

# The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art



## BYZANTINE PAINTING

*with an introduction and notes by*

*GERVASE MATHEW*

ΒΙΒΛΙΟΘΗΚΗ  
ΓΕΛΛΟΓΛΕΙΟΥ  
ΙΔΡΥΜΑΤΟΣ  
ΕΧΝΩΝ Α.Π.Θ.  
ΣΥΛΛΟΓΗ  
ΣΠΗΤΕΡΗΣ

ND  
142  
.M384  
1950  
c. 1

THE FABER GALLERY  
OF ORIENTAL ART

edited by  
BASIL GRAY

*Keeper of Oriental Antiquities  
in the British Museum*

This series of books does for Oriental art what The Faber Gallery, now well established in popular favour, does for the great masters and schools of Europe. But in the case of Oriental art there is need for introduction to a little-known but fascinating world, and not merely for the reproduction and interpretation of pictures already more or less well known.

This series, therefore, while complementary to the earlier series, is quite separate from it.

It is edited by Mr Basil Gray, and will cover the main Oriental schools. There will in each case be an introduction by an authoritative scholar, written so as to provide an account of each school and its historical background. The volumes will be fully illustrated in colour and the plates have been specially selected to give as balanced an impression as possible; the subjects reproduced are accurately documented and described.



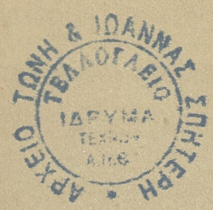
H.A.349

8s 6d  
net

8/6/1-

02115/GER

II. 6. 4.



ND  
142  
.M384  
1950  
c.1

The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art



# BYZANTINE PAINTING

*with an introduction  
and notes by*  
**GERVASE MATHEW**



*Faber and Faber Limited*

Βιβλιοθήκη  
ΤΕΛΛΟΓΛΕΙΟΥ  
ΙΔΡΥΜΑΤΟΣ  
ΤΕΧΝΩΝ  
Α.Π.Θ.  
Κωδ. 023914

0640009917

# Introduction by Gervase Mathew

It is still too early for any to hope to be definitive on any point connected with the development or with the influence of Byzantine painting. The discoveries of the last twenty years have made nearly all earlier generalizations untenable, but the chance evidence that they are continuing to provide is both heterogeneous and self-conflicting. A new period in the study of Byzantine art has begun since 1925. There have been Mr W. H. Buckler's discoveries of the dated wall-paintings at Cyprus, the publication of the paintings in the Cappadocian rock churches, the achievements of Professor Soteriou and Professor Whittemore's discoveries at Constantinople where the Byzantine mosaics with their underlying paintings are now being gradually stripped of the Turkish plaster work that covered them. At Moscow, at the Central Restoration Workshop, a new X-ray technique has led to the uncovering of Constantinopolitan panel pictures hidden and unsuspected beneath Russian re-painting. There are rumours of fresh discoveries not yet published; finds at Constantinople not only in Hagia Sophia but beneath the plaster of the Fetije mosque and on the walls of the buried chapel of Saint Euphemia; of series of dated panels found lying at the Sinai monastery and of new uncoverings at the Moscow Workshop. It is obvious that a mass of evidence would be provided if the technique of uncovering could be applied to the heavily re-painted walls and hanging ikons of the Athos monasteries.

Yet even when such discoveries have been completed and co-related the history of Byzantine painting will only become intelligible after there has been a close scientific study of the intricate Byzantine civilization that it mirrored; but scientific Byzantinism is still in its beginnings.

Byzantine history is often held to have begun on the eleventh of May in the year 330 when Constantine established the administrative centre of the Roman Empire at the old Greek town of Byzantium which was to be re-named Constantinople. On such a reckoning Byzantine history ended on the twenty-ninth of May 1453 when the Turks stormed the City and the last of the Roman Emperors Constantine XI died in the breach by the gate of Saint Romanos. But outside the unrealities of a pure political history all such dates are arbitrary. In the countries round the east Mediterranean, the third, the eighth, the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries coincided with crucial phases in social and cultural transition and therefore in altering art forms. Much that can be considered as characteristically Byzantine in art, in civilization and in the technique of administration is first apparent in the late third century, is only fully developed in the late eighth and survived under Turkish rule until the late seventeenth century. It is perhaps simplest to follow the practice of the Athens school and to begin to apply the

term Byzantine at the end of the eighth century transition. In this narrower sense Byzantine painting as here discussed would imply painting practised within the frontiers of the Byzantine Empire under the Macedonian, Comnenian and Palaiologan dynasties from the middle of the ninth to the middle of the fifteenth century. Historical accident gave it a crucial significance for west European art.

