The representations on the well-known bilateral icon from Mytilini, Christ Pantokrator on the front and St John the Theologian on the back, were detached in 1960 from the damaged wood and are now two separate icons. The icon of Christ has been dated to the middle or third quarter of the 14th century or to 1370–1380, and that of the Theologian to the late 14th-early 15th century or the second quarter of the 15th century. The conclusion is reached that the two representations are contemporary, date from the third quarter of the 14th century, and are the work of the same painter. This view is based on shared technical and stylistic features and the interconnection of meaning between the figures depicted, which accounts for the difference of character in the way in which the two figures — the divine figure of Christ and the earthly figure of the saint — are rendered.

The formerly bilateral icon from Mytilini with representations of Christ Pantokrator and St John the Theologian on the front and back respectively has long been known to the world of scholarship (fig. 1–4). The icon comes from the church of the Taxiarchs in the village of Kato Tritos on Lesbos. During the conservation of the icon in 1960, the irreparable damage suffered by the wood made it necessary to detach the painted representations and transfer them to new, separate, wooden mountings. Since then, both icons have been kept in the Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum of the Metropolis of Mytilini.


2 For the condition of the painting before conservation, see Φ. Κοντογλου, Έκφρασης της Ορθοδόξου Εικονογραφίας, II, Plates, Athens 1960, pp. 142–145. For the conservation method known since the 12th century, which involves transferring the representations from the destroyed wood to a new
The large icon, executed in art of outstanding quality and with dimensions of 107 × 69.5 cm, had its edges cut away for its second use in smaller intercolumnar openings of a templon, as is evident from the cramped position of the figures on the extant surface and the lack of a frame. The representations on both sides have generally been considered works executed at different times. The representation of Christ has been assigned to the third quarter of the 14th century and that of St John the Theologian to the second quarter of the 15th or the late 14th-early 15th century. The view that the two sides are contemporary and should be assigned to the advanced 14th century, which has already been touched upon, will be dealt with in the present article, which is dedicated to my honoured colleague and friend, Gojko Subotić, whose academic interests also extend to portable icons of this period.

An important feature of the bilateral icon from Mytilini is the fact that both representations are painted on a gold ground of the same quality and technique, as is evident from what is preserved. The existence of a gold ground on the rear side, too, a fairly rare phenomenon at the time of the icon, indicates the prosperity of the owner or donor and also his desire to create an expensive, luxurious item. The feeling of luxury is intensified by the use of gold in the halo, on the clavus of the chiton, on the binding of the gospel book held by Christ, and on the part of the name I(HCOC[XPJCCTOC] preserved in a small brown circle at the top left; also on the John's open gospel book, in which the gold binding is visible at the left edge, the thickness of the pages are gold and hatched in the same way as those of the book held by Christ, and calligraphic letters are executed in brown and gold. Their gold-bound books are of the same, impressive size.

If the coincidence of the features mentioned above were due to imitation on the second side, it would still be difficult to account for their similarity in quality, far less the unified painterly treatment at substantial points of the figures depicted. The monumental concept, the manner of the workmanship, the sculptural quality of the faces, and also the harmonious accord of the colours of the garments, all demonstrate the homogeneity of the work and point to the same painter.

Clear similarities in the different faces — the divine face of Christ and the earthly one of the saint — emerge from the exaggerated volume and proportions of the body and from the domination, identical placing and balance of the half-length figures in the space of the icon, from which they are disengaged by the long, strongly outlined curves that bow their shoulders, with intense modelling, dramatic


3 To the middle of the 14th century (Baltoyanni op. cit. (note 1), 40), or to 1370–1380 (T. Papamastorakis, Εικόνες 13ου–16ου αιώνα, Εικόνες Μονής Παντοκράτορος, Holy Mountain 1998, 50).

4 M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, Byzantine Art in the Aegean, The Aegean. The Epicenter of Greek Civilisation, Athens 1992, 157, fig. 132, 133; Kontoglou, op. cit. (note 2), pl. C, D, 142, 144, dated both representations to the 14th century.

lighting and an immediacy of expression that gives them the substance of a living presence. The spontaneous strength, tone and authenticity of the painting, and the advanced approach to the creation of perspective space, attested by the position and interrelation of the hands and gospel book of both figures, also preclude the likelihood that the representation on the second side was adapted to the style of that on the first by a painter of different inspiration and generation.

