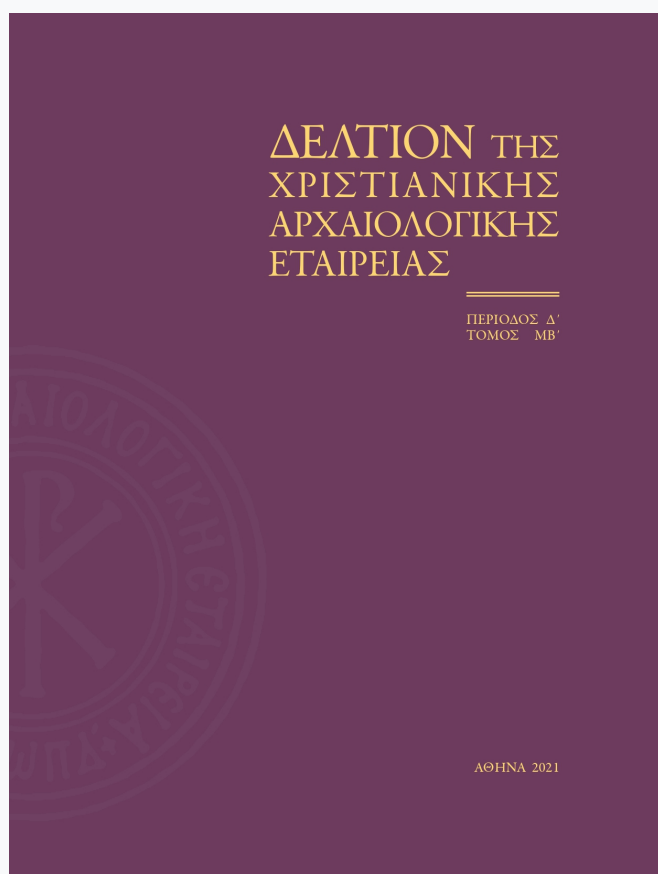


Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society

Vol 42 (2021)

Deltion ChAE 42 (2021), Series 4



Saint Mavra in Koilani, Limassol prefecture: cult, iconography, interpretations

Katerina KONTOPANAGOU (Κατερίνα ΚΟΝΤΟΠΑΝΑΓΟΥ)

doi: [10.12681/dchae.32391](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.32391)

To cite this article:

KONTOPANAGOU (Κατερίνα ΚΟΝΤΟΠΑΝΑΓΟΥ) K. (2023). Saint Mavra in Koilani, Limassol prefecture: cult, iconography, interpretations. *Deltion of the Christian Archaeological Society*, 42, 149–168.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.32391>

Katerina Kontopanagou

SAINT MAVRA IN KOILANI, LIMASSOL PREFECTURE: CULT, ICONOGRAPHY, INTERPRETATIONS

*In memory of my beloved aunt and mother
Angeliki Botsari*

Ο ναός της Αγίας Μαύρας στο Κοιλάνι Λεμεσού αποτελεί από τη βυζαντινή περίοδο διαχρονικό κέντρο ευλάβειας της ομώνυμης αγίας. Πρόκειται για έναν προσκυνηματικό τόπο της αγίας Μαύρας, η τιμή της οποίας ιδιαίτερα προβάλλεται στο νησί. Η πρώτη αρχιτεκτονική φάση του ναού ανάγεται στον 11ο-12ο αιώνα, ωστόσο ανακαινίστηκε κατά τον 15ο αιώνα. Το μεγαλύτερο τμήμα του τοιχογραφικού διακόσμου, συμπεριλαμβανομένων και των αγιολογικών σκηνών της τιμώμενης αγίας, εντάσσονται στην περίοδο της ανακαινιστικής τάσης που παρατηρήθηκε στην Κύπρο τον 15ο αιώνα, πριν από τη σταδιακή πολιτική και πολιτιστική εγκαθίδρυση των Ενετών.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

12ος αιώνας, 15ος αιώνας, παλαιολόγεια περίοδος, μνημειακή ζωγραφική, λατρεία αγίων γυναικών, βιογραφικές εικόνες, αγία Μαύρα, Κύπρος, Κοιλάνι, Λεμεσός.

The church of Saint Mavra in Koilani, Lemessos became a center of veneration for the saint of the same name from the Byzantine period onwards. It is a pilgrimage site of Mavra, who is honored throughout the island. The first architectural phase of the church is dated to the 11th-12th century but the church was renovated in the 15th century. The greater part of the painted decoration, including the biographical scenes of the honored saint, is dated to the second half of the 15th century, part of the renovative trend throughout Cyprus before the gradual political and cultural dominance of the Venetians.

Keywords

12th century; 15th century; Palaiologan period; monumental painting; cult of female saints; vita icons; St Mavra; Cyprus; Koilani; Limassol prefecture.

The village of Koilani is located 36 km northwest of Limassol, Cyprus. The history of the village is connected with St Therapon, who settled in the region, according to Leontios Machairas (15th century). He is included

among the “Alemanni” Saints, although it is unclear whether this is St Therapon the “Alemannus” or another, homonymous saint¹. The church of Saint Mavra sits on the eastern outskirts of the settlement². Current research

* Archaeologist, PhD, kontkat@yahoo.gr

** As a gesture of earnest gratitude to his Eminence the Metropolitan of Limassol, Athanasios for allowing me to examine the monument. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the honorable Domniki Kyprianou, for showing me the church in the course of our tour of the monuments of Cyprus, and to Chrystalla Sidera for her assistance. I would also like to thank the mayor of Koilani, Mr. Apostolos Giannakas, for his hospitality. The monument was first presented at the 10th Greek Byzantinists’ Conference (27-30 November, 2019), which was held in Ioannina. This paper is dedicated

to the memory of my beloved aunt and mother, Aggeliki Botsari. She loved Cyprus as her homeland, she passed away while the paper was being peer-reviewed.

¹ According to the chronicle of Leontios Machairas, after the Arab conquest of Jerusalem (638 a.d.), 300 saints fled to Cyprus, R. M. Dawkins, *Leontios Machairas. Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled “Chronicle”*, I, Oxford 1932, 30.

² Ch. Papadopoulos, “Οἱ Ἀλαμάνοι ἅγιοι τῆς Κύπρου”, *Ἀπόστολος Βαρνάβας*, per. 3, XVI/6, (1955), 176-186, mainly 180.

is limited to sporadic, general references to the frescoes of the church³, while isolated iconographic observations can be found in studies that examine the entirety of the artistic production on Cyprus during the Palaiologan period and in the 15th century⁴. The architecture of the monument and the information available until 2006 are both presented in detail in the doctoral dissertation of E. Prokopiou⁵, while the issue of the cult of St Mavra in Cyprus is referenced in a theological treatise on the saints of the Church on the island⁶. The present study provides the first comprehensive presentation of the monument (encompassing its history, architectural features, and murals), as well as an in-depth analysis and interpretation of its wall decoration (iconography, particularities, painting style, dating), while also examining the issue of the cult of St Mavra and its importance for the local community.

The monument, constructed on its west side adjacent to a rocky outcropping, gives the impression that it is an extension of the natural environment (Figs 1, 2). It is a small, single-aisled, compressed cross-in-square church, whose initial architectural phase has been dated,



Fig. 1. Limassol, Koilani, the church of Saint Mavra. View from East.

³ A. and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine Art*, Nicosia ²1997, 246-247. N. Gioles, *Ἡ χριστιανική τέχνη στην Κύπρο*, Nicosia 2003, 195.

⁴ N. Gioles, "Εἰκονογραφικὰ θέματα στὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη ἐμπνευσμένα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀντιπαράθεση καὶ τὰ σχίσματα τῶν δύο Ἐκκλησιῶν", *Θωράκιον. Αφιέρωμα στὴ μνήμη τοῦ Παύλου Λαζαρίδη*, Athens 2004, 274. N. Zarras, "Reflections of Palaiologan style in Cypriot monumental painting", *Σύμμεικτα. Collection of Papers Dedicated to the 40th Anniversary of the Institute for Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade*, ed. I. Stevović, Belgrade 2012, 301. Ch. Chotzakoglou, "Διεισδύοντας στὴν παλαιολόγειο μνημειακὴ ζωγραφικὴ τῆς Κύπρου", *Παλαιολόγειες ἀνασκαφαὶ στὴν τέχνη τῆς Κύπρου / Palaeologan reflections in the art of Cyprus (1261-1489)*, ed. I. Eliades, Nicosia 2019, 38, 40, 46, 47.

