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Manager Claudia Napolitano

Editing
Francesca Petrucci

Informatic assistance Michele Gasparello

Cultural Interactions in Cyprus 1191-1571: Byzantine and Italian Art

IOANNIS A. ELIADES University of Cyprus

Με την κατάκτηση της Κύπρου από τον σταυροφόρο Ριγάρδο τον Λεοντόκαρδο το 1191 και την εγχατάσταση της δυναστείας των Φράγχων Λουζινιάν και της Λατινικής Εχχλησίας, η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία για να επιβιώσει, υποχρεώθηκε σε υποταγή στον Πάπα (1260 - Bulla Cypria). Η τέχνη της Κύπρο, απομονωμένη από τον βυζαντινό κορμό, επαναλαμβάνει την τεχνοτροπία της κομνήνειας τέχνης της προηγούμενης περιόδου σε υπερβολικά απλοποιημένη μορφή. Επιρροές τόσο από πρόσφυγες ζωγράφους από τη Συρία και την Παλαιστίνη, όσο και από Δυτικούς, που εισρέουν στη μεγαλόνησο με το στρατό των σταυροφόρων, δίνουν στην τέχνη της Κύπρου ένα ιδιαίτερο ύφος γνωστό ως «maniera Cypria». Τα τοπικά κυπριακά εργαστήρια ετοιμάζουν μαζική παραγωγή εικόνων για τους προσκυνητές των Αγίων Τόπων. Η βυζαντινή τεχνοτροπία μεταφέρεται στα υπόλοιπα μεγάλα κέντρα της μέσης Ανατολής και του Σινά στην Ιταλία από Δυτικούς καλλιτέχνες, οι οποίοι έχουν εργαστεί σε κυπριακά εργαστήρια. Οι επιδράσεις στην τέχνη είναι αμοιβαίες, όπως διαφαίνεται από το δυτικό εικονογραφικό τύπο της Παναγίας Σκέπης που εμφανίζεται στην Κύπρο. Οι δυτικές επιδράσεις κατά τον 14ο αιώνα και μέχρι το 1453 στην τέχνη της Κύπρου είναι ελάχιστες και δύσκολα αφομοιώνονται. Στα μέσα του $15^{\circ v}$ αιώνα δύο σημαντικά γεγονότα, η Σ ύνοδος της Φλωρεντίας του 1439για την ένωση των Εκκλησιών και η άφιξη προσφύγων από την Πόλη μετά την Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης το 1453 συνέτειναν στην ανανέωση της βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής της Κύπρου, της οποίας αρχίζει η μεταβυζαντινή φάση με την παρείσφρυση σε όλα τα μνημεία δυτικών επιρροών. Πολλοί Κύπριοι ζωγράφοι εργάζονται στην Βενετία και έργονται σε επαφή με την τέχνη της Αναγέννησης. Στην τέχνη της Κύπρου αρχίζουν να διαφαίνονται δειλά-δειλά οι δύο τεγνοτροπικές τάσεις που θα κυριαργήσουν κατά τη διάρκεια της Βενετοκρατίας: η αποκαλούμενη Κυπριακή σχολή, η οποία εξελίσσεται παράλληλα με την Κρητική Σχολή λόγω της παρουσίας προσφύγων ζωγράφων από την Κωνσταντινούπολη και στα δύο νησιά, και η εκλεκτική τάση στην τέχνη η λεγόμενη «ιταλοβυζαντινή» τεχνοτροπία. Η καθιερωμένη ορθόδοξη εικονογραφία ανανεώνεται και εμπλουτίζεται με νέα θέματα που προέρχονται από την ιταλική τέχνη. Η γνώση της ιταλικής Αναγέννησης και των επιτευγμάτων της εκ μέρους των καλλιτεχνών, πρέπει να θεωρείται δεδομένη, αφού στα έργα τους παρουσιάζεται μια συνειδητή προσπάθεια για ορθή προοπτική και απόδοση της τρίτης διάστασης και του όγκου των μορφών και των κτηρίων.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of Frankish and Venetian rule in Cyprus (1191-1571) is permeated with the ideological approaches of foreign historians. The British archaeological authorities of the Cypriot colony (1878-1960) and the Anglo-Saxon school promoted the British colonial policy of the political integration of the Cypriots through scientific conclusions presenting the island as a no-man's land. Cyprus was viewed as a neutral country with a multicultural character at the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean, lacking cultural contact with its neighbour countries - especially Greece in ancient times and Byzantium in the medieval period¹. The French School, on the other hand, through the work of historians like Mas Latrie and art historians like Camille Enlart in the 19th century, presented the Frankish and Venetian rule as the glorious period of Cyprus. Their history was obviously not objective since they did not take into consideration the population of the island which was dominated by foreign rulers. Nowadays some historians and art historians, including Demetrios Triantaphyllopoulos, Nikos Gkioles, Charalampos Chotzakoglou, Benediktos Egglezakis and Athanassios Papageorgiou have undertaken the difficult task of revaluating the history of this period taking into consideration the local population.

