Abstract: This article examines Byzantine wall paintings dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth century depicting a rare iconographic theme of Jesus’s childhood inspired by the Infancy Gospels. The iconography shows the Virgin Mary leading the child Jesus by the hand. The child is depicted holding different objects, such as a writing tablet, an unfurled scroll, or a wicker basket filled with flowers or fruits. Several of the scenes under examination have been hitherto misidentified or altogether unknown. In addition to this, the article interprets these representations in a broader iconographic context and addresses the possible origin of the theme.

Keywords: Child Christ, Virgin Mary, Infancy Gospels, Byzantine Art, Western Medieval Art, Schooling, St. John the Baptist, Crete, Greece, writing tablets, wicker basket, thirteenth and fourteenth century

Images of the Virgin Mary leading child Jesus by the hand, accompanied by different objects such as a writing tablet, book, staff, wicker basket filled with flowers or fruits were widespread in Western Medieval Art. Images of this kind start to appear at the beginning of the thirteenth century. They are found in a variety of media, from frescoes and stained glass windows to illuminated manuscripts, embroideries, and seals in Germany and Switzerland, with several examples also found in France, Italy, England and Scandinavia. Scholars have relied on the objects carried by the child (and sometimes by the Virgin, too) to identify or name the scene in question (Schooling, Flight to Egypt, and so on). The best known examples are associated with the accounts of the Schooling of Christ from the apocryphal Infancy Gospels. In these images the child is represented carrying in one hand a writing tablet inscribed with the alphabet and occasionally a pen, while holding his mother with the other hand. The images where the child Jesus holds a wicker basket are named Flight to Egypt or Return to Nazareth.  

However, only a few representations of this kind are known in Byzantine Art. The most famous one is a stone slab (82 × 56 cm) from the monastery at Episcopi near Volos in Greece, today in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, on which the Virgin Mary holds the child Christ by his left hand while it appears that he has a tablet in his hand in the act of writing.

* A version of this paper was presented at the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, 22–27 August 2011, Sofia (L. Fundič, Two Scenes of Christ’s Childhood in Byzantine Art, in: Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Sofia, 22–27 August 2011, III. Abstracts of Free Communications, Sofia 2011, 313–314). This publication is a result of my participation in the project Byzantine Monumental Paintings in Eastern Crete (Greece), which has been conducted under the aegis of the Metropolis of HieraPytna and Sitea and led by Prof. Georgios Foustieris since 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Georgios Foustieris and Archimandrite Cyrilios Diamantakis, who included me in the project. During our field research, we identified a large number of unpublished or poorly studied fresco decorations in more than sixty monuments. This material will be published in a separate monograph. In this article I shall partly present unknown mural painting from two churches: St. Antony at Koutsouras and St. Marina at Meseleroi. It should be mentioned that, following my presentation at the Sofia Congress, Brigitte Pitarakis published the article Les images d’écoliers dans l’art byzantin et post-byzantin [CA 54 (2011/2012) 83–98], in which she discusses the relevant fresco from Koutsouras. I want also to thank the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, for providing me with the photo from Manuscript hs78 D I, fol. 9r (Fig. 2) and Georgios Foustieris for the drawings which I have included in this article. I also owe much to Nikoletta Pyrrou for her assistance and Bronwen Neil for her help with the language. Finally, I wish to thank Andrea Babuin and the two anonymous readers, whose comments and suggestions have helped me clarify several points in the text.

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right hand. They are walking towards a male figure that is sitting in the right corner of the icon. Scholars have identified this representation in different ways but generally they named this scene as Jesus' schooling, on the basis of other known examples from the West. The image is dated to the end of the thirteenth century.

