



Post-Byzantine Wall Paintings in Euboea: The Monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika

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Abstract: The wall paintings of the seventeenth century church of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika on Euboea were possibly produced by a local workshop. Rigorously executed, and with complex conceptual and spiritual content, the paintings permit an examination of the monument in the context of contemporary monumental painting, both on the island and in the wider region. Moreover, we may also explore the largely unknown Post-Byzantine artistic production of Euboea, which maintained the tradition of the great Theban painters of the preceding century.

Key words: Metrophanes, Justus, Eleutheroupolis, Bibloupolis, Katelanos, Kontaris, Skripou.

A. The history

The Byzantine monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin, also known as Panagia Peribleptos (**Fig. 1**), may be found in central Euboea. The monastery has been the focus of research since the 1930s². Anasta-

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2 *Orlandos*, Anastasios. Η Περιβλεπτος των Πολιτικών της Ευβοίας. Αρχείον Ευβοϊκών Μελετών, 1937, No. 3, 175-184. *Bouras*, Charalambos. Παρατηρήσεις στο Καθολικό της Μονής της Θεοτόκου "Περιβλέπτου" στα Πολιτικά Ευβοίας. – Αρχείον Ευβοϊκών Μελετών, 1988–1989, No. 28, 53-62. *Bouras*, Charalambos. Περί την χρονολόγησιν του καθολικού της Περιβλέπτου στα Πολιτικά Ευβοίας. Δέκατο Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής και Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης, Πρόγραμμα και Περιλήψεις Εισηγήσεων και Ανακοινώσεων, 1990, 52-53. *Ma-*





Fig. 1. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. General view

sios Orlandos was the first to look into the architecture and decoration of this monument, and also into the issues associated with the name of the monastery³. In the late '90s Charalambos Bouras studied the sculpture and the pavement of the *catholicon* and established a link between the foundation of Panagia Peribleptos on Euboea, and the famous monastery of Hosios Loukas in Boeotia⁴.

In its long history⁵, the *catholicon* underwent several stages of build-

maloukos, Stavros, *Pinatsi*, Christina. Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία για το καθολικό της μονής Περιβλέπτου στα Πολιτικά της Εύβοιας. – Αρχαίον Ευβοϊκών Μελετών, 2007, No. 37, 71-82.

3 *Orlandos*. Περιβλεπτος, 175-184.

4 *Bouras*. Παρατηρήσεις, 62. *Bouras*. Πολιτικά, 52-53.

5 About the history of the monastery see *Mamaloukos*, Stavros, *Pinatsi*, Christina. Συμπληρω-

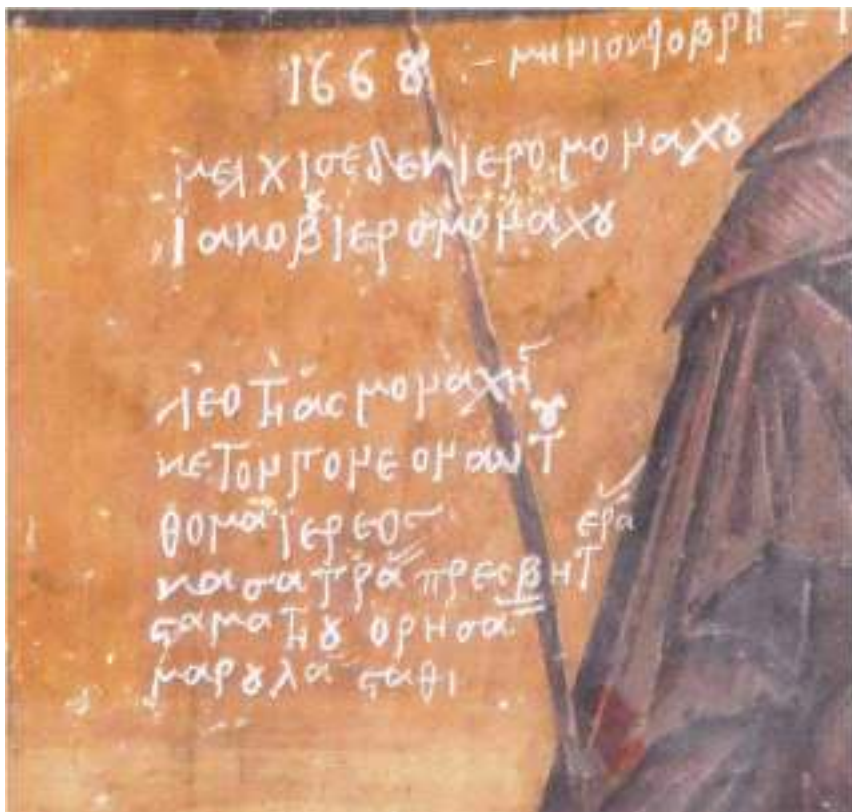


Fig. 2. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. The dedicatory inscription

