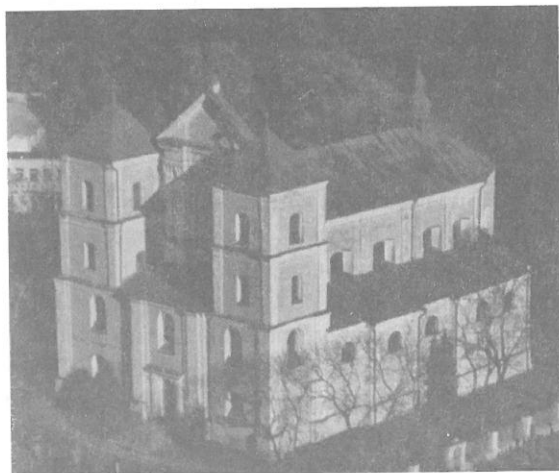


**“GREEK” PAINTINGS IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF TRAKAI:
PICTURING BELIEF AND SPREADING FAITH IN MEDIEVAL
LITHUANIA***

Giedrė MICKŪNAITĖ (Вилнюс, Литва)

In late 2006, fragments of wall paintings executed in the Byzantine style were found in the parish Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist in Trakai (Fig. 1), Lithuania.¹ The discovered images feature figures of saints, plants, and draperies. By 2008, all the surviving fragments have been opened and are currently under conservation. In what follows, I will briefly present the discovered pieces and will attempt at identifying their iconography and relation to the church architecture and will offer a hypothesis as to their artistic provenance and ideological context.



1. The Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist. Aerial view, 2007. Courtesy the Church Heritage Museum, Vilnius.

* The participation at the Symposium in Veliko Tärnovo and the preparation of this article has been made possible by the Lithuanian Research Council grant no. L-1-34. I am grateful to Prof. Elka Bakalova, Prof. Ivanka Gregova, Prof. Elissaveta Moussakova, Prof. Kazimir Papkonstantinov and Dr. Rossina Kostova for their valuable suggestions that helped me improving this article.

¹ Trakai (*Troki* in Polish) is a town ca. 30 km westwards of Vilnius.

History: Written Evidence and Surviving Fragments

The earliest information about “Greek”² wall paintings in the Trakai church comes from its history written by Priest Symon Mankiewicz and published in 1645. This book tells that the walls of the church “gifted with the miracles of the Most Holy Mother of God” had previously been entirely covered with “Greek” images. However, after a porch was built (in the first decades of the seventeenth century), the paintings in the naves were whitewashed. Mankiewicz adds that at the time of his writing, some “Greek” paintings were still extant in the choir.³ Five years later, professor of the Vilnius University Albert Wiivk Koiałowicz re-iterated this information, although he wrote of the “Greek” murals as referring to the past only.⁴ Given the chronology of the reconstructions of the church, it is likely that the paintings were completely plastered during the renovation of the building after the 1655–1661 war with Muscovy. Sources from the eighteenth and later centuries mention only a whitewashed interior, although reminiscences of the “Greek” paintings survived longer.⁵

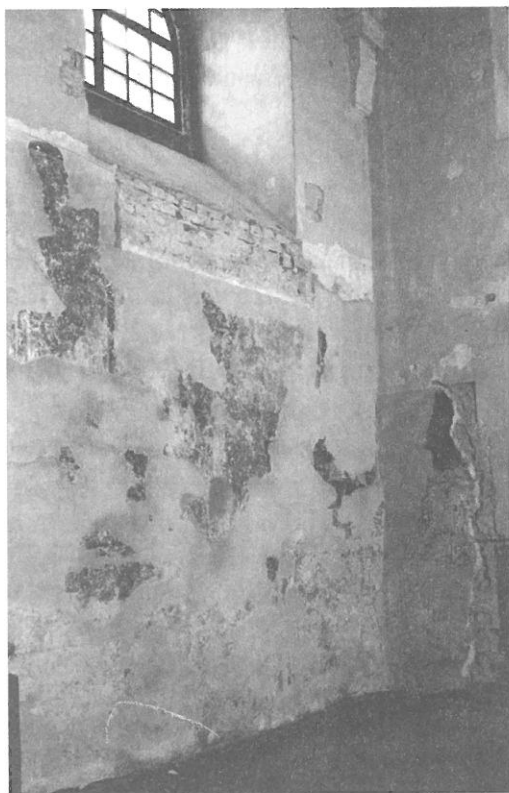
In medieval Lithuania, the fashion for “Greek” images is related to the grand ducal court and is better known from artistic export to Poland under the first Jagiellonian kings, rather than from pieces surviving in the territories of the former grand duchy. Generally, the inclination towards “Greek” art is explained by the strong presence of Orthodox culture among Lithuanian ruling elites in the Middle Ages. The highly fragmentary survival of these paintings, taken together with scarce and late-written evidence, has long prevented deeper research into this topic.

² Hereafter, the term “Greek” is used in accordance with the Lithuanian sources of the early modern period and indicates images executed in, or attributed to, the Byzantine style, rather than being of Byzantine provenance.

³ “... iakoż i sam kościol był wbytek z staro swiecka po Grecku malowany. Teraz babiniec robiąc połowę malowania wapnem zatarto, a chor sam s takimże malowaniem został,” *Kościol farski trocki, cudami Przenaswetszey Bogarodzice Panny Maryey obiaśniony a prez xiędza Symona Mankiewicza biskupstwa Zmudzkiego dyocesiano nowo na świat wystawiony* (Wilno: W Drukarni Ojców Bazylianów, 1645), sign. A3/r.

⁴ “... prout & totius templi parietes ante erant ornati picturis Graeco habitu”, *Miscellanea rerum, ad statum ecclesiasticum in Magno Litvaniae Ducatu pertinentia. Collecta ab Alberto Wiivk Koiałowicz Societ Jesu S. Theol. Doct. Almae Universitatis Vilnensis procancellario et ordinario S. Theol. Professore vulgata superiorum permissu* (Vilniae: Typis Academicis, 1650), 26.

