

Patrons and Painters on Cyprus

THE FRESCOES IN THE ROYAL CHAPEL AT PYRGA

Jens T. Wollesen

The fresco decoration of the Royal Chapel in Pyrga on Cyprus is usually dated 1421. The coat of arms featuring the Cross of Jerusalem and the lion rampant points to royal French commissioners, namely members of the Lusignan dynasty. Western, French patronage left its imprint on this chapel in terms of architecture and pictorial decoration – although within a complex Cypriot frame. The study presents iconographical and stylistic evidence supporting a much earlier dating into the first half or the middle of the fourteenth century.

The choice of scenes (with French *tituli*) has no comprehensive model on Cyprus. Significant western additions and variations distinguish this Lusignan program from other indigenous Cypriot predecessors and contemporaries. The iconographical analysis shows that the workshop made use of earlier Palaiologan Constantinopolitan models, such as the Kariye Camii mosaics. The iconography and the emotional pathos of some scenes suggest an awareness of western, French source material, and in particular of Franciscan book illuminations, Psalters, Missals, and Books of Hours. If this revised dating is correct, the program of decoration is an outstanding testament to royal, specifically Lusignan, commission and represents the first and most faithful adoption and adaptation of Palaiologan models in Cyprus.

STUDIES AND TEXTS 169

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ROYAL CHAPEL AT PYRGA

Jens T. Wollesen



PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

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To Kathy and Elena

CONTENTS

Plates	ix
Illustrations	xii
Acknowledgments	xiii
Map of Cyprus	2
Introduction	3
The State of Research	3
The Goals of This Study	8
1 The Frescoes: Cultural and Historical Contexts	11
Pictorial Anthropology	11
Cyprus and Crusader Art?	16
2 The Extant Chapel Decoration	21
The Pictorial Evidence	21
The Framing System	28
3 Pictorial Sources and Models	30
Asinou	35
Pelendri	37
Other Comparative Material	41
4 The Iconography	43
The East Wall	43
<i>The East Wall Annunciation</i>	45
<i>The Crucifixion</i>	45
<i>The Supplicants</i>	47
<i>The Lamentation</i>	50
<i>The Passion Scenes</i>	52
<i>The Descent from the Cross</i>	54
<i>The Holy Women at the Empty Tomb</i>	54
<i>The Angel at the Empty Tomb</i>	56
The South Wall	58
The Eastern Bay	58
<i>The Baptism</i>	59
<i>The Transfiguration</i>	59

	<i>The Ascension</i>	60
	<i>The Pentecost</i>	61
	The Western Bay	61
	<i>The Birth of Mary</i>	62
	<i>The Blessing of Mary</i>	62
	<i>The Presentation of Mary in the Temple</i>	63
	<i>Unidentified Scene</i>	64
	<i>The Martyrdom of St Stephen</i>	65
	South Wall Standing Saints	66
	<i>St Michael</i>	66
	The West Wall	66
	<i>The West Wall Annunciation</i>	67
	<i>Christ</i>	67
	<i>Mary</i>	68
	<i>Three Busts of Saints</i>	70
	The North Wall	71
	The Western Bay	71
	<i>The Dormition of the Virgin</i>	71
	<i>The Martyrdom of St Lawrence</i>	72
	The Eastern Bay	72
	<i>The Raising of Lazarus</i>	72
	<i>The Entry into Jerusalem</i>	73
	<i>The Last Supper</i>	74
	<i>The Washing of the Feet</i>	75
	North Wall Standing Saints	76
	<i>St Francis</i>	76
	Preliminary Conclusions	77
5	The Narrative Program	78
6	Dating and Provenance	85
	The Tituli	85
	The Style	90
7	The Historical Evidence Reviewed	102
	Conclusion	110
	Appendix: The Pyrga Restorations (1954–1989)	112
	Bibliography	113
	Index	177

PLATES

Unless otherwise indicated, all photos were taken on location in 2003 and 2007. I am greatly indebted to Dr P. Flourentzos, director of the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus, who generously granted me the right to publish these photographs.

- 1a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, external view of west wall.
- 1b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, external view of east wall.
- 1c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, external view of south wall.
- 2a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, left and right sides, decorative system with Lusignan coats of arms and Crosses of Jerusalem.
- 2b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall.
- 2c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, corner of north and east walls.
- 3a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall.
- 3b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall restoration of 1935. Photo: Cyprus, Department of Antiquities.
- 4a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, western bay.
- 4b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, eastern bay, *Baptism (?)*, *Transfiguration*, *Pentecost*, *Ascension*.
- 5a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Pentecost*.
- 5b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Birth of Mary*, *Blessing of Mary*.
- 5c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Martyrdom of St Stephen*.
- 6a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Blessing of Mary*, detail.
- 6b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Martyrdom of St Stephen*, detail: face.
- 7 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Presentation of Mary*.
- 8 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, west wall.
- 9a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, west wall, Christ enthroned, fragment.
- 9b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, west wall, *Annunciation*.
- 9c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, west wall, busts of saints.
- 10 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, west wall, *Kecharitomenē*.
- 11 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Dormition of the Virgin*.
- 12 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Dormition of the Virgin*, right side, detail.
- 13a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, standing saints.
- 13b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*.
- 14a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, east side: Sts Francis and Damian.
- 14b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, St Damian.
- 15a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Raising of Lazarus*.
- 15b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Entry into Jerusalem*, *Washing of the Feet*.
- 16 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *v.*

