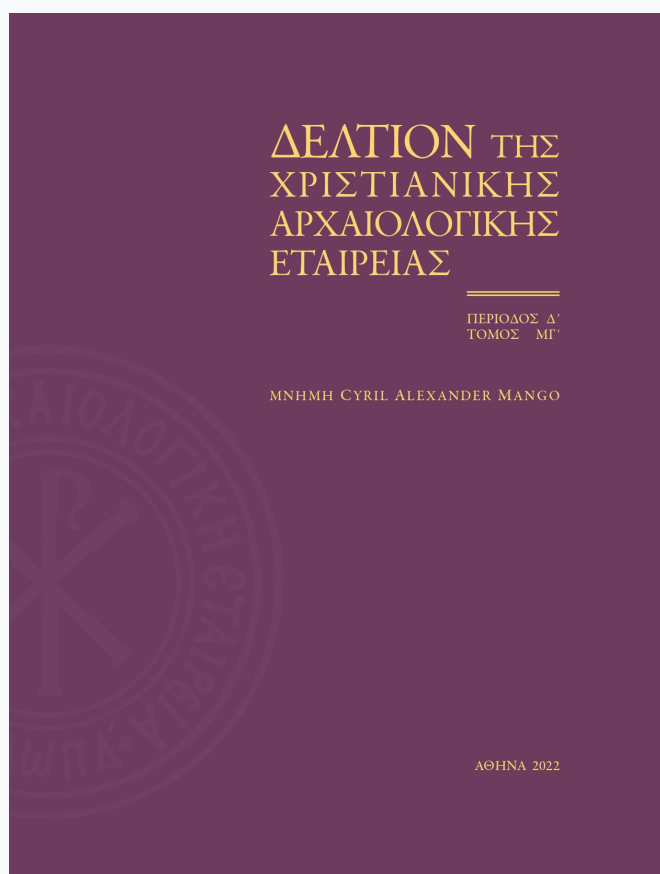


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The use of the past in late Byzantine reality: The promotion of the 10th-century saint Nikon “the Metanoieite” as equal-to-the-apostles on the laconian churches, Peloponnese (13th-14th centuries)

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THE USE OF THE PAST IN LATE BYZANTINE REALITY: THE PROMOTION OF THE 10TH-CENTURY SAINT NIKON “THE METANOEITE” AS EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES ON THE LACONIAN CHURCHES, PELOPONNESE (13TH-14TH CENTURIES)

Μεταξύ των πολλών υστεροβυζαντινών παραστάσεων του οσίου Νίκωνα «του Μετανοείτε» σε ναούς της Λακωνίας ορισμένες ξεχωρίζουν λόγω της θέσης τους δίπλα στους αποστόλους ή/και στην αποστολική χαράκτηρα σκηνή της Πεντηκοστής. Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τη διαχρονική σημασία της αποστολικότητας και τον ιδιαίτερο υπερτονισμό της μετά το 1204, στο πλαίσιο των ενωτικών συζητήσεων Ορθοδόξων και Λατίνων, η συγκεκριμένη επιλογή εξαίρει κατεξοχήν τον όσιο Νίκωνα ως ισαπόστολο και υπέρμαχο της ορθής πίστης.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδος, μνημειακή ζωγραφική, όσιος Νίκων, αποστολικότητα, τοπική παράδοση, Πελοπόννησος, Λακωνία.

Among the many late Byzantine representations of St Nikon “the Metanoeite” (Nikon “Repent!”) in the churches of Laconia, some stand out due to the position of his figure next to the Apostles or the apostolic scene of the Pentecost. Taking into consideration the importance of apostolicity through the ages and of the emphasis on the Apostles after 1204 in the context of the debates concerning the Union of the Churches, the combined depiction of St Nikon and the Apostles highlights the figure of St Nikon as an equal-to-the-apostles and advocate of the correct faith.

Keywords

Late Byzantine Period; monumental painting; St Nikon; apostolicity; local tradition; Peloponnese; Laconia.

A significant number of Byzantine and post-Byzantine representations of St Nikon “the Metanoeite”, especially in the churches of the Peloponnese, has been recorded by scholars¹. Nikolaos Drandakis, the researcher *par excellence* of the Laconian monuments, has dealt extensively with the iconography of the saint, pointing out that his facial features

are largely in concordance with what is mentioned in his *Vita* and likewise the text of his scroll is in complete harmony with the mission of the sermon of repentance². The saint is depicted in bust or in full length, as well as bearing a cross or cruciform rod and scroll, while he often stands with his hands raised in a gesture of intercession (*orans*)³.

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¹ M. Galanopoulos, *Βίος, πολιτεία, εικονογραφία, θαύματα και άσματική ακολουθία του οσίου και θεοφόρου πατρός ημών*

Νίκωνος του Μετανοείτε, Athens 1933, with earlier bibliography. N. V. Drandakis, “Εικονογραφία οσίου Νίκωνος”, *Πελοποννησιακά* 5 (1962), 306-319, pls 9-18 [reprint in: N. V. Drandakis, *Μάνη και Λακωνία* (ed. Ch. Konstantinidi), III, Athens 2009, 135-158]. At the suggestion of N. V. Drandakis, six more representations were mentioned in: O. Lampsidis, *Ὁ ἐκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων ὁ Μετανοείτε (κεῖμενο-σχόλια)*, Athens 1982, 439, three of which are preserved in the Laconian churches: Hagia Kyriaki in Kounos, Mesa Mani (ca. 1232), Hagioi Asomatoi (Archangels) in Flomochori, Mesa Mani (first layer, end of the 13th century) and Hagios Nikolaos in the settlement of Geraki (end of 13th – beginning of the 14th century).

² Drandakis, “Εικονογραφία”, *op.cit.* (n. 1) 309, 319.

³ Ibid., 318-319. Sh. E. J. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in*



Fig. 1. Epidauros Limera, Kato Kastania, church of Hagios Andreas. South wall, Saint Nikon.



Fig. 2. Mystras, church of Hagios Demetrios (Metropolis). South colonnade, first arch, intrados, east side. Saint Nikon "the Metanoieite".

Over the last years, studies and restoration works of monuments have brought to light more depictions of St Nikon, such as that of the middle Byzantine era in the north portico of the church of Aī-Strategos (Archangel

Michael) near the village of Kastania, Exo (Messenian) Mani (1194)⁴. To the list of late Byzantine representations of the saint should also be added those in the churches of the Taxiarches (Archangels) at Laīna (mid or second half of the 13th century)⁵, of the Koimesis (Dormition)

Late Byzantium. Art, Archaeology and Ethnography, New York 2015, 62-63, has observed that the iconographic type of saint with the scroll, where his sermon is inscribed, is preserved in the monasteries, while in the numerous churches of the Mani countryside, the saint is depicted in a prayer position (*orans*), which emphasizes its mediating and healing role.

