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MOUNTAINS PAINTED IN CHRISTIAN PAINTINGS IN THE MONASTERY OF HOSIOS LOUKAS

Keisuke Inomata[1], Shigeyuki Okazaki[1]

[1] *Mukogawa Women's University, Japan*

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Introduction

In Europe, people[1] were historically expressed as the main theme of paintings. In some Byzantine paintings nature was drawn, not as the main theme but in the background or along with something else. What meaning does nature have in Byzantine paintings? In "Mountains Painted in Christian Paintings in the Chora Church" [3], we analyzed and discussed the Christian paintings in the Chora Church (Turkey, the 14th century) because they are masterpieces of the Late Byzantine art and were drawn in the center of the Christianity world in medieval Europe. We identified the five types of spatial characteristics[2] of mountains in the Christian paintings in the Chora Church. The mountains are drawn to exist outside the living space of people as places with special meaning for connecting to the world of God.

In this paper, we studied the Christian paintings in the monastery of Hosios Loukas (Greece, the 10-11th century) which represents the Middle Byzantine art. This paper clarifies the spatial characteristics of the mountains in these paintings to discover the period's view of nature, weighs them against the spatial characteristics of the mountains of Christian paintings in the Chora Church. Clarifying and weighing the spatial characteristics of the mountains of Christian paintings in different ages and areas lead to learning their meaning in Byzantine paintings. These characteristics reflect a fundamental relationship between people and nature.

Research Method

Here, we analyzed 5 paintings that included mountains[3] in the monastery of Hosios Loukas (Fig. 1). We made explanatory drawings and pattern diagrams of each painting and analyzed them. We derived the spatial characteristics of the mountains from analysis.

Analysis

We enumerated the elements[4] of each painting, traced them, and made explanatory drawings (Fig. 2). In each explanatory drawing, we divided each painting into scenes[5]. Next, we made pattern diagrams (Fig. 2) to elucidate the relationships among persons, their backgrounds[6], and the mountains.

1 Nativity
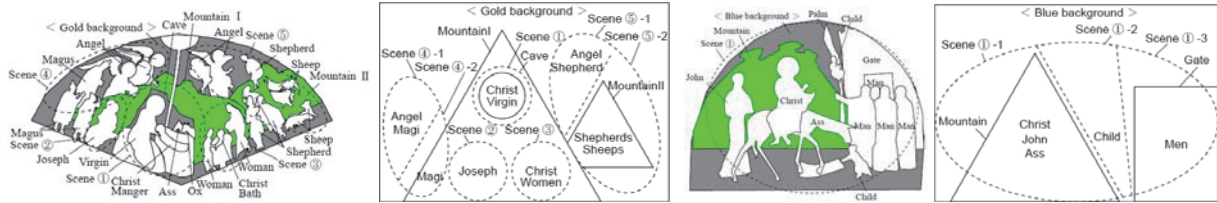

2 Entry into Jersalem

3 Crucifixion
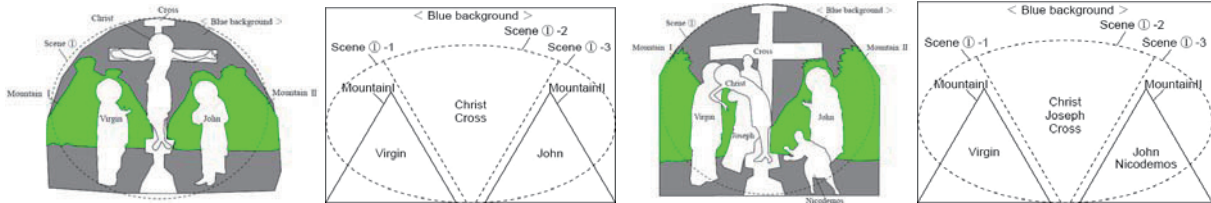

4 Descent from the Cross

5 Entombment and the Women at the Empty Tomb

Fig. 1: Christian paintings that include mountains in the monastery of Hosios Loukas
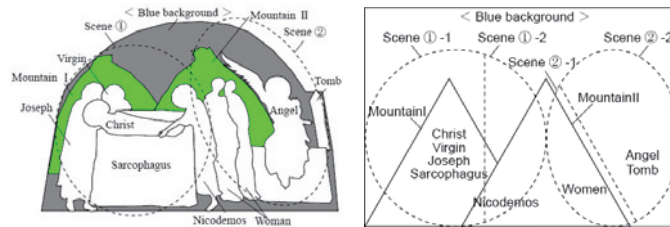(Chatzidakis, 1997)

6,7 Nativity

8,9 Entry into Jersalem

10,11 Crucifixion

12,13 Descent from the Cross

14,15 Entombment and the Women at the Empty Tomb

Fig. 2: Explanatory drawings (left) Pattern diagrams[7] (right)

Results and Discussion

The spatial characteristics of the mountains were derived from elements, scene divisions, and the backgrounds. A list of the analysis objects and the results are summarized in Table 1. In addition, spatial characteristics of the mountains stated in Table 1 were made into diagrams (Fig. 3).

1) Mountain Surrounding Person

When a mountain is in the person's background and surrounds the person, we call it a "mountain surrounding person."

This type of mountain has ridge line that encloses a person. For example, in the "Entombment and the Women at the Empty Tomb" (Fig. 1-5), scene ①, mountain I is in the background behind the Virgin and Joseph burying Christ. The ridge line of this mountain functions as a frame, and the place enclosed might have a special meaning that differs from that of its surrounding.

2) Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person, Mountain Next to Person and Swallowing Other Person

When the elements feature a mountain and a person's background is gold or blue and when the mountain is in another person's background and surrounds the person, we call it a "mountain next to person and surrounding another person." And when a mountain with a cave is in another person's background and the person is inside the cave, we call it a "mountain next to person and swallowing another person."

