

THESSALONIKI, ANDALUSIA AND THE GOLDEN HORDE\*

Thessaloniki, the second city of the Byzantine empire, was the stage for the dramatic socio-political and spiritual events that shook the empire during the middle and second half of the 14th century. The former weakened the hold of the central government of Constantinople over this regional capital, which gained greater autonomy<sup>1</sup>. The latter were instrumental in re-affirming Byzantine spiritual leadership amongst its co-religionists in Russia and the Slavic lands on a supranational level, while also ensuring the survival of orthodoxy and the church, after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453<sup>2</sup>.

In 1342, the Zealots' revolt broke out in Thessaloniki in support of the legitimate ruler John Palaeologus and against John Cantacuzenus who proclaimed himself emperor in 1341. On the surface, it appeared that this was a political revolt. In reality this bloody episode expressed the anger and frustration of the uprooted and improverished peasantry, artisans, sailors and merchants towards a divided Empire unable to protect them against foreign economic dependence, constant raids by Turks and Slavs as well as civil wars<sup>3</sup>. Yet another dimension was given to the civil war, for at precisely this time the Hesychast movement came into conflict with the church and the Patriarch John Calecas<sup>4</sup>.

The Hesychast doctrine was first endorsed in 1341 and in two subsequent councils, in 1347 and 1351, while its most eloquent apologist Gregory Palamas was elected metropolitan of Thessaloniki in 1347; his entry to the city was,

\* I would like to thank Mrs. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi for pointing these objects to me; I would also like to thank Professor Carswell for his advice and for the lovely photographs of the pieces, as well as Prof. R. Browning for his enlightened remarks.

1. Dennis, pp. 52-56; Vacalopoulos, p. 50ff; Ostrogorsky, pp. 518-519; Vasiliev, II, p. 679.

2. Ostrogorsky, p. 522; Vasiliev, II, p. 665ff; Meyendorff, *Rise*, p. 96.

3. Browning, pp. 170-171; Vasiliev, II, pp. 659-60, 664 and pp. 682-685; Vacalopoulos, pp. 56-61; Dennis, pp. 53-54; Tafrali, pp. 107-108; Ševčenko, "Zealot", pp. 603-617.

4. Ostrogorsky, p. 514; Dennis, p. 54; Vasiliev, II, pp. 665-670; Browning, p. 171; Meyendorff, *Rise*, p. 96ff.

however, barred up until the end of the Zealots' revolt in 1349<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the prevailing unsettling social and political conditions Thessaloniki experienced during the 14th century its artistic and intellectual Golden Age, and was able to maintain its important role as a commercial centre, at least up until its first temporary capture by the Ottomans in 1387<sup>6</sup>. Evidence for this artistic and cultural flowering is seen in the numerous religious foundations that mushroomed there<sup>7</sup>. Amongst these, is the Vlatadon monastery, situated on the northern side of Thessaloniki, near the place where the western and eastern city walls of the Byzantine period converge, and beside the southern tower of its Acropolis<sup>8</sup>. The church of this monastic establishment is dedicated to the Transfiguration of the Saviour and Christ Pantocrator, and bears on its southern facade three fragmentary ceramic vessels used as architectural ornaments (figs. 1, 2, 3)<sup>9</sup>. These were identified by Xyngopoulos as Persian 13th century and by Stogioglou as simply Byzantine<sup>10</sup>. It is these vessels we propose to discuss here, and revise their attribution, and chronology. Moreover, the very existence of these objects on a Greek Orthodox foundation raises problems of a different nature pertaining to the political, cultural and commercial relations between the Byzantines and their neighbours. To these questions, however, we will turn after an examination of the church's history and its date.

5. Meyendorff, *Rise*, p. 98; Meyendorff, *Spirituality*, pp. 86-106; Dennis, p. 54.

6. Vacalopoulos, p. 50; Tafrali, pp. 117-129; Dennis, p. 57; Dimitriadis, p. 15. The city was first taken by Murād I, for a short while then again by Bāyazīd Yıldırım in 1391. In 1403 the city was freed by Manuel Paleologus and then ceded to the Venetians in 1423. On March the 29th 1430 the city came under Ottoman rule.

7. Xyngopoulos, *Τέσσερες*, pp. 49-62; see also Krautheimer, pp. 300-303; and Djurić, p. 180 regarding the upsurge of building activities in Thessaloniki during the 14th century and the influence of local Palaeologan art on slavic lands.

8. Stogioglou, pp. 23-24. Dimitriadis, p. 265; the monastery was founded in the Asomaton, 'Ἀσωμάτων, neighbourhood.

9. Stogioglou, p. 26 dedicated to «Δεσπότης Σωτήρως Χριστοῦ τοῦ Παντοκράτορος»; Theocharidis, p. 20 was the first who identified the monastery's original name as «Μονὴ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτήρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Παντοκράτορος». During the Ottoman period this monastery was known as Çavuş Manastır, probably a reference to the first governor of Thessaloniki, after the final capture of the city by the Ottomans in 1430. Sungur Çavuş Bey might have used the monastery as his residence for a short time before returning it to the monks. The name Çavuş Manastır is first encountered in 1544, see Stogioglou, pp. 69-80.

