

## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 13 (2016)



### "Pittura Romeica" in Italy: Artistic transfers across the Adriatic sea (18th - 19th centuries)

*Eugenia Drakopoulou*

doi: [10.12681/hr.11553](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.11553)

Copyright © 2017, Eugenia Drakopoulou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Drakopoulou, E. (2017). "Pittura Romeica" in Italy: Artistic transfers across the Adriatic sea (18th - 19th centuries). *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 13, 7-28. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.11553>

## Articles

### “PITTURA ROMEICA” IN ITALY: ARTISTIC TRANSFERS ACROSS THE ADRIATIC SEA (18th – 19th Centuries)\*

*Eugenia Drakopoulou*

---

**ABSTRACT:** The complex historical reality of the Adriatic region, an area located even today on the borderline between East and West, is reflected in the works of religious painting and in the painters' geographical movements. The art of Orthodox regions was mainly influenced by Venice, but also by the rest of Italy, and, as a result, a unique art emerged in the Ionian Islands, which remained under Venetian control until the end of the eighteenth century. In the course of the eighteenth century, political and economic conditions contributed to the growth of the Orthodox communities in Italy. Their members were interested in the art of the country where they lived and prospered, but they simultaneously wished to preserve the “pittura romeica” in the decorations of churches and in the icons used for their personal worship. From Naples to the cosmopolitan Trieste, Orthodox painters, coming mainly from the Ionian Islands, produced artworks which were adapted to the new surroundings, thereby making the Adriatic region once again a privileged area for cultural exchanges.

---

The Palazzo Loredan, the residence of the Saxon general of the Venetian mercenary army Matthias von Schulenburg, who liberated Corfu during the siege of the Ottomans in 1716 and who was also a patron of the arts,<sup>1</sup> is located in Venice, on the Grand Canal, the most beautiful “street” in the world. In his close circle there was a young Greek painter, Nikolaos Doxaras, who came originally from the Peloponnese and joined the Venetian mercenary army under Schulenburg's orders. Doxaras was responsible for purchasing works of art and also for the set-up of Schulenburg's art gallery, which included works by Caravaggio, Correggio, Giorgione and Giulio Romano, among others. For a decade or so (1728-1738), Doxaras lived in Venice, painted *vedute* of Corfu and portraits of members of the general's

---

\* This study emerged in response to an invitation from the Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Atene to present a paper to the Cultural Events programme organized in December 2013 under the title “Greek Painters in Italy – Italian Painters in Greece (16th-19th century)”.

<sup>1</sup> Alice Binion, *La Galleria scomparsa del maresciallo von der Schulenburg. Un mecenate nella Venezia del Settecento*, Milan 1990; H. Krellig, *Feldmarschall und Kunstsamler Matthias von der Schulenburg (1661-1747). Ein unbekannter Bestand von Kunstwerken aus seiner Sammlung im Besitz der Grafen von der Schulenburg-Wolfsburg*, Wolfsburg 2011.

environment, among other works, and was also in charge of the general's art collection. When he returned to Greece, he introduced to the Ionian Islands the Italian art of the Baroque.<sup>2</sup>

Nikolaos Doxaras is only one among a large number of known artists who, originating from Italy, ventured into the arts of the Greek region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The cultural exchanges at the time took place in the area located, from the time of the foundation of the city of Adria in the delta of the Po River until today, on the borderline of East and West. In the gulf of the Adriatic Sea, the Straits of Otranto leave a wide passage, so that the communication with the Ionian Sea is unproblematic. Also, the destiny of the Ionian Sea is closely linked to that of the Adriatic Sea. Looking to the south and towards Corfu, there is an island which for centuries played the role of the guard of the Adriatic Sea. Although it has been said that the history of the Adriatic Sea developed from north to south, something which is, of course, true, especially for Venice, there are nonetheless those who came from the south, the Mediterranean Sea, a key location of which was Corfu, the island about which the Venetian Senate declared in 1500 that it was the "heart" of the whole Venetian state "as far as shipping is concerned but in all other respects too".<sup>4</sup>

Thus, a long tradition of cultural exchanges between the Ionian Sea and the Adriatic Sea, whereby Venice and Corfu had the dominant roles (fig. 1),<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Binion, *La Galleria scomparsa*, pp. 36, 136-161; M. Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek painters after the Fall (1450-1830)], Vol. I, Athens 1987, pp. 278-279; Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek painters after the Fall (1450-1830)], Vol. III, Athens 2010, pp. 270-272.

<sup>3</sup> S. Bettini, *Il pittore Panagioti Doxarà fondatore della pittura greca moderna*, Venice 1942; Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. I, pp. 125-129; Chiara Augliera, "Panagiotis Doxarás, artista di frontiera nel Settecento eptanesio tra 'la divota maniera greca' e le 'ricche minere' veneziane", *Studi Veneziani* XLIV (2002), pp. 91-128; A. Charalampidis, "Η τέχνη στα Επτάνησα. Δημιουργοί και μελετητές" [Art in the Ionian Islands: Painters and scholars], in E. D. Mathiopoulos and N. Chatzinikolaou (eds), *Η Ιστορία της Τέχνης στην Ελλάδα* [Art History in Greece], Heraklion 2003, pp. 9-50.

