THE VIRGIN OF THE PASSION: DEVELOPMENT, DISSEMINATION, AND AFTERLIFE OF A BYZANTINE ICON TYPE

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To Clement
ABSTRACT

Mary holds the Christ child in the traditional formula, but unexpectedly, angels appear above bearing not good news, but a cross, spear and sponge - tidings of Christ’s future torment. This is the Virgin of the Passion icon. Due to its enormous proliferation by papal command, it has been called perhaps the most popular religious icon of the twentieth century. But despite an abundance of recent studies on the Virgin Mary in Byzantium, there has been little investigation into what first spurred this iconographical innovation. This dissertation pursues this question by exploring four themes related to the Virgin of the Passion in Byzantium: Power, painting, priesthood, and predestination.

My first two chapters explore what the Virgin of the Passion is not. “Power” has been a pervasive scholarly theme in the humanities in recent decades, and Byzantine art history is no exception. Yet a vague concept of power does little to illuminate the original context of the first known Virgin of the Passion, which dates to 1192 on the island of Cyprus. Instead, the image conveys an iconography of political defeat, which was possible because the cult of the Virgin in Byzantium preceded imperial sponsorship, and could consequently transcend and outlast that sponsorship as well. Another obstacle to understanding the Virgin of the Passion comes from traditional accounts of the history of painting, suggesting Byzantine stasis and Renaissance innovation. Tracing the image to the creative milieu of Komnenian Constantinople, I argue that the history of the Virgin of the Passion type illustrates the reverse – Byzantine dynamism, followed by relatively homogenous mass production in the Renaissance and beyond.
My third and fourth chapters offer a new interpretation of the type. By connecting the icon to a twelfth-century Eucharistic controversy, I make the case that the original Virgin of the Passion is Eucharistic, which consequently associates Mary with priesthood. To contextualize this observation, I point to a surprising series of texts and images in the Byzantine world that also refer to Mary as priest. Finally, I offer a new interpretation of the instruments of the Passion borne by the angels above Mary and Christ. I relate them to the “Prepared Throne” imagery, a popular Byzantine motif most often interpreted as a throne “prepared” for Judgment. Instead, I make the case that it is the throne “prepared” from the foundation of the world. The result is that the Virgin of the Passion – a work of visual theology – treads on the verbally contested terrain of predestination.
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Cypriot art history seems to be accomplished in pairs. Couples, such as the Stylianous and the Winfields, publish their research together. Likewise, my wife Denise has been a full partner in this investigation from start to finish. She stood with me before the frescoes at Panagia tou Arakos, where it was clear to me that her understanding of the Virgin of the Passion transcended my own. I dedicate this dissertation to our son Clement. It was his brief life that taught us to look to the iconographical tradition for more than just a Virgin and Child.
INTRODUCTION: THE VIRGIN OF THE PASSION

χαῖρε, ἀμνοῦ... μήτηρ
Hail, Mother of the lamb. ¹

The Byzantine Virgin Mary was well acquainted with angels. According to the nearly canonical Protoevangelium of James, angels ministered to Mary when she was a child in the temple, bringing her heavenly bread. More famously in the gospel of Luke, angels appear at both the Annunciation and Nativity.² This dissertation is concerned with the next angelic appearance, less familiar than these earlier encounters. Presumably, angels also appeared to Mary and Christ with a different, more somber message: Mary’s baby is going to die. Textual record of this event is difficult to come by. “Neither in the Gospels, nor in any liturgy is such a fact recorded, viz, that at some time the Divine Infant beheld two angels showing him the instruments of His future sufferings.”³ But visual representations of this angelic visit are abundant, constituting an icon type known as the Virgin of the Passion. For this reason it might be called a form of Byzantine visual apocrypha.

¹ Excerpts from the Byzantine Akathistos hymn, with which each chapter of this dissertation begin, are from the edition provided in Leena Mari Peltomaa, The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2-19. Each of my chapters begins with a citation from the Akathistos hymn that anticipates so many later theological and visual developments. “Mother of the lamb” encapsulates the two chief interpretive contributions of this dissertation (offered in chapters three and four). Mary is also called “Mother of the living Lamb” in the Syriac liturgy. See Samuel Thykoottam, The Mother of God in the Syriac Tradition (Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1989), 17.
³ Clement M. Henze, Mother of Perpetual Help, anonymous English translation (unpublished), 19. I obtained this translation from the Fr. Carl Hoegerl at the Redemptorist headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. Quotations which appear in this dissertation have been examined against the published Latin version: Clement Henze, Mater de Perpetuo Succursu: Prodigiosae Iconis Marialis ita nuncupatae monographia (Bonn: Collegium Josephinum, 1926).
In the Virgin of the Passion icon, one angel hovers to the right of Mary with a cross, the other to the left of her with a lance and sponge. The theme of the Passion, alluded to in so many icons of Mary and the Christ child, is here made explicit – a “ripening” of themes hitherto implied. The Virgin offers her thumb to the Christ child, which he gently grasps. Christ looks to the angel with the cross, seemingly unaware of its meaning. The knowing, heavy eyes of Mary, which engage the viewer, betray that she might. Christ displays the upturned sole of his foot, and his sandal – which John the Baptist would dare not loosen – dangles. Though most recognizable in its western formulation, (Fig. 1) the roots of the type, theologically and iconographically, are unmistakably Byzantine (Fig. 2 and 3). It is the goal of this dissertation to explore these Eastern origins, to trace the development of the type, and to uncover new dimensions of original meaning in what is now a globalized image.

From the outset of this investigation, the search for a single Ur image that explains all the others will be abandoned. In this I follow more recent studies, which forego the hunt for an unquestioned original, instead allowing images “to be understood positively and directly, rather than as the reflection of something else.” Too little of Byzantine art has survived to assume that the existing examples of the Virgin of the Passion constitute an accurate record of the icon’s singular derivation. And yet, dimensions of the type’s original context – political, liturgical, and theological - can be discerned. The icon type

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6 According to Otto Demus, the number of surviving works of Byzantine art “surely does not amount to more than one percent – and probably less – of the total production.” Otto Demus, Byzantine Art and the West, (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 3.
arose from the twelfth century Komnenian art of the Byzantine world, that last great artistic effusion before the sack of Constantinople in 1204, from which the Empire would never fully recover. This backdrop has been insufficiently emphasized in previous studies of the image. Consequently, the devotional and theological currents of Komnenian art will occupy much of this investigation.

After appearing first in Cyprus and repeatedly in the Balkans, the Virgin of the Passion type was popularized as a portable icon in fifteenth century Venetian Crete to meet a growing demand for icons in the maniera Graeca – tokens perhaps of an Empire that had finally collapsed in 1453. In the nineteenth century, a version of the image (Fig. 1) was further popularized again under the aegis of the Redemptorist Order of priests, who were personally directed by Pope Pius IX to spread the icon around the world. Hence, major shrines replicating the most famous Virgin of the Passion, held at the Church of St. Alphonsus Ligouri in Rome (Fig. 4 and 5), are scattered throughout the globe: Brooklyn, Curitiba, Manila, Singapore. Lesser churches and schools devoted to this particular image are frankly innumerable, such that it has been called “perhaps the most popular religious icon of the twentieth century,”7 and possibly of the present century as well. The icon’s significance is gauged by the fact that two prominent examples can be found adjacent to two of the most famous Marian icons in eastern and western Christianity respectively. The Church of St. Alphonsos is just a few blocks from the Salvator Populi Romani icon at Santa Maria Maggiore (Fig. 6); and an equal distance from the famous Axion Estin icon in the Protaton on Mt. Athos lies a chapel dedicated to a miracle-

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working example of the Virgin of the Passion, attached to the Koutloumousiou Monastery (Figs. 7, 8, 9). The Virgin of the Passion, obviating themes of suffering and loss, functions as an ever-present shadow to more traditional images of Mary.

The Issue of a Name

The focus on one particular type in this dissertation was prompted by Hans Belting, who suggested that art history has “tended to overestimate the personal contribution of individual painters and to underestimate the role of given types, which artists reproduced rather than invented.” Similarly, David Freedberg writes that “The study of copies… remains one of the great tasks of the history of images.” And yet, the very possibility of studying one particular type is immediately problematized by an important question: What can it be called? In a seminal article on the Virgin of the Passion, Mirjana Tatić-Djurić begins by admitting: “in n’existe point un type fixé sous cette appellation.” It is therefore necessary to determine whether or not the Greek title Παναγία του Πάθους (literally “All Holy One of the Passion,” here translated “Virgin of the Passion”), can

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8 The two icons – the “Dreaded Protection” and the Axion Estin, are linked processionally. On the Monday after Easter, the Axion Estin is carried forward to Koutloumousi and returned that evening. The next day, the “Dreaded Protection” icon returns the favor, and is carried to the Protaton and then returned. R. M. Dawkins, The Monks of Athos (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), 206-207.


10 David Freedberg, The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 121. Freedberg’s and Belting’s calls have been answered in studies such as Salus populi romani : die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter (Weinheim: VCH Acta Humaniora, 1990), Beth Williamson’s Madonna of Humility or Robert Maniura’s Pilgrimage to Images in the Fifteenth Century : the origins of the cult of Our Lady of Częstochowa (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2004). But a monograph of this type studying a uniquely Byzantine image is rarer than we might suppose.

even be used to describe this type, especially as the type is most well known globally by a different title, *Mater de Perpetuo Succursu*, the “Mother of Perpetual Help.”

In truth, the icon has many names. The type is frequently depicted in Byzantium with the accompanying name *Amolyntos* (Spotless or Immaculate), which may be associated with the basilica of the Virgin ‘Undeﬁled,’ built in Constantinople in 1401 by Irene Palaeologina.12 To make things more complicated, terms like *Amolyntos* appear on images that are not the Virgin of the Passion, such as the Virgin of Vladimir.13 The icon also has a Russian title, *Strastnaiia* (“of the Passion”), a German designation, *Maria-hilfe*, and a French designation, *Notre Dame du bon secours*.14 Other titles appended to the icon include “Dreaded Protection,” “Chilandarini” (after the Chilandar monastery), “Our Lady of the Phillipines,” and even “The Princeton Madonna.”15 Angels hovering with the instruments of the Passion, furthermore, appear on types known as Glykophilousa, Kardiotissa, Kykotissa and Our Lady of the Angels.16 One might think going to the earliest example of the type could clarify this proliferation. But the first known instance of the Virgin of the Passion on the island of Cyprus in 1192 is by no means straightforward. Should we follow the texts associated with that particular image at the Panagia tou Arakos church in Lagoudera, the type should be called “κεχαριτωμένη”

Indeed, this titular problem is not unique to this particular type. To the frustration of art historians, icon names rarely match up to their respective images. The Russian scholar Nikodim Kondakov’s initial effort at categorizing Marian icons was comparatively straightforward. However, this iconographical analysis – the neat matching of names to types - came under criticism when André Grabar showed it to be too neat. The qualitative names given to Mary in Byzantine hymns, for example, cannot be attached to any one particular type. A single name could sometimes be used for several icons. Icon names, furthermore, are frequently associated as much with places as with “types,” as in the Pelagonitissa, named after the Pelagonia region. Marian iconography, Byzantine art historians have realized, is more complex than it first appears. One icon at Chilandar, for example, is labeled as both Eleousa and Kykottisa. The argument often made against the iconographical method – that it subordinates art to text – proves, in the case of Byzantine icons of Mary, justified.

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17 Luke 1:28. This Greek term was translated *gratia plena* (“full of grace”) in the Vulgate. For Byzantine authors such as the disciple of Michael Psellos, Theophylac, the term is less about grace than Mary’s being pleasing to God. See the discussion in Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 2009), 255-56.
It is tempting, therefore, to disregard the “Virgin of the Passion” as a modern art historical construct, and to atomize this investigation by studying images unconnected from one another. Instead, by embracing the necessarily synthetic nature of art history, I am choosing to accept the term “Virgin of the Passion,” with the full understanding that it is an art historical construction. It may be impossible to isolate one particular name for this type that was consistently employed by the Byzantines viewer, just as a field entitled “Byzantine art history,” or even the term “Virgin,” would have been alien to them.23 While the Byzantine viewer might not have consistently named the type “Virgin of the Passion,” they also did not share the historical hindsight we enjoy today. Despite its problems, “Virgin of the Passion” has come to be used in specifically Byzantine art historical discourse, and became the dominant term in Russia (Strastnaia, here translated “of the Passion.”). Of the many names for this image, it is the one that is most descriptive, that is, referring to elements of the composition (the angels with the instruments of the Passion) rather than abstract categories of Mary (Amolyntos) or geographical locations (Arakiotissa). What is more, the instruments of the passion borne by the angels are sufficiently unique to merit identifying this one particular type. It is an effective umbrella term under which various depictions of the Virgin with the angels of

22 Robin Cormack has pointed out that for the Orthodox Greek viewer she would have been “Panagia,” emphasizing her holiness and not her virginity. Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 39. Indeed she was (and is) so called in Orthodoxy even today, as oppose to “Parthenos” (Virgin). But conventions of wider historical and religious discourse have made “Virgin” a shared term that is acceptable in academic discourse. I do not use the distinctly Catholic “Our Lady,” but “Virgin” to convey this wider understanding.

23 Art is obviously not a “native term.” It does qualify, however, as a “second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as ‘language’ plays in linguistics or ‘culture’ plays in anthropology.” Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281-82.

the Passion, each of which shares a common meaning, can be grouped. A further advantage of this designation is that there can be many icon types to which we appellate “of the Passion.” A Resurrection of the Passion, for example, is possible as well, and the Virgin of the Passion is the leading type from which such variations emerge.

**Catholic Scholarship**

But perhaps the most important reason for the name “Virgin of the Passion” is because it can be distinguished from the Roman Catholic name most commonly associated with the icon, “Mother of Perpetual Help.” This is also the title of Clement Henze’s 1926 Latin monograph on the icon, *Mater de Perpetuo Succursu*. Citing the authority of both a heavenly revelation, the testimony of saints, and the encyclicals of two popes, Clement Henze defended “Mother of Perpetual Help” as the most appropriate title for the image. Henze attributed the inclusion of the instruments of the Passion to western influence, and argued for the aesthetic superiority of the icon in the Church of St. Alphonsus over against its more Byzantine variations. He was unaware of the image at Lagoudera in Cyprus, and considers the version at the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome (Fig. 1) to possibly be the oldest.

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25 Variations include “Our Lady of Perpetual Help” or “Mother of Perpetual Succor.”
26 As in note 3 above.
28 Ibid., 141-142.
29 Ibid., 143-144.
30 Ibid., 22.
31 Ibid., 29.
32 Ibid., 42.
Henze’s ambition was to produce a “scientific monograph” rather than a popular work, and he availed himself of the best art history available to him. But the Mother of Perpetual Help, in Henze’s interpretation, also became a symbol of Roman Catholic supremacy. The icon is “the heir of that singular blessing, which the Blessed Virgin is related to have given herself to the Hodegetria, so wretchedly destroyed in 1453.”

Interpreting the dangling sandal on Christ’s foot, Henze places these words on the lips of the Virgin, addressed to Orthodox Christians:

> Why, therefore, ought not all, who are united in the veneration of this same Image, be also associated in the same faith and the same obedience toward the Holy Roman Apostolic See? You behold in this Picture a sandal that is on the point of falling from the Divine Infant’s right foot. This is a warning to you of the present miserable condition, in which your Church, once so flourishing and so bound to Christ in art, is now existing. Hence return as quickly as possible to that rock upon which my Son built His universal Church.

Henze followed up his monograph with an Italian study of the icon’s wide proliferation after the Renaissance. More recently, Fabriciano Ferrero has published a Spanish study of the icon. It has the advantage of drawing on more recent Byzantine art history

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33 Ibid., iv.
34 Ibid., 11.
35 Ibid., 158. At the same time, Henze’s work illustrates a sincere and sustained ecumenical effort, anticipating the ethos of the second Vatican Council. The icon, for Henze, is a means by which “those most ancient and grand traditions of Byzantine art” have been passed to the entire world, 162. Henze would have encountered the image not only at St. Alphonsus, but also at the Oriental College in Rome, 160. He saw it to be “symbolical of the perfect ecclesiastical union between the East and the West,” 158. Of all the images of Mary, “Does any one of them seem more fitted to be the happy link between the Latin and the Greek churches, than this glorious Image of Perpetual Help?” 157. Chapter four of this dissertation intimates that Protestants (thanks to Karl Barth) might be included in this equation as well.
as well as data from the restoration of the icon at St. Alphonsus in Rome. Still, the supercessionist flavor of Henze’s study subtly persists in Ferrero’s: “The sanctuary of Crete, in which it was so venerated as the Virgin of the Passion, has been replaced by altars to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.” By titling this study the Virgin of the Passion, I aim to distinguish it from these Catholic approaches, calling attention to the icon type’s relatively neglected Byzantine beginnings. I do not aim to replicate Henze and his successors, but to provide more of the missing background, not unlike (if the analogy can be forgiven) the Protoevangelium of James gives the backstory to the Gospel of Luke. Exploring this Byzantine backdrop is only possible because of the explosion of Byzantine Marian studies in the past decades, to which we now turn.

**The State of Byzantine Marian Scholarship Today**

Bernard of Clairvaux’s words *De Mari, nunquam satis* have long been a catchphrase amongst Mariologists - one can never have too much to say about the Virgin Mary. And yet, for historians and art historians of the Byzantine world, this has not always been the case. In 1978, Byzantine historian Averil Cameron, in what has been described as a classic article, lamented the perceived lack of studies on the Virgin Mary in Byzantium,

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39 In his study of the icon Fabriciano provides an important background chapter on Byzantine art, and his inclusion of the term “Virgin of the Passion” in the original Spanish title (see note 38) indicates a new level of sensitivity not present in Henze’s work. However, Fabriciano’s approach to the Byzantine material remains very general.

40 Henze invited such an approach by beginning his study expressing his hope that later scholars would supplement his work. Clement Henze, *Mother of Perpetual Help*, v.
especially considering the rise in feminist literature. This lack was all the more surprising in view of the fact that early Byzantine history was formative for Marian theology and veneration. Since Cameron’s complaint, the situation has dramatically changed. Those interested in the Theotokos in Byzantium today may consult, among individually authored studies, Maria Vassilaki’s major catalog with an encyclopedic set of accompanying essays, all connected to the Benaki Museum’s Mother of God exhibition in the year 2000. Additional volumes of collected essays have followed in the wake of this exhibition. Attention to the cult of the Virgin Mary in the earliest years of the Byzantine Empire has also been emphasized, as evidenced by the Early Mariology Project, which has resulted in an impressive volume on that subject. And this is only to consider books exclusively devoted to the Byzantine Mary in the Greek and English speaking worlds. Should we include the output of Post-Soviet Russian scholars, the work on Byzantine images of Mary becomes genuinely staggering.

46 The Early Mariology project was begun in 2002 by Professors Pauline Allen and Leena Maria Peltomaa. The database being constructed contains all reliable Greek, Latin and Syriac texts containing references to Mary before the Council of Ephesus.
student of Byzantine Marian icons today has access to manifold resources,\textsuperscript{49} offering a variety of perspectives, and not a few contradictions.

While there are evident disadvantages to the paucity of scholarship as noted by Cameron in the 1970s, there are also disadvantages to the present super-production. Indeed, the proliferation has caused Cameron herself to comment, “I am considerably less certain about the subject now than when I originally wrote about it.”\textsuperscript{50} The flurry of publications within a short period has meant that scholars have not adequately engaged one another before publishing their ideas. The student of Marian images consequently has a good bit of sorting to do. For example, Thomas Mathews suggests that the Hodegetria icon type, due to its unique hand gesture, may have been patterned after the early cult of the lactating Isis.\textsuperscript{51} Bissera Pentcheva, however, argues that Hodegetria imagery is a post-iconoclastic phenomenon, because only after iconoclasm was the Virgin’s embrace of her son “loosened” to create the speaking, intercessory gesture of the Hodegetria.\textsuperscript{52} These interpretations seem incompatible, but the proximity of their publication (2005 and 2006 respectively) meant that neither could take into account the other’s arguments.

\textsuperscript{49} Unfortunately, this proliferation of Marian studies in Byzantium, as with many things Byzantine, can often slip the attention of the wider scholarly world. For example, a recently published encyclopedia naming itself Mary: The Complete Resource contains two chapters on Western iconography, but overlooks Byzantine iconography. Sarah Jane Boss, ed., Mary: The Complete Resource (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

\textsuperscript{50} Averil Cameron, “The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making” in Church and Mary, R.N. Swanson ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 1.

\textsuperscript{51} Thomas Mathews and Norman Muller, “Isis and Mary in early icons” in Vassilaki, Images of the Mother of God, 9.

\textsuperscript{52} Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 111.
Maximalists and Minimalists

To attempt to map the dizzying mass of scholarship on Byzantine images of Mary, I would like to propose that two Mariological “camps” currently exist. One I would call “Maximalist,” the other “Minimalist.” By suggesting such a binary I do not intend to insist that all Marian scholars must “fit” into one or the other camp; I only intend to suggest relative modes in which Marian scholarship has lately been produced – modes that are crucial to, even determinative, of scholarly conclusions. The Maximalist position is perhaps best represented by Niki Tsironis: “The honour rendered to the Virgin stresses different aspects of her being in different periods of the history of Byzantium, depending upon the questions engaging the Christological dialectic of the day.” Tsironis suggests that these themes are overlapping, continuing even when a period of particular emphasis passes. The various aspects of Byzantine Mariology “persist as constituents of the rhetoric surrounding the subject and are accentuated by additional arguments in each.” For a Maximalist Marian scholar, these strands of intertwined meaning might be devotional and theological, but they might also be imperial or straightforwardly militaristic. Mariology, for the Maximalist, involves sorting out these disparate, colorful threads of complementary or contrasting Marian themes.

Conversely, there are Minimalist Marian scholars who appear to follow a different methodology. Rather than sort out the various colorful threads of Marian themes in Byzantium, the Minimalists aim to expose an iron cable that the threads of color conceal.

53 I choose this terminology because it is a frequently cited chestnut in Mariology. See, for example, René Laurentin, The Question of Mary (London: Burns & Oates, 1965), 5-6.
55 Ibid.
“A study of the use of the verbal ‘image’ of the Theotokos in the political life of Byzantium,” explains Nike Kontrakou, “need not involve an examination of the theological aspect of the arguments employed… even though these arguments were basically theological in nature.”  Kontrakou is upfront in presenting her Marian methodology: “Our interest lies not in whether they accord with Orthodox doctrine, but in how they were exploited in the promotion of a specific [imperial] policy.”  The Minimalist embarks on an illuminating reduction of Marian image to one particular and ubiquitous concept: political power.

The differences between the Maximalist and Minimalist camps of Byzantine Marian scholarship are intensified when examining their strongest representatives. Alexei Lidov is a fair representative of a particularly strong Maximalist position. Speaking for the above-mentioned proliferation of post-Soviet Russian scholarship on Mary, specifically miraculous images of Mary, Lidov is direct. Scholarly progress has been explicitly impaired by “scientific” approaches that question the authenticity of miracles. Russian scholars has been able to advance rapidly because they understand that miraculous images of the Virgin, alongside the New Testament miracles of Christ, are a “matter of faith, and cannot be demonstrated to atheists.”  But this is not to relinquish the historical

56 Nike Kontrakou, “Use and abuse of the ‘image’ of the Theotokos in the political life of Byzantium (with special reference to the iconoclastic period)” in Vassilaki, Images of the Mother of God, 77ff. Needless to say, Kontrakou’s political focus is completely acceptable considering the purpose of her article. I use her as an example of a Minimalist Marian, however, because of her choice to focus on the political at the expense of the theological. As I have examined the field, I have noticed this political focus – which is completely legitimate – spills over into non-political elements and becomes the chief, even overriding, interpretive lens in exploring an issue.

57 Ibid., 78.

record to the realm of faith: “In our view, the only positive approach is to recognize any miracle recorded by written or oral testimony as a historical and cultural fact.”

Conversely, Marie José Mondzain offers an especially strong Minimalist Mariology. In considering the icon of Mary *perivleptos*, Mondzain translates the difficult term in a way that serves her interpretive purpose well: “The ubiquity of the Virgin’s gaze, as the icon’s title indicates—*perivleptos*—she who sees all around her—generates the ubiquity of the ecclesial gaze, which seeks to reign over heaven and earth in their entirety, and which overflows whatever might impose limits on human kingdoms.” Hoping to undermine the modern “optocracy” which was, according to Mondzain, inaugurated by Byzantine Iconophiles, Mondzain goes on to make an almost evangelistic appeal to her readers: “It is up to us to be done with belief and its ‘holocausts.’”

To say the least, in scholarship of the Virgin Mary in Byzantium, passions run high. A survey of Byzantine studies of the Virgin Mary presents us with scholars who take

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59 Lidov is far too careful a scholar to be suggesting that all miracles be accepted at face value. In the same article, he refers to the corroborating process of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which entails a degree of suspicion. For a different approach see Brad S. Gregory, “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion,” special issue, *History and Theory*, 45 (December, 2006).


61 Mondzain’s translation of *perivleptos* is problematic. We are fortunate not to have to speculate about the definition of this term, for a Middle Byzantine author, Michael Psellos, defines it for us as “celebrated,” in the sense of admired by all observers. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, III.15, in *Imperatori di Bisanzio*, ed. Impellizzeri, 1, 94; English trans. in *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, tr. Sewter, 74. Quoted in Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 236.


63 Ibid., 225. By quoting the last sentence of Mondzain’s book, my intention is not to dismiss it. Her fundamental insight—that the Byzantine decision for icons continues to shape our culture—is not to be casually dismissed. Where the problem lies, from my perspective, is in her evident frustration with Iconophile success.

64 One can see why John Haldon, surveying competing approaches to the study of Byzantine history in the 1980s, insisted that one’s approaches be presented at the beginning of scholarly pursuits. See Haldon’s
miracles as fact and who resist belief-centered accounts. As it happens, it may be that the debate between Maximalist and Minimalist Marians is a good thing for the study of her images in Byzantium, provided the two camps stay in conversation. The Maximalist may be tempted, at certain junctures, to downplay a political motivation or to avoid an instance where Marian images serve as tools of political control. Likewise the Minimalist can be reminded, on occasion, that there is more to Marian imagery than what Alexander Kazhdan’s called (not approvingly), a “hieroglyph of political struggle.” Maximalists and Minimalists can keep each other in check, resulting in a more honest appraisal of the past.

**DISSERTATION OUTLINE**

**Chapter One**

In the spirit of this exchange, my first chapter is a Maximalist critique of Minimalist Mariology. The concept of “power” has permeated Byzantine art history’s most prominent book covers and museum exhibitions, including *Icons and Power*, *Faith and Power*, *The Power of Images*, or *Sacred Power, Sacred Images*. Such pervasive use is remarkable considering that the term “power” is rarely explicitly discussed in the books.

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67 David Morgan exemplified such an approach when he argued that each of these approaches has its value, leading us beyond an easily deconstructible “artistic hagiography,” and the converse belief that “the arts are used by those in power in order to remain there.” See Morgan’s *Visual Piety: A history and theory of popular religious images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xii-xiii.