⁴ M. Kappas, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αι Στρατήγον παρὰ την Καστάνια της Μεσσηνιακῆς Μάνης", *Ἀρχονταρχί. Αφιέρωμα στον Ευθύμιο Ν. Τσιγαρίδα*, Athens 2021, 240, fig. 11.

⁵ See below, p. 148.



Fig. 3. Mystras, church of Hagios Demetrios (Metropolis). General view of the south colonnade with saints in the intrados.

of the Theotokos in Koumousta at Xerokampi (west wall of the nave, ca. 1286)⁶, of Hagios Niketas in Karavas at Kounos, Mesa Mani (south wall of the nave, 1270-1290)⁷, of Ai-Strategos (Archangel Michael) in Epano Boularioi, Mesa Mani (second phase, end of the 13th century)⁸,

⁶ Personal observation. The wall paintings are attributed to the “workshop” of Saint Demetrios at Krokees (1286): K. P. Diamanti, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Δημητρίου Κροκεών (1286) στις Κροκεές της Λακωνίας και το εργαστήριο του ανώνυμου ζωγράφου. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της πρώιμης παλαιολόγειας ζωγραφικής στη Λακωνία* (Αρχαιολογικό Ινστιτούτο Πελοποννησιακών Σπουδών, Σειρά μονογραφιών και διδακτορικών διατριβών 2), Tripoli 2012, 192-196, 201-202.

⁷ N. Gioles, “Ο ναός του Ἀγ. Νικήτα στὸν Καραβᾶ Μέσα Μάνης”, *ΛακΣπουδ* 7 (1983), 155, 173.

⁸ A. Takoumi – K. Tassoyannopoulou, “Constantinople et périphérie: Saint Léon, Évêque de Catane, particulièrement vénéré en Laconie, Péloponnèse”, Ch. Diamanti – A. Vassiliou (eds), in collaboration

of Hagios Georgios at Vigla, near Daphni (first decades of the 14th century)⁹, of Hagios Andreas in Kato Kastania at Epidaurus Limera (ca. 1400)¹⁰, where the figure of St Nikon is depicted next to the apostles Andrew and Peter (Fig. 1), of the Sotiras church at Gardenitsa, Mesa Mani (Diakonikon, first half of the 15th century)¹¹, of Hagios Petros (second half of the 14th century)¹² and

with Sm. Arvaniti, *Ἐν Σοφίᾳ μαθητεύσαντες, Essays in Byzantine Material Culture and Society in Honour of Sophia Kalopissi-Verti*, Athens 2019, 91, fig. 11.

⁹ See below, p. 5.

¹⁰ N. V. Drandakis *et al.*, “Ἐρευνα στὴν Ἐπίδαυρο Λιμερά”, *ΠΑΕ* 1982, 431, pl. 242a (M. Panayotidi) [reprint in: Drandakis, *Μάνη και Λακωνία*, op.cit. (n. 1), v. IV, p. 217]. See below, p. 155.

¹¹ N. Gioles, “Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες στο ναό του Σωτήρα στη Γαρδενίτσα της Μέσα Μάνης”, *Αντίφωνον. Αφιέρωμα στον καθηγητή Ν. Β. Δρανδάκη*, Thessaloniki 1994, 329.

¹² M. Kappas, “Approaching Monemvasia and Mystras from the

Hagios Nikolaos Trikambanos in Kastania, Exo Mani (first half of the 15th century)¹³.

In addition to the above-mentioned portraits of St Nikon, another, so far unknown, depiction of the saint is badly preserved in the church of Hagios Demetrios (Metropolis) in the castle-town of Mystras. The image of St Nikon along with other monks and one bishop are depicted in sequence on the intrados of the arches of the southern colonnade (Figs 2, 3). More specifically, the figure of St Nikon occupies the eastern arch, in close proximity to the image of Christ on the templon. Although the inscription with the saint's name is damaged, certain elements such as the monastic vestments, the cruciform rod and the text of his scroll *[M]ETANOEITE / HITIKE GAP / H BACIAEI(A) TΩN OYPA/NΩN* (Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near), suggest the identification of the figure with St Nikon (Fig. 2). Due to the extensive damage to the saint's representation, we are unable to include his image in one of the phases of the church's decoration¹⁴.

Taking into consideration that a pictorial group of monks decorates the arches of the south colonnade, the location of St Nikon in the eastern arch puts emphasis on him and reminds viewers of his contribution to the flourishing of monasticism in the region since the middle Byzantine period. From the iconographic point of view, the figure of St Nikon visually interacts with the image of Christ on the templon since they are on the same vertical axis (Fig. 3). This pictorial correlation seems to recall the fact that the church was dedicated primarily to Christ (and also to the Virgin Mary and Saint Kyriaki) and erected by St Nikon in the city of Lacedaemonia¹⁵.

Outside: The View from Kastania", Sh. E. J. Gerstel (ed.), *Viewing Greece: Cultural and Political Agency in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean* (Studies in the Visual Cultures of the Middle Ages 11), Turnhout 2016, 169-170, fig. 17.

¹³ Ibid., 172 note 86.

¹⁴ For the painting phases, see M. Chatzidakis, *Mystras: The medieval city and the castle*, Athens 2005, 35-43.

¹⁵ Lampsidis, *Ὁ ἐκ Πόντου ὁσιος Νίκων*, op.cit. (n. 1), 68:8-10. See also D. F. Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon* (The Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources 14) Brookline, Mass. 1987, 116. After the death of St Nikon, the church was converted into the katholikon of a monastery, which was active at least until the middle of the 14th century, P. Perdikioulas, *Τα χρυσόβουλλα του νοτιοδυτικού παρεκκλησίου του*

The depiction of St Nikon's portrait in the church of Hagios Demetrios at Mystras, built to serve as the Metropolitan church of the Metropolis of Lacedaemonia after the transfer of the bishop's seat from Sparta to Mystras after 1262, is exceptionally important. The selection and prominent place of the figure of St Nikon not only reflect the honor attributed to him by the local community, but mainly witness the intentions of the central administration to emphasize the important role of the saint in shaping the identity of Lacedaemonia in a turbulent period. Actually, after the recapture of the Byzantine territories (1262) and the reconstitution of the Metropolis of Lacedaemonia, the necessity of the historical connection of the Byzantine past of the region with the present is raised by highlighting elements of local tradition and Byzantine identity. Consequently, the figure of St Nikon, the most emblematic physiognomy of Lacedaemonia and responsible for the consolidation of the Christian faith of the local population and the reorganization of the wider area, was selected to be included in the iconographic program of Hagios Demetrios. Thus, it is the newly established Metropolis church, dedicated to the patron saint of the Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos, reflecting the current historical reality, that will be the reference point for the local Byzantine community, serving the goals of both the local and central, ecclesiastical and political authority.