⁵ E.g., Władysław Syrokomla, *Wycieczki po Litwie w promieniach od Wilna*, vol. 1, (*Troki, Stokliszki, Jezno, Funie, Niemież, Miedninki etc.*) (Wilno: Nakładem księgarza A. Assa, 1857), 42.



2. Remnants of wall paintings featuring the drapery at the bottom, unknown bearded saint with a scroll and fragments of two figures; south-western corner.
Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008.



3. Remnants of wall paintings featuring figures of unknown saint bishop and unknown military saint; eastern part of the southern wall.
Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008.

Nevertheless, even a brief glimpse at the known examples⁶ shows that all these pieces come from the sites related to the grand ducal power, and the Trakai church is not an exception to this rule.

Founded in 1409 by Grand Duke Vytautas/Witold/Vitovt (r. 1392–1430),⁷ the Trakai church reappears in written records only in 1479,⁸ by which time it is well established and quite influential. Circumstantial and archaeological evidence suggests that the church was built around 1420 and that its earliest mural decoration dates from that time as well.⁹ This red brick Gothic church was decorated with Byzantine murals composed typically of contemporary Orthodox churches. The paintings were arranged in registers, two of which can be identified today: the first

⁶ Maciej Strykowski mentions portraits of Grand Duke Algirdas/Olgierd (r. 1345–77) and his spouse painted in “Greek” style in the castle of Vitebsk (Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Zmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi* (Warsaw: Nakład Gustawa Leona Glückberga, 1846; reprint Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1985), vol. 2, 387); fragments of figurative paintings in the Lower Castle of Vilnius and the castle of Kreva (in Belarus), both dated to the 14th century are known from archaeological finds; Byzantine wall paintings from the palace of Trakai island castle are known from drawings, photographs, copies, and descriptions made from the early 19th to the mid 20th century (for their analysis in English see Giedrė Mickūnaite, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania* [Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2006], 52–62); and the composition featuring the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist from the 15th century was discovered in a crypt under the Vilnius Cathedral in 1985 (see Giedrė Mickūnaite, “The Crucifixion from the Vilnius Cathedral: Integration of Faith and Translation of Skill,” in *Art and the Church. Religious Art and Architecture in the Baltic Region in the 13th–18th Centuries. Proceedings of the Conference Dedicated to the Centenary of Sten I. Karling* [Tallinn: EKA Press, 2008], 57–67).

⁷ *Vitoldiana. Codex privilegiorum Vitoldi Magni Ducis Lithuaniae, 1386–1430*, ed. Jerzy Ochmański (Warsaw, Poznań: PWN, 1986), no. 21, 27–28.

⁸ *Codex diplomaticus Ecclesiae Cathedralis necnon dioeceseos Vlnensis / Kodeks dyplomatyczny Katedry i diecezji Wileńskiej*, vol. 1, 1387–1507, eds. Jan Fijałek and Władysław Semkowicz (Krakow: Nakładem Polskiej Akademii Umiejętności, 1948), no. 313, 371.

⁹ The reasoning behind this dating is the following: the foundation privilege from 1409 is the act of will and power, but does not inform about the actual construction works. In the winter of 1414, the Burgundian nobleman Ghillibert de Lannoy, having passed Trakai remained silent about any church in the town in his description otherwise keen on the matters of faith (*Oeuvres de Ghillebert de Lannoy voyageur, diplomate et moraliste*, ed. Ch. Potvin and J.-C. Houzeau [Louvain: Impremierie de P. et J. Lefever, 1878], 40–41). I assume that the church was not constructed at the time of Lannoy’s visit though building works might have already been started. Thus, the completion of the building is tentatively dated to the 1420s.

showing a drapery (Fig. 2) and the second containing full size figures (Figs. 2–4). In all likelihood, there were more elaborate compositions to which the figure of the Patriarch Jacob (Figs. 4–6) and a group of marching saints (Fig. 7) testify. The lower part of the painted drapery (Fig. 9) surviving in the apse is clearly distinct from its counterparts in the aisles. Recent investigation of the brickwork revealed that the apse was built after 1500¹⁰; therefore, its decoration will not be considered herein even though Mankiewicz called it “Greek.”¹¹

Iconography: Patriarch Jacob and Medieval Eschatology

From all the figures in the Trakai paintings, only the Patriarch Jacob (Fig. 4) has been identified after the Cyrillic inscription above the painted effigy (Fig. 5). The patriarch is shown seated under a kind of a vine tree; on his chest one sees ten or more almost identical faces whose implied bodies are enveloped in Jacob’s mantle and held by his crossed hands (Fig. 6). This representation has no direct basis in the Bible, but relies on the parable about rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). The parable contrasts the afterlife of poor Lazarus, whose soul goes to the bosom of Abraham, and the fate of the rich man thrust into the fires of Hell. Christianity not only inherited the motif of the Abraham’s Bosom from Judaism, but also elaborated upon it. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Near Eastern Christian thought provided the other two Old Testament patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, with bosoms for the souls of the righteous. From that period, Coptic prayers and inscriptions on tombstones regarding all the three patriarchs as intercessors for the souls of the dead are known. In spite of outstanding reputation of the patriarchs’ among the pious, their visual representations are quite rare in the Middle Ages. An overview of the known pieces gives an impression that the motif of Abraham’s Bosom, either illustrating the biblical parable or expanded to include more souls besides that of poor Lazarus, is the most popular; second to it, is the type of all the three patriarchs among whom only Abraham is shown holding a soul or souls; third is the type with the three patriarchs holding one, two, or three souls; and the rarest is the type with all the three patriarchs shown holding many souls. The latter might be divided into two sub-types according to the way in which the souls are held. More widespread is the sub-type where the souls appear in a cloth held like a hammock by a patriarch. In other sub-type, to which the figure of the Patriarch Jacob in Trakai belongs, the souls are held wrapped in a patriarch’s mantle. The geographic distribution these sub-types allows calling the first a southern and the second a northern sub-type. The following overview of the early representations of

¹⁰ I am grateful to the researcher of brickwork Robertas Zilinskas and archaeologist Olegas Fedajavas for sharing results of their investigations.

¹¹ See note 3 above.

the three patriarchs with the souls of elect will include only the southern sub-type as images of the northern one are of significantly later period.

