

STUDIA hereditatis universitatis

LETNIK 12
ŠTEVILKA 2
2024
VOLUME 12
NUMBER 2
2024



STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS HEREDITATI

Znanstvena revija za raziskave in teorijo kulturne dediščine

Letnik 12, številka 2, 2024 / Volume 12, Number 2, Year 2024

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ISSN 2350-5443 · [https://doi.org/10.26493/2350-5443.12\(2\)](https://doi.org/10.26493/2350-5443.12(2))

Mednarodni indeksi | *Indexing and Abstracting*

Anvur · DOAJ · Erih Plus · ROAD · Scopus

Navodila avtorjem ter izjava o etiki in zlorabah pri objavljanju so dostopni na

Guidelines for Authors and Publishing Ethics and Malpractice Statement are available at

<https://zalozba.upr.si/issn/2350-5443>

Uredništvo | *Editorial Office*

Studia universitatis hereditati

Fakulteta za humanistične študije | *Faculty of Humanities*

Univerza na Primorskem | *University of Primorska*

Titov trg 5, SI-6000 Koper · suh.editor@upr.si

Izdaja | *Published by*

Založba Univerze na Primorskem | *University of Primorska Press*

Titov trg 4, SI-6000 Koper · hippocampus.si

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Izid je finančno podprla Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz sredstev državnega proračuna iz naslova razpisa za sofinanciranje domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.

Revija je brezplačna. Izid revije je finančno podprla Javna agencija za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije s sredstvi državnega proračuna iz naslova razpisa za sofinanciranje izdajanja domačih znanstvenih periodičnih publikacij.

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The second 2024 issue of *Studia Universitatis Hereditati* is dedicated to exploring sensorial experiences related to medieval religious and artistic heritage. This Thematic Issue builds upon the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) annual meeting held in August 2024 in Rome. The session titled Medieval Sensorium: Exploring the Archaeology of the Senses brought together scholars from diverse disciplines to present their latest research. The session was designed to explore the complex interplay of senses within spatial contexts, the depiction of sensory experiences in visual arts, and the sensory encounters that enriched the lives of medieval communities. Central to the discussion was how medieval communities perceived, understood, and utilized their sensory reality. The session included presentations on a broad spectrum of sensory encounters, both indoors and outdoors, spanning sacred and secular spaces. This interdisciplinary dialogue highlighted sensory perception's profound role in shaping medieval cultural practices and landscapes.

This Thematic Issue features five selected papers from the EAA session and one book review, illustrating that the study of senses in medieval archaeology and other humanities disciplines remains a fertile field for research. The

articles in this issue show a variety of perspectives and approaches to the medieval sensorium, depicting the vast research potential and interdisciplinary approaches to the topic. At the same time, they form the basis for future research.

Eva Gjorgjievska's study, 'From Religious Lauda to Medieval Canzone and Sonnet: Poetry of the Senses in 13th- and 14th-Century Italy', examines sensory expressions in four medieval religious and love poems by Italian poets—Jacopone da Todi, San Francesco d'Assisi, Giacomo da Lentini, and Guido Guinizelli. Influenced by the medieval Italian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas, who viewed reason and emotion as complementary, these poets emphasize sensory and emotional messages that bridge divine creation with the experiences of ordinary people. Gjorgjievska highlights the therapeutic dimension of sensory poetics and demonstrates how sensory experiences are activated during reading or liturgical singing.

Jasmina Ćirić's article, 'Sensory Encounters: Decoding the Symbolism of St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten', offers fresh insights into the multi-layered art and architecture of the 14th-century Ljuboten church in present-day North Macedonia. The study demonstrates how a holistic methodology enhances iconograph-

ic and semiotic analyses, offering well-founded arguments while effectively integrating sensorial and art historical perspectives. Ćirić explores how the tactile, auditory, and visual elements of brickwork patterns, layered arches, and intricate sculptures engage viewers' senses and influence cognitive processes.

Bojana Beuk's contribution, 'Analysis of the Sense Perception in the Fresco Painting of the Dečani Monastery', delves into how the 14th-century frescoes of this UNESCO World Heritage Site engage viewers' senses. Beuk analyzes eight scenes from the frescoes, accompanied by relevant biblical quotes, to reveal how they create sensory imagery that bridges the material and spiritual realms. Her study examines the frescoes' ability to immerse viewers through tactile interactions, the strategic use of light, and the auditory imagery of angelic trumpets, conveying profound emotional and spiritual narratives.

The multidisciplinary research team led by Zorana Đorđević presents the study 'Unveiling the Historical Significance of Santa Maria d'Àneu: Can Soundscape Studies Illuminate Its Role within the Medieval Ecclesiastical Structure?' This article integrates archaeology, history, and acoustics to explore the propagation of bell sounds across the Catalan landscape. By combining Geographic Information System (GIS)-based sound maps with visibility analysis, the study demonstrates the significance of medieval soundscapes and the role of bells in long-distance communication. This research underscores the value of collaboration between the humanities and natural sciences.

Jean-Michel Sourd's article, 'Perceptions of a "Journey to the Past" in Some Viatical Stories at Mount Athos', examines the sensory experiences described in travel accounts by French visitors to Mount Athos from the 19th to early 21st centuries. Sourd characterizes Mount Athos as "a living relic of the Byzantine peninsula" due to its preservation of medieval Orthodox rituals and way of life. By analyzing visual, auditory, and olfactory impressions, the study high-

lights how travelers' sensory experiences connect the present to the medieval past, making Mount Athos a unique form of living heritage.

Instead of a paper by Mojca Ramšak, who presented at the EAA session, this Special Issue includes a review of her book *Anatomy of Smell*, written by Alenka Janko Spreizer. The review is highly positive and incisive, capturing the book's relevance in addressing the socio-cultural aspects of smell and olfactory heritage. As the reviewer notes, experiencing COVID-19, the sense of smell has gained substantial attention. This book significantly contributes to the study of smell, highlighting its relevance in medieval sensory systems and beyond. The review provides an engaging hook for both academic and general audiences.

This Thematic Issue and the EAA 2024 session were supported by the CULT-AURAL project, *Aural Culture: Decoding the Sacred Soundscapes of Medieval Europe*, funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101064323.

Uvodnik

Druga številka revije *Studia Universitatis Hereditati* iz leta 2024 je posvečena raziskovanju čutnih izkušenj, povezanih s srednjeveško versko in umetniško dediščino. Ta tematska številka temelji na letnem srečanju Evropskega združenja arheologov (European Association of Archaeologists – EAA), ki je potekalo avgusta 2024 v Rimu. Srečanje z naslovom Srednjeveški senzori: raziskovanje arheologije čutov je združilo znanstvenike z različnih področij, ki so predstavili svoje najnovejše raziskave. Namen srečanja je bil raziskati zapleteno prepletanje čutov v prostorskih kontekstih, prikazovanje čutnih izkušenj v likovni umetnosti in čutnih srečanj, ki so obogatila življenje srednjeveških skupnosti. Osrednja tema razprave je bila, kako so srednjeveške skupnosti dojemale, razumele in uporabljale svojo čutno resničnost. Srečanje je obsegalo predstavitev širokega spektra čutnih doživetij, tako na pros-

tem kot v zaprtih prostorih, ki so zajemala sakralne in sekularne prostore. Interdisciplinarni dialog srečanja je poudaril pomembno vlogo čutnega zaznavanja pri oblikovanju srednjeveških kulturnih praks in pokrajin.

Pričujoča tematska številka vsebuje pet izbranih prispevkov s konference EAA in eno knjižno recenzijo, ki ponazarjajo, da preučevanje čutov v srednjeveški arheologiji in drugih humanističnih disciplinah ostaja plodno raziskovalno polje. Članki v tej številki predstavljajo različne perspektive in pristope k srednjeveškemu senzorijski ter prikazujejo velik raziskovalni potencial in interdisciplinarne pristope k tej temi. Hkrati so tudi podlaga za prihodnje raziskave.

Raziskava Eve Gjorgijevske, »Od verske hvalnice do srednjeveške kancone in soneta: poezija čutov v Italiji 13. in 14. stoletja«, obravnava čutne izraze v štirih srednjeveških verskih in ljubezenskih pesmih italijanskih pesnikov – Jakopona da Todija, San Francesca d'Assisija, Giacoma da Lentinija in Guida Guinizellija. Pod vplivom srednjeveškega italijanskega filozofa svetega Tomaža Akvinskega, ki je razum in čustva obravnaval kot komplementarne, ti pesniki poudarjajo čutna in čustvena sporočila, ki povezujejo Božje stvarjenje z izkušnjami običajnih ljudi. Gjorgijevska poudarja terapevtsko razsežnost čutne poetike in pokaže, kako se čutna doživetja sprožajo med branjem ali liturgičnim petjem.

Članek Jasmine Ćirić z naslovom »Senzorična srečanja: dekodiranje simbolike cerkve svetega Nikolaja v Ljubotenu« ponuja svež vpogled v večplastno umetnost in arhitekturo cerkve v Ljubotenu iz 14. stoletja v današnji Severni Makedoniji. Raziskava ponazarja, kako celostna metodologija izboljšuje ikonografske in semiotične analize ter ponuja dobro utemeljene argumente, hkrati pa učinkovito povezuje čutne in umetnostnozgodovinske perspektive. Jasmina Ćirić raziskuje, kako otipni, slušni in vidni elementi opečnih vzorcev, večplastnih obokov in zapletenih kipov vključujejo čute gledalcev ter vplivajo na kognitivne procese.

Prispevek Bojane Beuk, »Analiza čutnega zaznavanja na freskah v samostanu Dečani«, raz-

iskuje, kako freske iz 14. stoletja na tem Unescovem območju svetovne dediščine vključujejo čutila gledalcev. Avtorica analizira osem prizorov s fresk, ki jih spremljajo ustrezni svetopisemski citati, da bi razkrila, kako ustvarjajo čutne podobe, ki povezujejo snovno in duhovno sfero. Preučuje sposobnost fresk, da gledalce pritegnejo z otipnimi interakcijami, s strateško uporabo svetlobe in z zvočnimi podobami angelskih trobent, s čimer posredujejo globoke čustvene in duhovne pripovedi.

Multidisciplinarna raziskovalna skupina pod vodstvom Zorane Đorđević predstavlja raziskavo »Razkrivanje zgodovinskega pomena cerkve Santa Maria d'Àneu: ali lahko raziskave zvočne krajine osvetlijo njeno vlogo v srednjeveški cerkveni strukturi?« Ta prispevek vključuje arheologijo, zgodovino in akustiko, da bi raziskal širjenje zvokov zvonov po katalonski pokrajini. S pomočjo združevanja zvočnih zemljevidov, ki temeljijo na geografskem informacijskem sistemu (GIS), prispevek z analizo vidljivosti prikazuje pomen srednjeveških zvočnih pokrajin in vlogo zvonov v komunikaciji na dolge razdalje. Ta raziskava poudarja pomen sodelovanja med humanističnimi in naravoslovnimi vedami.

Članek Jean-Michela Sourda z naslovom »Percepcije 'potovanja v preteklost' v nekatereh potopisih o gori Atos« preučuje čutna doživetja, opisana v potopisih francoskih obiskovalcev gore Atos od 19. do začetka 21. stoletja. Sourd goro Atos označi kot »živeči ostanek bizantinskega polotoka«, in sicer zaradi ohranjanja srednjeveških pravoslavnih obredov in načina življenja. Z analizo vidnih, slušnih in vonjalnih vtisov raziskava poudarja, kako čutne izkušnje popotnikov povezujejo sedanost s srednjeveško preteklostjo, zaradi česar je gora Atos edinstvena oblika žive dediščine.

Namesto prispevka Mojce Ramšak, ki ga je predstavila na srečanju EAA, v tej posebni številki objavljamo recenzijo njene knjige *Anatomija vonja*, ki jo je prispevala Alenka Janko Spreizer. Recenzija je zelo pozitivna in pronicljiva, saj je v njej zajeta pomembnost knjige pri obravna-

vi družbeno-kulturnih vidikov vonja in olfaktorne dediščine. Kot ugotavlja recenzentka, je v času covida-19 čut za vonj pridobil precejšnjo pozornost. Ta knjiga pomembno prispeva k preučevanju vonja in poudarja njegov pomen v srednjeveških čutilnih sistemih ter širše. Recenzija predstavlja zanimivo popotnico tako za akademsko kot splošno javnost.

To tematsko številko in posvet EAA 2024 je podprl projekt CULT-AURAL, Aural Culture (Zvočna kultura): Dekodiranje svetih zvočnih pokrajin srednjeveške Evrope, ki ga financira program Evropske unije Obzorje Evropa v okviru sporazuma o štipendiji Marie Skłodowska-Curie št. 101064323.

From Religious Lauda to Medieval Canzone and Sonnet:
Poetry of the Senses in 13th and 14th Century Italy
Od verskih hvalnic do srednjeveške kancone in soneta:
poezija čutov v italiji 13. in 14. stoletja

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the sensory expression impregnated in the medieval religious poetry from the 13th and 14th centuries written by Italian poets originally from the regions of Umbria, Sicily, and Emilia-Romagna: Jacopone da Todì, San Francesco d'Assisi, Giacomo da Lentini and Guido Guinizelli. Although religious representation is often related to the rationally expressed scholastic message, we can talk about the almost therapeutic dimension of the poem when spirituality is expressed through sensory poetics. Poetry affects not only through the open religious message it conveys but also through the activation of all sensory impressions at the moment of reading or liturgical singing, as empathy between the reader and the poet. Even religious poetry is not immune to these peculiarities, which we will prove in this article. Four poems will be taken as examples: Canticum of the Creatures ('Laudes Creaturarum') by San Francesco d'Assisi, The Lament of the Madonna ('Il pianto della Madonna') by Jacopone da Todì, Love Is a Desire that Comes from the Heart ('Amor è uno desio che ven da core') by Giacomo da Lentini, and Truly I Wish to Praise My Lady... ('Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare') by Guido Guinizelli.

Keywords: lauda, sonnet, canzone, senses, Middle Ages

Izvleček

Namen tega prispevka je predstaviti čutni izraz, impregniran v srednjeveški verski poeziji iz 13. in 14. stoletja, ki so jo napisali italijanski pesniki iz regij Umbrija, Sicilija in Emilija - Romanja: Jacopone da Todì, San Francesco d'Assisi, Giacomo da Lentini in Guido Guinizelli. Čeprav je religiozna predstava največkrat postavljena v razmerje z racionalno izraženim sholastičnim sporočilom, pa lahko govorimo o skoraj terapevtski razsežnosti pesmi, ko je duhovnost izražena s čutno poetiko. Poezija ne vpliva le z odprtim verskim sporočilom, ki ga posreduje, temveč tudi z aktivacijo vseh čutnih vtisov v trenutku branja ali liturgičnega petja kot empatije med bralcem in pesnikom. Tudi verska poezija ni imuna na te posebnosti in to bomo dokazali v tem članku. Za primer bomo vzeli štiri pesmi: Pesem stvarstev (»Laudes Creaturarum«) Frančiška Asiškega, Žalostinke Madone (»Il pianto della Madonna«) Jacopona da Todija, Ljubezen je želja, ki prihaja iz srca (»Amor è uno desio che ven da core«) Giacoma da Lentinija in Resnično želim hvaliti svojo gospo (»Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare«) Guida Guinizellija.

Ključne besede: hvalnice, sonet, kancone, čutila, srednji vek

Introduction: Italian Poetry in the Context of the Late Middle Ages

This paper traces the development stages of poetry in Italy starting from the 13th century through the prism of its gradu-

al distancing from the classical religious form of lyrical expression. The selection focuses on those poets who were directly influenced by the medieval Italian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1920) because, in his philosophy, reason and emotion become complementary things. Thus,

in poetry, a space can be given for sensory poetics. The Middle Ages, which includes the epoch of feudalism, is usually recognized as a dark or gloomy period in which all creations and actions are influenced by religion. The Middle Ages conflicted with ancient, classical values. The figure of the religious man replaces the place of the ideal of heroism from Antiquity. Mystical preoccupations replace the antique glorification of the light of reason. Philosophy, as well as the overall understanding of life, is under the patronage of the Church. Literature is the only domain of expression and creation in which the reconciliation of these opposites in the 13th century could occur.

But when we talk about medieval Italian literature, we mean the literature that developed in the Italian vernacular rather than the whole Italian creation in the Middle Ages, historically including the period from the 6th to the 14th century.¹ In medieval Italy's linguistic and social disunity, vernacular literature had a decisive function in forming a unique, standardized, and aestheticized expression that affirmed state and cultural continuity. Through poetry, it is possible to follow how the vernacular gradually matures into written creation, thus opening the question of a unifying linguistic phenomenon that will condition the consciousness of national unity, given the fact that Italian society until the 19th century existed through independent cities, dominions, communes, and lordships. From the religious poetry of San Francesco d'Assisi to the early love poetry of Dante Alighieri, poetry is refined stylistically. With it, the vernacular becomes amenable to literary expression. The sensory and emotional message that these authors

bring to poetry keeps the link with religious creation and, at the same time, brings it closer to the common man. On the other hand, it contributes to the development of formally developed poetry. The transition from Latin to the vernacular opens a new worldview through which faith gets closer to everyday life and the experiences shared among ordinary people.

The Literary Forms of *Lauda*, *Sonnet*, *Canzone* and *Canzonette*

Starting from the 11th century, the Church gradually began to lose its dominance, and at the same time, the feudal regime weakened. Namely, until then, the Church preaches in accordance with the state dogmas, and through art, the Christian religion leaves the institutions to connect with the common man and express a more sincere faith. The vernacular (volgare) is also becoming more prevalent in liturgies at the expense of Latin. On the social level, the commune was created as an independent social government in medieval cities. Religiosity existed even before the establishment of communes as self-governing cities, but with the rise of civic life, it takes on a completely different dimension.

Religious consciousness is most potent in Italy's central region, the Umbria, which was therefore called *mystical Umbria*. There, the most famous literature with religious content was developed, whose representative, San Francesco d'Assisi, expressed the harmonization of opposing things in poetry following medieval philosophy. In his poetry, the most visible trace is the attempt of St. Thomas Aquinas to reconcile the rationalist teaching of Aristotle with the religious teaching of the Church (Fortini 1981, 154).

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, also a new poetic form called *Lauda* (lat. *Laus* - praise) appeared in Italy, primarily as a religious folk song derived from liturgical songs, to later be interpolated in religious dramas from where it would develop its form in dialogue, transforming itself into a *dramatic Lauda*. The *Lauda* was dedicated to the themes from the Gospel, intended to express praises to the Mother

¹ Namely, until the 13th century, there was literature created on Italian soil, but which was written exclusively in Latin. In the Middle Ages, the vernacular and Latin languages were used in parallel, but they had a clearly demarcated domain of use. Latin is the language used by the educated, who know how to read documents and literature written in this language, while the vernacular is used in everyday communication and is understandable by all strata of the people. For its part, the Latin language in the Middle Ages is divided into literary and spoken. Today's Italian language developed from the spoken Latin language, *Volgare*.

of God, Jesus, and other saints while thematizing their sufferings and exploits. The laudas were preserved in collections called *laudari*, in which the remains of a musical text were also found, suggesting that they were accompanied by music. Laudas were initially recited as a collective prayer to acquire a folk tone later and come closer to ballads. Like the ballad, the dramatic *Lauda* contains elements of epic, lyric, and drama (Živković 2001, 415).

At the same time, the sonnet, the canzone, and the canzonette were created in Italy. The sonnet, with its strict structure of four stanzas (two tercets and two quatrains), was mainly used for love poetry as an extension of the religious feeling towards the amourosity. On the other hand, the canzonette occurs in a narrative and dialogic form, with short verses in hexameter or octave. If the canzone existed to express loftier themes and was primarily addressed to aristocracy, the canzonette was used for less noble, mundane themes (Živković 2001, 331).

In this article, we will present the religious and love poetry from this period, emphasizing the expression of all the senses in religious poetry and the predominance of visuality in love poetry, mainly as a result of the platonic love of the poet. *Canticum of the Creatures* by San Francesco d'Assisi is considered the oldest *Lauda* from religious poetry. Still, a unique artistic and dramatic work is the *Lament of the Madonna* or the *Lady from Paradise* by Jacopone da Todi. These two laudas will be the subject of analysis in the following article.

From the love poetry will be analysed one sonnet and one canzone: *Love Is a Desire...* by Giacomo da Lentini and *Truly I Wish to Praise My Lady...* by Guido Guinizelli.

Religious poetry in 13th-century Italy

The presence of religion in all domains of life in the Middle Ages conditions the existence of religious art. It expresses people's moral and religious dilemmas and preoccupations in that period. In the first religious poetry in the Italian language, during the early Middle Ages, the ar-

tistic goal was subordinated to the religious one, but this did not exclude the literary value of those works. Even more so that this poetry does not aim to confirm church dogmas but to reflect on some general human values, such as humanism, solidarity, and moral correctness; this is an integral part of Christian teaching.

However, there is a significant difference between the sensibility and understanding of religion reflected in the works of the two poets that will be considered here. Suppose Francesco d'Assisi wrote his poems in *Volgare* to reach more people. In that case, Jacopone's poems are expressed in a more elevated style and intended for a more educated audience. Jacopone sings about sin, death, and vice, not to present them as a necessary stage before bowing to God but to emphasize salvation as distancing from life. The only sign of religiosity for him is not joy but suffering. He denies theological theories; for him, even learned theology should be replaced by cruel renunciation in the name of faith. He agrees to misery, suffering, humiliation, and even ridicule as a sign of renunciation of human vanity.

Jacopone does not praise human bliss but only suffering, remorse, pain, and death. He aspires to negate the body, at the expense of which the soul should be elevated. However, the negation of the body does not mean the rejection of sensory experiences. In the poem 'O Signor, per cortesia', which is a kind of negative prayer he says: 'Tanto sia 'l fetor fetente che non sia null' om vivente che non fuga da me dolente' (Underhill 1919, 73). Although negative, the sense of smell is interpolated in the poem. A dark, mournful atmosphere and pessimism prevail in it. None of the pleasures of the soul should be sought on earth. Long but broken sentences are found in the songs, and shouts and exclamations are frequent. The last songs of his creation will contain exclusively a mystical dimension that will imply a direct fusion with God. Contrary to the harmony that Francesco seeks, Jacopone's songs are dominated by ignorance of measure, and excess

2 'Let the stench be so stinking that there is no living man who does not flee from me in pain'.

in suffering is the only right path. For him, life on earth is inseparable from the inauthenticity of existence, human sinfulness, hypocrisy, and greed.

Unlike Francesco, who celebrates all the phenomena of the earth as creations of God and speaks of man's unification with everything that surrounds him, Jacopone's work is marked by strict opposition between the divine and the mundane, life and death, pleasure and suffering.

Canticle of the Creatures – San Francesco d'Assisi

San Francesco of Assisi wrote in *Volgare Canticle of the Creatures*, which is thought to be based on the Song of Songs from the *Bible* and some similar works of Latin prose. The Canticle is *Lauda*, or a kind of prayer to God without strict metrics, which symbolically contains 33 verses, symbolizing the age of Jesus at the time of his death or a doubled sign of the Holy Trinity. The author addresses God's creations found in this world: the Sun, the Moon, and the stars, and the four elements: air, water, fire, and earth; since all things come from God, goodness, holiness, and justice are incarnated in them.

The author begins the poem using hyperbolic expressions: 'Most High, all-powerful... 'To You alone, Most High, do they belong' ('the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing') and by juxtaposing the greatness of God with the smallness of man: 'and no man is worthy to mention Your name' (Rebay 1971, 7–12).

In the manner of a *Lauda*, each verse begins anaphorically with the phrase *Praised be You*, which creates a mantric and rhythmic repetition throughout the poem. The poet celebrates the essential elements of the world's creation according to old philosophies: the sun, the water, the wind, the fire, and the earth. Each of those elements is described through a numbering of epithets:

The Sun is 'beautiful and radiant in all his splendour.'

The Moon, stars, and sky are 'clear and precious and beautiful.'

The Water is 'very useful and humble and precious and chaste.'

The wind is 'beautiful and playful and robust and strong.'

[Rebay 1971, 7–12]

The poet uses suggestive descriptions that invite the reader or the believer to feel what is stated in the verse. Through the positive images that the poet hints at, an optimistic and pantheistic representation of the relationship between the self and the world is created.

It is a pantheism in which the invisible is part of the visible world, which is its spirituality. Since the spirit is one, its recognition will lead to the fraternization of men. He appeals for the harmonious unification of man with the rest of the world's creatures because God's spirit flows through everyone. Hence, both pain and death should be understood as part of human existence. Different moods permeate the poem: in the first verses, a joyful mood of love and respect for the harmony in nature prevails, and the accidents and diseases that are an integral part of human life are listed further; in the end, the poet talks about suffering and death and the necessity of accepting them, i.e. about the transience of life. The poem ends with the word 'humility'; if the pain is humbly endured, it becomes a means of liberation from sin and a condition for union with God.

The poem differs from other medieval works because it celebrates the divine and the human, the mystical and the rational. The language is deliberately vernacular to appeal more easily to the poor and humble. The calm face of death is sung in parallel with the brightness of daylight so that even when the song opens these themes, it preserves the optimistic belief in a more authentic, higher world.

The Lament of the Madonna – Jacopone da Todi

This most significant and deeply humane dramatic *Lauda* of Jacopone da Todi, *The Lament of the Madonna* (Underhill 1919, 220), thematiz-

es the lamentation of Christ by his mother at the moment of the crucifixion, with the mother's feeling in the foreground, rather than the suffering experienced by the son. The Mother of God, just like Christ, is not depicted with holiness and unattainability but represents every mother who mourns for her child, thus calling for the universality of human existence. The specificity of the form of the *Lauda* allows it to contain both a narrative and dialogic part, apart from its primary poetic structure. The narrative part of the praise follows the Gospel, with the Messenger appearing as the first omniscient narrator, most likely the Apostle John, who communicates to the Virgin the facts about the crucifixion of Jesus in chronological order: his capture, torture, evocation of betrayal, humiliation and transfer to Pilate to be crucified. Jacopone da Todi brings the suffering of the Virgin to the scene in place of the suffering of Jesus. It is considered that the poet wrote in the form of a *Lauda*, which could already be found in the form of frescoes in the chapels of northern and central Italy as early as the 12th century, but also that he leaned towards the specifics of the *Lauda* originating from Perugia which is advocated less for asceticism and mysticism, as for a general and humane representation of suffering (Sapegno 1926).

Lexical peculiarities

In this *lauda*, we can find two different lexical registers: one refers to the lexicon from the colloquial speech or *sermo cotidianus*, and the other to the lexical elements that are Latinisms from the Gospel. The first should emphasize the universality of the mother-son relationship and give a humanistic vision to the poem, while the second register should emphasize its religious content. The frequent repetition of the lexeme 'son,' as well as the address of Jesus to the Mother of God with the vocative 'mother' ('Donna de Paradiso', verses 84, 92 and 104, cited in Sapegno 1926, 78) or, for nuance, the more formal use of 'mia mate' at the moment when Jesus hands his mother over to his friend John for him to be her new son (verse 108), they highlight the intimate and ten-

der relationship between mother and son. In the entire *Lauda*, the word 'son' appears 40 times to humanize the sacred or bring the content closer to the pathos and feelings of ordinary people. The same thing happens through the mention of breastfeeding, which emphasizes the physical aspect of the relationship: Figlio, perche t'ascundi al petto o'si lattato? ('Son, why do you spurn the breasts that suckled you?', verse 47). In verse 77, Mary's expression speaks of a motherly feeling which is described in words from the realm of profane love ('figlio, lo meo deporto' - My Son! My Comfort!), just as in verse 116, 'Red Son and White Son' is a way of describing beauty which is often it is found in love poetry, and the same metaphor is used in the Song of Songs, V, 10 ('my beloved is white and red').

However, Mary never leaves her human dimension, and her grief still seems to maintain the unbridgeable chasm between the human and divine worlds. In the initial address to Mary, St. John uses the lexeme 'donna,' whose translation is not 'Madam' but originates from the Latin 'domina,' which acquires a more sophisticated meaning as 'the lady from Heaven.' It is as if the address 'Signora,' which would contain the distanced meaning of 'Madam,' is deliberately left out. On the contrary, through the lexeme 'donna,' the emphasis is placed on the human nature of the mother's reactions. The title 'Signora' will be reserved for the Virgin's stay in Heaven; until then, she is a wife and mother.

In the verse 'figlio, pat'e mmarito'/'son, father and husband' (verse 89), the reference to son, father and husband is both a metaphor and an allusion to the holy trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A connection is made between the ordinary human and the sacred, expanding the semantic field of the son with that of the Father (God) and the Spirit, who himself is the embodiment of love, hence using the lexeme 'husband.' The son's identification with holiness is also metaphorical when Mary addresses him in verse 41: 'figlio, amoroso giglio!/'son, beloved dove' (verse 89), knowing that the dove in Christianity symbolizes spiritual purity.

Thematic-structural peculiarities

After the prologue of three stanzas, twenty stanzas follow in the *Lauda* (verses 4–83), which describe Mary's attempt to talk to various interlocutors (Magdalene, Pilat, the people, the cross...) to find help for her son, but which are marked by the absence or impossibility of communication. In the absence of an answer, Mary desperately turns to the cross (verse 55), personifying it and assigning to it some of the blame for the crucifixion. The absence of an answer to Mary's requests gives the text an increased drama because her words turn into a desperate monologue or rhetorical questions that speak more about her pain than about the expectation of understanding, not neglecting the foreknowledge of the reader who knows the outcome of the events, does not expect mercy from her interlocutors.

The messenger with whom the narrative begins reappears to describe the realistic crucifixion of Jesus (verses 64–75). The crucifixion is delivered in three stanzas that occupy the central part of the *Lauda* so that the poem can be said to have a strict structure, where the first 15 stanzas refer to the attempt at dialogue and the last 15 indicate the funeral lament (verses 112–135), which are the only real dialogue in the song, the one between mother and son. The wounds of Jesus and the anatomy of his hands and feet are described with expressionistic precision. This description stops the dialogue and emphasizes a cinematic presentation, slowing the narration and bringing the pain closer.

«Soccurri, plena de doglia,
cà 'l tuo figliol se spoglia;
la gente par che voglia
che sia martirizzato».
«Se i tollit'el vestire,
lassatelme vedere,
com'en crudel firire
tutto l'ò ensanguenato».
«Donna, la man li è presa,
ennella croc'è stesa;
con un bollon l'ò fesa,
tanto lo 'n cci ò ficcato.

L'altra mano se prende,
ennella croce se stende
e lo dolor s'accende,
ch'è plu multiplicato.³
[Underhill 1919, 220]

The description of Jesus's body (verses 64–75) emphasizes visuality, and the anatomy is followed in detail. The vocabulary is taken from the folk creation: 'abbraccate' means embraced (verse 134), 'afferato' means desperately (verse 87), and 'attossecato' means killed (verse 115).

Seven stanzas in the central part of the *lauda* are devoted to the dialogue between mother and son (verses 84–111). While Mary's speech is filled with pathos and suffering, Jesus retains the otherworldly dimension and comforts Mary to leave him to his fate with reconciliation and acceptance. Apart from the physical descriptions the Messenger gave, Jesus himself does not utter words that allude to suffering or an emotional state. His pain stems more from his mother's cries than from the wounds on his body.

In their article on Color Poetry, Jun Dong Cho and Yong Lee (Cho and Lee 2021) point out that apart from 'the classic five senses of vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell,' there are 'less obviously, proprioception, kinesthesia, pain, and the vestibular senses.' Exactly these less obvious senses, the pain, the proprioception, and the kin-

3 'Quick, Sorrowful Lady!
Your son is stripped naked.
The crowd want him
nailed to the wood'.
'Now they have torn off his clothes,
Let me see
how the cruel lash
has bloodied him'.
'Lady, they have taken his hand
and stretched it on the cross.
With a nail they have pierced it:
In this manner they have fixed it.
Now the second hand is taken:
They spread it on the wood.
The pain increases,
burning him up.
They take his feet now, Lady:
They fix them to the tree,
Every limb outstretched,
wrenching him all over'

esthesis, are present in this poem and are interconnected with the classic senses.

Mary's repeated address as 'son' is less a vocative than a posthumous lament for a lost son. The three stanzas with which Jesus addresses the mother are not accidental but reflect the holy trinity. Just as the mother, for whom the son is everything, identifies him with the trinity of father, son, and holy spirit. But Jesus also addresses Mary with the noun 'mother,' which etymologically also denotes the relationship of a newborn with its mother. The use of the vocative mother by Jesus is also specific, which refers to the Latin etymology for the breast, and from there, Mary alludes to breastfeeding: 'Son, why do you spurn the breasts that suckled you?' (verse 47). Using the synecdoche, according to the principle of *pars pro toto*, the mother's physical proximity and primordial connection with the child is emphasized.

Love Poetry in 13th-Century Italy

But, starting with the religious and moralistic literature of the 13th century, Italian creativity goes through a visible evolution in which changes occur both on thematic and compositional levels. Italian literature, mainly inspired by Provençal lyricism, would eventually reach more ethical qualities and independence through which it could influence future European literature and civilization. Three schools of poetry were formed in this period: the Sicilian school of poetry, the Tuscan school of poetry, and the *Sweet New Style* (Casadei and Santagata 2023). The first elements of literary novelty will be felt in the court lyrics of the Sicilian school of poetry from the first half of the 13th century. This school of poetry is among the first in Europe. It will bring a new poetic experience, a new style, and the power to plunge into the human psyche, thus representing a transitional moment towards Humanism and the Renaissance. The lyrical poetry of the first school of poetry is tied to the motif of love as a dominant feeling and was inspired to a great extent by the Provençal lyrics in which visible results were achieved and which signifi-

cantly influenced the poets of the 14th century, especially Dante and Petrarch.

By taking over the themes from the Provençal lyrics (that is, through the French influences), it goes towards processing the feeling of love, but there are changes in how it is treated. The poetry here is not performed to the accompaniment of music. Created in a different social context, court poetry differs from feudal poetry. Provençal lyrics are distinguished by coldness, intellectuality, expressed concern for form and rhetoric, complications in expression, unreality in depicting phenomena, and elevation to abstract and unattainable values. The beloved of the poets is described in the same way, with a perfection that makes her inhuman and almost always portrayed in a spring landscape that represents a kind of cliché, a stereotype, or kitsch from today's point of view. Artificiality is a characteristic of the sung object and the procedure applied by the one who creates it. It is about chivalrous respect and bowing in front of the lady (Giudice and Bruni 1981).

The Sicilian school plays a role in changing these poetic conventions and in introducing a certain spontaneity in the expression of feeling because the goal is to progress in the psychologization of both the creative subject and the sung lady. Therefore, the marble surface of the statement must be abolished, and the naturalization of the representations must be inclined. It describes a range of emotions associated with the feeling of love, which varies from joy and satisfaction to the other extreme of suffering and torture. The exaltation of the lady is not understood as an annulment of the poet but, on the contrary, as his predisposition to notice and experience the sublime.

Ultimate individualism has not yet been reached in this poetry characteristic of the modern era because what the poet sings is socially accepted and recommended. It is about leaning towards a collective, literary, and social ideal of love. Much attention is paid to the technical construction of the song. In that period, several poetic forms were characterized by precisely de-

finéd features the sonnet, the canzone, and the canzonetta. All these poems are written in vulgar language, borrowing from Latin, Provençal and other Italian languages. The vernacular in these poems acquires greater sophistication.

Giacomo da Lentini - Love Is a Desire that Comes from the Heart

Giacomo da Lentini occupies an essential place among Sicilian lyricists. It is believed that he is the creator of the sonnet. He has written 16 canzones and 22 sonnets. He uses metaphors to describe the variations of the feeling of love and its psychological effects on the subject. For him, the image has a very significant role both from a philosophical point of view and from the point of view of the formal shaping of the poem. Visualization precedes imagination. Love obsession is transferred from the actual image to a mental, imaginary image. The emphasis is not on the real lady, but she is the inspiration for the turmoil born in the poet's soul.

Amor è un[o] desio che ven da core
per abondanza di gran piacimento;
e li occhi in prima genera[n] l'amore
e lo core li dà nutrimento.⁴
[Lansing 2018, 109–148]

In this first stanza of the sonnet, as the poet moves from visual concern to contemplation, the sight of the beloved strongly affects him. The interior of the lady emanates from her gaze, and the poet's perception leads to an inner transformation that gives birth to a poem. Love for a girl is also an analogy for love for God (*Love is a desire that comes from the heart* / *Amor è uno desio che ven da core*). Lentini's understandings correspond to the science of the time, in which Aquinas's division of the soul into three functions – rational, sensory, and nutritional – can be rec-

ognized (1920). In his reading of the biblical passage dedicated to the Corinthians, he states: 'Or my spirit that is my reasoning prays, which means [my reason] organizes in me so that I may frequently say those things that are for good, whether by one's own words or of the other holy ones. Or my spirit, which is the viewpoint stored in the mind. Prays, inasmuch if voices are the likeness of physical things only as a record [in the mind] separate from this which is being understood by the intellect'. Therefore, he adds, 'But my mind, that is my intellect, is without fruit, because he does not understand and therefore prophecy or interpretation is better than the gift of tongues' (Aquinas Lectures on I Corinthians, chapter 14, 1C3) (Aquinas n.d.). The first sensory perception shakes the soul, so it can later be transformed into a rational image (*imaginatio* ie *interpretatio*), which is psychologically carried despite the absolute absence of the object of love.

After the collapse of the Sicilian court, around 1266, the dominant cultural and poetic environment became Tuscany, where the Tuscan school of poetry developed. For a long time, Sicilian poetry circulated throughout Central Italy, where it inspired the creation of new works of love typical of that climate. The themes and the literary level of the poetry remain unchanged, with the difference that political or patriotic content is also present in the Tuscan School. Its leading representative is Guitone d'Arezzo, who sets program poems that re-actualize the psychological stages of falling in love and imaginary visualization, similar to previous poets. However, the actual value of medieval poetry will come to the fore with the emergence of the third poetic school of the *Sweet New Style*.

