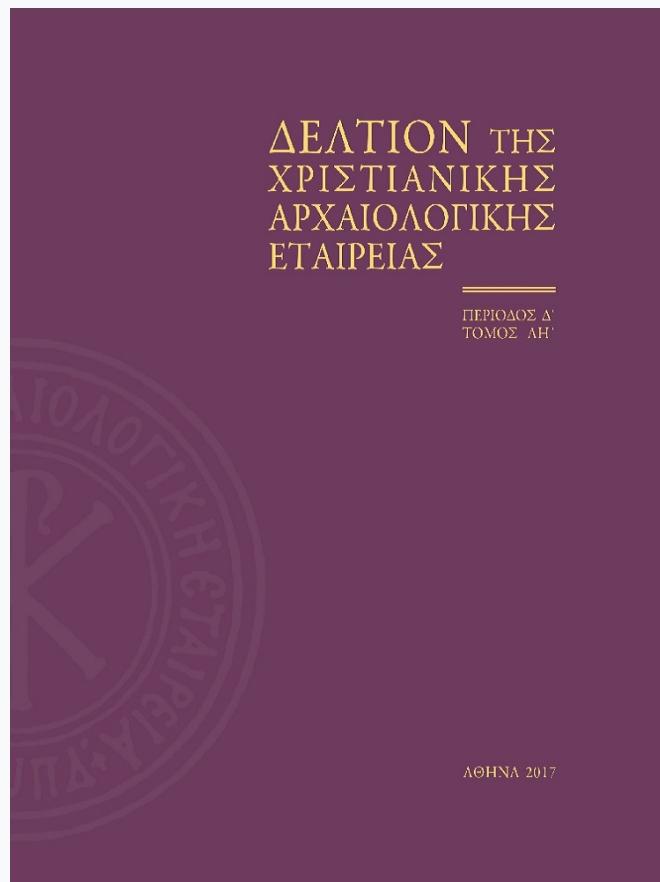


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**The sinaitic icon of the Heavenly Ladder and Saint Anthony archbishop**

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Charalampos Machairas

## THE SINAITIC ICON OF THE HEAVENLY LADDER AND SAINT ANTHONY ARCHBISHOP

Στην εικόνα της Ουρανοδρόμου Κλίμακος, που χρονολογείται στα τέλη του 12ου αιώνα και σήμερα βρίσκεται στην Ιερά Μονή του Θεοβαδίστον Όρους Σινά, απεικονίζονται δύο ἄγιοι να ανέρχονται τα σκαλοπάτια της Κλίμακας. Επιγραφές αναφέρουν ότι πρόκειται για τον ἄγιο Ιωάννη της Κλίμακος και τον ἄγιο Αντώνιο αρχιεπίσκοπο. Ο τελευταίος ταυτίζεται με τον πατριάρχη της Κωνσταντινούπολης ἄγιο Αντώνιο Β' (893-901), ο οποίος ίδρυσε τη μονή του Καυλέα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη.

*In the icon of the Heavenly Ladder from the Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount of Sinai, which is dated to the late twelfth century, two saints are depicted ascending the Ladder's steps. They are Saint John Climacus and Saint Anthony archbishop. The latter is identified as the Patriarch of Constantinople Saint Anthony II (893-901), who was the founder of the monastery of Kauleas in Constantinople.*

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

Μεσοβυζαντινή εποχή, εικόνα, Ουρανοδρόμος Κλίμακα, πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἄγιος Αντώνιος Β', μονή του Καυλέα, Σινά, Κωνσταντινούπολη.

### Keywords

Middle-Byzantine period; icon; Heavenly Ladder; Patriarch of Constantinople Saint Anthony II; monastery of Kauleas; Sinai; Constantinople.