Erica Cruikshank Dodd¹² writes that the earliest surviving image of the three patriarchs with the souls of the elect is the tenth-century fresco in the Yılanlı Kilise in Cappadocia. The most celebrated, although lost, piece was the mosaic of the Last Judgement commissioned by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos in 1043 (accomplished in 1048) for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Today, this composition is known only from written sources, which also mention the three patriarchs with the souls of the elect. In the twelfth century, crusaders rebuilt the church; however, the mosaic was preserved even though relocated. Its iconography has influenced frescoes in the Church of the Hospitallers of St. John of Emmaus in the village of Abu Gosh near Jerusalem from the 1170s. There eschatological compositions occupy the eastern vaults of the church: the Anastasis appears above the apse, the Deesis is painted above the northern conch and the three patriarchs with the souls of the elect are located above the southern conch.¹³ However, the best preserved composition executed under the influence of the mosaic in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is a fresco of the Last Judgement in the chapel of the monastery of St. Moses the Ethiopian (Mar Musa al-Habashi) in Syria. The dating of this painting to 1192 indicates that it was made after the fall of Jerusalem to Salah ad-Din in 1187 and suggests that monks fleeing the Holy City brought this iconography from Jerusalem to Syria.¹⁴

Crusaders transferred the image of the three patriarchs into the Last Judgements of Western Europe. However, very few western representations show the patriarchs with many souls. The three patriarchs each holding two souls on his lap appear in the famous twelfth-century portal relief of the Church of St. Trophime in Arles.¹⁵ Three souls appear in the cloths held by the patriarchs in the Last Judgement fresco in the Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina in Naples (ca. 1317–23).¹⁶ Similar iconography is found in a fragment of a mid-fourteenth-century

¹² The overview of the images of the patriarchs is based on Erica Cruikshank Dodd et al., *The Frescoes in Mar Musa al-Habashi. A Study in Medieval Painting in Syria*, Texts and Studies 139 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2000), 85–90.

¹³ For an in-depth study of the frescoes in the church of Abu Gosh see Gustav Kühnel, "The Church of the Hospital of St. John at Emmaus (Abu Gosh)," in id., *Wall Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Frankfurter Forschungen zur Kunst 14 (Berlin: Mann, 1988), 149–180.

¹⁴ Cruikshank Dodd et al., *The Frescoes in Mar Musa al-Habashi*, 85–90.

¹⁵ See *Alfa e Omega: Il Giudizio Universale tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. Valentino Pace (Milano: Itaca, 2006), 79.

¹⁶ *The Church of Santa Maria Donna Regina: Art, Iconography and Patronage in Fourteenth Century Naples*, eds. Janis Elliot and Cordelia Warr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), fig. 83, 188.

wall painting discovered in the Calvinist church of Svinica in Slovakia.¹⁷ Medieval Last Judgements featured the Bosom of Abraham more eagerly than all the three patriarchs. This iconography was made manifest by the well-known mosaic in the Torcello Cathedral. Made by Byzantine masters around 1100, the mosaic shows Abraham holding the soul of Lazarus on his lap while numerous souls stand around him. The patriarch is represented seated in the garden of Paradise in the company of the Virgin Mary and the Good Thief.¹⁸ Jérôme Baschet has demonstrated that in medieval West images of Abraham's Bosom within the compositions of the Last Judgement appeared in the eleventh, gained popularity in the thirteenth, decreased dramatically in the fourteenth and almost disappeared in the fifteenth century.¹⁹ This statistics reflect aptly even if belatedly the development of Catholic eschatology.

The image of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sitting under exotic plants, holding and/or surrounded with souls represents the Limbo of the Patriarchs. Understood as an upper edge of Hell, this limbo sheltered the souls of the righteous, who stayed there in repose and happiness even though deprived of the vision of God. The limbo "functioned" until Christ's descent into Hell. Then Adam and Eve and the righteous of the Old Testament were redeemed and the Limbo of the Patriarchs closed. Jacques le Goff has demonstrated the need for some intermediate place, where souls of the just and those who did not sin gravely may stay until the end of time. As a result the concept of Purgatory was introduced in the late twelfth century and became a Catholic dogma in the thirteenth.²⁰ By the same token, the functioning Limbo of the Patriarchs became a heresy and gradually seized being represented as part of the Last Judgement.

Eastern Christianity left the issue of Purgatory unsettled. Judging upon visual evidence, the Bosom of Abraham expanded to include all the three patriarchs and the latter merged gradually with Paradise. In the tradition of the Eastern Slavs, to which the Trakai case is geographically the closest, the earliest surviving representations of the Last Judgement date to the twelfth century; most of them

¹⁷ Zdzisław Kliś, *Paruzja. Przedstawienie Sądu Ostatecznego w sztuce średniowiecznej Europy Śródkowej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, 1999), fig. 86.

¹⁸ See *Alfa e Omega*, 53–60, for the reproduction of the mosaic see *ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹ For an in-depth study on this topic see Jérôme Baschet, *Le Sein du Père: Abraham et la paternité dans L'Occident médiéval*, *Le Temps des images*, ed. François Lissarrague and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2000), for the statistics of the representations in France and Italy see *ibid.*, table 3, p. 407.

²⁰ See Jacques le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire*, *Bibliothèque des Histoires* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1981).

include either the Bosom of Abraham juxtaposed to the rich man thrust in Hell²¹ or show all the three patriarchs.²² However, of all images from this region that I know of, none shows all the patriarchs holding souls. The murals in the Cathedral of St. Demetrios in Vladimir painted by Andrei Rubliov and Daniil Chernyi in 1408 are chronologically the closest to the paintings in Trakai. There all the three patriarchs are shown; however, Abraham alone holds a multitude of souls wrapped in his mantle while more stand around him.²³ Researchers have proved that these wall paintings follow the earlier twelfth-century iconography; however, in the original paintings Abraham was shown seated between Isaac and Jacob and holding a single soul on his lap.²⁴ It seems that in the early fifteenth century there was a tendency to paint more souls on Abraham's lap, but it did not concern the other two patriarchs. Art historians see Pskov as the city in which the tradition of painting the Last Judgement was firmly rooted. There the Last Judgements were painted on church walls in the fourteenth century while in other parts of Rus' they lost popularity in the thirteenth. The paintings in the Church of Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Snetogorsk (1313) are representative of the Pskov school. There the Last Judgement includes the three patriarchs, but again only Abraham holds the soul

