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The Idea of Tolerance and Visual Culture: Rista Vukanović's *Prayer**

Апстракт: Настало почетком XX века, дело „Молитва“ – рад сликара Ристе Вукановића, представљало је јединствен пример српске визуелне културе тог доба. Идејом, овај триптих је превазилазио оквире и границе размишљања о локалним проблемима, фокусирајући се преваходно на анализу религиозног живота трију монотеистичких религија – хришћанства, јудаизма и ислама. Вукановићев приступ одражава идеју верске толеранције, која јесте била једна од карактеристика Краљевине Србије у то време.

Кључне речи: Риста Вукановић, триптих „Молитва“, религија, толеранција, визуелна култура

One of the characteristics of European artistic practice and visual culture is the expression of various social, religious, and political ideas. The visual can be used to convey the attitude to the society, to propagate different ideals and create social and political context. The basis for such usage of art lies in the power of the visual to simultaneously perceive and shape the reality. Engaged usage of visual culture has had a very long tradition, and it has always been adapted to the context in which artworks were created. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, apart from the engaged action on behalf of the church, state, nation and political party, painters and patrons propagated different ideas on society, religion, international and inter-confessional relations.

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One of significant social ideas which marked new European culture and was embedded into various juridical systems was the idea of tolerance.¹ The concept of tolerance comprises the stance of respect towards other religious, national and ideological beliefs, different cultures and different political opinions. Tolerance is opposed to the extreme attitude; it becomes an integral part of the understanding of human rights, so it is recognized as one of the main characteristics of democratic societies. The history of the concept of human rights and tolerance can be recognized in various older social and religious systems.² It was intensively built up during the early modern time, the year 1789. with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen³ being a significant year and a turning point. During the 19th century, the attitudes stemming from the ideas of human rights and tolerance became part of legislative systems. This also characterized juridical norms of the newly-founded Principality/Kingdom of Serbia. Even though Orthodox Christianity became established as the state religion, other religious practices were allowed. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the idea of religious tolerance in Serbia was clearly mirrored in the existence and construction of various religious edifices in Belgrade. Islamic religious life was practiced in Bajrakli Mosque, a new synagogue Beth Israel was erected in Cara Uroša Street, and a catholic chapel was built in Vračar.⁴

At the time of Enlightenment, when the concept of tolerance was actively propagated in European society, it also entered the world of literature and visual culture. A classical work promoting tolerance was a play by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing „Nathan the Wise“, which featured a dialogue among the members of Jewish, Christian and Islamic religion.⁵ Lessing’s play was translated into Serbian by Jovan Hadžić in the mid 19th century.⁶ The idea of tolerance can also be found in the work of John Stuart Mill „On Freedom“, which was translated by Petar Karadjordjević in his youth.⁷ The first edition of this translation was published by „Ujedinjena omladina srpska“

¹ On tolerance see: G. Schlüter–R. Götter. „Toleranz“, in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 10, hrsg. Von J. Ritter–K. Gründer, Basel: Schwabe&Co. Ag. Verlag 1998, pp. 1251–1262.

² See: Schmale, Wolfgang, *Archäologie der Grund- und Menschenrechte in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ein deutsch-französisches Paradigma*, München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag 1997 (Schmale, Wolfgang, *Archäologie der Grund...*); *Religiöser Pluralismus und Toleranz in Europa*, Hrsg. Von C. Augustin, J. Wienand und C. Winkler, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2006.

³ Schmale, Wolfgang, *Archäologie der Grund...*, pp. 454–458.

⁴ An insight into the religious constructions of different confessions in Belgrade at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century can be found in: Каниц, Феликс, *Србија, земља и становништво*, књ. 1, Београд 1987, pp. 54–55, 77.

⁵ Robertson, R., „Dies hohe Lied der Duldung? The Ambiguities of Toleration in Lessing’s ‘Die Juden’ and ‘Nathan der Weise’“, *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 93, No 1 (Jan. 1998), pp. 105–120.

⁶ Лесинг, Готхолд Ефраим, *Натанъ мудрый: драматска спѣвка у петъ дѣйства*, Нови Сад 1861.

⁷ Мил, Џон С., *О слободи*, превео П. Карађорђевић, Беч 1868.

(United Youth of Serbia) which clearly shows that it influenced the development of awareness of young Serbian intellectuals.

Ideas of religious tolerance and religious pluralism were spread and propagated by means of visual culture, as well. Antic goddess Minerva, as an allegorical personification of tolerance, was introduced by Daniel Chodowiezky. Graphic images were also made for the Patent on Tolerance „Toleranzpatent“, which was introduced in the Habsburg Monarchy during the second half of the 18th century by Joseph II.⁸ Similarly, William Blake composed an illustrated graphical book „All Religions are one“.⁹ The issue of inter-religious dialogue became particularly topical as of the beginning of the 19th century. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim painted „Lessing and Lavater as guests in the home of Moses Mendelssohn“ in 1856.¹⁰ As it appears, the problem of inter-religious relations was central to Maurycy Gottlieb's work „Christ in Capernaum“, from 1878/79.¹¹ Also, the representation of different confessions within unique paintings was present in visual presentations of the Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the World Exhibition in Paris, in 1900, the pavilion of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a composition with the three main religions in the country. There were Catholic chrism, the process of sanctifying water in Orthodox Christianity, and an architect – the construction of a mosque.¹² Finally, the problem of representation of different monotheistic religions was the topic which Rista Vukanović explored in his triptych „The Prayer“.

