Title
The Unique Late Byzantine Image from the Epic of Digenis Akritas: A Study of the Dado
Zone in the Church of the Panagia Chrysaphitissa

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A Study of the Dado Zone in the Church of the Panagia Chrysaphitissa

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Laura Nicole Horan

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Unique Late Byzantine Image from the Epic of Digenis Akritas:
A Study of the Dado Zone in the Church of the Panagia Chrysaphitissa

by

Laura Nicole Horan

Master of Arts in Art History
University of California, Los Angeles, 2018
Professor Sharon Elizabeth Gerstel, Chair

The epic of Digenis Akritas is one that captivates the audience’s mind as the story of a
frontiersman defending the borders of the Byzantine Empire is intertwined with romance and
moral virtues. The tale, in both written and oral versions, was spread for centuries throughout the
tale exist from mainland Greece, southern Italy and the Peloponnese
empire. Remnants of the tale where this paper is centered.

My thesis focuses on a singular depiction of the epic in the church of the Panagia
Chrysaphitissa near modern-day Chrysapha, Lakonia: the image of a battle between Digenis
Akritas and his foe and lover, Maximou. The presence of a literary figure within the context of a
painted church in the rural Morea may at first appear uncomfortable and jarring. How does the
faithful viewer interpret the intersection of secular folklore imagery and the religious context within an ecclesiastical context. When considered in relationship to the moment in which it was created, the image begins to convey a story of interconnections with the greater world as political unease reshaped the region.

Set against a backdrop of turmoil, shifting geo-political boundaries and centers of power, and an overall sense of unease, it is logical that one of the greatest folk heroes of the period would be a frontiersman protecting the empire. In the direct area of this church, nearby Mystras would serve as the capital of the Despotate within a century, the Byzantines and Frankish forces battled for power continually, and the Angevins made their presence in the region known. The scene of Digenis and Maximou represents the moment of a heroic Christian male overcoming his worldly foe in defense of the empire. Constructed in 1289/1290 by a sebastos, an official responsible for controlling ethnic groups, in Chrysapha we see a depiction of a protector painted within a church located in an unsettled environment.

To my knowledge, this is the single labeled image of Digenis Akritas in existence. It is thus not only significant in relationship to the space in which it was painted but also plays a significant part in the realm of image making during the period overall since it can be used as a standard marker with which to identify other images of the subject.

Painted in the dado zone of the church, the image exemplifies the elasticity of the lower register of the church walls which contains imagery that extends beyond the boundaries of traditional church decoration. In the churches of Hagia Theodora in Arta and the Peribleptos at Mystras, which were both painted within one hundred years of the dedication of the Chrysaphitissa, the Late Byzantine dado zone was one of play and innovation. Though seemingly disparate and secular, each church presents a contemporary way of looking at
Christian themes and values. It is as though the religious imagery of the greater program is being “translated” into the worldly.
The thesis of Laura Nicole Horan is approved.

Charlene Villasenor Black

Saloni Mathur

Sharon Elizabeth Gerstel, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SCENE OF DIGENIS AND MAXIMOU</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGENIS AKRITAS TRADITION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PICTURING DIGENIS AKRITAS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE DADO ZONE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURES</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“So Digenis rejoiced in all his days.
The wondrous Basil, glory of the brave
And all trembled before him after his fights.”

_Digenis Akritas, G. ll. 1321-23_

_Digenis Akritas_, an epic poem about a two-blooded lord stationed on the eastern border of the empire, was widely read and recited in Late Byzantium (1261-1453). Despite its popularity, there are few surviving depictions of the heroic tale. Exceptionally, the late-thirteenth-century church of the Panagia Chrysaphitissa in Chrysapha, Lakonia, contains a labeled representation in the dado zone of the epic hero, Digenis Akritas, who engages in mortal combat with Maximou, the Queen of the Amazons (Fig. 1). Pictured adjacent to the opening of the sanctuary, the represented subject must have resonated with those who worshipped in this structure. In this paper, I will consider this image and the church in which it is found before turning to other works that have been associated with the poem. I will also more broadly consider its place within the dado zone.¹ As a secular subject depicted in an ecclesiastical context, the image presents challenges in its interpretation and contextualization.

The church of Panagia (Virgin) Chrysaphitissa is located 1.6 kilometers to the south of the modern village of Chrysapha (Fig. 2).² The medieval village, likely found below the modern settlement, was situated on a natural terrace. In all probability, the village took its name from the church of the Virgin on its outskirts. The epithet of the Virgin, Chrysaphitissa (most golden) is

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¹ This paper would not have been possible without the generous support of my advisor, Dr. Sharon Gerstel, who first brought the topic to my attention in a seminar course and has graciously read multiple drafts of this paper. I also owe a great deal of thanks to Dr. Andromache Karanika, who read _Digenis Akritas_ with me in its original language and provided invaluable guidance about the use of specific diction choices in the epic’s written versions.

derived from an important golden icon that was once its possession. The church and its
connected village were positioned within a key area of trade. From Chrysapha, one could travel
inland to the village of Kephalas, a route from which the medieval pathway is still visible, at
which point, the traveler could then cross the Evrotas River and join up with the important
Mystras-Sparta road before turning towards Skala, the main port city. On the other hand, one
could also depart eastward from Chrysapha to the larger town of Gkoritsa and onwards to the
port of Skala through Geraki (Fig. 3). According to the Laconia Survey, the medieval village
likely had a population of around 500-600 people.

There does not appear to have been a preexisting structure at the site of the church.
During archaeological survey in the surrounding fields, more than three thousand sherds were
found in its vicinity, mostly stemming from the Byzantine period. A tall tower built over the
church following its initial construction attests to continued use of the structure and also suggests
concerns for security.

The fragmentary Greek inscription on the west wall of the nave offers a great deal of
information about the church’s beginnings. According to the text, the church was constructed in
the year 6789 (1289/1290). The inscription includes the name of the ruling emperor,

\[\text{3} \text{ Ibid., 372.} \]
\[\text{4} \text{ Ibid., 342.} \]
\[\text{5} \text{ The survey was conducted between 1983 and 1989.} \]
\[\text{6} \text{ Cavanagh et al., The Laconia Survey v. I, 366.} \]
\[\text{8} \text{ Nikolaos Drandakis, “Παναγία ἡ Χρυσαφίτισσα (1290),” Πελοποννησιακά Παράρτημα 9 (1982-1983): 342-345.} \]
Andronikos Komnenos Palaiologos (r. 1282-1328). The names of the donors are also included, though they need to be supplemented from a second inscription in the church. The name of the female donor, Zoe, as well as a mention of her children, can be easily deciphered. The name of the male donor, her husband Michael, must be supplemented from an inscription on the north side of the east wall in the exonarthex. This second inscription also gives the title of the founder as a *sebastos*.