⁵ E. Prokopiou, *Ο συνεπτυγμένος σταυροειδὴς ἐγγεγραμμένος ναὸς τῆς Κύπρου (9ος-12ος αἰ.)*, unpublished PhD thesis, Athens 2006, 236-239, figs 270-281.

⁶ Photios Joachim, archimandrite, *Οἱ ἅγιοι μάρτυρες καὶ ὁμολογητὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου κατὰ τοὺς πρώτους χριστιανικοὺς αἰῶνες (1ος-5ος αἰ.)*, Thessaloniki 2017, 405-407. References to St Mavra are also included in publications meant for a wider readership: Z. Raptopoulos, *Βίος, Μαρτύριον καὶ Θαύματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐνδόξων μαρτύρων Τιμοθέου καὶ Μαύρας τῶν Θανματουργῶν καὶ περιγραφή τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἐκκλησίας τοὺς παρὰ τὸ Κοιλάνι Λεμεσοῦ*, Limassol 2004. Also, D. Kappais, *Οἱ ἐν Λεμεσῷ διαλάμπαντες ἅγιοι. (Μετὰ παρακλητικῶς κανόνος)*, Limassol 2002, 180, figs on p. 178, 179.

according to E. Prokopiou, to the mid-11th century⁷. After 1750 this church, along with the parish church of Monogenis in Koilani, were given wooden roofs. The upper sections of the murals were damaged when the 18th-century roof was removed in the 1920s-1930s, and an elevated narthex was added to the west during the same period. The current roof was installed in 1985 by the Department of Antiquities⁸, which also oversaw the initial conservation of the murals⁹. In 2017, conservation works expanded to include the localized removal

⁷ The interior has been organized into three sections with a cross-in-square arrangement, delineated by the four pilasters incorporated into the side walls. Arches that support the dome emerge from these pilasters, delineating the cross arms. The transverse arm is smaller than the vertical one, and its beams are covered by shallow arches. Prokopiou, *Σταυροειδὴς ἐγγεγραμμένος*, op.cit. (n. 5), 237. Andreas and Judith Stylianou offer a 12th-century dating, Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 236.

⁸ There is no evidence about the first phase of the roof. Prokopiou, *Σταυροειδὴς ἐγγεγραμμένος*, op.cit. (n. 5), 239.

⁹ During the conservation of the murals in the main church, an older layer was discovered beneath the existing floor. The exterior surfaces of the church were cleaned and freshly mortared in 2001.



Fig. 2. Limassol, Koilani, the church of Saint Mavra. View from Northwest.

of layering, complete conservation of murals, and restoration of the initial floor level of the monument.

This church is the oldest monument in the region and, according to Archimandrite Kyprianos, it was the *katholikon* of a monastery of the same name that belonged to the ecclesiastical region of Citium/Kition during the Late-Byzantine period¹⁰. The Russian monk Bazil Grigorevitch Barsky also refers to the church in his diary, in which he writes that the church was the *katholikon* of a monastery housing a few monks in 1735¹¹.

Taking into consideration the fact that this cross-in-



Fig. 3. Limassol, Koilani, church of Monogenis. Icon of Saints Timothy and Mavra.

¹⁰ Archimandrite Kyprianos, *Ιστορία χρονολογική της νήσου Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1902, 67-69, 526-527. N. Kyriazis, *Τὰ μοναστήρια ἐν Κύπρῳ*, Larnaca 1950, 76-77.

¹¹ During his second trip to Cyprus (1734-1736), Bazil Barsky visited Koilani, which he mentions as a center of production of a local sweet wine, known as “commandaria”. He also describes a virulent disease widespread during this period, characteristically noting that he did not remain for more than a few days in Saint Mavra due to the position of the monument next to the road. This easy access meant that large numbers of people passed through, which increased the danger from the spread of the disease. In terms of its layout, the monument is described as consisting of the *katholikon* and two or three cells. It was probably a male monastery, though



Fig. 4. Naos. South wall, view from Northwest.

square church was constructed in the mid-11th or, at the latest, the 12th century, the initial decorative phase must be dated to the 12th, or, to the 13th century. This dating is supported by the portable *vita* icon of Sts Timothy and Mavra from the church currently kept at the parish church of Monogenis, in Koilani (Fig. 3)¹². To the initial decorative phase probably are dated the mural fragments on the northern exterior wall. To the west of the central entrance it was noted that the deep red pigments resembled those of the lower layer in the interior of the church, on the blind arcade of the south wall¹³. In particular,

this is tenuous due to uncertainties in the translation. A. Stylianou, “Αἱ περιηγήσεις τοῦ Βάρσχυ ἐν Κύπρῳ”, *ΚυπρΣπουδ* 21 (1957), 82-83. In a supplementary comment, the author refers to the church as “a small late fifteenth-century monotholos church”.

¹² A. Papageorgiou, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1991, 33, fig. 19.

¹³ A macroscopic analysis of the mortar (composition and color) from the fragment identified it as belonging to the initial architectural phase. Therefore, it most likely belongs to the initial decoration of the monument, according to the conservation section of the Department of Antiquities of Limassol prefecture and the Koilani local archives. Invaluable, crucial assistance in the examination

traces of a previous decorative phase are observable at two different spots on the dividing bands. There is a marked contrast between the deep red first layer and the cinnabar red of the second. We must therefore conclude that this interior layer is also dated to the initial phase.

The funerary nature of the church, indicated by the arcosolia in the north and south (Fig. 4) walls, was confirmed by the archaeological trenches made during the 2017 conservation works¹⁴. An interesting architectural and historical element of the monument is the indication of the existence of a subterranean stone water-channeling system. In fact, according to a plan by the English architect and traveler George Jeffery (early 20th century) the water, in his words holy water, seems to have flowed

and research of the decorative phases of both this exterior section and of the interior blind arch of the south wall was provided by the conservator of Antiquities Anastasia Sampazioti.

¹⁴ These trenches revealed burials parallel to the south arch, as well as Frankish-period coins. This information was obtained from the church archive, as the proceedings of the Department of Archaeology have not yet been published.



Fig. 5. Naos. Dome and the four pendentives.

from the east wall of the church¹⁵. Initially the church was accessible via two entrances in the north and south walls at the sides of the transverse barrel-vault. The south part was walled up, possibly in the 15th century, while the north was expanded in the 20th century¹⁶. Subsequent architectural interventions have been quite limited¹⁷.

The iconographic program

The cohesion and organized development of the iconographic program allow certain observations. It is a complete

iconographic program that utilizes all available architectural surfaces¹⁸. The depictions are arranged as follows: Christ Pantokrator decorates the dome while the Evangelists are depicted on three of the pendentives; Matthew (northeast), Luke and John (southeast), and Mark (northwest) (Fig. 5).

In the holy bema, the Virgin Platytera attended by full-length Archangels decorates the semidome of the apse (Fig. 6). The Communion of the Apostles, *Metadosis* (Offering) and *Metalepsis* (Communion), is depicted in the register directly underneath (Fig. 6). The four co-officiating Hierarchs, Spyridon, Chrysostom, Basil, and Epiphanius, dressed in ecclesiastical mantles, occupy the bottom register. A modern window has been opened in the center, destroying the *Melismos*. According to the established arrangement, two Christological scenes, the Pentecost (South) and the Ascension (North), have also been included in the space of the holy bema¹⁹ (Fig. 6).

¹⁵ This drainage system was incorporated into the later narthex, Prokopiou, *Σταυροειδής εγγεγραμμένος*, op.cit. (n. 5), 237.

¹⁶ The biographic cycle of St Mavra has been illustrated at this position on the south wall, apparently contemporaneously with the walling up of the south door.

¹⁷ I.e. the lightwell in the apse of the holy bema and the expansion of the initial door in the north wall of the church, which is also the current entrance. The latter intervention seems to have destroyed a section of the Presentation of the Virgin and appears to have been an expansion rather than an opening of a new entrance.

¹⁸ St. Papadaki-Oekland, “Δυτικότροπες τοιχογραφίες του 14ου αιώνα στην Κρήτη. Η άλλη όψη μιας αμφίδρομης σχέσης;”, *Ευφρόσυνον. Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, 2, Athens 1992, 509.

¹⁹ M. Borboudakis, “Παρατηρήσεις στη ζωγραφική Σκλαβενοχωρίου”,



Fig. 6. Holy bema. Apse and east barrel-vault. Enthroned Virgin with Child and the Communion of the Apostles.



Fig. 7. Naos. South wall, the Dormition of the Virgin. Southwest pendentive, the Annunciation of the Virgin. West barrel-vault, scenes from the Christological cycle.

