Comments on the artistic interchange between conquered Byzantium and Venice as well as on its political background

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оригинал научни рад

from conquered Constantinople to the Basilica of St. Mark. We can detect the painting style and Greek inscriptions of the icon in a series of works of Venetian workshops, especially in the works of the major fifteenth century workshop belonging to the Bellini family. At the same time, the symbolic importance of the Virgin of St. Mark for the historical fortune of the Doges’ city was demonstrated in May 1797, a whole six centuries after the icon was brought from Constantinople, when the Venetians appealed to her to save the city from Napoleon’s forces. For centuries, Europeans have drawn from the sources of culture in the same fashion, transplanting, mixing, and giving objects new life.

The new life a Renaissance artist from Venice undertook to give to a work of Orthodox art from the Palaiologan period is associated with the contribution of a Byzantine exile who deeply honored Venice and was deeply honored in return. In 1472, Gentile Bellini was commissioned to paint the door of a tabernacle, which housed a reliquary with two relics of the True Cross and two pieces of Christ’s robe. This reliquary was the famous staurotheke (fig. 1) Bessarion had given to the Venetian Scuola Grande dei Battuti della Carità, which held a prominent position in the political and religious life of Venice. In 1463, Bessarion had been elected a member of its confraternity and had marked the occasion by pledging a precious reliquary cross. The reliquary’s first round of adventures came to an end in the Albergo of the Santa Maria della Carità in 1472–1473 with Gentile Bellini’s

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corded it an enviable spot in the Accademia, the building of the Scuola della Carità, in the same location Bessarion had originally intended for it.

However, its first round of travels had resulted from the political and religious maneuvering between Constantinople, Rome, and Venice; these involved a series of people, all associated with Bessarion. The Irene Palaiologina referred to in the inscription of the cross remains unidentified, although various identifications have been proposed, linking the princess with the emperors, Michael VIII (r. 1259–1282), Michael IX (r. 1295–1320), John VIII (r. 1425–1448), and Constantine XI (r. 1449–1453). In any case, the stylistic features of the Crucifixion scenes ornamenting the reliquary date the original decoration of the piece to the Palaiologan period, and more specifically the second half of the fourteenth century. Another, less legible, inscription on the holy relic has been interpreted as ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΥ ΙΩΝΙΟΥ (of Gregory the confessor); this person has been identified as Gregory, the Uniate Patriarch of Constantinople from 1445 to 1455 (†1459). If this is a correct reading of the inscription, it is reasonable to assume that Gregory received the Cross from Irene Palaiologina before he became Patriarch (summer 1445), an office that otherwise should have been mentioned in the inscription. The precious Cross probably came into Bessarion’s keeping in the mid-fifteenth century, while he was with the Patriarch in Rome tendent to the Byzantine exiles and negotiating with the Western powers over the fate of the Orthodox peoples. The popes of Rome, especially the learned humanist Enea Silvio de’ Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, from 1450, played an important role in the efforts of Gregory and Bessarion. As regards Pope Pius II, we should not forget that the central idea of his pontificate was the liberation of Europe from Turkish domination; although seriously ill, he placed himself at the head of a crusade, which never actually occurred, and left Rome for the East. He died on August 14, 1464, waiting in vain for Doge Christoforo Moro of Venice in Ancona (fig. 3).

It was one year earlier in August 1463, in Venice, that Bessarion had been elected a member of the Scuola della Carità during negotiations with that same doge over the crusade. As previously mentioned, he then promised to donate the reliquary, an object whose importance might have equaled that of his library, which he also donated five years later to Venice, a city where [the Greeks] feel they are entering another Byzantium. In approaching the Scuola della

The Staurotheka’s second round of adventures began with the dissolution of the confraternity in the eighteenth century, when it passed into private hands and, in 1821, it became the property of Emperor Francis I of Austria. In 1949, after World War I, it was returned to Venice. There, Italian sensibility, as well as, perhaps, historical conjunctions ac-

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5 L’art byzantin, art européen (catalogue), Athènes 1964, n. 184; M. Chatzidakis, Îcônes de Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la collection de l’Institut, Venise 1962, XXXVII, XLIX (n. 3); idem, Enixies της Ιησούς Υἱότητος τῆς Βυζαντίου χριστιανικής και βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής, Athènes 1995, n. 6; Bessarione e l’umanesimo, n. 112; Byzantium. Faith and power, n. 325.


