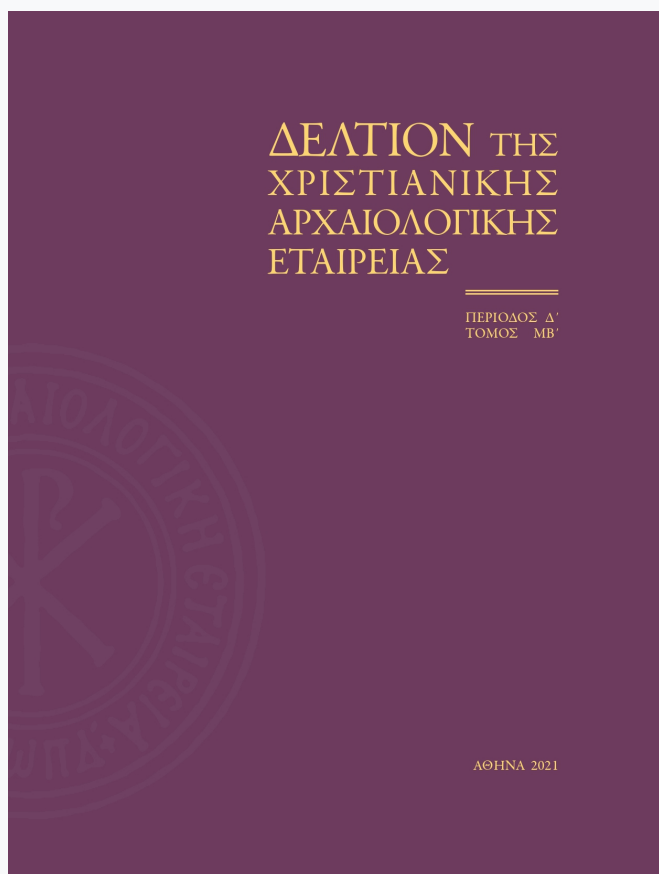


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Οι τοιχογραφίες στο καθολικό της μονής Αγίου Νεοφύτου: εικονογραφία, καλλιτεχνική ταυτότητα και ο κρητικός Θεοφάνης στη βενετική Κύπρο

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THE WALL-PAINTINGS IN THE KATHOLIKON OF THE SAINT NEOPHYTOS MONASTERY: ICONOGRAPHY, ARTISTIC IDENTITY, AND THE CRETAN THEOPHANIS IN VENETIAN CYPRUS

For Prof. Annemarie Weyl Carr

Η μελέτη των τοιχογραφιών του καθολικού της μονής του Αγίου Νεοφύτου στην Κύπρο και η προτεινόμενη απόδοσή τους στον κρητικό ζωγράφο Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά (π. 1485-†1559) αποτελούν το θέμα της εργασίας. Στον ναό η κρητική εικόνα της Παναγίας Εγκλειστριανής με δωρητή τον ηγούμενο Ιωακείμ Β' (μνείες 1512, †1521) υπογράφεται από τον Θεοφύλακτο, ο οποίος προτείνεται εδώ να ταυτιστεί με το ομώνυμο μέλος (μνείες 1509 και 1517) της οικογένειας ζωγράφων Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά που δραύσαν στην Κρήτη. Κατόπιν σειράς συλλογισμών ο Θεοφύλακτος ταυτίζεται με τον Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά, ο οποίος, επιλέγοντας όνομα με το ίδιο αρχικό γράμμα του κοσμικού του ονόματος, είχε καρεί μοναχός προ του 1527, οπότε υπέγραψε τοιχογραφίες στα Μετέωρα.

This paper deals with the wall paintings in the katholikon of the Saint Neophytos monastery, Cyprus and attributes them to the Cretan artist Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas (ca. 1485-†1559). A Cretan icon in the church, the Virgin "Enkleistriani", commissioned by abbot Ioakeim II (documented in 1512, †1521), is signed by Theophylaktos. He is here proposed to be identified with a homonymous member (documented in 1509 and 1517) of the Strelitzas-Bathas family of painters active in Crete. Furthermore, following a series of arguments the said Theophylaktos is identified with Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas, who, selecting a monastic name with the same initial as his secular name, was already a monk by 1527, the year he signed frescoes in Meteora.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

16ος αιώνας, μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική, κρητική ζωγραφική, βενετική περίοδος Κύπρου, κύκλος Ακαθίστου Ύμνου, ζωγράφος Θεοφάνης Στρελίτζας-Μπαθάς, ζωγράφος Ιωσήφ Χούρης, καθολικό μονής Αγίου Νεοφύτου, Κύπρος.

Keywords

16th century; post-Byzantine painting; Cretan painting; Venetian period in Cyprus; cycle of the Akathistos Hymn; painter Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas; painter Iossif Chouris; Saint Neophytos Monastery katholikon; Cyprus.

The Monastery of Saint Neophytos, located in a mountainous area of Paphos near the village of Tala, has its beginnings in a natural rocky cave inhabited by the monk Neophytos the Recluse. It was gradually enlarged, and transformed into his hermitage (*Enkleistra*) with

a small chapel, and eventually founded as a monastery in 1170, which became a hearth of religious life and spirituality in Cyprus already during the saint's lifetime (ca. 1134-1219). Thanks to the fame of its charismatic *ktitor* and first abbot, the monastery, adorned with fine Byzantine wall-paintings in Neophytos's cell and in the

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** I wish to express my sincere thanks to Maria Kazanaki-Lappa, Ephor emerita of Byzantine Antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture for our substantial discussion concerning the sixteenth century wall-paintings in the Saint Neophytos monastery, as well as to Prof.

Eleni Deliyanni-Doris for her stimulating questions and to Prof. em. Nikolaos Gkioles for his useful observations. I also thank Mrs Nina Baka and my students Dr Anthi Filidou, Vasso Klotsa, Stavroula Kokkini, Andreas Konstantinou, Chara Olympiou, Maria Vavva, Sophia Verouti and Dr Vicky Zorba for their help at various moments.



Fig. 1. The Holy Monastery of Saint Neophytos. The katholikon, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. View from the east.

chapel of the Holy Cross with its narthex)¹, developed into a pilgrimage site for the local Orthodox population. Its gradual expansion resulted in a large and complex foundation. Although the evolution of this monastic community during the Lusignan and the Venetian period of Cyprus's history (1191-1483 and 1483-1571, respectively) cannot be followed in detail, it appears that the monastery experienced a new period of prosperity

in the mid-fifteenth century, when its yearly revenue was about two hundred ducats, and in the early sixteenth century, when it possessed several dependencies².

The katholikon dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Construction and decoration

The present katholikon (or principal church) of the monastery is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, especially commemorating her Dormition on the fifteenth of August.

¹ C. Mango – E. J. W. Hawkins, “The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and Its Wall-paintings”, *DOP* 20 (1966), 136-206. S. Tomeković, “Ermitage de Paphos: décors peints pour Néophyte le reclus”, *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance: Textes, images et monuments*, eds C. Jolivet-Lévy – M. Kaplan – J.-P. Sordini, Paris 1993, 151-171. A. Stylianou – J. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus. Treasures of Byzantine Art*, London 1997 (1985), 351-369.

² I. P. Tsiknopoullos, *Ο Άγιος Νεόφυτος και η ιερά αυτού μονή*, Ktima, Paphos 1955, 52. Mango – Hawkins, “Hermitage”, op.cit. (n. 1), 129-130. Also, I. P. Tsiknopoullos, *Ιστορία της Εκκλησίας Πάφου*, Nicosia 1971, 240-246.

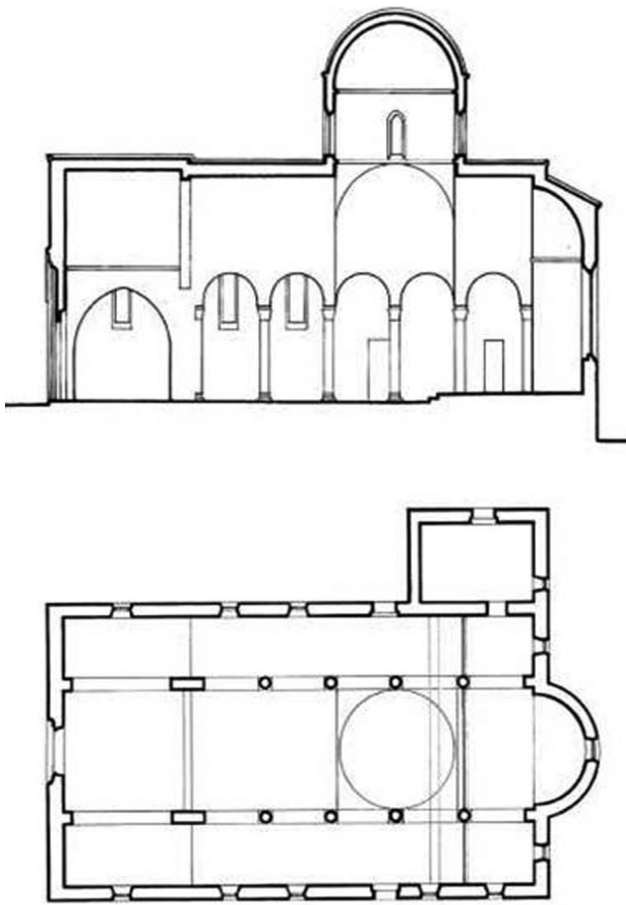


Fig. 2. The Holy Monastery of Saint Neophytos. The katholikon, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Plan and longitudinal section.

Various dates have been proposed for its construction, with the beginning of the sixteenth century as the most prevalent³, during the Venetian rule on Cyprus, which

³ The known monk and traveller from Kiev Vassilij Barskij opted (1736) for the middle of the 15th century (and observed similarities with the katholikon of the Saint Mamas monastery at Morphou); this dating, followed by Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 48-53, is now abandoned, see T. Papacostas, "An Exceptional Structure in a Conventional Setting: Preliminary Observations about the Katholikon of Saint Neophytos (Paphos, Cyprus)", *Caterina Cornaro, Last Queen of Cyprus and Daughter of Venice (International Conference, Venice, 16-18 September 2010)*, [Proceedings], eds C. Syndikus – S. Rogge, Münster 2013, 294 note 6. For the 16th century dating see already D. G. Hogarth, *Devia Cypria. Notes of an Archaeological Journey in Cyprus in 1888*, London 1889 (repr. Cambridge 2012), chapter I, 1-52. I. Ch. Chatzioannou, *Ιστορία και έργα Νεοφύτου πρεσβυτέρου μοναχού*

lasted from 1489 until its tragic end in 1571. This large and ambitious building (Fig. 1) points to a thriving monastic community, to the leadership of an energetic abbot, and to a patron disposing of considerable funds. A significant role in the erection of the katholikon was apparently played by the monk Neophytos, who is designated as "the new *ktitor*" of the monastery of Saint Neophytos in an *enthymesis* note written on a manuscript codex of the monastery, now in Paris. This note records the death of the said monk Neophytos, which occurred on 21 December 1512. It also states that the abbot at that time was the hieromonk Ioakeim (Ioakeim II), who died on 11 April 1521⁴. In addition, a monk also named Neophytos is mentioned in the inscription referring to scenes painted in 1503 by an unknown Cypriot master in the church of the Holy Cross in the rock-cut *Enkleistra*⁵, the original

καὶ ἐγκλείστου, Alexandria 1914, 75-77. Mango – Hawkins, "Hermitage", op.cit. (n. 1), 129-130, 203 note 211. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches* op.cit. (n. 1), 380 and eidem, "Ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῆς Φραγκοκρατίας (1191-1570)", *Ιστορία τῆς Κύπρου*, ed. Th. Papadopoulos, 5: 1229-1408, Nicosia 1996, 1342 note 346 (with a date before 1512). A. Papageorgiou, "Νεοφύτου Ἁγίου μοναστήρι", *Μεγάλη Κυπριακὴ Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, 10, Nicosia 1989, 212-213. Idem, *Ἱερὰ Μητρόπολις Πάφου. Ιστορία καὶ Τέχνη*, Nicosia 1996, 82. Papacostas, "An Exceptional Structure", op.cit. (n. 3), 293-308, where earlier mentions are revised and new observations are made.

⁴ Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 54. Ioakeim II is distinguished from his homonymous predecessor, Ioakeim I, who was the abbot around 1450, see ibidem, 52. The codex is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris. gr. 1461, Colbert 398, fol. 35v). For the *enthymesis* note see J. Darrouzès, "Les manuscrits originaux de Chypre à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris", *REB* 8 (1950), 187.

⁵ For the scenes: Mango – Hawkins, "Hermitage", op.cit. (n. 1), 140, 200, 202. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 366, 380. Inscription pictured in Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 133, fig. 78. Idem, *The Holy Monastery of St. Neophytos. History and Art. A Brief Guide*, Nicosia 1999 (repr. 2004), 13 and 8, fig. 2. Transcriptions of it in Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 54 (partial). I. Eliadis, "Ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Ἁγίου Νεοφύτου στὴν ἀνάπτυξη τῆς κυπριαγεννησιακῆς ζωγραφικῆς. Τοιχογραφίες στὸ Καθολικὸ καὶ τὴν Ἐγκλείστρα", *Πρακτικὰ Ἀ' Διεθνoῦς Συνεδρίου Ἁγίου Νεόφυτος ὁ Ἐγκλείστος. Ιστορία – Θεολογία – Πολιτισμὸς*, Paphos 2010, 395. "Kyr" Neophytos, "worthless" and "humble monk" in the inscription, was certainly prosperous, and before 1503 "out of great desire" (*διὰ πολλοῦ πόθου*) he provided funds for the partial



Fig. 3. The Holy Monastery of Saint Neophytos. Interior of the katholikon, dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

hearth of the monastery. The coincidence of the names and the proximity of dates points to the identification of

redcoration of the old church of the *Enkleistra* –and probably for the construction of the new katholikon (see below, notes 83 and 92). An icon of St Neophytos (127×53 cm) in the monastery’s Museum, dated to ca. 1500, has a fragmentary inscription mentioning the “humble servant” Neophytos, who can be identified with the “humble monk” of the 1503 inscription, see *Cyprus the Holy Island. Icons Through the Centuries, 10th-20th Century* (exhibition catalogue: London, The Hellenic Centre, Nov. – Dec. 2000), ed. S. Sophocleous, Nicosia 2000, no. 11 on p. 128-131 (G. Philotheou, who also makes this connection; he further hypothesizes that Neophytos was also the abbot of the monastery, although he is not recorded as such in the available evidence).

the two homonymous monks as one and the same person. Furthermore, the characterisation “new *ktitor*” for the monk Neophytos in the *enthymesis* suggests that he was patron of the construction of the katholikon, which must have been completed about the time of his death (December 1512)⁶. Certainly this major endeavour was

⁶ The erection of a new church dedicated to the Holy Cross was St Neophytos’s project, referred to in his Testament (“Τυπική δι-αθήκη”, 1167, 1204), indeed, he had laid foundations for it near the torrent (έν τῷ χειμάρρῳ). See Chatziioannou, *Ιστορία καὶ ἔργα Νεοφύτου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 30-31, 75. I. P. Tsiknopoullos (ed.), *Κυπριακά Τυπικά*, Nicosia 1969, 90, verses 20-25. I. E. Stefanis (ed.), *Ἀγίου Νεοφύτου τοῦ Ἐγκλείστου Συγγράμματα*, 2: *Τυπική*



Fig. 4. The holy sanctuary, semi-dome of the apse. Enthroned Virgin and Child flanked by two angels.

in collaboration with the abbot, who in December 1512 (and probably before) was the hieromonk Ioakeim II.

This church, the focal point for public worship in the historic monastery, hosts the sacred relic of St Neophytos's body, translated from the saint's burial place at the nearby *Enkleistra* on 28 September 1750. The building is a large three-aisled, barrel vaulted and domed basilica (internal dimensions approx. 26.00×11.00 m with the apse)⁷ (Figs 1, 2). The two side aisles communicate with the wider nave through arched colonnades each with four columns and one pillar towards the west part of the building, crowned by Corinthianesque capitals (Fig. 3). The interior, once covered with frescoes, has suffered extensive losses over the years, due to earthquakes and other causes,

especially between 1585 and 1611⁸. Despite the damage, the restored monument still preserves a good part of its wall-paintings, which were conserved by the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus between 1980 and 1984⁹. The present paper offers some comments on the iconography and meaning, the style and technique of this important set of wall-paintings¹⁰. My aim is a further understanding of their

διαθήκη, Paphos 1998, 1-69. It is unrecorded why the site and the dedication changed when the katholikon was erected about three centuries later, see Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 49, 52. Mango – Hawkins, "Hermitage", op.cit. (n. 1), 131 note 50. Papageorgiou, "Νεοφύτου Αγίου μοναστήρι", op.cit. (n. 3), 211; for a hypothesis on the dedication see note 92.

