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Η κρυφή γοητεία της επωνυμίας: μεθοδολογικά προβλήματα στην απόδοση ανυπόγραφων εικόνων σε κρητικούς ζωγράφους του 15ου-17ου αιώνα

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THE DISCREET CHARM OF A BRAND: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ATTRIBUTING UNSIGNED ICONS TO CRETAN PAINTERS OF THE 15TH-17TH CENTURIES

Στο άρθρο διερευνώνται οι μεθοδολογικές δυσχέρειες που παρουσιάζει η απόδοση ανυπόγραφων έργων σε επώνυμους κρητικούς ζωγράφους του 15ου-17ου αιώνα. Κρίνεται απαραίτητη η συστηματοποίηση ιστορικοτεχνικών κριτηρίων, βάσει των οποίων μπορούν να πραγματοποιούνται με δόκιμο τρόπο αποδόσεις, αλλά και η αξιοποίηση τεχνικών αναλύσεων, πρωτίστως στα ενυπόγραφα έργα, προκειμένου να καταγραφούν με μεγαλύτερη ακρίβεια τα ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά των ζωγράφων. Παρά ταύτα, ένας μεγάλος αριθμός κρητικών εικόνων καλής ποιότητας αλλά μαζικής απεύθυνσης επιβάλλουν ουσιαστικά την «ανωνυμία» τους λόγω της τυποποιημένης μαζικής παραγωγής τους.

In this article the author examines the methodological difficulties involved in attributing unsigned works to famous Cretan painters of the 15th-17th centuries. It is deemed necessary to systematise art historical criteria specific for icons in order to attempt creditable attributions, and make good use of technical analysis, first and foremost of signed works, in order to achieve a better understanding of the pictorial technique of each painter. However, a large number of good quality but rather uninspired Cretan icons essentially impose their ‘anonymity’ due to the standardization of their mass production.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

15ος αιώνας, 16ος αιώνας, 17ος αιώνας, βενετοκρατία, εικόνες, ζωγράφοι, υπογραφές ζωγράφων, πλαστές υπογραφές, πλαστογραφίες, αποδόσεις, εμπόριο εικόνων, τεχνικές αναλύσεις, μεθοδολογία, ζωγράφος Άγγελος, ζωγράφος Νικόλαος Τζαφούρης, Κρήτη.

Keywords

15th century; 16th century; 17th century; venetocracy; icons; painters; painter's signatures; forged signatures; fakes; attributions; icon trade; technical analysis; methodology; painter Angeles; painter Nikolaos Tzafuris; Crete.

In the present paper I wish to discuss the methodological problems involved in attributing unsigned works to Cretan painters. As those of us who work on Cretan painting know, securely attributing works to specific artists is proverbially challenging, at least using the tools currently at our disposal¹. Painters and patrons consciously sought faithful repetitions of well-established iconographic types and the high standards Cretan artists achieved in their

work allowed them to imitate models by other artists extremely successfully. I shall give a brief account of some aspects of the history of research into Cretan icons and of the current state of affairs, as I think the conditions are now right to reassess our methodological tools and discuss the direction in which our debates are heading.

In the history of art any study of a work or attempt to attribute it to a named artist inevitably raises the question of authenticity straight away. Not only falsifying the signatures of well-known artists but also creating completely fake works of art in order to add them to the oeuvre of famous artists are familiar phenomena in the history of Western painting. Internationally, the best-known and most scandalous case is that of Van Meegeren, the Dutch artist, who was accused of selling

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¹ A shorter version of this paper was presented in the international symposium “Painting and Society in Venetian Crete: Evidence from Portable Icons”, organized in Athens, 11-12 January 2017, by Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides.



Fig. 1. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen. Dirk Hannema, director of the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, and the restorer H. G. Luitwieler looking at “The Supper at Emmaus” after its restoration, 1938.

paintings by famous artists to the Nazis during the Second World War² (Fig. 1). During his trial in 1945, on charges of collaborating with the Nazis, Han Van Meegeren shocked the entire art world by revealing that the

paintings he had sold were in fact fakes painted by him. The most famous of his forgeries was a celebrated work, *Supper at Emmaus*, allegedly by Vermeer, which in 1937 had convinced Abraham Bredius, an expert on Flemish

² F. Lammertse et al., *Van Meegeren's Vermeers: The connoisseur's eye and the forger's art*, Rotterdam 2011. On the history of art forgery see *Fakes and Forgeries*, exhibition catalogue, ed. S. Sachs, II, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis 1973. W. G. Constable, *Forgers and Forgeries*, New York 1954. Dennis Dutton (ed.), *The Forger's Art: Art Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*, Berkeley 1983. T. Hoving, *False Impressions: The Hunt for Big-Time Art Fakes*, New York 1996. M. Jones (ed.), *Fake? The Art of deception*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 1990. M. Beretta – M. Conforti (eds), *Fakes! Hoaxes,*

Counterfeits and Deception in Early Modern Science, Sagamore Beach, MA 2014. H. Keazor, “Six Degrees of Separation: The Foax as More”, D. Becker – A. Fischer – Y. Schmitz, *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting: Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis*, Bielefeld 2018, 11-40. S. Radnóti, *The Fake: Forgery and Its Place in Art*, translated by Ervin Dunai, New York 1999. A. Briefel, *The Deceivers: Art Forgery and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, Ithaca, NY, 2006. On the rather obscure distinction between fakes and forgeries see N. Charney, *The Art of Forgery*, London 2015, 17.

painting, not only to accept the painting as a genuine Vermeer, but to sing its praises as one of the great artist's masterpieces. The Van Meegeren case is still taught in universities³.

The field of Byzantine painting has never thrown up similar famous examples, no doubt because Byzantium attracted the attention of the international art market at a late stage and never attained the cachet of a Vermeer, Frans Hals or Sandro Botticelli⁴. At the same time it is worth noting that in the case of icons, as regards their main function as cult objects, the notion of a *fake icon* is a contradiction in terms. As long as an image carries the established features of a saint and his/her name, it can function as an *icon*, as a conduit between the faithful and the holy person whose portrait is depicted therein. From this aspect the existence of and discussion on forgeries presupposes a modern perception of these paintings not as cult objects –i.e. icons–, but rather as works of art with religious subject matter⁵. Nevertheless there are plenty of cases of fake icons and above all forged signatures on Greek icons. Between 1928 and 1931, when Anthony Benakis was opening his museum to the public, he acquired from various sources in Athens a series of icons, some as valuable gifts and some as purchases, which were incorporated into the museum's Byzantine Collection and displayed in the main display cases on the ground floor. They were mainly works for private devotion, some painted on ivory with precious silver gilt revetment⁶. It is



Fig. 2. Athens, Benaki Museum. Triptych painted on bone, by Demetrios Pelekasis.



Fig. 3. Athens, Benaki Museum. Icon-pectoral painted on bone, by Demetrios Pelekasis.

³ On the Van Meegeren case see A. Blankert, "The Case of Han Van Meegeren's Fake Vermeer Supper at Emmaus Reconsidered", A. Golahny – M. M. Mochizuki – L. Vergara (eds), *In His Milieu: Essays on Netherlandish Art in Memory of John Michael Montias*, Amsterdam 2006, 47-58 (with earlier bibliography).

⁴ See above, n. 3 and http://www.arthistorynews.com/articles/4191_Fakes_fakes_everywhere_ctd (last retrieved January 2020).

⁵ H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, transl. by E. Jephcott, Chicago 1994, cf chapters 2 and 20. R. Cormack, *Painting the Soul. Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds*, London 1997, cf. chapter 5, 167-217. Ch. Barber, "On the Origin of the Work of Art: Tradition, Inspiration and Invention in the Post-Iconoclastic Era", K. Mitalaitė – A. Vasiliu (eds), *L'icône dans la pensée et dans l'art. Constitutions, contestations, réinventions de la notion d'image divine en contexte chrétien*, Turnhout 2017, 153-172.

⁶ Some of these fake works, made by Dimitrios Pelekasis were published in a catalogue dedicated to his art (G. Rigopoulos – M. Karkazis – D. Pavlopoulos, *Δημήτριος Σπυρίδωνος Πελεκάσης*,

worth noting that they were bought for extremely high prices, ranging from 130 to 150 pounds, at a time when the famous Palaiologan icon of the Hospitality of Abraham was acquired for £120, a price that Anthony Benakis noted was particularly steep⁷ (Figs 2, 3).