They are painted on the east barrel-vault, according to the symbolism of the space as the secret heaven to which Christ ascended during the Ascension and from which the Holy Spirit descended during Pentecost²⁰. The prophets David and Solomon are depicted on the face of the apse of the holy bema (Fig. 6), in their standard position in Cypriot churches²¹. Clearly identifiable fragments of the Sacrifice of Isaac are preserved in the upper register of the north recess; the fragmentary nature of the scene,

preserved only on the lintel, is due to the later opening of a window in the recess. Saints Stephen and Barnabas are depicted on the east and west sides of the soffit. Correspondingly, the Hospitality of Abraham, represented by three angels seated on a single bench without the presence of Abraham and Sarah, decorates the south recess. Two deacons, Laurentius and Romanus, are depicted on the soffit. Saints Augustine (Fig. 14) and Theodosius are depicted on the north wall.

The naos is decorated with basic Christological and Mariological subjects. Particular emphasis has been placed on the latter scenes, and, by extent, on the Virgin²². Her Presentation and Dormition are developed on extensive surfaces, occupying the north and south walls (Fig. 7). The entire register of the wall beneath the Dormition is occupied by Sts Mavra and Timothy, with four biographic scenes (Fig. 4). Two further related Mariological subjects have been illustrated on the north wall above the Presentation,

Ευφρόσυνον. Αφιέρωμα στον Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη, 1, Athens 1991, 377.

²⁰ They are painted on the east barrel-vault, according to the symbolism of this space as the secret heaven to which Christ ascended during the Ascension and from which the Holy Spirit descended during Pentecost. A. Grabar, "Le schéma iconographique de la Pentecôte" dans *L'Art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age*, I, Paris, 1968, 615-617. Borboudakis, "Παρατηρήσεις στη ζωγραφική Σκλαβενοχωρίου", op.cit. (n. 19), 377.

²¹ Indicatively, cf. the corresponding depictions in the Virgin Chrysokourdeliotissa and in the church of the Holy Cross in Agiasmati. A. Papageorgiou, *Οί ξυλόστεγοι ναοί της Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1975, 126 figs 20, 41.

²² Cf. the barrel-vaulted church of the Presentation of the Virgin in Sklavenochori (15th century), Borboudakis, "Παρατηρήσεις στη ζωγραφική Σκλαβενοχωρίου", op.cit. (n. 19), 375-398.



Fig. 8. Naos. South wall and Southwest arcosolium.

on either side of the single-lobed window: the Life-giving spring and the Vision of the prophet Ezekiel, on the east and west sides respectively. The figure of the Virgin holding Christ is repeated: she is depicted frontally in the Old Testament scene as the Tabernacle, in a prefiguration of the Divine Incarnation, while also emerging as the Life-giving Spring from the water basin (*perirrhanterion*)²³. The current main entrance to the church was opened in the north

²³ On prefigurations in the visions of the prophets, see Ch. Konstantinidi, “Η Θεοτόκος ως σκηνή του Μαρτυρίου με τις προεικονίσεις και ο Μελισμός στην αψίδα της Κόκκινης Παναγίας στην Κόνιτσα”, *DChAE* 29 (2008), 87-100. D. Mouriki, “Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρᾶ”, *AD* 25 (1970), I Meletes, Athens 1971-1973, 217-251. T. Papamastorakis, “Η ένταξη των προεικονίσεων της Θεοτόκου και της Ὑψωσης του Σταυροῦ σε έναν ιδιότυπο εικονογραφικὸ κύκλο στον Ἅγιο Γεώργιο Βιάννου Κορίθης”, *DChAE* 14 (1987-1988), 315-327.

wall, destroying the Presentation of the Virgin with the exception of the scene's upper part. The full-length Sts Paul and Peter (Fig. 10) are depicted on the north and south pilasters. To the east, heavily damaged frescoes of the full-length Virgin (north) and full-length Christ (south) (Fig. 4) are painted on either side of the iconostasis. The Christological scenes begin with the Annunciation on the southwest pendentive (Fig. 7). The arrangement and selection of the subject matter indicates a unified program for all the surfaces of the barrel-vault and the walls. According to the established system, the barrel-vault is subdivided into registers, in which the Christological subjects are developed in pairs; on the south side of the west vault are depicted the Nativity of Christ, the Presentation at the Temple (Fig. 12), the Transfiguration, and the Washing of the Feet (Fig. 8). The program continues on the north side of the west vault with the Baptism, the Raising of Lazarus, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, and the Betrayal, concluding at the south wall with the scene of the Descent into Hell, a position connected with the funerary use of the southwest arcosolium (Fig. 8). Beneath the Descent into Hell, remains of two Archangels can be discerned on the blind arch²⁴. Opposite the southwest recess there are fragments of a mounted warrior saint. Finally, the dado zone of the walls is decorated with a continuous, albeit damaged, band of ornamental motifs.

Particular iconographic observations

The iconography of the naos is dominated by Sts Mavra and Timothy, together with biographical scenes. The position of the biographic cycle²⁵ on the south wall (Fig. 4), just outside the holy bema, its development on an extensive architectural surface, and its symmetrical arrangement, demonstrate the skill of the painters (Fig. 9). The full-length Sts Mavra and Timothy stand at the center. The abbreviated biographic cycle includes four episodes from the martyrdom: St Mavra before the Roman governor Arrian (Ἡ ἁγία διαλεγόμενη μετὸν βασιλέα); the saint's visit to the prison, where her husband was incarcerated (Ἡ ἁγία διδασκόμενη ὑπὸ τό ἀντρί αὐτῆς); the

²⁴ Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 236.

²⁵ A door was initially present at this position, but was subsequently walled up.



Fig. 9. Naos, South wall. Saints Timotheos and Mavra. Biographic scenes of St Mavra.

mutilation of her hands (Ἡ ἁγία κόπτει τὰς χεῖρας); and the saint being boiled alive (the inscription has deteriorated and is almost illegible). The painters have given St Mavra the leading role, as both the virtuous life of the saintly couple and their martyrdom in Thebes, Egypt on 3rd May 304 have been omitted. Also absent is the martyrdom of Timothy. The painters most likely copied the composition from a portable *vita* icon, unfortunately non-extant today. It could possibly have been an icon contemporary with that of Sts Mavra and Timothy kept in the church of Monogenis (Fig. 3). Most of the surviving Byzantine *vita* icons date from the 13th century. They are usually of large dimensions and depict numerous episodes²⁶. The scene selection may differ depending on patrons' preferences or on the wish to emphasize the cult of a particular saint at a given monument. The chosen form indicates that the biographic cycles were

viewed as a type of donation to a particular image of the saint²⁷. In the case of the monumental cycle in Koilani, the inclusion of certain scenes emphasizes the honored female martyr, St Mavra, and must have been intended to illuminate aspects of her life.

Of particular note from the iconographic point of view is the fact that the Ascension and Pentecost are combined with the depiction of Christ Emmanuel on the face of the apse (Fig. 6)²⁸. Their combination serves to emphasize the

²⁶ T. Papamastorakis, "Pictorial Lives. Narrative in thirteenth-century *vita* icons", *Benaki Museum* 7 (2007), 33-65. N. Patterson Ševčenko, "The 'Vita' Icon and the Painter as Hagiographer", *DOP* 53 (1999), 149-165, mainly 150-155.

²⁷ Patterson Ševčenko, *Vita icon*, op.cit. (n. 26), 160. On the models of the biographic cycles in monumental painting, see K. Weitzmann, "The Selection of Texts for Cyclic Illustration in Byzantine Manuscripts", *Byzantine Books and Bookmen. A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (1971), eds C. Mango – I. Ševčenko, Washington, D.C. 1975, 84-86. Stereotypical iconographic structures and tropes were used for the illustration of the biographic scenes of lesser-known or local saints, J. Gardner, *Patrons, painters and Saints: Studies in Medieval Italian Painting* (Variorum, Collected Studies Series CS 414), Aldeshot 1993, 172-184.

²⁸ Regarding the iconography and position of this image in the church, see A. Glichitch, *Iconographie du Christ-Emmanuel, origine*

concept of the Trinity. It is also possible that they are a reflection of the Hesychast controversy, artistic traces of which can be observed throughout Cyprus²⁹. Iconographic details, such as the disproportionately large figure of the Cosmos in the scene of the Pentecost, an external testimony of the Epiphany, and the depiction of the mandorla in three different registers³⁰ with multiple rays around Christ Emmanuel, all lend further credence to this interpretation (Fig. 6). St John Chrysostom is depicted, in his established position, among the co-officiating Hierarchs in the holy bema. However, he is also depicted again as a full-length figure on the north wall of the naos (Fig. 11). This emphasis is indicative of the Hesychastic theological issues of the period and of the monastery in particular³¹. There are various iconographic particularities: in the Communion of the Apostles, the apostles who lead the two groups are Andrew and John, instead of the conventional Peter and Paul, which denotes the prominent role of the former two apostles in Cyprus (Fig. 6). Furthermore, the dominant figure of Andrew, in the position of Peter's brother, can be interpreted as a visual expression of the ecclesiastical tradition that connects the patriarchal throne of Constantinople with the apostle³².

et développement jusqu'au XI^e s., Paris 1990. Ch. Konstantinidi, *Ὁ Μελισμός. Οἱ Συλλειτουργοῦντες Τεράρχες καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι-Διάκονοι μπροστὰ στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα μὲ τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα ἢ τὸν εὐχαριστιακὸ Χριστό*, Thessaloniki 2008, 84-86.

