The Spinning Mary: Towards the Iconology of the Annunciation

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BETWEEN CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY AND SLAVONIC ETHNO-HERMENEUTICS

This article focuses on medieval Slavonic iconography of the Annunciation, with particular emphasis on the image of the spinning Virgin Mary. It is based on iconographic material representing religious art of the European Christian domain in the Middle Ages, along with supplementary data from the Mediterranean region (Coptic Egypt) and the Caucasus. It further includes iconographic, linguistic, ethnographic and folklore data from the Balkans from the period of the National Revival (18th-19th centuries), along with oral tradition collected during the 20th century (including the period of the communist regime). Having once been a vital part of the Byzantine commonwealth, this region represents an interesting case for our study, as it provides data revealing some of the popular dimensions of the cult of the Mother of God, a cult which is still flourishing there, representing one of the most vital components of folk Christianity.[1] In this, the vernacular background of spinning, weaving and other textile-creating activities are taken into consideration.

Some specific issues related to the cultural milieu of the Byzantine commonwealth are also explored in this connection, especially with regard to Pax Slavia Christiana, where the Virgin has been praised for centuries – not only by men of letters, but also by illiterate believers – as "Bogoroditsa" (i.e. "the Theotokos", the "God-Bearer"). The first use of the appellation "the Theotokos" appears twelve years after Christianity was legalised by the Emperor Constantine the Great; it is dated to 325 and is attributed to Alexander of Alexandria (d. 328) – one of the most zealous defenders of Orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea (O'Carroll 1983: 13-14); subsequently, the appellation "the Theotokos" was upheld and confirmed at the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).[2] As George Dennis points out in a study of "Popular Religious Attitudes and Practices in Byzantium", the actual term "Theotokos" was originally used by ordinary people, and

only later "taken up by the clergy" so that "[p]opular religion thus became official religion" (Dennis 1996: 246-7).

In this study, the iconography of the spinning Virgin Mary, and of the Annunciation, is also compared with, and contrasted to, the iconography of another spinning woman, that of "the mother of all living," Eve, after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This juxtaposition, in turn, allows us to envisage how the theological doctrine of Mary as the New/Second Eve[3] – which was first formulated in patristic writings – was spelt out in Christian iconographic tradition. The concept was set out as a theological framework of the cult of the Virgin Mary by one of the first Christian philosophers, St Justin Martyr (d. 165), in his "Dialogue with Trypho". While contemplating the ways in which Jesus Christ has revealed to us "all that we have understood from the scriptures by His grace", Justin Martyr meditates over the question of how "He became incarnate by the Virgin" (trans. Williams 1930: 208). He subsequently reflects on the symbolic meanings of the Annunciation as a portent of the forthcoming salvation of mankind. Justin emphasises that Jesus Christ "has become man by the Virgin in order that by the same way in which the disobedience caused by the serpent took its beginnings, by this way should it also take its destruction" (trans. Williams 1930: 210). The following passage is considered to be the initial kernel of the Eve-Mary parallel as a theological issue:

> For Eve, being a virgin and uncorrupt, *conceived* the words spoken of the serpent, and brought forth disobedience and death. But Mary the Virgin receiving faith and grace, when the angel Gabriel brought her the good news that *the Spirit of the Lord should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should overshadow her, wherefore also that Holy Thing that is born of her is Son of God, answered, Be it unto me according to Thy word* (trans. Williams 1930: 210).

In the second century, St Irenaeus of Lyons elaborated further on the Eve-Mary parallel. In his work *Against Heresies: On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called* (Book III), he contemplated the idea of the "Incarnation-as-a-recapitulation" and concentrated on "the recycling that Mary effected for Eve":

> For what has been tied cannot be loosed unless one reverses the ties of the knot so that the first ties are undone by the second, and the second free the first: thus it happens that the first tie is unknotted by the second and the second has the place of a tie for the first (trans. Grant 1997: 140).

The Eve-Mary parallel was further developed by Tertullian in the third century, in his *De Carne Christi*, where he made a significant contribution to the dogmatic definition of the Marian doctrine and contemplated extensively the theme of the "virginal conception" (Bettenson 1956: 174).

The Eve-Mary parallel was later explored in Medieval Slavdom by the "ideographic language" of Christian iconographic tradition, and further conveyed, in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, as a palpable visual metaphor. In this the image of the spinning Virgin Mary as the Mother of Christ, together with that of the spinning Eve as "the mother of all living", stand for emblems of (both celestial and terrestrial) motherhood while the act of spinning is recognised as tantamount to the act of (pro)creation. Correspondingly, the fabric of the body of Christ, as "spun and woven" by Mary, the New Eve, is regarded as "seamless cloth" in which both human and divine are wound up into one.[4] At the same time, the body of "the New Adam" is regarded as being of a "cloth-like" substance, a substance which is related to the bodies of the offspring of the first Eve. Thus the artistic devices of Christian iconography, having tacitly accommodated the rhetoric of patristic writings, and indeed the ethno-hermeneutics of Slavonic and Balkan oral poesis, "inscribe" into the collective memory of illiterate believers not only Eve-Mary parallelism, but also the Eve-Mary antithesis. This vernacular Marian exegesis has been accompanied by an elaborate system of folk rituals, songs and narratives which are usually considered by those performing them as verbal commentaries on the events rendered on the icons of the Virgin in the local churches and monasteries.[5] In this, storytelling and singing are regarded as sacred activities through which an enduring verbal icon of the Mother of God is being re-assembled at each new performance of "her" customs, songs and legends. On the other hand, the homology between the iconography of "the spinning Mary" and that of "the spinning Eve" indicates that the medieval icon painters from Pax Slavia Christiana, just like the Early Church Fathers, interpreted the Annunciation scenario as a contraposition to the Fall,

while the image of Mary the Mother of God was understood as both a "reversion" and a "counter-point" of that of the "mother of all living", Eve (see further Meyendorff 1983: 146-7).

While analysing the "Eve-Mary" parallelism, many scholars also find it necessary to point out that, in Western tradition, it is considered significant that on the day of the Annunciation, the Angel greeted the Virgin Mary by saying *Ave* (Latin for "Hail") – which is the reverse of the name of the first woman, *Eva*. Accordingly, the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel – "Ave Maria!" – was believed to have "neatly reversed the curse of Eve" (Warner 1976: 60-1).

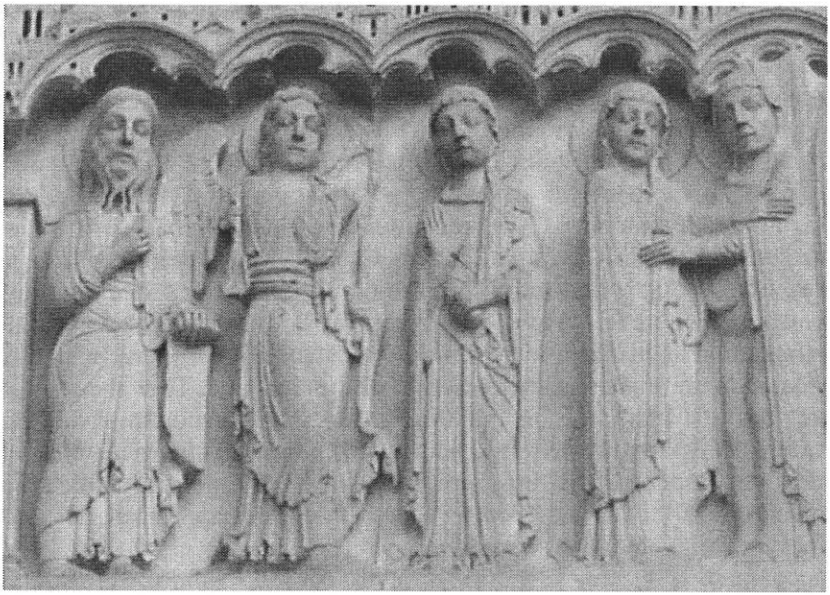

Fig. 1. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin": a stone relief from the St Anne's portal of the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral (12th century).
All photographs by the author unless stated otherwise.

Fig. 2. "The Annunciation: the Holy Theotokos spinning", a detail from the murals in the Church of Saint Elijah ("Sveti Iliia") in the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria , 17th c.

