

The Virgin Orans in Byzantine Apse Decoration

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Abstract

In eleventh-century Byzantium, depicting the Virgin Orans in the apse of the churches was prevalent. Among them, Nea Moni on the island of Chios is particularly renowned. This study argues that in Nea Moni, the *Pantocrator* in the dome and the Virgin Orans in the apse, simultaneously at the metalevel, are a representation of the Ascension of Christ. Archangels Michael and Gabriel in the subsidiary apses also serve as angels of the Ascension (Act 1:10). Nea Moni's dome and apse, together with the entirety of the naos space, speaks of eschatological Christology, or Christ's Ascension and the Second Coming.

Nea Moni's decorative program was not conceived on Chios but was probably influenced by the now lost Virgin's Chapel of Pharos in the Capital (Photios' Homily). On the Byzantine frontier, such as Cappadocia, southern Italy, and Georgia, churches that depict the Ascension in the apse still remain. On Crete, there is an example that represents the Virgin Orans under the *Pantocrator* of the dome. In Eski Baca in Cappadocia, the *Pantocrator* in medallion form is placed above the head of the Virgin Orans in the apse. Such examples would corroborate Nea Moni's interpretation.

Decorative Program of Nea Moni on the Island of Chios

According to tradition, Nea Moni of Chios, meaning "New Monastery," was dedicated to the Virgin Mary (*Theotokos*) by three monks—Niketas, Ioannes, and Ioseph—who lived there. It flourished under the reign of Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r.1042-55); in fact, it prospered through the emperor's donations. According to D. Mouriki, the mosaics that decorate the inner walls were created between 1049 and 1055 CE.⁽¹⁾

Rather than following the common cross-in-square plan of the Middle Byzantine period, its architecture has a unique structure. The exonarthex (outer narthex) has semicircular projections to the north and south, and has three narrow domes. The esonarthex (inner narthex) also has a dome at its center. The naos (main body of the church) has a square floorplan; however, rather than having four corners, it has a total of eight niche-shaped squinches to support the dome. To the east are three main and secondary apses.

In the main apse, the Virgin Orans stands [Fig.1], and the north- and south-side apses feature busts of the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Going clockwise around the squinches that support the dome are eight scenes from the life of Christ facing to the center of the naos: Annunciation (NE), Nativity (E, non-extant), Presentation to the Temple (*Hypapante*, SE), Baptism (S), Transfiguration (SW), Crucifixion (W), Descent from the Cross (NW), Descent into Hades (*Anastasis*, N). Although Christ *Pantocrator* was once depicted in the dome, the image no longer remains because of an earlier collapse.

* This article is the revised and enlarged version of chap.9 "The Virgin Orans" of my book in Japanese, *The Decorative Programs of the Byzantine Church*, Tokyo 2014.

(1) Only basic and recent studies are listed here: Ch. Bouras, *Nea Moni on Chios: History and Architecture*, Athens 1982; D. Mouriki, *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, 2 vols., Athens 1985; H. Maguire, "The Mosaics of Nea Moni: An Imperial Reading," *DOP* 46 (1992), 205-214 (rep. in: Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art*, Aldershot 1998); R. Ousterhout, "Originality in Byzantine Architecture: The Case of Nea Moni," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51-1 (1992), 48-60; S. Voyadjis, "The Katholikon of Nea Moni in Chios Unveiled," *JÖB* 59 (2009), 229-42;



Fig.1 Apse, Nea Moni



Fig.2 St. Theodore in the Apse, Kaphiona (Mani), Church of Hagioi Theodoroi

In the esonarthex, the images of the Raising of Lazarus (NE), Entry into Jerusalem (N vault, S side), Washing of Feet (N vault, N side), Prayer at Gethsemane/ Betrayal of Judas (S vault, S side), Ascension (SE), and Pentecost (S vault, N side) are arranged; it is possible that they were made by different artists of inferior techniques. The Virgin is depicted in the dome of the esonarthex. There is no extant mosaic in the exonarthex.

The Byzantine art of this period began to feature the twelve great feasts from the life of Christ and the Virgin, known as the *Dodekaorton*; these were used as axial church decorations.⁽²⁾ From a general standpoint, Nea Moni adopted eleven scenes from the *Dodekaorton* with the exception of the Dormition of the Virgin, and there is no significant difference between it and the contemporary monasteries of Hosios Loukas and Daphni.⁽³⁾ Although the scenes on the eight squinches include the Descent from the Cross along with the Crucifixion and the Anastasis, were it a twelfth-century church, the *Threnos* (Lamentation of the Virgin) would have been represented. Byzantine art would awaken to the significance of the *Threnos* or Pietà around the middle of the twelfth century.⁽⁴⁾ The placement

(2) E. Kitzinger, "Reflections on the Feast Cycle in Byzantine Art," *CahArch* 36 (1988), 51-73.

(3) For the mosaics of three monasteries, see O. Demus *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, London 1948.

(4) K. Weitzmann, "The Origin of the Threnos," in: *De Artibus Opuscula XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, New York 1961, 476-90 (rep. in: Weitzmann, *Byzantine Book Illumination and Ivories*, London 1980).



Fig.3 Apse, Thessaloniki, Church of Panagia ton Chalkeon

of the Ascension is noteworthy. By the ninth century, the Ascension, usually featured on domes, was moved to the bema ceiling.⁽⁵⁾ The Ascension in Nea Moni, an unusual example, is featured not on the dome or bema vault but in the narthex. This has not been explained by previous researchers. I provide an answer with the following argument.

Most of the apse decorations of Middle Byzantine churches were occupied by the Virgin and Child (seated or standing), a subject that represents the incarnation of invisible God. Those featuring a standing figure of the Virgin Orans were relatively rare. An overview of the Virgin Orans as apse iconography according to D. Mouriki is as follows.⁽⁶⁾ In *martyria* (early Christian churches for martyrs), an *orans* figure of the saint being memorialized decorating the apse was common.⁽⁷⁾ As a variation, from before the Iconoclasm, the depiction of the Virgin Orans in the apse was not uncommon. Before the Iconoclasm in Constantinople, the Church of the Virgin Mary of Blachernae is likely to have exhibited the same iconography in its apse. Although certain researchers suggest that this had considerable influence, there is no reliable detailed description of the apse of Blachernae.