²¹ Perhaps, the most representative juxtaposition comes from the murals in the Church of Transfiguration of the Lord in the village of Nereditsa near Novgorod (1199). There the scene of the Last Judgement occupied the western wall while the Bosom of Abraham was situated on the southern and the rich man in Hell on the northern wall. It is noteworthy that the rich man sits alone in front of Satan, while Abraham not only holds the soul of poor Lazarus, but is also surrounded with other souls of the elect. T.S. Shcherbatova-Sheviakova, *Nereditsa Monumental'nye rospisi tserkvi Spasa v Nereditse* (Moscow: Galart, 2004), fig. 206, 204 and fig. 209, 207; for a graphic reconstruction of the iconographic programme see the scheme enclosed in the book.

²² The Bosom of Abraham appears in the Last Judgement compositions painted in the Churches of St. Cyril of Alexandria in Kiev 1189. The three patriarchs are shown in the murals of the Churches of St. George in Old Ladoga (1193-97), the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Snetogorsk near Pskov (1313) and the Church of St. Demetrios in Vladimir (end of the 12 th c.), and the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin in Vladimir (originally in 1189, repainted in 1408), for an overview of most of these wall paintings and their iconography see Xenia Muratova, "Gli affreschi della cattedrale di San Demetrio a Vladimir," in *Alfa e Omega*, 85-89; Vladimir D. Sarab'janov, "De Cattedrale della Natività della Madre di Dio nel monastero di Snetogory a Pskov," *ibid.*, 93-94; *id.*, "La chiesa di San Giorgio a Staraja Ladoga," *ibid.*, 97-98.

²³ See M. Alpatov, "Vladimirskie rospisi," in *Andrei Rubliov, okolo 1370-1430* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972), 46-94.

²⁴ Muratova, "Gli affreschi della cattedrale di San Demetrio a Vladimir," 85-89.

of Lazarus, while many more souls stand in the background.²⁵ That Pskovians were the guardians of the tradition is testified by the artistic export to Poland. In 1470, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Casimir the Jagiellonian (r. 1447–1492) commissioned paintings for his burial Chapel of the Holy Cross in the Cathedral of Krakow. The Pskovian masters painted the Last Judgement on the chapel's western wall; however, it is unknown whether this composition showed the three patriarchs as this part of painting is covered by the eighteenth-century monument.²⁶ At first glance, the Pskovian connection might seem worth closer inquiry: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had constant and intense relations with the city of Pskov; however, written sources are silent of any artistic cooperation between Pskov and Lithuania. Moreover, the style of the Trakai paintings is clearly distinct from the Pskovian school.²⁷ At this early stage of my research I have not yet identified stylistic relations of the Trakai paintings; therefore, I rely on iconographic evidence. Thus far, results are quite paradoxical: regardless of the early the Last Judgements with the three patriarchs in the territories of medieval Rus', the "standard" Orthodox iconography of this composition was formed only in the late fifteenth century in relation to the eschatological expectations as the seventh millennium since the Creation was approaching in 1491/92.²⁸ Hence, the wall paintings in the Trakai church, dated to the 1420s, fall into a kind of chronological gap. Moreover, the representation of the Patriarch Jacob with many souls wrapped in his mantle in Trakai is the earliest such image of Byzantine style that I know of. It would be logical to postpone the dating of the murals to the later

²⁵ For the popularity of the Last Judgement compositions in Pskov see V.N. Lazarev, "Snetogorskie respisi," in id., *Russkaya srednevekovaya zhivopis'. Stat'i i issledovaniya* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 150–278; Vladimir Sarab'yanov, "'Strashnyi sud' v respisiakh sobora Snetogorodskogo monastyrya v Pskove i ego literaturnaya osnova," *Problemi na izkustvoto* 2 (1996): 23–30.

²⁶ Anna Rożycka-Bryzek, "Byzantińsko-ruskie malowidła ścienne w Kaplicy Świętokrzyskiej na Wawelu (1470)," *Studia do dziejów Wawelu* 3 (1968): 175–266.

²⁷ L. I. Lifshits, *Ocherki istorii zhivopisi Drevnego Pskova: seredina XIII – nachalo XV veka. Stanovlenie mestnoi khudozhestvennoi traditsii* (Moscow: Severnyi palomnik, 2004).

²⁸ David Goldfrank, "Who Put the Snake on the Icon and the Tollbooths on the Snake? – A Problem of Last Judgement Iconography," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 19 (1995): 191. For the overview of the early modern representations of the Last Judgement see Lilya Berezhnaya, "Orthodox Icons of Last Judgement [in] Ruthenian Lands (16–18th Centuries). Traditions, influences, and Unsolved Problems," *Sotsium. Al'manakh sotsial'noi istorii* 3 (Kiev 2003): 209–40.



7. *Procession of saints, northern wall.*
 Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008.



8. *A tree of Paradise (?), northern wall.*
 Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008.



9. *Lower part of painted drapery and fragment of floor tiles, after 1500; north-eastern corner of the apse.*
 Photo: Olegas Fediajavas, 2008.

fifteenth century, but this would contradict architectural logic.²⁹ Therefore, I leave the issue of artistic provenance open and inquire into the paintings as they are located within the church architecture.

