

Kastoria

Art, Patronage, and Society

EUGENIA DRAKOPOULOU

Kastoria's historical development was determined by its intelligently chosen location, its links to major roads, and its inhabitants' diligence. Before and after any approach to and interpretation of this development, one of the city's impressive achievements is unquestionable: this small urban center of the Byzantine Empire, which may or may not have totaled three to four thousand residents in the fourteenth century, had amassed dozens of churches decorated with artistically noteworthy frescos and portable icons. Furthermore, the city's pious and worthy inhabitants took care that a wealth of inscriptions accompanied these works of art, in which they included family names, offices, property, administrators, and church rulers. Today this admirable record of local artistic patronage¹ dating back to the tenth century serves as a basic key to the reconstruction of the history of a small Byzantine provincial city.

Kastoria² was built on the lake of the same name in western Macedonia in the Haliakmon River valley (figs. 34, 95); it was in direct communication with the major Via Egnatia, the main artery linking the West to Constantinople (fig. 19). The Byzantine city's characteristic features³ had already been formed by the tenth century: natural and built fortifications, a fertile hinterland—although one vulnerable to hostile incursions, and exploitation of the wealth of Lake Kastoria combined with a high living standard and the cultivation of Byzantine civilization in terms of its customs, art, and the Greek language.

With this solid foundation of urban structure and organization, Byzantine and later Turkish (from the late 14th century) Kastoria evolved up to the present into a

dynamic Balkan city with noteworthy potential for growth in its economy, education, social organization, and power structures. The image of a city that flourished economically and intellectually in the eighteenth century primarily impresses modern visitors to this densely settled center of 20,000 inhabitants as they encounter early modern Kastoria's imposing mansions of wealthy merchants and furriers' workshops. The processing of fur, which is attested in the region from the fifteenth century and was largely responsible for the city's flourishing economy in the eighteenth century, continues to this day.⁴

The Byzantine city then emerges in the same place with its small-scale plan, as churches, sections of walls, and towers unexpectedly appear beside old mansions and modern buildings. The area is constricted, given that the urban fabric extended a mere 984 yards (900 m) east to west and 1,093 yards (1,000 m) north to south. Within this space there are roughly seventy churches⁵ dating from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries, almost fully integrated into the urban fabric (fig. 96). Decorated with wall paintings, portable icons, and the Greek donors' dedicatory inscriptions, they bear witness to the spiritual and social life of Kastoria's residents.⁶ Around 400 portable icons (some of them on display in this exhibition) dating from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries, fragments of wall paintings, Early Christian mosaics, and architectural members from both Byzantine and Ottoman times are housed in the city's Byzantine Museum, built in 1989 atop the hill of the Byzantine acropolis.⁷

Fig. 95 | Panoramic view of the city of Kastoria.





