

### 3. The *Transfiguration* Miniature of *Parisinus Graecus* 1242

The subject of Christ's Transfiguration appears regularly in a doctrinal context in the writings of the hesychasts, connected with the vision of the 'age to come'. The event of the Transfiguration represents the vision of Christ in His glory, the deified state of being in God's Kingdom. For the 'Son of God became man so that we might become gods'.<sup>1</sup> It is a doctrine underlining Byzantine aesthetics and the theory of the image (*icon*) in representational arts; the inaccessible and invisible Triadic God imparts himself directly to his creation through his incarnation and in his uncreated glory or energies.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the doctrine of the Taboric light provides evidence for establishing an iconographic and aesthetic argument for the existence of God.<sup>3</sup>

The acceptance by the Byzantine Church of the theology of the uncreated light as an official dogma in 1375 motivated the advancement of a new and complex image of the Transfiguration in the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>4</sup> Byzantine manuscript illumination of the Transfiguration accompanying the *Theological Works of John VI Kantacuzenos (Parisinus Graecus 1242)*<sup>5</sup> verifies this trend. The miniature is a dramatic and captivating image of the Transfiguration that eloquently illustrates the release of the uncreated light of God on Mt Tabor (Fig. 11). Three new elements appear in this luxurious work of art: a new 'hesychast' mandorla, a tripartite representation of Mt Tabor, and overall change in the positioning of the apostles.

#### The theological background of the Transfiguration

The composition of the Transfiguration is the traditional Byzantine image of the feast of the Metamorphosis of Christ. This event is a theophany, a manifestation of God and a display of His uncreated light on Mt Tabor.<sup>6</sup> It has a pivotal place

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1 V. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Beds 1963) 34.

2 Nikephoros of Constantinople, Antirrheticus II, 16; *Patrologia Graeca* 100, 367 ABC, in Nikephoros of Constantinople, 'Antirrhetici Tres Adversus Constantinum Copronymus', *Patrologia Graeca* 100, 206–574.

3 P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Crestwood 1998) 231–238.

4 A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood 2005) 215–217.

5 John Kantacuzenos, 'Refutationes Duae Prochori Cydonii et Disputatio cum Paulo Patriarcha Latino Epistulis Septem Tradita Nunc Primum Editae Curantibus', in E. Voordeckers & F. Tinnefeld (ed.), *Iohannis Cantacuzeni Opera*, Corpus Christianorum. Ser. Graeca, vol. 16 (Belgium 1987) 3–105.

6 M. Smith, 'The Origins and Significance of the Transfiguration Story', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. 36 (1980).

in the New Testament and is described in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1–13, Mark 9:2–13 and Luke 9:28–36). It refers to the occasion when Christ appeared in glory during his earthly life. Shortly before his suffering on the cross, Jesus left Capernaum and, accompanied by his three apostles John, James and Peter, he ascended Mt Tabor, where he experienced a metamorphosis.

While the three evangelists give separate accounts of the event of the Transfiguration, their descriptions of the feast are similar.<sup>7</sup> When Jesus and his disciples climbed up Mt Tabor, the clothes of Jesus ‘became shining and exceeding white as snow, such as no launderer on earth could whiten them’ (Mark 9:3). At this point, the three apostles saw Christ conversing with Moses and Elias about his forthcoming suffering at Golgotha, and the fact that the blood of the Saviour would redeem the sins of humanity. When the apostles fell to the ground, a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice was heard: ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matthew 3:17). Peter’s response to witnessing this miracle was to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elias. The other Synoptic Gospels are slightly different. According to Luke, the apostles were heavy with sleep and, when they awoke, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him (Luke 9:32). When the apostles heard God’s voice, ‘they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid’ (Matthew 17:6). After the Transfiguration, Jesus returned to Capernaum with his disciples.<sup>8</sup> The event of the Transfiguration is also mentioned in II Peter 16–18, but the emphasis is on the reality of Christ’s Transfiguration, making known His divine power and majesty.<sup>9</sup> This text also refers to the doctrine of the hypostatic union of divine and human natures in Christ (*communicatio idiomatum*), which introduces a close relationship between the Transfiguration and deification.<sup>10</sup>

Written evidence of the Transfiguration also comes from the apocryphal treatises from the 2nd century, such as the Acts of John, the Apocrypha of John, and the Apocalypse of Peter 15–17.<sup>11</sup> The sources present the episode of

7 John Chrysostom, On Mathew, Homily 56; *Patrologia Graeca* 56, 552–553, in John Chrysostom ‘Spuria Contra Theatra’, *Patrologia Graeca* 56, 517–564.

8 The Troparion of the Transfiguration similarly summarises the meaning of the feast: ‘You were transfigured on the mount, O Christ God, revealing your glory to your disciples as they could bear it. Let your everlasting light shine upon us sinners, through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Giver of Light, and Glory to you’, The Troparion of the Transfiguration, <http://orthodoxkansas.org/HolyTransfiguration.html#troparion> (accessed 3/09/2012).

9 L. Thuren, ‘Style Never goes out of Fashion: 2 Peter Reevaluated’, in S.T. Porter & H. Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (Sheffield 1996) 341.

10 M. Aghiorgoussis, ‘Orthodox Soteriology’, in J. Meyendorff (trans), R. Tobias (ed.), *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran Orthodox Dialogue* (Augsburg 1992) 42.

11 R. Bauckham, ‘2 Petar and the Apokalipse of Peter’, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden 1998) 290–293; See also D.H. Schmidt, ‘The Peters Writing: Their Redactors and Their Relationships’, PhD thesis, Northwestern University (1972) 115–116.

the Transfiguration in the light of *Parousia*, (the Second Coming of Christ),<sup>12</sup> though in many different ways and against many false teachers and messiahs. The apocryphal writings, however, refer to the final destiny of righteous martyrs, rather than discussing the vision of the uncreated light on Mt Tabor.<sup>13</sup>

## Interpretation

The homilies and sermons of ecclesiastical writers, such as John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian and Cyril of Alexandria, affirm that the origins of the feast of the Transfiguration go back to the first centuries of Christianity. When Empress Helena erected a church on the site of the Transfiguration, religious authorities added the feast of the Transfiguration to the Church calendar.<sup>14</sup> The Eastern Church celebrated this feast on 6 August, well before the 8th century, when John of Damascus gave the feast canonical status.<sup>15</sup> The four gospels refer to the Transfiguration as occurring 40 days before the Crucifixion (possibly in February). Church authorities, however, transferred the celebration to August because, amidst the sorrow and repentance of Lent, the full glory and joy associated with the Transfiguration could not be celebrated. The writings of St Nicodemus Hagiorite and Eusebius of Caesarea contain references that support this hypothesis.<sup>16</sup> A celebration on 6 August is proper given that it is 40 days before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September in the Julian calendar), when the Eastern Church remembers Christ's passion for the second time during the liturgical year. Both *Kontakion of the Transfiguration* and the *Service of the Vespers* affirm the link between the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion, which share a common theological basis. A proper understanding of both Christological events is only possible in reference to the Resurrection.<sup>17</sup>

Pope Kallistos III introduced the feast of the Transfiguration in the West in 1457 to commemorate the victory over the Turks at Belgrade on 6 August 1456. The essentially Roman calendar of the Supplicationes does not include the event of the Transfiguration, which is a festival of the second rank (without octave of the feast).<sup>18</sup>

12 D. Farkansfalvy, 'The Ecclesial Setting of Pseudepigraphy in Second Peter', *The Second Century*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1985–1986).

13 V. Hills, *Parables, Pretenders and Prophecies: Translation and Interpretation in the Apocalypse of Peter 2*, *Revue Biblique*, vol. 98 (1991) 572–573.

14 P.B. D'Alsace', *La Mount Tabor* (Paris 1900) 58–61, 133–154.

15 John of Damascus, 'Homiliae on the Transfiguration', *Patrologia Graeca* 96.

16 P.B. Paschos, 'La Θεολογία de la Μεταμόρφωση', *Ερως Ορθοδοξίας εκδ Αποστολικής Διακονίας* (Athens 1978) 51–57.

17 For isolated instances of the celebration of the feast of the Transfiguration in Europe before the fifteenth century, see W. Kroning, 'Zur Transfiguration der Cappella Palatina in Palermo', *ZKunstw*, vol. 9 (1956).

18 K. Ware, 'La Transfiguration du Christ et la Souffrance du Monde', *Soperim*, no. 294 (January 2005).

Irenaeus was the first Christian father to provide an explanation of the meaning of the Transfiguration and he set the pattern for all future patristic exegesis about this event. Emphasising the eschatological and soteriological meaning of this feast, Irenaeus claimed that by participating in the uncreated light we acquire the state of incorruptibility or deification.<sup>19</sup> Clement of Alexandria regarded the Transfiguration as a sign of the transformation of human nature and the reality of salvation.<sup>20</sup> He focused on the experience of light as revealed to the apostles according to their spiritual state and their ability to receive the divine grace. Origen interpreted the event of the Metamorphosis of Christ in the light of eschatology, where only those living beyond the sixth day could see the transfigured Christ. According to Origen, the bright cloud, Jesus' shining face and the whiteness of his garments revealed Christ as God. The words of God the Father, which came from the cloud, signalled that Jesus is a beloved Son. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of dazzling light indicated the same. Moreover, the presence of Moses and Elijah alongside Christ bore witness to the fact that Christ was the Messiah of the Old Testament.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, in one of his interpretations on the subject of the Metamorphosis of Christ, Basil the Great affirmed the eschatological character of the Transfiguration, especially in the presence of Elias during the miracle. Elias was the prototype and prophet of the Second Coming of Christ because he received a vision of God on Mt Sinai while he was still embodied (I/III Kings 19:1–14, especially vs. 8–14). He achieved the state of transfiguration by virtue of his holiness in such way that God placed him within the divine aura of his holiness, in which Elias shared, participating in God's energies without compromising the divine essence.<sup>22</sup>

Moses, on the other hand, had two major theophanies on Mt Sinai. In the first revelation, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a bush that burned, but was not consumed (Exod. 3:1–2). The manifestation of God on Mt Sinai was a spectacular demonstration of God's power and majesty (Exodus, 3:1f; 33:19–23). The two revelations of God to Moses led Christian scholars to understand theophany as an unambiguous manifestation of God to man.

Athanasius of Sinai claimed that Christ banished all doubts concerning the *Parousia* when he gave Peter, John and James a vision of his glory and foreshadowed the kingdom of heaven.<sup>23</sup> More significant, however, was the

19 Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 34.

20 Clement of Alexandria, 'Stromateis II', 22, in O. Stählin (ed.) *Stromateis I–VI* (Berlin 1960).

21 A. Chemberas, 'The Transfiguration of Christ: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Scripture', *St Vladimirs Theological Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1–2 (1970) 48–65; R.P. Morozziuk, 'Origen and Apophaticism: The Case of Asomaton in I, 1.1–9 of the Peri Archon', *Logos*, no. 34 (1993) 587–600.

22 K. Onasch, *Icons* (New York 1969) 107 & 142f.

23 Anastasius of Sinai, 'Sermon on the Transfiguration 6–10', *Melanges d'Archeologie et d'Histoire*, vol. 67 (1955).

revelation of the change his body experienced during the Transfiguration. Christ did not depart from his divinity when he became man, nor was his human nature lost when it became part of the Godhead. On the contrary, the two natures in Christ remained unconfused, and their properties retained their integrity even after the union. Consequently, by virtue of the hypostatic union of his two natures, Christ gave humanity a share in the divine honour, as shown during his Metamorphosis on Mt Tabor.<sup>24</sup>

Maximus the Confessor affirmed that the uncreated light on Mt Tabor was without beginning and end and belongs to the mystical realm of apophysis, which means that it remains uncircumscribed and unperceivable by the senses.<sup>25</sup> John of Damascus stated that 'in the Transfiguration Christ did not become something He was not before, but appeared to his disciples as God and man'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Christ was the same person with whom they usually conversed every day. It was during the Transfiguration, however, that Peter, John and James received the faculty of contemplating him in his eternal glory.<sup>27</sup>

Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) was the greatest exponent of the doctrine of the Transfiguration, which he progressed in response to the attacks of Barlaam of Calabria.<sup>28</sup> His doctrinal position on this issue, which formed the basis of the Byzantine understanding of the Transfiguration, is discussed in detail in Chapter One.

Even though there are many different interpretations of the event of the Transfiguration in the writings of church fathers, symbols reveal the essence of the events. This allows for more than one explanation to be entertained across three literary genres: an epiphany that dealt with the revelation of Jesus' two natures, an apocalyptic vision of Christ referring to his *Parousia*, and a soteriological revelation of the Son of God with an emphasis on the restoration of the lost image in humankind.<sup>29</sup>

## The iconography of the Transfiguration

Scholars distinguish five different stages in the development of the iconography of the Transfiguration. The earliest preserved images of the Transfiguration are

24 Leo the Great, 'Homily delivered on the Saturday before the Second Sunday in Lent: On the Transfiguration, Matthew 17:1–13'; <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/360351.htm> (accessed 10/03/2010).

25 Maximus the Confessor, 'Ambiguorum Liber 10', *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1168A, Cf. K. Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden 1996) 123.

26 John of Damascus, 'Homilae on the Transfiguration', 564.

27 Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 433B, in Gregory Palamas, *Operum coninuatio*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 9–551.

28 Please refer to the Chapter I on Hesychasm.

29 D.A. Lee, *Transfiguration* (Chicago 2004) 122.

from the 4th–5th century. These are the images threaded on an ivory casket from Brescia, Italy;<sup>30</sup> manuscript illuminations of the Rabbula Gospels;<sup>31</sup> and, the woodcarving of a scene from the doors of Santa Sabina in Rome.<sup>32</sup> Artistically speaking these examples are not well developed, with the common feature being the depiction of only three characters: Jesus, Moses and Elijah. It is possible they express one of the central concerns of the early doctrinal conflicts — the unity of Old and New Testament.