According to the inscription, the donors built the church in gratitude for being saved from the plague.

At some point, likely soon after its initial construction, the remote church would serve as the katholikon for a monastic community. Images of monastic saints were likely painted in the Chrysaphitissa’s narthex to present models of virtue for the brethren. Within one hundred years of its construction, a second church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was built thirty meters to the northeast. Nikolaos Drandakes has suggested that this building served as a burial church for the growing monastic community. The inclusion of the name of a monk, Leontios Apostolopoulos, in an inscription on the east side of the sanctuary barrier memorializes one member of its community. The remains of walls to the north of the church have been identified by Jenny Albani as the ruins of monastic cells.

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10 Drandakis, “Παναγία ἡ Χρυσαφίτισσα (1290),” 343.

11 Ibid., 308. The monastery of the Brontocheion at Mystras demonstrates a similar pattern. Here, the Hodegetria church served as the katholikon and the earlier church of Hagioi Theodoroi was converted into a burial church to serve the growing monastery. See Manoles Chatzidakis, *Mystras: The Medieval City and the Castle: A Complete Guide to the Churches, Palaces, and the Castle* (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1981), 48.

The dedicatory inscription in St. John the Baptist indicates that the monastery was located in the midst of lush agricultural fields and records donations of fields and fig trees for the upkeep of the neighboring church:

The holy and venerable church of the saint and glorious prophet, the forerunner and baptist John, was decorated through the effort and expense of Ioannes Papadopoulos and his son, the priest Constantine, and his son, the priest George. The monk Leontios Apostolopoulos gave fields of two modioi … and a fig tree, Elias Cheilas (gave) one field of six pinakia (at the site called) Chalkaia, Kyr Demetrios Louk… (gave) a field of four pinakia and also a field of six pinakia adjacent to (the church of John the Baptist) toward the east…

While we do not know what was grown in the surrounding fields in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the relatively flat lands could have easily supported the cultivation of grains. Terrace walls and threshing floors are both recorded by archaeological survey of the surrounding area. The archeological survey team suggests that olives were also grown, but more sparsely. In all, about 70% of the land is thought to have been suitable for cultivation. The harvest of the fields mentioned in the inscription would have financed the priests and monks who celebrated within the church and lived in the community.

A more recent text also provides important information about the church. In 1633, the church and its community — including its properties and its annual panegyri (religious festival) — came under the protection of the powerful monastery of the Holy Forty Martyrs, which also


14 William Cavanagh, Christopher Mee and Peter James, The Laconia Rural Survey Project (London: The British School at Athens, 2005), 166.
controlled a number of other churches in the region. The inclusion of the church in the seventeenth-century document suggests that the Chrysaphitissa community survived for many centuries and, moreover, that it continued to maintain its agricultural properties. Throughout its extended history, the land would have provided a continuous source of income and support for the church, guaranteeing its relative prosperity.

The Panagia Chrysaphitissa, a cross-in-square type church, measures 13.70 meters long and 7.75 meters wide (Fig. 4). The tower and exonarthex were later additions to the church. A cistern was added at the same time as the exonarthex, indicating a moment of expansion and renovation. Albani places the exonarthex later than the church but before the creation of the defensive tower and walls. She finds evidence in the presence of a small staircase to the tower that blocks a portion of the exonarthex. She also notes that the donor portrait in the narthex includes an image of the church without its tower, suggesting that the tower was added after the church’s original construction in 1289/1290 (Fig. 5).

The donor scene is preserved in fragmentary condition; only the heads and torsos of the figures are still visible. Their bodies turn inward towards the image of the church, of which only the dome survives. The female patron, Zoe, raises her hands in supplication. Based on stylistic and epigraphic analysis, the figures in the narthex must have been painted at a later period. The facial features of the figures are more angular, and there are darker undertones in their skin. The


17 Ibid., 26.

18 Ibid.
letterforms of the inscriptions are different from those painted during the church’s initial construction.

Overall, the church’s painted program is well preserved, although some paintings have been damaged or overpainted. As is traditional, Christ Pantokrator is depicted at the apex of the central dome. The prophets once represented in the drum below him have mostly disappeared. Between the Pantokrator and the prophets is a band of large roundels of religious figures, including angels, seraphim, and a tetramorph.\textsuperscript{19} The pendentives include the four evangelists. The central apse depicts the Virgin enthroned with the Christ child. The vaults of the church show scenes of the life of Christ, as well as some less common scenes of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist and the Birth of John the Baptist. The lowest register of the church includes life-size standing saints on the sidewalls. Included among the saints is Nikon the Metanoeite, a regional saint whose presence in the church underscores the site’s connection with Lakedaimonia (medieval Sparta), the center of the saint’s cult. One unusual figure is the Patriarch of Constantinople Arsenios Autoreianos, who was exiled from the capital in 1265. Arsenios represents a moment of intense political conflict, as he fought to protect the rights of the child emperor John Lascaris over Michael Palaiologos, who as the ruler Michael VIII would banish him (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{20} On the whole, however, the decoration of the church is fairly standard. The inclusion of a scene from a secular epic, however, is unusual.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 36.

THE SCENE OF DIGENIS AND MAXIMOU

To my knowledge, the scene at Chrysapha is the only known labeled image from the epic poem to have survived from Byzantium. The scene depicts the two figures in conflict. The Amazon queen, Maximou, labeled ‘Η ΜΑΧΙΜΟΥ, stands to the left, dressed in a brilliant white dress. A long scarf billows behind her, intensifying the action of the moment as she lunges towards her opponent (Fig. 7). Much of the detail that would have once defined the garments has disappeared because of surface abrasion, but what remains is a long white gown with long sleeves and a headscarf that appears to blend into the dress, creating a uniform and pragmatic appearance. Maximou clutches a purple shield in her left arm and what appears to be a spiked mace in her right hand. The portion of fresco that once made up her right hand has fallen away. The weapon extends above the red border that frames the scene, underscoring the presence and action of the scene within the church.

The decoration of the figure’s large shield stands in contrast to that of her opponent, Digenis, who clutches a small, circular shield marked by a cross at its center. The “otherness” of Maximou is thus made apparent when contrasted to Digenis, whose shield identifies him with the most recognizable symbol of the Christian faith (Fig. 8). Whereas Maximou is clothed in fairly simple garb, Digenis, labeled ‘Ο ΔΙΓΕΝΙΣ, wears an elaborate garment that is trimmed with fur around the collar. Additionally, the hero appears to wear a fur cap. He extends a three-pronged weapon, which resembles a scaled down pitchfork. The two main traditions of the written epic refer to this weapon as a ράβδος or stick.²¹ Like Maximou, he takes an active stance, responding to the moment of intense fighting described in the written source.