Preliminary Italian contact with Cyprus

Cyprus was one of the most important ports of the Byzantine Empire, and became even more significant for the control of the Eastern Mediterranean after the conquest of Asia Minor by the Seljuk Turks following the fall of Manzikert in 1071. Italians had established very close ties with Byzantium and the East (Levante) since the 11th century. The emerging onshore towns in Italy, such as Venice, Pisa, Amalfi and Genoa, had already established districts in the heart of Constantinople for the residence of their traders and their ships were freely circulating in the ports of the Empire². With a Golden Bull (a Byzantine imperial document bearing the Emperor's golden seal [bulla]) accorded to the Venetians in 1082 by Alexius I Comnenus, they had the right to trade throughout the Empire³. Their right to approach Cyprus, though, was granted only in 1126 with another Golden Bull issued by Ioannis II Comnenus and the accordance of trade rights was extended to cover Cyprus, with the Golden Bull of Manuel I Comnenus in 1148⁴. Byzantine officials administered the island in the 12th century, and thanks to this, high quality Byzantine art of the Comnenian era was channelled to the island. Monasteries and churches like Trikomo (1105/6), St. Neophytos (1183) and Arakas (1192) were erected and painted by Constantinopolitan painters who were attracted though grants from high-ranking Byzantine officials⁵.

THE 13TH CENTURY

After the conquest of Cyprus by the Crusader Richard the Lionheart in 1191, and the establishment of the Frankish dynasty of the Lusignans and of the Roman Catholic







Fig. 1 Cultural interaction in Byzantine and Italian art in Cypriot painting.

Church, the local Orthodox Church, fearing for its survival, was forced to be subject to the Pope in 1260 with the *Bulla Cypria*⁶. For the local population, the domination of the Franks and the severing of political ties with Byzantium meant subjugation to the feudal system of the West. Concurrently, in the ecclesiastical sector, the Catholic Church sequestered the property of the Orthodox, limited the number of Orthodox episcopal sees, and replaced the Orthodox archbishop with a Catholic one.

Cypriot painting, totally cut off from Byzantium due to the simultaneous conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, repeated the style of Comnenean art of the previous era, but in an exaggerated, oversimplified manner⁷. It was exposed to the influences of refugee painters from Syria and Palestine and also Latin painters, who swarmed to the island with the crusader army, especially after the fall of the crusader states in Syria and Palestine (fall of Acre 1291), thus developing an individual style known as 'maniera Cypria'⁸. This built upon the cosmopolitan environment of the 13th century in the secondary points of the composition from the iconography of either the East, as in the icon of St. Jacob the Persian⁹ from the Church of St. Kassianos in Nicosia, today at the Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation in Nicosia (hereafter BMAMF), or the West, as in, for example, the icon of the Descent of Christ into Hades from the Lambadistis Monastery (BMAMF)¹⁰.

An important innovation with regard to iconography was the style of relief decorations developed in the West for the decoration of wooden sculptures. This was applied initially by western artists in order to replace the expensive metallic overlays. This was a borrowing that, after being shaped in the Cypriot environment, spread initially in

Southern Italy and then to the rest of Western Europe¹¹. Subjects that could be seen in Cyprus could also be seen in similar works in Italy. Examples include: the twirling floral plaits of the halos, for example the icon of the Apostle Paul from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa (BMAMF) and the Enthroned Mother of God holding the Christ Child (1347) by Bernardo di Daddo at the Orsanmichele chapel in Florence; and the grid bearing cross patterns which usually decorate Cypriot icons, for example, the icon of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa, (BMAMF), the icon of St. Dominic with scenes from his life from the Church of St. Peter in Naples (late 13th century), and the relief icon of the Mother of God Enthroned (early 13th century) at the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo in Siena¹².

The frescos in the Church of Our Lady of Moutoulas (1280) are a prime example of the reverberation of crusader art in the Mediterranean, manifesting western iconographic elements such as the chain-mail armour of St. Christopher or the western-style shoes worn by the Hebrews in the scene of the Entry to Jerusalem (*Vaioforos*)¹³. *Platytera* (Virgin Orans), as portrayed in one-quarter of the arch of this temple, with a round face, eyebrows joining, and visible neck-muscles, can be related to similar frescos in the crypt of San Vito at Gravina¹⁴, Puglia (southern Italy), the so-called crusader icons of Sinai¹⁵, and can also be seen in 13th-century Cypriot icons, such as the icon of St. Marina from the Church of the same name at Kalopanagiotis (BMAMF)¹⁶.

