



# SUMMARY



## THIRTEENTH CENTURY WALL PAINTINGS IN THE CHURCHES OF RHODES

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Rhodes in the 13th century: events, state and church  
administration, intellectual life (Greek text: 23-31)

In the early 13th century, Rhodes, which was under the rule of the self-proclaimed sovereign and then *caesar* Leon Gabalas, soon found itself the target of the territorial aspirations of the emperor of Nicaea Ioannes III Vatatzes, who included it among his acquisitions in 1226. The Rhodian ruler, a strong personality capable of highly effective diplomatic maneuvering in support of his interests, maintained a policy of keeping an equal distance between Vatatzes and the Venetian doge and ruled the island until his death in 1240. He was succeeded by his brother Ioannes Gabalas, who was more consistent in his obligations to the emperor of Nicaea and served the latter loyally. Indeed we are informed by written testimony that he had acquired the titles of *sebastos* (venerable), *pansebastos* (most venerable), and *megas doux* (grand duke), having married a blood relation of Ioannes III Vatatzes.

Following the recovery of Constantinople in 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos ceded the island to his brother Ioannes about 1275, while in 1284 is mentioned the name of the *pansebastos* Michael, “head of the island of Rhodes” (*κεφαλῆς τῆς νήσου Ῥόδου*), indicating imperial interest in strengthening regional administration over the island. For the last quarter of the century, Rhodes would at intervals constitute a feudal holding of the Genoese and fall prey to pirates before its definitive secession from the Byzantine Empire upon the founding of the state of the Knights of St. John in the Dodecanese.

Even during the tumultuous period of the 13th century, the island was not cut off from social concerns and the ideological movements of the age. Its intellectual life emerges from scattered written references such as the description of the large library of the Monastery of Artamites, where the learned historian Nikephoros Blemmydes stayed for some time in 1233, having found himself on Rhodes while sailing from Ephesus in 1233. Blemmydes’s sojourn provided him the opportunity to acknowledge and praise the qualities of Leon Gabalas whom he rewarded with an especially flattering portrait.

The participation of the church leadership in questions which beset the Empire in the second half of the century emerges indirectly from the testimony of texts and letters: the monk Ignatios Rhodios participated with fierce zeal in the events surrounding the Arsenite Schism as a defender of the Patriarch Arsenius, while Theodoulos, bishop of Rhodes, was in 1274 upon the convocation of the

Council of Lyon a co-signer of a letter in favor of Union addressed to Pope Gregory I. The consent of the head of the local church hierarchy to a text advocating Union did not of course mean that this view reflected the common feeling of the Rhodian Orthodox population.

Two anonymous bishops of Rhodes who were active during the final decades of the 13th century are referred to in letters of Patriarch Georgios Kyprios (1283-1289) and Maximus Planudes (1295-1300). These Rhodian ecclesiastical officials would certainly have been of recognized standing and maintained relations with the capital and the learned circles surrounding the patriarch and emperor. The four-year sojourn (1289-1293) of the exiled Patriarch of Alexandria Athanasius II on the island was especially important for the local history of Rhodes during the final decade of the 13th century.

The end of the 13th century coincided with a series of events which led to Rhodes becoming ever-more removed from the capital of the empire, which was enfeebled and torn by civil strife. Historical circumstances contributed to its surrender to the Order of the Knights of St. John in 1309 and to the formation of a potent administrative scheme that managed to survive for nearly 80 years after the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks.

Monuments of the first half of the 13th century.

The art of the age of the Gabalades and the orientation towards Nicaea

**Painting in the Medieval town of Rhodes, the seat of Leon Gabalas:**

**the example of Hagios Phanourios** (Greek text: 35-59)

Hagios Phanourios, built as a domed church of the free-cross plan and situated at a crossroads in the heart of the Medieval town, includes at least three layers of painting. Remains of the first layer are preserved in the sanctuary. Paintings remaining from its iconographic program include the Deesis in the conch of the apse, celebrating hierarchs in the apse semi-cylinder, the figures of saints on the walls, and the Ascension in the barrel vault. The depiction of Saint Stephen the First Martyr is characteristic: he is dressed not in the established vestments of a deacon, but in a chiton and himation, attire which highlights his apostolic attributes. This iconographic peculiarity, which is primarily associated with the earlier depictions of this saint and finds parallels in contemporary Serbian monuments dependent on the imperial capital, probably indicates its origins from the imperial environment of Constantinople or Nicaea.