<sup>4</sup> P. Cabanes et al., *Histoire de l'Adriatique*, Paris 2001, p. 14. For the cultural exchanges across the Adriatic Sea, see E. Concina, Giordana Trovabene and Michela Agazzi (eds), *Hadriatica. Attorno a Venezia e al Medioevo tra arti, storia e storiografia. Scritti in onore di Wladimiro Dorigo*, Padua 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See S. T. Chondrogiannis, *The Antivouniotissa Museum, Corfu*, Thessaloniki 2010; P. Ioannou, "Arte Veneta nelle Isole Ionie. Documenti e congettture", in Chryssa Maltezou, Angeliki Tzavara and Despina Vlassi (eds), *I Greci durante la venetocrazia. Uomini, spazio, idee (XIII-XVIII sec.)*, Atti di Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Venice 2009, pp. 765-771.



Fig. 1. *The Holy Trinity*, eighteenth century, The Antivouniotissa Museum, Corfu.



a Greek-Italian culture and an artistic tradition of Orthodox painters that was already shaped in the Ionian Islands would travel, in reverse motion, from the Ionian Sea to Italy in order to coexist there with Italian painters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During that period, new horizons opened up in Italian cities for the residents of the Ionian Islands. While France, England and Austria were rearranging the European territory, Venice, which had lost its maritime sovereignty (*dominium maris*) in the Adriatic Sea since the seventeenth century, was involved in an endless and heroic battle against the Ottoman Empire until the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1716, the Ottomans were preparing to invade Corfu, after the Venetians had lost the entire Peloponnese in 1715. At that time, a new alliance was made between Venice and the Austrians, who were afraid that the fall of Corfu might make it easier for the Ottomans to land in southern Italy.<sup>6</sup> The capable Saxon veteran Schulenburg, who, as mentioned earlier, contributed to the formation of the artistic personality of Nikolaos Doxaras, arrived on Corfu and pushed back the Ottomans, according to the orders of the Venetian Senate. The painter Ventouras Seremetis of Tzouane<sup>7</sup> came from the same island, that advanced military outpost, the ultimate passage to the Adriatic Sea; in 1748, the Greek community of Venice assigned to him the cleaning and overpainting of all the icons of the church as well as the restoration of the wall paintings of the dome of St George.<sup>8</sup> In that period, the once flourishing Greek community of Venice, the city that was *par excellence* the place of osmosis between Byzantine-Orthodox and Western art already from the era of the Crusades, was shrinking dramatically and received its definitive blow with the conquest of Venice by Napoleon in 1797.<sup>9</sup> However, the choice of a painter from Corfu in the middle of the eighteenth century cannot be regarded as random if we take into account that 40% of the members of the Greek community of Venice at the end of the same century originated in the Ionian Islands and that 80% of them came from Corfu.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cabanes *et al.*, *Histoire de l'Adriatique*, pp. 480-482.

<sup>7</sup> Ventura Seremeti di Corfu, *pittor*; see Ourania Karagianni, "Contratti per lavori di restauro nel Campo dei Greci durante la seconda metà del XVIII secolo", *Θησαυρίσματα* 30 (2000), p. 429.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 437, 449-450.

<sup>9</sup> F. Mavroidi, *Συμβολή στην Ιστορία της Ελληνικής Αδελφότητας της Βενετίας στον ΙΣΤ' αιώνα* [Contribution to the history of the Greek Confraternity in Venice in the sixteenth century] Athens 1976; M. Manoussacas, "An Outline of the History of the Greek Confraternity in Venice, 1498-1953", *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 5 (1989), pp. 321-333; Chryssa Maltezou, *Η Βενετία των Ελλήνων* [The Venice of the Greeks], Athens 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, *Η Ελληνική Κοινότητα της Βενετίας (1797-1866). Διοικητική και οικονομική οργάνωση. Εκπαιδευτική και πολιτική δραστηριότητα*

At this point a key issue arises, which is related to the artistic choices of the Orthodox Greeks who lived and prospered in the Italian cities,<sup>11</sup> in a purely Catholic environment, choices that were not in agreement with their degree of familiarity with Italian artistic ways, especially if they came from Crete or the Ionian Islands. It would be very interesting to study in detail the degree to which their undoubted bonds with the Orthodox liturgy and the artistic tradition, as well as their will to introduce the "pittura greca" to the interior decoration of churches, were influenced and formed by the artistic environment of Italy. Beginning with Venice and, in particular, with the Late Renaissance church of St George of the Greeks (fig. 2),<sup>12</sup> built by the famous Italian architect of Santa Maria della Salute, Baldassare Longhena,<sup>13</sup> it is important to stress that from Naples to Trieste the choices of the architectural type and the exterior decoration of the churches – as we will see later – absolutely conformed to the contemporary dominant architectural style of the Italian cities. The choices of the painters and their art became an issue only with respect to the interior decoration, where the icons were directly associated with dogma and worship.



Fig. 2. St George of the Greeks, Venice.

[The Greek Confraternity in Venice (1797-1866): Administrative and economic organization: Educational and political activity], doctoral thesis, Thessaloniki 1978, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Manoussakas, "Le grandi Comunità Elleniche in Italia (1453-1821)", in Caterina Spetsieri Beschi and Enrica Lucarelli (eds), *Risorgimento greco e filellenismo italiano. Lotte, cultura, arte*, exhibition catalogue, Rome 1986, pp. 43-48.

