

DIMITRA KOTOULA

‘With respect to the lavishness of the illumination’: the dramaturgy of light in the burial chapel of the monastic founder.

St Luke of Stiris died in the monastery he had founded on the western slopes of Mount Helikon, near ancient Stiris, in 953.¹ Increased pilgrimage to his tomb, which according to the saint’s instructions was built inside the monastic complex, soon led to the construction of a burial chapel to house his relics.² The cross-shaped building became the central point of the monastery and was ultimately transformed into the new *katholikon* of the monastic community. By the end of the 11th century, the sarcophagus with the saint’s relics, which had originally been housed inside a crypt, was transferred into an elaborate, sumptuously decorated monumental tomb under an arch set into the east wall of the northern arm of the church.³ The space adjacent to the shrine functioned as a funerary chapel, as well as being a transit area for those who came to venerate the saint’s relics.⁴

A series of frescoes, still surviving today, decorates the building.⁵ Apart from the single figures of the saints in the middle zones and the figure of Christ Pantokrator in the vaults, the decorative programme of the chapel consists exclusively of scenes that refer directly to its funerary function. The Crucifixion decorates the south tympanum, the Transfiguration and the Ascension of Prophet Elijah the upper part of the east and the west walls respectively.⁶ Two candlesticks, finely painted with quick brushstrokes, dominate the decoration in the northern part of the chapel.⁷ Almost as tall as the life-size figures of the depicted saints, they carry candles decorated with star shapes at flat pans at the top and stand on large, three-legged bases (fig. 1). The metaphysical experience of divine light by the deceased, finely implied in the theophanic scene of the Transfiguration and in Elijah’s Ascension, is related in the fresco programme directly to the more ‘pragmatic’ use of light during the funerary or commemoration ceremonies which were performed inside the chapel.



Fig.1. Candlestick, Fresco. Monastery of St Luke in Phocis, North-West Chapel.

¹ For the saint see: *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, vol. II/ed. by Fr. Halkin, Bruxelles, 1957, 994-994b, for his *Life* 994 (thereafter *BHG*)

² *St Luke. The Life of St Luke of Stiris*, ch. 81/ed. by D.Z. Sofianos, Athens, 1989, p. 209 (thereafter *Life of St Luke*). For an English translation see: *The Life and Miracles of St Luke of Stiris*, ch. 67/trans. by C.L.&W.R. Connor, Brookline MA. 1994, pp. 111-113.

³ *Chatzidakis M.* ‘A propos de la date et du fondateur de Saint-Luc’//*Cahiers Archéologiques*, 19 (1969), pp. 127-150, esp. 129 and 131, *Stikas E.* *The Founder of the Katholikon in the Monastery of St Luke*. Athens, 1974, pp. 54-64.

⁴ See: *Stikas E.* *The Building Chronicle of the Monastery of St Luke in Phocis*. Athens, 1970, pp. 178-188.

⁵ *Chatzidakis-Bacharas Th.* *Les Peintures Murales de Hosios Loukas. Les Chapelles Occidentales*. Athènes, 1982, pp. 39-81 and 109-113 (thereafter *Chatzidakis-Bacharas Hosios Loukas*)

⁶ *Chatzidakis-Bacharas Hosios Loukas*, pp. 44, 39, 49 and 25, 19, 18.

⁷ *Chatzidakis N.* *Hosios Loukas*. Athens, 1997, p. 62, fig. 59.

Light in Funerary Context

Lighting along with fragrance, the burning of incense, and chanting were considered as key elements contributing to the creation of sacred space in Byzantium.⁸ Usually, selected icons were carefully illuminated by candle and the quality and exposure to light differed in different parts of the Byzantine church and at various moments of the services performed in them. The system of church lighting was constantly changing over the centuries and on various occasions or during the church rituals. Light was a key element in the performance of funerary or commemoration ceremonies.⁹ Candles and lamps remained continuously lit during the different rituals performed as part of the funeral or the memorial services and a lamp suspended above a martyr's or a saint's tomb and the reliquary played a key role in the cult of the relics.¹⁰

Silver or bronze candlesticks similar to those that dominate the decorative programme in the burial chapel of St Luke illuminated the ceremonies performed by the deathbed of the deceased.¹¹ As such, they form a standard element in the decoration of Christian sarcophagi and are included in iconographic programmes with a strong funerary character as early as the fresco cycles of the catacombs and the decoration of the early Christian tombs.¹² Tall candlesticks with light candles are traditionally represented at the head of the



Fig.2. Procession to the tomb of Pope St Clement, Menologion of Basil II (Rom.Vat.Gr. 1613), 204.

⁸ In this paper will deal mainly with sources of artificial light. I will not concentrate on natural light in the shaping of sacred space. For a most recent comparative study of this issue in the Byzantine East and the Latin West see: *Dell' Acqua Fr.* 'Glass and natural light in the shaping of sacred space in the Latin West and in the Byzantine East'//*Hietopy: Studies in the Making of Sacred Spaces*/ed. by A. Lidov, Moscow, 2004, pp. 299-324.

