

## Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας

Τόμ. 43 (2022)

Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 43 (2022), Περίοδος Δ'



Οι κωνσταντινουπολίτες ζωγράφοι Αλέξιος και Άγγελος Απόκαυκος στην Κρήτη και η μονή Βαλσαμονέρου. Έγγραφα από τα Κρατικά Αρχεία Βενετίας (1399-1421)

*Maria CONSTANTOUDAKI-KITROMILIDES (Μαρία ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΟΥΔΑΚΗ-ΚΙΤΡΟΜΗΛΙΔΟΥ)*

doi: [10.12681/dchae.34381](https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34381)

### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

CONSTANTOUDAKI-KITROMILIDES (Μαρία ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΟΥΔΑΚΗ-ΚΙΤΡΟΜΗΛΙΔΟΥ) Μ. (2023). Οι κωνσταντινουπολίτες ζωγράφοι Αλέξιος και Άγγελος Απόκαυκος στην Κρήτη και η μονή Βαλσαμονέρου. Έγγραφα από τα Κρατικά Αρχεία Βενετίας (1399-1421). *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 43, 191-204. <https://doi.org/10.12681/dchae.34381>

Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides

## ALEXIOS AND ANGELOS APOKAFKOS, CONSTANTINOPOLITAN PAINTERS IN CRETE, AND THE VALSAMONERO MONASTERY. DOCUMENTS FROM THE STATE ARCHIVES IN VENICE (1399-1421)

Οι κωνσταντινουπολίτες ζωγράφοι Αλέξιος και Άγγελος Απόκαυκος, ευρισκόμενοι στην Κρήτη μεταξύ 1399 και 1421, εντάχθηκαν στην μεικτή βενετοκρητική κοινωνία και προσείλκυσαν παραγγελίες από ορθόδοξες μονές και βενετούς ευγενείς. Ο Αλέξιος δεχόταν μαθητευομένους στην τέχνη του, ενδιαφερόταν για χρηματικές επενδύσεις, ενώ το 1412 ζωγράφιζε παραστάσεις στην μονή Βαλσαμονέρου. Ο Άγγελος τοιχογράφησε τον ναό της Κυρίας των Αγγέλων στον Χάνδακα το 1421 με ανάθεση του Μάρκου Παυλόπουλου, αργότερα πρωτοπαπά Κρήτης, ευνοουμένου των Βενετών. Η παρουσία ζωγράφων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη συνιστούσε εξάλλου έναν από τους διαύλους διάδοσης της ύστερης παλαιολόγιας τέχνης στην βενετική Κρήτη.

*The Constantinopolitan painters Alexios and Angelos Apokafkos, documented in Crete (1399-1421), were integrated in the mixed Veneto-Cretan society and attracted commissions by Orthodox monasteries and Venetian noblemen. Alexios accepted apprentices in his art, attempted financial initiatives, and in 1412 painted murals at Valsamonero monastery. Angelos was commissioned to decorate the church of our Lady of the Angels in the city of Candia in 1421 by priest Markos Pavlopoulos, later chief-priest, favoured by the Venetians. The presence of artists from Constantinople in Candia also hints at a direct channel for transmission of Palaiologan trends in Venetian Crete.*

### Λέξεις κλειδιά

Υστεροβυζαντινή ζωγραφική, ζωγραφική σε ύφασμα, αρχαικά έγγραφα, θεολόγος Ιωσήφ Βρυέννιος, ζωγράφος Αλέξιος Απόκαυκος, ζωγράφος Άγγελος Απόκαυκος, ζωγράφος Άγγελος Ακοτάντος, βενετική Κρήτη, μονή Παναγίας Οδηγήτριας ή Αγίου Φανουρίου Βαλσαμονέρου.

### Keywords

*Late Byzantine painting; painting on textiles; archival documents; theologian Joseph Bryennios (Vryennios); painter Alexios Apokafkos; painter Angelos Apokafkos; painter Angelos Acotantos; Venetian Crete; Valsamonero monastery of the Virgin Odigitria or of Saint Phanourios.*

The Constantinopolitan painters Alexios Apokafkos and Angelos Apokafkos were active in Crete during a flourishing period of Venetian rule in the island. Their Byzantine surname suggests that they belonged to the broader family of Apokafkoi (Apokaukoi), whose most illustrious members were the metropolitan of Nafpaktos Ioannis Apokafkos (ca. 1155-1233) and the *meGas doux* Alexios Apokafkos (end of 13th century-1345). Nevertheless, we lack specific information about the immediate lineage of the two painters or the conditions under which they left from the Byzantine capital.

Crete, although under Venetian rule since the beginning of the thirteenth century, continued to cherish its Byzantine traditions in art and culture, while also absorbing occasional Italian elements. At the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century the fertile island was a rapidly growing commercial node, at the crossroads of the maritime trade routes between East and West<sup>1</sup>. It was soon to become a prosperous

\* Professor emerita of Byzantine Archaeology and Art, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, maconst@arch.uoa.gr

<sup>1</sup> D. Jacoby, "Creta e Venezia nel contesto economico del Mediterraneo orientale sino alla metà del Quattrocento", Gh. Ortalli (ed.), *Venezia e Creta, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Iraklion – Chanià, 30 settembre – 5 ottobre 1997)*, Venice 1998, 73-106, repr. in D. Jacoby, *Commercial Exchange across the Mediterranean*:

economy, especially due to the gradual development of urban centres, and a lively place of art production with a varied art market in portable objects, and particularly icons. During the closing years of the fourteenth century scholars and professionals, including artists, arrived in Crete from Constantinople under various circumstances, leaving behind a shrunken Empire, bringing their traditions with them, and perhaps looking for work on the island.

Alexios and Angelos Apokafkos, probably brothers, or father and son, are documented at the end of the fourteenth and in the first decades of the fifteenth century, as painters active in Venetian Crete or Candia, both in the capital, the city of Candia (Candida in earlier Latin documents, Chandax in Greek), present-day Herakleion, and the countryside. The remarkable commissions they attracted, as well as their acquaintance with prominent members of the Venetian nobility and of the Orthodox clergy, suggest that they enjoyed a considerable reputation. Moreover, contacts with other professionals, as well as initiatives of economic scope in Candia, and a legal affair which had to be resolved in Venice, reveal their active participation in the social and economic life of Crete. It is also documented that Alexios was a close friend of the well known theologian and writer Joseph Bryennios (1350 ca. – between 1431 and 1438), who corresponded with him (six of his letters addressed to Alexios are preserved) and even appointed him an executor of his will, drafted in Constantinople in July 1421<sup>2</sup>.