The Frankish kingdom of Cyprus, with its rich Byzantine legacy and the security provided as a result of being surrounded by sea (as opposed to other crusader states which





Fig. 2 Crucifixion from the church of St Luke in Nicosia (left) and the church of St Domenico Maggiore in Naples (right).

were under constant threat from the Arabs), quite naturally became a refuge for the clergy, as well as an important cultural centre where local Cypriot workshops mass-produced icons for the pilgrims to the Holy Land¹⁷.

The large icons of St. Nicolas of the Roof with scenes from the saint's life from the Church of the same name at Kakopetria and of the Virgin Mary Enthroned with scenes from the Church of St. Kassianos (both at BMAMF) bear witness to the existence of workshops in Cyprus that catered for both the Orthodox and the Catholics¹⁸. The icons exhibit the same technique and style and show few differentiations with respect to the iconography and the inscriptions (in the first they are in Greek, while in the second they are in Latin). It emerged that one of the principal channels through which the Byzantine style had spread to the West was the western artists who worked in Cypriot workshops, carrying the new style from Cyprus and the other major centres in the Middle East and Sinai, to Italy. This is demonstrated by the example of the crypt of San Vito in Gravina of Puglia.

Three 13th-century icons showing the Mother of God holding the Christ Child in Italy (in the Cathedral of Monopoli, in the monastery of St. Nile in Grottaferrata and in the Metropolitan Church of Andria) are considered to be of Cypriot origin ¹⁹ (Fig. 3). Cypriot iconographic style strongly influenced the painting of Southern Italy during the 13th century²⁰. In the catalogue of icons of probable Cypriot origin or, at least, Cypriot standards, we might add the Madonna della Fonte in Trani, the Madonna at Santa Maria de Latinis in Palermo, the Madonna Sotto gli Organi at Pisa, the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child of Santa Maria a Piazza in Aversa, the Madonna of San Michele in Borgo in Pisa, the Crucifixion at St. Dominico Maggiore in Napoles (Fig. 2) and others²¹. The similarity and relation of Cypriot icons to icons produced in Tuscany or Southern Italy creates problems with respect to the origin congruence of many unsigned works including the icons of the Virgin Mary Enthroned belonging to the



Fig. 3
13th-century Italian icons of the Mother of God holding the Christ Child (in the Metropolitan Church of Andria, the Cathedral of Monopoli and the monastery of St. Nile in Grottaferrata) are considered to be of Cypriot origin. On the left side the Cypriot icon from the church of Our Lady Asinou.

Kahn and Mellon Collection, which were recently attributed to a Cypriot workshop²². The iconographic type of the Mother of God Kykkotissa is of exclusively Cypriot origin, a type that spread to Italy during this period, as is witnessed by a series of icons at Velletri, Viterbo, Piazza Armerina in Sicily and elsewhere²³. The influences in art seem to be mutual, as is exhibited in the fresco of the Madonna del Manto, dated 1332/3, in the narthex of the Church of Our Lady Asinou which seems to share a common iconographic standard with the Mother of God of the Franciscans by Duccio²⁴ (Fig. 4).

THE 14TH CENTURY

During the 14th century, contact with Constantinople increased and the influence of Paleologean art becomes apparent in Cypriot painting. This can be seen in the icons from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa: the Christ with Angels and benefactors, dated 1356, the Saint Peter, and the Archangel Michael, dated 14th century (all of them now at BMAMF), which are characterised by a harmonious combination of vibrant colours, the shaping of the faces with gradually diminishing tones, the effort to render the volumes and the soft shaping of the folds and creases in the clothing²⁵. Towards the end of the 14th century and during the 15th century, the colouring gradually became more vibrant, mainly due to the use of white. The use of linear make-up became standard, as can be seen in the icon of the Archangel from the Church of Our Lady Faneromeni in Nicosia (BMAMF)²⁶. Western influences in the frescos during the 14th century and up until 1453 were minimal and very difficult to assimilate in Cypriot art²⁷. The frescos of the Lusignan Royal Chapel at Pyrga, dated 1421, aside from the French inscriptions, retained the Paleologan style²⁸. Heaver influences seem to be exhibited by portable icons. This can be seen in the case of the Virgin Mary Holding the Christ Child Enthroned from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa (BMAMF) which is dated to the 15th century and follows the respective iconographic type of the circle of Cimabue in Galleria Sabauda in Turin with a throne similar to that of the Mother of God Enthroned of Cimabue at S. Maria dei Servi in Bologna²⁹ (Fig. 5). Christ's posture as He stands in His Mother's arms can be seen in the fresco of the Mother of God Enthroned Holding the Christ Child between Saints John Prodromos and Theologian by Vanni di Pistoia and Nuccaro at the Opera del Duomo in Pisa³⁰.

