

FESTAL ICON DESIGN

The icon of the Transfiguration: the hesychast mandorla

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Fig.1. *Parsinus Graecus* (image accompanying works of John Kantacuzenus), 14th c.

Introduction

The purpose of this piece of writing is to develop a clear understanding of a festal icon design and to focus on a particular element of that icon for consideration ahead of painting.

The festal icon considered here is that of the Transfiguration. The particular element for focus is the hesychast mandorla which consists usually of a circle within which are a square and a rhombus, with variation generally in the quadrilateral shapes. As far as is known, the hesychast mandorla appeared for the first time in a fourteenth century manuscript of the theological works of John Kantakouzenus [fig.1], i.e. following about eight centuries of conservative iconic tradition that was established by the remarkably influential, and apparently innovative, Transfiguration design in the apse mosaic of St Catherine's, Sinai [fig.2]. Underlying this research and analysis of this mandorla is a concern to ascertain a right relation between the personal (viz. the hypostatic) and the abstract within the whole icon. Conceived in visual terms, this is a concern for a right relation between embodied living form and geometric form.

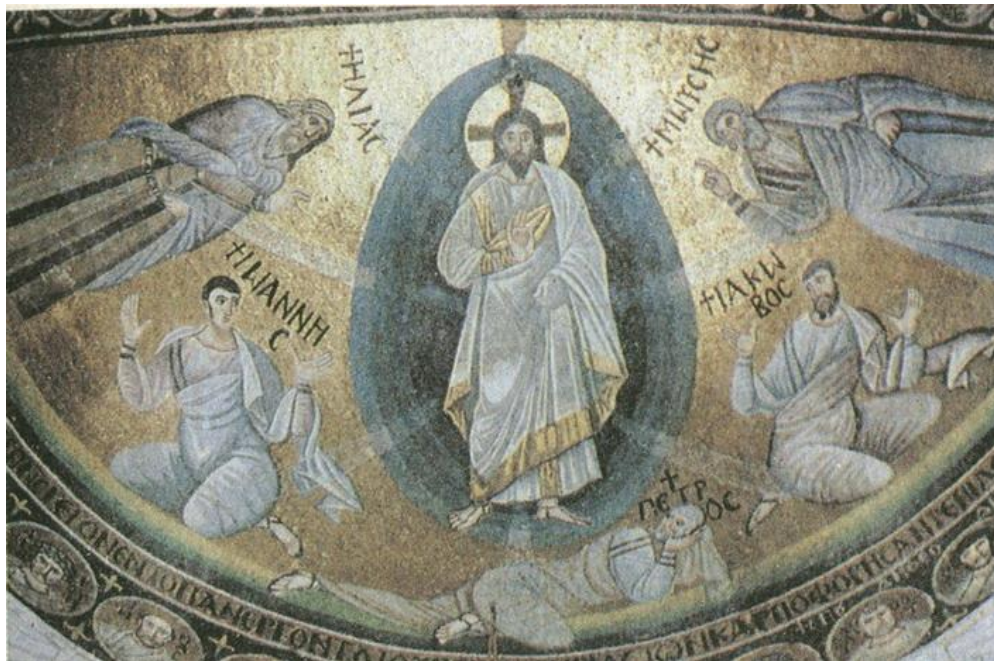


Fig.2. St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, c.565.

It is curious that at the very time when defenders of hesychast practice, including especially St Gregory Palamas, were emphasizing precisely the personal and embodied nature of sacramental inner prayer in defence against (but not prohibitive of) the natural-scientific speculations of their contemporaries, the geometric square and rhombus made their appearance in the Transfiguration mandorla. Why this geometric configuration at this point? Would it not

have made more sense in this theological context to be emphasizing instead the embodied person - and especially the face - of Christ? Our response to this question will be decisive for our conclusion about the most persuasive account for the signification of the hesychast mandorla. We shall look at two such accounts: i) the hesychast mandorla as signifying the natural cosmos; ii) the hesychast mandorla as signifying, in some manner, the Trinity. On the basis of our conclusion, we will be in a position to present a design for a contemporary festal icon of the Transfiguration that incorporates both the natural cosmos and the Trinity.