⁹ *Abrahamse D.* 'Rituals of death in the middle Byzantine period'// *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 29 (1984), pp. 125-134, esp. 129-133 (thereafter *Abrahamse 'Rituals'*), *Kyriakides J.* 'Byzantine burial customs: the care of the deceased from death to prothesis'// *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 19 (1974), pp. 37-72, esp. 54-57 (thereafter *Kyriakides 'Byzantine Burial customs'*).

¹⁰ *Xanthopoulou M.* *Les Lampes en Bronze à l'Epoque Paléochrétinne.* Brepols, 2010, pp. 65-70 (thereafter *Xanthopoulou, Lampes*).

¹¹ *Kyriakides 'Byzantine Burial customs'*, p. 57.

¹² See for example the funerary portrait of Proculus flanked by two lit candlesticks in the Catacomb of San Gennaro, Naples (5th c.), *Bouras L.&Parani M.G.* *Lighting in Early Byzantium.* Washington D.C., 2008, p. 9, fig. 11 (thereafter *Bouras &Parani Lighting*). A 4th-century fresco representing candlesticks with lit tapers decorates the entrance of a burial chamber in Silistra, Bulgaria, *Dimitrov A.* 'Le système décoratif et la date des peintures murales du tombeau antique de Silistra'// *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 12 (1962), p. 36, fig. 2. For the Silistra frescoes see also : *Valeva J.* 'La signification du cortège représenté dans le tombeau de Silistra. Essai de datation'// *Revue Archéologique de Picardie*, 1 (1990), pp. 113-118. Tall bronze candlesticks with lit candles decorate the frescoed tombs excavated close to Thessaloniki, now in the Byzantine Museum of the city, *Motsianos I.* 'Artificial lighting during the Byzantine and the post-Byzantine period'// *Light on Light: An illuminating Story*, exh.cat./ed. by I. Motsianos, H. Bints, Thessaloniki, 2011, fig. 32i-ii.

liturgical processions to a saint's tomb or during the translation and final deposition of a saint's relics (fig. 2).¹³ Elaborate examples are depicted in iconographic cycles with strong references to life after death and the Second Coming as early as the first centuries of Byzantium: tall candlesticks with lit candles alternate with praying full-length figures of martyrs in the dome mosaic of the Rotunda of St George in Thessaloniki.¹⁴ Metal candlesticks constitute a standard element in the representations of the Dormition of the Virgin as well as in scenes depicting the death of a saint as late as the post-Byzantine period.¹⁵ In the case of St Luke, the emphatic references to light in the iconography go beyond the actual pictorial scheme, and seem to relate directly the fresco cycle to specific rituals performed inside the burial chapel of the founder in the Byzantine monastery.

Lighting Monastic Burial Chapels and Relics

A carefully planned system of lighting, focusing on the founders' tomb, was applied to monastic buildings destined to function as places of burial and, later, commemoration. This would change according to the ceremonies or rituals performed there as well as the wishes of the interred lay or monastic founders. The Lives of the Saints as well as texts of more pragmatic nature such as the Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents (*Typika*), mainly of the middle and later Byzantine periods, include specific instructions by the founders themselves concerning the lighting of their burial chapel and tomb.

In the 12th-century *Typikon* composed by John II Komnenos, founder of the imperial complex of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople, precise orders are included concerning the illumination of the burial chapel of the *Heroon* that was to house the imperial tombs.¹⁶ Ever-burning candles () were to illuminate the conch and the founders' tombs, ever-burning oil-lamps () were to hang in the conch, the dome and the entrance to the building.¹⁷ A more complex lighting device, a triple candle (), that consists of three lamps joined to one another each one flanked by two candleholders, was to be suspended before the image of the Incorporeal.¹⁸

¹³ Some of the most representative examples of the iconography are included in the miniature cycle of the Menologion of Basil II (Rom. Vat. Gr. 1613) see: *Il Menologio di Basilio II*, Torino, 1907 (thereafter *Il Menologio*), p. 136 (illustrating the funerary of St Proclus Patriarch of Constantinople) and p. 204 (where a tall lit candlestick leads the procession to the tomb of Pope St Clement represented as a cross-shaped sarcophagus). See also: *Baldovin J.F.* 'Liturgical processions in the Menologion of Basil II'// *Eulogema: Studies in honour of Robert Taft/ ed. by E. Carr, S. Parenti, A.A. Theirmeyer, E. Velkovska*, Rome, 1993, pp. 25-37, esp. 34-35 (thereafter *Baldovin* 'Liturgical processions').

¹⁴ *Mastra P.* 'Iconic lighting in the Rotunda mosaics'// *Proceedings of the 4th International Round-Table of the International Lychnological Association*, Thessaloniki, 2011 (in press).

¹⁵ See respectively: *Acheimastou-Potamianou M.* 'The Dormition of Hosios Ephrem the Syrian in a Cretan icon of the Byzantine Museum, Athens' and *Baltoyanni Ch.* 'The Dormition by Andreas Ritzos in London and its relation to the painting and ideology of the 14th c.' // *Euphrosynon: Studies in honour of Manolis Chatzidakis/ ed. by E. Kypraiou*, Athens 1992, vol.I, pp. 41-56 and 353-372 (in Greek).

