The wall-paintings of Saint Constantine at Missochori.
New evidence concerning middle Byzantine Nissyros, Greece*

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INTRODUCTION

The church of Saint Constantine¹ is located in a verdant slope in the region called Missochori, close to the settlement of Mandraki, capital of the island of Nissyros. In a close and uncertain date, not long after the initial construction of the church, a second one, smaller in dimensions was annexed, probably a chapel dedicated today to Saint Mamas. This has no separate entrance as she shares the same wall, namely the north, with the church of Saint Constantine thus communicating through a rectangular gateway with the first building. Both churches are single aisled and barrel vaulted apses built within the thick east wall.

The church of Saint Constantine still preserves the low-height screen while a continuous bench runs along the walls of the nave, being interrupted only by the entrance and the doorway of the chapel. The floor of the church is laid with uneven flagstones. The masonry incorporates numerous ancient and early Christian spolia, and a further number are stored inside the church (Fig. 1).

The painted decoration is limited to the conch of the apse. The frescoes of the apse were first mentioned in an earlier article discussing the painting of the twelfth century in the Dodecanese.² We strongly believe, though, that the church and its murals deserve further study in conjunction with the accompanying inscriptions.

The conch of the apse is decorated with the figure of the Virgin Enthroned, of the Hodegetria type, flanked by two archangels dressed in imperial costumes. Underneath the Virgin and between the two archangels spreads a frieze of tendrils with palmettes, while on the extrados of the apse few fragments from a red draped decorative band can still be seen (Fig. 3).

The head of the Christ-child, in the al secco technique, probably belongs to a separate, later painting phase. We believe that the poor quality of the plaster from the first phase led to its renovation, probably during the Byzantine period. The painting must have deteriorated due to fungal spread on the surface of the rather poor quality plaster, most probably developed because the apse of the church is half-buried on the outside, in combination with the high sulphur content in the atmosphere coming from the nearby volcano. All these factors may have resulted in the extensive destruction of the fresco in the hemicycle, so that today a few fragments only are visible. The space between the throne and the left archangel is occupied by a fragmentary inscription in capital letters, while another miniscule inscription is located in the undecorated surface under the conch and the tendril motif frieze.

From the depiction of the Virgin Hodegetria only a few faint fragments can be discerned today, in contrast to the better preserved head and left leg of the Christ and the

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² Katsiōtē, Archontopoulos, op. cit., 381–382.
two flanking archangels. The archangel on the right side of the Virgin is wearing an ankle-length orange-red divitision with sewn bands visible on the left upper arm, the hem decorated with a series of asymmetrical, square and arched panels (Fig. 4). The panelled loros draped around the torso over this is encrusted with pearls and the squares are filled with X-shaped patterns in alternating red and white. A combination of both is used for the epimanikon. On his feet the angel is wearing pointed red shoes also encrusted with pearls. In his right hand he holds and orb painted with a cross mounted on two steps accompanied by the acronyms Ι(ησούς) Χ(ριστός) Υ(ιος) Θ(εού) and in his left a scepter.

The second archangel, in a better state of preservation than the first, broadly shares the iconographic features mentioned above (Fig. 5). He also has an elongated figure; the long curly hair covering the ears is tied at the nape of the neck. The orb in his right hand shows only the cross, because the letters may have flaked off. His apparel preserves the scroll embroidery on the broad superhumeral which is edged round the neck with a double row of pearls, just like the other of his cuff. The design of his panelled loros varies slightly and its underside, showing on the right arm, is decorated with a scroll motif and edged with a pattern in pearls. A repeated S motif is prominent on the divitision.

THE ICONOGRAPHY

The depiction of the Virgin Hodegetria escorted by the archangels in the conch of the apse is a very popular subject during the middle Byzantine period; this is borne out from the mural decoration of the bema, where it prevailed throughout the Byzantine Empire and beyond its frontiers. Although few examples have survived from the mural decoration of that period in the Dodecanese, it is believed that this subject would have been one of the most favoured. Two rather contemporary examples must be mentioned here, the conch decoration in the chapel of the Virgin at Patmos, which has been dated between 1176 and the end of the twelfth century, and the decoration in the cave church of the Virgin at Evlos near Lindos, dated to the late twelfth – early thirteenth century. Henceforth, throughout the thirteenth century the main theme for the apse decoration was that of the Deesis, with few exceptions.

