The Perception of the Crusader in Late Byzantine and Early Post-Byzantine Ecclesiastical Painting in Epiros

[La percepción del cruzado en el Bizancio tardío y en las pinturas eclesiásticas tempranas post-bizantinas en Epiros]

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Resumen: This paper penetrates into the nebulous relations of Epiros with the Latin West after 1204 by examining representations of Crusaders in late Byzantine churches and early post-Byzantine catholics. I shall attempt to unveil the dark and base memories left over by Crusaders (especially of the Fourth Crusade), weave in an alternative way the historical stage that shaped collective memory in peripheral regions, as Epiros and propose a new methodological model for understanding the past at the absence of textual sources.

Abstract: Este artículo indaga en las nebulosas relaciones de Epiro con el Occidente latino después de 1204 mediante el estudio de las representaciones de los cruzados en las iglesias tardo-bizantinas y católicas de época inicial post-bizantina Tratado de desvelar la oscuridad y los recuerdos deprimidos por los cruzados (esp. de la Cuarta Cruzada), intercalando como alternativa el escenario histórico que condicionó la memoria colectiva en las zonas adyacentes, como Epiro, proponiendo un nuevo modelo metodológico para entender el pasado ante la falta de fuentes textuales.


Key words: Crusades. Late Byzantine painting. Early post-Byzantine painting. Epirus. Albania. Custody soldiers.

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Having shown the realistic similarities of the soldiers of the custody with Latin knights, it becomes evident that the image as exegesis is not necessarily an objective, or neutral interpretation (otherwise the soldiers would present Roman or the very common Byzantine features), but it could be tailored to suit beliefs of the present. Moreover, while the combination of the scene with the one to its right (the Descent to Limbo) [fig. 10] is very common, the placement of two of the soldiers outside the scene’s red frame and closer to the personified Limbo can promote multiple layers of interpretation. Using perceptive and iconological methods of art historical enquiry, it is comprehensible that in the evangelical excerpt [Mt. 28:11-15] the soldiers of the custody are portrayed negatively: having eye-witnessed Christ’s Resurrection notwithstanding, they later accepted a bribe by Jewish prelates and elders, who also promised to support them before the local ruler, if they upheld the fiction that Jesus’ disciples seemingly stole His body overnight. Matthew even states that this fiction was thenceforth upheld by the Jews to deny Christ’s Resurrection. Having denied to profess Christ’s Resurrection, the soldiers of the custody were certainly considered as deniers of the divine nature of Christ and, therefore, in collective beliefs must have been condemned to Hell alike other disclaimers of faith. This assumption is reinforced by both hymnographical and hagiographical evidence.

The liturgical hymnographers’ treat the soldiers of the Sepulchre’s custody in distinct ways. In most cases the soldiers are seen as eye-witnesses of Christ’s Resurrection, yet in a non-negative way, contrary to the Jews. In one occasion the soldiers are portrayed as if they had not eye-witnessed the Resurrection. Yet, in the Matins of Sunday, Sound 5, in the first kathisma following the second stichologia, Sound 5, the soldiers of the custody are literally called “enemies” of Christ: “Ή οὐκ ἐν τῷ τάφῳ ἀνέκειτο, καὶ σφραγὶς ἐν τῷ λίθῳ ἐπέκειτο· ὡς βασιλεύς ὑπνοῦντα, στρατιώται ἐφ’ ἐπίτευκτον Χριστόν· καὶ τούς ἔχρισεν αὐτούς, ἀποκαθαρίσας, ἀνέστη ὁ Κύριος” (“[While] Life laid in the Tomb, and the stone was sealed; soldiers guarded Christ as a sleeping king; and, after blinding his enemies, the Lord rose”). There is no literary context allowing for a different interpretation as to who are Christ’s enemies.