10. Xyngopoulos, p. 58, Pl. Δ4; Stogioglou, p. 88, fig. 52.

*The Church*

The church is situated in the middle of the monastic complex and is of cross-in-square plan, surmounted by a dome and surrounded on three sides by a low narthex. Parallels for its architectural plan can be found in many local 14th century religious foundations. Xyngopoulos on stylistic grounds, dated this church to sometime between 1320 and 1350, and identified two later additions. To 1801, he attributed the enlargements on the northern and western sides of the church, and to 1907, he assigned the porticoed arcade on its southern side<sup>11</sup>. Recent restoration work has revealed a more complex history. Though the 19th and 20th century additions were confirmed, the building techniques characterising the enlargements suggested dates in the 15th or 16th centuries<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, the inside of the church was modified towards the last quarter of the 14th century and it is to this period that the frescoes decorating its walls have been credited as well as the newly uncovered painting of Gregory Palamas<sup>13</sup>. According to this report, the lower parts of the walls of the main church, as well as the northeastern chapel and part of the southern wall, where our three fragments were embedded, belong to an earlier date<sup>14</sup>. That the lower parts of the walls inside the church are earlier is further attested by the dendrochronological investigations on the church's timber which showed that the earliest wood dates from 1304, though one can assume that the wood could have been used later<sup>15</sup>. Whatever the case, the architectural evidence seems to point to two construction periods during the 14th century: a late 14th century date and an earlier one.

The Vlatadon monastery is first mentioned by the Russian traveler Ignatius of Smolensk who visited it in 1395<sup>16</sup>. A second reference to the "...σεβασμίαν μονήν τῶν Βλατάδων..." can be found in a document belonging to 1421 in the Dionysiou monastery of Mt. Athos<sup>17</sup>. Mention of this monastery is also made in a sigillum of Patriarch Hieremias II dated 1580, where we learn that the Patriarch Nilos, a fervent admirer of Gregory Palamas, richly endowed this monastic establishment during his term of office, between 1379 and 1388

11. Xyngopoulos, p. 56ff.

12. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi and Theodoridis, p. 100.

13. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi and Theodoridis, pp. 100-101.

14. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi and Theodoridis, p. 101.

15. Kuniholm and Striker, p. 419.

16. Khitrovo, p. 147; Mystakidis, pp. 370-371; Xyngopoulos, p. 49; Theocharidis, p. 17.

17. Theocharidis, p. 17.

and probably not after 1387, at which date the city fell to the Ottomans<sup>18</sup>. Though this sigillum clearly implies that the monastery was already in existence by the last quarter of the 14th century, yet it fails to inform us as to its founding date, nor why it was known as Vlatadon, an appellation that is obviously related to the inscription that can be seen on the church's western facade. This inscription is dated 1801, and on it we read that the church was founded by "...Κρητῶν ὑπ' ἀνδρῶν Βλατέων τῶν κτητόρων..."<sup>19</sup>. The name Vlat(t)as or Viat(t)is, usually associated with the makers or merchants of Vlatia textiles, a silk porphyry fabric, was a well known first and family name in Crete during the 14th century<sup>20</sup>. The reason this monastery became known as Vlatadon, has been recently explained by Theocharidis.

Relying on ecclesiastical sources and related documents, Theocharidis was able to demonstrate that the Vlateon men mentioned as the founders on the inscription are no others than the brothers Dorotheos and Markos Vlatis, staunch supporters of the Hesychast doctrine and disciples of Gregory Palamas<sup>21</sup>. According to Theocharidis, Dorotheos and Markos Vlatis founded the church and probably its surrounding monastery, before Dorotheos was elected metropolitan of Thessaloniki from 1371-1379, and after the final victory of the Hesychast movement in 1351<sup>22</sup>. Stogioglou endorsed Theocharidis' general chronological attribution but proposed a more precise date for this church. He argued, on circumstantial evidence, that this monastic establishment was founded in 1355. The reasons that prompted him to adopt this date are based on the close relationships that existed between Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessaloniki, the Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, and Anna Palaeologina with Dorotheos Vlatis, as well as the concurrence of certain events during this year<sup>23</sup>. Whether 1355 or sometime between 1351 and 1371,

18. Migne, vol. 151, col. 655-678; Theocharidis, p. 18; Mystakidis, p. 369; Xyngopoulos, p. 49.

19. Xyngopoulos, pp. 49-51; Stogioglou, pp. 56 and 82.

20. Theocharidis, p. 19; Stogioglou, pp. 60-61; see also Cange, vol. I, p. 206 for βλάτιον a textile fabric.

21. Theocharidis, pp. 9-17.

22. Theocharidis, pp. 24-26; Dimitriadis, p. 265.

23. Stogioglou, pp. 62-65. He argues that in 1355 Palamas returned to Thessaloniki after a short stay in Constantinople where he intervened in the quarrel between John V and Cantacuzenus; At his return he found Anna Palaeologina busy with the repairs of the city walls and the opening of a new gate that still bears her name, near the place where the monastery is situated. Dorotheos, then a prominent spiritual figure and a friend of Palamas and Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, asked their permission to found the monastery and Anna Palaeologina gave her support.

it is obvious that Stogioglou does not differ from Theocharidis' general chronological framework. Thus, it would appear that the written evidence strongly supports a date in the third quarter of the 14th century, for the establishment of this church and perhaps for its surrounding building complex. Yet all the surviving buildings that surround the church seem to belong to the post Byzantine era, as does the small chapel dedicated to St. Gregory Palamas<sup>24</sup>.