Fig. 1. Nissyros, Churches of Saints Constantine and Mamas. View from the southwest

The depiction of the archangels dressed in imperial apparel and the loros costume and holding the imperial insignia, namely the orb and the scepter-labarum, has a long tradition in art since the early Christian era. Their iconography, either imitating the imperial one, or influenced by the personifications of Rome – Constantinople or the Victories on the consular tablets, has already been the subject of a thorough study, along with the symbolic significance this tradition adopted during the Middle Byzantine period, particularly from the ninth century onward. In the Nissyros church the painter copies his prototypes and distorts them; the way the loros is draped round the torso and shoulders and the complete misunderstanding of the underside of the richly decorated loros on the hand holding the orb in the angel to the Virgin’s

Fig. 2. Nissyros, Saint Constantine. Inside view of the church

1 For the acronym v. Ch. Walter, The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint, Leiden 2006, 163, with references.
2 Ch. Ihm, Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts, Wiesbaden 1960.
3 This theme was popular throughout the Byzantine Empire; v., respectively, for Cappadocia, C. Jolivet-Lévy, Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’absidiole et de ses abords, Paris 1991, 14, 65–66, 92, 93, 116, 131, 201, 256, 287, 291, 301, 303, 332–333, and, for the Greek mainland, S. Pelekanidēs, Άγιοι Ανάργυροι Καστοριάς, in: S. Pelekanidēs, M. Chatzēdakēs, Καστοριά, Athens 1984, 30, fig. 7.
4 H. Kollias, Οι τοιχογραφίες, in: Οι Θησαυροί της Μονής Πάτμου, ed. A. A. Κουμίνης, Athens 1988, fig. 11, 12.
5 Katsionē, Archontopoulos, op. cit., 380, pl. 155a.
left prove this.\textsuperscript{11} In all probability the artist could have drawn from works of art like the Ms Coislin 79 (1071–1081),\textsuperscript{12} the painted decoration of Saint Anargyroi at Kastoria (c. 1180)\textsuperscript{13} or the Virgin’s chapel at Patmos,\textsuperscript{14} where the spread underside of the loros is decorated in a similar manner.

The plain tendril that decorates the frieze between the two archangels is one of the most commonly used ornamental patterns throughout the Middle Byzantine period, and persists in the centuries following in a number of variants.\textsuperscript{15}

INSCRIPTIONS

A. The inscription on the left side of the Virgin consists of nine lines written in white paint on the green and blue of the background (Fig. 6).

\begin{verbatim}
ΟΥ ου . ΑΥΤΟΥ NH . ΑΥΤΟΥ NH
.. ΤΙC ΔΙ ... της Δι
ABATHN αβατην
HC TE IC ης τε εις
ΕΩΙΔΟΥ εξοδου
ΤΟ ΔΗΜΙΡΟ τό δήμιορον
ΤΟΥ ΜΕΛΙΤΟ του Μελίτο
ΝΟC ΤΟ ΤΡΙΤΟΝ. νος το τρίτον
\end{verbatim}

The last lines of this dedicatory inscription refer, obviously, to the donation for the painting of the church. The bad state of preservation of the painting hinders any attempt for more elaborate conclusions. The text provides us with the information that the painting was realized with two-thirds (\textit{to dimoiron})\textsuperscript{16} of the cost covered by Diavatini Διαβατην, and the remaining third (\textit{to triton}) by Meliton. It is also possible that the two letters \textit{NH} should be referring to the artist’s name.

