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Arrival of Holy Mother in Mount Arhos, detail,
print, 19th century, Art Galery – Sliven



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ART READINGS

Thematic Peer-reviewed Annual in Art Studies, Volumes I–II

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ИЗКУСТВОВЕДСКИ ЧЕТЕНИЯ
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2020.I. – Старо изкуство

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Contents

A Journey from the Altar to the Narthex: Metropolitan Christophor and the Monastery of Bachkovo <i>Emmanuel Moutafov, Tereza Bacheva</i>	9
Sea Journeys in Roman Sculpture from the Territory of Bulgaria <i>Marina Koleva</i>	27
Sweat, Fear, Joy, and Amazement: Personal Experience and Mental Journeys of Orthodox Pilgrims to the Holy Land (12th to 15th Century) <i>Anna Adashinskaya</i>	41
Descriptions of Carved Lily Flowers on the Walls of Damascus in Fifteenth-Century Pilgrims' Accounts <i>Pierre Moukarzel</i>	61
До Йерусалим и обратно: топография и иконография на поклонничеството в Източното Средиземноморие (XVIII–XIX век) <i>Иванка Гергова</i>	75
The Staging of the Pilgrimage. Barskiy at the Holy Sepulcher and 18th Century Erusalimii <i>Marko Katić</i>	93
<i>In fernem Land, unnahbar euren Schritten...</i> Theodor Anton Ippen's Reports on the Medieval Churches of the Albanian North. A Critical Approach <i>Ioannis Vitaliotis</i>	109
Една фотография от първата половина на XX век и църквата в село Яна <i>Майя Захариева</i>	133
The Selection of Saints in the Narthex of Saint George's Church at Voroneţ Monastery: A Case Study on the Transmission of Religious Models from the Balkans towards Moldavia during the 15th Century <i>Oana Iakubovschi</i>	145
Едно изгубено изображение на тропара „Горе на трона и долу в гроба“ от църквата „Св. Георги“ в Арбанаси <i>Мария Колушева</i>	179
Икони от светогорския монах Доситей от Печ в Самоков <i>Александър Куюмджиев</i>	203

Itinerant Monks, Taxidiotic Boxes and Pilgrimage in the 18th–19th Century in the Bulgarian Lands	
<i>Darina Boykina</i>	223
Pilgrimage and Visual Culture in 19th-Century Kosovo and Metohija	
<i>Ivana Ženarju Rajović</i>	239
Gospodin Zhelyazkov and His Paintings in Sofia Churches	
<i>Vesselina Yontcheva</i>	259
A Journey <i>Intramuros</i>. Processions and Other External Rites in Liturgical Manuscripts of Thessalonica	
<i>Ilias Karalis</i>	283
One Chanson – Three Intabulations. The Journey of Orlando di Lasso’s <i>Bon jour mon coeur</i> to the <i>Wurstisen lute book</i> in Basel	
<i>Yavor Genov</i>	303
Пътят на литургичния смисъл в неговата музикална иманентност	
<i>Кристина Янова</i>	317
Три писма от остров „Св. Анастасия“ от лятото на 1911 година	
<i>Иван Ванев</i>	329
Два новоразкрити гръцки надписа от параклиса „Св. Архангели“ в Бачковския манастир и тяхната контекстуализация	
<i>Емануел Мутафов</i>	345



Gospodin Zhelyazkov and His Paintings in Sofia Churches

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Abstract: There is no comprehensive information on the work of the artist Gospodin Zhelyazkov. The scientific literature lacks a thorough systematic review of his church paintings. The present article attempts to consider and systematize the church paintings of Gospodin Zhelyazkov. The scope is limited to his works in churches in the city of Sofia.

Key words: Bulgarian painters after the Liberation, icons, murals

Comprehensive data on the work of the artist Gospodin Zhelyazkov are lacking. Asen Vassiliev and Petar Karapetrov mention some of the churches he has worked at². The most complete list of temples is provided by Protodeacon Stefan Markov who refers to information from G. Zhelyazkov's daughter, Olga Gospodinova Bogdanova, and her husband, Prof. Georgi Bogdanov³. Markov, however, does not specify which works were painted by the artist Gospodin Zhelyazkov. Hristo Dimitrov gives information on the work at the painting atelier St. Luke⁴, established by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and Apostol

¹ Vesseline Yontcheva is a full-time doctoral student, Institute of Art Studies; works in the area of church art from the Liberation to 1941.

