

**COME, YOU WHO ARE BLESSED BY MY FATHER
– THE LAST JUDGMENT IN THE MONASTERY OF ZRZE –**

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Abstract. *The paper analyzes the scene of the Last Judgment, depicted in the portico of Zrze near Prilep (the Republic of North Macedonia), in the 17th century. The image, which occupies the west façade of the oldest church in the monastic complex, serves as a typical post-byzantine example of the theme. It displays many novelties which were introduced in this period. Yet, the omission of the representation of Hell and eternal suffering from the scene, makes it a unique and distinctive example.*

Key words: *Zrze monastery, The Last Judgment, The Imperial Deësis, Post-byzantine art*

1. INTRODUCTION

The scene of the Last Judgment in monastery Zrze was depicted in 1624-1625, which is noted in the ktetor's inscription above the main entrance to the oldest (Transfiguration) church of the complex (Fig. 1). Except for the year of the creation of the scene, the inscription, which is located between two niches (the upper one with the depiction of the Transfiguration of Christ and the lower with Christ the Angel of the Great Council in bust), informs us that Damaskin was the hegoumenos of the monastery at the time it was painted and that the ktetors of the fresco decoration were priest Dimitar from the village of Barbarasi, his wife Kalina and their three sons – Georgi, Negro and Vasil.

The scene covers four painted zones and occupies the central part of the main church's west façade (Many scientists have written about the Last Judgment scene: Покровский 1887, 285–381; Simić-Lazar 1985, 167–179; Milošević 1993, 131–146; Davidov-Temerinski 1995, 191–211; Grozdanov 1997, 47–56; Pejić 2002, 77–82; Serafimova 2004, 163–186; Mitrevski 2005-2008, 33–43; Andrejić 2012, 95–128) (Fig. 2). Despite certain deviations, its iconography follows the model which characterizes the scene of the post-byzantine period, while some specifics link it to monuments which are located in the territory of North Macedonia. The theme itself was very popular in the post-byzantine period (Pejić 2002, 77, note 7), and has its

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literary sources in the Gospel of Matthew (16:27; 24:30), the Vision of prophet Isaiah (30-33), the Book of Daniel (7), the Psalms, the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Thessalonians and, especially, in the Book of Revelation. The highest painted zone houses two combined episodes, The Folding of the sky like a parchment and the Hetoimasia, the third one is occupied by the twelve apostles, the second by the Righteous who are divided into separate categories, while the first one is reserved for the images of Paradise and the Imperial Deësis.



Fig. 1 The Ktitor's Inscription, Zrze



Fig. 2 The Last Judgment scene, Zrze

2. THE FOURTH ZONE – FOLDING OF THE SKY AND THE HETOIMASIA

The highest zone of the scene is situated in a spacious framed triangular surface, which follows the lines of the roof covering. The artist united in it the episodes Folding of the sky like a parchment and the Deësis, which was a common praxis of the time, and also appears in the churches of Saint Nicholas in Zrze (first half of the 17th century), the Theotokos in Kostinci (first half of the 17th century), SS Peter and Paul in Tutuin (1646-1647) (Mitrevski 2009, 85, 99; Simić-Lazar 1985, 168; Vasileski 2015, 27–43), etc. This makes the image of Christ in a red mandorla (Book of Daniel 7:13; Psalm 9; Matt. 25:31; Rev. 4:1-11; 20:11–15), flanked by two cherubs, the central motif of the scene (Gavrilović 2017, 289–298; Popovska-Korobar 2016, 149, fig. 4). Christ, who is wearing a green hiton and a chimation of the same color, is resting his feet on two winged red thrones (Matt. 25:31). Both his hands are outstretched, and with his right hand he is inviting the righteous, while refusing the sinners with his left hand. Similar examples can be found in Morača (1577-1578), in the church of St. John the Baptist in Jašunja (1583), the church of the Theotokos Perivlepta in Ohrid (1595), Slimnica monastery (1613-1614) and Pustinja monastery (1622) (Grozdanov 2007; Popovska-Korobar 2016, 149; Pejić 2002, 77–78;). The motif of the calling of the just and the refusal of sinners has been in use since the 3rd century. An interesting example can be found on the relief of a sarcophagus on which Christ is shown as the Good Shepherd, petting a sheep with his right hand and refusing a goat with the left, as mentioned in Matthew (Matt. 25:32–33, 34, 41). In the mausoleum of Galla Placidia (5th century) the detail of the Good Shepard is repeated and in the Basilica of Saint Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (6th century) the palm of his right hand is outstretched towards the sheep standing on his right side (Покровский, 1887, Tbl. LXXIII; Milošević 1993, 135; Davidov-Temerinski 1995, fig. 1). A somewhat unusual example comes from Dečani monastery where Christ is sitting on a throne carried by two angels, and he is blessing with both hands.

