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The Discovery in Olympus (Lycia) of One of the Oldest Known Paintings of Christ Pantocrator with a Discussion of its Iconography

SEÇKİN EVCİM*

Abstract

The semicircular exedra in the north of Olympus's Church No. 3, with its cenotaphs and paintings, must have enabled the church to serve as a place of memorial for bishops. Some of the fresco fragments belong to a haloed figure in the lower part. It was understood from the fragmentary dipinto that this person was Aristocritus, the first bishop mentioned in church records two centuries after Hieromartyr Methodius of Olympus. But the main figure found here is Christ. It is thought that the depiction of Christ, which can be reassembled through the fallen pieces, was once located on the lunette of the niche. Christ is depicted in bust-length form with long hair and a beard, holding a Bible, and of the "Christ Pantocrator" type. This artwork, which we dated to the middle of the sixth century with the support of both its features and other finds, is one of the earliest examples of this type. It is therefore an extremely important piece for the history of Byzantine painting. In addition, it is the first Pantocrator example identified so far among the few surviving examples from the pre-Iconoclastic period in Asia Minor.

Keywords: Christ Pantocrator, Early Byzantine painting, bishop depictions, cenotaph, Lycia, Olympus

Öz

Olympos 3 No'lu Kilise'nin kuzeyinde yer alan yarım daire planlı eksedra gerek içerisindeki kenotaph uygulamaları gerekse dekorasyonu ile kilisenin azizlerin ve piskoposların hatırasıyla hizmet eden bir ziyaretgah olmasını sağlamış olmalıdır. Kazılar sırasında bulunan duvar resmi kalıntıları içerisinde özellikle Niş 1'de bulunan duvar resmi parçaları önemli veriler sunmaktadır. Parçalardan bir kısmı alt bölümde bulunan haleli figüre ait olup yazıt parçalarından bu kişinin Olympos'un Methodius'un şehit edilmesinden 120 yıl sonra kayıtlarda ismi geçen ilk piskoposu olan Aristokritos olduğu anlaşılmıştır. Burada bulunan esas önemli figür ise İsa'dır; parçalanıp dökülmüş halde bulunan İsa tasvirinin nişin en üst kesiminde, kemerin altında yer aldığı düşünülmektedir. İsa, yarım daire bir çerçeve içerisinde büst formunda tasvir edilmiş olup uzun saçlı ve sakallı, bir elinde İncil tutar haliyle "Pantokrator İsa" tipindedir. Bu tasvir, duvar resminde bulunan Elçilerin İşleri'nden alıntılanmış yazıtla birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, yalnızca tipolojik olarak değil ikonografik olarak da Pantokrator olarak tanımlanmalıdır. Gerek tasvir özellikleri gerekse diğer buluntuların desteğiyle MS altıncı yüzyıl ortalarına tarihlendirdiğimiz bu tasvir, tipin erken örneklerinden birisidir ve bu sebepten Bizans resim sanatı için son derece önemlidir. Ayrıca, Olympos 3 No'lu Kilise eksedrasının figürlü duvar resimleri, Anadolu'da İkonoklast

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Dönem öncesine ait günümüze ulaşmış az sayıda örnek içerisinde Pantokrator İsa'nın bulunduğu şu ana kadar tespit edilmiş ilk eserdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pantokrator İsa, Erken Bizans resim sanatı, piskopos tasvirleri, kenotaph, Likya, Olympos

Introduction

Among the studies of cities in Lycia, ancient Olympus stands at the forefront, especially in terms of showing the detectability of the sociocultural, economic, and political transformation in the Early Byzantine period through the course of its physical development as a coastal city. What makes this possible is the fact that the city has been abandoned since the early seventh century AD, as evidenced by the archaeological data. This has also enabled the city to reach the present day as it was in the Early Byzantine period. For scientific research this situation provides an abundance of data on early Christian religious architecture and decoration. In addition to the preservation of the main cult spaces, auxiliary chambers and architectural arrangements on liturgical practices, wall paintings with figures, mosaics, and architectural sculptures of the fifth and sixth centuries AD have survived the Iconoclastic period without being fully destroyed. Among the churches in Olympus, Church No. 3 takes the lead in this regard with its architectural-liturgical arrangement and wall paintings with figures.¹

Church No. 3 dates to the first half of the sixth century and is one of the numerous early basilicas with its architectural features. However, its exedra to the north allows us to easily distinguish the church from similar ones. This site is part of a late antique complex that was already located here before the church, and the original function of the building has not yet been determined. The apsidal part (exedra) of the previous building was preserved and a basilica was constructed by adding new walls on the south and west sides. Therefore this space, which is larger than the apse of the church, was included in the church, decorated with paintings, and took on a new religious function.

In today's Anatolia, Christian wall paintings from the Early Byzantine period, in other words before Iconoclasm, are quite rare. For this reason, the remains of wall paintings found in the excavations of Church No. 3 in Olympus are worth examining and protecting. The semicircular chamber called an exedra, in which a significant part of the aforementioned wall paintings are located, appears both in structural and functional terms as a unique space in Early Byzantine church architecture. Christ Pantocrator, located in Niche 1 of the chamber, is the oldest known example in Anatolia so far, and together with the depiction of a saint and the inscription (*dipinto*) below, it provides important information for the development of Pantocrator iconography.

Archaeological Context: Discovery of The Painting Fragments and Relative Dating

Church No. 3 is located northwest of sector S7/VI (fig. 1) in Olympus. It was built in the northern part of the Roman building area measuring 43.50 x 37.50 m. Large bossage cut stone blocks were used for the perimeter walls. Bridge Street, which cuts the city on a north-south

¹ The research on the wall paintings in the exedra of Olympus Church No. 3 has been supported by Koç University AKMED (Suna & İnan Kırac Research Center for Mediterranean Civilizations). Project No. KU AKMED 2019/P.1034.

axis, extends to the west of the building area. There are monumental tomb structures to the northwest and southeast, and a building thought to be a late antique bath is found in the east.

Olympus Church No. 3 is a three-aisled basilica with an atrium, large single apse, and auxiliary chambers (fig. 2).² A semicircular exedra, 7.30 m in diameter, is in the northwest of the nave and opens to the north aisle (fig. 3).³ The building material and technique of the exedra walls differ from other walls of the church. The northern part of the west wall, which connects to the exedra, is coherent with the exedra walls. The north aisle door in this section, which has a segmental arch built with bricks, is also different from the other arched entrances of the church. This section of the wall and exedra should be remnants of an earlier building upon which the church is built. On the other hand, probably between the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth century AD, these parts were repaired and integrated into the church during its construction.

In the 2017 excavation season, fragments of wall paintings were encountered when work started in Niche 1 of the exedra.⁴ In the 2019 season cleaning and levelling work down to the layer where fragments were encountered was completed (fig. 4). An important find of this season was the portrait discovered behind the western buttress in the southern façade of Niche 5.⁵ The furring on the surface was cleaned, and a portrait of a bearded man in a medallion (*imago clipeata*) framed by zigzag bands in yellow and green uncovered (fig. 5). There is no sign of his identity; however, it is thought that the garment around his neck may be a kind of *omophorion* and thus represents a bishop. Also, another wall painting was unearthed in Niche 5, but work continued in the 2020 season.⁶ The remains of a painting probably showing a red and white curtain were seen first. Then the top layer with three figures was discovered. It turned out that the layer with the red and white curtain belongs to an earlier phase, with three figures painted on it later (fig. 6). The lower half of the figure on the left and only the feet of the figures in the middle and right have survived. The thin rope sandals on the feet of the middle figure are often seen in depictions of holy men from the early centuries of Christianity such as apostles, protomartyrs, etc.

In the 2020 excavation season, the floor of the chamber was completely unearthed, and the excavation work was completed.⁷ Fallen and fractured wall painting fragments were collected from niches during the excavation work. Among these, fragments from Niche 1 especially belong to a significant composition. After cleaning and assembling work done in the laboratory of the excavation house, these fragments yielded two portraits that are the subjects of this paper: Jesus Christ and a saint (figs. 7 and 8). The painting in Niche 1 is partly protected on the wall like the one in Niche 5. There is a thick, light red bordure on the left side and a thin, dark red bordure on the right side that is still on the wall. Only the figure's lower half, below its knees, located between the bordures has survived (fig. 9). His left foot is completely decayed and only understandable thanks to the partly surviving colors. This lower part should belong to the depiction of the aforementioned saint. Another painted layer under the existing surface

² For more information about Olympus Church No. 3, see Evcim and Öztaşkın 2019, 136-38; see also Olcay Uçkan et al. 2022.

