

REMARKS ON THE ANONYMOUS COLLECTIVE SPONSORSHIPS IN POST-BYZANTINE EPIRUS (GREECE): THE CASE OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PAINTING WORKSHOP

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The region of Epirus, which, together with the southern parts of Albania, constitutes the Roman provinces of Epirus Vetus and Epirus Nova,¹ witnessed significant artistic activity in the Post-Byzantine period, especially in the last two centuries. Special privileges from the Ottomans, the development of trade,² and the geographical location of Epirus contributed to the region's cultural

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¹ Modern-day Epirus is a prefecture of western Greece located north of the Peloponnese that borders Albania and is defined geographically by the Pindus mountain range, the Ionian Sea and the Ambracian Gulf. Historically, the region was divided into *Epirus Vetus* and *Epirus Nova*. During the Middle Byzantine period, this region was home to the theme (province) of Nikopolis or Nikopolis and Kephallenia. It consisted of the aforementioned regions and the Ionian islands of Kephallenia, Lefkas and Corfu. The largest city on the Greek side of the border is Ioannina, and Gjirokastër is its modern Albanian counterpart. Peter Soustal and Johannes Koder, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini (Nikopolis und Kephallenia)*, III (Vienne, 1981); Panagiotis Aravantinos, *Χρονογραφία της Ηπείρου* [Chronography of Epirus], Vol. B (Athens: S. K. Vlastos 1856), 60-62; Spyros Ploumidis, "Nuances of Irredentism: The Epirote Society of Athens (1906-1912)," *The Historical Review* 8 (2011): 149-177; Christos Stavrakos, "Donors, Patrons and Benefactors in Medieval Epirus Between the Great Empires. A Society in Change or Continuity?," in Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan, eds., *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of Latin, Greek and Slavic Traditions*, vol. 6 (Berlin - Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022), 291.

² The migration of the Epirotes is remarkable during the Post-Byzantine era. Helen Antoniadē-Bibikou, "Ερειπωμένα χωριά στην Ελλάδα. Ένας προσωρινός άπολογισμός [Ruined Villages in Greece. A Provisional Report]," in Spyros Asdrachas, ed., *Η οικονομική δομή των βαλκανικών χωρών στα χρόνια της Οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας, 15^η-19^η αι.* [The Economic Structure of the Balkan Countries During the Years of Ottoman Rule 15th-19th C.] (Athens: Melissa, 1979), 211-219. For the economic connection and the trade among Epirus and the now current area of Romania during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with further bibliography, see, Andronikos Falaggas, "Μορφές Ηπειρωτών στις Ρουμάνικες χώρες κατά τον Ύστερο Βαλκανικό Μεσαίωνα [Epirotes in the Romanian Countries During the Late Balkan Middle Ages]," *Δωδώνη / Dodoni* 33 (2004): 387-388. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Historica* 25, I (2021): 57-75; <https://doi.org/10.29302/auash.2021.25.1.4>.

development.³ On the other hand, the number of regional and provincial monuments in the Balkans increased impressively after the second half of the seventeenth century, especially during the last decade of the eighteenth century. The gradual increase in the number of painters in the seventeenth century, which reached its apex in the eighteenth century, correlates with the prevalent social and economic conditions during the final two centuries of Ottoman suzerainty over the Balkans. However, regions such as Epirus displayed a staggeringly more significant increase in the number of painters compared to other areas of the Balkans, especially in the eighteenth century.⁴

The definite gradual increase in the number of provincial monuments directly correlates with the economic development of these regions and the tectonic transformations in the residential network of Epirus that began in the late sixteenth century⁵ and increased after the seventeenth century.⁶ Furthermore, from the end of the seventeenth century, there was an increase in monks and monasteries due to the privileges offered by the Ottoman administration in areas of Epirus.⁷ Although the byzantine sponsorship in Epirus has been sporadically studied,⁸ there has been no systematic examination

³ Donald M. Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros, 1267-1479: A Contribution to the History of Greece in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 197-203; Michalis Kokolakes, *Το Υστερο Γιαννιώτικο Πασαλίκι. Χώρος, διοίκηση και πληθυσμός στην Τουρκοκρατούμενη Ήπειρο (1820-1913)* [The Late Gianniotiko Pasaliki. Space, Administration and Population in the Ottoman-Occupied Epirus (1820-1913)] (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation NHRF, 2003), 115-118.

⁴ Manolis Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek Painters after the Fall of Constantinople (1450-1830)], Vol. 1 (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation NHRF, Section of Neohellenic Research SNR, 1987), 97, 109-112; Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Αναλυτικοί Πίνακες των Ελλήνων Ζωγράφων και των έργων τους (1450-1850)* [Detailed Catalogues of Greek Painters and Their Paintings (1450-1850)] (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation NHRF, Section of Neohellenic Research SNR, 2008), 142-145; Katerina Kontopanagou, “Κατά πάντα Αιτηρήσιμη: Some Comments on the *Απάρτισις* in Donor Inscriptions,” in Christos Stavrakos, ed., *Inscriptions in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History and History of Art* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2016), 187-192.

⁵ For the substantial change of the Post-Byzantine society and the economic circumstances in the sixteenth century, see Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι*, 86-87, 97, 109-112. In particular for the Epirus region, during the sixteenth century, the northern part of Epirus began to develop thanks to trade with Ragusa. Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, *Οικονομική και κοινωνική ιστορία της Οθωμανικής αυτοκρατορίας* [Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire], Vol. A (Athens: Alexandria, 2008), 295-300.

⁶ Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι*, 100-104.

⁷ Kokolakes, *Γιαννιώτικο Πασαλίκι*, 115-116.

⁸ Dimitrios Konstantios, “Χορηγία και Τέχνη στην Ήπειρο, την Περίοδο της Υστερης Τουρκοκρατίας [Sponsorship and Art in Epirus, the Period of the Late Ottoman Occupation],” *DChAE* 20 (1998): 409-416; Christos Stavrakos, “The Profile of Donors in Christian Monuments in Epirus,” in Stavrakos, ed., *Inscriptions in the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine History*, 41-52; Stavrakos, “Donors,” 291-313.

of the anonymous collective donations for religious monuments. The present paper examines the practice of anonymous collective sponsorships in Post-Byzantine Epirus, presenting the surviving monuments from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century and, in detail, the cases of anonymous collective sponsorships in a specific painting workshop of the eighteenth century, that of the so-called *Kapesovite painters*.