SPINNING THE LOGOS

The Russian scholar Nikodim Kondakov, who died in exile in Prague in 1925, was among the first European art historians to produce an extensive compendium of iconographic patterns and artistic devices employed in visual renderings of the Annunciation theme. In his fundamental work on the "Iconography of the Mother of God" he offers abundant information about Early Christian (Roman, Greek, Armenian, Georgian and Coptic) iconographic traditions, as well as a comprehensive analysis of symbolic types of representation of the image of the Virgin Mary in the Byzantine commonwealth (including Pax Slavia Christiana). The first two volumes of this monograph were published in 1914-1915 in Russia, while the manuscript of the third volume (still unpublished) is kept in the archival collection of the Vatican. It is regrettable that many contemporary art historians from Western Europe are not familiar with his work. Modern Western scholarship anchors iconography/iconology studies around a number of (predominantly) Western authors, such as Erwin Panofsky, whilst Nikodim Kondakov remains virtually unknown, absent from theoretical debates and scholarly discussions. I draw on his work in the present article.[6]

According to conventional iconographic devices observed in the early Middle Ages in both Western and Eastern Europe, the scene of the Annunciation was to follow a particular pattern. Mary was usually portrayed winding yarn – often wielding a distaff, or holding a spindle with a roll of red (or purple) thread upon it, or a skein of red (or purple) fibre for the curtain of the Temple of Jerusalem. Red and purple are the predominant colours of the yarn spun by the Virgin. It has been commonly accepted among art historians that the "red" signifies the Virgin's flesh and blood, whereas the "purple" refers to her status as an offspring descending from the royal lineage of David. In some cases, however, the yarn spun by the Mother of God is white. Considered to be the colour of purity and chastity, "white" can be interpreted here as an allegorical expression of the idea of "the Theotokos-as-ever-Virgin". The Virgin was depicted either sitting on a high stool (usually with a basket full of yarn next to it), or standing up, with the Archangel Gabriel graciously gliding from above (or swiftly walking towards her) and saluting her. The Lord's messenger could also be rendered standing upright in front of the Mother of God,

or else kneeling before her; he was depicted blessing (or saluting?) her with his right hand, while the Holy Spirit was descending from above with a ray of light following on to the Virgin's head.

After the first half of the 13th century, however, in Western Europe the image of "the spinning/weaving Mary" was gradually replaced by the image of "the reading Mary" (McMurray Gibson 1990: 47; Biscoglio 1995: 168; Vaz da Silva 2004: 280), whereas in Eastern Europe, and in particular in the Balkans, the iconography of the Annunciation continued to follow both patterns. As B. Young points out (1990: 41-3), holding a scroll on which the words of the depicted character are written out is one of the most widespread artistic conventions in Occidental iconography, employed by medieval artists in visualising "speech"; "talking" might thus been depicted as "holding a scroll or a book". Not only the Virgin Mary but also the Archangel Gabriel can be depicted "carrying his story on a scroll", as is the case with the stone carving on the capital in the Abbey church in Conques (Young 1990: 42).

According to *The "Painter's Manual" of Dionysius of Fourna* (1730-1734) – which was initially composed in the 12th century in Thesaloniki and later copied by Dionysius – the scene of the Annunciation of the Mother of God is to be depicted as follows:

> Houses, and Holy Virgin standing before a chair, with her head slightly bowed; in one hand she holds a spindle with a roll of silk thread upon it, while she stretches out her right hand towards the Archangel Gabriel who stands before her, blessing her with his right hand and holding a lance in his left. Above the house is heaven and out of it comes the Holy Spirit with a ray of light on to the Virgin's head (tr. Hetherington 1996: 32).

One of the earliest representations of the Annunciation with the spinning Virgin is to be found on a 5th-century sarcophagus from Ravenna, known also as Sepolcro di Braccioforte (Fig. 3), where the Mother of God is portrayed seated, with her head covered (a detail indicating her marital status). In front of her there is a basket full of yarn, and next to it stands a distaff from which the cord is being spun. The face of the Virgin is turned towards the winged Archangel

Fig. 3 (above). "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin": a stone carving on a 5th century sarcophagus from Ravenna (known also as Sepolcro di Braccioforte).

Fig. 4 (left). "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin": an ivory relief on the Throne of Maximian (now in Museo Arcivescovile), Ravenna, Italy; mid 6th-century.

Fig. 5. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin": a fragmentary wooden relief of the Virgin of the Annunciation from the Louvre (the Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Coptic art), 5th-6th century.

Gabriel, who is holding a sceptre in his left hand, while saluting her. His right hand is raised, which, according to medieval iconographic conventions was an indication that the sculptor was showing an act of speaking (see Young 1990: 41). The basket and the distaff with the fibre streaming from it are depicted between the Virgin and God's Messenger, thus marking the axis of the composition, its vertical median. Indeed, the thread spun by the Mother of God functions as the structuring centre of this composition (in terms of its spatial organisation, and the configuration of the images of the protagonists). By depicting the Virgin and the Archangel with the distaff and the basket of yarn between them, the artist also refers, quite evidently, to a certain symbolic nexus of "sub-textual" meanings attributed to the image of the Mother of God as a spinner, and indeed to the actual conceptualisation of the Annunciation as an act of spinning in which the very fabric of the body of Christ – who is entering the "terrestrial" world as Man among men, dressed in human flesh – is being produced.

Another early representation of the Annunciation with the spinning Virgin is to be found again in Ravenna (Fig. 4); this is one of the ivory reliefs on the Throne of Maximian (now in Museo Arcivescovile), which most probably dates from the mid 6th century (Bovini 1990: 14). The Virgin is depicted seated in a throne, with a portico in the background. She in holding spindles in her left hand, with her right hand stretched out (or perhaps pressed against her breast?), as a sign of greeting the winged Archangel Gabriel. He is standing before her, saluting (and blessing?) her with his right hand, while holding a sceptre in his left hand. The basket is depicted next to the throne of the seated Virgin, between her and the Archangel. It is important to point out at this point the fact that "the basket of the Virgin" was considered to be one of the most venerated relics before which pilgrims used to kneel while visiting the Holy Land. Thus the Martyr Antoninus, himself being a pilgrim, reports as follows:

> When we came from nearby Ptolemais to Galilee to the city called "New Caesarea", we bowed before and kissed (*adoravimus pro veneratione*) the bucket and basket (*amulam et canestellum*) of the Holy Mary. At this same place, there is also a chair (*cathedra*) on which she sat when the Archangel Gabriel appeared before her (Kondakov 1998: 2.145).

The above indicates that the iconography of the Annunciation was an integral part of a much broader socio-cultural milieu. It is as if, while depicting the details surrounding the encounter between the Mother of God and the Archangel Gabriel, the icon painters and sculptors were inscribing the story of the Annunciation in their works, via the "ideographic language" of Christian iconographic tradition, thus turning Mary's abode into a "tangible" sacred sight. Hence, the visual contact with the icons of the Annunciation was experienced as peregrination to the Holy Land. Not only the icon painters, but also the icon worshippers were transformed into virtual pilgrims "absorbing" the palpable traces of Mary's life with their own eyes, following in her steps with their own feet, touching her habitat with their own hands and breathing in the air of her presence with their own breasts. The miracle of the Annunciation was becoming a palpable instant, as if the Immaculate Conception was taking place here and now, as if happening in front of the eyes of the believers, themselves becoming witnesses of the Annunciation; the work of art was thus turning them into beholders sharing the life of Mary. As the above quoted testimony of the Martyr Antoninus indicates, the basket of the spinning Virgin Mary was considered to be one of the most important objects of worship in the sacred domain of the Holy Land.

On the other hand, as the vernacular folklore tradition (and in particular the ethnolinguistic data from Bulgaria) indicates, the image of the basket is often allegorically intertwined with the image of the womb; the pregnant woman is metaphorically described as a "brimming basket", whereas the laying-in woman is compared to a "loosed basket" (Badalanova, forthcoming, No. 88). At the same time, the story of the infant-hero found in a basket (registered in the biblical account of Moses and, in Bulgarian folklore, in narratives about Krali Marko) recalls the same mythological pattern. In this, the basket is imagined as a container of life, a metaphorical "uterus" from which heroes emerge. Obviously, from the point of view of the "unlettered believers", the basket motif was considered to be of crucial importance. In it certain profoundly significant sub-textual links were enfold and intertwined, thus allegorically reassembling the archetypal tale of the miraculous birth of a wondrous child-saviour. The fact that the icon painters persisted in depicting the Virgin's basket as a necessary attribute of the Annunciation settings is therefore indicative. It could be argued that "the basket" was in fact considered to be one of the allegorical images of the Virgin herself

(along with her image as a textile-loom , for instance); by depicting "the basket full of yarn" within the framework of the Annunciation, along with mandatory paraphernalia of this scene, the icon painters were hence conveying the visual metaphor of the Virgin as "the basket of the flesh of Christ".

Similar iconographical devices were employed in the depiction of the Annunciation scene on the mosaics on the upper level of the triumphal arch of the Santa Maria Maggiore Cathedral in Rome (5th century). The Virgin is depicted spinning, with a basket next to her chair (see Cottica in this volume, Fig. 15). The same pattern is observed in one of the earliest representations of the Annunciation theme in the Coptic art (from the 5th-6th century). The fragmentary wooden relief of the Virgin of the Annunciation from the Louvre (the Department of Egyptian Antiquities) shows her seated on a high stool, with the mandatory basket next to her (Fig. 5).

The oldest depictions of the dialogue between the Lords' messenger and the spinning Virgin within the context of Slavonic iconographical tradition are the mosaics at the St Sofia Cathedral in Kiev, from the eleventh century (see Karger, ed., 1963: pl. 5). The image of the spinning Mary serves also as the focal point of the mystery of the Incarnation in the "Annunciation of Ustiug" type of icon from Medieval Russia (one of the earliest copies is dated between 1119 and 1130). Theotokos, with the baby Jesus depicted inside her womb, is shown holding a ball of red thread and spinning while listening to the Archangel Gabriel who enters from her right side (Fig. 6).

