

Some Aspects of the Development of Christian Orthodox Art in the 16th and 17th Centuries: the Testimony of Church Inscriptions and Artists' Signatures

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Back at the end of the 15th century the Sultan Mehmed II conferred on the Patriarch of Constantinople Gennadius Scholarios the right to represent all Christians subjected to the Sublime Porte. Thus the Ecumenical Throne became the only legitimate Orthodox institution within the Empire. To an extent the Patriarchate of Constantinople, with the Ottomans' help, gained for the first time independence from political power as well as control over the old autonomous Slavic churches, which had been unthinkable prior to the 15th c. This was marked in a peculiar manner when in 1526 Ioannes, a tailor from Ioannina, was tortured and burnt by the Ottomans in Istanbul, thus becoming the first new martyr of the transformed Byzantine Church. The cult towards him immediately spread throughout the empire and gave rise to a multitude of new martyrs, strengthening the influence of the Greek Patriarchate. Thirty years later the Patriarch Joassaph founded in the Ottoman capital a priest school, thanks to the financial support from Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible, with which the Greeks filled both the religious and the education gap in Orthodoxy at the time. During the second half of the 16th c. small parish schools also operated in Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, the islands of Chios and Patmos, etc. In 1577 a Greek college was founded in Rome as an attempt to attract the Sultan's subjects to Catholicism, but also as recognition for the prestige of the Greek element and the Greek language in Orthodoxy, which was why the college was equipped with a printing press and the Holy Bible was translated into the common Greek language. The Constantinopolitan Patriarch Jeremiah II appointed the Moscow bishop Job for patriarch in 1589 as token of the support provided for preserving Orthodoxy within the Ottoman Empire. In fact Russia remained the only sustainer of Orthodoxy during the period of the Ottoman rule, because the Trans-Danubian principalities were subjected to the Sultan but kept only

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their internal governance. Therefore various Moldowallachian rulers were founders or donors of churches on Mount Athos. This fact determines the tolerant attitude of the Greek clergy to the ministry and writing in Church Slavonic in the first centuries of the Ottoman occupation on the Balkans. In some areas, however, the Phanariot policy replaced it by stimulating the creation of a local literary tradition, as it has happened in the lands of present-day Romania from the 17th century onwards².

Before it was conquered by the Ottomans in 1669, the island of Crete was also a powerful artistic centre. Between 1453-1526, the existence of 120 painters in Heraklion was documented. They painted mostly icons, adhering either to the strict Byzantine tradition, or to the *Maniera Italiana*. Urban centers in the Balkans did not have such conditions because the Ottomans imposed restrictions on the construction of new churches and short deadlines for repair works on the old temples. Exceptions were some urban centers such as Ioannina (until 1611) and Athens, where due to certain privileges for the local population greater construction took place in the 16th century.

Thus the centres of artistic activity naturally became monasteries where monumental art and architecture developed following the medieval patterns. Representatives of the so-called Art school of Castoria from the late 15th and the early 16th c. worked on the old katholikon of the Transfiguration monastery in Meteora³, on the St. Nikita church, in the village of Chucher (ill. 1), etc.⁴ Donors and founders were mostly representatives of the high clergy. The Voevods of Moldowallachia and Russian tsars were supporters of the canon and tradition and they donated funds for the decoration of churches mostly in the Holy Mountain⁵.

² Until the beginning of the 17th century the documents related to Romanian lands and preserved in the archive of the Xeropotamou monastery in Mount Athos, were in Church Slavonic, later on documents in Romanian became more and more numerous. See Μαρινέσκου, Φ. Ρουμανικά έγγραφα του Αγίου Όρους. Αρχείο Ιεράς Μονής Ξηροποτάμου. τ. Α', Αθήνα, 1997.

³ Chatzidakis, M. Recherches sur le peintre Théophile le Crétois. – In: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23/24, Washington DC, 1969-1970, ill. 132.

⁴ Св. Радојичић, *Једна сликарска школа из друге половине XV века*. – В: Св. Радојичић, Одабрани чланци и студије (1933 – 1978). Београд, 1982, 258 – 279 (препечатано от ЗЛУ, 1, 1965, 69-139); M. Chatzidakis, *Aspects de la peinture religieuse dans les Balkans (1300-1550)*. – In: M. Chatzidakis, *Etudes sur la peinture postbyzantine*. London, 1976, 177-197; E. Γεωργιτσογιάννη, *Ένα εργαστήριο ανωνύμων του δεύτερου μισού του 15ου αιώνα στα Βαλκάνια και η επίδρασή του στη μεταβυζαντινή τέχνη*. – In: *Ηπειρωτικά χρονικά*, 29, 1988-1989, 145-172; V. Popovska-Korobar, *The Icone of Jesus Christ The Savior and the question of continuity of Ohrid painting school from the XVth c.* – In: *Изкуство/Art in Bulgaria*, 33-34, 1996, 34-38; Г. Суботић, *Костурска сликарска школа. Наслеђе и образовање домаћих радионица*. Глас САНУ, CCCLXXXIV, Одељење историјских наука, кн.10, 1998, 109-139, etc.

⁵ For instance the Wallachian chieftain Mihea II donated the Plubuita monastery to Xeropotamou in Mount Athos in 1585 Μαρινέσκου, Φ. Op. cit., 78-79.



