Nektarios Terpos and the iconographic programme of Ardenica Monastery[1]

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This article demonstrates the link between Nektarios Terpos and the decorative programme of Ardenica Monastery, Myzeqe, central Albania. An early eighteenth-century preacher against Islam and conversion to Islam, Terpos emphasized the importance of undergoing suffering, and even death by martyrdom, in the conviction that suffering leads to salvation and glorification, while conversion to Islam to damnation. Terpos was abbot of Ardenica Monastery. The analysis of its decorative programme, which emphasizes salvation and glorification through suffering and passion, in conjunction with the writings of Nektarios Terpos, concludes that he must have been the mastermind behind the inception of the decorative programme of the katholikon.

Keywords: Post-Byzantine painting; conversion to Islam; Albania; Nektarios Terpos; Myzeqe; Mouzakia; Ottoman studies; Ottoman domestic interreligious affairs; Ardenica Monastery.

Introduction

Questions pertaining to the ideological orientation of post-Byzantine art remain highly controversial for a number of reasons. First, because, in the past, such matters were deceptively upheld as self-evident truths in the service of political agendas which were set out in advance of research on post-Byzantine art-historical material.[2] Second, because, especially in pre-war Balkan scholarship, artistic problems and phenomena

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2   For such theories, their ideologemes and critiques see M. Garidis, *La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450–1600) et dans les pays sous domination etrangère* (Athens 1989) 16–20.

were separated from their historical context and were studied in light of national ideology in an attempt to construct the alleged 'national' character of post-Byzantine painting.[3] Such constructs are profoundly both methodologically problematic and research-distorting. However, despite the controversial nature of the ideological orientation of art, as I shall show below, one should not summarily discredit the matter, provided that such questions are investigated in art-historical terms within their contemporary contexts.

Byzantine and post-Byzantine art is the product of a civilization whose different expressions pre-existed the construction of national identity and, even after its appearance, remained largely independent. In the border areas of states or ecclesiastical territories founded on ethnic criteria, and after political intervention in artistic causes, it is still possible to trace some iconographic particularities, as in the art of the Byzantine tradition. Yet even these cannot be considered as 'national' characteristics, as the aesthetic principles of art are not dependent upon national reasoning. Orthodox art, quasi-marginal as it was in the Ottoman Empire, depended in different ways and places on private initiatives or the initiatives of the Church, itself subject to the central administration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Relationships of many kinds inevitably developed among the provinces under Ottoman domination. The alleged 'national' particularities, therefore, were but local traditions that were generated by the coupling of certain painters with particular aesthetic or artistic trends, or simply by the use of different models.[4]

In this article I am building on previous work[5] on one of these local traditions generated by the influence of a patron with particular theological views and aesthetics over a group of artists who worked on the decorative programme of Ardenica Monastery, Kolonja, Lushnja, in the area of Myzeqe (Greek Μουζακιά) in central-southern Albania. More specifically, while in the previous article I demonstrated the necessity for the promotion of a militant spirit in the decorative programme of Ardenica Monastery on account of the region's conversion to Islam in the course of the eighteenth century and demonstrated how this programme addressed this need, in this article I am arguing that this militant spirit in the monastery's central church

3   For the case of Bulgaria see B. Filov, *L'art bulgare* (Berne 1919); and N. Mavrodinov, *Starobulgarskata Zivopis* (Sofia 1946). For Serbia see V. Petković, 'Srpski spomenici XVI–XVIII veka', *Starinar* 6 (1914) 165–203; and V. Petković, *La peinture serbe du Moyen Age*, 2 vols (Belgrade 1930–4). For the case of Romania see N. Iorga, G. Bals, *Histoire de l'art roumain* (Paris 1928) and I. D. Stefanescu, *L'évolution de la peinture religieuse en Bucovine et en Moldavie depuis les origines jusqu'au XIX siècle* (Paris 1928). For Greece see N. Kalogeropoulos, *Μεταβυζαντινή και νεοελληνική τέχνη* (Athens 1926).
4   For these theories and their critics see Garidis, *La peinture*, 16–20.
5   K. Giakoumis, 'Preparing for martyrdom: Ardenica Monastery's (Myzeqe) decorative programme', *Art Studies Quarterly* 3 (2016) 10–21.

(frescoes, icons, ceramics and wood carvings) should be attributed to the influence of Nektarios Terpos (Albanian: Nektar Terpo), a fiery preacher from Moschopolis (Albanian: Voskopoja) during the first four decades of the eighteenth century, preaching suffering and martyrdom as means of salvation and glorification. To argue this, in the first part I shall outline the art-historical evidence provided by the given artworks viewed through an iconological method of enquiry. Finally, in the second part, I will link previous observations with the figure of the mastermind who, directly or indirectly (i.e. through his successors), was behind the artworks under consideration: the priest-monk Nektarios Terpos, by contextualizing his writings after analysing them by means of classical hermeneutics.

The circumstances

In the eighteenth century, conversion to Islam in the region increased and a large number of inhabitants of Labëri, Filiates, Pogon and Kurvelesh converted.[6] On 25 December 1724 the scholar-monk Nektarios Terpos, the abbot of Ardenica, travelled to the village of Dragot, Elbasan, to celebrate the Christmas liturgy. Upon entering the village church, he found the parish priest and around a hundred and twenty women, but only fifteen men. He learned that the other men had all converted to Islam.[7] In 1739, twenty-five villages in Thesprotia were forced to convert to Islam *en masse*.[8] It has also been noted that conversions intensified after the wars of Russia with the Porte (1710-11, 1768–74, 1787–92, 1806–12).[9] There is no thorough study of conversion to Islam in the region of Myzeqe based on demographic data; hence, although we anticipate that the region followed the overall trend of the conversion to Islam in Albania, what is known for the region is that by 1833 a significant portion of Myzeqe's territory was already Islamized, though the majority of the population were Orthodox Christian.[10]

There are three main reasons for the spread of Islam throughout Albania and a part of Epiros. The first was social and political: since the Ottomans treated Christians with

6   K. Giakoumis, 'The Monasteries of Jorgucat and Vanishtë in Dropull and of Spelaio in Lunxhëri as Monuments and Institutions During the Ottoman Period in Albania (16th–19th Centuries)', Ph.D. thesis, Birmingham 2002, II, 522–5. Accessible via: http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.390688.

7   N. Terpos, *Βιβλιάριον καλούμενον Πίστις* (Venice 1732) 225; cf. A. Glavinas, Ἡ συμβολή του Μοσχοπολίτη ιερομονάχου Νεκταρίου Τέρπου στην ανάσχεση των εξισλαμισμών', *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο 'ΜΟΣΧΟΠΟΛΙΣ', Θεσσαλονίκη 31 Οκτωβρίου – 1 Νοεμβρίου 1996* (Thessaloniki 1999) 31–2.

8   L. Vranousis and V. Sphyroeras, 'Οργάνωση της τουρκικής διοικήσεως και φορολογία', in M. V. Sakellariou (ed.), *Ήπειρος. 4000 χρόνια ελληνικής ιστορίας και πολιτισμού* (Athens 1997) 252a.

9   A. Glavinas, Ἡ Εκκλησία στην Ήπειρο την εποχή της Τουρκοκρατίας (1430–1913)', *Ηπειρωτικό Ημερολόγιο* 19 (1998) 243–4.