This interpretation is in line with patristic evidence which, while not naming the custody soldiers as Christ’s enemies, clearly indicated a common belief that they were deniers of the Resurrection. In his XC homily, St. John Chrysostome, after emphasizing in how many ways the soldiers experienced the divine nature of Christ, portrays them not only to be more corrupt than the Jewish people and Pontius Pilate, but also more money-thirsty than Judas: “Do you realize that all of them were corrupted? (Pontius) Pilate! For he was convinced. The soldiers? The Jewish people? Do not wonder how money corrupted the soldiers. If money was so tempting for the disciple (= Judas), how much more would it be for them (the


2 Sunday Matins, Sound 1, First kathisma following the first stichologia; Sunday Matins, Sound 1, Fourth sticheron anatolikon of the Lauds; Sunday Matins, Sound 2, Second sticheron of the Lauds. Sunday Matins, Sound 2, Fourth sticheron anatolikon of the Lauds; Sunday Matins, Sound 3, Second sticheron of the Lauds; Saturday Vespers, Sound 5, Third sticheron anatolikon; The Apolytikon of Sound 6; Sunday Matins, Sound 6, Second kathisma following the first stichologia; Sunday Matins, Sound 6, Second sticheron anatolikon of the Lauds; Sunday Matins, Sound 8, Fourth sticheron of the Lauds; the Synaxarion of Easter Sunday; Matins of the Myrrh-Bearers, Ode VII, Fourth troparion of the Myrrh-Bearers in Sound 2; Matins of the Myrrh-Bearers, Ode VIII, Fourth troparion of the Myrrh-Bearers in Sound 2.

3 Fifth troparion of the Myrrh-Bearers in Sound 2; Matins of the Myrrh-Bearers, Ode VIII, Fourth troparion of the Myrrh-Bearers in Sound 2.

4 It is interesting to relate that in modern Greek there is still in use an expression relating the custody soldiers with the silenced knowledge of the Resurrection and, in wider context, any silenced knowledge; cf. “Στρατιώται γνώσεων οἱ φύλακες” (the guards know); compare also with the Fourth Sticheron anatolikon of the Sound 5 Sunday Matins’ Lauds in Sound 2: “Οὕτως παρέχεσθε, σπευδαμένοις τῶν λόγων, μείζονα χαίρετας ἴσως. Αὐτοῖς εἶπεν ἡ γνώσις οἱ φύλακες: Σήμερον προήλθε τοῦ μνήματος, καὶ ἔλεγεν· ἔπειτα, ὅτι ἤμασί κοιμώμενον, ἤθελον οἱ μαθηταὶ, καὶ ἔλευσαν αὐτόν. Καί τε κλέαται νυκτὸς, μείζονα δὲ καὶ γογγύς· ἀπό τῆς ἀντίκεισιςς ἐς θέαν, καταλαμπών καὶ ἐν τῷ τάφῳ τα ἐντάφια αὐτοῦ, δεῦτε ἔθετε θαυμασίας, πάσης ἡ καταληψίας τῶν σφαγῶν, τοῦ μικρὰτος πάτρας, καὶ τοῦ γένη τῶν ανθρώπων, τῆς ἀπελευθέρωσεν, καὶ τῷ μέγα ἔλεος.”

5 Chrysostome maintains that the earthquake during the Crucifixion took place only for the sake of soldiers: John Chrysostome, Homily XC, in Ἑρμο, Ἑλληνικά Πατρίκες τῆς Ἑκκλησίας (Thessaloniki, 1979), XII, p. 392, verses 11-17.
least, St. John of Damascus, to whom we should probably attribute the authorship of the first kathisma in Sound 5 following the second stichilma of Sunday's Matins in Sound 5, enjoints the faithful to "hate Christ's enemies", as "whoever does not confess Christ as Lord and Son of God is an anti-Christ".

I suggest that in the visual memory and religious beliefs of the artist, patron and/or the viewers of the Custody at the Sepulchre / Rejoice scene in question, both Latin knights and the soldiers of the Sepulchre's custody, shared a common condemnation to Hell (fig. 10). Pursuing iconological methods of inquiry, this suggestion is reinforced by the approaching of the soldiers with the Limbo/Hades represented in the next scene by their depiction outside the pictorial frame of their scene. Indeed, in the adjacent subject of the Descent to Limbo, Christ tramples down Death, or captivates Limbo. In provincial, popular fashion, Death, Limbo...
or Hades (Devil), is personified [fig. 18] in the form of an unkempt, old, dark and chained man. The Latin knights/custody soldiers of the bordering subject not only are represented at the same height with Death/Hell, but also transcend the red line dividing the two scenes further approaching Death/Hell [fig. 10]. In no other place has the artist repeated this transgression, while in spite of his provincial training, his drawing abilities leave to me no doubt that the proximity of the soldiers with Hades and the transcending of the dividing line by the former to further approach the latter are utterly intentional to intensify the link between the Latin knights and Hell.

