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Margarita Voulgaropoulou

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Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Twilight of the Republic of Venice: The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva, Montenegro

Margarita Voulgaropoulou

Abstract

The last quarter of the eighteenth century found the Republic of Venice confined to the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, a development which brought closer the Italian, Greek, and Slavic cultural elements that made up Venetian society. An illustrative example of this intercultural dialogue is the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva, Montenegro. According to an archival document, which is presented here for the first time, the church was built and decorated by artists and artisans of Heptanesian-Greek and Slavic origin. Through this case study, this article examines the broader issue of cross-cultural exchanges in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, assesses the reception of Heptanesian icon painting in the Adriatic, and illuminates the factors behind the creation of a common aesthetics in the Ionian-Adriatic region.

In his 1884 publication, *Secrets d'État de Venise*, Vladimir Lamansky described the last century of the Republic of Venice as “Italo-slavo-grècque” ([1884] 1968, 552; see also Paladini 2003, 164), stressing the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Serenissima after the Ottoman-Venetian wars. In the field of the arts, this threefold cultural dialogue between the Italian, Greek, and Slavic element of the Republic can be observed in the decoration of Orthodox churches along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, especially in Dalmatia and in the Bay of Kotor (Boka Kotorska). During the eighteenth century in particular, the presence of Slavic and Italian influences alongside the Greek in church decoration was becoming increasingly pronounced, suggesting the possibility of collaborations between artists and artisans of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Yet, however appealing such theories might be for scholars in art history and

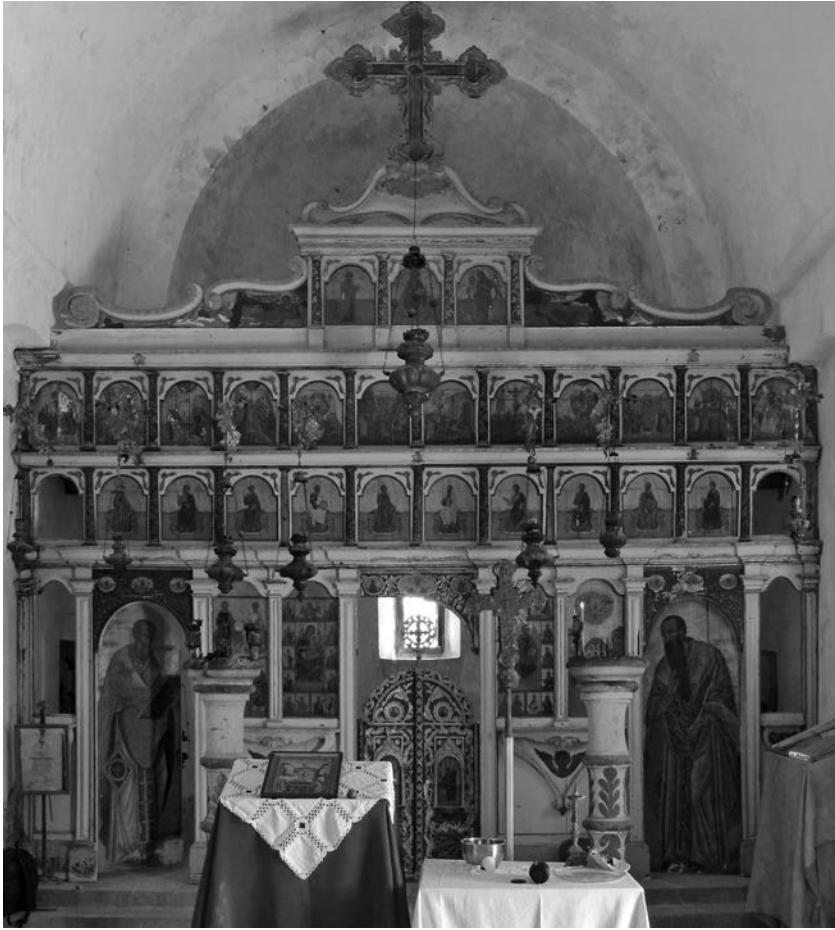


Figure 1. Titos from Corfu and Tripo Dabović, *Iconostasis*, 1790–1791, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnjeva. *Source*: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

cultural studies, the actual documented cases of cross-cultural artistic partnerships are extremely rare, making surviving examples exceptionally valuable.¹

One notable example of such an intercultural artistic collaboration can be seen in the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin (crkva Uspenja Presvete Bogorodice) in the village of Višnjeva, in the region of Grbalj, just a few kilometers southeast from Kotor in modern-day Montenegro. The surviving revenue and expenses book from the church offers detailed documentation about its construction and decoration, explicitly mentioning the names of the artisans who were involved in the work.² According to the records, the church of the

Dormition was built in 1777–1781 by the brothers Aleksije (Alehsi) and Vuk Subotić, stonemasons from Kotor, while in 1790–1791, it received a painted iconostasis, carved by the woodcarver Ižepo from Kotor and painted by the Greek artist Titos from Corfu along with his assistant, Tripo Dabović, from Škaljari (Figure 1).

Through an examination of the extraordinary case of the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva, this article examines the cross-cultural exchanges that occurred in the Adriatic region during the early modern period, while also contextualizing this example within the broader framework of the political, religious, and socioeconomic developments that defined the twilight years of the Republic of Venice.

*The province of Grbalj between the Venetian Gulf and the Ottoman Balkans:
A historical overview*

The intercultural character of the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva is strongly related to the geopolitical location of Grbalj,³ a borderland region that enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy throughout its history, but which was subject to multiple external influences that shaped its cultural identity. Located in a strategic position between the Bay of Kotor and the Montenegrin mainland, as well as at the intersection of important maritime and land trade routes, Grbalj offered passage from the Venetian Adriatic to the Ottoman Balkans; it was an important node for merchant caravans and postal services, but the region also served as a passageway for Catholic missionaries (Chaline 2001, 353; Molnár 2014, 499). In addition, Grbalj was important for its *solane* (saltworks), a vital source of income that rendered the region a theater of conflict between contesting powers, resulting in its ever-shifting political status (Stanojević 1976, 179; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 98, 105, 122; Maliković 2007, 51–52).

During the course of the late Middle Ages, Grbalj was constantly changing hands between the Republic of Venice and the Serbian Despotate. As an Orthodox province, Grbalj was generally hostile towards Catholic Venetian Kotor and sided mostly with the Serbs. After four revolts against the authority of Kotor (1421, 1433, 1448, and 1465), and after the fall of the Serbian Despotate, Grbalj finally accepted Ottoman protection in 1497 and remained in this position over the next two centuries (Kovačević 1964, 21–35; Maliković 2007, 55–83; Molnár 2014, 494–528). Under Ottoman rule, the nine villages of Grbalj enjoyed a state of relative administrative and religious autonomy, retained their Orthodox faith and customs, and were governed by clan associations.⁴

All administrative, judicial, and law-enforcement powers were concentrated in the hands of the clan chief, the *knez* (Sbutega and Serio 2006, 121; Mačić 2014, 163–180).

The loss of Grbalj was a heavy blow for Venice, as it was considered to be the most lucrative territory of Boka Kotorska and an important source of profit and supplies for the city of Kotor (Ljubić 1877, 245–246). During the Cretan War (1645–1669), the Venetians resumed their efforts to control Grbalj, striking an alliance with the Montenegrin tribes of Maini, Pobori, and Grbalj. As a result of these developments, Grbalj was taken over by the Venetians in 1647; however, after the end of the War for Candia in 1669, the province was left out of the *Acquisto Vecchio* and the new border (*Linea Nani*), returning instead to Ottoman rule (Solovjev 1931, 15–16; Butorac 2000, 141; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 143, 156). Grbalj continued to be a contested territory all through the First Ottoman-Venetian War of Morea (1684–1699) and was briefly placed under Venetian rule, but it was still excluded from the Republic's acquisitions as defined by the Treaty of Karlowitz (*Linea Grimani, Acquisto Nuovo*). It was only after the signing of the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 (*Linea Morosini, Acquisto Nuovissimo*) that Grbalj became once again part of the Republic of Venice, along with the neighboring communes of Maini, Pobori, and Brajići. (For the history of Grbalj after the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz, see in particular Butorac 2000 140–150; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 151, 157, 175; Ivetic 2009a, 55; 2011b, 69).

The eighteenth century marked a period of peace and relative political stability for the Adriatic, allowing the demographic recovery of the coastal cities, the development of new ports, and the reinvigoration of internal trade within the Adriatic “liquid plain” (Peričić 1980; Ivetic 2000, 30–33; Chaline 2001, 380; Schmitt 2006–2007a, 77–101; 2006–2007b, 87–116; Ivetic 2009b, 239–260; 2011a, 31). For the Republic of Venice, the so-called short century, which started with the Treaty of Passarowitz and ended in 1797, came with an increased focus on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, which were the last outposts of the *Stato da Màr* after the loss of Crete and Morea (Ivetic 2011b, 66; see also Chaline 2001, 360–383; Gullino and Ivetic 2009, 8). With the development of smaller peripheral ports like Ancona and Livorno, but especially after the rise of the free Habsburg ports of Rijeka and Trieste, Venetian commerce was severely threatened and limited within the Ionian and Adriatic Seas (Chaline 2001, 382; Costantini 2004, 33; Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 2011, 104–110; Ivetic 2011a, 29, 32; 2011b, 69).

Venice's increased focus on the Italo-Slavic and Greek world further strengthen the commercial ties between the Bay of Kotor and the ports of the

Ionian Islands, principally Corfu. Indeed, during the course of the eighteenth century, Corfu grew into one of the most important and frequented ports of the Serenissima. After the siege of the island by the Ottomans in 1716, Corfu port was equipped with an arsenal, built to service the Venetian fleet, and the city quickly became a regular stopover for ships that sailed between the Adriatic and the Levant. At the same time, the ports of the Bay of Kotor rose considerably in importance, especially Perast, which was the base of a naval school, but also Dobrota, Prčanj, and, of course, Kotor itself. These ports provided Venice with seamen, captains, and shipowners, and in return they were granted tax-exempt status. After the end of the War of Morea, and especially after the eradication of piracy in the Adriatic by the 1760s, maritime commercial activity between Venice, Greece, and the Bay of Kotor slowly resumed and reached its peak in 1786 (Milošević [1962] 2003, 1785–1818; Chaline 2001, 365, 369, 373–374; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 205).

