

Inventory No: 007

Title: The Mother of God "The Life-Giving Spring"

Author: Cetir Atelier

Date: The beginning of the 19th century

Technique: tempera and gold leaf on wood

Dimensions: H. 54,5 cm, W. 36 cm, D. 3 cm.

Background: This icon was brought to the Onufri museum from the Church of "Prophet Elijah", in the "Përrua" Neighborhood in Berat.

The Mother of God "The Life-Giving Spring" icon comes from the church of "Prophet Elijah" in the "Përrua" neighborhood in Berat. This iconographic presentation is a typology of the Marian image of the Goddess, and is very widespread and linked to a legend in Constantinople. According to a version of the wondrous miracle to which the life-giving church was built, a Byzantine soldier named Leo was walking in a forest around Constantinople. Suddenly, he saw a blind man in front of him who was thirsty. Leo told him to sit under a tree and went to look for water but without success. Upon his return, he heard a female voice saying, "Leo, don't be sad, the water is right by your side. Give it to the thirsty one and pour some on his eyes." Leo did as he was told, looked around, and discovered water. He poured it onto the eyes of the blind man and his vision was restored. Emperor Leo later built a magnificent church by the miraculous spring-the Sanctuary of the Spring.

The icon, representing the "Virgin of the Spring", shows the Virgin blessing and embracing the Child. She is sitting on the more elevated of two basins, presumably representing the "living water" which is Christ. The living water from the more elevated basin flows into a larger marble basin below.

The iconographic composition painted by an anonymous iconographer is simple in

its symbolism. To show the identity of the Life-Giving Spring, the iconographer connects within the same icon St. Mary with Christ together into a body-bust inside of some sort of funnel. Both figures hold hands open and with their eyes horizontally communicate with the watchers. The Christ-Child in the frontal position is presented with two frontal hands blessing. It seems that the iconographer deliberately attributes the curative properties of water to the presence of The Virgin and Christ. The water flows freely, and not constricted. In this way, the iconographer poses two messages: First, that water comes from a source and secondly that is not a simple and common water, but a purifier and fertilizer for the spiritual life.

In the background, the urban buildings that make up a symbolic representation of the architectural buildings of Constantinople divide the city in two parts: the Islamic area with mosques and minarets and the Christian walled space of the "Life-Giving Spring".

At the bottom of the scene, there are paralyzed and sick believers drinking water for healing. The realization of two figures at the bottom of the scene add a mystical quality to the icon. The inscription written in Greek capital letters: "Η Ζωοδόχου Πηγής" is not correct but with grammatical syntax errors, showing that the iconographer is not a fluent Greek connoisseur.



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