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ПРЕДГОВОР

Овој број на „Балканославика“ претставува органско и тематско продолжување на публикацијата посветена на научниот собир „Одрази на верувањата: Материјалните и општествените манифестации на сакралноста“. Додека претходното 52. издание се фокусираше на просторните и материјалните манифестации на сакралното, пред сè преку движните и недвижните археолошки наоди, во овој број примарниот фокус е поставен на дешифрирање на општествените, визуелните и јазичните кодови преку истражувањата од полето на историјата на уметноста, етнологијата и историјата на јазикот.

Сакралноста, како една од клучните и најкомплексни компоненти што ги содржеле сите општества низ историјата, до денес останува сериозен истражувачки предизвик. Религиските практики и верувања што ги одбележале цивилизациите во минатото претставуваат клучен елемент за нивно разбирање, како и за разбирање на сегашноста. Проучувањето на овие феномени денес бара особена научна ригорозност и јасно дефиниран фокус. Сознанијата што можат да се добијат преку проучувањето на овие феномени не се сведуваат само на податоци за социјалните односи, политичката клима, економската моќ и технолошкиот напредок на едно општество, туку даваат можност вистински да се сфати не само духот на самото општество, туку и светогледот и личното доживување на поединецот – нешта што тешко можат да се согледаат преку истражување на други теми.

Поставувањето на сакралноста како основна тема за елаборација на научниот собир има за цел повторно да ја укаже и да ја истакне важноста на оваа проблематика. Потребата од повторно акцентирање се базира на фактот што во денешно време хуманистичките дисциплини се наоѓаат под притисок да ја докажат својата релевантност преку инструментализација и приспособување кон актуелни, најчесто минливи општествено-политички агенди. Тежнеењето за актуелност по секоја цена често резултира со површни анализи што се оддалечуваат од примарниот предмет на проучување.

Сметаме дека вистинскиот одговор не се наоѓа во слепото следење на трендовите, туку во враќањето кон суштинските прашања. За да се добијат поцеловити и поиздржани одговори, несомнено, од големо значење е мултидисциплинарниот пристап што овозможува повеќезначно промислување на нашата духовна историја. Преку согледувањето на овие проблеми од различен аспект, се отвораат можности за поставување на сопствените истражувања во поширок контекст, потврдувајќи уште еднаш дека потрагата по универзалното знаење останува највисок и единствен вистински императив на хуманистиката.

FOREWORD

This issue of Balkanoslavika constitutes an organic and thematic continuation of the publication dedicated to the scientific gathering Reflections of Beliefs: Material and Social Manifestations of the Sacred. Whereas the preceding fifty-second volume emphasized the spatial and material expressions of the sacred, primarily through the analysis of movable and immovable archaeological finds, the present issue shifts its focus toward the interpretation of social, visual, and linguistic codes, drawing on research in the fields of art history, ethnology, and the history of language.

Sacrality, as one of the key and most complex components constitutive of all societies throughout history, remains a significant subject of scholarly inquiry. The religious practices and beliefs that have shaped past civilizations represent an essential element for their interpretation, as well as for a more comprehensive understanding of the present. The study of these phenomena today necessitates a high degree of scientific rigor and a clearly defined analytical focus. The insights derived from such investigations extend beyond data concerning social relations, political contexts, economic structures, and technological development, offering instead the possibility of engaging with the broader spiritual dimensions of society, as well as with the worldview and lived experience of the individual - dimensions that are often less accessible through other fields of research.

The establishment of the sacred as the central theme of the scientific gathering is intended to underscore and reaffirm the significance of this field of inquiry. The need for such renewed emphasis arises from the contemporary condition in which the humanities are increasingly pressured to demonstrate their relevance through processes of instrumentalization and alignment with current, often transient socio-political agendas. The pursuit of relevance at any cost frequently leads to superficial analyses that diverge from the primary object of study.

We maintain that an adequate response cannot be found in the uncritical adoption of prevailing trends, but rather in a return to fundamental questions. In pursuit of more comprehensive and enduring answers, a multidisciplinary approach - one that enables a layered and multivalent reflection on spiritual history - proves indispensable. Approaching these issues from diverse perspectives creates the conditions for situating individual research within a broader analytical framework, thereby reaffirming that the pursuit of universal knowledge remains the central and enduring imperative of the humanities.