⁷ For a plan and section of the church see G. Sotiriou, *Τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Κύπρου*. Α': *Λεύκωμα*, Athens 1935, fig. 41 and pl. 56. Papacostas, "An Exceptional Structure", op.cit. (n. 3), 296, fig. 4.

⁸ For the vicissitudes of the monument see Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 59. Mango – Hawkins, "Hermitage", op.cit. (n. 1), 130. Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95, 134-142. In 1585, under Ottoman rule, the possessions of the monastery were confiscated. In 1611, during the term of Abbot Leontios and when the bishop of Paphos was Christodoulos, the monastery was made a *stavropegion*, which was confirmed in 1631 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Kyrillos Loukaris.

⁹ See RDAC, 1980, 21 and figs 25, 26; 1981, 21; 1983, 23; 1984, 24 and figs 27, 28. My sincere thanks go to Mr Giorgos Philotheou, Ephor of Antiquities (Department of Antiquities of Cyprus), who kindly offered me this information and sent me these four short Reports. I should clarify that the terms wall-paintings, murals, frescoes are used interchangeably in this paper. There is no information whether an additional *a secco* technique was applied in part, as with some 16th century wall-paintings.

¹⁰ I would like to extend my respect and heartfelt thanks to the



Fig. 5. Sanctuary, semi-cylinder of the apse, upper register, north half. The Communion of the Apostles.



Fig. 6. Sanctuary, semi-cylinder of the apse, lower register, north half. Officiating bishops.



Fig. 7. Sanctuary, semi-cylinder of the apse, upper register, south half. The Communion of the Apostles.



Fig. 8. Sanctuary, semi-cylinder of the apse, lower register, south half. Officiating bishops.

art, its origins and context, and the identity of the creator (no signature survives), on the basis of a combination of visual and archival evidence, while touching also upon questions of taste and religious painting in Venetian Cyprus.

General overview of the mural decoration

The surviving decoration preserves a part of the original cycles depicted¹¹. Reference is made below to selected themes only.

In the tripartite sanctuary an iconographic programme relevant to that part of an Orthodox church unfolds. High up in the semi-dome of the apse the Mother of God is represented sitting on an elaborate wood-carved throne, holding the Christ Child and flanked by two angels (Fig. 4) (the upper part of her figure and the angels are damaged). Below, on the half-cylinder, the decoration continues in two zones. In the upper zone is the Communion of the Apostles in two groups (administration of bread and wine by Christ, who is depicted twice), each group attended by an angel as deacon holding a *rhypidion* (liturgical fan) with an *hexapterygon* (Figs 5, 7); in the lower zone are six officiating bishops, larger than life-size, three at either side, holding inscribed scrolls and turned towards an altar at the centre (Figs 6, 8). They are from left to right, Sts Athanasios, Gregory

Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Saint Neophytos, His Grace Bishop of Chytroi Leontios, for his cordial welcome and for providing me with photographic material, which greatly facilitated my work. I also thank the fathers of the monastery, especially the late Archimandrite Alexios Enkleistriotis and the late Archimandrite Chariton Enkleistriotis for their kindness and help. The essence of this paper was presented at a Symposium in honour of the well known specialist on Cypriot art Prof. Annemarie Weyl Carr (Nicosia, Cyprus American Archaeological Institute, 19-21 May 2017).

¹¹ The frescoes have been partly reproduced and described by several researchers, see Sotiriou, *Τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα*, op.cit. (n. 7), pls 104-106. A. C. Indianos – G. H. Thomson, “Wall-paintings at St. Neophytos Monastery”, *Κυπρ. Σπουδ.* 3 (1940), 157-206. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 369-381. Eidem, “Ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη”, op.cit. (n. 3), 1342-1344. Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95-111. Ch. Christodoulidis, *Τετὰ Μονὴ Ἀγίου Νεοφύτου. Ιστορία καὶ Τέχνη*, Paphos 1996, 30-47. Eliadis, “Ἡ συμβολή”, op.cit. (n. 5), 389-415. Mango – Hawkins, “Hermitage”, op.cit. (n. 1), 203-204 (who date them ca. 1500). See also below (pp. 220-221, notes 50-60) for various attributions of these paintings.



Fig. 9. Sanctuary, east wall. The deacon Saint Lawrence.

the Theologian and John Chrysostom – and Basil the Great, Cyril of Alexandria and John the *Eleemon* or Almoner, the Cypriot patriarch of Alexandria. The prothesis conch, hewn into the wall, is occupied by the archdeacon St Stephen the First-martyr holding an incense box. Next, on the east wall of the sanctuary, is the image of Christ as Man of Sorrows¹² (extensively damaged) mourned by an

¹² It is called *Akra Tapeinosis* (Utter Humiliation) in relevant literature. The cross bears the abbreviated title *O BACIAEYC THC*



Fig. 10. Sanctuary, east wall, conch south of half-cylinder. Angel holding Christ, the Lamb of God.

angel flying in a starry sky. In the south of the apse the deacon St Lawrence appears, holding a candle and a barely-preserved gridiron, attribute of his martyrdom (Fig. 9). In a narrow conch, hewn into the wall, against a blue and red ground, a sorrowful angel in deacon's vestments holds outstretched a purple cloth embroidered

ΔΟΞΗC (The king of glory), as usual. The inscription *Apokathilosis* (=Deposition of Christ from the Cross), as is here, for this scene was widespread in post-Byzantine times. See also below, note 18.

with the image of Christ (Fig. 10). A bronze candelabrum with a lighted candle is nearby and an inscription refers to the symbolism of the representation. Angels with torches and a censer depicted nearby relate to the scene. A number of saints completed the decoration of the bema, as usual, but only a few of them survive, among them St Eleftherios, St Hypatios, and the popes of the early Christian period St Silvester (see below Fig. 22) (beneath St Lawrence) and St Leo.

In the nave or central aisle most of the frescoes are lost, as well as those of the dome.

In the south aisle, on the barrel vault, were scenes from the cycle of the life of the Virgin, of which only three are partly preserved: the Offerings brought to the Temple by Joachim and Anne and their refusal due to the couple's sterility (Fig. 11), the Departure of the couple from the Temple, and the Prayer of Joachim in the wilderness, where an angel announces to him that he and his wife will have a child (Fig. 12). In a zone underneath, on the south wall, there were other scenes. From these, only a fragment escaped destruction preserving two inscriptions at different height, each with the names of two royal persons: ΘΕΟΔΩΡΑ ΕΝ Χ(ΡΙΣΤ)Ω [...] and ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΕΝ Χ(ΡΙΣΤ)Ω ΠΙΣΤΩC Β(Α)CΙΑ(ΕΥC), the empress Theodora and her infant son Michael, the future emperor Michael III (Figs 12, 19). Very small parts of their haloed heads and insignia are visible (their crowns and the cross-bearing sceptre of Michael). The piece belonged to a scene of the Restoration of Icons (*Anastylosis*)¹³, an important event signifying the return of the holy icons in religious practice in Byzantium after Iconoclasm, reconfirmed in the Synod of 843.

The two arched colonnades preserve figures of standing saints in their soffits and in the spandrels between the arches above the columns, especially in the south

¹³ The fragment has been attributed to a scene of an Ecumenical Council, see Papageorgiou, "Νεοφύτου Αγίου μοναστήρι", op.cit. (n. 3), 214. Eliadis, "Η συμβολή", op.cit. (n. 5), 402. Correct identification by Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 49-50. See also below, note 25. A first, neglected, effort to identify the two royal persons was made in 1936 by classicist Paschalis Paschalides, "Ο Άγιος Νεόφυτος ὁ Ἑγκλειστός", *Τὰ ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα σὺν ἀλύτρωτο Ἑλληνισμῷ. Μεταξὺ Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ Κύπρου*, ed. M. M. Kitromilidou, Nicosia 1998, 393-396, who thought of the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos and his wife Theodora.



Fig. 11. South aisle, barrel vault. Cycle of the life of the Virgin. The Offering of the gifts by Joachim and Anna and their refusal.

colonnade. Depicted in the soffits of the first two arches, starting from the east, are (in their east and west half, respectively) Sts Timotheos and Ignatios, and Sts Alexios *the man of God* and Ioannis *Kalyvitis*; in the third arch there is St Hilarion, a saint especially connected

with the city of Paphos. Sts Kosmas and Damian occupy the spaces above the first and the second column of the south colonnade. Sts Samonas and Elpidiphoros appear in the north colonnade. St Paraskeve, the only surviving female saint, has a place on the east side of the south



Fig. 12. South aisle, barrel vault. Upper register: Cycle of the Virgin, Joachim in the wilderness with angel. Lower register: Fragment of the Synod of 843, the Restoration of Icons.



Fig. 13. North aisle, barrel vault towards East: Cycle of the Akathistos Hymn.



Fig. 14. North aisle, part of the north half of the barrel vault towards West. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanzas 8-12 (Θ-Μ).



Fig. 15. North aisle, part of the north half of the barrel vault towards West. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanzas 15-18 (Ο-Σ).

pillar, recalling the dedication of the homonymous Byzantine church at Geroskipou in the Paphos area.

The north aisle has on its barrel vault a virtually complete cycle of the *Akathistos* Hymn, the remarkable long religious poetic composition, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, patron of Constantinople, comprising twenty-four stanzas (*oikoi*)¹⁴. The depiction of the scenes

starts on the south half of the east part of the vault, which covers also the sanctuary, and proceeds westwards without division between them (Figs 13-16). Of the 24 stanzas once illustrated in the church only two

¹⁴ The most famous kontakion of Byzantine hymnography, attributed by some to the hymnographer Romanos the Melodos (6th century), and by others to authors of the 8th century, is based on evangelical and apocryphal writings, and references from Church Fathers and hymns. Its 24 stanzas are arranged according to the letters of the Greek alphabet (Α-Ω). The first 12 stanzas form the biblical-historical part; the last 12 refer to the dogma of Divine

Incarnation and glorify the Virgin's role in it. For the poem see E. Wellesz, "The *Akathistos*. A Study in Byzantine Hymnography", *DOP* 9-10 (1956), 146 and ff. N. Tomadakis, *Βυζαντινή ὑμνογραφία καὶ ποίησις*, II, Athens³1965, 153-172. C. A. Trypanis, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica*, Vienna 1968, 17-39. H. G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, Munich²1977 ('1959), 427. Th. Detorakis, *Κοσμάς ὁ Μελωδός. Βίος καὶ ἔργο*, Thessaloniki 1979, 231-244. K. Mitsakis, *Βυζαντινὴ Ὑμνογραφία*, Athens 1986, 483-509 and 533-536. Th. Detorakis, *Ὁ Ἀκάθιστος Ὑμνος καὶ τὰ προβλήματα του*, Athens 1993.



Fig. 16. North aisle, sanctuary, north part of the barrel vault. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanzas 22-24 (X-Ω), and north wall: Saints Eleftherios and Hypatios.

(the thirteenth and fourteenth or *N* and *Ξ*) are missing. These must have been depicted on a wall that existed between the nave and the narthex and were lost during its demolition, probably in the early seventeenth century¹⁵. The cycle continues on the north half of the vault

¹⁵ Surely before Barskij's visit in 1736, who noted the absence of a narthex, see Papacostas, "An Exceptional Structure", op.cit. (n. 3), 297, 299. With the demolition of that wall any dedicatory inscription and signature (?), often placed on the west wall of churches, would be lost.

eastwards, and finishes in its part spanning the prothesis (Fig. 16).

High up in the north aisle, on the east wall of the sanctuary, the Holy Trinity is represented, with God the Father (*Ὁ Παλαιός τῶν ἡμερῶν*) and the Son in bust, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove flying between them towards the Son (Fig. 17). Underneath, an elderly holy figure, preserved from the shoulders up, with an inscription: *Ο ΔΙΚ(αι)ΟC* and remnants of the letters [...]*ΩB*, is perhaps the "righteous Jacob" (*ΙΑΚΩB*) of the Old Testament.



Fig. 17. North aisle, Prothesis, east wall of the sanctuary. The Holy Trinity.

Iconographic programme, particular themes, meanings

The carefully selected programme underscores the doctrinal character of the decoration. It includes a glorification of the Virgin Mary, to whom the church is dedicated, through the depiction of the cycle of her life as well as of the *Akathistos* Hymn. Moreover, given the size of the church, rich Christological and hagiological cycles must also have been depicted. The existing compositions adhere to Byzantine schemes with some diversified elements, thus revealing both a traditional training and an ability for invention on the part of the artist. I only point out some unusual features in selected compositions.

For example, the purple cloth embroidered with the figure of the dead Christ held by a sorrowful angel attired as a deacon, depicted in the sanctuary, recalls the liturgical veil called *epitaphios* or *aer* (ἄηρ). The nearby inscription refers to the redeeming sacrifice of Christ (the Lamb) and to the Holy Communion (see Figs 10 and 18): “AMNOC ΠΡΟΚ[Ε]ΙΜ(αι) ΜΥ/CTIKΩC ECΦAΓMENOC ME/ΛIZOM(αι) Δ(ε) / KAI ΤΡΕΦΩ ΤΟΥC ΑΙΩΙΟΥC / ΦΡΙΞΟΝ ΑΝ(θρωπ)Ε ΜΗ ΦΑΓΗ ΑΝΑΞΙΩC”. As is well known, in Orthodox Christian doctrine the Eucharist during the Holy Liturgy involves the sanctification of bread and wine and their change by invocation of the Holy Spirit into flesh and blood of Christ, which is offered to the faithful. This image and its accompanying inscription convey the meaning of the *Melismos*, a scene symbolizing the Lord’s mystical

sacrifice and referring to the Holy Communion, which has its usual place on the altar, in the centre of the semi-cylinder of the bema¹⁶. Alluded to also are representations of the Celestial Liturgy in late Byzantine iconography, in which angels during the Great Entrance carry in procession the *epitaphios* with Christ’s body embroidered on it¹⁷, and other liturgical objects too. In the katholikon here, related objects (a candelabrum, a censer and a candle) are held by two angels depicted on the side reveals of the high window in the semi-cylinder of the bema. Furthermore, the image of the dead Christ is associated with the Eucharistic theme of the

¹⁶ The subject is illustrated in the central apse from the end of the 12th century, see M. Altripp, *Die Prothesis und ihre Bildausstattung in Byzanz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Denkmäler Griechenlands*, Frankfurt am Main 1998. Ch. Konstantinidi, *Ὁ Μελισμός*, Thessaloniki 2008. Here only two corners of the painted altar table are visible at either side at the lower part of the central window of the sanctuary.

¹⁷ For the subject see R. F. Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and Other Preanaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, Rome 1975. This theme with its Eucharistic connotations is depicted in late Byzantine and post-Byzantine painting, either in the sanctuary of churches or in the dome, see T. Papamastorakis, *Dome Iconography in Churches of the Palaeologan Period in the Balkan Peninsula and Cyprus*, Athens 2001 (in Greek with English summary), 135-165. N. Gkioles, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Διονυσίου στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος*, Athens 2009, 15-16. See also M. Tomić Djurić, “To Picture and to Perform: The Image of the Eucharistic Liturgy at Markov Manastir (I)”, *Zograf* 38 (2014), 123-141, esp. 128-137.

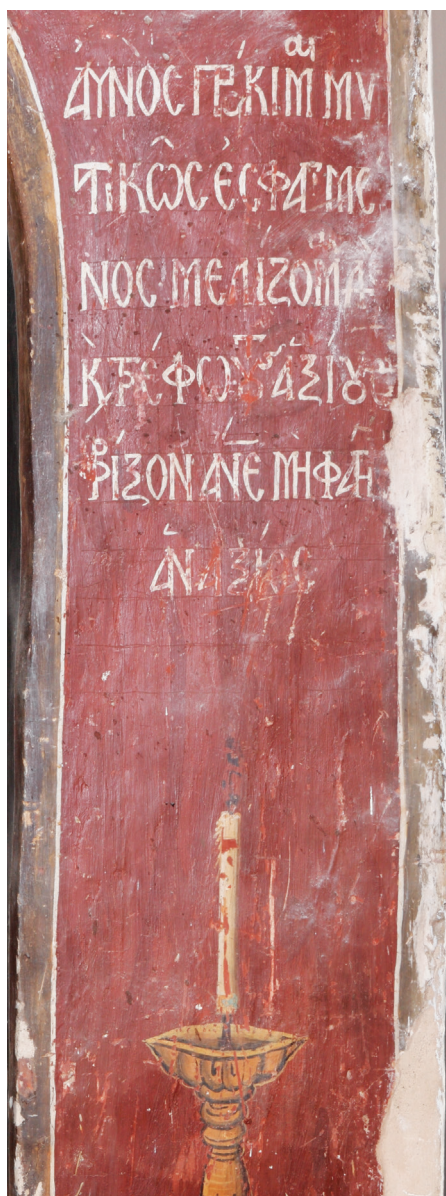


Fig. 18. Sanctuary, east wall, conch south of half-cylinder. The inscription and the candelabrum next to the Angel holding Christ, the Lamb of God (detail of the Fig. 10).

