



SEÇÃO: PHILOSOPHY & INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The apophatic visuality: aesthetic experience of icons

A visualidade apofática: experiência estética de ícones

La visualidad apofática: experiencia estética de los iconos

Una Popović¹

0000-0002-3024-1345

unapopovic@ff.uns.ac.rs

Received on: May 17, 2022.

Approved on: Jun 20, 2022.

Published on: Oct 11, 2022.

Abstract: This paper is about the specific character of the aesthetic experience of icons. I am arguing for the idea that the aesthetic experience of icons is a necessary condition of their role and function in Christian worship, and, moreover, that this particular aesthetic experience is of an apophatic kind. My arguments will be developed on the background of the Byzantine iconoclastic debate and the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Also, they should present the very debate from the perspective of aesthetics, often overlooked in favour of more theological or ontological issues related to it.

Keywords: icons; apophatic theology; aesthetic experience; byzantine iconoclasm; religious experience.

Resumo: Este artigo é acerca do carácter específico da experiência estética dos ícones. Defendo a ideia de que a experiência estética dos ícones é uma condição necessária do seu papel e função na veneração cristã, e, além disso, que esta experiência estética particular é de tipo apofático. Os meus argumentos desenvolver-se-ão sobre o pano de fundo da controvérsia sobre a iconoclastia no Império Bizantino e da teologia apofática de Pseudo-Dionísio Areopagita. Além disso, esses argumentos deverão apresentar o próprio debate na perspectiva da estética, não raro preterida a favor de questões sobre aspectos de cariz mais teológico ou ontológico.

Palavras-chave: ícones; teologia apofática; experiência estética; iconoclastia bizantina; experiência religiosa.

Resumen: Este artículo trata sobre el carácter específico de la experiencia estética de los iconos. Defiendo la idea de que la experiencia estética de los iconos es una condición necesaria de su papel y función en la veneración cristiana y, además, que esta particular experiencia estética es de tipo apofático. Mis argumentos se desarrollarán en el contexto de la controversia sobre la iconoclastia en el Imperio Bizantino y la teología apofática del Pseudo Dionísio Areopagita. Además, estos argumentos deberán presentar dicho debate desde la perspectiva de la estética, a menudo pasada por alto en favor de cuestiones sobre aspectos de naturaleza más teológica u ontológica.

Palabras clave: iconos; teología apofática; experiencia estética; iconoclastia bizantina; experiencia religiosa.

Introduction

The iconoclastic debate, which took place in the Byzantine empire in the time span of some 150 years during the 8th and the 9th centuries,



Artigo está licenciado sob forma de uma licença
[Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0 Internacional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

¹ University of Novi Sad (UNS), Novi Sad, Serbia.

is one of the most interesting medieval debates concerning the issue of art.² The art in question was, in today's terms, visual art – namely, the icons (and frescoes) representing Christ or the saints. Such representations were seen as problematic because of the religious context they were a part of: at first glance, the problem was not of a purely artistic or aesthetic nature, not about the artistic practises or the artworks *per se*. The problem was whether or not particular artistic practises and artworks should be integrated, and therefore allowed, into the complex structure of Christian worship; therefore, the iconoclastic debate is often presented as one concerning primarily religious or theological problems. Of course, there is no doubt that the issue of icons was referred to and resolved as a theological one, invoking many already existing and provoking many new theological problems and positions.³ However, it was also, and, in my view, very much so, an aesthetical problem as well.

To put it more simply, the problem with icons was, in fact, related to *their meaning*. At stake here was whether or not the meaning of the icons is restricted to the realm of the material, corporeal and created world; whether it could be that a material being, like an icon, transcends its ontological domain (of a created being), entering, at least partially, the ontological domain of the divine, and, consequently, inscribing into this world some meanings which originally do not belong to it.⁴ The educational and epistemological potentials of the icon, confirmed and advocated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Second Council in Nicaea) – the one ending the iconoclastic debate – strongly suggest such an interpretation.⁵ Icons are to be understood as a means to an end, as mediators for human souls to overcome their own ontological position as

created beings and to partake in the presence of the sacred, at the same time learning to see the created world from the perspective of the divine.

In this paper, however, I would like to take a different approach to the matter. Taking into account all mentioned before, I would like to suggest an interpretation which underlines the *aesthetic experience* of the icons being a constitutive aspect of their role as mediators between the human and the divine, as previously described.⁶ In other words, I would like to suggest that aesthetic experience of icons is a *sine qua non* condition of them functioning as icons, so that, without it, they would remain merely material objects with no special dispositions for the communion with the divine, as argued by the iconoclasts.

Moreover, apart from stressing the importance of the aesthetic experience in this respect, I would also like to show that the *differentia specifica* of the aesthetic experience relating to icons, by contrast with other visual representations, namely, secular and profane ones, consists in the *apophatic character* of the former. That is to say, what makes icons special is the fact that they are *artworks* provoking an *apophatic aesthetic experience* – that they organise and shape aesthetic experience in an apophatic manner, while remaining *kataphatic* with regard to *the method of their creation*.⁷ In my view, as I will try to present it, such an interpretation could explain many properties commonly attributed to icons, starting with reversed perspective, to the spiritual ascent they are supposed to initiate.

Meaning and representation: the ontological gap

The iconoclastic debate, as mentioned before, revolved around the issue of icons being

² BRUBAKER, Leslie, HALDON, John F. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680-850: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 79-80.

³ Louth, Andrew. The Theological Argument about Images in the 8th Century in HUMPRHREYS, Mike (ed.). *A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021. p. 401-403.

⁴ KARAHAN, Anne. Byzantine Iconoclasm: Ideology and Quest for Power. In: KOLRUD, Kristine, PRUSAC, Marina (ed.). *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. p. 84-85.

⁵ BESANCON, Alain. *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. p. 131-132.

⁶ Complementary to the idea that the theology itself functions in the manner similar to the aesthetic experience. Bychkov, Oleg V. Introduction. In: BYCHKOV, Oleg V., FODOR, James (ed.). *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008. p. xii.