The hesychast mandorla and the natural cosmos

Our starting point here, in considering the hesychast mandorla and the natural cosmos, is with Andreas Andreopoulos who advances an argument, in his book *Metamorphosis*, that the hesychast mandorla may be interpreted as a form of cosmic map, or *mappa mundi*. His evidence is, briefly, as follows. While little Byzantine cartography survived the Ottoman destruction,¹ the specific case of Maximus Planoudes in the thirteenth century does evidence that maps - of his own design and collection - were known to the Byzantine court and so then also to St Gregory Palamas in the course of his education.² More generally Andreopoulos argues with certainty that Byzantines were quite familiar with Western European, Islamic and Mediterranean cartography and were perhaps themselves the authors of some of these maps.³ Andreopoulos then observes that among such maps are some that look surprisingly like the hesychast mandorla, including maps in the form of the very square intertwined with a rhombus inside a circle that comprises the new hesychast design.⁴ For Andreopoulos, we therefore have, in the hesychast mandorla, 'a sacred map of the world based on the essential representation of the earth around its sacred axis, which in this case is none other than Christ'.⁵

This argument has appeal *prima facie* based on visual congruities, and gains further strength when we consider it in the context of Henry Maguire's argument, in his book *Nature and Illusion*, for increasing abstraction over time in iconographic presentations of the natural world. Maguire argues that 'in the early period, before iconoclasm, the glorification of nature in writing and in art tended to outweigh its denigration, while in the later period it was the

¹ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.235.

² Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.236.

³ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.237.

⁴ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.238.

⁵ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.240.

rejection of the terrestrial world that tended to gain the upper hand'.⁶ The Transfiguration makes for an interesting case in this regard since, taking place up a mountain, one might anticipate little or no flora and fauna: yet from the early depictions there was indeed, at the beginning and for some centuries, representation of vegetation though colour and line; but then over time there was a diminution of vegetation to the point of its near absence. We can observe this in a brief historical survey of key surviving Transfiguration icons.

In the paradigmatic St Catherine's, Sinai, apse mosaic there is right around the foot of the scene and underneath the gold but integral to the main image, a continuous unvarying strip of two tones of bright green [fig.2]. The roughly contemporary St Apollinaris in Classe apse mosaic is positively verdant and, as such, exceptional, on which more below. The 11th century Daphni mosaic, like St Catherine's, Sinai, has a marked green strip on the lower left side of the squinch (the right side not having survived, but presumably continuous in design) [fig.3]. So too does the c.1200 Constantinopolitan miniature mosaic now in the Louvre [fig.4]. Thus far, whatever the natural covering of the historic Transfiguration mount which cannot anyway be verified,⁷ it is evident that iconographers since the Sinai mosaic very often included the presence of at least plant life in the festal icon, and this until about the thirteenth century. From roughly the fourteenth century, there does appear to be a decreasing incorporation of plant material in Transfiguration icons: we see nothing but a few undifferentiated small scrub trees - if anything at all - in well known works such as the 14th century illustration accompanying the works of John Kantakouzenos; the 13th/14th century fresco in the Protaton, Mount Athos [fig.5]; the 14th century Sopoćani fresco [fig.6]; the late 14th century panel icon of Theophanes [fig.7]; and the early 15th century panel icon of Rublev [fig.8]. In summary, iconographers did design plant life into Transfiguration icons from the time of the Sinai mosaic right through the first millennium - albeit in highly undifferentiated and often highly abstract forms - and thereafter the amount of plant life reduced, at least in the best known surviving icons.

⁶ Maguire, *Nature and Illusion*, p.77. This thought on the place of nature forms part of Maguire's larger argument that, contrary to much commentary on Byzantine art, depiction of the divine involves heightened definition, not heightened abstraction. He writes that 'in posticonoclastic Byzantine art, differentiation was associated with the spiritual, while a lack of differentiation was reserved for the terrestrial. Frequently modern commentators have linked abstraction with the spirituality of religious icons, but it is more true to say that in medieval Byzantine art the type of abstraction that was created by lack of discrimination between species denoted the terrestrial world.' Maguire, *idem*, p.170. See also pp.115, 120, 134.

⁷ Not even its place is known with any certainty: Origen first supposed it to be Mount Tabor on the basis of Ps.89.12, a judgement which has since been accepted.