Stylistic comparisons reveal the origins of the monument's painting in the Komnenian art of Constantinople during the late 12th century, while its advanced elements followed developments of the second and third decades of the 13th century. The full-length figure of Saint John the Merciful expresses the originality of art at the beginning of this century, with increased solidity, skillful shading, refined ethos, and the bodily amplitude characteristic of this robust, sculptural type of painting. In modeling the faces with calm but austere features, calligraphic hairstyles, and restrained but graceful emotional expressions, one recognizes stylistic features of the wall paintings of Saint Demetrius in Vladimir (c. 1195), the church of the Virgin in Studenica (1208), and that of the Apostle John from the scene of the Dormition in the third painting layer at Episkopi in Euvrytania

(c. 1230). These similarities are indicative of the diffusion of trends during this particular period, and of their differentiation in accordance with the models followed and the centers from which these models came. Another illustration of the quality of the painting in Hagios Phanourios is its relation with some contemporary portable icons in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai: in the modeling of faces, there is a common, balanced employment of line and color, aristocratic nobility, and perception of classical beauty.

The high quality of the wall paintings – the work of a gifted painter – is a valuable visual testimony to the artistic standards of the capital of the self-proclaimed local ruler Leon Gabalas. As the island's leader, Gabalas saw to it that relations were maintained with the empire of Nicaea and it appears that he also endeavored through art to promote the prestige of his small state. The decoration of the monument is dated to the second decade of the century, perhaps during the period when Ioannes III Vatatzes had already imposed his authority on Rhodes. However, the paintings' date to shortly before 1226 should not be excluded, when Leon – autonomous and the master of his territory – together with his court would have sought among the finest painters who had left vanquished Constantinople's workshops to adorn monuments in their town.

**Painting in a monastic center: the katholikon of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Thari. A foundation of Leon or Ioannes Gabalas?** (Greek text: 59-91)

The Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Thari is located at a sheltered location in the island's interior near the village of Laerma. Its main church belongs to the domed free-cross plan, with an inscribed shorter eastern side and extended western one. The third consecutive layer of its wall paintings (preserved in the sanctuary and the dome) dates to the first half of the 13th century. Christ Pantokrator, ten venerating angels, and sixteen prophets are depicted in the dome. The representation captures the heavenly order and hierarchy with grandeur while simultaneously mirroring official imperial iconography. The selected passages on the scrolls held by the prophets, which express faith in the God's providence and the salvation of Israel, are considered to refer to a deposition of hope in the Emperor Ioannes III Doukas Vatatzes for the recovery of Constantinople. Representations of the Evangelists, of which only those of Luke and John survive today, decorated the pendentives.

The subjects chosen for the barrel vault of the sanctuary, which is divided into two zones, are particularly interesting. In the eastern zone, four scenes stemming from the public life of Christ were painted, giving emphasis to his divine nature as expressed through his miracles (the Meeting with the Samaritan Woman, the Healing of the Blind Man, the Healing of the Paralytic at Bethesda, and the Healing of the Ten Lepers). Their association in monumental painting is self-evident, given that the related Gospel passages are read aloud on the three consecutive Sundays between Easter and Pentecost. The western, wider side of the vault depicted the Ascension as was normal, while the Last Supper, the Washing of the Feet, and figures of saints adorned the sanctuary's side walls.

The painter's most characteristic attributes are his clarity in articulating scenes, the accuracy and purity of his drawing, a resolution and assurance in the use of expressive means, the separation of scenes using polychrome decorative bands, and the use of a white outline surrounding most of

the figures (or parts of them), projecting them more intensely against the bright background and lending them an elusive glow. A comparison with the contemporary painter of Hagios Nikolaos at Kyriakosellia, Crete shows that the two artists may have had a common training, but differed in perception and rank due to the natural gifts of each. The painter on Rhodes appears to have been influenced by more academic and austere currents: his drawing is at some points rigid and hard, and the roughness of his design is apparent in the outline of a number of heads. His colleague on Crete worked with tremendous comfort and ease, employing swift, agile brushstrokes. He manipulated line, but also utilized painterly means and color alternations with impressive skill. The figures he created were sometimes deformed by intensity and are uniquely expressive. Nevertheless, the two artists are very typical exponents of the new tendencies of the 13th century.

The distance between the painting at Thari and works of the late 12th century is evident, and the search for technique coincided with experimentation on monuments dating to around the middle of the 13th century. Comparison of the katholikon of the Archangel Michael to Hagios Phanourios reveals a connection as well as substantial differences, showing both the temporal and the artistic precedence of the latter, which probably functioned as a model for that at Thari. It is possible its wall paintings were executed by a local painter who may have apprenticed in workshops from Nicaea.