The inclusion of all the elements of the Biblical story of the Transfiguration, such as Moses and Elijah (standing next to Christ) and Peter, John and James witnessing the event, characterises the second stage of development of Transfiguration iconography. Among the best-known examples from this period are two mosaics of the Transfiguration in the Basilica of St Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna (Fig. 12), and the apse of the Monastery of St Katherine on Mt Sinai (Fig. 13).

The symbolic composition which covers the top part of the apse of the Basilica of St Apollinaire in Classe clearly symbolises the Transfiguration of Christ on Mt Tabor.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, this figurative scene is an allegorical interpretation of the eschatological glory of God's presence through the depiction of the cross, the martyrdom of apostles represented as lambs, the death of St Apollinarius and, finally, through the mystery of the Eucharist (the mosaic extends to the area above the altar where priests celebrate the Eucharist).

The mosaic of the Transfiguration in the apse of the Church of the Virgin Mary in the Monastery of St Katherine (Fig. 13), on is the most majestic of preserved ancient examples of early images of the Transfiguration.<sup>34</sup> This type reflects the influence of the new theology of the Transfiguration that reached its full development with Maximus the Confessor.<sup>35</sup> The inclusion of the three apostles

30 C.B. Tkacz, *The Key to the Brescia Casket* (Notre Dame 2001) 42.

31 M. Bernabò, *Il Tetravangelo di Rabbula: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 1.56: l'Illustrazione del Nuovo Testamento nella Siria del VI Secolo* (Roma 2008); M. Jeremias, *Die Holtur des Basilika S. Sabina in Rom* (Tubingen 1980) 77–80.

32 The three earliest images — from Brescia, Santa Sabina and illustration of the Rabula Gospels are commonly known as pre-Sinaitic images of the Transfiguration of Christ (J.M. Spieser, 'Le Programme Iconographique des Portes de Sainte-Sabinem', *Journal des Savants* (1991) 63–69.

33 E. Dinkler, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe* (Cologne 1964) 32–34.

34 Apocalyptic notes are combined with the image of the Holy Cross in the centre of heaven, which in turn points out the historical incident during the victory over Rome, the founder of the Byzantine Empire — St Constantine the Great. The presence of a symbol of the Lamb of God is like the lamb used for Christ as depicted in the first three centuries when Christians were persecuted (in this case depicted as a substitute for the image of 12 Apostles). It seems that the artist did not try to recreate a segment of physical reality, but rather used complex symbolism to convey the fully developed Christian dogma (G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, J. Seligman (trans), vol. 1 (London 1971) 147.

35 Andreopoulos, 'The Mosaic of the Transfiguration in St Katherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai: A Discussion of its origins', *Byzantion*, vol. 72, no. 1 (June 2002); G.H. Forsyth & K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai* (Princeton 1973) 11; G. SedRajna, *L'Art Juif: Orient et Occident* (Paris 1975) 105.



in the lower part of the icon, the placement of Christ surrounded by Moses and Elias at the top of the image, and the portrayal of Christ inside the mandorla surrounded by rays of light, confirm this fact.<sup>36</sup>

The next stage in the developing the iconography of the Transfiguration appeared during the Iconoclastic controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries. Two types of Transfiguration images flourished at this time. In the first, Christ appears in the centre of a circular mandorla, with Moses and Elijah encompassing him. In the second, the oval mandorla belongs to Christ alone. Although the two types often appear in one monument, for example, in the churches of St Prassede, St Nereus and St Achilleus in Rome,<sup>37</sup> they in fact represent two separate stages in the development of the iconography of the Transfiguration.

Circular mandorlas behind Christ appeared in images of the Transfiguration from the 9th to the 11th centuries, whereas from the 11th to the 14th centuries an oval mandorla surrounds Christ (Fig. 14). Often, to create an illusion of standing in front of luminous stars, iconographers added the luminous rays of light, which shone forth from the mandorla (Fig. 15). The depiction of the witnesses of the event of the Metamorphosis, as well as the representation of the mount of the Transfiguration, is of particular importance. Within this scheme, there was room for variation in the grouping and the relationship between various figures, the placement and gestures of the apostles, the shape of the mandorla, the representation of Mt Tabor, and Christ's relationship with his apostles.

The appearance of a narrative type of image in the late-13th century marked the intermediary stage in the developing iconography of the Transfiguration. Images of the three disciples, accompanied by Christ ascending and descending, supplemented the regular iconography of the Transfiguration. A contributing feature was the elevation of John, James and Peter above the ground, which is not depicted in earlier or later images of the Metamorphosis.<sup>38</sup>

A rise in the popularity of the subject of the Transfiguration parallels the spread of the hesychast movement in the 14th century. Patterson observed an increased interest in the theme of the Transfiguration during the second half of the 14th century, as well as changes in iconography in contemporary medieval Romania. A parallel development, persisting until the 17th century, was also noticeable in

36 O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration* (London 1948) 9–10; For St Katherine, see J. Miziolek, 'Transfiguratio Domini in the Apse of Mount Sinai and the Symbolism of Light', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 53 (1990) 42–60; and the pages devoted to this mosaic in J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge 1995) 99–123.

37 A Transfiguration image from the Chuldov Psalter consists of a round mandala in which the figures of Moses and Elijah are enclosed; M.B. Mauck, 'The Mosaic of the Triumphal Arch of S. Prassede: A Liturgical Interpretation', *Speculum*, vol. 62, no. 4 (October 1987).

38 There is an abundance of variations in the mandorla type: circular mandorla, oval mandorlas, mandorlas that envelope the Old Testament prophets and others that just stop just short from including them fully, mandorlas with or without rays; V.N. Lazarev, *History of Byzantine Art*, vol. 19 (1986) 46.

Russia (Fig. 16). The increase in the number of churches dedicated to the feast of Transfiguration affirms that the hesychast doctrine of the Transfiguration spread outside Byzantine borders around this time.<sup>39</sup>

Emphasis on the psychological reactions of the disciples, appearance of the complex mandorla and tripartite representation of Mt Tabor exemplifies the new iconography of the Transfiguration that formed under the impact of hesychasm. The best example of this trend is the miniature of the *Parisinus Graecus*.

## The *Transfiguration* miniature of the *Parisinus Graecus* 1242

It was not common for Byzantine scribes of the late Palaeologan period to produce illuminated manuscripts of theological treatises and, in the 'surviving corpus of late Byzantine manuscripts the Paris Codex is a rarity'.<sup>40</sup> The manuscript *Parisinus Graecus* (1242) contains the theological works of the Byzantine Emperor John VI Kantacuzenos who died at Mystra in 1383.<sup>41</sup>

The library of the monastery of St Athanasia on the Holy Mountain held the manuscript before it was deposited in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Kantacuzenos created this book as a gift for Nicolas Cabasilas, an eminent theologian and active participant in the hesychast controversy.<sup>42</sup> The first part of the manuscript dates from 1370, and the final colophon is from 1375. The illuminations were long believed to be a product of the noble author who, after his abdication in 1354, took the monastic name of Ioasaph; however, this is not the case.<sup>43</sup> The scribe was another person, also named Ioasaph, one of the most outstanding Byzantine calligraphers.<sup>44</sup> He was a monk and eventually a hegumen of the monastery of the Hodegon at Constantinople between 1360 and 1405.<sup>45</sup> Ioasaph died in 1406, leaving behind him a legacy of around 30 signed and dated illuminated manuscripts.<sup>46</sup>

39 J. Patterson, 'Hesychast Thought as Re-evaluated in Byzantine, Greek and Roumanian Church Frescoes: A Theory of Origin and Diffusion', *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1978).

40 I. Drpic, 'Arts, Hesychasm and Visual Exegesis', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 62, (2008) 236.

41 The *Parisius Graecus* 1242 is luxurious. The leaves of parchment are set vertically and horizontally and form two columns of 25 lines each. The titles and the initials which are from the hand of the same scribe are gilded.

42 A. Omont, *Miniatures des Plus Anciens Manuscrits Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (Paris 1929) 38.

43 H. Buchthal, 'Toward a History of Palaeologan Illumination', in K. Weitzmann (ed.), *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art* (Princeton 1975).

44 L. Politis, 'Jean-Joasaph Cantacuzène fut-il copiste?', *Revue des Études Byzantines*, vol. 14 (1956).

45 G.M. Prokhorov, 'Публицистика Иоанна Кантакузина 1367–1371', *Византийский Временник*, no. 27 (1968).

46 Omont, *Miniatures*, 58–59, pl. 126; Buchthal, 'Toward a History', 165.



It is more likely that Kantacuzenos commissioned the production of the *Parisinus Graecus*, which contains images of him and theological writings as well as his expositions against union with the Church of Rome.<sup>47</sup> The theological treatises start with strong patriarchal orthodoxy, referring to the doctrine of the uncreated energies of Palamas; they continue with a political statement against the circumstantial union with the Church of Rome; and finally, they outline Christian attitudes towards Jews and Muslims.<sup>48</sup> Kantacuzenos's authorship of the theological treatises contained in the *Parisinus Graecus* has never been challenged.<sup>49</sup> Apart from the theological texts, however, the manuscript is better known for its illuminations, which are a subject of interest for both theologians and art historians.<sup>50</sup> Buchthal identified the painter of the miniatures (based on the style) as the same individual who painted the *Lectionary of Koutloumoussi* (Codex 62), kept at Hodegon monastery. He also decorated the *Vatican Gospel* (Codex Graecus 1160).<sup>51</sup>

The first miniature is an image of the emperor presiding over a council. Folio 123v contains the second miniature, which in a striking and solemnly confrontational way shows two portraits of Kantacuzenos side by side: one of him as an emperor (dressed in an imperial regalia), and one of him as a monk named Ioasaph.<sup>52</sup> The offset on folio 70v, and the stubs of two missing leaves, suggest that someone removed at least one more page of miniatures accompanying the theological text. An inscription on folio 70 provides a hint: this page contained an excerpt from the writings of the holy fathers.<sup>53</sup>

On the left page of the diptych (v. 92 f.), the dramatic scene on Mt Tabor is depicted, whereas a three-quarter folio on the opposing page, 93v, shows the portrait of Gregory the Theologian with an inscription 'Holy Gregory'. Gregory's thought was a precursor to the essence and energies distinction, which was affirmed as dogma by the Palamite Council of 1375.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, he received the title *Theologus*, or Theologian, a designation that was given to no other Christian writers except John the Apostle and Symeon the New Theologian. Many other liturgical texts referred to Gregory Palamas with the title the 'New Theologian', to emphasise the importance and mystique of his work reflected

47 K. Weitzmann, 'The Selection of Texts for Cyclical Illustration in Byzantine Manuscripts', *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington D.C. 1975).

48 The treatises are written against: Isaac Argyre (8 books, ff. 9–70), the Latin patriarch Paul (7 books, ff. 71–119v), Islam (22 books, ff. 120–292) and Jews (18 books, ff. 293–436).

49 Buchthal, 'Toward a History'.

50 E. Voordeckers, 'Examen Codicologique du Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242', *Scriptorium*, vol. 21 (1967).

51 It seems that the miniaturist belonged to a group of painters whose style is recognisable also in the Peribleptos Church at Mystra and which re-emerges fully developed in the works of Theophanes the Greek, a native of Constantinople who worked in Russia; see Buchthal, 'Toward a History', 164ff.

52 *ibid.*, 290.

53 *ibid.*, 1, 29.

54 John Kantacuzenos, *Johannis Cantacuzini Imperatoris Historiarum Libri IV*, L. Schopen (ed.), vol. 2 (Bonn 1830) 438–439.

through his spiritual vision of the uncreated light. This view is supported by the representation of Gregory the Theologian in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature. There is also a visual connection between the text written by Kantacuzenos and the miniature representing the event of Transfiguration.<sup>55</sup> The text elaborates on the nature of divine light, interpreted as divine energy or grace as seen on Mt Tabor. Three quotations by Gregory the Theologian and numerous lengthy excerpts from other ecclesiastical writers accompany the miniatures.

The first quotation starts with the initial Phi. Taken from Gregory the Theologian's oration *On Baptism*, this citation equates the scriptural revelation of the divine light received 'during baptism in illumination with the light seen by the apostles during the Transfiguration'.<sup>56</sup> Starting with the golden letter Omicron and referring to the apostle's vision of light (the sole reason for the Transfiguration), the second quote comes from the treatise *On Discipline in Discourse* by Gregory the Theologian.<sup>57</sup> Specifically, Peter, John and James climbed up the mountain to witness Jesus 'shining forth in his bodily form, reveal the divinity and bare the one who was hidden in the flesh'.<sup>58</sup> The final quotation stems from the First Letter of Gregory the Theologian to Kledonios, in which Gregory talks about the reality of the incarnation and the impending event of *Parousia*. Kantakuzenos used this sentence as a proof that the divine light of the Transfiguration of Christ was equal to the eternal light of the Godhead.<sup>59</sup> The light revealing Christ as the Son of God is furthermore an anticipation of the *Parousia*, the final coming of Christ in all his glory. Kantacuzenos, therefore, quoted the Cappadocian father to validate and endorse his own teachings, and to support the hesychast doctrine he promoted.<sup>60</sup> The page contains an image of Gregory pointing at the scene of the Transfiguration; this gesture further advances Kantacuzenos's doctrinal views.<sup>61</sup>

55 The visual connection between the written word and the miniatures as well as that between the two miniatures is quite extraordinary. The manuscript's reduced visual program serves as an autonomous medium of theological reflection. In the illustration, Gregory the Theologian wears the liturgical garments of a bishop. He sits on a backless throne set against a uniform background of gold leaf. He holds a large codex and gestures towards the image of Metamorphosis on the opposite page.

