

## 2. General Iconographic Changes in the 14th and 15th Centuries

At different times, the subject of the re-emergence of hesychasm in the Byzantine world was related to new trends in the Palaeologan era of the 14th and 15th centuries in Byzantine and Slavic lands. Hesychasm supposedly affected the 'pre-renaissance' in Byzantium by stifling its development. Fruitful in itself, this hypothesis must be used with caution. Although it is possible that there were circumstances in which the monastic rigor of the 14th and 15th centuries was detrimental to artistic development, there is no stark contrast between the theology of Byzantine hesychasm and the most creative aspects of Palaeologan art. If the hesychast movement represents a consistent world view, then as well as a renewal of personal religiosity, individual prayer and a better understanding of Christianity, it is probable it could create an atmosphere of artistic creativity. The matter of the appreciation, collection and study of Byzantine art in the Palaeologan period and its relation to social and spiritual trends in Byzantium is, however, a complex topic, and it does not allow for a definitive answer.<sup>1</sup>

Two conflicting, but interwoven, cultural trends influenced the development of orthodox dogmas as well as artistic production during the Palaeologan period, namely, hesychasm and humanism. These tendencies in iconography did not, however, exclude the development of a plethora of private, complicated and interwoven trends as well.

The humanistic or descending (antique) trend of naturalisation (which had the characteristic of temporality) reduced the canon of icon painting and placed it in the ranks of secular painting. Hence, a love of the ancient past, the study of various works of ancient classical literature and art, and their imitation, characterised the Byzantine art of the late 13th and early 14th centuries.<sup>2</sup> The subject of this art, of course, was the church; the attraction to antiquity was only in style and form, for which the classical model became almost mandatory. Theatrical scenes appeared in mosaics and frescoes and iconographic programs expanded to contain complex allegories, symbols and allusions to the Old Testament, as well as texts of liturgical hymns. Complete theological preparation and intellectual erudition was a general requirement in the commission of iconographers and the contemplation of works of art. The form and content of frescoes reflected this renewed wave of reflection on classical ideas and subjects.<sup>3</sup>

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1 R. Nelson, *Later Byzantine Painting: Art, Agency and Appreciation* (Ashgate 2007).

2 N.L. Okunev, 'Арилье: Памятник Сербского Искусства XIII в', *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, vol. 8 (Prague 1936); K. Specieris, *Изображения Эллинских Философов в Церквах* (Athens 1964).

3 J. Meyendorff, 'Humanisme Nominaliste et Mystique Cretienne a Byzance au XIVe Siecle', *Nouvelle Revue Theologique*, vol. 79, no. 9 (Louvain 1957).

Many Byzantine paintings that were executed around 1300 bear an imprint of humanism, with their light and jagged architectural landscape, animated and graceful scenes, with frequent personifications and draped figures with expressive and elegant gestures.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to this naturalist or descending trend in Palaeologan art, a second or rising trend arose in the art of the 14th century, informed by the spiritual and mystical tradition of hesychasm.

## Hesychasm and Christian art of the 14th and 15th centuries

When hesychasm became a universally accepted doctrine in 1375, not only in monastic life but also in the Byzantine Church, art experienced changes that were different from those occurring at the beginning of the 14th century. The aim of this art was to contemplate transfigured flesh and matter, the shading of divine light, the fullness of ascent by the divine presence to ethereal heights where everything was perfect.<sup>5</sup> The spiritual ideal of a contemplative monastic life, as expressed in the theology of Gregory Palamas, supported the essence of Byzantine culture, in particular its doctrine of the transfiguration of human nature and the inseparable connection between heaven and earth. Palamite hesychasm denied Platonic spiritualism and taught the positive value of the body: its ideal was the transfiguration, not the destruction of the flesh (Figs 1–4).<sup>6</sup>

Even in this context, dramatic changes began to transpire in art that reflected changes in all parts of life.<sup>7</sup> First, the main trend of the new style, which reached a peak in the 14th century, was a gradual shift away from painting expressing psychological states. Small exquisite mosaics that were created during the early Palaeologan renaissance disappeared, and icons increased in size. Large images with full-length silhouettes were easy to read in the church's interior. Together with theological treatises and sermons, painted images expressed the essence of the doctrine of divine energy, a state of vision reserved for those in an advanced spiritual state of ascesis.<sup>8</sup>

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4 A. Grabar, *Byzantium: Byzantine Art in the Middle Ages* (Holland 1966) 84.

5 M.M. Vasic, 'L'Hesychasme dans l'Église et l'Art des Serbes du Moyen Âge', *L'Art Byzantin Chez les Slaves, Les Balkans: Mélanges Théodore Uspenskij*, vol. 1 (Paris 1930).

6 C.N. Tsirpanlis, 'Byzantine Humanism and Hesychasm in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Synthesis or Antithesis, Reformation or Revolution', *The Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1993) 18–21.