Anonymous donors in collective patterns of sponsorship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

Co-operative patronage is based on the joint effort of individuals, lay or clerical, couples, families, colleagues, ecclesiastical and military authorities, or fellow citizens and is common in some Byzantine provinces.⁹ The present study discusses representative Post-Byzantine monuments of Epirus in Greece and Southern Albania, the construction, decoration or renovation of which was funded by anonymous donors in collective forms of sponsorship. Through the donor inscriptions are evidenced the different categories of such co-operative patronage. In Greece, such types of anonymous groups of donors and benefactors most often came from a community as a whole, or certain inhabitants of a region, while collective donations by groups of monks were also widespread.¹⁰ With the monuments of Epirus, it is noteworthy that most cases concern the individual or collective sponsorship of renowned authorities secular and clerical.¹¹

In Epirus, the earliest surviving monument funded through anonymous co-operative patronage is the Church of St George in the village of Kato Lapsista, 14 km from Ioannina, which dates to 1508. It is a single-nave church,

⁹ For examples of byzantine collective sponsorship see the following: In Crete, the churches of the Archangel Michael (1321) in Doraki, Monofatsi and of St Paraskevi (1372/1373) in Kityro, Selinountas, were constructed with funding from the inhabitants of the village and inhabitants of the region of Kityro correspondingly. The Church of St Nicholas (1434/1435) in Maritsas, Rhodes, was also constructed through the collective sponsorship of the entire village. Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns of Patronage in the Late-Byzantine Village: The Evidence of Church Inscriptions," in Jean-Michel Spieser and Élisabeth Yota, eds., *Donation et donateurs dans le monde byzantine. Actes du colloque international de l'Université de Fribourg (13-15 mars 2008)* [Réalités Byzantines 14] (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer editions, 2012), 132-134. In the Post-Byzantine period, monuments were erected or decorated through collective patterns regardless of the local political situation, Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns," 135.

¹⁰ Konstantios, "Χορηγία και Τέχνη στην Ήπειρο," 410; Spyros Karydis, "Συλλογικές χορηγίες στην Κέρκυρα κατά την πρώιμη Λατινοκρατία. Επιγραφικά τεκμήρια" [Collective Sponsorships in Corfu During the Early Latin Occupation. Epigraphic Items], *Byzantina Symmeikta* 26 (2016): 164; Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns," 128.

¹¹ Katerina Kontopanagou and Vasiliki Koutsou, "«ἀναλώμασιν τῶν εὐσεβῶν χριστιανῶν»: A Case of Collective Sponsorship During the 18th Century in Epirus," in *40th Symposium on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Archaeology and Art. Programme and Abstracts of Major Papers and Communications* [Christian Archaeological Society] (Athens, 2021), 75-76, Stavrakos, "Donors," 291-310.

the donor inscription of which is located on the south wall. According to the inscription, the church was built and decorated through the economic contribution of the entire population of the village (...ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΟΔΟΥ / ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΟΜΕΝΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΧΟΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΛΑΨΥΣΤ(ΑΣ)...).¹² In spite of this, the depiction of a single figure on the south wall is quite likely a representation of one of the donors of the church, most likely the one who directed the collective effort. A similar case of collective sponsorship¹³ is the monastery of Molybdoskepastos, located close to Konitsa in NW Epirus. According to local tradition,¹⁴ the initial construction phase of the monastery was carried out in 670 by none other than the emperor Constantine IV Pogonatos, who camped close to the river Aaos while returning from his Sicilian expedition. The tradition is documented in the donor inscription¹⁵ of the *katholikon*, written above the door that connects the main church with the narthex (ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΟΔΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΣΕΒΕΣΤΑ

¹² The inscription has been written in upper-case letters for reasons of expediency. For more detail on the inscription, Myrtili Acheimastou-Potamianou, “Byζαντινά, Μεσαιωνικά και Νεώτερα μνημεία της Ηπείρου [Byzantine, Medieval and Later Monuments of Epirus],” *AD* 30 (1975): 224-225; Eadem, “Άγιος Γεώργιος στην Κάτω Λαψίστα των Ιωαννίνων. Παρατηρήσεις στις τοιχογραφίες του έτους 1508 [Saint George in Kato Lapsista of Ioannina. Observations at the Frescoes of 1508],” in Vasilis Katsaros and Anastasia Tourta, eds., *Αφιέρωμα στον Ακαδημαϊκό Παναγιώτη Λ. Βοκοτόπουλο* [Tribute to Academic Panagiotis L. Vokotopoulos] (Athens:Karon editions, 2015), 482; Eadem, *Η μονή Φιλανθρωπινών και η πρώτη φάση της Μεταβυζαντινής Ζωγραφικής* [Philantropinon Monastery and the First Phase of Post-Byzantine Painting] (Athens: Ministry of Culture, 1983), 30; Ioannis Chouliaras, “Τοιχογραφημένα μνημεία και ζωγράφοι του 15^{ου} και 16^{ου} αιώνα στην Ήπειρο και τη Νότια Αλβανία [Murals and Painters of the 15th and 16th Centuries in Epirus and Southern Albania],” *Δωδώνη / Dodona* 36-37 (2007-2008): 295-332; Idem, “Ένα άγνωστο συνεργείο ζωγράφων των αρχών του 16^{ου} αιώνα στην Ήπειρο [An Unknown Group of Painters of the Early 16th Century in Epirus],” *DChAE* 32 (2011): 115-128; Stavros Gatsopoulos, “Ιερά Σταυροπηγιακή μονή Μολυβδοσκεπάστου [Holy Molidvoskepastos monastery],” *Κόνιτσα* 30-31 (1964): 1-18; Idem, “Ιερά Σταυροπηγιακή μονή Μολυβδοσκεπάστου,” *Κόνιτσα*, 32-34 (1965): 1-17; Idem, “Ιερά Σταυροπηγιακή μονή Μολυβδοσκεπάστου,” *Κόνιτσα*, 35-37 (1965): 5-20; Idem, “Η ιστορική Σταυροπηγιακή μονή Μολυβδοσκεπάστου [The Historical Molidvoskepastos monastery],” *Epirotiki Estia* 3 (1954): 153-155; Dionisios Zakynthinos, “Ανέκδοτον βυζαντινόν κτητορικόν εκ Βορείου Ηπείρου” [Anecdotal Byzantine Donorship from Northern Epirus], *Epet. Byz.* 14 (1938): 277-294.

¹³ For the donors, Christos Stavrakos, “The Donors Inscriptions of Panagia Molybdoskepastos and Saint Paraskevi of Vikos in Epirus,” in Ivan Jordanov et al., ed., *Proceedings of the International Symposium in Honor of Dr. Vasil Haralanov. Shumen, 13th-15th September 2007* (Shumen: 2008), 249-257; Stavrakos, “Donors,” 301-305.

¹⁴ Dimitrios Kamaroulias, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου* [The Monasteries in Epirus], Vol. A (Athens: Bastas-Plessas, 1996), 178-179. The legend has several variations.

¹⁵ Gatsopoulos, “Η ιστορική Σταυροπηγιακή μονή,” 154; Kamaroulias, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 180. Remnants of a previous inscription and decoration are observable beneath the current inscription, and a third layer of frescoes likely lies underneath. The present inscription dates to the period of Andronikos II Palaiologos, and thus indicates that the existing structure is the result of renovations.

/ΤΟΥΒΑΣΙΛΕΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΥΑΙΜΟΥ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΜΠΩΓΩΝΑΤΟΥ...¹⁶ Some previous scholars had accepted the historicity of Constantine IV's passage through Epirus,¹⁷ while the latest reject it based on the available historical and archaeological evidence. The architectural type of the monastery supports the latter assertion; the *katholikon* adheres to the athonite triconch cross-in-square, thereby allowing a dating in the eleventh century. However, recent studies have placed the monastery in the fourteenth century, based on the capitals, the sporadic decoration, the brickwork and the glazed ceramics on the outer walls of the *katholikon*.¹⁸ The name of Constantine IV Pogonatos also appears in other inscriptions throughout Epirus, the most salient example of which is that of the monastery of Voutsa (Dormition of the Virgin) in Greveniti, Zagori. However, the *katholikon* dates to the fourteenth century, while the phraseology of the donor inscription adheres to the Late- and Post-Byzantine inscriptional standard. In both cases, in the two monasteries of Molybdoskepastos and Voutsa, the name of Constantine Pogonatos appears to have been used to make a connection with the region of Pogoni.¹⁹

The monastery of Molybdoskepastos was re-constructed in the fourteenth century by Andronikos II Palaiologos (*ANEKENHSEEN AYTON ANΔΡΟΝΙΚΟΣ Ο ΚΟΜΝΗΝΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΣ / ΔΟΥΚΑΣ Ο ΠΑΛΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣ*). It is worth noting that the donor portraits of the emperors survive, albeit in a fragmentary state, on the west wall of the narthex. The *katholikon* was renovated and decorated once again in 1522, this time through the collective sponsorship of the inhabitants of Pogoniani (...*ANEKAINISAN KAI EZΩΓΡΑΦΥΣΑΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΟΙ ΤΙΜΙΟΤΑΤΟΙ ΜΠΩΓΩΝΙΑΝΙΤΑΙ*...²⁰

¹⁶ Panagiotis Aravandinos, *Περιγραφή της Ηπείρου* [Description of Epirus], Vol. 3 (Ioannina: Etairia Epirotikon Meleton, 1984), 10; Gatsopoulos, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1964), 1-18; Idem, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1965), 1-17; Idem, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1965), 5-20; Idem, "Η Ιστορική Σταυροπηγιακή μονή," 153-155; Zakynthenos, "Ανέκδοτον," 277-294; Kamaroulias, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 180; Varvara Papadopoulou, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία της Ηπείρου* [Byzantine Monuments in Epirus] (Athens: Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development, 2002), 178; Varvara Papadopoulou and Argyro Karamperidi, *Βυζαντινά και Μεταβυζαντινά Μνημεία Μολυβδοςκεπάστου* [Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments in Molybdoskepastos] (Athens: Politistikos Syllogos Molybdoskepastou, 2008), 13; Stavrakos, "Donors Inscriptions," 8; Christos Stavrakos, *The Sixteenth Century Donor Inscriptions in the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Theotokos Molybdoskepastos: The Legend of the Emperor Constantine IV as a Founder of Monasteries in Epirus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 122 [henceforth abbreviated as Stavrakos, *Molybdoskepastos*]; Idem, "Donors," 301-305.

¹⁷ Kamaroulias, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 181.

¹⁸ Stavrakos, *Molybdoskepastos*, 71-72; Idem, "Donors," 301-305.

¹⁹ Further information on this issue, Stavrakos, *Molybdoskepastos*, 179 ff.

²⁰ Aravandinos, *Περιγραφή*, 10; Gatsopoulos, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1964), 1-18; Idem, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1965), 1-17; Idem, "Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1965), 5-20; Idem, "Η Ιστορική Σταυροπηγιακή μονή" (1954), 153-155; Zakynthenos, "Ανέκδοτον," 277-294; Kamaroulias, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 180; Papadopoulou, *Τα Βυζαντινά μνημεία*, 178;

In the village of Zervati or Zervates in the area Ano Dropolis in Southern Albania is the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin. The donor inscription, dated to 1605/6, mentions that the foundation and the decoration become with the financial assistance of all the inhabitants of the village (...*Κ(ΑΙ) Η ΣΗΝΔΡΟΜΗ ΔΕ ΟΛΟΝ ΓΕΤΟΝΕΝ*).²¹ The Church of Jesus Christ was renovated in 1669 and sponsored by the villagers of Hosteva, a settlement in the region of Argyrokastro (...*ΚΟΠΟΥ Κ(ΑΙ) ΕΞΟΔΟΥ ΧΟΡΙΟΝ ΧΟΣΤΕΒΑ...*).²² Another example of anonymous collective patronage is founded in Agios Nikolaos in the village of Sarakinista, on the borders of the diocese of Dryinoupolis, in the greater area of Liountzi. The foundation inscription is located on the lintel of the southern entrance of the main church. We read that the monument was built and decorated in 1630. The inscriptional evidence allows us to distinguish one differentiation of collective sponsorship: the donors are the priests and the elders of the village of Sarakinista (...*ΔΗΑ ΣΗ(Ν)ΔΡΩΜΗ(Σ) ΚΟΠΟΥ ΤΕ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΟΔΟΥ· ΤΟ ΤΗΜΗΟΤΑΤΟΝ ΗΕΡΙΣ Κ(ΑΙ) ΓΕΡΩΝΤΕΣ· ΣΑΡΑΚΥΝΗΣΤΑ*).²³ It is worth noting that the significant members of the area, the council of the village elders and the priests, are referred to collectively and anonymously. The donation in this case also highlights the whole community.

A similar case is that of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Lozetsi (Elliniko), in the north of the Tzoumerka mountain range, in Katsanochoria area (Epirus).²⁴ The donor inscription, dated to 1662, states that the priests, the lords and the inhabitants of the village sponsored the decoration of the church (*ΔΙΑΣΗΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ· ΚΟΠΟΥΤΕΚΑΙΕΞΟΔΟΥ· ΤΩΝΕΥΛΑΒΕΣΤΑΤΩΝΙΕΡΑΙΩΝ· ΚΑΙΤΩΝΤΙΜΙΩΤΑΤΩΝΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΝ ·*

Papadopoulou and Karamperidi, *Βυζαντινά και Μεταβυζαντινά Μνημεία*, 13; Stavrakos, "Donors Inscriptions," 8; Stavrakos, *Molybdoskepastos*, 122; Idem, "Donors," 301-305.

²¹ Theofan Popa, *Mbishkrime të kishave në Shqipëri* [Inscriptions of the Churches in Albania] (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë, Instituti I Historisë [Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania, Institute of History], 1998), 225, no. 535; Theocharis Tsampouras, "Τα καλλιτεχνικά εργαστήρια από την περιοχή του Γράμμου κατά το 16^ο και 17^ο αιώνα: ζωγράφοι από το Λινότοπι, τη Γράμμοστα, τη Ζέρμα και το Μπουρμπουτσικό" [The Artistic Workshops from Mount Grammos in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century: Painters from the Villages of Linotopi, Grammosta, Zerma and Bourboutsiko] (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, 2013), 141-142.

²² Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 237-238, no. 568.

²³ *Ibid.*, 232-233, no. 556; Tsampouras, "Τα Καλλιτεχνικά εργαστήρια," 176-179; Constantinos Giakoumis, "Κριτική έκδοση επιγραφών συνεργείων από το Λινότοπι στις περιφέρειες της ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας της Αλβανίας [Publication of the Linotopi Workshop's Inscriptions of the Albanian Orthodox Church]," *DChAE* 21 (2000): 256-257.

