Painters' Portraits in Byzantine Art

Sophia KALOPISSI-VERTI


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Painters in the Byzantine period are to a great extent anonymous. For the authors of the Byzantine ekphrasis, whose references to certain artists of antiquity is a commonplace, names of contemporary masters seem to be, generally speaking, of no importance, although their abilities and competence are highly praised. Likewise, mentions of Byzantine painters' names are rare in poems or epigrams referring to works of art. Furthermore, dedicatory church inscriptions rarely include their names, which are mostly recorded in short invocations or "signatures" written in quasi indiscernible places of the church. The very secondary role of the painter in comparison to the donor is also evident in the extant portraits. Effigies of donors by far outnumber those of painters. The context of those few extant images of painters in Byzantine art is the subject of the present paper.

The oldest known representation of an image maker in Byzantine art, is found in the codex of Dioscorides in the Austrian National Library in Vienna (Cod. Vindob. Med. gr. 1, f. 5v). The precious manuscript, which mainly contains the work Περί ξυλίας ἱατρικῆς (De materia medica) of the Greek physician Dioscorides (1st century AD), was executed in Constantinople shortly before 512 AD and offered in gratitude by the inhabitants of Honoratai to princess Anicia Juliana who had erected a church for them. In the full-page miniature of f. 5v, Dioscorides is depicted recording, in an open book, his observations about the mandragora, a plant of therapeutic-anaesthetic properties, which is held by the personification of Epinoia. On the left side of the miniature, the figure of a seated painter at work goes back to Hellenistic and Roman models and offers a detailed portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts, Leiden 796 (hereafter: Spatarakis, Portrait) only four belong to painters: Coslin 79, p. 107ff., Melburne 710/5, p. 76ff., Dionysioi 65, p. 49ff, Par. gr. 36, p. 77.

holds a brush in his right hand and a small pigment vessel in his left. Although there are inscriptions naming Dioscorides and Epinoia, this excellent illuminator of Late Antiquity remains anonymous. However, despite his anonymity, the image maker of the codex of Vienna represents the concrete painter of the archetype and is rendered in a realistic way.

The majority of the extant examples of Byzantine painters’ portraits belong to the period extending from the early 9th century to about 1200. Two effigies of painters at work, dating to the 9th and 11th century respectively, demonstrate a typically medieval approach to the subject. The first image is found in the margin of f. 328v of the codex of John Damascenus’ Sacra Parallela in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. Par. gr. 923) (Fig. 2). This codex goes back, according to Weitzmann, to the first half of the 9th century, i.e. to the Late Iconoclastic period, and must have been produced in the monastery of Saint Sabas in Palestine.

The painter is depicted seated, copying an icon which represents the bust of a figure on a board resting on his knee. He paints with a brush held in his right hand. The rendering of the miniature is limited to the essentials. The icon used as a model seems to sway in front of the painter, as it is neither fixed on the wall nor set on an easel. There is no nimbus around the holy figure of the icon and, with the exception of the faces and the painter’s hand, everything is rendered in gold.

The marginal miniature does not represent the actual painter of the book. It depicts a painter in abstracto as it illustrates a metaphor included in the text of the second epistle of Saint Basil the Great which is comprised in the Sacra Parallela of Damascenus (Στοιχείον Σ, Τίτλ. ΙΣΤ’): “Ὡσπερ οι ζωγράφοι, ὅταν ἀπὸ εἰκόνων εἰκόνας γράφουσιν, πικνά πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα βλέποντες, τῶν εἰκόνων τῶν ἔκεινῶν χαρακτῆρα πρὸς τὸ ἐαυτῷ σπουδὴν μεταβείνουσιν μεταφαίνειν. Οὐδέν οὖν ἐκείνων ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ τὸν ἐσπουδασθέντα εἰμὶν τὸν ἔμπρακτον τοῦ ἄγιου ἀνθρώπου ἐμφάνισθαι διὰ μιμήσεως. "As the painters when they paint icons from icons, looking closely at the model, are eager to transfer the character of the icon to their own masterpiece, so must he who strives to perfect himself in all branches of virtue look at the lives of the saints as if to living and moving images and make their virtue his own by imitation”.