The eighteenth century also saw the reinforcement of Orthodox Christianity in Boka Kotorska and the Montenegrin littoral. Since the beginning of the Cretan War, the advance of Ottoman troops towards the Adriatic had triggered a mass migration of Orthodox Christians from the Montenegrin hinterland to the coast, thus changing the confessional balance in the Bay of Kotor. Until 1645, the Orthodox population of Boka Kotorska was around 1,000 out of a total population of 5,000, and it was mainly located in Kotor and its surrounding territory, as well as in the cities of Perast, Dobrota, Prčanj, and Budva (Ivetic 2009a, 100). Another 1,000 Orthodox inhabitants were registered in the *corpus separatum* of Paštrovići in the year 1648 (Jačov 1992, vol. 1, 157). After the mid-seventeenth century, the demographic composition of city and village communities in the province of Kotor underwent a notable change. According to a document dating from 1662, around 2,000 Orthodox refugees from the Ottoman Balkans had settled in the lands of the bishopric of Kotor, and their numbers were increasing rapidly (Jačov 1992, vol. 2, 311). The highest concentration of Orthodox populations was recorded in Grbalj; according to the 1661 report of the Bishop of Kotor, Giovanni Antonio Sborovazzi (Zborovac), the region of Grbalj comprised 30 villages and had a total population of approximately 2,000 inhabitants, who followed the Eastern rite and were subject to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Peć and the Metropolitanate of Cetinje (Peri 1975, 224–227; Jačov 1992, vol. 1, 122–125, 129–130; vol. 2, 170–172). In 1657, many Orthodox Christians from these villages fled to the coastal cities of the Bay of Kotor, requesting asylum from the Venetian authorities (Jačov 1992, vol. 2, 170–172). Another wave of Orthodox refugees from Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina arrived in Boka in the years 1684–1699, accompanied by priests

and monks, and settled near Herceg Novi, Sutorina, and Grbalj (Radonić 1950, 396–397; Chaline 2001, 349; Ivetic 2009a, 102).

The vibrant circulation of people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds during the Ottoman period resulted in the confessional coexistence of Orthodox and Catholics. This biconfessionality covered all aspects of everyday life, extending from liturgical practices to mixed marriages, and was also reflected in the cultural heritage of the region (Milošević and Brajković 1976, 22; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 92–93, 221–222; Ivetic 2009a, 98). During the seventeenth century, numerous churches in the province of Kotor were equipped with both Orthodox and Catholic altars, while sometimes mass was celebrated in both rites, even on the same altar. In his 1661 report, Bishop Sborovazzi mentions that in the villages of the Luštica peninsula Orthodox and Catholics shared at least seven churches (Jačov 1992, vol. 2, 170–172), whereas dual churches were recorded in Donji Stoliv, Krtoli (Cartolla), and even in the city of Kotor.⁵

With the peace treaties of 1699 and 1718, as well as the inclusion of provinces with an Orthodox majority in the Republic's borders, the total Orthodox population of Boka reached approximately 10,000 inhabitants, while in 1766–1775, it rose to 16,000 compared to 9,000 Catholics (Sbutega and Serio 2006, 221; Ivetic 2009a, 100, table 2). Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to say that in the eighteenth century almost two-thirds of the total population of the *Albania Veneta* was Orthodox, while the villages of Grbalj, Maini, Pobori, Brajci, and Paštrovići were composed entirely of Orthodox residents. Predrag Kovačević notes that it was in fact impossible for a non-Orthodox to move to Grbalj—not even to work as a servant (1964, 14; see also Jačov 1986, 280). According to a 1766 census report, Grbalj had 3,023 Orthodox inhabitants, whereas Kotor counted 1,240 in an overall population of 4,457 (Ivetic 2009a, 101).

This increase in the numbers of Orthodox Christians in the Bay of Kotor led to a considerable improvement of their status. In order to ensure the allegiance of the Montenegrin tribes, in 1718 the Republic of Venice acknowledged the spiritual authority of the Metropolitan (*vladika*) of Cetinje over all Orthodox Christians of Old Montenegro, the Bay of Kotor, and the Highlands, granting him the right to reconstruct or establish new churches in said regions (Ongania 1896, 132–133; Veselinović 1966, 48; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 174, 221). In the coming years, the consolidation of the vladika's power as a spiritual, political, and military leader saw the transformation of Montenegro into a kind of conservative theocracy under the rule of the Petrović Njegoš dynasty (Sbutega and Serio 2006, 123). The vladika's influence was further intensified

after the abolition of the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć in 1766 (Chaline 2001, 349).

The confessional stability and economic growth that defined the better part of the century were succeeded by a period of political agitation during the twilight years of the Republic of Venice. For Montenegro and Boka Kotorska, the last quarter of the eighteenth century proved to be a major turning point (Cattaruzza, 2010, 43), as the gradual decline of Venice and the Ottoman Empire gave way to new emerging powers, more precisely Russia and the Habsburg Empire (Stanojević 1962, 26–31; Butorac 2000, 171–212; Roberts 2007, 160–162; Babović-Raspopović 2009, 78–81). The Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva was built and decorated right in the midst of this clash of old and rising political powers, and it was consecrated just a few days after the signing of the Treaty of Sistova, which ended the last Austro-Turkish War of 1787–1791 (Roberts 2007, 165).

After the mid-eighteenth century, the political situation in Montenegro can be described as chaotic. In 1768, the Ottomans deployed a full-scale attack against Montenegro in order to capture its ruler, Šćepan Mali, the impostor pretender of the Russian tsar; during the next couple of years, similar expeditions were led by the Venetians and the Russians until the ultimate assassination of the usurper in 1773, which was orchestrated by the Governor of Skadar, Kara Mahmud Pasha Bušatlija. Eight years later, in 1785 Mahmud Pasha launched another attack against Montenegro and the Venetian province of Paštrovići, driving the lands into devastation and anarchy (Stanojević 1962, 81; Butorac 2000, 196–199; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 185, 190–191). The situation further deteriorated by the severe frost, drought, and famine that struck Dalmatia and the Bay of Kotor in the years 1779–1782 and again in 1790 (Chaline 2001, 355, 358; Hrabak 2005, 240–241; Restifo 2005, 36, 39, 53–54). During that time, Montenegro remained largely isolated, trying to secure the help of either the Russians, the Austrians, or the Venetians. Eventually, with the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797 and the signing of the Treaty of Campo Formio, Montenegro and the Bay of Kotor were united and placed under Habsburg rule (Raspopović 2013, 227–228).

Caught in the middle of this geopolitical chessboard, the province of Grbalj was seriously affected by these developments. Although politically it remained under Venetian rule (Stanojević 1962, 86, 96–97; Roberts 2007, 164; Katušić and Čoralić 2013, 159–185), on an ethnoconfessional level Grbalj was more closely attached to Montenegro and was under the spiritual influence of the Metropolitan of Cetinje. In this respect, the consecration of the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva by the Metropolitan of Cetinje, vladika Petar I

Petrović Njegoš, should be assessed not only from a religious but also from a political and national perspective.

The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva, its iconostasis, and the archival evidence

The *Codex of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva* contains plenty of valuable information about the construction of the church, as well as the execution of its icons and iconostasis. In a record dated 30 August 1791, it is mentioned that the community of Višnjeva had spent 357 zecchini and 42 lire since 14 July 1790, which is when “the painters and carpenters arrived” (wd како доше питури и марангуни; *Codex of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva* [hereafter abbreviated as CCDVV], p. 25, f. 14v).⁶ This piece of information undoubtedly refers to the iconostasis of the church, thus providing a *terminus post quem* for its construction and decoration.

The earliest concrete mention of the church iconostasis (тенпиw, or tenpio) is recorded on 21 September 1790, regarding the payment of a certain “master Ižepo” (маисторъ ижепо) from Kotor, in all probability the carpenter who performed the woodwork (CCDVV, f. 12v). In particular, it is revealed that master Ižepo was paid 10 lire as a *giornate* (чорнаде, daily wage), and that he was due to receive 22.5 zecchini for the second in ten weeks of work (само други у десетъ неѡелах). Some extra work probably remained to be done up until July 1790, when the community bought various materials used in woodcarving and gilding, such as nails, linseed oil (уле wd лана; from the Italian, *olio di lana*), and German glue (колу тудешку; from the Italian, *colla tedesca*), as well as seven liters of silver.

Furthermore, the painting of the icons for the iconostasis must have also started on 14 July 1790, along with the woodcarving works. Two months later, the painting works had already advanced, as the date 14 September 1790 is inscribed on the icon of the Dormition of the Virgin, the patronal feast of the church (Figure 2). That said, it appears that the preparations for the decoration of the iconostasis had started much earlier, since on 30 January 1790 the community had already made a purchase of painting materials in Venice for the execution of the icons (CCDVV, p. 22, f. 12r). Another purchase of pigments was recorded in July 1790. However, the following commission for materials was only registered in May of the next year. Indeed, during that time, the church account book is completely silent, with no records of donations or expenses of any sort.



Figure 2. Titos from Corfu and Tripo Dabović, *The Dormition of the Virgin*, dated 14 September 1790, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnjeva. Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

This gap in the sources could be associated with the severe famine that struck Grbalj in 1790, just seven years after the previous outbreak. On top of that, the political situation in Grbalj was extremely fluid during that time: the *knežine* were divided over land disputes, while in the meantime the Ottomans were trying to bring Grbalj under their rule, and the Austrians were attempting to exert their power in the region. It appears therefore that in light of these circumstances the works for the painting of the iconostasis had stopped for a brief time.

Work on the church seems to have resumed in 1791, with a long list of expenses for painting materials from May through August. The last purchase of materials is recorded on 20 August, revealing that the painting had not been completed when vladika Petar Petrović Njegoš visited Višnjeva on 15 August 1791 in order to consecrate the church on the patronal feast day of the Dormition. In fact, the work seems to have been completed by 30 August, at which time the community paid the painters, master Titos, a Greek from Corfu, and his assistant, Tripo Dabović from Škaljari, for painting the church (CCDVV, p. 25, f. 14v).⁷ The two artists were paid 48 zecchini, and they received 2 more lire as a gift. As previously mentioned, the sum for the construction, woodcarving, and painting of the iconostasis from 14 July 1790 to 30 August 1791 rose to 357 zecchini and 42 lire.

The iconostasis of the Church of the Dormition was the fruit of the collaboration between artists of different ethnic origin and cultural backgrounds: Ižepo from Kotor, Titos from Corfu, and Tripo Dabović from Škaljari.⁸ At this point, no archival information has been located about any of the aforementioned artisans; this lack of evidence, however, is compensated by the rich indirect information, which can be derived from the church codex and from the artworks proper.

As stated above, the woodcarving for the iconostasis was assigned to master Ižepo from Kotor. In all probability, Ižepo ran a workshop with assistants, hence the plural “carpenters” (марангуни) used in the text. Judging by the fact that he was paid almost a year before Titos and Tripo Dabović, it is safe to assume that Ižepo worked independently of the painters and was mainly occupied with works associated with the carpenter’s craft. In fact, master Ižepo’s services were employed once again a year after the completion of the iconostasis. On 1 August 1792, Ižepo was paid 7 zecchini and 10.5 lire “to put glass on the icons”—in other words, to encase the six main icons of the iconostasis with covers (CCDVV, pp. 27–28, ff. 15v–16r).

