Abstract

The Orthodox Byzantine cultural tradition remained strong and even thrived in Cyprus throughout the 17th-19th centuries although the island had become a badly neglected province of the Ottoman Empire from 1571 to 1878. The leading figure among a multitude of 17th century icon painters in Cyprus was Leontios, who used to sign his icons as “the hieromonk (= priest-monk) from Nemesos” (Limassol). The signature of the Cyprus-born painter is found on an icon kept in the Royal Monastery of Machairas. The icon represents the founder of the Church of Cyprus, the Apostle Barnabas, enthroned. Below the saint’s feet, Leontios painted a map of the island, which is so far unique in the corpus of Byzantine painting, as far as Cyprus is concerned. What was the printed or manuscript prototype and where did Leontios come upon it?

The post-Byzantine artistic tradition remained strong and flourished in Cyprus between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century, a period when the island was an insignificant, neglected province of the Ottoman Empire.

One of Cyprus’s important icon-painters of the seventeenth century was Leontios (1673?-1705?),1 who usually signed his icons as “the priest-monk from Nemesos [Lemesos, Limassol].” The Cypriot painter’s signature is to be found on an icon2 (dimensions: 49 x 37.5 cm) of 1673 (Fig. 1), which is kept in the sacristy of the Royal and Stavropegic Machaira Monastery3 and comes from the Church of St. George4 in nowadays Turkish-occupied Nicosia.

The icon shows the founder and patron saint of the Autocephalous Church of Cyprus, the Apostle Barnabas,5 enthroned, and with the island of Cyprus shown at the bottom of the icon. St. Barnabas wears episcopal vestments, gives his
blessing with his right hand, and in his left holds an open gospel book with the inscription: ΕΠΕΝ Ο ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΕΛΓΟΥ ΜΑΘΗΤΑΙΣ Ο/ΑΚΟΥΩΝ ΥΜΩΝ ΕΜΟΥ ΑΚΟΥΕΙ ΚΑΙ Ο ΑΘΕ[ΤΩΝ ΥΜΑΣ ΕΜΕ ΑΘΕΤΕΙ] (He that hears you hears me; and he that despises you despises me - Luke 10: 16).  

Two archangels are shown in the two upper corners, doing reverence and proffering to the saint a mitre, an imperial sceptre (!), a gold inkstand with cinnabar, and an archiepiscopal royal staff and the melon (globe of the world), imperial privileges, which were given, according to tradition, to the Archbishop of Cyprus. The iconographic subject is, without any doubt, the creation of Leontios and concealed behind it are symbolisms of the secret longings of the enslaved Greeks of Cyprus.

The Apostle Barnabas is, then, shown to be blessing his homeland of Cyprus, as its missionary, protector and saviour par excellence, and the Archbishop of the day, his successor on the throne. St Barnabas was established as the patron saint of the Autocephalous Church of Cyprus in the late fifth century, when the Roman doctrine of apostolicity on apostolic sees made its appearance in the East and was at that time declared to be a principle of ecclesiastical organisation.

Leontios seems to have been a priest-monk at the archiepiscopal court, with access to the upper reaches of Cyprus society, and to libraries. It is apparent from his work that he had a good knowledge of history and of the local hagiography of the Church of Cyprus, and was the sole portrait-painter of his age, his subjects including the Archbishops of Cyprus Christodoulos II (1682-1685?) and Iakovos I (1691-1692?).

Typical is the use of escutcheons in his icons for the inclusion of inscriptions or dates. He could be identified with the painter Leontios ‘Lefkosianos’ (of Nicosia), whom the monk Akakios mentions in his texts of 1733.

Leontios had studied painting for ten years in Russia. His icons, with their onion-domed Russian churches, provide evidence of this. Leontios also had connections with the
Maronite community of Cyprus, given that in 1684 he painted the icon of St. Antony, with Greek and Arabic inscriptions, for the Maronite church at Kythrea.

The presence of a map in an icon is, in the present state of our knowledge, a unique phenomenon in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine painting of Cyprus. The map of Cyprus (Fig. 2) in the icon of the Apostle Barnabas was painted afterwards, since the outline of the south coast continues on to the gold band of the margin. The title of the map –ΚΥΠΡΟΣ (Cyprus)– is written outside the island, top left on the background of the icon.

There is damage to the map of Cyprus from the crack, which has opened between the two boards of which the icon is made up at the level of the Karpasia promontory. There has also been
A MAP OF CYPRUS IN A POST BYZANTINE CYPRIOT ICON

But which map served as the working drawing or the model for Leontios?

It seems likely that the painter Leontios would have come into contact with cartographical material on his journey to and from Russia. It is, however, much more likely to have been the case that he had some model at hand, which he would have found in the well-stocked library of the Cyprus Archbishopric.

The outline of the map, and particularly the rendering of the northern shoreline, leads to the conclusion that its model must have been the map, which is based on the outline of the one drawn and published in 1570 by Paolo Forlani (Fig. 3). This

fig. 3: Paolo Forlani, “Isola di Cipro,” Venice 1570.

a loss from the clear outline of the map, located in the Famagusta–Larnaka area (in the east) and the Limassol–Akrotiri area (in the south).
fig. 4: Paolo Forlani, “Isola di Cipro,” Venice 1570.

fig. 5: Matthes Zündt, “Cypern,” Nuremberg 1570.
specific map by Forlani happens to be shown in some copies of the work of Steffano Lusignano, *Chorograplia et Breve Historia Universale dell' Isola de Cipro principiando al tempo di Noé per insino al 1572* (Bologna 1573)\(^\text{13}\) (Fig. 4). The Church of Cyprus possessed certain printed chorographies; one copy has been preserved in the library of the Archbishopric of Cyprus.