The second Byzantine example of the Virgin walking with the child Jesus is a mid-thirteenth century fresco from the Cripta della Candelora a Massafra in Apulia (Fig. 1). The Virgin Mary walking with the child Christ who in his right hand holds a wicker basket, probably with fruits or eggs, is represented on the depiction located in the arcosolium. The fresco from Apulia has many parallels in Western art (Fig. 2) that are sometimes related to the theme of the Flight into Egypt or Return to Nazareth or to the Christ's schooling, where Christ the child, apart from a basket, holds a writing tablet, as well. As for its parallels in Byzantine art, the representation from the Cripta Candelora resembles the scene of Christ's schooling from the church St. Nicholas in Kyriakoselia in the prefecture of Chania, in west Crete. In this scene the Virgin Mary is leading Christ the child, who in his left hand has a wicker basket and in the right a fruled scroll (Fig. 3). This motif is encountered in the scenes of


5 Castelfranchi, Pittura monumentale bizantina, 201–210, fig. 182.

6 This event is briefly described in the Gospel of Matthew (2, 13–23). However, in the Apocryphal Infancy Gospels mentioned above the description of this event is enriched by different stories about miracles which the child Christ had been performing during the flight. The examples of this representation are preserved in the Western Art. Cf. n. 1 above. In the Byzantine representations of the Flight into Egypt, Jesus child is never depicted as walking but is always either in Virgin’s arms or is carried on the shoulders of Joseph. In some cases the wicker basket appears on these scenes in Joseph’s hand, as for instance on the example from Dečani monastery. Cf. B. Todić, M. Čanak-Medić, Manastir Dečani, Beograd 2005, 367.

7 In the Vetringa manuscript, which is kept in the Kantonsbibliothek in Aarau, Ms. Wett. Fol I (Ms. 7), fol. 260 dated to 1280, the Virgin holds the child Jesus who has a basket in his right hand and a tablet in the left. Cf. Wentzel, Des Jesukind an der Hand Mariæ, 258, abb. 8.

8 For more on this scene cf. infra.
St. Nicholas going to school from his pictorial life in which either Nicholas or his mother carries a wicker basket and a wax tablet. Presumably Nicholas's basket contains food for his own lunch or for his poorer schoolmates. Since the fresco from the Cripta Candelora in Apulia does not depict a tablet with the alphabet in Christ's hand but only a wicker basket, this fresco could also be related to another representation known as Jesus the nurturer (Ἰησοῦς ὁ τροφεύς), as M. F. Castelfranchi has proposed. A characteristic example of this theme is the representation of the Christ child in the Virgin's arms holding a wicker basket, preserved in Bogorodica Ljeviška monastery (Fig. 5). The main difference between the two frescoes is that on the example from Bogorodica Ljeviška the Virgin and the child are not walking together; rather the child is in her arms. However, this does not necessary change the meaning of the scene.

The scene from Apulia is the most similar to the representation of St. Dorothy and the infant Christ bearing a basket of roses and apples. St. Dorothy is a Christian martyr condemned to death in 303 because of her Christian faith during the persecution of Christians by Diocletian. The child Jesus, holding a basket filled with roses and apples, appeared to St. Dorothy as she was being taken to her martyrdom. The inspiration is taken from the Golden Legend (Legenda Aurea) written by Jacopo da Varagine, a Dominican friar who became archbishop of Genoa in 1292.

Examples of a rare iconographic theme from Christ's childhood inspired by the Infancy Gospels are preserved among the wall paintings from three churches located on...

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9 Cf. the description of St. Neophytos as a schoolchild giving away his lunch to his poorer schoolmates, Th. Ioannou, Μνημεία Ἀγιολογικά, Venice 1884 (reprinted Leipzig 1973) 242. However, in some examples from Byzantine art, St. Nicholas or his mother holds both a writing tablet and a wicker basket. These examples, with the two mentioned attributes in the scene of Saint Nicolas going to school, are encountered in the churches of St. George in the village of Staro Nagoričino (cf. N. P. Ševčenko, The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art, Torino 1983, 72) and in Bogorodica Ljeviška (cf. D. Panić, G. Babić, Bogorodica Ljeviška, Beograd 1975, fig. XXXVI).

