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George GALAVARIS

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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

Two Icons of St. Theodosia at Sinai

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TWO ICONS OF ST. THEODOSIA AT SINAI

In conversations with the author Doula Mouriki had often expressed her concern for the lack of systematic studies of female saints of the Orthodox Church. Doula was particularly fascinated by the figure of St. Theodosia and was thinking of a study of the Saint as one of her various, important, future projects. Alas, the future did not come but Doula managed to include one icon of the Saint in her contribution to the "Treasures of Sinai"¹. To honour her memory I publish here two icons of the Saint treasured in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai which present a number of special problems relating to St. Theodosia. Here I do not intend to study the iconography of Theodosia, the birth of her legend, and her cult. These should be part of a separate, extensive study. However, some of these questions must be touched upon so that we may understand the significance of the icons.

In the Menologion of the Orthodox Church there are six saints named Theodosia². The hieromartyr Theodosia of Constantinople is singled out among them for her involvement in the struggle for the protection of the icons during Iconoclasm. Her story has remained problematic. According to the Synaxarium of the Church of Constantinople Theodosia's feast is on July 18. In the Greek Church, however, she is commemorated on May 29 with Theodosia of Tyre who in fact dominates the synaxarium of the day in the Greek Menaia. Theodosia of Constantinople is given one line of commemoration and two verses referring to her death by the horn of a ram³. Obviously the two Saints have been confused with one another. The textual sources do not agree as to the time of her life and martyrdom. According to the Menologium she lived during the reign of Constantine V Copronymos (741-775) but suffered martyrdom under Leo III (711-741). In the few laudations and acolouthiae which have survived she is said to have suffered martyrdom in the time of Constantine V⁴. Her legend is related to the story of the destruction of the Chalkê image by Leo II of which two versions are known⁵. In the older redaction, the "Marian", it is Mary the Patrician who protects the Chalkê image. But in the later version which appears for the first time in the Menologion of Basil II the protagonist of the incident is the nun Theodosia. Her legend became popular and her cult in her church on the Golden Horn flourished in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The "invention" of St. Theodosia, if indeed she was invented, and why the iconophiles would "promote"

women as protectors of the icons are immaterial questions. If extant icons are any indications of her popularity, they are not numerous, we may assume that Theodosia was not very popular after all. She rarely appears in monumental art alone. Associated with the Triumph of Orthodoxy, she is included with Theodora in relevant representations, and on icons, alone or with other saints, she is depicted as a nun holding a martyr's cross or an icon of Christ, supposedly the icon of the Chalkê gate⁶.

The icons, published here for the first time (both in tempera on wood), represent these two iconographic traditions. The one (21 × 14 cm and 2.1 cm wide)⁷ shows the Saint in a monastic costume standing frontally on a red ground, holding with her right hand a small, white cross, and blessing with the other (Fig. 1). Her ample chiton is rendered in carmine brown, her cloak is brown and the monastic hood is carmine brown. The flesh tones are brownish with green shadows forming the modelling. Her nimbus, freed of a later overpainting, is gold and it is executed in the "rotating" technique. The upper part of the background, cleaned from overpaint-

1. Icons from the 12th to the 15th Century, in: *Sinai Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, ed. K. A. Manafis, Athens 1990, fig. 39 on p. 168.

2. S. Eustratiades, 'Αγιολόγιον τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, Athens s.a., p. 173-174.

3. BHG, ed. F. Halkin, Brussels 1957, 2, p. 286-287; Synaxarium CP, p. 828-829; PG, 117, 548-549 (Menologion Basil II); LChrI, 8, p. 454. Greek Menaion, Μάιος, Athens s.a., p. 181.

4. BHG, nos 1773zff; Eustratiades, *op.cit.*, p. 174; Constantine Acropolis, Λόγος εἰς τὴν Ἀγίαν Ὁσιομάρτυρα Θεοδοσίαν, PG 140, 893-936.

5. For the incident, texts and discussion see C. Mango, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen 1959, p. 115ff.

