

Walking through the Narthex: the Rite in the Chora

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The two narthexes of the Chora were decorated with an extensive mosaic programme under the patronage of Theodore Metochites.¹ Following a detailed study of the three cycles depicted – namely, the story of the Theotokos, the Infancy of Christ, and his ministry – as well as of the patronal and iconic images, later publications went on to interpret various aspects of the programme.² And although attempts have been made to attribute a liturgical focus to the individual compositions, by and large they concerned the salvation-oriented and commemorative intentions of the patron.³

The complex mural decoration is so successfully integrated into the domes, vaults, apses, tympana, and pendentives that it is impossible to extricate the scenes from this variegated architecture. Recently, Markos Kermanidis has developed the hypothesis that a link between Metochites's philosophical and literary output and his artistic patronage is evident in the latter's

- 1 All the surfaces above the cornice were covered with mosaics. On the completion of the Chora before 1317 see: Kostis Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites and His Refoundation of the Chora," *Revue des études byzantines* 80 (2022), 69–111. For Metochites: Ihor Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. Paul A. Underwood (Princeton, N.J., 1975), pp. 17–91; Robert G. Ousterhout, *The Art of the Kariye Camii* (Istanbul/London, 2002), pp. 119–25; idem, *Finding a Place in History: The Chora Monastery and Its Patrons* (Nicosia, 2017); Markos Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik der Raummodellierung in Literatur und Kunst des Theodore Metochites* (Berlin, 2020); Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 69–111. Smyrlis was able to prove that Metochites became Megas Logothetes between 1313/14 and April 1317.
- 2 Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 3 vols (London/Princeton, N.J., 1966); and idem, ed., *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background* (Princeton, N.J., 1975). For later studies, see below.
- 3 Robert G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*. *Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 25 (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 63–76; idem, "Temporal Structuring in the Chora Parekklesion," *Gesta* 34/1 (1995), 63–76, esp. 74–75; Robert S. Nelson, "The Chora and the Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999), 67–101, esp. 67; Rossitza Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance in the South Bay of the Chora Esonarthex," *Gesta* 48/1 (2009), 37–53; Maria Alessia Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle between Constantinople, Thessalonike, and Mistra," in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. Nicholas S.M. Matheou, Theofilii Kampianaki, and Lorenzo M. Bondioli (Leiden, 2016), pp. 226–40, esp. 239–40.

Raummodellierung, in which a symmetrically ordered and linear space is skewed by lateral strains of thought, forming an intricate vision of intellectual and material reality.⁴ There can be no doubt that the architecture of Metochites's additions to the Chora, like the iconography, reflected his personal priorities and values, and not just insofar as it provided a three-dimensional theatre for pictorial representation.⁵ Indeed, he supplemented this via an enormous knowledge of liturgical, philosophical, and literary theories, as well as of propaganda strategies, such that decoding the multi-layered meaning of this decoration is challenging.

Furthermore, the political dimension must be considered. The refoundation of the Chora by Metochites was part of the project of the first Palaiologan emperors to return the capital to its former glory.⁶ Most recently, Kostis Smyrlis pointed out that while Metochites, as a wealthy imperial official, was expected to participate in this effort because of his position and wealth, the Chora was also his opportunity to establish himself at the top of the hierarchy.⁷ In addition to these socio-political components, the contemporary religious policy also played a significant role. The programme of the Chora results from one of the first major campaigns of church decoration in Constantinople after the 1284 restoration of Orthodoxy by Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328) in reaction to Union efforts at the Second Council of Lyon.⁸ The pictures convey the traditional themes of Byzantine Orthodoxy, emphasizing the Orthodox liturgy.

But primarily, the church was constructed to host a wide array of rites, including the important sacrament of the Eucharist, the daily Liturgy of the

4 Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*.

5 Robert G. Ousterhout, "The Virgin of the Chora: An Image and its Contexts," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Leslie Brubaker, and idem (Urbana, Ill., 1995), pp. 91–109, esp. 92; Athanasios Semoglou, "L'éloquence au service de l'archéologie. Les 'enfants aimés' de Théodore Métochite et sa bibliothèque dans le monastère de Chora," *Series Byzantina. Studies on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art* 8 (2010), 45–65; Paul Magdalino, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and Constantinople," in *Kariye Camii, Yeniden* [The Kariye Camii Reconsidered], ed. Holger A. Klein, Robert G. Ousterhout, and Brigitte Pitarakis (Istanbul, 2011), pp. 169–87; Nektarios Zarras, "Illness and Healing. The Ministry Cycle in the Chora Monastery and the Literary Oeuvre of Theodore Metochites," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 75 (2021), 85–119.

6 For the wider context: Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Restoration of Constantinople under Michael VIII," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47 (1993), 243–61.

7 Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 84–93.

8 Robin Cormack, "... and the Word Was God: Art and Orthodoxy in Late Byzantium," in *Byzantine Orthodoxies*, ed. Andrew Louth, and Augustine Casiday (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 111–20, esp. 116–17. As Cormack argued, this is the case despite (or perhaps because) Theodore Metochites was the son of a pro-Unionist, George Metochites.

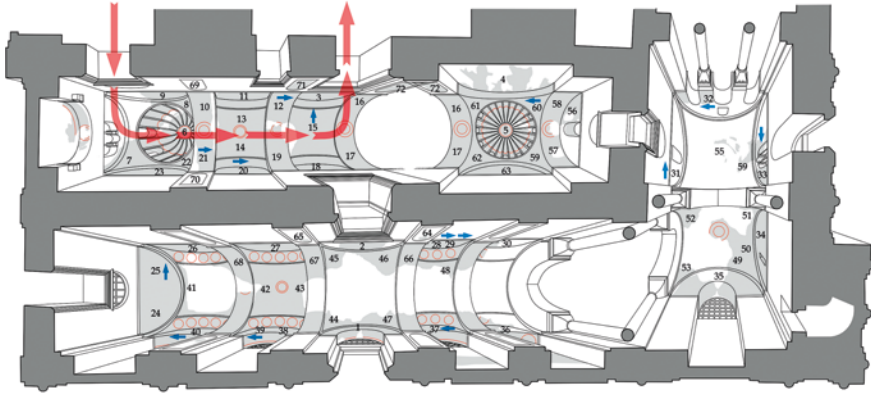
Hours, and the lesser services celebrated throughout the liturgical year.⁹ The function of the architectural framework in the realization of rituals is a central topic of this paper, which reconstructs the movements of the liturgy performed in the space. Operating as a persistently multi-layered system, the architecture and decoration offered a flexible setting that resonated with the nuances of the liturgy and, indeed, with the individual intentions of the patron.¹⁰

The Organization and Intersections of the Structure

Within the architectural complexity of the Chora, the esonarthex stands out as idiosyncratic (Fig. 3.1).¹¹

It is divided into four bays of varying sizes and with different types of vaulting, all arranged asymmetrically. The space rises into two domes of unequal size and shape, and the five doors are misaligned with one another.¹² The exonarthex originally formed a portico with arcaded openings along the west façade and a belfry over the south-west corner.¹³ It consists of seven bays that differ from one another in size; six form the west façade of the building, while the seventh turns the corner onto the south side, where it meets the parekklesion. As the two-story northern annex was accessible from the bema through

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- 9 Vasileios Marinis, "Defining Liturgical Space," in *The Byzantine Word*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London, 2010), pp. 284–302; idem, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople. Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 11–12; idem, "Sacred Dimensions: Church Building and Ecclesiastical Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Constantinople*, ed. Sarah Bassett (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 180–99.
- 10 Ousterhout, "Temporal Structuring," p. 63; idem, "The Virgin," pp. 92–93; idem, "Reading Difficult Buildings: The Lessons of the Kariye Camii," in *Kariye Camii, Yeniden*, pp. 95–105, esp. 96–97, also for the interconnections between architecture and decoration. Whether perceptible, legible, intelligible, or not, the images, by the mere fact of their presence in the cultic space, can communicate the relationships they have with the architecture of the monument, its functions, and its symbolism: Maréva U, "Images et passages dans l'espace ecclésial à l'époque médiobyzantine," in *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésial*, ed. Sulamith Brodbeck, and Anne-Oange Poilpré (Paris, 2019), pp. 301–27.
- 11 The plan was made by Georgios Fousteris, whom I would like to thank most sincerely. The numbers in brackets in the main text or in the captions refer always to the exact location on the plan of the church.
- 12 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 65–70. For lighting purposes, the domes in the esonarthex were necessary to create space for windows.
- 13 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 119–21; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 70–78, 101–06; Lioba Theis, *Frankenräume im mittelbyzantinischen Kirchenbau* (Wiesbaden, 2005), pp. 11–12. The portico was a ubiquitous architectural feature throughout the ancient and medieval world. The belfry has been replaced by a minaret shortly before 1511.



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| 1: Virgin Blachernitissa | 36: Mourning mothers |
| 2: Christ Pantokrator (Fig. 3.5) | 37: Flight of Elizabeth and John |
| 3: Christ and Theodore Metochites | 38: Joseph dreaming (Fig. 3.11) |
| 4: Deesis, Christ Chalkites with Isaakios Komnenos and the nun Melania | 39: Return of the Holy Family from Egypt (Fig. 3.11) |
| 5: Christ surrounded by 39 prophets | 40: Journey to Jerusalem (Fig. 3.12) |
| 6: Virgin surrounded by 27 prophets | 41: Christ among the doctors |
| 7: Joachim's offerings rejected | 42: John the Forerunner bearing witness to Christ |
| 8: Joachim in the wilderness | 43: Temptations of Christ |
| 9: Annunciation to St Anne | 44: The slaying of the calf (Fig. 3.10) |
| 10: Meeting at the golden gate | 45: Miracle at Cana (Fig. 3.8) |
| 11: Nativity of the Virgin | 46: Multiplication of loaves (Fig. 3.9) |
| 12: First seven steps of the Virgin | 47: Multiplication of loaves: the twelve baskets |
| 13: Virgin caressed by her parents | 48: Christ healing a leper |
| 14: Virgin blessed by the priest | 49: Healing of the dropsical man |
| 15: Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (Fig. 3.3) | 50: Healing of the paralytic at Capernaum |
| 16: Virgin fed by an angel | 51: Healing of the man born blind (?) |
| 17: Instruction of the Virgin | 52: Healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda and the paralytic healed |
| 18: Skein of purple wool | 53: Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well |
| 19: Zacharias praying before the rods of the suitors | 54: Christ calling Zacchaeus |
| 20: Betrothal of Mary and Joseph (Fig. 3.4) | 55: Healing scene |
| 21: Joseph taking the Virgin to his house | 56: Healing scene |
| 22: Annunciation to the Virgin at the well (Fig. 3.2) | 57: Healing of the leper |
| 23: Joseph taking leave, Joseph reproaching | 58: Healing with the man with the withered hand |
| 24: Joseph dreaming (Fig. 3.6) | 59: Healing of a blind and mute man |
| 25: Journey to Bethlehem (Fig. 3.6) | 60: Healing of the woman with the issue of blood |
| 26: Enrolment for taxation | 61: Healing of Peter's mother-in-law |
| 27: Nativity of Christ | 62: Healing of the two blind men |
| 28: Journey of the Magi (Fig. 3.7) | 63: Healing of the multitudes |
| 29: Magi before Herod (Fig. 3.7) | 64: St Peter |
| 30: Herod inquiring of the priests and scribes | 65: St Paul |
| 31: Adoration of the Magi (lost) | 66: St Demetrios |
| 32: Return of the Magi | 67: St George |
| 33: Flight into Egypt | 68: St Andronikos |
| 34: Herod ordering the Massacre of the Innocents and the Massacre of the Innocents | 69: St Anne with the infant Mary |
| 35: Massacre of the Innocents | 70: St Joachim |
| | 71: Theotokos with the infant Christ (Hodegetria) |
| | 72: St John the Baptist |

