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THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE OPUS SECTILE PAVEMENT IN THE MEGA SPELAION MONASTERY KATHOLIKON*

Preservation of pavements after the destruction of the superstructure is not uncommon, so this hypothesis would be technically feasible. However, in order to establish this hypothesis, the form of the pavement should convince us of a Byzantine dating, which is not the case. The pavement is characterised by a perfectly symmetrical layout of rectangular panels defined by continuous

Keywords
Post-Byzantine period, 17th century, opus sectile pavements, Peloponnese, Achaia, Mega Spelaion monastery near Kalavryta.

To the parnón ádfrho epánexézetai to marmarothetiménó diá-
pedio tov katholíkon tov mónh Mouzalou Spelaíon, apó tìn ópsiw tòu génnikis tov diáptáxh, tòu jwos àllai kai tòv epitéron téchnoríchwn charaktíristík-

The present paper re-examines the opus sectile pavement of the katholikon of Mega Spelaion monastery, in terms of its general arrangement, its style and the partial features and forms that it presents, to reach the conclusion of a Post-Byzantine dating, thus corresponding to the chronology of the full reconstruction of the church edifice.

The katholikon of the Mega Spelaion monastery, near Kalavryta in Achaia, has gone through multiple destruc-
tions and successive re-buildings through the ages. The present edifice was erected in the year 1641.2 Quite re-
cently, it has been claimed that the pavement adorning the church belongs to a previous (namely, Palaeologan) con-
struction phase.3

It would like to thank the members of the editorial committee of the Christian Archaeological Society for their uninterrupted efforts for the annual publication of the Deltion and for favourable reception of the present paper. In particular, I would like to express my deep grat-
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sors Bouras and Mamaloukos for proof-reading the article before submission.

1 G. Sotiriou, “Περὶ τῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ κειμηλίων,” Παράρτημα ΑΔ 4 (1918), 46-61, 47, fig. 8; Ch. Chotzakoglou, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte, Architektur und Wandmalerei der Klosterkirche Mega-Spelaion auf der Peloponnes, Philosophisches Fakultät, Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogri
zistik Universität Wien, Austria 1997 (doctoral thesis).

2 Sotiriou, op.cit. (n. 1), 47; Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 124.

3 Ibid., 139, followed by a more extensive analysis by the same author.

dρίου Κορινθιακών Σπουδών, Corinth 2009, 231-240] and Eikosi-
foinissa monastery [M. Kambouri, “Νέα στοιχεῖα ἀπὸ τὴ μεσοβυ-
ζαντινή φάση τοῦ καθολικοῦ τῆς μονῆς Παναγίας Εἰκοσίφωνίσσης,” ΕΕΠΣΑΠΘ Ε´ (1971-1972), 140-143, fig. 3].

5 Α. Ορλάντος, Η Μονή της Βαρνάκοβας, Αθήνα 1922.

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ΔΧΑΕΛΕ (2014), 65-76

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bands of white marble whose width remains unaltered throughout (Fig. 1). The ground is filled by *opus sectile* everywhere executed in black and white and forming the same pattern (rows of triangles), acting as a background for decorative elements of white marble, such as lozenges, circles, X-forming bands, double-headed eagles (Fig. 5), etc. Some sporadic coloured stones are isolated and do not appear in *opus sectile* motifs. The impressive central panels (Fig. 2) include two large symmetrical cypresses flanking the central feature, a double-headed eagle flanked by marble inlays, as in the Stavroniketa monastery (M. Chatzidakis, *Ὁ Κρητικὸς ζωγράφος Θεοφάνης. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Σταυρονικήτα*, Mt. Athos 1986, figs 13, 18, 19).

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5 Rows of lozenges have been inserted in modern repairs; however, the extant authentic parts reveal that initially, these were also formed by two triangular *crustae*. The rows of triangles are the simplest and therefore commonest pattern in Ottoman period bands of 

Fig. 1. Mega Spelaion, katholikon. General view of the central nave.
two smaller cypresses. In many panels, the central decorative slabs have incrustations (Figs 3, 9, 11) depicting stars and the sun or astragal (bead-and-reel) frames. Finally, the four peripheral disks of each “quincunx” in the north-east and south-east panel of the naos are formed by flower-shaped relief rosettes (Figs 6-7).

