

Recibido: 17.09.2009  
Aceptado: 25.10.2009

## THE «WINGS» OF THE SAINT: NEOPHYTOS THE RECLUSE AND CYPRIOT SOCIETY (12<sup>TH</sup>-20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)\*

**ABSTRACT:** The topic of this essay is the cult of Saint Neophytos the Recluse from the 12<sup>th</sup> century till 20<sup>th</sup> century. The expression “wings of the Saint” is an allegory for his cult. The “flight” of the Saint took off with high speed and much turbulence when the Bishop Basil Kinnamos honored him as a holy man. However, after his death, his cult gradually declined and became totally marginalized. Neophytos’ cult, which was doomed at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was revived by the Church in order to “resurrect” Neophytos. In the twentieth century Neophytos became a Hellenic idea, representing the resistance to the enemies of Hellenism.

**KEY-WORDS:** Neophytos the Recluse, Cyprus, Monastery of Enkleistra, Leontios Machairas.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo trata sobre el culto de S. Neófito el Recluso desde el s. XII hasta el s. XX. La expresión “alas del santo” es una alegoría de su culto. El “vuelo” del santo comenzó, con gran velocidad y turbulencia, cuando el obispo Basilio Cínamo lo honró como santo varón. Tras su muerte, sin embargo, su culto paulatinamente fue decayendo y se hizo marginal. El culto de Neófito, que fue condenado a comienzos del s. XVIII, fue revitalizado por la Iglesia para resucitarlo. En el s. XX Neófito se convirtió en un ideal helénico, por representar la idea de resistencia a los enemigos del helenismo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Neófito el Recluso, Chipre, monasterio de Enclistra, Leoncio Maqueras.

---

\* This essay originates in the lecture given in Kings College London (November 2007). I am grateful to Professor Judith Herrin for her suggestions.

Neophytos was born in 1134 in a village of Cyprus named Lefkara. His story is more or less known<sup>1</sup>. He became a monk and then a hermit when he withdrew to a cave in the Paphos peninsula where he spent the rest of his life. In 1184 the bishop of Paphos Basil Kinnamos sponsored the decoration of his cave (*Engleistra*). The work was assigned to the Constantinopolitan painter Theodoros Apsevdīs, who signed the frescoes there<sup>2</sup>. In relation to the iconography of the paintings, he followed Neophytos's instructions<sup>3</sup>.

In the hermitage there are two depictions of Neophytos. The painter depicted him in a humble prayer, kneeling at Christ's feet, while John the Baptist and Virgin Mary are standing on either side of Christ's throne. Theodoros Apsevdīs also depicted Neophytos standing between the two archangels. Many scholars have given various interpretations of this particular scene<sup>4</sup>. The most common and valid one explains the painting as the Recluse's as-

<sup>1</sup> A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Ο Εγκλειστος άγιος Νεόφυτος (1134-1214c.) και ο κόσμος του*, Nicosia 2007; C. GALATARIOU, *The making of a Saint. Life, times and sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse*, Cambridge 1991; EAD., «The bishop and the hermit: Church patronage in action in twelfth-century Cyprus», *Επετηρίς Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών Κύπρου* 28 (1991) 85-103; EAD., «Holy women and witches: Aspects of Byzantine conceptions of gender», *BMGS* 9 (1984-1985) 55-94; EAD., «Testamentary Rule of Neophytos for the Hermitage of the Holy Cross near Ktima in Cyprus», in: J. THOMAS-A. CONSTANTINIDES-HERO (EDS.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, Washington D.C. 2000 [vols. 1-5], vol. 3, pp. 1107-75, vol. 4, pp. 1338-73; C. MANGO-E. J. W. HAWKINS, «The hermitage of St. Neophytos and its wall-paintings», *DOP* 20 (1966) 119-206; B. EGGLEZAKES, *Είκοσι μελέται δια την Εκκλησίαν Κύπρου (4<sup>ος</sup> έως 20<sup>ος</sup> αιών.)*, Athens 1996, pp. 229-303; G. CALOPHONOS, «St. Neophytos the Recluse in the sweet land of dreams», *Επετηρίς Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών Κύπρου* 29 (1992) 187-95; I. P. TSIKNOPOULOS, «Η θαυμαστή προσωπικότης του Νεοφύτου πρεσβυτέρου, μοναχού και εγκλειστού», *Byzantion* 67 (1969) 311-413; M. H. CONGOURDEAU, «L'Enkleistra dans les écrits de Neophytos le recluse», in: C. JOLIVET-LEVY-M. KAPLAN-J. P. SODINI (EDS.), *Les Saints et leur sanctuaires à Byzance. Textes, images et sanctuaires*, Paris 1993, pp. 137-49; S. TOMECOVIC, «Ermitage de Paphos: decors peints pour Neophyte le recluse», in: C. JOLIVET-LEVY-M. KAPLAN-J. P. SODINI (EDS.), *Les Saints et leur sanctuaires...*, pp. 151-79.

<sup>2</sup> S. SOPHOCLEOUS, «Le peintre Apsevdīs et son entourage, Chypre 1183 et 1192», in: G. KOGH (ED.) *Byzantinische Malerei. Symposium in Marburg*, Wiesbaden 2000, pp. 307-20, pl. 33-44.

<sup>3</sup> See M. PANAYIOTIDES, «Το πρόβλημα του ρόλου του χορηγού και του βαθμού ανεξαρτησίας του ζωγράφου στην καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία. Δύο παραδείγματα του 12<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα», in: M. VASILAKI (ED.), *Το πορτραίτο του καλλιτέχνη στο Βυζάντιο*, Crete 1997, pp. 77-105; M. PANAYIOTIDES, «Η ζωγραφική του 12<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα στην Κύπρο και το πρόβλημα των τοπικών εργαστηρίων», in: A. PAPAGEORGHIOU (ED.), *Acts of the Third International Cyprological Congress*, vol. 2, Nicosia 2001, pp. 411-439.

