

The Mural Decoration of Protaton on Mount Athos: A pictorial Ekphrasis of Andronikos II Palaeologus imperial policy (1282-1328) *

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To the memory of my colleague Sotiris Kadas

The church of Protaton, the cathedral of Karyes, the capital city of the Holy Mount Athos, is a landmark monument for the Byzantine culture and art and the oldest Christian church in the Athonite peninsula.⁽¹⁾ It is a large triple-aisled, timber-roofed,⁽²⁾ basilica with narthex and is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin. Built in the middle of 10th century or maybe earlier, it was restored during the reign of the emperor Andronikos II Palaeologus (1282-1328),⁽³⁾ and decorated by frescoes of high artistic quality from the point of iconography, style and the broader theological meaning and context.⁽⁴⁾

The integration of the frescoes of Protaton in the artistic context of the early Palaeologan period is perhaps the only stable, lasting and indisputable element in more than a century of research on the art of the monument.⁽⁵⁾ All the rest having to do with its donor, the atelier of the painters and its provenance as well as the precise dating is still fluid, awaiting new findings that are hoped to be based on constants, whether they arise from unknown till today written sources either from archaeological data or from the pictorial material itself.

The wall paintings of Protaton have been the subject of exhaustive and important research focusing on the style and the artistic identity of its painters. On the basis of this type of research, it has been attempted the distinction of several artists participating to the decoration of the monument, accompanied by many hypotheses for the dating of its art.⁽⁶⁾ Nevertheless, the study of the style and the different attempts to perceive the classical and its aspects during the evolution of the Byzantine art have rather led to more questions than certainties.⁽⁷⁾

It is useful to summarize here the constants in the history of research of the Protaton art to date which are the following:

A. The written tradition of the anonymous Hermeneia of the art of painting, a guide with specific instruc-

* I would like to take the opportunity to deeply thank my colleague, Professor Tomoyuki Masuda for his invitation to this very interesting symposium on church wall decoration. I also thank the Japan Society for Promotion of Science for its fellowship which allowed me to get in contact with Japanese researchers on Byzantine art. A part of this paper was presented in the 6th international scientific workshop of the Mount Athos Center (Agioreitiki Estia) held in Thessaloniki from 9 to 11 December 2022 (A. Semoglou, The Protaton revisited. Iconographic reinterpretations of the identity of its patron, in *Abstracts of prospective speakers, 6^o Διεθνές Επιστημονικό Εργαστήριο, Αγιορείτικη Εστία*, Thessaloniki 2022, 61-62; electronically in the following site: https://www.agioritikiestia.gr/images/articles/2022_6o-ergastirio/6o%20ERGASTIRIO_PERILIPSEIS_FINAL.pdf).

(1) P. Mylonas, The successive stages of construction of the Athos Protaton, in *Ο Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος και η εποχή του/Manuel Panselinos and his age*, ed. L. Mavrommatis, Athens 1999, 15. See also D. Ambonis, Στοιχεία οικοδομικής ιστορίας του Ιερού ναού του Πρωτάτου, in *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος εκ του Ιερού ναού του Πρωτάτου*, Thessaloniki 2003, 72-73.

(2) Mylonas, The successive, art. cit. (n.1), 16.

(3) Ibidem, 19. See also Ambonis, Στοιχεία, art. cit. (n.1), 74-75.

(4) For the multiple levels of meaning of the iconographic program of the monument, see briefly the remarks of Dimitris Kalomoirakis in his interesting paper, Ερμηνευτικές παρατηρήσεις στο εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα του Πρωτάτου, *DChAE*, 4-15 (1989-90), 215-217. For the character and style of its art, see E. N. Tsigaridas, Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος ο κορυφαίος ζωγράφος της εποχής των Παλαιολόγων, in *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος εκ του Ιερού ναού του Πρωτάτου*, Thessaloniki 2003, 37-47.

(5) For a recent state of research on the dating of the Protaton's paintings, see E. Kostić, *Η γραφή των 'Ασπραδάων'*, PhD, Department of History and Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 2022, t. A, Text, 92-93.

(6) Ibidem, 93-94.

tions to the painters that the Russian scholar and pioneer of Byzantine studies Feodor Uspenskij discovered in Jerusalem and dated it to the 16th century and specifically to 1566.⁽⁸⁾ According to the Hermeneia, the decoration of Protaton is registered to the creation of the legendary painter, with the name of Manuel Panselinos. This information, never met in the known till today epigraphic material or in the contemporary to the art of the monument sources, will be passed on to the later version of the Painter's Manual (Hermeneia), work of the Athonite monk Dionysius from the village of Fourni in Evrytania (central Greece), about a century and a half later.⁽⁹⁾

- B. The excavation, which was carried out by the archaeological service around 2000. This one does not confirm an earlier layer of destruction or fire,⁽¹⁰⁾ so that the need for its restoration immediately arises, and
- C. The last restoration of the frescoes by the then 10th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities which was completed after 2010 and revealed part of an inscription with the letters YTYX on the himation of the military saint Mercury, in the lower zone of the south wall.⁽¹¹⁾ The inscription has been associated with the one of the painters who probably bore the name Eutychios, according to the well-known examples of the signatures from the atelier of the Astrapades family who decorated an ensemble of monuments in the wider region of Macedonia.⁽¹²⁾

The first constant is rather weakened, since the written source is at least two centuries later than the paintings of the church. On the contrary, the two others should be taken seriously in the research and especially in the formulation of valuable hypotheses. The criterion, for example, of the plundering of Mount Athos by the Catalans and the possible destruction of the monument of Protaton by them and therefore the late dating of its decoration within the 14th century, at the end of its first decade or even up to the middle of the second,⁽¹³⁾ cannot taken seriously, as it is not confirmed by the archaeological research. Also, the presence of the Eutychios' signature is a solid element in the research history of the art of Protaton, studied *in extenso* and, in comparison with the similar signatures of other monuments by Elena Kostić in her excellent graphological research, which constituted her doctoral thesis supported

(7) This topic is developed in the paper of Iv. Jevtić, Art in decline or art in the age of the decline? Historiography and new approaches to Late Byzantine painting, in *Late Byzantium reconsidered. The Arts of the Palaiologan Era in the Mediterranean*, ed. by A. Mattiello and M. Alessia Rossi, London and New York 2019, 31-52. See also the criticism of the style and the stylistic analysis presented in the article of Bente Killerich, Aesthetic Aspects of Palaiologan Art in Constantinople: Some Problems, in *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture, Papers Read at a Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul*, 1-5 December, 1999 (Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions, 13), ed. J. O. Rosenqvist, Uppsala 2004, 12-14.

(8) M. Medić, *Stari slikarski priručnici*, II Beograd 2002, 71-73.

(9) Dionysiou tou ek Fourni, *Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης και αι κύριαι αυτής πηγαι*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, Saint Petersburg, 1909, 3 and 6. For the existence or not of the painter Manuel Panselinos, see the fascinating paper of Maria Vasilaki, Υπήρξε Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος; in *Ο Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος*, op. cit. (n.1), 39-54.