All the above-mentioned features lend the pavement a character unrelated to Byzantine works of this kind. In particular, the absolute symmetry and rigidity of the composition – extending even to the symmetrical arrangement of identical motifs – is not related to medieval art, which consciously sought variety, but rather to an era resonant of the Renaissance, which has brought back the role of discipline to a uniform architectural design. The overall impression and style recall Post-Byzantine examples such as the Loukou monastery, where of course the existence of readily-available crustae from the nearby villa of Herod Atticus defined the size and patterns of opus sectile.

The lack of variety at Mega Spelaion is also underscored by the recurrence of the same opus sectile pattern (rows of black and white triangles) in the background of all the panels. This repetition does not appear in any Post-Byzantine examples that I am aware of, such as the Loukou pavement, which is often cited as an example of Post-Byzantine art due to its use of crustae and patterns taken from the nearby Roman villa of Herod Atticus, and is not a Byzantine work.

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I should note that omphalia with circular rows of triangles surrounding a central disc, as in Fig. 8, as well as rectilinear rows of triangles exist in Byzantine works. They are, however, very different in their execution, especially the circular ones, which usually aim to create a visual effect by diminishing sizes or alternating colours. Examples in the katholika of Peribleptos at Politi (supra n. 5), Varnakova (supra n. 5), Lechova (supra n. 5), Iviron monastery [D. Liakos, “The Byzantine opus sectile floor in the Katholikon of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos,” Zograf 32 (2008), 37-44].

6 For a more detailed description and drawing see Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 102-106, 131.

7 As regards accuracy and symmetry and the filling of panels with opus sectile and the bitonal taste of patterns, cf. the 17th century pavement from a manor house of Cairo, reconstituted in the Islamic art Museum of the Benaki Museum [A. Ballian (ed.), Οδηγός Μουσείου Ισλαμικής τέχνης, Athens 2006, 3] or the 1715 pavement in the central nave of the katholikon of Hagia Aiakaterini's monastery at Mount Sinai (M. Koutououlou-Myrianthou, “Τεχνίτες στη Μονή Σινά κατά το 18ο αιώνα μέσα από γνωστά έργα τους,” Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα, Athens 1994, 149-154, 150; for a view of the pavement see K. Manafis (ed.), Σινά, οι θησαυροί της Μονής, Athens 1990, 55, fig. 24). The black-and-white impression of the crustae also remind the opus sectile panels in Topkapi palace, as in the portico of Ahmed III's library.

8 A. Orlandos, “Η Μονή Λουκοῦς,” Πελοποννησιακά 24 (2001-2002), 317-354; however, this is probably based on the erroneous interpretation of the opus sectile as Byzantine, which fails to take into account the fact that the opus sectile at Loukou has merely reused crustae and patterns taken from the nearby Roman villa of Herod Atticus, and is not a Byzantine work.

9 In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I should note that omphalia with circular rows of triangles surrounding a central disc, as in Fig. 8, as well as rectilinear rows of triangles exist in Byzantine works. They are, however, very different in their execution, especially the circular ones, which usually aim to create a visual effect by diminishing sizes or alternating colours. Examples in the katholika of Peribleptos at Politi (supra n. 5), Varnakova (supra n. 5), Lechova (supra n. 5), Iviron monastery [D. Liakos, “The Byzantine opus sectile floor in the Katholikon of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos,” Zograf 32 (2008), 37-44].
Byzantine floor, where differentiation of patterns is meticulously pursued, even through limited variations in size or colour combinations. Furthermore, the very filling of the “ground” with opus sectile is a feature that does not correspond to Middle or Late Byzantine art, and this is in fact the most substantial difference between Middle/Late Byzantine pavements and contemporary Cosmati work, as well as Early Christian opus sectile.\(^\text{10}\)

As regards the main decorative themes, in Mega Spelaion there is no intricate interlacing of circles or marble strips, which is the hallmark of Byzantine omphalia. Although there are arrangements combining more than one circle or rectilinear shape, the more complicated connection so dear to the Byzantines that involved the linking and interlacing of marble bands is avoided\(^\text{11}\) (Fig. 3). In addition, some easily-created patterns common to the majority of Byzantine decorated pavements are absent (such as variants of an oblique chessboard, where either the dark or light squares are formed by more complex combinations of triangles and squares parallel to the main axis of the decorative band).

