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Review of: A. Lymberopoulou and R. Duits (eds),
Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe,

Jenny Albani

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A. Lymberopoulou and R. Duits (eds),
BYZANTINE ART AND RENAISSANCE EUROPE,
Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 219 pages,
45 illustrations and 16 color plates.

The question of cultural relations between the Byzantine East and the Latin West, although not unexplored, is still an open one. Therefore, this book, a collective volume of six studies on various aspects of cultural and artistic interaction between Byzantine and Western European societies from the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century, is welcome.

In the introduction, the editors, Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits, outline the aim of the volume. They point out that the term “Renaissance” is used “as a general indication of an art historical period” and present briefly the content of the six chapters that follow.

In the opening chapter, “The Byzantine Context”, Lyn Rodley traces some of the evidence for contacts between Eastern and Western art and material culture and outlines the condition of Byzantine art and architecture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Exploring the vehicle of cultural exchange between East and West, the author refers to diplomatic gifts, the marriage between the Byzantine princess Theophano and the German emperor Otto II (955-983) and trade activities. Contacts between the Byzantines and the Latins became stronger through the establishment of a

large community of Genoese, Pisans and Venetians in Constantinople in the twelfth century and with the Crusades. In her study of mutual borrowings in Byzantine and Latin architecture and painting, the author considers the so-called Mystras-type, applied in the churches of Hodegetria and Pantanassa, as well as in the Metropolis at Mystras, as “a desire to ‘Byzantinize’ the basilical form” (p. 28). In my opinion, there can be little doubt that the basilica type is a Byzantine one. Besides its predominance in the Early Christian period, the majority of Middle Byzantine cathedral churches were timber-roofed basilicas.¹ The final parts of this chapter refer to the limited influence of Late Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art on the arts of Renaissance Europe, since European artists turned to naturalism.

In the following chapter, “Byzantine Art and Early Italian Painting”, Hans

¹ For example, the cathedrals of Serrai, Veria, Kalambaka, Servia, Moglena, Meleniko, Rentina and Prespai. See C. Bouras, *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Architecture in Greece*, Athens 2006, p. 86; F. Karagianni, *Επισκοπικοί ναοί της μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου. Το παράδειγμα της Μακεδονίας* [Episcopal churches of the Middle Byzantine period: The example of Macedonia], unpublished doctoral thesis, Thessaloniki 2006, pp. 156-158.

Bloemsma examines the quest of Italian artists in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance to create more vivid and evocative images that could involve the viewer emotionally in the depicted event. In this process Italian artists were influenced by Byzantine art, which had a great appeal in Italian culture of that period. The author focuses on specific representative works of different geographical locations and periods: the mosaics of the western vault of the central dome of San Marco in Venice (1180-1190); the works of Giunta Pisano in Pisa and of the Master of St. Francis in Assisi (both around 1250); and Duccio's *Maestà* made for the Duomo in Siena (1308-1311). This penetrating analysis demonstrates the important and enduring role of Byzantine painting in Italian art and spirit until the Early Renaissance.

The third chapter, "Regional Byzantine Monumental Art from Venetian Crete", by Angeliki Lymberopoulou explores the social, financial and ideological context of the construction and decoration of the numerous (around 850) rural churches in Venetian-ruled Crete. On the basis of building practices and iconographic details of their wall paintings, the author argues that, from as early as in the fourteenth century, these churches are indicative of a degree of intercultural dialogue between the native and the Venetian communities and not testimonies of a strict orientation towards Byzantium. Cultural interaction between the Orthodox and Catholics on Crete is corroborated by Olga Gratzou in her recent studies on Cretan religious buildings used by the faithful of both doctrines (two-aisled churches, double churches and churches with two

apses).² It is moreover worth noting that unionistic iconographic subjects (the First Ecumenical Council, the Embrace of Peter and Paul) have been detected in the fifteenth-century wall paintings in the outer narthex of the two-aisled katholikon – probably a church for both doctrines – of the monastery of Agios Fanourios at Valsamonero.³

