

A Dragon Slayer Graffito Drawing in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (modern Istanbul)

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This paper deals with a rare example of a graffito drawing from the church of Hagia Sophia with a complete Christian scene of a warrior on horseback in western attire, who thrusts his long spear into the gaping jaws of a beast under the horse's hooves. The drawing represents St George and, taking into account the types of armor depicted, the creation of the graffito may be dated to the 1430s–1470s.

The Great Church or the church of the Holy Wisdom is a famous sixth-century domed church, which was built by emperor Justinian the Great. It contains an interesting collection of graffiti inscriptions and drawings, some crude and schematic, others remarkably detailed. Thematically, they may be divided into memoranda, inscribed mainly on the occasion of attendance at the church, various inscriptions of an invocative nature, the beginning of the alphabet, human,¹ magical and animal figures, ships, coats-of-arms², weapons, crosses, game board,³ monograms and mason's marks. The autographic, supplicatory inscriptions containing the formula 'Lord, help Your servant X' and those with the formula 'X wrote' occur frequently. The graffiti are written in Greek, Cyrillic, Armenian and Latin script letters. Eighty-five Cyrillic and one Glagolitic inscription which have been scratched in almost all parts of the galleries of Hagia Sophia have been recently published.⁴ A total of 90 graffiti drawings were recorded as a result of my fieldwork in Istanbul between 2005 and 2014. They include many different shapes – from sailing ships, animals, birds, weapons, coats-of-arms and abstract geometrical patterns, to portraits or full scale figures of saints, angels, clerics and laymen⁵. Among them, the most numerous are the ship graffiti (35).⁶ Many of the drawings are highly detailed and accurate, indicating that they have been sketched by skilled visitors.

1 CH. SAVOVA, Modata spored edin grafit na žena ot hrama „Sv. Sofia“ v Konstantinopol, *Spisanie za tekstil, obleklo, kozi i tehnologii* 5, 2018, 134–137. CH. SAVOVA–T. THOMOV, A woman's graffito drawing from Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, *ŽRVI* 56, 2019 (in press).

2 T. THOMOV, Gerbove-grafiti ot hrama 'Sv. Sofia' v Konstantinopol, in: *REGNUM BULGARIAE. Studia in honorem annorum LX Georgii N. Nikolov*, A. Nikolov (ed.), Sofia 2018, 679–693.

3 T. THOMOV, Igra na 'Dama' v hrama 'Sv. Sofia', Konstantinopol, in: *Bálgarsko srednovekovie: obbestvo, vlast, istoria. Sbornik v cest na prof. dr. Miliana Kájnaková*, G. Nikolov–A. Nikolov (eds.), Sofia 2013, 437–452.

4 T. THOMOV, *Népoznatijat hram 'Sv. Sofia'. Část I: Nadpisi-grafiti na kirilitsa i glagolitsa*, Sofia 2016.

5 I discovered 16 coat-of-arms and decided to share them with my Italian colleague Maurizio Carlo Alberto Gorra who is more competent in the field of medieval heraldry than I am. He published them on Academia.edu under the title of 'Observations and reflections on some coats of arms graffiti in Santa Sofia in Constantinople.' https://www.academia.edu/35771277/Observations_and_reflections_on_some_coats_of_arms_graffiti_in_Santa_Sofia_in_Constantinople (retrieved April 17, 2018).

6 Recently I have published four ship graffiti which are connected to Viking sailing vessels: Four Scandinavian ship graffiti from Hagia Sophia, *BMGs* 38/2, 2014, 168–184, as well as an ex-voto scene with three vessels and full scale figure of St. Nicholas: Maritime ex-voto graffito from the Church of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, *BSI* 73/1–2, 2015, 57–74.

This paper is the result of a fieldwork during my stay in Istanbul in 2009 and 2010. In the Church of Hagia Sophia I had the opportunity to observe a graffito, representing a complete Christian scene of a warrior on horseback, who thrusts his long spear into the gaping jaws of a beast under the horse's hooves. The figure of a warrior in full-face stands at the center of the composition, which is very well-balanced and shows climactic moment of a combat between a monster and a knight.

The drawing, 27×19.5 cm, is located in the north gallery of the church (see p. 302, Photo 1 and Fig. 1). It is engraved into the marble plate on the right side of the door to the northeast ramp at about 140 cm from the floor. First and foremost, the observer is confronted with the question: who is this warrior? It is my aim to give an answer to this question. We must note that the composition is focused on the fight of a knight and a beast. The possibility of proposing interpretations is hampered by the absence of an identifying inscription. The specific attributes of a saint are sometimes quite explicit, as is the case of icons, frescoes and manuscript illustrations, or if the name is mentioned in writing beside the scene. However, in other cases, as in our graffito, the scene is identified from the visual context. The anonymous artist felt the need to add something more, showing us the armor of the knight, his exact weapon and detailed tack elements of his horse. The most specific details belong to the horseman's armor (see p. 303, Photo 2). The rider is depicted wearing a plate Italian-style armor with some elements of the German-style.⁷ He wears a barbute-sallet, a form of sallet with "Y" shaped opening for the eyes and mouth giving a good protection without restricting the wearer's breathing.⁸ The barbute resembles classical Greek Corinthian helmet and may have been influenced by a renewed interest in ancient artefacts.⁹ The gorget is supposedly the rectangle at the upper end of the cuirass.

