



Muzeu
Kombëtar
i Artit
Mesjetar



National
Museum
of Medieval
Art



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National Museum of Medieval Art

The National Museum of Medieval Art was first established in 1980, comprising one of the richest collections of Middle Age, including Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art, as well other non religious objects.

There are more than 8200 works and objects which are enlisted in our inventory and displaying at the museum (icons, stone, and wood, metal and cloth objects). These artefacts clearly demonstrate our rich artistic legacy and cultural heritage.

Albania went through a long medieval period, experiencing different wars and struggling to survive through difficult times, where different ruling powers tried to assimilate the country and underestimate cultural heritage, including dictatorial times. We tried to preserve important objects of an important cultural value, thanks to the work of some heroes, researchers and specialists, which managed to save a large number of icons and other religious objects, from the communist ideology destruction, so we can today admire a great selection of Byzantine Art and Post-Byzantine Art in this Museum.

We can today admire these icons in wood, or engraved in stone, not as religious objects but to explore the reflection of figurative art cultivated through the centuries. We can identify the techniques used, and grasp a sense of the daily life they reflect upon, look at the traditional costumes used, where above all individual artists' expressions show up, artists which have mark an important step not only in the Albanian iconography, but in the visual art in general. During the communist times, in a period where religion and its belief were continuously under attack, destroying religious objects was a primary aim. Its in those years when the National Museum of Medieval Art was sheltered under the roofs of one of the most important churches in the city of Korça, "Life-Giving Spring", which played a vital role in preserving objects of such an important cultural heritage for the people of this country.

Starting from 2016, the Museum is accommodated in a contemporary building, which provides the necessary required standards for a proper exhibition, including preserving and restoration measures for storing such a valuable cultural treasury.

Medieval art is reflected in harmony with the contemporary architecture. Byzantine colors conquer together with mystics of another world, making the experience in the museum quite special and unforgettable.

Director of the National Museum of Medieval Art
Fjoralba Prifti

Golden Hall

The Golden hall is the first one to be introduced to in the Museum. It is conceived as a prompt introduction to the richness of objects and variety of styles, alignments of which impress the visitor as if it is admiring one big modern installation. Here we find a wide range of objects, from 5th-6th century like stone capital fragments or iconostas fragments, to the relocated frescos of David Selenica and ended with the early 20th century icons. Baldachins, beautiful doors, crosses, images of Christ and Virgin Mary, Saints and strategists, different stages, stand all together in front of the visitor. Besides anonymous artwork objects, the golden background exposes the magnificent icons of Kostandin Shpataraku and the Monk Kostandin, Zografi brothers and Çetiri (Katro) brothers, and many others.



1.

1. "The cow eating flower" IN 5294, from Fier, 5th Century

2. Fragment of Iconostasis IN 5280, 6th Century from Lin, Pogradec

3. "Bird with flowers" IN 5280 stone capital fragment, 4th Century, from Elbasan



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1. John, the Baptist, IN 2209
14th century, Origin: St. Mary Church, Maligrad island, Prespa lake.

2. St. Mary and Jesus Child, IN 4202
16th century, Origin: Postenan, Erseka

3. Christ the Pantocrator, IN 2215
17th Century, Origin: St. Mary Church, Boboshtica, Korça

4. St. Mary and Jesus Child, IN 1250,
19th Century, Origin: St. Mary Church, Sinica, Korça

5. Entry into Jerusalem, IN 0127,
20th century, Origin: St. Thanas, Gjyrez, Korçë



The Balcony

The portable icons exhibited here are the icons of the Byzantine period, during 14th-15th centuries.

Several factors have influenced the little number of artwork we possess today. The Ottoman invasion, iconoclast periods, and the anti-religion propaganda during the communist regime, have played their part in destroying many of these artworks. The oldest paintings of ecclesiastical art, which have survived to this day, are some frescos (mural paintings) that belong to the 12th-13th century.

These icons stand out for their elegant but also strong lines, as well as for the harmony between colors and contrasts that are at the same time very special. Extremely suggestive and mystical at the same time, these icons carry true artistic values. Such are: Archangel Michael or St. Mary with Christ, found in the Anchorite, or Hermit's cave -churches in Prespa.



