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Images in Churches in Late Byzantium: Reflections and Directions

Sharon E. J. GERSTEL

In late Byzantium, monastic *katholika* were painted with increasingly complex programs. The introduction of expanded images and texts into many church interiors not only manifests the theological training of painters and the devotional intentions of patrons, but also reveals the spiritual world of the community of faithful. Through the selection of saints, the detailed illustration of the *lives* of Christ, the Virgin and other holy figures, the representation of liturgical performance and chant, the mirroring of emotion, and the evocation of the senses, every painted program is intimately and uniquely connected to the lives of those who, having entered the church, were transformed by proximity to the sacred and through prayer. In this paper, I wish to focus on two areas of current research in the study of monumental decoration: how church painting, together with corporate prayer, could help forge emotional communities; and how imagery evoked senses engaged in worship, particularly the sense of sound. Such a discussion first involves the consideration of how words and images painted on the church walls worked in tandem as devotional tools.

As is well known, the church interior in late Byzantium was covered with images, from the level of the pavement to the apex of the dome. Yet many churches – particularly monastic *katholika* – were also filled with painted words.¹ Dedicatory inscriptions and epigrams in Late Byzantine churches have received sustained attention from scholars.² Similarly, the opening words of prayers painted on scrolls held by saints – particularly bishops in the sanctuary and prophets in the dome – have been catalogued and analyzed.³ Yet other kinds of texts were also visible in

1. For the meaningful absence of texts in rural churches, see S. GERSTEL, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography*, Cambridge MA 2015, p. 44-69.
2. For dedicatory inscriptions and epigrams, see V. DJURIĆ and A. TSITOURIDOU, *Namentragende Inschriften auf Fresken und Mosaiken auf der Balkanhalbinsel vom 7. bis 13. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1986 (Glossar zur frühmittelalterlichen Geschichte im östlichen Europa, Beihefte 4); S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, *Dedicatory Inscriptions and Donor Portraits in Thirteenth-Century Churches of Greece*, Vienna 1992 (Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse 226); A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, Vienna 2009 (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 1; Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Denkschriften 374); and I. DRPIĆ, *Epigram, Art and Devotion in Late Byzantium*, Cambridge MA 2016.
3. Among other studies, see G. BABIĆ and C. WALTER, The Inscriptions upon Liturgical Rolls in Byzantine Apse Decoration, *REB* 34, 1976, p. 269-280; A.-M. GRAVGAARD, *Inscriptions of Old Testament Prophecies in Byzantine Churches. A Catalogue*, Copenhagen 1979 (Opuscula Byzantina et neograeca).

monumental painting. Texts drawn from the eucharistic liturgy, festal services, hymns, and the gospels were inscribed on paintings, engaging the celebrant and the faithful in the simultaneous contemplation of word and image.⁴

The analysis of a single church suggests the intricacy of text/image relationships within a ritual setting. The mid fourteenth-century church (ca. 1360-1370) of the Virgin Peribleptos in Mystras, an important Late Byzantine *katholikon*, has yet to be the subject of a comprehensive study.⁵ Analysis of the church's decoration reveals the sophistication of the painters and indicates how a variety of texts could be strategically deployed – together with paintings – for the unification, edification and spiritual elevation of the monastic community. Texts painted in elegant uncial letters are represented throughout the church in separate bands, on scrolls, and within narrative scenes. The inscribed images capture words that were read, chanted and heard within the building. Within the church, painted texts help the literate viewer identify subjects, recall illustrated passages, give voice to interacting figures, facilitate emotional reactions, and conjure sounds. They can also point to sources of illustration.

Texts can unify the community through the common understanding of church dogma. In the Peribleptos, as Doula Mouriki has demonstrated, the selection of texts held by the prophets represented in two registers in the dome underscores the critical role of the Virgin in the Incarnation.⁶ The unusual choice was guided by an individual who sought to emphasize the role of the Virgin in salvation. These texts were intended to produce meaning through their representation and examination; others were activated by their contemplation and oralization.

Within this highly charged ritual setting, texts offered voice to the represented figures. The upper walls and vault of the north aisle and the upper walls of the *diakonikon* are given over to an extensive treatment of the Virgin's infancy and childhood. Today, the images are difficult to read because of surface damage. Photographs from the early 20th century, however, indicate that many, if not all, of the scenes were inscribed with lines from the Protoevangelium of James.⁷

4. On the expansion of representations of the *Eothina* in Late Byzantine monumental painting, see N. ZARRAS, The Iconographical Cycle of the *Eothina* Gospel Pericopes in Churches from the Reign of King Milutin, *Zograf* 31, 2006-2007, p. 95-113; ID., Narrating the Sacred Story: New Testament Cycles in Middle and Late Byzantine Church Decoration, in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. D. KRUEGER and R. NELSON, Washington DC 2016, p. 239-275.
5. For the paintings of the church, see G. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra : matériaux pour l'étude de l'architecture et de la peinture en Grèce aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, Paris 1910, pls. 108-131; S. DUFRENNE, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, Paris 1970 (Bibliothèque des Cahiers Archéologiques 4), p. 13-18; M. CHATZIDAKIS, *Mystras: The Medieval City and the Castle*, Athens 1985, p. 76-89; M. ACHEIMASTOU-POTAMIANOU, *Mystras*, Athens 2003, p. 62-77. For a recent discussion concerning the church's patrons, see A. LOUVI-KIZI, Οι κτήτορες της Περιβλέπτου του Μυστρά, *DChAE* 42, 2003, p. 101-118.
6. D. MOURIKI, Αί βιβλικά προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρά, *AD* 25, 1970, p. 217-251.
7. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (cited in n. 5), pls. 129.1, 130.2.

The words were written in large, white upper case letters in two lines along the upper border and in some cases between the represented figures as block text. Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, who analyzed the Peribleptos cycle, suggested that the densely illustrated images and lengthy texts were monumental adaptations of a series of manuscript miniatures, a view that was also promoted by Doula Mouriki.⁸ Yet, in the Peribleptos church, the painter has arranged the scenes and their inscriptions in order to emphasize oral components of the text. The texts are arranged by spoken part, like the lines of a script, giving voice to the depicted figures, a technique also employed in the painted south portico of the Hodegetria Church, Mystras, recently dated by Titos Papamastorakis to before 1322.⁹ In the scene of the Council of the Priests,¹⁰ for example, the text of the Protoevangelium is divided into two sections, each beginning with the identification of the speaker. Above the heads of the figures, along the upper border of the composition, two lines of text begin: “the priests saying” (ἱερέων λεγόντων). Between the figures, a narrow block text begins: “and the priests said to him” (καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ οἱ ἱερεῖς).¹¹ Illustrating the text, the priests excitedly gesture toward one other, expressing their concern about the young Virgin, who has resided in the Temple for twelve years. Mary stands between them in silence with her arms held tightly to her body. The scene, with its ongoing conversation conveyed in word and gesture, is located in the church’s *diakonikon*.

Elsewhere in the church, painters strategically modified texts to suit the needs of the faithful, trimming phrases or emphasizing certain words over others to produce meaning and to summon the spoken word. As in the scenes of the infancy and childhood of the Virgin, text and image work together to activate certain scenes. The text of the Gospels is arranged to amplify the dialogue between represented figures.¹² In a scene on the southwest vault, for example, Joseph of Arimathea

8. J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, Bruxelles 1964, p. 193; D. ΜΟΥΡΙΚΙ, Τέσσαρες μὴ μελετηθεῖσαι σκιναὶ τοῦ βίου τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὴν Περιβλεπτον τοῦ Μυστρά, *AEph* 1969, p. 1-6.
9. T. ΠΑΠΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΙΣ, Reflections of Constantinople: The Iconographic Program of the South Portico of the Hodegetria Church, Mystras, in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. S. GERSTEL, Washington DC 2013, p. 371-395.
10. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (cited in n. 5), pl. 129.1.
11. For the text of the Protoevangelium, see É. DE STRYCKER, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. Recherches sur le papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte grec et une traduction annotée*, Brussels 1961, p. 64-190. The exact text is from section 17.8-12 (upper part of the scene) and 17.12-16 (between the figures). I thank Fr. Maximos Conostas for his assistance in reading the text.
12. For the use of Gospel texts to evoke imagined conversations in monumental painting in Cyprus, see N. ŠEVČENKO, Written Voices: The Spoken Word in Middle Byzantine Monumental Painting, in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. S. BOYNTON and D. REILLY, Turnhout 2015, p. 153-165. A similar manipulation of text can be seen in churches elsewhere in the Peloponnese, for example at Prophetes Elias in Thalames, Messenian Mani, where an imaginary conversation takes place between St. Demetrios and Nestor. On this church, see N. KONTOGIANNIS and S. GERMANIDOU, The Iconographic Program of the Prophet Elijah Church, in Thalames, Greece, *BZ* 101, 2008, p. 55-87.