The second painter’s portrait is depicted on the margin of f. 35r of the Codex 61 of the Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos (Fig. 3). The manuscript includes sixteen homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus which are read during
the liturgy and is dated to the second half of the 11th century. The painter’s image is part of the illustration of the beginning of the ninth homily which is a funerary sermon for Saint Basil. The miniature on top of the page illustrates the Koinēsis of Saint Basil. Underneath, on the left, the minute figure of Gregory, forms the initial E. He stretches his right hand in which he holds a pen and seems to write the text and at the same time to point to a small figure of a painter depicted in the right margin. The painter, seated on a stool with a cushion, although very small in dimensions, is rendered with many details. He has brown hair, a short beard and is dressed in a simple, long red garment with long sleeves. On his head he wears a white headcover. In his raised right hand he holds a brush with which he is painting an icon set on an easel which rests upon four legs. The figure painted on the icon seems to represent Gregory, the author of the homily. To the right of the painter, a low table-like piece of furniture with a closed two-leaved door is depicted, similar to those very often illustrated in representations of evangelists. The whole picture is so minute that no pigments, brushes or other implements can be discerned.

As in the previous example, the painter’s effigy in Dionysiou 61 does not depict the concrete illuminator of the manuscript. It rather has a symbolical-abstract meaning as it illustrates a metaphor used in the homily of Gregory Nazianzenus: Όμως γάρ, εἰ τις τὴν ἐν λόγοις δυνάμεως πείσαι ποιούμενον, ἐπετα πρὸς μέτρον κρίναι ταύτην θελήσει, μικρὰν ἐν ποιούμενον προστιθέουσας, καθάπερ οἱ γραφάροι τούς ἀρχετύπους πίνακας, ταύτην ἄν ωφελόν μόνην, ὡς λόγου κρίτεινα, τὰν ἄλλαν ἑξερεύνητι τὴν πρώτην. “Because I think, that if somebody trying skillfulness in speech, then wishes to judge it according to the rule, choosing one assumption among all others, as painters do with the icons they use as archetypes, keeping only this apart, because it is better than speech, he will prefer the first to the others”.

Consequently, echoing medieval concepts, both aforementioned painters’ effigies, in Par. gr. 923 and in Dionysiou 61, do not depict the real miniaturists of the codices but the abstract idea of the painter and are used to illustrate literary metaphors included in the texts. Notwithstanding this fact, these portraits may, in my opinion, be considered as a personal intervention of the illuminators, as a sort of an "anonymous signature", since only exceptionally might one of the extant copies of the same work include the painter’s portrait.

Moreover, in accordance with medieval concepts about artisans is the idea of depicting a biblical rather than a contemporary painter at work. There are, therefore, rare representations of Saint Luke — who was later, in

Fig. 3. Athos, Dionysiou 61, f. 35r. Marginal miniature of a painter.
the 15th and 16th centuries, adopted by the guilds of painters, both in the East and in the West\textsuperscript{17}, as their patron saint — showing him painting the Virgin. They are rendered with such accuracy, as for example on f. 106v of the codex Taphou 14 in the Greek Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem\textsuperscript{18} (second half of the 11th century) (Fig. 4), that a good insight is offered into the methods of a medieval painter, the tools of his trade — easel, brushes, paint box, pigment shells — and his use of a model, an essential prerequisite in order to achieve a perfect likeness\textsuperscript{19}.

The only case of a portrait of a real and specific painter, in the period under discussion, may be considered the one included in codex Coislin 79 of the National Library in Paris\textsuperscript{20}. The well known manuscript comprises a collection of homilies of John Chrysostom and is dated to the eighth decade of the 11th century\textsuperscript{21}. As Spatharakis\textsuperscript{22} has shown, the book was originally destined for the Emperor Michael VII Ducas (1071-1078). His portrait was depicted three times — on f. 1 (2bis) v, 2r and 2v — and was later retouched to resemble the features of Nicephorus III Botaneiates (1078-1081), who was the final recipient of the codex.

On f. 2v, next to the suppedion of the Emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiates, who is represented between John Chrysostom and the archangel Michael, a tiny kneeling figure is discernible\textsuperscript{23} (Figs 5-6). He is beardless, i.e. he is a eunuch, and is clad in a red chiton and a blue chlamys. The marginal inscription above the miniature, in perfectly spelt dodecasyllabic verses, reads:

\begin{verbatim}
'Eγὼ μὲν εἰμί σος φύλακας στεφηφόρε, / ώς έγν(ών) αὐτό(ς) προσμένων τοῖς ἐκβάσεως, / ὃ δ' αὕτη γε ῥήσεις και χρυσοῦν φέρων στόμα, / ᾿ὁ συγγαρεῖς ἐπιτικῖν ἐς δοικήσιν, / αὐτῶν σὺν ἡμῖν γραφόντος τού σοῦ χάρι(ν), / ὃν εὑμενός βλέποις τε καὶ τρέφοις δόμος. "I am thy guardian, o bearer of the crown, as I myself know the issue of the events and he who disposes of utterance and of a golden mouth, the author, stands in supplication requesting with us thy grace for thy painter (or scribe), on whom thou mayest look with favour and support him, o King". It should be noted that the word γραφέως can mean either scribe or painter, but if we accept Dumitrescu’s reasonable argumentation, which will be discussed presently, the small figure should rather be identified with the painter of the sumptuous miniatures than with the scribe of the codex\textsuperscript{24}.