The Sinai icon of the Heavenly Ladder is well known to modern researchers as it was displayed in many of the great exhibitions of Byzantine art<sup>1</sup>. The icon is

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<sup>1</sup> K. Weitzmann et al., *Icons from South-Eastern Europe and Sinai*, London 1968, 13, pl. 19. K. Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images. Sixth to Fourteenth Century*, New York 1978, pl. 25. A. Palouras, *Iερά Μονή Σινά*, Athens 1985, fig. 144. D. Mouriki, "Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century", K. Manafis (ed.), *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, Athens 1990, 107, fig. 24. H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago – London 1994, 272-273, fig. 165. P. L. Vocopoulos, *Byzantine Icons*, Athens 1995, 198, fig. 28. K. Corrigan, "Constantine's Problems: The Making of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus, Vat. gr. 394", *Word and Image* 12 (1996), 61-93. *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1261* (Exh. Cat.), H. C. Evans – W. D. Wixom (eds),

commonly considered a work of art dated to the late 12th century. Although it was studied thoroughly, we will try to clarify some aspects that concern its iconography and specifically one of the depicted saints (Fig. 1). In particular, Saint John Climacus is depicted on the upper steps of the Ladder leading other monks to Christ. He is followed by an elderly saint depicted in supplication and dressed in hieratic garments. An inscription above his

New York 1997, no 247, 376-377 (K. Corrigan). *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (Exh. Cat.), R. S. Nelson – K. M. Collins (eds), Los Angeles 2006, no 48, 244-247 (B. Pentcheva). R. Cormack, *Icons*, London 2007, 18-20, fig. II. *Byzantium: 330-1453* (Exh. Cat.), R. Cormack – M. Vassilaki (eds), London 2008, no 322, 462 (M. Vassilaki). G. R. Parpulov, "Mural and Icon Painting at Sinai in the Thirteenth Century", S. E. J. Gerstel – R. S. Nelson (eds), *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, Turnhout 2010, 383, XII.92.

head mentions: “ο ἄ(γιος) Ἀντώνιος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος”, namely Saint Anthony archbishop. We should mention that only the figures of Christ, Saint John Climacus, and Saint Anthony have inscriptions that give their names, while unidentified monks ascend the steps behind them. Doula Mouriki believed that Saint Anthony was an abbot of Sinai<sup>2</sup>. According to her an unknown donor offered the icon to the depicted abbot. Hans Belting recognized in his figure an abbot of Sinai from Constantinople, who was also the donor of the icon<sup>3</sup>. However, as we will try to prove in this paper, Saint Anthony was neither an abbot of Sinai nor the donor of the icon.

The inscription of Saint Anthony informs us that he was an archbishop, yet his bishopric is not mentioned. Saint Anthony wears the vestments of high-ranking bishops<sup>4</sup>. These are an *omophorion* adorned with crosses, a golden *epitrachelion* (stole) and golden *epimankia* (cuffs). Furthermore, the inscription stresses that he was a saint and this could probably mean, although not necessarily, that he was not alive at the time of the icon’s production. His place behind Saint John Climacus might further support this opinion, because this position shows that he was a monk, who had accomplished the climbing of the Ladder and earned Christ’s blessing. Nevertheless, these suppositions do not answer the question about his identity. So first we must ask whether Saint Anthony was a bishop of Sinai or not.

The abbots of Sinai did indeed hold the ecclesiastical title of the archbishop, as Saint Anthony, who is called “ἀρχιεπίσκοπος” (archbishop)<sup>5</sup>. We also know an abbot Anthony, who lived during the middle of the 12th century. A Fatimid decree of the vizier Tala’ dated to 1156 mentions that the monk Anthony was the bishop of the Sinai monastery and that he demanded and received from the caliph of Egypt Al-Fa’iz (1154-1160) an exception for all kind of taxes and protection over demands of local governors

<sup>2</sup> Μουρίκη, op.cit. (n. 1), 107 note 35.

<sup>3</sup> Belting, op.cit. (n. 1), 272.

<sup>4</sup> For the vestments of bishops see N. Thierry, “Le costume épiscopal byzantin au IXe du XIIIe siècle d’après les peintures datées (miniatures, fresques)”, *REB* 24 (1966), 308-315. C. Walter, “Pictures of the Clergy in the Theodore Psalter”, *REB* 31 (1973), 232-233. C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church*, London 1982, 9-13.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, N. Tomadakis, “Historical Outline”, Manafis (ed.), *Sinai*, op.cit. (n. 1), 14.

of the province of Al-Tur<sup>6</sup>. Without doubt abbot Anthony of Sinai was a person with strong influence in the Fatimid court since the document also mentions that he had to be treated with respect and helped in his affairs. Thus as he was a prominent person he could be the depicted saint of the Sinai icon, given that the latter is dated to the end of the twelfth century. Although written sources attest that other abbots of Sinai were sanctified, including Saint John Climacus, Saint John, and Saint Macarios, we know of no contemporary or later source which mentions that abbot Anthony of Sinai was canonized. Furthermore, there is no written evidence that mentions a bishop of Sinai named Anthony who was also a saint<sup>7</sup>.

