

Preserving spirituality: The question of light in Byzantine icons and its implications for their restoration and presentation

Keywords

context, contextual light, de-contextualization, re-contextualization, clinical light, image, perception, gold, contrast sensitivity, colour discrimination, visual acuity

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Light is an essential tool of the conservator. A raking light is used to reveal form and texture; a steady daylight - whether real or simulated – is essential when colour matching; light can tell nuances of manufacture, of modifications and of previous interventive conservation; and specialist uses of light – infra-red, x-ray, and ultra-violet are all used by the conservator in the course of investigation.

Light was, too, an essential ingredient in the making and usage of icons. The aim of this paper is to bring the one to the other, to demonstrate the importance of light in a liturgical and (if one may say it) a theatrical way in the conception of the ecclesiastical icon, and to consider if there are any implications in this for conservators (and perhaps curators, too) and what they might be. The focus will be on those icons destined for churches, for these can be assessed in terms of light as they form part of the totality of an interior which, at the time of their production, and before the advent of modern artificial lighting, would have been carefully considered in terms of its illumination.

PRESERVING SPIRITUALITY: THE QUESTION OF LIGHT AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR RESTORATION AND PRESENTATION
John Lord, Dimitrios Doumas

Biblical references to light are numerous. 'Darkness [being] upon the face of the deep..... And God said Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness'. Thus the first verses of the book of Genesis gives primacy to light, which is immediately identified with goodness, and all further creation derives from this beginning. By extension it quickly becomes noted that darkness equates with a realm of evil. St. John's gospel tells the story of the woman taken in adultery and concludes that incident with Jesus' words " I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) St. John's book of Revelation gives several images of light in his vision of heaven, but now the emphasis is on light as colour. ' And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw Four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the Seven spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal....'(4:2-6) A further illustration of the imagery of light in Revelation is given in chapter 21 in which St. John sees a vision of 'a new heaven and earth': 'and there came to me one of the seven angels... and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God: and her light was like unto stone, clear as crystal; and the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.

The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chryoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. (verses 9, 18-21) Moreover ‘ he shewed me a pure river of water, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.(22, 1) It is, then, not just pure light that the Bible emphasizes but reflective, translucent and coloured light as well. Revelation includes the verse ‘I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,’ a phrase that was taken up in the iconography of art, especially in the western Roman Catholic countries during the Romanesque period to illustrate the books of Genesis and Revelation as the first and last of the Bible, and those that put emphasis on light and the beginnings and ending of this terrestrial world. The Last Judgment was frequently depicted particularly in sculpture and was often contrasted to the first chapters of Genesis from the story of Adam and Eve up to the flood (chapter 9), that is of the ideal world created by God that man abused. In Byzantine art the alpha and omega symbols were frequently used on sarcophagi, codex panels and other devotional items. This use of letters reminds us that much of the New Testament was disseminated in Greek, and that the Byzantine civilization grew out of and in many ways continued the Graeco- Roman traditions. It is perhaps interesting to note that antique authors shared some attitudes to light with Christians. An instance of this can be found in book III of Lucretius’s *On the Nature of the Universe* which he begins by saying ‘You [his mentor Epicurus], who out of black darkness were first to lift up a shining light, revealing the hidden blessings of life – you are my guide, O glory of the Grecian race.’ Though secular the attitude to light as a power for good is obvious.

Given these references to light and its central place in the symbolism of Christianity, how does it feature in the design of churches, and by extension in the making and use of icons? One interpretation of the centralized form of church such as that of San Vitale, Ravenna, 526-547, is that as one moves within the church one journeys from the dark of unknowing to the light of knowledge. The progression is from the peripheral 'aisles' to the central nave where the addition of a clerestorey just beneath the raised dome lets in more light. However in normal conditions the available light is actually diffused, especially given the difficulties of early clear glass, or the use (as at San Vitale) of glazing using the thinnest sheets of alabaster. So to supplement this light two additional sources were used during services, when the church assumes a deeper devotional character; one is direct – the use of candle or lamplight – the other indirect – the use of reflective, lustrous surfaces. At Santa Sophia, Istanbul, 532-7, M. Fobelli has shown that the natural light emanating from the ring of windows immediately below the central dome was enhanced by the use of chandeliers and also the addition of lights along the tribune walls of the nave.¹ In general candles were preferred to lamps for the closer liturgical purposes. Altars were, and still are, flanked by them, and sanctuary lights were for preference candles, and this may reflect their symbolism as a metaphor for life. There may even be links back to Jewish practices, and possibly even pagan ones in that the tending of sacred flames was a duty of the Vestals. To make more of this, light 'lustrous' surfaces were introduced. Chief among these was the use of mosaic using glass tesserae, which could be gilded. Gold came to symbolize the light of heaven: it was not to be found in the rainbow and so was seen to have extraordinary properties, and was seen as distinct from yellow a colour that was associated with deceit. Because silver tarnished it was preferred for cleanable objects such as

reliquaries, chalices, or sometimes icon frames, and its lustrous surface was also prized. Equally gems and polishable stones like agate and marble reflected and dispersed the light thus enhancing the available illumination. These would allude to those exotic materials that St. John described so vividly in Revelation.

