

The Place of the Anapeson of Soumela in Byzantine Art

Otto Meinardus

My interest in the iconography of the Anapeson was roused by a rather unusual wall-painting of this theme in a small chapel of the ruined Greek Monastery of the Soumeliotissa in the Pontic Alps.¹ In the summer of 1969 I visited several abandoned Greek churches and monasteries in the former Byzantine Empire of Trebizond.² In the course of these peregrinations I went to the famous Monastery and Pilgrimage Shrine of the Panagia of Soumela, which is situated near Çevislik, west of Trebizond in the Pontic Alps. According to tradition, this monastery was founded in honour of the miraculous icon of the Soumeliotissa by two IVth century Athenian monks, Barnabas and Sophronios.³ On August 15, 1923, following the Greek-Turkish war, which resulted in the compulsory exchange of the Muslims and the Orthodox between Greece and Turkey, the last orthodox monks left this monastery for Greece. The enforced departure of the monks led to the gradual destruction of the monastery in general as well as its wall-paintings in particular. In view of this tragic development, it seems imperative to record those wall-paintings which are still visible.

1. The Anapeson of Soumela

The Anapeson of Soumela adorns the conch of the apse of the small Church of the Holy Cross, which is situated north-east of the Cave-Church of the Panagia Soumeliotissa. This small church, which should be attributed to the XVIIIth century, was once completely decorated with wall-paintings, most of which, however, have been sadly defaced or even destroyed. In fact, the apse-painting of the Anapeson is one of the better preserved wall-paintings not only with respect to this particular church, but also with regard to the monastery in general.

The painting portrays the Holy Virgin, standing or sitting erect, similar to the posture of the Panagia of Cyprus (Petsherskaja). She is adorned with

¹ E. Th. Kyriakidou, *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΡΑ ΤΗΝ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΟΥΝΤΑ ΙΕΡΑΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΙΚΗΣ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΠΗΓΙΑΚΗΣ ΜΟΝΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΥΠΕΡΑΓΙΑΣ ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΣΟΥΜΕΛΑ*. Athens, 1898.

² Cf. William Miller, *Trebizond. The Last Greek Empire*. London, 1926.

³ Talbot Rice, 'Notice on some religious buildings in the city and vilayet of Trebizond', *Byzantion*, V, 1929, 1, pp. 72-73. H. F. Tozer, *Turkish Armenia and Eastern Asia Minor*. London, 1881, p. 434 ff.

a richly embroidered *maphorion* and holds in her hands the Christchild, Who is resting with His right arm on the right arm of His mother. With His right hand He supports His head. In the traditional posture of the Anapeson, His body is turned to the right, and His left hand is extended to the length of His body as far as the left thigh.

On either side of the Holy Virgin and Child there is an attending angel. The angel on the left of the Holy Virgin holds a cross, the angel on the right carries in his right hand a spear and the sponge with vinegar 'put upon hyssop'. The Holy Virgin, the Christchild as well as the angels are adorned with elaborately decorated halos. The inscription on either side of the halo of the Holy Virgin reads *MP ΘΥ*, while the letters above the head of the Christchild read *ΙΧΧ*. The inscription just above the Christchild reads : *ἀναπεσὼν ἐκοιμήθη ὡς λέων*. There is little doubt that this purely descriptive inscription was added at a later date, probably to satisfy the many questions asked by pilgrims to whom this particular representation of the Holy Virgin or that of the Anapeson was quite unknown. The dedicatory inscription is painted around the conch, and its text reads as follows :

✠ Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΥΪΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΝΚΡΑΤΟΣ ΝΗΣ
 ΤΗΜΙΣ ΓΡΩ, ΑΝΗΓΟΡΙΘΗ ΔΑ
 ΕΞΩΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΡΙΑ ΠΛΗΣΘΗΣ, ΘΥΡΑΤΕΣ
 ΚΗ, ΚΑΙ ΕΥΡΕΥΑ ΕΛΙΤ ΠΡΟΚΥΤΕΣ
 * ΕΝ ΕΤΥΣ ΓΡΩ ΑΨΗΕ *

(This divine and very venerable Church of the Holy Cross was painted by the donations of the Lady Palaises [daughter of ...] and the pious [Soum]elitou pilgrim in the Year of the Lord 1745).

