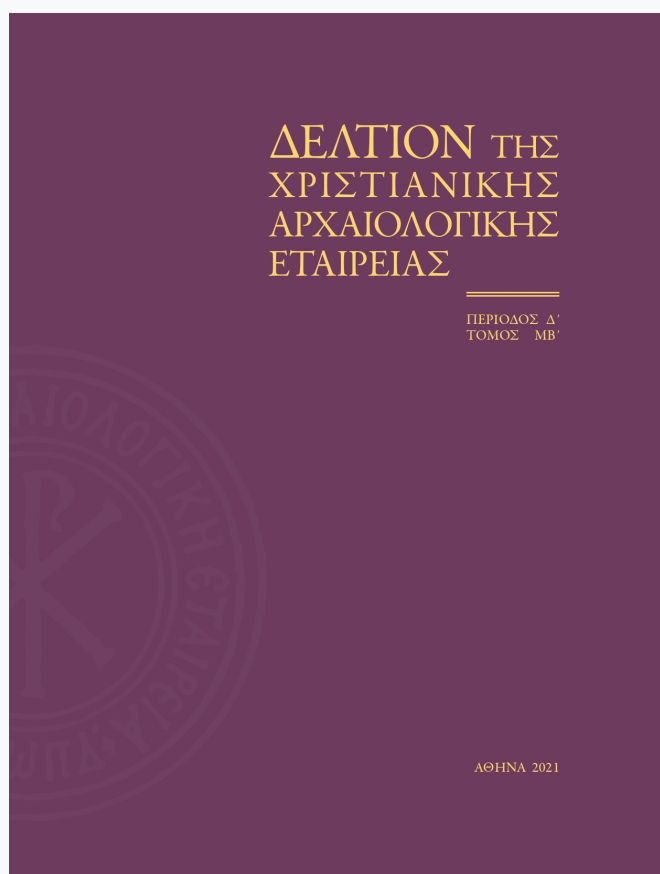


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### A Byzantine icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker

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Ioannis Tsiouris

## A BYZANTINE ICON OF SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER

Στον ναό των Αγίων Αποστόλων Πέτρου και Παύλου στο Καστράκι Καλαμπάκας φυλάσσεται φορητή εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου. Η απεικόνιση του αγίου σε συγκρατημένη κίνηση, η επιβλητικότητα της μορφής του, η απόδοση των προσωπογραφικών του χαρακτηριστικών, το πλάσιμο των γυμνών μελών τόσο του αγίου όσο και του Χριστού και της Παναγίας, η φωτοσκίαση, η δομή των πτυχώσεων και τα διακοσμητικά σχέδια μαρτυρούν την εργασία ενός πολύ ικανού ζωγράφου. Τα εικονογραφικά, και κυρίως τα τεχνοτροπικά, χαρακτηριστικά τοποθετούν την εικόνα στο τελευταίο τέταρτο του 14ου αιώνα.

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

14ος αιώνας, φορητές εικόνες, άγιος Νικόλαος, Μετέωρα, Μακεδονία.

Among the objects kept in the sacristy of the church of the Apostles Peter and Paul in the village of Kastraki near Meteora (Kalambaka) there is a portable icon of St Nicholas that is unknown to research. The icon, which is recessed, consists of a single board measuring 94.0×65.5×4.5 cm. and is in a good state of preservation (Fig. 1).

The icon has undergone conservation at some point in the past and appears to have borne an overpainting, a few remains of which are still visible, together with traces of a later inscription. The panel was prepared with gesso. The surface is damaged and flaked, although the flaking

*A portable icon of St Nicholas is preserved in the church of Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in the village of Kastraki, near Meteora. The depiction of St Nicholas in restrained motion, the commanding figure, the rendering of his facial features, the bare parts of the Saint, as well as of Christ and the Virgin and also the halo's decoration attest to the work of a remarkable painter. The iconographic and, above all, the stylistic features date the icon in the last quarter of the 14th century.*

### Keywords

14th century; portable icons; St Nicholas; Meteora; Macedonia.

is mainly around the faces and so does not hinder a study of the painting.

In the centre there is a large half-length figure of St Nicholas<sup>1</sup>. The saint is depicted almost frontally, with his body and head turning very slightly to the viewer's left. In his left hand he holds a closed pearl-studded Gospel book, while his right hand is raised in blessing over his chest.

St Nicholas is dressed in priestly attire consisting of a barely visible sticharion illuminated by white brushstrokes, an epitachelion with pearl-studded decoration at the neck, a purple phelonion and a white omophorion with red crosses. The sumptuous gold-embroidered epimanikia are inlaid with precious stones, as is the binding of the Gospel book. The halo, which is surrounded by

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\*\* I owe a debt of thanks to Professor Emeritus Euthymios Tsigaridas, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, for his valuable remarks on the theme and also to the art conservator and photographer Aimilianos Gkekas.

<sup>1</sup> Synaxarium CP, 281-284. For the iconography of the life of St Nicholas see N. Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art*, Torino 1983.

a red band, is particularly well executed and is adorned with a vine shoot enclosing anthemias. On either side of the saint lies the inscription in red paint: (O) ΑΓ(ΙΟC) ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟC Ο ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟC (Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker).

To the left of the saint's head, on a smaller scale, is a depiction of Christ clutching a closed scroll in his left hand and holding out a Gospel book for the saint with his right hand, while to the right is a depiction of the Virgin Mary proffering an omophorion.

The iconographic type depicting St Nicholas frontally and half-length was already in existence by the Middle Byzantine period<sup>2</sup> and was to enjoy a particularly wide dissemination. The joint depiction of Christ and the Virgin Mary presenting the saint with the symbols of his office is connected with the historical events that took place at the First Ecumenical Council and the saint's vision<sup>3</sup>. However, it seems that over the course of time this element lost its narrative character and became merely a standard feature of the iconographic theme<sup>4</sup>.

The depiction of the saint turning slightly to the viewer's left in a majestic albeit almost imperceptible movement recalls other works, like the portable icons with the same subject in the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393)<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 2) and the church of Saint

Nicholas tou Kyritze in Kastoria (1370-1385)<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 3), while it also appears on Russian icons, such as the icon with the same subject in the museum at Cherepovets (second half of the 14th century)<sup>7</sup>.

The saint's gesture of blessing with the thumb joined to the little and ring fingers does not differ from an iconographical tradition that was already in existence in the 11th century<sup>8</sup>. However, the depiction of the two horizontal fingers touching each other is an iconographical detail that appeared in the 14th century<sup>9</sup> and whose

<sup>2</sup> See, indicatively, the portable icons of St Nicholas at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (10th and 12th century), M. Bacci (ed.), *San Nicola. Splendori d'arte d'Oriente e d'Occidente*, Bari 2006, pls II.1 (A. Lidov) and II.6 (N. Ševčenko). Cf. the mosaic icon in the Monastery of the Apocalypse on Patmos (11th century), M. Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Πάτμου*, Athens 1990, 44-45, pls 1, 77, and the wall-painting in the church of Saint Nicholas Kasnitzes in Kastoria (12th century), Ch. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi – S. Tambaki, "Ο ἅγιος Νικόλαος. Η ἀπεικόνισή του στις τοιχογραφίες της Καστοριάς", *Δώρον. Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Νίκο Νικονάνο*, Thessaloniki 2006, 103, fig. 1.

<sup>3</sup> G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos, Der heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche. Texte und Untersuchungen*, II, Leipzig – Berlin 1917, 393-394.

<sup>4</sup> M. Vassilaki, "Μεταβυζαντινή εἰκόνα τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου", *Ἀντίφωνον. Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν καθηγητὴ Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, ed. V. Katsaros, Thessaloniki 1994, 230.

<sup>5</sup> M. Chatzidakis – D. Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο. Ιστορία και Τέχνη*, Athens 1990, 34, fig. on p. 61. G. Subotić, "Δώρα και δωρεές του δεσπότη Θωμά και της βασίλισσας Μαρίας Παλαιολογίνας", *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συμποσίου για το Δεσποτάτο της Ηπείρου (Ἀρτα 27 – 31 Μαΐου 1990)*, Arta 1992, 73, pl. 10, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> The saint is depicted full-length. E. Tsigaridas, *Icons of the Byzantine Museum and churches in Kastoria (12th-16th century)*, Athens 2018, 154-158, figs 67, 70. See the dating of the icon to the late 14th-early 15th century, A. Strati, "Εἰκόνα του ἁγίου Νικολάου με σκηνές του βίου του ἀπὸ την Καστοριά", *Αφιέρωμα στον Ακαδημαϊκό Παναγιώτη Λ. Βοκοτόπουλο*, eds V. Katsaros – A. Tourta, Athens 2015, 585-589, fig. 1, and to the sixth decade of the 14th century. I. Sissiou, "Two unpublished icons of the Kastoria School", *Zograf* 31 (2006-2007), 192. On the church's wall-paintings, see E. Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά. Κέντρο ζωγραφικῆς την εποχὴ των Παλαιολόγων (1360-1450)*, Thessaloniki 2016, 169-199. Cf. the icon of St Nicholas on Patmos (ca. 1400), Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Πάτμου*, op.cit. (n. 2), 56-57, pl. 10.