The painter of idea: Rista Vukanović

Rista Vukanović was born in Busovača, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1873.¹³ He spent his childhood in Turnu Severin, Romania, and he finished grammar school

⁸ On tolerance in the Habsburg Monarchy: O'Brien, C. H., „Ideas of Religious Toleration at the Time of Joseph II. A Study of the Enlightenment among Catholics in Austria, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society“, *New Series*, vol. 59, No. 7, (1969), pp. 1–80.

⁹ An electronic issue of this work is available at: <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=aro&java=no>

¹⁰ Cohen, Richard I., *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in modern Europe*, University of California Press 1998, стр. 163–165. (Cohen, Richard I., *Jewish Icons: Art and Society...*)

¹¹ Mendelsohn, Ezra, *Painting a People: Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art*, Hanover, Ma. 2002, pp. 129–138, 163–166.

¹² Weidinger, A., „Alfons Mucha und der Pavillon für die osmanischen Provinzen Bosnien und Herzegowina auf der Weltausstellung in Paris 1900“, in: *Alfons Mucha*, Ausst. Katalog, hrsg. von A. Husslein-Arco, J. L. Gaillemain, M. Hilaire und C. Lange, Wien 2009, kat. 146; pp. 53–54, 228–229.

¹³ On Rista Vukanović: Popović, B., „U spomen na Ristu Vukanovića“, in: *Rista Vukanović 1873–1918*, no place of issue or issuer (Beograd); Петровић, Вељко, „Риста Вукановић“, in: *Народна енциклопедија српско-хрватско-словеначка*, vol. IV, ed. С. Станојевић, Загреб 1929, p. 1178; Ристић, Вера, „Риста Вукановић“, *Зборник за ликовне уметности Матице српске* 1 (Нови Сад 1965), стр. 353–370; Секулић, Јован, *Минхенска школа и српско сликарство*, Београд 2002, p. 104.

in Belgrade. Having been granted scholarship by the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Serbia, he started studying fine arts in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1891. On his own request, supported by Mihail Valtrović, he continued his studies in Munich. He enrolled Munich Academy in 1892, after attending the preparatory studies in the atelier of the eminent Slovenian painter Anton Ažbe. He gained formal education in Otto Seitz's „Mal-Schule“ and Alexander – Sandor von Wagner's „Componier Schole“. In Munich, in Anton Ažbe's atelier, Vukanović met his wife Beta (Babette Bachmayer).¹⁴ They got married in Belgrade, which determined their common private and professional life. Vukanović returned from his studies in Munich in 1898. This was when he decided to stay in Belgrade, where he obtained a prominent place in the artistic and social life in the Serbian capital. Together with his wife Beta, as of 1900, after the death of Cyril Kutlik, he took over the management and organization of the Serbian School of Painting and the Arts and Crafts School.¹⁵ Rista Vukanović had success in exhibiting his works. The painting „The Dahias“ was purchased by King Milan Obrenović, and Vukanović took part in the pavilion of Serbian Kingdom in world exhibitions in Paris 1900 and Liege 1905. What testified of the social success of Rista and Beta Vukanović was the fact that they were able to build a house of their own at the centre of Belgrade. Their home was made according to the project of architect Milan Kapetanović,¹⁶ who was also working at that time on the construction of Belgrade synagogue Beth Israel. Vukanović's house, built in Kapetan Mišina Street, at the very centre of the city, became the first „Kunstlerhaus“ – artist's house in Belgrade. The Vukanović family had the opportunity to see the houses of eminent artists in Munich, like Lenbachhaus and Villa Stuck. They were important places of artistic life of the Bavarian capital in the 19th century. Vukanović's home, as the first „house of art“ in Belgrade must have been constructed following their example. This house had professional and private rooms, space for atelier and rooms for relaxation, and its artistic character was emphasized with the paintings on the façade. They featured personifications and emblem of art. Rista Vukanović was a member of one of the most active and influential circles in Belgrade of that time. He cooperated and made friends with the intellectuals working on the Srpski književni glasnik. These were the literary critic Bogdan Popović and the philosopher Branislav Petronijević, whose portraits were painted by Vukanović, among others. Bogdan

¹⁴ On Beta Vukanović: Марковић, Јасна, *Легат Бете Вукановић*, Београд 1990; Ristić, Vera, *Beta Vukanović*, Београд 2004.

¹⁵ On Rista and Beta Vukanović's school of painting and drawing: Трифуновић, Лазар, *Српска цртачко-сликарска и уметничко-занатска школа у Београду (1895–1914)*, Београд 1978, pp. 117–162. (Трифуновић, Л., *Српска цртачко-сликарска...*)

¹⁶ Павловић-Лончарски, Вера, „Кућа Ристе и Бете Вукановић“, *Наслеђе VIII*, (Београд 2007), pp. 51–59. (Павловић-Лончарски, В., „Кућа Ристе...“)

Popović confirmed that he felt intellectual closeness with R. Vukanović in his text „In Memory of Rista Vukanović“.¹⁷

Rista Vukanović was very much engaged in the organization of the Serbian artistic association „Lada“ and Yugoslav artistic exhibitions. He participated in Yugoslav artistic exhibitions in Belgrade 1904, Sophia 1906, Zagreb 1908.¹⁸ During the First World War, Vukanović retreated with the Serbian army to Greece via Albania. He went to France, where he died in 1918.