*Byzantium, the Crusader Levant, Egypt and Italy*, Ashgate 2005, no. VII. Ch. Gasparis, “The Trade of Agricultural Products in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Regional Sea Routes from Thirteenth to Fifteenth Century”, E. Kislinger – J. Koder – A. Külzer (eds), *Handels Güter und Verkehrswege: Aspekte der Warenversorgung im östlichen Mittelmeerraum (4. bis 15. Jahrhundert): Akten des Internationalen Symposions (Wien, 19.-22. Oktober 2005)*, Vienna 2010, 93-104, with bibliography, sources, and tables. I thank Dr Gasparis for his always kind help regarding Medieval Venetian Crete.  
<sup>2</sup> N. V. Tomadakis, *Ὁ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος καὶ ἡ Κρήνη κατὰ τὸ 1400: μελέτη φιλολογικῆ καὶ ἱστορικῆ*, Athens 1947, 33, 122-123, 126-130. Idem, *Σύλλαβος βυζαντινῶν μελετῶν καὶ κειμένων. Μέρος ἔκτον, Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος*, Athens 1961, 489-612, esp. 500-501, 503-504, 518-545. N. Ch. Ioannidis, *Ὁ Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος: βίος – ἔργο – διδασκαλία*, Athens 1999. H. Bazini, *Une première édition des œuvres de Joseph Bryennios: les traités adressés aux Crétois*, Paris 2004. Bryennios was in Crete between 1381 and 1402 on a mission to strengthen the Orthodox population and their priests against

This paper, based on both published and unpublished documents discovered in the State Archives in Venice<sup>3</sup>, in the individual files of the notaries of Crete (*Notai di Candia*), aims to offer a picture of the multifaceted activity of the two painters, whose presence and work in Crete exemplifies significant aspects of the role of the Byzantine artist in Veneto-Cretan society in the half-century before the fall of Constantinople. Furthermore, evidence from 1412 referring to Alexios Apokafkos’s trip to “Varsamonero mountain”, which I have associated<sup>4</sup> with his possible involvement with frescoes in the katholikon of the monastery of the Virgin Odigitria there<sup>5</sup> (later known as of Saint Phanourios)<sup>6</sup>, and specifically in the aisle of Saint John Prodromos (built 1400-1407)<sup>7</sup>, is discussed anew, and the relevant document is published here for the first time (see below Doc. II).

tendencies towards the union of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, see Tomadakis, *Σύλλαβος*, op.cit., 521-526.

<sup>3</sup> Father Mario Cattapan located numerous documents concerning 14th and 15th century painters in Crete, and published a selection between 1968 and 1977. I followed his steps in studying material from these two centuries, often with his indications, always appreciating his efforts and generosity.

<sup>4</sup> Paper appeared in April 2006, www.byzantinecongress.org.uk/communications; abstract: F. K. Haarer – E. Jeffreys – J. Gilliland (eds), *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies (London, 21-26 August 2006)*, III: *Abstracts of Communications*, Aldershot 2006, 45-46. Information and suggestions from my electronic text were repeated in scholarly articles. The present text, essentially based on the previous one, contains more observations, notes and unpublished material.

<sup>5</sup> The monastery was founded in the 14th century and the katholikon took its present form gradually from the end of the 14th to the mid-15th century, see V. Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, «Παρατηρήσεις για την ιστορία και την αρχιτεκτονική του καθολικού της Μονῆς Βαλσαμονέρου», M. S. Patedakis – K. D. Giapitsoglou (eds), *Μαργαρίται. Μελέτες στη μνήμη του Μανόλη Μπορμπουδάκη*, Siteia 2016, 291-309 and passim, with earlier bibliography. Relevant observations also in M. Acheimastou-Potamianou – A. Katsioti – M. Bormpoudaki, *Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τῆς Μονῆς Βαλσαμονέρου. Απόψεις καὶ φρονήματα τῆς ἕστερης βυζαντινῆς ζωγραφικῆς στὴ βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήνη*, Athens 2020 (with English summaries), with more bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> The monastery of the Virgin became a popular pilgrimage centre from the second quarter of the 15th century for the cult of St Phanourios, hence it acquired its second name (see here, notes 17-19).

<sup>7</sup> For this aisle see A. Katsioti, “Τὸ κλίτος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου”, Acheimastou-Potamianou – Katsioti – Bormpoudaki, *Τοιχογραφίες Βαλσαμονέρου*, op.cit. (n. 5), 181-290.

The oldest known document about Alexios Apokafkos dates from 1399 and reveals that he maintained a workshop in the city of Candia, in which he accepted apprentices to train them in the art of painting. This suggests that the master was established in the capital of the *Regno di Candia* for some time by then, which would have allowed him to develop a respectable professional profile. With the contract, dated 24 April 1399<sup>8</sup>, Angelina Angeleto (or Angelidi)<sup>9</sup>, an inhabitant of the *burgo* of Candia and apparently a widow, comes to an agreement with the painter concerning the apprenticeship of her son Georgius in the master's workshop. The apprenticeship was to last seven years, during which the trainee should serve his master day and night, and in the end he should be a "magister" in the profession. In fact, on 13 January 1408 (1407 m. v.)<sup>10</sup> Georgius, an independent painter (*pictor*) by then, assumes the responsibility of a guarantor for a resident in Candia. It should be considered certain that Alexios undertook commissions for icons, since panel painting was the main output in workshops<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, Alexios could execute decorative work. A practice quite frequently referred to in documents of the period was for a painter to elaborate with gold and silver luxurious cloth hangings for patrician or other prosperous households<sup>12</sup>. Alexios undertook similar

work before 1412 for a member of the noble Venetian family of the Cornarii (Corner), Michaelus Cornario. Also, on 13 July 1412 he was asked by a Venetian nobleman of the Contareni (Contarini) family, Zipano Contareno son of Fabianus to decorate a pair of curtains<sup>13</sup>, making them even more beautiful (*tantum pulchriores*) than in the previous commission, in accordance with the taste of his patron, who was to provide the silk cloth for the piece. The painter would need two and a half months to complete this demanding task. Upon commencement, he would receive 20 hyperpera and later three hyperpera for every one hundred of "Venetian leaves", of either gold or silver, which he would use in the embellishment of these curtains<sup>14</sup>. The work would be done after the master's return from the "Varsamonero mountain" (*monte vocato Varsamonero*), thus suggesting that Alexios Apokafkos participated, at least in the summer and autumn of 1412, in the pictorial decoration of a church in that area. Although no specific monument is mentioned, the case most probably concerns the monastery of Varsamonero (or Valsamonero)<sup>15</sup>, which lies near the village of Vorizia<sup>16</sup>, province of Kainourgio in today's prefecture of Herakleion, a good distance south-west of the city of Candia. Any involvement of Alexios in the decoration of this monastery is not specified. Nevertheless,

<sup>8</sup> Published by M. Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori in Creta dal 1300 al 1500", *Thesaurismata* 9 (1972), 218-219, no. 12.

<sup>9</sup> M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Viaggi di pittori tra Costantinopoli e Candia. Documenti d'archivio e influenze sull'arte (XIV-XV sec.)", Ch. Maltezou – A. Tzavara – D. Vlasi (eds), *I Greci durante la Venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII-XVIII sec.)*. *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Venezia, 3-7 dicembre 2007)*, Venice 2009, 700 note 25, and 718 note 53, for a possible alternative reading of the family's surname.