The back side of the icon is painted with a decorative pattern of a cross inscribed in interlocking roundels outlined with pearls and floral motifs (Fig. 2). In *Glory of Byzantium*, Kathleen Corrigan proposed that this subject-matter is linked with the aristocratic milieu of Constantinople<sup>8</sup>. Although this opinion needs further support, we should note that the same decorative motif is also depicted on the back side of fragments of an epi-style kept in the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos that is dated to the second half of the 12th century, which Manolis Chatzidakis also connected with Constantinople<sup>9</sup>. In addition, all scholars who have studied the icon

<sup>6</sup> S. M. Stern, *Fatimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fatimid Chancery*, London 1964, no 8, 70-75.

<sup>7</sup> For Saint John Klimakos see *PG* 88, 631-1210. Also, F. Nau, “Note sur la date de la mort de Saint Jean Climaque”, *BZ* 11 (1902), 35-37. S. Petrides – S. Salaville, “Saint Jean Climaque, sa vie et son œuvre”, *EO* 22 (1923), 440-454. H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Munich 1959, 353-355, 451-452. W. Völker, *Scala Paradisi*, Wiesbaden 1968. E. von Ivanka, “Aufstieg und Wende”, *JÖB* 19 (1970), 141-152. According to a Melkite Synaxarion Saint John suffered martyrdom in 1091. The same source refers to Saint Macarios, who probably lived in the 12th or the 13th century. J.-M. Sauget, *Premières recherches sur l’origine et les caractéristiques des synaxaires melkites*, Brussels 1969, 331-332, 352-356.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, *The Glory of Byzantium*, op.cit. (n. 1), no 247, 377 (K. Corrigan). Also, *Holy Image*, op.cit. (n. 1), no 48, 247 (B. Pentcheva).

<sup>9</sup> M. Chatzidakis, “Εἰκόνες ἐπιστυλίου ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος”, *DChAE* 4 (1964-1965), 377-403. K. Weitzmann et al., *Icones. Sinai, Grèce, Bulgarie, Yougoslavie*, Belgrade 1966, 14-15, pl. 43. E. N. Tsigaridas, “Φορητές εικόνες”, *Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου. Παράδοση, ιστορία, τέχνη*, 2, Mount Athos 1996, 354-361,



Fig. 1. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai. Icon of the Heavenly Ladder, end of the 12th century.



Fig. 2. The Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai. Icon of the Heavenly Ladder, end of the 12th century. Reverse side of the icon.



Fig. 3. Vatican Library, Vatican City. Miniature of Patriarch saint Anthony II from the Menologion of Basil II, end of the 10th – beginning of the 11th century.

believe that it is artistically linked with the capital of the Byzantine state. Thus the decoration of the reverse, the style, and the icon's artistic quality allow us to speculate that it might be connected with Constantinople. Therefore we might wonder if Saint Anthony is also related with Constantinople and not with Sinai. In fact there is a significant saint named Anthony, who lived in the capital of the Byzantine state. He was Saint Anthony II Kauleas, Patriarch of Constantinople from 893 to 901<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately only a few representations of Saint Anthony Kauleas are preserved. We can however compare his figure on these representations with that of the saint of the Sinai icon and observe that there are some common iconographic characteristics. In fact the saint shares some traits in common with other bishops, such as the hieratic clothes, but he has his own distinctive features. Our first example is a miniature found on fol. 393 of the Menologion of Basil II (Vat. gr. 1613)

(Fig. 3)<sup>11</sup>. In the miniature, Saint Anthony is depicted as an elderly man with gray hair and pointed beard, attired in a white *phelonion* covered by a mantle and an *omophorion* adorned with crosses. In addition he stands in a posture of prayer with his hands raised, in front of a lavishly-decorated church with a dome. His figure certainly resembles that of Saint Anthony of the Sinai icon. The headpiece above the miniature mentions: “*Μνήμη τοῦ ὁσίου π(ατ)ρ(ὸ)ς ἡμῶν Ἀντωνίου ἀρχιεπισκόπ(ο)υ Κωνσταντινούπολε(ως)*” (Commemoration of our holy father Anthony archbishop of Constantinople)<sup>12</sup>.

