

Manolis G. Varvounis – Nikos Rodosthenous**

Religious Traditions of Mount Athos on Miraculous Icons of Panagia (The Mother of God)

At the monasteries and hermitages of Mount Athos, many miraculous icons are kept and exhibited, which are honored accordingly by the monks and are offered for worship to the numerous pilgrims of the holy relics of Mount Athos.¹ The pilgrims are informed about the monastic traditions of Mount Athos regarding these icons, their origin, and their miraculous action, during their visit to the monasteries and then they transfer them to the world so that they are disseminated systematically and they can become common knowledge of all believers.² In this way, the traditions regarding the miraculous icons of Mount Athos become wide-spread and are considered an essential part of religious traditions not only of the Greek people but also for other Orthodox people.³

Introduction

Subsequently, we will examine certain aspects of these traditions, based on the literature, notably the recent work on the miraculous icons in the monasteries of Mount Athos, where, except for the archaeological and the historical data of these specific icons, also information on the wonders, their origin and their supernatural action over the centuries is captured.⁴ These are information that inspired the people accordingly and are the basis for the formation of respective traditions and religious customs that define the Greek folk religiosity.

Many of these traditions relate to the way each icon ended up in the monastery where is kept today. According to the archetypal core of these traditions, the icon was thrown into the sea at the time of iconoclasm from a region of Asia Minor or the Near East, in order to be saved from destruction, and miraculously arrived at the monastery. The fathers were notified by a vision or fiery column that identified the location where the icon existed, and they received it. The icon was placed in a

* Professor, Democritus University of Thrace

* Assistant Professor, C.D.A. College of Cyprus

¹ R. Cormack, "Miraculous Icons in Byzantium and their powers," *Arte Christiana* 76 (1988), 55-60; Nancy Patterson-Ševčenko, "Icons in the Liturgy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991), 45-57.

² Cf. *Ανωτέρα Επισκίασις επί του Άθω, ήτοι διηγήσεις περί των θαυματουργών εικόνων της Θεοτόκου*, Agion Horos 2000 and Archim. Nektarios Ziompolas, *Σαράντα εικόνες της Παναγίας*, Athens 2004.

³ For these see Gerasimos Smyrnakis, *Το Άγιον Όρος*, Athens 1903 (reprint: Karies Agiou Horous 1988).

⁴ G. Mantzaridis–Euth. Tsigaridas, *Οι θαυματουργές εικόνες στο Περιβόλι της Παναγίας*, Athens 2013 [THEPP].

location that the divine providence did not like, and by its miraculous movement, that usually repeated three times, it pointed out the location where it wanted to stay, which eventually became respected by the fathers.⁵

Icons of the Mother of God in Mount Athos' Monasteries

This basic narrative core is often enriched with narrative details, with an aim to make it more believable since it refers to the era of iconoclasm, during which monasteries and organized monasticism did not exist on Mount Athos.⁶ Thus, Panagia Eggitria (Mother of God Surety of Sinners) of the monastery of Megisti Lavra⁷ is associated with the repentance of Saint Mary of Egypt (*THEPP53*), while monk Gabriel⁸ who finally pulled from the sea Panagia Portaitisa (the Iveron Mother of God) of the Iveron monastery walked on the waves⁹ (*THEPP*, 109), a story that has as source the evangelical description for Christ who walked on the stormy lake of Gennesaret (Matthew 14, 26).

In the latter case, the animal stood opposite the monastery, where today there is an icon case, where the litany of the icon ends, in commemoration of the miracle.¹⁰ Of course, the motif of a godsend animal that discovers holy water or a miraculous icon is common in similar traditions of Greek and other Balkan people.¹¹ In the case of Panagia Glykophilousa (the Sweet-kissing Mother of God) of the Philotheou monastery, the tradition connects it with the pious wife of an iconoclast patrician of the emperor Theophilus (829-842) (*THEPP*, 229). Also, miraculous movements from monastery to monastery are more rarely mentioned, as exemplified by the image of Panagia Odigitria (Our Lady of Guides) of the Xenophontos monastery (*THEPP*, 281) which was miraculously moved from the monastery of Vatopedi.¹²

⁵ L. Kretzenbacher, „Kreuzerhebung und Nachtliturgie auf dem Heiligen Berge,“ in his book *Ethnologia Europaea. Studienwanderungen und Erlebnisse auf volkskündlicher Feldforschung im Alleingang*, München 1986, nr. 6.

⁶ Cf. Kr. Chrissochoidis, “The Portaitissa Icon at Iveron Monastery and the Cult of the Virgin in Mount Athos,” in M. Vasilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, Norfolk 2005, 133-141.