Gregory Palamas died in Thessaloniki in 1359 and was canonized by the Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos, his old friend and supporter, in 1368<sup>25</sup>. It is indeed appropriate that the first ever recorded representation of St. Gregory Palamas should occur amongst the frescoes adorning the interior of the Vlatadon church, the founders of which were so closely associated with the Hesychast movement and with Palamas himself. The presence of this fresco might also imply that the alterations that were recently identified as belonging to the second building period should post date Palamas' canonisation.

To summarise, the church's architectural history as recently unraveled, together with the ecclesiastical documents point to the following: firstly, that the second building period is most probably not earlier than 1368 and not later than 1387, the date at which the Ottomans first captured the city. These modifications could well be attributed to Patriarch Nilos, who is known to have richly endowed the monastery during his term of office from 1380 to 1388. Secondly, as regards the earlier or first building period, we know that according to the dendrochronological investigations it cannot be before 1304 and presumably not after 1368. According to Xyngopoulos, the church belongs to the period 1320 to 1350, while Theocharidis on strong and plausible evidence supported a date between 1351 and 1371, or 1355 if we espouse Stogioglou's more precise chronology. One hopes that the ceramics that are embedded on the church's original southern facade might further elucidate this problem.

### *The Ceramics*

Hidden within an arched recess, between the south-easterly window and the door situated on the southern facade, is a fragmentary bowl framed by bricks belonging to the church's original structure (fig. 1). The bowl is covered in a clear glaze and decorated in lustre and underglaze blue painting. Its surface is divided into diamond-shaped panels by interlaced bands in thick

24. Stogioglou, p. 50.

25. Meyendorff, *Spirituality*, p. 106; Meyendorff, *Rise*, p. 124.

blue strokes, containing alternately foliations composed of addorsed half palmettes forming a trefoil in reserve on a lustre ground, and a lustre dot surrounded by squiggly spirals painted in lustre. Parallels for the colour scheme, designs, and the division of the vessel's surface into geometric configurations can be found amongst Spanish lustre painted ceramics usually attributed to Valencia-Manises, *circa* 1400<sup>26</sup>. The origins of these patterns can however be traced to earlier traditions.

Lustre dots out of which spring lines on either a plain or spiraling ground are attested on late 13th-early 14th century Andalusian examples, as well as on others belonging to the late 14th<sup>27</sup>. Trefoils, formed out of affronted half palmettes are depicted on the Alhambran vases of the late 14th century, as is the geometric interlace and the use of blue painting in conjunction with lustre<sup>28</sup>. The motifs, therefore, that decorate the Vlatadon bowl would seem to combine earlier and later Andalusian traditions suggesting dates not later than the late 14th century for our Valencian bowl. The attribution of the vessels with related motifs to Valencia and to the late 14th at the earliest does not rest on any stratigraphic evidence or on dated pieces but rather on stylistic analogies that can be established between these and their forerunners from Malaga<sup>29</sup>.

The date at which Valencia or Manises started producing lustre painted vessels is debatable. According to Lane by 1414 production had already started, while Kühnel in his chronology of Moorish pottery from Spain dates the earliest Valencian type to the late 14th century and stresses its indebtedness to the more ancient centre of Malaga<sup>30</sup>. Frothingham was also drawn to similar conclusions. In her book, *Lustreware of Spain*, she stated that during the 14th century Valencians imported Malagan wares which they also copied<sup>31</sup>. "Obra de Manizes" are first mentioned in documents dating from 1342, and by 1362 the potters of Manisa had become so skilful in the art of lustre painting that they were summoned to work abroad<sup>32</sup>. Whether however these documents

26. Kühnel, *Maurische*, pp. 132, 134; Frothingham, fig. 50. See also Düsseldorf, fig. 472, for similar designs.

27. Frothingham, figs. 12 and 24.

28. Frothingham, fig. 29; Similarly shaped trefoils are also attested at the Alhambra Palace, Crespi, p. 232.

29. Frothingham, p. 83ff.

30. Lane, "Hispano-Moresque", pp. 251-252; Kühnel, "Daten", pp. 175-176.

31. Frothingham, p. 74 she says "At Manises another Valencian town the potters learned to reproduce this Malaga ware so expertly that even contemporaries were puzzled as to the source of certain objects", see also p. 83.

32. Frothingham, pp. 77, 79 and 83.

refer to lustreware beside the lustre painted tiles that we know were produced there by 1372, it is difficult to say<sup>33</sup>.

Another variety of lustre painted ceramics usually credited to Valencia, and recently to other centres as well, is represented by the Pula finds<sup>34</sup>. On these, patterns characterising Valencian wares have been treated in a much bolder and freer style. Lane compared these Pula finds to the Valencian tiles that decorate the dome of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception at Toledo, dated 1422<sup>35</sup>. Frothingham, however, compared their designs to Andalusian lustreware and underglaze painted Paterna wares of the 13th century and suggested dates closer to the early Valencian ceramics<sup>36</sup>. Examples closely relating to the Pula pieces have been found built into the walls of Italian churches. Such a Pula type lustre painted vessel ornaments the walls of St. Maria Novella at Marti, in the Province of Pisa, a building credited to the 14th century<sup>37</sup>. The Marti bacino is painted in lustre with panels outlined in underglaze blue painting, containing trefoils in reserve and bold lustre spots surrounded by squiggles, thus reminiscent of the patterns enlivening the surface of the Vlatadon bowl<sup>38</sup>.