The artistic poetics of Rista Vukanović stems from his education at Munich Academy. At the end of the 19th century, the Munich art was dominated by the ideas of intellectual painting, which was practiced within the symbolist-secessionist painting.¹⁹ The symbolist culture fully marks the work of numerous Serbian painters who were educated at Munich Academy. Djordje Krstić created intensive symbolist paintings, in his works like the icon „Death of Prince Lazar“ from the iconostasis in Cathedral Church in Niš, as well as in his paintings „Oath of Saint George“, „Prince Lazar's Head“ and in the portrait of King Milan on the monument in Ćurlina.²⁰ At the same time, Leon Koen created representative symbolist works in Munich,²¹ and Stevan Aleksić accepted and developed symbolist poetics, as well.²²

At Munich Academy, Rista Vukanović started the creation of his own opus in which he laid stress on narrativity, national-propagandist and symbolist contents. Bogdan Popović pointed out that Vukanović was „one of the painters who want to instill the painting with...‘thought’; or, the ones who are not satisfied with mere painting characteristics which address only our senses, but who wish their painting to speak to our heart and mind, as well. This can be an important or dramatic event, an anecdote, or a thought, ethical or philosophical, as a painted representation of an action or symbol“.²³

Vukanović's well-known artistic opus is not too bulky. One of his first paintings was „The Dahias“. This composition was awarded with a medal at the academy,

¹⁷ Павловић-Лончарски, В., „Кућа Ристе...“, pp. 51–59.

¹⁸ Тошић, Драгутин, *Југословенске уметничке изложбе 1904–1927*, Београд 1983, pp. 42–43, 71, 85–86. (Тошић, Д., *Југословенске уметничке изложбе...*)

¹⁹ On art in Munich at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century see: Makela, Maria, *The Munich Secession: art and artist in turn-of-century Munich*, Princeton University Press 1990. (Makela, M., *The Munich Secession...*)

²⁰ Макуљевић, Ненад, *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, Београд 2007, pp. 141–150; Борозан, Игор, *Споменик у храму: Меморија краља Милана Обреновића*, Magister thesis, Филозофски факултет у Београду, Београд 2008, pp. 74–149.

²¹ Šuica, Nikola, *Leon Koen 1859–1934*, Београд 2001; Adić, Vesna, „The Tragic Story of Leon Koen, the First Sephardi Painter from Belgrade: A Symbolist and Admirer of Nietzsche“, *Ars Judaica*, vol. 5, (2009), pp. 1–18.

²² Јованов, Јасна, *Стеван Алексић 1876–1923*, Нови Сад 2008.

²³ Поповић, Богдан, „У спомен Ристе Вукановића“, in: Поповић, Богдан, *О уметности и стилу*, Сабрана дела, vol. III, Београд 2001, p. 206.

which undoubtedly showed that Vukanović had met the ideals of academic education. In his composition „The Dahias“, Vukanović painted an episode from the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising, and the composition was inspired by the poem „Beginning of the Rise against Dahias“.²⁴ The literary source for the painting and its national content followed the epic poetics in painting, which was used by Serbian painters Djura Jakšić and Djordje Krstić.²⁵ The content of the painting does not focus on the particular historical narrative, but on the event which symbolically sublimates the epic fragment of history. Rista Vukanović also painted „The First Victims to Dahias“ and „The Gusle-Player“. The gusle-player was a great topic of the Serbian art of the 19th century, which reflected the image of the Serbian national singer.²⁶ At the end of the 19th century the image of the gusle-player was revived and it became popular. In symbolist culture the old gusle-player epitomizes the bearer of tradition and ancient truth. The national singer is particularly important as a herald and singer of the future national battles, so he can have both Serbian and Yugoslav character.

„The prayer“

The triptych „The Prayer“ is Rista Vukanović’s work which he painted for many years. The painting was most probably started around 1901. In that year one of the preliminary drawings was made, the image of a Muslim’s head.²⁷ The preserved drawing indicates that the preparation for the painting of the triptych must have included a complex process of creation. Rista Vukanović, as an academically trained painter, must have explored and developed the composition and details of the painting in the drawing first, and it was only after that that he started to paint. The drawing of the Muslim’s head is very precisely made, which clearly shows that the preliminary studies were done very thoroughly.

During 1904. Vukanović’s atelier was visited by the Slovenian art historian Ante Gaber, who was staying in Belgrade because of the First Yugoslav Artistic Exhibition. He noted that Vukanović was preoccupied by his work on the painting „The Prayer“, but that it was going slowly due to his numerous engagements. He mentioned there

²⁴ See: „Реч којом је проф. Мих. Валтровић отворио уметничку изложбу 20. септембра 1898. у Београду“, *Искра*, no 19 (Београд 1898), p. 293.

²⁵ On epic painting: Макуљевић, Ненад, *Уметност и национална идеја у XIX веку: систем европске и српске визуелне културе у служби нације*, Београд 2006, pp. 223–235.

²⁶ On representations of the guslar-player see: Тимотијевић, Мирослав, „Гуслар као симболична фигура српског националног певача“, in: *Зборник Народног музеја*, XVII/2 (Београд 2004), pp. 253–285.

²⁷ The drawing is kept in the National Museum in Belgrade, and it was published in: Поповић, Богдан, „У спомен на Ристу Вукановића“, in: *Риста Вукановић 1873-1918*, pic. 4.

that Vukanović's painting technique was based on the works of the Dutch painter Godfried Schalcken and Italian artist Giovanni Segantini.²⁸

Apart from the struggle with the painting technique, working on the triptych „The Prayer“ must have implied certain literary preparations, as well. As Bogdan Popović notes, R. Vukanović had carefully studied the epistle of the Sheik of Baghdad to the European public, taken from the French press and published in *Srpski književni glasnik*.²⁹ Popović's remark implies that Vukanović was trying to grasp the learning of different religions and that he might have tried to obtain some knowledge on Judaism in the same manner.

The concept of the picture „The Prayer“ is formulated in three groups, which compose three parts of the triptych. The Christian prayer is placed in the middle, the Jewish one is on the right hand side, and the Muslim one is on the left.