7 G. Ruzsa, 'Une Icône Inconnue Représentant les Apôtres Pierre et Paul et la Question del'Hesychasme', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 32, no. 5 (1982).

8 Vasic, *Жича и Лазарица: Студије из Српске Уметности Средњег Века* (Belgrade 1928) 163–237; L. Brehier, 'La Renovation Artistique sous les Paleologues et le Mouvement des Idees', in *Mélanges Charles Diehl* vol. 2 (Paris 1930) 2.

Dense, bold, dramatic brush strokes that expressed emotion framed painting technique during this period. The surface was unusually lively and included expansive movement, finicky gestures with hands and fingers outstretched, conveying a striking specificity of character and personality.<sup>9</sup> Figures had sharp flashing eyes, thick red lips and fleshy noses. Overall, a movable light blazed a harsh glare on their faces and hands. All this created a unique imaginative and artistic operation, which was active and temperamental.

The religious art of Byzantine and Slavic lands at this time used expressive colours, which depicted high emotional states and also enhanced the mystical mood of the icon. The expression of the faces in these icons was more emotional than previously, depicting different mental states, from the lyrical to the dramatic. Especially strong was the attachment to dark blue hues. There was a tendency to create a deep mysterious glow to arouse heavenly associations in the viewer. Larger surfaces were painted in a spectrum of colours.

A prominent feature of this new style was heightening the emotion and expression while maintaining the dynamism of heightened spirituality. Thus, the gesturing of figures was impulsive, robes began to flap, and figures turned to the sides, suggesting a freer and more bold perspective.<sup>10</sup> The iconography was complex, some images were close to genre scenes, and the colour range was softer, lighter, and dominated by blue-grey and greenish-yellow hues. These stylistic devices were reminiscent of the humanist trends of the Palaeologan era. Restoration of the classicism of previous centuries, however, or its natural extension, was on a different basis.<sup>11</sup> The central goal of this art was not to imitate ancient models, but rather to reflect their unique beauty by saturating the figures with divine light.<sup>12</sup>

Byzantine art of the early 14th, and later, centuries did not engage in literal reproduction of classical elements. Over time, more expressive options appeared, and love for the classical past lost its value. The figurative scene evolved to be characterised by a number significant artistic nuances. The emission of light from one point or central compositional axis revitalised the dynamic centre of

9 N.K. Goleizovskii, 'Послание Иконописцу и Отголоски Исихазма в Русской Живописи на Рубеже XV–XVI вв.', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 26 (1965); idem, 'Исихазм и Русская Живопись XIV–XV вв.', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 29 (1968); M.V. Alpatov, 'Искусство Феофана Грека и Учение Исихастов', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 33 (1972); G.I. Vzdornov, *Фрески Феофана Грека в Церкви Спаса Преображения в Новгороде* (Moscow 1976) 236–58; O. Vopovz, *Ascesi e Trasfigurazione: Immagini dell'Arte Bizantina e Russa nel XIV Secolo* (Milan 1996).

10 For the scholarly approach that locates the influence of hesychasm in the domain of iconography, see E. Bakalova, 'Към Вы і Роса за Отраженной! На Исихазма Върху Изкуството 1371–1971', in P. Rusev et al. (eds), *Търновска Княжовна Школа* (Sofia 1974); T. Velmans, *La Peinture Murale Byzantine la Fin du Moyen Age* (Paris 1977) 54–57.

11 Velmans, 'Le Rôle de l'Hésychasme dans la Peinture Murale Byzantine du XIVe et XVe Siècles', in P. Armstrong (ed.), *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, (London 2006) 182–226.

12 E. Tachiaos, 'Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature', in D. Davidov (ed.), *L'Art de Thessalonique et des Pays Balkaniques et les Courants Spirituels au XIe Siècle* (Belgrade 1987).

the icon. There was an aesthetic inversion (antinomian) in the painting, opposed to the canons of outer and inner beauty. It reflected spiritual peace, silence and exultation, and a combination of 'earthly' and 'heavenly' realities and, finally, a spiritual ecstasy, all fruits of the fruit of hesychast concentration. The sacred symbolism of colours emphasising the expressiveness and semantics of complex shades supported the mystical mood and inspiration of religious images. Icons were concise in detail; their semantic structure was centralised and had a transcendent vector to overcome emotional and psychological expression.<sup>13</sup> The process of spiritual rebirth was opened; the individual in transition was hypostatic. Many religious images created in a portable format (icons) reflected the increasing hesychast mood. They straightened the timelessness and allegorical physical space of Christian gnosis, with its address to inner peace, and metaphysical interpretation of the universe.