Jenny Albani and Nikolaos Drandakis have both suggested that the scene should be dated to the seventeenth century. However, I would argue, as does Ilias Anagnostakis in a recent publication, that this scene was painted in the Late Byzantine period. The scene covers a lower layer of fresco indicating there may have once been another depiction below this one. The older level is visible at the far left border of the scene, where the lower portion of Maximou’s arm is missing, while her upper arm and weapon remain visible on the surface. The exposed fresco layer retains some original painting, in addition to a large area of plain wall. The border of the newer painting seems to extend beyond the original framing, as evidenced by the intersection of red borders seen directly next to Maximou’s left arm (Fig. 9). The existence of a lower fresco layer does not discount the scene as being a Byzantine creation since painters in the region often covered earlier frescoes with later paintings, most often with the same subject. This could well be the case here, as witnessed in the nearly continuous arc of Maximou’s arm across the upper and lower layers of fresco in the scene.

The style of the representation and the epigraphy provide compelling proof that the Akritan representation is Late Byzantine and that it was added to the church soon after its initial decoration. Comparison of the figure Maximou to the late-thirteenth-century image of Salome in the representation of the Beheading of John the Baptist shows a similar misunderstanding of human proportions (Fig. 10). The sinuous movement of the limbs, as well as the way in which amongst others. Less commonly, it is referred to as a sword or σπαθί, such as in Grottaferrata Book 6:582.

22 Drandakis, “Παναγία η Χρυσαφίτισσα, 308; Albani, Byzantinischen Wandmalereien der Panagia Chrysaphitissa, 33.

23 Ilias Anagnostakis, “Digenis Akritas and Maximou: From Textual / Oral to Visual Representation” (in Greek), in Mapping Early Modern Greek Literature (12th-17th century), ed. Stefanos Kaklamanis and Alexis Kalokairinos (Heraklion: Society for the Study of Cretan History, 2017), 80. This article came to my attention after I had completed my research on the paintings.
the figures hold their weaponry, suggests a close moment of production. The elongated arms of each emphasize the action within the scenes. Both also share a similar method of clothing the forms in long tunics without excessive drapery. Because the facial features and other details have become worn with age, however, it is impossible to make a truly detailed comparison, and instead, one must look at the relationship of the broader forms. Additionally, the figures seated at the table behind Salome share affinities with Digenis; they all wear similar garments with pronounced circular collars and have blocked body styles. The seventeenth-century paintings in the church, like the image of St. Demetrius on the wall adjacent to this representation, exhibit darker flesh tones for the face and a deeper ochre color for the halos (Fig. 11). The elongated proportions of the seventeenth-century figures are also quite different from the more stunted figures of the Late Byzantine phase.

Letterforms in the Akritas inscriptions — particularly the shaping of the mu and alpha — are also close to the style of the late-thirteenth-century epigraphy on the vaults and walls of the church (Fig. 12). In comparing the forms of the eta and mu in the scene with those of inscriptions throughout the church and also in the church of St. John the Baptist most share similar characteristics, notably the distinctively formed mu’s whose arcs begin halfway down the height of the vertical form and contain prominent serifs. Letter forms used in the representation of St. Demetrius are quite different; they are composed of thin vertical lines, intersected by even finer horizontal lines (Fig. 13). All characters are connected to one another in a continuous form. These differ greatly from the thicker characters of the original painting, which are separated from one another for the most part and have a wider appearance than the more vertical script of the later period. The analysis of letterforms suggests that the scene of Digenis and Maximou must have been painted soon after the decoration of 1289/1290.
In my opinion, the Akritan scene was painted within one hundred years of the church’s original dedication, copying the style and epigraphy of the initial painter or workshop. Indeed, in addition to the letterforms, the general style of the scene in question is far closer to the church’s original 1289/1290 decoration than to its seventeenth-century layers. Though it is tempting to view the Akritan scene as the work of the painters involved in the decoration of the adjacent church, the paintings of St. John the Baptist share only a similar, although not identical, style to those of the original layer of the Chrysaphitissa.

Immediately above the scene is a representation of the Virgin Hodegetria, who holds the young Christ in her arms as he offers a sign of blessing (Fig. 14). The placement of a secular scene below such an important religious icon presents a strong contrast between the holy and the worldly below it. The two most divine figures, seen as responsible for man’s salvation, stand in contrast to the worldly Christian hero below, as he staves off the sinful “other.”

**DIGENIS AKRITAS TRADITION**

In order to understand the representation in the Chrysaphitissa church, it is important to examine the source of its illustration. The epic of Digenis Akritas, an example of a folk song genre popular in the Byzantine Empire, survives in at least six preserved manuscript copies. Of these, four derive from a now lost manuscript, known today in scholarship as Manuscript Z. The final two copies constitute the main areas of scholarly interest. These versions of the Digenis Akritas epic, the Grottaferrata and Escorial, both employ the same unrhyming fifteen-syllable

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24 The four known manuscripts deriving from hypothetical Manuscript Z are T (Trebizond, Soumela Monastery; now lost); A (Athens, National Library 1074); P (Thessaloniki, University Library 27); O (Oxford, Lincoln College 24). For a discussion of these manuscripts, see Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritas: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*, xxi-xxiii.
line, a common meter for the period. Although both versions tell the same basic story, certain scenes are only contained in the Grottaferrata version, likely as a result of its significantly longer length. The Escorial version (Escorial, Gr. 496 [Ψ.IV.22]) is comprised of 1867 lines and employs a form of Greek that is closer to the modern language than to that of the ancient world. This version was likely transcribed from oral performance. The Grottaferrata version (Grottaferrata, Z.α.XLIV [444]) is nearly double the length — 3749 lines — and employs much more classicizing language, recalling the ancient past rather than looking towards the contemporary. This version of the tale is considered to be more literature-based, likely having originated in written texts rather than in oral performance.

The relationship between the written and oral traditions of these figures is one that is much debated by scholars, especially in connection with the little remaining visual evidence. Michael J. Jeffreys identifies the Grottaferrata as an example of a written source coming first and the Escorial text as an example of the oral source coming first.

According to scholars, the Grottaferrata version was likely written around the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in Southern Italy, i.e., around the time in which the Chrysaphitissa church was painted. The Escorial version is dated later, between 1450 and 1500. Although both versions are considered in this paper, strong connections between Southern Italy and Lakonia in this period urge close consideration of the Grottaferrata

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26 Ibid.


