

Zodiacs in Post-Byzantine Churches of Epirus and Thessaly

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Abstract. During the post-Byzantine period, zodiac cycles were found in wall paintings and portable icons as secondary elements, in an attempt to depict time and the world. Their presence in Greek churches increases from the sixteenth century. However, in the nineteenth century this type of iconography becomes extremely rare. As this is also the period of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, we question whether the advances in science or the diffusion of astronomical knowledge has played any role in this. This study concludes that the coming of zodiacs into fashion was due to the influence of specific artists.

The zodiac as a decorative element in post-Byzantine iconography is mostly found in three types of types of painting, known as ‘In Thee Rejoice’, ‘Laudes’, and ‘Wheel of Life’. In all three cases, the zodiac is not a compulsory element; in fact, its presence is rather localized in place and time.

Portable icons of the Cretan school feature zodiac signs as decorative elements in the first type, known as ‘In Thee Rejoice’ (Ἐπί Σοί Χαίρει). It illustrates the Matins liturgical hymn to Theotokos, which is part of the *Octoēchos* and attributed to St John Damascene.¹ Typically, it features a central figure of Virgin Mary seated on a throne with Christ on her knees. They are surrounded by prophets and angels, and below a number of saints, all in miniature. The zodiac may appear as a concentric decorative element around the central figures. The actual signs are not necessarily a complete zodiac, or in the right order, and may even include imaginary signs. As this zodiacal motif is found on wall paintings neither in Epirus nor in Thessaly, it is not examined in the present paper.

The second type, ‘Laudes’ (Αἶνοι), is found in ceiling paintings in monasteries of mainland Greece.² In this, Christ takes central position,

¹ Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn 1961): p.44.

² Magdalini Parcharidou, *Οι Αἶνοι στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική του 16^{ου} αιώνα. Συμβολή στην μελέτη του θέματος, με αναφορές σε μνημεία του 5^{ου}-19^{ου} αιώνα*

surrounded by angels, saints, and laymen (Fig. 1, left). The zodiac represents the sky in general, as it joins in the praise of the Lord (*Psalm 148*, 1–4):³

*Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights.
Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.
Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,
and ye waters that be above the heavens.*

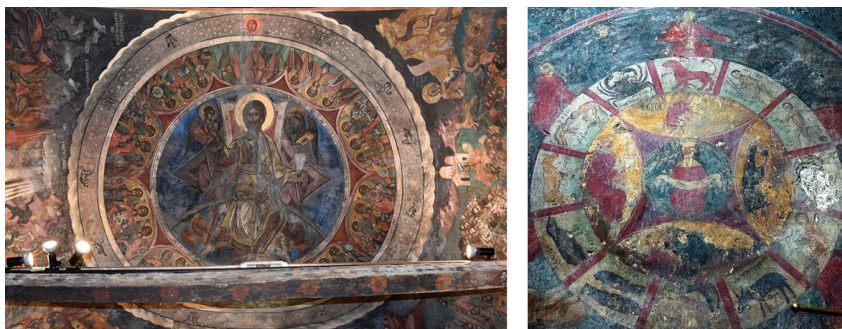


Fig. 1. Left: The earliest fresco from our study is the Laudes in St Demetrios in Veltsitsa (1568). The Sun is above the Christ, between Virgo and Libra. Notice the ‘Heavenly Waters’ band outside the zodiac circle. Photo: © Ioannis Houliaras. Right: The Wheel of Life at the Aretha monastery (1742) features a clockwise zodiac with summer on top. Notice the deliberate destruction of the Scorpio, as it is the monster of the fifth trumpet of the Apocalypse (*Revelation*, 9.3–9.10). Photo: © Vasilis Galatas.

The zodiacal signs may not be in the right order, and are accompanied by images of the sun, the moon, and the stars. In many cases, just images of stars are painted within a circular belt around the central figure. This type

[=Laudes in sixteenth century Monumental Painting. A Contribution to the Study of the Subject, with References to Monuments of the fifth to nineteenth centuries] (PhD dissertation, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 2000); Christos Merantzias, *Η εικονογράφηση των Αίνων στη μνημειακή μεταβυζαντινή ζωγραφική του Ελλαδικού χώρου (16^{ος} -18^{ος} αι.)* [=The Illustration of Laudes in the Monumental post-Byzantine Painting of the Greek area (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries)] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2001).

³ Holy Bible, King James Version.

of iconography was popular mainly in two areas: Mani in south Peloponnese, and in the mountainous parts of Epirus and Thessaly (which is the subject of the present paper).⁴

The third type of iconography that includes a zodiac is the ‘Wheel of Life’ (Τροχός της Ζωής), a tale of futility or fate, featured in the narthex or even the exterior of churches.⁵ A male figure representing Time or Cosmos sits on a throne in the middle, with the four seasons around him, then the zodiac signs in the correct order, representing the twelve months and the passage of time. The so-called ‘ages of man’ are drawn on the outside, from birth to death, with mottos for each one. The ages of man usually run clockwise, but the zodiacs may run clockwise or anticlockwise (Fig. 1, right). The Wheel of Life is rather obscure, and all our samples bar one are dated to the eighteenth century.