(10) I. Tavlakis, Η μέριμνα της Αρχαιολογικής Υπηρεσίας για το Πρωτάτο, in *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος. Εκ του ιερού ναού του Πρωτάτου*, ed. N. Papageorgiou – A. Ntouros, Thessaloniki 2003, 81-87.

(11) St. Stefanidis, A. Nastou, Το Συνεργείο του Πρωτάτου και η πρόταση χρονολόγησης των τοιχογραφιών, in *Πρωτάτο II. Η Συντήρηση των τοιχογραφιών*, Polygyros 2015, t. B , 40 and fig. 20 and t. A , 70 and fig. 49 (81).

(12) For the atelier of the Astrapades painters, their activity and signatures see M. Marković, Umetnička delatnost Mihaila i Evtihia. Sadašnja znanja sporna pitanja i pravci budućih istrazivanka, *Zbornik Narodnog Muzeja* XVII/2, 2004, p. 95-117. See the state of research by Kostić, *Η γραφή*, op. cit. (n.5), 25-37. See also in the present volume the very interesting paper of professor Tomoyuki Masuda.

(13) For this hypothesis on the dating of the frescoes of Protaton after the Catalan raids, see the recent paper of K. M. Vapheides, The wall-paintings of the Protaton church revisited, *Zograf* 43, 2019, 117-118, where the older literature. The author relying exclusively on stylistic observations, attributes the Protaton mural decoration to the patronage of the protostrator Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotēs (ibidem, 118-119). Nevertheless, the absence of any epigram related to this monumental and important project or any epigram in the monument of Protaton weakens significantly this fascinating hypothesis given Michael Glaba's habit of ordering epigrams from his favorite poet Manuel Philes to accompany his dedicatory works (about this, see the very recent PhD of E. Evangelou, *Ο ποιητής και ο πρωτοστράτωρ Μανουήλ Φιλής και Μιχαήλ Δούκας Γλαβάς Ταρχανειώτης*, PhD, Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology, University of Thessaly, Volos 2004, where all the previous literature.

recently.⁽¹⁴⁾ Although the signature weakens the first constant about the participation of a painter with the name of “Manuel Panselinos”, however, does not exclude it. Unfortunately, the presence of the signature is neither able to establish a specific date nor to indicate for the monument a specific donor.

It is worth pointing out that the hypotheses on the character and the identity of the art of Protaton are firstly and mainly based on observations on the style of the frescoes and only secondarily on the program and its iconographic data. It is epistemologically interesting that the theories based on the style are divided between those who place the frescoes of the monument in the last decade of the 13th c.⁽¹⁵⁾ and the others who propose for the dating the end of the first decade of the 14th century.⁽¹⁶⁾

On the contrary, the researchers who have dealt also with the iconography are unanimously oriented firmly and, as far as I know, without wavering, to the early dating of the 13th century. In this category belong the preliminary study by Maria Sotiriou as well as her still unpublished monography on the Protaton mural paintings,⁽¹⁷⁾ the pioneering extensive article on the iconographic program of the monument written by Dimitris Kalomirakis,⁽¹⁸⁾ the yet unpublished thesis of my colleague Anestis Vasilakeris⁽¹⁹⁾ and mainly the paper produced also by him in *Deltion* of 2013⁽²⁰⁾ and recently my article in the journal *Βυζαντινά* (2019-2020).⁽²¹⁾

In my paper, I will focus on the iconographic arrangements in Protaton which have not been highlighted or brought to light so far in the research, they may be related to the patronage milieu of the monument and strengthen, I believe, the proposal of its early dating, within the 13th century and, in fact, at the beginning of the reign of Andronikos II.

Specifically, I am referring primarily to the dialectical relationship between the two compositions of the Christological cycle, the Baptism **[Fig.1]** and the Descent into Hell (or Hades) **[Fig.2]** in the 3rd and upper zone, on the north and south walls, above the front of the south-west and north-west pillars respectively, with the one scene facing the other **[Fig.3]**.⁽²²⁾ It is of particular interest the fact that both *theophanic* scenes evenly occupy much more space even at the expense of their adjacent scenes, the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion in the south-west and north-west corners of the naos respectively.⁽²³⁾ The emphasis on the two compositions, on the basis and the logic of a typical, for the Byzantine monuments, pictorial program with a clockwise circular movement, is revealed not only by their prominent position, on either side of the entrance to the church, but also by their large extent, which we can easily perceive if we compare it with that occupied by the scenes in the two corresponding eastern pillars. The fronts of the two pillars there host two, instead of one, scenes with the Nativity and the Presentation of Christ to the Temple on the southeast pillar and the Ascension and Pentecost on the opposite north side.⁽²⁴⁾

(14) For the church of Protaton, see Kostić, *Η γράφη*, op. cit. (n.5), 388-394.

(15) See mostly the followings: D. Mouriki, *Stylistic trends in Monumental Painting of Greece at the beginning of the Fourteenth Century*, in *Vizantijska umetnost početak XIV veka* (Naučni skup u Gračanici 1973), Beograd 1978, 64-65; M. Chatzidakis, *Η Τέχνη κατά την ύστερη βυζαντινή εποχή, 1430-1830*, in *Μακεδονία 4000 χρόνια ιστορίας και πολιτισμού*, Athens 1982, 345; S. Kalopisi -Verti, *Τάσεις της μνημειακής ζωγραφικής περί το 1300 στον Ελλαδικό και νησιωτικό χώρο (εκτός από τη Μακεδονία)*, in *Ο Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος*, op. cit., (n.1), 64; Tsigaridas, *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος*, art. cit. (n.4), 37-47; and recently E. Tsigaridas, *Η μνημειακή ζωγραφική στη Θεσσαλονίκη κατά τη μέση και ύστερη Βυζαντινή περίοδο*, in *Το ημέτερον Κάλλος. Βυζαντινές εικόνες από τη Θεσσαλονίκη, Catalogue of Exhibition*, Thessaloniki 1/10/2018 – 31/3/2019, cur. Fl. Karagianni, Thessaloniki 2018, 85.

(16) A. Xyngopoulos, *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος*, Athens 1956, 10-12; Vapheides, *The wall-paintings*, art. cit. (n.13), 113-128.

(17) M. Sotiriou, *Η Μακεδονική Σχολή και η λεγόμενη Σχολή του Μιλούτιν*, *DChAE*, 4-5 (1969), 1-30; M. Sotiriou, unpublished monography on the Protaton paintings (1978). At this point I would like to warmly thank my colleague Dimitris Kalomirakis who was kind enough to make known to me the unpublished study of Maria Sotiriou which he is editing in order to publish it.

(18) Kalomirakis, *Ερμηνευτικές*, art.cit. (n.4), 197-220.

(19) A. Vasilakeris, *Les fresques du Protaton au Mont Athos. Analyse du processus créateur dans un atelier de peintres byzantins du XIIIe siècle*, PhD, Ecole Pratique des hautes Études Études, Section des sciences religieuses, Paris 2007.

(20) A. Vasilakeris, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Πρωτάτου και το πρόσωπο του αυτοκράτορα*, *DChAE*, 4-34 (2013), 117-128.

(21) A. Semoglou, *Ο Χριστός Αναπεσών στο Πρωτάτο και η δυναστική προπαγάνδα του Ανδρονίκου Β΄ Παλαιολόγου*, *Βυζαντινά* 37, 2019-2020, 93-112.