1. Detail of the mural decoration at the St. Niketas' church in Cucer village, FYROM, 15th century.

The Fall of Constantinople in Ottoman hands was an event that stained European culture and shifted its balance, which naturally had an impact on art in Mount Athos. From the 16th century on the Athonite monasteries, unprepared for such burden, would replace the Constantinopolitan centers as leaders because they were granted a special status and privileges in the Ottoman legislation. On the other hand, their main patrons and donors became the rulers on the other side of the Danube because the dynasties of Byzantine rulers in Constantinople were wiped out. These two factors became fundamental to the design of the new monumental painting in the most important spiritual center of Orthodoxy – Athos – and this would reflect on the art across the Balkans because of the undeniable theological authority of the ascetic and monastic peninsula. The frescoes from the refectory of the Xenophontos monastery have been preserved since the late 15th century. The painting of the first layer of the decoration of the old katholikon of this monastery can be attributed to the same workshop. An image of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary has survived as well. It is located at the entrance of the Protaton church from 1511-1512, where all the stylistic features later typical for the so-called Cretan School, named after the origins of its two most renowned representatives⁶, were already present.

Also noteworthy is the fact that a little before the appearance of Theophanes the Cretan, a painting workshop functioned on the monastic peninsula, transferring through its

⁶ Τουτός, Ν., Γ. Φουστέρης, Ευρετήριο των μνημειακών ζωγραφικών του Αγίου Όρους 10^{ου} – 17^{ου} αιώνας, Αθήνα, 2010, σ. 21.

brushes entirely different traditions and perception of the world. Its work included the frescoes in the St. John the Baptist chapel in Protaton (1525-1526), the ones in the St. Blasios church in the Great Lavra (1528-1529) and in chapels, in the cells of Flaskas in Karies and of Fakinos close to the Pantokrator monastery. The style of these painters is characterized by a purity of line and bright colours, and their work is rightfully linked to the influence of Ohrid and its painting heritage from the 15th century.⁷

During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1522-1560) there were favourable conditions for cultural and economic growth of subjected populations. It is not a coincidence that from the third decade of the 16th century across continental Greece and Mount Athos monasteries and churches went through renovations, temples, chapels and refectories were decorated with frescoes. Donors were both rulers of Moldowallachia and local clergymen who commissioned almost without exception the repainting of existing mural ensembles in the landmark cult centers of Mount Athos and in Thessaly to the artistic teams of the Cretan painters Theophanes Stelitzas-Batas and Dzordzis. It is through them that during the second and third quarters of the 16th century, mural painting would have its second prosperous period on Mount Athos⁸. This formally called Cretan school is believed to have imported “Western” or “Venetian” influences to the Athonite monumental painting, which, translated through the filter of the peculiar Orthodoxy of Crete, spread to the northernmost peninsula of Halkidiki⁹. However, researchers often tend to forget that its representatives were only born on this Cycladic island, and they became truly accomplished as painters in Meteora or in the Holy Mountain. I believe that those accused of being influenced by the realistic art of the West, a place of a different faith, were simply more gifted painters. Moreover, they did not share many common features with painters working on Crete, such as Andreas Ritsos (+ about 1492), Andreas Paviar (+ about 1504), Nikolaos Zaphouris (+ about 1507), together with their successors from the 17th c. (Emmanuel Dzanes Bounialis (1610-1690), Theodoros Poulakis (1622-1692) etc.¹⁰ The latter were the true representatives of the Cretan School, as influenced by the Italian masters, such as Raphael, M. Raimondi and Bellini. In this sense I believe it is more accurate to speak about Cretan painters on Mount Athos, rather than about the presence of a Cretan school in the artistic processes there. In reality, the search for Western/ European influences in church art on the Balkans during the first half of the 18th century, as well as the correlation between renaissance and post-renaissance processes and a completely different type of culture, is rather a compensatory act in the minds of contemporary researchers, caused more by modern yearnings for geopolitical belonging and the complex of the Anatolian stigmatization, than it is an act based on real observations on the medieval view of the Orthodox creator, who probably felt at ease with their visual world of two-dimensional mysticism and theatrical conditionality. On the hand, when speaking of influences, the influencing side should be interested as well, i.e. the West should have been interested in its

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Βοκοτόπουλος, Π. Μνημειακή ζωγραφική. – In: *Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους*, Β' εκδ., Θεσσαλονίκη, 1997, σ. 38.

⁹ Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Ο κρητικός ζωγράφος Θεοφάνης. Η τελευταία φάση της τέχνης του στις τοιχογραφίες της Ιεράς Μονής Σταυρονικήτα, Άγιον Όρος, 1986.

¹⁰ About the Cretan masters see Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση. τ. Α', Αθήνα, 1987, σ. 79-94.

influence over the Christian East. Such influence, however, is not documented, and the borrowings or rather the occasional appearance of certain patterns, gestures, and compositions is not enough evidence for the existence of influence.



2. *St. Menas the Egyptian*, by Theophanes Strelitsas-Bathas, Katholikon of the Stavronikita monastery, Mount Athos, 16th century.