In Zrze, the parchment on which the mandorla with Christ is shown, is decorated with stars, indicating that he is in his Heavenly kingdom. Christ is flanked by the Theotokos and St. John the Baptist, whose hands are raised in supplication on behalf of humankind. The personifications of the sun and the moon appear in the upper corners of the parchment. They are mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew (24:29), and in the Book of Revelation (6:12), and were first incorporated into the scene in the 14th century, after which they became usual motifs of the Last Judgment. The corners of the parchment are folded by the Archangels Gabriel and Michael. This detail illustrates the words from the Vision of prophet Isaiah (34:4) and the Book of Revelation (6:14), which describe the wrath of God.

The representations of the Last Judgment, in which the aforementioned episodes have been incorporated into the same scene can be traced back to the 14th century and the church of the Theotokos of Ljeviš (Panić, Babić 2007, 73, 138, fig. 30). Later, they appear in the two churches in Zrze (the Transfiguration church and the church of St. Nicholas), in the narthex of the Assumption church in Morača, on the west façade of the church of St. John in Jašunja, where the detail of the two archangels folding the sky most resembles that of our example in Zrze, and in the Pustinja monastery, but it also appears in the majority of churches of the post-byzantine period (Petković 1965, 174–176; Subotić 1988-89, fig. 6; Pejić 2002, 77–78; Serafimova 2004, 168, note 23).

In Zrze, the Hetoimasia is depicted within the same triangular surface, beneath the Folding of the sky. The Prepared Throne is flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and

surrounded by angels dressed in imperial garments. Even though the tribune of apostles is usually shown within this zone, e.g. in the monasteries in Morača, Jašunja, Slimnica and St. Nicholas in Zrze, it does not appear on the façade of the Transfiguration church in Zrze. In the narthex of Studenica, where the scene was depicted in the 16th century, the throne is flanked by the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Adam and Eve, while the apostles were completely excluded from the scene, due to the lack of space. For the same reason, they have been omitted from the scene in the narthex of the Patriarchate of Peć (Babić, Korać, Ćirković 1986, 162, fig. 128; Petković 1965, fig. 12).

In Zrze a simple wooden throne, which has its luxurious representatives in Studenica, and especially in Morača, is located in the center of the scene, beneath the detail of Christ in glory. A white dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, is standing on the closed Gospel, while Christ's garments are left out from the scene. The depiction of the Hetoimasia differs in details so, for instance, the dove can be omitted, which is the case in Studenica and Morača. The True Cross, which is a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for all humankind, is behind the throne. It is very simple and, in difference to the ones in Studenica and Jašunja, it is depicted only with the Crown of thorns and the nails which were used at the Crucifixion, but without the lance and the cane with the sponge. Sometimes, like in Morača, the cross and the Gospel can be richly decorated with gems and pearls. In the church of St. Nicholas in Zrze, the Hetoimasia is placed in a medallion carried by angels. A closed Gospel with the dove and Christ's garments are shown on the throne, while the True Cross stands behind it. Just like in the main monastic church, the instruments of torture have been omitted, while Adam and Eve flank the throne in proskynesis.