10 The word ‘trofeus’, which means someone who rears, nurtures, or provides food for the poor, is one of the old Christ's epithets, which has been used in both liturgical texts (troparion of the third Ode of the second canon on the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary) and patristic literature, cf. John Chrysostom. In Math. 79.2 (PG 57, 761A). For more about these representations, v. N. Davidović, Predstava Bogorodice sa Hristom „Krniteljem”, in: Starine Kosova i Metohije 1 (1961) 85–94.

11 Castelfranchi, op. cit., 204, 205, fig. 185.

12 Davidović, op. cit.; Panić, Babić, op. cit., 96, fig. XXXVI.

13 On her way to execution she was mocked by a lawyer who asked her to send him flowers and fruits from the heaven. In that moment the child Christ appeared with a basket with flowers and fruits. The wicker basket filled with both became her attribute in art representations. One of the famous representations of St. Dorothy and the infant Christ is the painting by Francesco di Giorgio in London National Gallery. C. L. Syson et al., Renaissance Siena. Art for a City, London 2007, 168.

the island of Crete. The first one is the church of St. Nicholas in Kyriakoselia, which is one of the most important churches on the island, dated to between 1230 and 1236.15

The third zone of the north wall of the transept depicts the Virgin Mary walking with the child Christ at her left side (Figs. 3 and 4).16 The child has a closed scroll in his right hand and a wicker basket in his left.17 They approach an old man on the left corner. The fresco has been identified as Jesus’ schooling, although the child does not hold a wax tablet, as it is common for this kind of representations preserved in Western Europe. A very similar depiction to Kyriakoselia’s is the representation of the finding of the child Jesus after his teaching in the temple (Luke 2, 48–49) from the church of the Virgin Peribleptos in Ochrid (Fig. 6).18

Joseph and Mary visited the temple of Jerusalem every year at the Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old he went with his parents to Jerusalem and stayed there for some days after they left, discussing with Jewish teachers different topics from the Scriptures. The fresco depicts the moment when the Virgin Mary found him after his speech. Jesus holds an unfurled scroll in his hand with the text from Luke 2, 49: ΤΙ ΟΤΙ ΕΖΗΤΕΙΤΕ ΜΕ; ΟΥΚ ΗΔΕΙΤΕ ΟΤΙ ΕΝ ΤΟΙΟΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΨΑΡΙΟΥ ΜΟΥ ΔΕΙ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΜΕ (“Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business”).19 Although the representation from Kyriakoselia has some similarities with the one from Ochrid, it is more likely that we should see here the depiction of schooling rather than an event related to Christ’s attendance at the temple. On the fresco from the Peribleptos, Christ seems older, looking like a twelve-year-old boy as described in Luke’s Gospel (Luke, 2, 42). On the contrary, on the representation from St. Nicholas in Kyriakoselia, he is much younger, probably about six years old. An additional argument in favour of the hypothesis that this fresco represents Jesus’ schooling is the fact that the Virgin Mary leads the child Jesus to one teacher, and not to a group of teachers, as the event in the temple is usually depicted. Furthermore, on the north side of the transept of the church in Kyriakoselia the schooling of St. Nicholas is depicted (Fig. 7), just opposite of Jesus’ schooling.


16 Borboudakis, op. cit., 293, πίν. 25, εικ. 10.

17 I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Maria Vassilaki, who brought into my attention this fresco, and Nikoletta Pyrou, who very graciously facilitated my access to the monument.

18 On the south-western bay of the nave two scenes inspired by the story of Jesus among the teachers of the Law are preserved: Jesus’ discussion with the teachers in the temple, and Joseph and Mary find Jesus in the temple. Cf. M. Marković, Ikonografski program najstarijeg živopisa crkve Bogorodice Perivlepte u Ohridu. Popis fresaka i beleške o pojedininim programskim osobenostima, Zograf 35 (2011) 123, 126, sl. 7.