(22) See the axonometric iconographic plan of the church in N. Toutos – G. Foustieris, *Ενρετήριο της μνημειακής ζωγραφικής του Αγίου Όρους 10^{ος} -17^{ος} αιώνας*, Athens 2010, 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 57 (= the Baptism), no 60 (=the Descent into Hell).

(23) Ibidem, 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 58 (=the Transfiguration), no 59 (=the Crucifixion).



Fig.1



Fig.2

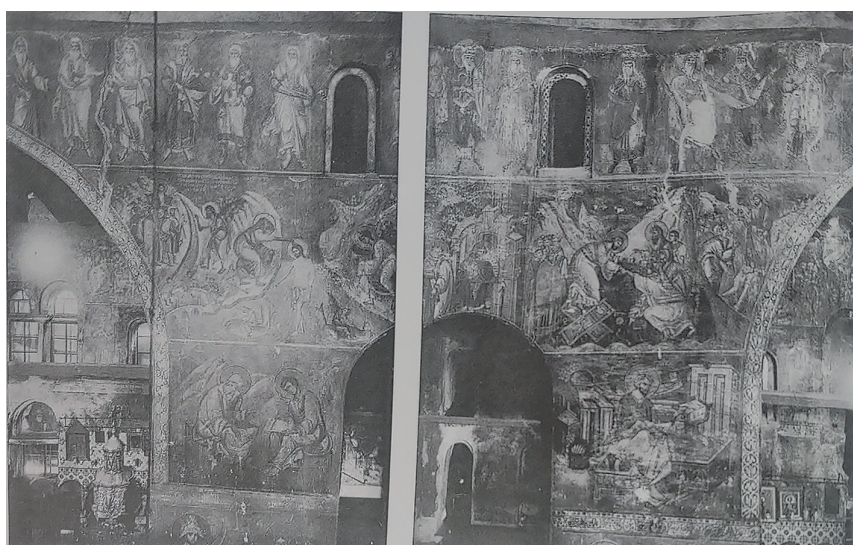


Fig.3



Fig.4

However, at this point it is worth underlining the specific weight and importance of the compositions of the Christological cycle as well as the arrangement of the evangelists directly below them, in a combination that directly refers to the illustrations of the full-page introductory miniatures of the four Gospels, such as the code NS 507 of the Iviron Monastery (dated to the second half of the 13th century) [Fig.4].⁽²⁵⁾ Thus, instead of the usual choice of the two evangelists and disciples of Christ on the east side of the church, Matthew and John, only Matthew was chosen for the South-east pillar, under the scenes of the Nativity and the Transfiguration.⁽²⁶⁾ Luke is paradoxically situated in the North-east pillar, under the Ascension and the Pentecost,⁽²⁷⁾ for perfectly understandable reasons related to the content of their Gospels.⁽²⁸⁾ Nevertheless, this choice had the consequence of expelling the evangelist John with his disciple Prochoros to the south-western pillar [Fig.5]⁽²⁹⁾ lining him up with Matthew, not on the eastern axis as is usual,⁽³⁰⁾ but on the southern one, as he accompanies the representation of the Baptism. Correspondingly Mark is

(24) Ibidem, 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 55 (=the Nativity), no 56 (=The Presentation to the Temple), no 61 (=the Ascension), no 62 (=the Pentecost).

(25) G. Galavaris, *Ιερά Μονή Ιβήρων. Εικονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα*, Mount Athos 2000, 79, fig. 51; 80, fig. 52; 81, fig. 53 and 85, fig. 55.

(26) Toutos – Foustieris, *Ευρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 78.

(27) Ibidem, 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 105.

(28) The Gospel of Matthew begins with the birth and Incarnation of Christ (Mt 1. 1) and this is why Saint Irenaeus, the bishop of Lugdunum associated the symbol of the man with Matthew (G. Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Prefaces in Byzantine Gospels*, Wien 1979, 36-39). As for the Ascension, only the evangelist Luke talks about it in his Gospel (24. 50-53) and in more detail in the first chapter of his Acts (N. Gkioles, *Η Ανάληψις του Χριστού βάσει των μνημείων της Α' χιλιετηρίδος*, Athens 1981, 43-45).

(29) Toutos – Foustieris, *Ευρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 87.

(30) The eastern position of Matthew and John, next to the Sanctuary, is interpreted by Andreas Xyngopoulos from the fact that the two evangelists are represented as the principal exponents of the double genealogy of Christ, with Matthew representing the human and John the divine (A. Xyngopoulos, *Η Ψηφιδωτή διακόσμησης του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων Θεσσαλονίκης*, Thessaloniki 1953, 44).



Fig.5

aligned with Luke on the opposite vertical, northern axis of the monument, accompanying respectively the Descent into Hades (the Resurrection).⁽³¹⁾

However, the dialectical relationship between the Baptism and the Descent into Hell seems to be strengthened by the fact that both compositions are enriched or combined with secondary episodes, such as the quite rare for the Byzantine art John's sermon to the priests and Levites **[Fig.6]**, included in Baptism and that of the Mission of the Disciples to the Nations next to the Resurrection **[Fig.7]**.⁽³²⁾ The second one is depicted in an unusual position, on the western side of the church instead of the more usual eastern one within the Holy Sanctuary,⁽³³⁾ a peculiarity which, according to Maria Sotiriou, is due to the architecture of the church and the available for decoration surfaces.⁽³⁴⁾ In addition, the coupling of the episode in question with the scene of the Descent into Hades on a common painted surface instead of the Ascension, as happens in many monuments of the Middle and Late period, makes impression and provokes questions.⁽³⁵⁾ Although the painter had the possibility to carry out a similar pictorial disposition by transferring the episode to the other side of the arch of the transversal aisle, to the eastern side of the church, in order for it to be part of the Ascension, he nevertheless adopted the solution of the combination of the Mission of the Disciples with the Resurrection, apparently to be in a visual dialogue with the directly opposite and also complementary episode of John's sermon to the people before the Baptism. This becomes more obvious if we consider that even their iconography coincides perfectly, relating to the asymmetrical type of both which is not, moreover, the most ordinary at least for the Mission of the Apostles during this period.⁽³⁶⁾

Let us briefly look now at these episodes in the light of their dialectical relationship we propose.

First, John's Preaching to the priests and Levites in Bethany and beyond the Jordan River **[Fig.6]** is confirmed

⁽³¹⁾ Toutos – Foustieris, *Ενρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 91.

⁽³²⁾ G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos, I, Les peintures*, Paris 1927, pl. 5.1, 6.1, 11.2, 12.4.

⁽³³⁾ S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, Paris 1970, 28.

⁽³⁴⁾ Sotiriou, Unpublished monography, op. cit. (n.17), 73 (I follow the pagination of the manuscript)

⁽³⁵⁾ A. Vasilaki-Karakatsani, *Οι τοιχογραφίες της Ομορφης Εκκλησιάς στην Αθήνα* (Τετράδια της ΧΑΕ, αριθ. 1), Athens 1971, 65-68.

⁽³⁶⁾ Ibidem, 66-68 and pl. 44.



