



Daniil Pinciuc

The Dormition of the Theotokos between Text and Image: The Vision of Philotheos Kokkinos (14th c.) and the Patronal Icon of the Athonite Protaton Iconostasis (16th c.)

Abstract

The present study¹ brings two different visions of the same theme face-to-face through a synergistic juxtaposition and an ekphrastic-type iconotextual approach of two art forms. This study aims to highlight the Christologically centered mystery of the Dormition (*koimēsis*) of the Theotokos in its entirety, with particular emphasis on the theological and mystagogical dimensions of the departure (*metastasis*) of her soul and body into heaven. Thus, it becomes a mystical resurrection (*anastasis*) through and in Jesus Christ as an eschatological response to the destiny of man who has reached deification (*theosis*). The two art forms studied here are the only Mariological homily at the Dormition of the Theo-



Rev. Protosyncellus Daniil Pinciuc, PhD student, Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Andrei Șaguna,” “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania

¹ This article was written under the supervision of Archdeacon Prof. Dr. Ioan I. Ică jr., with his consent for publication

tokos written by the hesychast patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos (14th century) and the patronal tempera icon from the iconostasis of the Athonite church of the Protaton (16th century). These two exceptional Byzantine compositions have a profound artistic and anthropological impact and, above all, a mystagogical dimension: an ‘icon’ in words and a ‘homily’ in color.

Keywords

iconotext, mariology, Theotokos, dormition, Philotheos Kokkinos, Theophanes the Cretan, Protaton

1 Context and Purpose

Following a remarkable pilgrimage to the “transfigured mountain” (Mount Athos)² in the summer of 2022, on the occasion of the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God on 15th/28th of August, my steps were providentially guided toward the discovery of two genuine and precious Byzantine masterpieces which, although produced approximately two centuries apart, deserve to be examined together in a comparative and integrative manner. The first one is the only Marian homily on the episode of the Dormition attributed to the hesychast Patriarch of Constantinople Philotheos Kokkinos (ca. 1300–1377)³, preserved in the form of a small volume in a

² Jean Biès, *Athos. Le Montagne transfigurée*, Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1997, 301 p.

³ Philotheos Kokkinos was a former Jew, hegumen of the Great Lavra, metropolitan of Heraclea, twice patriarch of Constantinople (1354-1354, 1364-1376) hymnographer and theologian, disciple and biographer of Saint Gregory Palamas, introduced into the Athonite *Synaxaria* only in the eighteenth century, with the feast day on October 11. *Cf.*

modern Greek paraphrase translation⁴, found almost forgotten on the shelves of the ecclesiastical shop of the Skete of St Andrew (Serai). The second one is the imposing and remarkable tempera icon, belonging to the school of Theophanes the Cretan (16th c.), depicting the same Dormition scene of the Virgin Mary, from the beautiful iconostasis (see Appendix 1) of the unique and oldest Athonite church, the Protaton, located in the capital of Mount Athos – Karyes.

My surprise of discovering this remarkable icon was all the more greater since the Romanian Orthodox Monastery in Aldeia de Santa Margarida (Portugal)⁵ – where I lived and served as a priestmonk between January 2019 and April 2025 –, dedicated to the same feast of the Dormition, had received, just two weeks earlier, a beautiful copy of this icon (see Appendix 2), painted in 2021 by an Athonite Greek monk named Kyrillos. The interest in the homiletic Mariology of the fourteenth century, together with the almost daily encounter with this icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos placed in our church, provided sufficient grounds to attempt a joint reading of these two Byzantine treasures through

Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit, ed. Erich Trapp et al. (Vienna, 1976), no. 11917; Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz. Ein Verzeichnis der Metropolen und Bischöfe des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel in der Zeit von 1204 bis 1453* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), p. 143; Vitalien Laurent, “Philotée Kokkinos”, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* XII/2 (1935), pp. 1498–1509; Aimé Solignac, “Philotée Kokkinos”, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire* XII (1984), pp. 1389–1392; Mihail Mitrea, *A Late-Byzantine Hagiographer: Philotheos Kokkinos and His Vitae of Contemporary Saints* (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2017), pp. 38–124 (“Part I, Philotheos Kokkinos and his œuvre”) and pp. 388–389 (“Appendix 1, Chronology of Kokkinos’ life and writings”).

⁴ Philotheos Kokkinos, *Hē Theotokos. Homilia eis tēn Koimēsīn tēs Hyperagias Despoinēs hēmōn Theotokou* (Athens: Athos, 2007), 92 p.

⁵ The Romanian Orthodox Monastery “Dormition of the Mother of God” in Aldeia de Santa Margarida (Portugal) is the first Orthodox monastery founded on Portuguese territory and is under the canonical jurisdiction of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Spain and Portugal of the Romanian Patriarchate.

a text-image approach, in a double hermeneutical key: an iconographic reading of Philotheos' Marian homily and, conversely, a homiletic reading of the icon – a true “iconotextual” synergy of two Byzantine compositions of different centuries and media, yet devoted to the same theme of the Dormition of the Theotokos.

2 The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos in the Homiletic Vision of the Hesychast Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos

Most probably composed during the first years of Philotheos Kokkinos'⁶ second patriarchate (1364–1376)⁷ for the feast of

⁶ *Kokkinos* (“the Red-haired”) is a nickname referring to his red hair (Ignatie of Huși, *Sfântul Grigorie Palama și teologia energiilor necreate* (Bucharest: Horeb; Spandugino, 2022), p. 150).

⁷ Mihail Mitrea, *A Late-Byzantine Hagiographer...*, p. 94 and p. 389 (“Appendix 1”). In his doctoral dissertation on the life and works of Philotheos, Dionysios A. Tsentikopoulos states: “According to the hypothesis of the editor of the text, V. Psevtonkas, the work should be dated to the period of Philotheos' second patriarchate (1364–1376). Completing this hypothesis, we observe that 15 August 1364 must be excluded, since Philotheos' second patriarchate began on October 8. The same applies to August 15, 1376, as Patriarch Philotheos was removed from the throne in the same month. On August 22, 1376, Andronikos IV, with the help of the Turks, entered Constantinople after a siege of thirty-two days and captured his father and his brother. The siege of the capital by the emperor's own son is an event that would not have remained unaddressed by the patriarch, had the discourse been delivered in 1376.” (Dionysios A. Tsentikopoulos, *Philotheos Kokkinos: Bios kai Ergo* (Thessalonikē, 2001), p. 306, available at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesis-BookReader/id/22813?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up>, accessed 20 March 2026). On the other hand, in the *Foreword* to the 2007 edition mentioned above, it is stated that: “The discourse was most probably written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the saint was abbot of the Great Lavra of the Holy Mountain, where the manuscript

August 15th, the *Homily on the Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos*⁸ is the only Marian text within his vast theological corpus, arranged according to a precise plan in the form of a small treatise, preceded by a prologue and concluded with an epilogue and a final prayer. First edited more than six centuries later by Vasileios S. Psevtonkas⁹ and scarcely studied, the homily has been transmitted in only four manuscripts¹⁰: *Mosq. Synod. gr. 164 (Vladimir 257)*¹¹, ff. 386v–408 (15th c.), *Lavras H 207 (Eustratiades 862)*¹², ff. 265–294* (15th c.); *Lavras M 89 (Eustratiades 1780)*¹³, ff. 264v–294 (15th c.) and *ms. Leimōnos 86*, ff. 294–313 (15th–16th c.). The edition of V. Psevtonkas, structured into 47 sections (paragraphs), was translated for the first time into a modern language – Romanian – by Fr. Prof. Archdeacon

Lavra 862 (H 207), from which the text is taken, is also preserved.” (Philotheos Kokkinos, *Hē Theotokos. Homilia eis tēn Koimēsīn tēs Hyperagias Despoīnēs hēmōn Theotokou*, p. 7).

- ⁸ F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* III (Brussels, 1957), 1102c; A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche*, III (Texte und Untersuchungen 52, Leipzig, 1952), pp. 76, 191, 292.
- ⁹ *Editio princeps* and critical edition: Vasileios S. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, *Epistēmōnikē Epetērīs Theologikēs Scholēs Panepistēmiou Thessalonikēs (EETSPT)* 27 (1982), pp. 92–120.
- ¹⁰ Dēmētrios Tsames, “Ta hagiologika erga tou Philotheou Kokkinou, Patriarchē Kōnstantinoupoleōs”, *EETSPT* 22 (1977), pp. 14–15; Dionysios A. Tsentikopoulos, *Philotheos Kokkinos: Bios kai Ergo* (Thessalonikē, 2001), pp. 305–306; V. Psevtonkas, “Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē Kōnstantinoupoleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, pp. 89–90. Philotheos Kokkinos, *Oratio in dormitionem Deiparae*, in *Pinakes: Textes et manuscrits grecs*, available at: <https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/11059/> (accessed 21 March 2026).
- ¹¹ Vladimir Philantropov, *Sistematicheskoe opisaniie rukopisei Moskovskoi Sinodalnoi (Patriarshei) Biblioteki* (Moscow, 1894), no. 257 (13), p. 352.
- ¹² Sophronios Eustratiades, Spyridon Lauriotis, *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts in the Library of the Laura on Mount Athos* (Harvard Theological Studies 12, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), no. 862 (13), p. 131.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 1780 (12), p. 318.