Man of Sorrows, painted nearby. This was present in the sanctuary of Orthodox churches from the thirteenth century and especially in the prothesis niche from the fourteenth century onwards¹⁸. Both themes are connected

¹⁸ For the theme see H. Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages. Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*,



Fig. 19. South aisle, barrel vault, lower register. Fragment of the Synod of 843, the Restoration of Icons (detail of the Fig. 12).

with the representation, in the semi-cylinder of the apse, in two superimposed zones, of the Communion of the Apostles and of the hierarchs celebrating the liturgy (see above Figs 5-8). The latter, rendered larger than life-size, are flanked at either end by painted marble columns with curtains tied around them and hanging from a bar, an unusual detail for the scene, enhancing its solemn character. An inscription in capital letters running on a strip above refers to the foundation and consolidation of the Church through the three persons of the Holy Trinity as well as to the glorification of the Lord¹⁹.

The depiction of popes of Rome in the sanctuary of Byzantine churches has its own significance since middle Byzantine times, as a reflection of ecclesiastical politics or of doctrinal issues²⁰. Depicted on the east wall of the

New York 1990 (first edition in German, Berlin 1981), 131-185. Altripp, *Die Prothesis*, op.cit. (n. 16). M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "The Man of Sorrows from Byzantium to Venetian Crete. Some Observations on Iconography and Function", *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, eds C. R. Puglisi – W. H. Barcham, Kalamazoo 2013, 147-190.

¹⁹ Left side: *TOYTON TON OIKON O PATHPΩKOΔOMHCEN, TOYTON TON OIKON O YIOC EZTEPEΩCEN, TOYTON TON OIKON TO ΠNEYMA TO AΓION ANEKAINICEN*, an inscription pertinent to the inauguration of a new church, and *KYPHE HΓAΠHCA EYΠEΠEIAN OIKOY COY KAI TOΠION CKHNΩMATOC ΔOΞHC COY* (Psalms 25, 8). Right side: *TO CTEPEΩMA TΩN EΠI COI ΠEΠOITHOTΩN, CTEPEΩCΩN KYPIE THN EKKAHCIAH HN EKTHCΩ TΩ TIMIΩ COY AIMATI* (Ode 3, *Katavasii* of Christ's Presentation in the Temple). Transcription with elimination of errors in orthography.

²⁰ The inclusion of prelates of Rome in the iconography of the sanctuary in Byzantine churches from the 11th century was related

sanctuary of the katholikon is the pope St Silvester, who according to tradition took part in the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea convened by Constantine the Great in 325. He is emphasized by a shell crowning his figure while he wears vestments of Orthodox bishops (Fig. 22). The nearby depiction of St Leo, eminent pope of Rome (ca. 440-461), who was involved in dogmatic issues of the early Church concerning the two natures of Christ, divine and human, also has a relevant meaning, while at the same time alluding to the Virgin's role in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The inclusion of themes from the cycle of the life of the Virgin, as the three remaining scenes on the south wall indicate, as well as the illustration of the *Akathistos* hymn, are in accordance with the dedication of the katholikon²¹. They also reflect an emphasis on the person of the Mother of God, which intensified during the Palaiologan period, when her role as protectress of Constantinople was re-emphasized and the whole month of August was dedicated to her. In particular the *Akathistos*, a special cycle in late Byzantine iconography and in the decoration of the katholikon, stresses the Orthodox identity of the foundation at a time when the Orthodox Church

of Cyprus had to co-exist under the Roman Catholic Church. This was a pronounced statement by the prominent monastery, made possible through the relative latitude allowed to the island's Orthodox populace during the late Lusignan and the Venetian period²². Likewise, the depiction of the Holy Trinity with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove flying in the direction of the Son (see above Fig. 17)²³ may also be an allusion to the Orthodox Church's position concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit solely from the Father as opposed to *filioque* of the Latin Church, a major issue of discord between the Eastern and the Western Church.

Additionally, the inclusion among the frescoes of a representation of the Restoration (*Anastylosis*) of Icons, described before, acquires greater significance (Fig. 19, see also above, Fig. 12). The subject is a reminder of the fundamental proclamation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 to re-establish the use of religious images²⁴ after the ban on their depiction and veneration during the first period of Iconoclasm. The restoration of icons in religious life was confirmed by a local Council convened in 843 in Constantinople on the initiative of the empress Theodora as regent for her infant son Michael, later emperor Michael III. The fact is celebrated on the first Sunday of the Great Lent, known also by the eloquent title Sunday of Orthodoxy. The depiction of this theme²⁵ is added to others in the iconographic

to ecclesiastical politics recalling the unity of the early Christian Church before the Schism of 1054 between the Eastern and Western Churches. On the other hand, the presence of popes in the bema in post-Byzantine times may allude to dogmatic issues concerning differences between the Orthodox and the Latin Church, and their use, see Gkioles, *Τοιχογραφίες Μονής Διονυσίου*, op.cit. (n. 17), 25-26, with earlier references.

²¹ For the iconography of the Cycle of the Virgin's life, and its significance basic studies are by J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, Brussels 1964, 1992. Eadem, "Iconography of the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin", *The Kariye Djami*, 4: *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. Underwood, London – Princeton, N. J. 1975, 163-194. Well known cycles from the Palaiologan period are at Saint Clement (Perivleptos), Ochrid (1295), in the inner narthex of the Chora monastery (1315-1320), at Perivleptos, Mystras (1370). For a remarkable cycle in Cyprus (mid-14th century), see I. Christoforaki, "Cyprus between Byzantium and the Levant: Eclecticism and Interchange in the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin in the Church of the Holy Cross at Pelendri", *Επετηρίς Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών* 22 (1996), 215-255. For the cycle's presence in post-Byzantine monuments see Gkioles, *Τοιχογραφίες Μονής Διονυσίου*, op.cit. (n. 17), 44-45, 97-101. For the *Akathistos* Hymn and its illustration see below, notes 73-79.

²² Th. Papadopoulos, "Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Κύπρου κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῆς Φραγκοκρατίας", *Ἱστορία τῆς Κύπρου*, 4, ed. Th. Papadopoulos, Nicosia 1995, 543-665, with previous bibliography.

²³ Similar typology for the Holy Trinity in the cave-chapel of the "Palaia Enkleistra" or *Enkleistron* near Kouklia, Paphos, of a date after 1442, see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 397-398, fig. 237. *Chypre entre Byzance et l'Occident, IV^e-XVI^e siècle* (exhibition catalogue: Paris, Musée du Louvre, 28 octobre 2012 – 28 janvier 2013), Paris 2012, 301, fig. 14. This iconography, different from the symbolic Trinity of Byzantine tradition (Abraham's hospitality of the three Angels) is also found in 15th-century icon painting.

²⁴ Convened at the wish of the empress Irene the Athenian, presiding Patriarch Tarasios, at Nicaea in Bithynia.

²⁵ The subject, in which Patriarch Methodios also appears, is depicted in Cyprus in the church of Saint Sozomenos by Symeon Axendis (1513) along with scenes of the seven Ecumenical Councils. On Mount Athos it was depicted first by the Cretan Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas in the katholikon of the Great Lavra monastery (1535/36), and later in the katholikon of the Stavronikita monastery (1546). It was afterwards widespread in other monasteries, some-

programme, which proclaims the Orthodox faith on the part of a historic middle Byzantine monastery on an island under the Venetians, with a predominantly Orthodox population but with a Latin prelate as head of the Church of Cyprus.

Artistic context in Cyprus for the *katholikon* frescoes. A brief reference

For an appropriate approach to the style of the frescoes in an effort to identify their character and perhaps the painter who was entrusted with such an ambitious programme, it is pertinent to take into account Cypriot wall-painting of the second half of the fifteenth and the first decades of the sixteenth century, that is, the years around the construction of the church which the wall-paintings decorate. This time span covers the last decades of the Lusignan period and the first decades of Venetian rule on the island. The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked the collapse of the foremost centre for Byzantine art and culture, nevertheless the Byzantine tradition continued to be alive in Cyprus as much as in other places. The formation in that period of two main trends, both in monumental painting and portable icons, has been referred to repeatedly, with occasional diversity of opinions concerning the characterization of specific monuments. The first tendency remained faithful to the tradition of late Palaiologan art, occasionally incorporating local elements, so acquiring a somewhat popular character, or undergoing minor Western infiltration. Despite its achievements, however, it does not present a unified stylistic character, perhaps because of the absence of a strong urban artistic centre which would give a general tone, but also due to the gradual development of individual artistic personalities. The second tendency, although preserving the Byzantine technique and basic components of Byzantine iconography, nevertheless absorbed quite extensive Italian features (a natural consequence for an island under Western rulers for centuries) and produced a local mixed idiom. This was widespread in the sixteenth century, often with high-quality results.

times near the scene of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, both symbolic themes, emphasizing the Orthodox faith. See Gkioles, *Τοιχογραφίες Μονής Διονυσίου*, op.cit. (n. 17), 44. See also above, note 17.

Palaiologan art reached Cyprus through various channels, for example the import of works of art, especially icons, and travels of Constantinopolitan painters to the island. Such was the case of Georgios Chryssokephalos, the earliest painter from the Byzantine capital to be named in archival documents in Cyprus in 1356²⁶. Monuments in Cyprus with frescoes and portable icons showing knowledge of Palaiologan trends date from the advanced fourteenth century on, as has been discussed in the literature²⁷. According to a damaged inscription, a master from Constantinople, whose name has not been preserved, decorated parts of the narthex of the Saint John Lampadistis monastery at Kalopanayiotis one year after the fall of the capital to the Turks, in 1454²⁸. The traditional

²⁶ It is also the first mention so far, see M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Viaggi di pittori tra Costantinopoli e Candia. Documenti d'archivio e influssi 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 Ch. Maltezou – A. Tzavara – D. Vlassi, Venice 2009, 711 note 7. Eadem, "From Constantinople to Cyprus and to Crete: The Adventure of Two Painters (1356-1357)", *Proceedings of the Fourth International Cyprological Congress, Nicosia, 29 April – 3 May 2008*, (in Greek with English summary, electronically circulated), Nicosia (to be published in print).

²⁷ S. Kalopissi-Verti, "The Murals of the Narthex: The Paintings of the late Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries", *Asinou Across Time. Studies in the Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorbiotissa, Cyprus*, eds A. W. Carr – A. Nicolaïdēs, Washington, D. C., 2012, 206 and note 397, with references. For wall-paintings of Palaiologan inspiration see M. Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting in Cyprus during the Last Phase of the Lusignan Dynasty, 1374-1489", *Medieval Cyprus. Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, eds N. Patterson-Ševčenko – Ch. Moss, Princeton 1999, 241-251, selected examples. N. Zarras, "Reflections of Palaiologan Style in Cypriot Monumental Painting", *Symmeikta. Collection of Papers Dedicated to the 40th Anniversary of the Institute of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade*, ed. I. Stevović, Belgrade 2012, 291-308, examples of various artistic levels, with previous bibliography.

²⁸ A. Papageorgiou, "Κύπριοι ζωγράφοι του 15ου και 16ου αιώνα", *RDAC*, 1974, 196-197. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 306-312. N. Gkioles, "Το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα του νάρθηκα του καθολικού της μονής του Αγίου Ιωάννη του Λαμπαδιστή στον Καλοπαναγιώτη", *ΚυπρΣπουδ* 78-79 (2016-2017), vol. 1, 183-205, and vol. 4 pls 17-19, figs 1-6. For these and other murals in this important monastery see M. Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting", op.cit. (n. 27), 245-249. A. Papageorgiou, *Η Μονή του Αγίου Ιωάννου του Λαμπαδιστού στον Καλοπαναγιώτη*, Nicosia 2007, 37.

current in Cypriot painting of the late Lusignan period has also been associated with the presence in Cyprus of the Byzantine princess Elena Palaiologina, daughter of the Despot of Morea and Duke of Sparta Theodoros II Palaiologos, following her marriage (1441) to the king of Cyprus John II Lusignan, her concern for the Byzantine tradition and her multifarious support of the Byzantine refugees on the island²⁹. In Cyprus a particular character is discernible in the mural decoration of almost each monument. Well-known signed wall-paintings are those by Minas from Myrianthoussa (or Marathassa) in the church of the Archangel Michael at Pedoulas (1474)³⁰, those by Philippos Goul in the chapel of Saint Mamas at Louvaras (1495)³¹, and in the church of the Holy Cross at Ayiasmati outside Platanistassa (uncertain date, 1494? perhaps 1505)³², as well as in unsigned frescoes attributed

to him³³. It seems that this artistic option was preferred by local traditional and ecclesiastical circles, as inscriptions suggest. A painter who in the early sixteenth century followed the traditional line with a few Italian elements, Symeon Axendis, worked in the area of Galata (1513, 1514) and probably elsewhere³⁴. Parallel developments are observed also in portable icons³⁵.

The second main tendency in Cypriot painting, the one quite receptive to Italian trends, was formulated in the sixteenth century as a distinct eclectic combination of Byzantine, late Medieval, Renaissance, and occasionally Mannerist features, often within more or less Byzantine iconographic schemes³⁶. It has been associated with

²⁹ G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, III: *The Frankish Period (1432-1571)*, Cambridge 1948 (repr. 1972), 527-528. A. Vacalopoulos, "Une reine grecque de Chypre mal comprise par les historiens: Hélène Paléologine (1442-1458)", *Πρακτικά τοῦ Α΄ Διεθνoῦς Κυπριολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου (Λευκωσία, 14-19 Ἀπριλίου 1969)*, 1, Nicosia 1972, 277-280. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 18-19. Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting", op.cit. (n. 27), 242, 244. Helen's origin perhaps also favoured artistic relations between Mystras and Cyprus.

³⁰ Minas worked in a distinct local idiom, of a provincial character. See Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 331-343. M. Garidis, *La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450-1600) et dans les pays sous domination étrangère*, Athens 1989, 28-31. Emmanuel, "Monumental Painting", op.cit. (n. 27), 249-250. S. Perdakis, *Ο ναός του Αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ στον Πεδουλά*, Nicosia 2014. See also below, note 32.

³¹ For the Louvaras frescoes by Philippos Goul see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 246-255. E. Constantinides, "Monumental Painting, in Cyprus during the Venetian Period, 1489-1570", *Medieval Cyprus*, op.cit. (n. 27), 266-267.

³² For the frescoes at Ayiasmati see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 186-218 (suggested dating to 1494). Constantinides, "Monumental Painting, 1489-1570", op.cit. (n. 31), 266-267 (dating to 1505). G. Philotheou, «Η μνημειακή ζωγραφική στην περιοχή της μητροπολιτικής περιφέρειας Μόρφου», *Ιερά Μητρόπολις Μόρφου. 2000 χρόνια Τέχνης και Αγιότητας*, Nicosia 2000, 121 (dating to 1494). Ch. Argyrou – D. Myrianthefts, *The Church of the Holy Cross of Ayiasmati*, Nicosia 2004 (dating to 1494). For figures going back to Minas see Stylianou – Stylianou, op.cit., figs 122, 204 and Argyrou – Myrianthefts, op.cit., 18-19. For some receptiveness of Italian elements in both monuments, see among others M. Parani, "Το αρχιτεκτονικό βάθος στο έργο

του ζωγράφου Φίλιππου Γουλ: μερικές σκέψεις", *Ανταπόδοση. Μελέτες Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης προς τιμήν της καθηγήτριας Ελένης Δεληγιάννη-Δωρή*, Athens 2010, 341-367.

