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Nektarios ZARRAS

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Nektarios Zarras

ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IN CENTRES AND THE PERIPHERY OF THE BYZANTINE PELOPONNESE. ASPECTS OF MONUMENTAL PAINTING IN THE LATE PALAIOLOGAN PERIOD

Στην παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζεται μνημειακή ζωγραφική από τον Μυστρά (Ευαγγελίστρια) και την περιφέρεια του Δεσποτάτου του Μορέως (Άγιος Γεώργιος στο Νικάνδρι, Άγιος Γεώργιος Μολάων, Παντάνασσα Γερουμάνας, Αγία Παρασκευή Πλάτσας), χρονολογούμενη στα τέλη του 14ου και τις αρχές του 15ου αιώνα, η οποία είτε επηρεάζεται άμεσα από σημαντικά μνημεία του Μυστρά είτε αναπτύσσεται στη σφαίρα επιρροής άλλων κέντρων του Δεσποτάτου. Από το Πριγκιπάτο της Αχαΐας παρουσιάζονται τοιχογραφίες από την παλαιά μονή Ταξιαρχών Αιγιαλείας, ένα εξαιρετικό δείγμα κωνσταντινουπολίτικης ζωγραφικής στην περιφέρεια της αυτοκρατορίας.

The study examines monumental painting from Mystras (Evangelistria) and the periphery of the Despotate of the Morea (St. George at Nikandri, St. George at Molaioi, Pantanassa at Geroumana, St. Paraskevē at Platsa), which is dated to the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth century and was either influenced directly by the important monuments of Mystras or developed in the sphere of influence of other centres in the Despotate. Presented from the Principality of Achaia are wall paintings from the old monastery of the Taxiarchs in Aigialeia, an outstanding example of Constantinopolitan painting in the periphery of the Empire.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Ύστερη παλαιολόγια περίοδος, μνημειακή ζωγραφική, Πελοπόννησος, Μυστράς, Πριγκιπάτο Αχαΐας.

Keywords

Late Palaiologan period, monumental painting, Peloponnese, Mystras, Principality of Achaia.

A constant in the formation of the artistic identity of the Peloponnese in late Byzantine times is the Despotate of the Morea¹, which emerged as the most important

centre, representing all the developments in monumental painting during that period. Constantinopolitan art radiated from the heart of the Despotate, Mystras, influencing a large number of monuments dispersed throughout the region. Earlier studies have pointed out clearly the tendency of painters in the late fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century to seek their iconographic and stylistic models in the monumental painting of Mystras. Through these perceptions, the art of the painters in the Despotate is linked indirectly to

* Alexander von Humboldt Senior Research Fellow, zarras@uni-muenster.de

** I wish to thank Professors Emeritae Heleni Deliyianni-Dori and Chara Konstantinidi for generously providing me with photographs from St. Paraskevē at Platsa and for our fruitful discussions; the Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Laconia, Evangelia Pantou, for permission to publish images from Mystras, Nikandri, Molaioi and Geroumana; and my colleague Angeliki Mexia for her assistance. I thank too the former Director of the Fifth Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, Kalliopi Diamanti and Afendra Moutzali for providing me with images from Nikandri and the Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs at Aigion, respectively and Alexandra Doumas for editing the English text.

¹ D. Zakythinos linked the artistic identity of Mystras to the local aristocracy (*Le Despotat grec de Morée. Histoire politique*, Paris 1932 [= Édition revue et augmentée par Ch. Maltezos, Variorum Reprints, London 1975, II, 295-309]).

that of Constantinople². At the same time, other artists were creating a different art, which, from a stylistic viewpoint mainly, is not linked –at least directly– to that of the major artistic centres, but to other parts of the Despotate³, and which enhances the role of these workshops in the development of a more local artistic idiom. Both these trends bear witness to a period of remarkable artistic development in the Despotate of the Morea.

On embarking on the study of the production of the late fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth century in the Peloponnese, we are immediately aware of the large gap in research, mainly due to the dearth of published material. Research in Mystras, despite the publications to date⁴, is far from being at a satisfactory

level. The picture we have of the other monuments in the Despotate of the Morea is somewhat better, since studies⁵ of late Palaiologan painting have appeared of late, although synthetic works that would offer a more integrated picture are still lacking. Interest in the painting of this period in the main centres of the Despotate was rekindled also after the relatively recent view on the remodelling of the church of the Holy Apostles at Leontari, in the period of its zenith, between 1428 and 1448⁶. This development reinforces significantly the earlier suggestion that the wall paintings in the gallery of the narthex should be dated to the fifteenth century⁷. And if for the host of monuments in the

² N. B. Drandakis, «Ο σπηλαιώδης ναός της Ζωοδόχου Πηγής κοντά στο Μυστρά», *Είλαπίνη, τόμος τιμητικός για τὸν καθηγητὴ Νικόλαο Πλάτωνα*, 1, Herakleion 1987, 489-504, esp. 493 [repr. in *Μάνη και Λακωνία*, 3, *Λακωνία – Μελέται* (ed. Ch. Konstantinidi), Athens 2009, no. 18]. S. Kalopissi-Verti, «Eine unbekannte spätbyzantinische Kirche in Lakonien: H. Strates (Αἰ-Στράτης) bei der Siedlung Hagios Andreas», *Festschrift für Klaus Wessel zum 70. Geburtstag*, Munich 1988, 147-166, esp. 160-166. J. Albani, «The Painted Decoration of the Cupola of the Western Gallery in the Church of the Holy Apostles at Leontari», *CahArch* 40 (1992), 161-180. H. Deliyianni-Dori, «The Friends of Theophanes the Greek in the Despotate of Morea», M. Aspra-Vardavaki (ed.), *Λαμπηδών. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη*, 1, Athens 2003, 193-204. S. Kalopissi-Verti, «Τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις στο γραπτό διάκοσμο του Αγίου Νικολάου Αχραγιά Λακωνίας», *DChAE* 27 (2006), 181-192.

³ See mainly, N. B. Drandakis, «Λείψανα βυζαντινῶν τοιχογραφιῶν ναΐσκου παρὰ τὸ Σελεγουδί Λακεδαίμονος (1439/40)», *ΛακΣπ* 2 (1975), 104-106. S. Kalopissi-Verti, «Ein Monument im Despotat von Morea: Die Kirche der Hagia Paraskeue bei der Siedlung Hagios Andreas», *Studies in the Mediterranean World. Past and Present* XI, Tokyo 1988, 177-205. E. Deliyanni-Doris, «Die Wandmalereien des 15. Jahrhunderts in Ajios Nikolaos in Zarnata», *Festschrift für Klaus Wessel*, op.cit. (n. 2), 57-85. Eadem, «Eine Gruppe von drei ausgemalten Kirchen (14./15. Jahrhundert) im Desotat von Morea: Das Werk einer lokalen Malerwerkstatt?», G. Koch (ed.), *Byzantinische Malerei. Bildprogramme-Ikonographie-Stil*, Wiesbaden 2000, 41-55. M. Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις για ένα τοπικό “Εργαστήρι” στην περιοχή της Επιδάουρου Λιμηράς», *DChAE* 27 (2006), 193-206 with extensive bibliography.

⁴ D. Mouriki, «Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλο τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρά», *AD* 25 (1970), Meletai, 217-251. M. Emmanuel, «Ο ναός της Αγίας Σοφίας στο Μυστρά. Παρατηρήσεις στην εικονογραφία και την τεχνοτροπία των τοιχογραφιῶν», *Αφιέρωμα στον Μίλτο Γαρίδη*, Ioannina 2004, 153-198. M. Aspra-Vardavaki – M. Emmanuel, *Η μονή της Παντάνασσας στον Μυστρά. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες του 15ου*

αιῶνα, Athens 2005. A. Bakourou, «The Last Creation of Palaeologan Painting in the Dome of the Metropolis at Mystras», *Being Peloponnesian (University of Nottingham, 31 March – 1 April 2007)*. For the online publication of the Proceedings, see www.nottingham.ac.uk/csps/open-source/peloponnese-2007.aspx. R. Etzeoglou, *Ὁ ναός τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας τοῦ Βροντοχίου στὸν Μυστρά. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ νάρθηκα καὶ ἡ λειτουργικὴ χρῆσις τοῦ χώρου*, Athens 2013. T. Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople: The Iconographic Program of the South Portico of the Hodegetria Church, Mystras», S. Gerstel (ed.), *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Constantinople*, Washington, D.C. 2013, 371-396. M. Emmanuel, «Το εικονογραφικὸ πρόγραμμα του καθολικοῦ τῆς μονῆς Περιβλέπτου στον Μυστρά και τὸ ζήτημα του κτήτορα», V. Katsaros – A. Tourta (eds), *Αφιέρωμα στον ακαδημαϊκὸ Π. Α. Βοκοτόπουλο*, Athens 2015, 407-416.

⁵ In addition to the bibliography cited already, I refer to studies that introduce deliberation on the problems and promote research on late Palaiologan art in the Despotate of the Morea. See indicatively, D. Mouriki, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου στὴν Πλάτσα τῆς Μάνης*, Athens 1975. Ch. Konstantinidi, «Ὁ ναός τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου στοὺς Μολάους τῆς Ἐπιδάουρου Λιμηράς», *Αντίφωνον. Αφιέρωμα στον καθηγητὴ Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, Thessaloniki 1994, 61-69, pls 657-660. O. Chassoura, *Les peintures murales byzantines des églises de Longanikos – Laconie*, Athens 2002. To the above should be added N. Drandakis' seminal studies on painting in the Despotate, collected together in his *opus magnum: Μάνη και Λακωνία*, 1-4 (ed. Ch. Konstantinidi), Athens 2009. See also, J. S. Papageorgiou, *Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αἰῶνα στο Κάστρο Γερακίων Λακωνίας. Ἐνα ζωγραφικὸ ἐργαστήριο τῆς ὀψιμῆς παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στους ναοὺς τῆς Ζωοδόχου Πηγῆς, των Ταξιαρχῶν, του Προφήτη Ηλία και τῆς Αγίας Παρασκευῆς* (unpublished PhD thesis), Athens 2007. S. E. J. Gerstel, «Mapping the Boundaries of Church and Village: Ecclesiastical and Rural Landscape in Late Medieval Peloponnese», *Viewing the Morea*, op.cit. (n. 4), 335-370.

⁶ A. Louvi-Kizi, «Ὁ ναός των Ἁγίων Αποστόλων στο Λεοντάρι Ἀρκαδίας», *DChAE* 28 (2007), 99-114.