¹⁶ '*Le Typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantokrator*'/ed. by P. Gautier, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 32 (1974), pp. 1-145/trans. in *Jordan R.* 'Pantokrator: Typikon of Emperor John II Komnenos for the Monastery of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople'// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*/ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 725-781 (thereafter *Pantokrator Typikon*).

¹⁷ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 81, lines 860-862 and 868-869, for the translation see: paragr. 34, p. 756.

¹⁸ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 81, lines 867, for the translation see: paragr. 34, p. 756. For the performed rituals in the Pantokrator Monastery see: *Congdon E.A.* 'Imperial commemoration and ritual in the Typikon of the monastery of Christ Pantokrator'// *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 54 (1996), pp. 161-199, esp. for the *Heroon*, 175-180.

A special priest (*ecclesiarch*) was appointed to take care of the lighting in the building.¹⁹ This practice, which reflects the importance assigned to the dramaturgy of light in Byzantine burial chapels, was common in monastic foundations that housed the remains of lay founders as well as relics. The oil from the lamp that traditionally hung above the reliquary inside the saint's shrine proved to have outstanding miraculous powers.²⁰ The existence, future growth and, sometimes, even the independence of a monastic community depended upon the development of a cult at the tomb of the founder-saint, a practice rooted in the cult at tombs of martyrs during the first years of Christianity.²¹ A special priest was in charge of the burial chapel of St Savas, founder in 478 of the Great Lavra monastic complex (Mar Saba) in the Judean desert and took care of the commemorations performed posthumously at the saint's tomb according to the 11th- century *Typikon* for the foundation.²² Similar provisions were made for the burial shrines of St Luke of Stiris and St Nikon the Metanoite (930-ca. 1000) housed in the monastic settlements they had established in Phocis and Sparta respectively.²³ Among the prime assignments of the appointed priests was to supervise the lamp that was hanging above and the oil that gushed forth from the saint's tomb: the holy reliquaries soon became the focus of a growing healing cult that attracted a constant, and sometimes overeager, influx of pilgrims.²⁴

Similar provisions were made by lay founders too. A special priest was appointed to perform memorial liturgies and take care of the family tombs in the burial chapel of St Nicholas erected by members of the Pakourianos family, very likely in Constantinople, during the 11th century.²⁵ Although the building, which has not survived, did not eventually function as a burial site, the commemoration of the dead founders was one of the prime duties of the clergy.²⁶ Similarly, provisions for the chanting and the lighting in the convent of the Kellaraia where the mortuary chapel of the Kecharitomene -the early 12th-century monastic foundation of empress Irene Komnene was to be located- were assigned to a special priest. His duties mainly included taking care of the oil reservoirs destined for the illumination of the burial shrine.²⁷ In order to secure perpetual lighting at their tombs, monastic founders or

¹⁹ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 81, lines 874-878, for the translation see: paragr. 35, p. 756.

²⁰ For some of the most representative examples see: *Xanthopoulou Lampes*, p. 70.

²¹ On the subject see: *Kotoula D.* 'The tomb of the founder-saint'// *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries/* ed. by M. Mullett, Belfast, 2007, pp. 210-233.

²² For the saint see: *BHG* 1608-1610. For an English translation of the *Typikon: Fiaccadori G.* 'Sabas: Founder's Typikon for the Sabas Monastery near Jerusalem'// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents/*ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 1311-1318, esp. 1316.

²³ For St Nikon see: *BHG* 1366-1368, for his *Life* 1366.

²⁴ For the case of St Luke see: *Life of St Luke*, ch. 83, pp. 209-210. For an English translation see: *The Life and Miracles of St Luke of Stiris*, ch. 67/trans. by C.L.&W.R. Connor, Brookline MA. 1994, pp. 113-117. For the provisions in the burial shrine of St Nikon see: *The Life of St Nikon*, ch. 55/ed. by D.F. Sullivan, Brookline, Mass., 1984, p. 177.

²⁵ '*Le Typikon de sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos*', ch. 29, line 1560/ ed. by P. Gautier, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 42 (1984), pp. 112-113, trans. in *Jordan R.* 'Pakourianos: Typikon of Gregory Pakourianos for the Monastery of the Mother of God Petritzonitissa in Ba kovo'// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents/*ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 549-550 (thereafter *Pakourianos Typikon*).

²⁶ *Pakourianos Typikon*, ch. 31, lines 1610-1620, p. 116-117, for the translation see: ch. 31, p. 550.

²⁷ '*Le Typikon de la Theotokos Kécharitôméné*', ch. 70, lines 107-110/ ed. by P. Gautier, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 42 (1984), pp. 112-113, trans. in *Jordan R.* 'Kecharitomene: Typikon of Empress Irene Doukaina Komnene for the Convent of the Mother of God Kecharitomene in Constantinople'// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents/*ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 699 (thereafter *Kecharitomene Typikon*).

donors who were to be interred in the premises of a newly-founded or re-founded monastic institution would even donate part of their landholdings, usually a vineyard, for this purpose to the foundation.²⁸ Donors or benefactors to monastic institutions who belonged to the founding family and wished to be buried within the monastic premises, would donate the lamps, usually silver, that were to illuminate the services performed posthumously to commemorate their soul.²⁹

Real and Iconographic Lights

The lamp and the candle, typical means of lighting at the Byzantine tomb, were considered critical by the monastic founders for the decoration and lighting of their burial site. Their size and number would vary considerably according to the tomb that they illuminated and the performed ritual, improving the quality of the light inside the burial chapel and bringing the burial monuments to the foreground as the focal point of the memorial cult and the services.

