

THE CHURCH OF ST. NIKOLAOS THE YOUNGER IN SALAMIS: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Katerina Kontopanagou

In memoriam Gregory I. Mitsionis

The church of St. Nikolaos the Younger is located on private property,¹ in the north of Salamis, at the location known as “Gouva tou Batsi” or “Batsi”.² The late professor Demetrios Pallas, a native of the island, provided in 1988 a cursory description of the church within the context of his studies on the topography of the area.³ The church is also referenced in a book by another native of Salamis, Mr. Tsamiles, who provides an overview of the churches on the island.⁴ This monument, therefore, is essentially unknown to contemporary scholarly research and its corresponding bibliography.

It is a single-chamber church (dimensions: 7,90 meters length x 3,00 meters width) with internal vaultings and three peaked lowered arches and is covered externally by a pitched and shingled roof (fig.1). An entrance can be found on the west face. The Bema, disproportionately large in comparison to the rest of the church, is signified by the easternmost arch and is separated with a constructed templum/iconostasis. (fig.2) The Sanctuary Door is framed by two marble pilasters, which have been repurposed from an unidentified ancient building. The remaining two arches, with their voussoirs on prominent display, demarcate three uneven sections within the main church. The second arch is at a distance of 2,20 meters from the templum, while the third is separated from the second by 90cm. On the north and south walls, at the bases of the arches and in the areas between them, the masonry is visible to a certain height - the rest is covered by later coatings. However, those segments that are visible preserve and display the dry stone walls with sections of brick. Impost blocks from ancient columns have been utilized as the base for the construction of the northeast and southwest arches of the main church, while correspondingly, a column plinth has been placed upside-down in the southeast arch.

1. It is located on property owned by the family of the great Byzantinologist Demetrios Pallas. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mrs. Rena Sophoulaki and Mr. Nikos Pallas for their invaluable assistance and warm hospitality.

2. The general overview of the monument was the subject of a paper at the 36th Symposium of the Christian Archaeological Society (20-22./5/2016), Kontopanagou 2016, 65. Special thanks to Mrs. Marina Papadimitriou, archaeologist at the Ephorate of Antiquities of Western Attica, Piraeus and the Islands, for her immediate response to my request for a research permit.

3. Pallas 1988, 131.

4. Tsamiles 1999, 118-23.

The successive interventions to the church, both internal and external, have altered its original form. A spacious semi-outdoor area has been created on the west side due to the construction of a wall across the building, which is a meter and a half taller than the roof of the main church (fig.3). This is a later addition, dated approximately to the mid-20th century.⁵ The masonry is not visible externally, as it has been covered by later layers, which hinder any attempts at morphological observations. Within the main church, the north and south sides, where the arches are located, extend across by 40cm each, functioning as buttresses. A single-lobed window, constructed with a monolithic arch without overlying relief, is located in the eastern wall. The main church also features three rectangular openings, two on the north wall and one on the south, for illumination.

The church under examination at Batsi is the only one on Salamis dedicated to St. Nikolaos the Younger, also known as the neomartyr Nikolaos of Vounaina, whose feast day is the 9th of May. He was initially venerated as a local saint in Thessaly, but his fame subsequently spread to other regions of Greece. Even though churches dedicated to this saint existed from as early as the byzantine period, worship did not become widespread until the post-byzantine period, with multiple extant monuments in Thessaly.⁶ However, isolated churches dedicated to him are extant throughout Greece (prefectures of Magnesia, Fthiotida, Fokida et.c.).⁷

From an architectural point of view, three peaked lowered arches⁸ are prominent inside the church. This pattern can be often found in monuments of Frankish rule and, thus, the dating of the monument is placed within this period. However, in order to date the monument more accurately, the historical conditions prevailing in Salamis have to be taken into consideration. That is to say, it is only during the Catalan rule, i.e. from the 14th century till 1388,⁹ that the reconstruction of monuments and the redevelopment of settlements in the abandoned lowland and coastal areas, such as Batsi, took place.¹⁰ With the settlement of populations in these areas, agricultural production began once again to flourish after an extensive period of pirate raids¹¹ and

5. The widening of the church space became necessary in the early modern period, as its initial, limited dimensions proved insufficient to house the number of pilgrims during the saint's feast day.

6. Kalousios 1996, 143-76. Sdrolia 2012, 279.

7. Regarding the worship and proliferation of the Saint, see Sofianos, 1972, in *passim*. Sofianos 19861, 89-91. Sofianos 19862, 73-136. Sofianos 2004, 36.

8. Peaked lowered arches are observable in monuments from the periods of Venetian and Latin rule, with multiple variants, see Kourouniotis 1998, 109-11.

9. After 1388, Athens and neighboring Salamis came under the jurisdiction of the Florentines and the Venetians, experiencing a period of instability and conflict, especially in the coastal regions of Salamis. See regarding, Miller 1909-1910, 5-7.