²⁹ Personal observations. The theologians who introduced Hesychasm emphasized the doctrine of the Triune God. Chotzakoglou, "Διεισδύοντας στην παλαιολόγιο μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Κύπρου", *op.cit.* (n. 4), 46.

³⁰ G. Millet, *Recherches sur Iconographie de l'Évangile*, Paris 1960, 230. A. Xyngopoulos, *Ἡ ψηφιδωτὴ διακόσμηση τοῦ ναοῦ τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων Θεσσαλονίκης*, Thessaloniki 1953, 19-20. On the development of the mandorla in three levels in the Transfiguration scene, see D. Konstantios, "Τρεῖς δεσποτικές εἰκόνες ἀπὸ τὴν Κληματαία", *Ἡπειρωχρον* 25 (1983), 194-195 and K. Kontopanagou, *Post-Byzantine Painting Art. The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop and Saint George Church of Negades*, Berlin 2021, 65-66.

³¹ The students of Palamas gave him the title of the new Chrysostom, see Chotzakoglou, "Διεισδύοντας στην παλαιολόγιο μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Κύπρου", *op.cit.* (n. 4), 47.

³² The apostle Andrew is given a prominent position in various depictions, emphasizing his connection with the founding of the church of Constantinople. Andrew the First-Called is considered to be higher than Peter in the order of the apostles, a position that also extends to his successors, the patriarchs, as opposed to the Pope. This was further developed during the Photian Schism (867-879/80) in the second half of the 9th century, see Gioles, *Εἰκονογραφικά*

This visual element serves to emphasize Orthodoxy against Catholicism, while also possibly being a silent condemnation of the Cypriot church's endorsement of the decisions taken at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439)³³.

Another noteworthy detail is the position of the Annunciation, which is depicted on the southwest pendentive; the evangelists occupy the remaining three pendentives (Fig. 5). Could this iconographic arrangement on the four pendentives be indicative of a clumsy, inexperienced painter? Quite to the contrary, this was in all likelihood a deliberate choice that made use of the available surfaces, with the viewer's gaze simultaneously taking in both the Annunciation and the Dormition of the Virgin (Fig. 7). Additionally, by viewing the Annunciation from southwest facing northeast, the double depiction of the Virgin becomes its background. Regarding the cohesion of the iconographic program, it is evident that the position of the Annunciation³⁴ was carefully and deliberately chosen. It initiates the visual narrative of the Christological scenes, which continue on the adjoining western barrel-vault (Fig. 7).

Palaiologan iconographic influences

The effort to depict the evangelists three-dimensionally, as well as the female figure who embraces Mark and Matthew, a personification of the Divine Wisdom, are elements of Palaiologan art³⁵, introduced as a form of

θέματα, *op.cit.* (n. 4), 266. Another likely comparison is with the depiction of Doubting Thomas in Sopoćani, in which the disciple leads the group. In this case, the emphasis on the apostolic nature of the patriarchal throne of New Rome through the depiction of the First-Called was connected with the efforts of Michael VIII Palaiologos to weaken the autocephaly of the Serbian church and bring it under the control of the church of Constantinople, N. Zarras, *Ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος των Εωθινών Ευαγγελίων στην παλαιολόγια ζωγραφική των Βαλκανίων*, Thessaloniki 2011, 198.

³³ Gioles, *Εἰκονογραφικά θέματα*, *op.cit.* (n. 4), 274-275.

³⁴ This scene provides a transition to the Christological cycle.

³⁵ This iconographic renewal draws, alternately, from both Italian painting and Palaiologan art, I. Iliadis. "Ἡ κυπριακή ζωγραφική καὶ οἱ σχέσεις της με τὴν τέχνη της Ἰταλίας κατὰ τὴν Φραγκοκρατία καὶ τὴν Βενετοκρατία (1191-1571)", *Ἡ τέχνη στὴν Κύπρο καὶ στὴν Ἰταλία τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ ἀγίου Νικολάου τῆς Στέγης τοῦ 13ου αἰ. πον συντηρήθηκε στὴν Ρώμη*, Nicosia 2009, 37. This iconographic element is encountered in rare instances in Cyprus, Chotzakoglou, "Διεισδύοντας στην παλαιολόγιο

iconographic renewal³⁶. The painter has remade Palaiologan-derived iconographic elements, successfully incorporating them into the concave surface of the pendentive (Fig. 5). The depiction of the two writing evangelists as wise men belongs to the Palaiologan tradition³⁷. Another element that displays the artistic mastery of the painter in the depiction of Matthew is the innovative correlation of the evangelist's symbol, the winged man, with the personification of the Divine Wisdom, depicted in the exact same manner as with Mark. In the compositions of the evangelists, the interiors in which they are shown writing have been rendered with meticulous attention to

μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Κύπρου", op.cit. (n. 4), 38. A noteworthy example is observable in the church of the True Cross in Pelendri (second half of the 15th century), I. Iliadis, *Η κυπριαναγεννησιακή ζωγραφική: Το "Λατινικό Παρεκκλήσιο" της Μονής του Αγίου Ιωάννου του Λαμπαδιστού στον Καλοπαναγιώτη και τα παρεμφερή μνημεία*, unpublished PhD thesis, I, Nicosia 2008, 204-205, with references regarding the dating of the depiction to the 15th century. An earlier dating in N. Zarras, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του κεντρικού κλίτους στο ναό του Τιμίου Σταυρού στο Πελέντρι. Οι ζωγράφοι και το έργο τους", *Proceedings of the 4th International Cypriological Congress (Nicosia 31 April – 3 May 2008)*, Nicosia, 150-160 (forthcoming). I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Nektarios Zarras for making his forthcoming paper available to me.

³⁶ The evangelists and the Divine Wisdom were widespread in murals, illuminated manuscripts and Cretan icons of the second half of the 14th – early 15th century, E. N. Tsigaridas, "Δύο εικόνες πρώιμης Κρητικής Σχολής στη μονή Βατοπαιδίου", *DChAE* 27 (2006), 300-301, with examples of murals and illuminated manuscripts in: E. Tsigaridas, *Τοιχογραφίες της εποχής των Παλαιολόγων σε ναούς της Μακεδονίας*, Thessaloniki 1999, 124. It is worth noting that this depiction is connected with Byzantine hymns, in which the prayer is not directed to God but to the angels instead, N. B. Tomadakis, "Βυζαντινὲς ἐπικλήσεις εἰς μούσας καὶ ἁγίους", *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν* 8 (1957-1958), 162-165, mainly 165. Also, J. Mayendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse divine dans la tradition byzantine", *CahArch* 10 (1959), 259-279, A. Grabar, "Les images des poètes et des illustrations dans leurs œuvres dans la peinture byzantine tardive", *Zograf* 10 (1979), 13-16. It was diffused in post-Byzantine works from the 16th century onwards, E. Drakopoulou, *Εικόνες από τις ορθόδοξες Κοινότητες της Αλβανίας*, ed. A. Tourta, Thessaloniki 2006, 62-64.

³⁷ RbK, II, "Evangelisten", (H. Hunger – K. Wessel), 452-507. A. M. Friend, Jr, "The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts. I", *Art Studies* 5 (1927), 115-151. These sections of the mural decoration are likely to have been from previous layers with paint-overs; the poor state of preservation of their upper sections precludes the possibility of reaching a concrete conclusion on the issue.

detail: a tall, double-sided wooden lectern with an intermediate space for writing utensils for Matthew, Luke and John, a glass inkwell in the intermediate space for Mark, and buildings of varying architecture (domes, barrel-vaults, balconies) that symmetrically surround all the evangelists. These scenes of divinely inspired authorship are emphasized by Mark's pensive gesture: he bows his head slightly, touching it with his retracted left hand³⁸ (Fig. 5). The depictions of the evangelists within a carefully arranged interior, their gestures, and the personification of the Divine Wisdom, are also observable in the church of the Holy Cross in Pelendri and indicate the dissemination of Palaiologan iconographic types³⁹. Finally, the painter of this monument, in a callback to older models, depicted Judas crouching with a microscopic demon in the scene of the Last Supper, demonstrating his preference for iconographic embellishments⁴⁰. These embellishments are indicative of the renovative trend of the period and the painters' care for delivering a thought-out composition.