28 Jeffreys, Digenis Akritas, xxiii-xxvii.

manuscript. Elizabeth Jeffreys describes this version of the text as having a greater emphasis on *eros* and *pathos*, as well as a strong theological attention, including quotations from the Creed and an interest in conversions. Though a secular story, this version of the tale had a moralizing tone that would have likely been understood within an ecclesiastical context.

The epic poem of Digenis Akritas, originally composed in the ninth century, tells the story of a guardsman named Basil who protected the frontier of the empire. The first portion of the narrative tells of his parents’ meeting. The reader learns his father was an Arab who converted to Christianity after abducting and marrying his mother, the daughter of a Byzantine general. The second portion of the story recounts his exploits as a young man, in particular, his acts of strength and heroism. This portion, narrated primarily from the view of the figure himself, includes substantial dialogue with other figures. Like his father, Digenis Akritas abducts a woman to be his wife. However, she is not the key woman in the story. Rather, it is the figure of Maximou, depicted and clearly labeled in the Chrysaphitissa scene, who is the most decisive female character of the tale. Whereas the wife remains unnamed and is mostly passive, Maximou, who is an Amazon, is said to be a descendant of Alexander the Great. She takes an active role in the narrative, as evidenced by her stance with weapon and shield in the painting. At times, she moves beyond the traditional roles of Byzantine women and begins to take on masculine qualities. However, even the strong female character of the story remains unable to surpass the protagonist, and following her defeats and that of other male leaders, she engages in...

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sexual acts with Digenis Akritas. It is this sinful liaison with a married man, which, in the Grottaferrata version of the tale, ultimately leads to her death.

