

Alexios Angelos Komnenos, A Patron Without History?*

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For my mother, Nataša Sinkević

Abstract

This article focuses on the superb quality of the painted cycle of the twelfth-century Byzantine church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi. Rather than extolling the high quality as an end in itself, however, the article uses the cycle's excellence as a way of gaining access to the figure of the donor, a distinguished but historically almost wholly unknown Byzantine aristocrat, Alexios Angelos Komnenos. Reading in the cycle's aesthetic and iconographic choices the characteristics of its donor, the paper maintains that Alexios was a man with exquisite artistic taste, high social aspirations, and a keen interest in current political and ecclesiastic events. Moreover, as a patron of an important monastic foundation in twelfth-century Macedonia, Alexios also played a significant role in the political and cultural dominion that his family established in the region at that time.

Alexios Angelos Komnenos is a rare member of the famous Komnenian dynasty in that he has remained almost entirely unknown.¹ The obscurity of Alexios Angelos Komnenos reflects the paucity of evidence about his life and his activities. In fact, in the preserved literary sources, Alexios is mentioned only once, in the documents of the Church Council of Constantinople of 1166.² These documents indicate only that Alexios, along with his brothers, John, Andronikos, and Isaac, was present at the Council. Lacking information either about Alexios' political activity or about his military achievements—both of which distinguished other members of his family—historians commonly ignored him.

While little known in historical literature, Alexios is a prominent, if equally shadowy, figure in the art world. He is the patron of one of the most important monuments of twelfth-century Byzantine art, the church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi in former Yugoslav Macedonia (Fig. 1).³ Well recognized for its artistic merits, Nerezi is one of the conspicuously few Byzantine monuments that has actually made its way into a textbook of Renaissance art.⁴ The church also reveals much information about its patron.

The painted cycle at Nerezi provides insight into the activities of the patron and distinguishes him as an important figure in twelfth-century Byzantium. In addition, Alexios' inscription placed on the marble architrave above the main entrance to the church informs us about his family origins and his aspirations. The inscription, written in Greek, reads: "The church of the holy and renowned great-martyr Panteleimon

was beautifully made with the aid of Lord Alexios Komnenos, son of the purple born Theodora, in the month of September, indiction 13, 1164, Ionnikos the monk being hegoumenos."⁵ The inscription thus informs us that Alexios was a member of the imperial family. His mother, "the purple born Theodora," was the youngest daughter of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), the founder of the Komnenian dynasty.⁶

If recognized as a grandson of a famous Byzantine emperor by his mother's ancestry, Alexios belonged to a much more humble social stratum according to his father's lineage. Alexios' father, Konstantine Angelos, came from an undistinguished family in Philadelphia, Asia Minor, and received recognition and the title of *pansevastohypertatos* only through his marriage to the princess.⁷

The marriage of a princess to a man of a common background was described as unwise by the contemporary historians.⁸ It was also looked down on by the imperial family, who expressed their disapproval through a considerable reduction of gifts and financial support to the newlyweds.⁹ Although Konstantine became an important military official at the time of erection of Nerezi, Alexios' decision to use his mother's surname is by no means surprising.¹⁰ The Komnenian period was an era when lineage meant everything, and when kinship to the emperor determined a place in the social hierarchy.¹¹ As a result, it was quite common, especially among the aristocracy, for children to use their mother's, or any other name which could bring them social recognition. By using the name of the Komnenoi and emphasizing his mother's lineage, Alexios stressed not only his descentance from the founder of the Komnenian dynasty, but also, indirectly, his relation to the current emperor, his uncle Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180).

Alexios' wish to emphasize his privileged social status is also apparent in the painted decoration of his church. The emotive richness and sheer beauty of the images at Nerezi have attracted much attention—from scholars and lay viewers alike. Elegance and sophistication of figures, dramatic coloristic effects, and masterful handling of line resulted in a program of high stylistic refinement, a feature which has been emphasized in numerous studies.¹² One important aspect of this beautiful and sophisticated decoration, however, has been ignored. The high aesthetic quality and refinement of Nerezi's decoration reflect both the superb skills of the



FIGURE 1. *Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, interior (photo: author).*

artists who executed them, and the distinguished taste of their patron. After all, it was most likely Alexios who had chosen, commissioned, and paid the artists.