\(^{10}\) A. Guidobaldi, “Tradizione locale e influenze byzantine nei pavimenti cosmateschi,” Bolletino d’Arte 26 (1984), 57-72.

\(^{11}\) The only Byzantine omphalion known to me that bears an arrangement similar to the easternmost panels of the naos of Mega Spelaion (Fig. 5 below; details in Figs 6-7), combining a lozenge with five circles without interlacing, is found in Andromonastiro in Messenia (C. Bouras – L. Boura, Η Ελληνική ναοδομία κατά τόν 12ο αἰώνα, Athens 2002, fig. 482); nevertheless, it is totally different in style, its chromatic preferences, and the scale and variety of its motifs.
In contrast, the incorporation in the pavement of features typical or even peculiar to the art of the Ottoman period attests to its chronology.

- The presence of cypresses in Early Christian and Byzantine sculpture does not suffice as an argument for the Late Byzantine dating of the pavement,12 since the cypress, especially in the particular stylized form13 it displays here (Fig. 2), appears more generally in the art of the Ottoman period.14 There is even an example on the fountain of the monastery itself (Fig. 4).

- Even though double-headed eagles made their appearance from the Late Byzantine period15 (though from examples of pavements cited,16 at the Vlacherna of Arta we do not actually have the eagle’s head, so it could well be one-headed,17 while at the Metropolis of Mystra the slab bearing the double-headed eagle was set later, during the period of Ottoman rule),18 they appear mostly in the form of relief slabs in pavements dated to the Ottoman period (the Loukou monastery,19 incorporation of the eagle slab at Hagios Demetrios of Mystra,20 the Prophet Elijah of Sitista,21 the Three Hierarchs,22 and the Hypapante church on Hydra,23 Panaghia ta Gournia on Sifnos,24 to name only a few), and have in fact been linked to the desire for national liberation.25 The rich delineation of the eagles’ plumage at Mega Spelaion (Fig. 5), which achieves a mood of baroque decorative exaggeration, recalls Post-Byzantine models rather than the stylized Byzantine representations of the same figure.26

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15 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 112; the slab from Politia mentioned has no connection to the period of the respective opus sectile pavement of the katholikon, as it dates to the Early Christian era [A. Orlandos, “Ἡ Περιβλέπτος τῶν Πολιτικῶν τῆς Εὐβοίας,” ΑΒΜΕ Γ΄ (1937), 180, fig. 6].
16 Examples in C. Bouras, “Διακοσμήσεις Ὀθωμανικοῦ Μπαρόκ στὸ Αἰγαίο,” Ἐκκλησίες V, 151-166, 152, figs 5, 9, 25. In figs 5 and 9, the form of the cypress base characteristic of Mega Spelaion is also observed. More examples in A. Goulaki-Voutira, “Δέτρες μονομοιωτερειάς του Αιγαίου στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη,” Μουσείο Μπενάκη 2 (2002), 111-123, figs 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 13. The examples cited belong mostly to the 18th century; however, Prof. Bouras notes byzantine de Trébizonde,” ΔΧΑΕ ΛΑ΄ (2013), 74.
17 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 112-113.
18 A. Orlandos, “Ἡ παρὰ τὴν Ἀρτά Μονὴ τῶν Βλαχερνῶν,” ΑΒΜΕΒ΄ (1936), 3-50, fig. 25.
19 G. Marinou, Ἀγίας Διονυσίας. Η Μητρόπολις του Μυστρᾶ, Athens 2002, 77, including relevant bibliography.
20 Orlandos, “Ἡ Μονὴ Λουκοῦς,” op.cit. (n. 8), 419-433.
21 Marinou, op.cit. (n. 18), 77.
22 K. Theoharidou, “Ο Προφήτης Ηλίας τῆς Σιάτιστας,” Ἐκκλησίες I, 55-66, figs 6, 9, 10, 11.
24 Ead., “Ἡ ἐκκλησία τῆς Ὑπαπαντῆς στῆν Ὕδρα,” Ἐκκλησίες ΙΙ, 225-236, figs 11, 12.
25 Trakou, op.cit. (n. 14), 215, fig. 8.
27 Byzantine stylized eagle representations (not double-headed) are met for instance on a floor slab at the Holy Trinity of Kriezotis church (A. Orlandos, “Ἡ Ἁγία Τριάς τοῦ Κριεζώτη,” ΑΒΜΕ E (1939-1940), 3-16), and on a slab of the marble screen at Hagia Theodora at Arta (B. Papadopoulos, “Τὸ βεζοντινὸ τίμημα τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Θεοδώρας στὴν Άρτα,” ΔΧΑΕ ΚΘ΄ (2008), 233-46). See also n. 19 above.
The four relief rosettes (Figs 6-7) adorning the corners of the easternmost panels of the naos,27 which were placed from the outset and have a clear ornamental purpose, are characteristic works of stone carving during the Ottoman period, analogous to the typical Turkish rose.28 The incorporation of reliefs other than champlevé - incrustation slabs is very unusual in Byzantine pavements, whereas it became fairly common in Post-Byzantine times.29 The rosette with two concentric rings, the inner one forming the core of the flower and the outer one depicting its petals, is a feature found in Byzantine sculpture through the last centuries of the first millennium.30 but the pieces in Mega Spelaion do not seem to be spolia,31 since this element enjoyed a revival in the Ottoman decorative arts during the 16th and 17th centuries (as did comparable capitals with reed leaves),32 expressing the period's tendency towards rich floral ornamentation,33 and adorning as a leitmotiv Ottoman mosques, mihrabs, and fountains from the time of Sinan.34 In Greece they often appear in stone-carved works of the Ottoman period (fountains, baths,
It has been suggested that the flowers depicted are tulips. However, tulips, which were actually a flower cherished by the Ottoman court and perhaps the most celebrated floral figure in Ottoman art during the 16th and 17th centuries, are preferentially depicted frontally due to their characteristic shape, and do not have as many petals; thus I believe the rosettes must represent other multi-petal flowers. 