Sweet New Style (Dolce Stil Novo)

The *Dolce Stil Novo* appears in the 80s of the 13th century. It retains the feeling of love as the essential element but acquires a more significant emotional and thought depth while being more refined in style and formality. Poetry has moral sublimity as a prerequisite, and it is the purity of the soul that the poet will notice in the woman

4 'Love is a desire that comes from the heart through abundance of great pleasure; and the eyes generate love at first, and the heart nurtures it there . . . That love that grasps with fury is born of the eyes. For the eyes present to the heart everything that is good, bad, and how it is naturally formed; and the heart, that which imagines and pleases that desire, is the conceiver.'

he sings about. In the new social reality in Italy, the Sicilian court soon reached its maximum. It begins to repeat itself through constant motifs and clichés, so there is a need for more nuanced poetic forms in place of this poetry. In the new lyric, the spirit of civil society begins to appear, of new democratic communities, municipalities, or communes in which human individuality begins to dominate more and more, and religious life becomes more secular. At the same time, there is a tendency to establish worldly authority; thus, conditions are created for new ethical principles. Love is understood realistically; it is found in an everyday existential context, and the woman is not only seen as a lofty ideal, but she occupies a real place in life (Magliozzi, Atalienti, and Cotroneo 1998).

The first reactions to the old Sicilian school appear in the learned environment of Bologna, a city with the oldest university in Europe. The school takes its name from Dante, who mentions it in the 24 cantos of Purgatory. This direction is 'new' in content and 'sweet' in style. For Dante, poetry has two stages: one is the one when the feeling of love causes a particular psychological state, and the second is the moment when reason dictates to the poet to record what he felt in the form of verse (Chiappelli 1978). Poetry begins to be distinguished by the rudiments of philosophical thought. Still, some conceptions from the field of ethics dominate, contradicting the Provençal lyric. The lady here is distant not because she is of an unattainable social position but because she embodies virtue and is identical to God. In this period, we are not talking about the ladies who lived in the castles but about the women who could be met in everyday life in the squares due to the development of civil life.

Guido Guinizelli - Within the gentle heart, Love shelters him

The founder of this school was the Bologna jurist Guido Guinizelli, and his most famous program canzone is *In the tender heart always hides Amor* ('Al cor gentil reppaira semper Amore').

This song is significant because it is representative of the Sweet New Style.

Interestingly, Guinizelli searches for a synthesis in the love of the noble heart of the woman and the angel. The identification of love for God and love for woman has its inspirations in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (1920). Through the intellectual structure of the canzone, Guinizelli asserts himself as a prover of a new doctrine in that period, according to which the phenomenon of love is much more complexly analyzed.

Al cor gentil reppaira sempre amore
come l'ausello in selva a la verdura;
né fe' amor anti che gentil core,
né gentil core anti ch'amor, natura:
ch'adesso con' fu 'l sole,
sì tosto lo splendore fu lucente,
né fu davanti 'l sole;
e prende amore in gentilezza loco
così propiamente
come calore in clarità di foco.⁵
[Borsa 2007, 162]

According to the canzone, love can only be born in a virtuous heart. The new democratic reality and the new understandings of the social life of that time will also be seen in the attitude according to which the nobility of the soul is a human characteristic that he acquires naturally; it is a natural phenomenon, not a privilege of the noble class and is not inherited according to blue blood, as propagated in feudalism. The ineffable ethereal love for the beloved compared to an angel shines in the gaze of the tender-hearted man and causes in him feelings directed towards goodness and God (Borsa 2007). The uniqueness of Guinizelli's poetry is also seen in the style; it is revealed in the poet's admiration for

- 5 Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,
As birds within the green shade of the grove.
Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme,
Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.
For with the sun, at once,
So sprang the light immediately; nor was
Its birth before the sun's.
And Love hath his effect in gentleness
Of very self; even as
Within the middle fire the heat's excess.

the realization of the power and influence of love on the human being, but in this lyric can sometimes be felt the indulgence of the intellectual at the expense of the immediate feeling itself. The frequent mention of the sun, fire, heat, and nature, in general, creates the effect of melting the subject into the environment through the power of loving feeling. Just as San Francesco of Assisi used the four elements to explain phenomena, Guinizelli distinguishes between good and evil through water and fire and expresses the effect of goodness and love through the sun's rays and warmth.

Donna, Deo mi dirà: « Che presomisti? »,
siando l'alma mia a Lui davanti.
« Lo ciel passasti e'nfin a Me venisti
e desti in vano amor Me per sembranti:
ch'a Me conven le laude
e a la reina del regname degno,
per cui cessa onne fraude ».
Dir Li porò: « Tenne d'angel sembianza
che fosse del Tuo regno;
non me fu fallo, s'eo li posi amanza ».⁶
[Borsa 2007, 189]

The essence of love becomes the true path to higher values. Love for a noble being elevates the human mind so much that it can get closer to God and understand heavenly things. In turn, through spirituality and mysticism, God can introduce him to the understanding of things unknowable exclusively by the rational mind (Kris-teva 1983). Dante Alighieri, whose early poetry was also included in the Sweet New Style school, called *Sapienza Amoroza*, the relation of love to knowledge, an idea also present in St. Thomas Aquinas (1920).

6 My lady, God shall ask, 'What dared'st thou?'
(When my soul stands with all her acts review'd;
'Thou passed'st Heaven, into My sight, as now,
To make Me of vain love similitude.
To Me doth praise belong,
And to the Queen of all the realm of grace
Who endeth fraud and wrong.'
Then may I plead: 'As though from Thee he came,
Love wore an angel's face:
Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame.'

Conclusion

The experience or the effect of the wind or the sun in San Francesco's poetry creates a new, atypical medieval poetry with an accent on the personal, sincere fate and connection to nature. Jacopone da Todi expresses the pain through visual precision and makes a hyperplastic ekphrasis (painting through poetic words). The other poets express the visual elements of the apparitions of an image by the medieval concept of platonic love.

This poetry corresponds more precisely to what Maurice Merleau-Ponty introduced in phenomenology as the 'embodied self,' claiming that man's initial awareness of the world occurs through the senses (Andén 2019). The body is not only a physical entity but a subject that is actively, sensibly, and even spiritually perceived and is an integral part of the overall thinking of man. That authentic connection of man with the world represents a turning to something that precedes strict thought, and that is the relation between sensation and sensibility, which is mutual for all people. Poetry becomes the most authentic domain where this connection can be restored, and the medieval poets succeeded in reconciling the sacred and sublime with humanity and everyday life.

Summary

This paper traces the development stages of poetry in Italy starting from the 13th century through the prism of its gradual distancing from the classical religious form of lyrical expression. The selection focuses on those poets who were directly influenced by the medieval Italian philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas (1920) because, in his philosophy, reason and emotion become complementary things. The Middle Ages, which includes the epoch of feudalism, is usually recognized as a dark or gloomy period in which all creations and actions are influenced by religion. The Middle Ages conflicted with ancient, classical values. The figure of the religious man replaces the place of the ideal of heroism from Antiquity. Philosophy, as well as the overall understanding of life, will be under the patronage of the Church. Liter-

ature is the only domain of expression and creation in which the reconciliation of these opposites in the 13th century could occur.

From the religious poetry of San Francesco d'Assisi to the early love poetry of Dante Alighieri, poetry is refined stylistically. With it, the vernacular becomes amenable to literary expression. The sensory and emotional message that these authors bring to poetry keeps the link with religious creation and, at the same time, brings it closer to the common man. On the other hand, it contributes to the development of formally developed poetry. The transition from Latin to the vernacular opens up a new worldview through which faith gets closer to everyday life and the experiences shared among ordinary people.

Although religious representation is most often associated with a rationally expressed scholastic message, we can discuss the almost therapeutic dimension of the poem when spirituality is expressed through sensory poetics. Poetry affects not only through the open religious message it conveys but also through the activation of all sensory impressions at the moment of reading or liturgical singing, as empathy between the reader and the poet.

Povzetek

Članek sledi razvojnim fazam poezije v Italiji od 13. stoletja naprej skozi prizmo njenega postopnega oddaljevanja od klasične verske oblike lirskega izražanja. Izbor se osredotoča na tiste pesnike, na katere je neposredno vplival srednjeveški italijanski filozof sveti Tomaž Akvinski (1920), saj v njegovi filozofiji razum in čustvo postaneta komplementarna. Srednji vek, ki vključuje obdobje fevdalizma, je običajno prepoznan kot temachno ali mračno obdobje, v katerem na vse stvaritve in dejanja vpliva religija. Srednji vek je v nasprotju z antičnimi, klasičnimi vrednotami. Na mesto ideala junaštva iz antike stopi lik religioznega človeka. Filozofija in tudi splošno razumevanje življenja sta pod pokroviteljstvom Cerkve. Literatura je pravzaprav edino področje izražanja in ustvarjanja, na katerem bi se v 13. stoletju lahko zgodila sprava teh nasprotij.

Od verske poezije svetega Frančiška Asiškega do zgodnje ljubezenske poezije Danteja Alighierija se poezija slogovno izpopolnjuje, z njo pa ljudski jezik postaja primeren za literarno izražanje. Čutna in čustvena

sporočilnost, ki jo ti avtorji prinašajo v poezijo, ohranja povezavo z verskim ustvarjanjem in ga hkrati približuje preprostemu človeku, po drugi strani pa prispeva k razvoju formalno razvite poezije. Prehod iz latinščine v ljudski jezik odpira nov pogled na svet, preko katerega se vera približa vsakdanjemu življenju in izkušnjam, ki si jih delijo preprosti ljudje.

Čeprav se religiozna predstava največkrat postavlja v razmerje z racionalno izraženim sholastičnim sporočilom, pa lahko govorimo o skorajda terapevtski razsežnosti pesmi, ko se duhovnost izraža skozi čutno poetiko. Poezija ne vpliva le z odprtim verskim sporočilom, ki ga posreduje, temveč tudi z aktivacijo vseh čutnih vtisov v trenutku branja ali liturgičnega petja kot empatije med bralcem in pesnikom.

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Sensory Encounters:
Decoding the Symbolism of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten
*Senzorična srečanja:
dekodiranje simbolike cerkve Svetega Nikolaja v Ljubotenu*

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of embodied cognition and sensory encounters within St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, built in 1337 near Skopje, North Macedonia. The study focuses on the church's ornamental brickwork, particularly the apse's decorations, arguing that these features transcend mere aesthetics to facilitate immersive spirituality. Central to the analysis is the monogram of Demetrius (Dmitar), a key element concealed within the west portal, which highlights the interplay between material culture and spiritual practice. By employing a multidisciplinary approach combining art historical analysis with cognitive science insights, this research examines how the church's physical and ornamental elements engage the senses, enriching the medieval religious experience. The decorative motifs of chess fields, zigzags, and cryptograms serve as cognitive metaphors bridging the sacred and sensory, contributing to a deeper understanding of religious devotion. This paper underscores the role of sensory encounters in medieval spirituality, positioning St. Nicholas Church within the broader Byzantine and Serbian medieval cultural context.

Keywords: Sensory Engagement, Symbolism, Medieval Church Architecture, Ljuboten.

Izvleček

Članek raziskuje presečišče utelešenega spoznavanja in čutnih doživetij v cerkvi svetega Nikolaja v Ljubotenu, zgrajeni leta 1337 v bližini Skopja v Severni Makedoniji. Raziskava se osredotoča na okrasno opeko cerkve, zlasti na okrasje apside, in poudarja, da ti elementi presegajo zgolj estetiko ter omogočajo poglobljeno duhovno izkušnjo. Osrednji del analize je monogram Demetrija (Dmitra), ključni motiv, skrit v zahodnem portalu, ki izpostavlja medsebojni vpliv materialne kulture in duhovne prakse. Z multidisciplinarnim pristopom, ki združuje umetnostnozgodovinsko analizo in spoznanja kognitivne znanosti, raziskava preučuje, kako fizični in okrasni elementi cerkve vključujejo čute ter bogatijo srednjeveško versko izkušnjo. Okrasni motivi šahovskih polj, cikcak linij in kriptogramov služijo kot kognitivne metafore, ki povezujejo sveto in čutno ter prispevajo k poglobljenemu razumevanju verske pobožnosti. Prispevek poudarja pomen čutnih izkušenj v srednjeveški duhovnosti in cerkev svetega Nikolaja umešča v širši bizantinski ter srbski srednjeveški kulturni kontekst.

Ključne besede: čutna izkušnja, simbolika, srednjeveška cerkvena arhitektura, Ljuboten

Introduction

St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten (figs. 1a, 1b), located in present-day North Macedonia, was constructed during the reign of King Stefan Dušan (r. 1331–1346 as King and 1346–1355 as Tsar). The ktetorial inscription dates the completion of the church between September 1, 1336, and Au-

gust 31, 1337 (Tatić 1927, 95; Đorđević 1995, 145; Korać 2003, 109; Radujko 2008, 101). The period marked significant developments in medieval Serbian architecture, with this church standing as a notable example of the era's artistic and structural advancements (Korać 2003, 13–14; Ćirić 2024, 257–273).



Figure 1a: St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, View toward the Apse (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

Medieval church architecture was not solely an expression of aesthetic or symbolic intent; it was designed to engage the worshipper's body and senses (Caseau 1999, 101–110; Nelson 2000, 143–168). The rhythmic arrangement of brick and stone, sculptural details on capitals, and decorative arches were all meant to guide the viewer's eye, stimulate contemplation, and evoke a deeper spiritual connection (Isar 2004, 215–242). The church's materiality – its texture, patterns, and spatial composition interact with the worshipper's sense of sight, touch, and movement, creating an embodied spiritual experience (James 2004, 522–537; Williamson 2013, 1–43; Debevec 2016; Ćirić 2022, 77–103). In this way, St Nicholas Church, as many of its contemporaries, served as a space where the physical and metaphysical realms intersected.

The architectural design of St Nicholas Church reveals a sophisticated approach to construction and decoration. The stone col-



Figure 2: St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, South Façade (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

umns, essential for supporting the church's upper structure, are crafted from well-hewn and polished monolithic pieces. The bases of these columns feature an elegant torus profile supported by corners adorned with curled leaf motifs. The capitals are intricately carved, with the northwest capital exhibiting alternating representations of a ram's head, an eagle's body, and downward-turned leaves alongside a central cross. These symbolic carvings invite both visual and tactile engagement, drawing worshipper's attention to its rich iconography and craftsmanship. The alternating forms create a visual rhythm that mirrors the cyclical nature of liturgical practices, engaging the mind and senses in spiritual reflection. This sculptural work aligns with the broader tradition of medieval Serbian art and draws parallels to the sculptural elements found in the Dečani Monastery (Petrov 1963, 259–263; Maksimović 1971, 113; Korać 2003, 112).



Figure 2: St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, South Façade (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

The church's brickwork demonstrates a methodical approach to decorative detailing. The façade features rhythmic layering of stone and brick, with stone layers comprising hewn ash-lars and brick layers arranged in a consistent pattern. The emphasis on mortar layers also creates a harmonious and geometric appearance, which serves an aesthetic function and contributes to worshippers' sensory experience. The brickwork on the southern façade, for example, features a chessboard pattern and diagonally placed bricks, drawing the viewer's eye in rhythmic, ordered directions (fig. 2).

This pattern not only enhances the visual complexity but also serves as a cognitive metaphor for Divine order and stability, inviting a deeper, sensory engagement that reinforces spiritual reflection (Korać 2003, 113–118; Ćirić 2024, 259).

Particularly noteworthy are decorative arches on the eastern façade, which are embed-



Figure 3: St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, East Façade Details (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

ded into the walls with a two-step 'cutting' effect. The outer arch aligns with the façade plane, while the inner arch is recessed, creating a visually engaging depth (Korać 2003, 113–114). This layered arrangement simulates a passage, guiding the eye and body into the church's sacred interior. Manipulation of depth in these arches echoes the spiritual journey from the earthly to the Divine, emphasizing the sensory dimension of medieval religious architecture (fig. 3; Taft 1991, 33–34; Gerstel 1999; Ćirić 2016, 311).

The west façade holds significant historical and artistic importance due to its original painted decoration including a ktetorial portrait of Danica, the church's patron. While this portrait is no longer preserved, its existence was documented and researched in earlier studies (Radujko 2008, 104). This portrait emphasized Danica's role in the church's construction and highlighted her devotion to the architectural



Figure 4: St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, West Façade of the Church (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

project. Positioned near the west portal, it originally drew attention to the church's central decorative program, symbolizing the merger of individual piety with communal spiritual practice (Radujko 2000, 171–196).

A detailed architectural analysis of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten reveals its sophisticated layout, structural innovations, and decorative elements. These features underscore this edifice's artistic and architectural significance and contribute to its sensory and spiritual impact. The chessboard patterns, layered arches, and intricate sculptures are not simply decorative – they engage worshippers in a multisensory experience, blending cognitive reflection with sensory immersion. In doing so, St Nicholas Church becomes the site of embodied spirituality, where physical space enhances worshippers' connection to the Divine.

Architectural Analysis of the West Façade of St Nicholas Church, Ljuboten

The west façade of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten showcases a harmonious composition of architectural elements that complement the overall design of the building (fig. 4). Dominated by a large central arch and flanked by two smaller side arches, the façade is framed by decorative elements, including intricate brickwork patterns and stone moldings, which create visual interest and balance.

The primary west entrance to the church is situated within the central archway. This alignment reinforces the building's cruciform plan and accentuates the entrance as a focal point of spatial and symbolic importance.

Decorative pilasters are flanking side arches – engaged columns that project from the wall. These pilasters are adorned with elaborate brickwork patterns that complement the overall decorative scheme of the façade. Small windows above the side arches allow natural light to filter into the church, contributing to the internal atmosphere and enhancing the sensory experience of space.

Constructed from a combination of stone and brick, the southern façade mirrors the material composition of the western façade. The stonework features carefully cut and polished blocks, while the brickwork displays a variety of patterns and textures. This combination of materials creates a rich and visually appealing surface and engages the viewer's senses, reinforcing the tactile and visual experience of approaching the church.

In conclusion, the southern façade of St Nicholas Church is a well-designed architectural element that enhances the building's overall harmony and aesthetic appeal. The central placement of the entrance archway, decorative pilasters and arches, and intricate brickwork all contribute to the visual richness of the façade and reinforce the church's cruciform plan. The strategic positioning of the entrance emphasizes its role as a significant focal point and enhances the



Figure 5: Monogram of Dmitar, Carved on the Interior Side of the Architrave of the West Portal (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

sensory impact experienced by visitors as they enter the church.

Moreover, the placement of the main entrance within the central archway reflects the medieval Serbian architectural tradition, where the main entrance held symbolic significance. By situating the entrance prominently and centrally, ktetors could assert their authority and demonstrate their connection to Divine power. This positioning reinforced the church's cruciform plan and served as a powerful sensory stimulus, aligning the architectural design with the building's spiritual and symbolic aims.

Sensory Engagement and Embodied Cognition

The architectural and decorative elements of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten exemplify a sophisticated medieval Serbian artistic tradition and also foster a multisensory experience that engages embodied cognition and deepens spiritual involvement. By exploring such elements through lenses of cognitive science, sensory studies, and religious studies, one gains insight into how the church's design shapes sensory and spiritual experiences.

Upon entering the sacred space of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, visitors are immediately drawn to the monogram of Dmitar (fig. 5),



Figure 6: Portraits of King Dušan, Queen Helen, and Their Son Uroš, North Wall of the Church (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

meticulously engraved on the lintel's inner side, aligned with an inscription mentioning the city of Zvečan.

This cross-like symbol is not merely decorative as it serves as a profound invocation: the name 'Dmitar' extends beyond mere identification to become a sensory prayer, with each syllable acting as a plea to the Divine and bridging the human and heavenly realms.¹ To utter or contemplate this name is to engage in a spiritual act, transforming the air into a vessel of sacred intercession.

Before entering the church, visitors first encounter spolia – relics from a bygone empire – positioned outside the portal. As they cross the threshold, their senses are enveloped by the di-

¹ It is likely that the lintel was originally a spolia, adapted to fit its current purpose, with the monogram of Dmitar in Ljuboten serving as a potent symbol of the power struggles within the Serbian nobility—those aligned with King Stefan Dečanski versus supporters of the young Dušan. The monogram, resembling the Greek letters ΔΜΤΡ (Δημητρίου), and its placement below the founder's inscription suggest different creation dates and methods: the monogram was carved in relief by removing the stone mass, while the inscription was incised. The paleographic differences and the distinct carving techniques indicate that these were not executed simultaneously or by the same hand. Similar monograms, such as those of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki, offer comparative insights, appearing in low relief on ceramics or scratched through the slip coating of vessels, further connecting this symbol to the saint's cult in the region (Ćirić 2024, 264–265).

agonal alignment of Dmitar's monogram with the interior vista (Đorđević 1995, 5–10). From this vantage point, one can view a fresco of the young King Stefan Dušan at the northern wall (fig. 6) while the memory of the spolia lingers from the exterior. This alignment is intentional, not coincidental, inviting the senses to connect past and present, royalty and the eternal (Ćirić 2024, 263–266).

The relationship between Dmitar's monogram, his city of Zvečan, and the figure of Dušan within the church transcends a mere political statement; it represents a theological dialogue. Dmitar's name, inscribed on the lintel, becomes a conduit for Divine petition. As the name 'Dmitar' is voiced within this sacred space, it serves as a sensory ritual, merging the breath of the faithful with the light streaming through the portal (Chariton 1978, 101; Isar 2014, 27–44; Foltz 2019, 157). This light highlights Dušan's image and affirms faith in the Divinely chosen king (Ćirić 2024, 267).

In contrast, the ktetorial inscription, hidden within the portal and commissioned by Dmitar's mother Danica for her son's salvation, represents a more intimate gesture of faith. This quiet prayer, inscribed in stone but felt in spirit, contrasts with the more overt visual pledge; while taken together, these elements transform the act of pronouncing 'Dmitar' into a tactile and auditory connection between the Divine and the worldly.

The church creates a dynamic sensory environment through its architectural features, including finely detailed columns, elaborate brickwork, and symbolic portals. The intricate carvings on columns – featuring motifs of ram and eagle – and the carefully structured stone-and-brick façade patterns generate visual stimuli that captivate the attention of observers. The theory of embodied cognition suggests that sensory input significantly influences cognitive processes, which means that the church's sensory stimuli engage the observer's perception and thought processes, shaping their spiritual experience. The visual complexity of the patterns and

forms stimulates one's mind, fostering heightened awareness of the space and the Divine presence it aims to evoke.

Initially, the church's west façade featured the ktetorial portrait of Danica, the founder, holding an image of the church. Although this portrait is no longer preserved, historical sources and analyses confirm its existence and original position. Prominently placed on the south side of the west façade, the portrait emphasized Danica's part in the church's creation and played a crucial role in the sensory and symbolic experience of those entering the sacred space (Radujko 2008, 105). As visitors pass through west the portal, they experience a transformative moment – what can be described as the 'miracle of light' because natural light streams into the church, illuminating the Deesis fresco on the northern wall. This light established a visual connection between the ktetor, the sacred figures of the Deesis, and the portrayal of King Dušan, Queen Helen, and their son Uroš (Ćirić 2024, 260, note 7).

This interplay of light and architecture was designed to evoke profound spiritual and sensory experiences. The light symbolizing Divine grace, being transitioned from the earthly realm, represents the pious act of Danica to the Divine figures depicted in the Deesis. King Dušan's image, situated near the Deesis, highlights his role as a Divinely chosen ruler, reinforcing his importance within the church's design and iconography (Radojčić 1934, 57; Đurić 1974, 61; Rasolkoska-Nikolovska 2004, 229). The importance of his figure is further emphasized by the complex political history surrounding Dušan's rise to power, particularly his opposition to his father, King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (Marjanović-Dušanić 2016, 61–78). The visual and sensory connection between the ktetor, King Dušan, and the Divine figures enhanced the perception of Dušan as the God-chosen ruler – a belief deeply embedded in the church's design (Ćirić 2024, 267–269).²

² It is important to note that the placement of King Dušan's portrait on the northern side across from the northwest column is by no means arbitrary, as it might seem at first

From a sensory studies perspective, the interaction between light and sacred imagery engages the visual cortex to deepen the observer's experience of the sacred (Pentcheva 2010, 141, 154, 184; Stejskal 2019, 55–66). The architectural manipulation of light and the symbolic placement of figures like Danica and Dušan create a multisensory environment where the Divine is both seen and felt. The rhythmic patterns of brickwork and arches engage the visual sense while creating a tactile quality, invoking 'haptic visuality,' where touch is simulated through sight (Betancourt 2016, 660–689). This tactile experience is further enhanced by the textured mortar layers, reflecting the visual rhythm of the space.

The auditory dimension of St Nicholas Church also plays a critical role in shaping its

glance (or as it might be mistakenly assumed to be the only possible location for the ktetor's portrait; Đorđević 1994, 146). For comparison, King Uroš II Milutin is also depicted as New Constantine on the northern side across from the northwest column in the Church of St George in Staro Nagoričino (Cvetković 2023, 667–692; for Staro Nagoričino cf. 679–680; fig. 7). Literature frequently mentions that this is not an easily noticeable position; however, this idea is not coincidental, particularly considering that by the late 13th and the beginning of 14th century, the concept of the ruler as defender of true faith emerged across from the column as symbol in architecture. The ruler's association with this column signifies his role as a pillar of support for the Church and its teachings. A nearly identical presentation was repeated in the Church of the Virgin of the Black Mount above Mateič. Emperor Dušan is depicted on a pilaster that slightly protrudes from the rest of the southern wall's surface (Dimitrova 2002, 185–186, and on the Holy warrior saint across the Emperor Dušan esp. page 197). He is shown directly across the southeast column, on which one of the holy warriors is depicted. It is important to mention that all three portraits are always shown close to the entrance structure. Only in the case of Ljuboten can we see that the relationship with the western entrance is the same as in Staro Nagoričino (the portrait is to the left of the portal, cf. Ćirić 2023, 122). Only in Ljuboten is the portrait on the northern side precisely aligned with the axis of the southern portal. When the doors were originally opened, the light passing through them would have directly illuminated the portrait of the king and queen with their son Uroš. The text addressing issues of the portraits in Mateič and the question of patronage, co-authored by Dr. Branislav Cvetković and myself, is being prepared for the monograph published by Trivent: *Women and Power in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Southeast and Central Europe (1300–1600)*, edited by Melina Rokai, Budapest 2025 (Ćirić and Cvetković forthcoming).

sensory and spiritual impact. The acoustics, particularly how sound reverberates off the stone walls and domes, amplify the auditory experience of religious rituals (Đorđević et al. 2019, 192–212). Cognitive science suggests that sound can evoke emotional or meditative states, facilitating deeper contemplation, especially in sacred spaces. Echoes of hymns and chants contribute to a heightened sense of the sacred, complementing the visual elements and deepening the spiritual atmosphere (Pentcheva 2017; Troelsgard 2018, 52–77).

Religious studies emphasize the embodied nature of religious experience, suggesting that the sensory environment of sacred spaces is intentionally designed to engage both body and mind in devotion. The ktetorial portrait of Danica, combined with the strategic play of light and King Dušan's likeness, guides the observer's sensory focus toward the sacred. As it opens to allow light in, the portal symbolically bridges the earthly realm with the Divine, inviting the beholder into a spiritual journey within the church. Bearing in mind that the Theotokos with Christ was depicted on the west façade of Ljuboten, it is important to recall the Great Lenten Matins, during which the Theotokos is invoked as the 'Gate of Heaven,' opening the gates of mercy, symbolizing her role as the image of Incarnate Logos. The Great Lenten Matins has a distinctive conclusion, namely, after 'Trisagion' and 'Our Father,' instead of the usual troparion to the saint, the following is read: 'In the temple stood Your glory, I think I stand in heaven, O Theotokos, Gate of Heaven, open to us the gates of Your mercy.' Since she gave birth to Christ, the medallion, or paraphrase of Psalm 46, 'God is in the midst of her,' is inscribed on her bosom (Mercenier, Mercenier, and Paris, 1947, 132; Ćirić 2015, 353).

Hence, it is of great importance that the church's patroness is positioned right next to the west portal, with the intercession of Theotokos with Christ in the lunette (it is obviously intentional that Theotokos with Christ, rather than

the patron St Nicholas, is in the lunette, as it was argued by Radujko 2008, 104, drawing 2).³

- 3 Regarding the act of repentance and mercy at the doors, interestingly, several details are recorded in the life of St Paphnutius, bishop of Upper Thebaid, at the beginning of the 4th Century. Since this is the only preserved source of its kind related to the act of repentance at the doors of the church, we present it here, translated from German in entirety: 'St Paphnutius, who lived in perfect solitude in the renowned Scetis Desert, shone with the grace of holiness as a young monk, and although he was younger than the others, he was compared to the elders. Thus, it was decided that he should be counted among the elders. When this became known, envy, which once stirred the souls of his brothers against Joseph, flared up with its poisonous fire against him by one of the brethren from Scetis. He intended to tarnish his glory with some stain of shame. Waiting for the time when Paphnutius would leave his cell to attend the Sunday service in the Church, he secretly entered his cell and hid his book among the baskets usually woven there from palm twigs. Then he, too, went to the Church, pleased with his cunning. After the Sunday service ended, he publicly complained before the brethren and the holy Isidore, who was then the presbyter, that his book had disappeared from his cell. This accusation confused everyone. The accuser demanded that all the brethren be held in the Church and that a few chosen ones be sent to search all the cells. When three elders, appointed by the presbyter, searched the other cells, they came to Paphnutius' cell, where they found the book hidden among the palm baskets, where the envious brother had hidden it. They immediately took it, brought it into the Church, and laid it before everyone. Although, because of the purity of his conscience, Paphnutius was sure he had no part in the sin, he, as if guilty of theft, submitted himself to the judgment of the elders, declaring his readiness to accept whatever punishment they would impose and asking them to assign him a place of repentance. He said nothing in his defense because of his modest humility, fearing that he might also be condemned for lying in his effort to clear himself of the stain of theft with words. After the investigation and judgment were completed, he left the Church without despair, entrusting himself to the judgment of God alone. He began to repent, increasing his prayers with abundant tears, tripling his fasts, and displaying the greatest humility of spirit before everyone. After nearly two weeks had passed in this way, subjecting himself to all bodily and spiritual penance, he came early in the morning on Saturday and Sunday to the Church not to receive Holy Communion but to lie prostrate at the Church doors, humbly begging for forgiveness. However, unable to endure seeing him continue to humble himself and be humiliated by others, God, the witness and knower of all that is hidden, forced the Devil to reveal what the inventor of evil, the thief of his belongings and slanderer had done without any witnesses. Thus, the one who had been the advisor of the evil deed also became its betrayer. The unclean spirit then tormented the miserable brother so greatly and for so long that neither the prayers of the other saints who dwelled there nor the special grace of Isidore the Presbyter could drive out the fiercest tormentor, though by the Lord's mercy he had been granted power over them, as the possessed would be healed even before they were brought to his door. This was

Additionally, the smell of incense, commonly used in Orthodox liturgy, adds an olfactory dimension to the sensory environment. Cognitive science indicates that smell is a powerful trigger for memory and emotional response, suggesting scents within a church evoke strong associations with spiritual practice. This olfactory experience, combined with tactile, visual, and auditory stimuli, creates an integrated sensory experience that deepens the worshipper's connection to the sacred (Caseau 2007, 75–92; Hedrick and Ergin 2015, 333). The church thus becomes an immersive environment for spiritual transformation, where architecture, light, and sensory stimuli converge to evoke a deep connection to the Divine.

The Capital of the Northwest Column and the Sacred Illumination through the South Portal

The decorative elements of St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten not only possess aesthetic value but also embody profound theological significance. Central to this interplay is the capital at the northwest corner and the strategic use of light entering through the south portal, which together create a harmonious convergence of spiritual symbolism and sensory experience. This analysis explores how these elements—the capital and the light—work in concert to manifest Divine presence and reflect the theological and political landscape of the time.

Positioned directly in front of the portraits of King Dušan and Queen Helen, the capital at the northwest corner (fig. 7) reveals layers of theological meaning through its sculpted symbols: the cross (at its south side), the ram's head (at its southeast corner), the double-headed eagle (at its eastern corner, directed toward Queen Helen) and at the southeast corner is sculpted the King's scallop. Each of these symbols not only reflects a

because Christ the Lord had reserved that glory for Paphnutius so that the slanderer might be healed by the prayers of the one against whom he had plotted and received forgiveness for his sin at the doors.' (Winkelman 1985, 32–42).



Figure 7: Details of the Northwest Capital of the Column (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

tradition of the Nemanjić dynasty but also expresses broader aspirations of the Serbian state.

Prominently sculpted on the capital, the cross embodies the fundamental Christian tenets of Christ's sacrifice and Humanity's salvation. It is a constant reminder of the Divine mandate for the rulers it faces, reinforcing their role as defenders of the Faith. Its proximity to the portraits of King Dušan and Queen Helen

accentuates their rule as Divinely sanctioned,⁴ reflecting the Biblical notion that God appoints all rulers to shepherd their people in righteousness, as attested in passages such as Romans 13:1, which states: 'Let every soul be subject to the

⁴ King Dušan's official imagery evolved alongside his expanding authority. As his status shifted from a king to an emperor, depictions of him became more grandiose and ceremonious. This intentional visual development underscores the deep connection between power and its representation (Cvetković 2022, 184).

governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.⁷

The ram's head carved into the capital in Ljuboten is also symbolically rich and deeply rooted in biblical narrative, reflecting themes of sacrifice, redemption, and leadership. This imagery draws from the sacrificial story of Abraham and Isaac, as described in Genesis 22:13: 'Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So, Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.' The narrative presents a ram as a substitutionary sacrifice, highlighting Divine providence and the theme of redemption through sacrifice.

King Dušan, who succeeded his father, King Stefan Dečanski, might be symbolically linked to this biblical narrative. The carving of the ram's head may allude to the complex dynamics between Dušan and his father. Just as the ram replaced Isaac as a sacrifice, the ram's presence could metaphorically reflect Dušan's role in supplanting his father's rule, drawing a parallel to the Old Testament substitution story. Dečanski's death and Dušan's subsequent rise to power might mirror the tension and transformation present in the Abrahamic sacrifice story (Marjanović-Dušanić 1997, 209).

Moreover, the ram's head being prominently positioned near Dušan's figure may reveal metropolitan artistic motifs that Dušan, who had spent part of his youth in Constantinople, would have encountered there. Such motifs often symbolize strength and leadership, aligning with Dušan's regal imagery and his efforts to establish legitimacy. The ram's symbolism thus intertwines with both the biblical narrative of Divine provision and the imperial ambitions of Dušan, reinforcing his role as a ruler shaped by both Divine and historical forces.

The shell, a symbol rich in religious and cultural connotations, adds a profound layer of meaning to the overall composition, particularly in its placement alongside the ram's head.

While the ram's head directly evokes the sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac, the shell introduces themes of Divine conception and spiritual rebirth (Jensen 2011, 203; Bogdanović 2017, 279). Its association with the Virgin Mary and the incarnation of the celestial Logos enhances the symbolism of this composition (Maguire 2011, 49).

The shell's origins can also be traced to ancient biblical texts and early Christian writings. In the Old Testament, specifically in Judges 6:36 and following, Gideon's fleece was used as a Divine sign. This motif later evolved into broader Marian symbolism through the *Physiologus*, a late 2nd-century text. There, the shell is seen as representing the two testaments of the Bible. Although this does not directly link the shell to the Virgin Mary's conception, it sets the stage for later theological interpretations.

Early Christian theologians such as Clement of Alexandria in 'Paidagogus' II, 63, 5 (Clement of Alexandria in Migne and Le Nourry 1857, 393) adopted the shell as a symbol of the heavenly Logos' incarnation. Here, the shell signifies the virginal conception of Christ.⁵

5 The idea that readily accessible scallop-shell fossil beds might have been used as pilgrimage souvenirs during the medieval period is intriguing. Historical records indicate that various fossils, such as belemnites (often referred to as thunderbolts, Devil's fingers, or St Peter's fingers), gryphea (known as the Devil's toenail), and crinoid stems (referred to as St Cuthbert's beads), were interpreted and valued both in antiquity and medieval times (Mayor 2000; Bassett 1982). It seems plausible that fossilized pecten shells, when readily available, could have been utilized as pilgrimage tokens, either genuinely or in a more symbolic context. Research from 1970 demonstrated that the amino acid content of Pecten shells decreases with the age of the fossil (Akiyama and Wyckoff 1970, 1097). Cf. Hall (2005). Therefore, exploring whether there is a correlation between known pilgrimage souvenirs and their geological origins might be fruitful. Specifically, could pilgrim scallops be identified as fossils, and if so, could they be traced back to their geological sources? In connection with royal iconography, this inquiry could reveal interesting insights. The scallop shell is a prominent symbol associated with pilgrimage and spiritual journeys, aligning with the concept of divine incarnation. This symbolism ties into the broader theme of sacred journeys and transformation, echoing the royal and divine imagery found in medieval art and architecture. Exploring the historical use of these shells in the context of pilgrimage and their representation in religious iconography might deepen our understanding of



Figure 8: Capitals of the Northwest and Southwest Columns, Church of the Virgin of the Black Mountain above the village of Mateič (Matejče Monastery; photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

The shell's placement in conjunction with the ram's head, especially on the portal oriented towards the entrance of the church, resonates with its more profound theological implications. The portal itself, often associated with the Virgin Mary as the 'Door of Salvation,' echoes the significance of this symbolism. The Akathystos

their symbolic significance in medieval royal and ecclesiastical contexts.

hymn, a key text in Eastern Christian liturgy, includes the invocation: 'Rejoice, O Door through whom the Salvation came into the world,' highlighting the Virgin Mary's role as a gateway to Divine salvation (Klein 2006, 79–99; Bulgakov 2009, 69).