⁷ Concerning the insight regarding the kataphatic nature of icons, as well as for the inspiration to reflect upon the apophatic character of aesthetic experience of icons, I am entirely in debt to artist, art theorist, and a dear friend, Srđan Šarović.

representations of the divine – primarily of Christ, and, consequently, of saints.⁸ At the heart of the problem was the relation between the representation and the represented, similar to that between the sign and the signified; as a matter of fact, visual representations were considered to be a type of signs at the time.⁹ As in the case of any sign whatsoever, so too in the case of the icons, the sign as such was considered to have no inherent meaning; its meaning is the matter of the sign-signified relation, and thus it depends on the signified. However, the problem with icons as signs was exactly the signified they are supposed to refer to; or, to put it more precisely, the problem was the very relation of signification.

Namely, an icon of Christ should be a sign of Christ himself, as much as his name is. However, if that is the case, then such an icon is meaningful because it refers to the Son of God, as is the case with the combination of letters C-H-R-I-S-T. Nevertheless, the iconoclasts questioned such interpretation. Namely, they argued that icons could not possibly refer to Christ himself, but only to some other material and created being; or, at best, only to Christ's human nature. In the first case, the icon would entirely miss the signified it was supposed to represent; therefore, it would only seem like the icon is representing Christ, while in fact it would collapse back to its own (ontological) limits and remain an empty signifier. The worship of such an icon would, then, amount to worshipping a piece of wood, i.e. to idolatry.¹⁰ In the second case, the icon would in part refer to Christ, but since it would refer only to His human nature, it would lead us towards heretical positions and ideas. By worshipping such an icon, we would actually worship Christ as a man and not as the Son of God, whether or not we consider him to be more than just a man.¹¹ In both cases, according to the iconoclasts, icons

should therefore be abandoned and removed from the Christian church practises.

For the iconoclasts, such conclusions were derived from the fact that an icon is a material and corporeal being, but even more so from their opposition to anthropomorphic representations of Christ and the saints. Namely, if we reconsider the parallel between the word 'Christ' and the icon of Christ, the main difference between the two would be the implied similarity of the icon with its referent, while such a similarity is in no way to be expected from the word 'Christ'.¹² Or, to put it differently, the fact that the word 'Christ' refers to Christ symbolically is what makes it acceptable; if icons were to have such a symbolical nature only, they would also be absolved of any charges.

So, if the relation of an icon to Christ, that of representation and represented, would be solely symbolic, not implying any real similarities between the two – as is the case with the word 'Christ' – the problematic implication of an icon resembling to both the human and the divine nature of Christ would simply be out of question. Instead of a mimetic character, the representational relation would bear a symbolic one, and such a relation would allow for the secret and mystery of Christ's embodiment to be nested within the representation-represented situation. To be more precise, it would allow for that relation to be established in an inexplicable manner, by the grace of God, legitimising the impossible bridging of the ontological gap between the sign and the signified.

That was the case indeed: the iconoclastic movement came into being as a reaction to a prevailing trend of making anthropomorphic representations of Christ, in the Byzantine Empire of the 8th century, instead of those more usual for the first centuries of Christianity, which were of a more symbolic nature, representing Christ

⁸ MANGO, Cyril A. *The Art of The Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. p. 166-169.

⁹ BARBER, Charles. *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002. p. 34-35.

¹⁰ KARAHAN, 2014, p. 82.

¹¹ KARAHAN, 2014, p. 84-85.

¹² BARBER, 2002, p. 102-103.

as a lamb for example.¹³ Anthropomorphic representations were problematic because they implied similarity between the icon and its archetype, and such implication was considered to be dangerously close to either idolatry or heresy. An icon could, under no circumstances, resemble Christ as its archetype, because of its very nature – because it is a material, corporeal and created being.

On the other hand, symbolic representations were under no suspicion, since they were already confirmed and legitimised by the Holy Scripture.¹⁴ Although the Holy Scripture is written in (human) words and language, which also belong to the realm of the created world – if written, they are only marks on a surface, if uttered, they are only voiced sounds, articulated human breath – nonetheless they stand, by divine intervention, in a proper sign-signified relation with the divine truth. Often ambiguous and unclear in meaning, these words are more than just human language – they are human words (created being) infused with divine meaning.

The wondrous and impossible combination is made operative by the divine, and therefore it is inexplicable – it could only be *experienced*, but not reasonably explained, constrained by definitions and logic, or at least not entirely. As such, it was considered to be symbolic: presenting us, at the same time, with a multitude of meanings, but without the possibility to restrict such multitude to a single, special and well-defined one.¹⁵ Instead of explaining such language reasonably, we are rather invited to take part in its inner richness and movement, thus being pulled from the usual way of thinking and communication to new horizons and to communion with the divine. By analogy, the same goes for visual signs and 'language' – for the

icons, representing visually the symbols already confirmed and legitimised by the Holy Scripture, as is the case with the mentioned representation of Christ as a lamb.¹⁶

Now, the other party confronting the arguments of iconoclasts, the iconophiles, could not disregard the facts; icons surely are material and created objects, and thus very different from the archetype they are supposed to represent.¹⁷ The strategy of iconophiles was, therefore, to shift the debate towards a different issue – the issue of the nature of the representational relation between an icon, *as a material object*, and the divine archetype, *an immaterial being*, claiming that the ontological difference of the two relata does not compromise the relation.¹⁸ The analogy with the language of Holy Scripture could be used as an argument in this case too: namely, if a proper relation of that sort is already established in words, why should there be any restrictions regarding images? If the necessary condition of the Holy Spirit making the relation possible is met, there is no reason to think that His workings are limited to words only – or, for that matter, that they would be limited at all.¹⁹

At the core of the words-images difference is, in fact, a very philosophical idea – advocated by Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, etc. – of reason being the most divine feature of a human being. Given that ancient pagan philosophy was entwined with the Christian narrative from the very first centuries of Christianity, both in terminology and some key ideas, it is only to be expected that Byzantine thinkers too would put stress on the rational, that is, on notions and concepts, and, consequently, on the language expressing them. Following that, it would be only natural to focus on language and thinking, and, particularly, on

¹³ KARAHAN, 2014, p. 80-81.

¹⁴ This proves that, despite the fact that the iconoclastic debate developed in the direction of ontological and epistemological issues, it was, from the very beginning, defined by the aesthetic issues as well (BRUBAKER; HALDON, 2011, p. 139).

¹⁵ As presented in the theory of symbols of Dionysius the Areopagite. See BARASCH, Moshe. *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*. New York/London: New York University Press, 1992. p. 167-168.

¹⁶ BARBER, 2002, p. 53-54.