Theophanes arrived in Mount Athos already an established master, which is why he was commissioned to paint the katholikon of the Great Lavra (1534-1535), where he became a monk and lived with his two sons until 1543 (**ill. 2**). Ten years later, together with his successor Simeon, he decorated the main church, the refectory and one of the chapels of the Stavronikita monastery (1545-1546); he is believed to have painted some of the frescoes in the Southern chapel of the katholikon in the Pantokrator monastery, which statement should be taken with some grain of salt since the monument was demolished in the mid 19th century. Two mural ensembles from the same period also have to be included in this overview: the katholikon of the Koutloumousiou monastery (1539-1540) and the small trikonchal Church of Molibdoecclesia in the Hilandar cell The Dormition of the Virgin Mary by Karies (1541). The inscriptions on the two monuments mentioned the name of the painter and monk Makarios, who was part of the same artistic movement and by no means a lesser painter than Theophanes. It is possible that the same Makarios assisted the Cretan painter in the work on the refectory of the Lavra or vice versa – that Theophanes worked with him in Koutloumousiou or Karies. The other representative of Cretan artists, Dzordzis, believed to be Theophanes' apprentice, belonged to the same powerful artistic trend. According to written data this Cretan started to work on Athos, painting the katholikon of the Dionysiou Monastery (1546-1547), but in recent years this assumption has been disproved because there we can notice more than one hand and higher professionalism, which is not typical for the artist's later work¹¹. After lengthy work in Thessaly and Meteora, Dzordzis was also invited in the Holy Mountain with his assistants in order to decorate the Docheiariou Monastery (1567-1568) (**ill. 3**). The reorganization and new painting of the katholikon of the Dionysiou Monastery during the second half of the 16th century was funded by the Moldovian prince Ioan-Peter, and later on the Voevode Alexander and his wife Roksandra built nowadays' main church of the Docheiariou Monastery and paid for its painting.

¹¹ Τουτός, Ν., Γ. Φουστέρης, *Op. cit.*, σ. 22.



3. Archangel Gabriel, by Tzortzis, katholikon of Docheiariou monastery, Mount Athos, 16th century.

Also worth noting from the 16th century in Athos are: the katholikon of the Iviron Monastery, where there is an image of the painter Marko with a halo, standing among the donors, as well as the frescoes in the refectory of the Philotheou Monastery (1561-1574). The same master has worked on both, but as part of a team. The stylistics of the two ensembles is very similar to the one of the Cretans Theophanes and Dzordzis. Other frescoes important for the development of late medieval art, despite their poor state, are the ones in the katholikon of the Simonopetra Monastery, which are also influenced by the art of the two Cretan painters. The name of the painter Antonios is also well-known. He signed the old katholikon in the Xenophontos monastery (1544), but the decoration of the St. John the Apostle chapel in the Vatopediou cell of St. Procopius (1536-1537) and the St. George Chapel in the St. Paul Monastery (1552-1555) are attributed to him to an extent. This painter borrowed certain elements of the esthetic of the Cretans, aliens in Athos, but he was clearly not a student of Theophanes'.

It should be noted that the so-called "Northern Greek" school or "school of Thebes"¹² is represented here by a single monument. These are the frescoes of the chapel St. Nicholas of

¹² Αχειμάστου-Ποταμιάνου, Μ. Η μονή Φιλανθρωπινών και η πρώτη φάση της βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής, Αθήναι, 1983, etc.

the katholikon of the Great Lavra (1559-1560), which are unique because they are the last and only signed work of Frangos Katelanos of Thebes (**ill. 4**).



4. *St. Ermolaos Anargyros*, by Frangos Katelanos, St. Nickolas chapel at the katholikon of the Great Lavra, Mount Athos, 16th century.

Only the frescoes in the narthex of the old central church in Xenophontos, signed by a certain painter Theophanes, a monk in 1563, cannot be related to the major workshops, which operated in Mount Athos at the time: the ones of Theophanes the Cretan, Makarios, Dzordzis, Antonios or Frangos Katelanos. The figures on those frescoes are interesting but of poorer quality of execution.

It is not a sheer coincidence that the date of the last significant monument of monumental painting on the Holy Mountain – the katholikon of the Docheiariou Monastery (1567-1568) – coincides with date of the confiscation of Athonite convents by Sultan Selim II. Deprived of this type of income, as well as of the tangible support of the Voevodes beyond the Danube, the Athonite monasteries were only in a position to complete the already started

endeavours or undertake small-scale renovation works. Nevertheless, the Docheiariou Monastery maintained the monastic painting workshop, which is why only one of the twelve monuments from the first half of the 17th century isn't work of its representatives. The main master of this local artistic workshop is the monk Daniel, who was inspired by the works of the Cretan Dzordzis but was no student of his. In 1602-1603 Daniel painted the refectory of the Dionisiou Monastery, and in 1607-1608, assisted by Merkourios, he decorated the St. John the Apostle chapel, and after working on the St. George chapel in the same monastery, he retired from there and decorated with frescoes the Sts. Anargyroi chapel in the Monoxylites. His student the monk Merkourios continued working on the frescoes of chapels and other halls of the Dionysiou Monastery but since he had good reputation and a fine taste for the beautiful, he was commissioned to paint the phiale of the Great Lavra in 1634-1635. The Vatopedi's authorities also invited Merkourios and his apprentices soon, which is visible in the paintings of the St George cell in Provata from 1634-1635. The only exception to the ubiquitous art of the painter-monks from Dionysiou was the non-Greek monastery of Hilandar, where the Serbian monk Georgi Mitrophanovich¹³ was invited to paint the refectory in 1622.

