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## Religious Imagery in Mystra. Donors and Iconographic Programmes

(with plates 24–28)

In the history of Mystra<sup>1</sup>, which extends over the last 211 years of the Byzantine Empire, one can distinguish four separate phases: the period of William II de Villehardouin, prince of the Frankish principality of Achaea, who, in 1249, founded the castle at the top of the hill; the period of the resident Byzantine general, from circa 1260 until 1348; the period of the Kantakuzenoi, from 1348 until 1384 and, finally, that of the Palaeologoi from 1384 until the fall of Mystra to the Turks in 1460. During its Byzantine phase, the history of this province was marked by endless wars, invasions and plundering raids, social and political upheavals. The despots of Mystra were forced to confront the Latin population of the Peloponnese (Franks, Navarese and Venetians), who, either by hostile actions or by diplomatic manoeuvres, continually undermined the Byzantine government. Moreover, the local Greek nobility often acted in an underhand manner in order to retain their privileges. In addition, during all these years the Byzantines had to face the Turkish threat: only during the Palaeologan period alone, eight great military operations were mounted by the Turks against the Peloponnese, during which they systematically, burnt, destroyed and laid waste the land<sup>2</sup>.

However, in spite of its turbulent history, Mystra became a small paradise for the Byzantines. It became an important centre of learning and the arts, as well as a focal point in the cultural development of Europe. It was frequently visited by outstanding political and ecclesiastical figures from Constantinople<sup>3</sup> and was home to numerous artists, scribes and copyists, connoisseurs and intellectuals. The most prominent figure among them during the fifteenth century was the philosopher George Gemistos Plethon, who settled in Mystra after c.1407 and, during his visit to Florence in 1439, particularly impressed with his teaching Cosimo de' Medici, the great promoter of arts and letters<sup>4</sup>. In Mystra life flowed relatively calmly inside the city walls, where the splendour of the Constantinopolitan court was reflected in miniature, and where the customs and traditions of Byzantine etiquette were still alive. Because of its position in a remote and isolated corner of the Peloponnese, Mystra offered a safe shelter from the tribulations of Constantinople and Thessalonica, the continuous and terrible sieges, the civil wars and epidemics. It should be mentioned that, in order to escape the epidemic of the plague of 1361, John VI Kantakuzenos left Mount Athos and went to Mystra<sup>5</sup>, while thirty years later, when the emperor Manuel II sailed for Italy, instead of leaving his wife and children in Constantinople, he brought them to Mystra, where they would be safe<sup>6</sup>. In the fifteenth century Mystra had become the second most important city of the declining Byzantine Empire.

The churches of Mystra<sup>7</sup> constitute the most brilliant evidence of the civilisation that prospered in this place. Their frescoes, despite their bad state of preservation in some cases, even now radiate a genuine Con-

<sup>1</sup> For the history of Mystra see: A. ZAKYTHINOS, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, I: Histoire politique. Paris 1932, II: Vie et institutions, Athens 1953, (édition revue et augmentée par Chr. MALTEZOU, London 1975). I. P. MEDVEDEV, *Mistra* (russ.). Leningrad 1973. W. VON LOEHNESEN, *Mistra. Griechenlands Schicksal im Mittelalter. Morea unter Franken, Byzantinern und Osmanen*. Munich 1977. S. RUNCIMAN, *Mistra. Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese*. London 1980.

<sup>2</sup> ZAKYTHINOS, *Le Despotat*, I (see n. 1), *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> E. BARKER, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus*. Oxford 1961, 196.

<sup>4</sup> C. M. WOODHOUSE, *George Gemistos Plethon, The Last of the Hellenes*. Oxford 1986, 59, 156.

<sup>5</sup> D. M. NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*. Cambridge 21993, 240 f.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): a Study on Late Byzantine Statemanship*. New Brunswick, N. J. 1969, XXVII and 494.

<sup>7</sup> G. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra*. Paris 1910. S. DUFRENNE, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra (Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques 4)*. Paris 1970. M. CHATZIDAKIS, *Η Μυστράς. Η Μεσαιωνική πολιτεία και το κάστρο*. Athens 21987. S. SINOS, *Mistras. RBK 6* (1999) 380–518.

stantinopolitan flavour<sup>8</sup>. Although almost all the written documents concerning their paintings have been destroyed, we know from several inscriptions, written on frescoes and from monograms incised on stones or columns, that enlightened donors, who belonged to the high clergy or to the governing aristocracy, founded or renovated some of these monuments, which in a particular way, have remained as the silent witnesses of their patrons' aspirations<sup>9</sup>. Repetitions of iconographic details, of entire iconographic programmes and of stylistic forms, due to the similar background of the donors and to the vicinity of the monuments, make the study of the Byzantine painting of Mystra most intriguing.

From this point of view, of particular interest are the two more important churches of the fourteenth century, Hagia Sophia and Peribleptos, which can be assigned to the first despot of Mystra, the erudite Manuel Kantakuzenos, and his wife, the French princess Isabelle de Lusignan. Manuel's monogram is still preserved on one of the columns of Hagia Sophia, while an inscription of a political nature deciphered by Michel Fourmont, mentioned the same despot as donor<sup>10</sup>. It should be added here that this monument was identified with the church of the Zoodotes Christos, which in 1365 became the katholikon of a male monastery. This information comes from a letter written by Manuel himself and is addressed to the patriarch of Constantinople<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, the information concerning the donors of the Peribleptos remains uncertain<sup>12</sup>. The couple painted inside the church, on the west wall<sup>13</sup>, cannot be identified with certainty. However, the two lions and the fleurs de lys on the stone slab bearing the monogram of the church, the fleur de lys on the interior and exterior walls of the apse (pl. 24, fig. 1) and the lion and the monogram of the Kantakuzenos family on the external south wall, show that the founders of the church must have been Manuel and his wife, Isabelle de Lusignan<sup>14</sup>. Both monuments belong to a variation of the cross-in-square architectural type, with the two western columns supporting the dome, a type that is quite common, especially in Greece during the Palaeologan period. In Mystra the church of the Evangelistria belongs also to this type<sup>15</sup>.