¹⁷ It should be mentioned that there was a third party involved – the iconolatric one, allowing for the anthropomorphic representations in iconography with no restrictions whatsoever. See BESANCON, 2000, p. 143.

¹⁸ MONDZAIN, Marie-Jose. *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 236-237; BARASCH, 1992, p. 193-194.

¹⁹ ANDO, Clifford. Signs, Idols, and the Incarnation in Augustinian Metaphysics. *Representations*, [S. l.], v. 73, n. 1, p. 24-53, winter 2001. p. 43.

the very special case of language and thinking exemplified by Holy Scripture, setting it apart from all other known ways of communication, and particularly from those having nothing to do with logic and reason, but relying on sense perception, as is the case with art.

However, that was not entirely the case. Unlike ancient philosophy, Christian doctrine teaches that a human being is a created one *in all of its parts and aspects*. Therefore, even our reason is very human indeed – it is not of a divine nature, and it does not hold the status of only divine-like feature of a human being, at all. On the contrary, a human being as such is an icon of God – *imago Dei*; therefore, whatever constitutes the man is, at least ontologically speaking, divine-like, although created. Also, the fact that the same word (as in the phrase ' ', which the Latin *imago Dei* translates) is used for describing the essence of a human being and for the visual representations of the divine, icons as artworks, is not to be overlooked. In fact, it was a part of the argument in favour of icons given by one of the most important iconophiles of the time, St. John of Damascus.²⁰

The idea of a human being being ontologically constituted both as created and as a divine-like being, however, has further important implications. First of all, and with regard to the heritage of ancient philosophy, it redefines the understanding of what reason is and how far can it go, if it is inspecting the fundamentals of reality. Given the fact that, according to Christian doctrine, reality was created by the transcendent and uncreated Lord, one has to conclude that human cognitive capacities are severely limited – that they cannot, under any circumstances, grasp that divine fundament of reality. To be more precise, what reason can do is to conclude that this world is a created one, that it has to have a creator, and, finally, that this creator – as a creator – has to be ontologically different from the world; similar arguments can be found in ancient philosophy as

well. Nevertheless, for much the same reasons, human reason cannot acquire proper and full knowledge of the nature of the creator; in this respect it remains oblivious.

Such ideas were taken a step further by a number of early Eastern theologians, for example, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, but especially by an unknown author of the 6th century, presenting himself as Dionysius the Areopagite. Establishing what is known as apophatic theology, Pseudo-Dionysius offered a severe critique of all human cognitive capacities, claiming that the only way to avoid false knowledge with regard to the divine is to coherently deny that we have any knowledge of God whatsoever.²¹ Even in the cases which would normally be recognized as the cornerstones of Christian doctrine, such as the proposition 'God is good', we would actually be making a huge mistake. The proper way to express what we intended to express by the proposition 'God is good' would be to negate it and to say that 'God is not good'.

Now, the point here is, once again, related to the meanings of our thoughts and words. Namely, the problem lies in the origin of meanings naturally accessible to the human mind: 'For if all knowledge is of beings and has its limits in beings, then that beyond every being is apart from every knowledge'.²² As created beings, human beings acquire all of their concepts, notions, words and their meaning through interaction with the equally created world. Therefore, the meanings we use are as limited as we are – they are not a consequence of some Platonic ideas we are remembering in this life. In other words, when we use a word, like 'good', its meaning, although it could be constituted of a vast number of nuanced details, is still restricted only to those cases of goodness we have encountered and experienced in this created world as the created beings we are.²³ To put it simply, it just has nothing to do with the property of goodness which we are claiming God

²⁰ BARASCH, 1992, p. 216-217.

²¹ STANG, Charles M. *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. p. 124-125.

²² PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. *The Divine Names*. In: JONES, John D. (trans.) *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999, p. 112.

²³ PERL, Eric D. *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. New York: SUNY Press, 2007. p. 17-18.

to have, since His goodness absolutely surpasses any goodness that could be experienced by a created being. Thus, although by asserting 'God is good' we wish to express that God possesses this special goodness belonging only to Him, what we are actually expressing is that He possesses the quality shared by the created beings. This is, obviously, wrong, and therefore the proposition 'God is good' is false. However, according to the rules of logic, if a proposition is false, then its negation has to be true – and thus, 'God is not good' would be a true proposition.

The fact that Pseudo-Dionysius is using the rules of logic to state his case is very important; his apophatic theology is intended to cover all the workings of reason, and not only some problematic predicates. Namely, by advocating for the apophatic way, the way of negation, he promotes negative propositions as the proper truth-bearing propositions when it comes to the propositions whose subject-term has God as its referent, thus strongly opposing the usual prominence of affirmative propositions in the cases where the subject-term is not God, but a created being. In other words, Pseudo-Dionysius is establishing a clear difference between a formal structure regulating speech about creatures on the one hand, and the formal structure regulating speech about God on the other hand; between the logic of speaking about the world and the 'logic' of speaking about God. Moreover, given that he says how the apophatic way, if followed far enough, leads towards the *divine silence*, this 'logic' of speaking about God would, perhaps, amount to a certain kind of *sigetics*.²⁴

Also, there is a strong opposition between the apophatic way on the one hand, and the language of the Holy Scripture on the other. The reason for this is yet again to be found in the origin of the meanings expressed in those two cases: while in the Holy Scripture meanings originate from the divine, although nested in the ordinary words of a human language by the mediation of the Holy

Spirit, in the apophatic speech meanings, as well as words, are still derived from the created world. The same goes for the kataphatic theology of the Areopagite, which is organised around the intervention relating to predicates, rather than to the copula of the proposition, as in apophatic theology. In kataphatic theology, the Areopagite solves the problem by keeping the affirmative form of the proposition, but using the predicates which clearly indicate the difference between the property ascribed to God and the one assigned to His creatures.²⁵ For example, instead of 'God is good', the true proposition would be 'God is over-good' or 'God is super-good'.