The German-style elements of the body armor seem to be related to the representation of the cuirass. It is long and slender, with two-piece placard breastplate with twofold fluting on both sides, a waist with a central ridge, a threefold and twofold fluting

7 K. DeVRIES–R. SMITH, *Medieval Weapons: An Illustrated History of Their Impact*, Santa Barbara 2007, 176–177. Italian full-plate armor is characterized by its rounded form while that made in Germany or in the German fashion had a more angular shape. See also E. OAKESHOTT, *A Knight and His Armour*, Philadelphia 1962, 33. C. BLAIR, *European Armour Circa 1066 to Circa 1700*, London 1958, 92–107.

8 The barbute made in Italy in the 15th century, normally classified as a type of helmet and often called "Venetian sallet" with the characteristic T-shaped opening at the front. The round eye openings and pointed nasal of this helmet are very unusual. Several helmets of this type are known, all from the armour find at Chalkis in Euboea (one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the others in the Historical Museum in Athens). For details, see St. W. PYHRR–J. GODOY, *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and His Contemporaries. The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1999, 90 with cited bibliography. Cf. also the helmet dated 1440 from War Gallery, Leeds Museum (Nº IV. 534) <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-506.html> (retrieved July 3, 2017). For the barbute-sallet (ca. 1450–ca. 1470) from The Wallace Collection, London [http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.inline.lightbox.t1.collection_lightbox.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=13&sp=Sartist&sp=SelectList&sp=0&sp=0&sp=999&sp=SdetailView&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=1&sp=T&sp=0&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=T&sp=0](http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.inline.lightbox.t1.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=13&sp=Sartist&sp=SelectList&sp=0&sp=0&sp=999&sp=SdetailView&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=1&sp=T&sp=0&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=T&sp=0) (retrieved July 3, 2017).

9 D. EDGE–J. PADDOCK, *Arms and Armor of the Medieval Knight. An Illustrated History of Weaponry in the Middle Ages*, New York 1988, 106. E. OAKESHOTT, *European Weapons and Armor. From Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution*, North Hollywood 1980, 110. E. OAKESHOTT, *The Archeology of Weapons: Arms and Armor from Prehistory to the Age of Chivalry*, New York 1996², 291. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 85 who states that the barbute-sallet does not seem to have survived the 1470s.

on the right, and respectively on the left side.¹⁰ A skirted fauld of five lames is shown below the breastplate to protect the waist and hips.¹¹ The fauld is made from series of looped metal rings – lames – that were riveted on a leather skirt, and joined to the breastplate and backplate. The skirt beneath the fauld is of mail or an independent piece of mail attached to the army doublet.¹² Mail armor was relegated to protecting smaller vital areas that could not be covered with plate armor, such as the groin and the underarms.¹³ Two rectangular plates called tassets protect the upper thighs, which are buckled to the bottom lame of the fauld.¹⁴ The tassets are elongated, fluted on the surface and engrailed at the edges.¹⁵ From mid to late 15th century the breastplate takes on various styles depending on the country of origin. The two centers of armor production were in Germany and Italy. Though made in northern Italy, the breastplate and tassets in the graffito reflect the influence of German armors and their popular use of fluting for both decoration and strengthening.¹⁶

The right shoulder of the horseman is protected by a heavy pauldron (the shoulder protection plate), while the left is covered by a smaller angular one. Pauldrons are usually asymmetrical, but our anonymous artist made a mistake.¹⁷ The most common type in the early 15th century was a large square-shaped plate on the left shoulder and a similar smaller one on the right one to facilitate the carrying and using of a lance. The “engrailed” edges of the left pauldron can also be explained as the influence of the German style.¹⁸ I am not quite sure whether the arms are protected with vambraces.¹⁹ On the left arm one can possibly find a hint of a vambrace and on the right one a cuff of a gauntlet. The thighs are protected by plates (cuisses) and the calves by greaves.²⁰ It

10 OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 50, 58. For example, see the breastplate from dated 1470 from War Gallery, Leeds Museum (Nº III. 1281) <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-1287.html> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

11 The first forms of plate protection for the lower area of the torso appear in the first decade of the 15th century. See, for instance OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 45–46. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 80–81, 93–94.

12 EDGE-PADDOCK, *Arms and Armor*, op. cit., 118. OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 38. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 75.

13 OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 40, 78, 82.

14 According to DeVRIES-SMITH (*Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 177): *From about 1430 the bottom plate of the fauld was cut in half to form two rectangular plates, or the tassets, which hang from the breastplate on straps and buckles. From about 1440 the tassets were triangular or spade-shaped, and small side tassets were used to supplement them.* See also EDGE-PADDOCK, *Arms and Armor*, op. cit., 107. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 81.

15 For example, see the knight's armour from a detail of the altar painting, ca. 1465, by Michael Pacher at the parish church of St Lawrence near Bruneck, now in the Austrian Gallery in Vienna.

16 DeVRIES-SMITH, *Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 178.

17 By the end of the second decade of the 15th century laminated pauldrons appear for the left arm, with a smaller one being worn on the right arm. Cf. DeVRIES-SMITH, *Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 177. EDGE-PADDOCK, *Arms and Armor*, op. cit., 107. OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 47–48. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 82–83.

18 See for example the pauldrons of the “knight of the von Müllenheim family”, a sculpture dates from ca. 1480, former Église de la Toussaint/Bethaus Allerheiligen, Strasbourg, Château de Grünstein, Stotzheim, dép. Bas-Rhin, France: <http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/roelipilami/32562671303/> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

19 OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 40. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 83.

20 DeVRIES-SMITH, *Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 175. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 88.

was more common for the *cuisse* to be made from a single metal plate with an attached *poleyn*.²¹ In the graffito in question, a curved round *poleyn* was placed on the right knee. The man wears *sabatons*²² on his feet. They look like pointed shoes made of a narrow iron plate to cover the top of the foot.