The religious art of the Palaeologan period marked an emergence of new iconographic subjects manifesting temporal and expressive elements in a figurative scene. The volume and the space of the buildings increased to have clear and rhythmic arrangements. The ancient mapping of the human figure changed, and it was accompanied by columns and soft drapes. Asymmetrical and small-scale facial features appeared in oblique view and were psychologically subtle. A soft rolling light illuminated the anxious facial expression, which gave an impression of the peace being unstable and unusually personal. The architectural forms were overly abundant and their bulk was drenched with energy, thereby reducing the space and dynamics of the figurative scene.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the classical art of the Commnenian and Palaeologan periods acquired new features, such as enhanced spiritual focus, new religious symbolism, iconicity, and timelessness. All these elements referred to a new manifestation of the icon and its primary function — to be a prayerful mediator between humanity and God. The 'techniques and methods of such iconography were to be understood only in the context of the doctrine of the uncreated light.'<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, iconographers had the liberty to uniquely embody doctrinal topics in paintings, which proves that canonical Orthodox art did not detract from the individual vision of the artist.

13 G. Peterson, 'The Parekklesion of St. Euthymius in Thessalonica: Art and Monastic Policy under Andronicus II', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 58 (1976).

14 Velmans, 'Infiltrations Occidentales dans la Peinture Murale Byzantine au XIVe et au Début du XVe Siècle, in V. Duric (ed.), *L'École de la Morava et son Temps: Symposium de Résava 1968* (Belgrade 1972).

15 P. Florensky, 'Иконостас', *Собрание Сочинений*, vol. 1 (Paris 1985) 221.

After the victory of hesychasm in 1375, idealistic tendencies became more pronounced. The sense of monumentality slowly diminished while the scenes came to have affinities with the portable icon. Works of art were complex and the architecture and landscapes assumed unprecedented importance.<sup>16</sup>

## General iconographic changes in the art of the 14th and 15th centuries

One of the key objectives of Byzantine art in the 14th and 15th centuries was to communicate spiritual (invisible) realities by physical means. Contemporary scholars have yet to enunciate the way in which this aspect of Byzantine art was achieved.<sup>17</sup>

In order to discern hesychasm in art, it is important to define the new message that hesychasm brought to the age and to see to what extent it brought renewal and change into spiritual life in the Byzantine Empire and the Slavic lands. The paintings of Theophanes the Greek gave art historians pause, mainly because he came to Russia from Constantinople at the time the hesychast influence was at large.<sup>18</sup> Was Theophanes influenced by hesychasm or humanism?<sup>19</sup> There is an apparent contradiction. Similar problems appear when one surveys monuments, which have a number of contrasts. Such is the case in the Monastery of Ivanovo, Bulgaria (1341–1370).<sup>20</sup> There is a series of naked human figures in frescoes of Ivanovo (a rare detail in art of the Christian East) as well as tonal gradations, shadows, and white highlights that symbolise the rays of divine light.<sup>21</sup> A diligent art historian faces challenges when analysing artworks by either Manuel Panselinos, from the Monastery of Protaton (14th century), or Manuel Eugenikos, from the Church of Calendžicha (Georgia). The frescoes of Panselinos represent a fusion of both humanistic and hesychastic artistic traits. For example, the light illuminating Christ (as circumscribed by Panselinos) is simultaneously a natural illumination and a visual language for the participation (of Christ) in the divine light. The expression of the eyes shows the compassion

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16 M. Chatzidakis, *Studies in Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (London 1972).

17 Bakalova, 'La Societe et l'Art en Bulgarie au XIVe Siècle, L'Influence de l'Hesychasme sur l'Art', *Actes du 14th Congress International des Etudes Byzantines II* (Bucharest 1975).

18 Tachioaos, 'Hesychasm'.

19 N.K. Goleizovskii, 'Заметки о Творчестве Феофана Грека', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 24 (1969) 139–143.

20 S. Dimitrieva, 'Rospisi Hrama Spasha Preobrazenija na Kovaleve (1380) v Novgorode', PhD thesis, Lomonosov Moscow State University (2003) 489–497.

21 Grabar, 'Les Frescoes de Ivanovo et le Art de la Palaeologes', *Le Art de la Fin du l'Antiquiti at du Moyen Age* vol II (Paris 1968) 842; S. Jordanov, *Skalniot Manastir Sv. Archangel Michael pri Selo Ivanovo* (Varna 2009) 70–72.

and mercy of a God who condescended to become human.<sup>22</sup> These features confirm the enduring importance of a coherent picture of the unity or synergy of the Byzantine world.