FIGURE 3.1 Plan of the narthexes with indications of the themes

Red arrows: Great Entrance (clergy)

DRAWING: GEORGIOS FOUSTERIS

the prothesis, the lower passage, equipped with a row of niches in the north wall, may have served as the storage place for liturgical furnishings (Fig. 1.2).¹⁴ The unusual upper storey of the northern annex, only accessible from the stairway, was probably built, as Robert G. Ousterhout argued, to house the library of Metochites.¹⁵ The narthexes served to connect these two lateral units – the parekklesion at the south of the church and the northern complex – in addition to fulfilling their traditional function as liminal spaces between the exterior of the building and the naos.

The overall appearance of the church is asymmetrical, creating a sense of movement and dynamism.¹⁶ Since the south façade as well as the south portal, just beside the belfry, were decorated with great detail, Ousterhout suggested that the south portal was the main entrance intended for the congregation (Fig. 1.1).¹⁷ Meanwhile, the northern door of the exonarthex was likely connected to a portico of light construction and, via this, to monastic buildings.¹⁸ This entrance was thus devoted to the clergy as a convenient passage to the many services held in the church.

Like many sacred spaces, the Chora was animated by liturgical rituals, including internal liturgical processions; when liturgical processions between the individual spaces are retraced, the connections that emerge, along with

14 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 46, 50, 114, fig. 74; Theis, *Flankenräume*, p. 155.

15 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:23; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 114–16, fig. 80; Theis, *Flankenräume*, p. 155. This form is almost without parallel in Byzantine architecture. The lighting of the upper storey is perfect for a library. Metochites wanted his book kept in the library of the Chora; see Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” p. 84. Architecturally, too, there are significant arguments in favour of this hypothesis: in its enclosure and remoteness, the space is difficult to access by unauthorized persons. The room also had a window-sized opening that directly faced the naos. This allowed both acoustic and visual participation in the liturgy.

16 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:20; Ousterhout, “Reading,” p. 96.

17 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, fig. 127; idem, “Contextualizing the Later Churches of Constantinople: Suggested Methodologies and a Few Examples,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 54 (2000), 241–50, esp. 243, fig. 1. The belfry is decorated with the monogram of the founder. Nelson assumed that the south door – as it led to the gate and the city beyond, in contrast to the north door – must have been used more by the laity than the monks. Therefore, Metochites and his family were also among the audience. Other worshipers probably included the inhabitants of this quarter, which became a popular place of residence for the aristocracy. Robert S. Nelson, “Taxation with Representation. Visual Narrative and the Political Field of the Kariye Camii,” *Art History* 22/1 (1999), 56–82, esp. 69–70, 74. The palace of Metochites was situated near the Chora: Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” p. 79. When we speak of congregation in this article, we mean the presumably heterogeneous group excluding the practicing clergy.

18 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 86–87; idem, “Contextualizing,” p. 243, fig. 7; idem, *The Art*, p. 100; and in his introduction to this volume.

their implications for the conception of the visual programme, are of the utmost significance. It is important to point out that the northern and southern annexes are both intimately integrated into the katholikon – not just via the narthexes – and, additionally, that this integration takes an unusual form. The parekklesion connects with both narthexes and with the naos, but not with the sanctuary; at the same time, it intrudes upon the sanctuary by occupying the space of the former diakonikon.¹⁹ The ground floor of the northern annex communicates both with the esonarthex and with the outside of the building, completely bypassing the main space of the katholikon. The door where the east wall of the northern bay of the esonarthex meets the west wall of the northern annex is, through its positioning, set into relation with both spaces, such that the north dome of the esonarthex is on the same axis as the exposed barrel vault of the annex. This web of connections, asymmetrical overall, can only be adequately understood in the context of the liturgical articulation of the entire interior of the church, and indeed this was the context in which the clergy and the congregation would have experienced the building.²⁰ For the processions, the dominant west-east axis, running from the portico to the apse on the line of the main entrance, offered a visual and formal prologue to the services performed inside the church.²¹

In the early Christian churches of Constantinople, narthexes were used for the preparation of liturgical ‘entrances’ into the naos. After the 10th century, however, the narthex found a multitude of uses.²² It was certainly intended for commemorative services for the deceased as well as for burials, as the later tombs in the exonarthex of the Chora also attest.²³ In the Middle Byzantine

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- 19 The access to the room south of the bema, the diakonikon, was blocked by the north wall, which is of Palaiologan construction. For the different functions of the diakonikon at the Chora in the 12th to 14th century: Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:23; Georges Descoedres, *Die Pastophorien im syro-byzantinischen Osten: Eine Untersuchung zu architektur- und liturgiegeschichtlichen Problemen* (Wiesbaden, 1983), pp. 155–56; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 49–51; Theis, *Flankenräume*, p. 155. See Athanasios Semoglou’s contribution to this volume.
- 20 Ousterhout, “Temporal Structuring,” p. 63; idem, “Reading,” pp. 96–97.
- 21 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, p. 92; idem, “The Virgin,” p. 100; Nelson, “The Chora,” pp. 69–70.
- 22 Thomas Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople. Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, Pa., 1971), pp. 138–52; Georgi Gerov, “The Narthex as Desert: The Symbolism of the Entrance Space in Orthodox Church Buildings,” in *Ritual and Art. Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (London, 2006), pp. 144–59; Marinis, “Defining,” pp. 294–95; idem, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 64–76.
- 23 The insertion of arcosolia in the arched openings gradually closed the once-open portico. Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 81–82; Sarah T. Brooks, “The History and Significance of Tomb Monuments at the Chora Monastery,” in *Restoring Byzantium: The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration*, exh. cat., ed. Holger A. Klein, and Robert G.

period, the narthex often served as a point of access to flanking chapels of a funerary or commemorative nature.²⁴ Generally speaking, the narthex was occupied during the Liturgy of the Hours, and the lesser services of monastic ritual were performed there rather than in the naos.²⁵ However, the climax of the Byzantine liturgy was the procession of the bread and wine to the altar, known as the Great Entrance, the course of which we have learned about particularly from *typica*.²⁶ We should note that no *typikon* associated with Metochites is known for the Chora.²⁷ Metochites authored a rich literary oeuvre, but it hardly deals in explicit terms with the liturgical processes in the church.²⁸ The architectural articulation and its interplay with the decorative

Ousterhout (New York, 2004), pp. 23–32, esp. 25–28; Emanuel Moutafov, *Богородица вместилище на невместимото: човешки измерения на Палеологовото изкуство в Констатиниопол* [Theotokos, Container of the Uncontainable: Human Dimensions of Palaiologan Art in Constantinople] (Sofia, 2020), pp. 90–140; Nicholas Melvani, “The Last Century of the Chora Monastery: A New Look at the Tomb Monuments,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 114 (2021), 1219–40. On the commemorative function of the narthex: Slobodan Ćurčić, “The Twin-Domed Narthex in Paleologan Architecture,” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 13 (1971), 333–44; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 96–100; Svetlana Tomeković, “Contribution à l’étude du programme du narthex des églises monastiques (XI^e-première moitié du XIII^e s.),” *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 140–54; Florence Bache, “La fonction funéraire du narthex dans les églises byzantines du XII^e au XIV^e siècle,” *Histoire de l’art* 7 (1989), 25–33. The tombs confirm the continued use of the Chora by its patrons. The process of transforming the outer narthex into a funerary space began rather early. Tomb E should be dated towards the middle of the 14th century. Melvani, “The Last Century,” pp. 1230–32. See also Michele Bacci’s contribution to this volume.

- 24 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, p. 98.
- 25 Marinis, “Defining,” pp. 284–302; Warren T. Woodfin, “Wall, Veil, and Body: Textiles and Architecture in the Late Byzantine Church,” in *Kariye Camii, Yeniden*, pp. 371–85, esp. 374–75; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 11–12.
- 26 Catia Galatariotou, “Byzantine Ktetorika Typika: A Comparative Study,” *Revue des études byzantines* 45 (1987), 77–138, esp. 89–107; Gail Nicholl, “A Contribution to the Archaeological Interpretation of Typika: The Case of the Narthex,” in *Work and Worship at the Theotokos Evergetis 1050–1200*, ed. Margaret Mullet, and Anthony Kirby (Belfast, 1997), pp. 285–308; Svetlana Popović, “Are *typica* sources for architecture? The Case of the Monasteries of the Theotokos Evergetis, Chilandri and Studenica,” in *Work and Worship*, pp. 266–84.
- 27 Magdalino, “Theodore Metochites,” pp. 170–71. There is no such document referenced in his writings. We do not know whether, upon taking over the monastery, Metochites adopted, adapted, or even replaced whatever document had been in use.
- 28 Ševčenko, “Theodore Metochites,” pp. 19–55; Mary Cunningham, Michael Featherstone, and Sophia Georgiopolou, “Theodore Metochites’s Poem to Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), 100–16; Michael Featherstone, *Metochites’s Poems ‘to Himself’: Introduction, Text and Translation* (Vienna, 2000); Magdalino, “Theodore Metochites,” pp. 169–87; Michael Featherstone, “Metochites’s Poems and the Chora,” in *Kariye Camii, Yeniden*, pp. 215–39; Theodore Metochites, *On*

programme provide clues to the liturgical functioning of the site, with the programme offering a visual commentary on the rituals performed in the church.

