

Summary

Theodor Daniel and his nephew Michael Veneris worked as fresco painters on Venetian Crete from the end of the 13th until the first third of the 14th century. They painted Byzantine Orthodox churches in the western region of the island and are commonly referred to as the »Veneris-Workshop«. The present study analyses the work of these two painters from various perspectives. In a first step, it focuses on the frescos themselves, and analyzes the style and iconography of both painters. The second part of the study then examines the networks Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris maintained with other Cretan painters.

A crucial requirement for the analysis of the works of the two painters is the differentiation between their hands, since the frescos are usually unsigned. The churches of the Panagia in Hagios Ioannes and of the Panagia in Drymiskos are the only two churches on Crete that carry inscriptions informing us that Theodor Daniel or Michael Veneris painted the church, each on their own. Therefore, I analyze the style, iconography and pictorial programme of the frescos in these two churches, as well as the donor inscriptions in order to achieve a basic characterization of the painters' works. The style analysis offers succinct individual stylistic elements that enable the identification and attribution of other, unsigned works, to the two painters. Moreover, the analysis of iconography and pictorial programme, set into the context of the standard programmes in Late Medieval Cretan wall painting, enables us to identify recurrent or even just punctiform diverging elements that are typical of the two painters.

The Panagia church in Hagios Ioannes was painted and signed by Theodor Daniel (pp. 19-48). Its comprehensive analysis therefore renders multiple results that are an indispensable prerequisite for the attribution of unsigned works to Theodor Daniel.

The pictorial programme comprises all the usual scenes to be expected in Late Byzantine churches in and outside Crete and shows just a few conspicuous aspects. Since the space in this church is rather abundant, some more images were added, such as the many portraits of holy men and women in medallions on the north and south walls. The special elements fall into three different categories: individual details specific to Theodor Daniel, iconographic elements that are common to both Theodor Daniel and Ioannes Pagomenos, and two singular elements specific to the church.

Theodor Daniel used a very linear style and a severely restricted color range. His figures, as well as his compositions, follow a strict recurring pattern. This is particularly visible from

the faces of the figures, which he composed in a particular manner for each figure type.

Specific indications for an exact dating of the frescoes in Hagios Ioannes are missing. Therefore, I can only tentatively narrow the composition period down to the end of the 13th / beginning of the 14th centuries.

While the Panagia in Hagios Ioannes enabled the identification of Theodor Daniel's style, the examination of the Panagia church in Drymiskos is highly important for the attribution of works to Michael Veneris (pp. 48-68). The donor inscription on the north wall of the bema contains the name of the painter – Michael Veneris – and a date for the completion of the frescoes (1317/1318).

The pictorial programme is the standard one for Late Byzantine church paintings on Crete. The iconography usually follows variants of the Byzantine tradition, though some iconographic details are specific elements typical to Michael Veneris.

Michael Veneris worked in the traditional linear style, just like his uncle. He implemented the rules of this style in his own characteristic way that shows through certain elements. In contrast to his uncle, however, Michael also used some few elements from the style of Palaeologan Period, such as using green shadows for faces.

In contrast to the two churches analyzed above, both artists worked together on the Soter church in Meskla, leaving their signature in the donor inscription (pp. 68-78). Therefore, I have tested the catalogue of their individual painting characteristics drawn from the first two churches in this church.

The palaeographic characteristics of the donor inscription on the south wall equal the handwriting in Hagios Ioannes. Theodor Daniel therefore wrote this inscription. It contains a range of crucial information for the further analysis of the »Veneris Workshop«. Most importantly, both painters are mentioned as nephew and uncle, and the date of the paintings is given as 1303.

An analysis of the frescoes using the catalogue of individual painter's characteristics illustrates clearly that Theodor Daniel painted all the images in the southern part of the church, while Michael Veneris was responsible for the northern half of the church. Both artists worked on the west wall, resulting in a mixing of hands, though the reason for this phenomenon is unclear. Theodor Daniel also painted the east wall, though later his paintings in the apse were repainted by Ioannes Pagomenos, probably at the same time as this painter also created the paintings in the narthex (probably around 1315). The reason for the repainting may have been

the remodeling of the windows in the apse, which were enlarged and therefore must have damaged the 1303 paintings.