The Eastern Orthodox iconographical representation of the scene of the Annunciation with the spinning Virgin corresponds with Western tradition. Interesting examples are the twelfth-century frescoes in the Church of Sopre, Spain, where the magnificent image of the Mother of God is depicted in the middle of the composition – she stands next to the Archangel Gabriel, holding a spindle in her hand (Baring and Cashford 1991: 560). Thought-provoking allusions to both the "Annunciation of Ustiug" iconographical type and the frescoes from the Church of Sopre are found in the masterpiece "The Virgin Mary Spinning", a work from the beginning of the fifteenth century, attributed to the Upper Rhenish Master; it represents the figure of the Virgin with a baby Jesus inside her. She is depicted seated, next to the distaff, while spinning a thread that crosses her womb (Baring and Cashford 1991: 561).

Fig. 6. "The Annunciation of Ustiug: the Holy Theotokos spinning": a Russian icon from the city of Novgorod, 1119-1130 (now preserved in the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow). After *Gosudarstvennaia Tretiakobskaia Galereia: Katalog Sobraniia (Drevnerusskoe Iskusstvo X- Nachala XV vv.)* (1995), Vol. 1, p. 49.

At the same time, the image of the spinning Virgin relates, of course, to the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*,[7] according to which, on the Day of the Annunciation, Mary weaves the purple veil of the Temple (Schneemelcher 1991: 430-1):

> 10.1. Now there was a council of the priests, who resolved: "Let us make a veil for the Temple of the Lord." And the priest said: "Call to me the pure virgins of the tribe of David." And the officers departed and searched, and they found seven (such) virgins. And the priest remembered the child Mary, that she was from the tribe of David and was pure before God. And the officers went and fetched her.
> 10.2. Then they brought them into the Temple of the Lord, and the priest said: "Cast me lots, who shall weave the gold, the amiant, the linen, the silk, the hyacinth-blue, the scarlet and the pure purple." And to Mary fell the lot of the "pure purple" and "scarlet". And she took them and went away to her house. At that time Zakharias became dumb, and Samuel took his place until Zakharias was able to speak (again). But Mary took the scarlet and spun it.
> 11. 1. And she took the pitcher and went forth to draw water, and behold, a voice said: "Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women". And she looked around on the right and on the left to see whence this voice came. And trembling she went to her house and put down the pitcher and took the purple and sat down on her seat and drew out (the thread).
> 11.2. And behold an angel of the Lord (suddenly) stood before her and said: "Do not fear, Mary; for you have found grace before the Lord of all things and shall conceive of his Word." When she heard this she doubted in herself and said: "Shall I conceive of the Lord, the living God, (and bear) as every woman bears?"
> 11.3. And the angel of the Lord came and said to her: "Not so, Mary; for a power of the Lord shall overshadow you; wherefore also that holy thing which is born of you shall be called the Son of the Highest. And you shall call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." And Mary said: "Behold, (I am) the handmaid of the Lord before him: be it to me according to your word."

12.1. And she made (ready) the purple and the scarlet and brought (them) to the priest. And the priest took (them), and blessed (Mary) and said: "Mary, the Lord God has magnified your name, and you shall be blessed among all generations of the earth."
12.2. And Mary rejoiced.

Fig. 7. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin next to a stream": a 12th-century icon from the Monastery of St Catherine's, Mt. Sinai, Egypt. After K. Weitzmann *et al.* (eds), *Ikoni ot Balkanite: Sinai, Gārtsiia, Balgariia i Iugoslaviia* (1966, Plate 30).

It should be noted, however, that the image of "the spinning Mary", together with the image of "the reading Mary", were not the only types of representations of the Annunciation theme known to

have existed in the Middle Ages in Pax Slavia Christiana. In fact, they co-existed with a variety of other visual representations of the Annunciation theme. One is "the Archangel Gabriel talking to the Virgin", i.e. Mary conceives via her ear, that is, the Word of God enters her body while she listens to the Archangel Gabriel (cf. Dragomanov 1894: 33; Badalanova 2003: 179-82; Vaz Da Silva 2004: 280-1). Another is "the Archangel Gabriel giving the Virgin a flower", i.e. Mary conceives while smelling it, that is, the Holy Spirit enters her body through her nose, cf. the concept of "conceiving via one's nose, by smelling a flower", as registered in Indo-European oral heritage (Dragomanov 1894: 33). The image may be related to Slavonic folklore tradition, where a woman between menarche and menopause is often compared to a blossoming flower; the ability to conceive and bear a child is metaphorically described as "blossoming". In Bulgarian there exists even a proverb stating that "If there is no bloom, there will be no world; if there is a bloom, there will be world" ("Ako niama tsviat, niama i sviat, ako ima tsviat, ima i sviat"). In this the "blossoming" is symbolically equated with "(pro)creation" – of both the man and the Universe, that is, of both the microcosm and the macrocosm. Thus the image of the "blossoming woman", often represented only by the icon of the flower itself, becomes an epitome of fertility. In some villages of Bulgaria a connection is made between the concept of the flower and the concept of spinning for it is believed that the flower which the Archangel Gabriel gives to the Virgin Mary to smell so that she may conceive is called "(H)urkite", which means "distaff". Thus in March 1989, in the village of Kliment, Karlovo area, Central Bulgaria, I recorded the following legend from a 67-year old woman by the name of Velika Marinova Tsankova, born in the same village in 1922:

> God was born of the Urkite ("Distaff") flower, that's how we call this flower. Some call it iris (Lilium candidum), but we call it "the Distaff flower". The Holy Bogoroditsa (Theotokos) conceived from an iris, yes; but once people used to say that it was not the "iris", but the Urkite ("distaff") flower. The Holy Bogoroditsa had smelt some Urkite ("Distaff") flower... Eventually, she gave birth to Isus Khristos (Jesus Christ).

Besides, while depicting the scene of the Annunciation, the icon painters from Pax Slavia Christiana further elaborated on some

specific details, obviously significant from the point of view of local ethno-hermeneutics, such as depicting (the spinning) Virgin next to a well or spring or a stream; according to some scholars this type of iconography has its roots in Byzantine tradition from the period of the dynasty of the Komnenoi (Weitzmann 1966: XVI; see Fig. 7). Similar iconographic patterns exist in the Caucasus (Figs 9 and 10) and Mediterranean region as well. These details were obviously "anchoring" the Annunciation imagery to the implicit sub-text of inborn ethnopoetics, embedding them within the indigenous context of local popular traditions. It can thus be argued that such components, like the case of the image of "the spinning Virgin", could have originated from either apocryphal tradition (such as the Protevangelium of James), or indeed from ethnopoetics, i.e. from folk imagery of popular Christianity. Besides, oral tradition was often bolstering the imagery born of apocryphal literature and vice versa. One such example provides the iconography of the so-called "first Annunciation" which, according to the apocryphal Protevangelium of James (11:1; see Schneemelcher 1991: 430), takes place next to the well / fountain / spring"; in this the image of the well as "axis mundi" (connecting "the beyond" with "our world"), was blending and merging with the image of the spring as a life-giving source.

Ethnographic sources indicate that among the Balkan Slavs, at least up to the beginning of the 20th century, it was believed that there exists a certain magic substance known as "living water", or "water of life" ("zhiva voda") which comes from a wondrous spring, situated somewhere at the end of the world (Marinov 1981: 82). The location of this spring is known only to the Sun (Marinov 1981: 45); every year, on Midsummer Night ("Eniovden"), the Sun goes there to bathe itself in this "living water" in order to rejuvenate itself; that is why the Sun is eternal and never grows old (Marinov 1981: 653). There exists also a cycle of folk legends maintaining that Alexander the Great was among the very few mortals who had found this water; however, those responsible for using it to wash his body after his death failed to fulfil the task, which is why Alexander did not become immortal.[8]

This mythopoeic imagery is evidently related to the iconographic pattern of the "Virgin Mary as a Life-Giving Spring/Fountain" ("Bogoroditsa Zhivonosen Iztochnik"; see Kondakov 1998: 2.372-8, and Gerov 2002: 34-6; see Fig. 8); hence the blending of the cult of the Virgin Mary with the local folklore cults of healing springs and

holy wells (see Kondakov 1998, 1: 347-50; 2: 372-7). At the same time, within Slavonic ethnopoetics, the spring is often perceived as the ultimate source of eternal life, "the cosmic vagina" bringing forth life and health. Some Slavonic and Balkan hydronyms betray the same mythopoeic pattern: springs, wells and fountains may be denoted by words which in local dialects mean "vagina". See for instance the appellation "Baba Pizdra" (i.e. "Granny Vagina") used by the local people to designate the fountain near the village of Govezhda in North-Western Bulgaria (Mikhailova 1984: 78), as well as the hydronym "Pizdeiyo" (from the local "pizda", meaning "vagina") which is used by the people living in the village of Leskovets, North-Western Bulgaria, to denote the local well (Mikhailova 1984: 119). Quite indicative in this respect is the extremely popular appellation "Pizditsa" (a diminutive of "pizda") attached to a number of wells and springs all around Bulgaria (see further, Badalanova 1996: 234-45, 319-20, 380).

Fig. 8. "The Virgin Mary as a Life-Giving Spring", 1885; a mural painting in the open gallery (narthex), on the eastern wall of the Church Of St Dimitar in the village of Teshevo, Gotse Delchev area, South-Western Bulgaria.