According to the text, the icons of the iconostasis were executed jointly by the Greek artist Titos from Corfu and the Montenegrin Tripo Dabović (Figure

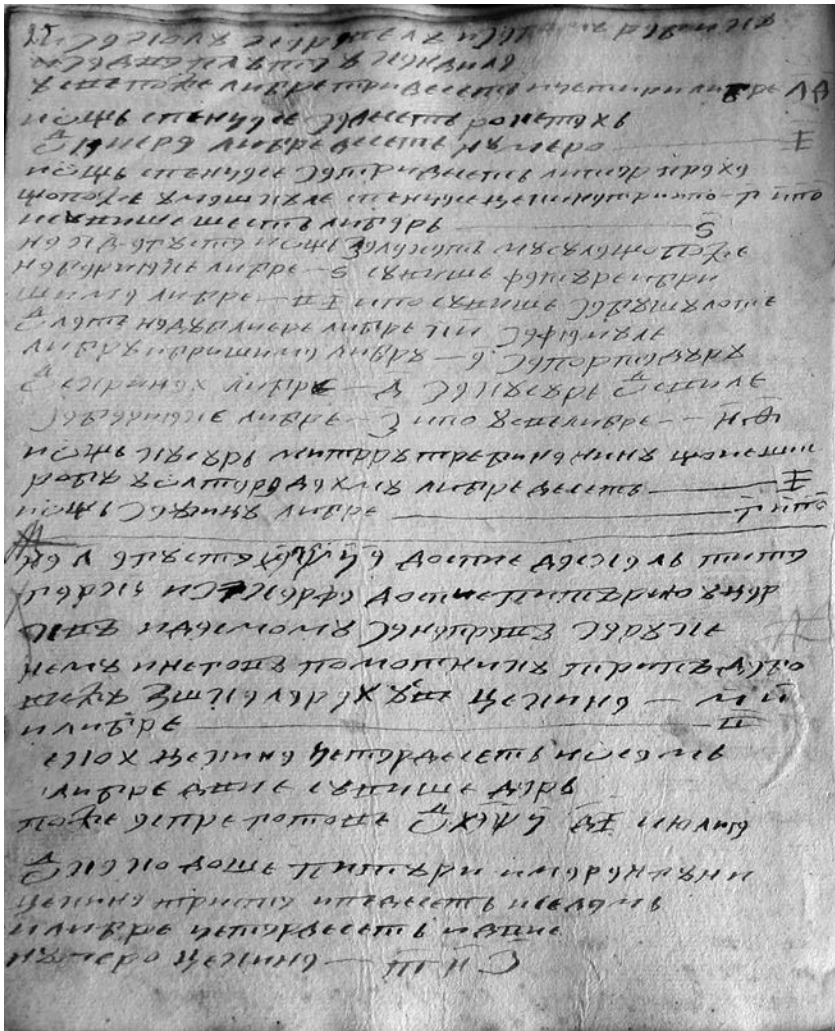


Figure 3. Page from the Book of Revenues and Expenses of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnja, mentioning the payment of Titos from Corfu and Tripo Dabović. Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

3). The head of this workshop—or better collaboration—was undoubtedly Titos, who is referred to in the manuscript as *daskal* (from δάσκαλος, διδάσκαλος), that is, teacher or master (μαϊστορας), whereas Tripo Dabović is clearly referred to as *pomotnik* (pomocnik), or assistant. The term *daskal* was commonly used in the local artistic tradition of Boka Kotorska in order to indicate

the master painter, the most prominent artist, teacher, and head of a workshop. For example, this title was used to designate the famous painter Dimitrije Daskal (Miter Dascalo), the founder of the icon painting school of Dimitrijević, which bears his namesake (for the work of Dimitrije Daskal, see Milošević 1971; Medaković 1996, 218; Gagović 2007, 46; Stošić 2014a, 187–202). Other painters of the same broad family of the Boka Kotorska school of painting also held the same title (Stošić 2014a, 194, 198).

It is hard to specify how the two artists met, whether they had collaborated before their work in Višnjeva, or if they were members of the same workshop. The involvement of the Dabović family with commerce and seafaring in the Adriatic and the Ionian Islands cannot be ignored. In 1794–1795, for example, a certain Captain Vincenzo Dabovich (Vicko Dabović) was collaborating with a Greek named Leon Pappas in Corfu (Paladini 1997, 113–116, no. 32; 253–251, no. 71). Nonetheless, it seems more likely that the two artists met in Kotor, and that their collaboration was circumstantial, serving the needs of this specific commission. It is highly possible that the commissioners were the ones to suggest Tripo Dabović to Titos, an assumption that is supported by the fact that Tripo kept returning to Višnjeva in the years following the completion of the iconostasis for minor works. In particular, on 1 August 1792, the community paid 56 lire to Tripo Dabović “to his hands and for the expenses” for materials and tools associated with gilding, such as minium (миния), *biacca* (жбіяке), cotton (бунбака), brushes (пенела), oil (ула), and two spoons (два кешика) (CCDVV, pp. 27–28, ff. 15v–16r). Moreover, on 10 April 1795, Tripo Dabović was paid 2 talleri to take a lamp part (брацулетъ; from the Italian *braccialeto*, bracelet) to the smith in Kotor and have him forge two similar parts in order to mount a pair of lamps on the iconostasis (CCDVV, p. 29, f. 16v). Tripo was also paid 36 lire to gild the iron lamps and was provided with the gilding materials, namely, gold (злата), minium (миния), *biacca* (жбіяке), and linseed oil (ула вѣд лана) (CCDVV, p. 29, f. 16v). It appears therefore that the community of Višnjeva employed Tripo Dabović regularly, especially for works related to gilding.

Furthermore, it is possible to conclude that Tripo Dabović was also assigned the task of writing the inscriptions on the icons, not just the Slavic ones, but also the ones in Greek, a hypothesis which explains why there are multiple errors and misspellings in the Greek inscriptions.⁹ The only inscriptions that seem to have been written by the Greek painter Titos are the abbreviations ΜΡ ΘΥ and ΙC ΧC,¹⁰ as well as the inscriptions identifying the Virgin and Saint John in the scene of the Crucifixion, which have been effaced and are hardly legible.



Figure 4. Titos from Corfu and Tripo Dabović, *Saint Nicholas* (prothesis door) and *Saint Nicholas* (detail from icon with four saints), 1790–1791, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnjeva. Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

As far as the painting of the icons is concerned, no strong stylistic inconsistencies can be observed so as to suggest different artistic hands. The divergence between the depiction of similar iconographic themes (such as the two different scenes of the Annunciation), between the two images of Saint Nicholas (Figure 4), and between the depiction of the Apostles flanking the image of Christ Pantocrator and those from the upper-tier of the iconostasis is easily

explained by the difference in scale, which required different levels of detail for each icon. It is therefore safe to assume that daskal Titos was the one in charge of the design and painting of the icons for the iconostasis, whereas Tripo Dabović's work as an assistant was limited to secondary tasks, such as gilding the icons and writing the inscriptions.

In any case, as a product of the joint effort of a culturally diverse group of artisans, the iconostasis of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin reflects the influences of different artistic traditions. The wooden structure of the iconostasis¹¹ follows a design that was illustrative of the transition from the baroque to the neoclassical style, and it was painted to imitate the elaborate marble iconostases that were created in the Adriatic region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Figure 1, above). In fact, the Višnjeva iconostasis bears a close affinity to monuments from rural Corfu, such as the one from the Monastery of Saint Paraskevi in the village Kynopiastes, thus indicating the possibility that master Titos contributed to its design and oversaw its construction along with the woodcarver Ižepo. Strong similarities can also be detected in other monuments from the area of Grbalj, such as the Church of the Birth of the Virgin (crkva Roždestva Presvete Bogorodice) in the village Kubasi or the Church of the Holy Trinity (crkva Svete Trojice) in Pelinovo, which however date from a much later period and were possibly created under the influence of the iconostasis of Višnjeva.

The cultural fusion that defines the monument is even more pronounced in the painting decoration and the iconographic scheme of the iconostasis. For example, the icon of the Madonna and Child from the main tier reproduces the popular iconographic model of the *Virgin Lambovitissa* that became largely diffused from the Ionian to the Adriatic Seas,¹² while the iconographic variant of the Virgin flanked by prophets constituted a standard theme in the pictorial tradition of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović school of painting. Moreover, although the placement of the full-scale figures of Saints Spyridon and Basil on the Prothesis and Diakonikon Doors was common in Cretan and Heptanesian iconostases,¹³ the structure of the Royal Doors and the tympana of the Prothesis and the Diakonikon instead follows the tradition of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović school.¹⁴

In a similar vein, the choice of the saints depicted on the iconostasis mirrors a mixed influence of Heptanesian and local elements. The double portrayal of Saint Nicholas, for instance, is easily explained by the large diffusion of the saint's cult throughout the Adriatic and in the Bay of Kotor, a region especially involved in maritime trade and shipping. An equally prominent place in the iconostasis was held by Saint Spyridon, patron saint of Corfu, whose cult was

widely disseminated to the maritime centers of the Adriatic and the Montenegrin coast, as indicated by the dedication of a chapel to the saint in the Church of Saint Luke in Kotor a few years earlier. However, the iconostasis of Višnjeva features several saints that were specifically pertinent to the local societies of Boka Kotorska and Grbalj. Saint Tryphon, for example, who is depicted on the icon of the Trinity, was widely venerated in the whole Boka Kotorska and was the patron saint of the city of Kotor. Next to him, Saint Eustathius is to be identified with the local saint Sveti Evstatije (Jevstatije) Prvi Prevlčki, a monk at the Monastery of Miholjska Prevlaka in Boka Kotorska and the sixth Serbian Archbishop. Also venerated locally in Grbalj were Saint Chariton the Confessor (Sveti Hariton Isповednik), who had a church dedicated to his cult in the village Lješevići, and Saint Sergius, who was even venerated in a small church in Višnjeva (crkva Svetog Srđa).

*Icon painting in the eighteenth-century Ionian Islands
and the work of Titos from Corfu*

In order to fully assess Titos's work in Višnjeva it is necessary to place him within the artistic milieu of the late eighteenth-century Ionian Islands. According to the dominant narrative of Modern Greek art, two distinct artistic tendencies emerged in the eighteenth-century Greek-speaking world, corresponding to two different attempts to refresh religious art in the Balkans. On the one hand, there was a tendency to return to the ways of Paleologan painting tradition, as it was expressed in the works of the legendary artist Manuel Panselinos. The chief exponent of this trend was an Athonite monk, Dionysios of Fourni, a traditionalist who around 1730 wrote a *Hermeneia* (painter's manual) to pass on the techniques of his craft to other aspiring artists (Dionysios of Fourni 1900). Concurrently, a contrary tendency towards the Westernization of Orthodox religious art was introduced by Panagiotis Doxaras, a painter who compiled and translated into Greek numerous Italian treatises in order to disseminate the ways of Western European art among Greek-speaking artists (Doxaras 1871; see also Moutafov 2001, 126–135; Bentchev 2004; Alevizou 2005; Kordis 2006; Moutafov 2006, 69–79; Ioannou 2016). Between the two trends, the first one is generally thought to have prevailed in the Ottoman-ruled Greek world, while the latter became popular mostly in the urban centers of the Venetian-ruled Ionian Islands.