We must assume that the partial destruction of the wall-painting occurred after the evacuation of the monastery in 1923, since the demolition of the faces of the Holy Virgin and the Christchild betray a purposeful destruction probably by Turkish shepherds, who used the abandoned monastery as a place for shelter. In view of the fact that the theme of the Anapeson of Soumela, the posture of the Holy Virgin with the Christchild, seems to be quite unique, it seems very strange that none of the XIXth and XXth century Western travellers to this monastery ever noticed or remarked about this unusual wall-painting.⁴

2. The Anapeson in Byzantine Art

A. Wall-Paintings

The fathers of the Eastern Church interpreted the Anapeson as a representation of Christ's sleep of the dead in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy: 'Judah, you lion's whelp, you have returned from the kill, my son, and crouch and stretch like a lion; and like a lion (or a lioness) who dare rouse you?' (Genesis xxxix:9).⁵

The best known wall-painting of this theme is undoubtedly the famous Anapeson by Manuel Panselinos (1282-1328) on the western wall of the nave of the Protaton in Karyes, Mount Athos.⁶ This painting portrays the Christchild with a cross-nimbus resting on a kline. The head of the Christchild is turned towards the right, and with His right hand He provides support for His head. In His left hand He holds a scroll. The left arm is stretched out and rests on His left thigh. The left leg is slightly elevated. A similar wall-painting of the Anapeson although with the inscription

⁴ The monastery was visited by the following Western travellers who included their impressions in their narratives. John MacDonald Kinneir (1813), Colonel Rottiers (1820), J. Ph. Fallmerayer (1840), Henry F. Tozer (1879), H. F. Lynch (1893), Lord Warkworth (Henry A. G. Perry) (1897).

⁵ The Eastern Church has always seen a messianic significance in this passage. The first line refers to the youthful vigor of the tribe. The last two lines are almost verbally identical with Num. xxiv:9a, and are probably a quotation from another poem.

⁶ Paul Huber, *Athos, Leben, Glaube, Kunst*. Zürich, 1969, p. 194. Const. D. Kalokyris, *Athos. Themes of Archaeology and Art*. Athens, 1963, p. 269. Spyr. Lampros, *MIKTAI ΣΕΛΙΔΕΣ*. Athens, 1905, pp. 506-515, pl. 6. Gabriel Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos I. Les Peintures*. Paris, 1927, pls. 30.1, 50, 1. D. T. Rice, *Byzantine Art*. Oxford, 1968, pl. 275. Andreas Xyngopoulos, *Manuel Panselinos*. Athens, 1956, p. 9.

'Αναπεσῶν exists in the principal church of the Monastery of Xenophontos, Mount Athos.⁷ The well-known Anapeson of Mistra, Peloponnesos, which should be assigned to the XIVth century, adorns the conch of the diakonion of the Perivleptos Church. G. Millet, who published this painting, called it 'Emmanuel dormant'.⁸ Typologically speaking, the Mistra Anapeson falls into the same category as the XIIIth century Anapeson of the Protaton in Karyes.



The Anapeson by Manuel Panselinos, Protaton, Mt. Athos

The idea of the fulfilment of the prophecy of the passion and death of Judah finds its artistic representation in a further development of the Anapeson. Thus, for example, we find the Anapeson, *i.e.* the Christchild resting on a kline, and attended by the Holy Virgin on the left and an angel on either side of the Christchild in the Church of the Manasija Monastery in Resava, Serbia.⁹ The angel on the left holds in his hands the Instruments of the Passion, while the angel on the right holds a cross. Since in this case the eyes of the Christchild are open, the theme of the 'Sleepless Eye' is joined to the Anapeson in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy 'the guardian of Israel never slumbers, never sleeps' (Psalm cxxi:4). This XVth century

⁷ Heinrich Brockhaus, *Die Kunst in den Athos-Klöstern*. Leipzig, 1891, p. 102. Fritz Fichtner, *Wandsmalereien der Athos-Klöster*. Berlin, 1931, p. 22.