19 Images of the Virgin Mary leading the Christ child by the hand, as an integral part of the story of twelve-year-old Jesus among the teachers of the Law, were widespread in the Western Medieval art. Cf. Wentzel, Mariæ mit dem Jesuskäbn, 216–219, abb. 23–32.
schooling. Hence, the possibility should not be excluded that the representation of St. Nicolas’ schooling inspired the creator of the iconographic program to depict Jesus’ schooling as its pendant.

Another similar depiction to the one from church of Kyriakoselia is preserved in the small cemetery church of St. Marina in the village of Meseleroi in the prefecture of Lasithi, in east Crete. It is a simple single-nave barrel-vaulted church of 4.00 × 7.00 meters. Despite the widespread loss of the painted layer in the upper parts of the pointed arch, the iconographic program of the church survives almost in its entirety in the better preserved part of the Sanctuary apse and the western wall. Based on stylistic features, its frescoes can be dated to the first half of the fourteenth century and they are of excellent quality. On the fresco of the equestrian figure of St. George on the south wall two dates written in Roman numerals can be discerned; one reads 1373 and the other 1455. The Virgin Mary walking with young Jesus at her side is depicted in the lowest zone of the north wall (Figs. 8 and 9). In his right hand the child has a tablet with Greek letters on it. They are approaching the figure of St. John the Baptist, who is depicted on the right. St. John has his right hand extended towards the Virgin and the child as if to greet them, while holding in his left hand a scroll with the following text:

ΟΥΤΟΣ Ε ΣΤΙΝ ΠΕΡΙ ΟΥ ΕΓΩ Η ΠΟΝ ΗΜΗΝ Ο ΟΠΙΣΘΕΝ ΕΡΧΩΜΕ ΝΟΣ Ο ΕΜ ΠΡΟΣΘΕΝ ΜΟΥ ΓΕΓΟΝΕΝ ΟΤΙ ΗΣΧΗ ΡΩΤΕΡΟΣ ΜΟΥ ΕΣΤΗΝ

It is a combination of two passages from the New Testament, namely John 1, 30 and John 1, 15, respectively: “Οὗτος ἐστι περὶ οὗ ἔγω εἶπον· ὑπὸ χάριν οὗ εἶπον ὑπὸ χάριν ὑπὸ χάριν” (“This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me’”), “Οὗτος ἐν οὐκ εἶπον, ὁ δὲ πρῶτος μου ἐμπροσθεν οὗ γέγονεν, ὃ πρῶτος μου ἦν” (“He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me”).
The same scene has been found in the church of St. Antony in the settlement of Koutsouras, also located in Lasithi prefecture, twenty-two kilometers east of Ierapetra. Koutsouras used to be the administrative centre of the municipality of Makry Gialos and is the biggest village in the region. The small single-nave barrel-vaulted church of St. Antony (6, 30 × 2, 80) is adorned on all its internal surfaces with frescoes currently unknown in relevant literature. Unfortunately, they have not been well preserved. The frescoes are covered with a layer of soot. All the identifiable scenes belong to the Christological cycle (Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation in the Temple, Crucifixion, and Ascension). A rare depiction of Mary leading the infant Christ to St. John the Baptist can be discerned among the saints depicted in full body lowest zone of the north wall (Figs. 10 and 11). The scene is poorly preserved, but it is clear that it exhibits the same iconography as in St. Marina at Meseleroi, although it is significantly smaller. It is possible to recognize child Jesus, who has a nimbus that has a decorated cross and a tablet with the Greek alphabet in the right hand, and the Virgin behind him. The shape of tablet is the same as in the previous church of St. Marina, on which it is possible to read a few letters. In front of the Virgin is John the Baptist. Both the figure and the scroll are damaged significantly. However, some words can be recognized and are identical to the ones from Meseleroi:

ΟΥΤΟΣ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΠΕΡΙ
ΟΥΤΟΣ Ε ΣΤΙΝ ΠΕΡΙ
ΟΥ ΕΤΩ Η
ΠΟΝ ΗΜΗΝ
ΕΡΧΩΜΕΝΟΣ
Ο ΟΠΙΣΘΕΝ
ΕΡΧΩΜΕ
ΝΟΣ Ο ΕΜ
ΠΡΟΣΘΕΝ
ΓΕΙΘΟΝΕΝ
ΜΟΥ ΓΕΙΘΟΝΕΝ
ΟΤΙ ΗΧΗ
ΡΩΤΕΡΟΣ ΜΟΥ
ΕΣΤΗΝ

Koutsouras
Meseleroi

In terms of style, the fresco decoration in these two churches is unrelated. Both of them are of relatively high quality and can be dated to around 1340.