According to the text of the inscription two more churches are attested that existed in Nissyros before the foundation of Saint Constantine. The first is the Virgin Diavatini, which is easily identified with the monastery dedicated to the Virgin\textsuperscript{17} located near the peak of the mountain Diavatis, while the second one, that of Meliton is a so far an unidentified monastery or church.\textsuperscript{18}

The above inscription provides the only, so far, known testimony of a shared donation from two monasteries for the decoration or the founding of a chapel. Taking into account the inscription’s unique content, no comparison can be found to other known inscriptions, which mention separate individuals and the proportion of their material support to the founding or the decoration of a church.\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, we think that the inscription of Saint Constantine, besides the implication of dependence from the Diavatini and Meliton monasteries, may be an oblique reference to property ownership as, in other cases such as the Virgin Hodegetria at Mystras,\textsuperscript{11} It should be mentioned however, that this feature can be observed in the murals of high artistic merit in the Virgin at Patmos (cf. A. K. Orlandos, Η αρχιτεκτονική και η βυζαντινή τοιχογραφία της μονής του Θεολόγου Πάτμου, Athens 1970, pl. 26) and in the murals at Evkios (cf. Katsiotis, Archontopoulos, op. cit., pl. 155).
\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Parani, op. cit., 47, fig. 26.
\textsuperscript{13} Pelekanidēs, Άγιοι Ανάργυροι Καστοριάς, 30, fig. 7.
\textsuperscript{14} Orlandos, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{17} For the church v. N. Koumentos, Τα μοναστήρια της Νισύρου, Νισυριακά Χρονικά 17 (1975) 19; I. Volanakis, Συμβολή στην έρευνα των χριστιανικών μνημείων της Νισύρου, Νισυριακά 12 (1993) 319–321; idem, Βυζαντινές και μεταβυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Νισύρου, 105; Orsărēs, Οι ποιηταρισμένοι ναοί, 54–57.
\textsuperscript{18} V. further infra.
\textsuperscript{19} For the categories of inscriptions v. S. Kalopissi-Verti, Dedica-
the dependencies of the church bearing the inscription are mentioned instead. Also, we cannot exclude the possibility that this short text might copy part of an official document or a written act, as is known from later examples.

B. The undecorated surface of the plaster in the conch, on the north side and below the band with the tendril, bears another inscription in a cursive hand written with charcoal, in a single line (Fig. 7):

Καὶ τ(οῦ) τέκν(ου) αὐτ(ού) Ἰωάνν(ου) μ(η)ν(ὶ) Ὁκτ(οβρίω) ἐν ἔτ(ει) στωκζ (ἰ)νδ(ιτιώ)νος β.

This inscription is an invocation on behalf of a man, whose name isn’t mentioned, and his son Ioannes. The name of the month is accompanied by the anno mundi year 6827, corresponding to AD 1318/1319. At the end there is the abbreviation of the word indiction and close to it the number of the indiction year which is only partly legible. Given that the year 1318/1319 corresponds to the second year of the indication, we have restored the missing number with the letter β.

The scripture is rather delinquent. The scribe adds abbreviated words over or under in the fashion of contemporary manuscripts. Despite the fact that the text is incomplete (one would expect it to be the ending of an invocation), surviving evidence does not allow us to maintain that the previously empty space above once bore its beginning. The importance of this inscription is the reference to a date, 1318/1319, which permits the assignment of a more secure dating to the surviving fragments of the second painting layer.

STYLE

The fresco decoration of the first layer has been dated to the late twelfth century, but with little reference to its derivation and relationship with other works of the region. Its characteristics, such as the indifference to the modelling of the human body, the vivid colours, the flat drapery and the general absence of any sense of monumentality, make it clear that this is a provincial work dryly copying the late Comnenian style. The key monument of the region, the chapel of the Virgin at Patmos, is of course the prerequisite for the murals of St. Constantine. It appears that even in the higher quality monuments of the area, that is, those of the Virgin at Patmos or the Armenopoulos’ chapel at Agisandrou Street in the medieval town of Rhodes, the refined comnenian stylistic trends adopted from the aristocratic or upper classes were gradually transformed to an ambitious but provincial variant of their prototypes. The mediocre quality monuments, like the church of St. Constantine, are characterized by the adjustment of these main stylistic principles under the influence of a different approach. In the Nissyros example the rather fleshy faces of Patmos have been abandoned for a modelling reminiscent of a mask (Fig. 8). This linear and dry late Comnenian style that develops in a mannerist way during the last quarter of the twelfth century can be traced in other contemporary monuments that are unable to keep up with the artistic current. An almost unknown example is the murals of the late twelfth – early thirteenth century of Saint

