

## Murals of Taurica in the context of ideological movements of the XIII – XV centuries

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**Abstract:** In this material, one of the urgent tasks of modern cultural studies is considered, as the development of ways of informational return of archaeological, historical, art history and religious studies sources, which have features associated with the method of encoding information in fresco painting of the High Middle Ages. However, to date, no cultural understanding of the material has been undertaken as a fundamental understanding of the value and sociocultural significance of the originality of the painting style of Taurica in the XIII – XIII – XV centuries sets before the researcher the not simple task of mastering the "language of mural painting" through which the content of the artistic form of the period under consideration is embodied.

**Keywords:** Monuments of medieval art, cultural understanding, symbolism, picture of the world, expressiveness of the image, artistic taste, a kind of "historical painting", ideals of valor, the theme of military patronage.

**Analysis of the scientific problem:** A fresco for a medieval inhabitant of Taurica is a tangible material environment of the picture of the world. A fresco is not only a cultural or art history phenomenon, but primarily a historical one. She is part of society, and develops along with it. A certain interest in fresco painting is explained by the fact that the latter is a kind of "historical painting", in a conventional manner narrating about the real events of the life of Taurica in the XIII – XV centuries. Fresco art is a reflection of social norms of morality, ideology, psychology. And, of course, the study of these phenomena is the direct responsibility of a culturologist.

**Main material:** The specificity of the fresco as a source lies in the fact that, like any work of art, it reflects the way of thinking of the master who created it through the prism of sociopolitical and sociocultural processes.

When selecting sources in the study, the author of the article proceeded from the idea that the analysis of fresco paintings in medieval Crimea of the XIII – XV centuries. The

"Paleologian era" should start with the least complex works, which include the plot compositions of the murals.

It should be noted that the problem of fresco painting is considered in connection with the issues of Christian culture as such, since the development of fresco painting of the Crimea in the context of Christian culture is an integral part of the historical (political, social) and religious processes of this time.

In the XIII century, Christianity on the land of medieval Taurica was formed as a dominant confession, and inhabitants professing Orthodox in the XIII – XV centuries were numerous. Together with Christianity, Taurica of the High Middle Ages received an already established image of the Church in its conservative classical understanding and folded teaching.



Fig.1. Eski-Kermen. Fresco of the Temple of the Three Horsemen.

Cut through the frescoes by O.I. Dombrovsky

Tavrika of the described era lived an intensive not only political and economically rich life, but also an artistic and aesthetic life. In the general flourishing of architecture of the XIII –

XV centuries, painting and liturgical creativity, it is Parsuna that occupies one of the leading positions - as an exponent of the spiritual and cultural life of society [4, p. 79]. It was during this period that the figurative language of painting reaches its maximum expressiveness and accuracy. It is distinguished by unusual expressiveness, spontaneity, freedom, purity of color tone, strength and joy of light [4, p. 78]. Not the least role is played by the form and structure of the fresco, acquiring symbolic fields [4, p. 79].

To determine the dominant character of the ideals of fresco painting of the XIII – XV centuries, it is necessary to pay attention to the choice of the subjects themselves and to the point of view from which they were depicted.

The fresco of the Temple of the Three Horsemen near Eski-Kermen can serve as a vivid example of composition, as a reflection of the era: on the wall of the temple there are frescoes depicting three horsemen in fluttering cloaks, three warriors-martyrs (fig. 1).

A sufficient number of images of the Holy Warriors is explained by the veneration in Tavrika at this difficult time. Their cult was especially widespread in the eastern border regions of the Byzantine Empire [4, p. 88]. In Asia Minor and Georgia in the XIII – XV centuries, their images were mandatory in the painting program of any, even the smallest, temple. The image of the three horsemen is unique because is a vivid example in the formation of the local Crimean style of fresco painting [4, p. 87].

O.I. Dombrowski, based on the results of studying the fresco paintings of the cave temples of Eski-Kermen and its surroundings, came to the following conclusion: "Of the many provincial Byzantine schools of painting, the school that in the XIII-XIV centuries formed in the South-West Crimea, was one of the most succumbing to the capital's influence; she was in close contact with the court aristocratic art of Byzantium" [3, p. 50]. The composition of the murals reveals the images of holy warriors who embodied the ideals of valor and courage, which were highly valued in the disturbing life of the inhabitants of medieval Crimea, full of dangers.