10   K. Thesprotos and A. Psalidas, *Γεωγραφία Αλβανίας και Ηπείρου* (Ιωάννινα 1964) 8–33.

a certain distrust, conversions were favoured in order for Christians to acquire and retain official positions and privileges,[11] The second was economic: conversion to Islam was frequently accompanied by freedom from exploitation, arbitrary justice, overwhelming income tax and the payment of the poll tax. Conversion was also a means of amassing wealth.[12] Finally, it has been suggested that Albanians were well known for their indifference to religion. In the Middle Ages, for example, they converted effortlessly from Orthodoxy to Catholicism and vice versa, and during the Ottoman domination from either of these two confessions to Islam. Heresies such as Arianism and Bogomilism were also widespread in the country.[13] Furthermore, the illiteracy of the clergy[14] and the attendant poverty of the church must have played a role in conversion to Islam. Aravantinos has recorded the manner in which the Labs (the inhabitants of Labëri; in Greek: Λιάπηδες) were converted. Apparently, at a time of great famine, the bishop of Delvina and Himarra stubbornly refused to permit the semi-nomadic Labs to break the fast and consume milk. Their request to do so was countered by threats of interminable hell.[15] Fear of the possible consequences of the Ottoman occupation constituted another reason why disappointed and scared Christian populations living in regions formerly under Venetian rule and recently under Ottoman occupation felt impelled to convert. In his work on Venice and Albania, Arno states that 'by 1690 Vlora had not only been placed under firm control by the

11 On the social reasons for conversion to Islam, see A. Vakalopoulos, 'Traits communs du développement économique et social des peuples balkaniques et sud–est européen à l'époque ottomane', *Balkan Studies* 16 (1975) 154–75; M. Kiel, 'Remarks on the administration of the poll tax (cizye) in the Ottoman Balkans and value of poll tax registers (cizye defterleri) for demographic research', *Études Balkaniques* 4 (1990) 89; S. Skendi, 'Religion in Albania during the Ottoman Rule', *Südost–Forschungen* 15 (1956) 320; S. Skendi, 'The *millet* system and its contribution to the blurring of Orthodox national identity in Albania', in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*, I (The Central Lands) (New York and London 1982) 248; S. Pulaha, 'Shpronësimi i klasës feudale shqiptare nga toka dhe rrugët e integrimit të një pjese të saj në klasën feudale osmane në shek. XV (L'expropriation des domaines de la classe féodale albanaise et l'intégration d'une partie de celle–ci dans la classe féodale ottomane au XVe siècle)', *Studime Historike* 3 (1982) 163–4; Glavinas, 'Ἡ Ἐκκλησία στην Ἤπειρο', 242–3.

12 Skendi, 'Religion', 319–20; I. Zamputi, S. Naçi, Z. Shkodra, *Burime të zgjedhura për historinë e Shqipërisë: Shqipëria nën sundimin feudal–ushtarak otoman (1506–1839)*, III (Tirana 1961), 55–6, 134, 274–89; N. Papadopoulos, *Ἡ Δρόπολις της Βορείου Ηπείρου κατά την Τουρκοκρατίαν (1430–1913)* (Athens 1976) 47; Skendi, 'The *millet*', 248.

13 M. Kiel, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania 1385–1912* (Istanbul 1990) 17; S. Rizaj, 'The Islamization of the Albanians during the XV–th and XVI–th centuries', *Studia Albanica* 2 (1985); E. Çela, 'Dëshmi të besimit të cekët fetar në disa krahina të Shqipërisë së veriut e të mesme nën dritën e dokumenteve të shek. XVII', *Studime Historike* 2 (1987) 153–65; E. Çela, 'Autorë të huaj mbi mendësinë dhe mungesën e fanatizmit fetar tek Shqiptarët (shek. XVIII–fillimi i shek. XX)', *Studime Historike* 2 (1988) 123–34; Kiel, 'Remarks on the administration of the poll tax', 89.

14 Skendi, 'Religion', 320; Skendi, 'The *millet*', 248. Clerical illiteracy was a general phenomenon. See, for example, the comment by the western traveller Pococke in 1738 with regard to the clergy in Cyprus, cited in K. Çiçek, *Zimmis (non–Muslims) of Cyprus in the Sharia Court: 1110/39 A.H. / 1698–1726 A.D.*, Ph.D. thesis, Birmingham 1992, 212.

15 P. Aravantinos, *Χρονογραφία της Ηπείρου*, I (Athens 1856) 244–5 and n. 1.

Ottoman sultans, but also a strong and steady wave of conversion to Islam had already been observed'.[16]

It was precisely at the peak of this conversion to Islam that a certain militant expression of resistance against it marked the appearance and veneration of neomartyrs during Ottoman domination. The neomartyrs were Christian converts who, having chosen to apostatize from Islam, faced the death penalty imposed by Islamic Law.[17] In Epiros and Albania there were at least eighteen neomartyrs (two in the sixteenth century, two in the seventeenth, nine in the eighteenth and five in the nineteenth), which indicates the pace of conversion to Islam (Table 1).[18]

Emphasis must be given to the role of clergymen such as Terpos and Saint Kosmas the Aetolian[19] in restricting the conversion to Islam. To a certain degree, these men, through the testimony of their sacrifice, helped to contain proselytism to Islam. Having outlined how one is to look at the ideological orientation of post-Byzantine art and the pace of conversion to Islam into the late nineteenth century, in the following section we shall move to our specific case-study. Ardenica Monastery must have been instrumental in containing conversion to Islam, not only because it provided a base for preachers such as Terpos and a refuge for Saint Kosmas' disciples in times of turmoil after his death,[20] but also because its decorative programme, as manifested in its ceramic

16 E. Arno, 'Venezia e l'Albania', *Rassegna Italiana* XIV/211 (December 1935) 12.

17 On the neomartyrs in general see C. Patrinelis, 'Μία ανέκδοτη πηγή για τον άγνωστο νεομάρτυρα Γεώργιο (1437)', *Ορθόδοξος Παρουσία* 1 (1964) 65–74; I. Anastasiou, 'Σχεδίασμα περί των νεομαρτύρων', *ΜΝΗΜΗ 1821* (Thessaloniki 1971) 7–61; I. Theocharidis and D. Loules, 'Οι νεομάρτυρες στην ελληνική ιστορία (1453–1821)', *Δωδώνη* 17/1 (1988) 135–50; M. Tritos, 'Γενικά περί των νεομαρτύρων', *Ηπειρωτικό Ημερολόγιο* 13 (1991) 324–36, where analytical citations of earlier literature; I. Theocharidis, 'Οι νεομάρτυρες στην ελληνική ιστορία (1453–1821) (supplement)', *Δωδώνη* 20/1 (1991) 57–68; P. Iliou, 'Πόθος μαρτυρίου', *Τα Ιστορικά* 12/23 (1995) 267–84. Cf. C. MacFarlane, *Turkey and its Destiny* (Philadelphia 1850) 55–6; I. Delehaye, 'Greek neomartyrs', *The Constructive Quarterly* 9 (1921) 701–12; F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, II (Oxford 1929) 452–9; S. Salaville, 'Pour un répertoire des néo-saints de l'église orientale,' *Byzantion* 20 (1950) 223–37; G. Arnakis–Georgiadis, 'The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire', *Journal of Modern History* 24/3 (September 1952) 235–51; S. Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley 1971) 360–62; R. Clogg, 'A little–known Orthodox neo–martyr, Athanasios of Smyrna (1819)', *Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1973) 28–36; K. Karpat, 'The situation of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire', *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 4/2 (1983) 259–66; N. Russell, 'Neomartyrs of the Greek calendar', *Sobornost* 5/1 (1983) 36–62; K. Karpat, 'Ottoman views and policies towards the Orthodox Christian Church', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31/1–2 (1986) 131–55; I. Theocharidis and D. Loules, 'The neomartyrs in Greek history, 1453–1821', *Études Balkaniques* 25/3 (1989) 78–86; E. Zachariadou, 'The neomartyrs' message', *Δελτίο του Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* 8 1990–1) 51–63; L. Kamperidis, 'Neomartyrs', in G. Speake (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, II (London and Chicago 2000) 1139ii–1140ii; K. Gjakumis, 'Paraqitija e parë në ikonografi e dëshmorit të ri Nikollës nga Mecova: tregues të orientimit ideologjik të pikturës në zonën e Gjirokastrës (1634–1653)', *Tempulli: Revistë Periodike Kulturore* 3 (2001) 47–80.