But much of this mysticism of light has been lost. We live in a world of controlled artificial light. Usually it is electric, but even gas lamps and oil lamps give a more steady illumination on account of their glass shades. Moreover light levels from these sources are far greater in general than with the former candle and lamplight; we like to see every corner well lit. The result is a static and predictable light. Candles and unshielded lamps flickered; they were susceptible to draughts, people's movements and even variants in the humidity of the air. Their light was alive. And as their light shimmered on the mosaics, the silver and gems, and to a lesser extent the polished stone surfaces within the naturally dim light of the Byzantine and Orthodox churches, a spiritual world would have appeared for the devout. The pictorial images of the mosaics would not have been instantly readable, especially where their tesserae were not set flush but at slight angles one to another, nor would the painted icons with their inclusions of silver and gems and their gold grounds. Instead the images would emerge and recede into the shadows as the light itself moved. The result was images that were less substantive than we see them (particularly in our carefully photographed and printed reproductions). They would seem to have a life of their own, and give us tantalizing glimpses into the heavenly world. This sense of movement was emphasized further in the rituals when illumination was at its greatest, when priests wearing cloth of gold or cloth of silver robes moved, transporting the devout through the visionary nature of worship into an otherworldliness.

In west European art the mystical quality of light was associated with the widespread use of window glass in church architecture. This is well demonstrated in a painting of c1425 by the Flemish artist Jan Van Eyck depicting the *Virgin in a Church*. It confirms that light was a major preoccupation and also that light was seen as a daily miracle in that it could pass through glass. The painting needs careful reading. Because churches are aligned so that the altar is towards the east, the view the spectator has of the Virgin is towards the east; therefore the strong light that comes in from the spectator's left is from the north – a miracle. The sense of the miraculous nature of light is reinforced by the verse of a hymn that is embroidered on the hem of Mary's dress and continued on the picture frame:

‘Like the sunbeam through the glass

Passeth but not breaketh.....

So the Virgin, as she was

Virgin still remaineth’

Thus the miracle of light passing through glass is equated to the Immaculate Conception.² Another instance of western interest in mystical light is Antonello Da Messina's *Virgin Annunciate*, c.1474, in which she is seen in an artificial light that can only be explained as the light of heaven that emanates from the Angel Gabriel.³ The depiction of light itself is always difficult and derives from mimetic sources, which E. H. Gombrich has argued derive from ancient Greek sources.⁴ The essence of this is the manipulation of light and shade, and more particularly the ability of highlights to visually advance; a device, which he believes was used by Apelles through the highlighting of leading edges. This ‘lustrous highlighting’ of edges was adopted by Byzantine painters as a means, when gilded, of giving a spiritual linear presence to divine figures, which with the use of gilded grounds passed across to Italian gothic painters like Duccio.⁵

That many of these liturgical and spiritual elements were known to icon painters is more than likely. The religious dimension to light had been discussed on the consecration of Santa Sophia. Procopius of Caesarea, d.565, senator and historian to the Emperor Justinian' wrote seven volumes – *De Aedificiis* - on the emperor's architectural achievements including those at Santa Sophia, and his contemporary Paulus Silentiarius, a high official to Justinian wrote a hymn to mark its consecration, the *Ekphrasis*. Paulus refers to the reflective qualities of its marbles, and mentions the glimmering of artificial lighting, but notes that the reflections from silver give a cold light. Procopius however emphasizes the large quantity of silver and notes the thousand lamps. He also remarks on the importance of colour to break up the large areas of gold whose reflective value he says is less pleasing than that from the polished marble.⁶ The result of all these reflective surfaces dispersing the light is to deny the physicality of the building, thus making it appear weightless (in anticipation of western gothic architecture, but through totally different means).

A look at many icons reveals how much the painters shared a similar approach. Corporeality is often denied in the rendering of figures, despite the antique heritage. The gold ground, occasionally punched or moulded with patterns; the use sometimes of silver additions or a silver frame perhaps studded with gemstones all create a wealth of reflective surfaces which seen by the flickering light of candles and lamps make the icon an intense, coloured and moving image. For earlier ages when colour of this intensity was rare in the lives of working people, to enter a church and to encounter these images of a perfect world would have inspired their devotion.