These two distinct artistic trends reflect the sociopolitical situation of the eighteenth-century Greek-speaking world and are often interpreted within the framework of the perennial contrast between the Ottoman East and the

Catholic West, with the Ionian Islands usually thought to be on the latter side. In truth, however, and especially in the field of arts, this cultural dualism can be hardly viewed as a clash of civilizations, since the Heptanesians managed to retain their Greek conscience and Orthodox faith to a great extent, as will be explained later on.

In the island of Corfu—where the painter Titos originated—it is generally thought that it was the Westernizing tendency that prevailed, leading to the emergence of the so-called Heptanesian school of painting. The new aesthetics was introduced in Corfu around 1727, when Panagiotis Doxaras painted the ceiling of the Church of Saint Spyridon, echoing the works of Paolo Veronese in the Doge's Palace in Venice. However, this shift towards Western naturalism, albeit fundamental, was neither abrupt nor did it bring about a comprehensive reform of Orthodox religious art; it was rather a moment of transition within a long process that had been slowly transforming Orthodox art since the fifteenth century as a result of the cultural interchange that occurred in the Venetian territories of the Eastern Mediterranean (Voulgaropoulou 2014).

In fact, Doxaras's innovations were fully adopted only by a handful of artists, like his son, Nikolaos, and the painters Nikolaos Koutouzis and Nikolaos Kantounis, both from the island of Zakynthos (Zante), whereas the majority of Heptanesian icon painters continued to work in a hybrid style all through the eighteenth century, combining Western and Byzantine elements to a lesser or greater extent, according to their patrons' preferences. Indeed, the most prominent Heptanesian painters of the time—Georgios Chrysoloras, Dimitrios Foskalis, Spyridon Sperantzas, and Spyridon Romas—would still produce religious icons in the Greek style and take up commissions for Orthodox churches, despite the fact that they were perfectly capable of working in the naturalistic Western fashion. An illustrative example is that of Spyridon Romas, who in 1762 was recommended to the Orthodox community of Livorno as the most skilled artist in the Levant for painting in the Greek manner (Dell'Agata-Popova 1978, 22n26; Grenet 2013, 323); less than ten years later, the same artist would migrate to Britain, where he would pursue a career as a painter of nonreligious subjects in an entirely Western style (Croft-Murray 1962, 44–45; Moore and Sitwell 1998, 22–24).

Furthermore, while the Westernizing trend introduced by Doxaras was predominant among the urban societies of the Ionian Islands, corresponding to the demands of a rising bourgeois class with a more refined taste, a quite different picture emerged in village communities (Triantaphyllopoulos 1981, 311–318; 1991, 163–177). Unlike city churches, village churches were in their majority being painted according to the Byzantine iconographic tradition,

responding to the aesthetic demands of a conservative Orthodox clientele. This tendency survived up until the nineteenth century, and artists would continue to paint icons in the traditional Byzantinizing style, even after the establishment of official schools of painting in Corfu and other Greek cities (Laurent 1821, 237).

These traditional icon painters received severe criticism from the leading artistic and ecclesiastical circles of the time. In his foreword for Panagiotis Doxaras's translation of Leonardo da Vinci's treatise *On Painting*, the monk Leontios the Peloponnesian addressed a fervent polemic against the traditional painters of his time. A supporter of the naturalistic style, Leontios attacked icon painters for their lack of skill, calling them «μουτζουρογράφοι» (miserable smudge painters) or «βδελυγματογράφοι» (painters of abominations, Doxaras 1871, 17–18). In the same vein, Nikolaos Koutouzis asserted that he was not «κολοραδῶρος ἀλλ' ἀρτίστας» (not a colorist but an artist), when asked to paint a Crucifix «λίγο πιο ανατολίτη» (in a somewhat more Oriental way, Lydakis 1976, 35n58).

Moreover, four years after Doxaras's translation of Leonardo's treatise, a major development took place in Corfu, which profoundly affected the working conditions of iconographers and the artistic production itself. On 28 February 1730, the Great Archpriest (Μέγας Πρωτοπαπάς) of Corfu, Spyridon Voulgaris, issued a decree imposing a set of rules that would govern the production of religious images.

We decree: First, that the holy icons are skillfully done by accomplished painters according to Holy Germanos, reviewed to our presence by the most competent iconographer in the city, and only then should they be judged if they are appropriate. Second, by all means the workshops of incompetent painters should be shut down, and the paintings should be done in narthexes of churches or in closed houses as it was in the past, so that the holy icons are not mocked. Third, that no one can either send or sell holy icons in the squares as did the Greeks their gods. (Kapadochos 1990, 352, document 168; 1994, 77–78)

The main goal of this decree was to limit the abuses of incompetent iconographers, «κακογράφων», and control the authenticity of icons, thus protecting clients from paying for low-quality works. The task of judging the artistic quality of icons would be assigned to the best icon painter in town, while the approved icons would bear the signature of accomplished painters. Iconographic workshops that were disqualified would be shut down, and icon painters would practice their craft only in their workshops or in church narthexes, but not in public. Failure to comply with these rules would result in excommunication.

In all likelihood, it was in this milieu that the Corfiot painter Titos received his training as an icon painter. Although we lack the evidence to assess fully his work, it would be safe to say that Titos fell into the category of traditional icon painters, working mostly for village churches and conservative patrons with low expectations and limited resources. Indeed, Titos's work in Višnjeva is clearly distanced from the artistic developments that took place in the city of Corfu, and even lacks the refinement of more Byzantinizing works of the time. In the Višnjeva iconostasis, Titos replicates models of the seventeenth century, simplified in the most basic iconographic elements, with minor concessions to Western Mannerist or Baroque influences. For example, in the episode of the Annunciation, the composition and the modeling of the main figures evoke Western European prints, in particular engravings by Jan Sadeler. Likewise, the episode of the Resurrection follows an iconography that was modeled after a print by Jan Sadeler (1571), which became widely popular in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious art. Western influences can also be detected in the rather unusual representation of the scene of the Crucifixion.¹⁵ All these influences, however, are limited to a purely iconographic level, and are by no means reflected in Titos's painting style. Indeed, even in the full-scale figures of Saints Spyridon and Basil, which are more carefully executed, the painter's style is still characterized by rigidity, bidimensionality, and austerity. In all, Titos's work on the Višnjeva iconostasis reflects not only the provincial nature of the monument and the conservative taste of the patrons but also the traditional artistic formation of the painter and his assistant.

In the newly formed and highly competitive artistic environment that was eighteenth-century Corfu, it is possible to imagine that an icon painter of modest skills, like Titos, would have had a hard time receiving important commissions and would be forced to look elsewhere for professional opportunities. Easily accessible from Corfu, the conservative milieu of Grbalj and the Bay of Kotor would seem for Titos an ideal destination.

Artistic interchange in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas:

Titos from Corfu and the reception of Heptanesian icon painters in the Adriatic

While it is easy to understand how the Montenegrin commissioners were introduced to the work of Ižepo and Tripo Dabović, as they were local artisans from the area of Kotor, it is much harder to determine how they got acquainted with the work of the Corfiot Titos. It is unclear whether he arrived in Boka Kotorska for this specific commission, or if he had already settled in the area for some time before being assigned the job for the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva.



Figure 5. Comparison of Titos's icon from Kotor and details of icons from the Višnjeva iconostasis (from left to right). *Source:* Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

It would seem reasonable to presume that Titos ran a workshop in the area of Boka, most probably in the urban center of Kotor, just like the other artisans who were engaged in the church decoration.

This assumption is further supported by the discovery of another icon that can be attributed to Titos, now in the treasury of the Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas in Kotor (Figure 5). The icon depicts the Madonna and Child with Saints Basil, John the Chrysostom, Gregory, and Nicholas, following the iconographic type of the Madonna of Angels, which was largely diffused in the Ionian and Adriatic Seas after the mid-seventeenth century. (The invention of this iconographic type is attributed to Emmanouil Tzanes, who has created some of its most characteristic examples). All inscriptions moreover are written in the Greek language. The Kotor icon also shares with the icons from Višnjeva similar iconographic and morphological features, the same color range, structure of the background, and style of drapery and inscriptions, while the holy figures in both icons are depicted with almost identical features.

Yet another icon that can be attributed to Titos's hand is now in the Galerija Umjetnina in Split (inv. no. 2559; Figure 6). This icon is divided into two parts, with the Holy Trinity in the upper zone and Saints Nicholas and Thomas surrounding the Holy Relics of Saint Spyridon in the lower one. The iconographic themes depicted on the Split icon are almost identical to individual scenes from the iconostasis of Višnjeva, while the portrayal of the figures, the handling of the drapery, and the color palette also evoke Titos's manner of painting.

Furthermore, it appears that Titos painted the icons for the iconostasis in Višnjeva *in situ* instead of shipping them from his workshop in Corfu. This



Figure 6. Comparison of Titos's icon from Split and details of icons from the Višnjeva iconostasis (from left to right). *Source:* Galerija Umjetnina u Splitu and Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

conclusion is supported first and foremost by Titos's collaboration with a local assistant, but also by the fact that the church was responsible for providing the painting materials, which otherwise would have been the painter's responsibility to procure. The explicit mention in the manuscript that Titos was to be paid his salary "to his hands" (за руке) also points in the same direction (CCDVV, p. 28, f. 16r). Lastly, the works themselves reveal that they were destined for the specific structure of the wooden iconostasis: the painted surface of the icons was treated so as to fit with the frames of the iconostasis and does not exhibit signs of later modification, as is usually the case with icons shipped from afar.

All of the above makes it reasonable to assume that Titos had arrived in the area of Boka Kotorska some time before 1790, taking advantage of the professional opportunities presented in the area. Driven by competition in his homeland, Corfu, where at that time Heptanesian art was clearly taking a turn towards Western models in the urban centers of the Ionian Islands, a traditional icon painter such as Titos would have found it hard to receive commissions and would have had to look for jobs elsewhere.

