

Archive: <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk>.

<sup>14</sup> Bentz, *Panathenäische Preisamphoren*, 128-9,

<sup>15</sup> Brandt, "Archaeologia Panathenaica," 13-15.

<sup>16</sup> *ABV* 325-8, 694, and 715; *Para* 143-5; *BAddP* 88-9; Kurtz, "Mr. Hattatt's Painter," especially 161-2.

<sup>17</sup> For frontal heads, see Korshak, *Frontal Faces*.

<sup>18</sup> London, British Museum 1849.6-20.11 (B 300): *ABV* 324,39 and 694; *BAddP* 88; Johns 1982, 81, fig. 63. Munich, Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek Inv. 8999: *CVA* Munich 9 Germany 48, plates 53, 1-2 and 58, 2.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Rome, Villa Giulia 933: *ABV* 323,17; *CVA* Villa Giulia 1 Italy 1 pl. 6,1-3. Once London Market: *ABV* 323,16 and 326; *BAddP* 88; Kurtz, "Mr. Hattatt's Painter," 160, fig. 26. Compare the satyr and maenad on side B with the pair on side A of the Walters' amphora.

## Fotios Nicholas Kontoglou: A Twentieth-Century Byzantine<sup>1</sup>

JOHN PAPSON

Fotios Kontoglou, of blessed memory, is best known as the modern era's most accomplished iconographer, or hagiographer to use the term he preferred, and propagator of the Byzantine style. What is not widely known about this extraordinarily gifted man were the many talents he had and how well he made use of them. He was not only an hagiographer but also a prolific writer, and, in his younger years, an accomplished secular artist.

He was born in Aibali, in Asia Minor, in 1895.<sup>2</sup> In 1911 he and fellow students from his high school began a magazine called *Melissa*, for which he did the artwork. It would be the first of several periodicals he would help to found, and marked the beginning of a prolific association of his literary and artistic talents. He received advanced placement in the School of Fine Arts in Athens after high school, but remained in Athens for only one year before leaving school and traveling to Spain and then Paris, where he lived for more than four years, working for the periodical *Illustration*, and writing the novel *Pedro Cazas*, published in 1920. It was this work which served as a harbinger of his unique talent to combine the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Greek people, drawing as he did from a deep and seemingly inexhaustible well, and a fertile imagination. The novel, written with such a deep understanding of the spiritual and philosophical foundations of the Greeks, gained so much recognition that he was warmly welcomed in religious and literary



circles in Athens when he moved there in 1922.

In later years he worked at the Byzantine Museum in Athens and the Coptic Museum in Cairo, and also began the restoration of the frescoes in the Byzantine town of Mystras, near Sparta. In 1938, however, he began the decoration of the City Hall of Athens, where he portrayed scenes ranging from ancient Greek mythology and the founding of Athens and other cities to the heroes of modern Greece's struggle for independence in the 1820s. He is considered the founder of the modern Greek art movement.<sup>3</sup>

Herein lies the reason to call him a twentieth-century Byzantine. His spirit burned with a desire to keep alive the fires of his cultural and spiritual heritage, undoubtedly due in great part to the immense sense of loss he must have felt, and which is reflected constantly in his writings. This is especially true of his corpus created following the destruction of his birthplace, Aibali,<sup>4</sup> and most of the Hellenic culture and Orthodox Christian presence in Asia Minor in the 1920s due to the fighting between Greece and Turkey. He probably realized the ease with which one could be cut off from one's roots. Specifically, he came to believe that the temporal life was fleeting, and he began to direct his considerable talents to the literary and artistic expression of his spiritual heritage. Thus, he drew on an immense tradition which he felt the Byzantines had entrusted to the race of modern Greeks.<sup>5</sup>

He was also somewhat enigmatic. In 1944 he put together a collection of essays on Orthodox Christian spirituality entitled *Ho Mistikos Kepos* (*The Mystical Garden*). But he also wrote about travels to the far corners of the earth, marveled at the adventures of Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe, and even drew a sketch of John Smith in Pilgrim garb. It was as if his imagination and talent were limitless, but he knew better, admitting as much many times.

Each succeeding period of devastation and loss seemed to shake him, to whisper silently within him to quicken his

pace, to urge him on in his chosen task. By the early 1950s, after Greece's painful civil war, he began to produce an enormous amount of iconographic work and his voice began to be heard more often and more loudly through his literary work as he became what some considered the conscience of modern Greece.

If he did nothing else during his lifetime, he initiated a renaissance of the understanding and use of the Byzantine style in the iconography of the Orthodox Church. His own style is unique and immediately recognizable even while keeping within the ancient tradition he was so careful to preserve and pass on. He knew that in order for one to become an accomplished hagiographer – that is, for one's icons to give the faithful a glimpse of the mystical Paradise – one had to be a person of faith and humility. He attests to this in his writings, for example in a note called "From the Depths" in *Mistika Anthi* (*Mystical Flowers*), another collection of essays: "The Lord gave me golden hands and many talents. I did not use them to collect material goods, or money, or glory, or any other kind of well-being. I used them for the glory of the Lord and His Orthodoxy."