6. Examples in frescoes: Mt. Athos, Lavra, Katholicon, 1535; Athos, Dochiariou, 1568 restored in 1855, in both the Triumph of Orthodoxy, see G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos. I: Les peintures*, Paris 1927, pls 131.2, 228.1; Rumania, Arbore, 16th century, J. D. Ștefănescu, *Iconografia artei bizantine și a picturii feudale românești*, Bucurest 1973, pl. before p. 161; icons: by E. Tzafovaris in Venice, Triumph of Orthodoxy, 17th century, M. Chatzidakis, *Icones de Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la collection de l'Institut Hellénique de Venise*, Venice 1962, no 63, pl. 48; Russian icon in the Tretjakov Gallery, 1690, Theodosia as nun with the megaloschema, and the Holy Trinity above, see B. I. Antonova - N. E. Mneva, *Katalog drevnerusskij zivopisi XI-načala XVIII vv.*, Moscow 1963, 2, no 904, fig. 140.

7. A photograph of this icon was published in J. Galey, *Sinai and the Monastery of St. Catherine*, Israel 1980, fig. 68.



Figs 1-2. Mount Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine, icons; St. Theodosia (Photos courtesy of the Monastery).

ing, is gold. However, from the shoulders downwards, the background has not been cleaned and retains the brown overpainting. The gold part of the background has revealed the original inscription: *H A(TIA) (ΘE)O-ΔOCÍ/A*.

Parts of the background and of the figure are gone and further cleaning may result into a spotty effect. A cross is carved on the back of the panel. Parts of the monastic costume, the almost pyramidal composition and the rendering of the figure present iconographic and stylistic problems to be discussed below.

The second icon (25 × 7,2 cm and 1,5 cm wide) represents St. Theodosia as the defender of the Chalkê image. The Saint is depicted within an arch, carved on the panel, standing frontally on a dark brown ground, holding a small cross in her right hand and an icon with a bust of Christ in her left (Fig. 2). Her monastic garments are: a greenish brown chiton with wide, vertical folds delineat-

ed in white; a very dark analabos, almost black with green tones; a brown cloak; black veil which covers a rectangular cap as in the previous icon. But while in the former icon this "hood" falls around the shoulders and covers the neck, in this icon the headcover falls on the shoulders and leaves the neck to be covered by a separate, greenish brown, with white lights, cloth. The frame of the Christ icon is greenish and white. Christ is rendered in very dark almost black colour. He holds a gold book and wears a large, gold nimbus which is punched with a series of triangles, forming rays, decorated alternatively with dots and simple rosettes. The background is gold. *'H A(TIA) ΘEOΔ (O)CÍ A* in red script. Traces of two hinges on the left hand side indicate that the icon was a leaf of a diptych. At one time a metal cover was attached on the background, as shown by extant nail holes, leaving uncovered only the figure.

The panel has suffered a crack through the Saint's left

side which has been repaired with metal pieces above and below. Pigments have flaked in various parts of the figure and the background.

Generally but not exclusively, portraits of single saints are represented in busts or in half figures. Complete figures usually are found in icons with more than one person — this is the case with the second icon the missing leaf of which must have contained another saint — or in icons the frames of which are formed by small panels.

In general, female martyrs are represented frontally with a simple maphorion covering the head, closed at the breast (cf. St. Anastasia in Fig. 3), often their hands clasp the end of the maphorion, or they are shown holding a cross in the right hand and making a gesture of prayer with the left⁸.

Except for the headdress, the icon of Theodosia as a nun, follows the traditional iconography of female saints. The iconography of the second icon relates to images of St. Theodora who also holds an image of Christ. However, the two Saints differ in their attire⁹. The stance of the figures in both icons recalls menologia whether in icons, manuscripts or frescoes in which such frontal figures are common¹⁰. Furthermore, the pyramidal composition of the first icon finds parallels in images of saints in prayer, their extended hands causing the opening and widening of the cloak, seen often in illustrated menologia, as for example, Sts. Theodora and Euthymia in a Menologion in Oxford, cod. gr. th. f. 1, fols 9r-v, from 1322-1340¹¹. It may well be that the artists had based their work on menologia.