³³ Stylianou – Stylianou, "Η βυζαντινή τέχνη", op.cit. (n. 3), 1332-1362. Constantinides, "Monumental Painting 1489-1570", op.cit. (n. 31), 263-284. Philotheou, «Μνημειακή ζωγραφική», op.cit. (n. 32), 121-124. N. Gkioles, *Η χριστιανική τέχνη στην Κύπρο*, Nicosia 2003, 182-195, 230-231. Parani, "Αρχιτεκτονικό βάθος", op.cit. (n. 32), 342 note 3.

³⁴ Signed works: Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 84-97. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides – D. Myrianthefts, *The Churches of the Virgin Podythou and of the Theotokos (or of the Archangel) in Galata*, Nicosia 2007, 48-84. Frescoes associated with Axendis's art adorn churches at Palaihori (Transfiguration of Christ) and Klonari (Saint Nicholas), see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 256-273. S. Sophocleous, "Religious Painting in Cyprus over two millenia", *Cyprus the Holy Island*, op.cit. (n. 5), 33. S. Sophocleous – Ch. Hadjichristodoulou, *Palaichoria: Centuries of Heritage*, Nicosia 2002, 121-123. I. Eliades, "Η περίοδος της Ενετοκρατίας και η ανάπτυξη της Κυπροαναγεννησιακής εντοχίας ζωγραφικής στη μητροπολιτική περιφέρεια Ταμασού και Ορεινής", *Ιερά Μητρόπολις Ταμασού και Ορεινής. Ιστορία – Μνημεία – Τέχνη*, ed. K. Kokkinoftas, Nicosia 2012, 297-290.

³⁵ A. Papageorgiou, *Εικόνες της Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1991, especially 93 ff. S. Sophocleous, "La peinture d'icônes à Chypre à l'époque venitienne, 1489-1570/1", *ΚυπρoΣπουδ* 69 (2005), 92-99. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Όψεις της ζωγραφικής εικόνων στην Κύπρο κατά τη βενετική περίοδο και οι σχέσεις με τη Βενετία", *La Serenissima and La Nobilissima. Venice in Cyprus and Cyprus in Venice. Proceedings of the Conference (Nicosia, 21 Oct. 2006)*, ed. A. Nicolaou-Konnari, Nicosia 2009, 157-193.

³⁶ E. Constantinides, *Images from the Byzantine Periphery. Studies in Iconography and Style*, Leiden 2007, 11-128. Concerning this trend, a date 1502 found in Podythou has been challenged as to whether it informs all frescoes in that church, or other frescoes

prosperous secular patrons, wishing to emulate the attitude of the ruling classes towards new developments in religious painting³⁷. No signatures are preserved on murals of this trend; their creators were versatile Cypriot masters willing to adapt their art in order to meet the taste of their clients. Among their sources may have been works found in Latin churches or patrician houses, drawings and engravings, or personal experience gained through travel. Well-known monuments in this current are the chapel of the *Akathistos* or “Latin chapel”, in the monastery of Saint John Lampadistis at Kalopanayiotis, the churches of Panagia Podythou near Galata, Panagia Iamatiki at Arakapas, and Panagia Katholiki at Pelen-dri³⁸. Portable icons on the templon of churches such as Panagia Katholiki and Panagia Podythou³⁹ equally show the dissemination of this eclectic style imbued with an Italianate flavour. This rather simplistic and of course

elsewhere (cf. below, note 38). It has been called “Italo-Byzantine”, “Veneto-Cypriot” or, lately, “Cypro-Renaissance” painting; for the latter term, more difficult to accept, see Eliadis, “Η συμβολή”, op.cit. (n. 5), 397 with more references. The Western elements, mostly from Italian art, and from various periods, blend with Byzantine components, while a particular rendering of oblique glances and distinct facial expressions lend a unique character to this trend of Cypriot painting. See also below, note 56.

³⁷ J. Andrews, “Flexibility and Fusion in Eastern Mediterranean Manuscript Production: Oxford, Bodleian, Laud. Gr. 86”, *Byzantine Images and their Afterlives: Essays in Honor of Annemarie Weyl Carr*, ed. L. Jones, Farnham 2014, 44, with references. Cf. M. R. Salzmann, “(Re)constructing Aristocratic Religious Identities in 15th Century Cyprus”, *Mensche, Bilder, Sprache, Dinge. Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen*, 2: *Menschen und Worte*, eds F. Daim – Ch. Gastgeber – D. Heber – K. Rapp, Mainz 2018, 337-350.

³⁸ For the first three monuments see S. Frigerio-Zeniou, *L'art 'italo-byzantin' à Chypre au XVI^e siècle. Trois témoins de la peinture religieuse: Panagia Podithou, la Chapelle latine et Panagia Iamatiké*, Venice 1998. Also, for Lampadistis see Papageorgiou, “Λαμπαδιστής”, op.cit. (n. 28); for Podythou see Constantoudaki – Myrianthefs, *Churches in Galata*, op.cit. (n. 34), 10-47; for Panagia Katholiki see Constantinides, *Byzantine Periphery*, op.cit. (n. 36), 112-114.

³⁹ For icons at Katholiki see S. Sophocleous, “Ο ανώνυμος ζωγράφος τοῦ εἰκονοστασίου τῶν ἀρχῶν τοῦ 16οῦ αἰῶνα στὴν Παναγία Καθολικὴ Πελεντρίου καὶ ὁ περίγυρός του”, *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ Γ' Κυπρολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, 2, Nicosia 2001, 453-490; for icons at Podythou see Constantoudaki – Myrianthefs, *Churches in Galata*, op.cit. (n. 34), figs on p. 37.

not absolute distinction between the two main trends referred to above makes clear the receptiveness and adaptability of Cypriot painters of the period and their familiarity with diverse modes of artistic expression.

The art of the *katholikon* frescoes and Cretan painting

The wall-paintings in the *katholikon* of the Virgin follow a traditional line, reproducing late Palaiologan iconography with very limited details of Western origin, which do not affect the Byzantine character of the whole. Examples are: the gesture of the Virgin with crossed hands in the third stanza of the *Akathistos* (Fig. 20) recalling late Medieval Annunciation scenes, architectural backgrounds with an underlying awareness of Renaissance principles of perspective (*Akathistos*, fourth stanza, Fig. 21), an arch with a shell and other carvings of Renaissance taste in porphyry marble (St Silvester, Fig. 22), plant shoots in the upper corners of panels with saints, recalling late Medieval vegetal motifs (St Elpidiphoros), transformed into rich acanthus-like leaves (Sts Damian, Alexios, Ioannis *Kalyvitis*, Ignatios, Timotheos), and other minor features. The creator of the frescoes proves himself to be an expert artist, possessing a rich iconographic repertoire rooted in the Byzantine tradition, producing balanced compositions with a consistent stylistic character and unified chromatic impression in earthly tones.

The painter's name and place of origin are not recorded, but we are compensated by the high quality of his art, which, furthermore, can eventually point to his identity. Although his employment of the established Byzantine technique and iconography is analogous to that used by Cypriot painters⁴⁰, his art differs from that of his counterparts

⁴⁰ Of similar taste but not of the same quality are frescoes of a layer in the church of Saint Paraskeve at Geroskipou, see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 392-393, figs 234, 235. Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 114-119, 121, figs 59-64, 66, dated to the end of the 15th century (somewhat later?). A. Foulis – Ch. Hadjichristodoulou, *The Church of Agia Paraskevi in Geroskipou*, Nicosia 2019, the relevant layer. Also compare holy figures (Sts Peter, Paul, Nicholas, Anthony, George, Mamas et al.), some unpublished, in the 1518 frescoes in the church of Saint Christina, Askas, see Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 290-291 (affinity with the Cretan

with regard to the facial expressions, a painterly sense, a certain freedom in using broad brushstrokes to render even small-scale faces (especially in *Akathistos* scenes), and in its exceptional level of craftsmanship. On the contrary, the frescoes he produced have obvious affinities with the Cretan school of painting.

This artistic trend was already formulated in the first half of the fifteenth century in Venetian-ruled Candia, as a development of the refined “second Palaiologan style” of Byzantine art and with the contribution of Constantinopolitan painters established on Crete since the fourteenth century, whose art influenced local production⁴¹. It was consolidated in the course of the fifteenth century due to the consistent work of remarkable painters, equally capable in both wall-paintings⁴² and portable icons⁴³. Cretan masters were invited to work in the

Cycladic islands (e.g. Naxos) and the Dodecanese (e.g. Patmos), executing frescoes and icons. These professionals were trained in the urban centres of Venetian Crete, which with its fertile cultural environment and well-organized workshops⁴⁴ became the foremost artistic hearth in the Eastern Mediterranean after the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. Cretan fifteenth-century artists, especially of easel painting (Angelos, A. and N. Ritzos, N. Tzafouris, A. Pavias), assimilated traits from late Medieval and early Renaissance art, according to circumstances, thus responding to the aesthetic preferences of their mixed clientele in Venetian Crete.

Cretan icons were renowned for their technical perfection, with firm drawing, the rendering of flesh in layers of graduated colours topped with fine white brushstrokes, balanced compositions and proportions, restricted movements of figures with concentrated expressions emanating authority, harmonious chromatic tones, and geometric drapery. As a result, thanks to the excellent quality of its products and the consistency of its aesthetic values, the Cretan school achieved fame and had an impact even outside Crete. Cretan portable panels reached Italy and even northern Europe as objects of cult, art and trade. Painters from Crete continued to travel in the following centuries to mainland Greece, the Ionian Islands, Venice, Southern Italy, Sicily, the Adriatic coast, and elsewhere⁴⁵. In the sixteenth century this ar-

school is observed). Further, see the officiating hierarchs, the Dormition of the Virgin, and other scenes in the church of the Theotokos at Kourdali, Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 141-150, with an early 16th century dating. I. A. Eliadis, *Η Μονή της Παναγίας Χρυσσοκουρδαλιώτισσας στο Κούρδαλι*, Nicosia 2012, 30-31, 68 and cover, with a dating post 1502; note the different expressive manners in this ensemble.

⁴¹ As revealed by archival sources, see M. Cattapan, “Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori di Creta dal 1300 al 1500”, *Thesaurismata* 9 (1972), 202-235. Constantoudaki, “Viaggi di pittori”, op.cit. (n. 26), 2009, 709-723.

⁴² For remarkable frescoes by brothers Phokas see Th. Gouma-Peterson, “Manuel and John Phokas and Artistic Personality in Late Byzantine Painting”, *Gesta* 22 (1983), 159-170 (cf. below, note 48). Further material in –among others– books by I. Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall-paintings of Crete, I: Rethymnon Province*, London 1999. *Dated Byzantine Wall-paintings of Crete*, Leiden 2001 and more volumes in the series by the same author between 2005 and 2015. Ch. Ranoutsaki, *Die Kunst der späten Palaiologenzeit auf Kreta: Kloster Brontisi im Spannungsfeld zwischen Konstantinopel und Venedig*, Leiden 2011. Recently: M. Acheimastou-Potamianou – A. Katsioti – M. Bormpoudaki, *The Frescoes of the Valsamonero Monastery. Viewpoints and Beliefs in the Late Byzantine Painting of Venetian Crete*, Athens 2020 (in Greek with English summaries, 459-504).

⁴³ M. Chatzidakis, “Essai sur l'école dite ‘italogrecque’ précédé d'une note sur les rapports de l'art vénitien avec l'art crétois jusqu'à 1500”, *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, 2, ed. A. Pertusi, Florence 1974, 69-124. Idem, “Les débuts de l'école crétoise et la question de l'école dite italogrecque”, *Μνημόσυνον Σοφίας Αντωνιάδης*, Venice 1974, 169-211. M. Kazanaki-Lappa, “Η ζωγραφική στην Κρήτη, 1350-1669. Η βυζαντινή παράδοση και η

σχέση με τη δυτική τέχνη”, *Cretan Studies* 6 (1998), 51-67. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “La pittura di icone a Creta veneziana (sec. XV e XVI). Questioni di mecenatismo, iconografia e preferenze estetiche”, *Venezia e Creta. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi*, ed. G. Ortalli, Venice 1998, 459-507.

⁴⁴ For the cultural climate see D. Holton (ed.), *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, Cambridge 1991. N. Panayotakis, “Education and Culture in Venetian Crete”, *El Greco of Crete. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Artist's Birth*, ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Heraklion 1995, 19-28. For workshops see M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “*Conducere apothecam, in qua exercere artem nostram: L'atelier d'un peintre byzantin et d'un peintre vénitien à Candie*”, *Symmeikta* 14 (2001), 291-299 (in Greek with French summary). Eadem, “Cretan Painters and Their Workshops in Sixteenth Century Candia”, *El Greco's Studio. Proceedings of the International Symposium*, ed. N. Hadjinicolaou, Rethymnon 2007, 1-29.

⁴⁵ M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “L'arte dei pittori greci a Venezia”, *La pittura nel Veneto. Il Cinquecento*, III, ed. M. Lucco, Milan 1999, 1203-1261. Eadem, “Tradition and Diversity: Icon



Fig. 20. North aisle, south half. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 3 (Γ), the Virgin's response to the Annunciation.



Fig. 21. North aisle, south half. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 4 (Δ), the Conception of Christ (the "Power of God").

tistic current spread to central and northern Greece. Its foremost exponent was Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas, later known as Theophanis the Cretan (ca. 1485-1490, †1559), who created extensive cycles in Meteora, Thessaly (1527) and on Mount Athos (Great Lavra 1534/35-1541 and Stavronikita monasteries 1546)⁴⁶, and other

works, and had a host of followers⁴⁷. Theophanis's technique follows the work of Cretan painters such as Manouil

Painting in Crete, Venice, the Ionian Islands, and El Greco's Early Career", *The Greek World under Ottoman and Western Domination: 15th-19th Centuries. Proceedings of the International Conference*, eds P. Kitromilides – D. Arvanitakis, New York 2008, 55-79. K.-Ph. Kalafati, "Greek Painters in Italy from the End of the 15th Century to the 18th Century", *Images and Writing. Greek Presence in Messina from the Middle Ages to Modernity* (exhibition catalogue), Palermo 2013, 179-187.

⁴⁶ M. Chatzidakis, "Recherches sur le peintre Théophane le crétois", *DOP* 23/24 (1969-1970), 311-351. Idem, *The Cretan Painter Theophanis. The Wall-Paintings of the Holy Monastery of Stavronikita*,

Mount Athos 1986. Garidis, *La peinture murale*, op.cit. (n. 30), 137-139. M. Chatzidakis – E. Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι μετὰ τὴν Ἀλωση (1450-1830)*, 2: *Καβαλλάρος – Ψαθόπουλος*, Athens 1997, 381-397. D. Sofianos – E. N. Tsigaridas, *Holy Meteora. The Monastery of St. Nicholas Anapafsas. History and Art*, Kalambaka 2003 (in Greek with English summary). N. Toutos – G. Foustieris, *Εὐρετήριο τῆς μνημειακῆς ζωγραφικῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους, 10ος-17ος αἰώνας*, Athens 2010, 65-74, 84-95 (Great Lavra); 79-100 (Stavronikita). E. N. Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, Thessaloniki 2016.

⁴⁷ For attributed works see Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46), 12, 34, 35-40. For paintings showing his influence see M. Chatzidakis – D. Sofianos, *The Great Meteora. History and Art*, Athens 1990. P. L. Vocotopoulos, *Τοιχογραφίες καθολικοῦ Μονῆς Διονυσίου*, Mount Athos 2006. Gkioles, *Τοιχογραφίες Μονῆς Διονυσίου*, op.cit. (n. 17). More studies propose various approaches to the authorship of related works.



Fig. 22. Sanctuary, east wall, south of the semi-cylinder. Saint Silvester.

Phokas (Vianos, 1453) and an unknown master (Amari, 1516)⁴⁸, and is recognized in the frescoes of the Saint Neophytos monastery's katholikon, as is discussed below.

Indeed, similarities of the wall-paintings in the katholikon of the Virgin to the work of Cretan masters and especially of Theophanis are so close that they cannot be adequately explained by a parallel artistic evolution in Crete and Cyprus after the fall of Constantinople and Mystras, which had preserved the principles of the late Byzantine tradition. Despite the common Byzantine heritage of the two islands on the one hand and Venetian reality in those years on the other, Cyprus, which had also experienced a long period of Lusignan rule, developed its own cultural and social conditions⁴⁹ which had an impact on its artistic production⁵⁰. As discussed, this was rich in murals and icons and diverse in taste. However, its published specimens have no particular similarities to the wall-paintings of the katholikon, which are different from murals in other local monuments both in the general sense and in particulars. On the contrary, the overall working method, technique and style are the same as those of the Cretan school and therefore point to a genuine exponent of Cretan art. Affinities of the katholikon frescoes with Cretan painting and Theophanis's work have been noted in the past, in a summary manner. Nevertheless, any attempt to substantiate an attribution must follow a long route of arguments, in which the present paper takes only a few steps.