ASPECTS OF TEMPORAL LIFE. ALLEGORICAL AND DIDACTIC SCENES IN POST-BYZANTINE MONUMENTAL PAINTING OF THESSALY

In memory of Professor Elias Antonopoulos, Teacher and Friend

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Review article
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Abstract: *In the monumental painting of Thessaly from the 16th century, scenes of allegorical content such as the Triumph of Death, the Wheel of Life, Time, the Tree of Good and Evil appear with regular frequency. These are visual renderings of high meanings, which are found mainly in Thessaly in relation to other regions of the Greek space. The existence of all these representations, spanning a period of three centuries, although difficult to interpret as a presence, create special pictorial ensembles and add dynamic features to the religious painting of Thessaly in the post-Byzantine period.*

Keywords: *Allegorical scenes, temporal life, post byzantine art, Thessaly*

In both Byzantine and post-Byzantine painting there exist scenes of didactic or allegorical character[1]. In Thessaly, in particular, a large number of post-Byzantine representations of this type exist which are either unique to this region or to be found mainly there.

For example, in the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos at Kalambaka (1573)[2], amongst other scenes, there is a 16th-century representation of the Triumph of Death (fig. 1). Death is depicted on a chariot adorned with skulls and drawn by four black oxen. The chariot is running over the bodies of both living and dead people of all ages and social classes. An inscription proclaims the establishment of Death's kingdom.

The iconography of the scene is not to be found in any earlier byzantine work, nor in any later one. It has been drawn from an engraving that is a visual representation of the Petrarch's Trionfo della Morte[3]. This depiction, a genuine loan from a Western work, is not found in any other work of the post-Byzantine period except for an iconographic

[1] Panayiotis Kampanis, "Αλληγορίες και προσωποποιήσεις στη βυζαντινή τέχνη", in *Meanings: Personifications and Allegories from Antiquity to Today*, ed. Nikolaos Stampolidis, Anna Vlachaki, (Athens: Akropolis Mudeum, 2023), 139 ff.

[2] Nikolaos Papageorgiou, "Η παράσταση 'Ο Θρίαμβος του Θανάτου' στον νάρθηκα της Μητρόπολης Καλαμπάκας", *Βυζαντινά* 26 (2006): 265-292.; Φανή Λυτάρη, *Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του ναού της Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου στην Καλαμπάκα, Συμβολή στο έργο του ζωγράφου Νεόφυτου του Κρητός* (Kalampaka: Metropolis of Stagoi and Meteora, 2022), 255 ff., pl. 31.

[3] Stichel Rainer, "Darstellungen des Trionfo della Morte in der nachbyzantinischen Malerei". *Byzantinoslavica* 32 (1971): 296-317.; Lynn White, "Petrarch's Trionfo della Moerte", *Speculum* 49 (1974): 201-221, figs 1-16.



Fig. 1. The Triumph of Death. Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos at Kalambaka (1573)
Сл. 1. Триумф на смртта. Црква „Успение на Пресвета Богородица“ во Каламбака (1573)

variant on the trapeza of the Great Lavra monastery on Mount Athos[4].

The next scene takes us on to the 17th century and is a monochrome depiction of merciless Death (fig. 2), dating from 1615/6 in the refectory of the Monastery of St. Panteleimon at Ayiá[5]. In this representation Death, holding sickle and bow and carrying at the same time a sword, is depicted standing on an open grave containing a skeleton. On either side of the sarcophagus stand a crowd of mourners and at the end is written an epigram related to death[6].

The scene has been drawn from a representation of the same subject which was itself based on the poem by Gioustos Glykos entitled ‘Grieving for Death, the Vanity of Life and a Return to God’ (1528 and 1548)[7].

In the Chapel of the Three Hierarchs at the Monastery of Barlaam (1637) there is a depiction of the ‘Raging Unicorn’ (fig. 3). The scene depicts a parable from the novel ‘Barlaam and Joasaph’[8]. A

[4] Gabriel Millet, *Monuments de l’Athos, I, les peintures* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1927), pl. 142, 2.; George Fytam, *Τα πρόσωπα του θανάτου. Εικονολογική μελέτη για τις προσωποποιήσεις του θανάτου στη μεσαιωνική και νεότερη ευρωπαϊκή τέχνη* (PhD thesis, Thessaloniki: Aristotle University, 2020), 142, pl. 142.

[5] Iphigenia Zoga, *Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος της Τράπεζας του Αγίου Παντελεήμονος Αγιάς (MA thesis, Volos: University of Thessaly, 2015)*, 67-71.

[6] Georgios Zoras, *Πένθος θανάτου, Ζωής μάταιον και προς Θεόν επιστροφή* (Athens: Βιβλιοθηκη Βυζαντινης και Νεοελληνικης Φιλολογιας, 1970), 83.

[7] Papageorgiou, “Η παράσταση”, 269.