ing work, mainly during the Post-Byzantine period, which altered its original architectural form. Based on the new research findings, Stavros Mamaloukos and Christina Pinatsi argued in 2007 that the *catholicon* in its present form belongs to a single building phase⁶. On the grounds of both epigraphic and architectural evidence, this phase can be dated back to the 17th century, confirming 1668 (Fig. 2) – a date that appears on the dedicatory inscription⁷ – as a *terminus ante quem*.

ματικά στοιχεία, 72.

6 Mamaloukos, Pinatsi. Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία, 74-75.

7 Mamaloukos, Pinatsi. Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία, fig. 21.



Fig. 3. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. The Christological Cycle (1668)

B. Architecture-Decoration

The building in its present form is a cross-in-square church of the semi-complex four-columned type, rectangular in plan⁸. The *catholicon* is decorated with remarkable wall paintings that occupy the dome and the drum, the walls and the vaults of the *prothesis* and the Sanctuary, and also the upper part of the *templon*. The remaining surfaces of the building had never been painted, as the construction details indicated us. In its present state, the building and its mural decoration show extensive signs of damage caused by a destructive earthquake and, more recently, by a fire.

C. Conservation and restoration work

In recent years, extensive restoration and conservation works have been undertaken thanks to private sponsorship, under the super-

⁸ *Mamaloukos, Pinatsi. Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία, 72-74.*



Fig. 4. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. View of the sanctuary (1668). Photo by I. Spanos

vision of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Euboea. The conservation work was carried out under the direction of Ioannis Spanos, and was completed at the end of 2015.

D. The iconographic programme

The wall paintings of Peribleptos, preserved in relatively good condition, include – apart from liturgical themes – a large number of scenes from the broader Christological Cycle (**Fig. 3**) and also from the iconography of the Virgin Mary. Numerous individual figures, prophets and saints, complete the iconographic programme.

A narrow zone stretches along both lateral walls of the Sanctuary, with scenes of the Divine Liturgy, as an extension of the Communion (**Fig. 4**), with the Heavenly Liturgy of Angels carrying the Body of Christ in procession. In the lower registers, a further four hier-



Fig. 5. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. General view of the *templon* (1668)

archs are shown, from right to left: Hierotheos⁹, Dionysios the Areopagite¹⁰, John Kaloktenis and Germanos. Moreover, four co-officiating Fathers leaning forward in the direction of the Sanctuary are represented on the intrados of the arches, between the Sanctuary and the *parabemata*: Clement and Metrophanes of Constantinople decorating the north intrados, and Justus of Eleutheropolis with John of Bibloupolis occupying the south one (Fig. 6-9).

Finally, the Post-Byzantine *templon* is constructed in accordance with the wooden ones¹¹ (Fig. 5). Three horizontal registers are defined. Byzantine marble panels are placed in the lower zone. Across the middle register are wall-painted figures of saints or compositions serving as despotic icons, and over the original marble epistyle there extends a *Great Deesis* with 17 figures. It should be noted that the entire mural decoration of the *templon* had been overpaint-

9 Delehay. Synaxarium. 103.

10 Delehay. Synaxarium. 101-102.

11 Mamaloukos, *Pinatsi*. Συμπληρωματικά στοιχεία, 73, fig. 1, 7.

ed. During the conservation work, it was confirmed that the original frescoes were preserved in their entirety. It was therefore deemed necessary to remove all the overpaintings of low quality. Indeed, after the removal, it became clear that the original wall paintings of the *templon* were stylistically linked to those of the Sanctuary and may therefore also be dated to 1668.

E. Observations on iconography

Having presented the iconographic programme of Peribleptos, certain stylistic and iconographic observations need to be pointed out. The inscriptions, although often spelled phonetically, are marked by a strong decorative character. A similar decorative feature is also evident in the way that the garments have been rendered. Garments are decorated with gems and pearls, and embroidered with vegetal and geometric motifs in various combinations. It should be noted that some of these decorative elements are rendered in relief – a technique that also appears on some of the inscriptions and on the halo of the Pantokrator within the dome.