² CDA, Fond 1680, inv. 1, a.u. 1179, p. 4; CDA, Fond 520, Inventory 1, a.u. 103, p. 3-4.

³ Markov 1988: 5.

⁴ Hristov 1991: 75-79

Hristov, without particular references to works painted by the artist. There are publications considering the participation of G. Zhelyazkov in post-liberation cultural life⁵ and his icon painting in particular temples⁶. A systematic review of the church paintings of the artist is lacking in the scientific literature.

The present paper attempts to consider and systematize the church paintings of Gospodin Zhelyazkov and its scope is limited to his works in Sofia temples. There are data that in some of the churches he worked alone, while in others it can be assumed that he participated in a team of artists, members of the St. Luke Atelier established by him.

Gospodin Zhelyazkov Serbezov (**Fig. 1**) was born in the village of Demircha, contemporary Romania, on August 1, 1873. He became an orphan at the age of 11 and left his birthplace to pursue his education⁷. Zhelyazkov graduated elementary school in the village of Bazarut, contemporary Zhitnitsa, Dobrich region, junior high school in Dobrich and high school in Varna, where Anton Mitov was teaching at the time. Then, most likely, the initial artistic impulses of the young painter emerged⁸. On October 14, 1986, the newly established State Painting School admitted its first class of 48 people, including Gospodin Zhelyazkov⁹. He studied in the class of Prof. Ivan Markvichka. His classmates included Asen Belkovski, Stefan Ivanov, Tseno Todorov, Aleksandar Bozhinov and Haralampi Tachev, among others. In the first year of the three-year course of study the young painter won the highest monetary reward granted for excellent grades¹⁰. In 1896 Gospdin Zhelyazkov graduated in the first class of the Painting School¹¹. The same year the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) announced a competition for gifted young painters; the winners were offered grants for specialization in orthodox painting in Russia¹². Having succeeded in the competition, the painter embarked for Russia. The diploma from the Painting School in Sofia, however,

5 Georgieva 2007: 84-92.

6 Ninov 2007: 40-44.

7 Belkovski 1947:2.

8 Markov 1988: 4.

9 CDA, f. 1680k, inv. 1, a.u. 1179, p. 2.

10 Markov1988: 4.

11 Badzhov 1936: 7.

12 Markov 1988: 4.

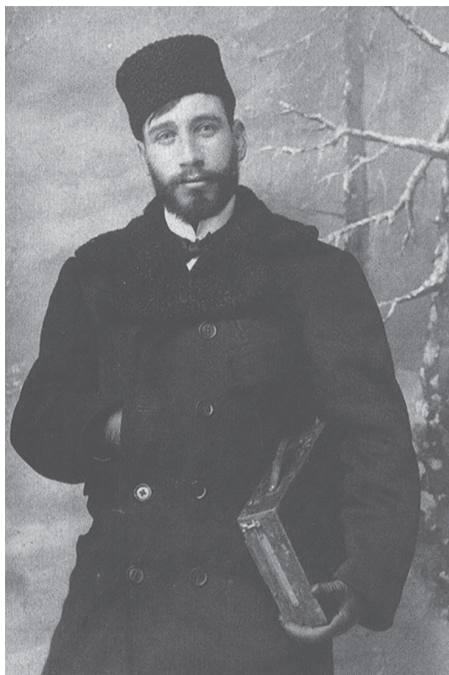


Fig. 1. Gospodin Zhelyazkov (photo http://www.artprice.bg/autor_details.php?act=data&elem_id=1400)

Fig. 2. St. John of Rila rejecting the gifts of Tsar Peter, mural, eastern wall of the southern gallery, St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral (1912) (photo according *Karavelov* 1966). Nowadays this scene is in very bad condition



proved to be insufficient for the young painter to be admitted as a student in Saint Petersburg without additional qualification. So, in the course of one year he completed the whole programme of the Kazan Academy, graduating in 1900¹³. The same year he was admitted with excellent marks as a full-time student at the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg¹⁴. Gospodin Zhelyazkov ended up in the class of Iliya Efremovich Repin. The professor was so impressed with his gift, that he admitted him to his personal master class, a privilege granted to very few students. One of Zhelyazkov's fellow students was Repin's son, Yuri¹⁵. During his stay in Russia Zhelyazkov met and communicated with many representatives of the Russian intellectual circles, including Sorin Brotski and Feodor Shalyapin. In the Art Academy in Saint Petersburg he was also taught by Viktor Vasnetsov, known as the Russian Raffaello¹⁶.