- 17a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, graffiti.
- 17b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, decorative wavy patterns.
- 18a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, decorative geometric pattern.
- 18b Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, decorative patterns.
- 18c Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, coat of arms.
- 19 Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Nativity, Presentation of Christ, Transfiguration, Baptism.*
- 20 Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Betrayal, Via Crucis, Entombment, Crucifixion.*
- 21a Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Holy Women at the Empty Tomb.*
- 21b Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Descent into Hell.*
- 22a Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Entry into Jerusalem.*
- 22b Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Last Supper.*
- 23a Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Dormition of the Virgin.*
- 23b Asinou, Panagia Phorvriotissa, *Raising of Lazarus.*
- 24a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, centre of east wall.
- 24b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, window zone, Mary and King David.
- 24c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Crucifixion.*
- 25 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Lamentation.*
- 26 Istanbul, Chora church (Kariye Camii), *Anastasis.* Photo © Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC.
- 27a Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Crucifixion.*
- 27b Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Crucifixion.*
- 28a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, the royal couple from the *Crucifixion.*
- 28b Paris, Notre-Dame, *Porte rouge* with the *Coronation of Mary* and royal donor couple. Photo: Hirmer Verlag, Munich.
- 29a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Lamentation*, detail: a Latin bishop.
- 29b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Lamentation*, detail: Mary.
- 29c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, fragment of top left Passion scene: *Betrayal* (?).
- 30 Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Betrayal.*
- 31a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, fragment of bottom left Passion scene: *Christ before Herod* (?).
- 31b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, fragment of bottom right Passion scene: *Betrayal* (?).
- 32 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Descent from the Cross, Holy Women at the Empty Tomb, Angel at the Empty Tomb.*
- 33a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Descent from the Cross.*
- 33b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Angel at the Empty Tomb.*
- 34 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, east wall, *Holy Women at the Empty Tomb.*
- 35a Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Angel at the Empty Tomb.*
- 35b Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Angel at the Empty Tomb.*
- 36a Anogyra, church of the Holy Cross, *Ascension*, upper half.
- 36b Anogyra, church of the Holy Cross, *Ascension*, lower half, detail.
- 37a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Pentecost.*
- 37b Anogyra, church of the Holy Cross, *Pentecost*, detail: apostles.
- 38a Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Birth of Mary.*

- 38b Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Blessing of Mary*.
- 39 Istanbul, Chora church (Kariye Camii), *Blessing of Mary*. Photo © Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC.
- 40a Istanbul, Chora church (Kariye Camii), *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*. Photo © Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC.
- 40b Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*.
- 41 Asinou, Panagia Phorviotissa, naos, south entrance, *Nicephoros Magistros Presenting the Model of the Panagia Phorviotissa church to Christ Through the Virgin*, detail: Christ enthroned.
- 42 Asinou, Panagia Phorviotissa, naos, south wall, Virgin flanked by angels.
- 43a Sopoćani, *Dormition of the Virgin*. Photo: Dusan Tasic, © Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC.
- 43b Istanbul, Chora church (Kariye Camii), *Dormition of the Virgin*. Photo © Dumbarton Oaks, Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Washington, DC.
- 44a Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Entry into Jerusalem*.
- 44b Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Last Supper*.
- 45 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Washing of the Feet*.
- 46a Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Washing of the Feet*.
- 46b Kalopanayiotis, St John Lampadistis, *Washing of the Feet*.
- 47a Asinou, Panagia Phorviotissa, prophets from the narthex vault.
- 47b Kakopetria, St Nicholas of the Roof, St Barnabas.
- 47c Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Raising of Lazarus*, detail: faces.
- 48a Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Dormition of the Virgin*, detail: faces.
- 48b Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Last Supper*, detail: faces.
- 49 *Histoire universelle*, London, British Library, Add. MS 15268, fol. 65v. Photo: British Library.

COLOUR PLATES

- 1 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, south wall, *Ascension*.
- 2 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, north wall, *Dormition of the Virgin*, left side, detail.
- 3 Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, *Pentecost*, detail: disciples.
- 4 Pyrga, Royal Chapel, *Last Supper*, compared with a prophet from the narthex of the Panagia Phorviotissa in Asinou.

ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Fig. 2.1</i>	Scheme of the extant decoration of the Royal Chapel at Pyrga	20
<i>Fig. 2.2</i>	Scheme of the east wall of the Royal Chapel	23
<i>Fig. 2.3</i>	Scheme of the south wall of the Royal Chapel	24
<i>Fig. 2.4</i>	Scheme of the west wall of the Royal Chapel	25
<i>Fig. 2.5</i>	Scheme of the north wall of the Royal Chapel	26
<i>Fig. 3.1</i>	Asinou, Panagia Phorviotissa, scheme of bema and naos narrative scenes (12th–14th c.)	34
<i>Fig. 3.2</i>	Pelendri, church of the Holy Cross, scheme of bema and naos narrative scenes	40
<i>Fig. 6.1</i>	Pyrga, Royal Chapel, the <i>titulus</i> of the <i>Last Supper</i> scene	86
<i>Fig. 6.2</i>	St Cassianus Hodegetria panel, details of inscriptions. By permission of the Byzantine Museum of the Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, Nicosia.	87
<i>Fig. 7.1</i>	The <i>gros d'argent</i> of Henry II, obverse and reverse. Photo courtesy of <i>SunJet</i> , Cyprus Airways (from the Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation).	105
<i>Fig. 7.2</i>	The <i>gros d'argent</i> of Henry II, second reign, obverse and reverse. Photo courtesy of the Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation.	106
<i>Fig. 7.3</i>	The <i>gros d'argent</i> of Peter I, obverse. Photo courtesy of the Numismatic Collection of the Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation.	107

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