Under the armor the horseman wears most probably, a padded garment called the *army doublet*.²³ It was a heavy and thick quilted coat. Note also the mantle behind the body of the rider.²⁴

In view of the above considerations, I come to the conclusion that the drawing certainly dates to a period between 1430s and 1470s. Since all knightly elements are found in the graffito, we may conclude that it was drawn by a skilled Western author. Due to the fact that by the fifteenth century the Byzantine Empire (now consisting of Constantinople and a small territory around it) depended heavily upon foreign, Western mercenaries, and the Italian seafaring city-states, there is indeed nothing strange to find a plate Italian-style armor with some elements of the German-style in the armor of the knight.²⁵ Bearing this in mind, I do not wish to rule out the possibility that the author recorded what he had seen himself. When we seek the evidence for such assumption, we must pay attention to the arrival of the Genoese contingent with 400 men in full armor (*κατάφρακτοι*) in Constantinople toward the end of January 1453 A. D.²⁶ The spectacle of Giovanni Giustiniani Longo's ships entering the imperial harbour with well-armed men on deck made an immediate impression on both the populace of Eastern and Western origin and the emperor. The drawing suggests that its author might have seen these particular arms and armor with his own eyes. This explains why the drawing is so detailed.

We are, therefore, confronted with the question: what image does the drawing depict? The question immediately leads to a second one: why did the anonymous author feel obliged to make such a drawing in the north gallery in Hagia Sophia? Without an identifying inscription, the graffito gives us no clear idea about the identification of the rider and opens the doors to various hypothesis. I think that there might be three possible answers to the first question: St George the Dragon-slayer, a self-portrait by a western mercenary or a fight of a Christian warrior against the forces of evil. If the choice lies between these possibilities, the preference must be given to the first one. The reason of this choice shall be explained more thoroughly below.

21 BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 84.

22 DEVRIES-SMITH, *Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 177. OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 39. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 85.

23 BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 75–76.

24 OAKESHOTT, *A Knight*, op. cit., 45. BLAIR, *European Armour*, op. cit., 78 pointed out that the mantle was a common element form in the knight's dress in the mid- 15th century Italy.

25 It probably represents a fusion of Italian and German elements. See J. BAILY, A Famous "Gothic Armour" at New York, *The Connoisseur* 89, 1932, 219. P. KRENN-W. KARCHESKI, *Imperial Austria: treasures of art, arms & armor from the state of Styria*, Houston 1992, 31. C. BLAIR, *Studies in European Arms and Armor: The C. Otto Von Kienbusch Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia 1992, 47.

26 As well as to the small band of the Genoese brothers Bocchiardo and the Catalan contingent. See K. SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571. vol. 2: The fifteenth century*, Philadelphia 1978, 111–112. D. NICOL, *The Immortal Emperor: The Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, Last Emperor of the Romans*, Cambridge 1992, 69.

The graffito is highly detailed but when it is looked upon more closely, one can notice the lack of a halo behind the rider's head. According to the accepted practice in the East, St George is more often depicted with a halo, in Roman armor and a rowing mantle. However, this does not mean that in the discussed case this is a persistent element only for the Eastern iconography. It may be recalled that such a detail is more interchangeable than it seems at first glance. The lack of a halo is not so surprising since with the growth of naturalism during the Renaissance in the West, the religious subject in visual arts appears very often without any halo delineation. From the 15th century onwards, the images of the equestrian St. George without a halo have in fact multiplied.²⁷

During this time, the best-known and famous dragon-slayer is no other but St George, who enjoyed considerable popularity in Western visual arts. One may find St George with a mantle in Western art just because the Byzantine iconography introduced it and influenced the West. In other words, the knight from the graffito is, with great probability, St George in western attire. It is true, of course, that in the East, the most famous dragon-slaying saint was St Theodore who was, and still is, revered by the Eastern Christian churches.²⁸ However, he was less well known in Western Europe