⁴⁸ Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall-paintings of Crete*, op.cit. (n. 42), figs 177, 178, 192-194. Cf. above, note 42.

⁴⁹ For aspects of Cypriot society in these periods see indicatively *Cyprus, Society and Culture 1191-1369*, eds A. Nicolaou-Konnari – Ch. Schabel, Leiden – Boston 2005. G. Grivaud, *Entrelacs chi-prois. Essai sur les lettres et la vie intellectuelle dans le Royaume de Chypre (1191-1570)*, Nicosia 2009.

⁵⁰ A characteristic result is the "Italo-Byzantine" trend in murals and icons (see here, notes 36 and 56) developed during the 16th century in Cyprus. An analogous tendency had already appeared in 15th-century "Italo-Cretan" icons, with a marked preference for Medieval taste (see above, note 43). Concerning architecture in Cyprus and Crete see T. Papacostas, "Echoes of the Renaissance in the Eastern Confines of the *Stato da mar*, Architectural Evidence from Venetian Cyprus", *Acta Byzantina Fennica* 3 (2010), 136-172.

History of attributions of the katholikon wall-paintings

Observations cited here are based on personal experience during repeated visits since the early 1980s to the always hospitable and welcoming holy monastery, with which there were also long-lasting family ties. However, other researchers too have associated its frescoes with Cretan painting, since the years 1985-1986. Judith and Andreas Stylianos, in the expanded edition (¹1985, ²1997) of their book *The Painted Churches of Cyprus* (an initial, shorter edition appeared in Nicosia in 1964), where they describe at length the frescoes of the katholikon, associated them with "the Cretan school of the sixteenth century", while acknowledging in places "a Palaeologue manner", reminiscences from wall-paintings at Mystras, and "later developments towards the so called Cretan style". Similarly, in their brief overview of the same wall-paintings (1996) references are made to Mystras, the Cretan school and Theophanis the Cretan, as influential factors "due to the common tradition"⁵¹. The great expert on Cretan art, Manolis Chatzidakis, noted in his book on Theophanis's murals in the Stavronikita Monastery (1986) that the Cretan artist "probably visited Cyprus (Monastery of Chrysostomos) and perhaps other places, in order to paint murals and icons"⁵²; this view is repeated in the long entry on Theophanis in Chatzidakis's book on *Greek Painters after the Fall of Constantinople*

⁵¹ Stylianos – Stylianos, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), ¹1985, 380, cf. the 2nd edition, 1997, 380 and passim (with a dating in the early 16th century). In the initial, small edition (A. Stylianos – J. Stylianos, *The Painted Churches*, Nicosia 1964, 136-137) there is no attribution. The two dedicated researchers of Cypriot painting referred analytically to these wall-paintings making detailed descriptions with useful observations (¹1985, ²1997, 369-381, figs 219-224), and, in a summary way, in 1996, see Stylianos – Stylianos, "Η βυζαντινή τέχνη", op.cit. (n. 3), 1342-1344 (with occasional confusing statements) and pls XCIV-XCV, figs 104-107.

⁵² Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), 41. The author probably referred to the Byzantine monastery of Saint John Chrysostomos at Koutsoventis (incidentally, St Neophytos had lived there for seven years), where no 16th century frescoes are preserved, see T. Papacostas, "The History and Architecture of the Monastery of Saint John Chrysostomos at Koutsoventis, Cyprus", *DOP* 61 (2007), 89; Chatzidakis may have inadvertently mentioned this instead of the monastery of Saint Neophytos.

(1997)⁵³. In an entry on Theophanis in the *Dictionary of Greek Painters* (2000) noted are the affinities of the wall-paintings in the basilica of Saint Neophytos with Theophanis's work⁵⁴. Later on, the discussion of the possible presence of Theophanis in Cyprus continued⁵⁵. However, to my knowledge no specific study on the matter has been undertaken and a substantial comparative analysis which would consider various questions raised is still lacking. Contrary to the views expressed by the aforesaid researchers, in a fairly recent article the katholikon frescoes are attributed to the so-called "Cypro-Renaissance painting"⁵⁶.

On the other hand, the well-known researcher of Cypriot art Athanassios Papageorgiou, who referred on several occasions to the murals of the katholikon of the Virgin and gave detailed descriptions⁵⁷, attributed them to Iossif Chouris⁵⁸, the painter of a series of 16 (initially 17) icons forming a Great Deesis, with Christ, the Virgin, St John the Forerunner, two Archangels and eleven

portraits of Apostles, placed on the epistylon of the wood-carved templon of the church. According to inscriptions on the reverse of the icon of Christ and other icons, these pieces were painted by Chouris in 1544⁵⁹. The same scholar attributes to Chouris a set of fine icons on the said templon depicting 22 (initially 26) scenes from the life of the Virgin and of Christ⁶⁰, which is possible. He believes, however, that the frescoes followed the two sets of icons connected with Chouris, a view which has been contested, along with his attribution of the *katholikon* frescoes to him⁶¹. In fact, the facial expressions of the Great Deesis saints by Chouris show a different artistic idiom from that of the katholikon frescoes. Their rendering is a blend of Palaiologan artistic principles with an Italianate flavour, which is reflected also in the landscape of the narrative scenes of the lower tier. Apart from stylistic differences, there are other reasons for dating the wall-paintings earlier than the icons by Chouris⁶², which adorn one of the most remarkable wood-carved and gilded iconostasis screens in Cyprus.

⁵³ Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι*, op.cit. (n. 46), 388 (the same erroneous mention).

⁵⁴ E. D. Matthiopoulos (ed.), *Λεξικό Ελλήνων καλλιτεχνών. Ζωγράφοι – Γλύπτες – Χαράκτες, 16ος-20ός αιώνας*, 4, entry "Στρελίτζας-Μπαθάς Θεοφάνης (Θεοφάνης ο Κρης)" (M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides), 243-244. Cf. Constantoudaki, "Ὁψεις ζωγραφικῆς εἰκόνων", op.cit. (n. 35), 161 (on the Cretan character of these murals).

⁵⁵ G. Petrou, "Ὁ ζωγράφος Θεοφάνης ο Κρης στην Κύπρο. Ενδείξεις ἡ πραγματικότητά;", *22nd Symposium of the Christian Archaeological Society (Athens, 2002)*, 92 (quoting M. Chatzidakis's view mentioned above, note 52), abstract. See also here, note 97.

⁵⁶ Eliadis, "Ἡ συμβολή", op.cit. (n. 5), 396, 397, 403-404, 415. The art of the katholikon frescoes does not in my view justify this consideration, independently of the validity or not of this term, for which see also above, note 36.

⁵⁷ Papageorgiou, "Νεοφύτου Αγίου μοναστήρι", op.cit. (n. 3), 209-215. Idem, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95 and 134-142, figs 79-87. Idem, *St. Neophytos*, op.cit. (n. 5), 33-44. A few decades earlier the same author had discerned a "remote influence of the art of Mystras" in the katholikon murals (thus recognizing correctly their Palaiologan associations) and gave them a dating "approximately to the end of the 15th century", see *Masterpieces of the Byzantine Art of Cyprus. Picture book No. 2*, text by A. Papageorgiou, Nicosia 1965, 4, and pl. XXI, 1-2, details of four scenes. He revised this dating in his later publications, as mentioned in the present study.

⁵⁸ Papageorgiou, "Κύπριοι ζωγράφοι", op.cit. (n. 28), 206-209. Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι*, op.cit. (n. 46), 458, with bibliography.

⁵⁹ Cited by Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 1985, 381 (repeated in 1997). Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95. Idem, *Monastery of St. Neophytos*, op.cit. (n. 5), 47.

⁶⁰ See Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95; the author sees in some of these icons a stylistic relationship with frescoes in the church. In my view icons and frescoes are not by the same artist, primarily due to stylistic and chronological reasons (cf. below, note 62). For reproductions of some of these fine icons see the same book, 181-193, figs 117-129. For these see also below, p. 236, notes 109 and 110.

⁶¹ Stylianou – Stylianou, "Ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη", op.cit. (n. 3), 1342-1344. D. Triantaphyllopoulos, "Βενετία καὶ Κύπρος: σχέσεις τους στὴν τέχνη", *Atti del Simposio Internazionale Cipro – Venezia. Comuni sorti storiche*, ed. Ch. Maltezos, Venice 2002, 330 note 57. Constantoudaki, "Ὁψεις ζωγραφικῆς εἰκόνων", op.cit. (n. 35), 182 note 13. Contrasting views by scholars reflect the difficulty in classifying this exceptional ensemble of the katholikon wall paintings among Cypriot monuments of the time.

⁶² The installation of the upper part of the wood-carved iconostasis, probably around the year the Great Deesis icons were painted (1544), caused some limited damage to the frescoes, e.g. on the south wall, at the point where the wooden beams were affixed, as is visible in situ. See also Stylianou – Stylianou, "Ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη", op.cit. (n. 3), 1342-1343 note 346, and 1386. Cf. Eliadis, "Ἡ συμβολή", op.cit. (n. 5), 399. Not all the icons on the templon are of the same date or style (cf. the despotic icons), as is already signalled in the bibliography. See also below, note 109.



Fig. 23. Saint Neophytos katholikon, sanctuary. Saint Silvester, here attr. to Theophanis (detail of the Fig. 22).

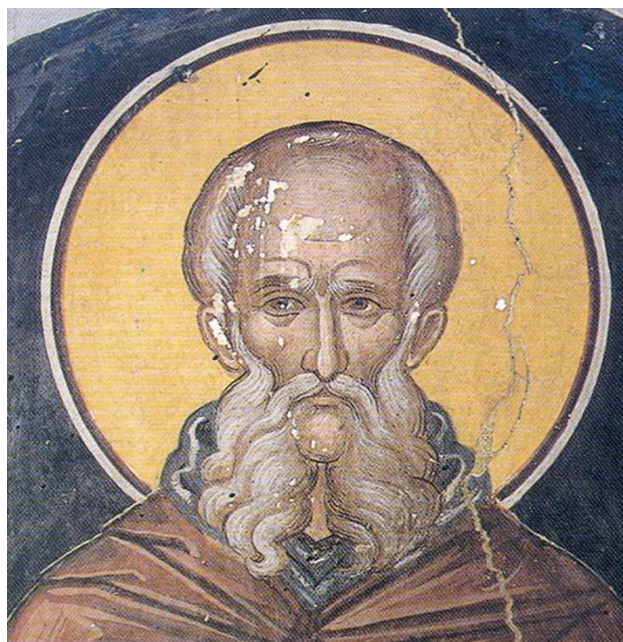


Fig. 24. Meteora, Saint Nicholas Anapafsas. Saint Savvas, by Theophanis (cf. Figs 37, 38).

The wall-paintings in the katholikon and Theophanis from Crete

Stylistic and technical observations⁶³ can be very helpful in the absence of archival or other textual evidence. It seems that the decoration of the katholikon as a whole was executed in a single campaign⁶⁴. Comparative research is essential for establishing, if possible, the identity of the painter of the frescoes and for the specific artistic current they express. I shall attempt a few comparisons between the katholikon wall-paintings and works of Cretan art by focusing on the principal exponent of the Cretan school Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas (ca. 1485 – †1559), whose earliest known signed and dated work are the frescoes in Saint Nicholas Anapafsas at Meteora

(1527), followed by works on Mount Athos already mentioned. Exemplified in these emblematic creations are the established features of Cretan art described above, which are observed also in the katholikon wall-paintings.

Parallels with the Anapafsas frescoes are apparent in the drawing of facial features, the modelling of the flesh, and the rendering of the dense expressions of saints surviving in the nave. Related striking similarities can indeed be observed, for example, between St Silvester in the sanctuary of the katholikon of the Virgin (Fig. 23) and St Savvas in the church of Saint Nicholas⁶⁵ (Fig. 24). Affinities are also visible in the structure of full-length figures. The noble ethos, poses, restrained movements, arrangement and highlighting of the drapery of Christ's disciples in the Communion of the Apostles in the Saint Neophytos katholikon (Fig. 27, see also above Figs 5, 7), as well as in the representation of hierarchs (Fig. 25, see also above Figs 6, 8), display close similarities to corresponding figures painted by Theophanis in the Anapafsas (Fig. 26), and Stavronikita monasteries⁶⁶

⁶³ Observations on technical execution were made in situ as far as possible and were aided by high resolution photographs. Concerning the conservation of the frescoes only general information was published (cf. here note 9).

⁶⁴ Cf. Mango – Hawkins, "Hermitage", op.cit. (n. 1), 203. See also above, note 9. Such decorations demanded team work. The extensive losses from the initial frescoes of the church should also be borne in mind.

⁶⁵ Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), fig. on p. 305. Their physiognomies are almost identical.

⁶⁶ Ibid., e.g. for the apostles cf. 270, 274, 280; for the hierarchs cf.



Fig. 25. Saint Neophytos katholikon, Saint John Chrysostom, here attr. to Theophanis.



Fig. 26. Meteora, Saint Nicholas Anapafsas, Saint John Chrysostom, by Theophanis, detail.

(Fig. 28). Especially noteworthy are the very impressive, about 2.40 m high, officiating bishops in the sanctuary, with an air of being absorbed in the liturgical praxis of the moment. In some scenes the exchange of meaningful glances creates a sense of direct communication between the figures involved (e.g. Joachim and the angel in the south aisle (see above Fig. 12); the Virgin and Joseph in stanza 11 of the *Akathistos*, see Fig. 29), a special feature of Theophanis's work⁶⁷. Furthermore, in the *Akathistos*

cycle a distinctive characteristic is the painterly execution and a degree of fluidity in the handling of the brushstroke. On the other hand, this kind of swift technique may be due to pressure of time, if we are to judge from some missing details, such as the lack of inscriptions on unfurled scrolls (e.g. stanza 16) (see above Fig. 15).

Other elements may also help in approaching the artist to whom the task was entrusted. For example, the enthroned Mother of God in the apse of the katholikon of Saint Neophytos⁶⁸ (see above Fig. 4) displays close iconographic similarities to her counterpart at Anapafsas

171-178. Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs. 40, 45, 48; and 40-44. More material in Chatzidakis, "Recherches", op.cit. (n. 46). Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46).

⁶⁷ Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs on p. 200-203; Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs 92-97.

⁶⁸ A photo in Eliadis, "Η συμβολή", op.cit. (n. 5), 413, fig. 21. For the theme in post-Byzantine sanctuary apses of katholika see Gkiolēs, *Τοιχογραφίες Μονής Διονυσίου*, op.cit. (n. 17), 14.



Fig. 27. Saint Neophytos katholikon. The Communion of the Apostles (detail of the Fig. 7).



Fig. 28. Stavronikita monastery, Saint Nicholas katholikon. The Communion of the Apostles, by Theophanis, detail.

(type, pose, drapery); also her throne has a series of little arches at its base, as is in the Great Lavra and Stavronikita monasteries⁶⁹. The Virgin of the katholikon shares a peculiar feature with her depiction at Anapafsas: she actually steps on the edge of her robe, which folds over her shoes. The same detail was already employed by Cretan painters in the early fifteenth century⁷⁰ and was continued

on contemporary and later Cretan icons⁷¹, including one by Markos Strelitzas-Bathas, a relative of Theophanis's⁷². Unfortunately, due to the destruction of Christological

⁶⁹ Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), fig. on p. 261. G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de l'Athos*, Paris 1927, pl. 118.1. Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), fig. 49.

⁷⁰ M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Enthroned Virgin and Child with Saints, a Composite Work of Italo-Cretan Art", *DChAE* 17 (1993-1994), 289, fig. 4 (in Greek with English summary). Cf. a similar but not identical arrangement in the enthroned Virgin in

the Perivleptos church at Mystras (M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Μυστράς. Ιστορικός και αρχαιολογικός οδηγός*, Athens 2003, 74, fig. 68), which implies a Byzantine origin of this detail.

⁷¹ M. Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos*, Athens 1985 ('1977, in Greek), pls 138, 156. Observed also in Cypriot icons of the 16th century, e.g. Papageorgiou, *Εικόνες της Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 35), 120, fig. 83 (no date given).