On the function of the Virgin Orans, Mouriki was of the view that she was an intermediary who delivered the benefactors' prayers for victory to Christ of the dome (the dome representing Heaven). Bearing an inscription stating that it was built in 1028, the Church of Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki [Fig.3] is characterized by a strong funereal nature; in that instance, the Virgin Orans in the apse was an intermediary who provided salvation to a buried person's soul and delivered it to Christ.⁽⁸⁾ In any case, Mouriki argues that the posture of the *Theotokos* with her hands spread in *orans* signifies that she is a mediator connected with Christ in Heaven. I do not oppose this theory. However, there is another interpretation, overlooked by Mouriki, that I propose.

Based upon that premise, we first reflect on the matter of "icons and narrative" in Byzantine church decoration.⁽⁹⁾ By arranging various iconic images in the three-dimensional space of the church, a new meaning is

(5) On the dome decoration of the Byzantine churches, see N. Gioles, *Ο βυζαντινός τρούλλος και το εικονογραφικό του πρόγραμμα*, Athens 1990.

(6) Mouriki (1985), 107-09.

(7) A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, Paris 1943-46, 292-96; Ch. Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden 1992 (1960). Interesting examples with orans figures of the title saints in the apse can be found in the Mani Peninsula (Peloponnesos) [Fig.2] and near-by island of Kythera (mostly in the fourteenth century). Did the early program remain in the peripheric regions? See N. V. Drandakis, *Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης*, Athens 1995; M. Chatzidakis, I. Bitha, *Ευρετήριο βυζαντινών τοιχογραφιών Ελλάδος. Κυθήρα*, Athens 1997.

(8) K. Papadopoulos, *Die Wandmalereien des XI. Jahrhunderts in der Kirche ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΧΑΛΚΕΩΝ in Thessaloniki*, Graz/Köln 1966; A. Tsitouridou, *The Church of the Panagia Chalkeon*, Thessaloniki 1975.

(9) This concept was introduced by Ringbom, and developed by Belting, particularly, for the Passion cycle of Christ. S. Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, Åbo 1965 (Davaco 1984); H. Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter. Form und Funktion früherer Bildtafeln der Passion*, Berlin 1981.



Fig.4 West Wall, Kurbinovo, Church of St. George

imbued through the relationships between the images, in addition to the individual meaning of each iconic image. Narrative images can also be viewed as icons. Additionally, there are cases wherein these icons give rise to a narrative meaning. For example, the west wall of the Church of St. George in Kurbinovo (North Macedonia) depicts the three images of the Pentecost, the *Majestas Domini* of the Ancient of Days, and the Transfiguration. At the meta-level, these images represent the Holy Spirit—God the Father—Jesus Christ, namely, the Holy Trinity [Fig.4]. In the village of Nerezi near Skopje, St. Panteleimon Monastery exhibits the Virgin and Child in its main apse (non-extant), depictions of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist in each of the north and south subsidiary apses, respectively, which together form the decoration program for the *Deisis*.⁽¹⁰⁾

It is my interpretation that in Nea Moni, the *Pantocrator* in the dome and the Virgin Orans in the apse form, simultaneously at the meta-level, a representation of the Ascension of Christ. Archangels Michael and Gabriel in the subsidiary apses also serve as angels of the Ascension (Act 1:10, “two men in white garments”). In a typical Byzantine church, the *Pantocrator*⁽¹¹⁾ of the dome highlights the divinity of Christ, and the Virgin and Child in the apse represents Christ’s humanity (his incarnation), a testament to the Dyophysite nature of Christ. However, Nea Moni’s dome and apse together, along with the entirety of the naos space, speak of eschatological Christology, or Christ’s Ascension and the Second Coming.

I provide two points of evidence that support the likelihood of this interpretation. On the island of Crete, in the village of Myriokephara near Rethymnon, is a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary (twelfth century)⁽¹²⁾; depicted on the east side of the dome’s *Pantocrator* is the Virgin Mary between archangels [Fig.5]. Originally, the dome was considered a place for the Ascension, but it was supplanted by the *Pantocrator* around the ninth century.⁽¹³⁾ However, there are still remnants of the Ascension even though it was changed to the *Pantocrator*, and the Virgin Orans, which is a motif frequently derived from the Ascension, has been annexed. Whether the lost depiction of Christ in

(10) On the iconography of the *Deisis*, see Ch. Walter, “Two Notes on the Deësis,” *REB* 26 (1968), 311-36; id., “Further Notes on the Deësis,” *REB* 28 (1970), 161-87; id., “Bulletin on the Deësis and the Paracletis,” *REB* 38 (1980), 261-69; T. Velmans, “L’image de la Déisis dans les églises de Georgie et dans celles d’autres régions du monde byzantine. 1. La Déisis dans l’abside,” *CahArch* 29 (1981), 47-102; ead., “2: La Déisis dans la coupole, sur la façade et dans les images du Jugement dernier,” *CahArch* 31 (1983), 129-73 (both rep. in: Velmans, *L’art médiéval de l’Orient chrétien*, Sofia 2002², 33-114); M.I. Kazamia-Tsernou, *Ιστορώντας τη “Δέηση” στις Βυζαντινές εκκλησίες της Ελλάδος*, Thessalonki 2003.

(11) On the iconography of the *Pantocrator*, see K. Wessel, “Das Bild des Pantokrator,” in: *Polychronion. Festschrift für F.Dölger*, Heidelberg 1966, 521-35; J.T. Matthews, *The Pantocrator: Title and Image*, diss., New York University 1976.

(12) I. Spatharakis, *Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete, vol.1, Rethymnon Province*, London 1999, no.14; K. Gallas, K. Wessel, M. Borboudakis, *Byzantinisches Kreta*, Munich 1983, 258; M. Bissinger, *Kreta. Byzantinische Wandmalerei*, Munich 1995, nos.1, 9, 11.

(13) For a corpus of the Ascension iconography up to the first millennium, see N. Gioles (Gkioles), *Η ανάληψις του Χριστού βάσει των μνημειών της Α’ χιλιετηρίδος*, Athens 1981.



Fig.5 Dome, Myriokephala (Rethymno), Church of Panagia

the dome of Nea Moni was a bust or a seated figure would make no difference. The *Pantocrator* and Virgin Orans, while both being independent iconographic images, evoke implications of the Ascension in the consciousness of the observer when they are combined. Therefore, the entirety of the monastic space develops into the Ascension.

