The painted ornament of the Holy Trinity chapel at Koutsovendēs, Cyprus*

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The paper explores the painted ornament of the Holy Trinity chapel at the monastery of Saint John Chrysostom Koutsovendēs in Cyprus, founded by Eumathios Phitolakēs (ca. 1100). When compared to that of other early Komnenian monuments on the island, the painted ornament at Holy Trinity stands out for its intricacy, diversity, and high-quality execution, while its sophistication is demonstrated to be in keeping with the ambitious and erudite character of the painted ensemble as a whole. Not least, rather than being on the fringe, the painted ornament appears to have been fully integrated into the iconographic programme of the chapel, reiterating through metaphor the patron’s hope for salvation.

Keywords: painted ornament, disk symbolism, cross-and-star pattern, Islamic glazed tiles, early Komnenian painting, Koutsovendēs Monastery, Byzantine Cyprus

Modern art-historical narratives of Cypriot monumental painting in the late eleventh and the early twelfth century developed under the glamour of the wall paintings of the Holy Trinity chapel at the monastery of Saint John Chrysostom of Koutsovendēs. These are thought to reflect metropolitan trends and, consequently, are ascribed a germinal role in artistic developments on the island.1 The work of Annemarie Weyl Carr on the murals of Panagia Pergaminiōtissa near Akanthou has highlighted the need for a more balanced view of what she identifies as “Cyprus’ Komnenian efflorescence.”2 One of the prerequisites towards achieving this objective is putting the relationship of the Koutsovendēs wall paintings with other early Komnenian Cypriot ensembles in its proper perspective. Elsewhere, I had the opportunity to highlight the innovative features of the iconography of the chapel, which were not adopted in other Cypriot monuments that are commonly ascribed to one or more painters trained by the Koutsovendēs master.3 In this paper, I would like to draw attention to another component of the chapel’s decoration, which seems to confirm the impression of complexity and uniqueness created by its narrative programme: the painted ornament.

Though we tend to assign secondary significance to it in relation to figural representations, even a cursory survey of extant ensembles reveals that the painted ornament was a constant of the mural decoration of Byzantine churches. It provided a podium or framing device for the display of individual figures and narrative scenes, or spread on parts of the walls deemed unsuited for figural decoration. More than a simple space-filler or frame, however, the painted ornament was used to highlight the structure of the overall painted decoration, if not actually to articulate its constituent parts into a coherent formal whole. Not least, it enabled the painters to negotiate the tension between their medium and the bearing surfaces of the church building by accentuating the building’s architectural forms or, alternatively, by concealing them or, even, by dematerializing and thus negating them.4 The investment of time, effort, and skill to decorate even surfaces that would not have been clearly visible by the faithful implies that the ornament was considered an essential component of the overall painted programme: though its details may not have been always legible, the beholder

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1 V. for instance: D. Winfield, Hagios Chrysostomou, Tríkomo, Asinou, Byzantine painters at work, in: Πρακτικά του Πρώτου Διεθνούς Κυπρολογικού Συνεδρίου, ed. A. Papageorgiou, Λευκωσία 1972, 285–291; L. Hadermann-Misguich, La peinture monumentale du XIIe siècle à Chypre, CR 32 (1985) 233–258; M. Panagiotidou, Η ζωγραφική του 12ου αιώνα στην Κύπρο και τα προβλήματα των τοπικών εργατηρίων, in: Πρακτικά του Τρίτου Διεθνούς Κυπρολογικού Συνεδρίου, ed. A. Papageorgiou, Λευκωσία 2001, 411–439.
2 A. Weyl Carr, The program of the Panagia Pergaminiotissa. A narrative in perspective, in: Cyprus and the balance of empires. Art and archaeology from Justinian I to the Coeur de Lion, ed. Ch. A. Stewart, Th. W. Davis, A. Weyl Carr, Boston 2014, 168.
3 M. G. Parani, A monument of his own? An iconographic study of the wall paintings of the Holy Trinity parekklesion at the Monastery of St. John Chrysostom, Koutsovendēs (Cyprus), Studies in Iconography 39 (2018) 1–85.
4 V. J. Hay, The passage of the other. Elements for a redefinition of ornament, in: Histories of ornament. From global to local, ed. G. Necipoğlu, A. Payne, Princeton 2016, 62–69, esp. 64–66.
would have been aware of its presence, and this awareness would have added to his/her experience of the painted decoration as a whole, with the ornament contributing a sense of opulence, visual complexity, and, not least, completeness. As such, decisions regarding its composition and execution may not have lay entirely with the painters. True, the ornament offered a great opportunity for painters to display their artistry and, thus, we tend to assume that it was more firmly within their purview rather than that of the patrons and their theological advisors. Still, the patron could have also had a say, given that his/her status, connections, and tastes could be expressed through the selection of specific patterns for the decoration of specific spaces within the church.5

The care and resources invested in the ornament also raise the possibility that its function was not limited to display and “elaboration … for the sake of visual pleasure”6. Within the context of religious devotion, the ornament may have been viewed as contributing to the beautification of church as befitted the House of God, thus also enhancing the ensemble’s value as a gift offered to the divinity by the pious patron.7 Considering that privileging form – which characterises ornament by definition – does not necessarily imply “the extinction of content”,8 I would further suggest, as others have done before me, that the painted ornament, beyond structuring and enhancing the viewer’s aesthetic appreciation of the iconographic programme, also enriched the latter by adding to it layers of signification through metaphor. Though the systematic investigation of the potential symbolic significance of the painted ornament in Byzantine monumental ensembles is still in its early stages, recent studies of the non-figural decoration of both the interior and the exterior surfaces of Byzantine churches executed in pigment, mosaic, marble, or brick certainly bear out this proposition.9

