NEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE MINIATURE OF THE VISION OF SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS IN PARIS. GR. 510*

The article deals with the iconography of the illustration of the Second Paschal Homily of St. Gregory of Nazianzus on fol. 285r of the Paris manuscript. It questions the identity of the woman saint represented on the right of St. Paraskeve in the lower register of the scene. Unlike that above St. Paraskeve, the inscription identifying this second woman saint is fragmentary and difficult to read, but it has been widely accepted that she is Saint Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great. On the basis of two other representations of Helena in the same manuscript and of the style of the inscription accompanying them, as well as taking into account the importance of the theological meaning expounded by St. Gregory in his oration, it is suggested that the second woman saint may be St. Kyriake.

This article deals with a problem which may turn out not to be a problem at all, or which may, on the other hand, give us an opportunity to grasp with more precision the attitude Byzantine artists took when given the task of illustrating a theological and at the same time highly poetical text, in this case a homily by the fourth century Church Father, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. It may also serve as a reminder of the importance of the original inscriptions accompanying Byzantine works of art, a greatly appreciated subject to which our friend and colleague Gojko Subotić, whose work we are celebrating, has devoted many enlightening studies.

The miniature which I am proposing to re-examine is on fol. 285r of the manuscript Paris. gr. 510, a renowned and superbly illustrated collection of liturgical orations of St. Gregory. Thanks to the portraits of the emperor Basil I, his wife Eudokia and their sons Leo and Alexander which it also contains, the manuscript can be securely dated between the years 879 and 882.1

* This is an enlarged version of a Communication read at the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21–26 August 2006.

The fragile state of preservation of this, in many ways unique example of Byzantine book illustration, has deprived most researchers of examining it as closely as they would have wished. The first descriptions and reproductions of the miniatures in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were followed by many modern studies as good photographs became available. Scholars found their task easier, without, however, forgetting the earliest readings of the inscriptions on or around the miniatures, identifying the events depicted, or the persons involved in them.

On fol. 285r is represented a Vision of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus which illustrates his Second Paschal Homily2: St. Gregory is contemplating the apparition of Christ as an angel, standing within a mandorla of light. He is surrounded by the angelic host. The inscription above reads: ‘Σήμερον σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου’ (‘Today is salvation come into the world.’) This vision is shown to St. Gregory by the prophet Habbakuk standing next to him. The surface of the painting behind St. Gregory and the prophet Habakkuk is completely destroyed, but the two can be easily identified by the meaning of the sermon.3

On the left of the prophet Habbakuk and St. Gregory are depicted standing two women saints. One reads clearly the name of Saint Paraskeve (Ἡ ΑΓΙΑ ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ) above the head of one of them. Only traces of letters can be seen above the other saint’s head, usually believed to be Saint Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. It should be noted that among the many illustrations of St. Gregory’s Second Paschal Oration, the inclusion of these two women saints is unique to Paris Gr. 510.

In his work on the oldest Greek manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale, H. Omont stated that the inscription above the other woman saint reads ΚΑΙ ΕΛΕΝΗ, thus forming a common title for both: “Saint Paraskeve and Helena”. That second saint is wearing imperial garments and a crown and is holding an object representing the model of Christ’s tomb: she is a counterpart to Saint Paraskeve, dressed in a dark veil, holding the instruments of Christ’s passion: the lance, the sponge, the nails and the recipient for the vinegar and gall. On the reproduction of the inscription in Omont’s publication4 the lettering above the second woman is fragmentary and one could question the correctness of his reading. Her identification with the Empress Helena is indeed attractive, especially in view of the pronounced imperial connotations characterising the Paris Gregory: by representing Helena, although she is not mentioned explicitly in the homily, one was possibly comparing