The analysis of the three signed churches by Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris enables us to identify unsigned churches by both painters in a systematic way (pp. 78-104). I have found 27 other churches decorated by our painters, 21 of which had been mentioned as possible works of the workshop in previous literature, while the six others constituted completely new finds. The painters' style was the most important element for the identification of these works, complemented by the specifics of iconography and pictorial programme.

Theodor Daniel created decorations in 16 of the 27 churches (pp. 78-92), painting them either completely or partially. Ten of these churches had already been mentioned as possible work of the »Veneris workshop«; the analysis proves their assignation to Theodor Daniel. These are the churches Hagia Marina in Kalogerou, the Panagia in Phres, (half of) the Panagia in Diblochori, the Panagia in Saitoures, Hagios Nikolaos in Elenes, Hagios Ioannes in Gerakari, Hagia Paraskevi in Meronas, the Panagia in Platania, the Panagia in Thronos and Hagios Georgios in Vathyako. Five of the 16 church decorations that we can now assign to Theodor Daniel had been only mentioned as works possibly coming from the same environment as the works of the »Veneris workshops«, but scholars had not connected them directly to the workshop. These are the decorations in the Panagia in Alikampos, in Hagios Ioannes in Stylos, in the Panagia in Rodovani, in Hagios Pavlos in the village of Hagios Pavlos and in Hagios Ioannes in Kentrochori. Moreover, I have been able to identify the decorations of the Panagia Kera church in Amari as a work by Theodor Daniel. This church had never been connected to the Veneris workshop before. The paintings in the church of Hagia Paraskevi in Argoule are known as a possible work of the »Veneris workshop«, but only now have I been able to prove that Michael Veneris and Theodor Daniel worked on this church together. There are therefore all in all three churches (Meskla, Argoule and Diblochori) that Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris jointly decorated.

In general, the analysis of all church decorations pertaining to Theodor Daniel shows a great persistency in his works. Theodor Daniel steadfastly maintained Cretan traditions, but also his own, regarding both style and iconography as well as the pictorial programme. Elements that deviate from the standard appear very regularly and can therefore be considered his very specific characteristics.

This persistency impedes a differentiated verdict on the chronology of Theodor Daniel's works, since there are almost no changes within his oeuvre that might allow a conclusion on the development of his style. We know only two dated church decorations by Theodor Daniel – the frescoes in the Hagia Marina church of Kalogerou (1300) and the decorations in the Soter church in Meskla (1303), where he worked together with his nephew. It is plausible that all cooperative projects between uncle and nephew took place in a relatively

short time span. Therefore, the decorations in Hagia Paraskevi in Argoule and the Panagia in Diblochori might have also been painted around 1303. Finally, Theodor Daniel's paintings in Phres stand out, because he experimented with light green shades in this church. Since Michael used greens very consequently for shading, Theodor Daniel might have taken to experimenting with them after the cooperation with his nephew. That would make a dating of the frescoes in Phres after 1303 plausible. We may assume that Theodor Daniel's many undated works should be dated from the end of the 13th to the beginning of the 14th century.

Eleven church decorations or partly decorated churches shall be attribute to Michael Veneris, based on the painter's salient characteristics (pp. 92-104). Nine of these churches had already been mentioned as possible work of the Veneris workshop; my analysis proves their assignation to Michael Veneris. These are the churches of Hagia Marina in Ravdoucha, Hagia Anna in Agriles, Hagios Nikolaos in Monē, Hagios Georgios in Benoudiana, Hagios Ioannes in Deliana, Hagia Paraskevi in Argoule, (half of) the Panagia in Diblochori, the Panagia in Kissos and Hagia Paraskevi in Melampes). The other three churches had either been only tentatively placed in the »circle« of the »Veneris workshop« via stylistic comparison (Hagios Georgios in Sklavopoula), or they had not been known at all and have been identified for the first time as Michael Veneris' work in this study (Hagios Photios in Hagioi Theodoroi, Hagios Georgios in Hagios Theodoros [Troula]).