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5 V. S. E. J. Gerstel, Crossing borders. The ornamental decoration of St. Nicholas at Phountouklis at Rhodes, TM 20/2 (2016) 155–169.
6 J. Trilling, The language of ornament, London – New York 2001, 6.
7 V. J. C. Anderson, Tiles, books, and the “Church like a bride adorned with pearls and gold”, in: A lost art rediscovered. The architectural ceramics of Byzantium, ed. S. E. J. Gerstel, J. A. Lauffenburger, University Park 2001, 119–141.
8 Trilling, The language of ornament, 12.
9 V. for instance, B. Cvjetković, O ulozi “ornamenta” u sakralnom kontekstu, Krusevacki zbornik 14 (2009) 35–65; J. Trkulja, Divine revelation performed. Symbolic and spatial aspects in the decoration of Byzantine churches, in: Spatial icons. Performativity in Byzantium and medieval Russia, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2011, 213–246; H. Maguire, Nectar and illusion. Nature in Byzantine art and literature, Oxford 2012; J. S. Ciric, Brick by brick. Textuality in the architecture during the age of king Milutin, in: Κύριλλος και Μεθόδιος: το Βυζάντιο και ο Κόσμος των Σλάβων, ed. A. Δεληκάρη, Θεσσαλονίκη 2015, 206–214; eadem, Constantinopolitan concepts. Old symbols and new interpretations. Façade ornaments at St. Sophia church in Ohrid, Zaum and Lesnovo, in: Macedonia and the Balkans in the Byzantine Commonwealth, ed. M. B. Panov, Skopje 2014, 156–165; S. E. J. Gerstel, M. W. Cothren, The iconography of light, in: The Routledge companion to medieval iconography, ed. C. Hourihane, Abingdon – New York 2017, 466–467; N. B. Teteriatnikov, Justinianic mosaics of Hagia Sophia and their aftermath, Washington D.C. 2017, 233–87. For the historiography of approaches to the study of ornament and its significative potential in Byzantine art, albeit with a special focus on Serbian scholarship, v. S. Martinović, Ornament removed from time and space, in: Memory update. Ornament of Serbian medieval frescoes, ed. D. Milovanović, Belgrade 2014, 45–67.

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Fig. 1. Koutsovendēs, Holy Trinity chapel, northwest recess, east, St. Clement (?) and dado
studies also make apparent is that meaning was nuanced according to context and could be inflected by the ornament’s formal qualities, by its spatial distribution, and, not least, by its evocation through its visual vocabulary of wider associations drawn both from Byzantine and non-Byzantine cultural spheres.10 With all this in mind, in what follows I propose to take a closer look at the painted ornament at Koutsovendēs with the purpose of interrogating how it functioned and may have been perceived within the chapel’s overall painted programme. At the same time, I intend to examine whether context-specific concerns and the patron’s identity and connections impacted the ornament’s articulation and could account for differences between the Holy Trinity and other roughly contemporary Cypriot ensembles stylistically related to it.

Holy Trinity was founded around 1100 thanks to the generosity of the Byzantine military governor of Cyprus at the time, Eumathios Philokalēs, who commissioned the construction of the chapel adjacent to the katholikon (main church) of Koutsovendēs Monastery and its adornment with wall paintings.11 These were executed by a gifted master painter, who, it is believed, came to Cyprus from a major artistic centre, such as Constantinople or Antioch. The hand of the Koutsovendēs master has also been recognised in the monumental fresco icon of the eponymous saint in the church of Saint Nicholas of the Roof at Kakopetria, where the murals of the cemetery chapel of Koutsovendēs Monastery known as the Saviour and the now-destroyed wall paintings of Panagia Apsinthiōtissa near Koutsovendēs have likewise been ascribed to him. Other early twelfth-century Cypriot monuments, namely Panagia Phorbiōtissa at Asinou (1105/6), the church of the Panagia at Trikōm, and Panagia Amasgou at Monargi, have been attributed to one or more painters trained by him, whereas the murals of the southwestern bay of Saint Nicholas of the Roof and those of the church of Saints Joachim and Anna at Kaliana evince a more distant awareness of his style.12 With the exceptions of the Holy Trinity itself and Panagia Amasgou, none of these monumental ensembles has been properly published, making the comparative study of their ornamental repertoire a challenging task. Another serious limitation is imposed by the fact that, since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the Koutsovendēs Monastery, located in a Turkish military zone in the northern part of the island, remains inaccessible to civilians. As a result, the following discussion of the painted ornament of the Holy Trinity is based primarily on the detailed description and photographs of the murals published by Cyril Mango, Susan Boyd, and Ernest Hawkins in 1990,13 on the holdings of the Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA) of Dumbarton Oaks and of the Photographic Archive of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus (DoAC), and, not least, on additional notes and drawings by the late Cyril Mango, to whom I remain deeply indebted for making them available to me.

The chapel is a vaulted, single-aisle structure, with a semi-circular apse to the east and a – today ruinous – narthex to the west. The nave is divided into three bays, with a dome pierced by twelve arched windows rising above the central bay. Two arched recesses articulate the north and south walls of the western bay. No trace of painted ornament survives in the narthex. Our examination will begin from the lower surfaces of the walls of the naos and the bema, gradually moving upwards.

The dado zone ran along the walls of the naos and the bema immediately above the level of the floor and up to a height of circa 80 to 90 cm. Its state of preservation is very poor, though enough has survived for us to discern that it had the form of imitative marble revetment which was meant to evoke the luxurious technique of wall opus sectile. It consisted of rectangular panels of imitative veined marble, in the middle of which were inserted single large ‘marble’ disks with serrated frames (fig. 1).14 This imitative marble revetment was interrupted twice, firstly by the unconventional placement of the two dedicatory inscriptions on the west face of the two eastern piers,15 and secondly by a rectangular cavity below the window of the north recess of the western bay. Though we ignore the latter’s function, its presence was highlighted by the different ornament adorning it, which would have been visible since there is no evidence that the cavity was ever provided with a door. The ornament in question comprises four triangular spaces created by a large X painted in thick black wavy lines directly on the white plaster. These triangles enclose one black trefoil each against a yellow background (fig. 2).16

Extant examples of wall opus sectile from the Middle Byzantine period are very rare, though sections of the walls of the no-longer extant original katholikon of Koutsovendēs Monastery may have been adorned thus.17 As things stand, it is in eleventh-century opus sectile that, considering the continued inaccessibility of the monument, it was deemed necessary to publish, for the first time, colour images of the painted ornament of the dome windows. These are reproductions of the colour slides taken following the completion of the restoration work at Holy Trinity in 1969; today, the slides are kept at the Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA), Dumbarton Oaks (Washington D.C.).