Almost all Athonite monasteries have icons, painted by representatives of the tradition from Crete. The most remarkable examples of their craftsmanship are the icons of the royal and apostle rows painted by Theophanes and his son on the altar screens of the Lavra, Iviron, Stavronikita, Pantokrator and Grigoriou. Other Cretans who worked on icons in Mount Athos were: Euphrosinos (active in 1542) – Dionysiou¹⁴; Michael Damaskinos (c. 1535 – 1592/93) – Stavronikita¹⁵; Konstantinos Paleokapas (active in 1635-1640) – Karakalou¹⁶; Ioannes Apakas (active at the end of the 16th – beg. of the 17th c.) – Great Lavra¹⁷ etc.¹⁸ Cretan icons, however, were costly and appeared rarely in other parts of the Balkans, especially if there was no Greek-speaking population in those areas.

In modern-day Greece Mount Athos is the greatest consumer of religious art from the Ottoman period. Still, despite the relatively favourable living conditions for Christians in the Ottoman capital, the existence of an artistic centre in the 16th century there remains doubtful. The Greek researcher Pallas believes that because the artist Dzordzis was mentioned, there were art workshops in Constantinople, which produced icons for the needs of Christians in the Empire, but we do not have any evidence for that today.

The 16th century was a period of prosperity for mural painting in continental Greece as well. Apart from Theophanes Strelitzas or Batas, who worked in Meteora and Mount Athos, the aforementioned Frangos Katelanos from Thebes worked during that century, painting temples in Epirus, Thessaly and Macedonia. Another important painter of the period was the priest Onoufrios who painted murals in nowadays' central Albania, Castoria, Valsh, Shelcan,

¹³ Kajmakovic, Z. Georgije Mitrofanovic, Sarajevo, 1977 и др.

¹⁴ Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι..., τ. Α', σ. 289.

¹⁵ Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι..., τ. Α', σ. 241-253.

¹⁶ Χατζηδάκης, Μ., Ευ. Δρακοπούλου, Έλληνες ζωγράφοι..., τ. Β', σ. 266-267.

¹⁷ Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι..., τ. Α', σ. 175-176.

¹⁸ Icons of Cretan Art: From Chandax to Moscow and St. Petersburg (in Greek), Ηράκλειο, 1979.

Berat, Prilep (1547-1554), etc.¹⁹ After the Ottomans' conquest of Cyprus in 1571, Onoufrios of Cyprus (1594-1615)²⁰ painted in the lands of what is now Southern Albania. The influence of Cypriot icon-painting art from this period is evident in the emulation of metal fittings in painting. However, the migration of artists from Cyprus to other parts of the Balkans was not a widespread but rather an isolated phenomenon. They usually preferred to work in Palestine or the Middle East²¹.

Between 1570 and the end of the 17th century in Epirus, Western Macedonia and the Western mainland part of Greece family teams of painters appeared originating from the village of Linotopi. Their pieces were signed only by their first names. Their aesthetic is naïve, their colors – vivid, and their typical multifigured compositions are almost miniature²². In this last trait they reminiscent many of the mural monuments in Romania, but that does not mean there is a direct link between the two. Linotopi' masters didn't even work on Mount Athos²³. The "Garden of the Virgin" did not host representatives of the Castoria school, nor any Cypriot artists.

Despite the bleak picture of decay in Christian Orthodox art on the Balkans, it must be acknowledged that, in the period between the 13th and the 15th centuries, the inscriptions in all church frescoes which survive in Bulgaria and have been dated with some confidence are in Palaeobulgarian, with insignificant additions of texts in Greek on the scrolls held by Saints²⁴. In the 15th century in particular, churches were decorated with frescoes of high quality and with inscriptions in Palaeobulgarian, despite the loss of political and religious independence²⁵. Only at the end of the 16th century did Greek inscriptions make their appearance in some churches in Bulgarian territories (St Steven's church from 1599 in Nessebar), but over the next century or so, they began to increase²⁶.

Icon-painters started to sign their works relatively late, but their signatures could serve as interesting grounds for making some observations. The names of three fifteenth-century

¹⁹ Χατζηδάκης, Μ., Ευ. Δρακοπούλου, Έλληνες ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση. Β', Αθήνα, 1997, 256-258.

²⁰ Βοκοτόπουλος, Π. Η θρησκευτική ζωγραφική στην Αλβανία από τον 10ο έως τον 19ο αιώνα. – In: Εικόνες από τις Ορθόδοξες κοινότητες της Αλβανίας, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2006, σ. 20.

²¹ Μутафов, Е. Страници от хаджийския дневник: някои наблюдения върху православно християнско изкуство в Йерусалим и връзките му с балканската традиция през османския период. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, 4/2012, с. 9-10.

²² Βοκοτόπουλος, Π. Η θρησκευτική..., с. 21.

²³ Moutafov, E. Живописна на Атон през призмата на новите научни изследвания. Размисли. – In: *Art Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, Sofia, 2012, с. 10

²⁴ Бакалова, Е. Стенописни надписи..., с. 187.

²⁵ Those are the churches of the Virgin Mary of Vitosha, St Theodor, Sts Apostles Peter and Paul, St George, St Archangel Michael, Holy Archangels, Mother of God at Mislovshitsa, and St John the Theologian at Poganovo, which are in the area of Southwestern Bulgarian epigraphic monumental artifacts influenced by the Ohrid archiepiscopate in the fifteenth century. See Андреев, Х. Новоразкрити надписи от 1475/1476 година в олтарното пространство на църквата в Драгалевския манастир. – В: *Старобългаристика XXXI* (2007), кн. 4, С., р. 82.