At the forefront of the Christian prayer there is a man. He is standing with his head bowed, dressed as a citizen. Behind him, there are two female figures kneeling down and praying. The woman on his right is older, and the one on his left is younger. In the background there is an icon of the Mother of God with Christ, a lit censer hanging in front of it, together with the flag featuring a cross and a chandelier. The Christian is represented as an elderly man with a moustache. This type of figure was characteristic of the representations of the Balkan Christians. An elderly woman is holding her hands pressed together, with her fingers interlaced in prayer. She is looking down. The younger woman is wearing a red dress, with her hands praying. The light in the painting does not come from any particular source.

The most probable iconographic sources for the image of the Christian prayer were the paintings of Ivana Kobilca and Leo Arndt, which were made in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Slovenian painter Ivana Kobilca was staying in Bosnia and Herzegovina for some time.³⁰ Among other, she also painted the scenes of folk life. Her painting „In Church“ was published in the „Nada“ magazine for the year 1903.³¹ In the foreground of this work there is an elderly man praying, behind whom there are many figures. Two women – an older and a younger one, immediately behind the man, are shown at prayer. The older one has her arms crossed on her chest, and the younger one's hands are put together, as a sign of prayer. Vukanović apparently used this work to construe his own composition, and yet he changed the characters. The German engraver Leo W. Arndt also devoted part of his career to painting types

²⁸ Gaber, A., „Prva jugoslovenska umetniška razstava“, *Dom in svet*, stev. 11 (Ljubljana 1904), p. 756.

²⁹ Шенк Абдул Хак, из Багдада, „Исламова последња реч Европи“, *Српски књижевни гласник*, vol. X, no. 7 (Београд 1903), pp. 520–538.

³⁰ Cevc, Emilijan, *Slovenačko slikarstvo 19. veka iz zbirke Narodne galerije Ljubljana*, katalog, Narodni muzej, Beograd 1967, pp. 22; 39–40.

³¹ The painting by Ivana Kobilca was published in: *Nada*, br. 20, (Sarajevo 1903), pp. 268–269.

and scenes from Bosnia and Herzegovina.³² He published many of his drawings in the illustrated magazine „Nada“, and drew some illustrations for the book on Bosnia by Heinrich Renner. His work „At prayer“ features a standing male figure, with the characteristic moustache, next to whom there is a woman. Behind them one can see a lit censer with some icons. This graphics was reproduced in the illustrated calendar „Orao“ for 1899.³³

Rista Vukanović took over some iconographic elements from the works of Ivana Kobilca and Leo Arndt, and later readapted them. He did not attempt to show a small part of the devotional Christian life, but to lay stress on its symbolic character. The figures are placed centrally, „iconicaly“, so that they undoubtedly symbolize, rather than illustrate, the Christian prayer.

In the Jewish prayer, there is a group of men in a synagogue. They are sitting on the benches praying. In the first row, there are an elderly man and a boy, probably father and son. They are dressed as citizens, but with certain personal objects of prayer. On their heads there is a cap for prayer – *kippah*. Around their neck they are wearing a prayer shawl – *tallit*, and on their forehead there is prayer strap – *tefillin*. The grown up is holding a prayer book, and the boy is staring at it, as if he were following the lines of the prayer in his father's book. The boy's prayer book is on the bench, and he is pressing his finger against it. On the bench next to the man there is a cylinder hat. It clearly points to the status of the painted person, but also implies that during prayer the tokens of citizen's wealth are put aside and that all believers should wear the same type of cap at prayer. In the second row there are two men. One of them has his head covered by the prayer shawl. He is fully immersed in the prayer text, which is indicated by the posture of his hand on his head. The figure next to him, with a cap resembling a fur-hat on his head and a prayer shawl on his shoulders, is resting his hand on the prayer book, on the bench, saying the prayer. The light in the picture is coming from aside, from the direction the figures are facing.

The scenes from religious life became important representations of identity in Jewish culture. Jewish painters depicted scenes from the annual holidays and life cycle. During the 18th and 19th centuries there were a number of portraits of Rabbis and works devoted to sufferings and persecution.³⁴ Rista Vukanović might have been familiar with these works and used the solutions developed in Jewish visual culture. The iconography of the representation of Jewish prayer often features a boy in a synagogue. Maurycy Gottlieb painted a boy and an older man (the father) in the foreground of his well-known painting „Jews at Prayer“. The image of a boy in a synagogue can have manifold meanings. It is both a testimony of family relationships,

³² See: Arndt, Leo, in: *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Band 2, hrsg. von Dr. U. Thieme – Dr. F. Becker, Leipzig 1908, reprint 1964, p. 126.

³³ *Orao* for 1899, Сремски Карловци 1899, p. 68.

³⁴ See: Cohen, R. I., *Jewish Icons: Art and Society...*

instilled with faith, and an emphasis on the continuity and duration of the Jewish devotional life. In contrast to other prayers, in Vukanović's painting, the boy is facing the prayer book of an older person. It is evident that he is still in the learning process, and that older people help him master the prayer rules.

Apart from the boy, who is leaning towards his father, two elderly people are shown in a very expressive manner, at the moment of their chanting the prayer. The looks of their eyes are especially prominent. They fully comply with the manner in which this movement of eyes was interpreted. In Rista and Beta Vukanović's school of painting, a lecture on the eye was held by Dr Vojislav Djordjević in 1903. He stressed that „cornea is facing straight ahead“ and that „the sight lines in both eyes are parallel“ during sleep, adding that „a similar look, but also with the eyes facing the sky, can be seen in the pious people praying to God. Some artists show even a stronger feeling of ecstasy, by placing the parallel sight lines even more remote from each other, divergently, like in Raphael's Sistine Madonna“. ³⁵ Vukanović fully implemented the learning of V. Djordjević. In the first row, the eyes of the older person and the boy are facing completely different directions. This is how the prayer ecstasy of the older one is even more pronounced.