Greek Enlightenment

The Greek Enlightenment was a cultural movement that peaked between 1774 and 1821.⁶ The title does not refer to the geographical area of modern Greece, but rather to those areas (mainly of the Balkans) that were home to compact Greek populations. It is important to note that the Greek Enlightenment was not addressed to the citizens of a state, but to the subjects of what was regarded as a heathen, Muslim empire. During calm periods within the Ottoman Empire, the wealth of the Greek merchant class and their patronage gave the opportunity to young Greeks to study in universities, first in Italy and later in Germany, where they were introduced to the ideas of the Enlightenment and ultimately the French Revolution.

These *logioi* (λόγιοι), usually proficient in classical philology and philosophy and/or theology, were the major bearers of the new ideas, both

⁴ Günter Paulus Schiemenz, ‘Laudes Psalms Paintings in the Palaiologian Realm? The Case of Hagios Nikolaos Zarnatas’, *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 51, no. 1–4 (2013): pp.185–210.

⁵ Elias Antonopoulos, ‘Τροχών Κυλίσματα: Ηλικίες του ανθρώπου’ [=Wheels Rolling: Ages of Man], in A. Paliouras and A. Stavropoulou, eds, *Μίλτος Γαρίδης (1926-1996) Αφιέρωμα* [=Tribute to Miltos Garidis (1926-1996)] (Ioannina: University of Ioannina Press, 2001): vol. I, pp.15–54. On the presence of the Wheel of Life in manuscripts, see Elias Antonopoulos, ‘Στροφάδες κέλευθοι. Εικονογραφικές όψεις του προσκαίρου στη μεταβυζαντινή τους σύνθεση’ [=Commanding the rotating: Iconographic aspects of the temporal in their post-Byzantine composition], *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 22 (2001): pp.61–76.

⁶ Paschalis M. Kitromilides, *Enlightenment and Revolution. The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

scientific and social.⁷ They spread throughout the Greek speaking communities of the Ottoman Empire and often became leading figures of the church, or major political players in the government.⁸ Their work combines these new ideas with the traditions and values of Hellenism. Their pupils played just as a significant role, as they promoted these ideas to a wider audience, leading eventually to the revolution of 1821 and the creation of the independent modern Greek state.⁹

The area comprising Epirus, western Macedonia and the mountainous parts of Thessaly (hereafter the ‘commerce triangle’) had a long tradition comprised of crafts practices.¹⁰ With time, this area also turned into a major educational centre, since the wealth and the size of the local communities allowed them to establish and finance schools.¹¹ It also became the major emigration centre of the Ottoman Empire; these people moved as ‘aggressor merchants’ along the main Balkan roads towards the Central Europe, establishing or maintaining an extensive network.¹² They were

⁷ For an overview of the Greek sciences of the period see Dimitris Dialetis, Kostas Gavroglu and Manolis Patiniotis, ‘The Sciences in the Greek Speaking Regions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, *Archimedes* 2 (1999): pp.41–72.

⁸ Manolis Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία φυσικής φιλοσοφίας. Ο Ελληνικός επιστημονικός στοχασμός τον 17^ο και 18^ο αιώνα* [=Elements of Natural Philosophy. The Hellenic Scientific Thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] (Athens: Gutenberg, 2013), p.225.

⁹ The connection of Enlightenment with the birth of ethnic identities is widely supported in the Balkan historiography; see Victor Roudometof, ‘From Rum Millet to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453-1821’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1998): pp.11–48 and references therein.

¹⁰ Following the short name given by Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία*, p.199.

¹¹ Tryfon Evaggelidis, *Η παιδεία επί Τουρκοκρατίας* [=Education under the Turkish Rule] (Athens: A. P. Chalikopoulou, 1936); Konstantinos Hatzopoulos, *Ελληνικά σχολεία στην περίοδο της οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας (1453-1821)* [=Greek Schools during the Period of Ottoman Rule (1453-1821)] (Thessaloniki: Vaniias, 1991); Theodoros Nimas, *Η εκπαίδευση στη Θεσσαλία κατά την περίοδο της Τουρκοκρατίας. Σχολεία – Θεσσαλοί δάσκαλοι και λόγιοι. Συμβολή στην μελέτη του Θεσσαλικού Διαφωτισμού* [=Education in Thessaly during the period of Turkish Rule. Schools – Thessalian Teachers and Scholars. Contribution to the Study of the Thessalian Enlightenment] (Athens: K. & M. A. Stamouli, 1994).