18 Glavinas, 'Ἡ Ἐκκλησία στην Ἤπειρο', 248–9.

19 From the rich literature regarding Saint Kosmas the Aetolian and his contribution, see G. Giakoumis, *Ο Άγιος Κοσμάς και το μοναστήρι στο Κολικόνταςι* (Marousi 1996); Glavinas, 'Ἡ Ἐκκλησία στην Ἤπειρο', 252–4.

20 Ibid.

Table 1: Neomartyrs of the Ottoman period in Epiros and Albania.

Name of neomartyr	Place of origin	Date of martyrdom
Jacob the Arvanite	Region of Korçë	1 Nov. 1519
John	Terrovo, Ioannina	18 Apr. 1526
Nikolaos	Metsovo	17 May 1617
Christos	Preveza	15/16 Apr. 1669
Auxentios	Vella	25 Jan. 1720
Nikodemos	Elbasan	11 Jul. 1722
Anastasios the furrier	Village of Hagios Vlasios, Igoumenitsa	8 Jul. 1743
Christos the Arvanite gardener	'Across the River Vjosa'	12 Feb. 1748
Anastasios	Paramythia	18 Nov. 1750
Panagiotis	Delvinë	24 Jun. 1767
Parthenios, bishop of Radovisdion, Arta	–	12 Jan. 1777
Kosmas the Aetolian	Megalo Dendro, Aetolia	24 Aug. 1779
Zacharias	Arta	20 Jan. 1782
Niketas	Corfu	4 Apr. 1808
Demetrios	Samarina	1808
John	Konitsa	23 Sept. 1814
Paul, monk of Konstamonitou Monastery	Ioannina	1822
George	Ioannina	17 Jan. 1838

decoration, wall paintings, icons and wood carvings, aimed at preparing the faithful for redemption, glorification and resurrection through suffering, sacrifice and martyrdom.

The 'militant spirit' in Ardenica Monastery's artworks: the art-historical evidence

Situated on the highest hill among a group of knolls, lying in the middle of the large valley of Myzeqe (central Albania), Ardenica Monastery justifies its reputation as 'the Castle of Myzeqe'. The Sacred Monastery of Ardenica is dedicated to the Nativity of the All-Holy Theotokos (8 September). The monastery has always been an important spiritual, cultural and historical centre for the region and beyond. This was due, among other reasons, to its proximity to the southern axis of the important road artery of the Via Egnatia, whose traces were still in use up to the beginning of the twentieth century.[21]

Legend has it that the original nucleus of the monastery, the Church of the Holy Trinity, dates back to the tenth century. According to certain local traditions the monastery was founded in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Other traditions, however, maintain that George Castriota Scanderbeg was crowned there in 26 April 1451 as 'King of Epirots and Albanians,'[22] or that he was married there.[23] The *katholikon* (central church) of the

21 For the southern branch of the Via Egnatia see H. Ceka, 'Dega Jugore e Rrugës Egnatia', *Monumentet* 2 (1971) 25–32; A. Baçe, 'Rrugët Shqiptare në Mesjetë', *Monumentet* 1 (1984) 59–65; cf. R. Gega, 'Arkitektura dhe Restaurimet në Manastirin 'Fjetja e Shën Mërisië' në Ardenicë', *Monumentet* 1 (1988) 141; S. Mihalçka, 'Piktura e Ardenicës', *Monumentet* 48 (2006) 86–101 (87).

22 M. Tritos, 'Νεκτάριος Τέρπος, ο μοσχοπολίτης διδάσκαλος του γένους', *Ηπειρωτικό Ημερολόγιο* 20 (1999) 228–9, n. 7.

23 Bardhyli, 'Historia e Bibliotekave në Shqipëri', *Ylli i Dritës* 1 (1938), 162–9; N. Kule, *Rrefimët e Ardenicës* (Tirana 1999) 31–43; G. Lorenzoni, 'Në Myzeqe', trans. Eqrem Çabej, *Myzeqeja* 4 (May 2006) 28–9; S. Sinani, *Kodikët Kronografike të Shqipërisë. Shkrime dhe Dorëshkrime prej Rilindjes Europiane deri në Rilindjen Kombëtare* (Tirana 2014) 87.

Nativity of the Virgin was rebuilt between 1730 and 1743.[24] Yet, apart from unreliable oral traditions, there is some concrete historical and material evidence that the monastery existed before 1741.[25] First, a 1690 icon of the Archangel Michael from Ardenica Monastery bears an inscription commemorating the name of hieromonk Symeon, abbot of the very monastery.[26] Second, in 29 June 1718 the monastery of Ardenica received a donation of three hundred *akçe*, as shown in a note kept in the register of the Moschopolis tailors' guild.[27] Thirdly, writing shortly before or after 1720, the Moschopolitan priest-monk and scholar Terpos introduces himself as the abbot of Ardenica Monastery.[28] Furthermore, two other inscriptions on monastic buildings or icons belonging to the monastery bear the dates 1730[29] and 1731,[30] while one of the extant oil-lamps of the monastery bears the date 1725 and states that it is the property of Ardenica Monastery.[31] In addition, other inscriptions on the monastery's bells bear the dates 1708 and 1738.[32] It is therefore beyond doubt that the monastery existed well before the eighteenth century, while legends placing its original nucleus in the late Byzantine period are reinforced by Reshat Gega's dating of Ardenica's Holy Trinity chapel to the thirteenth to fourteenth century on the grounds of anthropological analysis of the skeletons found outside the east wall of the chapel and of constructional data presenting similarities with the thirteenth- to fourteenth-century church of the Transfiguration at Mborjë[33] and also by the so-called 'Ardenica Codex' dating from the twelfth to thirteenth century.[34]

24 Cf. T. Popa, *Mbishkrime të kishave në Shqipëri*, ed. N. Nepravishta and K. Gjakumis (Tirana 1998) 96–7 (No. 115).

25 This is the date of the firman granting permission to the peasants of Ardenica to rebuild their monastery; K. Giakoumis and D. Egro, 'Ottoman pragmatism in domestic inter–religious affairs: the legal framework of church construction in the Ottoman Empire and the 1741 firman of Ardenica Monastery', *Ηπειρωτικά Χρονικά* 44 (2010) 103–5; K. Giakoumis, 'Dialectics of pragmatism in Ottoman domestic interreligious affairs. Reflections on the Ottoman legal framework of church confiscation and construction and a 1741 firman for Ardenica Monastery', *Balkan Studies* 47 (2008–12) 110–13.