This means that the Areopagite is not merely trying to change the elements of language and reasoning, our words and notions *per se* – to divinize them, perhaps; on the contrary, he wants to change *the way we use them*. His interventions do not end with the divine language, but with a not-false human language concerning the divine; they present us with a *methodology* leading our speech and minds closer to the Holy Scripture, but he is never merging the two. However, it should be mentioned that the Areopagite did take the language of the Holy Scripture as a supreme model of true speech about God and the divine, claiming that the proper theology should derive its truths, content and notions from the Church hymns, this being the most similar mode of human speech to the sanctified words of the Scripture.²⁶

Since a human being is confined to the ontological status of a created being, his cognitive capacities are adjusted to knowing the beings of the same kind. If such a being wishes to use those capacities for a purpose other than what they were intended for, he obviously has to change the way in which they operate. However, such endeavour results in no proper knowledge of God; rather, it results in *an indication* of where to direct our mind. The apophatic (and kataphatic) method of the Areopagite is, therefore, exactly that – *a method of thinking* (and speaking) about

²⁴ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. The Mystical Theology in JONES, John D. (trans.) *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999, pp. 215-216.

²⁵ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. The Mystical Theology, pp. 217-218.

²⁶ PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. The Divine Names, 1999, pp. 110-111.

God, a manner of forming our thoughts so that they would aspire in the right direction, so that our thinking would follow in the right path. It is a proper way of freely establishing the connection within a relationship, within a desired conversation; whether or not such a calling would be answered, as in any communication, depends not only on one, but on both involved parties.

Another equally important consequence of apophatic philosophy, apart from the limitation of the power of reason – the one often overlooked and seldomly stressed – is the equalisation of the cognitive capacities of reason and the senses (including here also imagination and memory). Namely, if reason is limited to the realm of created beings, then there is no real difference between the reason and the senses, since our sense-based knowledge is, obviously enough, also restricted to the same domain. Now, if that is so, then there are no reasons to ascribe more value to reason than to the senses with regard to knowing and addressing God: to the extent that God, as an immaterial being, cannot be seen or otherwise grasped by the senses, neither can He be grasped by reason and its concepts; He cannot be defined. Moreover, if there are adequate ways of using reason, despite its limitations, then there should also be ways of doing the same with the senses; apophatic and, perhaps, kataphatic ways for sure, but still proper ways to direct our sense-based cognition towards the divine.

In this case too, of course, a method of thinking and speaking about God sensually would only bring us a manner of forming our minds so they would aspire in the right direction, addressing the Lord and orienting us towards Him, in an attempt to communicate and to commune; it would not allow us to actually see God with our corporeal eyes. As I will try to show, the icons are meant to do just that; moreover, they can fulfil their function only because they originate a rather specific (sense-based) aesthetic experience. In this respect, as I will also try to prove, icons work apophatically. In the following chapters, I will focus on icons from the point of view of reception – of the effect they are to make on the soul, but taking into account

the perspective of the production as well, thus relating the kataphatic and the apophatic nature of the icon.

Icons: what is there to be seen?

In order to elaborate on the points stated above, I would like to start with some terminological issues: what do we mean when we say that icons are artworks, and also, what do we mean when we say that they bring about some kind of aesthetic experience?

First of all, when we think of an icon as an artwork, this is a potentially misleading idea. For sure, a nonbeliever can admire the artistic skill and beauty of a certain icon, although he has no intention of worshipping it; moreover, all of us are invited to do just that when we, say, visit a museum or a gallery presenting us with some fine examples of icons. It would be rather strange, and even inappropriate, to bow in front of the icon in a museum, or, say, to kiss it, as it was done in the churches of the Byzantine empire, and is still done today in Orthodox churches. On the other hand, the fact that the icons are exhibited in museums and galleries confirms that Western civilization has established their status as artworks. Therefore, it is only to be expected that icons bring about an aesthetic experience just as much the other artworks do – or, should we say, in the same way the other, profane and secular artworks do.

However, here I would like to suggest a different approach. Namely, although an icon can be, and in fact is considered to be an artwork, much similar to the profane ones, this is not the only way we can look upon it. The practises mentioned before – bowing in front of the icon, kissing the icon, worshipping the icon, etc. – practises which would be inappropriate in a museum, are an integral part of approaching the icons in churches. For a believer involved in such practises, an icon is not primarily experienced as an artwork; it is simply *an icon*. Although the same person can, before or after performing such practises, take a step back, stop for a moment and admire the icon solely as an artwork, while being involved

in worshipping of the icon he considers it to be more than just an artwork – or, better to say, he considers it to be something different from the usual artworks.²⁷ Moreover, an icon was originally considered to be an icon – and not an artwork – although it was rather clear that the icons are, at least in part, products of craftsmanship.

Now, we are presented with two possible ways of understanding and experiencing icons: with the secular proper-aesthetic one, showing them *as artworks* (similar to the profane ones), and with the sacral liturgical one, revealing them *as icons* and as objects having their true meaning only within the complex tapestry of Christian worship. The question I would like to raise is the following: are we wrong to restrict the aesthetic experience of icons only to the first case, or should we also consider the second case as marked by the aesthetic experience of icons? Or, to put it in another way, if we allow for the possibility that the icons are provoking aesthetic experience within the Christian worship, should we think of it in the same way we do while considering the museum situation? Is the aesthetic experience of an icon the same in both cases? Is it the case that, while worshipping an icon, the aesthetic experience one has should be considered an incidental, pedantic addition to the main course of events, having no essential role to play in it?

The questions raised are parallel to those concerning the matter of the term 'aesthetics' (or 'aesthetic') being applied to theories about beauty and art predating Baumgarten's famous founding of the discipline (and coining the term), or at least predating modern philosophy in general. Without going into terminological disputes, I would like to stress that the way we understand and use the notion of artwork today is heavily under the influence of such modern ideas, which restrict our comprehension of art only to certain modes and forms, the most famous probably being Kant's so-called disinterested appreciation.²⁸ Consequently, if some objects predating the modern

era are considered to be artworks, which is, of course, often the case, they are appreciated as such because they are viewed upon from the perspective of disinterested appreciation (to use the same example). In other words, while affording them the status of artworks, we are also restricting them from all features which do not satisfy the conditions prescribed by the modern view on art; whatever else is there, it is simply put in brackets and disregarded.

This goes for icons too. To use the above mentioned example: a person admiring an icon as an artwork in a museum, and especially in church, deliberately – although not necessarily consciously – disregards everything but its aesthetic properties; the worshipping person, however, has no need to make such restrictions. The worshipping person, thus, can have an aesthetic experience of the icon *together with* all the other experiences brought about by the act of worship. But now, should we consider it the same experience as the 'aesthetically oriented' person would have? In my view, the answer is – 'no'. The aesthetic experience of a worshipping person is modified by the very process of worshipping, it is part of the complex web of other non-aesthetic experiences this person has at the time of worship. So, does this fact make it any less of an aesthetic experience, an 'impure' aesthetic experience, or, to push things further, not an aesthetic experience at all? An aesthetic feature of a religious experience, perhaps?