20 See the inscriptions on the columns of the catholicon of the Virgin Varnakova at Naupaktia, where among other things, there is information about the metochia and landed property of the monastery: S. Kalopissi-Verti, Church Inscriptions as Documents. Chrysobulls – Ecclesiastical Acts – Inventories – Donations – Wills, Δελτίον ΧΑΕ 24 (2003) 84, with bibliography.

21 Ibid., 79–88.

22 V. the Venetus Marc. Gr. 398, of the year 1315: E. Mioni, Εισαγωγή στην Ελληνική παλαιογραφία, Athens 1979, pl. XXII.

23 Kollias, op. cit., fig. 11, 12.

24 Katsiadē, Archontopoulos, op. cit., pl. 152c.
Filonas at Agridia, Rizokarpaso Cyprus. The full length figures of the saints are characterized by an abstract and rather retardaire expression, while a green shadow is used to designate the voluminous contour of the faces. Similar angular contours, outlining elongated faces, are encountered in monuments of the late twelfth century, such as the mounted Saint George from the first layer in the Virgin at Axos Mylopotamou on Crete. Based on the above we assume that the end of the twelfth century, and more particularly the murals from the chapel of the Virgin at Patmos, should be used as a terminus ante quem for the dating of the murals of Saint Constantine at Missochori.

The few surviving frescoes from the twelfth century in the Dodecanese mostly consist of fragmentary and incomplete programs, and have been discussed only superficially with the exception of the Patmos monastery, the only extensively preserved iconographic program, which has been studied and published in detail. The Virgin fresco of St. Constantine, although loosely associated with these examples, cannot possibly bear any close comparison with them.

The oversize Christ from the second layer (Fig. 9) is depicted as a child rather than as a baby or toddler. His head is oval, with emphasized cheeks; in his ecstatic eyes the pupil is highlighted not only by its large size, but also by the shading of the eye cavity and the black colour of the well-drawn arched eyebrows. The slightly aquiline and broad nose has a rounded tip without a clear indication of the nostril, while the upper lip is thinner and more angular than the lower. At the base of the semidome, on the red partition strip of the decorative band, the left foot is still visible, clad in a dark sandal.

The dating of the Christ’s head could possibly be linked, as already mentioned, to the second inscription of 1318/1319 written with charcoal at the base of the conch. It is characterized by its bold, dark outline and the absence of highlights. The shading is handled in a painterly manner, with darker tones of the same colour. The intense contours recall murals dated to the late thirteenth century, such as those of St. Anne Kalliotissa at Vathy on Kalymnos. The prosopographical features of Christ, almost round-faced, have affinities with the fourth layer from the Armenopolos’s chapel in the medieval town of Rhodes, dated to the second decade of the fourteenth century. Further similarities with this obviously superior work are to be seen in the handling of the eyebrows and nose, which occurs, along with the shading of the lower lip, on the Christ child of the Virgin Hodegetria in St. George at Lambra, Asklipieio, on Rhodes (first half of the fourteenth century). As far as other technical or prosopographical details are concerned, such as the bold contours and the overall rendering of the nose, cheeks and lips, the

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND – THE CHURCHES OF DIAVATINI AND MELISSINI

Historical sources for the middle byzantine period on Nissyros are scarce. At the end of the tenth or at the beginning of the eleventh century demographic changes caused the establishment of a new diocese, which was an important landmark in the history of the island, given that from the eighth till the eleventh no other information is available. Abbot Daniel of Kiev, who visited Nissyros in 1106/1107, offered only little information, writing that the island was
fertile and well inhabited.36 Nevertheless, the aforementioned demographic changes that led to the establishment of the diocese must have occurred before the middle of the twelfth century, because the Arab geographer and traveler Edrisi simply describes Nisyros as just an inhabited, in contrast to other islands which he considers populous, or more populous.37 The discussion focusing on the middle-Byzantine monuments of Nisyros, such as the marble sanctuary screen of the catholicon of Spiliani monastery, dated to the end of the eleventh century,38 allows us to think that these monuments are evidence for building and artistic activity that must be related, directly or indirectly, with the establishment of the diocese.