[8] Evi Sampanikou, “Η εικονογράφηση της σκηνής του μαινόμενου μονοκέρωτος από το μυθιστόρημα Βαρλαάμ και Ιωάσαφ στην ελλαδική μεταβυζαντινή τοιχογραφία”, *Δωδώνη* 19 (1990): 127 ff., fig. 12.

mortal man, pursued by the Unicorn of Death, is falling into an abyss which symbolises the sins of life. He manages to grab the branches of the Tree of Life, which, however, is being gnawed away by two mice representing day and night. The man notices the honey dripping from the branches and, forgetting the immediate danger he is in, tries to savour the joys of life.

This is, in effect, an allegory of human life, in which someone devote himself to life's material pleasures and forgetting all about the needs of his soul and the death, which is symbolised by the unicorn[9].

This scene usually occurs in miniatures (10th -17th centuries)[10], while no other representation of this kind is known in Thessaly.

From the 18th century, in the refectory of the Dousiko Monastery[11] (1727) near Trikala, there are two scenes of didactic subjects that are fairly uncommon.

The central subject of the first scene is the depiction of the Crucified Monk (fig. 4), to whose robe are attached scrolls with texts referring to a monk's life. On the left is a depiction of the Devil, while on the right there is a mounted figure of Cosmos and the Dragon of the Deep. To the left of the cross there is a demon shooting an arrow at the monk. Next to it is visible the figure of a snake

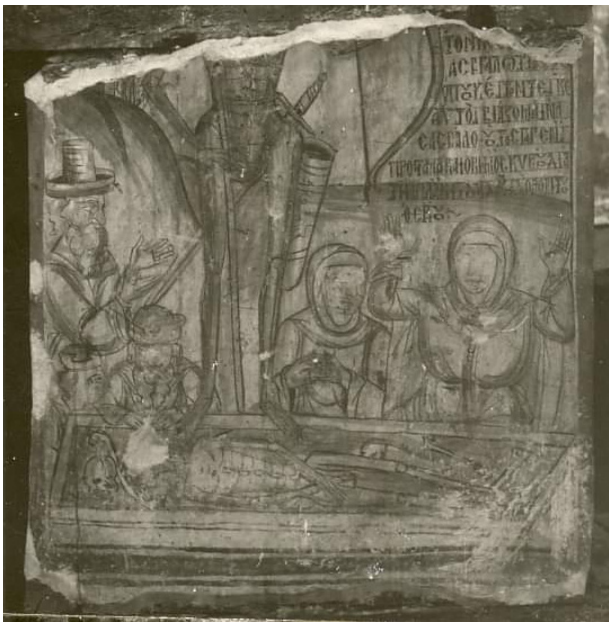


Fig. 2. The merciless Death. Refectory of the Monastery of St. Panteleimon at Ayiá, Larissa (1615/6)

Сл. 2. Немилосрдната смрт. Трпезарија на манастирот „Св. Пантелејмон“ кај Аја, Лариса (1615/6)

devouring souls. In the upper part of the scene there is a depiction of Christ flanked by angels.

This uncommon in Orthodox art scene, is known by Dionysios of Fourna's Hermeneia (Interpretation of the Art of Painting)[12]. Its origins are in Western art and the iconographic type depicted here refers to an engraving by Michel Birbaum (1st half of the 17th century)[13]. A similar

[9] Sampanikou, "Η εικονογράφηση", 128, with further bibliography. About the haunted trees that folk lore believed to have souls but also some of them were inhabited by demons see Charisios Megdanis, *Ελληνικόν Πάνθεον ή Συλλογή της μυθικής Ιστορίας των παρά τοις αρχαίοις Έλλησι μυθολογουμένων θεών, και της κατ' αυτήν αλληγορίας* (Pest: Trattner Matthias, 1812), 502.; Nikolaos Politis, *Μελέται περί του βίου και της γλώσσης του ελληνικού λαού. Παραδόσεις*, Α, (Αθήνα: ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΕΥΝΑ 1904), 177-179.

[10] Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L' illustration du roman de Barlaam et Joasaph, v. 1 texte, v. 2 Album", in ed. Jean Mécérian, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 21 (Paris: De Boccard, 1937).; Sirarpie Der Nersessian, "L'illustration des Psautiers grecs du Moyen Age, II, Londres, Add. 19352", *Revue des études byzantines* 30 (1970): pp. 57, 69-70, pi. 101, 118; Suzy Duffrene, *Tableaux synoptiques de 15 psautiers medicvaux* (Paris: Association des amis des études archéologiques byzantines slaves, 1978), ps. 91, 143-4.

[11] For the mural decoration of the Dousikou monastery's Trapeza βλ. Ioannis Tsiouris, "Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος της Ι. Μ. Δουσίκου (1727)", *Trikalina* 27 (2007): 347-376.

[12] Dionysios of Fourna, *Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης*, 1st ed. A. Papadopoulos- Kerameos, (Saint Petersburg: 1909, reprint Spanos Editions, Athens 2004), 209-211.