Ioan Ică jr in October 2011¹⁴. This Romanian translation, through the translator's very useful subtitles, highlights the homily's rigorous plan.

Written with remarkable Byzantine eloquence, the homily opens with a prologue in which the author expresses his due obligation of honor toward the Queen of all and Mother of God for the many and great gifts offered, in various ways, to all people, which she received from her Son and of which she herself spoke, saying: "For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things" (Lk. 1:48–49); and, on the other hand, it becomes an exhortation addressed to all lovers of the word and of the Word to praise here and now the Mother of the Word both by speech and by the inclination of mind and hearing (§ 1–3). If "yesterday and the day before", Jesus Christ Himself ascended Mount Tabor, around whom stood the two prophets (Moses and Elijah) and the three disciples (Peter and the Sons of Thunder), and from whose human body burst forth the glory and light of the divinity (cf. Mt. 17:1–9) (§ 4), "today", on another mountain, Zion, the same eternal Son of God descends in the same radiant glory, accompanied and escorted by multitudes of heavenly ranks, gathering not only those already mentioned but also an entire synaxis of holy apostles, disciples and theologians, to receive the most pure soul of the Mother and Queen, the holy life-bearing tabernacle, who is called and moved through death to heaven, to dwell in the heavenly tabernacles. The author urges all to leave Tabor for a time and to ascend to the holy Zion, being guided by the Mother of God herself, the true Mystagogue of the mystery of her blessed Dormition, of her supernatural departure and above

¹⁴ Ioan I. Ică jr., "Theosis, Metastasis, Anastasis – Adormirea Maicii Domnului în viziunea patriarhului isihast Filotei Kokkinos", *Tabor* 5/7 (2011), pp. 5–20 (Romanian Translation). No published English translation of the homily on the Dormition edited by V. S. Psevtonkas (1982) is currently known.

all, of the mystery of her mystical rising/resurrection, which constitutes the core and principal focus of this homily (§ 5).

2.1 The Mother of God – Spiritual Icon of Deification

The main body of the homily begins with a section which the Romanian translator aptly entitled *The Mother of God – Spiritual Icon of Deification*, in which the spiritual portrait of the Theotokos is outlined, the author referring especially to the period between the Ascension of her Son and the announcement of her Dormition by the Archangel Gabriel. Having shared in the sufferings and Crucifixion of her Son, which meant also a spiritual crucifixion for her (cf. Lk. 2:34–35), the Virgin was likewise present at the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ into heaven in glory and power, manifested both in the joy and strengthening of the disciples and in the healing of the wound of her own soul. This joy was soon followed by the supernatural arrival on the clouds of the disciples gathered in the upper room on the same mountain of Zion with the power of the Holy Spirit, into Whom she herself had already been “baptized” at the Annunciation (cf. Lk. 1:35). After the promised descent of the Spirit at Pentecost upon the disciples, the Virgin sends them forth to preach, as the fulfillment of the command of her Son (cf. Mk. 16:15) (§ 6). At the same time, she herself, as throughout her whole life, emptying herself and living only for Christ who dwelt in her (cf. Gal. 2:20). She continues her life of crucifixion for Him, “her soul hastening each day to leap out of her body,” becoming entirely an eros for the One Whom she had born, raised, and with Whom she had lived until the Ascension, suffering inwardly from a heavenly longing until the moment of reunion with Him (§ 7). Having attained from childhood the highest virtues of ascetism and contemplation, the Virgin Mary surpassed in divine love (*agapē*) all the heavenly orders (§ 8), being completely separated from all earthly and worldly things, and even from her Son Who had ascended. Though in body on earth, yet in mind in heaven, she now had “her citizenship in heaven” (cf. Phil. 3:20), becoming almost immaterial (§ 9). She lived not only a life of crucifixion

and longing, but also a life of service to others – showing philanthropy toward the poor, the weak and all who suffered, caring for the troubled and showing compassion for the grieving and sorrowful – and a life of teaching, conversing on the divine Scriptures and guiding others toward the Gospel and faith in her Son, becoming a “common Mother” or “common Lady of all,” so that all saw in her Christ Himself or an icon of Him (§ 10).

The spiritual crucifixion she experienced during the Passion of her Son continued throughout her entire life, as she led a strict ascetic life, “crucified in a supernatural manner” and “made dead to the whole world” (cf. Col. 3:5) (§ 11), in unceasing and intense prayer, both contemplative (*noetic*) and practical (*bodily*), through prostrations of the knees, now swollen from constant ascetic struggles, some of which were attested even by those who had been her contemporaries (§ 12). The Virgin Mary truly lived a spiritual and deiform life, her mind abiding in continuous supernatural contemplation in the Spirit and wholly in the uncreated light, becoming a deified being (§ 13), the first and the only human among all to partake “of the whole grace and of the whole Spirit,” in Whom the entire fullness of the divinity dwelt bodily (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9), so that she may be called the source and cause of deification (§ 14), realities altogether supernatural and ineffable.

2.2 The Miraculous Dormition

The second part, entitled *The Miraculous Dormition*, is marked by a narrative character and opens with the announcement of the same Archangel Gabriel, who addresses the Virgin with the well known greeting (cf. Lk. 1:28), informing her of her departure to her long-desired Son and God, with Whom she was already united in a noetic manner, to partake of the illumination of the Holy Trinity beyond all heavenly and earthly beings (§ 15). From the heavenly messenger she receives as a reward (*brabeion*) a branch of olive or palm – an image of the righteous man (cf. Ps. 91:13) – for the supernatural victory of her human nature in

“giving birth as a virgin,” having become for us a mediator, ambassador, intercessor and reconciler before God, but also as a pledge of her departure into the Kingdom of her Son (§ 16). Filled with unspeakable joy because of this wondrous angelophany, the Virgin, imitating her Son, first ascends the Mount of Olives, praying in the same place from which He also spoke the words of farewell before the Ascension (cf. Acts 1:12–14) (§ 17). At the same time, the whole cosmos participates in this moment, the plants and trees “bowing” and “paying homage” to her (cf. Phil. 2:10), “because of the divinity of her Son and Lord” (§ 18). Descending from the mountain, she ascends another mountain (Zion), preparing herself for the call of her Son and Lord and announcing to all the things her end, at which they became sorrowful, sighing and weeping in grief. Yet she consoled them all, urging them to rejoice and “to consider as a great feast and festival the day on which she passes from earth to her Lord and Son”, being ready for her blessed dormition and departure, chanting psalms and praying at length. To the two poor widows whom she cared for, she distributed the two garments she owned (long tunics).¹⁵ (§ 19). The approaching departure of the Mother of God from this world required the preparation for the burial, the carrying, the procession, and the doxological hymns fitting for such an event. Therefore, supernatural signs and wonders were manifested, such as the miraculous coming of the Apostles from the ends of the earth upon the clouds of heaven, from where each of them have been preaching. Their being brought in an instant to Zion around the tent of the Queen, thus compensating for their former flight in fear of death before the Passion and death of Christ (cf. Mt. 26:31). To them were added

¹⁵ See the “An Account of the Discovery of the Venerable Veil (*Maphorion*) of Our Most Pure Lady the Theotokos and Its Deposition in the Holy Reliquary of Blachernae” in *Parisinus graecus 1447* (10th c.), ff. 255–258v; A. Wenger, *L’Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VIe au Xe siècle. Études et documents* (Paris, 1955), pp. 294–300.

the disciples and the most renowned and wise theologians, so that all might minister together to the ineffable mystery and become unerasable witnesses (§ 20–21). Filled once again with unspeakable joy in her soul, the Mother of God utters the same prophetic words spoken at the Annunciation concerning the blessedness that all generations would proclaim of her and the greatness of the things now accomplished in her (cf. Lk. 1:46–49) (§ 22).

After the gathering of the multitude of those chosen, consisting of the rank of the Apostles, the seventy disciples who followed them, the wise men and theologians, at whose head stood James the Great, the pillar of the Church (cf. Gal. 2:9), together with companies of holy men and women, Christ Himself descends as Lord and Bridegroom, escorted by multitudes of angels, unseen by all yet perceived by many, coming to take to Himself His beloved Mother (§ 23). He addresses her mystical words as to a dove, as to a most beautiful beloved and Bride from Lebanon (cf. Song. 2:10–13; 4:7–8) (§ 24).