The relative brightness of the burial chapel of the *Heroon* in the Pantokrator foundation destined to house the imperial tombs of the Komnenoi family increased during the commemoration ceremonies and the regular Friday vigils, as well as the morning and the evening services. The extra candles provided additional lighting to the icon of the Incorporeal, to the *templon* and to the entrance to the sanctuary, as well as, primarily, to the founders' tombs. The prominently illuminated interred remains were at the very centre of the bright interior. Light was the essential component in this layout, separating and at the same time connecting the two holy spaces of the *Heroon* -the sacred area within the sanctuary and the nave containing the tombs- as two independent but closely related entities.³⁰ A candle and a lamp were to burn continuously during the memorial service on the tombs of distant relatives of the imperial family, two on the tombs of the imperial couple.³¹

In the 12th-century *Typikon* for the foundation of the Kecharitomene, Irene Doukaina Komnene includes clear instructions concerning the lighting at the tombs which were to be located inside the monastic complex. Candles of four ounces were to stand on each on the feast days of the Dormition of the Virgin, on Holy Thursday, on Easter Sunday and on the feast of the Transfiguration instead of the regular, smaller ones.³² A candle of the same type and a lamp were to stand on the tombs during the entombment of remains and the funerary rite.³³

Gregory Pakourianos, in his early 11th-century *Typikon*, commands that three lamps should remain continuously lit on each of the founders' tombs in the monastic complex of the Mother of God Petrizonitissa in Ba kovo. The devotional and the *templon* icons that decorated the two churches of the foundation were to be lit by a

²⁸ The practice continues as far as the 14th century see: 'Le *Typikon du Monastère de Notre-Dame*', ch. 142, lines 30-33/ed. by H. Delehay, *Deux Typica Byzantins de l' époque des Paléologue*, Brussels, 1921, pp. 93-94, trans. in *Talbot A.-M. 'Bebaia Elpis: Typikon of Theodora Synadene for the Convent of the Mother of God Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople// Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*/ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 1562 (thereafter *Bebaia Elpis Typikon*).

²⁹ See for example: *Bebaia Elpis Typikon*, ch. 137, line 10, p. 92 and ch. 142, line 1, p. 94, for the translation see: ch. 23, paragr. 137, p. 1561 and ch. 23, paragr. 141, p. 1562.

³⁰ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 81, lines 865-870, for the translation see: p. 756.

³¹ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 47, lines 280-290, for the translation see: p. 743.

³² *Kecharitomene Typikon*, ch. 59, lines 1601-1602, pp. 108-109 and ch. 63, pp. 110-111. For the translation see: pp. 696-697.

³³ *Kecharitomene Typikon*, ch. 59, lines 1601-1602, pp. 108-109 and ch. 66, lines 1660-1661, pp. 112-113. For the translation see: pp. 697-698.

single lamp each. A candle was to be added to burn next to the interred remains at matins, during the liturgy and the vespers.³⁴

Pakourianos' provisions for ample lighting are directly reflected in the fresco programme of the Ba kovo ossuary.³⁵ The only part of the monastery's original buildings that has survived is the two-storey, one-aisled mortuary chapel of the monastic community. This building which must have functioned as the official cemetery for the founding family and the monks underwent three successive phases of fresco decoration, dated on stylistic grounds and on the basis of surviving inscriptions, from the end of the 11th to the middle of the 14th centuries.³⁶ Impressive elements of the iconographic cycle are the two tall candlesticks with lit candles that decorate the apse in the upper part of chapel which ultimately housed the remains of the founders in arcosolium tombs (fig. 3).

The splendid illumination the lighting devices are crafted to provide was a standard demand of the monastic founders of all periods, particularly in relation to the funerary and memorial services performed at their tombs. Irene Komnene in the *Typikon* of the Kecharitomene clearly ordains that the night offices and all commemorations celebrated annually to honour the dead founders and members of the founding family must include above all 'abundant lighting', 'more abundant than usual' ('

Fig. 3.
Candlestick,
Fresco. Monastery
of the Mother of
God
Petritzonitissa in
Ba kovo, Ossuary
(The Gabriel
Millet Collection).



'),³⁷ Theodora Synadene, of the imperial family of the Palaiologoi, founder of the 14th-century convent of the Mother of God *Bebaia Elpis* in Constantinople, emphasizes in paragraph 22 of the *Typikon* she composed for the monastic foundation that the commemorations of close members of the founding family 'should be celebrated all in exactly the same manner...with respect to the lavishness of the illumination' ('ἄ... ἐν ἡ... α τῶν φῶτων ἰ... ἰς λοιπ ἰς ἀπασιν').³⁸ The same text provides further details for the lighting on commemoration days. Six candelabra (μ...) filled with candles were to decorate the main church of the monastery which functioned as the burial site for the founding family during the commemoration of the foundress' parents and sons, two on the commemoration day of her distant relatives.³⁹

The mid-12th-century *Typika* of Athanasios Philanthropenos and Nikephoros Mystikos for the private monastic foundations of St Mamas and of *ton Heliou Bomon*

³⁴ *Pakourianos Typikon*, ch. 12, lines 885-890, pp. 72-73, for the translation see: p. 536.

