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THE BETRAYAL: MILITARY ICONOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE BYZANTINE PAINTINGS OF THE 11TH–15TH C. AD REPRESENTING THE ARREST OF OUR LORD

The aim of this small contribution is to present the reality of Eastern-Roman arms, weapons and military costumes hidden behind the Gospel iconography of the Arrest of Jesus Christ in the Gethsemane Garden in the art of Byzantium, which it is also useful to understand the evolution of the East-Roman military gear through the centuries.

The iconography of the Betrayal is of ancient origin and we have examples of it already in the Early Christian art. Since the beginning the soldiers arresting Jesus Christ in the *Gethsemane* have been represented as warriors of the Roman Empire, whose military accoutrement was generally represented as contemporary with the period when the artists who depicted the event lived. This artistic fashion survived until the end of the East Roman Empire, and the related iconography allows us to discover a

great carrousel of military figures showing the evolution of the Roman army and local *militiae* through the entire Middle Ages. The same iconography in other Western and Eastern medieval states allows us to understand the same military evolution for other countries outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire of Byzantium, so that the representation of the Gethsemane arrest in medieval art is one of the richest sources for the depiction of medieval military equipment.

For reason of space I have concentrated in this paper on artistic iconographies of the event only within the boundaries of the Byzantium's commonwealth, ranging between the 11th and the 15th c. AD. I have also tried to compare some archaeological finds with those represented in the iconographic sources.

THE SOURCES

The four Synoptic Gospels, mentioning the arrest of Our Lord in the Garden of *Gethsemane*, describe the use of several weapons and qualify the ranks of the men arresting Jesus. Judas was in fact accompanied by a multitude (οχλος formed by chief priests and scribes, as well as other men carrying weapons:

- *Judas then, having taken a detachment of soldiers (σπεῖρα), and officers (ὑπηρέται) from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches and weapons (John, 18,3)*
- *Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came -- and with him a multitude with swords and clubs (μετὰ μαχαίρων καὶ*

ξύλων), from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (Mark, 14,43; Matthew, 26,47)

- *Jesus said to the chief priests (ἀρχιερεῖς), soldiers (στρατηγοὺς) of the temple, and elders, who had come against him, "Have you come out as against a robber; with swords (μαχαίρων) and clubs (ξύλων)? (Luke, 22,52; Mark, 14,48; Matthew, 26,55)*
- *"...So the detachment (σπεῖρα), the commanding officer (χιλίαρχος), and the officers (ὑπηρέται) of the Jews, seized Jesus and bound him ..." (John, 18,12)*

So, substantially, the text of the Gospels tells us that:



Fig. 1. The Betrayal, *Nea Moni*, Chios, mosaic of the inner Narthex, 1043 AD, ex Mouriki



Fig. 2. The Betrayal, *Nea Moni*, Chios, detail of Malchus, 1043 AD, author's collection

- The troops arresting Jesus Christ were probably not Romans, but soldiers of the Roman army, auxiliaries forming the Guards of the High Priest and of the Chiefs of the Temple;¹
- They were organised according to a Hellenic schema with a superior commander (*chiliarchos*), officers (*Uperetai*) and common soldiers (*stratiotai*); this confirms their military pertinence. The word *σπεῖρα* can be also translated as “band of men” or “band of soldiers.”² There is no express mention however of Roman soldiers, although among the mob we cannot exclude the presence of Auxiliaries, considering that the *Auxilia* in Judea were mainly of Jewish birth.³
- They were joined by non-soldiers, i.e. men not having a clear military role;⁴ however we should remember that in Roman times the custody of the Temple – the base of the operations during the

night of the Betrayal – was in the hands of the High Priest assisted by other priests officiating *in rota*, i.e. the *ἀρχιερεῖς* and *στρατηγοί* of the temple.⁵

- All of them were armed with swords and clubs;
- They also carried lanterns and torches (*μετὰ φανῶν καὶ λαμπάδων*).

This Biblical episode was illustrated in the Christian art of the Roman Empire since the 4th c. AD, as attested by the Brescia ivory casket (*lipsanoteca*) of c. 360–370 AD.⁶ It became a topic of the Christian Church iconography and art, increasing especially from the 11th c. AD.⁷ The artists who represented it followed the descriptions and the details of the Gospels, but of course adapted their paintings to the

¹ See Franchi de Cavalieri 1928, pp. 205ff. n. 7.

² Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 570; this word is used also by Matthew (27,27) and Mark (15,16) referring to the soldiers after the delivery of Jesus to Pilate.

³ Stobart 1925, p. 207.

⁴ According to Lagrange 1912, p. 367, they were not the Guards of the Temple, but a mob gathered for the occasion.

⁵ Cross 1957, s. v. Temple.

⁶ See Various 1990, pp. 344ff. cat. 5b.11.

⁷ For artistic samples from the 4th to 10th c. see Schug-Wille 1970, p. 48 (Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, 359 AD); Colomba 1998, pp. 77, 80 (mosaic of Saint Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, end of the 5th c.); Romanelli, Nordhagen 1999, p. 35 (fragments of frescoes from Santa Maria Antiqua, early 8th c.); Thierry 2002, pp. 121 fig. 33, 159, fig. 63, 267 (Saint John the Baptist of Çavuşin, 6th–7th c.); Kokar Kilise, second half of 9th c., Kiliçlar Kilise, Goreme, n. 29, chapel XIII, 10th c.).

material culture of their contemporary world. The degree of militarisation of the men arresting Our Lord varied in the paintings, according to places and times.

This aspect is extremely important under the point of view of study of military history. It allows firstly to study the evolution of the military costume of the Roman army of Byzantium during the centuries of

its history. It allows to help identify the date of weaponry and objects found in archaeological contexts, and to identify Regiments, Ethne, Armies, pieces of military costumes described in the sources. Last but not least, it confirms the reality and the reliability of the East-Roman art in the representations of soldiers and military equipment.

THE ANALYSIS

To prove it, I will analyse some examples of such iconography, from the first half of the 11th c. to the first half of the 15th c. The chosen range of time is due to the circumstance that examples of such iconography are more numerous and abundant especially in these centuries: not because they were absent in the previous centuries, but because the iconoclast movement and the antiquity of the monuments did not help preserve a lot of paintings in the earlier Churches or other artistic works.

The 11th c: Imperial Guardsmen in the Nea Moni monastery, c. 1043 AD, and parallels

The scene of the Betrayal in the famous Imperial Monastery of the Virgin of Nea Moni in Chios is represented in the inner narthex.⁸ It shows Roman warriors dressed in a very elaborated way, of blonde complexion and very strong physical constitution (Fig. 1). They are armed with staff weapons, in detail with double and single-edged axes, curved blades and maces. One of them wears a very precious shield, decorated with pearls, and the axe is worn on the right shoulder. Some of the shafts of their weapons are brightly painted in different colours.

The men are not represented as clad in armour, but this does not exclude their military character. The luxury of their equipment suggests to me that the unknown artist seems to have used Imperial Guardsmen as models for the Roman soldiers arresting Christ. Their weaponry is partially respecting the Biblical text, because they also have staves and lamps, but their armament is heavy and more typical of professional soldiers, as well as their uniforms are.