Just like his uncle, Michael Veneris was very persistent in his style, iconography and pictorial programme, which makes a dating of developments in his oeuvre impossible. He, too, used some elements that deviated from the standard very regularly, and they can therefore be seen as his specific characteristics. Again, we have only two dated works from Michael – the frescoes in the Soter church in Meskla (1303) and in the Panagia in Drymiskos (1317/1318) –, while the three cooperations with his uncle are to be dated around 1303. In one church, Hagios Georgios in Sklavopoula, Michael painted the Western part of the church while Nikolaos Anagnostes decorated the Eastern side. Since there are two donor inscriptions, I suggest that this was not a cooperation, but that Michael created his paintings in a later period. Since Nikolaos' work is dated to 1290/1291, Michael must have worked after this date and probably at the beginning of the 14th century. We may tentatively place all other undated works by Michael in the first decade of the 14th century.

The above analysis of both painters' characteristics invites a comparison of their style and manner of working. It is evident that Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris worked very differently with regard to style, iconography and pictorial programme. Though both used a strictly linear style, each of them practiced this style differently. However, Michael seems to have taken over some iconographic details from his uncle. Since there are only three cases of cooperation between uncle and nephew, we have to ask whether this really was a permanent workshop that emerged from what had been a

teacher-pupil-relationship, or if it was actually only a temporary, limited cooperation (pp. 104-110).

In general, the analysis of the jointly painted churches shows a relatively strict division between the painters' areas of responsibility, such as the northern vs. the southern, or the western vs. the eastern parts of the church. In some places, however, Michael Veneris actually intervened in his uncle's area. These results constitute first crucial insights into the way cooperation between artists worked in Late Medieval churches on Crete.

With the analysis of all known works of our two painters in mind, the second part of the study focused on the networks that Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris maintained with other painters on Crete.

An important prerequisite for the analysis of these networks is the question of how painters actually worked in general at the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th centuries, and which styles they used (pp. 111-115). Generally, though, we can constate a great variety of styles at the beginning of the 14th century both in Crete and in other parts of the Eastern Mediterranean. These styles existed parallel to each other, and therefore church decorations dating to the same period can differ widely. An overview of the dated church decorations from this period shows that painters generally rendered individual interpretations of the linear style. They must not take over many elements of the style of the Palaeologan Period. A comprehensive acceptance of this new Constantinopolitan style can only be seen from the middle or even the end of the 14th century onwards, and it was a slow process. However, some few punctiform influences of the style of the Palaeologan Period can be seen in various Cretan painters' works. Michael Veneris was closer in this aspect to other painters than his uncle, who was more conservative.

On the background of this situation, I analyze Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris' eight cooperative projects with other painters and the churches in which other painters worked after these two artists had finished their work. Apart from Theodor Daniel's cooperation with Michael, we know of six other churches in which he was not the only active painter. An important case of the second nature are the works that Ioannes Pagomenos created in three churches that had been decorated by Michael Veneris and Theodor Daniel, namely the main room in the church of Alikampos (except the Eastern wall), the narthex in Monē and the apsis and narthex in Meskla (pp. 115-118). The present study is the first to identify the decorations in Meskla as Ioannes' work. The earliest dated church decorations by the »Pagomenos-workshop« are those in Hagios Georgios of Komitades (1313/1314), and the next dated works can be found in Hagios Nikolaos in Monē (1315) and in the Panagia in Alikampos (1315/1316). There is therefore a time span of one or two years between the first church and the other two. If we look at the topography, the beeline distance between Komitades and Alikampos is 16 kms and between Monē and Komitades ca. 34 kms. The Soter church in Meskla lies in between. We may, therefore,

infer that Ioannes could have executed his frescoes in Meskla also in about 1315.

However, the connection between the three painters amounts to more than just the geographical closeness: Ioannes took over some iconographic as well as stylistic elements from both Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris. He might therefore have been both painters' pupil, even if the common elements are rather few. However, we have already seen from Theodor and Michael's works that a teacher-pupil-relationship does not necessarily result in a uniform aesthetic language.