⁸ Gabriel Millet, *Monuments Byzantins de Mistra*. Paris, 1910, pl. 115, no. 1.

⁹ Vojislav J. Djurić, *Resava*. Beograd, 1963, p. xiii, fig. 7. VI. Petković, *La Peinture serbe du moyen âge*. II. Beograd, 1934, pl. cciv. St. Stanoyević, L. Mirković, Dj. Bosković, *Manastir Manasija*. Beograd, 1928, pl. XVIII.

wall-painting occupies the traditional position above the western door of the sanctuary. A similar painting with the Holy Virgin attending the resting Christchild is also portrayed in the XVth century Anapeson of the Metamorphosis Monastery, the Great Meteoron, Meteora, Thessaly.¹⁰

An even further developed form of the same theme is found in the Church of Ljutibrod between Čerepiš and Mezdra in Bulgaria.¹¹ In this wall-painting of the Anapeson, the Christchild holds in His left hand the Instruments of the Passion, namely the spear and the sponge. Moreover, instead of resting on a kline, the Christchild lies on an altar, thereby portraying the idea of the fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrifice. Interestingly enough, the position of the Ljutibrod Anapeson has been changed from the west wall of the sanctuary to the conch of the apse of the church as in the case of the Anapeson of Soumela.¹²

B. Panel-Paintings

In many Byzantine and non-Byzantine panel-paintings, the emphasis of the Anapeson has clearly shifted from the resting Christchild on the kline attended by the Holy Virgin and two angels to the Holy Virgin holding in her arms the Christchild with two small angels carrying in their hands the Instruments of the Passion. This theme, which is found already in the XIIth century wall-paintings in the Church of the Panagia ton Arakon (Arakiotissa) near Lagoudera in Cyprus, is shown in several variants in numerous panel-paintings from the XIIth century onwards.¹³

G. and M. Sotiriou published two icons from the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai which depict this theme. Here, the Anapeson is intimately related to the idea of the passion and death of the Christ. A XIIIth century icon portrays the Holy Virgin holding in her hands the Christchild, her face being turned towards the Child. In fact, this Sinai icon might come closest to the composition of the Anapeson of Soumela, although the latter is

¹⁰ Michael Gytakos, *ΘΡΗΣΚΕΥΤΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΗΘΙΚΗ ΕΓΚΥΚΛΟΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ*. Athens, 1963, vol. II, p. 539.

¹¹ André Grabar, *La Peinture Religieuse en Bulgarie*. Paris, 1928, pp. 223-224, fig. 32. M. Theodoridis, « Εκκλησιαστικά "Αμφία της Μονῆς Ταράνης » *Θεολογία*, KZ, 1956, 1, pp. 137-138.

¹² It is interesting to note that no prescription for the position of the Anapeson is given in the *Hermeneia* of 1458. The only reference to the Anapeson in the *Hermeneia* speaks of the messianic significance of Gen. xxxix:9, 10. Cf. G. Schäfer, (ed.), *Das Handbuch der Malerei vom Berge Athos*. Trier, 1855, p. 157. Fichtner states that the Anapeson is normally found on the west-wall of the nave above the door. F. Fichtner, *loc. cit.*

¹³ This wall-painting was executed in 1192. Andreas and Judith Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*. Cyprus, 1964, pp. 70-71.

more stylized in so far as the Holy Virgin does not turn her head to her Child.¹⁴ A similar painting, belonging to the Paleologos era, shows the Christchild on the right side of the Holy Virgin.¹⁵ Manolis Chadzidakis published a XIVth century icon of the Holy Virgin and Christchild attended by two angels holding in their hands the Instruments of the Passion. In the description of the icon, Chadzidakis states among other things : 'Notre icône ne doit pas être sans relation avec le symbolisme messianique de l'Anapeson. On n'ignore pas que dès le XII^e s. la Vierge se tient auprès de l'Anapeson'.¹⁶ For that matter, this theme of the Anapeson, the Holy Virgin holding in her arms the Christchild with the two attending angels carrying in their hands the Instruments of the Passion became standardized in the famous icon of the *Φοβερὰ Προστασία*, the Terrible Protection of the Monastery of Koutlounousiou, Mount Athos.¹⁷