56 Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 228; Drpic's observations about the Paris miniature are similar to my conclusions that were reached when researching the *Parisinus Graecus* 1242 during a fieldwork trip in 2008 and also in 2010 (the manuscript is held at Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Drpic's paper was published prior to this volume and Drpic's observations inform this text. See also Gregory the Theologian, 'Oration 40', 5–6 in C. Moreschini (ed.) & P. Gallay (trans) *Gregory the Theologian, Discourse 38–41*, SC 358 (Paris 1990) 204–208.

57 Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 228.

58 Gregory the Theologian, Or. 32.18 3–12; in Gregory the Theologian, 'Orationes' 27–45, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 9–623, in C. Moreschini (ed.), *Gregory the Theologian*, 112.

59 Gregory the Theologian, Epist. 101, 25–29, in C. Moreschini (ed.), *Gregory the Theologian*; Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 228–229.

60 P. Guran & B. Flusin, 'L'Empereur Hagiographe: Culte des Saints et Monarchie Byzantine et Post-Byzantine', *Actes des Colloques Internationaux, L'Empereur Hagiographe (13–14 Mars 2000) et 'Reliques et Miracles (1–2 Novembre 2000) Tenus au New Europe College* (Bucharest 2001).

61 The Paris miniature depicts the spectacular moment on Mt Tabor when the apostles Peter, John and James witnessed Christ's Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:1–6, Mk 9:1–8, Lk 9:28–36); Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 228.

This example shows the emperor Kantacuzenos being a diligent follower of Palamas's hesychast tradition. He fought for the hesychast cause during his reign and, when he abdicated voluntarily from the throne, he maintained a friendship with supporters of this movement, such as Philotheus Kokkinos and Nikolas Cabasilas.<sup>62</sup> Hence, Kantacuzenos was instrumental in making hesychasm part of wider Orthodox doctrine at the patriarchal council of 1351. The miniatures in *Parisinus Graecus* that show Kantacuzenos presiding over a council, and the miniature of the Transfiguration, provide clear evidence of this claim.

## Description



**Figure 11. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1375, book illumination, scribe Ioasaph, in J. Kantacuzenos, *Disputatio cum Paulo Patriarcha Latino*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, (*Parisinus Graecus* 1242), fol. 92V**

62 See B. Laourdas, *Νικολάου Καβάσιλα προσφώνημα καὶ ἐπιγράμματα εἰς ἅγιον Δημήτριον* (Athens 1952) 100–101; Also Palamas, *Operum Continuatio*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 9–551; 536–558; Laourdas, 'Φιλοθενοῦ Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως: Δεγκωνμίων εἰς τὸν Ἅγιον Δημήτριον', *Μακεδονικά*, vol. 2 (1941–1952).

Dressed in a white vestment and surrounded by a blue-white circle of glory and octangular star, Jesus Christ stands on top of the mountainous peak. He raises his right hand in blessing and holds a scroll in his left hand, which is perhaps symbolic of his authority and role as the Living Word of God. Two men in profile rest upon their own respective mountains, to the right and left side of Christ. On the right, Moses keeps the tablets (of the law) and, on the left, the prophet Elijah points towards Christ; both make a sign of supplication to Christ. Elijah wears a greenish robe with dashes of ochre and blue, which are highlighted with white. He shows his attention to Christ by a gesture of his right hand. The slightly younger figure of Moses wears a reddish-brown robe with highlights in light grey. While Moses and Elijah are on the same level as Christ, they do not divert the viewer's attention from Jesus, who is the central point of the composition. The three apostles stand, kneel and collapse in a half circle below the figure of Christ, their postures are reflective of their response to the Transfiguration. With short curly hair and a beard, the apostle Peter rests against the hills, to the left. While he falls headfirst to the ground, he uplifts his right hand and gestures towards Christ the Transfigured Lord, but is unable to look upon his radiating body and he shields his eyes with his left hand. John lies on the bare ground in a foetal position with his face turned downwards. His chin is resting on his left hand, as if he is contemplating the meaning of the miracle, while he stretches his right hand in front, as if he is trying to protect himself from falling. Furthest to the right is James, who has collapsed to the ground face first; with his right hand he touches the ground and his left hand covers his face, protecting his eyes from the light. The disarray manifested in the postures and garments of the apostles indicates the dramatic impact of the vision. The rays of light radiate in different directions, connecting the apostles to Jesus by means of a triangular composition (Jesus, placed above, is the highest point, and the apostles below are the lowest points of the triangle). A complex, geometrically shaped mandorla surrounds the figure of Christ, consisting of two superimposed and overlapping shapes, a concave square and a rhombus inscribed within two concentric circles. The octagonal mandorla provides a complex rendition of the vision of the uncreated light of God (Fig. 17).<sup>63</sup> Moses and Elijah are not fully enveloped within the mandorla; rather, they stand at the corners of the circle. Both, however, touch the edges of the rhombus, hence, they share in the glory of God. This aspect of the iconography directs the viewer's attention to the divine energies revealed by Christ during the Transfiguration.

63 More often than not the iconographic vision of the uncreated light included the use of luminous colours, especially in the garments of sacred personages (pure and transparent colours that are frequently enhanced by reflected or self-generated light). White and gold were most frequently used to epitomise spiritual light. This effect is especially apparent on folds of clothing and is seen as patterns of white or gold ovals, rectangles and triangles. Also, hatching lines were used as accent lights and were seen as stars at the edges of clothing, thrones, seats, angels, wings and around halos. Glass tesserae reflected irregular light that was transmitted from one plane to another with mercurial effect (E. Terzian, *The Aesthetics and Poetics of Art in Eastern Christian Iconography: A Mythopoetic Perspective* (Carpinteria 2003) 141–147.

Although geometrically shaped mandorlas, aureoles and haloes are commonly found in compositions, such as the Anastasis, the Ascension of Christ, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary and the Pantokrator, the proliferation of the octagon or star-shaped doxa in Byzantine and Slavic art was mainly due to the icon of the Transfiguration.<sup>64</sup> Mandorlas contained many colourful layers, usually between three and seven, from the centre of which rays of light shone forth. According to Pseudo-Dionysius the number of layers in the mandorla reflected the three levels of ascent of the mystic (the darkness, the cloud and the divine light), as well as the three levels of hierarchy in the celestial sphere.<sup>65</sup> The Dionysian notion of hierarchy established that not everyone can contemplate and participate equally in the supreme cause (God); there is, therefore, a sophisticated and far-ranging hierarchy of the different images and representations that exist in heaven and on earth. The higher levels, which also possess the illuminations and powers of the lower ranks, receive a more direct illumination, and they can spread the divine light to the lower ranks at the level they are able to perceive the divine energies. The lower ranks, however, do not participate equally with those above them, but they guide other inspired hierarchs to the divine brightness. The same conclusion can be reached when considering the different levels of the spiritual journey as detailed by Palamas and Gregory of Sinai.

The colours and shapes of mandorlas varied; they often passed from the stages of darkness to the light, from the edge toward the centre, behind Christ, the Virgin or the saints. After the hesychast controversy, however, some compositions showed a new trend, with the core of the mandorla being translucent, or sometimes white or gold.<sup>66</sup> The preferred option, however, was a mandorla with three blue concentric circles (sometimes in green or silver-white). Predominately painted in white (at the time of hesychasm the frames of the mandorla were black), the borders of this mandorla were of varying thickness.<sup>67</sup> Before the 14th century, iconographers placed the figure of Christ within the space reserved for the mandorla, with the aim of affirming the hypostatic union of his two natures.

64 And finally, the uncreated light was represented as a nimbus or mandorla. The major difference between the nimbus and the mandorla lies not only in form, but in their symbolic value. The nimbus is a visual record of the indescribable idea of uncreated light emanating from God, and His grace and angels and saints. The mandala represents a 'cutting' in substantive space through which one can see a mystical event and spiritual reality (M. Raushenbah, *Пространственные Построения в Живописи* (Moscow 1980) 154–159).

65 Dionysius the Areopagite, 'Celestial Hierarchy VI', 1, 2, in G. Heil & A.M. Ritter (eds), *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistulae* (Berlin 1991); R.G. Todorova, 'Mandorla in Eastern Orthodox Iconography — Light or Space', [http://www.sustz.com/Proceeding08/Papers/THEOLOGICAL%20STUDIES/Todorova\\_Rostislava.pdf](http://www.sustz.com/Proceeding08/Papers/THEOLOGICAL%20STUDIES/Todorova_Rostislava.pdf) (accessed 10/03/2011).

66 I.K. Jazikova, 'Учение о Фаворском Свете и Иконография, Богословие Иконы: Учебное Пособие', <http://nesusvet.narod.ru/ico/books/yazyk/yazyk9.htm> (accessed 31/01/2012).

67 Todorova, 'Mandorla in Eastern Orthodox Iconography'.



In the middle of the 14th century, however, iconographers depicted the body of Christ outside the mandorla to affirm the separate properties of his divine and human nature.<sup>68</sup>

From the second half of the 14th century up until the late-17th century, an acute-angled quadrangle superimposed over a rhomboid formed an octagon-shaped mandorla behind Christ. The eight-sided mandorla was circumscribed within a circle, from the centre of which rays of light shone forth.<sup>69</sup> The mandorla had many layers, the darkest at the centre and growing progressively lighter towards the edges, 'precisely the opposite of what we expect from the source of light, and whose effect grows weaker the further it extends from the centre'.<sup>70</sup> Wherever the beams of light touched Peter and James, their pale-chocolate brown or purple garments changed to pale shades of blue.<sup>71</sup>

The use of black and blue for the centre of the mandorla reflects the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius regarding the essence of God, which he often refers to as 'luminous darkness'.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the hesychasts described the essence of God as the 'unknowable darkness hidden by the profusion of light'.<sup>73</sup>

Under the influence of hesychasm, the iconographers chose the dark mandorla with aberrant thick black borders and dark edges as the most brilliant expression of the uncreated light, seen during the Transfiguration. To symbolically affirm the differences between the three hypostases of the Trinity, the iconographers used different methods, such as the interplay of light and darkness to suggest the progress of the light from the whole (the unity of the Trinity) to part (hypostases of the Trinity). It is a movement from the illuminated volume of the sphere (God) towards the single point of a surface (the historical Jesus).<sup>74</sup>

68 W.C. Loerke, 'Observations on the Representation of Doxa in the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, and St Katherine's, Sinai, Essays in Honor of Harry Bober', *Gesta*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1981).

69 Lazarev, *Storia della Pittura Bizantina* (Torino 1967) fig. 542.

70 J. Cage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism* (University of California Press 2000) 76.

71 Many elements in the Gospel account of the Transfiguration support the view of Nikola Mesarites that the union of God and man in the transfigured Christ was productive of darkness and was a phenomenon beyond understanding (Mark (9, 7) and Luke (9, 34)) (G. Downey, 'Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople', XVII, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 47, part 6 (1957).

72 The blue in Byzantine art has always been identified with transcendence. Dionysius the Aeropagite called it 'mysterious' because it creates an impression of depth and serenity that are the domain of the world — other than material. Therefore, the use of blue in Orthodox iconography was reserved mostly for displaying garments of the Almighty, the chiton of the Theotokos, certain clothes of Holy Apostles, and the spiritual space in which God dwells. Hence the blue of the mandorla is the visual expression of the mystery of the divine existence. E.N. Trubetskoi, *Умозрение в Красках: Три очерка о Русской Иконе* (Moscow 1991) 52: R.G. Todorova, 'Mandorla in Eastern Orthodox Iconography'.

73 Dionysius the Areopagite, 'De Divinis Nominibus' 7, *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 586–997; 869D–872A; also P. Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius, A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*, (New York 1993).

74 L. Mavrodinova, *Stenata Zivopis v Balgaria do Kraja na XI vek-Sofija* (Sofia 1996) ill. 97; P. Hunt, 'The Wisdom Iconography of Light: The Genesis, Meaning and Iconographic Realization of a Symbol', *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 67, no. 1 (2009) 12.



The emergence of two superimposed rhomboid or star shapes behind the Transfigured Christ in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature is not a novelty. This feature appeared for the first time in an unrelated miniature of the 6th-century *Codex Dioscourides* (folio 6.v). Subsequent versions of the Transfiguration, such as the 6th-century apse mosaic of Sinai and the Monastery of Daphne contain the same detail.<sup>75</sup> This mandorla was identified as being a hesychast type in the late-14th century.<sup>76</sup> The miniature of the Transfiguration, which is the most prominent composition containing the octagon mandorla, accompanied the theological writings of Kantacuzenos, a known supporter of hesychasm.<sup>77</sup> The iconographers commissioned on Mt Athos and Mystra in the late- and post-Byzantine period also used the octagon mandorla.<sup>78</sup> It appears that the hesychasts adopted the eight-pointed mandorla as a principle means of expressing the vision of divine light, as claimed by Patterson and Belting.<sup>79</sup> Ouspensky and Lossky mention the possible connection between the use of complex mandorlas and the spread of hesychast doctrine in the Palaeologan era,<sup>80</sup> but they do not confirm or reject this assumption. Dufrenne defended the same argument, in the absence of convincing refutation of the hesychastic theory.<sup>81</sup>

Although the real reasons behind the introduction of this complex symbolism in the 14th century remain unknown, the hypothesis proposed below is plausible based on the available evidence.