The young painter graduated in 1905 at the age of 32. In 1906 he participated in the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905. He was wounded which compelled him to return to his home country in the same year¹⁷.

In 1907, after his return to Bulgaria, Gospodin Zhelyazkov and Apostol Hristov, a descendent of the old Frachkovski family, opened the atelier St. Luke¹⁸ located on 26 Alabin Street. According to information provided by Polikseniya Hristova, the wife of Apostol Hristov, however, the atelier was established two years later, in 1909¹⁹. The members of the atelier were primarily young painters²⁰. Zhelyazkov and Hristov provided guidance to Georgi Aleksiev, Atanas Veleve, Kiril Kanchev, Dechko Mandov, Radomir Mandov, Iliya Pefev, Metodi Yordanov, Georgi Isachev and Petar Gerasimov²¹. After the establishment of the atelier Zhelyazkov continued to take commissions for both individual and team work, as in the case of the painting of the Church of the Sts. Heptarithmoi (Seven Saints, disciples of Sts. Cyril and Methodius). One

13 CDA, f. 1680k, inv. 1, a.u. 1179, p. 2.

14 CDA, f. 1680k, inv. 1, a.u. 1179, p. 2.

15 *Markov* 1988: 5.

16 *Markov* 1988: 5.

17 CDA, f. 1680k, inv. 1, a.u. 1179, p. 3.

18 CDA, f. 520k, inv. 1, a.u. 103, p. 46.

19 *Dimitrov* 1991: 77.

20 CDA, f. 520k, inv. 1, a.u. 103, p. 46

21 *Dimitrov* 1991: 77.

of the priority goals in the atelier's articles of association was to "work in the field of art to support the progress of the painters' profession and increase the intellectual capacity of its members; to improve the working conditions and the wages of its members"²². Apparently this related to a union of decorators and painters who, under the leadership of an entrepreneur, could undertake all the finishing works in a temple: from its painting to its artistic decoration.

In 1907, Gospodin Zhelyazkov, who was a member of the Contemporary Art Union²³ at the time, joined the Southern Slavic Society Lada²⁴. From 1908 to 1912 he held the position of secretary of the society and was directly responsible for its organizational and artistic activities²⁵. It was during this period that the third and fourth Southern Slavic exhibitions took place in Zagreb (1908) and Belgrade (1912), respectively²⁶.

In 1908 the Holy Synod of the BOC gave Gospodin Zhelyazkov a special letter of recommendation (No. 1561 of April 30, 1908), granting him permission to handle work on icon and mural painting in all eparchies of the BOC²⁷.

The earliest church commission of Gospodin Zhelyazkov confirmed by the present study was for the **St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral**. The icons and the murals in the temple, or "the painting endeavors" as listed in the building archive, were produced during the period 1906–1912²⁸.

Gospodin Zhelyazkov painted one icon of Jesus Christ on the eastern wall of the narthex. He worked on the images of St. Athanasius the Great, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom and St. Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, on the eastern columns. In medallions above them he painted the images of the Sts. Heptarithmoi (Seven Saints, disciples of Sts. Cyril and Methodius) and Jesus Christ (above the prelate's throne). On the eastern wall of the northern gallery he painted the scene of The Baptism of St. Tsar

²² *Ustav* 1926: 5.

²³ *Georgieva* 2007: 84.

²⁴ CDA, f. 520k, inv. 1, a.u. 103, p. 46.

²⁵ *Tabakov* 2009: 48.

²⁶ *Georgieva* 2012: 39, 47.

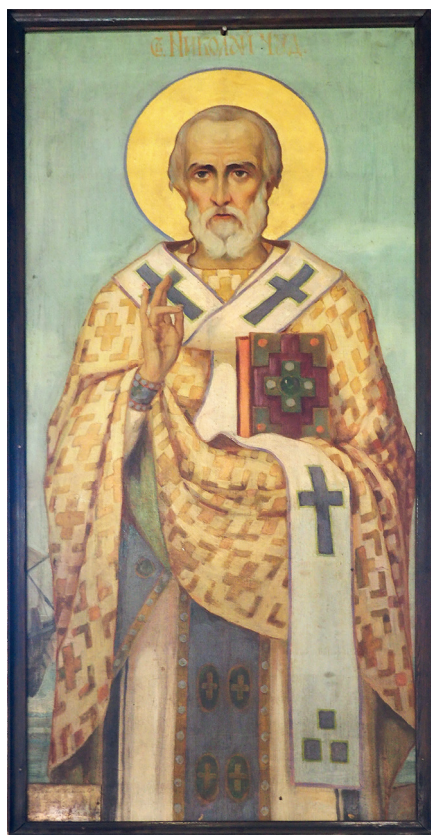
²⁷ *Polikarp* 2019: 37.