In the late ninth century all Western Europe was relapsing into the chaos that accompanied the break up of the empire of Charlemagne. At Constantinople Basil I had just established the Macedonian dynasty whose rule was to be marked by a strong administration, much surplus wealth and success in war. From 867 until 1071 the Byzantine empire was secure as a world power, often with expanding frontiers. From 1071 until 1204 it was only contriving to survive as a great empire among the sporadic avalanches of the Crusades, with its trade routes hazardous or broken and with a continual strain upon its boundaries, south and west, from the Seljuk Turks and from the Norman kingdom of Sicily. The capital was sacked by the Crusaders. There was an interlude of anarchy. From 1261 until 1458 Byzantium was only nominally an empire—districts of Greece and Asia Minor, a sphere for economic exploitation by Venice and Genoa. Yet the period of its political decline synchronized with the first period of the Italian Renaissance and with the new demand for Greek culture among the Latins. Constantinople still retained a unique prestige in the West, it was at the same time immemorally antique and very modern.

Through all these periods, among many changes, the essential notes of the Byzantine civilization remained constant. By the end of the ninth century there was a new ideological unity in the Eastern Empire. The long drawn-out struggle between image destroyers and image worshippers had closed, the bitter Monophysite controversies were forgotten. Constantinople had come to possess an inevitable unquestioned predominance in all Greek-speaking lands. It was the new Rome on the Bosphorus. It was the heir of Antioch and of Alexandria. In a fashion it was the predecessor of Venice. All that was still dynamic in Greek culture moved in the sheltered reaches of the Court. The Byzantines seemed to have achieved a corporate civilization, bureaucratic in its organization, united in its conception of hierarchic order and of the universal function of the sovereign, complacent in its self-conscious continuity from a classic past. In spite of the frequent successes of its well-trained armies Byzantium remained in many ways a civilian empire, dominated by the magistrate and by the civil servant at a time when both had been forgotten in the west. Nature was held to be intelligible, the quality most prized was that of serene and temperate and active mind.



Plate 1. St. Luke. See page 6

From the ninth to the fifteenth century the Byzantines conceived of themselves as Romans and of the Greek classics as their special heritage. But it seems increasingly clear that the conservative character of their civilization has been much overestimated. Until the fifteenth century it remained characterized by zest for experiment and for a sophisticated modernity in thought, in science, in literature and in painting. Even new barbarian sources would at times be utilized precisely because exotic and bizarre. The continual innovations in literary form seemed closely paralleled by experimentalism in painting. When the origins of Italian Renaissance painting come to be restudied it may be decided that much that is termed Byzantine in the handbooks is in fact old-fashioned provincial Italian and that some at least of its most character-

istic innovations are reflections of new fashions at a Constantinopolitan atelier.

Even at the end of much future research it will only be possible to classify Byzantine painting in terms of such workshops, not of individual painters. This is not due to any Byzantine desire for anonymity—for Byzantine literature is vividly egotistic—but to the fact that the artist had none of the social status of the writer. Whether he was monk or layman as a painter he was a journeyman. For the same reason it is difficult to classify Byzantine painting in terms of the medium employed. It is increasingly clear how close was the relation between wall-painting, panel painting and manuscript painting. Perhaps because all three might be commissioned from the same workshop whether lay or monastic.

Again, it is unsatisfactory to attempt to formulate too strict a division between Constantinopolitan and provincial styles. The fundamental distinction lies between a first-class and a second-class workshop whether in the capital or in one of the provincial centres. Clearly there was a considerable output from ateliers at Salonica and later at Mistra. But it seems possible that they mirrored the fashions of the capital and possible that there was a frequent interchange of personnel. Besides, outside the workshop, there is evidence for the existence of wandering monk-journeymen who passed from church to church. In twelfth-century wall-painting the same new traits appear at the same period at Nerez in Macedonia and at the chapel of Hagios Chrysostomos in Cyprus.

Throughout the slowly expanding and quickly contracting Byzantine world the influence of the capital seems determinant. Cappadocia in the Asia Minor hinterland provides an apparent exception in painting, as it does in literature. Wall-paintings have been found in this area at Qaranleq and at Tokale Kilisse and at Qeledjar Kilisse which suggest the existence of a strong provincial tradition from at least the ninth until the twelfth century. Vestiges of the style survive in panel paintings from this area as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. It is at times crudely emotional, it has its own rhythms, it is frequently marked by a vigorous brutal realism and by the successful intention to tell a clear story clearly. But even here too close a regional classification would be unsafe. There are obvious links between such workmanship and the mosaics in the Hosios Lukas monastery near Parnassus. It is possible that monastic workmen acted as carriers for such influences from East to West without affecting the capital. It is possible that workshops in the capital found fresh inspiration in detail from the bizarre technique of a provincial style and so diffused it. It is tenable that the style is only accidentally Cappadocian and that the rock-cut chapels in that conservative province have preserved the relics of a once widespread school of painting. But with the possible exception of Cappadocia no strictly geographical categories seem easily defensible. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the conventional division between 'Macedonian and Cretan' schools is only justified when it has been emphasized, but there is no special connection between the 'Macedonian' school and Macedonia, and geographically a 'Cretan' school only comes into existence with the sixteenth century.