¹² Traian Stoianovich, ‘The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant’, *The Journal of Economic History*, 20 (1960): pp.234–313; Olga Katsiardi-Hering, ‘Η Ελληνική διασπορά. Το εμπόριο ως γενικευμένη εθνική εξειδίκευση’ [=The Greek Diaspora. Trade as a General National Specialization], in B.

eager to exchange their financial success abroad with political power in their homeland, and *logioi* were a major part of their politics, as they returned to establish schools and libraries financed by their patrons.¹³

There are just five Greek astronomy books dating from the eighteenth century, compared to 32 books on mathematics and 21 books on natural philosophy; but almost all of these other books feature sections on astronomy.¹⁴ A general knowledge of the heavens was available in the libraries for advanced students. However, if we include the entire period of Ottoman rule, there are 273 astronomy texts, including 140 anonymous manuscripts; these, in turn, include translations, as well as original texts which were never published.¹⁵ The focus on mathematics is easy to explain, as the students in the schools were prepared for a career in the important commerce activities of the area – thus the 14 commerce handbooks that include mathematics as well as geography.¹⁶

The Greek population at the time was around 1.5 to 2 million. Each printed book secured subscriptions, with a usual order of two books per subscriber; 1000-1500 print runs were common.¹⁷ Readers of course were far more numerous, especially for books that were donated in schools or public libraries. More than half, 36, of the *logioi* who wrote books on

Panagiotopoulos, ed., *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού, 1770-2000* [=History of New Hellenism, 1770-2000] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2003): vol. I, pp.87–112.

¹³ Spyridon Loukatos, ‘Ο πολιτικός βίος των Ελλήνων της Βιέννης κατά την Τουρκοκρατίαν και τα αυτοκρατορικά προς αυτούς προνόμια’ [=The Political Life of the Greeks of Vienna during the Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Privileges Granted to them], *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος* 15 (1961): pp.287–350.

¹⁴ Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία*, p.238.

¹⁵ Yiannis Karas, *Οι επιστήμες στην Τουρκοκρατία. Χειρόγραφα και έντυπα* [=Sciences during the Ottoman Period. Manuscripts and Printed Materials], vol. II (Athens: Vivliopolion tis Estias, 1993).

¹⁶ A catalogue of 134 introductory science books published in Greek during the 18th century is available in Efthymios Nikolaidis, Dimitris Dialetis and Elias Athanasiadis, ‘Τυπολογία των βιβλίων των θετικών και φυσικών επιστημών του προεπαναστατικού αγώνα (1700-1821)’ [=Typology of Books on Mathematical and Natural Sciences during the Century before the Revolution (1700-1821)], *Τετράδια Εργασίας* 8 (1986): pp.7–38, at pp.24–29.

¹⁷ Christos Patrinelis, *Το ελληνικό βιβλίο κατά την τουρκοκρατία (1476-1820)* [=The Greek Book under the Turkish Rule (1476-1820)] (Thessaloniki: Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 1989), pp.42–3, 56–7.

physical sciences came from the ‘commerce triangle’.¹⁸ Their travels also reveal a pattern, as the most commonly documented destination is the ‘commerce triangle’ (109), followed by Italy (88) and German-speaking countries (85).¹⁹

Ioannina, a city famed in this period for its wealth, had been home to a school since the mid thirteenth century. Apart from the ‘Foiteteterion’ that fell in decline and closed in 1756, Ioannina had five other famous schools, active from 1648.²⁰ At least four *logioi* who had written on astronomy taught in these: Meletios Mitros (1661–1714), Evgenios Voulgaris (1716–1806), Ioannis Pezaros (1749–1806), Athanasios Psalidas (1767–1829). At the east edge (Fig. 2) of the region, Milies and Zagora, both in Thessaly, still hold on to their historical libraries with numerous editions and manuscripts from this era.²¹ These include, among others, the two-volume translation into Greek of Lalande’s astronomy by Daniel Philippidis (1750–1832). We know from the archives of the Zagora library, that the majority of these books were donated from the personal libraries of rich merchants that originated from Pelion and built their careers mainly in German-speaking countries.

Thus, a connection with the Greek Enlightenment is probable. The appearance of zodiacs in the seventeenth century and their demise after the Greek Revolution coincides with the Greek Enlightenment, while their appearance in Epirus and Thessaly coincides with a main area of activity of the science teachers.

¹⁸ Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία*, p.199.

¹⁹ Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία*, p.202.

²⁰ Ελένη Κουρμαντζή, *Η νεοελληνική Αναγέννηση στα Γιάννενα. Από τον πάροικο έμπορο στον Αθ. Ψαλίδα και τον Ιω. Βηλαρά (17^{ος} - αρχές 19^{ου} αι.)* [=The Modern Greek Renaissance in Ioannina. From the Émigré Merchant to Athanasion Psalidas and Ioannis Vilaras (seventeenth to early nineteenth century)], (Athens: Gutenberg, 2007), as well as references therein.

²¹ Alexandros Karaniaris, ‘Διαφωτισμός και εκπαίδευση την περίοδο της Επανάστασης του 1821. Τεκμήρια μέσα από τους θησαυρούς των Πηλιορείτικων ιστορικών βιβλιοθηκών Ζαγοράς και Μηλεών’ [=Enlightenment and Education during the Revolution of 1821. Documents from the Treasures of the Pelion Historical Libraries of Zagora and Milies], in M. G. Varvounis & A. G. Karaniaris (eds), *Ο Ρήγας και ο νεοελληνικός διαφωτισμός στη Θεσσαλία, Πρακτικά πανελλήνιου συνεδρίου, Βόλος 5-6/11/2021* [=Rigas and the Modern Greek Enlightenment in Thessaly, Proceedings of the Panhellenic Conference, Volos 5-6/11/2021] (Volos: Idiomelon, 2022): pp.309–52.