<sup>10</sup> Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi", op.cit. (n. 8), 226 and 232, mentions the year of this document. Also, Constantoudaki, "Viaggi di pittori", op.cit. (n. 9), 719 note 55 (with archival reference). The case concerns the purchase by Ioannis Kolivas of small quantities of cloth from Florence and Pisa from Marco Baffo, perhaps a merchant operating in the city.

<sup>11</sup> An idea of the style and quality of icons by Constantinopolitan painters can be gained from surviving specimens in Crete, which exemplify late Palaiologan trends as well as their evolution in early Cretan art, and are easily found in numerous publications.

<sup>12</sup> This was a well regarded specialised type of work; for a similar case concerning Nikolaos Philanthropinos (1413), see M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "A Fifteenth-Century Byzantine Icon-Painter

Working on Mosaics in Venice. Unpublished Documents", *XVI. Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress. Akten*, II/5 (=JÖB 32/5), Vienna 1982, 266, 270.

<sup>13</sup> Information first mentioned by Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi", op.cit. (n. 8), 232 (no archival reference). Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Viaggi di pittori", op.cit. (n. 9), 714 note 27. Document published below, doc. II. To note that Ioannes Cornaro, son of Michaelis visited the Valsamonero monastery in 1484, see D. Tsougarakis – E. Angelomati-Tsougaraki, *Σύνταγμα (Corpus) χαραγμάτων εκκλησιών και μονών της Κρήτης*, Athens 2015, 160. From the Contarini family came Giovanni Contarini, the Latin Patriarch (from 1409) of Constantinople (†1451).

<sup>14</sup> No details are given on this technique of decorating textiles, also known in medieval art. The gold and silver "Venetian leaves" mentioned were perhaps similar to those very fine ones used in icon-painting and coming through the Venetian market (?).

<sup>15</sup> Information mentioned by Cattapan, who located the document. The form "Varsamonero" as in our document derives from the word "varsamo" (a medicinal plant and infusion – balm), known also as "valsamo" in Greek.

<sup>16</sup> A single nave chapel nearby dedicated to the Holy Cross also belongs to the monastery.

by taking this hypothesis as plausible, and combining other evidence one can proceed a little further.

The Valsamonero monastery's initial single nave chapel dedicated to the Panagia Odigitria and erected before 1400, underwent subsequent additions resulting in its composite katholikon, which stands today. First, a smaller aisle, dedicated to Saint John Prodromos was added to the south side (1400-1407)<sup>17</sup>, and received murals in various phases, completed by 1428. Second, a transverse aisle, dedicated to Saint Phanourios was added (1426) to the west part and was decorated with murals by Konstantinos Eirnikos according to the existing inscription<sup>18</sup>. The last addition (1431) is a narthex<sup>19</sup>, with frescoes completed sometime between 1431 and 1447 by an unrecorded master<sup>20</sup>. All these works of building and painting<sup>21</sup>, including frescoes in the Prodromos aisle,

were realized thanks to the energetic abbot Ionas Palamas<sup>22</sup>, who also introduced into Crete, supposedly from Rhodes, the cult of St Phanourios's<sup>23</sup>, around 1426, thus giving the monastery its second name.

Taking into account the years of construction of the Prodromos aisle (1400-1407) and the date (1412) of the document mentioning Alexios's visit to the "Varsamonero mountain", a logical conclusion is that he participated in the decoration of this space, as I noted in 2006<sup>24</sup>. If this hypothesis holds, then we have a very rare instance in the study of Byzantine mural painting of Crete, in which archival evidence can be associated with surviving unsigned pieces of fresco. Accepting the above suggestion Angeliki Katsioti, who studied in detail the Prodromos aisle, searched to identify which parts of it could possibly be associated with Alexios Apokafkos. Purely on stylistic grounds, since no signed work by him survives, she indicated parts in the sanctuary, the half-barrel vault, and the south and west walls<sup>25</sup> (Figs 1, 2), by pointing out the quality of these frescoes, despite some discrepancies, and the reflection in them of late Palaiologan trends<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See above, note 5 and especially Katsioti, "Κλίτος Προδρομού", op.cit. (n. 7), 181, 183.

<sup>18</sup> Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Τὸ κλίτος τοῦ Ἁγίου Φανουρίου", Acheimastou-Potamianou – Katsioti – Bormpoudaki, *Τοιχογραφίες Βαλσαμονέρου*, op.cit. (n. 5), 291-370. Eirnikos's name is also encountered in the Cretan archives (doc. 1424, †ante 1480), see Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi", op.cit. (n. 8), 232, 205, no. 57. More data on his activity will be presented on another occasion. His surname may suggest a Constantinopolitan origin, although this is unspecified.

<sup>19</sup> Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, "Παρατηρήσεις", op.cit. (n. 5), 308-319. Acheimastou-Potamianou, «Ὁ νόρθηνας», Acheimastou-Potamianou – Katsioti – Bormpoudaki, *Τοιχογραφίες Βαλσαμονέρου*, op.cit. (n. 5), 371-458.

<sup>20</sup> The attribution of these murals to Angelos Acotantos (doc. 1436, †1450) by Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, "Παρατηρήσεις", op.cit. (n. 5), 312-315, 326 is difficult to accept, since plausible arguments are hindered by their mediocre preservation. Cf. critical remarks by M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, "Ὁ νόρθηνας", op.cit. (n. 19), 422-424.

<sup>21</sup> This programme would surely have included also portable icons. Several panels destined for the Valsamonero monastery and its dependencies were apparently commissioned by abbot Ionas Palamas from Angelos Acotantos, see M. Vassilaki (ed.), *The Hand of Angelos* (exhibition catalogue: *Benaki Museum, Athens, 16 Nov. 2010 – 31 Jan. 2011*), Athens 2010, for icons signed by or attributed to him, entries by various scholars. In parenthesis, I note that in an excellent two-zone icon with the *Chairete* and a miracle of St Phanourios, most probably by Angelos Acotantos, from the Odigitria monastery in Kainourgio, a dependency of Valsamonero monastery, in the lower zone there is a scene with the Virgin and St Phanourios (the patron saints of both monasteries) appearing in a vision on a boat with three priests aboard, in a stormy sea, see

M. Borboudakis (ed.), *Icons of Cretan Art*, Herakleion 1993, cat. no. 94 (M. Borboudakis). The priest in profile in the centre trying to hold the sail of the boat is an almost realistic representation, perhaps with intention to evoke the rendering of a portrait. I record this with reservation, as a pointer for further research.

<sup>22</sup> Ionas Palamas, a learned and enterprising monk, is mentioned, apart from the 1426 inscription, also by Angelos Acotantos in his will of 1436, see M. Kazanaki-Lappa, "The Will of Angelos Acotantos", *The Hand of Angelos*, op.cit. (n. 21), 104-110. This important document had attracted the attention of Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1972, 258-259. I had the chance to follow Prof. Mango's lectures (to whom this volume is dedicated) on Byzantine historiography in the spring term of 1993 at Exeter College, Oxford.

