Η χρονολόγηση του μαρμαροθετημένου δάπεδου του καθολικού της μονής Μεγάλου Σπηλαίου

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

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.

**Keywords**

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

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...
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 Κηπτικὸς 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...
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

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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 bitalon 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. Konstos, Έρευνες στη Μονή Λουκους, 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 and the form of the crustae also remind the opus sectile panels in Topkapı palace, as in the portico of Ahmed III’s library.
8 A. Orlandos, “Ἡ Μονὴ Λουκοῦ,” Ημερολόγιον Μεγάλης Ἑλλάδος 3 (1924), 419-433. In a more recent article, it has been suggested that the Loukou pavement also belongs to an earlier Byzantine construction phase [G. Poulimenos, “Τὸ καθολικὸ τῆς Μονῆς Λουκοῦς,” Πελοποννησιακὰ 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.\(^{10}\)

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\(^{11}\) (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).

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\(^{11}\) 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, *Ἡ Ελλαδική 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, since the cypress, especially in the particular stylized form it displays here (Fig. 2), appears more generally in the art of the Ottoman period. There is even an example on the foundation of the monastery itself (Fig. 4).
- Even though double-headed eagles made their appearance from the Late Byzantine period (though from examples of pavements cited, at the Vlacherna of Arta we do not actually have the eagle’s head, so it could well be one-headed, while at the Metropolis of Mystra the slab bearing the double-headed eagle was set later, during the period of Ottoman rule), they appear mostly in the form of relief slabs in pavements dated to the Ottoman period (the Loukou monastery, incorporation of the eagle slab at Hagios Demetrios of Mystra, the Prophet Elijah of Siatista, the Three Hierarchs, and the Hypapante, of the monastery itself (Fig. 4). These examples belong mostly to the 18th century; however, Prof. Bouras notes that cypresses are among the Ottoman features of the previous two centuries that continued in use. A similar form is found on the Chnialis fountain in Herakleion, Crete (E. Kanaki, "Κρητική Χώρα," H Οθωμανική Αρχιτεκτονική στην Ελλάδα, Ministry of Culture, ABMA, 2008, 409) and on the pavement slab at Panaghia ta Gournia church on Sifnos (S. Tzakou, “Παναγία τά Γουρνιά στή Σίφνο,” Eikelizes Ι, 55-66, figs 6, 9, 10, 11).

Examples in C. Bouras, "Διακοσμήσεις Οθωμανού Μπαρόκ στο Άγιον," Eikelizes 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, "Δέντρα με μομογολπυτική τού Άγιον 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 that cypresses are among the Ottoman features of the previous two centuries that continued in use. A similar form is found on the Chnialis fountain in Herakleion, Crete (E. Kanaki, "Κρητική Χώρα," H Οθωμανική Αρχιτεκτονική στην Ελλάδα, Ministry of Culture, ABMA, 2008, 409) and on the pavement slab at Panaghia ta Gournia church on Sifnos (S. Tzakou, “Παναγία τά Γουρνιά στή Σίφνο,” Eikelizes Ι, 55-66, fig. 8). On this topic, see also G. Marinou, "Ἡ παρὰ τὴν Ἀρτα Μονὴ τῶν Βλαχερνῶν," Μούσειο Μπενάκη, ΑΒΜΕ Β΄ (1936), 3-50, fig. 25.