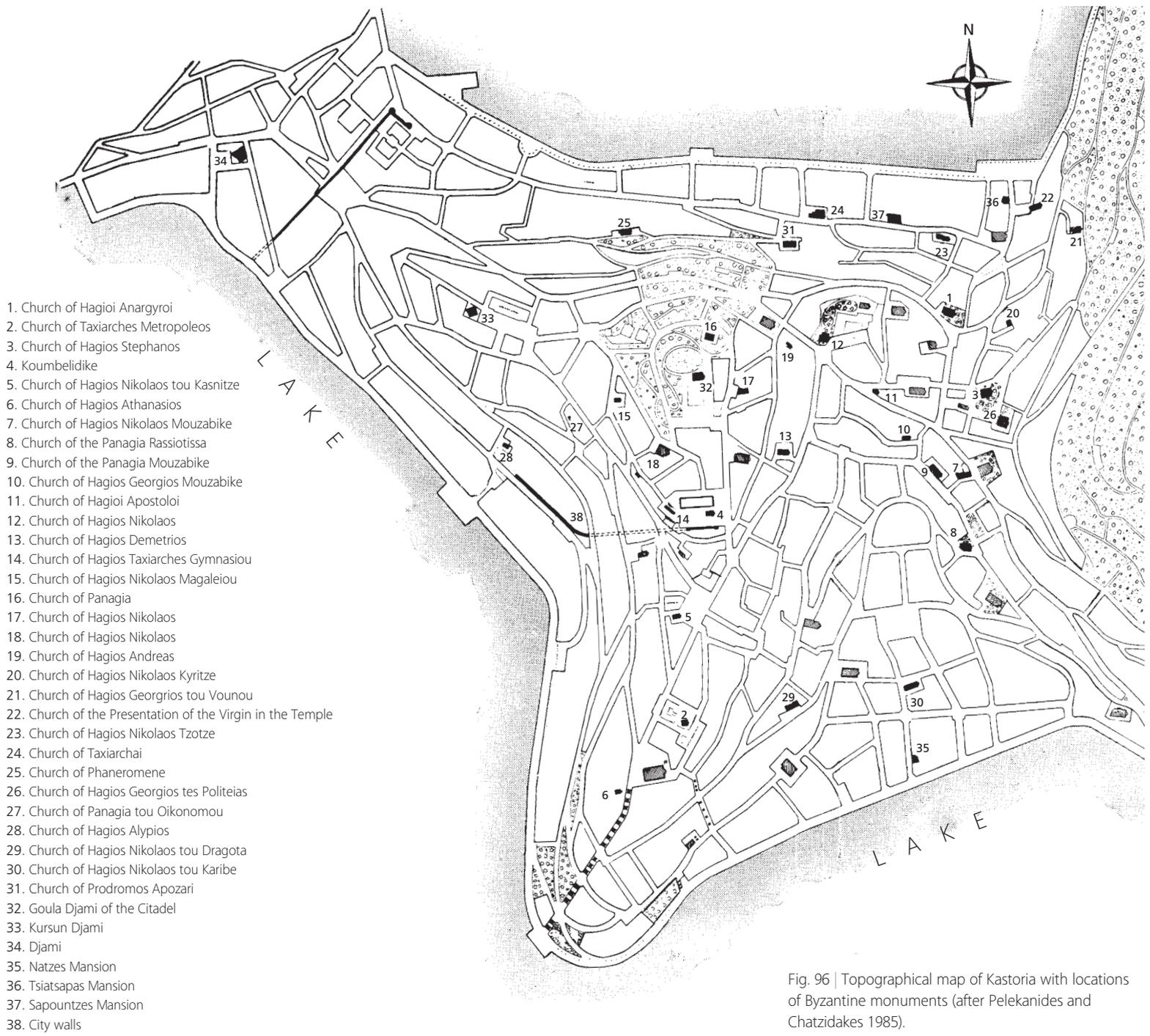


Fig. 96 | Topographical map of Kastoria with locations of Byzantine monuments (after Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985).

From this vantage point one enjoys a sweeping view of Kastoria and its lake. The city developed in the Byzantine period on a natural elevation some 246 feet (75 m) above the lake. The ridge on which the city was built started from a narrow strip of land, the isthmus, which was Kastoria's only connection with the mainland. It was described with exceptional accuracy by the twelfth-century Byzantine historian and writer Anna Komnene, daughter of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1083–1118): "there is a lake, the Lake of Kastoria, into which there obtrudes a strip of land from the mainland; at its tip it expands, ending in rocky mountains."⁸ By virtue of this unique geographic location, the lake served

to supplement the city's strong wall in defense of the city. The historian Prokopios mentioned the walls of Kastoria in his work *De Aedificiis*, in which he sings the praises of the emperor Justinian's (527–65) monumental building program in Europe, Asia, and Africa as well as his rebuilding of more than one hundred cities.⁹ Prokopios attributed the choice of Kastoria's location and its fortifications to Justinian's imperial policy. The fact that Prokopios includes information about the building of walls in Early Christian cities that does not agree with modern archaeological finds,¹⁰ added to the fact that more recent excavation in the city does not confirm with any degree of certainty the dating of Kastoria's walls to

the Justinian age,¹¹ should make us cautious about crediting the city's fortification to Justinian's imperial program.¹² In any case, it appears that medieval Kastoria developed at the same site as the Roman city of Celetron,¹³ and on the basis of the archaeological finds the first coherent picture of the well-developed Byzantine urban center dates to the tenth century. During this period its walls defined the city's outer limit, protecting it from enemies and separating it from the villages in the fertile valley of the Haliakmon, from which Kastoria's residents obtained their produce. The defensive requirements were of utmost importance for the survival of this provincial urban center, which saw fighting

between Byzantines and Bulgarians (10th century), Normans (11th century), Serbs (14th century), Albanians (14th century), and Ottomans (14th century).¹⁴ In the late fourteenth century, following the fall of other Byzantine cities in the Balkans, Kastoria was taken by the Ottomans, under whose rule it remained until 1912, when it was incorporated into the Kingdom of Greece during the first period of the Royal Republic. Throughout its history, the most important element of the city's defenses and its demarcation from the hinterland was the lakeside wall that closed off its northwest side, the only one not protected by the lake. From the Byzantine period we have testimony to a small-scale wall on the acropolis, site of the administrative buildings, the cathedral dedicated to the Virgin Mary as the city's patron,¹⁵ the bishop's palace, and presumably the residences of rulers and administrators. In the seventeenth century the chronicler and traveler Evliya Çelebi described a lovely fortress built with ashlar masonry on the western side of a large lake with limpid waters, atop a steep cliff, similar to an island. Its walls were quite high, and it had strong towers facing the lake.¹⁶

Only a very few portions of Kastoria's fortifications are preserved, and since the city has been inhabited in successive layers from the Byzantine age until the present, excavation is almost prohibitively difficult. But it is interesting that excavations of limited scope, in conjunction with historical testimony, have established that the city's two main modern streets trace the paths of the Byzantine streets that started from the main gate of the lakeside wall and crossed the city.

Within the walls residential neighborhoods were organized around their churches, the focus of social life in Byzantine urban centers. Especially in small provincial cities, the large open public gathering places characteristic of Greek and Roman cities, considered undesirable by Byzantine subjects, gave way to church precincts where people gathered not only to attend services but also to converse, enjoy themselves, and conduct business.

Kastoria's numerous churches continue in operation today, with the exception of a few monuments which by virtue of their interesting architecture and unique wall paintings function primarily as museums. Most churches, both Byzantine and Post-Byzantine, were built and decorated with private donations, as is confirmed by inscriptions and by the fact that even now they continue to be known by the names of their founders.