10 V. also E. R. Hoffman, Pathways of portability: Islamic and Christian interchange from the tenth to the twentieth century, Art History 24/1 (2001) 17–50, esp. 23–24.
11 C. Mango, E. J. W. Hawkins, S. Boyd, The monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsovendēs (Cyprus) and its wall paintings. Part I: description, DOP 44 (1990) 63–94; T. Papacostas, The history and architecture of the monastery of Saint John Chrysostomos at Koutsovendēs, Cyprus, DOP 61 (2007) 25–156; Parani, A monument.
12 Winfield, Hagios Chrysostomos: Παναγιώτης, Η ωφραστική: Weyl Carr, The program, 168.
13 Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, The monastery of St. Chrysostomos. Given that the painted ornament was described in exhaustive detail in the 1990 article, the descriptions will not be repeated here. On the other hand, considering the continued inaccessibility of the monument, it was deemed necessary to publish, for the first time, colour images of the painted ornament of the dome windows. These are reproductions of the colour slides taken following the completion of the restoration work at Holy Trinity in 1969; today, the slides are kept at the Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA), Dumbarton Oaks (Washington D.C.).
14 Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, The monastery of St. Chrysostomos, 75, 81–82, 85–86, 90–93, figs. 38–39, 97, 140, 147, 162, 169. As Mango suggested, the comparatively simpler appearance of the dado in sections of the western bay, consisting only of plain panels of imitative marble without the disks, could be a sign that this part of the decoration was executed in haste. V. ibid., 91, 93, figs. 40, 140, 162.
15 Ibid., 79, figs. 82, 84; Parani, A monument, 9–10.
16 Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, The monastery of St. Chrysostomos, 91, PI. 5, figs. 162, 171.
17 Ibid., 66; Papacostas, The history, 141. For the wall opus sectile at the katholikon of Daphni Monastery (eleventh century), v. Π. Λευκακοπούλου-Λιάκα, Η τέχνη opus sectile στὴν ενότητα διάκρισης, Θεσσαλονίκη 1980, 153, Pls. 71a, 72a. Compare the wall opus sectile of the Cappella Palatina in Norman Palermo (towards the middle of the twelfth century): W. Tronzo, The cultures of his kingdom:
floors, such as those of the church of Saint Nicholas at Myra (modern Demre in south Turkey) or the katholikon of Veljusa Monastery in North Macedonia (1080), that we find close parallels to the motif of the inlaid disk with the serrated border encountered at Koutsovendēs.18 As for imitative wall *opus sectile* in fresco, it appears to have been uncommon prior to the late twelfth century.19 Mention should be made of the two painted chancel panels at Karabaj kilise in Cappadocia (1060/61), where red disks, each enclosing a bejewelled cross, were ‘inserted’ into imitative plaques of textured marble. The disks have a radiate border reminiscent of the serrated border we encounter a few decades later at Koutsovendēs.20

Roger II and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, Princeton 1997, 41, Pl. III, figs. 33, 36–37.

18 S. Doğan et al., *Demre–Myra Aziz Nikolaos kilisesi*, Istanbul 2015, 55–59; P. Miličković-Pepek, *Veljusa. Manastir Sv. Bogorodica Milestiva vo seloto Veljusa kraj Strumica*, Skopje 1981, plan 25, Pl. VI, fig. 41; M. Petrovski, *Podnadi mozaik vo crkvata sv. Bogorodica (Eleusa) vo seloto Veljusa*, in: *Akta Veljusa*, ed. D. Koco et al., Skopje 1984, 147–161. For more examples of *opus sectile* pavements from the eleventh and twelfth century, v. D. A. Liakos, *The Byzantine *opus sectile* floor in the katholikon of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos*, Zograf 32 (2008) 37–44, esp. 38.

19 I. Andreescu, *Torcello III. La chronologie relative des mosaiques parietales*, DOP 30 (1976) 249, n. 6, fig. 3: Άπσειτακτοκοπουκού Άεακο, Η γιονοχ, 156.

20 C. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et ses abords*, Paris 1991, 270, Pl. 148.1. I am grateful to Prof. Jolivet-Lévy for sharing with me her photographs of the chancel screen.

In Cyprus itself, imitative wall *opus sectile* comparable to that of the Holy Trinity is encountered in two other monuments ascribed to the Koutsovendēs master, at Saint Nicholas of the Roof21 and at Panagia Apsinhtiòtissa.22 To my knowledge, in the early decades of the twelfth century we do not come across it elsewhere in Cyprus, except at locations directly associated with the two monuments just mentioned, namely the southwestern bay of Saint Nicholas of the Roof23 and the now ruinous chapel of Saint Sabas to the north of Apsinhtiòtissa.24

With regards to the pattern that adorns the rectangular cavity, though plain chevrons or chevrons enclosing a vegetal motif are not uncommon in Middle Byzantine monumental and miniature painting, I was unable to locate close parallels to this specific rendition of the pattern beyond Cyprus. On the island itself, and in contrast to the im-

21 Personal observation.

22 ICFA, Wall painting, Cyprus, Sykharī, color slides 79-2913-D, 79-2908-D; DoAC, Apsinhtiòtissa Monastery, b/w photo J.6288; Α. Παπαγεωργίου, Η παλαιοχριστιανική και βυζαντινή ιστορία και τεχνοτροπία της Κύπρου, Κατά το 1964, Απόστολος Βαρνάβας 26 (1965) 296, fig. 18.