In difference to the majority of scenes from this period, the one in Zrze has an image of the Fiery River flowing from the medallion with the Hetoimasia (Davidov-Temerinski 2010, 312), which makes it analogue to the images in Morača and St. Nicholas in Zrze. The same detail can be noticed in the nave of the Georgian church of the Theotokos in the Timotesubani monastery, where it flows from under Christ's throne. Still, in the majority of cases, the Fiery River is depicted as flowing from the winged thrones on which Christ is resting his feet (Book of Daniel, 7:10), e.g. the narthex of Peć (1561), Studenica (1568), Jašunja, Slimnica, Pustinja, Kostinci, the narthex of the Holy Archangels in Kučevište (1630-1631), and others (Petković 1965, fig. 12; Babić, Korać, Ćirković 1986, fig. 128; Grozdanov 2007, 401; Pejić 2002, fig. 30; Serafimova 2004, 163; Mitrevski 2009, 99).

The fact that the Hetoimasia has been depicted without the Arma Christi, in Zrze, can be understood as a wish to enhance the role of Christ as a just and gentle Judge, and not a punisher. And the reason for the depiction of the Fiery River flowing from the holy nails, which were used to crucify Jesus, and not from him, is because his sacrifice was already made on the Cross, after which he has defeated death, risen and ascended.

3. THE THIRD ZONE – THE APOSTLES

The apostles are depicted in the third zone, six on each side of the niche with the representation of the patron of the church, the Transfiguration. Even though the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 19:28) states that the twelve, who have followed Christ, will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, in Zrze they are standing in front of a long wooden bench. In monuments of the post-byzantine period, they are usually located on both sides of the Hetoimasia, but when they are given the role of heavenly judges of

Christ, they are shown as sitting on the twelve thrones with closed books and scrolls in their hands, which makes the example in Zrze an exception.

Adam and Eve, who are located in the same zone as the apostles, are very small and can easily be overlooked. Their presence is connected to Christ's Harrowing of Hell, which announces his Second Coming (Radovanović 1988, 89–103; Milošević 1993, 137). They were the first to be resurrected upon his descent into Hades, after which he defeated death and redeemed humankind. This is why they are depicted in proskynesis in front of the Hetoimasia, the symbol of salvation. Adam is crouching on the north side of the niche and Eve is on the south. She is standing in the Fiery River which flows from the Hetoimasia and ends just before the group of infidels with Moses, in the second zone.

St. Peter is leading the group of apostles on the north side. He is followed by John, Luke, Andrew, James and Philip. The initials of almost all the apostles in this group are inscribed above their heads. Philip is depicted as the last in the group, a common place reserved for him or Thomas (H. C. Evans, W. D. Wixom 1997, 452). He is a beardless youth with wavy brown hair (П.Э., Т III, 103–112) and a rolled scroll in his hands. James is standing next to him, also holding a scroll. He is young, with brown hair and a brown beard (The Painter's Manual 1974, 52; П.Э., Т XX, 517–520; LCI VII, 47–51). Andrew is standing in front of him, but is turned towards him. He has got long white hair and a beard, neatly split in the middle (The Painter's Manual 1974, 52; П.Э., Т II, 370–377; H. C. Evans, W. D. Wixom 1997, 47, fig. 14). He is holding his scroll with both hands. The Evangelist Luke is next in line. He and the other evangelists are holding closed books and not scrolls. Luke's beard and hair are brown and he has got a characteristic tonsure (The Painter's Manual, 52; Friend 1927, pp. 115–147; Đurić 1960, 333–351; Buchthal 1961, pp. 127–139; idem 1975, pp. 143–177; Kitzinger 1985; Spatharakis 1988; LCI VII, 448–464; Миљковић 2013, 991–992). John the Evangelist, a man with white hair and a bald crown is turned towards Luke. His white beard is split in two and his gaze is stern (П.Э., Т. XXIII, 679–731; Prolović 2011, 1–20; LCI VIII, 158–174). He is holding a closed book in his hands. St. Peter, who is leading the group, is standing next to him. He is depicted in usual iconography as a man with white hair and a white beard (The Painter's Manual 1974, 52). He is holding a rolled scroll with both hands, while looking up at the Prepared Throne.