G. B. Schioppalalba, In perantiquam sacram tabulam Greacam insigni Sodalitio Sanctae Marie Caritis Venetiarum ab Amplissimo Cardinali Bessarione dono datam dissertatio, Venezia 1767, 123.
Carità, Bessarion combined his immediate aspirations with a long-term strategy. This political and religious action is also associated with two important figures: Ulisse Aliotti, Guardian Grande of the Scuola, official notary, dogal secretary, and count palatine, who signed the act of donation of Bessarion’s reliquary,\(^{10}\) as well as Andrea della Sega, Guardian Grande of the Carità. The latter wrote to Bessarion in May 1472, describing the rapturous welcome Venice had given the Cross, the great celebration in the presence of the Doge that took place in the Grand Canal, the heart of the transportation system of the Mediterranean, and the temporary installation of the Cross on the High Altar of St. Mark’s.\(^ {11}\) The mobilization of all these personages had one basic objective: to create an alliance of the Christian powers against Ottoman expansion. In this alliance, the defeated Byzantines saw hope for salvation through another crusade, the Papal Church perceived another path to imposing its authority over Europe, while the Serenissima had a special interest in curbing the Ottoman’s increasing power in the Mediterranean.

Thus, Bessarion’s reliquary became both the symbol of a crusade and a priceless gift to Venice, to a society that accorded a fundamental importance to sacred relics, especially relics of the Holy True Cross. This is evidenced by the fact that, even before Bessarion’s donation, the city of Venice had at least six pieces;\(^ {12}\) one of these was in the possession of the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista, another confraternity that played a very important role in Venetian life. This Scuola was renowned for possessing the miracle-working fragment of wood from the True Cross, which had been donated in 1369 by Philippe de Mézières, Chancellor of Cyprus and Jerusalem. Leading Venetian painters were

\[^{10}\text{Schioppalalba, op. cit., 132; Bessarione e l’umanesimo, 369, 378.}\]

\[^{11}\text{Schioppalalba, op. cit., 142–145.}\]

\[^{12}\text{A. Frolow, La relique de la Vraie Croix: recherches sur le développement d’un culte, Paris 1961, 155–158.}\]
commissioned to portray the miracles performed by this holy relic, among them Giovanni Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio; later on, the Vendramin family, who had experienced a miracle, commissioned Titian to depict the Reliquary of the True Cross yet again.13

Painting was an art that played a very significant role in the culture of Renaissance Venice, and therefore in 1472, the same year the great celebration was organized to welcome Bessarion’s Staurotheke, the Scuola della Carità commissioned Gentile Bellini to paint the Byzantine exile’s portrait14 as well as the door of the tabernacle where the holy relic was housed. Ulisse Aliotti was most probably involved in choosing the painter, since one of his poems praised Jacopo Bellini, Gentile’s father as a new Apelles and Pheidias.15 In any case, the Bellini family had already begun working in 1460 on the monastery church of the Carità.16 The choices Gentile Bellini made to execute the work constituted an essential renewal. The comments by M. Chatzidakis on the Palaiologan art of a Patmos icon seem to be valid about Bellini’s artwork as well: these works are addressed to an educated public, which was in a position to appreciate, if not to demand, this refined and tender lyricism.17 In his reproductions of the seven small scenes from the Crucifixion, which he developed slightly in width, he faithfully reproduced the Greek inscriptions and the movements of the sacred personages. However, while executing the paintings, he distanced himself from the details and from the domination of red so prevalent in the Palaiologan work, giving priority to ochre and complementary black shades. This key decision creates an atmosphere of modesty and respect, which also dominates the lower part of the Renaissance work with the kneeling figures of the dedicators-patrons. The figure of Bessarion wears a black monk’s habit; his face and imploring hand stand out. His presence is juxtaposed with the beseeching figures of the Confraternity members, clad in white robes bearing the Carità’s pink and black badge. The painting,

14 The painting is lost.
15 L. Testi, La storia della pittura veneziana II, Bergamo 1909, 159.
17 Chatzédaïkis, Εικόνες της Πάτμου, 54.
April 11, 1462, after the reception of the holy relic near the Tiber’s Milvian Bridge. On Palaiologos. Once again, Bessarion was the mediator and he Despot of the conquered Moreas and brother to Konstantinos are referring to the arrival in Rome from the city of Patras of the Greek language for the accompanying inscriptions. We Christian crusade against the Ottomans. It’s artistic depiction, sance Rome that was also associated with the vision of a tine culture. In the same way, Venice ultimately assimilated Byzant- knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- In the same way, Venice ultimately assimilated Byzantine culture.