Did indeed the unknown mosaic-maker use Imperial Guardsmen as models for the *speira* described by the Evangelists? The Nea Moni Monastery was an Imperial foundation, and the date of the mosaic coincides with the rule of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055).⁹ The famous Varangian Guard of

the Emperors of Byzantium, loyal to the Macedonian Dynasty, was formed by *Rus* and Scandinavians, often with blonde hair and long beards¹⁰ exactly as the warriors on the mosaic. They were dressed at the court in the elaborate *Skaramangia* (long robes) of the Imperial Guards, mentioned in the Book of Ceremony (*De Cer.* II, 578) or the *Allaximata* (uniforms)¹¹ of their own unit (*De Cer.* I, 225), with decorated *Pektoraris*. The warriors of the mosaic are indeed all dressed in *skaramangia* of different colours (blue, yellow, orange, violet, green) lavishly ornamented by an overdressed *Pektoraris*. These were silk or embroidered squared decorations applied over the main dress.¹² Shaped like small mantles, they were coming down from the neck, behind which they were fastened, descending over the breast and sometimes over the entire body.¹³ One of the few representations of this guardsman's dress is exactly that of the Nea Moni mosaic (Fig. 2) where, on the person Biblically identified as "Malchus"¹⁴ – the servant of the High Priest whose ear was cut off by Saint Peter – the artist detailed even the black laces coming down from the neck and fastening the garment behind it. So there is no doubt that the men represented on the mosaic were mirrored from real Imperial Guardsmen, whose core in that period was formed by the Varangian Guard. The historian Psellos (VI, 87; VII, 24) describes the Varangians as bearing axes or *pelekys* on the right shoulder (VI, 3). The great Danish axe was the main weapon of the Varangians,¹⁵ together with other smaller kinds of such weapons. Another important weapon of the Imperial Guardsmen was the *Rhom-*

¹⁰ D'Amato 2010, pp. 22, 43–44, 46.

¹¹ Among the *αλλαξίμα* there were the *σκαραμανγία*, the *στεμματα*, the *λωροί*, the precious *χλαμύδα* and the *διβητισαί*; see Kukulès, 1953, II, 2, 21.

¹² *De Cer.*, I, 391.

¹³ Reiske 1830, I, p. 378; Du Cange, 1688, s.v. *Pectoralis*, *Pectorale*, col. 237c, 238a.

¹⁴ Mouriki 1985, p. 87.

¹⁵ D'Amato 2010, pp. 35–36.

⁸ Mouriki 1985, pp. 86–87, 184–186, Pls. 102, 106, 107, 268, 272–273.

⁹ Mouriki 1985, pp. 21ff.



Fig. 3. Imperial Guardsman, detail from the frescoes of the tower of Saint Sofia, Kiev, first half of the 11th c., author's photo, courtesy of Saint Sofia Museum, Kiev

phaia, a two-handed curved sword, shaped like a medium long pole-arm with a long, narrow blade hooked at the point, or a long pole-arm with a scythed

spear-like blade, of about the same length as its hilt.¹⁶ Both these weapons are well illustrated in the mosaic. The weapon of Malchus, moreover, presents a shaft painted with one row of brown, one row of gold and one row of green colour (Fig. 2). The habit to paint the shafts of the imperial Guardsmen's spears and pole-weapons in three different bands of colours is well attested since the 6th c. in the famous mosaic of Justinian and his retinue kept in the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna.¹⁷ Also this detail of the Nea Moni mosaic may have been therefore copied from the reality, attesting a military attire still in vogue after centuries.

The Malchus' shield is a precious round *aspis* decorated on its surface with what seems to be precious stones and pearls. Shields decorated with pearls are attested by the sources and other iconography

¹⁶ D'Amato 2010, pp. 37–39.

¹⁷ Grabar 1966, pp. 159–160, fig. 171; Southern, Dixon 1996, p. 102 fig. 22; the decorated shafts of the Guardsmen are for half of their diameter gilded for their full length, the other side appears to be alternate 2 inch sections in blue and green, separated by narrow half bands of silver, see also Barker 1981, p. 82 fig. 58.



Fig. 4. The Betrayal, Balleq Kilise, Cappadocia, detail, second half of the 11th c., ex Jerphanion



Fig. 5. The Betrayal, Balleq Kilise, Cappadocia, detail, second half of the 11th c., ex Jerphanion

of the period as used by the Imperial Guard. In the Oratory of Saint Theodore, in the *Khrisotriklinios*, were preserved the Imperial shields that were exhibited, together with the Imperial spears, by the accompanying Guardsmen. One of the shields was a gold *Skouton* enamelled with pearls, the other was a shield similarly decorated with gems and precious stones (*De Cer.* 640, 12ff.):

*σκουτον χρυσουν χειμευτον ημφιεσμενον απο μαργα-ρων. ετερον σκουτον χρυσουν χειμευτον ημφιεσμε-νον απο λιθων και μαργαρων (golden shield decorated with pearls. A second golden shield decorated by precious stones and pearls)*¹⁸.

Similarly the Imperial Guardsmen fighting and hunting animals in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, represented in the 11th c. frescoes of Saint Sophia of Kiev wear shields identical to that of Malchus (Fig. 3).

It is therefore highly probable that the men in the Nea Moni mosaic representing the Betrayal were copied from real Guardsmen and that these Guardsmen were the Varangians. There is one more point to confirm such a theory.

¹⁸ Kolias 1988, p. 26 and n. 200 remembers the high difference between the shields of the Imperial guardsmen and those of common soldiers. See also Theoph. Cont., 407, 7ff., 12, on the gold and silver shields of the Guardsmen of Simeon (*χρυσασπιδων-αργυρασπιδων*);



Fig. 6. The Betrayal, Panaghia Myriocephala, Crete, detail, late 11th c., author's photo

The civil police duties in *Vyzantion* was a task performed also by the Guard. They were particularly



Fig. 7. The Betrayal, Panaghia Myriocephala, Crete, detail, late 11th c., author's photo

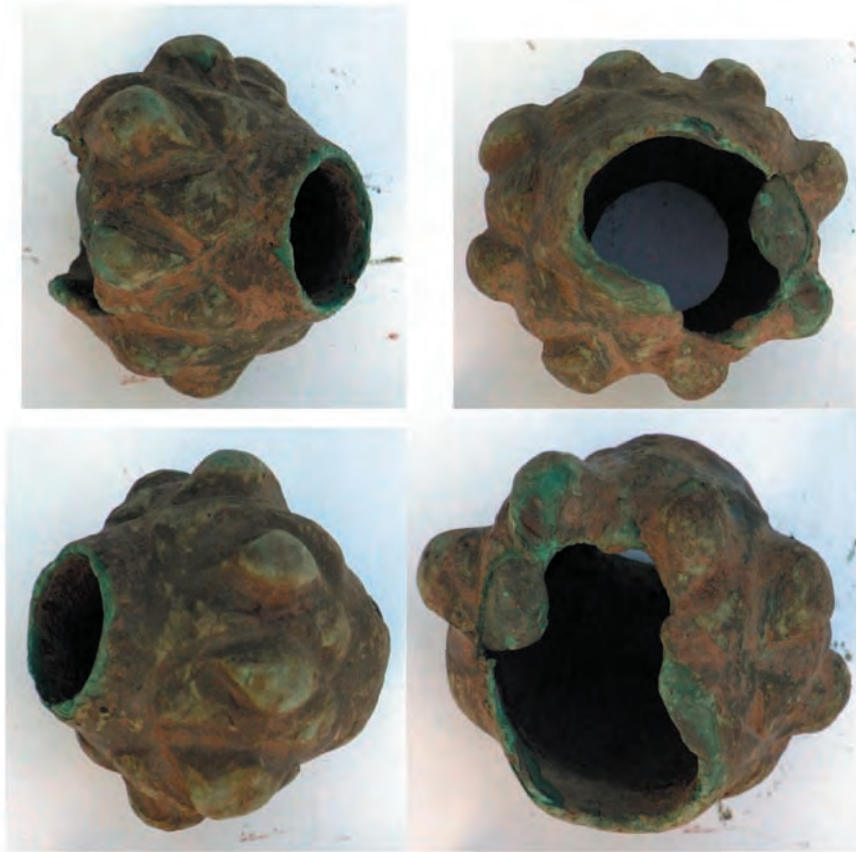


Fig. 8. War-mace, late 11th c., from the Drastar battlefield, author's photo, courtesy of Prof. Valeri Yotov, Varna Museum depot