In the next chapter, "Candia and Post-Byzantine Icons in Late Fifteenth-century Europe", also dedicated to Venetian Crete, Diana Newall examines the social, cultural, religious and financial context of icon painting in Candia around 1500. She discusses *inter alia* the geostrategic position of Crete and its capital, Candia, the urban space of this city, its role in Venetian trade, the Latin commissions to Cretan painters, and the travels of Cretan and Italian painters from Candia to Italy and *vice versa*. Newall also highlights an issue, not thoroughly studied so far,

² O. Gratzou, *Η Κρήτη στην ύστερη μεσαιωνική εποχή. Η μαρτυρία της εκκλησιαστικής αρχιτεκτονικής* [Crete in the late medieval era: The testimony of church architecture], Heraklion 2010, pp. 137-183; *ead.*, "Cretan Architecture and Sculpture in the Venetian Period", in A. Drandaki (ed.), *The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete*, New York 2010, p. 22; *ead.*, "Όσοι πιστοί προσέλθετε... Εκκλησίες για αμφότερα τα δόγματα σε μοναστήρια της Κρήτης κατά τη βενετική περίοδο" [All believers are welcome... Churches for both doctrines in Cretan monasteries during the Venetian period], in E. Kolovos (ed.), *Μοναστήρια, οικονομία και πολιτική* [Monasteries, economy and politics], Heraklion 2011, pp. 117-139.

³ U. Ritzerfeld, "Bildpropaganda im Zeichen des Konzils von Florenz. Unionistische Bildmotive im Kloster Balsamonero auf Kreta", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 80/2 (2014), pp. 387-407.

namely the important role of Candia, as a stopover on the maritime pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land, in the export of Cretan icons to Western Europe.

Kim Woods explores in the following chapter, “Byzantine Icons in the Netherlands, Bohemia and Spain during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries”, the value placed on Byzantine icons in Northern Europe: in the Prague of Charles IV (1346-1376) and the fifteenth-century Burgundian Netherlands, as well as in the Spain of Isabella of Castile (c. 1476-1504). The author concludes that images believed to derive from the hand of St. Luke the Evangelist and their copies were highly venerated in the Netherlands, while there is no evidence that the Byzantine style fascinated Northern European viewers. On the other hand, some prominent individuals, such as Queen Isabella of Castile, who owned a collection including Greek icons, and the German humanist Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), may have attached particular value to icons “à la façon Grèce”.

The book ends with the insightful and comprehensive study “Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection” by Rembrandt Duits. He discusses the seventeen – or possibly eighteen – icons (one panel of ebony, eleven icons in mosaic, three miniature icons in steatite and two or possibly three⁴ painted panels) which belonged to the Medici art collection, as documented in two inventories. The first of them, mentioning among other works twelve Byzantine icons, dates from 1465,

⁴ The icon of the Agony in the Garden could hardly have been painted in Byzantium, but may be assigned to Venetian Crete.

a few months after the death of Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464); the second, which was compiled in 1492, after the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492), includes five or six more icons, increasing their number to seventeen or eighteen. The only extant Byzantine icon from the Medici collection has been identified as the twelfth-century miniature mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence. The examination of the subjects of the Medici icons and their provenance, prices and location inside the Palazzo Medici indicates that this prominent Italian family appreciated Byzantine icons, which perhaps also fulfilled a devotional function, during a period when Italian art was moving in a naturalistic direction.

A general index completes the volume.

This book, which will be of interest to students of both Byzantine and Western European art, is an important contribution to the notion that the border between East and West is fictional, since it demonstrates in an eloquent way that the movement of people, goods and ideas in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance was perpetual.⁵

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⁵ Cf. the reviews by Massimo Bernabò in *Byzantinistica* 15 (2013) (accessible online: <https://www.academia.edu/20252566/>) and Stefania Gerevini in *Renaissance Quarterly* 67/1 (2014), pp. 204-205.