⁷ D. Mouriki, «Stylistic Trends in Monumental Painting of Greece at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century», *L'art byzantin au début du XI^e siècle. Symposium de Gračanica*, Belgrade 1978, 74.



Fig. 1. Mystras, Evangelistria. The Dome.

Despotate research proceeds slowly, virtually nothing is known about late Palaiologan painting in the rest of the Peloponnese, since the monuments are comparatively few, with most of them unpublished. So, given the problems that have to be confronted, we shall try, through studying mainly unpublished material and re-examining earlier publications, to investigate specific issues that will determine the future course of research in the Peloponnese. These are: first, the influence of the major fourteenth- and fifteenth-century monuments of Mystras on the minor churches of the metropolis, as well as on artistic production in the periphery of the Despotate; second, the monuments from the periphery of the Despotate, which express local artistic idioms or are influenced by other centres of smaller ambit and not directly by Mystras; and third the monuments from other regions of the Peloponnese.

One of the monuments that inducts us into the problems and deliberations exposit in this article is the Evangelistria at Mystras with its unpublished wall paintings⁸. Despite the now fragmentary condition of the decoration of this little church, it is particularly significant because it raises the crucial question of the influence of major fourteenth-century monuments, such as the Panagia Hodegetria (c. 1310) and the Perivleptos (c. 1370)⁹, on the art of Mystras and of the Despotate until their capture by the Ottoman Turks in 1460. Although the quality of the decoration of the Evangelistria falls short of the high standard of painting in these two churches –indicating the presence at Mystras of donors of different social status–, the painter’s conscious effort to adapt to the art of these monuments in iconography and style is nonetheless apparent. The painter, who probably hailed from Mystras, either faithfully follows the iconography of the models or combines subjects from the aforesaid two monuments, which he adapts to the programme in the Evangelistria. Among the most characteristic examples is in the programme of

its dome, which is modelled on that of the Perivleptos and reproduces the scheme: Pantocrator – Angels – Theotokos – Hetoimasia – Prophets (Fig. 1)¹⁰. The Virgin and the Hetoimasia define the east and the west axis respectively, as in the Perivleptos¹¹. Indeed, the painter’s fidelity to this important monument is apparent also in one other hitherto unnoticed detail, namely the inscription on the band of the medallion encircling the Pantocrator, on which survive, despite the extensive damage, the opening words of the 3rd ode of Cosmas the Melodos: *ΤΟ CΤΕΡΕ[Ω]ΜΑ ΤΩΝ ΕΠΙ [CΟΙ] ΠΕΠΟΙΘΟ[ΤΩΝ] [CΤΕΡΕΩCΟΝ ΚΥΡΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΝ ΗΝ ΕΚΤΙCΩ ΤΟ ΤΙΜΙΩ CΟΥ ΑΙΜΑΤΙ]*. The inscription begins at the west axial point, at the height of the Hetoimasia exactly as in the Perivleptos¹².

The scene of Christ’s Meal with Fish and Honeycomb, one of the rarer subjects in the cycle of the Eo-thina gospels¹³, on the south wall of the bema, in the same position and the same iconographic type as in the Panagia Hodegetria, is a characteristic example of the influence of that church on the Evangelistria. Directly opposite, on the north wall, is the Incredulity of Thomas, exactly as in the Hodegetria, whose iconography it reproduces¹⁴. In cases of familiar subjects, such as the Dormition of the Virgin (Fig. 2), the painter does not follow faithfully the iconographic model. He modifies almost all the borrowed iconographic elements from the representation in the south portico of the Hodegetria (before 1322)¹⁵, such as the angels in mandorla behind Christ, the candlesticks and the poses of the apostles,

¹⁰ T. Papamastorakis, *Ὁ διάκοσμος τοῦ τροῦλου τῶν ναῶν τῆς παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στὴ Βαλκανικὴ Χερσόνησο καὶ τὴν Κύπρο*, Athens 2001, 47.

¹¹ D. Mouriki, «Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλο τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρά», *AD 25* (1970), Meletai, 217, pls 74, 75.

¹² *Ibid.*, 250, pls 72, 73, 75. Papamastorakis, *Ὁ διάκοσμος*, op.cit. (n. 10), 12, 75.

¹³ N. Zarras, *Ὁ εἰκονογραφικὸς κύκλος τῶν εὐωθινῶν εναγγελίων στὴν παλαιολόγεια μνημειακῆ ζωγραφικῆ τῶν Βαλκανίων*, Thessaloniki 2011, 204, 366, fig. 88.

¹⁴ Zarras, *Ὁ εἰκονογραφικὸς κύκλος*, op.cit. (n. 13), 243.

¹⁵ On the scene of the Dormition in the south portico, see Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople», *Viewing the Morea*, op.cit. (n. 4), 381-386, with selected bibliography. On a different dating of the wall paintings in Hodegetria, see A. Tantsis, «Ἡ χρονολόγησις τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας στὸ Μυστρά», *Byzantiaka* 31 (2014), 179-204.

⁸ We still know very little about this important monument at Mystras. See M. Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς. Ἡ μεσαιωνικὴ πολιτεία καὶ τὸ κάστρο*, Athens 1999, 91-93. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Μυστράς. Ἱστορικὸς καὶ ἀρχαιολογικὸς ὁδηγός*, Athens 2003, 29-32.

⁹ On the phases of the Perivleptos and their chronology, see A. Louvi-Kizi, «Οἱ κτήτορες τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρά», *DChAE* 24 (2003), 101-18.



Fig. 2. Mystras, *Evangelistria*. *The Dormition*.



Fig. 3. Mystras, *Evangelistria*. *The Dormition (detail)*.

particularly that of Paul (Fig. 3), so creating his own composition. As far as the depiction of the human figure is concerned, we mention the Paralytic in the *Evangelistria* (Fig. 4), which is distinguished by the wide stride and the marked curvature of the torso, traits clearly recognizable in the figure of Christ in the scene of the Road to Calvary in the *Perivleptos*¹⁶.

The wall paintings in the *Evangelistria* have been destroyed in large part, while others have flaked leaving only outlines. Nonetheless, clearly apparent in the style of the extant decoration is the expressionist trend attested in the *Despotate* from the years before the mid-fourteenth century, by the *Hodegetria*¹⁷ and by the wall paintings in the central aisle (1337/38) of St. Nicholas at *Platsa* in Messenian *Mani*¹⁸. An example of this trend

is the figure of Christ in the Resurrection (Fig. 5), with the characteristic squinting gaze, in which the pupil is merged with the iris and painted in the upper part of the eye, leaving a large part of the white bulb visible. However, the trend here lacks the dynamism observed in the *Hodegetria*, because it is reproduced in more standardized versions. On the reddish-brown flesh the painter executes the highlights freely and vigorously through bold deft brushstrokes, creating expressive faces, such as those of the hierarchs, particularly St. Polycarpus (Fig. 6), who is strongly reminiscent of the Pope of Rome Leo in the *Hodegetria*¹⁹, and Apostle Paul in the *Dormition*, who comes close to portrait types in the *Dormition* of the south portico in the *Hodegetria*²⁰. Last, in the treatment of the drapery this expressionist tendency is evident in the juxtaposition of

¹⁶ Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, op.cit. (n. 8), fig. 52.

¹⁷ On the expressionistic trend in the *Hodegetria* church, see Mouriki, «Stylistic Trends», op.cit. (n. 7), 72-79. Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, op.cit. (n. 8), 60-62, 66-67.

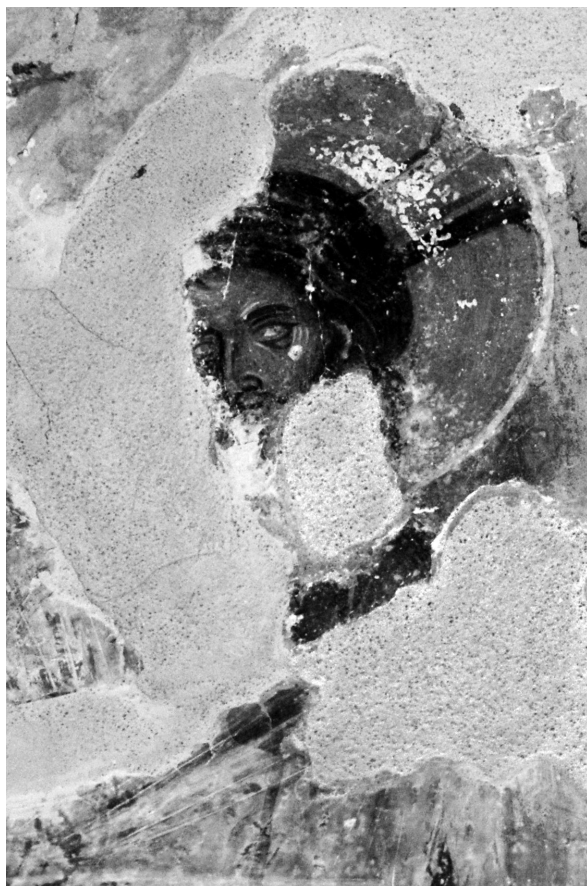
¹⁸ Mouriki, *Οί τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου στήν Πλάτσα*, op.cit. (n. 5), 54-60.

¹⁹ Etzeoglou, *Ὁ ναός τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 4) pl. 3 (general view of the hierarchs in the apse). Personal observation.

²⁰ Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople», op.cit. (n. 4), figs 14, 15.



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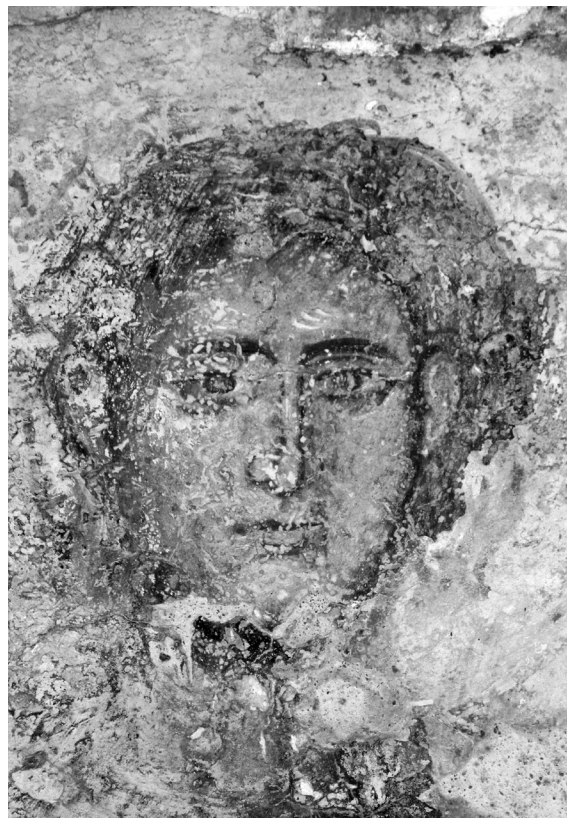
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- Fig. 4. Mystras, Evangelistria. The Paralytic.*
Fig. 5. Mystras, Evangelistria. The Resurrection (detail).
Fig. 6. Mystras, Evangelistria. Saint Polykarpos.
Fig. 7. Mystras, Evangelistria. The Ascension (detail).
Fig. 8. Mystras, Evangelistria. The evangelist Matthew.
Fig. 9. Mystras, Evangelistria. Unidentified saint.

complementary colours on the same garment²¹, such as the light blue on the carmine himation of Paul in the Dormition, of the angels in the Ascension (Fig. 7), and in several other examples. This combination is applied also in the Dormition of the south portico in the Hodegetria, as well as in the Perivleptos²². The diaphanous silky texture of the textiles with the pale tones of the same colour, as in the figure of the evangelist Matthew on the northwest pendentive (Fig. 8), is a typical feature of the paintings in churches at Mystras²³.