Fig.6



Fig.7

by the same lengthy inscription that accompanies the episode: «ΕΓΩ ΒΑΠΤΙΖΩ ΥΜΑΣ ΕΝ ΥΔΑΤΙ ΜΕΘΕΝ ΔΕ ΥΜ(ΩΝ)/ΕΚΤΙΚΕΝ ΟΝ ΥΜΕΙΣ ΟΥΚ ΟΙΔΑΤΕ ΟΥ ΕΓΩ ΟΥΚ ΕΙΜΙ/ ΑΙΙΟC ΙΝΑ ΛΥCΩ ΤΟΝ ΙΜΑΝΤΑ ΤΟΥ

ΥΠΙΟΔΗ/MATOC ΑΥΤΟΥ» (I baptized with water but among you stands one you do not know, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (Jn 1. 26-27). It is very interesting that this passage from the first testimony of John the Baptist before the priests and the Levites is read on Monday after the Easter and has a clear resurrectional character.⁽³⁷⁾ It is therefore very possible that the choice of the portrait of the evangelist John with Prochorus, below the Baptism, is drawn and interpreted by this episode of John’s Preaching which nevertheless defines the character of the whole composition.

But even more significant is the association of the Baptism with the Resurrection scene opposite, both on an interpretive and symbolic level. Already, it has been convincingly shown by the late colleague Kono Keiko and professor Vassilis Katsaros that the enriched core of the Baptism of Protaton and of similar monuments, with the dancing children on the bridge and even the rushing river itself that divides John the Baptist by the Pharisees and priests, is not simply the result of a narrative tendency, quite popular for the Palaeologan period, of depicting the everyday life details as figurative marginal comments (“iconographie marginale”), which convey an idyllic atmosphere of a certain celebration or feast, as the late professor Doula Mouriki assumed,⁽³⁸⁾ but they are testimonies par excellence of Christ’s triumph that reinforce the message of salvation of the composition.⁽³⁹⁾

However, the iconography of the testimony of the Baptist, as depicted in Protaton, and which does not follow the most common version, is unusual and original, comparing to the similar compositions. This one is described either as the John’s sermon to the people without the participation of Christ, a topic related to the liturgy of the vigil of the feast of the Baptism, the January 5th, interpreting Luke 3. 1-18 (describing how John is preparing the Way) or as the episode in which John shows Christ to the people by illustrating the liturgy of January 7th, the day of the Synaxis of the Baptist, according to John 1. 29-34 (how John testifies about Jesus).⁽⁴⁰⁾ In Protaton, on the contrary, Christ is depicted in the midst of the crowd as the expected Messiah who stands out both because of the scale of his depiction and also of his frontality.

On the other hand, the Descent into Hades is extending, as we have seen, with the Mission of the Disciples [Fig.7], accompanied by a large inscription from the Gospel of Matthew: «(ΕΛΘ)ΘΗ ΜΟΙ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑ ΕΝ ΟΥ(ΠΑΝΩ ΚΑΙ) ΕΠΙ ΓΙC ΠΟΡΕΥΘΕΝΤΕ(C)/ Μ(Α)Θ(Η)Τ(ΕΥ)CΑΤΕ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ ΕΘΝΗ» “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28. 19). With the addition of the Mission of the Disciples⁽⁴¹⁾ in the Descent into Hades, it is not only recounted the temporal succession of the events, but much more is achieved the liturgical and not only the symbolic matching of the two main Christological compositions, the Baptism and the Descent into Hades, a pairing which is based on both, in the hymnography and in the interpretive texts of the patristic sermons. I mention only here as an example the homily-interpretation of

⁽³⁷⁾ G. Millet, *Recherches sur l’iconographie de l’Évangile aux XIV^e, XV^e, et XVI^e siècles d’après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos*, Paris 1916, 187.

⁽³⁸⁾ D. Mouriki, Revival Themes with Elements of Daily Life in two Palaeologan Frescoes depicting the Baptism, in *Okeanos. Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on His Sixtieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students* (ed. C. Mango - O. Pitsak with the assistance of Ul. M. Pasicznyk), (Harvard Ukrainian studies VII, 1983), 458-488.

⁽³⁹⁾ K. Keiko, The Personifications of the Jordan and the Sea: Their Function in the Baptism in Byzantine Art, in *Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Σωτήρη Κίτσα*, Thessaloniki 2001, 187-188. See also K. Keiko, Some Remarks on Scenes of the Baptism of Christ in the Protaton and the Virgin Perivleptos at Ohrid, in *The Study of the History of Art* (The Society of History of Art, Waseda University) XL 2002, 1-20. The paper is in Japanese. I owe the information to Vassilis Katsaros’ article (V. Katsaros, Η παράσταση της Βάπτισης στην Παλαιά Μητρόπολη Βέροιας, *DChAE*, 4-27 (2006), 171, note 17; his paper on 169-180). The same remark also concerns the Baptism in the catholicon of the Vatopedi Monastery (1312), where the unusually large group of Jews depicted in a variety of positions highlights the soteriological context of the composition (see my remarks in A. Semoglou, Πρόλογος, στο *Τοιχογραφίες Καθολικού της Ι. Μ. Βατοπαιδίου*, *Ημερολόγιο* 2023, Mount Athos 2023. A detailed publication of the overall decoration of the Vatopedi Monastery is forthcoming).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Millet, *Recherches*, op. cit. (n.37), 188 and 194-195.

⁽⁴¹⁾ For the context of the composition and the different moments of the life of Jesus with which it is related as well as for the corresponding iconographic types, see T. Masuda, *Η εικονογράφηση του χειρογράφου αρ. 587μ της Μονής Διονυσίου στο Άγιο Όρος. Συμβολή στη μελέτη των Βυζαντινών Ευαγγελισταρίων*, PhD, Department of History and Archaeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 1990, 56-62. For the composition and the evolution of its iconography, see also the paper of N. Gkirole, “ΠΟΡΕΥΘΕΝΤΕΣ...” (Εικονογραφικές παρατηρήσεις), *ΔΙΠΤΥΧΑ Α*, 1979, 104-144.

Theophanes Kerameus, bishop of Rossano in Calabria (1129-1151), on the appearance of Jesus in Galilee, according to which this appearance is evaluated as: “the most universal of the others, containing the Trinity theology and the tradition of Baptism and the Mission and the Preaching of the disciples”.⁽⁴²⁾ As for the liturgical association, the passage of the first Resurrectional matin Gospel (“εωθινό ευαγγέλιο”) is read either on the Sunday of Thomas, according to the Typikon of the Evergetis Monastery in Constantinople (11th or 12th century) or on the Easter Sunday, according to the Typikon of Hagia Sophia,⁽⁴³⁾ in a significant liturgical proximity to the passage of John the Baptist’s sermon to the Levites, read on the Monday of Easter. This remark, however, reinforces the association of the Protaton art with the decoration of the manuscripts and specifically of the four Gospels while documenting *ipso facto* the liturgical background of the connection of the evangelists with the feasts and the compositions that accompany them referring to the day of the reading of the Gospels texts.