THE 15TH CENTURY

In the middle of the 15th century two significant events – the Ferrara-Florence Synod of 1439 for the Unification of the Churches and the arrival of refugees from Constantinople, following its Fall in 1453 – contributed to the renewal of Byzantine painting in Cyprus, whose post-Byzantine phase commenced with the infiltration of all monuments by western styles³¹. The Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 dealt Hellenism a severe blow. The focus and rallying point in so many ways, not only for the Greeks but also for the Orthodox Christian communities of the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, was lost, even at a symbolic level. In 1489,





Fig. 4
Madonna del Manto, dated 1332/3, in the narthex of the Church of Our Lady Asinou which seems to share a common iconographic standard with the Mother of God of the Franciscans by Duccio.

when the last Lusignan Queen, the Venetian Caterina Cornaro, abdicated in favour of the Serenissima Republic, Cyprus passed under Venetian rule. This period saw a greater mobility between the dominant nobles and the locals, resulting in the creation of a composite, mixed milieu, with plebeians (plebe, popolari), burgers-citizens (cittadini), and local and foreign nobles (nobiltà). The superior civilisation of Venice, which had insinuated itself much earlier in the Renaissance, provoked osmosis. Syncretism in art resulted in the 'Cypriot Renaissance' of the Venetian period (1489-1571). Many Cypriot painters worked in Venice and were exposed to Renaissance art. Slowly and timidly, the two stylistic movements that would dominate Cyprus during Venetian Rule begin to emerge. These were the so-called Cypriot School, which evolved parallel to the Cretan School due to the presence of refugees from Constantinople in both islands, and the selective tendency in art – the so-called 'Italian-Byzantine' style³². They refer to capable painters, who could easily combine both styles: the Byzantine (alla greca) and the Italian or 'Italian-Byzantine' (all'italiana). The two movements were differentiated with respect to the degree that they had assimilated western influences³³.

THE CYPRIOT SCHOOL

Filippos Goul and Symeon A(f)ksentis were classic representatives of the Cypriot School³⁴. Cypriot painting, while adhering to the Paleologean style, innovated by importing single iconographic elements of 14th-century Italian art, especially apparent in the secondary elements of the icon. A characteristic manifestation can be found at the Church of Antifonitis in Kalogrea, where the elliptical depiction of the opalescent glory of Christ in the scene of the Last Judgment and also the depiction of Satan in hell,

are elements which are almost identical to Giotto's corresponding fresco at the Chapel of Scrovegni in Padua³⁵ (Fig. 6). Architectural structures usually appear gothic with a similar conception of space as that shown in western works, for example in the case of the icon of the Birth of the Mother of God from Klonari, where the depth of the scene is composed with respect to three sides and a tendency for transverse perspective³⁶, or the frescos of the Denial of Peter at the Church of Our Lady at Galata, or the Birth of the Mother of God at the Church of Antifonitis in Kalogrea³⁷. An innovation of Cypriot painting was the resonant attempt of the artists to apply western perspectives (the creation of 'box-shaped' space) in order to depict in three-dimensions the indoor spaces of buildings, as in the narthex of Lambadistis³⁸ (Fig. 7).

TALO-BYZANTINE PAINTING

The other movement, the 'Italian-Byzantine style', was characterised by a more detailed design and a perfect iconographical system. It is distinguished by its liveliness and freedom provided by the use of new conjectural types. A great number of frescos were created in this style by different workshops which can be distinguished by the quality of the art produced, but also with respect to the import of overtly western elements.

Under Venetian rule, the worship of the Mother of God intensified with the depiction of three verses of the Akathistos Hymn. This was a hymn of 24 verses (oikoi) sung, all standing, on the Saturday of the fifth week in Lent, in honour of the Virgin Mary³⁹. Two of the depictions were in the Italian-Byzantine style (the Latin Chapel of the Lambadistis Monastery and the Church of the Holy Cross at Parekklisia, where Oikoi 6 and 10 have been identified), and the other (at St. Neophytos Monastery) was by the Cypriot 'School' with intense western elements, such as the depiction of the Mother of God on her knees with her hands crossed at the scene of the Annunciation⁴⁰. The composition of the Root of Jesse, as well as the iconographic theme of Above the Prophets, can be placed in the context of this effusion of the Marian cycle, which reached its peak with the depiction of the Crowning of the Mother of God at the Church of Our Lady Chrysopantanassa in Paleochori⁴¹. The subject was overtly western, which we must assume is probably connected to the Latin commissioner of the fresco.