According to the *Benaki Museum Guidebook*, of 1936 these icons were purchased and displayed as works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries⁸. In other words as

Athens 2001, 40-122). However, there is no mention whatsoever in that publication of them having been sold as original Cretan icons of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁷ Benaki Museum archive, Folder φ. Α2 (acquired 19.2.1922).

⁸ *Benaki Museum Guide*, Athens 1936, 44-46, Room Γ', case 26: "In the middle of the Room, are two cases: That on the right, Case 26,



Fig. 4. Athens, Benaki Museum (Inv. no. 3718). *The Descent into Hell*. 15th-century Cretan workshop, with a forged signature of Michael Damaskenos added in the early 20th century.

Cretan and Creto-Ionian works with the typically eclectic character of Cretan painting of that period, which took features of Byzantine iconography and Italian Mannerism and put them together. When the highly esteemed Byzantinist Manolis Chatzidakis was appointed Director of the Benaki Museum in 1941 he recognized these works for what they truly were, i.e. twentieth-century fakes, and they were withdrawn from the display cases. The creator of these forged Cretan icons was the highly proficient Zakynthian painter, restorer and art critic Dimitrios Pelekasis, who is known to Byzantinists above all for the numerous forged signatures that he added to Cretan icons, tormenting the profession for decades and obscuring our understanding of Cretan painting⁹ (Figs 4, 5).



Fig. 5. Forged signature of Michael Damaskenos (detail of the Fig. 4).

contains wooden and ivory triptychs, with miniatures of the 17th and 18th centuries". Th. Macridy, "Le Musée Benaki d'Athènes", *Museion: revue internationale de muséographie* 39-40 (1937), figs on p. 119, 155.

⁹ Manolis Chatzidakis, in his seminal work on *Greek Painters after the Fall (1450-1830)* clarifies the situation giving detailed information on forged signatures added on icons in the 20th century: M.

Chatzidakis, *Ἕλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά τὴν Ἄλωση (1450-1830)*, 1, Athens 1987; 2, Athens 1997 (with E. Drakopoulou) and 3, by E. Drakopoulou, Athens 2010. Dimitrios Pelekasis was among the Greek painters who participated in the 19th Biennale of Venice (1934), with four works executed in neo-byzantine style, under the titles: *Tipologia originale dell' arte pura bizantina I*, *Tipologia originale dell' arte pura bizantina II*, *Tipologia della pittura murale bizantina*, *Battaglia di Lepanto-alla maniera bizantina* (E. Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας στην Μπιεννάλε της Βενετίας, 1934-1940*, 3 vols, PhD. Diss., University of Crete, Rethymno 1996, 445).

In his preface to Nano Chatzidakis's book on the icons of the Velimezis Collection Manolis Chatzidakis described in some detail how Pelekasis and his associates operated and in a very useful addendum to this same publication we may read Pelekasis's own account, describing all the techniques of "antiquing" and deception he deployed with such extraordinary skill¹⁰. It is worth noting that Pelekasis's ability to simulate the style of earlier painters was well-known in the art market of Greece at the time. The art critic D. Kallonas, in his article "Mimis [Dimitris] Pelekasis, the painter of saints and devils" that was published in the newspaper *Vradyni / Βραδυνή*, on 15 January 1935, comments acerbically: "Should you like to acquire an... original "Deposition" by Kantounis or Koutouzis, should you like to have a Correggio, or wish for a [work by] Doxaras, a Greco, a Van Gogh, go to Mimis Pelekasis and you will get it." (author's translation from Greek)¹¹.

In the context of this paper the fakes and forged signatures that prevailed in the art market in the first half of the twentieth century are of considerable interest, partly because, as I mentioned before, they have created huge problems for scholars as regards correctly identifying the characteristics of Cretan painters and their works¹². It is also interesting to note that in the context of Byzantine and post-Byzantine painting it was Cretan icons that more or less monopolized the attention of forgers, and not, for example, earlier and more valuable Byzantine icons or the creations of other workshops, despite the fact that there are well-known names and signatures of Byzantine painters from other periods and places. I think the reasons for the unwelcome primacy of Cretan icons in this respect are already sufficiently well known. When, in the early twentieth century, museums and collectors began to turn their attention to Byzantine religious painting, Cretan and Creto-Ionian icons – by far the most open to the

influence of Western paintings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries – were the first and most obvious choice¹³. Their aesthetic and their hybrid style suited the ideological tendencies and the prevailing tastes of the bourgeoisie in Greece at that time¹⁴. At the same time the existence of famous artists whose signatures were in evidence on Cretan works (like those by Michael Damaskinos, Emmanuel Tzanes, or Emmanuel Tzanfournaris, to name but a few) made it possible to construct a pantheon of Greek artists, like that of the Western artists of the Renaissance and more recent times. In other words, a genealogy of great Cretan and Ionian painters, who represented the various stages in Greek religious painting and its dialogue with Western art, could be built around the personalities of important artists, following the model of the genealogy established for Western art by the Renaissance scholars like Giorgio Vasari, in whose footsteps the history of art has continued to tread¹⁵. Signed works by Cretan artists also offered a unique opportunity for fakes and forgeries

¹³ The content of icon collections of the first half of the 20th century, beginning with the first systematic assembly of Greek icons by the philologist Alexios Kolyvas (1848-1915), which later formed the core of Dionysios Loverdos's icon museum (A. A. Papayianopoulos-Palaios, *Μουσείον Διονυσίου Λοβέρδου*, Athens 1946); the icon collection of Anthony Benakis (Xyngopoulos, *Μουσείον Μπενάκη*, op.cit. [n. 12]); of Aimilios Velimezis (N. Chatzidakis, *Icons*, op.cit. [n. 10]); or that of Helen Stathatos [A. Xyngopoulos, *Συλλογή Ἑλένης Α. Σταθάτου: Κατάλογος περιγραφικῶς τῶν εἰκόνων, τῶν ξυλογλύπτων καὶ τῶν μετάλλινων ἔργων τῶν βυζαντινῶν καὶ τῶν μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν χρόνων*, Athens 1951] are all indicative of the prevailing taste of the period. See also the astute remarks by N. Chatzidakis in her introduction to the Velimezis Icons catalogue, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 10), 39-47.

¹⁴ On the artistic climate and ideological trends of the period and how it shaped collecting practices, art education and museums in Greece see also Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας*, op.cit. (n. 9), and more recently the dissertation by S. Frangouloupoulou, "Η ιστορική κουλτούρα των μουσειακών αφηγήσεων: τα κρατικά μουσεία στον μεσοπόλεμο (1922-1940)", unpublished PhD, University of Athens, Athens 2018.

¹⁵ Indicative in this respect is the work by Embirikos, *L'école crétoise*, op.cit. (n. 12), where the history of Cretan religious painting unfolds as a narrative of famous painters (Michael Damaskinos, Ioannis Kyprios, Andreas Ritzos, Andreas Paviyas etc); or the attempt at a comprehensive understanding of Greek Religious painting after the Fall of Constantinople by Andreas Xyngopoulos, *Σχέδιασμα ιστορίας τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ζωγραφικῆς μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν*, Athens 1957.

¹⁰ M. Chatzidakis, "On the worthy collector Emilios Velimezis", N. Chatzidakis, *Icons. The Velimezis Collection*, Athens 1998, 22-25 and Appendix II, 440-443.

¹¹ Matthiopoulos, *Η συμμετοχή της Ελλάδας*, op.cit. (n. 9), n. 767.

¹² See for example the catalogue of the icons in the Benaki Museum by A. Xyngopoulos, *Μουσείον Μπενάκη, Κατάλογος τῶν εἰκόνων*, Athens 1936, in which icons nos 7, 8, 15, 20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 35, 40, 42 bear forged signatures or A. Empeirikos, *L'école crétoise: dernière phase de la peinture byzantine*, Paris 1967, whose argumentation on the evolution of the Cretan painting is based almost solely on Cretan icons with forged signatures.

and inflated financial rewards to a small group of experts who kept collectors supplied with paintings and directed the priorities and preferences of the local market¹⁶. Fake signatures repeat the names of a few Cretan painters who were mainly based in or left works in the Ionian Islands, which became a source of supply for the collecting movement, but also of material for the study of Cretan art¹⁷.