During the same period, an event occurred in Renaiss- as faithful to its prototype as is necessary and departing from it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- in the Church of St. Peter in the Vatican, Pope Pius II depos- as faithful to its prototype as is necessary and departing from it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- as faithful to its prototype as is necessary and departing from it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- as faithful to its prototype as is necessary and departing from it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres- as faithful to its prototype as is necessary and departing from it as needed, constitutes a definite renovation by a painter who knew, respected, and valued a different type of artistic expres-

The following year, the Pope erected a monument by the Milvian Bridge, on the site of the initial ceremonies: the Tempietto di Sant’Andrea a Ponte Milvio. Paolo Taccone was probably the sculptor commissioned by the Pope to create the Renaissance statue of Apostle Andrew, which was accompanied by a large marble latin inscription (fig. 4). The central relief of the tomb of Pius II in the church of Sant’Andrea della Valle in Rome portrays Bessarion’s delivery of the Skull of St. Andrew to the Pope in the same purely Renaissance style; the work was created under the artistic direction of Paolo Taccone (fig. 5). Renaissance Rome had its own ways of depicting political and religious affairs through art, which differed from those of Venice.

And interestingly in the following century, it was to Rome, the Holy See, that Orthodox churches sent requests for convergence. I am referring to the help sought from the West by the leadership of the Ohrid Archbishopric because of the problems brought about by the Ottoman conquest. During the first half of the sixteenth century, the Ohrid Archbishopric was dominated by the energetic and ambitious personality of Archbishop Prohoros (c.1525–1550), who was very active on the religious, political, and cultural fronts. We know that in April 1548, after ordaining Bishop Pahnotious, Prohoros sent him to minister to the faithful of his Archbishopric who had settled in Southern Italy, while in the same year, the Archbishop corresponded with Pope Paul III. The pursuit of friendly relations with the Papal West on the part of the Orthodox and steadfastly Greek-speaking environment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid under Prohoros was a political stance that the Archbishopric maintained for two centuries. The right of the Orthodox faithful to retain their ceremonial mores and customs, along with, however, the obligation to cite the name of the Pope and to add the Filioque to the Creed, consistently characterized this stance. The culmination of the Archbishopric’s pro-Western movements was a letter the Ohrid Archbishop and the bishops of Velesa, Velegrada, and Kastoria sent to Don Juan of Spain on June 1, 1576 requesting him to liberate their flocks.

As early as the fifteenth century, these pro-Western and pro-unionist movements in the Orthodox environment expressed themselves by creating new iconographic themes. In the Orthodox iconography of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the symbol of this unionist policy was the depiction of the Apostles Peter and Paul embracing or holding a replica of the Duomo of Florence.

**Fig. 6. Embrace of Peter and Paul. Kastoria, Church of the Holy Apostles, detail**

**Fig. 7. Embrace of Peter and Paul. Kastoria, Church of Saint George Mouzeviki, detail**
In Kastoria, the protothroni of Ohrid,\textsuperscript{26} in 1547, during Prohoros’ archbishopric, there were two such representations, in a church dedicated, not by chance, to the Holy Apostles:\textsuperscript{27} these are a representation of the Embrace in the exterior niche of the church above the central door and a representation of Peter and Paul holding the replica of a church,\textsuperscript{28} most likely the creation of the fifteenth century Cretan painter Angelos, with a distinctly unionist message, is located also in another Kastoria church, dating to the second half of the sixteenth century. The Embrace on the northern wall of the church of St. George in the Mouzeviki parish, one of the church’s few well-preserved representations (fig. 7), may be an indication of the existence of a broader unionist climate in the city during that period. In any case, in 1547, the wall paintings of the church of the Holy Apostles in Kas-

\textsuperscript{26} For the artistic activity in Ohrid v. G. Subotić, Sveti Konstantin i Jelena u Ohridu, Beograd 1971; C. Greganov, Ohridsko zidno slikarstvo XV. veka, Beograd 1980; G. Subotić, Ohridska slikarska škola XV. veka, Beograd 1980.


the same time, the painter’s high education, evident in the dedicatory and ktetoric inscriptions of his works, is most likely associated with the existence of an important educational institution, the Ohrid Museum, a clerical school where instruction in the Greek language, theology, and literature was of paramount importance. He was evidently a painter with an extensive knowledge of Palaiologan art and who was enriched through his experience of Western painting, which he encountered and assimilated in Venice. Onoufrios was also in a position to transmit pro-Western ideas and tendencies to the Orthodox churches within the pro-unionist environment of the seventeenth century Ohrid Archdiocese.