Taking leave of those present and assuring them that she would not abandon them entirely, but would remain forever an intercessor before her Son and Lord, she lays down her body on the bed and, raising her hands invisibly toward Him whom she had once held and embraced, she entrusts her divine soul into the divine hands of her Son (§ 25), she who had partaken of deification beyond all others. Her all-holy body, the God-receiving receptacle (*theodochon te kai panaghion*), is given for a short time to the earth and to the tomb according to nature and is escorted not with lamentations and wailing, but “with hymns, words and sacred odes,” because “the joy of all the world departs toward the Joy of all” (§ 26).

This wondrous funeral rite consisted, as has been said, of “theologizings, hymns and prophecies of God-inspired prophets,” who foretold both Christ and her: the *kenosis* and the hypostatic union of the Son of God, the Virgin conception (cf. Is 7:14), His manifestation on earth and His dwelling among men (cf. Bar 3:38),

the burning bush (cf. Ex. 3:2), the morning dew and the fleece of wool (cf. Judg 6:36–38), the stone cut from the mountain without hands (cf. Dan. 2:34), as well as all the things concerning the Economy in the flesh of Christ and the salvation of humankind, for which she was praised doxologically as the one who became “servant, collaborator, mediator and benefactor for humankind.” (§27)¹⁶. Making use of biblical Mariological typology, the author emphasizes the superiority and greatness of the doxologies of the apostles, theologians and angels at the repose of the Virgin Mother, the true Ark, in comparison with the return and resting of David’s prefigurative ark of God, performed with leaps, dances, musical instruments and psalms (cf. 2 Sam. 6:5; 1 Chr 13:8), or with the solemn procession of Solomon, adorned with prayers, psalms, and sacrifices (cf. 3 Sam. 8:1–6; 2 Chr. 5:2–5) (§ 28). The angels receive in heaven the one who has departed from the earth, some bearing her with hymns and chants and commanding the heavenly powers to lift the highest gates (cf. Ps. 23:7–10). Others accompany her with great awe, since she had already been shown to be higher than all the heavens, so that the whole air was sanctified, the unclean spirits were scattered, and the sun, not being darkened as once at the Lord’s Cross (cf. Mt. 27:45), shone forth even more brightly (§ 29).

The motif of the Ark is taken up again, as the ranks of the apostles, fathers, and theologians sing the holy departure and surround the living and rational Ark of God, each offering himself as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1), “like living and animate instruments” (§ 30). All these are followed by the carrying to Gethsemane and the burial of the Mother of Life,

¹⁶ Sections (§ 26) and (§ 27) refer to the hymnic-ecstatic vision found in the Dionysian treatise *The Divine Names* III, 2, namely the theological proclamations, the divine hymns and all the praises offered to the God-receiving body by the Apostles and the theologians gathered there; see Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names* III, 2 (PG 3, 681C–684A); English trans. in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, with notes by Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 70.

who once again is shown to be the fulfillment of the prefigurations connected with the Ark. A new Uzzah touches the holy Ark, wishing to overturn it, but does not escape punishment (cf. 2 Sam. 6:3–11; 1 Chr. 13:7–14), for many priests and men of the Jewish Law – like the priests and scribes who stood against Christ – desired to attack that holy assembly together with the all-holy body of the Mother of God, and, rushing upon them with stones and swords, they were in an instant deprived of sight, colliding with one another. One of them, like the servant of Caiaphas who had struck the Lord on the face (cf. Mt 26:67), attempted to profane the holy bier, wishing to overturn it. The attempt proved fruitless, for this profaning Jewish priest was immediately punished, his hands being cut off at the elbows by an unseen hand, thus revealing both the punishment and the miracle of the Mother of God. Though present there only with her lifeless body, the Mother of the Lord shows mercy to her profaner, who, manifesting fervent remorse and repentance, is healed and sent to the other profaners, restoring the light of their eyes by means of a leaf from the branch previously given to her by the heavenly messenger (§ 31–33).

Finally, this narrative section concludes by placing the “life-bearing dead body” in the stone-cut tomb of Gethsemane, in the same doxological atmosphere (§ 34).

2.3 The Mystical Resurrection

Although shorter in length, the third part of Philotheos’ Mariological discourse represents the theological and mystagogical core of the entire episode of the Dormition of the Theotokos in the vision of the hesychast patriarch, who does not stop at the stone tomb in Gethsemane, but continues in a mystical atmosphere, describing in words something of the mystery of her resurrection. The lifeless body, the God-receiving receptacle (*theodochon*), was given to the tomb for a time. Yet, the Apostles remained in that place for three days in harmony with angelic hymns, themselves also chanting the ineffable

mystery and, by divine economy, becoming eyewitnesses of her mystical resurrection (*mystikēs anastaseōs*). The Son, who rose from the dead on the third day, glorifies His Mother, whom He also mystically raises on the third day; here too the hour of her rising from death is not known, yet it is revealed to His friends (§ 35).

The author further distinguishes the two resurrections, noting that the Resurrection of the Son was salvific and was confirmed through words and manifestations in different ways and on many occasions over several days (cf. 1 Cor. 15.3–8), whereas the resurrection of the Mother – being a recapitulation of the mystery of Christ – had already been confirmed through that of the Son (§ 36). Yet this, too, was revealed to the Apostles who kept vigil at the tomb, “seeing” her ascending to heaven in radiant and supernatural glory, accompanied by a multitude of angels in an ineffable doxological harmony (§ 37).

The confirmation of the mystery of the Resurrection of the Mother of God takes place with the arrival of the Apostle who was delayed – Thomas – on the third day after the burial, not having been present, as once before (cf. Jn. 20:24–25), at the holy assembly of his fellow Apostles, but suffering and longing to see, to venerate, and to embrace “the lifeless body of the Mother of God,” as a healing and consolation for the sorrow and distress caused by his absence.

The removal of the stone of the tomb confirms that the body of the Virgin Mother “was neither dead, nor in any way worthy of the earth and of the tomb” (§ 38–39), for it was impossible that “the living temple of the Temple and of God” and the “tabernacle of Life” should be given over entirely to the grave and to the earth, but only for a time. Her dormition and departure were a necessity that in no way abolishes the mystery of Christ’s Incarnation from her, but rather confirms that she too bore this mortal body and accepted death, yet without becoming akin to corruption and to the earth (§ 40). The Virgin is transferred to the first homeland of the forefathers, passing incorrupt and pure with both body and soul, which she opens in radiance as a New

Eve, Mother of Life and Daughter of Eve, mother of the living, becoming “the first inhabitant, guide, and leader of those who enter there, and the Mother of the human being and of the new creation in Christ” (§ 41).

Yet below, at the tomb, the Apostles were able to see other wonders confirming the resurrection of the Mother of God, just as in the case of Christ (cf. Jn. 20.6–7): the burial cloths left empty and the tomb marked by the form of the limbs of her lifeless body which had previously been laid there, the author suggesting here the common dormition and resurrection of all human beings after her likeness (§ 42).

The epilogue of the Discourse once again praises the Virgin Mary, who became the fulfillment of the Old Testament prefigurations: the ark of the covenant that cut the flow of the Jordan (cf. Josh. 3.15–16), the holy and immovable tabernacle of God (cf. Ps. 45.5–6), the city of God (cf. Ps. 86.3), the ark of sanctification (cf. Ps. 131.8), the cloud and the pillar of fire (cf. Exod. 13.21–22; 14.14–20), the Red Sea that drowned Pharaoh (cf. Exod. 14.15; 15.1–10), the golden lampstand with seven lights (cf. Exod. 25.31–40; Zech. 3.9; 6.12; Heb. 9.1–5), the golden vessel with the heavenly manna (cf. Exod. 16.33), the rod of Aaron that blossomed (cf. Num. 17.16–27), the new scroll of Isaiah (cf. Isa. 8.1), the Wonderful Counsellor (cf. Isa. 9.6), the gate in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ezek. 44.1–2), the “shady thicket” of Habakkuk (Hab. 3.3), the house of Wisdom built upon seven pillars (Prov. 9.1), the one victorious over the first tyrant of women (cf. Gen. 3.1–6), together with a series of images and symbols from the *Song of Songs* (cf. Song 1.14; 4.1; 5.6, 8), echoing Psalm 44 (cf. Ps. 44.11–12; 14–15), as well as New Testament images: the restorer of peace between heaven and earth by breaking down the dividing wall (cf. Eph. 2.14), the one who drives away the ancestral curse and brings blessing (cf. Lk. 1.42), the receptacle of the divinity (cf. Col. 2.9). She is also the starting point of the preaching of the Apostles, the foundation of the struggles of the martyrs, and the icon of the deification of man beyond nature (§ 43).