These types of mountains overlap with mountains described in 1). A mountain is in the background behind a person, and the background behind another person is gold or blue[8]. Table 2 shows the relationship between the person and its background, in scenes with these types of mountains.

In "Entry into Jersalem" (Fig.1-2), a mountain was possibly drawn to protect the saints. In the other scenes, the person whose background is either gold or blue is closer to the world of God than the person whose background is a mountain. These spatial characteristics of mountains overlap with "Mountain Next to Person" and "Mountain Swallowing Person" seen in the Chora Church [3]. Such mountains are drawn to exist outside the living space of people as places with special meaning for connecting to the world of God in the Christian paintings in the monastery of Hosios Loukas in the different age and the area from the Chora Church.

Table 1: List of analysis objects and results

Fig.1	Explanatory Drawing	Pattern Diagrams	Title	Scene	Elements		Person's Background	Spatial Characteristics of Mountains
					Person	Others		
1	6	7	Nativity	①	Christ, Virgin	Ox, Ass, Manger	MountainI（Cave）	MountainI："Mountain Next to Person and Swallowing Other Person" MountainII："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person"
				②	Joseph		MountainI	
				③	Christ, Women	Bath	MountainI	
				④-1	Angel, Magi	MountainI	Gold background	
				④-2	Magi		MountainI	
				⑤-1	Angel, Shepherd	MountainII	Gold background	
				⑤-2	Shepherds	Sheep	MountainII	
2	8	9	Entry into Jersalem	①-1	Christ, John	Ass	Mountain	Mountain："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person"
				①-2	Men	Mountain	Gate	
				①-3	Child	Mountain, Palm	Blue background	
3	10	11	Crucifixion	①-1	Christ	Cross, MountainI, MountainII	Blue background	MountainI："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person" MountainII："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person"
				①-2	Virgin		MountainI	
				①-3	John		MountainII	
4	12	13	Descent from the Cross	①-1	Christ, Joseph	Cross, MountainI, MountainII	Blue background	MountainI："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person" MountainII："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person"
				①-2	Virgin		MountainI	
				①-3	John, Nicodemos		MountainII	
5	14	15	Entombment and the Women at the Empty Tomb	①-1	Christ, Virgin, Joseph Nicodemos	Sarcophagus	MountainI	MountainI："Mountain Surrounding Person" MountainII："Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Other Person"
				①-2			MountainII	
				①-1	Women		MountainII	
				①-2	Angel	MountainII, Tomb	Blue background	

Mountain surrounding person
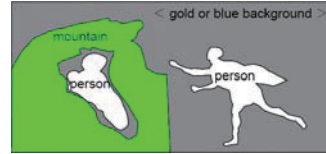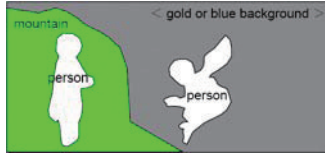
Mountain next to person and surrounding another person

Mountain next to person and swallowing another person

Fig. 3: Spatial characteristics of mountains

Table 2: Relationship between Person and Background

	Explanatory drawing	Pattern diagrams	scene	person whose background is mountain	person whose background is gold or blue
1	6	7	④	Magi	Angel, Magi
			⑤	Shepherd	Angel, Shepherd
2	8	9	①	Christ, John	Child
3	10	11	①	Virgin, John	Christ
4	12	13	①	Virgin, John, Nicodemos	Christ, Joseph
5	14	15	②	Women	Angel

Conclusion

We identified the following three types of spatial characteristics of mountains painted in the Christian paintings in the monastery of Hosios Loukas: "Mountain Surrounding Person," "Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Another Person," and "Mountain Next to Person and Swallowing Another Person." In the Christian paintings in the monastery of Hosios Loukas, as is the case in the Chora Church, the mountains are drawn as places with special meaning for connecting to the world of God.

Notes

1. In this paper, we treated Christ, the Virgin, and angels as "people" because they are drawn as human figures.

2. We identified the following five types of spatial characteristics of mountains painted in the Christian paintings in the Chora Church: "Mountain Next to Person," "Mountain Surrounding Person," "Mountain Swallowing Person," "Mountain Next to Person and Surrounding Another Person," and "Mountain Next to Person and Swallowing Another Person."

3. In this paper, we defined a mountain as rugged ground that greatly rises and excluded smooth ground that only slightly rises.

4. One main purpose of Christian paintings in medieval Europe was to faithfully express Bible content. The kinds of drawn elements are comparatively few.

5. In Christian paintings, more than one scene might be drawn on a single painting to effectively explain a Bible story.

6. "Background" refers to what is drawn around the outline of a person.

7. In explanatory drawings and pattern diagrams, numbers such as "①" indicate different scenes. And when more than one mountain was drawn on a single painting, they are named as "mountain I" and so forth. In pattern diagrams, a triangle shows a mountain, a quadrangle shows town or a gate, a circle shows a cave or crack in a mountain, and a dashed circle indicates a scene. When there are more than one background behind persons in a single scene, they are indicated as, for example, "①-1" for the first background, and so forth.

8. In Fig. 1-1, the Magi and the shepherd listening to the angels protrude from the area of the mountain to the area of the gold background. In Fig. 1-4, the Virgin holding Christ's arm protrudes from the area of the mountain to the area of the blue background. A person whose background is the mountain protrudes from the area of the mountain to contact the person in the area of the gold or blue backgrounds.

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Sources

The pictures in Figs. 1-5 are by HOSIOS LOUKAS（Chatzidakis, 1997）. The other figures and tables were made by the authors.