<sup>23</sup> M. Vassilakes-Mavrakakes, "Saint Phanourios. Cult and Iconography", *DChAE* 10 (1980-1981), 223-238. For various hypotheses concerning the abbot Ionas's role in the promotion of the cult of an unknown until then saint, see the studies by Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, Drandaki, Ranoutsaki, Acheimastou-Potamianou (below, note 27).

<sup>24</sup> See above, note 4. At that time, when in situ examination was necessary, the majority of the wall paintings in the katholikon were unpublished, and access to its interior was limited.

<sup>25</sup> See Katsioti, "Κλίτος Προδρομού", op.cit. (n. 7), 180, 231-233, 235-241, 245-251, 254, 255-256.

<sup>26</sup> A. Katsioti also finds some differences between these frescoes and other scenes displayed nearby.



Fig. 1. Herakleion Prefecture, Province of Kainourgio, Valsamonero monastery. Saint John Prodromos aisle, the half-barrel vault. Scenes from the life of Saint John Prodromos, attributed to Alexios Apokafkos.

This is a suggestion, which, it is hoped, may be supported by more evidence in the future.

The whole ensemble of murals in the Valsamonero katholikon is, without doubt, a significant visual testimony for the evolution of late Palaiologan painting and its impact on Crete, as this artistic trend was essential in shaping the character of early Cretan art. There has been renewed interest in the monument and its wall paintings in recent years. Observations on its iconographic programmes and on individual themes have resulted in contrasting views by scholars, touching on social, religious and spiritual matters in Venetian Crete during the first decades of the fifteenth century<sup>27</sup>. As is well known, this was a period of lively theological debate in Byzantium, between supporters of the union of the two Christian Churches and steadfast defenders of the Orthodox dogma.

Alexios Apokafkos besides his artistic activity was evidently involved in initiatives of economic character. On 25 October 1400 he borrowed a sum of 100 hyperpera for one year from Jacob Theotonico, a Jew resident in Candia<sup>28</sup>. In the hope of making a profit, Alexios was going to invest the money in some commercial enterprise through the intermediary of Anthonius Paradixi (Paradisi), the owner of a shop selling spices (*speciarius*), and return the loan within a year, with an additional 12% interest. The notary Nicolaus Medrino accepted to act as his guarantor, but not without demanding security. With a separate contract signed on the same day Alexios

gave Medrino as pawn two items of value, namely a heavy overcoat and a luxurious dress decorated with two rows of silver buttons. Despite all the preparation the initiative was abandoned on 8 November of that year by agreement of the two parties, and both documents were annulled by the notary<sup>29</sup>.

Having failed with this venture, Alexios makes a new attempt fourteen months later. On 2 January 1402 (1401 m.v.) he borrows 44 hyperpera from Moyse Demedico, a Jew from Nigroponte and resident in Candia (see below Doc. I)<sup>30</sup>. He intended to invest the money in business conducted again through the intermediary Anthonius Paradixi. He agrees to return the sum within six months, with 12% interest. His guarantor this time is a goldsmith from Milan, residing in the city of Candia, Petrus de Mediolano, to whom Alexios gives as surety a female silver belt<sup>31</sup>. However, eight days later, the two parties agreed for an annulment of the contract.

Apokafkos was the owner of two ground floor houses found in the city of Candia, which he had sold before 22 October 1405 to Anna Brocalio, wife of Johannes Ungaro. However, a dispute arose between them, which dragged out for years, and they finally agreed on 12 September 1411 to appoint two arbitrators to resolve it. Eight days later the arbitrators decided that the houses should remain in the possession of Alexios, who would repay the lady only 30 hyperpera from the 40 he had initially received. Also, the loser of the case, Anna Brocalio, was exempted from a debt of another 40 hyperpera agreed in the initial contract. One month later, on 23 October 1411, Alexios promises to settle his debt to Anna by the end of March of the following year<sup>32</sup>. The case as well as those of previously mentioned contracts

<sup>27</sup> The murals, especially in the Saint Phanourios aisle and in the narthex, have generated differing interpretations, opting either for a steady adherence to the Orthodox dogma or for a pro-unionist character or with attempts for a synthesis. See U. Ritzerfeld, "Bildpropaganda im Zeichen des Konzils von Florenz: Unionistische Bildmotive im Kloster Balsamonero auf Kreta", *OCP* 80 (2014), 387-407. Sythiakaki-Kritsimalli, "Παράτηρήσεις", *op.cit.* (n. 5), 324, 326. A. Drandaki, "Piety, Politics and Art in Fifteenth-Century Venetian Crete", *DOP* 71 (2017), 385-406. Ch. Ranoutsaki, "Η κρητική Μονή Βαλσαμόνερου. Πολιτιστικές ανταλλαγές μεταξύ Βυζαντίου και Δύσης στον ύστερο Μεσαίωνα (Προκαταρκτική έκθεση)", *Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Cretan Studies (Heraklion, 21-25.9.2016)*, <http://12iccs.proceedings.gr> (2019), 1-15 (with English abstract). The latest publication by Acheimastou-Potamianou, Katsioti and Bormpoudaki, *Τοιχογραφίες Βαλσαμονέρου*, *op.cit.* (n. 5), stresses the presence in the general programme of iconographic themes pertinent to the Orthodox dogma.

<sup>28</sup> Document first discovered by Cattapan, revisited.

<sup>29</sup> Document first discovered by Cattapan, revisited.

<sup>30</sup> Document first discovered by Cattapan, transcribed anew and published below.

<sup>31</sup> The same artisan is a witness in a document of 23 October 1411 concerning Alexios and Anna Brocalio. For the presence of Italian goldsmiths in Candia as well as for the use of gold or silver objects as pawns, see M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "In apotheca aurificum: botteghe, commissioni e uso di opere di argenteria e oreficeria a Candia (sec. XIV e XV). Documenti dall'Archivio di Stato di Venezia" (in Greek with Italian summary), *Thesaurismata* 42 (2011-2012), 361-385.

<sup>32</sup> All documents in question are unpublished and will be treated on another occasion.



Fig. 2. Herakleion Prefecture, Province of Kainourgio, Valsamonero monastery. Saint John Prodomos aisle, the half-barrel vault. Saint John Prodomos preaching and pointing towards Christ, attributed to Alexios Apokafkos (detail of the Fig. 1).



probably alludes to the painter's financial difficulties at the time.

A document of 30 September 1415 reveals that Alexios Apokafkos was involved in a rather significant case, probably a difference having to do with the Venetian administration of Crete<sup>33</sup>, for which it was necessary for him to appear in front of the authorities of the metropolis. Members of the Acotanto and the Calergi families (Petrus Acotanto son of the late Laurentius and Ioannis Kallergis son of Michael), were also directly involved in the same case<sup>34</sup>. However, instead of travelling to Venice, however, they all appointed the notary Constantius Maurica to represent them in this unspecified affair in the capital of the *Serenissima*. The last document mentioning Alexios concerns his son Theodoros (*Theodori*, Θεοδοῦρης), who on 28 January 1419 (1418 m. v.) is a witness in the will of a well-standing lady, Chaterucia, widow of Frangia Quirino: "Theodori Apochafcho filius ser Alexii pictoris"<sup>35</sup>. Alexios, too, was surely acquainted with the lady and her family, who was probably related to a branch of the noble Venetian house of the Querini<sup>36</sup>. Finally, it is

<sup>33</sup> Document unpublished.