<sup>12</sup> E. Concina, *Le chiese di Venezia. L'arte e la storia*, Udine 1995, pp. 99-100; M. I. Manoussakas, *Τα κυριότερα έγγραφα (1536-1599) για την οικοδομή και τη διακόσμηση του Αγίου Γεωργίου των Ελλήνων της Βενετίας, "Εις μνήμην Παναγιώτου Α. Μιχαήλ"* [The significant documents (1536-1599) about the building and decoration of St George of the Greeks in Venice, "In memory of Panagiotis A. Michelis"], Athens 1971, pp. 335-355.

<sup>13</sup> G. Romanelli (ed.), *Venice: Art and Architecture*, Cologne 2005, pp. 406-423.

In written testimonies from the sixteenth century onwards, we come across the constant concern of the Greeks of the community of Venice about the maintenance of the “divota maniera greca”<sup>14</sup> by the painters who undertook the decoration of the church of St George with icons, wall paintings or mosaics, but also their ambivalent attitude. It is worth mentioning that in 1598, in a contest between two Greek “professori di pittura greca” and one Venetian painter, the famous Giacomo Palma, with respect to the mosaic with a depiction of Christ which would decorate the niche of the sanctuary, Giacomo Palma and his manneristic Christ, with the playful small cherubim, received one third of the votes of the representatives of the Greek community.<sup>15</sup> Also, in 1664, when the Cypriot Bernard Akris offered money for the mosaic of the Transformation asking for “una pitura in greco”, the artistic result of the Italian mosaicists was merely an adaptation of a Byzantine model to the Italian painting style.<sup>16</sup>

The choice in 1748 of the above-mentioned Ventouras Seremetis from Corfu, someone unknown from other sources or works, was followed approximately a century later, in 1853, by that of Sebastiano Santi, an accomplished Venetian painter. Santi repainted the 16 prophets of the dome – first painted by Ioannis Kyprios in 1590 under the supervision of Tintoretto – changing the style closer to Italian painting (figs 3, 4).<sup>17</sup> Santi intervened also in the depictions of the sanctuary of St George, painted by the famous Cretan painter Michael Damaskenos (1579), according to the aesthetics of his era, adding also two hierarchs, St Nicholas and St Spyridon, to the original ensemble of the Three Hierarchs and St Athanasios painted by Damaskenos. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was no objection to the alteration of the initial style of the Cretan painter. Moreover, as demonstrated by the Hellenization of the name of the Italian painter in the inscription, the alteration was regarded as an act of renovating the initial painting of the sanctuary, which, as is stressed, respected the style of the original: ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΔΑΜΑΣΚΗΝΟΣ ΚΡΗΣ / ΤΗΝ ΚΟΓΧΗΝ ΕΖΩΓΡΑΦΗΣΕΝ / ΕΝ ΕΤΕΙ ΑΦΘΘ’ / ΚΑΤΑ ΔΕ ΤΟΝ ΤΥΠΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΠΡΩΗΝ / ΑΝΕΚΑΙΝΙΣΕ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΙΑΝΟΣ ΣΑΝΤΗΣ / ΤΩ ΑΩΝΙ [Michael Damaskenos painted the niche of the sanctuary in 1579; the

<sup>14</sup> M. Chatzidakis, “Το έργο του Θωμά Μπαθά και η divota maniera greca” [The work of Thomas Bathas and “la divota maniera greca”], *Θησαυρίσματα* 14 (1977), pp. 239-250.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248-249, pl. KB’.

<sup>16</sup> A. Paliouras, “Η εικονογράφησης του τρούλλου του Αγίου Γεωργίου Βενετίας” [The iconography of the dome of St George of the Greeks in Venice] *Θησαυρίσματα* 8 (1971), pp. 166-171, pl. IE’.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-66, 78-79, pls Θ’, II’2.





Fig. 3. The apostles painted by Ioannis Kyprios, 1590, St George of the Greeks, Venice.



Fig. 4. The prophets repainted by Sebastiano Santi, 1853, St George of the Greeks, Venice.



Fig. 5. Sts Peter and Paul, Naples.

niche was renovated by Sevastianos Santis in 1853 according to the model of the previous artistic style].<sup>18</sup>

While Hellenism was shrinking in the Venetian community, in other communities such as Naples, Lecce, Barletta, Ancona, Livorno but also in Trieste in the north, it was flourishing, taking advantage of the sea routes and the increasingly diminishing power of the Ottomans in the Mediterranean. The immigrants from the Peloponnese and the Ionian Islands and simultaneously the active merchants from Epirus were looking for painters for the renovation or redecoration of older or newly founded Orthodox churches.

In Naples, the roots of the Greek community can be traced back to the fifteenth century, in the first years after the Fall of Constantinople.<sup>19</sup> The small church dedicated to Sts Peter and Paul was founded in 1518 and was rebuilt in 1617. The elegant Baroque exterior façade of the basilica (fig. 5) conforms to the architectural style that was dominant in Naples at the beginning of the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> The interior wall painting decoration was assigned by

<sup>18</sup> See I. Veloudou, *Ἑλλήνων ὀρθοδόξων ἀποικία ἐν Βενετίᾳ. Ἱστορικὸν ὑπόμνημα* [The Greek Orthodox colony in Venice: Historical statement], Venice <sup>2</sup>1893, pp. 48-49; M. Chatzidakis, *Icones de Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la collection de l'Institut*, Venice 1962, p. 69; Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, "Ἔργα του Μιχαὴλ Δαμασκηνοῦ στο ἱερό του Ἀγίου Γεωργίου Βενετίας. Ἐξόδα καὶ ἀμοιβή (ἀνέκδοτα ἐγγράφα, 1577-1579)" [Works by Michael Damaskenos in the sanctuary of the church of St George in Venice: Expenses and remuneration (unpublished documents, 1577-1579)], *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Εταιρείας* 27 (2006), p. 506. See also Maria Constantoudaki, "Le icone e l'arte dei pittori greci a Venezia. Maestri in rapporto con la Confraternità greca", in Maria Francesca Tiepolo and E. Tonetti (eds), *I Greci a Venezia. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio (Venezia 1998)*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice 2002, pp. 569-641.