26 S. Forestier (ed.), *Trésors d'art albanais. Icônes byzantines et post–byzantines du XIIe au XIXe siècle* (Nice 1983) No. 45; K. Nasllazi, 'Mbi veprimtarinë artistike ikonografike të piktorit të fundit të shek. XVII murgut Simon i Ardenicës', *Monumentet* 47 (2005) 143–52; E. Drakopoulou, '39. The Archangel Michael', in A. Tourta, *Icons from the Orthodox Communities of Albania. Collection of the National Museum of Medieval Art, Korçë* (Thessaloniki 2006) 118–19. Symeon was erroneously referred to as Simon in the first two editions and was mistakenly reported as a painter.

27 The register is kept in the Central Archives of the State, Tirana. The relevant note reads: + Καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ἄνωθεν χίλλια τριακόσια τριάντα πέντε ἄσπρα ἐδώσαμεν εἰς τὴν / Παναγίαν Θ(εοτό)κον τῆς Ἀρδεβούτζας … ἄσπρα 300 / ἤγουν τριακόσια (Central Archives of the State, Tirana, F. 149, D. 2, f. 12v).

28 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 196; cited in Tritos, 'Τέρπος', 229 and n. 10.

29 This date was carved on a stone placed in the south wall of the monastery's kitchen: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 94 (No. 110); cf. Gega, 'Arkitektura', fig. 7 on p. 145, mistakenly read as 1770. This stone cannot be traced today.

30 This date appears in the famous inscription of the Theotokos Ἀρδεύουσα written in Albanian, Greek, Romanian and Latin by Nektarios Terpos: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 94–5 (No. 111).

31 Op. cit., 99 (No. 122).

32 A. Alexoudis, *Σύντομος ιστορική περιγραφή της Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Βελεγράδων και της υπό την πνευματικήν αυτής δικαιοδοσίαν υπαγομένης χώρας* (Corfu 1868) 74; Gega, 'Arkitektura', 157; Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 96 (No. 113). Unfortunately, these bells no longer exist in the monastery.

33 Gega, 'Arkitektura', 157.

34 Z. Simoni, 'Kodiku i 98të i Ardenicas', in S. Sinani et al. (eds), Kodikët e Shqipërisë (Tiranë 2003) 175–6.

Considering that the excavations that took place during recent restorations of the monastery did not reveal any evidence that the current *katholikon* was built on the foundations of another church,[35] one has to assume that the original nucleus of the monastery is actually the chapel of the Holy Trinity, which is situated on the highest spot of Ardenica's knoll.[36] Various inscriptions and other sources suggest that the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos, thanks to generous contributions from the merchants of Voskopoja[37] was built gradually from the 1730s to the 1770s.[38] The outcome was truly impressive:

35 Gega, 'Arkitektura'.

36 The building of new churches in old monasteries was not uncommon; see for instance the case Zograf monastery in Mount Athos: R. Gradeva, 'Ottoman policy towards Christian church buildings,' *Etudes Balkaniques* 4 (1994) 25.

37 For the contributions of merchants from Voskopoja, see Giakoumis and Egro, 'Pragmatism', 96, n. 87 and three other inscriptions on the icons of the *katholikon*'s iconostasis patronized by the guilds of haberdashers, grocers and coppersmiths: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 98–9 (No. 119–120). Such ties with the region around Voskopoja are also indicated in conjunction with the work of the monk Symeon of Ardenica for the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Vithkuq: see Giakoumis and Egro, 'Pragmatism', 97, n. 89. It is worth mentioning that merchants from Voskopoja conducting trade with Venice passed nearby the monastery, which, given that the area was densely forested until the 1940s, must have provided a sense of security. For the protective role of monasteries' sites in non–rational societies, see Giakoumis, 'The Monasteries', 325–7. Trade relations between Voskopoja and Venice can be traced in historical records from the end of the 17th century; this thriving trade lasted until 1761, after which date the trading focus of Voskopojar merchants appears to have totally switched to central Europe through the Balkan North: P. Kilipiris, 'Μοσχοπολίτες έμποροι στη Βενετία και στις χώρες της Αυστρουγγαρίας (18ος–19ος αιώνας)', in *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο «Μοσχόπολις» (Θεσσαλονίκη, 31 Οκτωβρίου – 1 Νοεμβρίου 1996)* (Thessaloniki 1999) 99–102; A. Koltsidas, 'Οι οικονομικές δραστηριότητες των Μοσχοπολιτών ως παράγοντας διαφωτιστικής και πολιτισμικής μετακένωσης στον Ελληνισμό', in *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο «Μοσχόπολις»*, 115–16 (the author moves the date of the switch from Venice to Austria–Hungary to 1774, yet, without providing any evidence, other than a 1761 report of the Venetian Consul in Durrës); for an insight into the trading posts of the network, see C. Papastathis, 'Από την αλληλογραφία Μοσχοπολιτών εμπόρων', in *Διεθνές Συμπόσιο «Μοσχόπολις»*, 191–6. As a matter of fact, trading relations between Venice and Voskopoja coincided with the dates of the gradual reconstruction of Ardenica monastery. For a more complete overview of Voskopoja, see A. Konstantakopoulou, *Η Ελληνική γλώσσα στα Βαλκάνια (1750–1850). Το Τετράγλωσσο Λεξικό του Δανιήλ Μοσχοπολίτη* (Ioannina 1988) 16–31; M. D. Peyfuss, *Die Druckerei von Moschopolis, 1731–1769. Buchdruck und Heiligenverehrung im Erzbistum Achrida* (Vienna 1996); and T. Kahl, 'Wurde in Moschopolis auch Bulgarisch gesprochen? Überlegungen zur Slawophonie im Südalbanien des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Probleme de filologie slavă* 15 (2008) 484–94.

38 The 18th–century architectural phases of the monastery's reconstruction can be observed through the help of inscriptions placed on monastic buildings and denoting the date of their construction: 1) 1730, date on the south wall of the monastery kitchen: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 94 (No. 110); cf. Gega, Arkitektura, fig. 7 on p. 145 and n. 30 above. 2) 1743, date of the inscription on the east wall of Ardenica's *katholikon*: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 96–7 (No. 115). 3) 1744, date of the inscription on the west wall of the *katholikon*'s naos, above the entrance: op. cit., 97–8 (No. 117). This must have been the progress of the *katholikon*'s construction at the time that abbot Antonios of Ardenica wrote the letter to 'all Christians': Giakoumis and Egro, 'Pragmatism', Appendix II. 4) 1754, date of an inscription carved on a stone placed in the first arch of the west colonnade: Popa, *Mbishkrime*, No. 128, 101. 5) 1777, date of the rebuilding of the monastery's main gate: op. cit., 106 (No. 145). 6) 1778, date of reconstruction of several monastic buildings, as shown in an inscription placed externally on the south wall of the Holy Trinity chapel: op. cit., 106–7 (No. 148).

suffice it to say that Ardenica's *katholikon* stands out as the oldest and most lavish among a series of impressive eighteenth-century monuments to be built in the region of Myzeqe.[39]

Around 10–19 November 1741, Sultan Mahmud I issued a firman permitting the repair of Ardenica Monastery.[40] Judging from the course of construction after 1741, this firman must have been used as a licence. If there were a prior firman granting a licence, the formulation of the 1741 letter would have been different and Ottoman bureaucracy would not have failed to mention it.