The fresco decoration of the two monuments reveals that a great affinity of style exists between them, a fact noted by all previous scholars. It is obvious that one church was the model for the other. In Hagia Sophia, built between 1350 and 1370, the enthroned Christ is painted in the conch of the apse (pl. 24, fig. 2): the placing of this subject here constitutes the revival of an early Christian practice<sup>16</sup>, it is a representation based on imperial iconography and symbolising God in Heaven<sup>17</sup>. This figure of Christ, on the one hand, must be connected with the authority assumed by Manuel Kantakuzenos as the first despot of Mystra, and on the other hand with the possible original dedication of the church to Christ Zoodotes; the frescoes in the nave are unfortunately heavily damaged, except for the Ascension, which is well preserved on the sanctuary vault.

The iconographic programme of the north-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia constitutes, from one point of view, a programme in miniature, of a typical Byzantine church. However, the selection of the Dodekaorton scenes related to death and resurrection, (e.g. the Crucifixion [pl. 24, fig. 3]), the Anastasis, the Women at

<sup>8</sup> D. MOURIKI, The Wall Paintings of the Pantanassa at Mistra: Models of a Painters Workshop in the Fifteenth Century. In: S. ČURČIĆ – D. MOURIKI (eds.), *The Twilight of Byzantium. Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire*. Princeton 1991, 217–49.

<sup>9</sup> G. MILLET, *Inscriptions Byzantines de Mistra*. *BCH* 23 (1899) 97–156 and *BCH* 30 (1906) 453–66.

<sup>10</sup> MILLET, *Inscriptions* (1899) (see n. 9), 142–5. ZAKYTHINOS, *Le Despotat*, I (see n. 1), 106, II, 197.

<sup>11</sup> ZAKYTHINOS, *op.cit.*, I, 105, II, 197–298. See also F. MIKLOSICH – J. MÜLLER, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi*. Vienna 1860, I 472–4.

<sup>12</sup> A. LOUVI, *L'architecture et la sculpture de la Peribleptos de Mistra*. (Thèse de doctorat du 3<sup>e</sup> cycle, Université Paris I). Paris 1980.

<sup>13</sup> MILLET, *Mistra* (see n. 7), pl. 111, 4.

<sup>14</sup> LOUVI, *L'architecture et la sculpture* (see n. 12), 193–5. MILLET, *Inscriptions* (1899) (see n. 9), 146, n. 41. For the fleur de lys see LOUVI, *op. cit.*, 143, 145, 147, 152, 196, 197–9. A. XYNGOPOULOS, *Φραγκικά κρινάνθημα εις το Γεράκι και τον Μυστρά*. In: *Mélanges Merlier*. Athens 1956, II, 205–11. A. BON, *Pierres inscrites ou armoriées de la Morée franque*. *DChAE* IV D' (1964–65) 101, note 3.

<sup>15</sup> SINOS, *Mistras* (see n. 7) 430–5.

<sup>16</sup> During the early Christian period Christ was pictured seated on a throne, often surrounded by apostles, saints, angels and donors: Ch. IHM, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts*. Wiesbaden 1960, 5 ff. and 11 ff.

<sup>17</sup> A. GRABAR, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*. Strasbourg 1936 (Variorum Reprint, London 1971), 196. For this subject see also T. F. MATHEWS, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*. Princeton 1993, 93 ff. J. M. SPIESER, *The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches*. *Gesta* 37 (1988) 63 ff., 65, note 24.

the Tomb and the Dormition of the Virgin), as well as the underground space that was dug beneath the chapel, clearly points to its funerary function<sup>18</sup>. It is very probable that this north-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia, was originally designed as a sort of mausoleum for the despot Manuel Kantakuzenos, and for the male members of his family.

Of particular interest are the frescoes of the south-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia, which was built later and most probably after 1366<sup>19</sup>. Its iconographic programme is most closely connected to that of the Peribleptos. It would seem that this chapel is dedicated to the Virgin and to the Holy Communion. Decisive, from this point of view, is the inclusion of the representation of the Virgin in the saucer dome (pl. 24, fig. 4), as well as of the two most important scenes of the Mariological cycle – the Birth of the Virgin (pl. 25, fig. 1) and the Entry of the Virgin into the Temple. We should also mention that two huge representations, those of the enthroned Virgin and Christ, figure on the south and north walls of the chapel, respectively. Unfortunately, these frescoes are very badly preserved today.