A second painter who participated in the decoration of the Evangelistria seems to have adopted a different approach to rendering the figures, more simplistic in manner. He avoided the strident contrasts between flesh and highlights, which are a reference point for the first painter, and simplified the coloration of the face with the olive-green under-layer and the solid brown flesh devoid of tonal gradations, as can be seen in the figure of the unidentified saint on the north wall (Fig. 9). The few highlights are not a principal expressive medium and do not seem to be linked organically to the modelling. The painter's ability in handling form is limited, as a result of which his figures display standardization and dryness, imparting a provincial character to the wall paintings in the Evangelistria.

As a whole, the painting in the Evangelistria offers important new evidence on artistic activity at Mystras in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. The painters' devotion to the art of major monuments of the past, which they approached eclectically, indicates that, notwithstanding their limited abilities, these artists were intent on renewing their art and not on slavish copying. Interesting subjects such as the Meal of Christ with Fish and Honeycomb, the Holy *Keramion*, which in contrast to the *Mandylion*²⁴ is not encountered frequently at

Mystras, and the iconographic type of the Resurrection²⁵ are choices that point to the endeavour of the painters –and possibly of the patron– to create an iconographic programme superior to the quality of the painting.

Analogous observations can be made in the wall paintings of the southeast *parekklesion* in the church of the Sts Theodore at Mystras, which is dedicated to the *Zoodochos Pēgē* (Life-bearing Source), represented in the apse²⁶. In the Dormition of the Virgin, on the west wall (Fig. 10), one of the few well-preserved scenes, the painter seems to have taken as model the representations in the south portico of the Virgin Hodegetria and in the Evangelistria, the influence of which is obvious at many points, such as the depiction of the Virgin upon the bier, the double mandorla surrounding Christ and the angels around the mandorla, the figures accompanying the apostles, which are identified as cantors-lectors, and the episode with Jephonias. It is clear too that the painter of the *parekklesion* attempted, with the expressive means available to him, to imitate also the portrait types of the Dormition in the Hodegetria. Despite the very poor condition of the *Zoodochos Pēgē* decoration, the standardized traits of expressionist painting can be seen in the countenance of the Virgin in the apse, such as the typical white streaks on the pupil of the eye. The juxtaposition of warm and cold colours, as applied in the Hodegetria and more systematically in the Perivleptos, is yet another trait observed in the *parekklesion*. However, in the painting there is an obvious simplification of the expressive means employed to render the figures, the schematic and conservative treatment of which distances this decoration markedly from the art of the Afentiko. The art of the *parekklesion* displays a more standardized expressionistic conception, which is reproduced mechanically mainly in the second half of the fourteenth century, as well as later, both at Mystras and in the wider region of the Despotate. The wall paintings

²¹ This art is applied already, but with less intense colour contrasts, in the wall paintings of the *parekklesion* of the Chora monastery. See P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 3, New York 1966, pls 214, 219, 223, 236, 262. On the application of this technique in monuments at Mystras and in the periphery of the Despotate, see Kalopissi-Verti, «Τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 2), 186-187.

²² Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, *op.cit.* (n. 8), figs 46, 49-50. Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople», *op.cit.* (n. 4), figs 14, 17.

²³ Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, *op.cit.* (n. 4), 279, figs 41, 62, 66, 87, 122.

²⁴ On the Holy Mandylion, see M. Emmanuel, «The Holy Mandy-

lion in the Iconographic Programmes of the Churches at Mystras», A. Lidov (ed.), *Eastern Christian Relics*, Moscow 2003, 291-304 with further bibliography.

²⁵ On the iconographic significance of the scene, see E. Deliyani-Dori, «Παλαιολόγεια εικονογραφία. Ο «σύνθετος» εικονογραφικός τύπος της Ανάστασης», *Αντίφωνον*, *op.cit.* (n. 5), 426-428.

²⁶ S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises de Mistra*, Paris 1970, 5, sch. 3.II.



Fig. 10. Mystras, Sts Theodore, South-East chapel. The Dormition.

of the southeast *pareklēision* in the church of the Sts Theodore should be dated within this timeframe and more specifically in the last quarter of the fourteenth century²⁷.

Outside Mystras, several monuments in which the impact of that centre is obvious to a greater or lesser degree have been studied²⁸. How do painters in the late Palaiologan period in Peloponnese express their concerns and inquiries, which in the end define also their artistic personality? Do they elect to create an art strongly orientated towards the great tradition of

Mystras or to become independent of this, or are they led to some other choice that better expresses their aesthetic demands? Important data that help to answer these questions are offered by monuments known for their very interesting mural painting, representatives examples of the artistic production in the periphery of the Despotate some of which will be discussed here, namely St. George at Molaoi, St. George at Nikandri, the Pantanassa of Geroumana and St. Paraskevē at Platsa.

Although the wall paintings in St. George at Molaoi are in fragmentary condition, they reveal a monument of high quality outside Mystras²⁹. The gentle modelling of the flesh, particularly on the faces with the subtly modulated pinkish-brown tones and the highlights skillfully modelled on the pigment layers, imparting a sculptural quality, bespeak an accomplished painter. The

²⁷ A date in the early 15th century was proposed by Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, op.cit. (n. 8), 93.

²⁸ For a concise yet comprehensive synopsis of opinions regarding the effect of the art of Mystras in the Despotate, see Kalopissi-Verti, «Τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις», op.cit. (n. 2), 181-191. Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», op.cit. (n. 3), 193-206.

²⁹ Konstantinidi, «Ο ναός του Αγίου Γεωργίου», op.cit. (n. 5), 69.

softness of the drapery is achieved through naturalistic and harmonious folds with rounded peaks, starting from almost shoulder height, and excellent highlighting that enhances the corporeality and cancels the schematization of the figures³⁰. The drapery on the garments of the angels-deacons and the rendering of the carmine neckband of the sticharion, which takes on the form of a torque, bring to mind the same figures in the representation of the Heavenly Liturgy in the Perivleptos³¹, in the apse of Sklaverochori (c. 1400) and of St. Anthony at Episkopi Pediados near Herakleion (early 15th century)³², as well as the deacon Romanos in St. Nicholas at Lampiotes, Amari (c. 1400)³³. Their refined facial features and elegant pose lead to sophisticated expressions of early fifteenth-century art in the Despotate. The hand of the talented painter in St. George can be seen also in the figure of the eponymous saint, which acquires the traits of a portrait with realistic features³⁴, notwithstanding the problems the painting presents, due to spoiling of the pigments. Last, the high level of the art at Molaoi attests the literariness of the painter and possibly of the patron of the church, because, as research has demonstrated, the inscriptions on the scrolls of the concelebrant hierarchs imprint a particular moment in the Divine Liturgy, in a manner unique in Byzantine iconography³⁵. The foregoing observations have concentrated on the issue of the high art³⁶ of the very few

wall paintings to have survived in this important monument at Molaoi and which are the work of an adept painter, who came most probably from Mystras or from some other notable centre, to decorate the church of St. George at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

The single-aisle vaulted-roof church of St. George at Nikandri in Mani³⁷ is one of the Despotate's outstanding monuments. The remarkable unpublished wall paintings brought to light a few years ago depict on the vault scenes from the life of Christ and of the Virgin. The influence of the artistic tradition of Mystras is evident in both their iconography and style, but a creative assimilation of the models points to the painter's ability to take his art a step further. In the representation of the Nativity (Fig. 11) the influence of the Panagia Hodegetria and the Perivleptos is overt in the organization of the composition and in basic pictorial elements³⁸. However, despite this general observation, closer scrutiny reveals that the painter deviates slightly in individual details, such as the two shepherds conversing next to a standing midwife, with the characteristic figure of the elder one with his weight planted firmly on one leg and his hat with upturned brim. Similar poses, gestures and details of the shepherds' attire are particularly popular in works of the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century³⁹. Analogous remarks on the eclectic character⁴⁰ of the painting at Nikandri can be made with regard to the scene of the Raising of Lazarus (Fig. 12). The composition is dominated by two mountainous massifs intersecting in the characteristic V-shape

³⁰ See Konstantinidi, *op.cit.*, 67-69, figs 1-3. Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 3), 197-200, figs 12-13.

³¹ Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, *op.cit.* (n. 8), fig. 48.

³² M. Borboudakis, «Παρατηρήσεις στη ζωγραφική του Σκλαβεροχωρίου», *Ευφρόσυνον. Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, 1, Athens 1991, fig. 188a-b.

³³ I. Spatharakis – T. Van Essenbergh, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete*, III, *Amari Province*, Leiden 2012, fig. 340.

³⁴ Konstantinidi, «Ο ναός του Αγίου Γεωργίου», *op.cit.* (n. 5), 68, fig. 5. Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 3), fig. 13.

³⁵ Konstantinidi, «Ο ναός του Αγίου Γεωργίου», *op.cit.* (n. 5), 67. Eadem, *Ο Μελισμός. Οι συλλειτουργούντες ιεράρχες και οι άγγελοι-διάκονοι μπροστά στην αγία τράπεζα με τα τίμια δώρα ή τον ευχαριστιακό Χριστό*, Thessaloniki 2008, 157.

³⁶ Manolis Chatzidakis, in one of his interventions during the 8th Symposium of the Christian Archaeological Society, in 1988, had pointed out the high standard of the painting in St. George at Molaoi. The view [Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 3), 199] expressed with some hesitation, that the painter A in the katholikon of the Cheimatissa monastery in Floka, worked in St. George at Molaoi should be re-examined, in my opinion, in the direction of seeking the influence of the art of Molaoi on painter A of the Cheimatissa.

