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The 'Balkan trend' in the monumental painting of Novgorod the Great: questions of attribution

The present article concerns ensembles of the monumental painting of Novgorod the Great in the second half of the XIV century. The core question is the influence of art of Byzantium and South Slavic countries on it. The research emphasizes the problems of attribution and the main subject is the analysis of iconography and stylistics of these frescoes.

XIV century in Novgorod is the period of economic and political blossoming of the city, time of intensive international contacts and a wide cultural exchange with the countries of the West and the East. Art of this period is traditionally discussed in light of various foreign influences — mainly, Byzantine and South Slavic. And in this period the fresco painting tends to be one of the most progressive arts and open for various innovations. Unfortunately, the monuments of the XIV cent. of Novgorod had suffered terrible losses and what remained today is just a small part of that heritage. The ensembles that we research are the churches of Nativity on the Red field, Transfiguration on Kovalevo, Archangel Gabriel of Skovorodka monastery and Annunciation on Gorodishe.

Traditionally scholars unite these four churches in one group, stating their similarity and proposing a hypothesis about their South Slavic origin. So, the majority of the researchers, mentioning these monuments in their works, associate them with „Balkan tradition”. This tendency is traced in works of such scientists, as M. K. Karger, V. N. Lazarev, G. I. Vzdornov, U. G. Malkov, L. I. Lifshits, O. S. Popova, V. D. Sarabjanov, T.U.Tsarevskaja and others. Many of them give concrete analogs from art of the Slavic Balkans, mainly from the so-called Moravian school, i.e. the group of churches located in northern part of Serbia.

However there is a number of scholars who mention not only Slavic, but mostly Byzantine (and Northern Greek) influence on novgorodian painting: V.N.Lazarev¹ tells about „processing of the late byzantine images” in frescoes of the Nativity church. Presence of Greek master among the Nativity church painters is assumed by M.K.Karger² as he tells about an inscription in Greek and a certain similarity in stylistics. Concerning the frescoes of the Skovorodka church Lazarev³ says that its author could have been educated in Greece. In the ensemble of Kovalyovo Lazarev⁴ marks some features of iconography,

¹ Лазарев В. Н. История византийской живописи. М.: Искусство, 1986. С. 183. (Lazarev V. N. Istorija vizantijskoj zhivopisi. M.: Iskusstvo, 1986. P. 183).

² Каргер М. К. Новгород Великий. Л.-М.: Искусство, 1961. С. 166-167. (Karger M. K. Novgorod Velikij. L.-M.: Iskusstvo, 1961. P.166-167).

³ Лазарев В. Н. Росписи сквородского монастыря в Новгороде. В кн.: Русская средневековая живопись. Статьи и исследования. М.: Наука, 1970. С. 221. (Lazarev V. N. Rospisi skovorodskogo monastyra v Novgorode. In: Russkaia srednevekovaja zhivopis. Statji i issledovania. M.: Nauka, 1970. P. 221).

⁴ Лазарев В. Н. Ковалёвская роспись и проблема южнославянских связей в русской живописи XIV в. В кн.: Русская средневековая живопись. Статьи и исследования. М.: Наука, 1970. С. 269. (Lazarev V. N.

characteristic for Byzantine monuments, and Karger⁵ speaks about the elements of Byzantine art considerably rethought in South Slavic countries. Very trustworthy is the research of A. P. Grekov⁶ whose merits include restoration of Kovalevo frescoes after its destruction during the Second World War. He claims a synthesis of South Slavic, novgorodian and Byzantine features in this monument. S. O. Dmitrieva⁷ in her recent thesis also proposes an idea of a basic orientation to metropolitan Byzantine art and finds analogies, quite new in this theme, — for example, frescoes of the Transfiguration church in Thessaloniki. Many scholars also think that monasteries of mount Athos were a basic place of contacts between Russian, South Slavic and Greek cultures.

The following conclusion about Byzantine influence is confirmed by the fact that a big part of prototypes proposed by the researchers stand apart from the circle of the Moravian school (which, according to such scientists as V. Djurić, A. Xingopoulos, E. Kiriakudis and others, may have had its roots in the art of Thessaloniki⁸) and include monuments of central and southern Serbia (including territories of Macedonia which has historically been connected with Northern Greece). U. G. Malkov speaks about Macedonian art as a possible analogue to the Nativity frescoes, Dmitrieva in her thesis about Kovalevo says that inscriptions in this ensemble have analogues in Macedonian art, the same ideas were shared by Lazarev (Skovorodka church) and Lifshits (church on Kovalevo).

Such context makes it possible to revise the theory about South Slavic origin of the frescoes and try to find features of common with monuments of metropolitan Byzantine art. A productive direction of this research might be studying of Northern Greek art since strong connections with Thessaloniki and Mount Athos existed in Russia and, in particular, in Novgorod, on one side, and in the Slavic states of the Balkans, on the other. This trend was developed by Dmitrieva in her thesis of 2003, and the same tendencies are observed in researches of art of South Slavic countries.