The question of Alexios' choice deserves special attention. Artistic production around the middle of the twelfth century in Macedonia exhibits a rather high level of quality,

as can be seen in the painted decoration of the church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki and the church of the Transfiguration at Chortiatis near Thessaloniki.¹³ It is even possible, given their stylistic and iconographic similarities, that some of the artists who worked at Hosios David were also employed at Nerezi.¹⁴ Thus, Alexios likely had many choices

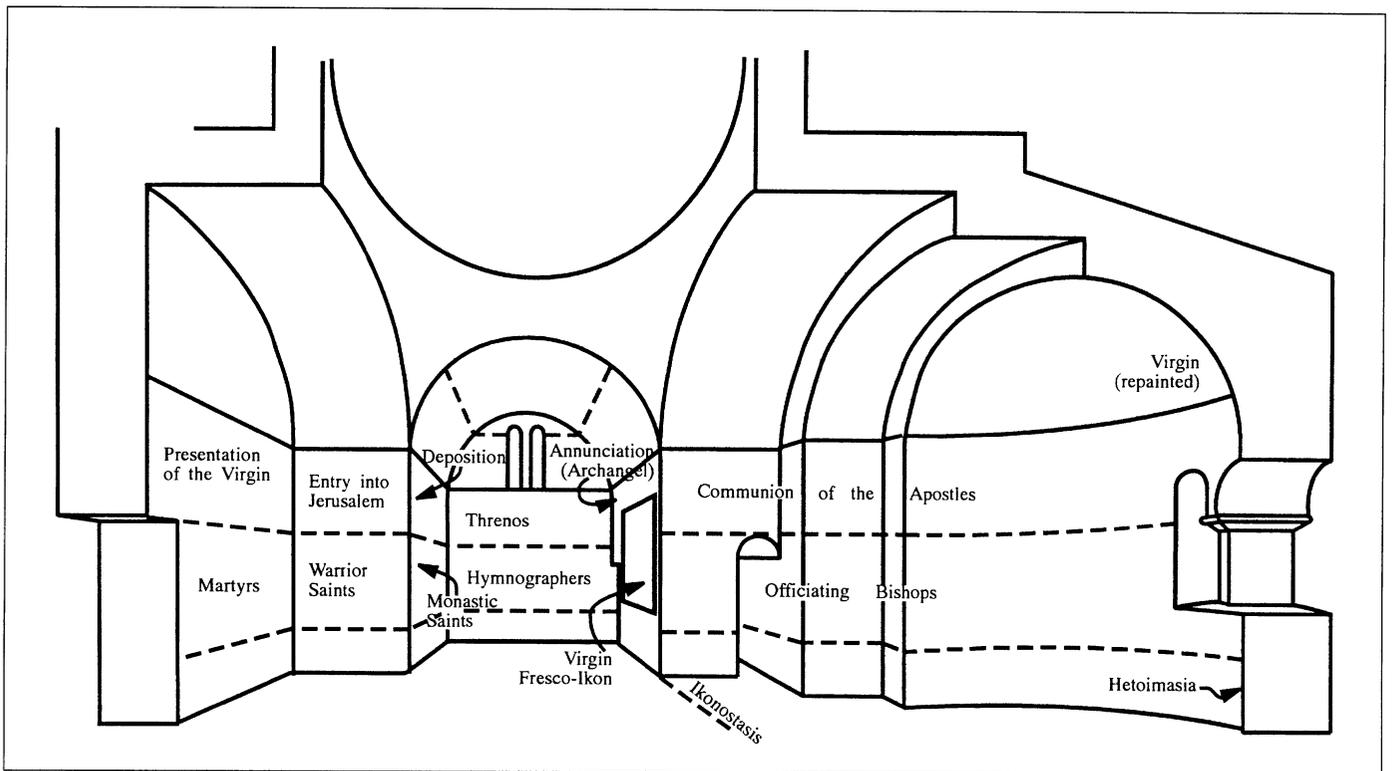


FIGURE 2. Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, diagram showing distribution of paintings on the north walls (drawing: L. Minter, revised from R. Hamann-MacLean).

and exercised a great deal of care in selecting the members of his artistic team. His success is apparent not only in the beauty of Nerezi, but also in the fact that the workshop from Nerezi became popular in Macedonia. After Nerezi, this workshop either worked at or made a strong impact on other twelfth-century Macedonian monuments, such as the church of the Virgin Eleousa at Veljusa, and the church of H. Nikolaos Kasnitzi in Kastoria.¹⁵

Alexios' sophisticated taste and aspirations are further exhibited in the unique, coherent, and systematically developed iconographic program of the cycle. This is particularly evident in the arrangement of the figures of saints and in the introduction of a new scene in the bema.

Considering the images of saints, the naos of Nerezi exhibits the earliest known example of the organization of saints in terms of their respective categories (Figs. 2, 3, 5). While the north and south walls are exclusively devoted to warriors, the west wall exhibits only images of martyrs dressed in courtly costumes, and the arms of the cross emphasize monastic saints. The entire zone of the north wall displays famous Byzantine hymnographers (Fig. 5). This distinct division of saints emphasizes their importance and articulates the multiplicity of their roles within Byzantine society. Saints are shown as defenders of the faith (military saints), pillars of Orthodoxy (monastic saints), martyrs (courtly images), and intellectuals (hymnographers).