The Holy Communion is symbolised in the chapel by the scene of the Divine Liturgy on the saucer dome (pl. 24, fig. 4), in the centre of which Christ is depicted as the Great High Priest, and around him in procession are angels holding the holy vessels and the Epitaphios<sup>20</sup>. Two iconographic types of Christ, which are immediately related to his Passion, were also depicted in this chapel: The Man of Sorrows, and the Holy Mandyllion. Both representations are related to the Virgin in more than one ways. Regarding the Man of Sorrows one need only mention the famous two-sided icon of the 12<sup>th</sup> century from Kastoria representing the Virgin on one side and the Man of Sorrows on the other<sup>21</sup>. The Holy Mandyllion, on the other hand, is related to the Virgin because it is the symbol of Christ's Incarnation; moreover it stresses the meaning of the Passion and sometimes becomes the symbol of the Holy Communion<sup>22</sup>. Great emphasis is given in this chapel, to the Birth of the Virgin (pl. 25, fig. 1), an impressive scene with many figures, which is expanded on the surface of the west wall. Its iconography is influenced by the imperial traditions concerning the birth of a new emperor<sup>23</sup>. An exact copy of this scene, but with fewer figures and not so luxuriously rendered, is to be found in the fresco depicting the same scene of the katholikon of the Peribleptos at Mystra<sup>24</sup>.

We believe that the founding of the south-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia can with certainty be assigned to Isabelle, Maria or Margaret de Lusignan, wife of Manuel Kantakuzenos and daughter of Guy de Lusignan, king of Armenia<sup>25</sup>. For Isabelle we do not possess any analogous texts to those written some years later on Cleopa Malatesta, wife of the despot Theodore II Palaeologos. This can be explained by the fact that the dynasty of the Kantakuzenoi fell into disfavour when the Palaeologan dynasty asserted its power over the throne of Constantinople. It would seem that Isabelle was a dynamic woman, who actively supported her husband's efforts to maintain peace between the Byzantine despotate and the Frankish rulers of the Peloponnese<sup>26</sup>. She must have been unhappy because she could not have children, and childlessness, especially during

<sup>18</sup> N. B. DRANDAKIS, Οι τοιχογραφίες του ΒΑ παρεκκλησίου της Αγίας Σοφίας Μυστρά. *EPhSpA* 28 (1979–85) 469 ff.

<sup>19</sup> This chapel is dated after 1366, because in the plan it seems to copy the chapel of the bishop Kyprianos in the Hodegetria at Mystra, dated 1366: Sinos, Mistras (see n. 7), 380. For the frescoes of the south-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia see M. EMMANOUIL, Η Αγία Σοφία του Μυστρά. Παρατηρήσεις στις τοιχογραφίες και στο εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα. In: Volume dedicated to the memory of M. Garidis, University of Ioannina 2003, 153–98.

<sup>20</sup> K. WESSEL, Himmlische Liturgie. *RbK* 3 (1978) 119–31. T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της Παλαιολόγειας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και την Κύπρο. Athens 2001, 135 ff.

<sup>21</sup> H. BELTING, An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: the Man of Sorrows in Byzantium. *DOP* 34–35 (1980–81), 1ff. IDEM, Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter, Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion. Berlin 1981, 142 ff.

<sup>22</sup> A. GRABAR, La Sainte Face de Laon. Le Mandyllion dans l'art orthodoxe. Prague 1931, 24, 26, 27 ff. D. PALLAS, Die Passion und Bestattung Christi in Byzanz (*MBM* 2). Munich 1965, 137 f.

<sup>23</sup> J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'empire Byzantine et en Occident. Bruxelles 1964, I 95–6, 98. The mosaic with the Nativity of the Virgin in the katholikon of the monastery of Daphni is one of the earlier representations, where one can see the influence from the life in the court. EADEM, fig. 57, p. 94. See also 97.

<sup>24</sup> MILLET, Mistra (see n. 7), pl. 127: 1.

<sup>25</sup> D. ZAKYTHINOS, Une princesse française a la cour de Mistra au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Isabelle de Lusignan Cantacuzene. *REG* 49 (1936) 62–76. S. BINON, Guy d'Arménie et Guy de Chypre. Isabelle de Lusignan à la cour de Mistra. *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 5 (1937) (= Mélanges Emile Boisacq) 125–42; *PLP* 6, no. 15057.

<sup>26</sup> ZAKYTHINOS, Une princesse française (see n. 25), *op. cit.*, 68. BINON, Guy d'Arménie (see n. 25), 138. D. M. NICOL, The Byzantine Family of Kantakuzenos (Cantacuzenus), ca. 1100–1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study (*DOS* 11). Washington, D.C. 1968, 127.

those times, was a state women found shameful and debasing<sup>27</sup>. When Manuel died she must have been 50 years of age. For a very short time she ruled alone over the despotate, and later sought refuge in Cyprus among her relatives, with whom she had always maintained close relations, often to the advantage of the despotate<sup>28</sup>. From the point of view of size and luxury the impressive representation of the Birth of the Virgin leads to the hypothesis that Isabelle was the donor of the south-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia, and most probably that she identified herself with saint Anna, the mother of the Virgin, in her wish to have a child. In the text of the Protoevangelion of James, the Birth of the Virgin is effectively seen as God's answer to the prayers of Joachim and Anna, about having a child<sup>29</sup>. The same wish is expressed also through the scene of the Entry of the Virgin into the Temple, which was painted on the east wall of the chapel, over the conch<sup>30</sup>.