~ Beautiful doors with Annunciation
IN2281/2, 14th century, from the hermit's
cave church, Blashtonja, Prespa



St. Mary with Christ.
IN 0347
14th century,
Origin: eremit cave-church, Blashtonja, Prespa



St. Mary (She, who shows the way - Hodegetria),
IN 2280
14th century,
Origin: Church "Birth of St. Mary", Maligrad island, Prespa lake



The Archangel Michael,
IN 2764

This is one of the most valuable works of the museum collections. It's origin is from the Church of St. Mary in Mborje, Korçë. The author is anonymous and belongs to the 14th century.

The Archangel Michael, the protector of the Byzantine Churches, is one of the highest quality artistic works. Painted on a wooden panel, he is shown wearing a combat armor and red imperial tunic, as commander-in-chief of the celestial army.

The whole composition is well balanced, within a drawing appearing as powerful as it is fine, where color contrasts are equally evident; where red and silver gray dominate, and straight and cut lines interlink with elegant and curved ones. It clearly shows the power and severity of a fighting body, with the sweet and divine nature of the angel.

In his right hand he holds the sword while in his left the crystal sphere that symbolizes the Christian world after the coming of Christ. Over the sphere are painted the Orthodox cross, the monogram of Christ and the monogram NK (the one who judges). The portrait is modeled with full volume and warm ochre tones. Wavy hair, give the idea of a royal crown on the head. They gather easily behind the neck, where they highlight its finesse and the portrait's, with the grandeur of a powerful torso. His deep, thoughtful and incredibly mystical gaze catches your eye.

The icon is painted in accordance with the classical tradition. The sweet modeling connects it with the excellent Palaeologian tradition style of the 13th -14th centuries.



The Archangel Michael,

IN 2278

Anonymous author

14th century,

Origin: Opar, Korça



The Black Labyrinth

In this pavilion get displayed the most important works of the collection of the National Museum of Medieval Art, dating to the 15th - 17th centuries.

We find here important names of iconography and figurative art in Albania such as Onufri the Great and his son, Nikolla, or Onufri of Cyprus, Marko Batha, etc., up to the high artistic values, icons of Postenan, Erseka and those decorative of Vithkuq, from Master Konstandine, painted in anticlassical spirit.

The art works of this hall are a reflection of the different artistic tendencies of the period and the transformation the Post-Byzantine paintings came across in the Albanian territory.



St. Nicholas with scenes from his life and miracles, IN 5027

Originally from Boboshtica, Korça, 15th century

On the blue background, in the center panel, is written : "St. Nicholas the Wonder-maker"



The beautiful Doors, IN 3683 / 3684

The Beautiful Doors of the Evangelical Church in Berat, painted by Onufri in the 16th century, are among the most impressive works of the master craftsman that reveal the high artistic level.

Onufri, the great master

The National Museum of Medieval Art holds the largest number of icons created by the greatest artist of Post-Byzantine iconography in Albania, Onufri, to whom has been given a reserved special display. Eleven works of the master craftsman are shown, one more stunning than the other. They were part of the iconostasis of the churches of "St. Trinity", "Evangelization" and "St. Constantine and Helena" in Berat.