Figure 1 - Joseph of Arimathea before Pontius Pilate, southwest vault, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Mystras (photo by the author).



Figure 2 - Prophet Zacharia facing the Entry into Jerusalem, west wall, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Mystras (photo by the author).

requests from Pontius Pilate the body of Jesus for burial (fig. 1).¹³ At the left side of the scene, set in front of a row of elaborate facades, the two protagonists engage in dialogue; a cluster of soldiers and buildings fill the space to the right. At the center of the scene, painted in a gap between the buildings, is the text of the represented conversation, which derives from John 19:38: “Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἠρώτησεν τὸν Πειλᾶτον Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ Ἀριμαθαίας, ὢν μαθητὴς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κεκρυμμένος δὲ διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων” (“At that time, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave”, John 19:38-42). The rest of the passage is no longer preserved. The first three words of the Gospel text, which is read on Holy Friday – Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα – are omitted.¹⁴ Rather, the inscription begins ΗΡΩΤΗΣΕ(N) ΤΟΝ ΠΙΛΑΤΟΝ (sic) (he asked Pilate), activating speech, and by extension, hearing. The words are illustrated in Joseph’s bent, supplicatory posture, his outstretched right hand, and the way in which his left hand crosses his abdomen in fearful protection. It is perhaps not accidental, as we shall see below, that the word ΦΟΒΟΝ, fear, is placed on the lowest line, flush left, over the heads of the figures – a cue to understanding the emotions evinced by the skillful painter. The last part of the text, “and Pilate gave him leave”, is today missing, but is rendered in the governor’s counter gesture of assent; his right hand is raised with the palm exposed to the viewer.

As in many Late Byzantine churches, auxiliary figures holding scrolls are inserted into scenes in the Peribleptos to provide exegetical commentary. This is the case in the Last Supper, for example, where David and John the Baptist stand behind a balustrade holding inscribed scrolls that comment on the scene before them.¹⁵ In this church, however, full-length figures are also represented in separately framed compartments adjacent to narrative scenes holding scrolls that were not only biblical passages, but also chanted portions of the liturgy. In the uppermost register of the west wall of the church, the prophet Zachariah extends a scroll inscribed with the prophetic text: Χαίρε σφόδρα θύγατερ Σιών. Κύρυσσε (sic) θύγατερ Ἰερουσαλήμ. Ἴδοῦ ἔρχετε (sic) ὁ βασιλεὺς σου (“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; for behold, Thy king comes unto Thee”, Zachariah 9:9) (fig. 2).¹⁶ The figure turns and gestures toward the representation of the Entry into Jerusalem, located immediately adjacent on the north wall of the nave. Although the text can certainly be read visually in connection with the Entry scene, it was well known as a verse that was chanted during the vespers before Palm Sunday.

13. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (cited in n. 5), pl. 122.2; DUFRENNE, *Les programmes iconographiques* (cited in n. 5), fig. 65

14. *The Lenten Triodion*, trans. MOTHER MARY and ARCHIMANDRITE K. WARE, London 1977; repr. South Canaan PA 1999.

15. The insertion of scroll-carrying prophets into narrative scenes is common in Late Byzantine monumental painting. For a similar device used in the Church of the Pantanassa, Mystras, see M. ASPRA-VARDAKAKI and M. EMMANOUEL, *Η μονή της Παντάνασσας στον Μυστρά. Οι τοιχογραφίες του 15ου αιώνα*, Athens 2005, p. 91, 94.

16. *The Lenten Triodion* (cited in n. 14), p. 489. Several of the misspellings are simple errors in the transcriptions of vowel sounds. In the last line of the text, the verb and noun are reversed.



Figure 3 - Prophet Elijah facing the *Anastasis*, north wall, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Mystras (photo by the author).

Thus, we see how the placement of the figure, who turns toward the scene and holds an easily read text, not only evokes emotion (Rejoice!) and sound (Shout!), but also repeats a joyful phrase associated with the representation through chant. Image and text are connected to ritual celebration visually, orally, and aurally.

Passages from the chanted portions of the service appear throughout churches, with increasing frequency in the Late Byzantine period,¹⁷ and this is especially the case in the Peribleptos. At the west end of the north wall, below the Entry into Jerusalem, the prophet Elijah carries an open scroll inscribed with the text of Psalm 117 (118):24: ΑΥΤΗ (ἡ) ΗΜΕΡΑ ΗΝ ΕΠΟΙΗCΕΝ Ο Κ(ύριος)C ΑΓΑΛΛΙΑCΩΜΕΘΑ ΚΑΙ Ε(ὖ) ΦΡΑΝΘΩΜΕΝ ΕΝ ΑΥ(τῇ) (“This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it”) (fig. 3).¹⁸ The prophet turns to the adjacent, west wall where he faces the scene of the Anastasis. The prayer inscribed on his scroll is chanted during *orthros* on Easter, immediately following the Resurrection. The two prophets, Zachariah and Elijah, placed in different decorative registers and facing opposite directions, bind together narrative scenes and monumental figures across the space in which the community would have stood and through which the sound of psalmody would have traveled. The texts that refer to emotions (rejoicing) and sound (shouting; singing) are connected to celebration below.

In the north chamber of the church's sanctuary, the *prothesis*, Christ is represented as archpriest, celebrating the liturgy in the company of angels.¹⁹ The painted scene dissolves temporal boundaries between the contemporary and historical churches, and spatial boundaries between heaven and earth. The beautifully written text under the angel/deacons on the north wall of the chamber derives from the chanted portion of the Holy Saturday liturgy: ΣΥΓΗΣΑΤΟ ΠΑΣΑ ΣΑΡΞ ΒΡΟΤΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΗΤΩ ΜΕΤΑ ΦΟΒΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΤΡΟΜΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΜΗΔΕ(ν) ΓΗΙΝΟΝ ΕΝ ΕΑΥΤΗ ΛΟΓΙΖΕΣΘΩ (“Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and stand with fear and trembling; and let it take no thought for any earthly things”) (fig. 4).²⁰ The text then continues on the east wall below the image of Christ as Priest: ὁ γὰρ Βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλευόντων, καὶ Κύριος τῶν κυριευόντων, προσέρχεται σφαγιασθῆναι, καὶ δοθῆναι εἰς βρῶσιν τοῖς πιστοῖς (“For the King of Kings and Lord of Lords draws near to be sacrificed and given as food to the faithful”). “Food to the faithful” refers directly to the offering prepared and blessed in this chamber, but equally to the adjacent image of Christ, who as priest, offers himself as the sacrifice. Importantly, the continuation of the text refers to angelic song: προηγοῦνται δὲ τούτου, οἱ χοροὶ τῶν Ἀγγέλων, μετὰ πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας, τὰ πολυόμματα Χερουβίμ, καὶ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα Σεραφίμ, τὰς ὄψεις καλύπτοντα, καὶ βοῶντα τὸν ὕμνον· Ἀλληλούϊα, Ἀλληλούϊα, Ἀλληλούϊα (“Before Him go the choirs of angels with all the principalities and powers, the many-eyed cherubim

17. For an analysis of such connections in the church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Ohrid, see R. SCHROEDER, Looking with Words and Images: Staging Monastic Contemplation in a Late Byzantine Church, *Word & Image* 28, 2012, p. 117-134. For similar connections in the church of Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, see: S. GERSTEL, Monastic Soundspaces: The Art and Act of Chanting, in *Resounding Images* (cited in n. 12), p. 135-152.