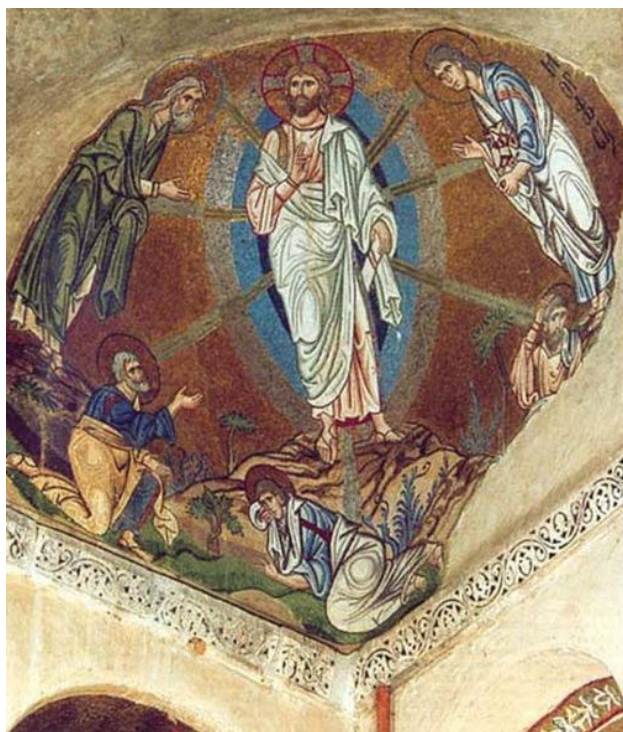


Fig.3. Daphni, c.1100.



Fig.4. Constantinople (Louvre), early 13th c.



Fig.5. Panselinos, Protaton, late 13th / early 14th c.

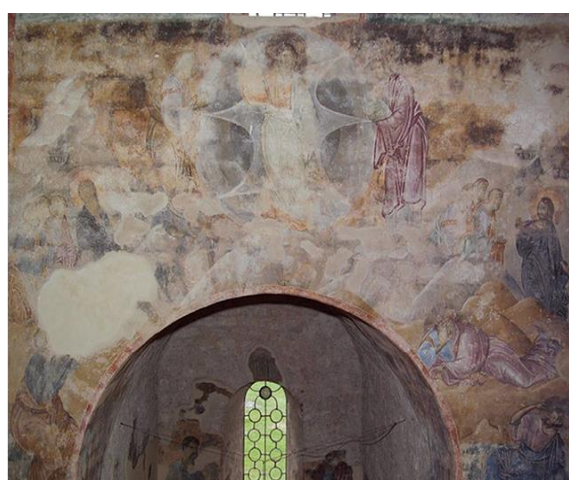


Fig.6. Monastery of Sopočani, Raška (Serbia), 14th c.

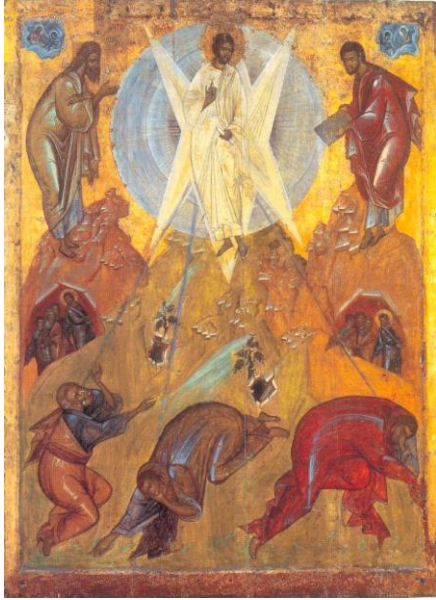


Fig.7. Theophanes, late 14th c.

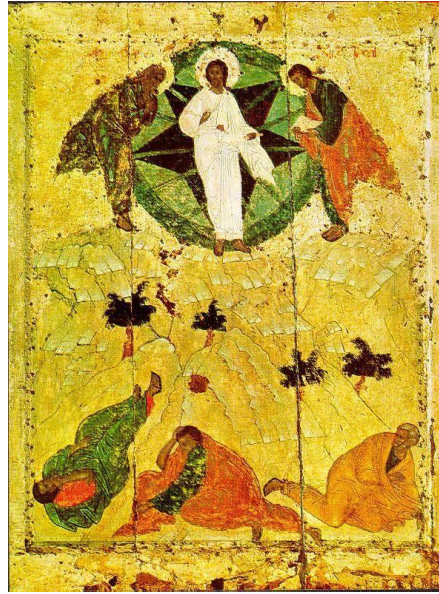


Fig.8. Rublev, c.1405.