Most probably at the same time as the southeastern chapel of Hagia Sophia, around 1370, Isabelle alone (rather than Isabelle and her husband), founded the katholikon of the monastery of the Peribleptos<sup>31</sup>. The things which motivated her to found a new monastery must have been, amongst other factors<sup>32</sup>, the wish to be near her husband, in case he should decided to become a monk in the male monastery of Hagia Sophia, the hope of security in her old age and potential widowhood; and various other socio-economic reasons. Isabelle would thus be able to play a more dynamic social role in the despotate and among the Frankish population still living in the Peloponnese. According to the *typika* of the women's monasteries, not only the donor and the female members of her family could retire to the monastery, but also other women of aristocratic origin. They could live there together, while preserving many of the privileges they had enjoyed in their ordinary life<sup>33</sup>.

The iconographic programme of the Peribleptos, which is also dedicated to the Virgin, consists of three separate cycles: the liturgical and Eucharistic cycle, the cycle of the feasts, (where emphasis has been given to the scenes of the Passion of Christ), and the cycle with scenes from the life of the Virgin<sup>34</sup>. The liturgical cycle is painted in the sanctuary, the prothesis and the diakonikon. In the prothesis are depicted the divine Liturgy, with Christ in the iconographic type of the Great High Priest<sup>35</sup>, the Ancient of Days, and the Man of Sorrows<sup>36</sup>. It must be noted here that the Man of Sorrows and the Divine Liturgy were also represented in the south-eastern chapel of Hagia Sophia. In addition, the iconography of the Divine Liturgy is exactly the same in both monuments. In the diakonikon of the Peribleptos, two iconographic types of Christ are depicted, the Anapeson (pl. 25, fig. 2), and the Holy Mandylion, in the conch and on the wall over the conch, respectively<sup>37</sup>. The Anapeson is represented between two angels holding the symbols of the Passion. This iconographic subject, which is based on the Biblical text of Genesis (49,9) is used mainly to serve the needs of the liturgy<sup>38</sup>. It constitutes an Old Testament prefiguration of the Epiphany of Christ. In some cases the Anapeson functions as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, in others as the symbol of the Incarnation and the Passion. In the Peribleptos the iconographic details that accompany the figure of Christ, that is the Symbols of the Passion and the architectural background, indicate the double nature of Christ, who died on earth and is alive with his Father in Heaven<sup>39</sup>. From this point of view the Anapeson and the Holy Mandylion in this church convey exactly the same messages, the first representing the Old Testament and the second the New Testament. Both lend support and give emphasis to the two predominant iconographic cycles in this church: the very extensive cycle with scenes from the life of the Virgin and the cycle of Christ's Passion.

<sup>27</sup> A. E. LAIOU, Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women. *BF* 9 (1985) 66, 67.

<sup>28</sup> ZAKYTHINOS, Une princesse Byzantine (see n. 25), 75–6. BINON, Guy d'Arménie (see n. 25), 137–8, 140–1.

<sup>29</sup> A. CAMERON, Η πρόιμη λατρεία της Παναγίας. In: M. VASSILAKI (ed.), Μήτηρ Θεού. Απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας στη Βυζαντινή τέχνη. Athens 2000, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Georgios Monachos kai Chartophylax, Enkōmion eis tēn apodosin tēs Hyperagias Theotokou en tō naō kai aphierōsin tō Theō kata tēn historian. *PG* 100, 1412–3.

<sup>31</sup> For the church see above, note 12.

<sup>32</sup> C. GALATARIOU, Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities: the Evidence of the Typika. *JÖB* 38 (1988) 276, 278, 279.

<sup>33</sup> LAIOU, Observations (see n. 27), 75–6, 77.

<sup>34</sup> DUFRENNE, Les programmes (see n. 7), pl. 29–30.

<sup>35</sup> T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, Η μορφή του Χριστού-Μεγάλου Αρχιερέα. *DChAE* IV 17 (1993–94), 67ff. IDEM, Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών (see n. 20), 148–9.

<sup>36</sup> S. DUFRENNE, Images du décor de la prothèse. *REB* 26 (1968) 297 ff.

<sup>37</sup> DUFRENNE, Les programmes (see n. 7), fig. 61.

<sup>38</sup> B. TODIĆ, Anapeson. Iconographie et signification du thème. *Byz* 64 (1994) 134 ff.

<sup>39</sup> TODIĆ, Anapeson (see n. 38), 153.

From the study of the iconographic programmes of the chapel of Hagia Sophia and of the Peribleptos it becomes obvious that the same meanings are predominant in both, except that in the chapel of Hagia Sophia there is a very small selection of scenes, which constitute a summary of the programme of the Peribleptos. Because the donors of these two monuments were the despots of Mystra, the paintings show an obvious Constantinopolitan influence, as much from the point of view of the iconography, as from the point of view of style<sup>40</sup>. We might suggest that Hagia Sophia, because of its original dedication to Christ and its vicinity to the palace of Mystra, had acquired a more worldly character while, in the Peribleptos, built from the beginning as the katholikon of a monastery, the programme is compact, full of theological messages and with a content of a purely liturgical and soteriological nature.

The iconographic programmes of another two churches in Mystra are also of particular importance, because they were the creations of two prominent personalities and represent the spiritual and artistic trends of their times. The first is the Hodegetria or Apheniko<sup>41</sup> (pl. 25, fig. 3): the church was built according to the so-called 'Mystra type', whose distinguishing feature is the combination of a three aisled basilica on the ground floor, with a cross-in-square church with five domes on the first floor. There is also a two-storied narthex in the middle of which there is another dome. One must add that among the most fascinating features of this church are the galleries on the first floor. The galleries played an important role in the court ceremonial of Constantinople and it has been suggested that a similar arrangement was recreated at Mystra with the establishment of a princely court<sup>42</sup>. The Hodegetria must have been greatly admired at Mystra: the same design was used c. 1430 for the monastery of the Pantanassa, while a few years later the Metropolis, built on the plan of a basilica, was also remodelled to resemble the Hodegetria<sup>43</sup>.