Nevertheless, a limited number of monuments, such as the Church of St Nikolas at Chilli, Tilos, contain paintings with such a distinctive style they could be interpreted only in the context of hesychasm. Inclusion of frescoes of eight monastics and 13 hesychast leaders in the middle zone of the church is a new element not found in art of the region. The technique is peculiar and the palette austere and limited. The facial features are rendered with swift, irregular and bold brushstrokes of white paint that was applied during preparation.<sup>23</sup> Arms and fingers receive a similar simplified treatment; modelled freely and concisely, they do not follow anatomical guides. The drapery is traced with thick white paint, which also covers large expanses of the body, creating the sense of plasticity through contrast between lit and shadowed areas. These troubled forms of lighting allow the painter to avoid excess in his rendering of movement and to select restrained poses. The same feeling animates the work of Eugenikos.<sup>24</sup>

Even though no particular hesychast influence could be assigned to a monument, icon or a subject, a set of iconographic changes occurred in the 14th century, which could only be interpreted as occurring in that context. No circumscription of a work of art represents the reciprocal influence of hesychasm on art more than a painting representing Palamas. Since the veneration of Palamas, took hold over the cities in which he lived and preached, that is Thessaloniki, Veroia and Kastoria, icons with his portrait appeared at the same time as his cult spread to these areas.<sup>25</sup> The Monastery of Christ Pantokrator, Vlatadon (constructed around 1339), contains the earliest icon depicting Palamas. Brothers Markos and Dorotheos Vlases, two important supporters of Palamas, resided in this monastery.<sup>26</sup> The figurative scene of the Transfiguration, placed just below the image of Palamas, affirms the hesychast connection.<sup>27</sup> Another well-preserved example comes from the Monastery of Vatopedi (1371). Both images were created during the hesychast controversy (Fig. 5).

22 S. Skliris, 'The Person of Christ and the Style of Icons, A Mystery Great and Wondrous', *Byzantine and Christian Museum. Exhibition of Icons and Ecclesiastical Treasures 28 May – 31 July 2001* (Athens 2001).

23 A. Katsioti, 'Ἡεσυχασμὸς ἀντὶ τῆς Ὁμολογίας τῆς Παιντινῆς ἐν τῇ Σηθρῇ οἴῳ Στ. Νικόλαος, Σηελί, Νίκος', *Αρχαιολογικὸν Δελτὸν*, vol. 54 (1999) 327–342.

24 H. Belting, 'Le Peinture Manuel Eugenikos de Constantinople en Georgie', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, vol. 28 (1979).

25 G.V. Попов, 'Икона Григория Паламы из ГМИИ и Живопись Фессалоник Поздне-Византийского Периода', *Искусство Западной Европы и Византии* (Moscow) 197.

26 C. Mauropoulou-Tsioumē, *Vlatadon Monastery* (Thessaloniki 1987).

27 The image of Palamas is also represented on the opposite side of the same church, closer to the south paraklession which dates from the last quarter of the 14th century. Here Palamas is shown together with John Chrysostom, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory Archbishop of Thessaloniki (S.E.J. Gerstel, 'Civic and Monastic Influences on Church Decoration in Late Byzantine Thessalonike: In Loving Memory of Thalia Gouma-Peterson', *Symposium on Late Byzantine Thessalonike, Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 57 (2003) 236).



The story of conversion of the young Indian prince named Iosapath by the monk Barlaam of Calabria was another influential image.<sup>28</sup> Important monuments depicting this scene are in the north-west chapel of the Protaton Church on Mount Athos (1290), the Peribleptos Church in Ohrid (1294/5), and the Church of St George at Omorphokklesia near Kastoria.<sup>29</sup> The Cathedral of the Deposition of the Robe, in Moscow's Kremlin contains the important example of the possible influence of hesychasm on art. The fresco in question represents the story of the appearance of an angel to the monk Pachomios. This composition often accompanied that of Barlaam and Iosaphat (Fig. 6) in churches.

With illustrations of individual moments of the liturgy, abstract symbolic images of the *Sophia* (the wisdom of God), the Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 7), and many others appeared to reveal the meaning of the sacrament. These images represent a figurative transmission of the Biblical text of Proverbs (Prov. 9:1–7) and express two subjects. The image of an angel symbolises the concept of *Sophia*. Christ is also depicted as Wisdom, but in the guise of the angel of the great council.<sup>30</sup> Wisdom was one of the subjects discussed during the hesychast controversy, resulting in a symbolic image of *Sophia*.<sup>31</sup> The inconsistencies, which occur in the use of the image of the Wisdom prior to the 14th century, reflect the various interpretations of the notion of *Sophia* among church fathers. During the hesychast controversy, both hesychast and humanists used the theme of Wisdom in support of their cause. The supporters of Palamas, however, interpreted the meaning of *Sophia* in the context of their Christology, to support Palamite doctrine of Christ as the Wisdom of God (Fig. 8). The followers of hesychasm applied other iconographic features to express the meaning of Wisdom as a manifestation of God's action in the world.<sup>32</sup> An unusually shaped halo, which surrounds the angel of wisdom, clearly expresses this concept. Many Russian icons contain the image of the angel of wisdom, such as that from the Monastery of Kirillo-Belozerskii (1548), which is currently in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.<sup>33</sup> In this work, the angel stands in front of the temple with seven columns, all representing the

28 R. Janin, *Les Eglises et les Monastères des Grands Centres Byzantins Bithynie, Hellespont, Latros, Galesios, Tribizonde, Athènes, Thessalonique* (Paris 1975) 386–388.

