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BOOK REVIEWS

Charalampos Pennas, *The Byzantine Church of Panagia Krena in Chios: History, architecture, sculpture, painting (late 12th century)*. Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2017, 388 pp. (256 pp. Text plus 305 illustrations mostly in colour), ISBN 978-94-90387-08-2.

The church of Panagia Krena on Chios immediately catches the eye of the modern visitor, offering an unexpected spatial encounter with its impressive architecture, surrounded by olive, oak, and pine trees, among many others. Its remarkable architecture, subtle ceramic decoration on the exterior surfaces, and almost intact wall paintings left a lasting impression on Charalampos Pennas during his first visit to the monument in the 1980s (p. v), which eventually led him to write his award-winning book.¹ The book itself can be considered as a monograph that tries to place the monument and its late-Komnenian wall paintings into a proper historical context, through a study of the church itself and an inquiry of its founders' connections to the western Asia Minor and Constantinople.

The book presents a detailed analysis of Panagia Krena Church, one of the few surviving Middle Byzantine domed octagon churches, in this case strongly imitating the architecture of Nea Moni on the same island. The wall paintings, dated to 1197 based on epigraphic evidence, allows the author to make a complete art historical and iconographic analysis, which occupies a significant portion of the book. The iconographic program strongly emphasizes the funerary context of the church, the social status of its patrons, and their relation to the metropolitan of Hypaipa in Asia Minor. The book also includes approximately three hundred explanatory illustrations, such as the photographs of the exterior façades, the architectural sculpture and the wall paintings, the restitution drawings of the church, and the diagrams of the iconographic program.

In the preface of his book, Pennas explains the incentive behind his research as a wide range of dates suggested for the construction of the monument. In order to write a more precise history of the church, he

¹ 2019 Maria Theocharis Prize, Christian Archaeological Society.

conducted surveys at the site and minutely studied the surviving evidence. He also employed prosopography, examining the founders and their connections to Asia Minor. In line with this incentive, the first chapter of the book focuses on the historical context of the monument. Pennas briefly explains the 11th-12th-century Chios, starting from the foundation of Nea Moni, the imperial commission par excellence on the island. Then, he compiles the existing literature on the church of Panagia Krena. The surroundings of the monument seem to have acquired the toponym *krena* from a nearby water source and to have become a popular recreational destination for the islanders in the 18th century. Two Byzantine family names appear in the donor portraits in the narthex: Kodratos and Pepagomenos. The founder Eustathios Kodratos is depicted on the eastern wall as he is presenting a model of the church to the enthroned Mary. The patronymic name of her wife, Pagomene, appears in the family portrait in the south arcosolium, manifesting her relation to the metropolitan Stephanos Pepagomenos. The representation of Stephanos himself as a saint in the prothesis, among other hierarchs, in a suppliant position to the virgin in the central apse, implies his intermediary role for the donors of the church. The chapter ends with a list of the transcription and translation of the thirteen painted and carved inscriptions, found in the church.

The second chapter of the book concentrates on the architecture of the church, starting with a general definition of the domed octagonal design, the distinction between the ‘simple’ and the ‘complex’ types, and a mention to the known examples of the typology. Several theories about the emergence of the design are summarized by the author in a very refined way, with an emphasis on the Constantinopolitan influence in its origins. This section is followed by an explanation of the construction phases, a detailed architectural description, and discussion. The narthex of the church was constructed shortly after the naos and the sanctuary; the outer narthex, however, was added later, in 1539 according to the inscription on the belfry sill. The upper structure of the narthex and the central dome collapsed after the earthquake in 1881 and rebuilt in 1884.

In a subchapter entitled “The contribution of Panagia Krena to the architecture of the twelfth century” the architecture of the church is com-

pared to, and discussed with, two other Byzantine churches: the church of St. George Sykousis on Chios and the church of St. Spyridon in Selymbria. These monuments are considered to be the earliest examples of the plan-scheme, after the catholicon of Nea Moni. Pennas particularly focuses on the church in Selymbria in his comparison since the other one is largely altered in the successive periods. In fact, the Spyridon Church in Selymbria is completely demolished in the early 20th century, and its architecture is merely known via earlier architectural descriptions and some surviving visual documents. Pennas, however, does not mention the now-lost character of the monument. He considers the Hallensleben's hypothetical restitution drawings² as if they were representing the actual situation in every detail. For example, comparing the façade articulation of two monuments, Pennas suggests that in Spyridon church plasters on the exterior do not correspond to the interior arrangement of the church, and the northern and southern façades are treated differently, creating 'an asymmetry' in the plan (p. 33). By contrast, Hallensleben does not assert an asymmetry in his restitution plan but simply applies two different possible façade articulations on the same drawing.³ Pennas also compares the narthexes of two churches, with an assumption that the narthex of Spyridon Church was roofed with a dome and two barrel vaults at the sides (p. 32). The detailed architectural description of Spyridon Church, made by the restoration architect Mavrides, is the only reliable source on the matter. As a matter of fact, Mavrides does not mention a dome, but only a barrel vault in the two-storeyed narthex.⁴ Interestingly enough, in the Hallensleben's restitution, the narthex dome is only shown on the plan but excluded from the section drawings. My humble opinion is that the architectural features of the church in Selym-

² Hallensleben, H. 1986. "Die Ehemalige Spyridonkirche in Silivri (Selymbria): Eine Achtstützenkirche im Gebiet Konstantinopel", in O. Feld & U. Peschlow (eds), *Studien zur Spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst: Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet*. Bonn: R. Habelt, 35-46.