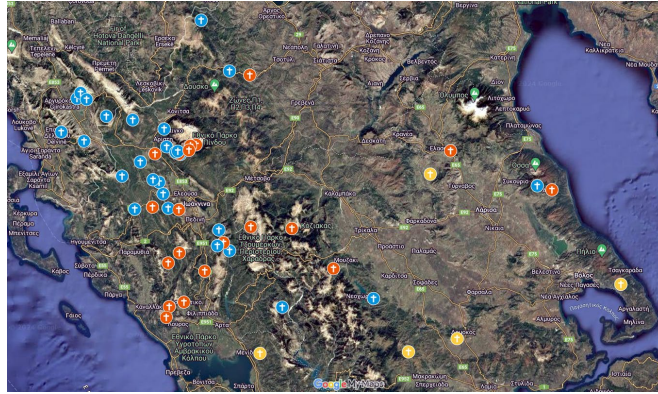


Fig. 2. The 52 churches with zodiacs in our study. Laudes of the first (blue, 28) and second (red, 19) period; Wheels of Life (orange, 5). Satellite image: © Terra Metrics, courtesy Google Maps.

Search for parallels

In the church of St Georgios in Zagora, a stone carving features two celestial spheres that are a direct copy from the 1716 astronomy book of Chrysanthos Notaras (1660–1731) titled *Γεωγραφικά και Σφαιρικά* [=Geographical and Sphericals]. He was the only *logios* who had (albeit an extremely short) experience at an astronomical observatory, under Cassini no less; he later became patriarch of Jerusalem.²² The book in the Zagora library is believed to be the personal copy of Kallinikos III (1713–1792), patriarch of Constantinople, who commissioned the decoration of the church in his hometown. The marble relief goes down to the minute details, including the signs of the zodiac along the ecliptic.²³

Similarly, we would very much like to find iconographical parallels of the church zodiacs in astronomy books or manuscripts of the era. However, our search was in vain. Only one book that goes beyond the necessary

²² Giannis Karas, *Οι «περιπέτειες» της Νεοελληνικής επιστήμης* [=The ‘Adventures’ of Modern Greek Science] (Athens: Enosi Ellinon Physikon, 2nd ed. 2022), p.124.

²³ Ioannis Varalis and Youla Koletsiou, ‘Μια παιγνιώδης παιδείωση στον Άγιο Γεώργιο Ζαγοράς και ο πατριάρχης Καλλίνικος’ [=A Playful Lesson in St Georgios in Zagora and Patriarch Kallinikos], in M.G. Varvounis & A.G. Kapaniaris (eds), *Ο Ρήγας και ο νεοελληνικός διαφωτισμός στη Θεσσαλία, Πρακτικά πανελληνίου συνεδρίου, Βόλος 5-6/11/2021* [=Rigas and the Modern Greek Enlightenment in Thessaly, Proceedings of the Panhellenic Conference, Volos 5-6/11/2021] (Volos: Idiomelon, 2022): pp.285–308.

CHURCH	LOCATION	DATE
St Demetrios	Veltsista	after 1558
Makralexí Monastery	Kato Lavdani	1599
<i>St Vissarion</i>	<i>Domeniko</i>	1600
Sosinou Monastery	Ano Parakalamos	1602
St Georgios	Kontsika	after 1604
Monastery of St John Baptist	Kato Meropi	1614
St Athanasius	Kleidonia	1612-13
St Georgios	Vageniti	1616
Prophet Elias	Georgoutsates	1617
St Nicholas	Vitsa	1618-19
St Menas	Monodendri	1619-20
Petras Monastery	Agrafa	1624
St George	Eptachori	1625
Monastery of Transfiguration	Tsiatista	1626
Monastery of Virgin Raidiotissa	Vrosina	1620
St Nicholas	Sarakinista	1630
Pateron Monastery	Zitsa	1631
St Panteleimon	Anatoli	1641
Dormition of Mary	Elafotopos	1645-46
Taxiarches	Zitsa	1649
Prophet Elias	Stegopoli	1653
Spilaiou Monastery	Sarakinista	1658-59
Dormition of Mary	Elliniko	1662
Dormition of Mary	Plaisia Malakasiou	1664
Monastery of St Zacharias	Grammos	1671
Kamenas Monastery	Delvino	1674
Prophet Elias	Vitsa	mid 17 th c.
Monastery of Virgin Botsiotissa	Megalochari	1690
Mouchtousiou Monastery	Plaka	1680
St Panteleimon	Agia	1724
<i>Monastery of Dormition of Mary</i>	<i>Rentina</i>	1 st half of 18 th c.
Vyliza Monastery	Matsouki	1737
<i>Aretha Monastery</i>	<i>Amphilochia</i>	1742
Monastery of Dormition of Mary	Vella	1745
Dormition of Mary	Skamneli	1748
St Paraskevi	Patero	1749
Dormition of Mary	Vargiades	1750

