

Subversive Evidence Regarding the Birth of Neohellenic Painting

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The history of the birth of Neohellenic painting starts in the eighteenth century, one hundred years before the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, in the still divided territories between Ottoman and Venetian rule. Four generations of artists living and active in the Venetian ruled Ionian Isles realised what is commonly held to be the Renaissance of Greek painting.¹ Panaghiotis Doxaras (1662-1729), and his contemporary Jeronymos Plakotos (1662?-1728), Nikolaos Doxaras (1705? –1775), Nikolaos Koutouzis (1741-1831) and Nikolaos Kantounis (1767-1834) are the five main protagonists of the so-called 'Heptanese School', the first school of Neohellenic painting, which developed in the Heptanese Islands in the Ionian Sea.² Dealing the decisive blow to Byzantine traditional painting, these artists abandoned the *old maniera* in favour of the *al naturale* realising a "breach with the past".³ More specifically, in all relevant studies they are presented as having consciously "westernised and secularised Greek orthodox ecclesiastical painting"⁴. They substituted the technique of egg-tempera on wooden panels for the use of oils and oil-varnishes on canvas, introduced changes to the iconographic programs of Greek orthodox church decorations, and widely imitated Italian compositions and style in both religious, and in particular ecclesiastical, and secular works. Characterised variably as "italian-greek painting", or "Heptanese naturalism", the works produced throughout the eighteenth century in the Isles by the native or fugitive artists who were active there, came to epitomise a new era for Greek art.⁵

The view of a *Heptanese* as a Greek Renaissance, first introduced in 1902, went unchallenged for almost 50 years. In the 1950s, however, it began to be openly disputed, causing thereafter heated debates among art historians.⁶ More specifically, the innovations introduced by the Ionian Isle artists to religious and particularly to ecclesiastical art, were now argued against as indicative of a "wilful surrender" to "total westernisation", which was judged as far too bold and ultimately non-characteristic of the history of Greek art. The "totally italianised" art of the artists of the Heptanese School was now generally dismissed as neither conforming to nor representing the Greek nation as a whole.⁷

In the 1970s a compromise was reached among scholars on the debate of the 'Greekness' of the Heptanese contribution to Neohellenic art. The School began now to be regarded as a brief spell of a proto Renaissance, preferably evaluated as a phenomenon, which was limited to the specific area of the Ionian Isles and chronologically enclosed within the eighteenth century. The term coined in essays on Neohellenic art was "a closed phenomenon", which as such, neither spread nor affected the rest of subjugated Greece in any way.⁸ Whilst the debate on the role of the Heptanese School in Neohellenic art has today reached what may be seen

as a standstill, the lives and works of its protagonists and not least the social, religious and political environment in which they lived and produced their works, remains very much unknown territory, and thus liable to offer surprises. The study of the written works of Panaghiotis Doxaras, the founder of the Heptanese School, offers today one such possibility.⁹

A Peloponnesian by birth, the cavaliere, Panaghiotis Doxaras, spent most of his life in the Heptanese area, where his family fled after the Ottoman invasion of the Peloponnese.¹⁰ After a four-year apprenticeship to Leo or Ilias Moschos, a post-Byzantine Cretan refugee painter in Zante, he began his independent career as an artist mainly in Corfu and Lefkas, which was to grant him the title of “founder and father of the Heptanese School” and “pioneer artist” in the history of Greek painting.¹¹ The common *topos* in all references to Doxaras since 1843, when his life and works first became known, is that in the last decade of his life he almost single-handedly not only methodically denounced the “old Byzantine ways” proposing instead, by his artistic practice, the introduction of “pure Italian painting” into Greek orthodox churches, but sought to systematise and propagate his “revolutionary aesthetic ideals” by setting them in writing.¹²

Two manuscript anthologies of translated texts chosen from sources such as DuFresne's edition of 1651 of Leonardo da Vinci's so-called *Trattato della Pittura* and Alberti's *Tre Libri della Pittura*, or Andrea Pozzo's *Breve istruttione per dipingere a fresco*, known as *Techne Zografias-1720* [The Art of Painting 1720], an incomplete work, and *Techne Zografias-1724* [The Art of Painting 1724] a richer and better work in many ways and above all one original treatise bearing the title *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* [On Painting Around 1726], all three extant today dispersed between Venice and Greece, verified the alleged will of Doxaras to “prepare the ground” and to “propagate” the new aesthetic ideals he was proposing in his paintings.¹³ “Practice and theory went hand in hand”, scholars agreed.¹⁴