Fig. 9. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin next to the well": an Armenian illuminated manuscript of a Gospel from the 13th century. After L. Durnovo and R. Drampian (eds), *Armianskaia Miniatiura* (1967, Plate 48).

To understand what is at stake here, we must turn once more to the ethnolinguistic data from Pax Slavia Christiana. Thus in some Slavonic dialects the lexemes denoting "spring" (Russ. "rodnik", "rodishche") (Fasmer III 1987: 492) are cognate with the verbs denoting "to give birth", "to create" (Old Church Slavonic "roditi") and the nouns denoting "origin", as well as "kinship" (Old Church Slavonic "rod'", Bulg. "rod", Czech, Slovak and Polish "ród", etc.) (Fasmer III 1987: 490-2). Significant in this respect is the fact that the Old Church Slavonic lexeme denoting "Nativity" – "Rozhd'stvo" (which is used to translate Greek γέννησις) has the same origin and belongs to the same semantic cluster (Fasmer III 1987: 493). Thus the iconographic pattern of the "Virgin spinning next to the well" encompasses not only the Apocryphal Gospel of St James (11.1) relating the so-called "first Annunciation" (Schneemelcher 1991: 430), but also the manifold concepts of birth, creation, origin, as revealed by indigenous mythopoeic imagery.

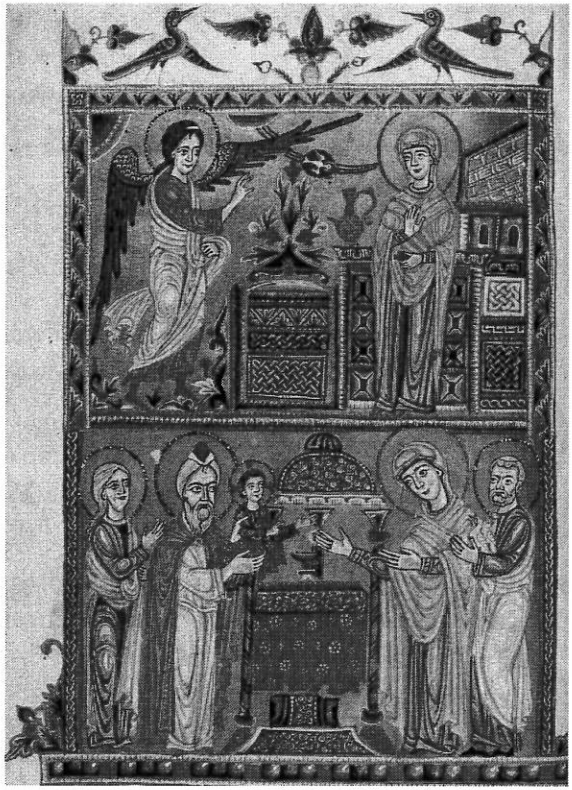

Fig. 10. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin next to the well" (above) and "The Candlemas" (below) from the Armenian illuminated manuscript known as "The Palace Gospel" (1336). After V. Kazarian and S. Manukian (eds), *Sokrovishcha Knizhnogo Iskusstva v Sobraniiakh SSSR: Matenadahran (Tom 1). Armianskaia Rukopisnaia Kniga VI-XIV vekov* (1991, Plate 388)

THE SPINNING MOTHER: IMAGE-TYPE AND ARCHETYPE

It has been maintained by many scholars that the "spinning = conceiving" mythological pattern forms the substructure of the story of the "Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin", as revealed in the *Protevangelium of James* (11: 1-3); often it is interpreted within the framework of the archetypal image of Great Mother, who spins her progeny out of herself, thus giving form to and clothing incarnation of the mankind (Baring and Cashford 1991: 559-61). Many Slavonic riddles play with this archetypal metaphor, showing the distaff as an allegorical image of the mother who is spinning the thread of life, while the yarn on the spindle is considered a child growing in her womb: "The mother shrinks, the child grows. What is it?" The answer given is "Spinning" (Stoikova 1970: 375; cf. Drettas 1980: 244-6). In a number of similar riddles the distaff is also allegorically described as a mother who is spinning her offspring's life into form out of her own body: "As the mother grows slimmer, the child gets plumper" (see Stoikova 1970: 375), "The mother thins out, the child grows" (ibid), "While the mother gets poorer, the child gets richer" (ibid; see also Drettas 1980: 245), "The calf gets fatter while the cow gets thinner" (see Stoikova 1970: 375), etc. The allegorical image of the "mother-as-a-distaff", together with that of the "child-as-the-yarn-on-a-spindle", shape the metaphorical representation of "life-span" as a "yarn-spun". This folklore imagery correlates with the classical Greek and Roman mythopoeic representation of the three goddesses of fate who were spinners and/or weavers. Indeed, the indigenous Balkan oral tradition still preserves the dormant memory of them in many narratives and songs relating to the theme of destiny as a "thread spun on the divine distaff". Here it is important to point out that, among the Southern Slavs, the "thread" ("konets") concept is symbolically associated with the perception of human life as a yarn which is spun by the three wise divine women. In Bulgaria these female mythical beings are called "orisnitsi" (related to the Greek ορίζω), as well as "narechnitsi" (var. "narāchnitsi"), "rechenitsi", etc. (Marinov 1981; Arnaudov 1969: 614-20). The lexemes "narechnitsi", "narāchnitsi" and "rechenitsi" are related to the Bulgarian verbs "naricham", "nareka", meaning "to name", "to call"; they are derivatives from the verb "reka", which means "to speak", "to say", "to utter"; hence the

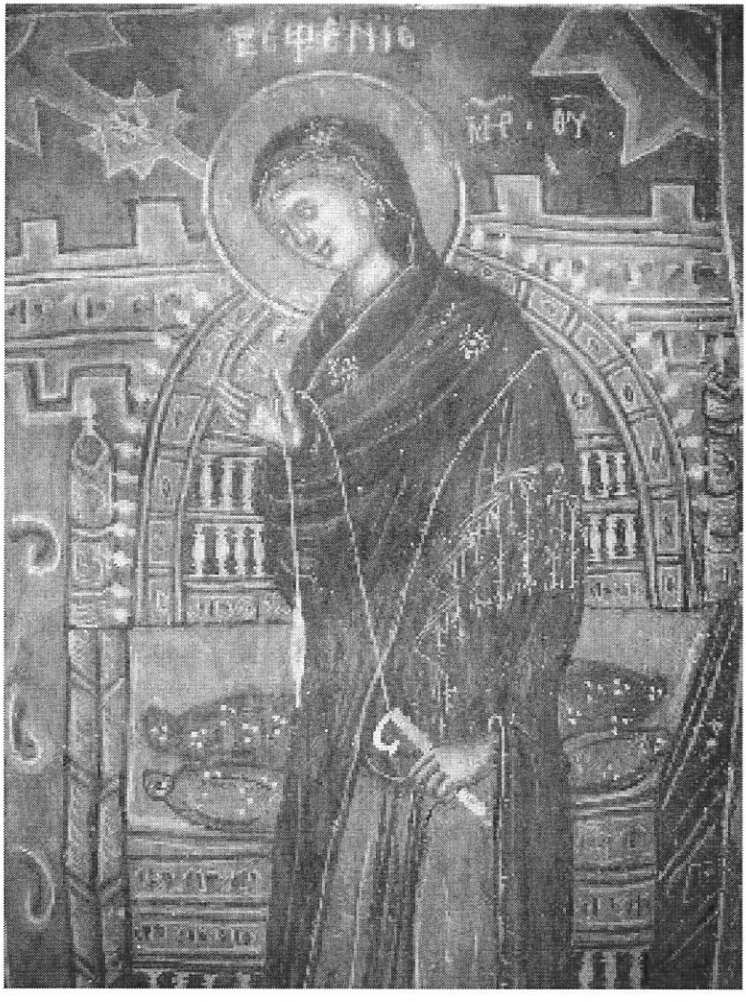

Fig. 11. "The Annunciation: the Holy Theotokos spinning", a detail from the murals in the Monastery Church of Saint Demetrius near the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria, 1488.