³⁵ *Bakalova E.* Ba kovo Manastir. Sofia, 1971, esp. pp. 239-242. For the ossuary see also: *Bakalova E. & Karageorghis V.* The Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery. Paris, 2003 with all previous bibliography.

³⁶ *Grishin S.* 'Literary evidence for the dating of the Ba kovo ossuary frescoes'// *Byzantina Australiensia*/ ed. by E. and M. Jeffreys-A. Moffatt, Canberra, 1981, pp. 90-100. See also: *Mouriki D.* 'The role of Byzantine art in the artistic style of the cultural neighbours of Byzantium'// *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik.* XVI Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongress, Akten 32.2 (1981), pp. 725-757, esp. pp. 732-736.

³⁷ *Kecharitomene Typikon*, ch. 71, lines 1765-1767, pp. 119-125, for the translation see: pp. 700-702.

³⁸ *Bebaia Elpis Typikon*, ch. 119, lines 16-20, pp. 82, for the translation see: p. 1556.

³⁹ *Bebaia Elpis Typikon*, ch. 113, lines 16-18, pp. 80 and ch. 137, line 4-5, p. 92, ch. 139, lines 23, p. 92, ch. 140, line 28, p. 92, ch. 141, line 8, p. 93 and ch. 142, line 16, p. 93, for the translation see: ch. 22, paragr. 113, p. 1555, ch. 23, paragr. 137, p. 1561, paragr. 139, p. 1561, paragr. 140, p. 1561, paragr. 141, p. 1562, paragr. 142, p. 1562.

which they had founded respectively in Constantinople, give an even more precise account of the lighting devices that were to illuminate their tombs. ‘Two candelabra with twelve candleholders and four tapers’ (‘μ’) were to be lit, besides the standard candle and the lamp that would burn continuously at the founders’ tombs during all funerary and commemoration rites.⁴⁰

Byzantine candelabra (fig. 4) were composite lighting devices designed to provide abundant lighting.⁴¹ With the exception of a few iron examples, the majority of the candelabra recorded in the monastic inventories were bronze. They were elaborate devices, lavishly decorated, that consisted of a candlestick with an adjustable disc supplied with multiple candleholders.⁴² The ‘μ’, referred to in the two *Typika* above, can be identified with candelabra consisting of multiple brackets, twelve in this case. The abundant light they provide can be compared to that of the *polycandela* multiple hanging metal holders for candles and, later, glass oil-lamps, ideal for ample lighting. Silver or, usually, copper-alloy examples in the form of a pierced disk with an open-work centre enclosed by circular perforations, were typically suspended between columns, or above altars, burial shrines and tombs. Most held between three or nine candles or lamps but there were rare versions that would include as many as sixteen.⁴³

The impressive glittering effect created both by the candelabra and the *polycandela* has been particularly emphasized in the sources as early as the 7th century and seems to correspond perfectly to the monastic founders’ wishes for the illumination of their tombs.⁴⁴ Their use, along with candlesticks, in funerary and commemoration rituals has been attested as far as the 14th century: copper-alloy *polycandela*, bronze candlesticks and candelabra are among the most common findings in the excavations of Byzantine ossuaries.⁴⁵

Archbishop Pachomios, the erudite intellectual and one of the most influential personalities in the Despotate of Mistra founded the monastic complex of the Vrontochion, sometime around 1290.⁴⁶ The two-storey, five-domed church of the

⁴⁰ For St Mamas see: *Typikon of the Constantinopolitan Monastery of the most holy martyr Mamas*, ch. 40, lines 28-33/ ed. by S. Eustratiades, *Hellenika* 1 (1928), p. 292, trans. in Bandy A. ‘Mamas: Typikon of Athanasios Philanhtropenos for the Monastery of St Mamas in Constantinople’// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*/ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, ch. 40, p. 1021 (thereafter *St Mamas Typikon*). For ton Heliou Bomon see the translation in Bandy A. ‘Heliou Bomon: Typikon of Nikephoros Mystikos for the Monastery of the Mother of God ton Heliou Bomon or Elegmon’, ch. 50// *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*/ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, pp. 1087-1088 (thereafter *Heliou Bomon Typikon*).

⁴¹ For a detailed analysis of some of the most representative examples of the type see: Bouras L. ‘Three Byzantine bronze candelabra from the Grand Lavra monastery and Saint Catherine’s monastery in Sinai’// *Deltion tes Christianikes Archeologikes Etaireias* 15 (1989-1990), pp. 19-26.

⁴² Bouras L. ‘Byzantine lighting devices’// *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik. XVI Internationalen Byzantinisten Kongress, Akten* 32.2 (1981), pp. 479-491, esp. p. 480, paragr. 2 (thereafter Bouras ‘Lighting devices’).

⁴³ Bouras ‘Lighting devices’, p. 480, paragr. 4. For a study of the type see also: Verykokkou M. ‘Two Byzantine brass *polycandela* in the Benaki Museum’// *Benaki Museum* 8 (2008), pp. 91-115.