The hesychast mandorla appeared at the same time that Trinitarian dogma was challenged by the Western Church, perhaps emerging as a response to the *filioque* clause. Recognition of three geometric forms as symbols for the three hypostases is probable,<sup>82</sup> though associating the three shapes (two rectangles and a circle) with the concrete hypostasis is problematic. The circle is a symbol of the Father;

75 In this miniature the prince Juliana Anticia, a well-known philanthropist and sponsor of the Church in the 5th and 6th centuries coming from Constantinople is pictured in two crossing squares which are included in a circle situated among two personified virtues, Magnanimity and Prudence (F.I. Walther, *Codices Illustres: The World's Most Famous Illuminated Manuscripts, 400 to 1600* (Cologne 2005) Folio 6 of Vienna Dioscorides, from Honorata (near Turkey) 512; at Österreichische Nationalbibliothek).

76 F. Gerke, *La Metamorphosi nell'Arte Protobyzantine*, vol. 7 (Rome 1960) 99–111.

77 For Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos see G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakuzenos: Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch, in der Gesell. Schaftsentwicklung on Byzanz im 14* (München 1969); D.M. Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor: A Biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and Monk, c. 1295–1383* (Cambridge 1996); Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenos) ca. 1100–1460: A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington D.C. 1968) 35–103.

78 S. Makseliene, 'The Glory of God and its Byzantine Iconography', MA thesis, The Central European University Budapest (1998) 65.

79 Patterson, 'Hesychast Thought', 663; H. Belting, *Des Illumierte Buch in der Spatbyzantinischen Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg 1970) 15.

80 L. Ouspensky & V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (1982) 73; J. Meyendorff, 'Introduction', *Defense de Saints Hesychasts, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes*, 2 vols (Louvain 1959) 218.

81 S. Dufrenne, 'La Manifestation Divine dans l'Iconographie Byzantine de la Transfiguration, in Nicee II, 787–1987', in B. Boespflug & N. Lossky (eds) (Paris 1987) 202.

82 G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'Iconographie de l'Évangile aux XI<sup>e</sup>, XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> Siècles d'Après les Monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos* (Paris 1916).

the two rectangles are emblems for the hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit, signifying their relation to the Father (of either birth or procession). Andreopoulos asserts that the Holy Spirit takes the form of a vertical square while the Son is the horizontal rhombus.<sup>83</sup> Maxilene, on the other hand, proposes that the square represents Christ (it is behind Christ), and the rhombus suggests the Father (according to visions of both Isaiah and Ezekiel, the tetramorphous surrounds the throne of the Father). The sphere around the two rhombi is the symbol for the Spirit, (according to the patristic identification of the bright cloud with the Spirit).<sup>84</sup> Although both interpretations are contradictory, they in fact reveal the tripartite stage in the evolving Christian symbolism of light. Delivering from the spatial realisation, it incorporates the three-stage development of the light symbolism involving the 'multiplication of the triad and quaternion' (the plane and volume). The 'action of the cone that identifies the seer and the Seen reflects the first stage in the development of the symbolism of light. It reveals the unity of the Trinity as reflected in the creation'.<sup>85</sup> Stages two and three represent the mirroring rhombi integrated by the cone and show the antinomical nature of God. This evolution in light symbolism contributed to the development of the mandorla's geometrical forms of star and protostar.<sup>86</sup>

An inscription of a sacred triangle within a divine sphere, supplemented with a single ray of light coming out of the upper triangle (signifying the essence of God), formed a star shape. As the ray emanates from the star, it divides into three, symbolising the participation of the three hypostases in the economy of salvation. The ray also connects the star with the part of the sphere which went beyond the limits of the icon.<sup>87</sup> This star also represents the return spiral of mental ascent. Moses and Elijah stood within circles of light, and they touched the rhombus of accessible divinity. They occupied individual mountains and were both interiorised into the circle of light, both acquiring the state of mental participation in Christ's mystical body.<sup>88</sup> The emergence of the star symbolism, as well as the introduction into the iconography of the Transfiguration of a mandorla of three layers, reflected the renewed impact of the writings of Dionysius in the development of hesychastic spirituality.<sup>89</sup> A passage from the Christmas liturgy provides a reference to the star symbolism. In this text, Christ is the 'light of spiritual knowledge' in front of whom monks prostrate themselves as before the

83 Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 209–245.

84 Maksilene, 'Glory of God', 68.

85 Hunt, 'The Wisdom Iconography of Light'.

86 *ibid.*, 12.

87 On the symbolism of the numbers in the Transfiguration see M. Didron, *Iconographie Chretienne. Historie di Dieu* (Paris 1843), E. J. Millington (trans), (New York 1851) 117f.

88 B. Bucur, 'The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West, Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas', *The Downside Review*, vol. 125, no. 439 (April 2007) 131–146.

89 Bucur, 'The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism', 137.

‘sun of sightlessness’.<sup>90</sup> The Bible contains other references; for example, verses in Revelation: star out of Jacob in 24:17; and 2 Peter 1:18–19, in particular, refers to the day of the Transfiguration as the ‘day of the Star’.<sup>91</sup>

The star-shaped mandorla representing the dual nature of Christ vanished by the end of the 14th century, when the octagon mandorla emerged. A vertical rhombus superimposed on the expanding circles of light evoked the intellectual form of Christ’s divinity (a double triangle represents the dyadic communication of the Godhead — the essence and energies distinction).<sup>92</sup> The horizontal rhombus, on the other hand, symbolised the divine self-identity communicated externally in Christ’s glorified body.<sup>93</sup> The octagon itself was a symbol of cosmogony emerging from the two manifesting the One.<sup>94</sup> It represented the world itself, so that when the mystic stood at the centre, he could identify himself with the force that governs the universe, or alternatively take the figure of Christ as a centre point of his meditation.<sup>95</sup> ‘Iconographers integrated the vertical and horizontal rhombi as modelled by the opening cone so that they could show with symbols the immaterial, indivisible, simultaneous form of unity of the material, divisible and plural world’.<sup>96</sup> The sphere was both a ‘Wisdom mirroring process between God and his creation, and a modelling system for representation of the uncreated light’.<sup>97</sup> Wisdom of God (*Sophia*) was one of the main doctrines clarified by Palamas during the hesychast controversy.<sup>98</sup>

The symbolism of numbers six and eight as expressed in the scriptural account of the Transfiguration<sup>99</sup> had some bearing on the emergence in iconography of the star and octagon mandorlas.<sup>100</sup> While the number six signified the number of days taken to create the universe, the number eight symbolised the final, heaven-like stage of history (*eschaton*).<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the eight (octagon) directly expressed the transcendence of the created world.<sup>102</sup> Finally, as an ecclesiastical

90 F. Walzl, ‘The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 80, no. 4 (Sep., 1965) 436–450.

91 J. Danielou, ‘The Star of Jacob’, *Theologie du Judeo-Christianisme* (Paris 1958) 237–247.

92 D. Fiene, ‘What is the Appearance of Divine Sophia’, *Slavic Review*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Fall 1989).

93 Hunt, ‘The Wisdom Iconography of Light’, 15.

94 *ibid.*, 15–16; also T. Mathews, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York 1971) 31.

95 J. & M. Arguelles, *Mandala* (London 1972) 21.

96 Dionysius the Areopagite, ‘Divine Names’, IV, 3–10; 73–80, in Dionysius the Areopagite, ‘De Divinis Nominibus’, *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 586–997; 697A–708D.

97 Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names*, IX, 9; *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 916D, 119; D. Burrell & I. Moulin, ‘Albert, Aquinas, Dionysius’, *Modern Theology*, vol. 24, no. 4 (October 2008); Hunt, ‘The Wisdom Iconography of Light’, 15–17.

98 A.G. Sakovic, *Narodnaja Gravirovannaja Kniga Vasilija Korenja 1692–1696* (Moscow 1983) 19–21.

99 Six or eight days passed between the times the apostles had a discussion about Christ and the Transfiguration.

100 E. Baldwin Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1956) 46–47 and figs 42–43.

101 H. Rahner, ‘The Christian Mystery of the Sun and Moon’, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, B. Buttershaw (trans), (London 1963) 154ff.

102 D. Fidler, *Jesus Christ, Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism* (New York 1993) 128.

emblem, the octagon stood 'for the resurrection' and marked cosmic equilibrium and immortality.<sup>103</sup> For this reason, in centrally planned churches, the shape of baptismal fonts is often octagonal.

The shape of an octagon, or sometimes a spiral, also constituted the great vision of the light of the Transfiguration of the Lord on the eighth day (eschatological connotation).<sup>104</sup> According to Gregory the Theologian, if the first Christians referred to the Resurrection as the 'eighth day', it was because 'it is the first of those that follow and the eighth of those that precede it, a glorious day among all others'.<sup>105</sup> Maximus the Confessor stated that Luke's eighth days included the beginning and end: the first day was the one in which the Lord spoke, and the last that of the Transfiguration.<sup>106</sup> Palamas stated that the great vision of the light at the Transfiguration of the Lord was the mystery of the eighth day; that is, after the termination of creating the world in six days. It represents the excess of the senses, which are six in number: 'We have five senses,' Gregory claimed,

but the word was uttered significantly, and the six energies of our sensation were added; conversely, this number not only symbolises the sensations but also represents a sign of the Kingdom of God promised to those who are worthy. Hence, the Age to come would happen on the eighth day after the suspension of these beautiful energies which are six, and after the seventh day when the wealth and dignity of God through the creation of humanity was shown.<sup>107</sup>

Palamas provided three different, but interrelated, interpretations of the meaning of the 'eighth day'. First, in two of his homilies (16 and 931) he confirmed that the eighth day came on earth when Christ rose from dead. Second, Palamas claimed that the number of people present during the Metamorphosis, that is, eight (five men and the Trinity) was a numerical reference to the 'eighth day'.<sup>108</sup> Finally, in a continuation of the preceding passage, Palamas referred to the eighth day as an age that is yet to come.<sup>109</sup> Two other passages in Palamas's *Homily of the Transfiguration* served as a source for the iconography of this episode.

103 Quoted by M. Reynolds, 'The Octagon in Leonardo's Drawings', <http://markareynolds.com/?p=89> (accessed 10/03/2012).

104 O.A.W. Dilke, 'Cartography in the Ancient World: A Conclusion', in J.B. Harley & D. Woodward (eds), *History of Cartography*, vol. 1 (Chicago 1987).

105 Gregory the Theologian, 'Oration 44', in Gregory the Theologian, 'Orationes 27–45', *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris 1886) 36, 9–623; 36, 612C.

106 G. Gianelli, 'Una "Editio Maior" delle "Quaestiones et Dubia" di S. Massimo il Confessore', a paper given at the Ninth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Thessaloniki, 1953, *Scriptura Minora: Studi Byzantine et Neellenici*, vol. 10 (1963).

107 Palamas, *Douze Homélies Pour les Fêtes*, Jérôme Cler (trans) (Paris 1987) 189.

108 J. Meyendorff, 'Introduction à l'Étude de Grégoire Palamas', *Patristica Sorbonensia*, vol. 3, no. 38 (Paris 1959) 267.

109 Palamas, 'Pour la Vénérable Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur, Dieu, et Sauveur Jésus-Christ; Où il est Démontré que la Lumière qui y est Apparue est Incréée', Homélie 34, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 425C, in *Douze Homélies pour les Fêtes*, Jérôme Cler (trans) (Paris 1987) 188.

The first passage affirms the light seen by the disciples as an expression of Christ invisible.<sup>110</sup> The second quote acknowledges the vision of the uncreated light on Mt Tabor as an expression of the Trinity.<sup>111</sup> In other words, the event of the Transfiguration is, in fact, a theophany that reveals God's glory and the divine nature of Christ, and also presents him as Kyrios elevated by God the Father.<sup>112</sup>

A new interpretation of the symbolism of light came from the writings of Metropolitan Theophanes III of Nicaea, a known defender of hesychast practice in the 14th century. He observed the mandorla surrounding Christ as representing the light of his *prosopon* (person) while the light reflected on the garments came from the hypostasis of the Godhead.<sup>113</sup> In addition, he claimed that the octagon mandorla emphasises two notions: firstly, the holiness of Christ, manifesting his divine nature during the Transfiguration, and secondly, it affirms the trans-temporal nature of the occasion, since, during the Metamorphosis, the notion of historical time was no longer in practice.<sup>114</sup>

Deliberate groupings of three apostles and prophets with Christ, as well as the use of a triangular shape for the mountain and the appearance of light beams radiating from Christ, provides the miniature with a Trinitarian accent that was always inherent in the generic iconography of light (Jesus as the light of the Father). The vision of the Trinitarian glory culminates in the inscription of a circle around two squares, which form the octagon mandorla.<sup>115</sup> This, in turn, creates a connection between two miniatures of *Parisinus Graecus*, the Transfiguration and the Double Portrait of Kantacuzenos (containing the image of the Holy Trinity).

Andreopoulos claims that the appearance of the hesychast mandorla in the 14th century coincided with developments in the fields of geography and cartography.<sup>116</sup> The visual language of individual 14th-century portolan charts, which were instrumental for European travel between the 13th and 14th centuries, consists of elements appropriated from Byzantine maps of Ptolemy's *Geography*, Medieval Latin world maps, regional maps from Islamic societies, and

110 Millet, *Recherches*, 230; Palamas, Homily 35, Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 441 B, in Gregory Palamas, 'Operum coninuatio, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 9–551.