The other point concerns the bema-ceiling iconography of the Nea Moni, which is now lost. Mouriki states that surely here there was a *Hetoimasia*.⁽¹⁴⁾ A question arises as to what kind of interpretation is possible when the *Hetoimasia* has been inserted between the Virgin Orans and *Pantocrator*. The Virgin Orans is understood to serve the ascended Christ here on earth. The archangels Michael and Gabriel, who appear in the north and south subsidiary apses, are there to guard and support the Virgin Mary, who will witness the Ascension. The archangels spoke as follows: “Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking heavenwards? He who has been taken from you into Heaven, this same Jesus, will come back in the same fashion, just as you have watched him going into Heaven” (Acts 1:11). It is believed that Christ will arrive once again in the same form as he did during the Ascension. The *Hetoimasia tou thronou* (the Preparation of the Throne) is the seat for the Second Coming of Christ. By placing the *Hetoimasia* between the Virgin Orans and *Pantocrator*, the eschatological theology that the Ascension is also the Second Coming impressively takes shape. While the iconic images each carry their respective meanings, the naos space collectively portrays this grand Christology.

Mouriki describes a narrow vertical wall in contact with the ceiling of the bema of Nea Moni as having likely been a *Deisis*.⁽¹⁵⁾ In the context established by Mouriki, the Virgin Orans would similarly be represented here as an intermediary. In my own context, the positioning of the *Hetoimasia* adjacent to the *Deisis* is a valid program. Consequently, an observer can more reliably visualize the meaning of the Second Coming. Simultaneously, the origin of the *Deisis* as a guardian of the sanctuary can explain this arrangement. The monastery of Hosios Loukas [Fig.6]⁽¹⁶⁾, the Church of St. Sophia in Ohrid [Fig.7], and the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kyiv [Fig.8] all have the same depiction of the *Deisis* near their apses. The Monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai is perhaps the best example in terms of conveying the original meaning of the *Deisis*.⁽¹⁷⁾

Overall, in the absence of a model, it is difficult to imagine that this sophisticated decoration program found at Nea Moni was developed on an island such as Chios in the Aegean Sea. The receipt of donations from Emperor Constantine IX indicates that the craftsmen who created the mosaic were from Constantinople and would have fol-

(14) On the iconography of the *Hetoimasia*, see Th. von Bogyay, “Zur Geschichte der Hetoimasia,” *Akten des 11. Internationalen Byzantinistenkongress*, Munich 1958, 58-61; id., “Hetoimasia,” *RBK*, vol.2, cols.1190ff.

(15) Mouriki (1985), 109.

(16) N. Chatzidakis, *Hosios Loukas*, Athens 1997.

(17) G.H. Forsyth, K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: the Church and Fortress of Justinian*, University of Michigan Press 1973, pl. CIII, CXXII-CXXV.



Fig.6 Apse, Catholicon, Monastery of Hosios Loukas



Fig.8 Apse, Kyiv, Cathedral of St.Sophia



Fig.7 Apse, Ohrid, Church of St. Sophia

lowed a church decoration program of the Capital. In current-day Istanbul, there are no extant examples reminiscent of Nea Moni; however, the literature notes that significant images were present in the ninth-century capital. Let us consider the Tenth Homily of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople below.

On the very ceiling is painted in coloured mosaic cubes a man-like figure bearing the traits of Christ. Thou mightest say He is overseeing the earth, and devising its orderly arrangement and government, so accurately has the painter been inspired to represent, though only in forms and in colours, the Creator's care for us. In the concave segments next to the summit of the hemisphere a throng of angels is pictured escorting our common Lord. The apse which rises over the sanctuary glistens with the image of the Virgin, stretching out her stainless arms on our behalf and winning for the emperor safely and exploits against the foes. A choir of apostles and martyrs, yea, of prophets, too, and patriarchs fill and beautify the whole church with their images.⁽¹⁸⁾

(18) V. Laourdas, *Φωτίου Ομιλίες*, Thessaloniki 1959, 102; C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photios Patriarch of Constantinople*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1958, 187-88; id., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, Toronto 1986 (1972), 185-86.

In the literature on Byzantine art, this homily was long thought to be derived from the *encaenia* (dedication) of *Nea Ekklesia* built by Basil I in the Great Palace complex; however, an investigation by Jenkins and Mango has made it fairly clear that it was for the rededication of the Chapel of the Virgin of *Pharos*⁽¹⁹⁾, the Byzantine emperor's court chapel.⁽²⁰⁾ It was probably connected with a donation made by Emperor Michael III in 864. Based on medieval historical records, the Chapel of the Virgin of *Pharos* was a small building with a narthex and subsidiary apses arranged to the north and south.⁽²¹⁾ According to the testimony of Patriarch Photios, Christ and the angels were depicted in the dome, the Virgin Orans in the apse, and various saints along the other walls. Mango also surmises that the dome's Christ was in the form of a full body, that is, a seated figure rather than a bust, and that the angels were distributed across the rib-like compartments of the dome, such as in the Monastery of Chora.⁽²²⁾

Like any example of ekphrasis, trying to reconstruct the actual iconography based on Photios' eloquent oration is incredibly frustrating, especially in terms of what was depicted on the ceiling of the bema and the vault of the naos. As statements regarding the life of Christ do not appear anywhere in the homily, and narrative images are not applied to the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos* in the ninth century, Mango indicates that various scenes pertaining to the life of Christ were added later.⁽²³⁾ If this were true, then the Ascension would not have been depicted on the bema ceiling. Regardless of whether the dome's depiction of Christ was a bust or full-length figure, that, in conjunction with the Virgin Orans in the apse, ensures that the decoration program, as a whole, can still be read as the Ascension—Second Coming. However, Patriarch Photios, one of the age's most impressive intellectuals, appears not to have understood that decorative program.

Pursuing a discussion on whether the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos* was the model for *Nea Moni* of Chios may prove to be fruitless, as the actual monument no longer remains. Nevertheless, in view of the Virgin Orans in the apse coupled with the dome's depiction of Christ, it can be confirmed that a decorative program representing the Ascension = Second Coming at the metalevel would have been present in the ninth-century Constantinople. Provisionally, if the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos* was a model for the artists of *Nea Moni*, it would have been the Chapel as Photios saw it, prior to the additional Comnenian decoration of the life of Christ.