If, in the case of the twentieth-century fake signatures, fraud and profit were the obvious and sole reasons for the forgeries, Cretan icons have the rare advantage of having been fertile ground for fake signatures in much earlier periods and apparently for different motives. A large number of icons on Mt Sinai, Cyprus and elsewhere bear signatures of Cretan painters that are later yet pre-modern additions¹⁸ (Fig. 6). On Sinai, at least, we know exactly when and by whom they were added. They are the work of the most productive and versatile of painters and icon restorers, Ioannis Kornaros, a Cretan by birth, who worked at St Catherine's between 1777 and 1784¹⁹.

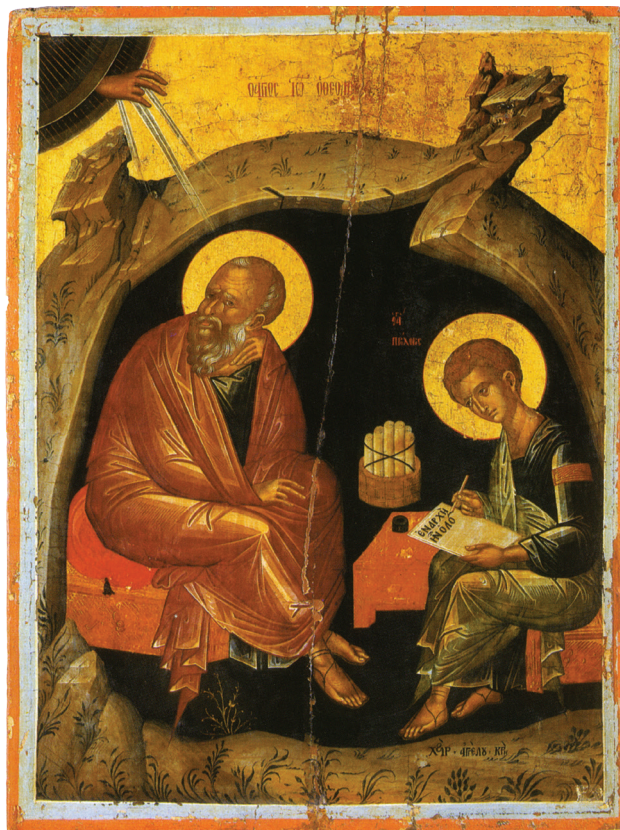


Fig. 6. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine. Saint John the Theologian with Prochoros, attributed to Angelos, with a forged signature of Angelos added by Ioannes Kornaros between 1777-1784.

¹⁶ Chatzidakis, "On the worthy collector", op.cit. (n. 10). The fake signatures on icons in the Benaki Collection are indicative. They represent the following painters, all of them active on Crete or the Ionian Islands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Michael Damaskinos (inv. nos 2979, 3718, 3735a), Georgios Klontzas (inv. no. 3726), Andreas Kallanas (inv. no. 3732) Emmanuel Tzanes (inv. nos 2998, 2999, 3001), Konstantinos Tzanes (inv. no. 32556), Ioannis Kyprios (inv. no. 2978), Leo Moschos, Emmanuel Lambardos (inv. no. 2986), Emmanuel Tzanfournaris (inv. nos 2991, 2993), Elias Moskos (inv. nos 2994, 2996), Ioannis Moskos, Viktor (inv. nos 3003, 3004, 3011), Stefanos Tzankarolas (inv. no. 3013), Ioannis Kairofyllas (inv. no. 3713), Ioannis Skoufos (inv. no. 3717).

¹⁷ On the looting of the Ionian Islands by art dealers, especially as regards icons see N. Chatzidakis, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 10), 39-42. Specifically on Zakynthos, M. Chatzidakis, "Ιστορικά για τις τύχες της συλλογής εικόνων του Μουσείου Ζακύνθου", M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες της Ζακύνθου*, Athens 1997, 11-31 and in the same volume the *Introduction* by Myrtili Acheimastou-Potamianou, 33-40.

¹⁸ N. Drandakis, "Post-Byzantine Icons (Cretan School)", K. Manafis (ed.), *Sinai. Treasures of the Monastery*, Athens 1990, 124-130. A. Drandaki – L. Vranopoulou – A. Kalliga, "Η μελέτη των εικόνων με υπογραφή του Εμμανουήλ Λαμπάρδου στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη με τη συμβολή της τεχνικής εξέτασης", *DChAE* 21 (2000), 189-220.

¹⁹ Ioannis Kornaros then moved to Cyprus (around 1787) where he continued his career at least until 1812. A prolific painter (over forty signed works of his have been published so far), Kornaros's work had an impressive impact on Cypriot religious painting: S. Sophokleous,

Kornaros restored a great many of the monastery's icons, many of them Cretan. He often added the signatures of famous Cretan painters to them quite arbitrarily, alongside his own signature and any invocations of spiritual assistance, thus appropriating part of the artistic value and the votive power of the icons in his capacity as restorer²⁰. Some of Kornaros's signatures probably repeat

"Ο ζωγράφος Ιωάννης Κορνάρου και η σχολή του", *Αρχαιολογία* 25 (1987), 64-70. S. Sophokleous lists 41 icons by Kornaros on Cyprus and discusses some of his renovations, on which he added forged signatures of earlier Cretan painters, like Viktor («Νέα στοιχεία για την παραμονή και το έργο του κρητικού ζωγράφου Ιωάννη Κορνάρου στην Κύπρο», *ΚυπρΣπουδ* 50 [1986], 227-256).

²⁰ The extent of Kornaros's interventions on the Sinai icons of all periods is best appreciated from the Weitzmann photographic archive, now fully accessible online thanks to the initiative of the Visual Resources Collection, Department of Art and Archaeology,

original ones that would already have been hard to read or ones which he himself had erased in the course of the restoration. This is the case of at least two icons, one at Sinai carrying the forged signature by Angelos and a famous monumental panel with the Virgin of Tenderness at the Benaki Museum that was acquired by Anthony Benakis in Egypt, where Kornaros was active (Figs 7, 8). Despite the 18th-century forged signatures, both of these icons can in fact be securely attributed to these painters, based on their stylistic and technical features²¹. But in other instances the signatures he added had no validity whatsoever²². For today's discussions there are two interesting aspects to Kornaros's case. Firstly, all of the signatures faked by him were added to Cretan works and he systematically added the painters' Cretan origin next to their names ('ΤΟΥ ΚΡΗΤΟΣ'). Thus the eighteenth-century artist recognized, restored and valued in the particular fashion of his age the works of his artistic forebears. On the other hand, the signatures he added belong to specific Cretan artists, above all Angelos, Michael Damaskinos and Emmanuel Tzanes, artists whose work presents particular similarities and represents what we might call the classical line of development in Cretan painting in the two centuries when it was at its peak. Thus Kornaros, icon painter/restorer almost takes on the role of an art historian. He recognized and selected works he attributed to Cretan painters from the past from among the multitude of icons he restored. Kornaros's choices and his mistaken attributions reflect, in my



Fig. 7. Athens, Benaki Museum (Inv. no. 2984). The Virgin of Tenderness, attributed to Emmanuel Lambardos, with a forged signature of Emmanuel Lambardos added by Ioannes Kornaros in late 18th century.



Fig. 8. Athens, Benaki Museum. Forged signature of Emmanuel Lambardos, by Ioannes Kornaros (detail of Fig. 7).

Princeton University, under the directorship of Trudy Jacoby, <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/about-this-project> (last retrieved January 2020). Many panels renovated by Ioannes Kornaros have since been restored, leaving no traces of their 18th-century make-up.

²¹ On the icon with St John and Prochoros by Angelos at Sinai, see N. Drandakis, "Post-Byzantine Icons", op.cit. (n. 18), 127, fig. 80. *The Hand of Angelos: An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete*, exhibition catalogue, ed. M. Vassilaki, Benaki Museum, Athens 2010, no. 40 (M. Vassilaki). On the Virgin of Tenderness by Emmanuel Lambardos at the Benaki Museum see the results of the exhaustive art historical and technical analysis conducted on a group of icons carrying that signature in Drandaki – Vranopoulou – Kalliga, "Η μελέτη των ειζόνων", op.cit. (n. 18).