The south group is led by St. Paul, a man with a brown beard and almost no hair (The Painter's Manual 1974, 52). He is holding a book in his left hand, while his right one is raised in a gesture of speech. He is followed by Matthew, a man with white hair and a tidy white beard split in the middle (LCI VII, 558–607). He is holding a book in his hands and is turned towards Mark, who is middle-aged and has brown hair (LCI VII, 549–562). Simon the Zealot comes next in the group. He is an old man with a white beard and white hair, and has a characteristic bald crown (The Painter's Manual 52, LCI VIII, 367–371). He is holding a closed scroll with both hands while turning towards Bartholomew, a middle-aged man with a brown beard and brown hair (The Painter's Manual, 52; П.Э. Т. VI, 706–711; LCI IV, 320–334). Bartholomew has a scroll in his right hand. The group ends with Thomas, a beardless youth with reddish hair (The Painter's Manual, 52; П.Э. Т. III, 103–112; The Glory of Byzantium, 73), who is holding a scroll in his left hand. All the apostles are clad in chitons and himations.

Even though not all of the apostles have been identified by initials, it is clear that only the authors of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, John and Luke) are holding books, while the others carry scrolls. As for St. Paul, it is easy to understand why he is also

holding a book. Being the author of the Pauline epistles, he too was a great contributor to the New Testament.

The four Evangelists and St. Paul are also holding books in the scenes from Morača and Tutin, while the others have scrolls. Another example can be seen in what is left of the representation in the church of St. Nicholas iz Zrze (Mitrevski 2009, 85), while in some cases, all of the apostles are holding open books (Slivnica), or are completely omitted due to the lack of space (Peć, Studenica).

4. THE SECOND ZONE – THE RIGHTEOUS

The groups of righteous are represented in the second zone. They include Old and New Testament saints, martyrs, emperors, empresses and holy women. Three groups are depicted on each side of the niche, above the entrance to the main church, with an additional group of infidels led by Moses. Each group is placed in a single framed field ending with a semi-circle. They represent clouds which will carry those who are alive to meet the Lord in Heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Some prominent representatives of each saintly category can be recognized. For instance, the group of archbishops is led by SS John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, kings David and Solomon are depicted among the prophets (Popovska-Korobar 2016, fig. 9; Serafimova 2004, 174), while St. Mary of Egypt is with the holy women.

The first group on the north side consists of eight monks, dressed in megaloshemos' robes. They are followed by martyrs who are young and beardless, dressed in garments with golden collars and pearled robes. The blue cloud in which they are depicted, illustrates the verses of John's Book of Revelation (Rev. 6:9; 20:4). They are preceded by a group of six archbishops, who are led by SS John Chrysostom and Basil the Great. The two also head the groups in Morača, Slivnica and Kučevište (Milanović 2006, fig. 5; Popovska-Korobar 2016, fig. 1, 9; Serafimova 2004, 174). The group of apostles, which is shown on the north side of the wall in the Perivlepta church in Ohrid, the Slivnica monastery and the church in Kučevište, is omitted from the scene in Zrze.

There are three groups of saints on the south side of the niche, joined by a crowd of infidels and Moses. The prophet looks as though he is floating in front of the Fiery River (Rev. 16:1), which has been addressed several times in the Old and New Testament, representing the wrath of God (Rev. 16:1; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8; Isa. 66:24; Amos 7:4; Matt. 13:42; 22:13; 25:30; Mark 9:44; Luke 12:5). The group consists of Jews, who are said to have committed the worse sin of all, known as the sin of deicide (Simić-Lazar 1985,174). Two Jewish elders at the front of the group, to whom Moses is showing the Prepared Throne, are in fear and disbelief. A few Turks are depicted at the back of the group and they are hiding behind the Jews, with only their heads protruding. The detail of Moses with the infidels is a novelty of the post-byzantine period (Milošević 1993, 140–141; Serafimova 2011, 207; Serafimova, Spahiu 2013, 165–178). Along with the Rich man standing in the Fiery River before Moses, the Jews and the Turks are the only other sinners represented in the scene in Zrze. During the Ottoman rule, this episode was rarely depicted in monuments in the territories of Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, while it appears in churches in North Macedonia (Grozdanov 392; Serafimova, Spahiu 2013 168, 170). Moses, with his characteristic prophet's hat, is turned towards the Jews and the Turks, showing them Christ in Glory and the Prepared Throne, which symbolizes his