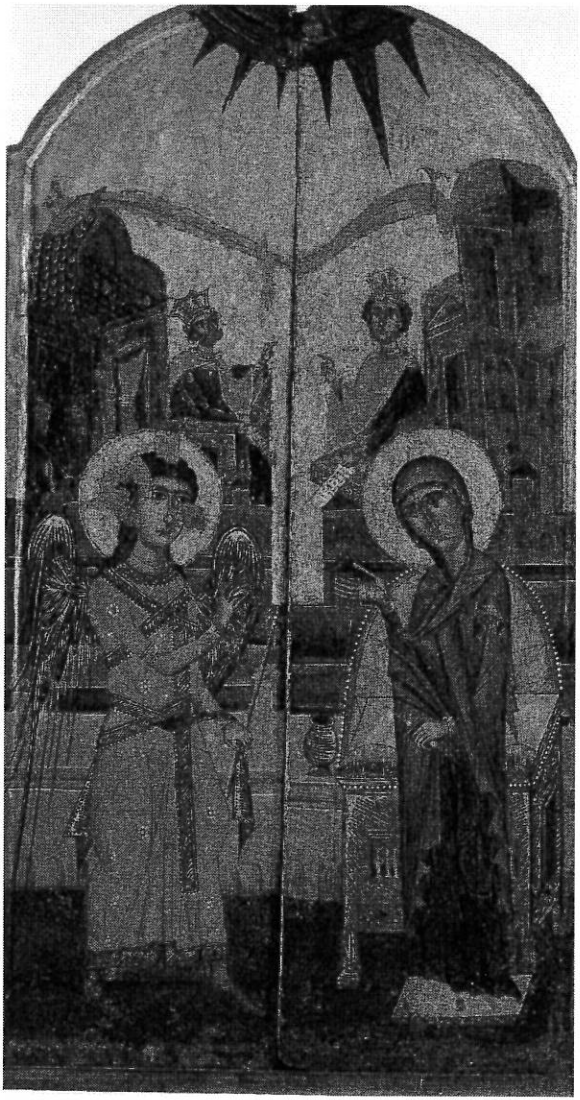

Fig. 12. "The Annunciation: the Holy Theotokos spinning", the Altar Gates of the Monastery Church of Saint Demetrius near the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria, 1488 (repainted at the end of the 17th c.); now preserved in the KRYPTA MUSEUM, Old Bulgarian Art National Gallery, Sofia. Photo F. Badalanova Geller, with the kind permission of the KRYPTA MUSEUM.

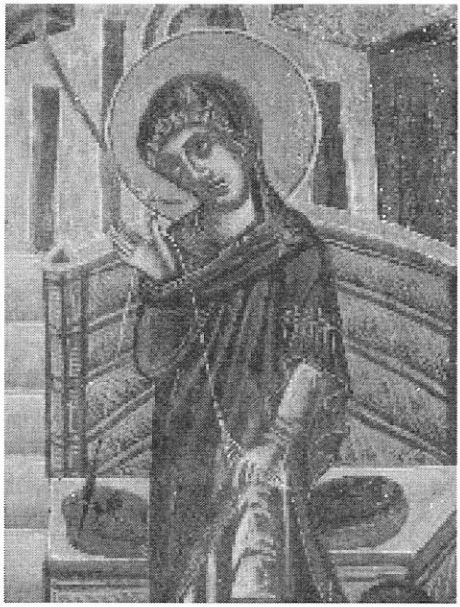

Fig. 13. "The Annunciation: the Holy Theotokos spinning" (dated 1598), a detail from the mural painting in the altar space in the Church of Saint Petka in the village of Vukovo, situated in the surrounding area of the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria.

Fig. 14. "The Annunciation to the Spinning Virgin Mary", a detail from the Altar Gates of the Church of Saint Trifon in the Hilandar Monastery (painted by Djordje Mitrofanovic, dated 1621). After K. Weitzmann *et al.* (eds), *Ikoni ot Balkanite: Sinai, Gārtsiia, Balgariia i Iugoslaviia* (1966, Plate 211).

belief that the name contains the fate of the person to whom it is given. In Serbian the three divine spinning women are known as "orisnice", "sudjaje", "sudjenice" (Kulišić, Petrović and Pantelić 1998: 339, 427-8). In both Bulgaria and Serbia it is believed that they visit all new-born children no later than the third night after their birth and determine their life while spinning. Respectively, the spindle (Serb. and Bulg. "vreteno", Russ. "vereteno") and the distaff (Serb. "preslica", Bulg. "khurka", Russ. "pialka") are regarded as their constant attributes. The length of the thread spun next to the baby's head embodies his/her destiny ("pisano", i. e. "that what is written"); it is also believed that everything they say is "written on the child's forehead" (Marinov 1981: 254-5; 1984: 58) and those "letters" are actually the lines found on one's skull when one dies (Tsepenkov 1894: 119-20, text No 1 in Section No 7). In this, the act of divine spinning is regarded as interchangeable with the act of divine writing; that is, "textile" (i.e. "texture", "cloth", "yarn", "fabric", "fibre", etc.) means "text" (i.e. "wording") and vice versa.

It is my conviction that this kind of folklore evidence – if taken into consideration while analysing the text of Holy Writ – can be used as evidence further broadening biblical hermeneutic. In this particular case, the above quoted oral accounts clearly show what was the basis for the thesaurus of artistic devices, i. e. they spell out the symbolic language of the icon-painters portraying the spinning Virgin. Also, they indicate what was meant to be depicted by the icon-painter and how it was supposed to be represented, so that it might be seen and understood by all those who contemplate the mystery of the Divine Incarnation, regardless of whether they are illiterate or learned. In other words, it is again oral hermeneutics that can make it possible to interpret the coded patterns that the early Christian Fathers would have taken for granted but which the latter-day Bible-readers appear to be unable to recognise.[9]

As already mentioned above, Bulgarian masters have occasionally portrayed not only the Virgin Mary with a spindle and/or distaff as her attributes (Figs 11-14), but Eve too, while Adam is depicted digging or ploughing (Figs 15-18).

On the Occidental iconography of the primal patterns labouring, see Pelta (1995: 79-86). According to the "Painter's Manual" of Dionysius of Furna (which is representative of Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconographic devices) the earthly life of Adam and Eve is

to be depicted by the icon-painters in the following way (Hetherington, trans. 1996: 18): "Adam tilling the earth. Adam holding a double-pointed mattock, digs in a field, and Eve, seated opposite holds her distaff and spins."

Correspondingly, in the traditional folklore culture of Pax Slavia Christiana, the image of the ploughing woman (and/or the image of the spinning man) signify the "reverse Universe". Indicative in this respect are some Slavonic ritual practices performed during periods of crisis (for instance, drought and/or an outbreak of an epidemic disease). In traditional societies, the "time of disaster" portends the "collapse of the World". In order to be recreated, the Universe needs to be turned upside down. Accordingly, men and women have to exchange their social and gender roles too – while "turning round" the macrocosm, the microcosm inverts as well. These ritual strategies are believed to bring forth "restoration" of the harmony in the Universe. Thus, according to Slavonic and Balkan folklore tradition, while praying for rain during the time of drought, women have to perform ritual ploughing; i.e. they have to act like men. For further details, see S. M. Tolstaia (1986: 18-22; Tolstaya 2001); see also S. M. Tolstaia and N. I. Tolstoy (1978: 121-3; 1994: 246-7).

The iconographical scene of the ploughing Adam and the spinning Eve is amongst the most popular components of the compositions interpreting the first few chapters of the Genesis. These are usually painted on the plinth panels under the iconostasis, or wood-carved on them (see Iwanowa and Koewa 1979: 256-7). The "spindle" and/or "distaff" were generally considered classical emblems of both "Mother of all the living", Eve, after her expulsion from Paradise, and the Mother of God during the Annunciation, thus putting a particular emphasis on the interdependence of these two events. Yet by the act of portraying the "Mother of all the living" on the base of the iconostasis, under the main line where the images of the Virgin Mary and her Son Christ the Logos are placed, Slavonic icon-painters spell out, in terms of Church architectonics, the definite and essential position of Eve in the history of the Creation of the world. At the same time, the higher position of the icon of Theotokos which has to be placed above the depiction of the "First Eve", symbolises, through the language of the church interior, the Incarnation of the Word and, therefore, the new and eternal covenant between the Lord and the mankind. In this, the image of the spinning Eve signifies the Creation,

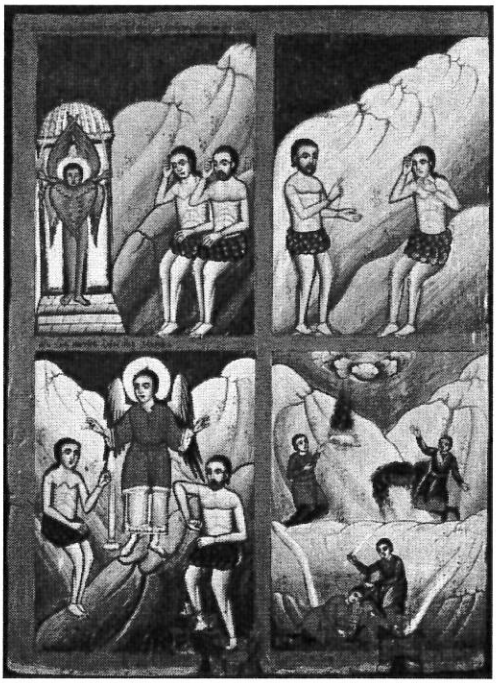

Fig. 15. "Hexameron", an eighteenth century four-icon ensemble. The fourth piece represents the themes of the "Expulsion of the First People from the Garden by the Fiery Angel" (Gn 3: 8-24), "Adam and Eve driven from the Garden of Eden and lamenting over the Paradise Lost", the "Expiation of the First People: Adam is to work the land whereas Eve is to spin" and last, "Cain and Abel". The icon is preserved in the Ilarion Makariopolsky Museum of Bulgarian National Revival in the city of Elena, Bulgaria. Photo: Courtesy of the *Ilarion Makariopolsky Museum of Bulgarian National Revival* in the city of Elena, Bulgaria.