And it is important that this quality is never lost, hence the need for conservators, and perhaps curators, to be aware of the spirituality as

much as the physicality of the icons in their care. In a sense the conservator shares something of the position of the artist. The icon painter creates and gives life to his image; dirt and damage and the deterioration of time bring death to it; the conservator is responsible for its resurrection. And as the conservator works in a studio or laboratory, so the icon painter would have worked in a relatively somberly lit room – certainly in a sheltered place when applying gold leaf – and just as the conservator should, he would have been aware of how his work would look within the church. Not being tied to verisimilitude as mimetic artists are, the icon painter would manipulate the image until it felt ‘right’. None of this is an exact science, for either artist or conservator, and to achieve a worthy result great integrity and aesthetic judgment is required, qualities necessary if our icons are to preserve their potency and devotional value.

Icons, being now museum artefacts, consist in many identities. They are no longer regarded as purely religious images – although in the Orthodox world veneration still occurs; they are works of art, illustrations of Byzantine artistic accomplishment and therefore documents of the epoch and culture they belonged to, but above all, they have been transfigured into museum objects, and within their newly acquired museological context icons reflect the multiplicity of their changeable values as these have been accumulated over time, and having witnessed the aftermath of political, cultural and ideological events and changes, they have become a message that encourages the production of new information and knowledge. Nowadays, whether we still acknowledge icons as sacred objects or deprive them of their holy veil, we ought to see them as much as this can be possible within the context they were meant to be seen. Context is a profoundly important parameter for viewing, studying and interpreting art. Conservators, in particular, having to deal with the object’s physicality and as their aim

is to disclose an earlier and truer state of appearance by means of restoration, are invited to thoroughly consider original viewing conditions and the painter's studio as determinant factors that condition their intervention. Toward this end, contextual light appears to be a critical element. We might be stating the obvious, but visual perception of the external world is made possible due to light. Apart from being a physical phenomenon, in the art of painting it becomes a primary element with philosophical connotations, which in the case of icons incarnates also theological truths. Light, is a means for manipulating an image, and at the same time a mental force that determines our perception of the physical world and a way of establishing reality within the represented reality of the image.⁷

Conservation and restoration is not just about the preservation of material and structure; it is about interpretation of the physical form of objects. We therefore as professionals who deal with the intangible cultural and religious attributes of these artworks face the challenge to perceive the object not only as it is now, but as it was; to discern the many different ways it has changed, and envision the possible ways it might continue to change in terms of its physical state as well as its social role. Bearing in mind that conservators have the enormous responsibility to act as intermediaries between museum objects and the public, our perception of a painting's message is dependent upon the treatment it has undergone.⁸

We ought to strive for giving visitors proper visual access to the object and context is a serious consideration. Everything we see comes with a context. The image of an object varies and when this happens the observer should be able to identify which of the two is actually accountable for the change: Is it the object, its context, or perhaps both? Apparently, there is an interdependence that establishes

perception. A percept is always a relative value. Size, for example is perceived in conjunction with the distance from which we look at the object. Respectively, an object's brightness is measured against the range of brightness that oscillates from the brightest to the darkest value occurring in our visual field. An object will look relatively bright against a dark background and relatively dark against bright surroundings. The reflected light may be the same in both cases; still, it will be differently perceived. In other words, any feature of a certain quality that is within our visual spectrum should be considered in relation to the qualities of the field seen as a unity. What our eyes receive from the image of an object results from the integration of the physical object with its environment – an essential part of which is the observer himself. Seeing is not a purely physical mechanism. Even if we take for granted that the viewer has perfect sight with no acquired or inherited deficiencies we should not undermine the fact that perception is in effect subjective and incorporates acts like recalling and reproducing. Perception embodies memory by stirring up the awareness of previous perceptions resulting in associations.⁹ These associations condition our predisposition to what we gaze upon and establish countless versions that determine the mentality of seeing.

The museum by definition de-contextualizes objects only to re-contextualize them. There is a seemingly bizarre situation in which the museum visitor expects to see artworks displaced from their original setting, but one also expects to see them in a brand new framework that is meant to favour and facilitate a chosen or a constructed perception and interpretation of original context that is no longer active. The lighting environment of a museum's exhibition galleries and laboratories is an essential part of this newly invented context that aims to help reveal an artwork's variable identities. To resolve therefore on an effective lighting scheme that enables re-

contextualization for visitors as well as for museum professionals proves to be an essential step towards understanding.