The images of the Jews in Vukanović's painting are not portraits, but rather typified physiognomies. During his studies in Munich, Vukanović had the opportunity to learn about the debate on the Max Liebermann's picture „Twelve-Year-Old *Christ* in the Temple“. Anti-Semitic critics disapproved of Liebermann's manner of painting the Jews, pointing to the Adolph Menzel's work of the same name, as an example of „good practice“. ³⁶ Menzel's painting gives out an air of anti-Semitism. The Jews are shown as caricatures, which emanated from the tradition of Albrecht Dürer. Vukanović entirely renounces the anti-Semitic line. He clearly shows an idealized image of the boy and devotional ecstasy of the grown-ups. In this manner he symbolically points to the expressive character of a Jewish prayer.

In the Islamic prayer there are two Muslims kneeling down on a prayer carpet. They are performing the prostration – Sajdah, facing the prayer niche – Mihrab, which is always directed to the Kaaba. During the prayer, they first go down on their knees, after which they put their palms on the ground, and finally their nose and forehead, touching the ground even with their toes. The figure closer to the observer is up straight, at the moment when the bow is about to begin. The hands are raised up to the ears and the Muslim believer is saying *Allahu ekbar*. The second figure is shown at the moment of prostration. They are wearing Ottoman-Islamic clothes, with turbans on their heads. The caftan is green, and the gown is red. In the background

³⁵ V. Djordjević's lecture „Oko sa umetničkog gledišta“ (Eye from the artist's point of view) was published in *Српски књижевни гласник* in 1903 and reprinted in: Трифуновић, Ј., *Српска цртачко-сликарска...*, p. 155.

³⁶ See: Liebermann, Max, *Der Realist und die Phantasie*, Ausst. Kat, Hamburg 1997.

there are some openings showing characteristic shapes of Islamic architecture. On the floor one can spot some decorative elements of the carpet. The light is coming from the direction of prayer, and illuminates only some parts of the figures, creating a dramatic and mysterious impression.

At the time when Vukanović painted the prayer, the Orientalist representation of the Muslim world dominated Europe, as well as Serbian art.³⁷ There were a great number of representations of Muslims at prayer, and Vukanović could see them both in Munich and on the Balkans. It was exactly at that time that an abundant production of paintings appeared, showing the life of the peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Vukanović chose to represent Islamic prayer in a symbolical manner in this painting, as well. By painting the green caftan, Vukanović showed one of the characteristic colours of the Islamic world. Green is the colour which is said to have a heavenly meaning. This is why it can frequently be found in Islamic visual culture. The space of the mosque is symbolic rather than realistic. One can perceive the decorative elements of carpet and imaginary „oriental“ architecture.

The costumes featured at this Muslim prayer do not match the reality of the Ottoman world of 1900. During this period of time, a transformation of the cultural model of the Ottoman Empire had already been done. As a result, they accepted European clothes and the fez. Therefore, Vukanović's painting does not show a realistic insight into the Ottoman devotional life which was practiced in Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina at that time. It is rather a recognizable and symbolical image of the Islamic prayer.

Prayer was one of the great topics of European art in the 19th century. Thus, representation of devotional address was an important part of the Christian iconography. The images of the prayers of Christ and saints, as well as the representations of unchristian prayers seem to have resulted from the corpus of ecclesiastical history. The act of prayer was an important part of the images used in patrons' compositions, the devotional stance becoming an important gesture of the portrayed personalities. In the 19th century, the old practice of prayer representations was continued, with the development of the former experience, and establishment of a new practice of prayer depiction.

The prayer became an integral part of the moralizing and didactic character in the citizen's culture of the 19th century. Citizen's morale insists on prayer as an important part of the everyday life, showing loyalty to the Christian general outlook. Prayer was represented in such a manner in the Biedermeier culture, and it was in line with this that Katarina Ivanović created the painting „Old woman praying before meal“.³⁸

³⁷ Compare with: Makuljević, Nenad, „Slika drugog u srpskoj vizuelnoj kulturi XIX veka“, in: *Istorija i sećanje. Studije istorijske svesti*, (ed. O. Manojlović-Pintar), Beograd 2006, pp. 146–154.

³⁸ Timotijević, Miroslav, „Katarina Ivanović prva srpska slikarka“, in: M. Timotijević-R. Mihailović, *Katarina Ivanović*, Beograd 2004, p. 47.

During the second half of the 19th century, images of prayer could also have a Christian-social character. The French painter Jean-Francois Millet painted devotional scenes within contemporary social French landscape.³⁹ At the end of the 19th century the prayer became one of the important elements of identification of the culture of a particular community. Therefore, in visual culture there were images of different peoples' prayers. This approach was marked by an „ethnographic“ character, but it was frequently defined by the Orientalist view of „the other“. A typical example of this practice can be noticed in the visual culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the time of Austro-Hungarian rule. The representations of Christian and Muslim prayers emerged in the illustrated magazines like „Nada“, and in postcards. Also, in the multi volume edition dedicated to the Habsburg Monarchy, prayer often identified a particular people, both in the image and in the text.⁴⁰