³ For details of the excavation work carried out in the exedra, see Olcay Uçkan, et al. 2019, 623; see also Olcay Uçkan and Evcim 2021; Olcay Uçkan et al. 2022, 420-24.

⁴ Olcay Uçkan et al. 2019, 623, fig. 5.

⁵ Olcay Uçkan et al. 2022, 420, fig. 5a.

⁶ Olcay Uçkan et al. 2022, 421, fig. 6.

⁷ For the first report with preliminary results, see Olcay Uçkan and Evcim 2021.

was detected, but it could not be understood whether that layer has figures/motifs or not. That layer is also visible in collected fragments belonging to the upper part of the wall painting.

There are interesting arrangements in Niches 1, 3 and 5. The lower part of the niches was closed with rubble in front, and the inside of the resulting rectangular spaces were filled with rubble stones, chip stones, and pottery sherds. The remaining traces suggest that the covering of these arrangements in Niches 3 and 5 were shaped like sarcophagus lids. Niche 3 is filled with chip stones, whereas Niche 5 is filled with rubblestones (fig. 10). There is no trace of the upper side of the arrangement in Niche 1, and the space between the single-row rubblestone wall built in front of the niche is filled with pottery sherds. Almost all belong to daily use pottery.

Whereas it is not certain when the exedra and its niches were converted, pottery sherds provide important hints, especially those found in Niche 1 (fig. 11). The sherds are mostly thick pieces such as bottoms and handles of coarse wares such as amphora, basin and mortarium (fig. 12). This repertoire of recovered pottery with sixth century AD amphora fragments together with vessels belonging to the end of the fifth century AD, such as basins and table wares with a long term usage, suggest that the sherds were used in Niche 1 in the first half of the sixth century AD⁸ That both the architectural sculpture pieces found during the work and the wall paintings mentioned above belong to the first half and middle of the sixth century suggests that the arrangement of the exedra as a part of the church took place at the end of the fifth century AD at the earliest and in the middle of the sixth century AD at the latest.

Unfortunately, not many coins to support these dating suggestions were found. Two of three coins are undefinable. The only identifiable coin is a bronze *minimus* dated to the reign of Justinian I (552-565).

Another group of finds found in the debris layer are moulding and revetment pieces. The mouldings are mostly of the ovolo-type binding mouldings and their material is marble. The revetment pieces include limestone, slate stones, and different types of marble. The most interesting elements of wall revetment are plaster capitals and bases (fig. 13). While the Corinthian-type plaster capitals are limestone, the Attic type B plaster bases are made of marble. Anatolian examples of plaster capitals with helix arrangement on single row acanthus are dated to the third and fourth centuries AD.⁹ However, in terms of the details of the leaf shapes, the closest parallel to the plaster capital is in the Konya Archaeology Museum. This capital was produced in the Docimium workshop and dated to the fourth century AD.¹⁰ But in this example, each lobe of the leaf has four ends. Acanthus specimens with different lobes with three and four ends are encountered until the sixth century when Corinthian capitals become differentiated by acanthus leaf shapes.¹¹

The exedra appears to have been built in the fourth century AD based on the fact that it belongs to a building before the construction of the church. This also accords with the dating of the pottery sherds used in the walls of this building and the similarity of the masonry technique to third and fourth century AD buildings of Olympus. Architectural sculpture fragments,

⁸ For analogues of the basin, see Reynolds 2011, 208-13, figs. 3, 5. For the dating of the amphora form, see Sazanov 1999, 266-67, figs. 3, 4.

⁹ Kramer 1994, 90-92.

¹⁰ Mert and Niewöhner 2010, 403, cat. no. 17, fig. 30.

¹¹ Niewöhner 2021, 26.

opus sectile and opus tessellatum pavements, fresco fragments, small finds and numismatic data found both in the nave and in the exedra suggest that the arrangement of the exedra as a church space took place at the end of the fifth century AD earliest and the middle of the sixth century AD at the latest.

Architectural Context: Arrangement and Function of the Exedra of Church No. 3

As explained in the previous section, the exedra clearly belongs to an earlier building phase and was connected to the church's northern aisle during its construction with three arches carried by two columns. Remaining traces show that a metal sliding railing was placed in the center opening while the side openings had stone slabs. While there is no conclusive evidence regarding the function of this pre-church structure, its location in the East Necropolis and its confinement within extensive perimeter walls suggests that it may have been a monumental tomb chamber or heroon, among the other monumental tombs of Olympus.¹²

Monumental Roman tombs of the exedra type are found in Lycia, but they consist of sarcophagi on U-shaped platforms. They should not be confused with the term exedra as used in this article.¹³ The exedra of Church No. 3, if it were a monumental tomb in the first phase, could have been a semicircular version of the exedra-type Harbor Street Heroon in Cnidus.¹⁴ The façade of this type is either a colonnaded façade or a wide arch, like the tomb (cenotaph?) on the east side of Pompeii's Herculaneum Gate.¹⁵

It is well known that pagan necropolises were Christianized over time and that some of the mausoleums in these areas were transformed into Christian tombs and martyrions. The Mausoleum of Empress Helena and the adjacent basilica in Rome is one of the oldest of the funerary basilicas and built on the site of an existing necropolis. Excavations revealed that the complex was surrounded by mausoleums with an apsidal ends.¹⁶ In Basilica Nova of Cimitile / Nola, the tomb of St. Felix and other burial chambers were also surrounded by churches from the fourth century onwards as a major pilgrimage center under the impact of the martyr cult.¹⁷ Undoubtedly the most well-known examples of the construction of churches with martyrion and/or memorial chapels in old necropolises are to be found around Salona.¹⁸ In particular, the side-by-side apsidal burial chambers of Manastirine raise questions as to whether the exedra of Olympus Church No. 3, which is in a Roman necropolis, could have been a tomb of that type before the church.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the exedra, or the apse of the previous building, was converted in the early sixth century, whether or not it was a former funerary chamber. As mentioned before, three of its five niches (1, 3, and 5) were filled with various materials

¹² Öncü 2021, 313, fig. 5 (labelled "Building B" on the plan).

¹³ For exedra type tombs of Lycia and western Anatolia, see Aktaş 2008.

¹⁴ Doksanaltı and Gider Büyükozer 2019, 113, fig. 7.

¹⁵ Campbell 2015, 189-90.

¹⁶ Guyon 1987, 272-315.

¹⁷ Lehmann 2004, 31-51.

¹⁸ Duval and Marin 2000, 619-64. Ann Marie Yasin pointed out that this may not always be the case and that there may be different reasons and diverse phases through the martyrion churches of Salona against the generalization of the development of the martyr cult on ancient necropolises based on some pioneering examples in Rome. It is particularly noteworthy that she points to the tomb arrangement at Manastirine. This may indicate the importance of the lineage of local clergy and the popularity of burial near preexisting graves, rather than the eschatological influence of the saint's burial; see Yasin 2012a, 110-11.

(figs. 10-11). Niches 3 and 5 had coverings in the shape of sarcophagus lids on top of the fill. Limestone slab fragments with relief crosses in the center found scattered across the exedra were undoubtedly used to cover the front of arrangements encountered in Niches 1, 3, and 5. Especially mortar residue on the front face of Niche 3 shows that a big slab had been placed there. With this slab installation (in addition to making the upper part in the form of a saddle lid), the niches were arranged in a way that imitates *arcosolium* tombs with sarcophagi (fig. 14 and e-section of fig. 15).¹⁹

Although uncommon, monumental tombs with no burials are known to have been built from the Hellenistic era onwards. This type of tomb is called a cenotaph (*κενοτάφιο*), and the tomb building is called a cenotaphion (*κενοτάφιον*).²⁰ This custom has continued in Christianity, where it is associated with the worship of martyrs and/or saints. At first, the idea of a cenotaph potentially exists in the tomb of Christ in the Christian world. However, the first monument that comes to mind when talking about the cenotaph in Byzantine architecture is the Church of the Holy Apostles. According to Eusebius, there were representative tombs (*θήκαι*) erected in honor and memory of the apostles around the tomb of the emperor in the building, which was originally Constantine's mausoleum.²¹ Although not referred to as cenotaphs, many martyrions or mausoleums built from the Early Christian period onwards are actually this type of tombs built in the place where the person whose name they bear is thought to have lived or died. One important example is the shrine of St. Demetrios in Hagios Demetrios Church in Thessaloniki, which contains neither the mortal remains of the saint nor his relics.²² In the case of Olympus Church No. 3, the prohibition of *intra muros* and the fact that a church is not allowed to be consecrated with inhumations inside (mentioned in ecclesiastical texts) may also have been factors.²³ The actual burials of the bishops may be around the church, but excavations are continuing inside the church at this time.