<sup>7</sup> O. Kulikova, *Drevniye liki Russkogo Severa. Iz muzeynogo sobraniya ikon XIV-XIX vekov goroda Cherepovitsa (Ancient images of the Russian North. From the Museum's collection of icons of 14th-19th centuries in the city of Cherepovets)*, Moscow 2009, cat. no. 1, pl. 1.

<sup>8</sup> See, indicatively, the mosaic icon on Patmos (11th century), Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Πάτμου*, op.cit. (n. 2), 44-45, pl. 1; the icon at the church of Saint Sophia in Kiev (11th century), and also the portable icons at the Tretyakov Museum (late 12th century), A. Lidov, "Il dio russo. Culto e iconografia di san Nicola nell'antica Russia", *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 78-88, figs 1 and 6, respectively and the icon at Ohrid (mid-14th century). M. Georgievski, *Icon Gallery – Ohrid*, Ohrid 1999, 60, fig. on p. 61. Cf. the depiction of the saint at the church of Saint Nicholas at Agoriani in Laconia (ca. 1300), M. Emmanouel, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του Ἁγίου Νικολάου στην Αγόριανη Λακωνία", *DChAE* 14 (1987-1988), 128, fig. 35.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the portable icons of St Nicholas donated by Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (1322-1325), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), pls II.7 (Ch. Chotzakoglou) and IV.7 (B. Miljković); the icon of Christ Pantokrator at the Monastery of Vatopedi (14th century), E. Tsigaridas – K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Τερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου. Βυζαντινές εἰκόνες καὶ ἐπενδύσεις*, Mount Athos 2006, figs 52, 60, 95; Saint Blasios at Veria (ca. 1330), Th. Papazotos, *Βυζαντινές εἰκόνες της Βέροιας*, Athens 1994, 49, figs 25, 26; Christ Pantokrator in the Hermitage Museum, T. Papamastorakis, "Εἰκόνες 13ου-16ου αἰώνα", *Εἰκόνες Μονῆς Παντοκράτορος*, Mount Athos 1998, 43,





*Fig. 1. Kastraki, Kalambaka, church of Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Icon of Saint Nicholas.*



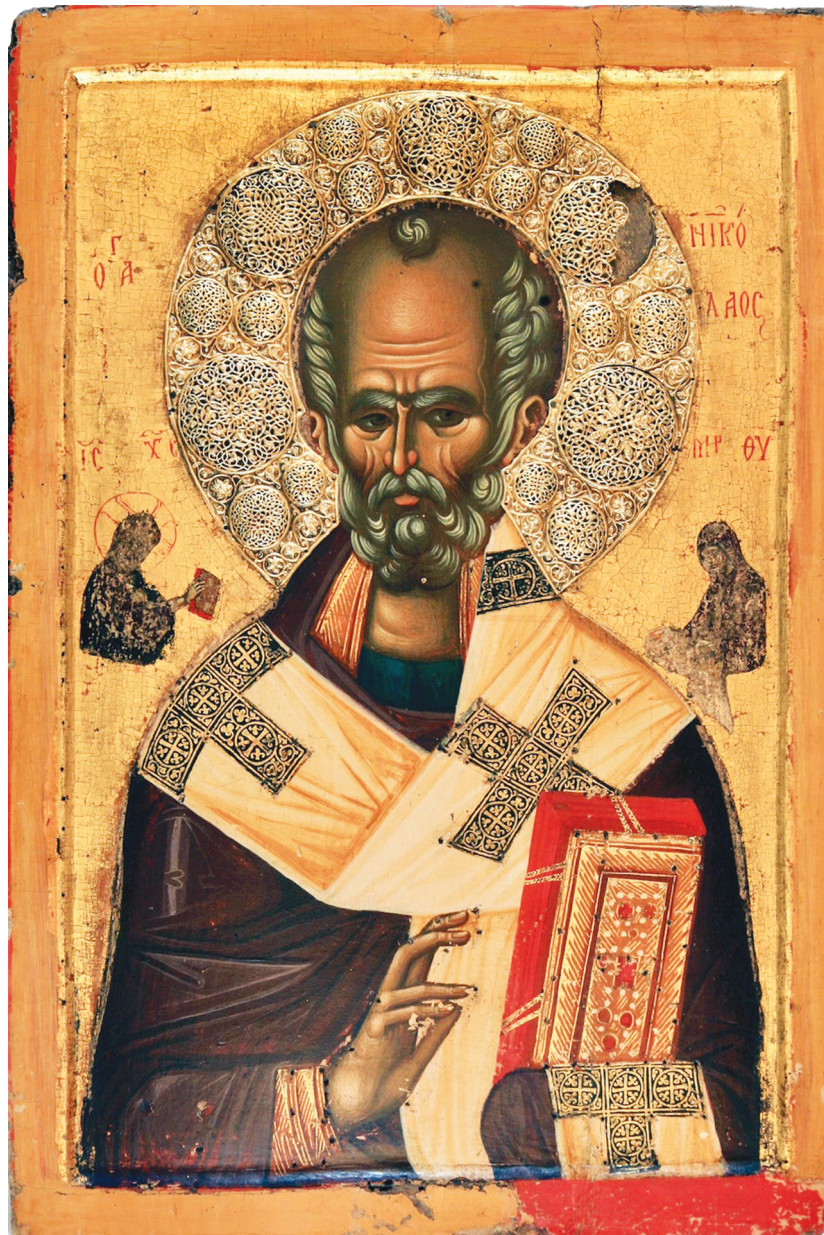


Fig. 2. Monastery of the Great Meteoron. Icon of Saint Nicholas.

fig. 9; Christ Pantokrator on Cyprus (14th century), *Cyprus the Holy Island. Icons through the Centuries*, ed. S. Sophocleous, Nicosia 2000, 169, fig. on p. 168 (S. Sophocleous), 169, fig. on p. 168 (S. Sophocleous), and Christ Pantokrator in the Chapel of Saint Nicholas at the Monastery of Timios Prodromos near Serres (ca. 1360-1370), A. Strati, *Η ζωγραφική στην Ιερά Μονή Τιμίου Προδρόμου Σερρών, 14ος-19ος αι.*, Thessaloniki 2007, 59, fig. 34. Cf. the depictions of St Nicholas at the church of Saint Nicholas at Agoriani in Laconia (ca.

1300), Emmanouel, "Οι τοιχογραφίες", op.cit. (n. 8), 131, fig. 35 and Christ the Saviour at the church of Saint Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki, A. Tsitouridou, *Ἡ ἐντοίχια ζωγραφική τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη. Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτη τῆς Παλαιολόγειας ζωγραφικῆς κατὰ τὸν πρῶμο 14ο αἰώνα*, Thessaloniki 1978, fig. 15, as well as the depiction of Christ in the katholikon of the Hypapante Monastery at Meteora (1366/67), D. Sofianos – L. Deriziotis, *Η Ιερά Μονή της Υπαπαντής των Μετεώρων*, Athens 2011, fig. 81.





Fig. 3. Kastoria, church of Saint Nicholas tou Kyritze. Icon of Saint Nicholas, detail.

dissemination can be attributed to the Hesychast movement<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> This particular gesture of blessing alludes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and was widely used during the 14th century by monastic circles that were directly connected with the Hesychast movement. See Chr. Baltoyanni, *Συνομιλία με το Θεόν. Εικό-νες από το Βυζαντινό Μουσείο Αθηνών (9ος-15ος αι.)*, Athens

At the same time, the saint's pose in which he is depicted holding the Gospel book to his chest with his left

1998, 61. On the Hesychast movement see indicatively J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems: Collected Studies*, Variorum Reprints, London 1974. I. Drpić, "Art, Hesychasm, and Visual Exegesis. Parisinus Graecus 1242 Revisited", *DOP* 62 (2008), 217-247.



hand exposed and his arm in a horizontal position is not so common<sup>11</sup>, compared with those which show him either holding the narrow side of the book in his palm<sup>12</sup> or his hand covered by the phelonion<sup>13</sup>. Also, the fact that instead of holding the bottom of the Gospel book, he is holding its lower half is a detail that is rarely found in similar representations of the saint and probably comes from similar depictions of other figures, such as Christ<sup>14</sup>.

The depiction of such a voluminous Gospel book was not uncommon in the second half of the 14th century, as may be observed in the icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Hermitage Museum (ca. 1363)<sup>15</sup>, the Monastery of

Pantokrator on Mount Athos (1363)<sup>16</sup>, the Monastery of Vatopedi (third quarter of the 14th century)<sup>17</sup>, the church of Saint Clement at Ohrid (final quarter of the 14th century)<sup>18</sup> and the Monastery of the Transfiguration at Zrze (1393/94)<sup>19</sup>.

