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1. *In the last thirty years, images have been a focus of scholarship from many different viewpoints, and they have been pivotal in the many scholarly movements, or “turns”, attempting to methodologically reframe the study of art history in general. Can you briefly explain which was your original focus of interest and in which directions your scholarly approach developed over the course of time?*

My first approach to art history adopted the current trend of the time to use iconography and style as the main vehicles to understand and interpret the art produced in Byzantium. This is what I had been taught to do while at university during my undergraduate years. I still do not regret it as a method, no matter how traditional is considered to be nowadays, as it does teach you a certain and solid (?) way of approaching, seeing, and interpreting art. My postgraduate years in London took me to a different path and introduced me to issues of inter- or trans-disciplinarity from a transcultural perspective. The notion of society, and of the ‘other’; the use of art to express issues of oppression and repression; all these have become the tools of my research.

2. *Please name up to three books that you consider to have played an important role in orienting your research.*

Μανόλης Χατζηδάκης, *Εικόνες της Πάτμου. Ζητήματα βυζαντινής και μεταβυζαντινής ζωγραφικής* (Αθήνα: Εθνική Τράπεζα της Ελλάδος, 1977¹, 1995²) Also in English: Manolis Chatzidakis, *Icons of Patmos. Questions of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Painting* (Athens: National Bank of Greece, 1985); Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul. Icons, Death Masks and Shrouds* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

3. *What is your assessment of traditional art history, with its emphasis on controversial notions and often rigid distinctions between “style” and “iconography”? What do you see as its hermeneutic limits and advantages? Do you think it should be thoroughly replaced with new approaches, or simply revised and integrated into the present-day art-historical discourse?*

Style and iconography are the foundation stones of art historical discourse. Despite the bad reputation they have received in the recent past, they remain useful analytical tools in the hands of open-minded art historians. The ultimate goal of any visual analysis is the

uncovering of an image's intrinsic meaning by framing it within its specific time, location and culture. Meaning should be in the heart of an art historical enquiry and if applied wisely, both style and iconography can be useful means to the desired end.

Stylistic analysis is especially effective for Byzantine art, where the overwhelming majority of artefacts are unsigned and need to be dated with precision. However, when it limits itself to a descriptive and formalistic analysis it becomes connoisseurship, an esoteric and rather elitist way of viewing art.

Style and iconography are two traditional art historical approaches which should not – and indeed cannot – be replaced, as they both form the basis of any art historical analysis. Once their limitations as analytical tools are acknowledged, they can be used but always with the aim of historical contextualisation in mind.

4. Since the 1990s, our field has experienced many different “turns”, each laying emphasis on one of the multiple dynamics in which images are involved. To what extent did your research benefit from such scholarly debates?

My research has benefitted from debates examining issues of patronage, audience reception, feminism, and the role of the artist.

5. In your opinion, which specific notions have become particularly relevant to our present-day understanding of images, and how have they affected your own approach?

One of the most important notions for our understanding of images is ritual. Rituals are focused interactions that are to be found at the heart of all social demonstrations. They employ symbolisms that generate group emotions which in turn form patterns of communication that are the backbone of any organized society. In this respect, the analysis of ritual practices is a deeper form of cultural analysis.

6. What is your specific understanding of “meaning” in visual objects? How do images manage to convey messages, and what are the implications?

Meaning in visual objects is created by a specific visual language with its own code of communication, which engages the mind in a powerful and transformative way. The unspoken codes and symbols contained in this visual language are perceived by the analysis of the sight and of the mind, which form a visual literacy that differs for each era. Line and colour, shadow, light, symbols and narration, are both tools and elements of conveying a message via an image.

7. To what extent is “meaning” determined by factors not immediately associated with the specific visual appearance of images, such as mise-en-scène strategies, conditions of visibility, and more generally the experiential dimension of viewers?

It is, but the question is how can we describe and interpret the experiential dimension of viewers, who lived many centuries ago and in circumstances completely different from ours, which sometimes is difficult or even impossible to understand and define.

8. *In your view, are we now better equipped to reconstruct and more deeply understand the complex relationship between the visual appearance of an image and the expectations of its viewers?*

We're definitely better equipped, but I'm not sure to what extent we can define the expectations of viewers, who are different from us. In any case, I find it very difficult to understand and interpret how different the viewers of the past had been in comparison with us.

9. *To what extent can images contribute to informing their viewers' understandings of other images and other aspects of reality and experience?*

Images alone may not usually suffice in providing their viewers with other viewers' notions about them. There is the danger of overstretching the evidence of reality and experience if we take it for granted that "images can contribute to inform their viewers' understanding of other images and other aspects of reality and experience".