The traditional Orthodox iconography was renewed and enhanced with new subjects that originated in Italian art⁴². Those who painted these works certainly had knowledge of the Italian Renaissance and of its artistic achievements, since these frescos echo a conscious attempt by the artists correctly to depict perspective and the third dimension, both with respect to the volume of the figures and of the buildings. The composition of space and the use of perspective is connected to the so-called 'first Renaissance' of Masaccio and Beato Angelico, as in the icon of the Communion of the Apostles from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa (BMAMF)⁴³ and the fresco of the 18th Oikos of the Akathistos Hymn at the Latin Chapel of the Monastery of St. John Lambadistis (Fig. 7). Among the novel subjects imported during this period was the depiction of St. Anna with the Mother of God holding the Christ Child⁴⁴. This can be seen, for example, in the







Fig. 5 Virgin Mary Enthroned, from the church of Our Lady Chrisaliniotissa, Nicosia (middle), Madonna at Novoli (left), Madonna in the Galleria Sabauda, Turin (right).





Fig. 6
Last Judgement fresco in the Church of Antifonitis in Kalogrea (before the destruction) left, corresponds to Giotto's fresco at the Chapel of Scrovegni in Padua (right).

fresco from the Church of St. George Exorinos in Ammochostos, the depictions of the Virtues (Justice, Love, Faith, Charity, and others) both at Chrysopantanassa at Paleochori and the Church of Our Lady at Choulou⁴⁵. Italian prototypes were also followed at the Latin Chapel of the Monastery of Lambadistis at Kalopanagiotis, dated around 1500, for the scene of the Hospitality of Abram, and the Birth of Christ in the 8th Oikos⁴⁶. This can also be seen in a later engraving from 1555, which reproduced a common, older prototype, unidentified until today. Similar engravings were also utilised by the painter of the church of St. John the Baptist at Askas village for the scene of the Apotome of the Skull of the Saint⁴⁷. Other imported subjects besides the western Man of Sorrows, which shows Christ standing dead in front of His sarcophagus⁴⁸, included the depictions of the so-called western-type Resurrection with Christ Rising from the grave holding a banner, labarum⁴⁹ or the Pietà⁵⁰, as in the icon from Pera Chorio of Cyprus (BMAMF)⁵¹.

'MADONNERI'

The portrayal of the Mother of God Holding the Christ Child was one of the most popular subjects both in the East and West. Icons of the Mother of God were exported from Cyprus at the end of the 13th century by the Crusaders and during Venetian rule icons with depictions of the Virgin Mary as the western Madonna were also exported. The icons of the Madonneri, Madre della Consolazione, Madre Misericordia and Mater Lactans were very popular in Cyprus and were intended mainly for the Latin Churches on the island and for private individuals⁵². They are works of art that exhibit an intense presence of western iconographic elements and can be seen throughout the





Fig. 7
The composition of space and the use of perspective from the Italian Renaissance: Icon of the Communion of the Apostles from the Church of Our Lady Chrysaliniotissa (left) and the fresco of the 18th stance of Akathistos Hymm at the Latin Chapel of the Monastery of Lambadistis (right).

Greek-Orthodox region. The large number of such works in Cyprus cannot preclude the existence of a Madonneri workshop on the island which produced and traded icons and was one of the workshops founded in territories under the Venetian rule.

The looting and slaughter that followed the conquest of Cyprus by the Ottomans in 1571 forced many Cypriot artists to seek refuge in Venice⁵³. These included artists such as Ioannis Cypriot⁵⁴, who painted the cupola and other parts of the Church of St. George of the Greeks in Venice, a painter called Peter⁵⁵ who, according to a document held in the Venetian archives, was captured by the Turks with his family, and another painter, Domenico the Cypriot, a member of the Greek Brotherhood of Venice⁵⁶.

Unfortunately, after the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus, the established relations of Cypriot iconography, which had persisted for many centuries, finally decayed during the 17th century. However, the lessons of the Italian-Byzantine painting developed under Venetian rule continued to influence post-Byzantine iconography in Cyprus, from Paul the Hierographer⁵⁷ in the 17th century until the School of St. Heraklidios in the 18th century. At the end of the 18th century, the arrival of the great Cretan painter Ioannis Kornaros, imported the baroque and rococo, both completely alien to Byzantine painting⁵⁸.

Notes

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