The iconographical type of the 'Terrible Protection', which portrays the message of the incarnation as well as the passion and death of the Christ, also spread to the non-Byzantine world. In several Coptic Churches of Egypt, this theme is found among the XIXth century canvas-paintings by Austasi (Eustathius) the Greek of Jerusalem.¹⁸

The theme of the Anapeson in the form of the reclining Christchild, which we have discussed in connection with the wall-paintings, is also found on some panel-paintings, although these representations appear at a later date and are undoubtedly inspired by the wall-paintings. The famous XVIth century Russian Anapeson portrays the Christchild reclining in a forest. As in the case of the Anapeson of Manuel Panselinos, His right hand supports His head while His left hand rests on His left thigh. The Holy Virgin with her hands outstretched towards her Son stands on the left, while the Archangel Michael holding a cross in his hand stands on the right. The inscription above the head of the Holy Virgin reads : 'The Never-sleeping Eye. The guardian never sleeps, never slumbers'.¹⁹

In the extensive and valuable icon collection of the Reverend Father Marios Dapergolas, parish priest of the Church of the Metamorphosis,

¹⁴ G. and M. Sotiriou, *Icones du Mont Sinai*. Athens, 1956, I, p. 188, II, p. 172.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 227, II, p. 199.

¹⁶ M. Chadzidakis, *Icones de Saint-Georges des Grecs et de la Collection de l'Institut*. Venice, 1962, pp. 9 and 11.

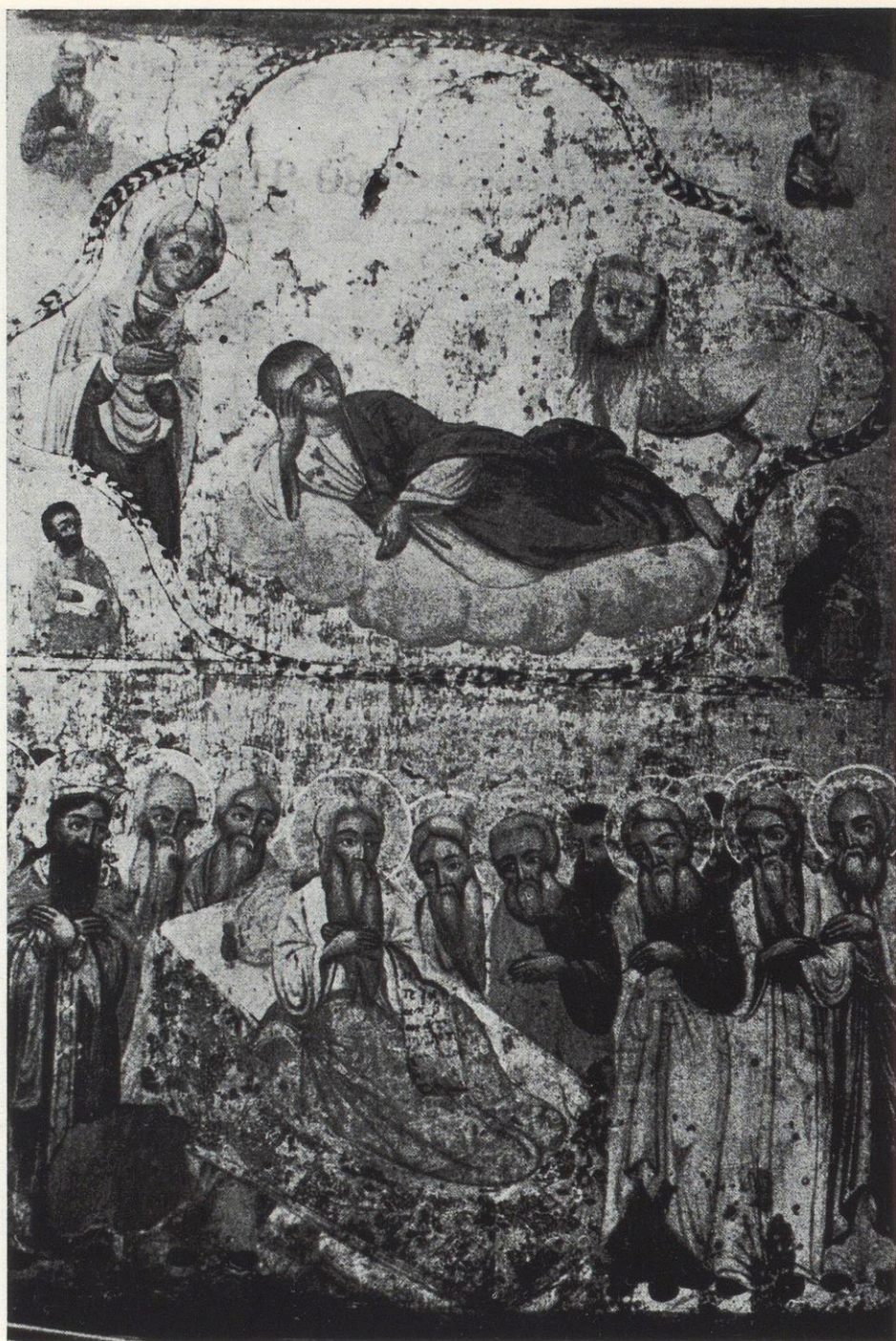
¹⁷ This idea is also developed by A. Xyngopoulos, *ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟΝ ΜΠΕΝΑΚΗ, ΚΑΤΑ-ΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΚΟΝΩΝ*. Athens, 1936, pp. 70-72.