<sup>34</sup> The Acotanto family included among its members Theodoros, *rector scholarum*, the painter Ioannis and the remarkable painter and chief-cantor (for a short period) Angelos, who executed icons for the Valsamonero monastery and its dependencies (see above note 21) sometime before 1450, the year he died, see M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "The Painter Angelos Acotantos: New Biographical Details from Unpublished Documents", M. Aspra-Varдавaki (ed.), *Λαμπηδών. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρούζη*, II, Athens 2003, 499-508. Also the Calergi household was the richest and most powerful in Crete counting among its members the famous leader Alexios Kallergis (†1321). Once again evidence points to Alexios Apokafkos's significant local connections.

<sup>35</sup> A.S.V. – *Notai di Candia*, b. 295 (Antonius Marci), fols. 4<sup>v</sup>-5<sup>r</sup>, 28 January 1419 (1418 m.v.). Document included in S. McKee (ed.), *Wills from Late Medieval Venetian Crete, 1312-1420*, Washington, D. C. 1998, 2, 838-839, no. 660; the year is given there as 1418/19 and the word "pictoris" is transcribed erroneously as "pretoris".

<sup>36</sup> Its best known member was the humanist and pro-unionist Lauro Quirini (Querini), who, after his return to Crete (1452), kept with rent lands belonging to the Latin Patriarchate of Constantinople in the broader area of Vrontissi monastery (then a dependency of Valsamonero monastery). These were conceded to him by his friend Cardinal Bessarion when he was nominated in this title (1463). For Lauro see Z. N. Tsiropanlis, *Τὸ κληροδότημα τοῦ καρδινάλιου Βησσαρίωνος γιὰ τοὺς φιλενωτικούς τῆς βενετοκρατουμένης Κρήτης (1439-17ος αἰ.)*, Thessaloniki 1967, 97.

known from Bryennios's testament that Alexios was still alive in 1421<sup>37</sup>.

Angelos Apokafkos was probably a younger brother or a son of Alexios. Only one document concerning him has been discovered so far among the notarial cartularies of Venetian Crete. Although his activity is less documented than that of his relative, it seems to have been equally notable. This is suggested by the fact that he attracted the attention of Markos Pavlopoulos, a well known codicographer and cleric, supporter of the union of the two Christian Churches, who was to become the Orthodox chief-priest (*protopapàs*) of Candia in 1452.

With a contract drafted in Candia on the first day of March 1421<sup>38</sup> the priest Markos Pavlopoulos commissioned from Angelos Apokafkos a fresco of the Last Judgment, to be painted in his church of *Sancta Maria Angelorum*, situated in the *burgo*, outside the walls of Candia<sup>39</sup>. Conditions for the execution of the work are set down in detail, as was usual. The painter was to buy the painting materials needed at his own expense, while the patron would provide scaffolding and lime necessary for the preparation of the walls. Angelos's remuneration for his work and expenses is specified at 50 hyperpera. As the painter was engaged in other commissions, work would not start before the 15th of May and the Last Judgment would be revealed before the eyes of the faithful in another two and a half months later that is by the end of July 1421.

Most details in the contract concern practical matters. Nothing is said about the different figures and the various episodes that the composition of the Last Judgment –one of the richest and more suggestive representations in Byzantine iconography– should include, perhaps because this was discussed between patron and painter. As the church of Saint Mary of the Angels has been

<sup>37</sup> Tomadakis, *Βρυέννιος*, op.cit. (n. 2), 33, 122-123.

<sup>38</sup> Document published by Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi", op.cit. (n. 8), 230, doc. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Pavlopoulos had restored the ruined church, which later became the seat of the Orthodox chief-priest (*protopapàs*), probably after he was invested with the title, see M. Manoussacas, "Βενετικά έγγραφα αναφερόμενα εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἱστορίαν τῆς Κρήτης τοῦ 14ου-16ου αἰῶνος (Πρωτοπαπάδες καὶ πρωτοψάλται Χάνδακος)", *Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 15 (1961), 165-193.

destroyed, we can only gain an idea of the work from murals of the same theme preserved in other churches of Crete<sup>40</sup>. References about several components of the Last Judgment theme are made in texts by Joseph Bryennios<sup>41</sup>, who was a close friend of Alexios Apokafkos and perhaps also of Angelos. Particular scenes in this subject, especially those concerning punishments of sins in hell are also useful for understanding social behaviours, sins and punishments of the time<sup>42</sup>.

### Concluding remarks

The documents briefly discussed above are a small but rather representative sample of the type of available documentation concerning painters of the late Byzantine period active in Venetian Crete. The case of these two masters exemplifies characteristic activities and the complex role that a Byzantine artist was asked to fulfill in the mixed and demanding society of this distant colony of the *Serenissima*. Their patrons belonged both to the secular and the ecclesiastical world, and were members of the Venetian nobility, abbots or priests of Orthodox monasteries and churches; they could also be of other origins and qualities and from different social strata, reflecting the multicultural character of the growing urban centres in this big island of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Alexios, an acknowledged master himself, was in contact with other professionals, such as the goldsmith Petrus from Milan established in Candia (1402-1411), and with members of the broader Acotanto family (Nicolaus,

1400, Petrus and Laurentius, 1415)<sup>43</sup>, to which the painters Angelos and Ioannis belonged<sup>44</sup>. Although we ignore whether Acotantos (†1450) had met Apokafkos in person, he certainly knew his work, not least because Angelos Acotantos collaborated with the Valsamoneo monastery and painted a number of icons<sup>45</sup> for the katholikon<sup>46</sup>, as well as for its related monasteries of Saint Anthony of Vrontissi and Odigitria of Kainourgio. Moreover, Alexios Apokafkos obviously had a close relationship with notaries (Nicolaus Medrino, Constantius Maurica) and probably with copyists of manuscripts (or even illuminators). Furthermore, he was undoubtedly acquainted with his contemporary fellow-painter Nikolaos Philanthropinos (doc. 1396-1436)<sup>47</sup>, since both shared a Constantinopolitan origin and close ties with the circle of Joseph Bryennios, whose mission was to serve as a link between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Orthodox clergy of Venetian Crete and to strengthen the local Orthodox population against pro-unionist propaganda.