Another allusion to the scribe (τοῦ γράφοντος) is found in the marginal inscription of f. 2r where the emperor is shown enthroned among the personification of two Virtues, Truth and Justice, and four high officials. The courtier who occupies the place of honour just to the right of the emperor, inscribed as ῾ὁ πρωτοπρόεδρος και πρωτοβεστιάριος, is a eunuch and is distinguished from the other three officials by his costume which alludes to a double function, that of ecclesiastic and that of court official\textsuperscript{25}. The marginal inscription above the miniature ends with the lines: Πλὴν τοῦ γράφοντος συμπαθής ελθοῖς άναξ, / πίστιν φέρει γὰρ εἶς τὸ σὸν πλείστην κράτος, "May thou come, though, with sympathy for the scribe, o King, for he bears absolute loyalty to thy sovereignty".

Dumitrescu argues that the protoproedros should be identified with Ioannes, Metropolitan of Side, whom, she considers as the first ktetor of the manuscript destined as a present for Michael VII Ducas\textsuperscript{26}. Certain iconographic details and the emphasis in the marginal inscription of f. 2r on “him who writes” (τοῦ γράφοντος), who is most loyal, seem, with good reason, to indicate that the ktetor was also the scribe of the manuscript. Furthermore, Dumitrescu remarks, basing herself on close ad hoc observation, that there is no physiognomical resemblance whatsoever between the protoproedros of f. 2r and the tiny figure of f. 2v (Fig. 6), a fact that eliminates the possibility of identifying the two figures. This argues in favour of the interpretation of the word γραφεώς of f. 2v as painter and not as scribe\textsuperscript{27}. If this assumption proves to be true, then the Coislin 79 offers
a unique Middle Byzantine example of a self-image of a real miniaturist, depicted exclusively in his function as a painter.

A different approach is demonstrated, on the contrary, by a group of painters’ self-images, all sharing a common character, which will be discussed below. In the Melbourne Gospel Book (Cod. 710/5 of the National Gallery of Victoria) dated to about 1100, on f. 1v, there is a representation of the Virgin and Child and of a monk who is offering her a codex28 (Fig. 7). Both figures are depicted on the same scale, standing under a double arch which carries a triangular roof crowned with a cross. According to the usual iconographic scheme, Christ, seated in His mother’s lap, blesses the monk. An

Fig. 5. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Coislin 79, f. 2v. The Emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiates between John Chrysostom and the archangel Michael, and kneeling painter (?).

Fig. 6. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Coislin 79, f. 2v. Painter (?) kneeling at the feet of the Emperor Nicephorus III Botaneiates.

18. Galavaris, Gregory Nazianzenus, p. 175, 222-226 (with bibliography), esp. 224.
19. On information about painters at work drawn from the hagiographical texts — use of a real person or a picture as a model, preliminary drawing or sketch, colouring etc. — see Kazhdan-Maguire, Byzantine Hagiographical Text (see note 8), p. 1-22. On the likeness with the model see recently G. Dagon, Holy Images and Likeness, DOP 45 (1991), p. 23ff.
23. Spatharakis, Portrait, fig. 72. Id., Corpus, fig. 174. Dumitrescu, op.cit., fig. 4.
27. Ibid., p. 42.
epigram above the miniature, consisting of four dodeca-
syllabic verses, written in minuscules, runs: "Ἀνευσά
πάντων ἀς Θ(εοί) μη(τη)ρ λόγου, / δοτὴρ καταὐτό και
γραφεὺς της παλύξιος, / (και) τῶν κατ' αὐτὴν έργα-
τῆς ποικιλμάτ(ων), / σάς νοσιρισιος οικέτ(ης) Θεο-
φάν(ης), "O queen of all, as mother of God's word, the
donor and at the same time scribe of the book and
painter of its ornaments (is) thy servant, the monk
Theophanes".

