

## From Word to Image: The “Hesychastic type” of Mandorla

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**Abstract.** Based on the complex interrelations between word and image, the present paper aims to elucidate the penetrating correlation of the theological thought of the time with the art of a specific epoch. The findings of this study emphasize on the Hesychasm and its influence over Byzantine iconography in the fourteenth century AD, especially in relation to the formation of a new, unusual form of mandorla, called “hesychastic type”. In order to explain its rise and further development in Byzantine and Post Byzantine iconography, the paper discusses the earliest extant patterns of the “hesychastic type” of mandorla from the very beginning of the century and compares them with several subsequent examples. The focal point of the research is to find out which one is the earliest known pattern of the “hesychastic type” of mandorla and the place where this type of the symbol has emerged. The generally shared view claims that the new form has been produced firstly in Thessaloniki and can be seen in the partially survived Transfiguration mosaics in the Holy Apostles Church there. However, this study proceeds from the assumption that the prime model originates from Constantinople, caused by the theological and artistic milieu in the metropolis and probably found its place first in the wall paintings of the Chora Church. In support of this hypothesis, we are going to pay particular attention to the evidences about the relationships between the first and the second city in the Empire, the obvious intervisuality between the iconographic models in both churches and to some data about the erroneous dating of the wall decorations of the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki.

**Keywords:** Hesychasm; “hesychastic type” mandorla; Transfiguration; Holy Apostles Church; Chora Church.

### [es] De la palabra a la imagen: El “tipo hesicástico” de mandorla

**Resumen.** Basándose en las complejas interrelaciones entre palabra e imagen, el presente trabajo pretende dilucidar la penetrante correlación del pensamiento teológico de la época con el arte de una época determinada. Los hallazgos de este estudio enfatizan en el hesicasmo y su influencia sobre la iconografía bizantina en el siglo XIV d.C., especialmente en relación con la formación de una nueva e inusual forma de mandorla, llamada “tipo hesicástico”. Para explicar su surgimiento y desarrollo posterior en la iconografía bizantina y posbizantina, el artículo analiza los patrones existentes más antiguos del “tipo hesicástico” de mandorla desde principios de siglo y los compara con varios ejemplos posteriores. El punto focal de la investigación es averiguar cuál es el patrón conocido más antiguo del “tipo hesicástico” de mandorla y el lugar donde ha surgido este tipo de símbolo. La opinión generalmente compartida afirma que la nueva forma se produjo primero en Tesalónica y se puede ver en los mosaicos de la Transfiguración parcialmente conservados allí en la Iglesia de los Santos Apóstoles. Sin embargo, este estudio parte del supuesto de que el modelo principal se origina en Constantinopla, causado por el medio teológico y artístico de la metrópoli, y probablemente encontró su lugar primero en las pinturas murales de la Iglesia de Cora. En apoyo de esta hipótesis, vamos a prestar especial atención a las evidencias sobre las relaciones entre la primera y la segunda ciudad del Imperio, la evidente intervisualidad entre los modelos iconográficos de ambas iglesias y algunos datos sobre la datación errónea de la decoraciones de pared de la Iglesia de los Santos Apóstoles en Tesalónica.

**Palabras clave:** Hesicasmo; “tipo hesicástico” mandorla; Transfiguración; iglesia de los Santos Apóstoles; iglesia de Cora.

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### 1. Introduction

The “word and image” relation has been a subject of discussion since ancient times, due to its central place in the theory of art and rhetoric. The comparison of poetry and fine arts has been a topic consist-

ently raised since the birth of aesthetics as a science. Even Aristotle in his theory of drama marked the importance of the interaction of *lexis* (speech) and *opsis* (spectacle) in tragedy, and Horace’s “*ut pictura poesis*” underlies the comparisons between the “sister arts” of word and image even today. The dispute over

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the relationship between word and image is so long and at the same time so topical, that it is impossible to present all the formulated arguments here, especially since the final definition has not been reached yet.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note, however, that despite the varied approaches to combining and distinguishing between both terms, the potential of moving “from word to image” is permanent, even in the most scarce and unadorned forms of writing and speech, and all visual images have the same potential, because in interpreting or describing images, even in the fundamental process of recognizing what is depicted, language enters the field of the visual.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1. Orthodox understanding of word and image

The general function of the religious art is to embody the abstract idea of God in a form that allows its easiest perception. The clarity of expression does not always correlate with the nature of the images themselves: in the history of human religious practices there are ample examples of allegorical images of specific ideas, as well as realistic images of abstract ideas. That is, the mechanism of “knowing” the supernatural cannot be linked to either way of representation.

The common feature of all religious images is their purpose to function as visual denotations of the basic characteristics of the divine, thereby allowing the limited human nature to attain a partly fragmented but sufficiently clear knowledge of the essence of what transcends it and what is its original source and prototype. In this respect, Christian art in its entirety and the Orthodox iconography in particular, has always been an integral part not only of the religious and doctrinal tradition of faith, but also has always performed purely theological functions, theologizing with images instead of words. The images support the “translation” of the truths of faith, enriching and supplementing the possibilities of the words because, as H. U. von Balthasar writes, there is no theology “that gives a fully valid translation into abstract concepts of the dimensions of poetry and image in Scripture” because it lies beyond “all the ‘literary genres’ of which it makes use as human speech”.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the image is necessary because of its constant linguistic message, according to R. Barthes,<sup>5</sup> and its linguistic and iconic structure is what makes it one of the most influential means of religious rhetoric.

Orthodox faith is built precisely on the original symbiosis between Word and Image, extant before time, beginningless and unchangeable, hypostatically expressed in God the Son, according to the words of St. John the Theologian /John 1: 1-14/ and the interpretations of St. John Damascene, a fact that firmly explains the dogmatic nature of icons and the necessity of their veneration for Orthodoxy itself. Despite the obvious connection between the development of theological thought and the formation of the pictorial paradigm of Christian art over the centuries, there is no subordination between word and image in this aspect, the image is not subordinated to the word and has equal dignity: it complements, explains, interprets and enriches the word. As stated in the definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, “through these two complementary ways we acquire knowledge of the same reality”.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the visual language of Orthodox art and its constituent subjects and symbols must be studied from the starting position of the word embedded in their basis.

The Scripture, the commentaries and the theologizing on it have established the necessary convention, however for its clear expression and understanding by the devotees another, more accessible degree of exegesis is needed: the visual ekphrasis of ecclesiastical art that theologizes in images and colors. This “eternal tandem” of word and image, as S. Smyadovsky calls it,<sup>7</sup> has been attested in the monuments of Christian culture over the centuries. In this environment the visual symbol upgrades the possibilities of literary language, of speech and all its possible forms, depicting its verbal descriptions of sacred events in the most unambiguous representative way attainable by human consciousness. This simultaneous theologizing in word and image is the means that elevates Church art to its rank in the Orthodox Church, a dogmatically established constant part of the religion of true Christianity.

### 1.2. The influence of theological thought on the visual culture of Byzantium

The present study seeks to answer a difficult question directly connected to the problem of relationship between word and image – the influence of theological thought and spiritual literature on the visual culture of Byzantium and hence on the art of the whole Orthodox world – to find out which one is the first pattern

<sup>2</sup> Further Readings: Berkeley, George, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (Dublin, 1907); Bal, Mieke, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Goodman, Nelson, *The Language of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976); Mitchell, William John Thomas, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987); Mitchell, William John Thomas, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Panofsky, Erwin, “Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art”, in Panofsky, Erwin, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 26-54, and more.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, William John Thomas, “Word and Image”, in Nelson, Robert S, Shiff, Richard (eds.), *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 53-57.

<sup>4</sup> Von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 7: Theology: The New Covenant* (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1989), 267-268.

<sup>5</sup> Барг, Ролан, *Въображението на знака* (София: Народна култура, 1991), 526.

<sup>6</sup> Mansi, Giovanni Domenico, *SC*, XIII, 300.

<sup>7</sup> Смядовски, Стефан, *Светци, свитъци, книги*, София, Агата-А, 2003, 50.

of the “hesychastic type” of mandorla in the Orthodox art: the one from the Transfiguration mosaic in the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki or those ones from the wall paintings in the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora (Kariye Mosque) in Istanbul?

The commitment between the theological environment and Byzantine art has long been used as a justification in the interpretation of certain iconographic models,<sup>8</sup> although this approach also meets opponents who do not find a direct connection between the theological debates of the time and the development of their contemporary iconographic language.<sup>9</sup> The initial hypothesis of the present study is that all artistic models of Orthodox iconography are visual interpretations or visual translations of the main postulates of their contemporary theological thought. Hence, they may be “read” through the theological treatises and the religious mainstream of the time in which they are created. The way of artistic utterance, whether pictorial or written, cannot be separated from the spiritual and ideological trends of its time. Once they appear, ideas get their artistic expression through the word and the image. Thus, in every epoch the dominant spiritual and ideological orientation is reflected in texts and images.