A question arises as to why the Ascension was not depicted in the *Nea Moni*'s naos. Having represented the Ascension at the metalevel by the images in the apse and the dome, a narrative Ascension would no longer have been necessary. In the *Nea Moni*'s naos, eight squinches depict the life of Christ from the Annunciation to the *Anastasis*, and the whole space embodies the Ascension—Second Coming. Furthermore, *Nea Moni*'s painters executed an ingenious move by depicting the narrative Ascension in the narthex. The Prayer in Gethsemane is arranged on the vertically adjacent wall, indicating that the object of the prayer of Christ in *proskynesis* there is the ascending Christ in the Ascension [Fig.9]. The Ascension is a Theophanic scene, and the ascending Christ is the same as God the Father; thus, the portrayal of the ascending Christ as the object of Christ's invocation of "Father" in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39 et al.) is theologically accurate, even though it appears that He is praying to Himself.

The Theodore Psalter (British Library, Add.19.352, 1066 CE)⁽²⁴⁾, with marginal illustrations, connects the Ascension with the Prayer in Gethsemane. Among the preceding marginal Psalters, the Chludov Psalter (Moscow, State Historical Museum, Cod.gr.129d, ninth century)⁽²⁵⁾ depicted the Ascension for Ps 107:6 (f.112v), and the Prayer in

(19) On the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos*, see J. Ebersolt, *Le grand palais de Constantinople*, Paris 1910, 104-09; R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin. 1er partie: Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique. Tome III, Le églises et les monastères*, Paris 1969², 232-26.

(20) R.J.H. Jenkins and C. Mango, "The Date and Significance of the Tenth Homily of Photius," *DOP* 9-10 (1956), 123-40; Mango (1958), 177-83; Ihm (1992), 63. Borognesi (E. Bolognesi, "La X Omelia di Fozio. Quale ekphrasis della chiesa di S. Maria Hodegetria," *Studi Medievali* 28-1 (1987), 381-98), however, insists on the possibility of the Monastery of Panagia Hodegetria (Hodegon), and Mango himself says that "the problem needs further investigation" (*ODB*, 1446, s.v. "Nea Ekklesia"). On the Hodegon Monastery, see Janin (1969), 199-207.

(21) Mango (1958), 181.

(22) *Ibid.*, 182-83.

(23) *Ibid.*, 183.

(24) http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_19352, accessed 5 May, 2022. Ch. Barber (ed.), *Theodore Psalter: Electronic Facsimile*, British Library 2000.



Fig.9 Ascension and Prayer in Gethsemane in the Narthex, Nea Moni



Fig.10 Ascension and Prayer in Gethsemane, Prilep, Church of St. Nicholas

Gethsemane for Ps 108:1-5 (f.113r). In the eleventh-century Barberini Psalter (Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Cod. Vat.Barb.gr.372)²⁶, the Ascension and Gethsemane were selected for the picturization for Ps 107:6 (f.189v) and Ps 107:13 (f.190v), respectively. In both manuscripts, two scenes are set on different folia, because the corresponding Psalm phrases are far apart. However, the painter of the Theodore Psalter made a fresh attempt to place both scenes vertically on the same folio by making the Ascension and Gethsemane illustrations of Ps 107:8 and Ps 107:13, respectively.²⁷ This iconographical attempt obviously designated that the both events—the Ascension and Prayer in Gethsemane—had occurred on Mount Olive; above the head of Christ in *proskynesis*, Christ is ascending to Heaven, though the narrative time differs. However, the mosaics in Nea Moni probably predate the Theodore Psalter by more than a decade and were thus not influenced by the manuscript illustrations, whose viewers were limited to a small circle. In the Church of Sveti Nikola in Prilep (North Macedonia), executed in the late thirteenth century, Christ in *proskynesis* in the Prayer of Gethsemane on the east end of the north wall faces the ascending Christ in the Ascension on the east wall [Fig.10]. Such attempts to link Gethsemane with the Ascension likely have their origin in the

²⁵ M.V. Ščepkina, *Miniatjurny Khludovskoi psaltiri*, Moscow 1977.

²⁶ https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Barb.gr.372, accessed 5 May, 2022.

²⁷ Eriko TSUJI, *Studies in the Miniatures of the Byzantine Marginal Psalters*, Tokyo 2018 (in Japanese), 103-18.



Fig.11 Apse, Kastoria, Church of Hagioi Anargyroi

capital city of Constantinople.

From a modern perspective, the programs of the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos* and of *Nea Moni* were not mainstreamed for church decoration during the Middle Byzantine period. For instance, in Kastoria, Greece, the Church of Hagioi Anargyroi has depicted the *Hetoimasia* in the upper portion of the small vault of the conch of the apse [Fig.11].⁽²⁸⁾ However, the conch does not depict the Virgin Orans; it features a seated image of the Virgin and Child. The Monastery of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi (North Macedonia) has the *Hetoimasia* in the bottom portion of its apse, directly behind the altar.⁽²⁹⁾ While there is a bust of the Virgin Orans featuring Christ in a medallion on its chest in the conch of the apse, its origin lies in the restoration that occurred in the sixteenth century. The original image of 1164 in the apse is unknown; however, because the conch is extremely narrow, it would have been difficult to fit a rendering of a seated image of the Virgin and Child or a standing Virgin. If the current fresco is equivalent to the original, the consolidated subjects of the Virgin Orans and the *Hetoimasia* also make an appearance together here, with Christ *Pantocrator* in the dome. The original iconography used for the bema vault remains unknown. Although this implies that there is a partial appear-

ance of a subject grouping that resembles *Nea Moni*, the overall program is currently not the same as that of *Nea Moni*.

Virgin Orans as Apse Decoration

As a general principle after the Iconoclasm, Byzantine churches featured the *Pantocrator* in the dome and the Mother and Child in the apse.⁽³⁰⁾ The first presents the Christ Lord in Heaven, and the second is a form of the doctrine representing the physical incarnation of invisible God. The dome and apse, as the most important places in the church architecture, convey how invisible God appeared on earth (incarnation) and how Christ has both divine and human natures (the Dyophysite theory).

Although there are some apse programs that focus on the *Deisis* or Theophanic image of Christ (*Majestas Domini*), after the Middle Byzantine period, most of churches were decorated with the Virgin and Child. The Virgin Orans in the apse of *Nea Moni*, while unusual, is not without similar occurrences. Focusing on the Middle Byzantine period, I provide a list of such examples below.⁽³¹⁾ In the later Byzantine period, the dramatic increase of the use of Virgin Orans in apses makes comprehensively listing them an impossible task.

