



Summary :

The building complex of the Zoodochos Pege monastery in Constantinople was built in the 6th century, in the location of a holy water fountain, known for its miraculous qualities. Despite the complete destruction of the buildings after 1452, the site's fame grew in later times. The iconographic type of the Virgin Mary of Zoodochos Pege was very popular among post-byzantine artists. The modern church was built in 1793 and it has been connected to large philanthropic activity. In 1833 it was rebuilt and acquired the form with which it stands today.

Date

6th century; 19th century

Geographical Location

Constantinople

Period

6th century, 19th century

1. Introduction

The building complex of the Zoodochos Pege in Balıklı, or the Virgin Mary of Balıklı, includes the monastery, the church and the fountain of Zoodochos Pege; it is situated in the western part of [Constantinople](#), outside the city [walls](#). The iconographic type of the Theotokos as Zoodochos Pege (the Life-giving Source) was popular throughout the Orthodox world. This type is known from the beginning of the 14th century and is common in Cretan art, mainly in two versions.

Regardless of how the holy fountain of Zoodochos Pege in Constantinople was established, this *proskynema* (shrine) grew into a renowned place of worship in Byzantine times; however, on the eve of the [fall of Constantinople](#) to the Ottomans, it was abandoned and its buildings destroyed.¹ During the first months of the Ottoman rule, only a small underground space existed in its place; it was visited only by a handful of pilgrims. Its worship was renewed in 1723, when the miracles of Mary and the iconographic type – said to have been created by Luke – became famous, and were connected to the theological tradition and art of post-byzantine Orthodoxy.

2. History of the fountain

2.1. The Holy Fountain

The fountain was situated outside the city-walls of Constantinople, near the gate of Selymbria. As a warm-water fountain it was known from an earlier age. However, sources refer to its miraculous qualities from the mid-5th century. According to tradition, there are two surviving versions concerning its origins:

1) The first version is narrated by the historian Procopius in his work 'On Buildings' (*De Aedificiis*); he mentions that the original church was built on the 6th century and attributes its building to [Justinian I](#) (527-565).² Justinian was hunting in the area, in a splendid scenery, when he dreamed of a small chapel, surrounded by masses of people and a priest in front of a fountain. "It is the fountain of miracles", they told him. Therefore he built a monastery there with the materials left from [Hagia Sophia](#).³ However, it appears that during Justinian's time, the monastery was built next



to an already existing church.⁴

2) According to the second version, mentioned by Nikephoros Kallistos,⁵ the future Emperor Leo I the Thracesian (457-474), when he first arrived in Constantinople – then still a mere soldier – he met a blind man near the [Golden Gate](#), begging him for water. As he was searching for water, Virgin Mary's voice indicated the fountain: "Enter, Leo", meaning to enter the place where the fountain was situated. Leo followed her instructions, found the fountain and rubbed mud over the blind man's eyes, causing him to regain his sight. The prophetic voice told him that when he became emperor he would have to build a church next to the fountain. Kallistos describes this church vividly, using many literary details;⁶ however, his description fits Justinian's church. It is documented that in 536, in the [Council of Constantinople](#) under the Patriarch Minas (536-552), Zeno, bishop of the 'House of the holy Virgin Mary in the Fountain' was present.⁷

2.2. The shrine (the monuments)

Regrettably, not much archaeological evidence exists concerning the architecture of this building complex during the Byzantine era. In the courtyard are the tombs of the [Ecumenical Patriarchs](#). In 1793 a larger church was built, paid for by the people. This church, with its abundant income, could afford to fund the building of three Greek hospitals in Constantinople (Seven Towers, Galata and Stavrodromi). In 1837 the monastery was renamed Holy Hospital Monastery of Zoodochos Pege and funded the building of a [new hospital](#), outside the walls. The still extant church was built in 1833, under the Patriarch Constans I and was inaugurated two years later⁸ ([fig. 1](#)). The holy fountain is situated in the underground church and springs from a marble faucet; the faucet pours water into a small tank that serves as a fish-bowl (for gold fish).