In both icons the headdress is striking and so is the collar in the second icon — elements which, to my knowledge, have not been studied; a history of secular costumes and a nun's habit is still to be undertaken¹². In both icons it is clear that the hood or veil falls over a rectangular cap. This can be best understood by looking at the two female saints in the Oxford Menologion, just cited. St. Euthymia wears the normal monastic veil, whereas Theodora wears a rectangular cap with the veil over it. Clearly the painter of the first Theodosia has made a special effort, however awkward, to depict this cap under the veil. The arrangement reminds of the *καλυμαύχιο* of the Orthodox clerics which is a later feature of religious vestments.

I cannot follow here the story of this headdress except to single out few examples which may provide us with a chronological terminus for the Sinai icons. In the now lost cod. Taur. gr. 237 fol. 256r, Anthusa Maliasenus wears a sophisticated hat in the form of an inverted cone, which has a long history, covered with a hood¹³. The accuracy of the eighteenth century engraving by

Pasinus cannot be trusted but the actual photo, taken shortly before the manuscript was destroyed by fire in 1904, shows Anthusa wearing a rectangular hat covered by a black veil which, turning round her left side, covers her neck. The inscription indicates that she is a nun and it can be assumed that her headdress is part of her monastic habit. The manuscript is generally assigned to the last quarter of the thirteenth century. A similar type of headdress is worn by the nuns represented in the Typikon of the Convent of Our Lady of Good Hope at Constantinople, cod. Oxford, Lincoln College gr. 35, assigned to date shortly after 1344¹⁴.

The cover or hood falls over the cap and on the shoulders and it is closed in front of the neck leaving out the face only. A similar headdress is worn by Helen, the widow of Staphan Uroš I at Arilje in Serbia from about 1296¹⁵. In later examples the veil covering the cap becomes more sophisticated falling over the shoulder on



Fig. 3. Hagia Paraskevi, Amari, church of Panaghia, fresco: Sts Anastasia and Pelagia (Photo after K. Gallas - K. Wessel - K. Borboudakis, *Byzantisches Kreta*, Munich 1983, fig. 80).

8. A. Chatzinikolaou, "Heilige", in *RbK*, 2, 1034-1093, esp. 1082-1093.

9. In the oldest, extant representation of Theodora, in the Menologium of Basil II, cod. Vat. gr. 1613, fol. 392r, Theodora, who is seldom represented alone, is depicted as an empress holding an image of Christ, see A. Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme byzantin: le dossier archéologique*, 2nd ed., Paris 1984, fig. 138. Cf. also the attire of Theodosia and Theodora in examples cited above n. 5.

10. For an example, see G. and M. Sotiriou, *Eikónes tēs Monēs Sinvā*, Athens 1956-1958, p. 117-118, fig. 127.

11. I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, Stuttgart 1977-, I.2, no 1, figs 13, 14 (hereafter CBM).

12. For the monastic habit and its symbolic meaning see Symeon of Thessalonica, *Περὶ τῶν ἱερῶν τελετῶν* and *Περὶ μετανοίας*, PG 155, 204, 497-499.

13. I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*, Leiden 1976, p. 188-189, figs 141, 142.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 190-206, figs 145, 153, 154.

15. G. Millet, *La peinture du moyen âge en Yougoslavie*, ed. A. Frolov, fasc. 2, Paris 1957, pl. 97.2-4.

one side and wound round the neck on the other, as seen in representations of: St. Thecla, according to Millet in Staro Nagoričino, from 1318; Theodora in cod. Oxford Holkham gr. 15, fol. 12r (here the headdress takes the form of a turban), from the second half of the sixteenth century, whose part I and II were produced possibly in Crete; and in a fresco of the church of Panaghia in Aghia Paraskevi, Amari, Crete, depicting St. Pelagia from 1516 (Fig. 3)¹⁶.

In the image of Theodora the colour of the hood is yellow suggesting that the hood is not part of nun's habit only. In fact in the sixteenth century, as icons and frescoes show, this "turban" becomes part of a woman's dress not necessarily an exclusive part of a nun's habit¹⁷. Its use by nuns may have a special meaning which cannot be discussed here.

But the neck cover in the second icon is not part of the outer veil. This scarf is a western feature of a woman's dress and in western examples it is part of a headcover which covers the head, the sides and the neck and it is distinct from the outer veil. It made a hesitant appearance at the end of the twelfth century and it became common in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in representations of the Holy Family, St. Anne with the Virgin Mary, and in Pietàs¹⁸. It passed in Cretan icons, especially in a series of Italo-Cretan icons, in the fifteenth century¹⁹.