The Processions

Despite the gradual decline of outdoor processions after the 7th century, the Byzantine rite still maintained its processional character. The most important element of the rite was the Divine Liturgy, distinguished by two processions known as ‘entrances.’²⁹ The Little Entrance was the first movement from the narthex into the naos on the part of the officiating priest bearing the Gospel book. During the Great Entrance, the gifts were carried from the prothesis, where the loaf of bread and the chalice had been prepared at the beginning of the liturgy, to the narthex and then returned to the bema via the naos and the Royal Gate.³⁰ The Great Entrance was the climax of the liturgy and was assigned the most solemn ceremonial embellishment. The naos accommodated the standing congregants and befitted the processions of the clergy that began and ended in the sanctuary.³¹

Although Byzantine sources emphasize that the liturgy of the Great Entrance encompassed the entire life of Christ, its focus was the Passion and Resurrection.³² This multi-sensory procession, symbolizing the Entry into

Morals or Concerning Education, trans. Sophia Xenophonos (Cambridge, Mass., 2020); Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*; Zarras, “Illness and Healing,” pp. 85–119; Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” pp. 95–103. See also Didier Clerc’s contribution to this volume.

- 29 Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 15–16; Marinis, “Sacred Dimensions,” p. 191.
- 30 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 155–62; Robert F. Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and Other Preanaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (Rome, 1978), pp. 178–215; Descoedres, *Die Pastophorien*, pp. 130–48; Robert F. Taft, “In the Bridegroom’s Absence. The Paschal Triduum in the Byzantine Church,” in idem, *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 87–91; Marinis, “Defining,” pp. 285–86, 294; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 22–23; Vasileios Marinis, “On earth as it is in heaven? Reinterpreting the Heavenly Liturgy in Byzantine art,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 114 (2021), 255–68, esp. 259–60.
- 31 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 158–61; Marinis, “Defining,” pp. 293–94; idem, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 22–23, 49.
- 32 In various commentaries on the Byzantine liturgy, authors interpret the procession as a mimesis of the Passion of Christ. René Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantines de la divine liturgie du VII^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1966), p. 239; Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 35–40, 178, 244–48; Woodfin, “Wall, Veil, and Body,” p. 378. In contrast to this, Nicolas Kabasilas is one of the rare commentators who insists on the purely practical nature of this transfer of

Jerusalem as well as the journey to Golgotha on Good Friday, was enriched by chants and smells (i.e. incense).³³ The *Cherubikos Hymnos* (Χερουβικὸς ὕμνος), sung during the Great Entrance of the gifts, praised the eternal kingdom of Christ.³⁴ This ceremony contained mystagogical elements and a psychological realism and favoured visuality and interaction.

As regards the liturgical disposition of the early churches in Constantinople, these two processions constituted entrances not only into the sanctuary but also into the church itself. In the Little Entrance, the clergy and congregation entered the church for the first time, before the former proceeded to the central doors of the sanctuary.³⁵ This means that, while the procession of the clergy would not become visible until it passed the north door of the exonarthex, its starting point was the prothesis, as the *diataxis* (διάταξις) of Philotheos Kokkinos (1300–79) clearly states.³⁶ In the case of the Chora, however, it can be assumed that the congregation gathered in the exonarthex and that, from there, the processions led along the main axis into the naos. The exonarthex was used for the preparation of the Little Entrance.³⁷

gifts. See Steven Hawkes-Teeples, “The Prothesis of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy: What Has Been Done and What Remains,” in *Rites and Rituals of the Christian East*, ed. Bert Groen, Daniel Galadza, Nina Glibetic, and Gabriel Radle (Leuven, 2014), pp. 317–27, esp. 319–22.

- 33 The important role of the liturgical movements within the church space can be seen in the detailed sketches of the monk Vasily Grigorovich-Barsky (1701–47) from Kiev, which were made much later; idem, *Τα ταξίδια του στο Άγιον Όρος 1725–1726, 1744–1745* [His journeys to Mount Athos 1725–1726, 1744–1745] (Thessaloniki, 2010). On the synaesthetic experience of the images during the rite: Liz James, “Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium,” *Art History* 27 (2004), 522–37; Béatrice Caseau, “Experiencing the Sacred,” in *Experiencing Byzantium*, ed. Claire Nesbitt, and Mark Jackson (Farnham, 2013), pp. 59–77.
- 34 Simeon of Thessaloniki, *De sacra liturgica*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1844–66), 155:340; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 22–23. The *Cherubikos Hymnos* was probably introduced in the 6th century under Justin II and has been intoned during the Great Entrance since the 12th century: Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 69, 119–48; idem, “The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980–81), 45–75, esp. 54; idem, and Stefano Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso. Edizione italiana rivista, ampliata e aggiornata* (Grottaferrata, 2014), pp. 155–205.
- 35 Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 43, 192; idem, “The Liturgy of the Great Church,” pp. 50–51; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 21–22.
- 36 Panayiotis N. Trempelas, *Αι τρεις λειτουργίες κατά τους εν Αθήναις κώδικας* [The three liturgies according to the codexes of Athens] (Athens, 1982), p. 6.
- 37 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 108, 125–49; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 68, 70–71.

Theodore Balsamon (c.1105–95) relays that the priest passed through the narthex during the Great Entrance.³⁸ This, too, was the case at the Chora, where the Great Entrance probably started in the prothesis chamber.³⁹ While no door connects the prothesis to the outside or to the naos, there is one leading to the bema and a second one to the northern annex (Fig.1.2). It is therefore likely that the procession moved through the vaulted lower annex – which may also have assumed some functions of the diakonikon – towards the dome of the esonarthex. As soon as the procession came to stand under the north dome of the esonarthex, it turned southwards and followed the same steps as the depicted Holy Family (Fig. 3.1). Also beneath the north dome of the esonarthex commenced the cycle of the Virgin.⁴⁰ We can assume that the procession then led through the central door of the esonarthex to the naos and the bema, placing an emphasis on the west-east axis. The beginning of the Great Entrance being invisible to them, the congregation experienced its reappearance in the naos as a sudden epiphany, as a real entry of the gifts into the building's consecrated space.⁴¹

Around 1380 Demetrios Gemistos described the Great Entrance in his guidebook for the service of the Divine Liturgy based on the influential and detailed work of Philotheos Kokkinos.⁴² Gemistos relayed that the whole procession took place within the building – as was true also at the Chora.⁴³ Unlike earlier *diataxeis*, in this one Philotheos inserted the rubrics into the text of the liturgy itself, in the proper places between the prayers, thus bringing

38 Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 199–200. It is his commentary on canon 2: Theodore Balsamon, *In epist. S. Dionysii Alexandrini ad Basilidem episcopum*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1844–66), 138:465–68.

39 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 105–16.

40 Nelson, “The Chora,” p. 70.

41 I am grateful to Paul Magdalino for sharing this idea with me.

42 *Philotheus cpolitanus Patriarcha, Ordo sacri ministrii*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1844–66), 154:745–66. Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii, 200–03; idem, *The Byzantine Rite: A Short History* (New York, 1992), pp. 191, 257–75; idem, “Mount Athos: A Late Chapter in the History of the Byzantine Rite,” in *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond*, pp. 179–94, esp. 191–94; Alexander Rentel, “The Origins of the 14th-Century Patriarchal Liturgical Diataxis of Dimitrios Gemistos,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 71 (2005), 363–85. Philotheus Kokkinos recorded the *diataxis* as Higoumenos of the monastery of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos between spring 1342 and June 1345. After he became patriarch of Constantinople in 1354, his work gained prestige and propagandistic force.

43 In contrast to the pre-iconoclastic period when outdoor processions preceded the main liturgical celebration. Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 155–61; Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 186–87, 192–94.

the development of the liturgical formulae into their present form.⁴⁴ Likely established in the context of the Great Entrance already in the first half of the 14th century, these formulae help elucidate the individual outcome at the Chora and specifically the interplays between the oeuvre of Metochites and the visual programme. When applied to the Chora, these individual rubrics inserted into the liturgy are important for understanding the unique intersections among the decoration, the architectural disposition, and the processional ritual.

Metochites evidently planned the building with this routing of the entrance processions in mind. This may have included practical considerations, such as the need to gather – along the path of the procession – precious objects or vestments, which may have been kept in the northern annex, given the absence of a diakonikon and the small confines of the prothesis. But he likely also intended to achieve a theatrical effect, to restore dramatic meaning to the concept of ‘entrance’ (εἴσοδος). There were undoubtedly further layers of ritual and symbolic intention behind what was the most obvious result of the arrangement: the enhancement of the value and visibility of the narthex and portico as liminal and transitional spaces. Indeed, the narrative cycles of the mosaics that cover their vaults and the pendentives of their domes suggest a processional use for both these spaces. The exonarthex takes the worshiper through the life of Christ in a sequence that begins not at the west door but at the north one. At the southern end of the exonarthex, the sequence proceeds under the former bell tower in the direction of the parekklesion. However, instead of continuing into the parekklesion, it turns again, ending in the pendentives and west tympanum of the south dome of the esonarthex. Here, the narrative cycle of Christ’s life and ministry meets that of the life of the Virgin, which begins under the north dome, near the doorway leading to the northern annex. Thus, the iconography of both esonarthex and exonarthex emphasized their respective functions as north-south passages whose orientation made no concessions to the west-east axis of the church.

The Interplay of the Monastic Ritual and the Eucharistic Liturgy: the Great Entrance

The architectural framework and the mosaic decoration were conceived with an eye towards monastic and other rituals desired by the patron. However, there is no reason to think that Metochites would have privileged monastic

44 Taft, “Mount Athos,” pp. 191–94.

ritual over the Eucharistic liturgy. That he wanted the Chora to have a place in public worship is clear in the mosaic programme's multiple allusions to images in other Constantinopolitan churches: thus, he intentionally evoked in the Chora the mosaics of Hagia Sophia, making conscious reference especially to those with imperial associations.⁴⁵ The aim of such allusions was to enhance his own status and to stress his imperial connections.