Our exploration of contextual light ought to start from the artist's studio. We have to clearly distinguish painters' studios in Post Romanesque Western Europe, where representational paintings achieved life-like resemblance to prototypes, from Byzantine artists' ateliers. The studio enables experimentation with light, for it '... is constraint in diverse ways' as opposed to direct or diffused solar light.¹⁰ It is also the light in which the artist lives and creates. The Western and the Byzantine artist encounter the same difficulties in transferring their observations of a three-dimensional material world to a two-dimensional flat surface, and in both cases colour is used to suggest depth and distance, light and shadow, reflections and highlights, mattness or luster. For the later Western artist colour is light interacting with matter and as such, it defines the optical properties of his subject. The Byzantine artist is only interested in depicting the colour that his subject retains perpetually.

The Byzantine painter is fascinated by nature just as much as the Western painter is. However, he is disinterested in real life representations. Nature is the inspiration that guides him through to the revelation of inner truths. Therefore, he does not represent what he sees, but rather what he perceives about life.¹¹ Contrary to that, western artists became keener on depicting how things work; that is why they are interested in anatomy, in shaping bodies casting shadows on their models, hence they became engaged in a scientific naturalistic approach to the portrayal of forms, and the workplace provides the setting for such renderings. This might have been one of the reasons for icons' diminished value by the West. As Nelson points, in Western European art, when people are portrayed they are usually placed either in a room or before a landscape, which means that these images were

made to be viewed in relevant lighting conditions. To place holy figures in gold background would seem rather primitive.¹² The aesthetics of icons is dominated by the transition from shadow to light. As outlined earlier, in contrast to the principles of western painting, the Byzantine artist models his colour from the darkest shades and progresses through to a lighter tonality to reach the 'highlights' that sometimes end in pure white colour.¹³

The Western artist does not experience the same sensation each time he looks at his subject, because it is hardly ever possible that this is attainable, but the Byzantine painter envisions an invariable subject and renders it in a highly skilful manner, part of which is the use of gold. Gold has many qualities; just like copper it is coloured and unlike the 'white metals' it reflects longer wavelengths of visible light more effectively than it does with shorter wavelengths. That is why it behaves like a pigment resulting in a yellowing cast, but having the electronic structure of metals it reflects light much more intensely than it absorbs it.¹⁴ Reflection depends also on the degree of smoothness of the burnished gold leaf on an icon's surface. A smooth surface reflects light at the same angle as the incident light resulting in glossiness.¹⁵ The visual properties of an icon's gold are conditioned by the Church environment, which forms the second aspect of contextual light. When direct light falls on its surface the concentration of the reflected light is so powerful that it makes the representation hardly readable. On the other hand, when no lighting occurs, gold acts rather like any other pigment and it is recognized by its colour. The museum environment attempts to create uniform controlled lighting, which on one hand facilitates viewing, but on the other, falsifies the spirit of icon contemplation. However, the entire visual experience of icons is based on this meaningful interplay between absorption and reflection of light. What gold does is not simply to symbolize divinity but to actualize it. As Rico Frances maintains (2003), '...it is a place where

optics and theology coincide'.¹⁶ He goes on describing an ideal setting: a direct light source would obliterate viewing, but '...an indirect broadly spread light...' like the one found in Orthodox churches in early mornings and late evenings when the interior is still dim would optimize the image. What seems to be perfect though for the appreciation of the theological connotations of icons contradicts contemporary modes of perception. The glittering effect of gold enhances the contrast between light and dark areas of the icons. This in conjunction with the low-light conditions of the church interior diminishes the sensation of individual colours hence the rest of the icon remains in the shadow.¹⁷

Before museum professionals decide on the most appropriate lighting scheme for the exhibition galleries, they ought to be insightful in terms of their own intentions first. As far as preventive conservation is concerned, it is taken for granted that our actions should meet generally accepted criteria for light sensitive material. But, in terms of the ambience that we intend to create or re-create we make choices. One option would be to create lighting identical to the one by which the original exhibit was created. This is a rather unattainable proposition considering the fact that artists create for specific conditions of display not easily reconstructed; icons certainly fall within this category. The second choice would involve a lighting environment similar to original display setting, which seems to be a rather plausible situation. The third possibility would entail ideal lighting conditions. This would embrace the following parameters: elimination of colour distortions and direct shine, aversion of reflections, prevention of illuminance variations and exclusion of distorting backgrounds. This is a particularly difficult target to reach as different works respond to different lighting conditions. Finally, a variety of lighting circumstances that would help reveal different

aspects of the work might be a rather debatable solution that could possibly justify the use of daylight, but would certainly be inappropriate for Byzantine art.¹⁸