This is a rough sketch and any conclusions derived from it must admittedly remain weak in the absence of a more extensive survey, but the evidence presented here conforms in general terms to Maguire's nuanced thesis.⁸ It can also be understood to cohere well with Andreopoulos's connection between the hesychast mandorla and the *mappa mundi*: on this line of thinking, nature is in fact present in the icon through the hesychast mandorla, but more abstractly than ever before. Nature is now symbolised not by flora or fauna but by basic geometric shapes: the living terrestrial world has been subsumed under the most abstract forms signifying the entire natural cosmos. On this view, Maguire's argument for the heightened abstraction of nature post-iconoclasm has been pushed further, with an engaging coherence.⁹

But there remains, as briefly mentioned above, a major early Transfiguration icon that challenges the above patterning in that, within it, nature is depicted more figuratively and fully than in any other well known icons of the Transfiguration from the Byzantine period. This is the image in the apse of the basilica of Saint Apollinaris in Classe and its unique place in tradition requires further discussion.

⁸ If there is indeed a change in representation of nature in Transfiguration icons as late as the thirteenth century as this brief sketch would indicate, and not in the earlier period of iconoclasm as an application of Maguire's argument would anticipate, then we might have discerned a matter of some interest: but the research here is not detailed enough to develop any strong argument on this point.

⁹ This conclusion is further supported when we consider Maguire's observations on the post-iconoclast representation of nature through fully abstract rectilinear *opus sectile* designs, read by contemporaries as signifying flowers, meadows and rivers. See *Nature and Illusion*, esp. pp.121, ff.

The distinct case of St Apollinaris in Classe

It remains an open question why the Transfiguration icon in the apse mosaic of St Catherine's, Sinai, became paradigmatic whereas the Transfiguration icon in the apse mosaic of St Apollinaris in Classe did not, given the latter's quality, its scale, and its site at Ravenna, the then heart of the Byzantine Empire [fig.9].

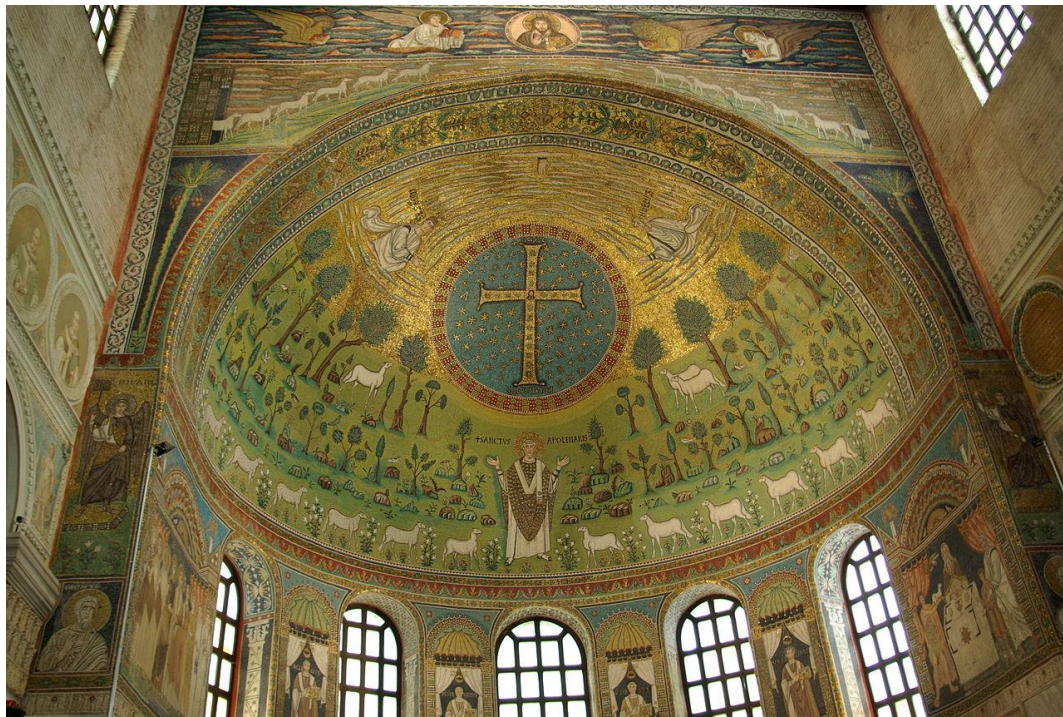


Fig.9. St Apollinaris in Classe, 6th c.