In the same fashion the very real distinction between monastic and court painting can only be made validly when it is emphasized that many of the town monasteries like those of the Pantanassa and of the Brontochion, must be reckoned in the circle of the court. It is probably an error to consider Byzantine culture as dominantly religious. But the religious and secular elements within it are closely blended; so also are secular and religious art. The same subject can be considered both as secular and as religious.

Three contemporary portraits of fifteenth-century magnates survive in the Peloponnese; one is very probably a cult image, two are votive offerings. In the late fourteenth century a small shepherd with a flute was painted on the walls of the Peribleptos church. The subject is probably an antiphon from a Christmas Office, 'Silence thy flute O Shepherd and chant that to-night Christ is born, the Saviour, the Blessed'. In contrast, it seems likely that religious images and scenes were used on the walls of secular palaces for purely decorative purpose.

Probably the only classifications in Byzantine painting which will continue to retain complete validity are those based on the fluctuating tastes of patrons and on the experiments in technique in the workshops. Only future research can determine how the two were co-related.

Three main tendencies in fashion can be noted during the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries; the fashion for the reproduction of the Antique, the influence of Islamic art motives, the desire for fresh expressions of dramatic tension. Each is illustrated in the present volume. They had their interplay against the common heritage of sub-antique art. They slowly fused with it and with one another. There seems no break in the history of Byzantine painting. The fifteenth century is implicit in the twelfth and what were once thought to be Palaiologan innovations have been found under the Comnenians. But constant changes in taste and in technique brought so many variations that it is gradually becoming possible to date a Byzantine painting with some exactness.

The fashion for the reproduction of the Antique has long been noted. It has led to the use of the phrase 'Byzantine Renaissance' for the period between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. There have been detailed analyses of contrasted Antiochene and Alexandrian reproductions. Yet the phrase 'Byzantine Renaissance' seems oddly clumsy for there was no conscious rebirth of classical elements in a culture which had been always almost excessively conscious of possessing them. And even in Imperial Hellenistic art it is at times difficult to maintain real antithesis between Antioch and Alexandria. Perhaps for the Byzantine patrons as to those of the Italian Renaissance the Antique appealed as the most modern. Perhaps in both periods the conception could be used to cover any fragment of art form from before the mid-third century transition and would at times be primarily associated with broken sculptures. The Antique would be equated with the classical and would gain its prestige from the association with those literary classics which formed so great a part of Byzantine higher education for both men and women. Technically an exact reproduction would be impossible and the conventional tendency was to render such reminiscences monumentally.

A desire for novelties was closely linked with the fashion for the Antique. Such novelties lay primarily either in the naturalist rendering of deep emotion conceived as

ennobling or in a naturalistic portraiture of an individual which would be at once recognizable and idealized. This tendency is only gradually becoming apparent. Again, it may be linked with the cult of the literary classics. It may explain the foreshadowing of innovations once attributed to the Italian Renaissance. It is represented in portraiture by the twelfth-century mosaic of the Empress Irene found in 1938 at Hagia Sophia with its curious resemblance to a Zucchero Queen Elizabeth, or by the mosaic of her stepson Alexios, or by the fourteenth-century Theodore Metochites in the Kahrie mosque, or by the fifteenth-century young Palaiologos at Megaspilion. But among such novelties the most important were fresh expressions of dramatic tension. These had an immediate source in new movements in Byzantine spirituality with their recurrent elaborations of detail of the Passion scenes. They can often be paralleled in Byzantine hymns. The convention of the 'Stabat Mater' had been established in the Greek-speaking provinces some centuries before it reached the West. In painting, such dramatic tensions of emotion are represented by the Deposition scene at Nerez or by the still Virgin beneath the cross in the late fourteenth century Crucifixion scene, now in the Byzantine Museum at Athens.

The precise influence of Islamic art upon Byzantine painting forms a more complex problem. It is becoming increasingly clear how very closely Byzantine and Islamic art forms were interwoven. From their beginnings they had been united in common sources and from the ninth to the twelfth century, Islamic art possessed some of the prestige of fashion at Constantinople. It was perhaps conceived as novel and as bizarre and yet was closely enough allied to be intelligible. The relationship is illustrated by the sporadic use of Kufic script in Byzantine decoration of this period and by the adoption of Islamic forms in ivory work. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries it seems probable that the chief current of such influences came by the sea trade route from the elaborate Fatimid court at Cairo. Direct Islamic influence on representation could only have occurred in purely decorative painting of beasts or of trees or of hunting scenes. The representation of purely Christian subjects could be affected indirectly by Islamic pattern and design copied from imported textiles or ceramics. Such indirect influences could at times be vital, for most of the new experiments in technique which diversify the developments of Byzantine painting consist of fresh combinations in pattern and in colour.