It should be noted that the fresco paintings of the temples of the Southwestern Crimea, along with the well-known provincialism, bear a clear shade of ancient traditions. Ancient traditions in mural painting as a dialogue of eras, concretely and visibly embodied the highest values of the heroic power of the gods of the early period. Mural painting as the most powerful cultural tool that served to convey the highest, undistorted truth: to love and protect your land. The fresco "Three Horsemen" is distinguished by a delicate pictorial style, which was cultivated by the capital's school, and Tavrika became their keeper [5, p. 88]. The traditions of the ancient world, surpassed and embodied in the images of the Hero-Warrior, are the symbols that make up the core of medieval culture. For many thousands of years of the medieval period, they surrounded the population of Taurica, as if they called not to rush, to think and understand the

revelation of the murals [4, p. 79]. Only then try to comprehend the fullness of being. Local painters knew how to combine high skill, artistic taste, knowledge of antique samples and the desire to fully express new artistic ideas [4, p. 78].

The "riders" amaze with the refined nobility of their appearance. Fluttering patrician clothes echo the rainbow tints of cloaks: against their background, sculpted faces with extraordinary precision appear in contrast, making you recall the works of Hellenistic artists. The faces depict pacification and exultant spirituality, which are characteristic already for the Middle Ages [4, p. 80]. The creators of the murals are distinguished by the desire for great emotional excitement, tk. the metropolitan tradition was perceived by the artists of that time not as a dead dogma, but as a living source of inspiration [4, p. 81]. The fresco is filled with pictorial freedom, where the master's keen observation is manifested in the living breath of antiquity [1, p. 46]. The completed figures are framed with a strict frame. The fresco painting "Three Horsemen" stands out against the background of other frescoes of the Crimea of that time expressiveness and at the same time more iconic, spirituality and even detachment [4, p. 85].

St. George the warrior (frontally, with a raised spear in his right hand, with a shield behind his left shoulder, in his left hand - the reins), St. George the serpent-fighter and a Christian saint with a youth rescued from captivity, sitting behind the saint's back on the rump of a horse. Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος is depicted in images associated with two legends: the fight against the devil in the guise of a serpent, and the miraculous salvation of the Paphlagon youth from the hands of enemies.

From a culturological point of view, the predominance in the era of the mature Middle Ages of interest in mystical dogmas, spiritualism, abstraction from reality, focus on hypersensitivity is noticeable. The saint is depicted in three persons. The number three in the Christian world is the personification of the Holy Trinity, as the presence of three versions of the image of St. Georgy on a horse on the fresco of the Three Horsemen [4, p. 78].

The Gospel mentions three wise men, three crucifixions on Calvary, resurrection three days later. Three is a symbol of the universe, as much is in one.

One of the most striking interpretations of the exploits of Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος was "The Miracle of the Serpent." Once George learned that a terrible dragon was devastating the lands of a certain pagan king. It was Take (Beirut). The dragon "shut off" the water sources from the townspeople. Forced the citizens every month by lot to give him a maiden to be eaten. When this fate befell the king's daughter (in the East she was called Elisava), the Great Martyr was just passing by and seeing the virgin, he prayed to God. He waited for the appearance of the dragon and pierced him with a spear. Taking away from the city to attack, prompting all the inhabitants,

led by the king, to accept Christianity. In this image of the Saint, the omnipresent punishment for sins appears. A formidable judge with a sharp spear - a symbol of the overtaken punishment for sins without repentance.

The style of the Eski-Kermen paintings is most characteristic of the samples of the first half of the XIII century. The brightness of flowers and their variety does not create the impression of variegation, as is the case on many provincial monuments, for example, in Cappadocian paintings [4, p. 82]. Posthumous miracles of Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος began to appear in the brands of Cappadocia. Later, "The Miracle of the Serpent" came to the fore and was already written on individual icons. Several types of images are known: on some the equestrian hero strikes the monster with a spear without any fancy, on others there are whole scenes with the princess, the townspeople and their king [1, p. 126].

In the Eski-Kermen paintings, we see iconic art. The fresco has a didactic meaning - it announces salvation. Mural painting is a means of transmitting information and it is also a goal, where information is carried with the help of signs. The image indicates a saving action: the idea of salvation. Disregard for the artistic form is felt in the fresco painting. The Savior endowed St. George the serpent fighter with special powers. The proclamation of salvation through introduction to Christian culture. Everything in the mural is natural. The absence of any artificiality is the path to a single sign. The word is preserved in the Bible materialized through art. Reified in fresco painting.