Alexios further expressed his respect for the institution of the holy man by assigning a special prominence to hymnographers (Figs. 2, 5). Five holy poets, St. Kosmas Melodos, St. John of Damascus, St. Theodore Studite, St. Theophanes Graptos, and St. Joseph the Hymnographer are distinguished from the other saints and displayed on the north wall of the north arm of the cross.¹⁶ Poetic verses inscribed on their scrolls are derived from liturgical sources and related to theological messages communicated in the scenes above.¹⁷ The hymnographers at Nerezi exhibit the earliest grouping of this kind in monumental painting, and clearly reflect both the educational and intellectual level of the patron and the importance that Alexios assigned to the institution of the holy man.

The distinguished status of the saints at Nerezi is in direct opposition to the politics of Manuel I and the writings of the twelfth-century hagiographers. Both Manuel I and the contemporary writers displayed a great skepticism and questioned the whole institution of the holy man.¹⁸ The corruption and moral and spiritual decline within twelfth-century monastic circles tarnished the cult of saints in the public domain and contemporary literature. However, judging by the cycle at Nerezi, the saints preserved their importance and continued to act as a powerful vehicle in the economy of salvation in the minds of Byzantine aristocrats.¹⁹ The distinct grouping and selection of saints at Nerezi thus reflect a dichotomy be-

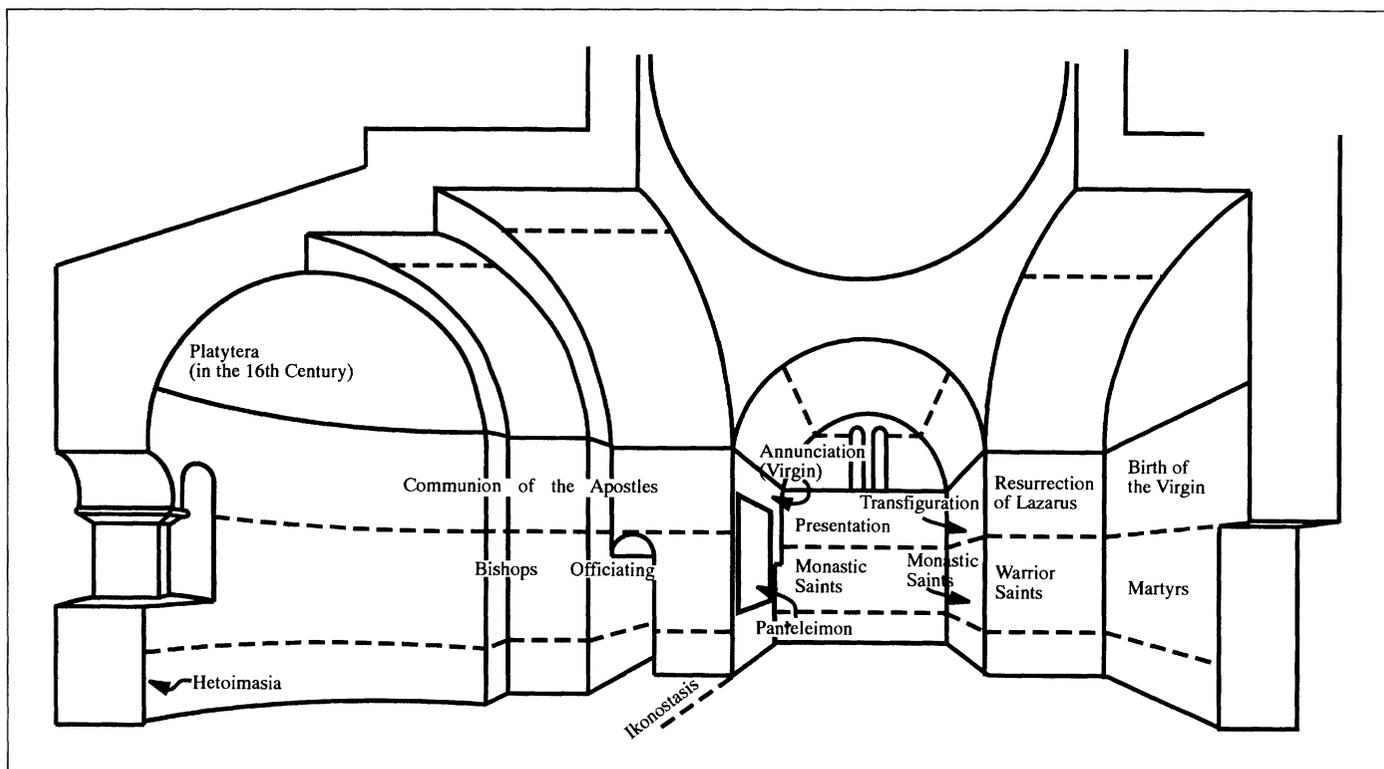


FIGURE 3. Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, diagram showing distribution of paintings on the south walls (drawing: L. Minter, revised from R. Hamann-MacLean).

tween political propaganda and Byzantine reality. It also tells us that Alexios was interested in current ideological issues; his foundation enabled him to express his opinions publicly.