The iconographic programme, whose vibrant and rich composition lays emphasis on liturgical and dogmatic themes, also features numerous figures of prophets and, chiefly, Fathers of the Church. In fact, more than fifteen hierarchs are represented in the Peribleptos, including some figures of local eminence, such as John Kaloktenis, and also some hierarchs who are not frequently encountered in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine painting.

The depiction of Hierotheos, the bishop of Athens, in a prominent position, is a case in point¹². According to his *vita*, Hierotheos was present in the Dormition of the Virgin¹³. The venerable father is consistently, although not frequently, depicted in Byzantine¹⁴ and Post-Byzantine painting¹⁵, sometimes in the Dormition of the Vir-

12 *Gritsopoulos*, Tasos. Ιερόθεος. Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, No. 6. Athens, 1965, 793-795.

13 *Simonopetritis*, Makarios. Νέος Συναξαριστής της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας, No. 2, Athens, 2004, 45. *Papadopoloulos-Kerameus*. Ερμηνεύα, 144.

14 *Orlandos*, Anastasios. Νεώτερα ευρήματα εις την Μονήν Δαφνίου. – Αρχαίον των Βυζαντινών Μνημείων της Ελλάδος, 1955–1956, No. 8, 91.

15 *Orlandos*. Νεώτερα ευρήματα εις την Μονή Δαφνίου, 91. *Katselaki*, Andromachi. Το Μοναστήρι και το Εκκλησιαστικό Μουσείο Ύδρας. Athens, 2009, 422-423.



Fig. 6. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. St Metrophanes (1668)



Fig. 7. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. St Clement, bishop of Alexandria (1668)

gin¹⁶ and occasionally as a co-officiating hierarch¹⁷, whereas his martyrdom is seldom depicted¹⁸.

Germanos¹⁹ and John Kaloktenis, a further two holy figures depicted in the Peribleptos, lived later. Germanos I²⁰ may be identified on

16 *Aceimastou-Potamianou*, Myrtali. Οι τοιχογραφίες της Μονής των Φιλανθρωπητών στο νησί των Ιωαννίνων. Athens, 2004, 133, fig. 123.

17 *Millet*, Gabriel. Monuments de l'Athos, I, Les peintures. Paris, 1910. pl. 256.2. *Orlandos*. Μονή Δαφνίου, 89-93. fig. 21, 23.

18 *Aceimastou-Potamianou*. Μονή των Φιλανθρωπητών, 139, fig. 96.

19 *Delehaye*. Synaxarium, 677-680.

20 *Papadopoloulos-Kerameus*. Ερμηνεία, 155.



Fig. 8. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. St John, Bishop of Bibloupolis (1668)



Fig. 9. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. St Justus, Bishop of Eleutheroupolis (1668)

the grounds of his peculiar hairstyle²¹. He is perhaps most famous as the Patriarch of Constantinople deposed during the Iconoclastic period, but was also a distinguished author and hymnographer.

On the other hand, Kaloktenis, the eminent Metropolitan of Thebes, lived in the 12th century. Being a man of spirit and action, held in high esteem for his deep theological knowledge, he became especially popular with the people of Thebes for his many activities as a

21 *Stavrianos, Kyriakos*. *Σ. Ο Άγιος Γερμανός Α' ο Ομολογητής Πατριάρχης Κων/πόλεως. Βίος-Έργα-Διδασκαλία-Συμβολή στην περίοδο της Εικονομαχίας*. Athens, 2003.

public benefactor to the city²². He was canonized after his death and appears in the monumental painting of the wider region, where his memory still lives on²³.

Metrophanes, the first bishop of Constantinople, worked together with Constantine the Great on establishing the glorious churches that embellished the new capital²⁴ (**Fig. 6**). His depiction in the *Peribleptos* is rare in Byzantine painting in which he is usually shown in expanded representations of co-officiating hierarchs²⁵.

In contrast to these generally well-known or locally distinguished figures, the presence of Justus of Eleutheropolis and John of Bibloupolis remains difficult to explain (**Fig. 8, 9**). In the Acts of the Apostles Justus is referred to as Joseph Barsabbas. He was renamed Justus when he was elected to take over Judas's place in apostolic ministry²⁶. Justus later became Metropolitan of Eleutheropolis near Jerusalem²⁷ (**Fig. 9**).

Even fewer attestations are available concerning John of Bibloupolis. He is mentioned, like Justus, only in the list of the seventy Apostles²⁸ (**Fig. 8**). Bibloupolis is identified with the ancient city of Byblos in Lebanon, which together with the city of Botrys constituted a Metropolitan See administered by the Patriarchate of Antioch²⁹. So far, I have not traced any other iconographic parallel, although reference to this toponym can be found in the well-known *Hermeneia*

22 *Simonopetritou*, Ieromonachou Makariou. Νέος Συναξαριστής της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας, No. 8, Athens 2007, 274-275.