Style and dating

Upon examination of the frescoes, it becomes evident that both the individual figures and the scenes themselves

³⁸ The studied design of the writing "workshop" is connected with the tendency to emphasize the human aspect of the evangelists in Byzantine miniatures and murals. They are depicted in a more corporeal manner because they announce the Incarnation. Above all other saints, they belong to the material world of flesh. H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium*, Princeton 1996, 80-87, 17 fig. 8.

³⁹ A. Weyl Carr, *Cyprus and the Devotional Arts of Byzantium in the Era of the Crusades*, Hampshire 2005, 245-246, fig. 13. Stylianiou, *The Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 223-233. The frescoes are dated to the second half of the 14th century (dome and holy bema), and the rest of the decoration to the second half of the 15th century. There are noticeable similarities with the monument under examination, as both have been heavily influenced by Palaiologan motifs. However, the painters in Koilani and Pelendri expressed a stripped-down interpretation of these Palaiologan influences, forgoing the academism of Palaiologan painting.

⁴⁰ Regarding this iconographic detail, see M. Garidis, *Μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική (1450-1600). Η εντομία ζωγραφική μετά την πτώση του Βυζαντίου στον ορθόδοξο κόσμο και στις χώρες υπό ξένη κυριαρχία*, Athens 2007, 43.



Fig. 10. Naos, South pilaster. The Apostle Peter.



Fig. 11. Naos, North wall. St John Chrysostom.

have been illustrated with an olive-green first paint layer (*proplasmos*), while the exposed skin has been rendered with cool colors. However, a stylistic analysis of the faces reveals stylistic divergences in the mural decoration; two distinct artistic styles are observable. The figures on the pilasters, arranged in a cross formation and attached to the side walls, belong to the first: the full-length Christ south of the iconostasis, the apostle Peter on the south pilaster of the west barrel-vault (Fig. 10), and St John the Forerunner on the eastern reveal of the south pilaster. Due to the extensive damage and possible over-paintings, or even to the interventions of the 2017 conservation, observations on the frescoes cannot easily be made. However, a well-preserved depiction can also be included in this group of figures; that of St John Chrysostom on the east part of the north wall (Fig. 11). These figures display a higher degree of plasticity, soft auburn shades on top of the olive-green first paint layer, and warm, peach-colored spots on their cheeks. Soft, thin bright brush-strokes

on the forehead, the chin and below the eyes are observable in the figures of John Chrysostom and the apostle Peter, being more pronounced in the former. All these figures are connected with each-other through common facial details: the elegant forked endings of the beards of Chrysostom and the Forerunner, the pronounced, stylized band of shade under and around the eyes of Chrysostom, Christ and Peter, and the markedly dark-colored (dark brown to black) lines around the faces of Chrysostom, Peter and the Forerunner, albeit only faintly visible in the latter, group these figures together and set them apart from the rest of the wall paintings. The depiction of St John Chrysostom, dated to the mid-14th century, has been compared with contemporary monumental works in the Balkans⁴¹. All of the aforementioned full-length figures, Chrysostom, Peter, Christ and the Forerunner

⁴¹ Zarras, "Reflections of Palaiologan style in Cypriot monumental painting", *op.cit.* (n. 4), 301-302.



Fig. 12. Naos, West vault. *The Presentation of Christ at the Temple.*

display similarities with individual figures from slightly earlier works: the monasteries of Mateić (1327-1348)⁴², Psača (1365-1371)⁴³ and Marko (1376-1381)⁴⁴. They cannot be dated later than the end of the 14th, or even the early 15th century. These frescoes are the earliest surviving painted decoration in the monument. A careful examination indicates that the decoration was completed with a second painting phase. The two different painting phases are confirmed by both stylistic and stratigraphic analyses. The damaged sections of the frescoes dated to the first phase display a different type of substratum compared to the later, mid-15th-century phase. The aesthetic expressed in the biographic scenes of the saintly couple on the south wall is in accordance with the art

encountered in numerous monuments throughout Cyprus after the mid-15th century⁴⁵.

This second artistic style is observable in both the biographic cycle (Fig. 9) and the remaining wall paintings. According to the architectural evidence, the monument was the object of successive renovations in the 15th century⁴⁶, a dating also supported by the stylistic analysis of the biographic scenes. Its primary attributes are the frontal rigidity of the full-length saints, the robust figures, their awkward arrangement in the available space, the emphasis on the horizontal axis, and the stylized depiction of the natural environment, the buildings, and the folds of the garments (Fig. 12). These are all familiar elements of other Cypriot works safely dated to

⁴² G. Millet – T. Velmans, *La peinture du Moyen Age en Yougoslavie (Serbie, Macédoine et Monténégro)*, IV, Paris 1969, pl. 52 fig. 104.

⁴³ Ibidem, pl. 62 fig. 122, pl. 70 fig. 135, pl. 72 fig. 139.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pl. 74 figs 141-142, pl. 79 fig. 151, pl. 90 fig. 167.

⁴⁵ Indicatively, Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 186-218, 341-343.

⁴⁶ The south door under the transverse cross arm (1,12m width) was walled up, Prokopiou, *Σταυροειδής εγγεγραμμένος*, op.cit. (n. 5), 238.



Fig. 13. Naos. South wall, the Boiling of St Mavra. detail.



Fig. 14. Holy bema. North wall, St Augustine, detail.

the end of the 15th century⁴⁷. Robust figures, the emphasis on the horizontal axis and the complete lack of slenderness are characteristics of the murals in the church

⁴⁷ Their characterization as rustic, simplistic and crude is likely due



Fig. 15. Holy bema. Apse, Enthroned Virgin with Child, detail.

of the Archangel Michael in Pedoula (1474), a work by the painter Minas⁴⁸. A similar approach to the depiction of figures, the layout of scenes and the rendering of space can be observed in the frescoes of the churches of the Archangel Michael in Pedoula (1474), the Holy Cross of Agiasmati (1494)⁴⁹, and St Mamas in Louvaras

to the fact that they were examined before their restoration, Gioles, *Ἡ χριστιανικὴ τέχνη στὴν Κύπρο*, op.cit. (n. 3), 194. The early 16th-century frescoes in Saint George Palaiochoritis in Kakopetria can safely be described as rustic, Stylianou *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 81-83.

⁴⁸ Indicatively, see the scenes of the Annunciation, the Presentation of Christ and the Baptism, as well as the figures of Sts Andronicus and Athanasia, St. Perdikis, *Ο ναός του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ στον Πεδουλά*, Nicosia 2014, figs on p. 50, 53, 54, 82. Also Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 331-343. M. Chatzidakis – E. Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση (1450-1830)*, 2, Athens 1997, 187. Papageorgiou, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 12), 93, 97.

⁴⁹ A similar aesthetic is observable in the church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati, by the painter Filippus Goul. Comparisons can be made with the scenes of the Betrayal, the Denial of Peter, the

(1495)⁵⁰. Furthermore, the cool-colored first painting layer that surrounds the heads like a wide frame, the shades of gray in the figuration and the lack of earthen, auburn colors in the faces, in addition to the pronounced, stylized outlines of the eyes, eyebrows and neck (Figs 13, 14), are all indicators for this dating⁵¹. The Virgin flanked by angels in the apse, the prophet-kings David and Solomon, and Christ Emmanuel can also be dated to the late 15th-century decorative phase, albeit attributed to a different hand (Fig. 6). The design of the faces in these depictions is differentiated by the pronounced circular crimson blemishes on their cheeks (Fig. 15). A late 15th-century dating is also supported by the meticulously designed decorative elements, evident in the military equipment⁵² and architectural features, which is a reference to the trend of artistic embellishment popular among painters of the second half of the 15th century⁵³. The painters created a conservative ensemble of frescoes with Palaiologan-period iconographic influences. The artistic style of the scenes is unassuming, free of mannerisms and awkward elements, evident primarily in the abbreviated rendering of the folds of the garments and the spaces.

Dormition of the Virgin, the evangelists John and Mark, and the full-length depiction of St John Kalyvites, see Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 186-218, figs 110-112, 120, 121. On the Syrian Orthodox painter Filippou Goul, see M. Chatzidakis, "Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ τὴν Ἀλωση (1450-1830)", 1, Athens 1987, 229 and E. Drakopoulou, "Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ τὴν Ἀλωση (1450-1830)", 3, Athens 2010, 223.