Coming now to the numerous (up to thirty) representations of St Nikon, his depictions next to the specific groups of saints highlight the saint's multiple roles in the local community. In most cases, St Nikon is painted next to the monks-ascetics and healing saints, highlighting his mission to preach the repentance and his assistance in healing as thaumaturgist respectively¹⁶. His figure is frequently located in a prominent place in the nave next to the eponymous saint or other popular saints of the region, i.e. military saints and Archangel Michael¹⁷. It is worth noting

ναού της Οδηγήτριας στον Μυστρά: τοπογραφία και ζητήματα γαιοκτησίας, unpublished Ph.D., posted: <https://phdtheses.ekt.gr/eadd/handle/10442/43938>, University of Peloponnese, Kalamata 2018, 184, with previous bibliography.

¹⁶ In a few cases, St Nikon is painted in close proximity to St John the Baptist, who both preached the repentance: Hagios Nikolaos in the settlement at Geraki; Soteris church at Gardenitsa, Mesa Mani.

¹⁷ Saint Nicholas church in Agoriani; Hagios Ioannis Chrysostomos in the settlement at Geraki; Paliomonastero (Old Monastery) at Vrontamas; Panagia at Koumousta, near Xerokampi; Hagios

here two cases of the combined depiction of St Nikon and St Kyriaki, whose cult was established by him¹⁸.

Of particular interest are some representations of the saint standing next to the Apostles¹⁹. The key to the interpretation of their combined depiction lies in the significance of apostolicity and the emphasis on the prominent role of the apostles in this turbulent period of the 13th century-beginning of the 14th century²⁰. Therefore, the questions that arise are: Why did the Byzantines want to overemphasize apostolicity? And what message did they want to convey to contemporary society by emphasizing the combined depictions of the Apostles and St Nikon? Based on the written sources my paper will concentrate its discussion on the historical and artistic framework of the combined depiction of St Nikon and the Apostles, as well as on the role of the donors and their messages to the local community.

The combined representations of Saint Nikon “the Metanoieite” and the Apostles: the monuments

One of the most prominent and valuable examples is displayed in the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko) at Mystras, which was decorated between the years 1311/12-1322 by the abbot Pachomios, *megas protosynkellos* of the Peloponnese, as the new *katholikon* of the Brontocheion Monastery²¹. The figure of St Nikon holding the scroll

and cross rod is depicted along with other monks in the west gallery. His figure is preserved in the south wall together with two monks, below the scene of the Pentecost, and in a visual continuation of the Seventy Apostles, even though they are separated by an arch (Figs 4-6)²². In the south wall of the gallery, where St Nikon and the two monks are depicted, there is an arched entrance (Fig. 5) that leads to a rectangular space with representations of the Twelve Apostles, precisely above the southwest chamber of Chrysobulls²³.

The church of Saint George (now the Transfiguration of Christ) is situated at the location known as Vigla, near the national road Sparta-Gythio. Few, still unpublished, fragments of wall paintings are preserved in the north and especially in the south walls²⁴. Among them, the figures of St Nikon and three Apostles are depicted to the left and right of the southern entrance door respectively (Figs 7, 8). It is obvious that the rest of the figures of the apostles would be depicted on the available surface, according to the iconographic concept of the apostolic group of Saint Demetrios (Metropolis) at Mystras (end of the 13th century)²⁵. The high quality of

Niketas at Karavas near Kounos, Mesa Mani; Monastery of Panagia Phaneromeni at Phragoulia, Mesa Mani.

¹⁸ See above, note 15.

¹⁹ Being the two important pillars of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the images of the leading apostles Paul and Peter are selected to be depicted on the southeastern and northeastern pilasters of the churches: Hagios Nikolaos in the eponymous settlement, outside of Monemvasia; Koimesis Theotokou (Dormition) at Teria, Epidaurus Limera; Hagios Petros at Glezou, Mesa Mani; Hagioi Theodoroi at Ano Poula, Mesa Mani; Ai-Giannakis at Mystras.

²⁰ On the idea of apostolicity and apostolic tradition in Byzantium, see generally Fr. Dvornik, *The Idea of apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the apostle Andrew* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies IV), Cambridge, Mass. 1958.

²¹ Chatzidakis, *Mystras*, op.cit. (n. 14), 53-67. T. Papamastorakis, “Reflections of Constantinople. The Iconographic Program of the South Portico of the Hodegetria Church, Mystras”, Sh. E. J. Gerstel (ed.), *Viewing the Morea. Land and People in the Late*

Medieval Peloponnese (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia), Washington, D. C. 2013, 371-394. R. Etzeoglou, *Ὁ νάρθηκας τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας τοῦ Βροντοχείου στὸν Μυστρά. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ νάρθηκα καὶ ἡ λειτουργικὴ χρήση τοῦ χώρου*, Athens 2013. Perdikoulis, *Τα χρυσόβουλλα*, op.cit. (n. 15).

²² Etzeoglou, *Ὁ νάρθηκας τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 21), 27. For the iconography of the Seventy apostles: S. Koukariis, “Ἡ Σύναξι τῶν Ὁ Ἀποστόλων στὴ βυζαντινὴ καὶ μεταβυζαντινὴ εἰκονογραφία”, *Κληρονομία* 18/2 (1990), 291-292. N. Zarras, “Painting and Ideology in 14th-Century Mystras: The Iconographic Program of the Gallery in the Panagia Hodegetria”, *41st Annual Byzantine Studies Conference (Simon Fraser University Vancouver, British Columbia, November 6-9, 2014), Abstracts*, Vancouver 2014, 18-19.

²³ Etzeoglou, *Ὁ νάρθηκας τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας*, op.cit. (n. 21), 27.

²⁴ For a short reference to the monument, see N. V. Drandakis, “Σχεδιάγραμμα καταλόγου τῶν τοιχογραφημένων βυζαντινῶν καὶ μεταβυζαντινῶν ναῶν Λακωνίας”, *ΛακΣπουδ* 13 (1996), 182 no. 82(B) [reprint in: Drandakis, *Μάνη καὶ Λακωνία*, op.cit. (n. 1), v. IV, 490], he has mentioned that the church is located near the settlement of Daphni. N. Skagkos, “Ὁ Ἀγιαννάκης στὴ Βίγλα”, *Φάρις* series 4 – v. 55 (December 2011), 3 note 8. Sh. E. J. Gerstel, “Mapping the Boundaries of Church and Village: Ecclesiastical and Rural Landscapes in the Late Byzantine Peloponnese”, *Viewing the Morea*, op.cit. (n. 21), 364.

²⁵ Drandakis, “Σχεδιάγραμμα”, op.cit. (n. 24), 182 no. 82(B).