disliked as alien “enforcers” of the imperial policies or commands. Their ultimate loyalty to the Emperor also made them especially useful in performing risky and delicate tasks such as arresting or imprisoning people of high religious or aristocratic rank, who could instead work on sympathies existing in native troops.¹⁹ For this reason they were also deputed to the surveillance of some people in jail, especially in the *Nóumera*, the prison attached to the Great Palace, having received for this reason a terrible reputation.²⁰ There is a interesting link between the iconography and the written sources about this point, as noted by Peter Beatson.²¹ The Varangians are often illustrated in paintings or mosaics representing the Betrayal. Why would Varangians make good models for this rather disreputable detachment? The role of Varangian guardsmen (outside of the theatre of war) became that of enforcers and prison guards. So, Michael Glykas wrote this poem (from personal experience) in the 12th c:

*Hades I call the Numera, and even worse than Hades,
For in its horror it surpasses even Hades.
In this murky and most deep dungeon
There is no light to the eyes, nor any conversation,
For the constant smoke, and the thickness of the darkness
Suffer us not to see or recognise each other.
But bonds and tortures, and guards and towers
And the shouting Varangoi; and terror keeps you awake...*

This element can supply a interesting linking between the iconography and the written sources, and help us identify the physical aspect and the military gear of the Varangians. Again, in the representation of the Betrayal in the Balleq Kilissé, in Kappadokia (the second half of the 11th c.), we have other “Varangians” at Gethsemane: imperial guardsmen dressed in rich *Skaramangia* and holding the fearsome Danish axes in their hands or leaned on their shoulders (Figs. 4–5). Again soldiers with maces and axes mounted on long shafts are shown in the parallel scene in the Church of Panaghia Myriokephala, in Crete, dated to the end of the 11th c. AD (Fig. 6).²² Here spiked and smooth maces are both represented besides war-axes and

¹⁹ D’Amato 2010, pp. 7, 21.

²⁰ D’Amato 2010, pp. 20–21.

²¹ Beatson 2000–2001, pp. 19–20.

²² Spatharakis 1998, pp. 40–41; Psilakis 1998, pp. 187ff.



Fig. 9. The Betrayal, Balleq Kilise, Cappadocia, detail, second half of the 11th c., ex Jerphanion

pole weapons, worn by the soldiers wearing also the torches mentioned in the Gospels (Fig. 7). In both Churches the soldiers arresting Jesus Christ could be interpreted as Varangians, or at least Varangians are represented amidst the mob.²³

Archaeological parallels to Varangian weaponry of the 11th c. support this theory. A mace found on the battlefield of Drastar (Fig. 8) in a part of the Roman camp where various Varangian equipment was found,²⁴ shows a striking similarity to some of the maces of the Cretan fresco. It could be exactly a specimen of maces mounted upon a shaft and used by elite infantrymen, such as the Varangians, against the cavalry. A very elaborated axe-head from Stana, the Novi Pazar Region, dated to the early 11th c.,²⁵ richly



Fig. 10. Elaborated axe-head from Stana, Novi Pazar Region, early 11th c., richly ornamented with silvering and black niello, Shoumen Museum of History, author's photo

²³ D'Amato 2010, pp. 8, 15.

²⁴ D'Amato 2010, p. 45.

²⁵ D'Amato 2010, p. 7; Yotov 2003, p. 25; Yotov 2004, cat. 587, Pl. LI, pp. 89, 98–99 fig. 54.

ornamented with silvering and black niello, shows a striking similarity to the axe of one warrior painted in the Balleq Kilissé fresco (Figs. 9–10). Again, the



Fig. 11. Axe-head from the Drastar battlefield, 1087 AD, Bulgaria, courtesy photo of Prof. Valeri Yotov and Boyan Totev



Fig. 12. The Betrayal, Panaghia Myriocephala, Crete, detail, late 11th c., author's photo

Cretan fresco shows a man dressed in red uniform²⁶ brandishing an axe identical to one specimen found on the Drastar battlefield (Figs. 11–12).²⁷

From these first data we can conclude that: the depictions of the soldiers in the Gethsemane scene varied according to the places, and that, in respect of the Biblical canons, the appearance of the armed

mob arresting Jesus Christ was derived from contemporary models, even represented with their own weapons and accoutrement, in such a detailed way that we are able to recognise men belonging to famous historic regiments of the Eastern Roman Empire. However, the represented warriors were not generally represented as clad in armour.

THE 11TH C.: THE CAPPADOCIAN FRESCOES

The Betrayal's episode is a very important topic in the Cappadocian churches: for the purpose of our analysis we will take into consideration the frescoes of the Qaranlek Kilissé Church (Fig. 13), of the Email Kilissé Church (Fig. 14) and of the Tcharekle Kilissé (Fig. 15). The compositions of the three frescoes are very similar: the young men arresting Christ are soldiers led by a senior man, not armed, characterised by long white hair and a long beard (maybe representing the elder of the ἀρχιερεὺς of the Gospel), and a second junior officer (the *chiliarchos*), armed with a military

knife ((μαχαίρον, εγχειρίδιον, παραξίφιδιον).²⁸ The σπειρα are armed only with spears (Fig. 13) or with spears and war-axes (Figs. 14–15). Malchus and Saint Peter are represented on the left side of the scene, both armed with knives in the Qaranlek Kilissé and Malchus – always dressed like a soldier – holding a spear in the other two frescoes. We can see that the Cappadocian frescoes of the Betrayal usually follow the Gospel's descriptions, with the representations of the Officer (*chiliarchos*), of soldiers and of the priest's chiefs. But the men painted here are most probably the reflex of the local Roman infantry troops (Thema of *Kappadokia, Anatolikon*) and local notables or members of the provincial aristocracy. The mob is in

²⁶ About the use of (also) red uniforms by Varangians see D'Amato 2010, pp. 39,40,44; also D'Amato 2005, p. 36; Blöndal, Benedikt, 1978, pp. 206–207.

²⁷ D'Amato 2010, p. 16; reconstruction in Pl. C3.

²⁸ Kolias 1988, p. 139; Nicetae 574,42; 589,47–50.



Fig. 13. The Betrayal, Qaranlek Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo



Fig. 14. The Betrayal, Email Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo



Fig. 15. The Betrayal, Tcharekle Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo

fact armed with various infantry weapons, not only with clubs and swords as in the Gospel's description. Spears (δορατα),²⁹ axes and maces (τζικουρια and

σαλιβα)³⁰ mounted on pole-shafts are visible (Figs. 16–17). The date of the frescoes of the three Göreme Churches has been now fixed at the second half of the 11th c.³¹ This was the period of the last splendours

²⁹ Kolias 1988, p. 192; *Sylloge Tacticorum*., 38,3.