⁵⁰ Located on the outskirts of Kalochorio, Limassol prefecture. The comparison with the scene of the Washing of the Feet is noteworthy. Regardless, the scenes in Saint Mamas diverge in the choice of architectural backdrop and the spatial arrangement of the figures. Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 256-255.

⁵¹ Professor Nikolaos Gioles proposes a dating in the early 16th century. According to N. Gioles the latest point to which they could be dated is the transition to the 16th century (1500-1505), while simultaneously displaying 15th-century trends.

⁵² Depictions of helmet-wearers, a reference to the crusaders in Cypriot monuments of this period, see Garidis, *Μεταβυζαντινὴ ζωγραφικὴ*, op.cit. (n. 40), 58. Chotzakoglou, "Διεσδύοντας στην παλαιολόγειο μνημειακὴ ζωγραφικὴ της Κύπρου", op.cit. (n. 4), 40.

⁵³ Cf. the frescoes in the church of the Archangel Michael in Pedoula. Perdakis, *Ο ναός του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ*, op.cit. (n. 48), figs on p. 50, 53, 54, 82.

The dedication of the church: the veneration of St Mavra in Cyprus

There is a degree of confusion in modern scholarship⁵⁴ regarding the identification of St Mavra as either the wife of St Timothy⁵⁵ or a local saint of the same name who was martyred in Cyprus in the Early Christian period, or even a local holy woman. In modern ecclesiastical hagiographical publications on the lives of Sts Timothy and Mavra, there are references to the church under examination as being dedicated to a local holy woman named Mavra⁵⁶. According to local traditions, this St Mavra was from a village neighboring Koilani, Pera Pedi, and settled in Koilani at the site where the church was later built, seeking to abandon worldly affairs and dedicate herself to God. However, in hagiographical texts St Mavra is also referenced as one of the 40 women martyrs of Heraclea in Thrace, who were martyred during the reign of Licinius⁵⁷. There are no other references in the hagiographical sources.

According to official state property registers, 34 toponyms and at least 13 churches dedicated to the saint have been documented⁵⁸. The cult of the married couple of martyrs or of St Timothy by himself are not nearly as widespread⁵⁹. Additionally, in Cypriot painted monuments of

⁵⁴ The issue of the dedication of the church to another St Mavra is discussed by Archimandrite Photios Joachim, *Οἱ ἅγιοι μάρτυρες καὶ ὁμολογητὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 6), 403-404. Furthermore, this conflation is also evident in modern ecclesiastical hagiographical publications that, despite describing the lives of the two saints, Timothy and Mavra, provide information on another, local St Mavra. According to the local traditions, the latter saint was from a village neighboring Koilani, Pera Pedi, and settled in Koilani at the site where the church was later built, seeking to abandon worldly affairs and dedicate herself to God.

⁵⁵ F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, I, Brussels 1957, 306: 1848z-1849. Timothy and Mavra were married and were martyred during the reign of Arrianos.

⁵⁶ Raptopoulos, *Βίος, Μαρτύριον καὶ Θαύματα*, op.cit. (n. 6), mainly 45-46, with earlier references.

⁵⁷ I would like to extend my warm thanks for the reference to Professor Alexandros Alexakis. F. Van Ortoy – H. Delehay – A. Poncelet – P. Peeters – C. Von Vorst (eds), "Saints de Trace et de Mésie", *AnBoll* 31 (1912), 194-207.

⁵⁸ M. Christodoulou – K. Konstantinidis, *A complete Gazetteer of Cyprus*, I, Nicosia 1987, 15, 16.

⁵⁹ Only a few churches on the island are dedicated to St Timothy. Official registers of monuments mention only one church, in Kato

the Byzantine period, the saintly couple does not appear to have been depicted together frequently. A salient example is the narthex of the Virgin Phorbiotissa in Asinou (1332/33)⁶⁰, while in an earlier monument, the church of the Virgin in Moutoula (1280), St Mavra is depicted without Timothy in the same composition with other saints and the most popular saintly couple of Cyprus, Andronicus and Athanasia⁶¹. The veneration of St Mavra without St Timothy appears to have been widely disseminated throughout Cyprus and is observable from the Byzantine period onwards⁶². Among the Byzantine monuments dedicated to her, of particular note is the Early Christian funerary chapel with 10th-century frescoes, the rock-hewn church east of Kyrenia, at Chrysokava⁶³. The 7th-century basilica located at “Aghia Mavri” in Alassa, Limassol prefecture, reconstructed in the 12th-13th century, may also be connected with the Early Christian cult of the saint⁶⁴.

Lefkara, Christodoulou – Konstantinidis, *A complete Gazetteer*, op.cit. (n. 58), 59.

⁶⁰ Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 136.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 328, 500.

⁶² Father Photios Joachim, “Ἡ ἁγία Μαύρα τῆς Κύπρου”, *Μεγάλη Ορθόδοξη Χριστιανική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, 11, Athens 2014, 286-287.

⁶³ There are numerous quarries in the region. This is a funerary church with a natural stone roof, arcosolia and rock-hewn burial chambers. See G. Sotiriou, *Τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Κύπρου. 1. Λεύκωμα*, Athens 1935, 1. Early Christian cemeteries, 2-4. An early Christian funerary chapel dedicated to St Mavra, with 10th-century wall paintings, is extant. For a ground plan of the chapel, see Sotiriou, op.cit., 3, figs 1, 2. A. Papageorgiou, “Recently discovered wall paintings in 10th-11th century churches of Cyprus”, *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines, Bucharest 6-12 September 1971*, III, Bucharest 1976, 412-413. Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 3), 451-454. A. Papageorgiou, “Λαξευτὰ ἀσκηταριὰ καὶ μοναστήρια τῆς Κύπρου”, *Επετηρίδα Κέντρου Μελετῶν Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Κύκκου* 4 (1999), 52-53. A. Papageorgiou, *Ἡ χριστιανικὴ τέχνη στὴν κατεχόμενη Κύπρο*, Nicosia 2010, 59. According to Archimandrite Ph. Joachim (*Οἱ ἅγιοι μάρτυρες καὶ ὁμολογητὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου*, op.cit. [n. 6], 406), this could be the first instance of the cult of the saint in Cyprus.

⁶⁴ The site is known as “Mavri”, not Mavra, though this is due to verbal alteration, as according to the testimony of the excavator himself, there was an icon of St Mavra within this three-aisled basilica. The inhabitants of the region referred to the monument as “the church of Saint Mavra”. No archaeological evidence relevant to the cult of the saint has yet been uncovered, however the toponym in combination with the local tradition are crucial indicators.

However, no hagiographical texts, such as synaxaria, lives, etc. are extant. The only written testimony regarding the cult of St Mavra in Cyprus is provided by the travelers who visited the monument in the 15th, 16th and 18th centuries, who mention that they paid their respects to her relic⁶⁵. This may be a conflation of a local Mavra with St Mavra, wife of St Timothy. This is also supported by the fact that the local community refers to the church as Saint Mavra in Koilani, and not the church of Saints Timothy and Mavra⁶⁶. The dedication of a church to St Mavra in the 12th or 13th century, during the period of Latin rule, might be connected with the dissemination of the cult of other female saints, such as St Marina the Great Martyr,

Architecturally, it is a complex of two clusters of buildings and a cemetery, located to the east of the basilica. This was an important Proto-Byzantine settlement that was, however, soon abandoned. P. Flourentzos (ed.), *Excavations in the Kouris Valley*, II, *The basilica of Alassa*, Department of Antiquities, Nicosia 1996, 1-37.

⁶⁵ In 1480, Pierre de Vermon (Pierre Barbatre), during his voyage to the Holy Land, toured Cyprus and reported the existence of the relic of St Mavra, which exuded a perfumed scent, similarly to the relics of Sts Catherine and Nicholas. See G. Grivaud, *Excerpta Cypria Nova*, I, *Voyageurs occidentaux à Chypre au XVème siècle*, Nicosia 1990, 100. The relevant excerpt does not mention the region of Koilani. See regarding Photios Joachim, *Οἱ ἅγιοι μάρτυρες καὶ ὁμολογητὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 6), 406. A reference from the following (16th) century, by Étienne de Lusignan (1537-1590), mentions St Mavra as the wife of St Timothy, and that the martyred couple lived in the wider region (he mentions the village of Pera Pedi as their home), adding that they were buried in the church of Saint Mavra. Also, according to his testimony, very few relics of the saint remained in the village of Koilani (Chillany), with many having been dispersed throughout the island, Etienne de Lusignan, *Description de toute l'isle de Cypre, et des Roys, Princes, et Seigneurs, Paris 1580*, ed. Th. Papadopoulos, Nicosia 2004, 13.56b-57a. The 18th-century monk Bazil Barsky mentions paying his respects to the relics (“κρανίον καὶ ὀδόντας”, “the skull and teeth”) of St Mavra, see Stylianou, “Αἱ περιηγήσεις τοῦ Βάρσκι”, op.cit. (n. 11), 82.