This been shown, two more questions remain unanswered. First, since the different panoply pieces of our soldiers belong to different periods of time, where did the local artist or the patron draw his models? I suggest that the panoply parts of the scene’s knights (disting in different periods) could be seen locally. Being a place of great strategic importance, Epirus often repeated to be used as commando of Latin expeditions against the East, as during the Byzantine-Norman wars (1081-1185)\(^\text{15}\), the First (Raymond of Toulouse and Hugh of Vermandois, 1096-1099)\(^\text{16}\) and the Fourth Crusades (Boniface of Montferrat, 1202-1204)\(^\text{17}\) [fig. 17]. Yet, as

\(^{15}\) I can roughly cite a Theotokion following Sunday’s Lauds: ‘You are the best blessed, Virgin Mother of God, for through Him who took flesh from you Hell has been taken captive, Adam recalled, the curse slain, Eve set free, death put to death, and we given life. Therefore in praise we cry: Blessed are you, Christ our God, who have been thus well-pleased. Glory to you’ (EPIRES ARCHIMANDRITE, ‘Matins for Sundays and Feasts’, in <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/ephrem/mat- sun.htm> accessed in 11 March, 2006).


\(^{17}\) Durrës and Vlora, two major bridgeheads of the East were used by the First Crusade armies as a transit station to proceed to the Byzantine capital with a special permission granted by Emperor Alexius I Comnenus. From western primary sources, see Fulcher of Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana, accessible in English in E. HALLAM (ed.), Chronicles of the Crusades, pp. 64-66. From Byzantine sources, see ANNA COMMENA, Alexiad, 10:7, in A. C. KLEY, The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants (Princeton, 1921), pp. 78-79 (digitally reproduced in Medieval Sourcebook, Anna Comnena. The Alexiad. On the Crusades, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/commena-cde.html>, accessed in 07 March, 2006).

\(^{18}\) As Villehardouin relates, by April 1203 most of the Fourth Crusade army had embarked at Corfou, a few miles opposite the region of Sarandë. For Villehardouin’s account (GEOFFREY OF

Angeliki Laiou relates, “The ‘Crusades’ were a frequent phenomenon of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We are accustomed to taking into account of the major crusades, ..., but crusading expeditions ... took place often, and certainly the Christians and Muslims of the area were aware of the fact\(^{19}\). It can be maintained that the artist or the patron had seen knights with their own eyes. Perhaps the painter might even have kept sketches of them or some knights had lost their lives in the battles of the region and their panoplies were taken as booty and used as models for the artist.

Second, why must western knights have locally a negative reputation? While the Normans were considered by the Byzantine elites as little more than barbarians\(^\text{18}\), their reputation was further blackened in Epirus after they seized and burned Kanina, Vlorë and Jericho in 1081\(^\text{19}\) and Corfu in 1084\(^\text{21}\). Moreover, the First Crusaders under Bohemund (1096) en route from the Epitoic coasts to the east, while endeavouring to refrain from pillage and disorder\(^\text{22}\), caused no little disturbance, as accounted by St. Theophylaktos of Ochrid\(^\text{23}\). While the First Crusaders advanced to the Middle East, they were hideously defamed, even though their alleged acts of cannibalism were more often rumoured than practised\(^\text{24}\). Having said that the Crusader expeditions were far more often than we customarily take into account, it is worth mentioning that the 1120s were punctuated by crusading expeditions undertaken by Pisans and Genoese by sea, while “in 1122 a Venetian Crusader fleet on its way to Palestine attacked Corfu in retaliation for the attempt of John II Komnenos to reduce Venice’s commercial privileges; it pillaged


23 P.G. 126, p. 324; this was only accessible to me in an Albanian translation, cf. K. BOZHNORI, Dokumente i Perëndisë Bizantinë për Historinë e Shqipërisë. Shk. VII-XV, extract Nr. XV (Tiranë, 1978).