The local originality of the fresco painting "Three Horsemen" was far from immediately developed. A special and original style took shape gradually and slowly. Fresco painting is not just part of an architectural form. It opens the door to the world of the sacramental image or the sacramental rite of the Christian cult. The image opens to contemplation in visible theology - mural painting.

The fresco of "Three Horsemen" is not traditional, which shows the originality of the social order of Tavrika in the mature Middle Ages. Their geographic horizons are unusually wide. The idea of the Great Martyr as a patron and protector was so firmly rooted in the popular consciousness that during the XIII – XV centuries the authorities made repeated attempts to declare the hero their ally and patron and thereby raise their authority. The fresco painting is the focus of attention. Prayer contemplation saturates the temple painting. It passes through time and space and stops at living content.

An example of such attempts is the third image of Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος in the Eski-Kermen mural painting. Tracing the development of the main subjects of the surviving fresco paintings of the Crimea, it should be noted the constant mutual influence of different cultural practices, which contributed to the transformation of Christian Greco-Byzantine traditions and

the emergence of a peculiar, original Crimean-Byzantine style, where St. George is often depicted as a horseman, on whose horse you can see a young boy, whom the serpent fighter saved from the horrors of captivity and returned unharmed to the parent's womb. It is for this reason that the Church calls the Saint the Victorious as the liberator of the captives. In the symbiosis of the drawing and its place, it is high, in the main place, the image carries away upward. Through the image of St. George, a warrior, the contemplation of the Almighty is revealed in art.

The Arabs attacked the Christians of Lesbos. Among the captives was a youth whose parents suffered greatly from the loss of their child. A year later, on St. George's Day, the teenager's father and mother arranged a dinner for their loved ones. Suddenly their boy appeared, holding a glass of wine. The son narrated that the entire period was a slave to the Cretan emir. Suddenly Saint George appeared. He put the child on a horse and carried it home. With one hand the youth was holding onto the saint's belt. In the other hand there was a goblet, which he served on the table to the owner.

It pleased God to reveal to the world the Holy One as the patron of youth and innocence. In the district of Lesbos, it became known about this miracle. After this experience, Saint George the Victorious began to be revered as the patron saint of children. Coming to him for advice, people met with the Angel, so much good was radiated by the Saint on the fresco painting.

You observe social tendencies in the understanding of George. The saint was brought closer to other heroes of medieval legends: And with Michael the Archangel on a white horse, and with Nikita defeating the devil, and with Elijah the prophet, involved in lightning [1, p. 293].

Looking at the image of Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος everyone experiences a strong sense of continuous life. Looking at the murals, you feel the sacred rite. In this interpretation of the murals, we can talk about the peculiar character of the great martyr, which threatens with his spear. Endowed with sacred power, he fiercely acts with his weapon in an attempt to defend the truth.

In cultural analysis, this is a rare iconographic type.

The fresco of The Three Horsemen is almost unknown. In terms of artistic quality and emotional richness, the fresco painting of the image is immeasurably higher than other works.

**Conclusions and prospects for further research:** The study of the image Γεώργιος Τροπαιοφόρος of the Temple of the Three Horsemen near Eski-Kermen as a single ideological and artistic system revealed a number of features concerning a specific plot in the mural painting. As a result of the culturological analysis, the author came to the following conclusions: the image of the saint is associated with special spiritual moods in the religious life of medieval

society. Towards ascetic ideals, "smart" prayer. The topic of military patronage is especially highlighted and is obviously connected with the victories of the citizens of Taurica over the nomads. The military-historical theme of the fresco painting of the temple of the three horsemen near Eski-Kermen impresses not only with the significance of the murals, but also with the reflections that are born during contemplation. However, it is impossible to fully decipher the meaning of the entire symbolism of the image of the Holy Great Martyr, as well as to adequately represent all the specificity of the language of the figure's movements and all its subtlest nuances. This poses for the researcher the not simple task of mastering the "language of mural painting" through which the content of the artistic form of the period under consideration was embodied. The cultural understanding of the painting of the Three Horsemen temple as a special information carrier with its own method of encoding information in the painting of the High Middle Ages, reveals in a new way the holistic phenomenon of the Christian tradition of its time, reflecting the ideological movements of the era, allows to illuminate and collect in a new way what existed as disparate facts phenomena of the artistic life of Taurica in the XIII – XV centuries.

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