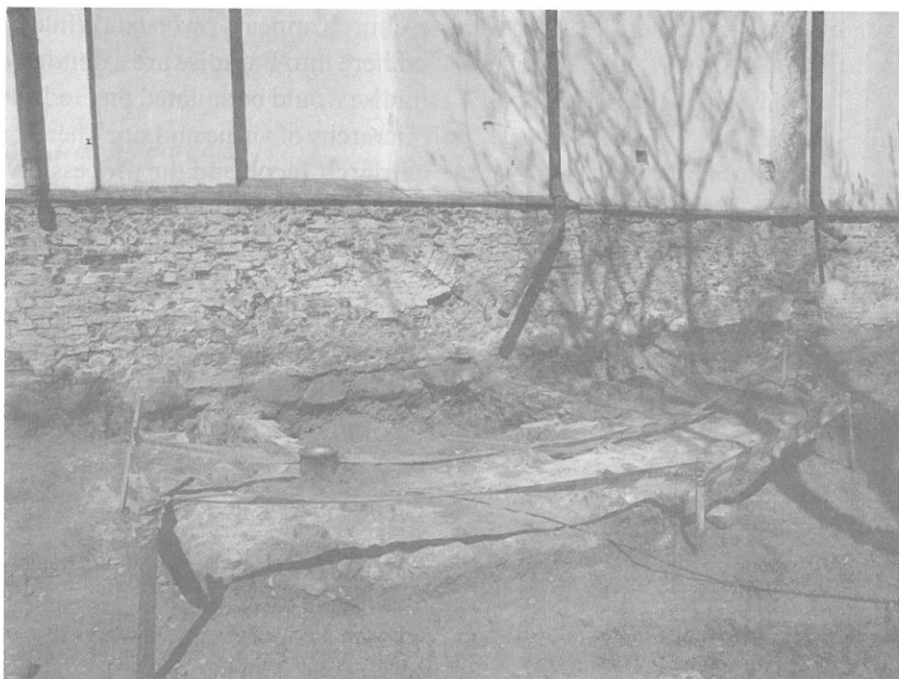
Iconographic Programme and its Location within the Church Architecture

Obviously, the figure of the Patriarch Jacob in the Trakai church once belonged to a larger composition of the Last Judgement, in which the three patriarchs were shown holding the souls of the elect. It is unknown, whether the patriarchs in Trakai were depicted within or besides Paradise. However, the surviving fragment of a tree (Fig. 8) very similar to that above the figure of Jacob and the group of marching saints (Fig. 7) join aptly into a larger picture of Paradise, to the gates of which the procession of the elect marches. Regardless of being quite persuasive, the suggested scenario becomes doubtful when the location of these images within architecture is considered (Fig. 10). While, the figure of the Patriarch Jacob painted on the western wall falls within the traditional location of the Last Judgement compositions, the fact that the other tree of Paradise and the procession of the elect appear on the northern wall deviates from this tradition. Even greater discrepancies are observed if one mentally projects the Last Judgement onto the western wall of the Trakai church. Despite certain confessional differences, all the medieval Last Judgements follow a standard scheme: the image of God is on top at the centre, Paradise is on God's right and Hell on God's left. Viewed with this scheme in mind, the location of Paradise in the Trakai church appears reversed. While one may disregard the fact that the images joined here into Paradise are extended on western and northern walls, the fact that Paradise would be situated on God's left violates the essential principles of Christian hierarchy of virtue and sin. Therefore, either the iconographic attribution of the Patriarch Jacob and the procession of the elect is wrong, or there should be some other explanation for such a grave reversal of the composition. I argue for the second option and address the architecture of the Trakai church.

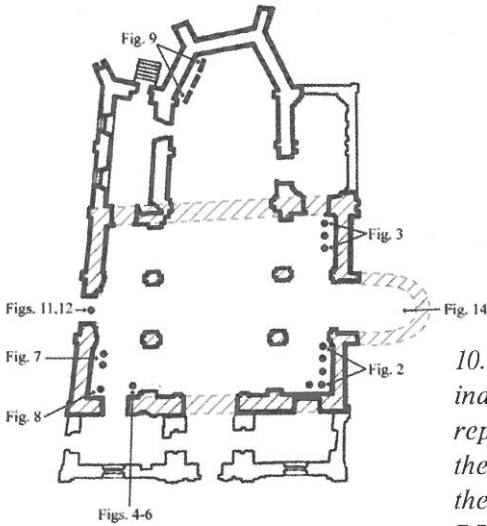
²⁹ The investigation of brickwork of the Trakai church revealed the relief mortar in the joints between bricks suggesting that the masons did not plan the church interiors to be painted. Nevertheless, around 1500 the Trakai church was significantly altered; therefore, it is highly unlikely that the church was first painted and then rebuilt. A more credible scenario suggests that initially there was no plan to paint the church; however, the arrival of masters offered such an opportunity.



13. *Protrusion of the southern wall. Photo: Gedrė Mickūnaite, 2009.*



14. *Foundations discovered by the protrusion of the southern wall. Photo: Olegas Fedajavas, 2008.*



10. Ground plan of the church, arrows indicate to location of wall paintings reproduced herein; line-contours show the hypothetical plan of the church in the fifteenth century. Digital drawing: Rūta Mickienė, 2009.

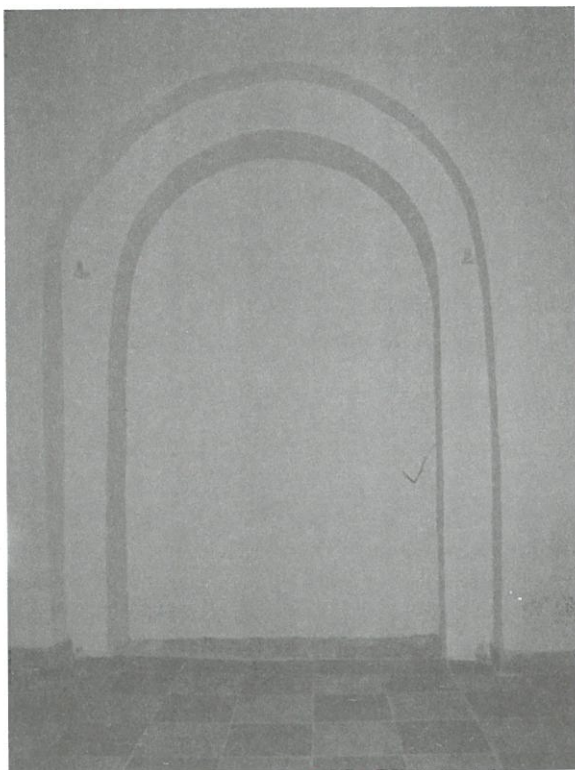
The ground-plan of the church (Fig. 10) shows the building composed of irregularly shaped rectangle, to which an oblong apse on the eastern and a rectangular porch on the western side are added. The apse is flanked by the narrow rectangular sacristy in the north and a slightly wider chapel in the south. This usual structure of the church deviates from the tradition of Gothic architecture in Lithuania when the size of its naves is considered. The inner measurements of the naves are the following: the western wall – 23.30 m, the eastern part – 21.80 m, the southern wall – 17 m and the northern – 16.40 m. Hence, the width of the naves exceeds their length by about six metres; this makes the Trakai church the sole example of such proportions among Gothic churches in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.³⁰ What is more, in the fifteenth century the entrance into the wide naves was located in the middle of the northern wall (Figs. 11, 12). Opposite this entrance, there is a protrusion of the southern wall. During the excavations performed in the churchyard in 2008, foundations of an annex of rectangular plan have been found (Fig. 13) by the protrusion. These foundations have been labelled a chapel and the protrusion in the southern wall was identified as its remnants. While such an interpretation is logical given the current ground plan of the church, it must be