The verses inform us, therefore, that the monk depicted,
named Theophanes, is at the same time donor and
scribe and painter of the codex and probably also au-
thor of the epigram.39 The fact that Theophanes is de-
picted in a standing position, on the same scale as the
Virgin and bearing a nimbus, reveals a certain pride and
indicates, in my opinion, that he is mainly depicted in
his capacity as donor of the book, and not as his humble
painter.

A parallel example is to be found in the Psalter Diony-
siou 65 on Mount Athos40, part of which, including the
full-page miniatures, may be dated to the first half of the
12th century. On f. 12v a prostrate monk is depicted at
the feet of the standing Theoktos who holds the Child;
the Virgin points to him with her right hand and Christ
blesses him (Fig. 8). An inscription under the miniature
runs:32 Λόσιν πασιμάτων Μήτερ τοῦ Λόγου ἑταών
ἀνυστόρησα σου / οἰκτρότατος και ναζιραΐος. "Asking
for forgiveness for my sins, O Mother of the Word, I,
the most pitiful monk, have illuminated for thee".

The iconographic scheme of the miniature and the phra-
seology of the inscription — λόσις πασιμάτων ηταῶν — are typical of patron portraiture. Furthermore,
the verb ἀνυστόρησα "I painted" indicates that the
monk was very probably also the illuminator of the
codex, although the meaning "I paid for the illumina-
tion" must not be excluded, just as the verbs ἀνίστορησα,
ἐκτρατόμησα, ἐδικτημα etc. in dedicatory inscriptions mean
"I paid for the erection" of the church.33

Sabas, the name of the monk, his place of origin near
Nicomedia and the explicit information that he wrote the
book (Σάβας γέγραψε της ταύτης εἰκόνας κ(αί) δόμω δέδωκε /...π...(μέν)... άνεξάλειπτον έν τούτω χάριν, τ(ήν) μητρι-

To conclude, the context of the dedicatory miniature
and its inscription, the appearance of Sabas' name once
more on f. 244v in a cruciform ornament, as well as the
information provided by the colophon, support the view
that the monk Sabas of Dionysiou 65 was, like the monk
Theophanes of the Gospel of Melbourne, not only scribe
and illuminator46 but also kteor of the codex.37 This last
quality of his explains the emphatic accentuation of his
personality in picture and word.

Another example of a monk, without self-portrait
though, who was at the same time kteor, scribe and
illuminator, is recorded in a poem included in a Geo-
rian Menologium executed in Constantinople in the year
1030 (Tbilisi, Gosudarstvennyj Musej Gruzii MS. A 648,
f. 142r): ...πίστις δέ ταῦτα και πονεῖ και προσφέρει, /και ποτνιάται και νεουργεῖ και γράφει /Ζαχαρίου κα-
λογίρου του Ἱβηρου... "The imploring faith of monk
Zacharias the Georgian executed, offered, restored and
wrote all this".38

Of special interest for our investigation is an hexapty-
chon in the monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai dated
to the second half of the 11th39 or first half of the 12th
century.40 The four side-leaves comprise illustrations of
a complete menologion for the whole year. One of the
two main panels represents the Last Judgement. On the
other main panel there are Christological scenes ar-
anged in four rows and, in the uppermost zone, four
copies of miraculous icons of the Virgin, known to have
existed in the sanctuaries of Constantinople, are depict-
ed on both sides of the Virgin enthroned.

Greek metric inscriptions41 in dodecasyllabic verses on
the rear of the icon furnish detailed information about
the painter and donor and his intentions. The inscrip-
tion running along the rear of the four side-panels which
bear the illustrations of the menologion informs us that
the painter Ioannes depicted the martyrs and the other
holy persons in order to have them as mediators before
the Lord for his salvation. It reads: Πετρομηνή φάλαγγα
κλεινών μαρτύρων / σύν τῶν προφητῶν και θεηγόρων
στίφει / τῶν θυοπόλων τε και μονοτρόπων / στυλογρά-
φήσωσιν εὐστοίχως Ιω(άννης), / τό λύτρον άντερ έφα-
lη / τοστου λαβέν / και προς τόν δεσπότην / πρέβεις ταχείς. "Having successfully painted a four-
part column of celebrated martyrs together with a host
of prophets and theologians, of priests and monks,
Ioannes committed (them) to the ruler as prompt me-
diators in order to receive redemption from his sins".42