⁷ Nikodimos Lavriotis, *Μεγίστη Λαύρα του Αγίου Αθανασίου Αγίου Όρους. Εικονογραφημένος οδηγός-Προσκυνητάριον*, Agion Horos 1988, 27-28, 39, 41-42.

⁸ Maximos Iviritis, *Ο όσιος Γαβριήλ ο Ίβηρ, ο διαγγελεύς της Παναγίας Πορταΐτισσης*, Thessaloniki 1990.

⁹ Cf. Th. Pazaras, «Ιστορία της θαυματουργικής έλευσης της εικόνας της Παναγίας Πορταΐτισσας στη μονή Ίβήρων», *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 20 (1998-1999), 385-398.

¹⁰ I. Bozilov, “Macenie za zografskite monasi, Legendi I fakti,” in *Svetogorska Obitel Zograf 2*, Sofia 1996, 175-189.

¹¹ Cf. D. S. Loukatos, „Le motif de la chevre decouvrant des lieux sacres en Grece,“ in *Festschrift Matthias Zender*, Bonn 1972, 465-469. Also, M. C. Varvounis, «Ζώα που μίλησαν με το Θεό. Ελληνικές λαϊκές θρησκευτικές παραδόσεις», in Anna Lydaki – G. N. Baskozos (ed.), *Περί Ζώων. Με λογική και συναίσθημα*, Athens 2011, 268-275, with bibliography and examples.

¹² I. Tognazzi-Zervou, “L’ iconografia e la ‘Vita’ delle miracolose icone della Theotokos Brefokra-tooussa: Blachernitissa e Odigitria,” *Bolletino della Badia Greca di Crottaferrata* n.s. 40: 2 (1986), 219-287.

These traditions, on the one hand, aim to support Mount Athos narratives regarding the Byzantine origin of most of the monasteries that are not consistent with the historical data, on the other hand, they are explanatory narratives related to the existence of holy water, at the borders of every monastery, of liturgy details that are regulated by the typical of every monastery and of particularities regarding the location that each miraculous icon is placed and exposed to pilgrimage.¹³

It should also be noted that the miraculous movements of the icons, which according to the traditions indicate the location where the depicted sacred person or the icon to be placed, are part of a whole category of similar hagiographical and pious Greek traditions, regarding building of temples and cities, whose origins lie in the Byzantine times.¹⁴ In any case, in these traditions, the traditions concerning the owners of every monastery intertwine with possible historical information about the origin of their well-known icons, which nevertheless are lost in the haze of each ological pious myth, shaping –and to a certain extent, explaining– the respective shipping and liturgical tradition of each monastery.

Following this tradition, associated with the basic idea of the popular belief that the depicted sacred person dwells inside the icon and performs miracles through it,¹⁵ are also the Mount Athos traditions hitherto mentioned in the monasteries of Mount Athos, in relation with the well-known and miraculous icons that each monastery possesses.

Folk Narrative Motives

The same basic principle of popular religiosity regarding the special power of icons as an expression of the actions of the sacred person that dwells inside them, which we find in many relevant Greek folklores,¹⁶ also express the Athonite traditions according to which the sacred person communicates with people through its icon. This communication has two sides, as it is compassionate and comforting for the pious and punishing for the wicked, in any case, it confirms the miraculous power of this icon.

A subcategory of these traditions is the one in which the wicked, layman or monk, who dared not to show obedience or reverence to the depicted holy person, or turned against it in various ways, expressing disrespect with his gestures and actions against the icon, is punished. In fact the wicked are often possessed or outraged monks, so their punishment is harder, in order to serve as an exemplification to the others, while they often become aware of their sin and ask for forgiveness by

¹³ Holy Monastery of Xeropotamou, *Θαυματουργές εικόνες της Παναγίας στον Άθω*, Agion Horos 1985.

¹⁴ M. G. Varvounis, "Notes on a Byzantine folk tradition," *Βυζαντικά* 16 (1996), 353-358.

¹⁵ St. D. Imellos, «Εικόνες αγίων δεσμευόμεναι», *Επετηρίς Κέντρου Ερεύνης Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας* 24 (1975-76), 60-64.