In the context of the west façade, where figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary were prominently depicted, the shell serves as a visual and



Figure 9: Portrait of King Dušan and the Impact of Light, St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, North Wall (photo Jasmina S. Ćirić)

symbolic link. It reinforces the connection between the themes of sacrifice, Divine intervention, and the sacred entrance to salvation. The shell thus enhances the theological narrative of the portal, aligning with the broader Christian symbolism of Mary as the mediatrix of Divine grace and gateway to Christ. It is important to note that a similar iconographic solution was later repeated in the Church of the Virgin of the Black Mountain above the village of Mateič (Matejče Monastery). Interestingly, Vojislav Korać observed that 'In the interior, a striking three-arched passage (trivilon) connects the narthex with the nave. The two powerful, circular columns support cubic capitals adorned with stylized human and animal heads and curved leaves on the corners. While there are no direct parallels for these capitals, their treatment resembles those found in the St Archangel's Church in Prizren, dated to the 14th century' (Korać 2003, 217, fn.14).

Nevertheless, it could be said that the protomagister from Ljuboten or the architect from his workshop, was possibly engaged in Mateič as well, as indicated by the sculpting style of the mentioned motifs (fig. 8).

Specific positioning of motifs on the capitals suggests that both the entrance in Ljuboten (1336/37) and the Virgin's Church of the Black Mountain (before 1355) had a ceremonial function. Significant spaces or buildings (refectory, abbot's residence, courtyard, etc.) were probably located on this side of the church (Korać 2003, 217; cf. 242, figs. 24, 25).

The double-headed eagle, a symbol frequently associated with both the Nemanjić dynasty and the Byzantine Palaiologos dynasty, represents the unity of spiritual and temporal authority. Its presence in the capital underscores the Serbian rulers' aspiration to reflect the grandeur and legitimacy of the Byzantine Empire.

The double-headed eagle can be seen as a manifestation of heavenly kingship, symbolizing the dual authority of Christ the King, who reigns both on earth as in the Heavens and, as suggested by the biblical vision of Christ's universal dominion in Revelation 11:15: 'The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever' (Androudis 2015, 315–341; Çağaptay 2018, 309–338).

The strategic alignment of these symbols with the light entering through the south portal further enhances their theological impact. As light filters through the portal, it illuminates the capital and the portraits of King Dušan and Queen Helen, creating a visual and symbolic connection between earthly rulers and celestial authority. This interplay of light and symbolism reinforces the Divine sanction of Dušan's reign and the church's role as a conduit of spiritual illumination and legitimacy (fig. 9; Potamianos 2022, 151–172).⁶

The capital at the northeast corner of St Nicholas Church, with its sculpted symbols of the cross, ram, and double-headed eagle, embodies a rich tapestry of theological and political symbolism. Through their alignment and interaction with the sacred light from the south portal, these elements collectively affirm the heavenly endorsement of the rulers and the aspiration to mirror the Byzantine Empire's spiritual and temporal grandeur.

The Sacred Impact of Light through the South Portal

Although the south portal of St. Nicholas Church is now sealed with a brick-and-mortar wall, its original design played a crucial role in shaping the church's sacred and sensory experi-

ence.⁷ In Christian theology, light is a powerful symbol of Divine presence and enlightenment, and its interaction with architectural elements was integral to the church's design.

Historically, sunlight streaming through the south portal would have gradually illuminated the capital at the northeast corner, causing the carvings of the cross, the ram, and the eagle to shimmer with Divine radiance. This dynamic interplay between light and sculpture would have transformed these symbols from static images into living conveyors of spiritual meaning. The light filtering through the portal was perceived as a manifestation of God's presence, creating a visual link between heaven and earth.

With its sculpted symbols, the capital was strategically positioned to exploit this natural illumination. As sunlight fell on the capital, it accentuated its intricate details and cast shadows that highlighted the theological implications of the symbols. This interaction between light and stone mirrored the dual nature of existence, where the material world (stone) is illuminated by heavenly truth (light). The light's movement through the portal deepened the viewer's experi-

⁶ The literature on natural lighting in Byzantine churches is extensive. This article aims to provide a summary of this body of work and offer recommendations for further reading. Notably, Potamianos' doctoral dissertation (Potamianos 1996) is the key resource for understanding interplay between natural light and liturgy in Byzantine architecture.

⁷ The south portal of the Church of St. Nicholas has undergone considerable changes over time, particularly during modern restoration efforts. In a photograph published by architect Žarko M. Tatić, the portal, although visibly damaged, remained part of the original façade and was filled with stone ashlars. Tatić, who completed the first architectural drawings of the church, documented its deteriorated state (Tatić 1927, 99). The subsequent decision to close the portal with brick and mortar during later conservation efforts in 1928 raises concerns about the rationale behind sealing an entrance that played a crucial role in the church's architectural and symbolic framework. Regarding the period of restoration efforts at Ljuboten, only V. R. Petković provides information, noting that the works were undertaken in 1928 (Petković 1950, 178). This intervention altered the visual and spatial perception of the façade, and the distinction between the original and new materials remains evident. Such a decision warrants critique regarding the conservation approach, particularly when it comes to the preservation of historically significant features like the south portal, which had an integral role in the sacred and sensory experience of the church's space. The photographs, most likely taken by Jakov Pavelic, were published by Tatić and are part of the photothèque of the National Museum in Belgrade. These visual records provide crucial documentation of the church's ruinous state before the modern interventions.

ence, inviting contemplation of the Divine mysteries represented by the capital's imagery.

Although the south portal is today covered with brick and mortar, historical evidence and architectural studies suggest that the original design intended for sunlight to emphasize key features of the church, including the capital and the portraits of King Dušan and Queen Helen with their son Uroš. The rulers, bathed in the same celestial light that would have touched the capital, were positioned as intermediaries between God and the people, legitimizing their authority through religious iconography and natural light (Korać 2003, 112, 113).

Ljuboten Church's surfaces are brought to life by the interplay of light and shadow. The architectural elements are designed to capture and reflect light in ways that emphasize their ornate details and enhance the spiritual experience of those entering the church. The highland sun serves as a powerful tool, much like the luminous pigments in illuminated manuscripts, transforming the building's interior into a space where light and shadow contribute to its aesthetic and liturgical significance. Although these vistas are lost today, photographs taken at different times of the day provide glimpses of the original perspectives.

Moreover, the original light's passage through the south portal could be seen as a metaphor for Divine guidance, casting a path for the faithful and symbolically anointing the rulers with God's grace. This spiritual illumination aligns with theological doctrines that emphasize the transcendent nature of celestial authority and its reflection through the Church and its rulers. The interplay of light and sacred art underscored the church's design as a profound tool for worship and spiritual reflection, reinforcing the connection between the earthly and the heavenly (Potamianos 2018, 117; Potamianos 2021, 284–302).

Conclusion

The multisensory experience within St Nicholas Church in Ljuboten is deeply intertwined with

its architectural features and environmental setting. The church's location enhances its spiritual and sensory impact, as it is situated within the sacred landscape of the Holy Mount of Skoplje (Skopska Crna Gora). This prominent positioning within a revered natural setting amplifies the sacred atmosphere and contributes significantly to the worship experience. The natural environment of the Holy Mount further enhances this experience, integrating the church's sensory elements with its sacred setting (Cosgrove and Della Dora 2009; Della Dora 2016, 147–177).⁸ The

8 It is important to note that the issue of sacred topography in Skopje, Kumanovo, and the surrounding areas has not been thoroughly addressed in historiography. The fact that endowments were established in a relatively small space speaks to the repetitive nature of creating sacred spaces on mountains. To recall, mountains, hills, and highlands—traditionally associated with topoi from the Holy Scriptures—are often chosen as sites for constructing Christian monasteries and churches. The significance of mountains in Orthodoxy is multifaceted. Their mention in the Holy Scriptures is historical and metaphorical, and numerous monasteries are located on these elevations. Additionally, mountains often appear in iconographic depictions. Mountains serve as attributes in the names of God and play a pivotal role in Christian theology. The mountain is where the Lord delivered His sermon, where He went to pray, where He was transfigured before His disciples, where He was crucified, and from which He ascended into Heaven. In the Holy Scriptures, mountains are also mentioned in a figurative sense. Ultimately, they are seen as the place of eschatological significance, symbolizing the final and future Jerusalem, the Heavenly Kingdom. In the Book of Ezekiel, it is stated that the Garden of God, the holy mountain of God, Eden, was located on a mountain (Ezekiel 28:13–16) and that the 'trees of Eden' were situated on Lebanon (Ezekiel 31:16). This has led some to localize Eden on Mount Lebanon. Lebanon is a mountain range in the country of Lebanon, with its highest peak, Qurnat as Sawda, at 3,088 meters above sea level. In the Book of Genesis, God and the mountain are mentioned in a common context. Abraham identifies Mount Moriah as God's Mountain and ascends it because 'the Lord will provide' there. 'And Abraham called that place: The Lord will provide. So it is said to this day: On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided' (Genesis 22:14). In the Book of Exodus, the mountain in the wilderness, Horeb (Sinai), is referred to as the mountain of God (Exodus 3:1; 4:27; 18:5), where God is located (Exodus 19:3). 'And the Lord said to Aaron: Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him' (Exodus 4:27). These geographical structures serve as models for conceptualizing space within theological discourse, as can be observed in the depiction of the mountainous surroundings of Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus (Exodus 19–34). Just as Eden is described as on a mountain, in the Old Testament, the future house of the Lord is also located on a mountain. The prophets Isaiah and Micah provide

church's location within the sacred landscape of the Holy Mount of Skoplje adds a profound dimension to this multisensory experience. The natural setting not only enhances the visual and tactile aspects of the church but also reinforces its spiritual significance, offering a deeper connection to the Divine.

In St Nicholas Church, the interplay between light and the sacred environment is critical in devotional practice and performative piety. Light entering through the south portal was more than a physical phenomenon; it was seen as a manifestation of Divine presence that united the viewers with theological messages. The fresco of King Dušan, positioned alongside holy figures, created a narrative linking the earth-

ly ruler to the celestial realm. This visual alignment allowed visitors to perceive King Dušan as a transitional figure, bridging the celestial with the earthly and drawing worshippers into the spiritual communion with the holy figures and patrons. Visitors and worshippers in Ljuboten are drawn into a mystical experience, joining with the donor, noblewoman Danica, and the sacred imagery in an atemporal spiritual relationship.

Acknowledgment

Financial support for this article was provided within the Agreement on the Transfer of Funds for Financing Scientific Research of Teaching Staff at Accredited Higher Education Institutions of the Republic of Serbia in 2024, no. 451-03-65/2024-03/200198.

Summary

The article provides a detailed analysis of the sensory and symbolic dimensions of St. Nicholas Church in Ljuboten, focusing on its architectural and artistic elements to uncover the profound theological and political messages embedded within its design. Situated within the sacred landscape of the Holy Mountain of Skoplje, the church's architecture is intricately linked to its natural environment, enhancing its spiritual and sensory impact. Central to the discussion is the interaction between light and sacred imagery within the church. The manipulation of light in relation to the church's architecture is not merely an aesthetic choice but a deliberate design element intended to deepen the observer's experience of the divine. The interplay between light and symbolic figures, such as King Dušan's and Queen Helen's portraits, creates a multisensory environment where the divine is both seen and felt. This engagement is further enhanced by the tactile quality of the brickwork and arches, which invoke a 'haptic visuality,' where touch is simulated through sight.

The auditory dimension also plays a crucial role. The church's acoustics, with sound reverberating off the stone walls and domes, amplify the experience of religious rituals, contributing to a heightened sense of the sacred. The echoes of hymns and chants facilitate deeper contemplation and enhance the spiritual atmosphere. The analysis delves into the religious and historical sym-

descriptions of the topographical characteristics of the space where the future house of the Lord will be situated, as a place 'on the mountain above all mountains and hills' (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2). Similar: 'In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem' (Isaiah 2:2-3).²⁸ This narrative reinforces the theological symbolism of mountains as places of divine encounters and sanctity, embodying the concept of "God-protected spaces" that resonate deeply in Christian art and architecture. Monasteries and churches on mountains echo the scriptural associations with sacred summits, creating a dialogue between topography, spirituality, and the sacred history of salvation. For a more detailed interpretation of mountains and sacred spaces in the Christian tradition, see: Lidov (2009, 8-10). For the idea of creating sacred spaces in Ohrid, see: Ćirić (2017, 319-329).

Protopresbyter Radoslav Grujić, while serving as the director of the Museum of Southern Serbia in Skopje, was the only scholar to write extensively about the concept of Skopje as a sacred space. Citing sources such as Procopius of Caesarea, Grujić argued that Skopje was once a metropolitan city with many churches. He also highlights the Komnenian dynasty (1084-1185 AD), a period conducive to constructing monasteries throughout the Byzantine Empire. During this time, Byzantine society—from emperors to peasants—was gripped by extraordinary religious fervor, bordering on mania. As a result, churches and monasteries proliferated across the empire. Grujić also identifies this area as the domain of the Monastery of St. George and mentions citations from the writings of St. Isaiah the Elder, who wrote about the churches near Skopje. It is believed that St. Isaiah may have translated Dionysius the Areopagite and described how the churches appeared to him as akin to paradise, a garden, or a flowerbed (Grujić 1935, 34, 68, 160).

bolism of various architectural elements, including the capital at the northeast corner of the church. This capital features sculpted symbols such as the cross, ram's head, and double-headed eagle. Each symbol reflects theological and political aspirations. The cross represents Christ's sacrifice and the divine mandate of rulers, while the ram's head, linked to the sacrificial story of Abraham and Isaac, also connects to the ambitions of King Dušan. The double-headed eagle signifies the unity of spiritual and temporal authority, echoing the grandeur of the Byzantine Empire and the divine kingship of Christ. Although now sealed, the south portal of the church initially allowed sunlight to filter through and illuminate these symbols. This interaction of light with the carvings transformed them into living conveyors of spiritual meaning, creating a visual link between heaven and earth. The light's passage through the portal was perceived as a manifestation of God's presence, enhancing the theological impact of the church's design.

Furthermore, the presence of the shell motif, associated with the Virgin Mary and divine conception, adds another layer of meaning. The shell symbolizes spiritual rebirth and aligns with Marian themes of salvation. Its placement, in conjunction with the ram's head, reinforces the connection between themes of sacrifice and divine grace. The article concludes by emphasizing the integral role of the church's location and design in shaping the worship experience. The multisensory environment created by the interplay of light, sound, and symbolism facilitates a deep spiritual connection for visitors. The church's architectural features and natural setting create a profound tool for worship and reflection, drawing worshippers into a mystical experience that bridges the earthly and divine realms.

Povzetek

Članek podrobno analizira čutne in simbolne razsežnosti cerkve svetega Nikolaja v Ljubotenu, pri čemer se osredotoča na njene arhitekturne in umetniške elemente z namenom razkrivanja globokih teoloških ter političnih sporočil, vgrajenih v njeno zasnovo. Arhitektura cerkve, ki se nahaja v sveti pokrajini Svete gore pri Skopju, je tesno povezana z naravnim okoljem, kar povečuje njen duhovni in čutni učinek. Osrednja tema razprave je interakcija med svetlobo in svetimi podobami v cerkvi. Upravljanje svetlobe v povezavi z arhitekturo cerkve ni

zgolj estetska izbira, temveč premišljen oblikovalski element, namenjen poglobljanju opazovalčevega doživljanja božanskega. Medsebojni vpliv svetlobe in simbolnih likov, kot sta portreta kralja Dušana in kraljice Helene, ustvarja veččutno okolje, v katerem je božansko vidno in občuteno. To izkušnjo še okrepi otipljivost opeke in obokov, ki vzbuja »haptično vizualnost«, pri kateri je dotik simuliran z vidom. Pomembno vlogo ima tudi slušna razsežnost. Akustika cerkve, kjer se zvok odbija od kamnitih zidov in kupol, okrepi doživljanje verskih obredov in prispeva h globljemu občutku svetosti. Odmevi hvalnic in spevov omogočajo globljo kontemplacijo ter krepijo duhovno vzdušje. Analiza se podrobno ukvarja z versko in zgodovinsko simboliko različnih arhitekturnih elementov, med drugim s kapitelom na severovzhodnem vogalu cerkve. Ta kapitel vsebuje izklesane simbole, kot so križ, ovnova glava in dvoglavi orel. Vsak simbol odraža teološke in politične pomene. Križ predstavlja Kristusovo žrtvovanje in božji mandat vladarjev, ovnova glava, povezana z žrtveno zgodbo o Abrahamu in Izaku, pa je povezana tudi z ambicijami kralja Dušana. Dvoglavi orel označuje enotnost duhovne in posvetne oblasti, kar odraža veličino bizantinskega cesarstva in Kristusovo božansko kraljevanje. Čeprav je južni portal cerkve zdaj zapečaten, je prvotno omogočal prodiranje sončne svetlobe, ki je osvetljevala te simbole. Ta interakcija svetlobe z rezbarijami jih je spremenila v žive prenašalce duhovnega pomena in ustvarila vizualno povezavo med nebom ter zemljo. Prehajanje svetlobe skozi portal so dojemali kot manifestacijo Božje navzočnosti, kar je okrepilo teološki učinek zasnove cerkve.

Poleg tega prisotnost motiva školjke, ki je povezan z Devico Marijo in božjim spočetjem, dodaja še eno raven pomena. Školjka simbolizira duhovni preporod in se ujema z Marijinimi motivi odrešenja. Njena umestitev v povezavi z ovnovo glavo krepí povezavo med temami žrtvovanja in Božje milosti.

Članek se zaključi s poudarkom na ključni vlogi lokacije in zasnove cerkve pri oblikovanju izkušnje bogoslužja. Veččutno okolje, ki ga ustvarja preplet svetlobe, zvoka in simbolike, obiskovalcem omogoča globoko duhovno povezanost. Arhitekturne značilnosti cerkve in njeno naravno okolje ustvarjajo močno orodje za bogoslužje ter razmislek in vernike pritegnejo k mistični izkušnji, ki povezuje zemeljsko in božansko kraljestvo.

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Analysis of the Sense Perception in the Fresco Painting of the Dečani Monastery

Analiza čutnega zaznavanja na freski v samostanu Dečani

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Abstract

This study explores the visual paradigm of art in the Middle Ages as a carrier of narrative media through sensory perception, particularly in the context of religious and ontological representations. The analysis focuses on the frescoes of the Dečani monastery as an authentic manifestation of written narrative contextualization. In medieval painting, there is a tendency to faithfully depict biblical words, inviting the viewer to participate through sensory perceptions, thus leading to the adoption of an exegetical message interpreted today through phenomenological archaeology. The frescoes of the Dečani monastery represent a monument of late Byzantine art in Serbia, characterized by a rich oeuvre of painters who merge liturgical word and image into a unique symbiosis aimed at the believer's "co-signing" and complete acceptance and understanding of the liturgical word through often personified representations and abstract painting, which was not an isolated case among Byzantine artists. We believe the perception of specific artistic expression in the Orthodox monastery of Dečani abounds in sensory sensations and theological-mystical reflections. Through a detailed analysis of various aspects of fresco painting in the monastery, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the medieval Orthodox tradition's artistic, religious, and cultural elements and their influence on the perception of spirituality and faith during that period.

Keywords: perception of the senses, fresco painting, Dečani Monastery, religion

Izvleček

Raziskava raziskuje vizualno paradigmo srednjeveške umetnosti kot nosilca pripovednih medijev preko čutnega zaznavanja, zlasti v kontekstu religioznih in ontoloških reprezentacij. Analiza je osredotočena na freske samostana Dečani, ki predstavljajo avtentično manifestacijo pisne pripovedne kontekstualizacije. V srednjeveškem slikarstvu je opazna težnja po zvestem upodabljanju svetopisemskih vsebin, ki gledalca spodbuja k aktivnemu sodelovanju preko čutnega doživljanja. To vodi k sprejetju eksegetskega sporočila, ki ga danes interpretiramo s pomočjo fenomenološke arheologije. Freske v samostanu Dečani so pomemben spomenik poznobizantinske umetnosti v Srbiji, za katero je značilen bogat opus slikarjev, ki liturgično besedo in podobo združujejo v edinstveno simbiozo. Ta simbioza verniku omogoča »sopodpisovanje« liturgične besede in njeno polno sprejemanje ter razumevanje. Umetniki pogosto uporabljajo personificirane upodobitve in abstraktno slikarstvo, kar med bizantinskimi ustvarjalci ni bil osamljen pojav. Menimo, da zaznavanje specifičnega umetniškega izraza v pravoslavnem samostanu Dečani prekipeva od čutnih zaznav ter teološko-mističnih razmišljanj. S podrobno analizo različnih vidikov freskoslikarstva pričujoča raziskava prispeva h globljemu razumevanju umetniških, verskih in kulturnih elementov srednjeveške pravoslavne tradicije ter njihovega vpliva na dojemanje duhovnosti in vere v tistem obdobju.

Ključne besede: zaznavanje čutov, freskoslikarstvo, samostan Dečani, religija

Nothing is in the intellect that was not first
in the senses, except the intellect itself.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

[Leibniz 1989, 49]

Introduction

In the beginning was the Word, and the
Word was with God, and the Word was
God...Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made that has
been made [Jn 1: 1–3]¹

Suppose we understand the initial verses of the Gospel of John as the fundamental generic aspect of the liturgical message about the creation of humanity. We can assert that they embody the paradigm for all material and immaterial testimonies manifested through various media modalities. Interpreted through artistic creation, the Word can invoke a multiplicity of interpretations. One of the primary functions of art is to stimulate sensory experiences in the observer, inspiring the faithful by conveying a message, in the case of fresco painting at the Dečani Monastery, exegetical content. During the Middle Ages, sensory perception was highly valued. Medieval visual objects, especially those of a sacred nature, were designed to engage all the senses. The essence and core of these visual representations lay in the richness of sensory experience. The senses of sight, smell, and touch profoundly influence the observer's body, shaping a reality where empirical knowledge is intertwined with spiritual imagination (Bagnoli 2017b, 32). The wall paintings of sacred objects in medieval Serbia, particularly biblical depictions, were significantly influenced by the written word of the Old and New Testaments, liturgical content, and the lives of saints. The perceptual exchange of interpreted religious content plays a causal role: sacred art encourages religious beliefs while utilizing Biblical verses to interpret and

inspire artistic creations. Over the centuries, sacred art has had the dual purpose of embodying biblical testimonies through visual and applied arts and educating observers theologically, thereby strengthening religious beliefs through visual manifestations. In medieval Serbia, particularly from the 12th to the 15th centuries, painting focused on iconographic representations within sacred structures – churches and monasteries. Icons and frescoes were not merely aesthetic; they functioned as tools to guide the faithful toward a deeper understanding of faith. Unlike Protestant doctrine, which, through the Reformation, clearly emphasized the absence of visual depictions and an inclination towards asceticism, such as Calvinism, the Orthodox Church encouraged the development of artistic tendencies and other exegetical 'instruments' that stimulated all senses, fully facilitating the presence and devotion of the faithful (MacCulloch 2003, 171). The eschatological dimension of the Orthodox Church and liturgical space is highlighted through the aesthetic adornment with frescoes, icons, priestly vestments, and sacred vessels, aiming to emphasize the presence of the Heavenly Kingdom. Fresco paintings, icons, and the overall architecture of the church, along with the internal design, are conceived to evoke a sense of divine presence in every worshipper entering this sacred space. Orthodox liturgy has retained and developed a rich visual tradition. It is indisputable that these religious elements, manifested through art, influenced the senses and undeniably stimulated and reinforced the spiritual message. The paradigm of religious and ontological interpretations in medieval compositions represents a foundation for further understanding of biblical content and the mystification of experiences through the senses, placing us within the context of the perceptual reality of a given time through the analysis of phenomenological archaeology. In this case study, we will examine the perception of the senses in the iconographic representations of the Dečani Monastery, characterized by a specific, symbolic, and abstract artistic style with rich thematic compositions.

¹ All Biblical citations according to *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (2011).



Figure 1: The exterior of Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

Through a historical-comparative method, we will analyse the iconographic representations from different cycles of the monastery concerning biblical sources to uncover deviations and highlight specific artistic expressions. Given that the narratives of the *Old* and *New Testament* offer multiple sources on certain scenes, this study will focus on particular scenes from the rich artistic corpus such as *The Creation of Adam*, *Annunciation*, *The Birth of Christ*, *The Baptism of Christ*, *The Transfiguration*, *The Betrayal of Judas*, *The Resurrection*, and *The Second Coming* as isolated examples of a rich artistic oeuvre. In our view, the iconographic solutions of these examples demonstrate a refined freedom in the artistic interpretation of the written word. Following this, the analysis will explore the sensory percep-

tion in the previously discussed representations to identify sensory experiences in the interpretations of ontological depictions.

Monastery of Dečani

The development and flourishing of architectural, artistic, and craft skills, influenced by Eastern and Western ecclesiastical art and reaching their zenith under the Palaiologos dynasty (ruled between 1261 and 1453), gave rise to remarkable achievements in the construction of Serbian spiritual centers – churches and monasteries – particularly at the beginning of the 14th century (Đurić and Babić-Đorđević 1997, 48). The construction of the Dečani Monastery started under the patronage of King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski Nemanjić, his future mauso-

leum. The entire construction process was entrusted to Archbishop Danilo II. The monastery is a major Serbian Orthodox institution located in a valley by the Pećka Bistrica River, situated in Kosovo and Metohija, within the Republic of Serbia.² The monastery's construction was completed in 1335, while the fresco painting continued until 1347-1348. The monastic church is dedicated to Christ the Creator and, as a dedication and funerary church of the ruler, represents a traditional dynastic order of sacred art. The wealth of Byzantine tradition is reflected in the twenty or so cycles depicted. The monumental nature of the Monastery required a significant number of painters, which is also evident in the stylistic inconsistencies of the artistic language (Đurić and Babić-Đorđević 1997, 53). New generations of artists relied on the models of their predecessors, striving to improve their skills and education, often finding this a challenging and elusive task. Given that the opus of the monastery is exceptionally rich and includes some infrequent themes from the Old Testament, calendar scenes, the life of the Mother of God, saints, and others, it is clear that such an undertaking was led by the theologically educated Archbishop Danilo II, advisor to the Nemanjić royal house (Fig. 1). This is supported by the following statement: 'In about a decade, around a thousand scenes and individual figures of saints were painted in Dečani, collected into twenty hagiographic and liturgical cycles and in even more meaningful wholes' (Todić and Čanak-Medić 2005, 31). The multifaceted significance of the Dečani Monastery was internationally recognized when it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, as a cultural and historical heritage preserving a distinctive form of fresco painting inherited from Byzantine traditions (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d.).

2 According to Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of Serbia and holds a status of substantial autonomy, notwithstanding UNESCO's designation of the territory as "Kosovo" in its official statements.

Sensory Experiences in Iconographic Representations

Although the Dečani Monastery engages the senses through the aroma of incense and the chanting of priests during the liturgy and through its refined architectural and sculptural artistry, the frescoes stand out as one of the most significant examples of Byzantine painting from the Renaissance era of the Palaiologos dynasty. The iconography of the monastery reflects not only historical and political contexts but also theological aspects of the *Old* and *New Testament*, liturgical content, and the hagiographies of the Serbian Orthodox Church as represented in the first half of the 14th century. When we speak about senses in archaeology, 'it is fair to say, however, that dominant and influential versions in Western modernist archaeology relied on a philosophical and social framework which consistently denigrated sensory experience, set out the framework of the five senses commonly known today, constructed a distinctive hierarchy within the Western sensorium (lower senses: touch, smell, taste; higher senses: vision, hearing), and elevated the autonomous vision to the highest position. Of course, this framework is part and parcel of a Cartesian view of the world, with its well-known binarism of mind/body, mental/material, culture/nature, and male/female, to name but a few' (Hamilakis 2014, 2010). Contemporary Western archaeology is still primarily visual; one only needs to reflect (another visual word) on its vocabulary, but it harbours at the same time a tension: a tension between this ocular-centric tradition on the one hand and the inherently multisensory nature of both material culture, and of the archaeological processes on the other. Beyond its historical and artistic heritage, the frescoes encapsulate the political and cultural climate, blending artistic techniques with theological premises in the religious scenes of authentic artistic expression. The sensory manifestations depicted in the frescoes dominate in accordance with theological reflections of biblical and sacramental narratives. Skilled ar-



Figure 2: *The Creation of Man*, Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc.

tistic representations aimed to profoundly influence the faithful through emotions, intending that their prayers would be inspired by sensory and visual content. Martina Bagnoli highlighted the importance and impact of iconography on the faithful: 'Medieval theologians recognized that sensation elicited emotional responses which could distract the mind from intellectual pursuits. For this reason, church interiors were designed to stimulate emotions conducive to pure thoughts and spiritual growth' (Bagnoli 2017a, 33). The iconography of the Dečani Monastery represents an illustrative form of spiritual discourse with a centuries-old tradition of educating and conveying exegetical messages. Supported by visualizations through the senses, we arrive at Kant's conclusion that 'All our knowledge begins with sense, proceeds thence to understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which nothing higher can be discovered in the human mind for elaborating the matter of in-

tuition and subjecting it to the highest unity of thought' (Kant 1990, 1989). From the extensive corpus of the monastery's artwork, we highlight specific iconographic solutions of a dogmatic nature to analyse sensory perception and reinterpret various concepts that are often allegorically depicted. This analysis will provide insights into how sensory elements in frescoes contribute to the theological and spiritual experience, reinforcing the connection between art and faith in medieval Serbian Orthodox tradition.

The Creation of Adam

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being [Gn 2:7].

The iconographic scene of *The Creation of Man* belongs to the cycle painted according to the First Chapter of Genesis, which de-

scribes the Creation. This depiction of the Genesis cycle in the Dečani Monastery represents not only the oldest but also the only thematic representation in Serbian medieval painting, and it stands as the sole preserved monumental example in Eastern Christian tradition (Marković and Marković 1995, 323). This scene is located in the northern chapel of the monastery. In the lower-left corner, we see the naked human body (Adam) lying on his back, with his legs stretched out on the rocks. Above his body, in the central zone, we observe Jesus Christ in a mandorla, surrounded by rays, blessing Adam. The presentation of Jesus Christ should not surprise us in this scene considering the following verse: 'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am' (Jn 8:58). Beyond the visual contrast of warm and cool tones and the distinctly sculpted drawing, there is a clear distinction in the representation of the First Book of Moses. Recall the verse: '...and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.' The ray, directed by the right hand of Christ, unmistakably points to Adam's navel. This interesting depiction does not follow the literal text. Still, it offers a unique approach that does not find analogies in other interpretations of the sensory experiences emerging from the Dečani Monastery scene. This portrayal of the transcendental touch of Christ and Adam through the 'breath of life' symbolized by the ray introduces us to the ontological tactility between God and man. Assuming that the artist intentionally directed Christ's ray toward Adam's navel, an analogy can be found in the term 'Even Ha'Shtiya,' which in Jewish tradition denotes the place in the Jerusalem Temple where God began the creation of the world. The 'navel of the world' represents the central point around which everything revolves, just as the navel is the central point of the body. This stone is also associated with the myth of the foundation of the world, as it is believed that the world emanated from this stone (Sefaria n.d.). Although the concept of the 'navel of the world' appears in Greek mythology, Hinduism, Buddhism, and even Native American cultures, the idea of a central

point in the world with spiritual or mythological significance presents a fascinating point of convergence. While unconventional for Byzantine painters, this hypothesis is not unimaginable within the context of cosmological symbols that were not foreign to them (Fig. 2).

Annunciation

The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled by his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel told her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus [Lk 1:28–31].

As the depiction that initiates the cycle of Great Feasts, the interpretation of the Annunciation is located in the lunette beneath the eastern pair of pendentives. This scene is rich with sensory perceptions, as Mary is brought into a direct and immediate relationship with the Archangel Gabriel, who brings her unexpected news. The representation has a solemn and celebratory character, fitting for the event's significance, with an elaborately painted architectural backdrop that reflects the announcement's importance. Its compositional construction and aesthetic elements underscore the scene's grandeur. The Archangel Gabriel, depicted with pronounced movement and almost mid-stride, appears on the left side in festive attire, addressing Mary and proclaiming that she is blessed among women. Mary, seated on a chest, seems surprised by the Archangel's presence, her head bowed in contemplation. At the moment of the announcement, a ray of light from the heavens descends upon the figurative depiction of Mary, symbolizing the divine intervention. Although Mary speaks only two sentences in the Gospel of Luke (one question and one affirmation (Lk 1:34, Lk 1:38)), the entire composition does not diminish in importance; instead, it emphasizes the miraculous nature of the encounter and highlights Mary's free will in her acceptance of the supernatural conception. The Arch-



Figure 3, *Annunciation*, Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

angel Gabriel addresses Mary as an equal, fully aware of her earthly role, without eliciting fear or similar emotions. This interaction is depicted as an unrestrained dialogue, and according to the testimony of the evangelist, it unfolds dynamically, as between two human beings. This scene thus represents the first episode of the good news in the New Testament concerning the Messiah and Savior. Sensory perceptions extend beyond the auditory dimension of this conversation; they are also vividly present in the materialization of the Archangel, who visually appears before Mary to deliver the message of eschatological and historical significance (fig. 3). The historical-eschatological narrative embodies a synthesis between the Old Testament, whose laws were encapsulated in the Ark of the Covenant, and the Virgin Mary, who carries within her womb the one who fulfils the contents of the Ark. In an allegorical sense, Mary thus represents the new covenant (Ex 25:10–21) between God and humanity,

centered not in the law but in grace, and pointing towards the future described by the apostle John in the Book of Revelation (Rev 12:1–6). This profound theological shift marks the transition from the Old Testament’s legalistic framework to the New Testament’s emphasis on divine grace, making the Annunciation a pivotal moment in Christian iconography and theology.

The Birth of Christ

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them [Lk 2:6–7].

The depiction of the Birth of Christ, as part of the Great Feasts cycle, is located in the lower part of the dome in the southern lunette. The scene is a composite of several episodes, rich in



Figure 4: *The Birth of Christ*, Dečani Monastery; a. entire scene, b. detail of Birth, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

details characteristic of 14th-century Eastern Christian iconography. According to M. Marković, 'an explanation can be found in the primary textual sources (Lk 2:4–19; cf. Mt 1:25 and Lk 2:9–11), as the Dečani painters, just like their predecessors, had in mind numerous poetic, homiletic, and apocryphal works inspired by the Christmas festival' (Marković 1995, 108). The scene itself is "constructed" to be abundant in sensory experiences, immersing the viewer in a very dynamic depiction (fig. 4a). At the centre of the composition is the figure of the Virgin Mary in the cave, with both arms around the baby Christ, who is lying in the manger. Christ is wrapped in a cloth, and the Virgin Mary has protectively placed her hands on him while her gaze meets the eyes of the three Magi positioned to the left of the manger, richly dressed and holding gifts. These intimate touches visually enhance the bond between mother and son on the fresco, conveying sensory and emotional depth that viewers can relate to (fig. 4b). Above the infant Christ are the figures of the ox and donkey, who 'warm' him with their breath (Marković 1995, 108). A beam of light descends from the segment of the sky down to Christ, rendered in the distinctive painting style of the Dečani artists. In the lower part of the scene, two female figures are preparing a bath for the infant Christ: one on the left is pouring water from a jug and holding the cloth in which Christ will later be wrapped, while the other holds Christ and checks the water temperature with her hand.

The sceptical Joseph sits in the lower right part of the image, observing the event. Above the Virgin and Christ, a highly dynamic scene unfolds, with angels at the top of the rocky ledge praising the birth and delivering the good news to the shepherds. The depiction is vividly rendered to offer a rich sensory experience. In interpreting the Birth of Christ, the rich, symbolic use of colour dominates, particularly in depicting the fabrics worn by Mary. These garments are illustrated as luxurious and of exceptional quality, symbolizing the occasion's solemnity despite such luxury being unattainable in the ac-

tual circumstances. This artistic choice underscores the sacredness of the moment, as Mary is fully aware that she has given birth to the Messiah. Every element in the painting has a sensory dimension, from the warmth of the bath to the angelic hymn, all designed to evoke an emotional response from the viewer, marking the beginning of a profound emotional narrative. Christ is depicted as an ordinary child in one sense, being prepared for a warm bath and cradled in his mother's arms, a scene that does not differ from any other child. Yet, the upper part of the image emphasizes his divine nature. This duality is captured in a vertical composition: from the birth/earthly realm, through the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets represented by Mary, to the heavenly realm of God, symbolized by the angels in glorification. The intricate composition invites the viewer to consider both the human and divine aspects of Christ's birth, creating a layered and immersive visual narrative beyond a mere depiction of an event, offering a theological reflection through art. Thus, the fresco tells the story of Christ's nativity and engages the senses and emotions, drawing the observer into a deeper contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation.

The Baptism of Christ

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" [Mt 3:16–17].

The composition of the Baptism primarily relies on traditional representations where multiple sensory elements are present. The central figure is Christ standing in the Jordan River, depicted schematically yet plastic. John the Baptist, positioned on the left side of the composition, stands on a rock with his right hand on Christ's head, while his left hand is raised with an open palm and gaze directed towards heaven (fig. 5). Although, according to Matthew's



Figure 5: *The Baptism of Christ*, Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

verses, the Spirit of God in the form of a dove descends upon Christ after emerges from the Jordan River, in the fresco of the Dečani Monastery, we see a segment of heaven depicted as a semi-circle with open doors and the hand of the Father blessing Christ during the act of baptism. While the tactile aspect in the portrayal of John and Christ is evident when discussing the senses, we again encounter an example of transcendental touch. The Father's blessing is depicted in a sensory manner, emphasizing the third person of the Trinity as an element embodied in the form of a ray, representing the continuous spiritual connection between Father and Son, as well as the presence in the liturgical invocation of transforming the material into the spiritual, into the blood and body of Christ. The one who performs the transubstantiation in the liturgy transforms the material into the immaterial. In this scene, not only is Christ baptized, but it also fulfils Christian Trinitarian theology, where all three persons of the Holy Trinity

are simultaneously present in a sensory unity, creating a unique scene where all three faces are united. We must not overlook the sensory, auditory-visual moment as the Father addresses the Son (Mt 3:13–17), affirming his sonship by sending the Holy Spirit. Although angels are never depicted with wings in the Bible, they are messengers with different iconographic positions. The scene is enriched with motifs inspired by poetic texts read during the feast of Theophany (Marković 1995, 109). These include the personifications of the Jordan River (as an older man) and the sea (as a woman with exposed breasts), painted in the water in the foreground. On the left is depicted the conversation between Christ and John before the baptism, a scene based on Matthew's description of the event (Mt 3: 13–15).