⁴⁴ For the different types of *polycandela* see: Xanthopoulou Lampes, p. 46, for the lighting effect they create: *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture*, British Museum, exhibition catalogue/ ed. D. Buckton, London, 1994, no. 116, pp. 106-107 (Monogrammed *Polycandelon* at the British Museum, mid-6th to mid-7th c.).

⁴⁵ One of the most representative groups was found during excavations at the ossuary of Ai-Yannakis, (St John), a 14th-c. barrel-vaulted, single-cell burial church outside the walls of Mistras see: Drandakis N. ‘The church of Ai-Yannakis at Mystras’// *Deltion tes Christianikes Archeologikes Etaireias* 14.4 (1987-1988), p. 64.

⁴⁶ Chatzidakis M. *Mystras. The Medieval city and the Castle*. Athens, 2005, p. 47-48.

Hodigetria, the *katholicon* of the monastery dedicated to the Virgin, housed the tombs of the founder and of members of the local aristocracy in a chapel attached to the north of the narthex.⁴⁷ The north arcade of the building was transformed by the end of the 14th century into a cemetery: four arcosolium tombs have survived in the north wall. A series of frescoes on the walls and in the vaults develop in detail the death and the burial of the Virgin: the death, the *prothesis* and the *ekphora* of the Virgin decorate the west, east and north parts of the building respectively.⁴⁸ Round candelabra with lit candles, are emphatically repeated in the iconography of the scenes. They flank the Virgin's deathbed at the different stages of the funerary rite or are carried by the attendants who participate in the funerary ceremonials (figs 5a, b, c).⁴⁹



Fig. 4. (from left to right) One of the Amalfitan candelabra. Great Lavra Monastery, Athos.
Fig. 5a, b, c. Candelabra, Drawing of wall-paintings (details). Vrontochion Monastery, Church of the Hodigetria (after Gabriele Millet, *Monuments Byzantins de Mistra*, fig. 102.1, 3).

As key objects in rituals related to death and posthumous commemoration candelabra are also one of the dominant iconographic features in the fresco programme of the north-west burial chapel of the monastery that houses the tombs of the Vrontochion founders. A tall candelabra decorates the area close to Pachomios' tomb below an arcosolium in the west wall of the chapel.⁵⁰ It belongs to an elaborate composite type with multiple lit candles on the round top and two taper candles affixed to the central metal stick to intensify the quality and tone of lighting (fig. 6).⁵¹ Its representation close to the portrait of the dead founder in a fresco cycle with strong funerary and commemorative connotations alludes directly to the primary provision of the monastic founders for ample lighting at their tombs through the use of specific composite lighting devices as described in detail in the texts of the *St Mamas* and *ton Heliou Bomon Typika*.

⁴⁷ For the tombs of the founders and their decoration see: *Brooks S.* Commemoration of the Dead. Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Institute of Fine Arts. New York University, 2002, pp. 331-336.

⁴⁸ *Dufrenne S.* Les Programmes Iconographiques des Eglises Byzantines de Mistra. Paris, 1970, pp. 12-13, pl. 19.

⁴⁹ For a detailed recording of the scenes see: *Millet G.* Monuments Byzantins de Mistra. Matériaux pour l' Étude de l' Architecture et de la Peinture an Grèce aux XIVE et XVe siècles. Paris, 1910, pl. 102.1 and 3 (thereafter *Millet Mistra*).

⁵⁰ *Millet Mistra*, pl. 99.7.

⁵¹ *Bouras* 'Lighting devices', p.480, paragr. 2 and pls. 1,2.

Light, Space and Ceremony

The role of lighting in funerary and commemoration rites seems to have determined not only pictorial details but also the general planning of the decoration in the Mistras monastic chapel. Enough space has been provided above the founder's arcosolium tomb in the west wall of the chapel for the depiction of a choir of angles. Gathered densely together in a tight group they all hold long lit candles and lean in procession towards Pachomios' tomb which is decorated with a fresco image of the founder offering a model of the monastic complex to the Virgin Mary and the infant Christ (fig. 7).⁵²



Fig. 6 (left) Candelabra, Fig. 7 (right) Group of Angles, Drawing of wall-painting. Vrontochion Monastery, Church of the Hodigetria, North-West Chapel (after Gabriele Millet, *Monuments Byzantins de Mistra*, fig. 99. 7, 99.1, 2).

Processions to cemeteries or tombs as well as the translation of a saint's relics typically involved the lighting of candles.⁵³ A group of attendants holding the lit candles would escort the dead into the burial chapel for interments that were to remain inside the chapel. Lay monastic founders assigned particular significance to the ceremony leaving detailed instructions concerning the use of lights during the ritual acts. The leading group of the procession to the tombs of the *Kosmosoteira* monastic community was to include those responsible for the 'appropriate illumination' noted Isaak Komnenos in the 12th-century *Typikon* he composed for the monastery of the Mother of God he had founded. The ceremony was to take place on the feast day of the Dormition of the Virgin and the mosaic icon of the feast would receive additional

⁵² Millet Mistra, pl. 99.1 and 4.