10. Pallas 1998, 131.

11. The consequences of pirate activity in the Saronic Gulf are evident in Salamis from the late 12th c., interrupting a previous period of stable economic activity on the island. It is a period of stagnation,

general turmoil.¹² The founding of the church of St. Nikolaos in the seaside settlement of Batsi, is directly related to the financial development of the local agriculture in this period.¹³ Of course, as it was mentioned earlier, the later layers that cover the masonry completely on the external face of the church and a large portion of its internal walls do not offer us any further information. Excavational surveys around the perimeter of the monument would likely reveal further evidence necessary for documentation.

The frescoes inside the church are limited to the eastern sections of the north and south walls, between the first and second arches, and to the western face of the templon. No donor inscription is extant. The remaining surfaces do not exhibit traces of wall painting, either on the walls or in the arch. Incisions made at seven points in the Holy of Holies by the archaeological service in the 1970s prove that the space dedicated to the Bema did not host any sort of wall decoration.¹⁴

Despite the fragmented nature of the decoration, it can be clearly divided into three phases. The oldest layer, visible on the north and south walls, is covered by later frescoes (fig. 4). A section of a halo, some brown hair with curls and a forehead belonging to the earliest phase are extant on the north wall, while on the south wall we can see sections of three halos of standing figures from the same phase. These frescoes can be dated to the initial phase of decoration, and must be dated to the period in which the monument was constructed.¹⁵ The fragmented and scant initial decoration was most likely due to the transient and uncertain economic development of the local small landowners. The landowners - donors of churches, already weaker than

mentioned by Michael Choniates, Lampros 1968, 8, 27, 43. During this period, architectural activity essentially ceases. Regarding pirate activity and its consequences, see Pallas 1988, 124. Herrin 1975, 279. It is worth noting that a reasonable number of middle byzantine monuments survives, denoting a period of stability and development in the region up to and including the 12th c. The monuments of the 11th and 12th centuries in Salamis conform to the wider development of the Helladic region despite pirate activities in the Saronic Gulf, see Aslanides and Pinatsi 1998, 192-3.

12. Salamis was awarded to the Venetians after 1204, however it was ruled *de facto* by the Latins due to its close proximity to Athens, with which it shared a similar fate. For Athens during this time period, see Maria Kazanaki-Lappa 2002, 645-6. However, in 1311 it was restored to the Byzantines. This resulted in the island becoming a center of conflict, with retaliatory actions being carried out on its inhabitants by the Venetians and the Catalans. The successive changes in leadership in combination with the pirate raids took a toll on the economy of the island in the 13th and early 14th centuries. Around 1350, the island was once again dominated by the Catalans, Pallas 1988, 129-31.

13. According to the late D. Pallas, abandoned settlements from other low-lying areas of the island are dated to the same period, Pallas 1998, 131-32.

14. The incision points are visible, and there exists a related report from the service, which was made available to us by the owners of the property.

15. Compare a characteristic example of hair similar to the fragment under examination in a Messenian monument from the same period; Messenia also experienced Latin rule. The particular examples are two military saints, St. Georgios and St. Demetrios in the church of the Savior in Piges: Kappas 2010, 262-64.

those of the middle Byzantine period,¹⁶ declined towards the end of the 14th c.¹⁷ It is therefore reasonable to assume that they serviced their religious needs by founding small churches without tending to their wall decoration.¹⁸

The main face of the constructed templon was decorated at a later phase. This decoration has been preserved in reasonably good condition, and conforms to the iconographical program typical of such spaces (fig. 2). The style of the full-body figures, the enthroned Mary holding Christ, of whose inscription only the epithet “Ἐλεούσα” survives, the Christ Pantokrator and John the Baptist, allow a dating after the mid-17th century (fig. 5, 6). The intensive use of lines in the depiction of the face and hair, the lighting under the eyes with parallel white lines, the stylized depiction of wrinkles on the forehead and at the base of the nose (fig. 7, 8), the pronounced outlines and the rough folds of the garments are elements of this century. In addition, belonging to this decorative phase is the depiction of the venerated saint, St. Nikolaos the Younger,¹⁹ whose figure is located on the north wall (fig. 5). Stylistic and inscriptional observations suggest that this is the work of the same artist. In the depiction under examination, the artist utilizes the epithet “ο Νέος”²⁰ and not εκ Βουνάβνης/Of Vounaina, which serves to distinguish him from St. Nikolaos of Myres and is already extant in the earliest depictions of the saint.²¹ The second epithet is related to the place where the saint was martyred and is extant for the most part in post-byzantine depictions, perhaps due to the proliferation of neomartyrs named Nikolaos, such as that of the soldiers or that of Metsovo. In Batsi he is depicted as a martyr, beardless and with curly hair, an established iconographical *topos* in byzantine and post-byzantine representations.²²

16. For the construction of churches on the island in the middle byzantine period, see Aslanides and Pinatsi 1998, 189-93.