67 Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*; Helen Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power 1261-1557*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*; Gary Vikan, *Sacred Power, Sacred Images* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003). I do not mean to suggest that all these texts use the same methodology; they are each, furthermore, frequently penetrating and invaluable texts. They do, however, share the same marketing strategy, by focusing on the term “power.”
just mentioned.\textsuperscript{68} What is more, should one turn to the leading theoretical textbooks that introduce scholars to the key terms of the discipline of art history, the otherwise ubiquitous term “power” is strangely absent.\textsuperscript{69}

Possibly, the term “power” is employed to gain a wider appeal for the relatively isolated field of Byzantine art history. It is a common, almost formulaic tendency of Byzantinists to complain that they are theoretically behind the times, a deficiency that has lead to repeated confessions,\textsuperscript{70} apologies,\textsuperscript{71} and recommendations.\textsuperscript{72} The concept of power is profoundly attractive as a means of signaling to the broader academic community that the isolated field of Byzantine art history is of interest. “It is easy to see,” explained Henry Maguire in the 1990s, “why the concept of the power of images has been embraced with such enthusiasm by the new, postmodern phase of art history, for the idea that images

\textsuperscript{68} For a different use of the term power as a guide to Marian images and literature, see Sarah Jane Boss, \textit{Empress and Handmaid} (London: Cassell, 2003), which contains a tidy appendix on the use of the term power in the Frankfurt School and how it informs her study.


\textsuperscript{70} Cyril Mango, for example, remarks that in the study of Byzantine architecture, “theoretical problems have gone largely unnoticed… There is a focus on ‘extremely meticulous archaeological analysis of buildings coupled with a certain reserve as regards the ‘big questions.’” Cyril Mango, “Approaches to Byzantine Architecture,” \textit{Mugarnas}, Vol. 8, K. A. C. Creswell and His Legacy, (1991), 41.

\textsuperscript{71} Paul Lemerle laments that the methodology of Byzantinists lags half a century behind comparable fields, and called for new approaches. Paul Lemerle, XV \textit{Congrès des études byzantines. Séances de cloture.} Athènes, 11e (Septembre 1976), quoted in Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, \textit{People and power in Byzantium: an introduction to modern Byzantine studies} (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 2. The introduction to the latter remains a helpful encapsulation of this perennial dilemma, which – any witness of the heated debates at a meeting of Byzantinists can attest – is in no way resolved.

\textsuperscript{72} Glenn Peers recommends “curators need to start thinking beyond devotional parameters and engage exciting ideas, even modern ideas, found in the production, viewing, and collecting of Byzantine art.” Glenn Peers, Review of \textit{Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art}, Maria Vassilaki, ed., College Art Association online review (January 2004). Anthony Cutler makes a plea for a more frank approach to sexuality and feminism, “if the field is to survive.” Anthony Cutler, Review of \textit{Byzantine Women and Their World} by Ioli Kalavrezou, College Art Association online review (September 2003). I will be responding to these recommendations in later chapters, seeking to address Terry Eagleton’s query: “We are still trading on the past - and this in a world which has changed dramatically since Foucault and Lacan first settled to their type-writers. What kind of fresh thinking does the new era demand?” Terry Eagleton, \textit{After Theory} (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 2.
interact with people gives a useful measure of moral respectability to art historical research, removing it from charges of isolated antiquarianism, and related it, instead, to societal concern.”  

One result of this “postmodern phase” of art history, which is no longer new, is that a vague concept of “power” has set a permanent grey overcast in Byzantine skies. Whether one is discussing the early fourth century, when Constantine I—whatever may have been his motivations—was establishing a new imperial capital; or the mid-fifteenth century, when Constantine XI desperately sought to ensure that capital’s survival, the climate is always the same. Power—and only power—is forever the “real story” of Byzantine art. I do not seek not to replace this vision with an equal and opposite distortion— to posit that Byzantium was one long sunny day. Instead I wish to point out some of the variety and dynamism of the clouds; the occasional points where they part, permitting different themes to break in. While the exclusive focus on the concept of power has led to scholarly insights that it would be churlish to ignore, it also has acute limitations. A similar debate in regard to icons of Christ was played out between Thomas Mathews and Peter Brown. Mathews suggested that art historians projected imperial associations onto early images of Christ. Brown pointed to the need for caution in assuming the motivations of previous generations of scholars, and to the risks of projecting different, more modern ideals onto images of Christ. See Brown’s review of Mathew’s The Emperor Mystique in The Art Bulletin, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Sept., 1995), 499-50. Brown’s retort is necessary reading, and is a caution against modern emotive projections. But Mathew’s point— that scholars have tended to assume that images of Christ were imperial when they were not—endures, even if he overplayed his hand. There is much to learn from this debate.

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Byzantium, what was understood by this term shifted.” My first chapter focuses on that shift. The cult of the Virgin indeed “supported the idea of empire in Byzantium,” and no serious scholar would dispute this. But marshaling resources native to Byzantium, my first chapter demonstrates that the Virgin could “support” the idea of its collapse as well. Possibly the finest illustration of this Byzantine dynamic is the Virgin of the Passion.

Chapter Two

My second chapter grapples with a different set of scholarly problems: Those of art history, a discipline that has yet to fully acknowledge its subterranean Byzantine roots. A brief survey of the state of research in Byzantine and Renaissance imagery will help set the stage for this chapter’s concerns. In the last century, Byzantine art historians have permanently altered our understanding of neglected Eastern contributions to Italian art. Recently studied Byzantine frescoes and the cache of icons at St. Catherine’s Monastery have revealed to us what Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) – the father of art

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75 Liz James, Review of Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium, by Bissera Pentcheva, The Art Bulletin (June 2007). Glenn Peers similarly asserts that “because the book deals with imperial power, it never really addresses the converse, the relationship of Mary's icons with the powerless. Surely, Marian devotion amongst individuals or at different social strata from the elite worked with and against imperial expressions of that devotion.” Glenn Peers, Review of Icons and Power, by Bissera Pentcheva, The Medieval Review, October 2006 (accessed online). Peers names two essays in Derek Krueger’s Byzantine Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) that shed light on this non-imperial “lay” perspective: Sharon Gerstel’s “The Layperson in the Church” and Alice Mary-Talbot’s “The Devotional Life of Laywomen.”

76 An intriguing example of such a shift comes in the fifth century, when the imperial statues which were placed atop honorific columns were gradually replaced by the cross. See Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjitryphonos, eds., Architecture as Icon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 12.

77 Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 11. This book has received wide attention outside the field of Byzantine art history, and recently earned the 2010 John Nicholas Brown Prize from the Medieval Academy of America. The book's wide exposure is part of the reason I analyze it at length in the first chapter. Pentcheva, it should be noted, has moved onto much different terrain with The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010).

78 “Now, thanks especially to the publication of icons from Mount Sinai, and the cleaning and restoration of numerous icons preserved in churches in Greece, we have a wealth of Byzantine icons undreamed of by earlier researchers.” Henry Maguire, “Byzantine Art History in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century,” in Laiou and Maguire, Byzantium: A World Civilization, 122. Similarly, Thomas Mathews writes that the
history - could not have known: Byzantine painters in fact anticipated Cimabue and Giotto’s innovations centuries beforehand. Hans Belting’s *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, “the most influential book published in the fields of medieval and byzantine art history in the last fifty years,” effectively explored the Byzantine images that the category of “art” had submerged. But Belting’s book has led to a lingering dissatisfaction, articulated in a series of scholarly protestations, for Belting took something for granted: The legitimacy of Giorgio Vasari’s Renaissance construction. Belting intentionally ended his survey of images with the inauguration of the “era of art,” only to continue in the nineteenth century when that era showed signs of decline. Accordingly, critics are awaiting (to alter Belting’s subtitle) *A History of the Image During the Era of Art*.

Publication of the Sinai icons “lifted a veil on a phase of painting history that had been virtually unknown.” Thomas Matthews “Early Icons of the Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai” in *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai*, Robert S. Nelson and Kristen Collins, eds. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2006), 39. Hans Belting is less optimistic. He suggests that such discoveries put Byzantine art history at a “new starting point;” but until these images are fully analyzed, which they have not been, “nothing definitive can be said.” Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 26. Only the first volume of Weitzmann’s multiple projected volumes specifically on the icons has been produced. Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons, Volume I*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). This dissertation avails itself of some of the unpublished material, many of which are Virgins of the Passion.

To say this, of course, is not to denigrate undeniable Tuscan accomplishments, but only to contextualize them. It will not do to correct Vasari by ignoring the art he rightfully praised.

Frank Fehrenbach, review of *Anachronic Renaissance* by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, College Art Association online review (March 2011).

Stephen Campbell nicely summarizes this general outlook: “Even powerful revisionist accounts from a medievalist perspective which seek to resist the perspective of Vasari – such as Hans Belting’s idea of the ‘era of the image’ and an ‘era of art,’ fall rather neatly into a Vasarian Paradigm.” Stephen Campbell, “Vasari’s Renaissance and Its Alternatives,” in *Renaissance Theory*, James Elkins and Robert Williams, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 50.

According to Belting, “If one viewed my work as a triptych, then the history of Renaissance and post-Renaissance art would be the middle part. But the Renaissance and its immediate aftermath is the period most fully studied in art history, and thus may be allowed to be the dispensible [sic] part of my project.” Hans Belting, *The Invisible Masterpiece*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8.
This project is underway, as scholars realize that the flood of Byzantine-style images was not impeded by Vasari, but only ignored by him. Visual Studies, or Bildwissenschaft (as opposed to Kunstgeschichte), are two art historical dilations that have attempted to take hitherto ignored imagery into account. Pushing David Freedberg’s insights in The Power of Images further, art historians today are attempting to “de-regulate” the flow of art history, revealing how images, especially miraculous ones, were very prevalent through and beyond the Renaissance. In order to counterbalance Vasari’s neglect of “Greek” art, Anthony Cutler explains that “Everywhere Cennini and his contemporaries looked they saw the art that we call medieval.” Robert Maniura asserts that the Renaissance “is characterized not so much by a rebirth of the antique as by a rejuvenation of established ‘medieval’ tradition.” For Renaissance art historians Christopher Wood and Alexander Nagel, “[Icons] played a catalyzing role in the development of

84 The metaphor is also used by Didi-Huberman: “The discipline [of art history] sought to arrogate to itself the prestige of its object of study; by grounding it intellectually, it sought to regulate it… Art was acknowledged less as a thinking object – which it had always been – than as an object of knowledge, all genitive senses conflated.” Georges Didi-Huberman, Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005), 82.
Renaissance art, and yet the importation of the icons has never been fully integrated into accounts of the art of this period.”

Conversely, work is taking place on the other side of Vasari’s artificial divide between medieval imagery and Renaissance art. Just as Renaissance art historians are showing the icon in the Renaissance, so medievalists are showing how a concept of “art” was operative before the Renaissance, even if this understanding was different from Vasari’s. “It is not possible,” asserted Henry Maguire, “to divorce the charm and beauty of a work of [medieval] art from the context of its use.” For the Byzantine thinker Pseudo-Dionysios, “physical beauty is a symbol of spiritual beauty;” hence for medieval viewers, the appreciation of beauty in both religious and secular imagery “can be a step on the path to God.” Jeffrey Hamburger, identifying a blind spot in art history’s anthropological turn, has produced impressive evidence for recently underemphasized aesthetic and stylistic concerns in the Middle Ages. Bissera Pentcheva has shown how artful manipulation of surfaces was a chiefly Byzantine concern, and Myrto Hatzaki has

produced a book on Byzantine views of beauty with a focus on the male body. In sum, flash floods of “images” occurred long after the Renaissance, and the aesthetic fields of “art” were cultivated long before it. The discipline of art history is trying to imagine the regularly flowing, and regularly flooding history of art long before the construction of Vasari’s Renaissance dam.

The Virgin of the Passion type can contribute to this restructuring. Whereas Vasari imagined medieval Greek artistic stasis and Renaissance invention, the history of the Virgin of Passion illustrates the opposite: Byzantine liveliness and invention, followed by relatively “static” repetition of the type during the Renaissance. To make this case, I focus on the artist who gave us the first known Virgin of the Passion and his Cypriot context: Theodore Apsevdis, a name that literally means “truthful,” or “he who does not lie.” By examining a Byzantine artist whose name should be far more familiar than it is, I attempt to generate new resources for understanding Byzantine artistic agency. Moving from Byzantine innovation to Renaissance repetition, the Virgin of the Passion type gives us traditional art history in reverse, and thereby contributes to current attempts to rethink the discipline.

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94 Because the English pronunciation “Apseudes” would be awkward, I am choosing to spell it with the Modern Greek pronunciation, *ApsevDEIS*, but to retain the spelling Apsevdis, also used by scholars such as Sophocles Sophocles, “Le Peintre Theodoros Apsevdis et son entourage, Chypre 1183 et 1192,” in Guntram Koch, ed., *Byzantinische Malerei: Bildprogramme – Ikonographie – Stil* (Wiesbaden, 2000). I am indebted to a conversation with Charalambos Bakirtzis regarding the “he who does not lie” translation of “Apsevdis.”
Chapter Three

Having grappled with two obstacles to a more complete understanding of the Virgin of the Passion - Minimalist Mariology and traditional art history - I then move towards a new interpretation of the image, one that cuts against recent interpretations. “Mary's chief traits,” describes one observer of this icon type, “are the passive abilities to console and nurture.”95 However, when the type’s original context is understood, the Virgin of the Passion emerges as a prominent depiction not of passivity, but of active female agency in the Byzantine world. The recovery of female agency, that “first casualty” of poststructuralist gender studies,96 is now an established frontier of art historical research. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard have argued against what they call the “postmodern precept” which shows women to be under constant oppression with only a few moments of intermittent relief.97 Attempts to use the thought of Freud, Lacan and Saussure to understand art history, has only “reified existing power structures… the result has been the steady erosion and suppression of an activist, reformist feminism within an increasingly theoretical and largely masculinist postmodernism.”98 Recent feminist art historians have sought to change this, showing the ways women have been present throughout history in a variety of ways that escaped the notice of earlier generations of feminist scholars.99 This chapter seeks to provide a missing Byzantine element to these

96 Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 1. The volume is the third in a series by the same authors, beginning with Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany (1982) and The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History (1992).
97 Ibid. The postmodern precept, according to the editors, is the belief “that the circulation of power in society is not natural but culturally manipulated and directed,” 1.
98 Ibid., 2. See also Joan Hoff, “The Pernicious Effects of Poststructuralism,” in Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed, Diane Bell and Renate Klein, eds. (North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1996), 393-412.
99 Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, Reclaiming Female Agency, 3.
art historical discussions, going beyond the general concept of female agency to make a specific case for Mary as priest in the Byzantine world.

There is, however, a strange convergence of obstacles to such an investigation, from traditionalists and feminists respectively. The Catholic scholar René Laurentin wrote a two-volume work on the subject of Mary’s priesthood, in which he both provides abundant evidence for Mary as priest, and counters what he considers a dangerous confusion between Mary and the priestly hierarchy. Laurentin concludes that only men can represent the strong, sacrificial, ministerial priesthood of Christ, an outlook which, until recently, was assumed in Orthodoxy as well. Similarly, the feminist

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100 Despite a great deal of work on gender in Byzantine history and art history, there is no exclusively Byzantine chapter in the Broude and Garrard volumes mentioned above (note 96). For an extensive compilation of secondary and primary sources, see the Dumbarton Oaks Bibliography on Women in Byzantium, accessed May 10, 2010, http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/women_in_byzantium.html.


102 Ibid., 200. Mary’s priestly acts are “less specifically sacrificial than the acts of Christ or the sacramental priest. They are essentially human, personal, interior. They do not constitute a sacrifice in the strong and plain sense of the term… [Mary] does not have a positive role in the accomplishment of the sacrifice.” Ibid., 119. A more recent articulation of Laurentin’s thesis by Br. John M. Samaha is in agreement: “She is not a priest, but is fully priestly, just as she is not a redeemer, but is fully Co-Redemptrix.” And yet, Samaha appears to go slightly beyond Laurentin. According to Samaha, Mary goes beyond the priesthood of the laity, who offer themselves in union with Christ. “But they do not participate in it by immolating the Divine Victim, an act possible only for the ordained minister of Christ at the time of consecration. It is this royal priesthood in the highest degree that must be attributed to Mary.” Nevertheless, Samaha argues that Mary is only an associa Christi, an “associate of Christ.” John M Samaha, “Mary’s Unique priestly role: Mother and associate of Christ the priest,” Homiletic & Pastoral Review, October 2010, 20.

103 Ibid., 102.

104 For the traditional position, see Gennadios Limouris, ed., The Place of Women in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women: International Symposium, Rhodes, Greece, 30 October-7 November 1988 (Katerini: Tertios Publications, 1992), 150-153. More recently, however, the most widely recognized name in the Anglophone Orthodox world, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, has shifted his earlier opinion on the issue, stating that he finds the “iconic” argument against women’s ordination – that only a male priest can signify Christ – to no longer be convincing. “What I would plead is that we Orthodox should regard the matter as essentially an open question.” Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2000), 50. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom has expressed similar opinions, based in part on Mary’s role in priesthood. See his preface to Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, The Ministry of Women in the Church (Redondo Beach: Oakwood Publications, 1991), p. xiii-xiv.
scholar Nancy Jay has explored priesthood through a feminist lens, concluding that the exclusion of women from priesthood and sacrifice is a necessary outcome of patriarchy that extends across cultures. The traditional Catholic priest René Laurentin and the feminist Nancy Jay, are in agreement. They both see women’s relation to “strong” sacrifice as impossible, albeit for different reasons. Likewise, C.S. Lewis, in an influential article arguing against the priesthood of women, suggests that “Never, in so far as I know, in all [the Middle Ages] was anything remotely resembling a sacerdotal office attributed to [Mary].” Similarly, Cleo McNelly Kearns – very indebted to Nancy Jay - suggests that while Mary is associated with the sacrament, “Mary does not act, even in the imaginary, as its agent or celebrant, nor is she depicted as elevating, blessing, or breaking the elements of bread and wine as a priest might do.” Both such perspectives form a blockade against the idea of Mary as priest.

I aim to challenge this unlikely alignment, producing new evidence for Mary’s association with sacrifice. So far as I am aware, none of the scholars who have explored this subject have included a serious and detailed investigation of the Byzantine visual record. Indeed, most investigations of Mary as priest generally rush past the Byzantine art historical record en route to the admittedly tantalizing images of Mary as priest in the

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105 Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xxiii. Sacrifice, for Jay, is a male “remedy for having been born of a woman,” and male priesthood is an attempt to rival the female womb. According to Jay, the taboo against women - especially mothers and menstruating women - from male rituals of sacrifice is because such rituals are intended to rival them, making strong female priesthood impossible. Jay unambiguously asserts that the creation of ritual space is “always political action involving struggles for power, including power over women’s reproductive capacities,” Ibid., xxvi –xxvii.

106 C.S. Lewis, “Priestesses in the Church?” in *God in the Dock*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann’s, 1970), 234.


108 Among these studies, Byzantine art history is referenced most extensively by Kearns, who begins her book, with a meditation on the Praying Virgin from the Church of the Perivleptos in Ohrid, and draws on Pentcheva’s *Icons and Power* near the end. Ibid., 1-4 and 271-277.
West. But when Byzantine art history is investigated, the case for Mary as priest increases, and does not so neatly fit the gender schema of René Laurentin\(^ {109} \) (Fig. 10) or the particular feminist outlook of Nancy Jay. Drawing on a twelfth-century Eucharistic controversy, I argue that the Virgin of the Passion is one such instance. Within the highly complex Lagoudera fresco program, I argue that Mary has a role in the upward Eucharistic vector of the *naos*. However, as the image is isolated from its original fresco context, new pressure is placed upon the Virgin of the Passion type. The result is that the image, in its later and most popular form, further accentuates this surprising priestly role. I contextualize this interpretation with another tour through the Byzantine Empire, isolating additional textual and art historical moments where Mary can be understood as priest. Orthodox and secular scholars alike have pointed out that the high view of Mary in the Byzantine world has been a smokescreen for patriarchy.\(^ {111} \) Yet a deeper exploration of the Marian tradition reveals that Mary in Byzantium can also be a “window into a world of different potentialities within the Christian story.”\(^ {112} \)


\(^{110}\) Laurentin’s grid can be compared to Maximus the Confessor’s assertion that in Mary, “the division between man and woman is surpassed.” *De ambiguis*, PG 91, p. 1308-09. Quoted in Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, 207.


\(^{112}\) Tina Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate: A Gynocentric Refiguration of Marian Symbolism in Engagement with Luce Irigaray* (CCSRG Monograph Series, 1999), 75. Beattie continues: “[W]omen theologians must deconstruct Marian symbols from within, accepting that there is no other symbolic
Annunciation is obviously an important event, and most of the scholarly controversy has swarmed around interpretation of this motif. But the Virgin of the Passion, the “second Annunciation” a clearer instance of female agency, deserves attention as well, especially in the present.

Chapter Four

My final chapter, entitled Virgin of Predestination, focuses on the angels bearing the instruments of the Passion above Mary and Christ. Having laid the groundwork for the image’s Eucharistic interpretation in the previous chapter, I here offer a new interpretation of the Hetoimasia (the “Prepared Throne”). This chapter suggests that this frequent motif in Byzantine art can be understood not only eschatologically, but protologically. That is, the Hetoimasia at Lagoudera not only depicts the Judgment to come -the motif’s traditional interpretation - but it also depicts God’s provision for the world before the world was made. When the Byzantine fresco program is understood in this new way, it is the Virgin of the Passion, and its multiple iconographical cousins, that take on new layers of theological depth, with interesting ecumenical implications. In short, this constitutes an argument that the history of the doctrine of predestination, a veritable coliseum of verbal disputation, has been incomplete. When visual evidence is

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114 Revelation 13:8, for example, refers to the “lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.”
taken into account, specifically the Lagoudera fresco program and the Virgin of the Passion, the record of historical theology can be altered.

Theological interpretation of art such as this, I believe, is consistent with the latest developments in the field of Byzantine art history. Hans Belting’s initial thoughts on the Virgin of the Passion were that it is as “complex as an entire sermon,”\(^1\) which he later revised to suggest that such images represent “on a single panel the whole of a theological system.”\(^2\) Likewise, Charles Barber summarized Byzantine Iconophile thought by suggesting that the Byzantines “elevated the status of the work of art to the realm of theology and effectively cast the artist in the role of theologian.”\(^3\) Perhaps theography would be a better term for this phenomenon than theology, because the Byzantine Greek term γράφειν is used for both writing and drawing.\(^4\) But if “the ‘logos’ of ‘theology’ may be taken in a wider sense than that usually at work in the verbally dominated Christian tradition,”\(^5\) then viewing Byzantine art as theology is possible.

\(^3\) Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 138.
\(^4\) See the discussion in Liz James, ed., *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, 9.
For the Byzantines, argues Robin Cormack, “icons were accepted as a mode through which one reaches closer to an explanation of God than any verbal definition could ever do.”

Likewise, Robin Jensen suggests that art in early Christianity “serves as a highly sophisticated, literate, and even eloquent mode theological expression.” Slobodan Ćurčić has similarly concluded that the Byzantine church was “a symbolic summa of the Christian universe as a reflection of the invisible, uncontainable God.”

“The theological view,” writes Clemena Antonova, “needs to be combined with visual studies in order to address the problem of how a visual image can intuit a theological dogma, analyzable in conceptual terms.” By seeing the Virgin of the Passion as visual theology, I seek to make this kind of contribution; uncovering new dimensions of original Byzantine depth are discovered in what is now a global icon type. I aim thereby, in each of the following chapters, to “defrost” the Byzantine theological nutrients that are freeze-dried into the mass-produced visual package of the Mother of Perpetual Help.

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123 Clemena Antonova, Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 166.

124 Beth Williamson explains the resurgence of “meaning” in the most recent art history, after an emphasis on its inevitable multiplicity: “The fact that many different meanings and readings are possible depending upon the identity and status of different viewers, and the different contexts in which the image has been seen does not mean that the image has no meaning.” Beth Williamson, The Madonna of Humility, 7.
CHAPTER ONE: THE VIRGIN AND POWER

χαίρε, κλίμαξ ἐπουράνιε, δι᾽ ἦς κατέβη ὁ θεός
Hail, celestial ladder by which God descended.

“Byzantium always knew how to be humble in the end…
even if it boasted about this to the Barbarians.” - Hans Georg Beck

“Byzantine cultural influence expanded almost in
inverse proportion to its political strength.” - Judith Herrin

Introduction

To read Byzantine authors on Mary is often, though certainly not always, to encounter the
relativization of power. In the mind of the fourth century poet-theologian Ephrem the
Syrian, for example, Mary functions as does a modern electrical transformer through
whom power is not amplified, but reduced.

A wonder is Your mother: the Lord entered her
And became a servant; he entered able to speak
And he became silent in her; he entered her thundering
And his voice grew silent; he entered Shepherd of all;
A lamb he became in her; he emerged bleating.
The womb of Your mother overthrew the orders:
The Establisher of all entered a Rich One;
He emerged poor. He entered her a Lofty One;
He emerged humble. He entered her a Radiant One,
And he put on a despised hue and emerged.
He entered, a mighty warrior, and put on fear…

125 Max Weber’s definition of power is a helpful touchstone: “‘Power’ (Macht) is the probability that one
actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless
of the basis on which the probability rests.” For Weber, power’s “sociologically amorphous” qualities led
him to use the term “domination” (Herrschaft) which implied the probability that a command given by
someone in power would be obeyed. Max Weber, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive
Sociology, Volume One (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 53. However, when studying the
Byzantine world, it is important to consider the disruptive dynamics of heavenly “power,” to be examined
in this chapter.

Ephrem’s poetry reflects a frequent theme in Byzantine authors regarding Mary and power. This, in turn, echoes the Magnificat, where a powerless Jewish maiden sings, “He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and the meek.”\textsuperscript{127} Mary in Byzantine thought is many things; among them she is a paragon of humility. This chapter will argue that such an insight – the humility of Mary and her connection not only to political victory, but to defeat – has been a blind spot in some of the some of the most prominent recent scholarship on Byzantine art. To draw attention to this underemphasized aspect of Mary in Byzantium, I will focus on the political context of the first Virgin of the Passion in Cyprus. After touring the Byzantine Empire to explore how Mary’s relationship to power is expressed iconographically, I will end with the Virgin of the Passion as well. My aim is to show that the complexities of Mary’s relationship to power in Byzantium are well expressed by the Virgin of the Passion, making the icon more paradigmatic than has previously been assumed.

**Komnenian Cyprus**

Well into the eleventh century, Cyprus was but a “backward province of little importance” for the Byzantines.\textsuperscript{128} Yet with the advent of the Crusades, Cyprus emerged as a crucial buffer state between the Islamic and Byzantine worlds. The Emperor himself sent his direct relations to Cyprus as governors.\textsuperscript{129} The creation of Latin states in Syria and Palestine brought an economic surge to the well-placed island,\textsuperscript{130} causing Venetians

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{Luke 1:52.}
\footnote{Peter W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2-3.}
\footnote{Athanasios Papageorghiou, *Icons of Cyprus* (Nicosia: Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus, 1992) 11.}
\footnote{Peter Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 2-3.*}
\end{footnotesize}
to acquire trading rights on Cyprus in 1126. Cyprus’s prominence also led to new monastic foundations.\(^{131}\) The island’s rising significance is illustrated by the fact that one of Constantinople’s most treasured icons, an Eleousa presumably painted by St. Luke, was given to Cyprus, where it became the Kykottissa, named after the mountain of Kykkos and the monastery upon it.\(^{132}\)

With the importation of icons came the importation of painters. The reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) ushered in a new artistic era for Cyprus, which began to mirror the art of the Byzantine capital. Nothing else can account for the quality of production on the island in the eleventh and twelfth century.\(^{133}\) This was interrupted in the middle of the twelfth century by raids,\(^{134}\) but patronage rebounded in the second half of the century.\(^{135}\) This led to new monastic foundations,\(^{136}\) and with them, an infusion of the most

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\(^{131}\) Athanasios Papageorghiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, 11. Kykkos Monastery was founded with assistance from the Emperor Alexios Komnenos. Agios Chrysostomos near Koutzouvendi was connected with Eumathios Philokalis. Machaeras was established thanks to the assistance of the Emperors Manuel Komnenos and Isaakios Angelos. Each of the major monasteries of Cyprus that are still functioning today was established during this period.