⁷² M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Icones portatives du peintre Markos Strilitzas Bathas ou Markos Vathas en Epire", *DChAE* 8 (1975-1976), 109-144, pl. 68 (in Greek with French summary). V. Papadopoulou (ed.), *Μνημεία των Ιωαννίνων*, Ioannina 2012, 172. For Markos, Theophanis's cousin, see note 95.



Fig. 29. Saint Neophytos katholikon. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 11 (Λ), the Flight into Egypt.



Fig. 31. Saint Neophytos katholikon. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 21 (Φ), the Virgin as a light-giving torch.



Fig. 30. Great Lavra monastery. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 11 (Λ), the Flight into Egypt, by Theophanis.



Fig. 32. Great Lavra monastery. The cycle of the Akathistos Hymn, stanza 21 (Φ), the Virgin as a light-giving torch, by Theophanis.

compositions which must have existed in the katholikon, we lack the possibility of relevant comparisons.

The *Akathistos* cycle, thanks to the fairly good preservation of most of its scenes, can provide material for the present research. The subject was introduced in the early Palaiologan period in the context of a renewed emphasis on the role of the Virgin protectress of Con-

stantinople and on Mariological subjects⁷³, and became widespread in late Byzantine and post-Byzantine art. In Cyprus four cycles only, not all complete, including the

⁷³ Cf. above, p. 213-214, notes 21 and 22. For early cycles and the iconography of the scenes see A. Pätzold, *Der Akathistos-Hymnos. Die Bilderzyklen in der byzantinischen Wandmalerei des 14.*

one under consideration, exist⁷⁴, none of which is dated. In Crete *Akathistos* themes are encountered in a number of churches with late Byzantine frescoes⁷⁵. Cycles of the *Akathistos* were executed by Cretan sixteenth-century painters, including Theophanis, on Mount Athos, as in the *trapeza* or refectory of the Great Lavra monastery (around 1535 – post 1541)⁷⁶, and the *trapeza* of the Stavronikita monastery (1546, with his son Symeon)⁷⁷. Neither of these cycles is published in detail. I shall only cite affinities between relevant scenes in the Saint Neophytos katholikon and those in the Great Lavra *trapeza*, despite their chronological distance. Figures in the *Akathistos* scenes there, such as the Virgin, St Joseph, angels, and groups, as well as architectural backgrounds are treated in similar manner⁷⁸. The same holds for entire composi-

tions, such as those of the stanza 11 with the Flight into Egypt (Figs 29, 30), and stanza 21 with the Virgin as a Light-giving Torch (Figs 31, 32), where the iconographic schemes are very close⁷⁹.

The few stylistic and iconographic observations made above, which can be multiplied, point to the attribution of the katholikon frescoes to a Cretan artist of the level and quality of Theophanis. Indeed, as observed above⁸⁰, monumental figures of standing saints depicted in the church and numerous small-scale figures in other scenes are, among others, very close to his creations. As is the case with the Anapafsas wall-paintings (1527), those of the katholikon of the Virgin reproduce Palaiologan schemes⁸¹ adopted by Cretan painters and include details inherited from earlier Cretan painting⁸². Therefore similarities of the wall-paintings in the katholikon at the Saint Neophytos monastery embrace all aspects of Theophanis's method of work.

Patron and taste, painter and identity. The *Enkleistriani* icon and its author

If the attribution of the Saint Neophytos wall-paintings to a Cretan workshop and to Theophanis in particular is accepted, then further questions arise regarding the commissioner of the project, the choice of a painter from outside Cyprus for a costly decoration, and the dates of its execution. Concerning the initiative to cover with wall-paintings

Jahrhunderts, Stuttgart 1989. L. M. Peltomaa, *The Image of Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, Leiden 2001. I. Spatharakis, *The Pictorial Cycles of the Akathistos Hymn for the Virgin*, Leiden 2005, 4-7 with short critical discussion of previous studies.

⁷⁴ They all date from the Venetian period of the island, see Eliadis, “Ἡ συμβολὴ” op.cit. (n. 5), 392. For a Cypriot portable icon of the 16th century with the Virgin and Child and the 24 stanzas of the *Akathistos* see S. Sofocleous, *Icons de Chypre, Diocèse de Limasol, 12e-16e siècle*, Nicosia 2006, 404, fig. 97.

⁷⁵ For six cycles in murals see Spatharakis, *Cycles of Akathistos*, op.cit. (n. 73), 8-44. Found on portable icons, too.

⁷⁶ *Akathistos* scenes from Great Lavra in: Millet, *Athos*, op.cit. (n. 69), pls 145.2-3, 146.1-2 and 147.1-2; M. Aspra-Vardavaki, *Οἱ μικρογραφίες τοῦ Ἀκαθίστου στὸν κώδικα Garrett 13*, Princeton, Athens 1992, figs 108-131. I. Tavlakis, *Τὸ εἰκονογραφικὸ πρόγραμμα στὶς τράπεζες τῶν μονῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους* (unpublished PhD thesis), Ioannina 1997, 41-75. Chatzidakis dates them from ca. 1535 to post 1541, see Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, “Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι”, op.cit. (n. 46), 383. For their restoration see I. Kanonidis (ed.), *The Conservation of Wall-painting Ensembles at Mount Athos in the Refectory ('trapeza') of the Monastery of the Megisti Lavra*, [Thessaloniki] 2015, 6, 9, 11. Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46), 62, likewise attributes them to Theophanis, who also painted the Great Lavra katholikon in 1535/36; for the restoration of over-painted frescoes of the latter see I. Tavlakis – N. Toutos – S. Stephanides, “Restoration study of frescoes in the katholikon of the Monastery of the Great Lavra”, *Ἡ Δεκάτη. Review of the 10th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities on the Christian Antiquities of Chalkidiki and Mount Athos* 1 (2003-2004), 54-69 (in Greek with English summary).

⁷⁷ *Akathistos* scenes: Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs 201, 208-210. Tavlakis, *Τράπεζες*, op.cit. (n. 76), 87-96.

⁷⁸ Cf. Millet, *Athos*, op.cit. (n. 69), 146, fig. 1. Aspra-Vardavaki, *Μικρογραφίες Ἀκαθίστου*, op.cit. (n. 76), figs 108-111, 113, 125.

⁷⁹ Millet, *Athos*, op.cit. (n. 69), 147, fig. 2. Aspra-Vardavaki, *Μικρογραφίες Ἀκαθίστου*, op.cit. (n. 76), figs 118, 128. A detailed investigation of the sources of the *Akathistos* scenes, already in progress, cannot be expanded on here.

⁸⁰ Cf. above, notes 65, 67, 69.

⁸¹ It is indicative that they have been considered close to the art of churches at Mystras, of which an emblematic monument is the Virgin Pantanassa, with frescoes of ca. 1428, see M. Aspra-Vardavaki – M. Emmanouil, *Ἡ Μονὴ τῆς Παντάνασσας στὸν Μυστρά. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ 15ου αἰώνα*, Athens 2005. Note also that Theophanis's father and uncle, active painters in Crete, were originally from the Peloponnese (see below, notes 93-95).

⁸² Not necessarily in the same scenes. For example, the small leafless trees observed here in the Annunciation to Joachim (Fig. 12) are found in 15th-century Cretan art, e.g. a *Pietà* icon, see N. Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες κρητικῆς σχολῆς, 15ος-16ος αἰώνας* (exhib. cat.: *Benaki Museum*), Athens 1983, no. 45 on p. 52; the same detail was used by Theophanis, see Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), 292-293.



Fig. 33. Saint Neophytos katholikon, proskynetarion in the south aisle. The "Enkleistriani" icon, by Theophylaktos.

the new katholikon, an obvious candidate would be the monastery itself, which at the time was enjoying prosperity under Ioakeim II; even so, a generous patronage would be needed for such a large project⁸³. The hieromonk Ioakeim was the abbot in 1512 (and probably some years earlier) until some time before 1521 (†11 April 1521), as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The rich iconographic programme, full of theological connotations, does indeed suggest an ecclesiastic with knowledge, culture, and vision. If Ioakeim II was the initiator, then the commission for the wall-paintings must have been given between 1512 and 1521⁸⁴. Proof of Ioakeim's particular piety and insight into aspects of his personality and taste are offered by the cult icon of the Virgin displayed in the katholikon (Figs 33, 34). It bears his dedicatory inscription, and the signature of a painter named Theophylaktos: "Supplication of the servant of God Ioakeim hieromonk, former abbot of the holy monastery of the Enkleistra and spiritual father. (By) The hand of Theophylaktos" (Fig. 34)⁸⁵.

This monumental panel (110.5×78.2 cm) represents the Virgin holding the Child in a Byzantine iconographic type, a sort of variation of the Hodegetria, in which the two figures are not depicted frontally, as in the classic type, but turned slightly towards each other⁸⁶ (Fig.

33). It has the significant epithet "Η ΕΓΚΛΗΤΡΙΑΝΗ" (the Mother of God of the *Enkleistra*)⁸⁷, underscoring the Virgin's protection for the whole monastery. The donor Ioakeim, "former abbot" was therefore Ioakeim II, who no longer held the office by the year of the icon's dedication in the monastery, but still served the community as a "spiritual father" (πνευματικός πατήρ). The composition includes a minuscule portrait of him kneeling and looking up towards the Theotokos, unrolling a scroll with his deesis to her, invoking her intercession for his sake at the Last Judgment. His distinctive facial features and beard suggest that he was portrayed from life⁸⁸, at an unspecified date between ca. 1512 and before 11 April 1521, when Ioakeim II died. The icon, a high-quality specimen of Cretan art, follows Byzantine iconography with inclusion of details established by Cretan painters such as Angelos (†1450) and Andreas Ritzos (†ante 1503). A characteristic example is an excellent Cretan icon in Corfu (Fig. 35)⁸⁹, I believe from Angelos's workshop, of exactly the same type as the *Enkleistriani*, including the triangular opening of the Virgin's *maphorion* and the little golden bow of her robe. Other examples,

⁸³ Private individual patronage is possible, as in the case of the wall-paintings of 1503 and, most probably, of with the construction of the church, see above, notes 5-6, and below, note 92. Collective patronage would be an alternative, but no information on either case has been discovered so far.

⁸⁴ This margin could be possibly modified, as we will see further on, see pp. 234-235.

⁸⁵ Transcription with the abbreviations solved: ΔΕΗCIC ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΙΩΑΚΕΙΜ ΙΕΡΟΜΟΝΑΧΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΠΡΩ-ΗΝ ΗΓΟΥΜΕΝΟΥ ΤΗΣ CΕΒΑCΜΙΑC ΜΟΝΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΓΚΛΗCΤΡΙΑC ΚΑΙ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ∴ ΧΕΙΡ ΘΕΟΦΥΛΑΚΤΟΥ, with four dots forming a lozenge before the signature.

⁸⁶ For reproductions of it before restoration see D. Talbot-Rice, *The Icons of Cyprus*, with chapters by R. Gunnis and T. T. Rice, London 1937, 218-219, no. 42, and pl. XXII (the name of the painter is read as "Theophanes"). Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 52-53, who connects the icon to a previous abbot, also named Ioakeim (Ioakeim I), documented in 1450 (see above, p. 2 and notes 4 and 6). A. Papageorgiou, "Κύπριοι ζωγράφοι φορητών εικόνων του 16ου αιώνα", *RDAC*, 1975, 175-176, pl. XXV.2. M. Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση, 1450-1830*, 1: *Άβέρκιος - Ίωσηφ*, Athens 1987, 314 (he dates it to the mid-16th century). Papageorgiou, *Εικόνες της Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 35), 130, no photo

(he considers it "of the Cypriot School of the 16th century" with Western influence, apparently because of the over-painting the icon had at the time). S. Sophocleous, *Icons of Cyprus 7th-20th Century*, Nicosia 1994, 102-103 (dated to the first half of the 16th century) and 186, pl. 52, in colour, before removal of later over-painting and with a wood-carved and gilded frame, now placed around a reproduction of the previous state of the icon displayed in the monastery's museum.

⁸⁷ Μ(η)Τ(η)Ρ / Θ(εο)Υ / Η ΕΓΚΛΗCΤΡΙΑΝΗ (for Έγκλειστριανή). The epithet refers to the initial hermitage (*Enkleistra*) founded by St Neophytos, the foremost locus of cult in the monasterial complex for centuries.

⁸⁸ ΠΑΝΤΑΝΑCΑ ΠΑΝΥΜΝΗΤΕ ΕΛΠΙC ΑΠΗΛΠΙCΜΕΝΩΝ ΕΝ ΩΡΑ ΜΕ ΤΗ ΦΟΒΕΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΔΙΚΗΣ ΡΥCΑΙ ΜΕ ΜΕCΙΤΕΙΑΙC CΟΥ. The inscription seems to have been retouched in the past (?). The somehow awkwardly placed, supposedly kneeling, donor at the edge of the panel's lower left corner, as well as some discernible brushstrokes in the area of his praying hand, which overlap folds of the Virgin's mantle, convey the impression that the monk's portrait was accommodated at this spot once the image of the Virgin was completed (?).

⁸⁹ For the icon in Corfu see P. L. Vocotopoulos, *Εικόνες της Κερκύρας*, Athens 1990, figs 6, 75-77 (dated there to the middle or the third quarter of the 15th century, no attribution). It bears the inscription Η ΕΛΕΟΥCΑ.



Fig. 34. The donor Abbot Ioakeim, his dedicatory inscription and the signature by Theophylaktos (detail of the Fig. 33).

by A. Ritzos, are an excellent work of the same type (Athens, Byzantine Museum), rightly attributed to him, and other icons⁹⁰. A further Cretan icon (Athens, Byzantine Museum)⁹¹, of slightly later date than those by A. Ritzos, is identical to the *Enkleistriani* in type and very close to it in style and facial expression (Fig. 36). In comparison to these icons, the one by Theophylaktos can be dated on stylistic grounds to the second decade of the sixteenth century⁹².

⁹⁰ See *Icons of the Cretan School. From Candia to Moscow to St. Petersburg* (exhibition catalogue), ed. M. Borboudakis, Heraklion 1993, no. 207 (Ch. Baltoyanni). Also, Ch. Baltoyanni, *Εικόνες. Μήτηρ Θεού Βρεφοκρατούσα στην Ενσάρκωση και το Πάθος*, Athens 1994, no. 64. For more icons by A. Ritzos see M. Cattapan, "I pittori Andrea e Nicola Rizo da Candia", *Thesaurismata* 10 (1973), pls 4.1, 7.2.

⁹¹ This icon, bearing the title *Η ΑΜΟΛΗΝΤΟC*, has been dated to the end of the 15th-beginning of the 16th century by Baltoyanni, *Εικόνες. Μήτηρ Θεού*, op.cit. (n. 90), no. 65, fig. 124. Affinities with the *Enkleistriani* extend to details such as the little bow on the Virgin's robe and the blue-greenish colour of Christ's tunic, which in other icons of the type is white. In addition, this work in my view can be associated with Theophanis' s early work. Baltoyanni attributes it to the "cycle of the workshop of Ritzos", not surprisingly, given the discernible artistic relationship between Theophanis and his famous predecessor in Cretan painting.

⁹² Its commission also shows the particular devotion for the Virgin by the former abbot, who, as Abbot Ioakeim II was the moving force for the erection of the katholikon, as proposed above. Moreover,

One instantly wonders whether the painter Theophylaktos had any involvement in the execution of the katholikon frescoes, although the only specimen of his work, the *Enkleistriani* panel, does not facilitate comparisons due to the difference in size and medium from the frescoes. At this point I would like to draw attention to two notarial documents written in Latin and drafted in Venetian Crete, which I happened to discover in the State Archive of Venice⁹³. They reveal that in 1509 and 1517 *Theofilacto Strilici* or *Theophylactus Striliza* (variations of names occur frequently in documents of the period) was resident in the city of Candia, the capital of Venetian Crete, and was involved in commissions and perhaps trade of icons. Theophylaktos was the son of the painter and priest Ioannis, and nephew of the painter

the dedication of the church to the Virgin, not to Holy Cross (cf. notes 5-6, 83), was probably due to his choice. It is added that this impressive icon seems to have had an impact locally, as for instance in the Virgin of the same type, with depiction of two donors and a church (1529), from Saint Kassianos, Nicosia, see Papageorgiou, *Εικόνες της Κύπρου*, op.cit. (n. 35), fig. 88.

