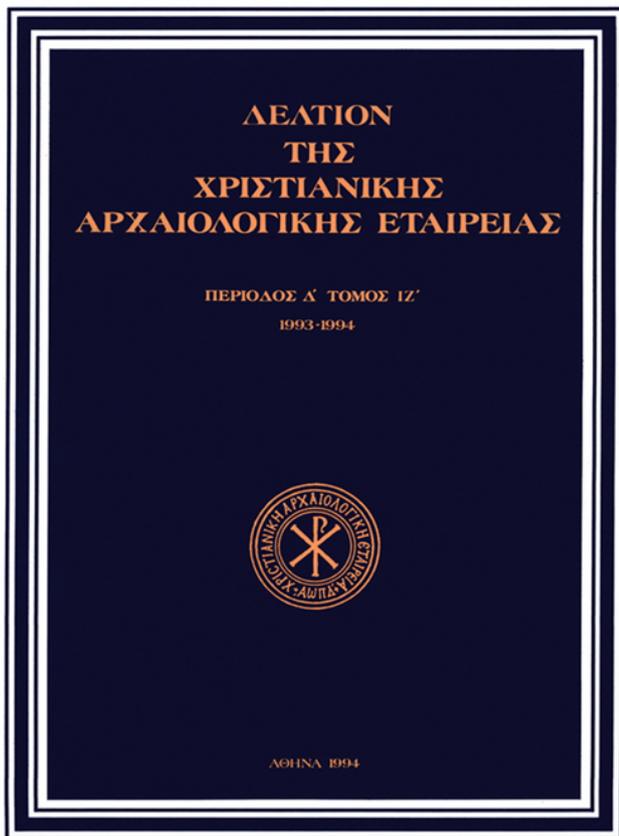


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An Unusual "Deesis" in the Narthex of Panagia Krena, Chios

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Charlambos Pennas

AN UNUSUAL "DEESIS" IN THE NARTHEX OF PANAGIA KRENA, CHIOS*

The central part of the east wall of the narthex of the Panagia Krena church in Chios¹ is very poorly preserved, due to the reconstruction of the arches and the barrel vaults. Its decoration consists of a shallow niche with the Virgin and Child, above which is a framed icon of Christ Pantocrator in bust, accompanied by two three-quarter length figures (Figs 1-2).

The alcove², above the main door on the east wall, framed by red bands to emphasize its privileged position, is occupied by a half-length Virgin and Child. The Virgin's face is largely destroyed and most of the surface paint is missing from the figures, and especially their background. The Mother of God wears a blue tunic, the cuffs edged with yellow-ochre stripes, and a purple-red *maphorion*. She is turned to the left and holds the Child with both hands. Christ is dressed in a white short-sleeved tunic and reclines asleep (?)³ in this mother's lap (Fig. 3). His left hand rests on her slightly raised left knee, while the right one holds a small white scroll.

The top and sides of the arched panel above the alcove are seriously damaged, due to the rebuilding of the narthex roof. A figure is depicted on each side of a framed icon of Christ, while in the lower corners are decorative motifs framed by red borders. The red bands on the main arched panel are totally destroyed.

The upper part of the framed icon has also been destroyed⁴. Christ is represented in half-figure on a gold ground (Fig. 4). The left half of his face and hair have been damaged. Only a part of the nimbus remains. Clad in a dark red tunic and dark blue *chlamys* with white highlights, he blesses with his right hand and holds a closed scroll in his left. Even in bust form and framed the figure of Christ is considerably larger in scale than the three-quarter length flanking figures. This type of bust-length Pantocrator, could be related to those in the main apses of the Norman churches in Sicily, especially the one in the main apse of Cefalu⁵, though in that representation Christ holds in his left hand an open Gospel book with texts in Greek and Latin.

The three-quarter length figure on the left is represented emerging from the blue background and turning towards the framed icon of Christ (Fig. 5). His halo and right shoulder have been partly destroyed, while the face and parts of the garments have lost much of their surface paint. Almost bald and white bearded, he wears a red

tunic with ochre-brown cuff and a light-green *chlamys* with white lights, draped over his left shoulder. In his covered left hand he holds an ochre book, drawn in reverse perspective, while with his right he touches the upper left red edge of its leaves. It is as if he raises his right hand with the palm open and points towards the icon. The saint is John the Evangelist, recognizable from the portrait type.