⁶⁶ It must be noted that in cases of churches dedicated to martyred married couples, such as Andronicus and Athanasia, who were also widely venerated in Cyprus, the names of both are included in the church names and toponyms. Notable examples are the Old Metropolis of Limassol, the church of Saints Andronicus and Athanasia. According to the state property registers, there are only two churches (in Limassol and Rizokarpaso) and a toponym (in the latter) named after St Athanasia, see Christodoulou – Konstantinidis, *A complete Gazetteer*, op.cit. (n. 10), 6.

during the same period⁶⁷. Also contemporary is the church of the Virgin in Moutoula, in which, as mentioned above, St Mavra is depicted together with other female saints. It is no coincidence that the church of the saint in Alassa was renovated during this period. The evidence indicates that the cult of St Mavra occupied a special position in Cypriot society. Regardless of whether she was the well-known wife of St Timothy who was martyred together with him in Egypt, or some other homonymous saint, it is safe to say that a long-held and notable religious tradition regarding her cult was established on Cyprus. This is confirmed by the numerous monuments, together with the descriptions of travelers during the Late Post-Byzantine period. The spread of the cult of St Mavra was likely due to the dissemination of hagiographical texts and illustrated saints' cycles in the Late-Byzantine period, mainly after the late 13th century⁶⁸. It was also during this period that synaxaria of new saints, such as St Theodora of Arta (1270), St Nicholas the Younger, who was martyred at Nyssa (1280-1290), the ascetic St Matrona of Chios (14th century) et al., made their first, timid appearances⁶⁹. The remarkably

limited number of hagiographical texts on holy women compared to those of male saints in the Byzantine literature of this period quite likely did not affect Cyprus, which was between Byzantium and the West⁷⁰. This might also be the case with the diffusion of the cult of St Mavra without Timothy on Lefkada, and the establishment or re-establishment of the monastery of the same name, which existed prior to 1475⁷¹. Also, between 1426 and 1453 Leontios Machairas wrote his history of Cyprus, in which he refers to the names of great saints from and associated with the island. This documentation connected the saints with Cyprus and contributed to their veneration on the island⁷².

Conclusions

The wall paintings of Saint Mavra in Koilani are part of the renovative trend, evident throughout Cyprus, that was precipitated by pivotal historical events in the second half of the 15th century and lasted for almost a century. In particular, the reconstitution of the Church of Cyprus following the proclamation of the union of the two Churches at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1439), the crucial presence of Princess Helena Palaiologina (1442), the wife of John II of Cyprus⁷³, the concession of

⁶⁷ Crusader art prominently features depictions of St Marina. The saint was widely worshipped in Cyprus, with her relics being kept in Cypriot monasteries and many churches and toponyms bearing her name, D. Mouriki, "The cult of Cypriot saints in medieval Cyprus as attested by church decorations and icon painting", *The Sweet Land of Cyprus. Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (Birmingham, March 1991)*, eds A. Bryer – G. Georgialidis, Nicosia 1993, 233-277. D. Mouriki, "The Wall Paintings of the Church of the Panagia at Moutoullas, Cyprus", *Byzanz und der Westen. Studien zur Kunst des europäischen Mittelalters*, ed. I. Hutter, Vienna 1984, 197. On the dissemination of the cult of St Marina in Crete during the period of Latin rule, see J. Albani, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του ναού της Αγίας Μαρίνας στον Μουρνέ της Κρήτης. Ένας άγνωστος βιογραφικός κύκλος της αγίας Μαρίνας", *DChAE* 17 (1993-1994), 211-222, mainly 213-215.

⁶⁸ A different kind of hagiography began to flourish in the late 13th century, when interest was renewed in the writing of texts about the saints of old, many of them martyrs of the early Christian era, whereas others were heroes of the struggle against iconoclasm, nuns, monks etc. Such texts indicate a revival of the cult of these saints in the final centuries of Byzantium. In contrast to the widespread dissemination of the saints of old, the composition of vitae of new heroes of Orthodoxy lagged behind. A.-M. Talbot, "Hagiography in Late Byzantium (1204-1453)", *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, I, *Periods and Places*, ed. St. Efthymiadis, London – New York 2011, 173-180.

⁶⁹ Talbot, "Hagiography", op.cit. (n. 68), 188-189.

⁷⁰ The Byzantine writers of the Palaiologan period seem to have been averse to the composition of female saints' lives, in contrast with their counterparts in the West, where the cult and composition of lives of female saints were widespread from the 13th and 14th centuries. D. Weinstein – R. M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1730*, Chicago 1982, 220. Both the female presence and specific references to women are limited in Byzantine sources, see regarding J. Herrin, *Women and Empire in Byzantium. Unrivalled Influence*, Princeton, N. J. 2013, 14-38.

⁷¹ M. Lamprinou, "Το μοναστήρι της Αγίας Μαύρας στη Λευκάδα", *Proceedings of the Conference: The monasteries of Lefkas*, ed. Ch. Papadatou-Giannopoulou, Athens 2010, 53-58.

⁷² A. Weyl Carr, "Sinai and Cyprus: Holy Mountain, Holy Isle", *Approaching the Holy Mountain. Art and Liturgy at St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai* (Cursor Mundi 1), eds Sharon E. J. Gerstel – Robert S. Nelson, Turnhout, Belgium 2010, 457.

⁷³ Daughter of the despot Theodoros II Palaiologos and granddaughter of emperor Manuel II. She was married in 1442, Garidis, *Μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική*, op.cit. (n. 40), 53-54. This Byzantine queen bestowed privileges on the Cypriot Orthodox Church and made efforts to bolster the Greek element of the island. She made

the Cypriot throne to the Venetians by Catherine Cornaro (1489)⁷⁴, all contributed to the economic recovery and bolstered the Orthodox faith in Cyprus⁷⁵. A number of monuments dated to the late 15th century display a return to older models, a notable example being Saint Mavra in Koilani⁷⁶. This was the period shortly before the Venetians gradually established their political and cultural dominance. Venetian rule gave prominence to a new, “Italo-Byzantine” style based on the amalgamation of Byzantine and Venetian painting⁷⁷. The widespread diffusion of the cult of female saints in the West during the 13th-15th centuries, concurrently with the development of the monument under examination, encouraged the already existing Cypriot cult of St Mavra. There appears to have been a renowned pilgrimage site of the

crucial donations to the Orthodox monastery of Mangana in the suburbs of Nicosia. She also encouraged the restoration of older monuments and the construction of new ones during her reign.

⁷⁴ In 1489 the sole remaining heir of John II, the Venetian-descended Catherine Cornaro, abdicated and ceded the island to the Venetians. Cyprus would remain under the control of the Serene Republic of Venice until 1570/71, Gioles, *Ἡ χριστιανικὴ τέχνη στὴν Κύπρο*, op.cit. (n. 3), 182.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, 302.

⁷⁶ The church of the Archangel Michael in Pedoula, the church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati, the church of Saint Mamas in Louvaras et al.

⁷⁷ Gioles, *Ἡ χριστιανικὴ τέχνη στὴν Κύπρο*, op.cit. (n. 3), 187.

saint, widely mentioned in travelers’ texts. The donors’ intention to emphasize the cult of Mavra explains the utilization of biographic cycle scenes referring to her martyrdom, excluding her husband’s. The existence of the earliest *vita* icon (late-12th – early-13th century) of the saintly couple, in addition to their depiction in the fresco, does not diminish the role of the cult of Mavra in Koilani. The painters evidently used a now lost *vita* icon as their iconographic template, and selected a biographic cycle modified to honor only St Mavra. This preference is evident even to the present day, with the monument continuing to be a place of pilgrimage exclusively for Mavra. The church of Saint Mavra in Koilani seems to have been, already from its foundation, a place of active worship that underwent successive renovations up to the 19th century. The 15th century, when her fame became more widespread, witnessed the reorganization of her pilgrimage destination in Koilani. During this period, the initial, 11th-12th-century church was transformed into an organized site for the cult of St Mavra, a fact confirmed by travelers’ diaries. The monument, a living witness to the cult trends in both the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine periods, continues up to the present day to be the saint’s most popular pilgrimage site in Cyprus.