<sup>4</sup> A. DEMOSTHENOUS, «Interpreting Byzantine Cyprus. The chalice, the cameo and the “mirror”», *Byzantinos Domos* 16 (2007-2008) 308-9; R. CORMACK, *Writing in gold, Byzantine society and its icons*, London 1985, ch. 5; A. J. WHARTON, *Art of Empire. Painting and Architecture of the Byzantine Periphery*, London 1988, pp. 87-90. See also A. DEMOSTHENOUS, «Καθρέφτη, καθρεφτάκι μου<sup>2</sup>: Η απεικόνιση του αγίου Νεοφύτου ανάμεσα σε αρχαγγέλους ως κάτοπτρο εσωτερικού διαλόγου και αυτοεπιβεβαίωσης», in: *Actes of the Fourth International Cyprological Congress*, Nicosia (forthcoming).

cension to Heaven as a saint<sup>5</sup>. C. Galatariotou interprets the depiction of Neophytos between the archangels as an arrogant manifestation of his sainthood and an expression of his belief on his own sanctity. In simple terms she considers such a fresco a work of propaganda and part of the Recluse's plan of self-sanctification. To quote Galatariotou: "Not everyone could read manuscripts, but everyone could 'read' pictures. And the message they would be getting would be exactly the same as the readers or listeners of the Recluse's writings would be receiving: that Neophytos was a Saint"<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, R. Cormack stresses this aspect: "The composition is one unique in Byzantine art. It portrays visually something which the writings of Neophytos allude to less directly: that Neophytos takes as his model Christ himself and will on death immediately go to Heaven"<sup>7</sup>.

However, another group of Byzantinists consider this painting as a visualization of the humble prayer of Neophytos<sup>8</sup>. This view is based on traditional Orthodox literature, which stressed that a monk can have only one desire: to become a member of the Heavenly Court<sup>9</sup>. A. and J.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. C. GALATARIOU, *The making of a Saint...*, p. 140: «Departing from the usual Byzantine artistic convention, to which other paintings of the Enkleistra adhere, both the archangel Michael (who stands on Neophytos' right) and Gabriel (who stands on Neophytos' left) have their left wing painted in anything but a mirror image of their respective right wing. The wings which are away from Neophytos (Michael's right and Gabriel's left wing) follow an almost straight, almost vertical line. The wings which are close to Neophytos, however, protrude in a much wider angle from their shoulders, disappear behind Neophytos' shoulders and reappear lower down, behind his buttocks, forming an imaginary "X" behind the Recluse. This has an almost trompe l'oeil effect: it requires little imagination for the onlooker who, naturally, focuses his or her eyes on Neophytos to see the Recluse as possessing wings!»

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. CORMACK, *Writing in gold, Byzantine society...*, p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> See the papers of D. Triantaphyllooulos, Father Benedictos and Ch. Economou, *Acts of the Fourth International Cypriological Congress* (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> H. HOTZAKOGLU, «Βυζαντινή αρχιτεκτονική και τέχνη στην Κύπρο», in: Th. PΑΠΑΔΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ (ED.), *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, vol. 3: Βυζαντινή Κύπρος (465-787), Nicosia 2005, pp. 614-15; D. TRIANTAPHYLLOPOULOS, «On Saint Neophytos Enkleistos and his alleged "self-sanctification". A reinterpretation of the paintings in his Enkleistra», in: *XXe Congrès International des Études Byzantines, Paris 2001, Pré-actes, III. Communications libres*, Paris 2001, p. 148; D. TRIANTAPHYLLOPOULOS, «Αποκαλύψεις οράματα στην Κύπρο. Ιστορική πραγματικότητα και εσχατολογική προοπτική», *Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* 64-65 (2003) 385-428: «...παριστάνεται ζων ο Νεόφυτος, χωρίς φωτοστέφανο, ως να οδηγείται στους ουρανούς από δύο αγγέλους. Οπως είναι γνωστό, η τελευταία αυτή σκηνή έχει ερμηνευθεί ποικιλοτρόπως, με αποκορύφωμα μία έντονα απομυθολογητική για την προσωπικότητα του οσίου ερμηνεία, κατά τη γνώμη μου αυτή ορθά επέσυρε δριμεία κριτική. Επισημάνθηκε δηλαδή ότι κάθε ερμηνεία της Εγκλείστρας πρέπει να ξεκινάει από τις ιδέες του ίδιου του οσίου, διατυπωμένες στα ποικίλα κείμενά του...» I will not comment the unhistorical approach of theologians and ecclesiastical scholars.

Stylianou take a position between the two, preferring a rather neutral formulation<sup>10</sup>.

But what was the symbolic meaning of this painting? There is no doubt that through his “wings” Neophytos wanted to convey the message that he was a holy man or perhaps a living saint. He was playing on a current way of thinking in Byzantium, where the emperor was also considered angelic. As H. Maguire puts it: “Twelfth-century Byzantine orators termed the emperor as an angel... The idea became even more of a commonplace at the end of the twelfth century... In the thirteenth century, the emperor finally acquired the specific iconographic attributes of an angel, namely, the wings... Angels, of course, were provided with wings to represent their power of heavenly ascent and descent; this idea was spelled out explicitly by several Byzantine writers... The emperor did not merely join the ranks of the angels, but his very nature became angelic”<sup>11</sup>.

