

THE CITY OF MYSTRAS

BYZANTINE HOURS

WORKS AND DAYS IN BYZANTIUM

Memory

SCULPTURE

YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS

5H EPHORATE OF BYZANTINE ANTIQUITIES

5H EPHORATE OF BYZANTINE ANTIQUITIES

BYZANTINE HOURS

WORKS AND DAYS IN BYZANTIUM

"MEMORY", SCULPTURE
OF YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS

CURATOR OF EXHIBITION

ANDREAS IOANNIDIS

Art Historian
Curator of the National Gallery

CATALOGUE

ART EDITOR
VASSO AVRAMOPOULOU

TRANSLATION
PHILIPPE RAMP

COLOR SEPARATIONS AND FILMS
ALPHAVITO S.A.

PRINTING
A. PETROULAKIS S.A.

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR
STAVROS MALAGARDIS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF MYSTRAS
23100 Mystras
Tel. +(3-07310)83377
www.culture.gr

5TH EPHORATE OF BYZANTINE ANTIQUITIES
87 Agesilaou str., 23100 Sparta
Tel./Fax: +(3-07310)25363
protocol@5eba.culture.gr

MEMORY



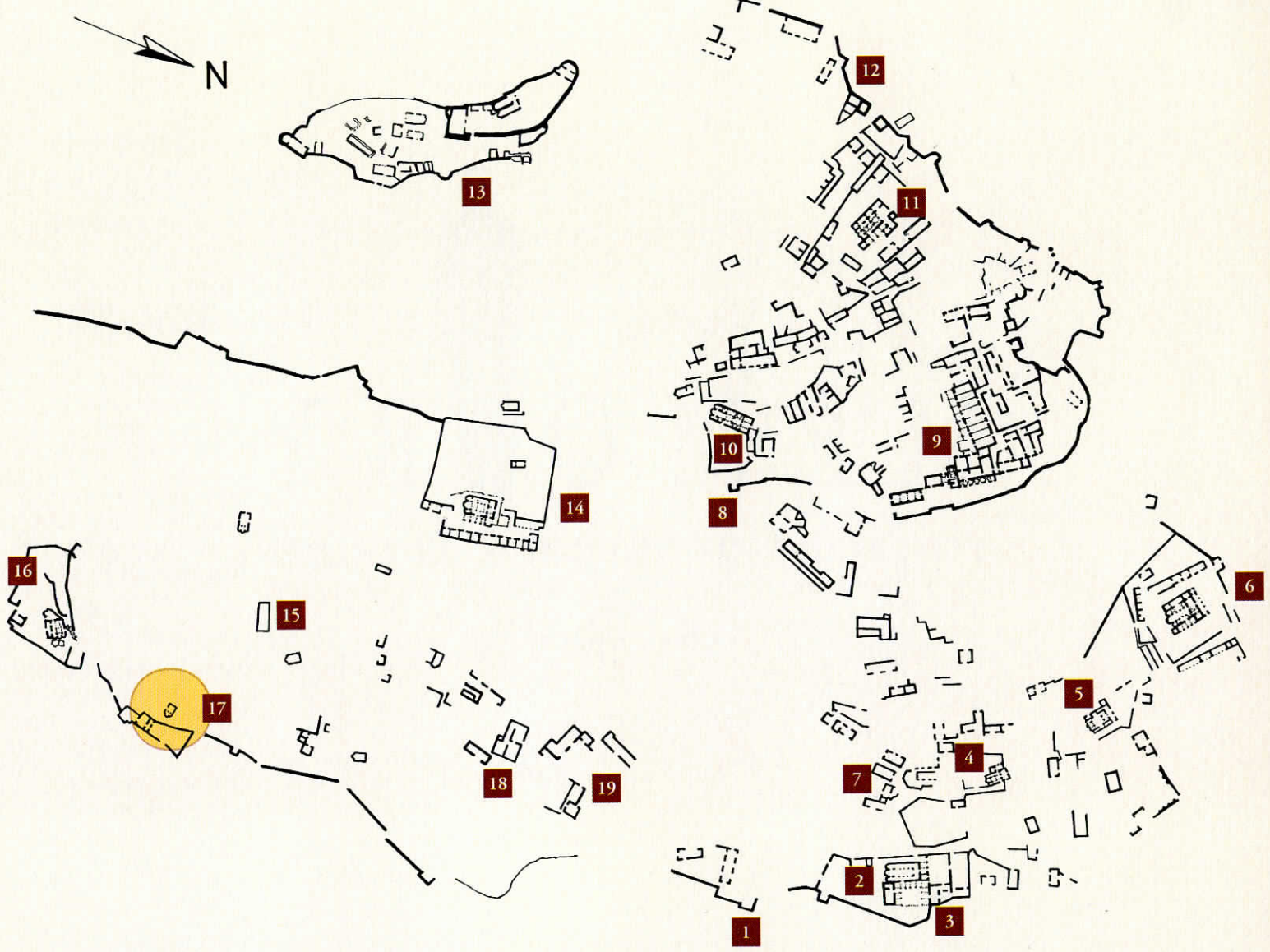
SCULPTURE OF YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS

Curator

ANDREAS IOANNIDIS

5TH EPHORATE OF BYZANTINE ANTIQUITIES

MYSTRAS • HAGIOS GEORGIOS • 3 AUGUST - 30 OCTOBER 2001



1 Main Gate
2 Metropolis (Hagios Dimitrios)
3 Museum
4 Evangelistria
5 Hagioi Theodoroi
6 Hodegetria(Afendiko)
7 House «O»
8 Monemvasia Gate
9 Palace Complex
10 Hagios Nikolaos
11 Hagia Sophia
12 Upper Gate
13 Citadel - "Castle"
14 Pantanassa
15 "Phrangopoulos" House
16 Peribleptos
17 Hagios Georgios
18 "Laskaris" House
19 "Chronis" House

MEMORY

THE PROPOSAL TO PRESENT THE IMPORTANT SCULPTURAL WORK BY YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS AT THE Byzantine site of Mystras was both challenging and very interesting. Its content, highly symbolical, constituted the proper link for the connection, and for the first time at this site, of contemporary pictorial creation and the reality of history.

The segmental exhibition, "Byzantine Hours. Works and Days of Byzantium", which will be realized in three towns, Mystras, Athens, Thessaloniki, provided with the presentation of the "Town of Mystras", the framework for the participation of this contemporary work of sculpture.

"Byzantine Hours" seeks, through the medium of time, to track down the traces of the daily lives of the Byzantines as well as the presence of certain principles, that their life in its course followed down through time. These return to the millennia of the past history of empire and create the present in the experiences or the memory of the contemporary person.

"Memory", a sculptural work by Yorgos Nikolaidis, is the expression of the conversation of the past with the future by means of the present, with the eternal, the unceasing relationship of mother and child. The future is predetermined by the present and the past will be contained in that.

The work is integrally connected to the essence of the Christian faith, the incarnation of the Word of God in humankind. The intimation of the Annunciation "articulates" the "logos" from the past and predetermines its relationship with the present. In addition to the redemptive character of the work and the theme of rebirth, the space of the church of St. George, a small, private chapel, is also involved, a space charged with a particular kind of mysticism.

EMILIA BAKOUROU

Archaeologist,
Director of the 5th Ephorate
of Byzantine Antiquities



MEMORY

THE SCULPTURE OF YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS

The placing of a contemporary work of art in a Byzantine church, in the framework of cultural events connected to Byzantium, and indeed, of an art such as sculpture, which Byzantium itself avoided, constituted, for me at least, a great test. Because though at first glance the relationship of this monument with a work called Memory is apparent, memory, however, and active memory in particular, is an area where the present converses with the past and where, at the same time, the future is carved out. This memory lies at the basis of every true creation and is what gives it validity down through time, as truth is a place, where there can be neither forgetting nor oblivion; therefore it also contains something of the eternal. By extension, the co-existence of a Byzantine monument and a contemporary work helps manifest their inner truth, of each of them separately, as well as the relationship between them, and the question is thus posed of the timeliness of the past and the "untimeliness" of the present, that is, the question of what it is that comes down through time.