Regardless of the selected mode of viewing conditions, the interrelationship between the illumination that falls on an object and the degree of comfort in which people perceive the icon in full detail should be seriously considered. Museum specialists therefore ought to create such an environment that viewers are enabled to look comfortably at the displayed objects for as long as they like without the obstruction of glare or reflections. It means, that visitors' viewing system should be totally acclimatized to the prevailing luminance of surfaces. The luminance of an object signifies the link between the illuminance that falls on the surface and the reflectance of that surface. Properties like *visual acuity*, *luminance contrast* and *colour discrimination* are taken into account. Visual acuity determines the smallest detail that can be clearly perceived. It depends on many parameters - apart from the object itself – like the sharpness of the edges of the object, the luminance of the surrounding area and the luminance contrast in the object itself. Icons like any other object are not self-luminous and they are usually displayed against a uniform background. This establishes contrast that derives from the relation between the luminance of the object and the luminance of its background. Finally, colour discrimination refers to the ability to recognize variances between various sensations of subtle colour differences.¹⁹

When viewers visit a museum of Byzantine art they do not anticipate to go in a simulated Orthodox Church environment. They certainly would not expect to see icons in the 'white cube', hung against white walls lit by harsh artificial daylight, like most museums and art

galleries of contemporary art would adopt. Instead, visitors would rather contemplate them against dark painted walls; with soft yellow light just like the ambience candles would produce because they are prepared for a similar experience - yet distilled and purified - that results from the institutionalization of Byzantine art. A museum professional studies, examines and intervenes into the physical form of icons under the rather clinical light that most working areas are illuminated by, and has absolutely no resemblance to an icon's contextual light. This fact may raise some serious considerations for conservators. What an art conservator does by restoration - particularly cleaning and to a lesser extent retouching - is to reveal existing colour and tonal relationships and define new ones under specific lighting conditions. Lighting is a determinant factor that establishes the effectiveness of the intervention in terms of the impact it brings about on the artistic and historical significance of the work as well as on the change of attitude that may occur on behalf of the public who contemplate and appreciate the work after its treatment. A cleaned painted surface is definitely perceived differently compared to an obscure, discoloured one. Despite the fact that the deleterious effects of light impose the necessity to range exposure levels from 50 to 150 lux in agreement with a reasonably sound visual understanding, it is the quality of the lighting that guarantees perception and corresponds to an accurate disclosure of an icon's light and colour relationships. A conservator's intervention is performed in a certain neutral environment. The lighting pattern of the museum's exhibition space has been differently planned though. The viewer is thus asked to interpret artworks in a different setting. One might argue then that it is either the viewer or the conservator who may see the icon distorted. Although it would seem rather ludicrous to suggest that a conservation laboratory should be lit like a 12th century painter's studio or a church interior, the artist's workplace and the lighting scheme of an icon's

natural surroundings should be seriously taken into account as they constitute an integral part of the icon's context. It is important that we are able to establish the relation of the painter to reality within the framework of his workplace²⁰ and the society in which he lived. This would legitimize our intervention and validate our interpretation of the physical form of icons.

The major advantage of the conservation studio's neutrality is the fact that it makes use of natural and artificial daylight that in most cases supplement each other and therefore eliminate variations in illumination and colour. In addition to that, daylight - in whatever form it is produced - creates a sense of naturalness. However, the lighting of the object should be separated from that of the room. What looks like being a drawback when it comes to viewing Byzantine art can be simultaneously regarded as a compromise. Conservators may not see the object in its contextual light, but at least they see divergent aspects and versions of an icon's painted surface under a range of lighting conditions that only daylight can generate. Wilkinson identifies six factors that determine daylight's variability. These are: the spectral composition of light, its levels, the direction of light, the change from direct to indirect light, the alteration which the painted surface's colouration undergoes in relation to their surrounding environment and finally the process of understanding the change itself with time.²¹

No matter how hard we - as museum professionals - try to emulate original viewing conditions for visitors, we all see artworks in remoteness and detachment from the framework of creation, artistic intent, and cultural or spiritual context. The realization of this truth can only raise our awareness as to how cautious we ought to be when it comes to restoration. Philip Conisbee would describe icons as

contemporary presences that have reached us through time originating from a specific context, which can only be approximated in the museum's exhibition space. Curators and conservators attempt to reconstruct a sense of place in the past, which is made eloquent to museum visitors.²² There is still, a gap between this fabricated environment and the conservation laboratory, which needs to be bridged. Conservators cannot experience the sensation of an icon's gold and colour relationship when carrying out restoration in the same light a worshipper would venerate the icon's content. Furthermore, we are in no position of knowing how the icon might have looked like once it left the painter's studio. We therefore can only discuss about these issues at a theoretical level. To minimize the disparity between the conservator's and the visitor's environment, many institutions and their conservation departments like the National Gallery of Art in Washington have adopted a policy that averts visual distortions, which may take place in the public's eyes and helps the conservator perform more rightfully in terms of museological intentions. Paintings whose restoration treatment is nearly finished are temporarily taken into the galleries. The work is thus seen in the lighting conditions, setting and colours in which current public viewing occurs, so that a balance between the treated work and its new context is achieved. At the end of the day, what the spectator sees results from a combination of parameters, which nonetheless conclude in one determinant: our choices and actions is nothing but a prudent compromise of historical consideration, museum context and intuition, which implies subjectivity.²³ Undoubtedly, the word subjectivity is ambiguous and may be misunderstood. Some argue that conservation can be seen as a creative activity both technically and artistically²⁴ – and to some extent this is true, but it can lead to arbitrariness. When it comes to viewing art – and icons are high art - it is important that we stick to the simple and yet so crucial principle, which is one of the main aims of