²² See for example the icon with the Presentation into the Temple on which Kornaros added Michael Damaskinos's signature, though the painting does not carry the features of Damaskinos's work. Drandakis, "Post-Byzantine Icons", op.cit. (n. 18), 129-130, fig. 89.

opinion, something beyond his personal preferences for "classic" Cretan painting. They reflect in equal measure the prevailing taste of his time and the enduring preference for Cretan icons that prevailed in monastic circles in general and at Sinai in particular²³.

²³ The close ties between Saint Catherine's monastery at Sinai and Crete are well known. The metochion of Sinai in Candia, dedicated to Saint Catherine, played a leading role not only in Candia's social

The confusion the fake Cretan works and the forged signatures created in scholarship has now for the most part been cleared up, thanks to more systematic study of the works and the help of scientific techniques that make it possible to confirm with certainty if a signature is contemporary with the paint surface. However, what I am interested in emphasizing here is the fact that, unlike in the study of other areas and periods of Byzantine painting, the study of Cretan icons began by concentrating on – and to a large extent continues to focus on – the issue of the famous painter and his signed works, thus putting the question of the artist's name at the centre of the debate from the outset.

Over the last fifty years the systematic primary research in the archives of Venice by scholars such as Mario Cattapan, Manoussos Manoussakas, Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, Maria Kazanaki-Lappa and others, whose work has revealed the presence and careers of dozens of painters, above all in fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Candia, has made a significant contribution in this respect, i.e. in exploring the careers of famous painters²⁴. In a number of fortunate cases the names and

and spiritual life, but also as a source of income, people and artworks that were channeled from the island to the mother institution: E. Pantelakis, “Τὸ Σινᾶ καὶ ἡ Κρήτη”, *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἐταιρείας Κρητικῶν Σπουδῶν* 1 (1938), 165-185, K. D. Mertzios, “Τὸ μετόχιον τῶν ἐν Ἡρακλείῳ Συναϊτῶν καὶ ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀλβίτζε Γουμάνι”, *Πανηγυρικὸς τόμος ἐπὶ τῇ ἀμφιετηρίδι τῆς ἱεράς μονῆς τοῦ Σινᾶ*, Athens 1971, 45-48. A. Panagiotounakou-Patsouma, “Τὸ μετόχι της Αγίας Αικατερίνης στο Χάνδακα και τα προνόμια των Συναϊτῶν στην Κρήτη”, *Κρητικὴ Ἐστία* 4/7 (1999), 31-49. E. Chalkiadakis, “Τα προνόμια του μετοχίου της Αγίας Αικατερίνης του Σινᾶ του Χάνδακα”, *Νέα Χριστιανικὴ Κρήτη* 21 (2002), 89-109. M. Lassithiotakis, “Le metochion de Sainte-Catherine et la vie culturelle en Crète aux XVIe-XVe siècles: de l'histoire et la légende”, *Cahiers de l'Association suisse des amis de la Fondation de Sainte-Catherine* 4 (2006), 3-24. M. Vassilaki, “Commissioning Art in Fifteenth-Century Venetian Crete: the Case of Sinai”, *I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII-XVIII sec.)*, *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venezia, 3-7 dicembre 2007)*, eds Chr. Maltezos – A. Tzavara – D. Vlassi, Venice 2009, 741-748. *Συναϊτικὰ μετόχια σὲ Κρήτη καὶ Κύπρο*, Ἰδρυμα Ὁρους Σινᾶ, Συναϊτικὸ Ἀρχεῖο Μνημείων, Athens, n.d.

²⁴ M. Manoussakas, “Ἡ διαθήκη τοῦ Ἁγγελοῦ Ἀκοτάντου (1436), ἄγνωστου κρητικοῦ ζωγράφου”, *DChAE* 2 (1960-1961), 139-150. See the pioneering publications by Mario Cattapan: “Nuovi documenti riguardanti pittori cretesi dal 1300 al 1500”, *Πεπραγμένα τοῦ Β' Διεθνoῦς Κρητολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, 3, Athens 1968,

details recorded in the archives for particular artists can be matched with extant signed works. Yet, for the vast majority of Cretan painters (and for the fifteenth century alone we know of more than 100 names), not a single signed work has survived. And this is where, I think, a strange statistical phenomenon emerges, in that – in addition to the number of signed works we have by a few artists – we tend to ascribe a disproportionately large number of the unsigned works to this same small group of artists. In studies on fifteenth-century Cretan painting the attribution of icons revolves for the most part around three names: Angelos Akotantos, Nikolaos Tzafuris and Andreas Ritzos. To each of these painters, based on their signed works, we are inclined to attribute, expressly or tacitly a “specialization” in a particular type of painting. Thus Angelos, undoubtedly an outstanding figure in the first half of the fifteenth century, is credited with more than forty attributed works, quite varied in nature, including a group of icons of St Phanourios²⁵.

29-46. Idem, “Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori in Creta dal 1300 al 1500”, *Thesaurismata* 9 (1972), 202-235. Idem, “I pittori Andrea e Nicola Rizo da Candia”, *Thesaurismata* 10 (1973), 238-282. Idem, “I pittori Pavia, Rizo, Zafuri da Candia e Papadopoulo dalla Canea”, *Thesaurismata* 14 (1977), 199-238. Also, M. Constantoudaki, “Οἱ ζωγράφοι τοῦ Χάνδακος κατὰ τὸ πρῶτον ἥμισυ τοῦ 16ου αἰῶνος οἱ μαρτυρούμενοι ἐκ τῶν νοταριακῶν ἀρχείων”, *Thesaurismata* 10 (1973), 291-380. Eadem, “A 15th-century Byzantine icon painter working on mosaics in Venice”, *JÖB* 32/5 (1982), 265-272. Eadem, *Μιχαὴλ Δαμασκηνός (1530/35-1592/93). Συμβολὴ στη μελέτη της ζωγραφικῆς του*, 3 vols, unpublished PhD, Athens 1989. Eadem, “Alexios and Angelos Apokafkos, Constantinopolitan Painters in Crete (1399-1421): documents from the state archives of Venice”, *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 21-26 August 2006*, III, Aldershot 2006, 45-46. Eadem, “Viaggi di pittori tra Costantinopoli e Candia: documenti d'archivio e influenti sull'arte (XIV-XV sec.)”, *I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII-XVIII sec.)*, *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venezia, 3-7 dicembre 2007)*, eds Chr. Maltezos – A. Tzavara – D. Vlassi, Venice 2009, 709-723. M. Kazanaki-Lappa, “Οἱ ζωγράφοι τοῦ Χάνδακα κατὰ τὸ 17ο αἰῶνα: εἰδήσεις ἀπὸ νοταριακὰ ἔγγραφα”, *Thesaurismata* 18 (1981), 177-267. Eadem, “Ἡ συμβολὴ των αρχαιακῶν πηγῶν στην ιστορία της τέχνης”, *Venetiae quasi alterum Byzantium: Ὀψεις της ἱστορίας του βενετοκρατούμενου ἐλληνισμοῦ. Αρχαιακά τεκμήρια*, ed. Ch. Maltezos, Athens 1993, 435-484. Eadem, “The will of Angelos Akotantos”, *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), 104-113.

²⁵ In the exhibition catalogue *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21),

Tzafuris is credited with a large and equally disparate assortment of good Italo-Cretan works of the second half of that century, despite the fact that we already know, thanks to the signed Deesis in Corfu and the stylistically bilingual Road to Calvary in New York, that he also produced beautiful, traditional paintings²⁶. And there has been at least one attempt at attributing him yet another traditional Deesis, quite dissimilar to Tzafuris's signed work²⁷. I have not come across any other attempt to attribute any other traditional work to Tzafuris, whereas a variety of Western-style works continue to be ascribed to him²⁸ (Figs 9-11). As to Andreas Ritzos, he is connected

twelve unsigned icons with quite dissimilar artistic features have been attributed to Angelos Akotantos, significantly increasing the uncertainty as to this excellent artist's style and manner of execution. Even more alarming is the fact that although two years earlier, the results of a systematic technical examination of a group of icons bearing Angelos's signature had been published by the Benaki Museum Conservation Laboratory, the results of these technical analyses have, for the most part, not been taken into consideration by art historians when attributing unsigned icons to Angelos. See K. Milanou – C. Vourvopoulou – L. Vranopoulou – A. E. Kalliga, *Icons by the hand of Angelos. The Painting Method of a fifteenth-century Cretan Painter*, Athens 2008.