Fig. 4. Mystras, katholikon of the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko). Gallery, south wall. Two apostles-bishops of Byblos of the Seventy Apostles (left to the arch) and Saint Nikon “the Metanoieite” (right to the arch, cf. Figs 5, 6).

the wall paintings of Saint George can be compared with the frescoes of the Virgin Hodegetria (1311/12-1322) and the narthex of Saint Demetrios (ca. 1310), painted by a workshop of Constantinopolitan origin²⁶.

This iconographic correlation between St Nikon and the Apostles can also be detected in the cross-vaulted church (7.08×3.25 m) of the Taxiarches in Laïna, at a short distance from Geraki. St Nikon is represented on

²⁶ A. Takoumi, *Η πρόσληψη των ιστορικών συνθηκών στην τέχνη της Πελοποννήσου κατά την υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο με βάση τη μνημειακή ζωγραφική, τις επιγραφές και τις παραστάσεις των δωρητών: η περίπτωση της Λακωνίας (1204-1349)*,

unpublished PhD, posted: <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/50249>, University of Athens 2020, 259. For a date around 1300, see Drandakis, “Σχεδιάσμα”, op.cit., 182 no. 82(B). Gerstel, “Mapping the Boundaries”, op.cit. (n. 24), 364.



Fig. 5. Mystras, katholikon of the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko). Gallery, south wall. The Pentecost (upper register), and Saint Nikon “the Metanoieite” and two unidentified monks (cf. Fig. 4).

the east side of the western pilaster next to the Apostles Peter, Paul and John the Theologian, depicted on the south wall of the nave (mid or second half of the 13th century) (Fig. 9)²⁷. Above the Apostles, the scenes of the Miracle

at Chonae and of the Pentecost are depicted on the middle and on the upper register of the wall respectively. Among the wall paintings that have never been fully published, certain iconographic and stylistic features, which

²⁷ Sh. E. J. Gerstel – M. Kappas, “Between East and West. Locating monumental painting from the Peloponnese”, A. Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West, 1204-1669. Whose Mediterranean is it Anyway?*, *Papers from the*

48th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (Milton Keynes, 28th-30th March 2015) (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, Publications 22), London – New York 2018, 180, fig. 9.3, they date the murals back to the middle of the 13th century. Drandakis,



Fig. 6. Mystras, katholikon of the Virgin Hodegetria (Aphentiko). Gallery, south wall. Saint Nikon (cf. Figs 4, 5).

“Σχεδιάσμα”, op.cit. (n. 24), 181 no. 74(B) (proposed date: end of the 13th century). A. Drandaki, “A Maniera Graeca: Context, context and Transformation of a Term”, *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014),

are considered elements of western origin, have caught the attention of researchers²⁸. However, the iconographic program of the church reveals the Orthodox faith of the donor²⁹.

Contextualizing apostolicity: the evidence of the written sources and the late Byzantine representations

In the context of the Union of the Churches, the ecclesiastical debates of the 13th century were held initially in the Empire of Nicaea (first half of the 13th century)³⁰ and after 1261 in Constantinople under the Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (Council of Lyons, 1274)³¹, focused

61-64, figs 13-15 (proposed date: second half of the 13th century).

²⁸ Drandaki, “A Maniera Graeca”, op.cit. (n. 27), 61, 63-64, figs 14, 15. Kappas, “Approaching Monemvasia”, op.cit. (n. 12), 153. Gerstel – Kappas, “Between East and West”, op.cit. (n. 27), 180-184, figs 9.2, 9.4.

²⁹ Drandaki, “A Maniera Graeca”, op.cit. (n. 27), 64, with earlier bibliography.

³⁰ J. A. Munitiz (ed.), *Nikephori Blemmydae Autobiographia sive curriculum vitae, necnon epistula universalior* (Corpus Christianorum, Series graeca 13), Turnhout 1984. Chr. Arampatzis, “Ο πατριάρχης Γερμανός Β΄ καὶ ἡ Λατινικὴ Ἐκκλησία”, *Βυζαντιακά* 20 (2000), 245-264, with collected editions of all the epistles of Germanos II. Idem, “Ἡ ἀνέκδοτη ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Γερμανοῦ Β΄ πρὸς τοὺς καρδινάλιους τῆς Ῥώμης (1232)”, *ΕΕΒΣ* 52 (2004-2006), 363-378. S. N. Kollias, *Λατῖνοι καὶ Ορθόδοξοι στὴ Magna Graecia τοῦ 13ου αἰῶνα*, Athens 2017 (it concerns mainly the activity of Nikolaos-Nektarios of Otranto, abbot of Casole Monastery). For the analysis of historical facts, see indicatively: D. Stiernon, “Le problème de l’union greco-latine vu de Byzance: De Germain II à Joseph 1er (1232-1273)”, 1274. *Année charnière. Mutations et continuités* (Lyon – Paris, 30 septembre – 5 octobre 1974) (Colloques internationaux du centre de la recherche scientifique 558), Paris 1977, 139-159. J. S. Langdon, “Byzantium in Anatolian Exile: Imperial Vicerengency Reaffirmed during Byzantino-Papal Discussions at Nicaea and Nymphaion, 1234”, *ByzF* 20 (1994), 197-233. J. Doran, “Rites and Wrongs: the Latin Mission to Nicaea, 1234”, *Studies in Church History* 32 (1996), 131-144. N. Chrissis, *Crusading in Frankish Greece: A Study of Byzantine-Western Relations and Attitudes, 1204-1282* (Medieval Church Studies 22), 2013, 93-99 and 159-172, with emphasis on the western sources.

³¹ A. I. Tăutu (ed.), *Acta Urbani IV, Clementis IV, Gregorii X (1261-1276)* (Pontificia Commissio ad redigendum Codicem Iuris Canonici orientalis, Fontes, series 3, v. 5, t. 1), City of Vatican 1953.

essentially on three interrelated areas of Christian theology: (a) papal primacy, which concerns the ecclesiastical order and hierarchy (Ecclesiology), (b) the use of leavened (*enzyme*) or unleavened (*azyme*) bread in the Holy Eucharist (Christology), and (c) the *filioque* (Triadology)³².

The main axis of the arguments of both parties was not only the Bible, but primarily the ecumenical preaching and the apostolic tradition, which each side interpreted differently and considered for itself as authentic. From the Orthodox point of view, which mainly concerns us in this article due to its impact on the Byzantine painting of the Laconian churches, the interpretation of apostolicity is based on two main points: (a) on the value of the universal scope of the apostolic mission, without any relation to a specific Episcopal See, and the importance of the authentic testimony of the Apostles as the first disciples and direct successors of Christ, as well as (b) on the compliance with everything handed down by the Apostles and their successors, the Fathers of the Ecumenical Councils, as elements of real unity between the two Churches.