[13] Almuth Seebohm, "The crucified monk", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996): 92, pl. 24. See also at the Hurez Monastery (ibidem, pl. 26).



Fig. 3. The Raging Unicorn. Chapel of the Three Hierarchs at the Monastery of Barlaam (1637), Meteora
Сл. 3. Бесниот еднорог. Параклис „Свети Три Хиерарси“ во манастирот Варлаам (1637), Метеори



Fig. 4. The Crucified Monk. Refectory of the Dousiko Monastery (1727), Trikala
Сл. 4. Распнатиот монах. Трпезарија на манастирот Дусико (1727), Трикала



Fig. 5. The Crucified Monk. Katholicon of Rendina Monastery (1st half of 18th cent.), Agrafa
Сл. 5. Распнатиот монах. Католикон на манастирот Рендина (прва половина на 18 век), Аграфа

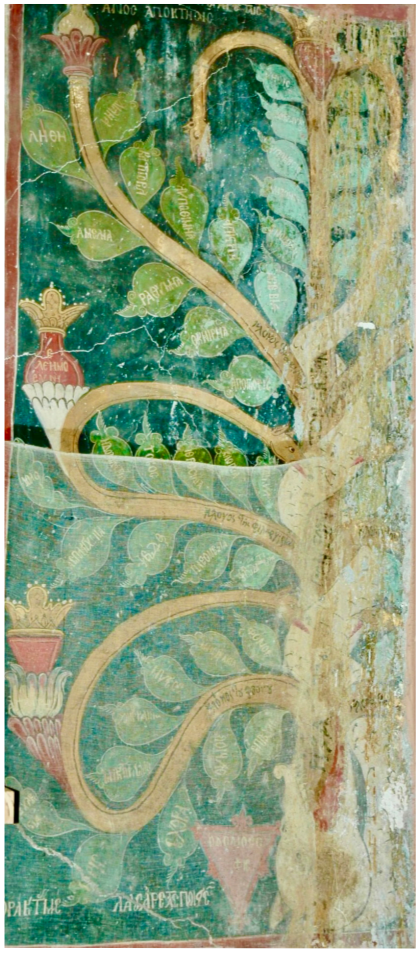


Fig. 6. The Tree of Virtue and Sin. Refectory of the Dousiko Monastery (1727), Trikala

Сл. 6. Дрвото на доблестите и гревовите. Трпезарија на манастирот Дусико (1727), Трикала

iconographic type is to be found at the katholikon of the Rendina Monastery in the Agrapha Mountains (Thessaly) (first half of 18th cent.)[14] (fig. 5).

Another allegorical representation is the Tree of Virtue and Sin (fig. 6). In the centre stands the trunk of the tree, around which is coiled a snake (Devil). From the trunk sprout branches on each of which is inscribed the name of a mortal sin, while each branch terminates in flowers bearing the names of the seven virtues.

This is a rare allegorical scene which presents the Seven Virtues and the Seven Mortal Sins of mankind[15]. Iconographically, it is based on the tradition of depicting symbolical themes based on the Tree of Life, such as in the novel about Barlaam and Joasaph[16], as well as other subjects like the Root of Jesse and genealogical trees[17]. Also, the use of a tree as a basis for depicting allegorical themes is also very common in Western iconography (arbor bona – arbor mala)[18], where the pictorial model of our performance should be sought.

Of particular importance is the mural decoration on the west façade of the katholikon of the Rendina Monastery[19]. This mural ensemble, among others, consists of depictions of St. John's Ladder of Divine Ascent, Caerus, the Crucified Monk and the Wheel of Life.

The depiction of the Ladder of Divine Ascent (fig. 7) follows the description in Dionysios

14 Ioannis Tsiouris, *Οι τοιχογραφίες της μονής Αγίας Τριάδος Δρακότρυπας (1758) και η μνημειακή ζωγραφική του 18ου αιώνα στην περιοχή των Αγράφων* (Athens: Ελληνικά Γράμματα 2008), 351, fig. 356.

15 The conceptual definition of the Seven Virtues and the Seven Mortal Sins were introduced by Pope Gregory I (*Sancti Gregorii Papei I cognomento Magni*, *Opera Omnia*, P.L. 76, Speech XXXIII, (Venetiis: Sumptibus Caroboli et Pompeati, 1768),1239.; For the non-acceptance of these formulations by the Fathers of the Orthodox Church see Tsiouris, "Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος", 354-355, with relevant bibliography.