One explanatory response might be as follows, using again the argument of Henry Maguire. Maguire notes, particularly with respect to different events of annunciation, that where God acts in greatest union with humans, the visual depiction of such a union is more likely to show figures surrounded by gold than surrounded by terrestrial forms. This is because such scenes of divine-human union are 'above-nature', and gold best depicts that which is above nature. So, for example, depictions of the annunciation to St Anne may be replete with vegetable life. Depictions of the Annunciation to the Mother of God, however, may be surrounded by gold, as for example at Daphni.¹⁰ The argument is that the transcendence of divine-human union was for Byzantines signified most effectively in the presence of gold and in the reduction or absence of natural forms. But the apse mosaic of St Apollinaris in Classe did not conform to such

¹⁰ Maguire, *Nature and Illusion*, illustr. p.71. The 12th century panel painting of the Annunciation at St Catherine's, Sinai, provides a limited exception, as such proving the general rule here (Maguire, *Nature and Illusion*, illustr. p.68).

understanding and as such, we might think, was not paradigmatic in the way that the gilded Sinai apse was, despite its visual power.

There is another possible and complementary response to the question of why the Ravennan mosaic was not lastingly influential for Transfiguration festal icons. Just as depictions of the annunciation to St Anne are reliant upon the (extra-evangelical) *Proto-Evangelium of James*, so the apse mosaic at St Apollinaris in Classe is likely reliant upon the *Apocalypse of St Peter* for some of its design. It may be an ecclesial resistance to using extra-biblical accounts over, or even alongside, existent synoptic accounts that led to the success of the St Catherine's over the St Apollinaris mosaic in terms of informing the subsequent iconographic tradition.

Yet this speculation regarding possible written sources of the St Apollinaris mosaic design also raises a question in the other direction: why is it that the St Apollinaris mosaic incorporates into its design the voice of God at the Transfiguration (depicted in the form of a hand vertically above Christ), whereas the Sinai mosaic and its many followers do not? Here, the St Apollinaris design is closer to the gospels. This question invites further investigation into the relation of icons of the Transfiguration to the synoptic texts and leads us toward the second possible signification of the hesychast mandorla: the Holy Trinity.

The hesychast mandorla and the Trinity

To investigate further the apparent absence of the Father's voice in Transfiguration iconography, we start with the synoptic narrative.

Luke's account specifies that the vision of the Transfiguration happened as Jesus was praying.¹¹ Thereafter both Matthew and Luke are clear (as is implicit in Mark also) that the overshadowing cloud is felt and the Father's voice is heard. Importantly then, the Father's voice is heard *subsequent* to the vision and, for Matthew, specifically in the course of Peter's mistaken offer. It was only when the disciples heard the Father's voice - and this only in Matthew's record - that the disciples fell on their faces.

What we see in the influential St Catherine's, Sinai, apse mosaic is therefore an interpretive contraction of the gospel text [fig.2]. In this icon, the disciples in the mosaic fall (and, of them, most obviously Peter below Christ at Sinai), but without any reference to the voice of the Father

¹¹ Luke 9.29. The other synoptics record only (with Luke also) that Jesus and his disciples were apart, by themselves on the high mountain, as context for the vision (Mk 9.2; Matt. 17.1).

(e.g. in the visual form of a hand above Christ). The mosaic therefore references the beginning of the disciples' experience (seeing the luminous Christ), omits reference to the middle of their experience (hearing the voice of the Father) and references the final element of their experience (their responsive falling to the ground). Interestingly, this contraction does not follow the liturgical texts which stay close to the scriptural order.¹²

In the context of this striking iconographic contraction of the gospel record, Andreas Andreopoulos has argued that a theological concern to combat monophysite theology may have governed the design such that the two natures of Christ are emphasized, or otherwise there could have been an overriding theological concern to show the harmonization of the two Testaments, or the divine light.¹³ It is not clear, however, why visual incorporation in the icon design of the Father's voice (in the form of a hand) would do other than support such objectives. Are Christ's two natures any better understood through a design that omits the Father's voice - a voice which precisely affirms the divine Sonship of Jesus? Andreopoulos goes on also to argue that such a move away from the 'letter of tradition' evident in the Sinai apse mosaic may be accounted for by the requirements of a specifically monastic - rather than a wider - Christian community.¹⁴ But again, why is the omission of the Father's voice in particular explained by this? On a final aesthetic point, it is not as though visual introduction of the hand of the Father need obstruct other design elements in the icon: indeed it surely does not obstruct the total design of Theophany icons.