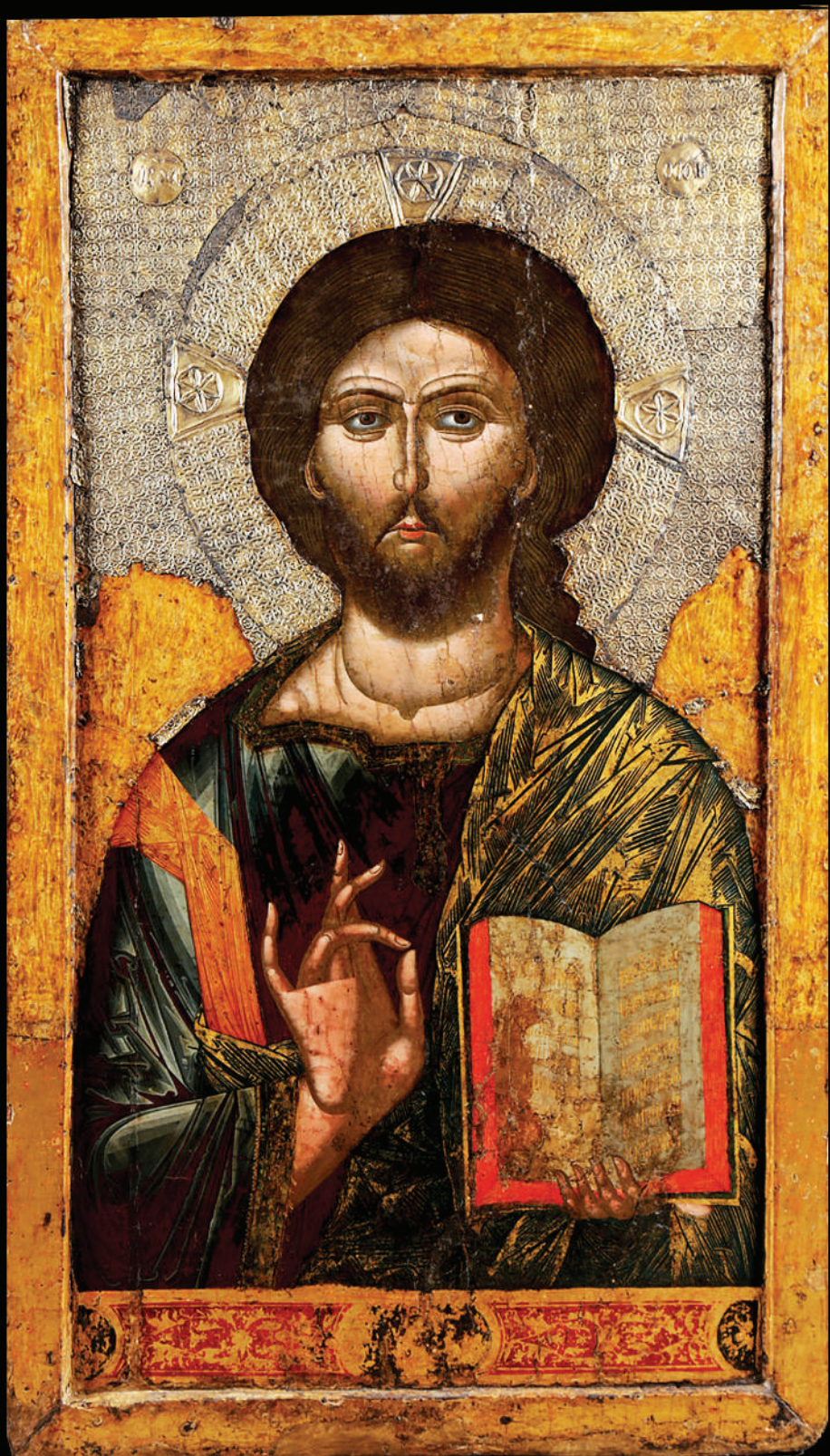
He excelled in the 16th century, as a painter of many frescoes and portable icons, which he realized in many churches, not only within the country.

Onufri is shown as an artist with extraordinary talent, who knew well the Byzantine tradition but also Western art. He was an unrivaled master in composition and the use of color, which plays a dominant role in his work. His use of red stands out, very special, which radiates strongly to the golden backgrounds and contrasts beautifully with the greens and deep blues. Along with the colors, within his compositions landscapes are beautifully placed, portraits with contrasts, as well as the combination of several scenes within the frame, which distinguish Onufri and his art, making him unique and incomparable.

The works are preserved in good condition, thanks also to the good techniques used by the artist to create them.

Christ the Pantocrator, IN 3682

This magnificent icon created by Onufri was part of the iconostasis of the church of the Holy Trinity in Berat and belongs to the 16th century.





Birth of Christ, IN 3673

This Wonderful icon comes from the Evangelical Church in Berat, which reveals the mastery in composition of Onufri, dating back to the 16th century.