29 E.G. Stikas, 'Une Église des Paléologues aux Environs de Castoria', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 51 (1958) fig. 5; C. Mavropoulou-Tsioume, *Buzantiniv Qessa* (Paris 1927) pl. 55.1; Stikas, 'Une église des Paléologues', 100–112, figs 5, 6.

30 Meyendorff, 'L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la Tradition Byzantine', *Cahiers Archeologiques*, vol. 10 (Paris 1959).

31 Okunev, 'Арилье, Памятник Сербского Искусства XIII в'.

32 G. Florovsky, 'О Почитании Софии Премудрости Божией в Византии и на Руси, *Труды 5-го Съезда Русских Академических Организаций за Границе*, vol. 1 (Sofia 1932); Meyendorff, 'L'iconographie', 10.

33 Meyendorff, 'Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting Approaches to a Complex Theme', *Studies on Art and Archeology in Honor of Ernst Kitzinger on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, vol. 41 (Washington D.C. 1987) 391–401.

‘home’ of *Sophia*. The symbolic representation of Wisdom affirms the opposition between the concept of *Sophia* as the wisdom of God and the concept of *Sophia* — the wisdom of the philosophers.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the hesychasts, the humanists, lead by Barlaam, have identified wisdom with the divine essence. Hence, two opposing concepts of divine wisdom prevailed in Byzantine and the Slavic lands, which contributed to the growth of this representation during the second half of the 14th century.<sup>35</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, however, the image of wisdom breached conciliar decrees. Similar violations occurred when iconographers used symbols to represent the Eucharistic story. In particular, Canon 82 of the Trullo Council eliminated symbols as a substitute for the direct image of the incarnate word of God: ‘Honouring the ancient imagery and the shadow, as signs of destiny and truth ... , we prefer grace and truth, accepting them as judges do when fulfilling the law.’<sup>36</sup>

Other iconographic changes evolved in the late-14th century and many compositions were either reintroduced or redeveloped. The compositions of the Akathist Hymn, the Prayer of John Chrysostom and the Heavenly Ladder<sup>37</sup> became frequent. Moreover, there was an increase in the number of images representing monks, hermits and stylites, as well as images of other followers of the hesychast tradition.

New objects of art emerged in the 14th century showing images of prominent saints, such as John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Athanasius the Great. An image of Athanasius at the Church of the Archangel Gabriel in Lesnovo (1341–1348),<sup>38</sup> accompanied by an angel, the personification of divine wisdom, is an important exemplar of this trend, as noted by Velmans. The most interesting detail is the head of the saint touching the angel’s halo, suggesting the saint’s participation in divine energies. The presence of this creation within the church stems from the desire to provide a visual narrative

34 Palamas defined Wisdom as an attribute of God common to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, through which God created the universe. In addition, he only approved signs that Old Testament prophets used as symbols for depicting higher realities, such as the Scythe of Zechariah (Zech. V, 1–2) and the Axe of Ezekiel (Ezek. IX, 1–2); reference to the image of the Divine Wisdom has been found in several Palamite texts (Meyendorff, ‘Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries’, in P. Underwood (ed.), *Kariye Dzami* (Princeton 1975) 103–106).

35 Dimitrieva, ‘Rospisi Hrama Spasha Preobrazenija’, 489–497, 495.

36 H.R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils, Second Series of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14 (1956) <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.txt> (accessed 20/02/2012).

37 E. Miner, ‘The Monastic Psalter of the Walters Art Gallery’, in Weitzmann et al (ed.), *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend*, (Princeton 1955) 2.32.–53; A. Cutler, ‘The Marginal Psalter in the Walters Art Gallery: A Reconsideration’, *Journal of Walters Art Gallery*, vol. 35 (1977).

38 G. Millet & T. Velmans, *La Peinture du Moyen Age en Yougoslavie: Serbie, Macédoine et Monténégro*, vol. 4 (Paris 1969) 49.



of a Palamite doctrine, the topic of the wisdom of God. The placement of this representation on the spandrels of the dome, however, was an unusual feature; it replaces the usual decoration of the dome with images of evangelists.