³ As he noted under the restitution drawings (Abb. 1) "Im Grundriß wurden an Nord- und Südfassade zwei unterschiedliche Gliederungsmöglichkeiten zur Auswahl gestellt." see Hallensleben (1986, 40).

⁴ Mavrides' report was published later in Stamoules, M. A. 1938. "Ο εν Σηλυβρία Βυζαντινός Ναός του Αγίου Σπυριδωνος" *Τα θρακικά* 9, 37-44.

bria need to be approached more cautiously before making any stylistic comparisons. Besides, Pennas does not include recent publications on Spyridon Church. It could have been useful to include especially the Ousterhout's articles⁵ since he brought to light some previously unknown photographs and an 18th-century drawing of the church, which would have allowed Pennas to make more secure comparisons of the façade treatments of two churches.

The third chapter of the book is dedicated to the sculptural decoration. They are found almost exclusively incorporated in the masonry. It is worth mentioning that the many marble elements in the church are reused fragments, mostly dating to the 11th century, one of the main reasons behind the confusion about the church's chronology. The chancel screen of the church receives a more detailed examination. Based on the stylistic and structural unity of the fragments of the marble templon, Pennas suggests that they must have originally belonged to the same 11th-century monument, before their re-installation in Panagia Krena Church in the late 12th century (pp. 36-38).

In the next chapter, the wall paintings are described, stylistically analyzed, and discussed in detail. Pennas cataloged and explained each surviving wall painting in three main sections of the church: sanctuary, naos, and narthex. He underlines the appropriation of the iconographic program according to the donors' preferences and the historical context in which the church was constructed and decorated. The funerary character of the monument, for example, was emphasized in the iconographic program of the narthex. In the wall paintings, the explicit predominance of the bishops and saints associated with Asia Minor manifests the connections of the church's patrons. Finally, *Panagia*, to whom the church was dedicated, was represented in many places in the church: in

⁵ For example, Ousterhout, R. 2011. "The Byzantine Architecture of Thrace: the View from Constantinople", in Ch. Bakirtzis, N. Zekos & X. Moniaros (eds), *4th International Symposium on Thracian Studies: Byzantine Thrace Evidence and Remains, Komotini, 18-22 April 2007, Proceedings*. Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 489-502; Ousterhout, R. 2012. "Two Byzantine Churches of Silivri/ Selymbria", in eds. M. J. Johnson, R. Ousterhout & A. Papalexandrou, *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration: Studies in Honor of Slobodan Ćurčić*. Farnham-Surrey: Ashgate, 239-257.

the main apse in orant position, in the east wall of the narthex receiving the model of the church from Kodratos, in the tympanum of the south arcosolium blessing the founders, and above the main entrance to the nave.

The fifth chapter presents stylistic comments on the wall paintings, the composition of narrative scenes, and the stylistic rendering of the individual figures. The author interprets the proliferation of the figures in many compositions as a characteristic of the later Byzantine art, which is signaled also in the late-Komnenian wall paintings. He, then, describes the wall paintings of Panagia Krena to be belonging to the 12th-century 'monumental' style, having also some elements of the so-called 'dynamic' style. According to Pennas, the movement of the figures are kept in minimum, and they do not reflect linearity or any mannerist features. He finds close stylistic connections with the wall paintings of the chapel of the Virgin on Patmos (ca 1180?). In the last analysis, Pennas argues for a provincial workshop with strong connections to the western Asia Minor (p. 154).

In the concluding chapter, the arguments are summarized with an emphasis on the monument's transitional role from the late-Komnenian to the Laskarid art and architecture, signaled through its brickwork ornamentations and mural paintings. The conclusion is followed by two appendices in which the architectural sculpture and the iconographic program of the wall paintings are cataloged and briefly described.

Pennas' book is a valuable contribution to Byzantine art and architecture history. Via first-hand observation and careful study, it brings to light a significant Byzantine monument, which was previously somehow overlooked. He provides a complete picture of the church and its patrons, employing a variety of tools as much as the available material permits. The book is a good read for the scholars of Byzantine art and architecture, specifically focusing on the context of a monument, and the people who imagined and constructed it. Thus, the text goes beyond to be a simple monograph of a church, providing some insights into the late-12th century Aegean world.

Görkem Günay