



INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE



75 YEAR JUBILEE OF
THE INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY
AND
ARCHAEOLOGY

Skopje 2024



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Edited by:
Antonio Jakimovski
Elizabeta Dimitrova

Skopje 2024

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For the Publisher:

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Editors:

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FOREWORD

75 YEAR JUBILEE OF THE INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

In 2022 we celebrated the 75th jubilee of the research and educational activity of the *Institute of art history and archaeology*, which over the years has undergone through several different configurations (department, educational and research unit, institute) and represents one of the earliest constitutive components of the Faculty of Philosophy, established in 1920. In the beginning constituted as a research unit (for archaeology and ancient art), yet from 1947 established as an educational institute at the Faculty of Philosophy with its own curricula, the present-day Institute of art history and archaeology is dedicated to the education of young professionals from the fields of art history and archaeology (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral level), creating: researchers, custodians, terrain investigators, consultants for protection of cultural heritage, fine arts critics, essayists, managers of cultural institutions, project managers, organizers of archaeological camps, etc.

In that context and in honour of the 75th jubilee, we organized an international conference entitled “Archaeology, artistic creation and legacy – investigation and protection” in the period October, 12th – 14th, 2022, in the town of Dojran (Hotel La Terrazza). The aim of the Conference was the presentation of the latest research results in the fields of archaeology, art history and protection of cultural heritage, as well as exchange of ideas and experiences in the mentioned academic domains among domestic and foreign scholarly authorities in order to construct sustainable awareness of the significance, role and impact of the cultural legacy in contemporary life.

Respectfully Yours,

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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

***75 YEAR IUBILEE OF THE INSTITUTE OF
ART HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY***

CONTENTS

Martina BLEČIĆ KAVUR	
ARCHAEOLOGY AND ICONOGRAPHY'S OF THE SOCIAL ELITE ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE TREBENISHTA GRAVE 8	13
Goce NAUMOV	
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PREHISTORY: A REVIEW OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN MACEDONIAN ARCHAEOLOGY	41
Dragi MITREVSKI	
ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON THE GREAT AEGEAN MIGRATIONS	79
Nikola STEFANOVSKI	
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF WARRIORHOOD IN THE IRON AGE AND ARCHAIC PERIOD IN MACEDONIA: A CASE STUDY OF LOWER VARDAR	97
Boško ANGELOVSKI	
Trajče NACEV	
IDENTIFICATION OF PAEONIAN WEAPONS FROM VI-V CENTURY B.C. FROM R. OF MACEDONIA	117
Igor EFTIMOVSKI	
THE SYMMETRICAL PAIR OF LIONS IN THE SYMBOLIC REPERTOIRE OF ANCIENT MACEDONIA	127
Sašo KORUNOVSKI	
ST. SOPHIA'S EXONARTHEX AND THE PORTICO FAÇADES FROM THE PALAILOGAN ERA	165
Snežana FILIPOVA	
SLAVIC COUNTRIES AND THE ROMANESQUE ART	179
Jehona SPAHIU JANCHEVSKA	
THERE WAS WAR IN HEAVEN, AND THE BEAST WAS CAST OUT: APOCALYPTIC SCENES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT	191

<p> Elizabetha DIMITROVA HOMINES IMMORTALES: FOUR PORTRAITS OF HISTORIC GIANTS </p>	211
<p> Marija LJUŠTINA IN SEARCH OF PRINCELY SEATS: SOUTHWESTERN SERBIA IN THE FIRST IRON AGE </p>	229
<p> Nikos ČAUSIDIS THE IRON AGE CROSS-SHAPED STRAP DIVIDERS AS PARADIGMS OF THE WHEEL MOTIF ON EDONIAN AND ICHNAEAN COINS (6TH - 5TH CENTURIES BCE) </p>	251
<p> Tosho SPIRIDONOV THE SACRED MOUNTAIN </p>	295
<p> Marjan JOVANOV ANCIENT MONUMENTAL TOMBS FROM MACEDONIA </p>	313
<p> Antonio JAKIMOVSKI Ivan MALEZANOV Kiril DENKOVSKI DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PROMOTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE - MACEDONIAN TYPE TOMBS </p>	323
<p> Viktor LILČIĆ ADAMS THE COINS OF THE ROMAN QAUESTORS GAIUS TAMIUS PUBLIUS AND LUCIUS FULCINIUS IN MACEDONIA </p>	339
<p> Boris KAVUR LOOKING DOWN ON CREATION: THE MONKEY BETWEEN GOD AND EVE </p>	365
<p> Angelina POPOVSKA MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH OF TWO DOUBLE-LAYERED ICONS </p>	379
<p> Tatjana FILIPOVSKA WAR OF AGGRESSION IN THE EUROPEAN VISUAL ARTS UNTIL THE 20TH CENTURY </p>	405