Also, the proliferation of paintings of healing miracles reflected the hesychast atmosphere of the Palaeologan period. It relates directly to the anthropological teaching of the hesychast, which perceives the body and soul as an integrated whole.<sup>39</sup> The union of the divine and human nature in Christ reveals and recreates authentic humanity, which is in fact, divine humanity. Christ grants the possibility of participation in that which frames his life: true humanity and true divinity in a single hypostasis.<sup>40</sup>

The image of Theotokos (the Mother of God) the Life-Giving Spring (Fig. 9). appeared in the 14th century due to the changes in liturgy and the introduction of a new liturgical office in honour of the Virgin Mary in 1335. It is difficult, however, to ascertain whether hesychasts contributed to this vast outpouring of Marian piety.<sup>41</sup>

Palamas expressed a personal attachment to the Virgin Mary, and he devoted several sermons and hymns to her; he often called the Virgin the source of life.<sup>42</sup> The first images of the Virgin as the source of life appeared in the middle of the 14th century, shortly after new liturgical services were composed in her honour in 1335, following the introduction of the Marian month. In this work, Theotokos assumes a frontal pose and emblem of Christ is visible on her chest. The meaning of the image is clear: salvation and eternal life were available to the Virgin after she willingly became an instrument of the incarnation. A few iconographical variants of the Virgin as the source of life exist and are distinguished not only for their iconographical subtlety, but also for a refined pictorial interpretation of the subject, indicating the high degree of freedom that Byzantine artists used in structuring holy images.<sup>43</sup> It is superfluous to question whether the above-quoted representations exhibit theologically explicable differences. Diversity of poetic formulations, both in poetry and in painting, arises from theological reflection on a topic; it is a result of subtle contemplation about its place, role and meaning within the economy of deliverance. According to Maglovski, this composition (*the Theotokos of the Life-giving Spring*) in art coincided with discussions during the hesychast controversy on the nature of light. Three types

39 T.B. Roussanova, 'Painted Messages of Salvation: Monumental Programs of the Subsidiary Spaces of Late Byzantine Monastic Churches in Macedonia', PhD thesis, University of Maryland (2005).

40 J. Breck, 'Reflection on the Problem of Chalcedonian Christology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1989).

41 Velman, 'L'Iconographie de la Fontaine de Vie dans la Tradition Byzantine a la fin du Moyen Age', *Synthronon: Bibliotheque des Cahiers Archeologiques*, vol. 2 (Paris 1968) 121.

42 A. Kniazeff, 'La Theotocos dans le Offices du Temps Paschal', *Irenikon*, 1 (1961) 30ff.

43 D. Medakovic, 'Bogorodica Zivonosni Istocnik u Srpskoj Umetnosti', *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, vol. 5 (Belgrade 1958).

of images bear the title the Virgin as the source of life: the Virgin Orant with or without the Christ-child, and with a legend; the Virgin Orant (other, later types as well) with the fountain and a legend; and, finally, the Virgin Orant with Christ painted 'as a fountain' on her chest, without a legend.<sup>44</sup>

Two striking Serbian examples are those of Lesnovo (1349) and Ravanica (1387).<sup>45</sup> They reveal one of the many mystical names for Theotokos, most notably the 'Spring', expanded at Lesnovo to 'the Spring of Life', and later to 'the Life-Giving Spring' in Ravanica. The Lesnovo example constitutes an iconographical minimum which developed further and reached its fullest form in Džefarovic, in a printed icon of 1744.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the Lesnovo type, the one from Ravanica, along with examples from the Afendico, Mystra, from 1313–1322 and the Chora church, Istanbul, 1340–1375, belong to the type where the epithet is the only iconographical connection with the fountain depicted. The example from Ravanica testifies to this, with its contrast of a dark, but starry, night on which an image of Oranta is depicted; the title reads Theotokos, the Life Giving Spring.<sup>47</sup>

The appearance of this figurative scene also testifies to the role of Theotokos in salvation, a representative of those who acquired true vision of light. According to the teaching of Palamas, she has, in fact, brought the light into the world.<sup>48</sup> Besides the two iconographical types which occurred in Serbian and Macedonian painting, there is an older type which has no legend. In the Patriarchate of Peć, there is such example, created in 1330.<sup>49</sup> The image of the *Virgin, the Spring of Life*, from the church of St Cosmas and Damian, Ohrid, which bears the inscription 'not made by hand' dates to 1340. From 1365 on, this Mariological composition found a place in the apses of the churches. The

44 J.D. Maglovski, 'The Virgin as the Fountain of Life: Gems of a Late and Post-Byzantine Motif', *Zbornik Matice Srpske za Likovne Umetnost*, vol. 1, no. 32–33 (2002).

45 Okunev, 'Lesnovo', in P. Lemerle (trans), *L'Art Byzantin Chez les Slaves: Mélanges Théodore Uspenskij*, vol. 1 (Paris 1930) 252, pl. 35; J. Babić, 'Портрет Данила II изнад Улаза у Богородичину Цркву у Пећин', *Данило II и Његово Доба* (Belgrade 1991).

46 T. Starodubcev, 'Богородица Живоносни Источник у Раваници-Питања Пореkla Слике' (unpublished paper) accessed 5/06/2011, in situ (Belgrade 2011).

47 G. Millet, *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 1960) chpt I, 95; P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami* (New York 1966) 207; V.J. Djurić, *Манастир Раваница и Раванички Живопис 1381–1981: Spomenica o Šestoj Stogodišnjici* (Belgrade 1981) 53–60.