Though highly indicative, the case of Titos from Corfu is rather common in the cultural history of the Adriatic. As early as the late Middle Ages, artists of Greek origin were traveling throughout the Adriatic and especially in the region of Boka Kotorska. Indeed, in the State Archives in Kotor there are several documents attesting to the presence of Greek artists in the first half of the fourteenth century, such as the painters Nikolaos (*Nycole pictoris Greci*), Emmanouil (*Hemanuel Grecus pictor*), Georgios (*Georgius Grecus pictor olim de Catharo*), Ioannis (*Jani Greci*), and possibly Michail (*Micho Grechi*) (Ćorović 1930, 39; Mayer 1951, documents 474–475, 563, 1182; Mirković 1955, 316–317;

Kovijanić and Stjepčević [1957] 2003, 88–92; Đurić 1960, 141–143; 1974, 156). In addition, in 1331, Greek artists painted the Cathedral of Saint Tryphon in Kotor (Mayer 1951, document 662; Fisković 1953, 76; Karaman and Prijatelj 1955, 179; Mirković 1955, 317; Kovijanić and Stjepčević [1957] 2003, 94; Đurić 1960, 142; 1974, 155–156), while during the same period artists of Greek origin—or at least of Byzantine formation—painted the Churches of Collegiata (Fisković 1953, 80–82; Vujičić 1995, 365–378; Živković 2010, 278–282), Saint James (crkva Svetog Jakova), and Saint Nicholas in Kotor (crkva Svetog Nikole Mornara),¹⁶ as well as the Church of Riza Bogorodice in Bijela (Šerović 1920, 273–294; Kovijanić and Stjepčević [1957] 2003, 93).

During the sixteenth century, the circulation of Greek artists and works of art in the Adriatic became increasingly frequent. The gradual loss of the Venetian possessions in the Eastern Mediterranean together with the consequent establishment of Greek Orthodox communities in the Adriatic created new markets for Greek icon painters, who opened new workshops in Venice and other Adriatic port-cities (Voulgaropoulou 2014). Prior to the seventeenth century, however, the percentage of artists of Heptanesian origin traveling in the Adriatic was still relatively low. It was not until the Ottoman conquest of Crete that the Ionian Islands started to play a more prominent role as the leading icon-painting center of the insular Greek-speaking world.

After the fall of the artistic centers of Chania (1645), Rethymno (1646), and Candia (1669) to the Ottomans, numerous Cretan icon painters sought refuge in the Ionian Islands, bringing with them their knowledge and profoundly influencing the local artistic production. This cultural fermentation contributed to the emergence of a new generation of Heptanesian icon painters, who stepped in to fill the void left when the supply of Cretan icons to the Adriatic markets was suspended. By the eighteenth century, Zante and Corfu had become significant icon painting centers that not only could cover “the needs of the local market, but could also export works elsewhere” (Koukiaris 1994, 157).

The close geographical proximity of the lower Adriatic to the Ionian Sea and the frequent ship connections linking the Ionian and Adriatic ports facilitated greatly the circulation of Heptanesian icons and icon painters in Dalmatia and the Bay of Kotor. According to the archival sources, standard maritime trade routes followed by merchants from Kotor passed through Greece and the Ionian Islands (Milošević [1962] 2003, 1785–1817), and at least once a month a ship sailed from the port of Kotor to Corfu (Milović 2009b, 295–310).

The already close relations between the Ionian Islands and Boka Korotska were further reinforced after the wars of Candia and Morea. The loss of Crete and Morea reduced the once powerful *Stato da Màr* mainly to the Dalmatian

coast and the Ionian Islands, causing the Republic of Venice to reconsider its geopolitical strategy and shift its focus to the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Meanwhile, the redefinition of the Ottoman-Venetian borders after the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz brought under Venetian rule regions with a majority of Orthodox population, such as the Dalmatian hinterland and the rural area around Kotor and Budva, including Grbalj. As mentioned before, the relative political stability that followed led to the demographic and economic growth of the Orthodox communities of the Adriatic, allowing them to afford larger commissions and create increasingly more opportunities for icon painters.

By the mid-seventeenth century, an extraordinary increase occurred in the imports of works of Heptanesian art in the Adriatic, but also in the number of artists traveling from the Ionian Islands. In 1699, for example, the Orthodox community of Šibenik commissioned 24 icons from a workshop in Corfu to decorate the iconostasis of the Church of Saint Julian (crkva Svetog Julijana). At about the same time, the iconostasis of the Church of the Archangel Michael in the Monastery of Krka was decorated with icons painted by a Heptanesian artist, possibly Gerasimos Kouloumbis from Zakynthos (Voulgaropoulou 2014, 327–331, 358–364).

This tendency culminated during the eighteenth century, when numerous artists from the Ionian Islands were commissioned to paint the iconostases of Greek- and Serbian-Orthodox churches along both Adriatic coasts. In 1756, for instance, the painter Eustathios Karousos (Ευστάθιος Καρούσος) from Kefalonia traveled to Naples when commissioned to paint the icons for the Church of Saints Peter and Paul (Rizzi 1974, 201–209). A few years later in 1767, Karousos would also paint several icons for the Orthodox Church of Villa Badessa, a village in the region of Abruzzo, which was founded by populations from Albania and Corfu (Passarelli 2006, 8–13, 36–57; Arbace, Nicolai, and Ruggeri 2012, 90–91, 104–109, 112–115). Another artist who worked in Villa Badessa was the Peloponnesian Ioannis Trigonis, who also painted the icons for the Greek Church of Saint Nicholas and the Holy Trinity in Trieste (Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou 1997, 441; Passarelli 2006, 86–91; Arbace, Nicolai, and Ruggeri 2012, 130–131). Likewise, Spyridon Romas (Σπυρίδων Ρώμας) from Corfu painted the iconostasis of the Orthodox church in Livorno (Dell'Agata-Popova 1978, 32–65; Passarelli 2001, 87, 89–101), also creating works in Dalmatia (Savić 2000, 153–154; Čolović 2006, 104). In the last decades of the eighteenth century, Spyridon Sperantzas (Σπυρίδων Σπεράντζας) from Corfu created the iconostasis of the Church of Saint Spyridon in Trieste along with his son, Michail (Μιχαήλ) (Triantaphyllopoulos 1985, 114; Bianco-Fiorin 1988, 298–302; Voulgaropoulou 2014, 106), who later painted the iconostasis for the Church of Saint Elijah in

Zadar (Berić 1959, 146–147; Savić 2000, 203; Čolović 2011, 139; Savić 2011, 18–23; Voulgaropoulou 2014, 106, 319–320).

It is worth noting that while some of these artists left after their work was completed, others among them chose to settle permanently in the Adriatic and were integrated in the local Orthodox communities. In the archives of the Church of Saint Elijah in Zadar, for example, there are several records of Heptanesian artists registered as members of the Orthodox community. Such was the case of the Corfiot painter Georgios Michalakis (Γεώργιος Μιχαλάκης), documented in 1727 and 1735 (ASPCZ, *Quaderno dell' Ecclesia*, f. 21v), whose signed works can be found in Zakynthos, Skradin, Dalmatinsko Kosovo, and in the Monastery of Krka (Mirković 1958, 371–373; Berić 1959, 161; Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou 1997, 196; Savić 2000, 105; Voulgaropoulou 2014, 105, 318, 555, 728, 741–742, 868, 902, 918). Most illustrative is the case of Spyridon Rapsomanikis (Σπυρίδων Ραψομανίκης), also from Corfu, who was a chaplain and rector of the Orthodox Church of Saint Elijah in Zadar until his death in 1769.¹⁷ Rapsomanikis left behind numerous works in various Orthodox churches and monasteries spanning the whole eastern coast of the Adriatic—from the Istrian peninsula through Albania—although his most representative works are to be found in Northern Dalmatia and the Bay of Kotor. In particular, Rapsomanikis is responsible for having painted the iconostasis of the Church of Saint Spyridon in Skradin (signed) and possibly that of the Chapel of Saint Spyridon in the Church of Saint Luke in Kotor, as well as numerous other icons that are to be found in churches and private collections in Peroj, Zadar, Šibenik, Skradin, Split, in the Monastery of Krka, Kotor, Topla, and Berat (Voulgaropoulou 2014, 105–106, 265–266, 316, 329, 336, 388, 555, 572, 689, 730).

Another painter who worked in the same region during the second half of the eighteenth century was Matthaios Vegias (Ματθαίος Βέγιας / Βεληγιαννίτης), the only icon painter in Dalmatia during that time, according to Gerasim Zelić (Medaković 1954, 292; Veselinović 1966, 203). Like Rapsomanikis, Vegias was a priest of the Orthodox Church of Šibenik and even rose to the rank of archimandrite (Vegias is extensively mentioned in the Archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Šibenik, ASPCŠ, *Matična Knjiga Krštenih*; ASPCŠ, *Matična Knjiga Rođenih*; see also Kašić 1975, 16; Moschopoulos 1980, 162–175; Savić 2000, 99, 132, 202; Voulgaropoulou 2014, 106). A similar case from the western coast of the Adriatic was that of Dimitrios Bogdanos (Δημήτριος Μπογδάνος) from Corfu, who also worked as a painter and priest in the Orthodox communities of Brindisi and Lecce in Apulia (Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou 1997, 221; Melenti 2002, 185–212; Voulgaropoulou 2014, 106, 178, 191, 196, 225–229, 555, 595–596).

In this context, the case of a Greek icon painter traveling in the Adriatic to undertake an important commission seems rather ordinary. Nevertheless, while there is plenty of information regarding the presence of Greek icon painters in most parts of the Adriatic—from Venice to Apulia and from Trieste to Dalmatia—there is little to no evidence of Greek artists working in the Bay of Kotor, at least not until the second half of the nineteenth century, which was marked by the extraordinary activity of the Corfiot Nikolaos Aspiotis (Νικόλαος Ασπιώτης) (Voulgaropoulou, forthcoming). Given the high circulation of Greek Heptanesian icons in Boka Kotorska and considering the substantial number of Orthodox churches functioning in the area, this absence seems even more peculiar.

A possible explanation lies in the presence of a lively local school of icon painting in the area of Kotor, the so-called painting school of Boka Kotorska (Bokokotorska slikarska škola) or the Dimitrijević-Rafailović school of Risan. The school produced 11 painters in five generations spanning more than two centuries from roughly 1680 to 1860 (Miković 1935, 8–10; Berić 1955, 269–303; Gagović 2007, 46–63; Stošić 2014a, 187–202). By producing a wide range of works—icons, frescoes, carved iconostases, and wooden frames—these family workshops offered a practical, all-inclusive solution to church decorations. From the late seventeenth century onward, workshops of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović school decorated the vast majority of Orthodox churches and monasteries in the broad area of Boka Kotorska, as well as most churches of the villages of Grbalj. In fact, even though they received larger commissions, their limited artistic skills and provincial style were better suited for small rural churches, such as the ones of Grbalj. It is no coincidence that although the school originated from the coastal city of Risan, the Rafailović family decided in the late eighteenth century to move its workshops to the village of Nalježići in Gornji Grbalj (Stošić 2014a, 188), obviously considering the professional opportunities offered for them in the area.