²⁴ Constantinos Stergiopoulos, "Συμβολή εις την μελέτην των ηπειρωτικών τοπωνυμίων" [Contribution to the Study of the Toponyms in Epirus]," *Epirotica Chronica* 8 (1933): 99-140.

ΤΗΣ ΠΙΩΛΕΩΣΤΑΥΤΗΣ ΠΑΝΤΟΝ ΤΩ ΝΕΥΡΙΣΚΟΜΕΝΟΝ).²⁵ Of particular interest is the absence of the names of the lords, as a result of which collectivity is projected once again.

The donor inscription in St Nicholas in Kalentzi also demonstrates the dynamic presence of collective donation in the seventeenth century. The monument was renovated structurally in 1630 through the contributions of the entire village population (...*ΔΙΑ ΕΞΟΔΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΧΩΡΙΟΥ*...).²⁶

Anonymous donors in collective patterns of sponsorship in the eighteenth century: The workshop of Kapesovite painters

The social and economic differences between regions are reflected through the disparities in the development of monumental art. During the eighteenth century, the flourishing of Post-Byzantine art is a fact. In Epirus the financial and commercial privileges, especially after the treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca (1774), contributed decisively to religious monuments' construction or renovation. West and central Zagori are two notable examples of financial growth and, therefore, the flourishing of Post-Byzantine art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁷ This growth is in large part due to the complete administrative autonomy enjoyed by the region, with the formation of the "Κοινό" or "Vilayet" of Zagori.²⁸ The abundance of monuments in this geographically limited area demonstrates the economic affluence and the power of the region due to contacts and trade with the western commercial centres.²⁹

²⁵ Argyro Karampreridi, "Ζωγράφοι από το Γράμμο στην Ήπειρο του 17^{ου} αιώνα: Στοιχεία από τις επιγραφές των έργων τους" [Painters from Grammos in Epirus in the 17th Century: Evidence from the Inscriptions of Their Works], in Athanasios Paliouras and Aggeliki Stavropoulou, eds., *Μίλτος Γαρίδης (1926-1996) Αφιέρωμα* [Miltos Garides (1929-1996) Tribute], Vol. A (Ioannina: University of Ioannina, 2003), 299; Gregory Manopoulos, "Επιγραφικές και άλλες μαρτυρίες για τα Κατσανοχώρια (1587-1699)" [Inscriptions and Other Testimonies about Katsanochoria (1587-1699)], *Epirotica Chronica* 35 (2001): 99-196 [henceforth abbreviated as Manopoulos, "Κατσανοχώρια"]; Christos Soulis, "Επιγραφαί και Ενθυμήσεις Ηπειρωτικά" [Inscriptions and Remembrances of Epirus], *Epirotica Chronica* 9 (1934): 81-126; Tsampouras, "Τα Καλλιτεχνικά εργαστήρια," 248-250.

²⁶ Manopoulos, "Κατσανοχώρια," 99-196.

²⁷ On the self-administration and autonomy of Zagori in the late eighteenth - early nineteenth centuries, Georgios Papageorgiou, *Οικονομικοί και Κοινωνικοί Μηχανισμοί στον ορεινό χώρο. Ζαγόρι (μέσα 18ου - αρχές 20^{ου} αι.)* [Economic and Social Mechanisms in the Mountainous Area. Zagori (Mid 18th - Early 20th Century)] (Ioannina, 1995), 189-226.

²⁸ The "Κοινό" or "Vilayet" of Zagori was established between the years 1681 and 1684, fostering the conditions for self-administration of the entire region. Eventually, western, eastern and central Zagori were consolidated; see Ioannis Lampridis, *Ηπειρωτικά Μελετήματα 1887-1890, Ζαγοριακά, Μέρος Α' και Β'* [Epirote Studies 1887-1890, Zagoriaca, Part A and B] (Ioannina: Anatiposi Etairias Epirotikon Meleton, 1971), 43.

²⁹ The gradual increase in the number of Greek Orthodox merchants helped strengthen their role in the financial life of their homelands. Ikaros Mantouvalos, "Greek Immigrants in Central Europe: A Concise Study of Migration Routes from the Balkans to the Territories of the

It is therefore apparent that the economic prosperity of the mountainous, highland regions of Epirus resulted from special privileges conferred upon them by the High Porte, to effectively secure Ottoman control.

The increasing of the immigratory trend from Zagori to Danube Principalities in the mid-seventeenth century, is evident; this trend assumed mass proportions from 1750 onwards, a period that witnessed increased mercantile activity by the Balkan merchants.³⁰ Among other charitable activities, merchants funded the construction of richly decorated churches that contained holy relics, the grandeur of which served to emphasise their social stature. For the most part, their affluence is reflected in the murals with which they decorated the latter.³¹ During this period, monuments were decorated by painters' workshops, which consisted of members of the same family. According to the inscriptional testimony, the painters gradually acquired an artist's conscience: they signed most of their works.³²

The Kapesovo workshop comprised a group of skilful and productive painters, some of whose patrons were wealthy and prominent personalities, demonstrating their works' fame and popularity. Among Epirote benefactors of

Hungarian Kingdom (From the Late 17th to the Early 19th Centuries),” in Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou, eds., *Across the Danube: Southeastern Europeans and Their Travelling Identities (17th-19th C.)* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2017), 25-53; Olga Katsiardi-Hering, “Diaspora and Self-Representation: The Case Study of Greek People's Identity, Fifteenth-Nineteenth Centuries,” in Cinzia Ferrini, ed., *The Human Diversity in Context* (Trieste: 2020), 248-249; Katerina Kontopanagou, *Post-Byzantine Art. The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop and Saint George Church of Negades* (Berlin: ProMosaik LAPH, 2021), 4-5.

³⁰ For the commercial activity of the Epirote merchants, see Lidia Cotovanu, “Ηπειρώτες έμποροι διαχειριστές των ηγεμονικών εισοδημάτων στη Βλαχία και στη Μολδαβία (15ος-αρχές του 18ου αιώνα)” [Merchants from Epirus Managing Hegemonic incomes in Wallachia and Moldavia (15th - Early 18th Century)], in Anastasia Papadia-Lala et al., eds., *Ο Νέος Ελληνισμός: οι κόσμοι του και ο κόσμος. Αφιέρωμα στην Όλγα Κατσιαρδή-Hering* [Modern Hellenism: Its Worlds and the World. Tribute to Olga Katsiardes-Hering] (Athens: Evrasia, 2021), 209-226; Eadem, “L'émigration sud-danubienne vers la Valachie et la Moldavie et sa géographie (XV^e-XVII^e siècles): la potentialité heuristique d'un sujet peu connu,” *Cahiers balkaniques* 42 (2014): 2-19; Traian Stoianovich, *Ο Κατακτητής ορθόδοξος Βαλκάνιος έμπορος. Η Οικονομική δομή των Βαλκανικών χωρών στα χρόνια της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας ιε' - ιθ'αι.* [The Conqueror Orthodox Balkan Merchant. The Economic Structure of the Balkan Countries in the Years of Ottoman Rule 15th - 19th C.], ed. Spyros Asdrachas (Athens: 1979), 309-330.