Finally, the epithet *Θαυματουργός* (Wonder-worker)<sup>20</sup> expresses an attribute of the saint that occurs in a similar expression – *Ἡ βρύση των θαυμάτων* (Fountain of Miracles)<sup>21</sup> – that was already in existence in the first few decades of the 13th century<sup>22</sup>. However, as far as the epithet *Θαυματουργός* is concerned, one of its earliest known occurrences is to be found in the Peloponnese, in the church of Saint Paraskeve at Geraki (first half of the 15th century)<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See the icon donated by Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (1322-1325), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 196, 259-261, pl. IV.7 (B. Miljković) and also the icons at Ohrid (late 14th century), Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 78, fig. on p. 79, on Cyprus (ca. 1400), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 196, 289-290, pl. V.6 (A. Iliades) and on Patmos (1430-1460), Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Πάτμου*, op. cit. (n. 2), 51-52, pl. 5. M. Vassilaki, "San Nicola nella pittura di icone post bizantina", *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 73, fig. 4. Cf. the wall-painting at Dečani, M. Marković, "Individual Figures of Saints in the Naos and Chapels", *Mural Painting of Monastery of Dečani. Material and Studies*, ed. V. Djurić, Belgrade 1995, 244, fig. 6.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the icon at Mileševa (1228), M. Bacci, "Il corpo e l'immagine di Nicola", *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), fig. 8 and the portable icons on Rhodes (mid-14th century), M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Ἀμφιπρόσωπες εἰκόνες τῆς Ρόδου. Ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου", *AD* 21 (1966), I Meletai, 73-77, pl. B'a-b. A. Katsioti, "Ἀμφίγραπτη παλαιολόγια εἰκόνα στη Νίσυρο", *DChAE* 25 (2004), 66-69, fig. 2, and on Patmos (ca. 1400), Chatzidakis, *Εἰκόνες τῆς Πάτμου*, op.cit. (n. 2), 56-57, pl. 11. Katsioti, op.cit. fig. 4.

<sup>13</sup> See, indicatively, the portable icon on Nisyros (final quarter of the 14th century), Katsioti, "Ἀμφίγραπτη παλαιολόγια εἰκόνα", op.cit. (n. 12), fig. 2.

<sup>14</sup> See the portable icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Hermitage Museum (ca. 1363), I. Drpić, *Epigram, Art and Devotion in Later Byzantium*, Cambridge 2016, 390, fig. 7.13, at Veria (ca. 1360-1370), Papazotos, *Βυζαντινές εἰκόνες*, op.cit. (n. 9), 51, fig. 33, at the Hilandar Monastery (ca. 1400), Sr. Petković, *Εἰκόνες Τεράς Μονῆς Χιλανδαρίου*, Mount Athos 1997, 33, fig. on p. 105 and in Cyprus (14th century), *Cyprus The Holy Island*, op.cit. (n. 9), 169, fig. on p. 168 (S. Sophocleus), as well as the late 15th century icon with the same subject and the icon of the Synaxis of the Archangels (mid- or second half of the 15th century) at the Vatopedi Monastery, Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εἰκόνες καὶ ἐπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 127-128, 248-249, 164-269, figs 95, 185 and 196, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Papamastorakis, "Εἰκόνες", op.cit. (n. 9), 43, fig. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Tsigaridas, "Τοιχογραφίες καὶ εἰκόνες τῆς μονῆς Παντοκράτορος Ἁγίου Ὁρους", *Makedonika* 18 (1978), 194, pl. 13a. Papamastorakis, "Εἰκόνες", op.cit. (n. 9), 48, fig. 21. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Παρατηρήσεις σε δύο ἀμφιπρόσωπες εἰκόνες τῆς μονῆς Παντοκράτορος στο Ἅγιον Ὄρος", *DChAE* 20 (1999), fig. 1. See also another portable icon of Christ Pantokrator at the same monastery, Tsigaridas, op.cit., 198, pl. 17b, with a dating to the late 14th – early 15th century, and Papamastorakis, op.cit., 88, fig. 40, with a dating to the early 15th century.

<sup>17</sup> E. Tsigaridas, "Φορητές εἰκόνες στη Μακεδονία καὶ το Ἅγιον Ὄρος κατὰ το 13ο αἰώνα", *DChAE* 21 (2000), 127, fig. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 74, fig. on p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> M. Chatzidakis – G. Babić, "The icons of the Balkan Peninsula and the Greek Islands", *The Icon*, ed. K. Weitzmann, Verona 1981, 143, fig. on p. 192. Cf. also the Gospel book held by Christ in an icon of the Deesis on Crete (ca. 1400), *The Hand of Angelos. An Icon Painter in Venetian Crete*, ed. M. Vassilaki, Athens 2010, 38-47, 87, fig. on p. 86 (M. Vassilaki).

<sup>20</sup> See a similar epithet on icons from the mid-15th century at Korçë in Northern Epirus (southern Albania), *Εἰκόνες ἀπὸ τις Ορθόδοξης Κοινότητες τῆς Ἀλβανίας*, ed. A. Tourta, Thessaloniki 2006, 37, fig. 4, and icons from the mid-16th century, N. Chatzidakis, "Εἰκόνα του ἁγίου Νικολάου με βιογραφικὲς σκηνές. Ἐνα ἀγνωστο ἔργο του Γεωργίου Κλόντζα", *DChAE* 22 (2001), 413, fig. 13. For other epithets applied to the saint see Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 224.

<sup>21</sup> This epithet comes from a doxastikon sung at Great Vespers on the saint's feast-day (6 December) (*Μηναῖον τοῦ Δεκεμβρίου*, Athens 1962, 32).

<sup>22</sup> See in the chapel at the Penteli Cave in Attica (1233/34), D. Mouriki, "Οἱ βυζαντινὲς τοιχογραφίες τῶν παρεκκλησιῶν τῆς Σπηλιᾶς τῆς Πεντέλης", *DChAE* 7 (1973-1974), 91, pl. 22.1.

<sup>23</sup> J. Papageorgiou, *Τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αἰώνα στο κάστρο Γερακίου Λακωνίας. Ἐνα ζωγραφικὸ ἐργαστήριο τῆς ὁπμης παλαιολόγιας περιόδου στους ναοὺς τῆς Ζωοδόχου Πηγῆς, των Ταξιαρχῶν, του Προφήτη Ηλία καὶ τῆς Ἀγίας Παρασκευῆς*

The depiction of Christ handing over the Gospel book to the saint in his extended right hand while holding a closed scroll in his left preserves a long-established tradition which dates back to the 11th century<sup>24</sup> and varies only slightly in its details.

The depiction of the Virgin Mary is also consistent with the established iconographical tradition. The portrayal of her gripping the omophorion with her right hand while her left hand protrudes with the fingers open does not recall a specific motif<sup>25</sup>, although it does bear a resemblance to similar portrayals in a number of works, such as the portable icons at Ohrid (mid-14th century)<sup>26</sup>, the Tretyakov Gallery (14th century)<sup>27</sup> and the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393)<sup>28</sup> (Fig. 2).

As far as the stylistic features are concerned, St Nicholas is portrayed as a middle-aged man with a lean face and a high broad forehead<sup>29</sup>.

The facial features (Fig. 4) have been executed with particular care. The almond-shaped eyes are set off by the deep eye sockets and the thick white eyebrows on the brow ridge. The nose is long and slender, blending in harmoniously with the elongated face, while the cheek-

bones are rendered with clarity through a combination of shading and outlines at the sides of the nose. The mouth, with the exception of the lower red lip, is covered by a thick moustache. The high forehead is broken up by the horizontal or semicircular wrinkles that follow the anatomical structure of the muscles of the head. The short hair is limited to a single tuft on top of the head, while at the sides wavy horizontal layers of hair define the outline of the face. The beard, which is also white, is short and forked. The saint's right hand, raised in a gesture of blessing, is robust with long fingers with clearly visible joints. It should perhaps be noted here that the slight turning of the body and particularly the head creates a lack of symmetry in the saint's facial and bodily features. For example, the right half of the face is disproportionate to the left half, while the saint's left ear is barely visible. The same asymmetry may also be observed in a number of almost imperceptible movements of the saint's body.

The lean, gaunt face with the short beard has parallels in various other portable icons, such as those in the Museum at Cherepovets in Russia (second half of the 14th century)<sup>30</sup>, the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393)<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 2), the church of Saint Nicholas tou Kyritze (1370-1385)<sup>32</sup> (Fig. 3), and the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (1380-1400)<sup>33</sup>. Also, this depiction of the saint's face is similar to corresponding portrayals in Russian art, such as those on the icons with the same subject in the Hermitage Museum<sup>34</sup>. Likewise, the large eyes emphasised by the deep eye sockets recall the painting of the second half of the 14th century<sup>35</sup>.