Concerning the question of historiography there appears a problem of terminology — and first of all when describing monuments of medieval art of the Balkans, as the boundaries were changing constantly for a long period of time. Considering certain convention of definitions „Serbian art”, „Macedonian art”, „South Slavic art”, we will use them exclusively in geographical sense, instead of attributive (i.e. „Serbian art” meaning „art on territory of medieval Serbia” etc.).

The present text represents an attempt to describe in detail the Novgorodian frescoes from the point of view of stylistics and iconography. Unfortunately, the poor condition of some of these frescos doesn't allow making full impression about them: no ensemble has remained completely, and some images appear only in small fragments — so their description will be made on the basis of photographs made before the churches were destroyed.

Kovalevskaja rospis i problema juzhnoslavianskih svjazej v russkij zhivopisi XIV v. In: Russkaja srednevekovaja zhivopis. Statji i issledovania. M.: Nauka, 1970. P. 269).

⁵ Каргеп М. К. Ук. Соч. С. 261. (Karger M. K. Op.cit. P.261).

⁶ Греков А. П. Фрески церкви Спаса Преображения на Ковалёво. М.: Наука, 1987. (Grekov A. P. Freski zerkvi Spasa Preobrazhenia na Kovalevo. M.: Nauka, 1987).

⁷ Дмитриева С. О. Роспись церкви Спаса Преображения на Ковалёво в Новгороде, 1380 года. Дисс. на соиск. уч. степ. к. иск. М.: Издательство МГУ, 2003. С. 202. (Dmitrieva S. O. Rospis zerkvi Spasa Preobrazhenia na Kovaleve v Novgorode, 1380 goda. Diss. na soisk. uch. Step. k. isk. M.: Isdatelstvo MGU, 2003. P. 202).

⁸ Djurić V. Origine thessalonicienne des fresques du monastère de Resava // Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta. Beograd: 1960. S. 111-128. Xyngopoulos A. Thessalonique et la peinture macedonienne. Athens: Society for Macedonian Studies Institute for Balkan Studies, 1955. Kyriakoudis E. N. The Morava school and the art of Thessaloniki in the light of new data and observations. // Зорпаф. № 26. 1997. P. 95-105.

Nativity church on the Red field

The church has been constructed in 1381–1382, date of painting is unknown. Scholars usually date it late XIV century.

In this ensemble we can define two manners, naming them an apprentice's manner and a manner of the master — probably, head of the group. This differentiation is quite conventional, as these manners are similar enough. Besides, they practically don't differ in the church zones: so, in the same parts of a temple and even in one composition it is possible to see works and both masters.

The brightest example of work of the first master are images of young prophets of the Old Testament in the drum — for example, images of prophets Daniel and Habbakuk. Both figures of prophets are rather massive, they are treated voluminous and illusionistic. Clothes shroud their large bodies that we can distinguish them under fabric. The clothes fabric is written naturalistically enough: we can imagine softness and at the same time weight of it: folds lie down on a body, repeating its forms, they form smooth lines — in particular in the image of prophet Habbakuk.

However the main thing that unites these two images is treatment of the facial features. In both images the volume of the body is characteristically underlined — with the use of green and ochre tones; these colors are picturesquely melted together, and the shades of roundish forms lie down on a figure; transitions between volumes are soft, smooth, unsharp. We can also mention the characteristic form of lips: the form of the upper lip is constructed of two triangles, while the lower is short and full, with small dredging in the middle. Under lips there lies a shade of green paint, outlining a chin line. Lines of red ochre outline the lower lip borders, and the upper lip border is outlined by white stroke. The form of nose is almost identical in two images. The nose has a correct triangular form, without any hump, with a small thickening on a tip. Nose wings are underlined, but not marked out brightly (later we will compare them with characteristic noses from another ensemble). They have a narrow nose bridge on which lies the light. Images also have large almond-shaped eyes with oval or triangular eye-sockets, smooth roundish eyebrows. The upper eyelid is underlined by a thin line of dark ochre. Warm reddish tone is put under cheekbones the mark the blush. Without any bright boundary lines the greenish and reddish shades on the general ochre tone of a skin create an effect of roundish volume of the body. The treatment of the corporal as a whole is distinguished by melting of all the tones and absence of contrast color combinations. There almost aren't any whitening expressive strokes, very characteristic for art of this time (of Theophanes the Greek, for example). The poses and gestures of young prophets are also characteristic: they are put in slight counterpose — heads are turned aside from the general movement of the gestures — of hands holding the books.

The image of an angel in the scene „Angel presents a cenobitic *monastic charter* to monk *Pachomius*” is written in the absolutely same manner. It is marked by an underlined volume of bodies, characteristic for the first two images, use of shades of two tones — green and red — and the light use of line that marks the facial features. Very similarly depicted are the angels from „Annunciation” and „Nativity”, and also Lazarus from the scene „Rising of Lazarus”. They are written characteristically in the first manner — the same set of colors and the same saints' images with massive figures and faces with narrow noses, big eyes, thin smooth eyebrows, voluminous lips.