<sup>19</sup> N. Katramis, *Ἡ ἐν Νεαπόλει ἐλληνικὴ ἐκκλησία* [The Greek Church in Naples], Zakynthos 1866; A. Rizzi, "Le icone postbizantine della Chiesa Greco-ortodossa dei SS. Pietro e Paolo in Napoli", *Θησαυρίσματα* 11 (1974), pp. 136-163; Efthalia Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi delle chiese greche in Italia*, Athens 2008, pp. 181-202; P. Ioannou, *Ο ζωγράφος Βελισάριος Κορένσιος* [The painter Belisario Corenzio], doctoral thesis, University of Crete, Rethymno 2003, pp. 61-66.

<sup>20</sup> V. Regina, *Le chiese di Napoli. Viaggio indimenticabile attraverso la storia artistica, architettonica, letteraria, civile e spirituale della Napoli sacra*, Rome 2015, *passim*.

the community to a man of Greek origin, educated in Venice and settled in Naples, a famous and productive painter during the period in question, Belisario Corenzio, whose style followed the Late Mannerism of Rome. Although Corenzio was Catholic and well-known for his Counter-Reformation iconography, it is important to emphasize that he was at the same time *economo*, *magistro* and *priore* of the Greek Confraternity, responsible for the celebration of the sacraments according to the Orthodox *Typicon*.<sup>21</sup> Both the building and the wall paintings of the church, which were unfortunately destroyed, show that the Greek community at the beginning of the seventeenth century did not seek to establish a difference between the Orthodox Church and the contemporary city churches in terms either of architecture or of painting.

During the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Greek community was reorganized, and their church was renovated. Although the Greeks of Naples under Spanish rule did not have the economic power of the Greeks of Venice or Trieste, the fact that the city was the capital of the Kingdom (of Naples first and of the two Sicilies later) means that the Neapolitan Greek community was privileged due to its significant contribution to the relations between Spain and the Ottoman Empire, both dominant powers in the Mediterranean area from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. During the latter period, mainly merchants from Epirus and the Ionian Islands were added to the community, whose members were mostly from the Peloponnese.<sup>22</sup> After the second half of the eighteenth century, the radical renovation of the church, which includes a large number of icons, was due to their financial power. A painter from Kefalonia, Eustathios Karousos, undertook the project and signed 11 out of approximately 40 icons in the church, dated between 1766 and 1791. Most of the icons by Karousos survive in Naples (fig. 6), and works of his still exist on Corfu



Fig. 6. Eustathios Karousos, *St Eleftherios* (detail), Sts Peter and Paul, Naples.

<sup>21</sup> P. Ioannou, *Belisario Corenzio. Η ζωή και το έργο του* [Belisario Corenzio: His life and work], Heraklion and Venice 2011, pp. 102-106, 425-427.

<sup>22</sup> See note 19 and also Angela Falcetta, *Ortodossi nel mediterraneo cattolico. Frontiere, reti, comunità, nel Regno di Napoli (1700-1821)*, Rome 2016.





Fig. 7. St Nicholas of the Greeks, Lecce.

present, the church of St Nicholas of the Greeks was built in 1765, thanks to contributions by Greek and Albanian merchants. It was built by architects from Lecce, Francesco Palma, Lazzaro Marsione, Lazzaro Lombardo and Vincenzo Carrozzo, who decorated the façade with simple and austere lines on the lower part, whereas decorative Baroque elements were dominant on the higher part (fig. 7).<sup>25</sup> The church was decorated with icons by its priest, Dimitrios Bogdanos from Corfu, who served the church of the Greek community from 1775 to 1841.<sup>26</sup> In the church, there were works by Spyridon Romas,<sup>27</sup> who was also

and Kefalonia also.<sup>23</sup> Karousos was not only a painter but also a scholar and a poet. He composed sonnets, and a work titled *Sentimenti di un concittadino delle Isole Ionie ai suoi concittadini* of 1802 was addressed to his fellow countrymen.<sup>24</sup> Without high expectations as far as artistic quality is concerned, the art of Karousos belongs to the conventional framework of the painting of the Ionian Islands, which united the Byzantine tradition and the Italian style of the time.

In the south of Italy, in Lecce, where the Greeks were also

<sup>23</sup> See M. Chatzidakis and Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek painters after the Fall (1450-1830)], Vol. II, Athens 1997, pp. 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> Rizzi, *Le Icone*, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> A. Cassiano (ed.), *Iconostasi dalla chiesa di San Niccolò dei Greci*, Museo Sigismondo Castromediano, Lecce, 1990; Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi*, pp. 203-229; Maria Vradi, “Η ελληνική παροικία στο Λέτσε και η αδελφότητα του Αγίου Νικολάου των Ελλήνων” [The Greek community in Lecce and the Confraternity of St Nicolas], in *Ελληνισμός και Κάτω Ιταλία. Από τα Ιόνια νησιά στην Grecia Salentina* [Hellenism in Southern Italy: From the Ionian Islands to the Grecia Salentina], Vol. II, Corfu 2002, pp. 159-176.