However, there is another equally important dimension to the painting. It functioned as a symbolic “mirror”, in conformity with a psychological archetype<sup>12</sup>. In Greek mythology Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection<sup>13</sup>. This is the typical behavior of every unsatisfied person who has specific unfulfilled expectations. For Neophytos the “portrait” confirmed his holiness. To his own eyes it was the realization of his personal mythology<sup>14</sup>. For at least thirty years, from 1184 till his death (after 1214), this spiritual “mirror” was not just a pamphlet of propaganda, but also a reflection of the Recluse’s inner world. His daily life was accompanied by many glances towards his “mirror” and in time, the habit could lead to an interactive relationship. Besides, Neophytos’ narcissistic personality allows us to suppose that gradually he may have develo-

<sup>10</sup> A.-J. STYLIANOU, *The painted Churches of Cyprus*, Nicosia 1997, p. 361: «He [Neophytos] is here standing between the Archangels Michael and Gabriel who hold him by the shoulders».

<sup>11</sup> H. MAGUIRE, «The heavenly court», in: H. MAGUIRE (ED.), *Byzantine court culture from 829 to 1204*, Washington 1997, pp. 247-58, especially 252-8.

<sup>12</sup> This perspective combines two areas of modern research; one is an examination on the “love of self” (see Th. OSBORNE, *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics*, Paris 2005) and the other concerns the efforts of scholars to discover an intimate and often private dialogue between image and worshiper (see G. PEERS, *Sacred Shock: Framing visual experience in Byzantium*, Pennsylvania 2004). See also the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, in: J. STRACHEY-A. FREUD (ED. and TRANSL.), vols. 1-24, London 1916-7, vol. 16, pp. 375-77.

<sup>13</sup> S. FREUD, «On Narcissism: An introduction», in: J. STRACHEY (ED.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, v. 1-24, London 1953-74, v. 14, p. 1981.

<sup>14</sup> *The seminar of Jacques Lacan*, in: J.-A. MULLER (ED.), New York-London 1988, pp. 139-44.

ped an inner dialogue with his polished idol. The aim of this dialogue was, of course, to assert his sanctity. Thus, Neophytos in his hours of solitude might have been asking the “mirror”: ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, am I a saint?’ and the answer was certainly ‘Yes, you are!’<sup>15</sup>

Yet the symbolic wings of the saint seem to have dominated his own mind rather than impressing the Cypriot community of his time. We have many reasons to believe that Neophytos’ influence on his audience was limited and not widespread<sup>16</sup>. His angelic nature was an obsession that probably very few members of the Cypriot flock accepted<sup>17</sup>. They may not have seen the painting very often. However, the impact of this image and the cult it engendered was very different in later centuries. If we bear in mind that “wings” are the means of going somewhere, Neophytos’ image certainly traveled in time.

His legend survived his death in around 1214. During the thirteenth century the monks of the monastery lived under the shadow of Neophytos’ ghost. Shortly before his death, Neophytos had appointed his nephew, Isaiah, as his successor in the most formal way. I quote from the *Typikon* of the Enkleistra Monastery<sup>18</sup>: “I offer this here location of my holy hermitage and its settlers firstly to Christ my God and his unblemished Mother and to His Holy Cross, and then to my nephew and the steward, the hieromonk Isaiah, a disposition made not by any means on account of loving kinship, but because, having been raised here from when his nails were tender (i.e. from a young age) and having placed auspicious hopes as regards him, I offer the holy hermitage and all the things attached to it as well as the spiritual and bodily protection of the brothers into his own hands and authority after God”<sup>19</sup>. There is no doubt that the new abbot continued the tra-

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A. DEMOSTHENOUS, “Καθρέφτη, καθρεφτάκι μου”...» (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. DEMOSTHENOUS *Ο Έγκλειστος άγιος Νεόφυτος...*, pp. 232-235.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. C. GALATARIOU, *The making of a Saint...*; A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Το κυπριακό ποίμνιο (4<sup>ος</sup>-12<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας). Η δράση των ιεροκηρύκων και οι αντιδράσεις του ακροατηρίου τους*, Thessalonica (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> I will use Coureas’ translation as the most accurate, see N. COUREAS (ED. and TRANS.), *The foundation rules of medieval monasteries: Makbairas and St. Neophytos*, Nicosia 2003, p. 19: «Galatariotou’s translation of the Rule of Neophytos the Recluse also has certain omissions and mistranslations».

<sup>19</sup> N. COUREAS (ED. and TRANS.), *The foundation rules...*, p. 150. Another point of the foundation rules describes the portrait of the ideal abbot of his monastery: «...you must elect one worthy of the eremitical station in word and deed...» (*ibid.*, p. 147). However, Galatariotou points out that St. Neophytos was contradicting this provision and was nominating a successor whose ability to become abbot or even remain a monk he himself doubted: see C. GALATARIOU, «Byzantine Ktetorika Typika: A Comparative», *REB* 64 (1987) [77-138], p. 111.

dition Neophytos had established<sup>20</sup>. Their close kinship made the founder of the Enkleistra Monastery trust Isaiah more than anyone else. Besides, the Typikon of the Enkleistra Monastery had as its main aim the preservation of the memory of the Recluse<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, his Monastery was the ark of his cult. Beyond the Enkleistra Neophytos' legend gradually fell into oblivion. His "wings" were just long enough to cover the few monks of his Monastery and maybe a small number of the visitors. The *ex-silentio* testimony is in this case suggestive. In the innumerable Orthodox Churches that the Cypriot flock built from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries there is not a single fresco representing Neophytos, despite the preference of the Cypriots for the depiction of local saints<sup>22</sup>. The sole icon of Neophytos known during this period is the sixteenth century one from the Monastery of the Enkleistra<sup>23</sup>. However, some medieval scholars did mention Neophytos in their writings: Neophytos Rodinos, Logizos Skevo-phylakas and others refer to him<sup>24</sup>. There can be little doubt that all these references were copied from the *Chronicle* of Leontios Machairas<sup>25</sup>. This renowned historian of the fifteenth century who studied Byzantine texts and Ecclesiastical History is the source for all the later ones. He knew that Neophytos's place of origin was the village Lefkara, but the only other information he provides is that he became a monk: "Also at the Englistra, St.