The decoration of the monument has been dated to between 1226 and 1234, but here a date in the next twenty years (i.e. 1240-1260) and its association with the brother and successor of Leon, Ioannes Gabalas (1240-1250) are proposed. According to the written sources, the latter was the *son-in-law (gambros) of the emperor*, having taken a wife from the family circle of Ioannes Vatatzes. On the basis of the above information, and given the aristocratic sponsorship of the monument, a different reading of the Samaritan Woman scene in the sanctuary is proposed here. The woman's splendid attire with embroidered, costly fabrics reflecting the fashion of this age for Byzantine noblewomen, and her appearance with portrait-like features and blond, neatly-combed hair recall the votive representations of donors. Thus we maintain that her face symbolizes (or was chosen by) a woman of aristocratic origins enjoying a prominent place in local society, perhaps the wife of the local ruler Ioannes Gabalas and a relation of the emperor of Nicaea. In the same context, the choice of the specific location in the sanctuary for the four scenes which involve healing and deliverance in the wake of divine miraculous intervention could, irrespective of its liturgical implications, be justified as an invocation for divine assistance in the personal vicissitudes of the donors.

### **Painting in the countryside: Hagios Ioannes Theologos at Koufas, Paradeisi and the relation of its wall paintings to Thari** (Greek text: 91-108)

The church of Hagios Ioannes Theologos at Kouphas, Paradeisi, is a barrel-vaulted single-nave church displaying various building phases, the most important being its 17th century alteration. The first layer of painting is preserved in places on the south wall, interrupted by subsequent wall paintings and is compromised by the overpainting to which it was subjected. Until recently it was believed that the surviving part of the Second Coming belonged to the earlier layer of the church's paintings and it had been dated to the late 12th century; however, it was established stratigraphi-

cally and shown to be contemporaneous with the 13th century layer, which also includes the scenes of the Baptism and the mounted Saint Mercurius.

From the scene of the Second Coming, which probably would have extended over the entire width of the dome on the west side, some terrified figures of the damned in the fiery river of Hell have survived: female and male figures, even a bishop, are falling into the outer fire, while the dragon is depicted at the side. The heads of the dragons emerging from the waters of the Jordan encircling Christ comprise an interesting iconographic detail of the Baptism, an element introduced during this age under the influence of hymnology which enriches the representation. The inclusion in the iconographic program of the mounted and armed Saint Mercurius is not accidental, as there survives in the same region a Byzantine church dedicated to his memory.

Regarding the stylistic rendering of the wall paintings, one observes that despite their poor state of preservation this was a work of high art. Very good models are reflected in the sophisticated manner of configuring the folds of the figures' garments, while the strong similarities of the wall paintings with the murals at Thari would place their dating to around the mid-13th century as well, and could support the hypothesis of a workshop with common roots being active in the region about this time. The mastery of the painter in the handling of painterly media is revealed in the lighting and shading, the rendering of drapery folds which cling to the body and delineate accented curves, forming pure, clear volumes and dividing into sectors the projecting, flowing limbs in a rhythmic repetition of the soft drapery folds, attesting to the activity of experienced workshops on the island.

The monuments of the second half of the 13th century.

The local character of painting in an age of political instability

#### **The hermitage of Hagios Niketas in Damatria:**

**the monks' response to official ecclesiastical policy?** (Greek text: 109-165)

The cave church of Hagios Niketas near the village of Damatria was hewn out of soft limestone on the south side of a rocky protrusion on the hill "Paradeisi", and consisted of three adjoining rooms. The space probably served the ritual needs of the ascetics who lived as hermits in the wider region, which teemed with caves and natural fissures due to its geological formation. These natural cavities would most likely have been the hermitages of the ascetics, and the church of Hagios Niketas the *kyriakon* of their community.

From its once fully-painted interior, today there survive the representations of the sanctuary, a part of its groin-vaulted ceiling, and the south side. The configuration of its carved templon with monumental, full-figure representations of Christ Pantokrator and the infant holding Virgin, which function as icons for veneration, with Saint Kerykos in a medallion at the apex of the soffit of the Beautiful Gate between Saints Stephen and Romanus on the sides of the soffits is characteristic. The important position of the saint at the top of the arched entrance to the sanctuary followed by the painted, pilgrimage-style representations of Christ and the Virgin, and his prominence, enhanced



by the circular medallion of the *imago clipeata* type in which he is incorporated, raise reasonable questions about the dedication of the church, permitting the hypothesis that the church was originally founded in memory of Saint Kerykos.