the profession – and that is revelation. By revelation we aim to make a conscious selection of the most important aspects, which nevertheless give the museum visitor a clear visual impression of the original form in all respects.²⁵



Fig.1A. Visible light, Saint George, by Emmanuel Tzannes (c. 1610-1690), date: second half of the 17th century, (36.4 x 28 cm), © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 3714.

1B. Special use of light – x-radiography



Fig. 2A Visible light, The Restoration of Icons, Cretan School, (mid 16th century (51 x 41 cm) © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 21170, (before conservation)

Fig. 2B. Special use of light – Ultraviolet

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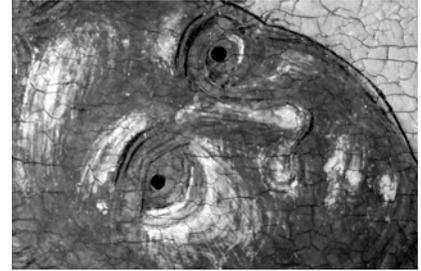


Fig. 3A. Visible light – The Virgin Holding the Child (detail), unknown artist, date: 14th century, (99.6 x 63.6 cm), © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 41420 (bequest by Trekoukias)

Fig. 3B. Special use of light – Infra-red (detail)

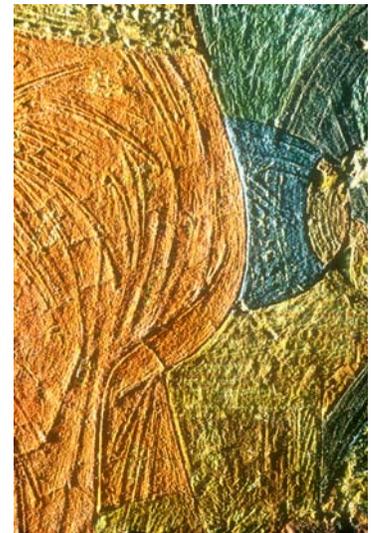


Fig. 4A. Visible light, Saint Catherine, by Emmanuel Lambardos ((15th-16th c), date: 1627, (28.2 x 22.5 cm), © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 2985²⁶

Fig. 4B. Special use of light – raking light (detail)

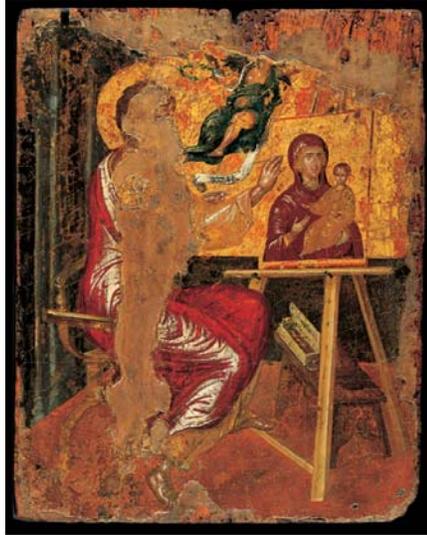


Fig. 5 The Apostle Luke painting an image of the Virgin Hodegetria, signed by Domenicos Theotokopoulos (1541-1614), date: 1560-1567, (41 x 33 cm) © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 11296. A rare illustration of the painter's studio that establishes the use of easel in the icon-making process being also informative of the size and shape of brushes, and the artist's palette, tools and the atelier's furniture. Theotokopoulos is implicit of the painter's individuality – and one might argue – eccentricity.²⁷



Fig. 6 (top left) Madonna and Child (Madonna del solletico), by Masaccio (1401-1428), date: c. 1426, (24.5 x 18.2 cm) © Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Inv. No 1890 9929.



Fig. 7 (top right) The Virgin of Tenderness, attributed to Emmanuel Lambardos (15th-16th c), date: second half of the 16th c., (1.10 x 0.83 m) © Benaki Museum, Inv. No: 2984.²⁸

Different approaches in manipulating light and colour. The linearity of style in Byzantine art is replaced by the transitional interplay of shadowed and lighted parts resulting in naturalistic representations.