The exact moment that is illustrated in the Chrysaphitissa is not clear. There are two moments of battle recorded in the epic between the figures. While elements of both bear resemblance to the depiction, neither categorically defines, nor contradicts the scene as it is painted. In the first battle between Digenis and Maximou in the Grottaferrata source, the narrator states:

```
drawing my sword,
I made for Maximou with all my heart and skill.
Since she was already well-prepared, she ran to meet me
and struck me a glancing blow on the breast plate with her spear.
I was not hurt at all, but broke her spear.32
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The language projects a sense of force within this suspended moment in time, encapsulating what would have been the painter’s understanding of a moment of battle. Maximou, with her weapon raised, moves aggressively toward Digenis. He, too, holds his spear aloft and extends his shield. Indeed, an emphasis on the weapons is demonstrated as they cross into the frame that surrounds the scene. The second scene of battle also presents a vivid scene of intense battle between the two, with particular interest to gender, stating in part:

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But she was amongst those with a reputation for bravery at that time,
and because of that I was not at all ashamed of fighting;
I struck her right hand just about the fingers;
And the sword which she held fell to the ground;
She was seized by terror and very great fear.33
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32 Jeffreys, Digenis Akritas: Grottaferrata Book 6: 582-86.

There is a dramatic shift between the beginning of the battle, in which Maximou’s gender is diminished due to her reputation as a warrior, and the ultimate outcome, in which she has fallen and is filled with terror. This ultimately leads to her offering her body to Digenis in a sign of defeat, having been overcome by a man.

The visual description of the figure of Maximou also reflects, at least in part, the story’s history of depicting her in a non-feminine way. It is said that “she wore a surcoat over her breastplate all of pure purple silk, a green turban embroidered with gold, a shield painted with eagle’s wings, an Arab spear” (Fig. 15). Close inspection of the fresco shows traces of a reddish-purple pigment in the central body, as well as green tones around the head and shoulder levels. The Amazon does not wear the traditional female garb of the period. She is portrayed in more masculine terms, wielding weaponry and devoid of feminine qualities of beauty. Maximou can be contrasted with Salome, daughter of King Herod, shown dancing in the scene of the beheading of St. John the Baptist (Fig. 10). This scene is located in the left barrel vault of the prothesis chamber. Unlike the figure of Salome, whose long tresses flow seductively around her body, a green turban covers Maximou’s hair. This action, in turn, removes a key aspect of the protagonist’s femininity both in the story and in the wall painting. Salome wears the typical elite female Byzantine costume — long flowing sleeves and a dress with elaborate ornamentation — while Maximou’s clothing is utilitarian. The garment clings to Maximou’s body and reflects a unified appearance from head to toe.


The representation of Digenis adheres closely to the written narrative. The epic in the Grottaferrata version reads: “I cast aside my weapons and dressed myself in a marvelous very light robe and, putting on a red cap of curly fur…” (Fig. 16).\textsuperscript{36} The depiction seen in the church draws upon vivid details of the epic, suggesting that the painter would have been familiar with the oral story. Both the Chrysaphitissa scene’s reliance on minute textual details and its inclusion points of departure, such as the exclusion of the horses that the main characters ride on in written versions of the epic, are unsurprising since this is a unique depiction in church painting. Though manifested in different manners, the same origin story of this epic also seems to have influenced other iterations of the tale as well.

The language used to describe Digenis and Maximou stands in stark contrast to one another. Digenis is a “Christian” hero, described in terms of goodness and godliness, while Maximou is described in a degrading and derogatory fashion. The language of the written epic as a whole is intensely vivid, encompassing the ability to physically manifest the dramatic landscapes and lively characters of the diverse scenes. In particular, the key descriptions of the main figures are often repeated as transitions between speakers, and in doing so, reminds the audience of each character’s status within the epic. Thus, the archetypes of Digenis and Maximou are created and heavily reinforced as the antitheses of one another, reminding the audience at each turn of the role of one as good and the other as bad.

Through these descriptions, the position of main figures within would have been well known to those entering the church. The supplicant would have seen Digenis as an honorable man, representing the ideal “Christian” hero and defending the empire from non-Christian threats such as the Amazon. Maximou is represented as a negative, judgmental foil to the supposedly

\textsuperscript{36} Jeffreys, \textit{Digenis Akritas:} Grottaferrata Book 6: 714-16.
righteous and pious Digenis. In the Escorial version of the text, Maximou is described as a “κόιρβα” (bitch) multiple times throughout her scenes.\(^{37}\) This term is tremendously derogatory and reflects the very negative light in which she is portrayed. In the Grottaferrata’s version of the same scene, she is tricked into going to Digenis because “a woman’s mind is very liable to be deceived.”\(^{38}\) She is described as stupid and mean, even when ultimately portrayed as a worthy opponent who is the descendant of powerful ancestors. She is an outsider and a woman.\(^{39}\) Jeffreys has noted that the poem as a whole presents very male-dominated values.\(^{40}\) This assertion can be clearly seen in the description of Maximou in both the Escorial and Grottaferrata versions as the highest hunting prize.\(^{41}\)

Maximou’s language towards others is equally negative, often reflecting a sense of anger and disdain in the Escorial version, such as when she refers to an old man as a “molting hawk.”\(^{42}\) Maximou is additionally quoted as telling the man that “\((e)x)\)xtreme age has withered [his] cock.”\(^{43}\) This type of theatrical language contrasts the patronizing and superior language of Digenis in the epic. In both iterations of the battle scene, the hero refuses to allow Maximou to

\(^{37}\) For examples of the reoccurring diction, see Ibid., Escorial: 1518, 1577.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., Grottaferrata Book 6: 426.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., Escorial: n. for 1595.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., Grottaferrata Book 6: 408 and Escorial 1383. The wife of Digenis is also described in this way in Escorial: 809.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., Escorial: 1361.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., Escorial: 1520.
cross the river to him, as it is “proper for men to cross over but not women.” He is portrayed as knightly and just, even in his competitions.

The descriptions of Digenis reflect this more positive view, as he is described as being saved through the protection of God when in unstable conditions. The Escorial version states: “God gave him good fortune in his acts of great bravery and wherever he went he achieved feats of valour.” Digenis’ actions are validated by a divine approval and protection, in contrast to Maximou, who remains defeated, even when in the Grottaferrata version, she evokes God’s name. As previously mentioned, the greater emphasis on conversions in the Grottaferrata version could reflect the tone changes between the two figures. This said, however, the likely basis for the scene in question would have been an oral tale that incorporated elements of both traditions. Thus, although the Southern Italian version may be closer to the region due to known influences, neither the Grottaferrata nor the Escorial version was the likely direct source of the church’s depiction. Instead, these textual sources can be employed, as I have done here, to give a general sense of the portrayals of each figure in relation to one another and others in the epic. Those viewing the image would also have heard the story of the heroic Digenis defeating the sinful, outsider Maximou in one way or another.

PICTURING DIGENIS AKRITAS

Although the image in Panagia Chrysaphitissa is the only labeled image of the epic poem to have survived from Byzantium, aspects of the tale may have also been represented on ceramic

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44 Ibid., Escorial: 1530, see also Grottaferrata Book 6: 569-571.

vessels and one stone relief. None of these representations is labeled, and their identification is therefore extremely speculative. Nonetheless, these works need to be considered in relation to the Chrysaphitissa representation. Alison Frantz was the first scholar to identify the image of certain male figures incised on ceramic vessels as that of Digenis.\textsuperscript{46} Building off of this scholarship, James Notopolous collected one hundred and ten examples of warrior imagery on ceramics.\textsuperscript{47} In a survey of Akritan iconography on ceramics, Notopolous defined the key elements of portraits of Digenis and other Akritan warriors: the kilt and low cap that he wears, his large eyes, and his curly hair.\textsuperscript{48} Many warriors are depicted wearing a \textit{fustenella} or a flaring kilt.\textsuperscript{49} Dragons are also represented on a number of the plates.\textsuperscript{50} Dated to the twelfth century by their archaeological context, the vessels were produced before the construction of the church in 1289/1290.