In such atmosphere, with emphasis on the importance of the prayer image, as a topos enabling contemplation of social reality, Rista Vukanović decided to paint a complex composition – the triptych „The Prayer“, which simultaneously represented images of devotional address in three monotheistic religions. In each part of the triptych only devotional portraits are featured. The most holy space of the temple – the altar, the Torah roll and Mihrab cannot be seen. The air of holiness is primarily instilled in the picture with the distribution of light. What gives the picture a sacral and mystical air is the invisible source of light that illuminates the people at prayer. Rista Vukanović's work on the triptych „The Prayer“ is characterized by a pronounced interest in colour and light, which are here placed at the service of the topic. The painting is dominated by reddish and orange hues, which build up a unique impression of light. Thus light was not really based on any exploration of the natural light, but it rather had a symbolist character.⁴¹ This was clearly stated in some contemporary comments of triptych. Jovan Dučić noted, „The faces are illuminated not only by the daily rays of light or candles, they are brightened by the great light which comes from another world, from the soul dazzled in the outmost beauty of the most essential and greatest feeling a man can have. It is a beautiful and harmonic poem of the souls set free, a religious symphony.“⁴²

The „absence“ of a precise illustration of the holy space and objects, to which the prayer is directed, together with the pronounced „unique“ divine and mystical light, could imply that Vukanović managed to convey in his painting that the prayers in monotheistic religions are directed to *one* and the same God. This could also find

³⁹ Fratello, B., „France Embraces Millet: The Intertwined Fates of ‘The Gleaners’ and ‘The Angelus’“, *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 85, No. 4, (2003), pp. 685–701.

⁴⁰ *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild, Bosnien und Herzegowina*, Wien 1901, pp. 57, 293, 325, 361, 365, 421.

⁴¹ The symbolical meaning of light as a sign of the divine was reintroduced into Serbian culture by Mihailo Valtrović during the Debate on Orthodoxy in Church Painting. See: Макуљевић, Ненад, *Црквена уметност у Краљевини Србији (1882–1914)*, Београд 2007, p. 129.

⁴² Ј. (ован) Д. (учић), „Вукановићев ‘Триптих’“, *Политика* бр. 1538 (Београд 1908), p. 3.

confirmation in the very name of the triptych – „The Prayer“. He features the prayer „in singular“. Thus, the devotional address is depicted as a unique act, whereas the image of the three monotheistic religions indicates that there are three forms of devotional address. This undoubtedly shows that in his work Rista Vukanović made no attempts to compare and contrast the religions, but to symbolically show the act of prayer in three monotheistic religions, which were dominant in Europe and the Balkans.

The complexity of Rista Vukanović's idea is also evident in his decision to paint a triptych. The triptych is a form with a religious character, which was widespread in Catholic and Protestant Christian art. In the Orthodox culture, the form of a triptych was mostly used for home or private icons. Vukanović took over this form from the contemporary European art. At that time, the triptych was popular in German art, and the painting „Christmas Eve“ (Heilige Nacht) was painted by the well-known German artist Fritz von Uhde in 1888/89. The work that took an important place in the Munich painting from the end of the 19th century was the triptych by Leopold Graf von Kalckreuth from the year 1889, devoted to the 10th verse of the 90th psalm „Our life lasts for 70 years“ (Unser Leben währet 70 Jahre).⁴³ The form of the triptych shows Vukanović's intention. He sacralized his work, giving it an iconic character.

What points to the importance of „The Prayer“ for Rista Vukanović are the preparations and work on the triptych that took many years. The time of its creation was marked by complex international and inter-confessional relations in Europe. In spite of numerous examples of citizen's tolerance and the rise of the capital cities of international cultures, there were also some examples of extreme intolerance and racism. France was shaken by the Dreyfus affair. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Jews were persecuted in the Russian Empire on several instances, which also affected the artistic production.⁴⁴ Anti-Semitic debates were shaking German artistic circles as a response to the painting „Twelve-year-old Christ in the Temple“ by Max Liebermann. At the same time, Orientalist representations of Asian and African lands, as well as those of the Balkans, were largely inspired by European imperialist politics.

On the other hand, the Serbian cultural and political public was characterized by complex relations at the time when „The Prayer“ appeared. Meanwhile, in between 1901 and 1906, there was a change of the dynasty in Belgrade. After King Alexander and Queen Draga had been murdered, the Obrenović family was succeeded by Petar Karadjordjević, who came to the Serbian throne. Intensive Serbian national politics was a paradigm of the political reality, and the activities were mainly focused on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Old Serbia. Equal stance taken to other religious and national communities in Belgrade and Serbia was guaranteed by the

⁴³ Makela, M., *The Munich Secession...*, pp. 100–101.

⁴⁴ Cohen, Richard I., *Jewish Icons: Art and Society...*, pp. 223–239; Rajner, M., „Chagall's Jew in Bright Red“, *Ars Judaica* vol. 4, (2008), pp. 61–80.

Constitution. The presence of different religions and religious tolerance characterized Belgrade's artistic life, and so the school of painting founded by Cyril Kutlik, and later managed by Rista and Beta Vukanović, was first situated in the Hall of Peace in Englezovac, originally a property of the English missionary Frances Mackenzie.⁴⁵

Even though there were some voices in the Serbian public against non-Serbian religious and ethnic communities, tolerance dominated them. King Petar Karadjordjević laid the cornerstone for the synagogue Beth Israel and was present during its consecration.⁴⁶ What inspired a more tolerant attitude towards other religious and ethnic communities were also the interpretations of the Serbian and Yugoslav national idea. In the ideology of Serbianhood the stance „Brat je mio, ma koje vere bio“ („A brother is dear, whatever his faith“) was a motto of the Serbian-propagandist association Saint Sava. The Yugoslav ideology simultaneously contributed to the overcoming of religious differences and to the cooperation of the artists from the South Slavic territory.

Rista Vukanović, as a particularly socially active personality, was indeed very familiar with the complex general outlook of the time he lived in. Having married Beta, a German, he apparently accepted the idea of tolerance in his private life. At the same time, his home was designed by Milan Kapetanović, the architect of the synagogue Beth Israel in Belgrade. Vukanović's overcoming of the national and religious boundaries, as well as his fight for Yugoslavism, were also shown in his participation in demonstrations and organization of Yugoslav artists.