These iconographic observations set as *terminus post quem* the end of the thirteenth century for the first icon, and the fifteenth century for the second. However, it is important to note that the painter of the second icon in rendering the collar obviously is trying to imitate something with which he is not very familiar. Hence the deduction can be made that the feature was not in common use in the Orthodox world at the time.

Stylistic observations can now lead us to a more precise date. In the first icon, the "closed" form, the wrapping of the maphorion up to the chin leaving only the face to be seen, the dark colours and the austere air of the image recall, among other saints, representations of St. Matrona in sixteenth century icons²⁰. The modelling of the face is broad and although the painter has attempted to use the eyes effectively for a piercing look, the face seems mask-like and frozen. The cloak is hard standing in the air, away from the chiton. The broad vertical folds convey a monumentality found in works of the sixteenth century²¹. In particular the character of the system of folds would lead to a date around 1500 but not earlier. The dark palette and the entire concept of rendering the figure leave no doubt that this icon is a monastic product, probably of a painter working at Sinai. However, the state of the background, the rotating

gold nimbus and the red inscription against the gold suggest that an earlier icon is under the present one, which may have been produced in the twelfth or thirteenth century. If this conclusion is correct, it follows that this first image of St. Theodosia must have been earlier than the icon published hitherto.

The second Sinai icon is of high quality and without any overpainting. Stylistically it is characterized by a small head, refined face, fluid and soft modelling. The deeply "cut" folds are formed by straight, wide lines, delineated in white, a feature found in the first half of the sixteenth century, and more commonly in Cretan icons in the second half of the century. The Sinai icon may be attributed to this later period²². Probably made at Sinai, the icon is the work of a painter who was trained in a Cretan workshop. The diptych to which the icon belonged was destined for private devotion. This may be true for the first Theodosia as well although its use on the proskynetarion cannot be excluded.

The association of Theodosia with monastic life and her contribution to the defence of the icons may explain her presence in Sinaitic icons. It is to be hoped that a comprehensive study of St. Theodosia in cult and art will be undertaken and more light will be thrown on the questions raised by these two Sinai icons.

16. Millet, *op.cit.*, fasc. 3, Paris 1962, pl. 101.1; Hutter, CBM, III.1, 2, no 39, fig. 660; M. Chatzidakis, Recherches sur le peintre Théophane le Crétois, DOP 23-24 (1969-70), p. 315, fig. 118. This veil is not related to the white veil worn by St. Barbara in Crusader icons and late-13th century frescoes, see K. Weitzmann, Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom, DOP 20 (1966), figs 46, 47 and D. Mouriki, The Wall Paintings of the Church of the Panagia at Moutoullas, Cyprus, in: Byzanz und der Westen, eds. I. Hutter, H. Hunger, Vienna 1984, p. 197, fig. 25.

17. See for example, mourners in a 16th century icon in Venice, Chatzidakis, *Icones de Venise*, no 18, pl. 13.

18. See Marienbild in Rheinland und Westfalen, Exhibition Catalogue, Villa Hügel, Essen 1968, nos 13, 184, 188, 327, 329 and passim; K. Kalokyres, 'Η Θεοτόκος εις την εικονογραφίαν της 'Ανατολής και της Δύσεως, Thessaloniki 1972, pls 235, 236, 244.

19. See Nano Chatzidakis, Εικόνες Κρητικής Σχολής, Μουσείο Μπενάκη, Athens 1983, no 45.

20. Ch. Baltoyianni, Εικόνες. Συλλογή Δ. Οικονομοπούλου, Athens 1985, no 57, fig. 138.

21. Cf., for example, icon in Patmos, ca 1500, M. Chatzidakis, Εικόνες της Πάτμου, Athens 1977, no 47, pl. 104.

22. The examples are several, see frescoes in Athos, Molivokklisia, 1536, and icon in Patmos, Chatzidakis, Theophanes, *op.cit.* (note 16), fig. 25; *idem.*, *op.cit.* (n. 21), no 78, pl. 132.