---

3 For a recent discussion of this and other illustrations of St. Gregory’s Second Paschal Oration in book illumination, with a particular emphasis on the only monumental example of the same theme at the church of the Virgin Perivleptos (St. Clement) at Ohrid (1294/95) see B. Miljković, L’Illustration de la deuxième homélie pascale de Grégoire le Théologien, ZRVI 41 (2004)105–112.
4 H.Omont, Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du VI au XIV siècles, Paris 1929, 25, pl. XLIII.
the Empress Eudokia with the saintly Empress, mother of Constantine the Great, with all the honour that such an allusion implied.\textsuperscript{5}

The identification of the second woman saint on fol 285r with Helena has been widely accepted by researchers, including myself. Yet, as will be shown, there are two details which could speak against it. In her important analysis of this and other miniatures from the Paris Gregory just quoted, Sirarpie der Nersessian only referred to a short mention of Helena being represented on this miniature by André Grabar in \textit{Martyrium}, his work on the cult of Christian relics.\textsuperscript{6} Surprisingly, neither Der Nersessian nor Grabar quoted the line identifying the two women saints as it appears in Omont’s publication, nor did they comment on its form. However, from that time on, this identification became firmly established in art-historical studies. As already mentioned, in her detailed research on the Paris Gregory, Leslie Brubaker also relied on the second woman being the empress Helena, saying that just as St. Paraskeve, she is identified by an inscription, without giving this second inscription an actual reading.\textsuperscript{7} As recently as 2001, in an article concerning the iconography of St. Kyriake in Byzantine art,\textsuperscript{8} I have also referred to the miniature of the Vision of St. Gregory in the Paris manuscript, without questioning the identification of the other woman saint with Helena.\textsuperscript{9} However, for some time now I have been wondering whether we were indeed right to consider that female figure as the Empress Helena. The first step was to consult again the inscription as it appears in Omont’s publication.

I noted two anomalies:

First, the unusual style of the inscription, omitting H \textit{ΓΙΑ} before the Saint’s name and

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{S. Der Nersessian}, \textit{The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus}: Paris. Gr. 510. A Study of the Connection between Text and Images, DOP 16 (1962), 195–228, esp. 219–221; \textit{C. Jolivet-Lévy}, \textit{L’image du pouvoir dans l’art byzantin à l’époque de la dynastie Macédonienne} (867–1056), 441–470, esp.457; \textit{L. Brubaker}, \textit{Politics, Patronage, and Art in the Ninth-Century Byzantium}: The Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B.N.510), DOP 39, 1–13. \textit{Ead.}, Vision and Meaning, esp. 163–164. In her considerations regarding the connection between text and image in the Paris Gregory, Brubaker has insisted on the paramount role played in her view by the Patriarch Photius (858–67; 877–86) whose choice of illustrations would have enhanced their political and pro-imperial bias. — This attitude is somewhat exaggerated: while it is accepted that the Patriarch’s influence may have been present in the commissioning of the manuscript, one finds that it was not overwhelming in all respects.
\item \textit{A. Grabar}, \textit{Martyrium}, Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique, Paris 1946, II, 204, n. 1.
\item \textit{L. Brubaker}, Vision and Meaning, 205-07
\end{enumerate}
Second, her completely different features to those of the Empress Helena who is twice depicted on fol. 440r of the same manuscript. Moreover, there, she is identified, as one would expect her to be, as Η ΑΓΙΑ ΕΑΕΗ.10

Having considered again the words and the meaning of St. Gregory’s sermon I can now say that I suspect that the badly damaged inscription on fol. 285r may have contained the name of Saint Kyriake: the letter K (Kappa) understood by Omont as the first letter of KAI, could be the first letter of Kyriake, a woman saint whose presence in the picture would correspond more closely to the words of Saint Gregory’s oration than that of Helena. After evoking the meaning of the preparation for the Great Feast of the Resurrection and the need to imitate Christ’s Passion (hence the depiction of Saint Paraskeve: her name means ‘preparation’ and is repeated several times in the homily), Saint Gregory speaks of those who have been baptised during the Easter night and in a masterly poetic outburst urges everyone to hurry with joy towards Christ’s tomb and into it. He then addresses himself to Pascha saying that by praising it he will speak to it as to a “living person”11

Just as Saint Paraskeve here is the earliest preserved representation of that saint in Byzantine art, so Saint Kyriake could be too, the first referring to Good Friday and the second personifying Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, the Feast of Pascha, to whom Saint Gregory directly speaks.