\(^{132}\) For the icon of Kykkos, see Andreas Jakovljevic, *Ephraim the Athenian: A Narrative of the Founding of the Holy Monastery of Kykkos and the History of the Miraculous Icon of the Mother of God* (Nicosia: Research Centre of Kykkos Monastery, 1996); Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The ‘Virgin Veiled by God’: The Presentation of an Icon on Cyprus” in *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object*, Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 215ff. In short, the General Manouel Voutomytis sent several icons to the monastery he founded as gifts. The Abbot Isaias and other Cypriot monks had travelled to Constantinople and were aware that they were not getting the finest icons. They might have seen the Eleousa icon, which was held in the Emperor’s palace, and petitioned for that particular image.

\(^{133}\) The best survivals from this period of Byzantine painting include the Church of the Holy Apostles at Pera Chorio (Cyprus, 1160-1180), *Agios Ierotheos* at Megara (Greece, 1160-80), *Agioi Anargyroi* at Kastoria (1170-80), Saint George at Kurbinovo (1191), as well as panel survivals in Cyprus and at St. Catherine’s Monastery. Sophocles Sophocleous, *Panagia Arakiotissa: Lagoudera, Cyprus* (Nicosia: Centre of Cultural Heritage, 1998), 48. The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi (1164) could be included in this list as well.

\(^{134}\) Raids, even when Byzantine imperial presence on Cyprus was strongest, continued: These included Rénauld de Chatillon (1155/56), an Arab fleet from Egypt in 1158, and the Count of Tripoli in 1161.


\(^{136}\) New foundations at this time include the Monastery of Machaeras, the Monastery of Asomatos at Kato Lefkara and the Monastery of Christ Antiphonitis near Kalogrea.
developed modes of Komnenian art. Among the surviving construction from this period is the Church of Panagia tou Arakos deep in the Troodhos mountains, and it is here that we find the first Virgin of the Passion, painted in 1192. But unlike some earlier monuments in Cyprus, these frescoes reflect anything but Byzantine political confidence.

In hopes of gaining the imperial throne for the entire Empire, the Byzantine usurper Isaac Ducas Komnenus took over Cyprus, tyrannizing the island from 1184-1191. Then came the English. King Richard the Lionheart, responding to Saladin’s retaking of Jerusalem in 1187, arrived in Limmasol, Cyprus in May of 1191. He docked on the pretense that the ship carrying his bride to be, Berengaria of Navarre, had been beckoned by an ill-intentioned Isaac to come ashore. In a series of skirmishes he swiftly defeated Isaac’s forces. It is difficult to say whether or not Richard’s capture of Cyprus was premeditated or an unplanned response to Isaac’s perceived hostility. At any rate,

137 Athanasios Papageorghiou suggests that this did not extend necessarily to architecture “Despite the fact that the octagonal type is considered a creation of the imperial capital, the masonry of Cypriot octagonal churches does not seem greatly influenced by the Constantinopolitan style.” Papageorghiou, “The Byzantine Art of Cyprus,” 97. For a more extended discussion of the architectural parallels, which differ from those of paintings, see Slobodan Ćurčić, “Byzantine Architecture on Cyprus: An Introduction to the Problem of the Genesis of a Regional Style” in Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki, Nancy P. Sevcenko and Christopher Moss, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 71ff.
138 Edbury summarizes history’s negative take on Komnenus: “To the Byzantines he was a usurper; to the English he was an evil man, whose duplicity and wickedness in trying to thwart the crusade and injure the king and the members of the expedition justified the conquest.” Peter W. Edbury, “Crusaders and Pilgrims: The Conquest of Cyprus in 1191” in Papanikola-Bakirtzis and Iacovou, Byzantine Medieval Cyprus, 28.
139 The delay can be accounted for by Richard’s need to raise finances and forces. His experience in war in France showed his the need to be fully, even excessively funded in any military enterprise. There was also the need to see to the repercussions of the death of his father in 1189 and arrange a truce of sorts with his French enemy, King Philip Augustus, who joined Richard on Crusade. There was the further delay of travel, as the seaward journey had to winter in Sicily, where Richard extorted further funding from King Tancred.
140 Western sources suggest that Isaac had an alliance with Saladin. Edbury explains that while Muslim authors do not confirm this, they do confirm an alliance between Saladin and Isaac II Angelos. Suffice it to say there was sufficient reason for Isaac to be mistrusted, and without Constantinopolitan endorsement, his position was already weak. “We shall never know the full story.” Peter Edbury, “Crusaders and Pilgrims,” 29.
141 Ibid., 27
Richard did not keep the island for long. “The English king, the wretch,” wrote the Cypriot ascetic Neophytos, “landed in Cyprus, and found it a nursing mother.” To pay for his Holy Land campaign, Richard exploited the island’s bounty, not only by seizing treasure, but also by selling the entire island twice. From Richard’s vantage the taking of Cyprus was a great success, replenishing his funds considerably. King Richard continued to battle Saladin in the Holy Land until October 1192, extracting a treaty from Saladin and extending western presence in Palestine considerably, though without retaking Jerusalem.

The first purchasers of Cyprus, the Templars, had a miserable and bloody experience on the island. Perceiving their weak position, the islanders revolted against them. The Templars retreated to Casteliotissa in Nicosia, only to reemerge and slaughter the population on Easter day, 1192. They gave the island back to Richard, who in turn sold it to Guy de Lusignan, who – many felt – was responsible for losing Jerusalem to Saladin in the first place. French rule of Cyprus, however, was much more enduring. Bringing with them refugees from the Crusader States in the Holy Land, the Lusignan family would control Cyprus for three hundred years. While the Byzantines may have wanted to regain control of Cyprus after the formidable Richard had returned to England, they were

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142 Neophytos the Recluse, Concerning the Misfortunes of the Land of Cyprus (Cobham 1908, 10-11) Quoted in Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzis and Maria Iacovou, eds., Byzantine Medieval Cyprus. (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus, 1998), 25.
143 Peter Edbury, “Crusaders and Pilgrims,” 29. Both transactions were for the same amount, 100,000 Saracen Bezants (the western version of the Muslim dinar produced in the Holy Land). Edbury explains that this was a modest sum, as a knight could receive 400,000 bezants each year as a fief. Richard, in any case, received only half of it. The low price can be explained by his being in the area for only a year and needing to raise money quickly.
145 Ibid.
incapable of doing so. Several recent Byzantine military defeats, imperial instability, and Crusader presence, which would culminate with the sack of Constantinople in 1204, meant that Cyprus’s Byzantine period had peaked. The feudal arrangement imposed by the Lusignans, which granted fiefs to crusader knights, would deal “a fatal blow to the old Greek aristocracy of Byzantine Cyprus.” Speaking of the violent and tumultuous events of the late twelfth century, Neophytos wrote:

Rich men have forgotten their wealth, their fine dwellings, families, servants, slaves, their many flocks, herds, swine, cattle of all kinds, grain-bearing fields, fertile vineyards and variegated gardens and with great care and secrecy have sailed away to foreign lands and to the queen of the cities. And those who could not fly, who is fit to set forth the tragedy of their sufferings?

The answer to that question came from the Byzantine artist responsible for the first known Virgin of the Passion type, Theodore Apsevdis.

One of the Byzantine aristocrats displaced by the Lusignans was named Leontius. Perhaps he had witnessed the revolt and massacre in Nicosia that year. He presumably retreated into the mountains to a monastery, one which may have been built

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146 There was a loss at the battle of Myriokephalan in Asia Minor in 1176, a Norman-Sicilian encroachment on Byzantine territory in Greece even to the point of occupation of the Empire’s Second City, Thessaloniki in the 1180s. Peter Edbury, “Crusaders and Pilgrims,” 31.
147 Following the child emperor Alexios II, the Angeloi family violently overcame the Komnenus family’s imperial streak in 1185.
149 Maria Iacovou, “Byzantine Medieval Cyprus: A Testimony” in Papanikola-Bakirtzis and Iacovou, Byzantine Medieval Cyprus, 23.
150 Neophytos, quoted in Athanasios Papageorghiou, Icons of Cyprus, 30.
151 A more in depth discussion as to whether or not Apsevdis painted these frescoes will await chapter two. I believe there is sufficient evidence to make his authorship a strong possibility.
152 Our knowledge of his rank is limited to the term “αὐθέντης” reserved for high-ranking Byzantine families. David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panaghia tou Arakos at Lagoudera, Cyprus: The Paintings and Their Painterly Significance (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2003), 51.
by his father on a family-owned estate. There he commissioned an artist, probably Theodore Apsevdis – the surname meaning “truthful” to repaint a mountain church. Like many churches of Cyprus, the church of the Panagia tou Arakos is named after a wild flower, the vetch (ᾱράξ), hence the inscription on the interior north lintel, “θ[εοτό]κου τοῦ Ἄρακος” It is this inscription that also gives the firm date of the repainting of the church to 1192, the same year of the coming of Latin rule to Cyprus. We can even trace the economic disruption in the pigments, as David and June Winfield claim that the “disruption of trade and supplies caused by the Frankish invasion may well have been the reason the painters ran out of blue pigment for the upper backgrounds.”

Leontios commissioned the repainting of a worn fresco cycle, yielding the first known Virgin of the Passion (Fig. 2), which appears on the southeast wall of the church. Mary had been likely been surrounded by confident angels in an earlier fresco layer, but the Virgin of the Passion is different. The accompanying angels bear the instruments of the Passion. We need not speculate about what the earlier, pre-1192 fresco layer might have

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153 Ibid., 51. The Stylianous suggest that Leon was possibly a regional governor. Andreas and Judith Stylianou, The Painted Churches of Cyprus (Nicosia, 1964), 71. Cited by David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos, 51.
155 David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos, 49. The Winfields relate a charming village legend that dates to the eighteenth century, claiming the church is so named after a hawk who, intending to bring a partridge to a princess, brought an icon of the Virgin instead. Hence the name still popular among the villagers today is Panagia tou Ierakou “Our Lady of the Hawk.” But, as Winfield explains, “Our Lady of the Vetches” is more faithful to the building’s original inscriptions.
156 David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos, 65.
157 The full inscription over the interior north lintel reads: ἀνιστορήσθη[η] ὁ πάνσεπτος ναὸς τῆς ἄνιστορήσθη[η] ὁ πάνσεπτος ναὸς τῆς υπὲρ[ε]ραιγίας θεοτόκου τοῦ Ἄρακος // διὰ συνδρομή[ής] καὶ πολλ[οῦ] πόθου κυροῦ Λέωντος τοῦ Αὐθέντες[ου] μηνί Δεκαμβρίου // ἴδο[ικτιῶν] ια[τ]ὸς σι[μ]οῦ // David and June Winfield translate: The most revered church of the All Holy God-Bearer of the Wild Vetch was repainted by the contribution and great desire of the Lord Leon (the son) of Authentes in the month of December (in the) indiction 11 (in) the year 6701. David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos, 65. A December date (end of the painting season) at the bottom of a church (painters worked from top to bottom) indicates that the painting cycle was complete at the time of inscription (ibid., 66).
158 David and June Winfield, The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos, 51.
looked like, because part of it survives in the apse of the same church (Fig. 11). There we see a less suggestive Mary, surrounded by angels with staffs. This first layer would have been painted when Cyprus was in a time of relative security. But the Virgin of the Passion was painted in crisis, reflected also in the figure of Peter who – unusually – bears a cross in the Dormition scene just above. “The donor’s grief,” explains Sophocleos, “is perceived through the transformation of the Virgin’s image which he prescribed.”¹⁵⁹

Henry Maguire has suggested that the “stereotyped nature” of Byzantine depictions of grief “raises the question of the sincerity of Byzantine artists when they used these formulae.”¹⁶⁰ And yet, Apsevdis’s Virgin of the Passion is different. Mary looks to the angel bearing the spear, while Christ gives his consent to the angel bearing the cross. Unlike later manifestations of the type, the angels are nearly as large as Christ. The full length Mary emerges from a magnificent throne, embellished with fleurs-de-lis, rows of pearls, and curving leaves. She rises up, activating the fresco arrangement, prepared to offer her son to a horrible fate. Perhaps the painter meant to suggest she was offering up the island of Cyprus as well.

A long and elaborate prayer, probably indicating that the artist was literate, accompanies the painting:¹⁶¹

All pure mother of God, he who has portrayed your immaculate image in perishable colors

¹⁵⁹ Sophocles Sophocleos, Panagia Arakiotissa, 47.
with great yearning and most ardent faith,  
Leon, your poor and worthless servant,  
called after his father Authentes,  
together with his consort and fellow servant [name of wife]  
request faithfully with countless tears  
to find a happy conclusion to the rest of their life  
together with their fellow slaves and children, your servants,  
and receive the death of the saved.  
For you alone, Virgin, are able to be glorified  
When entreated to provide people with…t…  

The patron Leontius would never regain his position of authority as a Byzantine governor. Whether he attained a happy conclusion to the rest of his life is not known.

But what we do see here is a remarkably clear case of Marian piety continuing as it always had, perhaps even intensified, on the other side of Byzantine political collapse.

The Virgin of the Passion, first attested in this precisely datable fresco of 1192, is – in a way – the first “post-Byzantine” icon, because the first known instance of the type occurs in lands that were Byzantine no more. In fact, this particular type would go on to become one of the most widespread of the post-Byzantine world.

This art historical moment, however, can be sharply contrasted with much scholarship on Byzantine images of Mary. “[T]he Mother of God,” explains a recent study, “embodied political ideas and promoted the concept of empire. She was perceived as a guarantor of imperial victory and legitimacy… It is in Byzantium where this powerful link between Marian devotion and the idea of empire became established and from which it then spread to the rest of the medieval world.”  

But if Marian images guarantee imperial

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victory, how are we to explain the Virgin of the Passion, whose emergence in Cyprus is
directly related to political collapse? This too was part of the Byzantine bequeathal to
global art history. Can the concept of political power make sense of this image? Such
an approach has led to the assumption that the Virgin of the Passion, and images like it,
were tools for military recruitment, summoning Byzantine women to give their sons to
the army as Christ gave Mary to the cross.\textsuperscript{164} But as we’ve seen, in Cyprus in the year
1192, there was no Byzantine army available to join.

Accurately understanding the Virgin of the Passion, and images like it, requires an
approach that transcends this paradigm of power. Establishing the foundation for this
approach requires covering Byzantine images of Mary throughout the duration of the
Empire. As it has been claimed that power is the “original template”\textsuperscript{165} of the Virgin
Mary in Byzantium, I will begin in the Empire’s earliest years.

\textbf{The Early “Cult” of Mary}

Because Mary was proclaimed Theotokos at the Council of Ephesus in 431, scholars have
long assumed that “the Mary cult was absent in the first few centuries of the Christian
era, only to appear relatively suddenly in the fifth.”\textsuperscript{166} But if there is anything
approximating a consensus in Marian scholarship today, it is a near complete revision of

\textsuperscript{164} “The virginal Mother… conveys a model of selfless sacrifice, necessary for the success of an
army,” (ibid., 97). For her discussion of the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera with these military
associations, see pages 101-102.

\textsuperscript{165} Speaking of the Akathistos hymn, Pentcheva writes: “Although the hymn is inspired by the early fifth
century homilies of Proklos, it builds a more powerful image of the Virgin. While Mary functions simply
as a vessel of the Incarnation in the writings of Proclus, she is an active figure in the Akathistos,
vanquishing the enemies and protecting the empire,” (ibid., 14). Should not then Proklos’s Mary be the
“original template”?

\textsuperscript{166} Michael P. Carroll, \textit{The Cult of the Virgin Mary} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), XIII.
this perspective.\(^{167}\) Scholars have long been aware of early Mariological texts such as the Protoevangelium of James (mid-second to early third century) and the earliest Marian image in the Roman catacomb of Priscilla.\(^{168}\) What has changed is a more systematic investigation by an organized team of scholars participating in the Early Mariology Project \(^{169}\) who have convincingly demonstrated that the term Theotokos – bearer of God – was in use long before the Council of Ephesus officially defined the term in 431.\(^{170}\) Some biblical scholars claim that \(\text{ΜΡ}\) was treated as a \textit{nomen sacrum} in third century New Testament papyri,\(^{171}\) and even that a term similar to \text{Theotokos} is contained in New Testament itself, specifically in Elizabeth’s cry “Mother of my Lord.”\(^{172}\) Still, evidence for the cult of Mary before the third century is necessarily fragmentary, as is to be expected from a religion lacking official recognition.

But in the fourth century the evidence expands.\(^{173}\) The famous early papyrus fragment recording a prayer to the Virgin – \textit{sub tuum praesidium} (under your protection), is dated

\(^{167}\) Nevertheless, the older perspective is still maintained in certain portions of Hans Belting’s indispensible \textit{Likeness and Presence}. In compressed coverage of the early Byzantine period, Belting writes: “It was only the council’s decision to recognize Mary as having given birth to God… that set in motion the autonomous and general veneration of the Virgin,” Belting, \textit{Likeness and Presence}, 34.

\(^{168}\) For a recent discussion of these early images, the dates of which are problematic, see Geri Parlby, “The Origins of Marian Art in the Catacombs and the Problem of Identification,” in \textit{The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary}, 41-56.

\(^{169}\) The initiative was begun in 2002 by Professors Pauline Allen and Leena Maria Peltomaa. The database being constructed contains all reliable Greek, Latin and Syriac texts containing references to Mary before the Council of Ephesus. See the project website: http://www.cecs.acu.edu.au/mariologyproject.htm.

\(^{170}\) Mark Starowieyski anticipated these discoveries in “Le titre \text{θεοτόκος} avant le concile d’Éphèse,” \textit{Studia Patristica} 19 (1989), 236-42. The title, at this point, is “only a simple appellation,” and has yet to gain the Christological weight it would attain at Ephesus. Examples are available in abundance in Luigi Gambero, \textit{Mary and the Father of the Church} (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).


\(^{173}\) An interesting barometer occurs between the 325 version of the Nicene Creed, where Mary is not mentioned, and the definitive 381 version, where she is. Reasons for the omission and inclusion are
to that century, not to mention the first Marian apparition and the first Constantinopolitan miracle attributed to Mary. Both Julian the Apostate’s mockery of Christians for using the term Theotokos, or Epiphanius’s concern that some were talking the cult of Mary in extreme directions, were evidently triggered by an intensified degree of actual practice. The assessment of Shoemaker encapsulates a scholarly consensus: “The existence of Marian devotion by the fourth century seems increasingly beyond question.”

When this background of Marian piety is understood, the decision at Ephesus in 431 naming Mary Theotokos emerges not as a revolution, but an “evolution in piety and devotion.” To be sure, it is important not to overplay the evidence. Mention of Mary, even as Theotokos, does not necessarily mean a cult of Mary, and the mention of Mary at

speculative, as the acta of neither of the two councils survive. See Norman Tanner, “Mary in the Ecumenical Councils of the Church” in Mary for Heaven and Earth, William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock, eds., Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2002, 156-170.

174 Stephen Shoemaker, “The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century: A Fresh Look at Some Old and New Sources,” in Maunder, Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary, 73. The prayer also uses the term “Theotokos.” Though the prayer is in Greek, it is known by its Latin title.

175 Among the prayers are those of Gregory of Nazianzus (Orations 24). See the discussion in Stephen Shoemaker, “The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century,” 73.

176 Patriarch Nektarios (381-397) writes of an appearance of Mary within a recently constructed basilica. A healing is reported, and Cyril Mango names this “the first appearance of the Virgin Mary as an active miracle worker in Constantinople.” Cyril Mango, “Constantinople as Theotokoupolis” in Mother of God, 19.

177 Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary through the Centuries (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 56


the Council of Ephesus in 431 was to clarify a Christological controversy.\(^\text{181}\) Still, the Constantinopolitan speeches of Proclus in 430 that generated the controversy, were given on the occasion of an official Marian Feast – one that obviously must have predated the Council of Ephesus.\(^\text{182}\) Nor is Proclus’s rhetoric subdued: “What we celebrate is the pride of women and the glory of the female, thanks to the one who was at once both mother and virgin… Let nature leap for joy, and let women be honoured!”\(^\text{183}\) This deeper Marian backdrop to Ephesus is also confirmed archaeologically. The first great Marian church, Rome’s Santa Maria Maggiore, was not built as a result of the Council of 431, but was nearly complete at the time the Council was meeting.\(^\text{184}\) Likewise, the recently excavated Kathisma Church in Jerusalem has an early fifth century date, and provides additional evidence for an active pre-Ephesian Marian piety.\(^\text{185}\) In short, to understand the early cult of Mary, it might be helpful to remove the Council of Ephesus as a definitive watershed altogether!

In light of this evidence, it becomes clear how beginning an account of Mary with the imperial sponsorship of Marian piety lends a false impression that Byzantine emperors invented the cult. I believe a better way to understand Marian piety in Constantinople is that the emperors appropriated an already active devotion for their own purposes. The

\(^{181}\) See the important words of warning in Richard Price’s “The Theotokos and the Council of Ephesus,” in Maunder, *Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 89ff. He cautions interpreting the Council as other than what it was – Christological. Yet he also points to a document two years later from John of Antioch, Bishop of Alexandria, which does give the term Theotokos “formal recognition,” (ibid., 95).

\(^{182}\) Stephen Shoemaker, *The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 72ff. The Feast, probably a celebration of Mary’s maternity and virginity, was celebrated on December 26, and continues in Orthodox tradition today.

\(^{183}\) Homily 1:1, translated by Nicholas Constas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity Homilies 1-5, texts and translations* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 137.

\(^{184}\) Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 34.

\(^{185}\) Shoemaker discusses the date, and the objections to it, in Stephen Shoemaker, “The Cult in the Fourth Century,” 75-76.
cult’s undeniable association with imperial power is not its original hue, but a later coloration.

**Imperial Appropriation of Pre-existing Marian Piety**

The first member of the imperial family to be directly involved with Marian cult may have been the Empress Pulcheria (r. 450-453), who drew the Empire’s diverse Mariology into the imperial orbit. Pulcheria went so far as to directly associate “the Virgin Theotokos and the virgin augusta.” The result, explains Nicholas Constas, was that “anyone who challenged Pulcheria’s legitimacy on the grounds that she was a woman risked insulting the New Eve.” Pulcheria’s devotion to the Virgin was not new – what was new was its permeation into the imperial court. The historicity of Pulcheria’s early Marian devotion has been repeatedly challenged, leading some scholars

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186 Pulcheria’s activity is difficult to delineate precisely because of later source retrojections, which claim the virgin empress was responsible for building the three major churches dedicated to the Theotokos in Constantinople, Hodegoi, Cholkoprateia, and the Blachernai. Cyril Mango makes a case that this is unhistorical. See Cyril Mango, “The Origins of the Blachernae Shrine at Constantinople,” *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae*, II (Vatican City and Split, 1998), 61-76. But whether or not she sponsored three new Marian churches, Pulcheria gives us strong evidence for the imperial use of the widespread devotion to the Virgin.

187 Nicholas Constas, “Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Vol. 3, Summer 1995, 188. Constas suggests that the image of Pulcheria and the Virgin that were also equated: “Images of Pulcheria and the Virgin were so close that an attack on the one could, and was perhaps supposed to be seen as an offense to the other,” (ibid.).

188 Among the new devotions to Mary, Constas suggest that Pulcheria’s weaving a robe for the altar is intended to be a parallel to the Virgin Mary: “Like her exemplar the Virgin Mary who wove a robe of flesh that was draped around the divinity, the virgin empress wove a robe of cloth that served as both a covering for the body of the altar and a shroud for the symbolic body of Christ,” (ibid., 189).
to push the full-fledged Marian piety in Constantinople to a later date.\footnote{Pentcheva pushes the date to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, because it was then that Constantinople gained patriarchal status. Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 189. Mango suggests the major Marian shrines of Constantinople were not founded by Pulcheria, but by Empress Verina (d. 484). Cyril Mango, “Constantinople as Theotokopoulis,” in Vasiliki, Mother of God, 19.} Most recently, however, the possibility of Pulcheria’s Marian enterprises has again been revived.\footnote{Stephen Shoemaker, “The Cult of Fashion: The Earliest Life of the Virgin and Constantinople’s Marian Relics,” Dumbarton Oaks Papers 62 (2008).}

As is to be expected, imperial sponsorship – whether it was in Pulcheria’s time or shortly thereafter - brought new possibilities to the Marian cult, resulting in a dramatic shift. Most demonstrably, the Virgin Mary began to replace pagan images on coinage. In addition, the chief Marian relic, her mantle, was transferred from Jerusalem to Constantinople under the reign of Leo I (457-74).\footnote{Hans Belting, Likeness and Presence, 35.} As if to return the favor, Justinian consecrated a new church in Jerusalem to the Theotokos a century later.\footnote{Margaret Barker, “The Life-Bearing Spring” in Maunder, The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary.} It is in this expansive, imperial period of the Marian cult, the sixth and seventh decades of the fifth century, that Cyril Mango attributes the conversion of the temple of Cyble at Kyzilos to a church to the Theotokos, and this may also have been the time when the Parthenon in Athens became a church dedicated to the Virgin.\footnote{Cyril Mango, “Constantinople as Theotokoupolis,” 22. More extensively, see Anthony Kaldellis, The Christian Parthenon: Classical Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens (Cambridge University Press, 2010).} This imperial boost to Marian devotion caused Constantinople to become Theotokoupolis in the fifth century. Mary became the defender of her city – a position illustrated by the fact that two of her recently constructed churches, the Blachernae and the Church of the Life Giving Source (Pege), roughly bookend the city’s vulnerable land walls (Fig. 12).
But there was more to Theotokoupolis than protection. In the next century, Corippus’s prayer to the Virgin is placed on the lips of the Empress Sophia on the occasion of the coronation of her husband, Justin II, in 565. Cameron identifies in it an “overtly devotional” expression of Marian piety.\textsuperscript{194} This is probably also the era of the famous Akathistos hymn, a “mere tip of the iceberg” of Marian piety.\textsuperscript{195} The sixth century also saw the liturgical feasts of the Virgin expanded by Emperor Maurice (r. 582-602), who continuing to appropriate a pre-Ephesian, Jerusalem-based Marian piety.\textsuperscript{196} Cameron’s conclusion about the cult of Mary in sixth century Constantinople remains valid: “No mere initiative from the top could dictate a change in the religious orientation of a whole society.”\textsuperscript{197}

The intensity of this cult was no doubt amplified by military threats. In the year 626 of the next century, the Avars were defeated next to the Blachernae shrine, and a smaller confrontation occurred at the Church of the Life Giving Source. The position of Mary as the defender of the City was consequently vindicated.\textsuperscript{198} These were, needless to say, dangerous times, and the Byzantines were “entitled to want security.”\textsuperscript{199} It is possible to brood on these defensive events at length, arguing for a close connection between Mary

\textsuperscript{194} Averil Cameron, “The Theotokos,” 82-85.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid. The dating of the hymn is controversial. For an extended book-length discussion, see Leena Mari Peltomaa, The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
\textsuperscript{196} “The earliest Marian feast for which there is any significant evidence is the feast of the Memory of Mary (also called Memory of the Virgin and Memory of the Theotokos), a feast that was celebrated in Palestine as well as elsewhere in the Byzantine empire, beginning in the early fifth century, even before the important events of the council of Ephesus in 431.” Shoemaker, The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption, 115.
\textsuperscript{197} Averil Cameron, “The Theotokos,” 97.
\textsuperscript{198} Cyril Mango, “Constantinople as Theotokoupolis,” 21
\textsuperscript{199} Averil Cameron, “The Theotokos,” 107.
and imperial power. But the incident may have frustrated the emperors as much as it may have validated their power. Perhaps to the annoyance of the imperial forces, the victory was attributed to the fact that Patriarch Sergios, rather than the Emperor or a general, had processed Mary’s *maphorion* (veil) around the walls. Mary’s protective role, furthermore, cannot be reduced to war. A very similar event is recorded in the next century regarding a very different threat – the plague. Marian piety had been sufficiently amplified by imperial patronage such that Mary saturated *all* of Byzantine life. Nicholas Constas, for example, suggests that in late antique Constantinople, “anyone seeing a woman (or a man) producing a piece of cloth could now see the Holy Spirit weaving together the body of God from the wool of humanity held fast by the pure thread of the Virgin.” This was the *Theotokoupolis*, and Mary could be found anywhere from warfare to weaving. To focus at length on her military manifestations is one side, albeit a very important side, of a variegated story.