The evidence provided so far has shown that our bowl relates stylistically, chromatically and thematically, to pieces usually attributed to Manises or Valencia. Relations can also be established with the lustreware found at Pula, datable to the late 14th century, and displaying the fusion of lustreware patterns with others characterising the 13th century underglaze painted wares of Paterna. Documents mentioning objects made in Manises begin to appear from the second half of the 14th century onwards, though it is as yet undetermined whether these refer to lustre painted tiles solely or to vessels as well. It would therefore appear that the Vlatadon bowl dates from the late 14th century. Yet, its close stylistic associations with Malagan wares cannot altogether abrogate its attribution to an earlier period. This is further suggested by the vessel's position within one of the arched recesses of the southern facade, believed to date from the third quarter of the 14th century, according to the documentary evidence. Unless, it replaced some earlier example that was damaged during the church's remodelling, datable to the last quarter of the

33. Olivar, pp. 117-118.

34. Frothingham, p. 88; Van de Put, pp. 67-83; Blake, p. 73.

35. Lane, "Reconsidering", p. 164.

36. Frothingham, pp. 87-89; and Blake, p. 72; the Pula finds also contain pieces of the 15th century.

37. Blake, p. 93.

38. Blake, p. 71, fig. 12.

14th century and prior to the city's first temporary capture by the Ottomans in 1387. Before, however we come to any conclusions, we should first examine the two other vessels, decorating the south-easterly and south-westerly extremities of the southern wall and, like the Spanish bowl, framed on four sides by the original rectangular bricks.

Both these fragmentary bowls are of curvilinear shape and thrown in a very fine, gritty and sandy white paste that is concealed by a thin grey engobe (figs. 2, 3). The designs are outlined in a fine greenish-black line and stand in perceptible relief thanks to the application of a rather thick white slip, so that they appear to float under the luminous, transparent clear glaze that evenly covers the vessel's surface. Apart from greenish-black, blue and turquoise-blue colours are used to further enhance the decorative effect.

Xyngopoulos, as mentioned earlier, identified these bowls as 13th century Persian, an attribution that is justifiable as similarities between the Vlatadon bowls and Persian underglaze painted wares of the late 13th and early 14th centuries can be established. The relief rendering of the designs, the grey slip, blue highlights and black outlines are attested not only in Iran but also in Egypt, as are certain motifs<sup>39</sup>. The differences, however, between our bowls and those others made in Iran and Egypt or Syria, are, perhaps, more telling. The potting of the Persian vessels, usually attributed to Sultanabad, though neither wasters or kilns have as yet been uncovered, is thick and clumsy and the body material is of a buff tinge and coarse<sup>40</sup>. The glaze is thick and glassy and the congested designs that can be perceived through a subtle gradation of darker and lighter tones, lack the clarity and boldness of execution characterising the Vlatadon vessels. Those of Egyptian or Syrian provenience, also display a murky clear, greenish glaze and their pastes are coarser and of a yellowish-white colour<sup>41</sup>. The patterns are scattered on the surface and the black and blue palette has been enriched by the use of red, albeit sparingly<sup>42</sup>. The structural and aesthetic differences just noted militate against the inclusion of the Vlatadon bowls in either group, suggesting a different origin for our objects. Indeed, parallels for these bowls can be found amongst the ceramic products of the Golden Horde Khanate.

39. Lane, *L.I.P.*, Pls. A, 1 and 11, and pp. 10-20.

40. Lane, *L.I.P.*, pp. 10-11; Féhervari, p. 119ff; Grube, pp. 261-268.

41. Lane, *L.I.P.*, pp. 18-19; Bahgat-Massoul, p. 7, Pls. 6 and 7 and Pl. K, 82, 83. This type of ware was also made in Syria; see Poulsen, Nos. 745-750. As both the Syrian and Egyptian vessels of this type display the same designs and colourschemes we will refer to these in the present context, as simply Egyptian.

42. Poulsen, Nos. 746, 760; Benaki Museum, Inv. Nos. 530, 1422.



The Golden Horde Mongols conquered an area stretching from the Black Sea to the east of the Aral Sea, and in the course of the second quarter of the 13th century on, they established themselves as an independent state<sup>43</sup>. Their two capitals Saray Batu or Old Saray and Saray Berke or New Saray built on the Volga, were famous in the Middle Ages as great commercial centres, visited by European, Arab and Persian travelers and merchants. Saray Batu was founded by Batu-Khan (1224-1255) sometime before William of Rubruck's visit in 1254, while its earliest minted coins date from 1266<sup>44</sup>. Saray Berke is usually credited to Berke Khan (1255-1266), though the city appears to have become important only after Özbek Khan (1313-1341) who made it the capital of the state sometime between 1320 and 1330<sup>45</sup>. New Saray under Özbek Khan and his successors prospered up to 1395 when the city was sacked by Tamerlane and the capital reverted once more to Old Saray<sup>46</sup>.