23 Personal observation.

24 Possibly the cemetery chapel for the monastic community of Apsinhtiòtissa, Saint Sabas is ascribed a late eleventh or early twelfth century date: Παπαγεωργίου, Η παλαιοχριστιανική και βυζαντινή ιστορία και τεχνοτροπία της Κύπρου, 91; T. C. Papacostas, *Byzantine Cyprus. The testimony of its churches 650–1200*, Oxford 1999 (doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford) 70–71. Painted dado: DoAC, Apsinhtiòtissa Monastery, b/w photo J.740. I thank Michalēs Iakōvidēs and Stylianos Perdikēs for recent photographs of the chapel and its decoration.
itive opus sectile, variations of the so-called floriate chevron are encountered in almost all the early twelfth-century monuments that are associated with our chapel in terms of style. What is more, in these other ensembles the floriate chevron was given a much more prominent role, being used not only in the dado zone, but also on door jambs and on the intrados of apse and dome windows. Fragments of painted dado in the naos of Apsinthiōtissa provide the closest parallels to the painted ornament of the rectangular recess at the Holy Trinity. A similar chevron design was also used for the decoration of the dado zone in the diakonikon of the small katholikon of Panagia Amasgou. To my knowledge, no trace of the early twelfth-century dado zone survives at the church of the Panagia at Trikōmo, though a variation of the floriate chevron was used on the intrados of at least two of the apse windows, the pair of windows in the south wall of the naos, and one of the dome windows. The most extensive use of this pattern, however, is encountered at Asinou. There, we find the floriate chevron in the painted dado zone in the bema and the naos, on the intrados of the apse windows, and on the jambs of all three doors to the naos, while simplified versions of it adorned the face of the niche of the diakonikon and the spaces between the apse windows.

The evocation – through the intermediary of painted ornament – of the opulence of marble revetment at Holy Trinity could have been deemed commensurate to the patron’s elevated social status and connections, perhaps referencing current tastes and/or practices for the symbolism of the opulence of marble revetment – of the veined-marble and polychrome chapel. As various discussions of the uses of marble in monuments that are associated with our chapel in terms of style and political agency in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean world, the veined marble enlivened with the addition of vegetal motifs, could have sprung from a wish to spell out this connection literally, making use of the greater expressive potential afforded by the medium of paint. Within this broad context, the disks with the serrated borders at Koutsouvardes could have functioned as invocations of the light of the sun illuminating creation, itself a symbol of the immanence of divine light into the world. A preoccupation with light, both physical and spiritual, does seem to have been a factor in the conception of the Holy Trinity, which in contrast to other contemporary Cypriot monuments of comparable plan and scale, is distinguished by a profusion of openings – windows and doors – through which natural light would have flooded its interior, an interior which was dominated by the Pentecost in the dome, the scene of divine illumination par excellence. Considering that at Karabas kilise the two mock marble disks enclose crosses, one could go so far as to suggest that, at Koutsouvardes, the disks, though plain, may have been thought to evoke divine presence in the world through Christ, who, after all, is Light (I 8, 12) and who had descended down to earth so that humankind could rise up to heaven. The disk or circle, an ancient and transcultural symbol of perfection, completeness, oneness, and eternity, was certainly an appropriate sign to be associated with the concept of divine presence and revelation. Be this as it may, I would posit that either the Koutsouvardes master or his patron was aware of the symbolic association of the imitative marble revetment and its elaboration in the floriate chevron with the earthly sphere: enough has survived to allow us to claim that neither the one nor the other were used in the higher parts of the structure and certainly not for the adornment of the windows of the dome, which in the symbolic interpretation of the ecclesiastical building represented the heavens. A comparable concern for the ‘appropriate’ use of the floriate chevron seems absent at Trikōmo, where we...
see it in the upper surfaces of the building, including the dome.

Moving away from the dado zone, almost nothing survives of the decoration of the jambs of the four doors of the Holy Trinity and the three apse windows. A dark brown patriarchal cross against a white background was painted on the south jamb of the west door into the naos (fig. 3).\(^{39}\) As far as I can tell, the cross was not accompanied by a cryptogram, as was the case with crosses painted on door jambs in later Cypriot monuments.\(^{40}\) Crosses on the jambs of doors leading into the naos or on the reveals of windows are not uncommon and are usually interpreted as having an apotropeic function, guarding the entrances of a church against evil.\(^{41}\) Nonetheless, the luminous white background against which they are often depicted – including at Holy Trinity – makes one wonder whether there may have been additional layers of signification to their representation. In Middle and Late Byzantine painting the white background was regularly associated with the depiction of Paradise.\(^{42}\) Could then the cross have served as an evocation of the Tree of Life and, by association, of Paradise that the faithful, the donor of Holy Trinity included, hoped to attain by entering into the church and participating in its mysteries?\(^{43}\) Or, is it possible that here we have yet another elaboration of the theme of light and divine illumination as a means of reaching heaven? Already in the Early Byzantine period the cross was associated with light and, by extension, with life and salvation.\(^{44}\) In the Middle Byzantine period we find this concept encapsulated in the exaposteilarion sung during the matins of Holy Friday: “The Wise Thief didst Thou make worthy of Paradise, in a single moment, O Lord. By the wood of Thy Cross illumine me as well, and save me.”\(^{45}\) By the light of the cross – a symbol of Christ, whose death opened the path to everlasting life – the faithful can hope to achieve Paradise. In either case, at Holy Trinity, the cross at the jamb of the west door would have fit perfectly within the overall salvific tenor of the chapel’s iconographic programme, while its very placement at the entrance would convey the potential offered to those crossing the door into the naos of being transported from earth to heaven.\(^{46}\)

This concept of passage between the two worlds was also projected, one could argue, by the vegetal ornament adorning other openings in the lower zone of the chapel’s walls: on the face of the west jamb of the north door, green leaves alternated with red scalloped leaves against a dark blue background,\(^{47}\) while on the reveal of the south apse window, there was a leafy rinceau with pomegranates.\(^{48}\) Though placed in the zone of the building symbolizing the earth and inspired by the natural world, the vegetal ornament at these points of transition, being ‘in between,’ becomes ambivalent, a foreshadowing perhaps of the beauties of the heavenly garden promised to all those entering the chapel to worship.