2.3. The worship of the Theotokos of Zoodochos Pege

The iconographic type of the Theotokos of Zoodochos Pege became renowned over time throughout the Orthodox world, and this is attributed to a large extent to the fame of the pilgrimage site itself. It is noteworthy that a mosaic, depicting the icon type, survives in the [inner narthex](#) of the [Chora Monastery](#) ([fig. 5](#)). In the post-Byzantine era, many orthodox churches and monasteries were dedicated to the Theotokos of Zoodochos Pege, as a solicitation for the miraculous cure of the patients and as a symbol of the struggle against the Ottomans, under the protection of the Virgin Mary. In the 19th century, this type spread mostly to the Bulgarians and the Serbs ([fig. 6](#)). Throughout the Balkans that were under Turkish occupation exist places or urban districts called Balıklı (which was the Turkish name of the shrine); they are mostly sites close to fountains, wells, cisterns or baths, as in the town Pleven in Bulgaria.

3. The name Balıklı, the legend of the fish and the miracles of Theotokos

The Turks gave to the shrine and its site the name Balıklı,⁹ deriving from the Turkish word "balık", which means "of the fish" or "with the fish", due to the many fish in the area. There is a [legend](#) connected to the monastery of Balıklı that refers to the Fall of the City, also described in a poetic manner by George Vizyenos. In the cistern of the fountain there were always fish; these were linked by the people to the legend of the seven half-fried fish that jumped back into the water when the City fell to the Turks and came back to life, while one side of their skin was red and the other grey.¹⁰



Beside the legend of Leo and the blind man, Kallistos refers also to other miracles, figuring kings and churchmen. Among them are three, which often appear in the iconographic programme of the Zoodochos Pege: the cure of the possessed man, which is identified by the demon springing out of the man's mouth or by the chain that binds his neck or arm, the cure of the barren woman – this is said to be Zoe, mother of Constantine Porphyrogennitos – depicted holding a child, and the resurrection of the sick Thessalian, who travelled to the fountain by ship seeking a cure, died during the journey and was brought back to life, when the ship's captain carried him to the holy fountain and poured three buckets of water over his body.¹¹

4. The iconographic type of the Zoodochos Pege

The iconographic type of the Theotokos Zoodochos Pege is known from the early 14th century¹² and appears in Cretan art mainly in two versions; in both, the Virgin Mary is holding the baby Jesus and emerges from a bottle hovering over the cistern with the holy water, as described in hymnography.

In the first variant, the Virgin Mary emerges from a simple cylindrical basin with a conical base. The water diffuses into a rectangular tank. Christ holds the scroll, he raises his right hand in blessing, while his head is turned to the left. An example of this type can be seen in the icon of the painter Angelos in the Monastery of Hodegetria in Crete. This same theme appears more developed in an icon of the second half of the 15th century in Mount Sinai; it depicts also two sick men to the left and right side of the basin, as well as the busts of the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

The second variant of this iconographic type was especially developed from the 16th century onward.¹³ In this version, Christ raises both hands in blessing and turns his head to the right. The vessel consists of two basins with a common base and is richly decorated with anthropomorphic, animal and plant motifs. Around the tank, sick men are usually depicted waiting to be cured. Two full-length angels holding open scrolls flank the Virgin Mary, holding the baby Christ in her arms. In the icon, the scrolls of the angels with the strange hair write: 'hail the fountain springing the healings copiously' and 'hail the holder of the lively springing water'. For this 'holder of the lively springing water', St Silouan writes that it is a gift from God to please and relieve.

The Virgin Mary is depicted in Various Types: **Hodegetria**, **Rodon to Amaranton** (Virgin the Unfading Rose) or with Christ sitting in front of her and her hands raised to the side. In Orthodox engravings from 1744 onward,¹⁴ the bottle usually resembles a baptizing basin or the Holy Chalice, sometimes with a faucet leading to one or two basins. Dionysios of Fourna describes this image,¹⁵ while he, himself, painted an icon of Zoodochos Pege in 1737;¹⁶ this indicates that from the early 18th century onward, the depiction of the Zoodochos Pege becomes one of the essential themes of Orthodox iconography, widely spread and with great influence, due to the miraculous activity of the Virgin Mary, its place of worship, but also its Constantinopolitan origin.

1. Janin, R. *Le géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire Byzantine, I: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat oecumenique, 3: Les églises et le monastères*, (Paris, 1953) p. 221-228.