The next example, which brings more evidence, is a lead seal dated to the last quarter of the 11th century, now kept in a private collection of the United States of America (Fig. 4)<sup>13</sup>. On the obverse Saint Anthony Kauleas is depicted in bust form. He has a pointed beard and straight hair. He wears an *omophorion*, he holds a closed gospel and he makes the gesture of blessing. His figure

figs 296-305. G. Galavaris et al. (ed.), *Treasures of Mount Athos*, Thessaloniki 1997, n. 2.4, 57-59 (E. N. Tsigaridas).

<sup>10</sup> His feast day is 12 February. H. Delehaye, *Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris: Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Brussels 1902, 460-462. V. Grumel, “Chronologie des événements du règne de Léon VI (886-912)”, *EO* 35 (1936), 6-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Il Menologio di Basilio II (Cod. Vaticano Greco 1613)*, 2, Turin 1907, 393.

<sup>12</sup> For the headpiece over the miniature and the text that follows see also *PG* 117, 308D-309A.

<sup>13</sup> J. Cotsonis – J. Nesbitt, “An Eleventh-Century Seal with a Representation of Patriarch Antony II Kauleas”, *Byz* 74 (2004), 517-526.

is flanked by the inscription: “*ό ἄγ(ιος) Ἀντώνι(ος) ἀρχ(ιεπίσκοπος) Κωνστ(αντί)νουνπόλεως*” (saint Anthony archbishop of Constantinople). On the reverse of the seal is the following inscription: “*τῆς μ(ο)νῆς τοῦ Καλλίου*” (of the monastery of Kalliou). We can observe the common iconographic features between the figures of Saint Anthony Kauleas in the miniature and the seal and the figure of Saint Anthony in the icon. In each case he is represented as an elderly bishop, dressed in an *omophorion*. In addition, the triangular pointed beard with straight hair that covers his neck and reaches the upper part of his chest as far as the upper end of the *omophorion* is particularly characteristic. Although he is an old bishop he is not bald but on the contrary, he has short, straight, neat hair over his forehead, which is grey at least in the case of the Sinai icon and the miniature of the Menologion of Basil II.

Furthermore, as far as we know there is no other representation of a saint archbishop with the name Anthony, at least during the middle Byzantine period. So it is not a simple coincidence that there are certain similarities in the saint’s title on the inscriptions of his representations. First of all we may note that on both sides of a seal today kept in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (DO.58.106.309/BZS.1958.106.309) and dating from the period when Anthony was Patriarch, we find an inscription which addresses Anthony with the title of the archbishop of Constantinople: “*Θεοτόκε βοήθει / Ἀντωνίῳ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ Κωνσταντίνουνπόλεως Νέας Ρώμης*” (Mother of God, help Anthony, archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome)<sup>14</sup>. His title was preserved in succeeding centuries. The inscription on the seal from the Kalliou monastery is: “*ό ἄγ(ιος) Ἀντώνι(ος) ἀρχ(ιεπίσκοπος) Κωνστ(αντί)νουνπόλεως*”, which is almost identical with the icon inscription: “*ό ἄγ(ιος) Ἀντώνιος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος*”, and there is of course a resemblance between these two inscriptions and the head-piece of the Menologion of Basil II.

<sup>14</sup> G. Galavaris, “The Representation of the Virgin and Child on a ‘Thokos’ on Seals of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchs”, *DChAE* 2 (1960-1961), 173. V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l’empire byzantin*, 5:3, Paris 1965, no 1628, 5. G. Zacos – J. W. Nesbitt, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, 2, Bern 1984, no 9, 10-11. J. Nesbitt, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, 6, Washington, D.C. 2009, no 114:1, 205.