Illustration credits

Personal Photographic Archive of Katerina Kontopanagou.

Η ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΥΡΑ ΣΤΟ ΚΟΙΛΑΝΙ ΛΕΜΕΣΟΥ: ΛΑΤΡΕΙΑ, ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ, ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΕΣ

Το χωριό Κοιλάνι βρίσκεται σε απόσταση 36 χλμ. βορειοδυτικά της Λεμεσού. Η ιστορία του χωριού συνδέεται με την εγκατάσταση του αγίου Θεράποντα στην περιοχή, όπως παραδίδεται στην αναφορά του Λεοντίου Μαχαιρά. Στις παρυφές του οικισμού δεσπόζει ο ναός της Αγίας Μαύρας (Εικ. 1, 2). Παρουσιάζεται για πρώτη φορά το μνημείο στο σύνολό του (ιστορία, αρχιτεκτονικά δεδομένα, τοιχογραφίες) και επιχειρείται ολοκληρωμένη ανάλυση καθώς και ερμηνεία του τοιχογραφικού διακόσμου (εικονογραφία, ιδιαιτερότητες, ζωγραφικό ύφος, χρονολόγηση), σε συνδυασμό με το ιδιαίτερο ζήτημα της προβολής της ομώνυμης αγίας στην Κύπρο και τη σημασία του προσκυνημάτος στην τοπική κοινωνία. Πρόκειται για μικρών διαστάσεων μνημείο που αρχιτεκτονικά ανήκει στους συνεπτυγμένους σταυροειδείς εγγεγραμμένους ναούς. Η αρχική αρχιτεκτονική του φάση ανάγεται στα μέσα του 11ου ή το αργότερο μέχρι τα μέσα του 12ου αιώνα. Ο ταφικός χαρακτήρας του ναού, που υποδεικνύεται από τα αρκοσόλια στον βόρειο και τον νότιο τοίχο, επιβεβαιώθηκε και από τις αρχαιολογικές τομές κατά τη διάρκεια των εργασιών συντήρησής του 2017 (Εικ. 4). Ενδιαφέρον στοιχείο σχετικά με την αρχιτεκτονική και την ιστορία του μνημείου παρουσιάζει η ένδειξη ύπαρξης υποδαπέδιου πέτρινου συστήματος διοχέτευσης νερού. Το νερό αυτό, μάλιστα, σε σχέδιο του Άγγλου αρχιτέκτονα περιηγητή George Jeffery (αρχές 20ού αιώνα), ο οποίος το αναφέρει ως αγίασμα, φαίνεται ότι ρέει από τον ανατολικό τοίχο του ναού.

Εσωτερικά του κυρίως ναού, στον νότιο τοίχο, κάτω από τις υπάρχουσες τοιχογραφίες (Εικ. 8) και στον εξωτερικό βόρειο τοίχο σώζονται σπαράγματα παλαιότερου τοιχογραφικού στρώματος, πιθανώς του αρχικού. Η συνοχή και η οργανωμένη ανάπτυξη του τοιχογραφικού διακόσμου μάς επιτρέπουν να προβούμε σε παρατηρήσεις επί του εικονογραφικού προγράμματος. Η θέση των βιογραφικών σκηνών στον νότιο τοίχο, ακριβώς έξω από το ιερό Βήμα, και η συμμετρική

διάταξη αποκαλύπτουν ικανούς ζωγράφους (Εικ. 4, 9). Η επιλογή των συγκεκριμένων επεισοδίων υποδεικνύει έμπνευση από κάποια αντίστοιχη βιογραφική φορητή εικόνα, πιθανώς του 13ου αιώνα. Εικονογραφικό ενδιαφέρον προκαλούν στοιχεία του τοιχογραφικού διακόσμου, τα οποία προβάλλουν εμφαντικά την έννοια της τριαδικότητας και αποτελούν απόηχο της ησυχαστικής έριδας. Εικονογραφικές λεπτομέρειες, όπως η δυσανάλογα μεγάλου μεγέθους μορφή του Κόσμου στη σκηνή της Πεντηκοστής, ως έξωθεν μαρτυρία της θεοφάνειας, και η απεικόνιση της δόξας σε τρία επίπεδα με πολλαπλές ακτίνες στον Χριστό Εμμανουήλ ενισχύουν την ερμηνεία αυτή (Εικ. 6).

Παρατηρώντας τις τοιχογραφίες, είναι εμφανές ότι τόσο στις μεμονωμένες μορφές όσο και στις σκηνές χρησιμοποιείται λαδοπράσινος προπλασμός και εν γένει ψυχροί τόνοι στο πλάσιμο των γυμνών μερών. Ωστόσο, κατά την τεχνοτροπική ανάλυση των προσώπων επισημαίνεται διαφορά ύφους στον τοιχογραφικό διάκοσμο. Διαχωρίζουμε δύο διαφορετικά ζωγραφικά στρώματα. Η πρώτη ομάδα μορφών, με βάση τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις, θα μπορούσε να χρονολογηθεί το αργότερο στο τέλος του 14ου ή στις αρχές του 15ου αιώνα (Εικ. 10, 11). Το δεύτερο ζωγραφικό ύφος το εντοπίζουμε στον βιογραφικό κύκλο αλλά και στον υπόλοιπο τοιχογραφικό διάκοσμο (Εικ. 4, 5, 12-15). Παρόμοια αντίληψη απόδοσης μορφών, δόμησης σκηνών και απόδοσης του χώρου παρατηρούμε στις τοιχογραφίες στον ναό του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ στον Πεδουλά (1474), στον ναό του Τιμίου Σταυρού στο Αγιασμάτι (1494) και στον ναό του Αγίου Μάμα στον Λουβαρά. Οι ζωγράφοι δημιουργούν ένα συντηρητικό τοιχογραφικό σύνολο με εικονογραφικές επιδράσεις παλαιολόγιας περιόδου. Η φάση αυτή συνδέεται με τις διαδοχικές ανακαινίσεις τον 15ο αιώνα, όπως μαρτυρούν τα αρχιτεκτονικά δεδομένα. Οι δύο διαφορετικές τοιχογραφικές φάσεις επιβεβαιώνονται όχι μόνο στιλιστικά αλλά και στρωματογραφικά. Στα

φθαρμένα σημεία των τοιχογραφιών που τοποθετούμε στην πρώτη φάση, διακρίνεται διαφορετικό είδος υποστρώματος, σε σχέση με τη μεταγενέστερη φάση των μέσων του 15ου αιώνα.

Σχετικά με την αφιέρωση του μνημείου, στη σύγχρονη έρευνα υπάρχουν διαφορετικές απόψεις. Η μνήμη της Μαύρας μεμονωμένης φαίνεται να έχει μεγάλη διάδοση στην Κύπρο και μαρτυρείται από τη βυζαντινή περίοδο. Είτε πρόκειται για κάποια αγία Μαύρα τοπικής εμβέλειας, η οποία πιθανώς μαρτύρησε στην Κύπρο, είτε για τη σύζυγο του Τιμοθέου, στο Κοιλάνι προβάλλεται η Μαύρα. Αυτό αποδεικνύεται από την επιλογή των σκηνών στον βιογραφικό κύκλο, από τις μαρτυρίες των περιηγητών, από τον 15ο αιώνα και εξής, αλλά και από το γεγονός ότι στην σύγχρονη τοπική κοινωνία ο ναός αναφέρεται ως η Αγία Μαύρα στο Κοιλάνι και όχι ναός των Αγίων Τιμοθέου και Μαύρας.

Μπορούμε, ωστόσο, να υποστηρίξουμε ότι αναμφισβήτητα δημιουργήθηκε στην Κύπρο μια μακραίωνη λατρευτική παράδοση της αγίας με αξιοσημείωτες διαστάσεις, αποτυπωμένες σε έναν αρκετά μεγάλο αριθμό προσκυνημάτων ήδη από την παλαιοχριστιανική εποχή. Ο ναός της Αγίας Μαύρας στο Κοιλάνι φαίνεται ότι από την αρχή της ίδρυσής του ήταν ένας ζωντανός χώρος ευλάβειας με διαδοχικές ανακαινίσεις έως και τον 19ο αιώνα. Ο 15ος αιώνας, περίοδος εξάπλωσης της τιμής της αγίας στην Κύπρο αλλά και άλλων αγίων συνδεδεμένων με το νησί, όπως προκύπτει από το *Χρονικό* του Λεοντίου Μαχαιρά, προκάλεσε και την ανασυγκρότηση του συγκεκριμένου τόπου ευλάβειας στο Κοιλάνι.

*Αρχαιολόγος, PhD
kontkat@yahoo.gr*