The first inscription on the rear of the main panel illus-
trating the five images of the Virgin and the Christologi-
cal scenes, includes an appeal to the grace and motherly
intervention of the Theotokos whose pictures Ioannes
painted: [Γ]θής,...ασης εὐτέ(λης) 'Ιω(άννης), τάς ίεράς
ἐγράψας ταῦτα σου / ι(κόνας) κ(α) δόμω δέδωκε /...π...
...μεν... άνεξάλειπτον έν τούτω χάριν, τ(ήν) μητρι-

134


33. In an inscription of the 15th century(?) on a fresco-icon of Saint George in the homonymous church in the castle of Geraki, the verb διωτόποι is undoubtedly used with the meaning of “I have payed for the painting”, as it refers to the donor, the ισαάκιος 'Ιωάννου, D. Feissel - A. Philippidis-Braat, Inventaires en vue d’un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance. III. Inscriptions du Pélagonnène (à l’exception de Mistra), TM 9 (1985), p. 345, no. 83.


36. A celebrated scribe and miniaturist (but not donor) was Theodore, monk of the monastery of Studios, who wrote and illuminated the Psalter British Museum Add. 19.352 in 1066 for Michael, abbot of the same monastery, Sirarpie Der Nersessian, L’illustration des icônes du monastère de Sainte-Catherine, in: Studies (see note 6), p. 140. Spatharakis, Portrait, p. 51.


29. For another example of a miniaturist, the thirteenth-century painter Theoktistos, who also wrote a metric epigram for a miniature of John Chrysostom, see Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit, ed. by E. Trapp, 4. Faszikel, Vienna 1980, p. 49, no. 7491.

the second inscription on the same panel Ioannes, the painter, having illustrated the miracles of Christ and His Passion appeals directly to Him for salvation: Τά κοσμοσώτητα σου πάθ(η) Λόγε, σύν τοις υπέρ νοῦν κ(αί) λόγον τεραστ[ίο]ς / [γράφων]ς μιονυχο(ς) εύφυώς / Ιω(άννης), έρυθροβαφή πταισμάτων αιτεί λύ[σιν]. “Having appropriately painted in red colours thy world-redeeming Passion, ο Word, together with thy miracles, surpassing mind and speech, Ioannes, the monk, asks for forgiveness for his sins”.

In the last Greek inscription on the back of the other main panel, depicting the Last Judgement, Ioannes the painter addresses his supplication for mercy directly to God: Ὁμοίων παρακάτων πάντων / παρακάτων ἑλπίδα στρατεύματι / εἰς νόμον βαλὼν γράψας / ἰω(άννης) δύστηνος ἐν μονοτρόποις σεπτάς διστόροις σὴν παρουσίαν αὐτῶν δυσσωπάν / σοῦ τιμεῖν παντεργάτα σικτίρμονος μῆλιστα μὴ κρι- τοῦ τὸτε. “As Daniel foresaw the terrible Judgement, o all-ruling abyss of mercy, having put in mind and written on the plates of the heart, Ioannes, unfortunate among monks, has respectfully painted thy Last Judgement imploring to have thee, creator of all, then merciful and not as judge”.

In addition, a Georgian inscription on the front of the same panel includes a prayer addressed to Christ by the hieromonk Ioannes Tsohabi, whom Doula Mouriki identified with the Ioannes of the Greek inscriptions. The context of the numerous inscriptions leaves no doubt that Ioannes Tsohabi, a Georgian hieromonk and a man of high education, was at the same time donor and painter of the icon and probably also the author of the epigrams. Moreover this ambitious patron and painter, who succeeded in including in his oeuvre all the saints and the Virgin as intercessors for his salvation, painted his self-portrait twice on the main leaves: once in prostration at the feet of the enthroned Virgin on the panel with the Christological scenes and the images of the Virgin (Fig. 9), and a second time kneeling in front of the gate of Paradise on the lower part of the panel depicting the Last Judgement.

The example of Ioannes Tsohabi, ktetor and painter of the hexaptychon of Sinai, is not isolated. Two well-known icons representing Elijah and Moses in the same monastery, dated to the beginning of the 13th century, bear inscriptions which indicate, through their phraseology, that the donor Stephanos, who asks for forgiveness, was also the painter of the icons. The beautiful classicizing style of the icons and the scholarly epigrams, which are also translated in Arabic, document not only Stephanos’ expertise as a painter but also his wide erudition.

A similar example of a painter who must have also been donor is found in a group of three icons at Sinai dated to the third decade of the 13th century, all of which preserve the supplication Δέησιν Πέτρου γράφου “Prayer of the painter Peter”. The prominent place of the inscriptions and the introductory formula δέησις, usually applied to indicate patronage, led Doula Mouriki, who studied this group of icons, to assume that the painter Peter, probably a monk, was also the patron of the three icons bearing his name.