Busts of the four Evangelists and seraphim adorned the groin vaults of the ceiling, an archaizing element that lent the iconographic program a panegyric and triumphal character with powerful eschatological references. The seven surviving representations of the Christological cycle (the Annunciation, Baptism, Transfiguration, Raising of Lazarus, Crucifixion, Descent into Hell, and Ascension) unfolded in the upper parts of the nave. Among the saints depicted (Demetrios, the Archangel Michael, Panteleemon, Hermolaos, Cosmas and Damianos, George the “Cappadocian”, the Apostle Paul and Saint Kyriake), the healing saints were found to have a special place.

The traces of an oversize roundel in the *prothesis*, most probably the remains of the depiction of the Holy Chalice, in combination with the majestic depiction of the Apostle Paul could be considered an iconographic allusion reflecting the reaction of the island’s monks against the official stance of the bishop of Rhodes Theodoulos in favor of Union with the Catholic Church in 1274. A possible date for the monument after 1282 – i.e. following the assumption of power by Andronikos II Palaiologos – agrees with the historical circumstances. The style of decoration, which follows the linear current which was then fashionable in provincial painting, would also suggest the same period.

This was the work of a local painter, with an emphasis on the declaration of the transcendental and a manifest decorative tendency, who was active within the austere context of a conservative monastic environment. Among his attributes one may note the limited constraint of the frames-limits of scenes, the absence of a ground line resulting in figures appearing to hover in air, thus acquiring a powerful sense of the transcendent, an adherence to a simple narrative line, a limited palette, a decorative tendency, and the linear arrangement of drapery. However, among the stereotypical faces we may single out that of Saint Kyriake, with the painterly execution of her corpulent face which exudes the coolness and freshness of a country girl, with its typical firm modeling and added rosy patches. The close relation of the wall paintings in Hagios Niketas to a large number of monuments dating to the second half of the 13th century around the periphery of the empire confirms their dating to the final two decades of the 13th century and their inclusion in the common artistic idiom of the empire’s periphery.

## **A Rhodian painter active in the island’s countryside**

### **Hagios Georgios Vardas in Apolakkia and the orientation towards Constantinople** (Greek text: 166-238)

The barrel-vaulted single-nave church of Hagios Georgios Vardas is on a low hill lying between the villages of Apolakkia and Arnitha. The founding inscription at the genesis of the apse semi-dome states that the church’s wall paintings were executed in 1289/90, and mentions the name of the emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos. The name *Vardas*, which comes from the oral tradition, may imply connections with the capital.



The infant holding Virgin was depicted in the apse along with saints Stephen and Romanos the Melodist, who were portrayed half-figured. The Christological cycle unfolds in the vault of the chapel. Its surface is divided into eight panels of equal height but different widths which increase gradually as one moves from west to east, with the result that the representations in the west part are integrated into very narrow, tall paintings, while the corresponding ones on the east are presented as considerably more expanded, an element which stresses the sense of rhythm and escalation of the narrative. There are ten scenes taken from the Dodekaorton, with only the Transfiguration and the Pentecost omitted. Of these, three are associated with the Nativity and infancy of Christ (the Annunciation, Nativity, and Presentation), two involve his public life (the Baptism and Raising of Lazarus), three come from the Passion and Resurrection (Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, the Descent into Hell), while apart from the requisite Ascension, the program also includes an extensive representation of the Dormition of the Mother of God on the west wall.

On the vertical surfaces of the nave walls the painted decoration is organized in two parallel zones of different widths which include the depictions of full-figure saints (Tryphon, Niketas, Demetrios, Hypatios, Blasios, Marina and Philemon) and busts of saints (Mamas, Prokopios, Theodoros Stratelates and Theodoros of Tyre, Panteleemon, Cosmas and Damian, plus the female saints Kyr-iake, Barbara, Eirene, and Paraskeve). Their arrangement in individual groups or pairs was determined on the basis of the calendar of feasts, the group to which they belonged, and their place in local worship. Wisely chosen and in a balanced ratio, the total of nineteen saints represent all ranks of the heavenly Church: an archangel, three prelates, two military saints, three healing saints, five martyrs, and five female saints form a compact unity which ensures through its intercession the region's security and prosperity.