**The Distinction Between Mary and Political Power**

Despite the intensity of the cult of Mary from the fifth through seventh centuries of Byzantium, and the appropriation of that cult by the emperors, an intriguing fact stands out: Mary was rarely depicted in imperial dress, and certainly never with a sword or cuirass – indeed, this fact stands, arguably, for nearly all of Byzantine history.

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This peculiarity in Byzantine images of Mary is best approached by comparison with contemporary Marian images in the West, where Mary does attains a distinctly imperial appearance. In late antique Rome, Mary appears in imperial garb “as if to compensate for the lack of an imperial family” (Fig. 13). In Byzantium, however, the empress had a corner on the market of imperial imagery. It is for this reason that she wears her humble attire, a head covering, and no jewelry to speak of (Fig. 14). “From the earliest surviving monuments that record her presence,” explains Judith Herrin, “the Virgin wears this deeply unregal costume.”

This was due to the Byzantine distinction between the heavenly and earthly courts. For the mainstay of Byzantine art, imperial dress in the heavenly court denotes second rank, while the same dress in the earthly court denotes first rank. Christ and Mary, therefore, have no need for imperial regalia, although their angelic consorts do have such a need. However, archangels, as they visited earth, “generally changed into appropriate second-rank costumes,” such as eunuchs or generals, because they were descending from a heavenly to an earthly hierarchy. In short, the Byzantine separation between the heavenly and earthly powers always followed distinct visual codes, and the “deeply

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204 These exceptions will be discussed below.
206 Ibid., 15-16.
207 See Henry Maguire, “The Heavenly Court” in *Byzantine Court Culture 829-1204*, Henry Maguire, ed. (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997). Annemarie Weyl Carr agrees: “Rather than by assimilation, visual rhetoric operated by association: the emperor was shown with Christ, or interacting with sacred figures in any range of substitution devices.” Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Court Culture and Cult Icons,” also in *Byzantine Court Culture 829-1204*, 85. The sole overlap between the heavenly and imperial court, according to Judith Herrin, were Mary’s red slipper, providing a link between heavenly and earthly domains. Judith Herrin, “The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium,” 16.
“unregal” Eastern Mary is evidence of her transcending imperial power. It has been suggested that there may have been a *Maria Regina* tradition in Byzantium, based on two controversial exceptions, one in Rome\(^{209}\) and the other in contemporary Albania.\(^ {210}\)

Nevertheless, the possibility that there may have been a *Maria Regina* in the East is just that – a possibility - and one that seems to have soon disappeared.\(^ {211}\)

The fact that Mary appears, for example, on coins and seals with the emperors is not, therefore, evidence of a conflation of the heavenly and earthly powers, but further evidence of their distinction. Consequently, images of Christ or Mary crowning the emperors need be read with greater nuance. Heavenly power, the Byzantine record reveals, was difficult to tame. According to Maguire, such depictions are “at the same time a statement of the emperor’s present political power and a prayer for his reception into the court of heaven.”\(^ {212}\)

Mary may have aided the Empire at one point, but she could

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\(^{209}\) Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 25. John Osborne recognizes a similar possibility, that the fresco at S. Maria Antiqua may be dated to the reign of Justinian based on a coin find. John Osborne, “Images of the Mother of God in Early Medieval Rome” in *Icon and Word*, Antony Eastmond, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 138-39. But even if this were the case, this may have been a Byzantine accommodation to a Western tradition (“When in Rome…”). At any rate, the tradition – even if it was actually Byzantine, quickly evaporated, and “the Roman church would make the [*Maria Regina*] type particularly its own,” (ibid., 140).


\(^{211}\) Still, conceding that the normative Byzantine depiction of Mary contains no imperial attire, guilt is assumed by association: “Her imperial status is expressed instead through association: the jeweled throne and two archangels placed in the bema.” Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 26.

\(^{212}\) Henry Maguire, “Heavenly Court,” 250.
not prevent the Arab onslaughts of the eighth century.\textsuperscript{213} Emperors may have co-opted the images of Mary, but at times her images were used against emperors as well, as in case of the notoriously corrupt Phokas (602-10). “You [the rival emperor Heraklios] placed against the corrupter of virgins,” writes George of Pisidia, “the awesome image of the pure Virgin.”\textsuperscript{214} Mary could be both for and against emperors. Depictions of the emperor with Mary and Christ were not just “propaganda,” they were also petitions – a hope that thereby the emperor would gain the blessing of the heavenly court, which no emperor could control. Mary in Byzantium is unpredictable. She may have been employed in battle, but – as we shall see below – she could turn against her “employers” as well.

**Mary Among the Goddessess**

One of the chief argument linking Mary and power comes from pagan antecedents. Several scholars have made connections between Mary and her pagan predecessors,\textsuperscript{215} which then carries over into the idea of power: “Subsuming the functions of the empress, Victoria and Tyche, the Theotokos emerges as the most potent guarantor of victory.”\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{213} Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 44.

\textsuperscript{214} Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 44-45. George of Pisidia continues by relating that Heraklios defeated Emperor Phokas with an icon of Mary: “For you had her icon as a helper when you were approaching in the praying range of the beast.” The reign of Phokas was the first violent change in power in Constantinopolitan history. He had his predecessor’s sons murdered, forcing their father to watch. Mary, according to George, was not pleased. It is, to be sure, far from surprising that a court poet would employ Marian imagery to vilify a bad emperor. But I cite such a passage to complicate the use of Marian image, which emperors – the sources relate – had occasion to fear.


\textsuperscript{216} Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 21. For a different assessment, see Jaroslav Pelikan, “From Tyche to Telos,” in *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). For Gregory of Nazianzus, the destruction of the temple of Tyche in Caeserea in 361 “was a consequence of the acceptance not simply of the authority of Christian revelation but of the universally valid principle of natural theology that there was ‘nothing of irrationality or fortune or chance’ in God and in the actions that came from God.” (Pelikan,
This point of view argues for a relatively seamless transition from pagan images of imperial victory, specifically in regard to Athena. But while power and virginity were linked in the Classical world in a distinct way, the Septuagint also used the term παρθένος (virgin), as does the New Testament, contexts that obviously change the term’s associations.

The connection between paganism and Christianity is a highly complicated, centuries-old debate, and a full discussion of the matter cannot be entered into here. But with deference to the more successful formulations of the problem, the latest scholarship on the relation of goddesses to the Virgin Mary has complicated earlier proposals.

Reviewing the connection between Mary and Isis, for example, John McGuckin argues

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160). Needless to say, all Christians did not operate on the intellectual plane of Gregory, but his influence was pervasive, and the (frequently dubious) distinction between popular and elite religion is more permeable than is often assumed.

217 Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 63-65.

218 The Hebrew word for maiden, almah, in Isaiah 7:14 (“a virgin shall conceive”) was translated as parthenos in the Septuagint, which was carried over into the Gospel of Matthew 1:23. Overall, the Jewish background to Byzantine civilization has been long neglected, and recently explored. See also Nicholas De Lange, Robert Nelson, Paul Magdalino, eds., The Old Testament in Byzantium (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks: 2010), 231. While the influence of the Old Testament on Byzantium is neglected, this volume argues it was an “integral component of Byzantine identity,” (ibid., 7). Also see Margaret Baker, “The Life Bearing Spring” in The Origin of the Cult of the Virgin Mary, which remarks on the Septuagint’s inspiration of Justinian’s church of the Life Bearing Spring in Jerusalem.

219 One of the more sophisticated recent discussions of the history of comparing pagan and Christian religious phenomena is Jonathan Z. Smith’s Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Smith succeeds in revealing a history of concealed motivations (traditionally Protestant invectives against Catholicism) behind this enterprise, highlighting the longevity of this dispute, which raged especially during the Revolutionary period of American history.

220 Johannes Geffcken’s treatment of the issue, according to Peter Brown, (Cult of the Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 139, note 77), is difficult to improve upon: “Earliest Christianity contains some analogies to paganism in its views, terminology and literary forms; later, these analogies increased. Mysteries, cult ethics, philosophy, literature, art and superstition on both sides show up considerable similarities. There exist the most direct borrowings; mostly antiquity is the source, but on occasion it is Christianity. At the same time, a whole string of coincidences shows how pagans and Christians were children of the same epoch, the mood of which was decisive for both. But these connections do not touch on the actual core of Christianity, even though in particular instances tracing them is of great value.” Johannes Geffcken, The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism, trans. Sabine MacCormack (New York: North-Holland Publishing, 1978), 295.
for a “bi-directional dynamic passage” between paganism and Christianity.221 “The Marian cult uses incidental motifs from the iconography of the Isis cult, but the substantial connections are simply not there.”222 Cameron too warns against monocausality, suggesting, “Pagan syncretism may have played a part, but in my view it was a minor one; competition would be a better model.”223

The connections between Mary and Athena are, no doubt, intriguing. While we have straightforward textual evidence of Christians castigating Athena in this period,224 there are parallels as well. In the seventh century *Chronicon Paschale*, the Avar general exclaims, “I saw a woman with an august bearing running alone on the walls.”225 This in turn, reflects Zosimos’s fifth-century Christian account of the battle at Athens in 396: “he saw the tutelary goddess Athena walking about the wall.”226 But the fact that a Christian writer would use a literary form to explain another event is hardly surprising. More remarkable is the Christian propensity to absorb images of violence more appropriate to Athena. Theodore Synkellos describes the Virgin in battle during the Avar siege. She would “protect her city and fight... winning uncontested victory and inflicting horror on the enemies.”227 This certainly does “echo qualities of the virgin warrior

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222 Ibid.
224 For example Firmicus Maternus’s *On the Error of Profane Religions* dates to 346. Cited in Susan Deacey’s *Athena* (London: Routledge, 2008), 143-144.
225 Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64.
226 Ibid., 65
Athena.” But the echoes are less notable than the dissonance. Perhaps to subvert such accounts, the seventh-century Byzantine poet George of Pisidias wrote “She destroyed them by water, not by the spear.” These words, furthermore, were inscribed on stones at the site of the Avar defeat. It was by her tears and compassion that Mary conquered, something that it is difficult to imagine from Athena. “[A]s she gave birth without a seed, in the same way she now gives birth to salvation with no weapons.” Likewise, Pisidias writes of Mary, “She alone can triumph forever over nature, first in her conception and second in battle.” The possibility that such rhetoric functioned as a subtle critique of the pagan inheritance cannot be ruled out.

Looking closer at the pagan attitude to war complicates the matter considerably. Mark Munn explains how for the Athenian Mother Goddess “an open defeat – even one of minor strategic importance – signified loss of favor of the Mother of the Gods.” But as in the attitude toward the crucifixion of her son, the Byzantine Virgin Mary could confidently navigate not only minor but also major military disasters, as already shown in Cyprus. Which is to say, an “Athena of the Passion” is very difficult to conceive.

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228 Bissera Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64.
229 Ibid., 62.
233 Scenes of Mary at the cross would take center stage in the later Byzantine world, with icons of the Deposition and Lamentation. See Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became *Mater Theou,*” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 44 (1990), 165-172. For textual evidence that makes a similar point, see D.F. Wright, “From ‘God-Bearer’ to ‘Mother of God’ in the Later Fathers” and Jane Baun, “Discussing Mary’s Humanity in Medieval Byzantium” in *The Church and Mary*, R.N Swanson, ed. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004). Such an attitude might be compared to the goddess Artemis who, at the end of Sophocles’s play *Ajax*, is quite clear about her attitude to human mortality. “Farewell,“ says Artemis to a dying man. “I may not watch man’s fleeting breath, Nor strain mine eyes with the effluence of death.” Thanks to Louis Ruprecht for this reference.
Mary and Power in the Era of Iconoclasm and Beyond

In her extensive study of the relation of pagan goddesses and the Virgin in Constantinople, Vassili Limberis concludes that “like the bright colored shards in the kaleidoscope, the functions of the goddesses, the imperial identity taken from the court, and the humble maiden of Luke’s gospel recombined themselves into a uniquely Constantinopolitan creation, the Theotokos.”

Limberis’s conclusion drawn from the available Late Antique evidence is viable – so long as we add that the kaleidoscope could be turned again. Belting, as mentioned, suggests that Byzantine icons’s failure to provide continued success in battles is exactly what generated the Iconoclastic controversy.

But images were vindicated, emerging on the other end of the controversy pruned and purified, with a more theological and less martial character.

To show the connection of Mary and imperial power in this period, the iconophile Andrew of Crete’s homily on the Akathistos hymn has been cited. Andrew’s homily recalls the Avar siege of 626, and does employ military tropes. But only, it seems to me, to subvert them, illustrating the very kind of purification Belting describes:

For neither the emperor fought, nor did the army enter into a battle arrangement, nor did the senators command, nor were the spears used, nor were the swords bared, nor did the helmets shine, nor did the shields receive the blow, but instead of all these human and material things and receiving suffering from them, the girdle of the All Holy and Pure One achieved the victory.

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234 Vassili Limberis, Divine Heiress, 147.
235 Hans Belting, Likeness and Presence, 44.
236 Ibid., 44-45. Carr sees this shift as well: “In contrast to Constantine’s ivory, where Constantine is clearly himself and Christ acts a role, translating the human activities around the emperor into divine ones, here in the Panoplia Dogmatica it is Christ who is himself, while the emperor is elevated to the role of a rather uppity sacred father in his heavenly court.” Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Court Culture and Cult Icons in Middle Byzantine Constantinople”, in Byzantine Court Culture 829-1204, 85.
237 Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 49.
Iconophile theologians have been depicted as aggressively militaristic. Their aim, we are told in one recent study, was to establish an “iconocracy” lead by “iconocrats” representing God the Father’s “program of universal conquest” to which we in the twenty-first century are still unconsciously captive. But Patriarch Nicephoros puts into the mouth of Christ a direct repudiation of political power: “I have no troops bearing shields, no spearmen, no sounds of acclamations coming from those who either precede or follow me. [I have] none of these transitory things which usually occur in earthly power. Consequently, my kingdom is not of this world.” As I’ve already suggested, such imagery is consistent with the emerging Byzantine distinction between the heavenly and earthly courts. But rather than taking this statement on its own terms, the passage’s translator suggests that these are the words “of some fantastic [sci-fi] doctor to whom one could assign the most devilish paranoia.”

Devilish or not, this kind of rhetoric was effective, and went further towards establishing something akin to the separation of church and state. Gerhard Ladner explains that that “with the end of Iconoclasm caesaropapism was replaced by a diarchy of emperor and patriarch.” The Iconophiles attained limited success in further distancing the emperor

239 Marie José Mondzain, Image, Icon, Economy, 152.
240 Ibid., 169.
241 Ibid., 168.
242 Ibid., 173.
243 Ibid., 168. Elsewhere, Mondzain appears to suggests herself that Iconophile thought was an attack on excessive political control, not an attempt to increase it: “The iconoclast emperors sought to become, in the name of a fight against the idols, the absolute masters of political, juridical, administrative, and military representation, and the sole practitioners earthly mimesis [of God].” (ibid., 165).
244 Ibid., 168.
from the realm of the sacred. “Kings,” declared John of Damascus, “do not possess the
authority to legislate for the church… for the business of kings is political administration;
ecclesiastical governance pertains to pastors and teachers.”

Mary, furthermore, was a quintessential aspect of the Iconophile cause. In fact, writers would “artfully cover their
confession of faith in icons under their confession of faith in the Theotokos.”

After Iconoclasm, Byzantium would therefore emerge further saturated with Marian devotion,
but now chiefly in the form of icons. The Mary that emerges on the other side of the
Iconoclastic controversy is even further distanced from imperial power than she was
before it. This is something that even a text devoted to connecting the Virgin and power
has to concede (Fig. 15): “The grand public image unveiled in the apse of Hagia Sophia
in 867 shows Mary in the typical maphorion, without imperial regalia; she has no crown,
loros, scepter, or globus cruciger. The concept of the empress is thus no longer
manifested in the costume and attributes of the Theotokos.”

Mary and Power After Iconoclasm

Following Iconoclasm, the Marian cult in Byzantium migrated from relics to icons. It
is important to note that Mary’s role in warfare – though now in the form of icons - does
not cease. Marian icons are first recorded in battle during the reign of Basil II (976-

(Prickerton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 38. Pelikan argues that a degree of caeseropapism certainly
remained in Byzantine society after the Iconophile triumph; but it was significantly weakened. Perhaps a
rough parallel can be drawn between the Iconoclastic controversy and the snows of Canossa, where Holy
Roman Emperor Henry IV did penance before Pope Gregory VII in 1077. In neither case was the
“separation” clear cut.

246 John of Damascus, PG 94: 1296, quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-


249 The point is emphasized by Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Mother of God in Public,” in Mother of God,
330. Of course, this migration does not mean that the cult of relics was abandoned.
and her icons were placed in and on the walls of the city during Crusader sieges. And yet, only very rarely was she depicted with military saints. Even when Marian icons were employed in battle, the practice was subject to subtle critique by Byzantine historians. Marian icons were not just another weapon in the imperial arsenal. They also adorned fountains or were used to perform exorcisms. This is the era of great iconic processions that shaped the Constantinopolitan landscape, processions of “urban scale and operatic splendour.” Marian icons were used in legal proceedings, and in one case an icon even served as a judge, evidencing the “full range of Marian functions: civic, military, devotional.”

Most notable in the post-Iconoclastic period is that Mary’s imagery begins to shift. A maternal role is emphasized, a point which has been repeatedly demonstrated by numerous scholars who note a “special Middle Byzantine flavour” of maternal imagery.

250 Ibid.
251 Ibid., 328.
253 A famous example occurred in Russia in 1169, when troops of the Suzdal prince Mstislav Andreevich put Novgorod under siege, but were stopped by Novgorod’s “The Sign of Our Lady.” For discussion of an icon depicting this event, see Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjityphonos, eds., *Architecture as Icon*, 240.
254 Annemarie Weyl Carr refers to Niketa Chonates’s “cynical description of John II Komnenos’s (1118-1143) calculated exploitation of the Virgin’s image to enflame the fervor of his troops in battle.” Annemarie Weyl Carr, “The Mother of God in Public,” in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 332. Pentcheva sees such commentary as an endorsement, but Carr reads the same commentary as a cynical critique. For the text under discussion, see Carr, “The Mother of God in Public,” 336, footnote 52.
255 Ibid., 329.
256 Ibid., 330.
257 Ibid., 328. The case was a dispute over a monastery’s ownership of a mill.
258 Ibid., 329.
259 Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother.” Kalavrezou argues for a Middle Byzantine shift to maternal imagery, an argument she restates in “The Maternal Side of the Virgin,” in *Mother of God*. Jane Baun agrees: “Authors, theologians, and artists of the [Middle Byzantine] period begin to ponder how the most traumatic even in the life of the divine family, the Crucifixion, affected its relationships.” Jane Baun, “Discussing Mary’s Humanity in Medieval Byzantium” in Swanson, *The Church and Mary*.
affection. It is not that earlier themes are suppressed, but “two types of representation of the mother, the formal and the intimate” run on parallel tracks through the Middle and Late Byzantine world. Mary’s humanity is stressed in tandem with the Iconophile concern to express Christ’s human nature. Mary becomes “more active, that is, she is more of a participant in the religious images of the Byzantine church.” Her “emotive and motherly qualities” are explored, and her imagery appears in “more private circumstances.” This new emphasis was achieved through images of the crucifixion. These innovations first came through texts, such as the ninth-century homilies on the Passion of George of Nicomedia. George brought the cult of the Virgin to a rhetorical peak matched only by the Akathistos hymn in the Late Antique period – except now the focus became not triumph, but suffering. As was common in Byzantine culture, once such imagery was established in text it manifested in images. New maternal imagery included intercessory themes such as the Eleousa icon type that shows Mary tenderly caressing her son (Fig. 16), or the Deesis and the haunting theme of Deposition. It was this devotional ethos that produced the Virgin of the Passion.

261 Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother”, 165.
262 Ioli Kalavrezou considers this as a non-doctrinal move: “[T]he representation of [Christ’s] human nature is necessarily tied to the miracle of the incarnation through the Virgin Mary. Her human qualities rather than her utility as a source of doctrine had to be brought out directly, and emphasizing her motherhood was the most obvious means of achieving this.” The Iconophile representation of Christ’s human nature (which was, in fact, the representation of neither nature, but composite hypostasis of both natures) was, however, doctrinal move as well, if theology is more widely conceived.
264 Ibid., 172.
265 See Maria Vassilaki and Niki Tsironis, “Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of Christ” in Vassilaki, Mother of God, 453ff; Henry Maguire, Art and Eloquence in Byzantium, 91ff.
266 Ibid., 461. The same pattern is charted in the West in Rachel Fulton’s From Judgment to Passion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
The Hodegetria

A closer look at Constantinople’s most famous icon, the Hodegetria (Fig. 17), underscores the complexity of Marian imagery’s relationship to power. It was for good reason that the icon was kept near the imperial palace (Fig. 12). There is no doubt that Constantinople’s Hodegetria Monastery and its image functioned as a “state icon” of sorts, a role that was imitated in Thessaloniki, Monemvasia, Athens, Siena267 and Serbia.268 This is Dimitri Obolensky’s “broken mirror” theory of Byzantine authority at work, as different power centers reflect, however jaggedly, the threatened authority of Byzantium.269 But at times, the protective power of the additional Hodegetrias could work against imperial power. Bishop Eustathios of Thessaloniki (1110-1198), for example, demurred on any need for imperial defense: “The Hodegetria, the protectress of our city, will be enough, without anyone else, to secure our welfare.”270 The association of this icon with imperial power was far from simple. Carr explains that the Hodegetria’s “state function was a process, not a premise, and a process that was accomplished at the expense of, not in accord with, the other icons of Constantinople.”271

What is more, the Hodegetria icon, which became the city’s palladium, was ultimately ineffective. The icon survived the Latin occupation by residing at the Pantokrator monastery (then occupied by the Venetians), but was returned to the Hodegon by Michael VIII in 1261, after the re-establishment of Constantinople as the Empire’s capital. With

268 Bissera Pentcheva, Icons and Power, 187.
270 Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Court Culture and Cult Icons,” in Maguire, Byzantine Court Culture, 97.
the rise of the Ottoman threat, the Hodegetria icon was moved from the Hodegon to the Chora monastery, which was thought to be more secure. It was there, on May 29, 1453, the Ottomans - after casting lots for the icon’s jewels - famously hacked the icon into pieces.\textsuperscript{272} On a Tuesday no less! (The same day as the icon’s famous weekly procession.) If the Hodegetria’s sole function was that of a palladium, it was ultimately pointless. The icon, however, endured as one of the most popular images of the post-Byzantine world because its purposes transcended its protective role.

The power paradigm has influenced religious scholars as well. Speaking of the destruction of the Hodegetria icon by the Ottomans, a Catholic commentator influenced by Clement Henze writes: “It appeared to be a manifestation of divine justice, punishing the Christians of the East for their rebellion against the pope… Mary, Mother of Mercy though she is, was constrained to abandon a people who had become blinded and hardened by the constant abuses of the graces which God had bestowed on them in rich abundance.”\textsuperscript{273} But the lines of piety and political power are not parallel. When, Gennadius Scholarios preached his homilies on Mary’s Assumption after the fall of Constantinople, he continued to exhibit complete trust in the Theotokos.\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{272} For a full account of the Hodegetria that covers the same material explored by Pentcheva, see Christine Angelidi and Titos Papamastorakis, “The Veneration of the Virgin Hodegetria and the Hodegon Monastery,” in Vassilaki, \textit{Images of the Mother of God}, 373-385.
\textsuperscript{273} Francis J. Connell, \textit{Our Lady of Perpetual Help} (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2006, originally published 1940), 5-6. The text has an imprimatur and nihil obstat!
The Blachernae

Another famous locus for Marian imagery, the Blachernae palace (Fig. 12), has also been a flashpoint for proving the power thesis. Indeed, this connection seems straightforward. Marian’s maphorion was kept in the palace, where the “usual miracle” occurred before the palace’s Blachernae icon every Friday. Surely this is a clear example of Marian images and relics under the imperial thumb. But again, when looking closer, the connections grow more complex. In the Alexiad, Anna Komnene reports that on one occasion, when her father Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) was heading into a battle, the Blachernae’s usual miracle failed to occur, forcing him to return. On another, Alexios attempted to take the maphorion with him to battle, imitating his predecessor, but the result was an embarrassing disaster. Alexios stuffed the veil into a tree and retreated. Perhaps with these events in mind, Patriarch John Oxites castigated Emperor Alexios I Komnenos for his impiety, citing the invincible maphorion, and (by implication) his inability to use it properly. As in the late antique period, Mary’s power continued to (quite literally) evade the imperial grasp.

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275 Bissera Pentcheva provides an illuminating comparison of a Latin pilgrim’s account and Michael Psellos’s observations of the “usual miracle” at the palace. Icons and Power, 154-159.
The Virgin in Defeat

The complex interrelation between heavenly and earthly power is especially important for understanding the later Byzantine world, a period in which “the weakening of the political power and prestige of the emperors was leading to a new emphasis upon their religious and mystical role, and therefore to a greater reliance upon the carrier of this mystical power, i.e. the Church.”\textsuperscript{279} The shift is well expressed in Gregory Palamas’s fourteenth-century homily on the Virgin’s entry into the Holy of Holies. It reads as if Gregory were describing an icon:

The signs of her rule are not that she has at her disposal crowns such as the masses will never touch, nor choice gems, ornaments and fabrics, nor regal costume different from the attire of common people. Such things were invented for those kings who cannot rise above what is earthly, and whose clothes reign rather than their souls. Instead, the tokens of her royal power are indescribable graces beyond our comprehension, abilities and energies surpassing nature and directed heavenwards, higher still than the adornments of heaven.\textsuperscript{280}

Mary’s power was a higher kind, and she “showed what it meant to be a heavenly subject instead of an earthly one.”\textsuperscript{281} It may be that this is a nefarious distinction, which it is the scholarly obligation to expose, revealing the political machinations at work behind the sources. But if the aim is to understand the Byzantines, then the distinction needs to be kept in mind.\textsuperscript{282} As the Empire weakened, Mary’s connection to political defeat only intensified. It may be true that it was in Byzantium where Mary was linked to imperial power. But it was in Byzantium where the link was severed as well.