³⁷ For a brief reference to the church, see K. Diamandi, «Το έργο της Αρχαιολογικής Υπηρεσίας για τη διάσωση των βυζαντινών μνημείων της Μάνης», E. Eleftheriou – A. Mexia (eds), *Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο στη μνήμη Νικολάου Β. Δρανδάκη (Καρaboστάσι Ουτύλου, 21-22 Ιουνίου 2008)*, Sparta 2008-2009, 52-53.

³⁸ Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, *op.cit.* (n. 4), figs 137, 138. Etzeoglou, «Ο ναός της Όδηγήτριας», *op.cit.* (n. 4), pls 11, 12.

³⁹ See for example the Volpi icon (15th c.) [M. Vassilaki (ed.), *The Hand of Angelos. An icon painter in Venetian Crete*, Athens 2010, no. 5, 78 (A. Drandaki)] and of the Nativity (15th c.) in the Byzantine Museum, Athens (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών*, Athens 1998, no. 25, 92-95).

⁴⁰ On the eclectic character of painting in the Despotate, see Kalopissi-Verti, «Τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 2), passim. H. Deliyianni-Dori, «Οι τοιχογραφίες τριών ναών του Δεσποτάτου του Μορέως: έργο ενός εργαστηρίου (:)», *DChAE* 20 (1998), 189-193 [= H. Deliyianni-Dori, «Eine Gruppe», *op.cit.* (n. 3), 41-55].

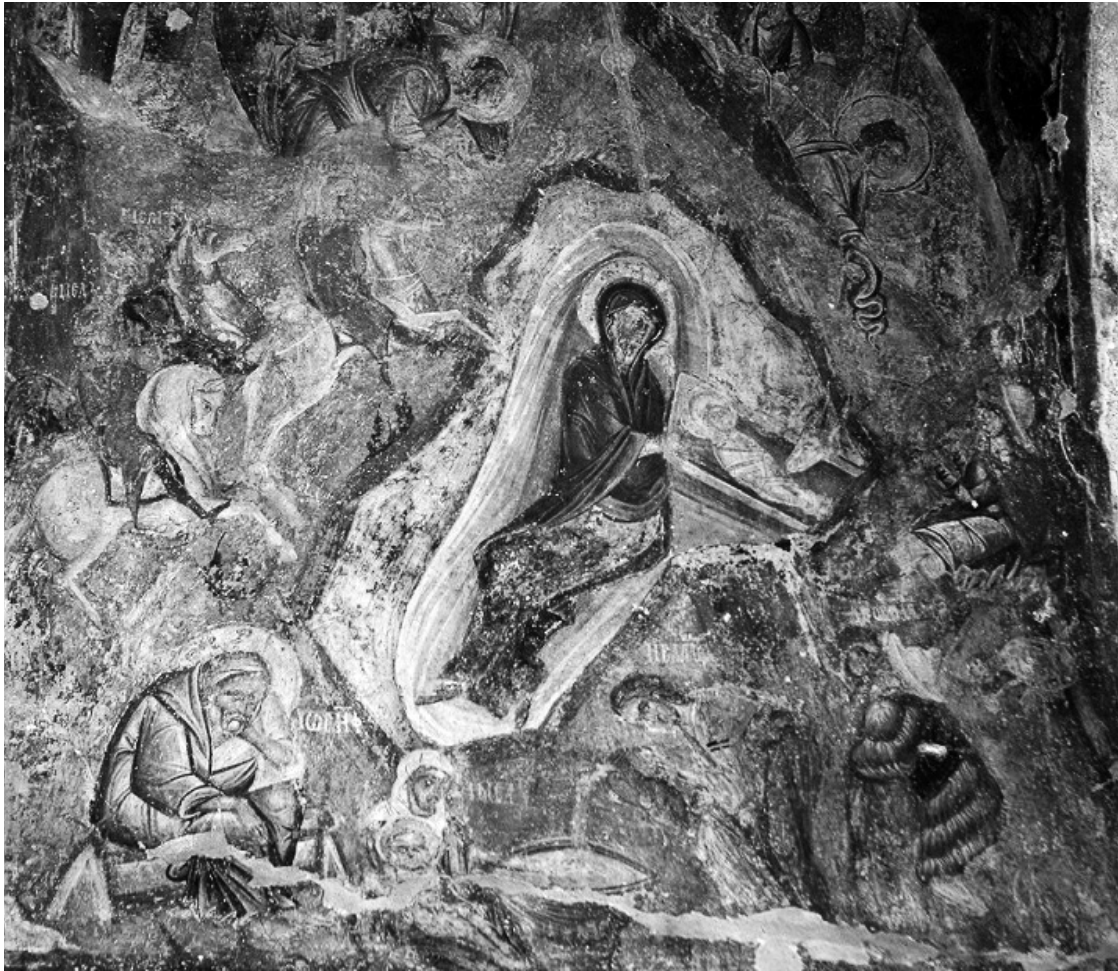


Fig. 11. Mani, Nikandri, St. George. The Nativity.

that is encountered in several scenes at Mystras, already from the Virgin Hodegetria church⁴¹, as well as in Crete⁴². Within this anti-realistic, asphyxiating space, symptomatic of the *horror vacui* from which there seems to be no possibility of escape, the figures are placed on different levels. The combination of the earthly and the transcendental character of the space, as a concept expressed in

the painting of the major monuments of Mystras⁴³, also typifies the painting at Nikandri. At the point where the rocks intersect is a group of Jews, exactly as in the Perivleptos⁴⁴. The bright planes of the rock, exemplifying the cubist conception of space that had been introduced by the painters of the Hodegetria church⁴⁵, the muted

⁴¹ It is observed that in the Hodegetria the forms in which the V-shape is ascertained are not as strict as those that held sway later in the Perivleptos and the Pantanassa. See Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople», op.cit. (n. 4), figs 3, 6, 7.

⁴² As in Kapetaniana and in Sklaverochori, K. Gallas – K. Wessel – M. Borboudakis, *Byzantinisches Kreta*, Munich 1983, figs 75, 134. Borboudakis, «Παράτηρήσεις», op.cit. (n. 32), fig. 198.

⁴³ Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, op.cit. (n. 4), 319-328.

⁴⁴ G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra*, Paris 1910, pl. 118.4.

⁴⁵ E.g. in the scene of the Baptism. See Millet, op.cit. (n. 44), pl. 94.2. D. Mouriki, «Revival Themes with Elements of Daily Life in two Palaeologan Frescoes Depicting the Baptism», C. Mango – O. Pitsak (eds), *Okeanos. Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on His Sixtieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), pl. 1.

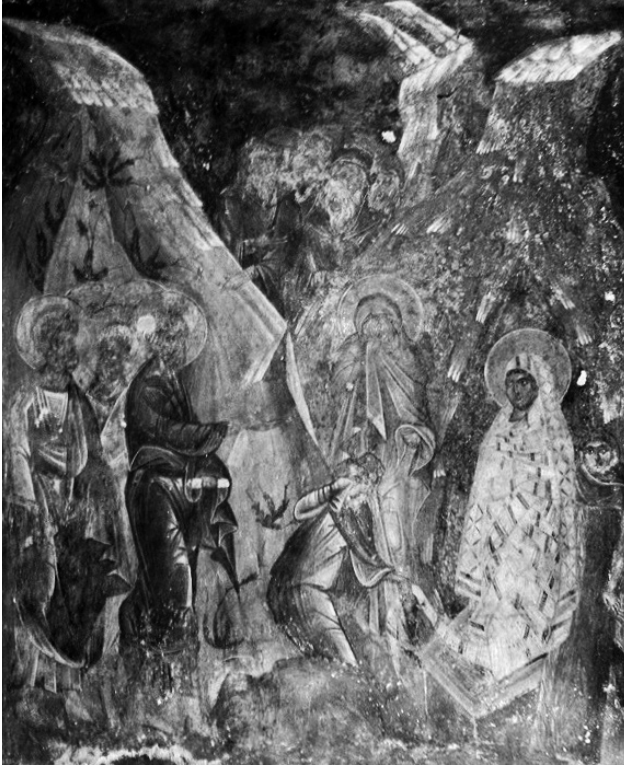


Fig. 12. Mani, Nikandri, St. George. The Raising of Lazarus.

colours and the few saplings growing from the crevices in the crags add a naturalistic note to the prominent rocky landscape. However, iconographic details, such as the unusual pose of Martha standing near her resurrected brother, next to the opening of the sepulchre⁴⁶, and the head-cloth covering Lazarus' head⁴⁷, give the scene an independence from the examples at Mystras. Last, in the scene of the Resurrection (Fig. 13), with the imposing and expressive figure of Christ, the painter opts for the «symmetrical» type that is known from the Evangelistria at Mystras, the Virgin Vrestenitissa (c.1400), as well as from other monuments in the Despotate⁴⁸. As in the

⁴⁶ This unusual detail is encountered in Crete. See Spatharakis – Van Essenberg, *op.cit.* (n. 33), fig. 532. The standing figure of Martha illustrating the words «Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he has been dead four days», according to the passage in the Gospel of John (11:39).

⁴⁷ On this iconographic detail, see N. Gkioles, «Ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Στράτηγου στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο Μονεμβασίας», *Λαζπ* 9 (1988), 435-436.

⁴⁸ On the «symmetrical» type of the Resurrection and its depi-

ation in monuments in the Despotate, see Deliyianni-Dori, «Παλαιολόγεια εικονογραφία», *op.cit.* (n. 25), 399-435, esp. 404-405, 426-432.

aforementioned scenes, the mountains are structural elements of the composition with figures, buildings or animals placed in the large fissures in the rocks, a characteristic that was employed systematically in the Chora Monastery⁴⁹ and to a large extent at Mystras; in more complex combinations in the famous scenes of the Nativity and the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem in the south portico of the Virgin Hodegetria church⁵⁰, and in simpler forms in the Transfiguration in the south arm of the cross in Hodegetria⁵¹, and the Perivleptos⁵². Apart from the naturalistic landscape and the building types with classicizing façades, such as stepped porches, the turrets and crenellations follow traditional types with reference point the Perivleptos, although in more simplified form. In combination with colour, they are structural elements of the compositions with staged setting. The most striking example is the scene of the Entry into Jerusalem (Fig. 14), in which the neutral colour tone of walled Jerusalem, in contrast to the reddish-brown rock, further widens the space of the composition, exactly as happens in the Perivleptos⁵³. The combinatory handling of space and colour in this example shows clearly the influence of Mystras on the artistic education of the painter at Nikandri.