The fundamental techniques of the Byzantine workshop were elaborate. The chief variations were in the technique of panel painting. The wood chosen differs, perhaps almost accidentally; hard pine, or olive, or nut tree, or poplar, or plane. The methods of preparing the panel differ widely and intentionally. At times, after the indentations have been made on the surface, gesso is laid on it directly and the paint laid on the gesso. More usually, the surface is covered with a thin layer or layers

of canvas, gesso is laid on the canvas, paint on the polished gesso. At times, the gesso is covered with a thin layer of gold leaf before the paint is applied. Some form of oil painting was known, but seldom used; normally egg yolk was mixed with a variant of mastic or glue.

In wall-paintings the pigments were usually laid on to hard plaster in an oil or tempera medium; the use of 'true fresco' on damp plaster was known but remained uncommon. The hard plaster was meticulously prepared. In one twelfth-century example the brick wall of the interior of the church was covered by a thin rendering of lime and marble dust with a binding of sedge. This was indented with a trowel and then received a slightly thicker intermediate layer mixed from the same materials. On this was painted in blue wash a rough sketch of the design in order to calculate the due proportions. This was again indented and a third layer laid on it, mixed from a finer white lime and without sedge. On this was laid the final painting.

Yet the real variations in the technique of Byzantine painting were provided by fresh combinations of colour. The significance of this would perhaps be best conveyed by examples from the wall-paintings in the deserted Byzantine city of Mistra on the mountain slope above Sparta. Series of scenes from the Nativity were painted there in the monastery church of the Brontochion perhaps between 1340 and 1350; only fragments of them remain, a bright green ox browses beneath the crib, the ivory flesh tints of the priest Zachary are shaded in green and ochre. Beyond, in the square domed chamber of the Imperial Charters, the angels swerve among the wine-red shadowing with their overlapping wings and the wreathed laurel. A pathway from the Brontochion wavers down the mountain through the small ruined houses to where the monastery of the Peribleptos, the Resplendent One, grows out of the hillside, half church half cavern. There are no inscriptions by which the paintings there can be dated with any certainty, but it is probable that they were completed by 1400. In the Passion scenes in the nave a dark bent Christ strains beneath the cross or against a ladder among rough splashes of blue light. In contrast, in the painting of the Divine Liturgy, Christ the Priest stands vested before the altar while towards Him and from Him come the lines of angels bearing the bread and wine. The subject is an antiphon from the monastic choir 'seeing the tribune of the altar stand trembling O Man cast down thy eyes for within is the Christ daily sacrificed and all the ranks of the holy angels prostrate themselves before Him in fear and ritual'. The dominant seems to have been an orange shadowing upon white, and opal vestments fall from neck to ankle in still and living folds.

On the walls of the Pantanassa above the Peribleptos, new ranges of colour combinations were achieved between 1428 and 1442; the raising of Lazarus with its stress on movement, the quick unwinding of the sere cloth, the dull ochre shadowing upon the marble, the small white

## *Note on Plate 1*

### ST. LUKE

B.M. ADD. MS. 28815 F. 76b

10th century

(17 × 12.8 cm.)

**T**he British Museum additional manuscript 28815 is a Greek manuscript of the four Gospels, of the Acts of the Apostles and of a number of the Pauline Epistles. It is possibly from western Asia Minor but more probably from a Constantinopolitan atelier. It can be dated palaeographically as of the 10th or early 11th century and was clearly prepared as a manuscript de luxe; gold letters are used upon purple vellum. The oldest fragments of its cover, silver gilt plates of the Evangelists and of the overthrow of Nestorius and of Noetus, suggest that it remained in the possession of a library of very considerable wealth. An attempt has been made to date the paintings stylistically as early 10th century. But against this should be noted their very close resemblance to those in Athens Nat. Lib. Cod. 56 which can be shown by manuscript descent to be later than A.D. 960. The use of an empty wide gold background to emphasize the isolation of the central figure is characteristic of much 10th century Byzantine painting. But the treatment of the drapery affiliates the painter to one of three particular schools. In Plate 1 the linen is artificially crumpled and straight dark lines converge to indicate folds where none could have been naturally. This is identical with the treatment of the drapery in the evangelist portrait in Athens Nat. Lib. Cod. 56 F. 4<sup>v</sup>. It first appears in Byzantine painting in the late 9th century Gregory at Paris. It is used in the evangelist portraits of the middle 10th century Bibl. Nat. Gr. 70, and is similar to the technique in the 10th century Joshua Roll. It is in complete contrast to the natural folds in the middle 10th century evangelist portraits in Stauronikita MS. 43, or the flowing linen of St. Luke in Vatican Codex Gr. 1522.