⁹³ Published by M. G. Constantoudaki, "I pittori di Candia della prima metà del XVI secolo attestati negli archivi notarili", *Thesaurismata* 10 (1973), 365-366 (in Greek with Italian summary), doc. 6 and commentary; by a contract of 19 April 1509 Theophylaktos Strilitzas commissioned ten triptychs (*incones videlizet sfinalitaria*) with holy figures from his uncle the painter Georgios Strilitzas



Fig. 35. Corfu, *Virgin and Child*, here attr. to Angelos's workshop.

Georgios Strelitzas-Bathas, both of whom had considerable personal activity in the city of Candia⁹⁴. It is possible

(Strilincea, Strilița) to be delivered by the end of July of that year at a price of one golden ducat per item. His role in this deal is not clear (trader, intermediary, painter occupied with other commissions?). The task was never realized, as revealed by a codicil of 16 May 1517, which settles this pending matter after 8 years. Also, Theophylaktos by an act of 9 May 1517 acknowledged a debt of the considerable sum of 15 golden Venetian ducats to a person from Chania, Crete, see *ibidem*, 366, which alludes to an enterprising activity or to an economic transaction.

⁹⁴ Ioannis (doc. 1486-1516) and Georgios (doc. 1495-1522), came to

that he had followed the family tradition, as was usual at the time, but his occupation is not recorded (this is sometimes omitted by notaries in the documents). Can it be that the Theophylaktos Strilitzas (Strelitzas) documented in Crete in 1509 and 1517, was the same person as the Theophylaktos who painted the Cretan *Enkleistriani*

Crete from the Peloponnese, see Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi e documenti", *op.cit.* (n. 41), 208, nos 111, 112 and 233. Constantoudaki, "I pittori di Candia", *op.cit.* (n. 93), 299-300 no. 3, 369-371 docs. 10-11 (Ioannis), and 319-321 no. 21 and 365-366 doc. 6 (Georgios).



Fig. 36. Athens, Byzantine Museum, *Virgin and Child*, here associated with Theophanis's early work (it bears a false signature by the name of Elias Moskos).

icon before 1521? And if yes, what might be his relationship to the artist of the katholikon wall-paintings?

I have noted above some of the many affinities of the katholikon frescoes with the Cretan school and especially with the art of Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas, who is one of at least nine painters by the same last name⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ For two of them see note 93; others (Markos, Theophanis, Symeon, Neophytos, Peros, Georgios son of Markos, Thomas) were active in Crete and outside the island in the course of the 16th century, see Chatzidakis, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι*, op.cit. (n. 86) and

Theophanis is the most prominent member of the family, known for his important sets of wall-paintings in mainland and northern Greece, dated from 1527 to 1546, and more⁹⁶. After a long life on the move and a successful career, especially on Mount Athos, with occasional trips

Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι*, op.cit. (n. 46), relevant entries. Markos was the son of Georgios, therefore Theophylaktos's first cousin.

⁹⁶ Chatzidakis – Drakopoulou, *Ἑλληνες ζωγράφοι*, op.cit. (n. 46), 381-396. See also above, note 53.

back to the city of Candia, he died in his home city on 24 February 1559.

A further thought which comes to mind is that Theophylaktos who signed the *Enkleistriani* icon may be the one who later became a monk changing his name to Theophanis⁹⁷ (both names with the same initial, as is the tradition in Orthodox monasticism), by which he signs his work in Meteora in 1527: “by the hand of the monk Theophanis Bathas, from Crete, Strelitzas”. If this identification is correct, as is plausible, then Theophylaktos later re-named Theophanis is the main author of the frescoes of the new katholikon in the Saint Neophytos monastery, a view supported by stylistic comparisons between these frescoes and Theophanis’s works.

Furthermore, this attractive hypothesis may be strengthened by observations such as the following: (a) no sixteenth-century painter by the name Theophylaktos, other than the one who signed the *Enkleistriani* icon, is mentioned in the most complete catalogues published so far⁹⁸, possibly because of the subsequent change of his name; (b) a paleographic analysis of inscriptions accompanying representations in the Saint Neophytos katholikon and works by Theophanis reveals close similarities, particularly concerning the Greek letters *B* and *P*, and complexes of letters such as *EI* and *ΣΤ* (although not all inscriptions seem by the same hand)⁹⁹ and this holds for the inscription on the *Enkleistriani* icon; (c) both the

Cretan (as his art reveals) painter Theophylaktos of the *Enkleistriani* (if identified with the Cretan Theophylaktos of 1509 and 1517) and the famous artist Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas were adventurous. Theophylaktos attempted the long sea-voyage to Cyprus, and resided on the island for some years. Theophanis scaled the gigantic Meteora cliffs in the dangerous way at the time, and worked there in isolated conditions, while later in his life he occasionally travelled between Mount Athos and Crete; (d) Theophylaktos and Theophanis were enterprising personalities. Theophylaktos was involved in the city of Candia with the commission and possibly trade of icons in 1509, and had an economic transaction in 1517. Theophanis, while undertaking major painting projects as head of a team on Mount Athos (at least in 1535-1546), acquired and exchanged rights of monastic residence and cultivated land at the Great Lavra monastery and at Karyes. He had also accumulated considerable wealth in golden coins and other valuables, and in 1552 he was able to lend to a resident in Candia the substantial sum of 400 ducats, later retrieved by his son Symeon in Venice¹⁰⁰. Therefore, the general behaviour of Theophylaktos and Theophanis shows similar characteristics, a fact encouraging for their identification in one and the same person.

It is also of some interest that a Cretan icon found in the Gonia monastery at Kissamos, Crete, which has identical iconography to the *Enkleistriani* and other affinities with it, was attributed to Theophanis’s early production¹⁰¹. In addition, both the *Enkleistriani* icon and frescoes by Theophanis attest their creator’s proficiency also in portraiture within religious contexts, as undertaken by Byzantine artists –and post-Byzantine painters too– when asked. I mention the likeness of the abbot Ioakeim

⁹⁷ Possibility expressed also by G. Petrou (cf. also above, p. 221, note 55), who was involved with (or aware of) the conservation of the *Enkleistriani* icon (unfortunately I have no more information on the year and details of this), who, assisted by C. Gerasimou, connected the katholikon frescoes with Theophanis and the icon and gave more comments, according to a journalist’s report appearing in: <https://churchofcyprus.org.cy/6475>, 23-6-2010 (accessed 14-4-2021). Cf. also another mention by S. Frigerio-Zeniou, *Luxe et umilité: se vêtir à Chypre au XVIe siècle*, Limassol 2012, 108, n. 190. On associations (since 1985) of Theophanis with the Saint Neophytos monastery by various authors see here, pp. 220-221 and notes 51-55.

⁹⁸ See Chatzidakis, “Ελληνες ζωγράφοι”, op.cit. (n. 86), 314 (the Theophylaktos of our icon, which is dated in the “middle of the 16th century”). E. Drakopoulou, “Ελληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση, 1450-1850”, 3, Athens 2010, 312 (the same painter, and his only icon, again dated “ca. 1550”).

⁹⁹ Indicative examples. An extensive analysis of this revealing aspect could not be undertaken here. On Theophanis’s writing see the detailed observations by G. Velenis, “Η γραφή του Κρητιζού ζωγράφου Θεοφάνη Μπαθά», *Βυζαντινά* 26 (2006), 211-240.

¹⁰⁰ Information for his wealth see in Chatzidakis, “Recherches”, op.cit. (n. 46), 348-350, documents of 1559-1560. The case of 1552 is found in unpublished archival material first discovered by the late Prof. N. Panayotakis.

¹⁰¹ E. N. Tsigaridas, “Unknown Icons and Wall-paintings by Theophanis the Cretan in the Pantocrator Monastery and the Gregoriou Monastery on Mount Athos”, *DChAE* 19 (1996-1997), 116 (in Greek with English summary), a possible attribution. Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46), 216, fig. 117. The same iconography (not style) is encountered in an icon by Theophanis (1546), A. Karakatsanis, “The Icons of Stavronikita Monastery”, *Stavronikita Monastery. History – Icons – Embroideries*, eds Ch. Patrinelis – A. Karakatsanis – M. Theocharis, Athens 1974, fig. 13.

II painted from life by Theophylaktos (*ante* 1521), and effigies of ecclesiastics elaborated by Theophanis, patrons of wall-paintings, not all of them from life: at Anapafsas (1527), and the Great Lavra (1535/36-1541) and Stavronikita monasteries, including, in the last, a portrait of the Patriarch of Constantinople Ieremias I (?-†1546)¹⁰².

At this point it is interesting to recall that Ieremias I the Ecumenical Patriarch resided in the Saint Neophytos monastery from 26 December 1526 for 17 days, extending his stay for another 27 days at Paphos, while en route to Mount Sinai and Jerusalem¹⁰³. He undoubtedly viewed the frescoes in the katholikon, but whether he met their painter (in the uncertain case that Theophanis was still in Cyprus) is not known. The fact that important ensembles of frescoes executed subsequently by Theophanis in monasteries in Meteora and Mount Athos coincide with the years during which Ieremias I was Ecumenical Patriarch, perhaps suggests that the Patriarch may have been aware of or involved somehow in the circumstances related to these commissions¹⁰⁴.

If the katholikon frescoes were executed by Theophanis as the principal painter, as I believe, then the Cretan travelled to Cyprus at the invitation of Abbot Ioakeim II some years before 1521. And if he is indeed identified with Theophylaktos, as the preceding discussion proposes, then he arrived there some time after 16 May 1517, when Theophylaktos (later Theophanis) settles by notarial agreement an old matter in the city of

Candia, probably in view of his departure. Apart from all the aforesaid, the best testimony of the character of the frescoes and the identity of the creator is offered by their art itself. The frescoes reveal an expert artist of sound Cretan training, familiar with late Byzantine and early post-Byzantine wall-paintings and icons in his homeland. Following the previous analysis, which could be expanded, and by combining available evidence, the frescoes in the katholikon of the Virgin can be attributed to Theophanis (and his team), and dated sometime between 1517 and 1521 ca., proposed here. In those years Theophanis would have been in his late 20s or early 30s (born ca. 1485-1490, †1559). The choice of a Cretan painter can be reasonably connected with Venetian rule over both Cyprus (1483-1571) and Crete (1211 ca.-1669) and the contacts between the two great islands. Moreover, Cretan art of the time, which had developed upon the best traditions of late Byzantine painting of Constantinople and Mystras, and was practised by painters active in the foremost urban artistic centre in the Eastern Mediterranean after the fall of Byzantium, the city of Candia, enjoyed wider recognition and was perhaps appreciated also by circles in Cyprus. Theophanis responded to the challenge of an invitation from overseas, and produced a remarkable ensemble of post-Byzantine paintings of the Cretan school in an important monastic establishment in Cyprus, the historic Saint Neophytos monastery.

Recapitulation, and more

The iconography and style of the high quality post-Byzantine wall-paintings in the katholikon of the Virgin Mary at the Saint Neophytos monastery follow the tradition of late Palaiologan trends, while at the same time bespeaking a Cretan artistic identity. As proposed in the present paper, these murals with their rich iconographic programme conveying theological meanings were most probably commissioned by Ioakeim II, documented as abbot already in 1512 until an unspecified date, certainly before 1521 (†11 April 1521). In that case the year of his demise can be taken as a certain *terminus ante quem* for the wall-paintings. The abbot and his entourage apparently wished the inclusion of some specific themes proclaiming the values of Orthodox dogma in a period when the Church of Cyprus was under the Latin

¹⁰² Examples: Metropolitan of Larissa Dionysios and Exarch of Stagoi Nikanor (Anapafsas), see Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), 264 and 265; Metropolitan of Veroia Neophytos (Great Lavra) and Patriarch Ieremias I (Stavronikita), see Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs 41, 81.

¹⁰³ See M. I. Gedeon, *Πατριαρχικοί πίνακες. Ειδήσεις ιστορικά βιογραφικά περί των Πατριαρχών Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Constantinople 1885-1890), Athens 1996, 379. Tsiknopoullos, *Άγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 54. Mango – Hawkins, “Hermitage”, op.cit. (n. 1), 130. M. Stroumbakis, *Ιερεμίας Α΄ – Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Ο βίος και το έργο του*, Athens 2004, 39-40.

¹⁰⁴ The cases concern the frescoes at Anapafsas (1527), at the Great Lavra (from 1535 on), and at the Stavronikita monastery (1546). Ieremias was especially involved in the new foundation of the Stavronikita monastery, where the decoration of the katholikon and the refectory, as well as the portable icons were entrusted to Theophanis (painted with his son Symeon in 1545/46). See Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46). Karakatsanis, “Icons”, op.cit. (n. 101), 39-140. Tsigaridas, *Theophanes the Cretan*, op.cit. (n. 46), 34, 173-212.



Fig. 37. Saint Neophytos monastery, entrance to the Enkleistra. The Annunciation, and Saints Peter, Paul and Savvas, all attributed here to Theophanis.

Archbishop. The expressive qualities of the murals especially recall the artistic vocabulary of the famous Cretan painter Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas (documented 1527-1546 in Meteora and Mount Athos, †24 February 1559 in Crete), who is considered in the present study the principal master of the whole work and head of a team possessing a rich repository of diverse compositions.

The *Enkleistriani* icon of the monastery was also commissioned by Abbot Ioakeim II in an unknown year before 1521, when he no longer held the abbotship, and includes his small-scale portrait. The style of the work suggests the identity of a Cretan painter as well, and a dating in the second decade of the sixteenth century following comparisons to Cretan icons of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Its creator Theophylaktos, of unrecorded surname, can be identified,

after combination of visual and archival evidence, as a homonymous member of the Strelitzas-Bathas family of Cretan painters, who is documented in the city of Candia in 1509 and 1517 collaborating with the Strelitzas workshop. The icon was intended for the monastery's new katholikon, dedicated to the Virgin. The wall-paintings were most probably commissioned during the tenure of Ioakeim II as abbot, and it seems reasonable to assume that the work was entrusted to the same Cretan painter as the one who signs by the name Theophylaktos the *Enkleistriani* icon. Since the frescoes present so many affinities with the art of Theophanis Strelitzas-Bathas, we suspect that Theophylaktos and Theophanis were one and the same person at different stages of his life, first as a lay professional, and later, surely before 1527, as a painter and monk, the way he signs the wall-paintings in



Fig. 38. Saint Neophytos, Entrance to the Enkleistra. Saint Savvas, here attributed to Theophanis (detail of the Fig. 37, cf. Fig. 24).



Fig. 39. Saint Neophytos katholikon, sanctuary. Saint Silvester, here attributed to Theophanis (detail of the Fig. 22, cf. Fig. 23).

the Anapafsas monastery at Meteora. This is, I believe, more than a plausible hypothesis. Theophanis would have executed the wall-paintings in the Saint Neophytos katholikon between 1517 and 1521, consequently this would be his earliest work. The large church of the Virgin originally covered completely with high-level wall-paintings must have impressed artists and audiences of the time. It is not known whether Theophanis worked in other places in Cyprus. In his notable cycle at Meteora in 1527 he employed once again Palaiologan iconography, this time with more receptiveness to Renaissance artistic trends and humanist culture, assimilating elements from Italian prints known to circulate in Venetian Candia¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ These prints, mostly engravings, recreated forms from the Greek and Roman tradition. For their use see M. Chatzidakis, “Ἡ κρητική ζωγραφική καὶ ἡ ἰταλικὴ χαλκογραφία”, *ΚρητΧρον* 1 (1947), 27-46. M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “Theophanis, Marcantonio Raimondi, themes *all’antica* and grottesques”, *Εὐφρόσυνον. Αφιέρωμα στὸν Μανόλη Χατζηδάκη*, 1, Athens 1991, 271-281 (in Greek with English summary).

Before closing this paper, I shall refer to the frescoes adorning the walls in the semi-open porch or narthex of the rock-cut *Enkleistra*, which certainly did not pass unnoticed in previous bibliography¹⁰⁶. They depict the Annunciation, the Apostles Peter and Paul, St Nicholas, St Savvas Ὁ Ἁγιασμένος (sanctified), and other saints (Fig. 37). Their high quality and stylistic similarities with the frescoes in the katholikon show that they are by the same team of Cretan painters¹⁰⁷ who decorated the

¹⁰⁶ Sotiriou, *Τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα*, op.cit. (n. 7), pls 104-114. Tsiknopoullos, *Ἅγιος Νεόφυτος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 54 (the frescoes are placed along those of 1503). Mango – Hawkins, “Hermitage”, op.cit. (n. 1), 137-139, 203 (with description of the paintings) and figs 7-13. Cf. Stylianou – Stylianou, *Painted Churches*, op.cit. (n. 1), 368 (with a 16th century dating as those of the katholikon). Papageorgiou, *Μητρόπολις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), 95 (attributed to the painter of the katholikon). Eliadis, “Ἡ συμβολή”, op.cit. (n. 5), 396-399 (correlation with the katholikon frescoes, no previous references).