18. MILLET, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (cited in n. 5), pl. 121.3.

19. T. ΠΑΡΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΙΣ, Η μορφή του Χριστού-Μεγάλου Αρχιερέα, *DChAE* 17, 1993-1994, p. 67-78.

20. *The Lenten Triodion* (cited in n. 14), p. 659.



Figure 4 - Heavenly Liturgy, north wall of *prothesis* chamber, Mystras, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos (photo by the author).

and the six-winged seraphim, which cover their faces as they sing this hymn: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia”).

The inscription surrounding the Pantokrator in the dome of the Peribleptos church is a prayer sung during *orthros* on the feast of the Presentation in the Temple, celebrated on February 2. The text, the third ode of the Canon of the feast of the Presentation attributed to Kosmas the Poet,²¹ reads: ΤΟ ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ ΤΩΝ Ε(πί σοι πεποιθότων στερ)ΕΩΣΟΝ Κ(ύρι)Ε ΤΗΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΝ ΗΝ ΕΚΤΗΣΩ ΤΩ ΤΙΜΕΙΩ ΣΟΥ ΑΙΜΑΤΙ (“Ο Lord, the firm foundation [το στερέωμα] of those that put their trust in Thee, do Thou confirm the Church, which Thou hast purchased with Thy precious blood”) (fig. 5).²² The elegant letters, painted in brown on a gold ground, are easily read from below. While it is tempting to attribute the selection of this text to its location in the dome through the understanding of the word στερέωμα as firmament, the chanted text is also of importance to the monastic community that used this building. The prayer is linked to a fundamental moment in the

21. W. CHRIST and M. PARANIKAS, *Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum*, Lipsiae 1871, p. 173; *The Festal Menaion*, trans. MOTHER MARY and ARCHIMANDRITE K. WARE, London 1969, p. 420.

22. Τ. ΡΑΡΑΜΑΣΤΟΡΑΚΗΣ, *Ο διάκοσμος του τρούλου των ναών της παλαιολόγιας περιόδου στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και την Κύπρο*, Athens 2001 (Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 213), p. 75; ΜΟΥΡΙΚΙ, Προεικονίσεις Περιβλέπτου (cited in n. 6), p. 250.



Figure 5 - Pantokrator, Dome, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Mystras
(photo by the author).

history of the community, the rite of the consecration of a church.²³ Thus the word *στερέωμα* takes on yet another meaning as the *foundation* confirmed by Christ. For the community who gathered in this church, this prayer was tied to the life of the building, as well as to a life of heavenly prayer. Images and texts in this and other churches were intended to reintroduce humans into the paradise they had lost, and to invite the holy to descend and mingle amongst men.

I begin this study with the Peribleptos Church in Mystras because it is one of hundreds of Byzantine churches that have yet to thoroughly studied – churches that are covered with sacred images that are not only aesthetically significant, but also iconographically and ritually important. The architectural remains surrounding the church indicate that this was home to a monastic community, which allows us to imagine with some degree of accuracy the kinds of services and ceremonies that took place within the building and the impetus behind some decisions about the church's monumental program. Study of the church's decoration also points to the loss of inscriptions which, painted on the most superficial layer of the wall surface, were most subject to damage and loss. As originally applied, the bright text – written in uncials and with few abbreviations or errors – would have been easily deciphered by literate members of the community and would have been heard by those standing in the presence of readers. For those unable to read the text, the lively gestures of the represented figures indicated that the texts were concerned with speech.

23. J. GOAR, *Euchologian sive Rituale graecorum*, Graz 1960² (1st ed. Venice 1730), p. 662.

PAINTING AND EMOTIONS

The representation of devotional images and texts intended to affect emotions like joy, sorrow, and fear also suggests that church decoration, comprising both text and image, was useful in forging what scholars like Barbara Rosenwein have termed “an emotional community.”²⁴ In recent years, the study of painting and emotions has focused on Byzantine icons like the late twelfth-century bilateral panel of the Virgin and Man of Sorrows from Kastoria,²⁵ but has less frequently addressed similarly emotive monumental images. Henry Maguire’s work on sorrow is one notable exception.²⁶ Yet, as noted above, inscriptions on the walls of the Peribleptos church mention joy and fear, emotions that are also captured artistically and heard in chant.

A discussion of a particular emotion – fear – encourages us return to the text on the north wall of the *prothesis* chamber of the Peribleptos where a clearly written inscription tells the faithful to stand in fear and trembling (στήτω μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου) (fig. 4). The text, one of the most ancient chants of the Church, was sung during the Holy Saturday liturgy, a moment of heightened emotion as members of the monastic community, following a long period of fasting and spiritual introspection, anticipated Christ’s resurrection. I want to consider texts and images that bind together communities of humans and angels through reverential fear. For this consideration, I need to move back in time before moving forward.

In a paper published in 1995, Kathleen Corrigan analyzed a small ninth-century icon of the Crucifixion in the collection of the Monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai (fig. 6).²⁷ The framing twelve-syllable verse, first published in Greek by

24. For the term emotional community, see B. ROSENWEIN, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2006; A. CHANIOTIS, Emotional Community through Ritual: Initiates, Citizens, and Pilgrims as Emotional Communities in the Greek World, in *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Representation*, ed. A. CHANIOTIS, Stuttgart 2011 (HABES 49), p. 264-290.
25. H. BELTING, An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in Byzantium, *DOP* 34-35, 1980-1981, p. 1-16; F.M. CONSTAS, Poetry and Painting in the Middle Byzantine Period: A Bilateral Icon from Kastoria and the *Stavrotheotokia* of Joseph the Hymnographer, in *Viewing Greece: Cultural and Political Agency in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, ed. S. GERSTEL, Turnhout 2016 (Studies in the Visual Arts of the Middle Ages 11), p. 13-32.
26. H. MAGUIRE, The Depiction of Sorrow in Middle Byzantine Art, *DOP* 31, 1977, p. 123-174. See also M. VASSILAKI and N. TSIRONIS, Representations of the Virgin and their Association with the Passion of Christ, in *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. M. VASSILAKI, Athens 2000, p. 453-463.
27. The icon measures 0.17 × 0.14 m. K. CORRIGAN, Text and Image on an Icon of the Crucifixion at Mount Sinai, in *The Sacred Image, East and West*, ed. R. OUSTERHOUT and L. BRUBAKER, Chicago/Urbana 1995 (Illinois Byzantine Studies 4), p. 45-62. See also K. WEITZMANN, *The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, Princeton 1976, p. 82; H. MAGUIRE, *Image and Imagination: The Byzantine Epigram as Evidence for Viewer Response*, Toronto 1986, p. 5; A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst*, Vienna 2010 (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung 2), Ikl1.



Figure 6 - Icon of the Crucifixion, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai
 (Photo by permission of Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt. Photograph courtesy
 of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai).