Andreopoulos himself briefly describes - but does not develop or argue for - an account of the hesychast mandorla in Trinitarian terms such that the circle represents the hypostasis of the Father and the two rectangles the hypostases of the Son and the Spirit.¹⁵ Could we understand that the Father's voice, absent for so long, has now found at least an implicit place in fourteenth century geometric representation of the Trinity?

There are two immediate problems with interpreting the hesychast mandorla as depicting the Trinity. First, would the design so understood not be duplicating the hypostasis of the Son who

¹² For example at Great Vespers: 'For they looked upon Thy garments that gleaned as the light and at Thy face that shone more than the sun; and unable to endure the vision of Thy brightness which none can bear, they fell to earth, completely powerless to lift up their gaze. For they heard a voice that testified from above: "This is my beloved Son, who has come into the world to save mankind"' (*The Festal Menaion*, p.477). And at Mattins: 'On Tabor the ministers of the Word looked upon strange and marvellous wonders, and hearing the voice of the Father, they cried out: "This is the imprint of the archetype, even our Saviour"' (*The Festal Menaion*, p.493).

¹³ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, pp.133-36.

¹⁴ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, pp.137-38.

¹⁵ Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, p.231.

is already depicted figuratively, possibly thereby risking a dyophysite or Nestorian image in which the humanity of the Son, depicted figurally, is visualized separately from the divinity of the Son, depicted geometrically as a square? Secondly, the hesychast movement did not concern itself primarily with the nature of the Trinity but with the gift of deification. Certainly hesychasts, including St Gregory Palamas, wrote on the nature of Trinity but this was in dispute with the Latin West: the debates around hesychasm on the other hand were largely intra-Orthodox. Perhaps this is simply a problem of nomenclature in that the notion of the 'hesychast' mandorla is misconceived: while I don't think this is the case, even if it were then the problem of depicting the nature of the Trinity remains.

In fact I submit that there is a reasonable response to both of these objections, as follows.¹⁶ The hesychast mandorla depicts not the Trinity *per se* (or *ad intra*) but rather the energies or activities of the Trinity (i.e. the Trinity *ad extra*) by means of geometrically differentiated light. In terms of the Trinity *ad intra*, the Father is understood to be the eternal originating principle of the Son and the Spirit; but in terms of the Trinity *ad extra*, the Father is understood to form a unique creative principle with the Son and the Spirit together, which principle is well illustrated in the geometric forms (while also maintaining the pattern of the Father's primacy through the circle). To emphasize, deification is participation in the divine energies (*ad extra*), and not the divine nature (*ad intra*), so what we see in the hesychast mandorla is the participation by Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John in the fullness of the Trinitarian energies seen enhypostatized in Christ. It was important to the hesychasts to affirm that by participation in the divine light they see no less than the fullness of the Trinity; and the Transfiguration, more even than at the moment of the general Resurrection, is the gospel moment at which human participation in the Trinity is most evident.

So while the voice of the Father is not explicitly signified in the innovation of the hesychast mandorla, the content of the Father's voice is implicitly signified: for the hesychast mandorla illustrates that the prophets and apostles and all those whose eyes have likewise been transfigured since that time - among them St Seraphim - have indeed seen Christ, recognised the beloved Son, listened to the Word, and so participated in the fullness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This position stood in stark contrast to that of the hesychasts' opponents who understood the divine light to be created, known in the imagination, and not to be the uncreated Trinitarian energies known through the transfigured *nous*.