¹⁶ M. G. Varvounis, «Η λειτουργία του λαογραφικού στοιχείου στο έργο του Μ. Καραγάτση: η περίπτωση του μυθιστορήματος *Σέργιος και Βάκχος*», *Αρχείο Θεσσαλικών Μελετών* 11 (1995), 191-196, with similar examples.

hard practice, which they eventually take: the hungry, due to his tasks, deacon that stabbed with a knife Panagia Esfagmeni (the stabbed Icon of mother of God) of the Vatopedi monastery¹⁷ was blinded, and possessed, and stayed for three years in a stall across the icon before being forgiven, but his hand remained unable to move even after his death (*THEPP*81). Panagia Papadiki (The mother of God named Papadiki) of the Hilandar monastery threw into the water and drowned a heretic priest that pretended to be an orthodox during a litany (*THEPP*, 123).

Probably a pattern for all these punitive traditions is the most widely known story about Panagia Gorgoepikoos (Virgin Mary Gorgoepikoos) of the Docheiariou ou monastery (*THEPP*, 219),¹⁸ according to which in 1664 the refectory monk Nile was punished by blindness because he used to leave before the icon a lit taper and blackened her face, and did not obey when Panagia commanded him not to repeat it. His sight was restored, after sitting on a stall across the mural of Panagia for a certain period of time, begging for her forgiveness.¹⁹ It is quite typical that in these traditions the wounds the blasphemer brings upon the icon gush blood, or that the voice of the depicted holy person is heard, as a certification that it dwells within the miraculous icon.²⁰ In any event, these traditions had also a correctional function for any disobedient and undisciplined monk, as the promised supernatural punishment could contribute to their reformation to the monastic norms of gentleness and obedience.

Often the wicked and punished are not monks, but people of a different religion. In this case, the historical adventures of the monasteries of Mount Athos are recounted, especially during the times of the Greek revolution of 1821, given that the protagonists are almost always Ottomans and Muslim soldiers. Panagia Pyrovolithisa (Virgin Mary Pyrovolithisa) of the Vatopedi Monastery was shot in the right arm by a Turkish soldier, who went insane and hanged himself (*THEPP*, 93).²¹ Panagia Portaitissa (The Iveron mother of God)²² of the Iveron monastery gushed blood because of a pirate's hit, who then became a monk, taking the name of Damascus and repenting for his act for life (*THEPP*, 109). Panagia Esfagmeni of the monastery of Zografos was engraved on the neck by a Turkish officer's sword, which eventually went insane and had a horrible death (*THEPP*, 215).²³ Panagia Pyrovolithisa of the Xenofontos monastery was

¹⁷ E. Tsigaridas, «Η Παναγία Εσφαγμένη της μονής Βατοπαιδίου», in Γηθόσυνον Σέβασμα. Αντίδωρον τιμής και μνήμης εις τον μακαριστόν καθηγητήν της Λειτουργικής Ιωάννην Μ. Φουντούλην († 2007) 2, Thessaloniki 2013, 1957-1984.

¹⁸ Για τα σχετικά συναξαριακά και υμνογραφικά κείμενα βλ. Holy Monastery of Dochiariou, Παναγία Γοργοπήκοος 1-2, Agion Horos 1999.

¹⁹ Βλ. σχετικά και Hierom. Philotheos Dochiaritis, «Η θαυματουργή εικόνα της Παναγίας Γοργοπήκοου», in St. Papadopoulos (ed.), Παρουσία ιεράς μονής Δοχειαρίου, Agion Horos 2001, 199 κ.εξ., with bibliography.

²⁰ Cf. L. Mavrodinova, “L’ icone miraculeuse de Docheiariou et l’ iconographie de la Vierge Gorgoepikoos dans la peinture medieval,” in Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου «Άγιον Όρος. Φύση-Λατρεία-Τέχνη» 2, Thessaloniki 2001, 75-79.

²¹ E. N. Tsigaridas-P. Papadimitriou, «Θαυματουργικές εικόνες της μονής Βατοπαιδίου και τα αντίγραφα τους», Μακεδονικά 36 (2007), 1-31.

²² L. Evseeva-M. Shvedova, “Afonskiie spiski Bogomateri Portaitissi I problema podobii v ikonopisi,” in Cudotvornaia ikona v Vizantii I Drevnei Rusi, Moskva 1996, 346-353.