Alexios remained in contact with the Byzantine theologian and philosopher even after the latter's return to the once proud capital of the Byzantine Empire. At some point Bryennios had sent him books from Constantinople to Crete and later on he entrusted him with a chest full of manuscripts written by himself, perhaps

<sup>40</sup> See A. Lymberopoulou, "Hell on Crete", A. Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Hell in the Byzantine World. A History of Art and Religion in Venetian Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean*, 1: *Essays*, Cambridge 2020, 117-190. R. Duits, "Hell from West to East: Western Resonances in Cretan Wall Painting", *ibidem*, 1, 191-234. A. Lymberopoulou – R. Duits (eds), *Hell in the Byzantine World. A History of Art and Religion in Venetian Crete and the Eastern Mediterranean*, 2: *A Catalogue of the Cretan Material*, Cambridge 2020, with catalogue of churches and systematic references of numerous examples of Last Judgment scenes in Crete.

<sup>41</sup> D. Stathakopoulos, "From Crete to Hell: The Textual Tradition on Punishment in the Afterlife and the Writings of Joseph Bryennios on Crete", *Hell in the Byzantine World*, 1, op.cit (n. 40), 46-47.

<sup>42</sup> Ch. Gasparis, "Venetian Crete, The Historical Context", *Hell in the Byzantine World*, 1, op.cit (n. 40), 91-116.

<sup>43</sup> Nicolaus Acotanto features as witness to a document of 25 October 1400 (see above, note 28). Petrus Acotanto son of the late Laurentius is involved, with Alexios Apokafkos and Ioannis Kallergis, in the case of 30 September 1415 mentioned (see above, notes 33 and 34). We are not able to associate directly these names with the family of the two Acotanto painters.

<sup>44</sup> Cattapan, "Nuovi elenchi", op.cit. (n. 8), 206, nos. 64 and 65. See also above, note 34. A graffito inscription in the Prodromos aisle at Valsamoneo records the name "angelus acotanto" with the date 1477, see Tsougarakis – Angelomati-Tsougaraki, *Σύνταγμα χαραγμάτων*, op.cit. (n. 13), 161 and note 201. It may refer to a relative of the famous painter, perhaps the homonymous person documented in the city of Candia at least in 1482-1483, as a "notarius" and as provider of 50 wooden panels to the painter Michael Capi, see Constantoudaki, "Angelos Acotantos", op.cit. (n. 34), 506 note 15.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. above, note 21.

<sup>46</sup> For an uncertain attribution to Acotantos of the wall paintings in the narthex, see above, note 20.

<sup>47</sup> See above note 12 and Constantoudaki, "Viaggi di pittori", op.cit. (n. 9), 716-719.

his “Forty-Nine Chapters”<sup>48</sup> or his “Treatises addressed to the Cretans”<sup>49</sup>, to be copied in Candia under Alexios’s supervision. All this points to the education and some intellectual interests of Alexios Apokafkos, but also to his possible role as a link between Bryennios and the local Orthodox church and society. On the other hand Angelos Apokafkos had collaborated (1421) with the above mentioned priest, codicographer and later *protospas* Markos Pavlopoulos. Consequently, the circle in which the two Apokafkos painters moved included well known personalities of the intellectual, theological and artistic milieu of the period. What appears remarkable in this respect was their contacts at the same time with clergymen of opposing views, either fervent defenders of Orthodoxy or pro-unionists.

Even if the above evidence can be considered to suggest that the two painters enjoyed the esteem of the public, it is not sure whether this was due to their profession or rather to their Byzantine origin and social relations. Whatever the case and although Alexios Apokafkos was living in Crete as a “foreigner” according to Bryennios<sup>50</sup>, he seems to have been well integrated into the environment of Venetian Crete. However, the painter’s financial situation does not seem to have been flourishing. His interest in monetary investments, rather than indicating an adventurous nature, betrays economic difficulties. In order to embark on these attempts Alexios resorts to the services of members of the Jewish community of Candia (1400, 1402), who practiced the profession of money-lending. The activity and quality of work of painters with a similar background did not seem to alter the medieval attitude towards painting, which is attested in Cretan documents well into the closing years of the fifteenth century<sup>51</sup>. Nevertheless the presence of painters

from the Byzantine capital probably helped to initiate a gradual change towards higher esteem for the artist’s craft in Veneto-Cretan society<sup>52</sup>, and the development of artistic personality in the sixteenth century.

Consequently, the archival evidence discussed gives an eloquent picture of the diversity of work, professional activity, private matters and social behaviour of painters, thus illustrating their role and overall presence in the society of their time. It also allows, *mutatis mutandis*, a glimpse into the works and days of late Byzantine artists in Constantinople, about whom almost nothing specific survives in the sources. Furthermore, the case of these two masters of Constantinopolitan origin, documented as executing frescoes and decorative work, but undoubtedly capable of producing portable icons as well, hints at the most direct vehicle for the diffusion of trends from the Byzantine capital to Crete, that is the painters themselves. In an island which, despite protracted western political rule, had maintained in its art vivid Palaiologan traditions, adapted to a local vocabulary, these incomers infused it with new life and quality, whose influence can be appreciated from the surviving frescoes and portable icons.

Last, the evidence offered by the contract of 1412 discussed above opens a window on the possibility of the involvement of the Constantinopolitan painter Alexios Apokafkos in parts<sup>53</sup> of one of the most significant groups of wall paintings<sup>54</sup> in the panorama of Byzantine art of Venetian Crete.

---

το κοινό τους: Η αντιμετώπιση της τέχνης τους στη Βενετοκρατία», *ΚρητΧρον* 26 (1986), 246-261.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Bryennios’s statement in his above mentioned letter, *op.cit.* (n. 49) to Alexios Apokafkos that people in Crete were envious of him “because of his art” (*ἐπὶ τέχνη*) among other things.

<sup>53</sup> Katsioti, “Κλίτος Προδρομού”, *op.cit.* (n. 7), especially 254-260.

<sup>54</sup> Acheimastou-Potamianou – Katsioti – Bormpoudaki, *Τοιχογραφίες Βαλσαμονέρου*, *op.cit.* (n. 5), for the most recent and complete study of the whole painted complex.

#### Illustration credits

Figs 1, 2: Katsioti, “Κλίτος Προδρομού”, *op.cit.* (n. 7), pls 42 and 54.

<sup>48</sup> Tomadakis, *Βρυέννιος*, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 39. Ioannidis, *Βρυέννιος*, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 74-77.

<sup>49</sup> Bazini, *Traité adressés aux Crétois*, *op.cit.* (n. 2).

<sup>50</sup> Tomadakis, *Βρυέννιος*, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 128, 21st letter: «ξένος καὶ τεθρονημένος παροικεῖς ἐν τῇ Κρήτῃ».

<sup>51</sup> M. Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, «Οἱ Κρητικοὶ ζωγράφοι καὶ

## SELECTED UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

**Note:** *The documents are here published according to the established rules of a diplomatic edition, with conventional abbreviations solved. Information within brackets marked with an asterisk (\*) is retrieved from similar documents by the same notary.*

**I.** The painter Alexios Apokafkos borrows from Moyse de Medico, a Jew from Nigroponte, 44 hyperpera for an economic enterprise, having as his guarantor the goldsmith Petrus from Milan and depositing a silver belt as a pawn. Agreement annulled 8 days later.