³⁰ In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, churches from the 13th and 14th centuries usually have a square plan, the later ones – rectangular but extended in an east–west direction, see Algė Jankevičiene “Gotikinių bažnyčių kompozicija. Bendrieji ir saviti bruožai” (The composition of the Gothic churches. Common and distinctive features), in *Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės gotika: sakralinė architektūra ir dailė* (Gothic style in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: sacred architecture and arts), ed. Algė Jankevičienė, Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis 26 (Vilnius: VDA leidykla, 2002), 13–32.



11. Bricked-up entrance in the northern wall, exterior view.

Photo: Giedrė Mickūnaitė, 2009.



12. Bricked-up entrance in the northern wall, interior view.

Photo: Giedrė Mickūnaitė, 2009.



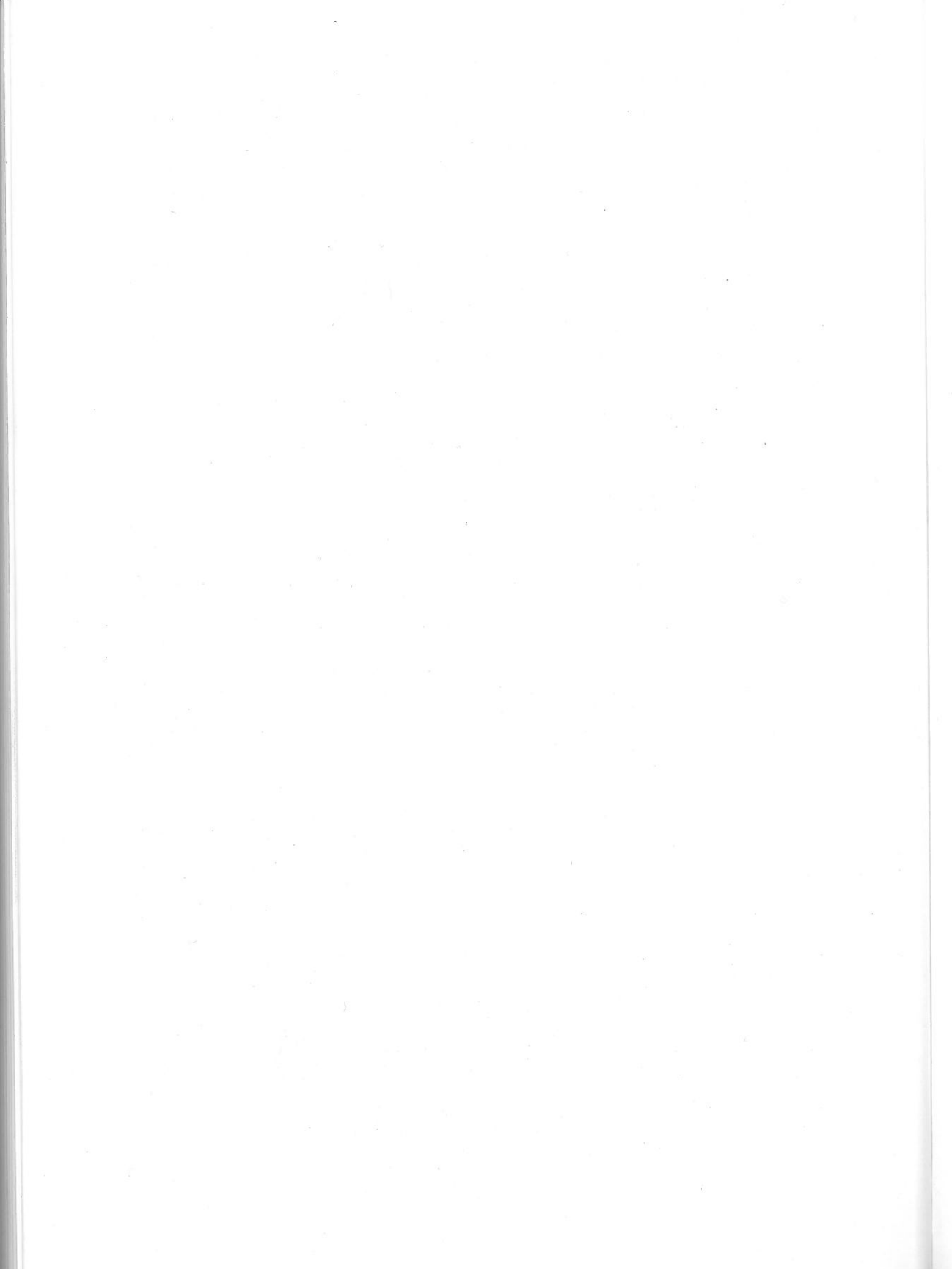
4. Patriarch Jacob, western wall.
Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008