Ana FRANGOVSKA ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC DISCOURSES IN CONTEMPORARY ART	429
Miguel GALLÉS MAGRI ICONS ON ICONS: META-ICONS	441
Viktor LILČIĆ ADAMS Oliver PROKOPOVSKI THE ANCIENT ROAD TRANUPARA (KONJUH) - PAUTALIA (KYUSTENDIL)	461
Zana HOXHA VARIETY OF CHURCH TYPOLOGIES IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD IN KOSOVO	479
Vane P. SEKULOV THE TOMB AND THE ROOSTER	493
Irena Teodora VESEVSKA SIX TETARTERA OF ALEXIOS I KOMNENOS FROM BRNJARCI, SKOPJE	525
Toni FILIPOSKI Mihailo POPOVIĆ THE EARLY BYZANTINE URBAN APPEARANCE OF LYCHNID IN THE 5 TH AND 6 TH CENTURIES	535
Pasko KUZMAN Mitja GUŠTIN THE STONE SYMPHONY OF THE MAGICAL HILL A PANORAMA OF THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION WORKS OF THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF OHRID	545
Katarina DMITROVIĆ NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PRESENTATION OF TUMULI FROM ATENICA: RECONSTRUCTIONS OF 3D MODELS	599
Kiril DENKOVSKI ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM COLLECTION AT THE FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY IN SKOPJE	611

Mitja GUŠTIN	
OF ALL OUR TOWNS IN THE SOUTH, OHRID IS THE RICHEST IN MONUMENTS	621
Miša RAKOCIJA	
LATE ANTIQUE AND PALEOBYZANTINE FORUM STATUES FROM SOUTHERN AND EASTERN SERBIA REGIONS	639
Dalibor JOVANOVSKI	
Verica ŠARAC	
ARCHAEOLOGY AND POLITICS: ARTHUR EVANS AND THE BALKAN AFFAIRS	661
Ile VELKOV	
TOPONYMS AND ARCHAEOLOGY (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TOPONYMS FROM THE BREGALNICA REGION)	677
Angela IKONOMOSKA	
EDUCATION OF STUDENTS FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE CARE - STUDYING THE PAST IS THE WAY TO THE FUTURE	689

Note: the arrangement of the papers in the Book of proceedings from the conference is according to the schedule of the presentations in the parallel sessions of the event.

Boris KAVUR

LOOKING DOWN ON CREATION THE MONKEY BETWEEN GOD AND EVE

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University of Primorska
Faculty of Humanities, Koper, Slovenia
boris.kavur@upr.si

Abstract: *Widely present in visual arts, we can trace the development and changes in monkeys' form, symbolism, and narrative from Antiquity to modern times. Nevertheless, the most profound transfiguration of their interpretation occurred at the end of Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance period. We will discuss the fresco of the Creation of man in the church of Holly Trinity in Hrastovlje in Slovenia, and the representation of a monkey sitting between God and Eve.*

In order to grasp the significance of monkeys during the Middle Ages, it is necessary to examine their symbolic representation as portrayed in medieval texts and art. Monkeys were often depicted as possessing "human" traits, which was believed to result from their separation from divine grace or punishment, leading to their classification as sub-human. This belief can be traced back to ancient traditions.

During the Middle Ages, humans and animals were often compared due to their similar and differing characteristics. However, the concept of monkeys changed from the fall of the Roman Empire to the late Middle Ages, this is the period of wide spread Gothic art. Monkeys were then considered a symbol of the Devil. This belief was based on patristic tradition, which viewed the desire to imitate God as the main characteristic of the Devil. The Devil was depicted as "Simia Dei", and this idea was extended to monkeys. They were viewed as creatures that imitated humans, but their image was also transformed into that of a human in a degenerated state.