The best illustration of the direct influence of the theological disputes on art is the Byzantine iconoclasm, a theological current that for a certain period of time caused a complete change in Orthodox imagery.<sup>10</sup> And one of the most interesting examples in

this regard is the mandorla<sup>11</sup> - a visual symbol of the indescribable phenomenon of the glory of God manifested repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>12</sup> As A. Grabar aptly described it, the mandorla is used when a theophany has to be denoted, when a prophetic vision has to be depicted, or when the problem of the pictorial representation of God in heaven has to be resolved, isolating the supernatural from the rest of the image by confining it within a radiant oval or disc.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Byzantine Hesychasm and the mandorla symbol

This oval or round outline around the figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary<sup>14</sup> and in rare occasions around some particularly revered saints is very sensitive to the theological tendencies over the centuries and at the beginning of the fourteenth century AD it had even developed a new type, a rarely seen occurrence in the iconographic symbolism after the first centuries of Christianity.<sup>15</sup> This dramatic alteration in the shape of the mandorla has been associated with the theological tradition of Hesychasm,<sup>16</sup> which leaves a profound imprint on all spheres of public life at the end of the Palaiologan era.<sup>17</sup> Hesychasm puts an emphasis on mysticism, asceticism and constant contemplative “inner prayer” as a means of achieving *theosis* by experiencing the *lux increata* as a manifestation of God’s divine energies.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Forsyth, George, Weitzmann, Kurt, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1965) 16; Grabar, Andre, “The Artistic Climate in Byzantium during the Palaeologian Period”, in Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. 4 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 8; Meyendorff, John, “Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries”, in Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. 4 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 105, n. 38; Karahan, Anne, *Byzantine Holy Images – Transcendence and Immanence: The Theological Background of the Iconography and Aesthetics of the Chora Church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 31; Andreopoulos, Andreas, *Art as Theology: From the Postmodern to the Medieval* (London: Equinox, 2006), 43-50.

<sup>9</sup> Hamburger, Jeffrey, “The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History: Problems, Positions, Possibilities”, in Hamburger, Jeffrey, Bouche, Anne-Marie (eds.), *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 12-13; Karahan, Anne, *Byzantine Holy Images – Transcendence and Immanence*, 26-28; Carr, Annemarie Weyl, “Images: Expression of Faith and Power”, in Evans, Helen (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: The Met Museum & Yale University Press, 2004), 151; Tachiaos, Antonie Emil, “Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature”, in Davidov, Dinko (ed.), *L’art de Thessalonique et des pays balkaniques et les courants spirituels au XIVe siècle* (Belgrade: GRO “Kultura”, 1987), 117-123.

<sup>10</sup> John of Damascus, Saint, Anderson, David (transl.), *On the divine images: three apologies against those who attack the divine images* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980); Theodoros Studitos, Saint, Roth, Catharine (transl.), *On the Holy Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981); Giakalis, Ambrosios, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Revised Edition*, Leiden: BRILL, 2005; Galavaris, George, *The Icon in the Life of the Church: Doctrine, Liturgy, Devotion* (Leiden: BRILL, 1981); Pelikan, Jaroslav, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Idem, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Noble, Thomas F.X., *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Meyendorff, John, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975); Brubaker, Leslie, Haldon, John, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680-850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Bryer, Anthony, Herrin, Judith (ed.), *Iconoclasm: Papers given at the ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies. University of Birmingham, March 1975* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson, George, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 148.

<sup>12</sup> Bromiley, Geoffrey William, (ed.) *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, Exater: Eerdmans, 1979, 477-483; 750-751.

<sup>13</sup> Grabar, Andre, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series 35.10, 1968, 116.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, “Virgin in a Mandorla of Light”, in Weitzmann, Kurt (ed.), *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 305-311.

<sup>15</sup> Todorova, Rostislava, “New Religion – New Symbolism: Adoption of Mandorla in the Christian Iconography”. *The Collection of Scientific Works Vol. IX* (Nis: NKC, 2011), 57-59.

<sup>16</sup> Meyendorff, John, *Byzantine Hesychasm: historical, theological and social problems* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1974); Idem, “Is ‘Hesychasm’ the Right Word? Remarks on Religious Ideology in the Fourteenth Century”. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies, Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students*, 7 (1983): 447; Chrysostomos, Archbishop, *Orthodox and Roman Catholic Relations from the Fourth Crusade to the Hesychastic Controversy* (Etna CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2001), 199–232.

<sup>17</sup> Meyendorff, John, “Spiritual Trends in Byzantium”, 102-103.

<sup>18</sup> Ouspensky, Leonid, Losski, Vladimir, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 209-212.

In fact, as early as the third and fourth century AD, the question of the “uncreated light” had become a central topic in patristic literature. Origen, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, a century later Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and then St. Maximus the Confessor had developed the so-called “theology of light” focused on the Transfiguration of Christ, which became the basis of Orthodox mysticism.<sup>19</sup> And in the fourth century AD, St. Macarios of Egypt and Evagrius of Pontus had already associated the *lux increate* of the glory of God with that gracious light experienced by monks while practicing the ascesis of the “inner prayer”.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the “theology of light” created in the first centuries of Christianity, cultivated in the tenth and eleventh century AD by such authors as St. Symeon the New Theologian and his disciple Niketas Stethatos, and finally formulated by Theophanes of Nicaea, St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Gregory Palamas in the early fourteenth century AD, has become the core of the hesychastic practice of the “inner prayer”.<sup>21</sup> Before turning our attention to the widely discussed question of the influence of Hesychasm on late Byzantine art in general and on the iconographic symbol of the mandorla in particular, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the used terms.

First of all, we must mention that J. Meyendorff has been questioning the correctness of the term “hesychasm”. Based on its most ancient use as a synonym for “anachoretism”, he considers it inappropriate as a description of the “broad phenomenon of spiritual and ecclesiastical revival” that Byzantium experienced in the fourteenth century.<sup>22</sup> However, Meyendorff does not deny the popularity of the term “hesychasm” and does not suggest replacing it with another (e.g., “Palamism”, as other researchers do).<sup>23</sup> Leaving it in use, he tries to specify its content as a term that outlines a broad religious and political movement promoting certain values, political and cultural priorities. According to him, although Palamism contains the mystical tradition of ancient hesychasm, neither the mo-

nastic revival that preceded and followed its victory, nor the overall nature of the Byzantine influence on the Slavs in the Palaiologan period, could be called “hesychastic” in a narrow sense.<sup>24</sup>

While the precision of Meyendorff’s suggestions and positions could sometimes be questioned,<sup>25</sup> and his interpretation of the term “hesychasm” can be challenged to some extent,<sup>26</sup> they present a topic which is not subject of this study. However, the dispute over the name of this theological current is an important fact, directly related to the question of the name of the so-called “hesychastic type” of mandorla. The new look of the mandorla symbol consists of a sudden appearance of two additional geometric shapes with a common center, rhomboid or square, which cover its middle part and form a star-shaped structure with its points directed outwards. The earliest extant patterns date from the second and third decades of the fourteenth century and are preserved in the two most important cities of Byzantium - Constantinople and Thessaloniki. A few decades later were created the “hesychastic type” mandorlas in Mystras and the mandorla in the famous Transfiguration miniature from the *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242* (Fig. 1).<sup>27</sup>

## 2.1. The “hesychastic type” of mandorla

The term “hesychastic mandorla” has been considered an issue similar to the other one with the term “hesychasm”. Simona Makseliene was probably the first researcher, who directly used the phrase “hesychastic mandorla model”.<sup>28</sup> Several years later, Andreas Andreopoulos boldly used the term “hesychastic mandorla”, although at times he apparently uses it to refer only to the mandorla in the scenes depicting the Transfiguration of Christ.<sup>29</sup> Prior to Makseliene, other researchers had also suggested that the new form of the mandorla symbol was a manifestation of the influence of hesychastic teachings, although without using the definition “hesy-

<sup>19</sup> Louth, Andrew, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Andreopoulos, Andreas, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> Louth, Andrew, “Light, vision and religious experience in Byzantium”, in Kapstein, Matthew (ed.), *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 85-103.

<sup>22</sup> Meyendorff, John, “Is ‘Hesychasm’ the Right Word?”, 451.

<sup>23</sup> Demetracopoulos, John, “Palamas Transformed. Palamite Interpretations of the Distinction between God’s ‘Essence’ and ‘Energies’ in Late Byzantium”, in Hintergerger, Martin, Schabel, Christofer David (eds.), *Greek, Latins and Intellectual History 1204-1500. Bibliotheca 11* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 263-372; Mihajlovski, Robert, “A Sermon about Anti-Palamite Theologian Gregory Akyndinos of Prilep”. *The Collection of Scientific Works Vol. VI, Nis: NKC*, 2007, 149-156.