In the first case, the connection of the Apostles with a specific See limits their ecumenical mission: “Οἱ γὰρ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι οἰκουμενικοὶ διδάσκαλοι ἐξαπεστάλησαν εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην παρὰ τοῦ σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ· διὸ καὶ οὐδὲ ἰδίους εἶχον θρόνους. πῶς γὰρ ἡδύναντο ἐν ἐνὶ τόπῳ ὁ καθεὶς προκαθῆσθαι, τὴν οἰκουμένην πᾶσαν ἀποσταλέντες διδάξαι τὸ σωτήριον κήρυγμα;”³³ Furthermore, the promotion of Papal primacy

disrupted the church unity and, consequently, deviated from the authentic spirit of the apostolic tradition³⁴.

In the second case, with the compliance with all the traditions given by the Apostles and their successors, the unity between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople is essentially ensured. The purity and the authenticity of the faith, without additions that alter what the apostles handed down, is what is confessed in the Creed and fulfilled in the worship of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, as the Living Body of Christ³⁵. The apostolic tradition guarantees the dogmatic, liturgical and administrative unity. This message is also expressed by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Germanos II, in his letter to the Cardinals of Rome (1232): “ἀλλὰ πάντες Χριστοῦ ὀνομάζεσθαι, καθ’ ὃ καὶ Χριστιανοὶ λεγόμεθα, καὶ τὴν κατὰ Χριστὸν εἰρήνην ἀσπάζεσθαι... ἡ ἀποστολικὴ δὲ διδασκαλία ταῦτά φησιν, εἷς Κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα”³⁶.

reason they did not have throne peculiar to each of them. How was it possible for each to preside in a particular place, when they were sent to teach the whole world the message of salvation?” See also: Νικολάου Μεσαρίτου, *Διάλεξις*, 22.18-20, Heisenberg (ed.), op.cit., v. II. For the English translation, see Angold, *Nicholas Mesarites*, op.cit., 204, §6.

³⁴ Arampatzis, “Ἡ ἀνέκδοτη ἐπιστολή”, op. cit. (n. 30), vv. 109-114 (pp. 377-378). See also the epistle of Germanos II, patriarch of Constantinople, to the Pope of Rome, who was invited in church union, so as not to further tear the unsewn garment of the Church, with which it was clothed by the apostles themselves: *Ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου κυροῦ Γερμανοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως νέας Ῥώμης καὶ οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου πεμφθεῖσα πρὸς τὸν πάπα Γρηγόριον* (Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη), ed. K. N. Sathas, Venice 1873, v. II, 41-42.

³⁵ Cf. J. Gouillard, “Le Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire”, *TM* 2 (1967), 51: “οἱ Ἀπόστολοι ὡς ἐδίδαξαν, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὡς παρέλαβεν... οὕτω φρονοῦμεν, οὕτω λαλοῦμεν, οὕτω κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν τὸν ἀληθινὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν... Αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν Πατέρων... αὕτη ἡ πίστις τὴν Οἰκουμένην ἐστήριξεν” (As the Apostles taught, as the Church has received... thus do we believe, thus we speak, thus we preach Christ our true God... This is the faith of the Apostles, this is the faith of the Fathers... this is the faith has established the whole world).

³⁶ “But we all have our name from Christ, from whom we are called Christians, and we embrace the peace that comes from Christ... the apostolic doctrine is teaching these ones; the Lord is One, the faith is one, the Baptism is only one”. Arampatzis, “Ἡ ἀνέκδοτη ἐπιστολή”, op.cit. (n. 30), vv. 54-58 (p. 375).

V. Laurent – J. Darrouzès (eds), *Dossier grec de l’Union de Lyon (1273-1277)* (Archives de l’Orient Chrétien 16), Paris 1976. For the analysis of historical events, see indicatively: D. J. Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West, 1258-1272: A Study in Byzantine-Latin relations*, Cambridge, Mass. 1959. J. Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy, 1198-1400*, New York 1979, 97-141. D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium. Its Ecclesiastical History and Relations with the Western World*, London 1973. Chr. T. Arampatzis, *Ἡ ὁρθόδοξη ἀντιρρητικὴ γραμματεία τὸν 13ο αἰ., II: Ἡ γραμματεία καὶ τὰ γεγονότα τῆς Συνόδου τῆς Ἀνών (1274)*, Thessaloniki 2005.

³² Takoumi, *Η πρόσληψη των ιστορικών συνθηκών*, op.cit. (n. 26), 92-116, with previous bibliography.

³³ Νικολάου Μεσαρίτου, *Ἐπιτάφιος*, 54.27-55.8, A. Heisenberg (ed.), *Neue Quellen zur Geschichte des lateinischen Kaisertums und der Kirchenunion*, I, Munich 1923. For the English translation, see M. Angold, *Nicholas Mesarites. His Life and Works (in Translation)*, 172, §42: “The twelve apostles were sent by Our Savior Christ, as ecumenical teachers to the whole world, for which

Later, in the context of the Council of Lyons (1274), the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joseph I, clarifies in his apology to the Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos that the peace alone is not enough, but it is important to consider how peace will be established: “Μὴ γοῦν τὸ εἰρηνεύειν προτείνετω τις μόνον, ἀλλὰ τὸ πῶς εἰρηνεύειν σκοπεῖτω, καὶ εἰ κατ’ ἐντολὴν δεικνύετω Θεοῦ...”³⁷. Joseph I goes on to point out that a confession of the common faith is a basic condition for a true unity, as defined by the Church Fathers³⁸.

Thus, the depictions of the Apostles can be seen in this context. The special emphasis on apostolicity in late Byzantine monumental painting aims at the emphatic promotion of the Orthodox faith and the authentic apostolic tradition, which were absolutely necessary for the achievement of the church unity. The images of apostles not only highlight the Orthodox views versus those of the Latins and Unionists (*λατινόφρονες*), but mainly proclaim the necessary condition that would allow a substantial union of the two Churches, which is the confession of the one and correct faith.

In the region of Laconia, the important meaning of apostolicity is reflected in the wall paintings of the second phase of the Metropolis church in Mystras, during the reign of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328). On the initiative of Metropolitan Nikephoros Moschopoulos himself (1288?-1315), the painted decoration of the church was completed, including among others the depictions of the Twelve Apostles on the south wall of the nave (end of the 13th century), as well as the scenes of the Seven Ecumenical Councils on the walls of the narthex (ca. 1310)³⁹. Nikephoros Moschopoulos, an educated high ecclesiastical official and follower of Andronikos II's policy against reconciliation, made clear to the local population the necessity to ensure the correct faith, not only excluding any disrupting action (cf. the



Fig. 7. Vigla, church of Hagios Georgios. Saint Nikon “the Metanoieite” (left to the door).

damnatio memoriae of Metropolitan Theodosius⁴⁰), but also strengthening the ecclesiastical unity through the promotion of the correct faith as defended by the Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

In the second decade of the 14th century, the special emphasis on apostolicity is exhibited in the iconographic program of the Virgin Hodegetria in Mystras through the selection of the images of two apostolic groups: of the Seventy Apostles depicted on the walls of the gallery and of the Twelve, painted in the small chamber next to the gallery⁴¹. These specific iconographic choices reflect the current important issues of the ecclesiastical unity, i.e. the consideration of the apostolic faith and tradition

³⁷ “Not only to promote peace, but also to consider how it will be achieved, and whether it has been revealed according to the commandment of God”. *Τοῦ παναγιωτάτου καὶ οἰκουμενικοῦ κυροῦ Ἰωσήφ, Ἀπολογία*, 173.16-18, ed. V. Laurent – J. Darrouzès, *Dossier grec de l’union de Lyon (1273-1277)*, Paris 1976.