23 *Panayotidi*, Maria. Οι τοιχογραφίες της κρύπτης του Αγίου Νικολάου στα Καμιά της Βοιωτίας, Actes du XV^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, II Art et Archéologie, Communications, No. 2, Athens 1981, 599, 614-615, fig. 5-6. *Ieronymos*, Bishop of Thebes and Levadia. Χριστιανική Βοιωτία Α'. Livadia, 2005, fig. 90.

24 *Delehaye*. Synaxarium. 727-730. *Kotter*, B. Metrophanes, Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, No. 7. Freiburg, 1962, 373.

25 *Aceimastou-Potamianou*, Myrtili. Μονή των Φιλανθρωπητών, 190. *Ieronymos*, Βοιωτία, fig. 106. *Constantinides*, Ioannis. Μητροφάνης, Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, No. 8. Athens, 1966, 1132-1134, fig. in p. 1133.

26 *Acts* 1: 23. *Papadopoulos*, Stylianos. Ιούστος, Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, No. 6. Athens, 1965, 985.

27 *Constantinidis*, Emmanouil. Ελευθερόπολις, Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, No 5. Athens, 1964, 569-570.

28 *Schermann*, Theodorus (ed.). Prophetarum Vitae Fabulosae, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. Lipsiae, 1907, 170. *Papadopoloulos-Kerameus*. Ερμηνεία, 264, 299.

29 *Janin*, Raymond. Dictionnaire d' Histoire et de Geographie Ecclésiastique, Paris. 1912, No. X. 1452-1454.



Fig. 10. The monastery of Panagia Peribleptos at Politika, Euboea. Prothesis. General view of the wall paintings (18th century)

of Dionysios of Phourna³⁰.

Finally, Clement, portrayed on the arch of the prothesis, whose the accompanying inscription mentions only his name, can be securely identified with Clement of Alexandria, one of the founders of the Orthodox Christianity in that city³¹ (**Fig. 7**).

³⁰ *Papadopoloulos-Kerameus*. Ερμηνεία, 153.

³¹ *Janin*, Raymond. Κλήμης, Θρησκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, No. 7. Athens. 1965, 636-642. *Detorakis*, Theocharis. Βυζαντινή φιλολογία. Τα πρόσωπα και τα κείμενα, Herakleion. 1995, 64-80.

The placement of these figures on the intrados of the arches between the bema and the *parabemata*, facing each other, suggests that these ought to form a coherent group. Indeed, Metrophanes, Clement, John and Justus share some common characteristics: they all lived during the early centuries of Christianity and may be considered representatives of the four ancient Orthodox Patriarchates, following their ecclesiastical rank, namely of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Based on this observation, it can be deduced that besides the Fathers of the Church who form part of the conventional iconography of the apse, the mural programme of Politika gives emphasis to the great figures of Orthodox Faith, who contributed to the establishment, consolidation and expansion of the Eastern Church, locally as well as more generally. One may infer from such an iconographic programme not only a deep knowledge of these distinguished figures of the Church, but also of the major theological issues related to their activities. This suggests that the person who devised the programme of the Peribleptos came from a cultured environment, possibly from the monasteries of the island.

Style

Stylistically, the wall paintings at Politika can be attributed to at least two different workshops. The scenes depicting the miracles of Jesus and the zone with the half-length saints in the *prothesis* were possibly produced by a later workshop (Fig. 10).

In these scenes the figures are short, marked by the flat rendering of the flesh and lacking distinctive facial features. Drapery here is likewise plain, whereas the narrative scenes themselves are infused with intensity betraying a strong interest in the depiction of details, but also a naive stylistic tendency.

The decoration of the Bema, the *templon*, the *prothesis* and the dome, were all rendered by an earlier workshop. Based on the epigraphic evidence mentioned above, all may be securely dated to 1668 (Fig. 2-9).

In these wall paintings the figures are taller and leaner. Solemn expressions on their faces, modeled with dark layers of underpaint and accentuated contours, emanate a sense of holiness. The forms are articulated while the postures and the gestures are elegant. By

contrast, the garments are flatter with few drapery folds despite the rich embroidered decoration. The compositions are rather plain, symmetrically arranged, and mainly conform to known types from Cretan art (**Fig. 3**).