<sup>24</sup> Meyendorff, John, “Is ‘Hesychasm’ the Right Word?”, 451-452

<sup>25</sup> Auxentios, Bishop, “The Humanist Quest for a Unity of Knowledge and the Orthodox Metaphysics of Light: A Corrective to Father Meyendorff’s Misunderstanding of the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas”. *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XI (1994): 3, 7-17.

<sup>26</sup> Tachiaos, Antonie Emil, “Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature”, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, M.A. Thesis in Medieval Studies (Budapest: Central European University, 1998), 63-65; Todorova, Rostislava, “New Religion – New Symbolism: Adoption of Mandorla in the Christian Iconography”, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, 65, 69, 72

<sup>29</sup> Andreopoulos, Andreas, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, 70, 227-233, 237, 242, 251-253. The numerous and extensive coincidences between Makseliene’s earlier research and Andreopoulos’s work are striking, suggesting that the original ideas of Makseliene occupied a vast place in the study of Andreopoulos. Andreopoulos uses the term “hesychastic mandorla” in his latest work: Andreopoulos, Andreas, *Gazing on God: Trinity, Church and Salvation in Orthodox Thought and Iconography* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2013), 106

chastic” for it. For example, J. Patterson said that “this form of mandorla appears to have been adopted by the Hesychasts as the symbolic means of representing Light” (the “uncreated light”)<sup>30</sup> and explained it through the prism of the Transfiguration iconography. According to him, the idea of rays of light, traditionally an important element of the ico-

nography of the Transfiguration, “was adopted by the Hesychasts in the form of an eight-pointed mandorla as the principle means of expressing their belief in the concept of the Divine Light”. In addition, he believes that the hesychasts apparently felt a need to incorporate the light symbolism into other iconographic schemes too.<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 1. *Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1370–1375, book illumination, MS gr. 1242, fol. 92v, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Fig. 2. *Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1312-1314 (?), but most probably after 1328, mosaic, Holy Apostles Church, Thessaloniki. Photo: the author

In these reflections, Patterson, for his part, cites Ch. Delvoye as the first researcher to mention the subject of Hesychasm in iconography at all.<sup>32</sup> It is about Delvoye’s hypothesis that the main church of the Peribleptos Monastery in Mystras was built by the son of John VI Kantakouzenos - Manuel Kantakouzenos, Despot of the Morea. According to Delvoye, this fact explains the hesychastic elements in the iconographic program of the church.<sup>33</sup> In addition to Delvoye, Patterson mentions three more researchers in the same place - D. T. Rice, M. Chadzidakis and A. Grabar for whom, however, he explicitly states that they approached the topic only from a stylistic point of view.<sup>34</sup>

Makseliene mentions a few more supporters of the idea of the hesychastic influence on the mandorla:<sup>35</sup> H. Belting, who calls the mandorla from the *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242* “the classical meditative image of the hesychasts”,<sup>36</sup> J. Beckwith, who repeats the same idea,<sup>37</sup> L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, who try to interpret the eight-ray mandorla as a visual expression of Ogdoad - the Eighth Day of Creation, the post-apocalyptic perfection of the New World,<sup>38</sup> and G. Millet, who connects this type of mandorla with the Trinitarian dogma, especially significant for hesychasts.<sup>39</sup> S. Dufrenne is mentioned here as an opponent of the thesis who believes that there are no convincing evidences in support of it, although she

<sup>30</sup> Patterson, Joby, “Hesychastic Thought as Revealed in Byzantine, Greek and Romanian Church Frescoes: A Theory of Origin and Diffusion”. *Rev Etud Sud Est Eur*, XVI, 4 (1978): 663.

<sup>31</sup> Patterson, Joby, *op. cit.*, 666.

<sup>32</sup> Patterson, Joby, *op. cit.*, 670.

<sup>33</sup> Delvoye, Charles, “Chronique archéologique”. *Byzantion*, 34, 1 (1964): 135-266, esp. 160.

<sup>34</sup> Talbot Rice, David, *Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 150; Chadzidakis, Manolis, Grabar, Andre, *Byzantine and Early Medieval Paintings* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 26.

<sup>35</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, 66-67

<sup>36</sup> Belting, Hans, *Das illuminierte Buch in der spätbyzantinischen Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1970), 15.

<sup>37</sup> Beckwith, John, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 330.

<sup>38</sup> Ouspensky, Leonid, Lossky, Vladimir, *The Meaning of Icons*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Millet, Gabriel, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968), 230-231.

does not offer another interpretation of this type of mandorla.<sup>40</sup> T. Velmans also notes that the angular shapes of the mandorla, established as a main model of what researchers call the “hesychastic” mandorla, are present in the iconographic programs of the churches in Thessaloniki, which is a major center of the Hesychasts controversy.<sup>41</sup> In her recent study, A. Strezova uses the term “hesychastic” mandorla, although she treats it differently, putting it inside or outside of quotation marks and sometimes replacing it synonymously with such definitions as “complex mandorla”, “geometrically shaped” or “hesychastic type” mandorla. Without going into explanation of the term itself, Strezova cites Andreopoulos and his hypotheses about the origin of the new form of the mandorla.<sup>42</sup>

The relation and influence between the hesychastic theology and its contemporary iconography have been discussed to varying degrees by many researchers. Some of them believe that the influence of the mystical theology penetrates the entire art of that era and even try to introduce a classification of its stylistic features. For example, N. Goleyzovskiy believes that the two main trends in Byzantine hesychasm: the teachings of St. Gregory of Sinai and the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas are reflected in Byzantine art of the fourteenth century in a way that can define two main groups of monuments. The first group is characterized by the inclination to the issues of practical confrontation with evil and the active improvement of man, accompanied by a real alteration of the human body. According to Goleyzovskiy, in these works of art can be seen an inner tension and expressiveness, purification and thinning of the flesh, and ubiquitous fiery rays penetrate even the inanimate matter. The second group of monuments is characterized by the tendency to the abstract-speculative doctrine of Palamism, in which human body is not guilty of human sinfulness, ontologically embedded in human soul. This inspires the “Palamist artists” to delve into the portrait detail and to abolish the idealization and abstract modeling.<sup>43</sup>

Speaking about Russian art, O. Popova also expressed the opinion that the triumph of Hesychasm in 1351 had a strong influence on it until the end of the sixteenth century. According to her, in that period art absorbed the intellectual ideas of the time with

the interest in the vision of God and the actions of God’s divine energies, as evidenced by the work of Theophanes the Greek, Rublev and their pupils.<sup>44</sup> L. Ouspensky also expresses the opinion that the “hesychastic spiritual renewal” of the fourteenth century had a great influence on the spiritual life and Church art of the whole Orthodox world. Although acknowledging that the subject of art is not present in the disputes between hesychasts and varlaamites, he sees the reflection of the theological disputes in the then tendency to blend the Orthodox artistic traditions with some elements of the “humanistic” renaissance, the acceleration of the number of ancient borrowings in the subjects and their interpretation, as well as in the inclination to emphasize symbolism in the iconographic themes. Without going into specific details, Ouspensky claims that through Hesychasm the doctrine of divine energies merges with the doctrine of icons and outlines the borders beyond which the ecclesiastical art cannot go without ceasing to be ecclesiastical.<sup>45</sup> In her recent study on the aesthetics of the Christian image, C. Tsakiridou also states that Hesychasm is the spiritual and aesthetic basis on which some of the most significant iconic images created by Theophanes the Greek.<sup>46</sup> A. Strezova also states that Hesychasm influenced Christian art in the period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, citing other authors whose opinions coincide with hers. Although she says that it is not possible to speak of a specific monument, icon or subject that demonstrates a hesychastic influence, she outlines a set of iconographic changes that appeared in art in the fourteenth century and which, in her opinion, can be explained only as appearing in the context of that influence.<sup>47</sup>

Other researchers argue that the influence of Hesychasm on art is far from large. An example in this regard is M. Alpatov, who openly criticizes Goleyzovskiy’s view that there is no difference between theology and art, that artists like Theophanes the Greek can also be defined as religious thinkers, and that those artists whose work is influenced by Hesychasm, should be called “Palamist artists”. On the other hand, Alpatov also criticizes speculations such as those of A. Bank, Ch. Delvoye and V. Lazarev that Hesychasm did not affect art.<sup>48</sup> Lazarev’s standpoint is quite extreme because it declares Hesychasm a “reactionary” doctrine, which was not even particularly

<sup>40</sup> Dufrenne, Suzy, “La manifestation divine dans l’iconographie byzantine de la Transfiguration”, in Boespflug, Francois, Lossky, Nicolas (eds.) *Nicée II: 787-1987* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1987), 202.