There are more examples of Christian cenotaphs, but the comprehensive assessment of the exedra of Church No. 3 is the subject for a different study. While its frescoes, which will be introduced in detail later, have depictions of bishops/saints, it is not certain yet if Olympus Church No. 3 was dedicated to a martyr saint. However, it is clearly understood from the wall paintings and cenotaphs that the exedra of the church was arranged as a memorial. These cenotaphs are the best physical evidence of the memorial chapel function of the exedra.

In the early Byzantine period, the tomb of a saint or a place containing the relics of a saint could be under a church or/and placed by an altar.²⁴ Yet there is a separate structure related to the main church in major pilgrimage centers.²⁵ The form of these structures always emphasizes the center of the building. Many examples seen in Lycia have a triconch plan type.²⁶ However, apsidal memorials such as the exedra of Church No. 3 have rarely survived. But a kind of

¹⁹ Olcay Uçkan and Evcim 2021, 21.

²⁰ *Κενοτάφιο* in Greek: *κενός* = empty and *τάφος* = tomb. For basic information about cenotaphs, see *RE* 11.1 s.v. "*Κενοτάφιον*"; see also Lekatsas 2000, 379-82. For a comprehensive study about cenotaphs, see Ricci 2006.

²¹ Cameron and Hall 1999, 176-77; Johnson 2020, 90-93.

²² For the shrine of St. Demetrios, see Bogdanović 2011. The author's comments that the shrine of Demetrios "localized divine actions on earth" and "acted as a container of sacredness" are notable for the function of the cenotaphs; see Bogdanović 2011, 289.

²³ Violante 1982, 989, 993-94; see also Cantino Wataghin 1999, 157.

²⁴ Dyggve 1952, 150-52.

²⁵ Yasin 2009, 159-63; 2012b, 249-50.

²⁶ Niewöhner 2006, 78, 89-100, figs. 14-23.

mausoleum that consisted of an apse alone was known in the Christian architecture of antiquity and the Early Medieval period. Medieval texts mention these sepulchral apses that were then built inside churches or attached to their exterior walls.²⁷ However, such spaces were not always built together with the church or later; the opposite is the case in Olympus Church No. 3.

While the exedra of Church No. 3 gives the building a unique appearance, it is not the only example of integrating a previous building with a church built later. In such examples, an existing tomb structure was turned into a side chamber (martyrion, relic chapel or memorial tomb) connected to the church with the construction of a church building adjacent to it.²⁸ As explained before, the exedra predates Church No. 3. Even though it is placed among the most important Roman tombs of the city,²⁹ it is not certain if it originally belonged to a burial structure or not. However, considering other known examples, it is possible to say that a similar situation applies to the exedra of Church No. 3. As we will explain in the next section, considering the meaning of the paintings, the exedra may have served as a memorial chapel for the holy persons to mediate the invocations of the worshippers.

Iconographic Context: The Mural of Christ Pantocrator and Bishop Aristocritus

The painting fragments in Niche 1 belong to the figures and inscriptions around them. The puzzle created by these pieces belonging to the same composition can be solved depending on the legibility of the inscriptions and the defining features of the figures (fig. 15). One depiction is of Christ Pantocrator used on the lunette (tympantum) of the niche.

The other depiction is of an elderly man with a halo (figs. 7, 15-a). This is at a lower level and depicted to the right of Christ (left in view) in full size, but on a smaller scale compared to Christ. The lower part of this figure was found in situ on the wall of the niche. The figure can be identified as a bishop based on his liturgical garment – a white omophorion with cross motifs. Combining some of the fragments of this bishop from this niche, the following inscription was obtained: “...*TOKP(I)TOC EIIIICKOII...*” (...tokritos Episcop...) (fig. 7, next to the bishop). This inscription indicates that he is most probably Bishop Aristocritus, whose name was associated for the first time with Olympus in the *Notitiae Episcopatumum*. He attended the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Calchedon (451) as the bishop of Olympus according to council records.³⁰

Bishop Aristocritus is looking at the viewer and has greyish hair and a beard. His hair is short, and his long beard has two curls at its end. He has auburn, brown eyes and slightly tanned white skin. Many saints in Byzantine painting have distinctive facial features, especially after the Iconoclastic period. However, in Late Antiquity, when portraits of saints were under

²⁷ For the apsidal martyrions and memorials, see Grabar, 1972a, 98-102.

²⁸ For example, St. Luke's Tomb in Ephesus, see Pülz 2010; for the Tomb of Apostle Philip, see D'Andria 2017, 9-12; for Amathonte Saint-Tychon Church, see Procopiou and Xydias 2013, 257-59; for Basilica Nova in Cimitile / Nola, see Lehmann 2004.

²⁹ With the cult of martyrs, which spread rapidly after the late fourth century, splendid churches began to be built in necropolises; see Dyggve 1952, 151; also Brown 1982, 7-8 and Deichmann 1983, 60; The only reason for this may not be the tomb of a martyr in the old necropolis. Old laws prohibiting *intra-urbem* burial must also have required the Christianization of old necropolises with church buildings. Dyggve's studies were pioneering regarding restrictions on *intra-urbem* burials and its effects on cemetery and town churches, see Dyggve 1952; Dyggve 1953. After Dyggve, Cantino Wataghin has dealt more extensively with the topic. For a comprehensive and instructive study of the phenomenon of urban burials and urban funerary churches in the early Christian period, see Cantino Wataghin 1999. For some implications and effects of burial laws, see also Dagron 1977, 11-19; Achim 2015, 288; Wenn et al. 2017, 205-6.

³⁰ Darrouzés 1981, 209, 223, 237, 256; see also Hellenkemper and Hild 2004, 2:758.

development, there were more standard types of portraits. Some variations were created by the color and style of hair and beard.³¹ Elderly bishops are often depicted as the standard type with short grey hair, a prominent hairline, and a long grey beard. Aristocritus is most likely depicted in this stereotypical way.³² Mosaics of St. Ursus and St. Severus in Sant'Apollinare in Classe, an early Coptic icon of Apa Abraham in Berlin, and the Christ and St. Menas icon in the Louvre are well-known examples.³³ This type depicts the educated or spiritual man, from the wise men of antiquity, especially philosophers, to Christian saints – and even Christ.³⁴ As mentioned above, it should not be forgotten that individuality is created through differences in the shape of hair and beard. The two curls at the ends of the beard of Aristocritus can be regarded as an example of this. As for his dress, although details are lacking, it is clear that it reflects Early Byzantine episcopal vestments.³⁵

The inscription, which we think was on the bishop's left and above his shoulder due to the color of the background, is written with a thick brush in white uncial letters on a light green background (figs. 15b, 16-17). Ten lines can be seen according to our reconstruction from the fragments of the words in the matched parts, although they are largely incomplete. The text is a quotation from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 7:55-56 in the New Testament. It is unclear whether the verses were quoted whole or in part. The relevant section of Acts concerns the martyrdom of St. Stephen:

(7:55) ὙΠΑΡΧΩΝ ΔΕ ΠΛΗΡΗΣ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΝ̄C ΑΓΙΟΥ ΑΤ
 ΕΝΙCΑC ΕΙC ΤΟ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΝ ΕΙΔΕΝ ΔΟΣΑΝ Θ̄Υ ΚΑΙ ῙΝ̄ ΕCΤΩΤΑ ΕΚ
 ΔΕΞΙΩΝ ΤΟΥ Θ̄Υ (7:56) ΚΑΙ ΕΙΠΕΝ ἸΔΟΥ ΘΕΩΡΩ ΤΟΥC ΟΥΡΑ
 ΝΟΥC ΔΙΗΝΟΙΓΜΕΝΟΥC ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝ ῩΝ̄ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥ ΕCΤΩ
 ΤΑ ΕΚ ΔΕΞΙΩ ΤΟΥ Θ̄Υ

Ἐπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου, ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ, καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ εἶπεν, Ἴδού, θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἀνεωγμένους, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.³⁶ (Byzantine text form)

(Acts, 7:55) *But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (7:56) and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*

³¹ Maguire 1996, 16-17; see also Kiilerich 2007, 328.

³² Belting's comments on the early development of portraits of saints are noteworthy and well suited to explain the common type we see in Aristocritus' portrait; see Belting 1994, 80-98.