²⁶ Ibid.

artists are known in present-day Bulgaria, signed in Bulgarian in the monastery of St Demetrios in Boboshevo (**ill. 5**): Neophit and his sons Dimitar and Bogdan²⁷.



5. Detail of a mural decoration with cryptograms from the church of St. Demetrios at Boboshevo village, Bulgaria, 15th century.

Another one is the monk Marko from Dubrovnik²⁸; i.e. we do not have any signed piece by a Greek painter. Over the next century the number of painters who signed their works rose to seven. Four of them, or more than a half, are Bulgarians: Nedelko from Lovetch²⁹, Pimen Zographski³⁰ and his teacher Thoma from Sofia³¹, but the other two are Greek clergymen: Arsenios, bishop of Plovdiv,³² and hieromonk Pachomios (**ill. 6**)³³.

²⁷ Божков, А. Краят на неизживяното българско кватроченто. – В: *Изкуство*, 1967, кн. 1, с. 35, бел. 10; Суботиќ, Г. *Охридската сликарска школа од XV век*. Охрид, 1980, с. 134-141; Машниќ, М. Прилози за три малку познати споменици во Кичевско-бродскиот крај од поствизантискиот период. – В: *Културно наследство*, 16, Скопје, 1993, с. 96-101.

²⁸ Димитров, Б. *Петър Богдан Бакиев. Български политик и историк от XVII в.* С., 1985, с. 177; *Документи за католическата дейност в България през XVII в.* С., 1993, с. 193.

²⁹ Паскалева, К. *Икони от България*, С., 1981, № 21; Божков, А. *Българската икона*, С., 1984, ил. 114.

³⁰ Пандурски, В. *Куриловският манастир*. С., 1975; Геров, Г. Аргументи за датировката и атрибуцията на няколко икони от Зографския манастир. – В: *Светогорска обител Зограф*, т. I, С., 1995, с. 131-142; Гергова, И. Още веднъж за св. Пимен Зографски. – В: *Българският XVII в.* (под печат); Поповска-Коробар, В. Кон атрибуцията на живописот во црквата на Слимничкиот манастир. – В: *Зборник*. Нова сер. бр. 2, Скопје, 1996, с. 213-237; Поповска-Коробар, В. Към атрибуцията на живописата в Слимничкия манастир и нейните паралели в някои църкви в България. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, кн. 2, 1997, с. 3-9; Гергова, И. Резбата в ателието на Пимен Зографски. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, кн. 2, 2003, с. 23-32 и др.



6. *St. George*, by hieromonk Pachomios, National Art Gallery, Sofia, 16th century.

³¹ Динеков, П. Житието на Пимен Зографски. – В: *Известия на Института за българска литература*, кн. 2, 1954, с. 233-248 и др.

³² Герлах, С. *Дневник на едно пътуване до Османската порта в Цариград*. С, 1976, с. 259.

³³ Ждраков, З. Влиянието на критската школа върху българската живопис през XVI в., сб. *Българският XVI в.*, С, 1996, с. 569.



7. Roof mural decoration of the Sts Theodor Stratelates and Theodor Teron' church in Dobarsko village, Bulgaria, 1614.

Another Greek signature is that of Constantine³⁴, who made icons in Nessebar and was certainly Greek as well. On the basis of such scanty data, we can tentatively deduce that, a century after the Ottoman conquest, the highest-ranking clergy in Bulgarian territories had been replaced by Greeks, some of the monks were of Greek origin as well, or began to write in Greek, and that happened mostly in places with compact Greek populations like Plovdiv and the Black Sea coast. Nevertheless, the workshop of Pimen Zographski became active in Sofia and its vicinity, producing high-quality wall-paintings for the monastery of St John of Rila in Kurilo in 1596; for the church of St Theodor Teron and St Theodor Stratelates in the village of Dobarsko in 1614 (**ill. 7**); and for the monastery of the village of Seslavtsi in 1615-1616; at the beginning of the following century, it produced works within the present borders of FYROM and in the Zographou monastery on M. Athos. Frescoes from 16th to 17th century survived as well in the Ilientsi Monastery, near Sofia (**ill. 8**).

³⁴ Паскалева, К. *Икони от България*, № 32-34; Божков, А. *Българската икона*, ил. 95; Ждраков, З. *Op. cit.*, с. 566



8. *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Plientsi, near Sofia, 16-17th century.*

From the seventeenth century, data are available for more or less the same number of artists who signed their names. There are eight of them. The following are certainly Greek: hieromonk Kesarios (ill. 9) and Jakovos Daronas³⁵, who painted icons for the Greeks in Nessebar.

³⁵ Тотева, П., С. Московска, *24 икони от Южна България*. С. 1987., с. 7-8, ил. 4-5; Паскалева, К. *24 икони от Кривопаланка*. С., 1987, с. 9, ил. 10-11; Московска, С. Осем несребърски икони от Държавната художествена галерия - Пловдив – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, 1997, 2, с. 46-52 и др.