The presence of the aforementioned figures (double-headed eagles, cypresses, celestial bodies) is also common in stone reliefs on the façades of Post-Byzantine churches and most of the Post-Byzantine Athonite katholika. 

The architectural details of Ottoman Monumental Architecture, Istanbul 2001, Classic Construction Details of Ottoman Monumental Architecture, Istanbul 2001,

35 Cf. the bath at Koraka square, Herakleion, Crete (E. Kanetaki, Oθωμανικές λιανίτις στοιχεία εν μέρει του ναού της Πεντέλης, Athens 2004, fig. 6.1.59), the fountain of Chalkis (E. Kanetaki, Ιστορία και χρήση Χαλκίδας,Ἡ Οθωμανική Αρχιτεκτονική στην Ελλάδα, op.cit. (n. 14), 89), the Elas-sona mosque (S. Choulia, Τα Μουσεία της Ελλάδος, ibid., 201), the Chaniali fountain at Herakleion (Kanaki, Κηποπάρκο του Ναού του Βελατζίζη, ibid., 140, 409), the Yeşilca Ağা fountain in Herakleion (E. Kanaki, Κηποπάρκο του Ναού του Βελατζίζη, ibid., 140, 409), the Malka Pasà fountain on Chios (P. Valakou, Κρήνη Μελέκ Πασά, Η Καινούργια Βρύση,” ibid., 140], the mihrab of the Gazi Hasan Pasà on Kon (G. Stalidis, Το Μοναστήρι του Γαζί Χασάν Πασά, ibid., 388).

36 It has been suggested (Kalolimnos) island pavement (Kalolimnos) island pavement [F. W. Hasluck, “Bithynica,” ΑΒΜΕ (1906-1907), 284-308] and the omphalos of Hagia Sophia in Nicea [Ch. Pinatis, “New Observations on the Pavement of the Church of Haghia Sophia in Nicea,” BZ 99 (2006), 119-126, with additional bibliography], merely include roundels surrounded by opus sectile bands with radically-disposed triangles, a common theme with many variations. The suns of the Mega Spelaion pavement are in a totally different, more “realistic” style, with wavy rays (Fig. 9) carved in marble (cf. the more recent (early 19th century) pavement of Holy Golgotha in the Resurrection church, seen in Al. Kariotoglou, Μήτις των Εκκλησιών Ιερουσαλήμ, Θεσσαλονίκης, Αθήνα 1998, 145, or the 1833 cobbled courtyard of the church of the Virgin on Tinos, in D. Filippidis, Διασωστικές πέτρες. Ένας αιώνας τέχνης στη νεοελληνική αρχιτεκτονική, Athens 1998, fig. 256 or specifically in a marble pavement to depict rays (Fig. 6)).