(unpublished Dissertation), Athens 2007, 135. K. Zisiou, *Επιγραφαι των χριστιανικών χρόνων της Ελλάδος*, I, Πελοπόννησος, Athens 1917, 34, no. 84. See a similar epithet on icons of the mid-15th century at Korçë in Northern Epirus (southern Albania), *Εικόνες από τις Ορθόδοξες Κοινότητες*, op.cit. (n. 20), 37, fig. 4 and also on icons of the mid-16th century, Chatzidakis, "Εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου", op.cit. (n. 20), 413, fig. 13.

<sup>24</sup> See the portable icons on Patmos (11th century), Chatzidakis, *Εικόνες της Πάτμου*, op.cit. (n. 2), 44-45, pl. 1, on Mount Sinai (12th, late 13th and late 13th – early 14th century, respectively), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 207-208, pls II6 (N. Ševčenko), 208-209, II7, and 209, II8 (Ch. Chotzakoglou) respectively, and at the Byzantine Museum in Nicosia (late 13th century), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 287-289, pl. V4 (I. Iliades).

<sup>25</sup> The depiction of the Virgin Mary's hands, together with the way in which she holds the omophorion, varies, without ever characterising a particular iconographical tradition or iconographical type.

<sup>26</sup> Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 60, fig. on p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> N. Bux, "La tradizione liturgica Nicolaiana", *San Nicola e la reliquia di Rimini. Storia, arte e spiritualità*, eds A. Donati – N. Valentini, Rimini 2006, fig. on p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *To Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61. Subotić, "Δώρα και δωρεές", op.cit. (n. 5), 73, pl. 10.

<sup>29</sup> For the iconographical rendering of the figure of St Nicholas in Byzantine art, see βλ. M. Bacci, "Il corpo e l'immagine di Nicola", op.cit. (n. 12), 15-30, with earlier bibliography.

<sup>30</sup> Kulikova, *Drevniye liki Russkogo Severa*, op.cit. (n. 7), cat. no. 1, pl. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *To Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61. Subotić, "Δώρα και δωρεές", op.cit. (n. 5), 73, pl. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 154, figs 67, 70. Strati, "Εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου", op.cit. (n. 6), 585, fig. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 172-176, figs 79, 81. Cf. Sissiou, "Two unpublished icons", op.cit. (n. 6), fig. 10, with a dating to the early 15th century.

<sup>34</sup> *Sviatoi Nikolai Mirlikiiskii v proizvedeniiax 12-19 stoletii is so-brania Russkogo Muzeia* (Saint Nicholas of Mirliki in works of the 12th-19th centuries and from the collection of Russian Museum), ed. I. Solovieva, Saint Petersburg 2006, 46, fig. on p. 47 (late 14th century) and 54, fig. on p. 55 (late 14th – early 15th century).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the icons compared here with the present work. Cf. also the portable icon of the Panaghia Eleousa at Kastoria (final quarter of the



The bare parts of the body have been modelled with particular care. The illuminated sections, which are of a light pink colour, have been laid out over a dark olive-green base colour, giving the depiction the maximum realistic effect<sup>36</sup>. Also, the soft volumes alternate with rough surfaces, while the alternation of light and shadow emphasises the contours of the skin. Indeed, the structure of the shading on the left part of the figure strengthens the impression that the body is turning and therefore the suggestion of latent movement<sup>37</sup>. At the same time, the alternation of the shading both on the outlines and in the eye sockets reinforces the two-dimensionality of the figure and clearly defines its anatomical features, such as the cheeks and the joints on the hand raised in blessing. In addition, white highlights consisting of groups of white horizontal or vertical parallel lines are to be found on the brow ridge and the cheeks and in the wrinkles on the forehead.

All of the above features are to be found in works of the second half of the 14th century, particularly in Macedonia, such as the portable icons with the same subject which have proved to be so relevant in the present case, namely those in the church of Saint Nicholas tou Kyritze in Kastoria<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 3) and the Monastery of the Great Meteoron<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 2).

As for the individual anatomical features, an interesting detail is the structure of the auricle of the right ear (Fig. 4). The bending inward of the outer edges creates an aesthetic effect that is not to be found in other depictions of the saint or any other figure, although ears generally are known to have been rendered in a variety of different ways<sup>40</sup>. The refined approach to the rendering

of the saint's ear that is clearly visible here is more suggestive of a manneristic development in the rendering of an original drawing.

Finally, the highlighting of the joints of the right hand is a feature that connects this icon with similar elements in the painting of the second half of the 14th century<sup>41</sup>, and also recalls practices characteristic of late 13th and early 14th century painting<sup>42</sup>. Also, the straightness of the thumb of the left hand is not unknown in the painting of the last quarter of the 14th century, as can be seen, for example, in the icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Pantokrator Monastery on Mount Athos<sup>43</sup> and at the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (third quarter of the 14th century)<sup>44</sup>.

The saint's garments, while covering the body, display pronounced folds which, following the movement of the body, lend a sense of naturalness. For example, the folds of the omophorion, together with the way in which the cross is laid out on the right shoulder, indicate an

<sup>41</sup> Papamastorakis, "Εικόνες", op.cit. (n. 9), 86. Cf. the icon of Christ Pantokrator at the Monastery of Timios Prodromos near Serres (ca. 1320-1330), A. Strati, "Οι εικόνες του Χριστού Παντοκράτορος και της Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας στο καθολικό της Ι.Μ. Τιμίου Προδρόμου Σεργίων", *DChAE* 18 (1995), 122, fig. 1. See, indicatively, the icons of St Nicholas (mid-14th century) and the evangelists Mark, Matthew, Luke and John (third quarter of the 14th century) at the Hilandar Monastery, Petković, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 14), figs on p. 81, 88, 90, 92 and 94, respectively. See also the icons of St John the Theologian in the Great Deesis at the Monastery of Vatopedi (1350-1360), Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες καί επενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 134, fig. 100 and St Nicholas at the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393), Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61. Subotić, "Δώρα και δωρεές", op. cit. (n. 5), 73, pl. 10.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the two portable icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Hilandar Monastery (third quarter of the 13th century and early 14th century, respectively), Petković, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 14), figs on p. 67 and 74, respectively. Cf. the portable icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Monastery of Vatopedi (13th century, second half of the 13th century and late 13th century, respectively), Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες καί επενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 77, figs 49, 86-87, 60 and 92-93, 63, respectively, and Sts George and Demetrios (ca. 1300-1310), Ibidem, 95, figs 65-66.

<sup>43</sup> Papamastorakis, "Εικόνες", op.cit. (n. 9), 70, fig. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 151-152, fig. 65. Cf. a similar rendering of the thumb in the katholikon of the Hypapante Monastery (1366/67) at Meteora, Sofianos – Deriziotis, *Η Ιερά Μονή της Υπαπαντής*, op.cit. (n. 9), fig. 81.

14th – early 15th century), E. Tsigaridas, "Εικόνα Παναγίας Ἐλεούσας ἀπὸ τὴν Καστοριά", *DChAE* 10 (1980-1981), 273-288, fig. 75a.

<sup>36</sup> Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Ἀμφιπρόσωπες εἰκόνες", op.cit. (n. 12), 73, with examples of a similar colour.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. a similar feature in the portable icons with the same subject in the church of Saint Nicholas tou Kyritze in Kastoria and the Monastery of the Great Meteoron.

<sup>38</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), no. 28. Strati, "Εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου", op.cit. (n. 6), 585, fig. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> See, indicatively, the variety of ways in which the anatomical features of the ear are depicted in the work of the painters Michael and Eutychios Astrapas, P. Miljković-Peppek, *L'oeuvre des peintres Michel et Eutych*, Skopje 1967, figs 55, 56, 103, 117.



Fig. 4. Icon of Saint Nicholas (detail of the Fig. 1).

attempt to avoid a standardised representation of the garment, and suggest a common model with other icons with the same subject of the same period, such as that from the church of Saint Nicholas Kyritze in Kastoria (1370-1385)<sup>45</sup> (Fig. 3). Also, the same effect is produced

by the triangular opening that is created underneath the right arm by the raising of the right hand in a gesture of blessing. Finally, the way in which the omophorion is fastened represents just one of the ways in which this

<sup>45</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 154, fig. 67. Strati, “Εικόνα του

αγίου Νικολάου”, op.cit. (n. 6), 585, fig. 1. Cf. similar depictions of the drapery on other portable icons.



garment is secured to the body<sup>46</sup>, a method that already appears in icons of the 10th century<sup>47</sup> and, though not widely depicted, enjoyed a long tradition in icon painting<sup>48</sup>. However, it is precisely this long tradition which hinders the use of this particular depiction of the omophorion as a dating tool.

The painter has also taken particular care in the rendering of the decoration on the garments and the Gospel book. Sumptuous decoration, for example, is to be found on the two long parallel edges of the epitrachelion on either side of the saint's neck. On the two bands, which are bordered by a groove in the cloth, there is an outer row of pearls, within which lies an inner band of precious stones encircled by small pearls. The adornment of the edges of garments with precious stones and particularly rosettes is not unknown in Byzantine art<sup>49</sup>; in fact,

it was very popular in Macedonia during the 14th and 15th centuries<sup>50</sup>.