## *Plate 2*

### PORTRAIT OF ST. LUKE

B.M. ADD. MS. 28815 F. 162b

10th century

(16.5 × 13 cm.)

**T**he two paintings on vellum which have been reproduced as Plates 1 and 2 were chosen to illustrate the conscious imitation of the antique which marks so many of the greatest achievements of the 10th century Byzantine schools. This is apparent not only in the details of costume and of architectural setting and in the almost sculptured monumental rendering of the figures but most significantly of all in the conception of an Evangelist as a Philosopher. This equation could be taken so literally in the middle of the 10th century that the St. Matthew painted on Fol. 10<sup>v</sup> of the Mount Athos Stauronikita Codex 43 is a direct copy of a 2nd century statue of Epicurus. Here behind St. Luke as author of his gospel and St. Luke as author of the Acts there lie two variants of the Philosopher convention on 3rd century sarcophagi.



*Plate 3*

TITLE PAGE

B.M. ADD. MS. 19352

by Theodoros of Caesarea

A.D. 1066

(23 × 19 cm.)

**B**.M. ADD. MS. 19352 consists of a Greek psalter, a metrical life of David, cast in dialogue form, and some hymns and canticles including the psalm traditionally composed by David when he had killed Goliath. It is stated in the text to have been written and illuminated by Theodoros of Caesarea, priest and monk of the monastery of [—————] by command of Michael, abbot of the said monastery in February in the year 6574 (A.D. 1066). The name of the monastery seems to have been purposely erased, perhaps when the manuscript passed into the library of another house. But it is almost certain that it was that of the great monastery of the Studion in Constantinople. For at the close, on F. 207b, there is a representation of an Abbot Michael, presumably the abbot who had commissioned the manuscript, and under it his name is given as Michael, Synkellos of the Studion. If this is a work from the Studite scriptorium this will also explain the rather irrelevant references to the iconoclast controversy vividly illustrated on FF. 27<sup>v</sup> and 88. Although on this hypothesis the manuscript was the work of a Constantinopolitan atelier, the illuminator was presumably a monk from Asia Minor since the frequent representations of St. Basil suggest that his birthplace Caesarea was Caesarea in Cappadocia.



ΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ  
ΤΟΥ ΛΑΛ  
ΗΓΩΤΟΣ

ΑΚΡΟΣΑΝΘΟΣΥΚΕΠΡΕΥΗΝΕΥΛΑΕΒ  
ΚΙΕΝΟΔΩΑΜΑΓΓΛΑΝΟΥΚΕΣΤΗ  
ΚΙΕΠΙΚΘΕΔΕΝΑΣΜΟΝΟΥΚΕΙΓΗ

ΠΑΔΑΙΣΗ

π χ

*Plate 4*

MARGINAL ILLUSTRATION

B.M. ADD. MS. 19352

by Theodoros of Caesarea

A.D. 1066

(23 × 19 cm.)

Plates 3 and 4 suggest the problem of the close inter-relation of so many Byzantine and Islamic art motifs. In Plate 3 the detail and the balance of the design seem closely related to one tradition in Islamic textiles. In Plate 4 the little paintings around the text, the cantering horse archers, the besieged town, the king in his pavilion can be paralleled by recognized stock motifs in later Islamic miniatures. B.M. ADD. MS. 19352 represents the convention of the marginally illustrated psalter, perhaps derived from a Syrian prototype, which had become increasingly popular in the 10th century and increasingly fashionable in the 11th. There is a very similar specimen in the Vatican (Gr. 372) from the Imperial scriptorium of the Comnenoi. No convention in Byzantine art gave freer play for studies from contemporary life and from nature, or illustrates more perfectly the fusion of secular and religious painting.