9. *Virgin Hodegetria with Christ, by hieromonk Kesarios, National Art Gallery, Sofia, 17th century.*

A cryptograph of the monk Lephteris has recently been found in Arbanassi³⁶, where masters from today's Albania were called in as well. Five painters, however, are doubtless of Bulgarian origin: Joan from Tsivinodola³⁷, Joan³⁸, Joan Komnov³⁹ and the teachers Nedelko⁴⁰

³⁶ Мутафов, Е. Новооткрит криптограф от църквата на Арбанашкия манастир „Успение Богородично“. – В: *Etropolskata knizhovna shkola i balgarskiat 17ti vek*, Sofia, 2011, 281-285

³⁷ Акрабова-Жандова, И. *Икони в Софийския археологически музей*, № XV, с. 66; Гергова, И. Зограф Йоан от Чивинодола. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, кн. 2, 1997, с. 31-40

and Nedio⁴¹. Judging by frescoes in Bulgarian territories, Greek and Bulgarian inscriptions on them were almost equal in number in the 17th century⁴². This is due to the fact that the church leadership of Constantinople was consolidated by the economically and politically powerful Phanariot community which was fostered by the Patriarchate⁴³. It is important to note that, during the preparation of the mural programs for the temples in Bulgarian lands, they used a Greek-language painter's manual of the type of the First Jerusalem Manuscript, or of the so-called hermeneia of the priest Daniel. In my view, the prototype of this text must have been created in Crete no later than the end of the 16th century⁴⁴. There are plenty of unsigned icons with aesthetics which would most probably identify them as belonging to Greek workshops as well. Also interesting noting is that the Russian “лицевые подлинники” appeared around the same time, which is evidence for a common need of established models across the Orthodox world, regardless of the political situation of the lands where the specific monuments were located. Until then there was no need for written manuals since the tradition was alive and art was passed on from teacher to student and by imitation from good models. This does not mean that painters did not make preparatory sketches or did not collect them.

The Romanian principalities, vassals to the Sublime Porte, used exclusively Palaeobulgarian in the inscriptions on frescoes and icons from the beginning of the 17th century. As with other Balkan nations, Romanians acquired a translation of the Bible in their native language thanks to the Protestants⁴⁵. It was only in 1640 that the first work in Romanian was printed, but it was also translated from Church Slavonic⁴⁶. This fact, however, is not due to Protestants in Transylvania only, but to the increased Greek presence north of the Danube after the late 16th century. Numerous Greek traders, councillors and creditors settled in those relatively free territories, and their numbers increased steadily over the next century. At the time many clergymen of Greek origin or education settled in the Romanian states, and the influence of Mount Athos over local monasteries grew, which lead to “a Hellenization of the Romanian Church and to the Greek language replacing the Slavic ones during the

³⁸ Гергова, И. Врачанската иконопис от XVII в. – В: *Изкуство*, кн. 9-10, 1990, с. 12, ил. на с. 11; Тарашоева, В., В. Борисов, Експозицията във Възнесенската църква – храм-паметник “Св. Софроний, еп. Врачански” във Враца. – В: *ИМСБ*, т. 17, С, 1991, с. 185, ил. 9.

³⁹ Машиниќ, М. Црквата Света Петка во Селник и нејзините паралели со сликарството на Алинскиот манастир Свети Спас. – В: *Културно наследство*, 17-18, Скопје, 1994, с. 102-111.

⁴⁰ Мутафчиев, П. *Из нашите старопланински манастири, Избрани произведения*. т. II, С., 1975, с. 373, 374; Пандурски, В. *Манастирската стенна живопис в Карлуково*. С., 2002, с. 193.

⁴¹ Гергова, И. Църквата на арбанашкият манастир Успение Богородично. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, кн. 1, 1999, с. 10-12, ил. on p. 10, 11.

⁴² *Корпус на стенописите от XVII в. в България*. Под ред. на Б. Пенкова и Ц. Кунева, С., 2012.

⁴³ Jorga, N. *Byzance après Byzance. Continuation de l' "Histoire de la vie byzance"*. Institut d'Études Byzantines, Bucharest, 1935, 220-237, etc.

⁴⁴ Мутафов, Е. Страници от хаджийския дневник: някои наблюдения върху православно християнско изкуство в Йерусалим и връзките му с балканската традиция през османския период. – В: *Проблеми на изкуството*, 4/2012, с. 9-10.

⁴⁵ История на Османската империя. Ред. Р. Мантран, С., 1999, с. 322.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, с. 323.

liturgy”⁴⁷. Furthermore, from that period onwards “Greek practically replaced Church Slavonic and became the official language of the Church and rulers”⁴⁸. These are parallel processes observed also in Bulgarian lands – in the 17th century Bulgarian and Greek inscriptions in churches were equal in terms of quantity, while during the next century the ones in Greek predominated, when in Moldavia and Wallachia the so-called “Phanariot period” began⁴⁹. These tendencies were inspired by the Constantinople Patriarchate (**ill. 10**) and were aimed mostly at weakening the Bulgarian element in local churches within the Ottoman Empire, and not so much at limiting the Russian influence, which is related to a significant political and financial support from the Ecumenical Throne.



10. View to the entrance of the main church of the Ecumenical Patriarchate today, Istanbul.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, c. 326.

⁴⁸ Sugar, P. Η Νοτιοανατολική Ευρώπη κάτω από Οθωμανική κυριαρχία (1354-1804). τ. Β΄, Αθήνα, 1994, σ. 36.