Georgios and Maria Soteriou,²⁸ reads in translation: “Who would not be confounded, be in fear, and tremble, seeing you, O Savior, dead on the cross; who rent the garment of death, and are covered with the robe of incorruption.”²⁹ Corrigan focused on the second half of the inscription; my interest is in the first. Beginning at the top of the panel, the inscription reads: TIC OY KΛONEITAI K(AI) ΦOBEITAI K(AI) TPEM(EI), then continues down the right side with EΠI EYΛOY CE <NE>KΠON Ω CΩTEP BΛEΠΩN, moves to the left with ΠIΓNYNTA TON XEITΩNA THC NEKPOΩCEΩC, and terminates along the bottom with the words AΦTAPCI<AC> ΔE TH CTOΛH CKEΠ<AC>MENON>. The text is only fully read if one moves his eyes cross-wise over the central image. The word order of the epigram, which directly addresses the Savior in the second line (on the right side), is adjusted to place the stress on a literate viewer’s emotional response to the scene of Christ’s suffering at the center. One could argue that the text’s interruption by Christ’s bowed head, introduced a break in the line before the reader, whom Corrigan posited to be a monk, visually decoded the word for fear. Corrigan rightly compares the text to passages from the Good Friday liturgy that emphasize emotional reactions to the Crucifixion, such as “the whole creation trembled. The foundations of the earth shook with fear at Thy power” and “the whole creation was changed by fear,”³⁰ a point taken up by Thomas Mathews in a later article analyzing icons and religious experience.³¹ The unusual, agitated style of the drapery reflects the emotional content of both image and epigram

Fear is frequently named as an emotion in inscriptions found in monumental contexts, particularly in texts placed in close proximity to the church sanctuary, either framing its opening, carved on the templon that marks its threshold, or, as in the Peribleptos, on the wall of the *prothesis* chamber. Examples of such inscription are widespread.³² An epistyle of 1052 now immured in the later bell tower of the Panagia Protothrono in the village of Chalke, Naxos, is inscribed: “Theotokos, Lady and Mother of the Lord, lean down, guard, and protect the supplicants who have renovated your glorious church” before asking her protection over “those entering in faith and fear.”³³ The text is carved into two faces of the beam with the words “πίστει ἐν φόβῳ” located above the head of the faithful facing the sanctuary.

Inscriptions mentioning fear and trembling are found in other Greek churches of the 11th century, and the frequency of such inscriptions raises a question about how the painted text was used to arouse or mirror emotions within sacred space.

28. G. SOTERIOU and M. SOTERIOU, *Eikόνες τῆς Μονῆς Σινᾶ*, II, Athens 1958 (Collection de l’Institut français d’Athènes 100), p. 42. I have corrected several of the words in the text following later publications and observation.
29. CORRIGAN, Text and Image (cited in n. 27), p. 45.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 45; *The Lenten Triodion* (cited in n. 14), p. 597, 598.
31. T. MATHEWS, Icons and the Religious Experience, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*. *Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, ed. S. BROOKS, New York 2006, p. 2-19, at 15.
32. On a group of similar inscriptions, see, recently, A. SITZ, ‘Great Fear’: Epigraphy and Orality in a Byzantine Apse in Cappadocia, *Gesta* 56, 2017, p. 5-26.
33. G. PALLIS, Inscriptions on Middle Byzantine Marble Templon Screens, *BZ* 106, 2013, p. 798-799 (with earlier bibliography).

Was the community of faithful, in other words, gathered together through a shared emotional reaction to the sacrifice? The well-known inscription of 1028 painted on the framing arch of the sanctuary of Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki, commands those beholding the altar to “stand trembling... for within, Christ is sacrificed daily, and the... incorporeal angels... circle around in fear.”³⁴ Here, the human and angelic worlds collide as somatic trembling (human) is paired with reverential fear (angelic). Of all figures in the apse, only the angels display any movement. The agitation of their robes is reminiscent of the undulating garments in the earlier Sinai icon. A nearly identical inscription once girded the apse of the late-tenth-century basilica of St. Achilleus on the island of Little Prespa.³⁵ The text is not limited to the Middle Byzantine period, but is found later, as well, in the sanctuary of the small, mid-thirteenth-century church of St. George at Longanikos in Lakonia,³⁶ where it is inscribed on a band dividing the Communion of the Apostles in the central register of the apse from the *Melismos* and concelebrating bishops below.

The same text appears in numerous post-Byzantine churches – in Cyprus, Mount Athos, Greek Macedonia, Thessaly, Epiros, Mani, and the Aegean islands. In many of these churches, the epigram is located at the sanctuary opening, in the apse, carved into the templon epistyle, or painted on the masonry screen.³⁷ In the eighteenth-century church of the Koimesis of the Virgin in the cemetery of Marathos,³⁸ a small village in the south of the Mani peninsula in Greece, the inscription is written on a white jagged band that runs along the upper edge of the masonry icon screen. The rendering of this text on a jagged band is found in other churches in the region as well, for example, in St. Nicholas in Exo Nyphi.³⁹ The unusual format of the band seems to emphasize the emotional resonance of the text. “Beholding” the altar through the narrow portal at Marathos, one sees a chalice painted within the curve of the apse, a representation of the sacrificed Christ (fig. 7). A thin band of letters immediately above the sanctuary entrance takes the symbolic meaning of the threshold one step further, giving voice to the portal and encouraging movement through it (fig. 8). “I am the door” (ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ θύρα), the words state, “if anyone enters through me...” (ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ...). The inscription omits the end of the phrase (σωθήσεται), taken from John 10:9, “he shall be saved,” although the priest, as well as the faithful would have reflexively supplied the missing word. One cannot avoid thinking that even in this very humble church in the Greek countryside the

34. S. GERSTEL, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Seattle and London, 1999 (College Art Association Monograph on the Fine Arts 56), p. 80-82.
35. N. RADOŠEVIĆ-MAKSIMOVIĆ, A Byzantine Epigram from the St. Achilius' Basilica at Mala Prespa, *ZRVI* 12, 1970, p. 9-13; RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme* (cited in n. 2), p. 187-188.
36. O. CHASSOURA, *Les peintures murales byzantines des églises de Longanikos, Laconie*, Athens 2002, p. 40.
37. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme* (cited in n. 2), p. 190-192.
38. K. KASSIS, *Άνθη της Πέτρας: Οικογένειες και εκκλησίες στη Μάνη*, Athens 1990, p. 334.
39. Μ. ΑΓΡΕΒΙ, Άγιος Νικόλαος στο Έξω Νύφι της Κάτω Μάνης; Εικονογραφικές παρατηρήσεις σε ένα άγνωστο σύνολο τοιχογραφιών του 1284/85, in *Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο στη Μνήμη Νικολάου Β. Δρανδάκη*, ed. E. P. ELEUTHERIOU and A. ΜΕΧΙΑ, Sparta 2008-2009, p. 171-196, at 174.



Figure 7 - Masonry Icon Screen, Church of the Koimesis, Marathos (photo by the author).



Figure 8 - Portal in Masonry Icon Screen, Church of the Koimesis, Marathos (photo by the author).

painter has not erred in omitting a word, but has placed emphasis on the passage through the door, a passage that is both physically and spiritually tied to salvation. The portal, like the dome in the Peribleptos, is a conduit between those awaiting salvation and those who are saved, a passage between those heavenward and those earthbound.

The inscription of a text referring to fear and trembling was significant, for the painted decoration of the church, through the use of word and image, aroused emotions that were intended to forge a close relationship between the community collectively involved in worship and the sacred. This use of art and text, placed in specific monumental settings to arouse an emotional response is not a Byzantine innovation, of course, but has much deeper roots in the Hellenic world. In considering epithets, performative texts, and inscriptions from the ancient Greek world, Angelos Chaniotes has analyzed how text and image are embedded in rituals that affirm the power of God, through the activation of emotions – particularly those of fear and hope.⁴⁰ Like the texts painted in Byzantine churches, many of the ancient inscriptions that concerned the fear of the gods are placed at the thresholds of *temenoi* or temples where they employ the vocative “Enter with no fear!” to invite the pure to cross into sacred space. In ancient contexts, the emotion of fear conditions the relationship of man and the gods, just as reverential fear is critical to the faithful in approaching God. Connected with acoustical and visual signals, the texts aroused emotions and bound the faithful together.

Within the context of the Byzantine church, the evocation of fear and trembling captures the emotional climax of the service – the moment when the faithful approached the entrance of the sanctuary to receive communion “with fear of God and faith.” This liturgical formula is attested in a ninth-century scroll containing the liturgy of James, Vatican Library 2282, where the incipit for the communion call reads Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ καὶ πίστεως.⁴¹ Let us recall that the small Sinai Crucifixion was painted around the same time as the liturgical scroll. The monks of Sinai would have used the liturgy of James for ritual celebration,⁴² appropriating its language for the composition of the epigram. The mention of fear and trembling on the icon, and the codification of a language of fear and faith in the liturgical service, reflects a common use of highly charged emotional language in image and text.