16 Sampanikou, "Η εικονογράφηση", 127 ff, fig. 12.

17 Stavros Gouloulis, *'Ρίζα Ιεσσαί': ο σύνθετος εικονογραφικός τύπος (13ος-18ος αι.). Γένεση, ερμηνεία και εξέλιξη ενός δυναστικού μύθου*, Βυζαντινά Κείμενα και Μελέται 45 (Θεσσαλονίκη: Κέντρο Βυζαντινών Ερευνών, 2007).

18 Penelope C. Mayo, "The Crusaders under the Palm. Allegorical Plants and Cosmic Kingship in the Liber Floridus", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973): 30 ff.

19 Tsiouris, "Οι τοιχογραφίες", 350 ff. The pictorial program of the western facade of the katholicon, with the inclusion of the specific scenes, constitutes a semantic unit with a special didactic and allegorical character.







Fig. 7. Ladder of Divine Ascent; Fig. 8. Caerus; Fig. 9. The Wheel of Life
Katholicon of Rendina Monastery (1st half of 18th cent.), Agrafa

Сл. 7. Лествица на духовниот подем; Сл. 8. Каирос; Сл. 9. Тркалото на животот
Католикон на манастирот Рендина (прва половина на 18 век), Аграфа

of Fourna's Hermeneia[20]. Iconographic parallels are to be found in the refectory of the Great Lavra[21] Monastery and Sinai Codex 427 (16th–17th century)[22].

Caerus (fig. 8) is portrayed as a youthful, beardless male figure with a largely bald head; clad in a loincloth, with wings on his shins, he is shown moving to the left, holding the razor in his right hand. In the lower part of the scene is inscribed the epigram of Posidippus.

The depiction of Caerus[23], which has its origins in the work by Lysippus, occurs in the miniature in codex H.16 of the Great Lavra Monastery (1602), although Caerus is portrayed as an old man. Also, the iconographic rendering of Rendina's monastery Caerus matches the

[20] Dionysios of Fourna, *Ερμηνεία*, 211 – 212.

[21] Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos*, pl. 142.2.

[22] John Rupert Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 190 - 191, pl. 293.

[23] Elias Antonopoulos, "Καιρός και βίος: Η Χριστιανική επιλογή ανάμεσα στην ευκαιρία και τη σωτηρία", *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 49-50, Μέρος Α' - Μελέτες (1994-1995): 247-266, ibidem, "Το τίμημα της τέρψης: Βίος και αναβιώσεις του καιρού στη Βυζαντινή τέχνη", *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογίκής Εταιρείας* 20 (1998), 204.; Charalampos Bouras, "Αλληγορική παράσταση του Βίου-Καιρού σε μια μεταβυζαντινή τοιχογραφία στη Χίο", *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 21, Μέρος Α' -Μελέται, (1966): 26-34; Athanasios Semoglou, "Ο Καιρός και ο Βίος σε πλάκα άμβωνα του Torcello: Μία αλληγορική ερμηνεία της Ε΄ Ομιλίας του Ιωάννη του Χρυσοστόμου", *Όψεις του βυζαντινού χρόνου*, *Proceedings of international Congress*, ed. Eleni Saranti – Theoni Kollyropoulou, (Athens: University of Peloponnese – Christian and Byzantine Museum of Athens), 2018, 220 ff.

description in Codex 85 (18th century) of the Historical and Ethnological Society (Athens)[24].

The depiction of the Crucified Monk (fig. 5) is not differentiated the Dionysios of Fourna's text[25]. The model for this representation should be sought in the engraving of Cologne (1st half of the 17th century)[26].

The Wheel of Life[27] (fig. 9), follows the description in Dionysios of Fourna's Interpretation. This subject is rendered in a similar iconographic type at the Retha Monastery in Aitolo-Akarnania (1st half of the 18th cent.)[28], the Church of the Taxiarchs at Milies in the Pelion (2nd half of the 18th cent.)[29], and the Monastery of St. Athanasios at Omvriaki near Domokos (1810)[30]. The links between these four representations suggest that they all have an unknown yet common prototype.

At the Church of St. George at Lefki near Karditsa (c. 1750), some of the scenes in the narthex (Death, the Wheel of Life, Alexander the Great) form a conceptual unity that lends a special character to the iconographic programme relating to the meaning of life[31].

The depiction of Death (fig. 10), which is not common in the parish churches of Thessaly, takes the form of an emaciated frontal, full-length figure holding a sickle in his right hand and a cup in the other[32].



Fig. 10. The Death. Church of St. George, (c. 1750), Lefki, Karditsa

Сл. 10. Смртта. Црква „Свети Георгиј“ (околу 1750), Лефки, Кардица

The iconographic type of The Wheel of Life (fig. 11), with the young woman at the centre of the wheel, the crowned figure of Cosmos and the anti-clockwise of the wheel, is not to be found in other, known mural depictions of the subject. The

[24] Tsiouris, "Οι τοιχογραφίες", 351, fig. 355, Antonopoulos, "Καιρός και βίος", 260, pl. 63a and fn. 60, respectively.