Within the framework of this tradition, although the selection of a Corfiot icon painter for the decoration of a church in rural Grbalj, like in Višnjeva, seems highly odd, it is not inexplicable. In the late eighteenth century, when the iconostasis of Višnjeva was being painted, two members of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović school worked in Boka, namely, the sons of Rafailo Dimitrijević, Petar and Vasilije Rafailović. Between the two brothers, Petar Rafailović was the master painter and head of the workshop, while Vasilije worked as his assistant. Then, in 1784, just a few years before Titos's work in Višnjeva, Petar Rafailović left Boka and settled permanently in Corfu (Miković 1935, 9; Berić 1955, 278–280; Medaković 1971, 168; Gagović 2007, 49; Stošić 2014a, 195–196;

2014b, 269–278). According to archival sources, Petar ran a trading business in Corfu and married a Greek wife.¹⁸ After Petar's departure, his younger brother, Vasilije, took over the family workshop, along with his two sons, Đorđe and Hristofor, whose earliest works however were created after the Višnjeva iconostasis, in 1795 and 1813, respectively.

Due to the lack of archival evidence, it is hard to tell whether the ties of the Rafailović family to Corfu had anything to do with Titos's arrival in Kotor and his work in Višnjeva. It does appear, however, that Petar Rafailović's departure left an artistic void in Boka Kotorska, which was filled by foreign artists like Titos. In fact, a few years before Titos's arrival in Višnjeva, another similar work was carried out in the close vicinity; the Chapel of Saint Spyridon in the Orthodox Church of Saint Luke in Kotor (crkva Svetog Luke) was decorated with a painted iconostasis. This piece was painted sometime after 1766, when the Metropolitan of Montenegro, Sava II Petrović-Njegoš, authorized the decoration of the Church of Saint Luke (Petrović 1883, 37), and definitely before 1786, when the silver *rize* (revetments) for the icons were created. Even though the iconostasis is unsigned, the style and iconography of the paintings point to an artist of Heptanesian-Greek origin or at least artistic formation. Numerous works that can be attributed to the same artist or his workshop are located in churches and collections throughout Boka Kotorska and across the Dalmatian Coast. Some illustrative examples include an icon of Christ Pantocrator in the Church of the Dormition in Savina Monastery, an icon of the Deisis in Topla, an icon of the Madonna and Child with Saints in the treasury of the Orthodox Church in Kotor, a triptych from the National Museum of Medieval Art in Korčë (Muzeu Kombëtar i Artit Mesjetar), an icon of the Last Supper from the Church of Saint Elijah in Zadar, and three icons of the Madonna and Child with Saints from Krka Monastery (Čolović 2006, 128–130). These works so strongly evoke the style of the Corfiot painter Spyridon Rapsomanikis that it might be possible to attribute them to him or his immediate circle.

In any case, what should be emphasized is that the decoration of the iconostasis of Saint Spyridon was executed according to the pictorial tradition of the Ionian Islands and was entrusted to a Greek icon painter instead of the local Dimitrijević-Rafailović workshops. This choice was of great importance, given that the Church of Saint Luke was one of the most significant and most frequented Orthodox institutions in the whole Bay of Kotor. What is more, the Church of Saint Luke was particularly important for the Orthodox communities of Grbalj. After the subjection of the region to the Ottomans in mid-seventeenth century, large groups of Orthodox Christians from Grbalj migrated to Kotor seeking refuge. In 1657, after petitioning the Republic of



Figure 7. Titos from Corfu, *Virgin and Child*, 1790–1791, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnjeva (left); Spyridon Rapsomanikis (attributed), *Virgin and Child*, Chapel of Saint Spyridon, Church of Saint Luke, Kotor (right). Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

Venice, these refugees from Grbalj were granted the Church of Saint Luke, which was then converted to the Orthodox rite (Jačov 1983, 60; 1992, vol. 2, 115–117, 165–169, 253–254, 635–636; Belan 1997, 199–200; Krivokapić 1997, 207). In subsequent years, worshippers from Grbalj continued to regularly frequent the Church of Saint Luke, especially during times of war, when they would leave their villages for Kotor.

The iconostasis of the Chapel of Saint Spyridon exerted a strong influence on the decoration of the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva, serving as a model for several of Titos's paintings. This becomes evident in the icon of the



Figure 8. Titos from Corfu, *Christ Pantokrator*, 1790–1791, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Višnjeva (left); Spyridon Rapsomanikis (attributed), *Christ Pantokrator*, Chapel of Saint Spyridon, Church of Saint Luke, Kotor (right). Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

Enthroned Virgin and Child, as well as that of the Christ Pantokrator, which both clearly replicate the respective icons from the Kotor iconostasis (Figures 7–8). It is possible to assume therefore that the members of the community of Višnjeva chose to entrust the decoration of their church to a Corfiot painter, following the example of Saint Spyridon in Kotor and obviously looking forward to a similar aesthetic result. In that way—intentionally or not—they differentiated themselves from the other village communities of Grbalj and Ottoman-ruled Montenegro, attempting to emulate monuments painted in Kotor and Corfu, while at the same time opting for the traditional Byzantinizing style produced in these centers, and not for the dominant Westernizing tendencies.

Art in the land of the noble savages: A conservative horizon of expectations and the creation of a common aesthetics in the Ionian-Adriatic region

The construction and the decoration of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin were largely based on the collective donation of the community of Višnjeva. This information is provided by the book of revenues and expenses, which explicitly documents the contributions made by each member, adding up to 132 zecchini (CCDVV, p. 15, f. 8r). The collective character of the commission essentially reflects the social structure of the village communities of Early Modern Grbalj. The names of the contributors mentioned in the document belong to the following four clans: Bojković, Radanović, Tupčević, and Pimić. According to Savo Nakićenović, these were the founding families of the village Višnjeva (1913, 373). The most prominent among them were the Bojkovići (Nakićenović [1913] 2012, 115; Skok et al. 1971, vol. 1, 516–517), the ruling clan of Višnjeva and of the whole province (*knežina, contea*) (Nakićenović [1913] 2012, 115; Tomović 2005, 312, fig. 5). In the late eighteenth century, the leader of the Bojković tribe, and thus ruler of the village of Višnjeva, was knez Vojini Bojković, who is repeatedly referred to in the account book as one of the most important donors (Ljubiša 1889, 51, 97; Strčić 1990, 54; Milović 2009a, 338–340). In fact, the initiative to build the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Višnjeva belonged to knez Vojini Bojković (Tičić 1883, 34), and in all probability he was also the author of the codex of the church (“I, knez Vojin”, CCDVV, p. 28, f. 16r).

In addition to the contributions of the community of Višnjeva, the Church of the Dormition also raised funds from charity (ЛЕМОЗИНЕ, МИЛОСТИНЕ; CCDVV, pp. 28, 30–31, ff. 16r, 17rv, 24v, 28v) and received numerous donations, gifts, and bequests by individual benefactors (ВД ДОБРОЧИНАЦАХ; CCDVV, f. 27v). On 15 August 1793, for example, two talleri were found in front of the icon of the Virgin, “donated in secret by some good soul” (CCDVV, p. 28, f. 16r). Such donations were not only made by villagers from Višnjeva but also by worshippers from other villages of the Bojković county (Glavati, Kovači, Zagora, and Krimovice) or from villages of other knežine (Glavatičići and Kubasi), as well as by benefactors from Kotor, Budva, and the villages of Paštovići and Maini (CCDVV, f. 25v).

The aesthetic preferences that led the villagers of Višnjeva to commission Titos from Corfu to decorate their newly built church can be better explained and easily understood by taking into consideration the political geography and cultural setting of late eighteenth-century Grbalj. For the eastern coast of the Adriatic, the eighteenth century marked a period of intense urban development

and artistic activity, reflecting the political tranquility and economic growth that followed the Peace of Passarowitz. Kotor and the other port-cities of Boka were rapidly transforming into Baroque centers; churches were constructed or renovated in the Baroque style, and they were decorated with works of Italian or local masters (Milošević 1983, 141–161). It is noteworthy that the influence of Baroque art was not only confined to works destined for Catholic religious institutions but was soon also extended to the decoration of Orthodox churches—for example, the iconostasis of the large Church of the Dormition at Savina Monastery painted in 1795 by Simeon and Aleksije Lazović (Medaković 1980, 411–426; Milošević 1983, 148–150).

But while these developments were taking place in the urban coastal centers of Boka Kotorska, the nearby mountain villages were still not very culturally advanced. Despite being under Venetian rule, even at the end of the eighteenth century Grbalj still remained a rural, remote, and nearly isolated province, its population largely uneducated and illiterate (Sbutega and Serio 2006, 200–201, 204; Roberts 2007, 160). To quote Antun Sbutega and Maurizio Serio, “it was a primitive culture, based on archaic traditions and influenced by mythology and oral literature” (2006, 105).

This image of a highly conservative society, still very attached to tradition and reluctant to change, was repeatedly illustrated in chronicles and accounts of Italian and Western-European travelers that visited the eastern coast of the Adriatic during the Enlightenment and interacted with the Orthodox tribes of the Montenegrin inland. In fact, the anthropological concept of Otherness that was expressed by Westerners might help us view the cultural background of Grbalj from a different perspective and thus better assess the aesthetic preferences of the commissioners.

To eighteenth-century European travelers, the Orthodox mountain-people of Montenegro seemed as uncultured “savages” (Pippidi 1980, 1–23) in contrast to the “civilized” Westerner (Cvijic 1918, 330; Pippidi 1980, 12; Wolff 2001; Jezernik 2004; McCallam 2011, 125–141). It should also be noted that such views were applied interchangeably for the mountain people (*Zagorci*) of Montenegro and Dalmatia, the so-called Morlachs (*Morlacchi*, *Morlaci*) (Lucio 1666; Fortis 1778; Laurent 1821, 12–13; Novak 1971, 600–603; Pippidi 1980, 14; Wolff 2001, 132–134, 157n12). In his *Viaggio in Dalmazia*, which was published in 1774, the Venetian traveler Alberto Fortis describes the Orthodox people of inland Dalmatia and the Albania Veneta as “barbarians” (1774, 27, 44). Likewise, in his *Memorie Inutili*, the famous Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi portrays the Orthodox inhabitants of the eastern coast of the Adriatic as uncivilized peasants, even cannibals (“*Antropofaghi*”), stressing that the most

vile and barbarian among them were the Montenegrins (1797, 67–78). Gozzi’s memoirs bear a particular significance, as they were written in 1777—in other words, around the same time as the construction of the church in Višnjeva—and were published in 1797, the year that the Republic of Venice fell.