As for the iconography, the scene of the Mission of the Apostles follows the narrative version, typical for the Palaeologan period, with Christ standing on a rock, which represents the Mount of Galilee, addressing to the group of his disciples on the left, holding a closed scroll with his left hand and raising the other in a gesture of speech. It has already been pointed out the special shape of the halo of Christ, which is inscribed in a rhombus with curved sides, an element which, according to Nektarios Zarras, underlines his divinity as well as the timeless character of Christ’s appearance, echoing the mystical current under the effect of the newly emerging Hesychastic movement.⁽⁴⁴⁾

In both of the above episodes, the common element is the preaching and the didactic content in its historical perspective, with the John’s Preaching as its starting point and the Mission of Christ’s disciples as its continuation. The compositions, therefore, of the Baptism and the Descent into Hades, to which the above episodes refer, are not simply annotated by them, according to their multi-verse Gospel inscriptions, but even more they reveal their sources of inspiration in the illustrated manuscripts Gospels and, mainly, they demonstrate the salutary role and message of a public sermon, which dispels the error and proclaims the right faith that renews and guarantees redemption. The question that follows is whether this dialectical and particularly prominent relationship between the two compositions in the church of Protaton is invested or not with a specific ideological content.

Research suggests that the creation of the composition of the Mission of the Apostles is linked in its historical and ideological context to the social and political situation in the Byzantine Empire after the triumph of Orthodoxy, -a feast commemorating the final defeat of iconoclasm on the first Sunday of Lent in 843- and particularly to the propagandistic content of its iconography, which was intended to securing the northern borders from the Slavs and the necessity of converting the new barbarian peoples.⁽⁴⁵⁾ On the basis of such an interpretation, we can easily understand the specific reasons for the visual formulation and dissemination of the idea of the restored Byzantine Empire after the recapture of its capital, Constantinople, by the Nicaeans in 1261, as the guarantor of the true faith, the Orthodoxy, which is the only one who can ensure its survival and restore the role of its high mission. In this context, it is indicative the propagandistic “renovatio” that is inaugurated by Michael VIII the Palaeologus and continues with his son, the young emperor Andronikos II as yet another new Constantine who restores the ecclesiastical order.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The focus on the apostolic role of Baptism, along with the idea of returning to the right path for salvation, as shown in the Resurrection scene, reflects the imperial policy to continue the Empire. In Protaton this is immediately perceived thanks to the alignment of the composition of the Descent into Hades with the youthful full-length portrait of the emperor Constantine the Great on the eastern foot of the arched opening that leads to the North-West com-

(42) N. Zarras, *Ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος των Εωθινών Ευαγγελίων στην Παλαιολόγεια Μνημειακή ζωγραφική των Βαλκανίων*, (Βυζαντινά Κείμενα και Μελέτες 57, Κέντρο Βυζαντινών Ερευνών), Thessaloniki 2011, 137.

(43) Ibidem, 84-86.

(44) Ibidem, 142-144.

(45) Gkioule, “ΠΙΟΡΕΥΘΕΝΤΕΣ...”, art. cit. (n.41), 126-128.

(46) T. Papamastoraki, Ένα εικαστικό εγκώμιο του Μιχαήλ Η΄ Παλαιολόγου: Οι εξωτερικές τοιχογραφίες στο καθολικό της μονής της Μαυριώτισσας στην Καστοριά, *DChAE*, 4-15 (1989-90), 221-240; Vasilakeris, Οι τοιχογραφίες, art. cit. (no 20), p. 126-127; see also R. Macrides, The New Constantine and the New Constantinople- 1261?, *Byzantine Modern and Greek Studies* 6, 1980, 22-24.



Fig.8



Fig.9

partment **[Fig.8]**.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Vasilakeris rightly associated the portrait of Constantine with the young Andronikos II Palaeologus,⁽⁴⁸⁾ noting its distinctive youthful features and its unique portrayal without his mother, Saint Helena. This theory supports a political interpretation and suggests an early dating of the monument to the late 13th century. The above becomes even stronger if we consider that the corresponding position at the eastern foot of the opening to the South-West, opposite, compartment is occupied by the figure of the saint martyr, Niketas the Goth **[Fig.9]**,⁽⁴⁹⁾ who was martyred during the reign of Constantine the Great by the barbarian Goths and whose name is synonymous of the victory against the error of the sects in the hymnology of his feast (September 15).⁽⁵⁰⁾ The saint is depicted as a bearded mature man, according to the hagiographic works, resembling Christ,⁽⁵¹⁾ holding the cross of the martyr. In my opinion, the choice of the Gothic saint aims to contrast his holiness with his origin which evokes the image of the typical barbarian of North, a fact which is also noted in his martyrdom⁽⁵²⁾. I am even wondering if placing the portraits of Constantine - Andronicus II and the Gothic martyr, Niketas, in prominent positions on the eastern face of the lateral compartments of Protaton suggests an eventual contrast between the virtuous-moral 'Romanity' and the

(47) Toutos – Fousteris, *Ευρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 52, sch. 1.1.5, no 361.

(48) Vasilakeris, *Οι τοιχογραφίες*, art.cit. (n.20), 117-128.

(49) Toutos – Fousteris, *Ευρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 53, sch. 1.1.6, no 321.

(50) «Τα ακροθίνια Μάρτυς, εκ των βαρβάρων Χριστώ, δόξαν προσάξας ώφθης, αθλητά θεηγόρε, θανάων υπέρ Τριάδος...» (Koutloumousianos Bartholomeos, *Μηναίων του Σεπτεμβρίου, περιέχον, άπασαν την ανήκουσαν αυτώ Ακολουθίαν, μετά και της προσθήκης του Τυπικού, κατά την νεωστί διάταξιν της Αγίας του Χριστού Μεγάλης Εκκλησίας*, Venise 1843, 105), «Της νίκης επώνυμος ανεδείχθης, Μάρτυς Νικήτα πανσεβάσμιε» (Ibidem, 106), «Της πλάνης τεμών, το κράτος τη ενστάσει σου, και νίκης λαβών, το στέφος τη αθλήσει σου, τοις Αγγέλοις ένδοξε συναγάλλη Νικήτα φερώνυμε, συν αυτοίς Χριστώ τω Θεώ, ο πρεσβεύων απαύστως υπέρ πάντων ημών (Ibidem, 107), «Φλέγη Νικήτα και γίνη νικηφόρος» (Ibidem, 108).

(51) M. Marković, St. Niketas the Goth and St. Niketas of Nikomedeia. Apropos Depictions of St. Niketas the martyr on Medieval Crosses, *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti* 36, 2008, 32 and 34.

(52) Ch. Messis, Str. Papaioannou, *Histoires "gothiques" à Byzance: Le saint, le soldat et le Miracle d'Euphémie et du Goth*, DOP 67, 2013, 18-19.