Key words: monkey, symbolism, arts, material culture, Renaissance

Introduction

In Western art history apes and monkeys are not commonly depicted, but they hold significant iconographic meaning when they are. Several historical and iconographic studies have analyzed the uses of apes in visual narratives. William Coffman McDermott's pioneering work (McDermott 1935; 1936; 1938) was later surpassed by Horst Waldemar Janson's monumental overview (Janson

1952). Janson's monograph remains the leading authority on ape lore even after more than 70 years since its original publication. It was the first study to focus on an animal's art and intellectual history in Medieval and Renaissance cultures.

Several minor studies, including those by Ptolemy Tompkins (Tompkins 1994), Solly Zuckerman (Zuckerman 1998), and others (Midgley 2015), have attempted to supplement the *magnum opus* decades after its publication. In recent years Cybele Greenlaw (Greenlaw 2011) presented a significant discussion on the representation of monkeys in ancient Mediterranean cultures. Despite several works attempting to introduce modern rhetoric into the traditionalist debate and a comprehensive presentation of the portrayal of simians in art, a modern evaluation of their cultural importance has not been produced. Researchers tend to interpret them as expressions of Renaissance naturalist and secular genres in art, assuming their appearance is an element of the rejection of medieval symbolism (Cohen 2014). Although they were heralds of a new intellectual climate, their importance in the creation of visual moralistic allegory in the selection of motives cannot be denied, acknowledging and defining their debt to literary and visual traditions ranging from Antiquity to the Middle Ages (Pyle 1996).

Looking down...

The Church of Holy Trinity in Hrastovlje, Slovenia, built around 1490, is known for its medieval paintings, representing the largest pictorial program preserved in Slovenia. It was probably erected short before 1490 when it was consecrated, and it consists of a barrel-vaulted nave and two aisles (Fig. 1). The architecture of the building adheres to the fundamental principles of Romanesque planning but also incorporates some unique Istrian features. It has been discovered that elements of Venetian Renaissance design were also present in the interior decoration, suggesting that it was painted shortly after the construction of the building (Ivančević 1989). The frescoes in the building are attributed to the painter John of Kastav and his pupils and depict a complete narrative and decorative complex with an extensive medieval iconographic program (Vignjević 2013). The workshop style is based on the general conventions of the wider Litoral-Carstic-Istrian painting of the second half of the 15th century. Upon closer inspection, it can be concluded that the frescoes were created by at least two major painters and their apprentices (Höfler 1997, 97).

Besides the usual cycles, such as Procession and Adoration of the Magi and Passion of Christ, several interesting themes are depicted, among which the most discussed was the Dance of Death (Vignjević 2015). For our discussion, the depiction of Genesis on the nave's vault is of significant interest (Höfler 1997, 28). A cycle based on the engravings of the Master with the Banderoles (Vignjević 2013) consists of two times six scenes with an additional one on the western wall (God resting on the 7th day) where each field is dedicated to a working day

in the Creation of the world (Zadnikar 1988, 111, Fig. 39). Starting from the eastern side, each scene features God depicted in a very similar posture - with a beard and a crown, dressed in a long violet robe with a golden border, and covered with a red and green cloak. He is positioned on the left side of the image, holding an open book. His right hand is raised, suggesting that he is speaking. The sixth scene depicts the Creation of man, this is the Creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Fig. 2-3).

On the depiction, Adam is seen lying on the jagged edge of the land with his legs crossed in a manneristic pose. His left hand supports his sleeping head (Fig. 3). Eve rises from Adam's open chest, embodying all her feminine qualities. God is depicted in his usual static position and is shown putting away a book while assisting Eve with his left hand (Zadnikar 1988, 31). Despite severe damage and fading on the upper right side, the fresco still reveals a landscape of Paradise teeming with various beasts. And not only creatures from the air and water as in the fifth fresco, but also larger animals, among which stand out the brown lion and ox and grey donkey and monkey located in the triangle between the three main protagonists. The lion is facing towards God, while the ox is looking at Adam. The donkey, partially obscured by the ox, raises its head towards Eve. On the donkey's head is a monkey sitting with bent legs and reaching out his hands in front of him. Although he is facing God, he is not looking directly at him (Fig. 4). The figure is depicted in the same position as the monkey holding a cup on the Renaissance bowl discovered in Sv Ivan (Kavur, Mileusnić 2023), with the right hand positioned slightly higher than the left.