[25] Dionysios of Fourna, *Ερμηνεία*, 209-211.

[26] Seebohm, "The Crucified Monk", 92 ff, pl. 24. Under the same iconograpfical type depicted the theme at the Hurez Monastery (18th century) (ibidem, pl. 26).

[27] The Wheel of Life is an infrequent scene which is found in the monumental painting of Thessaly for the first time in the church of Agios Bessarion in Domenikon (1600) (Eleni-Styliani Triviza, *Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του ναού του αγίου Γεωργίου (1611) και η μνημειακή ζωγραφική των αρχών του 17ου αιώνα στο Δομένικο Ελασσόνας*, (PhD Thesis, Ioannina: University of Ioannina, 2020), 363-364, fig. 225, with relevant bibliography.

[28] Athanasios Paliouras, *Βυζαντινή Αιτωλοακαρνανία. Συμβολή στη Βυζαντινή και Μεταβυζαντινή τέχνη* (Athens: Iphitos, 1985), 124, pl. 113. 124, pl. 113.

[29] Elias Antonopoulos, "Τροχών κυλίσματα: Ηλικίες του ανθρώπου", in *ΑΦΙΕΡΩΜΑ to Professor Miltos Garidis (1926 - 1996)*, (Ioannina: University of Ioannina, v. Α', 2003), 17 - 44, pl. 9.

[30] George Tsouknidas, "Χρόνος εστί καιρών κύκλος", *Λακωνικές Σπουδές* 11 (1992): 379 ff., pl. 1.

[31] Tsiouris, "Οι τοιχογραφίες", 308-309.

[32] On the subject of the depiction of Death see: Fytam, *Τα πρόσωπα του θανάτου*, 1 ff.





Fig. 11. The Wheel of Life;
Fig. 12. Alexander the Great, Church of St. George (c. 1750), Lefki, Karditsa

Сл. 11. Тркалото на животот;
Сл. 12. Александар Велики, Црква „Свети Георгиј“ (околу 1750), Лефки, Кардица

pictorial type of the scene draws its descent from a common pattern with the homonymous miniature in Codex 2174 (1674-1680) of the National Library of Greece[33].

Finally, also in the narthex, among the full-length figures of the saints in the lower zone, Alexander the Great (fig. 12) is depicted on horseback, without a halo and in imperial attire riding a horned horse (Bucephalus)[34]. This depiction of Alexander the Great is extremely rare in monumental painting and the only parallel can be found in the chapel of Agios Georgios in the church of Agios Dimitrios in Kastri Larisa[35], where the inscription “ALEXANDER THE GREAT” is preserved.

Also of interest is the depiction of Death (fig. 13) in the katholikon of the Monastery of the Presentation of the Theotokos in Metaxohori at Aghia (1797). Depicted as an upright, naked and winged figure holding a sickle and a sword, he

[33] Antonopoulos, *Τροχών κυλίσματα*, 30 ff., pl. 7.

[34] About Alexander the Great and the spectacular spread of his stories in the Greek world, βλ. Manolis Varvounis, “Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος στη λαϊκή παράδοση των ελλήνων”, *ΚΘ΄ Παύλεια. Proceedings of thw International Symposium ‘Ο Απόστολος Παύλος και η κληρονομιά του ελληνιστικού κόσμου’* (Veroia: Metropolis of Veroia, Naoussa and Campania, 2024), 3-23. For the depiction of Alexander the Great in Byzantine and post-Byzantine art see Tsiouris, “Οι τοιχογραφίες”, 309, with relevant bibliography.

[35] Ioannis Tsiouris, “Artistic Trends and Aesthetic Approaches in 18th Century Monumental Painting. The Case of Thessaly”, *Art Studies Quarterly* (2/2013), 22, fn. 79.

constitutes a hybrid between a cupid, Cronos (Time) and Death, displaying his relentless power over human life. Although the figure of Death has been depicted in a number of mural ensembles in Thessaly, the rendering of the figure here is unique in the region. If it is not a one-off creation by the painters who decorated the katholikon, its origins should be sought in Western works[36]. Accompanying the figure is a short inscription which reads "προκύψας ο θάνατος ως χόρτον της ζωής τω δρεπάνω θέρισεν" ("Death emerged, reaping, as it were, the grass of life with his sickle"), which is connected with an Resurrection canon for a dead woman[37]. The portrayal of Death in Thessaly cannot be unrelated to the periodic appearance of the plague in the region, especially during the post byzantine era[38].

