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*Is the so called Ἄνοτθενοἱ προφετται*, described *in Dionysius’s Hermeneia the source of the iconography of the Mother of God surrounded by prophets?*

In 1912 Władysław Podlacha recognized and characterised the subject Hodegetria surrounded by prophets as the illustration of the Hymn *Anothen hoi profettai* similar to the Athos paintings in the Moldavian (called then Bucovinian) frescoes. He underlined that it was the old tradition to paint prophets on the walls of narthex, as e.g. in Humor and Moldavitsa, and hymnographers in the pendentives of the cupola filled with the bust of Mother of God in the Blacherniotissa type[[1]](#footnote-2). This is why Podlacha called this part of the temple *The Shrine of the Mother of God* (pol. *PrzybytekBogurodzicy*), and he indicated *The Hymns of Prophets* (gr.*Ἄνοτθενοἱ προφετται*), described in *Hermeneia* traditionally linked with Dyonisios of Fourna as the literary source of the described composition.

It is worth to notice that the iconographic schemeknown from the Middle Byzantine Period in which the prophets surround the Mother of God, was not drawn in any particular way from the oldest or newer iconographic compendia, although the term used in*Hermeneia* (*The Prophets from above*) was adapted in the literature, e. g. in ManuelisChatzidaki’s monograph (1962) devoted to the Venetian icons or inSirarpie der Nersessian’s study of frescoes of the Parreclesion of Monastery of Our Saviour, that is KaryeDjami in Constantinople (1975). The most comprehensive study devoted to this subject was published by Doula Mouriki in 1971 in the context of the late Paleologian paintings in Peribleptos in Mistra. In her study she joined – to some degree – the conceptions of the origin of this subject seen in the Dionisious*Manual* and in the homiletic and hymnographic tradition of the Eastern Church. She indicated that the *TroparionAnothen hoi profettai* (*Ἄνοτθενοἱ προφετται*) was not only the name of the subject in*The Painters’ Manual* but it was an old liturgical Hymn as well, preserved already in the *Triodion*of the Sinai Monastery of the 11th c. (*Sinait, gr. 736*, fol. 71). Her conclusions were repeated by Serbian scholars GiordanaBabić and LubicaPopović in the 1980s in the case of Serbian murals in Studenica and in Peć (14th c.). In Serbian this subject was described as *The Prophets have Thee announced* (Serb. *Прорцисуɯенаговесɯили*,gr.*Ἄνοτθενοἱ προφετται*).

Popović after Mourikiadmitted that one of the oldest illustrations of prophets with Mariological symbols are known from the miniatures of *The Sermons* of Jacob Kokkinobaphos and *The Christian Topography* of Kosmas Indikopleustes. They also emphasised that the description in *Hermeneia* is much younger than any monuments to which it refers. Finally, one of the latest studies devoted to this subject were the articles of Olga Etingoff(2000). She noticed that the troparion*Anothen hoi Profettai*preserved in the Sinai *Triodion*is included in the *Canon of Prophets* read during the first Sunday of the Lent attributed to Patriarch Germanus I of Constantinople. Etingoff indicated that the sense of Mariological symbols was linked with the arguments of the iconodules and the heritage of the Byzantine poetry focused on the veneration of Virgin Mary and the icons.

In the meantimeother authors expressed alittle different opinions, including e.g. Eugeniusz Iwanoyko (1956) who believed that the source of the depiction was *TheAkathistos Hymn*, the most venerable hymn of the Eastern Church, while Josef Myslivec (1969) emphasized the meaning of the sermons of the Fathers of the Church in his study of the Slovak icons. ВiраСвєнцiцька (1983) and RomualdBiskupski (1985) shortly argued that the icons in this type should be understood as the apotheosis of the Mother of God.