⁵³ For the use of light in funerary processions see: *Bouras & Parani Lighting*, p. 22 with all previous bibliography and *Abrahamse 'Rituals'*, pp. 132-133. Lit candles dominate the iconography of these scenes, for the most representative examples see the manuscript illumination, mainly of the Menologion of Basil II (Rom.Vat.Gr. 1613), *Il Menologio*, p. 344 (St Anastasius of Persia- for the scene see also: *Holum K.G. & Vikan G.*, 'The Trier Ivory, 'Adventus' Ceremonial, and the Relics of St. Stephen', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 33 (1979), pp. 113-133, p. 119, fig. 5, thereafter *Holum-Vikan 'Trier Ivory'*, p. 353 (St John Chrysostom- for the scene see also: *Holum-Vikan 'Trier Ivory'*, p. 122, fig. 9 and *Baldovin 'Liturgical processions'*, p. 33, fig. 3), p. 355 (St Ignatius of Antioch). For other relevant examples see: *Dolezal M.L.* 'Illuminating the liturgical word: Text and Image in a decorated lectionary (Dionysiou Monastery, cod. 587)'// *Word and Image*, 12 (1996), p. 52, fig. 20 and *Galavaris G.* *The Illustration of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus* (Par. gr. 550). Princeton, 1696, p. 244, fig. 424.

lighting 'suitable to the occasion' as well as the 'sleepless lamp that was to burn perpetually close to it throughout the year'.⁵⁴

John II Komnenos describes the route of the festival procession from the monastery of the *Hodigetria*, via the Eleousa church, to his sarcophagus inside the burial chapel of the *Heroon*, where a brief commemoration of the imperial founders was to be performed, exclusively in terms of the lights passed. The ritual was to begin with the lighting and carrying of the four tall taper candles (μ) that illuminated the north side of the outer portico through which the public and the procession entered the monastic complex.⁵⁵ The burial chapel and in particular the space around the founders' tombs was to receive additional lighting: a taper candle was to be lit in front of the icon of Christ at the entrance to the area close to the imperial tombs, the *polycandela* around the chapel were to remain lit, a candle was to burn in front of the images that decorated the conches where the tombs must have been located.⁵⁶ The ample lighting at the head of the procession seems to connect, via light, the two principal buildings of the foundation which was to remain lavishly illuminated for the occasion. The culmination of the ceremony at the founders' tombs, an all-bright area of the chapel during the ritual, would bring to the foreground the burial monuments as the focal point of the rite. Its archetypical depiction in the Mistras fresco, with angels replacing the attendants holding the lights, further underlines the importance assigned by the Byzantines to the ritual act as part of their funerary and commemoration practices.

Ample lighting seems to have been equally important in the cases of the translation of a saint's relics close to or into the burial chapel that was to house the holy reliquary. The early 7th-century text of the Life of St Theodore of Sykeon refers to 'abundant lit candles' (' ω ') during the entombment of the saint's relics next to the chapel attached to the right-hand side of the *katholikon* of the monastic complex he had founded, that was built to serve the increasing needs of pilgrimage to the site.⁵⁷ An abundance of candles was the main feature of the processional deposition of St Paul of Latros' relic (d. 955) in the newly-constructed burial chapel inside the monastic complex he had founded, according to the text of his Life.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d' Aenos (1152)*, ch. 65/ ed. with a French translation by L. Petit, *Izvestijsa Russkogo Archeologi eskogo Instituta v Konstantinople* 13 (1908), p. 50. For an English translation see: *Patterson-Šev enko N. 'Kosmosoteira: Tyikon of the Sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos for the monastery of the Mother of God Kosmosoteira near Bera// Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents/ed. by J. Thomas, A. Constantinides-Hero, Washington D.C., 2000, p. 827 (thereafter Kosmosoteira Typikon).*

⁵⁵ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 75, lines 756-757, for the translation see: p. 755.

⁵⁶ *Pantokrator Typikon*, p. 75, lines 772-778, for the translation see: p. 755. For a discussion of the architecture of the chapel see: *Ousterhout R. Architecture, Art and Komnenian Ideology at the Pantokrator Monastery// Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life/ ed. by N. Necipoglu, Brill, 2001, pp. 133-153.*

⁵⁷ For the saint see: *BHG 1748-1749c*. For his tomb: *Vie de Théodore de Sykeon*, ch. 169, lines 40-49/ ed. by A-J. Festugière, Bruxelles, 1970 (with French translation), pp. 159-160. See also the discussion in *Kaplan M. 'Les Sanctuaires de Théodore de Sykeon// Les Saints et leur Sanctuaire à Byzance/ ed. by C. Jolivet-Levy, M. Kaplan, J-P Sodini, Paris 1993, pp. 65-79, esp. 78-79.*

⁵⁸ For the saint see: *BHG 1474*. For the translation of this relics: *'Monumenta Latrensia Hagiographica'*, ch. 46/ ed. and trans. by H. Delehaye in *Milet, Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen, vol. III, pt. 1: Der Latmos/ ed. by T. Wiegand, Berlin 1913, p. 132*. For the building see: *Kirby A. & Mercangoz Z. 'The monasteries of Mount Latros and their architectural development// Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis/ ed. by M. Mullett-A. Kirby, Belfast 1997, pp. 51-77.*