³⁰ Ὅτι μαρτζοβάρβουλον ἐλέγετο νὺν σαλιβα (*L'Extrait Tactique...1942 – Excerptum Tacticum – Z98, 88*) i.e. *the actual saliva was once called martiobarbulum*; originally the *martiobarbulum* was a Late Roman throwing weapon, a kind of javelin fitted with lead weight at the top, under the point (see Vegetius 2004, I, 17). In the military language of Byzantium it was translated as μαρτζοβάρβουλον (*Strategikon...* 1981, XII, B,2) and probably still used in the Roman army until the 8th–9th c. AD, when it was substituted on the battlefield by the throwing axe or mace. Leo, although in his *Problemata* (*Leonis VI, XII, 4*) follows Pseudo-Maurikios, in his *Tactica* substitutes this word as τζικούρια δίστομα, i.e. battle-axes. However, although it is impossible to deny that in the 10th c. the axe and the throwing mace substituted the weight-leded javelin, we cannot exclude that the *saliva* were a last development of the late Roman *martiobarbuli*, similar to the τρίβολοι according to Pseudo-Codinus, in the 14th c. AD. The word *saliva* would have been used instead of σειρομάστης, which, according to my previous analysis of the sources, may have been originally a sort of javelin similar to the *akontion*, but already in the 11th–12th c. it was the fighting mace fitted with chains and iron pendants, i.e., the flail (Kolias 1988, p. 177; D'Amato 2005, p. 24–25 and particularly n. 125). For an example of it mounted on a pole and used by Veneto-Byzantine infantrymen see the scene of the Betrayal in San Marco at Venezia (Babuín 2009, fig. 1070 – 13th c.).

³¹ Thierry 2002, p. 275.

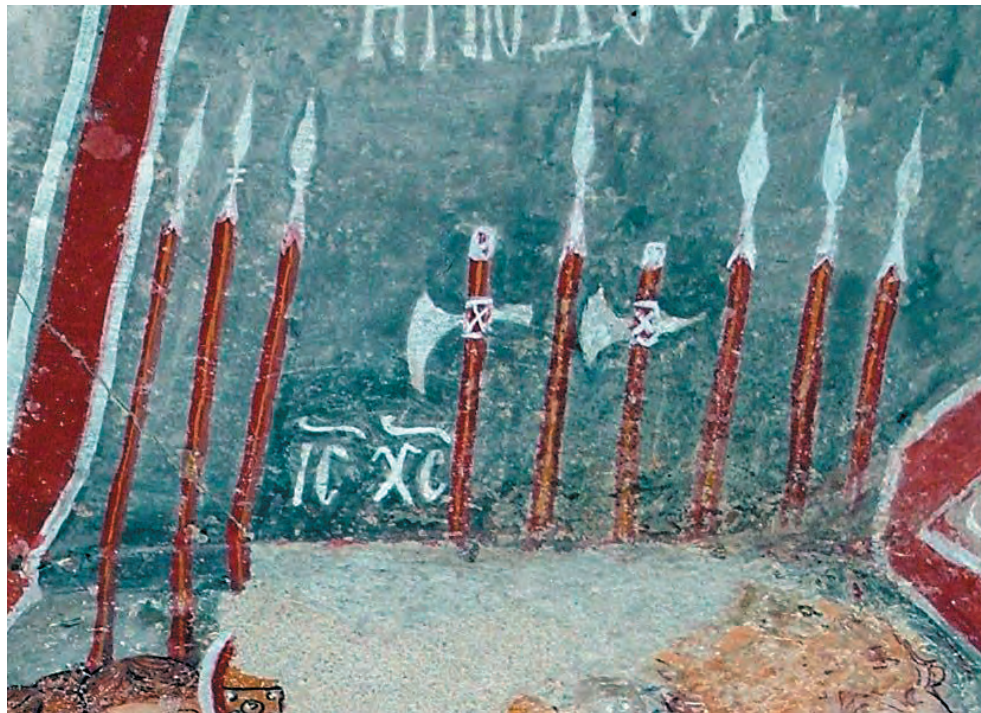


Fig. 16. The Betrayal, Email Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, detail of the infantry weapons, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo



Fig. 17. The Betrayal, Tcharekle Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, detail of the infantry weapons, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo

of Byzantium in the region before the invasion of the Seljuk Turks. Again, the represented weapons correspond to real specimens of the second half of the 11th c. It is enough to compare the spearheads of the Roman army found on the Drastar battlefield of 1087 AD (Fig. 18) with those of the frescoes (Fig. 19) to understand that we deal with the same material culture. The same can be said comparing the daggers and knives (*Machairia*, *Paraxiphidia*) illustrated in the frescoes with the Anatolian and Rumenian finds in 11th c. East Roman fortresses and urban centres, particularly from Dinogetia³² and from Pergamon³³ (Fig. 20). We can note the same decorated ivory and

³² Barnea 1973, fig. 12 n. 3; fig. 13 nn. 1 and 2, pp. 312–313.

³³ Radt 1982, fig. 6 Pl. 8.

³⁴ Psilakis 1998, pp. 211–212.

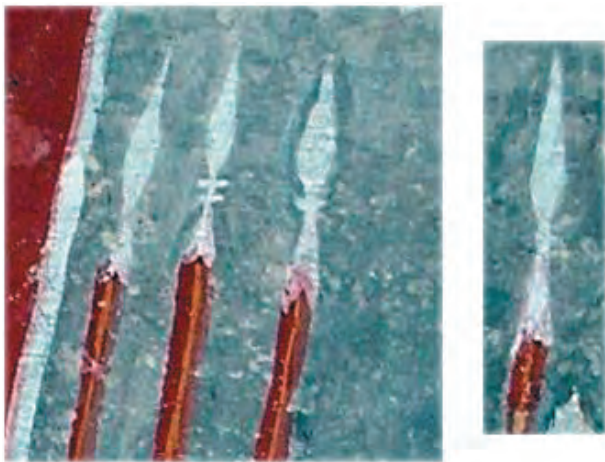


Fig. 19. The Betrayal, Email Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, detail of the infantry spears, mid-second half of the 11th century, author's photo



Fig. 18. Spearheads from the Drastar battlefield, 1087 AD, Bulgaria, courtesy photo of Prof. Valeri Yotov and Boyan Totev



Fig. 20. Comparison between the battle knives of Qaranlek Kilissé and Tcharekle Kilissé with original East-Roman specimens from Pergamon and Dinogetia-Garvan, author's photos and ex Barnea and Radt



Fig. 21. The Betrayal, Qaranlek Kilissé-Tcharekle Kilissé- Email Kilissé Churches, Cappadocia, detail of the infantry boots and footwear, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo

bone handles, and the similarity of the shape in the blades.

Also the represented clothing corresponds to the descriptions of Roman clothing in Cappadocian epic of the *Digenis Akritas*. It is for instance the case of the military leggings with boots (*Υποδηματα*, *Digenis Akritas*, IV, 397), or of the *Toubia* (IV, 226), other kind of leather boots or leggings, or even trousers, often decorated along the calf with images of dragons or griffins (*gripsoi*) or eagles. Such kind of military footwear are well represented on the legs of all the soldiers of the frescoes (Fig. 21). Also the military turban (*fakeolis*, III, 257), the military tunics called *εσθητα* (IV, 219, 488) and the precious *τραχελον* (IV, 223) are well represented. This tunic's collar was a wide circular band of precious fabric applied to the tunic around the neck and often covered with precious material, and it is well visible in the frescoes (Fig. 22). Even the *Rizai* (IV, 221–222) i.e. gold or precious embroidery applied to the tunics and the clothing are represented with photographic precision (Figs. 21–22). There is no doubt: the Cappadocian artist of the 11th c. copied his models for the Betrayal scene from real soldiers of his age and of his social context.

We can at this point say that during the 11th c. the iconography of the Betrayal represents a mob armed with the same weapons as described in the Gospels, represented according to the reality of the period, to which the artists added other weapons, concretely taken from peculiar objects used by the warriors of that



Fig. 22. The Betrayal, Tcharekle Kilissé Church, Cappadocia, detail of military clothing, mid-second half of the 11th c., author's photo

age. The soldiers and the officers of the Gospels are represented as Imperial Guardsmen (Varangians) or

thematic or local troops. Again, however, we have really few or no representations of armoured warriors.

