоброд, с мъченически одежди. До XIX в. нямаме образ на светеца Никола, който да е сигниран като „Софийски“. В повечето изображения от XIX в. светецът вече е отбелязан като Никола Нови Софийски. Представян е едновременно като воин, на кон и като мъченик.

Едва след Освобождението твърдо се налага иконографията на светеца като воин, облечен в доспехи, с праметнат плащ, на средна възраст, с брада и коса, прибрана зад ушите, държащ кръст в дясната си ръка. Тази иконография е съобразена с историческата вярност на житието му: светецът загива, когато е на 45 години, а за известен период служи в армията на Мирчо Чобан. Всички изображения на светеца в софийските храмове след 1878 г. следват този иконографски модел, установен от една икона, работена от самоковския зограф Васил Попрадойков.

През 1892 г. църковното настоятелство на новостроящия се храм „Св. Никола Нови Софийски“ поръчва изписването на голяма житийна икона на самоковеца. През 1898 г. е изработено нейно печатно копие, разпечатано в 10 000 тираж. Шампата е продавана от църковното настоятелство за събиране на пожертввателни помощи за новостроящия се храм. В резултат на разпространението ѝ се появяват и копия на иконата. Изображението на светеца от иконата на Попрадойков се утвърждава в представата на хората за светеца и се превръща в „прототип“ за художниците след Освобождението. В този смисъл може да се каже, че Васил Попрадойков е автор на иконографския тип на св. Никола Нови Софийски. Всички изображения на светеца, работени от Освобождението до средата на XX в. в храмовете в София, следват иконографския модел, разработен от Попрадойков.