27 Examples of the Saint without a halo are fairly numerous. The following may be cited: an illumination from the 15th century Breviary of Martin of Aragon, BNF, ROTH 2529, fol. 444v <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52000996s/f890.zoom.r=Lettre> (retrieved July 3, 2017); the painting "St George and the Dragon" by P. Ucello (ca. 1470), NG6294, National Gallery, London <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/paolo-uccello-saint-george-and-the-dragon> (retrieved July 3, 2017); the painting "St George and the Dragon" by Rogier van der Weyden (ca. 1432–1435), National Gallery of Arts, Washington <https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.50662.html> (retrieved July 3, 2017). Marble altarpiece for the high Chapel in the Château de Gaillou by Michael Colombe dating 1508, Louvre, Paris <https://www.ucc.ie/archive/milmartrgrgwstart11.jpg> (retrieved July 3, 2017); white marble door lintels, Genoese work at High Renaissance, Byzantine Museum of Chios <https://www.ucc.ie/archive/milmartrgrgwstart28.jpg> (retrieved July 3, 2017); the painting "St George and the Dragon" by an Anonymous artist (ca. 1480–1490), Toledo Museum of Arts, Ohio <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/72/8b/37/728b375ba2206b5cd1192b0029a13c1d.jpg> (retrieved July 3, 2017); an illumination "St George and the Dragon" by Lieven van Lathem (ca. 1471), MS 37, fol. 67v, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/1665/lieven-van-lathem-saint-george-and-the-dragon-flemish-about-1471/> (retrieved July 3, 2017); "St George and the Dragon" in Book of Hours, Belgium (1480s), MS M234, fol. 33v <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/14/77448> (retrieved July 3, 2017); "St George and the Dragon" by Maître du Retable de St George (ca. 1470), Národní galerie, Abbaye St George, Prague <http://damien.jullemier.pagesperso-orange.fr/sts/georges-prague.htm> (retrieved July 3, 2017); "St George and the Dragon" in Book of Hours, Belgium, Bruges (ca. 1450), MS M.421 fol. 23v, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York <http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/4/136028> (retrieved July 3, 2017); "St George and the Dragon" in Prayer Book (1450–1475), The Walters Art Museum, W.182, fol. 56v <https://ica.princeton.edu/plummer/display.php?country=United%20States&site=&view=country&page=36&image=1554> (retrieved July 3, 2017); the painting "St George and the Dragon", Museu Diocese de Mallorca (ca. 1470); "St George and the Dragon" wooden relief, (1420), Nuremberg Pl. O. 3458 <http://objekt.katalog.gnm.de/objekt/Pl.O.3458> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Danish Church wall painting: Højby (ca. 1380), Kirke Saaby (ca. 1415), Tuse (ca. 1450), Herlew (ca. 1450–1475), Højse (ca. 1460), Vrangstrup (ca. 1471) <https://ica.princeton.edu/> (retrieved July 3, 2017); "St George and the Dragon", wall painting from The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Pickering, Yorkshire (mid-fifteenth century); Wall painting of Saint George and the dragon in the chapel at Farleigh Hungerford Castle (ca. 1440) <http://www.uksouthwest.net/somerset/farleigh-hungerford-castle/farleigh-hungerford-chapel-wall-painting.html> (retrieved July 3, 2017); St George, ca. 1460, detail of the triptych Wielun, by an unknown artist, preserved in the Church of San Vitale in Włocławek, Poland <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/st-george-detail-of-triptych-wielun-15th-high-res-stock-photography/151819443> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

28 CH. WALTER, Theodore, archetype of the warrior saint, *REB* 57, 1999, 173.

where the cult of Saint George became well established.²⁹ Thus the iconography of St Theodore slaying the dragon was in most cases substituted by St George in medieval European context.³⁰

The western fashion is also shown through the image of the shield's shape and the rider's posture (see p. 303, Photo 3). Another thing: according to the traditional Byzantine iconography, the eastern depictions of St George and other military saints never include a helmet.

Let's now survey the creature below the horse. The author drew it facing sideways as one-headed snake or serpent-dragon with an open mouth that looks like a beak.³¹ Its serpentine body forms a loop at the mid-section before tapering to a point. The bony spines of the serpent-dragon's back appear as two parallel lines with branched short rays, pointing downwards and forming a curved ridge.³² They are fairly flexible and are not used as means of defense. Its narrow tail is raised above and ends under the left hoof of the horse. In interpreting the drawing, one should consider that there is a second serpentine figure, which raises from below and overlaps with the tail of the first one. As always with graffiti, it is notably difficult at present to determine the original elements from the later ones. Knowing this, I have come to the conclusion that the second figure is not part of the original work. Its lower contours turn into an animal paw, which appears to be the work of someone who decided, for reasons which I cannot explain, to add a tail and one mighty leg to the available beast.

On the whole, the legends surrounding St George do not specify the type of monster he fought. The final composition of the fabulous beast is left to the artist's imagination and it varies from one representation to another. Whereas in the East the monster looks more like a snake, the version brought by the Crusaders to the West grows in dimensions. In addition, it acquires paws and wings, becoming the dragon we all know.³³ It

29 He was venerated in Rome, but the most important West European centre of his cult was Venice. The Doge's chapel was dedicated to Theodore until the relics of St Mark arrived in the city in 828 when Theodore lost his primacy. For this, see WALTER, Theodore, op. cit., 172.

30 It is a case of substitution of George for Theodore. For this, see M. IMMERZEEL, Holy Horsemen and Crusader Banners. Equestrian Saints in Wall Paintings in Lebanon and Syria, *Eastern Christian Art* 1, 2004, 38–39. According to Anthony Cutler, it was standard Frankish practice to transfer the name of one saint to a type typically associated with another. See A. CUTLER, Everywhere and Nowhere: The Invisible Muslim and Christian Self-Fashioning in the Culture of Outremer, in: *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, D. Weiss–L. Mahoney (eds.), Baltimore 2004, 271.

31 See, for example, the 15th-century frescoes from the monasteries of Dragalevtsi (1476) and Kremikovtsi (1493): K. PASKALEVA-KABADIEVA–T. KHORISIAN, *Bulgarian Icons through the Centuries*, Sofia 1987, VII. For other examples, see G. ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz. Kult i obraz v Pravoslaniya Iztok prez Srednovekovieto*, Varna 2011, Ill. 199 (Crimea, 14th–15th century) and Ill. 200 (14th century). See, also the Dish with arms of the Visconti family (ca. 1480–1500), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/199723> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Libro de horas de Leonor de la Vega, 15th century, Biblioteca Nacional de España, fol. 39 <http://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000048889> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

32 For example, see a similar detail in Arundel MS66, fol. 97, 267v (1490) <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=7017> (retrieved July 3, 2017) and <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=56552> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

33 Dragons in medieval art from about 900–1450 are usually depicted as serpents with wolf-like heads, feathery wings, and two front legs, and these legs are mentioned or can be inferred in some Middle English, Old French, and Old Norse romances. See *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, J. Wenstock (ed.), London–New York 2014, 185. Cf. also ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 196, 197, 217.

seems that the shape of our beast is a snake rather than a 'dragon' and bears witness to Eastern influences. However, its shape does not give any idea as to the iconographic type of the whole scene. Bearing this in mind, the most obvious solution, I believe, is to suggest the presence of an eclectic artist and a time and place in which this particular eclecticism could be used.