³¹ Kontopanagou, “Κατά πάντα Αηρητίσθη,” 197.

³² Eugenia Drakopoulou, “Υπογραφές μεταβυζαντινών ζωγράφων. Ανίχνευση προσωπικών και καλλιτεχνικών μαρτυριών” [Signatures of Post-Byzantine Painters. Detection of Personal and Artistic Testimonies], *DChAE* 22 (2001): 131; for more about the painters' signatures in Byzantium see Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, “Painters in Late Byzantine Society. The Evidence of Church Inscriptions,” in *Cahiers Archéologiques* 42 (1994): 139-158; Eadem “Painters' Information on Themselves in Late Byzantine Church Inscriptions,” in Michele Bacci, ed., *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale* [Scuola Normale Superiore Pisa, Seminari e Convegni 12] (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2007), 55-70.

the eighteenth century, Chatzimanthos Gkinou, a trader in Bucharest, sponsored the construction of stone bridges in the Zagori region and the foundation of the Church of St George³³ in his homeland, the village of Negades.³⁴ Chatzimanthos Gkinou, for the frescoes of the enormous Church of St George, in 1793, chose the same Kapesovite painters who had worked under Ioannoutsos Karamesines' sponsorship on St Nicholas Church in the village of Kapesovo the previous year. Karamesines was the Potentate of Zagori and an influential figure at the Ottoman Porte.³⁵

Such cases of significant members of the community are probably the least common among the donors in the monumental production of the eighteenth century. Richly decorated places of worship, whether three-aisled basilicas or domed cross-in-square churches, typically of large dimensions, indicate the gradual rise to prevalence of the parishes and the communities over the monastic establishments and individual donors.³⁶ The financial circumstances and the social cohesion of the Orthodox Christians in Epirus favored the increase of anonymous collective sponsorship in the eighteenth century. The monuments of that period evidence a significant amount of co-operative patronage, in which "anonymity" starred among the donors.³⁷ The donor inscriptions allow us to distinguish three categories of collective sponsorship:³⁸ 1. Co-operative donation, based on the collaboration of ecclesiastical persons, monks or clerics and lay persons. In certain instances of the first category, the most significant members of the donors' group, clerical or lay, are registered by name, but most of the sponsors are referred to

³³ On a site previously occupied by an earlier monument; Kontopanagou, *The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop*, 8-10.

³⁴ It is worth noting that there was a type of unofficial competition among the lords of Zagori, both in charitable activity and in the splendour of their donations. Kontopanagou, *The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop*, 4-5.

³⁵ He achieved the reduction of taxes levied on the region. Konstantinos Varzokas, *Αλέξης Νούτσος. Ο μεγάλος Ηπειρώτης. Η προσφορά της Ηπείρου στον Αγώνα του 1821* [Alexes Noutsos. The great Epirote. The Offer of Epirus in the Struggle of 1821] (Ioannina, 1971), 29.

³⁶ Regarding the reasons which contributed to the dominance of the basilica architectural type, see Fragisca Kephallonitou-Konstantiou, "Η εισαγωγή κοσμικών στοιχείων στους ναούς των Ιωαννίνων τον 19ο αιώνα" [The Introduction of Secular Elements in the Temples of Ioannina in the 19th Century], in *Ήπειρος, Κοινωνία-Οικονομία, 15^{ος}-20^{ος} αι.* [Epirus, Society-Economy, 15th - 20th C. Proceedings of the International Congress. September 4-7, 1985] (Ioannina: Municipality of Ioannina, 1987), 299-301; Charalambos Bouras, "Ο αρχιτεκτονικός τύπος της βασιλικής κατά την Τουρκοκρατία και ο Πατριάρχης Καλλίνικος" [The Architectural Type of the Basilica During the Ottoman Occupation and Patriarch Kallinikos], in *Εκκλησίες στην Ελλάδα μετά την Αλωση, Churches in Greece 1453-1850* (Athens: National Technical University of Athens, I, 1979), 383-448.

³⁷ Konstantios, "Χορηγία και Τέχνη," 411-412.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Kontopanagou and Koutsou, "«ἀναλώμασιν τῶν εὐσεβῶν χριστιανῶν», 75-76.

anonymously. 2. Collaboration of exceptional members of the community, lay persons and clerics. 3. Collaboration of the whole community.

The Kapesovite workshop worked on 39 monuments, parish churches and monasteries.³⁹ Among the Kapesovite painters' works, the funding of anonymous donors is tracked for ten monuments.⁴⁰ Of particular interest is the collaboration of the monks with a group of secular patrons. During the late Ottoman period, the clerics and monks were often a significant part of the anonymous collective donorship, either as a collective entity or through representers. The donor inscription in the narthex of the catholicon of Eleousa's monastery in Lake Pamvotis's island in Ioannina, dated 1759, states that the donors were the community of monks and some faithful Christians, the latter probably inhabitants of the island (fig. 1) (...ΙΣΤΟΡΗΘΗ ΔΕ Ο ΑΥΤΟΣ ΝΑΡΘΗΞ ΔΙΑ ΔΑΠΑΝΗΣ ΤΙΝΩΝ ΦΙΛΟΘΕΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ...),⁴¹ A noteworthy aspect of co-operative patronage is the collaboration of the clerics⁴² and pious community members. In some cases, one cleric was the supervisor of the construction or decoration, and due to this distinguished task his name is written in the donor inscription. The clergy's oversight of the collective donations was common for the Orthodox communities under Ottoman or Venetian occupation.⁴³ The donor portraits

³⁹ Kontopanagou, *The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop*, 310-312; Dimitrios Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων από το Καπέσοβο της Ηπείρου* [Approach to the Work of the Painters from Kapesovo, Epirus] (Athens: Ministry of Culture. Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development, 2001), 47-48.

⁴⁰ The ten churches or monasteries decorated by the Kapesovo workshop that were funded by collective sponsorship are (in chronological order): the Church of the Taxiarchs (Chrysorrachi), the narthex of the Monastery of Eleousa (Lake Pamvotis Island, Ioannina), the Church of St Dimitrios (Lias), the Church of St George (Kourenta), the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin (Chysovitsa), the Church of St Nicholas (Tsepelovo), the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin (Makrino), the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin (Mikrokastro), the Church of St Nicholas (Grammeno), the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin (Aristi).

⁴¹ Varvara Papadopoulou, *Μνημεία Ιωαννίνων: Πόλη, Νησί, Λεκανοπέδιο* [Monuments of Ioannina: City, Island, Basin] (Ioannina: Ministry of Culture, 2009), 147; Eadem, *Τα μοναστήρια του Νησιού των Ιωαννίνων* [The Monasteries of the Island, Ioannina] (Ioannina: I. M. Ελεούσης Νήσου, 2004), 77; Kamaroulis, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 270-271; Evaggelos Lekkos, *Τα Μοναστήρια του Ελληνισμού. Ιστορία-Παράδοση-Τέχνη* [The Monasteries of Greece. History-Tradition-Art] (Athens: Ixnilatis Publications, 1997), 145; Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Ελληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek Painters after the Fall of Constantinople (1450-1830)], Vol. 3 (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation NHRF, Section of Neohellenic Research SNR, 2010), 331-332.