Byzantine lands on the way to and from Palestine and extracted the confirmation and expansion of Venetian commercial privileges in the Byzantine Empire. As for the Fourth Crusade, William Miller states that Boniface of Montferrat manned his army with the rag-tag and bobtail of Western Europe, who fought for him to receive feuds and titles. Even though there are no written accounts that I know of recording the impressions left by the Crusaders to the local populations, it is highly likely that the local inhabitants of Sarandë region felt no different than other Orthodox people, whose impressions were described at the beginning of the paper. It may also be alleged that, since Epiros was among the principal target territories of immigrants from Constantinople, the immigrants must have also shaped or influenced popular dark and base memories about the Crusaders, especially those of the Fourth Crusade. Last but not least, the region in question was for most parts of the second half of the 13th century a western dominion, either in the form of a dower given by the Despot of Epiros, as in the case of the marriage of King Manfred of Hohenstaufen with Helen Angelina (1259), or in the form of occupation by force of arms, as in the case of the expedition of Charles I Anjou who took hold of Corfu and the mainland fortresses in 1266 and kept them until his death in January 1285. As implied by the representation of the soldiers of the Custody in the church of St. George at Dhívër, their presence in the region must have been distasteful to the locals.

Similar conclusions can be drawn in the case of Judas’ Betrayal in the church of the Nativity of the Virgin on Maligrad. The church was re-built and re-decorated under the patronage of Caesar Novak in 1368/69. In the scene of

Judas’ Betrayal, two soldiers flank Jesus, both of whom wear kettle helmets with basinet, alternatively called chapel de fer, rather usual as from the beginning of the 14th century. While both soldiers extend threateningly their swords towards Jesus, the one at the right covers his back with a triangular shield curved to the body, of the type called the ‘heater’, which follows the curve of the body. This shield-type became common after 1270s, similar in form to the one shown in the brass of Sir Robert de Bures, ca. 1331, in the Church of All Saints, Acton, Suffolk. It is needless, I believe, to argue why these soldiers would be very negatively perceived by the public.

While in late Byzantine paintings at Mistra there is a deliberate absence of Latin influences, the ‘Latinization’ of military costumes in narrative scenes is also observed in other former ‘Latin’-dominated regions. In the context of medieval Morea, Gerstel mentions vaguely that “some evidence has been found in the details of narrative scenes, from the occasional embossing of haloes to unusual representations of soldiers at the Arrest and Crucifixion of Christ”. Even though Gerstel identifies a Frankish coat of arms that marks the shield of one of the custody soldiers in the scene of the Marys at the Tomb of the church of St. John

Chrysostome, Geraki, ca. 1300, thereby associating Roman soldiers with Latins, yet, she didn’t associate it with the thesis I have hereby attempted to uphold. Lymbouropoulou has identified a number of similar cases in 14th century Crete; the representation of soldiers in western armour in scenes like the Marys at the Tomb, the Betrayal, the Carrying of the Cross, or the martyrdom of saints was considered by her as ‘hostile’ and anti-western comments.

Several post-Byzantine churches and cathedrals in Epiros provide substantial evidence that such ‘hostile’, anti-western visual statements consistently persist up to the first half of the 17th century, after which the phenomenon gradually fades out in mechanical repetition of earlier post-Byzantine models.