It is possible to define the second manner in some images from the subject scenes, written more in the lower zone, on the temple walls. The scene „Assumption” has remained better of all, and we will look at it in more detail. Here in a number of imag-

es other paints are used — the basis is made not by light ochre, but with a dark reddish tone. It is possible to consider as an important distinctive feature a wide use of expressive white strokes that no longer build volume, but break it. Paints don't melt among themselves and lie down in separate dabs. Integrity of the forms, so strongly kept in images of the first group where the face oval was distinctly underlined, is less present; in some cases there appears wrong perspective reduction when a figure turns in three quarters. It is characteristic that many figures in these compositions are thinner than massive and voluminous characters of the first group. Here smooth and thin silhouettes of figures bend slightly while heroes of the first group stand confidently on earth. For comparison we will consider two angels — from „Annunciation” and „Nativity”. We tend to relate one to the first master, and another — to the second, though a difference is, apparently, quite small. The pose of the second angel seems a little awkward, position of hands — anatomically wrong (the left hand appears short) while the first angel makes a vigorous movement, its pose is easily read through the clothes folds. Also the painting manner in „Annunciation” seems more smooth and picturesque, we don't see sharp color contrasts; the „Nativity” angel is written more graphically, the artist actively uses separate dense dabs of paint of different colors which don't mix among themselves.

The manner of the first artist can be considered as grecophilic since we can see that he was following the traditions of the Byzantine art of that time. The second master seems to be following him (probably he was local), and in whole the ensemble of this church is unified by general stylistics. The roundness of the faces, massiveness of the bodies, smooth transitions between the colors and harmonious construction of the scenes recall the best images from the churches of Constantinople, Thessaloniki and Mount Athos in XIV cent. (and works of Manuel Panselinos, in particular). For example, we can compare the image of angel from the composition „The burning bush” from Nicolas Orphanos church in Thessaloniki (1310–1320-s) and figure of the angel from „Nativity” in Novgorod church. The treatment of the facial and corporal, the color scheme, building of volumes seem to be very similar. Even the hand of the angel in both images — written anatomically incorrect, being short and very small, as of a child — looks very much alike. The same can be said about the angel from the „Dream of Joseph” fresco in Thessaloniki — he reminds novgorodian image with his pose and gesture. The characteristic ovals of the faces when turned in three quarters are also very similar in these two ensembles: when the cheeks and forehead are put forward leaving a little gap on bridge of a nose.

The monuments of the metropolis workshop — such as Nicolas Orphanos in Thessaloniki — might be also examples for such ensembles as church of st. Andreas on Treska (1389, work of Ioannis Zografos), church of st. Demetrius in Pech (appr. 1345) and some earlier churches — Assumption in Gračanica (1319–1321), st. George in Staro Nagoricino (1317–1318), stt. Joachim and Anna in Studenica (1314). They relate to the same grecophilic trend as the Nativity church in Novgorod. The works of Michael Astrapas and Eutyichius from Thessaloniki — Peribleptos church in Ohrid (1294–1295), st. Achilleus church on Moravica (1296) might also have been the pattern for these ensembles. This group is characterized first of all by a classical, antique approach to form and beauty.

Let's compare, for example, the image of the Mother of God from the scene of „Annunciation” in Serbian church of Ascension in Milesevo (appr. 1230) and the image of prophet Habbakuk in Novgorod church of Nativity on the Red field. Except for a small amount of differences, as a whole these images are united by a strong likeness. It is first of all the underlined rotundity of face and volume of body written smoothly by green and red shades, and also a number of features: identical forms of the lips, noses and eyes, and

also the lines of red tone outlining parts of the body. The Nativity frescos are similar to Milesevo images with the massiveness of figures, their confident poses, softness of fabrics of clothes, reminding an antique manner to show body forms through clothes. We can also compare a figure of prophet Malachias), an angel from novgorodian „Annunciation” and an image of apostle John from Trinity church in Sopotchani (1263–1264). The main similarity is melting of the paints together, absence of sharp color contrasts. Coloristic manners of these ensembles are also very close — there are widely used ochre of different tones, and also lilac, orange, blue and green tone. These Serbian frescos are one of the best samples of the Early Palaeologan art to which artists the turn of XIV century referred as to the „Golden Age” of Byzantine culture, but it was seldom possible for them to reach this level. However a novgorodian monument approaches it surprisingly close though being kept away from it for almost 150 years.

Another novgorodian ensemble that relates to this trend is church of Archangel Michael of the Skovorodka monastery.

Church of Archangel Michael of the Skovorodka monastery

The church has been constructed in 1355 by order of archbishop Moisej, painting date is unknown. Researchers tend to date it late XIV — early XV centuries.