³³ Belting 1994, 93-97, figs. 43-45, 48; see also Marsengill 2013, 117-18, figs. 26-27. For more examples and detailed information on portraits of bishops in Byzantine painting, see Marsengill 2013, 112-37. The relevant section of Marsengill's book is very useful not only for portrait features and analogy, but also for the iconography of bishop depictions.

³⁴ Smith 1990; see also Zanker 1995, 307-19; Mathews 1999, 28-45; Marsengill 2020a, 131. One of the most recent studies on this subject deals with the matter in detail; see Jensen 2020.

³⁵ The bishop wears an *omophorion*, white *pallium* with a red stripe on a brown tunic, and black closed-toe sandals over white stockings. For some examples of the early period, see Miller 2014, 15-24, figs. 2-12; see also Pertegato 2019, chapter 5.7, fig. 5.27-29.

³⁶ Robinson and Pierpont 2005, 266.

In addition to the style of the figures of the painting, the form of letters on which the inscription is written provides an important piece of evidence for their pre-Iconoclastic origins. The Greek majuscule (or uncial) used in the inscription is mostly of the script type found in manuscripts from the Late Roman to Early Byzantine periods. The rounded letter shapes and the assignment of a broken horizontal stroke to the alpha, as well as the curving to the left of the lower ends of the vertical lines of the letters in Niche 1, are like examples from the fifth and sixth centuries AD.³⁷

The inscription on the wall painting in the Tomb of Luke at Ephesus offers a clear analogy.³⁸ Another similar example for the inscription is found in Church II on Gemiler Ada (Island) in Lycia, which dates to the sixth century.³⁹ The wall painting in Gemiler Ada Church II is also very important in terms of stylistic and iconographic analogy and is discussed again below. The sixth-century level B (or phase 1) murals in the Holy Apostles Church on the islet of Küçük Tavşan (Saint Apostles Island in Caria) also support our dating based on archaeological stratigraphy, both in terms of typeface and figurative painting stylistic likeness.⁴⁰ Another important analogy is the style of the sixth and seventh century paintings of Santa Maria Antiqua and their inscriptions.⁴¹

Besides dating, this inscription, which is a direct quote from the New Testament, plays a key role in iconographic analysis. It is important to describe the prominent figure of the composition before explaining the contribution of the verses to the iconography. Although 35% - 40% of the fragments of his head and half of the Bible he holds were found during the excavation in Niche 1, the figure's identity, clarified thanks to his cruciform halo, is Jesus Christ (figs. 8, 15-c). From the curved red sections above the halo, it was located on the lunette of the niche, just below the niche's arch. Twice as large as Bishop Aristocritus in the lower section, Christ looks straight ahead with his large brown eyes.⁴² His long hair is parted in the middle, partially covering his ears, and lying frizzily over his shoulders. He probably had a sparse beard on the cheeks, bushy under the chin, and not very long.⁴³ It is noteworthy that under the beard, the neck part is shaded darker, and the perspective between the face and neck is achieved.

It should be noted that the style of Christ' hair contributes to our proposed dating. We do not have many details about the portrait, but it is understood that his hair is symmetrical and lies quite flamboyantly over his shoulders. After Iconoclasm, the hair of Christ was favored in the style seen on the Sinai icon of the sixth century. This may have be related to the fact that

³⁷ Cavallo and Maehler 1987, 36 (14b), 46 (19b), 50 (21a); see also Vinogradov 2015, 65, fig. 7.

³⁸ This is perhaps the earliest (late fifth-early sixth century) wall painting of Christ found in Anatolia; see Zimmermann 2011, 138, fig. 21.

³⁹ Tsuji 1995, 114-15, figs. 40-41; see also Ruggieri and Zäh 2016, 134, fig. 24.

⁴⁰ Ruggieri 1990, 396-402; see also Özyurt Özcan 2016, 318-19; Ruggieri and Zäh 2016, 49-45, figs. 116-20, 126-33. For Ruggieri's analysis of the script and placing it to the mid to late sixth century, see Ruggieri 2005, 172-75. For a more comprehensive study of the painted majuscule samples from Caria, see Ruggieri, 2000.

⁴¹ Nordhagen 1962, 1978, 1982, 2017; Rubery et al. 2021. In these examples from Caria and Rome, the walls are palimpsests. A layer or layers belonging to the Iconoclastic period or later has not yet been identified on the figural wall paintings of the Early Byzantine period at Olympus. The results and finds from the excavations at Olympus indicate that the city was abandoned by the seventh century.

⁴² His under-eye is highlighted with shading, and the shadow of the straight-lined eyebrow with a slight curve drops on the eyelid. In this way, the gaze of Christ masterfully acquired impressive depth.

⁴³ Small fragments that may have belonged to his beard were also found, but only three pieces could be combined.

the style of the work in question resembles Zeus or some other pagan figure.⁴⁴ To get away from such a Zeus impression, instead of a wavy and fluffy style spilling over the shoulders, a wider wavy style with long hair gathered to one side at the back is often preferred.⁴⁵ Of course, we do not claim that the hairstyle provides certainty in dating, but hairstyles similar to our Christ are more commonly found in pre-Iconoclastic examples. One of the earliest portraits of Christ (fourth century), found in the Leonis Cubiculum in the cemetery of Commodilla, is of this type. Christ in the apse of the Basilica Santa Pudenziana (c. 400) is the most splendid example of the type.⁴⁶ Some other examples of depictions of Christ with long hair parted in the center and flamboyantly lying over his shoulders are the following: strigillated sarcophagus from Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura (fourth century), apse mosaic of Santi Cosma e Damiano (526-530), Christ on the cross of Justin II (565-578), transfiguration scene on the apse mosaic of St. Catherine's Monastery (sixth century), and apse mosaic of San Venanzio Chapel (seventh century).⁴⁷ A sculptural example is the relief icon of Christ from St. Polyeuktos (sixth century).⁴⁸ The mosaics from Ravenna should also be mentioned: Christ enthroned on the southern clerestory wall of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (sixth century), an *imago clipeata* of Christ on the middle of the presbytery arch of San Vitale (sixth century), an *imago clipeata* of Christ on triumphal arch of the Sant'Apollinare in Classe (sixth or seventh century), and the last one, another *imago clipeata* in the center of the cross on the apse dome of Classe (sixth century), are examples that show great similarity.⁴⁹

There are also examples in neighboring regions. One is the bust of Christ in *clipeus* (sixth century) in the Hagiasma of Nicodemus at Salamis-Constantia, Cyprus.⁵⁰ Another is the bust of Christ (sixth century) in a *clipeus* again, from Bawit, now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo.⁵¹ Their large number among similar examples requires a brief explanation. From the fourth century onwards, *imago clipeata* portraits began to be used to glorify both Christ and other holy persons (apostles, prophets, saints, martyrs, church fathers, bishops).⁵² There are many portraits in the *imago clipeata* style from the fifth and sixth centuries, so this type was common at the time. The origins of the *imago clipeata* lies in the Roman iconography of *apotheosis*, a theme often encountered in a funerary context in the Roman Imperial period.⁵³ The portrait in Niche 5 (fig. 5, see first section) must be related to the funerary context of the *imago clipeata* concept. On the other hand, the bust of Christ, which is our main subject, can be associated with

⁴⁴ From the fourth century onwards, the long-haired and bearded type of Christ began to be seen in apses. In this type, Christ sometimes appears as a philosopher-teacher, sometimes as a legislator, sometimes as a God. For detailed information on this subject, see Spieser 2015, 426-37. Long and lush hair has been a symbol of power and might since ancient times; see L'Orange 1982, 30-33, 50. From the fifth century onwards, busts with long hair parted in the center and a transcendental gaze in expression became popular; see L'Orange 1982, 95-102, figs. 69-72.

⁴⁵ The story of a painter whose hand was healed by Gennadius, archbishop of Constantinople, is interesting. After painting a portrait of the Savior as pagans depicted Zeus, with his hair divided on his forehead so that his face was not covered, the painter's hand had become shriveled; see Louth 2003, 153 and also Spieser 2015, 421-22; The ligature IC XC became essential after Iconoclasm to avoid any confusion; see Matthews 1976, 50-51. Nevertheless, there is no trace of this abbreviation in the painting on the exedra of Church No. 3.

⁴⁶ For both of them, see Paterson 2022, 88-90, figs. 2.17 and 2.19.

⁴⁷ Büchsel 2007, 17-18, 46-48 fig. 2.30-32, tables 5b and 6.

⁴⁸ Harrison 1989, 109-10, fig. 136.

⁴⁹ Dresken-Weiland 2017, 181, 192, 271, 220-21, 262, 264, 266.