The haloed figure on the right has suffered severe damage (Fig. 6). In spite of its very poor condition — most of the left part has disappeared — there are sufficient traces to describe it. Like his counterpart, he is depicted in three-quarter length and has traces of faded, short, curly brown hair and a round beard. Most probably the patron saint of the donor, Eustathius, is represented⁶. He wears a tunic and *chlamys*, the colours of which are effaced. The saint, in three-quarter pose, extends both hands towards the icon in a gesture of supplication. The figure of Eustathius is required to define Christ's role, as intended by the donor: an intercessor who prays here for Eustathios Kodratos⁷.

The triadic composition itself, with a blessing Christ in the middle and a figure on either side turning towards him, is very similar to that of the Deesis, particularly

*The photographs are due to the artist restorer Takis Mantzoukis and the drawing to the painter Theodosia Papadopoulou.

1. On the Byzantine church of Panagia Krena in Chios see: O. Wulff, *Das Katholikon von Hosios Lukas und verwandte byzantinische Kirchenbauten*, *Die Baukunst*, 11. Heft, II. Serie, 1903, p. 22-23. G. Sotiriou, *ΑΔ* 1916, p. 33-34. A. Orlandos, *Monuments byzantins de Chios*, II, 1930. E. Stikas, *L'église byzantine de Christianou*, 1951, p. 39-40, 31-37. C. Bouras, *Ὁδηγοὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, Χίος*, 1974, p. 30-34. H. Buchwald, *JÖB* 28 (1979), p. 274-276. P. Vokotopoulos, *JÖB* 28 (1979), p. 250. C. Bouras, *ΑΔ* 34 (1979), *Meletai* p. 2. C. Pennas, *Canadian Archaeological Institute at Athens, Symposium, Women and Byzantine Monasticism* (Athens 1988), 1991, p. 61-66.

2. Height 80 cm, width 1.35 m (at the base), depth 10 cm.

3. This part of the figure is partly damaged.

4. Preserved height 68 cm, width at bases 62 cm.

5. O. Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, 1949, pl. 1.

6. *Hermeneia*, p. 296: Εὐστάθιος, νέος στρωγγυλογένης.

7. "Next to Eustathius, on the south side of the east wall of the inner narthex the founder of the church is depicted offering an architectural model of the church to an enthroned Virgin". C. Pennas, *op.cit.* p. 61.



Fig. 1. Chios, Krena. Central part of the east wall of the narthex.

because the figure on the right, most probably Saint Eustathius, extends his hands in supplication to the Saviour. On the left, John's gesture may call attention to the divinity of the Logos. So, we have "a Deesis with two substitutes": John the Evangelist instead of the Virgin and Eustathius of John the Baptist.

In general, substitutions of the male figure in the Deesis are not uncommon, with Nicholas being by far the most frequent "stand in". In the representations on lead seals the frequent appearance of two or more saints, such as Nicholas-Menas, Demetrius-Panteleimon, Procopius-John Theologos, Nicholas-John Chrysostom, Elijah-Panteleimon, Peter-Paul, on either side of the Virgin or of Christ in a medallion above them is interpreted as a Deesis⁸. Nevertheless, in these instances the choice of imagery is made in the context of man's peculiar quest of the purely personal, so that there are more than two. In San Marco at Venice, there is a Deesis with two substitutes in the Capella di San Isidoro⁹: on the east wall,

where Christ is flanked by Mark and Isidore. In the Krena Deesis John the Evangelist replaces San Marco's Mark. In the frescoes of the *Sanctissima Annunciata* in Minuto (Amalfi), Italy¹⁰, a crypt chapel of a church dedicated to the Virgin, the iconographic programme incorporates elements of both Western and Byzantine origin: a half-length Christ Pantokrator is flanked by John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. Most probably this too is a case of "a Deesis with two substitutes". The theological content of such compositions is, on the whole, the same as that of the "normal" Deesis, whether it is a part of the Last Judgement or an independent image: namely intercession. There are several Deesis-like compositions without rigidly defined rules of content, such as the "normal Deesis", a "Deesis with two substitutes" and "a developed *Deesis* with extra figures".