The Queen who sits at the right hand of the Father in the Trinity, passing from here to there through departure or rising/resurrection (*metastaseōs ē anastaseōs*) wondrously and supernaturally (§ 44), becomes for us the ladder, the mediator and the protector (§ 45), but also the cause of our spiritual birth, nourishment and growth, and above all the cause of our deification (§ 46).

The entire Discourse of the Patriarch concludes with a final prayer to the Mother of God, who now abides in heaven, asking for protection from all enemies¹⁷: “snatching your flock from the invisible and visible wolves that attack it and howl terribly against it, above all overthrowing, as in former times and also now, the hidden tyrant together with the evil and dark regiments under his command.” He not only asks her for deliverance from the originator of falsehood and deception and the begetter of all evils, but also for supplication and intercession that the passions of the soul and of earthly life may fall asleep, and that the movements and powers of our mind may ascend and be restored to the beauty and to the archetypal image. The author also asks for the protection of the Mother of God against the heresies¹⁸ that have attempted to shake the Church of Christ (§ 47).

¹⁷ This is most likely an allusion to the siege of Constantinople in 1376. It may also refer more generally to the evils and injustices committed throughout history (Dionysios A. Tsentikopoulos, *Philotheos Kokkinos: Bios kai Ergo*, p. 306). After the revolt of Andronikos IV Palaiologos, Philotheos Kokkinos was forced to abdicate from the Ecumenical Patriarchal throne (V. Laurent, “Philotée Kokkinos”, col. 1503).

¹⁸ This may refer to the anti-Palamite controversy, which Philotheos Kokkinos opposed at the Constantinopolitan synods of 1347 and 1351, for which he himself drafted the *tomoi*, or to the attempts of Emperor John V Palaiologos to achieve union with the Church of Rome.

3 The Patronal Icon of the Athonite Protaton Church – Historical and Technical Considerations

Classified among the portable icons in the monumental catalogue entitled *Treasures of Mount Athos*¹⁹ and published in Thessaloniki in 1997 that includes the entire Athonite artistic treasury (frescoes, icons on wood and paper, *anthivola*,²⁰ illuminations,²¹ Byzantine sculptures in stone or wood, minor arts, ceramics, embroideries, *antimensia* etc.) as well as the archival heritage (old documents and manuscripts in various languages, incunabula²² etc.), the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos (see Fig. 1), identified in the catalogue under number 2.83²³, is painted on a wooden panel in egg tempera technique and measures 148 × 109.5 cm.

It dates from the sixteenth century, having been painted in the year 1542 together with a remarkable group of icons of the same height consisting of the icons *Christ the High Priest surrounded by saints* (2.82),²⁴ *Saint John the Baptist* (2.86),²⁵ *Saint Panteleimon* (2.85),²⁶ and *Saints Stephen, Nicholas and John the Theologian*

¹⁹ *Treasures of Mount Athos*, 2nd ed. (Thessaloniki: Ministry of Culture – Mount Athos Center, 1997), 695 p.

²⁰ Small drawings in the form of sketches representing faces of saints or other biblical scenes, used by painters as iconographic guides in the decoration of churches with mural paintings, portable icons and other works.

²¹ Miniature paintings that adorn the pages of a medieval manuscript.

²² Copies of books printed before the year 1500, during the early years following the introduction of printing.

²³ “2.83 The Koimesis, 16th–18th c., Protaton,” in *Treasures of Mount Athos*, pp. 154–156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–154.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 156–157.

(2.84),²⁷ which adorned the iconostasis of the Athonite Protaton church built in the same year.²⁸

In the following century, in the year 1611, the hieromonk Neophytos (8.4a–b)²⁹ constructed a new wooden carved iconostasis decorated with the same imposing despotic icons, at which time, in the space left free at one end, a new vertical icon of Saints Athanasios the Athonite, Spyridon and Peter of Alexandria (2.96),³⁰ of similar height (155.5 cm), was added. This iconostasis separated the sanctuary from the nave until the middle of the seventeenth century, when it was completely removed; the original marble templon (6.1), dating from the second half of the tenth century, remained in place and now serves as the support for the present iconostasis. Of this group of five icons, only the Dormition of the Theotokos icon has remained in the current iconostasis.

Its author is not known with certainty, yet the style and iconographic scheme common to the group of five most probably belong to the Cretan school, since they are closely related to the style of another *Deesis* group in the present iconostasis of the Protaton, consisting of the icons *The Virgin in Prayer* (2.47),³¹ *Christ Pantocrator* (2.48)³² and *Saint John the Baptist* (2.49),³³ whose author is the famous painter Theophanes the Cretan or his disciple Zorzis (also known as Tzortzi). The balanced composition and the manner of rendering the crowded scene, with figures in various positions, movements, and gestures, constitute further defining elements supporting this attribution.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ It may be observed that among the five icons mentioned the despotic icon of the Mother of God is missing, having been replaced by the icon of her Dormition, most likely because of the patronal feast of the Protaton church.

²⁹ *Treasures of Mount Athos*, pp. 300–302.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 165–166.

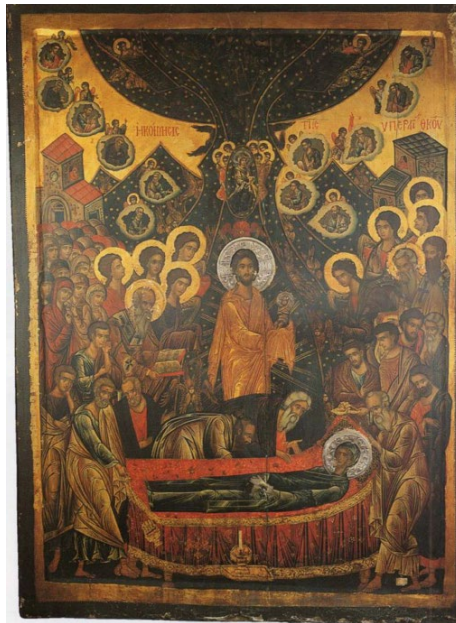
³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–122.

In the eighteenth century the icon underwent interventions consisting in the retouching of certain garments or the slight remodeling of some faces, as also happened with the other four icons painted in 1542. In the upper part, on the golden background, the title is written in Greek in red capital letters: “Η ΚΟΙΜΗΣΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΥΠΕΡΑΓΙΑ ΘΚΟΥ,” that is, “The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos.”

Fig. 1. The patronal icon “The Dormition of the Theotokos” from the iconostasis of the Athonite Protaton church (16th–18th c.)³⁴



³⁴ Source: icon no. 2.83 in *Treasures of Mount Athos*, p. 155.

4 **The Icon in Word and in Tempera in a Double Hermeneutical Key: Iconographic, of Philotheos’ Mariological Homily, and Homiletic, of the Athonite Protaton Icon**

Although composed long before the Athonite Protaton icon was painted, the homiletic text of Philotheos displays superior rhetorical development: It succeeds in describing in vivid words the episode of the Dormition of the Theotokos as it has been preserved and transmitted in the Eastern tradition, in an exhaustive manner: *descriptive* in the first part, *narrative* in the second, and *mystical-eschatological* in the third. Chronologically speaking, Patriarch Philotheos did not have before him this Athonite icon, painted almost two centuries later; yet, in the composition of his Discourse he certainly drew both on his personal *hesychast spiritual vision* – being himself one of the Palamite hesychast theologians – and on the *visual experience* of iconographic representations of the Dormition existing before his time or contemporary with him. To these must be added other biblical, apocryphal, hagiographical, hymnographic and especially homiletic sources belonging to the other Byzantine Mariological writers of the fourteenth century, particularly those of Palamite inspiration, as well as references to the visions of other authors, such as the hymn-like ecstatic vision in the treatise of Dionysius the Areopagite (*The Divine Names*, III, 2).³⁵ On the other hand, the Protaton icon may be considered a pictorial presentation of the *mental image* of the painter (the monk and well-known iconographer Theophanes the Cretan or one of his disciples), formed through the *experience*, first of all, of the *hymnography* of the feast of August 15th, but also of the homiletic tradition of the feast, perhaps even of the patriarch’s text itself, combined with his own *spiritual vision*.

³⁵ *Cf. supra* n. 16.