⁵⁰ Sacopoulo 1962, 76, figs. 13-14.

⁵¹ Innemée 2015, 245-46, fig. 22.3.

⁵² Sotira 2013, 55-131.

⁵³ Innemée 2015, 246.

apotheosis as a bust of Christ in a semicircular frame in the lunette, although it is not in a circle. In other words, the deification of Christ is also emphasized by such a framework.

In the introduction, we mentioned the scarcity of Christian paintings surviving from the Early Byzantine period in Anatolia. These have mostly been identified by researchers during surveys and excavations.⁵⁴ Along with the Olympus example, a few depict Christ. Among these, the Christ in a lunette in a vaulted tomb at Karacaören (sixth to early seventh century) and the Christ (sixth century) above the door in Gemiler Ada Church II, also in a frame (as a pseudo-tympanum) in the form of a lunette, are similarly bust-length depictions.⁵⁵ Next to the Christ of the Gemiler Ada are the letters epsilon (E) and mu (M), written with an abbreviated stroke which means *Emmanuel*.⁵⁶ As mentioned above, the inscriptions of the example in Gemiler Ada Church II are also very similar to our example. In addition, the presence of saint/religious figures on both sides of the door with Christ on the lintel increases the similarity.

The creation of these program types stemmed from the increasing veneration of martyrs and saints from the late fourth century onwards. Often, this led to the removal of revered bones from their original burial sites, and their distribution and reburial beneath the altars of memorial churches in local parishes. These churches were typically named after the saint and expressed this practice through their apse decorations, which depicted the saint(s) in communion with Christ, often as an inductee.⁵⁷ The western churches, especially in Rome, preferred the space just below the main altar for the relics, but the eastern churches usually used a separate chapel outside the sanctuary. This explains why we do not see the relationship between the saint and Christ - for example, in the apse mosaic of Sant'Apollinare in Classe - in the apses of eastern churches. However, in the case of Olympus, we see that similar ideas could be adapted to whatever space represented the tomb of the saint.

The depictions of Christ in the Karacaören tomb and Church II are related to the dual nature of Christ and are interpreted as representing the divine side of Christ, while the saints around them mediate prayers through theophany.⁵⁸ This point of view, taking into account our suggestion of the function of the exedra of the Church of Olympus No. 3 as a memorial chapel, helps us explain Aristocritus as the mediator/intercessor of invocations,⁵⁹ as well as supporting the title of Pantocrator for Christ in the composition in Niche 1.

⁵⁴ Examples are concentrated in Lycia, Caria, and Ionia. Tsuji and Asano's surveys and excavations, Zimmermann's studies on Ephesus, Ruggieri and Zäh's numerous examples, and Özyurt Özcan's surveys are the main studies providing an important data collection of Early Byzantine paintings in western Anatolia. See Tsuji 1995; also Asano 2010; Zimmermann and Ladstätter 2010; Zimmermann 2011; Özyurt Özcan 2014, 2016; Ruggieri and Zäh 2016. For previously documented examples from Olympus, see Çorağan 2017.

⁵⁵ For Gemiler Ada, see Tsuji 1995, 66-67, fig. 39, color plate IV, a-b-c; see also Ruggieri 2013; Ruggieri and Zäh 2016, 26-27, figs. 23-27. For the tomb on Karacaören Ada, see Tsuji 1995, 90-92, color plate VI, a-b; see also Ruggieri and Zäh 2016, 21-25, fig. 121.

⁵⁶ As is well known, *Emmanuel* means "God with us" and is associated with the dual nature of Christ: fully God and fully man. For the title of *Emmanuel* and depictions of *Christ Emmanuel* before Iconoclasm, see Matthews 1976, 60-62.

⁵⁷ Belting-Ihm 1992, 113-14. Christa Belting-Ihm divided the depictions of saints associated with the relic cult into six types. According to these, Aristocritus in Olympus Church No. 3 is in the first type: a saint under the hand of God or bust of Christ; see Belting-Ihm 1992, 118-19. Grabar mentions the Heroon of Calydon as an example, stating that the arrangement of the saint's tomb with a depiction may be a continuation of the ancient cult of the hero; see Grabar 1972b, 108-9.

⁵⁸ Ruggieri 2013, 140-45.

⁵⁹ Marsengill 2013, 119.

With his long hair and beard, his middle-aged appearance, his deep gaze with big eyes towards the viewer, and the Bible held to his chest with his left hand, it is quite possible to say that we are looking at Christ Pantocrator. However, this depiction became widespread in Byzantine art after Iconoclasm. So it should be questioned whether the painting in the exedra of Church No. 3 is a pioneering example from the Early Byzantine period. In addition, it will, of course, be questioned whether this type of Christ, identified with the domes of the post-Iconoclasm churches, can be described with the same title in a subsidiary chamber wall painting. For example, similar depictions of Christ dated between the fifth and eighth centuries in Rome and Ravenna are often not referred to as Pantocrator. Although the famous Sinai icon from the sixth century is defined as the first known example of the type,⁶⁰ the earliest surviving examples of depictions of Christ, usually referred to as Pantocrator, are 11th century dome paintings and mosaics.⁶¹ The main dome of the church, which represents the uppermost level of the universe, provides a perfect overlap and easy identification related to the word's meaning "Ruler of All." Inscriptions and monograms also indicate that title. It is possible to use this title for the depictions of Christ in the earlier bust form outside the domes, but only for the examples that can be evaluated within the Pantocrator typology. It is also commonly accepted that depictions of Christ in bust form on the coins of Justinian II (685-695 and 705-711) are antecedents of those Pantocrator images.⁶² Despite these, it will not be argued here which of some well-known examples were Pantocrator and which were "Christ in Majesty" or "Christ in Glory." With the New Testament quotation on the wall painting, we have tried to explain why the Christ depiction in Olympus Church No. 3 should be identified as Pantocrator, not only typologically but also in terms of iconography.

The exedra where the depiction is located - considering the naos as the main space - should not be defined as a side, additional or ancillary. Although the church was added to this place, this is the part that gives the structure its function and spiritual value. But there is no real burial or relics there nor in the naos of the church. As we explained in the previous section, it can be considered a memorial with its cenotaph arrangements looking like an arcosolium, and even a martyrion due to the New Testament quote about the martyrdom of the Saint Stephen. In both cases, the function requires treating the space as the primary rather than the secondary space of the complex. In this case, it becomes clear why such a major image as Pantocrator might have been encountered here, rather than in the remains of another part of the church (for example, the apse's semi-dome). In addition to figurative features, the title of Pantocrator supported by the dome and texts in Byzantine churches is provided by the quotation from the Acts on the wall painting in the Olympus example and the position of Bishop Aristocritus in connection with this inscription in the lower section.

⁶⁰ For artistic specifications of Christ Pantocrator of St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai, see Chatzidakis 1967. For a detailed description of the icon, see Weitzmann 1976, 13-15, tables 1-2, 39-41. For a comprehensive analysis of the icon, see Constanas 2014, 37-86, figs 1-15.

⁶¹ Matthews 1976, 105-38; see also Carmelo Capizzi 1964, 189-203. Thomas F. Mathews also agrees with this view and even for the Sinai icon comments: "This icon should not be called the Pantocrator, which is a name not employed for images of Christ until the ninth century"; see Mathews 1999, 183-84, 216-17, n. 34 and fig. 143. By contrast, Belting prefers to use the name Pantocrator even for the first depiction of the long-haired and bearded Christ in Leo's Cubicle in the Catacomb of Commodilla; see Belting 1994, 90; Unlike others, Spieser agrees with Mathews that early portraits of Christ represent divinity rather than imperial iconography, but he is close to Belting saying that some early depictions of Christ could be called "Pantocrator"; see Spieser 1998, 65-66.

⁶² Grabar 2011, 77-80. On the portraits depicted on the coins in question not being related to the Pantocrator type, see Breckenridge 1959, 48-58, 95.

The quote in Acts 7:55-56 relates to the vision Stephen saw during his stoning to death. It includes both the martyrdom/sainthood theme and the theme of witnessing the existence of God and the prophecy of Christ. At the moment of his death, Stephen saw God in heaven and Jesus standing to his right. Jesus is mentioned by name in 7:55, but in 7:56 Stephen uses the title "Son of Man," not Jesus' name when describing what he saw to those around him. This title is often used by Jesus himself in the Gospels, but only here the once in Acts and the Epistles. The issue of the Son of Man has been the subject of important theological studies. Although its use in Acts is explained in various ways in these studies, it commonly believed that the title still refers to Jesus.⁶³

We will not go into the theological discussions of that artwork as it would be beyond the scope of this study. But given that religious depictions are necessarily related to their inscriptions and complement each other, we believe that the composition in the painting in question can be interpreted in an interesting way. If we match them according to Stephen's vision, we can say that Aristocritus is placed in the position of Son of Man because he stands at Christ's right hand, and Christ is placed in the position of God who appears from heaven.