Sporadically included in early Byzantine euchologies and in various word orders, the emotional call is regularly found in its canonical form only from the 10th century, the time when the inscription about fear and trembling begins to appear, based on the evidence in Greek churches, in monumental painting. In the 11th century, the *Miracles of St. George* confirms the use of the phrase within the sphere of Constantinople. According to the text: “And as the end of the Divine

40. A. CHANIOTIS, Constructing the Fear of Gods: Epigraphic Evidence from Sanctuaries of Greece and Asia Minor, in *Unveiling Emotions: Sources and Methods for the Study of Emotions in the Greek World*, ed. A. CHANIOTIS, Stuttgart 2002, p. 205-234.

41. R. TAFT, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, VI, *The Communion, Thanksgiving, and Concluding Rites*, Rome 2008, p. 325.

42. R. TAFT, Worship on Sinai in the First Christian Millennium: Glimpses of a Lost World, in *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, ed. S. GERSTEL and R. NELSON, Turnhout 2011 (Cursor mundi 11), p. 143-177.

Liturgy drew near some of the Christians wanted to receive the divine mysteries. And...the priest said, 'With fear of God and faith, approach,' and all the Christians bowed their heads reverently and some of them approached to receive the divine mysteries."⁴³

The analysis of texts on icons and in churches of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine period indicates how sacred imagery could elicit emotional responses – indirectly, through association with emotions rendered in paint, and directly by texts that were instructional. Fear, and its opposite, joy are emotions that are signaled in liturgical performance as desired reactions to ritual transformation; these emotions are conditioned by the confrontation of the human and the divine. And this emotional response was heightened by the manipulation of lighting, by the orchestrated opening and closing of doors to reveal and conceal portions of the rite, by the modulation of chant and by the movement of the clergy and faithful. At the moment of the sacrifice, in the presence of the incorporeal angels, the community was united in reverence.

PAINTING AND SOUND

Many inscriptions in the Peribleptos and other churches derive from the chanted parts of the service. Vocalized by the community, the emotional qualities of the texts would have been emphasized in chant. Together with painted icons, sound is a critical component of spirituality and reverence, and this sound influenced church decoration.

The words surrounding the Pantokrator in the Peribleptos dome were not only meant to be read, but also to be sung and heard. The words also recalled movement throughout the church, and signaled the gathering of the community below the dome. As the text, a *katavasia*, was chanted, the two choirs positioned along the north and south walls of the nave converged in the center of the building. Here, in one of the most acoustically resonant locations of the church, the words chanted by the choir rose up to the Pantokrator and were then sent downwards by the concave shape of the dome, creating the perceptual effect that earthly and heavenly voices mingled in the center of the building.

The perceived fusion of heavenly and human voices within the church is not a modern construct. As early as the 4th century, John Chrysostom commented on the place of man, encircled by angels, within sacred space: "Think beside whom you stand, with whom you are about to call on God – with the Cherubim."⁴⁴ Chrysostom's observation that angels and humans share the space of the church is pervasive in Byzantine thought. Informed by writings on mystical theology, such observations about the joining of human and angelic voices have been taken as metaphorical, but they are also accurate perceptions of the movement of sound within the church, sound that also had emotional resonance.

43. TAFT, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (cited in n. 41), p. 328.

44. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies* (4.408-9), ed. A.-M. MALINGREY, *Sur l'incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, Paris 1970 (SC 28bis), p. 260.

Byzantine intellectuals demonstrate an awareness of building acoustics, but also demonstrate an awareness of what is today called psychoacoustics, the study of sound perception.⁴⁵ An early reference to the acoustics of a decorated chapel comes from an *encomion* about the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, which was delivered on the feast of the Holy Apostles. Philagathos of Kerameos, who was certainly familiar with the form and decoration of Byzantine churches, describes the acoustics of the chapel: “The whole church, just like a cave, softly joins in the singing of the sacred hymns with its own voice, because the echo causes the sound to return upon itself.”⁴⁶ The words are an accurate description of the desired reverberation within the church, particularly in domed structures.

Yet other intellectuals comment on their perception of sound. In 1321 the statesman and intellectual, Theodore Metochites, composed a lengthy poem in Greek hexameters entitled “Doxology unto God and Concerning What Occurred During his Life, and the Monastery of the Chora.”⁴⁷ In lyrical terms, he praises the restoration work that he had funded at the monastery, the church where he would later retire and the one in which, shriven before death, he would be buried. His poem, corrected by his own hand, contains a number of details about the building’s decoration – the magnificence of the cut marble and the stunning mosaics that adorned the walls. He describes liturgical vessels of silver, gold, encrusted gems and pearls, silken vestments, and icons covered in silver and precious stones. Of particular pride was his library, which contained hundreds of works, both of “divine” and “Hellenic wisdom.” Of all of the volumes contained in his library, Metochites singles out the large number of manuscripts that are “of great utility for the singers in God’s Church.”⁴⁸

In a second poem, written a year later, “For the Mother of God; and Concerning the Monastery of the Chora,”⁴⁹ Metochites delves into his motivations for funding the restoration. In this poem, also written in an archaizing meter, Metochites returns to the Chora church, in this case speaking about the experience of sacred sound in the building. Addressing the community, he writes: “My heart rejoices [...] when I stand in your midst in the choir in church together with the glorious choristers of the Lord God; thereby, through you, are my ears and mind and all my soul filled with serenity and calm and love.”⁵⁰ He continues:

45. On psychoacoustics, see S. HOROWITZ, *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, New York 2012.
46. J. JOHNS, The Date of the Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. Appendix, in *The Painted Ceiling of the Cappella Palatina*, ed. E. GRUBE and J. JOHNS, New York 2005, p. 1-14, at 13.
47. J. FEATHERSTONE, Metochites’s Poems and the Chora, in *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, ed. H. KLEIN, R. G. OUSTERHOUT and B. PITARAKIS, Istanbul 2011 (Istanbul Research Institute Symposium Series 1), p. 215-239, at 225-231.
48. FEATHERSTONE, Metochites’s Poems and the Chora (cited in n. 47), l. 1206.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 231-236.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 234, line 471 ff.

O you blessed companies in Christ, standing on either side of the church, intoning the monastic song in praise of the Lord God, King of all, and the glorious Mysteries and Miracles of Christ the Master! These same did He shew amongst men and these same do the intelligences dwelling above in highest heaven, the angels, celebrate in hymns. Of the first light they are second lights, all-effulgent, most bright, and with them sing you songs of praise all the day long and sometimes all the night, crowding around on both sides of the church. Oh, Who could describe the ineffable pleasure of the antiphonal odes sent up on the two sides unto the King by the monks, singing equally in twofold division according to their venerable custom from the God-wise men of old who, most wise and moved by God, established holy and pious rules for each and every thing which is necessary in the monastic life, all of them ornaments wonderful to behold? At one moment the voice of song rises on high proclaiming God's might unto all, so as to instill desire and strength in those filled with enthusiasm by these hymns; and then again a bright, serene voice is heard in quiet, sweet, humble entreaty, begging mercy for our sins from the All-Good Lord God who is ever disposed toward mercy, for this is His nature.⁵¹

In a letter written from exile in Didymoteicho, Metochites recalls with longing his experience chanting in the Chora:

I remembered the old days and was longing for those months of days gone by, when I was present in the altar space along with the best of shepherds; when I was a member of the good choir and of the religious community singing hymns to God – I did it during both day and evening, sometimes at night, and sometimes throughout the whole night; when I was discussing things divine with the monks and was inspired by Christ's mysteries; and when, on the days of the feasts of the Lord of all of us I was filled with joy and was cheering and gladdening my soul with a pleasure indeed difficult to describe..⁵²

In the same letter he defines the transformative nature of Byzantine chant:

... it is most chaste, and leads towards God and His worship; it gently charms the irrational part of the soul; or rather it befits rational beings quite well and does so by dint of what is natural and peculiar to matters sacred and divine, and by dint of a mixture of reverence and of plentiful, peaceful, and ineffable delight.⁵³

Theodore's letters describe the overwhelming experience of hearing and singing choral music in the church, the antiphonal, or two-choir chanting with monks divided on the north and south side of the nave, the perceived melding of human

51. *Ibid.*, p. 234-235, ll. 486-515.