Second Coming, when each person will be judged in accordance with his deeds (Rev. 14:7; 20:12–13). The episode with the Jews and the Turks was previously depicted on the west façade of the Perivlepta church in Ohrid (ca. 1595), and later on the east wall of the narthex in the church of the Archangels in Kučevište, the west façade of the Annunciation church in the Ovčar-Kablar Gorge (1633) and the church of SS Peter and Paul in Tutin (Grozdanov 2007, 386; Serafimova 2005, 183–184, 286; eadem, 2011, 207–208; Bojović 2010, 117, 120–122, fig. 4; Simić-Lazar 1985, 174–175, fig. 1, 3). The motif appeared under the influence of the monasteries of Mount Athos (Milošević 1993, 131–132, 140; Simić-Lazar 1985, 173; Serafimova 2004, 175–176, notes 73–75), along with some other novelties from the 16th century, which enriched the scene of the Last Judgment. The idea for the depiction of the Jews and the Turks in some post-byzantine Last Judgment scenes came from the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 4–24:13; 25–32; 35), the Gospel of John and the Sermons of SS John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa, which criticize Jews and other outcast nations as infidels (Serafimova 2004, 175).

The rich man, who is depicted in front of Moses, is standing in the Fiery River. He is pointing to his mouth, which is the usual iconography for the man's plea to Abraham to take pity on him and send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue, as he is in agony in the fire (Luke 16:24). Even though he is noted as Rich Lazarus, the name has no support in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which can be found in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 16:19–31) (Mirković 1961, 103; Pejić 2002, 79).

A poor man, who is on the other side of the Fiery River, is walking towards Paradise which is shown on the north side of the wall. He is an old man with a white beard and white hair. He is wearing a loincloth around his waist and has a food-sack hanging from his left shoulder. He is using a cane to support himself. His appearance evokes the verse from the Gospel of Matthew in which it is said that the Heavenly Kingdom is prepared for the likes of such people (Matt. 25:34–41). This is why the chapter was used as a literary source for the creation of the detail (Grozdanov 2007, 393–396; Simić-Lazar 1985, 171, 172; Serafimova 2004, 172–174; Pejić 2002, 78, note 9). In many churches of the same period, two or more beggars have been incorporated into the scene, and they are usually in the zone of the Hetoimasia, behind Adam and Eve. Attention should be drawn to the interesting example from the portico of St. George in Temska, in which seven unfortunates have been represented within the scene of the Last Judgment (Golac 2021, 187, note 31, fig. 13). The detail originates from Mount Athos from where it spread to the Balkans (Serafimova 2004, 173, note 57). The presence of the burdened, i.e. the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the poor, the ill and the imprisoned, in the scene is supposed to remind the faithful of one of the most important Christian virtues, which is mercy. This is why the poor man has been depicted opposite the rich man, who stands in the Fiery River in Zrze.

Old Testament prophets are depicted in a red field, behind Moses and the infidels. Even though they are not noted, kings David and Solomon, who are leading the group, can be recognized. Other such examples can be found in Morača, Slimnica and the church of the Archangels in Kučevište (Grozdanov 2007, 386; Popovska-Korobar 2016, fig. 9; Serafimova 2004, 174–175, note 72). They are dressed in imperial garments with richly decorated robes, and they have crowns on their heads. A youth with a tonsure, noted deacon, is standing behind Solomon. He is followed by a group of empresses who, like the two kings, are dressed in richly decorated garments and wear crowns on their heads. The last group on the south side of the second zone is that of the holy women. St. Mary of Egypt is depicted among them and is recognizable due to her characteristic iconography.

The most striking feature of the scene in Zrze is the omission of the punishments of sinners, both group and individual, the detail of the weighing of souls, angels summing the dead, or some other hint of hellish torments, usually depicted in monuments of the same, and earlier periods. For instance, in the church of St. Paraskevi in Brajčino, a group of sinners is situated within a separate frame in which they are depicted in the Fiery River. Another displays the image of an angel pushing demons with a trident, the weighing of souls is represented next to it, while a third field exhibits individual tortures (Popovska-Korobar 2007, 554–555; Chouliarás 2016, 141–158).