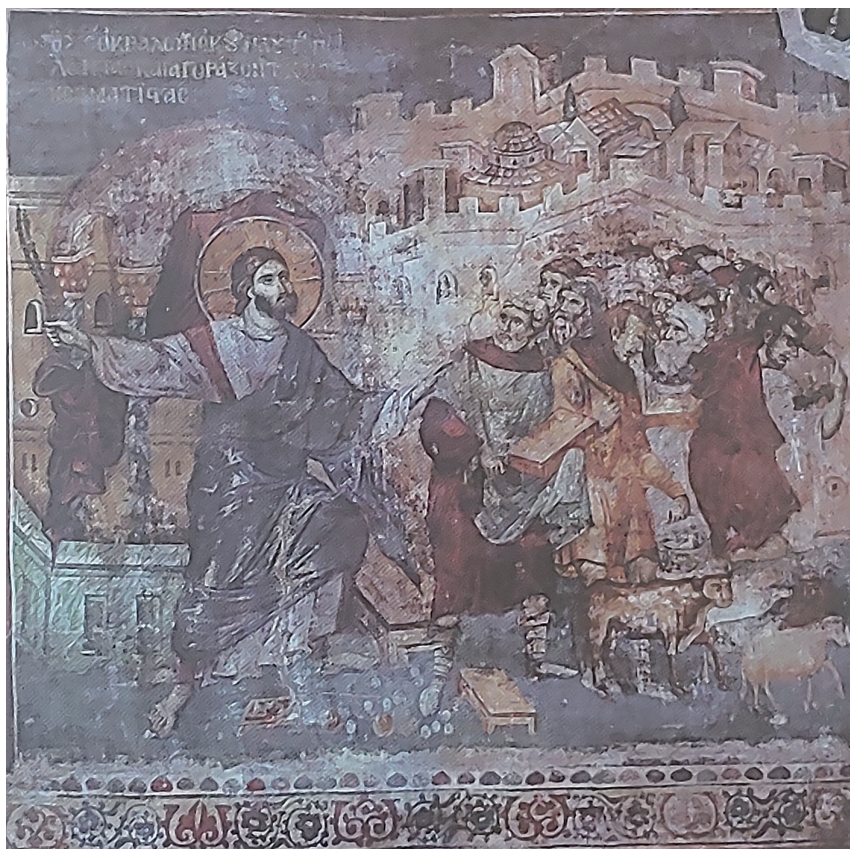


Fig.10

Gothic barbarity (from the people beyond the Danube River).⁽⁵³⁾

Even more, in this regard, we are able to understand the particularly important location of the composition of the merchants expelled from the Temple **[Fig.10]**, an episode reported by the four evangelists (Mt 21. 12-13; Mk 11. 15-17; Lk 19. 45 -46) but here following the more extended version of John (Jn 2. 13-17).⁽⁵⁴⁾ According to John, this one is located not after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem but is incorporated into the public life of Jesus and his miracles. The scene is placed on the west wall of the southwest compartment, just above the entrance leading to the narthex⁽⁵⁵⁾ while functioning as an “image de passage”.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The importance of such an option is revealed even more by the fact that the scene perfectly corresponds to the one which was chosen to decorate exactly the same place on the west wall, also above the entrance, but in the northwest compartment this time.⁽⁵⁷⁾ This is the episode of the twelve years old Christ Teaching in the Temple among the Jewish doctors in Jerusalem **[Fig.11]**, according to Luke (2. 40-2. 50). Given the composition’s reference to the notion of God’s Wisdom (Lk 2.40: *And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him*), illustrating the feast of the Mid-Pentecost⁽⁵⁸⁾ (after the Easter and in the middle of the time before the Pentecost) we cannot ignore the didactic sense and

⁽⁵³⁾ For this antithetical schema, *ibidem*, p. 20. In *Synaxarium of Constantinople* this is became obvious: «ου μην δε εκοινώνει τοις βαρβάροις, αλλά των ευσεβούντων ην» (H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi*, Bruxelles 1902, col. 45).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ For the scene and its meaning as the first public manifestation of Christ’s miraculous powers, see Th. Gouma-Peterson, *Christ as Ministrant and the Priest as Ministrant of Christ in Palaeologan Cycle of 1303*, *DOP* 32, 1978, 204-205.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Toutos – Foustieris, *Ενρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 53, sch. 1.1.6, no 301.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ On the symbolic character of these images, see M. U, *Images et passages dans l’espace ecclésial à l’époque médiobyzantine*, in *Visibilité et présence de l’image dans l’espace ecclésial. Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, ed. S. Brodbeck and A.-O. Poilpré, (Byzantina Sorbonensia – 30), Paris 2019, 307-327.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Toutos – Foustieris, *Ενρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 52, sch. 1.1.5, no 355.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ G. Babić, *O Prepolovljenju praznika*, *Zograf* 7, 1977, 23-27; D. I. Pallas, *Ο Χριστός ως η Θεία Σοφία. Η εικονογραφική περιπέτεια μιας θεολογικής έννοιας*, *DChAE*, 4-15 (1989-90), 131-135.



Fig.11

the preaching character of the composition, entirely compatible with the additional episodes of the Baptism and the Harrowing of Hell that we have just examined. Thus, we see how the iconographic program of these complementary scenes beyond their obvious eschatological and salutary context acquires its own functional dynamic as the visual means for the proclamation and the strengthening of the Orthodoxy. The combination of the two compositions aligned on the west wall of the two western lateral compartments, the Teaching of the young Christ and the Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple, also seems to be invested with an additional polemical character which could probably also reflect the religious opposition expressed solemnly by Andronikos II against the unionist policy of his father, the predecessor emperor, Michael VIII the Palaeologus, led to the union of the two churches ratified by the Council of Lyon in 1274.⁽⁵⁹⁾ From this perspective, we could then understand the reasons for the location of the scene considered, rightly, as enigmatic because of its unusual location for the Byzantine iconographic programs, as already noted by Kalomoirakis.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Moreover, the interpretation of Christ among the doctors within a polemical context is not a novel concept in church iconography. Precisely, in the narthex of the Bojana church in Bulgaria, founded by the sevastokrator Kalo-

⁽⁵⁹⁾ A. E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins. The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II 1282-1328* (Harvard Historical Studies 88), Cambridge (MA) 1972, 12-13; 17-21 and 32-37. See also P. Gounaridis, *Το κίνημα των Αρσενιατών. (1261-1310). Ιδεολογικές διαμάχες την εποχή των πρώτων Παλαιολόγων*, Athens 1999, 26 and 99-111.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Kalomoirakis, *Ερμηνευτικές*, art. cit. (n.4), 202-203. It is worth noting at this point that according to Kalomoirakis the scenes of Christ teaching in the Temple and the three youths in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) depicted directly above the previous one indicate the superiority of ascetic virtue in the strength and the wisdom of this world (ibidem, 217). In this context and under this interpretive prism, we fully understand the thesis of Kalomoirakis who argues that with the representation of the fiery furnace is emphasized the practice and the role of prayer, making those who practice it able to prevail even over the secular authority of the King (ibidem, 208). Let us add to this the patristic baptismal soteriological interpretation of the composition in question since through Baptism and prayer the three youths receive the Holy Spirit [M. Dulaey, *Les trois Hébreux dans la fournaise (Dn 3) dans l'interprétation symbolique de l'Église ancienne*, *Revue des sciences religieuses* 71-1, 1997, 50-57]. Couldn't it be read as a visual allusion to the strong resistance of the monastic communities against the unionist and the whole ecclesiastical policy of the emperor Michael VIII the Palaeologus, to the martyrdoms they suffered and their final triumph? [see Gounaridis, *Το κίνημα*, op. cit. (n.59), 67-79] This hypothesis seems plausible given once more the moral allegorical interpretation of the episode developed by the fathers of the church and especially by Origen who supported that exactly like the three young Hebrews the people is invited to face the sin and defeat the temptations with the grace of the Holy Spirit (Dulaey, *Les trois Hébreux*, art. cit., 57-58).