Ε λάνξωσβ λαι παρμηίσοσ καιτά  
παρρωσώ πομσου τασ ά μαρτί  
ρισσου ::

ο δαδ ελιγχομ

Ε ιεβττ δη ταυ τα οιδη λαι φαισο  
μωμοι του θυ ::

Μ λίσω ττ άρκα εσπι λαιου κληηο  
ρνο μωμοσ ::

Θ υσιω αι ριστωσ δοξασμω ::

Κ εμε κη οδου σ η ιδξω αι ποι τοσσο  
ταριου μου ::



ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΕΛΘΕΙΝ  
ΠΡΟΣΑΥΤΟΝ ΗΘΑΝ ΤΟΝ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΝ ΗΝ ΚΑ  
ΕΙΣ ΗΛΘΕ ΠΡΟΣ ΒΗΤΡΑ ΒΕΝΗΓΗ ΚΟΥΡ

1115

Ε λβισορ μω ο θυ λαι τα το μω γαι  
δ λβ οισου λαι λαι τα το πω ληθος  
τω ροικτρε μωσ σου εζ αχ ητομ  
ρω ανο κη μω μου ::

ο δαδ κη



Plate 5

THE MARTYRDOM  
OF ST. AUTONOMOS

B.M. ADD. MS. 11870 F. 104

early 12th century (?)

(15.7 × 12.5 cm.)

**B**.M. ADD. MS. 11870 consists of the first of the ten *Books of the Lives of the Saints* by Simeon Metaphrastes, a great lay official who had been Logothete and Magister under the Emperor Basil II (963-1025). Probably it is now only a third of its original size for it deals with the saints associated with the twenty-five feasts of September while it includes a table which deals also with the saints of October covered in the second and third Books. It can be dated palaeographically as 11th or early 12th century. Stylistically its illuminations belong to the period of Alexios I and John II Comnenos (1081-1143). Perhaps a date in the early 12th century is the safest hazard. There is nothing in its technique that precludes a Constantinopolitan provenance but the choice for illustration of the relatively obscure Bithynian saint, Autonomos, suggests that it may be the work of a scriptorium of one of the great Bithynian monasteries, for example that on Mount Olympus. The cult of Autonomos, Bishop and Martyr, centred around Limnae, the traditional site of his execution in the early 4th century. Metaphrastes describes him as seized by his executioner when about to offer up the eucharist and himself becoming the sacrificial victim. He is seldom represented in Byzantine art and his feast day on September 12th coincided with those of five saints of more established reputation: SS. Thecla, Serapion, Nicetas, Leontius and Theodore of Alexandria.



μαρτύριον του  
αγιου και ενδο  
ξου μαρτυρος αν  
των ομου. †

*Plate 6*

ST. JOHN ON PATMOS

from B.M. ADD. MS. 11870 F. 197b

early 12th century (?)

(19 × 13.2 cm.)

Plates 5 and 6 have been chosen to illustrate a third factor apparently distinct from the conscious inheritance of a classic past or the still ill-defined relationship with the Islamic courts. It has been suggested in the introductory essay that a desire for novelties seems closely linked with the fashion for the antique and that no novelty was more prized than a fresh expression of dramatic tension. Even within a pre-determined iconographic convention such tension could be conveyed by new rhythms in the grouping of the figures or by experiment in contrasted colours. In the beheading scene the headsman unsheathes his sword as the wind blows back his cloak and as the saint's red-clad body sways abruptly towards the dark blue crag. On Patmos St. John stands bent and listening even as he dictates. This emphasis on dramatic tension was to find its freest expression in Byzantine art in the 12th century wall paintings at Nerez in Macedonia and in the chapel attached to the Cypriote monastery of St. Neophytos.



: ὙΠΟΜΗΝΗΔΕΙΣ  
ΤΟΝ ἍΓΙΟΝ ἌΠΟ  
ΦΟΛΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΑΓ  
ΓΕΛΙΦΗΝΙΩ ΚΑΙ  
ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΝ :

*Plate 7*

CHRIST SEIZED IN THE GARDEN

B.M. Egerton MS. 1139 F. 7b

by Basilios

1131-1187

(14 × 10 cm.)

**P**late 7 illustrates the attempt to convey dramatic tension through the rhythm of dancing figures. It is one of a series of twenty-four vellum paintings of the life of Christ, prefixed to a Latin psalter. All seem the work of a single painter, Basilios, whose signature is recorded on the scene of Christ's enthronement. The form of his signature 'Basilios me fecit' proves that he was working for some Western patron but both iconographically and stylistically the series is East Christian. There seems little doubt that the manuscript was originally from some crusading state in Syria or Palestine. Details in the gilded initials and among the carvings on the ivory cover suggest Islamic influence. Its calendar contains a commemoration of the capture of Jerusalem, and also the 'obits' of King Baldwin II of Jerusalem and of his wife Queen Emorfia. On these grounds it has been asserted that the psalter was commissioned by Queen Melissande, King Baldwin's daughter, and in consequence it has been dated between 1131-1144. Granted that the psalter seems intended for the use of women it is at least equally probable that it was commissioned by some convent that honoured Baldwin II and Emorfia as benefactors or founders; for example by the Convent of Bethany with its close court associations. All that can be certain is that the manuscript is later than King Baldwin's death in 1131 and presumably earlier than the fall of the crusading kingdom in 1187. It is very possible that the painter Basil is identical with the Byzantine 'Basilios Pictor' known to have been employed on mosaics at Bethlehem completed in 1169. An ascription to the second half of the 12th century is also supported by the similarity of technique with early 13th century paintings in the Lectionary of Joseph of Malatea.