The examples from Studenica and Peć, in which the *zografos* had an extremely limited space to incorporate the tortures, and did so, proves that the omission of the episodes in Zrze was not due to the lack of space, but a deliberate decision of the person responsible for the painted program of the portico. The exclusion of the torments from the fresco in Zrze can be compared to the one in Dečani monastery, where the idea of salvation prevails over eternal torment (Davidov-Temerinski 2010, 309–324).

5. THE FIRST ZONE – HEAVEN AND THE IMPERIAL DEËSIS

In the lowest zone of the left-hand section of the scene is the image of Paradise with a completely unusual and unparalleled counterpart in the form of the Imperial Deësis, on the opposite, south side. On the north side, St. Peter, followed by a group of righteous, stands before the gates of Paradise (Matt. 16:19). He is holding the keys to the entrance of Heavenly Jerusalem, approaching the gate in a cloud, which carries him and the other righteous. The entrance is represented in the form of a hexagonal building with a red dome. It is guarded by a fiery cherub with a sword in each hand. The same detail can be found in Slimnica, the church of the Archangels in Kučevište, the church of Paraskevi in Brajčino, the Annunciation church in the Ovčar-Kablar Gorge, and elsewhere (Popovska-Korobar 2016, 155, fig. 1, 10; Serafimova 2004, 182, fig. 6; Bojović 2010, 120, fig. 3). The sides of the Enclosed Garden are surrounded by tall walls which end in five towers on the east and three towers on the west side. The Book of Revelation describes Heavenly Jerusalem as laid out like a square and made of gold, with high walls made of jasper, and with twelve foundations and twelve doors (Rev. 21:10–21).

The group of five Wise Virgins, of which only three can be seen, is depicted below St. Peter and the apostles. They are carrying the lit lamps which they have prepared, waiting for the bridegroom to arrive (Matt. 25:1–13). Even though this episode first appeared in the Rossano Gospels in the 5th century, it would only later become an essential part of the Last Judgment scene. However, in the post-byzantine period, it became an inevitable component of the representation, because it serves as an allusion to Christ's Second Coming.

The Good Thief is depicted within the walls of Heavenly Jerusalem (Luke 23:43). He is carrying his cross on his left shoulder as he turns to greet St. Peter and the others, who are about to enter the Garden of Eden (Шалина 2016, pp. 339–358). The three patriarchs of the Old Testament, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, are seated next to the west wall of the Enclosed Garden, with the souls of the righteous depicted on their bosoms. Eden is decorated with various plants, while the four heavenly rivers (Euphrates ϵ , Tigris T , Gihon Γ and Pishon Φ) flow from the wall in front of the patriarchs (Gen. II, 10–14). Even though the Theotokos was usually depicted next to, or in the register above the patriarchs (Serafimova 2004, 183–184), she has been omitted from the scene in Zrze.

Numerous examples speak of her frequent appearance in the scene. In the churches of Brajčino and St. John in Jašunja she is seated between the three patriarchs (right) and the Good Thief (left). In Morača she is shown between Abraham and the Good Thief. She also appears in St. Clement in Ohrid, in Lipljan (end of the 16th – beginning of the 17th century), and in Slimnica, where she is seated on the throne between two angels, with the patriarchs and the Good Thief in the lower register of the scene (Popovska-Korobar 2007, 555; Milanović 2006, fig. 5; Grozdanov 2007, 386; Petković 1965, fig. 85). It is only logical that her exclusion from the scene in Zrze comes as a result of her appearance on the opposite section of the wall, where she takes part in the scene of the Imperial Deësis.

As for the inclusion of iconographic novelties in the scene of the Last Judgment in Zrze, we have seen that the *zografos* had added four of them, i.e. Moses and the outcast nations, the beggar, the Wise Virgins and the four Heavenly Rivers, which appeared in the post-byzantine period and originated from Mount Athos (Grozdanov 2007, 391, 401–402). They were depicted in the church of the Theotokos Perivlepta in Ohrid (16th century) for the first time, after which they become essential elements of the scene.