The wall painting of the Virgin Glykophilousa on the east side of the north wall, with Saint John the Baptist at left, plays the role of an icon of veneration and is accompanied by the very rare inscription *Akedioktēnē* (Ἀκηδιωκτενή). A similar epithet for the Virgin, *Kedoktē[n]ē* (Κηδωκτη[ν]ή), is found again in the Dodecanese in a wall painting in the church of Hagios Georgios Theriavlis in Zia, Kos, which was executed in the late 13th or early 14th century. The odd epithet finds its interpretation in a mention in the Parisian codex of the Suda, which records the renovation of the church of “*τῆς ὑπ(ερ)αγίας θεοτόκου τῆς ἀκιδοκτηνῆς*” in Constantinople in 1267. The word is derived from the noun *ἀκίδουκτος* or *ἀκέδουκτος*, a Hellenized rendition of the Latin word *aquaeductum*, meaning aqueduct. With its obvious reference to the Valens Aqueduct, the inscription essentially constitutes the precise topographic identification of a Constantinopolitan church dedicated to the Mother of God.

The rare depiction of Saint Philemon, which is connected with the monastery of this name in neighboring Arnitha where his relics and icon of veneration were kept, is also of special interest. Iconographic study has shown that this was not the martyr Philemon from Egypt, who is identified with the flute-player (*χοραυλός*) of this name in the Rotunda of Thessaloniki and the saint depicted in the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, but rather one of the seventy apostles, Philemon from Colossae in Phrygia and disciple of the Apostle Paul, the first bishop of Gaza and a martyr of the Christian faith. The absence of churches dedicated to this saint in regions of the empire outside the Dodecanese and two churches dedicated to him in Constantinople (at *Strategeio* and in the quarter

of *Elaiia* or *ἐν τῷ Πρωχείῳ*) has led to the hypothesis that the establishment of paying honor to this saint was associated with the capital itself, whence it was transferred to Rhodes.

Although the epigraphic and iconographic testimony shows clear influences from and orientation towards Constantinople, the stylistic evidence suggests a provincial painter active in the region, as will be seen below.

### **Hagios Georgios Kounaras at Asklepeio. Another commission for the Vardas painter** (Greek text: 238-250)

The picture of Rhodian art during the final two decades of the century is completed by the wall paintings in a second church painted by the same artist as that of Hagios Georgios Vardas. This was the barrel-vaulted single-nave, once fully-painted church of Hagios Georgios Kounaras in the village of Asklepeio from whose iconographic program survive only four representations of the Dodekaorton in the north half of the vault: the Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion, and Ascension. Remains of the scene of Saint George's martyrdom survive on the north wall, an element which reveals the painter was informed about current developments and intended to enrich the typical iconographic program. Moreover, in 13th century monumental painting, there was a characteristic inclination to renew iconographic motifs and add episodes from the lives and martyrdoms of honored saints. An interesting detail in the representation of the Crucifixion was the addition of a rudimentary coat-of-arms with an inverse chevron on the shield of the centurion, an element showing western influence.

In a comparison of the wall paintings in this church with the decoration in Hagios Georgios Vardas, their impressive iconographic and stylistic similarity is obvious, proving that they were the work of the same painter. Their closeness begins from the design of the iconographic program and arrangement of scenes, and concludes with common facial types and the same technique. While no epigraphic evidence survives regarding the painter, the fact that he painted two churches in neighboring settlements in southern Rhodes strongly supports the argument that he was a local artist. At the same time, it is an indication of artistic activity in this region and the prosperity of the local rural population, which appears not to have neglected the decoration of churches despite widespread political instability and economic hardship.

### **The style, artistic technique, and characteristic attributes of the painter of Vardas** (Greek text: p. 250-263)

The churches of Hagios Georgios Vardas and Hagios Georgios Kounaras were the work of a painter who, if not himself a native, appears to have been active in southern Rhodes and remained there for a considerable time. Among his characteristic attributes, one should point to his persistence in implementing a specific type of iconographic program by starting the narrative from the west, perhaps in an attempt to record the episodes of the Gospel narrative in a way that would facilitate their viewing by the faithful. In creating his compositions, the painter drew inspiration from earlier models. A symmetrical arrangement was his priority and he aimed, wherever the representation allowed, at a balanced placement of persons in groups of equal size, maintaining the emphasis along

the vertical axis. In more populous scenes, however, which required the incorporation of a great many iconographic elements (e.g. Entry into Jerusalem, the Nativity), his inability to fully integrate the involved figures in a plausible relationship is revealed.

The figures he fashioned are slender and calm, with a vacant look and tender expression lacking any particular emotional intensity. In modeling the faces, a light green base was used; a pale ochre subtly rendered the skin, while a rough dark brown line delineated the characteristically large eyes, fleshy lips, strong chin, and heavy, accented eyelids. One of his traits was the limited indication of the natural landscape and architectural depth. We should also recognize in his style an effort to experiment as far as possible with the realistic depiction of a number of objects, e.g. the cross of martyrdom in the Crucifixion, where the pieces of wood are depicted prismatically with chiaroscuro which contributes to the depiction's perspective, and through the use of graduated shades of brown with accents of olive green, as well as with progressive shading. In contrast to faces, where his skill and the delicacy of his brush unfold, he appears to have fallen short in the depiction of bodies, and his weakness – or indifference – in giving balanced proportions to the limbs is apparent.