So, what does such an extraordinary connection between the text and the figures tell us? First, Aristocritus, in the Son of Man position, has no record of martyrdom that can be associated with Stephen's story. Moreover, he did not appear in any document or record as a saint. From the fifth century onwards, churches with mausoleums or any kind of *intra-muros* burial, gained importance not only as places where the remains of martyrs were kept, but also as buildings containing the actual tombs or monuments of bishops. Their spiritual status was strengthened by their relationship with the community and their power, both ecclesiastical and political.⁶⁴ Aristocritus was a pioneering bishop, of a type probably common in other cities in the early period, who contributed significantly to the Christianization of Olympus and its environs and who may have been canonized by the Church shortly after his death. Of course, martyrdom or doing miracles is not an absolute condition for sainthood.⁶⁵ However, it should be as important for the faithful to witness to the saint's dedication to God, or to remember this through images, as the canonization by the church. Visitors who turned from the nave towards the exedra first saw Aristocritus and Christ together and would realize that he was God's beloved servant and had received authority from him. Those who were able to read the quoted verses must have related Stephen's testimony to what they saw in the image and felt as if they were witnessing the sainthood of Aristocritus. In addition to being the first martyr, St. Stephen must have been chosen for the composition because he was the first figure in a succession: "Archdeacon" Stephen is the first of the seven men chosen by the apostles for "ministry" (Acts 6:5). The bishops also represent the continuity of a ministry that began with him. Especially from the beginning of the fifth century onwards, bishops began to come to the fore not only as religious leaders and scholars, but also as leaders of a powerful organization that regulated the entirety of urban life. These holy men, who received authority from both God and the emperor

⁶³ For Stephen's description of Christ as Son of Man in Acts 7:56, see Barrett 1964. For a comprehensive study of the "Son of Man" issue in the light of previous studies, see Casey 2009.

⁶⁴ Cantino Wataghin 1999, 159-61; see also Marsengill 2013, 123.

⁶⁵ Aristocritus was probably never canonized, but his depiction here and in the hierarchical order must indicate the place of holy men as intermediaries between the people and the divine order. In our opinion, Bishop Aristocritus is an example that supports Marsengill's argument: "... portraits of holy men who may not have attained sainthood in late antique Christian art fulfilled that desire to reach God by presenting these elevated humans as accessible and recognizable intermediaries"; see Marsengill 2020b, 143.

while organizing daily life according to the afterlife, thus had an important place in both the political and divine hierarchy (i.e., the universal Christian hierarchy).⁶⁶

At this point, it should be noted that the quotation from the New Testament in the painting not only alludes to the relationship between the figures and sainthood, but also vertically emphasizes a Christian universal order in terms of its position: God in heaven, man on the earth and the Holy Scriptures, which provide the connection between the two and is the ladder to reach heaven. The bishop is the mediator between the divine and the earthly, transmitting the Word to us, as well as carrying our invocations. In this mural the universal hierarchical order from top to bottom - and reaching out to the viewer - as well as the place of the bishops in the line from bottom to top, which brings the intercession/invocations of the viewer (as a supplicant) to Christ and God, is emphasized.

There are numerous examples in Christian works of art depicting people with Christ, who want to show the sanctity (and sometimes the dominion) of the relationship between Christ and the earthly person briefly described above. The main special case in this description is that the theological viewpoint of Christ's nature is indirectly depicted. The dogma of dyophysitism - that Christ had two natures both fully God and fully human - was adopted by the Council of Chalcedon, which was also attended by Olympus's bishop Aristocritus and whose signature affirmed it.⁶⁷ This doctrine is strongly visualized through this composition and supported by the inscription. Many studies have concluded that the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon were directly influential in the formation of the Pantocrator image.⁶⁸ The Pantocrator type of Christ unites the human and the divine and especially emphasizes the divine nature of Christ. Many theological and iconographical studies have been done on this title of Christ. Their common point is that the concept of "ruler of all," which dates back to pre-Christian times, was used to reflect the divine side of Christ's dual nature. Returning to the Acts quotation on the wall painting: If Aristocritus is in the position of "the son of man" "standing at the right hand of God", Christ above, at whose right hand Aristocritus stands, has assumed the position of God. Thus, Jesus' title of "Pantocrator" (Almighty) is presented to the viewer through text and image.

Conclusion

The church buildings of Olympus were strategically placed and utilized in accordance with the division of sacred and secular space during Roman period urbanization. The churches in the north city placed more emphasis on elements of religious representation, liturgy, and cult, while the location and features of churches in the south city were determined by the Christianization of the urban space and the community's needs. This highlights the importance of physical evidence in urban development and transformation, providing a basis for theories on the transition from paganism to Christianity and from Roman to Byzantine. Churches nos. 2, 3, and 4 contain spaces that could be classified as memorial chambers, such as a relic

⁶⁶ Marsengill's study on the place and meaning of living and/or non-sainted images of clergy in the light of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite is very illuminating in this regard, as she interprets the issue by evaluating views on the imperial hierarchy and religious hierarchy, see Marsengill 2020b.

⁶⁷ Bennett 2015, 274.

⁶⁸ The dogma concerning the two natures of Christ was adopted at the Council of Chalcedon. It has been expressed by many researchers that this doctrine, which is very dominant in the orthodox world, appears as Christ Pantocrator in icons. For details and a rich bibliography on the subject, see Conostas 2014, 60-62.

chapel, martyrion, or mausolea. It is typical for churches built on or within pagan shrines to be connected to the relic cult. These types of spaces, which can also be associated with relic or martyr/saint cults, are present in the north city's three churches, where the Roman religious infrastructure of the city was situated.

Although the memorial chapel (exedra) of Church No. 3 is remarkable, memorial or relic chapels of the churches in relation to the pagan cult areas in the northern city are not located in the centers of the buildings. However, in Church No. 3, it is supported by architectural arrangements, ornaments, and paintings so that it is perceived by visitors not as a secondary but as the primary space. This is the reason for the existence and dedication of the church. Thus, while the church enables the believer to meet the holy person/place for intercession, the memorial increases the spiritual value of the church and makes the building a center of attraction.

The positions of the wall paintings may also give clues about the circulation and/or spatial organization of the building. There is also a wall painting with three figures in Niche 5 directly opposite it, but the presence of Christ in Niche 1 suggests that the visit to the site was made from the west, since such a direction of walking would allow the visitor to encounter Christ and Aristocritus first. There is already an entrance to the north nave just west of the exedra. It can be assumed that those who visited this church circulated starting from the north nave door.

The exedra may be said to be a special memorial chapel to the founding bishops of Olympus. At least its most important image is a major bishop of Olympus who is with Christ. Although Methodios of Olympus is the first name that comes to mind when we think of the bishop of Olympus, Aristocritus must have been the first bishop to institutionally structure the episcopal center, if we consider the council records. The depiction of the bishop with Christ shows the legitimacy of the church for the community. And a New Testament quotation about Stephen, the first martyr and archdeacon, in the same picture implies that the ecclesiastical authority has continued from the very beginning through a line of succession, with the authority given by God. The fact that Christ is presented in the composition as Pantocrator, who is both God and man, strengthens these expressions. Although Pantocrator is often thought to be an invented "imperial image," on the other side, there is another implicit meaning that supports the idea that "religious authority comes from God," which has existed since ancient times in human history. In this light, it becomes possible to read the widespread use of Pantocrator after the Iconoclastic period as a harmonization of religious and political authority.

While the mural allows us to make such an interpretation, it is also very valuable as a rare work of art. The portrait of Jesus Christ in Church No. 3 of Olympus is one of the oldest examples of the Christ Pantocrator type theologically, when the archaeological context as well as the function of the building and its iconography are evaluated together. The dating of the building remains, the style of the depictions, and the stylistic features of the inscription indicate that the painting belongs to the mid-sixth century. This wall painting is an important work of art because it shows that the origins of the Christ Pantocrator type were laid in the Early Byzantine period before it appears on the domes of Byzantine churches. Christ is clearly depicted as Pantocrator not only with his well-known appearance, but also with the New Testament quotation that has an important place in the composition. This is also important proof of the relationship between painting and script and the idea that they are complementary in Christian depictions. In addition, this wall painting in the exedra of Church No. 3 is an interesting example of ensuring the integrity between the space and the decoration and the clear declaration of the function.