A further example of an icon-painter and ktetor, that of the deacon and referendarios Ioannes, is documented in an inscription on the rear of the icon of Saint George at Struga dated to the year 1267.

Considering Byzantine concepts about painters, it is surprising and particularly interesting to read Niko-
Fig. 9. Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine, Hexaptychon, detail. The monk Ioannes Tsouhi, donor and painter, kneeling in front of the Virgin.

42. Mouriki, La présence, op.cit., p. 39.
45. The date is based on the portrait, depicted on one of them, of the Patriarch Euthymios II of Jerusalem, who died at Sinai in the year 1224.
46. Mouriki, Four Thirteenth-Century Sinai Icons, op.cit., p. 344f. On the contrary, small-scale figures, usually depicted kneeling in several icons at Sinai, which Sotiriou (Eikoves, I, pls 32, 159, 164, 168-170, 221; II, p. 45-46, 139, 143-144, 152-157, 194-195) thought might represent the painters, should rather be identified, as far as our present knowledge allows us to assume, with the donors of the icons.
Sophia Kalopissi-Verti

In Nicolaos Mesarites' reference, in his Description of the Holy Apostles (Chapter 28), to the self-portrait of the mosaicist in the scene of the Holy Women at the Tomb(48):

"The painter, or rather the mosaicist, is not named in the text of Mesarites. Nevertheless, Heisenberg was able to decipher the name "Eulalios" in a marginal note added by the copyist(49). Heisenberg believed that Eulalios lived in the 6th century at Constantinople, in the time of Justin II (565-578)(50), but Bees and later Malickij convincingly showed that he lived in the 12th century, a view nowadays widely accepted(51).

Eulalios' self-portrait in the church of the Holy Apostles is quite unique(52), by Byzantine standards, and indicative of the special eminence he enjoyed in his and in later times. Eulalios is one of the very few Byzantine painters repeatedly mentioned in the written sources from the 12th century onwards and, moreover, compared to ancient artists. His name is recorded in two poems of Theodore Prodromos(53), in two epigrams of Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos(54) as well as in Theodore Metochites' Logos 10 along with famous ancient sculptors and painters, such as Pheidias, Polygnotos, Zeuxis and Lysippos(55).

Of particular interest is the combination of the Renaissance-like concept of a figure bearing the painter's features included in a biblical scene, with the medieval idea of suppressing the name of the artist(56), which, as mentioned above, was only added on the margin by the scribe. This approach may be understood in the spirit of a prominence of ancient principles(57) traceable also in the twelfth-century architecture and monumental painting(58) of Byzantium. It may, furthermore, be considered as indicative of the social conditions of the late 12th century(59) when an emergence of the craftsmen from their anonymity has been observed(60). A parallel phenomenon of individualism, concerning art production, also resulting from the political and socio-economic conditions of the time, is the broadening of the social range of patronage. In other words, alongside representatives of the imperial administration and members of the ruling dynasty, laymen of local eminence are also recorded as church donors in the second half of the 12th century, as for example in Kastoria(61) and in Andros(62).

These social developments, echoed in Late Comnenian sources.


Fig. 10. Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, cod. 3632, f. 425v. Dioscorides, Sophia and the painter.
PAINTERS' PORTRAITS IN BYZANTINE ART


58. According to a disputed ancient tradition of which Mesarites must have been aware, Phedias inserted his own features as well as those of Pericles when carving two figures of the Amazonomachy on the shield of the statue of Athena in Athens: A. Xyngopoulos, Of τοιχογραφίες του Άγιο Νικολάου Ορθοδόξου Θεσσαλονίκης, Athens 1964, p. 13, fig. 12, believed that the painter of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos in Thessalonica depicted his own features in the figure of the stable-boy who holds the horses in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi. Cf. Anna Tsitouridou, Ό ζωγραφικός διάκοσμο τού Άγιου Νικολάου Όρφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη (Βυζαντινά Μνημεία 6), Thessalonica 1986, p. 88, n. 38.

57. An interesting parallel is found in Photius, Homily 10, § 5 on the church of Theotokos of the Pharos. Photius refers to the celebrated ancient masters Phedias, Parrhasios, Praxiteles and Zeuxis, but finds their work inferior to that of the ninth-century mosaicist of the church of the Theotokos. Nevertheless, he passes over in silence the name of his contemporary artisans, C. A. Mango, The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, (DOS III), Washington, D. C. 1958, p. 1987; id., op.cit. (see note 49), p. 186.