\textsuperscript{279} John Meyendorff, \textit{The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church} (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 74.
\textsuperscript{280} Palamas, Gregory, \textit{Mary the Mother of God: Sermons by Saint Gregory Palamas}, 19.
\textsuperscript{281} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{282} Too see such methodology worked out in detail, see Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, eds., \textit{Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion}, (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).
Chryssanthi Baltoyianni’s suggests that Marian icons in the twilight of Byzantium convey an “eschatological mood… melancholy conclusions and worrisome foreboding.” It was these images that would also be especially appropriated by the West, “the more intimate postures of the pleading profile Virgin Paraklesis as in Spoleto or Freising, or the tender Mother caressing her Son as in Regensburg or Cambrai.”

Perhaps such images are Byzantium’s most lasting contribution to Marian imagery. As the Mediterranean-wide zenith of Justinian’s sixth-century reign slowly receded to the contours of Constantinople alone, Byzantine Marian imagery expanded in almost inverse proportion. There are at least three more flashpoints of Byzantine political displacement to which Marian imagery can be connected.

Myriokephalon in 1176 was a pivotal military defeat for the Byzantine Empire - the beginning of the end - leading to the irreversible process of losing Anatolia. The twelfth-century Chronicle of Choniates tells of a vision related to the battle of Myriokephalon, when a bilingual man named Mavropoulos approached the emperor Manuel Komnenos (1143-1180), and related a dream he had the previous night. In the dream, he entered a church and petitioned an icon of the Mother of God, which replied, “The emperor is now in the utmost danger, who will go forth in my name to assist him?” An unseen voice replied, “Let [Saint] George go.” Mary responded, “He is sluggish.” “Let [Saint] Theodore set forth,” responded the voice, but Mary rejected him as well. “And finally,”

the chronicler concludes, “came the painful response that no one could avert the impending evil.”

It is not surprising that such stories would accumulate around such a catastrophic failure, attempting to soften its blow. Maria Mavroudi, furthermore, has suggested that the man who told the story, the bilingual Mavropoulos, may have been hostile to the Byzantine Empire. The story has been used as evidence of Mary’s role as “strategos [general] to her icons.” She is, however, not a very capable general in this case. Mary may have at one point dispatched “her trusted soldiers to the field.” Here, she refuses to do so. The official Byzantine chronicler sees fit to record an instance where Mary almost appears to accept imperial disaster.

I mentioned above that there was a key Byzantine exception to the general rule that Mary in Byzantium was not depicted in imperial dress – an exception that proves the rule of the distinction between heavenly and earthly power. This exception appears in late fourteenth-century Kastoria, where Mary does appear with the imperial crown (Fig. 18). The difference, however, is that in this region in the 1380s, when the fresco was painted, the Ottomans were at the gates. “Only in the fourteenth century,” explains Henry Maguire, “and only outside of Byzantine territory, as the emperors in Constantinople became increasingly weak and powerless, was it possible for artists to introduce a new

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287 Ibid., 69.
288 Ibid., 94.
iconography which gave the imperial costume to Christ, as the King of Kings.” 289 And the same went for Mary. There is then, a clear deviation to the separation of earthly and sacred power. In Byzantine art, Mary could subsume the garb of the imperial court, “but only when the court at Constantinople is on the brink of extinction.” 290

One final example of Mary’s connection to political defeat comes from King Marko’s Monastery, built in the later fourteenth century. 291 The Virgin appears directly above the south entrance to the church, set on a dark blue backdrop (Fig. 19). Christ’s arm is raised, as if in an expression of emotion. King David bears a scroll reading in from Psalm 44[45]:10: “Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline [thine ear].” King Solomon appears with an open scroll displaying Proverbs 31:2: “Many daughters have wrought valiantly, many have obtained wealth, but thou has exceeded, thou hast surpassed all.” While the scrolls are in Greek, the scroll held by King Marko is in Old Serbian. Below to the left are St. Stephen the first martyr, St. Catherine, and probably St. Anastasia Pharmokolytria. 292

But the form of the Virgin in this instance is the form with which we began – the Virgin of the Passion. An angel flanks Mary and Christ with the instruments of the Passion. At first this seems like an odd inclusion in a fresco that would have been painted in 1372 to celebrate Marko’s coronation as a “New David.” V. J. Djurić, however, suggested that

289 Henry Maguire, “The Heavenly Court” in Byzantine Court Culture, 829-1204. 258.
290 Ibid.
292 Ibid., 153. The arrangement probably once decorated a small annex which may have been a baptistery, destroyed in 1963. Ibid., 154.
the Virgin of the Passion – alongside the martyrs – was a reference to the suffering that would inevitably follow the Serbian defeat at Černomen in 1371. If so, it was an accurate prognostication, as the Ottomans would further overrun Serbian territory at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. At Marko’s Monastery, therefore, we see a parallel to the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudhera. The image acknowledges military defeat, and evokes a power beyond political boundaries. Less than a century later, the Byzantine Empire fell.

**Conclusion**

“The Mother of God,” it has recently been suggested, “rose to become the protector of city and state, whose undefeatable power stemmed from her paradoxical virginal motherhood.” No doubt this is one element of Byzantine images of Mary. But the long view of Byzantine history also shows that the Mother of God was, in fact, eminently defeatable – her “power,” to recall the words of St. Paul, was made perfect in weakness. It blossomed, perhaps most fully, in collapse. Accordingly, the cult of the Virgin in Byzantium pre-dated imperial sponsorship, evaded such sponsorship, and endured after that sponsorship’s expiration. This was because Mary’s power was the

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296 Establishing this is not intended to “vindicate” the Marian cult from its detractors. In fact, distancing Mary from “power” merely invites a resumption of the traditionally Nietzschean critique. For a uniquely vigorous expression of this line of reasoning that treats some of the images mentioned above, see Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, “The Moral Masochism at the Heart of Christianity: Evidence from Russian Orthodox Iconography and Icon Veneration,” *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society*, Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 2003, 12-22. In later chapters, I will attempt to suggest how the conclusions of this chapter need not necessarily lead to Rancour-Laferriere’s.
heavenly kind, operating on rules that transcended Byzantine politics as usual, and was not reducible to them.

Generic understandings of power are far too vague to make sense of this complicated dynamic. Sarah Coakley suggests that recent academic debates over the meaning of the term power, “rival in complexity – and arguably replicate in secular form – the debates that might in a pre-modern age have been held over the nature and purpose of divine ‘acts.’” Better, however, when studying Byzantium, to consult Byzantine theology, offering a “sense of paradox and wonder which… is itself a form of deconstruction.” I began this chapter with Ephrem’s image of Mary as a great reducer of power. In the end, perhaps Mary’s Byzantinum – soaked in her hymns, criss-crossed with her processions and glittering with her icons - functioned in just the same way. Imperial power “entered her a Lofty One… and emerged humble… Entered a mighty warrior, and put on fear.”

The loss of political power made her more of a protectress, not less, because she provided the protection that no political power could. The Virgin of the Passion encapsulates this

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298 Sarah Coakley, *Power and Submissions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), xv. She then asks for proof of the existence of power as an atheist might ask for proofs for the existence of God: “Is power a force, a commodity, a hereditary deposit, a form of exchange, an authority, a means of ‘discipline’, sheer domination, or a more nebulous ‘circuit’? Must it necessarily involve intentionality, imply resistance, suppress freedom, or assume a ‘hierarchy’? And where does it reside: in individuals, in institutions, in armies or police forces, in money, in political parties, or more generally and democratically in every sort of subtle societal exchange?” (ibid., xv-xvi) She concludes that “There is no answer to these questions which is not also an implicit ideology, or at least a *recommendation,*” citing Foucault’s exchange with Habermas as a perfect instantiation of such metaphysical presumptions at work.

299 Early Christian writings on the incarnation exhibit, “a search for meaning which can only ever express itself through exploiting the logical impossibilities and apparently irreconcilable opposites of dualistic knowledge, in such a way that the hubristic power of human knowledge is shattered on the conceptual impossibility of the incarnation.” Tina Beattie, *God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate*, 94-95.

300 See note 126 above.
alternate understanding of power, and it is to further manifestations of this type that we turn in the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: THE VIRGIN AND PAINTERS

χαίρε, τὸν εἰδώλων τὸν δόλον ἐλέγξασα
Hail, you who refuted the deceit of the idols.

“[O]ne could always make the case that the Renaissance, with its interminable sequences of Madonnas, was on the whole distinctly lacking in invention.” - Michael Cole

“A Byzance, [La Vierge de Passion] n’est pas fixée.”
- Mirjana Tatić-Djurić

Introduction

In order to create a new field of study for his Renaissance painters, sculptors and architects, Giorgio Vasari – the father of art history - had to build a barrier to the past. 301

The “Greeks,” according to Vasari, were anything but Greek in the classical sense. “Giving no though to making any advance,” they painted “not in the good ancient manner of the Greeks but in that rude manner of those times.” 302  Dynamism and artistic innovation, for Vasari, was practiced only later, most especially in his own time.

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301 Vasari’s was not a solitary accomplishment but had precedents. After quoting Cennini’s observation that Giotto “changed the profession of painting from Greek back to Latin, and brought it up to date,” the Byzantinist Anthony Cutler makes the following disarming observation: “To understand this declaration requires us to recognize what was obvious to all c. 1400: the Byzantine manner was the way in which all Italians had painted. Everywhere Cennini and his contemporaries looked they saw the art that we call medieval.” Anthony Cutler, “The Pathos of Distance: Byzantium in the Gaze of Renaissance Europe and Modern Scholarship,” in Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650, 24.

Vasari’s perspective has continued to shape the discipline of art history,\textsuperscript{303} even when it is resisted.\textsuperscript{304} This chapter aims to contribute to the deconstruction of Giorgio Vasari’s artificial divide by further revealing Renaissance-style artistic agency before the Renaissance, and medieval-style “copying” after it. The Virgin of the Passion type is uniquely suited to illustrate this changing art historical perspective. The artistic activity of the Byzantine artist Theodore Apsevdis\textsuperscript{305} in the supposed “era of the image,” is responsible for giving us the first surviving instance of the Virgin of the Passion. Theodore Apsevdis, I will argue, operated with a level of artistic agency similar to what we have come to expect from Renaissance artists, except this activity embodies a wider ecclesial tradition, and is equally described as theological and intercessory. Following Apsevdis, the Virgin of the Passion type went through an extensive period of experimentation. Different artists – about whom we know little - tested different possibilities. But it was only during the Renaissance, on the island of Crete, that the type was finally codified into what would become its globalized form. The image would remain remarkably consistent from this point forward. When it comes to the Virgin of the Passion, the “era of art” was in Byzantium, and the “era of images” was in the Renaissance and beyond.


\textsuperscript{304} See note 81 above.

\textsuperscript{305} An argument for his authorship of the Lagoudera frescoes will be made below.
Komnenian Context: Liturgy, Rhetoric, Art

The late twelfth-century painter of the Panagia tou Arakos church on Cyprus found himself at the cusp of centuries of Byzantine liturgical and artistic developments.

Byzantium’s Iconoclastic controversy was long settled, and new artistic experimentation was being conducted on the tested foundation of Iconophile culture. The catalyst for such developments was the liturgy.\textsuperscript{306} Led by pioneering developments of monastic liturgies and their accompanying sermons, Byzantine artists had been experimenting with various motifs to materialize the dogmas of the Passion and Redemption.\textsuperscript{307} The Komnenian art of Constantinople in the twelfth century thus saw the development of new types, such as the Man of Sorrows and the Anapeson.\textsuperscript{308} Fresco programs followed Byzantine sermons, as Mary’s joy at the Nativity was frequently contrasted with her mourning at the deposition across the naos.\textsuperscript{309} As explained in the previous chapter, new types of the Virgin were developed in this period, such as the Virgin of Vladimir, the Eleousa, the Pelagonitissa, and the Glykophilousa icon types. Because each of these images hinted at the Christ child’s fate, they might each be legitimately called, “Virgins of the Passion.” But this particular designation is reserved for the one type where hovering angels actually bearing the cross, lance and sponge appear. By including these angels, the Virgin of the Passion type obviated the implications latent in these other motifs. The liturgy of the Meeting of Mary and Simeon in the temple (ὑπαπαντή), which had evolved into a formal feast at this point in Byzantine history, was an especially fertile

\textsuperscript{306} Hans Belting, \textit{The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages}, 119.
\textsuperscript{307} Marijana Tatić-Djurić, “La Vierge Passionnée à Žiča,” 140.
\textsuperscript{309} Henry Maguire, \textit{Art and Eloquence}, 91-108. For an illuminating discussion of such sermons, see Maria Vassilaki and Niki Tsironis, “Representations of the Virgin and Their Association with the Passion of the Christ,” in \textit{Mother of God: Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art}, 453ff.
locus for these developments, as were sermons related to Great Friday. The Virgin of the Passion icon is closely associated with Simeon’s words to Mary that “a sword shall pierce your heart too.” The Virgin of the Passion icon type effectively rendered the famous double-sided icons of Mary, with the Crucifixion on one side and the nativity on the other, on one side of the panel.

A precise textual equivalent to the type, however, is difficult to isolate. A sermon by Romanos the Melodist, in which the Christ child warns his mother of his future passion, is close. The infant Christ says to his mother: “One day you will see the child you carry now in your arms with his hands pierced by nails out of his love for your kind… He whom you call life, you will have to see hanging on the cross and you will mourn his death.” Romanos the Melodist also emphasizes Mary’s grief in realizing her son’s impending passion using the term κεχαριτωμένη, a name appended to the image at Lagoudera: “You are called full of grace [kecharitomenē] and must show yourself worthy of the title by ceasing to weep.” Another textual parallel comes from the Meeting sermons of George of Nicomedia, where Simeon is pressed by Mary to explain

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311 This connection continued in the post-Byzantine era as well. Consider, for example, the sixteenth-century fresco on the north side of the narthex of Transfiguration Monastery at Meteora, which shows Simeon himself bearing the instruments of the Passion (unpublished to my knowledge). Another post-Byzantine icon from Russia shows pairs the Meeting with Simeon with the Virgin of the Passion in the upper left corner (Clement Henze, *Mater de Perpetuo Succursu*, fig. 14).


in detail, “For what reason will the sword run through my soul?” The result is another sharp rhetorical contrast between the Nativity and the Passion.

Another textual parallel to the Virgin of the Passion icon comes from the twelfth-century sermons of Nikephoros Basilakes. The Virgin, upon seeing her dead son, complains of Gabriel’s broken promises at the Annunciation: “Even Gabriel’s greeting turns out to be almost the contrary for me. For now it is not the case that ‘The Lord is with me,’ as he promised to me, but you [Lord] are wandering without breath and among the dead.”

Such rhetorical tropes regarding Gabriel are extensive. Is it possible that in the Virgin of the Passion, Gabriel - accused in Byzantine rhetoric of not warning Mary of the Passion at the Annunciation - is shown to have done just that? There are also connections between the reclining Christ child at Lagoudera and another sermon by Nikephoros Basilakes: “Many times you slept on my breast as an infant, and now you have fallen asleep there as a dead man.”

Further liturgical parallels to the Virgin of the Passion have been suggested by Tatić-Djurić and Pallas connects the shape of Mary’s hands at Lagoudera to the Eucharistic spoon based on a sermon from Methodius.

However, an exact textual “match” may not be necessary, as the Virgin of the Passion is its own independent theological statement, regardless of the texts with which it can be associated. As mentioned at the outset of this dissertation, it is a distinctly visual form of

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314 Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, 98. The sermon is found in PG, 28, cols. 973-100.
316 Ibid., PG, 114, col. 216 B-C.
317 Mirjana Tatić-Djurić “Iconographie de la Vierge de Passion,” 163, note 143.
apocrypha. After all, in the “Byzantine repertory, any scene may relate to numerous texts, and numerous kinds of texts,” but such scenes are not necessarily reducible to texts. The Virgin of the Passion grew from the rich soil of Byzantine rhetorical and liturgical art, but it is nevertheless an independent bloom. “We cannot read a picture without knowing the texts on which its contents depend,” writes Robin Cormack, “but knowing the ‘story’ is only a start towards understanding how Byzantine icons could, although working through a limited tradition set of pictorial themes, develop and convey new meanings within the traditionalism of Orthodox Christianity.” But whatever is said about the relation of word and image, what is certain in that the Virgin of the Passion grew from a distinctly Middle-Byzantine liturgical and devotional milieu.

**Immediate Cypriot Context**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Virgin of the Passion’s first appearance was not in Constantinople, but on the Byzantine outpost of Cyprus. A case, however, has been made that the Virgin of the Passion stems specifically from Jerusalem. Such influences are not impossible, especially as Cyprus would have experienced Christian refugees after Jerusalem was surrendered to Saladin in 1187. But Annemarie Weyl Carr argues, rightfully in my view, that “more probably, both the Holy Land and Cyprus

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319 Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul*, 83.
320 Cormack continues: “Recognising the Biblical sources of an icon offers us a starting point in an interpretation an no more… Icon imagery is not mere illustration of Biblical texts,” ibid., 86.
321 Svetozara Ratseva suggests “The images of the Virgin of the Passion, of St. Simeon with the Infant, of Christ Anapason, and of the ‘Man of Sorrow’ were not created in Constantinople, but rather in the [Sinai/Holy Land/Cypriot] region.” Svetozara Ratseva, “The Virgin of the Passion: Origin and Semantics in the context of Medieval Image Tradition” *Art Studies Quarterly*, 37, 2004, 10-14. That quotation is from the French summation – the Bulgarian text, which I have translated with the help of Ralitsa Zaharieva, goes into significant more detail. Ratseva sees the catalyst being the Crusades, which is no doubt true in the case of Lagoudera – but I will be arguing that the image would have been found in Constantinople first.
reflect current fashions at Court.” Evidence for this Constantinopolitan influence on the Virgin of the Passion comes from the image’s title in the original Lagoudera fresco, “κεχαριτωμένη.” While the word refers to the gospel of Luke, “Hail, Mary, full of grace,” reflected – as was just mentioned – in the Romanos’s rhetoric, the name also refers back to the titular icon, now lost, of the homonymous monastery in Constantinople founded by Emperor Alexios I Komnenus (1081-1118). Records for this lost monastery are scarce. But it seems possible that the Kecharitomeni monastery’s titular icon was similar, if not identical, to the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera, even if the icon took on new meaning in a troubled Cypriot context. Still, there is far more to connecting this image to Constantinople than merely a name.

Why would images of such quality appear on Cyprus? As discussed in the previous chapter, Cyprus had become a key outpost of the Byzantine Empire in the twelfth century, and was consequently both fortified and beautified. Relatively few icons survive from this period, but this is due to fires and repeated raids, not to mention the practice of burning old icons to heat the oils used to consecrate a new church. A portion of the monumental wall paintings, however, has survived, and is crucial in our attempts to reconstruct the art of the Constantinople. In fact, the Stylianous have indicated that the

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325 Raids, even during the time when Byzantine imperial presence on Cyprus was strongest, would continue. These included Rénauld de Chatillon in 1155/56), an Arab fleet from Egypt in 1158, and the Count of Tripoli in 1161. Athanasios Papageorghiou, *Icons of Cyprus*, 14.
326 Ibid., 9.
“emotional” manners of more famous churches such as at the Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi (1164), can be seen a half-century earlier on Cyprus.\(^{327}\) Cypriot art, having bypassed the Iconoclastic controversy, gives a unique window to the Byzantine art historical record.\(^{328}\) And yet, it has still been slow to make it into the wider art historical canon.\(^{329}\) It has not helped that Komnenian art in general has been saddled with a range of terminology derived from Western art history, having been called “classiocizing,”\(^{330}\) “mannerist,” “Byzantine baroque,”\(^{331}\) “rococo,”\(^{332}\) “fin de siècle… art nouveau,”\(^{333}\) even – based on the folds of the draperies – the “toothpaste style.”\(^{334}\) Less adventurously, Ernst Kitzinger simply offers the term “dynamic.”\(^{335}\) But however Komnenian art is described, such adjectives need be leavened with Robin Cormack’s suggestion, applicable to Byzantine art in general, that the aim was “to support the spirituality of the viewer, not to flatter their stylistic discrimination.”\(^{336}\)

\(^{327}\) Andreas and Judith Stylianou, *Painted Churches of Cyprus*, 35.

\(^{328}\) Because Cyprus was separated from Byzantium during the Iconoclastic controversy, it did not condemn icons, and its own iconophile archbishops were themselves condemned by the Iconoclasts in 754. Cata Galataritiou, *The Making of a Saint: The life, times and sanctification of Neophyto the Recluse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 134.

\(^{329}\) Annemarie Weyl Carr shows how, with the recent dramatic burst of interest in the subject, this could be changing. See her informative chapter entitled “Art,” in Angel Nikolaou-Konnař, Christopher David Schabel, eds., *Cyprus: society and culture 1191-1374* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 285ff.

\(^{330}\) Andreas and Judith Stylianou, *Painted Churches of Cyprus*, 36.


\(^{335}\) More broadly, Kitzinger described the style as characterized by “intense agitation, rapid movements, complicated patterns of undulating, swirling and cascading draperies, and dramatic use of lights and shadows.” Ernst Kitzinger, “Byzantium in the West in the Second Half of the Twelfth Century,” 431.

Sadly, the most prominent of the imperially sponsored Komnenian foundations in Cyprus such as Machaeras and Kykkos, whose wall paintings must have been of the highest quality, have been completely destroyed by fire. But the Enkleistra of Neophytos (1183) and Panagia tou Arakos (1192) are two of the finest Komnenian survivals, reflecting that Cyprus “fully shared the golden era of Byzantine art.” There is significant evidence to suggest that the artist of both was Theodore Apsevdis. After these productions, what the Stylianous call “degeneration” sets in, also called the “Komnenian koine” style of painting prompted by the terrible events of 1191 and 1192 explored in the previous chapter. Telltale signs in thirteenth-century Cypriot art, such as the gold and silver revetments being replaced by imitative gilding, betray a loss of prosperity. By investigating the artistic activity of Apsevdis, therefore, we have a unique window into the last effulgence of Komnenian art before its impoverishment.

**Apsevdis at Neophytos’s Enkleistra**

The Enkleistra of the hermit Neophytos is a famous painted cave chapel and cell preserved in the hillside of a monastery still very active today (Fig. 20). Mango and Hawkins provided the first full study of this monument in 1966. Neophytos benefited from a friendship with Bishop Basil Kinnamos who was connected in imperial circles,

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338 Andreas and Judith Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus*, 35.
339 Ibid., 34.
340 Ibid., 36. The churches by which “the thirteenth century is announced” include the Church of Christ Antiphonitis near Kalogrea, Panagia Amasgou near Monargri, the Church of the Archangel Michael at Kato Lefkara and Agioa Solomoni at Paphos.
resulting in decorations of especially high quality. Neophytos himself advised his fellow monks that imperial sponsorship was necessary in church decoration, for “holy works of such magnitude have need of very great expenditure.” An artist’s signature survives at the bottom of a Deesis composition in Neophytos’s cave chapel, one of the earliest on record in Byzantine monuments. The inscription reads: “The Enkleistra was painted by the hand of Theodore Apsevdis in the year is 6691.” Mango and Hawkins contend that Apsevdis must have come to Cyprus from elsewhere. “His acquaintance with the newest style of painting is an indication of this; another is that he signed his work.” Even if Apsevdis was not trained in Constantinople himself, he might still have been trained directly by artists who were. As mentioned, the quality of Apsevdis’s work at Neophytos’s Enkleistra is evidenced by the Komnenian koine paintings on offer in the later frescoes of the same monument.

While Apsevdis would have somehow learned the refined forms of the capital, it is impossible to say that he merely regurgitated them in Cyprus, for he painted a living, Cypriot saint – a highly unusual threefold portrait of Neophytos which can be considered

344 Mango and Hawkins suggest Basil Kinnamos was connected to the Kinnamos family, which was established in Byzantine circles in the Middle Byzantine period. If so, then the Bishop of Paphos was closely connected with the court of Manuel I. Cyril Mango and Ernest J. W. Hawkins, “The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and Its Wall Paintings,” 205.
345 Typikon, fols. 48r – 50v, 22f, quoted in Mango and Hawkins, 134.
346 The only earlier ones, according to Mango and Hawkins, are the signatures of Ephraem and Basil at Bethlehem that date to 1169. See William Harvey, W. R. Lethaby, Robert Weir Schultz, The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem (London, 1910), 34, 43.
348 Ibid., 206. They also suggest that “Theodore was not a first-class artist – he was a little weak at compositions – and he may even have been a beginner at monumental painting” (ibid.).
349 Robin Cormack, Painting the Soul, 230.
a suitable complement to Neophytos’s unique spiritual quest. Robin Cormack has suggested that what was forbidden in text was in fact painted by Theodore: Neophytos ascendant. Neophytos’s prayer that he be received into the company of angels is brilliantly illustrated by two angels whose wings – while remaining theirs – appear to be his (Fig. 21). When contrasted with the humble donor portrait of Neophytos in the same cell beneath the Deesis, Apsevdis’s portraits constitute a dynamic theory of human nature – humble, yet with the potential (Neophytos is depicted without a nimbus) for divinization. This is consummated in a remarkable visual stunt, as Neophytos could climb into the heavenly register of the fresco program to be depicted – through a clever opening - as a living icon himself. The fact that Apsevdis signed his paintings suggests, according to Cormack, an artistic parallel to Neophytos’s self-assertion. We can therefore posit a certain individualism, albeit an ecclesial individualism, in late twelfth-century Byzantine art on Cyprus.

Apsevdis as Theologian and Intercessor

Examining the Enkleistra is a means of illuminating the role of Apsevdis at Lagoudera, where he may have also painted the first Virgin of the Passion. Earlier scholars had dismissed the connection of the painter of the Enkleistra to the later monument at

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353 “May I join the community of these two angels by virtue of my ‘angelic’ habit.” Robin Cormack, Writing in Gold, 242.
354 Ibid., 229.
355 Ibid. Emphasizing the role of Neophytos in the cycle, Galatariotou suggests that Apsevdis was “an ordinary, conventional” painter, and subordinates the work of Theodore to that of the patron, referring to Neophytos as the creator. I prefer Cormack’s suggestion that the role of patron and artist is impossible to distinguish, even at the time of the paintings production.
Lagoudera because the state of cleaning was insufficient for such a comparison.\textsuperscript{356}

However, with the cleaning\textsuperscript{357} and publishing of Lagoudera in two monographs, the time for this comparison has arrived.\textsuperscript{358} Leading authorities such as Athanasios Papageorghiou to openly assert that Theodore Apsevdis is the painter of both churches, as well as four icons, two from Neophytos’s Enkleistra two icons from Lagoudera.\textsuperscript{359} If Apsevdis did paint both the Enkleistra and Lagoudera, it is impossible to determine what he did in the years that separate the two programs. What is possible to determine is that life on Cyprus had dramatically shifted by the time of his second surviving commission.

Whereas Cyprus in the 1180s was in a period of stability, the 1190s brought chaos, which -- as we have seen -- is profoundly reflected in the Lagoudera frescoes.