Generally speaking, however, we recognize in the artistic style of these two churches in southern Rhodes the common artistic current that prevailed in nearly all the provinces of the empire during the final decades of the 13th century, as comparisons to monuments in Naxos, Crete, the Peloponnese and Euboea demonstrate. An evaluation of these wall paintings not only suggests dating them close to one another, but allows a concrete proposal for their relative dating. At Hagios Georgios Vardas, the painter seems to be more confident of his medium, appearing surer of himself and more competent. Having acquired the requisite techniques, he shows greater spontaneity and freedom in his rendering, familiarity with his painterly means and unfolds his skills with greater self-confidence. Thus, the available evidence would allow the hypothesis that the church in Asklepeio was as it were his earlier work. In any case, the two should not be separated by more than two to five years.

## Conclusions concerning monumental painting on Rhodes in the 13th century

### **Issues of iconography** (Greek text: 268-275)

The number of monuments examined may be limited, but both their chronology – which encompasses nearly the entire century – as well as their geographical distribution across the whole island, both city and countryside, compose a broad field adequate for observations. In assessing the iconographic programs of these six churches, the composition in the dome at Thari, which is considered to reflect in its solemnity the ideological climate of the empire of Nicaea, holds a special place. With their gaze fixed on the lost capital, expectations were directed towards the ambitious rulers of the new states formed after the fall of the Byzantine capital, which both claimed and vied for the honor of recovering Constantinople. In the figure of Christ Pantokrator, framed by whirling discs, there is an implicit declaration of the cosmological overtones of the representation and the expectation of Christ's triumphal Second Coming. On the other hand, the archaic choice for the ceiling of the hermitage of Hagios Niketas with the evangelists and seraphim represents the conservatism and

strictness of ascetic life, copying earlier iconographic compositions in domes and emphasizing in this archaic element the non-anthropomorphic celestial powers they are praising.

In church apses, both the Deesis, so popular in monumental paintings of the Dodekaorton, as well as the representation of the infant holding Virgin established for this position were depicted. It appears that Rhodes maintained a balance between metropolitan art and that of the eastern provinces, which is justified by its geographical position in the midst of sea routes and at the crossroads of cultural contacts in the empire.

The peculiarity of the iconographic program of the sanctuary at Thari is noteworthy, with the Ascension confined to the west part of the vault, since on the corresponding east part extended four scenes of Christ's miracles sharing the common element of life-giving water as common denominator. This iconographic module, which is rare for this position, comes from the cycle of the Pentecost and finds analogies only in the chapel of the Virgin at the Monastery of Patmos. Its presence at Thari has been interpreted as the possible fruit of the founders' wish to invoke Christ's miraculous action. However, one should not exclude the possibility that it was an iconographic variant established among learned monastic circles which did not become widespread due to the increased demands it presented for the smooth integration of scenes into the limited area of the sanctuary vault. In the same monument, the detailed rendering of the building in the scene of John the Evangelist has been seen as an attempt at a realistic depiction of the Patmos monastery, with emphasis on the exonarthex's four-arched portico supported by columns.

In the arrangement of the Dodekaorton of Hagios Georgios Vardas and Hagios Georgios Kouraras, the implementation of an unusual organization is observed: with the placement of the Annunciation at the west end of the south side, the narrative thread begins with the viewer's entrance into the church and concludes in the Ascension at its easternmost point, following a tightly-woven sequence in alternating directions. This system, unknown elsewhere, may have been an innovation of the artist who painted both churches. In the cave chapel of Hagios Niketas, the Christological cycle is extended in terms of the number of scenes, but placed in small panels in the high parts of the church. The result is that the impressively large figures of the saints predominate. The miniature Gospel scenes, as if in imitation of portable epistyle images hung on the walls, complement the dominant representations of saints.

The theme of dragons emerging from the waters of the Jordan in the Baptism held a special place in the monumental painting of Rhodes during the 13th century. It first appeared in Hagios Ioannes at "Kouphas", Paradeisi, and is found without exception on all later Rhodian monuments. The same element is simultaneously found at Hagios Nikolaos in Kyriakosellia on Crete, whose painting is also believed to echo the imperial art of Nicaea. The discovery of the common presence of an element which was rare for this particular age in two regions influenced by the art of the new capital leads us to suppose that this was an iconographic detail that came from the new artistic environment, emphasizing the soteriological content of the scene.