<sup>26</sup> See Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. II, p. 221; Maria Melenti, “Ο Δημήτριος Μπογδάνος και η ζωγραφική των εικόνων στο Λέτσε τον 18ο αιώνα” [Dimitrios Bogdanos and painting in Lecce during the eighteenth century], in *Ελληνισμός και Κάτω Ιταλία*, Vol. I, pp. 185-212.

<sup>27</sup> See Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. II, p. 337.

a painter from Corfu active in Livorno, such as the icons *Noli me tangere* (fig. 8) and *Archangel Michael*, closer to Italian art as far as iconography and style are concerned.

In Barletta, the icons of the iconostasis in the Orthodox church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, depicting scenes from the Twelve Feasts and the apostles, is also attributed to Dimitrios Bogdanos. He was a painter of moderate quality, quite faithful to Byzantine models, but also having a certain knowledge of Italian painting, as is demonstrated, for example, in his attempt to use perspective in the icon of the Pentecost (fig. 9), which recalls *The Last Supper*



Fig. 8. Spyridon Romas, *Noli me tangere*, St Nicholas of the Greeks, Lecce.

by Leonardo. The despotic icons of the same iconostasis were painted by the Cretan painter Thomas Bathas, who worked in Venice in the sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup> After the earthquake of 1980, the church was no longer used, and in 1985 the icons were transferred to the Museo Civico.<sup>29</sup> It is known that the Greeks had found shelter in this small town of the Italian south after the fall of Koroni to the Ottomans in 1532, while in the eighteenth century the community was regenerated by a new wave of merchants from Epirus.<sup>30</sup> The presence of Greeks from Corfu is also dominant during this period in the Italian south, if we take into consideration that the painter Dimitrios Bogdanos is reported in 1799 in the archives of Lecce as "parocco dei corfioti" and not as "dei greci".<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Pina Belli d'Elia (ed.), *Icone di Puglia e Basilicata dal Medioevo al Settecento*. Bari, Pinacoteca Provinciale, Milan 1988, nos 65, 66; Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. II, pp. 215-218.

<sup>29</sup> C. Dicatorato (ed.), *La Chiesa Greca di Santa Maria degli Angeli a Barletta*, Barletta 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Eleni Giannakopoulou, "Ηπειρώτες έμποροι στην Ιταλία" [Epirot merchants in Italy], *Ο Επανιστής* 21 (1997), pp. 143-175; Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi*, pp. 156-180; Z. N. Tsirpanlis, "Memorie storiche sulle comunità e chiese greche di Terra d'Otranto (XVI sec.)", in *La chiesa greca in Italia dall' VIII al XVI secolo*, Padua 1971, pp. 845-877.

<sup>31</sup> Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi*, p. 207.



Fig. 9. Dimitrios Bogdanos, *The Pentecost*,  
Santa Maria degli Angeli, Barletta.



Fig. 10. Holy Trinity, Livorno.

In the port of Livorno, on the other side of the Italian peninsula, the rulers of Tuscany had already granted to the Greeks many privileges from the end of the sixteenth century, with a view to promoting the commercial development of the city. In 1653, the Greeks, mainly merchants and seafarers, were united in a Fraternity, which also included the Orthodox Slav residents of Livorno and definitely the Syrian Uniates of the city, the so-called Melkites. In the eighteenth century, Livorno emerged as an unrivalled transit centre and station, especially for English people. The Greek community, which consisted of merchants from Epirus, flourished.<sup>32</sup> In 1754, a period when Livorno was under the rule of Austria, there was a rupture between the Uniates and the Orthodox citizens. In 1757, the Orthodox citizens were granted permission by the ruler of the city and the Latin archbishop of neighbouring Pisa to build the first Orthodox church in Tuscany.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the elegant Baroque church of the Holy Trinity was inaugurated in 1760 and renovated in the beginning of the twentieth century by the architects Enrico Azzati and Giovanni Saccardi (fig. 10).

For the interior decoration of the church, the Greek community first invited the Archbishop Moses from Crete. The two principal icons, of large dimensions, the Holy Trinity – Holy Liturgy (1761) and the enthroned Virgin and Child (1762), which are found today in the Museo Civico of the city, did not satisfy the aesthetic expectations of the Greeks of Livorno because of their linearity and conservative style (fig. 11), so the cooperation with Archbishop Moses came to an end.<sup>34</sup> A surviving reference

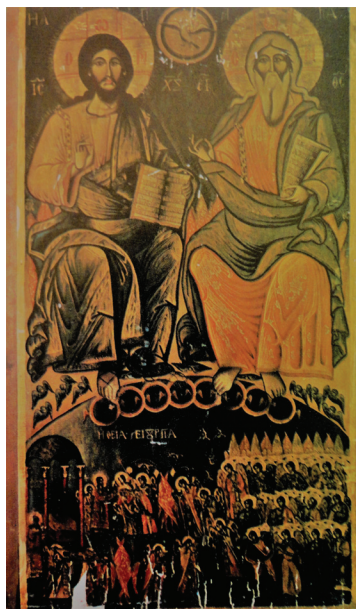


Fig. 11. Archbishop Moses, *The Holy Trinity – Holy Liturgy*, Museo Civico, Livorno.