Despite the fact that the documentary evidence did not allow for safe conclusions regarding the dissemination of these works and even more importantly, despite the fact that the manuscripts and their contents remained insufficiently analysed,¹⁵ their key role in the history of Neohellenic painting, remained constantly emphasised by art historians and by historians of Neohellenic literature alike.¹⁶ Doxaras's *Peri Zografias kata to 1726*, the “landmark treatise of Neohellenic painting” considered as his “theoretical apology” and “a distillation of his personal study of Italian painting and of his technical experience” inevitably attracted the most attention.¹⁷ Its importance was stressed in each and every relevant study, all the more so, since from the first publication of its contents in 1871, it was compared to another contemporary written work, the *Hermeneia tis zografikis technis* [Treatise on the Art of Painting] by Dionysius from Fourná, a monk from Mt. Athos, living in Ottoman-ruled mainland Greece.¹⁸ The two works were henceforth insistently presented as two extreme and antithetical poles, representative of the Greek reality of the divided subjugated nation. On the one hand, Dionysius in his ‘manual’ was calling for adherence to Byzantine canons, recipes and techniques, proposing the fourteenth century artist

Manuel Panselinos as the exemplary artist to be imitated,¹⁹ whilst on the other, Doxaras in his treatise was proposing the substitution of the *dry and crude maniera* of Byzantine art with the *pastose and tender al naturale*, the use of oil technique and oil varnishes and the Venetian Golden Age triumvirate, Titian, Tintoretto and particularly Veronese, as the model to be followed by young artists.²⁰

Identified with differences in religious ideals in the divided territories, which ultimately implied differences in the sense of national identity, the two works came to represent “two different worlds”.²¹ Yet, if the juxtaposition allowed the treatise on painting by Doxaras to acquire an enhanced importance, the systematic analysis of its texts was to prove its proposed role dramatically overemphasised.

The long overdue comparative study of the *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* treatise on western and more specifically Italian art literature proved in 1998 that the manuscript was in fact an anthology of translated texts selected from Italian editions.²² Extracts were chosen by Doxaras from Marco Boschini's second introduction to his celebrated *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, published in Venice, in 1674²³ and from a recent edition of the encyclopaedia of art *L'Abcedario Pittorico*, published in Bologna in 1719, the author of which was the Bolognese Carmelite monk Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi.²⁴ The treatise had thus never been an “original theoretical work”, but had always been another manuscript anthology of translated texts from Italian art literature, even sharing one translation with the manuscript extant today in the Biblioteca Marciana, the *Techne Zografias-1720*, which has also gone unnoticed.²⁵

The fallacious conclusion of the work as an “original treatise on the art of painting”, albeit partly justified undoubtedly by the lack of mention of sources in the manuscript,²⁶ inevitably leads today to a thorough re-examination of many of the conclusions drawn in related reception studies regarding its alleged role in the oeuvre of Panaghiotis Doxaras, or equally aspects of the life and the role of the painter and translator himself. All the more so, since, as shall be demonstrated immediately, the choice of the specific sources and their assimilation indicate a milder interpretation of his alleged will to revolutionise the existing painting practices of his time, than has so far been put forward by scholars.

The carefully chosen extracts from specific sources and their assimilation in the *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* seem to reflect how Panaghiotis Doxaras was in fact codifying the reality for artists active in the first decades of the eighteenth century in the Venetian-ruled Isles. The texts, all didactic in character and obviously addressed to the young student of the art of painting, echo the naturally felt admiration for Venice and the Venetian Golden Age by the young artists of the Isles, who are known to have been visiting and even studying in the Serenissima even before the eighteenth century.²⁷ The apprenticeship practice of selective study from western *Stampe e Disegni* was already accepted and the use of new materials, such as varnishes and oil paints, by that time easily accessible to the artists living in the Venetian-ruled territories, was already widespread. The *Peri Zografias kata*

to 1726 may thus be now regarded more as a codification of the reality of artistic and aesthetic ideals and practices already acceptable and current in eighteenth-century Ionian Isle workshops and less as a revolutionary assimilation of translations carefully selected to propose personal and innovative principles and techniques on the art of painting.²⁸