⁴⁹ История на Османската империя, с. 325.

The same happened a century later on a smaller scale in Serbian lands, since the Patriarchate of Peć existed until 1766⁵⁰. The Cyrillic inscriptions on works of church art were always predominant there; Fener treated the Serbs with respect or certain lack of interest, which is why influences from the Habsburgs, Russia and Ukraine extended more easily. Last but not least, the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate was never afraid of a “Bulgarisation” of the Serbian Church for obvious historic reasons. Thus Serbia is a more particular example of the development of Balkan culture during the Ottoman period.

We can only regret that despite the rising importance of Mount Athos in the 16th-17th centuries in Albanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian lands there were no masters of the class of Theophanes the Cretan and Frangos Katelanos. This made the Holy Mountain a centre for the artistic life of the time, and in the periphery painters of more modest talent worked, following unconsciously the same developments and models. We cannot speak of Athonite influence on Balkan painting in the 16th century. There was art on Mount Athos, but there was no Athonite art.

Echoes of the so-called Macedonian or Ohrid art school of the second half of the fifteenth century are discovered by Greek researchers in Dorohoi (1522) and Hirlau (1530). Relatively small is the number of Greek masters who worked in the Romanian lands as George from Trikala (+ 1530), Nikolaos of Crete, Andrew, Mark, Mina Stamatelos Kotronas from Zakynthos (1554). Some of them, however, are certainly koutsovlachoi/ arumani. Assumed, but rather far-fetched, is that in Moldovitsa (1557) also worked priest Onoufrios from Neokastro⁵¹.

Of course there are some difficult-to-explain parallels in the choice of iconographic themes in a completely different linguistic and cultural environment. An example is the appearance of the scene with “The request of Joseph of Arimathea” (**ill. 11**) in the frescoes of the main church in the Gyromeri Monastery, Thesprotia in Epirus (1577-1590)⁵² and even more in some Romanian monuments from the 16th century, such as the St. George’s church in Hirlau⁵³, Popauti⁵⁴, the Dobrovat Monastery⁵⁵, and Vatra Moldovitei⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ История на Османската империя, с. 354.

⁵¹ Χατζηδάκης, Μ. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι..., τ. Α', σ. 130.

⁵² Τσιούρης, Ι. Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του καθολικού της Μονής Γηρομερίου Θεσπρωτίας (1577-1590). Συμβολή στη μελέτη της εντοίχιας θρησκευτικής ζωγραφικής του 16^{ου} αιώνα στην Ήπειρο. Αθήνα, 2011, σ. 82.

⁵³ Stefanescu, I. L' art Byzantin et l' art Lombard en Transylvanie. Peintures murales de valachie et de Moldavie, Paris, 1938, ill. XXXII.1.

⁵⁴ Henry, P. Les églises de la Moldavie du Nord, Des origines à la fin du XVI^e siècle. Architecture et peinture. Album. Monument de l'art Byzantine VI, Paris, 1930, ill. XXXVI.2.

⁵⁵ Stefanescu, I. Op. cit., ill. XLVIII.1.

⁵⁶ Henry, P. Op. cit., ill. XXIV.1.



11. *The Request of Joseph of Arimathea, Gyromeri monastery, Thesprotia, Greece, 16th century.*

The scene appeared already in the Paleologian period⁵⁷ but in art from the 15th century it existed only in Greek and Romanian monuments. In this particular case there is a link between the monastery in Epirus and the trans-Danubian principalities: a decree by Patriarch Metrophanes III from 1568 mentioned as donator Mr. Axiotis, who was born in Epirus and was the first agas of Ungro-Wallachia between 10.12.1567 and 23.05.1568⁵⁸. It is based on his initiative that in the same year the prince of Wallachia Petru the Younger granted a yearly support to the Gyromeri Monastery in the amount of 1000 aspras⁵⁹. In the 17th century the interest of Romanian rulers in this Greek monastery increased⁶⁰. It is unclear, however, how the donations became borrowed ideas for iconographic themes and what was the direction of influence: whether art in Greek lands influenced the Romanian one, or vice versa – old iconographic schemes remained on the periphery of the former Slavic and Byzantine community and then transformed returned back to the lands with a Greek-speaking population. Another issue is the language of the inscriptions in these scenes, since if we

⁵⁷ Millet, G. *Monuments de l' Athos. I les peintures*, Paris, 1927, Ill. 27.1; Millet, G. *Recherches sur l' iconographie de l' Evangelie au XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles*, Paris, 1960, p. 465-466, ill. 490.

⁵⁸ Nasturel, P. *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains*. – In: *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 227/ Roma, 1986, p. 228, etc.

⁵⁹ Τσιούρης, Ι. *Op. cit.*, c. 18.