In my view, the answer to these questions would also be a firm 'no'. There is no doubt that the aesthetic experience of an icon by the worshipping person would differ from the one a nonbeliever would have; still, there is no reason to suppose that aesthetic experience has to be restricted to one and only one type or kind or mode. If we would subscribe to such an idea, we would also have to accept all its implications – for example, we would have to find a particular artwork whose aesthetic experience

²⁷ TSAKIRIDOU, Cornelia A. *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image*. London: Routledge, 2013, p. 9.

²⁸ LEVINSON, Jerrold. *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 5-6.

would give us a clear and indubitable criterion for discerning between all the candidates for aesthetic experience, and hence, all candidates for the status of 'artwork'. That would, however, force us to establish one type of artworks as the proper artworks, disregarding other candidates either as impure art, or as not art at all. However, there is no way to establish, in advance, what art should look like, and what kind of reaction should it provoke; therefore, there is no reason to discard the worshipping person's aesthetic experience of an icon as well.

Now I would like to concentrate on the worshipping person's aesthetic experience of an icon, and to analyse it more precisely. In order to differentiate it from the aesthetic experience a nonbeliever would have, I will call it a *specific aesthetic experience* of an icon. I will start by comparing such specific aesthetic experience of an icon with the ordinary aesthetic experience of a profane artwork.

When approaching an artwork – say, a painting, a person surely has an ordinary sense perception of it: we see colours, lines, shapes, etc. The same goes for the icon: here too we see colours, lines, shapes, etc. In both cases, ordinary sense perception is the first step one has to take; without it, there could be no aesthetic experience of an object at all. However, my experience of a painting would hardly be truly described by enumerating everything the ordinary perception informs me about. There is something else involved, some kind of a surplus, which I recognize rather as an exception than as a rule of my sense perception; therefore, I am willing to call this experience an aesthetic one. What exactly constitutes this surplus – thoughts, emotions, the combination of the two, something else entirely – remains an open question; actually, the question at the heart of aesthetical debates for centuries now. Nevertheless, the surplus is clearly felt and it differentiates those experiences caused by sense perception which are marked by it (aesthetic experience) from those which are not (ordinary experience).

Since we have already established that icons do bring about an aesthetic experience, the same goes for them too.

However, in the case of icons such aesthetic experience is not the end of the story, it is not the final step of the way. On the contrary, if we were to stop here, we would find ourselves in the position of a nonbeliever admiring an icon as an artwork, seeing it, more or less, as a painting of a specific kind (a bit traditional, perhaps). The aesthetic experience we would have, therefore, would not be the specific aesthetic experience of an icon. But then, how are we to acquire it?

Here I would like to draw precisely from the Byzantine theory of icons during the Iconoclastic controversy. Namely, according to the views of iconophiles, an icon is not simply a special kind of painting: it is more like a window to the other realm – the realm of the spiritual, divine and the invisible, a looking glass revealing what cannot be seen.²⁹ However, the metaphor of the window is not to be understood as if, standing in front of an icon, we are in a position to look through it – as if we would be the agent of the looking. On the contrary, the icon is a window through which we are looked upon – by the Christ or by some of the saints, who are the real agents in the story. The icon is not merely a material, inanimate object before us, and our relation to it is not that between a living human being and a thing. The icon is a mediator, a bridge of communication between two persons – one human, and the other divine (or divinized).³⁰

If that is so, what are we actually presented with while perceiving an icon? What is it that we actually see? Most surely, we are presented to the Christ (or a saint) himself – it is Him we are or should communicate with. But then, have we abandoned the realm of sense perception, with or without the mentioned surplus of the aesthetic value? Have we stopped looking, perceiving, seeing with our eyes? Not at all; to worship an icon doesn't mean to stand in front of it with our eyes closed, but to face it.

²⁹ BARASCH, 1992, p. 203.

³⁰ BESANCON, 2000, p. 131-132.

To clarify this, we have to go back to the representation-represented model of understanding and describing an icon mentioned before and to interpret it more precisely. Namely, as mediators of communication between us humans and the divine, icons are not to be understood as representations at all. Rather, they are to be understood as *presentations* – as points (or places) of *the presence of the divine* here in the created world.³¹ Therefore, if one worships an icon, he does not worship a beautiful painting, a material and created object – he worships the archetype presented and present in/through the icon: 'The icon of Christ, primarily and immediately, and from the first look, manifests to us his visible form, and conveys his recollection. Indeed, we behold him who is placed in the icon [as] being reflected, as in a mirror'.³² An icon is, therefore, a particular point in space-time where the divine is *presenting itself*, where it is *present for us* – in the manner of looking upon us and inviting us to look back. Such presence, of course, surpasses human understanding and cannot be fully explained, other than to say that it is miraculous – that it is a consequence of the good will of the divine to be so.

Also, this is not to say that the divine is embodied in an icon; it is present *through the icon*, and not within it. Our Lady is, say, present to us in such a way in all the icons presenting her, transgressing space-time boundaries entirely. Surely, she is not reduced to a single piece of wood, nor is she scattered and divided between all those icons – a part of her here, and another part of her there. As an archetype, Our Lady is beyond all the icons, and yet present in each and every one of them. Because of this particular feature, the icons could be considered to be *apophatic*: they show us what is *not here*, but there – they even *do not represent*, but *indicate*. The fact that the archetype is *present for us* through the icon clearly shows this; the archetype is not equal to the icon, but *manifested* – in an ontologically

strong sense of the term – by the icon.