The war horse is represented riding to the right and his legs are parallel with the hooves touching the ground. The combed down mane is drawn in fine lines. An interesting element of the humiliation of the enemy, and especially the enemy who was far off, exotic, and strange, is shown through the horse urine leaking on the beast.³⁴ The saddle is drawn in detail and it has a higher front and a comfortable back to better hold the rider. The girth (strap encircling the animal's body in order to better secure the saddle) behind the left rider's leg can be easily recognized. The horse tack includes parade straps: a breast collar with a tuft and a crupper with additional breeching straps. Note the absence of stirrups from the horse furniture. Traditionally, the rider's left hand holds the reins or the instrument to control horse, and the right throws the lance. In addition to the reins, the rider holds up in his left hand an emblazoned shield with a cross³⁵ heater. It is well known that the coats-of-arms of St George is a red cross on a white background. In his raised right hand, he holds a long spear with a slanting downwards triangular gad. The spear is the preferred weapon of a knight, second only to the sword. In western fashion there is a waving flag fixed to the end of St. George's spear.³⁶ Another thing, the rider's posture is iconographically similar to that which occurs in the Western art.³⁷ The rider is shown standing upright on the saddle thrusting his long spear into the gaping jaws of a beast. This is the most effective way to find a balance on horseback in the moment when the rider is going to attack.

34 According to G. Atanasov (*Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 217) it is a folklore motif from the profane tales widespread among ordinary Christians. See, for example, a graffito on stone with St George Dragon-Slayer from Crimea (14th–15th century). For this, see V. KIRILKO–V. M^{ITZ}, Крепость Фуна в системе обороны княжества Федоро, in: *Византийская Таврика*, Киев 1991, 157, 158, fig. 3.

35 The heater shield was the common type of shield in most parts of Europe during the 13th and 14th centuries. By the 15th century knights rarely used the shield except for display purposes in parades and at tournaments. See DEVRIES-SMITH, *Medieval Weapons*, op. cit., 129, 261.

36 To illustrate this I chose several examples: St George and the Dragon, relief from Chiesa di S. Maria del Lago, Moscufo, Pescara (1159) https://www.flickr.com/photos/andrea_carloni/10855622425/in/set-72157637668929956 (Retrieved July 3, 2017); the bronze group statue of St George at the Prague Castle of 1373 <http://www.prague.eu/en/object/places/1864/statue-of-st-george> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Triptych with Scenes from the Life of St George, (ca. 1425–1450), Spain <http://collections.lacma.org/node/230183> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

37 In the course of medieval art, this posture remains common in the West. There are many similar examples. See, for example, Sano di Pietro, Siena (12th–13th c.) <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/90/80/78/908078f0cefa176ccd25721742fc9a11.jpg> (retrieved July 3, 2017); a miniature of George killing the dragon, with the princess kneeling, in the *Legenda Aurea*: Paris, 1382 (London, British Library, BL Royal 19 B XVII – *Legenda aurea*, fol. 109r) <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=-mid&IID=47960> (retrieved July 3, 2017); St. George fighting the dragon, from a Book of Hours (Use of Rennes), ca. 1400–1415, Paris. Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia, Rare Book Department Widener 004, fol. 188r <http://libwww.freelibrary.org/medievalman/detail.cfm?itemID=mcaw041881> (retrieved July 3, 2017); St. George and the Dragon, Cod. Sal. IXe, Livre d'heures – Paris, 1420–1430, Heidelberg University Library <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/salIXe/0473/image> (retrieved July 3, 2017); St. George and the Dragon, by the Girard Master, 15th century Spain. Legion of Honor/Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco <http://art.famsf.org/girard-master/st-george-and-dragon-195916> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Detail of a miniature of George fighting the dragon, in a Book of Hours: France, ca. 1430–1440 (London, British Library, MS Harley 2900, f. 55r) <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?>

As far as the story of the saint³⁸ goes, in spite of his recognition as a Christian warrior³⁹ and dragon-slayer, there is no solid evidence that he really existed.⁴⁰ The earliest narratives⁴¹ portray him as a martyr who was tortured and executed for his refusal to abjure the Christian faith,⁴² and in some versions, he is not even presented as a warrior, but simply as a holy man.⁴³ The oldest known text of St George's victory over the dragon, which corresponds to the better-known European versions from the 12th century and later,⁴⁴ is preserved in an 11th century Georgian manuscript in Jerusalem.⁴⁵ In fact, the

Size=mid&IIIID=39537 (retrieved July 3, 2017); Horae ad usum Parisiensem (1434–1480) <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000466t/f166.zoom.r=Parisiensem> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Triptyque Sforza by Rogier van der Weyden (detail, verso of the right panel), St George (1460) <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.50662.html> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Saint George and the Dragon by Willem Vrelant (Bruges, early 1460s), Getty Museum <https://www.sodalitium.biz/arenberg-hours-bruges-1460-getty-museum-001/> (retrieved July 3, 2017); Saint George and the Dragon by Jacopo Bellini (1396–1470) <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/42/f0/21/42f0218e2310c61227b78fc2a820b1d4.jpg> (retrieved July 3, 2017); St George and the Dragon by Pere Niçard (1468–1470), Diocesan Museum, Palma de Mallorca https://www.arabalears.cat/cultura/obra-cabdal-pintura-gotica-illenca_0_1841215981.html (retrieved July 3, 2017).