Finally, the exclusion of Hell from the scene should be addressed. Even though it is an imminent element of the Last Judgment, with imaginative depictions of eternal torments, angels that summon the dead, the Weighing of human souls, the apocalyptic beast, or the Four Kingdoms, they have all been excluded from the scene in Zrze. Individual punishments, which were sometimes depicted in the lowest painted zones, and were very popular in rural areas during the post-byzantine period (Todić 1978, 193–204; Gerstel 2015, 65, 82–84, fig. 62; Chouliaras 2016, 141–158), were also left out in Zrze. Here, they have all been replaced by the Imperial Deësis (Fig. 3). The three participants of the Deësis have been placed in a separate plane with a red frame. Four decorated columns carry three arches under which Christ, the Theotokos and St. John the Baptist are depicted. Christ the Emperor and Great Archbishop is sitting on a richly decorated throne, under the widest arch (Grozdanov 1990,



Fig. 3 The Imperial Deësis, Zrze

132–149; idem 1988–1999, 151–160). The Heavenly King has an open book on his left knee, while blessing with his right hand. The words from Matthew, with which he will address the righteous during the Last Judgment (Matt. 25, 34), are written on the pages of the open book. Christ is wearing a white dalmatic rimed with golden bands. A blue omophorion decorated with large red crosses hangs down his chest, with a golden loros over it. He is wearing a blue kamelavkion on his head, heavily decorated with pearls.

The Theotokos as Empress and Paraklisa and St. John the Baptist are approaching the throne in supplication on behalf of humankind (Vasileski 2015, 27–43). The Theotokos is standing on the right side of the throne. Even though she is noted as empress, she is not wearing imperial garments. Instead, she has a simple blue dress, decorated only with a golden hem with pearls, which is placed around her neck. The sole imperial symbol she has is a richly decorated crown. She is holding an unrolled scroll in her left hand, with the words of her dialogue with her son written on it. Her right hand is shown in a gesture of speech. St. John the Baptist is standing on the left side of the throne, carrying a scroll with the words of his dialogue with Christ, while his left hand is also raised in a gesture of speech.

The scene of the Imperial Deësis first appeared in the 14th century and the earliest examples can be found in the Treskavac monastery, the church in Zaum, the Theotokos Perivlepta in Ohrid and Marko's monastery (Grozdanov, 105–109, 132–134; idem, 2007, 132–149; Tomić-Đurić 2017, 592–604). It was influenced by Psalms 45, 13–14 and 110, 4, which is why the verses are sometimes included in the scenes in the post-byzantine period. The oldest case was discovered by Cvetan Grozdanov in the church of St. Elias in Dolgaec (Grozdanov 1988–1999, 338–339; Subotić 1980, fig. 34, Mitrevski 2009, 30–31). The image of the Imperial Deësis is more frequently found in later centuries, like the 16th century example from St. George in Banjani near Skopje, or in St. George in Vraneštica, the Theotokos in Matka (Rasolkoska-Nikolovska 2004, 522, fig. 9; Subotić 1980, 157, fig. 114), the church of the Presentation of the Theotokos in Jašunja, and others. In these churches the scene is found in the nave and is not a part of the Last Judgment. However, the biggest similarities with the scene from Zrze can be found in the group from the church of St. Athanasius of Alexandria in Žurče near Bitola, which is the first example of the Imperial Deësis from the 17th century (Grozdanov 2007, 366–367). The main difference between the two images, apart from the fact that the one in Žurče is depicted on the north wall of the nave, is the representation of the Theotokos, because in Žurče, she is dressed in imperial garments.

The reason for the replacement of the episode of Hell with the Imperial Deësis in Zrze should be sought in the idea of giving the scene a positive twist, in hopes of awakening belief in future salvation for those who see it. So, instead of depicting eternal torture in the fires of Hell, the initiator of the scene chose a positive image of the Heavenly King who will be merciful to mankind when he comes to judge humans in accordance with their deeds. A similar idea, which is differently expressed, can be found in the scenes from the Timotesubani monastery (1205–1215) in Georgia and the Akhtala monastery (1205–1216) in Armenia. Even though the tortures in Hell are depicted in both churches, the idea of a positive outcome has been accentuated by the domination of the image of Paradise, which is positioned closest to the viewer's gaze. Another indication can be found in the episode of the Weighing of souls in Timotesubani, where the scale is tipped in favor of the good deeds. The third example appears in the Dečani monastery where Christ is addressing only the righteous in the scene of the Last Judgment (Davidov-Temerinski 2010, 309–324; 313, 319). Just like in Zrze, he is blessing with his right hand

and holding the Gospel of Matthew with the words "Come, you who are blessed by my Father" (Matt. 25, 34) written on its pages, in the left.