Fig. 4. Private collection, USA. Seal of the Kauleas monastery with the depiction of Patriarch Saint Anthony II, last quarter of the 11th century.

Also, we are informed by the *Vita* of Saint Anthony Kauleas and an *Enkomion* dedicated to his memory that he was a member of a wealthy family, originating from the provinces that moved to the capital, and that he was only twelve years old when he entered a monastery and became a monk<sup>15</sup>. He soon showed his virtues as a monk, becoming ordained as a priest and later elected abbot of the monastery. He suffered ascetic hardships and performed many charitable acts. He was in fact a famous and beloved monk to the people of Constantinople by the time he was elected Patriarch. As a Patriarch he was even more respectable than previously, and continued his charitable work. He also contributed to the pacification of the dispute between the supporters and opponents of Patriarch Photios (858-867, 877-886)<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, according to his *Vita*, he was the founder (or possibly the

<sup>15</sup> The *Vita* of Saint Anthony was written by Nikephoros Gregoras during the 14th century. The *Enkomion* was written by the philosopher and orator Nikephoros. He can be identified with Gregoras. It is also possible that he is another writer of the 10th century. P. L. M. Leone, “La Vita Antonii Cauleae di Niceforo Grégora”, *Nikolaus* 11 (1983), 3-50. P. L. M. Leone, “L’encomium in patriarcham Antonium II Cauleam del filosofo e retore Niceforo”, *Orpheus* 10 (1989), 404-429. There is also another publication of the *Enkomion*: A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Monumenta graeca et latina ad historiam Photii patriarchae pertinentia*, 1, St. Petersburg 1899, 1-25. For Latin translations of the *Enkomion* see AASS February, 2, 621-629. PG 106, 181-200.

<sup>16</sup> P. Karlin-Hayter (ed.), *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP: Text, Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, Brussels 1970, 7, 175-176, 185-188.

restorer) of the monastery of Kauleas, known to Byzantines as “τοῦ Καλλίου, τοῦ Καλέα, τοῦ Καλέως, τοῦ Καυλέα”<sup>17</sup>. The emperor Leo VI the Wise (r. 886-912) wrote a sermon on the occasion of the dedication of the new church of the monastery of Kauleas in which he describes that the catholicon was a beautifully decorated monument<sup>18</sup>. The monastery's church was not initially consecrated to saint Anthony. But it is possible that soon after the death of its founder, who in the meantime was sanctified, it was dedicated in Saint Anthony's name. For example the Typikon of the Great Church mentions that his memory was commemorated on the 12th of February and that it was celebrated in his monastery<sup>19</sup>. At this point we should recall that in the Menologion of Basil II, Saint Anthony is depicted in front of a domed church within a precinct, which in all probability is the monastery of Kauleas. Furthermore on the sides of the seal of the 11th century we read “δ ἔγ(ιος) Ἀντώνι(ος) ἀρχ(ιεπίσκοπος) Κωνστ(αντί)νου ουπόλεως” and “τῆς μ(ο)νῆς τοῦ Καλλίου”, which could possibly mean that the catholicon of the monastery of Kalliou (Kauleas) was dedicated to his memory or at least that Saint Anthony was venerated there. In addition the *Vita* and the *Enkomion* refer to many miracles that took place on his tomb, which was probably located at the monastery of Kauleas<sup>20</sup>.

There is thus sufficient evidence to support the opinion that Saint Anthony of the Sinaitic icon is in fact Saint

<sup>17</sup> His *Vita* mentions: Βίος τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατριάρχον Κωνσταντίνου ουπόλεως Ἀντωνίου τοῦ τὴν μονὴν τοῦ Καλέως συστησαμένου, Leone, “La Vita”, op.cit. (n. 15), 19, also 41. See also Laurent, *Le corpus*, op.cit. (n. 14), 5:2, 80-81. R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin, Première partie, Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique, Les églises et les monastères*, 3, Paris 1969, 39-41.

<sup>18</sup> Hieromonk Akakios, *Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ πανηγυρικοὶ (sic) λόγοι*, Athens 1868, 248-253. T. Antonopoulou (ed.), *Leonis VI Sapientis imperatoris byzantini homiliae*, Turnhout 2008, 423-430. See also A. Frolow, “Deux églises byzantines d'après des sermons peu connus de Léon VI le Sage”, *REB* 3 (1945), 43-91. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: Sources and Documents*, Toronto – London 1986, 202-203.