2. Prokopios, *On buildings* I .3, Hauri, J., Wirth, G. (eds.) *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, III: De aedificiis* (Leipzig 1963) p. 20-21.



3. Migne, J.P. (ed.), *Patrologia cursus completus Series Graeca*, vol. CLXVIII, (Paris 1857-1866) col. 592A.
4. Παπαστράτου, Ντ., *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)*, τόμ. Β', (Αθήνα, 1986) p. 172.
5. Νικηφόρος Κάλλιστος, Ξανθόπουλος, *Σύγγραμμα περί συστάσεως του σεβασμίου οίκου της εν Κωνσταντινούπολει Ζωοδόχου Πηγής, και των εν αυτή υπερφωώς τελεσθέντων θαυμάτων* (Κωνσταντινούπολη 1812).
6. Janin, R. *Le géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire Byzantine, I: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat oecuménique, 3: Les églises et le monastères*, (Paris, 1953) p. 227. Among the themes of the iconographical programme of the church were: the Pentecost, the Crucifixion, the *Metamorphosis*, the *Hyparante* and the Ascension of Christ, St Agathonike, the three Hierarchs, St Onouphrios, St Symeon the Stylite and others. From the surviving epigraphs of Manuel Philes we conclude that the icons of St Ignatius and St John Euchaites also existed, see *Anthologia palatina*, I, p. 109-114.
7. Mansi, J.D., (ed.), *Acta sacrorum conciliorum, nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. I (Florentiae 1759, reprinted 1960-1961) VIII, 882 A, 907 A, 930 B.
8. Janin, R. *Le géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire Byzantine, I: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat oecuménique, 3: Les églises et le monastères*, (Paris, 1953) p. 226.
9. Παπαστράτου, Ντ., *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)*, τόμ. Β', (Αθήνα, 1986) p. 172.
10. Παπαστράτου, Ντ., *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)*, τόμ. Β', (Αθήνα, 1986) p. 172
11. Παπαστράτου, Ντ., *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)*, τόμ. Β', (Αθήνα, 1986) p. 172
12. During this period Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos wrote the "Sermon of the Zoodochos Pege", which can be heard on the Friday of the Diakainesimos.
13. For an analysis of the iconography and history of this type see Πάλλας, Δ., *Ζωοδόχος Πηγή*, Αθήνα, p. 201-224.
14. The first known engraving piece belongs to Christopher Zephar and was produced in Vienna, see Παπαστράτου, Ντ., *Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)*, τόμ. Β', (Αθήνα, 1986) p. 172.
15. Διονυσίου του εκ Φουρνά, *Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης* (εν Πετρούπολει 1909) p. 145.
16. Ξυγγόπουλος, Α., "Τέσσερις φορητές εικόνες του Διονυσίου", *Ελληνικά* 10 (1938) p. 274, 275, fig. 2.

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	Παπαστράτου Ν. , <i>Χάρτινες εικόνες. Ορθόδοξα θρησκευτικά χαρακτηριστικά (1665-1899)</i> , τόμ. Β', Αθήνα 1986
	ο εκ Φουρνά Διονύσιος , <i>Ερμηνεία της ζωγραφικής τέχνης</i> , εν Πετρούπολει 1909
	Γεδεών Μ. , <i>Η Ζωοδόχος Πηγή και τα ιερά αυτής προσαρτήματα</i> , Αθήνα 1886
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	Kimball V., <i>Theotokos of the Life Giving Fountain (Licentiate in Sacred Theology)</i> , 2000
	Ξυγγόπουλος Α., <i>Σχεδιάσμα ιστορίας της θρησκευτικής ζωγραφικής μετά την Άλωσιν</i> , Αθήνα 1957

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	Mary and Fountain in Art http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/aoeu.htm
	Theotokos, life-giving Fountain, Feast http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/questions/yq/yq122.html

Glossary :

	Hodegetria Iconographic type of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin is depicted standing, slightly turning to the right of the viewer, holding in her arms the infant Jesus. The type was named so after an allegedly thaumaturgic icon of the Virgin Mary kept in the monastery of Hodegoi in Constantinople.
	narthex A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.
	Virgin the Unfading Rose (Rhodon to Amaranton) In Byzantine art, the iconographic scene with the Virgin Mary crowned, holding a standing Christ Child also crowned and vested imperial garments. Occasionally other iconographic elements are included, such as angelic orders and, most often, a rose in the hand of the Virgin.