Glazed ceramic plates excavated in Ancient Corinth and the medieval levels of the Athenian agora have been linked to the epic poem.\textsuperscript{51} One of the Athens plates, inv. no. P9396, shows a tall figure on a light background slaying a dragon, whose tail wraps around the

\textsuperscript{46} Alison Frantz, \textit{“Digenis Akritas: A Byzantine Epic and Its Illustrators,” Byzantion} 15 (1940–41): 87–91.


\textsuperscript{48} Notopoulos, \textit{“Akritan Ikonography,”} 113.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 114.


\textsuperscript{51} Corinth, Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth, inv. no. C-1934-0054; Athens, Stoa of Attalus Museum, inv. nos. P9396, P8623. The bibliography on these vessels is extensive. For the vessel from Ancient Corinth, see Guy D. R. Sanders, \textit{“110. Ceramic Plate with Lovers,” in Heaven & Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections,} ed. Anastasia Drandaki, Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzi and Anastasia Tourta (Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013), 239-40 (with previous bibliography). For the vessel from the Athenian agora, see Frantz, \textit{“Digenis Akritas,”} 87-91 and Allison Frantz, \textit{“Akritas and the Dragons,”} \textit{Hesperia} 10 (1941): 9-13.
perimeter (Fig. 17). The central figure holds a weapon in his hand and faces towards the right of the plate. He wears a pointed cap, as well as the characteristic *fustenella* and long curly hair. The thin, sinuous dragon wraps around the center of the plate, encircling so that its head meets its tail slightly below and to the right of the warrior’s head. It should be noted that Digenis is not described as fighting a dragon, but a serpent, suggesting a potential synthesizing of key characteristics on the plate. This Athens plate exemplifies the common interest in the combat. The survival of a large number of vessels (or fragments of vessels) incised with similar representations of these folkloric heroes indicates that interest in this representation was widespread.

The closest thematic comparison to the scene at Chrysapha is on a plate excavated in Corinth. (Fig. 18). While scholars describe the scene incised on this plate as a representation of Digenis saving the princess, Notopoulos contends that the scene is a moment of sexual intimacy between Maximou and Digenis. The male figure, supposedly Digenis, sits in a reclined position in order to accommodate the female figure, identified as Maximou, on his lap. Both figures have defined curls. The female wears a small crown on her shorter hair. The exaggerated arms of both extend towards the foreground. The female figure stares at the male, while he looks off into the distance. The pair sits on a small backless stool. Both figures’ feet, as well as the legs of the stool, extend beyond the center of the plate on to the rim. To the side of Digenis is a now mostly destroyed tree while to the side of Maximou is a small hare, a creature often associated with

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fertility, and thus sexual activity. These additional details in the background support a reading of the plate as the moment of intimacy between the pair given the encounter occurs at Digenis’ camp in a wooded area beside a stream.\textsuperscript{55} The scene is known from the epic itself, stating in part:

\begin{quote}
When we came to the trees that bordered the river…

she threw off her surcoat for the heat was intense.

Maximou’s shift was gossamer-thin,

and it revealed her limbs as in a mirror,

and her breasts rising just a little above her chest.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

The female figure wears a crown, a fitting adornment for a woman of elite heritage. Additionally, her gown resembles the one that Maximou wears in the epic text. Although the identification of the subjects on the plates demands closer study, this plate, in particular, seems to be correctly identified. Thus, the plate provides an image of the pair that can be used in discussions of the Chrysaphitissa representation. It is another scene of intimacy rather than those of combat depicted in other plates of the period.

The representation of the folkloric tale in several media underscores the importance of the story in contemporary secular society. Another image that has been identified as Digenis Akritas comes from the church of St. Catherine in Thessaloniki, an important late Byzantine monastic katholikon. A relief representing the figure of a male hero was found immured in the masonry of a minaret that survives from the Ottoman phase of the church’s history. The relief, which was discovered along with other reused marble slabs in the decoration of the minaret’s entryway in the 1940s, has been dated to the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{57} Measuring approximately one

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\textsuperscript{55} Notopoulos, “Akritan Ikonography,” 131.

\textsuperscript{56} Jeffreys, \textit{Digenis Akritas: Grottaferrata Book 6}: 778, 781-784.
meter by one meter, the relief depicts a male wielding a large club slung across his back as he fights a lion with his hands. The head of a second lion looms over the back of the primary figure along the right edge of the plaque (Fig. 19). There is some question as to what is depicted in the scene. André Grabar identified the figure as Hercules defeating the Nemean lion. Stylianos Pelekanides, however, argued that this is Digenis Akritas slaying the lion, a scene that is mentioned in all written versions of the epic. The Grottaferrata version states:

when I saw the lion I promptly leaped forward, brandishing my stick in my hand, and charged at it immediately, striking it on the head. It died on the spot.

Thus, it is not impossible this could be a scene from the Akritic tale.

Regardless of depicted character however, this plaque represents another example of a secular depiction of a hero within the bounds of a late Byzantine church. The back of the plaque depicts a simple cross, contrasting the secular front with the religious back. The carving of two sides suggests that the plaque would have once been seen upright in a church, perhaps as part of the lower register of the sanctuary barrier. It is in this exact location that the images of Digenis and the Amazon are found in the Chrysaphitissa church.


60 Ibid., 215.
THE DADO ZONE

Traditionally, the dado zones of Byzantine churches feature painted imitations of the luxurious marble revetments found in elite churches of the period. At times, there are geometric motifs, such as circles and rhombuses painted into this section in jewel tones. On some occasions, painters represent textile patterns in imitation of suspended cloth. Figural representations are rare. The Chrysaphitissa representation thus emerges as an unusual example of secular “marginalia” in a Late Byzantine church.

In his study *Image on the Edge*, Michael Camille asserted that the margins of medieval decoration in the West were a place of flexibility and subversive play. The author suggests the Western uneasiness with the proliferation of sacred texts *en masse* during the period could be related to a desire to counterbalance it with something even more unstable — the peripheral image.61 Secular images were placed in the margins of medieval manuscripts as a contrast and commentary on the adjacent religious texts. These images would have entertained the viewer in moments of contemplation and religious activity. They would also have served to reflect an outward sign of the interests of those using and creating the materials. Within the context of Byzantine ecclesiastical decoration, these impulses can be translated to the dado zone, a marginal space within the church. Just as liminal spaces in the margins of Western Medieval manuscripts and church sculpture became spaces for play, so too did the dado zones of some Byzantine churches. The lowest register of the walls, the margin, was a space in which secular images came to mingle with religious ones, blurring the line between the sacred and the secular.

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The Chrysaphitissa is one of several Late Byzantine churches to feature secular imagery in this location. An analogous example can be seen in the late-thirteenth-century painting in the church of Hagia Theodora in Arta. The original late-twelfth-century form of this church was a simple three-aisle basilica, which was modified in the mid-thirteenth century to include a barrel-vaulted narthex with a low dome. In the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, an additional portico was added. Additional renovations took place in the seventeenth century (c. 1623).

Painted within one hundred years of the Akritan scene in Chrysapha, the secular scene depicted here is very similar in appearance. Set against a dark backdrop to highlight the figures by candlelight, another moment of battle is created (Fig. 20). To the right is positioned a knight dressed in a red cape that flares out behind him, intensifying his movement. He is seated on a white horse, whose legs jump up in the front, as though captured in mid-gallop. The knight chases a centaur with a weapon in his hands. The centaur, in turn, turns his head back to watch the enemy, as he too gallops forward with legs extended. In his arms, he clutches a bow and arrow. Like the scene of Digenis Akritas, this is one of combat in which the supposedly “noble” Christian heroic male triumphs over a worldly foe. Drawing from conventions in ancient art, those defeated by the heroes are “others” — Amazons and centaurs. In his discussion of amazonomachy Bruno Snell observed:

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63 Giannoules, Οι τοιχογραφίες των βυζαντινών μνημείων της Άρτας, 278.

For the Greeks, the Titanomachy and the battle against the giants remained symbols of the victory which their own world had won over a strange universe; along with the battles against the Amazons and Centaurs they continue to signalize the Greek conquest of everything barbarous, of all monstrosity and grossness.\footnote{Bruno Snell, \textit{The Discovery of the Mind} (New York: Dover Publications, 2012), 35.}