¹⁸ O. Meinardus, 'The Coptica of the Monastery of the Holy Virgin (Dair al-Muharraq)', *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, XX.

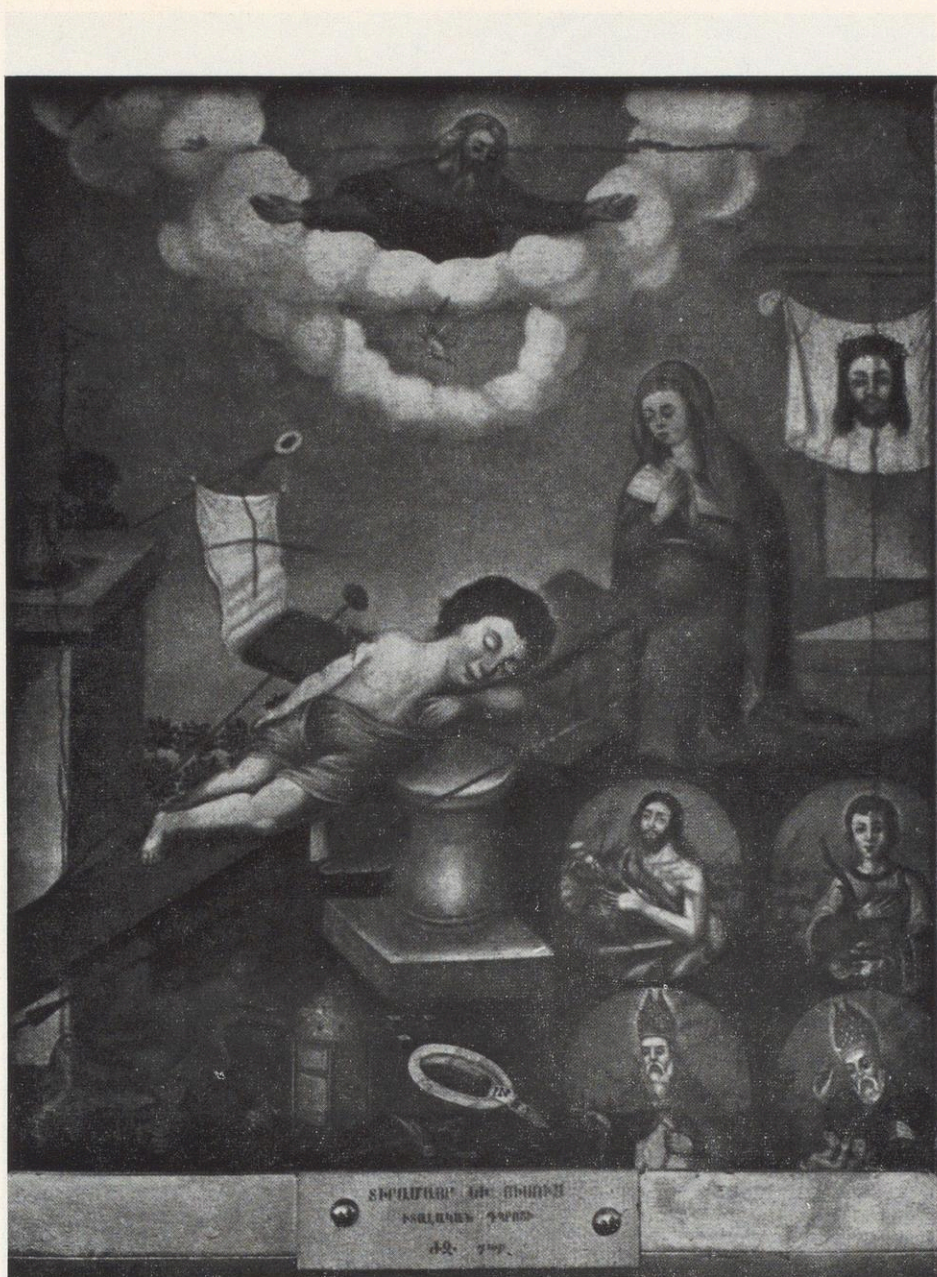
¹⁹ Ulrich Fabricius, *Jesus Christus. Ikonen*. Recklinghausen, 1957, p. 68.



A XIXth cent. Anapeson, collection Dapergolas, Athens



A XVIIIth-XIXth cent. Anapeson, collection Dapergolas



A XVIIth century Anapeson, Armenian Museum, New Julfa



The Anapason
of Soumela

Plaka, Athens, there are two interesting XIXth century icons which portray rather unusual variations of the theme of the Anapeson. There is an icon, painted in 1844 probably in Asia Minor, which shows the Christchild resting in the traditional posture on the back of a lion and attended by the Holy Virgin on the left and St. Joseph on the right.²⁰ A river divides the icon into an upper part, representing the Old Covenant, and a lower part, representing the New Covenant. In the very centre of the icon there is a bridge, which conveys the messianic significance of the pontifex. In the background of the upper part of the icon there is the Heavenly Father enthroned and surrounded by clouds. He is attended by three archangels. On either side of the clouds there are two Old Testament personages holding in their hands a scroll. On the left, there is Jacob holding in his hand a scroll with the following text: 'Αναπessών ἐκοιμήθης ὡς λέων καὶ ὡς σκύμνος τίς ἐγερεῖ αὐτόν. On the right, there is David holding in his hand a scroll with the following text: 'Εξηγγέρθητι ἵνα τί ὑπνοῖς Κύριε.

The second icon of the Anapeson, belonging to the same collection, is also divided into an upper and a lower section. The upper section portrays the Christchild resting on a cloud, His right hand supporting His head, His left hand deviates from the traditional posture, and rests on the cloud. The eyes of the Christchild are looking upward. The Christchild is attended on the left side by the Virgin and on the right side by a lion with a human face. In the four corners of the upper section there are portrayed the four Evangelists. The lower section shows the Forefathers of Christ assembled around Abraham with their names inscribed in their halos.