²⁸ *Radkova* 1999: 67.



Fig. 3. St. Nicholas, icon in the central part of the iconostasis of the Church of St. George in Sofia (1918) (photo V. Yontcheva)

Fig. 4. St. Nicholas, icon in the Basilica of St. Sophia (1934) (photo V. Yontcheva)



Boris-Mikhail I, and on the eastern wall of the southern gallery he painted the scene of St. John of Rila rejecting the gifts of Tsar Peter²⁹ (**Fig. 2**). After the Liberation of Bulgaria, secular historical scenes connected with both religion and significant political events were introduced in church painting³⁰. The two works mentioned above are among the earliest examples of this tendency, which became quite appreciable after the first decade of the 20th century.

In 1911 Gospodin Zhelyazkov worked on the Crucifix of the Holy Throne with two ripidia depicting Virgin Mary and John the Apostle for the church of **Sts. Heptarithmoi**³¹. It is massive and ornamented with carvings.

During the period 1911–1912 Zhelyazkov participated in a team painting the murals in the church of **St. Nicholas of Sofia the New**. The work was contracted by the entrepreneur Spiro Smilev who represented the painters Gospodin Zhelyazkov, Stefan Ivanov, Haralampi Tachev, Nikola Petrov and

²⁹ Radkova 1999: 110.

³⁰ Dinova-Ruseva 2014: 107.

³¹ Kalev 1979: 93.

Apostol Hrisov³². Only some of the painted images have been preserved until present days. Information on the distribution of the murals and their authors is provided by Priest P. Katsarski and some of the depictions are attributed to Dechko Mandov who also participated in the creative team³³. There are no data on particular fragments or images painted independently by Zhelyazkov.

According to Protodeacon Stefan Markov, Gospodin Zhelyazkov painted some of the icons of the iconostasis at **the Church of St. George** in Sofia. However, during the period 1878–1941, four temples with St. George as patron were erected on the contemporary territory of Sofia³⁴ and Markov did not specify in which of them the artist performed the work. The icons in the Greek church were signed by Christodoulos Mattheou, but were in fact painted by his apprentice Gavril Atanasov who left his signature between the ornaments of the waist-belt of Saint Constantine the Great: “G. A. Z.” meaning Gavril Atanasov Zograph. In 1904, while living in Sofia, Gavril Atanasov also painted the small Apostle icons in the temple³⁵. The icons of the royal row in the church of St. George, Gorublyane district, were painted by Nikola Valyov in 1862³⁶, while the small icons of the second tier of the iconostasis date from the period 1878–1941. Therefore, it is clear, that Markov had in mind the icons of the iconostasis of the Church of St. George on Patriarh Evtimiy Blvd. These icons were painted in 1918³⁷ by several artists. It is certain that the icons of Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus, and of Jesus Christ in the northern part of the iconostasis, and the icons of Tsar Boris and St. Nicholas in the central part of the iconostasis were painted by Zhelyazkov. The icons of Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ are very similar in style and composition to the icons of the same names in the new temple of Dragalevtsi Monastery. There is a strong resemblance between the image of St. Nicholas from the central iconostasis of the Church of St. George (**Fig. 3**) and the homonymous image in the Basilica of St. Sophia (**Fig. 4**).

32 *Temelski* 2000: 116

33 *Katsarski* 1966: 58.

34 The Greek church, the temple in Musagenitsa district (1888), the first church in Gorublyane district and the temple on 90 Patriarh Evtimiy Blvd (1918).

35 *Vassiliev* 1965: 295, 296.

36 *Vassiliev* 1965: 438.

37 The temple was finished in 1918 and consecrated on November 11, 1918.



Fig. 5. The Holy Trinity, icon
on the fronton of the iconostasis of the
Church of St. George in Sofia (1918)
(photo V. Yontcheva)



Fig. 6. The Holy Trinity, icon of the iconostasis of The Holy Spirit Church in Nadezhda district, Sofia (1921) (photo V. Yontcheva)

Fig. 7. The Holy Trinity, mural in the dome of the Church of the Seven Saints, Sofia (1926) (photo V. Yontcheva)

It can be argued that Gospodin Zhelyazkov also painted the Holy Trinity icon on the fronton of the iconostasis (**Fig. 5**) which finds an exact parallel in the icon of the same name in The Holy Spirit Church in Nadezhda district (**Fig. 6**) and the mural in the dome of the Church of Sts. Heptarithmoi (**Fig. 7**). Considering the characteristic style, it can be assumed that the Apostle icons in the second tier of the central iconostasis were also painted by the hand of Gospodin Zhelyazkov.



