

The Late Palaiologan court in Mystras – Abstract

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Abstract – PhD Thesis – in progress

The Late Palaiologan court in Mystras: visual culture and dynastic alliances demonstrates that the artistic and cultural production of Mystras, while still Byzantine, was affected by the contributions of historical figures who resided or visited the city, between 1349, when it became capital of the Despotate of Morea, and its surrender to the Ottoman Empire in 1460. Alliances between Imperial dynasties of Byzantium and neighboring polities, established through the diplomatic, inter-religious marriages of Manuel Kantakouzenos and Isabelle de Lusignan, Theodore I Palaiologos and Bartholomea Acciaiuoli, and Theodore II Palaiologos and Cleophe Malatesti, brought cultural traditions from Frankish Cyprus, Italian Athens, Florence, Rimini and Venice. Aggregate cultural and visual analyses of innovative design solutions in architecture, religious and non-religious iconographic details in frescoes, cross-cultural references in manuscripts and everyday objects in Mystras, reveal a multitude of interests – court standards, patronage acts, theological debates within the Orthodox Church, and forms of antiquarianism – shared across the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. The analysis of the cultural production of Mystras demonstrates both a response to Constantinopolitan models and the ability to generate autonomous, innovative and syncretic standards in 14th- and 15th-century Peloponnese, where diverse cultural heritages were merging into new socio-political orders.