- Leivadia near Ammochostos on Cyprus, Church of Kyra (Theotokos), fragment of mosaic, sixth century(?)⁽³²⁾

⁽²⁸⁾ S. Pelekanidis, M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens 1984, 24, no.11.

⁽²⁹⁾ I. Sinkević, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi. Architecture, Programme, Patronage*, Wiesbaden 2000, 35-36; G. Babić, "Les discussions christologiques et le décor des églises byzantines au XIIe siècle. Les évêques officiant devant l'Hétimasia et devant l'Amnos," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 2 (1968), 368-86; N. Gioles, "Christologische Streitigkeiten im 12. Jh. und ihr Einfluss auf das ikonographische Programm in dieser Zeit," M. Aspra- Vardavaki (ed.), *ΛΑΜΠΗΛΩΝ. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη της Ντούλας Μουρίκη*, vol.1, 265-76.

⁽³⁰⁾ On the apse program in the Middle-Byzantine Macedonia, see, S.E.J. Gerstel, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries. Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Seattle / London, 1999, and in Greece, A.G. Mantas, *Το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα του ιερού βήματος των μεσοβυζαντινών ναών της Ελλάδας (843-1204)*, Athens 2001.

⁽³¹⁾ Mantas, (2001) 70-79, discusses this theme as "η όρθια δεόμενη Θεοτόκος χωρίς το Χριστό."

⁽³²⁾ A.H.S. Megaw, E.J.W. Hawkins, "A Fragmentary Mosaic of the Orant Virgin in Cyprus," *CIEB* (1971), vol.3, Bucarest 1976, 363-66; Ihm (1992), 243-44.

- Constantinople, Chapel of the Virgin of *Pharos*, 864⁽³³⁾
- Ihlara/ Yeşilköy (Cappadocia), Eski Baca Kilisesi, tenth century [Fig.12]⁽³⁴⁾
- Kyiv, Church of Desjatinnaja, 989-96⁽³⁵⁾
- Thessaloniki, Church of Panagia ton Chalkeon, 1028 [Fig.3]⁽³⁶⁾
- Kyiv, Cathedral of Svjataya Sofia, 1043-46 [Fig.8]⁽³⁷⁾
- Chios, Monastery of Nea Moni, 1049-55 [Fig.1]
- Kyiv, Monastery Pečerskij, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, 1083-89⁽³⁸⁾
- Kakopetria on Cyprus, Church of Hagios Nikolaos tes Steges, eleventh century [Fig.13]⁽³⁹⁾
- Near Kyiv, Church of Arkhangel Mikhail, 1108⁽⁴⁰⁾
- Novgorod, Cathedral of Svjataya Sofia, 1108⁽⁴¹⁾
- Połock (Belarus), Spaso-Evfrosiniev Monastery, Transfiguration Church, late twelfth century⁽⁴²⁾
- Kastoria, Church of Hagios Nikolaos tou Kasnitzi, 1180's [Fig.14]⁽⁴³⁾
- Prilep (N. Macedonia), Church of Sveti Nikola, c.1200 [Fig.10]⁽⁴⁴⁾

Many of the examples listed above⁽⁴⁵⁾ survive only in a fragmented state, thereby making it difficult to discuss the decorative program as a whole. Although the Church of Panagia Kyra on Cyprus represents the only early work, the entire program of the church could not be recovered. In Kyiv and Novgorod, multiple examples that originated from St. Sophia in Kyiv remain. In Kyiv's St. Sophia and other Russian churches, a standing representation of the Virgin resides comfortably in the tall apse. Conversely, in the small churches of the Aegean islands, it is not possible to depict a standing Virgin within the narrow conches of the apses. However, the mosaic on the bema vault in Kyiv's St. Sophia has flaked off, making the iconography unknowable. As the church in Kakopetria on Cyprus has an

(33) See supra, n.19.

(34) J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, "L'église rupestre dite Eski Baca Kilisesi et la place de la Vierge dans les absides cappadociens," *JÖB* 21 (1972), 163-78; C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et des ses abords*, Paris 1991, 310-11, pl.171.

(35) First stone building in Russia, built by Grand Duke Vladimir, but collapsed in 1240. V. Lazarev, *Old Russian Murals and Mosaics from the XI to the XVI Century*, London, 1966, 31, 215 n.83.

(36) Papadopoulos (1966); Tsitouridou (1975); T. Malmquist, *Byzantine 12th Century Frescoes in Kastoria. Agioi Anargyroi and Agios Nikolaos tou Kasnitzi*, Uppsala 1979, 111, no. II-2.

(37) H. Logvin, *Kiev's Hagia Sophia*, Kiev 1971, figs.12-13; Malmquist (1979), 148ff., no.VI-1; O. Popova, V. Sarabianov, *Mosaics and Frescoes of Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kiev*, Moscow 2017 (in Russian), 47, fig.27.

(38) Lazarev (1966), 68.

(39) A. and J. Stylianou, *The Painted Church of Cyprus*, London 1997², 53-75.

(40) Lazarev (1968), 113ff.

(41) Lazarev (1966), 95; Malmquist (1979), 151, no.VI-6; V.D. Sarabianov, E.S. Smirnova, *История древнерусской живописи*, Moscow 2007, 86-90.

(42) L.I. Lifshits (ed.), *История Русского искусства, том 2/1: Искусство 20-60-х годов XII века*, Moscow 2012, 286-330, fig.332 (text by Sarabianov).

(43) Pelekanidis-Chatzidakis (1984), 50-65; Malmquist (1979).

(44) V. Djurić, *Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien*, Munich 1976, 19, fig.10; P. Miljković-Peppek, "Sur la chronologie de l'église Saint Nicolas à Varoš près de Prilep," in: B. Borkopp, B. Schellewald, L. Theis (eds.), *Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für H. Hallensleben zum 65. Geburtstag*, Amsterdam 1995, 73-84.