The most interesting group of painted ornament that has survived in the chapel is encountered on the reveals of

\[^{39}\] Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, *The monastery of St. Chrysostomos*, 89, fig. 135.

\[^{40}\] V. for example: S. Kalopissi-Verti, *The murals of the narthex. The paintings of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*, in: Asinou across time, 190–192; A. Weyl Carr, *The murals of the bema and the naos. The paintings of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*, in: Asinou across time, 257–260.

\[^{41}\] A. B. Καραγιάννη, *Ο σταυρός στη βυζαντινή μνημειακή ζωγραφική. Η λειτουργία και το δογματικό του περιεχόμενο*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2010, 137–142.

\[^{42}\] E.g., *Alfa e Omega: il giudizio universale tra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. V. Pace et al., Castel Bolognese 2006, figs. on 59, 85, 88, 93, 171, 176, 180. V. also: Gerstel, *Crossing borders*, 157.

\[^{43}\] Ćirić, *Constantinopolitan concepts*, 158. V. also N. Teteriatiukov, *The hidden cross-and-tree program in the brickwork of Hagia Sophia*, BS 56 (1995) 691–694.

\[^{44}\] Teteriatiukov, *The hidden cross*, 695–697; eadem, *Justinianic mosaics*, 276–277.

\[^{45}\] R. H. Jordan, *The Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis (March–August, the movable cycle)*, Belfast 2005, 486; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Par. gr. 402 (olim Colbert. 6040), fol. 248r (manuscript of the thirteenth century): Koutsovendis Monastery liturgical typikon (unpublished).

\[^{46}\] V. also Gerstel, *Crossing borders*, 165.

\[^{47}\] Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, *The monastery of St. Chrysostomos*, 84, fig. 111. A comparable vegetal ornament adorned the reveal of the north window of the bema apse (?) at Apсинитиотissa: ICFA, Wall painting, Cyprus, Sykhari, color slide 82-0114-D; DAoC, Apсинитиотissa Monastery, b/w photos J.6422–24.

\[^{48}\] Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, *The monastery of St. Chrysostomos*, 76.
the dome windows. These were apparently painted first, before the interior of the dome.\textsuperscript{49} Eleven out of the twelve windows have preserved smaller or greater parts of their decoration, which comprised at least nine different designs mostly painted against a dark blue or a dark green background. Only two windows, both featuring a similar loop design with a split palmette, display a yellow background, the whole composition reminiscent of golden mosaic work (figs. 4–5).\textsuperscript{50} Whether in addition to the search for variety,

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 74.  

\textsuperscript{50} Windows 4 and 9, according to Mango’s numbering, which is the one also adopted here: ibid., 74, fig. 57. V. for instance, E. Kitzinger, The mosaics of St. Mary’s of the Admiral in Palermo, Washington D.C. 1990, fig. 148.
this choice was determined by the reflectivity of the yellow colour is at present not possible to determine.

Fantastical vegetal motifs constitute the larger group, embellishing the reveals of eight windows. In addition to the loop with the tall split palmette already mentioned,\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) Though I have been unable to locate close parallels for the tall split palmette, comparable loop designs appear to have been popular in the twelfth century in miniature painting and architectural sculpture, e.g., I. Hutter, *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandskriften*.

they include a rinceau consisting of loops of green leaves enclosing a red pomegranate (figs. 6–7);\(^{52}\) oblong, leafy

\(^{52}\) Window 1: Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, *The monastery of St. Chrysostomos*, 74, fig. 54. Comparable to the pattern of the south window of the apse (supra). The leafy rinceau was popular in Constantinopolitan miniature painting of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, though in known examples the loops enclose birds, animals, or flowers, not pomegranates, e.g., M. A. Frantz, *Byzantine illuminated ornament. A study in chronology*, ArtB 16 (1934) 60–61, Pls. XIII.7, 13, XVII.9; Στ. Μ. Μπούρας, Λ. Μπούρα, *Ἡ ἑλλαδικὴ ναοδομία κατὰ τὸν 12ό αἰώνα*, Ἀθήνα 2002, figs. 43–44, 74, 78, 143a, 245a, 330, 343.
loops enclosing a ‘Sassanian’ palmette (figs. 8–9),53 a vegetal diaper pattern framing cream-coloured leaves (figs. 10–11),54 black interlacing tendrils with white outlines or white tendrils against a dark background forming rhomboidal or oblong loops and giving rise to trefoils (figs. 12–15),55 and lastly, repeats of flaring trefoils growing out of a small red disk with white dots (fig. 16).56

The remaining two patterns that appear on the dome windows are more geometric in character. The first, though now poorly preserved, must have had quite a luxurious appearance. Elongated octagons and half-octagons joined together by means of black-and-white squares formed the grid of the design (figs. 17–18). The octagons enclosed red disks with a white pearl border, each containing a dark-coloured quatrefoil.57 The second, encountered on two of the dome’s windows, constitutes a Byzantine adaptation of the well-known Islamic eight-pointed-star-and-cross pattern (figs. 19–21).58 Its earliest occurrences in Islamic contexts go back to the ninth and tenth centuries. Though in the Islamic sphere it was also encountered on portable works, such as textiles and ceramics, it was mostly associated with different forms of architectural decoration, above all ceramic wall tiles, the earliest examples of which may be ascribed to the late eleventh century.59 Apparently, the star-and-cross pattern was also adopted by Eastern Christian communities residing under Islamic rule for the adornment of their places of worship.60 As opposed to known Islamic examples, the emphasis at Koutsoventès is on the crosses rather than the stars comprising the pattern. These crosses, whose cross-arms terminate in points, have at their centre a medallion enclosing an eight-rayed star, while S-shaped motifs and, in one case, hearts (fig. 20), adorn their cross-arms. Half eight-pointed stars fill the spaces between the crosses. Alternately yellow and green and adorned with vermiculation, these half stars enclose semi-circles, which in their turn contain stepped half crosses. The bright contrasting colours and the pleasing succession of straight and curvilinear lines make this, in my opinion, the most striking of the ornaments adorning the reveals of the dome windows. Nonetheless, its occurrence here requires some comment, as it appears to depart from the earlier Middle Byzantine ornamental repertoire in which all the other patterns encountered in the chapel are firmly rooted.