When it comes to us, the difference between representation and presentation just introduced implies the following: if what I am seeing while looking upon the icon is the presence of the divine, then this presence has to be somehow inscribed in my gaze, in the way I see and perceive the icon. If the icon is like a window through which I am being looked upon by the divine, then I am being confronted with its very look – with the gaze of the Other. It is this look of the Other which makes him present for me through the icon, and while seeing the icon, I actually see the unseen – the look. The situation with icons is quite similar to the ordinary situation of looking the other (human) person in the eyes: although what I perceive are his or her eyes, their shape, colour, etc., at the same time I have a strong feeling of his or her presence, which cannot be reduced to those eyes or their particularities. It is worth mentioning that the analogy between a portrait and the icon was established by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

However, the fact that icons are the points of seeing the divine Other makes all the difference. The look of the Other is not similar to mine at all; it does not function in the same way, it has its own inner organisation and structure. First of all, the divine Other does not look with corporeal eyes, so its look is neither restricted as mine, nor does it have the same constitution. Therefore – and this is crucial – as a mediator, the icon has to be organised *according to its constitution*: it presents us not only with the presence of the divine, but also with the visibility other than the one we naturally possess and are accustomed to. This is what we see while looking upon the icon: another kind of visibility, strangely opened within our own, as a sort of a new dimension to it. Similarly to the language of the Holy Scripture: what reaches our eyes and ears are just normal and regular signs and sounds, but what we actually see or hear – and, hopefully, understand – is the

³¹ PENTCHEVA, Bissera V. *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010, p. 66.

³² From *Antirrhetic* by Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople. See: MONDZAIN, 2005, p. 242.

word of the Lord.

The constitutive features of any icon as an object are adjusted to such a purpose. The mentioned reversed perspective is the best example here: usually, it is called reversed in comparison to the perspective characteristic of Renaissance paintings, which is compliant with the way the eye normally operates, even with the scientific knowledge in optics of the time. So, Renaissance paintings present us with the visibility typical and characteristic of a human being, with the way a human being naturally sees the world. Icons, however, present us with the reversed perspective – the one belonging to the divine, which has nothing to do with optics.³³ Icons are, therefore, organised *from within* – not following the line starting with the subject of seeing (us) towards some object, but the other way round, with a line starting from the object (the icon) of seeing towards its subject (us). Actually, in the case of icons, the line starts with the archetype (divine person), goes through the object/icon and stops with the subject/us (human person), only to go back the same way, again and again.

What could we say now about the specific aesthetic experience of an icon? What is it that makes it special and specific – and, moreover, apophatic, as I have suggested? Let us return to the comparison of the aesthetic experience of a painting and that of an icon. As we have seen, the first two steps are identical: firstly, we have to perceive both painting and icon with our eyes, we have to have an ordinary sense perception of them both; secondly, the result of us perceiving both a painting and an icon is an experience constituted by sense perception, but also by the mentioned surplus, which allows us to judge such experience as an aesthetic one. Nevertheless, how do these two steps actually work in the case of an icon? Taking into account all that has been explained before, regarding the icon as a point and the place of the divine presence, we should ask ourselves – is there anything special to the aesthetic experience of an icon?

The first step would surely be a necessary one:

I have to actually see the icon. While perceiving it, surely my eyes function in the usual way, as they normally would. This, however, means that the first step brings my very human visibility into play: I perceive an icon as I would perceive a Renaissance painting. However, what I am presented with is not a Renaissance painting – not an image which complies with the way I usually perceive, with the manner my eyes normally function. Instead, I am presented with an image which is entirely different, which is – in its perceivable elements and aspects – organised in a different manner.

To this, I can react in two ways: I can try to conquer the presented visibility and to possess it, that is, to push it into the forms of visibility I am used to; to translate it into my already existing way of seeing the world. The situation is much similar to the computer models presenting four or more dimensional space; since our perception is able to grasp only three dimensions (width, depth, and height), we have to make a sort of translation of a, say, four-dimensional object to a three-dimensional object representing it. In this case, I am in a position of a nonbeliever aesthetically reacting to the icon in question, and I can have an aesthetic experience of it, whether I ascribe a positive or a negative aesthetic value to it.

However, I can also react in a different manner, by trying to adjust my natural way of perceiving to the visibility presented with the icon. Actually, I cannot really do this, since I cannot willingly change the way my eyes operate. Nevertheless, the image I am perceiving is organised so as to invite me to do just that: if I let myself be led by it, I am – within the boundaries of my natural perception – starting to experience this other way of seeing, this different visibility. Speaking theologically, I am starting to experience the look of the Other, I am starting to notice that there is a look behind the (painted) eyes.

This is where the apophatic way of thinking is of crucial importance. Namely, to be able to gain such an experience, I have to leave my original and natural perception behind. If I am only seeing things, and icons among them, with the

³³ ANTONOVA, Clemena. *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 30.

eyes of this world – in the manner of the created world and corporeal being, then I won't be able to experience this otherly visibility, coming out of the icon. If I look upon the icon as if it is only a (created) material being, then a (created) material being is all I will see. On the other hand, I cannot change my ontological status, nor can I change the visibility naturally given to me, as much as I cannot change the limited character of my notions and concepts and words. Human sensibility is as much limited as human reason is, and thus it cannot go further than reason when it comes to the divine.

However, what I can do is to make an intervention regarding the ways in which my sensibility usually operates – in a manner much similar to the one presented with the apophatic theology of the Areopagite. That is, I can negate the natural ways and workings of my sensibility, I can introduce a sort of suspension of those. Of course, as mentioned before, this does not mean that I should literally negate my eyesight – by closing my eyes, for example. On the contrary, I should make an intervention *while seeing*, by deliberately choosing *to adjust it to what is seen* – to the icon; that is, by choosing to let my look be controlled and directed by the icon. Whether or not I will be successful in this is, actually, not up to me; as a created being, I can only engage my free will and decide to open myself for such a possibility. If I make such a decision, I am acknowledging an icon *as an icon* – as a point and the place of the divine presence, as a bridge relating two persons and allowing for a communication and communion. The result, however, depends on the other party as well.

Nevertheless, if the other party is equally willing to participate in this communication, if it does make itself present here with me, through the icon, then and only then my experience of the icon acquires a religious character. In other words, the true religious experience of an icon has to be the experience of the relation and communion

with the archetype, with the divine. The religious experience of an icon is not a matter of me declaring myself as a Christian approaching an icon, but a matter of me *acting* as a Christian while approaching an icon; in other words, its *conditio sine qua non* is me worshipping the icon. Simply put, it comes down to the described willingness to be open for the look of the divine Other presenting itself through the icon.