53. Evidently based on the example of Eulalios, A. Χυνγούλος, Of τοιχογραφίες του Άγιο Νικολάου Ορθοδόξου Θεσσαλονίκης, Athens 1964, p. 13, fig. 12, believed that the painter of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos in Thessalonica depicted his own features in the figure of the stable-boy who holds the horses in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi. Cf. Anna Tsitouridou, Ό ζωγραφικός διάκοσμο τού Άγιου Νικολάου Όρφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη (Βυζαντινά Μνημεία 6), Thessalonica 1986, p. 88, n. 38.


art, are increasingly continued in Late Byzantine times and strengthened by the historical conditions created by the Fourth Crusade. In this late period of Byzantine history, the epigraphic evidence shows that painters' names — less in dedicatory inscriptions and more in the form of "signatures" or short invocations — are more and more frequently mentioned. Moreover, information from documents also indicates a certain rise in the social status of painters, especially in large urban centres like Thessalonica. Parallely, western European art, in the same Late Medieval period, shows an increasing number of images of painters at work. Has the rise in the social position of painters in Late Byzantine society entailed any personal involvement of the painter in the formation of the church programme? To answer this question, a thorough and overall investigation of the monuments is needed which is beyond the aims of the present paper. For the time being, we will limit ourselves to an observation concerning the church of Panagia Peribleptos in Ochrid (1294/95). According to Grozdanov, the representation of two otherwise rarely depicted prelates on the north wall of the bema of the Peribleptos — namely Saint Michael the Confessor, bishop of Synnada in Phrygia († 821) and Saint Eutychios, patriarch of Constantinople († 582) — may be attributed to the personal wish and intervention of the celebrated painter Michael and Eutychios who have, furthermore, tried to make their personality present by writing their names in several places in the church. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, as in previous periods, there are no representations of painters in Byzantine monumental art and that former theories in this respect are no longer accepted. Radiojč, in his time, identified as painters a group of persons, wearing long white garments and high cylindrical white headcovers, in the scene of John Chrysostom as "Fountain of Wisdom" in the narthex of Lesnovo (1349). Furthermore, he interpreted the passage written on Chrysostom's board of the easel as: Eπειρ(εν) με ο τροχός εξέφνης και μάχας... Ούτω δή και οι προφήται ζωγράφοι τινές είσιν ἄρτης και κακίας... "Painters imitate nature through their art and, mixing the colours, they paint the pictures of the visible bodies, and make (paint) men and non-reasoning beings and trees and wars and battles... So prophets are painters of virtue and evil...".

Rare effigies of painters are included in Late Byzantine manuscripts. A 15th-century copy of the codex of Dioscorides of Anicia, now in Bologna (Biblioteca Universitaria cod. 3632), comprises on f. 425v (Fig. 10) an illumination copying that of f. 5v of the Vienna Dioscorides (Fig. 1). One or more intermediate codices, now lost, may have existed. The personification of Epinoia, named here Sophia, holds the mandragora which is depicted in huge dimensions, obviously resembling a creature and not the root of the plant. The bench with the painter’s implements is missing and the painter, who does not hold a brush, seems to mould rather than to paint the human-shaped mandragora which is much larger than the parchment leaf on which it should be depicted. The board of the easel is not fixed on a tripod. The misunderstanding is continued in the marginal inscriptions where, above the painter, we read "Ο ευγάλας τόν μανδράγοραν, i.e. "he who has uprooted", not who has painted, "the mandragora". It is more than evident that the figure of the painter from Late Antiquity has completely lost its meaning.

Of a quite different character is the self-portrait of the painter in the codex Par. gr. 36 in the National Library of Paris, dated to the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th century. Among the figures depicted around the Wheel of Life on f. 163v (Fig. 11), a monk is represented lying in its lower part. The accompanying inscription reads: Επειρ(εν) με ο τροχός εξέφνης και καλόγερον επιησεν με / και ως νέον ήδίκησ(έν) με κάνθαν μήθεαν κάν μή θέλεαν / Νικόδημος καλολόμα (ai). "All of a sudden the Wheel took hold of me and made me a monk and did injustice to me, the young man, whether I wanted it or not. Nicodemus is my name".