Fig. 8A/B (top left-bottom left) Views of the Icon/Painting/Woodwork laboratory of the Benaki Museum Conservation Department. A combination of abundant daylight supplemented by artificial light sources provides a neutral, and in effect, detached – still harsh – lighting environment that facilitates study as opposed to exhibition galleries

Fig. 9 (top right) The Byzantine Museum of the Andivouniotissa. The museum is housed in the Church of the All Holy Virgin Lady Andivouniotissa, Corfu (late 15th century). It opened in 1984. The collection was re-displayed in 1994 after the completion of extensive restoration work.



Fig. 10 (top right) View of the ‘Twilight of Byzantium’ permanent exhibition, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki. The display opened in 2002 and represents the final and most dramatic phase of the Empire’s cultural and artistic course.



Fig. 11 (top left) View of the Benaki Museum's Byzantine and Post-Byzantine exhibition galleries (ground floor)

Fig. 12 (top right) View of the Museum of the White Tower, Thessaloniki. The monument was converted into an exhibition space in 1984-1985 and housed initially a part of the collection which is now displayed at the Museum of Byzantine Culture. The monument will be closed until 2007; it will house the Museum of the City of Thessaloniki.



Fig. 13 (top left) The Church of our Lady of the Castle, Rhodes. The monument turned into an exhibition space in 1988 and housed for many years Post-Byzantine icons (17th-18th century) and wall paintings from the Church of St. Zacharias, Chalki (14th century) and the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Thari, Rhodes (17th century). The monument is no longer an exhibition space.

Fig. 14 View of the Benaki Museum, Pireos street annexe (photo Erieta Attali, © Erieta Attali). An ideal museum environment for exhibitions of contemporary art is juxtaposed with a rather 'aesthetic approach' to display, which at the same time is 'contextual'²⁹

Illustration credits

- Fig. 1-4 Benaki Museum Conservation Department photographic archives
Fig. 5 DELIVORRIAS, A., PHOTOPOULOS, D. (1997) *Greece at the Benaki Museum*, Athens, Benaki Museum, p: 282
Fig. 6 FOSSI, G. (2001) *Uffizi Gallery – Art, History, Collections*, Florence/Milan, Ministero per I Beni e le Attivita Culturali – Soprintendenza Speciale per il Polo Museale Fiorentino/Giunti, p: 94
Fig. 7 DELIVORRIAS, A., PHOTOPOULOS, D. (1997) *Greece at the Benaki Museum*, Athens, Benaki Museum, p: 275
Fig. 8A/B Benaki Museum Conservation Department photographic archives
Fig. 9. Courtesy of the Department of State Archaeological Museums and Collections, Hellenic Ministry of Culture, photographic archives
Fig. 10. Μουσείο Βυζαντινού Πολιτισμού (2002) *Τεύχος 2/2002*, Θεσσαλονίκη, Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού / Εκδόσεις Καπόν, σ. 4
Fig. 11 Benaki Museum photographic archives
Fig. 12-13. Courtesy of the Department of State Archaeological Museums and Collections, Hellenic Ministry of Culture, photographic archives
Fig. 14 *Οδός Πειραιώς – Το Κτήριο του Μουσείου Μπενάκη*, Αθήνα, Μουσείο Μπενάκη, σ. 33 © ERIETA ATTALI

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- ⁵ See Duccio's *Noli me Tangere* or Cimabue's *Madonna and Child Enthroned* for Italian examples and Andreas Ritzos' (attr.) *Enthroned Virgin and Child*. or *Washing of the Feet* from St Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, as Byzantine examples.
- ⁶ see FOBELLI, M.L. (2006).
- ⁷ DOUMAS, D. (2000) *Aesthetic Understanding and Conservation – The Interaction of Light and Colour Perception with the Reinstatement of the Visual and Historical Integrity of the Work of Art*, MA Dissertation, Lincoln, De Montfort University, pp: 1-4.
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- ⁹ READ, H. (1943) *Education through Art*, Faber & Faber, pp: 36-37.
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- ¹¹ STUART, J. (1976) *Ikons*, London, Faber & Faber, p: 35.
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- ¹³ ΚΑΤΣΕΛΑΚΗ, Α., ΚΑΚΑΒΑΣ, Γ. (1996) *Ο Κόσμος των Βυζαντινών Εικόνων Εκπαιδευτικά Προγράμματα*, Αθήνα, Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού
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- ¹⁴ BRILL, T. (1983) *Light – Its Interaction with Art and Antiquities*, New York, Plenum Press, pp: 108-109.
- ¹⁵ *ibid*, p: 100
- ¹⁶ FRANCES, R. (2003) 'When all that is gold does not glitter: on the strange history of looking at Byzantine art' in: EASTMOND, A., JAMES, L., eds., *Icons and Wood – The Power of Images in Byzantium*, Hants, Ashgate Publishing, p: 18
- ¹⁷ *ibid*, p: 19.
- ¹⁸ WILKINSON, M. (1987) 'Lighting options: daylight and artificial lighting' in: *Lighting: A Conference on Lighting in Museums, Galleries and Historic Houses*, London, The Museums Associations, UKIC, Group of Designers and Interpreters in Museums, pp: 58-59.
- ¹⁹ BOYCE, P. (1987) 'Visual acuity, colour discrimination and light level' in: *Lighting: A Conference on Lighting in Museums, Galleries and Historic Houses*, London, The Museums Associations, UKIC, Group of Designers and Interpreters in Museums, pp: 50-57. The luminance of a surface is a function of the illuminance falling on the surface and the reflectance of the surface. It subjective correlate is brightness. Visual acuity is understood as the angle subtended at the eye by the detail, which can be seen on 50% of occasions it is presented. It is measured in minutes of arc. Luminance contrast's definition:
$$\frac{Lt - Lb}{Lb}$$