The inclusion of the figure of St. John, instead of the teacher Zacchaeus, in this rare representation, who appears in the role of the witness of the Messiah, is particularly noteworthy. These examples indicate that their creators were Byzantine painters who knew very well the Macedonian school, while certain details, e.g. the weapons of the warriors and the clothes, show the influence of Western art. As no evidence exists that can confirm the Byzantine origin of the Jesus’ schooling theme, I tend to believe that the examples from Crete might have been influenced by works of Western art. If we keep in mind the historic fact that the island of Crete was under Venetian rule from 1212 to 1669 (the so-called Ducato di Candia), which certainly was reflected in the works of the Greek Orthodox artists in terms of Western influences, my claim seems even more plausible. Previous studies have demonstrated that western influences on artistic production on Crete during the period in question are not limited to architecture and sculpture alone; they can be observed in wall paintings as well. A number of iconographic themes indicate that western influence on iconography is wider than previously believed. Examples include representations of St. Romanos the Sklepodioktis, protector and healer of horses, of St. Francis, as well as a western type of depiction of Saints Bartholomew and Stephan. Amongst the earliest preserved scenes depicting Jesus’ schooling are those that accompany the text of the Latin Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew in the Parisian codex BNF lat. 2688 (fourth quarter of the thirteenth century). Circulation of manuscripts and other works of art through the western monastic orders were ample on this Greek island.20

23 The mural paintings of this church will be published in Byzantine Monumental Paintings in Eastern Crete (Grece), which is under preparation. V. p. 133, n. * above.
The representations of Jesus’ schooling from the churches of St. Marina at Meseleroi and St. Antony at Koutsouras are not only very rare in Byzantine art, but this theme is also unique from the Western perspective. Furthermore, the scene is also characterized by an anachronism; while according to the Gospels the age difference between Jesus and John the Baptist is six months only, in both Cretan representations Jesus is depicted as a six-year-old boy, and John as an adult in his thirties. Hence, I would argue that John’s personality in these paintings is

Fig. 9. Church of St. Marina, Meseleroi, Crete, the north wall (drawing G. Fousteris)

Fig. 10. Virgin Mary leading the child Jesus to St. John the Baptist. Church of St. Antony at Koutsouras, near Ierapetra, Crete, the lowest zone of the north wall

Fig. 11. Virgin Mary leading the child Jesus to St. John the Baptist. Church of St. Antony at Koutsouras (drawing G. Fousteris)
imbued with a dual role, namely as a witness of Jesus’ advent as well as his teacher.