It is worth noting here Paul Evdokimov's contention that a 'star is often inscribed in the mandorla and represents the "luminous cloud," sign of the Holy Spirit and transcendent

¹⁶ I haven't yet seen the interpretation that follows developed in secondary literature, though I anticipate that it must surely be.

energies'.¹⁷ Evdokimov does not explain why Holy Spirit in particular should be signified by the numinous cloud: if the sense is that the Father (in a voice not depicted but implicit) is then present with the Spirit (depicted as the overshadowing cloud) together with the Son (depicted in full figure), then Evdokimov avoids the difficulty discussed above of having any one Trinitarian hypostasis replicated in the design. On the other hand this interpretation does not do justice to the particularity of the geometry within what he calls a 'star'. Stars need not be depicted with such internal spatial differentiation. There is surely something more going on than he suggests.

Evdokimov offers his interpretation immediately following a consideration of St Gregory Palamas's writing on the Taboric light. Now St Gregory does write that 'the Holy Spirit joined his brilliance to Christ's in the radiant cloud' but he continues immediately, '...and showed that the Son was of one nature with the Father and himself and united in their light'.¹⁸ Elsewhere, St Gregory writes that light shone forth not only from the cloud which bore in itself the Father but also from the flesh which bore in itself the Son.¹⁹ And in another place, he writes of the glory of the one brightness in three suns.²⁰ It is surely the case that St Gregory, instead of thinking that the luminous cloud is associated with the Spirit alone, thinks rather that the Spirit is both in the cloud and in the body of Christ: the Spirit is the one through whom the Trinity may be seen.

So despite Evdokimov's claim and the context in which he places it, I submit that a better interpretation of the geometric configuration of the hesychast mandorla remains that it signifies the Trinitarian energies in which those present are participating – and again this position gains strength when the need of the hesychasts to defend this vision of the uncreated Trinitarian light is taken into account.

The natural context of the Trinity

It is the hesychast context that, I submit, privileges an interpretation of the hesychast mandorla as signifying the energies of the Holy Trinity over Andreopoulos's interpretation of the hesychast mandorla as signifying the cosmos. While the light of the Transfiguration had hitherto been depicted in the form of a circular or an oval mandorla, and as such could be interpreted to be either created or uncreated light, the light of Transfiguration was now differentiated in a threefold manner to show that it was Trinitarian, thereby affirming both the

¹⁷ Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, Kindle loc. 4844.

¹⁸ Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 34.4 (not cited by Evdokimov).

¹⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Triad* 1.3.36.

²⁰ Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 35.18.

doctrine of the divine energies, and the deifying nature of the Taboric light, contra Barlaam et al. While Andreopoulos's argument for the hesychast mandorla as a form of cosmic *mappa mundi* is plausible in visual terms, it does not reflect this or any other particular interest of the hesychasts. The hesychasts were primarily concerned with participation in the activities of the Holy Trinity: they were concerned much less with - and even hostile on occasion to - the outer learning of such cosmology, sacred geography and geometry as informs the *mappa mundi*. So I contend that Andreopoulos's argument is historically unlikely, though it can nonetheless remain a creative eisegesis that informs ongoing contemporary interpretation on the basis that in the present we need not be constrained solely to particular historic interpretations of icon design (which may anyway for some festal icons, or elements of these icons, be unclear or absent) so long as present interpretation conforms to the lived tradition of faith, which includes the testimony of scripture.

However, while Andreopoulos's interpretation may well be tenable and informative albeit not historically likely, it does not thereby follow that it brings inspiration to our contemporary context. In our current context plant and animal species are being destroyed, and natural patterns and cycles at different levels are being disordered, by human activity. Faced with such destruction and disorder the vital value of nature has come to the heart of cultural and political discourse with urgency and alarm. In this circumstance, depicting the cosmos with entirely abstract circular and rectilinear forms derived from *mappa mundi* risks exacerbating the very divorce of humans from their natural surroundings that marks contemporary life, in which humans come close to denying the conditions of their own embodiment. Surely in this contemporary context it is more effective to affirm the natural world as created, and belonging to the creator, through the use of embodied forms of differentiated plants and / or animals. One may object that this position risks a kind of paganism that Byzantines changed their art to overcome, in the way observed and analysed by Maguire. But the early Byzantine theologians' battle with the paganism of Greek mythology is not (quite) the contemporary battle. And for the post-iconoclast Byzantines, the relative absence of flora and fauna in iconography was a result not of any theological difficulty with nature *in se* but the result of a calculated sacrifice made in order to maintain any option at all of depicting deified humans.²¹ If these points are accepted, we can say that a natural context for the Trinity (*qua* divine energies) is fully justified.