Also, the shape of the crosses on the omophorion, with their slightly widened ends, occurs already in the late 13th century over a wide geographical area<sup>51</sup>, although it is not possible to determine in which particular area this artistic trend was first introduced.

Particular attention has been paid to the rendering of the epimanikion on the saint's right wrist, which consists of very luxurious gold-embroidered material adorned with precious stones and pearls. The rows of small green and white precious stones at the edges, the large precious stones and diagonal stripes in the centre, the horizontal folds near the outer edge of the hem and the scattered pearls create a very sumptuous effect which is almost life-like. The attention to detail is also evident in the rendering of the inner gold lining at the level of the wrist.

As a whole, this particular rendering of the epimanikia (Fig. 1), with its careful attention to luxurious detail, is not to be found in other depictions<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, the symmetrical positioning of the garment around the wrist, together with its particular structure, form of decoration and almost metallic sheen, does recall certain

<sup>46</sup> For the different ways of fastening the omophorion, see the icon of the Three Hierarchs at the Monastery of Vatopedi (second half of the 14th century), in which the three saints wear the garment in different ways, Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 160-165, fig. 121. Cf. the icon on the same subject at the Byzantine Museum in Athens (early 14th century), M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Παναγία Οδηγήτρια και Τρεις Ιεράρχες. Αμφιπρόσωπη εικόνα του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών”, *DChAE* 39 (2018), 360, fig. 3.

<sup>47</sup> See the portable icon of Sts Zosimos and Nicholas at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (10th century), Bacci, “Il corpo e l'immagine di Nicola”, *San Nicola* op.cit. (n. 2), 23, fig. 6.

<sup>48</sup> See the portable icons of St Nicholas in the church of Saint Theodore Stratelates at Lemithou on Cyprus (14th century), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 289, pl. V.5 (Ch. Chatzichristodoulou), on Patmos (1430-1460) Chatzidakis, *Εικόνες της Πάτμου*, op.cit. (n. 2), 51-52, pl. 5 and at Veria (first half of the 15th century), Papazotos, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 9), 66, pl. 90, as well as the icons of St Gregory at the Byzantine Museum in Athens (first half of the 14th century), M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Αθηνών*, Athens 1998, 40, fig. on p. 42, St Blasios at Veria (ca. 1330), Papazotos, op.cit., 49, pl. 25 and St John Chrysostom at the Monastery of Vatopedi (third quarter of the 14th century), Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 156-161, fig. 117.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the decorative motif on a similar figure in portable icons of St Nicholas at the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (second half of the 13th and late 13th century), Tsigaridas, “Φορητές εικόνες”, op.cit. (n. 17), 132-133, figs 11, 12, respectively and at the museum in Cherepovets (second half of the 14th century), Kulikova, *Drevniye liki Russkogo Severa*, op.cit. (n. 7), cat. no. 1, pl. 1. See also the decoration in the portable icon of St John Chrysostom at the Great

Lavra Monastery, Tsigaridas, op.cit., 132, fig. 10 and on the Gospel book of Christ Pantokrator in the icon on the same subject at the Hilandar Monastery (third quarter of the 13th century), Petković, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 14), fig. on p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> See, indicatively, M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *The wall paintings of the year 1414 in the monastery of Aghia Paraskevi in Vikos at Zagori, Epirus*, (Greek with a Summary in English), Athens 2017, 47, with relevant examples. Cf. a similar decorative design in the halo of Christ Zoodotes in the church of the Panaghia Faneromene in Kastoria (ca. 1400), Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 315, fig. 242 and in a portable icon of Christ Pantokrator in the same church (late 14th century), Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 311, fig. 23.

<sup>51</sup> See, indicatively, the icons in the church of Saint Nicholas at Agoriani in Laconia (ca. 1300), Emmanouel, “Οι τοιχογραφίες”, op.cit. (n. 8), figs 5, 35, and the church of Saint Paraskeve at Argoules in the Municipality of Sfakia on Crete (early 14th century), P. Varthalitou, “Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του ναού της Αγίας Παρασκευής στον Αργουλέ Σφακίων. Παρατηρήσεις στο έργο του κρητικού ζωγράφου Μιχαήλ Βενέζη”, *DChAE* 33 (2012), fig. 2.

<sup>52</sup> For the epimanikia, see W. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon. Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium*, Oxford 2012, 5-17, with earlier bibliography.

works from the second half of the 14th century<sup>53</sup>. The metallic sheen and thick outer hem, in particular, resemble similar features in the icon of the Sts Theodore in the church of the Aghioi Treis in Kastoria (1400/1)<sup>54</sup>.

The portrayal of the Gospel book from a high angle – a feature which already occurs in the late 12th century<sup>55</sup> – can be found in depictions of Christ, St Nicholas and other saints<sup>56</sup>. The positioning of the open side of the book either towards the centre or towards the outside of the painting cannot assist us in determining a particular model for this icon. As for the decoration on the binding, despite the considerable damage at this point, it is still possible to create a complete reconstruction. The dominant central feature is a precious stone in the form of a

black rectangle with white wavy streaks, on either side of which is a smaller, similar stone. These elements are surrounded by four heart-shaped stones forming an imaginary square. Finally, at both the top and bottom edges of the binding there are three square stones flanked by vertical rows of pearls, while the corners are adorned with large pearls encircled by smaller ones. The same motif seems to continue along the long sides of the binding, although it is not possible to accurately determine the size, form or number of the precious stones at these points. Despite the great variety in types and forms of binding in Byzantine art<sup>57</sup>, the form of decoration here recalls a model similar to that used for the Gospel book in a portable icon of Christ Pantokrator at the Hilandar Monastery (early 14th century)<sup>58</sup>, while bearing a closer resemblance to the icons of Christ Pantokrator at the Hermitage Museum (ca. 1363)<sup>59</sup>, the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (1370-1385)<sup>60</sup> and the Monastery of the Transfiguration at Zrze (1393-1394)<sup>61</sup>.

Finally, the form and structure of the clasps, as well as the form of their metallic ends, may be found principally in works of the second half of the 14th century, such as the portable icons of St John the Theologian and the Apostle Luke at the Monastery of Vatopedi (third quarter of the 14th century)<sup>62</sup>, Christ Pantokrator at the Hermitage Museum (ca. 1363) and the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria, as well as that of St Nicholas at the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393)<sup>63</sup> (Fig. 2).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the wall paintings at the church of Saint Athanasios tou Mouzaki, Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), figs 140, 157, and the church of the Aghioi Treis in Kastoria, ibidem, fig. 277. N. Pazaras, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του ναού του Αγίου Αθανασίου του Μουζάκη και η ένταξή τους στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική της Καστοριάς και της ευρύτερης περιοχής* (Καστοριά, Μ. Μακεδονία, Β. Ήπειρος), unpublished Dissertation, Thessaloniki 2013, fig. 218; the church of Christ Zoodotes at Borje in Northern Epirus, Tsigaridas, op.cit., fig. 362, Pazaras, op.cit. fig. 85, and also in the Monastery of Saint Paraskeve at Monodendri near Ioannina, Acheimastou-Potamianou, *The wall paintings*, op.cit. (n. 50), figs 13, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), figs 207, 215. Pazaras, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, op.cit. (n. 53), fig. 218.

<sup>55</sup> See, indicatively, the portable icon of St Nicholas at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Sinai (late 12th century), *San Nicola*, op.cit. (n. 2), 207-208, pl. II.6 (A. Ševčenko).

<sup>56</sup> See, indicatively, the portable icons of St Nicholas on Rhodes (second half of the 14th century), Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Αμφιπρόσωπες εικόνες", op.cit. (n. 12), 73-77, pls 34-35, at the Monastery of Timios Prodromos near Serres (second half of the 14th century), Strati, "Οι εικόνες", op.cit. (n. 41), 122, fig. 1, and at the church of Saint Eustathios at Kolossi on Cyprus (14th century), *Cyprus The Holy Island*, op.cit. (n. 9), 169, fig. on p. 168 (S. Sophocleus), as well as the icons of St John the Theologian in the Great Deesis and St John Chrysostom at the Monastery of Vatopedi (third quarter of the 14th century), Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και επενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 134, fig. 100 and 156, fig. 117, respectively and Christ Pantokrator at the Hilandar Monastery (ca. 1400), Petković, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 14), fig. on p. 105. Cf. the icon of St Clement at Ohrid (last quarter of the 14th century), in which, however, the Gospel book is depicted slightly differently as it is not placed in front of the saint's chest and is also portrayed from a slightly oblique angle, Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 74, fig. on p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> On bindings see P. L. Vocotopoulos, "Ο μεταλλικός διάκοσμος τριών βυζαντινών κωδίκων", *Το βιβλίο στο Βυζάντιο. Βυζαντινή και μεταβυζαντινή βιβλιοδεσία. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Αθήνα 13-16 Οκτωβρίου 2005*, Athens 2008, 201-218, with relevant bibliography.