Alexios' involvement in current issues is also evident in the new scene rendered in the bema of the church: the procession of bishops who are shown officiating, carrying open liturgical scrolls and inclined towards the Hetoimasia (Figs. 1–3, 4, 6). The procession is, as indicated by scholars, closely related to current theological disputes which were carried out during numerous sessions of the Church Councils held at Constantinople between 1156–1176.²⁰ Among other issues, the Councils debated the mystery of Eucharistic sacrifice and the question to whom the sacrifice was offered during the Eucharistic rite. The debate was resolved in favor of the traditional dogma maintaining that Eucharistic sacrifice is to be offered to the Holy Trinity, inseparable and divine.²¹

In the apse at Nerezi, the Hetoimasia, an image of the prepared throne, symbolizes the Holy Trinity, with the Gospel Book and cross surmounted by a crown of thorns, referring to the presence of Christ, and the dove representing the Holy Spirit (Fig. 4).²² The procession of bishops inclining toward the Hetoimasia thus offers the Eucharistic prayers, inscribed on their open scrolls, directly to the Holy Trinity, as prescribed by the Church Councils.²³ The iconographic debut of officiating bishops at Nerezi becomes even more interesting in the light of the literary account which attests to

Alexios' presence at one of the Church Councils.²⁴ It is thus reasonable to believe that Alexios was personally involved in the contemporary theological disputes, and that he introduced new iconographic features to the painted program of his foundation in order to express his own political views.

The iconographic features of the cycle at Nerezi also help us determine Alexios' motives for building the church by indicating its possible funerary function. Since no recurrent or canonical scheme of imagery has been identified as yet in Byzantium that would permit us to identify particular programs with certainty as "funerary," each program, Nerezi's included, has to be examined in its own right to ascertain the likelihood of its funerary implications.²⁵ At Nerezi, the prominence given to the themes of Passion and intercession in the selection and organization of the program suggests that the patron may have conceived the church as a place for his own burial.

The theme of intercession is particularly emphasized by the prominence that Alexios' patron saint, St. Panteleimon, received within the church (Figs. 1, 7). St. Panteleimon is honored three times. First, the hagiographic cycle of the saint is displayed in the narthex, thus providing the first visual environment for believers upon entering the church. Second, a single standing figure of the saint is rendered under an ornate sculpted proskynetarion frame flanking the south side of the iconostasis, and this draws the immediate attention of

anyone entering in the naos. Finally, four other physician saints, St. Kosmas, St. Damian, St. Kyros, and St. John, are represented in close proximity to St. Panteleimon at the entrance and on the walls of the diakonikon. They are further distinguished by their unusual, round frames. Although screened from the eyes of the beholder by the templon, these physicians further emphasize both the charitable deeds and the medical profession of St. Panteleimon, and indicate that Panteleimon's healing charity held special significance for the patron.

Portrayal of the life of the patron saint and his prominent position on the proskynetarion were common features in the twelfth-century Byzantine churches.²⁶ The grouping of the physician saints in the diakonikon is, however, without precedent in the surviving monuments. The pictorial glorification of St. Panteleimon, which honored his sacrificial life as well as his profession as a physician, shows both Alexios' respect for and his expectation from the patron saint. Like other Byzantines, Alexios, too, believed and hoped that the intercessor in whom he placed his trust would protect him both during and especially after his terrestrial life.

The funerary function intimated by the emphasis on Panteleimon's intercessory grace gains more pointed force from the treatment of the theme of Passion. More than one third of

