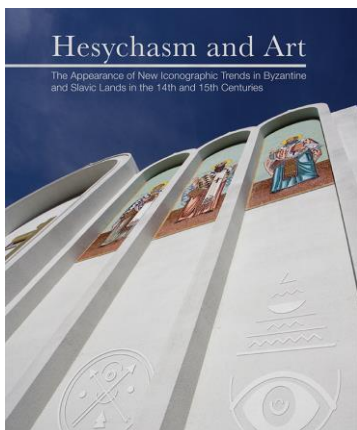


Cosmin Lazar



Review

Anita Strezova,
Hesychasm and Art.
The Appearance of New
Iconographic Trends in
Byzantine and Slavic
Lands in the 14th and 15th
Centuries

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Reviewed by

Rev. Cosmin Lazar

In the preface of this book, professor Sasha Grishin, assistant of Art History, School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics, highlights how dr. Anita Strezova, author of this book, claims hesychasm or hesychastic movement initiated



Rev. Cosmin Lazar is PhD Student at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the “December 1st 1918” University of Alba-Iulia, Romania

and supported by the great Athonite monk St. Gregory Palamas, who had a profound impact upon Byzantine iconography and style of art, including the one of the slavic diaspora during the 14th and 15th centuries.

This work represents an innovative study which canvas essentially Christological cycle, which predominate in wall paintings, manuscripts and icons from Palaeologan Dynasty (1259-1453), the longest dynasty of the Byzantine Empire. The five chapters: *1. Byzantine hesychasm in the 14th and 15th Centuries; 2. General iconographic changes in the 14th and 15th Centuries; 3. The Transfiguration miniature of Parisinus Grecus 1242; 4. The fresco of the Anastasis in the Cora Curch; 5. The icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev*, and a rich list of illustrations that includes paintings and icons from this period present on the slavic land evokes consistent and fruitful work of the author. At the end of the book one can find an index that provides the reader a more complete image of the Byzantine art on the Slavic territory in the 14th – 15th centuries, and a rich and varied bibliography.

The first chapter deals with the linguistic and theological perspective the hesychast¹ current by its promoters Gregory of Sinai, but especially to St. Gregory Palamas synthesizer of Hesychasm. This introductory chapter also seeks to influence this trend mystical in the Slavic area and the famous theological dispute between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam of Calabria. While Western monk Barlaam suggest using dialectical syllogism in terms of God's transcendent nature and use in his demonstration only apophatic theology, ignoring the cataphatic, Gregory Palamas underlies hesychastic othodox based experience showing that the authority of Holy Scripture and Patristic writings are as argued above human knowledge of

¹ *Hesychasm* is a mystical tradition of continuous prayer in the Orthodox Church. It is described in great detail in the *Philokalia*, a compilation of what various saints wrote about prayer and spiritual life.

Barlaam. Gregory also emphasized the role of the mind (νοῦς) that contradict spiritual understanding discursive thought (διάνοια). Eastern theology makes a clear distinction between the divine essence and divine energies in order to reconcile traditional theology mystical experience. Another important point which led to the dispute is related to the vision of Christian anthropology. While Barlaam defines man as a spiritual mind who acquires knowledge of divine realities through natural contemplation, Palamas says that man is a psychosomatic creature capable of a direct experiment of divinity. Moreover he emphasize the synergistic relationship between the human and divine.

The second chapter deals with the iconography changes of 14th-15th centuries, appeared under the influence of the hesychast and particularly highlighted in „ Transfiguration " icon that dr. Anita Strezova analyze it in the smallest details in order to emphasize the transcendence and divine immanence reflected on light from Tabor.

The next chapter is devoted to the analysis of iconographic miniature called *Parisinus Graecus* of 1242 which confirms the influence Hesychasm on Byzantine art through the bright cloud which appears in the icon of the Transfiguration of the uncreated light symbol present on Tabor.

In chapter four, the author analyzes theological and iconographic the scene „Resurrection", made in fresco, from *Chora* Church of Constantinople² which highlights the

² *The Chora Church* was originally built as part of a monastery complex outside the walls of Constantinople, to the south of the Golden Horn. Literally translated, the church's full name was the *Church of the Holy Saviour in the Country*: although „The Church of the Holy Redeemer in the Fields" would be a more natural rendering of the name in English. The last part of that name, *Chora*, referring to its location originally outside of the walls, became the shortened name of the church. The original church on this site was built in the early 5th century, and stood outside of the 4th century walls of Constantine the Great. However, when Theodosius II built his formidable land walls in 413–

principles of mystical spirituality from 14th century Byzantine. Apparently this scene is a revolutionary type, especially for it contrasts between humanistic and theocentric vision that was so evident during hesychastic controversy. Furthermore, the concept of deification of man is expressed profoundly and the iconographer uses in his technique his inner experience to emphasize the mystical light of God.

In chapter five, Anita Strezova analyze, interpret and evaluate historical icon „ Trinity" of the russian painter Andrei Rublev, but also other iconographers as Sergiu of Radonesh and Theophanes the Greek. It should be noted that Rublev's Trinity reveals that current symbolism specific to hesychast, in which combines own asceticism to harmony Orthodox monasticism with Byzantine iconography. Icon provides a hesychastic view of calm and tranquility, which reveals the possibility of human deification.

It is important to state that the present work succed to highlight the impact of hesychasm upon Byzantine religious art from the age of Palaeologan Dynasty. Born as a spiritual movement, hesychasm becomes part of the Byzantine theological tradition since the beginning of 9th century. The famous dispute between Barlaam and Gregory Palamas, was seen by many as a conflict researchers between the two philosophical currents aristotelianism and platonism, and theologians as Ostrigorsky and Meyendorff qualified it as a triumph of mysticism in late Byzantine society.

Unfortunately no hesychasts and no humanists have left writings or documents dedicated to byzantine art leading the connection between religious movement in Byzantium and the development of a new iconography in the Byzantine and Slavic religious art. The art of this period is characterized by a polarization between mystical ancestry and ancient ancestry hesychastic and humanist.

414, the church became incorporated within the city's defences, but retained the name *Chora*.

Hesychasm brought significant changes in eastern christian art of 14th -15th centuries. The complex emergence of the divine cloud of eight rays of light, inherent monogram, three-dimensional rainbows, jag patterns on moral paintings reflect the influence of the hesychast. Both the icon of Transfiguration and Anastasia represents visually the uncreated light of God. Mount Tabor becomes a mountain of spiritual ascent while the miniature of Parisinus Graecus Tansfiguration is a sublime attempt to capture the effects of Tabor light upon humanity. The same trend can be seen in hesychastic icon of Anastasia, where Adam and Eve are simultaneously lifting by Christ's hand in the cloud. Saviour gestures express a profound hesychastic vision embodied the idea of synergy of collaboration between man and God by awaking human consent.

Furthermore under the influence of hesychasm is found the Rublev's Trinity, where is evoked the unit, power, harmony and peace and divine presence of God in history. The using of blue color in painting angels symbolizes merely the idea of flowing of the uncreated energies inherent and common to Trinity person.

Here are just a few reasons, for which this book is worth reading and profound reading in view of understanding the influence that hesychasm had on byzantine art in 14th -15th centuries, influence manifested not only in Byzantine and Slavic area, but also in other areas including Orthodox Christian diaspora.