Going back to the oldest inscription of Saint Constantine it is interesting to trace back the existence of the other two churches on Nissyros by the end of the twelfth century, which were responsible for the decoration of theen of the diocese. The monastery of Diavatini (Fig. 10),39 is mentioned in a later document of 1783, treasured in the monastery of Spiliani, and if this document of the archive of Panagia Spiliani of the year 1733. The church was renovated by a monk called Jonas; a renovation that, as Ours orēs assumes, included the murals of the monastery. This phase covered, to an uncertain extent, an older one probably Byzantine in date, which was recently discovered in an investigation in situ. As an aside, it should be mentioned that the name Diavatini could possibly be connected to the Diavatinoi family. For the family cf. J.-C. Cheynet, D. Theodoridis, Sceaux byzantins de la collection D. Theodoridis. Les sceaux patronymiques, Paris 2010, 82–83.

Unfortunately, little has survived of the Byzantine construction phase at Diavatini, besides the traces of the early mural layer. Of the church, part of a broader monastic construction phase at Diavatini, besides the traces of the early mural layer. Of the church, part of a broader monastic

also was the case with the monastery of Meliton, as indicated by the connections implied by the inscription. The church of St. Constantine was decorated, the monastery of Diavatini was already a metochion of Spiliani, and if this
the spot observations have led us to interesting conclusions. From a plethora of toponyms etymologically related to the name Meliton44 (i.e. τῆς Μέλισσας το λεγόμενο, Ἐλληνικὴ ἑτερογραφία, Μελίσσηνος) our interest was roused by the Melissini locale in the area of Emporion close to the cemetery. We believe that this toponym could be linked to the lands or the ecclesiastical building that probably belonged to the Meliton of the inscription.45 Thorough study revealed the existence of a church dedicated to Saint John Prodromos, part of a monastery in all probability, as presumed from the buildings surrounding the church (Fig. 11). This church, according to an inscription in the later built sanctuary screen, was radically reconstructed in 1936. However, an intact panel serving as an altar top provides a date for the first building phase of Saint John of Melissini in the middle byzantine period: its decoration, in the champlevé technique, includes an eight-leaf rosette in the central circle as expressed in the composite decoration that fills up all the available space, we believe that dates the slab to the second half of the eleventh century.46 This tendency towards horror vacui, as expressed in the composite decoration that fills up all the available space, we believe that dates the slab to the second half of the eleventh century. We believe that the church of St. John of Melissini, unknown to scholars, deserves further investigation, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

The artistic dependence of the mural of Saint Constantine to that of the Patmos monastery, a relation between prototype and copy, poses a tempting question referring to the actual relations between the two islands, although undocumented in the archival history of Patmos.47

Circumstantial as it may be, reference should be made to the case of the family of Konstantinos Kavallourios (11079) of unknown provenance and in charge of the imperial wardrobe (βυζαντινή), founder of the monastery of the Prodromos at Strovilos at Asia Minor48 and his sister Maria Kavallourina; according to the archives of Patmos the latter, before the year 1080, owned extensive rural properties in Kardamaina at Kos49 and the suburbs of Partheni and Temenia at Leros which, in 1089, were granted to Hosios Christodoulos, founder of the Patmos monastery. By the end of the nineteenth century, descendants of the Kavallourios family bearing the surname Kabalouris still kept part of their ancestral lands on Kos and there is evidence that they had developed close contacts on Nissyros, had settled and were active there.50