Ensuing comparative study of the contents of all the three known written works by Panaghiotis Doxaras further revealed that the misconception of the originality of *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* had not been the only mistaken conclusion drawn by scholars. Despite the thrice affirmed identity of the scribe of the three extant manuscripts as unequivocally Panaghiotis Doxaras, a new cross-examination of the handwriting proved that he had been the scribe of only two of the three works. The incomplete Manuscript extant today in the Biblioteca Marciana bearing in its long descriptive title Panaghiotis's name as author and translator of its texts was in fact a work written by the hand of his first-born son, active in the second generation of artists of the Heptanese School, Nikolaos Doxaras.²⁹ More specifically, the *Techne Zografias-1720* is considered today as an incomplete copy of a missing work by Panaghiotis Doxaras.³⁰ As such, it certifies Nikolaos's involvement with his father's written works. Moreover, the partly completed illustrations contained in the Manuscript become a valuable documentation enriching the still very much unknown and probably early oeuvre, of the painter of the second-generation of the Heptanese School.³¹

Recent evidence, allows us finally to substantiate that the engagement of Nikolaos with his father's written works was not limited to the incomplete task of copying an anthology of translations. The first-born son had also been the owner of the *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* manuscript, since his handwriting has now been safely identified in a recipe written in Italian on its folio 1r.³² The particular recipe entitled *Dose per fare il sottoespresso metale di Color d'oro come segue* [a recipe written in Italian of a blend of zinc, copper and pork lard], is proof furthermore that Nikolaos had not only owned but also amplified the contents of the anthology in this way.³³

In conclusion, although the study of Neohellenic art seems suddenly deprived of the hero-innovator who had taken the burden of the Heptanese Renaissance on his shoulders as author of an original treatise, it has gained a translation work, which sheds ample light on aspects of the history of art, as it really was in the Ionian Isles of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the new evidence regarding the engagement of the son with the written works by the father has certified the, until now only suspected, relationship between the two protagonists of the Heptanese School,³⁴ and has also added a significant work to Nikolaos's early oeuvre.

Whilst piece by piece aspects of the story of the life and works of father and son are still being revealed and put together, the history of the Heptanese School discloses step-by-step its long kept secrets. Compromised or not as a "closed phenomenon", the first School of painting in the history of Neohellenic art thus remains an intriguing case, still very much open to further study.

¹ First formulated by Sp. De Viazis 'Η ζωγραφική εν Ελλάδι. Ιστορική μελέτη', Πινakoθήκη, Β', 1902-1903: (1902: Vol.ΙΓ', 3-6, Vol.ΙΔ', 30-2, Vol.ΙΕ', 49-51, Vol.ΙΣΤ', 81-4, Vol.ΙΖ', 98-9, Vol.ΙΗ', 125-6, Vol.ΙΘ', 142-3, Vol.Κ', 172-4, Vol.ΚΑ', 185-7, Vol.ΚΒ', 206-10, and 1903: Vol.ΚΓ', 234-7, Vol.ΚΔ', 258-61 (Zante, 1968).

² Sp. P. Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά *Ιππ* έως Πελοποννησίου, Ζωγράφου. Περί Ζωγραφίας χειρόγραφον του αφκοτ'. Νύν το π ρώτον μετά π ρολόγου εκδιδόμενον Athens 1871, μὲ ΣορίΔανοσ Πιηκίσι ππβου επτανήσω σχολή των Δοξαράδων', *Εστία*, Vol.12, 1894, 177-9, and Vol.13, 1894, 198-202; Sp. De Viazis, 'Η ζωγραφική εν Ελλάδι', Πινakoθήκη, Vol.ΙΓ', 4.

³ A. Procoriou, Νεοελληνική τέχνη. Εφτανησιώτικος νατουραλισμός, Athens 1936, 136.

⁴ D. Triantaphyloroulos, 'Μεταβυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες', *Καθημερινή*, *Επτά Ημέρες*, 'Η Μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική στα νησιά του Ιονίου', 22 December 1996, 8.

⁵ Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, 1871, λζ'; Procoriou, Νεοελληνική Τέχνη, 58-61.