<sup>32</sup> D. Mattoni, *La città nella storia d'Italia. Livorno*, Livorno 1985; G. Panessa, *Le comunità greche a Livorno. Vicende fra integrazione e chiusura nazionale*, Livorno 1991; Despina Vlami, *Το φιορίνι, το σιτάρι και η οδός του κήπου. Έλληνες έμποροι στο Λιβόρνο, 1750-1868* [The fiorino, the wheat and the way of the garden: Greek merchants in Livorno, 1750-1868], Athens 2000, pp. 549-641.

<sup>33</sup> Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi*, pp. 117-155.

<sup>34</sup> D. Dell'Agata-Popova (ed.), *Icone greche e russe del Museo Civico di Livorno*, Pisa 1978, pp. 84, 86.





Fig. 12. Spyridon Romas,  
*The Holy Trinity*, Museo Civico, Livorno.

letter from Corfu dated 1762, now in the State Archives of the city, bears witness to the fact that the search for a capable painter continued; it introduces the painter Spyridon Romas from Corfu as a capable painter of “*pittura romeica*”. This type of painting, the style of Spyridon Romas, is a significant sample of the art of the Ionian Islands, which had Byzantine influences, Renaissance naturalness and tranquillity, but also Baroque decorative tendencies (fig. 12). More than 20 icons were painted for the church of the Holy Trinity, as demonstrated by Romas’ contract, which was renewed in 1764 and 1766.<sup>35</sup>

From Tuscany, we move to the north of Italy, to Trieste, the multicultural city where James Joyce “left his soul”. On Sundays, he went to the Greek church to attend the Orthodox liturgy, in an environment which reflected the economic power of the Greek community, their prudence in the management of money, the concern about the Greek language and the Orthodox tradition, but also their opening towards other cultures. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Joyce lived in Trieste, the financially powerful Greek families become acquainted with him, as they often visited the church of St Nicholas and the Holy Trinity of the Greeks, with its Neoclassical façade (fig. 13). The families of Rallis, Skaramangas and Oikonomou are among those who became wealthy in Trieste, the free port of the Habsburgs during the eighteenth century, the main maritime and commercial station in the Adriatic Sea after the fall of Venice in 1797. In February 1751, the Empress Maria Theresa issued a decree of privileges for the Greeks of Trieste. The Greeks, property agents and merchants in the beginning, ship owners and brokers later, lived with the Jews from Trieste and Venice, Austrians, Germans, Italians and Serbs.<sup>36</sup> In Trieste, where multilingualism and multinationalism

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 36, 38, 40, 42-64.

<sup>36</sup> Olga Katsiardi-Hering, *Η Ελληνική παροικία της Τεργέστης (1751-1830)* [The Greek

were the rule, and "triestinità" would lead to rich literary production, the Irish author taught English to the offspring of rich Greeks and attempted to learn Greek from a young Greek salesman of fruit and vegetables at the port, Nikolas Santas, who originally came from Corfu and was his companion at the taverns, a figure who was immortalized in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Many families from Corfu had already settled in Trieste from the eighteenth century; among them was a family of painters, Spyridon Speranzas and his son Michael. The latter settled in Trieste together with his family in 1784. Two years later, he painted 14 icons for the Greek church. In the same year, with a view to decorating the church, he invited his father, also a painter, from Corfu, so that he could help him with the work.<sup>37</sup> Their art is located at the aesthetic and



Fig. 13. St Nicholas and Holy Trinity of the Greeks, Trieste.

community in Trieste (1751-1830)], 2 vols, Athens 1986. See also Despina Vlassi, "Ο εποικισμός της Ακυλίας από Έλληνες (ΙΗ' αι.) και ο ανταγωνισμός Αυστρίας-Βενετίας. Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα" [The Greek settlement in Aquileia and the competition between Austria and Venice: Unpublished documents], *Θησαυρίσματα* 15 (1978), pp. 177-191; S. Nicolaidi, *La presenza greca di Trieste*, Trieste 1990.

<sup>37</sup> Katsiardi-Hering, *Η Ελληνική παροικία*, pp. 229-232; See also Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. II, pp. 369-370; Maria Melenti, *Η ζωγραφική των εικόνων στην Κέρκυρα τον 18ο αιώνα και ο Σπυρίδων Σπεράντζας (1731-1818)* [Icons painting on Corfu during the eighteenth century and the painter Spyridon Speranzas (1731-1818)], Corfu 2002.





Fig. 14. Iconostasis (detail) painted by Spyridon Speranzas, Holy Trinity and St Nicholas of the Greeks, Trieste.

artistic borderlines of the Ionian Islands, influenced by Byzantine iconography but also displaying Italian naturalness and expressive freedom (fig. 14). The cooperation of Michael with the church wardens of the Greek church lasted for many decades, for he was involved in the cleaning of icons, improvements to the church, wall paintings and the decoration of the *gynaecoonitis*. In 1821, the church wardens praised him for the “grandiosa pittura del Gineceo”.<sup>38</sup> Earlier, around 1800, Speranzas ran a shop of ecclesiastical items in Trieste.<sup>39</sup> The next generation of the Speranzas family would continue the cooperation in relation to the decoration of the Greek church. The son of Michael, Spyridon, who in 1818 was included in the census of the Greek community as an *ispettore teatro*, worked on the wood-carved epitaph of the church five years later. The Greek community, concerned about retaining the “uso antico Greco”, the “old Greek-Byzantine artistic style”, commissioned Michael Speranzas to decorate the ceiling of the church. The large amount of money he demanded as remuneration, 4000 fiorini, forced the Greeks to choose the Italian painter Giacomo Granziosi instead, who agreed to half the amount of