²³ D. Zografski, Sveta Gora Zograf v minaloto I dnes, Sofia 1943, 28.

shot with a firearm by a Turkish soldier, who was killed by his own bullets, which were rebounded (*THEPP*, 305). In any case, the traditions give to the wicked room for painful repentance, while people of a different religion are immediately ished by death, a fact that is indicative that those traditions are teaching and moralizing or exemplary.²⁴

Another subcategory of these traditions refers to the communication of the depicted holy person with the people, monks and laymen, but which is not meant as a punishment for some sin or impiety, but as a correction, a teaching and a spiritual training. In these traditions, the motif of Panagia who through her voice that is through one of her icons is prohibiting the entrance of an Empress to a monastery, who attempted, sometimes by pious motives, to violate the avaton for women of monastic state of Athos, is usual. According to tradition Panagia Antiphonetria Virgin who-answers), of Vatopedi monastery, thus refused entrance to the to Gala Plakidia, daughter of Great Theodosius and wife of the Roman Emperor stantine III, which in order to atone built the chapel of St. Demetrius of the (*THEPP*, 89).²⁵

This story is without historical basis, designed to support the monastic point of view on the monastery's origins in early Byzantine years, which is however not established from the sources. The same is also referred many centuries later for Mara Brankovic, daughter of Serbian Prince George Brankovic and mother of Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror, who Panagia miraculously stopped halfway to the monastery of St. Paul, to where she was traveling carrying the gifts of Magi that she had rescued, to offer them to the monastery. In fact, on the location where the voice of Panagia sounded, an icon case is *built* (*THEPP*, 257). However, in this case, the correlation of Mara to the tradition of the relic in the Athos monastery seems to have a historical basis.²⁶ These traditions are intended to support by these miracles the respect for the avaton of Mount Athos, which for centuries suffered many attacks and several attempts of violation or ablation.²⁷

In fact, sometimes Panagia while addressing to the faithful and in order to support the monks is gushing myrrh [(Panagia Myrovlytissa (Virgin Mary the Myrrh-gusher) of the St. Paul monastery (*THEPP*, 247)]²⁸ and displays tears in her eyes [Panagia Dakryrooussa (Virgin Mary in Tears), of the cloister of Prophet Elijah (*THEPP*, 185)]²⁹ or answers to a monk complaining for the poverty of the monastery, who addressed to her specific icon, prompting him to care for the salvation of

²⁴ Cf. St. D. Imellos, *Η περί πειρατών λαϊκή παράδοση*, Athens 1968, 83-84, and P. Peeters, "Miraculum sanctorum Cyri et Johannis in urbe Monembasia," *Analecta Bollandiana* 25 (1906), 236-237.

²⁵ E. N. Tsigaridas-K. Loverdoy-Tsigarida, *Ιερά Μεγίστη Μονή Βατοπαιδίου. Βυζαντινές εικόνες και επενδύσεις*, Agion Horos 2006. Cf. E. Sandler, *Les icons byzantines de la Mere du Dieu*, Paris 1992, 123 κ. εξ.

²⁶ Mon. Moysis Hagioritis, *Προσκυνητάριον της ιεράς μονής Αγίου Παύλου*, Agion Horos 1997.

²⁷ I. M. Hatzifotis, *Η καθημερινή ζωή στο Άγιον Όρος*, Athens 1995, 239.

²⁸ St. Papadopoulos (ed.), *Ιερά Μονή Αγίου Παύλου. Εικόνες*, Agion Horos 1998, with bibliography.

²⁹ Archim. Ioakim Karachristos, *Ιερά Κοινοβιακή Σκήτη Προφήτου Ηλιού*, Agion Horos 1999, 34.

his soul and not to bother her again with similar requests [Panagia Glikofilousa of Philotheou monastery (*THEPP*229)], or prompts a monk who asks the icon of the way way of his salvation to leave the monastery and become a hermit³⁰ [Panagia Epakouousa (Virgin Mary Epakouousa) of Zografou monastery (*THEPP*, 197)]³¹ or moves miraculously a fisherman who fell asleep in front of her icon case, furthermore coated with his covers, in order to help him escape from a huge landslide [Panagia Arsaniotissa or Arsenarissa of Esfigmenou Monastery *THEPP*, 309)].

These traditions are Athonite variants of known traditions about icons that speak to speak to the faithful or display tears or gush myrrh as evidence for their miraculous properties and their particular worshipping value, since this way it is certified to the faithful that the depicted sacred person dwells within the icon and acts through it.³² This way some aspects of the monastic point of view on certain things are supported, such as the perception of the superiority of the ascetic versus the cenobitic monastic life, which is not based on the patristic tradition. The attribution to the supernatural through the traditions always gives special prestige and contributes to the spread of the worshipping honor of this miraculous icon, with all the consequences this has for the spiritual and the overall life of the monastery and the fraternity.