16 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 112-113.
17 A. Orlandos, "Ἡ παρὰ τὴν Ἅρτα Μονὴ τῶν Βλαχερνῶν," ΑΒΜΕ Β΄ (1936), 3-50, fig. 25.
18 G. Marinou, Ἀγίας Μονής, Ἡ Μητρόπολη τοῦ Μυστρᾶ, Athens 2002, 77, including relevant bibliography.
19 Orlandos, "Ἡ Μονὴ Λουκοῦς," op.cit. (n. 8), 419-433.
20 Marinou, op.cit. (n. 18), 77.
21 K. Theocharidou, "Ὁ Προφήτης Ἡλίας τῆς Σιάτιστας," Εικελίσεις Ι, 55-66, figs 6, 9, 10, 11.
23 Ead., "Ἡ ἐκκλησία τῆς Ὑπαπαντῆς στῆν Σίφνο," Εικελίσεις ΙΙ, 225-236, figs 11, 12.
24 Tzakou, op.cit. (n. 14), 215, fig. 8.
26 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 Τριὰς τοῦ Κριεζώτη," ΑΒΜΕ Ε’ (1939-1940), 3-16), and on a slab of the marble screen at Hagia Theodora at Arta (B. Papadopoulou, "Τὸ βυζαντινό τέμπλο τῆς Άγιας Θεοδώρας στήν Αρτά," ΑΒΜΕ ΚΘ΄ (2008), 233-46. See also p. 19 above. 

Fig. 5. Mega Spelaion, katholikon. A double-headed eagle motif on the pavement.
The four relief rosettes (Figs 6-7) adorning the corners of the easternmost panels of the naos, 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. The incorporation of reliefs other than champlevé - incrustation reliefs is very unusual in Byzantine pavements, whereas it became fairly common in Post-Byzantine times. 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, but the pieces in Mega Spelaion do not seem to be spolia, since this element enjoyed a revival in the Ottoman decorative arts during the 16th and 17th centuries (as did comparable capitals with reed leaves), expressing the period's tendency towards rich floral ornamentation, and adorning as a leitmotiv Ottoman mosques, mihrabs, and fountains from the time of Sinan. In Greece they often appear in stone-carved works of the Ottoman period (fountains, baths, etc.).

27 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 105.
28 For reference to the motif and its diffusion in Post-Byzantine architecture in Greece see C. Bouras, “Τὸ καθολικὸ τῆς μονῆς τῆς Μαλεσίνας στήν Λοκρίδα,” Ἐκκλησίες IV, 135, 138, fig. 8. Further examples in D. Liakos, Τα λιθανάγλυφα του Αγίου Όρους (doctoral thesis), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 2000, figs 158, 159, 197. For additional examples see also infra, nn. 35-36.
29 Floral relief slabs are prominently incorporated in the Post-Byzantine pavement at the entrance to the katholikon of Loukou monastery (see supra, n. 9). For the incorporation of Post-Byzantine relief slabs within the pavements of the katholika of Mount Athos, see Liakos, op.cit. (n. 28), 42-43, figs 129-132, where some additional instances of the double-headed eagle motif are presented. Examples in Scripou (M. Sotiriou, “Ὁ ναὸς τῆς Σκριποῦς τῆς Βοιωτίας,” ΑΕ 1931, fig. 19) and on the bottom face of an epistyle from Corinth (R. L. Scranton, Medieval Architecture, Corinth XVI, Princeton 1957, pl. 33, no. 157), which was recently dated to the 8th-9th century [D. Athanasoulis – G. Velenis, "Συμπαραμορφώσεις επιγραφών Κορίνθου," 33ο Συμπόσιο ΧΑΕ (2013), 17-18].
30 Even if the rosettes were Byzantine works, this would not indicate a Late Byzantine dating rather than a Post-Byzantine one for the pavement, since either way the motif should be attributed to much earlier times and considered as spolia.
33 See for instance the Sokullu mosque (Cadirga) and Suleyman’s Mausoleum in R. Günay, Sinan, the Architect and his Works, Istanbul 1998, 95 and 153, respectively. Examples on stone-carved fountains and mihrabs in G. Goodwin, A History of Ottoman Architecture, Baltimore 1971, figs 228, 387, 390. Rosettes of simpler form appear in earlier Islamic art, but the richly ornamental and composite form of a more naturalistic flower is characteristic of Ottoman art from the 16th century onwards [Ballian - Moraitou - Sardi, op.cit. (n. 33), 154]. Other examples, almost identical to the Mega Spelaion rosettes, are found in Ahmed III’s fountain near Topkapi palace in Constantinople, and at the wall fountain just inside of the second courtyard main gate (Bab-üs Selam or Orta Kapı) at Topkapi palace (Fig. 8).
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,37 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.