52. I. ŠEVČENKO, Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time, in *The Kariye Djami, IV, Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. UNDERWOOD, Princeton 1975, p. 19-91, at 67 (Appendix I: Metochites' Letter to the Monks of the Chora).

53. *Ibid.*, p. 67-69.

and angelic voices, and the singing of a choir and a soloist, whose voices weave together, but preserve in their threads individual coloration. Metochites is also writing about psychoacoustics, the effect of sound on the listener.

His interest in sound also extends to the images that survive in the church. In the Chora, hymnographers pause in the midst of composing funerary and commemorative odes. They find a place on the pendentives of a domed chapel given over to burials, including eventually, those of Metochites and his children.⁵⁴ The compositions they write are the texts chanted below, in a space shared by images of saints and portraits of the dead. The church's program also includes other subtle markers of sound – figures gesturing in speech or reading from texts, cocks crowing, and toddlers – even holy ones – that appear to gurgle in delight.

Late Byzantine writers connected images with sound in direct ways. In his homily on the Nativity, as observed by Rossitza Schroeder,⁵⁵ Gregory Palamas, the fourteenth-century Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, emphasized the transformative effect of hymnody using the image – whether painted or imagined – of the Nativity:

On account of Him who is born today, shepherds stand in the same choir as angels, sing the same hymn, and strike up a melody together. The angels do not take the shepherds' pipes into their hands, but the shepherds, surrounded by the radiance of the angels' light, find themselves in the midst of the heavenly host and are taught a heavenly song of praise by the angels, or rather a hymn both heavenly and earthly...⁵⁶

As Schroeder observes, “Christ's birth, according to Palamas, allowed for the lowly shepherds to assimilate themselves to the heavenly choir.”⁵⁷

Both Theodore Metochites and Gregory Palamas were well-known composers, and it is clear that many of their texts, playing with word juxtapositions and repetitions, were intended for oral performance. Both men were intimately familiar with churches painted with sophisticated imagery that visualized the texts of hymns and ecclesiastical texts. Their observations about the melding of human and angelic voices follow a long line of texts in which Byzantine writers note the same phenomenon;⁵⁸ they also prefigure modern observations on psychoacoustics. Recent research suggests that the effects they describe can be documented scientifically.⁵⁹

54. E. AKYÜREK, Funeral Ritual in the Parekklesion of the Chora Church, in *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*, ed. N. NECİPOĞLU, Leiden 2001 (The Medieval Mediterranean 33), p. 89-104; S. GERSTEL, The Chora Parekklesion, the Hope for a Peaceful Afterlife, and Monastic Devotional Practices, in *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered* (cited in n. 47), p. 107-145.

55. SCHROEDER, Looking with Words and Images (cited in n. 17), p. 120-121.

56. ST. GREGORY PALAMAS, *The Homilies*, ed. and trans. C. VENIAMIN, Waymart 2009, p. 483.

57. SCHROEDER, Looking with Words and Images (cited in n. 17), p. 121.

58. For more evidence, see R. DUBOWCHIK, Singing with the Angels: Foundation Documents as Evidence for Musical Life in Monasteries of the Byzantine Empire, *DOP* 56, 2002, p. 277-296.

59. As part of the *Soundscapes of Byzantium* project, Chris Kyriakakis and I are investigating what acoustical engineers call “the flutter effect.”



Figure 9 - Hymnographers and Lamentation, north wall, Church of St. Panteleimon, Nerezi (photo by the author).

As one might infer from the brief presentation of the Peribleptos church in Mystras above, the Byzantines were keenly aware of connections between image and sound. From the 12th century, as André Grabar, Nancy Ševčenko, Gordana Babić, and Elka Bakalova have shown, hymnographers appeared in church decoration, occasionally paired with narrative scenes.⁶⁰ In the church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi, five hymnographers stand below the image of the Lamentation, in the part of the *katholikon* where half of the choir would have stood (fig. 9). For Nancy Ševčenko, the depiction of the composers reflects the importance of chant in the monastic community. This connection is supported by the texts that the figures hold and by their hand gestures, which can be linked to choral conducting. Several of the texts, as Ševčenko demonstrates, are related to chanting.⁶¹ John of Damascus, one of the most important composers of ecclesiastical verse, carries a scroll marked with the *heirmos* of the Ninth Ode of his Second Canon on the Nativity: “It would

60. A. GRABAR, *Les images des poètes et des illustrations dans leurs œuvres et dans la peinture byzantine tardive*, *Zograf* 10, 1979, p. 13-16; G. Babić, *Les moines-poètes dans l’église de la Mère de Dieu à Studenica*, in *Studenica et l’art byzantin autour de l’année 1200*, Belgrade 1988, p. 205-216; N. Ševčenko, *The Five Hymnographers at Nerezi*, *Paleoslavica* 10, 2002, p. 55-68, repr. in N. Ševčenko, *The Celebration of the Saints in Byzantine Art and Liturgy*, Farnham 2013, XIII; E. BAKALOVA, *Hymnography and Iconography: Images of Hymnographers in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Paintings in Bulgaria*, in *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. P. ARMSTRONG, London 2006, p. 246-273.

61. ŠEVČENKO, *Five Hymnographers* (cited in n. 60), p. 57.

be easier for us, because free from all danger, to keep silence in fear: While it is hard indeed, O Virgin, in love to devise songs harmoniously put together”. (Στέργειν μὲν ἡμι(ας) ὡς ἀκίνδυνον φόβω ῥᾶον σιωπή[ν] τῷ πόθῳ δὲ παρθένε ὕμνους ὑφαίνειν συντόνως τεθηγμένους Ἐργῶδες ἔστιν]).⁶² One of the most famous hymnographers, Joseph, stands at the left. His scroll is marked: “Receive, O Christ, these my hymns” (Δέχοιο, Χριστέ, τοῦσδε τοὺς ἔμοὺς ὕμνους) from the first (“compunctive”) canon of Monday morning, chanted in the first mode.⁶³ Theophanes Graptos carries a scroll with an acrostic that reads: “The first hymn of the angels, by Theophanes”.⁶⁴ The emphasis on hymn composition and chant signals the expansion of hymn-related imagery in the Late Byzantine period.

Late Byzantine painting shows a heightened interest in the representation of hymns, not only through the depiction of composers and their texts, but also through the depiction of chants and, frequently, of chanters. Hymns are represented most frequently outside the nave in the subsidiary spaces that multiplied in the last centuries of imperial hegemony, or in spaces connected with burial, commemoration, or other devotional rites. Among other represented hymns is the Canon of the Soul, located in the south aisle of a small chapel in the Chilandar Monastery.⁶⁵ The Late Byzantine period sees the monumental representation of the Akathistos Hymn in more than a dozen churches.⁶⁶ The representation of the hymn not only signals the glorification of the Virgin, but the importance of a chant used in vigils in large monasteries, in front of the doors of the church, likely in the narthex.⁶⁷ The troparion of the Christmas Hymn “What shall we offer Thee, O Christ” which I have addressed in a recent publication, became the subject of numerous paintings in this period (fig. 10).⁶⁸ In its earliest representation, in the church of the Virgin Peribleptos (Sv. Kliment) in Ohrid, the hymn is strategically located below a domical vault decorated with a full-length image of Christ carrying the incipit to Gregory

62. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *Heirmos* of the 9th Ode of his Second Canon on the Nativity (PG 96, 824); *The Festal Menaion* (cited in n. 21), p. 283; I. SINKEVIĆ, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 63; ŠEVČENKO, *Five Hymnographers* (cited in n. 60), p. 62.

63. *Parakletike*, Athens 1959, p. 18.

64. ŠEVČENKO, *Five Hymnographers* (cited in n. 60), p. 63.

65. V. MARINIS, ‘He Who Is at the Point of Death’: The Fate of the Soul in Byzantine Art and Liturgy, *Gesta* 54, 2015, p. 59-84 (with collected bibliography).