⁴² Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, "Donors in the Palaiologan Church of the Mani in the Southern Peloponnese: Individualities, Collectivity and Social Identities," in Anna Zakharova, Olga Ovcharova, and Irina Oretskaia, eds., *Art of the Byzantine World: Individuality in Artistic Creativity: A Collection in Honour of Olga Popova* (Moscow: State Institute for Art Studies, 2021), 162.

⁴³ Karydis, "Συλλογικές χορηγίες," 163-166.

depict two exceptional members of the monastery: the monastery's head, the hegumen Gerasimos and his substitute, called Dorotheos.⁴⁴ According to the inscriptions, Dorotheos was responsible for collecting the amount from the secular donors. The anonymity of "*filotheon christianon*", i.e., "of pious Christians", holds a leading role in the donation, and Dorotheos' portrait itself highlights donors' social contribution. Of similar content is the inscription in one monument that is not included in the production of the Kapesovite painters, St Athanasios in Preveza, dated 1780. The cleric Ioannes Georgousis was the supervisor (*ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΠΙΣΤΑΣΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΑΒΕΣΤΑΤΟΥ ΕΝ ΙΕΡΕΥΣΙ ΠΑΠΑ ΚΥΡ ΙΩΑΝΗ ΓΕΟΡΓΟΥΣΗ*). He is called "kyr", i.e. "Mr", revealing that he is a person of some social status.⁴⁵ (*ΤΟΥΠΙΚΛΕΙΝ ΤΟΥ ΚΕ ΚΤΗΤΟΡΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΝΑΟΥ ΤΟΥΤΟΥ...*). The following verses note that the decoration was funded collectively by the offerings of devoted Christians (*ΔΑΠΑΗΣ ΔΕ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΩΝ ΧΡΗΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΔΕΛΦΩΝ*).⁴⁶

The clergy's oversight is also observable in the frescoes of the church in the village of Thesprotiko (Nativity of the Virgin), a work of the painters from Koritiani (fig. 2).⁴⁷ According to the donor inscription, the decoration of the church, dated 1794, was sponsored collectively by: 1. the clerics (...*ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΙΕΡΕΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΙΕΡΕΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΕΤΕΡΟΥ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΙΕΡΕΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΛΟΙΠΩΝ ΙΕΡΕΩΝ...*); 2. the church commissioner, the epitropos Athanasios Pougkias (...*ΚΑΙ ΑΘΑΝΑΣΙΟΥ ΠΟΥΓΚΙΑ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΟΥ...*) and 3. the contributions of the entire village population without listing any names (*ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΧΩΡΑΙ ΤΑΥΤΗ*).⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 30-31.

⁴⁵ "Kyr" is the abbreviation of "*kyrios*" (*κύριος*). For the use of the abbreviation in similar cases in the Byzantine period, see Kalopissi-Verti, "Collective Patterns," 128-129.

⁴⁶ Varvara Papadopoulou, "Η Ουρανία του ναού του Αγίου Αθανασίου στην Πρέβεζα" [The Heaven of the Church of Agios Athanasios in Preveza], in Athanasios Paliouras and Aggeliki Stavropoulou, eds., *Μίλτος Γαρίδης (1926-1996) Αφιέρωμα* [Miltos Garides (1926-1996) Tribute], Vol. B (Ioannina: University of Ioannina, 2003), 527-528.

⁴⁷ Katerina Kontopanagou, "Εικονογραφικές παρατηρήσεις στην εντοίχια ζωγραφική του 18^{ου} αιώνα στην περιοχή της Πρέβεζας: ο ναός του Γενεσίου Θεοτόκου στο Θεσπρωτικό" [Iconographic Observations in the Frescoes of the 18th Century in the Area of Preveza: The Church of Nativity of the Virgin in Thesprotiko], in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium for the History and the Culture of Preveza Region. September 16-20, 2009*, Vol. B (Preveza: Actia Nicopolis Foundation, 2009), 345-346.

⁴⁸ Odysseas Mpetsos, *Λέλοβα (το σημερινόν Θεσπρωτικόν) και η Κάτω Λάκκα Σούλι* [Lelova (The present Thesptotiko) and the Down Lakka Souli Region] (Preveza: 1975), 75-76; Athina Tzakou, "Γενέσιον της Θεοτόκου στο Θεσπρωτικό Πρέβεζας" [The Church of Nativity of the Virgin in Thesptotiko of Preveza], in *Εκκλησίες στην Ελλάδα μετά την Άλωση, Churches in Greece 1453-1850* (Athens: National Technical University of Athens, II, 1982), 116; Manolis

A notable case of collective sponsorship is when the church as an institution supports the construction or the decoration. The donor inscription of the Dormition of the Virgin in Makrino, dated 1766,⁴⁹ states that the church fund covered the costs for the frescoes' depiction (...ΔΙΑ ΑΝΑΛΟΜΑΤΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ...).⁵⁰ It is noted that the local community's modest offerings provided the parish's incomes and, finally, the decoration's funding, revealing the socio-economic situation of the village.⁵¹

The co-operative donorship of exceptional community members, lay persons and clerics is of particular interest. In this category, noteworthy is the donorship for the Church of St Nicholas in Tsepelovo, dated 1789. Three different sources provided the donation for the construction and decoration of the monument, as attested by the inscriptional evidence: the noble lord Vasileios Rados (...ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΜΕΝ ΤΟΥ ΕΥΤΕΝΕΣΤΑΤΟΥ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΟΣ, ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΡΑΔΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ...) and other local potentates (...ΚΑΙ ΕΤΕΡΩΝ ΤΙΝΩΝ ΠΡΟΕΣΤΩΤΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΔΟΣ...), the inhabitants of the region (...ΔΑΪΑΝΗΣ ΔΕ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΧΩΡΑΣ) and the parish's devotional clerics (ΙΕΡΑΤΕΥΩΝΤΩΝ ΔΕ ΚΑΙ ΤΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΔΙΟΙΚΟΝΤΩΝ ΕΥΛΑΒΕΣΤΑΤΩΝ ΙΕΡΕΩΝ...).⁵² The *proestoi*, i.e., the most prominent inhabitants of the village, among them the noble lord, the common people and the clergy collectively and anonymously founded the impressive Church of St Nicholas. The mention of Lord Rados reflects his influential role in local society and his substantial financial support.

Chatzidakis and Eugenia Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση (1450-1830)* [Greek Painters after the Fall of Constantinople (1450-1830)], Vol. 2 (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation NHRF, 1997), 138.