<sup>20</sup> A. PΑPAGΕΟΡΓΙΟΥ, «Λαξεντά ασκητήρια και μοναστήρια της Κύπρου», *Επετηρίς τοῦ Κέντρου Μελετῶν Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Κύκκου* 4 (1999) [33-70], p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> N. COUREAS (ED. and TRANS.), *The foundation rules...*, p. 142: «In order that the tendency to forget quickly might not sink all these things into the depths of forgetfulness, we enjoy you, O brothers, to read the present Rule and the chapters three times every year on a suitable day when none of the brothers is absent. Furthermore, let the first lection be on the eighth of the month September on account of this being the birthday of the Mother of God, the second on the festival of the birth of Christ, and the third on the Annunciation of the all pure Mother of God, so that the lection of the things decreed might arouse the brothers to watchfulness». Furthermore, like many monastic founders Neophytos beseeches his monks to conserve his memory through the liturgy: «You are duty bound to perform the extended prayers on behalf of the emperors and rulers, prelates and ministrants past and present daily during both vespers and matins, and in the course of the divine service. Do not overlook the divine services on Saturdays, Sundays, feast days and on major saints' days, and, if it is not too troublesome to you, furnish in the course of each service an offertory prayer to God on my own behalf also» (see *The foundation rules*, p. 144).

<sup>22</sup> N. GIOLES, *Ἡ χριστιανική τέχνη στην Κύπρο*, Nicosia 2003, pp. 167-95; A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Ὁ Ἐγκλειστος ἅγιος Νεόφυτος...*, pp. 178-9.

<sup>23</sup> A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Ὁ Ἐγκλειστος ἅγιος Νεόφυτος...*, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> For this Chronography see N. ANAXAGOROU, *Narrative and Stylistic Structures in the Chronicle of Leontios Machairas*, Nicosia 1998.

Neophytos, who was a young monk from Lefkara, and he came and dwelled on a pillar in the said monastery: and he fell asleep; and his tomb is there, and is a source of many miracles”<sup>26</sup>.

Firstly, we should underline the inaccuracy of some of this information concerning Neophytos’ life and times. He, of course, did not dwell on a pillar and his monastery was not in Lefkara as the source implies. The Chronographer’s reference to Neophytos is brief and not very specific since Machairas narrates everything he knows about Cypriot saints from the very appearance of Christianity on the island till his own time, in some parts in detail. The miracles at the tomb are certainly a sign of sainthood. The only obstacle to accepting this information is the low credibility of the source. So first, let us examine the ethno-religious ideology of the author<sup>27</sup>. Ph. Michalopoulos points out that apart from signaling the triumph of despotism over the learned tradition, the *Chronicle* also proclaims the victory of Hellenism over Frankism<sup>28</sup>. C. Galatariotou, K. Kyrris and others adopt what may be described as a fundamentalist approach in support of Machairas<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, this part of the *Chronicle* is a list of Saints that includes old stories, oral traditions and of course imagined saints. Machairas attempts to advertise the holiness of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus by stuffing its history with additional names. In addition his text is a work of propaganda. The following passage is indicative: “And because the Latins envy the Greeks, they hide the miracles that are worked by the icons and by the pieces of the Holy Wood in the churches of the Greeks: not because they disbelieve, but because they are envious”<sup>30</sup>.

So, his account is related to the rivalry between the Latins and the Greeks on the island. The Chronographer stresses the position of his community and underlines the superiority of the Orthodox tradition. In this indirect way Leontios Machairas claims that in the Orthodox world one finds the most glorious saints and the most impressive miracles; this proves that

<sup>26</sup> R. M. DAWKINS (ED. AND TRANSL.), *Leontios Makhairas, Resital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled Chronicle*, Oxford 1932, vol. 1, pp. 38-39, §38.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. N. ANAXAGOROU, *Narrative and Stylistic Structures...*, pp. 15-7.

<sup>28</sup> Ph. MICHALOPOULOS, «Λεόντιος Μαχαίρας», *Φιλολογική Πρωτοχρονιά* (1954), pp. 87-91.

<sup>29</sup> C. GALATARIOTOU, «Leontios Machairas’ Exegesis of the Sweet Land of Cyprus: Towards a Re-appraisal of the Text and its Critics», in: *The Sweet Land of Cyprus, Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Birmingham 1991 [393-413], p. 411; C. P. KYRRIS, «Η Ορθόδοξη συνείδηση του Λεοντίου Μαχαίρα», *Κυπριακός Λόγος* 20 (1978), pp. 159-65.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Leontios Machairas, *Chronicle*, pp. 66-7, §72.

Orthodoxy is the only true dogma. It may seem rather childish today but in medieval times this antagonism took place under these conditions. Furthermore, Leontios knows almost nothing about Neophytos and emphasizes the miracles that occurred at his tomb as a testimony and a revelation from God of Neophytos' holiness. It is further proof that the Orthodox Church was the one and only true Church of Christ. However, Machairas' reference says nothing concerning the spread of Neophytos' cult, thereby creating the contrary impression that not even a leading scholar and a researcher of his time, such as Leontios was, knew anything specific about Neophytos. Following him, all those scholars who study the case of Neophytos focus on the testimony of the written texts and consider as insignificant the lack of archaeological data.

For many centuries Neophytos' cult diminished. In the early eighteenth century his monastery was about to close. The Russian visitor Gregory Barsky testifies that only two or three monks were living there<sup>31</sup>. The footprints of Neophytos were about to become extinguished. However, the flame of his fame was revived in 1757 when the monks discovered the relics of Saint Neophytos and transferred them to the *Katholikon* of the Monastery. According to his will his corpse had been buried in a wall of the Enkleistra following the instructions laid down in his *Typikon*<sup>32</sup>. The discovery in 1757 was interpreted as a miracle, a supernatural intervention of the saint and a divine sign. Ecclesiastical ceremonies and ritual parades of clergy and laymen escorted the precious relics from the Enkleistra to the Church with hymns and psalms. The whole event was magnificent by itself<sup>33</sup>. After that, Neophytos' cult emerged into the light of history. Fur-

<sup>31</sup> N. BURSUKOV (ED.), *Stranstvovanija Vasil'ja Grigorovija-Barskago*, vol. 2, St. Petersburg 1886, p. 274.