The Transfiguration of Christ

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and



Figure 6: *The Transfiguration of Christ*, Dečani Monastery; a. entire scene, b. detail of the scene, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. [Mt 17:1–9; Mk 9:2–9; Lk 9:28–36].

The scene of the Transfiguration is depicted in all the synoptic Gospels. The composition of the Transfiguration is presented narratively in three distinct parts. On the left side, Christ is shown addressing John, Peter, and James as they ascend the mountain (Mt 17:1; Mk 9:2; Lk 9:28). On the right side, Christ is depicted returning from Mount Tabor, commanding the disciples not to tell anyone about the event they witnessed. The central part of the composition captures the moment of Christ's Transfiguration before the disciples, revealing His divine nature. Christ is the central figure, clothed in white, surrounded by a mandorla from which rays of light emanate, rendered in a distinctive painterly manner. To the left and right of Christ stand Moses, holding the tablets, and the prophet Elijah, a customary feature of this composition (fig. 6a). The disciples, depicted at the bottom of the scene, are shown recoiling from the sight, overwhelmed by the brilliance of the light and the divine revelation. This represents a dynamic and dramatic moment in the Holy Scriptures, characterized by its intense sensory experience. The sensory impressions are vividly depicted in this composition. The dialogue between Christ and the apostles is illustrated in an exceptionally narrative form, supported by the scriptural sources, specifically the synoptic Gospels. Christ fulfils the role of the Creator from the Pentateuch and the realization of all the messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament. The significance of this composition is underscored by the radical presence of light, symbolizing the absolute and eternal glory of the Holy Son, which was concealed during His earthly life (fig. 6b). Abstract sensory experience materializes through the depiction of the apostles' reaction to the Transfiguration itself, as they are blinded by the light and filled with fear, an almost instantaneous response. Recognizing

Christ as the Holy Son, the apostles are depicted with halos during the Transfiguration, unlike the figures on the left and right sides of the composition. This indicates the unique nature of this Biblical scene. The Apostle Peter, one of the witnesses, describes the event as follows, emphasizing the sensory aspect of the experience: 'For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain' (2 Pt. 1:16–18). This statement highlights the sense of hearing, given that the disciples were blinded by the light yet amazed by the opportunity to hear the voice of God directly. The sensory presence of light, depicted from the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple to the Transfiguration, represents God's presence in the world and the manifestation of divine sensory perception through light (Lv 24:3).

The Betrayal of Judas

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Do what you came for, friend' [Mt 26:47–50].

The cycle of the Betrayal of Judas is marked by a strong narrative character and dramatization of the events, almost resembling the graphic novel style, a characteristic technique of the Dečani painters. Although this event is described in all four Gospels, the depictions of the scene vary significantly. The Betrayal of Judas follows the serene scenes of Christ's prayer in



Figure 7: *The Betrayal of Judas*, Dečani Monastery; a. Judas leading a Great multitude with swords and staves, b. Soldiers fall to the ground in front of Christ, c. Kiss of Judas, d. Peter cutting off Malchus' ear, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

the Garden of Gethsemane, a dramatic counter-balance filled with tension and sensory imagery. The scene where Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve

apostles, betrays Christ for thirty pieces of silver to the Roman authorities is one of the New Testament's pivotal moments. The Dečani art-

ists, through their composition of Judas's Kiss, capture an extraordinary intensity of emotion and sensory experience, encapsulating these elements in almost a single instant. The scenes of this cycle commence with an episode where Judas leads a procession of Pharisees, servants, and soldiers, who, armed with spears and torches, come to seize Christ (fig. 7a). Judas addresses the group at that moment, indicating that he will identify Christ with a kiss.

This form of communication is among the first sensory perceptions observed in the cycle. In the following scene, three soldiers are depicted as having fallen before Christ, who extends His hand to them, affirming His identity (fig. 7b).

The crucial scene features Judas confirming Jesus Christ with a kiss, occupying a central position in the composition. Surrounding them is a procession equipped with weapons directed at Christ (fig. 7c).

While Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is solely focused on an inner communicative form between Christ and the Holy Father, characterized by the absence of external sensory inputs and impressions, reflecting a profound, mystical act of the main protagonist in relation to the surrounding environment, the narrative sharply introduces Judas and his entourage, thereby dramatically escalating the scene's intensity, shifting from spiritual tranquillity to an almost cinematic action scene. The impression is that everything unfolds very rapidly. The sound of footsteps, the clinking of spears, physical contact, and the crowd's shouts underscore a multisensory experience that enhances the tragic nature of this event and the entire cycle of the betrayal. The contrast is critical: tranquillity versus conflict; Christ's arrest is loud, shocking, and definitive. Judas's touch of Christ, his communication with Him, and the palpable contact between the teacher and the disciple, which is threatening, provokes an unexpected reaction from the apostle Peter, who resorts to violence. The subsequent scene portrays Peter cutting off the ear of a servant from the Jewish entourage (fig. 7d). This depiction is filled with

dramatization, given that the image of the severed ear closes the entire cycle of Judas's Betrayal while also serving as an introduction to a series of scenes filled with dramatic tension and violent narratives that culminate in the death of Christ's human nature, emphasizing His depiction as a martyr, which fulfils the mission of Jesus Christ on Earth. This mission is reflected in the resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ, thereby narratively unfolding the most significant Christian story. The emphasis on Christ's suffering, where the wounded body is foregrounded, holds a special place in Roman Catholicism, far more than in Orthodox iconography. Depictions of the Crucifixion in Roman Catholic sacred aesthetics often manifest in frequent sculptural representations highlighting suffering through pronounced, three-dimensional depictions of wounds. At the same time, the visual practice of the Orthodox Church relies on two-dimensional representations, behind which lies a mystical reflection of hope.

Crucifixion

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots [Lk 23:33–34].

The Crucifixion, one of the most renowned and dramatic scenes in the cycle of Great Feasts, is depicted in the semi-dome of the western apse. This composition is dynamic and presented in multiple segments, following the core narrative of the Gospels. At the centre of the composition is the figure of Christ, crucified and bowed, his head resting on his right shoulder. Two groups of figures are densely packed on either side of him. On the left side of the composition, the Virgin Mary, the Apostle John, and a group of women are depicted in anguish and disbelief. Their sorrow is palpable, their faces etched with the profound grief of witnessing the suffering of their

beloved Christ. Their postures and expressions are deeply evocative, capturing the raw emotional weight of the moment. On the right side of the composition, a group consisting of soldiers, priests, and other onlookers is shown.

Among them are two significant figures for this scene: the soldier holding the spear that pierced Christ's side (Longinus) and the centurion with a halo, recognizing the Son of God (fig. 8). There has been considerable debate over the depiction of these two figures in the history of medieval fresco painting. Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention the centurion, not the soldier with the spear, while John's account is the reverse (Marković 1995, 111). In the lower-left corner, the scene of soldiers casting lots for Christ's garments (the tunic) is vividly illustrated, described in detail by John, and frequently appears in Byzantine iconography (Jn 19:23–24). This element underscores the brutal reality of the crucifixion, and the dehumanization Christ suffered. A detail in the lower right corner depicts human figures rising from their graves, a schematic element that aligns with the verses from Matthew (Mt 27:52). This inclusion highlights the theological implications of Christ's death, representing the resurrection of the dead and the victory over sin and death. In addition to the standard synoptic iconographic elements, traditional motifs such as the skull beneath the cross are included. These elements are inspired by apocryphal texts and the writings of the early Church Fathers, which speak of Adam's grave at Golgotha.³ In liturgical poetry, Christ's sacrifice is depicted as liberating Adam, representing all humanity (Marković 1995, 111). In the upper sections of the composition, four angels are painted weeping over the crucified Christ, alongside personifications of the Sun and Moon (Lk 23:44–45). The Sun and Moon are represented as miniature human figures within unusual, rounded shapes emitting rays, seemingly fleeing the scene

of the crucifixion. The combination of human figures and cosmic allegories is a well-established motif in medieval iconography, symbolizing cosmic upheaval and universal mourning at the moment of Christ's suffering and death. Sensory experience in this composition is manifested in a complex manner, mainly through the depiction of Christ's crucifixion, which is central to understanding this artistic scene. Christ's crucifixion is not only a representation of his physical suffering but also a profound symbol of the redemption of humankind. Exhausted and tormented, his body is portrayed with a unique artistic expression that captures the grandeur and depth of the event through minimalistic details and the symbolism of blood. Through this depiction, the artists convey the physical pain and the spiritual dimension of the suffering, highlighting the universal significance of Christ's sacrifice.

Additionally, the absence of sensory elements in the personified representations of the sun and moon, which, according to the Gospel of Luke, further adds to the dramatic intensity of the moment. This darkening signifies a physical eclipse and symbolizes the sombre atmosphere surrounding Christ's death, foreshadowing the dramatic events. This artistic choice intensifies the scene's emotional impact, focusing on the internal anguish and spiritual dimension. The tearful faces of the Virgin Mary, the onlookers, and the angels in this depiction further emphasize the intensity of the emotions provoked by Christ's physical suffering. Their sorrow is not just an emotional reaction to the moment of crucifixion but also serves as a prelude to the climax of Christian faith – the Resurrection of the body. This profound and heavy sorrow is a precursor to the joy and celebration of the Resurrection, representing the pinnacle of Christian hope and faith. The Dečani painters authentically portrayed this transition from suffering to celebration, thus emphasizing not only the tragic aspects of the event but also their eschatological and spiritual dimensions.

3 Church Fathers who wrote about Adam's tomb beneath Golgotha are: St. Jerome (c. 347–420), St. Augustine (354–430), St. Epiphanius (c. 315–403), St. Paul of Trebizond (c. 1300–c. 1360), and St. Helena (c. 250–330).



Figure 8: *Crucifixion*, Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

The Second Coming of Christ

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever [1 Thes 4:16–17].

The composition depicting the Second Coming of Christ represents one of the most sensory interpretations within Christian theology, encompassing all senses and extending its significance to humanity. No other global event, theological or otherwise, can compare its profound impact and universal importance to this specific New Testament event. The Revelation maintains the vibrant and rich imagery of the apocryphal books while simultaneously transcending the boundaries of non-canonical

sources by emphasizing the sensory experience that heralds the Second Coming of Christ. From the heavens descends a young, beardless Christ, seated on a throne, extending both arms in a gesture of blessing. The adorned throne, shaped like a chest with closed front and side panels, features a low backrest, behind which rises an ellipsoid mandorla of light, gradually brightening toward the edges. The throne is supported by two symmetrically curved angels in flight, facing the Fearsome Judge: each holds the throne with one hand while grasping the hem of their garments with the other. Beneath Christ's bare feet hovers a purple cushion, symbolizing his divine authority and the majestic nature of this event (fig. 9). According to the words of Aleksandra Davidov Temerinski, the primary biblical source for this scene is the text of the evangelist Matthew: "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have



Figure 9: *The Second Coming of Christ*, Dečani Monastery, Courtesy of BLAGO Fund, Inc

done”; and “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Davidov Temerinski 1995, 193).

The trumpets the angels hold serve as the audible manifestation of God’s judgment at the end of time. There is a clear etiological connection between the Book of Life, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls of wrath, with the final, seventh trumpet signifying the commencement of God’s wrath (Rv 8:6–12; 9:1–21). The composition also includes the figures of the Mother of God, John the Baptist, the holy apostles, and notable figures from Serbian history, emphasizing the universal and timeless nature of the event. As Todić notes, the Second Coming of Christ is inevitable and assured, marking the final stage of salvation (Todić and Čanak-Medić 2005, 448). This eschatological belief profoundly perme-

ated all aspects of thought and spiritual activity in the medieval world, serving as a powerful and ever-present reminder of the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise. The sensory elements of this composition are striking and deliberate. Christ’s descent from heaven, surrounded by angels and enveloped in the radiant light of the mandorla, creates a visual spectacle that is both awe-inspiring and overwhelming. The sound of the trumpets, signalling the final judgment, resonates with a sense of urgency and inevitability, reminding the faithful of the seriousness of the moment/process. The presence of historical and biblical figures gazing upward in reverence and awe adds a layer of emotional intensity to the scene as they witness the culmination of divine prophecy. This depiction of the Second Coming is not just a visual narrative but an immersive experience that engages the viewer’s senses and emotions, drawing them into the anticipation and reverence that accompanies the return

of Christ. The sensory richness of the scene – from the brilliant light and vibrant colours to the resonant sound of the trumpets and the palpable tension in the expressions of the figures – all heighten the emotional impact of this profound moment in Christian eschatology.

Conclusion

The iconography of the Dečani Monastery offers a profound and intricate exploration of how sacred art employs sensory elements to bridge the material and spiritual realms. This analysis has elucidated how the frescoes at Dečani are not merely visual artifacts but are rich with sensory stimuli that engage the observer on multiple levels. The frescoes in the Dečani Monastery are a testament to the sophisticated integration of light, colour, and movement, each carefully orchestrated to enhance the visual and emotional impact of the scenes depicted. The strategic use of light in the frescoes is particularly noteworthy. It illuminates the narrative and symbolizes the divine presence, creating an aura of sanctity and transcendence. Similarly, vibrant colours and dynamic compositions convey complex theological messages and evoke a deep sense of spiritual reality. The sensory experience provided by these frescoes goes beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. It is intricately connected to the spiritual messages, inviting observers to engage with the divine narrative through their senses. The frescoes are a conduit for experiencing the sacred, making the divine more tangible and accessible to the faithful. This immersive quality of the frescoes enhances the observer's connection to the spiritual truths depicted, reinforcing and deepening their faith. In addition, the iconographic program of the Dečani Monastery serves as an exemplary model of how sacred art can transcend its physical medium to offer glimpses of the divine. The interplay between material beauty and spiritual meaning in these frescoes demonstrates the potential of religious art to bridge the gap between the earthly and the heavenly. The frescoes at Dečani do not simply represent divine narratives; they invite the ob-

server to enter these narratives, experiencing the divine presence in a profound and transformative manner. Ultimately, the iconography of the Dečani Monastery stands as a powerful example of the ability of sacred art to engage the senses in a way that reinforces and deepens religious understanding. The sensory experiences elicited by the frescoes are deeply embedded with theological significance, offering a vivid portrayal of the divine that leaves a lasting impression on the observer. This integration of sensory and spiritual elements underscores the enduring impact of sacred art on the faithful, illustrating how it can both transcend the material world and offer profound insights into the divine.

Summary

This study examines sensory perception in the fresco paintings of the Dečani Monastery, focusing on integrating theological and artistic elements within the medieval Serbian Orthodox tradition. The analysis positions the monastery as a critical site where visual and sensory stimuli were utilized to reinforce theological teachings and evoke spiritual experiences.

The frescoes in the Dečani Monastery embody the late Byzantine artistic tradition, blending Eastern Orthodox liturgical elements with rich iconographic narratives. These depictions aim to engage the observer's senses—primarily sight but also invoking the imagination tied to other senses—thereby enhancing spiritual understanding. Through a combination of biblical, liturgical, and hagiographic content, the frescoes serve as tools for theological education and spiritual reflection.

These artworks' light, colour, and movement are deliberate, creating an immersive experience that bridges the material and the divine. Key cycles analysed include depictions from the *Old and New Testament*, such as *The Creation of Adam*, *The Annunciation*, *The Birth of Christ*, *The Baptism of Christ*, *The Transfiguration*, and *The Crucifixion*. Each narrative is enriched by unique sensory and symbolic elements that enhance theological interpretations. For instance, the ray of light symbolizing divine intervention in *The Annunciation* and the transcendental tactile connection in *The Creation of Adam* demonstrate the intentional merging of abstract spiritual concepts with physical representations. Simi-

larly, scenes like *The Second Coming of Christ* encapsulate eschatological themes with vivid sensory manifestations, such as angelic trumpets and divine light, underscoring the profound emotional and spiritual impact on the observer.

The frescoes present theological narratives and invite the faithful into a participatory experience. The artists achieved this through a sophisticated interplay of sensory stimuli and symbolic imagery, reflecting the Orthodox Church's emphasis on the material as a pathway to the spiritual. Unlike the ascetic visual practices of Protestantism, the Serbian Orthodox tradition celebrated a sensory engagement, making the divine more accessible and tangible to worshippers.

Povzetek

Raziskava obravnava čutno zaznavanje na freskah samostana Dečani, pri čemer se osredotoča na povezovanje teoloških in umetniških elementov v okviru srednjeveške srbske pravoslavne tradicije. Analiza postavlja samostan kot ključno prizorišče, kjer so vizualni in senzorični dražljaji uporabljeni za krepitev teoloških nauk ter vzbujanje duhovnih izkušenj.

Freske v samostanu Dečani utelešajo poznobizantinsko umetniško tradicijo, ki združuje vzhodnopравoslavne liturgične elemente z bogatimi ikonografskimi pripovedmi. Cilj teh upodobitev je nagovoriti čutne zaznave opazovalca – predvsem vid –, hkrati pa spodbuditi domišljijo, povezano z drugimi čutili, ter s tem poglobiti duhovno razumevanje. S kombinacijo svetopisemskih, liturgičnih in hagiografskih vsebin freske delujejo kot orodje za teološko izobraževanje ter duhovni razmislek.

Uporaba svetlobe, barv in gibanja v teh umetninah je premišljena, saj ustvarja poglobljeno izkušnjo, ki povezuje materialno in božansko. Ključni analizirani cikli vključujejo upodobitve iz *Stare in Nove zaveze*, kot so *Svarjenje Adama*, *Oznanjenje*, *Kristusovo rojstvo*, *Kristusov krst*, *Preobrazba in Križanje*. Vsaka pripoved je obogate na z edinstvenimi čutnimi in simbolnimi elementi, ki krepijo teološke razlage. Npr., žarek svetlobe, ki simbolizira božansko posredovanje v *Oznanjenju*, in transcendentalna taktilna povezava v *Svarjenju Adama* kažeta na namerno združevanje abstraktnih duhovnih konceptov s fizičnimi predstavami. Podobno prizori, kot je *Drugi Kristusov prihod*, vključujejo eshatološke teme z živahnimi čutnimi manifestacijami, kot so angelške trobente in

božanska svetloba, ki poudarjajo globok čustveni in duhovni vpliv na opazovalca.

Freske ne predstavljajo zgolj teoloških pripovedi, temveč vernike tudi vabijo k aktivnemu sodelovanju. Umetniki so to dosegli z dovršenim prepletanjem čutnih dražljajev in simbolnih podob, kar odraža poudarek pravoslavne cerkve na materialnem kot poti do duhovnega. V nasprotju z asketskimi vizualnimi praksami protestantizma je srbska pravoslavna tradicija slavila čutno vpletenost, zaradi česar je božansko vernikom postalo dostopnejše in otipljivejše.

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Unveiling the Historical Significance of Santa Maria d'Àneu:
Can Soundscape Studies Illuminate its Role within
the Medieval Ecclesiastical Structure?
Odkrivanje zgodovinskega pomena cerkve Santa Maria d'Àneu:
ali lahko raziskave zvočne krajine osvetlijo njeno vlogo
v srednjeveški cerkveni strukturi?

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Abstract

The church of Santa Maria d'Àneu, located in the Àneu valley of the Catalan Pyrenees, holds significant yet debated historical importance within the ecclesiastical structure of the medieval period. While renowned for its Romanesque paintings, its exact role within the Àneu deanery remains unclear. This article explores whether the church's visibility and the audibility of its bells across the landscape, as a representation of ecclesiastical power, extended across the 22 parishes of the Àneu valley. The study is based on onsite acoustic measurements, virtual sound propagation simulations using the ArcGIS Sound Mapping Tools plugin, and different visibility models built with the QGIS Visibility Analysis toolbox. The findings suggest the existence of a bell aural network among most parishes in the Àneu deanery, positioning Santa Maria d'Àneu as a central church within the district.

Keywords: Medieval soundscapes, archaeoacoustics, sound mapping, aural community, medieval Catalonia

Izvleček

Cerkev Santa Maria d'Àneu v dolini Àneu v katalonskih Pirenejih ima velik, a sporen zgodovinski pomen v cerkveni strukturi srednjeveškega obdobja. Čeprav slovi po svojih romanskih poslikavah, njena natančna vloga v dekanatu Àneu ostaja nejasna. Pričujoči članek raziskuje, ali sta vidnost cerkve in slišnost njenih zvonov v pokrajini kot predstava cerkvene moči veljali tudi za 22 župnij v dolini Àneu. Raziskava temelji na akustičnih meritvah na kraju samem, virtualnih simulacijah širjenja zvoka z uporabo vtičnika ArcGIS Sound Mapping Tools in različnih modelih vidnosti, izdelanih z orodjem QGIS Visibility Analysis. Ugotovitve kažejo na obstoj zvskega zvočnega omrežja med večino župnij v dekaniji Àneu, ki cerkev Santa Maria d'Àneu postavlja kot osrednjo cerkev v okrožju.

Ključne besede: srednjeveške zvočne krajine, arheoakustika, zvočno kartiranje, zvočna skupnost, srednjeveška Katalonija

Introduction

In medieval Europe, church bells played a crucial role in daily life. They marked the passage of time, served as alarms during danger, and conveyed news of various events. These auditory messages were broadcast into the surrounding landscape. In addition, bells expressed and shaped contrasting emotions —joy and sorrow— and influenced perceptions of respect, community, and local identity (Corbin 1998; Tullett 2020). The bell, often called the “voice of God,” carried significant symbolic and political power across both secular and sacred domains, transmitting auditory messages effectively across the landscape (Castellet i de Ramon 2021, 223–230; Parker and Spennemann 2024).

Church bell sound can be considered an *earcon*, as defined by Blesser and Salter (2007). *Earcon* is a sonic event containing symbolic meaning ‘by repeated exposure to a particular event in a corresponding context, which then creates an associating linkage between the sound and its context,’ merging religious and philosophical views of the cosmos with life on earth, connecting *here* and *there* (Blesser and Salter 2007, 82). Emotional responses to bell sounds were deeply tied to feelings of attachment to a place, fostering a sense of belonging and connection (Milesen 2016). This strong link between sound, emotion, and place underscores the importance of visualizing how far bell sounds permeated the landscape and how audible they were.

Previous research has suggested that the audibility of bells often coincided with parish boundaries, making them a unique soundmark that contributed to a sense of community (Castellet i de Ramon 2021, 230–241; Milesen 2016). Understanding the inclusivity of soundscapes and the size of acoustic communities enhances our comprehension of the medieval aural environment and the communication networks among neighboring parishes (Mlekuž 2004). That kind of research fits into auditory archaeology, whose main objective is to gather acoustic information that sheds light on the everyday practices of me-

dieval times, including the environment and the relationship between humans, acoustic information, and dwelling places (Mills 2014).

Over the past few decades, significant efforts have been made to map sound in archaeological contexts using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). In 2004, Mlekuž simulated the propagation of bell sounds in the late medieval soundscape of Polhograjsko hribovje in Slovenia, considering sound attenuation due to distance and topography (Mlekuž 2004). Other studies have mapped the audibility of church bells by tracing public footpaths onsite and noting whether the bells were audible (Milesen 2016). Similarly, sound was mapped at an archaeological site, combining GIS and onsite acoustic measurements of pink noise captured with sound level meters (Scullin 2019). Recent studies of sound propagation in landscapes have utilized SPreAD-GIS, a freely available plugin for ArcGIS. This tool allows complex calculations of sound propagation, including attenuation due to distance, topography, atmospheric absorption, ground cover, wind, and background noise. SPreAD-GIS has been used to test the soundscapes of archaeological sites (Hincks and Johnston 2022; Primeau and Witt 2018; García Atiénzar et al. 2022) and to study the propagation of bell sounds around medieval monasteries (Bertoldi et al. 2022).

This paper examines the case of Santa Maria d’Àneu, a church located in the Àneu valley at the western end of the Catalan Pyrenees. Our focus is on its relationship with other religious centers in the Àneu deanery, a minor administrative division of the Diocese of Urgell that encompassed several nearby parish churches under the authority of a dean. This is a particularly intriguing topic because the historical significance and role of Santa Maria d’Àneu within this ecclesiastical district remain unclear to historians. Based on available sources, it is nearly impossible to confirm the hypothesis that this church, situated in the middle of a plain with no surrounding settlement, served as the center of the deanery. However, our soundscape study aims to



Figure 1: The church Santa Maria d'Àneu in the landscape of Àneu valley, viewed from the road from Esterri d'Àneu village.

explore whether the church bells of Santa Maria d'Àneu, as a symbol of authority, could be heard across the parishes that comprised the district, potentially indicating its central role. In addition, this soundscape study is complemented by a visibility analysis of the site. Our research thus offers new insights that may help to clarify Santa Maria's significance as a potential ecclesiastical center in the Àneu valley.

To achieve this, the paper is structured as follows: First, we explore the current understanding of the ecclesiastical significance of Santa Maria d'Àneu. In the second section, we detail our three-part methodology, which includes onsite acoustic measurements, virtual sound propagation simulations, and visibility analyses. For the acoustic measurements, we simultaneously used a sound level meter to record the bell sounds and background noise and an audio recorder to capture these sound events. Virtual simulations of bell sound propagation were conducted using ESRI ArcGIS Desktop 10.5 and the freely available Sound Mapping Tools (SMT) toolbox, specifically the SPreAD-GIS script (Reed, Boggs, and Mann 2012). For the visibility analysis, we used the QGIS Visibility Analysis plugin (Čučković 2016) to establish the viewshed of Santa Maria d'Àneu, the cumulative viewshed of the entire deanery, and the intervisibility network between its parish churches. In the third section, we present the results of these simulations. Finally, we discuss three key themes

that emerged from this study: the limitations of virtual simulations, the challenges of assessing bell audibility over long distances, and how our findings on visibility and audibility contribute to understanding Santa Maria d'Àneu's role within the medieval Àneu deanery.

The Ecclesiastical Significance of Santa Maria d'Àneu

The Santa Maria d'Àneu church is an exceptional case in the ecclesiastical history of the Catalan Pyrenees. Despite the limited documentation that has survived, the importance of this religious center can be argued based on its central position in the Àneu valley, its imposing architecture, and the exceptional Romanesque paintings that decorate its apse (fig. 1). Nevertheless, this church never attained parish status nor generated a surrounding population, and its correct interpretation remains a challenge for historians today.

Very little information is available on the earliest origins of Santa Maria d'Àneu. One of the first Carolingian privileges from the 9th century that refers to the Àneu valley, confirming its attachment to the bishopric of Urgell, already mentions a place under the patronage of Santa Deodata that could be identified as the later church of Santa Maria (Abadal i de Vinyals 1950, 286–288).¹ In a forgery dated 819, whose

¹ The same reference also appears in three confirmatory papal bulls of the years 951, 1001, and 1012 (Ordeig Mata 2020, 402–4; Baraut Obiols 1980, 100–101; 1981, 38–40).

actual wording must have been written at the beginning of the 11th century, a church of Santa Maria, 'which was formerly called Santa Deodata,' is mentioned in the valley of Àneu (Ordeig Mata 2020, 759–763).² This change of title, combined with the archaism of the first dedication, unknown in the Carolingian period, leads us to believe that Santa Maria d'Àneu is an ancient church, possibly predating the Muslim conquest. Although this has not been archaeologically proven (Cabestany Fort, Matas Blanxart, and Palau Baduell 2005, 192), the mention of this church 'together with all its parishes' has led historians to deduce a certain pre-eminence of Santa Maria over the rest of the churches in the Àneu valley, considering it the center of its ecclesiastical organization (Adell Gisbert and Cases Loscos 1993, 242). Some authors have even suggested it might have been a monastic center (Riu Riu 1992, 214), although none of the surviving sources, whether documentary or archaeological, support that idea (Adell Gisbert and Cases Loscos 1993, 242; Costa-Badia 2019, 358–359).

In the 11th century, during the feudal struggles that affected Catalonia, Santa Maria d'Àneu was usurped by Count Artau I of Pallars Sobirà. This is known from a preserved document in which his son, Artau II, returned the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu to Urgell Cathedral in 1086 in exchange for lifting the excommunication under which his father had died, allowing him to be buried in a sacred place (Baraut Obiols 1984, 145–146).³ Similarly, shortly afterward, in 1088, a man named Martí Escó also re-

nounced all future claims over the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu, including its tithes and first fruits, before Bishop Bernat of Urgell. This indicates that Escó had also partially appropriated this church (Baraut Obiols 1984, 165–166). In the late 11th and early 12th centuries, Santa Maria d'Àneu also appears as the beneficiary of specific donations in some wills, such as that of the nobleman Tedball Guerlí, who gave it some estates in Esterri (Baraut Obiols 1986, 29–30) and that of Countess Eslonça of Pallars Sobirà, who gave it a man in Unarre (Puig Ferreté 1991, 74). However, none of these documents provide precise information about its historical evolution or juridical nature.

Although the documentation preserved for the Catalan territory became much richer in terms of quality and quantity from the 12th–13th century onwards, the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu remained on the margins of the most relevant sources for understanding the churches and the ecclesiastical reality of the Late Middle Ages. As Josep M. Palau demonstrated in his doctoral thesis, the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu, like the rest of the parishes in its valley, never appears in the episcopal visits made by the bishops of Urgell, at least until the end of the 14th century (Palau Baduell 2015, 90–91). This particularity must be linked to the fact that, at least from the end of the 12th century, the Àneu valley was organized through its own deanery, as evidenced by the election of the priest Arnau Gibert as its dean by Bishop Arnau de Preixens in 1175 (Baraut Obiols 1990, 229). This one had special privileges like other deaneries in the Pyrenean area, as shown in modern period sources. It was ruled with significant autonomy through its own council, comprised of 24 clerics from the valley, with a dean for life who presided over it (Moliné 1982). Therefore, this autonomous character, together with the local clergy's reluctance to allow more significant episcopal interference, could have considerably limited the bishop's capacity for action in the Àneu valley and might explain the systematic exclusion of its deanery

2 Regarding the long debate about the falseness of this diploma and the actual date of its writing, finally fixed around the year 1020, see: Benet Clarà 1983, 137–43; Baraut Obiols 1985, 519–29; Riu Riu 1992, 318–20; Garsaball 1994; Pladevall Font 1998, 21–33; Gascón Chopo and Vergés Pons 2017.

3 It seems that the claims and usurpations of the Counts of Pallars over the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu and the episcopal rights over the Àneu valley did not end with the agreement of 1088, since, almost a century later, in 1164, Count Artau III of Pallars Sobirà once again gave the church of Santa Maria d'Àneu and all the other churches in his county to the Bishop of Urgell, undertaking to preserve its security and properties (Baraut Obiols 1990, 108).

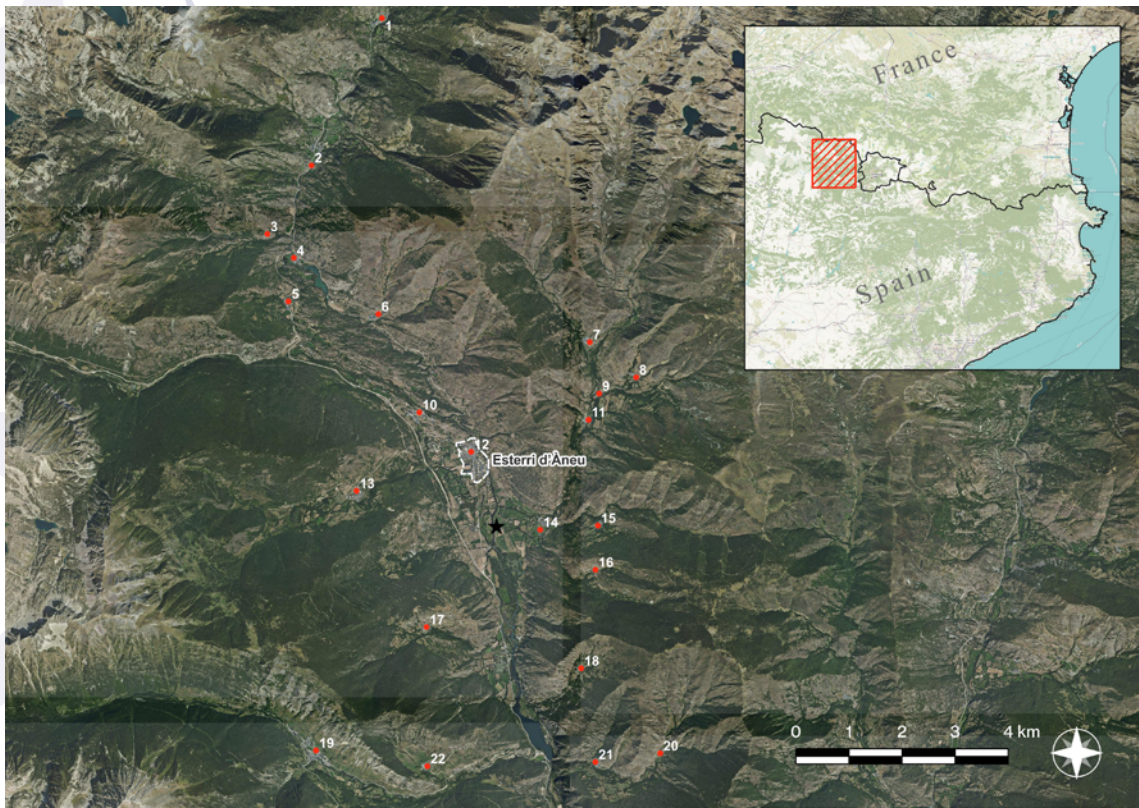


Figure 2. The Location of the Church Santa Maria d'Àneu and the Surrounding Parish Churches belonging to the Deanery of Àneu: (1) Sant Llisier d'Alós, (2) Sant Joan d'Isil, (3) Sant Serni d'Arreu, (4) Sant Martí de Borén, (5) Sant Pere de Sorpe, (6) Sant Llorenç d'Isavarre, (7) Sant Serni de Cerbi, (8) Sant Esteve de Gavàs, (9) Sant Pere d'Aurós, (10) Sant Andreu de València d'Àneu, (11) Sant Julià d'Unarre, (12) Sant Vicenç d'Esterri d'Àneu, (13) Sant Just i Sant Pastor de Son, (14) Sant Martí d'Escalarre, (15) Sant Joan de Burgo, (16) Sant Miquel de Llaborre, (17) Sant Pere de Jou, (18) Sant Bartomeu de Dorve, (19) Santa Llogaia d'Espot, (20) Sant Quirze de Berrós Sobirà, (21) Sant Jaume de Berrós Jussà, (22) Sant Esteve d'Estais. The parish churches are numbered from north to south, showing that they were positioned all around Santa Maria d'Àneu, with many extending north along the main roads and the river Noguera Pallaresa.

from pastoral visitations (Palau Baduell 2015, 90–91).

The counterpart to this autonomy is the scant information we have about the churches in the territory around Santa Maria d'Àneu. In fact, we do not even know which church would be the center of the deanery of Àneu. Several authors have suggested that Santa Maria might initially have held this role. This would explain why, despite never appearing with the title of a parish church, it has such a unique architectural specificity and pre-eminence (Adell Gisbert and Cases Loscos 1993, 243–244; Cabestany

Fort, Matas Blanxart, and Palau Baduell 2005, 194). Additionally, it clarifies why the Counts of Pallars always preferred it, both to promote and appropriate it. Hypothetically, it would also be possible that this church remained in the Late Middle Ages as the ecclesiastical center of the valley and the place of residence of the dean, possibly accompanied by other clerics. Consequently, all the parishes that made up the late medieval Àneu deanery, in total 22 according to Palau's reconstruction (Palau Baduell 2015, 130–131), would have had some relationship of dependence with it (fig. 2).

Verifying whether Santa Maria d'Àneu served as the center of the Àneu deanery through existing historical records is challenging. However, our soundscape analysis offers a novel perspective by assessing whether this church had the auditory capacity to initiate the deanery's aural network, transmitting auditory messages throughout the Àneu parishes via its bell ringing. Thus, our findings introduce fresh evidence that may help to resolve the debate regarding the central ecclesiastical role of Santa Maria in the Àneu valley.

Methodology of Archaeoacoustic Study

The methodology of this archaeoacoustic study consists of three main parts: 1) field acoustic measurements, 2) virtual sound propagation simulations, and 3) visibility analysis.

Field Acoustic Measurements

In March 2024, we conducted outdoor acoustic measurements at the site of Santa Maria d'Àneu. The church features a bell gable on the west-facing entrance wall, slightly offset towards the south. A medium-sized bell within the bell gable (fig. 3) is manually rung by pulling a rope from the interior church gallery. We recorded acoustic data using the Sound level meter Cesva 202 connected to a ZoomH4n recorder. This setup provided acoustic data in an Excel file as the sound level meter output and a corresponding audio file in WAV format from the recorder. The sonometer was mounted on a tripod at a height of 1.5 m, approximating ear height.

As shown in fig. 4, we recorded background noise and bell ringing for two receiver points: in front of the church and approximately 70m



Figure 3: The Location of the Bell Gable with the Microphone/Sonometer Set at the Receiver Point R1 in Front (left) and a Close-up of the Bell (right).



Figure 4: Map Showing the Bell's Location (white dot) and Two Receiver Points (red dots)—R1 in Front of the Bell Gable and R2 Approximately 70 m Down the Road.

down the road from the bell. For each acoustic measurement, the bell was rung three times to ensure a reliable and consistent record of the sound level.

Virtual Sound Propagation Simulations

The second part of our research involved simulating bell sound propagation in the surrounding landscape using GIS. We used the ESRI ArcGIS Desktop 10.5 software and the Sound Mapping Tools (SMT) toolbox, specifically the SPreAD-GIS script, developed by Reed and colleagues (Reed, Boggs, and Mann 2012). This script simulates sound propagation in natural environments, adapted from the SPreAD - System for the Prediction of Acoustic Detectability (Harrison, Clark, and Stankey 1980). Ideally, sound propagates spherically, diminishing as the square of the distance from the source increases.