This synergic juxtaposition of the two contributes to a reciprocal explanation and mirroring within a meta-aesthetic unity, but also opens the perspective for identifying new meanings of the event, not only symbolic, allegorical, metaphorical or typological, but above all theological and mystagogical. The two “media” or visions are, in fact, instances of an abstract *ekphrasis*.³⁶ We may therefore consider Philotheos’ homily as a *rhetorical ekphrasis* of the Protaton icon in the patriarch’s hesychast vision. In contrast, the Athonite icon may be seen as a mental image and personal vision of the Cretan painter, with the Mariological homily before him. At the second level of this *ekphrasis* stands the exegete, the reader or listener of the homily, as well as the beholder of the icon, who in fact “is being looked at” by what is represented in the icon, which attempts to “paint” him inwardly in mind and soul, so that for them too another mental or spiritual image is formed in the hermeneutical process.

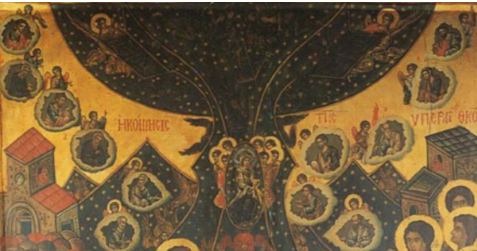
4.1 The Two Visions of the Dormition of the Theotokos – A Comparative View

The Athonite icon does not depict the moments preceding the Dormition on Zion, but rather corresponds to the second part of the homiletic text, entitled by the Romanian translator *The Miraculous Dormition*, together with certain elements from the final part, *The Mystical Resurrection*. These two parts, however, are sufficient to allow the homily and the icon to be placed side by side and analyzed in a comparative and integrative manner.

³⁶ *Ekphrasis* is a rhetorical mode of linguistic representation (verbal or textual) of a visual representation through a vivid description of an event (scene) or of a work of art. In the reverse sense, pictorial representation constitutes a second level of *ekphrasis*, grounded on two elements: the mental image “born” in the mind of the painter through the experience of receiving the text to be represented, and the painter’s own personal spiritual vision.

The table below (Tab. 1) illustrates the multiple corresponding “intermedial” elements of the two visions.

Table 1. Comparative Intermedial Elements in Two Visions of the Dormition of the Theotokos

Philotheos’ homily (14th c.)	Protaton icon (16th c.)
I. The miraculous arrival of the Apostles	
<p>“The Apostles [...] are now once again all <i>gathered</i> to Him for the departure of His Mother from the different regions of the earth, each from a different place and all at once, interrupting their preaching of the Gospel and the ministry of the word.”³⁷</p> <p>“Running by the ineffable power of the Spirit from the ends of the earth toward her who is higher than heaven and earth, toward the Mother of the</p>	 <p>The accompanying and escorting of the Apostles on clouds by angels, identified by the red initials of their names and depicted in the golden zone, outside the blue, star-filled heaven shaped like a chalice, through which Christ descends in glory.</p>

³⁷ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 102, § 20.

Creator and King of heaven and of all creation, they were struck with supernatural amazement as they saw themselves all *arriving* in the same place, learning from one another what concerned each of them, who they were and from where each had been caught up into the air, like the renowned Habakkuk of old (cf. Bel. 33–39), and carried aloft so that in an instant he reached Zion, to the tent of the Queen.”³⁸

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103, § 21.

II. The presence of the Apostles, the other disciples and the theologians around the holy bier

“Therefore there stood present in a magnificent manner and with the greatest dignity — how else could one say it? — not only *the twelve coryphaei*, but also the most wise and distinguished among the disciples and theologians who came after them, who together with them ministered to the mystery.”³⁹

“And most of those who followed *the coryphaei*, *wise men* and *theologians*, as our discourse has already shown in addition to these or, rather, before them, was *James the Great*, the pillar of the Church (cf. Gal. 2.9).”⁴⁰



- The presence of the Apostle Paul, who usually stands at the head of the Mother of God, is shown here bending together with another Apostle behind the bier.
- At the head of the Mother of God is most probably John the Theologian.
- The Apostle Peter is placed here, in an unusual manner, at the feet of the Virgin Mary,
- The other Apostles are arranged on both sides of the holy bier.
- The presence of the three hierarchs usually depicted in the icon of the Dormition: Dionysius the Areopagite, Hierotheos and Timothy (or James the Great).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102, § 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104, § 23.

III. The presence of the holy men and women

“having with him an assembly of *holy men* and *holy women*, as a wondrous fruit of the new Church entrusted to him by Christ in Zion.”⁴¹



On the left side a large group of women can be seen.

IV. The presence of the holy angels

“And not only these, but there was also present a festal multitude of *angels from above* and, as Paul might again say, ‘an assembly (*ekklesia*) of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven’ (Hebr. 12.22–23).”⁴²



⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

	<p>Around Christ, who is accompanied and escorted by the Cherubim, the Seraphim and all the foremost angels, four angels can be seen on each side.</p>
<p>V. The glorious descent of Christ</p>	
<p>“And Christ Himself, escorted as a Master, as was fitting, by the Cherubim and the Seraphim and by all the foremost angels, was gloriously calling to Himself His beloved Mother, the angels being unseen by all, yet perceived and understood by most of those present, abundantly granting them a share in the illumination and grace.”⁴³</p> <p>“And today, once again, shining with the glory of His own divinity from wondrous Zion as from a lofty watchtower... He now</p>	<div data-bbox="468 384 904 874" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>– <i>The Chalice of glory</i>, like a dark-blue, star-filled heaven that envelops the whole earth at the coming of Christ in glory from heaven is depicted on the top part of the icon.</p> <p>– The descent of Christ from heaven in divine glory on the holy Zion, as once on Mount Tabor, is depicted by the homiletic vision of the hesychast patriarch Philotheos as a lofty watchtower (<i>hōsper apo tinos hypsēlēs skopias</i>).</p>

⁴³ *Ibid.*

brings not only Moses again from Hades, nor Elijah only from heaven, nor from among men only Peter and the Sons of Thunder [James and John; cf. Mt. 17.1-9], but He brings from heaven a multitude of angelic orders sent beforehand, accompanying and escorting with radiant and God-befitting glory their Lord and Master who was descending in the flesh."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, § 5.

VI. The Mother of God, laid upon the bier, delivers her soul into the hands of her Son

“Then, laying down on the bed that was placed in front of her and giving her body the form that she deserved – free from every illness and weakness and truly fitting for such a soul –, she raised her hands toward her Son and Master, who was seen in an unseen and supernatural manner, the hands that had once embraced Him humanly as an infant.”⁴⁵



– In the lower part lies the God-receiving lifeless body of the Virgin, stretched out on a massive red-and-gold bier, with her hands crossed in the form of the Cross, thus showing her exemplary life of crucifixion and heavenly longing, but with her head turned in the right side.⁴⁶

– Christ is depicted in a radiant garment, receiving and holding in His arms the soul of the Virgin in the form of a swaddled infant.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105, § 25.

⁴⁶ According to hermeneia of byzantine painting Tradition, the Virgin Mary is usually depicted looking towards the left side. In this icon Theotokos is looking in the opposite direction towards the right.

VII. The doxologies and hymns of those gathered on earth around the true Ark of the Covenant

“These were not the things sung at that time by the apostles and the theologians at the departure of the Mother of the Word – for she had not the slightest need of such things – but rather hymns most supernatural and most exalted, truly worthy only of her who lay there and of her divine and supernatural mystery:

*theological praises, hymns and prophecies of God-inspired prophets.*⁴⁷

“These were sung together with holy praises of the Mother of God by each of the apostles and hierarchs




The Apostles and the theologians, depicted in various positions, movements, and liturgical gestures (the open books of the hierarchs, the censing of the Apostle Peter), gathered around the holy bier, show the wondrous funeral rite of the Virgin, the repose of the true Ark.

⁴⁷ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 106, § 27.

individually and by all together, all being carried by divine inspiration and some being borne by God, standing – as they themselves said in ecstasy – through participation and communion in the things they were chanting in their *hymns*.”⁴⁸

“They surrounded *the holy Ark of God* like living and animate instruments, making the divine melodies resound mystically, those *odes* of the Spirit and of *praise*, becoming themselves entirely *hymns* and wonders for the Mother of God, as the Spirit who was in them moved each one, and, I believe, as the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107, § 27.