What do we know about the cult and the iconography of St. Kyriake? Her Life tells us that she was born on a Sunday in the province of Bithinia and as a Christian was martyred in Nicomedia during the persecutions of Diocletian. In wall-paintings she is most often depicted wearing either patrician or royal attire, although in some cases she wears just a simple veil. Moreover, from the 11th century on, we find a peculiarity added to her dress, namely representations of small portraits of the seven days of the week. Apart from one example, at Kounos in Mani, on the Peloponese, where she is wearing a simple veil with small heads of the personifications of the days of the week woven in her garment, these small heads, usually within medallions or small squares, are decorating her royal robe. These representations of St. Kyriake are concentrated in Cyprus. On those frescoes, dating over a period from the 12th–16th centuries, she is wearing a crown; in some cases she holds an orb or a three-pronged candlestick.(see note 8 above)

As research has shown, in the Byzantine tradition a great importance was attached to St. Kyriake whose person is strongly linked to the symbolism of the Lord’s

---

10 Omont, op. cit. 31, pl. LIX; Der Nersessian, op. cit. 219–221; Brubaker, Vision and Meaning, 163ff., fig. 45. The miniature represents the dream of the Emperor Constantine, his vision of the cross at the Milvian bridge and Helena’s discovery of the true cross.

11 It is important to note that in his Second Paschal Homily St. Gregory does speak of Christ’s tomb, using the words τάφος and μνημείον and does not mention the rock of Golgotha, place of the Crucifixion, outside Jerusalem. Yet both Grabar and Der Nersessian have referred to the object held by the other woman saint as being a model of the rock of Golgotha. Brubaker, on the other hand, has argued in favour of the object being the model of the tomb, but has emphasised yet again the predominant role of the Patriarch Photios in the choice of that attribute. Brubaker, Politics, Patronage and Art, 10–11; Ead. Vision and Meaning, 205–207.
Day (Κυριακή ημέρα) within which the hebdomad is contained and thus to the symbolism of the day of Resurrection itself.\textsuperscript{12}

If my hypothesis were correct, we can say that in the case of the Paris Gr. 510 the artist followed closely the thought of St. Gregory and gave it a straight yet quite original visual interpretation. The accent of St. Gregory’s teaching in his Second Paschal Homily is on the Preparation for the Day of the Resurrection and the celebration of that Day itself, both personified in this case by two much venerated women saints.

My suggestion that Saint Helena is not represented in the miniature of the Vision of St. Gregory on fol. 285r does not detract from the view that in the illustrations of the Paris Gregory a tendency to glorify the emperor is present. On the contrary, I would say that throughout the illustrations of this remarkable book, the imperial ideology was included in a highly sophisticated manner, but with the theological meaning always in the first plan.\textsuperscript{13}

In recent times the Paris Gregory has been re-examined with the intention of producing a much desired facsimile. Indeed, a thorough examination of the fragmentary inscription above the second female saint on fol. 285r, supported by some modern technical methods, could perhaps solve this problem.

\textsuperscript{12} Z. Gavrilović, Observations on the iconography of St. Kyriake, as in n. 9.

је друга светица која стоји десно од свете Параскеве, у ствари Света Недеља. Њено би присуство у сцени потпуно одговарало дубокој теолошкој мисли коју свети Григорије надахнуто проповеда пастири, позивајући је да учествује у великом дану Христовог Вајкрсења. Као што је света Петка уведена у сцену да би илустровала припрему за Ускрс, тако је света Недеља персонификација самог празника.
Paris Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, fol. 285r
Paris Gr. 510, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, fol. 440r
Kalopanayotis, Cyprus, monastery of St. John Lampadistis (13th c): St. Kyriake with another woman saint. (photo J. Stylianou)
St. Demetrianos, Dhali, Cyprus (1317), St. Kyriake (photo J. Stylianou)