Two representations of the Holy Trinity, also by Onoufrios, in the churches of St. Nicholas in Shelcan near Elbasan (Albania) and of the Holy Apostles in Kastoria support this hypothesis. These portrayals of the triadic Deity, frequently charged with ideological messages, acquire particular importance if they are associated with the spiritual, religious, and political climate of the time in the Ohrid Archdiocese. The first representation, in the church of St. Nicholas in Shelcan, with the inscription ἉΓΙΑ ΜΕΤΑΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗ ΆΓΙΟΝ ΟΡΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΦΑΤΕΡΟΥ ΟΗΡΟΥ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ ΛΑΣΤΟΥΣ ΠΑΛΑΙΟΣ ΤΟΥΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ ΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟ(font missing). A large inscription on the lower part of the wall painting refers to observing the Laws to ensure Future Salvation. The absence of the Holy Spirit from the representation leads us to think it was a deliberate omission that aimed to accentuate the presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit’s procession from Him. Similarly, in earlier representations of the Hetoimasia of the Throne, the omission of the Gospel aimed to strengthen the Orthodox doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone. This theory is reinforced by Christ’s accentuated role in the composition, both iconographically as well as through the inscriptions. It appears that the correct choice of artist was made when donors selected the eclectic painter and learned priest, Onoufrios, who had apprenticed in Venice, to portray in a representation with theological implications the unionist climate of the Archbishopric in the time of Archbishop Prohoros. His art was widespread and his son Nikolaos and his Cypriot partner Onoufrios continued his work throughout the Archbishopric of Ohrid, in Verati, Kastoria, Valsh, Zrze, Kicevo, and the monastery of St. Naum.

Once again Venice appears as a center influencing and forming Orthodox painters in a way that simultaneously demonstrates its own affinities with the civilization of Byzantium. These eclectic affinities are evident in the example of Gentile Bellini’s renovatio of Bessarion’s reliquary. Both bust within concentric circles, with the features of Christ and the long white hair of the Ancient of Days. The portrayal of the Father and the Son as one figure that blesses is accompanied by the inscriptions Ο ΣΩΝ, ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ and Ο ΠΑΛΑΙΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ, while a text regarding Christ Pantocrator is recorded on the elliton. A large inscription on the lower part of the wall painting refers to observing the Laws to ensure Future Salvation. The absence of the Holy Spirit from the representation leads us to think it was a deliberate omission that aimed to accentuate the presence of the Son and the Holy Spirit’s procession from Him. Similarly, in earlier representations of the Hetoimasia of the Throne, the omission of the Gospel aimed to strengthen the Orthodox doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father alone. This theory is reinforced by Christ’s accentuated role in the composition, both iconographically as well as through the inscriptions. It appears that the correct choice of artist was made when donors selected the eclectic painter and learned priest, Onoufrios, who had apprenticed in Venice, to portray in a representation with theological implications the unionist climate of the Archbishopric in the time of Archbishop Prohoros. His art was widespread and his son Nikolaos and his Cypriot partner Onoufrios continued his work throughout the Archbishopric of Ohrid, in Verati, Kastoria, Valsh, Zrze, Kicevo, and the monastery of St. Naum.

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in this case and in the case of the Orthodox painter Onoufrios, the tracing of the political and religious choices of the environment of the people commissioning and sponsoring specific painters adds a parameter to any attempt to interpret their artistic choices. Historical conjunctions, political choices, and religious orientations preserved the old and dictated a new artistic interchange between Orthodox and Western painting in the crucial period from the Fall of Constantinople to the Battle of Lepanto, when for the first time, the Christian West rallied to face the Muslim threat.
Zapajaњa o umjetничкоj razmjeni izmeђu osvojene Vizantiјe i Venecije i њenoj političkoj pозадini

Евгенија Дракопулу

Током XV и XVI века, у периоду клањања за Европу и хрпљање, политичке одлуке и историјске опсевности довеле су до приближавања историчке и западне цркве. Млетачка република, привучена надмоћношћу византијске културе, тежила је испуњењу својих интереса, док су угледни изгледи Грци из Византије очекивали помоћ Венеције у борби против Османлија. Захваљујући прливи уметничких дела са православног Истока, ренесансни сликар венеција XV века могли су да се упознају са уметничкошћу Цариграда и да тако остваре нова достигнућа.