Another important result of the study is to analyze and introduce one of the rare wall paintings belonging to the pre-Iconoclastic period - in other words the Early Byzantine period - in Anatolia, and thus find a place for itself in academic literature. The importance of this artwork is that it offers valuable information about the pre-Iconoclastic development of Byzantine painting in the homeland of the Byzantine Empire, rather than just its physical value.

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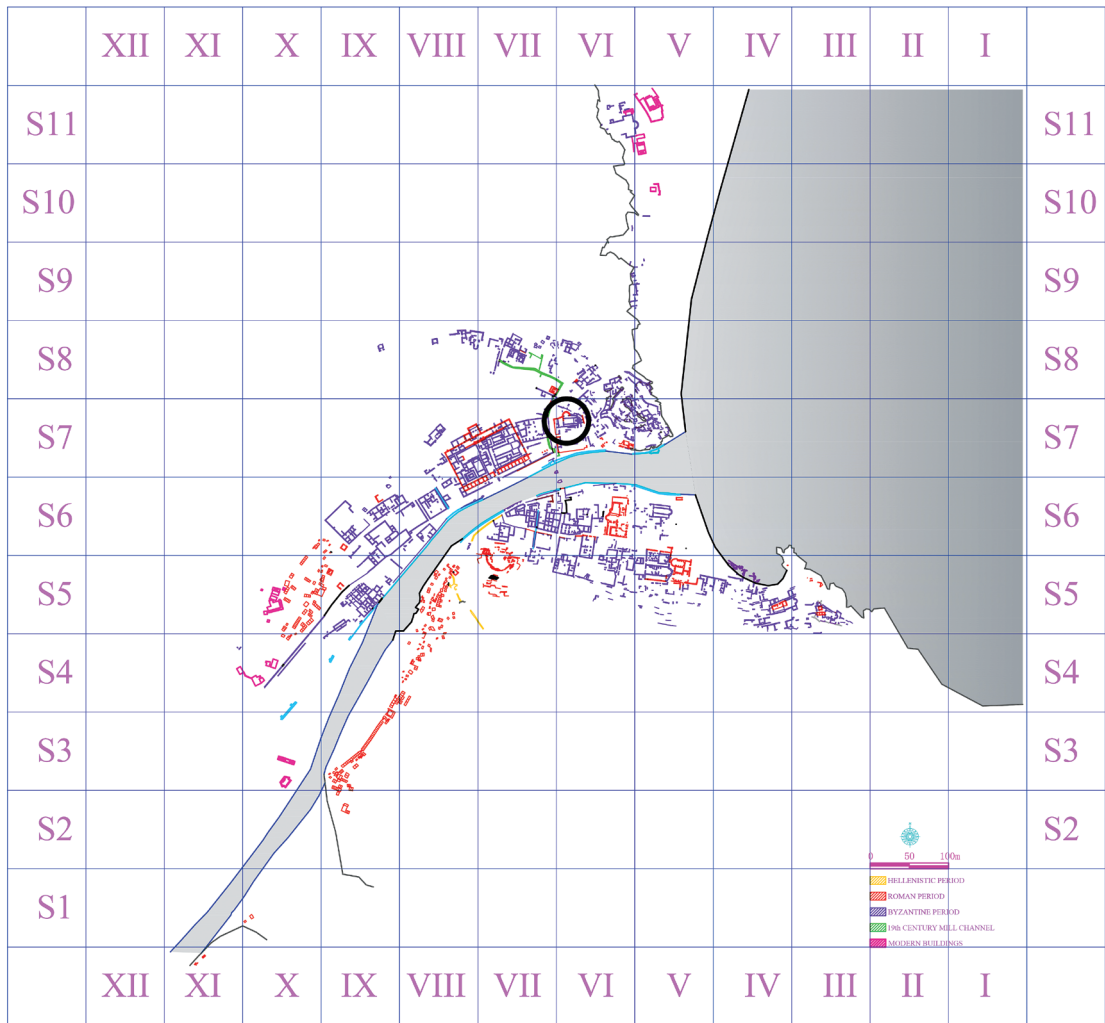


FIG. 1 Olympus city plan and location of Church No. 3 (© Olympus Excavations, editing: S. Evcim).

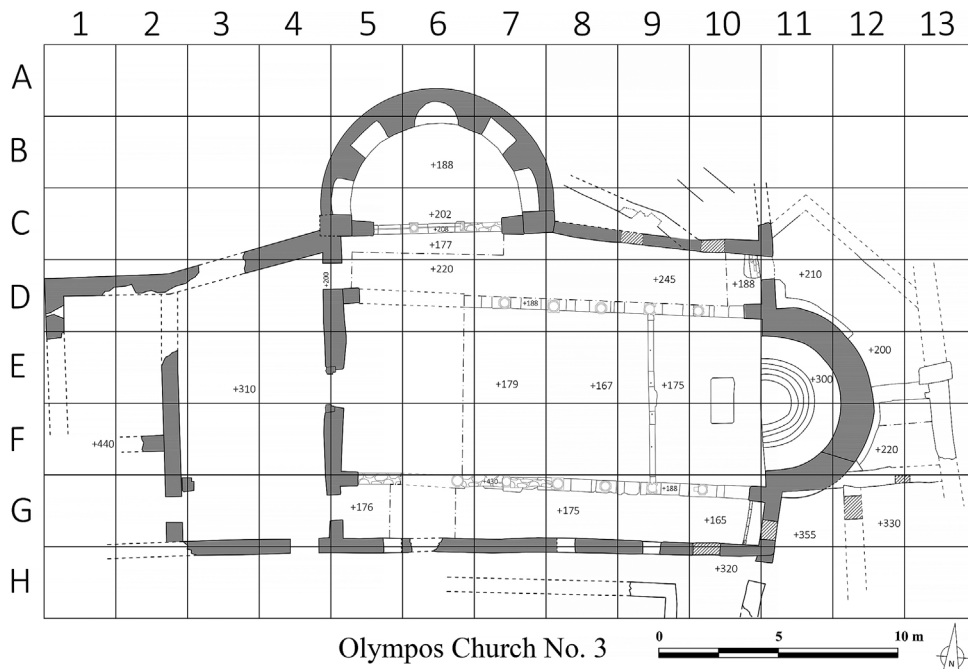


FIG. 2 Plan of Olympus Church No. 3 (© Olympus Excavations, drawing: S. Evcim).

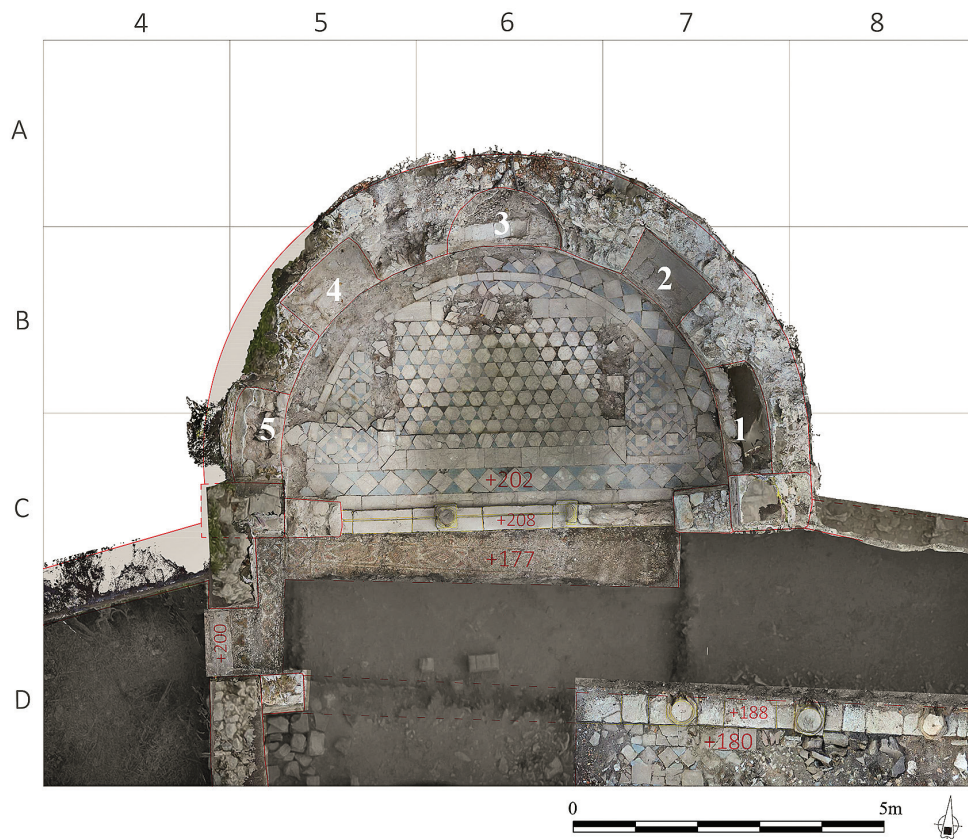


FIG. 3 Photo-plan of exedra of Church No. 3 (© Olympus Excavations, editing: S. Evcim).