Such stereotypical views of the Montenegrins survived all through the nineteenth century. Note, for example, the scathing account in the memoirs of the Russian naval officer Vladimir Bogdanovich Bronevsky, who passed through Montenegro in 1810 on his way back to Saint Petersburg after participating in the Napoleonic Wars (1836–1837, 192; see also Shaw 2008, 105–108; Babović-Raspopović 2009, 82–84); the travelogues of the French colonel Jacques Louis Vialla de Sommières published in 1820 (Vialla de Sommières 1820, 329–330; see also Burzanović 2009, 149–155); the memoirs of the French Duke of Ragusa, Marechal Marmont (Babović-Raspopović 2009, 81); and the writings of Egor Kovalevsky (1841, 124). The uncountable dangers and difficulties that travelers encountered when venturing in Montenegro as well as the natives’ savagery are also underlined by several writers, such as John Gardner Wilkinson ([1848] 2013, 433, 442, 502), Gustav Rasch (1873), or the elusive author of the volume *Rambles in Istria, Dalmatia and Montenegro* (R.H.R. 1875, 206, 248; see also Jezernik 2004, 104–105; Shaw 2008, 20–22).

It is obvious that these accounts are often exaggerated and portray a stereotypical and even caricatured image of the Montenegrin tribes; nevertheless, they can prove useful tools for analyzing the social structure of the village populations in late eighteenth-century Grbalj—and therefore delineating their cultural horizon of expectations. Although Montenegro was not quite “an island of barbarism in a sea of civilization” (Carr 1884, 52; see also Jezernik 2004, 117), village societies were certainly more conservative, traditional, and unrefined compared to the urban centers of the littoral and to Venice (Wolff 2001, 126), as is clearly reflected in their artistic preferences.

What is even more interesting is that such stereotypes were not only restricted to the Slavic-speaking populations of the eastern coast of the Adriatic but also extended to the Greek-Orthodox inhabitants of the Ionian Islands. In fact, despite the widespread notion that the Venetian-ruled Ionian Islands were far more civilized compared to Ottoman Greece, the impressions of foreigners that have been recorded in Enlightenment travelogues offer quite a contrasting image, which much resembles Westerners’ views on Dalmatia and Montenegro. Much like in Dalmatia and Boka Kotorska, Heptanesian urban populations were regarded as cultured and educated, sharing a similar lifestyle with the Venetians, whereas the Orthodox peasants of the countryside were seen through the same lens as their Slav counterparts. According to Wolff, for

example, there was a clear “distinction between urban coastal society and the pastoral people of the mountainous interior” (2001, 127; see also Cvijic 1918, 200; Pippidi 1980, 17–18; Venturi 1990, 425; Gallant 2002, 15–56). Travelers who visited the Ionian Islands, such as André Grasset de Saint-Sauveur (1799, 189) or Guillaume de Vaudoncourt (1816, 409–412), agreed on the fact that although Heptanesian cities were under complete Venetian influence, village societies had retained their so-called Greekness and were more similar to those of mainland Greece (Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, 110–112).

Major de Bosset, for example, who was Governor of Cephalonia from 1809 to 1813, depicts the Islands as “a land of savages,” remarking on the Greeks’ “uncivilized” nature and their “barbarian” and “superstitious” customs (quoted in Kirkwall 1864, 41, 51, 86, 101, 181, 192). Furthermore, Tertius Kendrick underlines the Heptanesians’ “rude barbarism” and “superstition,” particularly referring to the people of Zakynthos as “savages” (Kendrick 1822, 15, 90, 107). This opinion was also shared by the Cephallonian doctor and politician Giovanni Francesco Zulatti, who also regarded the Zakynthians as “execrable” and “barbarous” (quoted in Venturi 1987, 71n77).

These tropes were largely based on the fact that both Greeks and Montenegrians followed the Eastern Orthodox rite, which was regarded by the “rationalistic” Westerners as “a leprous composition of ignorance, superstition and fanaticism” (Walpole and Browne 1820, 60; see also Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, 82–85) and was thought to lead its representatives to “idiocy,” “absurdity,” “simple-mindedness,” and “barbarism.” (*The Annual Register* 1778, 48; see also Kotzageorgi 1986, 213–214; Gallant 2002, 29–33). After all, such views had already been expressed by the official Catholic Church in the program of the Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, whose role was to “convert the peoples of the Ottoman empire, who were formerly renowned for many celestial qualities, but have now fallen into idiocy, reduced to the level of beasts, existing solely for the devil and his adepts, destined to raise the number of the inhabitants of Hell” (Pippidi 1980, 5).

This conservatism of the Eastern Orthodox Church and its adherents could not have left religious art unaffected. According to Lord Hobhouse, “the state of the arts in Greece is, as might be expected, most deplorable. It would be difficult to find an architect, a sculptor, or painter equal to the common workmen in the towns of Christendom” (1813, 435; see also Leake 1814, 534; Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, 142). William George Clark echoed similar views when he stated that “modern Greece has produced no great artist” (1858, 336; see also Kotzageorgi 1986, 213). The Scottish painter Hugh William Williams agreed that “the fine arts in the Ionian Islands are not very

high” and noticed the “total apathy” of the Greeks towards the arts; at the same time, however, he blamed the impoverished and degraded state of the country for the artists’ lack of motivation, since in Greece “accomplishment is despised, or at least does not meet with that regard which it so justly merits” (Williams 1820, 329–330; see also Leake 1814, 329; Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, 142). Through the comparison with heteroreferential representations of the Orthodox populations of hinterland Boka and the rural areas of the Ionian Islands in Enlightenment travel literature, it becomes more evident that both cultures shared common characteristics, which were mostly attributed to their insularity and provinciality, as well as their adherence to the Eastern Orthodox Church. The combination of these factors resulted in the preservation of a culture that was considered traditional and conservative as opposed to the supposedly more progressive Western societies of the Adriatic and Ionian region. Although they were officially parts of the Republic of Venice, Grbalj and the village communities of the Ionian Islands were less receptive to the Venetian influence, remaining largely unaffected by the artistic developments that had been set in motion in neighboring urban centers, such as Kotor and Corfu.

Located on the borders of the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire, the region of Grbalj developed a diverse cultural landscape, shaped by the long interaction of different influences and traditions. It was exactly this blending of the Adriatic and Balkan cultures that defined eighteenth-century Grbalj, which found its ideal expression in the decoration of the Church of the Dormition in Višnjeva. Despite being a provincial monument, reflecting the unsophisticated aesthetics of its commissioners, this church of Višnjeva can be clearly distinguished from all other contemporary monuments in the area.

Departing from the modernizing tendencies of the time, which called for the Westernization of Orthodox religious art, the villagers of Višnjeva remained faithful to the Byzantine tradition and entrusted the decoration of their newly built church to a traditional icon painter. But instead of following the example of other neighboring villages and settling for a local icon-painting workshop, the community of Višnjeva chose to commission a Greek painter, demanding an artistic result that echoed religious monuments in the nearest centers of Kotor and the Ionian Islands. The painter Titos was the right man for the job, as he originated from a major artistic center—eighteenth-century Corfu—but still retained a traditional painting style, conforming to the community’s tastes. Titos’s collaboration with local artisans resulted in a hybrid

work of art, which is yet another manifestation of the intertwining cultural exchanges between the Ionian Islands and the port-cities of the South Adriatic.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST

NOTES

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¹Most of the time, it is either the archival material or the works of art that are missing. An illustrative case is that of the Orthodox Church of Saint Elijah in Zadar. While the entire process of renovating the church and the iconostasis in the eighteenth century is fully documented in the book of expenses, the destruction of the iconostasis during World War II allows little room for further elaboration.

²The codex spans a period of approximately 120 years—from 1777 to 1899—and documents all stages of the construction and decoration of the church, including explicit references to artists and artisans, donors, payments and revenues, building and painting materials, works of art, and liturgical objects. The text has been written by three different hands and can thus be divided into three parts, corresponding to three different time periods. An edited volume of the full codex is being prepared for publication by the author of this article.

³Grbalj extends southeast of the Mountain of Lovćen to the Adriatic Sea, and it is between Kotor, Tivat, and Budva. It is divided into Gornji (upper) and Donji (lower) Grbalj (Stjepčević 1941, 3; Sindik 1950, 26; Kovačević 1964, 5–8; Hrabak 2005, 231–245; Maliković 2005, 177–93; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 98; Maliković 2007, 51).

⁴According to the Ottoman census of 1582/1583 the “*vilayet* of the Black Mountain” (*vilayet-i Kara Dağ*) was registered as part of the *Sanjak* of Skadar (Scutari) and was divided in nine *nahiyahs*, one of which was Grbalj with its nine villages (Vasić 1991, 410–411). On the history of Grbalj under Ottoman rule, see Solovjev 1931, 14–15; Hadžibegić 1950, 23–50; Sindik 1950, 35; Hadžibegić 1952–1953, 485–508; Kovačević 1964, 35–41; Chaline 2001, 349–350; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 98; Maliković 2007, 81–83; Šarkinović 2014, 169–208).

As early as 1637, Fra Santo from Split mentions in a letter that the region of Grbalj was divided into four *komunitadi* (provinces), ruled by clans that were equal in number. “*Garbai ha 4 Contee, et è diviso in molte vile. . . Nella Contea del Conte Lupo vi sono vilagi: Platomcini, Crimoviza, Nehode, Puhovich, Visgneva, et Covaci. In questi vilagi vi sono da 300 case in circa,*

soto regimento in spirituale del prete Vlatco, et duoi suoi figlioli sismatici, et questo vi è dalla parte del mare" (Jačov 1986, 286–287). A document from 1717 mentions that the four ruling clans of Grbalj were the Lazarović, Bojković, Ivković, and Mirković; however, by the mid-nineteenth century, the latter two had been replaced by clans Ljubanović and Tujković (Stjepčević 1941, 16; Samardić 2000; Sbutega and Serio 2006, 103; Mačić 2014, 173).

⁵The dual Church of Saint Basil (crkva Svetog Vasilija) in Donji Stoliv was decorated in the mid-fifteenth century with frescoes of Orthodox and Catholic iconography (Petković 2003, 39). For the dual Church of Saint John (crkva Svetog Jovana) in Krtoli, see Jačov 1986, 89–90, 93; Butorac 1999, 236–237; Blehova-Čelebić 2007, 68). The dual Church of Saint Luke in Kotor was later given entirely to the Orthodox community: "*Edificatis tam a Latinis quam a Grecis, in quibus tam Latini quam Greci celebrant, Latini in altari suo, Greci vero in suo*" (Jačov 1983, 288).

⁶The codex has survived in a fragmentary condition, since many of its pages have been removed or torn. The first two folia (pp. 1–4) have been removed, as well as f. 5 (pp. 9–10), and ff. 9–10 (pp. 16–19). Highly problematic is also the pagination of the manuscript, which is neither continuous nor consistently sequential. The numbering runs by pages, and starts on p. 5, with even numbers on the recto. The pagination continues in this order through p. 15 (f. 8r), which has been incorrectly numbered twice, both in the recto and verso of the eighth folio (pp. 15 and 15 *bis*). Consequently, after page 15 *bis* the odd numbers appear on the recto side and the even numbers on the verso. The pagination continues unbroken up to p. 22 (f. 12r), then it is disrupted and it resumes with p. 23 (f. 13v). The pagination continues like that to p. 33 (f. 18v). The page numbers on ff. 19 and 20 have been torn and the pagination resumes on f. 21, pp. 38 and 38 *bis*. Page 39 (f. 22r) is the last page that bears a number, and the rest of the manuscript (ff. 22v–29v) has been left unnumbered.