The hand of the same, excellent, artist is betrayed by the ample, heavy, broad appearance of the figures and the rough relief of the face, the high cheekbones, the narrow, almond-shaped eyes sunk in the shadow of the sockets and of similar colour, shape, and outline, and the hands with their strong wrists, long fingers and prominent joints. It is also betrayed by the force and fullness of expression of their inner world and the luminous lighting of the figures, as though the light were shining on metal; and by the texture, pulse and intensity of the paint brush, which models, lights and animates their aspect — golden in the white flashes of the divinity of Christ, sunburnt in the profound spiritual reflection of John, the “son of thunder”.

The different colouring of the flesh, the abrupt lights on the face, and the sharp, brilliant folds that traverse John's garments make their own contribution to the juxtaposition and contrast between his figure and that of Christ, and to the rendering of the inner meaning linking both sides of the icon — the only surviving icon with depictions of Christ Pantokrator and St John the Theologian. This connection is emphasised by the open book, with its significant size and position, held by the Theologian before the middle of his breast, in which the opening words of his gospel flash with gold lettering: EN AP/XH HN / O ΔΟΓΟΣ. / ΚΑΙ Ο ΔΟΓΟΣ [H]Ν/ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ Θ(ΕΟ)Ν // ΚΑΙ Θ(ΕΟ)C HN / O ΔΟΓΟΣ. / ΟΥΤΟΣ HN / EN APΧΗ / ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ Θ(ΕΟ)Ν. / ΠΑΝΤΑ ΔΙ ΑΥΤΟΥ (εγένετο). (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him.”) The evangelist proclaims the divine substance of Christ, and the Word of God is in epiphany on the front of the icon, with the apocalyptic, luminous, radiant face, that seems to transmit its brilliance to John on the back.

Light, a dominant element in the interconnection and inspired rendering of the two figures, alludes, through its particular position and use, to the theory of Hesychasm. In its vital painterly function, which points to the second half of the 14th century, a major role is played by gold, used in the background, in Christ's large halo, and in the details of both representations, and characteristically prominent in the gospel books held by Christ and John. The boundless brilliance of the transcendental gold adorns, unites and illuminates the two sides and initiates us into the spiritual and apocalyptic content of the icon.

The unity of concept of the two representations is reflected in the powerful character of the figures, and the ethos and passion of their expression, which are

associated with their monumental size and exaggerated presence and are expressed through the intense modelling and their breathing, lively, luminous lighting. The painted surface, with its bold, rough workmanship, the like of which is rarely found in portable icons, renders the divine and human nature of the persons depicted with the same skill on both sides. They are distinguished in particular by the strong contrasts in the flesh colour, the way in which they are lit, and the treatment of the drapery of the garments: in Christ’s himatia, the folds are soft and diffused in shadows and in the Theologian’s, restless, with dry, sharp edges rendered at the front of the surface as they are “caught” by the light.

The dating of the icon to the third quarter of the 14th century is suggested by the relationship of the painting on both sides to some fine works preserved mainly on Mount Athos. Specifically, these are icons of the Great Deesis from the templon in the monasteries of Vatopedi and Chelandari, and icons and wall-paintings from the Pantokrator Monastery dated to about 1360, from which the Mytilini icon cannot be far removed in terms of the date of its creation.

The connection has already been noted between Christ and the superb icon of Christ Pantokrator in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, dated to about 1363, from the Pantokrator Monastery, to which it had been presented by the founders Alexios, megas stratonarches, and his brother Ioannis, megas primikerios. The iconographic type is identical even in details such as the size and treatment of the gospel book, in which the cross of precious stones on the gold binding has the same shape, and differs only in the reversed position of the book. The Christ of Mytilini holds it opened inwards, just like Christ in another, contemporary bilateral icon from the Pantokrator Monastery, in which the decoration on the binding has a different design. That the Hermitage representation is the closest to the Mytilini Christ is shown, inter alia, by the proportions of the body, its breadth and positioning in the space of the icon, the long face with the same features and the rounded beard, and the powerful hands with their sensitive fingers; and also by the diffusion of the light over the flesh, with white highlights of identical shape and arrangement — with a delicate variation of intensity in the Hermitage Christ —, and the dense, gentle and