Baptism of Christ, IN 3675 ,
Painted by Onufri. The icon of the Baptism of Christ dates back to the 16th century and is one of the icons of Dodekaorton (The Twelve Great Feasts), from the Evangelical church in Berat.



Descent to Hell, IN 3679

Onufri has masterfully presented the meaning of this icon: the transition from darkness to light. The origin of the icon is from the Evangelical Church in Berat, 16th century.



Madonna (St Mary), IN3688

This icon of St. Mary dates back to around 1578, originating from the Church of St. Demetrius in Berat, and is attributed to Nicholas, the son of the great Onufri, both his student and his successor.



John the Theologian, IN 3634

The icon of the author Onufri of Cyprus, belongs to the 16th century, and originates from the Church of Saint George in Berat.



Life-giving Christ, IN 5094

This icon dates back to around 1541-1542, and is attributed to Franco Catelano.



John the Baptist, IN 5096

The despotic icon comes from the monastery of St. Mary in Postenan, Ersekë, 17th century, by an anonymous author.



Holy Friday and her life scenes, IN 5032

The icon, with an anonymous author, belongs to the 16th century, and originates from Postenan, Ersekë. Both sides of the icon present scenes from the life of the saint as well as details of her sacrifices which led her to sanctification.

Within this harmony her large, very expressive eyes are noticed, where she mixes innocence, linear and meaningful purity, with perfect compositional realization, original in conception and unique, far from template models.



Great Celebrations,
IN 1845

It's origin is from the Evangelical Church in Vithkuq of Korça, and dates back to the 17th century.

This icon summarizes events that are considered as Liturgical Feasts and are celebrated according to the religious calendar.

These topics have their source mainly in the Evangelical Scriptures.

The first four generations present the Great Feasts, which begin with the "Evangelization" and end with the "Transfiguration".

Icon from the church of St. Michael, Vithkuq

Seven icons get displayed here and the Beautiful Doors of the iconostasis of the church of St. Michael in Vithkuq of Korça. The church is of the basilica type and has two layers of murals made at different times. These icons are the product of a local atelier associated with the painter, who signed his works as Master Constantine, which is unusual among post-Byzantine artists.

The changes that post-Byzantine painting underwent after the 16th century are clearly visible. There is a return to some features of Byzantine art. Their style is hard and we find this spirit in this period in the territories of southeastern Albania and in northern Greece. The volume starts and flattens out almost completely. Colors become more frugal and tend to become more decorative. The drawing is mostly linear. The spirit of these icons is anticlassical. These very evocative icons because of their powerful expression and individuality have not kept the proportional ratios.

The portraits are painted simply and with a strong graphic sense. On the brown preparation, the lights are turned on with a warm ochre, without many tones passing towards the final lights. The backgrounds are golden and strongly highlight the reds, deep blues and greens. The integrated frames are made with carvings and aureoles in relief with floral motifs. Calligraphy on open parchments is perfect.

Beautiful Doors IN 5870 / 5871

These Beautiful Doors belong to the iconostasis of the church of St. Michael in Vithkuq of Korça.

Author: Master Kostandine

Period: 17th century





John the Baptist, IN 2106

This icon, originating from the Evangelization Church in Vithkuq of Korça, painted by Master Kostandin, in 1685



Saint George IN 5867

This icon, originating from the Evangelization Church in Vithkuq of Korça, painted by Master Kostandin, in 17th century



John the Baptist , IN 4116

This icon from an anonymous author, belongs to the middle of the 16th century, and originates from Gostivisht, Ersekë.



St . Mary on the throne with Christ “Lady of the Angels” IN 4025
This icon comes from Erseka and dates back to the middle of the 17th century.



The Red Room

The icons exhibited in this pavilion are from the 18th - 19th centuries and correspond with the period known as the post-Byzantine renaissance in Albania. The exhibition includes works by the monk Kostandin Jeromonaku, who is known as a brilliant artist of portable icons that decorated the iconostasis of the churches of Voskopoja, St. Naum, Ohrid, etc.. A large number of his icons are preserved in the museum.