Relations between the monumental painting of Rhodes and the art of the eastern Mediterranean are indicated by iconographic details on monuments dating to the second half of the century, such as the representation of Moses in the Transfiguration at Hagios Niketas in Damatria as beardless

and with short white hair. The rarity of this iconographic type and its presence on icons of Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai, and in the manuscripts of a group of doubtful provenance which most likely originated in Cypriot and Palestinian workshops, probably signals the route followed in its implementation in Rhodian iconography.

The use of a neoteric iconographic element in the Raising of Lazarus in Hagios Niketas leads in the same direction of geographical influence: the depiction of the risen man in a seated position in a sarcophagus at the moment he is being raised. This detail, which became customary at the beginning of the following century, is found earlier in a Crusader icon on the epistyle of the Mt. Sinai Monastery (c. 1260), and provides a possible indication of the knowledge, models, and origin of the painter, as well as the penetration of what was probably an element of western provenance into the iconography of the region through sea routes in the eastern Mediterranean.

### **Donors and painters** (Greek text: 275-283)

Based on the qualitative difference between the earlier and later 13th century Rhodian monuments, one would conclude that during the first half of the century members of the aristocracy who were connected with the island had assumed the initiative for their decoration, while members of the humbler classes in local society sponsored the painting of churches dating to the end of the century. This hypothesis is supported by the lower quality of the painting, but it cannot be solely related to the financial position of sponsors. It is more likely to reflect changes in the political and social sphere, which were a consequence of historical circumstances.

The high quality of the decoration of Hagios Phanourios reveals the patronage by a senior official in the Byzantine town. Even if Leon Gabalas himself was not directly involved in the creation of this monument's decoration, his presence as the island's ruler, his seat in the town, and the relations he had established with the empire of Nicaea all contributed to shaping the artistic climate of the age. Sponsorship by a member of the upper class is attested by the church's location in the town, where local political and administrative authorities were based, but above all by the artistic quality, which could only have been introduced with the intervention or support of the supreme local leader. It was reasonable for this ambitious ruler to also seek through art to demonstrate his power and promote the prestige of his state, which he was anxious to maintain *inter alia* against much larger and more powerful states. The wall paintings of Hagios Phanourios offer eloquent visual testimony to the intellectual level of the town Leon aspired to promote, and to the refinement of the art of their painter, who, it is presumed, acquired his art and practiced it in a major artistic and cultural center, possibly in Constantinople itself or Nicaea, its successor.

The dating of the wall paintings in the church at Thari to about the mid-13th century in combination with the historical evidence leads to the hypothesis that its founder was Leo's brother and successor Ioannes Gabalas, who had married a woman from the house of the Vatatzedes. This Byzantine noblewoman may have in turn seen to the decoration, and perhaps the placement in an unusual location in the sanctuary of a group of scenes emphasizing a female figure with whom Christ converses on equal terms was her choice. The scale of quality in comparing this monument with

Hagios Phanourios is visible in the coarseness of the line, which in the latter church is instead thin and flexible, expressive of a different chronological phase, but which is also indicative of the variation within a common painting current. Here it is not impossible that indigenous artistic potential in Rhodes was utilized, with possible apprenticeships and training in workshops associated with Nicaea. In any event, the painter of Thari is distinguished by a precision of design and his style is recognizable because, with its emphasis on contour, it creates stereotyped figures filled with intensity.

In the church of Hagios Ioannes at Kouphas, Paradeisi, the choice of representations reveals the thought of a cultured donor, who dictated an iconographic program which was up-to-date in conception and rich in references. Stylistic observation shows his dependence on previous forms of art on the island and a great affinity with Thari. The roughness of contours and the uniform modeling of faces in addition to the successful use of colors were the hallmarks of this painter. Thus, the three monuments dating to before 1261 represent different levels of a common artistic current whose beginnings may be traced for historical reasons to the empire of Nicaea.

The period intervening between 1261 and 1280 coincides with a gap in the evidence, since the next three monuments date to the last two decades of the 13th century, and indeed two of them are from the same painter. Artists had by then become removed from the style of the early 13th century, unable to follow current trends, and so they repeated earlier models. The case of the painting in the hermitage at Damatria is one of the clearest instances of sponsorship, since the form of the space itself reflects the activity of what was probably a small ascetic community. The painter's conservative idiom would have pleased the monastic circles which invited him. Through the use of rough contours he composed imposing figures in an austere style well-fitted to the spiritual environment he was called to satisfy.