37 Stars, suns, and the like also appeared in Late Byzantine pavements, but with a totally different style. Besides, they are the rule in the decorative trends of Post-Byzantine church pavements (church of the Nativity of the Virgin at Gortsouli, Mantinea, Pr. Eliaj in Statistia, and of the Post-Byzantine Athonite katholika). 

38 St. Theodora at Arta [A. Orlandos, “Ἡ Ἁγία Θεοδώρα τῆς Ἄρτης,” ibid., 201], the mihrab of the Gazi Hasan Pasà on Kon (G. Stalidis, Το Μοναστήρι του Γαζί Χασάν Πασά, ibid., 388).


39 Theocharidou, op.cit. (n. 21), 55-66, figs 6, 9, 10, 11.

40 St. Theodora at Arta (A. Orlandos, “Ἡ Ἁγία Θεοδώρα τῆς Ἄρτης,” ΑΒΜΕ (1936), 88-104, figs 3, 12). Periplus church at Mystra (G. Millet, Monuments byzantins de Mistra, Paris 1910, pl. 44.17, 44.19). The fragmentarily preserved pavement of the Periplus of Mystra [A. Loura, L’architecture et la sculpture de la Pérolipède de Mistra (doctoral thesis), Université de Paris I – Panthéon – Sorbonne 1980 pl. 6], constitutes a particular case, where crustae in second use, apparently re-arranged, and is therefore not suitable for comparisons. Other Middle and Late Byzantine pavements cited by Chotzakoglou as depicting suns [Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 112 n. 51], such as the Imrali (Kalolimnos) island pavement [F. W. Hasluck, “Bithynica,” ΑΒΜΕ XIII (1906-1907), 284-308] and the omphalos of Hagia Sophia in Nicea [Ch. Pinatis, “New Observations on the Pavement of the Church of Haghia Sophia in Nicea,” BZ 99 (2006), 119-126, with additional bibliography], merely include roundels surrounded by opus sectile bands with radically-disposed triangles, a common theme with many variations. The suns of the Mega Spelaion pavement are in a totally different, more “realistic” style, with wavy rays (Fig. 9) carved in marble (cf. the more recent (early 19th century) pavement of Holy Golgotha in the Resurrection church, seen in Al. Kariotoglou, Μήτις των Εκκλησιών Ιερουσαλήμ, Θεσσαλονίκης, Αθήνα 1998, 145, or the 1833 cobbled courtyard of the church of the Virgin on Tinos, in D. Filippidis, Διασωστικές πέτρες. Ένας αιώνας τέχνης στη νεοελληνική αρχιτεκτονική, Athens 1998, fig. 256 or specifically in a marble pavement to depict rays (Fig. 6)).
in Greece. Two slabs on the façade of the later church of Hagios Georgios in Solos near Kalavryta may be mentioned as indicative, because of their close geographic proximity: one bears a double-headed eagle and the other the sun, surrounded by the names of the months and symmetrically flanked by two cypresses.

Fig. 9. Mega Spelaion, katholikon. A sun incrustation on a marble slab.

Art of Marble Pavements during the Middle Byzantine period,” Architecture of Byzantium and Kievan Rus from the 9th to the 12th centuries (Transactions of the State Hermitage Museum LII), Saint Petersburg 2010, 103-104. It should be noted that comparable items used in the 13th century narthex pavement of Pantanassa in Philippias were placed there in second use and their provenance may have been 12th century Constantinople (P. Vokotopoulos, Παντάνασσα Φιλιππιάδος, Athens 2007, 27-37).

Fig. 10. Mega Spelaion, katholikon. A sun motif on a marble slab.