38 Due to the enormous literature on that topic, the reader will be directed only to key studies: J. MYSLIVEC, Svatý Jiří ve východokřesťanském umění, *BSI* 5, 1933–1934, 304–375. V. LAZAREV, Новые памятник станковой живописи и образ Георгия – воина в византийском и древнерусском искусстве, in: V. Lazarev, *Русская средневековая живопись. Статьи и исследования*, Москва 1970, 55–102. D. HOWEL, St George as Intercessor, *Byz* 39, 1970, 121–136. A. DIMITRESCU, Une iconographie pas habituelle: les saints militaires siègeant, *Byz* 59, 1989, 48–63. M. MARKOVIĆ, O ikonografiji svetih ratnika u istočnohrišćanskoj umetnosti i o predstavima ovih svetitelja u Dečanima, in: *Židno slikarstvo manastira Dečana Grcha i studije, SANU, DCXXXII, Otdelenje istorijskih nauka*, kn. 22, Beograd 1995, 567–627. CH. WALTER, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, London 2003, 109–144, where one can find a complete bibliography.

39 Y. GUILCHER-PELLAT, La légende de Saint Georges: du Mégalomartyr au Tropaiophoros, in: *Miscellanea Mediaevalia. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Ménard*, Cl. Faucon–A. Labbé–D. Quérueil (eds.), Paris 1998, 601–611. N. IAMANIDZE, The Dragon-Slayer Horseman from its Origins to the Seljuks: Missing Georgian Archaeological Evidence, in: *Der Doppeladler. Byzanz und die Seldschuken in Anatolien vom späten 11. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, N. Asutay-Effenberger–F. Daim (eds.), Mainz 2014, 111–127. P. GROTOWSKI, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints. Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261)*, Leiden 2010, 111. K. TUTTE, St George in the Caucasus: politics, gender, mobility, in: *Sakralität und Mobilität in Südosteuropa und im Kaukasus*, T. Kahl–I. Darieva–S. Toncheva (eds.), Wien 2017, 4 (cited according to the pagination of the edition in academia.edu: http://www.academia.edu/17881597/St_George_in_the_Caucasus_politics_gender_mobility (retrieved July 3, 2017)).

40 According to A. P. Kazhdan and N. P. Ševčenko (George, saint, in: *ODB* II, 834): ... no reliable evidence attests his martyrdom, attributed to the time of a legendary Persian king Dadianos and located in Lydda (Diospolis in Palestine); later account transferred his execution to Nikomedeia and the reign of Diocletian.

41 The original Vita of St George would have been composed no later than the 5th century, and possibly some decades earlier. For this, see K. KRUMBACHER, *Der heilige Georg in der griechischen Überlieferung*, München 1911, 281–292, 301–302. Cf. also GROTOWSKI, *Arms and Armour*, op. cit., 108.

42 S. RICHES, St George as a male virgin martyr, in: *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women, and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, S. Riches–S. Salih (eds.), Routledge 2002, 65–85.

43 H. DELEHAYE, *Les Légendes grecques des saints militaires*, Paris 1909, 50–76. Cf. also TUTTE, St George, op. cit., 4. A. STOJKOVA, *Sveti Georgi Podnoset, Agiografski proizvedeniya v Južnoslavjanskata srednovekovna traditziya*, Sofia 2016, 55–76.

44 For this see T. DALE, Cultural hybridity in medieval Venice: reinventing the East at San Marco after the Fourth Crusade, in: *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, H. Maguire–R. Nelson (eds.), Washington, D.C. 2010, 151–192.

45 E. L. PRIVALOVA, *Павлиси*, Tbilisi 1977, 71–76. In Byzantium, the miracle of the dragon is first attested in a late 12th century manuscript as an appendix to an account of the passion of St George, and in a roughly contemporary illustration from Anargyroi in Kastoria (ca. 1180). Cf. C. WALTER, *The Origin of the Cult of*

eneration of St George originated in the Byzantine Levant and did not become popular in the West until returning Crusaders brought the Saint's cult back with them.⁴⁶ The story of St George's exploits also appears in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *The Golden Legend*, a compendium of the lives of the saints.⁴⁷ A dragon slayer George appears in Byzantine art in the 12th century, both in the East and in Italy, from where the motif spread throughout Western Europe. Following the popularity of the *Golden Legend* from the 13th century⁴⁸ onward, St George's victory over the dragon looks like the most popular representation in Western art.

There are two main iconographic types based on this story: the 'concise' with St George and the dragon, and the 'detailed' with the princess, the walls of Lasia and the people witnessing the miracle.⁴⁹ The earliest known depictions of the 'concise' version are on the frescoes of some Cappadocian churches from the 10th and 11th centuries.⁵⁰ The earliest dated example with St George and the princess is at Pavniši (near Axalcixe, third quarter of the 12th century), although Chr. Walter lists examples at Adiši, Bočorma and possibly Ikvi, which stylistically could be dated slightly earlier.⁵¹ The iconography soon spread to Orthodox countries in the Balkans and farther on to the Caucasus and Rus.⁵² The Saint's image was brought to the West by the Crusaders and this is how it achieved its international status lasting so far.⁵³ However, the transfer to the West of the dragon slayer iconography has not yet been fully clarified.

St George, *REB* 53, 1995, 320, 322. STOJKOVA, *Sveti Georgi*, op. cit., 37.