This point also was a very important issue within the iconoclastic debate: if icons are nothing more than mere material objects and empty signifiers, then to worship them would be anything but acting as a Christian. Church Fathers of the Seventh Council, as well as other iconophiles, refuted such idea by claiming what we have already described and interpreted – by claiming that icons are not merely material objects, but points of encounter between a human and the divine. Therefore, to worship an icon would not result in idolatry: to worship an icon is to worship the archetype (apophatically) presented through it. Nevertheless, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, church Fathers have also accepted and promoted a differentiation introduced by St. John of Damascus – a differentiation between two kinds of worship, *proskynesis* and *latreia*.³⁴

Namely, the worship of icons is not the same as the worship of God as such; again, this confirms the apophatic aspect of icons. If the worship is given to the Lord directly, then it is called *latreia*. The point here would be that only God himself, according to his own nature, is worthy of worship and respect as such.³⁵ *Proskynesis*, however, is reserved for the icons, and often translated as devotion or veneration (in Latin *adoratio*). Here we have a kind of mediated worship which applies to the archetype presented, but it is directed firstly towards the icon, and then to the archetype – by the mediation of the icons.³⁶ Therefore, the only reason legitimising the worship of icons is the fact that it is not an icon we are worshipping, but the archetype. The reversed inner 'logic' of icons

³⁴ BRUBAKER; HALDON, 2011, p. 139; LOUTH, 2021, p. 409-410.

³⁵ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Treatise III: Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. New York, 2003, p. 87, 125-126.

³⁶ JOHN OF DAMASCUS, 2003, p. 104-105.

is to be found here too, since it would be wrong to say, as I just did, that in *proskynesis* I am firstly worshipping an icon, and only secondly the archetype. In fact, it is the other way round: my worship is primarily directed to the archetype, and only because the archetype is present through the icon I am consequently worshipping the icon too.

So, the religious experience I have as a consequence of worshipping an icon depends on the encounter with the divine archetype, that is, it depends on the presence of the look of the divine Other and the visibility it presents me with. Such an experience should be a transformative one: not only should I be struck by the encounter, but it should also change me. In the presence of the divine, no matter how mediated it is, a human being cannot be indifferent; therefore, our souls are transfigured, and the religious experience I find myself having is only a phenomenological consequence of the event.

But, what should be the real consequences of it? What should be the true effect of such an encounter and transfiguration? Among many possible answers I would like to stress this one – the true effect should be *a new way of seeing the world*, a transfigured sensibility. In other words, while worshipping icons, I am being gifted with a new possibility – to see the world I live in the way it is seen from within the icon, from the perspective of the divine. Of course, such a possibility is not something I can accomplish by myself, by my own human will and powers; it has to be miraculously given from the part of the divine – much similar to the Holy Scripture.

Now, what does this actually mean? First of all, it means that the sensibility involved in the worshipping of an icon is not disregarded, but heavily accentuated – so much so, that it becomes a constitutive part of the worship. It is not only that we have to perceive an icon in order to worship it – it is not only that we have to make an apophatic intervention on our sensibility in order to open ourselves to the encounter with the divine; it is about being put through the transformative process changing this very sensibility. If the sensibility is not changed, then the encounter

did not happen. Still, the change of sensibility is not a matter of its divinization, as much as Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic way is not a matter of divinization of our thoughts and language. On the contrary, the sensibility remains as it previously was in all its aspects and elements, but not in the way they operate with each other.

Such a transfigured sensibility is apophatic in one more respect. Namely, as we have stressed before, the encounter made possible through the icon does not amount to us seeing the archetype with our own eyes; what we see in such a way is still only an icon. The encounter amounts to seeing the look of the archetype, its presence, and not the archetype as such. Therefore, the icons are apophatic: they present – or, better to say – indicate the archetype by not presenting it.

So, although the sensibility is taken a step further towards the divine, it still remains what it always was and can only see the divine as not-what-is-ordinarily-seen. The apophatically transfigured sensibility, however, is still very much in power to perceive ordinary created beings of the world – but, now, with the 'new pair of eyes', with the new divine perspective, the new and different visibility inscribed into the natural one. This is how the truth of the creation should be revealed to us: the icons are, thus, tools for seeing the world in its truth, and they teach us not just to know it, but to experience and live it.

Final remarks: the way of the icons

Now, to go back to the iconoclastic debate once again, we should also mind the fact that the icons indeed are material and created beings; in fact, at least partially created by the artists. The aesthetic character of the icons, thus, has to be confirmed from the perspective of their production as well. The question is the following: if the icons bring about the special aesthetic experience, as I have just described and argued for, are there any special conditions to be met in the making and creation of icons, so that they could be the places and points of the encounter with the divine, and so they would bring about an apophatic aesthetic experience? And, if the icons

bring about such apophatic aesthetic experience, is it because they are a sort of apophatic artworks?

As mentioned before, if considered from the perspective of production, icons prove themselves not to be apophatic, but kataphatic artworks. The reason for this is simple: if the icons were apophatic artworks, they would have to be made in an apophatic manner – through the process of negation. However, this is not the case; icons are not made by negating (lines, shapes, colours, etc.), but through the process of affirmation, as much as the profane artworks usually are. In other words, to make an icon, one has to apply – not to remove – a line, or a colour on an (empty) surface, and therefore the process is affirmative rather than negative. The process of application has its own rules, defined and determined by the canons of iconography, but it is still a matter of confirming, asserting and claiming this or that line – this rather than that colour – as the integral part of the icon's final composition and look.

The canons of iconography are defined and legitimised by the Church; they encompass rules for the proper making of icons, including the specific features of presentation of particular saints.³⁷ The canons, however, are not to be understood as a predefined unchangeable algorithm, to be mechanically applied over and over again, in order to get the same results; they are often misunderstood in this way, especially in view of the not so human origin of the icon's production. On the contrary, the canons are rather to be considered as the laws governing the making of icons, allowing the final works to vary depending on the materials used in the production, as well as on the specific 'handwriting' of the artist.³⁸ Although it was not usual for the artists to sign the icons they've made, one can still notice such thing as a specific and significative style of a particular master.

So, if the icons are artworks, and if they are,

from the perspective of their production, not apophatic works, how is it that they still bring about an apophatic aesthetic experience? The obvious discrepancy between the production and reception of icons – that is, between the way in which icons are made and the way they are experienced – can and should be interpreted with regard to the ontological paradox they embody and the impossible encounter they should serve.³⁹ As a place of encounter between human and divine, an icon should be an impossible place, indeed.⁴⁰ Impossible, of course, from the human side of the story, and therefore also possible only in an apophatic way.