Traditions about miraculous Rescues

Another category of traditions refers to miraculous rescues of monasteries and brotherhoods, especially from the fires, which were frequent and destructive in Mount Athos. These traditions likely reflect historical events related to fires, which until today are a key risk for the Athonite monasteries and the holy relics. The first subcategory regards miraculous rescues of monasteries from fires through the litany of a specific miraculous icon,³³ to which the supernatural salvation is attributed. Usually traditions attribute the extinguishing of the fire to a heavy rain caused by Panagia, who extinguished the threatening to the monastery fire [2012: Copy of Panagia Triherousa (the Virgin with Three Hands) of the Hilandar monastery (*THEPP*, 143)], even though it had already affected buildings of the monastery [1948: Panagia Pyrosoteira (Mother of God rescuer from Fire) (copy of the icon of Panagia Gerontissa (Mother of God named Gerontissa)) of the Pantocrator monastery (*THEPP*, 173)]. In both cases, these are copies of the well-known miraculous icons of the monasteries in danger,

³⁰ I. Gergova – A. Kujumdjiev, “Novootkriti sceni ot zitiето na sv. Kozma Zografski v glavната carkva na manastira Zograf,” *Problemi na Izkustvoto* 3 (2002), 53-59.

³¹ E. N. Tsigaridas - Al. Trifonova, «Οι θαυματουργές εικόνες της μονής Ζωγράφου», *Μακεδονικά* 35 (2005-2006), 119-131.

³² See St. D. Imellos, *Η περί πειρατών λαϊκή παράδοση ... op. cit.*, 81-82.

³³ See M. G. Varvounis, «Αστικές εκκλησιαστικές λιτανείες», in Kyrillos katerelos – Ap. Glavinias – Gr. Larentzakis (ed.), *Σκευος εις Τιμήν. Αφιερωματικός τόμος επί τη συμπληρώσει 25ετίας από της εις Επίσκοπον χειροτονίας και 20ετίας από της ενθρονίσεως του Μητροπολίτου Αυστρίας και Έξάρχου Ούγγαρίας και Μεσερράπης κ. Μιχαήλ. Festschrift zum 25-jährigen Jubiläum der Bischofweihe und 20-jährigen Jubiläum der Inthronisation zum Metropoliten von Austria und Exarchen von Ungarn und Mitteleuropa* Dr. Michael Staikos, Athens 2011, 67-75, with bibliography.

which got miraculous power from their original,³⁴ in accordance with the relevant Athonite stories and traditions.

In the second case, the same icons are thrown into the fire by heretics [Panagia Proangellomeni (Virgin Mary the Notifier) of the Zografou monastery (*THEPP*, 193)],³⁵ iconoclasts [Panagia Kathreptis (Virgin Mary Mirror) of the St. Paul monastery (*THEPP*, 253) - St. Stephen of the Konstamonitou monastery (*THEPP*, 325)] and disrespectful people of different religions [1800: Panagia ek pyros diasothisa (Virgin Mary rescued from Fire) of Nea Skiti (*THEPP*, 273)]³⁶ to be destroyed, but their miraculous power preserves them intact, and proves to the present, but also to each person listening to the narration of the tradition, that these are miraculous icons. Other times the icons are preserved despite the fact that the wing of the monastery [1722: Panagia Vivliothikarissa (The Mother of God the librarian) of the Hilandar monastery (*THEPP*, 139)]³⁷ or the temple where it was kept and exhibited was completely destroyed by fire [1535: Timios Prodromos o paleos (John the Baptist) of the Dionysiou monastery (*THEPP*, 153)], and retrieved intact from the ashes [Apostoloi Petros kai Pavlos (Apostles Peter and Paul) of the Karakallou monastery (*THEPP*, 225)]³⁸ without even a minimum alteration of the icon's colors [1761: Panagia Palaiologina or Pantanassa)Mother of God named Palaiologina or Pantanassa) of the Gregory monastery (*THEPP*, 305)].³⁹

These traditions correspond to the historical reality of the large fires that through the centuries have affected the monasteries of Mount Athos, and this is why some of them have been linked to specific and precisely dated historical events [Agios Panteleimon (Saint Pantaleon) of the St. Panteleimon monastery, who according to references saved the monastery from fire twice (*THEPP*, 313)]. In general, the narrative for the incorruptibility from fire, as opposed to natural laws, has as paragon the biblical narrative of the Tris pedes en kamino (Three Holy Children in the Fiery Furnace) (*Daniel c*), which by divine action remained unscathed by the fire of the furnace where they were thrown, and as a pattern is seen in other Greek traditions, designed to indicate and certify the relevant divine will, through the manifestation of a miraculous ability⁴⁰ to resist fire.