Excavations in both sites have revealed a wealth of material imported from China, Iran, Egypt or Syria, and probably Italy and Spain, as well as locally made products<sup>47</sup>. Amongst the local manufactures were ceramics, both vessels and tiles. Large quantities of the ware to which the Vlatadon bowls belong have been found in both Old and New Saray, at Bolgary and other sites. Characteristic shapes are survilinear bowls and dishes decorated with concentric bands framing a centrally placed design situated at the well; their reverses are usually decorated with a degenerate form of petal panels. Common are floral and epigraphic motifs, though birds also appear<sup>48</sup>.

Russian scholars when discussing Golden Horde finds, acknowledge the indebtedness of this civilization to its neighbours and enemies the Il-Khans of Iran, and in general to Persian culture<sup>49</sup>. A number of tiles found at Bolgary are inscribed in Persian, important testimony to the presence of Persian craftsmen in the lands of the Golden Horde<sup>50</sup>.

Egypt must also have inspired Golden Horde artists through presents to the Khans and the recurrent exchange of embassies<sup>51</sup>. Egyptian products

43. Grekov-Iakoubovski, pp. 54-57.

44. Risch, p. 123; Spuler, pp. 265-270; Balodis, pp. 6-11.

45. Balodis, p. 7; Spuler, p. 267.

46. Balodis, p. 10; Spuler, p. 269.

47. Balodis, pp. 14, 29; Fëdorov-Davydov, figs. 102, 117; Grekov-Iakoubovski, pp. 64, 89, 160, for the Genoese in the Crimea.

48. Lane, *L.I.P.*, pp. 13-15 and Pl. 5A, B; Fëdorov-Davydov, p. 134, figs. 104, 107-113; see also Bulatov, p. 101; Matveyeva, figs. 2-3.

49. Balodis, p. 75; Grekov-Iakoubovski, p. 88.

50. Matveyeva, p. 221 fig. 3:3, 4, 6, 7; Fëdorov-Davydov, fig. 102, for Persian ceramics.

51. Bulatov, p. 104, No. 8 for Mamluk slip-ware; Fëdorov-Davydov, fig. 117 for a Mam-

were also brought there as either merchandise, or as part of a merchant's belongings<sup>52</sup>. Nor should we perhaps spurn the view that the much finer wares of the Golden Horde Khanate perhaps influenced Persian and Egyptian ceramics through travelling craftsmen and trade.

Regarding the dates at which the decorative modes characterising the Vlatadon vessels developed, we, unfortunately, have no secure chronological evidence. The excavations at Saray Berke and Saray Batu have not been very informative. The period of Old Saray's prosperity seems to belong to the early 14th century, and once again, towards the end of the 14th and early 15th centuries<sup>53</sup>. New Saray, as we know, was elevated to the role of a capital under Özbek Khan, and its first coins were minted in 1310, by the end of the 14th century New Saray's importance appears to have waned<sup>54</sup>.

Ceramics belonging to the group under discussion have been found at both sites, but blue-and-white pottery of the late 14th and 15th centuries inspired by Chinese models has been discovered only at Old Saray. This might imply that with the demise of New Saray<sup>55</sup> the type of ware to which our vessels pertain were supplanted by the emergent Chinese blue-and-white imitations. Most pieces decorated with designs in relief first appear at sites associated with coins of Özbek Khan and his immediate successors. If these assumptions are correct, then they would seem to agree with the general chronological horizon of the Persian and especially of the Egyptian ceramics of this type, while also pointing to the universality of this ware in the Near and Middle East.

In Iran, a thick white slip was employed to render inscriptions on the reverse of bowls as early as the late 13th century, as can be seen from a stemmed bowl dated 674/1276<sup>56</sup>. Overall relief motifs, however, enliven the surface of vessels that are usually attributable to the first half of the 14th century, though firm chronological data are altogether lacking<sup>57</sup>.

In Egypt ceramics displaying the same decorative techniques emerge between 1317 and 1343. This we can suggest, for on pieces belonging to the

luk underglaze painted bottle; Grekov-Iakoubovski, p. 160 for Mamluk şamdan. On pp. 92 and 155 relations with Egypt and the marriage of Özbek Khans' daughter, with al Malik an-Nâsir ad-Din Muhammad, are referred to.

52. Grekov-Iakoubovski, pp. 78-81 and p. 84 commercial and artistic contacts.

53. Balodis, p. 44.

54. Balodis, p. 7.

55. Balodis, pp. 14, 19, 33, 38, 76.

56. Lane, *E.I.P.*, Pl. 94B.

57. Lane, *L.I.P.*, p. 10ff; Reitlinger, pp. 27-29.

early decades of the 14th century no relief designs have so far been recorded while on examples inscribed "made in the year forty-four" or "made in the year forty-five", which according to Lane refers to 744 or 745 H/AD 1343-4, the characteristic arrow-shaped leaves so typical of the vessels with relief decorations are present<sup>58</sup>. It would, therefore, appear that at least in Egypt these wares date from the second quarter of the 14th or circa the middle of this century.