Some ten monuments survive from Byzantine Kastoria's earliest years, beginning in the mid-ninth century following the age of Iconoclasm (the religious controversy, with political implications, over the worship of sacred images) and down to the late tenth century.¹⁷ Members of the local elite took the initiative in building and decorating these churches, in which they are frequently depicted. Constantine (Konstantinos) is one of the first residents of Byzantine Kastoria to come to life, thanks to his portrait in the church of the Hagioi Anargyroi (fig. 97). His picture is quite large. He is dressed in simple garments and standing beside his patron Saint Constantine; a touching inscription mentions only the date of his death—November 21—presumably some time around the year 1000.¹⁸

The church of the Hagioi Anargyroi (fig. 98),¹⁹ where in all probability Constantine was also buried, dates to the tenth–eleventh century. Together with the churches of Hagios Stephanos (c. 900) and Taxiarches Metropoleos (Taxiarches in the parish of the cathedral; c. 900), it is representative of the small, simply-constructed churches of the three-aisle basilica type that could be erected on constricted building sites at no great cost to their donors. They more or less reflect prototypes from Thessalonike or Constantinople, and were widespread throughout Macedonia.

In many Byzantine and later churches we find continual alterations—renovations and additional wall paintings and dedications beyond the central unified iconographic cycles. In Kastoria this is especially pronounced. In the church of

Hagios Stephanos,²⁰ on the city's eastern side, this is most apparent. In its main floor, its narthex, and its galleries the greater part of its original painted decoration is preserved, dominated by the scene of the Second Coming, an exceptionally important work of Middle Byzantine painting (10th century). The original paint layer was sporadically covered by wall paintings from various later periods, most of which are in the nature of occasional votive icons. A second layer includes primarily scenes from the Gospels dating to the late twelfth–early thirteenth centuries.²¹ Many votive images falling outside the iconographic program cover various portions of the walls and the main-floor piers; these date to the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth



Fig. 97 | The donor Constantine and the dedicatory inscription. Wall painting, circa 1000. Kastoria, church of Hagioi Anargyroi, narthex.

centuries. In a small “hermitage” (*asketerion*) on the church’s upper floor dedicated to Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin, there are “remembrances” and graffiti dating up to the modern era, documenting continuous contact between the population and its monuments. Constantine and his wife Anna (13th century), the nun Marina, the priest Theodoros Lemniotes, and Georgios (14th century) (fig. 99) are among the Kastorians who wished not only to make an offering to God, but to preserve their names and portraits for eternity.²²

During its first years Kastoria was occupied for a time by the Bulgarians, and its recapture in 1018 by the Byzantine emperor Basil II the “Bulgar-Slayer” (*Boulgaroktonos*; 976–1025) signified a decisive turn in the city’s history. The emperor’s plan was to found a Byzantine-influenced archbishopric, subject to the

emperor, that included previous Bulgarian conquests around Ohrid in the modern-day Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).²³ Kastoria was designated as the first among other bishoprics, an indication of its importance within the greater region. Its subjugation to the archbishopric of Ohrid generally determined its history until the late eighteenth century, during the period of Byzantine and mainly of Turkish rule, when ecclesiastical administrations had the greatest influence on the lives of Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

After the establishment of the archbishopric of Ohrid in 1018, Kastoria was under Byzantine governance with only brief interruptions. Following its temporary conquest by the Normans, its recapture in 1083 by the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos led to a long period of peace resulting in notable cultural development.

The twelfth century—the age of the Komnenoi—generally signified a rise of local aristocracies within the Byzantine Empire.²⁴ Administrative reforms by the Komnenoi brought significant changes to the structure of the Middle and Late Byzantine city, prompting the dynamic economic ascent of local rulers. These rulers, the agents of local patronage, drew their power from their military or administrative offices as well as their landed wealth. Their involvement was decisive for the social makeup as well as the artistic achievements of the age. In Kastoria the twelfth century was a prosperous time, for the local upper class managed to take advantage of generally more favorable conditions for the growth of cities under the Komnenoi.²⁵ Two important patrons representing the local aristocracy, the magistrate Nikephoros Kasnitzes and his wife Anna (fig. 100) and the family of



Fig. 98 | Kastoria, Hagioi Anargyroi. The east and south sides of the church.