<sup>32</sup> N. COUREAS (ED. and TRANS.), *The foundation rules...*, p. 167: «Having broken down the wall of the tomb to bring in the coffin and intending to rebuilt a new, do not leave a small door as was the case previously, but seal it altogether, and depict a picture outside, where the small door used to be, of whatever kind the Lord thinks fit to impart to you. And this is how you shall edify the place, so that most of the visitors are unaware of the fact that a tomb is placed within»; C. GALATARIOΤΟΥ, *The making of a Saint...*, p. 138: «That Neophytos believed his own places of abode to be holy even before he died is clear from what he says about them in his *Typikon*. There he claims that his enkleistra was God's gift to Neophytos and that its buildings were built by God. Also, in making arrangements so that his tomb would be part of his first cell he made sure his relics (an important ingredient in a cult) would remain intact and in the specific context of a place which he had already immersed in holiness».

<sup>33</sup> Arch. KYPRIANOS, *Ιστορία χρονολογική της νήσου Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1902, p. 350; S. PERDIKIS, *Η Μονή Κύκκου, ο αρχιμανδρίτης Κυπριανός και ο τυπογράφος Μιχαήλ Γλυκής*, Nicosia 1989, p. 39: «Ο



thermore, it was strengthened not only by the miraculous appearance of the relics but also by the participation of Kyprianos, the archimandrite and great scholar of his time, in the celebrations of 1757. Due to his efforts the Church of Cyprus officially consecrated the 28<sup>th</sup> of September as the commemoration day of the Finding of Saint Neophytos' relics<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, Kyprianos consecrated the 24<sup>th</sup> of January to the memory of Saint Neophytos in the ecclesiastical calendar. This was his official recognition as a Saint. Kyprianos also edited many works of Neophytos such as *Theosemeia* and *Hexaemeros* which were published in Venice, thus spreading the fame of the Cypriot Recluse further a field<sup>35</sup>.

This development should be connected to the harsh experience of the Cypriot Church under Ottoman rule, which was looking for heroes to sustain the Orthodox faith<sup>36</sup>. After the middle of the eighteenth century we have dozens of icons representing Neophytos from churches scattered all over Cyprus. On the vast majority, different painters depicted him wearing the *koukoulion*, the typical attire of a monk, and holding a cross. In Christian iconography the Cross is the symbol of a martyr<sup>37</sup>. According to the iconography martyrs are depicted holding a Cross as an indication of their passion and their death. At the same time the Cross is the trophy of a triumph against evil powers. Neophytos, however, had a natural death at a late age. This paradox finds its explanation in the socio-political context of the eighteenth century. The Cypriot flock suffered under Ottoman rule and the Church desperately wanted heroes to offer hope and to support the faith of the oppressed people. A martyr was by far the most reliable hero in comparison to a stoic monk. The Church wanted to set an example that a

---

Κυπριανός φέροντας τότε σχήμα υποτακτικού έλαβε μέρος στην τελετή μαζί με τον ηγούμενο Κύκκου Παρθένιο, τον αρχιμανδρίτη Παΐσιο...»

<sup>34</sup> According to P. Agathonos, «από τη χρονολογία ευρέσεως των λειψάνων (1757) μέχρι τη χρονολογία εκδόσεως της ακολουθίας (1778) μεσολάβησαν είκοσι ένα έτη. Άρα, η καθιέρωση της εορτής τούτης προς τιμή του αγίου Νεοφύτου από την Εκκλησία της Κύπρου θα έγινε όταν ο Κυπριανός βρισκόταν ακόμη στην Αρχιεπισκοπή. Και το γεγονός ότι ανέλαβε την ευθύνη για την έκδοση των δύο ακολουθιών του Αγίου, μας πείθει πως ο Κυπριανός διαδραμάτισε σημαίνοντα ρόλο στην καθιέρωση της εορτής της 28<sup>ης</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου, δεδομένου ότι από τη θέση που κατείχε στην Αρχιεπισκοπή θα επηρέαζε σημαντικά τα εκκλησιαστικά πράγματα». See P. AGATHONOS, «Το υμνογραφικό και εκδοτικό έργο του αρχιμανδρίτη Κυπριανού», *Kleronomia* 30 (1999) [9-28], p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. S. PERDIKIS, *Η Μονή Κύκκου...*

<sup>36</sup> R. C. JENKINS, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World 1570-1640*, New York 1992; H. LUKE, *Cyprus under Turks: 1571-1878*, Oxford 1921; L. PHILIPPOU, *Η Εκκλησία της Κύπρου επί Τουρκοκρατίας*, Nicosia 1975.

<sup>37</sup> Phil. 3: 7-11.

Cypriot could easily emulate. So the key word was pain. Under Ottoman rule Cypriots were plagued by the cruel behavior of their oppressors. They probably felt like martyrs and the torment of the earlier martyrs took on a deeper meaning. The Cross that symbolizes this torment was their final victory over the infidel tyrants. This justification was what Cypriots needed and it explains why this otherwise arbitrary iconographical type provided hope and faith.

However, after the change of political status in Cyprus in 1878, when the island passed from Ottoman to British rule, depictions of Neophytos were modified. There are a few icons dating from the last two decades of the nineteenth century that represent Neophytos with a *bacteria*, the stick of an abbot. The *bacteria* replaced the Cross since Cypriots felt relief and no longer needed to stress the role of a martyr. They strongly believed that the Union with Greece (*Enosis*), something that they wanted most, was a matter of time. This iconographic type, of course, pre-existed but it seems that after 1878 it became more common<sup>38</sup>.