⁷"На Л августа А Ψ Ч А доспие даскаль тита // гарка из карфа доспие питуриу ю цар//кву и дасмо му за направу за руке // нему и негову помотнику трипу дабо/вићу з шкаларах усве цекина МИ // и либре – В / рекох цекина четрдесет и wсамъ // и либре две сувише даръ" (On 30 August 1791, master Titos, Greek from Corfu, is due to receive [money] for the painting work in the church, and we gave to his hands and to the hands of his assistant Tripo Dabović from Škaljari 48 zecchini and 2 more lire as a gift, CCDVV, p. 25, f. 14v).

⁸The family name Dabović was very common in the region of Boka Kotorska, especially in Perast and Kostanjica. Records of members of the Dabović family become more frequent in the eighteenth century, when the family was involved in trading businesses in the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas. Thus, a great number of members of the Dabović family were shipowners, captains, or seafarers, among them a certain Tripun Dabović, who is mentioned in 1764 in a commercial ship from Venice to Dalmatia. Another Tripo Dabovich [*sic*], who lived in the village of Baošići in Herceg Novi around 1826, probably cannot be identified as Tripo from Škaljari (Komar 2014, 258). For the Dabović family, see also Milošević 1958, 100–101; Kovijanić 1963, 103; Milošević 1964, 105–166; Čolak 1985, 570–571; Butorac 1998, 143; Čoralić and Katušić 2013, 121–146). For the small town of Škaljari in the suburbs of Kotor, see Sabljar 1866, 196.

⁹The inscription on Christ's scroll reads «INEMA ΓΗΠΙΒ // ΕΠ ΕΜΘ». The inscription on the book of Saint John the Theologian reads «EN AP[XH] INE O ΛΟΓΟΣ ΓΕ O ΛΟΓΟΣ // IN ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΣ ΓΕ O ΘΕΟΣ IN». The inscription on the scroll of Saint Anthony reads «Η ΝΙCΤΙΑ ΓΕ Η ΠΡΟCΕ[ΥΧ]Ι COI ΤΟ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟC». The inscription on the scroll of Saint Elijah reads «TON NOMON ΓΕ ΤΟΝ ΠΡΟΦΙΤΟΝ». The scribe continuously mistakes the letter K for a Γ, and writes ΓΕ in place of the word KAI (and). He also makes several grammatical errors by writing, for example, «TON ΘΕOC» instead of the correct «TON ΘΕON».

¹⁰These abbreviations are also identical to the inscriptions on an icon from the treasury of the Orthodox Church in Kotor that can also be attributed to the same painter, as will be discussed below.

¹¹The iconostasis of the Church of the Dormition is a three-tier construction, which measures approximately 6.5 × 5.4 meters. The main or sovereign tier of the iconostasis consists of six icons: two pairs of panels framing the Royal Doors, with and a single icon on the left and right side of the iconostasis. Each of the four central icons measures 95 × 38 centimeters, while the lateral ones measure 95 × 30 centimeters. The upper tier consists of two rows of icons, each measuring 50 × 40 centimeters. The icons of the bottom row depict the Twelve Apostles and Evangelists, while those of the upper row are dedicated to the major feasts. Above them, there are images of the Christ flanked by the Virgin and Saint John, forming the Deisis. The iconostasis is crowned by a Crucifix, which belongs to a later period.

¹²Based on the *Virgin Lambovitissa* by the Cretan painter Emmanouil Tzanes, the iconographic model of the Virgin and Child sitting on a cushion became one of the most diffused themes of Marian iconography from the mid-seventeenth century onward. Variations on this theme are to be found in the Corfu Cathedral (signed by by Konstantinos Tzanes), in the Church of Saint Spyridon (by Dimitrios Foskalis), in the Church of Saint John (by Chrysoloras or Tzenos), in the Church of All Saints, and in the Church of Saint Andrew, all of which are in the city of Corfu, as well as in the Church of Zoodochos Pigi in the village of Kato Korakiana in Corfu, and, lastly, in the Monastery of Magoulades in Corfu (by Dimitrios Foskalis). In the eighteenth century, this iconographic model became largely popular throughout the Adriatic Sea and especially in the Bay of Kotor, reflecting the strong ties of the area with the Ionian Islands. Icons reproducing the same design as the Višnjeva icon, varying in quality and iconographic details, can be found in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Perast (crkva Svetog Nikole), in the treasury of the Orthodox Church of Saint Nicholas in Kotor (riznica crkve Svetog Nikole), in the parish church of Prčanj (župna crkva), and in the treasury of Praskvica Monastery (riznica manastira Praskvice). An icon based on a similar model and bearing the signature of the Corfiot painter Konstantinos Kontarinis is located on the iconostasis of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Savina Monastery. The same iconography is also reproduced in an icon from the National Museum in Belgrade (Narodni Muzej), as well as in two more icons from the Museum for Applied Arts in Zagreb (Muzej za Umjetnost i Obrt), originally from Dalmatia and Boka Kotorska. In the Church of the Holy Apostles (crkva Svetih Apostola) in Peć, there is also an icon following the models of Emmanouil and Konstantinos Tzanes. On the Italian Peninsula, on the other hand, an icon reproducing the exact same iconographic type is to be found in the Orthodox Church of Villa Badessa in Abruzzo, a community founded in the eighteenth century by Albanian and Corfiot populations.

¹³See, for example, the Royal Doors from the Church of All Saints, the Church of Saint John, the Church of Our Lady Spilaiotissa, the Church of Saint Basil, which are all in the city of Corfu, as well as the icons from the Church of Saint Paraskevi in the village Kynopiastes and the Monastery of the Virgin in the village Skripero in Corfu, the iconostasis of the Church of Saint George in the village of Skarous in Lefkada, and, finally, the icons of Gerasimos Kouloumpis and Georgios Gryparis in the Museum of Zakynthos. In the Adriatic area, see the relevant icons from iconostasis of the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Barletta, attributed to the Corfiot painter Dimitrios Bogdanos.

¹⁴The Royal Doors feature medallions with the scene of the Annunciation and the Prophets Solomon and David. The structure and style of the carved decorations are indicative of a tradition that became widely popular in eighteenth-century Boka Kotorska through the work of the

Dimitrijević-Rafailović school of painting. Similarities can be detected between the Višnjeva Doors and a large number of works dating from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, such as the Royal Doors of Banja Monastery, created by Petar Rafailović in 1775, the Royal Doors of the Church of Saint Luke in Kotor, created by Vasilije Rafailović in 1777, the Doors of the Church of Saint John the Theologian (crkva Svetog Jovana Bogoslova) in Morinj, also made by Vasilije Rafailović in 1785, and, lastly, the somewhat later Doors of the Church of Saint Nicholas (crkva Svetog Nikole) in Gradište Monastery, which were finished by Vasilije Rafailović in 1795. The decoration of the tympanum of the Royal Doors with the Deisis also seems to evoke the aforementioned iconostases, as well as the work of Maksim Tujković in the Church of Saint Luke in Kotor.

¹⁵ While the main composition with the contorted bodies of the two thieves had been established in post-Byzantine art as early as the sixteenth century, the iconographic variation of the thieves' bodies crucified on trees was much less diffused, but was again inspired by Flemish prints. Strong similarities to the Višnjeva Crucifixion are to be found in: an icon by Theodoros Poulakis in the Monastery of Agios Andreas in the village Milapidia, Cephalonia; an icon signed by Frantzeskos Dimisianos in the Church of Our Lady Faneromeni (Παναγία Φανερωμένη ή των Ξένων) in Corfu; an icon from the Church of Saint Basil (Άγιος Βασίλειος), also in Corfu; an icon from Tositsa Museum in Metsovo; an icon signed by Georgios Margazinis in Venice; an icon by Michail Prevelis; and two icons from private collections (sold at Sotheby's in 1999 and 2010). Individual iconographic features are also repeated in an almost contemporary icon by Petros Vossos (1788) from the Church of All Saints (ναός Αγίων Πάντων) in the village Galaro in Zakynthos.

¹⁶ In the report of his 1605 apostolic visitation, the Bishop of Kotor, Angelo Baroni, mentions that these churches were "painted with Greek pictures" (*picta picturis graecis*) and were "entirely covered with Greek pictures" (*tota depicta picturis grecis*), respectively (Radojčić 1953, 61; Kovijanić and Stjepčević [1957] 2003, 94; Đurić 1960, 142; 1974, 156–157; 1996, 44n134; Živković 2010, 278).

¹⁷ The earliest documented account of him is found in the archives of the Greek Orthodox community of Zadar. In particular, the painter is first documented in 1743 as "Spiridion Rapsomanichi Pitor," and then in 1744, he is registered as "Spiridion Rapsomanichi, Pitor ora ζαρά." In February 1745, the painter got married in Zadar to Anna Eleftheriou, with whom he had many children, all born and baptized in Zadar. Around 1750–1752, Rapsomanikis was ordained as a priest, a position which he held until his death in Zadar in 1769, as we learn that «Μὴν ἀπριλίου 21 1769 Sv. // Ἐτελευτίσε ἕνας Ἱερεὺς Σπηρῆδων Ραψωμανικὸς» (On 21 April 1769, a priest named Spiridon Rapsomanik [sic] passed away). Rapsomanikis's widow, Anna, is mentioned in the archival sources as member of the confraternity until 1774 (ASPCZ, Quaderno dell' Ecclesia, ff. 35v, 36v; DAZD, Knjiga I Rodenih (1637–1776), ff. 129v, 138r, 148r, 169v; see also Mirković 1958, 371; Berić, 1959, 161–162).

¹⁸ Even before settling permanently on the island, Petar had been influenced considerably by Greek iconography, as is shown by an icon of the Virgin Hodigitria in the Sekulić Collection in Belgrade painted in 1779, an icon of the Madonna and Child with Angels in the Museum of Arts and Crafts (Muzej za Umjetnost i Obrt) in Zagreb dated to 1782, and two triptychs in Skopje painted in 1781 and 1782, which even bear Greek inscriptions. Especially after moving to Corfu, Petar started to incorporate increasingly more elements of Heptanesian iconography, as can be seen in an icon of Saint Matthew painted in 1794 for the Đurković family of Risan, now in the Maritime Museum of Kotor (Pomorski Muzej) (Radojčić et al. 1967, no. 14, table VI; Stošić 2014b, 269–278).

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