Unfortunately, in this case we can't describe the color scheme of this painting as today only black-and-white photos of it are available to us (the church was destroyed during the Second World War). A unique source about the color of frescos are the descriptions made by restorers in the pre-war time.

Here is how U. A. Olsufiev describes the colors of Skovorodka painting: „the texture of frescos is of the following sequence: dark-brown base, partly... covered by green pistachio color, then a dark color of blush, dark red shades... on a body-colored tone”⁹. The scholar here also asserts that colors of these frescos were similar to those of the images of Nativity church on the Red field.

In Skovorodka ensemble it is also possible to define different manners. There is a number of images of amazing beauty which can be compared to the best Byzantine monuments. Again the most expressive images are written in the top zone of a temple — these are images of prophets and forefathers in the cupola, drum and on the arches. Characters here are presented either en face or in a three-quarter turn. They are united by a certain static character of poses — unlike in the Nativity temple, for example, where saints are often shown in vigorous movements and poses. Many figures here are dressed in magnificent draperies of clothes, however some characters appear more slender and tall, than the personages of the Red field (prophet Daniel, king David).

Nevertheless some of them resemble the Nativity images — for example a Skovorodka image of prophet Isaiah and Nativity „portrait” of prophet Elijah. They are written so similarly that the impression of copying is made. Though the image of Isaiah is written more picturesquely, with use of dense dabs that mold forms voluminously and plastically, while the image of Elijah is made more linear and flat. Probably, it can specify that the Skovorodka image was written earlier, and the Nativity one was created under its influence.

What unites the images from Skovorodka with those of the Red field church in Novgorod is their orientation to the classical Byzantine ensembles of the Palaeologan era.

⁹ Краткий отчёт об экспедиции ГЦРМ в Новгород в июне-июле 1930 г. (подписано: А. И. Анисимов). — Архив ГТГ, оп. 67, д. 341, лл. 23–24. (Kratkij otchet ob ekspedicii GCRM v Novgorod v iune-iule 1930 g. (Podpisano: A. I. Anisimov). — Arhiv GTG, op. 67, d. 341, ll. 23–24).

For example, many frescoes from Skovorodka have a lot in common with works of Manuel Panselinos in Protaton church on Mount Athos (1310). Saints from Skovorodka painting have almost the same facial features as those of saints from Protaton cathedral — we can compare a portrait of King David from Skovorodka with st. John of the Ladder of st. Nicolas from Protaton. These two monuments stand apart from each other for about a century, and we can see that the master of Skovorodka uses a more picturesque technique, while the style of Panselinos is quite more graphical. Moreover the images from Skovorodka look more contemplative than the strict and serious saints from Protaton.

Treatment of the corporal here is characterized by the soft molding of forms and melting of colors. Sometimes the white strokes underline cheekbones and eyebrows, but they play a supporting role in construction of an image. Most Skovorodka images are specifically beautiful and handsome, as artist underlines their big expressive eyes of the almond-shaped form, thin noses, small mouths of the same characteristic form (as in Nativity images — almost like a „bow”). It pulls this ensemble together with some monuments of the Balkans, namely — frescos of church of St. Nikolas in Ohrid (appr. 1330–1340) and churches of Mother of God Peribleptos in Ohrid (appr. 1400).

Let's compare images of the saints from St. Nikolas church in Ohrid (илл. 17) and young prophets from the Novgorod church — Zachariah and Obadiah. Similarity lies mainly in treatment of facial and corporal features. In both monuments we see identical forms of faces with long and very thin noses which do not have neither small humps nor thickening on the end, with absolutely small wings. Large almond-shaped eyes, thin eyebrows are also similar (“the surprised” bend is very similar with Ohrid church saints and novgorodian Obadiah), as well as the mouth forms — tiny, with triangles in an upper lip. Ohrid images are distinguished by a characteristic and a little „decorative” blush form constructed by a round stain, put under a cheekbone. For the Novgorod images more „anatomic” variant of blush, made with a smooth shade, is characteristic. However the blush of prophet Zachariah is very similar to Ohrid variant. The images from these two churches are also pulled together by tiny palms of the saints which appear disproportionate for their large figures.

Some images here may resemble the characters of Sopochani and Milesevo (and partly — Nativity church in Novgorod). So, the silhouette and treatment of a face of Lazarus remind an image of the Mother of God from Milesevo, and the image of Christ from the scene „Entry to Jerusalem” — the one from „Assumption” in Sopocani (by a s-shaped bend of figure of Christ and partly treatment of the body).

Being quite similar to the frescoes of Nativity church in Novgorod, Skovorodka ensemble is characterized by a tendency to idealism and estheticism. It makes it close to the art of Moravian school in Serbia — especially to frescoes of Kalenic (appr.1413) and Resava (before 1418) with their refined and exquisite style. Painting of Skovorodka should have been made earlier than these ensembles, but they all relate to another period of style that goes from the classical forms to more stylization.