The Hodegetria was founded by Pachomios, the enterprising abbot of the monastery of the Brontochion, between 1313 and 1322, that is during a period when the church of Constantinople had recovered from all the persecutions and retaliations that followed the unionist policy of Michael VIII Palaeologos, and enjoyed a significant spiritual revival with the growth of the hesychast movement<sup>44</sup>. Pachomios obtained important privileges for his monastery from the emperors Andronikos II and Michael IX. Copies of the chrysobulls granting these privileges were painted in the small south-western chapel<sup>45</sup>. This abbot was buried, according to his wish, in the north-western chapel, which was built and decorated for this purpose; his portrait offering a model of the church to the Virgin is placed near the south-western corner of this chapel, over the tomb. Following a Constantinopolitan tradition, Pachomios dedicated his funerary chapel directly to Christ, who is depicted twice in a peculiar double Deisis, as the central point of the scene of the Last Judgement<sup>46</sup>.

The paintings of the Hodegetria are among the most brilliant of the Palaeologan period and were immediately related to the Constantinopolitan style of painting<sup>47</sup>. To the donor, the abbot Pachomios, we must assign the composition of the iconographic programme and the iconography, which seem to promote and

<sup>40</sup> MOURIKI, The Wall Paintings of the Pantanassa at Mistra (see n. 8), 219–20.

<sup>41</sup> MILLET, Mistra (see n. 7), pl. 92–104. CHATZIDAKIS, Μυστράς (see n. 7), 60ff. DUFRENNE, Les programmes (see n. 7), 8 ff. pl. 10–9. D. MOURIKI, Revival Themes with Elements of Daily Life in Two Palaeologan Frescoes Depicting the Baptism. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983) (= Okeanos, Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko), 458 ff.

<sup>42</sup> H. HALLENSLEBEN, Untersuchungen zur Genesis und Typologie des «Mistratypus». *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* XVIII (1969) 105–18. C. DELVOYE, Considérations sur l'emploi des tribunes dans l'église de la Vierge Hodigitria de Mistra. In: Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès Intern. Études Byzantines, III. Beograd 1964, 41–7. C. MANGO, Byzantine Architecture. Milan 1978, 159.

<sup>43</sup> For the Pantanassa see: M. ASPRA-VARDAVAKI – M. EMMANOUIL, Η μονή της παντανασσας στον Μυστρά. Οι τοιχογραφίες του 15<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα. Athens 2005. For the Metropolis: G. MARINOU, Αγίος Δημήτριος. Η Μητρόπολη του Μυστρά. Athens 2002.

<sup>44</sup> G. OSTROGORSKY, History of the Byzantine State. Padstow (Cornwall) 1984, 486 f. S. RUNCIMAN, The Last Byzantine Renaissance. Cambridge 1970. J. MEYENDORFF, Society and Culture in the Fourteenth Century, Religious Problems. In: XIV<sup>e</sup> Congrès Intern. des Études Byzantines, Bucarest 1971. Bucarest 1974, I 111 ff. For the Hesychast movement, IDEM, Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas. Paris 1959. IDEM, Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries. In: P. A. UNDERWOOD (ed.), The Kariye Djami, VI. Studies, Princeton 1975, 95 ff.

<sup>45</sup> MILLET, Inscriptions (1899) (see n. 9), 98–120.

<sup>46</sup> For the decoration of the chapel see MILLET, Mistra (see n. 7), pl. 96, 1–6 and 97, 3–4. DUFRENNE, Les programmes (see n. 7), pl. 17. For the portrait of the donor, R. ETZEOGLOU, Quelques remarques sur les portraits figurés dans les églises de Mistra. *JÖB* 32/5 (= XVI. Intern. Byzantinistenkongress, Akten II/5) 516–7. For the programme of the chapel see: H. BELTING – C. MANGO – D. MOURIKI, The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul (*DOS* 15). Washington, D.C. 1978, 72–3.

<sup>47</sup> MOURIKI, Revival Themes with Elements of Daily Life (see n. 41), 459.