With regard to iconography, figurative representations lost from the Mega Spelaion pavement (a heart with two arrows, a soldier with a lance, a siren), known from texts, are not suitable for technical comparisons to Middle Byzantine works, since we have not seen their execution or technique. The specific figures mentioned, however, may lead to some thoughts and observations. Either way, the technical and stylistic differences between the Mega Spelaion pavement and Middle Byzantine ones that contain figurative elements (persons or mythical creatures) or heart-shaped crustae, renders any relevance of these works to the Mega Spelaion implausible. There is no reason to assume, therefore, that the lost figures had
any similarity to the respective Byzantine ones. Besides, even in the hypothetical case that there were technical or stylistic similarities, a Palaeologan date is almost two centuries away from the works proposed for comparison. The misunderstanding is largely due to the lack of a comprehensive study on the Byzantine pavements of Greece, which has so far led some scholars to regard medieval opus sectile as a uniform phenomenon without geographical and chronological differentiations.

In any case, even in Middle Byzantine pavements and Byzantine iconography more generally, a heart pierced by two arrows is unusual. In Western dogma, where we have the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin, these can be present even on blazons of monastic orders of the Catholic Church. Even in the Orthodox Church, however, the heart alone does not have a religious connotation. Therefore, it is more likely that a heart, especially when placed at the entrance to the church, should be interpreted as the coat of arms of a secular donor. Greek coats of arms of the 17th and 18th centuries featuring hearts are known, but of course a positive identification cannot be made, since the exact form has long been lost. With considerable reservations, we venture the assumption that the heart-shaped element mentioned falls within the spirit and aesthetics of heraldry during the period of foreign occupation, perhaps implying a connection to the Hellenic communities in territories under Venetian rule.

Finally, the siren (mermaid) figure in Greece belongs to the repertoire of Post-Byzantine art par excellence, and not only in maritime areas, as would perhaps have been expected: she appears as an apotropaic figure on stone and timber screens of the 17th and 18th centuries, possibly as a result of Western influence, but she also appears among other creatures in church paintings as early as 1619, as well as in other forms of popular art (embroidery, cobbled courtyards, etc.). Apart from being a mythical sea creature, the mermaid carries a special meaning because she is connected with popular beliefs about Alexander the Great. Of all the legends that tradition attributes to the life of Alexander, the one about his sister (or daughter) who is thrown into the sea and becomes an immortal mermaid after having drunk and then accidentally poured out the Water of Life before Alexander has had the chance to drink it – and who, ever since, has dominated the fate of ships – is perhaps the most widespread and appealing. Thus, in connection with Alexander, the mermaid acquired nationalist dimensions, particularly as regarded the preeminence of the Greek fleet. Alexander's personality had become the bearer of the desire for liberation from the time of Byzantine authors, around the period of the Fall of Constantinople; they had connected his victories over the Persians to...
the Emperor’s possibility of victory against the Turks. From the 17th century onward, such parallels became more frequent, assuming either an inspirational-national character, as after the death of Michael Gennaio, who rebelled against the Turks at the end of the 16th century, or the form of a summons to the Tsar and other Orthodox rulers, who are paralleled to Alexander, to liberate the Greeks from the “tyrant.” During the 18th century and the years prior to the Greek Declaration of Independence, this phenomenon became more pronounced, and it continued even after the War of Independence within the framework of irredentist ideas. Indeed, the mermaid’s obsession with Alexander’s immortality can be interpreted as a substitute for the immortality of the nation (something expressed in Modern Greek literature). I believe the presence in Mega Spelaion of the so-called “soldier” with a long lance, positioned as equivalent to the mermaid, represents Alexander himself, holding a spear – the characteristic weapon of antiquity – and alludes to the legend. N. Politis notes that until the 19th century, armed ancient warriors found in popular art were called “Macedonians.” Furthermore, the representation of a military figure as purely apotropaic would be rather weak semantically, given that the powerful symbolic significance of such figures derives from their identity, whether saint, hero, or king. The pavement cannot host a saint’s form, so it would make sense that the representation refers to a mythical or historical hero. The mythical narratives surrounding Alexander’s life had already been written by Pseudo-Kallisthenes, and various versions were known during the Middle Ages in Byzantium and the West. Variations in the demotic language were in circulation in the 16th century, and it seems that the narratives were particularly popular during the 17th century, when the *Pylada tou Megalexandrou* (1680), a printed pamphlet that became very popular, was published. Regardless of whether this theory is correct or the figures of the mermaid and the soldier are merely apotropaic, the motifs themselves are characteristic of the Turkish occupation period in Greece.