Monastery of Nativity of Mary	Sistrouni	1751
St Nicholas	Tsaritsani	1753
Monastery of Holy Trinity	Drakotrypa	1758
<i>Taxiarches</i>	<i>Milies</i>	1774
St Achillios	Pentalofos	1774
St Georgios	Kourenta	1775
St Nicholas	Tsepelovo	1786
Nativity of Mary	Thesprotiko	1797
Holy Trinity	Desi	1798
Nativity of Mary	Pente Pigadia	1813
New Monastery	Zaloggo	1816
<i>St Athanasios</i>	<i>Omvriaki</i>	1817
Monastery of St John Rogkovos	Tsepelovo	1844
Avassou Monastery	Kotsanopoulo	1853
Taxiarches	Vitsa	1885

Table 1. List of the paintings in the present study. ‘Laudes’ in upright letters and ‘Wheels of Life’ in *italics*.

astronomical diagrams survives in *Milies*: Andrea Cellarius’s *Harmonia Macrocosmica*, in its second (and not so impressively coloured) edition of 1708, and the way its zodiac signs are drawn do not reveal any impact on local tradition.

As most of the wall paintings in our study (47 *Laudes* and 5 *Wheels of Life*) are dated with accuracy (Table 1), we can draw a figure comparing the creation of the zodiacs with the periods of activity of the major schools in the area. This shows that the zodiacs appear in two waves (Fig. 2 and 3). The first, during the seventeenth century, is centered in north-west Epirus and comes before the establishment of the famous schools of Ioannina. The second one comes in the mid eighteenth century and spreads the motif in south Epirus and Thessaly.

Lynotopi is a now deserted village high up on the mountain of Grammos (close to today’s border between Greece and Albania) famous for its artisans, especially painters. Researchers have identified the painters of 71 churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as coming from Lynotopi and neighbouring villages.²⁴ Most of these churches are located in Epirus, West Macedonia and West Thessaly; however, these artists travelled and worked as far as Arbanasi (in Bulgaria) and Novo Hopovo

²⁴ Tsampouras, *Γρόμμος*, see Map 2 for a list.

(in Serbia). Moreover, Lynotopi was not the only village to feature an icon painters' guild.²⁵

²⁵ Details on the Lynotopi painters Michail and Konstantinos can be found in Maria Skavara, *To έργο των λιντοπιτών ζωγράφων Μιχαήλ και Κωνσταντίνου στη Νότιο Αλβανία* [=The Work of Linotopi painters Michael and Constantine in Southern Albania] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2003). For the painters from Kapesovo: Dimitris Konstantios, *Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων από το Καπέσοβο της Ηπείρου* [=An approach to the work of painters from Kapesovo in Epirus] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 1997). For the painters from Agia: Ioannis Tsiouris, 'Το εργαστήριο της Αγίας στο χώρο της Θεσσαλίας και της Μακεδονίας. Μνημεία, εικόνες και ζωγράφοι' [=The Workshop of Agia in the Area of Thessaly and Macedonia. Monuments, Icons and Painters], forthcoming. For paintings in Zagori with a lot of information on their dating: Ioannis Houliaras, *Η εντοίχια θρησκευτική ζωγραφική του 16^{ου} και 17^{ου} αιώνα στο δυτικό Ζαγόρι* [=The sixteenth and seventeenth century Religious Wall Paintings in West Zagori] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2006). For paintings in Zitsa: Argyro Karamperidi, *Η Μονή Πατέρων και η ζωγραφική του 17^{ου} αιώνα στην περιοχή της Ζίτσας Ιωαννίνων* [=The Pateron Monastery and seventeenth century Paintings in the Area of Zitsa, Ioannina] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2006). For churches around Gjirokastër: Ioannis Sarigiannidis, *Το μνημειακό απόθεμα στην Αλβανία σήμερα. Εκκλησιαστική αρχιτεκτονική – τέχνη στην ευρύτερη περιοχή του Αργυροκάστρου* [=The Monuments in Albania Today. Ecclesiastical Architecture and Art in the Wider Area of Gjirokastër] (PhD dissertation, University of Macedonia, 2016). For specific churches, see: Ioannis Tsiouris, 'Artistic Trends and Aesthetic Approaches in eighteenth century Monumental Painting. The Case Of Thessaly', *Art Studies Quarterly* 46 (2013/2): pp.18–25; Ioannis Tsiouris, *Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος της Μονής Αγίας Τριάδος Δρακότρυπας (1758) και η εντοίχια θρησκευτική ζωγραφική του 18^{ου} αιώνα στην περιοχή των Αγράφων* [=The Fresco Decorations of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity of Drakotrypa (1758) and the eighteenth century Religious Wall Paintings in the Agrafa Area] (Athens: Ellinika Grammara, 2007); Eleni-Styliani Trivyza, *Ο τοιχογραφικός διάκοσμος του ναού του Αγίου Γεωργίου (1611) και η μνημειακή ζωγραφική των αρχών του 17^{ου} αιώνα στο Δομένικο Ελασσόνας* [=The Murals in the Church of St George (1611) and the Monumental Painting of the Early seventeenth century in Domeniko, Ellassona] (PhD dissertation, University of Ioannina, 2020); Anastasia Tourta: *Οι ναοί του Αγίου Νικολάου στη Βίτσα και του Αγίου Μηνά στο Μονοδένρι. Προσέγγιση στο έργο των ζωγράφων από το Λιντόπι* [=The churches of Agios Nikolaos in Vitsa and Agios Minas in Monodenri. Approaching the work of the painters from Linotopi], (Athens: Tameio Archaiologikon Poron kai Apallotrioseon, 1991); Günter Paulus Schiemenz, 'The Paintings of the Last Psalms in the Church of Hagios Achilleios at Pentalopho and the Hermeneia', *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 49, 1–4 (2011): pp.73–84; Ilias Karalis