- Stars, suns, and the like also appeared in Late Byzantine pavements, but with a totally different style.38 Besides, they are the rule in the decorative trends of Post-Byzantine church pavements (church of the Nativity of the Virgin at Gortosouli, Mantinea,39 Pr. Elijah in Statista,40 and most of the Post-Byzantine Athonite katholika).41

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,35 dating between the 16th and 17th centuries,36 and in stone pavements, but with a totally different style.38 Besides, they are the rule in the decorative trends of Post-Byzantine church pavements (church of the Nativity of the Virgin at Gortosouli, Mantinea,39 Pr. Elijah in Statista,40 and most of the Post-Byzantine Athonite katholika).41

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in Greece. Two slabs on the façade of the later church of Hagios Georgios in Solos near Kalavryta\(^{42}\) 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.

\(^{42}\) A. Agoropoulou-Birbili, “Η εκκλησία του Αγ. Γεωργίου στον Σόλο Καλαβρύτων,” Εκκλησίες VI, 2002, 111-126, fig. 19.

\(^{43}\) Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 103-104, 113.


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. 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 painting 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

46 This is the subject of the author’s doctoral research, currently being carried out at the National Technical University of Athens.

47 The Virgin’s heart in particular is portrayed as pierced by one or seven lances, recalling Symeon’s prophecy: “καὶ σῶτον ἐκ εὐλογίας τῆς
ψυχῆς βαλείσθηνε φωνή” (‘Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine soul also’) (Luke 2.35).

48 Cf. from the Greek region the 18th century blazon of the Minorities order on Times (A. Florakis, “Μοιχήματα ουσίων στην Τήνο,” Δελτίον Εραλδικής και Γενεαλογικής Εταιρείας Ελλάδος 3 (1982), 37-73, fig. 32).


47 Hearts combined with two intersecting swords – 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.57
From the 17th century onward, such parallels became more frequent, assuming either an inspirational-national character, as after the death of Michael Gennaios, who rebelled against the Turks at the end of the 16th century,58 or the form of a summons to the Tsar and other Orthodox rulers, who were paralleled to Alexander, to liberate the Greeks from the “tyrant.”59 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 immortality60 can be interpreted as a substitute for the immortality of the nation (something expressed in Modern Greek literature).61 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.”62 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.63 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.64 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 *Fyllada tou Megalexandrou* (1680), a printed pamphlet that became very popular during the 17th century, when the opposition provoked her anger.

54 Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), νη΄-ξδ΄.
55 Minaoglou, op.cit. (n. 57), 78; Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), ξ.
56 Minaoglou, op.cit. (n. 57), 82-83; Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), υθ΄, ξ.
57 Her question to the sailors “Does King Alexander live?” anticipated a positive response for her to appease the waves; a negative response provoked her anger.
58 Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), νη΄-ζδ΄.
59 Politis, “Νεοελληνικὴ Μυθολογία,” op.cit. (n. 51), 261.
62 Politis, Ιστορίες της φαντασίας του αρχοντικού, Athens 1978, 40.
63 Chotzakoglou, op.cit. (n. 1), 131.

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,65 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

58 Minaoglou, op.cit. (n. 57), 78; Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), ξ.
59 Minaoglou, op.cit. (n. 57), 82-83; Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), υθ΄, ξ.
60 Her question to the sailors “Does King Alexander live?” anticipated a positive response for her to appease the waves; a negative response provoked her anger.
61 Veloudis, op.cit. (n. 57), νη΄-ζδ΄.
62 Politis, “Νεοελληνικὴ Μυθολογία,” op.cit. (n. 51), 261.
63 Cf. figures of Samson in medieval pavements or other mythical heroes on textiles, mentioned in the epic poem of Digenes Acritas (see R. Ousterhout, “Architecture, Art and Komnenian Ideology at
Byzantine pavements or their contemporaries in Romanesque Italy67 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.68 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 normally69 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 works70 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,71 and iconographic comparisons with examples indirectly chosen from a broad span of historic periods, styles, and geographic regions, even from beyond the limits of the Empire.72 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.73