In addition to the aforementioned, one more detail should be pointed out regarding the broader context of the iconographic program of St. Marina church, within which the representation of the child Jesus’ schooling is situated. It is worth noting that the theme of the childhood is particularly highlighted in the mural paintings in this church. This is evident from the fact that exactly across from the representation of Jesus’ schooling, another unique representation in Byzantine fresco decoration appears, namely that of St. Julitta mourning her child Cyricus (Fig. 12). Mandarakis misidentified this scene as the Virgin Mary mourning her child Jesus, who shows his head and probably wears a crown. In Byzantine fresco decoration, the three-year-old martyr St. Cyricus and his mother Julitta are usually depicted as individual standing figures or inside a medallion, as for instance in the church of the Virgin Peribletos in Ochrid, St. Nikita in Vučer, the Virgin in the village of Kučevište near Skopje, in the church of St. Cyricus and Julitta in Veroia, etc. Along with the individual figures or busts, scenes of their martyrdom are preserved as well. For instance, in Santa Maria Antiqua a cycle of the martyrdom of these saints divided into eight scenes is depicted. Moreover, in the church of St. Archangel Gabriel in the village of Lesnovo (ca. 1342) the saints are represented in pair, with the child Cyricus holding a cross and looking at his mother (Fig. 13). In both those cases scholars have connected the presence of the martyrs in the fresco decoration, to the significance that the saints had for the founders of those churches. The representation from St. Marina at Meseleroi has some similarities to the one depicted above the South entrance of the church of Archangel Gabriel at Lesnovo. From the fourteenth century onwards, depictions of large crosses with cryptograms were put in this place. Representations of the cross conveyed an old idea of sacrifice and sacrificial blood, and had as a goal to increase the faith in its apotropaic power. In the context of this symbolism Smiljka Gabelić attempted to interpret the place and way in which Cyricus and Julitta are depicted in Lesnovo. According to his Vita, Cyricus was murdered by the governor of Tarsus Alexander. For that reason she proposed that the founder might have ordered this representation as an allusion to the death of their child that was, perhaps, buried there. This hypothesis could also be put forward regarding the choice of this scene in St. Marina church at Meseleroi. First of all, the emphasis in the scene is put on Julitta mourning her child. Next to her, the church patron, St. Marina, is depicted, as she will mediate to Christ for the deceased at his Second Advent. In the second zone the following scenes are represented: Presentation of Christ to the Temple and Nativity, and directly across from the Presentation and above from Jesus’ schooling is the Stone and the Descent into Hades. The combination of these representations indicates the apotropaic symbolism of suffering and death with the resurrection as the ultimate goal. The inclusion of John the Baptist in the rare scene of Jesus’ schooling should probably been seen in this context, since according to the Christian tradition he also was a witness of Jesus’ descent into Hades as a prelude to his triumphant resurrection and is depicted along with the Virgin Mary in the representation of this event.

Little detail of Jesus' childhood is provided in the canonical Gospels. This gap was filled in by a number of second-century and later texts known as Infancy Gospels. None of those has been accepted into the biblical canon, but the sheer number of surviving manuscripts attests to their continued popularity. The oldest Infancy Gospel is Evangelium Thomae Graecae A and B, and the others were based on its text, such as Pseudo-Matthae Evangelium (known also as Liber de Infantia), Evangelium infantiae arabicum, the Aramaic Gospel, Historia Iosephi, and Liber de infantia Salvatoris – Arundel 404. All these apocrypha describe different events from Jesus's childhood between the ages of five and twelve. In chapters VI to VIII and XIV to XV in Thomae Graecae A a story of the child Jesus’ schooling is preserved. The same event is also described in Thomae Graecae B (chapters VI and VII) in which a detail that partly corresponds to the iconographic model examined in this paper is encountered: the child Jesus is led to the teacher Zacchaeus. Besides, a difference can also be observed in this account: Joseph, not the Virgin Mary, holds the child Jesus by his hand and leads him to the teacher:

And on the morrow he took him by the hand and led him to a certain teacher, Zacchaeus by

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32 Marković, Ikonografski program, 131, 136.
36 G. McN. Rushforth, The Church of S. Maria Antiqua, Papers of the British School at Rome 1/1 (1902) 45–51; N. Tetereiatnikov, For whom is Theodore Praying? An Interpretation of the Program of the Private Chapel in S. Maria Antiqua, Cahiers archéologiques 41 (1993) 41, 43.
37 Gabelić, Manastir Lesnovo, 120.
38 Teteriatnikov, op. cit., 41, 44, 45; Gabelić, op. cit., 120.
39 The busts of St. Cyricus and Julitta are also represented above the south entrance of the church of the Virgin Peribletos in Ochrid as well. Cf. Marković, op. cit., 131, 136.
41 Gabelić, op. cit., 120.
47 Tischendorf, op. cit., 115–133.
48 It has been kept in the British library. Cf. M. R. James, Latin Infancy Gospels, Cambridge 1927.
49 Tischendorf, op. cit., 138–142. I am quoting passages from the Evangelium Thomae Graecae A and B because they were sources for all the other Infancy Gospels. The Protoevangelium of James is the only Infancy Gospel that does not mention Jesus’ schooling.
name, and said unto him: Take this child, O master, and teach him letters. ⁵⁰