⁶⁰ Βρανούσης, Λ. *Μονή Γηρομερίου*. – In: *Θρησκευτική και ηθική εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, τ. Δ' (1964), σ. 500.

assume that the direction was from Paleologian art, via Epirus to Romania, then why weren't those inscriptions preserved in Greek in the 16th century? On the other hand it is important to specify who the carrier of these borrowings was: painters, monks, donors, or some iconographic bilingual manuals that we are not familiar with. There is no evidence as to the presence of arumani in Thesprotia, there were concentrated in Thessaly and Epirus. A clear proof for the delegation of powers from Ottoman authorities to Wallachian rulers regarding the population south of the Danube was an edict of Suleiman the Magnificent from 1543. It stipulated that Radu Pajsie (1535-1545) had to take care of the Rila Monastery, protect the rights of the Rila monks and do so as vassal of the Sultan but also as chieftain of these lands⁶¹. It is clear that Wallachian rulers had extensive rights in the territories south of the Danube, and their status was similar to the one of Ottoman dignitaries. What is more, they also had the possibility to make use of this status in order to help the local population. Their rights, however, did not lead to artistic influences in the biggest Bulgarian monastery, which, in its turn, is a sign for certain selectivity despite the lack of a language barrier.

One thing is certain though: in spite of the Ottomans' presence on the Balkans, inscriptions on frescoes in Orthodox churches continued to be the same in the 16th century as the ones during the two previous centuries. This means that the ethnic profile of painters, clergy, and users of this art remained the same. A century later, however, a hellenization process began with varying intensity and two forms of manifestation – by the direct use of Greek and manuals in Greek or by encouraging the use of the local language, for instance in the monuments in Romania from the 17th century. In this we can agree with Helen Evans' insight that the year 1557, when the term “Byzantium”⁶² appeared in research, was in fact an important date for the Christian East because it marked the end of the medieval Orthodox tradition and its transition into the pre-modern period. In the art and culture of the peoples subjected to the Sultan this period started in the next century to pave the way for the new Balkan national differentiation during the 17th and the 19th centuries. Behind their apparent conservatism the inscriptions on frescoes also reflected the stages of this process.

As a Bulgarian scholar I am expected to write about the language of the inscriptions in Romanian monuments from the 16th century, which was definitely not the Russian version of Church Slavonic from the 18th century. It appeared on the Balkans in the 18th century through old printed books, published in Russia. Since the 1990s Bulgarian researchers have not been writing about a “language” when describing manuscripts or reading epigraphics so as to avoid misunderstanding. Such monuments exist on the territories of Ukraine, Serbia etc. In the case of Romania, according to the established practice (A. A. Turilov's most recent observations⁶³) it should be noted that the inscriptions on frescoes from the 16th century were written in the “Middle Bulgarian spelling” because the nasal sounds were in their etymological places, in most case the “er”-s were also written in their etymological places, this is proven by

⁶¹ For a translation of this document see: Архимандрит Кирил Рилски, Кратки спомени из миналия ми живот 1861–1931, С., 1931, 146-147.

⁶² Evans, H. C. Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557) – In: *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004, p. 15.

⁶³ Турилов, А. Критерии определения славяно-молдавских рукописей XV–XVI вв. – В: *Хризотграф*. Кн. 2. Москва, 2005, 139–168.

morphological features etc. The spelling of the Slavic language is Middle Bulgarian, because it is used like this after the reform of Patriarch Euthymios. Before that often there had been inconsistencies in spelling. However, this does not make the monuments in Moldowallachia Bulgarian just as the inscriptions in Greek appearing in Bulgarian lands do not make automatically our churches Greek. Painters from the Paleologian period had to be at least bilingual in order to serve communities with different mother tongues, use written sources in Slavonic and Greek, and speak the language of the administration in the territories they crossed. Until the end of the 18th century the main distinctive feature on the Balkans was religion, and not nationality or language.

Summary

This text tries to draw a general view of the development of the Christian Orthodox art in the 16th and 17th centuries. The author represents in brief the main monuments and artists during the above period on the Balkans as well as the interactions between different cultures in historical context. Special interest is given to the art appeared on Mount Athos and the role of Patriarchate of Constantinople as a political and spiritual factor in the Ottoman empire and their influence in the Trans-Danubian principalities. Most of the existing bibliography on this subject is presented and analyzed. In his critical reading of the available publication E. Moutafov suggests for instance that it is more accurate to speak about Cretan painters on Mount Athos, rather than about the presence of a Cretan school in the artistic processes there. On the hand, when speaking of Western/ European influences, he believes that the influencing side should be interested as well, i.e. the West should have been interested in its influence over the Christian East, which is not documented. It is important to note the observation made here, that during the preparation of the mural programs for the temples in Bulgarian lands, the artists used a Greek-language painter's manual of the type of the First Jerusalem Manuscript, or of the so-called *hermeneia* of the priest Daniel. Also interesting noting is that the Russian “лицевые подлинники” appeared around the same time, which is evidence for a common need of established models across the Orthodox world, regardless of the political situation of the lands where the specific monuments were located. Until then for the author there was no need for written manuals since the tradition was alive and art was passed on from teacher to student and by imitation from good models. This does not mean that painters did not make preparatory sketches (*anthivola*) or did not collect them. One thing is certain though: in spite of the Ottomans' presence on the Balkans, inscriptions on frescoes in Orthodox churches continued to be the same in the 16th century as the ones during the two previous centuries. This means for Moutafov that the ethnic profile of painters, clergy, and users of this art remained the same. A century later, however, a *hellenization* process began with varying intensity and two forms of manifestation – by the direct use of Greek and manuals in Greek or by encouraging the use of the local language, for instance in the monuments in Romania from the 17th century. In this the author agrees with Helen Evans' insight that the year 1557, when the term “Byzantium” appeared in research, was in fact an important date for the Christian East because it marked the end of the medieval Orthodox tradition and its transition into the pre-modern period.