In other words, if we consider icons from the human perspective only, what we will be able to see is merely something created – even if the thing created is an artwork. Moreover, even if we consider icons to be places of encounter with the divine, still, as humans, we can only approach them apophatically, by negating and denying human perspective as the only possible perspective – human visibility as the only possible visibility. On the other hand, in the Church doctrine such an artwork couldn't possibly be a product of human craftsmanship only; the intervention of the Holy Spirit is necessary. Therefore, the canons of iconography encompass not only suggestions of icon-making of the usual artistic kind – as, for example, how to apply colours and similar things, but they also demand for prayer and fasting, as integral parts of the process. For an icon *to be* an icon, human efforts are just not enough; however, for an icon *to function and operate* as an icon, human effort is necessary – and it is an apophatically oriented effort to change the way in which one usually perceives the world.

In my view, this allows us to make the following conclusions. First of all, as argued before, an aesthetic experience of icons is a *sine qua non* condition of them functioning as icons within

³⁷ LOUTH, 2021, p. 422.

³⁸ Makrides, Vasilios N. Orthodox Christianity, Change, Innovation: Contradiction in Terms? in WILLERT, Trine S., MOLOKOTOS-LIEDERMAN, Lina (eds.). *Innovation in Orthodox Christian Tradition?* The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice. London: Routledge, 2016. p. 33-34; BARBER, 2002, p. 30-31.

³⁹ TSAKIRIDOU, Cornelia A. *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image*. London: Routledge, 2013, p. 28-29.

⁴⁰ BARASCH, 1992, p. 173.

the religious practice of worship. The aesthetic experience of icons is not an incidental, pedantic feature of the religious experience it is a part of; it is its constitutive element. Further, this proves that the iconoclastic debate, although it was not developed in terms of aesthetics, had a footing in questions and problems of an essentially aesthetic nature. These questions and problems are not merely theological, but also ontological and epistemological; if we are, because of the fact, more inclined to discard them as aesthetical problems, then we are merely subscribing to a dominant trend in modern aesthetics and its constraints.

In other words, the negative visibility of the aesthetic experience of icons proves that the categories of modern aesthetics, which strongly define those of contemporary aesthetics too, are just too narrow to explain and describe these particular artworks. Therefore, if we wish for an aesthetic analysis of medieval issues and topics, we should be mindful of the fact: in my view, a proper aesthetical investigation within medieval philosophy would have to take into account all the specific features of the epoch and to be developed 'from within', disregarding and openly criticising any theoretical approaches restricting it in advance. There is a lot to be learned from medieval philosophy; a new, although rather traditional, approach to aesthetics is, in my view, among the most important such gains.

On the other hand, many avant-garde and contemporary artworks are intended to do almost exactly the same as icons – to change the way in which we perceive the world, both metaphorically and literally. From Picasso to Malevich and Kandinsky, there is a strong belief in the power of images to transfigure human sensibility; some of the artists, as Ad Reinhard and Hugo Ball, even openly comment on Pseudo-Dionysius and draw from his ideas. Of course, their artworks are all profane ones; none of it has any religious function whatsoever. Nevertheless, what this proves is that secular and liturgical artworks – those which are intended to bring about 'merely' aesthetic expe-

rience, and those which bring about aesthetic experience nested within a religious one – could have more in common that is to be expected. In this respect too we can learn from the icons and the iconoclastic debate: to allow artworks to indicate more than human words, notions, and, perhaps, even emotions can express, to transcend the boundaries of what is known and seen.

So, the way of the icons is not a linear one. It goes back in time, and winds back to our present moment, hopefully, opening its future. It moves both horizontally and vertically. It is apophatic in effects, and kataphatic in its birth. The way of the icons 'exist[s] on the verge of speech'.⁴¹

References

- ANDO, Clifford. Signs, Idols, and the Incarnation in Augustinian Metaphysics. *Representations*, [S. l.], v. 73, n. 1, p. 24-53, winter 2001.
- ANTONOVA, Clemena. *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- BARASCH, Moshe. *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*. New York: New York University Press, 1992.
- BARBER, Charles. *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- BESANCON, Alain. *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- BRUBAKER, Leslie, HALDON, John F. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, C. 680-850: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- BYCHKOV, Oleg V. Introduction. In: BYCHKOV, Oleg V., FODOR, James (ed.). *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2008. p. xii.
- JOHN OF DAMASCUS. *Treatise III: Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. Translation by Andrew Louth. New York: [s. n.], 2003.
- KARAHAN, Anne. Byzantine Iconoclasm: Ideology and Quest for Power. In: KOLRUD, Kristine, PRUSAC, Marina (ed.). *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. p. 75-94.
- LEVINSON, Jerrold. *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- LOUTH, Andrew. The Theological Argument about Images in the 8th Century. In: HUMPRHREYS, Mike (ed.). *A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021. p. 401-424.

⁴¹ TSAKIRIDOU, 2013, p. 3.

MAKRIDES, Vasilios N. Orthodox Christianity, Change, Innovation: Contradiction in Terms? In: WILLERT, Trine S., MOLOKOTOS-LIEDERMAN, Lina (ed.). *Innovation in Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*. London: Routledge, 2016. p. 19-50.

MANGO, Cyril A. *The Art of The Byzantine Empire 312-1453: Sources and Documents*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

MONDZAIN, Marie-Jose. *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

PENTCHEVA, Bissera V. *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

PERL, Eric D. *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. New York: SUNY Press, 2007.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. The Divine Names. In: JONES, John D. (trans.) *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999. p. 107-210.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS AREOPAGITE. The Mystical Theology. In: JONES, John D. (trans.) *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999. p. 211-224.

STANG, Charles M. *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: "No Longer I"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

TSAKIRIDOU, Cornelia A. *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Una Popović

PhD in Philosophy from the Belgrade University (BU), in Belgrade, Serbia. Professor at the University of Novi Sad (UNS), Novi Sad, Serbia.

Mailing address

Una Popović

Univezitet u Novom Sadu

Filozofski fakultet

Zorana Đinđića 2

21 000 Novi Sad

Republika Srbija

Os textos deste artigo foram revisados pela Poá Comunicação e submetidos para validação do(a) autor(a) antes da publicação.