³⁴ Ar. Lidov, «Θαυματουργές εικόνες της Παναγίας», in M. Vasilaki (ed.), *Μήτηρ Θεού. Απεικονίσεις της Παναγίας στη βυζαντινή τέχνη*, Athens 2000, 47-57.

³⁵ A. Bozkov – A. Vasiliev, *Hudozestvenoto nasledstvo na manastira Zograf*, Sofia 1981, 36-37.

³⁶ P. Uspenskij, *Putesestvije v afonskije monastyri I skity 2*, Moskva 1880, 34.

³⁷ Th. Teneketzis, *Ιστορία της ιεράς μονής Χιλανδαρίου*, Agion Horos 1966, 67.

³⁸ I. M. Hatzifotis, *Μονές του Αγίου Όρους 4. Η Παναγία και το Άγιον Όρος – Σταυρονικήτα – Ιβήρων – Καρακάλλου – Φιλοθέου – Μεγίστης Λαύρας*, Athens 2009, 73. Cf. E. N. Tsigaridas, «Εικόνες του ασπασμού των αποστόλων Πέτρου και Παύλου, έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Παλαιολόγου στη μονή Καρακάλλου», in *Θωράκιον. Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη του Παύλου Λαζαρίδη*, Athens 2004, 309-312. Idem, «Εικόνες από το δεύτερο μισό του 14ου αιώνα έως το τελευταίο τέταρτο του 16ου αιώνα», in *Εικόνες Ιεράς Μονής Καρακάλλου*, Agion Horos 2011, 57-134.

³⁹ I. M. Hatzifotis, *Μονές του Αγίου Όρους 3. Ιερές Σκήτες και Ησυχαστήρια – Ξηροποτάμου - Σίμωνος Πέτρας – Γρηγορίου – Διονυσίου - Αγίου Παύλου*, Athens 2009, 63.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. G. Varvounis, *Θεμελιώδεις έννοιες και μορφές της ελληνικής θρησκευτικής λαογραφίας*, Athens 2013, w. «ακαΐα».

Traditions about miraculous Cures and supernatural Events

Finally, some traditions refer to miraculous actions associated with specific icons, as well as to tradition or miraculous cures and supernatural events associated with certain icons, and form the basis for the special religious honor attributed to them. Each of them is special; some indeed are unique and cannot be grouped, so they are examined separately below.

The tradition for one of the most respected palladiums of Mount Athos, the icon of Panagia tou Axion Esti (Mother of God of Axion Esti) that is kept in Karyes Protaton, is well known.⁴¹ Following the iconographic type of Panagia tou Kykkou⁴² (Mother of God of Kykkos), according to the tradition it owes its name to the fact that an angel in the form of a monk sang for the first time in front of it, in the pantokratorino cell of Koimiseos tis Theotokou (Assumption of Mother of God) in Karyes,⁴³ where it was placed, the liturgy hymn “*Axion Esti os alithos ...*” delivering it this way to humans (THEPP, 33).⁴⁴ In the present case, the supernatural appearance of the angel is combined with the Byzantine tradition of the divine origin of a liturgy hymn, taught in a miraculous way to humans, continuing an old narrative material, and adapting it to new standards.⁴⁵

Some traditions aim at the justification of paradoxical iconographic types. So, for example, the existence of a third hand in the icon of Panagia Triherousa, of the Hilandar monastery became the basis for the tradition that this hand was added by St. John of Damascus, to whom the icon originally belonged, when the Muslim caliph of the region he lived in cut his hand as a punishment, and the Mother of God miraculously weld it back (THEPP, 117). Miracle cures and welding of excised members by icons are mentioned in Greek hagiological and religious traditions, and this tradition seems to draw from this older narrative material.⁴⁶

The traditions regarding the image of Panagia tou Akathistou Imnou (The Mother of God of the Akathist Hymn) of Dionysiou Monastery (THEPP, 147) follow the known pattern, from the hagiological traditions of the Greek people who in fact rely

⁴¹ Ioustinos Simonopetritis, «Άξιον Εστί», η θαυματουργή εικόνα του Πρωτάτου, Agion Horos 1985. Also, I. M. Hatzifotis, Άξιόν Εστί, Katerini 1988.

⁴² E. N. Tsigaridas, «Η εικόνα Άξιον Εστί του Πρωτάτου και η Παναγία η Κυκκώτισσα», in Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου «Η Ιερά Μονή Κύκκου στη βυζαντινή και μεταβυζαντινή αρχαιολογία και τέχνη», Nicosia 2001, 181-190. Also see K. Spyridakis, «Η Παναγία εις την Κύπρον», Κυπριακά Σπουδαί 8 (1944), 135-137 and X. Pharmakidis, «Αι προσωνυμίες των εικόνων της Παναγίας εν Κύπρω», in Κύπρια λαογραφικά σπουδάσματα, Nicosia 1941, 20-25.