support the ecclesiastical policy of the church of Constantinople and of Andronikos II (1282–1328). This profoundly religious man, dissolved the Union of the Churches imposed by his father Michael VIII, and did all in his power to restore orthodoxy and to bring peace and unity to the Church<sup>48</sup>. In the church there is an obvious reference to Christ and to his work of salvation on earth. The depiction of the genealogy of Christ in the domes and saucer domes of the north and south galleries prove this point (pl. 25, fig. 4). The iconography of these magnificent figures is based on the gospels of St. Matthew (1: 1–16) and St. Luke (3: 23–28), and on the *synaxarion* of the Forefathers celebrated on the Sunday before Christmas<sup>49</sup>. The same purpose is also served by the iconographic cycle preserved in the narthex, where there are represented the Teaching of Christ in the Temple, based on St. Luke (4:18–19), and several scenes and miracles of Christ, such as the Healing of the Blind (pl. 26, fig. 1), the Healing of Peter's Mother-in-law (pl. 26, fig. 2), the miraculous Healing of the Man with the Dropsy (pl. 26, fig. 3), Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, and the Wedding at Cana (pl. 26, fig. 4)<sup>50</sup>. These scenes, and especially those related to water, must be connected with the representation of the Virgin in the iconographic type of the Virgin of the Life-giving Source, seen between her parents Joachim and Anna and with two small flying angels, painted on the tympanon over the entrance to the naos (pl. 27a, fig. 1)<sup>51</sup>. It must be noted here that the *ἀγίασμα* of the Virgin Source of Life in Constantinople was particularly promulgated during the reign of Andronikos II;<sup>52</sup> at the same period the feast was transferred to the Friday after Easter-Sunday and Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos wrote the liturgy for it<sup>53</sup>. The depiction of the Virgin in the narthex of the Hodegetria, is an obvious reference to the famous monastery of the Theotokos, the Source of Life, in Constantinople, where miracles such as healing of blind people or of people with dropsy, and others, had also been reported<sup>54</sup>. It should be noted that even the Miracle at Cana was celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January in the same church<sup>55</sup>. Regarding the iconographic programme of the narthex, we should add that the scenes and the miracles connected with water, express a baptismal symbolism<sup>56</sup>. As to the Miracle of the Wedding at Cana, it was considered by theologians as Christ's first authentic miracle and as a symbol of the Eucharistic 'Transubstantiation'<sup>57</sup>. The programme of the narthex in the Hodegetria, with its baptismal and Eucharistic emphasis, thus expresses the religious and monastic ideals of the two most influential prelates of the reign of Andronikos II, Bishop Theoleptos of Philadelphia (1283–ca 1322/24) and Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople (1289–93 and 1303–9), who have emerged as the leaders of the Hesychast movement of ca 1300<sup>58</sup>. It should also be noted that the cycle of Christ's ministry

<sup>48</sup> On the political and cultural milieu of the reign of Andronikos II see NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261–1453* (see n. 5), 101 ff. A. E. LAIOU, *Constantinople and the Latins, the Foreign Policy of Andronicos II, 1282–1328*. Cambridge, Mass. 1972, 32 ff. T. GOUMA-PETERSON, *The Parecclesion of St. Euthymios In Thessaloniki. Art and Monastic Policy Under Andronicos II*. *Art Bulletin* 1976, 173, 178 ff.

<sup>49</sup> *Μηνναίον του Δεκεμβρίου*, Athens 1962, 127 f. UNDERWOOD, *The Kariye Djami, I* (see n. 44), 52. A. PΑΠΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ-KERAMEUS (ed.), *Διονυσίου του εκ Φουρνά, Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης*. St Petersburg 1909, 73–6.

<sup>50</sup> DUFRENNE, *Les programmes* (see n. 7), pl. 13.

<sup>51</sup> For the iconography of the Virgin the Life-Giving Source, see T. VELMANS, *L'icōnographie de la "Fontaine de Vie" dans la tradition Byzantine a la fin du Moyen age*. In: *Synthronon*. Paris 1968, 119–34. D. PALLAS, *Η Θεοτόκος Ζωοδόχος Πηγή*. *Archaeologikon Deltion* 26 (1971), A', 201–24. A.-M. TALBOT, *Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges and Its Art*. *DOP* 48 (1994) 135–65. R. ETZEOGLOU, *The cult of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege at Mistra*, in: M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*. Burlington 2005, 239–49.

<sup>52</sup> TALBOT, *op.cit.*, 137.

<sup>53</sup> *Πεντηκοστάριον* (Ed. by the Apostoliki Diakonia tis Ecclesias tis Ellados). Athens 1959, 15–21.

<sup>54</sup> For the miracles see the *Akolouthia*, *Πεντηκοστάριον*, 15–21, *op.cit.* See also TALBOT, *Epigrams of Manuel Philes* (see n. 51), 135, note 1.

<sup>55</sup> R. JANIN, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. Première partie, Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Œcuménique, III, Les églises et les monastères*. Paris 1969, 227.

<sup>56</sup> P. A. UNDERWOOD, *Some Problems in Iconographic Programs and Iconography of Ministry Cycles*. In: *The Kariye Djami, IV*, 259 ff. T. GOUMA-PETERSON, *Christ as Ministrant and the Priest as Ministrant of Christ in a Palaeologan Program of 1303*. *DOP* 32 (1978) 209. M. EMMANUEL, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγ. Δημητρίου στο Μακρυχώρι και της Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου στον Οξύλιθο της Εύβοιας*. Athens 1991, 184 f.

<sup>57</sup> On this miracle's symbolism and iconography see UNDERWOOD, *Some Problems* (see n. 55), 280–5. GOUMA-PETERSON, *Christ as Ministrant* (see n. 55), 205.

<sup>58</sup> For the relation of these two prelates to Andronikos II see T. GOUMA-PETERSON, *The Parecclesion of St. Euthymios* (see n. 48), 178, note 42. For the Hesychast movement see note 41.

acquired a prominent place in Byzantine monumental painting during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, judging by the plethora of the examples preserved<sup>59</sup>.

Another subject here underlining the new and strong position of the Byzantine church is the depiction in the galleries of the whole group of the seventy apostles of Christ the symbol of the continual apostolic succession<sup>60</sup>. In this way, the reaction of the Byzantine church against the primacy of the apostle Peter and of the Latin Pope, as well as against the Union of the Churches, is particularly emphasised.