A.S.V. – *Notai di Candia*, b. 145 (Costanzo Maurica), quad. 31-42 (1400-1402), fol. 308<sup>v</sup>, 2 and 10 January 1402 (1401 m.v.).

Candia, Crete, 2 January 1402 (1401 m.v.)

[1401, mensis januarii, indictione X<sup>a</sup>. Die secundo].\* *Eodem die. Manifestum facimus nos Alexius Apocafco pictor, principalis et Petrus de Mediollano aurifex, eius plecius, ambo habitatores Candide, quia cum nostris heredibus habuimus a te Moyse Demedico de Nigroponte, judeo habitatore Candide, et tuis heredibus, yperpera quadraginta-quatuor mihi principali a te data mutuo, tibi solvenda hinc ad menses sex proxime venturos vel antea, hic Candide, cum tali prode vel damno atque periculo ignis et latronum clarefacto, in quali erint dicto tempore havere stationis Anthonii Paradixi speciarum, Candide, non ascendente eorum prode ultra yperpera duodecim pro centenario yperperorum in anno. Et si dicta yperpera steterint in manibus mei predicti principalis ultra dictum terminum, tunc ex inde in antea similiter, liber erint prode predictae et subiaceant periculo stationis predictae, quousque tibi persolvamus predicta yperpera. Et pro signo et pignore dictorum denariorum tibi dedi et consignavi centuram unam muliebrem argenti ponderis unciarum viginti et exagiorum duorum cum dimidio. Hec autem et cetera suprascripta yperpera in toto et parte, pena suprascripta [=yperpera X].\**

*Testes suprascripti [=Ser Franciscus Longo presbyter, ser Nicolaus Tonisto, Dimitrius Cortaci].\* Complere et dare. Die X suprascripti mensis cancellavi de velle partium [suprascriptarum].\**

**II.** Alexios Apokafkos undertakes to decorate a pair of silk hangings for the nobleman Zipano Contareno, who will provide the silk fabric necessary and will pay 3 hyperpera for every 100 golden or silver leaves to be used. The painter will start on his return from Varsamonero (Valsamonero) mountain receiving at that time 20 hyperpera.

A.S.V. – *Notai di Candia*, b. 145 (Costanzo Maurica), quad. 1412, 13 July 1412.

Candia, Crete, 13 July 1412

[1412, mensis julii].\* *Die XIII. Manifestum facio ego Alexius Apocafco pictor, habitator Candide, cum meis heredibus, tibi nobili viro ser Zipano Contareno quondam domini Fabiani, habitatori Candide, ad hec presenti et contento, et tuis heredibus, quia promitto tibi et sum contentus expensis meis laborare de arte mea et facere tibi par unum cortinarum, laborando illas sicut sunt ille quas feci ser Michaleto Cornario et tantum pulchriores quantum laborerium volueris, te dando mihi tellam pro dictis cortinis, salvo quod artis mee debeat esse de çendato, te dando etiam mihi aurum et argentum necessarium pro dicto laborerio. Incepero laborare illas bene et sufficienter a die primo mensis novembris proxime venturi vel antea, si rediero ad civitatem Candide de monte vocato Varsamonero, ad quod in brevi sum iturus, et illas habere debeam completas usque ad diem quindecim mensis januarii proximi vel antea. Tu autem*

MARIA CONSTANTOUDAKI-KITROMILIDES

*pro meo labore premio mihi dare et solvere promisisti yperpera tria pro singulo centenario foliorum venetorum tam auri quam argenti, qua posuero in dicto laborerio. Tu autem teneris mihi dare pro pretio dicti operis laborerii yperpera viginti, quando incepero laborare dictas cortinas. Si quis igitur et cetera, pena yperperorum XXV, contractu firmo.*

*Testes: Ser Johannes Sevasto, Stamatius Gri[...], Petrus de Padoa. Complere et dare.*

ΟΙ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΙΤΕΣ ΖΩΓΡΑΦΟΙ ΑΛΕΞΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ  
ΑΠΟΚΑΥΚΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΡΗΤΗ ΚΑΙ Η ΜΟΝΗ ΒΑΛΣΑΜΟΝΕΡΟΥ.  
ΕΓΓΡΑΦΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΑ ΚΡΑΤΙΚΑ ΑΡΧΕΙΑ ΒΕΝΕΤΙΑΣ (1399-1421)

Η εργασία, βασιζόμενη σε δημοσιευμένα και αδημοσίευτα έγγραφα από υλικό που αφορά στην Κρήτη, θησαυρισμένο στα Κρατικά Αρχεία Βενετίας, σκοπό έχει να παρουσιάσει την πολύπλευρη δραστηριότητα δύο ζωγράφων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη ως ενδεικτική περίπτωση για ορισμένες όψεις του ρόλου των βυζαντινών καλλιτεχνών στην βενετοκρητική κοινωνία κατά την τελευταία πεντηκονταετία πριν από την άλωση της Βασιλεύουσας. Ο Αλέξιος και ο Άγγελος Απόκαυκος (πιθανώς απόγονοι της γνωστής βυζαντινής οικογένειας των Αποκαύκων) έδρασαν στην Κρήτη σε περίοδο ακμής της βενετικής κυριαρχίας στο νησί, το οποίο εξακολουθούσε να συντηρεί τους καλλιτεχνικούς και πολιτισμικούς δεσμούς με την βυζαντινή παράδοση. Οι δύο ζωγράφοι, πιθανώς αδέρφια ή πατέρας και γιος, μαρτυρούνται στην Κρήτη στα τέλη του 14ου και στις πρώτες δεκαετίες του 15ου αιώνα εκτελώντας παραγγελίες για ζωγραφικά έργα στον Χάνδακα (σημ. Ηράκλειο) αλλά και στην ύπαιθρο της βενετικής Κρήτης. Οι αξιόλογες εργασίες που ανέλαβαν όπως και η γνωριμία τους με μέλη ευγενών οικογενειών αφενός και του ορθόδοξου κλήρου αφετέρου υποδηλώνουν ότι είχαν τύχει σημαντικής αναγνώρισης. Επιπλέον, επαφές με άλλους επαγγελματίες στον Χάνδακα και ένα σοβαρό, ασφαλώς, θέμα που όφειλε να λυθεί στην μητρόπολη Βενετία, δείχνουν την ενεργό συμμετοχή τους στην κοινωνική και οικονομική ζωή της νήσου.