<sup>41</sup> Velmans, Tania, “Le Rôle de l’Hésychasme dans la Peinture Murale Byzantine du XIVe et XVe Siècles”, in Armstrong, Pamela (ed.) *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter* (London: Pindar Press, 2006), 218-219.

<sup>42</sup> Strezova, Anita, *Hesychasm and Art: The Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 6, 73-74, 81, 88, 92-93, 95, 99, 109, 112, 115, 117, 144, 235-236, 240.

<sup>43</sup> Голейзовский, Никита, „Исихазм и русская живопись XIV-XV вв.”. *Византийский временник*, 29 (1968): 200-201; Idem, „Послание иконописцу” и отголоски исихазма в русской живописи на рубеже XV-XVI вв.”. *Византийский временник*, 26 (1965): 224-232.

<sup>44</sup> Popova, Olga, “Medieval Russian Painting and Byzantium”, in Grierson, Roderick (ed.), *Gates of Mystery: The art of Holy Russia* (Forth Worth: Inter-Cultura & the State Russian Museum, 1993), 55-58.

<sup>45</sup> Успенски, Леонид, *Богословие на иконата* (София: Омофор, 2001), 178, 183-189.

<sup>46</sup> Tsakiridou, Cornelia, *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), 258-260.

<sup>47</sup> Strezova, Anita, *Hesychasm and Art*, pp. 64-80.

<sup>48</sup> Алпатов, Михаил, „Искусство Феофана Грека и учение исихастов”. *Византийский временник*, 33 (1972): 190-194.

liked by some icon painters such as Theophanes the Greek. Lazarev believes that Hesychasm is responsible for undermining the centuries-old traditions of Constantinople art and that in practice it dealt him a deadly blow because in the second half of the fourteenth century it changed its character according to the prevailing monastic ideals.<sup>49</sup>

However, despite the contradictions, the vast majority of researchers take into account the historical and cultural context of the epoch and the indisputable participation of the hesychastic ideas in the artistic trends of the time. E. Bakalova also criticizes Golezovskiy's attempts to connect the expressive and free painting style of the second half of the fourteenth century with the teachings of St. Gregory of Sinai, and the more arid academic style of some Constantinople masters such as Manuel Eugenikos with the abstract and speculative doctrine of St. Gregory Palamas. Bakalova believes that such a differentiation is too bold an act, given that none of the hesychastic theologians show a special interest in art and, therefore, no one has tried to build a special "hesychastic" aesthetic. Therefore, she concludes that the attempts to seek a reflection of the hesychastic ideas in the artistic style of the time can only lead to broad conclusions and cannot explain the artistic currents in the Orthodox art of the fourteenth century.<sup>50</sup> However, Bakalova specifies that the problem does not have an unambiguous answer, because the specific analysis of artistic monuments requires a more complex interpretation than the elementary opposition of lack of influence with the presence of influence. According to her, the strongest manifestation of the influence of Hesychasm in the art of that epoch can be found not as much in the artistic style and stylistic features as in the selection of the subjects in the iconographic programs, in the general concept and certain emotional nuances in the interpretation of scenes and images, as well as in some particular iconographic details.<sup>51</sup>

A. Carr also expressed a moderate skepticism about the ability of Hesychasm to influence art. Giving a brief overview of the researchers' pro and contra arguments, she concludes that there were images expressing hesychastic ideas from that epoch. They were addressed to groups or individuals sympathetic to the doctrine, as in the case with the Transfiguration miniature from the Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242 (Fig. 1). However, given the heterogeneous profile of the supporters of Hesychasm, A. Carr considers it unlikely that the doctrine has formed a unified attitude to something as conventionally social in nature

as art.<sup>52</sup> In his recent study of the *Parisinus Graecus 1242*, I. Drpić also attempts to shed light on the relationship between Hesychasm and art and to formulate the functions of the image as a visual exegesis of the word. The author examines the possibilities for a real existence in the fourteenth century of a new stylistic idiom as "hesychastic art"<sup>53</sup> and although he does not engage in a new comprehensive definition of the relationship between Hesychastic teaching and visual art, he does not deny the possibility of art to respond in various ways to the spiritual ideals and religious priorities of Hesychasm. According to him, the search for a comprehensive and correspondingly reductive interpretation of these relationships should be replaced by a more productive consideration of the diversity of models in which art during this period responded to the religious and cultural priorities of the hesychastic movement<sup>54</sup>

Hence, even though it cannot be said that Hesychasm created a new iconographic school or that it inspired a certain iconographic style, or that it guided integral artistic currents, there are sufficient indications that it influenced the artistic language of its time, thematically,<sup>55</sup> stylistically and exegetically. One of the most striking examples in this regard is the way *lux increate* began to be depicted in the late Palaiologan art, especially in preferred iconographic subjects such as the Transfiguration, where the action of the uncreated light of God's glory plays a central role. That is, the iconographic symbol of the mandorla is one of the most important particular iconographic elements that E. Bakalova talks about. This superior role stems from the fact that it serves not only as a sign and an image of *lux increate*, but functions as a mode of transformation of matter and as a *topos* of God's presence.

How then, did hesychasm form its own symbols in Orthodox art, did the word influence the image, did the image become a visual exegesis of its contemporary theological thought? The probable answer is positive, even it is not a question of building a whole new iconographic tradition, but only of an influence of the theological constructions on the form and content of Christian iconography.<sup>56</sup> In the course of the study the term "hesychastic type" mandorla will be used, first and foremost because of its brevity and suitability for clear designation. In order to keep an equal distance from the different theories of the researchers on the subject, this term is accepted as a linguistic compromise and a convenient stylistic idiom, in the spirit of what I. Drpić said.

<sup>49</sup> Лазарев, Виктор, *Феофан Грек и его школа* (Москва: Искусство, 1961), 25, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Бакалова, Елка, „Към въпроса за отражението на исихазма върху изкуството“, в *Търновска книжовна школа 1371-1971* (София: БАН, 1974), 373-375.

<sup>51</sup> Idem, „Ивановските стенописи и идеите на исихазма“. *Изкуство*, 9 (1976): с. 14-26.

<sup>52</sup> Carr, Annemarie Weyl, "Images: Expression of Faith and Power", 151

<sup>53</sup> Drpić, Ivan, "Art, Hesychasm and Visual Exegesis: Parisinus Graecus 1242 Revisited". *DOP*, 62 (2008): 217-219.

<sup>54</sup> Drpić, Ivan, *op. cit.*, 247.

<sup>55</sup> Tachiaos, Antonie Emil, "Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature", 118, 119-120

<sup>56</sup> Hamburger, Jeffrey, "The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History", 14.

### 3. The new visual formula of the concept of the glory of God

One of the main problems surrounding the “hesychastic type” of mandorla is the indication of the earliest image<sup>57</sup> in which it appears as a visual sign of the hesychastic interpretation of the essence of the *lux increate* of God’s glory.

#### 3.1. The earliest extant patterns of the “hesychastic type” of mandorla

Frequently, the first mandorla of this type<sup>58</sup> is considered to be the one from the Transfiguration miniature on fol. 92v of the *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242* (Fig. 1), dated ca. 1370-1375. This is mainly due to the context in which the illustration is placed: the manuscript has an indisputable hesychastic character. In addition, it belongs to a group of three other preserved miniatures, also directly related to the hesychastic themes of the text. Three similar mandorlas from Mystras are mentioned as its earlier models. The first one is from the Theotokos Blachernitissa fresco in the dome of the

Hagia Sophia Church in Mystras, dated ca. 1365. The current condition of the fresco is very bad, although in G. Millet’s drawing the two angular shapes added behind the figure of the Holy Virgin are clearly visible.<sup>59</sup> The second mandorla is present in the apse fresco of the church of the The Peribleptos Monastery in Mystras, dated ca. 1365-1374. It is an eight-pointed mandorla composed of two overlapping quadrangular shapes, positioned behind the figure of the Virgin and flanked by two archangels.<sup>60</sup> The last mandorla from Mystras mentioned by J. Patterson among the early specimens of the symbol is that from the Transfiguration fresco in the Panagia Pantanassa church. However, its dating is problematic because the extant wall paintings probably do not belong to the time of the construction of the church ca. 1370, but to the period of its restoration in 1428.<sup>61</sup> In order to be comprehensive in the enumeration of models similar to the Transfiguration miniature, it must be mentioned that a classical “hesychastic type” mandorla is also present in the Transfiguration fresco of the Peribleptos church in Mystras.<sup>62</sup>



Fig. 3. *The Installation of the Ark*, c. 1320-1321, fresco, parekklesion, Holy Apostles Church, Thessaloniki.



Fig. 4. *Aaron and his Sons Before the Altar*, c. 1320-1321, fresco, parekklesion, Holy Apostles Church, Thessaloniki.