These mannerisms are associated with renowned Theban painters of the 16th century such as Frangos Katelanos³² and the Kontari³³ brothers. Similar stylistic features may be traced in other monuments of the wider region whose decoration is dated to the 17th century, for example the mural paintings of the church of St Nicholas at Korakies (Euboea)³⁴.

Even closer correspondence may be seen between the 1668 mural paintings of the Panagia Peribleptos at Politika and the Post-Byzantine wall paintings of the monastery of Panagia Skripou in Orchomenos, particularly with regard to the iconographic rendering of the figures as well as their stylistic qualities³⁵. Such a direct link between the two sets of paintings lead us to the conclusion that both may be attributed to a single workshop that was active in Boeotia and Euboea during the second half of the 17th century.

The wall paintings of the Panagia Peribleptos at Politika on Euboea were possibly therefore produced by a local workshop. Rigorously executed, and with complex conceptual and spiritual content, the paintings permit an examination of the monument in the context of contemporary monumental painting, both on the island and in the wider region. Moreover, we may also explore the largely unknown Post-Byzantine artistic production of Euboea, which maintained the tradition of the great Theban painters of the preceding century.

32 *Chatzidakis, Drakopoulou*. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι, 76-79.

33 *Chatzidakis, Drakopoulou*. Έλληνες ζωγράφοι, 102-104. *Kanari, Triantafyllia*. Les peintures du Catholicon du Monastère de Galataki en Eubée, 1586. Le Narthex et la Chapelle de Saint-Jean-le-Précurseur. Athènes, 2003.

34 Unpublished.

35 *Ieronymos*, Βοιωτία, 84-86, fig. 75-112.

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Поствизантийски стенописи на остров Евбея: манастирът „Св. Богородица Перивлепта“ в с. Политика

Андромахи Кацелаки



Близко до историческото селище Политика в централната част на о. Евбея се намира манастирът „Св. Богородица Перивлепта“. Католиконът от типа на сложния четириколонен вписан кръстовиден храм с купол е бил преустроен през османския период и не е запазил оригиналния си план. В по-ново време пък сериозни земетресения и скорошен пожар са също оказали своето влияние върху състоянието на църквата.

Във вътрешното пространство стенописната украса е датирана без съмнения от посветителния надпис в проскомидийната ниша през 1668 г.

Стенописите на „Перивлепта“, съсредоточени днес в купола и олтара, включват литургични и евхаристийни сюжети, сцени от Христологичния и Мариологичния цикъл, както и множество самостоятелни фигури.

Особен интерес представлява изборът на представените тук йерарси. Шестима отци на църквата са изобразени в свода на олтара: св. Кирил Александрийски, св. Атанасий Велики, св. Йоан Златоуст, св. Василий Велики, св. Григорий и св. Спиридон. Други четирима йерарси се появяват върху страничните стени на олтарното пространство: св. Йеротей, св. Дионисий Ареопагит, св. Йоан Калоктенис, митрополит на Тива, както и св. Герман. Още четирима отци пък са зографисани в отворите за комуникация на олтара със страничните ниши на север: св. Климент Охридски, св. Митрофан Константинополски, а на юг – св. Иуст Елефтеруполски и св. Йоан Вивлиуполски. Свързвайки последните четири персонажа, се разбира, че всички са живели в раннохристиянския период и представляват четирите най-стари православни патриархии, присъстващи тук в йерархичния им ред: Константинополска, Александрийска, Антиохийска и Йерусалимска.

Според горното наблюдение може да се изкаже тезата, че в с. Политика са изобразени йерарси, които с делото си са допринесли за основаването, укрепването и разширяването на източната църква, избор, който се дължи на една особено образувана среда, вероятно състояща се от монаси на острова.

Стилистично стенописите в с. Политика могат да се припишат на две различни ателиета. На първото, което вероятно е и по-новото, принадлежат

изображенията на Христовите чудеса, както и реда на допоясните светци в протезисната ниша. Тези стенописи в народен стил демонстрират наративна склонност и представляват интерес по отношение на детайлите от действителността.

На второто и по-ранно датираното ателие се приписва украсата на олтара, на иконостаса и на апсидата в протезиса, както и на купола, датирани през 1668 г.

В тези стенописи се разпознават художествени похвати, свързващи се пряко със зографи от Тива от XVI в. като Франгос Кателанос и братята Кондарис. Особени сходства обаче се забелязват със стенописната украса в с. Политика и в манастира „Св. Богородица Скрипу“. Директната релация между Перивлепта и Скрипу ни отвеждат до хипотезата, че и двата паметника биха могли да се припишат на художествената продукция на едно и също ателие, което работи в Беотия и на Евбея през втората половина на XVII в.