All the above render the Mega Spelaion pavement indicative of the osmosis of different influences and local traditions in Post-Byzantine art, and perhaps of the reference of a people under foreign rule to symbols of its glorious past. Even the use of *opus sectile* could be interpreted as such a conscious turn to Byzantium. In fact, it seems plausible that a Late Byzantine *opus sectile* floor may have pre-existed the present one, as part of an imperial patronage, and influenced the 17th century restorers of the church to create an *opus sectile* pavement for the new church, repeating some of the previous patterns. This hypothesis would explain why the present floor might mislead us to assign it a Byzantine date, despite the fact that in conception, traits, style, and taste it is Post-Byzantine.

Finally, some remarks regarding the relation of the pavement to the building may also be of relevance. The limitation of the width of the central zone of decoration in the side aisles of the naos, as opposed to those of the Bema, may attest to an effort to avoid hiding these panels through the placement of stalls, something that would not have occurred during the Byzantine period. Furthermore, there is no construction evidence to indicate that the pavement preceded the building of the church. The octagonal built piers of the actual building show no indication of having tampered with a pre-existing pavement (Fig. 11). Of course, this argument does not entirely preclude such a possibility, since the piers could have taken the exact place of the previous ones. In that case, the destroyed church would have been of the cross-in-square type, like the existing one. However, the actual pavement’s design tends to reflect a basilica plan, which perhaps demonstrates the craftsmen’s experience with Post-Byzantine spatial arrangements. Byzantine pavements normally display a clearer correspondence to their superstructures, and a hypothetical earlier basilica would have left traces of the positions of additional columns on its pavement.

In conclusion, any attempt to resort to iconographic and technical comparisons to otherwise dissimilar Middle
Byzantine pavements or their contemporaries in Romanesque Italy to conclude that the subject is Late Byzantine suffers due to the tendency to regard medieval floors as an integral unity independent of their geographic and chronological parameters. Apart from the stylistic differences mentioned above, a pavement of such uniformity in design and execution would be highly unexpected in the 13th-century Peloponnese, and even more so in the 14th century. A Late Byzantine pavement would normally include elements absent from Mega Spelaion, including polychromy, a variety of motifs (including combinations of *crustae* of different sizes, e.g. among intersecting quatrefoils or variations of chessboard patterns), an eclectic spirit in the mix of forms and techniques, and a willingness to present interlacing circles, despite a decline in the accuracy of execution, as we see in the churches of Mystra and the Despotate of Epirus. Therefore, the quality expressed in the accurate execution of a rich but simple design should not be confused with the well-known exquisiteness of Middle Byzantine works and lead to an early dating, trying to approach that period of acme; on the contrary, it points to a later (Post-Byzantine) one.

Thus, given that the pavement of a church dated to ca. 1641 presents a plethora of features befitting the 17th and, perhaps even more so, the 18th century, in order to prove that it is an earlier work, it would take more compelling evidence than general technical similarities, which pertain to a very wide range of this kind of work, and iconographic comparisons with examples indiscreetly chosen from a broad span of historic periods, styles, and geographic regions, even from beyond the limits of the Empire. The comparison to Late Byzantine examples in Greece and Asia Minor provides some similarities only in terms of repertoire, whereas references become far more lucid and numerous when the pavement is examined within the artistic context of the Ottoman period. In any case, what must not be overlooked is the fact that the pavement of the Mega Spelaion katholikon is an outstanding work, and its dating to the period of Ottoman rule by no means reduces its value. On the contrary, it reveals a creative tendency in the art of Greece at the time and may possibly attest to a conscious ideology of national aspirations in a monastery that was to become one of the cradles of the struggle for Greek independence.

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67 Ibid., 108-120.
68 For an attempt to approach local trends, see Pinatsi, “Regional Trends and International Exchange,” op.cit. (n. 44), 101-117.
69 The Late Byzantine pavement of the Vlatadon monastery chapel is also not offered for comparison, since that too has been constructed of *crustae* in second use from an Early Christian pavement or wall revetment [see E. Chotzakoglou, “Τὸ μαρμαροθετημένο δάπεδο τοῦ νότιο παρεκκλήσιο τοῦ καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Βλατάδων,” *Κληρονομία* 14 (1982), 375-406, 381-387].
70 Of course the Mega Spelaion work is nowhere near the superb quality of Middle Byzantine *opus sectile*, and therefore an even earlier date is excluded.
71 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 107-110.
72 Ibid., 108-116, 120, 130. The typological similarity with Monte Cassino, an 11th century pavement, derives rather coincidentally from the similar process of their composition: the integration of a Byzantine technique, on the one hand, in the Monte Cassino basilica, where it is introduced to serve a general layout from the local tradition, which is considered, in point of fact, as the major difference with Byzantine works themselves, and on the other hand, in Mega Spelaion, to serve a new tendency in design, has led to analogous results in terms of their general plan.