⁴⁹ The year is documented in a carved inscription on a stone tablet on the southern exterior side of the church; Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 32; Gregory Manopoulos, "Έπανεξέταση των επιγραφών των Καπεσοβιτών Ζωγράφων" [Review of the Inscriptions of the Kapesovite Painters], *Epirotika Chronica* 37 (2003): 307.

⁵⁰ Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 32-33; Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, 148; Manopoulos, "Έπανεξέταση των επιγραφών," 307; Dimitrios Triantaphyllopoulos, "Βυζαντινά, Μεσαιωνικά και Νεώτερα μνημεία της Ηπείρου" [Byzantine, Medieval and Later Monuments in Epirus], *AD* 32 (1977): 170-171; Stefanos Mpettes, "Παλαιογραφικά επαρχίας Κουρέντων" [Paleographics of Kourenta Province], *Epirotiki Estia* 14 (1965): 53.

⁵¹ A similar case of donorship ...ΔΙΑ ΑΝΑΛΟΜΑΤΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ... is that of the Church of the Taxiarchs in Kato Pedina. Konstantios, "Χορηγία και Τέχνη," 410; Ioannis Chouliaras, "Τοιχογραφημένοι ναοί στα Άνω και Κάτω Πεδινά Ζαγορίου 18^{ος}-19^{ος}αι" [Frescoes in Ano and Kato Pedina, Zagori 18th - 19th C.], in Kostas Papagianopoulos and Eleni Simone, eds., *Οι ρίζες των Σουδενιωτών* [The Roots of the Sudanese] (Lousika Patras: Syllogos Soudenioton Patron kai Perixoron, 2017), 289-308.

⁵² Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 146; Drakopoulou, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι μετά την Άλωση*, 215.

The third category of anonymous collective sponsorship is attested at the Church of the Dormition in Chrysovitsa.⁵³ The inscription notes that the devoted Christian villagers financed the decoration of the church in 1781 (...ΔΑΠΑΝΗ ΔΕ ΤΩΝ ΦΙΛΟΧΡΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ...)⁵⁴ In the Church of St Spyridon in the village of Vouno in the region of Avlona in modern-day Albania, all the inhabitants covered the expenses of the frescoes in 1784. Ordinary persons, without reference being made to names or other information in the inscription, are the sole donor of the wall-paintings (...ΟΛΑ ΔΥ ΕΞΟΔΟΝ ΚΕ ΔΑΠΑΝΗ ΤΟΥ ΟΛΟΥ ΚΥΝΟΥ ΧΟΡΙΟΥ...)⁵⁵ The “κοινό χωρίο”, i.e., the common people, laypersons and probably also the village’s clerics contributed to the donation anonymously.⁵⁶ Another example of anonymous collective sponsorship is attested at the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Aristi, Zagori. The monument was constructed in 1791, but the frescoes are dated 1806. The donor inscription mentions that the church was decorated with all the villagers’ contributions (...ΔΙΑ ΣΥΝΔΡΟΜΗΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΩΡΑΣ ΤΑΥΤΗΣ...) (fig. 3).⁵⁷

Of essential importance for the current research is the collective donorship for the Church of St George in Kourenta, revealing the role and the unity of the Greek-speaking communities in the eighteenth century under Ottoman rule.⁵⁸ The inscriptional evidence highlights the anonymous collective

⁵³ The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin of Chrysovitsa is located in the village of the same name, which belongs to the municipality of Metsovo. It was once a monastery, and is currently the parish and funerary church of the village. Kamaroulas, *Τα μοναστήρια της Ηπείρου*, 649-655.

⁵⁴ Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 39-40.

⁵⁵ Is located near Chimara. Popa, *Mbishkrime*, 306, no. 834. Regarding the date of the decoration is attested also the year 1783, see in Alexandra Trifonova, “Άγνωστος κύκλος θαυμάτων του αγίου Σπυρίδωνα στο ναό του Αγίου Σπυρίδωνα (1783) στο Βουνό της Χειμάρδας (Αλβανία)” [An Unknown Cycle of St Spyridon’s Miracles in the Church of St Spyridon (1783) in Vuno Near Heimarra (Albania)] (*Rencontres culturelles. Le passé et la contemporanéité. Conférence scientifique internationale. 30^e anniversaire du Centre de Recherches Slavo-Byzantines “Ivan Dujčev” auprès de l’Université de Sofia “St. Clément d’Ohrid”*, Sofia, l’Université de “St Kliment Ohridski,” 2-4 juin 2016), *Annuaire de l’Université de Sofia “St Kliment Ohridski”* 99 (18), 201: 319-320.

⁵⁶ The word “κοινό” (*koino*) is attested in byzantine co-operative patronage. Kalopissi-Verti, “Donors in the Palaiologan Church of the Mani,” 128.

⁵⁷ Soulis, “Επιγραφαί και Ενθυμήσεις,” 106-107; Panagiotis Vocotopoulos, “Αγία Παρασκευή του Δράκου” [Saint Paraskevi of the Dragon], *DChAE* 14 (1987-1988): 49-59; Fotis Petsas and Giannis Saralis, *Αρίστη και Δυτικό Ζαγόρι* [Ariste and West Zagori] (Athens: 1982), 159-161; Chatzidakis, *Έλληνες Ζωγράφοι*, 167; Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 45.

⁵⁸ For the economic and social model of Ottoman society, Sencer Divtçioğlu, “Οικονομικό μοντέλο της Οθωμανικής κοινωνίας (ΙΔ΄ και ΙΕ΄ αιώνας)” [Economic Model of Ottoman Society (14th - 15th C.)], in Spyros Asdrachas, ed., *Η οικονομική δομή των βαλκανικών χωρών στα χρόνια της Οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας, 15th-19th αι.* [The Economic Structure of the Balkan Countries During the Years of Ottoman Rule, 15th - 19th C.] (Athens: Melissa, 1979), 117-127.

funding and the cohesion of the mountain community. The external inscription refers to the initiative of founding the church in 1774, which was of Braimi Kalatzi. He was the *soubasi* of the region, a powerful administrative and military officer.⁵⁹ The donor inscription in the main church attests to the unity of the inhabitants, authorities, clergy and ordinary people (fig. 4). According to the internal inscription, Ioannis Koutzotis, an exceptional member of the community,⁶⁰ was the overseer of the church's decoration in 1777. Koutzotis had the responsibility for the completion of the project. The clerics' names follow and the final verse reports that the community donated the decoration of the monument. We read the typical phrase "*eusebon christianon*", i.e., the pious Christians (...*ΑΝΑΛΩΜΑΣΙΝ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΕΒΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ*) provided the funding, indicating their devotion to God and dedication to their homeland. It is worth noting that the frescoes funded collectively by anonymous donors create an impressive and extensive iconographic programme. The frescoes and portable icons in St George in Kourenta are of exceptional artistic value (fig. 5). The clear artistic preferences testify to the capability and professionalism of the painters.⁶¹ The humble anonymous offerings of the devoted Christians continued the *soubasi's* initiative and covered the costs of the considerable and prolific painters of their era: The Kapesovites Athanasios, Ioannis and Georgios were the most capable and well-known painters throughout West Greece and Albania.⁶²

Conclusion

The construction and renovation of religious monuments during the Ottoman rule in the region of Epirus found support through collective sponsorship and groups of anonymous donors, clerics, monks and laypeople.