One hundred years later, the programme of the Hodegetria served as a model for the katholikon of the Pantanassa monastery, the best preserved and most beautiful of all the churches of Mystra (pl. 27a, fig. 2). Situated on a terrace commanding a superb view, the Pantanassa was founded around 1430 by Ioannis Frangopoulos, who was a descendant of a noble and important family, and an outstanding political and military figure of the despotate during the fifteenth century. His personal mark is still to be seen in the monument, in the inscription in the dome of the western gallery and in the monograms of his name and title, *protostrator* and *katholikos mesazon*, that is general of the army and prime minister, still preserved on the south-western column inside the church, and over the two windows of the western facade<sup>61</sup>.

As has already been pointed out, Ioannis Frangopoulos adopted the basic structure of the iconographic programme of the Pantanassa from the programme of the Hodegetria. In both monuments the Virgin is represented in the conch of the apse and in the dome of the western gallery (pl. 27b, fig. 1). Great religious feasts and secondary episodes from the gospels are represented in the barrel vaults and on the north and south walls of the galleries. Prophets, kings and the Just from the genealogy of Christ, together with figures of bishops and saints, most of whom are numbered among the seventy apostles of Christ, make up the decoration of the galleries in both monuments of Mystra<sup>62</sup>. However, the iconographic programme of the Pantanassa has become more precise. The cycle with the scenes from the Dodekaorton forms, as usual, a circle around the church. Moreover, with the Prophets, the Just, and the kings belonging to the genealogy of Christ, the apostles and the bishops, (who in a miraculous way are combined together and are all linked to the Pantokrator depicted in the central dome), the iconographic programme of the Pantanassa has become a system with absolute coherence, which forms a total expression of the Orthodox dogma and of the meaning of the church, as it is described in the well-known quotation from the 8<sup>th</sup>-century *Ecclesiastical History and Mystical Theory* attributed to the patriarch of Constantinople, Germanos<sup>63</sup>.

However, within the iconographic programme certain details of scenes reveal a more personal character. This becomes clear when one recalls that this monument was built by its founder to act as the place where he would spend the last years of his life and that it would become, after his death, his personal mausoleum. For instance, the epigram on the base of the dome of the western gallery speaks of the piety of Ioannis Frangopoulos, who, having on occasions been aided and protected by the Virgin, offered her this church as a humble gift. The text ends with the patron's wish that after his death he be placed to the right of the Virgin<sup>64</sup>. Another inscription preserved in the conch of the apse, also ends with a personal prayer of the donor to Christ<sup>65</sup>. Both inscriptions reveal the funerary nature of the monument, which is made more obvious by certain peculiarities of the iconographic programme.

<sup>59</sup> GOUMA-PETERSON, Christ as Ministrant (see n. 56), 201–2, 212 f. For churches with this cycle, *ibid.* 199, note 1.

<sup>60</sup> A. PHILIS, Το πρόβλημα των Εβδομήκοντα Αποστόλων του Κυρίου, Athens 1977. S. ΚΟΥΚΙΑΡΗΣ, Η σύναξη των Ο' αποστόλων στη βυζαντινή και μεταβυζαντινή εικονογραφία. *Kleronomia* 18 (1986) 289–304.

<sup>61</sup> MILLET, Inscriptions (1899) (see n. 9), 134 ff. and 30 (1906), 462 ff. *PLP* 12, no. 30100. For the protostrator see: N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, Les listes des préséance Byzantines des IX<sup>e</sup> et X<sup>e</sup> siècles. Paris 1972, 337–8. A. HOHLWEG, Beiträge zur Verwaltungsgeschichte des Oströmischen Reiches unter den Komnenen (*MBM* 1). Munich 1965, 111 f. C. P. KYRRIS, Σταράτορος=[Πρωτοστ]ράτωρ or Strator: A Military Institution in XVth Century Cyprus. *EEBS* 36 (1968), 119 ff. R. GUILLAND, Recherches sur les institutions byzantines. Berlin 1967, I 478 ff. J. VERPEAUX (introd., texte, trad.), Pseudo-Kodinos. Traité des offices, Paris 1966, 133 ff., 136–7. For the *mesazon* see: J. VERPEAUX, Contribution a l'étude de l'administration Byzantine: ό μεσάζων. *BSI* 16 (1955) 271 ff.

<sup>62</sup> DUFRENNE, Les programmes (see n. 7), pl. 26–8.

<sup>63</sup> Ιστορία εκκλησιαστική και μυστική θεωρία. *PG* 98, 384–5

<sup>64</sup> According to ΖΑΚΥΤΗΝΟΣ, Le despotat grec de Moree, II 98, the inscription is as follows: Πολλῶν σου τυχῶν τῶν χαρίτων, Παρθένε, | μικρὸν κομιζῶ σοι δῶρον νεῶν τόνδε | Ἰωάννης Φραγγόπουλος πρωτοστράτωρ | θεοπρόβλητος ἐν δεξιῷ τυχεῖν θέλω.

<sup>65</sup> ... καὶ τὸν δομισάμενον, Χριστέ μου, σῶσον. MILLET, Mistra (see n. 7), pl. 137, 4.