³⁸ Ibid. 279.13-27.

³⁹ Chatzidakis, *Mystras*, op.cit. (n. 14), 41-42. G. Marinou, *Ἅγιος Δημήτριος. Ἡ Μητρόπολις τοῦ Μυστρά* (Δημοσιεύματα τοῦ Αρχαιολογικοῦ Δελτίου 78), Athens 2002, pls 3, 5, 28b. Papamastorakis, “Reflections of Constantinople”, op.cit. (n. 21), fig. 24.

⁴⁰ M. Chatzidakis, “Νεώτερα για την ιστορία και την τέχνη της Μητροπόλεως τοῦ Μυστρά”, *DChAE* 9 (1977-1979), 143-144.

⁴¹ See above, p. 147.



Fig. 8. Vigla, church of Hagios Georgios. Nave, South wall. The Apostle Luke and two unidentified Apostles (right to the door).

as the basis of the true union. Having left behind the religious controversy, and the long-lasting division of local society into two parts (unionists and anti-unionists), the abbot Pachomius, follower of Andronikos II's policy, promoted the ecclesiastical peace and unity on the basis of the apostolic doctrine. The iconographic program of the Aphentiko church, including the detailed pictorial cycles of Christ and the Virgin Mary, being associated with the holy shrines in Constantinople, as well as the figures from all groups of saints (prophets, bishops, soldiers etc.) echoes the political and ecclesiastical ideology of the era⁴². Actually, the entire decoration of the Hodegetria seems to be a visualization of the prayer of the

Orthodox Church for peace and unity⁴³, summarized in the inscribed frieze in the sanctuary⁴⁴.

⁴³ Cf. the “Litany of Peace or Great Litany” (*Ειρηνικά*) of the Eastern Orthodox Liturgy: “Υπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου, εὐσταθείας τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν πάντων ἐνώσεως” (For the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord): F. E. Brightmann, *Liturgies. Eastern and Western*, I: Eastern Liturgies, Oxford 1896, 362.35.

⁴⁴ “μεγάλη ἡ δόξα τοῦ οἴκου τούτου ἡ ἐσχάτη ὑπὲρ τὴν πρώτην λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ καὶ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ δώσω εἰρήνην” (Haggai 2.9). For the inscription, see P. Kouphopoulos – M. Myriantheos, “Παρατηρήσεις στην αρχιτεκτονική της Θεοτόκου Οδηγήτριας στη Μονὴ Βροντοχίου Μυστρά (Αφεντικό)”, *ΗΡΩΣ ΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ. Μνήμη Χαράλαμπου Μπούρα*, Athens 2018, v. II, 651, pl. 10:1, with previous bibliography. Although the specific relief inscription can be read in many ways, in my opinion it is closely correlated with the overall iconographic program of the church: Takoumi, *Η πρόσληψη των ιστορικών συνθηκών*, op.cit. (n. 26), 256-258.

⁴² See above, note 21. For a synoptic view of the wall paintings, see recently S. Kalopissi-Verti, “Mistra. A Fortified Late Byzantine Settlement”, J. Albani – Eu. Chalkia (eds), *Heaven and Earth. Cities and Countryside in Byzantine Greece*, Athens 2013, 232-234.



Fig. 9. Laïna, church of Taxiarches. Nave, South wall. The Apostles Peter, Paul, and John the Theologian, and Saint Nikon “the Metanoite”.

The meaning of the apostolic tradition, as a value which guarantees the ecclesiastical unity of the correct faith, was transmitted by the local rulers in the countryside. The monumental dimensions ($11.90 \times 5.20 \pm 5.00$ m) of the church of Saint George at Vigla and the high quality of its wall paintings⁴⁵, testify to one or more literate donors with an obvious prominent position in the local

community and a close connection with the metropolitan center of Mystras. Thus, reasonable questions are raised about the character of the church (parish?) and its erection within the context of the policy of the center of Mystras into the Laconian countryside.

In the church of the Taxiarches in Laïna (mid or second half of the 13th century), the meaning of apostolicity is reflected in the three frontal figures of the apostles Peter, Paul and John the Theologian (Fig. 9), as well as

⁴⁵ See above, p. 147.

in the scene of the Pentecost in the upper register, emphasizing the beginning of the ecumenical mission of the Apostles. The three figures of the apostles selected should be obviously considered as representatives of the twelve-member apostolic group, who are depicted all together in the scene of the Pentecost, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the choice of the depiction of St John the Theologian next to Paul and Peter reflects the special honor he enjoyed in Monemvasia and in other cities of the Peloponnese⁴⁶.

St. Nikon “the Metanoite”, the most honored saint of Laconia is incorporated into the chain of apostolic succession. In his *Vita*, he is characterized as an “equal-to-the-apostles” (ἰσαπόστολος) due to his extensive preaching in the Byzantine territory⁴⁷. Coming to Lacedaemonia, he took action in an apostolic way: (a) consolidating the Christian faith of the inhabitants on the basis of the Sunday holiday, (b) preaching repentance, (c) erecting churches and (d) promoting the cult of certain saints, such as of St Kyriaki and most probably of St Leo, bishop of Catania (Sicily, Italy)⁴⁸.

Thus, in the late Byzantine milieu characterized by the special promotion of apostolicity, St Nikon is chosen to be placed next to the Apostles and Ecumenical teachers of the Church, in order to emphasize the apostolic character of his mission. In the case of the Virgin Hodegetria, the depiction of St Nikon below the scene of the Pentecost and in an iconographic continuation of the Seventy Apostles, who were bishops with specific

sees according to their inscriptions, emphasizes particularly his apostolic role in the region of Laconia. Thus, the area of Lacedaemonia acquires an apostolic identity through the apostolic activity of St Nikon.