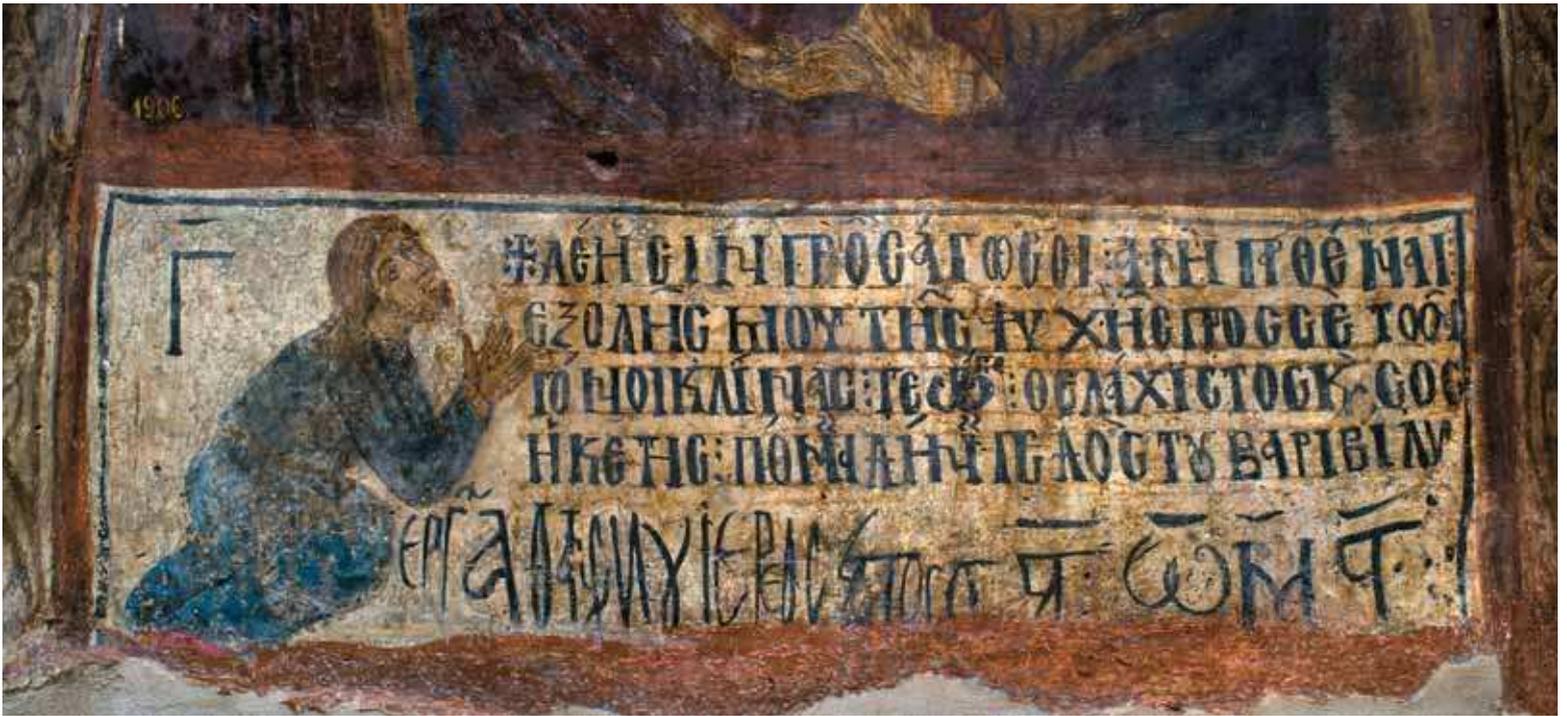


Fig. 99 | Donor and dedicatory inscription. Wall painting. Kastoria, church of Hagios Stephanos, north wall.

Theodoros Lemniotes and his wife Anna Radene (fig. 101) would adorn two of Kastoria's churches, Hagios Nikolaos and the Hagioi Anargyroi, with wall paintings representative of the high art of the twelfth century.²⁶

The art in these two churches is closely related to the painting in the church of Hagios Panteleemon in Nerezi (in modern-day FYROM),²⁷ which was founded in 1164 by Emperor Alexios Komnenos's grandson of the same name. At Nerezi the tall, aristocratic figures, their harmonious movements and expressive gestures, and the arrangement of religious scenes with their undulating curves introduced the most complete expression of divine Passion and human suffering to date in European religious painting (fig. 102). The presence, in a provincial city like Kastoria, of monuments of comparable art representing trends derived from major centers like Constantinople (fig. 103) documents the strong ties between the region of Macedonia and the capital's high level of culture. The families of affluent Kastorian donors wished to pass into eternity wearing their luxurious clothing and jewelry, even if later they embraced the monastic life, as appears from the monastic head covering added to the abundant blond hair of Anna Radene in the Hagioi

Anargyroi (see fig. 101). The superb wall paintings and donors' portraits in the churches of Kastoria are accompanied by many inscriptions, often metrical literary texts which preserve a different kind of memory than the paintings themselves.²⁸ While the wall paintings speak to us thanks to their artistic quality, the expressiveness of the holy personages, and the directness of the religious scenes, and

the portraits capture the donors' features for eternity, the inscriptions preserve names, familial relations, and offices, while recording the donors' wishes for good health, long life, and the forgiveness of sins. In combination they document the donors' faith and metaphysical concerns, but at the same time they attest to their prosperity and desire for social and/or political affirmation—a motivation behind the



Fig. 100 | Saint Nikolaos, the holy Tile and the donors of the church. Wall painting, 12th century. Kastoria, church of Hagios Nikolaos tou Kasnitze, narthex.



Fig. 101 | Virgin and Child among the donors of the church. Wall painting, late 12th century. Kastoria, church of Hagioi Anargyroi, north aisle.



Fig. 102 | Lamentation. Wall painting, 1164. Nerezi, church of Hagios Panteleemon.

commissioning of works of art from antiquity down to the present day.

While these paintings and inscriptions in themselves serve as an indication of the city's spiritual and intellectual life in the twelfth century, we also happen to know that Kastoria's bishops during this same period were particularly cultivated prelates. They had been educated in Constantinople and maintained friendships and corresponded with prominent church officials of their era.²⁹ It is important to bear in mind the importance of bishops as key figures in the administrative, economic, and social life of Byzantine cities.³⁰ They were more stable figures than politicians and military commanders, managed Church property, served as judges and reconcilers of differences within their flocks, and represented a high level of education, especially if they came from Constantinopolitan circles.