What is certain, however, is that the very distinctive plan that Metochites imposed with his additions to the Chora had a liturgical dimension and intention. The space between the north entry to the esonarthex (via the west door of the northern annex) and the vault over the main axis of the church is occupied by the cycle of the life of the Virgin.⁴⁶ It begins in the north-west corner of the pendentive vault with the scene of the rejection of Joachim's offerings (7)⁴⁷ and proceeds around the esonarthex, including the central bay in front of the doorway to the naos. It ends with the Annunciation to the Virgin at the well (22; Fig. 3.2) and Joseph's reproach of the Virgin (23), which appear at the north end of the west wall.⁴⁸

It is well known that the main source for the cycle of Mary's life is the Protoevangelium of James.⁴⁹ In the middle of the 6th century, liturgical writers began to draw inspiration from this text.⁵⁰ It was precisely in this period that various Marian feasts came to be instituted, celebrating events in the life of the

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- 45 Nelson, "The Chora," pp. 67–101; Nancy P. Ševčenko, "The Portrait of Theodore Metochites at Chora," in *Donations et donateurs dans le monde byzantin*, ed. Jean-Michel Spieser, and Elisabeth Yota (Paris, 2012), pp. 189–205, esp. 193–94; Zarras, "Illness and Healing," pp. 111–12. There is also a section devoted to the Great Church in Metochites's 11th poem, dating from the mid-1320s. Michael Featherstone, "Theodore Metochites's Eleventh Poem," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 81 (1988), 253–64.
- 46 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:60–85; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Iconography of the Cycle of the Life of the Virgin," in *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami*, pp. 163–94; Ousterhout, *The Art*, pp. 35–47; Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*, pp. 319–21.
- 47 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:60–61, pl. 86–87.
- 48 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:82–85, pl. 146–51. Karahan's interpretation of the Annunciation as an example of the interaction of spiritual and bodily strength is too hypothetical: Anne Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images and the Issue of Transcendence and Immanence. The Theological Background of the Late Byzantine Palaiologan Iconography and Aesthetics of the Chora Church, Istanbul* (Stockholm, 2005), pp. 89–93.
- 49 Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Life of the Virgin," pp. 163–64.
- 50 Mary Cunningham, "The Use of the Protoevangelion of James in the 8th-century Homilies on the Mother of God," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Text and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker, and Mary Cunningham (Ashgate, 2011), pp. 163–78, esp. 166; Cornelia Horn, "The Protoevangelium of James and its Reception in the Caucasus," *Scrinium* 4 (2018), 223–38, esp. 225–26. This begins with Romanos the Melode, who employs the apocryphal text as a narrative source in his *kontakion*.



FIGURE 3.2 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, esonarthex: *Annunciation to the Virgin at the Well*

PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK RECORDS AND PAPERS, DUMBARTON OAKS, TRUSTEES FOR HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Virgin and her role in the conception and birth of Christ.⁵¹ Consequently, by the early 8th century at the latest, the Protoevangelium achieved full acceptance in the Byzantine liturgical and theological traditions, serving as an important resource for liturgical hymns and sermons.⁵² At the Chora, the locations

51 Joseph Ledit, *Marie dans la liturgie de Byzance* (Paris, 1976), pp. 102–03, 109, 113, 118–19, 121, 129; Averil Cameron, “The Early Cult of the Virgin,” in *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan, 2000), pp. 10–17; Cunningham, “The Use,” pp. 166–67.

52 Horn, “The Protoevangelium,” p. 225. The Protoevangelium enjoyed a hybrid status, at once apocryphal and quasi-canonical. It should be stressed that the *Akathistos Hymnos* played a major role in shaping the feasts in connection with the Virgin’s protective role in Constantinople. On the influence of this hymn on the images in the Chora: Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, “L’illustration de la première partie de l’hymne akathiste et sa relation avec les mosaïques de l’enfance de la Kariye Djami,” *Byzantion* 54/2 (1984), 648–702; Henry Maguire, “Rhetoric and Reality in the Art of the Kariye Camii,” in *Kariye Camii, Yeniden*, pp. 57–69, esp. 63.

of such images visualizing the Marian feasts speak to their liturgical function: their prominent placements, as well as their inscriptions, refer to the liturgy, inspired by the Protoevangelium and based upon the cult of the Theotokos and her role in the salvation of mankind. It is crucial to note that the liturgical hymns and sermons rhetorically amplified the text.⁵³ For example, an association of the Virgin with paradisiacal imagery occurs in a remarkable piece written by the court official Theodore Hyrtakenos (active c.1282–1328).⁵⁴ He is the author of an ekphrasis describing the garden of St Anne as a fertile space in which the Virgin's mother was told by an angel that she would conceive the Virgin. This text finds a visual corollary in the mosaic of the Annunciation to St Anne (9) at the Chora, which features a portrayal of the garden.⁵⁵ That the mosaic is an intentional rendering of the description is further suggested by the fact that Hyrtakenos was a correspondent of Metochites.⁵⁶ Henry Maguire cites other contemporary customs that served to stress the special status of the Virgin.⁵⁷ This 'rhetorical realism', as Maguire puts it, underscored the Virgin's essential role in the Incarnation – the antithesis to the Passion of Christ – and this formed the main liturgical theme. The Eucharist is above all a commemoration of the Passion and death of Christ, which were made possible by the Incarnation. The Passion was evoked in the Great Entrance, which was performed in this part of the narthex. Thus, the emphasis on the Incarnation in this region of the decorative programme might bespeak Metochites's thoughtful planning.

The first part of the cycle is rendered in extreme detail, such as the episode of Joachim, treated in two separate compositions (7, 8).⁵⁸ The level of detail can

53 Maguire, "Rhetoric and Reality," pp. 57–69. These hymns and sermons – once incorporated into the liturgies – acquired a canonical status, which Maguire calls 'rhetorical realism'.

54 Mary-Lyon Dolezal, and Maria Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrtakenos' Description of the Garden of St. Anna and the Ekphrasis of Gardens," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. Antony Littlewood, Henry Maguire, and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, D.C., 2002), pp. 105–58, esp. 144–47; Maguire, "Rhetoric and Reality," pp. 63–64.

55 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:64–65, pl. 92–95; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Life of the Virgin," pp. 171–72; Maguire, "Rhetoric and Reality," pp. 63–64, fig. 8.

56 Maguire, "Rhetoric and Reality," p. 63; Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 108–10.

57 Henry Maguire, "Abaton and Oikonomia: St. Neophytos and the Iconography of the Presentation of the Virgin," in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, ed. Nancy P. Ševčenko, and Christopher Frederick Moss (Princeton, N.J., 1999), pp. 95–105. The image shows the Virgin passing through the door that only she could pass through, as described in a sermon of St Neophytos the Recluse.

58 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:60–61, pl. 86–89; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Life of the Virgin," pp. 169–71.



FIGURE 3.3 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, esonarthex: *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*

PHOTO: NEKTARIOS ZARRAS

be explained by the fact that the scenes represent Marian feasts – namely, the Nativity of the Virgin (11) and the Presentation in the Temple (15; Fig. 3.3) – that played a liturgical role of the utmost importance and, therefore, demanded a prominent location in the church.⁵⁹

The large composition of the Nativity⁶⁰ occupies the entire eastern lunette of the second bay, while the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple extends

59 Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Life of the Virgin,” pp. 174–87; Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, pp. 189–92.

60 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:66–68, pl. 98–103.

around the domical vault of the third bay in a composition made possible by increasing the number of attendant maidens from the usual seven to nine, disposed in a graceful ring around the vault.⁶¹ Although it remains part of the larger narrative cycle, its primary compositional device, that the Temple is centred directly over the door leading to the actual sanctuary, as well as its adjacent episodes, such as Mary being fed by an angel (16), evoke the significance of the Eucharistic experience that took place in the naos.⁶² The depiction of the Virgin's first steps (12) directly to the north on the vault points towards the Temple, while the composition of the vault points east. Figures move towards the Temple and thereby replicate the believers' path to the naos (Fig.3:3).⁶³ Just as the Virgin is brought to the Temple in the depiction directly above the door, so beneath this image, the gifts are carried to the entrance of the church's sanctuary.⁶⁴ Furthermore, a stop was made here during the procession in order to reciprocate supplications and to explicitly commemorate the founders (*ktetors*); the image thus closely correlates with the performance.⁶⁵ This halt was accompanied by recitations of various texts and prayers, each of which articulated a connection to the Old Testament, with an emphasis on the fulfilment of the prophecies in the history of salvation by means of the Incarnation and Passion.⁶⁶ In the Chora, this point is visualized particularly by the juxtaposition of the Virgin holding the Christ Child in the summit of the dome to the

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- 61 Ibid., 1:72–74, pl. 119–25; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Life of the Virgin,” pp. 179–80.
- 62 Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Life of the Virgin,” p. 179; Ousterhout, “The Virgin,” pp. 99–100; Maguire, “Rhetoric and Reality,” p. 67. The Presentation is flanked by the trilogy of Mary's life in the Temple: The Virgin fed by an angel (16), Mary's instruction in the temple (17) and the skein of purple wool (18). Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:74–78, pl. 128–37.
- 63 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:68–69, pl. 104–05; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Life of the Virgin,” p. 177; Nelson, “The Chora,” pp. 68–69; Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, pp. 147–48.
- 64 Ousterhout, “The Virgin,” pp. 99–100; Nelson, “The Chora,” p. 68; Maria Evangelatou, “Krater of Nectar and Altar of the Bread of Life: The Theotokos as Provider of the Eucharist in Byzantine Culture,” in *The Reception of the Virgin in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images*, ed. Thomas Arentzen, and Mary Cunningham (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 77–119, esp. 92; Jasmina S. Ćirić, “Theodore Metochites Mosaic at Chora and the Relics of the True Cross,” *Journal of Mosaic Research* 14 (2021), 41–51, esp. 46–49. The procession depicted above comments upon and reinforces the real procession below.
- 65 Dimitris I. Pallas, *Die Passion und Bestattung Christi in Byzanz. Der Ritus – das Bild* (Munich, 1965), p. 40; Taft, “The Liturgy of the Great Church,” p. 50; Hans Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter. Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 195–96; Stefanos Alexopoulos, *The Presanctified Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite. A Comparative Analysis of its Origins, Evolution, and Structural Components* (Leuven, 2009), pp. 232–35.
- 66 Ousterhout, “The Virgin,” p. 101; Manuela Studer-Karlen, “Les typologies mariales dans l'art paléologue,” *Byzantina* 36 (2019), 103–66.

surrounding prophets, an adjacency that of course also points to Mary's royal descent (6).⁶⁷

Starting in the 13th century, the image of the Virgin holding the Christ Child surrounded by prophets came to be frequently used in wall and vault paintings, especially in the drum of the secondary domes where prophets are sometimes accompanied by typological attributes.⁶⁸ The attributes have a precise function in the course of the prayers, just as they had a precise function in the course of the action of the Old Testament.⁶⁹

The second part of the cycle, depicted on the west wall, also has many detailed episodes that constitute a small cycle in themselves, such as the wedding.⁷⁰ From all this, it can be concluded that the intention of the programme of this area of the esonarthex was twofold: to offer a counterpart to the Passion-focussed Great Entrance with a totality of Mariological subjects

67 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:28–29, 35–37, 49–59, pl. 67, 71–84; idem, “Some Problems in Programs and Iconography of Ministry Cycles,” in *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami*, pp. 245–302, esp. 268.