48 The examples from Afendico, Mistra (1313–1322), and the Chora church, Istanbul (1340–1375), belong to a type where the epithet 'spring' is the only iconographical connection with the depicted fountain (Maglenovski, *Theotokos-Zivonosni Iсточnik: Dragulj Jedne Kasne i Postvizantiske Teme* (Belgrade 2003) 188–192.

49 M. Tatic-Djuric, 'Image et Message de la Theotokos Sorce de Vie', *Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen Bulletin*, vol. 19, no. 23, 1–2 (Bucarest 1993). This example, which has no legend, precedes an unpublished example from the Church of Virgin Peribleptos in Ohrid, more or less of the same type (Velmans, 'Le role de l' Hesychasm', 192–195).

image of the *Virgin the Spring of Life* from Psača is one of those paintings placed in apses; it bears no inscription, but it exhibits the iconographical features of the type.<sup>50</sup>

The intellectual climate prevailing in the Church in the middle of the 14th century, and for which the hesychasts were partly responsible, made an impact upon the growth of the composition 'Jesus Christ the King of Kings'. In this figurative scene, Christ wears imperial robes, and he is surrounded by the Virgin and other saints. The main examples are found at the Church of St Athanasius, Kastoria (1384), the Monastery of Theotokos, Trescavec<sup>51</sup> (1342–1343), as well as at the Church of the Transfiguration, Kovalevo (1380),<sup>52</sup> and the Dormition Church, Kremlin. According to Millet, this creation depicts Palamas's interpretation of Psalm 44, 9 and gives a narrative prefiguration of Christ as King and Theotokos as Queen. Similarly, a text written by patriarch Philotheus Kokkinos, a known hesychast proponent, described one of Palamas's dreams in which the saint had a vision of Christ as King surrounded by a group of servants (St Demetrius being one of them).<sup>53</sup> Even though Djurić and Grozdanov disputed this hypothesis, claiming that Palamas could not have had such a public influence before 1347, the influence of hesychasm was widespread before 1347 under the guidance of Gregory of Sinai.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Palamas's teachings spread to monastic circles long before he was sent to prison. Finally, it is difficult to ascertain the date of creation of frescoes in the few monasteries containing these themes.<sup>55</sup>

The addition of song VI of the *Akathistos Hymn* at the end of the 13th century informed its representation (Virgin Olympiotissa, Elasson, for example). The purpose of this image was to reject the changes brought by the Western doctrine of *filioque* (Fig. 10). In addition, the aim of this representation was to validate the double nature of Christ (human and divine) as well as to confirm the role of the Virgin Mary in the incarnation. The *Akathist Hymn* at the Trinity Church, Cosia, symbolises Palamas's concepts regarding the role of the Virgin in the history of salvation. She is endorsed with a complex mandorla that is commonly reserved for Christ. While the neighbouring Church of Panagia Kanakaria, Lithrankomi, (6th century) contains precedents for this image, such models are rare.

50 Velmans, 'Fontaine', f. 11.

51 S. Smolčić-Makuljević, 'The Treskavac Monastery in the 15th Century and the Programme of Fresco Painting of the Nave in the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God', *Zbornik Matice Srpske za Likovne Umetnosti*, vol. 37 (2009).

52 D.M. Fiene, 'What is the Appearance of Divine Sophia?', *Slavic Review*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Autumn 1989).

53 A. Xyngopoulos, 'Saint Demetre le Grand duc Apocafkos', *Ellenica*, vol. 15 (Thessalonica 1957).

54 C. Grozdanov, 'Христос Цар, Богородица Царица, Небесните Сили и Светите Воини во Живописот од XIV и XV век во Трескавец', *Културно Наследство* (1985–86) (Skopje 1998).

55 V.J. Djurić, *Византијске Фреске у Југославији* (Belgrade 1974) 218; C. Grozdanov, 'Христос Цар', 7–11.

An interesting example is in the illustrated program of *Stichera for Christmas* (6th century). The Church of the Virgin Peribleptos, Ohrid, from the 13th century, contains a similar figurative scene.<sup>56</sup>

The metaphorical title of the Virgin as '*kandilo svetlonosno*' (light-emitting lamp) used in XI Ikos (part of the hymn) advanced the Mariological cycle in the churches of Decani, Matejce, Koxija as well as in manuscripts of Thomas's Psalter and the Escorial. All these artistic creations contain an image of Theotokos with a candle placed above her head or behind her neck. In some Byzantine lead seals, the body of Theotokos assumes the shape of a candle, and the space around her is painted bright red to symbolise the bright light that comes from 'tongues of fire' (divine energies).<sup>57</sup>