Kastoria's elevated cultural environment was fostered by the city's economic prosperity and that of the surrounding region. It is confirmed by the testimony of the twelfth-century Arab geographer Al-Idrisi, who wrote that in that age Kastoria was wealthy, pleasant, and populous, with a lake in which abundant catches of fish were to be had, and with a large number of surrounding villages.³¹ In addition to the Christian population, a flourishing Jewish community established itself in the city in the eleventh century. Its leader was the Kastorian Tobiah ben Eliezer, a well-known writer and poet.³²

The mention of Kastoria in the chrysobull for the Venetians issued in 1198 by emperor Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203) confirms that there was noteworthy commercial activity in the city, reinforced by the presence of Venetian merchants who dominated Mediterranean trade.³³

A decisive factor in the development of Kastoria's commerce, economy, and culture was its ready access to major roads. From the eleventh century we know of its link to the Via Egnatia, the major west-east artery starting from Dyrrachion that passed through Ohrid, Pelagonia (near Kastoria), Edessa, and Thessalonike and

ended in Constantinople.³⁴ The other road favored by Western merchants—above all the Venetians—started on the Dalmatian coast, from Dyrrachion and Avlona (modern Vlorë, Albania), passed through Ioannina and Kastoria, and continued to Trikala and Larissa before ending at the Pagasitic Gulf.³⁵

These arteries, as has been true up until modern times, were not merely roads facilitating trade and military movements—for example, the Crusaders of the First Crusade passed over the Via Egnatia after sailing across the Adriatic Sea—but also routes for pilgrims, scholars, artists, and new ideas. Thus relations between the Kastorians and Venetians were not confined to trade, but extended to cultural ties, as is seen from influences of the painting of the *Serenissima* over the course of many centuries on both Kastoria's frescos and portable icons.³⁶

In 1204 the Venetians, who envisioned themselves as successors to Byzantium, finally turned the Crusaders en route to the Holy Land against Constantinople, temporarily depriving the Byzantine state of its capital. Half a century later, in 1261, Constantinople was retaken by Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–82), up to that time emperor of Nicaea, one of the successor states in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) founded after the conquest of the capital. In 1259 Michael won a decisive victory in Macedonia at Pelagonia, near Kastoria, which ensured him control over the greater region.³⁷ The new emperor, founder of the last dynasty of Byzantine emperors, had no hereditary rights to the throne, and in an effort to overcome this problem and stabilize his rule he attempted a propaganda policy that would connect him with the imperial dynasty of the Komnenoi. In Kastoria there is a rare example of similar political propaganda at the Monastery of the Virgin Mavriotissa, built around 1000 on the shore of Lake Kastoria in an area that even today preserves its unique natural beauty. The church was painted with exceptional frescos in the thirteenth century.³⁸ The monastery's founding was associated with the age of Alexios



Fig. 103 | Archangel Michael. Wall painting, late 12th century. Kastoria, church of Hagioi Anargyroi, south aisle.

Komnenos, for it was at this site that the emperor's forces, which retook the city from the Normans in 1083, had disembarked. It was here, at a point kept alive in the collective memory and where municipal events continue to be held today, that the new emperor of Constantinople, Michael Palaiologos, victor in the battle of Pelagonia, chose to be depicted beside Alexios Komnenos on the monastery's exterior. In the pictorial composition, which includes the Virgin Hodegetria, military saints, and the motif of the Tree of Jesse, a symbolic representation of the genealogy of Christ, the figures of the emperors (unfortunately headless today) predominate in their royal attire and holding the symbols of their power (fig. 104).³⁹

Michael Palaiologos attempted to resolve another major issue that was both

religious and political, namely the schism between the Western and Eastern Churches that had been finalized in 1054. The Byzantine emperor's diplomatic initiatives toward the West led to the council held in the French city of Lyons in 1274, which officially endorsed the union of the two Churches, a decision that was never implemented. Both before and after the council, the views of leaders in the Orthodox Church were divided. The archbishopric of Ohrid, whose most prestigious see was that of Kastoria, as mentioned above, was located in a sensitive geographical area near the Adriatic. It is known that many inhabitants of Adriatic centers such as Dyrrachion represented both the Orthodox and Catholic dogmas. It is characteristic that in the thirteenth century the bishop of Dyrrachion, Constantine Kabasilas, who

later became archbishop of Ohrid, sought the counsel of his teacher, one of the leading prelates and spiritual figures of the time, Demetrios Chomatenos (1220–34/36), about how strict he should be with Catholic residents of Dyrrachion who frequently attended services and confession in Orthodox churches.⁴⁰ It is known that the main opposition between the Churches to this day had to do with the doctrinal issue of the emanation of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son (*filioque*). During this age, when ecclesiastical and political relations with the West were of intense interest to the Byzantine Empire, and the climate in the nearby archbishopric of Ohrid was in flux between the

Orthodox and Catholic dogmas⁴¹ and politically between East and West, we find in a church in Kastoria a unique representation of the Holy Trinity displaying iconography that deviates from that established in the Orthodox Church. The painting is in the city's only domed church, which for this reason was also called "Koumbelidike"⁴² from the Turkish word for "dome" (*kubbe*), and was dedicated to the Virgin. This elegant church (fig. 105) was built in 900 within the city's Byzantine acropolis. Among the frescos executed between 1270 and 1280, a rare representation of the Holy Trinity pictures the Holy Spirit emanating as a white dove from a disk held by the Son, emerging

from the breast of the Father (fig. 106). This is a clear reference to the Catholic doctrine of the emanation of the Holy Spirit from the Son as well (*filioque*).