(45) I did not include here the examples of a double-tiered apse, wherein the Theophanic vision of Christ (*Majestas Domini*) and Virgin Orans are depicted in the upper and lower parts, respectively, suggesting as a whole the Ascension—Second Coming: Chapel no.17 of Apollon Monastery in Bawit, and Chapel of S. Venanzio in S. Giovanni in Laterano in Rome, and so on. Ihm (1992), pl.XXIII, 1,2. We can also add the churches in Palermo to the list; the Cathedral in Cefalù depicts Christ *Pantocrator* in the apse's conch, the Virgin Orans in the lower frieze, and the *Hetoimasia* on the bema vault. Accordingly, in Cefalù, the same iconographical combination as Nea Moni—the Virgin Orans, Christ *Pantocrator*, and the *Hetoimasia*—is realized. O.Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, New York 1988 (London 1949); V. Lazarev, "Early Italo-Byzantine Painting in Sicily," rep.in: Lazarev, *Studies in Byzantine Painting*, London 1995, 103ff.. The Church of Hagios Hierotheos in Megara (Greece), which is closer to the dome of La Martorana in both iconography and style, has a seated *Pantocrator* in the center of the dome, the medallion of the *Hetoimasia* on the east side, and the bust of the Virgin Orans on the west side with her palm showing at the breast. Therefore, the thematic combination of the *Hetoimasia*, *Pantocrator*, and Virgin Orans can be recognized here as well. D. Mouriki, "Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος του τρούλλου του Αγίου Ιεροθέου κοντά στα Μέγαρας," *Αρχαιολογικά Ανάλεκτα εζ'Αθηνών*, 1978, 115ff.



Fig.12 Apse, Ihlara, Eski Baca Kilisesi



Fig.13 Apse, Kakopetria, Church of Hagios Nikolaos tes Steges



Fig.14 Apse, Kastoria, Church of Hagios Nikolaos tou Kasnitzi

extraordinarily complex production phase, it is difficult to discuss a unified program, and the apse that Mouriki attributed to the eleventh century appears to be, in my view, a much later work.

The single-naved basilica of St. Nicholas in Kastoria has the Virgin Orans in its apse conch, the Annunciation featuring the Mandylion as a central motif above it, and the *Deisis* in bust images depicted on the pediment section. In the church of no dome, Christ *Pantocrator*—featured on the top of the eastern wall, with the addition of the Virgin and Baptist—functions as the *Deisis*. Like in Nea Moni, the Virgin Orans and *Pantocrator* are united with the subject of the *Deisis*. The top of the west wall depicts the Ascension, including the Virgin Orans as part of the iconography; therefore, it is not possible to consider the Virgin Orans in the apse as part of the Ascension. In this church, the Virgin Orans is depicted on both facing walls of east and west.

At the St. Nicholas Church in Prilep, North Macedonia, the Virgin Orans was installed in the apse around 1200. In addition to the apse, the east wall is linked to 1298. While it is unclear whether the original iconography was adhered to, at present, the Ascension is set above the top of the east wall. In other words, the Virgin Orans of the Ascension is repeated directly above the Virgin Orans in the apse [Fig.10]. This phenomenon—double representations of the Virgin Orans—is also found in the near-by Church of St. Demetrios (Sveti Dimitrije) in Prilep; this indicates that the Byzantines did not always understand the decorative program, wherein the Virgin Orans in the



Fig.15 Apse and Bema, Chalki (Naxos), Church of Hagios Georgios Diasorites

apse can represent the motif of the Ascension. On the contrary, the painter of the Church of Hagios Georgios Diasorites near Chalki on Naxos, understood the meaning of the decorative program at the metalevel; above the Virgin in the apse, the Ascension depicted on the bema vault does not portray the Virgin Orans [Fig.15].⁽⁴⁶⁾

In Cappadocia's Eski Baca Kilisesi, although the state of the fresco is poor and there remains room for debate on its date, considering it to have originated in the tenth century makes it relevant to the context at hand. In the slender apse's conch stands the Virgin Orans, and archangels attend to her from the left and the right; directly above the head of the Virgin, Christ *Pantocrator* is set in the medallion. The decorative program of an apse with the Virgin Orans and a dome depicting *Pantocrator* as a metalevel implication of the Ascension—derived most likely from the capital—appear to have been transferred to this church without a dome. To the left and right of the Virgin, short trees are depicted. In this clear motif of the Ascension, we can consider that the Cappadocian painter interpreted it to be a condensed version of the Ascension [Fig.12]. The frieze under the apse of the nearby Direkli Kilise also depicts the Virgin Orans.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Basically, the Byzantine churches do not depict the Ascension in the apse⁽⁴⁸⁾; in the periphery of the Empire, however, there are instances of depiction of the Ascension in the apse, such as S. Maria a Cerrate in Squinzano (South Italy, late twelfth century) [Fig.16]⁽⁴⁹⁾, a monastic chapel in David Gareja (Georgia, twelfth century) [Fig.17]⁽⁵⁰⁾, and the south chapel of Şahinefendi near Ürgüp (Cappadocia, early thirteenth century).⁽⁵¹⁾ The capital's sophisticated program for the metalevel representation of the Ascension, understood as a simple narrative in the peripheral regions, such as southern Italy, Georgia, and Cappadocia, seems to have given rise to these examples.

An aporia when considering the Virgin Orans of the Middle Byzantine apses is the problem of *Blachernitissa*.⁽⁵²⁾ First, so as to avoid confusion, I will temporally define the term. An independent depiction of the Virgin without the Infant is defined here as the Virgin Orans, and the Virgin Orans with a medallion of the infant Christ on her chest as

⁽⁴⁶⁾ M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Άγιος Γεώργιος ο Διασπορίτης της Νάξου. Οι τοιχογραφίες του 11ου αιώνα*, Athens 2016, 44-50, does not discuss the reason of the Virgin's absence in the Ascension.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Lafontaine-Dosogne (1972), fig.6; Jolivet-Lévy (1991), 323-27, pl.180.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ An exception is the frescoed apse of the Rotonda (St. Georgios) in Thessaloniki. Gioles (1981), 248-50.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ T. Pellegrino, *Santa Maria a Cerrate*, Lecce 2004; M. Falla Castelfranchi, "Sul programma 'monastico' dell'abbazia italogreca di S. Maria a Cerrate (Lecce), con particolare riferimento al ritratto di S. Davide di Tessalonica," *Nea Rhome* 16 (2019), 131-40.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ On David Gareja in general, see J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, et al., *Art and Architecture in Medieval Georgia*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1980, 89-91; T. Velmans, A. Alpago Novello, *Miroir de l'invisible. Peintures murales et architecture de la Géorgie*, Paris 1996, passim; *Davit Gareji: Multidisciplinary Study and Development Strategy (International Conference, Proceedings)*, Tbilisi 2020.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Jolivet-Lévy (1991), 206, pl.128-2. The restoration work has recently finished.