The *katholikon* of Ardenica Monastery is decorated with frescoes dating to 1744, i.e. a year after the construction of the *katholikon* was completed. They were painted by the brother painters Constantine and Athanasios from Korça, who were commissioned by merchants from Voskopoja. The *katholikon* bears four zones of frescoes, which generally follow the traditional structure of iconographic programmes. The lowest of these is taken up with full-length depictions of saints; the second register contains saints in medallions, the third depicts the Akathist Hymn and the fourth consists of scenes from the Christological cycle. Among the saints of the first zone, two observations are worth mentioning. First, the depiction of several military saints on the north wall (from East to West: St Demetrios, St Nestor, St Artemios and St James Intercisus[41]) and on the south wall (from East to West: St George, St Prokopios, St Theodore Tyron, St Theodore Stratelates and St Menas) without their military attire (Fig. 1). The saints are instead portrayed as martyrs, bearing lay clothes and the characteristic cross of martyrdom. Such is also the choice of patrons at the Skete of St Anne on Mount Athos, also painted by Constantine and Athanasios from Korça, which follows late Palaeologan and early post-Byzantine models dating from no later than the seventeenth century.[42]

39 For the 18th-century churches and monasteries in Myzeqe see P. Thomo, *Kishat pasbizantine në Shqiperinë e Jugut* (Tirana 1998) 206–34.

40 The sultan became involved in the process of repair at the Orthodox Christians' behest, either because after obtaining a first permit by local authorities they were being prevented from completing the task at hand, or as a matter of procedure: K. A. Leal, 'The Ottoman State and the Greek Orthodox of Istanbul: Sovereignty and Identity at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2003, 253–5. The sultan's order for an investigation for verification purposes was not unusual: cf. Gradeva, 'Ottoman policy', 24–5 and n. 63; Leal, 'Ottoman State', 252, 258–60 and 252 (n. 35). Nothing in the case of Ardenica's firman indicates that there was a prior ruling from a kadi.

41 St James the Intercisus (the dismembered) or the Persian (known in Greek as St Jacob the Persian); although the saint's vita in the *Synaxarion* (27 November) does not mention him as a military officer, he is often portrayed and quoted as such. See R. W. Corrie, '75. Icon with the Virgin and Child (front) and Saint James the Persian (back)', in H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixon (eds), *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era. A.D. 843–1261* (New York 1997) 127–9 (128); cf. M. L. Menendez, 'The leadership of the dead: notes towards a Weberian analysis of charisma in narratives of martyrdom', in D. Chalcraft, F. Howell, M. L. Menendez and H. Vera (eds), *Max Weber Matters: Interweaving Past and Present* (Furnham and Burlington 2008) 233.

42 G. Tsigaras, 'Οι ζωγράφοι Κωνσταντίνος και Αθανάσιος από την Κορυτσά. Το έργο τους στο Άγιον Όρος, 1752–1783'. PhD. diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1997, 199–205.

Fig. 1. (Colour online) *St George, St Prokopios, and St Theodore Tyron*, fresco by Constantine and Athanasios of Korça, 1744, south wall of *katholikon* of Ardenica Monastery. All photos in this article are © K. Giakoumis.

Second, the scene of St Tryphon[43] is not unlikely to be identified with a local martyr saint, St Tryphon of Sheqista, locally venerated in peasant-farmer settings, as is the well-known third-century saint of the same name who was martyred at Nicaea.[44]

The programme of Christological scenes is characterized by a remarkable reduction of the historical cycle in order for the Passion and Resurrection cycles to occupy almost the entire pictorial surface. This choice, as demonstrated below (Table 2), is unique among the studied monuments painted by the same artists, even in such ascetic settings as Mount Athos.[45]

All the icons of the iconostasis were probably made in 1744, together with the iconostasis itself. The icons bear the signature of the painter, Deacon Constantine of Shpat.[46] Below the Cross of the Lypera a little almond-like tondo icon represents a

43 The iconography of the saint is similar to the same subject encountered at the Skete of the Xenophontos Monastery on Mount Athos and follows late Palaeologan models: Tsigaras, 'Οι ζωγράφοι', 192–3 and Figs. 178a.

44 For this local saint, see Alexoudis, *Ιστορική περιγραφή*, 85–7, 113. For the Nicaenean saint, cf. N. Kastrinakis, 'Nicaea (Byzantium), Cult of St. Tryphon', *Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Asia Minor*: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=8511>, accessed 6 August 2016.

45 Full analysis of this in Giakoumis, 'Preparing for martyrdom'. The iconographic programme of the four Athonite monuments in Tsigaras, 'Οι ζωγράφοι', 33–42.

46 Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 96 (No. 114), 98 (No. 119); 98–9 (No. 120).

Table 2: Proportions of representation of different iconographic cycles in Ardenica Monastery's *katholikon* compared with those of other monuments painted by the same artists. The dominance of the Passion and, to a lesser extent, of the Resurrection cycle is evident.

		Ardenica Monastery	Philotheou Monastery	Kyriakon of St Anne's Skete	Kyriakon of Xenophontos Skete	Xeropotamou Monastery
1	Mariological Scene	6.90%	7.14%	0.00%	9.09%	1.89%
2	Christological Historical Cycle	10.34%	50.00%	50.00%	24.24%	60.38%
3	Christological Passion Cycle	58.62%	26.79%	10.00%	39.39%	20.75%
4	Paschal Cycle	24.14%	16.07%	40.00%	27.27%	16.98%

Fig. 2. (Colour online) Constantine Hierodeacon from Shpat, *Tondo-icon of the pelican* on the iconostasis, 1744, tempera on wood and gold leaf.

pelican on the left of the painting, dominating the vertical axis of the pictorial space, piercing her right flank with her beak to feed her three chicks, who open their beaks to drink from the blood spilt from the wound (Fig. 2). Using iconological methods of interpretation, I have demonstrated that the association of the placing of the icon with relevant texts points to a powerful symbolism of sacrifice and resurrection.[47] The same variant of the pelican's story appears twice in wood carvings of the Ardenica Monastery. First, on the ambo, where a pelican is bitten by a serpent (Fig. 3). Second, on a panel of a *proskynetarion*, where narrative elements are observed: on the lower part of

47 Giakoumis, 'Preparing for martyrdom'.

Fig. 3. (Colour online) *Pelican bitten by a serpent* on the ambo, c. 1744, painted wood and gold leaf.

the panel an adult pelican with open wings appears to be tenderly caressing a dead chick lying on the ground. Above this, the now resurrected young chick is flying up to the skies with open wings. On the upper part of the panel, two lions in profile face each other holding a red, green and gilded crown with their front left foot. The crown's lower part is painted in red to demonstrate that it is lined with velvet. The two lions crown the young pelican chick which emerges underneath floral decorations (Fig. 4). The lion here symbolizes Christ, 'the lion from the tribe of Judah' (Rev. 5:5). According to Hall, in 'medieval bestiaries the lion symbolizes the Resurrection because the cubs are born dead and only come to life on the third day when their father breathes on them.'[48]

The dominance of the crown in the wood carvings, with its dual symbolism of passion and redemption or glorification, befits the overall messages conveyed through other artistic media. It can be found in the iconostasis, as well as in other wood carvings of the *katholikon*, like the bishop's throne (Fig. 5), the canopy of the altar (Fig. 6) and a *proskynetarion*.[49] In Christian iconography the crown is a symbol of sovereignty, power, victory and the attainment of honours. The Christian martyr's crown signifies both the passion, reminiscent of Christ's crown of thorns,[50] and victory over death,[51] also manifested in various ways and artistic media detailed above.