Thus, as regards the iconography of churches, despite the prevailing impression that it was conservative and unchanging, the truth is—as is clear from the above two examples—that it could be exceptionally timely and transmit political and doctrinal messages to believers. It should be noted that the Christians of that era, thanks to their intimate familiarity with religious representations, could immediately discern differences and understand new dogmatic or political proposals. And we should also remember that generally speaking the formulation of iconographic programs in many important monuments and the appearance of new images, like the texts of the inscriptions, was a matter of choice on the part of the patron, worked out in collaboration with the painter.

It is especially interesting that in Kastoria the occasional Christian rulers of the city, whether Bulgarians, Serbs, or Albanians, fully adopting Byzantine habits and the Greek language, chose churches—the places where the city's residents gathered—to transmit political messages to their subjects. They continued the Byzantine sponsorship policy, followed the same artistic styles, and employed the same painting workshops. This was true during the thirteenth century and down to the final decades of the fourteenth, when the city's history was marked by continuous changes in rulers. In the church of the Taxiarches Metropoleos⁴³ it is possible to trace the continuity in customs and artistic practices under the city's temporary Bulgarian and Serbian rulers. The church, dedicated to the archangel Michael, was built around 900 at the city's southeast border, and was decorated with its first layer of frescos during that same era. Three centuries later, an impressive painting on the exterior wall of the narthex shows the Bulgarian king Michael Asen (1246–56/57) and his mother and co-ruler, the Byzantine Irene Komnene, in full figure and dressed in royal attire and jewelry, supplicating the archangels Michael and

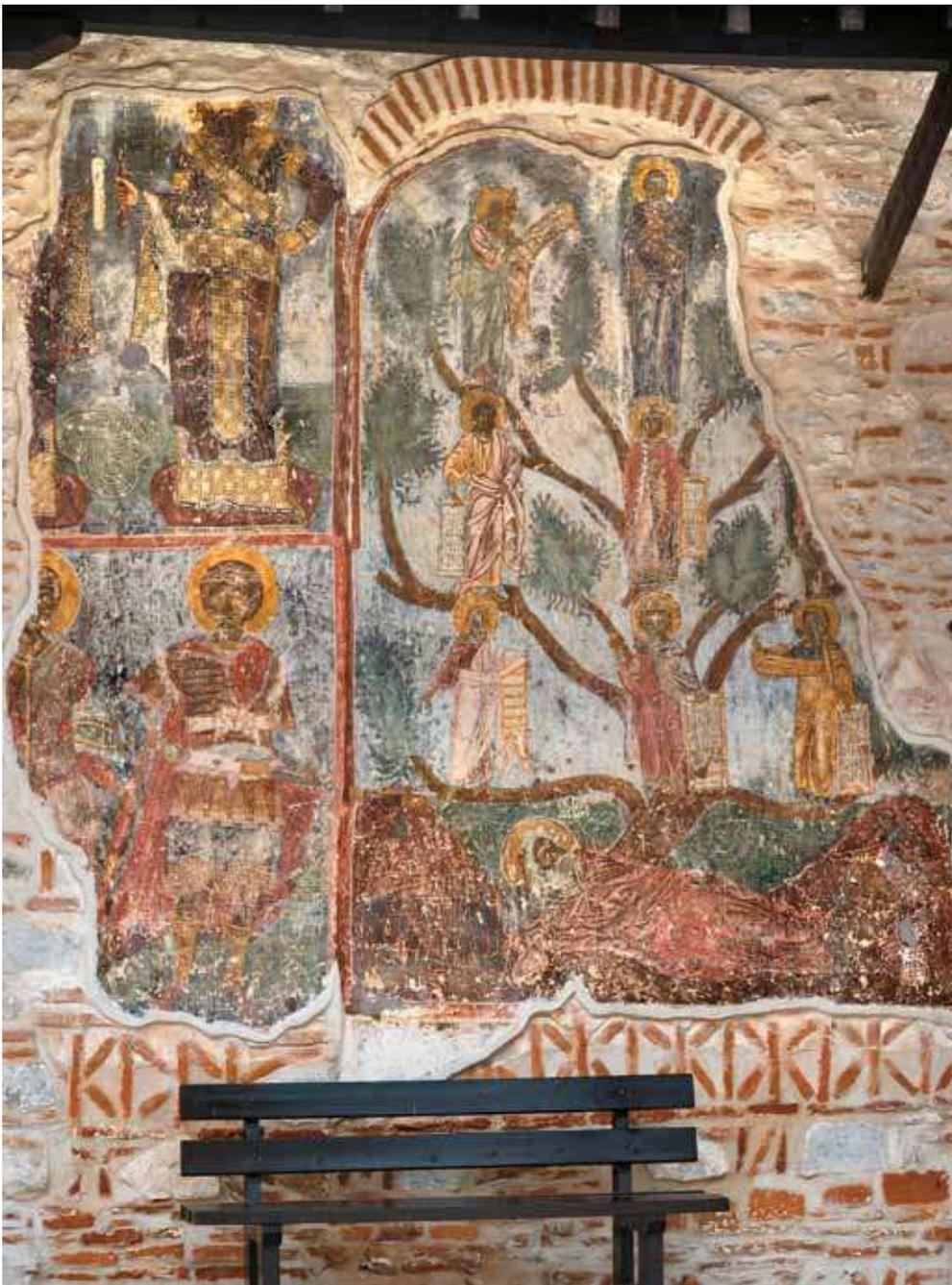


Fig. 104 | Emperors, saints, and the Tree of Jesse. Wall painting, late 13th century. Kastoria, church of the Virgin Mavriotissa, exterior of the south wall.