To my knowledge, the cross-and-star at Holy Trinity constitutes the third earliest known appearance of this Islamic pattern in a Byzantine context. Its first documented occurrence is as early as the beginning of the eleventh century in the Menologium of Basili II, where we see it as pattern-
ing on garments, intimating that imported silks might have been one of the vehicles by which this scheme had arrived in Byzantine lands.61 Its earliest known appearance in a monu-

61 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS gr. 1613, 166–167, 270 (all executed by Symeon of Blachernai) – https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613. Compare with The glory of Byzantium. Art and culture of the Middle Byzantine era, A.D. 843–1261, ed. H. C. Evans, W. D. Wixom, New York 1997, no. 269B (Islamic textile with a star pattern, eleventh or twelfth century).
and the crosses. A few decades after Koutsovendēs, during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), we hear of colourful cross-shaped tiles used to line the walls of the staircase of the Mouchroutas, a no-longer extant hall in the imperial palace in Constantinople crowned by a muqarnas.

On the reveals of two of the arches of the tripartite opening in the wall of the narthex gallery overlooking the naos: Z. Janc, *Ornamenti fresaka iz Srbije i Makedonije od XII do sredine XV veka*, Beograd 1961, Pl. LII.345. I am grateful to Prof. Dragan Vojvodić for detailed photographs of the pattern and information on its context and date.

The cross-and-star pattern continues to occur sporadically in Late Byzantine monumental and miniature painting.

62 On the reveals of two of the arches of the tripartite opening in the wall of the narthex gallery overlooking the naos: Z. Janc, *Ornamenti fresaka iz Srbije i Makedonije od XII do sredine XV veka*, Beograd 1961, Pl. LII.345.

63 V. selectively, N. Asutay-Effenberger, “Muchrutas”: der seldschukische Schauschiff von Konstantinopol, Byzantion 74 (2004) 313–329; A. Walker, *The emperor and the world: exotic elements and the imaging of Middle Byzantine imperial power, ninth to thirteenth centuries C.E.*, Cambridge – New York 2012, 144–164, 175–176; J. Johns, *A tale of two ceilings. The Cappella Palatina in Palermo and the Mouchroutas in Constantinople*, in: *Art, trade, and culture in the Islamic world and beyond. From the Fatimids to the Mughals*, ed. J. M. Rogers, A. Ohita, R. Wade Haddon, London 2016, 58–73. The cross-and-star pattern continues to occur sporadically in Late Byzantine monumental and miniature painting.
tas and some later occurrences of the star-and-cross pattern in Byzantine contexts have been commonly associated with including a now-lost mosaic in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: Frantz, Byzantine illuminated ornament, Pl. VI.11; Janc, Ornamenti, Pl. I.3; Στ. Μ. Πελεκανίδης et al., Οἱ θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους. Εἰκονογραφημένα χειρό-
γραφα Γʹ, Ἀθήνα 1979, fig. 300; Gerstel, Crossing borders, 160–166; Tetric-
atnikov, Justinianic mosaics, 180–181, figs. 28, 214.

glazed Seljuk wall tiles, the production of the latter really takes off only in the second half of the twelfth century, too late to be relevant to the appearance of the pattern at

64 For an alternative view, associating the Mouchroutas with the Fatimid artistic sphere instead, v. Johns, A tale.
65 R. Arık, O. Arık, Tiles: treasures of Anatolian soil. Tiles of the Seljuk and Beylik periods, Istanbul 2008; Arık, New information.
Koutsovendēs. Nonetheless, the crispness of the lines of the Koutsovendēs pattern and its rich colour-palette does have a tile-like quality to it. Furthermore, by a strange coincidence the S-shaped and heart motifs that adorn the crosses find close parallels in the inscriptions and the non-figural decoration of the earliest known lustre cruciform tiles – associated with blue-green star-shaped tiles – from the palatial complex of Qal'a Bani Hammād in Algeria, within the Fatimid cultural sphere (end of eleventh – beginning of the twelfth century).66 On the other hand, the eight-rayed star in the central medallion of each cross is reminiscent of one of the more widespread Seljuk symbols of power, the asterisk.67 To add to the mix, the stepped cross appears to have been a popular motif in the vocabulary of Middle Byzantine ornament in various media, including painting and enamel.68 Furthermore, S-shapes and, more rarely, hearts are used as space fillers in certain Constantinopolitan manuscripts already in the tenth century69 though the closest parallels to the Koutsovendēs forms are to be found in a liturgical scroll produced in the Byzantine capital in the second half of the eleventh century.70 What we seem to be faced with this to my attention and for discussing the Koutsovendēs pattern with me.

66 *Reflets d’or*, no. 51.
67 S. Redford, *A grammar of Rum Seljuk ornament*, Mésogeios 25–26 (2005) 300–301. I am grateful to Prof. Redford for bringing

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Fig. 14. Koutsovendēs, Holy Trinity chapel, dome, window 12, right reveal, ornament

Fig. 15. Koutsovendēs, Holy Trinity chapel, dome, window 12, left reveal, ornament
here, then, appears to be a Byzantine synthesis of Byzantine and 'exotic' elements, the latter apparently enjoying a wide circulation in the medieval Mediterranean because of their prestigious associations and their pleasing aesthetic qualities.\(^7\)

Still, the emphasis on the cross at Holy Trinity, both in the shape of the central motif of the repeat and in the incorporation of the stepped crosses, intimates a deliberate adaptation of the pattern to its Christian ecclesiastical context.\(^72\) Whether this blend had taken place in a major Byzantine cosmopolitan artistic centre, like Constantinople, or on Cyprus, is not possible to say. The island in the late eleventh and early twelfth century was perfectly situated between the two cultural spheres to allow for such a transference and conglomeration of elements, and no place better than Koutsoventēs itself: the monastery’s founder originated from the region of Antioch and he and his monks maintained close links with the Holy Land even after their settlement on Cyprus.\(^73\)