This is why the Deësis has been given such a prominent place in the portico of Zrze, where the episodes with the doomed, punished and tortured have been completely omitted, making it an unparalleled example. The King of Kings is expected to be merciful and his role is soteriological, which is why this is the first thing the faithful should encounter when approaching the church. The feeling of hope is emphasized by the intercession of the Theotokos and St. John the Baptist who are shown twice in the scene – in the highest painted zone within the Folding of the sky and in the Imperial Deësis, which is also noticeable in the Dečani monastery. It should also be noted that the Crazy Virgins have been omitted from the scene for the same reason, as they were denied the entry into Paradise. The motifs which allude to sin and punishment have been minimalized in Zrze, so only a remote detail of the Fiery River with the rich man standing in it, and the group of outcast nations led by Moses, are included.

The inclusion of the Deësis in the Last Judgment has its earlier examples in a number of churches in the territories of North Macedonia and Serbia. For instance, in the church of Paraskevi in Brajčino it is located in the triangular fronton of the west façade. On the façade of the chapel of St. Nicolas in Kučevište (1500) it occupies the entire zone, because of the inclusion of SS Peter and Nicholas, the patron of the church, in the scene. The same is evident in the church of St. John the Baptist in Jašunja with the addition of SS Paul, Peter and John the Evangelist to the scene, and in the church of the Theotokos in Slimnica, in which the apostles Peter and Paul have been subsequently added in 1645 (Popovska-Korobar 2015, 553–554; Subotić 1988-89, 80; Popovska-Korobar 2016, 158–159, fig. 1).

The earliest and mainly formed iconography of the scene, which would later be repeated, appeared in the 11th century, while the first and mostly symbolic images can be found on sarcophagi reliefs already in the early Christian period (Milošević 1993, 131). During the Byzantine period, the attention was divided equally between the representations of good and evil, while in some instances in the post-byzantine period, which was already difficult enough, these tendencies were minimalized. This is why almost the entire fresco in Zrze was assigned to purity, moral, virtue, and hope that the King of Kings will be merciful during his judgment, and that he will welcome those who approach him with the words: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world".

6. CONCLUSION

The abundance of representations of the Last Judgment in the post-byzantine period shows just how popular the scene was during this time. The positioning and often huge dimensions of the scene were used to warn viewers of what is to come at the end of time. As it is the first thing one sees when approaching the church, it offers tremendous potential for the manipulation of human feelings through the use of generally scary and detailed representations of Hell and tortures which await those who do not repent and change their ways. But sometimes, as in the cases of the Timotesubani, Akhtala and Dečani monasteries, the representations of punishments can be reduced in favour of a positive outcome of the judgment. The image in Zrze has taken a step further in that direction, as the depiction of Hell was almost completely omitted and replaced by the scene of the Imperial Deësis with a forgiving and welcoming King of Kings.

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PRIDITE, BLAGOSLOVENI OCA MOJEGA – STRAŠNI SUD U MANASTIRU ZRZE –

Rad se bavi analizom scene Strašnog suda u tremu manastira Zrze, nedaleko od Prilepa (Republika Severna Makedonija), koja je naslikana u 17. veku. Freska, koja zauzima čitavu zapadnu fasadu najstarije manastirske crkve, predstavlja tipičan primer predstave nastale u postvizantijskom periodu, i obuhvata sve novine koje su u ovom periodu u nju uvedene. Međutim, izostavljanje detalja paklenih muka, čini je jedinstvenim primerom bez paralela.

Ključne reči: *Manastir Zrze, Strašni sud, Carski Deizis, postvizantijska umetnost*