<sup>19</sup> “Μηνὶ τῷ αὐτῷ ιβ’ (Φεβρουαρίου)... τῇ αὐτῇ ἡμέρᾳ, μνήμη τοῦ ἐν ἀγίοις πατρός ἡμῶν Ἀντωνίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντίνου ουπόλεως. Τελεῖται δὲ ἡ αὐτοῦ σύναξις ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ μονῇ”, J.

Mateos, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, 1, Rome 1962, 230.

<sup>20</sup> Leone, “La Vita”, op.cit. (n. 15), 48-49. Leone, “L'encomium”, op.cit. (n. 15), 426-427.

Anthony Kauleas and not a bishop of Sinai. We could further suggest that the Sinaitic icon was not originally painted for the monastery of Sinai. It is possible that the icon was painted in Constantinople during the late 12th century. We might also propose that the icon was probably dedicated by an unknown donor, since he did not wish to leave a dedicatory inscription, to the monastery of Kauleas, although for the moment this is a mere speculation. However we can observe that Saint Anthony's figure is enlarged and prominent and stands out from the other holy persons on the Heavenly Ladder. This might be the effort of the donor to point out that Saint Anthony was in fact the venerated person in a narrative scene that offered few chances to focus on a single figure, in contrast, for example, with a full-standing portrait<sup>21</sup>. Besides, as a monk he is represented following the steps of Saint John Climacus since his *Enkomion* describes him as “τῇ καθ' ἐκάστην ἐπιδόσει ὅλην ἀναβάντα τὴν τῶν ἀρετῶν κλίμακα καὶ ἀφιγμένον εἰς τὸ ἀκρότατον” (He had the virtues to ascend all the steps of the heavenly ladder and climb to its top)<sup>22</sup>. If we accept that the icon was kept in the monastery of Kauleas then we can also understand the reason for the omission of the word “of Constantinople” (*Κωνσταντίνου ουπόλεως*) from the saint's inscription that can be found for example in the lead seals. First, inscriptions of icons do not necessarily reproduce official titles, and second, the icon of the Heavenly Ladder was kept in Saint Anthony's monastery and everyone recognized the depicted saint.

It seems then that the Sinaitic icon represents the Patriarch Saint Anthony II Kauleas. Thus we can support that the icon was painted in Constantinople during the late 12th century and was probably kept in the catholicon of the monastery of Kauleas. The icon was later transferred to the monastery of Sinai at an unknown date and for reasons that for the moment are not clear.

<sup>21</sup> There are few examples of saints ascending the Heavenly Ladder, with the exception of course of Saint John Klimakos. A lord called Nikon is depicted reaching the summit of the Ladder in a miniature of codex Vatic. Gr. 394. Corrigan, op.cit. (n. 1), 61-93, fig. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Leone, “L'encomium”, op.cit. (n. 15), 412.

#### Provenance of the figures

Figs 1, 2: Courtesy of the Mount Sinai Foundation. Fig. 3: Vatican Library. Fig. 4: *Byzantion* 74.2 (2004), 521, pl. 1 (Courtesy of Professor Peter Van Deun, member of the editorial board).

## Χαράλαμπος Μαχαίρας

# Η ΣΙΝΑΪΤΙΚΗ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΤΗΣ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΔΡΟΜΟΥ ΚΛΙΜΑΚΟΣ ΚΑΙ Ο ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΝΤΩΝΙΟΣ

Σ την Ιερά μονή του Θεοβαδίστου Όρους Σινά σώζεται σήμερα μια εικόνα με το θέμα της Ουρανοδρόμου Κλίμακος, η οποία χρονολογείται στα τέλη του 12ου αιώνα. Στην κορυφή της σκάλας απεικονίζεται ο άγιος Ιωάννης της Κλίμακος και τον ακολουθεί η μορφή ενός αγίου ιεράρχη, που αποδίδεται σε μεγαλύτερη κλίμακα σε σύγκριση με τις υπόλοιπες μορφές. Ο πολύσιος ιεράρχης φορά αωμοφόριο με σταυρούς, επιτραχήλιο και περικάρπια. Πάνω από τη μορφή του σώζεται η επιγραφή «ό ἄ(γιος) Αντώνιος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος».