To evaluate these considerations, we must now turn to the bowls of the Vlatadon church and discuss the motifs that adorn them.

On the fragment situated on the south-eastern side of the southern facade, we notice some of the most favoured motifs of Golden Horde ceramicists. Its rim is decorated with a row of blue dots and below the rim, a band embellished with a repeating single word inscription, is written in a cursive script (fig. 2). A fine greenish-black line delineates the letters in relief—the verticals of which point towards the centre of the bowl rather than the rim—and on each, two and occasionally one large blue dot is affixed. Closely following the contours of the letters and those of the other motifs, are tiny black dots. Five six-petalled rosettes or wheel-patterns outlined in a fine greenish-black line embellish the cavetto and encircle a similar motif occupying the well. The rosettes are framed by a white circular band, while on each petal or wheel-segment a dot has been lodged. Four of the interstices of the cavetto are decorated with arrow-shaped leaves and circles with a dot while the fifth displays a trefoil resting on a reclining almond-shaped leaf. Parallels for the calligraphic, floral and secondary patterns can be found on numerous ceramics unearthed at Saray Batu and Saray Berke<sup>59</sup>, while the arrowshaped leaf is well in evidence on Syro-Egyptian vessels dated: in the year 44 or 45 (fig. 4).

The second bowl is technically and decoratively similar to that just described, but its design is different and perhaps, more unusual. Well attested on Golden Horde ceramic products is a grid-pattern painted in blue, interspersed with circles with a turquoise dot, that adorns the narrow band below the rim, as are the obliquely placed leaves decorating the third band close to the well<sup>60</sup>. The motif embellishing the middle band of the cavetto and consisting

58. Scerrato, pp. 48-49 and fig. 49 for a piece belonging to the earliest type and inscribed with the date 717/1317-8, where no designs in relief are recorded; see Lane, *L.I.P.*, p. 18 for examples dated 744 or 745/1343-5; Baghat-Massoul, Pl. XXXVIII; Bahgat, Pl. 126; Poulsen, p. 291.

59. Fëdorov-Davydov, figs. 109, 111, 112.

60. Fëdorov-Davydov, figs. 106, 107, 109.

of "polo-sticks" and quatrefoils is, however, rarer as is the theme decorating the round panel of the well which, does not appear to have been recorded in any of the publications accessible to me (fig. 3).

Against a dotted ground move fish-like shapes with curving tails. The fish's head bears a blue dot and is schematically rendered as an arrow-shape, and the same dot can be seen on its tail. The highly stylised rendering of this design makes its deciphering more difficult, yet the shape and movement of each form reveals its iconographic origin. Known as "fish-pond" ornament, this motif is quite common in Persian and Mamluk metal vessels, and on ceramics of the 13th, 14th and even 15th centuries<sup>61</sup>. On these, we see fish with curving tails positioned one on top of the other, arranged in a radial scheme or circling a sun-symbol and often surrounded by others of their kind following a circular movement. Iconologically, this ornament symbolises the "Fountain of Life" or the "Fountain of the Sun" or of "Light"<sup>62</sup>. When fish surround a central rosette or a sun symbol, it probably is a visual translation of the "Fountain of Sun or Light", which, in turn, is associated with the sky, and by extension the universe. The bowl decorated with such motifs expresses these concepts in pictorial terms, for its shape represents the celestial sphere and the fish-pond ornament, the "Fountain of Life"<sup>63</sup>. This bowl may well have been deliberately chosen, therefore, for the facade of a Christian church as the fish was also imbued with Christological significance<sup>64</sup>.

The "polo-stick" and quatrefoil pattern decorating the middle band of this second Vlatadon vessel is repeated in a more degenerate rendering on another bowl from Old Saray, decorated with radiating fern like sprays bearing leaves and six-petaled flowers<sup>65</sup>. Recalling these are those embellishing a number of Persian underglaze painted vessels that are usually attributed to the 14th century but also on others datable to the 15th<sup>66</sup>. Parallels for this spray can also be found on the so-called Miletus wares of the 15th century<sup>67</sup>. The six-petaled flowers growing beside the wiry sprays on the just mentioned bowl from Saray Batu are not only recorded on Golden Horde vessels but also on others from

61. Baer, p. 45, Pl. XII; Bahgat, Pl. 119; Lane, *E.I.P.*, Pl. 74B; Melikian-Chirvani, p. 186, fig. 83C; Allan, p. 98; Grube, p. 272, fig. 219 publishes a piece which he attributes to the 13th but might well be as late as the 15th century.

62. Baer, p. 27; Melikian-Chirvani, p. 21.

63. Grube, p. 272; Melikian-Chirvani, pp. 21, 186, 203, 211; Baer, pp. 25-27.

64. Philon, p. 170.

65. Fëdorov-Davydov, fig. 116.

66. Düsseldorf, p. 171, fig. 239; Grube, p. 297, No. 257.

67. Aslanapa, figs. 6-11.

Syria and Egypt and usually credited to the 14th century, as is the cross-hatched pattern in blue<sup>68</sup>.