Fig. 8. The Last Supper, icon of the iconostasis of The Holy Spirit Church in Nadezhda district, Sofia (1921) (photo V. Yontcheva)

There are data that in 1921 Gospodin Zhelyazkov worked on the icons for **the chapel in Nadezhda district**, at whose location The Holy Spirit Church was later built. These icons are displayed on the iconostasis and one of the proskynetaria of the current temple³⁸. The style allows the conclusion that Zhelyazkov is the author of The Holy Trinity from the proskynetarion, the icons Archangel Michael, The Holy Trinity (Fig. 6), Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus, Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, St. Nicholas and St. Menas, and Archdeacon Stephan, the depictions on the Royal Doors, and the images of the twelve apostles, St. George and St. Demetrius in the Apostles tier. The Last Supper (Fig. 8) icon is an absolute analogue of the icon of the same name of the iconostasis in St. Catherine Chapel, Orlandovtsi district (Fig. 9).

As a member of St. Luke Atelier, Gospodin Zhelyazkov participated in the painting of some icons of the iconostasis of **Sts. Cyril and Methodius Temple**. In 1909 the Church Council commissioned the painting of the icons for the wood-carved iconostasis³⁹ and received

³⁸ Gerginova 2007: 17.

³⁹ Tabakov 2009: 44.

quotes from two potential contractors: Ivan Dimitrov and St. Luke Atelier. Based on the contractors' proposals, the Council divided the work between them⁴⁰.

The same year the painters from St. Luke Atelier finished the festive icons of the northern iconostasis: The Nativity of Christ (99/48.5 cm), The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ (131.5/62.5 cm), The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (99/48.5 cm)⁴¹, some icons on the royal row of the southern iconostasis: Virgin Mary (167/78 cm) and Jesus Christ (167/78 cm), as well as the festive icons St. Daniel the Prophet, Epiphany and The Raising of Lazarus⁴².

The icons of the royal row in the church of **St. Nicholas of Sofia the New** were painted during the period 1923–1926 by a team led by Gospodin Zhelyazkov with Stefan Ivanov, Anton Mitov Junior, Dechko Mandov and Apostol Hristov as associates and assistants⁴³.

Currently there are no signatures on any of the icons of the iconostasis. One description of the temple from 1966, however, makes it clear that some of the icons were signed⁴⁴. The icons of St. John the Baptist and St. Kliment Ohridski of the royal row of the iconostasis bore the signature of Gospodin Zhelyazkov⁴⁵.

In 1926 **the Church of Sts. Heptarithmoi** was partially painted. Dr. Nesho Salchev, one of the renowned parishioners of the church, made a donation dedicated to the painting of the dome of the temple. The work was performed under the supervision of Stefan Badzhov with the participation of Gospodin Zhelyazkov, Nikola Marinov, Dimitar Gyudzhenov and Haralampi Tachev. In the zenith of the dome Gospodin Zhelyazkov painted The Holy Trinity⁴⁶ (**Fig. 7**).

In 1927 Zhelyazkov painted several icons for **The Holy Trinity temple on Konstantin Velichkov Blvd**. He left his signature on the patron

⁴⁰ Tabakov 2009: 45, 46.

⁴¹ Tabakov 2009: 49.

⁴² Tabakov 2009: 49.

⁴³ Katsarski 1966: 58.

⁴⁴ Katsarski 1966: 58.

⁴⁵ Katsarski 1966: 58.

⁴⁶ Kalev 1979: 92.

icon of the iconostasis, The Holy Trinity. It can be assumed that he also painted the icons of St. John the Baptist, St. Stephen and St. Nicholas the Wonderworker of the iconostasis, as well as the icon of Jesus Christ Enthroned on the bishop's throne.

There are data that Gospodin Zhelyazkov painted icons for the temple of St. Paraschevi and the chapel of St. Catherine in Orlandovtsi district⁴⁷. The icons in the temple of St. Paraschevi, however, were painted in 1895 by Vasil Popradoykov who left his signature on the icon of Archangel Michael on the northern altar door. The icons in the St. Catherine chapel were indeed painted by Gospodin Zhelyazkov.