In the other Infancy Gospels, like Evangelium Infantiæ Arabicum (chapter XLVIII) or Pseudo-Matthæi Evangelium (chapters XXX–XXXIX), in the chapters with the same story of the child Jesus’ schooling, both Maria and Joseph are mentioned. As an example the next passage from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew should be quoted:

And again teacher Zacchæus, instructor of the law, said to Joseph and Mary: Give me the boy and I shall entrust him to teacher Levi to teach him words and educate him. Then Mary and Joseph agreed and took Jesus to school to be taught letters by the old man Levi. ⁵¹

Along with the texts from the Infancy Gospels, literary parallels and possible source of inspiration for the representations of Jesus’ schooling from the churches of St. Marina at Meseleroi and St. Antony at Koutsuras, are encountered in Theophany carols (κάλαντα in Greek):

Despite being used by modern Greeks they should be dated to the Byzantine period. ⁵² Although their theme is Christ’s baptism, a similarity can be seen in the fact that the Virgin Mary addresses John the Baptist as an adult inviting him to baptise her child

However, this hypothesis requires more detailed folkloristic and philological analysis not only of the carols, but also of other sources related to the local tradition. ⁵³ Wentzel, who studied more than seventy examples of such images from Western Christian art, where the Virgin is walking with the child Jesus, implies that this painted motif, which appears in the West around the year of 1220, is probably of Byzantine provenance. ⁵⁴ The representations of the mother leading her child by the hand was known in Byzantine art, but not in the cycle of Christ’s life. That motif is encountered in the aforementioned scenes from the life of St. Nicholas. The earliest preserved representation of St. Nicholas’ schooling occurs on a Sinaiic icon dated to ca. 1200. ⁵⁵ In a couple of cases, Ni-
Western artistic production. Unlike the representations of St. Nicholas’s childhood, which fit well in the narration of his life, the preserved scenes that depict Jesus’ schooling do not belong to a broader Christological cycle; for instance, they are not depicted as a continuation of the scenes showing his Nativity and Presentation to the Temple. The scenes of Jesus’ schooling are represented isolated as, for example, in the Cripta della Candelora a Massafra in Apulia and in the church of St. Antony at Koutsouras. In some other cases, like in the church of St. Nicholas at Kyriakoselia and St. Marina at Meseleroi, they are situated next to other scenes related to Christ’s resurrection. For this reason I argue here that these representations were imbued with more profound symbolism, which depended on a broader iconographic context of the specific monument or is related to a personal preference of the founder of a particular church. In conclusion, it is worth noting that such representations are extremely rare in post-Byzantine art, as well. It seems that the only similar example is the representation of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus on an icon from the monastery of Leimon on the island of Lesbos, dated to the end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century (Fig. 15). The icon is named the First steps of Jesus Christ, but the figures depicted on it do not hold any object in their hands. The icon also represents a unique example of this theme in Byzantine and post-Byzantine Art.

56 A. Katsiotis, L’ange conduisant saint Jean-Baptiste dans le désert à l’église de la Dormition à Vladimir (1408), Cahiers balkaniques 11 (1987) 77–89.