Therefore, I would like to warmly thank Mrs. Bakourou, Director of the 5th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, who accepted this challenge and indeed was most generous in her psychological embracing of the project.

But let us turn to the work itself, the reading of which is made up of (as is every human activity, furthermore), two levels, one physical and the other metaphysical. By the term metaphysical I mean that branch of philosophy which is authoritatively involved with the meaning of existence. That is, it is involved with the what and how but, first and foremost, with the why this something exists, and what the purpose of its existence is. This is a very deep existential question, perhaps the deepest of all, and lies outside the competence of scientific objectivity.

A standing female figure dressed in white has a child seated next to her, a young boy in hieratic garments, a form of co-existence, which refers to the maternal relationship. Both figures are dominated by vertical lines to show both immobility and stability. The space they occupy is defined by a rectangular level, that is, a human space, made rectalinear - made rationalistic. Both these figures are possessed by a feeling of being suspended in mid-air along with immobility seen as potential, which includes the intensity of an inner anticipation of something which, although it is diffused in space, nevertheless does not become in actuality perceptible. This vague, diffuse nature of the surrounding atmosphere, is suggested by the light beam that traverses the space lengthwise, thereby lending direction to what is scattered, as well as by a variety of sounds, either natural, such as the beating of wings or the splashing of water, or metaphysical such as the echoes of a bell and church hymns. The metaphysical content, made manifest by the two latter sounds, is further extended by the morphological elements of the sculpture: the white and hieratic clothing of the woman and child respectively, their size which though undeclared exceeds the natural, and finally the hieratic frontal pose, connected to the frontal attitude of Byzantine painted figures. Consequently, the maternal relationship that existed till then is shown to have been transformed by a physical event into a metaphysical archetype and dressed in the sacred. The motherliness which presupposes birth is now brought down to the sphere of the archetype of Birth and Rebirth, sweeping along with it the light beam and the sounds to which it now lends another meaning, if still not declared.

The reduction to the dimension of the sacred defines the placement of the work in the Byzantine chapel, and makes it concrete. Thus, above the rectalinear human space, which puts a limit round the figures, the curve of the dome of heaven above, the *urania*, is extended. The light beam that traverses the scene lengthwise coincides with the axis of the church heading from West to East, that is, from the entrance to the sanctuary, a direction which is in agreement with the rules of Byzantine church construction and symbolizes the course from darkness to light and from matter to spirit. In this way, the visual/pictorial whole acquires an orientation which broadens its notional content. The splashing of the water now refers, potentially, to the watery womb, symbol both of birth and rebirth, the beating of the wings further extends the meaning of rebirth, hinting at the approach of the heavenly world by means of the watery purification, and finally the echoes of the hymns and the church bells contribute to the sacred nature of the event –let us not forget that the Baptism of Christ as the archetypical event by means of which the human being is reborn, contains the sounds of water (Jordan river) and the beating of wings (the spirit in the form of a dove).

This entire all-encompassing notional "charge" broadens to an even greater degree the metaphysical content of the figures. Thus, the original couple, mother and child, corresponds to the now expanded couple of the Mother-Church / Child-Faith, where the former relationship refers more to birth and the latter to rebirth.

At this point, however, I would like to add that on the level of birth we are dealing here more with birth viewed as a metaphor, physical yes, but not on a biological scale. This is the raising to consciousness, of "my birth", an event which helps the human being cut, by means of consciousness, the umbilical cord, to make himself independent of his mother and to complete himself as an individual. So that, in essence, we are dealing here with a form of rebirth.

But how are these two rebirths accomplished? By means of a meeting with the father. As on the physical level, the duty of the mother, who sincerely loves her child, is to detach the child from herself by means of meeting with, of referring to, the father, so that the child can then set off down the road of autonomy and completion, and therefore on a metaphysical level this is the Mother-Church's duty, that is, the completion of the human being by means of his meeting with the heavenly Father, God.