At the same time there are some images in Skovorodka temple that recall art of another type — namely, the monuments of the „expressive” trend of Balkan art in late XIV cent. The emotional portraits of prophet Obadiah and John the Baptist with their thoughtful looks are similar to the images from Markov monastery (1370–1380-s), church of Mother of God in Mateic (1356), archangels Michael and Gabriel church in Lesново (1348), Saviour church in Decani (1335–1350). This group of monuments is characterized by a quite severe and rough style, different from the grecophilic trend.

We can assume that the ensemble that frescoes of Skovorodka church was made by painters from different artistic circles, even cities. They represent different traditions that come from Moravian Serbia, on one side, and from „expressional” current of Macedonia, on the other.

Annunciation church on Gorodishe

The church is constructed by archbishop Vasily in 1343, painting time isn't known, presumably — the end of XIV century.

The fresco ensemble of the Annunciation is very difficult to describe because of its extremely poor condition: it was destroyed during the Second World War and has not been reconstructed yet. We have only one photo from this temple with one composition represented, but also with big losses. It is a composition „Man of Sorrows” where Christ is depicted in the tomb and Mother of God supporting His figure. Evangelist John (on the right side) is praising them and at the left there is en face image of prelate Rodion. This image has remained better than others, and it shows features of similarity to a number of images from Nativity church on the Red field. For example, the portrait of prelate Simeon of Jerusalem in a medallion on the arch. Images are similar, first of all, in the posing and gesture of the saints. There is also a number of similarities of stylistic character — both saints have long and narrow shapes of the face, a long thin nose, almond-shaped eyes and eye-sockets of the triangular or oval form. Likewise is the treatment of volumes — artists used melting colors and finished the image with several white brushstrokes. The image of prelate Eleuterus of *Illyria* is written in a similar way though it is a little more picturesque. For the Annunciation frescoes some degree of exaggeration is characteristic in general. It is seen in the image of evangelist John — with his large and pointed nose, big eyes and very long face form. Probably, the general style was taken from another ensembles contemporary to this one, but the artists slightly changed it towards simplification. It is possible to make a conclusion on monument dating: probably, it has been created after the Nativity church. Stylistically this ensemble is similar to those relating to the „expressive” trend in art of Macedonia — Markov monastery, Decani, Lesnovo, Mateic.

Transfiguration church on Kovalevo

The temple on Kovalevo was constructed in 1345, painted in 1380, which is said in the inscription over the western portal.

The church stands apart from the other ensembles of this group. While the previous three monuments were united by a number of features of similarity the Kovalevo painting has less things in common with them. However a certain general Balkan prototype can unite them, but we will speak about it a bit later.

Kovalevo frescoes are distinguished by polychromy, use of bright paints and various tones which are often juxtaposed in contrast combinations. The majority of images are written on the basis of green or yellow-ochre paint (i.e. the unknown saint), in other cases the basis is red color (i.e. st. Antony).

In comparison with the previous temples, figures from the Kovalevo are less massive — in most cases they are written quite proportionally, without any exaggeration. Usually the separate figures of saints here are represented more flatly and static, while the characters involved in subject scenes are given in various foreshortenings and written in more volume.

For the majority of images a very picturesque technique is characteristic, artists used wide color planes and juicy dense dabs, finish an image imposing several white strokes which build the form. (i.e. the unknown martyr, archdeacon Stefan). The artist used here thick lines with which he expressively depicts features. Often these lines turn to wide color stains, merging with each other, creating absolutely picturesque effect. Facial features thus become large and rude — and saints have a massive mouth and nose, large eyes, dense eyebrows.

However a number of images are characterized by a more graphic manner — for example, an image of Christ in the tomb. It is distinguished by use of thin, long dabs of a paint of different colors. Features are written accurately, not widely, as in many images of Kovalevo. The same manner can be seen in the image of st. Antonius, st. Varvara.

Probably, two masters had worked here (or two persons were leading the group) with different techniques and of different education.

Frescoes of Kovalevo, in our opinion, have a number of common features with some images of Thessaloniki of XIV century. For example, the best images from Kovalevo reveal similarity with frescos of church of Saint Apostles (appr. 1330). We can compare the image of st. Antonius from Kovalevo to a fragment from a composition „the Tree of Jesse” from church of Saint Apostles. Despite of the fact that these ensembles are separated by over than 50 years, there is an impression of acquaintance of Kovalevo master with the art of Saint Apostles in Thessaloniki. Figure statement, pose, even a sight — above and more to the right of the spectator — are similar, as well as the features of the faces — the form of eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth, beard, and a manner of their writing — large juicy dabs, but put accurately and graphically. The Kovalevo image, however, looks more complete (it is a separate figure of large size while the image from Thessaloniki is a part of big composition). However it, apparently, develops all those artistic methods which were used by the Greek master.