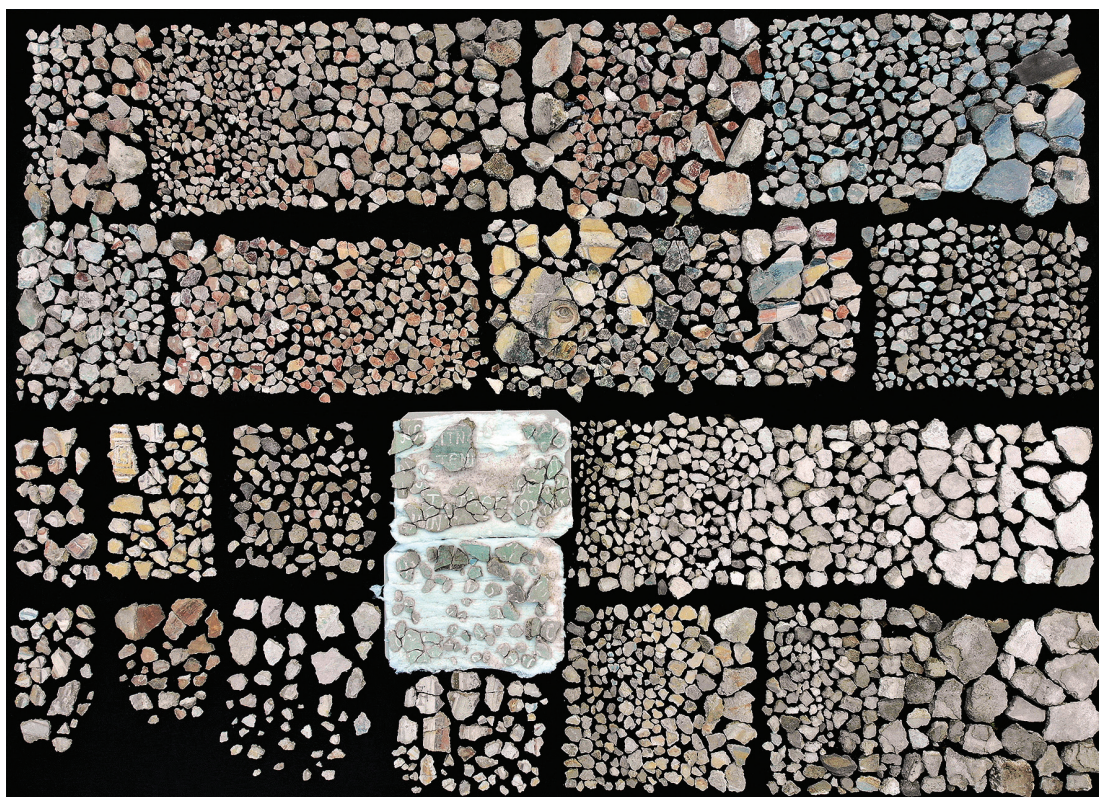


FIG. 4 Wall painting fragments from the exedra (© Olympus Excavations).



FIG. 5 Portrait on the south side of Niche 5 (© Olympus Excavations).



FIG. 6
Remains of wall painting
in Niche 5
(© Olympus Excavations).



FIG. 7
Fragments of Bishop
Aristocritus' depiction
(© Olympus Excavations,
editing: S. Evcim).



FIG. 8
Fragments of Christ
Pantokrator
(© Olympus Excavations,
editing: S. Evcim).

FIG. 9
In situ part of Bishop
Aristocritus' depiction
(© Olympus Excavations).





FIG. 10 Niche 5 of exedra and remains of the cenotaph (© Olympus Excavations).



FIG. 11 Pottery sherds filled in the cenotaph of Niche 1 (© Olympus Excavations).

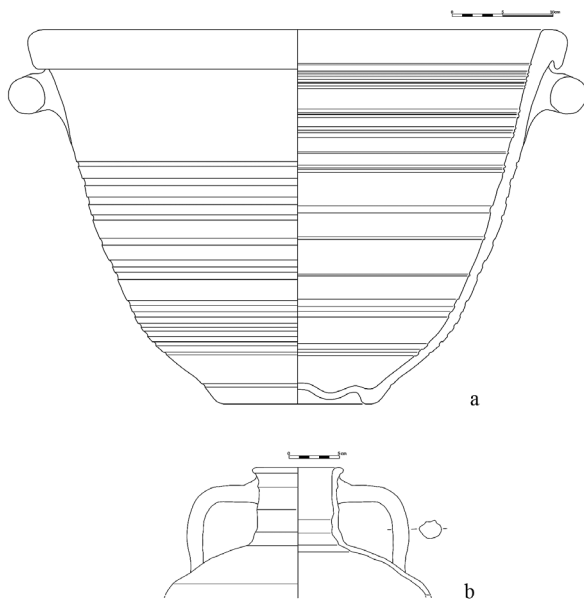


FIG. 12 Amphora and basin found in the
cenotaph of Niche 1
(© Olympus Excavations, drawing M. Bursali).



FIG. 13
Plaster capital and base from the exedra
(© Olympus Excavations, editing: S. Evcim).



FIG 14. General view of the exedra (© Olympus Excavations).



FIG. 15 Photo restitution of painting in Niche 1 (drawing and editing: S. Evcim).

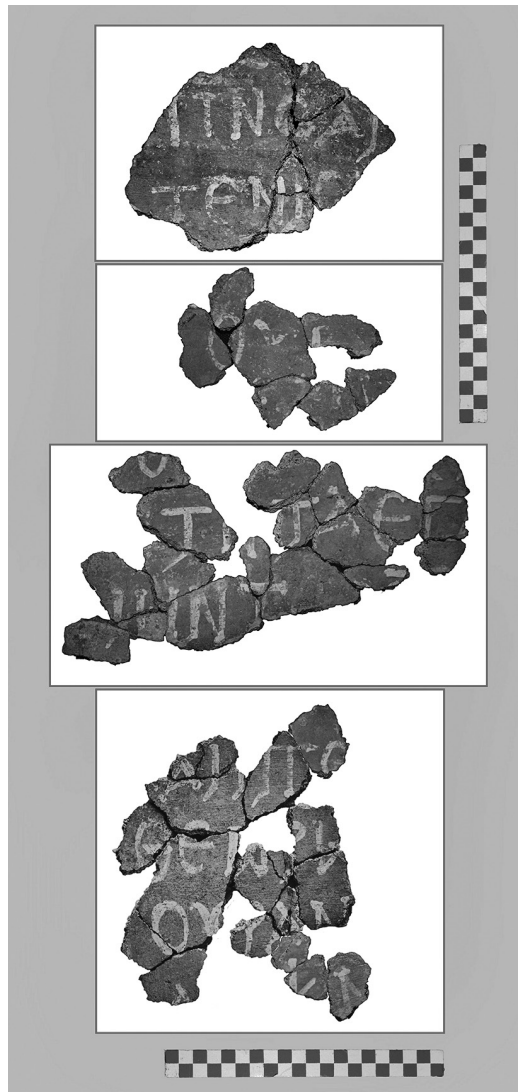


FIG. 16
Fragments from the
Acts quotation on the
painting in Niche 1
(© Olympus
Excavations,
editing: S. Evcim).



Acts 7:55-7:56

7:55 ὕπαρχων ἀεὶ παρῆς πνεύματος ἵερωσάου τενικασίου τοῦ ὄψανον εἰδέναν ὄσανθ' καὶ ἔκτρωτα ἐκ ἀεζίων τοῦθ'

7:56 καὶ εἶπεν ἰδοὺ θέωρω τοὺς οὐρανούς· καὶ ἰδὼν τὸν ἦν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου // ἔκτρωτα / ἐκ ἀεζίων // τοῦθ'

FIG. 17 Crosscheck of Acts quotation with Codex Sinaiticus (editing: S. Evcim).