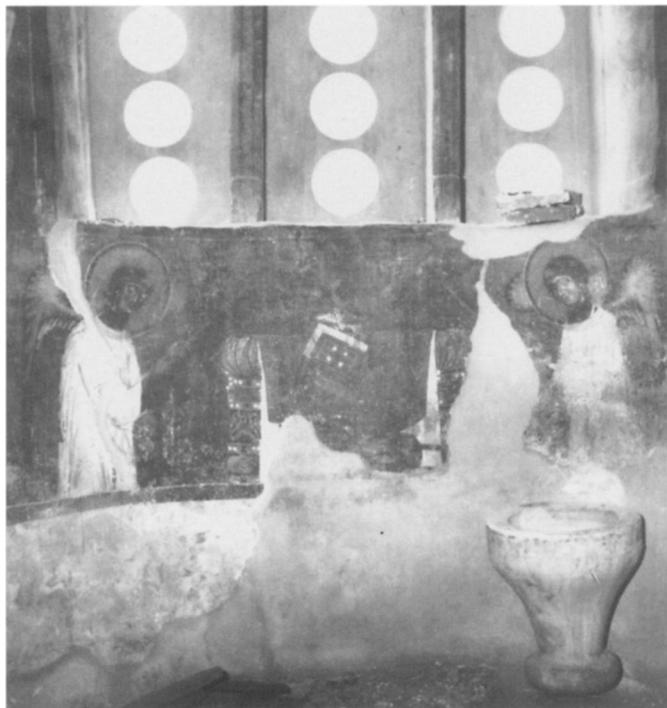


FIGURE 4. *Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, Hetoimasia (photo: author).*



FIGURE 5. *Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, hymnographers (photo: author).*



FIGURE 6. Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, procession of bishops (photo: author).

the preserved scenes of the life of Christ illustrate his Passion and sacrificial death.²⁷ The themes of Passion and sacrifice are further emphasized through the program's organization in terms of paired images, so that the scenes of the Incarnation, theophanies, and miracles of Christ are spatially related to the scenes which either anticipate or portray his sacrificial death (Figs. 2, 3). Above all, the program of the narthex, although dedicated to St. Panteleimon, also gives the greatest prominence to the events of his passion, death and burial.²⁸

The funerary function of the church is confirmed by an arcosolium located in the north-west chapel. The arcosolium is 1.90 meters long and 0.68 meters wide and was large enough for the body of an adult. The existence of an actual arcosolium within the church shows that Nerezi was built as a burial site. It is thus quite plausible that Alexios intended the church to be his own final resting place. After all, Middle Byzantine aristocrats were commonly buried in their monastic foundations.²⁹

In addition to symbolizing the social rank, wealth, and spiritual values of their founders, private monasteries were also powerful vehicles for patrons' salvation. As indicated by the twelfth-century *Typika*, the founders of the monasteries and their immediate families were repetitiously commemorated during the Liturgy, and the day of a founder's death was one of the most elaborately celebrated feasts. Among the

important duties of the monks was the performance of intercessory prayers for the founders of the monastery and their families, appealing for their patrons' protection both during and after their terrestrial life.³⁰ As apparent from the program of Nerezi, Alexios likely took advantage of these practices.

If Alexios indeed intended to be buried and maybe even spend some time of his life at Nerezi, one important question remains. What was a Komnenian aristocrat of Alexios' distinction doing in the distant Byzantine *thema* of Skopia in Macedonia?³¹ Ostrogorsky's hypothesis that he was *dux* of the *thema* at the time when he built Nerezi is difficult to sustain because we have no evidence to prove it.³² Also, if Alexios had held such a high office, he would surely have confirmed it in the inscription of the church, in the same manner in which he stressed his imperial lineage. Moreover, *dux*, like *strategos*, was an administrative function that hardly ever lasted for longer than three or four years, and those officials rarely built their foundations on the land that they ruled for such a limited time.³³

We can be also quite certain that Alexios was not involved in any major military operation, because such activities would not have been left unnoticed. After all, all three of his brothers, John, Andronikos, and Isaac, along with their father fought for the emperor and were noted for their military deeds.³⁴ There is no reason to believe that Alexios



FIGURE 7. Nerezi. Church of St. Panteleimon, St. Panteleimon (photo: author).

would have been omitted from the written records if indeed he joined with his brothers. Rather, from what we can deduce by analyzing Nerezi, Alexios was a member of an intellectual elite, and it seems that his profession is by and large responsible for his anonymity. While holding soldiers in the highest social regard, the eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine society by and large showed little interest in the biographies of intellectuals and learned men.³⁵ However, Alexios' anachronistic profession made him an important asset to the Komnenian family in Macedonia.

The period of the eleventh through the late twelfth century is marked by the Byzantine expansion on the Balkan peninsula.³⁶ For their military and political missions in the northern Balkans, the Byzantines needed a stronghold and found it in Macedonia. In order to strengthen their power within the Macedonian themes, the Komnenian rulers appointed people from their own clan to the highest ecclesiastic and administrative posts.³⁷ By doing so, the emperors secured the loyalty and centralized rule of the provinces.