The animal...

In Antiquity, apes and monkeys were often used as decorative elements in jewelry and on painted pottery. Some ceramic vessels were also made in their likeness. However, it was not their artistic representation that greatly influenced later iconography, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean. Rather, the literary traditions from ancient Greece covered a range of topics, from mythology and philosophy to fables, natural sciences, and geographies (Greenlaw 2011).

Apes have a long history in literature, with early mentions as pets in fragments of Greek comedigraphy and multiple references in Aristophanes' plays. All of these are abusive, alluding to a person's mischievous character or/and ugliness, for they were considered ugly, vicious animals, and evil omens. This may contradict the practice of keeping them as pets, but the main reason for the latter is attributed to the ape's intelligence and ability to learn and perform tricks (Keller 1909). Still, there are no funny examples of these traits in comedy (Lilja 1980) since the comedigraphers preferred to describe the ape's negative characteristics to present the idea about imitation as a kind of inauthenticity, a term of abuse. Aesop's fables contributed to the negative perception of monkeys, further emphasizing their unfavorable image. A tradition is later rewritten in natural history by Pliny the Elder, who included numerous moral judgments about apes deriving from older fables and transcended these narratives

into the medieval period and developed into one of the most widely reproduced motives. The negative perception was also supported by the works of philosophers who used them as a comparative tool to describe the human condition. Heraclitus, quoted in Plato's *Hippias Maior*, believed that the most beautiful monkey is ugly compared to humans and that the most intelligent man compared to God is a monkey (Janson 1952, 14-15).

Later, in Roman comedigraphy, the monkeys symbolized the capacity to create illusions – they were associated with plots perpetrated when comic characters used deceptive imitations and the fact that they, more than any other animals, resembled humans became a pseudo-etymological pun between *simia* and *similis* (Connors 2004). While Greek thought humans were dehumanized into monkeys, in the Roman traditions, the opposite happened – for the first time in art, they would wear cloaks and perform human activities, especially those of lesser social appreciation, such as lending and exchanging money (Voegtli 2021).

It is evident that monkeys were studied in the scientific field, not just used as a metaphor, as far back as Aristotle and Galen, the latter even dissected them (Meyer 2016; Wuketits 2005). However, it should be noted that they have exaggerated the anatomical similarities between monkeys and humans (Walker Vadillo 2013). During the end of Antiquity, beings that were once considered intermediaries between humans and animals lost their position due to only partially recognizing human characteristics. As the Middle Ages began, they were transformed into an illustration of the opposite pole of humanity due to their simultaneous deviation from and similarity to human characteristics.

When in his writings Isidore of Seville wrote of "... *those who had their tails cut off*...", he was referring to individuals who lack perseverance in doing good deeds and, at the same time to the part in Leviticus where God declares (22:23) that the tail is a necessary part of animals. Those without a tail are not for sacrifice. Focusing on their Latin denomination, he discussed the possibilities of deriving the word *simiae* from Greek and referring to their flat noses or Latin because they perceive a lot of "similitude" with the human mind. Referring to the older tradition of Pliny the Elder, he mentioned their fable relations to the moon (MacKinney 1963, 120-122) and discussed the notion of Aesop repeating the discussions on their love for their offspring. His rhetoric greatly influenced the medieval depictions of monkeys (Grant 1999, 134).

During the Early Medieval period, the patrists commonly used the term "monkey" to symbolically refer to anyone who opposed Christianity (Barney, Lewis, Beach, Berghof 2006, 253). This usage carried a negative connotation and eventually led to the term being associated with the Devil (Grant 1999, 52, 71) – a figure known for his ugliness and the lack of a tail (Heath 2016, 33-54). Additionally, their viewpoint was impacted by the *Physiologus*, which served as the primary compendium of Christian zoology. Originally older, this writing and its variants, believed to be from the second century AD, utilized the behaviors of various animals to convey moral or theological lessons (Kay 2015) it is widely

regarded as the precursor to all subsequent moralized bestiaries (Mermier 2004, 17-55; Dines 2007; McCulloch 1962, 21-44).