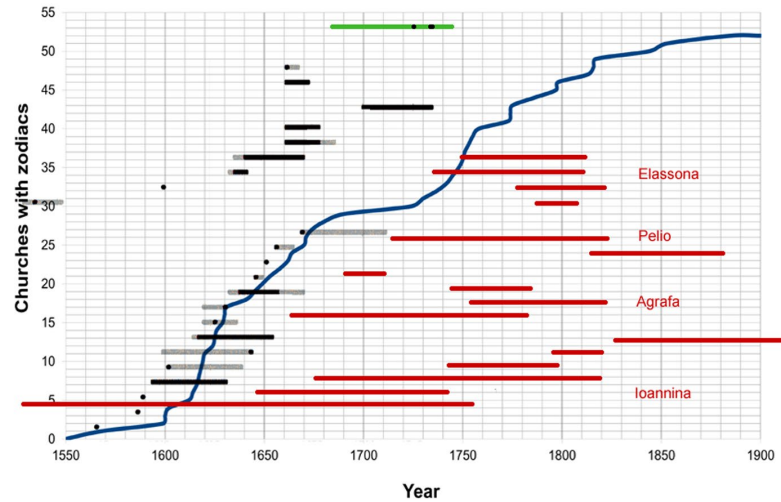


Fig. 3. The cumulative number of zodiacs in churches of Epirus and Thessaly (blue line). Compare with the operational period of famous schools in the area (red bars); the periods of activity of various Lynotopi painters (gray bars) including their dated work (black bars);²⁶ the lifetime of Dionysius (green bar) and his dated work in Fournia (dark green dots).

The Greek painters of the era travelled on similar routes as the *logioi*, occasionally working even outside the Ottoman Empire, and encountering baroque art in the Habsburg regions.²⁷ Laudes were a very popular motif in the ‘commerce triangle’ with almost as many (27) frescoes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in all of the rest Balkan peninsula (31).²⁸

and Grigorios Koutropoulos, ‘Το καθολικό της Νέας Μονής Ζαλόγγου, Αρχιτεκτονική και ζωγραφική’ [=The Catholicon of the New Monastery in Zaloggo: Architecture and Painting], *Πρεβεζάνικα Χρονικά* 53–54 (2017): pp.45–97.

²⁶ Theocharis Tsampouras, *Τα καλλιτεχνικά εργαστήρια από την περιοχή του Γράμμου κατά τον 16^ο και 17^ο αιώνα* [=The artistic workshops from mount Grammos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] (PhD dissertation, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 2013), Diagramme 1.

²⁷ Georgios Chr. Tsigaras, ‘Routes of art and the artistic unification of the Central European and Balkan territories in the Post-Byzantine period’, *Historiogeographica* 16–17 (2018): pp.191–218.

²⁸ Parcharidou, *Αίνοι*, p.232.

Thus, Lynotopi painters included Laudes (mostly with zodiacs) in their churches (Fig. 3).²⁹



Fig. 4. Left: Detail from Spilaiou Monastery (1634). Notice the swimming Aquarius, the back-to-back Gemini and the misspelled sign names. An image of the moon is at the bottom of the painting, under the feet of Christ. Right: Detail from the church of St Nicholas in Sarakinista (1630). Notice the seal-like Leo, the unicorn-like Capricorn and the Scorpio resembling a lobster. The zodiac signs are accompanied by the name of the corresponding months, yet they are not in the correct order. Photos: © Ioannis Houliaras.