*Plate 8*

THE EVANGELIST

B.M. ADD. MS. 5112 F. 134

c. 1320-c. 1360

(25.5 × 19 cm.)

**P**late 8 can only be dated stylistically. It is improbable that it is much earlier than 1320 or much later than 1360. With its classical reminiscences and its monumental rendering it has an obvious relation to Plates 1 and 2. But it is very much of the mid-14th century both in the range of its colour combinations and the particular geometric quality of its pattern. It contains perhaps fifteen shades of colour. In the slender doorway of the high blue-walled house a red curtain is being blown back by the wind to balance the turning leaves of the gospel; the Evangelist is counter-balanced by the small bronze figure erect on the locked casket.

Nothing can be learnt as to its provenance from the manuscript in which it is at present found. B.M. ADD. MSS. 5111-5112 form a single enigmatic unit. It contains a considerable portion of a 12th century manuscript which, from an obit, was possibly Western Greek. But it includes fragments of a far older manuscript of the Eusebian Canons and fragments from the 14th and 15th centuries. Its most probable history is that it began as a commonplace book of Sacred Parallels constructed in a monastic scriptorium perhaps in the 17th century, by dismembering earlier manuscripts, and was intended to include the four gospels, the creeds, a selection of canons and extracts from Cyril and Athanasius and that further fragments and loose leaves were added to it before it came into the possession of the British Museum.



Ο ΑΓΙΩΘΕΟΛΟ

Τὸν λόγον  
ἀρχὴν λόγου  
τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ  
πατρὸς

*Plate 9*

THE ABBESS AND THE COMMUNITY  
OF THE CONVENT OF THE VIRGIN  
OF THE PROTOVESTIARY AT  
CONSTANTINOPLE

Lincoln College, Oxford, Gr. MS. 35. F. 12

c. 1360-1400

(21.4 × 15 cm.)

**P**late 9 has been chosen to represent the zest for pure experiment which marks much late 14th and early 15th century Byzantine paintings. To our present knowledge it is unique both in subject and in treatment. In the second row of figures the Abbess leans upon her staff of office, her counsellors and the senior nuns are grouped around her, the novices or out-sisters stand below.

Lincoln College Gr. MS. 35 is a 'Typikon', part Rule, part Cartulary, of the rich and fashionable convent of the All Holy of the Protovestiary at Constantinople. It consists of 163 folios and includes the rules and customs of the house, a survey of the convent buildings, edifying exhortations, an account of the family of a co-foundress, a calendar, and portraits of twenty-one Palaeologan benefactors and benefactresses. The most probable hypothesis (cf. Fol. 11 and c. 146) is that it was commissioned by a lady of the Imperial House, Euphrosyne Comnena Ducaena Palaeologina, grandniece of the Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos, in order to commemorate her mother who had died as a nun in the convent under the name Theodulia and to ensure that she was reckoned a co-foundress. The manuscript would seem to have grown slowly, the paintings are by at least three hands, and it is possible that the portrait of the Abbess and her community is a late addition made not long before 1400. On ff 161-162<sup>v</sup> there are dated entries of donations in 1397, 1398 and 1402.



Plate 10

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

(panel painting from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

possibly by Andronikos Byzagios

c. 1410-c. 1470

(45 × 32 cm.)

The Ashmolean *Resurrection of Lazarus* though very markedly of its own period, perhaps between 1410 and 1470, yet foreshadows the careful repetitions of much post-Byzantine art. It is on a curved panel carefully prepared in a fashion known to have been used in the 15th century in the south-east Peloponnese and Crete. It does not appear to have been re-painted but the half-effaced inscriptions above some of the figures were probably added in the late 17th century. In the 14th and early 15th centuries the subject had an increasing popularity as the opening scene in the Passion Cycle but the full iconography was not yet determined; there is a great contrast in iconographic detail between this and the Raising of Lazarus in the 14th century fresco at Chilandari. On the other hand there is clearly some relation with the work of the second Master of the Pantanassa among the wall paintings of Mistra. There is a very much closer relationship with the Raising of Lazarus painted on the walls of the Chapel of St. George in the monastery of St. Paul on Mount Athos. Here the resemblance is so close not only in iconography but in composition, colour, and technique that it is at least very tenable that both are by the same master; an inscription states that the chapel was decorated in the year 1423 'by the hand of Andronikos Byzagios', though this has been proved to have been written or perhaps re-copied after 1555.