Finally, in the narthex of the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos at Astritsa (1754)[39], the Wheel of Life (fig. 14) is depicted in an iconographic type that links it with the scene of the same subject in the Church of St. Nicholas at Tsaritsani (1753)[40]. However, in the lower part of the representation Death is uniquely depicted on the Wheel, holding a sickle and a bow, while above a man who is close to death and falling into the mouth of the Dragon of the Deep there is an inscription that reads: 'Ούτε ήμουν ούτε εφάνηκα' ("I neither existed nor appeared"). A phrase[41] that condenses the meaning



Fig. 13. The Death. Katholikon of the Monastery of the Presentation of Theotokos (1797), Metaxohori, Ayia

Сл. 13. Смртта. Католикон на манастирот „Воведение на Пресвета Богородица" (1797), Мегалохори, Аја

[36] See for example the Francesco di Antonio del Chierico, *Triumph of Death* (Biblioteca dell'Accademia nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, MS Cors., 1081) (Fytam, *Τα πρόσωπα του θανάτου*, fig. 119). Cf. a similar depiction of death with wings in a miniature by Georgios Klontzas (1591-92) (Triantaphylos Sklavenitis, "Χρησμολογικό εικονογραφημένο μονόφυλλο τω ναρχών του 18ου αι", *Μνήμων* 7 [1978]: 46 ff., pl. 2).

[37] Jacobi Goar, *Ευχολόγιον sive rituale Graecorum, complectens ritus et ordines* (Lutetiae Parisiorum 1647, Editio secunda Venetiis 1730), 473.

[38] The first written reference to the appearance of the plague in Thessaly dates to 1466/67 (Konstantinos Kostis, *Στον καιρό της πανώλης. Εικόνες από τις κοινωνίες της ελληνικής χερσονήσου, 14ο-19ος αιώνας*, [Heraklion: Crete University Press, 1995], 183). It would subsequently appear many times during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, both universally across the region and locally (ibidem, 352 κ.ε.).

[39] On the mural painting of the church see: Nicoleta Troupkou, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του ναού Κοιμήσεως της Θεοτόκου Αστρίτσας Καρδίτσας. Τεχνοτροπική, επιγραφική και ιστορική προσέγγιση (1754)", *Θεσσαλικά Μελετήματα* 8 (2028): 223 -244. In this article does not record or make any reference to the ship scene.

[40] Kitsos Makris, *Η Τσαριτσάνη και τα μνημεία της* (Athens: Υπηρεσία Γενικής Αναπτύξεως Θεσσαλίας, 1967), 17-21, figs 5,7, *Aikaterini Koumarianou – Loukia Droulia - Evro Layton, Το ελληνικό βιβλίο, 1476-1830,* (Athens: National Bank of Greece, 1986), fig. 88.

[41] On this specific phrase and its origin see: Elias Antonopoulos, "Η δεκάδα των ηλικιών: Αμφίδρομη γενεαλογική δοκιμή", *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 26 (2005): 364.



Fig. 14. The Wheel of Life. Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos (1754), Astritsa

Сл. 14. Тркалото на животот. Црква „Успение на Пресвета Богородица“ (1754), Астрица

of the whole of this multi-level scene with dramatic emphasis.

In the same narthex, and in the same zone, there is a scene that seems initially difficult to interpret. Next to the figure of Abba Sisoe, on the tomb of Alexander the Great, there is a depiction of a ship moving towards him (fig. 15). On the bow stands an erect figure of a man playing a lyre, while another man holds the billowing sails with outstretched arms and a third is depicted at the helm holding a sphere. Finally, behind the bow, in the sea, there is a depiction of a demonic figure.

An initial interpretation could be that this constitutes a unique portrayal of the scene known in Western art as the ‘Ship of Fools’[42]. However, the demonic figure behind the bow is reminiscent of a

[42] Elisabeta Negrău, “The Ship of Salvation. Thematic Transfers in the Rhetoric and Iconography of the Orthodox Church in the Seventeenth Century”, *Museikon* 7 (2023): 35-50.



Fig. 15. Abba Sissoe on the tomb of Alexander the Great. Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos (1754), Astritsa
Сл. 15. Ава Сисој над гробот на Александар Македонски. Црква „Успение на Пресвета Богородица“ (1754), Астрица

mermaid, the rendering of which resembles that of other depictions of the figure in 18th-century art. This particular scene may be interpreted as representing the encounter between Alexander the Great's sister and a ship[43], of whose captain she enquires whether her brother is alive. If such an interpretation is correct, the presence nearby of the great king's tomb intensifies the dramatic irony.