In the modelling of the faces the Nikandri painter cleaves closer to traditional manners and confines himself to the green under-layer, which is conspicuous mainly on the edge of the face. The use of green shading on the edge of the face, particularly widespread at Mystras, became the fashion in the Despotate, where it is modelled either softly⁵⁴ or schematically⁵⁵. The

⁴⁹ Both in the mosaics in the narthex and the wall paintings in the *parekklesion*. See Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, *op.cit.* (n. 21), figs 225, 231, 233, 234.

⁵⁰ Papamastorakis, «Reflections of Constantinople», *op.cit.* (n. 4), figs 2, 6, 7.

⁵¹ Unpublished.

⁵² As in the Nativity, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Raising of Lazarus and the Entry into Jerusalem. See Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, *op.cit.* (n. 8), figs 46, 49-51. Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, *op.cit.* (n. 4), figs 134, 152.

⁵³ Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, *op.cit.* (n. 8), fig. 51.

⁵⁴ Mostly in the monuments of Leondari. See Albani, «Holy Apostles», *op.cit.* (n. 2), 168-175.

⁵⁵ In monuments at Epidavros Limera and Geraki. See Panayotidi,



Fig. 13. Mani, Nikandri, St. George. The Resurrection.



Fig. 14. Manti, Nikandri, St. George. The Entry into Jerusalem.



Fig. 15. Manti, Nikandri, St. George. The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple.

painter at Nikandri leaves a more pronounced shadow at the edge, in order to create a marked contrast to the brownish-red flesh of the rest of the countenance, as can be seen on Joachim and Anna in the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (Fig. 15), in the Entry into Jerusalem and in the Resurrection. His youthful figures have benign and fleshy faces, softly modelled, as of the children in the Entry into Jerusalem and of the maid-servants in the Birth of the Virgin.⁵⁶ He was, of course, following the current mode in using expressionist traits, but in a rather constrained way. The most characteristic traits of this kind are apparent in the portraits, such as that of Protomartyr Stephen (Fig. 16) on the north wall of the bema. On his visage a sheaf of highlights begins from the inner corner of the eyes and radiates towards the cheeks, there are free brushstrokes in different directions on the forehead and, primarily, there is a sheaf of fine brushstrokes between nose and lips only on the right side of the face, while a few further brushstrokes

are applied near the lips and on the chin. This expressionistic manipulation of the highlights, of like conception but more exuberant and schematic, is known from the church of the Virgin Kamariotissa on the island of Chalki (last quarter of 14th century) and mainly from the work of Manuel Eugenikos in Calendzicha of Georgia (1384-1396)⁵⁷. The same trend at Nikandri is expressed also by the lively white brushstroke covering almost the entire eye and directing the small black pupil, creating through the dominant white an otherworldly expressive gaze. In Laconia, similarly executed highlights are observed in the church of St. Nicholas at Achragias⁵⁸. The combination of the above stylistic traits is encountered in the Perivleptos⁵⁹, but with much stricter drawing, as

«Παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 3), figs 4-6, 8, 15. Papageorgiou, *Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αιώνα*, *op.cit.* (n. 5), 244.

⁵⁶ Unpublished. Personal observation.

⁵⁷ V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina*, Torino 1967, figs 518, 521, 523, 524. H. Belting, «Le peintre Manuel Eugenikos de Constantinople en Géorgie», *CahArch* 28 (1979), 103-114, figs 4, 5, 7. T. Velmans, «Le décor du sanctuaire de l'église de Calendzicha. Quelques schémas rares: la Vierge entre Pierre et Paul, la Procession des anges et le Christ de Pitié», *CahArch* 36 (1988), 137-159, figs 7, 11, 15, 23.

⁵⁸ Kalopissi-Verti, «Τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις», *op.cit.* (n. 2), 182-185.

⁵⁹ Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, *op.cit.* (n. 4), figs

well as in several churches in the Despotate⁶⁰. The treatment of the drapery of the garments, which is emphasized by the metallic sheen of the colours, is likewise standardized, similar to the manners in the Perivleptos, as for example on the sister of Lazarus who stands next to the cave. Furthermore, the handling of warm and cold colours on the garments, such as the blue brushstrokes on the brick-red maphorion of Eve in the Anastasis, is yet another trait linking Nikandri with the art of the Perivleptos⁶¹. The afore-going remarks lead to the conclusion that Nikandri has been influenced overtly by the art of Mystras and primarily by the painting in the Perivleptos, which it reproduces in a standardized way and argue for the dating of the Nikandri paintings in the period between 1370-1390. The painter at Nikandri was a talented artist with a restive spirit, who, having assimilated the painting of Mystras, succeeded through a mature eclectic conception in combining different iconographic elements, some of which are not detected within the boundaries of the Despotate and which he sought in the working drawings that will have circulated widely in its metropolitan centre. In speaking of the personality of the painter at Nikandri, two other iconographic details are particularly significant because they confirm what has been said. The first detail is the two male figures in antique manner, in grisaille, in the representation of the Pentecost, which symbolize the races of the world (Fig. 17). The one on the left holds a bow and a spear, and the one on the right has a loosened tunic exposing most of his torso, a spear and a sword resting on the shoulder. The second detail is the lion mask in the scene of the Presentation of the



Fig. 16. Mani, Nikandri, St. George. The Protomartyr Stephen.

Virgin in the Temple. Both details bring to mind several corresponding examples in the Chora Monastery and in other important monuments and artworks⁶². These classicizing perceptions, particularly widespread in the work of leading painters of the Palaiologan period, such as Michael Astrapas and Eutychios⁶³, as well as of artists at Constantinople, bear witness to the scope of the inquiries of the Nikandri painter, who made recourse to sophisticated models, in order to attain the high-stan-

134 (the apostles), 148 (the archangel on the right), and fig. 152.

⁶⁰ For example in Agriakona, Vrestenitissa, Agoriani, Longanikos, Molaoi and in Cheimatissa. See Deliyianni-Dori, «Agriakona», op.cit. (n. 1), 584. N. B. Drandakis, «Παναγία ή Βρεστενίτιστα», *Πρακτικά Α' Λακωνικού Συνεδρίου (Σπάρτη-Γύθειο, 7-11 Οκτωβρίου 1977)*, *ΛακΣπ* 4/1 (1979), 175 [repr. in *Μάνη και Λακωνία*, op.cit. (n. 2), no. 11]. M. Emmanuel, «Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Νικολάου στην Αγόριανη της Λακωνίας», *DChAE* 14 (1987-1988), 146. Chassoura, *Longanikos*, op.cit. (n. 5), 257, 291-292. Konstantinidi, «Ο ναός του Αγίου Γεωργίου», op.cit. (n. 5), 67-68. Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», op.cit. (n. 3), 197-200.

⁶¹ The combination of these particular colours is one of the characteristic traits of the painting in the Perivleptos (Baptism, Nativity, Lamentation). See Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, op.cit. (n. 8), figs 16, 49. Millet, *Mistra*, op.cit. (n. 44), pl. 123.1.

⁶² D. Mouriki, «The Mask Motif in the Wall Paintings of Mistra. Cultural Implications of a Classical Feature in Late Byzantine Painting», *DChAE* 10 (1981), 307-338, pls 91c-d, 92b-d.

⁶³ Both painters frequently introduce figures from antiquity into their works. I mention indicatively the scene of Christ in the synagogue. See N. Gkioles, «Ο Ίησοῦς διδάσκων ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ τῆς Ναζαρέτ. Σχολία τινὰ περὶ τῆς εἰκονογραφίσεως τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους», *ΕΕΒΣ* 50 (1999), fig. 1. See also, P. Miljković-Peppek, *Deloto na zografite Mihailo i Eutihij*, Skopje 1967, fig. 80. Indeed in the scene of the Pentecost in the Perivleptos at Ohrid, the races are symbolized by two Orientalizing figures holding a spear, as at Nikandri. See G. Millet – A. Frolov, *La peinture du Moyen Âge en Yougoslavie (Serbie, Macédoine et Monténégro)*, III, Paris 1962, pl. 101.3.



Fig. 17. Mani, Nikandri, St. George. The Pentecost (detail).

dard art to which he aspired. Analogous classicistic models infiltrated, mainly from Constantinople, into the major monuments of Mystras⁶⁴. In the light of the above, it is reasonable to argue that the Nikandri painter was linked to local workshops of Mystras, which were active in the Despotate. In conclusion, the painting at Nikandri is a characteristic example of a synthesis of aesthetic values that were elaborated in Mystras and disseminated from there throughout the territory of the Despotate, always depending on the artistic level of the painters, a factor that should be a basic prerequisite in the study of the painting of this period in the Morea. The future revealing of the impressive wall paintings in the bema at Nikandri will surely fill in our knowledge of painting in the Despotate.

⁶⁴ See for example the naked figures in the scene of Baptism in Hodegetria [Etzeoglou, *Ὁ ναὸς τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 4), pl. 12] and in the small arches of the Virgin's throne, in the apse of the Perivleptos [Dufrenne, *Les programmes*, op.cit. (n. 26), fig. 60].

The katholikon in the region of Monemvasia, known as the Pantanassa of Geroumana, is a comparable case to St. George at Nikandri⁶⁵. The art follows the usual expressive manners encountered in the Despotate, with the olive-green under-layer on the edge of the face and the brown flesh tones. Recognition of the high quality of the art in Geroumana was occasioned by the commentary on the figure of Christ⁶⁶. It should be noted further that the realism and expressiveness in the portrait of Christ are promoted by particular motifs, such as the thick well-groomed hair crowning a large part of the forehead and raised at the back so that it is rendered in perspective, which are encountered in major works of this period and which research has linked to Constantinople and dated around 1400⁶⁷. Moreover, the facility in handling colour in the modelling of the faces and the modulation of the chromatic tones, as on the figure of the unidentified hierarch (Fig. 18), attest the quality of the art of the Geroumana painter, who was most probably associated with a leading artistic centre. However, it is not possible to say more on this issue, due to the scant remnants of the decoration, only in the sanctuary. The interesting view⁶⁸ that the greater affluence of the area of Epidavros Limera favoured the commissioning of works of high art and their execution by proficient painters will only be confirmed if more examples of fine painting come to light, as the activity there of one more local workshop, distinguished by its flat and linear painting, has been ascertained from several monuments⁶⁹. Besides, research has shown that good painters were active in other parts of the Despotate too, less significant commercially than Epidavros Limera. The dating of the Geroumana church from the second half of the fourteenth century⁷⁰ up to 1404 on the basis of the historical-architectural data, is supported by

⁶⁵ For the church of the Pantanassa, see A. Louvi-Kizi, «Παντάνασσα της Γερούμανας: Ένα μνημείο των Ιωαννιτών Ιπποτών», *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 16 (2003), 357-378. Gerstel, «Mapping the Boundaries», op.cit. (n. 5), 366-367.