Bestiaries contained descriptions of both real and imaginary animals. These creatures were often given Christological meanings, and their most important characteristic was their liveliness. Their visual representations accompanying the texts fulfilled the mnemonic purpose and supplemented the moral and spiritual education (Rowland 1989). In the Medieval perception, some animals proved challenging to distinguish from humans. Due to their similarities with people, apes threw a wrench into the idea of humans' superiority over beasts. Just by observing them, it was clear that they are most similar to humans and with the revival of Classical knowledge, the Bestiaries based on the *Physiologus* became very popular in France and England during the 12th century, and with them, the image of the mother ape with her twins was pursued by the hunter. It is especially important to understand depictions since the story replaced the ape-devil imagery. The story's interpretation symbolically linked the mother ape to a sinner who valued material wealth over spiritual wealth. This was represented by the mother ape holding her beloved young in front of her while neglecting the young one trying to hold onto her neck (Crane 1890, 9). In this context, the hunters may symbolize the Devil, who torments the sinner and leads them to hell. Alternatively, they may also represent death, which aligns with the memento mori concept prevalent in the Late Middle Ages.

The interpretations of animals in sermons and classical fables that were once clear have become increasingly ambiguous. The images could be adapted for various cultural situations by changing the underlying morals, and the metaphors conveyed were more significant than the accompanying animal depictions. Authors were less interested in describing and presenting the animal than using it to illustrate moral and ethical choices (Salisbury 1994, 106-112). Since iconography, representing the religious dogmas and social rules was rigidly structured and hierarchical, the potential for resisting these dogmas, ridiculing them, and overturning and inverting them was limitless (Camille 1992). This was reflected in the choice of animals depicted in the marginalia, and the monkeys played a major role among them (Salisbury 1994). Further, in numerous illuminated manuscripts, the monkeys were depicted as a dark force (Janson 1952, 15-17). They belonged to that set of mythological creatures that were taken over into the artistic world of Romanesque sculpture and, some with obscene gestures, stared at the observers from the capitals and vestibules. The whole spectrum of images emanating from the Old Testament was strongly condemned by St. Bernard, who wondered, "*What are dirty monkeys doing here, but wild lions, monstrous centaurs, half-humans and striped tigers ...?*" (Clanchy 1999, 52) and according to his belief, discouraged monks from praying (Pastoureau 2004). During that time, many religious authorities held the belief that depictions that provoke laughter rather than piety were unnecessary and inappropriate (Baxandall 1988, 67).

Prior to the widespread use of Bestiaries, monkeys were commonly viewed in medieval rhetoric as representations of the Devil (Downey 2020). The claim is rooted in the patristic tradition, which viewed the Devil's desire to imitate God as a defining characteristic, often depicted as "Simia Dei". Monkeys are known for imitating human behavior, but their portrayal can also symbolize the decline of human qualities. A further significant change in the concept of monkeys occurred in the middle of the 12th century when the monkeys appeared as sinners - as a victim and not as the Devil. They became an ignoble parody of humans, a symbol of the inner chaos of the medieval soul, the propensity for vice and the unbridled urges of the time (Lurati 2017). Continuing the anatomical tradition of Antiquity and considering the similarities of anatomy, Albert the Great in *De Animalibus* placed monkeys among humans and animals. In contrast, St. Augustine believed that the existence of a "ratia" required an average human body. He believed that physical similarities equated to spiritual similarities, but he made an exception for humans and included pygmies and monkeys with other animals in the category he called "similitudines hominis." He also indirectly acknowledged the similarity of internal organs in humans and "similitudines homo" - where he is a more accurate anatomical comparison (Janson 1952, 19-31).