<p>longing of their souls for her.”⁴⁹</p>	
<p>VIII. The departure (<i>metastasis</i>) of the Virgin into heaven and the doxology of the angels</p>	
<p>“Some of the angels, receiving her invisibly into heaven and into the wondrous lot prepared for her there, bore her aloft with marvelous solemnity and with <i>hymns</i> worthy of her, and commanded, as once at the Ascension of Christ, the heavenly powers above to lift up the highest gates for the Queen (cf. Ps. 23.7–10); while others received and accompanied with the greatest awe her who was higher than the heavens, as she <i>ascended beyond heaven,</i></p>	 <p>– At the “neck” of the <i>Chalice of glory</i> in heaven stands the Virgin Mary, surrounded and escorted in glory by seven angels, holding in her hands the girdle which she “casts” to the Apostle Thomas, who arrived late at the Dormition.</p> <p>– In the upper part of this <i>Chalice of glory</i>, two angels are shown opening the Gates of the Kingdom, while others, depicted in monochrome, descend to receive into heaven her who is higher than they.</p>

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108, § 30.

though she had by
no means
descended from
there before.”⁵⁰

“There are some
who say that to the
apostles who were
sitting there and
keeping vigil beside
the tomb, the
Queen appeared in
the air on the third
day, *ascending into
heaven* with a
supernatural and
radiant glory, hosts
of angels
accompanying and
escorting her in a
manner worthy of
God, filling the air
with *chants and
hymns* strange and
ineffable, intoned
in wondrous
harmony.”⁵¹

4.2 The Chalice of Glory

The fundamental element of the Protaton icon is the depiction of the glory of the divinity in an original and suggestive manner, forming a “Chalice of glory” depicted in the color of a dark, star-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108, § 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112, § 37.

filled sky. Its cup, partially visible, descends from above as from an infinite heaven and at its base stands Christ, the King of Glory, from Whom rays of light burst forth, escorted from heaven by a multitude of seraphim, cherubim and angels toward the holy Zion, to His Mother whose body is lying upon the bier. This glory envelops the whole earth and the entire sacred assembly like a chain of mountains.

Yet this “Chalice of glory” expresses two moments: the descent of the Son at the Dormition (*koimēsis*) of His Mother, whose soul He receives, and the departure (*metastasis*) of the Mother into the glory of the Son through the resurrection (*anastasis*) and ascension (*analēpsis*) accomplished by the Son. The ascent of the Mother by the power of the Son is rendered suggestively through her escort by angels and her being enveloped in the same light of glory as that of the entire “Chalice of glory” – the same dark, star-filled heaven.

The position of the Virgin at the “neck” of the “Chalice of glory” may be connected with the comparison — in the theologizings of Theophanes of Nicaea — of the Virgin to the mystical “Neck” that unites Christ the Head with His mystical Body (the Church)⁵². Above this “neck,” the gates of the heavenly Kingdom are opened by two angels,⁵³ while many other celestial orders, rendered in monochrome, receive her who is exalted above them.

⁵² Theophanes, Bishop of Nicaea, *Discourse [Treatise] on our Most Pure and Most Holy Lady the Theotokos, which through many praises proclaims her ineffable and God-befitting greatness, and shows that the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word is the convergence and union of God and all creation, the supreme good and final cause of all beings* in Theophanes Nicaenus († 1381), *Sermo in Sanctissimam Deiparam* (Lateranum, Nova Series, An. 1, no. 1), textum graecum cum interpretatione latina, introductione et criticis animadversionibus edidit Martinus Jugie, A.A. (Romae, 1935), p. 130, X, § 23.

⁵³ A possible allusion to the image of the heavenly Temple opened, the vision of the Ark of the Covenant and of the Woman clothed with the sun in the Johannine vision of the *Revelation* (Rev. 11.19; 12.1).

Saint Philotheos also renders this glory in words, associating it with the Taboric light that shone forth from the body of Christ: “A sight and a manifestation truly astonishing, surpassing both speech and nature; a natural glory and an unapproachable light of the divinity which shines forth supernaturally from a human body and by its flashing rays conceals the light of this visible sun, yet is seen by men in a supernatural and incomprehensible manner through the ineffable condescension toward us of Him who gives it, who is at once God and man.”⁵⁴

Departing from Tabor, the Patriarch brings us to Zion, illumined by the same divine and radiant glory and within the same Christophany, but this time with a body risen and transfigured, not only in the presence of those below, but also in the accompaniment and escort of those above:

“And today, once again, shining with the glory of His own divinity from wondrous Zion as from a lofty watch-tower... He now brings not only Moses again from Hades, nor Elijah only from heaven, nor from among men only Peter and the Sons of Thunder [James and John; cf. Mt. 17.1–9], but He brings from heaven a multitude of angelic orders sent beforehand, accompanying and escorting with radiant and God-befitting glory their Lord and Master who was descending in the flesh.”⁵⁵

In this angelophanic and theophanic image, the Emperor of Glory calls His Mother in glory; she is raised and exalted mystically by being enveloped and covered in the glory of the Son, a moment unknown and unseen by anyone. The Mariophany of the third day, experienced only by the Apostles who kept vigil at the tomb in Gethsemane and by the accompanying angels, was an ascent with a supernatural and radiant glory that comes from the Son, no longer visible because of this divine light except to those who

⁵⁴ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 92, § 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, § 5.

themselves were hidden within that light — the angels and the saints⁵⁶:

“And Christ Himself, escorted as a Lord, as was fitting, by cherubims and seraphims and by all the foremost angels, called to Himself in glory His beloved Mother, [the angels] unseen by all, yet perceived and understood by most of those present, granting them abundantly the participation of illumination and grace.”⁵⁷

“A divine dispensation from above held them there in an ineffable manner and persuaded them to remain at the tomb, so that they too might become eyewitnesses of the mystical resurrection (*mystikēs anastaseōs*) of the Mother of God, just as they had been witnesses of her end and of her mysteries.”⁵⁸

“Some say that to the Apostles who were sitting there and keeping vigil by the tomb, the Queen appeared in the air ascending to heaven on the third day with a supernatural and radiant glory, ranks of angels accompanying and escorting her in a manner worthy of God, filling the air with wondrous and ineffable hymns sung in marvelous harmony.”⁵⁹

The glory, majesty and manifestation of this glory upon the Virgin Mary in the episode of the Dormition are rendered in a similar manner by the two visions, showing the glorification of the fully deified human being, the mystical resurrection and ascension not by her own power but by the power of the Son, for she does not rise and ascend as the Son does, but is raised and exalted only through and in the Son.

St. Dumitru Stăniloae argues for this mystical resurrection and ascension of the Mother of God:

⁵⁶ St. Dumitru Stăniloae, “Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și catolici,” *Ortodoxia* 4/4 (1950), p. 602.

⁵⁷ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 104, § 23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111, § 35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112, § 37.

“If in the event of death the Mother of God re-entered into a higher union with her Son, this union was raised to its supreme degree in the event of her ascension. Therefore her ascension is an act of the Son; it did not take place by her own power. The Mother of the Lord did not ascend by herself as her Son did. His divine power was concentrated even more fully in her body, restoring it to life, to a life incomparably higher than the earthly one. The resurrection and the ascension represent the supreme spiritualization and deification of the body, its elevation into the deepest divine intimacy. For this reason the risen body is no longer seen. The act of resurrection is no longer visible, nor is that of the ascension, because they signify the absorption of materiality into light, its being overwhelmed by the divine light, its elevation into pneumatic transcendence.”⁶⁰

Although this is an iconographic composition dedicated to the great feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, which closes the festal cycle of the liturgical year, the Christological centrality dominates the entire episode represented in color. This constitutes an additional argument in favor of a Christocentric eschatological Mariology accomplished only *in* and *through* Christ. Thus, the two visions, the iconographic and the homiletic, complement one another and clarify dogmatically the event of the Dormition of the Theotokos.

4.3 The Profaning Jewish Priest versus the Burning Lamp (Seraphim)

The homily mentions the appearance of a profaning Jewish priest who attempts to overturn the bed (bier) on which the body of the Mother of God lay, an antitype of Uzzah, who earlier had seized the Ark of the Covenant in order to steady it when the oxen were about to overturn it (cf. 2 Sam. 6.6–7): “But what boldness, what terrible madness and insolence of the evil one!

⁶⁰ St. Dumitru Stăniloae, “Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și catolici”, p. 599.

Again the devil stands among the angels before God, as once in the case of Job [cf. Job 1.6–2.10]. Again Uzzah touches the *holy Ark* unlawfully and did not escape punishment [cf. 2 Sam. 6.3–11; 1 Chr. 13.7–14].⁶¹ “Yet *one of those defiled priests*, surely imitating Judas, the betrayer of Christ, or the servant of Caiaphas who once struck Him on the cheek [cf. Mt. 26.67], not yet struck with blindness like the others, rushed like a wild boar upon the holy bier and, seizing it with both hands, tried to cast it to the ground and boldly to profane the holy things.”⁶²

The icon does not depict this moment; instead of the repentant and corrected profaner, there appears a burning lamp, representing Saint John the Baptist, who is also shown in the form of a red seraphim, depicted more prominently than the others seraphims in the icon above the Lord Jesus Christ as “burning” with the ineffable glory. In this way, the image of the Deesis is mystically completed or rather the hidden presence of the Friend of the Bridegroom at the Dormition of the Theotokos⁶³ is suggested – *martyr, prophet, and baptist*, but also *voice, lamp and angel* – as interpreted in one of the troparia of the hymnographic Canon of the Feast of August 29th:

“As Martyr, Prophet, and Baptist, as voice and lamp and Angel sent by God, having been shown to be greater than the

⁶¹ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 109, § 31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110, § 32.