The combined depiction of St Nikon and the Apostles leads us to the conclusion that they are interrelated. St Nikon’s actions, following the model of the Apostles, attribute authenticity and validity to his activity; at the same time, they testify that the correct faith of the Apostles continues to be defended through the centuries by their successors, since apostolicity ultimately exists in every era and is not interrupted. In this way, the diachronic value of tradition is highlighted, as well as the imperative necessity of its preservation, especially in the 13th-century disruption of the correct faith and the loss of church unity and peace. The apostolic mission of St Nikon establishes him as a role model in the community’s consciousness. In this way, the mechanism of collective memory finally emerges as a living element of the society, which nourishes the consciousness of the local community according to contemporary issues.

Confirming the above-mentioned, it is noted here that around 1400 the portrait of St Nikon (see above Fig. 1) is depicted next to the frontal and enthroned Apostles Peter and Andrew on the south wall of the church of Hagios Andreas at Kato Kastania, Epidaurus Limera⁴⁹. The murals are attributed to a “workshop” of painters, who were particularly influenced by the art of the Despotate of Mystras⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ I. Bitha, “Η παρουσία του αποστόλου Ανδρέα στο εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα των βυζαντινών ναών των Κυθήρων (13ος αι.)”, E. G. Saranti – D. D. Triantaphyllopoulos (eds), *Ο απόστολος Ανδρέας στην ιστορία και στην τέχνη, Proceedings of the International Conference (Patra, 17-19 November 2019)*, Patra 2013, 186, with previous bibliography.

⁴⁷ *Βίος όσιου Νίκωνος*, 30.39-32.7; 32.19-20, ed. Lampsidis, *Ὁ ἐκ Πόντου όσιος Νίκων*, op.cit. (n. 1): “Ἐκείνη (i.e. Divine Providence) οὖν δεῖ σε τὴν χάριν όμολογεῖν, ἥ σε καὶ ἰσαπόστολον ἔκρινε καὶ πρὸς τοιαύτην διακονίαν ἐξελέξατο”. See also Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon*, op.cit. (n. 15) 11.38-48; 12.16-18.

⁴⁸ I. Anagnostakis, “Μονεμβασία-Λακεδαίμων: Για μια τυπολογία αντιπαλότητας και για την Κυριακή αργία στις πόλεις”, T. Kioussopoulou (ed.), *Οι βυζαντινές πόλεις (8ος-15ος αιώνες). Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις*, Rethymnon 2012, 101-137. Takoumi – Tassoyannopoulou, “Entre Constantinople et peripherie”, op.cit. (n. 8).

⁴⁹ See above, note 10.

⁵⁰ M. Panayotidi, “Observations on a Local Workshop in the Region of Epidaurus Limira”, I. Stevović (ed.), *ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ. Collections of Papers dedicated to the 40th Anniversary of the Institute for Art History*, Belgrade 2012, 275-290. Furthermore, according to a post-Byzantine oral tradition, which has been recorded in Exo (Messenian) Mani, St Nikon erected a church, dedicated to Apostles Peter and Paul, in Poliana (formerly St Nikon), where he died. Based on the local tradition, his body was buried in the nearby Monastery of Prophetes Elias (Prophet Elijah). Every year, the inhabitants of Lagada and the surrounding villages celebrate the finding of the alleged “saint’s skull” along with the Apostles Peter and Paul on June 29th: I. Mitrakos, *Το Συναξάρι των λακώνων αγίων*, Sparta 2010, 119. Warm thanks are due to Father Iakovos (Monastery of Holy Forty Martyrs, outside Sparta) for providing me with information on St Nikon’s feast.

Conclusions

In the castle-city of Mystras, which was gradually built to be the administrative, political and ecclesiastical center of the newly recaptured area of Laconia (after 1262), the emphasis on apostolicity through the depiction of all the apostles in both the important churches of Metropolis and Panagia Aphetiko is not only an ecclesiastical choice, but also a significant political action. Although the above-mentioned examples of the representations of the Twelve, and the Seventy Apostles are few, they reflect the art of Constantinople and, obviously, the idea of apostolicity, which was cultivated in the imperial center. The depictions of the three apostles in Laïna and of the most common leading apostles Paul and Peter in other Laconian churches, considered as the representatives of the apostolic group, attests to the development of the idea of apostolicity from the imperial center to the periphery, as well as to the perception of the apostolic message by the local population.

The combined depiction of St Nikon and the Apostles is of particular importance and aims to promote the saint as an equal to the apostles during the turbulent period from the 13th century until the early years of the 14th century. Although he is not labeled as “equal to

the apostles” in the murals of the Laconian churches, the depictions of the saint next to the apostles in the same or in different scale, emphasize his apostolic and preaching activity. In this case, monumental painting confirms the textual information (his *Vita*) regarding the saint as an “equal to the apostles” (ἰσαπόστολος). Thus, it is obvious that monumental painting was an important tool for Byzantines to enrich and visualize the messages they wanted to communicate.

After the period of the Frankish occupation, the image of the 10th century-St Nikon is explicitly chosen by the ecclesiastical and political authority to strengthen the coherent elements of collective identity, as a “visual” link between the middle Byzantine past and the late Byzantine reality. Within this context, Nikon “the Metanoite”, the most venerable local saint and a dominant figure in the collective memory, is distinguished as the most familiar role model of collective awakening for the defense of the correct faith.

Illustration credits

Figs 1-4, 6-9: Photographs by Anna Takoumi, with the permission of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Laconia. Fig. 5: Photographic Archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Laconia.

Η ΧΡΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΠΑΡΕΛΘΟΝΤΟΣ ΣΤΟ ΥΣΤΕΡΟΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΟ ΠΙΓΝΕΣΘΑΙ: Η ΠΡΟΒΟΛΗ ΤΟΥ ΟΣΙΟΥ ΝΙΚΩΝΟΣ «ΤΟΥ ΜΕΤΑΝΟΕΙΤΕ» ΩΣ ΙΣΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΥ ΣΕ ΝΑΟΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΛΑΚΩΝΙΑΣ (13ος-14ος ΑΙΩΝΕΣ)

Στους ναούς της Λακωνίας σώζονται περισσότερες από τριάντα παραστάσεις του οσίου Νίκωνος «του Μετανοείτε», κατά κύριο λόγο δίπλα σε μορφές άλλων μοναχών ή/και ιαματικών αγίων, συνδυασμός που αναδεικνύει τις δύο κύριες ιδιότητες του οσίου ως μοναχού και θαυματουργού. Στο παρόν άρθρο εστιάζουμε σε λίγες υστεροβυζαντινές απεικονίσεις του αγίου δίπλα στους αποστόλους ή/και στην αποστολική χαρακτηριστική της Πεντηκοστής. Πρόκειται για τους ναούς της Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας (Αφεντικό) στον Μυστρά (1311/12-1322) (Εικ. 4-6), και του Αγίου Γεωργίου (σήμερα αφιερωμένου στη Μεταμόρφωση του Σωτήρος) στη Βίγλα (πρώτες δεκαετίες του 14ου αιώνα) (Εικ. 7, 8), αλλά και των Ταξιαρχών στη Λαίνα (μέσα ή δεύτερο μισό του 13ου αιώνα) (Εικ. 9). Μετά τη σύντομη εξέταση των σχετικών απεικονίσεων, με οδηγό και τις γραπτές πηγές διερευνάται το ιστορικό και καλλιτεχνικό πλαίσιο της δημιουργίας τους καθώς και ο ρόλος των χορηγών και των μηνυμάτων που κοιμίζουν στην τοπική κοινωνία. Ερμηνευτικό κλειδί αποτελεί η διαχρονική αξία της αποστολικότητας και ο υπερτονισμός του εξέχοντος ρόλου των αποστόλων την ταραγμένη αυτή περίοδο του 13ου έως και τις αρχές του 14ου αιώνα.