Fig. 16. "The Spinning Eve", detail from the illuminated manuscript, written and designed by Priest Puncho from the village of Mokresh, Lom area, North-Western Bulgaria, in 1796; page 281a. The manuscript is preserved in the Sts Cyril and Methodius National Library of Bulgaria (Sofia) under signature No 693. Photo St. Badalanov, with the kind permission of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Bulgarian National Library.

Fig. 17. "An Angel Teaches Adam and Eve how to work ", a plinth panel of the iconostasis of the Church of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel in the village of Arbanasi, Veliko Turnovo area, Northern Bulgaria (19th c.).

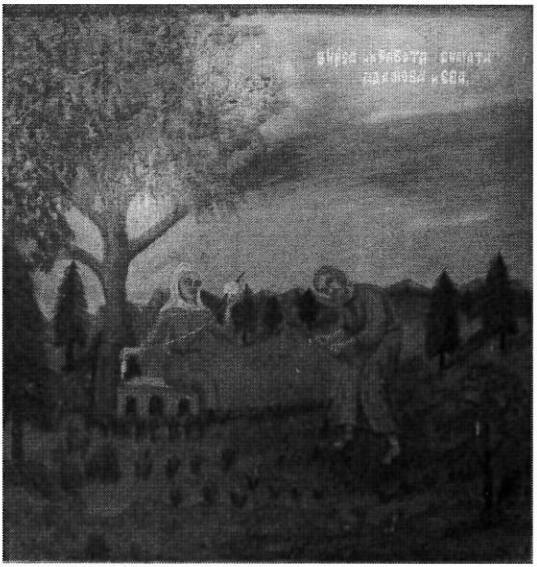

Fig. 18. "Adam and Eve After the Expulsion" ("Adam tilling the earth and Eve spinning"), an icon from the Church of St Nicholas in the village of Musomishte, Gotse Delchev area, South-Western Bulgaria, late 19th c. The inscription on the icon reads: "The bodies of Adam and Eve learn to work". Photo St. Badalanov.

while the image of the spinning (or reading) Virgin Mary on the Royal Doors stands as an emblem of Salvation.[10] Thus, not only the contrast but also the correlation, between the two matriarchs is viewed.

It is significant in this respect that the initial semantics of the lexemes "text" and "texture" in many European languages are similar – thus in Latin "texo" means "weave". Therefore the act of spinning (as an element of the process of making fabrics = texture, i.e. text) appears to be identified with the act of reading (i.e. coming into existence of the text, its verbal manifestation). Hence, it becomes quite obvious why the Virgin Mary conceives her Son the Logos by spinning or reading: in terms of mythopoeic imagery both actions are considered synonymous. Hereby the image of the "spinning" (or "reading") Mary as the Second Eve corresponds to the image of the First Eve who also has to be depicted with a spindle and a distaff. Thus the parallelism between the First and the Second Eve is further developed and spelled out through not only the poetic language of literary and oral tradition, but also the language of visual art, where the image of a "spinning woman" is regarded as an icon of motherhood. In this, the image of the "spinning Eve" functions as an implicit prototype of the image of the "spinning" or "reading Virgin Mary".

At the same time, according to some traditional Slavonic and Balkan aetiological legends, the Universe may be described either as a divine manuscript or scroll or book (Soloshchenko and Prokoshina 1991: 34-48) written by the Hand of God, or, alternatively, as a cloth woven on His heavenly loom. Furthermore, in folk riddles (dealing with ethnocosmology and ethnocosmogony) these two images, that of the writ and that of the cloth, may be interchangeable. The image of the Universe as a "scripture written with no human hand" is thus intertwined with that of the Universe as an "unwoven shirt" ("robe", "mantle", "shroud", "swathe", etc.) which covers the Earth and belongs to God.[11] On the other hand, the concept of the Universe as a "cloth" (i.e. "textile") and/or a "text" corresponds to some passages from the Book of Revelation as well. Thus the verbal description of "heavens receded as a scroll" (Rev. 6:14) resembles not only the "text = textile" parallel, but also the image of the World as a manuscript, that is, as the universal metatext of divine origin; and this concept defines not only the expressive devises of the Orthodox iconographical representation of the scenes illustrating the Book of

Revelation, but also the very content of the pictures. An excellent example of this is offered by the murals (dated 1476) which are painted in the narthex of the church in one of the Bulgarian monasteries near Sofia, dedicated to "Sveta Bogoroditsa Vitoshka" ("The Holy Theotokos of Vitosha"), in the village of Dragalevtsi. The fresco shows an angel holding the scroll on which the disappearing sun and scattered zodiac are drawn. In this, the heavens are depicted as a piece of cloth "shaken of a mighty wind" (Rev. 6:13). Similar iconographic representation of the motif of "heavens receded as a scroll" can be found on the mural paintings in the Monastery Church of Saint Demetrius near the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria, dated 1488 (Fig. 19).

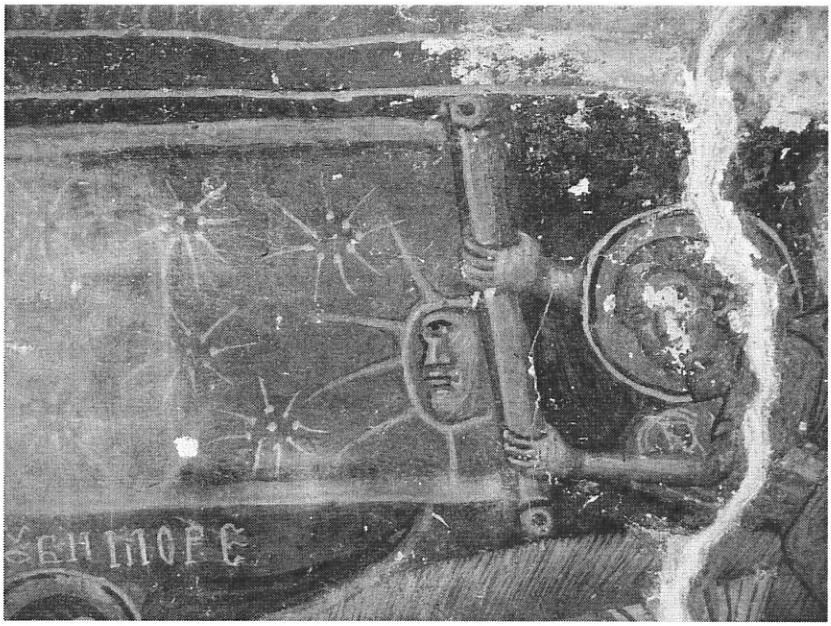

Fig. 19. "Heavens receded as a scroll", mural paintings in the Monastery Church of Saint Demetrius near the city of Boboshevo, Kyustendil district, Western Bulgaria, dated 1488.

STORYTELLING ICONS: WORDS DEPICTED

For our purposes it is sufficient to notice that the homology between icons and words, between painting and writing, between the visual and the verbal is well attested in Slavonic languages. As the linguistic data indicates, not only are the Holy Scriptures "written", but so also are the icons. For instance, the icon-painter (Russ. "zhivopisets" and/or "pisatel'", the latter meaning "writer" as well) – does not *paint* icons, he *writes* ("pishet") them (see Uspensky 1976: 9-10). Correspondingly, the word denoting "icon-painting" (in Bulg. "ikonopis", in Russ. "ikonopis'") is a compound, formed by joining two independent roots referring to the lexemes "an icon" ("ikona") and "to write" (Russ. "pisat'", Bulg. "pisha", etc.). The verbal cliché denoting the actual process of "superimposing a new picture, very often of identical content, on an old icon" (Russ. "zapisyvanie ikony") relates to the notion of icons as a "written text" likewise. On the other hand, interesting in this same connection are the materials presented by I. Sreznevskii in the second volume of his *Prolegomena to the Dictionary of the Old Russian Language according to the Data from the Written Monuments* (1895). Thus, as stated in some sources from the eleventh century, the noun "pisatel'" used to denote "an icon-painter" ("zhivopisets"), while the verb "pisati" stood for "scribere" ("pisat'" = "write") and "paint" (icons), "decorate", "portray", "depict", "draw" (Sreznevskii 1895: 936-7). As B. Uspensky points out,

> the semiotic, i.e., lingual, nature of the icon was clearly realized and even proclaimed as dogma by the Fathers of the Church. Particularly characteristic in this respect are the comparisons made, from extremely ancient times (in fact, almost from the epoch of the birth of the icon), between icon painting and language, and between the icon and the verbal text. Thus, St Nilus of Sinai wrote as early as the fifth century that icons are placed in churches 'so that illiterate who are unable to read the Holy Scriptures, may, by gazing at the pictures, become mindful' of the faith (Uspensky 1976: 9-10).