²⁶ *The Origins of El Greco. Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, exhibition catalogue, ed. A. Drandaki, Onassis Foundation New York, Athens 2009, 60-62, nos 14-15 (B. Papadopoulou and M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides). E. Drakopoulou, "Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση, 3, Αβέρκιος-Ιωσήφ (Συμπληρώσεις-Διορθώσεις)", Athens 2010, 285-288, where the author questions many proposed attributions.

²⁷ Ch. Baltoyanni, *Conversation with God. Icons from the Byzantine Museum of Athens (9th-15th centuries)*, exhibition catalogue, The Hellenic Centre, London – Athens 1998, 141-145, no. 24.

²⁸ See for example the catalogue *The Origins of El Greco*, op.cit (n. 26): icons nos 13-15 bear the signature of N. Tzafuris, while the Bellinesque Pietà no. 19, from the Hermitage, tentatively attributed to him should probably be ascribed to one of his followers. More recently, N. Siomkos, in his article "Έργα του Νικολάου Τζαφούρη και του εργαστηρίου του", *DChAE* 34 (2013), 253-266, argues that three triptych wings now dispersed between the Great Lavra Monastery, the Benaki Museum and the Byzantine Museum of Athens originally belonged to the same triptych that should be attributed to N. Tzafuris, along with two larger panels he examines in his paper, the first in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo in Pisa and the other in Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. This is not the place to elaborate on the topic. Suffice it to say that the discussed paintings share the common aesthetics, iconography and style typical of the majority of fifteenth-century

with a large number of Cretan icons of the late fifteenth century in the classicizing style and with refined technique²⁹. Yet the evidence we have at our disposal undermines the theory of "specialisms" or "exclusivity" that dogs many of these attributions. In the case of Angelos and St Phanourios, for example, a case that has been well researched³⁰, we know that at least one other successful bourgeois painter from Candia, Konstantinos Eirinikos, played a vital part in creating the iconography of this saint, when he undertook the job of painting the walls of the corresponding shrine with the saint's miracles and an

Cretan icons rendered in late Gothic style. However, their manner of execution (underdrawing, drapery, modelling of the flesh, striations etc) is quite dissimilar. Therefore their attribution to a single artist, let alone Tzafuris whose signed works offer us a solid base for comparisons, remains in my view highly problematic. At least as far as the Benaki wing and the Fitzwilliam panels are concerned, which I have had the chance to examine closely, they present different features and execution from Tzafuris's signed works.

²⁹ Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, "Έλληνες ζωγράφοι, 2, op.cit. (n. 9), 324-332, where out of the sixty works ascribed to Ritzos, only twelve are signed. Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou wisely note that by listing the works attributed to Ritzos they don't necessarily agree with all the attributions, because often the evidence presented is not enough to judge their validity. See also the questions raised regarding attributions to A. Ritzos in A. Drandaki, "Piety, Politics, and Art in Fifteenth-Century Venetian Crete", *DOP* 71 (2017), 367-406. Evangelos Zournatzis has published a paper on Andreas Ritzos's pictorial technique, which however has been disregarded in most subsequent attempted attributions (E. Zournatzis, "pittura così ottima e perfetta". Aspects of the pictorial technique of Andreas Ritzos", *Λαμπηδών. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρέκη*, ed. M. Aspra-Vardavaki, 2, Athens 2003, 901-914.

³⁰ M. Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, "Saint Phanourios: Cult and Iconography", *DChAE* 10 (1980-1981), 223-238, repr. in M. Vassilaki, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete*, Farnham 2009, 81-110. M. Vassilaki-Mavrakaki, "Ο ζωγράφος Άγγελος Ακοτάντος: το έργο και η διαθήκη του (1436)", *Thesaurismata* 18 (1981), 290-298. E. Zachariadou, "Ιστορικά στοιχεία σ' ένα θαύμα του άγιου Φανουρίου", *Άρχαίον Πόντου* 26 (1964), 309-318 and *Trade and Crusade: Venetian Crete and Emirates of Menteshe and Aydin (1300-1415)*, Venice 1983, 62 note 260. E. Kollias, "Άγιος Φανούριος: ένας μεταλλαγμένος άγιος", *Χάρις χαίρε. Μελέτες στη μνήμη της Χάρης Κάντζια*, ed. A. Giannikouri, 2, Athens 2004, 285-305. O. Gratziou, "Όσοι πιστοί προσέλθετε... Προσκυνήματα για αμφότερα τα δόγματα σε μοναστήρια της Κρήτης κατά τη Βενετική περίοδο", *Μοναστήρια, οικονομία και πολιτική Από τους μεσαιωνικούς στους νεότερους χρόνους*, ed. E. Kolovos, Herakleio 2011, 117-139. Drandaki, "Piety", op.cit. (n. 29), 385-406.



Fig. 9. St Petersburg, The Hermitage Museum (Inv. no. I-406). *Pietà* (detail) attributed to Nikolaos Tzafuris.



Fig. 10 Athens, Benaki Museum (Inv. no. 3050). *Pietà* (detail) attributed to Nikolaos Tzafuris.

impressive full-length portrait of Phanourios that closely resembles the well-known icon of St Theodore signed by Angelos³¹. What does the confirmed participation of both artists in the creation of the emergent iconography of Phanourios mean? A work-sharing arrangement between a painter who specialized in wall-paintings and another who specialized in icons? Possibly³². Eirnikos's

³¹ Drandaki, "Piety", op.cit. (n. 29), 389. See also V. Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, "Παρατηρήσεις για την ιστορία και την αρχιτεκτονική του καθολικού της Μονής Βαλσαμονέρου", *Μαργαρίται. Μελέτες στη μνήμη του Μανόλη Μπορμπουδάκη*, eds M. Patedakis – K. Yapitsoglou, Siteia 2016, 104-140, with a color reproduction of the full-length portrait of St Phanourios in the wall paintings of the eponymous monastery, fig. 17.

³² Drandaki, "Piety", op.cit. (n. 29), 393. On documentary evidence regarding the painter Eirnikos, Ch. Maltezou, "The history of

signature has not been preserved on any other work and to date no one has shown any inclination to assign any other work to him, neither a panel painting nor any wall-paintings. What is certain, I think, is that, if there were not a donor inscription naming the painter Eirnikos in the chapel of St Phanourios, we would all be willing to accept Angelos as the creator of the wall-paintings too.

Angelos was certainly some sort of expert in producing icons of Saint Phanourios. Four bear his signature and two others can, based on the historical evidence, be securely attributed to him³³. However, should we consider him responsible – as if by right – for the other icons of the period

Crete during the fifteenth century on the basis of archival documents, *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), 33.

³³ *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), nos 17-22 (with earlier bibliography).



Fig. 11. Athens, Paul and Alexandra Canellopoulos Museum (Inv. no. E2). *Madre della Consolazione* (detail) signed by Nikolaos Tzafuris.

that share the same iconography and style? Especially since, as we learn from the Life of St Phanourios, when the saint performed a miracle, in most cases the grateful beneficiaries, in fulfilment of a vow to the saint, commissioned icons with his portrait³⁴. Eighteen years ago I confronted this question when studying an icon in the Andreadis Collection, which had already been published as one of Angelos's works, an attribution that I too then supported³⁵ (Fig. 12). In terms of its iconography, handling and style the icon is undoubtedly painted in the same spirit as the icons by Angelos (Fig. 13). The written description of the modelling and of the skilful combination of

Palaiologan and Italian elements in the Andreadis Collection icon could be used word for word to describe signed works by Angelos³⁶. Yet, eighteen years later, things have changed. Thorough technical analysis of eight icons signed by Angelos carried out by the Conservation Department of the Benaki Museum in collaboration with the Byzantine Museum of Athens and the comparative study of two attributed ones that followed have elucidated and deepened our understanding of Angelos's working method³⁷. The first exhibition dedicated exclusively to Angelos at the Benaki Museum, curated by Maria Vassilaki, was equally revealing³⁸ (Fig. 14). Having the chance to compare the numerous signed and attributed works in the exhibition emphasized in many instances the differences between them, which are often diluted in publications and written descriptions. It was not only the technical analysis but, in my opinion, also the comparing and contrasting of the works themselves at first hand that once again raised the issue of the methodology of attributions. The data from the technical examinations and the publication of brilliant details of signed works by Angelos using a variety of techniques (in the visible and infrared spectrum, UVR and UVF) (Fig. 15) show that the Andreadis Collection icon, despite close iconographic and stylistic similarities with the latter's work, cannot be attributed to Angelos because the preparation of the ground layer, the underdrawing and the brushstrokes used by its painter are different³⁹ (Figs 16-18). He achieves the same artistic objective by another route, as I believe happens with at least one other icon of St Phanourios, also attributed to Angelos⁴⁰. Both works go back to the

³⁶ Drandaki, *Greek Icons*, op.cit. (n. 35), 36.