**Illustration Credits**
Figs 1-11: Ch. Pinatsi.

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Fig. 11. Mega Spelaion, katholikon. A star incrustation on a marble slab. The relation of the pavement to the pier is noted.
Χριστίνα Πινάτση

Η ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΜΑΡΜΑΡΟΘΕΤΗΜΕΝΟΥ ΔΑΠΕΔΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΣΠΗΛΑΙΟΥ

Το καθολικό της μονής Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου, κοντά στα Καλάβρυτα, έχει υποστεί πολλοκαταστροφές και αντίστοιχες διαδικασίες ανακαινισμού. Το σημερινό καθολικό χρονολογείται αμέσως μετά το 1641. Σχετικά προβλήματα υποστηρίζεται ότι το δάπεδο του είναι περισσότερο έρημο. Ωστόσο, η μορφή του δαπέδου δεν πείθει για μια βυζαντινή χρονολογία. Συγκεκριμένα, η απόλυτη συμμετρία και ο σχεδιασμός δεν προσδιάζει στη μεσαιωνική τέχνη, που επιχειρεί την ποικιλία, αλλά μάλλον σε μια εποχή στην αυτή της Αναγέννησης, που έχει επαναφέρει στο προσκήνιο το ρόλο της παιδείας στο σχεδιασμό. Η επανάληψη μάλιστα του ίδιου θέματος στα μαρμαροθετήματα είναι στοιχείο που δεν απαντά σε κανένα βυζαντινό δάπεδο, όπου επιχειρείται η διαφοροποίηση των θεμάτων, έστω με παραλλαγές. Το γέμισμα του φόντου με μαρμαροθέτημα αποτελεί στοιχείο που δεν χαρακτηρίζει τη βυζαντινή τέχνη, και μάλιστα αποτελεί την αισθητική διάφορη ανάμεσα στα μαρμαροθετήματα, τα υπόγεια-βυζαντινά δάπεδα με τα σύγχρονα τους εσωτερικά και τα παλαιοχριστιανικά.

Παράλληλα, αποναυσώντας στο Μέγα Σπήλαιο η πολέμικη στρατιωτική κίνηση και εν γένει ταινιομορφία, που χαρακτηρίζει τα βυζαντινά ωμέλεια, καθός και άλλα, άσκηση και απλά θέματα που συνιστά στα βυζαντινά δάπεδα. Αντιθέτως, η ενθάρρυνση των προσωπικών διατάξεων της εποχής της ιθαρικής περιόδου με τεχνοτροπική ακρίβεια της εναρμονικής τέχνης. Αυτό δεν προθετάσει την καθολική μορφή του, αλλά παραδείγματα που έχουν χαρακτεριστεί από το δάπεδο του Μεγάλου Σπήλανο έχουν χαρακτηριστεί από τον Μ. Αρχιτέκτων με δύο βέλη, στρατιωτικής μορφής και πιθανότατα σημαίνει μια εν αντιθέσει με την εποχή. Το δάπεδο του Καθολικού Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου, που εμπεριέχει εναρμονικής τέχνης, ακόμη και απλά θέματα που συνιστά στα Μεσοβυζαντινά δάπεδα και την εποχή της Τουρκοκρατίας.

Συγκεκριμένα, τα αναπαραστάτες τους που έχουν χαρακτηριστεί από το δάπεδο του Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου, ιδιαίτερα με δύο βέλη, στρατιωτικής μορφής και πιθανότατα σημαίνει μια εναρμονικής τέχνης, ακόμη και απλά θέματα που συνιστά στα Μεσοβυζαντινά δάπεδα και την εποχή της Τουρκοκρατίας.

ΔΑΣΕ ΕΛ (2014), 65-76

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