A similar idea was formulated by St Gregory the Great (d. 604) in his letter to Serenus, the Bishop of Marseilles (Gardner, ed., 1911: Bk 11, epistle 13), who was one of the most zealous adversaries of

pictures "painted in venerable places". While adhering "the pictorial representations which had been made for the edification of an unlearned people in order that, though ignorant of letters, they might by turning their eyes to the story itself learn what had been done", St Gregory points out that by impugning these images, the Bishop of Marseilles "acted inconsiderately on the impulse of his feelings" thus offending his flock and scattering it instead of gathering it together:

> For to adore a picture is one thing, but to learn through the story of a picture what is to be adored is another. For what writing presents to readers, this a picture presents to the unlearned who behold, since in it even the ignorant see what they ought to follow; in it the illiterate read. Hence, and chiefly to the nations [i.e to the unlearned], a picture is instead of reading. And this ought to have been attended to especially by thee who livest among the nations, lest, while inflamed inconsiderately by a right zeal, thou shouldest breed offence to savage minds. And, seeing that antiquity has not without reason admitted the histories of saints to be, if thou hadst seasoned zeal with discretion, thou mightest undoubtedly have obtained what thou wert aiming at, and not scattered the collected flock, but rather gathered together a scattered one; that so the deserved renown of a shepherd might have distinguished thee, instead of the blame of being a scatterer lying upon thee. But from having acted inconsiderately on the impulse of thy feelings thou art said to have so offended thy children that the greatest part of them have suspended themselves from thy communion. When, then, wilt thou bring wandering sheep to the Lord's fold, not being able to retain those thou hast? Henceforth we exhort thee that thou study even now to be careful, and restrain thyself from this presumption, and make haste, with fatherly sweetness, with all endeavour, with all earnestness, to recall to thyself the minds of those whom thou findest to be disjoined from thee.

The above statement suggests that St Gregory the Great did not envisage "reading" as an act based upon the knowledge of letters exclusively. His *Homo legens* is not necessarily "learned". One can read in icons too, argues the saint. Without being familiar with the alphabet, believers can read scriptures by gazing at the icons.

Moreover, in the above epistle icons are in fact envisaged by St Gregory as Holy Writ depicted; he thus maintains that if for "men of letters" the process of reading requires knowledge of letters as such, for the scattered flock of Sirenus (and many other like him) it is obviously not the case. In his epistle pictures "painted in venerable places" are likened to silent storytellers revealing the Scriptures to all those "ignorant of letters"; furthermore "the story of the picture" is regarded as a text laid open on the walls of the Church thus inviting the illiterate to read in it. Plainly, icons are letters enlightening unlettered who are thus able to learn "through the story of a picture". Accordingly, the icon is thought as a written, i. e., verbal text composed in an ideographic manner.

On the other hand, the analysis of traditional vocabularies related to the weaving techniques and decorative patterns of Carpathian and Balkan areas shows that some of the ornaments with geometrical forms are called simply "icons" ("ikonici"); thus "carpets with icons", "carpets-in-icons", "icon-like carpets" (*kilimi na ikonice*). This, in turn, suggest that the act of carpet-weaving is regarded as the *female* counterpart of icon-painting which is considered to be a male-only activity. That is, the carpet is an "icon painted/written by a woman".

Furthermore in Slavonic tradition it is attested that the patterns of the textile (i.e., the ornaments which are woven, embroidered, etc.) are also imagined as "written" (i.e. "subtly fashioned")[12] – and as such it is regarded as a "sacred text". Indicative in this respect are some formulaic expressions used to describe female beauty in traditional Bulgarian (and in other Slavonic and Balkan) Christmas carols, such as "pisani poli" ("embroidered" and/or "multicoloured skirts"), "pisani rākavi" ("embroidered" and/or "multicoloured sleeves"), "pisani pazvi" ("embroidered and/or "multicoloured necklines"), etc., which are likewise associated with the semantics of "written". Moreover, each ornament is regarded as a letter, and as such – just like it is with the letters of the Cyrillic (and also in the Glagolithic for that matter) alphabet – it has its own name (Koev 1948: 98-103); further, every dialect has its own vocabulary of textile related terminology in which each pattern has its own designation.[13] As Ljiljana Tojaga-Vasić points out, in some areas of Serbia, the "embroidery with silk" is simply called a "(cloth that has been) written (and/or made) with letters" ("pismarka") (1999: 212). Significantly, the word is a gender-inclusive one, and is feminine. Respectively, the act of producing an ornament – through the process

of weaving, sewing, embroidery or any kind of decoration with needlework – is considered to be equivalent to "writing". The same stereotype is to be found in some Russian and Belorussian dialects as well.[14]

At the same time, the Old Church Slavonic verb "p'sati" ("write") and its cognates (Bulg. "pisha", Serb. "pisati", Russ. "pisat'", Polish "pisać", Czech "psáti'", etc.) are related to the Slavonic words denoting "multicoloured", "pigmented" (Russ. "pëstryi", Ukr. "pistryi", Bulg. "pāstār", etc.) on the one hand (Fasmer III 1987: 251), and to the Greek "ποικίλος" ("multicoloured", "subtly fashioned", as applied to embroidery, metalwork and painting) and Latin "pingo" ("colour", "depict", "paint", "adorn") on the other. These forms also correspond with the Sanskrit "pēças" and Avestan "paēsa" denoting "form" ("shape", "configuration", "appearance", "pattern", "model"), "type" ("kind", "sort", "class", "category", "set"), "adornment" and "colour" (Fasmer III 1987: 251, 266), which suggest that there was a strong inter-relationship between the archaic notions they spelled out. In other words, the semantic shift of "written" within the context of Indo-European languages suggests that this concept encompasses a cluster of notions referring to various activities, some of which are connected not only with decoration, but also with the idea of creation itself.

It is evident that, according to the traditional vocabulary of Slavia Orthodoxa, the cloth-creating female activities, such as spinning and weaving, knitting and sewing, as well as embroidering – which are often defined by lexemes denoting "writing" and/or "icon-paining" – are considered to be the classical female hypostases of labour, signifying birth/rebirth mysteries. On the other hand, spinning/ weaving/producing cloth and reading/writing (i. e. "producing text") seem to go together in a universal system of symbols, standing jointly as synonyms for Divine Incarnation. Thus the Eastern Orthodox iconographical tradition of depiction of spinning or reading Mary as the central image of the Annunciation composition appears natural indeed. In this, the parallel between the semantics of "spinning" and the "divine Incarnation", is emphasised once again.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the beginning of this study we pointed out that in our analysis will consider vernacular counterparts of the theological doctrine of Mary as the New/Second Eve. And here I cannot resist the temptation to refer to John Henry Newman's essay on "Our Lady as the Second Eve" in which he suggested that the doctrine of the Fathers about the Blessed Virgin,

> was the received doctrine of their own respective times and places; for the writers after all are but witnesses of facts and beliefs, and as such they are treated by all parties in controversial discussion. Moreover, the coincidence of doctrine which they exhibit, and again, the antithetical completeness of it, show that they themselves did not originate it. The next question is, *Who did?* for from one definite organ or source, place or person, it must have come. Then we must enquire, what length of time it would take for such a doctrine to have extended, and to be received, in the second century over so wide an area" (Newman 1952: 17).

This essay is an attempt to broaden, as Henry Newman once suggested should be done, the quest for the origins of this patristic doctrine; in fact, it is a search for a new discourse. A further anthropological exploration into the popular traits of the veneration of the Mother of God may illustrate how certain dogmatic concepts were transmitted between the "high" ecclesiastical canons and the "low" system of popular faith. Thus the folklore hypostasis of the Spinning Virgin, which anthropologists encounter when engaged in present-day field-research, may be considered as a vestige of certain archaic ideas that both preceded the theological definition of Mary as a New Eve, and epitomised different stages in the evolution of the cult of the Mother of God as a divine figure.

Recent field-research amongst the rural communities in Eastern Europe, and in the Balkans in particular, further indicates that the folklore dimensions of her veneration still "remember" not only the sub-apostolic age, but also the pre-Christian epoch. Moreover, one may legitimately approach these folklore dimensions as an exemplification of certain concepts, whose ascent and metamorphosis from oral tradition into written canon, and/or descent from the

theological doctrine into mythopoeic imagery, paved the way towards the inclusion of the Virgin Mary in the *topic of theologica*.

It could be argued that the vernacular Marian exegesis, as affirmed in ethno-hermeneutics (and attested in popular religious beliefs of what was once the Byzantine commonwealth), might provide not only new material, but also new methodology for searching into this direction, opening further discussions related to the focal question, *Who did?,* as formulated by Henry Newman more than fifty years ago.

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Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 On the cultural and socio-political framework of popular religion in Medieval Slavdom, see Obolensky (1982: 43-54); on the problems of the adoption of the religious culture of Byzantine and Latin Christendom by the Slavs, see Floria (1996: 273-6), Ivanov and Turilov (1996: 276-98), and N. Tolstoy (1998: 30-42, 49-63); further on methodological problems arising in the process of studying the system of traditional religious beliefs among the Slavs, with special regard to "folk Christianity", see Antonić (1992: 227-33), Buchowski (1979: 93-111), Czarnowski (1956: 88-108), Ciupak (1973), Kasprzak (1999: 37-61), Kovacheva-Kostadinova (1994: 44-58), Kwaśniewicz (1983: 25-39), Tomicki (1981: 29-70). An extensive analysis of confessional stereotypes in traditional Slavonic culture is offered in a series of articles by N. Tolstoy (1996: 145-60), Vinogradova and N. Tolstoy (1996: 196-222), Toporov (1996: 160-74) and Levkievskaia (1996: 175-95).