At the same time, this was a period of a significant increase in wealth and the rise of the civil and ecclesiastical aristocracy. Among other things, possessing exotic animals became a primary way for them to show off their status - and monkeys played a significant role in this process (Urbani, Youlatos 2023; Shemesh 2018). Skeletal remains of monkeys were discovered by archaeologists in various locations, such as Southampton and London in England, Carrickfergus in Ireland, and Ryurik Gorodische in Russia, which dates back to the end of the 12th century (Nosov et al 2007; Grigson 2016). During the early 12th century, there was an increase in the number of monkey depictions in art, and the quality of their portrayal became more realistic. We must be aware that monkeys have been present in Europe for quite some time - they were located in rare menageries, which in the Middle Ages were a sign of power and prestige (Walker-Meikle 2012, 13-16). Exotic animals have been highly valued as gifts in the diplomatic exchanges between social elites in every period (Nickel 1991). As early as the 13th century, with the rise of wealth, individual cities began to collect them, focusing on wild beasts considered symbols of power and excellence (Cockram 2017). Thus, at the end of the Middle Ages, exotic animals from the north and south began appearing in menageries. Their images were transferred into the fine arts, especially heraldry (Pastoureau 2004). On society's other end, jugglers often had monkeys as their companions, and they entertained the general public with their tricks (Holbrook 1902, 84).

The humanistic heritage of ancient texts on one side and the day-to-day observation of animals created a sometimes-contradictory perception of these animals. Artistic depictions, nonetheless, tended to adhere more closely to the

moral teachings found in literature (Lewis 1964; Lo 2009). However, the Renaissance marked the end of this era. With education and economic advancements, animals were no longer solely used for labour but became pets and scientific research subjects (Arbel 2017). Albrecht Dürer provided a detailed account of the cost of the monkey he purchased and the numerous issues the animal caused within his household (Christian 2017). With time, monkeys became less of a symbol for the wealthy and more of a source of amusement. Their portrayals now often show them participating in human-like behaviors (Ross 2020). This shift in philosophical beliefs regarding animals resulted in a transformation of their portrayal. They were no longer viewed as inferior to humans or as metaphors for our “animalistic” impulses and urges. Instead, they were recognized as intelligent creatures, distinct from humanity. This newfound independence allowed them to be represented as unique individuals to become images presenting differences for mockery. They became a symbol that enabled mocking the irrationality or stupidity of those they were meant to represent. Their depictions became anthropomorphic since they projected a human story onto a group of animals (Sax 2017). In art, numerous genres of “singerie” were created (Schepers 2012; 2019).

The Early Enlightenment was Europe's most significant period of gathering of miracles and wonders. Westerners first encountered otherwise familiar animals, but their existence was more disguised in medieval myths when the first living representatives of great apes resembling humans began to arrive, becoming incorporated into the European cultural environment. They were described from a human point of view and acknowledged at least something human (Eiseley 1979, 188-191) and their allegorical sense was replaced by the scientific narrative.

Conclusion

During the development of the Renaissance culture in Istrian cities, many humanists viewed the study of classics and medieval heritage as more than a mechanical approach to texts and art. They believed it had a transformative effect and potential for impact (Gouwens 1998). The frescoes in Hrastovlje showcase the significance of print culture in spreading iconographic and compositional innovations from artistic centers during the early modern period. These frescoes also demonstrate the influence of humanism, as seen in their chosen motifs. Conversely, the monkey image shows that even small details in imagery were influenced by the prevalent use and circulation of specific fashionable items, such as Renaissance cups and bowls adorned with various depictions, including animals. However, at the same time, we are fully aware that such graphic bases were locally rearranged and enriched with local iconographic traditions and stylistic idioms. Complex motives known from painting and book illustrations, laden with meaning, were deconstructed and reduced to individual images. In the fresco of Creation of Man, although borrowed from Re-

naissance material culture and depicted in this way, the monkey bore the heritage of medieval interpretations (Fig. 3-4). There were many reasons why this motive was chosen. Although it is seen as a representation of human degeneration in humanistic topos, it still holds a medieval meaning. It is placed in the image, hovering over the main characters, as a dark premonition that hints at the beginning of a process where God's intervention with humanity will have catastrophic consequences.

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Fig. 1. The three-nave Church of the Holy Trinity in Hrastovlje, built on a rocky hill in the centre of the fortress on the eastern side of the village (Photo: Jaka Ivančič).