Behind each separate detail of the Ashmolean panel there lies a long tradition; Mary and Martha prostrate before Christ, the whispering group of the disciples, the neighbour with his face half muffled for fear the corpse should be corrupt and then, beyond the Hellenistic convention of the rocks, the stylized classic town.



*continued from page 5]*

flower with chocolate leaves; the Entry into Jerusalem, the high white donkey against a background of small vermilion houses crushed within a city wall of crocus yellow; the slender silver trees and olive-coloured rocks of the Ascension; the Annunciation scene with the thin marble pillars, and the quail beneath the wine-red pineapple of the fountain.

Such colour combinations would not be considered as violating nature. Byzantine Nature was conceived as a unit, as intelligible, as following intrinsic laws, as incorporeal as well as corporeal. A phrase from the eleventh century philosopher Michael Psellos is revealing; 'to steal from intelligence the incorporeal quality of things and to realize the light within the body of the sun'. In some fashion middle Platonism had coloured so many forms of Byzantine thought. Byzantine church painting was to remain a liturgy, a ritual of all created things through which the initiate moved securely in a shadow world intent upon the world it shadowed. In the fourteenth century the figure rhythm and the pearl and sapphire can at times be linked with contemporary Byzantine mysticism, the search for the value of Number and for the Uncreated Light. A pleasure in small individual detail and an almost emotional delicacy of treatment is combined with sense of distance. The humanism of Byzantine artists could be an attempt to translate into human sense perception the intricate pattern of the Divine Wisdom. Byzantine painters styled themselves 'zoographoi', the painters of the living, but the life that they painted could be life in the world of ideas.

Yet even if all this be admitted and the possibilities of colour change through chemical reaction taken into account, such experiments can only be understood when much further study has led to the reconstruction of the mannerisms of Byzantine aesthetic. They

are not paralleled in medieval Byzantine poetry where 'natural' colours are transcribed meticulously 'the gracious gold flowered crocus, the anemone, the narcissus gleaming whiter than the snow'. It may be suggested tentatively that Byzantine painting, like Byzantine mosaic, was in some fashion conceived as music and that the colour combinations were seen as harmony. This might also explain the constantly altering geometric patterns which seem to underlie experiments in colouring. This can only be established when the new X-ray processes have been applied to the blue wash design which probably survives upon the intermediate layer of plaster beneath most Byzantine wall-paintings. Already most Byzantine painting can be expressed in terms of the varying proportion of rectangle to triangle and of intersecting semi-circles. All movement is expressed as rhythmic. The changing colour schemes may also have been conceived in terms of rhythm.

Byzantine music was to be transformed under Turkish rule and is only being rediscovered. Until recently what commonly passed for it was its seventeenth century transformation. Throughout the seventeenth century Byzantine painting slowly faded, weakened by the adoption of the *seicento* Italian mannerisms and by the strange pervading influence of western woodcuts and engravings. It was replaced in the Levant by the stiff unchanging conventions of a formalized religious art, most often directly derived from old Byzantine monastic sources, so often distorting them. Until recently what commonly passed as Byzantine Painting were the repaintings from the late seventeenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries; eighteenth century manuals like Denis of Fournas's 'Painters' Guide' were assumed to represent immemorial practice. Only in our own time there is the beginning of a slow uncovering of a lost art.

### *Note on the Illustrations*

**T**he illustrations have been chosen for two reasons. First they are with one exception relatively unknown and for the most part unpublished. Secondly they represent three tendencies in Byzantine painting already discussed in the introductory essay; the attempted reproduction of the antique, the close interrelation of many Byzantine and Islamic art motifs, and the attempt to achieve fresh expressions of dramatic

tension by experiments in composition.

Grateful acknowledgments are due to the Trustees of the British Museum, the Keepers of the Ashmolean Museum and the Rector and Fellows of Lincoln College, Oxford, for permission to reproduce paintings in their possession.

I owe much to Thomas Whittemore, to Otto Pächt, to Emmy Wellesz and to Basil and Nicolette Gray.

*First published in Mcml by Faber and Faber Limited, 24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1. Text pages printed in Great Britain at the Shenval Press, Hertford. Blocks made by Fine Art Engravers Limited, Esher. All rights reserved.*



*The Faber Gallery of Oriental Art*



with an introduction and notes by the author named

RAJPUT PAINTING – BASIL GRAY

MUGHAL PAINTING – J. V. S. WILKINSON

BYZANTINE PAINTING – REV. GERVASE MATHEW, O.P.

JAPANESE SCREEN PAINTING – BASIL GRAY

other titles to follow

PERSIAN PAINTING

PERSIAN FOURTEENTH CENTURY MINIATURES

CHINESE PAINTING



*Faber and Faber Limited*

B  
TEΛΛΟΓ  
TE  
ΣΥΛΛ