These three types bear witness to transitions in Deesis compositions. Apart from the representations, varia-

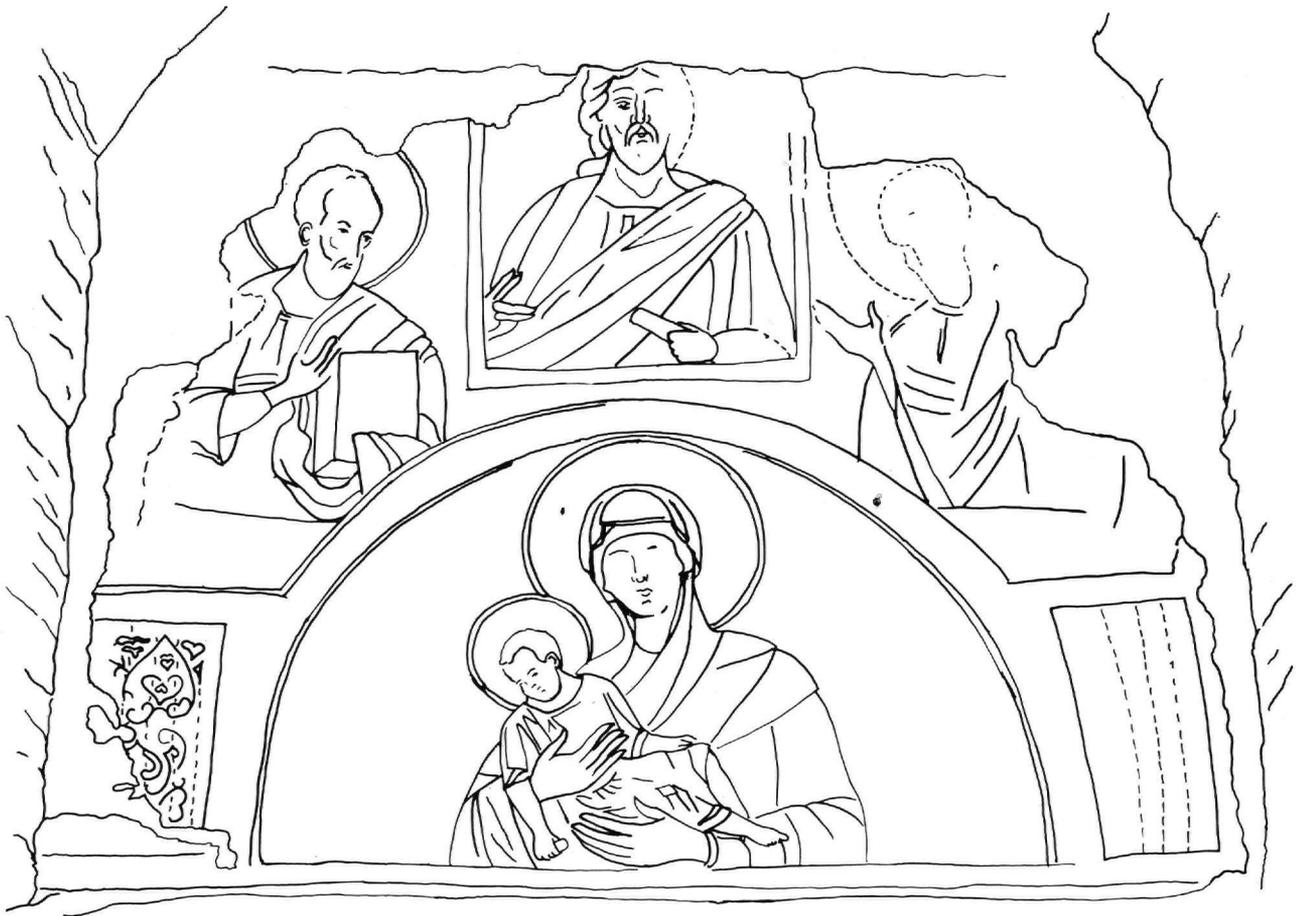


Fig. 2. Chios, Krena. Central part of the east wall of the narthex (drawing).