It is not known when **the chapel of St. Catherine in Orlandovtsi** was built. In 2011 it was rebuilt at the location of the old temple and consecrated⁴⁸. The original iconostasis is preserved together with one icon depicting the temple's patron, St. Catherine, from the waist up. The iconostasis is wood-carved, with two tiers of icons: six icons of the royal row and twelve small icons of saints⁴⁹. The style of the icons leaves no doubt that they were painted by Gospodin Zhelyazkov.

In 1927 the construction of the new church in **Dragalevtsi Monastery** began⁵⁰. Erected north of the old church Assumption of Mary, it was completed in 1932/33⁵¹. The iconostasis is wood-carved, created by the Sofia-based carver Filip Filipov⁵². Its icons of the royal row were painted by the artists Stefan Ivanov and Gospodin Zhelyazkov⁵³. The Ministry of Religious Affairs allocated 20 000 leva to the painting of the new church⁵⁴. Having in mind the painting style and the analogy with other works by Gospodin Zhelyazkov, all of these icons, with the exception of St. Archdeacon Stephen and The Last Supper of the

⁴⁷ Markov 1988: 5.

⁴⁸ Mitov 2017: 1.

⁴⁹ Icons of the royal row: St. Archdeacon Stefan, St. Catherine, Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus, Jesus Christ, St. John the Baptist, St. Archangel Michael; The tier of small icons consists of twelve images of saints from the waist up, displayed on unicolored background: St. George, St. Paraskevi, St. Mark the Evangelist, St. Demetrius, St. Matthew the Evangelist, St. Paul the Apostle, St. Peter the Apostle, St. John the Evangelist, St. Elijah the Prophet, St. James the Apostle, St. Tsar Boris, St. John of Rila. In the middle of the tier the icon of the Last Supper is displayed.

⁵⁰ Katsarski 1982: 59.

⁵¹ Bozhilov, Tuleshev, Prashkov 2006: 199.

⁵² Katsarski 1982: 61.

⁵³ Katsarski 1982: 60.

⁵⁴ Katsarski 1982: 60.



Fig. 9. The Last Supper, icon of the iconostasis in St. Catherine Chapel, Orlandovtsi district (photo V. Yontcheva)

fronton of the iconostasis, most likely belong to his brush (**Fig. 10**). All of them find almost exact parallels in the icons from the temple of the Holy Spirit in Nadezhda district.

In 1927, the full restoration of the **Basilica of St. Sophia** began under the supervision of architect Aleksandar Rashenov. Since in its original form the central nave had a low stone balustrade separating the altar space, architect Rashenov built a moderate-height wooden iconostasis imitating stone⁵⁵. The many preserved photographs show that this iconostasis had six icons of the royal row which have recently been replaced by contemporary icons.

⁵⁵ Bozhilov, Tuleskov, Prashkov 1996: 51.



Fig. 10. St. Nicholas, icon of the iconostasis of the new church in Dragalevtsi Monastery (1932–1933) (photo V. Yontcheva)

It is known that on January 1, 1933, Zhelyazkov received a commission for twenty icons for the price of 80 000 leva⁵⁶. Currently the temple holds more than twenty works of the artist and it is difficult to judge whether the commission included the six iconostasis images. It is possible that the author completed more icons due to some disagreements with respect to the fees. The icon paintings by Gospodin Zhelyazkov that are currently exhibited at different locations in the temple had different purposes. Six of them were painted for the iconostasis in 1934

⁵⁶ Boyadzhiev, Dinova-Ruseva 1996: 54.

as icons of the royal row. These are: The Virgin Enthroned with the Infant Christ, the patron icon of St. Sophia – Holy Wisdom – and St. Knyaz Boris I the Baptist⁵⁷ on the northern door; Jesus Christ, St. John the Baptist and St. Archdeacon Stephan on the deacon's door⁵⁸. Four of these iconostasis icons are now kept at the emporium of the temple⁵⁹.

Currently there are seventeen more icons in the church that were painted in 1934 and signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov. These are exhibited at different locations in the temple's interior⁶⁰. Their purpose was to substitute for the lack of murals and mosaic decorations in the temple⁶¹.

The **Holy Transfiguration Church** in Lozenets district, Sofia, keeps three icons from its original iconostasis that have survived the Anglo-American bombing of Sofia on January 10, 1944. Data show that the works were completed by St. Luke Atelier⁶². It is certain that the preserved icons were painted by Gospodin Zhelyazkov. These are the icons of Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus and of Jesus Christ (**Fig. 11**) that are now kept in the narthex of the temple, and the icon of St. John the Baptist displayed in the chapel of St. Barbara.