17. The changes in economic policy and the movement of populations took a financial toll on the minor landowners, Laiou-Thomadaki 1987, 176-79, 262-93. Regarding the small landowner-based economy and the policies of concessions, which burdened small producers, see. Laiou and Morrisson 2011, 241-56, 291-94.

18. Similar fragmentary decoration is extant in other churches of the same period on Salamis, such as St. Georgios and St. Charalambos in Kampoli in the south of the island, Tsamiles 1999, 94, 96-7.

19. For the iconography of St. Nikolaos the Younger, see Sofianos 1986, mainly 89-91. Sofianos 19862, 73-136, pls. I-M. Popovska-Korobar 2006, 105-18. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi and Tabaki 2006, 101-15.

20. As a rule, in the 17th c. the depictions of St. Nikolaos with the epithet “ο Νέος” depict St. Nikolaos of Vounaina. Actually, in many cases there is a misunderstanding with the iconography of St. Nikolaos the Soldier. Regarding the similar depictions and the iconography of St Nikolaos the Younger in the 17th c., see Karaberidi, 209, 250, note 1957. Sdrolia 2012, 279. Regarding St. Nikolaos the Soldier, see Constantinides 1993, 35-54, pls 1-2.

21. In monuments from the early 14th century: in Staro Nagoricino (Todic 1993, 8, fig. 73), in Gracanica (Zivkovic 1989, pl. V) etc. Regarding early depictions of the saint, see Popovska-Korobar 2006, 107-17.

22. He is depicted as a martyr already from the Byzantine period, see for example at Protato (13th c.): Fousteris and Toutos 2010, 56. Also see: the old Catholicon of the Monastery of the Trasnfigu-

Concluding the study of the wall decorations, the final fresco in the church under examination is the depiction of St. Nikolaos of Myres of Lycia, located on the west of the venerated saint (north wall) (fig. 9). This saint is depicted full-bodied following the typical iconographical template.

The overpaintings evident on its garments and hands make the task of dating the figure difficult. Despite its stylized facial features, such as the beard, hair and ears, the figure's outline is disrupted. (fig.10). Its piercing gaze and artistic configuration, with white details under the eyes, are hallmarks of works dated, at the latest, up to 1600.

Finally, the inscribed memories (εὐθυμῶσεις) on the dark-colored background on either side of the figure of St. Nikolaos of Myres, are worth mentioning. Although they are difficult to discern, we can observe the years 14..., 162., 164 _____ , 1700, 1738, 1742, 1772.²³ These datings were written alongside the names of clerics who performed rites within the church, and a baptism. Phonetic spelling and multiple errors characterize the writing of the scribes who inscribed these names. At certain points, the already difficult task of reading the inscribed information is compounded by interventions with blue-colored text.

These datings are an indirect testimony to the consistent usage of the church as a place of worship of St. Nikolaos the Younger, an element also evident through the successive phases of wall decoration. This private church continues today to be a particularly popular place of worship for the saint on the island. Modern traditions regarding the existence at this location of a small monastic complex remain unfounded due to the lack of historical and archaeological evidence.

ration of Meteora (1483), Georgitsoyanni 1992, 250-51, pl. 78 and St. Nikolaos Anapausas (1527), Sofianos and Tsigaridas 2003, 86, with further examples.

23. Invaluable assistance for the reading of these inscriptions was provided by earlier readings carried out by the amateur historians of the area, Tsamiles 1999, 122.

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KATERINA KONTOPANAGOY

e-mail: kontkat@yahoo.gr

Ο ΝΑΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΝΕΟΥ ΣΤΗ ΣΑΛΑΜΙΝΑ: ΠΡΩΤΕΣ ΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΗΣΕΙΣ

In memoriam Γρηγορίου Ι. Μητσιώνη

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στο βόρειο τμήμα της Σαλαμίνας στη θέση «Γούβα του Μπατσι» ή «Μπατσι» ο ναός του Αγίου Νικολάου του Νέου, βρίσκεται εντός ιδιόκτητου χώρου, ο οποίος ανήκει στην οικογένεια του αείμνηστου βυζαντινολόγου Δημητρίου Πάλλα. Ουσιαστικά το μνημείο παραμένει άγνωστο στη σύγχρονη έρευνα και βιβλιογραφία. Στη Σαλαμίνα ο εξεταζόμενος ναός είναι ο μοναδικός αφιερωμένος στον Άγιο Νικόλαο το Νέο. Πρόκειται για τον νεομάρτυρα Νικόλαο τον εκ Βουναίνης, ο οποίος τιμάται στις 9 Μαΐου. Αρχικά καθιερώθηκε ως τοπικός άγιος της Θεσσαλίας, αλλά αργότερα η τιμή του διαδόθηκε και σε άλλες περιοχές της Ελλάδας. Ο ναός μονόχωρος, εσωτερικά καμαροσκέπαστος με τρία οξυκόρυφα χαμηλωμένα τόξα, καλύπτεται εξωτερικά με δίριχτη κεραμοσκεπή. Την Ωραία Πύλη πλαισιώνουν δύο μαρμάρινες παραστάδες σε μεταγενέστερη χρήση από αταύτιστο αρχαίο κτίσμα. Στον κυρίως ναό τα δύο τόξα, με εμφανείς τους λαξευτούς θολίτες, διαμορφώνουν τρία άνισα τμήματα. Οι αλληπάλληλες επεμβάσεις, τόσο στο εσωτερικό, όσο και στο εξωτερικό του ναού, έχουν αλλοιώσει την αρχική του μορφή. Εξωτερικά η τοιχοποιία δεν είναι ορατή, καθώς καλύπτεται από πολλαπλά στρώματα επιχρίσματος, τα οποία δυσχεραίνουν τις μορφολογικές παρατηρήσεις. Η αρχιτεκτονική του μνημείου, με κυρίαρχο στοιχείο τα τρία οξυκόρυφα χαμηλωμένα τόξα παραπέμπει στην περίοδο της Φραγκοκρατίας στο νησί και συγκεκριμένα στην εποχή κατά την οποία κυριαρχούσαν στη Σαλαμίνα οι Καταλανοί, δηλ. από τα μέσα του 14^{ου} αιώνα έως το 1388. Η ίδρυση του ναού του Αγίου Νικολάου στο παραθαλάσσιο Μπατσι, συνδέεται με την οικονομική ενδυνάμωση του ντόπιου αγροτικού στοιχείου την περίοδο αυτή. Ανασκαφικές έρευνες περιμετρικά θα έδιναν τα επιπλέον απαραίτητα στοιχεία τεκμηρίωσης. Μολονότι ο διάκοσμος είναι αποσπασματικός, η διάκριση τριών φάσεων είναι σαφής. Μεταξύ του περιορισμένου εικονογραφικού διακόσμου, ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζει η παράσταση του αγίου Νικολάου εκ Μύρων Λυκίας, δυτικά του τιμώμενου αγίου (βόρειος τοίχος). Με βάση τεχνοτροπικές παρατηρήσεις χρονολογείται το αργότερο έως το 1600. Οι εγχάρακτες ενθυμήσεις εκατέρωθεν της μορφής του αγίου αποτελούν έμμεση μαρτυρία για τη συνεχή χρήση του μνημείου. Σήμερα ο ιδιωτικός αυτός ναός συνεχίζει να αποτελεί προσκύνημα του αγίου, ιδιαίτερα προσφιλές στο νησί.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

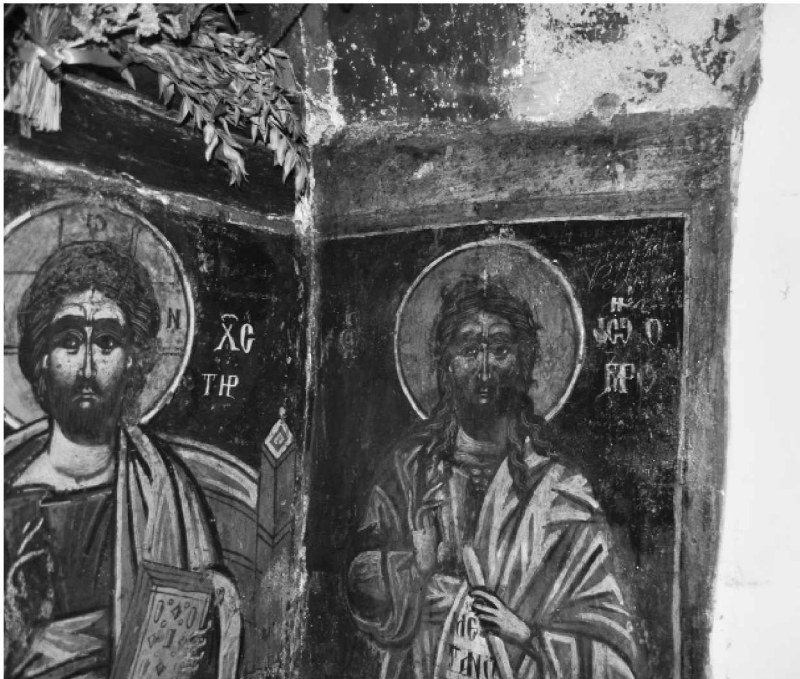


Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.