111 Guran, P. & Flusin, B., 'L'Emperour Hagiographe', 30–41.

112 Dufrenne, 'La Manifestation', 195–197.

113 I. Polemēs, *Theophanes of Nicaea: His Life and Works*, vol. 20 (Vienna 1996) 100.

114 The diamond nimbus is a sign of pre-existing Christ at St Clement in Ochrid (1295) and in Rila Monastery (1335). After 1540 only the pre-existent Christ or the Ancient of Days were represented with an eight-pointed nimbus. In the later iconography of the sixth day of creation, Christ, as an angel of great council, is shown with an eight-pointed nimbus. The same phenomena occurs in the icon 'On the Seventh day God Rested', in A.A. Saltkov, *Музей Древнерусского Искусства Имени Андрея Рублева* (St Petersburg 1989) 243, fig. 18, 19. Didron, *Iconographie Chretienne*, 31, 60 ff; see also Polemēs, *Theophanes of Nicaea*, 99.

115 The sun as a circle with eight rays, or an eight-pointed star, has often been depicted in the art of the ancient east (old Babylonian relief in Louvre, Neo-hittite stela from northern Syria, now in Berlin (G. Contenau, 'La Representation des Divinites Solaires en Babylonie', *Revue Biblique*, vol. 12 (1917) 4f.)).

116 Andreopolis, *Metamorphosis*, 145.

art works from 13th-century Arabic and 14th-century Iranian provenance.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the principle of the four cardinal directions supplemented by four secondary ones, sometimes even 16 directions, was used to arrange geographical space after the 9th century.<sup>118</sup>

As a cosmogram, the mandorla represents the world reduced to an essential pattern; it was a sign of the whole universe in its essential plan, in its process of emanation and reabsorption. The octagonal mandorla was also a psychocosmogram, presenting in a symbolic fashion not only the 'disintegration of one to many, but also the reintegration from the many to the one'.<sup>119</sup> The central part of the mandorla represented the unity, peace and stability of the divine and human nature in Christ. The centre was also a point of breakthrough between the material–mental world of space and time, and the calm, peace and stability of the heavenly reality ... an *axis mundi* for macrocosm and microcosm.<sup>120</sup>

Within the octagon mandorla, the feet of the Old Testament prophets form the axis of an equilateral triangle; the two sides of the triangle extend towards the three apostles and finish at the edges of the icon. The dominant blue of the triangle separates the lower part of the miniature that is the vision of the apostles, represented in an earth-bound perspective of terror and incomprehensibility, expressed towards the upper part, where the glory of Christ during the Transfiguration appears (Mark 9:6; Mathew 17:6). The blue enflames the middle section of the miniature; see, for example, the greyish-brown mountain rocks beneath Moses and Elijah.<sup>121</sup>

Even though the Biblical text does not describe the relative position of Elijah and Moses in relation to Christ during the Metamorphosis, the painters invariably deployed them in a symmetrical triad. Unlike the significance of their placement on the peaks of Mt Tabor, it does not seem to have been important whether Moses and Elijah stand on the right or left side of Christ. This disposition of the figures of Christ, Moses and Elijah, would remain more or less fixed in Byzantine art.<sup>122</sup> In a few instances the composition of the

117 An example from the Cathalan atlas from 1375 is interesting — Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Esp. 30; Ibid. 145–146.

118 Similar designs were found in Bede's 9th-century manuscript of *De Natura Rerum* which demonstrates the relationship between four cardinal virtues and superimposes one square onto another (hot, cold, wet and dry with four sides of the world east, south, west and north). This shape also forms a part of Islamic cartography, such as in the four Qiblas' Dar al-Katub in Cairo, which symbolise the word around the axes mundi (G. Gabra, *The Treasures of Coptic Art and Architecture in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo 2007) 235).

119 Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 238–241.

120 Z. Grover, 'Mandala Symbolism and Use in the Mysticism of Hugh of St Victor', *History of Religions*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1973) 317.

121 Some compositions of the Transfiguration have the images of Moses and Elijah symmetrically positioned on each side of Jesus and enveloped within the mandorla, hence, forming a circle around Jesus.

122 On the composition and iconography of the Transfiguration, see J. Myslivec, 'Verklärung Christi', in E. Kirschbaum & W. Braunfels (eds), *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie* vol. 4, 416–421; Schiller,



Transfiguration included images of angels taking Moses and Elijah from the place of the Transfiguration up to the clouds (this is the case in the icon of the Transfiguration at the Cathedral Pereslavl-Zaleski).<sup>123</sup>

Moses and Elijah appeared together in the Transfiguration of Christ as witnesses of his glory or the heavenly kingdom coming to power. In the same manner, iconographers adopted various streams of Old Testament thought and patristic traditions<sup>124</sup> about the role of Moses and Elijah as eschatological prophets.<sup>125</sup> Basil the Great described the figures of Moses and Elijah as prophets appearing in the last days before the dawn of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>126</sup> Ephraim the Syrian claimed both Moses and Elijah affirmed the state of human transfiguration: God took Elijah alive to heaven in a transfigured state; Moses, on the other hand, received a new life at his Resurrection, just like Christ's people will obtain at his return. Hence, Moses and Elijah are representatives of both worlds — the dead and the living: Moses represents the dead, and Elijah the living, because he never saw death; he went by a whirlwind 'into heaven' (2 Kings 2:1).<sup>127</sup>

The appearance of Moses and Elijah alongside Christ at the Transfiguration provided another site for typological analysis, closely connected with the teachings of the hesychasts. Both Moses and Elijah were specifically connected with a mountain where the direct vision of God was denied.<sup>128</sup> In regard to the theophanic visions that both Moses and Elijah experienced, it is necessary to note that Moses received two revelations on Mt Sinai. Prior to the Exodus, God appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush. Moses, however, received another vision when he saw God's glory from the back with God's face remaining hidden (Exodus 33:18f.). The prophet Elijah, on the other hand, had one sighting of God in a revelation of Him when he climbed Mt Horeb (I Kings 19:11–15). Both Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius the Areopagite took Moses as an exemplar of a mystic who entered divine darkness, whereas Gregory of Sinai and Palamas described the various postures and gestures assumed by Elijah as embodying

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*Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 1, 145–52; Changes in situation and context, however, have altered the significance of the composition. See Elsner, 'Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium', *Art History*, vol. 11 (1988) 471–491.

123 N.K. Goleizovsky, 'Notes on the Work of Theophanes the Greek', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 24 (Moscow 1964).

124 C.E. Carlton, 'Transfiguration and Resurrection', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 80, no. 3 (Sept. 1961) 233–240.

125 The Old Testament testifies the assumption and return of Elijah (II Kings, 2:11; Mal 3:23) while the evidence for either of those in the career of Moses is uncertain at best. Yet, there is a reference in the New Testament to both Elijah and Moses being eschatological prophets (Rev 11:6), and many church fathers support this assertion.

126 Basil the Great, Homily, Psalm 44, 5; *Patrologia Graeca* 29, 400, in Basil the Great, 'Basili Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Graeca* 29 (Paris 1886).

127 N.V. Pokrovsky, *Notes on Monuments of Russian Iconography and Art* (St Petersburg 1900) 356.

128 Palamas often mentions the prophet Elijah as an exemplum for his fellow hesychasts. See Gregory, *Triad* 1.3.24, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*, 160–162.

the 'hagiographical topos of the solitary hesychast'.<sup>129</sup> In particular, Elijah's theophanic vision on Mt Sinai was described as an earthquake of the heart and fire of such force that it purifies, illuminates and sometimes destroys the initiated in the hesychast practice.<sup>130</sup> In the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, however, Moses and Elijah serve as 'models of ascetic monasticism, rather than operating as Old Testament archetypal visionaries'.<sup>131</sup>

The typological link between mounts Sinai and Tabor, as privileged sites for theophanic visions, recurred in exegesis and liturgical poetry and became a frequently narrated topic in the hesychast literature.<sup>132</sup> Writers of these treatises found several parallels between the theophanies of Sinai and Tabor. Both revelations of God occurred on the mountain only when the prophets left the non-initiated majority behind; both served as initiations for the missionary works of Moses and Elijah. Finally, the sightings of God on Sinai and Tabor showed that his essence is unknowable and unperceivable.<sup>133</sup> What Moses and Elijah saw was not the essence of God but his energies.<sup>134</sup>

The contrast between Sinai and Tabor also offered an opportunity to consider the interplay of doctrines of apophaticism and deification, the way of darkness and the way of light, the ambiguity of silence and the clarity of articulation.<sup>135</sup> Sinai was a symbol of the elusive, aniconic quality of the divine being, where Moses met God in the darkness of unknowing. Sinai also served as a symbol to remind people of God's utter freedom and inaccessibility. It showed that no permanent guarantee of the divine presence could be assigned. Tabor, by contrast, incorporated the uncreated light, allowing the light of the divine presence to be experienced by humans. In turn, while participating in the event of the Metamorphosis, the disciples not only received a vision of the uncreated light, but they also saw themselves anew.<sup>136</sup>

The ecclesiastical writings of the Christian fathers mentioned the interplay between darkness and light, Sinai and Tabor. Some of them, such as John Chrysostom,<sup>137</sup> Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>138</sup> Maximus the Confessor<sup>139</sup> and

129 V. Lossky, 'La Théologie Négative dans la Doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite,' *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, vol. 28 (1939); J. Williams, 'The Apophatic Theology of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite', *Downside Review*, vol. 117 (1999); Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 233.

130 Palamas, *Triad* 1.2. 10; Palamas, *Defense des Saints Hesychastes*, J. Meyendorff (ed. & trans), 2 vols (Louvain 1959) 1, 92–94.

131 M. Corbin, *La Vie de Moïse selon Grégoire de Nysse* (2008); Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 233.

132 B.C. Lane, 'Sinai and Tabor: Apophatic and Kataphatic Symbols in Tension', *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, no. 13–14 (1992–1993) 192.

133 Dionysius the Areopagite, 'De Divinis Nominibus', 1045–1048B.

134 Loerke, 'Observations', 21.

135 Lane, 'Sinai and Tabor', 199.

136 *ibid.*, 190.

137 John Chrysostom, 'Expositio in Psalmum' 143, 2–3, *Patrologia Graeca* 55, 459; John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, P.W. Harkins (trans) vol. 72 (Washington, D.C. 1984).

138 Gregory of Nyssa, 'Quod non Sunt Tres Dei', *Patrologia Graeca* 45, 132.

139 Maximus the Confessor, 'Ambiguorum Liber 10', 1168A.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,<sup>140</sup> took Moses as a model of a mystic who ascended to Mt Sinai to encounter God in a thick cloud (darkness). Other Christian apologists, however, such as Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory the Theologian, Symeon and Palamas took the light seen during Christ's Transfiguration on Mt Tabor as a goal for their mystical ascent.<sup>141</sup>

Tabor is the place where both *apophasis* and *kataphasis* meet: God came down to earth so that humanity could be lifted from its earthly baseness and be transformed in the same way that Christ was transfigured.<sup>142</sup> Bringing the experience of God closer to the human realm, however, the hesychast, in fact, underplayed the significance of the Resurrection.<sup>143</sup>

The event of the Transfiguration is not only a revelation of things to come (with a reference to the future Apocalypse), but also a fulfilment of the promise given by God to Moses on Mt Sinai.<sup>144</sup> Hence, Tabor has absorbed the mystical tradition associated with Mt Sinai, but in some ways, it served as symbol for Sinai. The image of human participation in God as light, and images of divine transcendence as darkness, do not present mutually irreconcilable views of God.<sup>145</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite reconciled both symbols, calling the vision of God 'dazzling darkness outshining the brightest light'.<sup>146</sup> In other words, what the darkness is to the light, Mt Sinai is to Mt Tabor.<sup>147</sup>

Conversely, the mount of the Transfiguration was a culmination of the events that took place on all Old Testament mountains, which is a symbol of spirituality that is not limited to Tabor, Hermon or Sinai, and which transcends all historical realities and foreshadows the unending process of human transformation.

An interesting detail in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature of the Transfiguration affirms the parallelism between Sinai and Tabor. The apostles John and James are literally thrown out of their sandals as they fall headlong down the mountain. This iconographical marker of losing sandals is an allusion to the episode of the Burning Bush, when Moses took off his sandals at God's command (Exodus, 3:2–5).<sup>148</sup> In his celestial hierarchy, Dionysius the Aeropagite presented this episode as a symbol of the apophatic nature of God. He claims the brilliance of the fire of

140 J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York 1983) 3–12.

141 K. Ware, 'La Transfiguration du Christ et la Souffrance du Monde', *Soperim*, no. 294 (January 2005) 20–26.

142 Gregory of Sinai, 'On the Transfiguration', in D. Balfour (ed.), *St Gregory the Sinaite, Discourse on the Transfiguration*, *Theologia*, vol. 52, no. 4 (1981) 647–651; Palamas, Homily 34, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 426, in Gregory Palamas, *Operum conuatio*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 9–551.

143 H.P.L. Orange, 'Luc Aeterna: L'Adorazione della Luce nell'Arte Tardoantica el Alto Mediveale', *Rendiconti della Pontifica Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, no. 67 (1974–1975) 78–142.

144 C. Jones et al., *The Study of Spirituality* (Durham 1986) 240–253.

145 C. Charalampidis, 'The Representation of the Uncreated Light (Lux Increata) in the Byzantine Iconography of the Transfiguration of Christ', *Arte Mediveale*, vol. 1 (2003).

146 Dionysius the Areopagite, 'Mystical Theology I', in *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 997–1065, 997B.