tions of the Deesis are known also from texts, as for example the Life of Lazarus the Galesiote, written by his disciple Gregory at the end of the eleventh century¹¹. In the case of Krena the posture of Eustathius in supplication reinforces the meaning of intercession (παράκλησις), which was a function of the Deesis image, while that of John the Evangelist witnesses the divinity of the Logos, even if it does not belong to the earlier “visionary” type of the Deesis but to the later “interces-



Fig. 3. Chios, Krena. Christ Child.

8. A. Cutler, *Under the Sign of the Deesis*, DOP 41 (1987), p. 147.

9. O. Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, 2, Chicago 1984, p. 69.

10. R. D. Bergman, *The Frescoes of Sanctissima Annunciata in Minuto (Amalfi)*, DOP 41 (1987), p. 71.

11. A. Cutler, *Under the Sign of the Deesis: on the Question of Representiveness in Medieval Art and Literature*, DOP 41 (1987), p. 147. Also for an extensive bibliography on the Deesis.



Fig. 4. Chios, Krena. Christ (detail).

sory" version¹². This visionary type, "contaminated" with intercessory figures such as John the Evangelist and Eustathius, acquires an intercessory sense, with connotations of prayer, in the Last Judgement. According to the publications of Walter and Thierry¹³ the primary and principal meaning of the representation of the Deesis was the witness and acknowledgement of the divinity of the Logos, not that of the intercession. This was the case in Cappadocia, as well as in regions within the sphere of influence of Constantinople, such as Hosios Loukas, St Sophia, Kiev, St Sophia at Ochrid, St Nicholas Kasnitzi, Kastoria, St Anargyroi, Kastoria, the chapels of the Cave of Penteli¹⁴. Concerning the cases of St Sophia at Ochrid and the Cave of Penteli, Wharton Epstein and Mouriki respectively¹⁵ recognize only the liturgical character of the Deesis representation. The element of the divinity of the Logos, expressed by the presence of John the Evangelist, proves that the monument belongs within the sphere of influence of the Capital. The element of intercession is of secondary impor-

tance, since it is represented by the patron saint of the donor, Eustathius, and only indirectly by the Virgin.

In the Krena church the esonarthex functions as a funerary chapel, in view of the presence of arcosolia. The dominant compositional scheme in the narthex repertoire is the Last Judgement into which are incorporated the following representations: the donors, on the south arcosolium and the arched upper corner of the SE wall; the Lamentation on the north arcosolium; the Deesis above the main entrance, which, while preserving its autonomy, attaches great importance to the prayers of intercession. It could be present in the main apse, as observed in the provincial monuments of Cappadocia¹⁶, Crete, Rhodes and Southern Italy¹⁷.

Due to the fact that the Krena narthex is a funeral chapel, the central part of the east wall is equivalent to the Bema apse, where Deesis figures are normally shown in such chapels¹⁸.

It was the artist's intention to create a monumental composition which would strike the eye as soon as the visitor entered the church. The artist had to rearrange the composition in the central part of the east wall in order to combine the principal figures of the narthex which are: Christ, in the Last Judgement, and the Virgin, to whom the church is dedicated. This is successfully achieved by combining the Deesis composition with substitutes on the arched-top panel, and the Virgin in the alcove, indirectly incorporated in the Deesis composition. The manner in which the Virgin is separated from the "Deesis-like" composition was doubtless meant to underline the fact that the church of Krena was dedicated to her. Judging by the surviving compositions, in addition to this representation, the Virgin's patronage is expressed by: a. the orans Virgin in the main apse; b. the standing Virgin between the donors on the back wall of the south arcosolium in the narthex; c. the seated Virgin receiving the model of the church from the donor Eustathios Kodratos on the south part of the east wall of the narthex.