Photos: the author

<sup>57</sup> This section contains in an expanded form the results of the author’s research published in: Тодорова, Ростислава, „От слово към образ: коя е първата исихастка мандорла?“, в *Преславска книжовна школа*, том XV. Шумен: УИ „Епископ Константин Преславски“, 2015, с. 427-446.

<sup>58</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, 63; Andreopoulos, Andreas, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, 228; Drpić, Ivan, “Art, Hesychasm and Visual Exegesis”, 219-228.

<sup>59</sup> Millet, Gabriel, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra: Matériaux pour l’étude de l’architecture et de la peinture en Grèce aux XIVème et XVème siècles, recueillis et publiés* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1910), pl. 132

<sup>60</sup> Delvoe, Charles, “Chronique archéologique”, 160; See the image at: <https://bit.ly/3kk0HV0> (Accessed on 2.11.2021).

<sup>61</sup> Millet, Gabriel, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra*, pl. 140, cited in Patterson, Joby, “Hesychastic Thought as Revealed in Byzantine, Greek and Romanian Church Frescoes: A Theory of Origin and Diffusion”, 666, n. 10. See the image at: <https://bit.ly/3GYO3V0> (Accessed on 2.11.2021).

<sup>62</sup> Лазарев, Виктор, *История византийской живописи* (Москва: Искусство, 1986), 171-172, табл. 564



Among the earliest examples of the “hesychastic type” mandorla is the mandorla from the Transfiguration mosaic in the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki (Fig. 2), often dated ca. 1312-1314,<sup>63</sup> although it is probably from a later period – an issue that will be discussed below. Some researchers emphasize the fact that superimposed geometric shapes, be they triangles, squares, star shapes or circles, together with the multiplied beams of light, are not something new, but are present in the treasury of late Byzantine imagery.<sup>64</sup> An evidence of this is the fact that geometric mandorlas and halos first appeared in the last decades of the thirteenth century and then they spread widely from the beginning of the fourteenth century on.<sup>65</sup>

We will return to these earlier forms later, while here we will only add to the list a few mandorlas from Constantinople, which could also claim supremacy: four of them are present in the wall paintings in the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora (Kariye Mosque) and a little later one is preserved in the Baptism of Christ mosaic in the Pammakaristos Church (Fethiye Mosque). From a chronological point of view, the greatest rivalry for supremacy exists between the “hesychastic type” mandorla in the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki (Fig. 2) and the similar mandorlas in the parekklesion (Figs. 3, 4, 5) and the exonarthex (Fig. 6) of the Chora Church in Constantinople.

### 3.2. The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki and the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora

The Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki was built in the early fourteenth century as a catholicon of a large monastery, often described as founded by Patriarch Niphon I and dedicated to the Mother of God.<sup>66</sup>

Most likely this is the Theotokos Gorgoepikoos, the second of the two monasteries in Thessaloniki dedicated to the Virgin Mary.<sup>67</sup> The dating of the church is usually linked to the four years in which Niphon I occupied the patriarchal throne in Constantinople (May 1310 - April 1314). A controversial figure, considered by his contemporaries to be an “illiterate”, “ill-suited” and “with few if any qualifications for his office”,<sup>68</sup> colorfully described in history by Nicephorus Gregoras as a “luxury-loving gourmet, better suited to be a dealer in real estate than a patriarch”,<sup>69</sup> Niphon I became the main donor of this monastery in Thessaloniki. His name, along with that of the monastery’s abbot and second donor Paul, who was his disciple, is immortalized in several inscriptions inside the catholicon<sup>70</sup> and above its main entrance.<sup>71</sup>

A. Xyngopoulos’ opinion, which prevailed in the middle of the last century, states that the mosaic decoration of the church begun around 1312 and after 1315 it remained unfinished due to Niphon I’s renouncing of the patriarchal throne.<sup>72</sup> The lack of sufficient donations after the abdication of the patriarch led to the subsequent decision to complete the iconographic program of the church with frescoes.<sup>73</sup> These frescoes were certainly executed in the time after 1315,<sup>74</sup> mainly in the period 1328-1334.<sup>75</sup> This dating has led researchers to point to the mandorla in the Transfiguration mosaic (Fig. 6) as probably the earliest extant “hesychastic type” mandorla.<sup>76</sup> Hence, the logical question is what were the reasons for the appearance of this complex shape made of two overlapping geometric figures – a rhombus with concave sides and a quadrangle – on the pointed oval of the mandorla, filled with rays? And why did this theologically meaningful visual symbol of the hesychastic understanding of the essence of the *lux increate* of God’s glory first appear outside the metropolis?

<sup>63</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, 63

<sup>64</sup> Дрпич, Иван, “Art, Hesychasm and Visual Exegesis”, 229.

<sup>65</sup> Мако, Владимир, „Геометријски облици нимбова и мандорли у средњовековној уметности Византије, Србије, Русије и Бугарске”. *Зograf*, 21 (1990): 41, 53-58.

<sup>66</sup> Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies Thessaloniki, 1998), 7-10.

<sup>67</sup> Ξυγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας, „Μονή των Αγ. Αποστόλων ή μονή της Θεοτόκου”. *Προσφορά εις Στίλπιωνα Κυριακίδη, Παράρτημα 4*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών, 1953, 726-735.

<sup>68</sup> Hussey, Joan Mervyn, *Orthodox Church and the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 253-254.

<sup>69</sup> Nicephorus Gregoras, *History*. bk. VII, ch. 9 (CB I, p. 259), cited in Hussey, Joan Mervyn, *Orthodox Church and the Byzantine Empire*, 253

<sup>70</sup> Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Ξυγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας, *Η ψηφιδωτή διακόσμησης του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων Θεσσαλονίκης*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών, 1953, 4-5; Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, 26-27.

<sup>72</sup> Ξυγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας, *Η ψηφιδωτή διακόσμησης του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων Θεσσαλονίκης*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 3-4; Kazamias-Tsernoul, Maria, “The ‘Proslepsis’ in the Bible in the Paleogeogean Monumental Painting of Thessaloniki”. *Synthesis*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2013): 32; Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, 10-11, 31.

<sup>74</sup> Ξυγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας, “Τα ψηφιδωτά του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων εν Θεσσαλονίκη”. *AE*, (1932): 156; Semoglou, Athanasios, “Le portrait de saint Lazare le Galésiate aux Saints-Apôtres de Thessalonique: un nouveau témoignage sur la datation des peintures murales de l’église”. *Βυζαντινά*, 21, 1 (2000): 617.

<sup>75</sup> Kissas, S. K., “La datation des fresques des Saints Apôtres a Thessalonique”. *Zograf*, 7 (1997): 52-57; Semoglou, Athanasios, “Le portrait de saint Lazare le Galésiate aux Saints-Apôtres de Thessalonique”, 617; Tsitouridou, Anna, „La peinture monumentale à Salonique pendant la première moitié du XIVe siècle”, in Davidov, Dinko (ed.), *L’art de Thessalonique et des pays balkaniques et les courants spirituels au XIVe siècle* (Belgrade: GRO “Kultura”, 1987), 16.

<sup>76</sup> Makseliene, Simona, *The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography*, 63



Fig. 5. *Christ with Seraphims*, c. 1320-1321, fresco, parekklesion, Tomb C, Holy Apostles Church, Thessaloniki.

Fig. 6. *Virgin Blachernitissa*, c. 1325-1330, fresco, exonarthex, Tomb E, Holy Apostles Church, Thessaloniki.

Photos: the author

Without underestimating the role of Thessaloniki as the second city in the Empire and without denying the specifics of its culture,<sup>77</sup> Constantinople as a political center has always been in the foundation of the theological debates and artistic innovations, it sets styles and spreads models willingly multiplied throughout the Orthodox world.<sup>78</sup> However, in the case of the “hesychastic type” mandorla, if we accept

as credible the chronological framework of the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki, the approach suddenly changed and Thessaloniki set an iconographic model. Given the dating of the extant patterns, this model was copied in two of the most important Constantinopolitan churches - in the Chora Church (Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 6) and in the Pammakaristos Church (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. *Baptism of Christ*, c. 1320, mosaic, Pammakaristos Church, Istanbul.

Photo: the author

Fig. 8. *Christ Pantocrator*, c. 1310-1314, fresco, Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš, Prizren.