48 J. Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (Boulder, CO 1996) 33–4 (34).
49 For the variants of the theme, see Giakoumis, 'Preparing for martyrdom'.
50 L. Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary* (Westport, CO and London 1996) 57–8.
51 Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary*, 116–17 (116).

Fig. 4. (Colour online) *The story of the pelican* on front panel of Proskynetarion, c. 1744, painted wood and gold leaf.

The artist's persistence in rendering military saints as martyrs, without their military attire, though a trait of a period style in the Balkans, acquires a particular significance when combined with other elements. Such elements include, first and foremost, the extended Passion cycle, the image of the pelican piercing her flank below the crucified Christ of the Lypera and the similar image on the wood carvings of the ambo, and the dominance of the element of the crown in the wood carvings with its dual symbolism of martyrdom and triumph. To these elements one could also add the supreme symbol of the divine passion, the cross, formed with five glazed clay plates dating from the first decades of the eighteenth century (Fig. 7), which was formerly visible to pilgrims as they first glanced at the gable of the *katholikon* above the apse as soon as they entered the monastery (with one plate at the joint of the arms). Regrettably, these plates, which were still visible until 2010, have nowadays almost entirely perished, having fallen prey to children's slings. A complementary interpretation of the same artworks, however, points to an emphasis on salvation and glorification: martyred military saints are painted by the side of other saints united to God; besides the extended Passion cycle, there is another extended cycle of

Fig. 5. (Colour online) *Crown held by two angels* on lintel of bishop's throne, c. 1744, painted wood and gold leaf.

Fig. 6. (Colour online) *Crown held by two angels* on south side of canopy frontal of the altar, c. 1744, painted wood and gold leaf.

Fig. 7. (Colour online) *Five plates in the shape of the Cross* in gable above apse, early 18th century, glazed clay.

frescoes, the Resurrection and Paschal cycle; the resurrection of the pelican's chicks, the crown, a symbol of royalty and glory; and, last but not least, the very Precious and Life-Giving Cross as symbol of hope, salvation and glorification. I have no doubt that the mastermind behind the design of Ardenica Monastery's decorative programme must have been a theologian who placed much emphasis on eschatological theology.

The mastermind

In the previous sections I outlined the history of the ideological orientation of 'resistance' in post-Byzantine painting,[52] the pace of conversion to Islam in Epiros and Albania[53] up to the eighteenth century that set the historical backdrop of such a spirit, and the emphasis on salvation and glorification through suffering and martyrdom in the decorative programme of Ardenica Monastery. In this section I argue that, directly or indirectly, on the basis of his theological discourses and their ideological orientation, the mastermind behind the monastery's iconographic programme is most likely to have been Terpos, Ardenica's abbot during the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

52 For its counterpart in theological texts, see A. Argyriou, ʽΗ ελληνική πολεμική και απολογητική γραμματεία έναντι του Ισλάμ κατά τους χρόνους της Τουρκοκρατίας᾽, *Θεολογία* 1 (2013) 133–65.
53 For the trivial matter of the geographical delineation of these terms see K. Giakoumis, 'Self-identifications by Himarriots, 16th to 19th centuries', *Erytheia* 37 (2016) 18–24.

The role of scholar monks in the drafting of a monument's iconographic pro-gramme in the period is known to us from various epigraphic and documentary sources, including contracts between the monks of Xeropotamou Monastery on Mount Athos and the two brother painters Constantine and Athanasios from Korça, who worked for this monastery in 1783, i.e. at the end of their career. Their contract with the monastery clearly stipulates that 'the archons of this monastery gave us [i.e. the painters Constantine and Athanasios from Korça] a register of feasts drafted by kyr Kaisarios Dapontes and the feasts should be made according to this, at the place where the teachers [i.e. the painters] believe this is appropriate'.[54] Constantine Dapontes, renamed Kaisarios after his ordination as a priest-monk, was among the most learned men of the eighteenth-century Orthodox world of the Ottoman Empire, the dominant figure of eighteenth-century religious poetry and literature, whose seminal work is recognized as one of the most reliable geographical, ethnographical, sociological, anthropological and philological sources of the eighteenth-century Balkan world.[55] His role in drafting the iconographical programme of Xeropotamou Monastery, embedding in it the 'militant' spirit of neomartyrs, is well known.[56] It was therefore neither uncommon nor demeaning for the artists to receive a template of the programme they were to execute by their patrons or one of their appointees. Though the evidence in favour of the attribution of Ardenica Monastery's decorative programme to Terpos is not as strong as in the case of the role of Kaisarios Dapontes in the *katholikon* of Xeropotamou Monastery on Mount Athos, I am arguing that it is sufficient.

Terpos' biography can arguably be classified as evidence of the sort of suffering that many Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire had to endure. Notwithstanding the Ottoman Empire's pragmatism in matters pertaining to domestic inter-religious affairs,[57] non-Muslim subjects in the Ottoman world were clearly second-class subjects, with rare exceptions. Furthermore, local state authorities and those responsible for public order lacked the open-mindedness needed for a more pragmatic approach to sensitive issues, such as condoning the illegal construction of churches in return for strict loyalty to the Sultan, a characteristic which was only to be found in the capital or other major centres of the empire. In addition, provincial regions of the empire were also much more

54 M. Polyviou, Ἀνέκδοτο συμφωνητικό σχετικά με την αγιογράφηση του καθολικού της Μονής Ξηροποτάμου', Paper read at the ΣΤ΄ Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής–Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης, Athens, 23–25 May 1986: *Πρόγραμμα και Περιλήψεις Ανακοινώσεων* (Athens 1986) 56–7; M. Polyviou, Ἀλλα αρχειακά στοιχεία με την αγιογράφηση του καθολικού της Μονής Ξηροποτάμου', Paper read at the Ζ΄ Συμπόσιο Βυζαντινής–Μεταβυζαντινής Αρχαιολογίας και Τέχνης, Athens, 24–26 April 1987: *Πρόγραμμα και Περιλήψεις Ανακοινώσεων* (Athens 1986 [1987?]) 67–8; cf. Tsigaras, Ἱ ζωγράφοι', 19–24; G. D. Tsimboukis, *Η Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική του Αγίου Όρους* (Athens 2013) 63–5.
55 E. Soulogiannis, Ἱαισάριος Δαπόντες (1714–1784). Η ζωή, η μόρφωση και οι γνωριμίες του', *Θησαυρίσματα* 34 (2004) 447–57, where detailed bibliography.
56 M. Polyviou, Ὁ Καισάριος Δαπόντες και οι απεικονίσεις νεομαρτύρων στο καθολικό της Μονής Ξηροποτάμου', *Ελληνικά* 46 (1996) 115–25.
57 Giakoumis and Egro, 'Pragmatism', 73–127; Giakoumis, 'Dialectics', 73–132; synopsis on pp. 238–239.

vulnerable to abuses at a local level, which the pragmatic open-mindedness of the central government had to control.[58]