57 This icon is not displayed in the temple's interior. There are no data on its current location.

58 Boyadzhiev, Dinova-Ruseva 1996: 54. The icon is in the southern nave of the temple. It has a metal plate with a donor inscription. It is neither signed, nor dated.

59 These are: St. Sophia – Holy Wisdom, Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus, Jesus Christ Enthroned and St. John the Baptist.

60 These are the icons: *St. Pantaleon* in full length. The icon is on one of the northern columns in the central nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Matthew*. The icon is on one of the northern columns in the central nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Elijah*. The icon is in the northern part of the cross-nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Paraschevi*. The icon is in the northern part of the cross-nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki*. The icon is in the southern nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov, not dated. It has a metal plate with a donor inscription; *St. Spyridon*. The icon is in the southern nave of the temple. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Luke the Evangelist*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Anthony the Great*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov; *St. John of Rila the Wonderworker*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov; *St. George the Great Martyr and Triumphant*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov; *St. Kliment Ohridski*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov; *St. Mark the Evangelist*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Nicholas the Wonderworker*. The icon is in the southern nave. It has a metal plate with a donor inscription. It neither signed, nor dated. The style and colors strongly suggest that it was painted by Gospodin Zhelyazkov; *St. Theodore Tyron*; The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Charalambos*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov and dated 1934; *St. Basil the Great*. The icon is in the southern nave. It is signed by Gospodin Zhelyazkov.

61 Boyadzhiev, Dinova-Ruseva 1996: 1996: 54.

62 Dimitrov 1991: 79.

According to Protodeacon Stefan Markov, Gospodin Zhelyazkov also painted the icon of St. John of Rila in **the church of the Theological Seminary**⁶³. His information, however, is incorrect, as this icon, currently kept at the library of the seminary together with the other icons of the royal row of the iconostasis, was painted by Ivan Markvichka⁶⁴. Another misleading piece of information concerns the authorship of G. Zhelyazkov of the icons in the temple of St. Andrew the First-Called, Sofia⁶⁵. The icons of the central iconostasis were painted in 1926 by Apostol Hristov⁶⁶.

In terms of style, Gospodin Zhelyazkov's work is characterized by an academic approach. The painter paid attention to the smallest details of the saints' faces following the principles of volumetric and spatial modelling. With some exceptions, the clothing is stylized, rather planar and lacking detail. The backgrounds are neutral, dynamic in hues; the saints are almost never presented in particular environments. The Russian painters who worked at the St. Aleksandar Nevski Cathedral had left a noticeable mark in Zhelyazkov's work. Their influence shows through details such as the design of the gem-encrusted thrones on which Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ are seated depicted in the icons of Viktor Vasnetsov on the temple's central iconostasis. Zhelyazkov portrays the thrones in this manner throughout his church-painting work.

It should be noted that the atelier established by Gospodin Zhelyazkov in 1907, whose members worked with him on church commissions, became a reason for his colleagues to perceive him as an artisan and a tradesman⁶⁷. It is true that some church paintings completed by the atelier for different temples show identical composition schemes and portrayal of faces, postures and clothing of the saints. An example can be given with the icons of Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus in the church of St. George on Patriarh Evtimiy Blvd., the church of The Holy Spirit in Nadezhda district and the new church of St. Menas in Dragalevtzi Monastery. Another example are the icons of the Last Supper in the chapel of St. Catherine in Orlandovtsi district and the church of The Holy Spirit in Nadezhda district, among others. It should

⁶³ Markov 1988, 4.

⁶⁴ Didov 2003: 2.

⁶⁵ Markov 1988: 4.

⁶⁶ NINKN, f. C-1001-14-I x, 3.

⁶⁷ CDA, f. 520K, inv. 1, a.u. 103, p. 46.

be considered that Gospodin Zhelyazkov attracted to his atelier some of the leading artists in the field of church painting, including Stefan Ivanov, Dechko Mandov and Apostol Hristov. Although they may have taken the liberty to produce “serial” works, they still made the highest achievements in church painting in Bulgaria during the period 1910–1941.