The most impressive cases, however, can be viewed in the early post-Byzantine mural paintings of the Lite of Philanthropenion Monastery’s cathedral on the Isle of Ioannina (painted in 1560), subject already discussed by the late Milos Garidis. There, a great number of torturers, represented in different scenes of martyrdoms, bear the form of western knights. Exceptionally interesting is the martyrdom of St. Vincent, represented on the southern wall of the Lite; the saint’s executioner is engaged into chivalric dancing figure before he effects the fatal attack against the saint [fig. 20]. In the martyrdom of St. Babylas and his disciples, a figure, identified by Garidis as a Spanish merchant, stands before the ruler. Very similar to an equestrian harness of Otto Heinrich, Count Palatine of the Rhine, dating 1530s and other German armours dating from the first quarter of the 16th century is the mounted knight who tortures St. Amphilochoi, Bishop of Ikonion, by dragging him behind his galloping horse [fig. 21]. Similar models have, undoubtedly, been utilized to represent the executioners of St. Stephen the Younger, the Confessor [fig. 22]. Patronized by the renowned family of Philanthropenoi, who migrated from Constantinople due to the City’s growing pro-Latin support, the Monastery of St. Nikolaos of Philanthropenion virtually provides the most palpable examples of anti-western pictorial statements.

Similar, yet far less impressive examples can also be found in other 16th century monuments of the region. The scene of the Betrayal of Jesus in the church of St.
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Athanasiou at Goraxhi, Dropull (Gjirokaster region) ([fig. 23] dates in 1524 and imitates panoplies of the 12th and 13th centuries43. In the catholicon of Ntiilioi Monastery, on the Isle of Ioannina (1542/3), the scenes of Christ’s Desirion, the Route to Golgotha, the Carrying of the Cross, the Ascent to the Cross and the Marys at the Tomb contain soldiers depicted in a western 14th and 15th century fashion44; yet, western influences in the armoury of several military saints indicates trends that may shadow the strength of the hereby presented thesis45. However, the persistence of such examples point to the contrary. Cases indicating the ‘Latinization’ of soldiers can also be found in the third 16th century monastery on the Isle of Ioannina, the Eleousa Monastery (third quarter of the 16th century), in the representations of Christ’s Desirion, Pilate and His Suite, the Carrying of and Ascent to the Cross46. From other 16th century monuments in the regions of Epiros we can cite the church of the Transfiguration at Veltissa (1568)47, that of St. Nikolaos at Krapsi (1563)48, the narthex of Barlaam Monastery, Meteora (1566)49, the church of St. Demetrios at Veltissa (1558-1568)50, the narthex of Dryano

43 The church in question is unpublished. For the comparison, see D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff.
45 T. Liva-Xanthaki, “Το Καθεδρικό της Μονής Ντίλιοι και οι Τοιχογραφίες του”, in M. Garidis – A. Palouras (eds.), Μοναστήρια της Νήσου Ιοάννησ, figs. 391 and 408 on pp. 235 and 244.
47 See the scenes of the Massacre of the Innocent, the Betrayal, Christ’s Judgement by Amnas, Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, the Desirion and the Carrying of the Cross, the Ascent to the Cross and the Crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea before Pilate and the Marys at the Tomb (see A. Stavropoulos-Makril, Les Peintures Murales de l’Eglise de la Transfiguration a Veltissa (1568) en Epire et l’atelier des peintres Kondarís (Ioannina, 1989), figs. 14b, 19b, 20, 21a-b, 22-24, 26 and 28-29 (details), 31a and 33b; cf. D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff.

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Monastery’s catholicon (last quarter of the 16th century) ([fig. 24])51 and the church of St. Nikolaos at Dhuvian, Dropull (end of the 16th century)52. The 17th century also offers some good examples, while the phenomenon clearly fades out in unsophisticated imitations towards the 18th century. One can cite the Martyrdom of St. Theodore Stratelates in the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Zervat, Dropull (1603)53, the Massacre of the Innocents in the catholicon of Ravenia Monastery, Dropull (second quarter of the 17th century)54 and the Carrying of the Cross in the nais of the catholicon of the Transfiguration Monastery at Mingul, Gjirokaster (1666) ([fig. 25])55. From distant memories of the phenomenon in the 19th century we could cite the martyrdoms of saints in the third zones of frescoes, western wall of the church of St. George at Libofshe, Pier (1782)56, which seemingly reproduce 17th century models.