Both churches have a unique “flavor” that distinguishes them from the other churches in Cyprus considerably. The precise dots on the angelic shoes, the unique rendering of the curls of hair and eyes, the elongations of figures, and the expressive tone of the faces, are enough to connect the monuments stylistically.\textsuperscript{360} And yet, the connection does not rest solely on style. There is a signature at Lagoudera as well. The inscription, located at the base of a fresco depicting Christ’s Baptism, is less certain than at Lagoudera. It reads,

\textsuperscript{356} “These paintings should, in the first instance, be compared to other twelfth century decorations in Cyprus, but it would be premature to do so until a greater number of such decorations have been subjected to proper cleaning and investigation.” They lament that of the twelfth century churches, Asinou (1105-06), St. Chrysostomos (ca. 1115) to Lagoudera (1192), only Perachorio (ca. 1160-1180) has been thoroughly studied.

\textsuperscript{357} The church languished until a structural restoration in 1955 and 56 by the Department of Antiquities, and the restoration of the paintings from 1968 to 1973 by Dumbarton Oaks.

\textsuperscript{358} David and June Winfield, \textit{The Church of Panaghia tou Arakos}; Andréas Nicolaïdès, “L’église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre,” 1-137.

\textsuperscript{359} Athanasios Papageorghious, \textit{Icons of Cyprus}, 19.

\textsuperscript{360} Maria Panayotidi, “The Question of the Role of the Donor and of the Painter: A Rudimentary Approach,” in Deltion, ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟΣ Δ’ ΤΟΜΟΣ ΙΖ’ (Athens, 1994), 150.
“Remember thy slave… a monk… o…”361 While an earlier reading by David Winfield claimed a longer inscription which included the word Theodore, the more complete monograph of the Winfields refrains from adding the word “Theodore” to the inscription, referring to the previous reconstruction as “hypothetical.”362 Even so, the Winfields suggest this may be an inscription by the painter of the church, as the letters are similar to those in the paintings.363 Furthermore, “there is no doubt that one master painter planned and was responsible for the drawing, much of the execution, and certainly for the finished appearance of the [Lagoudera] paintings.”364 After remarking that the paintings at the Enkleistra require more work to distinguish which ones were actually painted by Apsevdis, the Winfields assert “there are enough similarites of color and technique, however, to warrant the view that the Encleistra and the church at Lagoudhera contain paintings by the same masters who were trained in the same workshops.”365 The Winfield monograph, therefore, lends caution to the hypothesis that Apsevdis painted both churches, though it does not rule out this possibility.

A signature at this time does not necessarily indicate the “rising status of the artist,” as in the western milieu.366 And yet, the signature at both locations may also suggest that Apsevdis was “fully aware of his contribution which he dared express discreetly with the

362 Ibid., 162. The change may also be because the inscription has eroded since the earlier publication.
363 Ibid., 162.
364 Ibid., 317.
365 Ibid., 320.
means available to him at the time.”

Cypriot art at this time has been described as offering “a new latitude for the individual painter” and betraying “the character of distinctive personal creations.” The painter of Perachoriou has been described as “no slavish copyist, but a creative artist… who was ready to experiment with new rhythms of form and color.” A pattern book, furthermore, which may be traced to the circle of Apsevdis contains variety and innovation within it.

In a close comparison of the two monuments, Maria Panayotidi also finds the evidence sufficient to claim Apsevdis painted both churches, Lagoudera representing “a more mature phase” of his artistic development. Panayotidi argues for the painter’s own initiative to be more present in the later church, where he “intervenes in the choice of certain representation.” Although ultimately impossible to prove, there is much to be said for Panayotidi’s observations. The imposing monk Neophytos may have firmly directed a lay painter, Apsevdis. Whereas the painter, now himself a monk at Lagoudera, may have had greater authority in guiding his lay patron, Leontius. The Enkleistra displays a layman painting for a monk emphasizing the hope of heaven, whereas Lagoudera displays a monk painting for a layman emphasizing the hope for a peaceful

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369 Ibid. The signature, furthermore, can be contextualized by other Cypriot artist names that have recently been studied Costas Gerasimou, “Rescuing from obscurity the humble icon-painters of the Metropolis of Morphou,” in *Holy Bishopric of Morphou: 2000 Years of Art and Holiness*, (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus, 2002), 159-178.
372 Ibid., 154.
remainder of earthly life. But in both cases, artist and patron fuse into a sort of unified volition. Sophocles Sophocleos - after comparing both monuments – discerns in Apsevdis the best of Constantinopolitan art, revealing “a perfectionist personality, talented and extremely refined.” Lagoudera, furthermore, was the “fertile terrain where his genius culminated.”

“Genius” terminology, however, may risk again saddling Komnenian art with alien art historical vocabulary. The Winfields suggest that the cycle’s aim is neither backward (classicizing antiquity) nor forward (a foretaste of the Renaissance), but upward, with the aim of the viewer’s spiritual perfection. As we saw in the previous chapter, Apsevdis used new developments in Komnenian art to minister to a particular patron’s distress, and to intercede on his behalf. Theodore Apsevdis is an intercessor, a facilitator of prayer as much as an artist. According to Robert Nelson, the reading of the inscription beneath the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera, “makes the prayer on behalf of Leon.” But this is also to say that Theodore Apsevdis, who would have painted the inscription, made that prayer first, just as he had visually articulated the sanctification of his previous patron, Neophytos. Ultimately, we need to set both of Apsevdis’s creations next to one another: The triumphant theme of Neophytos ascendant, borne by angels, and the tragic Virgin of

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373 Ibid. Among her evidence for this contrast of the two monuments is a comparison of the two representations of the Virgin with an open scroll. In the Enkleistra Deesis inscription, the Virgin offers a peculiar prayer that reflects Neophytos’s concerns. Whereas at Lagoudera, “Leon seems to have accepted the iconographical type which was usual at the time, and which must have been proposed by the painter, since it would have been included in the subject matter of the models he brought with him,” (Ibid., 154-155). This may be speculative, but it is a plausible suggestion.


376 Ibid.

377 Ibid., 316.

the Passion, flanked by angels as well. Together they constitute a tour de force of Byzantine theology, illustrating its heights but also its depths, bringing new insight into the translation of “Apsevdis” as “he who does not lie.”

**Apsevdis at Lagoudera: The “First” Virgin of the Passion?**

In their examination of the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera, the Stylianous left us with an important, but unanswered, question: “Did the artist here develop a new theme of his own accord, or at the request of the donor Lord Leon? Was he following the latest developments from the capital?” Considering how little Byzantine art has survived, seeking an original, I believe, is a red herring. The search for one lost prototype may be as unhelpful as the search for one definitive textual source. As discussed above, the type appears to be more than an invention of one particular artist, and may be connected to the Kecharitomeni monastery in Constantinople. But what cannot be proven should not distract us from what can: The Virgin of the Passion is the result of a slow crystallization of motifs that had been percolating in Byzantine Marian imagery for centuries. For example, a nearly contemporary Virgin and Child at Sinai is extremely close to the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera, albeit without the accompanying angels (Fig. 22). Dating to the late twelfth/early thirteenth century this image shows the Christ child lifting up his hand in blessing, holding a scroll, and displaying his upturned foot as

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380 Arguing against the search for lost originals, Beth Williamson says that images should instead be studied “positively and directly, rather than as the reflection of something else… We need to think not in terms of unidirectional invention and copying, but rather about networks of assimilation and appropriation, adjustment and negotiation.” Beth Williamson, *Madonna of Humility: Development, Dissemination and Reception*, 2 and 6. She replaces the search for a lost prototype with focus on individual instances, and a return to an exploration of meaning. Similarly, I will explore the meaning of the Virgin of the Passion in chapters three and four.
at Lagoudera, an allusion to the Passion.\(^{381}\) The differences are evident, as Mary gestures to Christ in the Hodegetria style in the Sinai image, and Christ is not reclining.\(^{382}\) But the similarities reveal that the Lagoudera artist was using motifs already available, and perhaps intensifying them. Indeed, the first surviving Virgin of the Passion appears to be an amalgamation of several different types: An Anapeson, a Dexiokratoussa, “Christ the Lamb,”\(^{383}\) and Christ with an upturned foot.

The mosaic icon at Sinai is evidence that the artist at Lagoudera – very possibly Theodore Apsevdis - was drawing on much wider reserves. While he must have invented the specific motif of Neophytos ascendant, there is significant reason to think the Virgin of the Passion was available to him before. The strongest evidence for the pre-existence of the Virgin of the Passion comes from the Balkans and wider Mediterranean.

Following the fall of Constantinople in 1204, multiple examples of the Virgin of the Passion appear, from workshops that can be linked to the capital. It is to these examples that we now turn. In pursuing them, we will not undermine Apsevdis’s originality as much as plumbing the artistic tradition from which he drew.

\(^{381}\) Chrysanthe Baltoyianni suggest that the upturned foot in such icons goes back to the ninth/tenth century (the Hodegetria of Tsikanli in Georgia), and is related to the Passion prophesied in Genesis 3:15, “and you [the serpent] shall bruise his heel.” Likewise, Christ quotes Psalm 41 at the Last Supper, “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me” (John 13:8). The dangling sandal in later examples of the icon in fifteenth-century Crete serves to highlight this motif, which also appears in late Byzantine sermons. Chrysanthe Baltoyianni, *Icons: Mother of God*, 132-134.


The Virgin of the Passion at Žiča

The Byzantines had begun to lose their onetime dominance in Serbia in the early eleventh century. Over a century later, with the death of Emperor Manuel I in 1180, the Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja (St. Simeon), began to consolidate his own power. The fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders in 1204, while a disaster to the Byzantines, was therefore an opportunity for the Serbs. Two of Nemanja’s sons achieved a remarkable diplomatic success. Stefan Prvovenčani (the “First Crowned”) and Rasko (St. Sava), were able to secure both the royal crown from the Pope (1217) and independent status for the Serbian Orthodox church (1219) from the Byzantine Emperor. Serbia’s independent Orthodox identity was materialized in the patronage of monasteries and other church structures, especially during the “intense cultural byzantinization of Serbia.” The process was extensive, and was anchored in the Serbian monastery of Chilandar on Mt. Athos. One church that illustrates this process is the katholikon of Žiča Monastery that became the seat of the new Serbian archbishopric. It is here that the second oldest surviving Virgin of the Passion is found.

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384 John Van Antwerp Fine, The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 2. Slobodan Ćurčić explains that the subsequent “cult of Stefan Namanja – St. Symeon – embodied two most sacred and influential tenets for the future of medieval Serbia: its political independence as a state and the autonomy of its Church.” Slobodan Ćurčić, Architecture in the Balkans: From Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 486. Nemanja’s relics were held at the prototypical Serbian Monastery, Studenica.

385 The eldest son, Vukan, was not as successful. After their father abdicated in Stefan’s favor to become a monk on Mt. Athos, Vukan contested the coronation with the support of Rome and Hungary. After St. Sava attempted reconciliation, Stefan conquered almost all of Vukan’s former possessions by 1208, and gained the crown from Pope Honorius in 1217. “Stefan the First-Crowned,” Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium Vol. III (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1949.

386 Slobodan Ćurčić, Gračanica: King Milutin’s Church and Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1979), 6.

387 Nemanja’s son Raska (later St. Sava), fleeing his father’s court to become a monk on Athos, originally resided at the Russian Monastery of Panteleimon, then moving to Vatopedi. But when his royal father later joined him, the two were able to secure permission and endowments for a new monastery, located on the site of an abandoned Greek foundation known as Chilandar. This became the spiritual center of the Serbian nation with complete independence.
The main church of Žiča is dedicated to the Ascension. It was begun by Stefan “the First Crowned” Nemanja in 1206, and was completed in time for his coronation ceremony in 1217. It survives on the bottom fresco zone of the east side of the southwest pilaster, within the church naos (Fig. 23). The iconographical intent, according to Tatić-Djurić, was to integrate this part of the church with the part in which the Passion scenes were depicted. Like at Lagoudera, this Virgin of the Passion is depicted as standing. But unlike at Lagoudera, it is accompanied by only one angel, and he is depicted on an adjacent surface. The angel, also shown full-length, stands alongside Mary, holding the lance, cross and sponge. Although we do not have a signature for this fresco, there is fortunately no need to speculate where the painters came from. A document survives that explains that Archbishop Sava I brought “marble workers and fresco painters from Constantine’s City.” This evidence seems to clinch the case against the Lagoudera image being the first Virgin of the Passion. It is highly unlikely that such painters had somehow traveled to occupied Cyprus to see the “first” Virgin of the Passion deep in the Troodhos mountains, then returned to Constantinople from where they traveled to Serbia in the early 13th century, where they painted a significantly different image. If Byzantine painters from Constantinople were responsible for this fresco series at Žiča, as there is every reason to believe, than we have further evidence that the Virgin of the Passion – in

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390 Slobodan Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*, 500. Constantinople was then in Latin hands, which leads to doubt as to whether Byzantine painters were still active there. Yet we do have a record of St. Sava meeting with “imperial masters” in Constantinople in 1235, perhaps arranging a different project. Still, the artists could have been from Thessaloniki or Nicaea. To account for Žiča, Dimitri Obolensky speculates that “it is possible… that Sava on his way back from Nicaea in 1219-20 brought, to decorate Žiča, some painters who had been trained in Constantinople before 1204.” Obolensky concludes that “the Byzantien origin of Sava’s artistic programme for Žiča is beyond question.” Dimitri Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 137.
a variety of forms - was one of the motifs on offer in Constantinople, where the Lagoudera painter may have trained as well.

**Latomou Monastery**

The next Virgin of the Passion, chronologically speaking, also appears in the Balkans, at the church of Hosios David in Thessaloniki. The church itself dates to the fifth century, and contains an early Christian apse mosaic. However, the church’s cross-arms were renovated, and new frescoes appeared during the third quarter of the twelfth century (1160-70). Finally, another fresco was added after the Byzantine recovery following the Crusader occupation, in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. It is to this Palaiologan period that the fresco of the Virgin of the Passion at Latomou has been dated. The fresco is very poorly preserved, and survives on the east wall of the north barrel vault, near the altar ([Fig. 24](#)). Like at Žiča, the Virgin of the Passion at here shows only one angel. However, like at Lagoudera, the angel is not full length, and hovers above Mary with the instruments of the Passion. The angel’s instruments are still visible. Mary’s head is inclined toward the angel, but her face and Christ’s expression do not survive. The fresco to the immediate left of the Virgin of the Passion is closely linked to it: Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. We do not know as much about the individual artists in these churches as we do at Lagoudera. However, what we are

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392 This Virgin of the Passion, consequently, coincides the first Palaiologan works in the city of Thessaloniki such as those in the Chapel of St. Euthymios, appended to the Church of St. Demetrios. Tsigaridas connects this Virgin of the Passion to the late thirteenth century icon of St. Anne in the Vatopedi Monastery and the wall paintings in the Church of the Holy Apostles at Peć of the year 1300, (ibid., 81).
beginning to see is variety in employment of the type—both in terms of where it was placed within the program and in the manner of its depiction.

**Konče Monastery**

By the year 1300 when the Latomou Virgin of the Passion was painted, the Serbian King Milutin had expanded his territorial possessions at the expanse of the Byzantine Empire.\(^{393}\) His grandson Stefan Dušan would culminate this expansion of power, proclaiming himself Emperor of the Serbs and the Greeks in 1346. This era saw an increase in private patronage, leading to many new foundations. The impressive Lesnovo Monastery boasts an iconographical cousin to the Virgin of the Passion which could be referred to as an Anapeson of the Passion, painted in 1349.\(^{394}\)

Technically speaking, however, the next surviving Virgin of the Passion is at another private church, that of Konče Monastery, also constructed during the reign of Emperor Dušan in the mid-fourteenth century by the nobleman Nikola Stanjević.\(^{395}\) The Virgin of the Passion at Konče depicts the fear of Christ in a way completely removed from his composure at Lagoudera (Fig. 25). Christ appears on the right, with both arms extended

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\(^{393}\) Slobodan Ćurčić, *Gračanica: King Milutin’s Church*, 140.

\(^{394}\) The church of the Archangels at Lesnovo was founded by one of Dušan’s noblemen, the *sevastokrator*, later Despot Oliver. With his wife Maria and two sons, Oliver established a private monastery that rivaled the finest buildings in the area. The part of the building containing another Virgin of the Passion was built from 1341-46, but the paintings date to 1349. Mary is present in the scene to the right of Christ fanning her son who appears in the Anapeson type. To the left of Christ is an angel bearing the cross. Smiljka Gabelić, “Diversity in fresco painting of the mid-fourteenth century: The case of Lesnovo,” in *The Twilight of Byzantium: aspects of cultural and religious history in the late Byzantine empire: papers from the colloquium held at Princeton University 8-9 May 1989* Slobodan Ćurčić, Doula Mouriki, eds., (Princeton: Program in Hellenic Studies, 1991). And her more complete monograph, Smiljka Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo : istorija i slikarstvo* (Belgrade, 1998).

away from the angel. His two arms are extended away from a single angel. Christ recoils from the cross-bearing angel as he does elsewhere in Middle Byzantine art,\footnote{See, for example, Christ extending both his arms away from Simeon towards his mother at St. Nicholas tou Kasnitzē in Kastoria. Henry Maguire, “The Iconography of Symeon with the Christ Child in Byzantine Art,” \textit{Dumbarton Oaks Papers}, Vol. 34/35 (1980/1981), fig. 5.} and as John the Baptist does at a much earlier point in the Byzantine art historical record (Fig. 26).\footnote{In the seventh century iconography related to the flight of Elizabeth, John the Baptist retreats in a similar manner from a Roman soldier. The ampulla with this image was discovered at San Colomba de Bobbio in 1920, dating to the middle or second half of the seventh century. André Grabar, \textit{Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza – Bobbio)}, (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1958, plate LVI. I thank Slobodan Ćurčić for this reference.}

But the perhaps the most unusual feature of this particular Virgin of the Passion is the title: Hilandarini. We know that Chilandar Monastery on Mount Athos continued to exert a dominant cultural influence in the Balkans at this time, as many of the Serbian archbishops were connected to the monastery.\footnote{Slavko Todorovich, \textit{The Chilandarians}, (East European Monographs, 1990), 55-88.} Stefan Dušan himself resided at Mount Athos for four months (with his wife!).\footnote{John Van Antwerp Fine, \textit{The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest}, 306.} Was the monastery of Chilandar particularly associated with the Virgin of the Passion? Tatić-Djurić wisely suggests that we know too little to say.\footnote{Mirijana Tatić-Djurić, “La Vierge Passionnée à Žiča” in \textit{Le Monaster de Žiča: Recueil des Travaux}, 164.} While I am unaware of Virgins of the Passion at that monastery other than a sixteenth century Anapeson of the Passion,\footnote{Streten Petkovic, \textit{The Icons of Monastery Chilandar} (Monastery Chilandar: The Holy Mountain Athos, 1997).} a Chilandar Virgin of the Passion would do much to explain the proliferation of surviving examples in the Balkans. Chilandar was dedicated to the Hodegetria,\footnote{Slovo P. Todorovich, \textit{The Chilandarians: Serbian Monks on the Green Mountain} (Columbia University Press, 1989), 40. Three other major icons of the Virgin are identified with the monastery: Two were brought from Jerusalem by Saint Sava, “Galaktrophousa” and the \textit{Panaghia Trikeroussa} (“Three Handed”). Sava placed the former in his cell in Karyes, and the latter he sent to Studenitsa, until – two centuries later - it miraculously returned to Athos strapped to a donkey. Being placed in in the “upper place” near the altar,} and we can wonder if perhaps the Hilandarini title...
was a result of confusion with that icon. 403 Another Virgin of the Passion appears at King Marko’s Monastery, built in the later fourteenth century, and discussed in the last chapter. 404

What is especially notable about this series of frescoes, from Lagoudera to King Marko’s Monastery, is the variety. The Virgin of the Passion appears in different poses, at different points in the sanctuary, with different titles as well. 405 Such diversity is amplified when we study examples of the Virgin of the Passion type attested in portable icons, which correspond to some of the frescoes already discussed.

**Portable Icons**

Several examples of Virgin of the Passion portable icons mirror these Balkan frescoes. The earliest of the portable Virgin of the Passion icons, hailed as a “missing link” 406 in the type’s development, is kept at Mount Sinai (Fig. 27). The clumsy hands and non-classical features of the angels and Christ’s garments lead Baltoyanni to suggest its origin in a non-Constantinopolitan, possibly Sinai, workshop at the beginning of the

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403 There is an Anepeson in the original fresco program of Chilandar, and perhaps “Hilandarini” is a reference to that. But this unusual depiction, Mary orant is placed near the sleeping Christ, and instead of a sole angel to the right bearing the instruments of the passion, there are two to the left and the right bearing liturgical fans. Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *L’Art au Mont-Athos* (Thessaloniki, Patriarchal Institute de Recherches Patristiques, 1977), 253-54.


405 Such as the fifteenth century Virgin of the Passion at the Church of St. Mary in Matka, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Here Mary sits on a throne, her whole body is in view, her head lightly inclined towards the Child. Svetozara Rateva, “The Virgin of the Passion: Origin and Semantics in the context of Medieval Image Tradition,” 13.

fifteenth century. She argues that that the type did not proliferate because the Sinai workshop had limited influence. The Greek inscription on the icon anticipates what later would become the Virgin of the Passion’s standard inscription: “and Christ, clothed in mortal flesh, seeing the signs of death, was afraid.”

Another portable icon at the St. Anastasia Museum in Rhodes dates to the mid-fifteenth century (Fig. 28). The Virgin is seated on a throne, and the angel in a bright orange tunic, as tall as the seated Virgin, stands bearing the instruments of the Passion. It has been described as a “rare variant, combining the Virgin of the Passion with the seated ‘Glykophilousa.’”

The relief decoration, illusion of depth, and the thick foliate patterns, according to Konstantia Kefala, recall western prototypes, suggesting that the icon is a local product of a Rhodian workshop. Painting during the Hospitaller period, it reflected the “aesthetic taste of the wealthy Rhodian burghers, irrespective of Creed.”

It appears to be an analogue to the thirteenth-century, full-length fresco at Žiča.

An additional fifteenth-century icon is further representation of the “experimental stage.” This icon in the collection of Queen Frederica, shows Christ’s two hands stretching away from the angel with the cross, who appears on the left (Fig. 29). This gives a corollary in hand-held icons to the frescoes already seen at Konče, while its Greek inscription also reflects what would become the icon’s normative accompanying lines. An additional

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407 Chrystanthe Baltoyianni, Icons: Mother of God, 171. Her reasons are the triangular opening of the neck which is characteristic of Cretan workshops. The unique feature of the Virgin’s lips touching the child’s hair resembles the Kykotissa, of which examples survive at Sinai. The Virgin holding the child’s himation also appears in a Virgin Pelagonitissa at Sinai, and the red lettering which appears on this icon appears at Sinai as well. I have been able to inspect this icon personally, and concur with Baltoyianni’s conclusions.
408 Chrystanthe Baltoyianni, Icons: Mother of God, 171.
410 Ibid.
mid-fifteenth century example shows a Virgin Lactans, with a single angel bearing the cross, lance and sponge hovering above a nursing Christ who does not appear to notice\footnote{Anastasia Drandaki, ed., \textit{The Origins of El Greco: Icon Painting in Venetian Crete} (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2009). 73.} (\textbf{Fig. 30}). Such icons have been called “intermediate iconographic schemes before the complete formulation.”\footnote{Ibid., 158.} The rarity of these formulas proves that they were experiments that ultimately did not succeed.\footnote{Ibid.. 153.}

A further single-angel example discussed in this dissertation’s introduction can be found at the Koutloumousiou Monastery on Mt. Athos,\footnote{The Koutloumousiou Monastery, the sole Athonite monastery bearing a Turkish name, may have been founded in the first half of the twelfth century. The monastery emerged from relative obscurity in the mid-fourteenth century under the leadership of Chariton, who gained patronage from a Wallachian ruler John Vladislav – giving the monastery a Romanian connection that endures to this day. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, eds., \textit{Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents}, Volume 4 (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 1408-1409.} known as the “Dreaded Protection” (ἡ Παναγία τῆς Φοβερᾶς Προστασίας (\textbf{Figs. 8, 9 and 31}). It inhabits a side chapel off the north side of the main katholikon.\footnote{The architectural complex that frames this miraculous image can perhaps be compared to similar complexes surrounding miraculous images in the West. Erik Thunø, “The Miraculous Image and the Centralized Church Santa Maria Della Consolazione in Todi,” in Thunø and Wolf, \textit{The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance}, 29ff.} Monastery lore tells how this icon saved the monastery during an invasion of Turkish pirates,\footnote{Ibid.}, hence its name “Dreaded Protection.”\footnote{Ibid., 1411.} Before this, the icon was said to have miraculously survived a fire that occurred on one of the monastery’s Cretan meto\kia.\footnote{\textit{Koutloumousi: Ten Centuries of long vigil} (Mount Athos: Holy Monastery of Koutloumous, 2000), 5.} The icon has been heavily revetted, hence dating is difficult to determine; but its Cretan connection, and its similarity to other icons in the “experimental stage,” suggest a fifteenth-century date.\footnote{Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, \textit{L’Art au Mont-Athos}, 22.}
An icon similar to the “Dreaded Protection,” but with two angels, can be found in Stavronikita Monastery on a side chapel on the north side of the katholikon. The evidence of such portable icons contributes to the impression of variety. This Byzantine phase of the Virgin of the Passion type is well-expressed in the words of Gouma-Peterson: “During the course of Byzantine art proper, there always was enough leeway for artistic inventiveness within the limits imposed by church doctrine.” Nowhere in the Byzantine period does the type behave with the rote repetition that Vasari saw as the hallmark “Greek” art.