⁴³ B. Miljkovic, “Ikone Bogorodice Galaktotrofuse iz Inosnice Svetog Save osvetjenog u Kareyi,” in Na Travovima Vojisleva J. Djurica, Beograd 2011, 167-184.

⁴⁴ P. Oikonomaki-Papadopoulou, «Το Άξιον Εστί. Η αργυρή επένδυση της εικόνας», in Το Άξιον Εστί. Ιστορία – λατρεία, Agion Horos 1999, 25-30.

⁴⁵ M. G. Varvounis, Όψεις της καθημερινής ζωής των Βυζαντινών από αγιολογικά κείμενα, Athens 1995, 125 seq.

⁴⁶ L. Kretzenbacher, „Legende und Athos-Ikone. Zu Gegenwartsüberlieferung, Geschichte und Kult um die Marienikone der ‘Dreihändigen’ im Serbenkloster Hilandar,“ Südost-Forschungen 21 (1962), 22-44 (= Idem, Geheiligttes Recht. Aufsätze zu einer vergleichenden rechtlichen Volkskunde in Mittel- und Südosteuropa, Wien-Köln-Graz 1988, nr.11).

on paragons from synaxaria, of the removal of a miraculous icon or ⁴⁷ relic from a monastery and its return with the threatening for the *sacrilegious* interference of saint. According to them, in 1592 pirates who raided against the monastery stole it, but Panagia appeared to their leader, who was forced to return it. But also in 1767 picture was stolen and found in Skopelos, where the Christians recognized it and not want to return it to the monastery, resulting in an outbreak of plague at the as a punishment, so that they were forced to return it to the monastery for their ment and salvation. In this case, the narratives of the infectious epidemic as a punishment of supernatural origins against the residents of a place who violated the will,⁴⁸ but also in order to break the curse upon the fulfillment of the divine will, are inherent, already found in the ancient Greek tradition.⁴⁹ In the case at point, these traditions give prominence to the spiritual stature of each monastery, but also to the spiritual relationship of the laity with these monasteries and the obedience of the laity in the callings of monks from fear of punishment, a concept vital to the survival of the monastery and the fraternity, particularly in the superstitious years of the Ottoman empire era. Managing of the divine will was always a means of serving the monasteries and clergy interests against the horrified, by the likelihood of divine wrath manifestations, laity cohabitants of the monasteries.

The tradition concerning some icons of Theotokos, especially from cloisters and monasteries of Russian, Serbian and Romanian influence, which the respective rulers or even the Russian czar in wartime requested to be transferred to the front and protect their troops, is frequent and repeated.⁵⁰ According to tradition, after the victorious outcome of the war they wanted to keep the icons, but after a miraculous intervention or appearance of Theotokos (Mother of God) they were forced to return them to Mount Athos, accompanied by rich offerings and large donations to the dominant monastery. Of course, this meant the wide dissemination of each icon's worship to the respective people, mainly through the miraculous traditions, that were widely disseminated.⁵¹

From the study of the preceded material, by the identification of the patterns contained in the traditions of Mount Athos regarding the miraculous icons of the sacred foundations of Athos, the miraculous effect of those icons is not in dis-

⁴⁷ St. D. Imellos, Η περί πειρατών λαϊκή παράδοση ... op. cit., 90-93, about the icon of Panagia Glykophilousa in the Holy Monastery of Philotheou.

⁴⁸ Cf. G. A. Megas, «Παραδόσεις περί ασθενειών», Λαογραφία 7 (1923). Μνημόσυνον Ν. Γ. Πολίτου, 465-520.

⁴⁹ See M. G. Varvounis, «Λαογραφικές παρατηρήσεις στον μύθο του Οιδίποδα», Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βοιωτικών Μελετών 3: 2 (2000). Πρακτικά Γ' Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Βοιωτικών Μελετών, 746-760.

⁵⁰ E. Tsigaridas, "L' icone de la Vierge AXION ESTI du Protaton et ses copies," Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Instituta 44 (2007), 341-352. Cf. Io. Tavlakis, «Η Παναγία Το Άξιον Εστί», in Το Άξιον Εστί. Ιστορία – λατρεία, Agion Horos 1999, 7-17.