Thus, in the sanctuary, the figure of Christ in the scene of the Ascension, that of the Virgin, in the apse, and those of the parents of the Virgin in an attitude of prayer, of two archangels and the apostles Peter and Paul on the columns supporting the central dome<sup>66</sup>, form a Deesis in three dimensions, so to speak; a composition related *par excellence* to the salvation of souls and to life after death. In this Deesis seem to participate all the single figures in the galleries, that is the seventy apostles and the other saints who thus form a great Deesis under and around the Pantocrator in the dome<sup>67</sup>. The scene with the Resurrection of Christ (pl. 27b, fig. 2) is represented in the southern half of the east barrel vault of the naos, almost inside the sanctuary. The placing of this episode so near, or actually inside the bema, is characteristic of funerary iconographic programmes, and especially of those in mausoleums or in funerary chapels of high ranking donors<sup>68</sup>. In the Pantanassa this scene acquires a more personal character thanks to two iconographic details that are immediately related, in our opinion, to the donor. The prophet Solomon is slightly differentiated from the other prophets in the scene by his luxurious garments and his pose. It seems logical to suppose that the donor, in a subtle way, is presenting himself as Solomon, who was the model of emperors and other ambitious personalities of aristocratic origin, and who financed great building activities in Byzantium<sup>69</sup>. In this way Ioannis Frangopoulos relates himself to the royal ancestors of Christ, who are represented in the domes of the galleries. Furthermore, in the scene of the Resurrection in the Pantanassa, there is a closed sarcophagus, an extremely rare iconographic detail, (most probably symbolising the tomb of the same *ktetor*, as well as his wish to be resurrected after his death, as so rare are Adam and Eve in the same scene<sup>70</sup>).

In the iconographic programme of the western gallery several holy monks are included. Three of them are very obviously represented: saint Pachomios with the angel of God, saint Sabbas and saint Arsenios<sup>71</sup>. They are founders of big monasteries and are the most important of the saints of this category. It is interesting that, in the inscriptions on their scrolls, all of them stress the importance of and the advantages of the ascetic way of life, for the salvation of man's soul. Their selection in the iconographic programme most probably symbolises Frangopoulos' wish to end his life as a monk, a practice that was very common among the emperors and the aristocrats of Byzantium during the last centuries before the fall of Constantinople to the Turks<sup>72</sup>.

The iconography of the Pantanassa frescoes presents a tendency towards eclecticism. Besides the Hodegetria, the painting of the Peribleptos also acted as a model here, mainly with regard to the iconographic details of the scenes<sup>73</sup>. However, in some of the frescoes of the Pantanassa with the many decorative details, one can discover a real joy of life. For instance, in the Annunciation (pl. 28, fig. 1), a peculiar *hortus conclusus* is depicted, with trees, yellow walls and a red floor, symbolising the chastity of the Virgin. In this scene there is also a fountain with birds drinking water, related again to the Virgin as the Source of Life. In the Nativity (pl. 28, fig. 2) several secondary episodes recall idyllic scenes of late antiquity depicting pastoral subjects. All these elements detach the eye of the viewer from the central and main subject. But the most brilliant scene is the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (pl. 28, fig. 3). It is a real celebration, with groups of people bursting out of the walls of the city, and many young children taking off their cloaks and placing them under the feet of the donkey bearing the Lord, while others are shown climbing trees, running, playing and fighting. One figure is pictured removing a thorn from his foot. We should also notice the garments of the Jews, which seem to copy real 14<sup>th</sup>- and 15<sup>th</sup>-century fabrics, produced mainly in Thessalonica<sup>74</sup>.

It is very difficult for the scholar to draw final conclusions after such a brief reference to the iconographic programmes of the four monuments in Mystra. However, some preliminary points should be made: they

<sup>66</sup> DUFRENNE, Les programmes (note 7), pl. 21, 27–8.

<sup>67</sup> The iconographic programme of St. Mary Pammakaristos in Constantinople presents certain similarities with the programme of the Pantanassa: BELTING – MANGO – MOURIKI, The Mosaics and Frescoes (see n. 42), 69 ff.

<sup>68</sup> S. DER NERSESSIAN, Program and Iconography of the frescoes of the Parecclesion. In: Kariye Djami, IV. Studies, 308. N. TETERIATNIKOV, Private Salvation Programs and their Effect on Byzantine Church Decoration. *Arte Medievale* 7 (1993) 47.

<sup>69</sup> D. MOURIKI, Τα ψηφιδωτά της Νέας Μονής Χίου. Athens 1985, 151.

<sup>70</sup> ASPRA-VARDAVAKI – EMMANOUIL, Παντάνασσα (see n. 43), 134.

<sup>71</sup> MILLET, Mistra (note 7), pl. 146, 2.

<sup>72</sup> ASPRA-VARDAVAKI – EMMANOUIL, Παντάνασσα (see n. 43), 228.

<sup>73</sup> MOURIKI, The Wall Paintings of the Pantanassa at Mistra (see n. 8), *passim*.

<sup>74</sup> B. RADOJKOVIC, Les métiers d'art dans la Serbie moravienne. In: L'école de la Morava et son temps. Symposium de Resava, 1968. Beograd 1972, 197, note 57 and 210. D. SIMIC-LAZAR, Kalenic et la dernière période de la peinture Byzantine. Skopje 1995, 30, fig. 31.



were important works of art commissioned by people of a high social and spiritual ranking and prove that, in those years, when Constantinople and Thessalonica, the two dominant cultural centres, were in a state of progressive decline, Mystra could still play a crucial role in the field of the arts.

Among the most impressive qualities of the paintings of Mystra is their power of renewal, which displays an attitude of optimism in a period when the threat of the expanding Ottoman Empire had already cast its shadow over all the activities of the waning Byzantium. The donors and the painters of the churches, besides their incontestable religious commitment, succeeded in subtly expressing their personal needs, wishes and political or religious beliefs, conveying the impression that they were living in a different world, completely untouched by the tragic events that marked the history of the last centuries of the Byzantine Empire.