Вртитељи Белински познаје 1472 г. да сликаху украси врата табернакла у којем је чунак реликвијар са две реликвије Частог крста и две честиче Христовог ортарца. Тај реликвијар у ствари је чунава ставротека коју је кардинал Висарон подаро млетачком братству Скуола Grande dei Battuti della Carità, веома значајној институцији у политичком и религиозном животу града. Било је то 1463. године, када је Висарон изабран за члану поменутог братства. Стилске одлике сце стварају Христовог Креста, тачније да су настале у другој половини XIV века. У Григорију Исподвенику (ГРИГОРИЈУ ПЈЕУМАТИКЈУ) поменутом у натпису на реликвијару препознаје се Григорије, унијатски патријарх Цариграда (1445–1455). Драгоцен ставротека доспела је у Висарионово власништво средином XV века, када је у Риму боравио са патријархом Григоријем због преговора с папом Пијем II и западним владарима о судбини православних народа. Основни разлог тог политичких и религијских мотивисаног чина био је стварање савеза хрпљања снага ради борбе против османлијског шириње. У њој алјанси поражени Грци видели су на-

Dragopolou E.: Comments on the artistic interchange between conquered Byzantium and Venice

Schorrpalbša G. B., In perumtum sacrum tabulum Gregorcum insigni So-
dalitio Sanctae Mariæ Caritatis Venetiarum ab Amplissimo Cardinali
Bessarione dono datat dissertario, Venetia 1767.
Sisios I., Εκθέσεις του Ονομασίαν τύχα και ζωγραφίας στην Κατοχή, Νικ και Byzantium VIII (Νικ 2010) 335–354 [Sisios I., Ekstesen tou Onomasiou tachuy kai zografhun stin Katoxia, Nis och Byzantium VIII (Nis 2010) 335–354].
Stavropoulou A., Une version de la Traditio Legis sur une icône italo-
crétoise, in: Brescianopapa: Εσπερινική ο Συλλογή (Βεζητα, 7–14 Αυγούστου 2007), ed. Ch. Maltezou, A. Tzavara, D. Vlassi, Vene-
zia 2009, 725–739 [Stavropoulou A., Une version de la Traditio Le-
gis sur une icône italo-crétoise, in: Venetokratousmenos Hellenismos: Anthiropoi, khóres, idees (13th – 18th ct.), Praktika Diethnous Episthē-
monikou Synedriou (Venetia, 3 – 7 Dekemvriou 2007), ed. Ch. Malte-
Славни свет у оквиру проузнетских струјања у Охридској археографској у XVI веку.

Измете тврдње добро поткрепљују два примера представе Свете Тројице. Њих је такође извео зограф Онафрије, једну у цркви Светог Николе у Шелкана код Елбасана (1554), а другу у Светим апостолима у Касторо- рији (1547). У цркви Светог Николе насликана је представа Тројичног Бога са три главе (АПА ОРЈА) од којих се шире светлосни зраци. Онафрије је исто иконографско решење применио нешто раније, око 1535, у цркви манастира Зрза код Прилепа. Сасвим ретка у православном сликарству, та представа била је рашиrena на средњовековном Западу током XV и XVI века. Нагласак на Христовом лику на представи Свете Тројице у Шелкану указује на римокатоличко учење о исходињу Светог Духа „и од Сина” (Filhosue). Представа из костурских Светих апостола откривена је приликом недавних конзерваторских радова на западном зиду наоса, изнад узла. То је антропоморфна представа Свете Тројице. Средињи део композиције заузима Старач дана у кружном меда- лону уписаном у квадрат, који се уздже у двоструком слави. Слику која приказује две личности Свете Троји- це – Божа Оца и Сина – прати натпис Ο有可能, ΗΘΟΥΧ Χ(PEΠΟΣ) и ΠΑΛΑΙΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ. То што Свети Дух није приказан наводи на помисао да је у питању поступак смиршени ради истицања Сина и исхођења Светог Духа од њега.

У историјском, политичком и црквеним околностима раздобља омекшег падом Цариграда (1453) и битком код Лепанта (1571) као кључним догађајима остварена је појачана размена на пољу православне и за- падноевропске уметности. При томе је Венеција имала важну улогу уметничког средишта у којем су се образо- вали граци сликари.