68 Doula Mouriki, “Αἱ βιβλικαὶ προεικονίσεις τῆς Παναγίας εἰς τὸν τροῦλλον τῆς Περιβλέπτου τοῦ Μυστρά,” [The biblical depictions of the Virgin Mary in the Church of the Peribleptos in Mistra] *ΑΔ Μελέται* [Studies] 25 (1970), 217–51, esp. 267–70; Titos Papamastorakis, *Ὁ διάκοσμος τοῦ τροῦλου τῶν ναῶν τῆς Παλαιολόγειας περὸδου στὴ Βαλκανικὴ χερσόνησο καὶ τὴν Κύπρο* [The decoration of the dome of the churches of the Palaiologan period in the Balkan Peninsula and Cyprus] (Athens, 2001), pp. 98–109, 166–248. Mouriki hypothesized that the composition was intended to decorate the secondary domes, the privileged place of the Virgin in correlation to the central dome, traditionally reserved for the image of Christ Pantokrator. In the Chora, this second composition occupies the south dome of the esonarthex (5). This larger dome has 24 flutes, and the northern one 16. The genealogy of Christ encompasses both domes and can be broken into four subdivisions within the genealogy. Among the figures in the genealogy, some bear iconographic attributes symbolizing the metaphors of the Virgin. Studer-Karlen, “Les typologies,” pp. 17–24. In the north dome at the Chora, Moses bears the *stamnos* on which the medallion of the Virgin is represented: Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, pl. 81–82. The typological image is a prototype of the Holy Eucharist. Ousterhout, “The Virgin,” pp. 101–02; Ousterhout, *The Art*, p. 107.

69 The 18th-century manual of the painter of Mount Athos, the Hermeneia, recommends decorating one of the cupolas of the narthex with the medallion of the Virgin and Child, carried by angels and surrounded by the prophets, and placing on the pendentives the hymnographers with appropriate words on their books or scrolls. Paul Hetherington, *The Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fournā: An English Translation with Commentary, of cod. gr. 708 in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library Leningrad*, 3rd ed. (London, 1981), p. 51.

70 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:78–82, pl. 135–45; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Life of the Virgin,” pp. 184–88. Zacharias praying before the rods of the suitors (19); the Virgin entrusted to Joseph (20; Fig. 3.4); Joseph taking the Virgin in his house (21); Joseph taking leave of the Virgin (23).



FIGURE 3.4 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, esonarthex: *The Betrothal of Mary and Joseph*

PHOTO: NEKTARIOS ZARRAS

and, in addition, to assign the two main Marian feasts – the Nativity of the Virgin (11) and the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (15, Fig. 3.3) – the most prominent placements. As the fourth bay was not used for the Great Entrance, this cycle within the esonarthex corresponds to the route of the procession (Fig. 3.1).⁷¹

Aside from these ritual inflections, further eloquent analogies are evident among the compositions. Thus, the Annunciation to Mary (22; Fig. 3.2) is set opposite the Annunciation to St Anne (9), and vis-à-vis the Nativity scene (11) appears the betrothal of Mary and Joseph (20; Fig. 3.4).⁷²

In the latter, the stature of Joseph – as a tall adult man – contrasts with that of the diminutive girl. Ousterhout interprets this disparity as an allusion to Andronikos II's successful negotiation of the scandalous marriage of his

71 Nelson, "Taxation," p. 67. Nelson described it as a self-contained cycle starting and ending far from any processional path. The self-contained nature of the cycle corresponds to the exclusivity of the Great Entrance, which is undertaken only by the clergy and which mimics the Passion that commences in the Incarnation depicted here.

72 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:79–80, pl. 138–42; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Life of the Virgin," pp. 185–86, pl. 138.

very young daughter, Simonis Palaiologina, to the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin.⁷³

The six saints depicted in the panels of the first, second, and third bays recall the theme of Incarnation and articulate the significance of this space. Thus, facing one another across the narthex, on the pilasters between the first and second bays, are St Anne with the infant Mary (69) and her husband Joachim (70). Between the second and third are Mary and the infant Christ (71) and probably her husband Joseph, although the latter is destroyed. On the eastern pilaster between the third and fourth bays, a small fragment remains of an image of St John the Baptist (72).⁷⁴

Commemoration of the Living and the Dead

Of relevance to the Great Entrance in the narthex is the fact that the *Cherubikos Hymnos* was rhythmically interrupted – as documented in the manuscripts – by liturgical commemorations for the living and the deceased.⁷⁵ These interjections multiplied over time.⁷⁶ Ultimately, praying for the ruler, the bishop, and the benefactors, even if they were not participants in the liturgy, became a stable element of the rite.⁷⁷

73 Ousterhout, *The Art*, p. 122; Ousterhout, *Finding a Place in History*, p. 47. This marital diplomacy was a great triumph for Metochites.

74 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:33, 160–61, pl. 314–17. The pendant of St John, which is destroyed, would have been his father, the prophet Zacharias, or his mother Elizabeth. On each of the pilasters that receive the transverse arches, a mosaic panel, semi-circular at the top and framed with marble, was set into the revetments of marble of the walls.

75 Concerning the *Cherubikos Hymnos* in the Great Entrance: Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 69, 78–79, 119–48, 227–34; Belting, *Das Bild*, pp. 195–96; Alexopoulos, *The Presanctified Liturgy*, pp. 232–35; Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon. Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 124–26; Richard Barrett, “Let Us Put Away All Earthly Care: Mysticism and the Cherubikon of the Byzantine Rite,” *Studia patristica* 64 (2013), 111–24; Taft, and Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso*, pp. 155–205, 396; Marka Tomić Đurić, “To Picture and to Perform: The Image of the Eucharistic Liturgy at Markov Manastir (I),” *Zograf* 38 (2014), 123–42, esp. 130–37.

76 References to the custom of commemoration are evident in the numerous inscriptions on the *epitaphioi* carried in the Great Entrance, which plead for the salvation of the donor and are to be understood as liturgical intercessory formulae. Yuliana Boycheva, “L’aer dans la liturgie orthodoxe et son iconographie du XIII^e siècle jusque dans l’art post-byzantin,” *Cahiers archéologiques* 51 (2003), 169–94, esp. 169–72; Yuliana Boycheva, “Functions and Iconography of the Aer-Epitaphios: Byzantine Aeres-Epitaphioi of the 14th–15th century preserved in Bulgaria,” in *Medieval Bulgarian Art and Letters in a Byzantine Context*, ed. Elka Bakalova, Margaret Dimitrova, and M.A. Johnson (Sofia, 2017), pp. 192–222.

77 Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 119–34; Taft, and Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso*, pp. 227–34.

The unusual features of the south bay of the esonarthex suggest that it, too, had a special function.⁷⁸ As noted above, it does not participate in the Mariological cycle, as the route of the Great Entrance proceeded southwards through the esonarthex and turned east into the naos, thus never reaching the south bay. This bay was nevertheless assigned prominence through its architectural and decorative articulation. Its major characteristic is the monumental mosaic of the Deesis, depicting Christ Chalkites alongside Isaakios Komnenos (c.1093–1152) and the nun Melania (4).⁷⁹ It appears that Metochites set aside the south bay of the esonarthex as a founders' chapel, for the purposes of commemoration.⁸⁰ The visual prayer represented in the Deesis would have testified that the historic *ktetors* of the Chora were remembered in the liturgies, and especially in the *Cherubikos Hymnos*, during which the procession of the Great Entrance stopped beneath the central vault of the esonarthex.⁸¹ In this liturgical and visual context, the most prominent image is the portrait of Metochites in proskynesis before Christ, directly over the central door of the esonarthex (3).⁸² Here, Theodore had himself depicted as at once a kneeling supplicant and a donor, a conjunction that is unique. The spatial disposition of the two panels of the Deesis alongside the former founders and the new patron kneeling before Christ makes evident that these should be read together,⁸³ and

78 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 98–110, fig. 113; Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," p. 40; Ousterhout, *Finding a Place in History*, pp. 39–42.

79 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:45–48, pl. 36–41. For Christ Chalkites, the imperial icon par excellence: Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," pp. 41–45.

80 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, p. 100; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The Place of the Nun Melania (the Lady of the Mongols) in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople," *Cahiers archéologiques* 43 (1995), 163–80; Ousterhout, "Contextualizing," p. 246; Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," pp. 37–53; Ousterhout, "Reading," p. 99; idem, *Finding a Place in History*, pp. 21–29, 34–41, 49–55; Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," p. 90. The mosaics convey the concern of Metochites with the past and with his own position in history. The nun Melania, or Maria Palaiologina, is known to have offered a Gospel book to the monastery: Georgi Krustev, "A Poem of Maria Commene Palaeologina from Manuscript No. 177 of the Ivan Dujčev Centre for Slavo-Byzantine Studies," *Byzantinoslavica* 58 (1997), 71–77, esp. 73–75; Teteriatnikov, "The Place," pp. 178–79.

81 Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 216–19.

82 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:42–43, pl. 26–29; Ousterhout, *The Art*, pp. 23–29; Ševčenko, "The Portrait," pp. 189–205; Ćirić, "Theodore Metochites Mosaic at Chora," pp. 41–51. For the inscriptions: Nektarios Zarras, "Remarks on Donor and Other Narrative Inscriptions of the Chora Monastery," in *Materials for the Study of Late Antique and Medieval Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Istanbul*, ed. Ida Toth, and Andreas Rhoby (Oxford/Vienna, 2020), pp. 175–88, esp. 175–77; Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," p. 108.