³⁷ *Icons by the hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 25) and K. Milanou – Ch. Vourvourou – L. Vranopoulou – A. Kalliga, "Τεχνολογική εξέταση κρητικών εικόνων που χρονολογούνται από τα τέλη του 14ου έως τα μέσα του 15ου αιώνα", *Μουσείο Μπενάκη* 13-14 (2013-2014), 251-272.

³⁸ *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21).

³⁹ In the catalogue of the 2010 exhibition, *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), based on the new technical data, I attributed the icon to a painter from Angelos's circle (151, no. 24).

⁴⁰ *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), 148-149, no. 23 (I. Varalis), with earlier bibliography, where the icon is attributed to Angelos. Despite its close iconographic similarities with the Andreadis icon, I had questioned its attribution to Angelos on stylistic and technical grounds, Drandaki, *Greek Icons*, op.cit. (n. 35), 38.

³⁴ Drandaki, "Piety", op.cit. (n. 29), 387.

³⁵ A. Drandaki, *Greek Icons 14th-18th centuries. The Rena Andreadis Collection*, Athens – Milan 2002, 36-41, no. 5.



Fig. 12. Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (former Rena Adnreadis Collection). Saint Demetrios, originally named Saint Phanourios, 15th-century Cretan workshop.

same model, which – for all that it is in the same vein as works by Angelos, is nevertheless different (Figs 12-13).

The example I have used shows how systematic technical examination of art works, established for decades in the history of Western art as a necessary part of the methodology for attributing works to named artists, is



Fig. 13. Patmos, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. Saint Phanourios signed by Angelos, first half of the 15th century.

even more essential to Cretan painting, where a certain uniformity in production and the repetition of specific models was a desideratum and a criterion of the success of these works⁴¹. I think, in order to identify the work of any given painter, it is essential to gather detailed information by analysing signed works. Once we have that data we can at least exclude the attribution of icons that

⁴¹ So far, systematic attempts at mapping the technical traits of specific Cretan painters have been attempted in the cases of Angelos (see n. 37) and Emmanuel Lambardos: Drandaki – Vranopoulou – Kalliga, “Η μελέτη των εικόνων”, *op.cit.* (n. 18), 189-220 and <https://benaki-conservation.com/tag/drandaki/> (last retrieved January 2020).



Fig. 14. Athens, Benaki Museum., Exhibition *The Hand of Angelos*. An icon-painter in Venetian Crete, November 16, 2010 – January 16, 2011.

diverge significantly from the approach that a particular artist regularly uses. Unfortunately, however, the converse does not apply. A great many of the features that distinguish signed works and painters, even Angelos, are not their personal characteristics, but traits that they share with other contemporary Cretan workshops and artists⁴². Repeated iconography, systematic copying of techniques, restricted colour palettes and standardized dimensions for icons and triptychs are for the most part what distinguishes fifteenth-century Cretan icon production. As we know from the sources, collaboration and partnerships between artists and the standardization required by the terms of the commissions for works such as those I have described ultimately call into question the reasoning that underlies the practice of looking for a well-known artist behind the creation of so many anonymous fifteenth-century Cretan icons. The much discussed order for 700 icons of the Virgin from two merchants in 1499 and the ensuing – almost Taylorian – organization of a production line by four painters, one of whom painted seven heads of the Virgin per day to fulfil the order, confirms that Cretan icons were to a large extent mass produced, high-quality, standardized commercial products: uniform, familiar and recognizable to an international general public⁴³.

In respect of Cretan icons a process of commodification can be glimpsed not only in the contracts but through the extant art works themselves, a process that

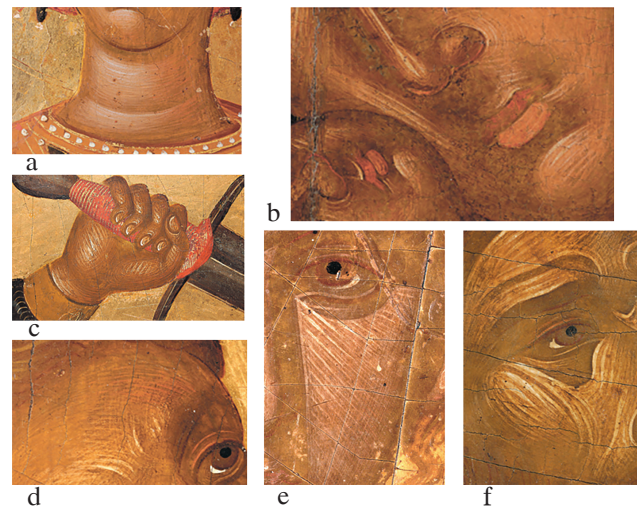


Fig. 15. Benaki Museum Conservation Department. Details of icons signed by Angelos: (a) Patmos, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. Virgin and Saint Catherine. (b) Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Virgin Kardiotissa. (c) and (d) Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Saint Theodore. (e) Patmos, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Saint Phanourios. (f) Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Saint John the Baptist.

is well known from other areas of artistic production. In all instances the Venetians appropriated high-quality Byzantine artistic or ideological creations, transforming them into standard, cheap, mass-produced and mass market commercial products. They met the needs of middle-class purchasers, who had no special artistic requirements but had become familiar with the first-rate products and

⁴² See the pertinent observations by Milanou – Vourvopoulou et al., “Τεχνολογική εξέταση”, op.cit. (n. 37).

⁴³ Cattapan, “Nuovi elenchi”, op.cit. (n. 24), 211-213.



Fig. 16. Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (former Rena Adnreadis Collection). Saint Demetrios, originally named Saint Phanourios (detail of Fig. 12).

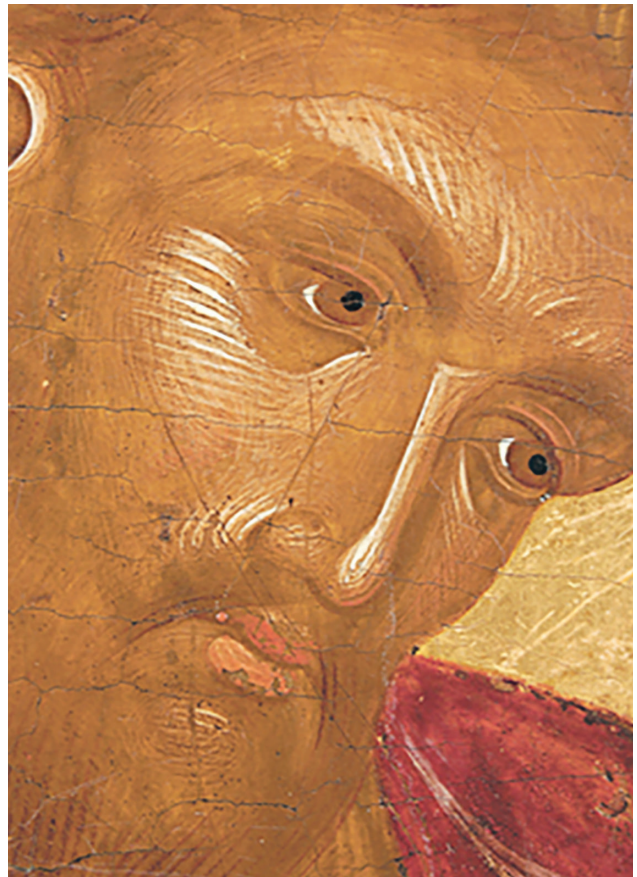


Fig. 17. Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (Inv. no. BXM13059-Α 335/ΣΛ 285). Detail of Saint Theodore signed by Angelos.