In both, the figures are in rapid conflict with one another, as the protector of the empire attacks the figure that stands for the rest of the world. Demetrios G. Giannoules relates the scene to a number of sources and precedents. He observes a relationship between the centaur here and the use of zodiac symbols of the East, as well as Roman texts and manuscripts from the fourth century onwards. In particular, he compares the dress of the knight to a manuscript image from the Romance of Alexander, suggesting a potential relationship between the imagery on the church wall and a written source that circulated widely.\footnote{Giannoules, \textit{Οι τοιχογραφίες των βυζαντινών μνημείων της Άρτας}, 288-89. The manuscript to which Giannoules refers is the Trebizond Alexander Romance (Venice Hellenic Institute Codex Gr. 5). See Nicolette Trahoulia, “The Venice Alexander Romance: Pictorial narrative and the art of telling stories,” in \textit{History as Literature in Byzantium}, ed. Ruth Macrides (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 145-165 (with collected bibliography).} These many cultural references suggest that as in Chrysapha, the church paintings, commissioned by a pious empress after she joined the monastery, were created for a learned audience that would respond to the timely references of conquest and moral heroism. The dynamic scenes in both Arta and Chrysapha rely on secular tropes to relay the triumph of good over evil and sin within the margins of the church.

Despite being unusual, both images are found below canonical representations — the Deesis and the Hodegetria. The Deesis scene in Arta is now badly degraded, with only the lowest portion remaining visible (Fig. 21). It would have once shown the depiction of the central figure of Christ flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, both with their hands raised in
supplication towards Christ. Christ’s feet remain planted on his footrest below his throne, where he would have once sat.

Similarly, the Virgin Hodegetria, seen above the scene of Digenis and Maximou in Chrysapha, was one of the most prevalent depictions of the Virgin in the period. With both images above the dado zones in question, there is a clear contrast between the secular images below and the canonical images above. Each image above concerns the notions of salvation and supplication so emphasized in Late Byzantine imagery. These evocations contrast strongly with the worldly and learned depictions of these mythological characters below. It is as though the lower portion depicts the more difficult aspect of salvation — overcoming sin and immorality — while the larger upper portions depict the more pious issue of prayer and submission to the divine.

Although the churches in Chrysapha and Arta are at a great distance from each other, and from the traditional centers of Byzantium in Constantinople and Thessaloniki, both present contemporary ways of looking at Christian themes and values. Though likely not in direct conversation with one another, both respond to an interest in reimagining the Christian within the church by incorporating more contemporary analogies below and surrounded by traditional biblical depictions. It is as though the religious imagery of the greater program is being grounded in the worldly.

Another dado image of two intertwined birds, likely griffins, is located further west in the Arta church, towards the narthex, but along the same wall (Fig. 22). The two birds are positioned within a circular roundel, with two distinct bodies and differentiated necks intertwined. Giannoules identified these figures as partridges or swans and connects the

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67 Close inspection of the church did not yield any other secular images in the dado zone, though wear to the painting allows for the possibility that there were originally more images.
intertwined birds painted in the dado zone to Early Christian paintings and pavements, noting that they were rarely found post-Iconoclasm. He also compares them to the decorated sculpture of the roughly contemporary churches of Kato Panagia and Blacherna in Arta (Fig. 23).68

Though each church was located far from Constantinople and at a distance from one another, their dado zones should be considered together. These churches each exhibit connections to the center of imperial power, either directly or indirectly. Hagia Theodora was reconstructed under the direction of the despotissa Theodora, who retired to the convent following the death of her husband, Michael II Komnenos Doukas, the Despot of Arta.69 The Chrysaphitissa, built by a Byzantine military official and located close to Mystras, must have had strong connections to the cultural center, where numerous manuscripts were collected and copied.

Decorated dado zones are known in two other churches in Lakonia and neighboring Arkadia. The mid-fourteenth-century Church of the Peribleptos in Mystras was constructed by Manuel Kantakouzenos, the contemporary despot of the Morea, and Isabella de Lusignan, the daughter of a French-Cypriot lord.70 The church is supposed by many scholars to have been a Western hybrid of sorts, with foreign elements inserted into the traditional sculptural program of a Late Byzantine church. A carved fleur de lis, for example, is locate on the east exterior wall of the building (Fig. 24). One element that has not been studied within the church is its decorated dado zone.

68 Giannoules, Οι τοιχογραφίες των βυζαντινών μνημείων της Άρτας, 289-90.


The pseudo-marble paintings of the dado zone include images of animals and heads of men, as though covertly playing with the eye of the viewer (Figs. 25, 26). Approximately six such images remain in the church, including two human heads, three birds, and a lion. Along the north wall of the church, a slightly recessed portion of the nave wall contains three painted panels. Within them, two of the human faces, as well as two of the birds, are positioned below the frontal images of four warrior saints, who stand garbed in armor with swords at their sides (Fig. 27).

The fourteenth-century Church of the Holy Apostles at Leontari in Arkadia contains images that are strikingly similar to those at the Peribleptos. The church shares the same plan as the Peribleptos and also the Hodegetria, known as the “Mystras type” which consists of a domed, cross in square superimposed on a three-aisle basilica. The structural similarities between this church and those of Mystras give way to visual similarities as well. Many of the frescoes that once decorated the Church of the Holy Apostles are now degraded and were later covered with a layer of white fresco. From what remains, however, much can be considered. The churches in Mystras and Leontari notably include the prophet Gideon holding a scroll of his prophecy relating to the Virgin. This prophet and the potentially identified figure of Naum next to him are usually not depicted in the domes of churches. Thus, to appear in both churches

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suggests an artistic connection between the two. This connection is further underscored by the dado zones, which contain strikingly similar depictions of encoded pseudo marble revetments.

At least five heads remain in the Leontari dado zone, with the potential of a very degraded sixth (Fig. 28). Like in the Mystras example, all extant examples face outwards towards the center of the nave. There were no visible examples in the narthex, gallery or apses of the church. As at the Peribleptos, the figures are positioned directly below depictions of military saints (Fig. 29). The depictions of the heads themselves, however, differ from one another. While the Mystras human heads are forward facing men, with elongated faces and straight, stylized hair, the human heads of Leontari have a more softened, youthful appearance. The heads in Holy Apostles are positioned at a three-quarter turn with a more rounded face and curled hair. They occupy the same positioning within the dado frieze, to the side of a central figural shape. The inclusion of rhombi or circles within the pseudo-marble revetment is a common occurrence in the late Byzantine period, further underscoring the unexpectedness of the small figures in the corner.

Whereas in Hagia Theodora and the Chrysaphitissa, the dado zones each are comprised of a moment of action within a narrative, in Mystras and Leontari the figures are busts, with frontal facing saints above them. It is of note that in all churches surveyed, the images of the dado zone were positioned facing towards the center of the nave and therefore the faithful who would have gathered there. While the image of Digenis is positioned on the east wall of the church, adjacent to the sanctuary screen, the other three were all positioned on side walls.

In all four churches, the images are found only in the central nave of the church, not in the narthex or gallery. The secular images in all instances were given a space of importance within the central church. The presence of these other examples further supports a Byzantine
date for the Akritan scene in the Chrysapha katholikon and suggests that in this period there was broad interest in using the margins of church decoration to signal erudition.

DIGENIS AND THE SEBASTOS

The story of Digenis Akritas represents only a portion of the greater interest in Akritan lore during the period. Scholars have characterized Digenis as a fusion of Achilles, Hercules, and Alexander. The songs of the Akritan genre told of the lives of Byzantine army men. Set against the backdrop of turmoil, shifting political boundaries and centers of power, and an overall sense of unease, it is almost logical that one of the greatest folk heroes of the period would be a frontiersman protecting the empire. The songs emerged in the ninth century, as the Arab-Byzantine conflict raged on. The akrites within the poem reflected the Byzantine army as a whole and romanticized the valiant hero on the edge of the empire. In the immediate area of the Chrysaphitissa church, the memory of Byzantine and Frankish conflicts was still alive, bringing the moments of border conflict for the soldiers into the personal territory of those around the church.  