A waster from Saray-Batu is decorated with radiating twigs bearing six-petalled rosettes and a grid pattern in blue just below the rim<sup>69</sup>. Closely resembling this in both its decorative scheme and designs is another from Egypt, clearly implying that the Saray bowl and its Egyptian relation can not be far removed in time<sup>70</sup>. The date of the Egyptian vessel can be inferred thanks to the design of its reverse, decorated with shell-like scrolls which are in turn attested on the exterior of bowls embellished with motifs originating on Chinese 15th century wares<sup>71</sup>.

The grid or cross-hatched pattern is not solely attested on 15th century wares but also on earlier examples as evidenced by a fragmentary example in Cairo dated "in the year 744", that is A.D. 1344<sup>72</sup>. Other pieces decorated with cross-hatched bands display on the reverse panels outlined by thick blue horizontal strokes containing fern like sprays, a design that embellishes the reverse of the famous Hama plate, the obverse of which copies 14th century blue-and-white Yuan design<sup>73</sup>. Thus at least in Egypt and probably Syria the grid-pattern, introduced sometime in the middle of the 14th century, continues in use well into the 15th. Whether the same is true for Golden Horde ceramics it is difficult to say as evidence is at present lacking. However the analogies we have been able to establish between Golden Horde and Mamluk ceramics clearly show that the close political and diplomatic relations these two kingdoms entertained often resulted in the elaboration of related visual vocabularies.

To conclude, the second bowl from the Vlatadon monastery can be related through its designs to other locally made ceramics as well as Mamluk ware. The "polo-stick" motif seen on the Vlatadon bowl must be earlier than its degenerate rendering attested on the Saray bowl decorated with fern like sprays and probably dating from the late 14th or early 15th century. Secondly, the

68. Poulsen, fig. 746; Benaki Museum, Inv. Nos. 1424, 16817 are pieces associated with the group inscribed "made in the year 44"; For Golden Horde examples see Fëdorov-Davydov, fig. 108, 111, 112.

69. Fëdorov-Davydov, fig. 106.

70. Atıl, p. 158, fig. 70.

71. Benaki Museum, Inv. No. 1163.

72. Bahgat-Massoul, Pl. XXXVII.

73. Pope, Pl. 131 C and D. The same fern pattern occurs on another vessel from Hama. Its obverse is decorated with radiating pointed lobed panels in reserve containing similarly shaped panels filled with stylised leaf motifs. The grid pattern is used here as a filler.

fish-pond ornament embellishing its well can find parallels on 13th and 14th centuries wares from Egypt, Syria and Iran, while the grid pattern embellishing its rim is recorded on other Golden Horde ceramics as well as Egyptian wares, the latter dating from circa the middle of the 14th century onwards. Thus the decorative motifs seen on this bowl suggest dates in the middle of the 14th century for this example and probably for the other bowl situated on the south-eastern side of the facade. This chronological attribution does not contradict the archaeological evidence from the Golden Horde sites where these ceramics are attested with coins of Özbek Khan and his immediate successors<sup>74</sup>. Moreover, the evidence provided by the Egyptian vessels, where we noted the presence of similar decorative techniques and motifs, seem to corroborate this date. Apart from Egypt and the Golden Horde Khanate, decoratively and technically related vessels were also made in Iran, showing that the Islamic ceramics of the 14th century were frontierless.

Having established the possible dates of the Golden Horde ceramics that decorate the southern facade of the Vlatadon church, we must now return, once again, to the monument itself.

As mentioned earlier, the architectural investigations have shown two building periods in the course of the 14th century; one early and the other belonging to the late 14th century, and probably before 1387. The wall on which these Golden Horde fragments are situated is believed to belong to the earlier period and, apparently, to the same date as the lower parts of the walls on the inside of the church. The samples used for the dendrochronological analysis were taken from the lower parts of the wall inside the church and provided the date 1304. The evidence, however, provided by the ecclesiastical documents disagree with such an early attribution and clearly point to dates in the third quarter of the 14th century. To similar dates point our Golden Horde vessels, as they appear to date from approximately the middle of the 14th century.

If this is the case then the Spanish bowl, which is also set in the same wall, should belong to this earlier period. Yet, most scholars are reluctant to attribute Valencian wares to before the end of the 14th century, despite the close stylistic and thematic analogies they display with the Malagan wares of the 14th century. Admittedly, the Spanish fragment is hidden away within a recess, but the wall where it is set does not seem to differ structurally from the one the Golden Horde "bacini" are placed in. So we have to envisage the possibility that all three pieces reached the monument at about the same time. According to the

74. Balodis, p. 7.

Golden Horde bowls this would be sometime towards the middle of the 14th century, while according to the conventional dating of the Spanish bowl in the last quarter of the 14th. Unless of course this example replaced an earlier bowl, now lost. Another recess similar to the one housing the Hispano-mooresque vessel can be seen on the southwest side of the door, but this has now lost the piece that was once decorating it. If this lustreware is a replacement then one can, perhaps, suggest that it pertains to the church's second building period datable to before 1387. This scenario would agree with the documentary and architectural history of the church. The Golden Horde vessels would exemplify the church's founding date credited to Dorotheos and Markos Vlatis, the Spanish bowl pertaining to its remodeling, perhaps under Patriarch Nilos.