Lt: Luminance of the target object

Lb: Luminance of the background

²⁰ see ALPERS, S. (1998), p: 403

²¹ see WILKINSON, M. (1987) p: 60

²² CONISBEE, P. (2003) 'Comments – response to the papers of Mark Leonard and Jorgen Wadum' in: LEONARD, M. ed., *Personal Viewpoints – Thoughts about Paintings Conservation*, Los Angeles, The Getty Conservation Institute, p: 75

²³ *ibid*, p: 76.

²⁴ VINAS, M.S. (2005) *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, Oxford, Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann, p: 147.

²⁵ CAPLE, C. (2000) *Conservation Skills – Judgement, Method and Decision-Making*, London/New York, Routledge, pp: 33-35. Caple considers conservation as the balance of three activities: revelation, namely the disclosure of an object's original form or function either by means of cleaning or restoration; investigation, which embraces all analytical techniques and results in the unveiling of information about the object; and finally, preservation, that ensures maintenance of the object's present form averting further decay (see the RIP Triangle configuration, p: 34).

²⁶ ΔΡΑΝΔΑΚΗ, Α., ΒΡΑΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Λ., ΚΑΛΛΙΓΑ, Α. (2000) 'Μελέτη εικόνων του Εμμανουήλ Λαμπάρδου στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη' στο: *Δελτίο της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, Περίοδος Δ, Τόμος ΚΑ*, Αθήνα, Χ.Α.Ε. σσ. 192-194.

²⁷ CORMACK, R. (1997) 'Ο καλλιτέχνης στην Κωνσταντινούπολη: αριθμοί, κοινωνική θέση, ζητήματα απόδοσης' στο: ΒΑΣΙΛΑΚΗ, Μ. επιμ. *Το πορτραίτο του καλλιτέχνη στο Βυζάντιο*, Ηράκλειο, Κρήτη, Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης - Ίδρυμα Τεχνολογίας και Έρευνας, σσ. 45-76. Στις εικαστικές πηγές στις οποίες απεικονίζεται ο Ευαγγελιστής Λουκάς να ζωγραφίζει την Παναγία συγκαταλέγεται η μικρογραφία του κώδικα Τάφου (αρ. 14) με τις λειτουργικές ομιλίες του Γρηγορίου του Ναζιανζινού (Ιεροσόλυμα, Πατριαρχική Βιβλιοθήκη (σελ. 48). Επίσης, αναφέρεται εικονογράφηση από Ευλητάριο της Ιεράς Μονής της Αγ. Αικατερίνης του Σινά το οποίο χρονολογείται κατά το 13^ο αιώνα (Αρ. κατ. 233), αλλά και φορητή εικόνα (πρώμος 15^{ος} αιώνα) που εκτίθεται στο Μουσείο Recklinghausen, Γερμανία.

²⁸ Βλ. ΔΡΑΝΔΑΚΗ, Α., ΒΡΑΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, Λ., ΚΑΛΛΙΓΑ, Α. (2000) σσ. 196-202.

²⁹ VERGO, P. (1989) 'The reticent object' in: VERGO, P. ed., *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion Books, pp: 41-59. Aesthetic exhibitions result from the notion that objects ought to be left to speak for themselves, with their beauty, or whatever it is that makes them significant. The viewer's personal involvement is also an important parameter. The process of seeing is associated with the realization of the experience as well as the understanding of the object's inner situation; this is not a superficial sensory function. On the other hand, the contextual exhibition is supported by thorough documentation and by the ambience of the display's presentation.

PRESERVING SPIRITUALITY: THE QUESTION OF LIGHT AND ITS
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