Gospodin Zhelyazkov played a key role in the unification of specialists in the field of traditional religious arts and the protection of their professional interests, especially in front of the Holy Synod and the Church Councils as main guarantors. In 1925 (according to some sources in 1922 or 1918), the Society of Icon Painters and Carvers was established at the initiative of Prof. Stefan Ivanov and Gospodin Zhelayzkov. It included Prof. Stefan Ivanov (chair) as a representative of the Art Academy, Prof. Nikola Ganashev, Prof. Hristo Todorov and Archimandrite Maksim, chair of the Holy Synod⁶⁸. In 1938 the Society was chaired by Metodi Balachev who retained his position until 1946, when the organization was disbanded⁶⁹. It is not known whether the artists acquired the capacity to work on church commissions only by virtue of their education in art and whether the Society ordered



Fig. 11. Jesus Christ, icon in the Holy Transfiguration Temple in Lozenets district, Sofia (photo V. Yontcheva)

⁶⁸ Vasilchina, Miteva 2014: 2.

⁶⁹ Vasilchina, Miteva 2014: 2.

and approved the developed projects or this was a responsibility of the church councils. It is unclear whether the Society managed to mediate between the artists and the church institution, but its regulatory role was obvious.

Gospodin Zhelyazkov devoted more than 30 years of his life – from his return to Bulgaria in 1906 to his death in 1937 – solely to church painting. He made an enormous contribution to church painting, working in dozens of towns and villages all over Bulgaria. Even during the wars, “when he was a military painter, he worked on subjects connected to church painting and Bulgarian history...”⁷⁰ By establishing the Professional Society for Support of Apprentices in Decorative Painting St. Luke, he professionalized temple painting. This was one of the first smaller associations aimed at uniting the specialists in the field of traditional church art and protecting their main interests.

This was also a first attempt to foster interactions between painters creating the church interior – icon painters, mural painters, decorators and carvers. Later this idea developed into the establishment of the Society of Icon Painters and Carvers created in 1925 at the initiative of Stefan Ivanov and Gospodin Zhelyazkov⁷¹. Zhelyazkov was a prolific artist: only in the capital, independently or in a team, he worked in more than ten of the most representative temples. Although Gospodin Zhelyazkov is not very popular today, during the first half of the 20th century he was considered as one of the most prominent church painters of his time.

⁷⁰ Badzhov 1936: 7.

⁷¹ Vasilchina, Miteva 2014: 2.

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Господин Желязков и работата му в софийските храмове

Веселина Йончева



Липсват пълни данни за творчеството на художника Господин Желязков. Досега в научната литература не е правено цялостно систематично проучване на църковното му творчество. Настоящият текст разглежда и систематизира църковната живопис на Господин Желязков, като се ограничава до произведенията му в храмовете в София. През 1896 г. той е приет в първия випуск на Държавното рисуwalно училище, в класа на проф. Иван Мърквичка. През 1896 г., когато завършва училището, се явява на конкурс, обявен от Св. Синод на Българската православна църква, който той спечелва, и така получава възможност да специализира църковна живопис в Русия. През 1900 г. завършва Казанската академия и е приет като редовен студент в Петербургската императорска художествена академия. Учи в класа на Иля Ефремович Репин. През 1906 г. участва в революционните събития в Русия. Ранен е, което става причина през същата година да се завърне в родината. През 1907 г. Господин Желязков заедно с Апостол Христов основават ателие „Св. Лука“. През 1907 г. Господин Желязков става и член на Южнославянското дружество „Лада“. От 1908 до 1912 г. е негов секретар и е пряко свързан с организационния живот на дружеството и неговата художествена дейност. През 1908 г. Св. Синод на Българската православна църква дава специално препоръчително писмо на Господин Желязков, с което той получава възможността да поеме работата за иконопис и стенопис по храмовете във всички епархии на Българската православна църква. До края на живота си (1937) се посвещава изключително на църковната живопис. Създаденото от него е във впечатляващ брой паметници: храм-паметник „Св. Александър Невски“, „Св. Седмочисленици“, „Св. Никола Нови Софийски“, „Св. Георги“ на бул. „Патриарх Евтимий“, параклиса в кв. Надежда, на мястото на който е изграден сегашният храм „Св. Дух“, „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“, „Св. Троица“ на бул. „Константин Величков“, параклиса „Св. Екатерина“ в Орландовци, новата църква в Драгалевския манастир, базиликата „Св. София“, „Св. Преображение Господне“ в столичния квартал Лозенец. А с основаването на декора-

тивно-бояджийското калфенско спомагателно дружество „Св. Лука“, което цели да обедини специалистите в областта на традиционното църковно изкуство и да защитава основните им интереси, прераснало по-късно в Дружество на художниците иконописци и резбари, той професионализира църковното изкуство. Макар и не особено популярен днес, Господин Желязков е разпознаваем творец и открояваща се фигура сред художниците от първата половина на XX в.