**Crete: The Twilight of Experimentation**

The evidence of icons amplifies what was revealed by the frescoes: A distinguishing characteristic of the Virgin of the Passion type from the late twelfth to the early fifteenth century is diversity. Different gestures, expressions and poses of Mary, Christ, and the angel(s) lend the image varying levels of apprehension regarding Christ’s impending destiny. This situation changed, however, in fifteenth-century Crete under Venetian rule, where unique trade conditions froze the Virgin of the Passion in the “type définitif de Ricco.” Crete experienced a cultural flowering in the fifteenth century, as icon

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420 Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *L’Art au Mont-Athos*, 26; R. M. Dawkins, *The Monks of Athos*, 207. I have not been able to visit this monastery, and the date of Dawkins’s text indicates that the icon’s placement could well have changed. The two angels may mean that this icon dates to a later period, after Andreas Ritzos, as evidenced by the traditional Virgin of the Passion on Stavorinikita’s mid-sixteenth century iconostasis, painted by Theophanes Strelitzas. Angeliki Lymberopoulou, “Audiences and Markets for Cretan Icons,” in *Viewing Renaissance Art*, Kim Woods, Carol M. Richardson and Angeliki Lymberopoulou, eds., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 184-85.


production\textsuperscript{423} eclipsed the frescoes of the century past.\textsuperscript{424} Discussion of this important chapter in the history of icons begins in 1400, with the documentation of emigrating Constantinopolitan icon painters.\textsuperscript{425} From Philanthropinos, to Angelos Akotantos, the artist emerges on Crete as a distinguished individual,\textsuperscript{426} enjoying considerable amounts of prestige and wealth.\textsuperscript{427} Nevertheless, icon painters in the early fifteenth century were still in the shadow of Constantinople,\textsuperscript{428} which continued to be a source of innovation even in the closing decades of the Byzantine Empire.\textsuperscript{429}

Thanks to the work of Maria Vassilaki, the artist Angelos has emerged as “El Greco of the fifteenth century.”\textsuperscript{430} Owning a considerable library, he operated – not unlike Apsevdis – as a visual theologian, taking positions on the issues of the day.\textsuperscript{431} Our new information on Angelos enables us to further contextualize the artist who both learned in his workshop and purchased his drawings: Andreas Ritzos (active 1451-92), the name

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{424} Anastasia Drandaki, “Between Byzantium and Venice,” 12. She cites the unpublished wall paintings in Temenia, Saint Demetrios in Livada and St. Photosios as mixing Byzantine and Gothic elements. The emphasis on Christ’s humiliation and suffering can be connected to the Franciscan order in Crete.
\bibitem{425} Ibid., 11.
\bibitem{426} Ibid., 14.
\bibitem{428} Ibid. Artists endured the dangerous and expensive journey because the variety and quality of supplies, not to mention artistic inspiration, were superior to those available in Crete.
\bibitem{429} Robin Cormack, “The Icon in Constantinople around 1400” in \textit{The Hand of Angelos}, 50.
\bibitem{430} Before Vassilaki, Angelos was thought to be a seventeenth century artist. She showed that icons depicting Angelos can be connected to the surviving fifteenth century will of Angelos. Maria Vassilaki, “Introduction” in \textit{The Hand of Angelos}, Maria Vassilaki, ed., 11. Her work on Angelos is also published in Maria Vassilaki, \textit{The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete} (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2009).
\bibitem{431} “Angelos seems to use his icons as a vehicle for participating in and commenting on the major theological debates of the day, and in doing so he displays the depth of his ideas and of his training.” Maria Vassilaki, “Introduction” in \textit{The Hand of Angelos}, 10.
\end{thebibliography}
most closely associated with the “final” Virgin of the Passion type.\textsuperscript{432} Three of the most paradigmatic Virgins of the Passion are signed by him in Latin, \textit{Andreas Rico de Candia pinxit}.\textsuperscript{433} Ritzos’s father Maneas was a goldsmith and painter, and his son Nicholas and grandson Maneas painted as well, placing Andreas in a family of painters that spanned the peak of Cretan icon production.\textsuperscript{434} Andreas Ritzos would have lived through the shock of the fall of Constantinople, to which he was no passive observer. Andreas is on record for donning a crossbow in a ship en route to Negroponte,\textsuperscript{435} and a document shows his son Nicholas to have rented suits of armor as well.\textsuperscript{436}

\textbf{Andreas Ritzos and the Final Formulation}

Like Apsevdis, Ritzos may have combined different types to create the Virgin of the Passion as it is most recognized today. During this era we see variations of the Glykophilousa which includes Christ with the upturned foot, and his hand gently grasping his mother’s thumb\textsuperscript{437} (Fig. 32). Both of these formulas would be adopted in Ritzos’s Virgin of the Passion. Investigating such antecedents to Ritzos, Baltoyianni suggest that a “lost prototype” of the Glikophilousa by Angelos was remodeled by Ritzos

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{432} John Akotantos, the brother of Angelos, in fact trained Ritzos, and sold him models, showing the close continuity in Cretan icon painting at this time. A document dating to 1477 shows that Andreas purchased “54 examples of various figures and saints” that John had inherited from Angelos. Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “The Icon as a Cultural Presence After 1453,” in \textit{Byzantine Tradition After the Fall of Constantinople}, John Yiannis, ed. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 154.

\textsuperscript{433} Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “The Icon as a Cultural Presence After 1453,” 153. One is at the Museo Bandini at Croatia, another at the Galleria of Parma, and another at the church of St. Blasius at Ston. The icons are almost perfect matches, except for slight variations in the decoration of the haloes.


\textsuperscript{435} Mario Cattapan, “I Pittori Andrea e Nicola Rizo da Candia” in \textit{Thesaurismata: Bpllettino Dell’Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini} (Volume 10, 1973), 249.

\textsuperscript{436} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{437} Chrysanthe Baltoyianni, \textit{Icons: Mother of God}, 155.
\end{footnotesize}
to make the Virgin of the Passion. Whether or not an exact prototype can be surmised, it does seem likely that Ritzos used available models to “package” the Virgin of the Passion in a unique form, one that would become extremely successful. In Ritzos’s version, the child’s face is wrenched from his mother to engage the angel with the cross. This balances the tenderness of the united hands with a certain severity. And yet, some elements are lost in this formula as well. Gone, for example, is the bare leg of Lagoudera which references the paschal lamb, which appears on other Cretan icons of the period. The “Princeton Madonna” in the Princeton University Art Museum, possibly by Nicolas Ritzos, is a fine example of the standardized form (Fig. 33).

An inscription, in Greek or Latin, is frequently affixed to the Virgin of the Passion in Ritzos’ formulation:

Ὁ τὸ χαίρε πρὶν τῇ Πανάγῳ μηνύσας
tά σύμβολα νῦν τοῦ πάθους προδεικνύει,
Χριστὸς δὲ, θνητὴν σάρκα ἐνδεδυμένος
Πότῳν δεδοίκως δειλιᾶ, ταῦτα βλέπων

438 Manolis Borboudakis, ed., Icons of the Cretan School (From Candia to Moscow to St. Petersburg), (Pergamos: Adams Editions), catalogue entry 214, 567.
439 Baltoyianni points out one eighteenth century example at the Strophades monastery. In this case, waist-length angels enable there to still be a Glykophilousa Virgin of the Passion. Chrysanthe Baltoyianni, Icons: Mother of God, 155.
440 The icon was purchased by Allan Marquand at a New York auction in 1911 and given to the Museum in 1920. It was the basis for Homer Eaton Keyes making a direct parallel of Princeton’s Art Museum to the Uffizi, which also had a Ritzos’s Virgin of the Passion. Princeton University, he wrote, having acquired “almost an exact duplicate of the Florentine work, may well lay claim to possessing the finest Byzantine painting in America.” Homer Eaton Keyes, “The Princeton Madonna and Some Related Paintings,” American Journal of Archaeology, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1913), 210. Keyes, however, followed Arthur Frothingham in assuming that the icon had to be medieval. They both attributed the icon to the fourteenth century mosaicist Andrea Taffi, who appears in Vasari’s Lives. A. L. Frothingham, Jr. “Byzantine Artists in Italy from the Sixth to the Fifteenth Century,” The American Journal of Archaeology and of the History of the Fine Arts, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1894), 46.
442 Clement Henze, Mater de Perpetuo Succursu, 11. In searching Enric Follieri’s Initia hymnorum ecclesiae Graecae (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1960-66), I have not been able to find any precedent in Greek hymnody for these lines.
The inscription makes the theme of the Passion even more explicit. From a Byzantine point of view, this was perhaps unnecessary, as the words tell the meaning of an icon that might have once been immediately grasped. Based on the precedent of the single angel that we have already examined, Xyngopoulos has suggested that Cretan artists like Ritzos, influenced by the Hodegetria, added a second angel without altering the inscription, which clearly was intended for images with only one. This inscription, therefore, which is sometimes but not always included by Ritzos, is further evidence that his was a composite formulation rather than an original invention.

This inscribed version of the Virgin of the Passion attributable to Ritzos might have been one among others, but market forces dictated otherwise. Following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, Crete in many ways took up the mantle of icon production. An oft-cited contract from 1499 lists an order of 700 Cretan icons, 500 “a la latina” and 200 “a la greca.” This demand would peak in the 1560’s and 1570’s,

444 This loose translation is provided by Gouma-Peterson, “Crete, Venice, the ‘Madonneri,’” 59.
446 Nano Chatzidakis, *Venetiae quasi alterum Byzantium: From Candia to Venice: Greek Icons in Italy 15th-16th Centuries*, exhibition catalogue, Correr Museum, Venice (Athens, 1993), 2, note 7. Robin Cormack also points out that such an order at the peak of the Renaissance shows that Europe in 1500 was interested in more than merely humanist paintings. Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul*, 214. Data such as this
corresponding with the zenith of Venetian power.\textsuperscript{447} Desire for such icons came from the Venetian bourgeoisie, but also from the monasteries extending from Mount Athos to Metora, Patmos, the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Alexandria, and Sinai, as evidenced by the large monastic inventories of Cretan icons.\textsuperscript{448} A consequence of this proliferation was relative monotony. In 1499, an artist named Antonio Tajapiera, was under contract to produce seven faces of the Virgin \textit{per diem} over a period of two months for another artist, who we presume would complete the rest.\textsuperscript{449} Art historians have noticed this mass production before, resulting in the unflattering term “madonnero,” long used to refer to Cretan artists of the post-Byzantine period. The artistic ethos has been accurately described as “small scale industrial production.”\textsuperscript{450} When Ritzos’ version of the Virgin of the Passion met such conditions, it overwhelmed its iconographic competitors.\textsuperscript{451} The Virgin of the Passion from this point forward became enormously popular, in just this form, copied by Emmanuel Lambardos, Victor the Cretan, Theophanes the Cretan, Emmanuel Tzanes, as well as works that do not bear a signature.\textsuperscript{452} “In all of these,”

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\textsuperscript{447} Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “Crete, Venice, the ‘Madonneri’ and a Creto-Venetian Icon in the Allen Art Museum,” 66.
\textsuperscript{448} Manolis Chatzidakis, \textit{Etudes sur la peinture postbyzantine}, 210-211. Sinai, for example, has 250 Cretan icons dating from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. When the taste for icons in Venice subsided, Cretan artists as Theophanes Strelitzas (d. 1559) continued to produce icons for the Mediterranean monastic milieu. Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “The Icon as a Cultural Presence After 1453,” 155-156. Islands such as Cyprus also produced icons through this period, though our archival material there is not as rich. Ioannis A. Elliades, “Cultural Interactions in Cyprus 1191-1571: Byzantine and Italian Art,” in \textit{Culture, Religion, Rhetoric} (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006), 15-31.
\textsuperscript{450} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{452} Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “Crete, Venice, the ‘Madonneri,’” 81, with a list of many of the icons in footnote 74.
\end{flushright}
explains Gouma-Peterson, “the type is repeated with almost slavish faithfulness down to the last detail and it is difficult to detect the personal style of an artist even in those that are signed… it is not until after the fall of the Byzantine Empire that one observes the close adherence to established types and to an established pictorial style.”

Even when western influence such as one-point perspective and naturalized, blue skies encroach upon this icon type, the Virgin of the Passion as defined by Ritzos seems almost untouchable (Fig. 34). The dominance of the Ritzos paradigm is evidenced by the Virgins of the Passion that survive at Sinai. While they span centuries and exhibit varying levels of artistic skill, all but one (the Sinai icon examined above) are in the Ritzos formulation (Fig. 35).

In addition, of the many Virgin of the Passion on offer in the comprehensive Icons of the Cretan School catalogue, from an international array of museums, all of them are in the Ritzos formulation. Hors Bredekamp, arguing against Walter Benjamin’s famous essay, has shown how “the mass production of the work of art… is not an invention of the twentieth century.” His case in point is the year 1400 in Germany, but 1500 in Crete would serve just as well.

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453 Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “Crete, Venice, the ‘Madonneri,’” 81 and 86.
454 Anastasia Drandaki, ed., The Origins of El Greco, catalogue entry 24, 76-77. There is, however, one slight variation in the example from the P. and A. Canellopoulos Museum. Christ, instead of looking at the angels, is engaging the viewer. This panel almost seems to suggest that the motif is now so familiar that an additional level of engagement is required, though without altering the essential contours.
455 Numbers compiled from Kurt Weitzmann’s unpublished photographs of the St. Catherine’s Monastery icons, Princeton University, Department of Art & Archaeology, supplemented by my own visit to the Monastery.
456 Manolis Borboudakis, ed., Icons of the Cretan School (From Candia to Moscow to St. Petersburg).
458 Hors Bredekamp, “The Simulated Benjamin: Medieval Remarks on its Actuality,” translated by Iain Boyd Whyte. First published in German as ‘Der simulierte Benjamin: Mittelalterliche Bemerkungen zu seiner Aktualität,” in Frankfurter Schule und Kunstgeschichte, Andreas Berndt et al., eds, (Berlin: Reimer, 1992), 295. “The crucial point, however, is that this mechanism was not employed against cult value, as Benjamin assumes, but rather in order to propagate it,” 296.
Miraculous Verification and Global Proliferation

But when artistic interventions ended, supernatural ones seem to have begun. Miraculous images in the Renaissance have lately become a subject of new scholarly focus, among other reasons because of the faulty assumption that such images were a chiefly a medieval phenomenon.\(^{459}\) In some cases, it was not until the Renaissance that such images “revealed themselves as miraculous, thereby becoming the focus of attention and artistic patronage.”\(^{460}\) Richard Trexler has outlined a certain formula for these Renaissance-era accounts of miraculous icons. First, a miracle occurs in a profane or exotic locale, distanced from the public, but revealed to a devotee. The pious witness is disbelieved, and the image is acquired by a pious lay person who seeks to harbor the miraculous power for themselves. Ultimately, a church or cathedral would claim the image to bring the benefit to the community (and confirm its authenticity), thus conferring new legitimacy to the host foundation.\(^{461}\) Though Trexler does not mention the Virgin of the Passion, the most famous miracle story related to the Virgin of the Passion fits his criteria almost exactly.\(^{462}\)


\(^{460}\) Erik Thunø, “The Miraculous Image and the Centralized Church Santa Maria Della Consolazione in Todi,” in Thunø and Wolf, The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance, 30.


\(^{462}\) There are other miracle stories as well, beyond the Renaissance. In Russia, an example was copied from a Cretan version in the 17th century and was displayed in the town of Nizhnij-Novgorod. After healing a woman in the village of Palitsy, it was moved to Lykov and by 1641 was placed in Moscow on the order of Tsar Alexander Michailowitsch. It was placed near the Tverski gate, where a monastery was built in its honor, and was demolished in 1928. Francisco Ferrero, The Story of an Icon, 90.
One Cretan Virgin of the Passion was stolen by a sailor from a church in Crete and taken to Rome. The thief fell ill, and consequently repented, requesting to a friend that the icon be placed in a church. Rather than follow these instructions, the friend was convinced by his wife to keep the impressive image. The family’s daughter then had a vision in which Mary demanded that the picture be placed in the church of St. Matthew, located between the churches of Santa Maria Maggiore and the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. Mary revealed herself in this vision as *Mater de Perpetuo Succurso* (“Mother of Perpetual Help”), the origin of the icon’s most popular name. The parents yielded to their daughter’s wishes, and the image was placed in the church of St. Matthew at Merulana in Rome on March 27, 1499 – just at the peak of the Cretan icon production described above. There the image was tended by Augustinian friars, who also had a strong presence in Crete.

The image was lost when the Church of St. Matthew was destroyed in 1798 during the French invasion of Rome. But in the nineteenth century, it was rediscovered, placed in the Church of St. Alphonsus, where it became the prototype for worldwide proliferation at the orders of Pope Pius IX. Its machine-aided replication in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including medals, prayer books, short tracts, and official

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463 This image is clearly the most famous example of the Virgin of the Passion, was given a more westernized appearance when it was repainted in the 18th century. In a recent restoration, the wood has been carbon dated to the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, hence, leading Ferrero to conclude that this most famous image is “a unique copy, made in the 18th century, of a venerated icon of the 14th century.” Fabriciano Ferrero, *The Story of an Icon*, 102. For images, see this dissertation’s introduction, Figs. 1, 4 and 5. The enormous impact of this icon will be further explored in this dissertation’s conclusion.

464 Fabriciano Ferrero, *The Story of an Icon*, 108ff. This story is also outlined in detail in Clement Henze’s *Mother of Perpetual Help*, 50ff. The historical source is a piece of parchment attached to a wooden tablet which hung in the church of St. Matthew. The original has been destroyed, but three copies, in relative agreement, survive in the Vatican Library.

reproductions, dwarfed any earlier multiplication. Ritzos’s – and only Ritzos’s - Virgin of the Passion was reproduced at a staggering rate; gaining the world, according to Clement Henze, “by peaceful conquest.” The type’s medieval diversity, however, had disappeared.

Conclusion

According to Byzantine art historian Robin Cormack, the icon has yet “failed to find a place in the conceptual framework of the Western art historian.” This chapter has addressed this dilemma by showing how the history of the Virgin of the Passion type gives us traditional western art history in reverse. The features of artistic personality emerge most clearly in the Byzantine milieu, where the intercessory, creative activity of Apsevdis was tethered to the complex artistic and devotional currents of Constantinople. His work at the Enkleistra and Lagoudera, both informed by a deep tradition, evidences artistic maturation and adaptation to different patrons. This continued with other artists, whose names we do not know, but who gave the Virgin of the Passion type variety in composition, meaning and placement. Such variety was mirrored in portable icons up through the fifteenth century. But with Ritzos’s arrangement in Venetian Crete, the Virgin of the Passion type continued to proliferate while the variety effectively ceased. Moreover, the image’s association with miracles did not stop in the Renaissance, but was actually amplified. There are, to be sure, numerous exceptions to the story as I have told

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466 Clement Henze provides an early twentieth century tally (Clement Henze, Mother of Perpetual Help, 106-126; Clement Henze, Mater de Perpetuo Succursu, 69-86.

467 Robin Cormack, Painting the Soul, 37.

it here, but the “final formulation” of the Renaissance clearly overwhelmed its dynamic medieval competitors.

A final question remains: If art history can be shown to function exactly opposite to how Giorgio Vasari conceived it, then why does Vasari’s paradigm still hold? Part of the reason, I believe, is a lack of compelling, non-Vasarian alternatives, and I conclude this chapter by suggesting them. Modern Western art historians, of course, did not invent the categorization and explanation of Byzantine icons of Mary. Examples of proto-art historical activity can be found in the eleventh century, the fifteenth century, and especially the European Counter-Reformation and throughout the history of Russia. These chronicles show that the staggering variety of Marian images in the Byzantine and medieval world did not escape notice – but only the notice of more recent art historians. Russian theology, still relatively unfamiliar to Western scholars, is also particularly

469 The Koumbelidiki church in Kastoria contains a Virgin of the Passion from the 1480s that still retains the one angel with Christ leaning away. Stylianos Pelkanidis and Manolis Chatzidakis, Kastoria (Athens: Melissa Publishing House, 1985), 84ff. On the island of Cyprus in the sixteenth century, the Virgin of the Passion appears on the Royal Doors in the fifteenth century, a phenomenon which will be explored in the next chapter.

470 An eleventh century hexaptych from Sinai, for example, shows five miraculous Marian icons of Constantinople, the Eleousa, Hodegetria, Kyriotissa, Deesis, and Hagiosoritissa types. As such, it can perhaps be understood as an early Marian icon “catalog.” Chryssanthi Baltouanni, “The Mother of God in Portable Icons,” in ibid., 144).

471 In 1422 a Cypriot monk named Gregory of Kykkos sought to make sense of the Kykkotissa icon in his monastery, and in so doing, provides an illuminating account of how Luke’s original images of Mary were created and dispersed. Michele Bacci, “With the Paintbrush of the Evangelist Luke,” in Vassilaki, Mother of God.


473 The modern era also saw visual compendia, specifically in Russian culture, both in print, panel, and finally frescoed form. Elena Boeck, “Strength in Numbers or Unity in Diversity? Compilations of Miracle-Working Virgin Icons,” in Alter Icons, Jefferson Gatral and Douglas Greenfield, eds., 27ff.
helpful in this regard. According to the theologian Sergei Bulgakov, “There is no such thing… as an absolute canon of the icon, as the Old Believers think. Such a canon would condemn the painting of icons to complete immobility and to death in so far as art is concerned. Icons are born of art and should remain in the realm of art. While founded on tradition and developing it, the icon has its own life and its place in modern art.”

The medieval variety I have indicated in this chapter supports Bulgakov’s perspective. In the Russian novella by Leskov, The Ensealed Angel, an icon painter suggests a similar view: “It’s an offense to us to think that we simply use set patterns as if they were stencils. In the pattern book [podlinnik], we’re given a rule, but how it’s followed is left to the freedom of the artist.”

Likewise, for the theologian, priest and art historian Pavel Florensky, “It is as a mystical theologian, a vates or ‘seer’, that the iconographer must fulfill [the artistic] task, not as a copyist.” For Florensky, “to the truly creative, the presence of a canonical tradition is never a hindrance, for in every sphere of art the complexities of canonical forms act as a touchstone that, while it may break lesser talent, will serve to sharpen true creativity.” Such perspectives better enable us to understand why it is that Byzantine artists could employ types with such counterintuitive liberty.

Byzantine, “Greek” art is irreducibly dynamic. The theological and liturgical sources of this dynamism are the subject of the next chapter.

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474 Of course, it is not that Russian thought on Byzantine art has been absent from Angloshphere discussions of Byzantine art and theology. Vladimir Lossky and Leonid Ouspensky, for example, has had significant influence. However, theologians such as Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov, whom I cite here, have not had as much of an impact. Theological ideas will be further explored in this dissertation’s last chapter.

475 This is not to say that for Bulgakov, theology is unimportant: “Art alone cannot create an icon, nor can theology alone.” Sergius Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 143-144.


CHAPTER THREE: THE VIRGIN AND PRIESTHOOD

χαῖρε, ἁγία ἁγίων μείζων
Hail, greater than the Holy of Holies

“The first casualty of poststructuralist gender studies was the possibility of women’s agency.” - Norma Broude & Mary Garrard

“Still relatively unknown, the feminine face of Eastern Christianity remains open to further exploration.” - Elizabeth Behr-Sigel

Introduction

The extent of Virgin of the Passion’s mass proliferation after Byzantium is revealed on the outskirts of contemporary Coptic Cairo. There, two twin gray cupolas mediate between distant modern skyscrapers and ramshackle homes. Moving towards the cross-capped towers, one passes through open steel gates into the courtyard of a bustling Coptic Orthodox community: The Church of the Chaste St. Demiana in Bulaq (Fig. 36). Pasted to the front of the arched church exterior, is an almost fluorescent, full-length Virgin of the Passion, precisely dated to September 21, 2006. The medium appears to be airbrush (Fig. 37). An almost Victorian Christ, wearing a red sweater and wrapped in a white blanket, stares blankly into the distance. He is crowned like his mother, who floats barefoot in the air. Angels with the instruments of the passion dutifully appear on artificial cloud puffs, set against an azure sky. Disney comes to mind rather than Byzantium.
What might appear to be an unfortunate aesthetic consequence of globalization grows far more noteworthy within the church itself. Behind a curtained iconostasis is another Virgin of the Passion, roughly in Andreas’ Ritzos’ formulation (Fig. 38). The colors are similar, but this one is half-length, and contains the traditional Greek inscriptions for Mary and Jesus. What is remarkable, however, is its location. It is on the ciborium which contains the elements of bread and wine, adjacent to an image on the same ciborium of Christ consecrating the Last Supper. In her frequently brilliant and wide-ranging study on the Virgin Mary and sacrifice, Cleo McNelly Kearns suggests that in highly sacramental traditions such as Orthodoxy, the Virgin appears “prominent and close to the altar (thought not on it).” 479 This church in contemporary Cairo may suggest otherwise.

As the discipline of art history has expanded into the broader field of visual culture, contemporary images such as this one in Cairo have come under serious academic consideration. 480 But they are best understood, I believe, by taking the long view - setting aside their impossibly wide proliferation to consider their art historical inception. 481 By investigating the Virgin of the Passion type’s Byzantine beginnings, I hope to shed new light on questions that this image brings to mind. Is this Virgin of the Passion in the holiest part of a Christian sanctuary a mere anomaly, or does a close association with Mary and the Eucharist, even with priesthood, find precedent in the Byzantine world? Is

479 Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism and Sacrifice*, 266.

480 For an excellent discussion on how the field of visual culture relates to religious imagery, see chapter one of David Morgan’s *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

481 This is not to suggest that a close investigation of parallels to this image in contemporary Cairo would be insignificant, but only that this is beyond my concern in this study.
there evidence in Byzantine art for understanding Mary as priest? The argument of this chapter is that there is; and the history of the Virgin of the Passion type is central to making this case.

**A Constantinopolitan Eucharistic Controversy**

The political and artistic contexts of the first surviving Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera have already been explored. It remains to go deeper into an analysis of the frescoes, exploring both their arrangement, and the Constantinopolitan theological controversy that may have generated them. The Virgin of the Passion at Panagia tou Arakos is a “split” meeting. Which is to say, Mary and Simeon, who met in the temple in the Gospel of Luke, are depicted directly opposite one another across the nave (**Figs. 39 and 40**). This meeting, I believe, is Eucharistically reenacted during the celebration of the liturgy in the church. Such a suggestion is not entirely new. Hans Belting has suggested that Mary’s arms at Lagoudera intentionally resemble a “liturgical spoon (labis) on which the Sacrificial Lamb reposes” (**Fig. 2**). Likewise, Chrysanthe Baltoyianni has argued that the bare leg of Christ is a deliberate reference to the Eucharistic lamb, as evidenced by John the Baptist’s scroll to right of Simeon, which reads, “Behold the Lamb of God.”

However, these Eucharistic associations can be taken a step further when the theological backdrop to the frescoes is understood. This involves going deeper into the culture of Komnenian Constantinople.

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482 The iconography of the meeting will be discussed in more detail below.  
483 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 118. Belting cites textual support for this connection in Pseudo-Methodius, PG 18, 364. He also suggests that the reclining Christ at Lagoudera is a prolepsis of the Passion, evoking the sleeping child of the Anepson.  
In the mid-twelfth century, Constantinople was embroiled in a Eucharistic controversy, set off when a deacon named Basil mocked his namesake, Basil the Great, for suggesting that the entire Trinity received the Eucharistic sacrifice. The prayer in question was Basil’s famous line, located at the end of the liturgy’s Cherubic Hymn, sung during the Great Entrance: “For you are the one who offers and is offered, who receives, and is distributed.” Basil the deacon felt that this prayer divided the singular hypostases of Christ. “If one was sacrificed,” argued the deacon, “the other received the sacrifice.”

This opinion gained notoriety among the learned of Constantinople. Soterichos Panteugenesis, who had recently obtained the patriarchal throne of Antioch, agreed with the deacon Basil against Basil the Great.

Soterichos enhanced Basil the deacon’s objection with a liturgical logic that is not difficult to grasp. According to Soterichos, the Eucharist is offered to the Trinity. The Eucharist, however, is Christ, and Christ is a member of the Trinity. Because Christ can’t be offered to himself, evidently the Eucharist was not offered to the entire Trinity, but to the Father alone. To suggest otherwise would be to fall into the Nestorian heresy, which separated the divine and the human nature of Christ.

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488 Leo’s tome had resolved the Council of Chalcedon by declaring Christ had two natures and one hypostasis. This was the foundation upon which all subsequent Christological formulations had to be based.
But as often happens in Christological discussion, the accusation of heresy doubled back on the accuser. Soterichos’s suggestion – it was charged - entailed that the action of offering and receiving each implied a separate hypostasis. Hence Soterichos appeared to compromise the unity of Christ’s person by dividing Christ the priest from Christ the victim. The debate dragged on, and Nicholas of Methone became responsible for the final resolution. The Eucharist, Nicholas argued, was offered to the entire Trinity, including Christ, meaning that Basil the Great was right.