Art is closely connected to social and political developments and the icons of Saint Neophytos reflect this. It is important to note that nineteenth century monumental painting on the island is almost non-existent and from the few fragments that are conserved, Neophytos is absent. However, the inadequate sample of paintings does not permit any rigid conclusions. There are mosaics and frescoes representing Neophytos, dating from the last decades of the twentieth century. Such samples can be seen in the Monastery of Enkleistra and in newly decorated churches in various parishes. Today Neophytos' cult is very popular and his Monastery flourishes. All this began in 1757 when certain cunning churchmen found a way to exploit Neophytos' almost forgotten legacy<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Ο Εγκλείστος άγιος Νεόφυτος...*, pp. 173-230.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-3: «Στη σύγχρονη εποχή η λατρεία του Νεοφύτου βρίσκεται σε άνηση. Μετά από 800 χρόνια ο Νεόφυτος επανεμφανίζεται στη μνημειακή ζωγραφική. Θα μπορούσαμε να πούμε, με κάθε επιφύλαξη βέβαια, πως εφόσον η έρευνα μας στους ναούς του β' μισού του 20<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα είναι καθαρά εμπειρική (δεν έχει γίνει καταγραφή για τόσο πρόσφατα μνημεία), ότι η πρώτη απεικόνιση του Νεοφύτου σε τοιχογραφία μετά το 1183/4 έγινε στο Ναό της Παναγίας Ευαγγελίστριας στην Παλλουριώτισσα (κεντρικό πρόστειο της Λευκωσίας), το 2000. Ο ναός είναι από τους μεγαλύτερους σε διαστάσεις σε ολόκληρη την Κύπρο και γι αυτό οι τεράστιες επιφάνειες των τοίχων του επέτρεψαν την ολόσωμη απεικόνιση του Νεοφύτου, ανάμεσα σε δεκάδες άλλους αγίους. Βέβαια στη μνημειακή τέχνη ο Νεόφυτος έχει παρασταθεί και μερικές δεκαετίες νωρίτερα. Στα 1973 ο αξιόλογος Κύπριος ζωγράφος και ψηφοθέτης Γ. Κοτσώνης φιλοτέχνησε μια ψηφιδωτή παράσταση στην είσοδο της σύγχρονης Μονής του Εγκλείστου, η οποία μιμείται την περίφημη τοιχογραφία του Θεόδωρου Αψευδή με το Νεόφυτο ανάμεσα

The power of the Church is the faith of its flock. Thus, the Church often improvises supernatural events in order to serve its hope of reviving peoples' faith<sup>40</sup>. And the miraculous 'discovery' of holy relics is a long established practice<sup>41</sup>. However, it is not always easy to keep these events hidden. Lorenzo Warriner Pease, an American Missionary, who stayed in Cyprus from 1834 till 1839, reveals this particular intrigue in his *Diaries*. He visited the Monastery of Saint Neophytos for three hours. But these three hours were enough for a rational Christian, but not an Orthodox man, to understand that the miracle of 1757 was a deceit. He comments: «On our entering it, we passed on our left the former residence of St. Neophytus, who for many years lived in a cave in the side of a frightful precipice... To the east of these is the church where the bones of the Saint are to be found. His head is in independent box, while his carcass, which was found in the cave and has some of his flesh dried on, is shown i.e. a part of the lower vertebrae, say 3 or 4, the hip bones and the legs. The archimandrite contented valiantly that the hip bone was the shoulder. The coffin in which the relics are deposited was said to have been found in the cave, is 5 feet. 4 ½ inches long and the carcass 4' 6 inches. It is a perfect hoax»<sup>42</sup>.

The expression “wings of the Saint” is not just a reference to the painting of Neophytos between the archangels. It is an allegory for his cult. In conclusion we could say that the “flight” of the Saint took off with high speed and much turbulence when the Bishop Basil Kinnamos honored him as a holy man<sup>43</sup>. However, after his death his cult gradually declined and became

---

σε δύο αρχαγγέλους. Το ψηφιδωτό αυτό εντάσσεται στην προσπάθεια που άρχισε επί αρχιεπισκόπου Μακαρίου Γ' για προβολή του Νεοφύτου».

<sup>40</sup> C. MANGO, *Βυζάντιο, η αυτοκρατορία της Νέας Ρώμης*, Athens 1990, p. 188; A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Σκοτόνοντας το δράκο. Τρεις μελέτες βυζαντινής αγιολογίας*, Thessalonica 2006, ch.1.

<sup>41</sup> G. JONES (ED.), *Saints of Europe. Studies towards a survey of cults and culture*, Donington 2003.

<sup>42</sup> R. C. SEVERIS (ED.), *The diaries of Lorenzo Warriner Pease 1834-1839. An American Missionary in Cyprus and his travels in the Holy Land, Asia Minor and Greece*, vols.1-2, Nicosia 2002, vol.2, pp. 1052-3.

<sup>43</sup> N. COUREAS (ED. and TRANS.), *The foundation rules...*, pp. 138-9: «During those years the bishopric of Paphos fell vacant, and in the seventh year of my residence in the hermitage (1166) that blessed man Basil Kinnamos assumed this office. Showing as much faith and favour as possible in a divinely inspired manner towards my humility, he did not cease urging me for a whole four-year period, on the one hand himself coming and going frequently, and on the other making exhortations through his own lords, until he had strapped me to the yoke of the priesthood and had persuaded me to have a pupil living together with me, having written down the required ration in a sealed document. And so from then on the buildings of the hermitage began to be extended and embellished, and the whole length of the precipice was hewn in its entirety

totally marginalized. Neophytos' cult, which was doomed at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was revived by the Church in order to "resurrect" Neophytos. The spread of the fame relating to Neophytos' relics did the rest. Everybody accepted this as a supernatural event because everybody needed a reconfirmation that God was with the Cypriot people. Nobody noticed the paradox that Lorenzo Warriner Peace refers to. Was this blind faith and lack of education or fear of doubting a welcome miracle? All these prepared the ground for the re-making of a Saint. Archimandrite Kyprianos established Neophytos' cult on new and stronger foundations and he gave him brand new "wings". These "wings" proved themselves powerful and launched Neophytos' cult up to the sky.