83 Ousterhout, "Reading," p. 100.

meanwhile all the depicted protagonists are mentioned in the prayers of the *Cherubikos Hymnos*.

An image of the Virgin Blachernitissa (1) is depicted on the opposite wall, framing the view out the western door, i.e. looking towards the city walls.⁸⁴ The inscription identifies the Mother of God as the dwelling place or container for the Uncontainable, an epithet linked to the name of the Chora and derived from the *Akathistos Hymnos*.⁸⁵ The prominent location and the inscription refer to the fact that Chora Monastery was dedicated not only to Christ but also to the Virgin.⁸⁶ The visual model for the rendering of the Blachernitissa in the church was one of the most potent and miraculous icons worshiped in Constantinople. The icon evoked the protective function of the Virgin for the city and was kept at the imperial church of Blachernai.⁸⁷ At the Chora, the location of the Virgin Blachernitissa in the exonarthex corresponds to a monastic gate to the west of the church, indicating the direction to the Palace of Blachernai, with which the Chora had a well-documented connection.⁸⁸ The church's location near the city walls was no doubt also meant as a (symbolic) contribution to the defence of Constantinople.⁸⁹

The Two Paths of the Little Entrance in the Exonarthex

The image of Christ (2) that appears in the lunette above the central door of the exonarthex – leading to the exonarthex on the main west-east axis – is certainly a key part of the ensemble (Fig. 3.5).

The inscriptions proclaim Christ as the Dwelling Place of the Living, while the juxtaposition of the image with the architecture implies his status as the

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- 84 On the various functions of the images over passages: U, "Images et passages," 302–27.
- 85 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:40–41, pl. 20–25; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, p. 66; Ousterhout, "The Virgin," pp. 92–93. See for another interpretation: Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*, pp. 326–27.
- 86 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:27–28; Ousterhout, "The Virgin," p. 93; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The Dedication of the Chora Monastery in the Time of Andronikos II Palaiologos," *Byzantion* 66/1 (1996), 188–207; Ousterhout, *The Art*, pp. 103–04.
- 87 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:27; Ousterhout, "The Virgin," pp. 94–98; idem, "Reading," pp. 99–100. Theodore Metochites refers often in his poems to the theme of the Virgin as a refuge.
- 88 Ousterhout, "The Virgin," pp. 91–109; idem, "Contextualizing," p. 244, fig. 7; idem, "Reading," p. 100.
- 89 Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 86–87.



FIGURE 3.5 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *Christ Pantokrator*
PHOTO: ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

door by which the faithful enter into life.⁹⁰ As mentioned above, the clergy and congregation entered the church for the first time during the Little Entrance, the true introit of the Mass.⁹¹ The exonarthex formed an open portico and may also have had liturgical functions.⁹² As the main entrance for the congregation was at the south, the exonarthex also served as a gathering space from which the participants began the Little Entrance into the church. Two pieces of evidence suggest that the clergy entered the exonarthex through its north door: firstly, the fact that the narration in this area begins simultaneously with

- 90 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:45–48, pl. 36–41; Nelson, “Taxation,” p. 72; Woodfin, “Wall, Veil, and Body,” pp. 375–76; Ousterhout, *Finding a Place in History*, p. 15. This is a reference to Psalm 116:9, “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living,” a verse that appears in the funeral liturgy.
- 91 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 138–54; Taft, *The Great Entrance*, p. 428; idem, “The Liturgy of the Great Church,” pp. 50–51.
- 92 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, pp. 108, 125–49; Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 101–06; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 68, 70–71.

Christ's infancy and ministry,⁹³ and secondly, the possibility that the north façade was once an interior wall connected to monastic buildings.⁹⁴ If the latter is true, the door would have provided the clergy with a convenient, covered passage to the many services that took place daily and nightly at the church, as well as to the starting point for the Little Entrance.⁹⁵ The entranceway for the clergy thus differed from that of the congregation, and this had consequences for the mosaic decoration.⁹⁶

The cycle of the Infancy of Christ, likewise, inspired by the apocryphal narrative, appears in the 14 lunettes on the walls of the exonarthex.⁹⁷ It begins in the one directly above the north door, through which the clergy entered, with Joseph dreaming (24) on the western half and the Journey to Bethlehem (25) on the eastern half (Fig. 3.6).⁹⁸

The depicted movement of the Holy Family towards the east as well as the long accompanying quotation from Luke 2:4 anticipate the departure of the procession. The cycle proceeds on the eastern wall, turns the corner to fill the north and east lunettes in the last bay of the exonarthex, continues in the two south lunettes, and returns along the western wall of the exonarthex. This means that the clergy coming from the north did not enter the exonarthex through the central door. Moreover, the two depicted movements from the north towards the south – namely, the Magis' journey (28) and meeting with Herod (29), which converge on the fourth lunette of the east wall (Fig. 3.7) – once again parallel the processions of the clergy further to the south, where they turn to the east.⁹⁹

The same principle of mirroring applies to the three episodes in the last bay near the parakklesion. The depictions of the Adoration of the Magi on the west part of the north wall (31; today lost) and the return of the Magi (32) anticipate

93 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 5, 77–78; Nelson, "Taxation," pp. 67, 70, 74. Entry from the north door allows a view of both cycles, sequentially.

94 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, pp. 86–87; idem, "Contextualizing," p. 243, fig. 7; idem, *The Art*, p. 100.

95 However, the Little Entrance begins earlier in the prothesis, as stated by Philotheos Kokkinos (Trepelas, *Αι τρεις λειτουργίαι*, p. 6). The clergy nevertheless enters the church for the first time through this door.

96 The two passages are also outlined by Nelson, "Taxation," p. 74.

97 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:29, 86–107, pl. 152–210; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Iconography of the Cycle of the Infancy of Christ," in *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami*, pp. 197–241; Ousterhout, *The Art*, pp. 48–57.

98 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:86–88, pl. 152–58; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Infancy of Christ," pp. 202–06; Nelson, "Taxation," p. 69. The procession of the family is a symbol of the actual procession below.

99 Nelson, "Taxation," pp. 72–73, 77–78.



FIGURE 3.6 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *Joseph Dreaming* and *The Journey to Bethlehem*

PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK RECORDS AND PAPERS, DUMBARTON OAKS, TRUSTEES FOR HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

the processional route and point to the door on the north wall leading into the south bay of the exonarthex.¹⁰⁰ As the depiction of the Adoration would have been composed with Mary and the Christ Child to the east of the Magi, the direction of the Adoration characterized the door as an entrance for the procession of the clergy, coming from the west.¹⁰¹

The congregation took another path. Entering the south door, the worshippers turned west and followed the tragic and detailed depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents (34, 35). This drama represents the violence of the contemporary moment and would thus have had an important significance for the viewers, conveying something of their experience of real life.¹⁰² The sequence

100 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:95; Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Infancy of Christ," pp. 220–23; Nelson, "Taxation," p. 74; idem, "The Chora," pp. 77; Kermanidis, *Episteme and Aesthetik*, pp. 321–22.

101 For the reconstruction of the scene of the Adoration: Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, pl. 180a.

102 Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Infancy of Christ," pp. 229–35; Nelson, "The Chora," pp. 74–75; idem, "Heavenly Allies at the Chora," *Gesta* 43/1 (2004), 31–40, esp. 34; Karahan, *Byzantine*

is spread over three lunettes in two successive bays of the south-west corner and in the fifth bay of the exonarthex, and a fourth lunette shows Elizabeth (37) fleeing the massacre.¹⁰³ The dramatic and highly emotional representation of mourning mothers in the fifth bay (36) elicited empathy. Maguire specifies that the structure of the narrative derives not from visual models but from ancient rhetorical theory and, more specifically, the 5th-century sermon of Basil of Seleucia that was read on the day commemorating the Massacre of the Innocents.¹⁰⁴ The congregation took the same direction as Elizabeth to the central bay of the exonarthex.

On the east wall of this bay, the central panel with Christ Pantokrator (2; Fig. 3.5) is flanked, to the north, by the Nativity (27) and the scene of the enrolment for taxation (26) and, to the south, by the Journey of the Magi (28; Fig. 3.7) with the two episodes with Herod (29, 30).¹⁰⁵ The monumental arrangement implies a visual hierarchy with eschatological connotations, the position to Christ's right being superior to the left.¹⁰⁶ This would have been the first impression for a beholder entering the church through the south door, with an experience of empathy provoked by the contemplation of the Massacre of the Innocents, while standing before the image of Christ. This must have been the route for the congregation.

Holy Images, pp. 159–62; Maguire, “Rhetoric and Reality,” p. 66. As Nelson showed, the period at the beginning of the 14th century was characterized by catastrophic ravages by the rebellious Catalans and Turks, which created great suffering. For the historical context: Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 132–242; David Jacoby, “The Catalan Company in the East: The Evolution of an Itinerant Army (1303–1311),” in *The Medieval Way of War: Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach*, ed. Gregory I. Halfond (Farnham, 2015), pp. 153–82.

- 103 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:98–104, pl. 184–99; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Infancy of Christ,” pp. 224–29. Such an extensive depiction of the Massacre of the Innocents was unprecedented in Byzantine art.
- 104 Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J., 1981), pp. 30–33; Maguire, “Rhetoric and Reality,” pp. 66–67. See also Semoglou, “L'éloquence au service de l'archéologie,” pp. 45–65.
- 105 Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Infancy of Christ,” pp. 206–24. The five episodes of the Magi (28–29, 31–33) form an exceptional ensemble and are inspired by the *Akathistos Hymnos*. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:92–97, pl. 173–81; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “L'illustration de la première partie de l'hymne akathiste,” 648–702; Nelson, “Taxation,” p. 67.
- 106 Nelson, “Taxation,” pp. 72, 77; idem, “Heavenly Allies,” pp. 33–34. The scene of the enrolment for taxation (26) would have been on the right side of Christ, celebrating the triumph of a politically and economically meritorious contemporary government. The primacy of the right is maintained throughout the church, as, for example, in the Last Judgement in the parekklesion. See Athanasios Semoglou's contribution to this volume.