As a result of such politics, many members of the Komnenian family resided in or were associated with Macedonia. This is particularly true of the reign of the emperor Manuel I Komnenos, whose rule coincides with the erection of Nerezi. The emperor's cousin, Adrian-John Komnenos, was appointed the archbishop of Ohrid, thus securing Manuel's powers over religious matters.³⁸ In addition, Manuel's brother-in-law, John Dalassenos Rogerios, husband of Manuel I's oldest sister, who had the high administrative rank

of *caesar*, was in charge of *thema* Strumica and most of the lands east of the Vardar river.³⁹ Manuel himself made a number of visits to Macedonia.⁴⁰

Needless to say, Emperor Manuel was Alexios' uncle, and John Rogerios, the *caesar*, was the husband of his aunt. Moreover, John Komnenos, the archbishop, was his close cousin. In addition, Alexios' brothers and his father were also fighting in the Balkans at the time, as has been mentioned earlier. There is even a hypothesis that his brother John was the *dux* of Skopje around the middle of the twelfth century.⁴¹ Although this hypothesis has been challenged by scholars, the overwhelming presence of Alexios' close relatives in Macedonia is apparent and may account for his presence in the region.

It is quite conceivable that Manuel I gave some land around Skopje to his distinguished and educated, yet militarily uninvolved nephew.⁴² After all, in addition to military bases, religious foundations were a well-known means of strengthening imperial power in the provinces.⁴³ If, for whatever reason, not fit for battle, Alexios could certainly lobby for the family in the intellectual strata of the society. In addition to their religious function, monasteries were often centers of social affairs, current gossip, and places of gathering. Moreover, a monastic foundation at the outskirts of the town, headed by a faithful member of the family, could provide safe grounds for his brothers when going to battle, for the emperor when in Skopje, which he visited frequently, and for Alexios himself. In fact, by coming to Skopje, Alexios was probably much closer to his family than he would have been if he had stayed in Constantinople.

A thought of Nerezi immediately brings to mind a highly refined work of art with aesthetically pleasing scenes and figures. Scholars tend to complement their appreciation of these works with numerous questions regarding their origin, influence, and other art-historical concerns. The purpose of this paper, however, has been to shift the perspective and consider the church as a reflective image of its patron. After all, behind the elongated, sophisticated icons of the church stands the equally sophisticated man who commissioned them.

There has been a tendency in contemporary scholarship to disregard images as unreliable and almost exclusively use literary sources when discussing the questions of patronage. While one can not but agree with such approach, Nerezi obviously challenges it. Eight centuries after their creation, the images at Nerezi still provide precious information about their founder.