A special place is reserved for the great painter Kostandin Shpatarak from village of Shpati in Elbasan. His icons use to decorate the churches of St. Peter in Vithkuq, St. Friday in Kavaja, the Monastery of the Birth of the Virgin in Ardenica, etc. Kostandin also appears as a miniaturist of the superior levels. In many icons he integrates elements from everyday life.

Another special place has been reserved to the creativity of two brothers from Korça, Kostandin and Athanas Zografi, whose artistic activity, as iconographers and fresco painters, takes an important place during the period 1744 - 1783.

Here is also displayed an icon by David Selenica, the greatest fresco painter of the 18th century in Albania, The work of Katro (Çetiri) painters from Grabova, iconographers and fresco painters with a great activity, is represented in this hall with three icons and the painters Mihal and his son Dhimitër Anagnosti.

This pavilion is dominated by the iconostasis of the church of "St. Nicholas", in the village of Rehova of Erseka. It was made of walnut wood, in the early 19th century. IN7477

In the Byzantine Orthodox churches, the iconostasis is an important element where icons are displayed according to established rules.



St. Demetrius, IN 7610

The icon of St. Demetrius, the warrior martyr, comes from the iconostasis of the church of St. Nicholas in Voskopoja, by Kostandin Jeromonak, and dates back to 1725.



St. Mary, IN 2711

This icon, originally from Korça, which belongs to the late 17th century, stands out for accurate and finesse drawing, perfect portrait and hand modeling, achievement of perfection in every detail, clothing, throne and fine calligraphy on the parchment held by the Virgin. The artist has used gold on most of the surface, on the engraved background, the throne and the ornaments of the Virgin's dress.

The icon is very unusual as it shows the pregnancy of the Virgin, which rarely appears in this form. Her portrait with big eyes, fine arched eyebrows and the richness of warm and cool tones is very impressive. The author, Kostandin Jeromonak, (Costandine, the monk) is known as a brilliant artist of portable icons.

St. John Vladimir with scenes from his life, IN 5324

This icon was painted in 1739 and found in the monastery of the Virgin in Ardenica. It was painted by one of the most prominent iconographers of the 18th century, Konstandin (of Shpat) Shpataraku.

The saint presented was the king of Doclea principality from about 990 to 1016. He was distinguished as a very religious king with high morals, charitable and peaceful. St. John Vladimir was treacherously killed by the king Vladislav of Bulgaria. His relics have been moved to different places for veneration and protection. In 1381, Karl Topia, Prince of Albania (1358–1388), built the St. John Vladimir's Church in the proximity of Elbasan, where relics of the saint were transported to this church and remained there until 1967, when the monastery was closed. From 2021, the relics of the Saint are preserved back to this church.

This type of icon evolved in iconography and fresco painting in the 17th and 18th centuries. The saint in this icon appears on the throne in royal attire, with the cross of the martyr in his right hand and the severed head in his left hand. It is surrounded by 12 scenes that start on the left and continue down to the right. They present the most important events of the life of St. John Vladimir and conclude with his execution. Quite interestingly the Albanian prince Karl Topia, is presented in the second scene to the left as the founder of the monastery dedicated to the saint.





Akathist anthem, IN 6718

This icon comes from the Monastery of St. Mary in Ardenica, and dates back to the 18th century. The Akathist anthem is a rare icon, where Konstandin Shpataraku appears as a great miniaturist with extraordinary talent. He shows here his mastery in the perfect accomplishment of portraits even when these are extremely small. In the center, above, is a scene of the Virgin's coronation, followed by twenty-four scenes from the life of St. Mary painted in regular squares, where a deep blue color prevails, which makes the golden tones contrast nicely with the warm ones. These begin with the preaching scene and end with the Virgin ascending to Heaven. The figures are sketched with precision and elegance. Every detail has been painted with extraordinary care.





Zografi brothers, of Korça

The atelier of brothers Athanas and Konstadin Zografi is one of the most productive ateliers of the 18th century, not only in Albania but also abroad. Their artistic activity was shared between the Korça region and the Holy Mount Athos in Greece. Being in contact with artists from all over Europe, they mastered not only the Byzantine art, but also the western one of the period. European influences are clearly visible in the works which are exhibited in this Museum.