FIGURE 3.7 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *The Magi's Journey* and *The Magi meet with Herod*

PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK RECORDS AND PAPERS, DUMBARTON OAKS, TRUSTEES FOR HARVARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Two miracles are represented across four images on the vault of the central bay, where the congregation stood before entering. The Wedding at Cana (45; Fig. 3.8) and the Feeding of the Five Thousand (46, 47; Fig. 3.9) both allude to the sacrament of the Eucharist celebrated inside the church.¹⁰⁷

The exceptional motif of the slaying of the calf (44; Fig. 3.10) in the north-western pendentive is incorporated into the episode of the Wedding at Cana, exemplifying the sacrifice of Christ and thus also the Eucharist.¹⁰⁸

This Eucharistic signification is further apparent in the placement of these scenes on the vault between the two lunettes above the entrance door, where the dedicatory figures of Christ (2) and the Virgin Blachernitissa (1) appear. It is notable that the main event within each scene is positioned in the eastern

107 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:121–24, pl. 228, 238–45; Underwood, “Some Problems,” pp. 260, 264–67; Ousterhout, “Temporal Structuring,” pp. 66–68; idem, “The Virgin,” pp. 98–101; Nelson, “The Chora,” pp. 67–69; idem, “Heavenly Allies,” p. 33; Rossi, “The Miracle Cycle,” pp. 233–34; Zarras, “Illness and Healing,” p. 99.

108 The motif has no relation to the Wedding at Cana but rather originates from the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:23). Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:117–21, pl. 228–37 (pl. 230 for the slaying); Underwood, “Some Problems,” pp. 266, 280; Rossi, “The Miracle Cycle,” p. 234.



FIGURE 3.8 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *The Wedding at Cana*
 PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK
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FIGURE 3.9 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *The Feeding of the
 Five Thousand*
 PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK
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FIGURE 3.10 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *The Miracle at Cana* and *The Slaying of the Calf*

PHOTO: NEKTARIOS ZARRAS

pendentives (45, 46), thus being visible when entering the exonarthex. From this, it is clear that the west-east axis – including these two scenes in the portico, along with the Presentation of Mary in the Temple (15; Fig. 3.3) and the image of Mary fed by an angel (16) in the exonarthex – offered an insistent visual prologue to the services that took place inside the church.¹⁰⁹

When departing, the congregation took the same central east-west path, with the image of the Virgin Blachernitissa (1) in front of them. Their directionality merged with that of the Magi's journey (28, 29; Fig. 3.7). Moreover, they had to pass through the south door of the last bay beneath a depiction of the Flight into Egypt (33), represented as a journey to a walled city, with idols falling from the exterior of the Temple.¹¹⁰

In contrast to the congregation, the clergy left the exonarthex again through the north door. The two episodes on the west wall of the north bays of the

109 Evangelatou, "Krater of Nectar and Altar of the Bread of Life," p. 92; Ćirić, "Theodore Metochites Mosaic at Chora," pp. 46–49.

110 The south door led to the gate and the city beyond. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:97–98, pl. 182–83; Nelson, "Taxation," pp. 74, 77; Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, p. 163. The Falling Idols are not mentioned in the Gospel account nor in the Greek text of the Protoevangelium but are alluded to in the *Akathistos Hymnos*.



FIGURE 3.11 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *Joseph Dreaming* and *The Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*

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exonarthex – showing the return from Egypt (39; Fig. 3.11) and the departure for Jerusalem (40; Fig. 3.12) – are once again relevant for the procession in that they represent the act of travelling.¹¹¹

The orientation of both scenes towards the north door attests that this was the exit point for the clergy.

Alongside the monumental polyptych constituted by the five eastern lunettes of the portico and the images mirroring the processional directions are compositions reflecting the personal aspirations of Metochites. The enrolment for taxation (26) in the northern lunette, for instance, allows for an exploration of the political function of the visual in Late Byzantine society.¹¹²

111 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:104–07, pl. 200–10; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Infancy of Christ,” pp. 235–38; Nelson, “The Chora,” p. 76.

112 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:84, 88–89, pl. 159–65; Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Infancy of Christ,” pp. 206–08; Nelson, “Taxation,” pp. 56–82, esp. 59. About Metochite’s tasks in fiscal functions: Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” pp. 73, 81–82, 94. Behind the Virgin, a gnarled tree is depicted. Underwood suggests that this is a visualization of Isaiah’s prophecy (Is. 11:1) that a living branch will grow from the stem of Jesse.



FIGURE 3.12 Chora Church/Kariye Camii, Istanbul, exonarthex: *The Journey to Jerusalem*
 PHOTO: BYZANTINE INSTITUTE AND DUMBARTON OAKS FIELDWORK
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The scene makes explicit reference to contemporary imperial ceremony and to the career of Metochites.¹¹³

The cycle of the Infancy of Christ is a visual model of the procession that took place in its vicinity. It begins where the clergy arrives in the exonarthex for the Little Entrance. Accordingly, the images adjacent to where the laity gathers – such as the Massacre of the Innocents – amplify the actions of the congregation and demand from them, via personal experience and contemplation, an emotionally charged empathy that corresponds perfectly to the goal of the Little Entrance.¹¹⁴ At the same time, eschatological connotations are called up by the hierarchization of the left and right sides, with Christ in the centre. The images become multivalent, also incorporating aspects of contemporary politics as well as city topography.¹¹⁵

113 Nelson, “Taxation,” p. 63; idem, “Heavenly Allies,” pp. 33–34; Semoglou, “L’éloquence au service de l’archéologie,” pp. 49–53; Ousterhout, *Finding a Place in History*, p. 45.

114 Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 192–94.

115 Kermanidis, *Episteme and Aesthetic*, pp. 157–277.

The second cycle, namely, that of Christ's ministry, begins in the vaults of the exonarthex (where the infancy sequence ends) and follows a similar trajectory.¹¹⁶ That each of the three cycles begins in the north part of the narthex – Christ's infancy and ministry in the exonarthex and the Marian sequence in the esonarthex – signalled both the real and the ritual entrance of the clergy from that direction. The complexity of the ministry cycle owes much to the proliferation of miracle accounts and saints' lives at the beginning of the 14th century.¹¹⁷ Indeed, the selection is not chronological but consists of groupings with liturgical, thematic, and didactic influences.¹¹⁸ The selection of scenes was certainly informed by the liturgy, namely, illustrating the Gospel lections read on successive weeks of the liturgical calendar.¹¹⁹ One arrangement based on this principle is that of the miracles in the three pendentives of the bay in the south-west corner of the exonarthex, which visualize the feasts celebrated respectively on the fourth, fifth, and sixth Sundays between Easter and Pentecost: Christ and the Samaritan woman at the well (53), the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda (52), and the healing of the blind from birth (51).¹²⁰ Each makes symbolic reference to the Resurrection and emphasizes the importance of the healing water. This choice of theme might relate to the fact that the sacrament of baptism was celebrated on Pentecost. It is known from the typika that the liturgies of the consecration of the water, the Hagiasmos, took place in the narthex.¹²¹

Recently, in a detailed textual and iconographical analysis, Nektarios Zarras has explored the message of the ministry cycle through the lens of Metochites's literary oeuvre.¹²² He demonstrates the relationship between the extensive

116 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:29–30, 108–41, pl. 211–81; idem, "Some Problems," pp. 245–302; Ousterhout, *The Art*, pp. 58–65; Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle," pp. 226–40; Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*, pp. 323–26. None of Christ's parables were depicted.

117 Alice-Mary Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002), 153–73; Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle," pp. 227–28. Of the original 36 episodes, 28 are preserved.

118 Silvia Pasi, "Il ciclo del Ministero di Cristo nei mosaici della Kariye Djami: considerazioni su alcune scene," in *L'arte di Bisanzia e l'Italia al tempo dei Paleologi, 1261–1453*, ed. Mauro Della Valle, and Antonio Iacobini (Rome, 1999), pp. 183–94; Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle," p. 233.

119 Underwood, "Some Problems," pp. 248, 255–56.

120 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:126–37, 250–57; idem, "Some Problems," pp. 257–62; Zarras, "Illness and Healing," p. 100. The feasts are recalled in the Pentekostarion. It is significant that the fourth pendentive, at the south-west, contains only some foliate ornament.

121 Bache, "La fonction," p. 31; Studer-Karlen, "Les typologies," pp. 136–42, 147. But as the church is a monastic katholikon, there was no celebration of baptisms.

122 Zarras, "Illness and Healing," pp. 85–118.

cycle of Christ's healings in the Chora narthexes and the life and philosophical corpus of the founder. Indeed, baptism had an important signification of new life for Metochites, who emphasized Christ's status as the guarantor of the healing and salvation of mankind.¹²³ The scenes in the domical vault of the second bay – John the Forerunner bearing witness to Christ (42) and the Temptation of Christ (43) – amount to a fundamental ideological message about the triumph of the spiritual word.¹²⁴ The healings are symbols of the rebirth of the soul and the spirit and thus of the spiritual and corporeal restoration of man. Zarras is certainly right to conclude that the illustrations in the Chora convey Metochites's belief in the monastery itself as a place for healing the body and soul.¹²⁵

Eight miracles are depicted on the surfaces beneath the dome in the south bay of the esonarthex: The healings of the blind and mute man (59), of the two blind men (62), of Peter's mother-in-law (61), of the woman with the issue of blood (60), of the man with the withered hand (58), of a man with leprosy (57), and of the multitudes (63), along with an unidentified miracle of healing (56).¹²⁶ These might correspond to the Gospel lections for the period from the third Saturday to the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.¹²⁷ With regard to the four miracles in the pendentives (59–62), it has been noted that for didactic purposes these show that both men and women could enjoy Christ's beneficence and forgiveness.¹²⁸ Moreover, their reserved compositions invoke movement from south to north, towards the entrance to the church; indeed, this station was the last for the clergy in the Little Entrance before entering the church.¹²⁹ Natalia Teteriatnikov interprets this selection as showing the virtues of the

123 Ibid., p. 98.

124 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:110–27, pl. 211–21; Karahan, *Byzantine Holy Images*, pp. 163–67; Zarras, "Illness and Healing," pp. 87–98.

125 Zarras, "Illness and Healing," p. 104.

126 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:124–37, pl. 246–57; Zarras, "Illness and Healing," pp. 107–13. The rare healing scenes led researchers to consider the existence of a hospital in the complex of the monastery. This is only attested by the healing cycle related to Metochites's broader thinking and personal desire for healing and salvation.

127 Underwood, "Some Problems," pp. 262–64, 297–301, pl. 277–81; Pasi, "Il ciclo del Ministero," pp. 185–88; Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle," p. 231.