Ο Αλέξιος διατηρούσε εργαστήριο στον Χάνδακα, στο οποίο δεχόταν μαθητευομένους για να τους διδάξει την τέχνη του (1399), γεγονός που δηλώνει επίσης ότι ζωγράφιζε και εικόνες. Εκτός της καθαρά ζωγραφικής εργασίας του ο Αλέξιος αναλάμβανε και διακοσμητική εργασία με χρώματα και λεπτά φύλλα χρυσού και αργύρου σε πολυτελή υφασμάτινα παραπετάσματα (μια συνήθη πρακτική της εποχής) για κατοικίες ευγενών, όπως αυτές των μελών των οικογενειών Cornaro και Contarini (1412 και πριν). Μια σημαντική διάσταση της δραστηριότητάς του αποκαλύπτει έγγραφο που

αναφέρει την μετάβασή του, το 1412, στην γνωστή μονή Βάλσαμονέρου, στην επαρχία Καινούργιου του νομού Ηρακλείου, αφιερωμένη στην Παναγία Οδηγήτρια (αργότερα και στον Άγιο Φανούριο, απόρροια της εισαγωγής, περί το 1425-1426, της λατρείας του καινοφανούς αγίου στην μονή). Στο αρχικό μονόχωρο καθολικό του 14ου αιώνα προστέθηκε, μεταξύ 1400 και 1407, ως φαίνεται από τον δραστήριο ηγούμενο Ιωνά Παλαμά, ένα μικρότερο κλίτος προς νότον, αφιερωμένο στον Άγιο Ιωάννη Πρόδρομο. Είναι πολύ πιθανό να κλήθηκε ο Αλέξιος Απόκαυκος να ζωγραφίσει σε αυτό, όπως είχα υποθέσει στην ανακοίνωσή μου στο 21ο Διεθνές Συνέδριο Βυζαντινών Σπουδών του Λονδίνου το 2006 (αναρτημένη από τον Απρίλιο του 2006 στην ιστοσελίδα του Συνεδρίου), χωρίς να δυνηθώ να προχωρήσω περαιτέρω λόγω των δυσκολιών πρόσβασης στο μνημείο. Πρόσφατα σε διεξοδική συλλογική μελέτη των τοιχογραφιών της σημαντικής αυτής μονής από την Μυρτάλη Αχεμιάστου-Ποταμιάνου, την Αγγελική Κατσιώτη και την Μαρία Μπορμπουδάκη, η Α. Κατσιώτη, που ανέλαβε το κλίτος του Προδρόμου, λαμβάνοντας υπόψη την προαναφερθείσα υπόθεση περί συμμετοχής του Αλεξίου Αποκαύκου στις τοιχογραφίες του κλίτους του Προδρόμου και την σύμπτωση των χρονολογιών, προχώρησε, με βάση τεχνοτροπικά κριτήρια, στην προσπάθεια ταύτισης ορισμένων παραστάσεων στο εν λόγω κλίτος, στις οποίες αναγνωρίζει στοιχεία πολύ καλής τέχνης με κωνσταντινουπολίτικες αναφορές (Εικ. 1, 2). Αν οι υποθέσεις αυτές είναι ορθές, τότε έχουμε μια πολύ σπάνια περίπτωση για την μελέτη των βυζαντινών τοιχογραφιών της Κρήτης, κατά την οποία η αρχαιολογική μαρτυρία μπορεί να συσχετισθεί με ένα σωζόμενο ανυπόγραφο τοιχογραφημένο σύνολο, του οποίου ο ζωγράφος δεν τεκμηριώνεται από άλλη γραπτή πηγή.

Άλλα έγγραφα αποκαλύπτουν την συμμετοχή του Αλεξίου σε πράξεις οικονομικού περιεχομένου, σε μερικές από τις οποίες έχουν ρόλο μέλη της εβραϊκής

κοινότητας του Χάνδακα (1400, 1402, 1411) ως ενεχυροδανειστές, στην γνωριμία του με έναν αργυροχρυσό από το Μιλάνο (1402, 1411), σε κάποιο σοβαρό θέμα που αντιμετώπιζε από κοινού με μέλη των οικογενειών Ακοτάντο (στην οποία ανήκαν οι ζωγράφοι Άγγελος και Ιωάννης Ακοτάντος) και Καλλέργη (η ισχυρότερη οικογένεια της βενετικής Κρήτης) και το οποίο όφειλε να λυθεί στην ίδια την Βενετία (1415). Έγγραφο του 1419 δείχνει γνωριμία του γιου του Θεοδώρου, ασφαλώς και του ίδιου του Αλεξίου, με μέλη της οικογένειας Querini, πιθανώς του γνωστού βενετικού οίκου. Επίσης, ο Αλέξιος ήταν στενός φίλος του σημαντικού θεολόγου και συγγραφέα Ιωσήφ Βρυεννίου, ο οποίος για ένα διάστημα βρισκόταν στην Κρήτη ως απεσταλμένος του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου ενδυναμώνοντας το φρόνημα του ορθόδοξου πληθυσμού έναντι των φιλενωτικών ιδεών σχετικά με την ένωση της Ανατολικής με την Δυτική Εκκλησία. Ο Βρυέννιος αλληλογραφούσε μαζί του και μάλιστα τον όρισε εκτελεστή της διαθήκης του το 1421.

Η δραστηριότητα του έτερου ζωγράφου, του Αγγέλου Αποκαύκου, υπήρξε και αυτή αξιοσημείωτη, μολοντί είναι λιγότερο τεκμηριωμένη. Τούτο συνάγεται από το γεγονός της επιλογής του από τον Μάρκο Παυλόπουλο, γνωστό κωδικογράφο και φιλενωτική προσωπικότητα (αργότερα πρωτοπαπά Κρήτης), ο οποίος

του παρήγγειλε το 1421 να τοιχογραφήσει τον ναό της Παναγίας Κυρίας των Αγγέλων στον Χάνδακα με συμβόλαιο που περιγράφει τα καθέκαστα της συμφωνίας.

Οι περιπτώσεις των δύο ζωγράφων, που φιλοτεχνούσαν τοιχογραφίες αλλά ασφαλώς και φορητές εικόνες, και η κωνσταντινουπολίτικη καταγωγή τους, παρότι δεν έχουν εντοπιστεί ενυπόγραφα έργα τους, δείχνει έναν από τους άμεσους διαύλους διάδοσης καλλιτεχνικών ρευμάτων από την βυζαντινή πρωτεύουσα στην βενετική Κρήτη. Επιπλέον, η επαγγελματική ευελιξία και η κινητικότητα τόσο σε εκκλησιαστικά όσο και σε κοσμικά περιβάλλοντα, και οι σχέσεις τους με ορθόδοξα μοναστήρια, βενετούς ευγενείς, φιλενωτικούς εκκλησιαστικούς κύκλους αλλά και τεχνίτες και άλλους επαγγελματίες αποτελούν δείγματα των δραστηριοτήτων της επαγγελματικής συμπεριφοράς ομοτέχνων τους και επιτρέπουν, τηρουμένων των αναλογιών, να αποκτήσουμε μια ιδέα για τα έργα και τις ημέρες των ζωγράφων της υστεροβυζαντινής παράδοσης όχι μόνο στην Κρήτη αλλά και στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, από την οποία ανάλογες διαθέσιμες αρχειακές πηγές σπανίζουν ή λείπουν εντελώς.

*Ομότιμη καθηγήτρια  
Βυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης, ΕΚΠΑ  
maconst@arch.uoa.gr*