Under these complex political and social conditions, „The Prayer“ painted by Rista Vukanović undoubtedly had a clear character of a program. It was not created in line with the „l'art pour l'art“ principle, but as a distinct attitude and thinking of the social and religious reality. By exhibiting „The Prayer“ publicly, Vukanović showed an engagement of his thought.

Reception

„The Prayer“ triptych was publicly exhibited a number of times, which conditioned its presence and reception in the most important instrument of the public – in printed media. The painting was first exhibited in the first exposition of the art association „Lada“ in Belgrade in 1906. The exhibition was opened by King Petar Karadjordjević in the pavilion of the Srpsko poljoprivredno društvo (Serbian Agricultural Association) on the first day of Easter in 1906,⁴⁷ which gave it a character

⁴⁵ On the Hall of Peace see: Gordić, M., „‘Sala Mira’ u Beogradu“, *Nasleđe* 1 (Beograd 1997), pp. 145–150.

⁴⁶ Lebl, Ženi, *Do konačnog rešenja: Jevreji u Beogradu 1521–1942*, Beograd 2001, pp. 234–235.

⁴⁷ The opening of the exposition by King Petar Karadjordjević was regularly featured in newspapers and magazines. See: „Slikarska izložba“, *Politika* 704, (Beograd 2. IV 1906), pp. 2; Поповић, Богдан,

of a very important public event. The exhibitors of this exposition dedicated much attention to Vukanović's work. „The Prayer“ was also exhibited in the Second Yugoslav Exhibition in Sophia in 1906,⁴⁸ and in the Third Yugoslav Art Exhibition in Zagreb in 1908.⁴⁹ In Zagreb, Vukanović exhibited „The Prayer“, the portrait of Olga Jovanović in pastel and an unidentified portrait in oil.⁵⁰ According to the published photographs from the Zagreb exhibition,⁵¹ one can see the position of Vukanović's triptych in the Serbian pavilion. „The Prayer“ was placed in a single frame, and next to it there was the painting „Saints Cyril and Methodius“ by Uroš Predić. The painting was purchased by the Royal Country Government of Croatia for three and a half thousand of dinars,⁵² after which they gave it to *Strossmayer's Gallery*.

*The exhibition of „The Prayer“ triptych during the years 1906 and 1908 inspired a greater number of critical reviews, and different structures of the painting's reception. In Bogdan Popović's review of the „Lada“ exhibition in 1906, it was noted that „The Prayer“ was „the largest“ painting in the whole exhibition, and that R. Vukanović had to solve a difficult problem of light, both in each of the triptych wings, and in the whole painting. He stresses that the painting is „also full of beautiful details: especially the left wing of the triptych – the Jewish prayer – is masterfully done, with respect to the colour, composition and the particular understanding, alike. [...] Mr. Vukanović might have been a little partial to the Christians; however, it cannot be said that the characteristics of these different 'prayers' were not studied meticulously, and the overall thought of each of the paintings is worthy of every praise“.*⁵³

The exhibition of „The Prayer“ triptych left a strong impression on the visitors of the „Lada“ exhibition in Belgrade 1906. This was testified in Nadežda Petrović's review of the second „Lada“ exhibition in Belgrade 1909, where she singled the triptych out as Vukanović's valuable work of art. She noted that, „the historical compositions of 'The Dahias' and 'The Jewish Prayer' in the triptych show that Vukanović is an artist with a strong artistic sensibility, his art is in there, [...], in them he sensed the form in a better way, and the colour is more intensive and truthful: in these paintings, his individuality is forceful and emphatic“.⁵⁴

„Изложба српске 'Ладе““, *Српски књижевни гласник*, књ. 1906, reprinted in: *Изложбе у Београду* огласи, каталожки подаци, прикази, критике. 2, 1904–1911, М. Коларић, ed. Београд 1990, p. 21

⁴⁸ Тошић, Д., *Југословенске уметничке изложбе...*“, p. 71

⁴⁹ Тошић, Д., *Југословенске уметничке изложбе...*“, pp. 71, 86.

⁵⁰ *Treća Jugoslavenska umjetnička izložba saveza „Lade“ Zagreb 1908*, katalog, Zagreb 1908.

⁵¹ „Lada III Jugoslovenska umjetnička izložba“, *Obzor ilustrirani* 23, (Zagreb 1908), p. 13.

⁵² The selling price of the painting was mentioned by: J.(ovan) D.(učić), „Vukanovićev 'Triptih““, *Politika* br. 1538 (Beograd 1908), p. 3.

⁵³ Поповић, Богдан, „Изложба српске 'Ладе““, *Српски књижевни гласник*, књ. 1906, reprinted in: *Изложбе у Београду 1904–1911*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ N. Petrović's review was reprinted in: *Изложбе у Београду 1904–1911*, p. 93.