jan under the aegis of the Bulgarian tsar Constantine Assen, whose paintings date from 1258-1259, this composition takes on, according to Rossitza Schroeder, a controversial character having reference to the political and religious opponents of the Bulgarian king Constantine Assen, at the time of his ascension to the throne.⁽⁶¹⁾

In Protaton, one could easily understand the combination of that composition with the Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple, a scene which has been used especially in the West and for a long time, from the 11th century and forward, for the protection of the Church (the *Ecclesia*) and its Unity by its enemies and of its sacredness and above all in a logic of designating an anti-heretical program. According to Emanuel Bain the presence of this scene can also be explained within the framework of many hypotheses as for example the speech against the Jews, a call to the crusade or a speech on wealth etc.⁽⁶²⁾

Even more, this neotestamentary composition accompanies as a visual commentary (*exegesis*) the Psalm 68/69, 10 in the Middle-Byzantine marginal psalters from the 9th to the 11th century, such as the Chloudov Psalter (Moscow, State Historical Museum 129D), the Pantocrator Psalter from Mount Athos (Pantocrator 61), the London Psalter (London, British Library, Additional 19352) and the Barberini Psalter (Barb. Graec. 372).⁽⁶³⁾ The psalm verse ("the zeal for your house consumes me and the insults of those who insult you fall on me") is referenced in John's Gospel 2. 17 ("His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me") during the cleansing of the Temple. According to Maria Evangelatou, the composition has a clear and evident polemic character interpreting the exclusion of iconoclastic simony and avarice from the church. She also suggests that "the episode was probably read in the ninth century as a visual allusion to the expulsion for the church of the avaricious and iniquitous iconoclasts".⁽⁶⁴⁾ It is also worth underlining that the choice of the word zeal has been connected by the research to the effort of the psalmist to awaken the people of Israel to rebuild the Temple or to the righteous indignation committed in favor of the honor of the Sanctuary.⁽⁶⁵⁾

But moreover, in the Athonite church, it is also to be taken into consideration that the creator of the iconographic program intended to connect the Cleansing of the Temple with the Teaching of Christ among the Jewish Doctors in the opposite position and so as to correspond with each other. This becomes even more clear because next to the first scene is depicted, as a kind of a visual commentary, a quite rare episode taken from the Gospel of John (7. 37): "On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus, standing, cried out: If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and let him drink",⁽⁶⁶⁾ accompanied by the inscription with the above words of Jesus [Fig.12]. The episode is also part of a yet another teaching of Christ which took place during the Feast of Tabernacles in Galilee. The text, according to the late professor Dimitrios Pallas, refers to the memory of Christ's Teaching in the Temple on the feast of the Mid-Pentecost, the Wednesday between the Sunday of the Paralytic and the Sunday of the Samaritan woman.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The evangelical text of the feast of Mid-Pentecost belongs, according to Pallas, to the passages from the Gospel of John, which are read during the Pentecost, while the establishment of the feast of Mid-Pentecost seems to have been established no later than the 7th century.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Likewise, the episode of the Jesus' Teaching in the Temple which is taken from the Gospel of Luke and is part of the reading during the feast of the Circumcision also illustrates the same feast of the Mid-Pentecost, as an image of the divine Wisdom, but constitutes, very probably, an iconographic notion integrated later.⁽⁶⁹⁾ However, by the addition of these two "synonymous" liturgically and iconographically images on the west wall of the two lateral

(61) R. B. Schroeder, Transformative Narratives and Shifting Identities in the Narthex of the Boiana Church, *DOP* 64, 2010, 118-120.

(62) E. Bain, Les marchands chassés du Temple, entre commentaires et usages sociaux, *The Cleansing of the Temple: Commentaries and Social Uses*, *Médiévales* 55, 2008/2, 53-74 and specially 57 (on line review on the <https://journals.openedition.org/medievales/5449>).

(63) Chr. Walter, Christological themes in the Byzantine Marginal Psalters from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century, *REB* 44, 1986, 272.

(64) M. Evangelatou, *The Illustration of the Ninth-Century Byzantine Marginal Psalters: layers of meaning and their sources*, PhD, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, London 2002, 161-162.

(65) P. Glossis, *Η σχέση του Ισραηλίτη με το ναό του Θεού στο βιβλίο των Ψαλμών*, Master submitted in the Department of Pastoral and Social Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki 2015, 123.

(66) Toutos – Fouteris, *Ενρετήριο*, op. cit. (n.22), 53, sch. 1.1.6, no 300.

(67) Pallas, *Ο Χριστός*, art. cit. (n.58), 132.

(68) Ibidem, 132.

(69) Ibidem, 132.



Fig.12

compartments in Protaton and in the very privileged place of the lintel above the doors which lead to the narthex (the Teaching in the Temple and the Preaching in Galilee), the focus has moved to the Divine wisdom and to its transmission to the people, through teaching, as well as to the House with its seven pillars (“Oikos”), built by the wisdom, a poetic allegory of the Church, according to the Proverbs of Solomon (9.1).⁽⁷⁰⁾ Moreover, such a remark then makes reasonable the combination of the two scenes, one placed next to the other, the Expulsion of the Merchants and the Preaching of Jesus in the south-west compartment which have no apparent connection at the narrative but also at the liturgical level, the first being linked to the events before the Passion while the second to the period before Pentecost.

Moreover, this arrangement underscores the significant role of the Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple and the ecclesial dimension of all compositions in the lateral compartments of the church—including those from the Pentecost cycle. It highlights their ideological and specifically polemical function in the iconographic program of the naos, a previously overlooked aspect. Moreover, the very choice of the

portrait of Saint Niketas the Goth, close to the composition of the Expulsion of the Merchants, defines clearly, in my opinion, the recipient of this polemical visual vocabulary.

Finally, to the above iconographic function I want also to add and then comment the monumental-scale representation of Christos Anapeson (Fallen Christ as child), which debuts in monumental Byzantine art at the Protaton church, on the lintel of the western door and beneath the Dormition of the Virgin [Fig.13].⁽⁷¹⁾

This scene is a veterotestamentary theophany drawing from the prophecy of the Patriarch Jacob (*Genesis* 49: 9).⁽⁷²⁾ The depiction of Anapeson [Fig.14] foreshadows the coming of the Lord, who as a young lion rises, conveying the message of the Resurrection and the promise of salvation.⁽⁷³⁾ I think that in Protaton the depiction of Anapeson was deliberately chosen and associated with an extraordinary event that has to do with the personal life of the emperor. I am referring specifically to the extraordinary coincidence of the date of birth of the purple-born son and successor of Andronikos II Palaeologus, Michael IX, to the Easter Sunday of the year of 1277.⁽⁷⁴⁾ The above event takes a special place in the text of the high praise (*Encomium*) of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregory II of Cyprus to Andronikos, in the first paragraph of the *Synopsis Minor* as well as in the panegyric βασιλικός (the royal formal public speech delivered in high praise) of the byzantine scholar, the monk Maximus Planudes in honor of Michael IX Palaeologus.⁽⁷⁵⁾ In these texts, the connection of the birth of Michael with the resurrection of the Lord is strongly political and symbolical, as it is seen as a prophetic insight into the victory over the enemies and the sal-

⁽⁷⁰⁾ J. Meyendorff, L’iconographie de la Sagesse divine dans la tradition byzantine, *CahArch* 10, 1959, 259-277. See also T. Velmans, Deux images de la sagesse divine en Moldavie (Roumanie), *DChAE*, 4-22 (2001), 385-392.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Toutos – Foustieris, *Ενρετήριον*, op. cit. (n.22), 49, sch. 1.1.2, no 175.