Terpos, an offspring of a well-known family,[59] was born in Voskopoja in the last decades of the seventeenth century. It was there that he completed his education, pursuing studies at the well-known Moschopolitan New Academy. After completing his studies, he pursued the path of monasticism. He travelled to the Skete of St Anne on Mount Athos, where he was ordained a monk, and later to the Monastery of St Naoum in Ohrid, before serving as abbot of Ardenica Monastery.[60] His affection for that monastery is evidenced by various references in his most important work,[61] dedicated to 'the Holy Embrace of the Lady Theotokos, the so-called Ardenica', whose icon, dated 1731, Terpos calls upon to help her servants. The quadrilingual prayer (in Greek, Albanian, Aromanian and Latin) accompanying this icon indicates Terpos' Aromanian ethnic background, since Greek and Albanian would be the minimum languages spoken by intellectuals in these regions.[62] It is interesting to notice that his concern for the monastery remained undiminished even when he was temporarily deposed from the monastery's abbacy, having suffered much, as he claimed, at the hands of a certain Arsenios.[63] In the course of his abbacy, the monastery was renovated, attracted several monks and became an important educational centre of the region.[64] He must have died at the end of 1740 or at the beginning of 1741 at a hitherto unknown location.[65] Soon after his death, his portrait was painted in full monastic attire in the church of the Holy Apostles in Voskopoja.[66]

The analysis of Terpos' single most important work, *Βιβλιάριον καλούμενον Πίστις* (*A Booklet Called Faith*) – initially published in 1732 and henceforth republished as many as twelve times during and after his lifetime[67]– reveals his almost obsessive persistence on suffering and martyrdom, his condemnation of those who refuse it, and his assurance of

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58 For the case of Ardenica Monastery as a case–study, see Giakoumis and Egro, 'Pragmatism', and Giakoumis, 'Dialectics'.

59 E. Kourilas, 'Γρηγόριος Ἀργυροκαστρίτης', *Θεολογία* 11 (1933) 45 (4).

60 For his paths to monasticism, see op. cit., 45–6 and Tritos, 'Τέρπος', 227–52 (228).

61 Terpos, *Πίστις*. Cf. K. Garitsis, *Ὁ Νεκτάριος Τέρπος και το έργο του. Εισαγωγὴ – Σχόλια – Κριτική έκδοση του έργου Πίστις* (Thera 2002) 169–526.

62 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 9–11, non–numbered pages of his prelude to the book; D. Shuteriqi, *Shkrimet Shqipe në vitet 1332–1850* (Tirana 1976) 107; A. G. Lazarou, *Η Αρωμουνική και αι μετά της ελληνικής σχέσεις αυτής* (Athens 1986) 183–5; E. N. Kekridis, *Θεόδωρος Αναστασίου Καβαλλιώτης (1718;–1789). Ο διδάσκαλος του Γένους* (Kavala 1991) 153 (n. 7); G. Exarchos, *Αυτοί είναι οι Βλάχοι* (Athens 1994) 54; Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 94–5 (No. 111); cf. R. Detrez, 'Pre–national identities in the Balkans', in R. Daskalov and T. Marinov (eds), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, I (Leiden and Boston 2013) 52–3.

63 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 411–12.

64 Tritos, 'Τέρπος', 229.

65 Garitsis, *Ὁ Νεκτάριος Τέρπος*, 70.

66 T. Georgiadis, *Μοσχόπολις* (Athens 1975) 69.

67 G. Valetas, 'Νεκτάριος Τέρπος, ο αγνηνμένος μεγάλος εθνοδιαφωτιστής, πρόδρομος του Κοσμά Αιτωλού (1690–1740)', *Νέα Εστία* 89 (1971), 577–88.

salvation and glorification for those who do not escape it. In his work, his assessment of the reasons which compel Orthodox Christian to convert to Islam relate to a 'consumerist' model in the service of social status.[68] He claims that the fashionable new cultural model is not in keeping with the meagre income of the non-Muslim subjects of these regions:

> The inhabitants of these places of Illyricum, Albania and Morea (alas) deny the Lord of Glory, everyone's Jesus Christ and God, purely for the sake of certain material needs. They spend two ducats or more on their [cloth] dye, on their vest and other clothes and wide underwear and brilliant braids and silver-gilded knives and silver rifles; they spend their *akçe* on all these things. And for Christ's faith and Paradise, they do not want to give six *kuruş* or even less per year; and thus, the miserable, they only separate themselves from Christ...[69]

Instead, Terpos insists that the faithful should bear suffering with fortitude, and in his description of what this suffering entails he provides a precious first-hand account of what it meant to be a Christian in the remote Ottoman provinces where Terpos lived and travelled, thereby providing another perspective on the reasons compelling Christians to Islamize. As 'Christ teaches us to have no pity on our body, but to spill our blood, if required,'[70] he writes, so one should bear with joy and patience the foreigners and 'infidel', even 'if someone enslaves you, if someone preys upon you, if someone takes anything from you, if someone boasts, [or] if someone slaps you in the face.'[71] The call to perseverance is grounded in the biblical passage 'Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' (Matt. 7:14), a passage which the author contextualizes as follows:

> So what is the strait way? [The strait way] is the suffering and passions that we, the Christians, have to suffer. What are these? These are when the Turks are torturing us for Christ's love, battering us and swearing at us; and [when] we give the haraç, they get us on the roads and bother us, impose forced labour on us and seize our horses, and they grab what they like, they come to our homes and they remove us from our hearths; they warm themselves, while we tremble with cold; they eat and drink from our own, while we are hungry and thirsty; they go towards food and drink on their own and they take as much as they want, to the extent that they do not leave anything and your children cry and lament in their hunger and thirst. They get all the rugs, woollen covers and bedspreads, they make their beds and cover themselves and use what they do not need to cover their horses, and your children are on the floor all night, they

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tremble and cry out. They ate all the straw and grains and your own (animals) come to a bad end. Every year and time you give donations and presents to the Turks, or rather we give, because I am also suffering with you.[72]

Terpos makes a concerned and concerted effort to align himself in sympathy with the simple folk, as, in evidence of solidarity, he records many examples of personal suffering because of his faith. The most palpable example he uses is related to the event of his trip to the region of Elbasan, at the village of Dragot, which was outlined above, namely finding the local priest celebrating the liturgy with about a hundred and twenty women with only about fifteenth men in attendance, the rest having been 'Turkicized' (i.e. converted to Islam). At that village Terpos not only preached Christ to be true God and the Theotokos to be the Virgin Mother of God, but he further made offensive statements about Islam and Mohammed, as a consequence of which he was lucky to escape death with only a heavy beating, which 'left my left arm injured and I can never rest on that side.'[73] Indeed, Terpos is a well-known polemicist against Islam and many of his passages reveal a hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims,[74] for which reason Georgios Valetas[75] erroneously believed that his book was anathematized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.[76] His generally conservative spirit must have also offended Jewish communities, as he records having been beaten five times by Jews.[77]

Terpos' unswerving longing for suffering and martyrdom, for him and others, does not condone those who, for the purpose of avoiding suffering, opt for crypto-Christianity.[78] The disposition of the Church towards crypto-Christianity in the earliest encounters with the Ottomans – as expressed in the letter of Patriarch John XIV to the Christians of Proussa (Boursa) which fell under Ottoman control in 1331 – was one of clemency in the spirit of economy to those who were not brave enough to voluntarily become martyrs in the conviction that this was a strategy that would help preserve Christianity in territories newly controlled by the Ottomans. Later, however, patriarchs abandoned such clemency, reasoning that, as the Ottoman were not temporary rulers, 'tolerating crypto-Christianity meant assisting the spread of Islam'.[79] Terpos is very critical towards mixed marriages or mothers encouraging their children to crypto-Christianity to avoid the hardship of everyday life[80] – indeed conversion to Islam appeared to be quite appealing to the younger generation in the course of the eighteenth century[81] –

72 Op. cit., 245.

73 Op. cit., 225–6.

74 Op. cit., 241–50, 392–5.

75 Valetas, 'Νεκτάριος Τέρπος'.

76 Tritos, 'Τέρπος', 85–111 (234).

77 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 204.