⁶⁶ Gerstel, op.cit., 366, fig. 33.

⁶⁷ On this typological feature in icons and wall paintings, see N. Zarras, «Η παλαιολόγεια εικόνα του Χριστού ἐν δόξῃ με τους αποστόλους στο Μουσείο του Ελληνικού Ινστιτούτου της Βενετίας», *DChAE* 34 (2013), 245-246.

⁶⁸ Gerstel, «Mapping the Boundaries», op.cit. (n. 5), 367.

⁶⁹ Panayotidi, «Παρατηρήσεις», op.cit. (n. 3).

⁷⁰ Louvi-Kizi, «Παντάνασσα», op.cit. (n. 65), 367.



Fig. 18. Monemvasia. Pantanassa of Geroumana. Unidentified hierarch.

the typological features of Christ in the painting, which may be dated at the end of the century.

The last example from the Despotate, which represents the second category of monuments as these are classed at the beginning of this article, is the small transverse-vaulted church of St. Paraskevē at Platsa in Mani, which according to the inscription carved on its exterior is dated to 1412⁷¹. Chara Konstantinidi, in her study of the architecture of this church, discerned peculiarities in the ornamental brickwork, which she considered

⁷¹ On the architecture and the iconographic program of the church, see Ch. Konstantinidi, «Ο σταυρεπίστεγος ναός της Ἁγίας Παρασκευῆς στὴν Πλάτσα τῆς Ἑξω Μάνης», *Φίλιον Δώρημα εἰς τὸν Τάσον Ἀθ. Γριτσόπουλον διὰ τὰ 50 χρόνια ἐπιστημονικῆς του παρουσίας, Πελοποννησιακά* 16 (1985-1986), 423-440, pls 53-60. G. Fousteris, *Εικονογραφικά προγράμματα σε βυζαντινοὺς σταυρεπίστεγους ναοὺς* (unpublished PhD thesis), Thessaloniki 2005, 126-129, sch. 48. E. Deliyianni-Dori, «Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τῆς Ἁγίας Παρασκευῆς στὴν Πλάτσα τῆς Ἑξω Μάνης (1412)», *6ο Συμπόσιο ΧΑΕ (Ἀθήνα 1986)*, 22-23. Eadem, «The Friends of Theophanes», op.cit. (n. 2), 197, fig. 7.

«as a rare example of provincial character» with influences from the art of Geraki⁷². Unfortunately, the greater part of the painted inscription in the interior, which refers to the building and the date of the decoration of the church, has been destroyed⁷³.

Two tendencies are apparent in the manner of modelling the faces, but these cannot be used as an argument that two painters worked in St. Paraskevē, as careful examination of the painting as a whole reveals stylistic unity. In the first tendency there is a preference for the dark under-layer spread over the entire surface, with minimal highlights, creating flat and dull monochrome countenances, as in the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (Fig. 19) and the angel from the Hospitality of Abraham (Fig. 20). In the second tendency, such as in the Ascension (Fig. 21), the light olive-green under-layer is confined to the edge of the face, the rest of which is worked in brown flesh tones. The painter has paid greater attention to the single figures (Fig. 22), in his endeavour to achieve softer modelling and more vivid highlights. However, the linear rendering of the facial features of the angel, for example, the nose of the apostles (group in the right) in the Ascension, the tip of which is divided unnaturally by a line, the figures' lack of correct anatomical proportions, the flat geometric drapery and the total lack of background in the scenes create a painting that is overall anticlassical. The weaknesses in the painter's draftsmanship are apparent either in the simplification⁷⁴, as in the apostles in the Ascension, on whose legs only the outline is drawn, or in

⁷² Konstantinidi, «Ἁγία Παρασκευή», op.cit. (n. 71), 428-439. Earlier, H. M. Küpper (*Der Bautypus der griechischen Dachstuhlkirche*, I, Amsterdam 1990, 216-217), relying on the view of G. Velenis (*Ερμηνεία του κεραμοπλαστικού διακόσμου*, Thessaloniki 1984, 264), that the stone above the entrance to the church, with the incised inscription of 1412, had been brought from elsewhere, dated the wall paintings to the first half of the 14th century. However, Velenis's view is not supported by strong arguments and I do not agree with it.

⁷³ Deliyianni-Dori, «Ἁγία Παρασκευή», op.cit. (n. 71), 22. It is striking that whereas the first six lines of the inscription are preserved in very good condition, the rest of the inscription is destroyed, but the damage does not extend at all to the red frame enclosing it. So, it is reasonable to suppose that there was intentional intervention to the extensive text, from which only the phrase [...] *την [ψ]υχὴν τῆς δού[λης]* survives.

⁷⁴ This element has been ascertained also in churches at Geraki. Papageorgiou, *Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αιώνα*, op.cit. (n. 5), 271-272.



Fig. 19. Mani, Platsa, St. Paraskevē. The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple.



Fig. 20. Mani, Platsa, St. Paraskevē. *The Hospitality of Abraham* (detail).

the organization of space, as in the Last Supper, where the painter's inability to adjust the representation to the available surface has resulted in the depiction of the disciples in a group on one side of the table and not seated⁷⁵. Responding to the more general current of the period, the painter in St. Paraskevē attempts to include his work in a «common» visual language and to present the expressionistic trend seen in the monuments discussed above, especially in the rendering of the eyes. But he does this in a loose and clumsy manner, as he has not assimilated the expressionism, which means that the final aesthetic result fails to convey the dynamism of this stylistic trend, as can be seen in the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and in other scenes.

⁷⁵ Unpublished. Personal observation.

Despite the local character of the painting in St. Paraskevē, it could be argued that the portrait types of some figures are reminiscent of those encountered in artistic centres, such as Geraki. In the Martyrdom of St. Paraskevē⁷⁶, as well as in the unidentified female saint (St. Anastasia?) (Fig. 22) the portrait type, the modelling of the face and the individual features, such as the lips, the eyes, and the highlights, are strongly reminiscent of figures in churches at Geraki⁷⁷. The painter at Platsa strives to offset the flaws in the drawing, particularly of the figures, with iconographic particularities, some of which appreciably improve the overall picture of the decoration. This is exemplified by the scenes of the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, in the west arm of the transept vault, two subjects with common symbolic content which are rarely combined⁷⁸, as there is no other Mariological scene on the vault. The composite buildings creating the unifying backdrop, with their details and lovely colours, bear witness to the good models the painter used⁷⁹. Indeed, they catch our attention immediately, as they are the only elaborate edifices in the entire church, creating a strong sense of imbalance when compared to the simplistic buildings of the other two scenes in the vault: the Raising of Lazarus and the Entry into Jerusalem (Fig. 23). I believe that the painter himself or one of the donors of the church, the names of some of whom are preserved in the badly damaged painted inscription, wanted the two representations to be depicted together, which fact justifies the very good models he utilized. Among the interesting scenes in terms of iconography are the Hospitality of Abraham, on the front of

⁷⁶ Archim. S. Koukiaris, *Ὁ κύκλος τοῦ βίου τῆς ἁγίας Παρασκευῆς τῆς Ρωμαίας καὶ τῆς ἐξ Ἰκονίου στῆ χριστιανικῆ τέχνη*, Athens 1994, pl. 24.

⁷⁷ Papageorgiou, *Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αιώνα*, op.cit. (n. 5), figs 57, 69, 108-109.

⁷⁸ Among the cross-roofed churches, Fousteris (*Εικονογραφικά προγράμματα*, op.cit. [n. 71], sch. 57) refers only to the example of St. Demetrios at Krokees. See also K. P. Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου (1286) στις Κροκεές της Λακωνίας και το εργαστήριο του ανώνυμου ζωγράφου. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της πρώιμης παλαιολόγιας ζωγραφικής στη Λακωνία*, Tripoli 2012, 38, sch. 6b.

⁷⁹ Such as the drawn curtain (velum) on the buildings, a rare detail in the churches of the Despotate. See Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, op.cit. (n. 4), 107.



Fig. 21. Mani, Platsa, St. Paraskevē. The Ascension.



Fig. 22. Mani, Platsa. St. Paraskevē. Saint Anastasia (?).

the apse, and the now-destroyed scene of the Betrayal, on the west vault. However, that trait which is distinctive of the St. Paraskevē painter, apart from the linear and flat effect, is his penchant for ornamental motifs, vegetal and geometric, which he places at several points in the naos, in spite of its limited dimensions. Through these naturalistic floral ornaments he sought to display his competence, as these are reverberations of the art of Mystras in the periphery of the Despotate, where the artistic personality of the painter in St. Paraskevē was formed.

Unfortunately, very little is known about fifteenth-century art outside the Despotate of the Morea, which surely had important works to its credit⁸⁰, judging by a monument with high-quality painting, the Old Monastery of

⁸⁰ The wall paintings found in a small church in Patras, which are unfortunately now destroyed except for a few fragments, should also be counted among the examples of good fifteenth-century painting in the Principality of Achaia. See D. Athanasoulis, «Μεσοβυζαντινό ναύδριο στην Πάτρα και η ένταξή του στη μεσαιωνική πόλη», *AD 53* (1998), Meletes, esp. 339-340.



Fig. 23. Mani, Platsa. St. Paraskevē. The Entry into Jerusalem.

the Taxiarchs at Aigion, the so-called *Paliomonastiro*⁸¹.

⁸¹ On the Old Monastery of Taxiarchs in Aigion, see L. Politis, «Η Μονή Ταξιαρχών Αιγίου», *Ελληνικά* 11 (1939), 67-80. E. Aggelomati-Tsougaraki, «Μια άγνωστη χειρόγραφη ιστορία της Μονής Ταξιαρχών Αιγιαλείας», *Πρακτικά του Β' Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών*, 3, Athens 1981-1982, 65-86. K. Tsiknakis, «Η Μονή Ταξιαρχών του Αιγίου στα τέλη του 16ου αι.», *Πελοποννησιακά* 21 (1995), 54-72, with bibliography.

The monastery is associated with the building activity of Hosios Leontios, scion of an eminent family of Monemvasia, who after 1357 arrived in the area of Aigion and established a reputation as an ascetic. According to historical testimonies, the Blessed Leontios died in the early fifteenth century⁸². The small monasterial com-

⁸² Politis, «Μονή Ταξιαρχών», op.cit. (n. 81), 70. A. I. Lampro-



Fig. 24. Aigion. Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. Angel in the Bema.