THE 12TH C.: THE CRETAN FRESCOES OF THE KISSAMOS ROTUNDA AND PARALLELS

The frescoes of the Early Christian *Rotunda* of Michael Archangelos in Episkopi, Kissamos, are, at my knowledge, unpublished or anyway not published for what concerns our subject. Its shape is unique on Crete, and it owes its name to its shape with a particular dome (*rotunda*), that dominates the church architecture in its centre. Within the church, arches support the central space under the cylindrical dome, once completely painted. The church has remnants of wall paintings from various periods,³⁴ but what it is interesting for us are the layers of the 12th c., of the Comnenian Age. On the north-eastern cornered wall of the dome, there is a fragment of the Betrayal scene (Fig. 23).

Interestingly, the represented soldiers are no more the mixed mob of military men and armed civilians of the previous examples, but soldiers of Byzantium clad in complete armour, wearing helmets furnished with aventails (*kinei/koven*³⁵) and scale armours.

Scale and lamellar were types of armour most commonly used by East-Roman warriors of the period. The men in the fresco wear what in East-Roman sources of this time was called *chiton pholidotos* (χιτων φολιδωτος)³⁶ or *sosanion* (σωσανιον).³⁷ Also these fresco shows interesting details concerning the weaponry. The weapons are no more visible, but the sword brandished by Saint Peter is a single-edged sabre (Fig. 24). This sabre, with its inscription³⁸ (Fig. 25), is very similar to a specimen from Armenia, found in Northern Urals, and dated by Nicolle to the 12th–13th c.³⁹

The helmets seem to be of segmented construction, echoing the *Spangenhelm* type already used in Late Rome and Byzantium since the 3rd century

³⁷ Tzetzes, *Allegorie* in Cramer 1963, *Anecd. Oxon.* III; Kolias 1988, p. 49 and n. 96.

³⁸ Today very difficult to read, although two letters C (*Sigma*) and may be a ω are still visible.

³⁹ Nicolle 1999, cat. 125.

³⁵ Niketas Choniates, VII, 239.

³⁶ Niketas Choniates, 62, 95 and 197,17.



Fig. 23. The Betrayal, the Rotunda of Kissamos, Crete, second half of the 12th c., author's photo



Fig. 24. The Betrayal, the Rotunda of Kissamos, Crete, detail, second half of the 12th c., author's photo

AD.⁴⁰ Helmets of this type are visible in many illuminated Greek manuscripts of the late 12th c., for instance the *Vatopedi Octateuch* in Athos (*Vatopedi-nus* 602),⁴¹ or the *Cod. Athos Vatopedi* 760⁴² (Fig. 26). These helmets are often considered by historians of art as fanciful representations. It is not the case. A splendid specimen of the 13th c. from the Kuban area recently published by Gorelik (Fig. 27)⁴³ shows again the realistic attitude of the East-Roman artists

in the representations of the material culture of their age. This kind of helmet begins to appear in the 12th c. and one of the first iconographic records are the painting representing the Betrayal, of which the Rotunda of Kissamos is one of the many examples. The iconography of the Betrayal introduces the visual record of new kind of weapons.

⁴⁰ It is clear that the type was constantly used in Byzantium, since the 4th century; we have examples of segmented helmets for all periods of the East-Roman history, until at least the 15th century. The segmented helmet (*Spangenhelm*, if referred especially to the 5th – 6th centuries helmets, some of the sub-type called *Baldenheim* by the scholars) was a variety of the rib helmet. Simple shapes of this helmet consist of convex spherical trapezoid segments riveted to each other, with a round plate at the top and a hoop at the bottom. In his monograph of *Spangenhelme* of the *Baldenheim* type, M. Vogt (2006) described at least forty specimens in various conditions of preservation, found in 36 various locations of the Ancient world. Last specimens of segmented helmets used by Bulgaro-Byzantine infantrymen have been recently published by Paroushev, 2000, pp. 171–178, figs. 1–3.

⁴¹ Huber 1973, fig. 92.

⁴² Kolias 1988, Pl. XX, figs. 2 and 3.

⁴³ I am in great debt to my dear friend Dr. Yuriy Kuleshov for the information about the existence of this helmet and for the related image.



Fig. 25. The Betrayal, the Rotunda of Kissamos, Crete, detail of the sword of Saint Peter, second half of the 12th c., author's photo



Fig. 26. The Betrayal, the Rotunda of Kissamos, Crete, detail of the helmet compared with the helmets of cavalymen from Cod. Athos Vatopedi 760, fol. 286r, second half of the 12th c., author's photo and courtesy photos of Prof. Nikolas Emeritizidis

Armoured and helmeted warriors are a new rule in the representations of the Betrayal especially since the end of the 12th c. Here the soldiers are clearly Mediterranean in their facial shape, mainly Greeks and Armenians, and there is no trace of tall northern warriors. Maybe the local garrisons furnished the model to the painter.

A further example comes from the Church of Saint Neophitos, in the Paphos district of Cyprus, dated to about 1196 AD or the early 13th c.⁴⁴ Two groups of warriors surround the protagonists from left and right. The soldiers carry knives, a sword, a flail, spears, pole-axes and torches. The *Chiliarchos* carries the sword and the flail and is dressed with a short *chiton*, and a *chlamys* (military cloak), eastern *αναξυρίδες* (trousers) and white *toubia* (boots). The heads are covered by chain-mail coifs with nape protection, brown or red helmets supplemented with a conical plate or a metal frame in grey, ochre or red background.⁴⁵ Most of the helmets are reinforced with scales and with attached protective aventails (neck protections, *peritrachelia*).⁴⁶ Interestingly,

the represented sword is an infantry sabre (*spathion zostikion?*).⁴⁷

Some Roman warriors wear long beards that in the fresco are red and fair; they thus have Anglo-Saxon and Nordic attire. In Byzantium the members of the Varangian Guard were famous as men with red hair and beards, "as tall as date palms;" they were also said to drink too much. The description of the Varangians who impressed the Romans of the East with their huge size, blonde and red hair, beards and moustaches, is well remembered in the Northern sources.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Praecepta Militaria* (I, 24ff.), p. 14.

⁴⁸ "He was striking of countenance and fair of feature, he had the finest eyes of any man, and was light of hue. He had a great deal of hair as fair as silk, falling in curls"; "This man had yellow hair; waving down over his shoulders; he was fair of hue" "Next there sat two men like each other to look upon, and might have been of middle age; most brisk they looked, red of hair, freckled of face, yet goodly to behold." (Laxdale Saga, cap. 28.63 – Muriel 1889, pp. 87, 220). It is true that red beard often equals evil character in medieval art, but guardsmen with red beards are also represented like bodyguards of Saint Emperors or Kings in the frescoes of the councils, or escorting Joshua, like in the Church of Blachernae in Arta, Epeiros, or in the Church of Saint Sofia in Kiev, respectively 13th and 12th centuries, s, D'Amato, 2010, p. 13, and D'Amato, 2012, pp. 38–39.

⁴⁴ Babuin 2009, figs. 108–109; Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, pp. 573ff., n. 18, Pl. 318; Stylianou calculated in 1985 that in Cyprus's churches there were about 14 wall-paintings of the Betrayal, but the number should have been superior.

⁴⁵ Haldon 1975, p. 26.

⁴⁶ D'Amato 2010, p. 33.