46 St George made a deep impression on the crusaders: he was believed to have assisted them in battles, in particular during the assaults on Antioch in 1098 and on Jerusalem one year later. For this, see R. CORMAC-ST. MIHALARIAS, A Crusader Painting of St. George: 'maniera greca' or 'lingua franca', *Burlington Magazine* 126, 1984, 132–133.

47 *Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, With an Introduction by E. Duffy, Princeton 2012, XI–XII, 238–242.

48 The story of St George saving the princess and slaying the dragon seems to have enjoyed wide popularity at the beginning of the 15th century. In order to illustrate this, we refer to the following example. In 1429, Duke of Savoy organized a two-day dramatic spectacle at Thonon during which the sacred life of the saint was represented. For this, see F. COGNASSO, *Amedeo VIII (1383–1451)*, Turin 1930, vol. I, 124.

49 Interestingly, the narrative is set in the town *Lasia*, which might echo the southwest Caucasian toponym *Lazica*. See J. AUFHAUSER, *Das Drachenzwunder des Heiligen Georg*, Leipzig 1911, 74–75.

50 According to WALTER, *The Warrior Saints*, op. cit., 128 the following examples – though, it must be insisted, without the princess – may be cited: the 7th century fresco from Mavruca in Cappadocia № 3 (also known as Güzeloz № 3 or Mistikan kilise); another from the 9th century, Yılanlı kilise, Yeşilköy (İhlara); yet another from the beginning of the 10th century, Pürenli seki kilisesi, and four others from the 11th century, Yusuf koç kilisesi, Avclar; Sakli kilise, Göreme 2a; church of the Rock, necropolis of Göreme; Yılanlı kilise, Goreme № 26. Cf. also ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 195.

51 WALTER, *The Warrior Saints*, op. cit., 142. WALTER, *The Origin*, op. cit., 322. See also A. VÖLSK'ALIA, K'edlis mxat'vroba sop. adišis c'm. giorgis ek'lesiaji (Wall paintings in the St George of Adiši), *Dzeglis megobari* 19, 1969, 53–58 (Adiši, Svaneti, Ik'vi, Kartli; Boč'orma, Kaxeti) and PRIVALOVA, *Павниши*, 71, 91, 111 (Pavniši, near Axalcixe; Vani, Imereti). Cf. TUTTE, *St George*, op. cit., 6–7.

52 ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 230.

53 ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 199, 210.

In Constantinople, the military iconography of St George was accepted as most important,⁵⁴ while the dragon slayer subject was regarded as semi apocrypha.⁵⁵ It was only after 1261 when the attitude changed. From the 14th century onwards, the iconography of the dragon slayer saint was widely accepted in the Byzantine capital.⁵⁶ This image remains very popular for the last two centuries of the Byzantine Empire⁵⁷ due to the fact that the saint became a symbol of the fight against Muslim invaders in the East Orthodox world.

The attribution of this drawing to the 15th century is based on the knight's armor and the specific iconography. Iconographic analysis points undoubtedly to the same century. In most cases, the iconography indicates the belonging of an image to one or another artistic tradition. What makes the difference in the end is the accumulation of such details more characteristic of one tradition than of the other and the general style of the image. In Western tradition St George is a contemporary knightly figure, depicted in more complicated posture with realistic details of arms, armor and horse tack. In our case, all details of arms, armor, tack and posture are in the Western group while the mantle, plus snake-dragon is in the Eastern group. However, the shape of the beast is more interchangeable than it seems at a first glance. It is iconographically similar to that which occurs in the places of contact between the Eastern and Western culture, for example like Crimea, Constantinople and the Balkans.⁵⁸ The fact that more than half of all the knight elements are to be found on the graffito indicate that the western type of knightly culture permeated more Constantinople, which is understandable due to the presence of the westerners in the Byzantine capital. The observation shows that the graffito dates between 1430s and 1470s. As the model for the Christian knights, George is often depicted as a crusading knight in illuminated manuscripts and in stained glass windows. The military costume was indicative of his military prowess and his power as a guardian against physical and spiritual enemies upon request on behalf of the faithful.⁵⁹ The author chooses to concentrate on the culmination of the

54 The earliest depiction of St George on horseback dated to the end of the 13th century is to be found in the circular martyrium of St Euphemia at the Hippodrome. For this, see R. NAUMANN-H. BELTING, *Die Euphemia-Kirche am Hippodrom zu Istanbul und ihre Fresken*, Berlin 1966, 180. R. JANIN, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin, part I : Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique, 3: Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1969², 126–130. ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 213. In the Byzantine capital by the end of the 12th century, besides the sanctuary at Mangana, there were at least nine churches dedicated to St George and in the late Byzantine period there is evidence for further three: in the city quarters of Hieron and Galata, and at the monastery of St Martha. See R. JANIN, *Les églises byzantines des saints militaires* (Constantinople et banlieue), *EO* 33, 1934, 162–169, 178–180. JANIN, *La géographie*, op. cit., 74–83. Cf. also GROTHOWSKI, *Arms and Armour*, op. cit., 122–123 for individual churches.

55 ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 211, 213, 256–257.

56 In the 14th century the dragon slayer iconography was adopted by the metropolitan art as attested by Pseudo-Kodinos. According to him in the Emperor's palace were kept two gonfalons with the images of St George as a rider and dragon-slayer. See Pseudo-Kodinos, *Traite des offices*, J. Verpeaux (ed.), Paris 1966, 195–196.

57 See, for example, ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., 213.

58 One may find snake-dragon in Western pieces of art, presumably the Western iconography being influenced by the Byzantine one, which produced it in the first place. For example, see ATANASOV, *Sveti Georgi pobedonosetz*, op. cit., Ill. 199 (Crimea, 14th–15th century) and Ill. 200 (14th century). See, also the Dish with arms of the Visconti family (ca. 1480–1500), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/199723> (retrieved July 3, 2017).