We find a fascinating recent theological commendation of iconographic depiction of landscape in the writing of Cornelia Tsakiridou. Further to an analysis of Zen Buddhist landscape painting, Tsakiridou speaks of envisioning the "Orthodox image opening itself [...] to theotic moments in nature that rival in vitality the transcendent and yet so immanent mind-world of

²¹ See the arguments of Maguire in *Nature and Illusion*, *passim*.

Zen painting.”²² Indeed Tsakiridou at this point ends her book by suggesting that there is nothing better for the Orthodox iconographer to do than to follow such a path, so long as she remains immersed in tradition. In Christian tradition for Tsakiridou (here in contrast to Zen tradition), objects themselves contain the energy – the vitality – from which the image draws.²³ This energy of the object is conceptualized in the language of *logos* and *logoi* such that “the *logoi* of beings reveal their innermost reality, and that is what the ascetic who has acquired *eusebeia* can actually see”.²⁴ Aidan Hart, in a new article commending the Chinese *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* as an inspiration for iconographers, compares the *logoi* to the Chinese concept of *li*, understood as the principle or essence of things. He writes: “Because this *li* or *logos* is spoken by the divine Logos it has a divine quality and therefore an infinite quality. [...] So, contrary to popular conception there is scope for originality within the icon tradition, as long as it does not disregard the *li* of its sacred subject. This *li* will actually generate the authenticity”.²⁵

We have here an Orthodox turn to natural forms of flora and fauna that constitute landscape which is seen and experienced as an environment for divine self-disclosure, conceptualized in the language God’s spoken *logoi*. Can we not see the landscape of the St Apollinaris apse mosaic in just these terms? If so, we are in a position to accept and affirm a festal icon of the Transfiguration that has within its design both a hesychast mandorla signifying the Trinitarian energies and natural flora and fauna signifying the divine *logoi* in creation.

A clear example of this design is Aidan’s Hart recent apse fresco for the Roman Catholic chapel at Lancaster University [fig.10]. Here we see the hesychast mandorla with the increasingly brilliant bands of light registered by darkening colour toward the centre of each of the constituting geometric shapes. And here we also see a tree to the far right of the design beside St John, balancing the figure of St James to the far left. The tripartite foliage of the tree appears to mirror the head and hands of St James opposite, as if nature itself were joining with the apostles and in astonished praise of Christ.²⁶ Christ himself is designated ‘Light from Light’, a phrase found in the Mattins liturgy within praise for the Trinity as a triune Light guiding the whole

²² Tsakiridou, *Icons in Time, Person in Eternity*, p.306.

²³ Tsakiridou, *Icons in Time, Person in Eternity*, p.305.

²⁴ Tsakiridou, *Icons in Time, Person in Eternity*, p.305.

²⁵ Hart, *The Mustard Seed Garden*, commentary on 20.

²⁶ The Mattins liturgy indeed suggests that the disciples call nature forth to praise the Lord at the Transfiguration: ‘When the infinite Light that knows no evening, even the brightness of the Father that gives splendour to creation, ineffably appeared in unapproachable glory on Mount Tabor, it made men godlike as they sang: ‘O all ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord’. *The Festal Menaion*, p.491.

creation.²⁷ The mountain itself is lowered and flattened in a way which compositionally fits, though is not necessitated by, the wide landscape orientation of the apsidal icon surface: it suggests the relative accessibility of Christ at the Eucharistic altar. And below the mountain is undulating grassland stretching (as do the green lines at Sinai) right from one side to the other of the apse. This grassland is populated with two birds and five plants. The plants appear to be of two different kinds, symmetrically (and not alternately) configured around the central vertical axis of Christ. The abstraction of these plants, their limited variety, and their symmetrical order are all characteristics shared with the plants of the St Apollinaris icon. In all, we see in this icon a combination of the hesychast mandorla and terrestrial forms in a theologically and aesthetically unified whole.

I will be guided by this icon in my designs to follow.



Fig.10. Aidan Hart, Roman Catholic Chapel at Lancaster University, 2017.

²⁷ 'Today on Tabor in the manifestation of Thy Light, O Word, Thou unaltered Light from the Light of the unbegotten Father, we have seen the Father as Light and the Spirit as Light, guiding with light the whole creation'. *The Festal Menaion*, p.495.