Fig. 2. Southeastern side of the nave's vault with the images of Genesis and the Creation of Man at the end of the vault (Photo: Boris Kavur).

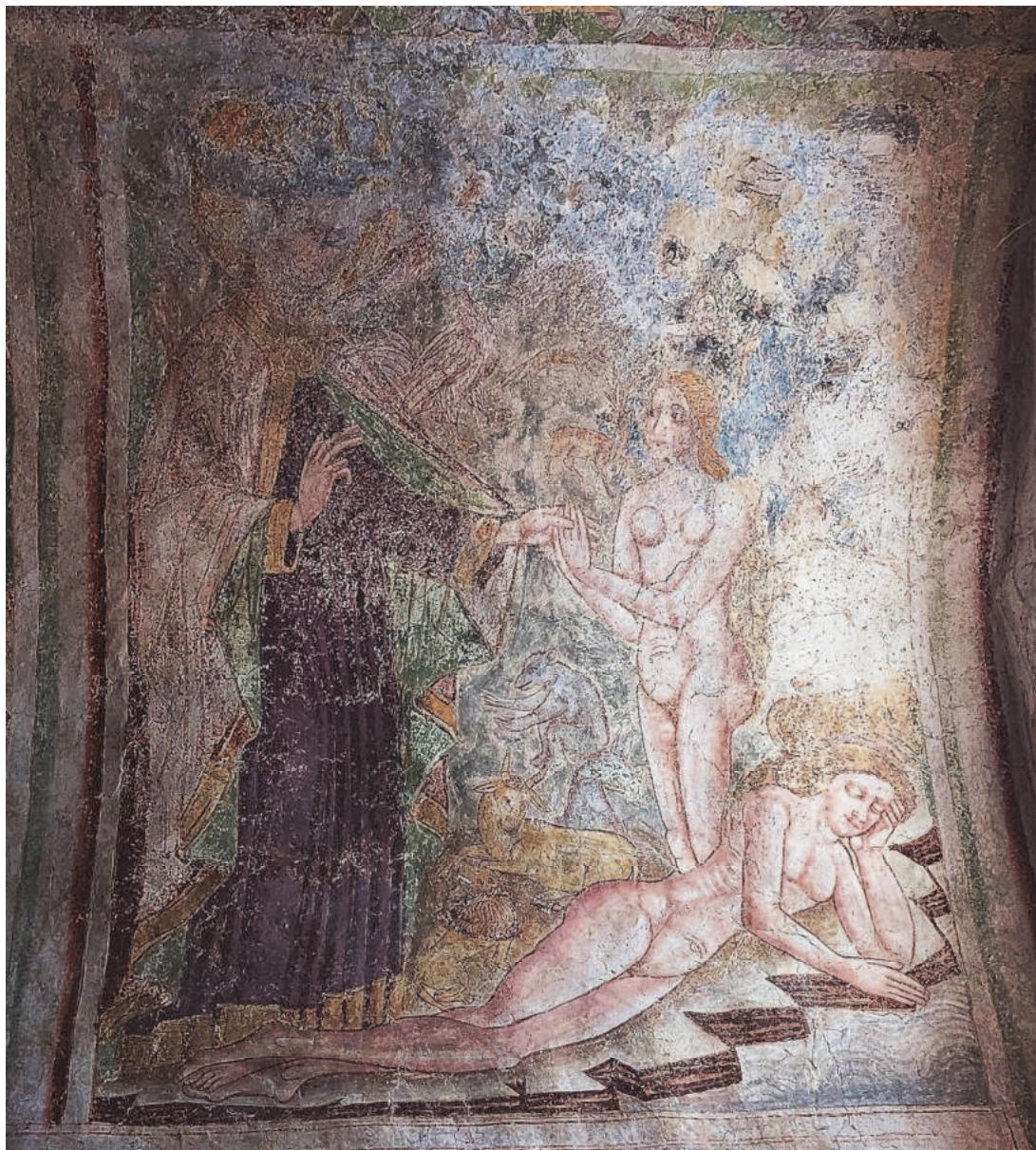


Fig. 3. A fresco depicting the Creation of Man (Photo: Boris Kavur).



Fig. 4. A monkey between God and Eve – detail of the fresco Creation of Man (Photo: Boris Kavur).