These zodiacs are painted at a rate of one a year in the early seventeenth century and generally do not follow the correct order of the zodiac signs. In a single village, there may be zodiacs with correct or incorrect order, and it is not necessarily the later one that is correct (e.g., the three Laudes in Vitsa). The most common series is: Sun on top, then, in clockwise order Libra, Cancer, Sagittarius, Aries, Taurus, Pisces; the Moon at the bottom, then clockwise Gemini, Aquarius, Leo, Capricorn, Scorpio, Virgo. In the monastery in Vella we have the same series, but anticlockwise.³⁰ Note that in this arrangement the Sun is placed in the position of the autumn equinox, and that September 1 marks the start of the ecclesiastical year (Ἀρχή της Ἰνδίκτου). Most of the zodiacs of the first period have common stylistic traits (Fig. 4, left), even down to some spelling peculiarities (e.g., use of *H/η* instead of *Y/v*, as in ΔΙΑΗΜΟC, ΖΗΓΟC, ΗΔΡΟΧΟΟC). Some frescoes have the names of the months, occasionally with similar spelling, like ΜΑΗΟC, ΗΟΥΝΙΟC (*Maios/May*, *Iounios/June*) written right next to the

²⁹ The motifs that are combined for the Laudes iconography first appeared in earlier Byzantine manuscripts; see Parcharidou, *Aívoi*, 28–42; Merantzas, *Aívoi*, pp.11–15, 23–34 and references therein.

³⁰ For a comparison of the irregular order of the zodiacal signs in other churches in Greece and the Balkans, see Schiemenz, *Laudes*, p.196.

zodiac sign (Fig. 4, right) and there is no doubt that everyone knew the correct order of the months!



Fig. 5. Left: The zodiac in the monastery of Holy Trinity in Drakotrypa (1758) features the signs in correct order and anticlockwise. It has greater similarities with the zodiacs found in Mount Athos than with other churches in our study. Photo: © Ioannis Tsiouris. Right: The zodiac in St Panteleimon in Anatoli (1641) is also quite distinct from the style of Lynotopi artists. The zodiac order is irregular. Photo: © Zaharias Pitsoulis.

In cases where the proper sequence of the zodiac signs is followed, their succession is most often counterclockwise (Fig. 5, left). This bears an important astronomical distinction. A counterclockwise zodiac is the way we (or God) might see the sky from the outside of the celestial sphere, and it is the way it is pictured on a celestial globe. With the arrival of stellar maps the view was changed to the view of the heavens as we see them from earth, which leads to a clockwise zodiac.³¹ In the first wave of the zodiacs, there are nine counterclockwise zodiacs and only one clockwise; this ratio changes in later churches.

A particular characteristic of most of the zodiac symbols is the fish-shaped (or rather seal-like) rear ends of their bodies (Fig. 4, right). This gives the signs an aquatic element, as if they are floating in the watery celestial environment existing above the sky.³² This design trend persists even to the latest church in our study, Taxiarches in Vitsa (1885). The zodiac signs are accompanied by the images of the Sun and the Moon,

³¹ Nick Kanas, *Star Maps. History, Artistry and Cartography* (Cham: Springer/Praxis, 3rd edn, 2019), p.13 and pp.252–58.

³² Parcharidou, *Aívoi*, p.114, p.118; Merantzias, *Aívoi*, p.54; Henry Maguire, *Earth and Ocean. The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p.21.

representing the unchanging annual and daily celestial circles (Fig. 5, right). The Sun is usually depicted in yellow and the Moon in grey; both have human features. In St John the Baptist in Kato Meropi, both the Sun and the Moon are placed above the Christ, to the inside of the zodiac circle.

Dionysius (1670–1746), a talented icon painter, was born in Fourná, a mountainous village of Evrytania.³³ Only three signed works by him survive in his homeland; he lived most of his life on Mount Athos, where the zodiac is also present in Laudes. Dionysius wrote (often compiling from older manuscripts) the famous ‘Ερμηνεία Ζωγραφικής Τέχνης’, a manual on how to draw every saint and icon in accordance with the orthodox church tradition. In his book, just over two pages are devoted to the Wheel of Life; compare this with less than half a page for Resurrection. The book was written around 1730. A couple of years later he established a monastery in his village, which included a school of painting where he taught. This school rose to a higher status in the 1750s under Sergius Makraios (infamous for his 1797 book against the Copernican system) and *logioi* from Thessaly studied or taught there.

It is a good bet that his influence turned other artists in the late eighteenth century to paint zodiacs in churches. However, his book did not achieve important status until well into the nineteenth century. Although the manuscript had circulated, its first complete print run was almost two centuries later, from a manuscript kept in St Petersburg.³⁴ This delay was also the norm with science books. Most of them were printed between 1770 and 1820, even if they were used in teaching for much longer from manuscripts.³⁵ In addition, Wheels of Life in Thessaly predate Dionysius, such as at St Vissarion in Domeniko (1600). This features the Sun at the

³³ Maria Vasilaki, ‘Ακολουθώντας τα βήματα του Διονυσίου του εκ Φουρνά’ [=Following the Footsteps of Dionysius of Fourná] *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 33 (2014): pp.379–86.

³⁴ Athanasios Papadopoulos-Kérameus, ed., *Διονυσίου του εκ Φουρνά: Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης* [=Dionysius of Fourná: Interpretation of the Art of Painting]. (St Petersburg: B. Kirschbaum, 1909). There is an earlier partial edition (Athens, 1853). Curiously, it was already translated and published in French by Adolphe-Napoleon Didron (1845) and in Russian by Porphyrius Uspensky (1868). For an English translation see Paul Hetherington, *The ‘Painter’s Manual’ of Dionysius of Fourná: an English translation with commentary of cod. GR. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Leningrad* (London: Sagittarius Press, 1974).