5. Inscription identifying Patriarch Jacob.
Photo: Kęstutis Stoškus, 2008.



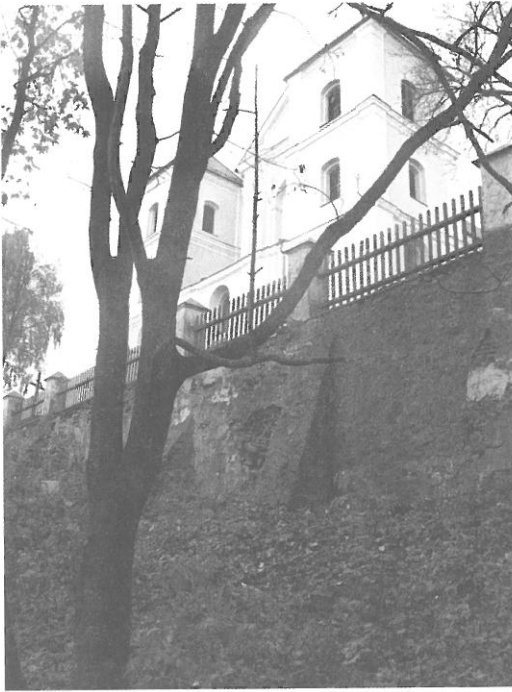
6. Souls of the elect wrapped in
Jacob's mantle. Photo: Kęstutis
Stoškus, 2008.



taken into consideration that no source mentions any chapel in the Trakai church before 1700, when the Römer family built one at the church's south-eastern corner. Hence, the silence of written sources, the bricked-up northern entrance, the unusual width of the naves, and the discovered foundations at the southern wall taken together with the fact that the current apse was built in the sixteenth century, suggests that in the fifteenth century the liturgical axis of the Trakai church was oriented southwards and that in the sixteenth century, it was turned towards east. If this reasoning is correct, the main entrance into the church was situated in the middle of the northern wall, the nave divided by the four pillars had the shape of an irregular rectangle, the eastern and western sides of which were longer than the northern and southern ones. The recently discovered foundations (Fig. 13) might have belonged not only to some chapel, but perhaps also to the fifteenth-century apse. Topographical and archaeological evidence offers additional support to this hypothesis. Today, the churchyard is most spacious on the northern side, where the main gate is located (Fig. 19). The plot on the western side is the narrowest (Fig. 15); moreover, the churchyard is inaccessible from the west as this part lies on a mound artificially reinforced with boulders (Fig. 16). Recent archaeological research revealed significant transformations in the churchyard from about 1500. The hill on which the church stands was lowered to enlarge the churchyard towards east. As a result, the depth of fifteenth-century graves excavated in 2008 at the southern wall is 50 cm while those discovered in the north-eastern part of the churchyard lie 350 cm deep.³¹ It follows that, the top of the hill was removed to enlarge the churchyard and make space for the new apse to be built at the eastern wall of the church. Graves discovered under the foundations of the apse also support this reasoning.³² Visual evidence reinforces this interpretation. The panorama of Trakai from around 1600 shows not only the church building, but also a tower-like structure (Figs. 16, 17). In all likelihood, the tower is a belfry; however, its location in the north-western corner of the churchyard, that is, on the left hand side from the western entrance is unusual. Therefore, I suppose that the tower captured by the church is the belfry left from before the enlargement of the churchyard. Then, when the main entrance was in the northern wall, the belfry stood on the traditional right hand side from the entrance.

³¹ Olegas Fedajavas, “Trakų Švč. Mergelės Marijos Aps ilankymo bažnyčia ir šventorius” (The Trakai Church of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary and its Churchyard), *Archeologiniai tyrinėjimai Lietuvoje* 2008 (2009): 279–94.

³² Ibid. Similar although much later case is the enlargement a churchyard by lowering a mound in Alsėdžiai (western Lithuania) in the 1640s, Mindaugas Paknys, “Alsėdžių bažnyčios iki XVIII a. pabaigos” (The churches of Alsėdžiai until the end of the eighteenth century), in *Alsėdžiai*, eds. Adomas Butrimas and Liepa Gričiūtė, *Žemaičių praeitis* 10 (Vilnius: VDA leidykla, 2002), 63–72.



16. The churchyard from the south-west.

Photo: Giedrė Mickūnaitė, 2009.



15. The churchyard, space between the western façade and the fence, view towards north.

Photo: Giedrė Mickūnaitė, 2009.

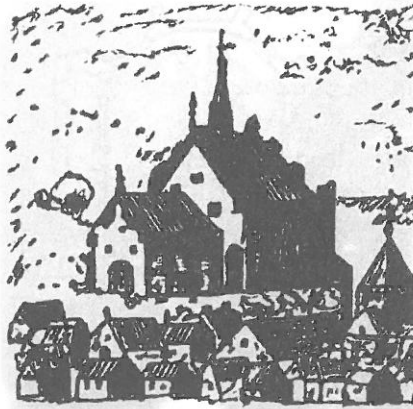
The combination of the hypothesis about the iconographic context of the Patriarch Jacob with the souls of the elect and that about the architectural development of the Trakai church results in the following scenario of the "Greek" wall paintings: the church building from the 1420s was oriented southwards. The Last Judgement was painted opposite the main altar and occupied the northern and, at least parts of, the western wall (Fig. 10). Around 1500, the churchyard was extended eastwards to accommodate the new apse added on the eastern side of the church. Then the building acquired the shape captured by Tomasz Makowski around 1600 (Fig. 16). However, the location of the belfry was not affected by these transformations (Fig. 19). Changes in the western part of the churchyard occurred only in the seventeenth century, when the porch was built at the western wall. These developments were in line with the Catholic Reform. It is likely, that the early modern Catholic zeal was instrumental for whitewashing the "Greek" murals, by that time already damaged by the reconstructions of church building. Obviously, the iconography of the Last Judgement with the three patriarchs did not match the Catholic idea of purgatory reinforced by the special decree of the Council of Trent (1545–1563).³³

Images and Ideology: A Hypothesis

The suggested scenario explains the destruction, but not the origins of the "Greek" murals in the Trakai church. In order to hypothesize about the artistic and ideological provenance of the paintings a historical excursus is necessary. It must be remembered that in the fifteenth century Lithuania, which converted into Catholicism as late as 1387, was a neophyte country. Fear and hope were those instruments that sustained the new faith among former pagans. Christianity used visual and verbal representations of the Last Judgement to indoctrinate the converts of torments of Hell and blessings of Paradise. Therefore, it is not surprising to find the Last Judgement painted on the wall of the church founded by Grand Duke Vytautas, a neophyte ruler striving to be recognised a Christian prince.³⁴ However, the founder of the church might be responsible for the general message of the church decoration, but he did not invent iconographic details. Hence, someone else stood behind the iconographic programme of the wall paintings in the Trakai church. The fact that the Last Judgement in Trakai included the three patriarchs with the souls of the elect, images that the Catholic Church considered heretical, suggests that not only masters, who painted the church were apprenticed in Orthodox

³³ "Session the Twenty-Fifth: Decree Concerning Purgatory," in *The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 232–33, accessed at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html> [10-06-2009].