66. E. CONSTANTINIDES, *The Wall Paintings of the Panagia Olympiotissa at Elasson in Northern Thessaly*, 2 vols, Athens 1992 (Publications of the Canadian Archaeological Institute at Athens 2); A. PÄTZOLD, *Der Akathistos-Hymnos: Die Bilderzyklen in der byzantinischen Wandmalerei des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1989 (Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie); I. SPATHARAKIS, *The Pictorial Cycles of the Akathistos Hymn for the Virgin*, Leiden 2005.

67. SYMEON OF THESSALONIKI, *De Sacra Precatione* (PG 155, 620C-621A).

68. GERSTEL, *Monastic Soundspaces* (cited in n. 17), p. 135-152. For representations of the hymn, see also N. ŠEVČENKO, *Alcuni influssi delle opere poetiche di Giovanni di Damasco sull’arte bizantina*, in *Giovanni di Damasco. Un padre al sorgere dell’Islam. Atti del XIII Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa. Sezione bizantina, Bose, 11-13 settembre 2005*, ed. S. CHIALÀ and L. CREMASCHI, Bose 2006, p. 315-341.



Figure 10 - Christmas Hymn, narthex, Church of the Virgin Peribleptos (Sv. Kliment), Ohrid, 1294/1295 (photo: © Sean Sprague/SpraguePhoto.com).



Figure 11 - Martyrdom of St. Demetrios, narthex, Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki (photo by the author).

of Nazianzen's Second Homily on Easter: σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ κόσμῳ, ὅσος ὄρατος, καὶ ὅσος ἀόρατος ("Today, salvation is come to the world, as much to the visible as to the invisible"), a text that was also chanted.⁶⁹ The chamber also includes the representation of hymnographers, which extends the program to consider issues of text composition.⁷⁰

Expanding on the canon of represented hymns, it is now possible to reexamine the painted programs of monastic *katholika* to question whether the insertion of unusual scenes may be linked to new musical composition in the Late Byzantine period, a period that witnesses the development of kalophonic, or highly embellished chant.⁷¹ It is possible, for example, that the representation of the martyrdom of St. Demetrios in the Church of Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki,⁷² may have been stimulated by new chant composition in honor of the city's holy patron (fig. 11). In the 14th century, the composer Manuel Plagitis, protopsaltis of Hagia Sophia, the cathedral of Thessaloniki, composed new *kalophonic heirmoi* for the feast of Demetrios.⁷³ The depiction of this scene of martyrdom, which is described in the *heirmos*, may very well have been inspired by devotion to the saint and the chanting of services in his honor within the city's churches. I suspect that collaborations between scholars of monumental painting and musicologists, focusing specifically on the Late Byzantine period, will reveal ways of linking new musical composition to new imagery.

Members of *Soundscapes of Byzantium*, a collaborative scholarly project, have recently investigated the relationship of sound images and acoustics in Byzantine churches in Thessaloniki.⁷⁴ One of the interests of the project is to look at ecclesiastical spaces that are marked by sound images. In several cases, images of hymns are placed over interior portals that have ritual significance. These portals, closely connected with the imagery around them, seem to be gathering points for the community.

69. The psalm is illustrated in the thirteenth-century sticherarion, Mount Athos, Koutloumoussi, Cod. 412, fol. 232v, with a sketch of the Anastasis. See O. STRUNK, St. Gregory Nazianzus and the Proper Hymns for Easter, in *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. K. WEITZMANN, Princeton 1955, p. 82-87, repr. in O. STRUNK, *Essays on Music in the Byzantine World*, New York 1977, p. 55-67.

70. SCHROEDER, Looking with Words and Images (cited in n. 17).

71. GERSTEL, Monastic Soundspaces (cited in n. 17), p. 139.

72. A. ΧΥΝΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, "Η τοιχογραφία του μαρτυρίου του αγίου Δημητρίου εις τους Αγίους Αποστόλους Θεσσαλονίκης," *DChAE* 8, 1975-1976, p. 61-77.

73. The kalophonic *heirmoi* to St. Demetrios are noted in the mid-fifteenth-century MS Iviron 1120 (f. 631v-636r) and in MS Laura I 185 (likely from the first three decades of the 15th century). Prior to these compositions, an inscription on f. 189r of the latter source reads: "Canon to the Great-martyr St. Demetrios the myrrh-streaming, poem of Konstantinos Porphyrogennitos, composed by the Protopsaltis of Thessaloniki, Manuel Plagites, second mode, Come, O ye people...". See also E. RUSSELL, *St. Demetrius of Thessalonica: Cult and Devotion in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2010 (Byzantine and Neohellenic studies 6). I am very grateful to S. Antonopoulos for his insights into this subject.

74. S. ANTONOPOULOS, S. GERSTEL, C. KYRIAKAKIS, K. RAPTIS and J. DONAHUE, Soundscapes of Byzantium, *Speculum* 92/S1, 2017, p. 321-335; S. GERSTEL, C. KYRIAKAKIS, K. RAPTIS, S. ANTONOPOULOS and J. DONAHUE, Soundscapes of Byzantium: The Acheiropoietos Basilica and the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, *Hesperia* 87/1, 2018, p. 177-213.



Figure 12 - Christmas Hymn, north ambulatory, Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki (photo by the author).

I have already published preliminary thoughts on the representation of the Christmas troparion in the church of Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (fig. 12).⁷⁵ In this monastic *katholikon*, the troparion “What shall we offer Thee, O Christ” is depicted in a section of the north ambulatory that likely formed a chapel of John the Baptist.⁷⁶ The composition is centered over the arched door between the north side of the ambulatory and the nave. The composition is crowned by a heavenly portal with descending angels labeled “The angels offer Thee a hymn.” Components of the hymn are illustrated from top to bottom and then left to right in two bands. At the bottom of the scene are two groups of monks represented in chant. These may represent the division of singers into the left and right choirs. In modern-day choral practice, the left, or north choir is charged with singing the hymn. The position of the image, in the north ambulatory, is in closest proximity to the left choir that would have stood on the other side of the door. Closer analysis of this and other similar images – almost always located over portals – and a consideration of fourteenth-century Byzantine chant has led to a new conclusion. A recent transcription from a sticherarion of 1341 (MS Ambrosianus A139 sup) suggests that the hymn

75. GERSTEL, *Monastic Soundspaces* (cited in n. 17).

76. A. XYNGOPOULOS, *Les fresques de l'église des Saints-Apôtres à Thessalonique*, in *Art et société à Byzance sous les Paléologues. Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Association internationale des études byzantines à Venise en septembre 1968*, Venice 1971, p. 83-89, at 87, fig. 14, repr. in A. XYNGOPOULOS, *Θεσσαλονίκη μελετήματα (1925-1979)*, Thessaloniki 1999, XXVIII; C. STEPHAN, *Ein byzantinische Bildensemble. Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostel-Kirche zu Thessaloniki*, Baden-Baden, 1986, p. 227-231, fig. 55

was chanted in a stately tempo that had an obvious processional quality.⁷⁷ The representation of the hymn over the portal to the nave may have marked the gathering place of the community before entering for the Christmas vigil. The image captures the sound and motions of chanting. Here, at a gathering point of the community, the chant was performed before the scene, with depicted monks facing their living cohort. The chanters would have then processed into the nave, passing under the composition.

In the late-fourteenth-century church of Prophetes Elias in Thessaloniki, the *lite*, the expanded narthex, consists of nine bays. The groin vaults and domes covering the bays are supported by four columns. In the vault above the entrance to the nave is a composition of angelic thrones and cherubim holding standards inscribed with the words ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ ΑΓΙΟΣ, the beginning of the Epinikios or Seraphic hymn: ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ, πλήρης ὁ οὐρανός καὶ ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης σου ὡσαννὰ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις ὑλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου ὡσαννὰ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις (“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He Who came and will come in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest”) (fig. 13). The prayer, from the Anaphora and the Great Doxology, refers to the interplay of human and heavenly worship. The space in which the prayer was located, the *lite*, was used for the recitation of monastic hours. Acoustical testing demonstrated much higher clarity in this space than in the adjacent nave, indicating that the community would have easily understood and appreciated the complexities of the chanted service (fig. 14).⁷⁸ Indeed,



Figure 13 - Seraphic Hymn, narthex, Church of Prophetes Elias, Thessaloniki (photo by K. Raptis).