In front of Alexander the Great's tomb is a reproduction of the words of Abba Sisoe[44], as they appear in the Dousiko Monastery[45] (fig. 16). According to the inscription: ".....ΑΝΘΡΩΠΕ ΚΑΙ ΝΕΦΙ ΦΘΑΣΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΓΗΣ ΜΕΤΡΙΣΕΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΗΣ ΤΑ ΒΑΘΗ, ΤΑΦΟΣ ΣΕ ΘΑΠΤΕΙ ΚΑΝ

[43] For the popular story of the transformation of Alexander the Great's sister into a mermaid, who desperately travels the seas and asks if King Alexander is alive see George Aikaterinidis, "Ο Μέγας Αλέξανδρος στη λαϊκή παράδοση", *Σερραϊκά Χρονικά* 12 (1996): 5-42, with relevant bibliography.

[44] For the iconography of Abba Sisoe in front of the tomb of Alexander the Great βλ. Rainer Stichel, *Studien zum verhaltnis von text und bild spat - und nachbyzantinischer verganglichkeitsdarstellungen. Die Anfansminiaturen von Psalterhandschriften des 14. Jahrhunderts, ihre Herkunft, Bedeutung und ihr Weiterleben in der griechischen und russischen Kunst und Literatur* (Wien: Byzantina Vindobonensia - Band V, 1971), 83 – 120.

[45] Tsiouris, "Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος", 360-361, fig. 17.



Fig. 16. Abba Sissoe on the tomb of Alexander the Great. Refectory of the Dousiko Monastery (1727), Trikala

Сл. 16. Ава Сисој над гробот на Александар Велики. Трпезарија на манастирот Дусико (1727), Трикала

ΘΕΛΕΙΣ ΚΑΝ ΔΕΝ ΘΕΛΕΙΣ" (".....Man, even if you reach the clouds and plumb the depths of the earth and the oceans, the tomb will bury you, whether you like it or not"). The words are in complete harmony with those of the desperate man in the Wheel of Life ("I neither existed nor appeared").

The existence of all these scenes, of which there are more that are not included in this paper, and especially those that are characteristic of Thessaly, such as the Wheel of Life, Alexander the Great and the Crucified Monk, is difficult to interpret. What are the reasons for their appearance in this particular period and in this particular region? The question becomes even more complex if one considers that they were executed over a period of three centuries, in different areas, and by painters representing different artistic trends.

The appearance of these scenes is particularly intriguing because they do not appear in other works by the same painters. Most probably the existence of these representations is due to the ability of local people, through their oral traditions, to perceive and understand their meanings, and also to education. The existence of schools and great teachers of the Greek nation like Anastasios Gordios[46], as well as the trading relations that existed with the West, led to the existence of educated and cultivated patrons and founders who, in turn, called on painters to portray subjects chosen by themselves that corresponded to their high level of culture[47].

All of the above factors combined mean it was quite possible for such scenes as the above to be used in monasteries and parish churches, especially during the 18th century, a period when the influences of Western art can be clearly seen in the works of many painters.

These scenes, harmoniously integrated into the iconographic tradition of the region, help to create ensembles of a unique character that lend a dynamism to post-Byzantine painting in Thessaly.

[46] Anastasios Argyriou, "Anastassios Gordios et la polémique anti-islamique post-byzantine", *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 43 (1969): 58-87, ibidem, *Les exégèses grecques de l'Apocalypse à l'époque turque (1453-1821). Esquisse d'une histoire des courants idéologiques au seindu peuple grec asservi* (Thessaloniki: Société des Etudes Macédoniennes, Travaux Scientifiques, Série Littéraire et Théologique, no 15, 1982), 311-15.

[47] Tsiouris, "Artistic Trends", 18ff, idem, "Οι τοιχογραφίες".

РЕЗИМЕ

АСПЕКТИ НА ВРЕМЕНСКИОТ ЖИВОТ: АЛЕГОРИСКИ И ДИДАКТИЧКИ СЦЕНИ ВО ПОСТВИЗАНТИСКОТО МОНУМЕНТАЛНО СЛИКАРСТВО ОД ТЕСАЛИЈА

Јанис ЦУРИС

Алегориските сцени како Триумфот на смртта, Тркалото на животот, Времето и Дрвото на доброто и злото се среќаваат со значителна зачестеност во монументалното сликарство од XVI век во Тесалија. Овие иконографски мотиви, исполнети со длабока симболичка содржина, се особено застапени во Тесалија во споредба со другите региони од грчкиот свет. Присуството на вакви претстави, кое опфаќа период од три века, предизвикува бројни интерпретации; но, вклучувањето на овие интерпретации резултира со создавање на специфичните визуелни целини. Дополнително, овие мотиви му даваат динамичен карактер на тесалиското поствизантиско религиско сликарство, збогатувајќи ја неговата уметничка и духовна комплексност.