While at Hagios Georgios Vardas there are direct references to Constantinople with the epithet *Akedioktēnē* (*Ακηδιωκτενή*), and in the representation of the Virgin Glykophilousa and depiction of Saint Philemon, possible links between donor and capital city are likely but difficult to substantiate. Despite the sufficient evidence of the monument, the sponsor's identity remains obscure and undocumented. The name *Vardas*, which recalls the surname of a Byzantine noble family, might indicate the involvement of an individual of high social status connected with Constantinople, but the frequency with which this particular surname is found and its connection in the 13th century with persons of humble origin offer no solid arguments to support this conjecture. The connection with the center of the empire is detectable in epigraphic and iconographic testimony, but is not reflected in the quality of the painting, which follows the average for the empire's provinces. As concerns the small church of Hagios Georgios Kounaras, this was clearly a typical case of a rural church. Its location in the heart of a fertile valley supports the hypothesis that it belonged to some local landowner who owed property in this fertile and wealth-producing area.

In conclusion, it could be said that during the first decades of the century, historical and political circumstances as well as economic growth allowed the hiring of painters from the major artistic centers of the age who had been trained in the workshop tradition of Nicaea, itself inherited from Constantinople. In contrast, during the turbulent decades just before the century's end, it appears that local painters working as individuals and not in organized workshops were active on the island.



**Stylistic trends** (Greek text: 283-303)

Despite the central place of Rhodes in the island periphery of the southeast Aegean, it does not seem to have played a leading role in the formation of painting currents in the rest of the Dodecanese. Although the creation of a workshop tradition in the region's main urban center and subsequent replenishing of the islands would have been understandable, this does not emerge from the archaeological evidence. The islands of the Dodecanese did not function as satellites to the largest and richest island in the island complex.

A series of Dodecanesian churches have been dated to the early 13th century and in their decoration one may discern the continuation of tendencies in Late Komnenian painting. Examples include the churches of Hagios Menas at Lindos, Hagios Ioannes at Epta Bemata, Zoodochos Pigi at Monagri near the village of Asfendiou on Kos, and of Hagios Ioannes Theologos at Lakki on Leros. These monuments are connected by a discreet quality, an attachment to the previous painting tradition, and the persistent use of line, which sometimes created sophisticated undulations in drapery folds and sometimes produced figures of monumental character. The fine quality of the painting at Hagios Phanourios in the Medieval town of Rhodes remains an isolated instance among contemporary examples in the region, with the exception of the second layer of decoration in the Refectory of the Monastery of Hagios Ioannes Theologos on Patmos, for which a connection to the imperial environment of Nicaea has also been proposed. There one may point to the coexistence of two tendencies, with the retention of tall, lanky figures and a linear style surviving in parallel to the manifestation of a new monumental style. This disposition to experiment and the eclecticism of the work may be consequences of the loss of the artistic center and its move to Bithynia before the new trends had become systematized.

As regards the dissemination of artistic tendencies, it is therefore observed that during the first half of the 13th century Rhodes was annexed to the empire of Nicaea and was one of the regions which reflected the guidelines the new center would transmit to its dependent territories. However, during the second half of the century the art of the island, reliance on the high-quality tradition of monuments of the previous half-century was transformed, resulting in a local artistic idiom. Wall paintings were consigned to painters with a local range and their style was the conservative linear one found in the empire's provinces. An acceptance of this conservative tendency is noted, with emphasis on linearity and stylization, which is found in all of the empire's provincial societies and expressed the aesthetic preferences of those commissioning paintings. Adherence to the principles of an earlier tradition was perhaps desirable, serving as a stable reference point in an age of continual unrest, of dangers threatening the empire's borders as well as challenges to the cohesion of the Orthodox Church.

This stylistic tendency, expressed in its late form in the church of Hagios Georgios Vardas is also found in the wall paintings of Panormites at Plagia on nearby Halki, of Hagia Triada at Spitakia on Telos, and of Hagios Loukas at Apella on Karpathos. An interesting group of monuments with similar origins is found in Vathy on Kalymnos. Artistic developments noted in the major centers such as Constantinople or Thessaloniki appear to have left the Dodecanese unaffected, and only distant echoes are occasionally noted, as in the church of Hagios Pavlos at Livadia on Telos.



In conclusion, it may be said in light of their chronological sequence, the 13th century wall paintings in Rhodes offer a vivid record of the fluctuations of their age, and their evolution was fully in line with historical circumstances. The ambitious start of the century and strong presence of a local aristocracy coincided with the involvement in artistic developments, while the turmoil of the century's final decades resulted in the reproduction of older models.

*Translated by Deborah Kazazis*