So, we can see that the sculpture we have before us, of Yorgos Nikolaidis, has concealed within it a "redemptive" content. It is this undeclared element suspended in abeyance, that we spoke of in the beginning, which acquires further meaning, and therefore form and content. This is a quest for the true meaning of life, that is, of that point at which the fragmentation of human existence ceases and subsequently the physical and the metaphysical acquire the same meaning, but on a different scale –just what is meant by this event, that the relationship between mother and child is here made to symbolize the most unselfish and unlimited form of love.

At this point I would like to return to my original speculation concerning the placing of a work of contemporary sculpture in a Byzantine church.

I have always believed, and continue to believe, that each and every human activity has at one and the same time a historical and a non-historical dimension. To this latter case belong fixed human need, eternal and universal. These are the fundamental factors of life, such as birth, death, nourishment, love and knowledge, all of which underlie the questions: What am I, what is the world and why do we exist? Historicalness, in its turn,

includes the varius forms with which are expressed the above mentioned factors among varying cultures and people. So Byzantine art may differ from Renaissance and Modern Art, but that does not mean that the three of them do not constitute equal endeavors to give an answer to the above existential questions. By extension, this brings a person into contact with artistic creation from various eras and this person then tests, in the end, as I have already mentioned, their inner truth and their relationship in regard to the above mentioned questions. In the present case, we have confirmed that despite the morphological differences between the Byzantine church and contemporary creation, we have achieved convergence on the level of meaning, at least. Furthermore, this constitutes the interest to be found in such an exhibition: just what is that one can draw up from the past which can contribute to the fertilization of the present and, by extension, the future. That is, briefly put, "Byzantine Hours" can also be considered as the "hours" of the immediate present.



Such a dialogue with history and the past fascinates me, I must confess. A dialogue that is not concentrated only on differences but also on similarities, which does not divide, but first and foremost unites. This is a dialogue which, in agreement with the Nietzschean maxim, leads to historical knowledge "about life and about action and not about the convenient withdrawal from life and action, or even worse, for the beautification of the egotistical life and the cowardly and unprincipled act." (F. Nietzsche, *History and life*).

The challenge of the above points of view I would like to deal with as an art historian, by means of this exhibition, where the challenge, conceals within it the anguish of consciousness as regards life and history, because when you get down to it, "... it is hateful to me just being taught something without it increasing my activity or directly revitalizing me" (Goethe).

ANREAS IOANNIDIS
Art Historian,
Curator at the National Gallery

YORGOS NIKOLAIDIS

Biographical note

Yorgos Nikolaidis was born in Maroneia, Rodopi, in 1924. He studied at the Physico-Mathematical School of the University of Thessaloniki (1942-1945) and at the High School of Fine Arts of Athens (1945-1950).

He has made a number of individual exhibitions in Egypt, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Japan, Holland, Belgium, France and Great Britain.

His distinctions include the award of the Prix d'Achat at the Concorso Internationale per la metaglia e targa d' Arte, in Arezzo, in 1966, the First Prize at the Biennale of Small Form Sculpture, in Budapest, in 1978 and the gold medal at the Biennale of Alexandria.

Works of his are exhibited at the Hakone Museum, in Japan, the National Gallery of Athens, the Goulandris Museum in Andros island and in the Art Gallery of Rhodes island; his works are also found in the Art Collection of the National Bank of Greece, as well as in private collections in Greece and abroad.

He is a member of the Société Européene de Culture and he was also one of the founding members of the Art A΄group, of the Artist's Society, the Contemporary Art Association, the Group for Art Communication and Education, the Acropolis Appeal, the Union of Acropolis' friends etc.

He has repeatedly held the office of the member of the Managing Board and the Artistic Committee of the National Gallery and Alexandros Soutsos' Museum. Moreover, he has been a member of the Plastic Arts Committee in addition to the other committies of the Greek Ministry of Culture.

He was professor at the High School of Fine Arts (1980-1991) and rector of this School (1984-1989).