59 M. PARANI, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images. Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)*, Leiden–Boston 2003, 152.

duel between the saint and the beast.⁶⁰ In sum, most of iconographical features and mainly all knightly elements suggest that this may have been the work of a skilled Western author following some of the traditions of the Eastern art.

The second possibility leads us to a conclusion according to which the horseman was a self-portrait by a western mercenary with a beast thrown in for extra drama. Nothing in particular marks him as a saint and apparently, the scene refers to a secular combat, albeit with a religious connotation, namely the beast as a personification of the evil or the Ottoman Turks. In support of this assumption, we may refer to the level of detail in the depiction of the armour and the lack of a halo. Of course, it is difficult to establish his nationality on the strength of external features alone. At this point, however, a reservation must be made. The horse urine leaking on the snake-dragon is an important detail in the iconographic repertoire of St George. The fact, that this graffito demonstrates such a surprising detail, leaves no doubt that we are dealing with an image of St George. This detail constitutes one of the chief reasons for rejecting the possibility of a self-portrait. We can also conclude that for the person who created this drawing it was necessary to emphasize that the saint is St. George himself. In the Western tradition, as I have stated before, the saint is more of a contemporary knightly figure and frequently depicted without a halo. It is, therefore, risky to say that we are dealing here with a self-portrait by a western mercenary.

Another possibility is that the fight of a knight and a beast can also be non-specifically interpreted as the fight of a Christian warrior against the forces of evil. Thus, the scene is permeated with the hope placed in the Western armies in order to successfully face the new danger, the Ottoman Turks. Moreover, we may refer to the above stated reservations as to the second possibility.

It remains to solve the question why the anonymous author decided to draw such an image in the north gallery of Hagia Sophia. Perhaps, there is no satisfactory answer to this question. In particular, the author of the drawing has to be sought among the Latins in Constantinople or in the suburb of Galata/Pera, situated to the north of the Golden Horn. It is possible that after gaining access to the north gallery he might have succumbed to the temptation of scratching a graffito, following the example of many others before him. All I can accentuate in order to support the above presumption is that the central and eastern part of this same gallery were a preferred place for Western graffiti. Indeed, it may be recalled that St George is also the patron saint of Genoa and held in great honor in Venice.⁶¹ The meaning of the figurative presentation of a patron saint is undoubtedly to express gratitude for salvation or to request intercession for future aid. In other words, in our scene St George was called to intercede with his apotropaic and protective function.⁶² It is also possible that this drawing personifies Genoa and respectively its contingent in 1453 A. D. as the saint was a patron of the Ligurian republic.

60 See, for example the bronze group statue of St George at the Prague Castle of 1373. For details, see J. BAŽANT, St. George at Prague Castle and Perseus: an Impossible Encounter? *Studia Hercynia* 19/1–2, 2015, 195.

61 See George, Saint, in: *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture*, P. Murray–L. Murray (eds.), Oxford 1998, 194.

62 He was invoked to protect military building, castles and stations, churches and chapels dedicated to his memory. For this, see WALTER, *The Warrior Saints*, op. cit., 269.

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to suppose that the horseman in the graffito can be identified with St George representing a rare example of an ex-voto drawing requesting the protection of the saint. Its completion may be placed between the 1430s and 1470s.

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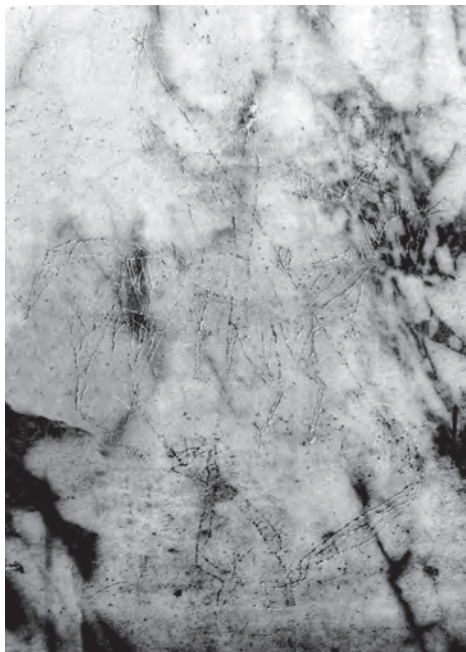


Photo 1

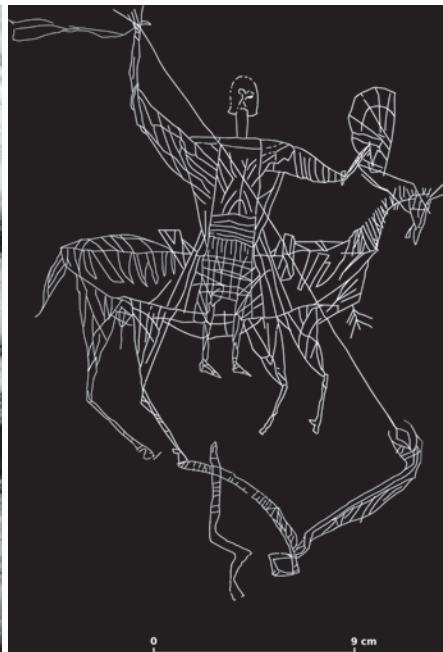


Figure 1



Photo 2, detail of St George



Photo 3, detail of the snake-dragon