⁶ D. Sisilianos, 'Έλληνες αγιογράφοι μετά την άλωση', Athens 1935. See studies of M. Chatzidakis and A. Xyngoroulos.

⁷ M. Chatzidakis, 'Η κρητική ζωγραφική και η παλική χαλκογραφία', *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, Vol.1, 1947, 21; *ibid.* 'Επτάνησα', in *Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους*, Vol.ΙΑ', Athens 1975, 264-5); A. Xyngoroulos, *Σχεδίασμα ιστορίας της θρησκευτικής ζωγραφικής μετά την Άλωση*, Athens 1957, dispersed 339-47. These views were recently repeated and expanded on by D. Triantaphyloroulos, in his relevant studies.

⁸ A. Charalambides, *Συμβολή στη μελέτη της εφτανησιώτικης ζωγραφικής του 18^{ου} και 19^{ου} αιώνα*, Ioannina 1978, 99-100.

⁹ For studies on the written works by Panaghiotis Doxaras cfr. A. Moustoxidis, 'Παναγιώτης Δοξαράς', *Ελληνομνήμων*, Vol.1, 1843, 17-40; Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά; *ibid.* 'Συμπληρωματικές ειδήσεις περί του ζωγράφου Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά', *Νέος Ελληνομνήμων*, Vol.Θ', 1912, 265-70; A. Ioannou, *Η πραγματεία του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά Περί Ζωγραφίας και η κριτική τοποθέτησή της*, *Μελέτες τέχνης-7*, Αθήνα 1971; K. Kiriakou, 'Συμβολή στη μελέτη του έργου του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά 'Τέχνη Ζωγραφίας' στη Μαρκετινή Βιβλιοθήκη της Βενετίας', *Θησαυρίσματα*, Vol.19, 1982, 212-23; D. Deliyannis, 'Η πραγματεία του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά Περί Ζωγραφίας (1726)- η Ερμηνεία του Διονύσιου και η δυτική παράδοση', *Διπλή Εικόνα*, Vol.5, 1985, 41-55. The new evidence to be presented is based on D. C. Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά: Περί ζωγραφίας κατά το αφκοτ'. Οι πηγές του έργου και η σημασία του (Ph.D. Thesis), Rethymnon, 1998; *ibid.* 'Νεότερα στοιχεία για τα μεταφραστικά έργα του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά', *Μνήμων*, Vol.22, May 2000, 259-67; *ibid.* 'Το γραπτό έργο του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά και η ιστοριογραφία της τέχνης της Δύσης', *Πρακτικά Ζ' Πανιόνιου Συνεδρίου*, May 2002 (under publication).

¹⁰ P. Rondoyiannis, 'Η Χριστιανική τέχνη στη Λευκάδα', *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Λευκαδικών Μελετών*, Vol.Γ', 1973, 241-66.

¹¹ S. Bettini 'Panaghiotis Doxaras fondatore della pittura greca moderna', *Archivio Veneto*, Vol.39, 1942, 166-93; T. Spiteris, 'Η ουρανία του Αγ. Σπυριδώνος. Βρέθηκε το μοναδικό γνήσιο κομμάτι του Π. Δοξαρά', *Ζυγός*, Vol.4, 1956, 12; A. Ioannou, *Η πραγματεία*, 3.

¹² Moustoxidis, 'Παναγιώτης Δοξαράς'; D. Triantaphyloroulos, 'Πρόοδος' και 'συντήρηση' στο πεδίο της εκκλησιαστικής και θρησκευτικής ζωγραφικής. Η επρίπτωση του 18^{ου} αιώνα, Vol.13, Athens 1993, 36-7; Procoriou, Νεοελληνική τέχνη, 77, 80-83; Ioannou, *Η πραγματεία*, 3, 11; Charalambides, *Συμβολή*, 25; *ibid.* 'Επτανησιακή ζωγραφική- Με την κυριαρχία των αναγεννησιακών στοιχείων θεμελιώνεται η βάση της νεοελληνικής τέχνης', *Καθημερινή*, *Επτά Ημέρες* «Η Μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική στα νησιά του Ιονίου», 22 December 1996, 116.