Fig. 18. Patmos, Monastery of Saint John the Theologian. Saint Phanourios signed by Angelos (detail of Fig. 13).

religious practices of both the Byzantine and the Islamic Eastern Mediterranean and were keen to invest in acquiring them. The same process has been observed in other types of works and other media. A typical example is the mass production of glass medallions in Venetian workshops, which turned the demanding task of producing small icons on gemstones, luxury objects in Byzantium, into mass-produced items⁴⁴ (Figs 19, 20). The ever greater spread of the cult of icons, which flourished spectacularly in Europe after the crusades, opened the way – and whetted the Venetians’s appetite – for a new religious commodity: icons, which for a series of historico-political and religious reasons that I have discussed elsewhere, were approaching peak production in the second half of the fifteenth century⁴⁵. Apart from the testimony of notarial documents from Venetian Crete, the apparent peak in the production of and international demand for Cretan icons in the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century is further supported by evidence coming from the other side of the Mediterranean, namely the archives of Catalonia, Majorca and Valencia in which references to Cretan icons become much more common in the years around 1500⁴⁶.

In these circumstances just how reliable can attempts to attribute unsigned, mass-produced works to well-known artists be? Especially before we put more effort into attempting a systematic mapping of the technical features of signed icons that can offer a more solid common ground for distinguishing hands and artists. Equally welcome and much needed by the scholarly community would be initiatives aiming at collecting, evaluating and making accessible existing technical data concerning specific icons that to date remain scattered and largely unexploited.

To sum up, looking for a link with a famous Cretan



Fig. 19. London, The British Museum (Inv. no. 1916,1108.1). Carved Bloodstone Cameo with Saint George. Byzantium, 11th-12th century.



Fig. 20. London, The British Museum (Inv. no. 1856,0701.5195). Green glass cameo with Saint Demetrios. Venice, 13th century.

⁴⁴ V. Foskolou, “Glass medallions with religious themes in the Byzantine Collection at the Benaki Museum. A contribution to the study of pilgrim tokens in Late Middle Ages”, *Μουσείο Μπενάκη* 4 (2004), 51-73. On the role of Venetian Crete in Mediterranean commerce, D. Jacoby, “Candia between Venice, Byzantium and the Levant: The Rise of a Major Emporium to the Mid-Fifteenth Century”, *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), 38-47.

⁴⁵ A. Drandaki, “Between Byzantium and Venice: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries”, *The Origins of El Greco*, op.cit. (n. 26), 11-18.

⁴⁶ D. Duran I Duelt, “Icons and minor arts: a neglected aspect of trade between Romania and the crown of Aragon”, *BZ* 105/1 (2012), 29-52, esp. 38.

painter has hitherto always been a basic feature of the study of Cretan icons. On the one hand evidence from the sources give new information about the names and careers of the artists concerned, while on the other it undermines the idea of a named creator, because it reinforces the picture of mass production and standardization that the extant works themselves reveal. Creating a systematic methodology that would include not just



Fig. 21. Irakleion, Museum of Icons and Heirlooms of The Holy Archdiocese of Crete, Collection of Saint Catherine of Sinai. From the Hodegetria Monastery, Crete, icon with the *Noli me Tangere* and a miracle of Saint Phanourios attributed to Angelos.

subjective iconographic and stylistic descriptions but also detailed technical analysis of the works is an essential prerequisite for attributing them to specific painters, albeit not always sufficient in itself to achieving this end. Finally I come back to an issue that Robin Cormack raised twenty-three years ago in his book *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (1997). Acknowledging that in the historical period when the

Cretan icons were made there were “no controllable methods of attribution”, Cormack went one step beyond methodology, noting that scholars “would need to be persuaded that the identification of icon painters would add a dimension to the study of icons which could not be derived from the works themselves”⁴⁷. My answer to this would be “not necessarily and not always”. In the fifteenth-century production of Cretan icons I do not so much see well-known painters as well-known works: i.e. demanding commissions with carefully planned programmes, specifications and objectives that stand out from the standard-quality, mass-produced Cretan paintings that flooded the market⁴⁸ (Fig. 21). Thanks to these celebrated works, the workshop, patron and painter acquire real substance. And this leads to the creation of new and emblematic compositions. If these paintings are not signed, identifying the painter and patron can give crucial answers to historical and art historical questions. As regards the other extremely numerous Cretan works of the period that are of undoubted quality but limited inspiration I shall paraphrase the historic words of Roland Barthes on the death of the author: the icon “is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the black and white where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the artist”⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ R. Cormack, *Painting the Soul: Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds*, London 1997, 191.

⁴⁸ Such for example are the cases of the two majestic templon icons painted by Andreas Ritzos for the Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos (M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting*, Athens 1985, nos 9-10) or the exquisite two-tiered icon with the *Noli me Tangere* and a miracle of St Phanourios attributed to Angelos, now in the Collection of the Archbishopric of Crete: and Drandaki, “Piety”, op.cit. (n. 29).

⁴⁹ “L’écriture, c’est ce neutre, ce composite, cet oblique où fuit notre sujet, le noir-et-blanc où vient se perdre toute identité, à commencer par là même du corps qui écrit.” Roland Barthes, “La mort de l’auteur” (1968), *Essais critiques IV* (1984), 63-69.

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Fig. 1: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Figs 2-5, 7, 8, 10, 14: ©Benaki Museum, Athens. Fig. 6: Nikolaos Drandakis archive. Figs 9, 11, 21: The Origins of El Greco, op.cit. (n. 26). Figs 12, 16: Greek Icons 14th-18th centuries, op.cit. (n. 35). Figs 13, 15, 17, 18: Icons by the hand of Angelos, op.cit. (n. 25). Figs 19, 20: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Η ΚΡΥΦΗ ΓΟΗΤΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΠΩΝΥΜΙΑΣ: ΜΕΘΟΔΟΛΟΓΙΚΑ ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑΤΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΑΠΟΔΟΣΗ ΑΝΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ ΣΕ ΚΡΗΤΙΚΟΥΣ ΖΩΓΡΑΦΟΥΣ ΤΟΥ 15ΟΥ-17ΟΥ ΑΙΩΝΑ

Στο άρθρο εντοπίζονται και διερευνώνται μεθοδολογικά προβλήματα στην απόδοση ανυπόγραφων έργων σε επώνυμους κρητικούς ζωγράφους του 15ου-17ου αιώνα, με τα εργαλεία ανάλυσης που χρησιμοποιούμε μέχρι σήμερα. Η αναζήτηση του «επώνυμου» έργου καθόρισε *ab initio* τη μελέτη της κρητικής ζωγραφικής. Όταν στις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα το ενδιαφέρον συλλεκτών και μουσείων άρχισε να στρέφεται στη βυζαντινή θρησκευτική ζωγραφική, οι κρητικές και κρητοεπτανησιακές εικόνες –κυρίως οι πιο ανοικτές στη δυτική ζωγραφική δημιουργίες του 16ου-18ου αιώνα–, αποτελούσαν την πρώτη και ιδανική επιλογή. Η αισθητική και το μικτό ύφος των έργων αυτών ταίριαζε με τους ιδεολογικούς προσανατολισμούς και το κυρίαρχο αστικό γούστο στην Ελλάδα της εποχής εκείνης. Την ίδια στιγμή, η ύπαρξη επώνυμων ζωγράφων, των οποίων οι υπογραφές διατηρούνταν σε σωζόμενα έργα (Εμμανουήλ Τζάνες, Εμμανουήλ Τζανφουρνάρης, Μιχαήλ Δαμασκηνός κ.ά.), πρόσφερε τη δυνατότητα να χτιστεί ένα πάνθεον ελλήνων καλλιτεχνών, ανάλογο με εκείνο των δυτικών ζωγράφων της Αναγέννησης και των νεότερων χρόνων να δημιουργηθεί, με άλλα λόγια, μια γενεαλογία μεγάλων κρητικών και επτανήσιων ζωγράφων που αντιπροσώπευαν την εξελικτική πορεία της καθ' ημάς θρησκευτικής ζωγραφικής και τον διάλογο της με τη δυτική τέχνη, με όρους προσωπογραφίας σημαντικών καλλιτεχνών, κατά το πρότυπο της καλλιτεχνικής γενεαλογίας που είχαν καθιερώσει στη δυτική τέχνη οι θεωρητικοί της Αναγέννησης, πάνω στα χνάρια της οποίας συνέχιζε να κινείται η ιστορία της τέχνης, καταγράφοντας την ιστορία των μεγάλων δημιουργών. Τα ανυπόγραφα έργα των κρητικών ζωγράφων πρόσφεραν επίσης και μια μοναδική δυνατότητα για παραχαράξεις, πλαστογραφίες και φουσκωμένα οικονομικά οφέλη σε ένα κύκλο επιτηδείων που τροφοδοτούσε με έργα τους συλλέκτες και καθόριζε τις ιεραρχήσεις και το γούστο της τοπικής αγοράς. Η κυκλοφορία πλαστών κρητικών και κρητοεπτανησιακών εικόνων, και η προσθήκη πλαστών υπογραφών σε ανυπόγραφα έργα κατά το πρώτο μισό