On 21th of November 1953, the renowned poet Georgios Seferis visited the monastery of Saint Neophytos and wrote a poem using as a motto an abstract from Neophytos' essay on the misfortunes of Cyprus. It is called "Neophytos the Recluse speaks": "Νεόφυτος ο Έγκλειστος μιλά / Υπέρογκες αρχιτεκτονικές, Λαρίων Φαμαγκούστα Μπουφαβέντο / Σχεδόν σκηνικά / Ήμασταν συνηθισμένοι να το στοχαζόμασταν αλλιώς το Ιησούς / Χριστός Νικά / Που είδαμε κάποτε στα τείχη της Βασιλειούσας / τα φαγωμένα από Γυφτοτσάντιστα και στεγνά χορτάρια, / Με τους μεγάλους πύργους κατάχαμα σαν ενός δυνατού που έχασε, τα ριγμένα ζάρια. / Για μας ήταν άλλο πράγμα ο πόλεμος για την πίστη του Χριστού / Και για την ψυχή του ανθρώπου καθισμένη στα γόνατα της Υπερμάχου Στρατηγού, / Που είχε στα μάτια ψηφιδωτό τον καημό της Ρωμιοσύνης, / Εκείνου του πέλαγου τον καημό σαν ήβρε το ζύγισμα της καλοσύνης. / Ας παίζουν τώρα μελοδράματα στα σκηνικά των σταυροφόρων / Λουζινιά / Κι ας φλομώνουνε με τον καπνό που μας κουβάλησαν από το βοριά. / Ας τους να τρώγονται και ν' ανεμοδεύονται ωσάν το κάτεργο / Που δένει μούδες / Καλώς μας ήρθατε στην Κύπρο, αρχόντοι. Τράγοι και μαϊμούδες!"<sup>44</sup>

In this poem Neophytos acts as a symbol of the eternal Cypriot resistance against non- Greek and non-Orthodox conquerors. The Latins become an allegory for the British<sup>45</sup>. Seferis wrote this poem on the eve of the Cypriot

---

for the construction of cells. The hermitage was fully furnished in the twenty-fourth year of my confinement and the cliff adjoining it, having been hewn, became a church of the august cross.

<sup>44</sup> G. SEFERIS, *Ποιήματα*, Athens 1994, pp. 259-60.

<sup>45</sup> G. GEORGIS, *Ο Σεφέρης περί των κατά χώραν Κύπρον σκαιών*, Athens 1991, p. 119: «...συνειρμική μετάβαση από την πρώτη στη δεύτερη Αγγλοκρατία...»; P. MACKRIDGE, «Ο Σεφέρης και η προφητική φωνή», in: M. PIERIS (ED.), *Γιώργος Σεφέρης. Το ζύγισμα της καλοσύνης*, Athens 2004 [93-113], p. 104: «Η φωνή του Νεοφύτου αποτελεί άλλη μια φωνή από το παρελθόν που σχολιάζει αλληγορικά την παρούσα κατάσταση»; S. PAVLOU, *Σεφέρης και Κύπρος*, unpr. PhD, Nicosia 1994, pp. 263-66, especially p. 264: «Ο ίδιος άλλωστε ο Σεφέρης σε επιστολή του από το Λίβανο, ημ. 26

anti-colonialist fight of EOKA<sup>46</sup>. After the Turkish invasion in 1974, Neophytos became an emblematic figure of the struggle of Cypriots against the occupation<sup>47</sup>. Through this poem Seferis gave another dimension to Neophytos' portrait, that of the national fighter. In my view literature can sometimes influence the way we see reality more than historical facts themselves. In this case we face a vigorous contrast. According to C. Galatariotou: «Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Neophytos' post-1191 polemic against the Latins is that it never became open and explicit. First, because he was afraid, and with good reason: after all, the monk in Cyprus who had become so openly anti-English as to join the rebellion against them in 1191, had been hanged. Second, because Neophytos' own monastery, just like all other Cypriot monasteries during his lifetime, was actually left intact by the Latin rulers: perhaps it was therefore wiser not to be too openly hateful towards them»<sup>48</sup>.

Clearly, Neophytos was no guerilla and his writings are not a revolutionary declaration. On the contrary, he was a monk who above all protected the interests of his monastery and his own. Neophytos was a hermit with a dynamic personality, many talents and ambitions. However, his contemporaries treated him with caution and suspicion. C. Galatariotou notes: «They rather behaved with the same lack of enthusiasm which the monks would have demonstrated towards any abbot whose sermons they found overlong and boring. But if Neophytos felt hurt and angered by his monks' response to him, he felt outraged at the response of some of the people outside the Enkleistra's walls. Some of Neophytos' early writings reveal

---

Αυγούστου 1954, προς τον Γ. Π. Σαββίδη, παρέχει πολλά επεξηγηματικά στοιχεία, τα οποία μπορούμε να συνδέσουμε με τα προαναφερθέντα: «Στο 'Νεόφυτος [ο 'Εγκλειστος μιλά]' είναι φυσικά η αντιδικία ανάμεσα σ' έναν ορθόδοξο καλόγερο και τους σταυροφόρους...—ο καλόγερος βλέπει τα φράγκικα καστέλια (υπάρχουν βέβαια αναχρονισμοί), γι' αυτό χρησιμοποεί τα ονόματά τους όπως τα έλεγαν τον καιρό της Φραγκοκρατίας».