77. I am very grateful to Spyridon Antonopoulos, who studied the setting in MS Ambrosianus A 139 sup. Antonopoulos, a member of *Soundscapes of Byzantium*, first recorded the new setting in 2014.
78. For additional testing results in this church, see S. GERSTEL and C. KYRIAKAKIS, Revealing the Acoustic Mysteries of Byzantine Churches, *Faith and Form: The Interfaith Journal of Religion, Art and Architecture* 3, 2016, p. 15-17.

the existence of four stone columns and the uneven surface of the ceiling may have created an early reflection pattern that enhanced intelligibility. The lower walls of the chamber are covered with images of monks, reflecting the use of the space by members of the monastic community. The easternmost image of the vault gathers the monks and angels together in holy song. The comments of John Chrysostom on this prayer are apt: “When was the earth filled with His glory? When this hymn was brought down to earth, and human beings below became companions in the dance with the powers above, striking up a single melody and composing a common praise.”⁷⁹

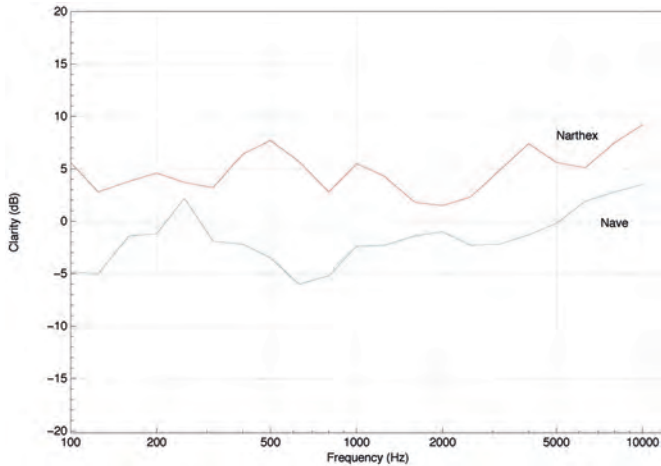


Figure 14 - Contrast of clarity between the nave and narthex, Church of Prophetes Elias, Thessaloniki, 1360-1370 (drawing: Soundscapes of Byzantium).

In the church of St. Nicholas Orphanos in Thessaloniki, nine scenes from the Akathistos Hymn are represented in the north aisle of the ambulatory. The space, originally closed off by a wall, formed a separate chapel in the Late Byzantine period, likely dedicated to the Virgin. The Akathistos cycle, as preserved today, is incomplete. The cycle is painted on the south wall of the chapel, which is pierced by a low portal leading to the sanctuary and a higher portal leading to the adjacent nave. Originally, the cycle likely continued on the west and north walls of the chapel. Because of an interest in the connections between paintings of sound and acoustics, *Soundscapes of Byzantium* investigated the north aisle of the church in order to consider the acoustics of a space decorated with the Akathistos hymn. The recording of chanters in front of the Akathistos scenes was unsatisfactory; the lack of resonance was disturbing to both chanters and listeners.⁸⁰ During testing, however, one chanter moved to the central nave to sing the Akathistos at the threshold

79. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *In Isaiam*, ed. J. DUMORTIER (SC 304), 6.3.

80. Changes to the space, including the removal of the west wall of the chapel, impacted the acoustical environment.

of the sanctuary. Unlike the singing in the north chapel where the chanter's voice fell flat, the sound of the voice chanting on the west side of the sanctuary screen, facing the altar, was funneled through the lower portal below the representation of the fourteenth *oikos* of the Akathistos Hymn.⁸¹ Sound emerged as if through a microphone (fig. 15). The representation of the *oikos* is inscribed: ΞΕΝΟΝ ΤΟΚΟΝ ΙΔΟΝΤΕΣ ΞΕΝΩΘΩΜΕΝ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΣΜΟΥ ΤΟΝ ΝΟΥΝ ΕΙΣ ΟΥ(ΡΑ)ΝΟΥΣ ΜΕΤΑΘΕΝΤΕΣ (“Seeing the strange childbirth, let us be estranged from the mundane, transporting our mind to heaven”). The young Christ is seated on a bench at the center of the composition with a bishop and a cluster of chanters represented to either side. Because the composition is generally cropped in publications that focus on monumental painting, scholars have not noted that the bench is centered over the door; the painter seems to have taken this architectural feature into account when planning the scene. Activated by chant in the nave, this portal became a magnifier of sound.



Figure 15 - Akathistos Hymn during acoustical testing, north ambulatory, Nicholas Orphanos, Thessaloniki (photo: Soundscapes of Byzantium).

81. A. ΧΥΝΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Αγίου Νικολάου του Ορφανού Θεσσαλονίκης*, Athens 1964, pls. 52, 88; A. ΤΣΙΤΟΥΡΙΔΟΥ, *Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της παλαιολόγιας ζωγραφικής κατά τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα*, Thessaloniki 1986, p. 149-150, pl. 57; K. KIRCHHAINER, *Die Bildausstattung der Nikolauskirche in Thessaloniki: Untersuchungen zu Struktur und Programm der Malereien*, Weimar 2001 (Marburger Studien zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte 3), p. 115-125.

The representation of chanters immediately above the portal, like those represented in the Christmas troparion in Holy Apostles, must be deliberate. The selection of *oikos* fourteen for this location, with its emphasis on “transporting our mind to heaven,” refers to the role of chant in spiritual elevation, recalling Metochites’ thoughts about the transformative effects of choral singing. In this small church, the sound of chant, the words of the chant, and the sacred images are linked in an unexpected and sophisticated way.

As gathering points of the community, portals became important sites for images of sound. The study of such images is in its infancy, but even a brief collection of examples indicates that this is a fertile area for future study.

In this paper, I have focused on two issues of concern for the study of the decoration of sacred space: art and emotion, and art and sacred sound. The two topics, of course, are related, since sound – both the form of chant and the content of chant – generates emotions within the community. As art historians, we need to consider chanted texts when we think about the resonance of images in sacred space. In the late twelfth-century church of Panagia tou Arakos in Cyprus, Joseph, one of four represented hymnographers, carries a scroll inscribed with a canon to the Virgin: “Beholding God, made flesh from Thee, O Virgin, the choirs of angels were stricken with fear, and they honor Thee as Mother of God through ceaseless hymns.”⁸² The text, held by one of the most prolific hymnographers of the church,⁸³ reminds us of the close connections between the language of hymnography, the sound of chant and the emotional communities that were created in response. In the church of the Peribleptos in Mystras, the text undergirding the angels, referring to fear and trembling, was one that was chanted. The chanted text surrounding the Pantokrator makes reference to emotions. Monks represented in Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki, raise their hands in chant. Chanters are represented above a portal in the church of Nicholas Orphanos, a portal that channeled sound. An integrative approach to the consideration of Byzantine images and sacred space requires us not only to look, but also to feel, and to listen. Just as the building was designed to frame and highlight images, so was it constructed to evoke emotional responses to those images, and to hear those images through prayerful song. For, in monastic communities of late Byzantium image and the chanted word worked together, giving vision and voice to one another, and preparing the faithful, through heightened emotions, to perceive the sacred. It was only at this moment of perception that the angels would descend and participate in a liturgy performed simultaneously on earth and in heaven.

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82. A. NICOLAÏDÈS, L'église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre : Étude iconographique des fresques de 1192, *DOP* 50, 1996, p. 1-137, at 33-34, fig. 32. For the canon, see *Παρακλητική, ἤτοι Οκτώηχος ἡ μεγάλη*, Rome 1885, p. 459.
83. CONSTAS, Poetry and Painting (cited in n. 25), p. 13-32 (with collected bibliography).