Fig. 14. St. Nicholas’ schooling. Monastery of Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren

Fig. 15. Virgin Mary and the child Jesus, Icon from the monastery of Leimon, Lesbos, end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century (after G. Gounaris)


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Сликање Христовог детињства. Неколико примера ретке иконографије надахнуте апокрифним јеванђељима детињства

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Добро је познато да канонска јеванђеља пружају мало података о Христовом детињству. Ту празнину попуњавају поједини апокрифни текстови настали у II веку и касније, познати као јеванђеља о детињству Христовом. Ниједан од тих текстова није увршен у новозаветни канон, иако велики број сачуваних рукописа сведочи о њиховој популарности. То је на шло новозаветни канон, иако велики број сачуваних рукописа сачуваних која води дете са свитком у руци, држећи га за руку, води учитељу. У раду се разматра ретка и необична иконографија надахнута апокрифним јеванђељима детињства. Доброто је познато да канонска јеванђеља пружају јеванђеља о детињству Христовом. Ниједан од тих текстова није увршен у новозаветни канон, иако велики број сачуваних рукописа сведочи о њиховој популарности. То је на шло новозаветни канон, иако велики број сачуваних рукописа сачуваних која води дете са свитком у руци, држећи га за руку, води учитељу. У раду се разматра ретка и необична иконографија надахнута апокрифним јеванђељима детињства.

Представе Богородице које води дете Христа са атрибутима попуњу натписа налика на лице са алфабетом, писање, књиге, плетене корпе, цвета ста са атрибутима попут дрвене таблице за писање, држивог детињства, наспрам из манастира Епископи код Волоса и фреска из цркве свете Марије у Меселерима и Светог антонија у Кушрaru, обема на источном делу Крита. На њима Христос држи у руци таблицу са грчким алфабетом, а Богородица га не води ка учителу, већ ка Јовану Претечи. Приказивање Јовановог светог детињства, као онога који је сведочио о Христу, уместо учителу За- хеја нарочито је вредно пајење. Претеча у левој руци држи свитак с текстом из Јовановог јеванђеља (1,30 и 1,15). Сликарство у обе наведене цркве дело је добрих мајстора, а настало је око 1300. године.

Ова необична и ретка иконографска представа догађаја из Христовог детињства могла је бити надахнута западном уметношћу. Новије студије показале су да западни уметнички утицаји на Крит, који се појављују од почетка XIII века, нису били сведени само на архитектуру и скулптуру већ и у сликарству. Известан број нових тема у критском детињству могла је бити надахнута западном уметношћу. Новије студије показале су да западни уметнички утицаји на Крит, који се појављују од почетка XIII века, нису били сведени само на архитектуру и скулптуру већ и у сликарству. Известан број нових тема у критском детињству могла је бити надахнута западном уметношћу.
једна изузетна представа – Света Јулита оплакује сина Кирика. У старијим студијама та фреска погрешно је идентификована као Богородица која плаче за дететом Христом. Сликање мученика Кирика и Јулите у фреско-ансамблима често је довођено у везу са знањем који су ти свети имали за ктиторе храма, што би се могло односити и на ктиторе Свете Марије у Меселерију. Нагласак је стављен на лик свете Јулите која оплакује сина. Уз њу је насликана света Марина, патрон храма, будући да ће она посредовати за умрле приликом Другог Христовог доласка. У другој зони приказани су Сретење и Рођење Христово, а наспрам Сретења и изнад Христовог одласка у школу насликани су Мироносице на гробу Христовом и Силазак у ад. Комбинација тих представа указује на апотројевске симболизам страдања и смрти, с васкрсењем као крајњим циљем. Сликање Јована Крститеља у ре-ткој сцени из Христовог детењства могло би се сагледати у овом контексту, будући да је, према хришћанској традицији, Јован био сведок Христовог силаска у ад, што је представљало увод у његово тријумфално васкрсење, а у приказу тог догађаја Јован Претеча насликан је поред Богородице.

Поред несумњивог утицаја апокрифних јеванђела детењства и западних илуминираних рукописа на настанак представе о којој је реч, не треба искључити ни могуће утицаје византијског фолклора, попут грчких богојављенских песама (κάλαντα), у којима Богородица позива Јована да крсти Богомлађенца. Ипак, да би се потврдила та претпоставка, неохвата је много дубља фолклористичка и филолошка анализа, која надилази оквире ове студије.