In 1570, Nadale Bonifacio Sibenisensis\(^\text{14}\) used Forlani’s map in publishing his own *Cyprus Insula* in Venice. Furthermore, another very important map with an outline identical with that of Forlani was brought out in the same year by Matthes Zündt (Fig. 5). There was always a copy of this map in Cyprus; today it is kept in the Kykkos Monastery.\(^\text{15}\)

The outline of Forlani’s map was in wide circulation from the end of the sixteenth century to the second decade of the eighteenth in the *itineraries* (*viaggia*). The *itineraries* belong to a category of travel books of modest quality. They circulated widely because they were cheap and provided a service for travellers setting out from Venice for Constantinople and the Holy Land. These travel guides had almost always three items which concerned Cyprus: the map of the island and the topographical plans of the cities of Famagusta and Nicosia.\(^\text{16}\) In all the *itineraries*, the same map is used, and that is the map of Forlani.

The map in the icon of the Apostle Barnabas may be related more particularly with the map of Cyprus which the engraver Giosepppe Rosaccio re-engraved in his *Viaggio Da Venetia, a Constantinopoli per Mare, e per Terra Santa*, Venice, after 1610, which is also shown devoid of place-names.\(^\text{17}\)

Leontios was also aware of the geophysical morphology of Cyprus and ventured to give a rendering not only of the Troödos mountain range, but also of the Pentadaktylos, schematically, in the form of five mountains in a row. Low vegetation and flowers grow all over the island, showing Cyprus, in spite of the difficult situation then prevailing, as an ‘earthly paradise’. Traces of blue paint on the background of the icon rendered the sea which surrounds the island.

Christodoulos Hadjichristodoulou

*Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation*
NOTES

1. Athanasios Papageorgiou, entries on ‘the painter Leontios’ and ‘the priest-monk Leontios’, Μεγάλη Κυπριακή Εγκυκλοπαίδεια [Great Cyprus Encyclopedia] (Nicosia: Philokypros, 1984-), 9: 29. This is probably the same artist who, as a layman in 1659, signed the icon of the Crucified in the katholikon of the Our Lady Amirous Monastery. Leontios painted in 1677 the icon of the Deesis from the Church of St. John at Galini, in 1679 the icon of St. John the Theologos in the Church of Our Lady Amirous, in 1680 the icon of the Crucified and the Lypera in the katholikon of the Monastery of St. Spyridon at Tremetousia, in 1685 the icon of St. Antony in the Maronite church of the same dedication at Kythrea, in 1683 the icon of St. John the Theologos in the Church of Our Lady Chrysopolitissa at Larnaka, in 1685, as a commission from Archbishop Christodoulos II (1682-1685?), he painted the icon of St. John the Baptist for the Church of Our Lady Asprophorousa at Bellapaïs, in 1686 the icon of All Saints in the Cathedral Church of the Saviour in Larnaka. The icon for veneration of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in the same church has also been attributed to this painter (K. Gerasimou, “Η Αγιογραφική Τέχνη από τό 15ο έως καί τό 17ο αιώνα” [The art of icon-painting from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century] in Η κατά Κίτιον αγιογραφική τέχνη [The Kition art of icon-painting], Larnaca: Sacred Bishopric of Kition, 2000), 83-4 and 196 (1659?-1692?). In 1696 he painted the icon of Christ the Great High Priest in the Machaira Monastery. Gerasimou, op. cit., 93-4, note 26. In 1705 Leontios painted the icon of St. John the Theologos, which used to be located in the women’s gallery of the old Cathedral Church of Sts Andronicus and Athanasia at Limassol.


3. Thanks are due to the Very Reverend Archimandrite Arsenios Machairiotis, Abbot of the Holy Machaira Monastery, for permission to photograph and present the icon of the Apostle Barnabas, and to Professor Maria Iakovou for her suggestions in connection with the cartographical material. I owe my information on the existence of the icon to the conservator Mr Costas Gerasimou, in whose studio this icon was conserved.

4. Peristianis, op. cit.

5. It is customary for small icons of the Apostle Barnabas, founder of the Church of Cyprus, instead of an icon of Christ, to be placed on the bishop’s thrones of the churches of the Archdiocese, within whose jurisdiction the Holy Monastery of the Apostle Barnabas, near ancient Salamis, belongs. According to Peristianis, op. cit., the icon under
examination was also hung on the episcopal throne of the Church of St George, Nicosia. Peristianis makes no reference to the presence of the map in the icon.

A similar custom, of placing icons of the Apostles or Hierarchs who are patron saints on episcopal thrones, is to be found in the Metropolitan Bishopric of Paphos, where the icon of the Apostle Philip, whose relics are kept in the churches of Arso and Omodos, is placed on the throne, and in the Metropolitan Bishopric of Kiton (which then included what is today the Metropolitan Bishopric of Limassol), where it is the icon of St Lazarus, patron saint of Larnaka, which is placed on the episcopal throne.