του 20ού αιώνα συσκοτίσε την κατανόηση της κρητικής ζωγραφικής και του έργου γνωστών ζωγράφων. Για διαφορετικούς λόγους, πλαστές υπογραφές κρητικών ζωγράφων είχαν προστεθεί σε ανυπόγραφες εικόνες και σε παλαιότερες εποχές. Χαρακτηριστικό παράδειγμα αποτελεί η περίπτωση του Ιωάννη Κορνάρου, ο οποίος, στο δεύτερο μισό του 18ου αιώνα, πρόσθεσε κατά το δοκούν πλήθος πλαστών υπογραφών ζωγράφων «ΕΚ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ» σε έργα στη μονή Σινά και αλλού, αναδεικνύοντας την υψηλή εκτίμηση που έχαιρε στην εποχή του η στιβαρή καλλιτεχνική παράδοση της κρητικής εικονογραφίας.

Η συσκοτίση που δημιούργησαν στην έρευνα τα πλαστά κρητικά έργα και οι πλαστές υπογραφές έχουν σήμερα, σε μεγάλο βαθμό, ξεκαθαριστεί χάρη στη συστηματικότερη μελέτη των έργων και με τη βοήθεια των τεχνικών μέσων που επιτρέπουν να διαπιστωθεί με ασφάλεια αν μια υπογραφή συνανήκει με το ζωγραφικό στρώμα. Ωστόσο, η επισκόπηση της σύγχρονης βιβλιογραφίας πάνω στην κρητική ζωγραφική εικόνων αναδεικνύει ένα άλλο συναφές πρόβλημα: την κυρίαρχη τάση της έρευνας να αποδίδει πλήθος ανυπόγραφων έργων με ανόμοια τεχνοτροπικά και τεχνικά χαρακτηριστικά σε λιγοστούς επώνυμους καλλιτέχνες, στους οποίους, δηλωμένα ή σιωπηρά, αναγνωρίζεται ένα είδος καλλιτεχνικής εξειδίκευσης. Έτσι, ο Άγγελος, αναμφίβολα εξέχουσα φυσιογνωμία του πρώτου μισού του 15ου αιώνα, πιστώνεται με πάνω από σαράντα έργα, άνισης ποιότητας και διαφορετικής εκτέλεσης, ανάμεσά τους και το σύνολο των πρώιμων εικόνων του αγίου Φανουρίου. Στον Νικόλαο Τζαφούρη χρεώνεται ένα ανομοιογενές πλήθος ιταλοκρητικών έργων του δεύτερου μισού του ίδιου αιώνα, αν και γνωρίζουμε ότι φιλοτεχνούσε και ωραία παραδοσιακά έργα. Όσο για τον Ανδρέα Ρίτζο, αυτός συνδέεται με μεγάλο αριθμό κρητικών εικόνων του όψιμου 15ου αιώνα, κλασικού ύφους. Όμως τα στοιχεία που διαθέτουμε, έρχονται να υποσκάψουν το σκεπτικό εξειδίκευσης ή αποκλειστικότητας, που υφέρπει πίσω από πολλές από αυτές τις αποδόσεις. Στην περίπτωση, φερ' ειπείν,

του Αγγέλου και του αγίου Φανουρίου γνωρίζουμε ότι τουλάχιστον ένας ακόμη, επιτυχημένος αστός, ζωγράφος του Χάνδακα, ο Κωνσταντίνος Ειρηνικός, είχε εμπλακεί με καίριο τρόπο στη διαμόρφωση της εικονογραφίας του αγίου, αναλαμβάνοντας την τοιχογράφηση του προσκυνημάτων στο Βαλσαμόνερο. Επίσης, μετά τις συστηματικές τεχνικές αναλύσεις σε ενυπόγραφες εικόνες του Αγγέλου, που πραγματοποιήθηκαν και δημοσιεύτηκαν από το εργαστήριο του Μουσείου Μπενάκη, είναι πλέον βέβαιο πως τουλάχιστον ορισμένα από τα σωζόμενα κρητικά έργα του 15ου αιώνα με τον άγιο Φανούριο έχουν φιλοτεχνηθεί από άλλον ή άλλους καλλιτέχνες.

Η συστηματοποίηση των ιστορικοτεχνικών κριτηρίων που εφαρμόζονται, προκειμένου να συνδεθούν κρητικές εικόνες με συγκεκριμένους ζωγράφους, πέρα από υποκειμενικές και ασαφείς περιγραφικές διατυπώσεις αποτελεί το ένα από τα ζητούμενα της έρευνας. Παράλληλα, η συστηματική τεχνική εξέταση των έργων, καθιερωμένη από δεκαετίες στην ιστορία της δυτικής τέχνης ως απαραίτητο κομμάτι της μεθοδολογίας απόδοσης έργων σε επώνυμους ζωγράφους, είναι ακόμη πιο αναγκαία για την κρητική ζωγραφική, όπου η ομοιομορφία της παραγωγής και η επανάληψη συγκεκριμένων προτύπων αποτελούσε ζητούμενο και κριτήριο επιτυχίας των έργων. Η αναγνώριση της παραγωγής κάθε ζωγράφου προϋποθέτει τη συγκέντρωση λεπτομερών δεδομένων, που προκύπτουν από την ανάλυση των ενυπόγραφων

έργων. Διαθέτοντας τα στοιχεία αυτά, μπορούμε τουλάχιστον να αποκλείσουμε την απόδοση εικόνων που παρεκκλίνουν σημαντικά από τον τεχνικό κανόνα που κάθε ζωγράφος χρησιμοποιεί. Όμως, το αντίθετο δυστυχώς δεν ισχύει. Ένα μεγάλο μέρος των χαρακτηριστικών που διακρίνουν ενυπόγραφα έργα και ζωγράφους, δεν είναι ιδιάζοντα χαρακτηριστικά τους αλλά γνωρίσματα που μοιράζονται με άλλα σύγχρονα κρητικά εργαστήρια και καλλιτέχνες. Οι συνεργασίες και οι συμπράξεις μεταξύ καλλιτεχνών, όπως τις γνωρίζουμε από τις πηγές, καθώς και η απαιτούμενη από τις παραγγελίες τυποποίηση των έργων θέτουν εν τέλει σε αμφισβήτηση το ίδιο το σκεπτικό αναζήτησης του επώνυμου καλλιτέχνη πίσω από τη δημιουργία πολυάριθμων κρητικών εικόνων του 15ου αιώνα. Οι κρητικές εικόνες ήταν σε μεγάλο βαθμό τυποποιημένα εμπορικά προϊόντα υψηλής ποιότητας ομοιόμορφα, εύληπτα και αναγνωρίσιμα από ένα διεθνές ευρύ κοινό. Για αυτά τα πολυάριθμα, εγγυημένης ποιότητας αλλά περιορισμένης έμπνευσης, κρητικά έργα θα παραφράσω την ιστορική ρήση του Roland Barthes για τον θάνατο του συγγραφέα: «η εικόνα είναι εκείνο το ουδέτερο πεδίο, ο σύνθετος χώρος διαφυγής του θέματος, το άσπρο-μαύρο, όπου κάθε ταυτότητα απαλείφεται και πρωτίστως η ίδια η ταυτότητα του ζωγράφου.»

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