That the wide-ranging genius of Kontoglou is little known outside of Greece, even among Orthodox, is due in great part to the fact that only a minuscule amount of his writings has been translated into English and his "artwork" is not such that it would be greatly sought-after by collectors of secular art. What is certain, however, is that the history of art will undoubtedly place him in the company of such great hagiographers as Roublev, Theophanes and Andrew the Cretans, and Panselenos, and he will take his place with the great literary talents of modern Greece such as Koraes, Papadiamantis, Cavafy, Kazantzakis, and Seferis.

Kontoglou often wrote about the Resurrection. One such essay, "The Appearance of Spring, The Fragrance of the Resurrection," appears in *Mystical Flowers*. I brought this



book to George Pilitsis on one of my visits to him several months before his repose, and it was this particular essay that I thought of when trying to decide what to contribute to this *festchrift*. I had translated it several years before and thought it especially appropriate because of Kontoglou's reference to St. George.

### **The Appearance of Spring: The Fragrance of the Resurrection**

by Fotios N. Kontoglou

I have the idea that even if one were blind and deaf he would know that spring had come without either seeing or hearing anything which bears witness to it. That is because every person feels within himself its coming.

For me, as for every Greek who loves our religion, all the natural phenomena are tied to the mystery of the Church, and especially so the springtime, which becomes spiritual with the Resurrection of Christ. If someone were able to remove the sweet thrill of religion from within me, I know that I wouldn't experience the beauty of nature as I experience it now, for without the hidden enthusiasm and the blessed joy which I feel now that I experience everything as being connected with the fragrance of religion, I would feel about nature the way the so-called "nature worshipers" feel about it, poetically, externally, and not with the mystical bliss and blessed peace which the Christian feels. My mind rejoices at every moment with the works of chanting and hagiography and from within those it sees and hears and smells the beautiful and pleasing things of creation. It hears the deepest voice of nature. Now, at Pascha, because of the fragrances given off by the flowers and plants, the birds singing, the soft wind stirring the fresh branches, the gentle wave murmuring sweetly at the seashore, on the cliffs, on the islands, in the

mountains and the valleys, you experience everything as celebrating with the angels, because of Christ's Resurrection.

The flowers' fragrance that fills the air mixes with the myrrh carried by the Myrrh-bearers as they went to Christ's tomb. The deserted chapels of the mountains celebrate. Chanting is heard everywhere, in the cities, in the countryside, in the humble churches in the fields, in the vineyards and on the barren mountains, at the seashores and on the islands.

However, wherever I might be, on land or at sea, I hear within me and slowly chant the cheerful hymns of the Resurrection, which make everything around me fragrant.

A blessed dew drips from wild branches. The soil and every humble plant smells sweetly like incense. All of creation is the house of God. The mountains rise up joyfully, their peaks in the golden light. The white clouds drift about like banners in the blue sky.

The sea, decorated with promontories and islands, gleams in the sun through the trees. Even the seashores celebrate. The soil is fragrant. You would think that even the stones were alive and joyful. Nothing is dead or without a soul today, when Christ has arisen and given life and immortality to all of creation. Today the King of life rules over His living kingdom. Nowhere does death exist; nowhere does darkness remain: "Now all things are filled with light; Heaven and earth and the nethermost regions."<sup>6</sup>

All of creation glorifies Him, thanking its Benefactor, from the indestructible mountains and the clouds which drift on high, to the small blade of grass which hides humbly under a rock.

I hear the trees chanting like chanters, like priests, like bishops; the right chanter is the oak which chants "slowly and melodiously" this undying troparion: "It is the day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O ye peoples: Pascha, the Lord's Pascha; for Christ God hath brought us from death unto life, and from earth unto Heaven as we sing the trium-



phal hymn." And the oak, which is the left chanter, chants: "Come let us drink a new drink, not one marvelously brought forth from a barren rock, but the Source of incorruption, which springeth forth from the grave of Christ, in Whom we are established." And again, on the right, the olive tree chants humbly the fifth ode: "Let us arise in the deep dawn and, instead of myrrh, offer praise to the Master; and we shall see Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causeth life to dawn for all." And from the left, the holly chants with its rough voice and says: "This chosen and holy day is the first of the Sabbaths, the queen and lady, the feast of feasts, and the festival of festivals, wherein we bless Christ unto the ages."

Later is heard the voice of the cypress, which is the deacon, short and as with a great mustache, calling out: "Let us magnify the Theotokos and Mother of the Light, honoring her with hymns." And the first chanter, the oak, chants majestically: "The angel cried unto her that is full of grace: O pure Virgin, rejoice, and again I say, rejoice; for thy Son hath arisen from the grave on the third day. Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord hath arisen upon thee; dance now and be glad, O Sion, and do thou exult, O pure Theotokos, in the arising of Him Whom thou didst bear."