Finally, due to the spread of hesychasm in Byzantium, the pictorial representation of the Eucharist incurred alterations. In principle, the composition commonly known as the Communion of the Apostles, which was usually placed in the apse of the church, was a symbol of the liturgy, celebrated by Christ and the angels in heaven. This was frequent in the middle of the 14th century, when the figure of Christ in this work recalls in a concrete way the parallelism between the heavenly and earthly Church, as in Decani and Matka (1496–1497).<sup>58</sup> Despite the presence of this image in the apse, the dome was decorated with a related composition, the Divine Liturgy. Both compositions refer to the service celebrated in heaven, yet each has a different context: Communion of the Apostles was a liturgical version of the Supper; the Divine Liturgy, on the other hand, illustrated the sacramental rites as acts of God.<sup>59</sup> Many fathers of the Eastern Christian tradition affirmed the parallelism between the two offices (heavenly and earthly liturgy), but Nicolas Cabasilas advanced this doctrine even further.<sup>60</sup>

In terms of symbolism, important novelties were the introduction of complex mandorla, the appearance of eight rays of light, the appearance of the 'ΟΩΝ ('I am who I am') monogram on the halo of Christ, and the introduction of three-dimensional rainbows. Other significant features were the use of zigzag

56 G. Babic, 'Le Iconographie Constantinopolitane de l'Catiste de la Vierge i Valachie', *Zbornik Radova Vizantiskago Institute* (Belgrade 1973) fig. 13.

57 J. Cotsonis, 'The Virgin with the Tongues of Fire on Byzantine Lead Seals', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 48 (1994).

58 G. Millet & A. Millet, *La Peinture du Moyen Âge en Yougoslavie: Serbie, Macédoine, et Monténégro*, vol. 3 (Paris 1962) fig. 116.

59 F.E. Brightman, 'The Hystorica Mystagogica and Other Commentaries on the Byzantine Liturgy', *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 9 (1908) 255–256, 390–394.

60 This composition is interesting as it represents figures of officiating prelates accompanying the procession of angels to emphasise their mystical union, the effect being that behind the liturgy, which takes place in the bema, is its model, which takes place in heaven. A. Jevtic, 'Recontre De la Scholastique et de l'Hesychasme dans l'Oeuvre de le Nilus Cabasilas', *L'Art de Thessalonique et des Pays Balkaniques et les Courants Spirituels au XIVe Siècle Recueil des Rapports du IVe Colloque Serbo-Grec 1987: Éditions Spéciales: Balkanološki Institut*, vol. 31 (1987) 149–157; D.P. Miquel, 'L'Experience Sacramentelle selon Nicolas Kabasilas', *Irenikon*, 2 (1965) 130.

patterns on murals, consisting of red and blue bands within a circular band, fanlike highlights on figures, and the use of monochrome colours (red, ochre and dark shades of blue). The painted surfaces were illuminated with white strokes (on the face, neck and hands) representing the rays of the divine light. Given the widespread changes in style and iconography arising in the 14th and 15th centuries, it can be affirmed that iconographic trends during Paleologan era were shaped by mystical spiritual currents, one of them being the Byzantine hesychasm. Detailed analysis of three compositions of the Transfiguration, the Anastasis and the Trinity will provide evidence for this assertion.



**Figure 1. *The Dormition of the Virgin*, c. 1105–1106, fresco, west door of the nave, Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou (Cyprus)**





Figure 2. *The Dormition of the Virgin*, c. 1294–1295, fresco, west wall of the nave, painters Eutychios and Michael Astrapas, Church of St Clement Ohridski (Church of the Virgin Peribleptos), Ohrid (Macedonia)



Figure 3. *The Dormition of the Virgin*, c. 1265, fresco, west wall of the nave, Monastery of Sopočani, Raška (Serbia)



## 2. General Iconographic Changes in the 14th and 15th Centuries



Figure 4. *The Dormition of Virgin*, c. 1321, fresco, west wall of the nave, Monastery of Gračanica (Serbia)



Figure 5. *Gregory Palamas*, c. 1371, fresco, eastern wall of the nave, Monastery of Vatopedi, Mt Athos (Greece)



Figure 6. *Barlaam and Ioasaph*, c. 1400, fresco, painter Andrei Rublev, Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, Gorodok, Zvenigorod (Russia)



Figure 7. *The Communion of the Apostles*, c. 1425–1427, tempera on wood, 87.5 x 67 cm, Cathedral of the Trinity, Trinity-Sergius's Lavra, Sergiev Posad (Russia), inv. no. 3050



Figure 8. *The Wisdom of God (Sophia)*, mid-15th century, tempera on wood, 69 x 54.5 cm, Church of the Annunciation, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 480 со6



Figure 9. *The Theotokos of the Life-giving Spring*, c. 2012, tempera on wood, 69 x 54.5 cm, painter Anita Strezova, private collection (Sydney)



Figure 10. *The Akathistos Hymn*, 14th century, tempera on wood, 198 x 153 cm, Cathedral of the Dormition, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia)

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