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

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Figs 1-11: Ch. Pinatsi.
Η ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΗΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΜΑΡΜΑΡΟΘΕΤΗΜΕΝΟΥ ΔΑΠΕΔΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΣΠΙΛΑΙΟΥ

Το καθολικό της μονής Μεγάλου Σπιλαίου, κοντά στα Καλάβρυτα, έχει υποστεί πολλαπλές καταστροφές και αντίστοιχες διαδικασίες ανακατασκευής. Η σημερινή καθολικό τροιχογλυπτική αμφίβλητη αισθητική χαρακτηρίζεται αμέσως μετά το 1641. Σχετικά προσαρμογές υποστηρίζουν ότι το δάπεδο του είναι παλαιόλογο έργο. Ωστόσο, η μορφή του δαπέδου δεν πείθει για μια βυζαντινή χρονολόγηση. Στη συνέχεια, η απόλυτη συμπεριφορά και ο σχεδιασμός δεν προσδιορίζεται στη μεσαιωνική τέχνη, που επικεντρώνεται όλο το ρόλο της πειθαρχίας στο σχεδιασμό. Η επανάληψη κάλυπτε τον ιδιωτικό θέματος στα μαρμαροθέτημα είναι στοιχείο που δεν εμφανίζεται στο στάδιο που δεν χαρακτηρίζεται τη βυζαντινή τέχνη, και μάλιστα αποτελεί την ουσιόδοξη διαφορά ανάμεσα στα μεσαία υπερ-βυζαντινά δάπεδα με τις υψηλότερες τους σκοπιμότητες και τα παλαιολογιστικά.

Παράλληλα, παρατηρούντας στο Μέγα Σπίλο η πολύτελη συμπλόκη κτισμάτων και εν γένει ταινιών μαρμάρου, που χαρακτηρίζεται τα βυζαντινά ομάδες, καθώς και άλλες, ακόμη και ακτιβά θέματα που συνηθίζονται στα βυζαντινά δάπεδα. Αντιθέτως, η ένταση μορφών προσοφόρων της τέχνης της ισθομανικής εποχής και την περιγραφή των συγχρόνων τους αποτελεί στοιχεία που δεν χαρακτηρίζεται τη βυζαντινή τέχνη, και μάλιστα αποτελεί τον ουσιώδη διαφορά ανάμεσα στα μεσαία υπερ-βυζαντινά δάπεδα με τις υψηλότερες τους σκοπιμότητες και τα παλαιολογιστικά.

Παράλληλα, παρατηρούντας στον καθολικό του Μεγάλου Σπιλαίου έργο ενδείκνυται πιθανή συσχέτιση με στην Αναγέννηση, καθώς και στην εποχή της Ανεξαρτησίας. Ανεξαρτήτως γεωγραφικών και χρονολογικών παραμέτρων. Το δάπεδο του καθολικού της μονής Μεγάλου Σπιλαίου, που εμφανίζει εναρκτικές μορφές που συνηθίζονται στη μεταβυζαντινή περίοδο, καθώς και μεταβυζαντινής πολυπληθείς αναφορές, όταν ενταχθεί στην εποχή της Ανεξαρτησίας, καθώς και στην εποχή της Αναγέννησης, καθώς και στην εποχή της Αναγέννησης. Ανεξαρτήτως γεωγραφικών και χρονολογικών παραμέτρων, η διάδοση ουσιώδης διαφορά ανάμεσα στα μεσαία υπερ-βυζαντινά δάπεδα με τις υψηλότερες τους σκοπιμότητες και τα παλαιολογιστικά.