Παλαιότεροι ερευνητές υποστήριξαν ότι ο εικονίζομενος άγιος είναι ένας σιναϊτής ηγούμενος. Ωστόσο, δεν γνωρίζουμε κάποιον σιναϊτή άγιο-ηγούμενο Αντώνιο, αφού δεν υπάρχουν ή δεν σώζονται γραπτές πηγές, στις οποίες να μνημονεύεται η αγιοποίηση σιναϊτή ηγούμενου με το όνομα Αντώνιος. Θα μπορούσαμε, επομένως, να υποστηρίξουμε ότι ο απεικονίζομενος αρχιεπίσκοπος άγιος Αντώνιος δεν ήταν ηγούμενος της μονής Σινά. Σε αυτήν την περίπτωση στη μορφή του αγίου της εικόνας θα μπορούσαμε να αναγνωρίσουμε έναν άγιο που συνδέεται με την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Άλλωστε, όπως έχει υποστηριχθεί, ο διάκοσμος της πίσω όψης και η τεχνοτροπία της συγκεκριμένης εικόνας συνδέονται με τη Βασιλεύουσα, γεγονός που θα μπορούσε να μας προσφέρει μια ένδειξη για το περιβάλλον από το οποίο προερχόταν ο συγκεκριμένος άγιος.

Φαίνεται πιθανό ότι στο πρόσωπο του αγίου της σιναϊτικής εικόνας θα μπορούσαμε να αναγνωρίσουμε τον πατριάρχη της Κωνσταντινούπολης άγιο Αντώνιο Β' (893-901). Η παλαιότερη γνωστή σε εμάς απεικόνιση του πατριάρχη αγίου Αντωνίου βρίσκεται σε μικρογραφία στο φ. 393 του Μηνολογίου του Βασιλείου

Β', στην οποία ο άγιος προσεύχεται μπροστά από μια εκκλησία. Ο άγιος εικονίζεται επίσης στηθαίος σε μολυβδόβουλλο της μονής του Καλλίου ή Καυλέα, που χρονολογείται στο τελευταίο τέταρτο του 11ου αιώνα. Ο άγιος αποδίδεται στις δύο προηγούμενες περιπτώσεις και στη σιναϊτική εικόνα με τον ίδιο εικονογραφικό τύπο. Πρόκειται για έναν ιεράρχη προχωρημένης ηλικίας με ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστική τριγωνική γενειάδα και ίσια, πυκνά και καλοχτενισμένα μαλλιά.

Επιπλέον, η συνήθης επιγραφή, που συνοδεύει τη μορφή του αγίου, είναι ο «ό ἄγιος Αντώνιος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος». Ο ίδιος τίτλος απαντά στη σιναϊτική εικόνα, στη μικρογραφία του Μηνολογίου του Βασιλείου Β', στο μολυβδόβουλλο της μονής του Καυλέα καθώς και σε μολυβδόβουλλο που χρονολογείται στην περίοδο κατά την οποία ο άγιος Αντώνιος ήταν πατριάρχης. Παράλληλα, από τον Βίο του αγίου και από ένα Εγκάμιο γνωρίζουμε ότι ο άγιος Αντώνιος ήταν ένας ιδιαίτερα αγαπητός πατριάρχης. Φαίνεται, επίσης, ότι ήταν ο ιδρυτής της μονής του Καυλέα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, όπου και πιθανότατα βρισκόταν ο τάφος του. Μάλιστα, από τις ίδιες γραπτές πηγές πληροφορίαστε ότι κοντά στο σκήνωμά του επιτελέστηκαν πολλά θαύματα.

Με βάση την ταύτιση του αγίου Αντωνίου με τον πατριάρχη της Κωνσταντινούπολης θα μπορούσαμε να υποστηρίξουμε ότι η εικόνα της Ουρανοδρόμου Κλίμακος, που σήμερα φυλάσσεται στη μονή του Σινά, φιλοτεχνήθηκε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη και ίσως να προοριζόταν για να κοσμήσει τη μονή του Καυλέα.

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