Fig. 25. Aigion, Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. Unidentified Bishop.

plex consists today of two contiguous *parekklesia* within a natural hollow in a tall rock⁸³. The earlier chapel is decorated with wall paintings of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, of which those in the first layer, of the late Palaiologan period, although distinguished

ρουλου – A. G. Moutzali, «Ο μεσοβυζαντινός ναός του Αγίου Νικολάου Αιγιάλειας. Συμβολή στην ιστορία της μονής Ταξιαρχών», *Σύμμεικτα* 11 (1997), 326.

⁸³ It is possible that the Blessed Leontios chose this particular place of sequestration on the criterion of his experience of comparable anachoritic spaces in his birthplace Monemvasia, in the wider environs of which there was a burgeoning of the ascetic life in barely-accessible hermitages, in emulation of the famed monastic sites in Byzantium. See A.-M. Talbot, «Les saints montagnes à Byzance», M. Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident*, Paris 2001, 263-275. Gerstel, «Mapping the Boundaries», op.cit. (n. 5), 358-362.

by their quality still remain unpublished as a whole⁸⁴.

The modelling of the flesh with the red ochre under-layer over the entire surface and the few highlights, as on the angel in the bema and the unidentified bishop (Figs 24, 25), the slanting eyebrows and the perfunctory rendering of the eyes with very few, extremely fine brush-strokes and the highlights as fleeting white lines following the course of the eyebrows, the greyish-blue streak on the pupil of the eye and the highlights on the hands and

⁸⁴ Four layers have been identified, three of which possibly date to the post-Byzantine period. For a short reference on the wall paintings of the *Paliomonastiro*, see A. Koumoussi – A. G. Moutzali, *Παλαιά Μονή Ταξιαρχών Αιγιάλειας, 21ο Συμπόσιο ΧΑΕ (Αθήνα 2001)*, 52-53. A. Koumoussi, «Άγνωστος ναός στο Παυλόκαστρο Πατρών. Συμβολή στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Αχαΐας κατά τους υστεροβυζαντινούς χρόνους», *AD 58-64* (2003-2009), Meletai, 463-464, figs 12, 13.

the fingers, as in the Betrayal and the Remorse of Peter (Figs 26, 27), are comparable only to the *avant-garde* art of the Theophanes the Greek, who bequeathed us great works in Russia, of the late fourteenth-early fifteenth century⁸⁵. One other way of handling highlights, which is encountered in the small church of the *Paliomonastiro*, again on the brick-red flesh, is with meshes of parallel lines that start under the eye and radiate over a large part of the face, as in the exquisite portraits of the unidentified saint (Fig. 28) and one of the «Penniless» saints (Anargyroi) of Arabia (Fig. 29)⁸⁶. Theophanes uses highlights of this kind with considerable freedom, while another excellent contemporary painter, Manuel Eugenikos from Constantinople, uses them in a more stylized manner and over a wider area on the countenance, in the wall paintings of Calendzicha in Georgia⁸⁷. In my opinion, the two different manners in the use of highlights in the *Paliomonastiro* cannot be due to two different painters, but are an indication of his ability to differentiate his artistic expression, which fact is justified absolutely by the high quality of his art⁸⁸. In the narrative scenes the free and fleeting brushstrokes of the highlights express at once the tension and the naturalism of the dramatic events, whereas the painter adopts a different approach in his creation of the remarkable portraits, which virtu-



Fig. 26. Aigion, Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. The Remorse of Peter.

⁸⁵ In particular the use of highlights on the figure of Peter in the monastery of the Taxiarchs brings to mind mainly figures of hermits and prophets by Theophanes the Greek in Novgorod. See V. Lazarev, *Theophanes der Grieche und seine Schule*, Vienna – Munich 1968, 21, 33-36, 40. G. I. Vzdornov, *Frescoes of Theophanes the Greek in the Church of the Transfiguration in Novgorod*, Moscow 1976, figs 36-37, 58, 130-132.

⁸⁶ The Saints Anargyroi of Arabia are usually depicted with a turban on the head like in Dečani. See V. R. Petković – P. D. Bosković, *Manastir Dečani*, II, Belgrade 1941, pl. CLVI. For more examples, see Etzeoglou, *Ὁ ναὸς τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 4), 60-75.

⁸⁷ See Belting, «Manuel Eugenikos», op.cit. (n. 57), figs 4, 7. Lazarev, *Theophanes*, op.cit. (n. 85), figs 9, 10. The face of St. Christopher in Calendzicha [D. Mouriki, «Reflections of Palaiologan Style in Georgian Monumental Painting», *VXI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress* (Wien 1981), *JÖB* 31/2 (1981), fig. 50] is strikingly reminiscent of the unidentified saint from the *Paliomonastiro*.

⁸⁸ Both Theophanes and Manuel Eugenikos used different manners of executing the highlights in the same painting ensemble. See e.g. the different manners of highlighting used by Theophanes in Novgorod [Lazarev, *Theophanes*, op.cit. (n. 85), figs 12-15, 23, 28-31, 38, 39. Vzdornov, *Frescoes*, op.cit. (n. 85), figs 73, 97, 98, 111, 112] and by Manuel Eugenikos in Calendzicha [Belting, «Manuel Eugenikos», op.cit. (n. 57), figs 4, 7, 11, 13, 14].

ally immaterialize in the meshes of highlights covering almost the entire face.

The choice painting in the *Paliomonastiro*, which can only be compared with works by the outstanding Constantinopolitan painters mentioned above, is, in my view, one of the paramount examples of expressionism known in the Byzantine realm. Both ways of handling the highlights, observed in the monastery of the Taxiarchs, recall the Hodegetria and the Pantanassa at Mystras⁸⁹, which reproduce stylistic trends of mid-fourteenth century Constantinopolitan art. However, the handling of highlights in the *Paliomonastiro* is consistent with cur-

⁸⁹ See for example, Etzeoglou, *Ὁ ναὸς τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 4) pls 5, 7, 8. Aspra-Vardavaki – Emmanuel, *Παντάνασσα*, op.cit. (n. 4), 259, 262. figs 103, 109, 110. Koumoussi [«Ἀγῶστος ναός», op.cit. (n. 84), 465] mentions similarities between Mystras and the *Paliomonastiro*, but without giving specific examples.



Fig. 27. Aigion. Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. The Betrayal.



Fig. 28. Aigion. Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. Unidentified saint.



Fig. 29. Aigion. Old Monastery of the Taxiarchs. St. Anargyros of Arabia.

rent artistic developments in Constantinople, where the expressionist aesthetic was at its zenith, with principal exponents Theophanes the Greek and Manuel Eugenikos. The wall paintings in the *Paliomonastiro* of Aigion are a groundbreaking work of an accomplished painter who at the end of the 14th century expressed in an authentic manner the artistic developments of the age. For this reason I believe that he is a Constantinopolitan painter who was active in the Peloponnese in that period or who came to Aigion from the Byzantine capital for the purpose of decorating the monastery of the Taxiarchs. The personality of Hosios Leontios, who had turned the said monastery into a centre of asceticism, but mainly his personal connections with influential persons in Constantinople and with the Palaiologi⁹⁰, are, I believe, strong indications for the presence of Constantinopolitan art in the monastery at Aigion. We should not forget that this was

⁹⁰ Politis, «Μονὴ Ταξιαρχῶν», op.cit. (n. 81), 69. See also, Lampropoulou – Moutzali, «Μεσοβυζαντινός ναός», op.cit. (n. 82), 326-327, note 10.

a monastic foundation that received significant gifts and funds from the Palaiologos family even after Leontios' death⁹¹. At Aigion, the combination of the status of the donor and the high quality of the painting reflects the importance of the Principality of Achaia as an artistic centre, the particular identity of which will be enhanced by the publication, in the future, of other monuments there with comparable art.

Research to date on the monuments examined here has yielded interesting information on the art in the Despotate of the Morea, as this developed in correlation to that of Mystras –of the artistic centre and the periphery. Mystras, the capital of the Despotate, due to its infrangible relations with Constantinople, had all those characteristics of the leading artistic centre: it became a pole of attraction for painters from the Capital of the Empire, who moved to the Morea in order to work in a

⁹¹ Lampropoulou – Moutzali, op.cit. (n. 82), 344-345.

safe and refined milieu, undertaking commissions of the always ambitious local aristocracy. Their works in the Hodegetria, the Perivleptos and the Pantanassa reflected contemporary artistic developments and influenced local painters of the Despotate, who were inspired by Constantinopolitan art, while concurrently these celebrated painters must have been interested in teaching their skills to others⁹².

Present in Mystras already in the years of the decoration of the Hodegetria church, Constantinopolitan painters must have created there a flourishing artistic hub, interacting with painters who had studied and matured artistically by working with them. I believe that Mystras functioned as the artistic «nursery» of painters, some of whom, as research has demonstrated⁹³, were also in high demand elsewhere, not only in the main centres of the Despotate, by officials of the administrative, military and ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also in small or distant towns, where there was notable economic prosperity and artistic development⁹⁴. Molaoi, the Pantanassa of Geroumana and Nikandri belong in this category. Of these monuments, the first and the second, despite the fragmentary state of their decoration, constitute important testimonies of the high standard of the painters who were active outside Mystras, while the third, in which the wall paintings are intact, offers invaluable insights into painting in the Despotate and the personality of the painters. The eclectic character of the painting at Nikandri indicates that the major monuments in Mystras were reference points for painting in the Despotate, but without this meaning that the painters slavishly copied their models. They followed the expressionist trend, that held an allure for many painters in the Despotate, and other structural elements of the compositions, but through working drawings and other guides they were able to differentiate or enrich their models

with iconographic particularities. Through this freedom of approach to their models the painters expressed their artistic personality and painting in the Despotate evolved, creating an artistic idiom which, although stylistically more dependent on Mystras, iconographically appears to be more pluralistic.

At the same time, another category of painters participated actively in artistic developments in the Despotate, but through a purely local artistic expression that disengaged it from Mystras. This means that the painters did not copy directly the art of the metropolis but were acquainted with it indirectly, through its influence on other centres of the periphery⁹⁵. I would argue that such a perception of the metropolitan art is observed in the church of St. Paraskevē at Platsa. This modest monument is particularly didactic, as it demonstrates that through the circulation of working drawings in the periphery of the Despotate even painters with a strong dependency on a purely local artistic idiom had the possibility of copying lofty models, either originating from Mystras or from other artistic centres. It should be noted that these provincial workshops complement the artistic identity of the Despotate, with the painters' attempts either to imitate the sophisticated art of the leading centres of the Morea⁹⁶, or to create humbler versions of it.