A loose \textit{opus sectile} panel with an intricate pattern of eight-pointed stars and a pair of carved wooden door valves, both of which apparently belonged to the original decoration of the late eleventh-century katholikon, document the familiarity, appreciation, and appropriation of Islamic ornament at the Cypriot monastery from the very beginning.\(^74\) As for the patron of Holy Trinity, Eumathios Phīlokalēs was an active agent of the Byzantine imperial government in the Levant,\(^75\) where he could have come into contact with the ornamental vocabulary of the Muslim and Christian East. Whether created on Cyprus or imported from the Byzantine capital, the inclusion of the star-and-cross pattern in the painted ornament at Holy Trinity functioned as testament to if not an intentional declaration of Philokalēs’s successful participation into a lively network that linked Constantinople and Cyprus with the Muslim and Christian communities of the East. It is also possible that the patron, through this choice, wished to cater to the interests and tastes of the primary audience of the chapel’s decoration, the members of the local monastic community.\(^76\)

The ornamental repertoire of the dome windows at Holy Trinity in its entirety stands out among Cypriot monumental painting of the early twelfth century for its diversity, elaboration, lushness of forms, and masterly execution.

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\(^{7}\) The use of the star-and-cross pattern both in the \textit{opus sectile} decoration and the \textit{muqarnas} of the Cappella Palatina in Norman Sicily could be adduced as supporting evidence not only of its popularity, but also of its perceived suitability for the adornment of a high-status structure, a popularity that transcended cultural and religious boundaries. On the star-and-cross at the Cappella Palatina, v. Ettinghausen, 93; R. Longo, The \textit{opus sectile} work of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. New material for new studies, in: Die Cappella Palatina in Palermo: Geschichte, Kunst, Funktionen, ed. Th. Dittelbach, Künzelsau 2011, Pls. 1–2; Anzelmo, \textit{Dress}, 117, 119, fig. 46.

\(^{72}\) V. Gerstel, \textit{Crossing borders}, 164.

\(^{73}\) Papacostas, \textit{The history}, 29–50.

\(^{74}\) Mango, Hawkins, Boyd, \textit{The monastery of St. Chrysostomos}, 68–69, figs. 13, 20–23; D. Michaelides, \textit{The opus sectile of the southern church of the monastery of Ayios Chrysostomos at Koutsoventēs and Jacques Georges Desmeules}, in: \textit{Philokypros}, ed. L. Dubois, E. Masson, Salamanca 2000, 227–228, figs. 7–8; Papacostas, \textit{The history}, 143–146, figs. 48, 50. The closest parallel adduced by Papacostas for the Koutsoventēs doors is the wooden carved screen from Abū Saifein in Fatimid Cairo (supra, n. 60).

\(^{75}\) Papacostas, \textit{The history}, 67–68.

\(^{76}\) V. Parani, \textit{A monument}, for the preoccupation with the region of Antioch and the Holy Land in the figural decoration of the chapel, a preoccupation in which the interests of Philokalēs and the local monastic community converged.

\(^{77}\) The most significant caveat is Apsinthiōtissa, where no elements of the original dome survive.
execution. Of its nine patterns, only the leafy rinceau with the pomegranate has been securely identified in other Cypriot monuments stylistically related to Koutsovendēs, namely at Asinou and Trikōmo. Beyond that, a pattern similar to the grid of octagons may have adorned one of the apse windows at Apsinhtiōtissa, while bands of semicircles enclosing stepped crosses against a vermiculated background—which we encountered at Holy Trinity integrated into the star-and-cross scheme—can be seen as a self-standing pattern at Apsinthiōtissa.

Though faded and fragmentary, the extant remains help us envision the beauty and brilliance of the painted ornament of Holy Trinity’s dome and to admire the paint-

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78 Χρ. Χατζηχριστοδούλου, Δ. Μορανθεύς, Ο ναός της Παναγίας της Ασίνου, Λευκωσία 2002, figs. on 24, 26; Asinou across time, fig. 6.1; ICFA, Wall painting, Cyprus, Sykhari, color slides 79-2909-D, 79-2908-D, 79-2914-D.

79 Personal observation.

80 ICFA, Wall painting, Cyprus, Sykhari, color slide 79-2912-D; DAoC, Apsinthiōtissa Monastery, b/w photo J.6427.

81 Χοτζάκογλου, Βυζαντινή άρχιτεκτονική, figs. 412–413; Asinou across time, fig. 6.1; ICFA, Wall painting, Cyprus, Sykhari, color slides 79-2909-D, 79-2908-D, 79-2914-D.

82 Χατζηχριστοδούλου, Φούλιας, Παναγία Θεοτόκος Τρικώμου, fig. on 54. I thank Giōrgos Philotheou, Ephor emeritus of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, for detailed photographs of the painted ornament at Trikōmo.
er’s creativity and skill. Especially striking is the great variety not only in colour and designs, but also in the character and style of the ornaments, with some being more painterly and others evocative of mosaic, low-relief works in stone and metal, enamel, encrustation with precious stones and pearls, and architectural glazed tiles. This search for ‘poikilia’, here evoked through the painted ornament rather than actualised, was characteristic of Middle Byzantine approaches to the interior decoration of churches. On one level, it contributed to the further embellishment of the ecclesiastical building, whose beauty was considered as a reflection of the beauty and variety of the world created by God. On another level, however, especially the visual

83 E.g., R. Ousterhout, The holy space. Architecture and the liturgy, in: Heaven on Earth. Art and the church in Byzantium, ed. L. Safran, University Park 1998, 99, 101.
84 Β. Ε. Γ. Σαράντη, Ο χώρος στη βυζαντινή σκέψη, in: Η αρχιτεκτονική ως εικόνα: πρόσληψη και αναπαράσταση της αρχιτεκτονικής
references to expensive materials and decorative techniques advanced the impression of the chapel as a precious receptacle eminently suited to house the sacred mysteries unfolding within it in rite, word, and image. In fact, the variety and lavishness of the painted ornament of the dome is reminiscent of the aesthetics of the mixed-media or revetted icons, which were preferred by Middle Byzantine aristocratic donors in their desire for conspicuous expressions of piety and as appropriate means for negotiating the relationship of the sacred to matter and divine immanence in the world. It is quite tempting to read similar aesthetic and theological concerns behind the articulation of the dome’s ornament at Holy Trinity, executed at the behest of Philokalēs, who was himself a member of this upper class of sophisticated donors.