Σύμφωνα με τις γραπτές πηγές του 13ου αιώνα, η αποστολική παράδοση είναι η μόνη εγγύηση για τη διασφάλιση της ορθόδοξης πίστης και αληθινής ενότητας των εκκλησιών. Συνεπώς, ο ιδιαίτερος τονισμός της αποστολικότητας στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική κατά την υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο αποσκοπεί στην εμφατική προβολή της ορθής πίστης και της αυθεντικής αποστολικής παράδοσης ως βασικών όρων, απολύτως αναγκαίων για την επίτευξη της εκκλησιαστικής ενότητας. Επομένως, οι υστεροβυζαντινές αυτές παραστάσεις των αποστόλων εξαίρουν τις θέσεις των Ορθοδόξων έναντι εκείνων των Λατίνων και των λατινοφρόνων ενωτικών κυρίως όμως διακηρύττουν την απαραίτητη προϋπόθεση που θα επέτρεπε μια ουσιαστική ένωση των δύο Εκκλησιών, δηλαδή την ομολογία της μίας και

αυτής πίστης, όπως την κήρυξαν και την διέδωσαν οι απόστολοι. Υπό αυτό το πρίσμα μπορούν να ειπωθούν οι απεικονίσεις των Δώδεκα Αποστόλων στον νότιο τοίχο του κυρίως ναού (τέλη του 13ου αιώνα) και των Οικουμενικών Συνόδων στον νάρθηκα (π. 1310) του Αγίου Δημητρίου (Μητρόπολης) στον Μυστρά, που εισάγονται για πρώτη φορά στην τέχνη της περιοχής με πρωτοβουλία του μητροπολίτου Νικηφόρου Μοσχόπουλου (1288;-1315). Τη δεύτερη δεκαετία του 14ου αιώνα, στην Παναγία Οδηγήτρια, οι μορφές των Εβδομήκοντα στο υπερώο και των Δώδεκα Αποστόλων στον ορθογώνιο χώρο πάνω από το νοτιοδυτικό παρεκκλήσιο των χρυσοβούλλων, σε συνδυασμό με τις υπόλοιπες παραστάσεις του ναού, συνιστούν ένα κάλεσμα για ενότητα και ειρήνευση, την οποία εύχεται ο ίδιος ο ηγούμενος Παχώμιος μέσω και της ενεπίγραφης ζωφόρου στο ιερό.

Εκτός της θεολογικής διάστασης που ενέχει η παράσταση των αποστόλων κατά την ορθόδοξη χριστιανική διδασκαλία, η επιλογή της απεικόνισής τους στους δύο ναούς του Μυστρά, άμεσα συνδεδεμένους με την τέχνη και το περιβάλλον της Κωνσταντινούπολης, συνιστά επιπλέον σημαίνουσα πολιτική πράξη, μαρτυρώντας τη σύμπραξη της εκκλησιαστικής και πολιτικής εξουσίας. Επομένως, οι εξεταζόμενες μνημειακές παραστάσεις του Μυστρά και της ευρύτερης λακωνικής περιοχής μαρτυρούν τη διάχυση της ιδέας της αποστολικότητας από το αυτοκρατορικό κέντρο προς την περιφέρεια, καθώς επίσης και την προσαρμογή του σχετικού μηνύματος στην τοπική κοινωνία.

Στην αλυσίδα της αποστολικής διαδοχής ενσωματώνεται και ο όσιος Νίκων «ο Μετανοείτε», ιδιαίτερα τιμώμενος άγιος της Λακωνίας, που έδρασε τον 10ο αιώνα. Ερχόμενος στη Λακεδαιμονία, σε μια περιοχή με σοβαρά προβλήματα κοινωνικής συνοχής λόγω της έντονης παρουσίας αλλοθρήσκων και αλλογενών πληθυσμών, δρα αποστολικά: (α) εδραιώνοντας τη χριστιανική πίστη των κατοίκων με άξονα την Κυριακή

αργία, την κατεξοχήν ημέρα του Κυρίου και της τέλεσης της θείας λειτουργίας, (β) κηρύττοντας τη μετάνοια, (γ) ανεγείροντας εκκλησίες και (δ) προωθώντας ιδιαίτερα στην περιοχή την τιμή ορισμένων αγίων. Μέσα, λοιπόν, στο κλίμα της υστεροβυζαντινής περιόδου, όπου υπερτονίζεται πρωτίστως η έννοια της αυθεντικής αποστολικότητας, ο όσιος Νίκων επιλέγεται να αποδοθεί δίπλα στους αποστόλους, δίπλα δηλαδή στους οικουμενικούς διδασκάλους της Εκκλησίας, ώστε να αναδειχθεί ακριβώς ο αποστολικός χαρακτήρας και του δικού του έργου ως εφάμιλλου των πρώτων αποστόλων. Έτσι, ουσιαστικά αναδεικνύεται με ζωγραφικό τρόπο η ιδιότητα του ισαποστόλου, που αναφέρεται στον *Βίο* του.

Η αναγνώριση του ισαποστολικού έργου του τοπικού αγίου Νίκωνος προσδίδει στην πραγματικότητα

αποστολικό χαρακτήρα στην κύρια περιφέρεια της δράσης του σε μια ιδιαίτερα κρίσιμη περίοδο. Μετά την ανάκτηση της περιοχής από τους Βυζαντινούς (1262) και μπροστά στη μεγάλη διάσπαση του πληθυσμού σε ενωτικούς και ανθενωτικούς, η επιλογή της απεικόνισης του Νίκωνος, ενός αγίου του 10ου αιώνα, και πολύ περισσότερο η πρόθεση τονισμού της ισαποστολικής του ιδιότητας ισχυροποιεί τη συλλογική ταυτότητα της τοπικής κοινωνίας. Επομένως, η απεικόνιση της μορφής του αγίου στους τοίχους των ναών λειτουργεί εκείνη την εποχή ως ένας «οπτικός» κώδικας που συνδέει το μεσοβυζαντινό παρελθόν της περιοχής με το τρέχον υστεροβυζαντινό της γίγνεσθαι.

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