78 Among other regions, Shpat, Elbasan, is well known for practising crypto–Christianity; see E. Nikolaidou, *Οι Κρυπτοχριστιανοί της Σπαθίας, αρχές 18ου αι. – 1912* (Ioannina 1979).

79 T. Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narrative of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford 2011) 124.

80 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 185, 220.

81 Asdrachas, 'Οικονομία', 101; Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 134, 153–5.

or women finding mitigation for their husbands' espousal of Islam in the fact that they secretly practised Christian rites at night.[82] Using a powerful metaphor, the fiery preacher likens crypto-Christians to a dead mouse he once found in a church, because of whose presence neither 'the Holy Church suffered molestation, [nor] was the mouse sanctified; such is the fate of deniers, who are secretly being brought to God's Church'. Thus, in a powerful anti-syncretic statement, Terpos explains that crypto-Christians were destined to be damned together with the apostates to Islam, suffering and martyrdom being the sole means of repentance.[83]

Indeed, elaborating upon several evangelical passages on the denial of the Trinitarian God, such as 'whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father' (1 John 2:23) and 'whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven' (Matt. 10:33),[84] Nektarios describes at great length the damnation that awaited apostates in the afterlife.[85] In his writings he states that he, as a spiritual father, is prepared to exercise strict economy in condoning the non-application of any religious calendar fasts to avoid someone's conversion to Islam.[86] He further enjoins Christians, if they cannot bear suffering, to emigrate 'beyond the wide seas and go to foreign territories, other kingdoms, rather than to become a Turk [i.e. a Muslim].'[87] Although he upholds messianic views on the divine approval of the Ottoman Empire's rule, i.e. that 'God made the Turks and He gave them the kingdom and the rule' on account of 'certain mistakes we did and are doing', he does not accept this as a valid reason for conversion to Islam and likens the Ottomans to beasts of the earth created by God 'because of the first man's, Adam's, disobedience and transgression'.[88] Terpos also brings forth a model of life conducive to enduring hardship:

> So, I will show you a way by which you can easily save money [to pay] for the *haraç* and avoid becoming a Turk, and an apostate of God, and foreigner to Christ's Holy Church. First, work more than you are used to; and second, restrain yourself from food and drink. And if you plan to buy an *okka* of fish or meat, or wine, or oil, get only half for the sake of your soul and body. And your hat should be shorter, your belts may be of cotton or leather, but not exclusively of leather. And you should wear a short hat or a cap, and you should not become a Turk.[89]

82 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 221.
83 Op. cit., 221–2.
84 Op. cit., 221, 250–1 and *passim*.
85 Op. cit., 213, 217–18, 220, 226–8 and *passim*.
86 Op. cit., 247–8.
87 Op. cit., 214–15.
88   Op. cit., 249.
89 Op. cit., 212. His prescriptions regarding clothes might be a testimony to the perception that good clothes were only suitable for converts to Islam, on account of the new clothes traditionally allotted to new converts to Islam, or the respective cash equivalent; see Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 124 for the former and A. Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670–1730* (Leiden 2004).

The call for suffering is not without promise for salvation and glorification in the after-life. 'Whoever wants to be great and honoured in Paradise, I want him to be and become small in this world and the least of all'. So preaches Nektarios, updating Christ's words, 'whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister' (Matthew 20:26).[90] Hence, he admonishes his contemporaries to believe in God as the Lord of everything, obey his commandments to go to Paradise in the spirit of 'he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live' (John 11:25) and conduct an openly Christian life to be saintly and blessed.[91] The direct and stark contrast between earthly delights offered by the Turks and the delights that Christians would enjoy in Paradise in the company of the saints and angels amidst Christ, reads almost as a promise for the after-life, filled, as it is, with various relevant evangelical passages.[92] In his book, these two worlds of the afterlife – hell and Paradise – and the paths leading to each of them are visualized in a woodcut, so that the message will appeal to those relying more on visual representations than on texts.[93]

Conclusions

To conclude, Nektarios Terpos was well-known for his preaching against Islam and conversion to Islam, with polemical statements against Islam and Mohammed involving the dichotomy between Christ and Antichrist, thereby causing the reaction of Muslim individuals and authorities at a local level and forcing him several times to leave Otto-man territory and find refuge in Venice.[94] He lived and worked in a period characterized by cultural shifts and a new wave of conversion to Islam, especially by the youth in the westernmost regions of the Via Egnatia. In his teachings he emphasized the importance of bearing suffering with fortitude even if this had to come about through death by mar-tyrdom, in the conviction that such suffering leads to salvation and glorification, while conversion to Islam, explicit or concealed in the form of crypto-Christianity, would lead to damnation. Considering Terpos' association with Ardenica Monastery as the abbot and an avid patron, the unique emphasis of Ardenica Monastery's decorative pro-gramme on the two key concepts of salvation and glorification through suffering and

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90 Terpos, *Πίστις*, 211.
91 Op. cit., 214, 222.
92 Op. cit., 246–7.
93 Op. cit., 358.
94 For Terpos' 'revolutionary' activities in the region see Glavinas, 'Ἡ Ἐκκλησία στην Ἤπειρο', 250–2; Glavinas, 'Ἡ συμβολή,' 29–43; A. Glavinas, *Ὁ μοσχοπολίτης ιερομόναχος Νεκτάριος Τέρπου, ένας οικουμενικός χριστιανός'*, in *Εικοσιπενταετηρικόν αφιέρωμα στον μητροπολίτη Νεαπόλεως και Σταυρουπόλεως κ. ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟ* (Thessaloniki 1999) 341–64; Tritos, 'Τέρπος', 85–111; Garitsis, *Ὁ Νεκτάριος Τέρπος*; A. Glaros, 'Ἐσχατολογικές προεκτάσεις στο Βιβλιάριον καλούμενον Πίστις του Νεκταρίου Τέρπου', *Altarul Banatului* 1–3 (January–March 2014) 106–14. For his hostile attitude towards Islam and Mohammed in the context of other such scholarship see A. Argyriou, 'Angélologie et démonologie en Byzance: formulations théologiques et représentations populaires,' *Cuadernos de CEMYR* 11 (2003) 157–84.

passion cannot be coincidental, especially in the light of the uniqueness of the decorative programme and the rare specimens of Terpos' teachings. By analysing the decorative programme of Ardenica Monastery by means of iconological methods of enquiry and the works of Nektarios Terpos through classical hermeneutics, I have demonstrated that a correlation exists between these two that would make me convinced that the mastermind behind the inception of the *katholikon*'s decorative programme must have been a personality of the intellectual calibre of Nektarios Terpos. Terpos must have acted as a source for the iconographic programme, either directly, by means of notes left with his disciples of the Ardenica monastic community, or indirectly, through his spiritual legacy formally set forth in his work *Πίστις*, which was certainly alive among his disciples at the time of the *katholikon*'s decoration. Through the design and execution of the decorative programme Terpos succeeded in manipulating visual imagery to prepare the faithful for suffering and martyrdom. In this regard, the monastery's contribution to the containment of conversion to Islam in Myzeqe should henceforth be appreciated more than it has been until now.