128 Underwood, "Some Problems," pp. 267, 271, 280–89; Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," p. 38; Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*, pp. 323–24. This gender symmetry characterizes the overall programme of the two narthexes. Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:27; Ousterhout, *Art of the Kariye*, 104; idem, *Finding a Place in History*, pp. 27–29, 53–55. See also Robert G. Ousterhout's contribution to this volume.

129 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, p. 141. The blessing and the preceding prayer were pronounced at the entrance to the naos when the celebrant was at the point of entering into the naos.

healing of the eight passions of the human soul.¹³⁰ And as mentioned above, the distinct architectural features of the bay suggest that it was a special space for commemoration. Another relationship can be decoded in the placement of the kneeling Melania immediately beneath the woman with the issue of blood (60) in the south-east pendentive, an alignment that may have stressed the personal medical history of the nun.¹³¹ Overall, the programme of this bay emphasizes the importance of faith in individual salvation, and accordingly the space was used not only for commemorations but also for confessions and personal or prescribed penitence.¹³²

From what we know, the narthexes served also for smaller daily services, for example the Diaklysmos. Indeed, various typika specify that the monks took part in a Diaklysmos in the narthex after the Divine Liturgy. This ritual consisted of a light meal, at which the monks would be given a piece of bread and a cup of wine.¹³³ The monks waited in the narthex for the bell to ring before departing for the refectory.¹³⁴ The nearby belfry as well as the trapeza in the north of the katholikon would also have been well suited to this practice. This means that the Diaklysmos partook of the west-east axis that proceeds in the exonarthex under the vault of the central bay, where the Eucharistic imagery is concentrated (44–47; Figs 3.8–3.10), and in front of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple (15; Fig. 3.3); afterwards, the clergy would have left the church via the north door of the exonarthex towards the trapeza.

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- 130 Teteriatnikov, "The Place," pp. 173–74; David Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol. The Early Christian Image of the Haemorrhissa and the Mosaics in the Narthex of the Kariye Camii," in *The Woman with the Blood Flow (Mark 5:24–34): Narrative, Iconic, and Anthropological Spaces*, ed. Barbara Baert, and Niels Schalley (Leuven, 2014), pp. 143–63, esp. 160–61.
- 131 Teteriatnikov, "The Place of," p. 171; Nelson, "The Chora," p. 76; Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," pp. 37–53; Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol," pp. 142–63; Rossi, "The Miracle Cycle," p. 235; Zarras, "Illness and Healing," pp. 110–11. Both Melania and the woman with the issue of blood would have provided models of penance and faith.
- 132 Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance," pp. 37–53.
- 133 Christine Stephan, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble. Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche zu Thessaloniki* (Worms, 1986), pp. 173–75; Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual*, pp. 22–23, 110–11. This is found in a number of 11th- and 12th-century typika; see Paul Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Saviour Pantocrator," *Revue des études byzantines* 32 (1974), 1–145, esp. 88, n. 5; Nicholl, "A Contribution," pp. 287–94. Although no consistent information can be found in the different typika, the Diaklysmos is a common feature of monastic ceremony.
- 134 Tomeković attributes a Eucharistic meaning to the Diaklysmos, associating it with the iconography in some narthexes and assuming a relationship between the spatial organization and the community gathering in the narthex for a meal. Tomeković, "Contribution à l'étude," pp. 47–49.

An interesting occurrence of the Diaklysmos is to be found in the Pantokrator typikon, which characterizes the ritual as an occasion for commemorating the ruling family and the donors.¹³⁵ A wish to guarantee this daily commemoration might offer another explanation for the presentation of Eucharistic symbolism alongside patronal images (3, 4) in this space.

In the exonarthex, there are two categories of saintly portraits: the martyr figures in the soffits of the arches and the figures of other saints on the pilasters.¹³⁶ All are dressed in courtly costumes, such that they would have resembled their aristocratic beholders. These resonances signalled that the saints were allies and friends.¹³⁷ For instance, portrayed nearest to the central lunette of Christ are St George (67) and St Demetrios (66), figures intimately connected with the Palaiologan family – and thus carrying a political message.¹³⁸ Between the enrolment for taxation (26) and the Nativity (27), St Andronikos (68) is shown looking down towards the former.¹³⁹ The homonym made reference to the emperor Andronikos II himself, who in this way became present in this heavenly allegory and allied with the political imagery of the Chora's patron.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Metochites was one of the closest associates of the emperor and was allied with him through marriage.¹⁴¹

A Multi-Layered Programme

Thanks to the new dating of the Chora's mosaics to before 1317, they can now be considered part of the rich artistic milieu of the beginning of the 14th century, characterized by its mannerism and sophistication of form as well as its penchant for liturgical themes that reflect the rituals celebrated in sacred

135 Gautier, "Le typikon," p. 89. On the commemoration connected to the Diaklysmos: Constantin Andronikof, *Le cycle pascal: le sens des fêtes* (Lausanne, 1985), pp. 154–56; Stephan, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble*, p. 175; Nicholl, "A Contribution," pp. 285–308.

136 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 1:32–33, 152–63, pl. 282–313.

137 Nelson, "Heavenly Allies," pp. 31–40. A reference to the aristocracy is made also in some episodes, for instance in the courtly dress of the civil servants in the scene of the enrolment for taxation: Lafontaine-Dosogne, "Life of the Virgin," p. 172.

138 Nelson, "Heavenly Allies," pp. 35–36, figs 7–8; Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 69–111.

139 Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, pl. 294.

140 Ousterhout, *The Art*, p. 123; Nelson, "Heavenly Allies," p. 38; Magdalino, "Theodore Metochites," pp. 179–81; Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 70–78.

141 Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," p. 84.

space.¹⁴² The related yet discrete visual experiences activated in the Chora – via a series of sophisticated iconographic interconnections layered into the decorative programme – pertained to ritual, belief, and political-social standing.¹⁴³ The first and most basic layer was the liturgy performed daily in the building, consisting of the Divine Liturgy and, of particular relevance to the narthexes, the two processional entrances. During the Little Entrance, the congregation entered through the south gate, with its highly decorated exterior, including the inscription of the founder. Appearing in the first two bays of the exonarthex accessed by the congregation were scenes that indicated directions of movement. In the portico, the sequence with the Massacre of the Innocents (34–37) demanded intimate contemplation before participants stepped in front of the bust of Christ (2; Fig. 3.5) and the monumental polyptych (26–30), both imbued with eschatological meaning; finally, the congregation proceeded along the west-east axis into the naos. The clergy took a path from the north entrance of the portico, where the two Christological cycles begin. But rather than proceeding along the west-east axis, they continued southwards before turning to pass under the depiction of the Adoration of the Magi (31, when entering the south bay of the exonarthex) and the Deesis (4). Before the door, they awaited the signal for the introit. The congregation in the naos witnessed the appearance of the clergy, splendidly attired in the rich vestments of their order and bearing the Gospel and the Cross, symbols of Christ. The Little Entrance stands for the coming of Christ.¹⁴⁴

The Great Entrance, on the other hand, consisted only of one participating group, namely, the clergy bearing the gifts. Once they reached the prothesis, they were no longer visible to the congregation standing in the naos. Via the northern annex, they headed to the north dome of the exonarthex, where the Marian cycle begins. The cycle prefigures the Passion and therefore also the Great Entrance. Passing through the main door of the exonarthex into

142 For the new dating: Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” pp. 60–111. According to recent research, the paintings of the Protaton on Mount Athos (1309–11) and the Deesis mosaic in Hagia Sophia (beginning of the second decade of the 14th century) also belong to this group: Konstantinos M. Vapheiadis, “The Wall-Paintings of the Protaton Church Revisited,” *Zograf* 43 (2019), 113–28; Konstantinos M. Vapheiadis, “Reassessing a Late Byzantine Masterpiece: The Deesis Mosaic in the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 45/2 (2021), 166–83. Among the other mosaic ensembles from the early 14th century already known, the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (1310–14) is particularly noteworthy, as it was created by an artist whose style is similar to that of the painter who decorated the Protaton.

143 Smyrlis notes that the main motive of Metochites seems to have been the desire to be the benefactor of his city. Smyrlis, “Contextualizing Theodore Metochites,” p. 86.

144 Mathews, *The Early Churches*, p. 140; Taft, “The Liturgy of the Great Church,” pp. 50–51.

the naos – carrying the gifts to the Temple, thus mirroring the bringing of the Virgin to the Temple (15), which is depicted over the door itself – they reappeared to the congregation. Each route found analogies in the imagery.

The next layer involved smaller services, like the Hagiasmos, the Diaklysmos, and the *Cherubikos Hymnos*, and the incorporation of the commemoration of the founders through the disposition of relevant scenes. Yet another layer can be observed: the mosaic panels condense and fuse events that took place over time.¹⁴⁵ Most importantly, the images engaged with the reality of daily life. The result was the provocation of emotional empathy in the observer. The visual programme finds a corollary in the philosophical oeuvre of Metochites and signals a commemorative and salvific intention. Certain religious images served to justify the secular realities of Metochites's career as well as his imperial aspirations.¹⁴⁶ It can be concluded that, given that the greater part of the cycle's course parallels the life and worldview of Metochites as expressed in his works as a whole, the cycle had a unique autobiographical character.¹⁴⁷

It must be noted that the narthex and the portico housed a wide array of rites, including the Little and the Great Entrances, the daily Liturgy of the Hours, and the lesser services celebrated throughout the liturgical year. Although the congregation could see the Deesis when entering the church, the southern bay had an exclusivity, for the clergy at the Little Entrance as probably still for Metochites and his family as commemoration chapel. All rites unfolded without entering the parekklesion, which highlights its special function as a funeral chapel.

Nevertheless, the structure of the liturgy offers the basic explanation for the articulation of the architecture and imagery. In the Chora, the intended experience of the viewer was not only to observe works of art as a means of gaining knowledge of God but, moreover, to hope for salvation by engaging with the church's architectural-painterly theatre.

145 Ousterhout, "Temporal Structuring," pp. 63–76; Nelson, "Taxation," pp. 56–82; Kermanidis, *Episteme and Ästhetik*, pp. 318–26.

146 This group concerns the images like the betrothal (with the reference to Simonis; 20; Fig. 3.4) and the enrolment for taxation (26), as well as the courtly depiction of the saints. Ultimately, the references to Hagia Sophia are also part of this group. On the motives of Metochites: Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites," pp. 84–95.

147 Zarras, "Illness and Healing," p. 117.

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