The wall paintings in the *Paliomanstiro* in the monastery of the Taxiarchs are a precious testimony of the artistic output of the Peloponnese. We can confidently contend that, apart from the Despotate of Morea, Constantinopolitan painters were active also in the Principality of Achaea, producing high art under favourable conditions created by personalities such as the Blessed Leontios. The painting of the *Paliomonastiro* expresses an artistic idiom, the power of the authenticity of which puts it on a par with the art of Theophanes the Greek and Manuel Eugenikos. In a period in which Constantinople was waning and painters were leaving the collapsing Capital for the periphery of the remaining State, as well as venturing beyond its borders⁹⁷,

⁹² Of particular importance in the attempt to sketch the artistic milieu of Mystras is the correlation with that of Crete, where Constantinopolitan painters were active from the 14th century. For a fully-documented presentation of their work, see *Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 39), 58-65 with further bibliography.

⁹³ Among the most recent researches see the studies by Kalopissi-Verti and Panayotidi, op.cit. (n. 2, 3).

⁹⁴ On those territories and villages with economic and artistic development that make up the landscape of the Despotate, see Gerstel, «Mapping the Boundaries», op.cit. (n. 5), 335-368.

⁹⁵ Mouriki, «Stylistic Trends», op.cit. (n. 7), 74. See also Gerstel, op.cit. (n. 6), 364.

⁹⁶ Panayotidi, «Παράτηρήσεις» op.cit (n. 3), 206.

⁹⁷ On the demographic crisis that hit Constantinople and other major cities, see A. E. Laiou, «The Agrarian Economy, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries», A. E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic*

the Peloponnese continued to be an important artistic centre that either assimilated creatively the dominant trends with talented and energetic local painters, or attracted painters from the Byzantine Capital, who creat-

ed some of the most wonderful works of art just a few decades before the Fall of Constantinople.

History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1, Washington, D.C. 2002, 312-319. Indeed, if we take into account the view of R. Cormack [«Ο καλλιτέχνης στην Κωνσταντινούπολη: αριθμοί, κοινωνική θέση, ζητήματα απόδοσης», M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Το πορτραίτο του καλλιτέχνη στο Βυζάντιο*, He-

rakleion 2000, 45-76], that the painters in Constantinople were not many, then a few decades before the Fall the Capital was perhaps facing the problem of the emigration of painters in search of more favourable working conditions.

Provenance of the figures

Figs 1-18: Ephorate of Antiquities of Laconia. Figs 19-23: Photographic Archive of H. Deliyanni-Dori. Figs 24-29: Photographic Archive of Afendra Moutzali.

Νεκτάριος Ζάρας

Η ΚΑΛΛΙΤΕΧΝΙΚΗ ΠΑΡΑΓΩΓΗ ΣΕ ΚΕΝΤΡΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ ΠΕΛΟΠΟΝΝΗΣΟΥ. ΟΨΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΜΝΗΜΕΙΑΚΗΣ ΖΩΓΡΑΦΙΚΗΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΥΣΤΕΡΗ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΕΙΑ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟ

Η συμβολή του Μυστρά στη διαμόρφωση της καλλιτεχνικής ταυτότητας του Δεσποτάτου του Μορέως υπήρξε καθοριστική, καθώς επηρέασε σημαντικά τη ζωγραφική που αναπτύχθηκε τόσο σε σημαντικά κέντρα όσο και στην περιφέρεια του Δεσποτάτου. Η επίδραση της Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας και της Περιβλέπτου είναι εμφανής καταρχάς σε ναούς του Μυστρά που χρονολογούνται προς το τέλος του 14ου αιώνα. Με βάση τα στοιχεία της έρευνας προκύπτει ότι το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα της Ευαγγελίστριας, αλλά και η τεχνοτροπική τάση που κυριαρχεί στον αποσπασματικό διάκοσμο του ναού επηρεάστηκαν σημαντικά από τα παραπάνω μνημεία. Τόσο στον τρούλο όσο και στο ιερό, όπου η ζωγραφική διατηρείται σε καλύτερη κατάσταση, είναι εμφανής η προσπάθεια του ζωγράφου να συνδυάσει εικονογραφικά θέματα από την Οδηγήτρια και

την Περιβλέπτο και να τα προσαρμόσει στο πρόγραμμα της Ευαγγελίστριας. Ο εκλεκτικός χαρακτήρας, που με σαφήνεια αποτυπώνεται στη διακόσμηση του ναού, αποδεικνύει ότι αρκετοί ζωγράφοι αυτή την εποχή προσεγγίζουν τα σπουδαία μνημεία του παρελθόντος με δημιουργική διάθεση που αποσκοπεί στην ανανέωση της καλλιτεχνικής τους έκφρασης.

Ανάλογες παρατηρήσεις, αλλά και νέα στοιχεία προκύπτουν από την έρευνα της καλλιτεχνικής παραγωγής στην περιφέρεια του Δεσποτάτου μέσα από τη μελέτη δημοσιευμένων και αδημοσίευτων κυρίως τοιχογραφιών στον Άγιο Γεώργιο στο Νικάνδρι, στον ομώνυμο ναό στους Μολάους, την Παντάνασσα της Γερομάννας και την Αγία Παρασκευή στην Πλάτσα. Τα πρώτα τρία μνημεία χαρακτηρίζονται για το υψηλό επίπεδο της τέχνης τους. Στην Παντάνασσα και στους

Μολάους οι τοιχογραφίες μπορούν να συγκριθούν με έργα τα οποία συνδέονται με την Κωνσταντινούπολη και την Κρήτη, αντίστοιχα, και χρονολογούνται στην περίοδο περί το 1400. Στο Νικάνδρι, όπου ο διάκοσμος σώζεται στο μεγαλύτερο τμήμα του και σε εξαιρετική κατάσταση, οι τοιχογραφίες από εικονογραφική κυρίως άποψη ξεπερνούν τα όρια του επαρχιακού μνημείου. Ο προικισμένος και με ανήσυχο καλλιτεχνικό πνεύμα ζωγράφος του κυρίως ναού, έχοντας αφομοιώσει τη ζωγραφική του Μυστρά κατορθώνει μέσα από μια ώριμη εκλεκτιστική αντίληψη να συνδυάσει διαφορετικά εικονογραφικά στοιχεία, ορισμένα από τα οποία δεν ανιχνεύονται στα όρια του Δεσποτάτου. Οι κλασικιστικές προσλήψεις του ζωγράφου στο Νικάνδρι μαρτυρούν το εύρος των αναζητήσεών του σε σπουδαία πρότυπα και αναδεικνύουν το υψηλό επίπεδο, στο οποίο επιθυμεί να φτάσει την τέχνη του. Η εξπρεσιονιστική τάση στην απόδοση των φώτων συνδέει τη ζωγραφική του ναού της Μάνης με έργα σημαντικών ζωγράφων, όπως τη Θεοτόκο Καμαριώτισσα στη Χάλκη (τελευταίο τέταρτο του 14ου αι.) και κυρίως τις τοιχογραφίες στην Calendzicha της Γεωργίας (1384-1396), έργο του Μανουήλ Ευγενικού. Η ζωγραφική στο Νικάνδρι αποτελεί χαρακτηριστικό παράδειγμα σύνθεσης των αισθητικών αξιών που αναπτύχθηκαν στο Μυστρά και διοχετεύθηκαν από αυτό το σπουδαίο κέντρο σε ολόκληρη τη γεωγραφική έκταση του Δεσποτάτου, ανάλογα πάντα με το επίπεδο των ζωγράφων. Αρκετά στοιχεία για την καλλιτεχνική ταυτότητα του Δεσποτάτου προσφέρει και μια άλλη κατηγορία ζωγράφων, οι οποίοι συμμετέχουν ενεργά στην καλλιτεχνική παραγωγή μέσα όμως από μια καθαρά τοπικού χαρακτήρα εικαστική έκφραση, η οποία, σε αντίθεση με τα παραπάνω μνημεία, προσδιορίζει το περιορισμένο εύρος των αναζητήσεων και ενδιαφερόντων τους. Η περίπτωση της Αγίας Παρασκευής στην Πλάτσα (1412) αποτελεί ίσως ένα από τα αντιπροσω-

πευτικότερα παραδείγματα αυτής της τάσης. Εκτός από το ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον για την απόδοση των αρχιτεκτονημάτων στις σκηνές των Εισοδίων της Θεοτόκου και της Υπαπαντής, που δεσπόζουν στην εγκάρσια καμάρα λόγω του κοινού θεολογικού τους συμβολισμού, αδυναμίες παρατηρούνται στο σχεδιασμό και στην απόδοση μορφών και κτιρίων, καθώς και στην οργάνωση του διαθέσιμου χώρου. Τα στοιχεία αυτά χαρακτηρίζουν τη ζωγραφική της Αγίας Παρασκευής στο σύνολό της ως αντικλασική. Η απόδοση των μεμονωμένων κυρίως μορφών συνδέει τη ζωγραφική του ναού της Πλάτσας με περιφερειακά κέντρα του Δεσποτάτου, όπως το Γεράκι.

Την αποσπασματική γνώση μας για τη ζωγραφική αυτής της περιόδου στην Πελοπόννησο έξω από το Δεσποτάτο του Μορέως συμπληρώνει η υψηλής ποιότητας τέχνη των τοιχογραφιών της παλαιάς μονής Ταξιαρχών Αιγιαλείας. Η προσωπικότητα του κτήτορα της μονής, όσιου Λεόντιου και οι διασυνδέσεις του με την Κωνσταντινούπολη οδήγησαν στη δημιουργία ενός αυθεντικού δείγματος πρωτευουσιάνικης τέχνης στο Πριγκιπάτο της Αχαΐας στα τέλη του 14ου αιώνα. Η σημασία των τοιχογραφιών της μονής Ταξιαρχών αναδεικνύει τη σπουδαιότητα του Πριγκιπάτου ως καλλιτεχνικού κέντρου στην Πελοπόννησο, η μελέτη του οποίου αποτελεί στόχο της μελλοντικής έρευνας. Τόσο οι σκηνές όσο και τα υπέροχα πορτραίτα της μονής Ταξιαρχών συνδέουν τη ζωγραφική της παλαιότερης φάσης της με κορυφαία δείγματα εξπρεσιονιστικής τέχνης του Θεοφάνη του Έλληνα και του Μανουήλ Ευγενικού και μαρτυρούν περί της δραστηριότητας στην Πελοπόννησο ζωγράφων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη λίγες δεκαετίες πριν από την πτώση της.

*υπότροφος Alexander von Humboldt,
zarras@uni-muenster.de*