Sources

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Quotations

1a. Apolytikion (dismissal hymn) of Mary the Life-giving Source (Echos a)

«Ο ναός σου Θεοτόκε ανεδείχθη παράδεισος, ως ποταμούς αιζώους αναβλύζων ιάματα ώ προσερχόμενοι πιστώς, ως Ζωοδόχου εκ Πηγής, ρώσιν αντλούμεν, και ζωήν την αιώνιον, πρεσβεύεις γαρ συ τω εκ σου τεχθέντι, Σωτήρι Χριστώ, σωθήναι τας ψυχάς ημών».

1b. Megalynarion (hymn)



«Ἦδωρ το ζωήρyton της Πηγής, μάννα το προχέον, τον αθάνατον δροσισμόν το νέκταρ το Θεῖον την ξένην ἀμβροσίαν το μέλι το εκ πέτρας, πίστει τιμήσωμεν».

2. George Vizyenos's poem "Balikli"

Σαράντα μέρες πολεμά ο Μωχαμέτ να πάρη
την Πόλη τη μεγάλη.
Σαράντα μέρες έκαμεν ο γούμενος το ψάρι
στα χείλη του να βάλη.
Απ τις σαράντα κι ύστερα πεθύμησε να φάγη
τηγανισμένο ψάρι.
-Αν μας φυλαγ' η Παναγιά, καθώς μας εφυλάγει,
την Πόλη ποιός θα πάρη;
Ρίχτει τα δίχτυα στο γιαλό, τρία ψαράκια πιάνει,
-Θεός να τα 'βλογήσει
Το λάδι βάλλει στη φωτιά μες στ αργυρό τηγάνι,
για να τα τηγανίση.
Τα τηγανίζ' από τη μια και πα να τα γύρισε
κι από το άλλο μέρος.
Ο παραγιός του βιαστικά πετά να του μιλήση,
και τα 'χασεν ο γέρος!
- Μην τηγανίζης, γέροντα, και μόσχισε το ψάρι
στην Πόλη τη μεγάλη!
την Πόλη την έξακουστη οι Τούρκοι έχουν πάρει,
μάς κόβουν το κεφάλι!
Στην Πόλη Τούρκου δεν πατούν κι ' Αγαρηνού ποδάρια!
Μου φαίνεται σαν ψέμα!
Μ' αν ειν' αλήθεια το κακό, να σηκωθούν τα ψάρια,
να πέσουν μες στο ρέμα!
Ακόμα ο λόγος βάσταγε, τα ψάρια απ' το τηγάνι,
τη μια μεριά ψημένα,
πηδήξανε και πέσανε στις λίμνης τη λεκάνη,
γερά, ζωντανεμένα.
Ακόμα ως τώρα πλέουνε, κόκκιν' από το μέρος,
όπου τα είχε ψήσει.
Φυλάγουν το Βυζάντιο ν' αναστηθή,
κι ο γέρος να τ' αποτηγανίση.

Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός, *Αττίδες Αύραι*.

3. Iconographic analysis and the story of the second version of the Virgin as Life-giving Source

"...Ότε ίστατο παρά τον Σταυρόν, τότε ως ωκεανός απέραντος ήτο η θλίψις Αυτής, και οι πόνοι της ψυχής Αυτής ήτο ασυγκρίτως μεγαλύτεροι του αδαμιαίου πόνου μετά την έξωσιν εκ του Παραδείσου, διότι και η αγάπη Αυτής ήτο ασυγκρίτως μεγαλύτερα της αγάπης του Αδάμ εν τώ Παραδείσω. Καί εάν επέζησεν, επέζησε μόνον θεία δυνάμει, διά της ενισχύσεως του Κυρίου, διότι η ευδοκία Αυτού ήτο όπως ίδη την Ανάστασιν, και ύστερον, μετά την Ανάληψιν Αυτού, παραμείνη ως παράκλησις και χαρά των Αποστόλων και του νέου χριστιανικού λαού".

Πάλλας, Δ., *Ζωοδόχος Πηγή*, (Αθήνα) pp. 201-224.