NOTES

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1. The only studies which provide some limited information about Alexios are K. Barzos, *He genealogia tōn Komnēnōn*, 2 vols. (Thessaloniki, 1984), I, 664–65; and G. Ostrogorsky, “Vozvishenie roda Angelov,” in *Iubileinii sbornik Russkogo arheologicheskogo obshchestva v Korolovstve Iugoslavii* (Belgrade, 1936), 111–29.
2. Migne, *PG*, CXL, 253.
3. For the most recent study on the church and earlier bibliography, see I. Sinkević, “The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1994). My book on the subject of Nerezi is forthcoming.
4. See F. Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, 4th ed. (New York, 1994), 46.
5. This inscription was first published in A. J. Evans, “Antiquarian Research in Illyricum,” *Archeologia*, LXIX (1885), 96. It was translated into English by A. Wharton, *Art of Empire. Painting and Architecture of Byzantine Periphery. A Comparative Study of Four Provinces* (Philadelphia, 1988), 118.
6. See Ostrogorsky, “Vozvishenie roda Angelov,” 113.
7. *Ibid.*, 113–15.
8. *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. H. J. Magoulias (Detroit, 1984), 95–96.
9. Ostrogorsky, “Vozvishenie roda Angelov,” 113–14. It is also interesting to note that Konstantine did not receive the title *sebastohypertatos*, which was commonly awarded to the son-in-law of the fourth youngest daughter of the emperor. The title of *pansevastohypertatos* may have been yet another way in which the ruling family showed its disapproval of the marriage. For the titles of imperial sons-in-law (*gambroi*), see D. Nicol, “The Prosopography of the Byzantine Aristocracy,” in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 84–85.
10. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, 1969), 401.
11. The literature on the importance of lineage in Komnenian times is vast. For information and bibliography, see A. P. Kazhdan and A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Los Angeles, 1985), 102–6; and P. Magdalino, “Byzantine Snobbery,” in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 58–69, especially 64.
12. The style of the Nerezi’s paintings has been discussed in almost all studies dealing with twelfth-century Byzantine painting. For bibliography, see D. Mouriki, “Stylistic Trends in Monumental Painting in Greece during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *DOP*, XXXIV/XXXV (1982), 100–101. However, there are only two works dedicated exclusively to the style of this monument: F. Mesesnel, “Najstariji sloj fresaka u Nerezima,” *Glasnik skopskog naučnog društva*, VII/VIII (1930), 119–33; and M. Rajković, “Iz likovne problematike nereskog živopisa,” *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta*, III (1955), 195–206.
13. The paintings in these two churches have been dated differently by different scholars. The paintings at Hosios David were dated in the middle of the twelfth century by Tsigaridas and Panayotidi, while Mouriki dates them in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century. Similarly, while Mouriki dates the paintings at Chortiatis in the middle of the twelfth century, Djurić dates them at the beginning of the thirteenth century. For Hosios David, see A. Tsigaridas, *Oi toichographies tēs monēs Latmou Thessaloniki kai hē Byzantinē zoografikē tou 12ou aiona* (Thessaloniki, 1986), and M. Panayotidi, “The Wall Paintings in the Church of the Virgin Kosmosoteira at Ferrai (Vira) and Stylistic Trends in the 12th century Painting,” *Byzantinische Forschungen*, XIV/1 (1989), 461–62. For Chortiatis, see N. Nikonanos, “Hē Ekklēsia tēs Metamorphosēs tou Soterou sto Chortiatē,” in *Kernos* (Thessaloniki, 1972); and V. Djurić, “Le peinture murale byzantine,” *XV Congrès international d’études byzantines. Rapports et corapports, III: Art et archéologie*, (Athens, 1976), 61. For both monuments, see Mouriki, “Stylistic Trends,” 105–6; 119–22.
14. A close similarity between the facial type of Joseph in the Nativity at Hosios David and Joseph in the Presentation at Nerezi, as well as between the unusual posture of Christ in the Baptism at Hosios David and Christ in the Threnos at Nerezi, and between the maid washing the baby in the Nativity at Hosios David and the maid in the Nativity of the Virgin at Nerezi suggest that they could be the work of the same artist. For the Presentation and Threnos at Nerezi, see R. Hamann-MacLean and H. Hallensleben, *Die Monumentalmalerei in Serbien und Makedonien von 11. bis zum frühen 14. Jahrhundert* (Giessen, 1976), III, Figs. 39–42. For the maids of the Nativity in both monuments and the images of St. Joseph and the Baptism at Hosios David, see Mouriki, “Stylistic Trends,” Figs. 88–93.
15. For the heritage which Nerezi’s workshop left in Macedonia, see P. Miljković-Peppek, *Veljusa: Manastir Sv. Bogorodica Milostiva vo seloto Veljusa kraj Strumica* (Skopje, 1981), 230–33.
16. This grouping became standard in later art. See, A. W. Carr, “Illuminated Musical Manuscripts in Byzantium: A Note on the Late Twelfth Century,” *Gesta*, XXVIII/1 (1989), 41–53; and G. Babić, “Les moines-poètes dans l’église de la Mère de Dieu à Studenica,” in *Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200 godine* (Belgrade, 1988), 205–17.
17. For inscriptions, see Babić, “Les moines-poètes,” 207, n. 12. For a discussion on the relationship between the inscriptions on the scrolls of the hymnographers and the iconography of Nerezi, see my forthcoming study.
18. For the status of the holy man in twelfth-century Byzantium, see P. Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Byzantine Saint. University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. S. Hackel (San Bernardino, Calif., 1983), 51–65.
19. *Ibid.*, 64–66.
20. For the Councils and their implications for art, see G. Babić, “Les discussions christologiques et le décor des églises byzantines au XII siècle,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, II (1968), 368–86.
21. *Ibid.*
22. The Hetoimasia acquires a variety of meaning depending on the context and iconographic features. As C. Walter pointed out, when the attributes of Christ appear alone, the Hetoimasia symbolizes the throne which belongs to Christ only. When the dove is added to the attributes of Christ, the Hetoimasia symbolizes the Holy Trinity, for the Father had no personal attribute. See, C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London, 1982), 201. For bibliography on earlier interpretations of the Hetoimasia as an image of the Holy Trinity, see A. Townsley, “Eucharistic Doctrine and the Liturgy in Late Byzantine Painting,” *Oriens Christianus*, LVIII (1974), 138–53.
23. Babić, “Les discussions christologiques,” 370–86.
24. See note 2 above.
25. For example, a considerable effort has been made by scholars to identify the representation of the Deesis in the apse as “funerary.” See N. Thierry, “A propos des peintures d’Ayvali köy, Cappadoce: Programmes absidaux a trois registres avec Deisis en Cappadoce et en Géorgie,” *Zograf*, V (1974), 5–22; and G. Babić, “Les programmes absidaux en Géorgie et dans les Balkans entre le XIe et le XIIIe siècle,” in *L’arte georgiana, dal IX al XIV secolo. Atti del terzo Simposio internazionale sull’arte georgiana, Bari-Lecce, 14–18 ottobre 1980* (Galatina, 1986), I, 117–36. An instance in which the particular characteristics of the imagery clearly invite a funerary interpretation is evident in the Chora Parekklesion. See R. Ousterhout, “Temporal