Reviewing the Yugoslav exhibition in Zagreb 1908, Vladimir Lunaček devoted particular attention to Vukanović's triptych. He read into this work a religious and social overtone: „Rista Vukanović had a triptych. It seems that he represented piety with a social overtone. The worker or the peasant is looking at something, then looks up, and is about to kneel down and break into religious feeling. On the right there are Israelites in a synagogue. The rich ones at the front, the poor ones at the back. They proudly invoke their God Jehovah, the God of revenge and temptation, they invoke his help for their persecutions and the subjected fellow people. On the right, the Muslims fall into ecstasy, their destiny, they chant 'Allah'. The whole triptych is done in a half-lit local key, in which one can perceive half-illuminated figures, very thoroughly studied and carefully rendered.“⁵⁵

The three examples of the art reviews of Bogdan Popović, Nadežda Petrović and Vladimir Lunaček show that the reception of „The Prayer“ triptych was not unanimous. The reviewers interpreted the value of the artwork and its meaning in different ways. This clearly shows that the reception of the painting depended on individual attitude, testifying of a variety of stances and relations towards art in the spectators of art at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

The purchase of Rista Vukanović's „The Prayer“ was an important episode in its history, as well as a political segment, which followed international expositions.⁵⁶ The exhibition of Yugoslav artists was a public political move, rather than a manifestation of a particular art movement. Therefore, artists with most different art poetics participated in them. Similarly, the purchase of the paintings in these expositions was supposed to legitimize a particular government and show it as a protector of art. At the first Yugoslav Exhibition in Belgrade 1904, the paintings of Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Bulgarian artists were purchased by King Petar Karadjordjević.⁵⁷ At the third exhibition in Zagreb, the purchase of paintings was enabled by Emperor Franz Joseph and the Royal Country Government of Croatia. A great number of artworks from the Serbian pavilion of „Lada“ – Beta Vukanović's painting „Pensive“ and Marko Murat's paintings „Spring clouds“ and „Heather“ – were purchased from the Emperor's fund.⁵⁸ Even though Rista Vukanović's triptych was bought by the Croatian Government, until we find more documents about the purchase we cannot be sure if, and to which degree, this act was the result of the former relations between Serbia and Croatia, or of the Croat-Serb Coalition.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Lunaček, V. „III jugoslovenska umjetnička izložba 'Lade' u Zagrebu“, *Obzor ilustrirani*, Zagreb 1908, reprinted in: Тошић, Д., *Југословенске уметничке изложбе...*“, p. 197.

⁵⁶ On politics in international exhibitions compare with: F. Forster-Hahn, „'La Confraternité de l'art': Deutsch-französische Ausstellungspolitik von 1871 bis 1914“, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, Band 48, Heft 4, (1985), pp. 506–537.

⁵⁷ „Краљ на изложби“, *Политика* 248, (Београд 20. IX 1904), p. 2.

⁵⁸ „Домаче vijesti“, *Narodne novine* 74/138 (Zagreb 1908), p. 3.

⁵⁹ On the Serbo-Croatian relations in the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia in the Habsburg Monarchy: Милутиновић, Коста, „Хрватско-српска коалиција“, in: *Историја српског*

The purchase of Vukanović's painting spurred fierce criticism from certain reviewers. Otto Kraus criticized this patronage of the Croatian Government in Belgrade's newspaper „Štampa“, which provoked Jovan Dučić's reply.⁶⁰ Although this newspaper debate had a nationalist overtone, it did not significantly affect the further destiny and reception of the painting. Vukanović's painting was bestowed to the Strossmayer's Gallery in Zagreb. The painting was always marked in the catalogues of this gallery as follows: „The Prayer. Originally a triptych. In the three paintings the followers of the three dominant monotheistic religions are shown praying to their God: the Christians (in the middle), the Jews (on the left), and the Muslims (on the right).“⁶¹ The painting was later brought to the Modern Gallery in Zagreb, where it is still situated today.

Rista Vukanović's „The Prayer“ triptych is a unique work of art in Serbian visual culture. It surpasses the frameworks and boundaries of contemplating the local problems, focusing on the analysis of the devotional life of monotheistic religions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Vukanović's approach demonstrates the idea of religious tolerance, which was characteristic of the life in the Kingdom of Serbia at that time. The process of the creation of the triptych implies that Vukanović was familiar with the visual culture nurtured in Europe, as well as the one from the region. At the same time, Vukanović's active participation in the exhibitions of the Southern Slavs was symbolically marked in the purchase of „The Prayer“ for the Strossmayer's Gallery in Zagreb. In this manner, the work painted in Belgrade found its place in one of the important South Slavic cultural centres. The iconography and life of Rista Vukanović's triptych „The Prayer“ show the complexity of the cultural and artistic life in Serbia at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, opening the possibility to think over the most complex issues of religious and social life and express one's own ideals in a visual manner.

народа, ed. А. Митровић, Београд 1983, pp. 432–495.

⁶⁰ Тошић, Д., *Југословенске уметничке изложбе...*“, p. 86.

⁶¹ *Akademijska galerija Strossmayerova*, 4. izdanje, Zagreb 1911, p. 125.

Резиме

Ненад Макуљевић

Идеја толеранције и визуелна култура: *Молитва* Ристе Вукановића

Триптих *Молитва*, рад Ристе Вукановића са почека XX века, представља јединствено дело српске визуелне културе по томе што превазилази оквире и границе размишљања о локалним проблемима, фокусирајући се превасходно на анализу религиозног живота монотеистичких религија – хришћанства, ислама и јудаизма. Вукановићев приступ овој теми одражава идеју верске толеранције, што јесте била једна од карактеристика живота Краљевине Србије у то време. Процес стварања триптиха имплицира да је Вукановић био упознат, како са визуелном културом која је била негована у тадашњој Европи, тако и са оном која је била негована и у региону. Значај и симболика овог Вукановићевог дела били су препознати када је *Молитва*, после изложбе 1908. године, била откупљена за Штросмајерову галерију у Загребу. На тај начин, рад који је настао у Београду, нашао је своје место у једном од важних јужнословенских културних центара. Иконографија и живот Вукановићеве *Молитве* показују комплексност уметничког и културног живота крајем XIX и почетком XX века, отварајући могућност да се на још један начин промисле најсложенији проблеми религиозног и друштвеног живота, као и њихов одраз у визуелној култури.