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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

Byzantine Painting in Trebizond

David TALBOT-RICE

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BYZANTINE PAINTING AT TREBIZOND

BY
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Professor Sotiriou, in a full review of the book on Byzantine Painting at Trebizond, in which the writer collaborated with Professor Gabriel Millet, arrives at rather different conclusions as to the dates of the respective monuments than those proposed by the writer of this note. As there is every reason to believe that the monuments published in the book will soon perish—if, indeed, they have not perished already—it seems desirable to come to a definite agreement regarding their age. It is for this reason that the writer ventures to return to the subject for a short space in the periodical in which Sotiriou's review appeared (1).

It will be simplest to take the monuments in the order of antiquity proposed by Sotiriou. The references in brackets are to the plates of **Byzantine Painting at Trebizond**.

The paintings in the naos of St. Sophia (I-III) are attributed by Sotiriou to before 1204, and he regards them as of a Pre-Revival, Hellenistic type, while the writer sees in them the influence of the Byzantine Revival manner (p. 98) and assigns them at latest to the fourteenth and probably to the thirteenth century (p. 95).

The proposed descriptions of the style depend on the use of the word Hellenistic, and if Sotiriou uses it in the same sense as Millet, namely to describe a revival of elegance and delicacy, the writer is in complete agreement with him. Such a monument as Ne-rez (1164) for instance may thus be said to be Hellenistic in style, and at the same time it shows a vitality which heralds that of the full Revival manner of the fourteenth century. The work at St. Sophia shows little less vitality, while the colouring, in its brilliance, is akin to that of such, typically Revival work as that at Mistra. The iconography is however conservative, as the scene reproduced on pl. II. A,

1) Vol. XIII, Heft 1. 1937, p. 124. A second review by Sotiriou was also published in APXEIOY ΠΟΝΤΟΥ, 1937, h. 125.

h. 2 note proves. The writer is in agreement with Sotiriou in identifying it as a Manifestation of Christ to His followers rather than as the Transfiguration.

In his architectural examination of the building Brunov¹ distinguishes two main periods of construction, one before 1204, and the other probably in the time of Manuel I (1236—63). He also concludes that the roof probably belongs to the second phase. In assigning the paintings to before 1204 Sotiriou appears to differ from him in this, for they are so high up on the walls that they cannot antedate the roof.

The architectural evidence for dating the paintings is thus open to discussion, and the stylistic and iconographical evidence is by no means conclusive. In view of the fact that other work at Trebizond shows the region to have been as a whole of a very conservative nature, a certain "time lag" must, moreover, be allowed for. It hence seems to the writer that though a date before 1204 is possible, probability definitely favours the second half of the thirteenth century.

For the two Western chapels of St. Savas Sotiriou proposes various dates between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. He also confuses the upper and the lower chapels, which are actually quite distinct, for he refers to pls XXXIX, XXXV and XXXVI as of the same date, though pl. XXXIX is of the upper and the others of the lower chapel. The writer's examination disclosed four quite distinct sets of work, which may be tabulated as follows.

1) Lower chapel. Interior portion. Original decoration on roofs and walls (XXXII—XXXVII).

2) Lower chapel. Paintings of a later age, often superimposed above those of period (XXXI and XXXII, B).

3) Upper chapel. Original work (XXXIX—XLI).

4) Upper chapel. Later work, which overlaid the original, but followed it closely in iconography, style and colouring, as is shown on pl. XXVIII.

To these the writer assigned dates as follows. (1). XV century (p. 129). (2). XV or early XVI century (p. 127). (3). XIV—XV century (p. 133).

On iconographical grounds far earlier dates than these are probable, but the character of the drawing, the colouring and the style of much of the work of (1) was at times so akin to what is to be seen in the Eastern chapel of St Savas (pls XXIV—XXX), which is definitely dated to 1411, that it did not seem safe to regard the

1) Byzantion. IV, 1927/28, p. 403.

work as very much earlier. The writer's conclusions were arrived at on the spot and were based to a great extent on style and colouring. After a lapse of years, and on reconsidering the monochrome reproductions, the similarities seem less striking, and the writer wishes, in the light of Sotiriou's criticisms, to revise his judgement. Period (1) may this be as early as the thirteenth century, though in his opinion the later rather than the earlier part of the century seems most probable. Period (2) must post date this by at least a century and probably by more; the fourteenth century hence seems a probable date. Period (4) is not to be dated on iconographical grounds, for it followed well nigh exactly the lines of earlier work. Its colouring, if paintings on Athos may be taken as a guide, is typical of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Period (3) is, as Sotiriou points out, closely akin to (1), and is probably to be assigned to the same century; it can hardly be earlier than the thirteenth, however.

The writer is in complete agreement with Sotiriou in assigning the work on the roof at Sumela (XLIX) to an early date (p. 147). Sotiriou suggests the twelfth century; the eleventh would be equally possible. The paintings have, however, without doubt been recoloured, and though the restorer undoubtedly followed the original work closely, the possibility of variations having been introduced cannot be disregarded. The work is hence not infallible as a basis on which to found theoretical deductions.

The writer is again in complete agreement that the small chapel at Sumela (pl. L, no I) should be assigned to the sixteenth century. The attribution to the eighteenth century on p. 149 was an error which was rectified on p. 17.

As noted on p. 151, the delightful little chapel identified by Sotiriou as that of the Archistrategoï was described by the writer under the name of the nearest village, namely Kurt Boghan. Sotiriou presents evidence by which it can now be definitely assigned to the last years of the fourteenth century. It was the close similarity of the work here to that in the chapel of Hoja Stephanos at Kaimakli, dated to 1622 (pls. XLIV, XLV) which led the writer to assign it to the sixteenth.

The date assigned to the paintings in the Theoskepastos (pls XVI — XXIV) by the writer and those suggested by Millet and Sotiriou show greater divergence of opinion. The latter regard the paintings as undoubtedly of the fourteenth century, while the writer concluded that they were to be regarded as an exact copy of earlier work, done in the seventeenth century. This conclusion was arrived at entirely because of the nature of the paint and the actual technique,

and was suggested by comparison with work on Athos, where monuments of the fourteenth century have frequently been repainted, so that the colours that are to be seen today are by no means ancient, though the iconography and even the drawing in no way differs from that of the original work.

There can be no doubt as to the fourteenth century character of the iconography and drawing in the Theoskepastos. Millet's admirable analysis proves it beyond dispute (pp. 40—65). So clear is it, that on reconsidering the paintings as shown in monochrome reproduction, the writer is forced to concur in assigning the work to the fourteenth century, and probably to the time of Alexios III (1344—90) who is known to have endowed the sanctuary.