One more example from the earlier time that can be compared to the image of st. Antonius is a fresco of Manuel Panselinos from Protaton — namely, the image of a stylite. It is similar to the image from Kovalevo with the facial traits — oval of the face, form of a nose, eyes, and also with the pose. The stylistic features are similar as well — both masters use wide graphical dashes of paint to build the form, they underline the massiveness and materiality of the body and cloths.

The image of Christ in tomb in Kovalevo church can also be compared to the image of preaching Christ in the churches of Saint Apostles in Thessaloniki. The manner of treating the hair, of depicting the facial features with thin long dabs of red, yellow and green colors and several white strokes are similar in two ensembles. The forms of noses are still different and proportions differ as well (in novgorodian fresco the face of Christ is more oval and long) — it might mean that the novgorodian artist could copy a manner of the Greek master, but also used a set of other iconographical samples.

One more image from Kovalevo church — one of the unknown saint — has similarity with the images of aged men in Saint Apostles church. They are united by the form of the face, with round cheek, large eyes (which are a little „bulging”), and also the characteristic form of nose — quite thick, with massive wings and a large tip. In Novgorod we hardly ever see such noses in any other fresco, however it is very often used in paintings of Thessaloniki. But again we deal with a partly used method: some iconographical features seem to be copied, but in novgorodian ensemble the whole manner appears to be more picturesque.

S. Dmitrieva also compares frescoes of Kovalevo to painting of Savior church in Thessaloniki¹⁰ (appr. 1350, it is very similar in treatment of volumes and use of color, light

¹⁰ Дмитриева С. О. Ук. Соч. с. 196–198. Dmitrieva S. Op. Cit. P. 196–198.

and shade), and to frescoes of Pantocrator catholicon on Mount Athos (1370-s, the building of facial features with separate lines of color is very alike). In whole, the best images from Kovalevo seem to be very similar to work of Thessaloniki artistic workshop. S. Dmitrieva also sees the art of Ioannis Zografos school (namely, st. Andreas on Treska frescoes) and paintings of the Old Cathedral in Edessa (before 1389) similar to Kovalevo ensemble. Several portraits of saints here appear to be similar to the images from Ravanica in Moravian Serbia and Presentation church in Sklavenochori on Crete — that is to say, from those monuments that were made by the metropolitan masters or under their influence. Thus, the frescoes of Kovalevo appear to be interfered to the tradition of the best Byzantine artistic workshops of XIV cent. Painters that executed them must undoubtedly have been acquainted to the monuments of Thessaloniki and Mount Athos of that time.

Now, after we have described our monuments and have compared them to possible analogs on the Balkans, we will consider those fresco ensembles that are often mentioned by researchers as possible prototypes. These are the ensembles of church of Ascension in Ravanica (appr. 1387), churches of Presentation of Virgin to the Temple in Nova Pavlica (before 1389), Presentation of Virgin to the Temple in Kalenic (appr. 1413) and Trinity church in the monastery of Manasija (or Resava, before 1418).

Ravanica

Traditionally the researchers draw a parallel between Novgorod frescoes and images of Ravanica — for example, in images of saint warriors written in full tall and the saint martyrs represented in medallions. Images of soldiers are in many aspects similar to some images of the young saints of the Novgorod temples — especially, of Skovorodka and Kovalyovo. They are united by the same refinement of images, grace of figures, slightly excessive for soldiers, and also an abundance of ornaments on their armor. Some of them have a massive figure and tiny feet and palms, thin hands and feet, small heads. However the images from Ravanica differ in the treatment of the facial forms: they are written in a very picturesque melting of tones in which it is impossible to make out any strokes, practically without use of line that is uncharacteristic for Skovorodka and Kovalevo images. It creates a completely illusionistic effect, which is not a deliberately picturesque (or, in other cases — deliberately graphical) manner of the Novgorod artists. Such treatment — as we see in this Serbian church — seem to be of the latter epoch and it is an evolutionary step that appeared after the one that is represented by novgorodian churches. The iconography of images also differs. Ravanica „portraits” do not have neither the underlined beauty of Skovorodka saints, nor bright expressiveness of Kovalevo images. It is also impossible to compare them to Nativity frescos where the first master, the carrier of a picturesque manner, gives to the characters an almost antique shape, underlining volume of figures and accenting massiveness of their figures.

Nova Pavlica

In this church the volume treatment of face, neck and hands of the figures seems almost identically to the one in church of Nativity and in general in monuments of Palaeologan style. However a radical difference lies in writing of facial features — they are represented very graphically which contrasts with the general picturesque nature of these images. Moreover, facial features are not quite proportional — big eyes are placed too close to each other, the figures are written absolutely flatly, the bodies seem to have no volume and weight which is difficult to find in Novgorod painting of this time. The image that is similar iconographically to Skovorodka fresco is John the Baptist's portrait.