Again, they are pictured as armed with axes and knives, so we are again probably in front of the representation of Varangians. The knives show a very similar shape to the late 12th c. battle knives found at Ras, Serbia,⁴⁹ the axes with an axe-head from Thebes, dated to the 13th c.⁵⁰ If the fresco was painted under the new Latin rulers of Cyprus rival of the Angels in Constantinople, the use of Imperial Guardsmen as models for “evil” people could be very probable. According to Stylianou they are maybe representations of Crusaders who invaded Cyprus,⁵¹ but their full equipment is completely Eastern-Roman.

At this point we can summarise the following points:

1. The representation of the Betrayal in the 12th c. begins to show armoured soldiers, probably under

the influence of the growing presence of the Latin mercenaries in the East or of the wars with the Crusaders;

2. The artists, though Saint Peter and Jesus Christ are represented as stereotypes, always differentiate the mob, the officers and the soldiers with different costumes;
3. The latter are copied from the reality of their age;
4. Some of them are again copied from real existing regiments with well defined ethnic characteristics (Varangians);
5. Weapons and equipment, as well as clothing, are copied in realistic details;
6. The employment of the new kind of weapons and equipment is documented by the frescoes.

THE 13TH C.: SAINT JOHN OF ARABISSOS AND PARALLELS

The tendency to the militarisation of the frescoes of the Betrayal grows in the 13th c. The conquest of Byzantium by the Latins of the Fourth Crusade provoked a further impact also on the artistic representations, and the violence of the war was reflected in the Biblical episodes, where the Latin warriors were often proposed as the evil people arresting Christ.

In the Church of Saint John the Theologos in Patmos (early 13th c.)⁵² the guards are divided into two groups: at the left of the spectator there is a *υπηρετης* with the priests and the Pharisees. At the right the armoured soldiers, formed by a contingent of warriors in chain mail and conical or rounded helmets of various colours (the *Chiliarchos* and the *Σπειρα*). The commander is differentiated with a white helmet, white trousers and boots and a sword hanging from the waist (*paramerion*). Kollias, Chatzidakis and Orlandos dated the fresco to c. 1200–1204, considering them executed by artists coming from Constantinople.⁵³ They used maybe Greek warriors at the service of the Franks, or Venetian soldiers as prototypes of the soldiers. They are perhaps also represented in the illuminated MS of the Four Gospels now kept in Tübingen, Germany, but originally executed in Kalavryta in the Peloponnese, where two contingents of troops in coats of mail and conical helmets holding pole-weapons, swords and spears, surround Jesus and Judas.⁵⁴

The temple of Saint John Chrisostomos in Arabissos (today Karsi Kilise, Suves), Kappadokia, was frescoed probably in 1212 AD by Theodore I Laskaris of Nikea to celebrate his victory over the Seljuks in the battle of Antiochia on Pisidia and contains valuable images of the warriors of the Nicaea Empire.⁵⁵ One of its magnificent frescoes represents the Betrayal. The heads of several spiked maces, war axes and spears are again visible above the heads of the warriors arresting Jesus (Fig. 28). These warriors were probably copied from the *militia* of Theodore Laskaris I of Nikea, and I have recently proposed the identification of them with members of the Varangian Regiment serving under the Nicean Emperors, due to their red beards and their red uniforms, together with the long shafted axes represented as well in the fresco. Round and polygonal “star” maces are here represented alongside each other. Axes and pole-weapons (Figs. 29–30) are well representative of 13th c. specimens and found their parallels with the Balkan weapons preserved in the Museum of Kazanlik, Bulgaria (Figs. 31–32). The main kind of defensive protections listed in the sources are well illustrated on the warriors: ring mail cuirass (*λωρικιον, χιτων alusidotos*);⁵⁶ lamellar armours (*klibania, χιτωνες φολιδωτοι*);⁵⁷ and military clothes comprise cloaks (*sagia*),⁵⁸ long robes (*kabadia*), tunics (*χιτωνα*),⁵⁹

⁴⁹ Nicolle 1999, cat. 82 h-i.

⁵⁰ Various 2002, p. 134, cat. 145.

⁵¹ Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 575.

⁵² Ορλανδος 1970, Pls. 73–74; Κομινης 1988, fig. 35.

⁵³ Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 572.

⁵⁴ Millet 1960, fig. 347.

⁵⁵ D’Amato 2010, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Kolias 1988, p. 39; Tzetzis, in Cramer 1963 (Anecd. Oxon III, 383).

⁵⁷ Nicetae, 62, 95; 197, 17ff.; Kolias 1988, pp. 44–46 and n. 70.

⁵⁸ Du Cange, Du Fresne 1688, col. 1752.

⁵⁹ Du Cange, Du Fresne 1688, col. 1316.

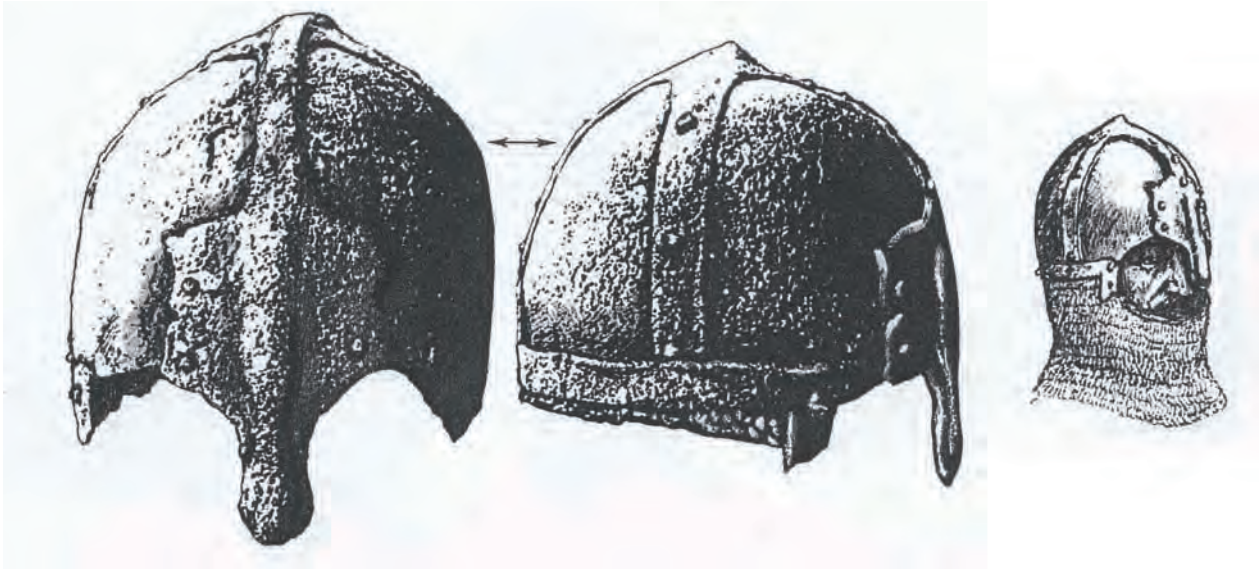


Fig. 27. Eastern Roman helmet of the 13th c. AD, from the area of Kuban or South Crimea, ex Gorelik, private collection, courtesy image Dr. Yuriy Kuleshov

overtunics (*επιλωρικια*),⁶⁰ military footwear, trousers and boots (*toubia*, *anaxyrída*, *kampagia*)⁶¹ (Fig. 33).

Summarising, the fresco tells us that we are again probably in front of the representation of Varangians,

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Kodinos, *De Off.*, VI, 18 records that still in the 14th century 'The officers wear the *σκαρανικα*, the *φακεωλια* and the *καββαδια*, and the other over-tunics *επιλωρικια* each according to his rank.