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9 Bank, op. cit.; Vocotopoulos, op. cit.; Papamastorakis, op. cit., 43 ff., fig. 9.
10 Chatzidakis, Ikonen aus Griechenland, op. cit. (note 1), XXXI, LXXXV, p. 71; Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους (note 6), no. 2.20 (Ε. Ν. Τσιγαρίδας); M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, Παρατηρήσεις σε δύο αμφιβολίες εικόνες της μονής Παντοκράτορος στον Άγιον Όρος, ΔΧΑΕ XX (1998), 309 ff., fig. 1; Papamastorakis, op. cit. (note 3), 48 ff., fig. 21.
intense expression. The Christ in the Mytilini representation differs in its rough painting style and the meaningful lighting of the apocalyptic face, which contrasts with the milder ethos, nobility and sage refinements of the high-quality art of the Constantinopolitan icon.\(^\text{11}\)

The representation of St John the Theologian on the rear is rendered with the same impulsive workmanship. At the time of the icon, the closest parallel to the ample, vigorous figure is provided by the Theologian on the two icons of the Great Deesis in Vatopedi\(^\text{12}\) and Chelandari,\(^\text{13}\) and in the wall-painting on the Pantokrator Monastery, in which the detail of the unruly tuft of hair on the bald pate\(^\text{14}\) is also found. The facial features, especially the eyes, the deep emotion and the reflective expression exhibit greater affinity with the John in the Vatopedi Monastery, while the strong character and the complex, well-knit modelling of the face with firm, lively brushstrokes from which the light gushes, recall the Theologian and other saints in the wall-paintings of the Pantokrator Monastery.\(^\text{15}\) The dark-coloured flesh with its diffuse lighting and bright, limited highlights corresponds with figures of saints from the Great Deesis of Vatopedi and Chelandari, where, too, is found the bold use of dark-brown and black in the hair, moustache and beard,\(^\text{16}\) which flash with white lights in the John of Mytilini and give him a wild appearance. Similar treatment is also given to the drapery of the himatia, with concise lighting, sharp at the edges,\(^\text{17}\) and to the heavy hands, that resemble each other in having a thumb raised\(^\text{18}\) and also recall the hands of St Athanasios the Athonite on the second side of the icon of Christ in the Pantokrator Monastery.\(^\text{19}\) The main differences in the impressive Mytilini Theologian are the scope of the painting and the intensity with which the similar elements are composed in an icon figure, possibly by a painter who was more familiar with the art of wall-painting.

\(^\text{11}\) We may note the significant similarity in the modelling with that of the excellent icon of the Descent from the Cross in the Vatopedi Monastery, which also dates from the third quarter of the 14th century (\textit{Tsigaridas}, op. cit. (note 6), 386 ff., fig. 327, 328; \textit{E. N. Tsigaridas — K. Loverdou-Tsigarida, Ierά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου, Βυζαντινές Εικόνες και Επενδύσεις}, Holy Mountain 2006, no. 28, fig. 8, 105–112.

\(^\text{12}\) \textit{Tsigaridas}, op. cit. 384 ff., fig. 326; \textit{Θησαυρό του Αγίου Όρους} (note 6), no. 2.24; \textit{Tsigaridas — Loverdou-Tsigarida, op. cit., ns. 22–27, fig. 93–94.}

\(^\text{13}\) \textit{K. Weitzmann et al. Frühe Ikonen}, Vienna 1965, LXIX, fig. 200; \textit{Vocotopoulos, Byzantine Icons} (note 1), no. 120.

\(^\text{14}\) \textit{Tsigaridas}, Τοιχογραφίες και εικόνες της Μονής Παντοκράτορος Αγίου Όρους (note 8), 190, pl. 7b; \textit{Papamastorakis, op. cit. (note 3)}, 44, fig. 11.