10. *What is your assessment of the materiality of images?*

The materiality of images is an approach that complements the formal analysis of images in terms of style and iconography. Although images are usually examined for their visual properties they are also physical objects that can be held, touched, sensed. These material properties are vital in facilitating a rethinking of the traditional art historical representation of images and complementing our understanding of them.

11. *In your view, how can we approach the "social life" of images? In what sense can we assume that images interrelate with their viewers and users?*

The term "social life of images" is a theoretical and methodological approach of analysing images in public spaces as part of a wider visual dialogue that involves both the patron and the viewer. This analytical framework seeks to situate the image in a spatial and temporal context, while considering the social factors influencing the image, leading to an analysis of the political dynamics of an image and its potential symbolic power to influence public discourse. Thus, the viewer and/or user of an image becomes an indispensable agent in the art historical analysis of an image. Although art objects and artworks are produced to satisfy a certain demand, practical or spiritual, once they are publicly displayed, they acquire a meaning attributed to them by their viewers and users, which can be different than that of the original patron. This is the mechanism by which they can reveal the dynamics of a social system.

12. *Does the experience of images exclusively imply the exercise of sight, or do other senses also play a role? If possible, please cite a relevant case from your research field.*

Modern theoretical approaches, varying from phenomenology and cognitive psychology to social and cultural anthropology, have manifested that 'sight' alone is not enough to 'see'. In order for sight to become vision, perception, cognition and ultimately memo-

ry, the human mind experiences a multi-sensory process, involving touch, smell, hearing and even taste. In recent years this viewpoint has also been applied to Byzantine art and archaeology, placing all kind of images, be it frescoes, icons, relics and inscriptions, in the centre of a synesthetic religious experience.

No matter how appealing this cross-disciplinary approach may be, it should always be remembered that the main goal of images in Byzantium was to bring the faithful in contact with the divine. In my opinion, we should be careful not to superimpose modern sensibilities or the latest research trends upon the medieval viewer. It is equally important to bear in mind that, with the exception of frescoes, all other medieval images are viewed and experienced in the safe and often sterile environment of a museum, which limits a holistic and sensual perception of images.

13. Recent studies have emphasized that “iconicity” (or “visual efficacy”) is not an exclusive property of artistic images but can also be regarded as an attribute of non-figurative objects, such as elements of landscape, natural materials, and living beings. To what extent can such objects be included in an art-historical narrative?

The issue here is the translation and understanding of the term iconicity in other languages and especially in Greek. As is widely known, the term icon and εἰκών do not carry the same meaning, although the former is typically the translation of the latter and vice versa. Similarly, the term iconicity, when translated as εἰκονικότητα, it refers to virtual reality (εἰκονικός = virtual) rather than the similarity between the form and meaning of a subject. Therefore, the use of the term is rather problematic in some languages and we should begin by clarifying the nuanced use of the term in various languages.

14. Many studies have focused on the dynamics by which images originally meant for a specific viewing context come to be transferred to, appropriated by, and transformed and reshaped in another. Which hermeneutic tools can be useful in our analysis of such phenomena?

Hermeneutics is broadly defined as the theory and practice of interpretation. In art history, these interpretative approaches are meant to shed light on specific intentions and beliefs involved in the production of the art historical object/artefact. Essentially, the aim of a hermeneutic methodology is to unveil the wider cultural and social forces that may have influenced the final artistic outcome. Thus, when analysing medieval images with this perspective in mind, it is vital that we take into account the fact that the vast majority of them have been transferred outside their natural habitat, which was mainly the church. With the exception of frescoes, images, be it icons or other liturgical objects, are nowadays to be found in museums and other collections. It is therefore vital to take this into account, if we are to interpret in a way that can be justified by the social and historical context of the time a specific image was produced.

15. English is more and more the lingua franca of global art-historical scholarship. To what extent may we avoid applying to non-European contexts notions drawn from an essentially Western European understanding of images and their materiality and meaning?

The problem with the global use of English as the *lingua franca* is not so much in the application of Western European notions on the understanding of images but the ubiquitous use of English as a reading and writing language for medieval art history. Bibliographical references these days tend to be mainly – if not solely – in English, which goes to show that primary sources and past publications in non-English languages are ignored with a light heart. It is of course impossible to demand that modern scholars speak, read, or understand more than two languages, as was the case for the founding fathers of the discipline, but this is an issue we should keep in mind, when training younger academics. Perhaps a third foreign language should be a pre-requisite for doctoral studies and a fourth should also be a taught option.

16. *Finally, what are we still lacking? In which direction should we pursue our studies in the following decades?*

An innovative approach and an ultra-fresh mind. To me what really matters above all is the use of common sense while interpreting and analysing issues of art of the past.

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