The Meanings of Light in Funerary Context

‘Late at night the crowd eventually allowed the nuns to make the necessary provisions for the burial of the most holy body. They lit candles of various sizes and...soon after they prepared an empty tomb inside the chapel of the martyr-in-Christ Theodore, which was attached to the main church of the monastery and placed it in all honour there...the accompanying chanting and the ample lighting signifying the mystery of the lavish illumination and the ineffable glory of her heavenly residence’.⁵⁹ This is how the late 10th-century text of the Life of St Irene, abbess of the Chrysovalanton convent in Constantinople describes the final deposition of the saint’s relic in the side chapel of St Theodore inside the monastic complex. The building is described as particularly luminous with the abundant lighting referring to the mystical light that the soul aspires to experience posthumously. It has been suggested that lit lamps and candles at funerals were a reminder of the eternal light of heaven to which the departed have gone.⁶⁰ In particular, a direct relationship was established by the Early Church Fathers already between the illuminated interior of the church or the chapel where the funerary rite takes place, and the celestial light.⁶¹ Echoing this, the 7th-century liturgical commentary attributed to Sophronios of Jerusalem, seems to proceed a step ahead: the flames of the lamps and the candles that decorate the church ‘also reveal the light that will shine forth from the just’ (‘δεικνύουσι δε καὶ τό φῶς ὅπερ ἐκλάμπουσιν οἱ δίκαιοι’) at their resurrection.⁶² The wish for splendid illumination during the funerary rite may also be rooted in the popular belief that the dead required light to guide their footsteps to the otherworld or that the soul should not remain in the dark since light drives away the demons.⁶³ However, a standard *typos* in the text of the funerary and commemoration rites in Byzantium expresses the metaphors that directly link light with the posthumous experience of the divine, the marriage of the soul with God implied by Sophronios.⁶⁴

Surviving fresco programmes in monastic burial chapels appear permeated with these predominant ideas by referring directly to the use of abundant lighting during the burial or memorial services. Monastic founders clearly favoured the use of elaborate lighting at funerals or during commemoration going as far as to prescribe the use of very specific composite lighting devices particularly appropriate for this purpose in the foundation documents they composed for their monastic communities. Archaeological findings attest to their use in that very context.

Decoration, ritual and specific material objects seem to be united with light as the vital component in the burial chapels of the Byzantine monastic founders resulting to the creation of a new ‘image’. Although implicit rather than actually depicted these

⁵⁹ Ὅψε δὲ τῆς νυκτὸς μόλις ὁ ὄχλος μετρίαν ἐδίδου τὴν ἄδειαν τὰ πρὸς τὴν κηδείαν τοῦ ἱεροῦ σώματος ἐκεῖνου ταῖς μοναζούσαις ἐτοιμάσασθαι ἀνήπτον δὲ λαμπάδας καὶ κηρούς καὶ μάλιστα ὅσοι τῆς συγκλήτου συνεληλύθασιν ὑπὲρ ἀριθμόν... μετ’ ὀλίγον δὲ τάφον καινὸν εὐτὸ ἐπίσαντες ἐν εὐκτηρίῳ τοῦ χριστομάρτυρος Θεοδώρου τῷ τῆς μουῆς συνημμένῳ ναῶ ἐντίμως κατέθεντο... ψαλμωδίαις πάλιν καὶ φωταψίαις ταύτην καταγεραίροντες τὸ μυστήριον ἐχαρακτήριζον τῆς ἐν σῶρανοῖς ἀποκειμένης αὐτῆς φωταγωγίας καὶ δόξης ἀνεκφράστου. For the saint and the text of the Life see: *BHG 950* and *The Life of Saint Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton*, ch. 23/ed. and transl. by J.O. Roseqvist, Uppsala, 1986, p. 110.

⁶⁰ Bouras & Parani Lighting, p. 23 with all previous bibliography.

⁶¹ Galavaris G. ‘Some aspects of the symbolic use of lights in the Eastern Church: Candles, lamps and ostrich eggs’//Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 54 (1978), pp. 69-79, esp. p. 71-73.

⁶² *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graecae*, vol. 87c, col. 3985c/ed. by J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1865.

⁶³ For a discussion on the subject see: Bouras & Parani Lighting, p. 23.

⁶⁴ From the numerous references see mainly : *Euchologion Sive Rituale Graecorum Complecteus. Ritus et Ordines*/ ed. by Rev. P.F.I. Goar, Pars, 1647, pp. 526, 528, 530, 532, 537.

'images', combining representation and performance, filled the architectural space. The Byzantine viewer would watch specific lighting devices being used in specific burial or commemoration ceremonies, look at diverse images of them reproduced in the frescoes or the mosaics that decorate these buildings, contemplate or try to experience metaphysically through real light the divine light and, ultimately, the union with God, as is implied in the texts that were chanted or read during these rituals. Light became therefore an essential element in the creation of an *hierotopos*, a sacred space with a non-material and, at the same time, a very specific material substance, function and characteristics- that of the burial chapel of a Byzantine monastic founder.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ For the term, which was first coined by Alexei Lidov, see: *Lidov, A. Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium. Moscow, 2006.*