⁶³ See the important motif suggested by Sorin Dumitrescu in his original iconological interpretation of the hymnographic canon concerning the presence of the Baptist in the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos: the red seraphim (cherubim) is John, who whispers into the ear of Christ, and the same John is also the burning lamp placed before the massive catafalque. The seraphim (cherubim), the voice and the lamp are, in his interpretation, the theological vocations of the Baptist and correspond to his hypostases as angel, prophet and martyr (Sorin Dumitrescu, *Noi și icoana (I). 31+1 de iconologii pentru învățarea icoanei* (Bucharest: Fundația Anastasia, 2010), p. 157).

prophets, beseech the Lord to deliver from every temptation and from every hostile harm those who with longing celebrate thy light-bearing memory, O Forerunner.”⁶⁴

4.4 The Threefold Representation of the Virgin Mary in the Protaton Church Icon

The icon from the Protaton church portrays the Virgin Mary three times: *lying in repose* upon the massive bier, as *a swaddled child* in the radiant arms of Christ and *escorted by angels* in the air into the glory of her Son. The intention of the iconographer was to present the whole episode of the Dormition, giving it a more dynamic character through the threefold representation of the Virgin, while at the same time bringing us closer to her mystery as a summary of our own mystery, giving the impression that we ourselves are present *here* and *now* at this great feast of mystery.

The hesychast Patriarch extends and perfects this iconographic image by adding to these three states also the eschatological state of the Virgin’s departure into Paradise. “But she, shaking off all kinship with corruption and the earth and all things earthly, passes wholly incorrupt and pure, both in soul and in body, to the place free from corruption, that is, into Paradise, the first homeland of our forefathers (§ 41),”⁶⁵ being placed as a Queen at the right hand of the Son in the Trinity,

“and according to the theology spoken beforehand by the prophet [David], thou also, *O Queen, didst stand at the right*

⁶⁴ Ode 9, Tone 8, Second Canon, by John the Monk, from the Canon of Matins for August 29th, in *Mēnaion tou Augoustou*, revised by Bartholomaios Koutloumousianos (Venice: Ek tēs Hellēnikēs Typographias tou Phoinikos, 1845), p. 162: „Ὡς Μάρτυς καὶ Προφήτης καὶ Βαπτιστὴς ὡς φωνὴ τε καὶ λύχνος καὶ Ἄγγελος, ὑπὸ Θεοῦ, μείζων Προφητῶν τε μαρτυρηθεὶς, δυσώπησον τὸν Κύριον, ῥύσασθαι παντοίων ἐκ πειρασμῶν, καὶ βλάβης ἐναντίας, τοὺς πόθῳ ἐκτελοῦντας, σοῦ τῆν φωσφόρον μνήμην Πρόδρομε”.

⁶⁵ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 17, § 41.

hand of thy Son and King, that is, of the Father and the Spirit, of equal honor with Him, clothed in a golden and many-colored garment [cf. Ps. 44.10].”⁶⁶

Combining and summarizing the two visions, one may say:

“in the tomb with the body, in the arms of the Son with the soul, departed into Paradise with body and soul, and seated at the right side of the Son in the Trinity, thou hast been, O Virgin Mother of God, passing through all things, thou who didst contain in thy womb the Uncontainable.”

4.5 The Dormition as Entrance. The Departure and the Rest of the True Ark of the Covenant

The episode of the Dormition of the Theotokos represents, in fact, an antitype (*antitypos*) of the episode of the Entry of the Virgin into the Temple, in which Christ, the eternal High Priest, receives the soul of His Mother, moving her into His rest with body and soul in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Temple through mystical resurrection and ascension. This is just like when the high priest Zacharias brought the three-year-old Mary into the rest of the inaccessible Holy of Holies where she discovered the hesychia by herself. The once exit (*exodos*) of the Child Mary from the world and her entrance (*eisodos*) into the Temple becomes now the Dormition (*koimēsis*) and the entrance/departure (*metastasis*) of the Mother of God into the eschatological temple. Her once introduction into the temporal Holy of Holies now becomes her departure into the eternal Holy of Holies. The Ark of Moses’ prefiguration finds its rest (*anapausis*) in the Davidic Tent in Zion and in the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem, over which the glory of the Lord rested, the place *par excellence* of the divine presence (Hebr. *Shekhinah*). But the temporal Holy of Holies into which the Virgin Mary entered receives the living Ark that fulfills typologically the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114, § 44.

earlier prefigurations. Patriarch Philotheos signals these shadowy prefigurations also in the episode of the Dormition, referring to the rest (*anapausis/katapausis*)⁶⁷ of the Ark:

“For of old, at the return and rest of the prefigurative Ark, David leaped and danced before it with his customary instruments and psalms [cf. 2 Sam. 6.5; 1 Chr. 13.8], and Solomon, gathering all the people together with the priests and Levites, led it in procession into its temple, adorning the celebration with prayers, psalms and an abundance of sacrifices [cf. 1 Kgs. 8.1–6; 2 Chr. 5.2–5] [...] But at the rest of the true Ark, for which all those things were only prefigurations and shadows, what kind of celebration and feast ought to have been celebrated?”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ In the Greek text, the Philothean homily uses both terms *anapausis* and *katapausis*, both meaning “rest,” but with different nuances. *Anapausis* denotes rest in a general sense (repose, quiet, place or day of rest etc.) (cf. Exod. 16.23; 23.12; Ps. 131.8; Mt. 11.28–29; 12.43; Lk. 11.24; Phlm. 1.7; Rev. 4.8; 14.11 etc.), whereas *katapausis* refers more specifically to rest in God (cf. Exod. 35.2; Deut. 12.9; Ps. 94.11; 131.14; Isa. 66.1; Acts 7.49; Heb. 3.11, 18; 4.1, 3, 5, 10, 11 etc.). The word *katapausis* occurs four times in different inflected forms:

1. “the rest of the typological Ark” (*katapausei tēs typikēs kibōtou*) (V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 107, § 28).
2. “the rest of the true Ark” (*tēs alēthinēs kibōtou katapausei*) (*Ibid.*).
3. “the rest of the living Ark of God” (*tēs empsychou Theou kibōtou katapausin*) (*Ibid.*, p. 108, § 30).
4. “rest with thy Son and God” (*son Huion te kai Theon authis katapausin*) (*Ibid.*, p. 117, § 43).

By contrast, *anapausis* appears only once, in connection with Ps. 131.8: “Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy holiness” (*anastēthi, Kyrie, eis tēn anapausin sou, sy kai hē kibōtos tou hagiastatos sou*) (*Ibid.*, pp. 117–118, § 43). The use of *anapausis* in this verse reveals, in a typological-mystagogical sense, the mystical resurrection and eternal rest of the Virgin Mary, the true Ark.

⁶⁸ V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 107, § 28.

But it is also the prophet David who leads Saint Philotheos to identify the Virgin, the living Ark of God, in the words of *Psalm* 131, which concentrates the whole mystagogy of the Dormition:

“and mystically describing the dormition, the rising/resurrection, and the rest with thy Son and thy God, thus he spoke to Him, being filled with God: ‘Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy holiness’ [Ps. 131.8].”⁶⁹

Therefore, the Mother of God, the true Ark of the Covenant, passes through several states far superior to the shadowy Ark, which explain the synergy of the two Marian feasts of the Entry and the Dormition, but also the particular iconographic scheme of the Athonite icon: deification (*theosis*), dormition (*koimēsis*), resurrection/raising (*anastasis*), ascension (*analēpsis*), departure (*metastasis*)⁷⁰ with body and soul, and rest (*katapausis*) in the glory of the Son⁷¹.

The passing for a short time through death and tomb was a necessity, as the hesychast Patriarch declares, “lest the mystery

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118, § 43.

⁷⁰ “John the Geometer explicitly affirms the death of Mary, which, according to him, is not a punishment resulting from sin, but a necessity in order to guarantee the human nature of both Mary and Jesus. He makes a distinction between *metastasis*, that is, the translation of Mary’s soul to heaven, accompanied by the natural corruption (*phthora*) consisting in its separation from the body (but not the unnatural decay, *diaphthora*, of the corpse after death), and *metathesis*, that is, the translation of the Virgin’s body into Paradise in order to receive the supernatural gift of incorruptibility.” A. Wenger, *L’Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine* (Archives de l’Orient Chrétien 5, Paris, 1955), § 49, pp. 234–235 *apud* Ioan I. Ică jr., “Viețile Maicii Domnului – sinteze narative ale tradițiilor mariologice ale Bisericii,” in Epifanie Monahul, Simeon Metafrastul, Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Trei Vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, 2nd ed., trans. Ioan I. Ică jr. (Sibiu: Deisis, 2007), p. 285.