Yet another possibility, is that the first structure might date to soon after 1304 suggested by the dendrochronological investigations of its timber, followed by a second and more important building period attributed to the Vlatis brothers and attested by the Golden Horde ceramics. Finally, a few years before the city's first capture by the Ottomans, the church was further remodelled and to this period belong the frescoes that adorn its interior and the Spanish bowl that decorates one of the recesses of its exterior southern facade.

However the recent archaeological examinations of the building, pointed to only two building periods and it is therefore possible that the timber was taken from some other monument and re-used. One can thus argue that all three bowls framed by the bricks of the original structure belong to the first building period which, according to Theocharidis' strong documentary evidence, should be sometime between 1351 to 1371.

Now that we have tentatively suggested the dates of the bacini at the Vlata-don church, it would be interesting to examine briefly the ways they could have reached this monastic establishment.

Thessaloniki was a metropolis inhabited by different ethnic and religious minorities, with close commercial relations with their co-religionists in other parts of the world. Products from the Balkans and the Black Sea arrived here to be bought or exchanged by others imported by Spaniards, Genoese, Venetians, Syrians or Egyptians, to mention but a few<sup>75</sup>.

The Genoese especially had close relationships with both Spain and the Golden Horde Khanate, and we know of their commercial representation in

75. Tafrali, pp. 17-41 and pp. 117-129.

Caffa on the Black Sea and of their colony in Thessaloniki<sup>76</sup>. Nor should we forget the direct contacts between Thessaloniki, mainland Greece and Spain<sup>77</sup>. Apart from the Catalan Company, which had established a state in Attica and Boeotia from 1311 to 1388 with Thebes as their most important commercial centre, the Jewish communities of Thessaloniki must have also entertained relations with their brothers in Spain<sup>78</sup>. Though this community was not as large then as it became later, yet there is enough evidence to suggest that Jews were already settled there. Moreover, we know that diplomatic relations between the Byzantine emperors and the Aragonese kings were particularly good during this period and Catalan merchants visited the ports of Constantinople and Thessaloniki. These visits often contributed to the replenishment of the impoverished Imperial Exchequer<sup>79</sup>.

It is, therefore, not surprising to find a Spanish object in Thessaloniki, as many were the channels through which such objects could have reached Greece.

Relations between the Golden Horde Khans and the Emperor were also friendly, helped by the bishop of Saray and the Russian metropolitan<sup>80</sup>. Bishops traveled between Constantinople and the Volga carrying letters and gifts<sup>81</sup>. One should also note that one of the wives of Özbek Khan was a Byzantine princess, who returned to Constantinople for the birth of her child in the company of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa<sup>82</sup>. Undoubtedly, these contacts can explain the presence of these Golden Horde bowls in Thessaloniki. To forget, however, the impact of the Hesychast movement in Russia would be inappropriate.

76. Balodis, p. 89; Grekov-Iakoubovski, p. 83 ff; Frothingham, p. 74 mentions Italian merchants; Meyendorff, *Rise*, pp. 205-221; Dennis, pp. 46-51; Ševčenko, p. 606, argues that the Genoese were not established in Thessaloniki but in the theme of Thessaloniki; Balard, p. 164, disagrees with Ševčenko and mentions a contract dated 1305 and mentioning the name of the Consul of the Genoese in Thessaloniki.

77. Dennis, pp. 103-108.

78. Setton, p. 15 we are told that the Catalan Grand Company turned to the house of Aragon for protection and to King Frederick II of Sicily. Large quantities of Spanish lustre painted vessels have been found in Italy and Sicily, Frothingham, pp. 60 and 74; The Catalan duchy of Athens entertained commercial relations with Spain: Setton, pp. 35, 69 and 85-87; see also Bowman, p. 67ff for the Jewish community of Thessaloniki; and Heyd, vol. I, pp. 476-479 and vol. II, p. 257ff, regarding the commercial agreements between Catalans and Byzantines.

79. Dennis, pp. 130-131.

80. Grekov-Iakoubovski, p. 105, Meyendorff, *Rise*, pp. 43-47.

81. Meyendorff, *Rise*, pp. 119-132.

82. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, pp. 488 and 505.



Its victory strengthened the ties between Russia and Byzantium, prompting the translation of ecclesiastical and religious texts into Slavic. Byzantine monastic spirituality had a lasting influence on the Russian Orthodox church, and pilgrims traveled to Constantinople, Thessaloniki and Mt. Athos to visit these holy sites<sup>83</sup>. It is possible that these objects were offered to the Vlatadon church during such a pilgrimage. A humble tribute to its founders so closely related to Gregory Palamas, and the Hesychast movement that revived the strength and unity of the orthodox faith.

83. Meyendorff, *Rise*, p. 107 says "...Ideologically, the leadership given by hesychast patriarchs...exercised a decisive impact upon Russia in the 14th century", see also pp. 122, 129-130; Majeska, p. 1ff, for an evaluation of the sources regarding the pilgrimages to Tsar-grad-Constantinople and other cities.



*Fig. 1. Fragmentary bowl, Spain, second half of 14th century.*



*Fig. 2. Fragmentary bowl, Golden Horde, middle 14th century.*



*Fig. 3. Fragmentary bowl, Golden Horde, middle 14th century.*



*Fig. 4. Fragmentary bowl, Egypt, dated in the year 45H/AD 1344, Benaki Museum Inv. No. 512.*

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