In his authoritative ‘Memory and Proof of Age in England (1272-1327)’, John Bedell57 states that “history, when it is not invention, is memory written down. Although the enormous attention paid to memory by philosophers, psychologists and neurologists has led to little certainty, we do know that memory is a complex process, not a recording device, and that it involves many parts of the brain and

51 Martyrdoms of Sts. Demetrios and George; cf. D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff. The frescoes of this monument date in the last quarter of the 16th century, with substantial overpainting from the 17th and 19th century (G. Giakoumis – K. Giakoumis, Ορθοδόξα Μνήμη της Βόρειας Ηπείρου [Ioannina, 1994], pp. 79-81 and figs. 160-162; G. Giakoumis, Μνήμη Ορθοδόξων στην Αττική [Athens, 1994], pp. 28-33 and figs. 29-43).
52 See the soldier next to Longinus in the scene of the Crucifixion (see G. Giakoumis – K. Giakoumis, Ορθοδόξα Μνήμη της Βόρειας Ηπείρου, p. 150, fig. 300; cf. D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff.)
53 G. Giakoumis – K. Giakoumis, Ορθοδόξα Μνήμη της Βόρειας Ηπείρου, pp. 53-55 and 56 and fig. 105 on p. 56; cf. D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff.)
54 G. Giakoumis – K. Giakoumis, Ορθοδόξα Μνήμη της Βόρειας Ηπείρου, p. 144, fig. 287; cf. D. Edge – J. M. Padock, Arms and Armour, pp. 84 ff. For the monastery, see G. Giakoumis, Η Ιερά Μονή Ροφίδιου Αρδούτας (Athens, 1995), where citations to the relevant literature.
56 G. Giakoumis – K. Giakoumis, Ορθοδόξα Μνήμη της Βόρειας Ηπείρου, pp. 72-75, figs. 144-154, and particularly fig. 148 on p. 73.
aspects of the self. We construct our memories, choosing consciously or unconsciously to emphasize some experiences and impressions and disregard others, and, over time, we reshape them, reordering our pasts to meet the changing needs of the present. Our memories are shaped by our interactions with others, especially by conversations we have had about shared experiences. We each have our own histories, which we have made as much by thought as by need.” With this in mind, in this paper, taking into consideration representations of Crusaders in ecclesiastical paintings of late Byzantine and early post-Byzantine churches and cathedrals, I attempted to interpret expressions of collective base memories of the Crusades in peripheral regions, as Epiros, Crete and, possibly, Morea. Further research in other contemporary monuments of former ‘Latin’-occupied territories could check the theory that such anti-western attitudes reflect general feelings, rather than isolated cases, especially in former western-dominated Orthodox provinces. Last but not least, the paper introduces an empirical methodology in which a historian can unveil collective memories of the past at the absence of textual sources by looking at and interpreting artworks.

Fig. 10. Hermitage of St. George at Dhivër, Sarandë. Naos. Northern wall. Second zone of frescoes. The Descent to Hades. Last quarter of the 13th c.

Fig. 17. An initial from Winchester Bible, c. 1170, a panel from the Silver Shrine of Charlemagne in Aachen Cathedral, c. 1207 and our soldiers. Notice how the lances in our scene are closer to the 1207 example
Fig. 18. Hermitage of St. George at Dhivrē, Sarandē. Naos. Northern wall. The Descent to Hades. Second zone of frescoes. Detail of the personification of Death, or Satan, trembled down by Christ. Last quarter of the 13th century.

Fig. 20. The martyrdom of St. Vincent. Fresco. Philanthropenon Monastery, Narthex, 1560.
Fig. 21. The martyrdom of St. Amphilochoius, Bishop of Ikonion. Fresco. Philanthropenon Monastery, Narthex, 1560

Fig. 22. The martyrdom of St. Stephen the Confessor. Fresco. Philanthropenon Monastery, Narthex, 1560
Fig. 23. The Betrayal of Jesus. Fresco. St. Athanasios Church at Goranxi, Dropull (Gjirokastra region), 1524

Fig. 24. The Martyrdoms of Sts. George and Demetrius. Fresco. Dryano Monastery, Narthex, last quarter of the 16th century
Fig. 26. A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry interpretation of the Battle of Hastings (1066). On the extreme left is Bishop Odo, wearing what may be a hauberk of scale armour and carrying a mace of cudgel form. On the extreme right, William of Normandy raises his helmet by its nasal.