<sup>46</sup> Cf. S. PAVLOU, *Σεφέρης και Κύπρος*, pp. 172, 174-5: «Η συλλογή ολοκληρώνεται το καλοκαίρι του 1955 και ο Σεφέρης σε επιστολή του, ημ. 2 Αυγούστου 1955, συζητά με τον Γ. Π. Σαββίδη τα σχετικά με την έκδοσή της... Με τη φροντίδα του Γ. Π. Σαββίδη, η εκδοτική διαδικασία ακολούθησε το δρόμο της και τις τελευταίες ημέρες του Δεκεμβρίου 1955 η συλλογή ήταν έτοιμη να κυκλοφορήσει», p. 265.

<sup>47</sup> A. FYLACTOU, *Μια συνομιλία του Γιώργου Σεφέρη με το Νεόφυτο τον Εγκλειστο*, Nicosia 1992. See the handbook *Ανθολογία Κυπριακής Λογοτεχνίας*, Nicosia 1990, pp. 7-8: «...μπορεί να σχολιαστεί η παράλληλη ιστορία, εμπειρία και περιπέτεια του ελληνισμού της Κύπρου... να συγκρίνετε αυτά τα δεινά με τα πρόσφατα δεινά του κυπριακού ελληνισμού»; *Ανθολογία Νεοελληνικής Ποίησης*, Nicosia 1991, p. 91: «Προσέξτε στο ποίημα τη στάση των ξένων που απεγνωσμένα αγωνίζονται να αλλοιώσουν το πρόσωπο και την εθνική φυσιογνωμία του ελληνισμού της Κύπρου».

<sup>48</sup> C. GALATARIOU, *The making of a Saint...*, p. 237.

that some people thought that he was not a holy man but, on the contrary, an arrogant, even blasphemous and –perhaps worse still– ridiculous person»<sup>49</sup>.

For Neophytos' contemporaries he may possibly have seemed a ridiculous person. For contemporary Cypriots he is an idol. How did this happen? History is about realities and one of these realities is that Neophytos was transformed by the Cypriot prelates into more than a saint; they made him a legend, one of the heroes of the Orthodox Church. In the twentieth century the angelic Neophytos became a Hellenic idea, representing resistance to the enemies of Hellenism. This is a common phenomenon in history. Neophytos is a product formatted in accordance with society's needs, rumors and emotions. As P. J. Stewart and A. Strathern put it: «The perspectives of anthropologists themselves can well be complemented by taking into account the work of social psychologists. Here we have traced a movement from the work of Allport and Postman, which was concerned to study how rumors deviate from “the truth”, to later viewpoints such as those of Shibutani and Jean-Noel Kapferer, which look on rumor as a search for information and an attempt at problem solving. From these analyses also we can see clearly how this search is shaped by people's emotional proclivities and social relationships, in particular, their views of themselves and others in the world»<sup>50</sup>.

The story of Neophytos clearly shows that the most prevailing view of reality is not what actually happened but how it has been perceived. Just a glance in the Lives of St. Demetrios, St. Nicolaos, St. Andrew the Holy Fool and others can confirm that<sup>51</sup>. The distinguished poet Nicos Engonopoulos wrote: «History!/  
What desultory information it has retained/  
What misleading rumours it has conveyed to us!/  
So many fiascos and what machinations!/  
»

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>50</sup> P. J. STEWART-A. STRATHERN, *Witchcraft, sorcery, rumors and gossip*, Cambridge 2004, p. 87; H.-J. NEUBAUER, *The rumour: A cultural history*, New York 1999; W. ALLPORT-GORDON-L. POSTMAN, *The psychology of rumor*, New York 1947; P. A. LIENHARDT, «The interpretation of rumor», in: J. H. M. BEATTIE-R. G. LIENHARDT (EDS.), *Studies in Social Anthropology*, Oxford 1975, pp. 105-31. According to Professor G. Gouliamos this process is not a *unicum*. The case of General Makriyiannis is similar to that of Neophytos (many thanks to Professor Gouliamos for this suggestion).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. A. DEMOSTHENOUS, *Σκοτώνοντας το δράκο...*; C. MANGO, «Saints», in: G. CAVALLO (ED.), *The Byzantines*, Chicago, pp. 255-80; N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, «How to become a Saint in eleventh century Byzantium», in: E. ΚΟΥΝΤΟΥΡΑ-GALAKE (ED.), *Οι ήρωες της Ορθοδοξίας. Οι νέοι άγιοι 8<sup>ου</sup>-16<sup>ου</sup> αιώνας*, Athens 2004, pp. 473-91; J. M. H. SMITH, «Oral and written: Saints, Miracles, and Relics in Britany, c. 850-1250», *Speculum* 65 (1990) 309-43.

Ah! Clio! But no doubt/ She recorded whatever she heard:/ She had very little concern it seems/ To grasp/ What was true / and what was not!»<sup>52</sup>

Anthoullis A. DEMOSTHENOUS

27 *John Kennedy*  
*Nicosia 1046 (Cyprus)*  
a\_demosthenous@hotmail.com

---

<sup>52</sup> N. ENGONOPOULOS, *The beauty of a Greek. Poems*, transl. D. CONNOLLY, Athens 2007, pp. 192-3: "Pandora's Box". In Greek: «Το κουτί της Πανδώρας. Η Ιστορία! / τι αβασάνιστες πληροφορίες συνεκράτησε / τι λανθασμένες φήμες μας μετέδωσε! / πόσα χουνέρια και τι πλεκτάνες! / Α! Η Κλειώ! Μα βέβαιο / πως εσημείωνε ότι άκουγε: / φαίνεται πως πολύ λίγο θα την σκότιζε / ν'αντιληφθή / τι είτανε αλήθεια / και τι δεν ήταν».