2 On the origin and further distribution of the appellation "Theotokos" within the terminological and philosophical framework of patristic tradition and Byzantine thought, see Meyendorff (1983: 39, 123, 147-9, 155, 165), Constas (1995: 174-6; and particularly footnotes 18-21 and

24-25) and bibliography in O'Carroll (1983: 342). Further on the liturgical celebration of the Theotokos in the Byzantine heritage, see Samaha (1997: 338-42).

3 For a general survey of theological discussions related to the evolution of the idea of Mary as the "New" or "Second Eve" see O'Carroll (1983: 139-41); on Eve-Mary parallelism as a subject of patristic teaching see Graef (1963: 37-100); on the typology of speaking about Mary as "the Second Eve" as an extrapolation from the classic Pauline definition of Christ as the Second Adam, see Pelikan (1996: 14-15, 39-52), Warner (1976: 59-61, 245, 254); on the "Second Eve" theme in the cultural and religious life of Constantinople in late antiquity see Limberis (1994: 90-1, 102-7); on the concept of the "New Eve" in the patristic tradition in the Byzantine period, see Meyendorff (1983: 146-9); on the soteriological dimensions of the biblically based Mariological themes in the Byzantine liturgy, with special regard to "Eve-Mary" parallelism, see Samaha (1997: 341); on the parallelism Eve-Mary as a concern for both Christian theology and cultural anthropology see Benko (1993: 18, 168-9, 195, 229-62), Baring and Cashford (1991: 537-9), Badalanova (2003).

4 On the conventional image of the Virgin as "the textile-loom", see Constas (1995); the image was set out by Proclus of Constantinople (*sed.* 434-46). Further on the iconographic development of the Annunciation theme in Medieval art, with special emphasis on the image of the spinning/weaving Virgin, see McMurray Gibson (1990), as well as Pentcheva (2000: 44-5). On the iconography of the spinning woman in the European Middle Ages, see Biscoglio (1995: 163-76).

5 On vernacular religious attitudes and practices in the Byzantine commonwealth, with special regard to popular devotion to the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, and the veneration of her icons, consult Kondakov, Vol. 2 (1998: 19-391); see also Poselianin (1909) and Voronov and Sokolova (1993). As for the general theological framework of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Slavia Orthodoxa, the works of Berdiaev (1989: 33-5), Fedotov (1982: 219-40; 1991: 49-57, 65-78) and Bulgakov (1991: 253-76) are most significant. Of particular importance in this respect is also Uspensky's analysis of the interplay between the image of the Mother of God and the image of Mother Earth, with Russian tradition as a primary model (1996: 83-107). On the image of the Virgin Mary as a spinner and/or weaver, and its symbolic representations in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, with special emphasis on popular religious culture, see Bernshtam (1999: 224). Further on

Marian piety in Pax Slavia Christiana, see Nikita Tolstoy's article on "Bogoroditsa" ("The Theotokos") in the first volume of the *Ethnolinguistic Dictionary of Slavonic Antiquities* (1995: 217-19), as well as Tsvetana Romanska-Vranska's monograph on the representation of the image of the Virgin in Old Church Slavonic (Bulgarian) apocryphal tradition and folklore (1940). For empirical evidence regarding the cult of the Virgin (with Bulgarian traditional culture as a primary model), extensive data can be found in D. Marinov's works on popular faith (1981: 360-2, 368, 490-2, 618, 686; 1984: 493-5). The specific folklore dimensions of the East Orthodox paradigm of the veneration of the Theotokos, as registered in traditional Serbian culture, are examined in Petar Petrović's entry "Bogoroditsa" in his (together with S. Kulišić and N. Pantelić) *Serbian Mythological Dictionary* (1998: 42-3). An extended analysis of a number of customs and beliefs related to the veneration of the Mother of God among the Slavs – with special regard to the theme of her encounters with various "blessed" and/or "cursed" animals – can be found in Gura's monograph (1997) on animal symbolism in traditional Slavonic culture.

After the collapse of communism, a series of articles on the cult of the Mother of God (with special regard to the folklore aspects of her veneration) appeared in Ukraine; among them are the articles by Katrii (1997: 54-7), Styshova (1997: 60-6), Radzykevych (1997: 67), Ivankiv (1998: 86-92), Muzychka (1998: 92-5), Selians'ka-Vovk (1998: 95-7) and Luzhnyts'kyi (1989: 99-104).

As far as Slavia Catholica is concerned, there exists a deep-rooted tradition of studying popular Marian piety. An extensive bibliography on the subject is provided by Sokolewicz in her article "The Madonna in Polish folk culture of the 19th and 20th centuries: selected problems of sources and arising questions" (1988: 289-303). On the popular veneration of the Mother of God and the significance of her cult in the system of traditional religious beliefs which frame the substructure of Polish "folk Catholicism" as a cultural phenomenon, a significant academic contribution is made by Grąbczewski (1984: 157-67) and N. Kasprzak (1999: 52-5). A general analysis of "Marian Christophany" ("Chrystofania Marii") as a religious phenomenon, with special regard to the Middle ages, is offered in the study of Dobrzeniecki (1965: 7-120); of particular importance in this respect is also the collection of articles on the image of the Virgin in the Catholic tradition (ed. Pzybylski) "Gratia Plena: Theological Studies on the Theotokos" (1965), as well as the survey of publications on Polish Mariology, as produced at the beginning of the twentieth century by V. Brukhnal'skii (1904).

An interesting approach to the verbal and ritual "thesaurus" of traditional folklore imagery involved in the veneration of the Mother of God in popular – as opposed to official – Catholicism (with Italy as a primary model) can be found in Carroll (1992).

6 In my analysis I refer to the 1998 Russian reprint (by the *Palomnik* Publishing House, Moscow) of the first two volumes of Kondakov's monograph. For his observations on the Annunciation iconography, see Kondakov (1998, vol. 1: 25-8, 58, 110-11, 180-1, 191-5, 197-201, 206-9, 212-8, 340 and vol. 2: 75, 370-1, 374, 420, 434). For discussions on medieval representations of the Annunciation theme, with special emphasis on the image of the spinning Virgin, see Vassilaki, ed. (2000: 10-11). Of particular interest in this respect are the contributions to this volume by Brigitte Pitarakis (269) and Marie-Helene Rutschowscaya (270-1), who also provide extensive bibliography on the subject. On conventions for representing the Annunciation theme in medieval Occidental stone carving, see Young (1990: 42-4).

7 For general discussion and references regarding the apocryphal (dated to the mid-second century) *Protevangelium of James* as a work reflecting popular trends see Graef (1963), O'Carroll (1983: 39-40), Benko (1993: 18, 38, 196-7), Limberis (1994), Pelican (1996: 46-8), Warner (1976: 244-5), Khristova (1992: 21-6); see also the English translation with commentaries and bibliography in Schneemelcher, ed. (1991: 1.421-37). As far as Slavia Orthodoxa is concerned, the earliest copy of the translation of the text of the *Protevangelium of James* appeared, according to some scholars, in Medieval Bulgaria, in the ninth-tenth centuries. See further, Khristova's monograph *The Protevangelium of James in Old Bulgarian Literature* (1992).

8 See in this connection the legend entitled "Tzar Aleksandr" in the *Bulgarian Folk Songs* collection published by the Miladinov brothers in Zagreb (Miladinovtsi 1861: 526); I recorded versions of this legends in 1975 and 1976 in the regions of Thrace and Sakar Mountain, South-Eastern Bulgaria.

9 The way in which I approach the iconography of the Annunciation in my study leans, to a certain extent, towards the particular type of scholarship outlined by Edmund Leach in his introduction to *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Leach and Aycock 1983), a collection of essays whose principal task is to make explicit coded patterns of the sort that the early Christian Fathers took for granted but which many latter-day Bible-readers seem to be unable to recognise (1983: 3).

10 As Paskaleva points out, "the Annunciation scene was commonly featured on the so-called 'Royal Gates' of the iconostasis of Eastern Orthodox temples" (Paskaleva 1987; see her commentaries related to Plate 23); see also Figs 12 and 14.

11 Thus in some Christmas carols the Universe is metaphorically described as a "blue cloth", or a "blue robe" which God puts on before setting off on a journey in which he encounters the sinners suffering in the beyond for their wrongdoings committed on earth. See for instance the Christmas carol sung among the Bulgarian Diaspora in the Berdiansk region (former Tavricheskaia Guberniia of the Russian Empire), now in Ukraine (Crimea), which was published in 1910 by one of the local teachers by the name of Atanas Vārbanski. The collection was reprinted in 2002 in Bulgaria (and our reference follows this edition). The song in question is published as text No 32, on pp. 38-9.

12 See in this connection Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian folklore data presented by Bernshtam (1999: 192, 200-01, 238-9).

13 Interesting material offers Bratislava Idvoren-Stefanović's work on folklore terminology related to text-producing activities (1999: 221-6), Jadranka Djordjević's work on the traditional Serbian folk embroidery on the wedding towels in the villages of Vransko Pomoravlje (1999: 203-7), as well as Ljiljana Tojaga-Vasić's work on embroidery on the folk costumes of the area of Svrlig (1999: 209-14).

14 See in this respect the materials published in the fourth volume of *The Dictionary of the Turov Area Dialects* (Kryvitski, Tsykhun, Iashkin, Mikhailaū 1985: 52).

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