<sup>58</sup> Petković, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 14), fig. on p. 74.

<sup>59</sup> Papamastorakis, "Εικόνες", op.cit. (n. 9), 43, fig. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 151-152, fig. 65. A note should be made here of the Gospel book's similarity in terms of its colour.

<sup>61</sup> Chatzidakis – Babić, "The icons", op.cit. (n. 19), 143, fig. on p. 192.

<sup>62</sup> Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και επενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), figs 100 and 104, respectively.

<sup>63</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61. Subotić, "Δώρα και δωρεές", op.cit. (n. 5), 73, pl. 10. Cf. the similar structure in the portable icon of St Clement at Ohrid (last quarter of the 14th century), Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 74, cat. no. 29, fig. on p. 75.



St Nicholas's halo (Fig. 4), which is surrounded by a red band, has been executed with particular care, as it consists of a delicate vine shoot painted in dark green, black and red on a green ground<sup>64</sup>. Also, the halo contains a symmetrical arrangement of ten heart-shaped leaves, within each of which is depicted another, five-lobed leaf.

The structure of the halo's decoration, with central ornaments enclosed within a separate, in this case vegetal, motif, may also be found both on the painted surfaces of portable icons and on silver revetments<sup>65</sup>. However, this particular design is not to be found in any other depiction from the same period. Nevertheless, as an individual decorative element, the distinctive heart-shaped leaf or "anthemion" enclosing another, five-lobed leaf already occurs in mural painting in the first half of the 14th century<sup>66</sup>. On the other hand, the vine scroll, which bears leaves only at the ends of the shoots, is a quite common decorative motif, with a number of different variations, in 14th-century Byzantine art<sup>67</sup>. Also, the

choice of colours –black, dark green and red– is not to be found in comparable mural works<sup>68</sup>, although the use of a similar colour combination as a standard practice can be seen in a foliate cross in the icon of Christ Pantokrator at the Byzantine Museum in Athens (second half of the 14th century)<sup>69</sup>. However, the very use of this colour combination creates an optical illusion of depth and therefore perspective, which makes the halo appear to stand out in relief. This feature, which consists of an essentially three-dimensional form of vegetal decoration, is popular in Palaiologan painting, from as early as the 13th century<sup>70</sup>, while in this particular case it recalls the structure of silver filigree revetments on portable icons<sup>71</sup>.

As for the other figures on the icon, stylistic differences may be observed between the depictions of Christ and the Virgin Mary on the one hand and St Nicholas on the other.

The figure of Christ (Fig. 5), with its almond-shaped eyes and slender nose, the soft ochre-red modelling of the face, the highlighted cheeks and distinctive short

<sup>64</sup> The use of light green on the ground, which lends a special character to the work and is also used in the haloes of Christ and the Virgin Mary, is not a very common phenomenon. For example, in Kastoria it occurs in only four icons of the 14th and 15th centuries, Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 24-25, where relevant examples can be found, as well as an analysis of the depiction of coloured haloes both in portable icons and in fresco ensembles in Macedonia.

<sup>65</sup> See the portable icons of the Panaghia Psychosostria and Christ at Ohrid, Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 50, figs on p. 51 and 54, and on p. 55, respectively, as well as those of St Nicholas at Ohrid (mid- and late 14th century), respectively, Ibidem, figs on p. 51, 55, 60 and 78, respectively. For silver revetments see Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 275-390; K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, "Αργυρές επενδύσεις εικόνων από τη Θεσσαλονίκη του 14ου αιώνα", *DChAE* 26 (2005), 263-272, with relevant bibliography. Cf. the decoration on the haloes in the icon of the Panagia Dimosiana on Corfu (last quarter of the 14th century), P. L. Vocotopoulos, *Εικόνες της Κέρκυρας*, Athens 1990, 4-6, fig. 4.

<sup>66</sup> See, indicatively, the examples at the Dečani monastery, M. Marjanović, "Basic explanation of the purpose and types of ornaments", *Mural Painting of Monastery of Dečani*, op.cit. (n. 11), 513-533, figs 3, 5. A. Nitić, "Painted ornaments in Dečani. Motifs and dispositions", *Mural Painting of Monastery of Dečani*, op.cit. (n. 11), 476, figs 99, 103, 171, and at Studenica, G. Babić – V. Korać – S. Črković, *Studenica*, Belgrade 1986, figs 107, 108.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. a similar depiction on a silver icon revetment (early 14th century), Loverdou-Tsigarida, "Αργυρές επενδύσεις εικόνων", op.cit.

(n. 65), 308, fig. 234. According to Loverdou-Tsigarida (ibidem, 321), this design has a connection with Thessaloniki. Cf. a similar form in the haloes on the portable icons of the Virgin Hodegetria at the Geromeri Monastery in Thesprotia (third decade of the 14th century), E. Tsigaridas, "Ο ναός της Μεταμορφώσεως του Σωτήρος στην Πλακωτή και η εφέστιος εικόνα της μονής Γηρομερίου", *Θεσπρωτία Ι, Πρακτικά Α' Αρχαιολογικού και Ιστορικού Συνεδρίου για τη Θεσπρωτία (Ηγουμενίτσα, 8-11 Δεκεμβρίου 2016)*, 2, Ioannina 2019, 513f., fig. 7. V. Papadopoulou, "Αμφίγραπτη εικόνα του 14ου αι. στη μονή Γηρομερίου Θεσπρωτίας", *Byzantina* 25 (2005), 379, fig. 1.

<sup>68</sup> For the influence of manuscript miniatures on this colour combination see M. Aspra-Vardavaki – M. Emmanouel, *Η μονή της Παντάνασσας στον Μυστρά. Οι τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αιώνα*, Athens 2005, 245, with relevant bibliography.

<sup>69</sup> Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 48), 56, fig. on p. 58. Cf. a similar practice in a foliate cross on the icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa at the Monastery of Vatopedi (last quarter of the 14th century), Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 171, fig. 128.

<sup>70</sup> C. Lepage, « L'ornementation végétale fantastique et le pseudo-réalisme dans la peinture byzantine », *CahArch* 19 (1969), 208.

<sup>71</sup> See, indicatively, the revetments on the icons of the Virgin Brephokratousa (late 14th – early 15th century), Christ Pantokrator (early 15th century) and the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (late 14th – early 15th century) at the Monastery of Vatopedi, Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και έπενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 357, figs 313-314 and 382, figs 354-359, respectively.



Fig. 5. Icon of Saint Nicholas, Jesus Christ (detail of the Fig. 1).

thin beard, does not depart greatly from other depictions of this kind. However, certain details, such as the form of the beard with its straight vertical hair<sup>72</sup>, the dark narrow line that connects the hair of the head with

the forehead, the red colouring on the cheeks and the soft rendering of the ochre flesh, recall works from the second half of the 14th century<sup>73</sup>. From the same tradition also come the rich folds of the tunic around Christ's

<sup>72</sup> Cf. a similar rendering of the beard in an icon of Christ Pantokrator from the church of Saint Nicholas tou Kyritze in Kastoria, now in the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (1370-1385), Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 151-152, fig. 65. I. Sissiou, *Η Καλλιτεχνική Σχολή της Καστοριάς κατά τον 14ο αιώνα*, unpublished Dissertation, Florina 2013, 325, fig. 25.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, the figure of Christ in the scene of the Raising of Lazarus in the church of Saint Athanasios tou Mouzaki in Kastoria (1383/4), Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 215, fig. 153. Cf. The figure of Christ at Globoko, Great Prespa (late 14th – early 15th century), *ibidem*, 462, fig. 391.



neck, the structure of which recalls works from the last quarter of the 14th century<sup>74</sup>.

The inscription of the words “Ο ΩΝ” in the halo<sup>75</sup> occurs already in the late 13th century<sup>76</sup>. The lines of the arms of the cross that curve outwards towards the outer circle, together with the double lines along the lower edges of the cross-arms, create an impression of volume, a practice not unknown in Byzantine painting<sup>77</sup>. Finally, with regard to the decoration on the binding of the Gospel book, the structural arrangement of the shapes, with the additional pearl decoration, appeared in icons over a large part of the 14th century<sup>78</sup>, thereby making it difficult to attribute it to any one particular source.

The face of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 6) is oval-shaped, with almond-shaped eyes and deep arch-shaped eye sockets, a slender nose, small bright red lips, and a pronounced round chin. The modelling of the skin on the face has been executed with particular care, with soft brushstrokes on a light ochre, which turns into a rosy hue on the cheeks, while there is a large area of shading

around the nose. The neck and long delicate fingers are also highlighted in a similar way. This method of modelling the skin, which creates a “transparent” and idealistic effect, differs from that used in the case of St Nicholas.