¹³ The two Mss. of *Techne Zografias* exist today in the Biblioteca Marciana (code Gr.IV 50-1117) and in the National Library of Athens (code no.1285); Cfr. Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, κ'-κα'; *ibid.* 'Συμπληρωματικά', 268-9 and Kiriakou, 'Συμβολή'; Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 203-41. The Manuscript entitled *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* extant in the National Historical Museum archives (code no.6) was discovered in the 1860s; cfr. K. N. Sathas, *Νεοελληνική φιλολογία-Βιογραφίαι των εν τοις γράμμασι διαλαμψάντων Ελλήνων από της καταλύσεως της βυζαντινής αυτοκρατορίας μέχρι της ελληνικής εθνεγερσίας (1453-1821)*, Athens 1867, 426; Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, λε'.

¹⁴ Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, λθ' and thenceforth reiterated in all relevant studies.

¹⁵ None of his written works were published in his time, cfr. Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 45-6. Whilst the systematic and comparative analysis of the texts contained in the *Techne-Zografias-1720* and the *Techne Zografias-1724* Manuscript is still lacking, the analysis of the contents of the *Peri Zografias kata to 1726* Manuscript in studies remained contradictory, cfr Bettini, 'Panaghiotis Doxaras', 144; Ioannou, *Η πραγματεία*, 3; Deliyannis, 'Η πραγματεία', 44.

¹⁶ J. Korthatos, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας (1453-1961)*, Athens 1962, 80; M. Vitti, *Storia della letteratura neogreca*, (trans. ed. Οδυσσεάς, Athens 1978, 89); L. Politis, *Ιστορία της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας*, Athens 1978, 89.

¹⁷ Ioannou, *Η πραγματεία*, 12; Spiteris, 'Η ουρανία του Αγ. Σπυριδώνος', 16; Chatzidakis, 'Επτάνησα', 264.

¹⁸ Lambros, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά; Deliyannis, 'Η πραγματεία'. For the scribes and dating of the *Hermeneia* see the introduction in Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης και αι κύριαι αυτής ανέκδοτοι π ρωτότυπ ηγαί εκδιδόμενη μετά προλόγου νυν π ρώτον π λήρης κατά το π ρωτότυπ ον αυτής κειμενογράφου 1909ό Α. Παπ αδοπούλου-Κερα

¹⁹ *Hermeneia* ed. 1909, 3, 6, 20, 21, 236, 239, 243, 245, 259.

²⁰ Deliyannis, 'Η πραγματεία'; Triantaphyloroulos, 'Πρόοδος' και 'συντήρηση', 26-33, 41. For an extensive presentation of passages from all relevant studies cfr. Alevizou, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, 31-8.

²¹ Xyngoroulos, *Σχεδίασμα*, 345.

²² Alevizou, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, 20-31, 38-40.

²³ Marco Boschini, *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, Venice 1674. Cfr. Alevizou, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, 120-9.

²⁴ P. A. Orlandi, *L' Abecedario pittorico nel quale compendiosamente sono descritte le Patrie, i Maestri, ed i Tempi ne quali fiorirono circa quattro mila Professori di Pittura, di Scultura e d' Architettura*, 2nd edition, Bologna 1719. Cfr. Alevizou, Παναγιώτου Δοξαρά, 154-60; *idem.* 163-84 which includes notice for a presumed third source.

²⁵ Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 216-24.

²⁶ Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 247-50.

²⁷ Arguments, references and analysis in Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 243-244.

²⁸ Alevizou, Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 246; *ibid.* 'Το γραπτό έργο του Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά'.

²⁹ Alevizou, 'Νεότερα στοιχεία'.

³⁰ Alevizou, 'Νεότερα στοιχεία'; *ibid.* Παναγιώτη Δοξαρά, 116-224.

³¹ For a concise description of the illustrations contained in the *Techne Zografias-1720* mainly Kiriakou, 'Συμβολή'. My first analysis of Nikolaos as the illustrator of the manuscripts is currently in publication.

³² Alevizou, 'Περισσότερα για τη σχέση του Νικόλαου Δοξαρά με το γραπτό έργο του πατέρα του *Mihimon*, Vol. 25, 2003, 209-15 (resume in English 372-3).

³³ Alevizou, 'Περισσότερα για τη σχέση του Νικόλαου Δοξαρά'.

³⁴ De Viazis, 'Η Ζωγραφική εν Ελλάδι', Vol.ΚΓ', 234-237; Charalambides, Συμβολή, 37.