The SPreAD-GIS script also incorporates the effects of atmospheric conditions, vegetation, wind, and terrain. These factors collectively contribute to sound level attenuation, as detailed in tab. 1. The script aligns with ISO 9613-2 standards for outdoor sound attenuation (Keyel et al. 2017). It tracks the propagation of various frequencies, allowing us to determine the dominant pitch in different areas. Moreover, the map design was carried out using the software QGIS Desktop 3.38.0.

For the simulation, we defined the study area and overlaid a digital elevation model (DEM) as a cartographic base obtained from the website of the Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica (n.d.). We used the National Land Cover Data (NLCD) provided by the European Space Agency (n.d.) for vegetation cover data. The land cover data were reclassified into seven categories:

Table 1. Environmental Sound Propagation Factors that are Included in the SPreAD-GIS Calculation Process

Environmental sound propagation factors	Declining the sound level due to...
Spherical Spreading Loss	Distance
Atmospheric Absorption Loss	Atmospheric absorption which depends on temperature, humidity and elevation
Foliage and Ground Cover Loss	Absorption by the ground and scattering by vegetation
Downwind and Upwind Loss	Wind direction, wind speed, seasonal conditions
Terrain Effects	Barrier effects from hills or ridgelines
Predicted Noise Propagation	The difference between introduced and background levels

barren land, coniferous forest, herbaceous/grassland, deciduous forest, scrubland, urban/developed land, and water. DEM and NLCD were set at the same resolution of 10x10 meters, the highest available resolution for the NLCD in this Catalan region. We also introduced data related to the sound source, including the location of the Àneu bell and a frequency table with measured sound levels in the one-third octave frequency bands from 400–2000 Hz, recorded at a distance of 11 m (tab. 2).

To validate the simulation, we first recreated the weather conditions present during the field measurements (tab. 4, weather scenario A.1). Then, we generated the sound propagation map, showing sound levels at the receiver points (fig. 5). Tab. 3 compares the measured and simulated sound levels, showing a deviation of 3 to 4 dBA, an acceptable range for validation. This

validation allowed us to proceed with further testing under different weather conditions.

Anticipating that the simulations would reveal the extremes of sound propagation under different weather conditions, we conducted simulations for both extreme winter and summer days (B and C, tab. 4). Meteorological data were sourced from Servei Meteorològic de Catalunya (n.d.), including data from nearby stations. Wind data were obtained from Tírvia, extreme temperature data from the last 50 years were taken from Tremp, and humidity data were collected from La Pobla de Segur. Given that wind significantly influences sound propagation, we also tested conditions with the most favorable wind direction, blowing from SSE towards Esterri d'Àneu (tab. 4, A.2.).

Table 2. The Frequency Table Used to Characterize the Sound Source for the SPreAD-GIS Simulation, Including Sound Pressure Levels (dBA) in the One-third Octave Frequency Bands from 400–2000 Hz, Recorded at 11 m from the Source.

Frequency (Hz)	400	500	630	800	1000	1250	1600	2000
Sound Pressure Level (dBA)	47	73	69	70	81	80	76	80

Table 3. Measured vs. Simulated Values of Sound Pressure Levels for Two Receiver Points on the Site of Santa Maria d'Àneu

Receiver ID	Receiver location	Measured values (L AF; dBA)			Simulated values (dBA)
		1st toll	2nd toll	3rd toll	
1	In front of the church and bell gable	81.7	80.3	90.7	85
2	On the earthen road behind the church	60.2	53.3	56.2	64

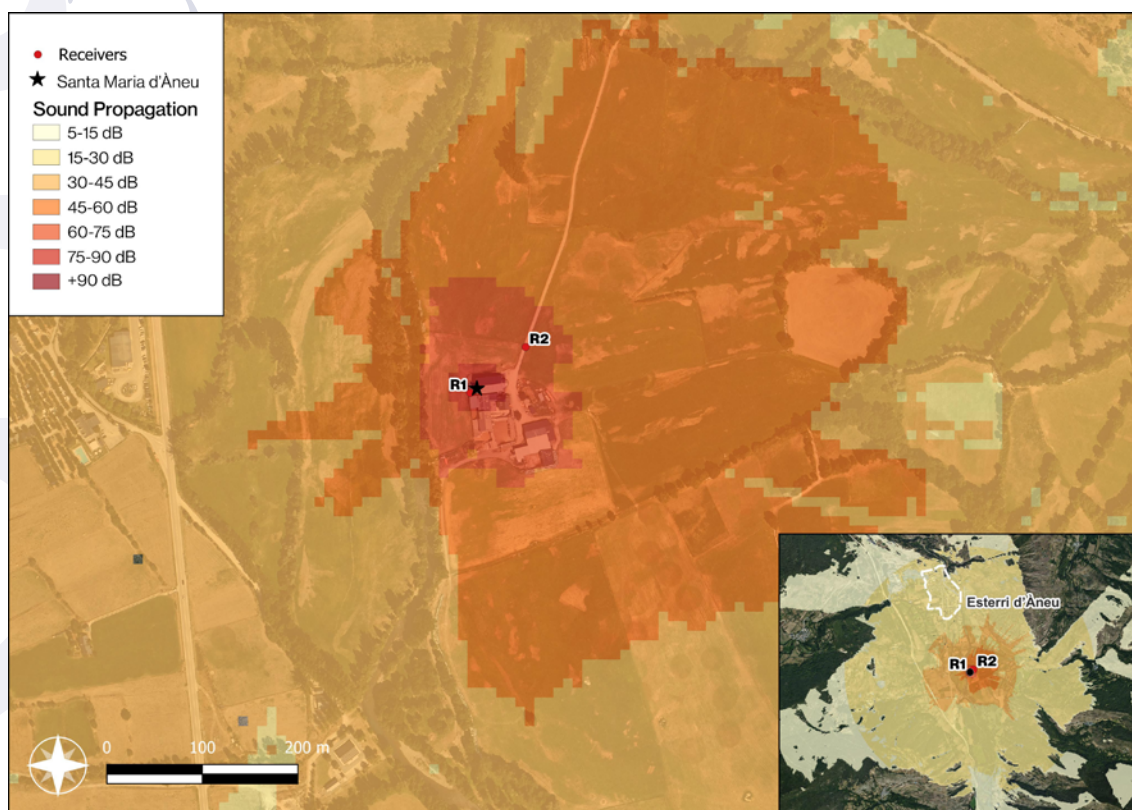


Figure 5: Bell Sound Propagation Map Simulating the Weather Conditions during the Onsite Acoustic Measurements. The values obtained for two receiver points – R1 and R2 – were used to validate the SpreAD-GIS script (see tab. 3).

Methodology for the Visibility Analysis

While the primary aim of this paper is to identify and study the aural network of Santa Maria d'Àneu, we also complemented our findings with a virtual visibility simulation to assess the church's visual influence over the deanery of Àneu. This study was conducted using the Visi-

bility Analysis plugin developed by Zoran Čučković for the open-source software QGIS (Čučković 2016).

We employed three different types of visibility analysis. First, we defined the individual viewshed of Santa Maria d'Àneu, calculating the entire area visible from this observation point

Table 4. Weather Scenarios that Are Used in Testing the Sound Propagation

#	General description	Temperature (°C)	Wind (direction, m/s)	Relative Humidity (%)
A.1.	As measured onsite (no wind)	18	No wind	30
A.2.	As measured onsite, but with the most favorable wind conditions	18	SSE 3,75	30
B.1.	Extremely cold and calm winter day	-8	No wind	74
B.2.	Extremely cold and windy winter day	-8	NNE 6,25	74
C.1.	Extremely hot and calm summer day	36	No wind	53
C.2.	Extremely hot and windy summer day	36	WSW 3,75	53

based on the region's digital elevation model (DEM). Second, we generated the cumulative viewshed of all the parishes in the Àneu deanery to determine whether Santa Maria was situated in a more or less visible area compared to the surrounding churches. Finally, we constructed a network of intervisibility between these religious centers, establishing which churches were visible to each other and which were not.

To build these models, we used the same coordinates file and 10x10 meters DEM for the sound propagation simulations. However, visibility analysis requires converting the original points into 'viewpoints,' which necessitates establishing the height above ground for both the observers and the target objects. For the individual viewshed of Santa Maria d'Àneu, we assumed the observation would be from ground level, as the church has only a small modern bell gable. Therefore, we set the observer height to the average height of a person: 1.60 meters. The same value was applied for the cumulative viewshed of the Àneu valley and the intervisibility network between its parishes, as our interest lies in views of daily life, not those from the tops of steeples.

Determining the height of the target objects—the medieval parish churches—was more challenging. These churches undoubtedly stood above ground level, but most have been extensively rebuilt in modern times, making it difficult to determine their original height in the Middle Ages. To address this uncertainty, we set the target height at 7.50 m for the two viewshed analyses, a reasonable estimate for medieval churches (for example, Santa Maria d'Àneu rises to 11 m). For the intervisibility network, in order to avoid misleading results, we conducted three different simulations: one assuming all buildings were approximately 7.50 m tall, another considering the maximum current height of the buildings (including their modern bell towers), and a third assuming both the observer and target points were at the top of the respective steeples.⁴

As we will discuss below, the differences between these simulations are minimal for Santa Maria d'Àneu but provide some thought-provoking insights.

Finally, all procedures accounted for the earth's curvature and atmospheric refraction, set at 0.13000. However, all simulations assumed optimal visibility conditions without considering adverse weather effects, such as fog, which could significantly impact visibility.

Results of the Simulation of Sound Propagation

The sound propagation is simulated for six weather scenarios: without wind (A.1., B.1., C.1.) and with wind (A.2., B.2., C.2.). Fig. 6 displays the sound propagation maps for these scenarios, using different colors to indicate seven ranges of sound levels (5-15 dB, 15-30 dB, 30-45 dB, and so on).

Scenario A.1. represents the most common mild weather conditions without wind. In this case, the total area coverage is the largest, about 16.5 km² (tab. 5). However, bell ringing reaches half of this area with less than 15 dB. Whether this low sound level could have been heard depended on several factors, primarily if the background noise (such as river or traffic) was sufficiently quiet. Our acoustic measurements of background noise at the site Santa Maria d'Àneu range from an $L_{Aeq, 2min}$ of 30 to 45 dB. However, given that no motor vehicles existed in the medieval period, the background noise was undoubtedly lower than today.

Observing the maps in the left column of fig. 6, we notice a more extensive coverage area than the maps on the right. This is because the maps on the left show scenarios without wind, allowing the sound of the bell to propagate further into the landscape. According to the simulations, the sound of the bell reaches the churches Sant Vicenç d'Esterri d'Àneu and Sant Martí d'Escalarre (numbers 12 and 14 on the map, re-

⁴ The height of the different buildings has been obtained thanks to an inventory of all the bells and steeples in the Àneu valley (Dalmau Argemir and Orriols Sendra 2001).

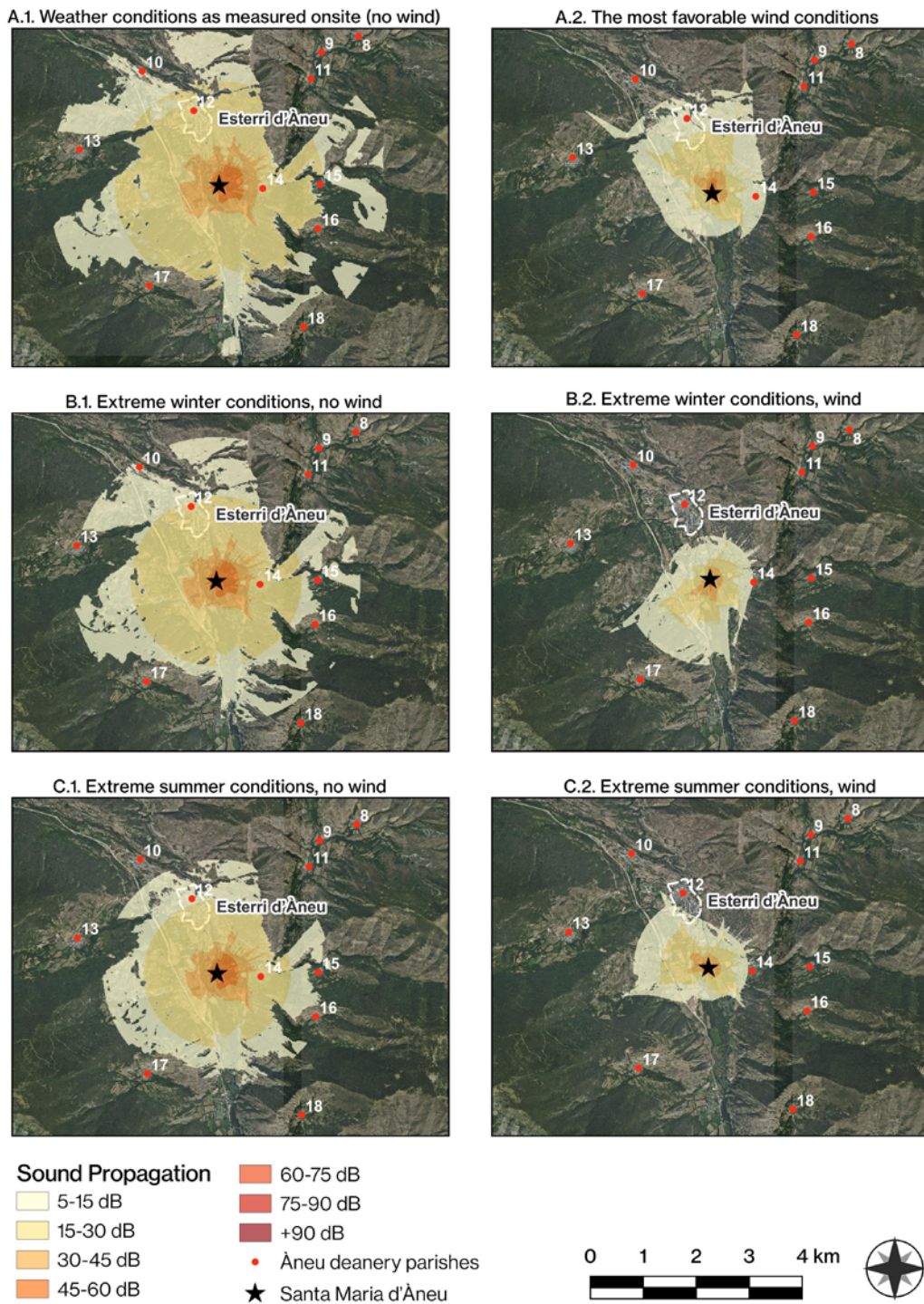


Figure 6: Sound Propagation Maps for Six Weather Scenarios, Showing the Coverage of the Sound of the Bell Ringing from Santa Maria d'Àneu by the Sound Levels in dB

Table 5. The Area Covered by the Sound of Bells (km²) Shown per Sound Levels (dB)

#	General description of weather conditions	Coverage area (km ²) by the sound levels					Total
		05-15 dB	15-30 dB	30-45 dB	45-60 dB	60-90 dB	
A.1.	As measured onsite (no wind)	7.12	7.9	1.17	0.28	0.0285	16.49
A.2.	As measured onsite, but with the most favorable wind conditions	3.56	1.49	0.21	0.04	0.0157	5.32
B.1.	Extremely cold and calm winter day	6.57	6.08	0.89	0.24	0.0271	13.8
B.2.	Extremely cold and windy winter day	2.48	0.95	0.18	0.02	0.0054	3.64
C.1.	Extremely hot and calm summer day	4.97	4.53	0.8	0.22	0.0263	10.55
C.2.	Extremely hot and windy summer day	1.88	0.97	0.17	0.02	0.005	3.04

spectively) at a level between 15 and 30 dB under no-wind conditions. In contrast, the church Sant Andreu de València d'Àneu (number 10 on the map) is on the border area in scenarios A.1. and B.1.

The scenarios that include wind are presented in the right column (fig. 6, A.2., B.2., and C.2.). When the wind is introduced, the sound

propagation area is shrunk by 3 to 4 times (tab. 5). Only in scenario A.2., which includes the 'favorable wind' blowing from the church Santa Maria d'Àneu towards the village Esterri d'Àneu, does the bell sound reach the churches Sant Vicenç d'Esterri d'Àneu and Sant Martí d'Escalarre (numbers 12 and 14 on the map, respectively) at a level between 5 and 15 dB. In B.2.,

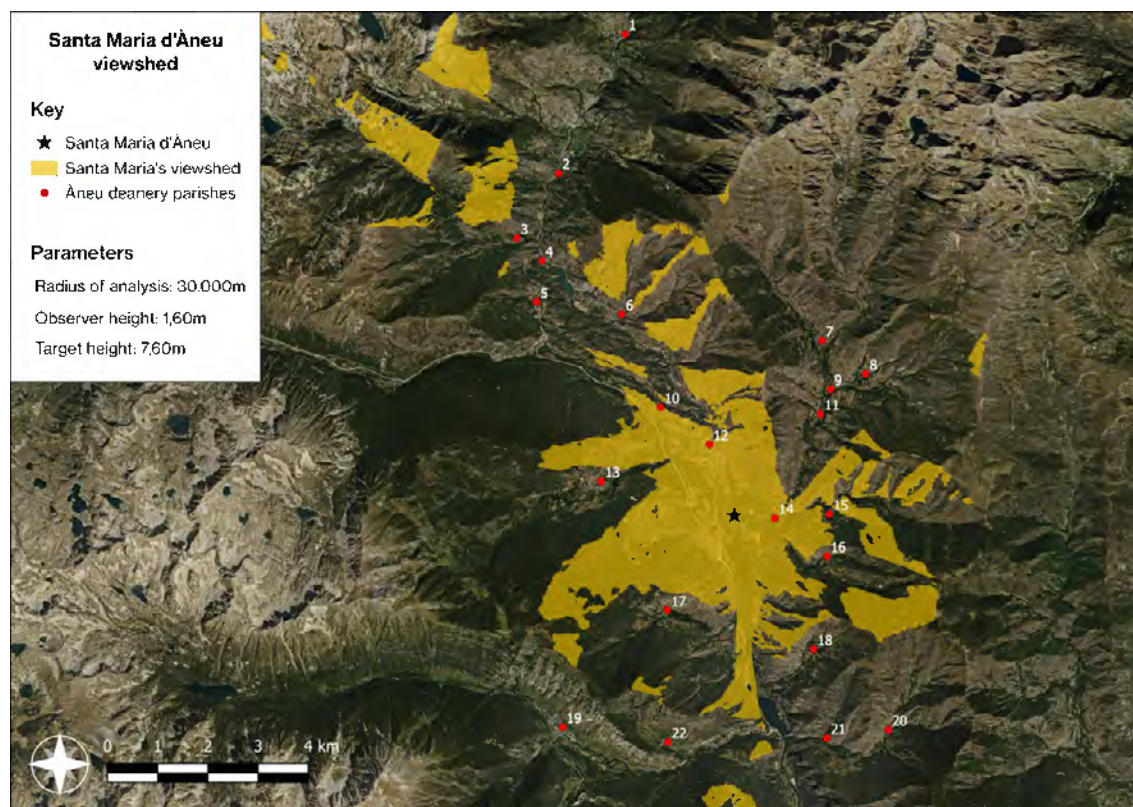


Figure 7: Individual Viewshed from Santa Maria d'Àneu

the church Sant Martí d'Escalarre (number 14) is on the border of the bell sound propagation area.

Results of the Visibility Analysis

Our visibility study comprised three distinct procedures: defining the individual viewshed of Santa Maria d'Àneu to determine the visible areas from that location; generating the cumulative viewshed of all the parish churches in the Àneu deanery to assess whether Santa Maria d'Àneu was in a notably visible position; and mapping the intervisibility network among these religious centers to examine their visual relationships.

Starting with the individual viewshed analysis (fig. 7), we observe that the visible area from Santa Maria d'Àneu does not encompass the entire Àneu valley. Still, it does cover its central and most fertile parts. Although the church is situat-

ed at the bottom of the valley, just a few meters from the Noguera Pallaresa River, its central location in the broad plain between La Guingueta and Esterri d'Àneu offers a commanding view of the surrounding area. From here, it has direct visual connections with three significant parish churches: Sant Andreu de València d'Àneu, Sant Vicenç d'Esterri d'Àneu, and Sant Martí d'Escalarre. Additionally, its field of vision extends toward the vicinity of Sant Joan de Burgo, which would be visible if the church had a bell tower at least 17.42 meters high. Notably, the viewshed of Santa Maria d'Àneu also includes the castle of València d'Àneu, one of the main fortresses of the Counts of Pallars Sobirà, whose historical ties to Santa Maria d'Àneu have been well-established.

In the cumulative viewshed analysis of the Àneu deanery (fig. 8), we used a color gradient to

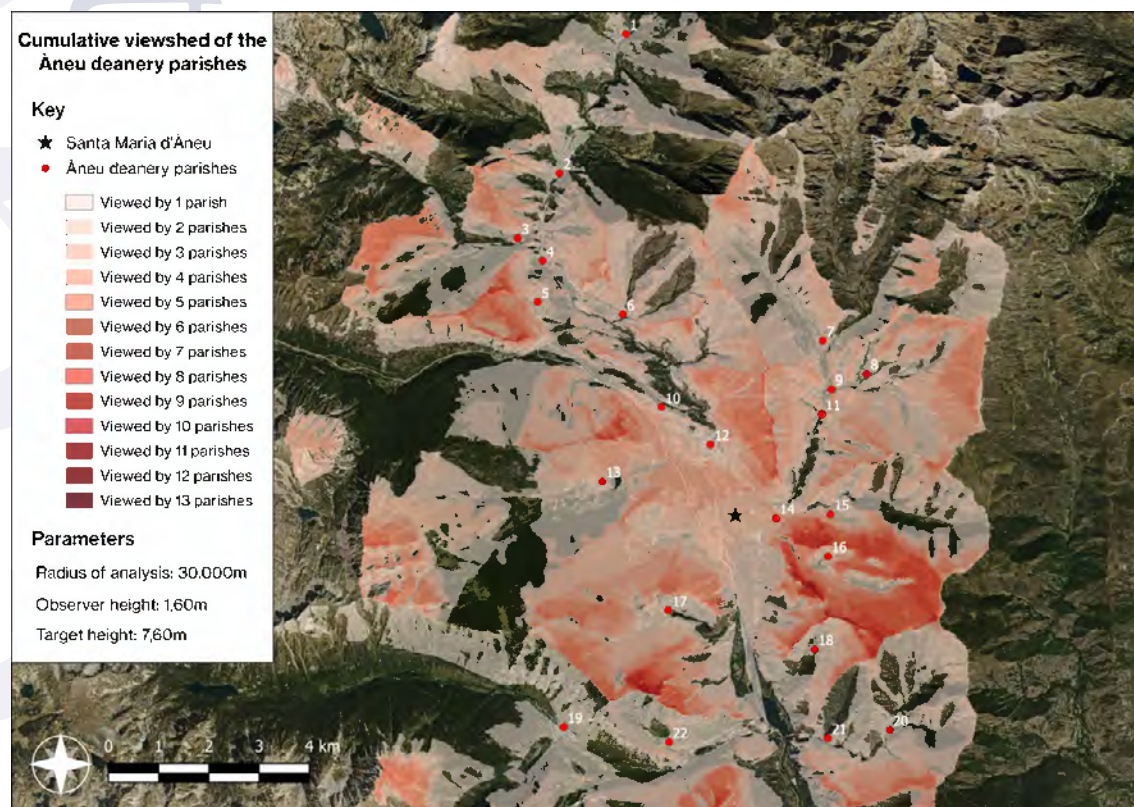


Figure 8: Cumulative Viewshed of the Àneu Deanery

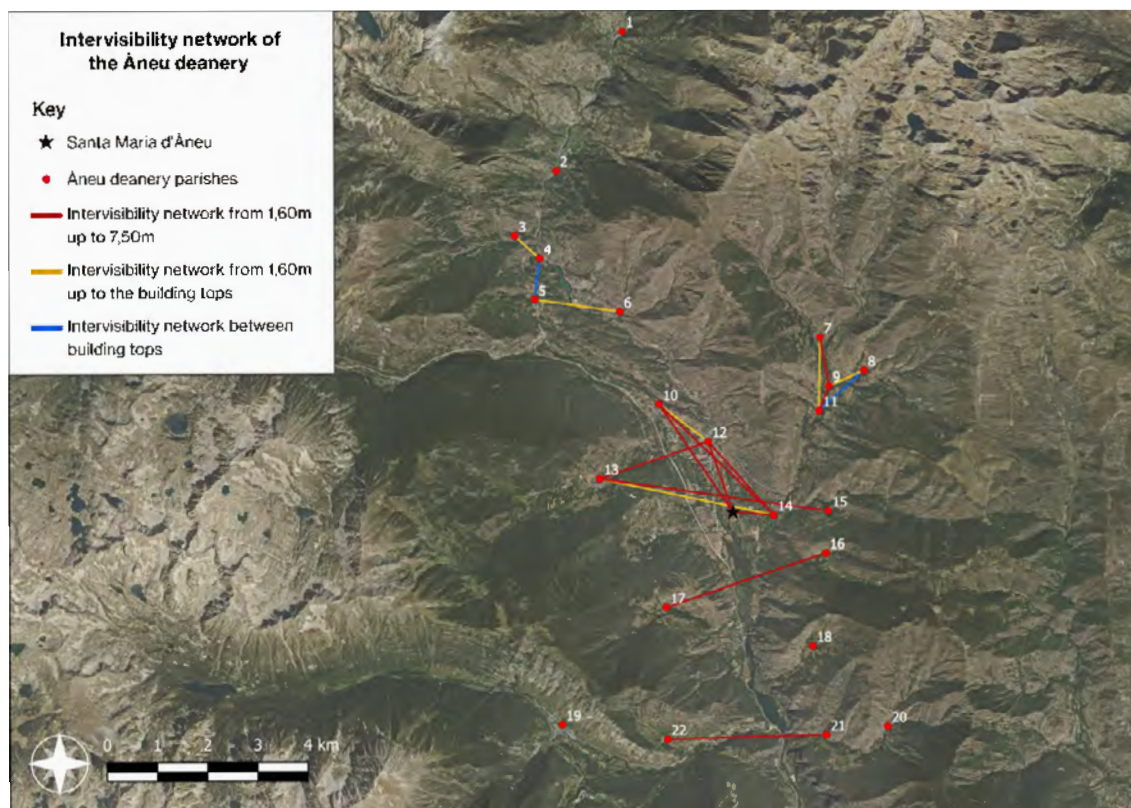


Figure 9: Intervisibility Network between the Àneu Deanery Parish Churches

indicate the number of parishes that can see each raster pixel. This analysis reveals that Santa Maria d'Àneu, visible from three different observation points, is situated in an area relatively well monitored by the surrounding parish churches. Apart from the slopes and peaks of the highest mountains, which are visible from most of the valley, only a narrow strip of land between Santa Maria and Esterri—visible from one additional observation point—has a higher visibility index.

Finally, the various intervisibility network simulations demonstrate no continuous visual communication between all the parishes of the Àneu deanery. The region's abrupt geography creates isolated points and at least three visually independent subsystems (fig. 9). Of these, the one in the central valley plain—including Santa Maria d'Àneu—is the most intricate, with up to six fully interconnected churches. Notably, Santa Maria d'Àneu, with its three connections,

was one of the most visually controlled churches in the deanery, at least before many surrounding parishes were outfitted with tall bell towers in the modern era. These new towers created additional connections, especially when analyzing the visibility from their top. This suggests that while the network was not fully interconnected during the Middle Ages, efforts to maximize intervisibility across the network may have been sought as much as possible.

Discussion

In this section, we will discuss three main topics that arose from our research: 1) The limitations of the SpreAD-GIS script when exploring the propagation of bell sounds in the landscape, 2) The audibility of bell sounds concerning background noise, and 3) The aural network with Santa Maria d'Àneu as the central church of the Àneu valley.

Table 6. Distances of the Closest Parish Churches to the Coverage Area of Àneu's Bells

Parish church number the maps and name	Minimum distance from Àneu's bell coverage (meters)
13: Sant Just i Sant Pastor de Son	300–350
15: Sant Joan de Burgo	200–250
16: Sant Miquel de Llavorre	250–300
17: Sant Pere de Jou	350–400
18: Sant Bartomeu de Dorve	350–400

The Limitations of the SPreAD-GIS Script

The simulation of sound propagation in the landscape, especially for sounds of large percussion instruments such as bells, is an underdeveloped area of research. The SPreAD-GIS script used in this archaeoacoustic study is not designed explicitly for bell sound propagation. Although our simulation was validated by on-site acoustic measurements and followed by weather scenario simulations, several script limitations should be highlighted.

The SPreAD-GIS is a static model that represents the spatial pattern of bell sound propagation around the church for a snapshot in time. This model does not account for the cumulative effect of repetitive bell ringing. The script omits reflections and foliage effects, as accurately representing these factors would require higher-resolution data sets that are not widely available. Consequently, the simulation is somewhat simplified and does not provide precise predictions, particularly at the map's borders.

The sound map provides a frozen image of sound propagation in one moment. It fails to transmit the dynamics of soundscapes. As Mlekuz (2004) pointed out, the soundscape is relative to the listener, in a permanent process of construction and stratification by the listener as (s)he's moving across the landscape.

The Audibility of the Bell Ringing

While the SPreAD-GIS script allows for introducing ambient sound conditions to predict where the bell sound would exceed background noise, we did not utilize this feature. Our hesitation stemmed from the absence of studies on

the audibility of bells in landscapes with varying background noise levels. However, the SPreAD-GIS script developers indicate that some sounds can be heard below background noise levels (Keyel et al. 2017). In addition, previous studies have shown that repetitive sounds can be heard even more than 10 dB below background noise levels (Almagro-Pastor et al. 2021), though none have included church bells.

Sound sensitivity and perception depend on various factors, including frequency, sound type, auditory expectation, and age (Plack 2018). Our subsequent research will question whether the bell sounds lower than the background noise can be heard and, if so, by how much. This psychoacoustic question warrants investigation with a statistically significant number of respondents.

The Aural Network and Santa Maria d'Àneu as a Central Church of the Àneu Valley

According to the simulations and sound maps (fig. 6), Santa Maria d'Àneu appears centrally positioned, especially for churches 10–18. In scenarios without wind, the bell sound propagation encompasses two or three parish churches (10, 12, and 14). As presented in tab. 6, several churches are positioned close to the bell sound propagation area of Santa Maria d'Àneu (13, 15–18) at a distance of 200 to 400 meters. Even if the Santa Maria d'Àneu bell ringing doesn't reach these parish churches directly, it could be heard in the nearby area. This would be sufficient to alert or notify the neighboring parish, which would then ring their bells and thus broadcast the signal further into the deanery.

This soundscape analysis was based on the acoustic measurements of a modern bell in Santa Maria d'Àneu. We do not know about the bell used in the medieval period. However, we expect that the medieval bell's acoustic characteristics differed somewhat from those of the modern bell.

As shown in the testing of weather scenarios, wind strongly affects sound propagation in the landscape, drastically shrinking the area covered by bell-ringing sounds. However, strong winds are rare in this area, and we should keep in mind that the weather scenarios tested in this research (A.2., B, C) are extremes that occur once every several years or even decades.

The results of the visibility analysis are perfectly in line with those of the virtual sound propagation simulation. Once again, Santa Maria d'Àneu seems to be in a central position, with a good field of vision and a high visibility index. Likewise, the three churches that can virtually hear its bells (10, 12, and 14) can also see it. The developed models allow us to go a step further and suggest that all these churches were part of a much wider network of intervisibility, something that we can only guess at for the aural dimension.

To fully understand the aural network of the Àneu deanery during the Late Middle Ages, it would be crucial to simulate the sound propagation of bells from all 22 parish churches and verify these simulations with onsite testing. Additionally, this research should be expanded to include the numerous suffragan churches that existed alongside the parish churches in each district, as they undoubtedly influenced the density and stability of the Àneu deanery's aural network. Expanding the study this way could reveal auditory or visual connections between some of the isolated points on our maps and integrate the three subsystems we identified as independent within the intervisibility network.

Conclusion

This archaeoacoustic study determined that the bell sounds of Santa Maria d'Àneu are audible

in at least two of the parish churches and several more parish districts that comprised the medieval Àneu deanery. Due to its central location in the valley, Santa Maria possessed the auditory capacity to initiate an aural network among all the surrounding parishes, allowing auditory messages to be promptly broadcasted throughout the Àneu deanery. This supports the hypothesis that Santa Maria d'Àneu was an ecclesiastical center of the valley during medieval times, although it is insufficient to prove it definitively.

The results of this study encourage further investigation into the medieval aural network of the Àneu deanery. A deeper understanding of what happens at the borders of the sound propagation maps is fundamental. High-resolution DEM and NLCD data are necessary to achieve more precise sound propagation models. Additionally, measuring the acoustic properties of medieval bells still in use in the Catalan region and exploring the audibility of bell sounds concerning background noise would significantly advance our understanding of the medieval auditory network of the Àneu deanery.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available at CORA—Repositori de Dades de Recerca: <https://doi.org/10.34810/data1756>.

Acknowledgments

This research was conducted as part of the CULT-URAL project, fully titled 'Aural Culture: Decoding the Sacred Soundscapes of Medieval Europe,' which received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No. 101064323. It was also supported by the Advanced ERC Artsoundscapes project (Grant Agreement No. 787842). As the research results were presented at the EAA Rome 2024 annual meeting, we would also like to thank MAHPA (Research Group of Medieval Art, History, Paleography, and Archaeology) for partially covering the travel expenses. The authors thank Diego Moreno Iglesias, an acoustic technician, for his invaluable assistance in conducting the field acoustic measurements.

Author contributions

Zorana Đorđević: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Xavier Costa-Badia: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visibility analysis, Writing – original draft. Natalia González Vázquez: GIS and Sound Mapping Tool simulation, Visualization. Lidia Alvarez Morales: Methodology, Formal analysis, Validation, Data curation, Writing – review & editing.

Summary

In medieval Europe, church bells were more than just time markers; they served as powerful communicative tools in both secular and sacred life. Bells announced significant events, served as alarms in times of danger, and conveyed messages of joy, sorrow, and community identity. The sound of bells permeated the landscape, shaping daily life and reinforcing social bonds. Often called the “voice of God,” bells held symbolic and political power, uniting people under a common auditory experience. The sound of a bell can be considered an earcon—a symbolic sonic event that gains meaning through repeated exposure in specific contexts, as defined by Blesser and Salter. As such, bells were crucial in shaping medieval people’s emotional responses to their environment, fostering a sense of place and belonging.

The audibility of bells often coincided with parish boundaries, contributing to a shared sense of community among those who could hear them. As unique soundmarks, bells helped define the acoustic communities of medieval parishes. Understanding the range of bell sounds and the inclusivity of these soundscapes is essential for a fuller comprehension of the medieval auditory environment and the communication networks between neighboring parishes. This fits Mills’ definition of auditory archaeology, which explores the relationship between people, sound, and their environment. Recent studies have mapped sound in archaeological contexts using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), such as Mlekuž’s 2004 simulation of medieval bell sounds in Slovenia. These advancements in sound mapping technologies, particularly SPreAD-GIS, have allowed researchers to understand sound propagation in historical landscapes better.

This paper explores the case of Santa Maria d’Àneu, a church located in the Àneu valley in the Catalan Pyrenees, focusing on its potential auditory relationship with nearby parishes in the medieval Àneu deanery. Although historians have debated Santa Maria d’Àneu’s significance within this district, its role as a potential ecclesiastical center remains unclear. Positioned in the middle of a valley without an adjacent settlement, the church’s strategic location could have enabled its bells to reach the surrounding parishes. This study seeks to test that hypothesis through an acoustic analysis of bell sound propagation and visibility studies.

The methodology involved a three-part approach: onsite acoustic measurements, virtual sound propagation simulations, and visibility analysis. Sound levels were measured in real-time using sound level meters and audio recorders to capture both the bell sounds and background noise. The virtual simulations were conducted using ESRI ArcGIS Desktop and the SPreAD-GIS script to model the propagation of the bells across the deanery, accounting for variables like distance, topography, and atmospheric absorption. The visibility analysis used QGIS to examine the viewshed of Santa Maria d’Àneu and its visual relationship with other parish churches in the deanery.

Results indicate that Santa Maria d’Àneu’s bell sounds were audible in at least two nearby parish churches and several more parish districts within the deanery. Due to its central location in the valley, Santa Maria d’Àneu had the potential to initiate an auditory network that allowed messages to be quickly broadcast throughout the region. These findings support the hypothesis that Santa Maria d’Àneu may have served as an ecclesiastical center during the medieval period, although the evidence is inconclusive.

The study’s results highlight the need for further research into the medieval aural network of the Àneu deanery. Higher-resolution DEM and NLCD data are required to improve sound propagation models’ accuracy. Additionally, measuring the acoustic properties of medieval bells still in use in the Catalan region and investigating the interaction between bell sounds and background noise would significantly enhance our understanding of medieval auditory networks and their role in shaping community life in the Àneu valley.

Povzetek

V srednjeveški Evropi so bili cerkveni zvonovi več kot le označevalci časa; služili so kot močna komunikacijska orodja v posvetnem in cerkvenem življenju. Zvonovi so naznanjali pomembne dogodke, služili kot alarm v času nevarnosti ter prenašali sporočila o veselju, žalosti in identiteti skupnosti. Njihov zvok je prežemal pokrajino, oblikoval vsakdanje življenje in krepil družbene vezi. Zvonovi, pogosto imenovani »božji glas«, so imeli simbolično in politično moč ter so združevali ljudi pod skupno zvočno izkušnjo. Zvok zvona lahko štejemo za zvočni dogodek – simbolni zvočni dogodek, ki pridobi pomen s ponavljajočo se izpostavljenostjo v določenih kontekstih, kot sta ga opredelila Barry Blesser in Linda-Ruth Salter. Kot taki so bili zvonovi ključni pri oblikovanju čustvenih odzivov srednjeveških ljudi na njihovo okolje, saj so spodbujali občutek kraja in pripadnosti.