Concerning the uneasy-recumbent pose of the Christ Child in the Virgin's lap, this is occasionally assumed in images of the so-called "Virgin of the Passion" where Christ is depicted lying horizontally in the Virgin's arms, turning his head away from her, gripping her garments at the chest to steady himself, and blessing with the other hand. The pose of the Christ Child in Krena combines also the image of Christ Anapeson "the reclining one": the image of Christ asleep, awaiting resurrection¹⁹.

The representation of the Virgin with the Child sleeping could be related to the Pantocrator's blessing. Possibly the artist did not wish to represent Christ blessing twice:



Fig. 5. Chios, Krena. St. John the Evangelist.



Fig. 6. Chios, Krena. St. Eustathius.

both as the Pantocrator in the framed icon and as a Child in the Virgin's lap.

On the other hand the incorporation of the Virgin in the "real" Deesis would have annulled the importance of the Virgin, to whom the Krena church is dedicated. For this reason there is a representation of the Deesis with two substitutes on the large panel, while the Virgin and Child in the small alcove indicates the pathonage of the church.

In the monumental painting of the late twelfth century there is a distinct attempt to break away from the Comnenian hieratic style, particularly evident in two characteristic representations in the church of Panagia tou Arakou, 1192, near Lagoudera in Cyprus: the Virgin Arakiotissa or Kecharitomene, where the Christ Child is represented in a recumbent pose to the side, blessing and with his gaze averted from the beholder, and the devout Symeon holds the Christ Child reclining in his arms. In the former representation Christ's pose in the Virgin's

12. C. Walter, REB 38 (1980), p. 262.

13. C. Walter, The Notes on the Deesis, REB 26 (1968), p. 311-336. N. Thierry, A propos des peintures d'Ayvali Koy (Kappadoce). Les programmes absidaux à trois registres avec Deesis, en Cappadoce et en Georgie, Zograf 5 (1974), p. 5-22.

14. Στ. Παπαδάκη-Οεκλανδ, Το Άγιο Μανδήλιο ως το νέο σύμβολο σε ένα αρχαίο εικονογραφικό σχήμα, ΔΧΑΕ, Δ' - ΙΔ' (1987-1988), p. 283-294.

15. Ντ. Μουρίκη, Οι τοιχογραφίες της Σπηλιάς Πεντέλης, ΔΧΑΕ, Δ' - Ζ' (1971-1974), p. 84, 92 κ.ε. Ann Wharton Epstein, The Political Content of the Paintings of Saint Sophia at Ochrid, JÖB 29 (1980), p. 320.

16. For the popularity of the Deesis in Cappadocia, A. E. Epstein, in: JWarb 42 (1979).

17. H. Belting - C. Mango - D. Mouriki, The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fetiye Camii) at Istanbul, Washington, D.C. 1978, p. 58.

18. N. Thierry, *op.cit.*, p. 5-22.

19. A. P. Kazhdan, The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, New York-Oxford 1991, p. 439. The oldest example in the manuscript 45 Stavroniceta dated in the twelfth century has the following inscription: κεκοίμησαι ὡς λέων και ὡς σκύμνος· τίς ἐγερεῖ σε, Βασιλεῦ (K. Wessel, RbK 1, 1011).

arms is not organically integrated. There is an awkwardness in the linking of the figures. In the devout Symeon the movements of the young Christ clutching the garments of the old man at the chest and raising his left leg, are somewhat excessive. In Krena the Christ Child turns his head away from the Virgin, as he lies horizontally in her arms. This represents a transitional stage from the hieratic formulation to the "Anapeson" type. It also reflects the late twelfth-century tendency to break away from the hieratic severity of the Comnenian era, leading either to the extravagant representations of Mannerism or to a monumental dynamism in the figures, which presages the Palaeologan era.

The compositional scheme on the central part of the east wall of the Krena narthex corresponds to the innovations of the Comnenian period in the iconography of the "evangelical scenes". These reveal two tendencies, accentuated in the second half of the twelfth century²⁰. On the one hand there is an intensification of the supernatural aspect of the "divine acts", and on the other the underlining of the human side of Christ's life.