Photo: Serbian Orthodox Church

The extremely rich bibliography on the Chora Monastery and the activity of its ktetor Theodore Metochites on the reconstruction and decoration of

the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora in the early fourteenth century leaves no doubt in the dating of the mosaics and wall paintings there.<sup>79</sup> The restoration,

<sup>77</sup> Nelson, Robert S, “Tales of Two Cities: The Patronage of Early Palaeologan Art and Architecture in Constantinople and Thessaloniki”, in Mavrommatis, Lenos, Nikolaou, Katerina, (eds.) *Manuel Panselinos and His Age. Proceedings of International Symposium* (Athens: Institute of Historical Research, 1999), 127-140; Panayotidi, Maria, “Les tendances de la peinture de Thessalonique en comparaison avec celles de Constantinople, comme expression de la situation politico-économique de ces villes pendant le XIVe siècle”, in Papadopoulou, Eutyhia, Dialetti, Dora (eds.), *Byzantium and Serbia in the 14th Century* (Athens: Institute of Historical Research, 1996), 351-362.

<sup>78</sup> Demus, Otto, “The Style of the Kariye Djami and Its Place in the Development of Palaeologan Art”, in Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*. Vol. IV (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 134-136; Nelson, Robert S, “Chora and Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople”. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 23 (1999): 87; Rautman, Marcus Louis, “Patrons and Buildings in Late Byzantine Thessaloniki”, *JÖB*, 39 (1989): 313-315.

<sup>79</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*. Vol. I, II and III (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967). and Vol. I (Princeton: Princeton Univer-

expansion and decoration of the existing church, financed by Metochites, began around 1315-1316 and were completed at the end of 1320 or at the latest in the first months of 1321.<sup>80</sup> The painting of the frescoes in the parekklesion was the last part of Metochites' decorative program, so their most probable date is 1320-1321.<sup>81</sup> Two of the scenes, which contain a "hesychastic type" mandorla, are part of a cycle of nine Old Testament subjects depicting the Virgin Mary and the miracle of the Incarnation located in the arches and lunettes under the dome of the western bay window in the parekklesion. These are "The Installation of the Ark" (Fig. 3) and "Aaron and his Sons Before the Altar" (Fig. 4). The decoration of the tombs in the parekklesion and the exonarthex was performed after Metochites, for a longer period of time, although the scenes including the "hesychastic type" mandorla were made several years after 1321 (Tomb C - Fig. 5) and most probably around 1325-1330 (Tomb E - Fig. 6).<sup>82</sup> The Baptism of Christ mosaic in the Pammakaristos Church (Fig. 7) is dated around 1320.<sup>83</sup> Here the glory of God, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the voice of God are represented by a "hesychastic type" mandorla with several beams coming out of it.

Now then, is it really possible that Thessaloniki has set a completely new iconographic model that has been copied from Constantinople, or is it a matter of a wrong chronology and a misinterpretation of the historical facts related to it? In order to find the answer to this question we must consider its two main aspects - the chronology of the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki and the intervisuality between its iconographic program and that of the Chora Church in Constantinople.

### 3.3. The construction date of the Holy Apostles Church in Thessaloniki

Many researchers, led by A. Xyngopoulos<sup>84</sup> and O. Demus,<sup>85</sup> following G. Millet,<sup>86</sup> consider Thessalo-

niki as a center of a particular style in art during the Palaiologan era. They believe that Thessaloniki was able to export authors, hence their own local models, and it happened not only towards the periphery of the Empire, but also towards the metropolis. The topic is too broad to be considered here, but limited to the decorative program of the Holy Apostles Church, the announcement of its authors as local masters tends to a local patriotism. As P. Underwood rightly points out, if these mosaics and frescoes "are examples of the work of a 'Macedonian' school, then the mosaics and frescoes of the Kariye Djami in Constantinople, and most of what is known of Constantinopolitan art of the Palaeologan period, would have to be considered 'Macedonian'. The Kariye Djami and Holy Apostles mosaics and frescoes, executed within a very few years of one another, have the most extraordinary identity of style that can be found in Palaeologan art"<sup>87</sup>

The supposed period of construction of the monastery complex dedicated to the Holy Mother of God and its catholicon far exceeds the four years of Patriarch Niphon I on the Constantinopolitan cathedra. The two main hypotheses in this regard are that either the nave and the inner narthex are part of an older church that Niphon restored by adding the side parekklesions and the exonarthex bearing his inscription (two-phase construction),<sup>88</sup> or Niphon took care of the construction in a sufficiently advanced stage to be able to put his name in the upper part of the western facade of the church (single-phase construction).<sup>89</sup> Each of these hypotheses is more plausible than the assumption that the entire church was completely built and half-decorated in just three years (1312-1315), with the relatively slow process of making of mosaics.<sup>90</sup> In this respect, the internal inscription certifying the second patron of the church is extremely important, because the hypothesis that the frescoes are his way to complete the remaining unfinished decoration has no evidentiary support, even

city Press, 1975); Ousterhout, Robert, *The Art of the Kariye Camii* (London – Istanbul: Scala Publishers, 2002); Ousterhout, Robert, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul* (Dumbarton Oaks: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1988); Klein, Holger, Ousterhout, Robert, Pitarakis, Brigitte (eds.), *Kariye from Theodore Metochites to Thomas Wittemore: One Monument Two Monumental Personalities* (Istanbul: Pera Muzesi, 2007); Klein, Holger, Ousterhout, Robert (eds.), *Restoring Byzantium: The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 2004); Karahan, Anne, *Byzantine Holy Images – Transcendence and Immanence: The Theological Background of the Iconography and Aesthetics of the Chora Church* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*. Vol. I, 15; Nelson, Robert S, "Taxation with Representation. Visual Narrative and the Political Field of the Kariye Camii". *Art History*, 22, No. 1 (1999): 57.

<sup>81</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 15-16, 188.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp. 223-224, 231-232, 235-236, 188, 273, 275, 286-287.

<sup>83</sup> Belting, Hans, Mango, Cyril, Mouriki, Doula, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii at Istanbul)* (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, Vol. 15, Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1978), 64-65, 94-95; Chatzidaki, Nano, *Byzantine Mosaics* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1994), 26, 252.

<sup>84</sup> Xyngopoulos, Andre, *Thessalonique et la peinture macédonienne* (Athens : M. Myrtilis, 1955).

<sup>85</sup> Demus, Otto, "The Style of the Kariye Djami.", 140-141.

<sup>86</sup> Millet, Gabriel, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1968).

<sup>87</sup> Underwood, Paul, "Manuel Panselinos: a Review Article". *Archeology*, 10, No. 3 (1957): 216.

<sup>88</sup> Παπαγεωργίου, Πέτρος, „Θεσσαλονίκης Βυζαντινοί ναοί και επιγράμματα. I. Ο ναός Δώδεκα Αποστόλων". *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 10, 1 (1901): 33; Diehl, Charles, Le Tourneau, Marcel, Saladin, Henri, *Les Monuments chrétiens de Salonique* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1918), 191-192.

<sup>89</sup> Ćurčić, Slobodan, *Gračanica: King Milutin's church and its place in late Byzantine architecture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 73, n. 15; Rautman, Marcus Louis, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki: a Study in Early Palaeologan Architecture*, PhD Thesis (Indiana University, School of Fine Arts. Ann Arbor, 1984), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 15.

on the contrary. As N. Chatzidaki explicitly emphasizes, due to the extremely high cost of mosaics, the combination of mosaics and frescoes was a normal practice in Byzantine art, even when it comes to the most important churches.<sup>91</sup>

In 1977-1980 Kuniholm and Striker made a detailed dendrological analysis of the building timber from different parts of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki, publishing their results in 1983, 1987 and 1990.<sup>92</sup> The obtained data support the theory of the single-phase construction of the church<sup>93</sup> and show that the dating of the latest wooden beams used in the Byzantine phase of its construction is 1329, which determines that its completion took place in the same year or slightly later, “at least 15 years after the inferred date from the founder’s inscription”.<sup>94</sup> This chronological framework coincides with the content of the second donor inscription, which declares abbot Paul as disciple of Niphon I and as a second donor of the monastery.<sup>95</sup> Considering the years of his rule of the monastery (1328-1334), it is probably then that not only the frescoes but also the mosaics were executed as parts of an entire iconographic program of the church.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, judging by certain stylistic features, some researchers tend to attribute the frescoes to an even later period and date them as far back as around 1340-1350.<sup>97</sup>

The chronological evidences indicate that the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki was apparently part of a long-term monastery project that had been overseen by at least two Constantinopolitan patriarchs: started during the time of Patriarch Athanasius I, continued by Patriarch Niphon I and completed only during the time of Patriarch Isaiah.<sup>98</sup> The third donor inscription, written long after Niphon I abdicated, is associated with his rehabilitation from the charges brought against him after the accession of Emperor