One of the most interesting icons of the Anapeson I discovered in the Museum of the Armenian Cathedral of All Saviour in New Djulfa, Isfahan, Iran. This icon measures 30 × 35 cm. and should be assigned to the XVIth or the XVIIth century. Like so many objects of art in the Armenian churches of New Djulfa, so also this icon betrays distinct Italian characteristics. The Christchild with His eyes closed rests on the Cross, His head supported by His left arm, His right arm being extended along His right thigh. The upper part of the painting shows the Heavenly Father in the clouds. Just below Him, there is a dove signifying the Holy Spirit. On the right side there is the famous *acheiropoietos* of Christ, and to the left of it the Holy Virgin in prayer. On the left side of the painting there is a cupboard with a pitcher standing on it. The banner of victory is shown between the cupboard and the Cross. Below the sleeping Christchild on His Cross, there are the Instruments of the Passion, which include the sponge, the scarlet

²⁰ This icon is published in the *Bulletin for the Holy Services during Holy Week 1969 in the Church of the Transfiguration, Plaka, Athens, 1969*, p. 4 (in Greek).

robe, the lantern, the dice, the hammer and nails, the bag of Judas with coins of silver, the scourge, the superscription of the Cross with the letters INRI, and even the cock. In the lower right corner there are four medallions with St. John the Baptist in the upper left, St. Stephen (?) carrying in his hand a palm-branch in the upper right, a bishop with mitre holding in his left hand a cross in the lower left, and another bishop with mitre holding in his left hand a *pedum* in the lower right.

In popular iconographic art, the Anapeson, the Christchild supporting His head with His right hand (type Manuel Panselinos) is quite frequently found among the numerous hagiological themes which are included on the XVIIIth and XIXth century Greek Jerusalem Proskynitaria. In some instances, the Christchild rests on a kline, in other cases He reclines on an altar.²¹

C. Miniatures

In his *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts on Mount Athos*, S. Lampros refers to a XIIIth century miniature portraying the Holy Virgin with Child with the following inscription: 'Ο ΑΝΑΠΕΩΝ ΚΕΚΙΟΝΗΣΕ (sic) ΩΣ ΛΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΩΣ ΕΚΥΜΝΟΣ ΤΙΣΑΙΓΗΡΟΙ (sic) ΒΑ ΣΙΛΕΥ.²² (The One Who reclines as a lion, as a young lion, who is going to awake the king). This particular miniature appears in connection with a collection of sayings from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles.²³

3. The Anapeson of Soumela in Byzantine Art

The brief references to the above mentioned types of the Anapeson as found on the wall-paintings, panel-paintings and miniatures provide us with a variety of iconographical arrangements in the paintings of this theme. From the representations of the Anapeson which we have described it is evident that this theme never underwent the kind of process which would have led to a single canonically binding iconographical type. The principal types are clearly determined by two principal objectives of the artists, namely the veneration of the Christchild in His particular posture of the Anapeson, and the veneration of the Holy Virgin with the Christchild attended by angels holding the Instruments of the Passion.

²¹ O. Meinardus, 'Greek Proskynitaria of Jerusalem in Coptic Churches of Egypt', *Studia Orientalia Christiana, Collectanea*, XII, 1967, p. 308-341.

²² The faulty syntax and orthography betrays a certain unfamiliarity of the copyist with the Old Testament text.

²³ XIIIth century ms., Monastery of Stavronikita, Mount Athos. S. Lampros, *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts on Mount Athos*. Cambridge, vol. I, p. 77, no. 910/45.

In the case of the Anapeson of Soumela, the Holy Virgin takes the central position and the Anapeson, the reclining Christchild in the arms of His mother, ought to be seen as an interesting variation of the standard theme normally found in conchs of Byzantine churches. In fact, this particular combination seems quite unique as it portrays a perfection of integration of the two above mentioned iconographical themes in one picture. The Christchild in the arms of His mother ponders about His messianic destiny, which is illustrated by the two attending angels with the Instruments of the Passion. The Old Testament prophecy of Genesis xxxix:9 finds its fulfilment in two soteriological events, the incarnation and the passion of the Christ. This is the theme and the message of the Anapeson of Soumela.