⁽⁷²⁾ Br. Todić, Anapeson: iconographie et signification du thème, *Byzantion* 64/1, 1994, 143-144. See also the recent book of M. Studer-Karlen, *Christus Anapeson. Bild und Liturgie*, Basel 2022.

⁽⁷³⁾ Todić, Anapeson, art. cit. (n.72), 143. See also H. Belting, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages. Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, (transl. by M. Bartusis, R. Meyer), New York 1991, 104.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Semoglou, *Αναπεσών*, art. cit. (n.21), 100-103.

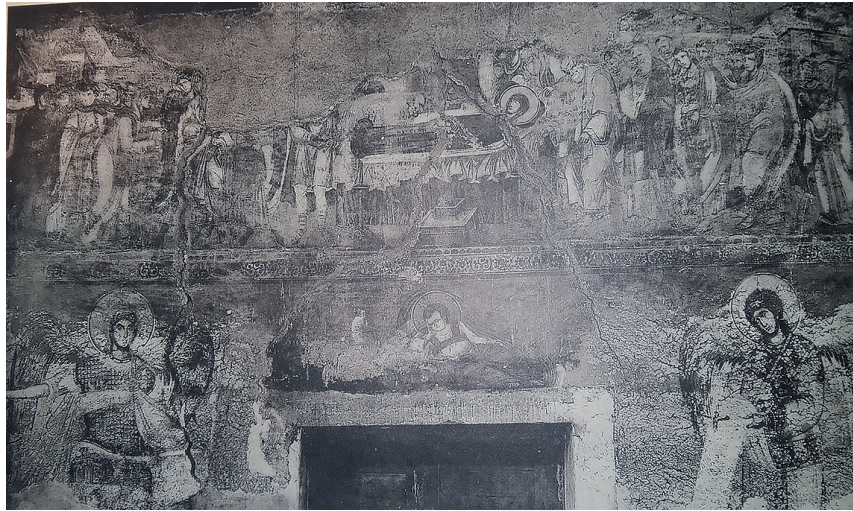


Fig.13



Fig.14

vation of the people.⁽⁷⁵⁾ I conclude supposing that Christ Anapeson is directly associated with this extraordinary coincidence serving as a propaganda image of Andronikos II, in the frame of his broader policy of continuing *renovatio* through the return to the righteous dogma and the ecclesiastical unity.⁽⁷⁷⁾

The prospect of such a reading and interpretation of the image of Anapeson with an ideological and political perspective and content seems to be confirmed by its appearance in another monument, just as early as that of the Protaton church, in the southern chapel in the Omorfi Ekklesia in Galatsi, Attica (dated to the end of the 13th c). Anapeson shares there unexpectedly the eastern arch of the Sanctuary with the composition of the Mission of the Apostles (“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations”, Mt 28.19) in an unusual combination.⁽⁷⁸⁾ The combination of the two subjects is obviously deliberate, given the imperial and also propagandistic content of the iconography of the Mission of the Apostles.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The paradoxical, at first reading, and unique pairing of the two images, the Anapeson and the Mission of the Apostles in the Omorfi Ekklesia in Galatsi, Attica, is therefore particularly perceptible as it is located in a monument of a Frankish area, the Duchy of Athens, whose decoration was attributed to painters aware of the artistic achievements in the major Byzantine artistic centers, Constantinople or Thessaloniki, and with a donor undoubtedly a person of high prestige and education, confirming the distinct ideo-

⁽⁷⁵⁾ St. Perentidis, L'empereur né le jour de Pâques. Michel IX Paléologue et la date de la Synopsis minor, *Fontes Minores* VII, 1986, 253-257.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Semoglou, Αναπεσών, art. cit. (n.21), 102.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Ibidem, 104-105.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Vasilaki-Karakatsani, Οι τοιχογραφίες, op. cit. (n.35), 65-71 and pl. 43 β, 44.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Semoglou, Αναπεσών, art. cit. (n.21), 103-104.

logical content of these iconographies.⁽⁸⁰⁾

As a result, I strongly believe that the depiction of Anapeson in the Protaton church primarily serves as a motif of propaganda for the Emperor Andronikos II. It symbolizes the promise of redemption and revival, reflecting the hopes for the salvation of the Roman people amidst numerous external and internal threats to the Empire. Such an interpretation of the Anapeson comes to verify the hypothesis on an early dating of the mural decoration of Protaton, only a few years after the the birth of Michael IX and at the very beginning of the reign of Andronikos II (probably between the years 1282 and 1285).⁽⁸¹⁾

In conclusion, understanding the complex iconography of this monument, which is significant for the Mount Athos monastic community and connected to the Palaeologan dynasty's imperial movement, is challenging and requires a thorough structural analysis, which must take into consideration many levels and parameters and calculate the internal forces of images and their interaction with each other, in order to decode its function and convert the visual data into a currently understandable to us language. As we see in Protaton, we are dealing with a triptych of meanings and purposes declaring the personal policy of Andronikos that guarantees the continuity and salvation of his state, promises the Restitution of the wounded Ecclesiastical Unity and restores, above all, the damaged legitimacy of his dynasty.

Finally, it's crucial to address the misconception that underestimates the importance of the Protaton's pictorial program. This view, dismissing its significance and dating potential, fails to acknowledge its unique contributions compared to other monastic monuments on the Athonite peninsula.

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Fig.6: Protaton, John's sermon to the priests and Levites

Fig.7: Protaton, the Mission of the Disciples to the Nations

Fig.8: Protaton, saint Constantine the Great.

Fig.9: Protaton, saint Niketas the Goth

Fig.10: Protaton, the Merchants expelled from the Temple

Fig.11: Protaton, Christ Teaching in the Temple

Fig.12: Protaton, The Teaching of Christ (John 7.37)

Fig.13: Protaton: Anapeson and the Dormition of the Virgin, General view of the western wall (according to G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos, I, Les peintures*, Paris 1927, pl. 30.1).

Fig.14: Protaton: Anapeson (detail)

⁽⁸⁰⁾ S. Kalopissi-Verti, Thirteenth-Century Painting in the Lordship of Athens: The Case of Hagios Petros in Kalyvia Kouvara and the Omorphi Ekklesia at Galatsi. Some new thoughts, *Arte Medievale*, IV serie, anno XI, 2021, 63-72.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Semoglou, Αναπεσών, art. cit. (no 21), 105-106.