Another inscription of f. 203v consisting of four dodecasyllabic verses written in a scholarly style informs us that the painter is the famous Nicodemus, of celebrated birth. It reads, according to Xyngoulos’ transcription: Φυτοφ σφαγωγος χρωματουργιαν βλέπαν, / ἢς θεατης ζωγράφον τούτου νόει, / κλείνον τι Νικόδημον εὐχλέως φύλτης, / Ξενοφόν ἐκείνον τόν ἔπησαν γένει. "Looking at the picture of the light-bringing plant, every spectator would bring to mind its..."
painter, the famous Nicodemus, of celebrated birth, a descendant of the noble lineage of Xenophon. Xyngopoulos identifies the painter Nicodemus, mentioned on f. 203v, with the monk Nicodemus depicted under the Wheel of Life on f. 163v (Fig. 10). If we accept this identification, which seems very reasonable, then we have here a Late-Byzantine painter's self-portrait. Its context differs, though, from the examples previously examined. Nicodemus is not depicted as a humble servant of God. The lofty self-characterizations in the epigram of f. 203v and the iconographic context of the miniature comprising his self-portrait on f. 163v are alien to Byzantine concepts. They demonstrate a strong individualism, revealing a new approach, which can be associated with the social changes of the period of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Parallely, representations of Saint Luke painting the icon of the Virgin become more frequent in the Late Byzantine period, for example in Malei (1356-60), in a Lectionary of the monastery of Saint John on Patmos (MS. 330, f. 82v) of the year 1427 and in Cod. gr. 233 (f. 87v) of the monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai of the 15th century, also indicating the growing emphasis on the personality of the painters in the last phase of the Middle Ages.

To sum up, the rarity of references by name to Byzantine painters in the written sources and in church inscriptions has its parallel in the scarcity of their portraits in Byzantine art. The painter's image in the Early Christian codex of Dioscorides in Vienna attests to the continuity of the tradition of Late Antiquity. The majority of extant effigies belong to the period extending from the


70. About the White Church of Karan (1340-42) where the presbytery Georgije Medoŭ, depicted in the aipse, was previously thought to represent the master of the church decoration, a view no longer accepted, see Sv. Radojičić, Staro srpsko slikarstvo, Belgrade 1966, p. 142-143; V. Djuric, Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien, Belgrade 1976, p. 89-90, 271, n. 71.


72. PG 55, col. 565 a' ff.


74. PG 55, col. 565 a'.


76. Xyngopoulos, "O μικρογράφος, op.cit., p. 66.

77. Xyngopoulos, ibid., p. 69, was right, I think, in attributing the production of the manuscript in a Latin-occupied region of Byzan­tium.


79. Spatarkeris, Corpus, I, p. 69, no. 287; II, fig. 508.

first half of the 9th to the end of the 12th century and include a) two anonymous and abstract images of painters at work used to illustrate metaphors in theological texts, as in the codices Par. gr. 923 and Dionysiou 61; b) a unique effigy of an anonymous but real painter, if the tiny kneeling figure on f. 2v of Coislin 79 is rightly interpreted; c) a group of examples in manuscripts (Melbourne 710/5 and Dionysiou 65) and icons (Hexaptychon of Ioannes Tsohabi at Sinai) where the eponymous painters are portrayed in their capacity as donors. These last examples attest to the existence of monk-painters who were not mere craftsmen but men of learning, disposing of certain financial means, who combined the capacities of donor, scribe and painter and possibly also author of the accompanying epigrams.

There are no extant examples of painters' effigies in monumental painting. The unique recorded statement of Nikolaos Mesarites, in his Description of the Holy Apostles, that his almost contemporary mosaicist — whose name, Eulalios, has been added on the margin by the copyist — had his own features painted in a secondary figure of a Christological scene, surprising as it may seem at first, should be understood in the spirit of a revival of ancient art principles, also evident in the architecture and painting of the 12th century, and is in conformity with the social changes of the time.

Very few painters' self-portraits are known from the Late Byzantine period, although one would expect a greater number of examples, as the historical conditions and socio-economic transformations after the Fourth Crusade favoured, to some degree, a rise of the status and personality of craftsmen. The image of the illuminator comprised in the fifteenth-century codex of Dioscorides in Bologna (Bibl. Univ. cod. 3632) shows many misinterpretations in comparison to its Early Christian model, the Dioscorides of Vienna, probably due to the intermediate copies. On the contrary, the effigy of the eponymous painter in the codex Par. gr. 36 (end of 14th/beginning of 15th century) shows a completely different iconographic approach in comparison with the examples of the previous period and indicates an individualism consonant with the historical events and social alterations of this period of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

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