<sup>38</sup> Katsiardi-Hering, *Η Ελληνική παροικία*, p. 231.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Speranzas’ payment.<sup>40</sup> His contract was full of instructions from the church wardens about the use of Greek inscriptions in the paintings, as well as about respect for Byzantine iconography with regards to the depiction of prophets and the apostles. The above-mentioned Eustathios Karousos, who had decorated the Orthodox church in Naples from 1766, was appointed as his helper. The result, at least as far as the ceiling is concerned, depicting Christ in Glory among the angels, is closer in terms of colour and artistic style to Venetian painting (fig. 15), whereas, on the walls below the ceiling, the Evangelists and the prophets assume the positions determined by Orthodox iconography.



Fig. 15. Ceiling painted by Giacomo Granziosi, Holy Trinity and St Nicholas of the Greeks, Trieste.

Later, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the “century of Trieste”, the community considered that the church was not equivalent to the fame of the Greek nation (*του ελληνικού γένους*). Despite the construction difficulties and the arguments put forward that other residents of the city, such as Lutherans or Jews, did not have magnificent places of worship, they decided upon the creation of today’s Neoclassical church by the famous architect of the Neoclassical buildings of Trieste, Matteo Pertsch.<sup>41</sup>

During the same period, the teacher of painting at the Greek community school, Ioannis Trygonis<sup>42</sup> from Methoni in Messenia, who had settled in Trieste, designed the icon of the Holy Trinity and St Nicholas, which was later engraved in order to be distributed to the worshippers.<sup>43</sup> In the upper part

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>41</sup> W. Bensch, “L’architetto Matteo Pertsch a Trieste”, *Archeografo Triestino* Ser. IV, XXXVI (1976), pp. 19-52. See also M. Bianco-Fiorin, “Il patrimonio artistico”, in *Il nuovo giorno. La comunità Greco-Orientale di Trieste. Storia e patrimonio artistico-culturale*, Udine 1982, pp. 82-87.

<sup>42</sup> See Chatzidakis and Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, Vol. II, p. 441.

<sup>43</sup> Katsiardi-Hering, *Η Ελληνική παροιμία*, pp. 237-238, fig. 34.



Fig. 16. Engraving of *The Holy Trinity and St Nicholas* by Ioannis Trygonis.

of the picture, the Holy Trinity with *putti* is borrowed from Italian painting, whereas below St Nicholas is represented according to Post-Byzantine patterns (fig. 16).

This peculiar dedication of the church to the Holy Trinity and St Nicholas led to ironic comments of Adamantios Korais from Paris. In 1819, the text of the inscription, which referred to the renovation of the church and was written by the then teacher in Trieste, Christoforos Filitas, was sent to Korais for approval. He replied from Paris: “St Nicholas can share a church with all the other saints, but not with the Supreme Being. It is as if you dedicate a book to the Emperor Francis and at the same time to Prime Minister Metternich or to a courtier [...]”<sup>44</sup> The dedication

of the church could not, of course, change because it was precisely a matter of choice. The dedication of a church to the Holy Trinity, a conscious decision by other Greek communities abroad, such as Vienna or Livorno, reminded one of the basic dogmatic differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism. St Nicholas, on the other hand, was the choice for a seaside city, the choice of a maritime nation that excelled on the routes of sea and commerce. The double dedication of the church was a unique compromise solution in an environment where oppositions were compromised, that of the cosmopolitan Trieste. Besides, the gesture *par excellence* of social affirmation, the commission of artworks by the financially flourishing Greek communities was nowhere else, not even in Venice most probably, as distinguished as in Trieste for its open-mindedness. The works of the Speranzas family from Corfu, created according to the aesthetics of the Ionian Islands, in Italian style but having strong features of the Byzantine tradition, were followed by the oil paintings of the Italian Giacomo Graziosi in Venetian form, and a few years later, in 1850, by two icons of large dimensions, *Let the Little Children Come to Me*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

and *St John Preaching* by the famous painter Cesare dell’Aqua from Trieste.<sup>45</sup> The coexistence in Orthodox churches of different painting styles and the simultaneous commissions of works to painters of Orthodox and Western religious painting may be dated much earlier than the nineteenth century, if we refer to the above-mentioned church of St George of the Greeks in Venice.

A reverse movement of cultural exchanges took place on Corfu, the “gate-keeper” island of the Adriatic Sea.<sup>46</sup> In 1809, a young man from Kefalonia, Gerasimos Pitzamanos, was studying drawing and painting on Corfu, at the Académie Ionienne (1808-1815), which was founded by the Imperial French when they governed the Ionian Islands. The Ionian Senate, especially its president, Emmanuel Theotokis from Corfu, but also senators, such as Marinos Metaxas from Kefalonia and Dionysios Romas from Zakynthos, keenly supported the attempts of the talented young painter, who, having received the scholarship granted by the Ionian Senate and on the order of Napoleon, was sent to study at the famous Académie de France in Rome.<sup>47</sup> A compulsory requirement for all the Académie’s students having scholarships was the so-called “les envois de Rome”, that is, the obligation to communicate back to their countries the results of the inspiration they gained in Rome.<sup>48</sup> The works of those students, the ones considered to be worthwhile, were sent once a year to their home countries in order to be exhibited to the wider public and to remain in the ownership of the state. The first “envoi” of Pitzamanos to Corfu, of 1810, includes copies of the wall paintings of Raphael from the Vatican and of the *Mary Magdalene* of Guido Reni, as well as the drawings of a small theatre and a mausoleum. In the following year, Pitzamanos was preparing a copy of the *Justice* of Raphael from the Stanza della Segnatura.<sup>49</sup> The work was exhibited in September 1811 in the Vatican, and we read the following enthusiastic review in a newspaper of Rome: “The young man from