Six other churches show works that stems from other painters additionally to either Theodor Daniel or Michael Veneris (pp. 119-124). The churches in Rodovani, Platania, Vathyako and Thronos for Theodor Daniel and the paintings in Hagioi Theodoroi and Sklavopoula for Michael Veneris and other painters.

The division of workspace in these churches varies broadly. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to determine whether the painters worked together at the same time, or if one painter worked subsequently to the other. Sometimes, the division is between the Eastern wall or the bema and the naos. In these cases, the probability for subsequent works is higher, but not to be assumed automatically. The case of Sklavopoula is rather clear, since the church possesses two donor inscriptions, pointing to subsequent work by two painters. In Hagioi Theodoroi, in contrast, the division of workspace was not completely consequent, showing that this must have been a real cooperation. Every church decoration has to be examined in detail, since the frescoes in Vathyako show how sometimes seemingly unimportant details can be crucial indications for a joint cooperation. These joint projects are extremely valuable to us, since they can identify a painter as another's contemporary, and make a dating of the rest of his work possible.

Additionally to the joint ventures, a number of churches show a certain reception and reflection of Michael Veneris' style (pp. 124-130). These are two groups of buildings decorated by two anonymous painters/workshops, one in Western Crete, comprising the churches of Hagios Georgios in Mourne, Archangel Michael in Aradaina, Hagios Nikolaos in Argyroupolis, Soter in Leukochori (Voutoufou) and Archangel Michael in Voutas, and one in Eastern Crete, with the churches of the Panagia in Vigli (Voulismeni), Hagios Georgios in Kroustas and the church of the Soter in Kritsa. Former scholarly literature has erroneously attributed two of these churches to the »Veneris-workshop« itself. However, the present study has been able to disprove these assumptions. The analysis of the two groups of buildings yields some interesting results regarding the reception of Michael Veneris' style. Like Veneris' works, these frescoes all build on two main basic components – the linear style, animated by green shading in the faces, and the characteristic composition of the figures. However, the comparison of the church in Mourne in particular with works by Veneris has shown that the paintings differ decidedly in other, mostly iconographic, aspects.

We can only speculate how these decorations connect to Michael Veneris' work. Perhaps they result from a teacher-pupil-relationship, though we do not know who was the teacher, and who the pupil. Michael Veneris' work does indeed seem to be reflected somehow, although the connection between the works differs from the one between Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris, and also to Ioannes Pagomenos. The latter three painters all used the linear style, though they implemented it diversely, and conformed in certain iconographic details. The anonymous painters/workshops, in contrast, do not only parallel the linear style, but also conform to Veneris' work in the composition of head and face types, a fact that shapes the overall impression crucially.

If we assume that Michael Veneris was the model for the anonymous works, these must have dated a bit later than his work and could therefore be placed in the first decade/first half of the 14th century.

The analysis of Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris and their so-called Veneris-workshop, two of the most important and well-known Byzantine painters on Crete, renders fundamental and extremely valuable insights into Late Byzantine painting in Crete but also in the wider Byzantine world. I have based this examination on the classic categories of pictorial programme, iconography, and style. A special challenge of this analysis has been the fragmentary condition of the many

unsigned works of the two painters under consideration. Therefore, style in particular has proven to be a crucial instrument for the differentiation of painters' hands. In conjunction with iconographic analysis, this classic category still shows itself to be the most crucial analytic instrument at hand, if historiographical and epigraphic sources are missing.

The case under consideration moreover has been able to test the term »workshop« that is often used in scholarly literature. This is all the more important, since little is known in Byzantine studies »[...] about the organization of workshops (e. g. »painting schools«) and the education of artisans and artists, as well as their mobility (wandering workshops)«. The present study shows that various concepts of »workshop« successfully co-existed at the same time, and that these concepts did not necessarily coincide with today's concepts of a workshop, concerning their personnel and administrative organization. Theodor Daniel and Michael Veneris were independent painters who cooperated with others in temporary projects. We should therefore think of these cooperations as networks in which painters worked together depending on the needs of the community, instead of imagining them as permanent joint workshops. This case study has shown that basic research may still yield important results regarding various aspects of scholarly work on Byzantine art.

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