The portraits in these icons aim at realism, the movements and gestures are vital, the draperies become more naturalistic and lots of life essentials get included into the biblical scenes.

These two icons, are part of the series of icons of the Great Celebrations : "The Entrance of St. Mary into the Temple" (IN 1770), " The Evangelization" (IN 6062).



All the Saints, IN 0829

This icon was painted in 1776, by Athanas Zografi, originating from the church "Life - Giving Spring" in Korça. The meaning of depicting "All Saints" rests on the meditation on salvation at the Last Judgment.



Madonna
St. Mary on the throne,

IN 5783

This beautiful icon, painted in a very elegant way by the Zografi brothers in 1760 and comes from the iconostasis of the Monastery of Peter and Paul in Vithkuq, Korça.



The Three Hierarchs,
IN 1736

This is an icon with large dimensions, which comes from the church "Life-Giving Spring", one of the main churches in the city of Korça.

It was painted by Athanas and Konstandin Zografi during 1760.



First Ecumenical Synod (council),
IN 2623

This magnificent icon comes from the church "Life - Giving Spring" in Korça and was painted by Zografi brothers, in 1765. It depicts two episodes from the life of Emperor Constantine the Great: the First Ecumenical Synod and Vision of the Cross over the Milvian Bridge.



St. Christopher,
IN 3127

This icon from an anonymous author, dates back to 1812, and originates from the church of St. Mary in Ogren, Përmet.

In this icon we see the combination of the traditions of Christianity and antiquity, and Eastern and Byzantine culture.

St. Christopher was a Roman soldier and Christian martyr. He is being blessed by Christ, who appears from the clouds holding the globe of the world and an angel unfolds a parchment where it is written: "Greetings, Martyr Christopher."

The saint wears the uniform of Roman legionnaires. In his right hand he holds the cross of martyrdom and a palm branch.

He appears as a mythical monster believed to have lived in Egypt, human body and dog head, being captured by Roman forces.

He was later transferred to Syria, where, he was baptized and where he was martyred in 308.

The touch of Thomas,
IN 5328

David Selenica was a prominent 18th century fresco painter who brought back to iconography the 14th century models. He was well acquainted with the Byzantine tradition as well as the Italian way of painting. This icon resembles to the same style and tendencies that are noticed in the frescos of the church of St. Nicholas in Voskopoja, a reason which attributes this icon to David as the author.

The icon originates from the church of St. Mary in Voskopoja and dates back to around 1730.





Christ of Mercy,
IN 3898

This large icon of 1830, where the Christ of the Pantocrator type is associated with the inscription "Christ of Mercy", is painted on a golden background and decorated the iconostasis of the Evangelical church in Tirana. The work is executed by Mihal Anagnosti and his son Dhimitri.



John the Baptist,
IN 6793

Origin: St. George church, Fier, 18th century.

This icon is painted from Katro (Çetiri) brothers from Grabova, iconographers and fresco painters with a great activity, not only in Albania.



Doors of the Church "Birth of the Virgin" IN 5369

These are the original doors of the church "Birth of the Virgin" in the cave of the island of Maligrad in Prespa. They date back to around the 14th century and are made of wood.

Craft metal buckles were also used for the decor. The side frame is engraved with geometric motifs. Some small parts are saved from this. The two door shutters have the same style of decoration. In the upper part there are two circles, in the middle the motifs create crosses, while in the third division the same motif is placed diagonally. Metal buckles are skillfully used and enrich the décor.



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The National Museum of Medieval Art, houses diverse collections of religious objects and not religious. Numerous articles, have been preserved, in wood, precious metals, stone and clothes

- 1. / 2. Communion cup is a ritual liturgical vessel, 18th century,
- 3. Religious box, 17th century
- 4. Gospel covering with scenes, 18th century
- 5. Ceremonial headdress of Bishop (Miter of Bishop), early 19th century



National Museum of Medieval Art

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