The Sebastos Michael, who originally financed the construction and decoration of the church along with his wife Zoe, was a military commander responsible for commanding ethnic units. Thus, just as Digenis was responsible for defending the borders of the empire, at the time of the church's construction, a sebastos would have played an official role in the protection of

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74 Anagnostakis suggests this work may have been commissioned by a family of the last name Digenis from the nearby region of Leondari in Anagnostakis, “Digenis Akritas and Maximou: From Textual / Oral to Visual Representation,” 83-84.

peripheral groups. Below the inscription naming the donor are frontal portraits of two saints, the military figures Serguius and Bacchus, who are given the esteemed position of guarding the door (Fig. 30). Here, these eastern saints act as protectors not only of this sacred space but also of the empire as a whole. A number of other military saints are also represented throughout the church, further suggesting a particular interest in this aspect of contemporary life. The interest in security is made evident through the painting of Digenis, who also served as a protector of the empire.

In the twelfth century, the writer known as Phtochoprodromos addressed a letter to the emperor of the time, Manuel I Komnenos, stating that he hopes to become a “New Akritis” in response to complaints about the lavish lifestyle of his monastery. As Corinne Jouanno notes in her writing on the epic, the presence of such a reference reinforces the popularity of the epic in society. Digenis can be understood as someone to emulate and as a protector of what is morally just. The Sebastos, protecting the empire and guarding ethnic units, would likely have also identified as a “Digenis” — that is, as someone who stood for morality and protection of the empire.

Chrysapha is situated nine kilometers to the east of the ancient and current regional Lakonian capital of Sparta, and more importantly for the period of this study, nineteen kilometers from the Byzantine city of Mystras. Mystras, which served as the capital of the Despotate of the Morea between 1349 and 1460, had already been a thriving Byzantine center in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. The city was a known site of manuscript production and a magnet for intellectuals. Steven Runciman, who has published extensively on Mystras,

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77 Chatzidakis, Mystras, 16-20.
notes that the increasing volatility of other major capitals of the period such as Thessaloniki and Constantinople inspired the migration of the elite to Mystras instead. By the end of the fourteenth century, many key scholars came to the important city, joining the already large group of Constantinopolitan artisans residing in the capital-in-exile.\textsuperscript{78}

In addition to key Byzantine scholars, there would have likely been a constant influx of foreign visitors to the region. Italian scholars such as Cyriacus of Ancona are known to have visited Mystras.\textsuperscript{79} These cross-cultural interactions have been well documented in the artistic production of the city of Mystras itself and in written travelogues by the literary scholars. But what has not been considered is the greater effect such a presence had on the visual culture of the region as a whole.

While at first the notion of representing a secular folklore image may seem disorienting, the strong literary culture in the Morea both during this period and throughout its \textit{longue durée} suggests that there would likely have been an interest in such learned things as well as a desire to represent that knowledge within a space such as the Chrysaphitissa. Though located far from Constantinople, as Elizabeth Jeffreys has noted, literate members of the elite in Lakonia were not removed from the culture of the imperial capital. Members of this highly cultured group are thought to have contributed to the transliteration of the epic \textit{War of Troy}, which incorporated and responded to the environment of the Morea in which it was created — a feat that Jeffreys argues was only possible because the creator was an outsider coming into the Morea.\textsuperscript{80} Therefore, I

\textsuperscript{78} Steven Runciman, \textit{Mistra: Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 109-110.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 116.

would suggest that the incorporation of an epic figure in the decoration of this church might have been in keeping with intellectual trends of the period, as people responded in new and innovative ways to the shifting world around them, often through contact with neighboring cultures or their representatives.

CONCLUSION

The scene of combat between Digenis and Maximou in the Chrysaphitissa stems not only from a place of visual interest, to entertain the viewer and inspire thoughts of Christian goodness, but also from one of literati culture that existed in the surrounding region. The figures of Digenis Akritas and Maximou, his foe and lover, embody the ideals of Christian and Pagan, good and bad. Its Christian undertones and interpretation in the contemporary period suggest that the painting would likely have been seen in its time as a sign of Christianity and one of learning.

When considered in relation to the small but fascinating collection of other decorated dado zones of the period, as well as other likely images of Digenis Akritas, the striking image comes to life, embodying an interest in changing boundaries and innovative thought. In short, an image drawn from a secular epic poem represented in a liminal space in a church that was far from the usual was actually centered within the notions of power and empire, which it so adeptly projected.
[Image Redacted]

Figure 1: Scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 2: Exterior of the Panagia Chrysaphitissa, Chrysapha, Lakonia (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 3: Map of medieval trade routes (After William G. Cavanagh, Joost Crouwel, R. W. V. Catling and Graham Shipley, Continuity and Change in a Greek Rural Landscape: The Laconia Survey Vol. I: Results and Interpretation (London: British School at Athens, 1996), Ill. 7.1)
Figure 4: Plan of Panagia Chrysaphitissa, Chrysapha (After Nikolaos Drandakis, “Παναγία ἡ Χρυσαφίτισσα (1290)” Πελοποννησιακά, Παράρτημα 9, plan 2)
Figure 5: Image of Panagia Chrysaphitissa donors, the Sebastos Michael and his wife Zoe, in narthex of church (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 6: Former Patriarch Arsenios Autoreianos, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 7: Detail of Maximou from scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa
(Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 8: Detail of Digenis from scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 9: Detail of Maximou’s arm and lower layer from scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 10: Detail of Salome in the scene of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 11: Post-Byzantine depiction of St. Demetrius, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 12: Byzantine inscription of Saint Nikon, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 13: Post-Byzantine inscription of St. Demetrius, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 14: The Virgin Hodegetria with Christ, and Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 15: Detail of Maximou’s headdress from scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 16: Detail of Digenis’ headdress from scene of Digenis and Maximou, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 17: Scene of Digenis slaying the Dragon, Athens: Stoa of Attalus Museum, inv. nos. P9396. (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 18: Plate depicting two lovers, Corinth: Archaeological Museum of Ancient Corinth, inv. no. C-1934-0054 (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 19: Scene of Digenis fighting a lion, Church of St. Catherine, Thessaloniki. Now held in the collection of the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki. (After Stylianos Pelekanides “Un Bas-Relief Byzantin de Digénins Akritas.” Cahiers archéologiques 8 (1956), Fig 3).
Figure 20: Scene of a knight and centaur, Hagia Theodora, Arta (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 21: Scene of a knight and centaur with remnants of Deesis depiction above, Hagia Theodora, Arta (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 22: Intertwined creatures in dado zone, Hagia Theodora, Arta (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 23: Intertwined peacocks on marble templon of Blacherna Monastery, Arta. (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 24: Exterior decoration of fleur de lis. Church of the Peribleptos, Mystras. (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
Figure 25: Dado pseudo-marble revetment containing lion, Church of the Peribleptos, Mystras. (After Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 26: Human heads in dado zone, Church of the Peribleptos, Mystras (After Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 27: Portion of south wall, Church of the Peribleptos, Mystras (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 28: Human head in dado zone, Church of the Holy Apostle, Leontari (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 29: Portion of north wall, Church of the Holy Apostle, Leontari (Photo: Laura Nicole Horan)
Figure 30: Doorway flanked by military saints with inscriptions, Panagia Chrysaphitissa (Photo: Sharon E. J. Gerstel)
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