Slišnost zvonov je pogosto sovpadala z mejami župnij, kar je prispevalo k skupnemu občutku skupnosti med tistimi, ki so jih lahko slišali. Kot edinstveni zvočni znaki so zvonovi pomagali opredeliti akustične skupnosti srednjeveških župnij. Razumevanje obsega zvokov zvonov in vključenosti teh zvočnih pokrajin je bistveno za boljše razumevanje srednjeveškega zvočnega okolja ter komunikacijskih omrežij med sosednjimi župnijami. To ustreza Millsovi opredelitvi slušne arheologije, ki raziskuje odnos med ljudmi, zvokom in njihovim okoljem. Nedavne raziskave so kartirale zvok v arheoloških kontekstih z uporabo geografskih informacijskih sistemov (GIS), npr. Mlekuževa simulacija srednjeveških zvonov v Sloveniji iz leta 2004. Ti napredki v tehnologijah kartiranja zvoka, zlasti SPreAD-GIS, so raziskovalcem omogočili boljše razumevanje širjenja zvoka v zgodovinskih pokrajinah.

V tem prispevku obravnavamo primer cerkve Santa Maria d'Àneu v dolini Àneu v katalonskih Pirenejih, pri čemer se osredotočamo na njeno morebitno zvočno povezavo z bližnjimi župnijami v srednjeveškem dekanatu Àneu. Čeprav so zgodovinarji razpravljali o pomenu Santa Marie d'Àneu v tem okrožju, njena vloga kot potencialnega cerkvenega središča ostaja nejasna. Ker je cerkev stala sredi doline brez sosednjega naselja, bi lahko njena strateška lega omogočila, da bi njeni zvonovi dosegli okoliške župnije. Namen pričujoče raziskave je

preveriti to hipotezo z akustično analizo širjenja zvoka zvonov in raziskavami vidnosti.

Metodologija je vključevala tridelni pristop: akustične meritve na kraju samem, virtualne simulacije širjenja zvoka in analizo vidljivosti. Raven zvoka je bila izmerjena v realnem času z merilniki ravni zvoka in zvočnimi snemalniki, ki so zajemali zvoke zvona in hrup ozadja. Virtualne simulacije so bile izvedene z uporabo programa ESRI ArcGIS Desktop in s skripto SPreAD-GIS za modeliranje širjenja zvonov po dekaniji, pri čemer so bile upoštevane spremenljivke, kot so razdalja, topografija in absorpcija ozračja. Pri analizi vidljivosti sta bila s programom QGIS preučena pogled na cerkev Santa Maria d'Àneu in njen vizualni odnos z drugimi župnjskimi cerkvami v dekanatu.

Rezultati kažejo, da so bili zvoki zvona v Santa Marii d'Àneu slišni v vsaj dveh bližnjih župnjskih cerkvah in še nekaj župnjskih okrožjih v dekaniji. Zaradi svoje osrednje lege v dolini je imela Santa Maria d'Àneu možnost sprožiti zvočno omrežje, ki je omogočalo hitro razširjanje sporočil po vsej regiji. Te ugotovitve podpirajo hipotezo, da je Santa Maria d'Àneu v srednjem veku morda služila kot cerkveno središče, čeprav dokazi niso prepričljivi.

Rezultati raziskave poudarjajo potrebo po nadaljnjih raziskavah srednjeveškega zvočnega omrežja dekanije Àneu. Za izboljšanje natančnosti modelov širjenja zvoka so potrebni podatki DEM in NLCD višje ločljivosti. Poleg tega bi merjenje akustičnih lastnosti srednjeveških zvonov, ki se še vedno uporabljajo v katalonski regiji, in raziskovanje interakcije med zvoki zvonov ter hrupom iz ozadja bistveno izboljšala naše razumevanje srednjeveških zvočnih omrežij in njihove vloge pri oblikovanju življenja skupnosti v dolini Àneu.

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Perceptions of a 'Journey to the Past' in Some Viatical Stories at Mount Athos

*Percepcije »potovanja v preteklost«
v nekaterih potopisih o gori Atos*

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Abstract

A careful examination of selected extracts from French travellers who visited Mount Athos between the 19th and 21st centuries reveal the distinctiveness of this millennium-old Monastic Republic, which remains inaccessible to women. These travellers have articulated this sacred site's unique character through their acute powers of observation. Their accounts reflect a broader narrative concerning the evolving perceptions of those who regard this Holy Mountain, which has largely retained its traditional rituals and way of life. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the essence of Orthodox monasticism has enriched Western literature surrounding this living relic of the Byzantine peninsula. This enhanced comprehension has transformed the depiction of Mount Athos into a compelling account of an initiatory journey, offering readers a vivid and immersive experience of its spiritual and cultural significance.

Keywords: Travel literature, Mount Athos, shifting mentalities, initiatory journey

Izvleček

Natančna analiza izbranih odlomkov francoskih popotnikov, ki so med 19. in 21. stoletjem obiskali goro Atos, razkriva posebnosti te tisočletja stare samostanske republike, ki ostaja nedostopna ženskam. Ti popotniki so z natančnim opazovanjem izrazili edinstven značaj tega svetega kraja. Njihovi zapisi odražajo širšo pripoved o spreminjajočem se dojemanju tega svetega prostora, ki je kljub temu v veliki meri ohranil svoje tradicionalne obrede in način življenja.

Poleg tega je poglobljeno razumevanje bistva pravoslavnega samostanstva obogatilo zahodno literaturo, ki obravnava to živo relikvijo bizantinskega polotoka. To razumevanje je opis gore Atos preobrazilo v prepričljivo pripoved o iniciacijskem potovanju, ki bralcem ponuja živahno in poglobljeno izkušnjo njenega duhovnega ter kulturnega pomena.

Ključne besede: potopisna literatura, gora Atos, spreminjanje mentalitet, iniciacijsko potovanje

Introduction

Throughout the centuries, travellers to Mount Athos have engaged in a profound 'journey into the past' by residing in the monasteries of this venerable Holy Mountain (fig. 1). This experience prompts critical inquiry into how these visitors interacted with the intellectual and social contexts that shaped Byzantine civilization. It raises the question of whether their perceptions were influenced by a romanticized vision of this rich cultural heritage manifested through their capacity to artic-

ulate sensory experiences in both verbal and artistic forms. Such expressions encompass the visual splendour of monastic art—encompassing architecture, frescoes, and icons—as well as the auditory dimensions of Byzantine life, including chants and prayers. The olfactory experiences derived from incense and beeswax also contribute to this multisensory engagement. Beyond doubt, the enduring beauty of the landscape, revered over the centuries, adds another layer of significance to the travellers' experiences, inviting reflection on the sacredness attributed to this unique environment.



Figure 2: The Holy Mountain Counsel in Karyes (De Vogüé 1878, between p. XII and p.1.)

A journey to Mount Athos offers an encounter with a vibrant past. Diehl's reflections resonate with De Vogüé's assertion that traveling to Athos entails an attempt 'to search memories and to ask with confidence to contemporary Orientals a living lesson of the past'³ (De Vogüé 1894, 255), essentially in the Magazine *Le Tour du Monde*. For De Vogüé, the Orient of his era is populated by 'faithful guardians of old historical deposits'⁴ (De Vogüé 1894, 255), underscoring the enduring significance of this pilgrimage for understanding historical continuity and cultural heritage.

Visual Impressions

Charles Diehl, a noted Byzantinist, articulates the essence of monastic life by focusing on the katholikon, or central church, describing its profound atmosphere: 'And the effect is even more striking in the already dark church, where the candles cast an uncertain and flickering light: in the mysterious half-light, reflections light up in the large copper chandeliers; lightning flashes from the gilding of goldwork and icons; on the walls decorated with ancient paintings and mosaics, figures, appearing at the end of a candle, suddenly emerge from the darkness, strange, almost alive in this unexpected lighting, and then suddenly re-enter the night; and sumptuous fabrics, exposed behind the iconostasis, take on shimmering and tender reflections in the falling daylight; and it is good to forget yourself there, in the high choir stalls, in the calm of the dark

itée autrefois la plus sauvage, le moyen âge grec n'avait laissé une des plus extraordinaires créations.'

3 'Chercher des souvenirs et demander avec confiance aux Orientaux contemporains la leçon vivante du passé'

4 'fidèles gardiens des vieux dépôts historiques'

church, full of the poetry of the past⁵ (Diehl 1909, 199).

In his preamble to a description of the frescoes, De Vogüé similarly evokes the ecclesiastics he observes 'sitting side by side' on the vessel transporting him to Athos, likening them to 'one of those dark-tinted frescoes where the conciliar assemblies take place, in the night Byzantine naves, above the altar lamps⁶ (De Vogüé 1894, 257).

Recognizing the significance of the Protaton frescoes, De Vogüé asserts that their 'frescoes reach the highest degree of perfection,' albeit acknowledging that 'bastard restorations [have] disfigured the majority.' He draws comparisons between these works and those of Fra Angelico, employing this juxtaposition to communicate his appreciation of Athonite art to his audience (fig. 2). However, a sense of disdain for this Oriental art emerges in his writing, as he criticizes the monks for providing vague information regarding their artistic heritage, attributing 'indistinctly all their masterpieces to the famous Panselinos, the Raphael of the Athos⁷ (De Vogüé 1894, 294–294). Nevertheless, the hegumen of Iviron, described as 'an old man of a certain education,' reassures De Vogüé, asserting that 'the frescoes of Karyès would be the only authentic productions of Panselinos,' while those

of Lavra, Vatopedi, and Dochiariou could be credited to his disciples.

De Vogüé contends that Athonite painters 'maintained for three centuries an artificial life and an incontestable brilliance to the immobile tradition, but the day comes when this embalmed art undergoes the law of everything that dies and decomposes; under the lies of the hieratic canon, only paltry remains reach us, the ashes of a plant which could not grow in a dried-out earth and which gave its most beautiful flowers at the beginning⁸ (De Vogüé 1894, 298).

Western values permeate De Vogüé's reflections. This was a common tendency among 19th-century traveller-writers, who often approached other cultures with a sense of superiority. This perspective underscores the broader issue of failing to appreciate diverse ways of living and understanding the world from multiple viewpoints.

The traveller is notably struck by the sacralization of secular communal spaces, particularly the refectories. The palaeographer Emmanuel Miller (1812–1886) described the refectory of Lavra as 'perhaps the most curious thing' due to the presence of frescoes adorning its 'walls (..) painted by the famous Panselinos' (Miller 1889, 113).

In the 1930s, the erudite historian and former member of the French Armée d'Orient, Eugène Mercier, expressed a desire to visit the illustrated refectory of Dochiariou monastery: 'He remarked on its small Byzantine windows, which, adorned with elegant capitals, frame the horizon of the sea in their diptychs, evoking a sense of infinity^{9,10} (Mercier 1933, 355). Mercier's

5 'Et l'effet est plus saisissant encore dans l'église déjà obscure, où les cierges mettent une lumière incertaine et vacillante: dans le demi-jour mystérieux, des reflets s'allument aux grands lustres de cuivre; des éclairs brillent aux dorures des orfèvreries et des icônes; sur les murailles décorées de peintures et de mosaïques anciennes, des figures, apparues au bout d'un cierge, sortent brusquement de la pénombre, étranges, presque vivantes sous cet éclairage inattendu, et puis brusquement rentrent dans la nuit; et des étoffes somptueuses, exposées derrière l'iconostase, prennent dans le jour qui tombe des reflets chatoyants et tendres; et il fait bon s'oublier là, dans les hautes stalles du chœur, dans le calme de l'église sombre, toute pleine de la poésie du passé.'

6 'Assis côte à côte... On dirait d'une des fresques aux teintes sombres où se déroulent les assemblées conciliaires dans la nuit des nefes byzantines, au-dessus des lampes de l'autel.'

7 '[...]ces fresques atteignent le plus haut degré de perfection: des restaurations bâtarde ont défiguré le plus grand nombre[...]indistinctement tous leurs chefs-d'oeuvre au fameux Panselinos, le Raphaël de l'Athos.'

8 Ils 'maintiennent durant trois siècles une vie factice et un éclat incontestable à la tradition immobile; mais le jour vient où cet art embaumé subit la loi de tout ce qui meurt et se décompose; sous les mensonges du canon hiératique, il n'en arrive que des restes dérisoires, cendres d'une plante qui n'a pu grandir dans une terre desséchée et qui a donné ses plus belles fleurs au début.'

9 'Le réfectoire est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus curieux. Les murailles ont été peintes par le célèbre Panselinos.'

10 '...les petites fenêtres byzantines, aux gracieux chapiteaux, présentent l'horizon de mer dans leurs diptyques, comme un rappel de l'infini.'

writings articulate a subtle mystical connection between architecture and nature as he endeavors to revive the Byzantine spirituality that Athos embodies.

The didactic nature of the frescoes in the refectory of the Serbian monastery of Chilandari indicates an emerging interest in the dogmatic significance of these paintings. However, this interest does not fully engage with the concept of an iconographic program, a topic previously explored by the eminent Byzantinist Gabriel Millet in his seminal work, *Researches on the Iconography of the Gospel*. Nonetheless, Mercier's analysis reinforces a Western perspective on Byzantine fresco painting while acknowledging the pivotal role of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, as the protector of Athos and its sacred spaces.

Mercier describes the trapeza, or refectory, as 'entirely populated by eloquent and naive paintings that inspire the imagination.'

'This trapeza, itself entirely populated by eloquent and naive paintings, which inspire the imagination. These lively compositions must undoubtedly be attributed to the 14th century. In the curve of the apse is the Eucharistic Supper, the supreme meal, where Christ, as an inheritance, leaves below the bread of angels to the humble humanity he is preparing to leave. Above this large motif, whose traditional texture is flexible, here is the Annunciation: on the right, Mary the Immaculate Virgin, and on the left, the angel Gabriel, all radiant with celestial glories. Elsewhere, Solomon is in the palace tower, and the Virgin is kneeling near another tower where Isaiah and David reign because the career of the Theotokos will take place on the walls. And these walls, in a word, have drunk all the colours and all the poetry of the sacred Scriptures, so much so that in these cascades of effusive allegories of the divine Testaments, the prophetic vision of Jacob's Ladder appears only a trait of no longer between heaven and earth. This refectory also presents the usual shapes of

the trapezas of the Holy Mountain (Mercier 1933, 374).'¹¹

Despite their limited visibility—given that Athonite churches are seldom open outside of service hours and exist in the subdued light of candles—the frescoes significantly impact the narratives of the viaticum, enriching the viewer's spiritual experience.

The frescoes of the Byzantine monasteries have captured the attention of the archaeologist Adolphe-Napoleon Didron (1806–1867), who enthusiastically discusses them. Examining the frescoes at the monastery of Esphigménou, Didron addresses the theme of imperial patronage, notably the representations of the imperial couple, Theodore and Pulcheria. These figures pay homage to the work of an iconographer, whose contributions to the church in 1810 led to the discovery of the 'Guide to painting' (Didron 1845). Didron published a French edition of this work in 1845, dedicating it to Victor Hugo, while contemporaneously, the palaeographer Miller lamented the recent restorations at Iviron. Thus, the frescoes evoke a dual response of attraction and repulsion. Approximately two hundred and forty years later, the French writer of Russian descent, Jean Blot (Alexandre Blokh, 1923–2019), visited Lavra and remarked on the restoration of certain frescoes with a less favourable perspective:

11 'Cette trapéza elle-même est entièrement peuplée de peintures éloquentes et naïves, qui portent l'imagination vers ses sources lointaines. C'est au XIV^e siècle qu'il faut attribuer sans doute ces vives compositions. Dans la courbe de l'abside, voici la cène eucharistique, repas suprême, où Christ, en héritage, laisse ici-bas le pain des anges à l'humble humanité qu'il s'apprête à quitter. Au-dessus de ce grand motif, dont la texture traditionnelle ne va pas sans souplesse, voilà l'Annonciation: à droite, Marie la Vierge immaculée, à gauche, l'ange Gabriel tout rayonnant des gloires célestes. C'est d'ailleurs Salomon dans la tour d'un palais, et la Vierge agenouillée auprès d'une autre tour où règnent Isaïe et David; car la carrière de la Théotokos va se dérouler sur les parois. Et ces murs en un mot ont bu toutes les couleurs et toute la poésie des Écritures sacrées, si bien que ces cascades d'allégories effuses des Testaments divins, la vision prophétique de l'Echelle de Jacob ne figure qu'un trait de plus entre le ciel et la terre. Ce réfectoire présente au reste les formes habituelles des trapézas de la Sainte Montagne.'

As for the frescoes, alas, they are the instrument of worship, that is to say, they must not be beautiful but useful, and they have been savagely restored. There, on the walls, where the incense has extinguished the colours and blurred the design, it is barely visible, but still beautiful. Here, in the narthex, it's freshly painted, shiny, hideous.¹² [Blot 1984, 74]

This shift in perception may suggest a transformation in the conceptualization of aesthetics and beauty, akin to the historical analysis offered by Umberto Eco in *History of Beauty* (Eco 2004). Eco's work actually shows us an evolution of mentalities in terms of defining beauty throughout the ages. This is how we could consider that the part of 'naivety' in the techniques of the recasting of the murals described by Blot would remain completely acceptable today.

However, at the onset of the 20th century, the artist Maurice Feuillet (1873–1968) distinguished between the artistic merits of different periods. He praised the 'superb paintings dating from the 12th century, of remarkable expression, stunning works of the master Manuel Panselinos'¹³ (Feuillet 1900, 666) while simultaneously critiquing the post-Byzantine works as a significant decline in the Athonite pictorial tradition.

At present, nothing like this. The traditions of Manuel Panselinos and Dionysius of Agrapha seem irretrievably lost. The painters of Athos are nothing more than workers carrying out their work as quickly as possible and flooding the Panaghias peninsula with Greek saints with stiff gestures, fixed gaze, archaic physiognomy, always the same. Placed under the despotism of the Byzantine canons, they carry out their task

12 'Quant aux fresques, hélas, elles sont instrument du culte, c'est-à-dire qu'elles doivent non être belles mais servir, et qu'on les a sauvagement restaurées. Là-bas, sur les murs où l'encens a éteint les couleurs et brouille le dessin, c'est à peine visible, mais beau encore. Ici, dans le narthex, c'est frais, brillant, hideux.'

13 'Les peintures superbes datant du XIIe siècle, d'une expression remarquable, œuvres très belles du maître Manuel Panselinos.'

imposed in advance without any personal inspiration, without variety, mechanically, blindly following the precepts of the ancients of implacable usage. I realised while observing a monk who was brushing on an enormous canvas Saint George Taxiarch, armoured and armed with a spear. It was simply abominable.¹⁴ [Feuillet 1900, 667]

This critique underscores a broader discourse concerning the evolution of artistic values and the integrity of tradition within the context of Byzantine iconography.

Over half a century after the observations made by Feuillet, Jean Décarreaux (1899–1988), an art historian attuned to the nuances of Byzantine art, drew attention to the frescoes of Cretan style located within the Saint George Chapel of the Saint Paul monastery, advocating for their preservation against the detrimental effects of humidity (Décarreaux 1956, 118).

At the turn of the 20th century, as noted by Feuillet, and again in the 1980s with the work of Blot, there existed a prevailing sentiment that post-Byzantine painting was irrevocably marginalized. However, the same frescoes from the Lavra monastery, which had been subjected to Blot's critical assessment three decades earlier, underwent a re-evaluation by French photographer Ferrante Ferranti (born in 1960). Ferranti emphasized the didactic nature of these frescoes, specifically interrogating the portrayal of the celestial Jerusalem as envisioned by the Orthodox tradition. He described a representation of a hill situated 'between the throne of Glory where God the Father sits and the ruins of a city,

14 'À l'heure actuelle, rien de semblable. Les traditions de Manuel Panselinos et de Denys d'Agrapha semblent irrémédiablement perdues. Les peintres de l'Athos de ne sont plus que des ouvriers exécutant leur travail le plus rapidement possible et inondant la presqu'île de Panaghias, de saints grecs aux gestes roides, au regard fixe, à la physionomie archaïque, toujours les mêmes. Placés sous le despotisme des canons byzantins, ils font leur tâche imposée d'avance sans aucune inspiration personnelle, sans variété, machinalement, suivant aveuglément les préceptes des anciens d'un usage implacable. Je me rendais compte en observant un moine qui brossait sur une toile énorme saint Georges Taxiarche, cuirassé et armé de la lance. C'était tout simplement abominable.'

by myriads of angels arranged in crowns. At its summit, the Lamb of God carries the standard of the Resurrection"¹⁵ (Ferranti 2015, 25).

These instances exemplify a significant shift in scholarly perspectives. The mid-19th century marked the inception of a structured discourse surrounding Byzantine art in France. Scholars began to engage with frescoes from a predominantly technical standpoint, culminating in influential works such as the *Guide to Painting* by Didron, which referenced the painter Denys de Fournà. This trajectory ultimately led to Charles Diehl's publication *Manual of Byzantine Art* (Diehl 1910) and Gabriel Millet's *Researches on the Iconography of the Gospel* (Millet 1916). Benedictine Abbot and musicologist Neyrat (1825–1913) noted the intrinsic merit of the frescoes, asserting that 'the figures possess a very great and noble character.' Nevertheless, he felt compelled to draw parallels with 'the ancient frescoes of Orcagna and Giotto, and occasionally with select works of Albert Dürer'¹⁶ (Neyrat 1884, 99). This reference to Western art highlights a critical juncture in which the engagement with other cultures was often framed within a comparative context that frequently undermined the value of the encountered civilizations.

Literate travellers of the 20th century, such as Jean Blot, often rejected the fresco-monks' inclination to refresh their paintings. This rejection stemmed from a belief that such practices did not align with their Western bourgeois values, which elevate the artist to a pedestal and dismiss art characterized by naivety and anonymity. This art, inherently didactic, is distinguished by its humility and popularity. In contemporary society, particularly in the second decade of the 21st century, Ferrante Ferranti has revitalized these discussions by reframing the aesthetic con-

siderations of post-Byzantine art within the context of its theological significance.

Jacques Lacarrière (1925–2005) articulated a transformative understanding of Byzantine art in his renowned work *L'Été grec*. He acknowledged 'to have truly felt the meaning and the life of this art only during his final visit.' Lacarrière's reflections suggest an initiatory experience, as he admitted that his previous ignorance 'about Orthodox hagiography, Byzantine history, painting techniques' made him 'experience a sort of dizziness at the sight of these hundreds of saints, anchorites, bishops, of martyrs populating the walls of Athos.' His avant-garde approach, which prioritized meaning, appeared to diverge from the aesthetic emphasis of Jean Blot; instead, Lacarrière deems that 'frescoes and icons' respond 'to a double function, narrative and aretological: showing the history of the world according to tradition of the unction Orthodox East and demonstrate, by recounting the lives, deeds, miracles and martyrdoms of these exemplary figures, the permanence of their faith, and the transcendence of profane time'¹⁷ (Lacarrière 1975, 83).

Jean Biès (1933–2014) followed in Lacarrière's footsteps along this initiatory journey. The revised and corrected edition of his seminal work (1963), published in 1997, introduced a sub-chapter entitled 'Theology of the Icon,' which echoed Lacarrière's insights: 'This formula pre-existed in the 1963 edition'¹⁸ ... (Biès 1963, 69) and 'there is not only an aesthetic of the icon;

15 '...une colline est portée entre le trône de Gloire ou siège Dieu le Père et les ruines d'une cité, par des myriades d'anges disposés en couronnes. À son sommet, l'agneau de Dieu porte l'étendard de la Résurrection.'

16 '...les figures ont un très grand et très noble caractère.[...] aux anciennes fresques d'Orcagna et du Giotto, parfois à certaines têtes d'Albert Dürer.'

17 'trop de choses sur l'hagiographie orthodoxe, l'histoire byzantine, les techniques de la peinture » lui fit « éprouver une sorte de vertige à la vue de ces centaines de saints, d'anachorètes, d'évêques, de martyrs peuplant les murs de l'Athos [...] d'importance secondaire', valorisant les 'fresques et les icônes' dans une perspective répondant 'à une double fonction, narrative et aréologique : montrer l'histoire du monde selon la tradition de l'Orient orthodoxe et démontrer, en racontant la vie, les actes, les miracles et les martyres de ces figures exemplaires, la permanence de leur foi, l'abolition du temps profane.'

18 But the word 'philosophie' (philosophy) was used at that time, instead of 'theologie' (theology).

this has its theology¹⁹ (Biès 1997, 74). Biès emphasized that the analysis ‘includes an *alchemical* aspect, concerning the spiritualization of matter: this is its transfiguring function; a *symbolic* aspect, concerning the transposition of archetypes into visible images: this is the purifying function; finally, a *liturgical* aspect, concerning the ‘descent of heaven onto earth,’ and this is its cultural function²⁰ (Biès 1997, 74).

It is evident that travel writers of the 1970s began to adopt a novel perspective on Byzantine and post-Byzantine art, a shift that appears to correlate with the increasing frequency of their stays at the Holy Mountain. These prolonged engagements encouraged a more profound exploration of the essential elements of monastic life, with the Orthodox imagery of icons and frescoes emerging as a crucial focal point in their analyses.

Sounds Impressions

In his 1555 work, the French naturalist, writer, diplomat, and traveller Pierre Belon du Mans (1517–1564) observed that ‘the caloières go every day to sing the service’²¹ (Belon du Mans 1555, f. 66. v.). However, he offered merely a factual account without delving into further details. It was not until the 19th century that a more reflective narrative emerged regarding the liturgical practices, particularly as Father Braconnier’s travel report from 1706 included no commentary on this subject.

The earliest substantial testimony can be attributed to the manuscript specialist Miller, who, upon his arrival at the Russian site of Saint Andrew on a Sunday, expressed his intention to attend the Russian ‘mass’ [sic]. He remarked, ‘The chants are beautiful,’ contrasting

them with what he described as ‘this abominable Greek chant for which the nose bears all the costs’²² (Miller 1889, 15). This apparent disdain for Greek Byzantine chant may be linked to his expertise in Byzantine manuscripts, yet a further examination of Abbot Stanislas Neyrat’s observations reveals an equally critical perspective. Neyrat, serving as Chapel Master during the celebration of the feast of Saint John Prodromos, recounted (Neyrat 1884, 125–126):

(..) the office of the great vigils or agripnias begins before ten o’clock and lasts until the morning. We go there as curious people, hoping for masterpieces. But what a disappointment! Nasal melodies performed by six or eight monks placed in the two arms of the cross. Two or three sing a monotonous, interminable hymn, the vague tone of which one would hardly recognise; while another voice, no less nasal, performs a droning hold on a single note, in tune or not with the melody: which recalls quite well, but much less musically and much more unpleasantly the effect of our Savoyard oldies.²³

Notably, art historian Jean Décarreaux, writing in the following century, echoed the sentiments of both Miller and Neyrat, characterizing the chants as ‘ugly’²⁴ (Décarreaux 1954, 94). Despite being a specialist in Western religious chant, Neyrat struggled to appreciate this new form of liturgical music, merely noting its duration. Vendômois Eugène Mercier, in the early 1930s, articulated a more poetic response to the

19 ‘Il n’existe pas seulement une esthétique de l’icône; celle-ci a sa théologie.’

20 ‘... comporte un aspect *alchimique*, concernant la spiritualisation de la matière: c’est là sa fonction transfigurante; un aspect *symbolique*, concernant la transposition des archétypes en images visibles: c’est la fonction purificatrice; un aspect *liturgique* enfin, concernant la ‘descente du ciel sur la terre’, et c’est sa fonction culturelle’

21 ‘les caloières vont tous les jours chanter le service’

22 ‘d’aller entendre la messe russe. » « Les chants sont beaux, et contrastent avec cet abominable chant grec dont le nez fait tous les frais’

23 ‘(..) l’office des grandes vigiles ou agripnies commence avant dix heures pour durer jusqu’au matin. Nous y allons en curieux, espérant des chefs-d’œuvre. Mais quelle déception! Des mélodies nasillardes exécutées par six ou huit religieux placés dans les deux bras de croix. Deux ou trois chantent une hymne monotone, interminable, dont on reconnaîtrait à peine la tonalité indécise; tandis qu’une autre voix, non moins nasillarde, fait une tenue bourdonnante sur une note unique, juste ou non avec la mélodie: ce qui rappelle assez bien, mais bien moins musicalement et bien plus désagréablement l’effet de nos vieilles savoyardes.’

24 ‘Les chants sont laids’

liturgical experience, during which the monks of Vatopedi adapted their practices into 'Agrypnie or Pannikis (the whole night), which start before sunset, and are not exhausted until well after daybreak' (Mercier 1933, 203):

One could hear through the stone, like the murmur of a river: it was a confused mass of sounds that the sacred melody rolled relentlessly. The ear sometimes thought it could guess that this sound flow was the majestic slide of free and easy water, sometimes that it broke among the returns and rocks of a torrential bed. The waves criss crossed each other in their agitated courses, were torn apart at times under the sudden thrust of a more imperious stroke, sometimes even nourished a rumour which rose to the tumult, or calmed down like a tired flood, until giving the illusion of silence.²⁵

In his scholarly examination, Mercier distances himself from the unfavourable evaluations articulated by his predecessors, while simultaneously acknowledging his familiarity with their works. Notably, in a footnote accompanying the aforementioned passage, he references the organisational structure of ecclesiastical offices as detailed by Abbot Neyrat. Mercier's palpable enthusiasm for the auditory ambiance of Eastern liturgies serves as a cornerstone of his endeavour to explore the resurgence of Byzantine philosophical thought within this sanctuary, which has perpetuated such traditions into the twentieth century, primarily through the benevolent stewardship of the monks residing in the monasteries of Mount Athos.

25 'On entendait à travers la pierre, comme le murmure d'un fleuve : c'était une masse confuse de sons que roulait sans relâche la mélodie sacrée. L'oreille croyait tantôt deviner que cet écoulement sonore était le glissement majestueux d'une eau libre et facile, tantôt qu'il se brisait parmi les retours et les rocailles d'un lit torrentueux. Les ondes s'entrecroisaient dans leurs cours agité, se déchiraient par instants sous la poussée soudaine d'un trait plus impérieux, nourrissaient parfois même une rumeur qui s'élevait au tumulte, ou s'apaisaient comme un flot fatigué, jusqu'à donner l'illusion du silence.'

This intellectual and philosophical inquiry into Byzantine spirituality is manifest in the domains of 'photography, music, and liturgy.' It is pertinent to note that in various monasteries, liturgical services do not consistently occur within the central church. The fluctuating presence of pilgrims, which swells during the summer months compared to the winter season, significantly influences the number of chapels used for these services. For instance, ethnologist Panagopoulos (born in 1975) elucidates that 'in the winter, because there were not many visitors, the liturgies took place in seven chapels. In the summer, they used nine chapels to accommodate the greater number of participants, as it was the tourist season' (Paganopoulos 2012, 210). Thus, the organisation of liturgical life within the monastery is intricately linked to the volume of pilgrims or visitors, whom this researcher characterises as tourists. This observation punctuates the journey toward the Athos of Ferranti, who also experiences the captivating phenomenon of agrypnia, to him, a 'solemn celebration which owes its name to the 'standing' position and lasts all night' (Ferranti 2015, 94):

My first vision is a large wooden crucifix standing at the entrance to the narthex. As at Vatopedi (Ferrante Ferranti describes this passage at Dochiariou during Pentecost), Christ is crowned by the representation of God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit. Indifferent, pilgrims flock and kiss the icons lined up along the walls.

The first readings are done in the liti by the light of a simple candle, which irises the icon of the Virgin and relegates the fresco-painted saints to the darkness. (...) Placed in front of the tarnished branches of the tree of Jesse, I measure how the sculptors of the Hispanic world, galvanised by the edicts of the Catholic Reformation, knew how to exploit the wood of the altarpieces so that, in sim-

ilar light conditions, vibrates with gold and bright colours the genealogy of Christ.²⁶

Ferranti's exploration begins with a detailed examination of the frescoes, which Mercier had previously described as embodying a 'mystical atrium' within the 'beautiful liti,' a space defined by its 'gentle forest of columns'²⁷ (Mercier 1933, 355). This description draws a parallel to Spanish religious art while simultaneously inviting the reader to immerse themselves in the vibrant atmosphere of Orthodox rituals, particularly those distinctive to the monastic communities of Mount Athos.

The clergy in festive attire enters the naos, the ground of which is strewn with laurel branches. The abbot takes place on his throne leaning against a pillar. He begins a long chant, lit by a thin candle held by a monk whose profile glowing red is silhouetted, from where I am, against the burnished gold of the iconostasis.²⁸ [Ferranti 2015, 94–95]

Added to his description is the birth of a closer relationship between Ferranti and the abbot when the latter, 'who senses his emotion and shyness, calls out to him and orders him to take

photographs'²⁹ (Ferranti 2015, 95). The abbot, perceiving Ferranti's emotional response and reticence, encourages him to take photographs, thereby fostering a new dimension of trust and acceptance between the photographer and the Athonite monks. The abbot's approval signifies a broader acceptance by the monastic community, an affirmation of Ferranti's presence among them.

However, this moment of exchange, which allows for participation in the various rites, is not universally attainable. The experiences of Claude Chevreuil, a former headmaster of a Parisian high school (1937–2023), illustrate this difficulty. 'Awakened by a chanted hammering' of a simander during a liturgical service, he hesitates to join the monk who, after calling for him, soon enters the katholikon. He reflects on his uncertainty, pondering, 'Where to go?' and remarks, 'Killing time is a murder I will often commit on Mount Athos'³⁰ (Chevreuil 2008, 48–49). This introspection reveals the challenges that visitors may face in assimilating into the rhythm of monastic life, suggesting that such integration is not always straightforward.

That said, Ferranti vividly describes the scene, striving to convey the captivating sensory experiences that arise from it: 'The elders come and go through the side doors of the holy of holies, resembling actors in an ancient tragedy. The central door opens to reveal the golden disk of a paten, the Eucharistic saucer. The hegumen appears, adorned in a shimmering star-embroidered cape, bordered by a trellis of alternating gold clusters and silver leaves. He kneels and reads before an assembly that is collectively bent over, their foreheads touching the ground. Father Gabriel and then a priest chant in turn, while none among us dares to move. Suddenly, the atmosphere becomes animated. The thurifer, whose large, long-lashed eyes evoke an Egypt-

26 'Ma première vision est un grand crucifix de bois dressé à l'entrée du narthex. Comme à Vatopédiou (Ferranti décrit ce passage à Dochiariou durant la Pentecôte.), le Christ est couronné par la représentation de Dieu le Père et de la colombe de l'Esprit Saint. Indifférents, les pèlerins affluent et baissent les icônes alignées le long des murs.

Les premières lectures se font dans la liti à la lueur d'une simple chandelle, qui irise l'icône de la Vierge et relègue dans la pénombre les saints peints à fresque. (...) Placé en face des ramifications ternies de l'arbre de Jessé, je mesure combien les sculpteurs du monde hispanique, galvanisés par les édits de la Réforme catholique, surent exploiter le bois des retables pour que, dans des conditions de lumière similaires, vibre d'ors et de couleurs vives la généalogie du Christ.'

27 Mercier avait relevé 'l'atrium mystique' de la 'belle liti', composée 'de sa douce futaie de colonnes'

28 'Le clergé en habit de fête pénètre dans le naos, dont le sol est jonché de branches de laurier. L'higoumène prend place sur son trône appuyé contre un pilier. Il entame une longue psalmodie, éclairé par une fine bougie tenue par un moine dont le profil rougeoyant se découpe, de l'endroit où je me trouve, contre les ors brunis de l'iconostase.'

29 'qui devine son émotion et sa timidité, lui hèle et le somme de prendre des photographies.'

30 '...réveillé par un martèlement scandé[...] Où aller? Tuer le temps, c'est un meurtre que je commettrais souvent au Mont Athos.'



Figure 3: Docheiariou Monastery: The Dance of the Chandeliers during the Festival of the Pentecost (Ferranti 2015, between p. 96 and 97)

tian portrait from the Fayoum, emerges from the den of mystery, incensing each of us in turn, as a monk hoists the silver nightlights aloft, accompanied by the creaking of pulleys attached to the large chandeliers (fig. 3). With meticulous care, another monk lights the wick of long blasters and ignites the pairs of candles positioned at the cardinal points of the *polyelaïos*, each of its twelve sides punctuated by a small icon and an ostrich egg, symbolizing the Resurrection. The *typikaris*, as a worthy master of ceremonies, indicates the troparia to the cantors and goes from one choir to another. The chants in response mingle with the clicking of cowbells in censer bells³¹ (Ferranti 2015, 95).

31 'Les anciens vont et viennent par les portes latérales dans le saint des saints, comme des acteurs de tragédie antique. La porte centrale s'ouvre et laisse entrevoir le disque d'or d'une patène, la soucoupe eucharistique. L'higoumène apparaît dans sa cape scintillante d'étoiles brodées, bor-

In 1997, Bernard Noël (1930–2021) employed a poetic lens to describe the Saint André skete, an abandoned site near Karyès that has remained in a state of disrepair since a fire in 1958, yet yearns for revival following a partial restoration. Noël's depiction draws attention to the harmonious interplay between the bells of the censer and the vocal expressions of the prayer of the heart. He notes, 'Maximos celebrates the three daily offices at six seven and nine I like how he's able to handle the thurible with twelve small bellsones for each apostle and makes us a path of smoke I also like how he psalmodies Kyrie Jesou Chistou Yie tou Theou eleison imas our Lord Jesus Christ son of God have pity on us I counted up to seventy-seven times this morning eighty-three times yesterday at the evening office this appeal dates to its beginning with the hermetic life of Saint Anthony chanted while facing demons Saint Gregory Palamas introduced it at Mount Athos' (Noël 2011, 9–10).

It is essential to recognize that these ecclesiastical services, during which the bells of the censer resonate, are preceded by the sounding of bells and the *semantron*—a suspended wooden or metal percussion instrument (fig. 4). Byzantine art historian Charles Diehl invites us to contemplate the profound impact of these auditory elements: 'And at the end of the day, the impression is deep, almost solemn, of this entry into the ancient monastery, to the sound of the bells ringing out loud, to the sound of the chimes playing

dée d'une treille où alternent grappes d'or et feuilles d'argent. Il s'agenouille et lit devant l'assemblée, toute entière courbée, les fronts touchant le sol. Le père Gabriel puis un prêtre psalmodient tour à tour sans qu'aucun de nous ne bouge.