Fig. 105 | Kastoria, Koumbelidike. The east and south sides of the church.

Gabriel under the protection of the Virgin (fig. 107). A fairly corrupt inscription mentions the “Great King Asanes [Asen]” and his mother, and attests that in the mid-thirteenth century, when the city was under their rule, they wished to signal their royal presence to the citizens of Kastoria, praying to the saints for their victory.⁴⁴ They employed an established Byzantine imperial method, so resistant to the passage of time, of transmitting even seven centuries later not only historical information and artistic intensity but also ideological messages. To this day the painting eloquently communicates how pious royal donors understood their position between divine omnipotence—the towering archangels—and the people they ruled for a time, the masses that encountered them daily on their way to church.

The decoration of this same church with wall paintings closely related in style to painting in Ohrid, the region’s metropolitan center, was done in 1359/60 with a donation by an ecclesiastic, a monk named Daniel. The dedicatory inscription mentions the rule in the region by the brother of the great Serbian leader Stefan Dušan (1308–55), Symeon Uroš Palaiologos, son of Stephen Uroš and the Byzantine Maria Palaiologina.⁴⁵ This was a time of political instability and successive changes following the collapse of Byzantine rule in western Macedonia, Thessaly, and Epiros. In the city of Kastoria the rule of the Serbs was followed by that of the Serbians’ Albanian ally, Andreas Mouzakes (Muzaka), ruler of Berat.⁴⁶ According to inscriptional testimony, Mouzakes’ sons, Theodore and Stoias, between whom their

father had distributed his lands in the greater region of Epiros and Macedonia, built the church of Hagios Athanasios in Kastoria and adorned it with wall paintings.⁴⁷ These introduce a new style and new repertoire of subjects that we encounter during the same period in the regions of Prespes and Koritsa (Korçë), near Kastoria; their models, however, go back to monuments in the artistic center of Thessalonike. The saints, who pray to Christ and the Virgin, are dressed in impressive regal attire and tall hats, like great archons (fig. 108). This new iconography was widely disseminated in the region during the centuries that followed, and was connected with the theological teachings of Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessalonike (1347) and Orthodox saint. Palamas, a fervent supporter of Hesychasm,



Fig. 106 | Holy Trinity. Wall painting, 1270–80. Kastoria, Koumbelidike, esonarthex.



Fig. 107 | The Bulgarian king Michael Asen and his mother, the Byzantine Irene Komnene, supplicating the archangel Michael. Wall painting, mid 13th century. Kastoria, church of Taxiarches Metropoleos, exterior wall of the narthex.

a spiritual movement that fell within a broad context of political, religious, and social disputes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was already venerated as a saint in Kastoria by the mid-fourteenth century.⁴⁸ It is obvious that the donors of the church of Hagios Athanasios, the Albanian archons and the bishop Gabriel mentioned in the church's inscription, were connected with erudite circles in Thessalonike, the second-greatest city in the empire after Constantinople and the one in which Palamas was primarily active. In Kastoria, for example in the Three Saints church built in 1401 by the high-ranking nobleman Theophilos Pankrates, it is apparent from the language of the donor's inscription, the church's other inscriptions, and the iconographic program that the founder was well aware of contemporary ecclesiastical developments such as the veneration of Gregory Palamas.⁴⁹

During the period between the construction of these two churches, the city fell under Ottoman rule. The example lends force to the more general finding that the change in overlords does not seem to have influenced the religious life of many Byzantine cities, since the building and fresco painting of Christian churches continued unabated. The new conditions of political stability in the region appear to have provided new impetus to the city's economic and social life, for only a century later Kastoria was among the major cities in the Balkans, while in the sixteenth century it was one of eleven cities in the same geographic area with a ninety to one hundred percent Christian population.⁵⁰

Not only in Kastoria but throughout Macedonia, Byzantine art in its ecumenical Orthodoxy appeared indifferent to historical circumstances and was uninfluenced by the Ottoman

conquest. Furthermore, from the late fifteenth century, when the Ottoman presence in the region was stabilized, the opening of roads favored artistic creation in the city of Kastoria and revived its ties with more northerly Balkan regions. Thus, in late fifteenth century a new artistic movement, probably created by local workshops, came to predominate. Faithfully following Byzantine tradition from an iconographic and technical standpoint, it was distinguished by its urban character, with its wealth of learned Greek inscriptions, its studied organization and decoration, the luxuriousness of its depicted clothing, and its obvious familiarity with western European means of artistic expression. This important painting workshop executed the frescos in at least five of the city's monuments between the late fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth, and moved

with ease into neighboring regions—on the borders of the archbishopric of Ohrid—as far as Bulgaria.⁵¹ It is interesting that in all its works in Kastoria, despite the fact that the painters' names are not mentioned, their patrons are always identified—laypersons, monks, and priests.⁵²

As we have seen, from as early as the tenth century and continuing down to the fifteenth, Kastorian society included a great number of individuals in a position to exhibit their generosity and enhance their stature by commissioning works of art. The city managed not only to attract artists but even to maintain its own artistic workshops, both in times of war, famine, or pillaging of the hinterland, when it was compelled to withdraw behind its walls, and in more peaceful periods when it flourished and was in communication with the major cities of the Balkans, the Adriatic, and Italy.