Andronicus III to the throne in 1328.<sup>99</sup> The empirical data, in turn, show that the two parts of the iconographic program are unified and executed most likely by masters belonging to the same Constantinopolitan school.<sup>100</sup> The stylistic features of this iconographic program entirely follow the artistic trend of the decoration of the Chora Monastery,<sup>101</sup> which, according to O. Demus, is an emanation of a revolutionary style originated in Constantinople much earlier.<sup>102</sup> What is more, Demus directly attributes the authorship of the decorative program of the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki and that one of the Chora church to the same metropolitan atelier, although immersed in his desire to support the primacy of the mosaics and frescoes from Thessaloniki over these from Constantinople, he puts forward beautifully formulated arguments, which in themselves would sound much more convincing, if they were applied as evidences to the opposite hypothesis.<sup>103</sup>

#### 4. The intervisuality between the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki and the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora

The modern data on the chronology of the construction and decoration of the two churches compared here are supplemented and supported by the indisputable similarities in their iconographic programs. Here comes to the aid the theory, popular in recent decades, of the permeation of the visual patterns by R. Nelson, who successfully applied the theory of intertextuality<sup>104</sup> of M. Bakhtin and J. Kristeva<sup>105</sup> from word to image. According to Nelson, the simultaneous study of the verbal and its corresponding visual narrative naturally leads to the transition from intertextuality to its parallel intervisuality. The terms “subjective vi-

<sup>91</sup> Chatzidaki, Nano, *Byzantine Mosaics*, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Kuniholm, Peter, Striker, Cecil, “Dendrochronological Investigations in the Aegean and Neighboring Regions, 1977-1982”. *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 10 (1983): 411-420; Idem, “Dendrochronological Investigations in the Aegean and Neighboring Regions, 1983-1986”. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 14 (1987): 385-398; and Idem, “Dendrochronology and the Architectural History of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki”. *Architectura*, 20 (1990): 1-26.

<sup>93</sup> Kuniholm, Peter, Striker, Cecil, “Dendrochronology and the Architectural History of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki”, 12-15, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Kuniholm, Peter, Striker, Cecil, *op. cit.*, 10-11.

<sup>95</sup> Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, 11.

<sup>96</sup> *Ενγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας*, “Τα ψηφιδωτά του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων εν Θεσσαλονίκη”, 156; Kissas, S. K., “La datation des fresques des Saints Apôtres a Thessalonique”, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Djurić, Vojislav J., “La peinture murale de Resava. Ses origines et sa place dans La peinture byzantine”, in *L'ecole de la Morava et son temps. Symposium de Resava 1968* (Beograd: Filozofski Fakultet, 1972), 278.

<sup>98</sup> Hussey, Joan Mervyn, *Orthodox Church and the Byzantine Empire*, 256; Rautman, Marcus Louis, “Aspects of Monastic Patronage in Palaeologan Macedonia”, in Ćurčić, Slobodan, Mourike, Doula (eds.) *The Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire: Papers from the Colloquium held at Princeton University 8-9 May 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 71-72.

<sup>99</sup> Bosch, Ursula Victoria, *Kaiser Andronikos III. Palaiologos: Versuch einer Darstellung der byzantinischen Geschichte in den Jahren 1321-1341* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1965), 174-175.

<sup>100</sup> Gerstel, Sharon, “Civic and Monastic Influences on Church Decoration in Late Byzantine Thessalonike”. *DOP*, 57 (2003): 226, n. 4; Βελώνης, Γεώργιος, „Οι Άγιοι Απόστολοι Θεσσαλονίκης και η Σχολή της Κωνσταντινούπολης”. *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress, Akten II/4, JÖB*, 32, 4 (1981): 457-467.

<sup>101</sup> Parani, Maria, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> Centuries)* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 265-266.

<sup>102</sup> Demus, Otto, “The Style of the Kariye Djami.”, 127-128.

<sup>103</sup> Demus, Otto, *op. cit.*, 150-152.

<sup>104</sup> Alfaro, María Jesús Martínez, “Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept”. *Atlantis* 18, No. 1/2 (1996): 268-285.

<sup>105</sup> Добрева, Елка, Савова, Ивелина, *Текстолингвистика. Уводен курс*, Шумен: УИ „Еп. Константин Преславски”, 2000, 9-12; Idem, *Текст & Дискурс. Терминологичен справочник*, В. Търново: Фабер, 2009, 81-82.

sion” and “intervisuality” were first introduced to the scientific community on behalf of R. Nelson at the annual CAA conference in February 1990.<sup>106</sup> They were reported by M. Camille, who in 1991 officially introduced the term “intervisuality” into the medieval studies, in its role of a generator of meaning, of a visual discourse manipulating the meaning of the image.<sup>107</sup> Camille defines the intervisuality as “a process in which images are not the stable referents in some ideal iconographic dictionary, but are perceived by their audiences to work across and within different and even competing value-systems.”<sup>108</sup> In addition, J. Alexander defines the intervisuality as a quality of images that recalls “other images that are formally similar, but which have different contexts and thus different connotations.”<sup>109</sup> R. Nelson explains the intervisual relationships between images as an intertextuality applied to visual images, which can be widely used because art in its entirety is a communication between the addresser and the addressee that always considers pre-existing works.<sup>110</sup>

In this particular case, the pre-existence of the iconographic program of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople and its subsequent permeation as a visual example in the iconographic program of the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki can be further substantiated by means of the intervisual evidences. The stylistic features in the art of Constantinople and Thessaloniki can be clearly distinguished based on the historical context and characteristics of the ktetorship and the social significance of the artistic activity in the two capital cities of the Empire. The art of Thessaloniki could be described as more monastic while the art of Constantinople is more aristocratic in its character, as Nelson concludes.<sup>111</sup> From this point of view, the hesychastic character of an iconographic symbol such as the mandorla could have its origins in Thessaloniki, although both the chronology and the intervisuality between the iconographic programs of several important churches from this period say otherwise.

After its publication Xyngopoulos’ error has been widely multiplied in the scientific literature, so where does it come from? First of all, we must point out that at the time when Xyngopoulos wrote and published his works on the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki,<sup>112</sup> he could not know in detail the iconographic program of the Chora Monastery. The restoration of the mosaics in the Chora church, begun by T. Whittemore in 1947,<sup>113</sup> was followed by the discovery of the frescoes in the parekklesion by P. Underwood in 1951-1958<sup>114</sup> and the preliminary results of these achievements were published successively from 1949<sup>115</sup> to 1959.<sup>116</sup> For this reason, Xyngopoulos was not able to reach the conclusion made by O. Demus regarding the close relation between the mosaics from the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki and from the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, because he simply did not have any data about it. As mentioned above, Demus concludes that the masters of the mosaics in both churches belonged to the same Constantinopolitan atelier, looking at the similarities in the scenes of the Nativity, the Resurrection and the Assumption as evidences in this regard. Yet, accepting the dating of Xyngopoulos as reliable, Demus points to the iconographic program of the Holy Apostles church as the earlier of the two.<sup>117</sup> Already aware that the chronology of the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki is later than that of the Chora church in Constantinople, we must say that the evidences of Demus remains valid, only in the opposite direction.

P. Underwood also repeatedly noted the amazing coincidences in the ornamentation and interpretation of some scenes from the two churches in question. He pays special attention to the similarities in the Miracle in Cana from the Chora church and the Entrance of the Lord in Jerusalem from the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki.<sup>118</sup> In addition, there is an easily noticeable literal resemblance in some of the independent decorative elements. For example, the mosaic cross in a medallion, which crowns the lower part of

<sup>106</sup> Del Alamo, Elizabeth Valdez, “Triumphal Visions and Monastic Devotion: The Annunciation Relief of Santo Domingo de Silos”. *Gesta*, 29, No. 2 (1990): 167-188; see n. 93, 187-188.

<sup>107</sup> Camille, Michael, “Gothic Signs and the Surplus: The Kiss on the Cathedral”, in Poirion, Daniel, Regalado, Nancy (eds.), *Special issue Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1991), 151-170.

<sup>108</sup> Camille, Michael, *op. cit.*, 151.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander, Jonathan James Graham, “Dancing in the Streets”. *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery, Essays in Honor of Lilian M. C. Randall*, 54 (1996): 156.

<sup>110</sup> Nelson, Robert S, “Chora and Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople”, 85.

<sup>111</sup> Nelson, Robert S, “Tales of Two Cities”, 130, 139-140.

<sup>112</sup> Ξυγγόπουλος, Ανδρέας, “Τα ψηφιδωτά του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων εν Θεσσαλονίκη”, 133-156; Idem, „Μονή των Αγ. Αποστόλων ή μονή της Θ εοτόκου”, 726-735; Idem, *Η ψηφιδωτή διακόσμησης του ναού των Αγίων Αποστόλων Θεσσαλονίκης* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών, 1953).

<sup>113</sup> Ousterhout, Robert, “(Re)Presenting the Kariye Camii: Architecture, Archeology and Restoration”, in Klein, Holger, Ousterhout, Robert (eds.), *Restoring Byzantium*”, 32-34.