Soudain, tout s'anime. Le thuriféraire, dont les grands yeux aux longs cils m'évoquent un portrait égyptien du Fayoum, jaillit de l'autel du mystère et nous encense un à un tandis qu'un moine hisse dans un grincement de poulies les veilleuses d'argent à hauteur des grands lustres. Avec un soin infini, un moine allume la mèche de longs boutefeux et enflamme les paires de bougies placées aux points cardinaux du *polyelaïos*, rythmé sur chacun de ses douze côtés par une petite icône et un œuf d'autruche, symbole de la Résurrection.

Le *typikaris*, en digne maître de cérémonie, indique aux chantres les tropaires et va d'un chœur à l'autre. Les chants en répons se mêlent au cliquetis des sonnaillies en grelots de l'encensoir.'



Figure 4: Docheiariou Monastery: The Call for Prayer Using the Semantron (Ferranti 2015, between p. 96 and 97)

their arpeggios, in an envelopment of vibrations that the great evening peace makes more sonorous, and where on the deep bass of the bells the bronze semantron, struck with great blows of a hammer, sometimes throws its strident and clear notes³² (Diehl 1909, 198–199).

In contrast, Diehl describes a different auditory landscape at a Russian monastery, where ‘the bells ring loudly from all the bell towers of the monastery; and in this rustling of sounds, thin or sonorous, which seem to fall from every-

where and envelop us in a vibrant harmony³³ (Diehl 1909, 202). This emphasizes the notion that the Russian interpretation of Orthodoxy transcends mere ritual, elevating its spiritual power through this rich auditory experience.

And while once again the bells are ringing loudly, we return to shore in the boats manned by black teams of monks, very struck by this Russian wealth and strength, born yesterday at Athos and already all-powerful.³⁴ [Diehl 1909, 203]

The demonstration of power within the context of Russian monasticism is poignantly articulated in Diehl’s reflections on the liturgical service, where he notes: ‘In front of the iconostasis overloaded with gilding, we attend a solemn office³⁵ (Diehl 1909, 202). This observation underscores the grandeur of the setting, which serves to elevate the spiritual experience. Diehl further illustrates the harmonious atmosphere of the Russian monastery through the unifying effect of the chants, stating, ‘Then, through a charming courtyard, where the jet of water from the holy fountain gives its cool murmur, we are led to the refectory, and from floor to floor, to yet another church, where other religious chants take us greet, these Russian songs of such simple and powerful beauty³⁶ (Diehl 1909, 202).

This notion of the aesthetic appeal of Russian sacred music is not novel; De Vogüé, writing over twenty-five years before Diehl, similarly emphasized this aspect. He remarked, curios-

32 ‘Et dans cette fin de jour, l’impression est profonde, presque solennelle, de cette entrée dans l’antique monastère, au son des cloches sonnantes à toute volée, au bruit des carillons égrenant leurs arpegges, dans un enveloppement de vibrations que la grande paix du soir fait plus sonores, et où sur les basses profondes des cloches la simandra de bronze, heurtée à grands coups de marteau, jette parfois ses notes stridentes et claires.’

33 ‘les cloches sonnent à toute volée à tous les clochers du monastère ; et dans ce bruissement de sons, grêles ou sonores, qui semblent tomber de partout et nous enveloppent d’une vibrante harmonie.’

34 ‘Et tandis que de nouveau les cloches sonnent à toute volée, nous regagnons le bord dans les barques que manœuvrent de noires équipes de moines, très frappés de cette richesse et de cette force russes, nées d’hier à l’Athos et déjà toutes-puissantes.’

35 ‘devant l’iconostase surchargée de dorures, nous assistons à un office solennel’

36 ‘Puis, à travers une cour charmante, où le jet d’eau de la fontaine sainte met son frais murmure, on nous mène au réfectoire, et d’étage en étage, à une autre église encore, où d’autres chants religieux nous saluent, ces chants russes d’une si simple et si puissante beauté’.

ity had kept us all night in church, seduced by the Russian service's pomp, by the song's beauty, by the strange types of this multitude which went up to the altar praying for the Tsar, like an army marching to conquests. All night long...,' and 'the pale flock of monks,' as the poet notes, 'standing under the dying light of the candles, had chanted to the vigils without one being able to read on these mystical faces any concerns other than those of heaven. We went to bed at dawn and early we were awakened by the sound of bells'³⁷ (De Vogüé 1894, 327).

In a subsequent account, De Vogüé provides an exceptional observation of a ritual he initially perceives to be the enthronement of the new abbot of Saint Panteleimon. However, he soon realizes it is, in fact, a funeral procession for a caloyer he had observed succumbing to illness in the monastic hospital. He describes the scene with evocative detail: 'The bells [which] rang out in slow volleys, a procession of monks, their heads covered with the mourning veil while holding candles in their hands, lay down on the square chanting sad litanies. All these pomps have a funeral character at Athos'³⁸ (De Vogüé 1894, 329).

What about fragrances?

The representation of perfumes and olfactory experiences in travel literature is notably sparse. However, examining the correspondence between the writer François Augiéras (1925–1971, fig. 5) and his friend Paul Placet (1928–2023) reveals a significant shift. This shift is particular-

37 'la curiosité nous avait retenu toute la nuit à l'église, séduit par la pompe de l'office russe, par la beauté du chant, par les types étranges de cette multitude qui montait à l'autel en priant pour le tsar, comme une armée marchant à des conquêtes. Toute la nuit, 'le pâle troupeau des moines », comme dit le poète, debout sous la clarté mourante des cierges, avait psalmodié les vigiles sans qu'on eût pu lire sur ces faces mystiques d'autres soucis que ceux du ciel. Nous nous étions couchés à l'aube et de bonne heure nous fûmes réveillés par le son des cloches.'

38 'les cloches [qui] s'ébranlèrent à lentes volées, une procession de moines, la tête couverte du voile de deuil en tenant des cierges à la main, s'allongea sur le parvis en psalmodiant de tristes litanies. Toutes ces pompes ont un caractère funèbre à l'Athos.'



Figure 5: François Augiéras (1925-1971), portrait taken in 1954, Eyzies de Tayac, France (Augiéras 1994, 9); © Fata Morgana Publisher

ly evident in religious rituals, which serve as a backdrop for olfactory descriptions.

On the 18th of August 1956, Augiéras wrote: 'The chapel shone with a thousand lights. Among the monks, I saw children aged 13 to 14, dressed in black robes, with long girly hair, with wild and gentle looks. The monks sang, burned incense, the children lit the candles, only to extinguish them almost immediately, and relight them among the songs: they were playing in Paradise, they were angels and prophets among the seraphim and the constellations. Then they began to recite the litanies of the Saints, of the martyrs of the beginnings of Christianity, those of the children tortured under Tiberius, under Nero, flogged to death, burned alive. More songs of incredible sweetness, heartbreaking melancholy, cries of joy, love, sobs, and sometimes the murmur of voluptuousness. My turn came to be praised; I bowed in silence and breathed in the pungent scent of incense. Some old monks looked like my uncle'³⁹ (Augiéras 1994, 21–22).

39 'La chapelle brillait de mille feux. Parmi les moines, je vis des enfants de 13 à 14 ans, vêtus de robes noires, aux longs cheveux de filles, aux regards sauvages et doux. Les moines chantaient, encensaient les enfants allumaient les chandelles, pour les éteindre presque aussitôt, et les rallumer

Gestures and Rituals

The episode concerning the veneration of icons, as recounted by Swiss journalist Michel Egger in 1993, elucidates the distinctive Orthodox perspective on monastic practices. Egger, born in 1958, articulates that the devotional act of venerating icons ‘does not bother him’ and, for him, carries ‘nothing idolatrous or superstitious.’ Commenting on ‘these ballets of monks’ during services, Michel Egger specifies how, by becoming Orthodox, he ‘had to relearn’ that he had ‘a body and that this body, far from being the ‘sepulchre of the ‘soul’, could be the ‘temple of the Spirit’. The first sign of the cross was a terrible fight. Heavy with a Catholic education rejected as a teenager, he was slow to come’⁴⁰ (Egger 1993, 32).

In a subsequent narrative, Egger also recounts that ‘his unbelieving and Protestant friends’ had found the veneration of icons shocking on another trip when they visited Romanian churches. We thus see that he adapts to his status as an Orthodox pilgrim but specifies that this veneration ‘does not really affect him’ and that he does not ‘yet understand its full depth’⁴¹ (Egger 1993, 32).

parmi les chants: ils jouaient au Paradis, ils étaient des anges et les prophètes parmi les séraphins et les constellations. Puis ils commencèrent à réciter les litanies des Saints, des martyrs des débuts du Christianisme, celles des enfants torturés sous Tibère, sous Néron, flagellés à mort, brûlés vifs. Des chants encore, d’une incroyable douceur, d’une mélancolie déchirante, des cris de joie, d’amour, des sanglots, et parfois le murmure de la volupté. Mon tour vint d’être encensé; je m’inclinai en silence et respirai l’âcre parfum de l’encens. Certains vieux moines ressemblaient à mon oncle.’

40 ‘ce geste dévotionnel ne le gêne pas », n’ayant pour lui, « rien d’idolâtre ni de superstitieux. » 152 Commentant « ces ballets de moines » lors des offices, Michel Egger précise combien, en devenant orthodoxe, il lui « a fallu réapprendre » qu’il avait « un corps et que ce corps, loin d’être le ‘sépulchre de l’âme’, pouvait être le ‘temple de l’Esprit’. Le premier signe de croix fut un combat terrible. Lourd de toute une éducation catholique rejetée à l’adolescence, il fut lent à venir.’

41 ‘ses amis mécréants et protestants » avaient trouvé choquante la vénération des icônes, dans un autre voyage, visitant les églises roumaines. On constate ainsi qu’il s’adapte à son statut de pèlerin orthodoxe, mais précise que cette vénération « ne le touche pas vraiment », et qu’il n’en sait « pas encore toute la profondeur’

In contrast, the approach to icon veneration presented by author Maryse Choisy (1903–1979) is particularly striking. After undergoing a mastectomy, Choisy claimed to have entered the male-restricted peninsula of Mount Athos disguised as a man. Her narrative is imbued with irony, especially in her description of the renowned icon of the Virgin Portaitissa from the Iviron Monastery. She recounts that, following a ‘surgical sword stroke’ inflicted by an ‘iconoclast,’ the icon ‘began to bleed and still bleeds on days of mourning.’ Choisy notes, ‘Naturally, I didn’t see her on a day of mourning,’ and adds that ‘the wound is so gaping that your breasts hurt (even when they are cut) just by looking at her’⁴² (Choisy 1931, 74–75). While the veracity of her account may be questioned, her perspective remains a compelling contribution to the discourse surrounding the history of literature and the cultural significance of icon veneration.

Jacques Lacarrière presents an innovative approach to depicting Mount Athos in his inaugural work dedicated to this monastic community. Lacarrière’s narrative is significantly shaped by the monks’ writings and reflections, which reinforce the imagery associated with Athos. The text is organized into concise sections, including ‘The Monasteries,’ ‘The Historians at Mount Athos,’ ‘The Days and the Nights,’ ‘The Monks,’ and ‘The Hermits.’ These segments collectively explore the interplay between legend and historical reality as conveyed through the perspectives of the monks, manifesting as brief visual vignettes—akin to photographic snapshots—articulated in Lacarrière’s fragmented prose: ‘After which comes night. We wake up, everything shakes, we are surprised by a kind of ballet in the dark: the monks and their shadows who waver in the corridors, who kneel in the church, lavish kisses on the Virgin, on Christ and to the saints,

42 ‘d’un coup d’épée chirurgical » par « un iconoclaste » « se mit à saigner et saigne encore les jours de deuil. », elle note: « naturellement, je ne l’ai pas vue un jour de deuil » et ajoute que « la blessure est si béante qu’on a mal aux seins (même quand ils sont coupés) rien qu’en la regardant.’

wander from icon to icon⁴³ (Lacarrière 1954, 12). Using the image via the choice of photographs and a refined text, Lacarrière opened in 1954 the era of an intimate look at the Holy Mountain, which would be corroborated not only by his following works but by a certain number of authors including François Augiéras in the form of a reasonably autobiographical novel and Jean Biès through questioning of faith and a questioning of 'the sensitive world' of which 'even time no longer depends on it (...) so much complexity in the calendar as in the 'schedule' ending 'by making your head spin'⁴⁴ (Biès 1963, 26).

The Relics

Brother Jean (born in 1947) articulates a guiding framework for understanding the pilgrimage experience at Mount Athos, positing that 'the pilgrim comes, in general, to Mount Athos, to venerate the relics, to accomplish a wish or participate in an important celebration: Easter, Christmas. He asks a few questions. (..) In monasteries, he participates in the life of the monk'⁴⁵ (Frère 1991, 67).

In contrast, Jacques Lacarrière, in his renowned work *L'Été grec*, critiques the reverence often afforded to the relics of monks, expressing a sense of disillusionment: he states that he is 'sickened at the sight of these absurd remains,' which, in his view, do not contribute to the maturation of the 'adulthood' (Lacarrière 1975, 92). For Lacarrière, true maturity is found in pursuing the hermits who sought solace in the desolate landscapes surrounding the Prodromos Skete. His encounter with the hermit Gabriel illustrates that the perceived ignorance of monks

is relative because even if he 'barely knows how to read and write (...), he has formed an image of the unique world. (...) This strange geography, forged during his years of solitude, this naive and tragic image of the world - a torn, absurd and inhuman world - reinforces him in the idea that men are crazy, that all history is nonsense, that wisdom and peace reign only in Athos. (...) No real trip to Athos could do without a stay in the land of hermits. There is the mystical heart of the mountain, the place of the most extreme and voluntary deprivation'⁴⁶ (Lacarrière 1975, 98–99). It is this transmission of the monks' mystical quest that Lacarrière endeavors to convey to his readers.

Conversely, Jean-Claude Larchet (born in 1949), a trained theologian, recounts his first pilgrimage to Mount Athos in 1974, during which he observed a significant ritual involving relics. Following vespers, Father Cyril requested permission from Father Serge, a young English-speaking Russian hieromonk, to venerate 'the most precious relic of the monastery: the venerable head of the great martyr and anargyri Saint Panteleimon, which is kept in the church dedicated to him.' Larchet further emphasizes the personal significance of this relic, noting, 'He is a saint that I particularly venerate because I was born on the day of his commemoration by the Orthodox Church, and he is in a way my second patron and protector saint, after Saint John the Baptist, whose monastery also has a precious relic that I have the privilege of venerating (because I am the only pilgrim in the monastery today)⁴⁷ (Larchet 2022, 32).

43 'Après quoi vient la nuit. On s'éveille, tout s'ébranle, on surprend dans le noir des sortes de ballets: les moines et leurs ombres qui vacillent dans les couloirs, qui s'agenouillent dans l'église, prodiguent les baisers à la Vierge, au Christ et aux saints, se promènent d'icônes en icônes.'

44 'du monde sensible » dont « même le temps n'en dépend plus », « tant de complexité dans le calendrier comme dans l'horaire » finissant « par faire tourner la tête »

45 'le pèlerin vient, en général, au Mont Athos, pour vénérer les reliques, pour accomplir un vœu ou participer à une fête importante: Pâques, Noël. Il pose peu de questions. (..) Dans les monastères, il participe à la vie du moine.'

46 'sait tout juste lire et écrire (...), il s'est fait une image du monde bien singulière. (...) Cette étrange géographie, forgée au cours de ses années de solitude, cette image naïve et tragique du monde - un monde déchiré, absurde et inhumain - le confortent dans l'idée que les hommes sont fous, que toute l'histoire est un non-sens, que la sagesse et que la paix ne règnent qu'à l'Athos. (...) Aucun véritable voyage à l'Athos ne saurait se passer d'un séjour au pays des ermites. Là est le cœur mystique de la montagne, le lieu des plus extrêmes et volontaires dénuements.'

47 'C'est un saint que je vénère particulièrement car je suis né le jour de sa commémoration par l'Eglise orthodoxe et il est en quelque sorte mon second saint patron et protecteur, après saint Jean-Baptiste, dont le monastère possède une

The Monks' Hospitality

In the early twentieth century, Charles Diehl articulated a nuanced perspective on the reception afforded to visitors at Vatopédi Monastery, noting that the 'reception, although different, [which] is no less cordial at Vatopédi than at Lavra: in the great salon of the hegumen, where the portraits of the past and present sovereigns of Europe are lined up, from the sultan and the czar to the presidents of our republic, the refreshments circulate, and the gifts shower us, and they would like to detain us more, to keep us until the next morning: but time is running out and we must leave, taking away the regret of the visit too brief, of the barely glimpsed vision of this monastic world of yesteryear'⁴⁸ (Diehl 1909, 199).

In a similar vein, the observations of De Vogüé regarding the representatives of the Holy Community in Karyès evoke a poignant comparison to the councils of the early Church. He remarked upon the venerable age of these men, suggesting that 'these old men are eight hundred years old, double that perhaps. Are we not in Chalcedon or Ephesus, in one of the committees of the conciliar assembly?'⁴⁹ (De Vogüé 1894, 274).

Authorities have streamlined the process for visitors, no longer requiring the inspection of passports or other documents. Instead, access to Mount Athos is facilitated by issuing a Diamonitirion visa (since the 1980s), a pass that officially authorized entry into the monks' territory. This pass is obtained from an office in Ouranoupoli, aptly named 'the city of the sky.' Visitors are typ-

précieuse relique, que j'ai également le privilège de vénérer (car je suis ce jour dans le monastère le seul pèlerin).'

48 'Et la réception, pour être différente, n'est pas moins cordiale à Vatopédi qu'à Lavra : dans le grand salon de l'higoumène, où s'alignent les portraits des souverains passés et présents d'Europe, depuis le sultan et le czar jusqu'aux présidents de notre république, les rafraîchissements circulent et les cadeaux nous comblent, et l'on voudrait nous retenir davantage, nous garder jusqu'au lendemain matin : mais le temps presse et nous devons partir, emportant le regret de la visite trop brève, de la vision entrevue à peine de ce monde monastique d'autrefois'

49 'Ces vieillards ont huit cents ans, le double peut-être. - Ne sommes-nous pas en Chalcédoine ou à Ephèse, dans un des comités de l'assemblée conciliaire?'

ically granted a minimum stay of four days, during which they are invited to observe and participate in the monastic life at their own pace. The hospitality extended by the monks leaves a lasting impression on travellers, as evidenced by the reflections of Belgian priest Dom Théodore Belpaire (1882–1968), who articulated his experience of being 'at the mercy of the hospitality' of the monks, and 'becomes aware of being here, in this Orthodox environment, foreign to everything: to the language, to the customs, to their table, to their piety'⁵⁰ (Belpaire 1929, 29).

Conclusion

The concept of a living past, a past that is still alive, a dive-like journey through time,⁵¹ (Lacarrière 2002, 8), plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of travel to Mount Athos. This idea, which has been previously articulated through readings with vivid 'descriptions of all these convents, these hermitages, nestled in the crevices of the mountain'⁵² (De Launay 1897, 148) that we come to encounter, allows travellers to engage with and verify the authenticity of these sites during their journeys. This notion began to take root in the 19th century, evolving throughout the 20th century, and it fundamentally characterizes the essence of travel narratives related to Mount Athos.

In 1884, Father Neyrat articulated this perspective, expressing his desire to witness firsthand a region that had only been accessible to a select few. He spoke of the churches where the

50 'À la merci de leur hospitalité. [...] d'être ici dans ce milieu orthodoxe, étranger à tout: à la langue, aux mœurs, à leur table, à leur piété...'

51 Lacarrière takes up this idea in his latest book devoted to Athos where for him we 'penetrate the heart of another time, in some print inhabited by silhouettes from another age' which are compared to 'very real ghosts, (...) who move around, greet you, accompany you, even inquire about your nationality, your age and your health.' ('on « pénètre au coeur d'un temps autre, en quelque estampe habitée de silhouettes d'un autres âge » qui sont comparées à « des fantômes bien réels, (...) qui s'agitent, vous saluent, vous accompagnent, s'enquière même de votre nationalité, de votre âge et de votre santé.'

52 'de descriptions de tous ces couvents, ces ermitages, nichés dans les anfractuosités de la montagne'

tradition of Byzantine art was purportedly preserved, thus highlighting the rarity and exclusivity of this experience. This idea seemed to germinate in the 19th century, which wandered throughout the 20th century and truly characterizes the essence of travel stories to Mount Athos. Father Neyrat, in 1884, spoke of it as follows: 'I wanted to see in my turn this region that only a few privileged people had been able to contemplate; these churches where, it was said, the tradition of the purest Byzantine art was preserved'⁵³ (Neyrat 1884, 3). This image of rarity, the notion of a closed community of purity ('In fact, it is not very easy for a Frenchman to approach this remote country...' ⁵⁴ (Neyrat 1884, 2)), is the basis of a viaticum narrative that fosters a vision of timeless otherness, interweaving landscapes, architecture, and individuals who embody an anachronistic past. The Russian Viscount De Vogüé's 1876 account, subtitled 'A Journey to the Twelfth Century,' exemplifies this sentiment. The enduring enthusiasm for De Vogüé's work, which reached its fourth edition in 1894, serves as an invitation for readers to embark on a true epic of pilgrimage, as the author himself asserted: 'Here we are in the middle of the marvelous and, as we were promised, in the middle of the Middle Ages'⁵⁵ (De Vogüé 1894, 260).

The themes of lost paradise and preserving the past through the sustainability of monasteries serve as fundamental drivers in portraying otherness. Henri de Régner (1864–1936), writing in the early 20th century, describes 'the transparency' and 'the delicious purity' of the 'water of the little bay'⁵⁶ (Régner 1913, 292). For Régner, this paradisiacal beauty appears not only transmissible but also harmonious with its inhab-

itants. He recounts an encounter with a kind monk who aided him and his companions on the peninsula, illustrating the profound connection between the natural environment and its monastic residents: 'The good monk preceded us. He would nimbly lift his dress to cross a ditch or tumble down an embankment and advise us on the best passages'⁵⁷ (Régner 1913, 297).

This deep-seated harmony (Zaitsev 2017, 22)⁵⁸ between humanity and nature emerges as a recurrent theme in viaticum accounts, with notable exceptions in Maryse Choisy's controversial 1929 (reprinted in 1931) work *Un mois chez les hommes*. Additionally, François Augiéras, in his *Letters from Mount Athos*, provides a more critical perspective on the monks. However, he acknowledges their sense of community and sharing, as evidenced by a monk who offered him the last remaining piece of bread.

The vision of the territory encompassed by this republic of monks can be succinctly articulated through the insightful observations of Boris Zaitsev, who encapsulated the multifaceted experiences of the traveller in 1927 in a manner that remains relevant to contemporary visitors. Zaitsev's description evokes a rich tapestry of natural and spiritual elements that define Mount Athos (Zaitsev 2017, 24):

Mountains, winds, forests, here and there vineyards and olive trees, isolated monasteries with their monks, the solitary ringing of bells, cuckoos in the woods, eagles above the peaks, flights of swallows making a stop on their road to the north, chamois and wild boars, silence, peace, sea around... and above everything: God - that is what Athos is.

Summary

As travellers to Mount Athos have over the centuries experienced a 'journey into the past' by staying in the mon-

53 'Je désirais voir à mon tour cette région que quelques privilégiés seuls avaient pu contempler; ces églises où, disait-on, était conservée la tradition de l'art byzantin le plus pur.'

54 'De fait, il n'est pas très aisé à un Français d'aborder en ce pays reculé...'

55 'Nous voici en plein merveilleux et, comme on nous l'avait promis, en plein moyen âge'

56 'la transparence' et de 'la pureté délicieuse' de 'l'eau de la petite baie'

57 'Le bon moine nous précédait. Il relevait lestement sa robe pour enjamber un fossé ou dégringoler un talus et il nous conseillait les meilleurs passages.'

58 The Russian traveller Boris Zaitsev said in 1927 that he immediately felt that 'in this new world, everything is marvellous.'

asteries of the Holy Mountain, one is entitled to wonder whether their varied approaches to their intellectual and social environments which produced them were not a romantic vision to varying degrees of Byzantine civilization based on their ability to transcribe the visual senses into words and expressions: the art of monasteries: architecture, frescoes, icons, the auditory sense: Byzantine chants, prayers, without forgetting a certain beauty of the landscape said to be preserved, even considered sacred over the centuries. This symphony of the senses, therefore, generated viatical texts in the form of stories, descriptions, and epistolary exchanges where the part of a particular shared imagination for the medieval period materialized through the words and expressions of a language conveying an ideology, according to their cultural background, ranging from passion to self-sacrifice to criticism. As for French-speaking literature, since the 16th century, from Pierre Belon du Mans (1555), botanist, to Byzantium enthusiasts like Eugène Mercier (1933), to the foundations of a spiritual search of Orthodox theologian Jean-Claude Larchet (2022), via the initiatory gaze of a lover of the Greek language and civilization, Jacques Lacarrière (1954; 1975; 2002), and the sarcasm of a journalist-future psychoanalyst Maryse Choisy (1931) or the criticism of a Oblate of the Catholic Church and former high school headmaster, Claude Chevreuil (2008).

We will attempt to use textual analysis to reveal the archeology of the meanings emerging from a particular narrative evolution of the French-speaking viaticum story at the Holy Mountain of Athos for almost half a century.

Povzetek

Popotniki, ki so skozi stoletja obiskovali goro Atos in bivali v samostanih svete gore, so pogosto doživljali »potovanje v preteklost«. Upravičeno se lahko vprašamo, ali njihovi različni pristopi k intelektualnemu in družbenemu okolju, ki jih je oblikovalo, ne odražajo romantične vizije bizantinske civilizacije. Ta vizija temelji na sposobnosti pretvarjanja vizualnih občutkov v besede in izraze. V tem kontekstu lahko govorimo o umetnosti samostanov: arhitekturi, freskah, ikonah ter slušnih zaznavah, kot so bizantinski spevi in molitve. Pri tem ne smemo zanemariti lepote pokrajine, ki naj bi se skozi stoletja ohranila in veljala za sveto.

Ta simfonija čutov je ustvarila potopisna besedila v obliki zgodb, opisov in epistolarnih izmenjav, ki so materializirala del posebne skupne domišljije za srednjeveško obdobje. To je bilo izraženo v jeziku, ki je ideologijo, zaznamovano z avtorjevim kulturnim ozadjem, prenašal od strasti in samožrtvovanja do kritike.

Francosko govoreča literatura o gori Atos se je razvijala od 16. stoletja dalje. Začela se je s Pierrom Belonom du Mansom (1555), botanikom, in se nadaljevala z navdušenci nad Bizancem, kot je Eugène Mercier (1933), ter s pravoslavnim teologom Jean-Claudom Larchetom (2022), ki je v svojih delih poudaril duhovno iskanje. Pomembni prispevki vključujejo tudi iniciacijske poglede ljubitelja grškega jezika in civilizacije Jacquesa Lacarrièra (1954, 1975, 2002), sarkazem novinarke in bodoče psihoanalitičarke Maryse Choisy (1929) ter kritiko oblata Katoliške cerkve in nekdanjega ravnatelja srednje šole Clauda Chevreuila (2008).

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Recenzija knjige Mojce Ramšak *Antropologija vonja*

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O d čutnega obrata v antropologiji v 80. letih 20. stoletja je preteklo precej časa, preden smo v slovenski etnologiji in/ali kulturni antropologiji dobili obsežen in poglobljen prvenec, znanstveno monografijo, ki sistematično in primerjalno obravnava družbeno-kulturne vidike in pomene vonja ter sposobnosti vohanja. Dr. Mojca Ramšak, redna profesorica kulturne antropologije na Univerzi v Ljubljani in na Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, je tematiko raziskovala že med pandemijo covida-19, svojo znanstveno monografijo pa je objavila letos (2024). Številni ljudje s(m)o se po preboleli novi koronabolezni soočili z bolj ali manj začasno oz. s trajno izgubo sposobnosti zaznavanja vonja, spremenjenim vohom, z vohalnimi halucinacijami oz. zaznavami vonja, ki ga ni v zraku, ipd. Čeprav so se prve raziskave vonja v slovenskem nacionalnem prostoru začele že leta 2019, gotovo ni naključje, da je vzniknilo širše zanimanje za senzorične raziskave v zvezi z vonjem, med pandemijo in še po njej, ko so se razmahnile raziskave vonja tudi v povezavi z mednarodnimi okviri, npr. v projektih Odeuropa, Horizon 2021–2023 ter Odotheka 2021–2024.

Morda je k poznejši obravnavi vonja in vohalnih sposobnosti v medkulturni perspektivi v slovenskem nacionalnem prostoru (v primerjalni perspektivi z drugimi čutnimi kulturno pogojenimi zaznavami vida, zvoka, dotika in okusa) kot tudi drugod prav tako prispevalo dejstvo, da v t. i. »zahodni« kulturi vonj in vohalne spretnosti ne kotirajo visoko na lestvici čutnega zaznavanja. Družbeno okolje, v katerem živimo ljudje, namreč definira pomembnost in hierarhizacijo čutov, kar je povezano s preživetvenimi strategijami. Razvijanje senzorične sposobnosti in občutljivosti za vonjave ter pripisovanje

posebne (manj)vrednosti vonju je prav tako pomembno povezano z dimenzijami družbenega okolja. Prav glede vohalnega vidika čutnega zaznavanja naravnega in kulturnega okolja smo ljudje, socializirani v kulturno normo t. i. zahodne evropske družbe, ki narekuje molk oz. preziranje vonjav, prepoznanih za neugodne. Ob tem velja tudi, da prijetnih in diskretno prisotnih vonjav mnogokrat niti ne zaznavamo, kar izrabljajo, denimo, strategije trženja vonjav.

Estetsko opremljena knjiga, ki je prijetna tudi na oko, je zasnovana iz predgovora – prvega vdiha, uvoda – globljega vdiha ter desetih osrednjih poglavij. Jedrna poglavja zajemajo metodološki oris antropologije vonja ter vohalne dediščine, jezikovne dimenzije ideje vonja, vonj v medicini, olfaktorni imaginarij, poleg kultiviranja voha v literaturi in kultiviranja miazem ter arom. Osrednji del knjige obravnava pravne regulacije vonjav v okviru nacionalne države Slovenije in Evropske unije, ki zajema zakonodajno ureditev (delovnega) okolja, živil, pijač, tobaka ter parfumov, pri čemer izpostavi tudi pravne praznine, ki omogočajo trženje z neoriginalnimi dišavami prav zaradi pravne praznine. Glavna poglavja *Antropologije vonja* zajemajo tudi obravnavo vonja pri trženju, v spolnosti in erotiki ter v kulturni dediščini in muzeologiji. Knjiga se sklence z zaključkom oz. zadnjim izdihom. Vsebinsko knjige dopolnjujejo številne preglednice, shematski prikazi tipologij in konceptualizacij vonja ter fotografije številnih upodobitev vonja in vohalnih zmožnosti, npr. v kiparstvu in likovni umetnosti, poleg materialnih predmetov iz kulturne dediščine. Monografija je opremljena tudi z obsežnim stvarnim kazalom ter s seznamom virov in literature, ki bralcem omogočata še podrobnejši pregled posameznih vidikov obravnave olfaktorne tematike.

Posebno pozornost antropološkega branja pričujoče knjige nedvomno pritegne njena epistemološka plat, kjer sta predstavljena antropologija čutov in njen raziskovalni domet, ki zajema preučevanje fizičnih in kulturnih vidikov vonja ter vlogo vonja v senzoriju, sistemu vseh petih človekovih čutil. Antropologija čutov namreč preučuje zgodovinsko-kulturno specifične in kontekstualne dimenzije čutnih zaznav, ki so pomembno povezane s spomini, čustvi, z izkušnjami in s kognicijo. V knjigi se avtorica ukvarja z nevrofiziološko dimenzijo vohanja in vonja. Posveča se miselnim konceptom različnih čutnih redov različnih kultur in pomenom čutov v vsakdanjem življenju. Knjiga izpostavlja kulturno specifične variacije čutov in čutenja, kot npr. izrazito kulturno specifičen primer malezijskega lovsko-nabiralniškega ljudstva Batek Negrito, ki v svoji kozmologiji sveta vsemu pripisuje vonj, tudi nebesnim telesom, npr. neprijeten meseni vonj soncu in prijeten rožni vonj luni. Miselni koncepti se posvečajo tudi delitvam glede na spol: npr., na Papi Novi Gvineji je notranjost žensk konceptualizirana kot temna, sočna, smrdljiva, medtem ko je notranjost moških bela, trda in brez vonja. Percepcija vonjav, ki se glede na olfaktorni imaginarij pripisujejo ženskam, je odvisna od moči, ki je dodeljena ženski v določeni družbi. Za številne raziskane skupnosti, kjer nad ženskami dominirajo, imamo izsledke o predstavljanju ženske, povezane s slabim vonjem. Slab vonj je povezan z njeno moralno, s »predzakonsko nedotaknjenostjo« oz. z »življenjem na koruzi« in s tem pripisano le njeno moralno izprijenostjo ipd. Spolna dihotomija vonjav med moškimi in ženskami odraža družbeno moč enih ter drugih in jim pripisuje vonjave z negativnim ali s pozitivnim označevanjem.

Za antropološko epistemologijo so pomembni tudi opisi izsledkov poglavitnih raziskav kulturnih vonjav v globalnem okviru ter razgrnitev fragmentarnih in parcialnih omemb vonjev v slovenski etnologiji, kulturni antropologiji ter kulturni zgodovini. Znanstvena monografija *Antropologija vonja* se tako osredinja na (a) antropološke predstavitve lingvistično-se-

miotičnih analiz vohalnih pojmov; (b) antropološke komparacije različnih kulturnih pomenov vonja v posameznih kulturah in družbah; (c) obravnavanje (spolnega) vedenja in (religioznih) ritualov, pri katerih ima vonj pomembno vlogo; (č) vlogo manipulacije z ambientalnimi vonjavami v potrošniških družbah ter (d) možnosti manipulacije z vonjavami pri predstavljanju kulturne dediščine v muzeološki praksi, pri razstavljenih galerijskih in muzejskih artefaktih ter pri performansih.

Znanstvena monografija prinaša tudi izsledke glavnih raziskav o kulturi vonjav, med katerimi omembe fizičnih in čutnih značilnosti preučevanih ljudstev izven Evrope v 19. in 20. stoletju odstirajo vpogled v kolonialno večvrednost Evropejcev, rasiziranje ljudstev, ki so jim psevdoznanstveniki pripisovali intelektualno inferiornost in ki so jih uvrščali v različne rasne tipologije, povezane z večjo sposobnostjo zaznavanja vonjav, kar je prestavljalo poseben vidik domnevne duševne degeneracije. Seveda so te posplošitve veljale tudi za nižje družbene sloje v evropskih družbah. Nedvomno so omenjene raziskave o dimenzijah moči izjemnega pomena za raziskovanje širokega nabora čutnih domen in odsevajo določeno medkulturno senzorno simboliko.

Knjiga prinaša tudi analitično-deskriptivni pregled zgodnjih terenskih raziskav moderne kulturne in socialne antropologije. Zgodnja antropološka dela med drugim zajemajo tudi parcialne opise vonjalnih zaznav med terenskim delom. Franz Boas (2009), ki je bil na terenu na Baffinovem otoku pri Inuitih, npr. opisuje vonj medvedje maščobe, uporabljene za impregnacijo šotorov; Bronisław Malinowski (1932) se je v antropoloških raziskavah, opravljenih na Trobriandskih otokih, posvetil obravnavanju vonja pri telesni privlačnosti in odbojnosti v spolnem življenju »divjakov«, njihove vonjalne magije pred poroko ter vonja v povezavi s čarovništvom in čarovnicami. Tudi poznejši antropologi so se občasno posvečali opisom vonjev. Npr., Claude Lévi-Strauss je dokumentiral vonjalne vidike svojih terenskih izkušenj v Braziliji. V »potopisu« *Tristes tropiques* (1955) je med drugim opisal

neprijetne vonjave živil in ladje, s katero je plul. Poleg tega je tudi v knjigi *Le cru et le cuit* (1964) obravnaval pomen vonja in drugih čutov, npr. obravnavo vonja v mitih, kontraste vonjev med neprijetnimi in prijetnimi, med vonjem po razpadu in vonjem, ki je veljal za dobrega.

Antropologe so zanimali sociokulturni pomeni vonjav in vprašanje, kako človek voha v fiziološkem ter nevrološkem pomenu, v povezavi z vplivom kulture pri tovrstnih zaznavah: kako kultura vpliva na to, da nekaj človek zazna in zaznanemu pripiše pozitivno oz. negativno vonjalno izkušnjo. Knjiga Mojce Ramšak oriše kulturnozgodovinske raziskave, povezane s telesno higieno, razsmrajevanjem oz. dezodoracijo okolja. Posveča se tudi medkulturnim primerjavam simbolnih pomenov čutnih zaznav arome ter nizanju preglednih zgodovinskih čutnih zaznav, zbornikov, ki so pomembni za kulturno obravnavo in razumevanja vonja ter poznavanje zgodovine posameznih vonjav, kot je npr. biografija parfumov, ki je odražala blokovsko delitev sveta med t. i. hladno vojno.