\(^\text{15}\) \textit{Tsigaridas}, op. cit., pl; 6–8; \textit{Papamastorakis, op. cit., fig. 11–14.}

\(^\text{16}\) \textit{Vocotopoulos, Byzantine Icons} (note 1), nos. 121, 122; \textit{Θησαυρό του Αγίου Όρους} (note 6), nos. 2.22, 2.27.

\(^\text{17}\) See also the icon of the Descent from the Cross in the Vatopedi Monastery (op. cit., note 10).

\(^\text{18}\) \textit{Vocotopoulos, op. cit.}, nos. 121, 122.

\(^\text{19}\) \textit{M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, op. cit. (note 9), fig. 2; Papamastorakis, op. cit., fig. 23.}
Мартили Ахимасту-Пошампянун

РАЗМАТРАЊА О ДВОСТРАНОЈ ИКОНИ СА МИТИЛИНЕ


Значајну особину иконе, ретку у време њеног настанка, представља сликање обеју представа на златном пољу, са идентичним квалитетом и техником. Обилна употреба злата, као и неке друге појединости, сведочи о благоствању владника или донатора и његовој жељи за стварањем скупоценог и луксузног дела.

Ситурне сличности двеју представа проистичу из пренаглашене масе насликаних тела и њихових међусобних аналогија, из начина уметања и положаја у пољу иконе ликова датих у попреј, који се из њega издибају дугим и снажним облицима, непосредношћу суштине и драматичном осветљеношћу, што им све даје особине живог присуства. Њихова изворна снага, колорит и оригиналност сликања искључују могућност да је друга, задња страна настала додањем од стране мајстора другачијег духа и друге генерације. Исту руку једног изузетног уметника одају, осим појединачних стилских елемената, снага и унуца изражавања унутрашњег света, метална блиставост, осветљеност облика, потка сликања, покретљивост и снага сликарске четкице која структурира рељефност лика, осветљава и продуховује његов израз.

Другачије бојење инкарната, изненадна појава светла на лици и оштри светли набори који пресецају одећу Јованову природно се усклађују, за разlikу од „идеализованог” облицива Христовог, у унутрашњем поимању које повезује обе стране иконе. Њихову повезаност наглашава отворена, упадљива по величини и месту књига коју пред собом држи Богослов, на којој златним словима блиста почетак његовог Јеванђеља (Јов., 1, 1–3). Јеванђелиста објављује божански лих Христов, а у обликовању овог открића Реч Божија се на предњој страни искажује као свесветлени, исјавајући лих који доноси Откровење и као да своју светлост преноси на Јованова, на задњој страни.

Светлост, елемент који влада узајамном повезаношћу и продуховљеним прожимањем двају облицима, указује својим посебним местом и употребом на теорију Исихазма. У оновременом сликарској пракси употребљава се позлата која обједињује и осветљава ликове и уводи у садржину духовности и откровења, коју има икона. Сликарево тумачење, које јаким акцентима и смелошћу израде
тешко да има сличности са другим покретним иконама, приказује на обе ма странама са подједнаким мајсторством и сначним унутрашњим супротностима божанску и људску природу насликаног лица.

За датирање икона у трећу четвртину 14. века говори сликарска веза са значајним делима, сачуваним пре свега на Светој Гори и стављеним у време око 1360. године. Запажена је повезаност представљања митилинског Христа са Христом Пантократором на икони из петроградског Ермитажа, која потиче из светогорског манастира Пантократор и која је настала 1363. године. Осим иконографских елемената, у очи падају лепота тела и управљеност фигуре на површини иконе, издужено лице са округлом брадом, сначне руке са танким прстима и просипање светлости на инкарнат, са белим потезима кичице.

Са истом снагом и изражаженошћу приказан је и Јован. По снази обличја и карактера, најближе међу сличним представама Јована Теолога, али и других личности, су иконе из Ватопеда (нарочито Скидање са крста) и Хиландара, као и фреске из Пантократора.
Fig. 1. Mytilini, Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum. Bilateral icon, Christ Pantokrator
Fig 2. Christ, detail of fig. 1
Fig. 3. Mytilini, Ecclesiastical and Byzantine Museum. Bilateral icon, St John the Theologian
Fig. 4. St John the Theologian, detail of fig. 3.