In the twelfth century Kastoria's Byzantine art attained a splendor equal to that of the capital under the imperial family of the Komnenoi. Later, with the break-up or dissolution of the empire, it was forced to fall back on its traditions and create "local schools," following a gradual course of popularization. What is impressive is the way art continued to function. Tastes and uses which had once been monopolized by

lords or rulers spread to different social classes. From the literary inscriptions accompanying the aristocratic paintings sponsored by the wealthy Theodore Lemniotes family in the twelfth century to the simple legend "through subscription, labor, and expense" on a more provincial work funded by the nun Eupraxia in the late fifteenth century, we discern an impressive unity in artistic forms and the repetition of Byzantine practices.⁵³ Thanks to the city's large number of preserved churches, founders' portraits, and inscriptions, it is possible to follow an admirable continuity in customs and lifestyles even down to the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ The inhabitants of this small urban center continued to read the same prayers, recognize the faces of the same saints, seek elegant attire, speak and write the Greek language of the Byzantine Empire, build churches, and commission icons and wall paintings from the best artists of their city or other remote areas. These latter, works of religious art, the most brilliant and representative art of the major cities of the Byzantine Empire, were costly as well as pious dedications by the small society of Kastoria. At the same time they emerge through their artistic value and the testimony of their inscriptions as a vibrant, reliable, and usable piece in the cultural

history of the city. Above all they show that from the Byzantine age on Kastoria provided an erudite, Christian, and Greek-speaking environment with access to cultural tools with which to express one's worldview in forms resistant to time.



Fig. 108 | Saints Nicholas of Vounena (Saint Nicholas "the New") and Alexander of Pydna, detail of the "Royal Deësis." Wall painting, 14th century. Kastoria, church of Hagios Athanasios tou Mouzake, north wall.

- ¹ For artistic patronage in Byzantium, see Cormack 1989; Dimitropoulou 2010.
- ² See Brubaker 1986; Albani 1996, 838–39.
- ³ For the Byzantine city, see Concina 2003; Bouras 2002.
- ⁴ For the fur industry in Kastoria, see Deslondes 1997.
- ⁵ Orlandos 1938; Moutsopoulos 1992; Albani 1996.
- ⁶ Albani 1996, 838–39; Drakopoulou 1997.
- ⁷ http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/1/gh151.jsp?obj_id=3401. For the icons in the Museum, see Tsigaridas 2002.
- ⁸ Anna Komnene 2001, I, 169.
- ⁹ Prokopios 1964, IV, 112.
- ¹⁰ See Cameron 1985, 84–112.
- ¹¹ For the dating of Kastoria's walls, see Orlandos 1938, 6; Moutsopoulos 1974, 429.
- ¹² For cities of the Justinian age, see Foss 2002; Saradi 2006; and Saradi 2008.
- ¹³ Hammond 1972b, 110–14.
- ¹⁴ Albani 1996, 838.
- ¹⁵ See Tsolakis 2006, 447.
- ¹⁶ Dimitriadis 1973, 163–82.
- ¹⁷ Albani 1996, 839. See also Panayotidi 1989.
- ¹⁸ Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985, 29.
- ¹⁹ Malmquist 1979; Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985, 22–49.
- ²⁰ Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985, 6–21.
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- ²² Sisiu 2007.
- ²³ Gelzer 1902; Péchayre 1936.
- ²⁴ Ostrogorsky 1971; Angold 1984.
- ²⁵ Tsigaridas 1988; Drakopoulou 1997, 27–56.
- ²⁶ Malmquist 1979; Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985, 22–49; Panayotidi 2006.
- ²⁷ Djurić 1993; Sinkević 2000.
- ²⁸ Drakopoulou 1997, 41–52.
- ²⁹ Drakopoulou and Loukaki 1989.
- ³⁰ Angold 1984, 241.
- ³¹ Jaubert 1975, 291.
- ³² Molho and Mevorah 1938, 11–12.
- ³³ Thiriet 1975, 59.
- ³⁴ Oikonomides 1996.
- ³⁵ Avramea 2002.
- ³⁶ Tsigaridas 1992; Drakopoulou 1997, 156–58.
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- ⁴⁰ Rallis and Potlis 1855, 403–6, 430–36.
- ⁴¹ Bogevska 2012.
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- ⁴⁵ Nicol 1984, 131ff.
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- ⁴⁷ Djurić 1975; Pelekanides and Chatzidakis 1985, 106–19.
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- ⁴⁹ Drakopoulou 1997, 123–24; Sisiu 2011.
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- ⁵² Drakopoulou 1997, 130–33.
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