The church of Saint John of Melissini at Nisyros, whether the second donor church of the inscription or not, highlights the question of displacement in the islands of members of aristocratic families, like the Melissinoi. A member of this family, Ioannes Melissinos, judge of the veler (κρίτης τοῦ βόλου), a high-ranking official, witnessed a chrysobull of Isaac Angelus in 1186, now kept at Patmos.51 The dispersion of the descendants to the Aegean islands is corroborated by a document of 1453 from the archive of the Knights of Saint John in Malta, where is attested the name of a priest Costas Melissinos with his wife, who cultivated public lands at Kalymnos.52 The toponym Melissini53 still survives at Kos in the village of Zia at Asphendiou, where the church of the Virgin Kyparissiotissa with murals dated ca. 1200-1250.

The artistic dependence of the mural of Saint Constantine at Missoschori, a high-ranking official, witnessed a chrysobull of Isaac Angelus in 1186, now kept at Patmos.54


52 This is attested only later, v. Z. N. Tsirpanlēs, Νίκηφορος και Πάτμος (17ος – 18ος αι.), Πνευματική επικοινωνία και οικονομικές σχέσεις, Ναυπακτία 8 (1982) 7–11.


54 This is attested only later, v. Z. N. Tsirpanlēs, Νίκηφορος και Πάτμος (17ος – 18ος αι.), Πνευματική επικοινωνία και οικονομικές σχέσεις, Ναυπακτία 8 (1982) 7–11.


56 E. Mēlitsē, Μακάριος Αυτοκράτορς, Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα για τη Ρόδο και τις Νότιες Δωδεκανησιακές Νησίδες, Rodos 1995, 129, 754.


58 This is attested only later, v. Z. N. Tsirpanlēs, Νίκηφορος και Πάτμος (17ος – 18ος αι.), Πνευματική επικοινωνία και οικονομικές σχέσεις, Ναυπακτία 8 (1982) 7–11.

59 B. Chatzévstålesiou, Το χρονικό μιας οικογένειας, Athens 1977, 149, 165.

60 It is mentioned here that the church of Hyprapontes at Mandraki, Nissyros, has a portable icon of saint John Prodromos, dedicated by Nicholas Kabalouris in 1929.

61 The church of Saint John of Melissini at Nisyros, whether the second donor church of the inscription or not, highlights the question of displacement in the islands of members of aristocratic families, like the Melissinoi. A member of this family, Ioannes Melissinos, judge of the veler (κρίτης τοῦ βόλου), a high-ranking official, witnessed a chrysobull of Isaac Angelus in 1186, now kept at Patmos.

62 The church of Saint John of Melissini at Nisyros, whether the second donor church of the inscription or not, highlights the question of displacement in the islands of members of aristocratic families, like the Melissinoi. A member of this family, Ioannes Melissinos, judge of the veler (κρίτης τοῦ βόλου), a high-ranking official, witnessed a chrysobull of Isaac Angelus in 1186, now kept at Patmos.
1400 is located.35 Such scattered evidence does not provide answers to the questions of the relationship between the two islands, but projects the profound bonds and interactions that may have existed between families, potential donors during the Byzantine period.

The second inscription of 1318/1319 is placed in a disturbed period in the history of Nissyros, and the Dodecanese in general. The Knights of St. John of Jerusalem from 1306 gradually conquered nearly all the islands of the group. From the late thirteenth century till the first years of the fourteenth, Nissyros was neglected and became a nest for both Greek and ‘Saracen’ pirates.36 In 1306 the castle of Nissyros was unsuccessfully besieged by the Venetian Jacomo Barozzi,37 but was conquered by the Knights in 1314,38 while the last, but very significant testimony for the history of the island to the Knights of Saint John and the obsolescence of the second inscription on the verge of the surrender of the island to the Knights settled a Latin bishop there instead.39

The information drawn from the first inscription of St. Constantine enriches our knowledge of Middle Byzantine Nissyros. Scattered architectural members from the ninth till the eleventh century,40 the sculpted decoration of the Byzantine Nissyros. Scattered architectural members from the eleventh century,41 combined with the existence of three more Byzantine churches of the late twelfth century, St. Constantine, the Virgin Diavatini and the church of Meliton, mentioned above – add some valuable evidence for artistic and economic activity, donors and recipients on the island during a period where historical information is scarce. The written invocation of the second inscription on the verge of the surrender of the island to the Knights of Saint John and the obsolescence of the orthodox diocese of Nissyros constitute probably the last, but very significant testimony for the flock of the island, before it was deprived from orthodox ecclesiastical care for more than three centuries.