⁶¹ Du Cange, *Du Fresne* 1688, col. 565 (*καμπαγιον*), 1588 (*τουβιον*) ; Niketas Choniates, VII,242 (*anaxyrída*).

mentioned in the sources as effective guardsmen of the Emperors of the Nicaean Empire.⁶² The fresco confirms the sources telling us that Varangians were axe-bearers and the represented weaponry corresponds with real specimens contemporary to the age of the fresco. The military details and the various kind of clothes and weapons effectively used at that time and mentioned in the sources are clearly represented in the painting.

⁶² D'Amato 2010, pp. 11–12.



Fig. 28. The Betrayal, Church of Saint John Chrysostomos in Arabissos (Karsi Kilise), Suves, Turkey, c. 1212 AD, author's photo



Fig. 29. The Betrayal, Church of Saint John Chrysostomos in Arabissos (Karsi Kilise), Suves, Turkey, detail, c. 1212 AD, author's photo

The following example is the fresco of the Betrayal in the Cathedral of Saint Nicola in Prilep, dated to about 1289 AD (Fig. 34). The painting illustrates again contemporary soldiers beside the stereotypes of Jesus Christ and Judas. This time, the soldiers are more Balkanic in their appearance, probably copied from the local militia of the Paleologian Age. Arms and weapons are again represented in detail, and conforming to the Gospel, the soldiers also wear lanterns (Figs. 35–36), that, again, are a precious source for the reconstruction of the material culture of the age and, specifically, of the area of origin of the fresco. The similarity with contemporary specimens is evident (Fig. 37). This can also be seen in other frescoes of the same century.⁶³ In the Betrayal painted in the Church of Aghios Georgios Mefismeni, in Crete, the detail shows an alternative kind of torches used at that time and various kind of helmets and neck protections (Fig. 38). In the Church of the Panaghia Chrisafitissa, in Chrisafa, Laconia, also dated to 1289 AD, the details of the military costume are magnificent (Fig. 39). One of the officers (Fig. 40, maybe the *Chiliarchos*) wears a *bonnet* in the Western style (Fig. 41), and

⁶³ Babuin 2009, fig. 234 (Aegina, Ομορφη Εγχλησια–Αγιοι Τεοδωροι).



Fig. 30. The Betrayal, Church of Saint John Chrysostomos in Arabissos (Karsi Kilise), Suves, Turkey, detail, c. 1212 AD, author's photo

this is probably one of the first representation of the new elite regiments of the fleet of Michael VIII, the *Gasmouloi*, who were conducting military operations in Laconia some decades before the completion of the frescoes.⁶⁴

Again shields covered with pearls are represented (Fig. 42), maybe symbols of the Imperial Guardsmen or elite troops.

After 1204 and the temporary conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders many frescoes of the Betrayal show the scene as a full scale military operation with the warriors clad in full armours and fighting gear.⁶⁵ The analysis further conducted on the frescoes representing the Betrayal in the 13th century

⁶⁴ D'Amato 2010b, pp. 220–221, 231,

⁶⁵ Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 571, who suggests that this is the result of the Crusades and the establishment of the Latin Kingdoms in 'Romania'.



Fig. 31. Axe-head from the area of Kazanlik, Bulgaria, probably the 14th c. AD, Kazanlik, Regional Museum, author's photo, courtesy of the Museum



Fig. 32. Mace heads and spear point from the area of Kazanlik, Bulgaria, probably the 13th c. AD, Kazanlik, Regional Museum, author's photo, courtesy of the Museum



Fig. 33. The Betrayal, Church of Saint John Chrysostomos in Arabissos (Karsi Kilise), Suves, Turkey, detail, c. 1212 AD, author's photo

shows now fully armoured soldiers representing local troops or specific regiments. A strong influence of the Western armament and equipment on Roman arms and armours begins to be seen. The artists, though



Fig. 34. The Betrayal, Church of Saint Nikolaos in Prilep (Macedonia), c. 1289 AD, courtesy photo Dr. M. Tutko



Fig. 35. The Betrayal, Church of Saint Nikolaos in Prilep (Macedonia), c. 1289 AD, detail, courtesy photo Dr. M. Tutko



Fig. 36. The Betrayal, Church of Saint Nikolaos in Prilep (Macedonia), c. 1289 AD, detail, courtesy photo Dr. M. Tutko

Saint Peter and Jesus Christ are represented as stereotypes, always differentiate the mob, the officers and the soldiers. The latter are copied from the reality of their age, and also weapons and equipment, as well as clothing, are copied in realistic details. Finally, last but not least, the evolution of the weapons employed at the time of the frescoes is well documented by the paintings.



Fig. 37. Medieval sword from Rouse (Bulgaria), 13th c., Rouse Museum, courtesy of Prof. Valeri Yotov

THE LAST EXAMPLES: THE 14TH AND THE 15TH C.

In the last centuries of Byzantium we have the best preserved images of the Betrayal episode. The details are rich of evidence for the military costume, and the images show now a strong mix of Western and Eastern equipment. The presence of the Franks in the territories of “Romania” and the circumstance that many local militia was fighting at the service of the new masters – Franks or Venetians, as well as the strong presence of Western mercenaries in the last Roman armies, played a decisive role in the models used by the artists for the execution of a

Biblical scene in which the armed militia played a fundamental role. The painted soldiers are the reflex of the local reality and are of inestimable value for the costume not only of the Roman soldiers of Byzantium but also of the Frankish and Venetian militiamen, Greeks or Latins.

The armed *militia* of Thessalonika, who played an important role in various civil uprisings of the 14th c., is immortalised in the fresco of the Betrayal of Saint Nikolaos Orphanos Church, of about 1310–1320 AD (Fig. 43). Here the Biblical description finds one of



Fig. 38. The Betrayal, Church of Aghios Georgios Mefismeni, in Crete, detail, 13th c., author's photo

its most literal representations, but the costumes of the mob, the weapons of the soldiers and the armour of the *chiliarchos* mirror the Balkans armament of the early 14th c. Noteworthy is the armoured *Peritrachelion* (armoured gorget, *gorgère*)⁶⁶ of the officer, widely used by the Balkan warriors of the period.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Bartusis 1992, p. 323.

⁶⁷ Nicolle 1988, Plate F1, p. 45.

Local militiamen, regular soldiers and armed mobs are painted in a very detailed way, and the dramatic scene seems to evoke the furious fights between various factions of Thessalonika in the 14th c.

The frescoes of the *Panaghia* of Roussospiti, of the early 14th c., in Crete, show a very great deal of equipment in a pure Balkan style (Fig. 44). Details of the mail armour (*λωρικιον*) with hauberk (Fig. 45) and of the military footwear (*kampagia* – fig.



Fig. 39. The Betrayal, Church of Panaghia Chrysafitissa, in Krysa, Laconia, 13th c., author's photo



Fig. 40. The Betrayal, Church of Panaghia Chrysafitissa, in Krysafo, Laconia, 13th c., detail of the *Chiliarchos*, author's photo



Fig. 41. The Betrayal, Church of Panaghia Chrysafitissa, in Krysafo, Laconia, 13th c., detail of the *Chiliarchos*, author's photo