As for the Virgin Mary’s garments, the maphorion forms an angle at the breast, with a folding of the hems at this point<sup>79</sup>, while folds can also be seen reaching up to the level of the neck<sup>80</sup>. However, there is no clear depiction of a headband.

The combination of these particular stylistic features and iconographic details in the rendering of the figure of the Virgin Mary recalls a small number of similar examples dating from the last quarter of the 14th century, such as the corresponding figures in an icon with the same subject at the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (1387/88-1393)<sup>81</sup> (Fig. 2) and in a wall-painting of the same period on the external wall of the old katholikon of the same monastery<sup>82</sup>.

To sum up, then, the iconographical and stylistic features of this icon of St Nicholas, as a whole, (Fig. 1) connect this icon with works of the second half of the 14th century,

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, the icon of St John the Theologian at the Byzantine Museum in Veria (ca. 1380), Papazotos, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες*, op.cit. (n. 9), fig. 37.

<sup>75</sup> The inscription “Ο ΩΝ” (“*The One who is*”) accompanies the figure of Christ regardless of the age at which He is depicted. It is based on a text from the book of Exodus (3: 14) while, amongst other things, St John of Damascus mentions that this expression represents the most important epithet of Christ as it means “*the whole... the infinite and (the) indeterminate*”, P. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, II, Berlin 1973, 31. St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) also analyses the expression and connects it with the Hesychast movement, while it appears in almost all the monuments of the period, T. Papamastorakis, *Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και την Κύπρο*, Athens 2001, 71.

<sup>76</sup> See the halo of Christ in the portable icon of the Virgin Hodegetria (last quarter of the 13th century) at the Monastery of Vatopedi, Tsigaridas – Loverdou-Tsigarida, *Βυζαντινές εικόνες και επενδύσεις*, op.cit. (n. 9), 87, fig. 59.

<sup>77</sup> See M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “Χρυστός Παντοκράτωρ στηθαίος, πρώιμη κρητική εικόνα”, *Ροδωνιά. Τιμή στον Μ. Ι. Μανούσακα*, I, Rethymno 1994, 260, with relevant examples.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, the portable icons of the Three Hierarchs at the Byzantine Museum in Athens (first half of the 14th century), Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Παναγία Οδηγήτρια”, op.cit. (n. 46), 360, fig. 3, and St Nicholas at Cherepovets in Russia (second half of the 14th century), Kulikova, *Drevniye liki Russkogo Severa*, op.cit. (n. 7), cat. no. 1, pl. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. a similar feature in depictions of the Virgin Mary at Studenica (1313/14), G. Babić, *Kraljeva crkva u Studenici (L'église du Roi à Studenica)*, Belgrade 1987, fig. on p. 36, at Donja Kamenica (4th decade of the 14th century), Sissiou, *Η Καλλιτεχνική Σχολή*, op.cit. (n. 72), fig. 34, on a fragment of a wall-painting of the Birth of Christ from the church of Saint Paraskeve at Mystras (Mystras Museum; first half of the 14th century), H. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, New York 2004, 92, cat. no. 48D (E. Bakourou), at the church of Saint Nicholas tou Tzotza in Kastoria (1360-1380), Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 94, figs 55, 59. Pazaras, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, op.cit. (n. 53), fig. 194, and at the church of Saint Blasios at the Great Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos (first half of the 15th century), E. Tsigaridas, “Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Βλασίου της Μονής Μεγίστης Λαύρας στο Άγιον Όρος”, *Makedonika* 31 (1997-1998), 102, fig. 9. Cf. a similar structure in the head-covering in the depiction of St Paraskeve at Globoko (late 14th-early 15th century), Pazaras, op.cit. fig. 409.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. a similar structure in the folds of the maphorion of the Virgin Mary on the sanctuary door from the church of Saints Constantine and Helen at Ohrid, now in the Ohrid museum (late 14th century), Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), cat. nos 28, 72, fig. on p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), 34, fig. on p. 61. Subotić, “Δώρα και δωρεές”, op.cit. (n. 5), 73, pl. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Chatzidakis – Sofianos, *Το Μεγάλο Μετέωρο*, op.cit. (n. 5), fig. on p. 50. In the wall-painting the depiction of the Virgin Mary differs in that there is no opening in the maphorion in front of her breast.





Fig. 6. Icon of Saint Nicholas, Mother of God (detail of the Fig. 1).

such as icons with the same subject at the Monastery of the Great Meteoron (Fig. 2), Kastoria<sup>83</sup> (Fig. 3) and Ohrid<sup>84</sup>. Indeed, the slight movement, the shape of the face, the dark shaded eyes, the highlighted cheekbones, the slender nose with its swollen tip, the unusual structure

of the ears, the bulges on the forehead, the clear depiction of the wrinkles, the long delicate fingers and the structure of the hair are all features that recall the painting prevalent in Macedonia in the second half of the 14th century, and particularly works like the portable icon of St Nicholas Kyritze in Kastoria (Fig. 3). The patterns on the halo and the decoration on the garments and the Gospel book can also be attributed to the painting of this region.

This recognition of common features in portable icons can be combined with the detection of the same features in wall-paintings of the same period, such as those in

<sup>83</sup> Tsigaridas, *Icons*, op.cit. (n. 6), 154, fig. 67. Strati, “Εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου”, op.cit. (n. 6), 585, fig. 1. Cf. the portable icon of St Nicholas at the Byzantine Museum in Kastoria (1380-1400), Tsigaridas, op.cit., 172-176, fig. 79. Sissiou, “Two unpublished icons”, op.cit. (n. 6), 192, fig. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Georgievski, *Icon Gallery*, op.cit. (n. 8), 78, fig. on p. 79.

the church of Saint Athanasios tou Mouzaki at Kastoria (1383/84)<sup>85</sup>, and those at Borje in Northern Epirus (southern Albania) (1389/90) and at the church of the Aghioi Treis at Kastoria (1400/1)<sup>86</sup>.

All of the above facts, therefore, lead us to connect this icon with the artistic tradition in Macedonia and to date it to the last quarter of the 14th century.

The remarkable painter of this icon remains anonymous and no other work has been found that could safely be attributed to him. Nevertheless, he is evidently an important painter with a profound artistic training that enabled him to create works of particular merit.

Finally, as regards the provenance of the icon, this cannot be determined. The fact that it is kept at Kast-raki suggests that it may come from somewhere in the

Meteora region. It is, for that matter, a well-known fact that, throughout the centuries, a large number of relics from monasteries and hermitages that were for various reasons destroyed were kept in the village's churches<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> One source of information for this fact is the reference written by Uspenskij in 1865, in which he mentioned that in the Byzantine church of the Virgin Mary at Kastraki he had seen icons dating from 1642 which had been moved there from the already abandoned Monastery of the Chains of the Apostle Peter at Meteora in order to rescue them. Uspenskij Porfirij arhim., *Vostok hristianskij. Putešestvie v meteorskie i ossoolimpijskie monastyri v Fessalii arhimandrita Porfirija Uspenskogo v 1859 g. (Christian East. Journey to the monasteries of Meteora and Olympus in Thessaly by Archimandrite Porfiry Uspensky in 1859)*, Saint Petersburg 1896, 234.

#### Illustration credits

Figs 1, 2, 4-6: Private archive of Ioannis Tsiouris. Fig. 3: Ephorate of Antiquities of Kastoria.

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<sup>85</sup> Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 201-241. Pazaras, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, op.cit. (n. 53).

<sup>86</sup> Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά*, op.cit. (n. 6), 433-451 and 275-305, respectively.

## ΜΙΑ BYZANTINΗ ΕΙΚΟΝΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟΥ

**Σ**τον ναό των Αγίων Αποστόλων Πέτρου και Παύλου στο Καστράκι Καλαμπάκας φυλάσσεται φορητή εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου (Εικ. 1). Είναι σκαφωτή, αποτελείται από μία σανίδα και έχει διαστάσεις 94×65,5×4,5 εκ. Συντηρήθηκε σε άγνωστο χρόνο στο παρελθόν και φαίνεται ότι έφερε επιζωγράφηση, από την οποία διατηρούνται ορισμένα στοιχεία καθώς και ίχνη μεταγενέστερης επιγραφής.