Kalenic

The frescoes of Kalenic, perhaps, are the most similar to Novgorod frescos (especially Nativity church) in the color scheme. Here gentle combinations of „fruit” colors — orange, light green, lilac and pink are used. The Kalenic saints are distinguished by round faces, but the forms and volumes of them aren't expressed. Features of face and body are all very small, the eyes are half opened, personages look pretty and quiet. Figures are written flatly, they almost don't reveal bodies underneath the fabric of clothes, though silhouettes are written smoothly and plastically. Such „calm” art will appear in Russia in much latter period — in XVI century, while among frescos of the late XIV century, still full of Palaeologan the energy and inspired by its antique sources, the ensemble of church of Michael Archangel on Skovorodka might be close to the art of Kalenic, though it differs a lot stylistically and ichnographically.

Resava

In this monument the treatment of the facial is made in a similar way to Novgorod frescoes — on the basis of smooth transitions from dark to light ochre, forming volume. However faces are more thin, more long. Also features of faces become smaller — mouth, nose and eyes are absolutely tiny. Eyes of the saints are half opened, that creates the contemplate expression which is distinct from intense thoughtful images of the saints in churches of Novgorod. Figures of saints are large and massive, however there the same contradiction observed in Skovorodka church — in these large figures head, palms and feet appear to be of small size, quite disproportionate. The treatment of clothes is also inconsistent — on the one hand, silhouettes are written with roundish lines, but folds of clothes are rigid, they form expressional geometrical pattern.

So, the analysis of stylistics of Novgorod monuments allows assuming that the range of sources of influence was very wide. It seems possible that the masters who painted these churches were acquainted to the monuments of Byzantine empire of XIV and even XIII centuries — and both on territory of the Slavic Balkans, and in the Northern Greece. Probably, we see here not the „Serbian” influence, revealed in the presence of the Serbian masters, but rather a very extensive erudition of the masters, that were dealing with a considerable quantity of samples. Such explanation can be supported by a remark A. P. Grekov that S. S. *Radajčić* and J. Boskovic, watching the fresco fragments from Kovalevo in his workshop, „strongly denied their attribution to the work of Serbian masters though recognized presence of certain 'serbisms' in them”¹¹.

In novgorodian ensembles concerned there are some specific compositions which are not very usual for Russian art of that time and that can tell us something about the attribution of frescoes.

For example, the composition „Christ in the Tomb” (in frescos of Volotovo, Kovalevo and Gorodishe churches) is also present in fresco painting of church of Markov monastery (1379–1381), Peter and Paul church in Veliko Tyrnovo¹² (around 1392; both in XIV century on territory of Serbia), and also can be seen in a number of monuments of Moravian Serbia: in church in Nova Pavlica, in Rudenca and Kalenic (all — late XIV — early XV вв)¹³.

¹¹ Греков А. П. Ук. Соч. с. 17. (Grekov A. P. Op.cit. p. 17).

¹² Немыкина Е. А. О проблеме южнославянских влияний на монументальную живопись Новгорода XIV в. / Актуальные проблемы теории и истории искусства. [Сб. статей]. Вып. 1. СПб.: Профессия, 2011. С. 112–113. (Nemikina E. A. O problem ugnoslavanskih vlianj na monumentalnuju zhivopis Novgoroda XIV v. / Aktualnie problema teorii i istorii iskusstva. Sbornik statej. Vip. 1. SPb.: Professia, 2011. P. 112–113).

¹³ Джурич В. Византийские фрески: средневековая Сербия, Далмация, славянская Македония. Пер. с сербского. М.: Индрик, 2000. С. 215. (Djuric V. Vizantijskie freski: srednevekovaja Serbia, Dalmazia, slavanskaja Makedonia. Perevod s serbskogo. M.: Indrik, 2000. P. 215).

Scene of delivery to Pachomius of the monastic charter (Nativity church on the Red field,) appears in Nagoricino (work of Michael Astrapas and Eytichios from Thessaloniki, middle of XIII century) and in Veliko Tyrnovo as well.

Composition „Christ the Great Archbishop” from Kovalevo appears for the first time in Assumption church in Treksovac in Serbia (1340) and st. Athanasius church in Kastoria (1383–1385). The nearest analogies are scenes of „the Heavenly court” or reduced Deisis that are widespread on the Balkans: for example, in the church in Zaum (in XIV century on territory of Serbia, now — in Bulgaria), Markov monastery and St. Athanasius church in Kastoria (Northern Greece).

Figure of the tetramorph in the decor of the cupola of Kovalevo temple, to which V.N.Lazarev has found the nearest analogy in frescoes of Ravanica, can also be seen in Snetogorsky monastery in Pskov (1313) and church of Peribleptos in Mistra (1330-s), in a chapel of Transfiguration of the Rylsky monastery (Bulgaria, 1334–35) and churches of archangels Michael and Gabriel in Lesnovo (1347–48). One interesting detail to pay attention on in the cupola frescoes of Lesnovo are images of great forefathers of IV century — the prelates John Chrisostom, Vasily the Great, Gregory Nazianzin and Athanasius the Great presented in pendentifs where they replace figures of Evangelists.