147 Balfour, *Discourse on the Transfiguration*, 75, 22–23.

148 Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm'.

the Buring Bush revealed the divine energies or the proper operation of God.<sup>149</sup> The essence of God, on the other hand, remained forever uncircumscribable and unknown in the Burining Bush.<sup>150</sup>

The 5th- and 6th-century representation of Mt Tabor in the figurative scene of the Transfiguration was only minimal. Starting from the 9th century onwards, however, Mt Tabor was given prominence in the composition. Around the 12th century, images of the disciples ascending and descending from the mountain, led by Christ, enriched the composition.<sup>151</sup> Also, there are instances when the mandorla surrounding Christ assumes the shape of a star (Fig. 18). Finally, in the icons of the Transfiguration of the 13th and 14th centuries, Mt Tabor was easily identifiable and it became personalised. Sometimes there was a single mountain, at other times the mountain had three parts, with Moses and Elijah standing on their own respective rocks. Rarely, the entire mountain had only two levels, with the apostles standing at the foot of the mountain, while Christ stood at the top (Ex. 24:12–18; Ex. 33:11–23; 34:4–6, 8).

The *Parisinus Graecus* miniature shows Mt Tabor as steep, inaccessible and harsh; its appearance differs from the vertical mountain seen in the Chludov Psalter illumination. The most prominent change, however, is the introduction of a mountain consisting of three peaks joined at the base, instead of one angular and rocky landscape. This accentuated the unity of all previous mystical ascents to Christ, with the incessant upwardly aimed spirituality represented as a triangular mountain.<sup>152</sup>

Moreover, Mt Tabor assumed the shape of an upward triangle, stressing the upward movement of the soul towards God, as well as reaffirming the division between heaven and earth. The overall trapezoid shape of the miniature further affirms these aspects. The illusion of a gap (*diastema*), between the creation and the creator was a common feature in all earlier compositions of the Transfiguration.<sup>153</sup> For example, the mosaic from the Monastery of St Katherine, Mt Sinai, and the manuscript illumination of the Rabula Gospel, show the Transfiguration being divided in two parts. Christ and prophets are confined to the upper part of the scene, with the apostles and prophets occupying the lower part.<sup>154</sup>

149 Dionysius the Areopagite, 'Celestial Hierarchy I', 5.

150 Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 217–233; Dionysius the Areopagite, 'Celestial Hierarchy 15', 2.

151 Such details were found in monuments throughout the centuries, such as: Church in Gračanica (1321) and the Church of God in Peribleptos, Mystra.

152 Chapter 13, f.16.

153 Cologne, second quarter of 11th century, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Bibl. 94 (A.2.18) fol. 155.

154 This tendency was later heightened in the Paris illumination of the ninth century and Chludov Psalter illumination; Moscow Historical Museum, Cod. 129, f.88 Cf colour plates, figure 14a; Elsner, 'The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse', *Art History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (March 1994) 81–102.

The increasing gap between Christ and the apostles in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature was a result of the spread of hesychast spirituality in Byzantium. The depiction of mountains and deserts in the iconography corresponds to the notion of mountains as traditional places for monastic asceticism and retreat, without which true hesychia was considered impossible.<sup>155</sup>

The acceptance of the doctrine of the vision of light as dogma provided the basis for the development of a more personalised and individualistic spirituality, a metaphorical cross that every Christian had to lift in imitation of Christ. This did not mean that individual spirituality was separated from the sacramental and inclusive *koinonia* (communion by intimate participation). On the contrary, only those transformed with the help of the Spirit, who is present in the sacraments, could receive the divine light and the grace of God.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, the light held significance for all. This is the beginning of transfiguration, a momentary foretaste of what will constitute the happiness of Paradise.<sup>157</sup> The process of Transfiguration, however, is individual and does not have the same effect on all believers.

The miniaturist of *Parisinus Graecus* affirmed this fact by emphasising the distance between the transfigured Christ and the disciples, who stumble down precipitously, stunned by the supernatural light emanating from Christ. The powerlessness of the three disciples is palpable. Nevertheless, they are not just weak, but also 'fallen' human beings. The apostles are contained within the shape of the mountain and they lack the free movement of many previous Byzantine examples.

To understand this better, it is important to recognise that as Byzantine art developed, iconographers often varied the positioning and gesturing of the three disciples witnessing the Metamorphosis. Hence, in the so-called 'oriental type' rendering of the Transfiguration, the three apostles were depicted in the same position (standing, kneeling or sleeping on the ground).<sup>158</sup> There were few instances in which Peter was placed on the right, but in most extant images of the oriental type he was represented on the left side of the composition. James and John either kneeled or stood on either side of the composition. In some examples, James kneeled with his torso pointing upwards, or rarely, his body touched the ground, with his right hand covering his eyes. John, on the other hand, stood in the middle of the scene, his hands and knees towards the ground while his face opposed the light. Occasionally, he was shown in a state of deep

155 Gregory of Sinai, 'On Stillness: Fifteen Texts', in G.E.H. Palmer (ed.), *The Philokalia: Eastern Christian Spiritual Texts*, vol. 4 (Athens 1961) 264.

156 Palamas, *Triads*, III, 3.10, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*.

157 M. Grace, 'Spirit-Centred Eastern Fathers: Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas', *Diakonia*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1998) 129–138.

158 Palamas, 'Pour la vénérable Transfiguration de notre Seigneur', 188.

sleep. From the 11th century on, however, changes occurred in the positioning of apostles: John and James appeared closer to the ground and they covered their faces with their hands. Peter did not monopolise the upright position and his knees were often bent. The only exception to this rule is the fresco of the Transfiguration in the Church of Tokali Killise, in which the apostles are also close to the ground, standing or prostrated. In most compositions of the Transfiguration, Peter takes primacy over John and James and is the only disciple to either face or gesture towards Christ.

## Formal qualities of the *Transfiguration* miniature

Inscribed on a fine, creamy white parchment and enclosed in a frame painted in blue and grey tones, the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature of the *Transfiguration* is the product of careful planning by the scribe Ioasaph, the most outstanding calligrapher of later Byzantium.<sup>159</sup> The parchment has a distinctive, chalky surface that is characteristic of Ioasaph's works and the miniature has a retrospective, classic feel.<sup>160</sup> The placement of the inscriptions suggests that the painter did not uphold the authority of earlier Byzantine manuscripts while creating the illumination, but rather, he turned to contemporary manuscript examples.<sup>161</sup>

Elegantly executed in a luminous, painterly style, the miniature is essentially an icon in book format.<sup>162</sup> A varied combination of blue, green, grey and lavender appears across the miniature, while a shared colour scheme of electric royal blue illuminates the initials and unites the picture in a distinguished harmony with the ornament that surrounds the masterpiece. The overall background colour scheme, however, is expressed with shades of orange, yellow and black, and shows the interpretive nature of the Transfiguration. The light emitted from Jesus spreads a blue-green hue over the disciples.<sup>163</sup> The outer circle of the mandorla is a lighter blue, whereas the inner circle is deep blue. The beams of light appear transparent with their colour changing from light to dark. The mountain is

159 Voordeckers, 'Examen'; also Lazarev, *Storia Della Pittura Bizantina* (Torino 1967) 370, 379.

160 R.S. Nelson & J. Lowden, 'The Palaeologina Group: Additional Manuscripts and New Questions', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 45 (1991).

161 Buchthal, 'Toward a History'; H. Hunger, 'Herbert, Johannes Chortasmenos', *Wiener Byzantinische Studien*, vol. 7 (1969); D.D. Lixaceva, *Vizantitskaia Miniatiura* (Moscow 1977); Lixaceva, 'The Illuminations of the Greek Manuscript of the Akathistos Hymn (State Historical Museum Synodal Gr. 429)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 26 (1972).

162 Buchthal, 'Notes on Some Early Palaeologan Miniatures', *Kunsthistorischen Forschungen Otto Pösch zu seinem 70* (Salzburg 1972).

163 Guran, 'Jean VI Cantacuzène, l'Hésychasme et l'Empire: Les Miniatures du Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242', *Actes des Colloques Internationaux, L'Empereur Hagiograph: 13–14 Mars 2000 et 'Reliques et Miracles', 1–2 Novembre 2000 tenus au New Europe College* (Bucharest 2001) 73–121.



grey-brown with hints of dark green tinting the foliage. The five men are clothed in weaker pastel colours, ranging from greys to browns and blues. The repeated use of colour on the draperies creates a sense of interconnection. The kinship of the facial and figure type is clear and, by using reds and greens, the faces are made to appear loose and fresh. Highlights on the figures are angular; the use of a full brush creates a sense of fluid delineation.<sup>164</sup>

The figures of the apostles show compact body types, with stubby hips and long trunks. While James's flying drapery has a hollow, pointed form and his garments fall in tight folds from the hips, the overall modelling of the drapery folds is sharp.<sup>165</sup> The use of angular drapery is a Palaeologan convention and appears in the fresco-painting of several monuments from the 13th and 14th centuries. Frescoes of King Milutin's churches,<sup>166</sup> of the Church of Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki,<sup>167</sup> the Church of the Virgin Peribleptos at Mystra, as well as the mosaics of the Chora church,<sup>168</sup> affirm this trend.<sup>169</sup>

The *Parisinus Graecus* miniature has an elongated, tapering format which conveys a sense of upward movement.<sup>170</sup> The miniaturist shaped this narrow, trapezoid form from a wider rectangle that he scaled down. Auxiliary geometric figures appear at the centre of the miniature, such as a circle in the upper part and a pyramidal triangle in the lower part. In front of two concentric circles, a square and a rhombus create an octagonal mandorla (with Christ as the centre). Two triangles expand the compositional plan by arising on either side of, and behind, the third dominant triangle that forms in the middle. Across the diagonals, figures stand across one another, irrespective of whether they are in a group or separate.

Although Christ stands high on the mount, far from the viewer, and the apostles appear at the foot of the hill, considerably closer to the viewer, the figure of Christ is significantly larger than that of the apostles. Moreover, the miniature has two parts, representing both heaven and earth. The bodies of the three apostles fill the lower part of the miniature, their hands touching the lower edge of the icon. In contrast, Mt Tabor takes approximately one-third of the vertical

164 A. W. Carr, 'Two Manuscripts by Joasaph in the United States', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 2 (Jun., 1981).

165 R. Marcel, *Repertoire des Bibliothèques et des Catalogues des Manuscrits Grecs*, 2nd ed. (Paris 1958).

166 Millet, *La Peinture du Moyen-Age en Yougoslavie*, vol. 1 (Paris 1954) pl. 13, 2 (exonarthex of Hagia Sophia, Ohrid) and vol. 3, pl. 110, 2 (Staro Nagoriino); R. Hamann-McLean & H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien* (Giessen 1963) I, pl. 318.

167 A. Xyngopoulos, 'Les Fresques de l'Église des Saints-Apôtres à Thessalonique', *Art et Société à Byzance sous les Paléologues: Bibliothèque de l'Institut Hellénique d'Études Byzantines et Postbyzantines de Venise*, vol. 4 (Venice 1971).

168 P. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami: Studies in the Art of Kariye Djami and its Intellectual Background* (Princeton 1975) pl. 320.

169 Carr, 'Two Manuscripts'; Millet, *Monuments Byzantins de Mistra* (Paris 1910) pl. 117, 2.

170 Drpic, 'Art, Hesychasm', 223–240.

axis of the scene. The dominant feature of the middle section is two big caves under the two-sided mountain peaks. The cave entrances indicate an opening into the mountain which gives the mountain volume.

Riddled with big caves, the barren triangular mountain landscape fills the middle part of the figurative scene and serves as a prop against which the drama of divine revelation unfolds.<sup>171</sup> The feet of Christ rest on top of the rocky and arid mountain landscape. The lower part of the mountain does not extend to ground level and is, instead, obscured by gold paint, which frames the lower section.

In contrast with the forceful diagonal gestures of the Old Testament dignitaries in the lower section, there is a sense of quiet in the top section of the miniature. The position of the apostles in the pyramidal triangle and their dramatic bodily postures, as well as the operative power of the three beams of light radiating from Christ, creates the sense of movement. Apostles move along a vertical axis (presented in the form of a mountain), seemingly engaged in a spiritual struggle, while the spiritual bodies of Moses and Elijah levitate next to Christ. In contrast, Peter, James and John plunge to the ground, gesticulate and crouch away from the blinding light.

The variations in the colour scheme also affirm the distinction between the upper and lower part of the miniature. Following the biblical narrative, Christ wears a white robe with light grey-blue shadows in the folds. The garments of Moses and Elijah are lighter in colour than those of the apostles, which signifies their advanced spiritual state, as well as their active participation in Christ's glory.<sup>172</sup>

While Christ is the main source of light in many earlier depictions of the Transfiguration, the immediate impression of luminosity in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature comes from other sources.<sup>173</sup> The extensive use of gold and luminous colours intensifies the intense and harmonious experience of enlightenment. The three light beams that fall upon Peter, James and John reflect the source of their radiance, Christ. Moreover, a light source, which originates outside the pictorial plane and defies the conventional depiction of space within the miniature, conveys a sense of brightness.<sup>174</sup> The intentional use of highlights on draperies affirms the overall affinity of the miniaturist to represent the vision of

171 Similar landscape imagery can be found in Paris Psalter ca. 950–975 (Bibl. Nat. MS. GR. 139), L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge 1999) fig. 14, 18–19, 23, 26, 35, 44. Buchtal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter: A Study in Middle Byzantine Painting* (London 1938) fig. 2, 10, 12.

172 Andreopoulos, 'The Vision of Light and the Icon of the Transfiguration in the Fourteenth Century', in J. Goering et al. (eds), *Mystics, Visions and Miracles* (Leigas 2001).