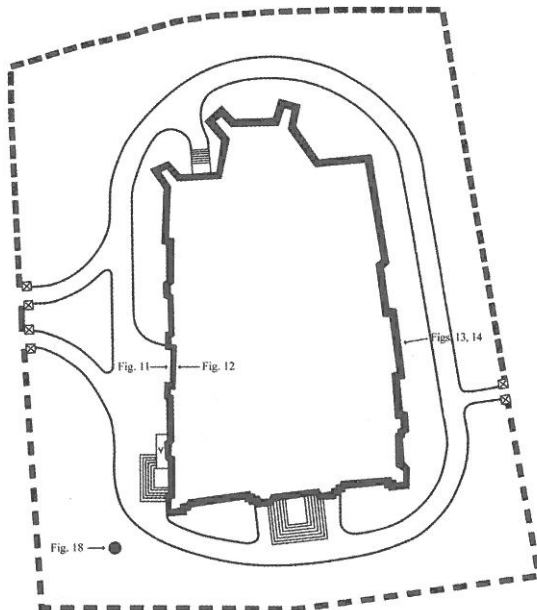
³⁴ On Vytautas' Christian reputation see Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler*, 35–52.



17. The church from north-east.
Fragment of the "Panorama of
Trakai" by Tomasz Makowski, ca.
1600.



18. A belfry (?) of the Trakai
church. Detail of fig. 17.



19. Plan of the churchyard,
arrows indicate architectural
and topographical features
reproduced herein supporting
the hypothesis about the
change of the direction of
liturgical axis. Digital
drawing: Rūta Mickienė,
2009.

milieu, but also there was an Orthodox mind behind the iconographic programme of the church decoration.

Given the position of the Catholic Church, it is surprising that the heretical image of the patriarchs was represented in the Roman Catholic church in Trakai, founded by the Lithuanian ruler to serve the neophyte people of his country. Viewed from the Orthodox perspective, there was nothing controversial about the bosom of the patriarchs. Moreover, the Orthodox Church saw the Last Judgement as instrumental for accepting and sustaining the Christian faith; conversions of Bulgarian Khan Boris and Vladimir of Kiev testify to this understanding. Therefore, my hypothesis is that the Trakai church was not only painted by the Orthodox masters, but that its iconographic programme was authored by an Orthodox person thinking along the lines of the Byzantine missionary tradition.

Among Orthodox persons associated with Grand Duke Vytautas, the founder of the Trakai church, the name of Gregory Camblak (1364–1419/20) stands out. Indeed, Camblak's activity left a lasting impact in Lithuania and was echoed for several hundred years.³⁵ Thus far, this prominent churchman and rhetorician has never been associated with visual arts and the available evidence cannot prove his direct influence on the Trakai paintings. However, medieval cultural practices imply that Camblak did not go to Lithuania alone; he was just the most distinguished among his companions. Unfortunately, no source that I know of identifies any of Camblak's associates. Nevertheless, some insights might be gained from the formal qualities of the Trakai paintings. Although these murals have survived in fragments, the colour of which was transformed by heat of fires, they can be clearly attributed to skilful draughtsmen, who followed the so-called graphic style. What is more, the figurative paintings give an impression of archaic modelling much more akin to Byzantine provincial art of twelfth and thirteenth centuries rather than to that of the early fifteenth. The impression of archaism is reinforced by the Cyrillic inscription identifying the Patriarch Jacob. The fact that it begins with characters "HĪ..." (Fig. 5) dissociates the person, who wrote it, from Eastern Slavs. Thus far, I did not find analogous spelling for the patriarch's name, but the usage of the character "H" at the beginning is more typical for Southern Slavs and suggests the southern provenance of the master/s. This brief excursus into political, ideological and geographical context of the early fifteenth century results not in conclusions, but into a hypothesis for further research.

³⁵ For Camblak's legacy in the written tradition of the Grand Duchy see Dimitar Kenanov, *Ozareniyat Grigorii Tsamblak. Po materiali ot Vilniuskite rākopisni i staropechatni sbirki* (Veliko Tārnovo: Pik, 2000).

Camblak's Lithuanian "sejour" is quite a shadowy period of his biography and is generally seen as an episode of Vytautas' aims to conclude the Church union in his realm. However, Francis J. Thomson argued convincingly that Camblak did not digress from the Byzantine standing about the matters of Orthodox Christianity. Moreover, judging from the "words" of Vytautas as recorded in the annals, they can be interpreted as an answer to Camblak's missionary initiatives.³⁶ Viewed from the perspective of Byzantine missionary tradition, Camblak falls aptly into the known scheme of conversion "from top to down"³⁷: he arrives at the grand ducal court, acts as the duke's envoy at the Council of Constance, and, as might be inferred from Vytautas' reply, urges the Lithuanian ruler and his people to abandon Latin Christianity for the true Orthodox faith.³⁸ Given the established reputation of the Last Judgement as an instrument of conversion and its usage in missions, it is suggested, that the wall paintings in the Trakai church is a result of missionary activity at the grand ducal court. There is no written evidence to associate these hypothetical missionaries with Camblak. However, future stylistic analysis of the wall paintings will identify the provenance of the Orthodox hands, who painted the walls of the church, and perhaps will shed light on the Orthodox mind, who authored the iconographic programme.

³⁶ Francis J. Thomson, "Gregory Tsamblak — the Man and the Myth," *Slavica Gandiensa* 25.2 (1998): 54–103.

³⁷ See "Missions," in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1380–81.

³⁸ *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, vol. 27, *Sokrashchennye letopisnye svody kontsa XV veka*, ed. A. N. Nasonov (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1962), 98.