⁽⁵²⁾ C. Belting- Ihm, «*Sub matris tutela*», *Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte der Schutzmantelmadonna*, Heidelberg 1976, esp. 38ff.; C. Mango, "The Chalkoprateia Annunciation and the Pre-Eternal Logos," *DChAE* 4-17 (1993/94), 165-170.



Fig.16 Apse, Squinzano, S. Maria a Cerrate



Fig.17 Apse, Chapel in David Gareja (Georgia)

Blachernitissa.⁵³ Regardless of whether it is in *Orans*, a bust of the Virgin with the infant Christ on her chest, within or without the medallion, is named as *Platytera*. The Virgin Orans is inscribed as *Blachernitissa* in certain cases; moreover, on occasion, the Virgin Orans bust along with an infant Christ medallion is called *Platytera*, whereas a Virgin bust holding a medallion of the infant Christ is called *Nikopoia* to differentiate between the two. I have not used these naming conventions here.⁵⁴

I summarize the evident problems of what cannot be resolved from the surviving images and literature using two points. The first point concerns the relationship of the Virgin Orans and the *Blachernitissa*. Why does the supernatural Christ in the medallion appear to be “floating” over the Virgin’s chest? The second point focuses on, even if the *Platytera* was derived from the *Blachernitissa* omitting the lower half of the body due to space constraints, why there is a type in which the Virgin is posed in *orans* and another in which she holds the medallion of Christ?

⁵³ On the image of the Virgin Orans with the infant Christ, see B. Pitarakis, “À propos de l’image de la Vierge orante avec le Christ-Enfant (XIe-XIIIe siècles): l’émergence d’un culte,” *CahArch* 48 (2000), 45-58.

⁵⁴ For discrepancies between inscriptions and iconographic types, see for instance below: C. Angelidi and T. Papamastorakis, “Picturing the Spiritual Protector: from Blachernitissa to Hodegetria,” in: M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, 209-24.



Fig.18 North Apse, Chalki (Naxos), Church of Panagia Drosiani

As to the first question, the Virgin Orans and the *Blachernitissa* both adorned the Church of St. Mary of Blachernae in Constantinople as its primary subjects, and were often reproduced on lead seals⁽⁵⁵⁾ and coins. The ekphrases are ambiguous, however, and the context of a passage relating to their iconography (or their coexistence) is unclear. A. W. Carr describes this as follows: “the orante Virgin with the medallion of Christ on her breast was a latecomer to Byzantine imagery”.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Logically, or in terms of historical development, this must be the case. A version of the Virgin Orans without a medallion is unlikely to have occurred later than the version with the medallion floating over her breast. Unmistakably, the Virgin Orans came first, and then for reasons that remain unknown, the supernatural type, that is, the *Blachernitissa* came into being. However, deciphering the interim circumstances is not possible.

In recent years, a new seventh-century example of the *Platytera* has become known to the academic community. On the island of Naxos, on the outskirts of Chalki, Panagia Drosiani is a church with an irregular trefoil plan, wherein the *Platytera* is featured on its north apse [Fig.18].⁽⁵⁷⁾ The Virgin holds a medallion in her hand. If the matter of the Virgin’s behavior is overlooked, then the iconography of *Blachernitissa* seems to

have spread widely from before the Iconoclasm.

Whether the original medium of the *Blachernitissa* was a panel icon, a church mural, or feature of some other craft is unknown. This iconography can be established, however, in the context of a church mural; medallions or busts of Christ Immanuel are found, independent of the Virgin, around the apse’s conch in several churches. Such examples include the Mirozhsky Monastery in Pskov (Russia, mid-twelfth century)⁽⁵⁸⁾, Hagioi Anargyroi Church in Kastoria (late-twelfth century) [Fig.11]⁽⁵⁹⁾, and Monastery of Panagia Mavriotissa in Kastoria (early thirteenth century?).⁽⁶⁰⁾

The Church of Panagia Peribleptos in Ohrid (North Macedonia), a later monument, is of greater interest.⁽⁶¹⁾ In the apse stands the Virgin Orans, and a medallion of Christ Immanuel is depicted above the conch, over the head of the Virgin. The separate iconographies of the Virgin Orans and Immanuel medallion were combined at some point in time to convey the connotation of the Logos’ mystical incarnation as the *Blachernitissa*. In the narthex of the same

⁽⁵⁵⁾ On Marian iconography on lead seals, see J.A. Cotsonis, *The Religious Figural Imagery of Byzantine Lead Seals*, vol.1, London 2020.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ A.W. Carr, L.J. Morrocco, *A Byzantine Masterpiece Recovered, the Thirteenth-Century Murals of Lysi, Cyprus*, University of Texas 1991, 43.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ N. Drandakis, *Οι παλαιοχριστιανικές τοιχογραφίες στη Δροσιανή της Νάξου*, Athens 1988, pl.VII; N. Drandakis, M. Chatzidakis, “Παναγία η Δροσιανής,” in: M. Chatzidakis, et al., *Νάξος*, Athens 1989, 18ff.; N. Gioles, “Οι παλαιότερες τοιχογραφίες της Παναγίας της Δροσιανής στη Νάξο και η εποχή τους,” *DChAE* 4-20 (1998), 65-70. The church is also famous for having two *Pantocrators* in the dome; there is no interpretation other than that these represent the Dyophysitism of Christ.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ V. Sarabianov, *Transfiguration Cathedral of the Mirozh Monastery*, Moscow 2002; V.D. Sarabianov, “Живопись середины 1120-х—начала 1160-х годов,” in: Л.И. Лифшиц (ed.), *История Русского искусства, том 2/1: Искусство 20-60-х годов XII века*, Moscow 2012, 158-335, esp.225-61.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Pelekanidis-Chatzidakis (1984), 24, no.9; Malmquist (1979).

⁽⁶⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 68, no.11; G. Gounaris, *Η Παναγία Μαυριώτισσα της Καστοριάς*, Thessaloniki 1987.

⁽⁶¹⁾ e.g., R. Hamann-Mac Lean, H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien vom 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert*, Gießen 1963; P. Miljković-Peppek, *Deloto na zografite Mihailo i Eutihij*, Skopje 1967; M. Marković, “Iconographic Program of the Oldest Wall Paintings in the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Ohrid: A list of frescoes and notes on certain program particularities” (in Serbian), *Zograf* 35 (2011), 119-43.

church⁶², concealed amid the Virgin's bosom, Christ is depicted (Moses and the Burning Bush), and a desire to express the mystery of the incarnation can be recognized.