- Structuring in the Chora Parekklesion," *Gesta*, XXXIV/1 (1995), 66–76.
26. S. Tomeković, "Les répercussions du choix du saint patron sur le programme iconographique des églises du 12e siècle en Macédoine et dans le Péloponnèse," *Zograf*, XII (1981), 25–43.
 27. The significance assigned to the preserved scenes is based on two facts. 1) Despite the damage inflicted on the scenes of the upper tiers of Nerezi, the program above the zone of saints is preserved *intact*. 2) The size of the scenes in this tier indicates that they were the most prominent within the church and most likely carried significant weight for the meaning of the program.
 28. For the cycle of St. Panteleimon, see S. Tomeković, "Les cycles hagiographiques de Sant' Angelo in Formis: recherche de leur modèles," *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta*, XXIV (1988), 1–8.
 29. R. Morris, "The Byzantine Aristocracy and the Monasteries," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold, (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 112–38.
 30. *Ibid.*, 118.
 31. The city of Skopia was the capital of the Bulgarian Empire and a seat of the *doux* of the *thema* of Bulgaria until Bulgaria was divided in the beginning of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Subsequently, the city of Skopia and its surroundings became the *thema*, still attested in sources in 1198. See G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 311–12; and J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, eds., *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1991), I, 98.
 32. Ostrogorsky, "Vozvishenie roda Angelov," 118.
 33. For the administrative organization of the provinces in the Middle Byzantine period, see J. Herrin, "Realities of Byzantine Provincial Government: Hellas and Peloponnesos, 1180–1205," *DOP*, 29 (1975), 253–85; P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 166, 233–37; and V. von Falkenhausen, "A Provincial Aristocracy: The Byzantine Provinces in Southern Italy (9th–11th century), in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 211–31.
 34. Ostrogorsky, "Vozvishenie roda Angelov," 118–28.
 35. A. Kazhdan, "The Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 43–58, and Magdalino, "Byzantine Snobbery," 66–69.
 36. For some important studies and comprehensive bibliography, see J. Ferluga, "Byzance et les Balkans vers la fin du XIIe siècle," in *Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200 godine* (Belgrade, 1988), 17–24; *idem*, *Byzantium on the Balkans. Studies on the Byzantine Administration and the Southern Slavs from the VII to the XII centuries* (Amsterdam, 1974); A. R. Lewis, "The Economic and Social Development of the Balkan Peninsula during the Comneni Times A.D. 1081–1185," in *Actes du IIe Congrès international des études Byzantines* (Bucarest, 1974), 359–69; and M. Dinić, "The Balkans, 1018–1499," in *Cambridge Medieval History; The Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge, 1966), IV/1, 519–39.
 37. See Herrin "Hellas and Peloponnesos," 266–69; Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 180–228; and von Falkenhausen, "A Provincial Aristocracy," 211–14.
 38. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 136–37.
 39. For the most comprehensive study on John Dalassenos Rogerios and extensive bibliography, see B. Ferjančić, "Apanažni posedi kesar Jovana Rogerija," *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta*, XII (1970), 193–201. See also E. Jeffreys, "Western Infiltrations of the Byzantine Aristocracy: Some Suggestions," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. M. Angold (BAR International Series 221, 1984), 202–11.
 40. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 136–37.
 41. This has been suggested by M. Boškoski on the basis of a seal which displays the scene of the Transfiguration and the name of John Komnenos: M. Boškoski, "Vizantijski pečat Jovana Komnina, duksa Skoplja," *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta*, XXII (1983), 31–40. However, both G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel, 1972), No. 2714, and Oikonomides, *Byzantine Seals*, 98, suggest that the owner of this seal was in fact John Komnenos, the son of Isaac Sebastokrator and Irene of Alania. It is important to note that none of the authors has conclusive evidence to prove his attribution.
 42. Komnenian interest in the religious life and monastic foundations in Macedonia has a rather long history as can be exemplified by their involvement with the church of the Virgin Eleousa at Veljusa near Strumica. According to the preserved documents, all of the Komnenian emperors, including Manuel, granted considerable funds and privileges to this monastery. Giving gifts and privileges to the monasteries was one of the ways in which the ruling dynasty established a good rapport and gained popularity among the local religious and secular authorities. For Veljusa, see Miljković-Peppek, *Veljusa*, 33–64.
 43. On the importance of ecclesiastic power in provinces, see Herrin, "Hellas and Peloponnesos," 258–66.