³⁵ Patiniotis, *Στοιχεία*, p.252.

centre,³⁶ and the four temperaments of Aristotle rather than the four seasons.

Astronomical knowledge may have spread, but the correct order of the zodiac signs was still a minority in the Laudes of our study area. In the second wave of Laudes, there are five anticlockwise zodiacs and four clockwise. However, the zodiacs in the Wheel of Life are always in the correct order; three of them clockwise and two anticlockwise.



Fig. 6. Aries and Taurus from the Laudes (1694) in Plakas Monastery (left) in comparison with the zodiac signs in the Monastery at Lesnovo (right). Photos: © Ioannis Houliaras (left); © Wikimedia Commons (right).

In the mid twentieth century, Fotios Kontoglou wrote his own book on how to draw the icons, often borrowing from Dionysius manual mentioned above. The Wheel of Life is missing altogether. Laudes are present in the general description on which icons are proper for the narthex³⁷ with no details, but templates are given for drawing the sun, the moon and the zodiac signs, listing their order within the Gregorian year.³⁸

³⁶ Compare with the Wheel of Life in Arbanasi (dated 1649); Lyuben Praškov: Църквата "Рождество Христово" в Арбанаси [=The Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanasi], (Sofja: Bălgarski hudožnik, 1979), p.123; Patrick Lecaque: 'The Wheel of Life at the Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanassi Revisited', *Annual of the Faculty of History of 'St Cyril and St Methodius' University of Veliko Tarnovo* 5, no. 1: pp.546–56.

³⁷ Fotios Kontoglou, *Εκφρασις τῆς ὀρθοδόξου εἰκονογραφίας* [=Expression of Orthodox Iconography] (Athens: Astir, 1960), pp.359–60.

³⁸ Kontoglou, *Εκφρασις*, p.365 and p.410.



Fig. 7. Detail from the St Paraskevi (1749) in Patero (left). The zodiac is in incorrect order and there are spelling mistakes. Notice the Libra looking like Gemini connected at the neck and the jellyfish-like Virgo; also the light figures on a dark background. Compare with St Athanasios (1616) in Kleidonia (right), where the Libra is practically a copy from the monastery of Lesnovo. In both cases, the Sun is between Libra and Virgo, at the time of autumn equinox. However, in first case, Scorpio is to the right of Virgo, while in the second case, Scorpio is to the right of Libra. Photos: © Ioannis Houliaras.

Our painters possibly encountered the zodiac in medieval contexts via their journeys. For example, they may have come across the Laudes in the Lesnovo Monastery³⁹ (Fig. 6), dated mid fourteenth century.⁴⁰ These feature the zodiac signs on each side of the central composition, spring and summer signs on the left, autumn and winter on the right. This is the only zodiac in an Eastern Orthodox church listed in the Index of Medieval Christian Art.⁴¹ However, the only Laudes in Greece with a similar layout to Lesnovo is found in the church of the Great Virgin in Samos and dates from the late sixteenth century.⁴² Interestingly, the monastery at Lesnovo

³⁹ Ivana Lemcool, 'Astronomical Imagery in the Painting of the Lesnovo Narthex: Iconographic Innovations in Serbian Medieval Art', in Vladislav Puzović and Vladan Tatalović, eds, *Eight centuries of Autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church (1219-2019): Historical, Theological and Cultural Heritage* (Belgrade: Publishing Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 2020): vol. II, pp.477–93.

⁴⁰ Smiljka Gabelic, 'Нови податак о севастократорској тигули Јована Оливера и време сликања лесновског наоса' [= New Data on the 'Sevastokrator' Title of Jovan Oliver and the Time of the Painting of the Lesnovo Church], *Zograf* 11 (1980), pp.54–62.

⁴¹ Colum Hourihane, ed, *Time in the Medieval World. Occupations of the Months and Signs of the Zodiac in the Index of Christian Art.* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2007).

⁴² Nikolaos Passas, *Αἱ τοιχογραφίαι τοῦ καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Μεγάλης Παναγίας τῆς Σάμου* [= The Murals of the Church in the Monastery of Great Virgin of

is a subsidiary (μετόχιον) of Hilandariou monastery of Athos, and in Mount Athos there are also murals with zodiacs. The iconography of Libra in the form of two heads connected by the neck (Fig. 7), survives in the Great Virgin of Samos, in St John the Baptist in Kato Meropi and in St Athanasios in Kleidonia.

Conclusion

There does not seem to be a direct connection between the Greek Enlightenment and the appearance of zodiacs in churches in Epirus and Thessaly. Rather, the sudden popularity of this motif in ecclesiastical contexts stems from the originality of a small group of artists. This may well have been brought to their attention via their journeys, where they would have encountered the zodiac motif in medieval contexts.

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Samos], (PhD dissertation, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 1982), pp.136–52, Plates XXIII–XXVI. To our knowledge, this is the only zodiac in a church of the Aegean islands, except Euboea.