Incidentally, the example from Ohrid depicts the Ascension on the bema vault and the bust of Christ *Pantocrator* on the dome. The Ascension on the bema vault seems to have been an established practice during this period. One must wonder if the artists (Michael Astrapas and Eutykhios) did not understand that such an apse and dome would constitute a metalevel Ascension program within the church space. In this case, the Virgin Orans depicted in the apse can also be interpreted as looking to the Ascension on the bema vault; however, within the Ascension there is also a depiction of the Virgin.

The Savior (*Spas*) Church in Nereditsa near Novgorod should also be examined in this context.⁶³ The *Blachernitissa* is in the apse, but in the upper portion, not only the Immanuel but also the Ancient of Days is depicted; the usual *Pantocrator* is in the dome. An unusual *Deisis* centered on a representation of Christ as Priest⁶⁴ is arranged in the bottom section of the apse; so far, the meaning of this iconography is wholly unknown. However, a publication of the Church of Panagia Drosiani has revealed an example tracing back to an earlier period. In the example from Naxos, the *Platytera* is positioned in the north apse's conch, and the *Deisis* of Christ as Priest is located below it (including an unidentified female saint). We can thus infer that the *Blachernitissa* and *Platytera* (full-length or bust) bear the same meaning, and the *Blachernitissa* and *Deisis* of Christ as Priest together signified a meaning that is now lost to us.⁶⁵

In the Church of St. George Diasorites on Naxos, as cited above, the *Platytera* and the Ascension are depicted in the apse and on the bema vault. As the Ascension does not include the Virgin, the *Platytera* in the apse also serves the role of being the witness to the Ascension. In this case, although the Immanuel medallion on her chest seems unnecessary in terms of Ascension iconography, the combination is indicative of the union of the beginning and end of Christ's incarnated life, the *Platytera* and the Ascension, respectively. In the dome, the *Pantocrator* reigns, serving as a representation of the divine.

The earlier depiction of the Ascension represents suitable iconography for the dome; the Virgin, the two angels and the twelve apostles can be depicted equally balanced in the drum of the dome. As the head of Christ points west, the Virgin is set on the east axis of the drum; in other words, she is placed at Christ's feet. However, with the Ascension moved to the bema vault, it is no longer possible to place the Virgin on the central axis. Christ's aureole is placed spanning the full width of the vault, and the Virgin is now compelled to view the Ascension from either the northern or southern edge, implying that the composition's symmetry cannot be maintained. By considering the Virgin Orans in the apse as the motif of the Ascension, however, symmetry is once again established.

Having begun this journey on the island of Chios, we return, in conclusion, to another island: Cyprus. In examining the Church of Panagia Theotokos in Trikomo of Northern Cyprus⁶⁶, the apse shows the *Blachernitissa* unaccompanied by archangels, and the bema vault shows the Ascension [Fig.19]. As the south side of the vault is flaked, the presence of the Virgin cannot be detected in the Ascension. However, it is possible to infer from the presence of four apostles to the right of the angel, that two apostles and the Virgin had been depicted on the left. The

⁶² On the narthex images of Panagia Peribleptos, see R.B. Roussanova, *Painted Messages of Salvation: Monumental Programs of the Subsidiary Spaces of Late Byzantine Monastic Churches in Macedonia*, diss., University of Maryland 2005, 205-64; R. Schroeder, "Looking with Words and Images: staging monastic contemplation in a late Byzantine church," *Word & Image* 28:2 (2012), 117-134.

⁶³ J. Ebersolt, "Fresques byzantines de Néréditsi d'après les aquarelles de M. Brajlovskij," *Monuments et Mémoires* (Fondation Piot), 13(1906), 35-55; N.V. Pivovarova, *Фрески Церкви Спаса на Нередице в Новгороде*, Sankt Peterburg 2002.

⁶⁴ We can also deem the iconography as the Syrian or the eastern type of Christ, one of the earliest surviving examples being the illustrations of the Rabbula Gospels (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, cod. Plut. I, 56, 586 CE). K. Wessel, "Christus als Priester oder Bischof," *RBK*, vol.1, col.1027.

⁶⁵ Lidov argues that Christ as Priest is an iconography that made sense after the Great Schism of the Church. However, he does not consider the early Naxos example. A. Lidov, "Byzantine Church Decoration and the Great Schism of 1054," *Byzantion* 68 (1998), 381-405; id., "Образы Христа в храмовой декорации и Византийская Христология после схизмы 1054 г.," *Древне-русское искусство. ВИЗАНТИЯ И ДРЕВНЯЯ РУСЬ. К 100-летию Андрея Николаевича Грабара*, Sankt Peterburg 1999, 155-77.

⁶⁶ Carr-Morrocco (1991), 44ff.; Stylianou (1997), 486-91; A. Papageorgiou, *Christian Art in the Turkish-Occupied Part of Cyprus*, Nicosia 2010, 429-40.



Fig.19 Apse and Bema, Trikomo (Northern Cyprus), Church of Panagia

dome's *Pantocrator* places the *Hetoimasia* on the eastern side; by placing the Virgin and St. John the Baptist on either side, it acts as the *Deisis*. From the apse to the dome on the east—west axis through the church, the subject groups are sequenced as *Blachernitissa*—Ascension—*Hetoimasia* / *Deisis*—*Pantocrator*. The island of Naxos and several other islands feature the *Platytera* on their apses, unlike in Cyprus, where the *Blachernitissa* is frequently seen on a church's apse.

In the Late Byzantine period, the *Platytera* (many of them in *orans*) were perhaps the most popular form of apse iconography. However, the decorative program's use of the entire church space, as in Nea Moni, to form a metalevel Ascension, was no longer observed. Of course, the *Blachernitissa* or *Platytera* were not uniquely coupled to indicate the metalevel Ascension. While the elegant program seen in Nea Moni—and possibly, at the Virgin's Chapel of *Pharos*—was not to become the mainstream decorative program for Byzantine churches, its reverberations and derivations can still be felt in many churches.

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[Photo Credit]

Fig. 12: Hirofumi SUGAWARA (Kanazawa University)
Figs. 1-11, 13-19: Author