Στο κέντρο δεσπόζει η μορφή του αγίου Νικολάου σε προτομή. Ο άγιος είναι σχεδόν μετωπικός αλλά με μια αδιόρατη και διακριτή συστροφή του σώματος και της κεφαλής προς τα αριστερά, ως προς τον θεατή. Με το αριστερό χέρι κρατεί κλειστό μαργαριτοποίκιλτο ευαγγέλιο, ενώ ευλογεί με το δεξί, εμπρός, στο στήθος. Ο άγιος Νικόλαος φέρει ιερατική ενδυμασία αποτελούμενη από στιχάριο που μόλις διακρίνεται και φωτίζεται από λευκές πινελιές, επιτραχήλιο που κοσμεείται στον λαιμό με μαργαριτοποίκιλτο διάκοσμο, πορφυρό φαιλόνιο και λευκό ωμοφόριο που φέρει κόκκινους σταυρούς. Τα επιμανίκια είναι πολυτελέστατα, χρυσοκέντητα και φέρουν ένθετους πολύτιμους λίθους, όπως και η στάχωση του ευαγγελίου. Ο φωτοστέφανος, ο οποίος ορίζεται με κόκκινη ταινία, είναι ιδιαίτερα επιμελημένος και κοσμεείται από κληματίδα που περιβάλλει ανθέμια. Ψηλότερα, στο χρυσό βάθος, με κόκκινο χρώμα η επιγραφή: (Ο) ΑΓ(ΙΟ)C ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟC Ο ΘΑΥΜΑΤΟΥΡΓΟC. Εκατέρωθεν της κεφαλής του αγίου εικονίζονται, σε μικρότερη κλίμακα, ο Χριστός, που κρατεί κλειστό ειλητό στο αριστερό χέρι, ενώ τείνει το δεξί προσφέροντας ευαγγέλιο στον άγιο, και στα δεξιά η Παναγία που, αντίστοιχα, προσφέρει το ωμοφόριο.

Ο εικονογραφικός τύπος του μετωπικού, έως την οσφύ, αγίου Νικολάου είναι διαμορφωμένος ήδη κατά τη μέση βυζαντινή περίοδο και θα γνωρίσει ιδιαίτερη διάδοση. Η συναπεικόνιση του Χριστού και της Παναγίας να του προσφέρουν τα διάσημα του αξιώματός του έχει σχέση με το ιστορικό πλαίσιο των συμβάντων στην Α΄ Οικουμενική Σύνοδο και το όραμα του αγίου.

Ωστόσο, στην πάροδο του χρόνου φαίνεται να χάνουν τον αφηγηματικό τους χαρακτήρα και να αποτελούν απλά ένα πάγιο στοιχείο του εικονογραφικού θέματος. Η απεικόνιση του αγίου να στρέφεται συγκρατημένα προς τα αριστερά, με μια γεμάτη μεγαλοπρέπεια, αν και ανεπαίσθητη, κίνηση, παραπέμπει σε έργα όπως οι ομόθεμες φορητές εικόνες στη μονή του Μεγάλου Μετεώρου (1387/88-1393) (Εικ. 2) και στον ναό του Αγίου Νικολάου του άρχοντα Κυρίτζη Καστοριάς (1370-1385) (Εικ. 3). Η στάση του αγίου να κρατεί το ευαγγέλιο στο στήθος με το αριστερό χέρι ακάλυπτο και τον βραχίονα σε οριζόντια θέση δεν είναι τόσο συχνή, όσο εκείνες, σύμφωνα με τις οποίες είτε το κρατεί από τη στενή πλευρά με την παλάμη, είτε το χέρι είναι καλυμμένο με το φαιλόνιο. Η απεικόνιση του ογκώδους ευαγγελίου δεν είναι ξένη στο δεύτερο μισό του 14ου αιώνα, όπως παρατηρείται στις εικόνες του Χριστού Παντοκράτορα, στο Μουσείο Ερμιτάζ (περ. 1363), στη μονή Βατοπαιδίου (τρίτο τέταρτο 14ου αιώνα) και στο Ζίτζε (1393/94). Η αναγραφή του προσωνυμίου «Θαυματοουργός» αποδίδει μία από τις ιδιότητες του αγίου, η οποία απαντά σε παραπλήσια έκφραση («Η βρύση των θαυμάτων») ήδη στις πρώτες δεκαετίες του 13ου αιώνα.

Το ισχνό, λιπόσαρκο πρόσωπο του αγίου Νικολάου (Εικ. 1, 4) με την κοντή γενειάδα, βρίσκει αντίστοιχο σε φορητές εικόνες όπως αυτές του Μεγάλου Μετεώρου (1387/8-1393) (Εικ. 2), του Αγίου Νικολάου του άρχοντα Κυρίτζη (1370-1385) (Εικ. 3) και του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου Καστοριάς (1380-1400). Συνακόλουθα, τα μεγάλα μάτια που τονίζονται από τα βαθιά υπερόφρυα τόξα, παραπέμπουν επίσης στη ζωγραφική του δεύτερου μισού του 14ου αιώνα. Το πλάσιμο των γυνών μελών του σώματος είναι ιδιαίτερα επιμελημένο. Επάνω σε σκούρο λαδοπράσινο προπλάσμα απλώνονται τα φωτεινά μέρη, τα οποία φέρουν ένα ελαφρώς ρόδινο χρώμα προσδίδοντας μια όσο το δυνατόν ρεαλιστική προσέγγιση. Οι μαλακοί όγκοι εναλλάσσονται με τραχιές



επιφάνειες, ενώ η εναλλαγή σκιάς και φωτός επιτείνει το ανάγλυφο του δέρματος. Μάλιστα, η απόδοση της φωτοσκίασης στο αριστερό μέρος της μορφής ενισχύει την αίσθηση της συστροφής του σώματος και συνακόλουθα της λανθάνουσας κίνησης. Ο τονισμός των αρθρώσεων στο δεξί χέρι συνδέει την εικόνα με αντίστοιχους τρόπους του δεύτερου μισού του 14ου αιώνα. Επίσης, η ευθύτητα του αντίχειρα στο αριστερό χέρι δεν είναι άγνωστη στη ζωγραφική του τελευταίου τετάρτου του 14ου αιώνα, όπως, για παράδειγμα, παρατηρείται στις εικόνες του Χριστού Παντοκράτορα στη μονή Παντοκράτορος του Αγίου Όρους και στο Βυζαντινό Μουσείο Καστοριάς (τρίτο τέταρτο 14ου αιώνα).

Ιδιαίτερη επιμέλεια επιδεικνύει ο ζωγράφος στην απόδοση της διακόσμησης τόσο των αμφίων όσο και του ευαγγελίου που κρατεί ο άγιος. Η δομή της διακόσμησης του φωτοστεφάνου (Εικ. 6), με κεντρικά κοσμήματα που περιβάλλονται από επιμέρους διάκοσμο, εδώ φυτικό, συναντάται επίσης τόσο στη ζωγραφική επιφάνεια φορητών εικόνων όσο και σε ασημένιες επενδύσεις. Όμως το εξεταζόμενο εδώ σχέδιο δεν απαντά ως σύνολο σε άλλη απεικόνιση της εποχής. Επιπλέον, ο συνδυασμός των χρωμάτων οδηγεί σε μια οπτική ψευδαίσθηση βάθους και συνακόλουθα προοπτικής, που οδηγεί στη θεώρηση του φωτοστεφάνου ως έξεργου. Το στοιχείο αυτό, της τρισδιάστατης, ουσιαστικά, φυτικής διακόσμησης είναι αγαπητό στην παλαιολόγια ζωγραφική από τον 13ο, ήδη, αιώνα, ενώ στη συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση παραπέμπει στο σχέδιο ασημένιων επενδύσεων με συρματερή τεχνική σε φορητές εικόνες.

Η μορφή του Χριστού με τα αμυγδαλωτά μάτια, το απαλό ωχροκόκκινο πλάσμιό του προσώπου και τις τονισμένες παρειές, παραπέμπει σε έργα του δεύτερου μισού του 14ου αιώνα. Επίσης, η απόδοση της Παναγίας (Εικ. 6) ανακαλεί κοινούς τόπους με έργα της ίδιας εποχής, όπως, για παράδειγμα, η αντίστοιχη μορφή στην εικόνα του αγίου Νικολάου στο Μεγάλο Μετέωρο (1387/88-1393) αλλά και η ίδιας εποχής τοιχογραφία στον εξωτερικό τοίχο του παλαιού καθολικού της ίδιας μονής. Τα εικονογραφικά και τεχνοτροπικά χαρακτηριστικά της εικόνας του αγίου Νικολάου, ως σύνολο, τη συνδέουν με έργα του δεύτερου μισού του 14ου αιώνα, όπως οι ομόθεμες εικόνες του Μεγάλου Μετεώρου, του Αγίου Νικολάου του άρχοντα Κυρίτζη Καστοριάς και της Αχρίδας. Στον ίδιο χώρο μπορούν να αποδοθούν τα σχέδια του φωτοστεφάνου, η διακόσμηση των ενδυμάτων αλλά και του ευαγγελίου.

Συμπερασματικά, το σύνολο των εικονογραφικών και τεχνοτροπικών στοιχείων οδηγούν στη χρονολόγηση της εικόνας στο τελευταίο τέταρτο του 14ου αιώνα. Τέλος, το μέγεθος της εικόνας μαρτυρεί τη χρήση της ως δεσποτικής. Το γεγονός δε ότι φυλάσσεται στο Καστράκι οδηγεί στην υπόθεση της προέλευσής της από κάποια, κατεστραμμένη σήμερα, μονή ή ασκηταριό των Μετεώρων.

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