⁵⁹ The *soubasis* were Ottoman administrative and military officials who headed the timariots of a given administrative subdivision known as a *soubasilik*. Katerina Kontopanagou, *δέξος αναλώμασιν. St. George, Kourenta (Ioannina) 1774. Artwork of the Kapesovite Painters* (Athens: Kourenta Fraternity, 2021), 59, 81.

⁶⁰ Ioannis Koutzotis was the son of an important local official, as Ioannis's father held the office of *έξαρχος* (exarch). The *έξαρχος* was an ecclesiastical title, conferred upon the clergy and laymen alike, whose duties included custodianship of the patriarchal monasteries and the collection of revenue over a large geographical region. See Kontopanagou, *δέξος αναλώμασιν. St. George Kourenta*, 75.

⁶¹ The recent conservation of the church frescoes offered an opportunity for comprehensive study. In 2013, the project was included in the operational programme of the Directorate of Conservation of Ancient and Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture with the partial funding of the European Regional Development Fund. The completion of restoration works uncovered frescoes painted by the Kapesovite painters Athanasios, Ioannis and Georgios, true gems of eighteenth-century painting, in all their splendour.

⁶² For the Kapesovite painters and their workshop, see: Kontopanagou, *The Kapesovite Painters' Workshop*, 300-309; Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων*, 45-51; Manopoulos, "Επιανεξέταση των επιγραφών," 311-316.

The inscription model of St George in Kourenta is the outcome of a local collective initiative, with the consensus of all local members, administrative and ecclesiastical actors, and ordinary people. The particular reference to the area's *soubasi*, Braimi Kalatzis, a local administrative actor of the Ottoman Porte, states his essential participation in constructing the monument. An influential person of the Ottoman administration funded a Christian monument.

His donation in 1774 was followed by the anonymous collective donorship of the community in 1777, demonstrating the inhabitants' approval of the construction's donation. In this way, the spiritual orientations of a prosperous Greek-speaking community in the last quarter of the eighteenth century are demonstrated. The construction of the church was probably not dictated only for purely religious reasons. At the same time, however, it is a testament to the community's cohesion and the benefactor's desire to create a legacy for future generations. The Kourenta community could be a robust community with historical, geographical, religious and cultural references, being part of the wider geographical society while maintaining the peculiarities of its economic physiognomy and local cultural "identity".⁶³ The parishes gradually exerted a more significant influence, through their anonymous collective donations, than the monastic institutions. Thus, even anonymously, all the inhabitants may contribute equally – who knows? – and the local communities become the primary factor in the construction or renovation of the monuments and consequently the custodians of the religious and cultural tradition.

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Fig. 6. The Church of St George in Kourenta (2020). Authors' archive.

⁶³ Dimitris Arvanitakis, "The Institution of the Communities: A Form of Communication between Sovereign and Subject and a Mechanism of Constructing Social Memory," in *The Greek World under Ottoman and Western Domination: 15th-19th Centuries* (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation and Benaki Museum, 2006), 21-22.



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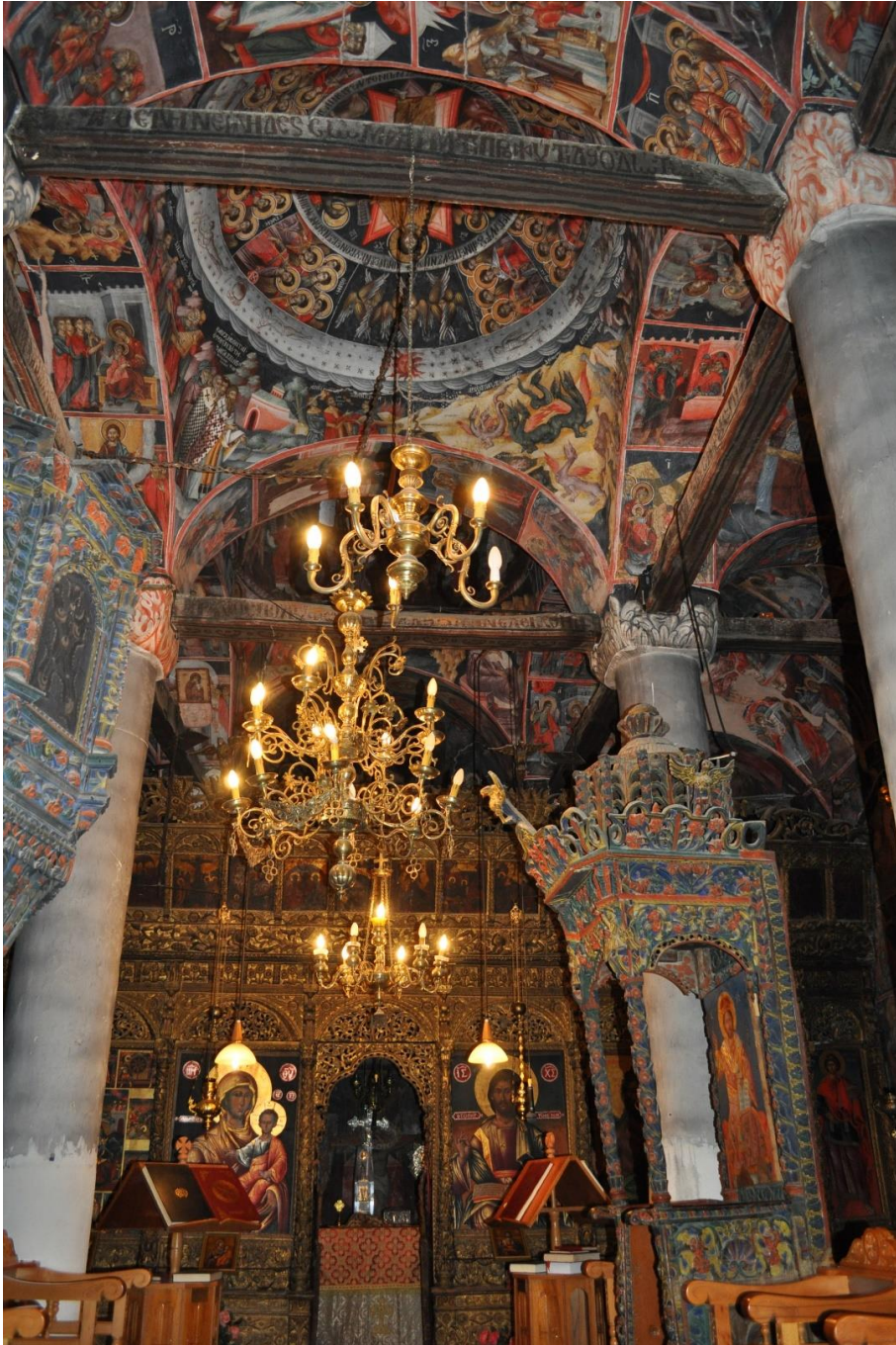


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Fig. 6. The Church of St George in Kourenta (2020).