Thus, the liturgy proceeds before the sun rises, that mystical liturgy which is heard only by spiritual ears and whose hymns echo throughout the great church of creation which has high mountains for domes, cool valleys for transepts, an iconostasis made from the whitest rocks decorated with wild plants, the blue sea for holy water, clouds for banners and fans, the sun for the chandelier, and stars for candles.

"Exalt ye the Lord our God, and fall down before the footstool of His feet, for He is Holy."

When the shining sun hits the mountaintops, they begin to chant, "Let every breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest!" And then they

chant the *stichira* of Pascha: "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Him flee from before His face. A sacred Pascha hath been shown forth to us today...." And at the end the first chanter, the oak, with its thunderous voice, chants with modest grandeur the glory of the Resurrection which echoes to the ends of the earth: "It is the day of Resurrection; let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, O brethren, even to those that hate us: Let us forgive all things on the Resurrection; and thus let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, by death hath He trampled down death, and on those in the graves hath He bestowed life."

Yes. Those who have drunk from the incorrupt well of Orthodoxy will hear this mystical liturgy wherever they might go. Around them everything is chanting, and inside them, again, other mysterious chanters, and priests, and deacons, and canonarchs chant, glorifying the Resurrection of Christ.

The priests are Father Pine and Father Cedar. The archimandrite is Father Fir. The plane tree is the bishop. The cypress and the poplar are the deacons. The first chanter is the oak. And the chorus is the holly, the rushes, and the old nun the olive tree. Canonarchs are the myrtle, the thorny bushes, the maple, the bay leaf, thyme, pennyroyal and oregano. And together with the chanters, the spearmint, basil, marjoram, rue, anemones, the thorn bushes, and the other humble and innocent plants slowly murmur.

Christ is found in all; everything gives thanks to Him because He gave them life with His Resurrection. Without God everything is dead and mute.

We celebrate the memory of St. George the Trophy-bearer with the Resurrection of the Lord. We commemorate him in the springtime because he was martyred in the flower of his youth, this brave young warrior of our faith. That's why the hymnodists adorned him with their fragrant anthems, join-



ing his memory to the Resurrection of Christ and the springtime.

"Come ye lovers of the Martyrs, let us offer a melodious hymn unto Christ, Who is risen from the tomb. For the spiritual flowers are in full bloom today, as the noetic springtime is come upon us, even the universal memorial of the wise Great Martyr George, and in calling to mind his wounds, we gain fountains of healings. Let us now entreat him to intercede continually with Christ the Savior, that peace be granted to the world and great mercy to our souls."

"Come, as we all gladly celebrate the all-festive glorious, radiant Resurrection of Christ, let us also celebrate the shining festival of the holy Great Martyr George; with flowers of springtime, come, let us now crown him who hath proved invincible, that by his most mighty entreaties we may be redeemed from afflictions, tribulations, and all our iniquities."

Behold the splendid glory of the matins of St. George, who is the Thanasis Diakos<sup>7</sup> of our faith: "Spring hath shined forth as the dawn; come let us celebrate. The Resurrection of Christ hath appeared in its splendor; come, let us be glad. The memorial of the prizewinner hath been revealed, making the faithful bright with joy. Wherefore, O ye that love the feasts, come, let us mystically keep the festival; for this man, as a good soldier, bravely defied the tyrants and put them to shame, becoming an imitator of Christ the Saviour's Passion. Unto his own clay vessel he showed no mercy, but cast it naked into the forge, transforming it by means of torments. Let us cry out to him: O prizewinner George, make entreaty that our souls be saved."

Oh! Without the fragrance which emanates from Christ's mystical garden, the Greek Christian cannot comprehend the fragrance of springtime. In his soul, the physical springtime becomes one with the spiritual springtime. And so he experiences the joyous breath of eternal life, chanting with inef-

fable gladness and jubilation:

"We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of an everlasting life. And with leaps of joy we praise the Cause thereof, the only blest and most glorious God of our Fathers."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See "*Ho Teleutaios Antiklassikos*" (The last anticlassicist) by Manolis Hatzidakis, and "*Enas Byzantinos Ton Hemeron Mas*" (A Byzantine of our times) by Jean de Gaigneron, in *Mneme Kontoglou* (In memory of kontoglou), a collection of essays marking the tenth anniversary of his death.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical information was taken from *Mneme Kontoglou*.

<sup>3</sup> See "*Ho Fotios Kontoglou kai he Neoellinike Zografike*" (Fotios Kontoglou and modern Greek painting), in *Mneme Kontoglou*.

<sup>4</sup> See his book, *Aibali he Patrida Mou* (Aibali my homeland).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, his book *Evlogemenon Katafegion* (Blessed refuge).

<sup>6</sup> All liturgical translations are courtesy of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, Mass., and used with permission.

<sup>7</sup> Thanasis Diakos was a hero of the Greek War of Independence.