However, given the specific spatial context of the painted ornament, there may have been additional considerations behind this impressive and variegated display. The luxuriant foliage with fruit and flowers, the “many and varied colors”, and the evocation of precious substances bring to mind Middle Byzantine rhetorical descriptions of the heavenly city, where all these elements feature prominently suffused with brilliant light. One pattern in particular, the foliate diaper pattern, has been associated by various scholars with abstract representations of Heaven and Paradise in Byzantine monumental and miniature painting. One may also note that in its original Islamic contexts, the eight-rayed star that we see incorporated into the star-and-cross pattern had astral connotations, which might have informed its introduction here. The painted ornament of the dome windows could then be understood as a metaphor of heaven, quite fittingly developed on the dome. Indeed, the spatial ambiguity and the focal fragmentation created by the ornament’s poikilia and its referencing of different media heightened the visual and perceptual impression of the dome as immaterial, an impression already created by its pierced drum and the natural light streaming through its twelve windows.

Having reached here the end of our discussion, what can one say about the painted ornament at Holy Trinity in conclusion? Its repertoire included motifs and patterns that were current in the vocabulary of Middle Byzantine art from the late tenth century down to the twelfth. Most of these knew a wide diffusion, thus making them impossible to localise. Apart from the stepped cross within a semi-circle, the ornamental vocabulary of Holy Trinity appears unheralded in Cypriot monumental painting of the eleventh century. However, given the small number of extant ensembles from that time, no reliable conclusions may be drawn from this. As for the monuments associated with

Fig. 21. Koutsovendēs, Holy Trinity chapel, dome, window 7, left reveal, ornament

the chapel on stylistic grounds, the vocabulary of their painted ornament, though less varied, supports the idea that their workshops were related to that of Koutsovendēs. The differences observed in elaboration and detail of execution between them could be equally ascribed to the tastes and the preferences of their respective patrons as to the knowledge and the skills of their painters.

At the Holy Trinity, with its diverse and intricate forms, the painted ornament projected a sense of luxury and sophistication, which was in keeping with the ambitious and erudite character of the monument as a whole,
itself a testament to the patron's elevated social status and wide-ranging connections. More importantly, rather than being on the fringe, the painted ornament emerges fully integrated into the iconographic programme of the chapel, which expressed the prayer of the patron for salvation: bound to earth by his sins — mentioned in the dedicatory inscription inserted in the dado zone — Philokalēs could still aspire to the beauty and pleasures of heaven conjured in the dome above, thanks to Incarnation of Christ, whose story unfolded on the surfaces of the walls in between.

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Parani G. M., On the fringe. The painted ornament of the Holy Trinity chapel at Koutsoventēs, Cyprus and its wall paintings. Part II: catalogue, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 44 (1990) 63–94.
Историјскоуметнички наративи о кипарском монументалном сликарству позног XI и раног XII века развили су се у светлу изузетних фресака параклиса Свете Тројице у Куцовендишу на Кипру, који је основао војни заведник острва Евматије Филокал (око 1100). Однос фресака Куцовендиша према другим ранокомнинским ансамблима на Кипру потребно је, међутим, сагледати из одговарајуће перспективе. У науци је више пута истакнуто да иновативне одлике иконографског програма параклиса нису примењене у другим кипарским споменицима чије се фреске обично приписују сликару који је образовао стекао уз мајстора из Куцовендиша или неколиких таквих сликара. Ова студија среће пажњу на орнаментални сликарски украс која потврђује сложеност и јединственост целокупног наративног програма.

У лагање времена, напора и вештине да се украс чак и површине које остају изван домађа ока показује да се сликани орнамент у византијској цркви сматрао значајним делом украсног фреско-профрагма, иако историчари уметности имају обичај да му приписују мању важност. Изгледа да нису само сликарци одлучивали о изражајним облицима нефигуралне декорације. Ктитори су ту такође морали имати удела, нарочито ако се има у виду да је их пажња и средства уложени у орнаментално сликарство намењу мисао да његова функција није била само украсна инти једноставно естетска. Заиста, може се рећи да је сликарски орнамент обликован посматрачево перцепцију иконо графског програма, истовремено га обогаћујући до давањем значајних симбола помоћу метафора.

У раду се, пошто су од највише зоне зидова наоса и беме, па навише све до дванаест прозора куполе, истражују улога сликараног орнамента и начин на који је он могао бити схваћен у оквиру фреско-целине параклиса. Истовремено се испитују могућности и неинформације у комнинарском ансамблу Свете Тројице и приближно сувременим, стилиским и стилским кипарским фреско-ансамблама.

Нарочито је упечатљив орнаментални украс прозора куполе, који се издваја разновоєшћу боја и шара, као и разнородним карактером и стилом украсних техника које се приручавају утисак о параклису као драгоценим ковчегу намењеном примању светих тајни које се одвијају у њему у обреду, речи и слици. Штавише, раскошне лиснате вреже с воћем и цвећем, богат колорит и алузија на скупоцене материјале – све то окупано светлосту – могу се, према нашем мишљењу, доживети као метафора Небеског града, која је на савим одговарајући начин развијена у куполи.

Аналiza показује да је сликарски орнамент какав постоји у Светој Тројици непознат у старијем кипарском монументалном сликарству. У поређењу са орнаменталним репертоаром који се среће у другим ранокомнинским споменицима на оструvu, овај пример се издваја сложеносту, разновоєшћу и високим квалитетом изведбе, док је његова софистицираност усклађена са амбициозним и ученим карактером фреско-ансамбла као целине. Сликани орнамент не само што није изолован на ободу већ се чини да је у потпуности уклоњен у иконографски програм Свете Тројице и да помоћу симбола и он изражава ктиторску пажњу у спасење.