In my opinion (Kruk 2000; 2004; 2007; 2009), apart from the righteous indication of the great meaning of the *Troparion*attributed to JakobKoukozeles of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos or John Kladas of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (Милановић 1991; Etingoff 2000),one cannot neglect the validity of the analyzed theme of the patristic texts as its literary source. To the sphere of the looking for the parallels between the *Old* and the *New Testaments* belongs the vision of the Prophets regarding the magnificent role of the Virgin Mary. This was the common link regarding the writings of SS.Athanasius of Alexandria (+373), Ephremthe Syrian (+373), Cyril of Alexandria (+c.444), Patriarch GermanusI of Constantinople(+740) and TheodoreStudites (+826). The vision was common in the same time to the homiletic tradition of both Churches of the East and the West. In the wall paintings this idea was expressed simultaneously in the painting by associatingspecific attributes with the individual prophets and in the verbal layer by adding to them the written scrolls fulfilled with their predictions, repeated in the sermons of the Fathers of the Church.

It is the anticonoclast activity of the apologets and the defenders of the worship due to venerated icons and the role of the hymnographswhich exerted great influence on the final shape of this iconography. The latter, soon after their canonization, were placed nearby the Mother of God together with the rows of prophets on the icons and frescoes. The one who can be distinguished among them was John of Damascus, who joined the apologetic passion with the Mariological homiletic, based on the heritage of the Fathers of the Church and *The Holy Script*.

The heroes depicted around the Mother of God form the Holy assembly, as the witnesses of *The Good Revelance*,adoring the role played by the Daughter of Joachim and Anna. They announcetogether the Act of Incarnation and the Glory of Mother of God and Jesus. One of the accurate description of the Glory of Mary which seemed to be just a kind of ekphrasis of the composition of the described type is the text of St. Tarrasios(+ 806) *Sermon on the Offering of the Holy Mary to the Temple* (*PG* 98, 460-465).

Finally,I agree also with L. Popović that this subject could be treated as the result of growing popularity of hymnography which added some poetry into the inscriptions in the Sinai icon. The role of hymnography was special during the Paleologian period and some Hymns, and above all *The AkathistosHymnos* became richly illustrated in large cycles. Perhaps it was the reason why M. Chatzidakis(1962) or earlier Ş. Ştefănescu (1929) would also like to see in this subject the kind of the illustration of the Hymn *All the creation rejoices in Thee* / *Tufais la joie* for the aspect of Triumph – the Triumph of Orthodoxy in the depictions: *Vierge en Gloire* / *Glory of Virgin* / *ПохвалаБогоматери* is clearly visible.

1. W. Podlacha, *Malowidła ścienne w cerkwiach Bukowiny*, Lwów 1912, s. 35; Cf. M. P. Kruk, *Zachodnioruskie ikony Matki Boskiej z Dzieciątkiem w XV i XVI wiekach*, Kraków 2000, p. 77-193; Idem, *Hymnograf Stefan czy hymnografTeofan. Problem identyfikacji pieśniopiewcy w ikonach zachodnioruskich* [*Hymnograph Stephen orTeophan. Problem of the Identification of the Byzantine Melodist in the Ruthenian Icons*], [in:] „Series Byzantina” II (= Studies on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art), ed. W. Deluga, M. Janocha, Warszawa 2004, p. 129 – 154, fig. 1 – 4; Idem, *Balkan Connections of Ruthenian Icons of the Former Republic of Poland Exemplified by Iconography and Inscriptions*, [in:] *The Orthodox Church in the Balkans and Poland. Connections and Common Tradition*, ed. A. Mironowicz, U. Pawluczuk, W. Walczak, Białystok 2007, p. 287 – 298; *Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti w ikonieHodegetrii w otoczeniuproroków w Czarnej k. UsciaGorlickiego* [*Concordia Veteris et Novi Testamenti in the Icon of Hodegetria surrounded by Prophets in Czarna by UscieGorlickie*], [in:] *Szczelinaświatła. Ruskie malarstwo ikonowe*, ed. Agnieszka Gronek, Kraków 2009 (= Biblioteka Tradycji nr LXXXVI), p. 215 – 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)