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. the figures of St Silvester in the katholikon and St Savvas depicted at the entrance to the *Enkleistra*, next to St Paul (Figs 22-24 and 37-39).



Fig. 40. Saint Neophytos katholikon, templon. Icon of Saint John the Theologian, by Iossif Chouris.

katholikon of the Virgin, perhaps by Theophanis himself¹⁰⁸ (Figs 38, 39). Therefore, two sets of wall-paintings in the Saint Neophytos monastery can be connected to an excellent famous Cretan painter.

Last, it is interesting that a quarter of a century later a remarkable painter, Iossif Chouris, of probable Syrian origin and apparently working on the island, was commissioned to paint a number of icons for the templon in the katholikon of the Virgin¹⁰⁹. The church was already

adorned with splendid mural compositions by another artist (Theophanis) who had arrived in Cyprus from another great island (Crete) and had a professional training in the Cretan manner. The common denominator of the two painters was a similar artistic background (late Palaiologan painting). Chouris executed for the templon a great number of fine icons, with sacred scenes of a miniaturist character in small scale (life of the Virgin and of Christ) on the one hand, and on the other portraits of holy figures of monumental air in large scale (the Great Deesis with Christ, the Theotokos, St John the Forerunner and Apostles, Fig. 40)¹¹⁰. Like his Cretan fellow painter, he was accomplished; he was also eclectic and capable of combining late Palaiologan tradition with echoes of an international Gothic elegance and a Mannerist tinge. The fact reveals a further aspect of the subtle appreciation of diverse taste in the social circles and in the context of religious painting serving the spiritual needs of the Orthodox vast majority of the population in Venetian Cyprus.

the katholikon, see Stylianou – Stylianiou, “Η βυζαντινή τέχνη”, op.cit. (n. 3), 1388, who, moreover, date the icons of the lower tier to the beginning of the 16th century, and disassociate them from Chouris. Papacostas, “An Exceptional Structure”, op.cit. (n. 3), 303-304 agrees for an earlier phase of the lower part of the templon.

¹¹⁰ It has not been clarified whether the icons on the lower tier of the templon, attributed to Iossif Chouris are indeed earlier (not to be excluded), than those on the upper tier which preserve his name and the date 1544, as mentioned above (p. 221 and notes). The difference in scale and category of the two sets does not facilitate comparisons, however similar aesthetic values are discernible in both. At any rate all of these icons are definitely not by the same artist who painted the katholikon murals, which I placed between 1517 and 1521 in this study and attributed them to the Cretan painter Theophanis.

Illustration credits

Figs 3-23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33-34, 39: by kind concession of the Saint Neophytos Monastery. Fig. 2: Papacostas, “An Exceptional Structure”, op.cit. (n. 3), fig. 4: reworked after Sotiriou, *Τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα*, op.cit. (n. 7), fig. 41. Figs 24, 26: Sofianos – Tsigaridas, *Anapafsas*, op.cit. (n. 46), fig. on p. 305, and on p. 171. Fig. 28: Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), fig. 48. Figs 30, 32: Aspravaravaki, *Μικρογραφίες Ἀκαθίστου*, op.cit. (n. 76), figs 118, 128. Fig. 35: Vocotopoulos, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Κερκύρας*, op.cit. (n. 89), fig. 6. Fig. 36: Baltoyanni, *Εἰκόνες. Μήτηρ Θεοῦ*, op.cit. (n. 90), pl. 122. Figs 1, 37, 38: photographs by M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides. Fig. 40: Papageorgiou, *Μητροπόλις Πάφου*, op.cit. (n. 3), fig. 122.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. for example the Annunciation above the entrance to the *Enkleistra* with the corresponding scene at the Stavronikita monastery, where the iconography is similar, with the seated Virgin, the little girl spinning and the symbolic vase of flowers, see Chatzidakis, *Stavronikita*, op.cit. (n. 46), figs 81, 82.

¹⁰⁹ See above, note 60, with more references. The icons of the lower tier with the Twelve Feasts (*Dodekaorton*) were considered to have been executed before those of the upper tier with the Great Deesis (1544), and to belong to an earlier phase of the templon of

ΟΙ ΤΟΙΧΟΓΡΑΦΙΕΣ ΣΤΟ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΟ ΤΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΝΕΟΦΥΤΟΥ: ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ, ΚΑΛΛΙΤΕΧΝΙΚΗ ΤΑΥΤΟΤΗΤΑ ΚΑΙ Ο ΚΡΗΤΙΚΟΣ ΘΕΟΦΑΝΗΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΒΕΝΕΤΙΚΗ ΚΥΠΡΟ

Το καθολικό της μονής του Αγίου Νεοφύτου στην Κύπρο (η οποία είναι περισσότερο γνωστή για την *Εγκλειστρο* του αγίου του 12ου αιώνα), κτίσθηκε κατά την πρώτη περίοδο της βενετικής κυριαρχίας στο νησί και είναι αφιερωμένο στην Παναγία. Πρόκειται για τρικλιτη καμαροσκέπαστη βασιλική με τρούλο, με κλίτη που διαχωρίζονται από τοξωτές κιονοστοιχίες, και με ημικυλινδρική αψίδα στο ιερό (Εικ. 1-4). Το εσωτερικό του, άλλοτε κατάγραφο με τοιχογραφίες, υπέστη εκτεταμένες φθορές κατά την διάρκεια των αιώνων. Σώζεται, ωστόσο, μεγάλο τμήμα από τις αρχικές, υψηλής ποιότητας, μεταβυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες του μνημείου, οι οποίες απεικονίζουν θέματα από τον λειτουργικό και τον αγιολογικό κύκλο, καθώς και σκηνές από τον θεομητορικό κύκλο. Η ιστορία της μονής κατά την περίοδο της Φραγκοκρατίας και της Βενετοκρατίας στην Κύπρο δεν είναι επαρκώς τεκμηριωμένη. Ο ιδρυτής του καθολικού δεν μαρτυρείται, ωστόσο, με βάση τα σωζόμενα στοιχεία, διατυπώνεται στην παρούσα μελέτη η υπόθεση ότι πρωτεργάτης της ανέγερσής του ήταν ο ηγούμενος Ιωακείμ (Ιωακείμ Β'), για τον οποίο υπάρχουν μνείες μεταξύ 21 Δεκεμβρίου 1512 (οπότε ήταν ήδη ηγούμενος) και 11 Απριλίου 1521 (οπότε απεβίωσε).

Στο ιερό απεικονίζονται, κατά τα ειωθότα, λειτουργικά και ευχαριστιακά θέματα, η Κοινωνία των Αποστόλων, συλλειτουργούντες ιεράρχες, διάκονοι και άλλες ιερές μορφές. Το πλατύτερο κεντρικό κλίτος διασώζει μορφές αγίων (Εικ. 3, 13) επάνω από τις κιονοστοιχίες και στα εσωράχια των τόξων. Στον κυρίως ναό το νότιο κλίτος περιλάμβανε στην καμάρα σκηνές από τον βίο της Παναγίας, αλλά μόνο τρεις σώζονται σήμερα (Εικ. 11, 12). Σπάραγμα από την Αναστήλωση των εικόνων κατά την Σύνοδο του 843 μ.Χ. διακρίνεται στον νότιο τοίχο (Εικ. 12, 19). Το βόρειο κλίτος περιλαμβάνει έναν σχεδόν πλήρη κύκλο του Ακαθίστου Ύμνου στην καμάρα (Εικ. 13). Οι τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού έχουν ελκύσει το ενδιαφέρον διαφόρων μελετητών, οι οποίοι συνεισέφεραν χρήσιμες παρατηρήσεις,

αλλά εξέφρασαν και διϊστάμενες απόψεις σχετικά με το ύφος και την χρονολόγησή τους. Η επικρατούσα άποψη μέχρι σχετικά πρόσφατα τις συνέδεε με τον ζωγράφο Ιωσήφ Χούρη, συριακής καταγωγής, δημιουργό φορητών εικόνων που κοσμούν το τέμπλο του καθολικού, εκ των οποίων ορισμένες χρονολογούνται στο 1544 (Εικ. 40). Έχουν διατυπωθεί και άλλες απόψεις ενώ το ιστορικό όλων των αποδόσεων δίδεται εδώ για πρώτη φορά.

Από τις σωζόμενες τοιχογραφίες επισημαίνονται θέματα με βάση την ιδιαίτερη εικονογραφία τους και τα νοήματα που θα εξέφραζαν σε αυτό το ιστορικό καθίδρυμα, όταν η Εκκλησία της Κύπρου, κατά την βενετική περίοδο της νήσου, έπρεπε να συνυπάρξει υπό την Λατινική Εκκλησία. Ορισμένες συνθέσεις με έμφαση στο ορθόδοξο δόγμα υποδηλώνουν ότι πιθανότατα το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα καταρτίστηκε από μια προσωπικότητα με όραμα και θεολογικές γνώσεις, ίσως τον ηγούμενο της μονής, ιερομόναχο Ιωακείμ Β'. Η άποψη αυτή μπορεί να υποστηριχθεί από στοιχεία που αναλύονται στο άρθρο. Ο Ιωακείμ, «πνευματικός πατήρ» για την μοναστική του κοινότητα, αφιέρωσε στον ναό, όταν ήταν πλέον προηγούμενος, μια εικόνα με την Παναγία Οδηγήτρια, με την επωνυμία «Εγκλειστριανή», στην οποία απεικονίζεται και η προσωπογραφία του σε μικρή κλίμακα (Εικ. 33, 34). Η εικόνα, χαρακτηριστικό δείγμα κρητικής τέχνης, φέρει την υπογραφή του ζωγράφου Θεοφυλάκτου, αγνώστου από αλλού (για τον οποίο επίσης γίνεται λόγος παρακάτω), και μπορεί με ασφάλεια να χρονολογηθεί πριν από τον Απρίλιο του 1521, οπότε ο Ιωακείμ απεβίωσε.

Οι τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού, σε σύγκριση με δείγματα εργασίας γνωστών κυπρίων καλλιτεχνών που είχαν διακοσμήσει ναούς στην Κύπρο στα τέλη του 15ου και τις αρχές του 16ου αιώνα, εκφράζουν ένα διαφορετικό ιδίωμα, παρότι την εμφανή παλαιολόγεια κληρονομιά και στις δύο περιπτώσεις. Αντιθέτως, οι τοιχογραφίες παρουσιάζουν συνάφεια με την κρητική ζωγραφική,

η οποία είχε εδραιωθεί ως ισχυρό καλλιτεχνικό ρεύμα στην θρησκευτική ζωγραφική της ανατολικής Μεσογείου μετά την κατάρρευση της βυζαντινής αυτοκρατορίας. Η διερεύνηση της καλλιτεχνικής ταυτότητας του δημιουργού των τοιχογραφιών του καθολικού, και ιδίως οι εικονογραφικές και υφολογικές συγγένειες με την κρητική ζωγραφική, μας οδηγούν στον κορυφαίο εκπρόσωπό της στον χώρο της μνημειακής ζωγραφικής, τον Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά (π. 1485-1490, †1559). Η σύγκριση με τα μνημειακά σύνολα του Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά στα Μετέωρα (Άγιος Νικόλαος Αναπαυσάς, 1527) και στο Άγιον Όρος (μονές Μεγίστης Λαύρας και Σταυρονικήτα, 1535-1546) υποδεικνύει την απόδοση των υπό εξέταση τοιχογραφιών στον ίδιο σημαντικό κρητικό καλλιτέχνη, ο οποίος ήταν ήδη μοναχός το 1527, σύμφωνα με την υπογραφή του στον Αναπαυσά.

Συμβόλαια του 16ου αιώνα που συντάχθηκαν στην πόλη του Χάνδακα και ανακαλύφθηκαν από την υπογράφουσα στα Κρατικά Αρχεία της Βενετίας, σχετικά με την οικογένεια ζωγράφων Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά, που δρούσε από τον 15ο αιώνα στην βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήτη, μαρτυρούν ότι ένα μέλος της οικογένειας αυτής, εμπλεκόμενο σε παραγγελία εικόνων το 1509 και το 1517, ήταν ο Θεοφύλακτος Στρελίτζας. Είναι πιθανόν ότι ο εν λόγω Θεοφύλακτος μπορεί να ταυτισθεί με τον ομώνυμο ζωγράφο της κρητικής εικόνας της Παναγίας Εγκλειστριανής, που αναφέρθηκε παραπάνω, άποψη που στοιχειοθετείται αναλυτικά στο άρθρο. Εάν αυτό ευσταθεί, τότε η εικόνα της Παναγίας Εγκλειστριανής, παραγγελία του προηγούμενου Ιωακείμ, μπορεί να χρονολογηθεί μεταξύ του τέλους του 1517 και των αρχών του 1521. Επιπλέον, είναι πιθανόν ότι ο ίδιος αφιερωτής επί της ηγουμενίας του στην μονή του Αγίου Νεοφύτου ανέθεσε και την τοιχογράφηση του καθολικού στον ίδιο ζωγράφο, ασφαλώς με την οικονομική συνδρομή ιδιωτικής ή και συλλογικής χορηγίας.

Επιζητώντας την εξακρίβωση της ταυτότητας του ζωγράφου του καθολικού και με βάση τις διαπιστωμένες συγγένειες με την τέχνη του Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά, είναι δυνατόν να συνδέσουμε τα δύο διαφορετικά

ονόματα, Θεοφύλακτος και Θεοφάνης, με το ίδιο πρόσωπο, τον γνωστό ζωγράφο Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά. Αρχικά λαϊκός, υπογράφει ως Θεοφύλακτος την εικόνα της Εγκλειστριανής, μεταξύ των ετών 1517 και 1521, ενώ το 1527 υπογράφει ως μοναχός Θεοφάνης (Στρελίτζας-Μπαθάς) τις τοιχογραφίες στον Αναπαυσά, έχοντας επιλέξει μοναστικό όνομα με το ίδιο αρχικό γράμμα, όπως συνηθίζεται στον ορθόδοξο μοναχισμό. Η υπόθεση αυτή, εύλογη κατά την άποψή μου, μπορεί να στηριχθεί στον συνδυασμό της υφολογικής ανάλυσης (ιδίως την σύγκριση του τρόπου με τον οποίο ο Θεοφάνης αποδίδει τις άγιες μορφές αλλά και συνθέσεις όπως σκηνές του Ακαθίστου) με το αρχαιολογικό και επιγραφικό υλικό καθώς και με άλλες παρατηρήσεις που διατυπώνονται στην παρούσα μελέτη και οι οποίες θα μπορούσαν να αυξηθούν. Εν κατακλείδι, οι τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού της μονής του Αγίου Νεοφύτου μπορούν να αποδοθούν στον περίφημο κρητικό καλλιτέχνη, ο οποίος ως ο κύριος ζωγράφος δημιούργησε με το συνεργείο του ένα υψηλής ποιότητας εκτεταμένο εικονογραφικό σύνολο σε μια ιστορική μονή της Κύπρου, μεταξύ των ετών 1517 και 1521. Επιπλέον, σωζόμενες τοιχογραφίες στον ημιυπαίθριο νάρθηκα της λαξευμένης στον βράχο Εγκλείστρας του Αγίου Νεοφύτου του Εγκλείστου, με την σκηνή του Ευαγγελισμού και μορφές αγίων γύρω από την θύρα εισόδου (Εικ. 37, 38), παρουσιάζουν πολλές συγγένειες με τις τοιχογραφίες του καθολικού και μπορούν να αποδοθούν και αυτές στο ίδιο συνεργείο και, πιθανότατα, στον ίδιο τον Θεοφάνη Στρελίτζα-Μπαθά.

Εάν η παραπάνω συλλογιστική είναι σωστή, όπως φαίνεται εύλογο, οι τοιχογραφίες που εξετάζονται στην παρούσα μελέτη αποτελούν το παλαιότερο γνωστό μνημειακό έργο του σπουδαίου αυτού κρητικού καλλιτέχνη, υποδεικνύοντας επίσης την παρουσία του στην Κύπρο σε χρόνους κατά τους οποίους τόσο η Κρήτη όσο και η Κύπρος βρίσκονταν υπό την διακυβέρνηση της Βενετίας.

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