⁵¹ A. A. Turilov, "Tales of the miracle-working icon of the Chilandar monastery in a 16th century Russian recording," in Cudotvornaia ikona v Vizantii I Drevnei Rusi, Moskva 1996, 510-553.

pute.⁵² Certainly, the study did not delve into matters of faith, but on the other hand, the presence of Panagia and the saints is always alive on Mount Athos,⁵³ and is manifested in many different ways. What emerges as a conclusion, is that often the old narrative material is used again with new combinations every time, and recycled, as in the case of the texts of synaxaria, as already observed.⁵⁴

Conclusions

It should also be noted here that in recent years the increase in the number of pilgrims to the Athonite monasteries, but also the construction of copies of the miraculous icons of every monastery, from the precious copies to the wood or paper versions distributed as a blessing,⁵⁵ combined with the extensive circulation of icon cases and printed material of every monastery, resulted in the wider dissemination of these traditions. It is material that is disseminated online through the church and monastic Orthodox Christian websites, contributing to the better connection of the broader concerned public with the Athonite religious traditions examined above. Moreover, as is well known, copies of the main miraculous icons of the Mount Athos circulated in the Orthodox world since the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period,⁵⁶ and they continued to be sent from Mount Athos to the world also in more modern times, even to the present day,⁵⁷ disseminating their worship and spreading the reputation of the dominant monastery, performing miracles and attracting pilgrims therein. Besides, this is why both images and their basic Athonite traditions are so well known to the orthodox peoples.

The traditions regarding these miraculous icons were the basis for building a special Athonite worship primarily of Panagia and secondly of the honored in the monasteries saints. They were disseminated by the companion monks in each sending of the miraculous icons copies to the Orthodox countries in the East,⁵⁸ particularly to the Orthodox people of the Balkans.⁵⁹ Through this process they became common knowledge of the people, and they influenced their folk religious faith and tradition, acquiring inter-Orthodox dissemination and prestige, creating a mythical "historic"

⁵² See. P. Huber, *Athos. Leben–Glaube–Kunst*, Zürich 1969. Cf. P. Huber, *Icones du Mont Athos*, Lausanne 1965.

⁵³ Archim. Th. Marinakis, *Θαυματουργές εικόνες της Παναγίας στο Άγιον Όρος*, Thessaloniki 2001.

⁵⁴ M. G. Varvounis, «Βίοι Αγιορειτών (19^{ος}-20^{ός} αι.) ως πηγές για την μελέτη της αγιορειτικής λαογραφίας», in G. Vozikas (ed.), *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου «Λαϊκός πολιτισμός και έντεχνος λόγος (ποίηση–πεζογραφία–θέατρο) 1*, Athens 2013, 117-128.

⁵⁵ Cf. M. G. Varvounis, «Χάρτινες μικρές εικόνες ευλογίας», *Εκκλησία* 85: 9 (2008), 717-721.

⁵⁶ See M. Masnic, "The Icon of the Holy Virgin Vatopedini with a portrait of Voevoda Ioan Radul," *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloskog Instituta* 40 (2003), 313-320.

⁵⁷ Cf. Archim. Dimitrios Stratis, *Η Πορταϊτίσσα στο Αιγαίο*, Athens 2002, with similar narrations.

⁵⁸ See Z. Schiztladre, "The Portaitissa Icon at Iviron and the Jakely Family of Samtskhe," *Bulletin of British Byzantine Studies* 21 (1995), 40-41.

⁵⁹ E. Bakalova, "Zwei Ikonen der Muttergottes Portaitissa (von Iviron) in Bulgarien," *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 17 (1993-1994), 347-358. Idem, "La veneration des icons miraculeuses en Bulgarie. Aspects historiques et contemporains d' un pelerinage," *Ethnologie Française* 31 (2001-2002), 261-274.

consciousness in the people's traditions⁶⁰ and securing even more the dominant position of Mount Athos, and particularly its major monasteries that had the best-known and most miraculous icons (eg monasteries of Vatopedi, Megisti Lavra, Iveron, Docheiariou, Hilandar, Pantocrator) to the Orthodox peoples throughout the world. This process continues unabated until today,⁶¹ again mainly driven by these miraculous traditions, which continue to be narrated and disseminated.

⁶⁰ K. Chrisochoidis, «Παραδόσεις και πραγματικότητες στο Άγιον Όρος στα τέλη του ΙΕ΄ και στις αρχές του ΙΣΤ΄ αιώνα», *Αθωνικά Σύμμεικτα* 4 (1997), 99-147.

⁶¹ Cf. Th. Tsoulias, *Τα ιερά προσκυνήματα της Παναγίας ανά την Ορθοδοξία* 2, Katerini 1996, with examples.