The replacement of images of the evangelists from the pendentifs is seen in the church of Archangel Michael on Skovorodka in Novgorod — there is a floral ornament instead, and images of evangelists are transferred to the walls. A similar example is in the frescoes of church of St. George in Polosko (Macedonia, late 1360-s) — here in pendentifs we see the seraphims, and evangelists are depicted on the arches. Similar case can be observed and in St. Nikolas Orfanos church in Thessaloniki (middle of XIV cent.) where it is caused by the absence of dome¹⁴.

As we see, the research of iconographical structure of frescoes leads us to a very wide range of prototypes which is connected with art of the Balkans. Thus the monuments, noted by similar iconographical features, have been created either earlier or later than novgorodian churches investigated by us. It shows a considerable inclusiveness of Novgorod into the art life on wide territory of the Byzantine provinces on the Balkans.

This review also allows to draw a conclusion about the acquaintance of the artists who executed the frescoes with the local tradition of the earlier monuments — for example, of the middle of the XIV century or contemporary to them (Assumption church on Volotovo field, Theodor Stratilate church on the Stream, Transfiguration Church on Iljina Street, painted by Theophanes the Greek, etc.) At the same time there is an impression that some artists were little acquainted with architectural tradition of Novgorod and had no close contact to those architects who built the temples they painted. For example, in the monuments concerned 4 of 8 windows of the drum were closed after the church was built. Then, the researchers mark an unusual feature in Nativity church on the Red field: in its lunettes there are no complete compositions though traditionally in other churches different scenes were located there. In this church in lunettes we see parts of two different compositions placed on adjacent walls. T.U.Tsarevskaja¹⁵ assumes that it might have been influence of the tradition of the triconche churches, characteristic to the Balkan architecture — in them northern and southern sleeves of a cross ended with semicircular

¹⁴ Marki E. Saint Nikolaos Orphanos. History, topography and architecture. Athens: Acritos Publications, 2003. 235 p.

¹⁵ Царевская Т. Ю. Церковь Рождества Христова на Красном поле близ Новгорода. М.: Северный паломник, 2002. С. 46. (Tsarevskaja T. U. Zerkov Rogdestva Christova na Krasnom pole bliz Novgoroda. M.: Severnij palomnik, 2020. P. 46).

conchs that also had a window in the centre. Usually the painters never located complete compositions in these places but transferred there some separate figures or parts of the scenes written on the walls. The border between the two compositions lied in the centre of a conch, where the window was placed — just as it is made in Nativity church. If it was painted by masters from the Balkans, they could apply the system they got used to, without looking at the difference in architecture of the church.

So, experience of description of Novgorod fresco painting in the second half of XIV century has shown that these four ensembles have very much in common and, probably, have been executed approximately by one group of masters. At least, it is possible to confirm their acquaintance among themselves and acquaintance to art of each other. Unfortunately, there is no possibility to compare them to the monuments of the first half of the century, since they haven't remained till now. It is, first of all, monumental painting of the church of Entry to Jerusalem in Novgorod Kremlin, created in 1338 by „the Greek Isaiah with friends”, as the chronicle tells us¹⁶. A possibility to investigate this monument would allow researchers to draw important conclusions on evolution of Palaeologan art in Novgorod and foreign influences on the local art.

It seems very important that the monuments concerned reveal many common features with the ensembles of Macedonia and Northern Greece — not only contemporary to them, but also created earlier. We cannot say confidently where the artists came from — were they local or foreign, but it is clear that they were working in one direction with the main workshops of Byzantine metropolis and province. Probably, painters from the Balkans have taken part in painting these monuments of Novgorod. Being under Turkish aggression, Greek and Slavic countries of the Balkans were experiencing a period of large artistic activity, many monuments were built and painted then. At the same time artists were looking for work outside the Balkans — and probably in Russia cities as well. In any way, it is evident that masters who created in Novgorod the frescoes concerned were acquainted to the art of these territories, their arsenal contained the most actual current collection of iconographic schemes and old and new stylistic methods. That highest artistic quality of their paintings is amazing. The artists were able to be very close to the Byzantine analogues and patterns and created the images of exceptional beauty.

The similarity to the monuments of Moravian Serbia is also evident, but its importance seems to be revised. It was rather not a direct succession, but an orientation to a common example which was metropolitan Byzantine art. Masters that worked in Novgorod and in Moravian school of Serbia in late XIV century obviously related to the one current in art, but it seems that Serbian art of Moravian school was created later than novgorodian churches concerned and referred to another stage of evolution of style.

¹⁶ Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов. // Полное собрание русских летописей. Том 3. М.-Л.: Издательство Академии Наук СССР, 1950. (Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis starsjego I mladshego izvodov. In: Polnoe sobranie russkih letopisej. Tom 3. M.-L.: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1950.)