V preglednem poglavju raziskav o vonju se avtorica posveti podrobnemu branju polihistorja Janeza Vajkarda Valvasorja (2017) in njegovega dela *Slava vojvodine Kranjske*, ki lahko predstavlja spoznavno orodje za domnevanje vprašanja obravnavanja vonja v 17. stoletju, saj so v njegovem delu izpostavljene posebne vonjave: vonj cvetic, zdravilnih zelišč, vonj hrane in pijače, kutinovega sira, usmrajenega vina, tudi vonjave materialnega sveta, npr. industrijskega sveta, kot je npr. kamšt, neprimerne nekrepostnega in krepostnega življenja. Valvasor je npr. opisoval vonjave ljudi in se posvečal percepcijam vonja, ki jih je pobral iz drugih virov, pri čemer je kritiziral primerjavo moralnih in vonjalnih modalitet (npr. primerjava moralne sprevrženosti in slabih vonjav, značilnih za nemoralnost). Konceptualiziral je tudi odvrčanje ljudi s slabimi vonjavami ob etnografskem opisu varovalnega nošenja smrdljivega kokošjega mesa med nadržem pri mladih furlanskih ženskah, s pomočjo katerega so odvrčale avarske zavojevalce. Tudi pregledno branje etnoloških in kulturnozgodovinskih del,

ki opisujejo prakse, navade, rituale in ohranjanje spominov s pomočjo vonjav, prinaša vpogled v olfaktorne dimenzije na Slovenskem, četudi so vonjave v teh praksah omenjane zgolj fragmentarno, a vendar zato nič manj pomembno, saj predstavljajo izhodišča za poglobljenejši pristop k obravnavi vonja.

Velika znanstvena vrednost je v nazorno predstavljeni metodologiji raziskav voha in vonja ter z njim povezane kulturne dediščine (muzejskega konzervatorstva, vonjalne rekonstrukcije in poustvaritve, vonjalne scensko-ambientalne ter umetniške (preoblikovane) vonjalne predstavitve). Poleg klasičnih terenskih in kabinetnih metod kulturne ter socialne antropologije so izpostavljene še inovativne tehnike, kot so npr. vonjalna etnografija kot del senzornih etnografij, čutenje z udeležbo, uporaba in kreiranje vonjalnih zemljevidov, oblikovanih s pomočjo vonjalnih sprehodov, krožni vonjalni grafikoni ter metode merjenja z različnimi merilnimi pripomočki, kot so olfaktometri, vohalne kamere ter e-nosovi. Posebej prepričljiva je v predgovoru nazorno predstavljena avtobiografska metoda, ki ima drugod v evropskem prostoru prepoznan velik epistemološki potencial, a je med etnologi, socialnimi in kulturnimi antropologi slovenskega nacionalnega prostora zapostavljena in manj prakticirana, poleg tega imajo nekateri antropologi do njene uporabe tudi zadržke/predsodke zaradi domnevne subjektivnosti. V *Antropologiji vonja* najdemo podroben opis metodologije preučevanja vonjav, povzete po Davidu Howesu (1991) ter Davidu Howesu in Constance Classen (2014), ki je lahko tudi odličen vir metodološkega usposabljanja na področju senzorne antropologije za (bodoče) antropologe ter muzealce, in predstavitev sistemov razvrščanja vonjav v naravoslovju, psihologiji in antropologiji, za katere najdemo tudi vizualne shematske prikaze, ki jih je izdelala avtorica.

Poleg avtobiografskih in antropoloških ter kulturnozgodovinskih vonjalnih zaznav se avtorica podrobneje posveti tudi v jezik vpisani idejni predstavitvi vonja in njegovemu ubesedenju, ki nastaja v interakciji voha ter jezikovnega siste-

ma. Monografija razgrne sodobnejše raziskave v medkulturni primerjavi in v kulturnospecifičnih kontekstih, nevrokognitivne mehanizme (od zaznavanja do leksikalno-semantične integracije in ubeseditve) in procese v vonjalni socializaciji ter vonjalno terminologijo v sinhroni ter diahroni perspektivi. Ob tem pomembno vlogo igrajo tudi druga opisana nejezikovna kulturno posredovana komunikacijska orodja, npr. obrazna mimika, gestikulacija, in piktogramska upodobitev. Pozornost je posvečena tudi preučevanju vonjalnega izrazoslovja in kulturno-jezikovnim značilnostim vonjalnih besednjakov, zlasti še simbolno-pomenskim dimenzijam vonjav, ki se izrisujejo v metaforah, uporabljenih v različnih vrstah diskurzov, npr. povezanih s spoznavno dimenzijo in priklicem spominov na vsakdanje življenje ter njegove ritualne ritme. Posebna zanimivost v knjigi so konceptualne metafore vonja in večpomenskost vonjalnih izrazov. Avtorica naniza primere rab konceptualnih metafor, npr. »vonj je zasledovalec«, »vonj je zrak«, »vonj je vseživljenjski dogodek«, »vonj je arhitektura«, »vonj je predmet«, »vonj je agresor«, povezan s »sumničanjem«, a tudi »zaščitnik«; raziskovanje in odkrivanje je prav tako metaforično povezano z vonjem.

Mojca Ramšak predoči interakcijo med vohom in jezikovnim sistemom, a tudi pomenke dimenzije dobrih in slabih vonjav, ki so povezane s figurativnimi rabami in naslovljene na manjvredne etnično razločene (družbene) skupine, ki so tarča vonjalne mizoginije, vonjalnega rasizma in vonjalne ksenofobije. Avtorica predstavi olfaktorni imaginarij v *Svetem pismu* in *Visoki pesmi*, ki ju vzame kot vir kulturoloških analiz rabe posameznih predmetov pri svetih ritualih in rabe vonjav mire, aloje ter kadilovca kot kulturne dišave. V nadaljevanju predstavi še olfaktorni imaginarij v zvezi z izbranimi družbenimi skupinami, zaslužjenimi Afričani, temnopoltimi ženskami in ameriškimi staroselci – »Indijanci«, ki ga povezuje s kolonializmom in z rasizmom kapitalističnih zavojevalcev ter s kulturnozgodovinskim pojmovanjem vonjav tedajnjega časa, s katerimi se povezuje npr. tudi Rome

in Jude. Knjiga večkrat izpostavi evrocentrično načelo pri opisovanju olfaktornih imaginarijev, vendar pogrešamo konceptualizacije iz poddisciplin oz. specializacij, kot so antropologija etničnosti, postkolonialna antropologija, romske in judovske študije, ter upoštevanje nekaterih njihovih izsledkov. Pri poglavjih, ki obravnavajo »družbene skupne«, bi knjiga bistveno več pridobila, če bi se naslonila na poglobljenejšo in kompleksnejšo obravnavo postkolonialnih antropoloških perspektiv pri obravnavi rasizma do temnopoltih žensk, moških (»Črncev«) in ameriških staroselcev ter drugih domorodcev; anticiganizma v odnosu do Romov (Agarin 2014; Cortés Gómez in End 2019; Janko Spreizer 2022); antisemitizma v odnosu do Judov; študij spolov in feministične antropologije za refleksijo mizoginije. Vprašanjem kolonializma ter razvijajočega se kapitalizma v 18. in 19. stoletju se moramo v Sloveniji antropologi bistveno koncizneje posvetiti, saj so tovrstne razprave pogosto še vedno zapisane s perspektive, ki je premalo občutljiva za rasiziranje ter brutalno kapitalistično izkoriščanje zahodnih družb, iz katerega tudi ta del sveta ni bil izvzet. Upamo lahko, da bodo v prihodnosti antropologi upoštevali, da je bilo današnje ozemlje Slovenije vključeno v imperialno zgodovino, če se bodo poglobljeneje ukvarjali z vonjalnim rasizmom.

Knjiga se sistematično loteva pregledne zgodovine medicinsko-filozofskih razlag vonja in prinaša izsledke prvih piscev ter klasičnih zdravnikov – filozofov, kot so npr. Galen iz Pergama, Celz in Dioskurid, ki so slabe telesne vonjave pripisovali boleznim in njihovim simptomom. Poleg misli grških filozofov in zgodnjih zdravnikov iz antike sta orisani tudi konceptualizacija vonjav, relevantnih za medicino v zgodnji islamski in evropski medicini, ter zdravstveno-medicinska diagnostika iz drugih kultur v diahroni perspektivi. Za humanistiko je posebej zanimiva obravnavo vonja v filozofski misli oz. konceptualna zasnova filozofije vonja. Posebej velja izpostaviti tudi poglavje o sodobni medicinski diagnostiki. Bralci dobimo vpogled v razvijajoče se postopke diagnosticiranja s pomočjo novih elek-

tronskih zaznavalnih naprav vonja in okusa, kot je npr. e-nos, in s pomočjo živali, kar je razmeroma neznano polje. V medicini pri diagnosticiranju bolezenskih stanj sodelujejo posebej strenirani psi pomočniki, ki lahko pri ljudeh zavohajo specifične bolezni in zdravstvene anomalije, npr. padeč sladkorja pri diabetikih, bližajoči se epileptični napad, pomagajo lahko tudi pri diagnosticiranju rakavih obolenj, bližajoče se Alzheimerjeve bolezni ipd. Nedvomno to poglavje odpira pomembno vprašanje za preučevanje odnosa ljudi in živali, s katerim se je od nedavne ga začela ukvarjati etnografija mnogoterih vrst.

Delo Mojce Ramšak prinaša pomemben uvid tudi v učenje olfaktornega imaginarija oz. socializacijo vohanja od zgodnjega otroštva naprej. Ena izmed navedenih raziskav je npr. pokazala, da imajo otroci v vrtcu sposobnost razločevanja posameznih vonjav, vendar slednjim ne znajo pripisati vrednostnega predznaka, pač pa jih povezujejo z znanimi ali neznanimi kulturnimi praksami, značilnimi za domača okolja. Posebno epistemološko vrednost pri uvidu v socializacijo vohanja in vonja imajo pričevanja oz. mitologije o t. i. »divjih« ali »volčjih otrocih«. Pričanja o divjih živalih, ki naj bi vzgojile otroke, govorijo o tem, da ti otroci niso imeli civilizacijskih navad in jih tudi ob prisotnosti resocializacije v družbenem okolju ljudi niso mogli v popolnosti razviti. Naveden je npr. primer iz Nürnberga v 19. stoletju, zapuščenega in zaprtega ter od socialnih stikov izoliranega Kasperja Hauserja, ki mu je bilo nemogoče privzgojiti prehrabne režime družbenega okolja, v katerega so ga poskušali resocializirati potem, ko je bil najden. Njegova sposobnost za razvijanje učlovenjenih čutov se ni mogla razviti, saj so bili čuti voha in vida atrofirani.

Za literarne študije je posebej pomembno poglavje o kultiviranju voha v literaturi, pri čemer avtorica za spoznavni vir pri obravnavanju antropoloških tematik, kot so divjaki nasproti civiliziranim, vpliv vonja na spomin ter razredna razmerja, vzame tri kultne romane, tj. *Parfum* Patricka Süskinda (1986), *V Swanovem svetu*

Marcela Prousta (2003) in *Pot v Wigan* Georgea Orwella (1937).

Knjiga se posveča tudi produkciji dišav, privabljanju ljudi z vonjem ter komercializaciji vonjav. Preko kulturnozgodovinske obravnave pokaže, da je uporaba dišav in mazil prisotna tudi pri starih civilizacijah; pri Egipčanih naj bi npr. Kleopatra dišala pikantno sladko, domnevno po datljih in začimbah. Prelomno za rabo dišav z namenom privabljanja drugih datira v 19. stoletje, ko si ljudje želijo dišati drugim, kar sovpada z industrijsko proizvodnjo dišav in načrtnim hotelnjem po razsmrjevanju okolja ter ljudi. Predstavljene so tudi raziskave o prekrivanju in odvrčanju neprijetnih vonjav ljudi, v času, ko npr. v neurbaniziranih okoljih ni bilo osnovne komunalne infrastrukture, ki bi omogočala vzdrževanje osebne higiene z umivanjem in s tem tudi odvrčanje telesnih neprijetnih vonjav. Prav tako se je razvijala erotična vonjalna kultura in uporaba dišav za ta namen.

S sklicevanjem na dobre vonjave, npr. dišanje po morju, se trži določene razstave v muzejih ali turistične kraje preko kulinarike, navezujoč se na naravne vidike morske krajine, npr. morje, vonj po soli, ali prehrabne navade oz. specifične jedi, kot so npr. ribe, školjke.

Tudi veliki nakupovalni centri na potrošnike želijo vplivati s pomočjo vonjav in v svojih prostorih uporabljajo razpršilce, in to ne le v toaletnih, kjer se načrtno prikriva vonjave s pomočjo sintetičnih toaletnih vonjav, pač pa tudi drugod. Ambientalni sintetični vonji sovpadajo z letnimi časi ter s prazniki, ob katerih se z vonji spodbuja potrošniške prakse, ki sovpadajo z določenimi dogodki. Sintetične in skorajda nezaznavne vonjave se skladajo z različnimi prazničnimi časi, v katerih sicer prevladujejo kulinarične ali naravne vonjave. Z odišavljanjem prostorov skozi razprševalce vonjav ob vhodnih vratih v nakupovalne centre, npr. s pršenjem vonja po kuhanem vinu in praznični hrani v prednovoletnem času, želijo potrošnike zadržati v prostorih in jih spodbuditi k nakupovanju. S pomočjo trženja in uporabe sintetičnih vonjav nam npr. tudi v muzejih želijo omogočiti podoživetje rabe razstavljenih pred-

metov, med katerimi so nekateri, povezani tudi s prtljago osebnih spominov ali pridruženi kulturnim spominom okolja, v katerem živimo.

Avtorica je tudi sama opravila nekatere manjše raziskave, z namenom preverjanja izsledkov sodobnih raziskav o zaznavah vonja. Raziskovala je rabe vonjev za namen trženja v specifičnih slovenskih prostorih – npr. čajnicah, kjer se uporablja vonj vanilije, šolah, kjer naj bi vonj mandarine prispeval k zbranosti, mirnosti in dobremu počutju šolarjev, tako da želijo z njim vplivati na boljšo koncentracijo pri učenju, kar je izvajala ena od šol na Primorskem. Nekatere hotelske in zdraviliščne verige uporabljajo sintetične ambientalne vonjave, ki naj bi bile njihov razpoznavni znak in jih specializirana podjetja proizvajajo le za njih.

Mojca Ramšak svojo pionirsko znanstveno monografijo *Antropologija vonja* sklene s poglavjem o vonju in kulturni dediščini, ki oriše njene pomembne raziskave na omenjenem področju. Poglavje zajema poglobljeno analizo mednarodnih in domačih dokumentov, ki pravno urejajo kulturno dediščino ter z vonji povezane registrirane znanje in prakse. Avtorica analitično povzame pravne dokumente o zaščiti vohalne kulturne dediščine, ki datirajo v konec 20. in začetek 21. stoletja ter urejajo kulturni pomen vonja in vonj kot del nesnovne kulturne dediščine. Šele leta 2021 je bil sprejet francoski zakon o čutni dediščini, medtem ko se v Unescovi Konvenciji o varovanju nesnovne kulturne dediščine iz leta 2023 vonj ne omenja neposredno, pač pa ta konvencija omogoča zaščito znanj in praks, povezanih z vonjavami. Na tej pravni podlagi so tako šele leta 2018 na Reprezentativni seznam nesnovne kulturne dediščine vpisali znanje in prakse, povezane s proizvodnjo parfuma v francoski regiji Grasse, in sicer pod ključnim izrazom »senzorični sistemi«. Po tem letu, ko se vonjave in znanje ter prakse, povezane s tem vidikom sensorija, prepoznani kot pomembni vidik nesnovne kulturne dediščine, se začne večje prizadevanje za zaščito lokalnih vonjav preko Unesca. Avtorica predstavi Unescov seznam nesnovne dediščine človeštva, ki vsebuje nominacije za vpis

na Unescov seznam, z eksplicitnimi opisi vonjav in arom v utemeljitvenem delu ter ključnih besedah. Do leta 2024 je omembo vonja vsebovalo 12 nominacij, med katerimi je zaščiteno tudi čebelarstvo v Sloveniji, ki eksplicitno omenja vonj. Prav tako omenjeni razdelek knjige na enciklopedičen način predstavlja raziskovanje in ukvarjanje z vonji v muzejih, galerijah ter knjižnicah in koncipira polje olfaktorne muzeologije, vključno z njeno specifično terminologijo. To poglavje bo nedvomno zanimivo za študente kulturne dediščine in za bodoče eksperte, ki jih zanima muzeologija, ter za kustose, ki se želijo podrobneje posvetiti prikazovanju in analizi vonjav ter z vonji povezanih kulturnih praks. V nadaljevanju poglavja avtorica komparativno pregleda olfaktorno muzeologijo v mednarodnem okviru in Sloveniji. Predstavi rezultate zbranih podatkov, pridobljenih v slovenskih muzejih med letoma 2021 in 2023, v zvezi s prisotnostjo vonjav in z zavedanjem vonjav, povezanih s specifičnimi razstavnimi muzejskimi predmeti ter z razstavnim in pedagoškim delom kustosov. Zanimivo je, da so muzeji, ki so posredovali podatke v raziskavi (od 59 povabljenih je sodelovalo 49 muzealcev iz 29 slovenskih muzejev) po oceni avtorice leta 2023 hranili več sto vohalnih predmetov. Avtorica je pridobila tudi natančne opise vohalnih predmetov, prostorov z vonjem ter snovi in bitij, ki oddajajo vonj, na podlagi česar je izdelala naslednjo tipologijo: vohalni muzejski predmeti iz slovenskih muzejev, notranji in zunanji muzejski prostori, povezani z vonjem, pisni dokumenti, ki opisujejo vonjave, pripovedi o vonjavah iz preteklih razstav oz. zgodbe kustosov in dišeči, z dediščino povezani predmeti iz muzejskih trgovin.

Znanstvena monografija Mojce Ramšak je prvenec na področju antropologije, ki se ukvarja z zaznavami vonja v etnološki, kulturnoantropološki perspektivi na holističen in primerjalen način. Ne le da etnologinja in kulturna antropologinja celovito zajame obravnavo vonja preko pregleda antropoloških raziskav, ki se ukvarjajo z vonjem kot specifičnim sensorijem, pač pa analitični pregled v nekaterih poglavjih bolj ali

manj poglobljeno dopolni z lastnimi vonjalno-etnografsko-antropološkimi raziskavami. Če sklenem: knjigo vsekakor priporočam tako širši javnosti, ki jo zanima vpogled v antropološko obravnavo vonja, kakor tudi antropologom, etnologom ter muzealcem – specialistom za kul-

turno dediščino, ki lahko svojo antropološko teorijo in prakso pomembno dopolnijo z obravnavo občutka voha, za katerega smo šele ob njegovi začasni ali trajni izgubi »po covidu« lahko uza-vestili, da je izjemnega pomena za celovito eksis-tencialno izkušnjo.

Review of Anthropology of Smell (*Antropologija vonja*) by Mojca Ramšak

After the sensory turn in anthropology in the 1980s, it has been a long time since Slovenian ethnology and/or cultural anthropology have produced a comprehensive and in-depth debut, a scientific monograph that systematically and comparatively addresses the sociocultural aspects and meanings of smell and the ability to smell. Dr Mojca Ramšak, full professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Ljubljana and the Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, has been researching the topic since the Covid-19 pandemic and published her scientific monograph this year (2024). Many people have experienced a more or less temporary or permanent loss of the ability to detect smell, altered sense of smell, olfactory hallucinations or perceptions of smells that are not in the air, etc., after suffering from a new coronavirus disease. Although the first odour research in the Slovenian national context started already in 2019, it is certainly no coincidence that a broader interest in sensory research related to odour has emerged during and after the pandemic, when odour studies have also proliferated concerning international contexts, e.g. in the Odeuropa, Horizon 2021–2023 and Odotheka 2021–2024 projects.

Perhaps the fact that smell and olfactory skills are not ranked high on the scale of sensory perception in the so-called ‘Western’ culture also contributed to the later consideration of smell and olfactory skills in a cross-cultural perspective in the Slovenian national context (in a comparative perspective with other senso-

ry culturally conditioned perceptions of sight, sound, touch and taste), as well as elsewhere. The social environment in which people live defines the importance and hierarchisation of the senses, which is linked to survival strategies. The development of sensory ability and sensitivity to smells and the attribution of a particular (minor) value to smell is also significantly linked to the dimensions of the social environment. It is with regard to the olfactory aspect of the sensory perception of the natural and cultural environment that we humans are socialised into the cultural norm of so-called Western European society, which dictates silence or ignoring odours identified as unpleasant. It is also true that pleasant and discreet odours are often not even perceived, which is exploited, for example, by scent marketing strategies.

This aesthetically pleasing book, which is also pleasing to the eye, consists of a foreword – the first inhale, an introduction – the deeper inhale, and ten central chapters. The core chapters cover a methodological outline of the anthropology of smell and olfactory heritage, the linguistic dimensions of the idea of smell, smell in medicine, and the olfactory imaginary, in addition to the cultivation of smell in literature and the cultivation of miasmas and aromas. The central part of the book deals with the legal regulation of scents within the national state of Slovenia and the European Union, covering the legal regulation of the (working) environment, food, beverages, tobacco, and perfumes, also highlighting the legal loopholes that allow the marketing

of non-original fragrances due to the legal void. The main chapters of the *Anthropology of Smell* also cover smell treatment in marketing, sexuality and eroticism, and smell in cultural heritage and museology. The book concludes with a final conclusion or last gasp. Numerous tables complement the book's content, schematic illustrations of typologies and conceptualisations of smell, and photographs of numerous representations of smell and olfactory capacities, e.g. in sculpture and fine art and material objects from cultural heritage. The monograph is also accompanied by a comprehensive index and a list of sources and references, enabling readers to explore the olfactory theme's various aspects further.

The epistemological side of the book undoubtedly attracts particular attention in anthropological reading, where the anthropology of the senses and its research scope are presented, covering the study of the physical and cultural aspects of smell and the role of smell in the sensorium, the system of all five human senses. The anthropology of the senses studies the historically culture-specific and contextual dimensions of sensory perceptions, which are significantly related to memories, emotions, experiences and cognition. In this book, the author focuses on the neurophysiological dimension of smell and olfaction. She focuses on the mental concepts of different sensory orders in diverse cultures and the importance of the senses in everyday life. The book highlights culturally specific variations of senses and sensations, such as the highly culturally specific case of the Malaysian hunter-gatherer Batek Negrito people, who, in their cosmology of the world, attribute smell to everything, including celestial bodies, e.g. an unpleasant carnal smell to the sun and a pleasant floral smell to the moon. The mental concepts also address gender divisions: e.g. in Papua New Guinea, women's interiors are conceptualised as dark, juicy, and smelly, while men's interiors are white, hard and odourless. The perception of odours attributed to women according to the olfactory imaginary depends on the power attributed to women in a particular society. In many female-domi-

nated communities studied, we have evidence of representations of women associated with bad smells. Bad smell is associated with woman's morality, with 'premarital virginity' or 'living in sin', and thus only attributed to her moral depravity, etc. The sexual dichotomy of odours between men and women reflects the social power of one and the other and attributes to them odours with negative or positive labels.

Also important for anthropological epistemology are the descriptions of the results of the main studies of cultural odours in a global context and the dismantling of fragmentary and partial references to odours in Slovenian ethnology, cultural anthropology and cultural history. The scientific monograph *Anthropology of Smell* thus focuses on (a) anthropological presentations of linguistic-semiotic analyses of olfactory concepts; (b) anthropological comparisons of different cultural meanings of smell between individual cultures and societies; (c) treatment of (sexual) behaviour and (religious) rituals in which smell plays an important role; (d) the role of the manipulation of ambient smells in consumer societies; and (e) the possibilities of manipulating smells in the representation of cultural heritage in museological practice, in gallery and museum artefacts and performances.

The scholarly monograph also brings together the findings of major studies on the culture of smell, including references to the physical and sensory characteristics of the people studied outside Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. The latter, in particular, reveals insights into the colonial superiority of Europeans, the racialisation of peoples to whom pseudo-scientists attributed intellectual inferiority and who were classified into different racial typologies linked to a greater ability to perceive smells, which constituted a particular aspect of alleged mental degeneration. Of course, these generalisations also applied to the lower social classes in European societies. Undoubtedly, these studies on the dimensions of power are of paramount importance for the exploration of a wide range of sensory do-

mains and reflect a certain cross-cultural sensory symbolism.

The book also provides an analytically descriptive overview of early field research in modern cultural and social anthropology. Early anthropological work includes, among other things, partial descriptions of olfactory perceptions during fieldwork. Franz Boas (2009), who did anthropological fieldwork on Baffin Island with the Inuit, for example, describes the smell of bear grease used to impregnate tents; Bronisław Malinowski's (1932) anthropological research in the Trobriand Islands focused on odour in physical attraction and repulsion in the sexual life of 'savages', their olfactory magic before marriage, and odour in relation to witchcraft and witches. Later anthropologists have also occasionally turned to descriptions of smells. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, documented the olfactory aspects of his field experiences in Brazil. In his 'travelogue' *Tristes tropiques* (1955), he described, among other things, the unpleasant smells of the foodstuffs and the ship he was sailing on. In addition, in his book *Le cru et le cuit* (1964) he also discussed the importance of smell and other senses, such as the treatment of smell in myths, the contrasts between unpleasant and pleasant smells, the smell of decay and the smell that was considered good.

Anthropologists were interested in the sociocultural meanings of smells and how humans smell in a physiological and neurological sense in relation to the influence of culture in such perceptions: how culture influences the way a person perceives something and attributes a positive or negative olfactory experience to it. The Ramšak's book outlines cultural and historical studies on physical hygiene and environmental deodorisation. It also focuses on cross-cultural comparisons of the symbolic meanings of sensory perceptions of aroma and on a series of overview histories of sensory perception, compilations relevant to cultural treatments and understandings of smell, and knowledge of the history of particular scents, such as the biography of perfume, which also reflected the bloc division

of the world during the so-called Cold War. In an overview chapter of research on scent, Mojca Ramšak also devotes a detailed reading to the polyhistor Johann Weikhard von Valvasor (2017) and his work *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*, which can be a cognitive tool for speculating on the question of the treatment of scent in the 17th century. In his work, he highlights specific smells: the smell of flowers, medicinal herbs, the smell of food and drink, quince cheese, fermented wine, also the smells of the material world, e.g. of the industrial world, such as kamšt (water pump), of the improper, unchaste and virtuous life. Valvasor, for example, described the smells of people and focused on the perception of smells, picking them up from other sources, criticising the comparison of moral and olfactory modalities (e.g. the comparison of moral depravity and the bad smells characteristic of immorality). He also conceptualised the deterrence of people by bad smells, using the ethnographic description of the protective wearing of smelly chicken meat between the wombs of young Furlan women to ward off Avar invaders. A survey reading of ethnological and cultural historical works describing practices, customs, rituals and the preservation of memories through smells also provides insights into the olfactory dimensions in Slovenia, even if smells are only mentioned in a fragmentary way in these practices, but this is no less important, as they provide a starting point for a more in-depth approach to the study of smell.

The great scientific value lies in the illustrative presentation of the research methodology on smell and olfaction and related cultural heritage (museum conservation, olfactory reconstruction and recreation, olfactory scenic-ambient and artistic (transformed) olfactory presentation). Besides the classical fieldwork and cabinet methods of cultural and social anthropology, the monograph also highlights innovative techniques, such as, for example, the use of the ethnography of smell as a part of sensory ethnographies in cultural and social anthropology and sensing with participation. The use and creation of

olfactory maps were created through olfactory walks, circular olfactory charts, and measurement methods with different measuring devices such as olfactometers, olfactory cameras, and e-noses. Particularly convincing and illustrative is the autobiographical method presented in the foreword, which has a great epistemological potential recognised elsewhere in Europe but is neglected and less practised among ethnologists, social and cultural anthropologists in the Slovenian national context, and some anthropologists also have reservations/prejudices towards its use, due to its alleged subjectivity. In *The Anthropology of Smell*, we find a detailed description of the methodology of studying smells, taken from David Howes (1991) and David Howes and Constance Classen (2014), which can also be an excellent source of methodological training in sensory anthropology for (future) anthropologists and museum professionals and a presentation of the classification systems of smells in the natural sciences, psychology, and anthropology, for which we also find visual schematics made by the author.

Besides autobiographical, anthropological, and cultural-historical olfactory perceptions, the author also elaborates on the conceptual representation of smell inscribed in language and cognition, produced in the interaction of the sense of smell and the language system. The monograph exposes more recent research in cross-cultural comparison and in culturally specific contexts, neurocognitive mechanisms (from odour perception to lexical-semantic integration and phrasing) and processes in olfactory socialisation, and olfactory terminology in synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Additionally, the important role play also others non-linguistic culturally mediated communication tools, that are described in the book, such as facial expressions, gesticulation, and pictogram representation. Ramšak also focuses on the study of olfactory terminology and the cultural-linguistic characteristics of olfactory vocabularies, in particular the symbolic dimensions of smells meanings, which are mapped out in metaphors used

in different types of discourse, that are related to the cognitive dimension and evoke memories of everyday life and its ritual rhythms. The conceptual metaphors of smell and the multiple meanings of olfactory expressions are particularly interesting in the book. The author gives examples of the use of conceptual metaphors (in Slovenian language), e.g. 'smell is the pursuer', 'smell is the air', 'smell is a lifelong event', 'smell is architecture', 'smell is the object', 'smell is the aggressor', associated with 'suspicion', but also 'protector', exploration and discovery are also metaphorically linked to smell.

Mojca Ramšak shows the interaction between smell and the linguistic system, and the semantic dimensions of good and bad smells, which are connected with figurative uses and addressed to inferior ethnically distinct (social) groups, which are the target of olfactory misogyny, olfactory racism and olfactory xenophobia. The author presents the olfactory imaginary in the Bible and the High Song, which she takes as a source for cultural analyses, using particular objects in sacred rituals and using myrrh, aloes and frankincense scents as cultural fragrances. She then goes on to present the olfactory imaginary in relation to selected social groups: enslaved Africans, black women, and Native Americans – 'Indians' – which she links to colonialism and the racism of the capitalist invaders and to the cultural-historical conception of the smells of the time, with which she also associates, for example, the Roma and the Jews. The book repeatedly emphasises the Eurocentric principle in describing olfactory imaginaries. Still, conceptualisations from sub-disciplines or specialisations such as the anthropology of ethnicity, postcolonial anthropology, Romani and Jewish studies are missing, as are some of their findings. In the chapters dealing with 'social commons', the book would have benefited considerably more by drawing on a more in-depth and complex treatment of postcolonial anthropological perspectives in addressing racism towards black women, men ('Black') and Native Americans and other indigenous peoples; antigypsyism concern-

ing Roma (Agarin 2014; Cortés Gómez and End 2019; Janko Spreizer 2022); antisemitism concerning Jews; approaches to gender studies; and feminist anthropology to reflect on misogyny. The issues of colonialism and developing capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries need to be addressed in future with much more precision by anthropologists in Slovenia, as such debates are often still written from a perspective that is too insensitive to the racialisation and brutal capitalist exploitation of Western societies, from which this part of the world was not exempt. It is hoped that future anthropologists will consider that Slovenia's present-day territory was included in imperial history if they engage more deeply with olfactory racism.

The book systematically surveys the history of medical-philosophical explanations of smell. It brings together the findings of early writers and classical physician-philosophers, such as Galen of Pergamum, Celz and Dioscurides, who attributed foul body odours to diseases and their symptoms. In addition to the thoughts of Greek philosophers and early physicians from antiquity, the monograph also outlines the conceptualisation of odours relevant to medicine in early Islamic and European medicine and medical diagnosis from other cultures in a diachronic perspective. Of particular interest to the humanities is the treatment of smell in philosophical thought, or rather, the conceptualisation of the philosophy of smell. The chapter on modern medical diagnostics is also particularly noteworthy. Readers are given insight into the development of diagnostic procedures using new electronic sensing devices for smell and taste, such as the e-nose, and with the aid of animals, that is a relatively unknown field. In medicine, specially trained assistance dogs are involved in diagnosing medical conditions and can sniff out specific diseases and medical anomalies in humans, e.g. a drop in sugar in diabetics, an impending epileptic seizure, and can also help diagnose cancers, impending Alzheimer's disease, etc. There is no doubt that this chapter raises an important question for studying the relationship between

humans and animals, which has recently become the subject of multispecies ethnography.

Mojca Ramšak's work also provides important insights into learning the olfactory imaginary, or the socialisation of olfaction, from early childhood onwards. For example, one of the studies cited above showed that children in kindergarten can discriminate between smells. Still, they cannot assign a value to smells; instead, they associate them with the question of how familiar they are with cultural practices typical of their home environments. The testimonies or mythologies of the so-called 'wild' or 'wolf children' are of particular epistemological value in insight into the socialisation of smell and olfaction. The accounts of wild animals supposedly raising children suggest that these children did not have the habits of civilisation and, even in the presence of resocialisation in the social environment of humans, could not fully develop them. For example, in the case of Kasper Hauser abandoned and imprisoned in Nuernberg in the 19th century and isolated from social contact, it was impossible to inculcate him with the dietary regimes of the social environment into which people tried to socialise him after he had been found. His ability to develop his humanised senses could not develop, as his senses of smell and sight were atrophied.

The chapter on cultivating the sense of smell in literature is of particular relevance to literary studies. The author uses three iconic novels – Patrick Süskind's (1986) *Perfume*, Marcel Proust's (2003) *In Swann's World*, and George Orwell's (1937) *The Road to Wigan* – as a source of insight to address anthropological themes such as savages versus the civilised, the impact of smell on memory, and class relations.

The book also looks at the production of fragrance, the attraction of people through smell and the commercialisation of scent. A cultural-historical approach shows that the use of fragrances and lubricants is also present in ancient civilisations: for example, Cleopatra is said to have smelled spicy-sweet to the Egyptians, presumably of dates and spices. The turning point

for using fragrances to attract others dates to the 19th century when people wanted to smell good to others, coinciding with the industrial production of fragrances and the deliberate desire to deodorise the environment and people. Studies on the masking and deterrence of human odours are also presented when, for example, in non-urbanised environments, there was no basic municipal infrastructure to maintain personal hygiene by washing and thus deter body odours. There was also a developing erotic scent culture and the use of fragrances for this purpose.

Certain exhibitions in museums or tourist destinations are referred through the smell of the sea, and through gastronomy by marking the natural smells of the maritime landscape, the smell of salt, or by culinary (eating) habits, and specific dishes, such as fish, shellfish.

Large shopping centres also seek to influence consumers through scents and use diffusers on their premises, not only in the toilet areas where synthetic toilet scents deliberately mask odours but also elsewhere. Ambient synthetic scents coincide with the seasons and holidays, where scents are used to encourage consumption practices that coincide with certain events. Synthetic and almost imperceptible smells are consistent with different festive seasons, otherwise dominated by culinary or natural smells. By scenting the premises through scent diffusers at the entrance doors of shopping centres, e.g. by spraying the smell of mulled wine and festive food in the run-up to New Year, they aim to keep consumers indoors and encourage them to shop. The marketing and use of synthetic scents in museums, for example, also aims to allow us to experience the use of the objects on display, some of which are also linked to the baggage of personal memories or the associated cultural memory of the environment in which we live.

The author has also conducted some small-scale research to verify the findings of contemporary research on the perception of smell. She has investigated the use of scents for marketing purposes in specific Slovenian spaces – e.g. tea rooms, where the smell of vanilla is used. Man-

darin smell is used in schools, which is supposed to contribute to the concentration, calmness and well-being of schoolchildren to influence better concentration in learning, which was carried out by one of the schools in Primorska. Some hotel and spa chains use synthetic ambient scents, which are supposed to be their hallmark and are produced by specialised companies only for them.

Mojca Ramšak concludes her pioneering scientific monograph, *The Anthropology of Smell*, with a chapter on smell and cultural heritage, which outlines her important research in this field. The chapter includes an in-depth analysis of international and domestic legal documents regulating cultural heritage and registered knowledge and practices related to scent. The author analytically summarises the legal documents on the protection of olfactory cultural heritage dating back to the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which regulate the cultural significance of smell and smell as part of intangible cultural heritage. It was not until 2021 that the French law on olfactory heritage was adopted, while the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2023 does not mention smell directly but allows for the protection of knowledge and practices related to smells. It was only on this legal basis that, in 2018, knowledge and practices related to perfume production in the Grasse region of France were thus inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage under the keyword sensory systems. After this year, when scents and the knowledge and practices associated with this aspect of the sensory are recognised as an important aspect of intangible cultural heritage, a significant effort to protect local scents through UNESCO begins. The author presents the UNESCO List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity, which contains the nominations for listing on the UNESCO list, with explicit descriptions of odours and aromas in the rationale and keywords. By 2024, 12 nominations referenced scent, including the protected beekeeping in Slovenia, which explicitly men-

tions scent. This section of the book also presents the research and engagement with scents in museums, galleries and libraries in an encyclopaedic way. It outlines the field of olfactory museology, including its specific terminology. This chapter will be undoubtedly interested for students of cultural heritage and future experts interested in museology, as well as curators who wish to focus on the display and analysis of smells and smell-related cultural practices. In the following part of the chapter, the author provides a comparative overview of olfactory museology in the international context and Slovenia. She presents the results of the data collected in Slovenian museums between 2021 and 2023 regarding the presence of odours and the awareness of odours related to specific museum exhibits and curators' exhibitions and teaching work. Interestingly, the museums that provided data in the survey (49 museum professionals from 29 Slovenian museums out of 59 invited to participate) were estimated by the author to hold several hundred olfactory objects in 2023. The author also obtained detailed descriptions of the olfactory objects, spaces imbued with scent, and substances and beings that emit odours., which allowed her to classify them into the following typology: olfactory museum objects from Slovenian museums, indoor and outdoor museum spaces related to smell, written documents describing smells, narratives about smells from past exhibitions or curators' stories, and scented heritage-related objects from museum shops.

Mojca Ramšak's scientific monograph is a debut in anthropology, dealing with the perception of smell in an ethnological, cultural, and anthropological perspective holistically and comparatively. Not only does the ethnologist and cultural anthropologist comprehensively address the study of scent through a review of anthropological studies that examine smell as a specific sensory experience, but she also supplements the analytical review in some chapters—more or less in-depth—with her own olfactory-ethnographic-anthropological research. In conclusion, I would definitely rec-

ommend the book to the general public interested in an insight into the anthropological treatment of smell, as well as to those anthropologists, ethnologists, and museum and cultural heritage specialists, who can significantly complement their anthropological theory and practice by considering the sense of smell, that only when temporarily or permanently lost 'after the Covid' can we realise is exceptional for a holistic existential experience.

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Založba Univerze na Primorskem
www.hippocampus.si
ISSN 2350-5443