<sup>114</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Whittemore, Thomas, “Report of the Byzantine Institute”. *Annual report (Fog Art Museum)*, No. 1948/1949 (1948-1949): 24.

<sup>116</sup> Underwood, Paul, “First Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Frescoes in the Kariye Camii at Istanbul by the Byzantine Institute, 1952-1954”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 9/10 (1956): 253-290; Idem, “Second Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Frescoes in the Kariye Camii at Istanbul by the Byzantine Institute, 1955”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 11 (1957): 173 + 175-222; Idem, “Third Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Frescoes in the Kariye Camii at Istanbul by the Byzantine Institute, 1956”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 12 (1958): 235 + 237-266; Idem, “Fourth Preliminary Report on the Restoration of the Frescoes in the Kariye Camii at Istanbul by the Byzantine Institute, 1957-1958”. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 13 (1959): 185 + 187-214.

<sup>117</sup> Demus, Otto, “The Style of the Kariye Djami”, 150-151.

<sup>118</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 16.

the arch of the tomb of Michael Tornikes (Tomb D) in the Chora church<sup>119</sup> has its correspondence with the cross in a medallion, crowning the scenes from the birth and childhood of the Virgin Mary in the inner narthex of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki.<sup>120</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most obvious intervisuality can be seen in the mosaics of Christ Pantocrator in both churches, and the additional proof of the precedence of the Constantinopolitan model can be deduced from the presence of the same mosaic in the Pammakaristos church in the metropolis. In all three churches the selection of the obligatory subjects and their arrangement is similar,<sup>121</sup> and their artistic interpretation is remarkably similar. The mosaics of Christ Pantocrator in the domes of the parekklesion of the Chora church and the Pammakaristos church are practically identical, as in the Pammakaristos mosaic can be seen some elements of the interpretation of the mosaic of Christ Pantocrator “H XΩPA TΩN ZΩNTΩN” from the Chora exonarthex (the expression of the face, the shape of the eyebrows, the specific deformation of the left cheekbone and the left ear, etc.). When comparing what is left of the dome mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki with the same mosaic from the Chora exonarthex, the coincidences (the shape and position of the hands, the interpretation and color of the garment and the Gospel) are so literal that they can be cited as successful proofs of the hypothesis of the existence of “model books” in the Byzantine iconographic ateliers.<sup>122</sup>

The assumption that the iconographic program of the Chora Monastery is a successor of the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki can be further refuted by the interpretation of the “Aaron and his Sons Before the Altar” fresco (Fig. 4). The same scene, developed in a similar way, is a part of the Mariological cycle of frescoes in the southern narthex of the Pammakaristos church, which was probably painted in the late thirteenth century. This fact gives Underwood a reason to assume that the depiction of Aaron and his sons among the Old Testament scenes prefigurations of the Virgin has been a peculiar subject to Constantinopolitan iconography.<sup>123</sup> H. Belting also believes that the painters of the Chora and the Pammakaristos most likely belonged to the same atelier. He points out as the closest similarity the one between the Pammakaristos mosaics and the Holy Apostles mosaics, making an explicit parallel between the iconogra-

phic and stylistic features of the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki and the Chora church.<sup>124</sup> In addition, examples of scenes identical to those of Chora church are found in the iconographic programs of the Kalenić Monastery in Serbia (1417-1418), Curtea de Arges in Romania,<sup>125</sup> as well as in the metropolitan’s church in Mystras,<sup>126</sup> which further demonstrates the power of the influence of the Constantinopolitan models and the consciously sought intervisuality in the churches of the periphery with the most beautiful patterns of the metropolis.

The import of Constantinopolitan artistic models is a very common phenomenon. There is a fresco of Christ Pantocrator (Fig. 8) in the iconographic program of the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš in Prizren, mentioned by Underwood. The fresco dates from 1307 (most probably in 1310-1314) and is located in the main dome of the church. Here the Lord Jesus Christ is depicted in a round mandorla combined with two overlapping quadrangular shapes with slightly concave sides. The mandorla itself is three-layered and the outlines of its outermost light belt emit eight short beams of light directed at each of the vertices of the octagon added behind the mandorla, thus forming a classic “hesychastic type” mandorla. L. Popovich makes a reasonable assumption that this image was imported and originated from an “ultimate Byzantine prototype”.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, he points to a written testimony of the existence of such a much earlier image in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Popovich cites the Constantinopolitan clergyman Constantinus Rhodius, who in his ekphrasis of the mosaic decoration of the Holy Apostles church in Constantinople, created in the tenth century, writes: “[737] In the middle of the costly ceiling, it (the church) bears a representation of Christ as if He were the sun, a wonder exceeding all wonders;...”.<sup>128</sup>

The interpretation of the fresco in the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš in Prizren strongly resembles the dome mosaic from the parekklesion of the Chora Monastery, as the most obvious resemblances can be seen in the development of the garment, the face and the position of the blessing right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, the typical Constantinopolitan models circulated in the process of decorating the important churches of the metropolis. They were exported and not brought in from without, be it from the second important city of the Empire, such

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, 279, Vol. III, 538-539.

<sup>120</sup> Nikonanos, Nikos, *The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki*, 60, pl. 28.

<sup>121</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 31, n. 10.

<sup>122</sup> Demus, Otto, “The Style of the Kariye Djami”, 121-122.

<sup>123</sup> Underwood, Paul, *The Kariye Djami*, Vol. I, 236.

<sup>124</sup> Belting, Hans, “The Style of the Mosaics”, in Belting, Hans, Mango, Cyril, Mouriki, Doula, *The Mosaics and Frescoes of St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii at Istanbul)*, 96-107.

<sup>125</sup> Hjort, Øystein, “Oddities” and “Refinements”: Aspects of Architecture, Space and Narrative in the Mosaics of Kariye Camii”, in Rosenqvist, Jan Olof (ed.), *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture* (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2004), 31.

<sup>126</sup> Torp, Hjalmar, “A Consideration of the Wall-Paintings of the Metropolis at Mistra”, in Rosenqvist, Jan Olof (ed.), *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture* (Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2004), 85.

<sup>127</sup> Popovich, Ljubica, “A Study of the Standing Figures in the Five Domes of the Virgin Ljeviška in Prizren”. *Зборник радова Византолошког Института*, 41 (2004): 320-322.

<sup>128</sup> Mango, Cyril, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312 – 1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 200.

as Thessaloniki. In the interest of impartial analysis, we must mention that according to many researchers, the frescoes in Prizren are made by Michael Astrapas and Eutychios, who are considered to be Thessalonians. But in practice, their school specialized in the wall paintings may have been both Thessalonian and Constantinopolitan, because the participation of Thessalonian painters in it does not necessarily mean a Thessalonian origin of the atelier.<sup>129</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

At the end of this search for the prototype of the “hesychastic type” of mandorla, three main conclusions can be formulated.

The first is that the angular-geometric shape of the mandorla is an early Constantinopolitan model, which is a part of the artistic arsenal of Byzantine art over the centuries and which is often used outside the metropolis, as shown by the extant patterns from Trabzon,<sup>130</sup> Serbia,<sup>131</sup> Cyprus and others.<sup>132</sup>

The second conclusion is that the earlier forms of this type of mandorla did not actually precede Hesychasm, because it had always existed as a spiritual

current in the Orthodox East. Following the line of the theological debates and the wider popularization of the hesychastic practices, which began at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century and found its culmination in the victory of the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas over the Barlaam’s rationalism in 1351, this model quickly seeped into the art of the Palaiologan epoch. It is a visual expression of the hesychastic understanding of the essence and manifestations of the *lux increate* of God’s glory, i.e., the image has become a visual exegesis of the word and of the theological thought of the age.

The third conclusion is that the earliest extant “hesychastic type” mandorlas are found in Constantinople. Unfortunately, it is impossible to specify which one is the first due to the lack of sufficiently reliable data. However, in this context it can be assumed that the Transfiguration mosaic in the Holy Apostles church in Thessaloniki repeats scenes from the iconographic programs of the metropolitan churches Chora and Pammakaristos, and probably bears vestiges of the style of the destroyed church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.

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<sup>129</sup> Gouma-Peterson, Thalia, “The Frescoes of the Parekklesion of St. Euthymios in Thessaloniki: Patrons, Workshops and Style”. in Ćurčić, Slobodan, Mourike, Doula (eds.) *The Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire: Papers from the Colloquium held at Princeton University 8-9 May 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 123-126, esp. n. 15

<sup>130</sup> Eastmond, Anthony, *Art and Identity in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium: Hagia Sophia and the Empire of Trebizond* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2004); Demus, Otto, “The Style of the Kariye Djami.”, 141, n. 110. See the image at: <https://bit.ly/3gGCeVK> (Accessed on 5.08.2020)

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