173 Charalampidis, 'Representation of the Uncreated Light'.

174 Carr, 'Two Manuscripts'.

the uncreated light of God as reflected on the overall environment. The complex mandorla, on the other hand, is not a source of its own radiance, but rather a manifestation of the main source of light.<sup>175</sup>

Spatial analysis of the Transfiguration miniature reveals a dynamic relationship between the presentation of line and depth and displays two rather than three dimensions. The tendency to converge the parallel lines in reverse perspective serves as a way for the viewer to experience divine vision.<sup>176</sup> The octagonal mandorla provides a natural focus from which the other figures find their orientation, and it is the point where parallel lines intersect.<sup>177</sup> The use of the principle of simulating planes allows the objects and their parts to appear smaller the closer they are to the viewer. Therefore, the lower part of the mount appears smaller, whereas the upper part appears larger. The capricious distribution of light and shade that comes from inside and outside the pictorial plane creates the same illusion of depth. Moreover, although Elijah and Moses are the same size and operate within the same space, the fact that the three mountains overlap produces a sensation of depth. In other words, one perceives 3D despite the 2D image that is projected.

## The *Transfiguration* miniature in the context of 14th- and 15th-century art

The *Parisinus Graecus* miniature is a complex and fascinating image, eloquently illustrating the vision of the uncreated light of God during the Metamorphosis.<sup>178</sup> The balance of mathematical harmony in line and shape, the master's use of an earth-toned palette and precious gold leaf, evokes a powerful spirituality and is a tribute to the genius of this relatively unknown miniaturist.<sup>179</sup> Three novelties characterise this miniature of the Transfiguration: the octagonal mandorla consisting of a concave square and a rhombus inside a circle, the tripartite representation of Mt Tabor, and the dramatic representation of the apostles in shock and disarray. These iconographical variations, however, were not exclusive to the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature. The angular-painted forms retaining the basic form of a hesychast mandorla also appeared in the churches of Thessaloniki, the main centre of the hesychast dispute.<sup>180</sup> Monuments from

175 M. Cheremeteff, 'The Uncreated Light: Hesychasm, Theophanes the Greek and Russian Iconostasis', *Zapiski Russkoi Akademicheskoi Gruppy v SShA*, Transactions of the Assoc. of Russian American Scholars of USA, vol. 21 (New York, 1988) 125–162.

176 V. Bychov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky* (Crestwood 1993) 93, 7.1.

177 J. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden 1976) 129–137.

178 H. Caviness, 'Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing', *Gesta*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1983).

179 Orange, 'Lux Aeterna'.

180 T. 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) 218–219.

the complex of Mystra (Greece), namely, the Church of Hagia Sophia and the Virgin Peribleptos, contain paintings with geometric forms,<sup>181</sup> and octagonal mandorlas surround the images of the Virgin Orans with the inscription, 'Container of the Uncontainable.'<sup>182</sup> A square superimposed over a second square with its corners projecting beyond the four sides of the first square, creates an octagon.<sup>183</sup> Manuel Kantacuzenos, the son of John Kantacuzenos and a diligent hesychast adherent, was a patron of both churches.<sup>184</sup> This supports the idea that hesychasm informed the appearance of geometrically shaped mandorlas in both churches. Manuel Kantacuzenos shared the same predisposition as his father and it is not surprising, therefore, that the mandorla behind the Virgin Orans relates directly to that of the *Transfiguration* in the *Parisinus Graecus*.<sup>185</sup>

The mosaic decoration of the dome of the Holy Apostles church, Thessaloniki and the icon of the Monastery of Xenophon (Fig. 19), is one of the earliest depictions of the hesychast type of mandorla in a depiction of the Transfiguration as well as the composition of Despite the partial destruction of the image, the figure of Christ surrounded by Moses and Elijah is clear. The figures of Peter, John and James witnessing the divine splendour are also recognisable.<sup>186</sup> A circular mandorla, superimposed with an X-shaped star, surrounds the figure of Christ, which symbolises the three hypostases of the Trinity.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, the colour of this mandorla is much deeper and more sombre than that of the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature. The four diagonal rays of light radiate from Christ and touch the apostles. Blinded by the divine light, Peter, James and John are hiding their faces with their hands while falling to the ground. Moreover, through the varied use of colour, animated gesticulation and fluttering drapery, the outer drama of the Transfiguration is represented. The shared stylistic and iconographic similarities between the mosaic of the Transfiguration and the miniature

181 Todorova, 'New Religion — New Symbolism: Adoption of Mandorla in Christian Iconography', Ninth Symposium Niš and Byzantium, 3–5 June 2010, *Collection of Scientific Works*, vol. 9 (Niš 2011).

182 S. Delvoye, 'Chronique Archéologique', *Byzantion*, vol. 34 (1964) 160; T. Gouma-Peterson, 'Manuel and John Phokas and Artistic Personality in Late Byzantine Painting', *Gesta*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1983).

183 Millet, *Monuments*, pl. 140.

184 The use of this kind of mandorla in association with paintings of the Virgin Orans with a Child, the Pantokrator, and the Transfiguration reappears frequently in the 15th and 16th centuries in the churches and monasteries in Moldavia (Patterson, 'Hesychast Thought').

185 *ibid.*, 665.

186 P. Serracino Inglott, 'La Trasfigurazione come Epiphania Monarchica', *Arta Christiana*, vol. 60 (1971).

187 M.L. Rautman, 'The Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki', PhD thesis, University of Indiana (1984). This unusual type of mandorla, which is supposed to represent the uncreated light on Mt Tabor, is depicted in three other monuments from the second half of 14th century: the rock monastery of St George in Potamies, Crete, the Transfiguration Church of Zrze, Macedonia (1384, 1385), and the Church of St Athanasius, Muzaki (1384–1385). A similar style is employed in several churches on Mt Athos (D. Kornakov, 'Манастирот Зрзе', *Културно — Моментисториско Наследство Наследство во Ср. Македонија*, vol. 11 (1972) 15–19). 'St Athanasius of Muzakis' (in Greek), Kastoria City, [http://www.kastoriacity.gr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=405&limit=&limitstart=4](http://www.kastoriacity.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=135&Itemid=405&limit=&limitstart=4) M (accessed 17/07/10). M. Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece* (1988); Millet, *Recueil des Inscriptions Chrétiennes de l'Athos Paris* (Paris 1904) pl. 62.2; 123, 1.

indicate that iconographers of the same workshop created both compositions. In contrast with the dramatic narrative of the *Parisinus Graecus*, the mosaic of the Transfiguration gives a realistic and vivid expression of the event.<sup>188</sup>

Two images of the Transfiguration that share the same iconographical format as the miniature decorate the walls of the monasteries of Mt Athos. The Transfiguration from the Church of the Protaton, painted by Manuel Panselinos, is of importance. Specifically, the circumstantial evidence points to the Church of the Protaton being an important place for the hesychasts. Palamas produced and signed the first document opposing Barlaam at the hesychast assembly of Protaton around 1340–1341. Also, the monastery of Hodegon on Mt Athos held the theological writings of Kantacuzenos (the *Parisinus Graecus*) before it was sent to Bibliothèque nationale de France. Finally, both Palamas and Gregory of Sinai learned the practice of the Jesus Prayer while spending extended periods amongst the monastic brotherhood of Mt Athos — the centre of hesychast mystical practices. Although the influence of hesychasm on Panselinos's image of the Transfiguration is not certain, it cannot be excluded.

The paint on the lower part of the mandorla at Protaton is transparent, which allows the top of the mountain and the lower part of Christ's figure to be visible. The upper part of the fresco, however, which contains the two prophets and Christ inside a blue star-shaped mandorla, looks almost identical to the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature.<sup>189</sup>

Considering that iconographers often copied religious images, and thereby perpetuated certain types of illumination, it can be assumed that there was a causal connection between the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature and later images of the Transfiguration.<sup>190</sup> Panselinos painted another image of the Transfiguration in which he makes an unusual choice for the mandorla<sup>191</sup> of using an elliptical form, which radiates a rhomb with two acute edges,<sup>192</sup> instead of a circular doxa superimposed with a rhomboid and a rectangle as he did in the church of Protaton. Was the unusual choice of mandorla, perhaps, indicative of the need to represent the glory of God in the Transfiguration in a more intricate manner than in the earlier period, under the influence of hesychasm? It is difficult to prove or disprove this hypothesis; however, the introduction of an angular shape behind Christ demonstrates the need to change the shape of the traditional mandorla from oval to octagonal.

188 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 109–159.

189 Makseliene, 'Glory of God', 5–9.

190 Borboudakis, 1991; S.M. Pelekanidis, *The Treasures of Mount Athos Illuminated Manuscripts Miniatures — Headpieces — Initial Letters* (n.d.) 2, 34.

191 Loerke, 'Observations'.

192 Daniilia et al., 'The Byzantine Wall Paintings from the Protaton Church on Mount Athos, Greece: Tradition and Science', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, vol. 34, no. 12 (December 2007).

The hesychast mandorla quickly became the dominant type for a couple of centuries, not just on Mt Athos (Fig. 20) but also in Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia and Russia (Fig. 21).<sup>193</sup>

The example from the Church of St George, Staro Nagoricane is the 14th-century composite scene of the Transfiguration (Fig. 22), characterised by an increased number of figures, a concentrated iconographical presence, and altered positions and gestures of the apostles. Following the hesychast interpretation of the Transfiguration, the iconographers dressed Christ in luminous white ceremonial dress decorated with gold ornaments. He stands in front of an oval mandorla with triangular projections, indicative of the transmission of divine light of the son of justice.<sup>194</sup> Although this is an unusual choice, it is consistent with the mandorla in the miniature. Nevertheless, more than 12 rays of light radiate from the four sides of the rhomb, illuminating the apostles and the landscape. This feature affirms the hesychast teaching about the unlimited splitting of the divine splendour of the inaccessible light. The hesychasts believed the uncreated light had no essence, and could not be contemplated as a hypostasis, that is as an independent reality. Having a personal focus, the only way one could consider the uncreated light is in a hypostasis. The divine energies reflecting this light are also 'enhypostatic'. Therefore, the light of the Holy Spirit that touches the whole creation in the Transfiguration at Nagoricane is the same light enlightening the eternity (the Godhead). It is also the light that reveals the second person of the Trinity (Christ).

The fresco of the Transfiguration at the Monastery of Lesnovo shows other variations (Fig. 23). The figurative scene has two parts: a shiny mandorla envelops the upper part of the composition, while the three apostles are depicted in the lower part of the Transfiguration.<sup>195</sup> This creates a sense of space and depth in the central motif. If the figures of Peter, John and James display feelings of wonderment and trepidation in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, the postures of the disciples at Lesnovo reflect both ecstatic tension and elevated calm. The overall stance of the three disciples testifies to the effect that the mystical vision has on them. Their facial expressions and gestures, however, are relatively controlled. This creates a contrast between the two parts of the icon: the upper part, where the Transfiguration of Christ occurs, and the lower part, where the apostles witness the miracle. On one hand, the Metamorphosis happens beyond the terrestrial plane, somewhere on the inner, invisible level where the energy emitted from Christ envelops and transforms everything. On the other,

193 B. Todić, *Staro Nagoricano* (Belgrade 1993) 27.

194 Andreopoulos, 'How Do We Represent the Glory of God? Theological and Iconological Connections between the Transfiguration and the Resurrection', *La Mort et la Résurrection dans la Tradition Orthodoxe* (University of Sherbrooke 2004).

195 I.M. Djorđević, 'The Dialogue Relationship between the Virgin and Christ in East Christian Art: Apropos of the Discovery of the Figures of the Virgin Mediatrix and Christ in Lesnovo', *Zograf*, vol. 38 (2000).



the great trembling and awe that seized the apostles on Mt Tabor, 'When a cloud overshadowed the apostles', depicts the transformation occurring in their hearts and minds at the moment of the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration at Lesnovo has parallels in other churches, such as the Monastery of Gračanica,<sup>196</sup> and the Church of Pec.<sup>197</sup> It has to be noted, however, that in the aforementioned monuments, the painter introduced a double mandorla into the Transfiguration. The internal mandorla represents the halo that surrounds Christ. The external mandorla, on the other hand, envelops the two Old Testament prophets who, by virtue of their holiness, acquired a certain level of vision. Variations in the development of the mandorla of the Transfiguration appear in the fresco decoration of churches in Macedonia and Serbia. Thus, at the Church of the Virgin Misericordius, Prespa, there is a star inside the mandorla behind Christ (of the Transfiguration).<sup>198</sup> At Leskoec, on the other hand, the mandorla includes Moses and Elijah. Moreover, at Leshani, one may observe a complex geometrical shape including two diamonds, a circle and two rays of light.<sup>199</sup> A star-shaped mandorla surrounds the image of Christ in the scene of the Dormition of the Virgin at Leshani.<sup>200</sup> A fresco of the Transfiguration in the Church of the Virgin Mary, Ivanovo (Fig. 24),<sup>201</sup> is similar in style to the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, which testifies to the spread of iconographical influence from Thessaloniki and Mt Athos to neighbouring countries of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia (Fig. 25).

In the Church of the Virgin Mary, Ivanovo, the obligatory scenes for the decoration of a liturgical space take four rows of three scenes each, starting from the north-east corner of the church. The middle scene of the Transfiguration is in good condition, and there is a marked dynamism in the representation of the figures, which is emphasised by the contrasting rocky landscape. The dark-green shadows under the pink rock on which Christ stands contributes to the overall feeling of the scene.<sup>202</sup> Christ holds a scroll in his left hand and blesses with his right. Inside an almond-shaped mandorla that has been painted in several bands from light grey to dark grey, a diamond is inscribed, whose edges go downwards, while behind Christ, the four pink-red beams cross on

196 Todic, *Gračanica: Slikarstvo* (Belgrade 1988) 116, 34.

197 S. Petkovic, *La Peinture Serbe du Moyen Age II*, vol. 2, pl. XCI; Millet, *L'Iconographie de l'Evangile*, 216–231; S. Gabelic, *Manastir Lesnovo: Istorija i Slikarstvo* (Biblioteka Monografije 1998) 70.