<sup>45</sup> Maria Masau Dan and Rosella Fabiani (ed.), *Cesare dell’Aqua. I colori della storia*, Trieste 2005.

<sup>46</sup> For the cultural history of Corfu, see E. Concina and Alikì Nikiforou-Testone, *Κέρκυρα. Ιστορία, αστική ζωή και αρχιτεκτονική, 14ος-19ος αι.* [Corfu: History, urban life and architecture, fourteenth – nineteenth century], Corfu 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Anastasia R. Kouli, *Ιππότης Γεράσιμος Πιτζαμάνος (1787-1825), ζωγράφος και αρχιτέκτων. Η Συλλογή του Εθνικού Ιστορικού Μουσείου* [The knight Gerasimos Pitzamanos (1787-1825), painter and architect: Collection of the National Historical Museum], Vol. I, Athens 2013, p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> F. Lechleiter, *Les envois de Rome des pensionnaires peintres de l’Académie de France à Rome de 1863 à 1914*, dissertation, Université Paris IV – Sorbonne, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Kouli, *Ιππότης Γεράσιμος Πιτζαμάνος*, p. 33.



Kefalonia [...] produced a creation which demonstrates spirit, effectiveness, chromatic agreement and unity. The teachers and lovers of the fine arts applauded the creation of this young man, who became very recognizable in the short period of time in which he lived in Italy.<sup>50</sup> The works of Pitzamanos impressed and excited the people of Corfu so much that it was suggested that they should be exhibited in the conference hall of the Senate.<sup>51</sup>

This is just a small example, which is nonetheless indicative of the double direction of the cultural transfers at the beginning of the nineteenth century from Italy to the Ionian Islands and back. It is exceptionally important that these cultural transfers were not limited to the circle of the authorities, but also influenced the aesthetics of the residents of Corfu insofar as the artworks were exhibited and judged publicly.

If we take into consideration that the studies of the painter from Kefalonia in Italy and the transfer of his works to Corfu were carried out in very



Fig. 17. Interior view of St Nicholas and Holy Trinity of the Greeks, Trieste.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

difficult economic, political and communication conditions<sup>52</sup> due to the well-known European turbulence at the end of the eighteenth century, we can recognize that the motivating power was the strong desire to participate in the acknowledged superior art of Europe, towards which the Ionian Islands constantly turned, thereby boosting the local cultural level, something which was not limited to the case of painting alone.

On the other side of the Adriatic Sea, the environment of Italy challenged the economically flourishing Greek communities to find new artistic pursuits, communities that did not hide their desire to promote themselves and to stand out through building and decorating their churches. The pursuit of "pittura romeica", the art represented by the invited painters from the Ionian Islands, does not reveal any concrete stylistic preferences but the wish for a secure association with the Greek ethos, the Greek language in the inscriptions and the Orthodox dogma. This is why the architectural choices (Late Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical) were entrusted, not by accident, to local architects, whose purpose was clearly to incorporate the Orthodox churches into the contemporary facets of the Italian cities; but for the high templon (fig. 17) and the iconostasis according to the Orthodox *Typicon* such an amalgam was always out of the question.

Even the desire to decorate the church interiors with religious scenes created by painters who come from an Orthodox environment subsided due to financially non-affordable offers or to the difficulty of discovering available artists. The Italian painters, then, almost always outstanding and well-known, undertook, under the supervision of their sponsors, the crucial work of combining the Orthodox ethos with the art of the European non-Orthodox environment. Within the churches, the symbolic and real centres of the Greek communities, the desire for prominence and promotion of the prosperity and of progress by means of art, the tendency to adapt to the Italian artistic environment and the wish to respect the traditional values, all these were carried out with moderation and open-mindedness and always with a certain element of caution. This was a strange balance which wisely bridged the breach between East and West across the Adriatic Sea.

*Institute of Historical Research / NHRF*

---

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.



## Photo Credits

Fig. 1: S. T. Chondrogiannis, *The Antivouniotissa Museum, Corfu*, Thessaloniki 2010, p. 213.

Figs 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17: Author's archive.

Figs 3, 4: A. Paliouras, “Η εικονογράφησης του τρούλλου του Αγίου Γεωργίου Βενετίας” [The iconography of the dome of St George of the Greeks in Venice], *Θησαυρίσματα* 8 (1971), pp. 166-171, pl. Θ'; pl. ΙΓ.2'.

Figs 8, 12: Efthalia Rentetzi, *Le iconostasi delle chiese greche in Italia*, Athens 2008, p. 227; p. 150.

Fig. 16: Olga Katsiardi-Hering, *Η Ελληνική παροικία της Τεργέστης (1751-1830)* [The Greek community in Trieste (1751-1830)], Vol. II, Athens 1986, fig. 34.