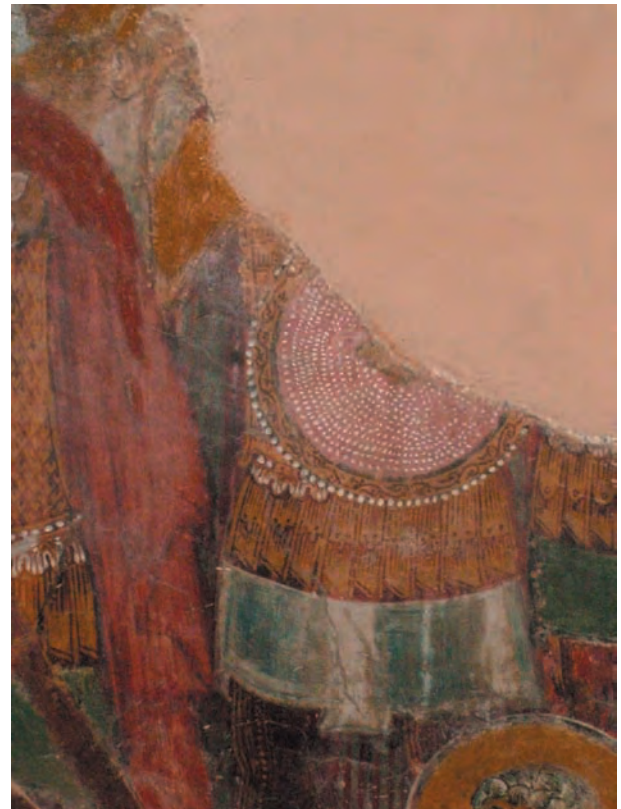


Fig. 42. The Betrayal, Church of Panaghia Chrysafitissa, in Krysafo, Laconia, 13th c., detail, author's photo

46) are clearly visible on the armed men represented in the mob, who seem to be again the reflex of a local Greek *militia*. Also the scene of the Betrayal in the church of *Aghios Sotir* of Potamies makes the same impression (Fig. 47): but here the left side of the *speira* is formed by armed brigands, the right side by regular soldiers. In the Church of Archangel Michael of Kavalariana (Crete), frescoed by the great Iohannes Pagomenos between 1327 and 1328 AD,⁶⁸ the warriors are dressed in a mixed Western-Eastern military accoutrement, and the chain mail protecting the body of a soldier is shown in realistic detail with alternate rows of iron and bronze rings,⁶⁹ as in some actual specimens. A padded *gambeson* is worn by one of the soldiers. Brimmed helmets are visible on the soldiers arresting Christ in the Church of the Virgin Mary the Myrtiodissa at Gephyra (Crete).⁷⁰

In the third quarter of the 14th c. the frescoes of Panaghia Phorbiotissa of Asinou, near Nikitari, Cyprus, show the soldiers arresting Christ armed in a mixed Eastern-Western style, brandishing spiked

weapons and torches.⁷¹ They not only wear scale armours (*κλιβανία*), but the group on the left is pro-

⁶⁸ Cultural Association of Kandalos 1999, p. 69.

⁶⁹ Cultural Association of Kandalos 1999, p. 81.

⁷⁰ Cultural Association of Kandalos 1999, pp. 106, 129 (in this page erroneously referred to the Church of Saint Mary of Spina).

⁷¹ Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 575ff., Pl. 319.



Fig. 43. The Betrayal, Church of Nikolaos Orphanos, in Thessaloniki, c. 1310–1320 AD, courtesy photo Dr. Andrea Babuin



Fig. 44. The Betrayal, Church of the *Panaghia* of Roussospiti, Crete, early 14th c., author's photo



Fig. 45. The Betrayal, Church of the *Panaghia* of Roussospiti, Crete, detail of the *lorikia*, 14th c., author's photo



Fig. 46. The Betrayal, Church of the *Panaghia* of Roussospiti, Crete, detail of the *kampagia*, 14th c., author's photo



Fig. 47. The Betrayal, Church of Aghios Sotir in Potomies, 14th c., author's photo

tected with scale, mail and organic padded corselets, while the group on the right is clad in corselets of small scales and chain-mail alternated again in different rows of iron and copper-alloy rings, as in the Kavalariana Church. The red and grey helmets are fitted with flexible mail aventails. The various specimens of represented armours were all still in use in the 14th c., so the artist did not borrow them from older prototypes, but copied them from real soldiers of his age. Also it is significant that the *Chiliarchos* is armed with a mace as symbol of command and further protected by a shield, and also the officer of the opposite troops is armed in the same way, but without shield.

The Church of Aghios Georgios in Missolourgaki (1401 AD)⁷² introduces us into the Betrayal's scenes of the 15th c. (Fig. 48): but here the mass of men-at-arms is undoubtedly that of a small army of regular soldiers. Their helmets, of segmented construction (Fig. 49), find good parallels with archaeological specimens found inside "Romania," such as the helmet from Veliko Tarnovo (Fig. 50) or the Byzantine-Bulgarian helmet from the fortress of Asenova Krepost, today preserved in the Historical Museum of Kazanlik (Fig. 51).

The last frescoes of the Betrayal show more evidently local difference in the armament of the soldiers. They are even more convincingly based upon real warriors members of the local militia, or garrison troops. In Thessaloniki the soldiers are more similar to the Gospel descriptions, although copied from the local militia. Various kinds of dresses, shoes, type of armours, showing a mixing of military influence from

⁷² Spatharakis 1998, pp. 52–54.



Fig. 48. The Betrayal, Church of Aghios Georgios in Missolourgaki, 1401 AD, author's photo

Latin states, Byzantium and Venetia are more visible in the Cretan and Cypriote frescoes.

In some paintings the warriors wear typical Western equipment, like in the scene of the Betrayal of Saint Paraskevi in Kandanos, where the soldiers wear red lacquered *bacinettos*,⁷³ very similar to the specimens found in Halkis,⁷⁴ or in the Church of St.

⁷³ Cultural Association of Kandanos 1999, pp. 217–218.

⁷⁴ Nicolle 1999a, p. 63 nn. E,F.



Fig. 50. Helmet from the fortress of Veliko Tarnovo, 14th c. AD, courtesy photo Dr. Stanimir Dimitrov



Fig. 49. The Betrayal, Church of Aghios Georgios in Missolourgaki, 1401 AD, detail, author's photo

Herakleidos of the Monastery of Saint John Lapa-distis, in Cyprus (c.1400 AD):⁷⁵ in this last painting the armour of the soldiers is purely of Western type, dominated by a “*bascinet*” fitted with a camail or a curtain mail, i.e. a slightly pointed helmet with a piece of mail attached to its bottom rim and spread out over the shoulders, overlapping the plate armour as additional protection, which is a typical evolution of the 14th c. in the West. One of the *bascinets* has a white plume, probably a symbol of command. The artist mirrored probably warriors of the Lusignans, rulers of Cyprus until 1489 AD. This is confirmed also by the sign of the cross painted on the epaulets of one of the warriors.

⁷⁵ Stylianou, Stylianou 1992, p. 577, Pls. 320–321.



fig. 51. Helmet from the fortress of Asenova Krepost, 14th c. AD, ex Cončev.

In the Chapel of Saint George in Artos, Crete, the Rethymnon district, the tall soldiers wear Western armours, conical helmets painted in blue, red and

yellow and a great quantity of spears.⁷⁶ Were the Venetian colonial infantrymen the model for such a painting?

CONCLUSION

The frescoes representing the scene of the Betrayal are a valuable source that furnished a realistic picture of the evolution of the military equipment of the Eastern Mediterranean World and Byzantium. If at the beginning the frescoes, though representing the reality of the material culture of the period of their execution, were more focused on the Biblical description, since the late 12th c. they begin to be always more militarised, i.e. to represent a band of fully armoured soldiers. The final result shows that the usual consideration of the Byzantine iconography as conventional and not responding to reality is wrong,

at least for what concerns the images of warriors and the detail of the military equipment.

The frescoes offer not only a good instrument for the dates of weaponry found in archaeological context, but, compared with the written sources and other iconography, also a good way, sometimes within the limits of the hypothesis, to identify the image of famous regiments or ethnic groups in the territories of "Romania," i.e. the former territories of the Eastern Roman Empire.

⁷⁶ Δρανκακης 1957, 115, Pl. H.

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