Both are visible in the compositional scheme. The transcendental element is stressed by the representation of the Deesis "with two substitutes". The transcendence culminates in the icon-palladium of Christ Pantocrator, to whom both figures pay homage.

There are mural painting portraits in bust, primarily of bishops at the base of apses, each within a round or square frame ending above in a hook and nail, imitating icons hung on the wall²¹. According to Grabar these are simulations of panel icons on the iconostasis which do indeed reproduce, at the base of the side walls of the iconostasis, large icons before which the faithful is called upon to pray. Representations of panel icons in wall paintings are found in the Backovo monastery (osuary chapel, second half of twelfth century), in the Zica monastery (katholikon, end of twelfth century), in Djurdjevi Stupovi (early thirteenth century). The Krena example is unusual in that, instead of the portrait of some bishop or martyr, Christ Pantocrator is so depicted in the pre-eminent scene of the Deesis. The iconographic type of the Krena Saviour, brings to mind the icons in a rectangular frame with arched top, in the twelfth-century Skylitzes manuscript in Madrid, where a deacon standing on a ladder tries to erase icons on an epistyle of an ambiguous structure, either a tempon or a ciborium. In this twelfth-century representation, Christ, between the Virgin and an archangel, blesses with his right hand and holds a closed scroll in his left, as in the Krena depiction²². These icons on the epistyle are shown in ordered arrangement, required by the story of the text. While, the framing of the figure of Christ,

at once defines and accentuates its cult significance. The representation of Christ All-Ruler as a framed icon recalls corresponding cult icons of the Virgin²³. It is thus possible that this type of Christ Pantocrator in bust copies some well-known cult icon of the period, in the possession of a noble family in the Capital. This image of Christ in an icon is reminiscent of lead seals with representations of the Deesis, on which Christ is shown within a medallion, higher than the other figures, as mentioned above²⁴.

On the other hand the Virgin, surrounded by red borders in her own panel and alcove, is represented self-contained and yet creates the feeling of intimacy and familiarity, marking the fact that the church is dedicated to her. From the intimacy and tenderness of the Virgin and Child, however, the spectator goes directly to the "Deesis" image above, with the centrally placed impressive and unusual depiction of Christ, which is the focal point of the programme of the narthex²⁵.

The peculiarities in the iconographic programme of the Krena narthex need not be considered as necessarily reflecting the iconographic trends of the Comnenian era. The sepulchral function of the Krena narthex, combined with the fact that the Panaghia Krena was the private church of Kodratos and his family, account for an iconographic schema determined by a personal intervention of the owner. The iconographical arrangement submits to his desire to project himself, while also accommodating the patronage of the Virgin and the dominant presence of Christ who constitutes the focal point of the representation of the Last Judgement.

20. Especially, L. Hadermann-Misguich, *La peinture monumentale du XII siècle à Chypre*, XXXII *CorsiRav* 23/30 (1985), p. 255.

21. A. Grabar, *Les représentations d'icônes sur les murs des églises et les miniatures byzantines*, *Matiqa Cpacka*, ZLU 15 (1979), p. 22.

22. A. Grabar - M. Manoussacas, *L'illustration du manuscrit de Skylitzes de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, Venise 1979, fig. 66 (f. 64va).

23. The Cult of the Virgin in Constantinople had a dominant place in the religious life of the city. Indeed after she had proved her powers in 626, her place as the principal patron of CP was assured. According to Cameron "the Virgin of 6th-century CP is before all the most potent intercessor before God" (A. Cameron, *The Theotokos in 6th-century CP*, *JThS* 29 (1978), p. 79-198).

24. Concerning the representation of Christ as an icon in a circular form, in manuscripts referring to Iconoclasm, we find portraits of ecclesiastics (patriarchs, bishops, and so on) holding in one hand an icon, usually in the form of a disc.

25. C. Walter, *Bulletin on the Deesis and the Paraklesis*, *REB* 38 (1980), p. 261-269, where the author presents, in the form of a bulletin, with essential commentary, the various studies on the place of the Deesis and Paraklesis in Byzantine religious art.