35 For the paintings v. A. Katsīdē, Παραγράφεις στη γλυπτική του 14ου–15ου αιώνα στα Δωδεκανήσια. O θρησκευτικός και οικονομικός χρόνος της Τείχους της Χάντζας, Αργυροβολία Λέσβου 54; mert. A (1999) 330. As V. Chatzivasileiou mentions, this Joannes Melissinos, exiled on Kos in 1079, along with his wife Eudokia built the church. Given that the church of the Virgin antedates the fresco, we have to suppose either that the church must have been built on the remnants of another church or, which is more plausible, that the church was built from another member of the same family who owned the land around 1400, thus being contemporary with the frescoes.


38 Tsirpanlēs, op. cit., p. 34.


40 T. E. Evangelides, Εκκλησία Ρόδου, Ενεργική, Επομένη, Βυζαντινά Σχολεία 6 (1929) 153, 165, n. 1; Tsirpanlēs, op. cit., p. 36, n. 2.

41 Katsīdē, Papavasileiou, Μεταβλητής γλυπτικής, 135–136.

42 Ibid.

Фреске Светог Константина у Мисохорију.
Нова сазнања о средњовизантијском Нисирошу

Ангелики Катсиоти, Николаос Мастохристос

Комплекс цркава Светог Константина и Светог Мамаита налази се у области Мисохорија, недалеко од Мандракија, највећег града на острову Нисирошу. Обе цркве засведене су полубличастим сводом и изграђене од притесаног камена. У њима је сачуван велики број античких и ранохришћанских архитектонских елемената.

У цркви Светог Константина, већој и старијој, постоје и фрагменти фресака. У конхом апсиде налази се представа Богородице на престолу, у пратњи двојице архангела у царском орнату. Испод Богородице протеже се фриз лозица с палметама, док се на тријумфалном луку још може видети неколико фрагмената црвене декоративне траке. Фреске се, према одликама стила, могу датовати у крај XII века. Глава детиња Христа у ал сецко техници припада засебној, вероватно позицији фази зидног сликарства. Простор између престола и арханђела приказаног слева заузима делимично сачуван натпис, исписан великим словима, док се други натпис, изведен малим словима, налази на неукараној површини испод конке и фриза с мотивом лозице.

Први натпис обавештава нас о томе да је две трећине трошкова живописања цркве сносно манастир Диаватини, а једну трећину манастир Мелигонос. Тај натпис представља једино досад познато сведочанство о заједничком ктitorству два манастира у вези са живописањем или изградњом једног параклиса.

Други натпис јесте молитва за спас неког човека чије име није наведено и његовог сина Јована. На крају натписа уз индикт је наведена и година 6827, што одговара 1318/1319. години после Христа, с којом треба посетити другу фазу осликавања цркве.

Нова сазнања о средњовизантијском Нисирошу стичу се захваљујући зидним сликама, али највише захваљујући натписима. Два поменута храма треба поистоветити с двема црквама које су у новије време темељно обновљене. То су цркове Богородице Диаватини, која налази близу врха планине Диаватис, и црква Светог Јована у области Мелисини, код села Емпорнос. Иако непотпуни, први натпис доноси важне податке о уметничким и економским приликама на острову, о којима се иначе врло мало зна. Молитва у другом натпису, насталом пред саму предају острова јовановцима и гашење православне епископије на Нисирошу, представља вероватно последњу али веома значајну сведочанство о верницима на том острову пре него што ће оно током више од три века бити ван јудиснације православних архијереја.