198 Subotic, *Ohridskata Slikarska Skola od XV Vek* (Ohrid 1980) note 78, fig. 16.

199 *ibid.*, note 69, fig. 51.

200 The same arrangements are noted in the compositions of the Dormition of Virgin Mary, Gračanicaas, as well as in the Church of St George, Staro Nagoricane (Todic, *Gračanica*, note 60, fig. 37; Todic, *Staro Nagoricane*, fig. 26–27).

201 Mavrodinova, *Stenata Zivopis*, f. 85.

202 C. Cavarinos, 'Byzantine Churches of Thessaloniki, An Illustrated Account of the Architecture and Iconographic Decoration of Seven Byzantine Churches of Thessaloniki, Together with Important Historical Data', MA thesis, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies (1995) 46–65; Metropolitan Tseemee, 'Βυζαντινή Θεσσαλονίκη', *Θεσσαλονίκη: ΠΕΚΟΣ, Γ' έκδοση* (1996); G. Velnee, 'Οι Άγιοι Απόστολοι Θεσσαλονίκης και η Σχολή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως', *Akten des XVI International Byzantinistenkongress*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Vienna 4–9 October), *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 32, no. 4 (1981).

the diagonal.<sup>203</sup> The two beams of light that cross behind Christ radiate towards the corners of the chamber and flood it with light.<sup>204</sup> The apostles are frightened and confused. John falls upside down, the exploding light sweeps James away, and Peter collapses to his knees. With few exceptions, this composition resembles the mosaic decoration of the Transfiguration in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki (c. 1315). The apostle James lies on his back and a rhomb superimposed over a circle in the shape of the letter X forms the glow around Christ, symbolising the three hypostases of the Trinity.

The fresco of the Transfiguration at Ivanovo and the miniature of the *Parisinus Graecus* are analogous.<sup>205</sup> While the octagonal mandorla in the miniature is different to the rocket-shaped doxa at Ivanovo, the similarities between both testify to the changes occurring in the iconography of light in the 14th and 15th centuries under the impact of hesychasm.<sup>206</sup> Adherents to this spiritual movement inhabited the Monastery of Ivanovo in the 14th century and it is plausible that hesychasm influenced the fresco program in Ivanovo's complex. Regardless, it is important to note that Bulgarian fresco-painters used these complex types of mandorlas at least until the 17th century (Fig. 26).

The hesychastic iconography of the Transfiguration transferred to Russia with the help of travelling artists, such as Theophanes the Greek (Fig. 27). In Theophanes's portable icon of the Transfiguration, his fidelity to the theological teaching of Palamas is clear.<sup>207</sup> The technical challenge in both paintings was the influence that the uncreated light had on its surroundings, as opposed to the effect of the sunlight or another light source.<sup>208</sup> The miniature is luminous with the application of gold around the figures, and the use of harmonising colours of blue, grey and ochre giving the impression that the scene is immersed in serene blue light. In addition, the highlights on faces and clothes reflect the light source coming from different angles of the pictorial plane. A mixture of gold leaf and transparent egg tempera creates the impression of light permeating the matter, so that the landscape shines from within itself. The upper portion of the icon radiates with the light of Transfiguration, but at the same time an internal luminescence shines from all surfaces. The rendering of figures projects Hellenistic elegance in their correct proportions and plastic perfection, and the

203 Velmans, 'Les Fresques d'Ivanovo et la Peinture Byzantine à la Fin du Moyen Âge', *Journal des Savants*, no. 1 (1965).

204 Cheremeteff, 'The Uncreated Light'; Velmans, 'Les Fresques d'Ivanovo', 364–365.

205 B. Nikolova, *Православните Църкви през Българското Средновековие IX–XIV* (Sofia 2002) 79–82; Mavrodinova, *Stenata Zivopis*, 95.

206 *ibid.*, 80.

207 Charalampidis, 'The Representation of the Uncreated Light'.

208 M. Cheremeteff, 'The Transformation of the Russian Sanctuary Barrier and the Role of Theophanes the Greek', PhD thesis, University of Oregon (1987).

illuminated slopes of the high mountain emphasise the specific iconographical detail of successive circles, as opposed to elliptical shapes, within the rhomboid formation.

Enriched with a corona of radiating beams, the star-shaped blue mandorla is an emblem of the uncreated light on Mt Tabor. The mandorla and the geometric (star-like) 'radiance' behind Jesus simultaneously emanate from him and from behind him. This mandorla surpasses any other doxa in the Byzantine art of Palaeologan period. Moreover, the iconographic element of three, blue, light beams, which become progressively lighter when approaching Christ, refers to the doctrine of Transfiguration. This iconographic element also asserts the essence–energies distinction, with the rays of light referring to 'the divine darkness' (essence of God) while reflecting the divine energies. The two darker insets of the disciples following Jesus up and down the mountain carry the same symbolism. In the same way, the angels who collect both Moses and Elijah from their heavenly abode are wrapped in grey colour tones.<sup>209</sup>

The brilliant and harmonious colouring, and a lively play of light, enriches the effect of the whole series. There is a general mood of calmness and concentration, which is enhanced by the use of soft layers of saturated colours. The application of highlights (above the eyebrows, and under the eyes) has a transformative effect on these colours.<sup>210</sup>

In contrast to Theophanes's Transfiguration icon, a strong central axis and symmetry pervade the illumination of the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, which creates a geometrically balanced scheme. The square, the triangle, the circle and the semicircle are some of the forms used in this composition. Christ is the only figure facing the viewer and he is intrinsically balanced.<sup>211</sup> There are no converging lines to create a sense of depth and reverse perspective. Together with the interplay of light and shadows on the clothing, the overlapping mountains are the only elements that generate space in the composition. A sense of calmness prevails in the middle of the piece and movement is confined to the periphery. The ecstatic rapture of the disciples who, affected by their vision of the divine light, fall prostrate to the ground, alludes to a mystical

209 A. Tachioas, 'Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature', *L'Art de Thessalonique et des Pays Balkaniques et les Courants Spirituels au XIVe Siècle*, (Belgrade 1987) 123. 1; Charlampides, 'The Representation of the Uncreated Light'.

210 A. Omont, *Miniatures des Plus Anciens Manuscrits Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VIe au XIVe Siècle* (Paris 1929); Voordeckers, 'Examen'.

211 S. Nes, *The Uncreated Light: An Iconographical Study of the Transfiguration In the Eastern Church* (Edinburgh 2007) 32–40.

text written by one of the main exponents of hesychasm, Symeon, in which he describes the mystical state of the hesychasts in the same manner as the apostles are positioned in the miniature.<sup>212</sup>

The icon of the Transfiguration by Andrei Rublev discards superficial detail and is limited to six essential figures (Fig. 28). The unusual arrangement of this icon depicts rays of light connecting the six figures who diverge into two groups of three. Moses and Elijah surround Christ, who sits on the mountain peak in the middle of the figurative scene. The three trembling disciples are in the lower part of the icon, and there is a significant gap between them and Christ. This space, which is repeated in the other iconographical features, represents the distance between the divine and the human world (in contrast to the Transfiguration at Sinai, where the apostles were close to each other, almost back to back). Rublev creates a feeling of awe before the mystery of the Transfiguration.<sup>213</sup> Comparing Rublev's icon of the Transfiguration with the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, the difference between the two reflects the divergence in the styles of the Greek and Russian masters.<sup>214</sup> Traces of the Byzantine influence on Novgorodian iconography exist, however, and it seems that Russian artists adopted peculiarities from Greek masters to create realistic works of art showing the balance between the human and the divine that reflect the spread of hesychasm from Byzantine to Slavic lands. The white lightning of the octagonal mandorla cut the space, 'piercing the flesh of the earth, and illuminating everything with light'.<sup>215</sup> A separate ray of light acting as a spear nails each of the apostles to the ground (Matthew 17:6). Rublev's *Transfiguration* icon, on the other hand, depicts the divine uncreated light as kind and gentle, the greatest mystery (a presence of dark mandorla marks this) and an ineffable grace. In addition, Rublev's icon reflects purity, luminosity, simplicity, and the richness of emotions that attract us to meditation.<sup>216</sup> The use of geometrically shaped mandorlas was a common feature of Russian interpretation for the Transfiguration, a tradition which persisted until after the 16th century (Fig. 29).

212 Cap 3, 21 in J. Darrouzes (ed.), *Symeon the Nouveau Theologien: Chapitres Théologiques Gnostiques et Pratiques*, vol. 51 (Paris 1951) 132.

213 M. Golubstov, 'Икона Живоначальной Троицы', *Журнал Московской Патриархии*, vol. 7 (Moscow 1972).

214 G. Every, *The Time of the Spirit: Readings through the Christian Year* (Oxford 1984) 220–222.

215 The aesthetic description of the light of Transfiguration is continued in the 14th century portable Russian icon from the Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery, Novgorod. The whiteness of the divine light has illuminated the clothes of the prophets and apostles (K. Dyadakova, *Science in Russia, Browsing Through a Book: Monasteries in Russia* (Moscow 2003) 89–96.

216 L. Hughes, 'Art and Liturgy in Russia: Rublev and his Successors', *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5, *Eastern Christianity*, M. Angold (ed.) (Cambridge 2006) 291; N.V. Riasanovsky & M.D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 7th ed. (New York 2005) 120.

## Conclusion

The iconography of the Transfiguration in the 14th and 15th centuries underwent changes that were reflective of the renewed interest in the subject of uncreated light on Mt Tabor, the central doctrine of the hesychast controversy. The *Parisinus Graecus* miniature is a sublime attempt to capture this vision of the Taborian light in participial form, as well as an important example of the changes occurring in the iconography of the Transfiguration during the 14th century. The most dramatic change in the miniature is the introduction of the 'hesychast' mandorla consisting of two superimposed squares (rather a square and a rhomb) placed inside a circle consisting of three different layers of colour. The emergence of the star symbolism and the octagonal mandorla was a way of representing the hesychast concept of the vision and knowledge of God seen as light during Christ's Metamorphosis. The postures and gestures of the participants in this event reflect the dramatic elements of this vision. The varied use of colour and the animated gesticulation and fluttering drapery of the disciples reveals the drama of the Transfiguration. The agonising position of the apostles on the ground and their obvious avoidance of light are consistent with this. They fell to the ground headfirst, gesticulating and crouching away from the blinding light. In contrast, Christ stands calmly on the top of the mountain between the similarly calm figures of Moses and Elijah. Other iconographical features bear witness to the changes in the iconography of the Transfiguration. Mt Tabor has three parts joined at the base, with Christ, Moses and Elijah standing on separate peaks.<sup>217</sup> Overall, however, the miniature visually represents the intersection of God's transcendence and immanence as reflected in the Transfiguration. It also serves as a sign of hope for humankind, and as a reminder of the ultimate destiny of humanity, which is participation in the uncreated light of God.

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217 Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 225.





Figure 12. *Saint Apollinaire amid Sheep*, c. 549, mosaic, apse, Basilica of St Apollinaire in Classe, Ravenna (Italy)



Figure 13. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 565, mosaic, apse, Church of the Virgin, Monastery of St Katherine, Mt Sinai (Egypt)





Figure 14. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, first half of the 12th century, tempera on wood, 52 × 35.3 cm, Musee du Louvre (France), inv. no. ML 145, 6591



Figure 15. *The Transfiguration*, mid-12th century, tempera on wood, 41.5 x 159 cm, part of the iconostasis, Monastery of St Katherine, Sinai (Egypt)



Figure 16. *Transfiguration of Christ*, 17th century, fresco, vault of the nave, right side, painters Sidor Pospeyev, Ivan Borisov and Semyon Abramov, Church of the Deposition of the Robe, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia)



Figure 17. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 12th century, fresco, northern wall of the nave, Church of St George, Kurbinovo (Macedonia)



Figure 18. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 14th century, fresco, central zone of the nave, Monastery of Sopočani, Raška (Serbia)





Figure 19. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 13th century, tempera on wood, Monastery of Xenophon, Mt Athos (Greece)



Figure 20. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c.1535–1545, tempera on wood, 91 x 80 cm, att. Theophanes the Cretan, Monastery of the Pantokrator, Mt Athos (Greece)



Figure 21. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1408, fresco, lunette walls in the northern arm of the cross, Dormition Cathedral of the Virgin, Vladimir (Russia)



Figure 22. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1313–1320, fresco, west wall, painters Eutykhios and Michael Astrapas, Church of St George, Staro Nagoricane, Skopje (Macedonia)



Figure 23. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 14th century, fresco, narthex, Church of St Archangel Gabriel, Monastery of Lesnovo, Probistip (Macedonia)





Figure 24. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 14th century, fresco, vaulted ceiling, Church of the Virgin Mary, Rock-hewn churches of Ivanovo, Rusenski Lom (Bulgaria)



Figure 25. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1259, fresco, sanctuary, Boyana Church of St Nicholas and St Panteleimon, Sofia (Bulgaria)



Figure 26. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 17th century, fresco, northern wall of the nave, Church of Theodore Tyro and Theodore Stratelates, Dobarsko, Razlosko (Bulgaria)



**Figure 27. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, c. 1403, tempera on wood, 184 x 134 cm, painter Theophanes the Greek, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 12797**



Figure 28. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 15th century, tempera on wood 80.5 x 61 cm, painter Andrei Rublev, Church of the Annunciation, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 3248 СОБ/Ж-1401





Figure 29. *The Transfiguration of Christ*, 15th century, tempera on wood, temple icon, Church of Our Savior in the Woods, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia)

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