⁷¹ Protos. Drd. Daniil (Daniel-Cosmin) Pinciuc, “Tipologia chivotului în corpusul omiletic al mariologiei bizantine a secolului XIV. Revelarea adevăratului Chivot al Legământului,” *Studia Doctoralia Andreiana* XI/2 (2022), pp. 48–49.

of Christ should appear to some as a mere illusion (*phantasia*) and lest it be thought that the Mother did not receive from us this mortal body.”⁷²

Conclusions

The episode of the Dormition of the Mother of God remains, in essence, an eschatological recapitulation of the deiform earthly life of her who became the Mother of Life and the receptacle of God. As the final feast of the liturgical cycle of the Church, which explains the role and place of the Virgin in the Economy of salvation, it mystagogically gathers within itself a series of fundamental moments from the life of the Mother of God, celebrated liturgically: the Nativity, the Entry into the Temple, the Annunciation, the Presentation of the Lord to the Temple etc. Although not included in the biblical text, the episode of the Dormition has nevertheless been transmitted and described in a text–image–sound unity: through the *word*, forming the apocryphal, hagiographical, hymnographic and homiletic tradition of the feast; through *color*, in the Marian iconography of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine tradition; and through *sound*, as a hymnographic and liturgical treasure sung in the worship of the Orthodox Church.

The homily of the hesychast Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos succeeds in portraying, in a descriptive, narrative and mystagogical manner, the exemplary and exceptional life of the Virgin Mary after the Ascension of Christ, the entire preparation for her Dormition and the eschatological reality of her departure to heaven through mystical resurrection and ascension in the power and glory of the Son. The Athonite icon from the ancient church of the Protaton renders silently, through color, the hermeneutics of this episode. From a comparative perspective,

⁷² V. Psevtonkas, „Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē, Kōn/poleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou”, p. 113, § 40.

the two compositions – the icon and the homily – interpret one another, as if mutually inspired, presenting in a meta-aesthetic unity the final event of the earthly life of the Mother of God, as well as something of the mystical-eschatological realities of the heavenly life. From an integrative perspective, both the homiletic and the iconographic visions open and reveal two fundamental directions of this episode.

On the one hand, there is a dogmatic-theological direction, which clarifies apologetically the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Son, summarized and recapitulated in the Mother of God – she being the first of human beings fully deified, raised, exalted and seated at the right side of the Son in the Trinity – as well as the eschatological reality of the general and universal resurrection.

On the other hand, there is a mystagogical (spiritual) direction, which shows that the Virgin Mary is both the cause and the prototype of our deification and the one who reveals the entire mystery of man. In fact, the Virgin Mary had already “ascended” to God beforehand, because she had set ascents in her heart (cf. Ps 84.5), uniting her mind with Him through the hesychia discovered by herself in the Temple, dying completely to the world and giving birth first mystagogically to Christ and then physically, so that her Dormition is at once a departure from the world through a necessary and brief passage through death and tomb, but even more a birth and an eschatological entrance into heaven.

Therefore, the “intermedial” iconotextual approach to the two visions represents a theological and spiritual power for penetrating and understanding the Christocentric Marian depths of the man and of his ontological destiny in his likeness to God according to the model of the Theotokos. In other words, this is an “icon” in words and a “homily” in tempera of the dormition, resurrection and departure of the deified human being into the heaven of God.

Bibliography

1. Biès, Jean, *Athos: Le Montagne transfigurée*, Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1997.
2. Dumitrescu, Sorin, *Noi și icoana (I). 31+1 de iconologii pentru învățarea icoanei*, Bucharest: Fundația Anastasia, 2010.
3. Ehrhard, Albert, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche*, III, Leipzig: Texte und Untersuchungen 52, 1952.
4. Erich Trapp et al. (ed.), *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, Vienna, 1976.
5. Eustratiades, Sophronios, Lauriotis, Spyridon, *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts in the Library of the Laura on Mount Athos*, Harvard Theological Studies 12, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.
6. Halkin, François, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*, III, Brussels, 1957.
7. Ică jr., Ioan I. (trans.), *Epifanie Monahul, Simeon Metafrastul, Maxim Mărturisorul, Trei Vieți bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, 2nd ed., Sibiu: Deisis, 2007.
8. Ică jr., Ioan I., “Theosis, Metastasis, Anastasis – Adormirea Maicii Domnului în viziunea patriarhului isihast Filotei Kokkinos”, *Tabor* 5/7 (2011), pp. 5–20.
9. Ică jr., Ioan I., *Maica Domnului în teologia secolului XX și în spiritualitatea isihastă a secolului XIV: Grigorie Palama, Nicolae Cabasila, Teofan al Niceei*, Sibiu: Deisis, 2008.
10. Ignatie of Huși, *Sfântul Grigorie Palama și teologia energiilor necreate*, Bucharest: Horeb – Spandugino, 2022.
11. Jugie, Martin (ed.), *Theophanes Nicaenus (†1381), Sermo in Sanctissimam Deiparam*, Lateranum, Nova Series 1/1, Rome, 1935.
12. Karakatsanis, Athanasios A. (ed.), *Treasures of Mount Athos*, 2nd ed., Thessaloniki: Ministry of Culture – Museum of Byzantine Culture – Holy Community of Mount Athos, 1997.
13. Laurent, Vitalien, “Philotée Kokkinos”, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, XII/2, Paris, 1935.
14. *Mēnaion tou Augoustou*, revised by Bartholomaios Koutloumousianos, Venice: Ek tēs Hellēnikēs Typographias tou Phoinikos, 1845.
15. Migne, Jacques-Paul (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, vol. 3, Paris, 1857.
16. Mitrea, Mihail, *A Late-Byzantine Hagiographer: Philotheos Kokkinos and His Vitae of Contemporary Saints*, PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2017.

17. Philantropov, Vladimir, *Sistematicheskoe opisanie rukopisei Moskovskoi Sinodalnoi (Patriarshei) Biblioteki*, Moscow, 1894.
18. Philotheos Kokkinos, *Hē Theotokos. Homilia eis tēn Koimēsīn tēs Hyperagias Despoinēs hēmōn Theotokou*, Athens: Athos, 2007.
19. Pinciuc, Protos. Daniil (Daniel-Cosmin), "Tipologia chivotului în corpusul omiletic al mariologiei bizantine a secolului XIV. Revelarea adevăratului Chivot al Legământului", *Studia Doctoralia Andreiana* XI/2 (2022).
20. Preiser-Kapeller, Johannes, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz. Ein Verzeichnis der Metropolen und Bischöfe des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel in der Zeit von 1204 bis 1453*, Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.
21. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid, notes Paul Rorem, New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
22. Psevtonkas, Vasileios S., "Philotheou Kokkinou patriarchē Kōnstantinoupoleōs, eis tēn koimēsīn tēs Theotokou", *Epistēmōnikē Epetēris Theologikēs Scholēs Panepistēmiou Thessalonikēs* 27 (1982).
23. Salignac, Aimé, "Philotée Kokkinos", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique, Doctrine et Histoire*, XII, Paris, 1984.
24. Stăniloae, Dumitru, "Învățătura despre Maica Domnului la ortodocși și catolici", *Ortodoxia* 4/4 (1950).
25. Tsames, Dēmētrios, "Ta hagiologika erga tou Philotheou Kokkinou, Patriarchē Kōnstantinoupoleōs", *Epistēmōnikē Epetēris Theologikēs Scholēs Panepistēmiou Thessalonikēs* 22 (1977).
26. Tsentikopoulos, Dionysios A., *Philotheos Kokkinos: Bios kai Ergo*, Thessalonikē, 2001.
27. Wenger, Antoine, *L'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VIe au Xe siècle*, Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 5, Paris, 1955.

Appendices
Appendix 1

Fig. A1. Iconostasis of the Athonite Protaton Church (Karyes). Left:



The icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos (16th–18th c.). Photo credit: Silviu Cluci, doxologia.ro.

Appendix 2



Fig. A2. Copy of the Dormition of the Theotokos icon from the iconostasis of the Athonite Protaton Church, painted by Monk Kiril (2021). Photo credit: Daniil Pinciuc, Romanian Orthodox Monastery "Dormition of the Mother of God" Aldeia de Santa Margarida, Portugal