In the Council proceedings, Nicholas of Methone posited that the one hypostasis of Christ is the only subject of human action (the offering) and divine action (the reception of the offering). The actions of Christ, argued Nicholas, whether as priest, victim, or as God who receives the offering, are unified. Hence, the sacrifice of the Eucharist is indeed offered to the entire Trinity, including Christ. Soterichos, in turn, objected by suggesting that it was the hypostasis of the Father who received the Eucharist, and the hypostasis of the Son who offered it. Nicholas of Methone responded that this move entailed a further confusion of the “hypostatic characters” of the Trinity in the work of salvation. While the hypostases remained distinct in Orthodox theology, Nicholas argued, the activity of the Trinity was always unified. Faced with this proposition, and in order to maintain


490 Explicating the controversy, Aristeides Papadakis writes, “any confusion between God’s hypostatic characteristics and his actions or energies, or between the ‘immanent’ and ‘economic’ Trinity, was unacceptable… against [Soterichos’] breakdown of the saving work of Christ into a two-tiered process of salvation, Nicholas and the Church were to contend that the redemption of mankind was not only essentially a Trinitarian act, but a consequence of the totality of the divine economy which include not only
consistency, Soterichos then went on to assert two acts of reconciliation, one that unified divinity and humanity in the Incarnation, and another where the Son, on the cross, offered himself to the Father alone. Soterichos’s need to divide the actions of the Trinity amongst the different members entailed an unsavory, overly juridical notion of sacrifice, which landed him outside the boundaries of Orthodoxy. The upshot of the Council’s decision, decreed in 1156/57, was that salvation was less a legal exchange than a genuine reconciliation. According to Nicholas, God “did not have to receive anything from us, [and] we did not go to him (to make an offering), but he condescended toward us and assumed our nature, not as a condition of reconciliation, but in order to meet us openly in the flesh.” Simply put, Soterichos’s overly literal conception of sacrifice was at odds with the mystery of salvation as conceived by the collective Orthodox mind of Byzantium.

Artistic Ramifications of the Council

But this theological decision would not remain at the level of abstraction. While the Council of 1156/57 determined that the entire Trinity received the Eucharist, a mere textual reference, even if it was liturgical, was insufficient. Images were marshaled as well. One result of the Council’s decision is that images of the entire Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – appear near the locus of Eucharistic consecration shortly after 1157, visually encapsulating the Council’s decree that the entire Trinity receives the Christi’s incarnation, death and passion, but resurrection.” The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453 A.D., 192-193.

491 Quoted in Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 154.

Eucharist. Byzantine artists did not need to invent a Trinitarian symbol, for one was already on offer in what is known as the \textit{Hetoimasia}, or “Prepared Throne” (Fig. 41). This symbol, whose history shall be explored in the next chapter, reverently “depicts” the invisible Father as an empty throne, represents the Son as a Gospel book and (occasionally) the instruments of the Passion, and symbolizes the Holy Spirit as a dove. This is the Trinitarian image that was placed near the altar.\footnote{Ibid. See also Ida Sinkevič, \textit{The Church of Saint Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage} (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2000), 35-36.}

The Church of the Panagia tou Arakos at Lagoudera is one of the monuments that reflect the decision of the Council. As established in the last chapter, many art historians are in agreement that a Constantinople-trained painter executed the cycle, whose name may have been Theodore Apsevdis. Apsevedis - I am suggesting - would have been aware of the Council’s decision, thus he included Basil with his standard scroll depicting the Cherubic hymn,\footnote{David and June Winfield, \textit{The Church of Panaghia tou Arakos}, 96.} and gave the \textit{Hetoimasia} a prominent place in the dome of his fresco program. Directly below it is the first Virgin of the Passion (Fig. 40). Based on the close visual resemblance between the \textit{Hetoimasia} and the throne of the Virgin of the Passion, we can posit a connection between those instruments and the Prepared Throne. Connecting the instruments of the Passion in the \textit{Hetoimasia}, and the same instruments borne by the angels in the Virgin of the Passion, unifies the action of the Trinity in the same way Nicholas of Methone had described. Mary, furthermore, is a living throne, and is frequently referred to that way in sources contemporary with this fresco program.\footnote{In the early twelfth century, the connection of Mary with the couch of Solomon becomes a recognized theme. Kallirroe Linardou, “The Couch of Solomon, a Monk, a Byzantine Lady, and the Song of Songs” in \textit{The Church and Mary: papers read at the 2001 Summer Meeting and the 2002 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society} R.N. Swanson, ed., (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2004).}
By unifying the Virgin of the Passion and the *Hetoimasia*, Apsevdis may have provided a visual enhancement to Nicholas of Methone’s arguments. While this may seem speculative, a post-Byzantine Virgin of the Passion obviates the connection that I am suggesting to be present at Lagoudera (Fig. 42)

But there is further evidence that Theodore Apsevdis might have illustrated the Council of 1156/57. The fresco pair of Mary and Simeon at Lagoudera may be an illustration of the liturgical formula emphasized by the Council, also reflected by the cupola program above: “For you are the one who offers and is offered.” Mary holds the Christ child, who – with a confidence uncharacteristic of a baby – gives his assent to the angels bearing the cross. “You are the one who offers.” On the other side of the naos, Simeon holds the struggling child, who is anything but confident. “You are the one who is offered.” The dueling images of Lagoudera may illustrate the Orthodox doctrine that Christ had two wills, human and a divine.496 The lamb is both offered (by Simeon), and offers himself (from the arms of Mary), to the entire Trinity, depicted in the *Hetoimasia* above him (Fig. 43). This triangle of painting combines to depict the offertory, upward vector of Eucharistic action. The Lagoudera painter was not only a painter – he was a theologian. And his Virgin of the Passion not only reflects political disaster – it also marvelously encapsulates the highly refined theological discussion defined by the Council of 1156/57.

496 This is not to suggest that either of the frescoes of Christ offering (the Virgin of the Passion) or being offered (Simeon) depict the divine and human natures respectively. The theology of depictions of Christ, as worked out following the Iconoclastic controversy, did not claim to depict either nature, but the composite hypostasis. See Matthew J. Milliner, “Iconoclastic Immunity: Reformed/Orthodox conversion according to Theodore of Studios,” *Theology Today* 62, no. 4 (2006), 501-514.
The Virgin of the Passion After Lagoudera

If my argument is correct, then there is further evidence to closely associate Mary with Eucharistic sacrifice in the fresco program at Lagoudera. However, based on the evidence I have provided, the case could be made that the fresco program deliberately avoids associating Mary with the theme of this chapter: priesthood. After all, Mary merely holds Christ as he offers himself, and Simeon – a priest in the Byzantine tradition – is the one who actually offers Christ.\textsuperscript{497} And yet, when the behavior of the Virgin of the Passion type is considered after Lagoudera, the (perhaps intentional) segregation of Mary from a direct priestly role disintegrates. Another example of the Virgin of the Passion near the altar, examined in the last chapter, appears in Thessaloniki in the Palaiologan period, directly proximate to the apse (\textbf{Fig. 24}). The frescoes at the Church of Hosios David are fragmentary, but an image on the north wall can be identified as a Virgin of the Passion, near the altar. Interestingly, this is in the very spot where Abraham offering Isaac once appeared at St. Catherine’s monastery on Sinai.\textsuperscript{498}

But as we’ve seen, the most dramatic shift comes in the fifteenth century, when Andreas Ritzos gave the icon its final formulation (\textbf{Fig. 33}). Christ looks towards the angel with the cross, and Mary stares at the viewer knowingly. But if the original fresco context at Lagoudera is understood, we can see that Andreas Ritzos – perhaps unwittingly – fused the roles of Simeon and Mary. Mary is here the one who offers her son, who appears

\textsuperscript{497} Simeon’s pose at Lagoudera is reminiscent of the Kykotissa icon, where Christ – held by Mary - struggles in the same way. Because of this, the case could be made that Apsedvis at Lagoudera deliberately deprives Mary of the priestly associations possibly alluded to in the Kykotissa icon, making Simeon the offerer instead.

\textsuperscript{498} For an examination of the primarily Egyptian theme of Abraham and Jephtha’s sacrifice, its Eucharistic connotations, and its importation into mainstream Byzantine art, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Iconography and Identity: Syrian Elements in the Art of Crusader Cyprus” in \textit{Religious Origins of Nations?: The Christian Communities of the Middle East}, Bas Ter Haar Romeny, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
afraid. Mary takes on Simeon’s priestly function, as she offers her son to the cross above her. If the original fresco series at Lagoudera is understood, then the later, standardized depiction of this image unifies both Simeon and Mary, and intensifies the understanding of Mary as priest. Ritzos-style Virgins of the Passion frequently appear near the altar, intensifying these Eucharistic associations, most famously on the iconostasis of the Middle Byzantine monastery of Hosios Loukas (Fig. 44), as well as on the main iconostasis at the Monastery of Stavronikita on Mount Athos.

Most interestingly, two rare examples of the Virgin of the Passion appear in sixteenth century Cyprus on the Royal Doors themselves, the doors through which the priest exits and enters to bring the Eucharist to the faithful (Fig. 45). Overwhelmingly, the Annunciation is reserved for this central part of the Byzantine iconostasis, but doors featuring the Virgin of the Passion existed as well. However, apart from a Cypriot publication, these doors have rarely been discussed. While the Annunciation is highly appropriate for the Royal Doors, the Virgin of the Passion – where Mary offers her son – is also appropriate as it echoes the priestly act of consecration.

**Mary as Priest in the Protoevangelium**

The Virgin of the Passion’s association with the Eucharist and priesthood is not merely an iconographical accident. Byzantine texts and imagery relating Mary and priesthood extend to the beginnings of Christianity, and were an integral part of Byzantine liturgy

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499 Athanasios Papageorghiou, Ο ΔΙΑΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΒΗΜΟΘΥΡΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΩΝ ΤΕΜΠΛΩΝ – ΕΙΚΟΝΟΣΤΑΣΙΩΝ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΝ 12ο ΜΕΧΡΙ ΤΟΝ 19ο ΑΙΩΝΑ, 103-124. These royal doors can be seen in Cyprus at the Byzantine Museum in Paphos and the Byzantine Museum of the Bishopric of Arsinoe. They were removed from small churches in Paphos and Koli respectively.
and devotion. Exploring these textual and visual instances will help contextualize the later Virgin of the Passion’s association with priesthood.

When the Jerusalem temple was destroyed in the year 70AD, Mary in some senses became a substitute temple. This understanding was most clearly expressed in the Protoevangelium of James. Though condemned in the West by Jerome and Pope Innocent I, the document became nearly canonical in the East, providing comparatively fertile ground for Mary’s association with priesthood. In the Protoevangelium, Joachim and Anna mourn their barrenness, and with a moving petition, plead to God for a child. Mary is born as a result, and Anna promises to present her to the temple in gratitude. In the meantime, however, Anna erects a home temple of sorts, banning anything unclean for the sake of the child. At the age of three Mary is offered in service to the temple, and the toddler signals her assent by joyfully dancing. The Protoevangelium’s assumption that a female child could reside in the temple “could scarcely be credited by anyone who had the slightest acquaintance with temple traditions.” And yet, Mary resides in the temple where she receives food from the

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500 The text begins, “Birth of Mary, Revelation of James,” and could be so titled, but scholarship has named it Protoevangelium (Proto-Gospel) because it precedes the narratives of Matthew and Luke. Though the text claims authorship by James, stepbrother of Jesus, scholarly consensus places it in the mid-to-late second century. Of the 140 manuscripts, the earliest Protoevangelium papyrus dates to the third or fourth century (Papyrus Bodmer 5). However, Clement and Origen (and possibly Justin) refer to it, meaning it must have been written by the end of the second century. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 106-107.

501 Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 122. Though censured in the West, the document was still influential through poetry and art, as witnessed most famously by Giotto’s Arena Chapel.

502 Based on such passages, Gaventa makes a convincing case that the guiding motif in the Protoevangelium is Mary’s “sacred purity.” Likewise, for Peter Brown, Mary in the Protoevangelium is “a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space,” Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 273.

503 This motif evokes King David, who danced before the Lord in the temple.

504 Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 107. The author was probably a Gentile Christian who awkwardly employed the Septuagint to intentionally connect Mary and the Jewish traditions. The fact that
hand of an angel until the age of twelve, at which point her adolescence requires she be removed. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist and the kinsman of Mary, is the high priest at the time. Considering the fact that John the Baptist refuses his priestly lineage, it might be possible to read the temple-dwelling Mary of the Protoevangelium as the priestly offspring that Zechariah never had.

The visual treatment of this apocryphal account takes the Mary as priest implications much further than does the Protoevangelium itself. To be sure, the first visual evidence for this perspective appears in the West, in a Roman inscription at St. Maximin in Provence, probably dating to the fifth century, which refers to Maria Virgo, minster de tempulo Gerosale (Mary, minister of the Temple in Jerusalem) (Fig. 46). This is a clear reference to the Protoevangelium. Accompanying the inscription is Mary depicted on a marble slab, alone, without a nimbus, with long hair and in a gesture of prayer. But the more formal acceptance of the Protoevangelium in the East would lead to visual evidence that is quite literally monumental. Justinian’s Basilica of St. Mary the New, was constructed in 543 on Mt. Zion, near the ruined temple. The building is referred to in Procopius’s De Aedificiis, and was an unavoidable architectural witness to the understanding of Mary as temple, at least until it was destroyed in the seventh century.

Mary’s purity is guarded by the temple authorities may have been in response to accusations of Christ being the son of a Roman soldier, (ibid., 108).

There is a parallel story, known to Origen, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa, the Legend of Zechariah. In it, Mary is permitted to stay beyond her adolescence, indirectly testifying to her perpetual virginity. Cleo McNelly Kearns, The Virgin Mary, p. 233ff.

Although he generally leaves out imagery (due in part to printing difficulties in the 1950s), Laurentin does refer to this image. Laurentin, Maria. Ecclesia. Sacerdotium (Vol. I), 50.

St. Mary the New would probably even have been constructed from remains of the Jewish temple itself. Such associations continued in the Akathistos hymn, which names Mary the ἀχωρῆτου χώρα, the “container of the uncontainable,” the “space of the spaceless God.” Absent the precedent of the Jewish tabernacle and temple that localized the presence of a yet transcendent God, such developments are difficult to imagine.

But with the illustration of the Protoevangelium in the East, associations of Mary and the temple were intensified. A feast celebrating the presentation of Mary in the temple appears in Jerusalem lectionaries by the eighth century. Around the time of the feast’s inclusion in the Menologion, the first iconography of the event surfaces in a tenth century Berlin ivory, showing a procession with Joachim and Anna and seven virgins. A similar example in the Menologion of Basil II, dating to the eleventh century, has the same design (Fig. 47). In this iconography, the Virgin is depicted twice – being received by Zechariah, but also seated on an elevated throne beyond him, within the sanctuary itself, as if to emphasize the fact that she resided in the temple. The throne elevated upon a flight of steps, directly behind the altar table, is a clear allusion to the synthronon. Because the synthronon in Early Byzantine churches was used for the seating of the bishop or a presiding priest of some sort, as well as a place for displaying the Gospel

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508 Robert Jenson suggests that the most precise translation of this phrase in English, however inelegant, is “the space embracing that which can be encompassed by no space.” Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten, eds., Mary: The Mother of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 51.
509 The Hebrew Bible asserts that God actually did dwell in the temple (Exodus 40:35), but in no way was God limited to that temple (2 Chronicles 6:18), nor did the temple operate in the same way as pagan temples, as evidenced, for example, by the absence of images.
512 Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, Iconographie de l’enfance de la Vierge, vol. 2, fig. 81.
book, its priestly associations are unmistakable. These images of a woman associated with the temple were a constant, and also emerged in Byzantine rhetoric where Mary’s residence in the temple became a paradigm for God’s forgiveness. In addition, whereas the Protoevangelium merely refers to Mary receiving “food,” Byzantine art depicted this event by making a direct reference to the Eucharist, interpreting “food” as the bread of the Eucharistic.

A fine example of the mature Presentation in the Temple iconography is contained directly across from the first Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera. (Figs. 39 and 48). The seven virgins accompany Joachim and Anna as they present their three-year-old daughter to Zechariah, who stands at the Temple gates. The resemblance of the doors of the temple in the painting to the actual doors of the iconostasis in the Orthodox sanctuary adjacent to it, adds a liturgical immediacy to the painted scene. In the same depiction, Mary sits above the ciborium, receiving the heavenly bread, evidencing that she passed through the closed gates. Simeon, who - as we’ve seen - replaces Zechariah as priest in the Protoevangelium, is placed directly below his predecessor.

513 I thank Slobodan Ćurčić for this observation.
514 Henry Maguire, Abaton and Oikonomia in Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki, Nancy Ševčenko and Christopher Moss, eds., 99.
515 George of Nikomedia, Oratio VIII, PG 100, col. 1448. Quoted in Maguire, Abaton and Oikonomia, 102.
516 Henry Maguire argues that in Presentation iconography, “the holy of holies of the temple was made to resemble the sanctuary of a church; the doors of a sanctuary barrier were emphasized within the image; and the image itself was frequently situated over an actual door leading into the interior of the church itself.” Henry Maguire, Abaton and Oikonomia, 101-102.
517 An angel similar to the one who gives Mary the bread appears positioned directly across the naos, receiving Mary’s soul at the Dormition. Connecting these two events is a centrally placed Annunciation.
Mary as Priest in the Gospel of Luke

The other chief textual source for the idea of Mary as priest roughly picks up where the Protoevangelium concludes: The Gospel of Luke (2:22-38). There, Mary and Joseph come to the temple with the Christ child in accordance with the law to present him to the Lord. Like the writer of the Protoevangelium, Luke is somewhat unfamiliar with Jewish practice, as he conflates two separate events, the Purification of Mary, which would have occurred forty days after the birth - and the Redemption of the first-born child, which would have happened thirty days afterward. The result is that Mary is present at an event that would normally have only involved the father. In Luke’s gospel, Simeon does not appear to be a priest as he is in the Protoevangelium, except for his blessing of the parents. Nor does Mary directly offer her son.

But again, the priestly implications are explored most fully in art, as already witnessed in the “split” depiction of the meeting of Mary and Simeon at Lagoudera. The meeting of Simeon and Mary in the temple, called the ὑπαπαντή (meeting), is attested as a feast day long before the Presentation of Mary, and also becomes one of the twelve great Byzantine feasts. It appears in Jerusalem by 384, and was only gradually accepted, until it also became one of the twelve great feasts by the eleventh century. While not

518 For the Redemption of the first born, which was connected to the Passover, see Exodus 13:1, 13:11ff., and Numbers 18:15-16. For the Purification rites, see Leviticus 12:2-8, which Luke references in verse 22 (where he assumes both parents need purification). Immediately after, however, Luke appears to have the Redemption in mind. For an illuminating discussion of Luke’s conflation of these events, see Raymond Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, updated edition (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 447-551. Needless to say, the presence of Mary in the temple would not have been an exegetical problem for a Byzantine reader who accepted the Protoevangelium, as not only was she pure, but she once resided there.

519 Dorothy C. Schorr, “The Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple,” 17-19. Schorr clearly distinguishes the “Hypanpante” (Eastern iconography) from the “Presentation in the Temple” (Western). She describes the transfer of the feast to the West by the fifth century, where it is also known as
unknown in earlier centuries, iconography for the meeting of Mary and Simeon becomes much more common in the ninth.\(^{520}\) From such iconography comes an indirect visual witness to Mary as a priest. There are visual depictions of the meeting of Mary and Simeon that happen outside of the temple, which would have been more of a historical possibility.\(^{521}\) But in Byzantine iconography, the meeting of Mary and Simeon and the Presentation of the child to the Lord are fused,\(^{522}\) leading to a nearly universal inclusion of an altar. As with the Gospel of Luke, we witness another conflation of separate events, but this time in the realm of art. The amalgamation of the act of presenting the Christ child and the meeting with the priest Simeon intensifies the scene’s sacerdotal potential - a potential not necessarily present in the original Lucan account. This is well illustrated in the mosaics of Sicily’s Cappella Palatina, constructed by Byzantine craftsmen in different periods of the mid-twelfth century.\(^{523}\) The most prominent scene viewed by the officiating priest looking down the nave would be Mary about the offer her child to Simeon in the spandrels across the principal western arch (Fig. 49). Is it possible to think that the offering priest here might have most identified with Mary, who offered her son as well?

\(^{520}\) Henry Maguire, “The Iconography of Symeon with the Christ Child in Byzantine Art,” 261-269.

\(^{521}\) Schorr, “The Iconographic Development,” 21. Schorr points out that an “outdoor” altar against an architectural background corresponds most to the Jerusalem temple at the time of the birth of Christ. However, this would of course not have been known to the early Christian artists. The example she employs of the outdoor meeting is from Cod. Lat. 9448, an Antiphonary from Prüm dating to the eleventh century (ibid., 23).

\(^{522}\) “In this [later] scene, the two episodes of the meeting with Simeon and the presentation of the Child at the altar are always synthesized.” Ibid., 22.

As with the Virgin of the Passion, Byzantine artists experimented with the iconography of Simeon and Mary in the temple. As they did, we witness a tug of war between Mary and Simeon, with the Christ child caught in between. In the earliest description of the Presentation, at St. Sergius at Gaza, Mary holds the Christ child.\textsuperscript{524} And yet, in the next surviving description of an illustration of the meeting at the Church of the Holy Apostles, Simeon is holding Christ.\textsuperscript{525} Other depictions of the event that survive indicate the same discrepancy. Sometimes Mary holds the child, as she does at the pre-iconoclastic Kalanderhane fresco in Istanbul (Fig. 50), and sometimes Simeon holds Christ, as at the early thirteenth century depiction at Amasgou in Cyprus (Fig. 51). All this would seem to suggest nothing more than a normative variation across centuries and locations.

Interestingly enough, however, the back and forth is finally resolved.\textsuperscript{526} In the “final” version of the Presentation iconography, Simeon ends up with the child, and Mary’s hand is raised above the temple gates in offeratory gesture. This is how the scene is described in the post-Byzantine depiction of Dionysios of Fourna,\textsuperscript{527} and this is how it appears, with almost no variation, in Cretan iconography (Fig. 52 and 53).\textsuperscript{528} In addition, the exposed leg, frequently shown in these depictions, is – as we’ve seen - a reference to the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{524} The description is given by the orator Choricius, who says, “The mother is present, holding the child in her arms.” \textit{Laudatio Marciani}, I. 56, ed. R. Foerster and E. Richsteig, Teubner (1929). Cited in Maguire, “The Iconography of Symeon,” p. 262.
  \item \textsuperscript{525} The description is given by Constantine of Rhodes, written between 931 and 944. He says the “old man Symeon carrying Christ as a baby in his arms.” Maguire, “The Iconography of Symeon,” 262.
  \item \textsuperscript{526} Variations continued, such as Simeon holding the Christ child as Mary grieves, or the Simeon Glykophilon where he appears alone holding the Christ child. But Cretan icons and Pseudo-Dionysios evidence the fact that Mary holding Christ out to Simeon becomes standard.
  \item \textsuperscript{528} In one Sinai depiction Mary’s hand is lowered (Maguire, “The Iconography of Symeon,” fig. 9) which would remove the movement of offering, but this did not ultimately prevail. Ample and marvelously reproduced examples of such iconography can be found in Chrysanthe Baltoyianni, \textit{Icons: The Mother of God}, 17-77.
\end{itemize}
Eucharistic lamb. Kearns writes that representations of Mary as priest are “by no means normative.” And yet, the standard post-Byzantine depiction of Mary lifting up her child to Simeon at least qualifies as an approximate association with the offering of the Eucharist. As with the Virgin of the Passion, the iconography of the meeting of Mary and Symeon reveals an initial variety, followed by a later standardization that intensifies the associations of Mary and priesthood.

**Further Textual and Visual Evidence**

Beyond the Protoevangelium and the Gospel of Luke, there is additional early textual evidence in Byzantium for the idea of Mary as priest. With the intensification of sacrificial themes in the Eucharist after Constantine I, Mary’s connection to the priesthood grew more direct. For the fourth century theologian Ephrem the Syrian, the Eucharist was “grape from Mary.” An accompaniment to the Irenaean understanding of Mary as the new Eve is her reversing the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil: “Mary gave us the refreshing Bread,” writes Ephrem, “in place of the fatiguing bread Eve had procured for us.” In the orbit of the Council of Ephesus that proclaimed Mary Theotokos in 431, Proclus emerged as the greatest of Mary’s homilists. In his rhapsodic sermons, Mary is described – following the Protoevangelium and Gregory of

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529 Ibid., 18.
530 Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary*, 275.
531 Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, 113. Illustrating this shift in perspective, Jay affords the example of Cyprian of Carthage who moves from a more general to a more solidified line of apostolic succession, being the first to call the bishop sacerdos (ibid., 116). See also Kearns, “The Virgin Mary,” 261.
534 Nicholas Constas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the cult of the Virgin in late Antiquity*. 

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Nazianzus\textsuperscript{535} - as temple and tabernacle and rod of Aaron the priest.\textsuperscript{536} Proclus would be criticized by Nestorius for his exclamation to Mary: “O temple, in which God became a priest….”\textsuperscript{537} What is more, Mary is frequently referred to as the altar itself. By the seventh century, Andrew of Crete could write:

Hail altar where the lamb, the living holocaust, the Christ is offered; divinely inspired table of sacrifice which passes all mental concepts, on which the bread came down from heaven, the Christ, is immolated like incense and like a living victim, giving life to the communicants.\textsuperscript{538}

In the iconoclastic era, Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople, exclaims in a sermon on the Presentation: “O minister greater than that of the high priests.”\textsuperscript{539} Likewise, in the ninth century, George of Nicomedia carries forward the tradition of referring to her as temple: “Temple of God, she enters the temple.”\textsuperscript{540} Mary is the real temple, the first temple being a shadow of what was to come.

These associations were not merely poetic motifs, but had profound theological import. Priesthood in Levitical law was hereditary, an arrangement which avoided the presumption of a priest offering himself for service voluntarily.\textsuperscript{541} This, however, led to a problem for early Christianity, as Christ – the greatest of priests – was not a Levite.

The New Testament book of Hebrews states the problem plainly: “For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{535} “The God man was born from the Virgin’s womb, which the Spirit of the great God formed, constructing a pure temple of the Word.” (PG: 36,100). Quoted in Luigi Gambero, \textit{Mary and the Fathers of the Church}, 198.
\textsuperscript{536} Cleo McNelly Kearns, \textit{The Virgin Mary}, 248.
\textsuperscript{537} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{538} Ibid., 285.
\textsuperscript{539} PG XCVIII, 1500B. p. 50. Cited in Laurentin, \textit{Maria. Ecclesia. Sacerdotium} (Vol. I), 50. The original, which is difficult to translate, reads: ‘Αρχιερέων λειτουργήμα μέσων.
\textsuperscript{541} Cleo McNelly Kearns, \textit{The Virgin Mary}, 205.
\end{footnotesize}
nothing about priests.” To solve this problem, the seventh chapter of Hebrews employed the mysterious Scriptural figure of Melchizedek to establish that Christ’s priesthood was independent of the Levitical line. However, there was another tradition in the Byzantine world that sought to establish Christ’s priestly credentials through Mary. This was already seen in the Protoevangelium, where Mary’s association with the temple is clear. According to John of Damascus and Andrew of Crete, Mary could serve as the link between the priestly lineage of Israel and the priesthood of her Son, because the priest Zechariah was Mary’s kinsman. “By you,” says John of Damascus to Mary, “priestly office has passed from the priestly stream into that of David.” Andrew of Crete is more explicit:

Today from Judah and David comes the young virgin, presenting the face of royalty and of the priesthood of Aaron, who exercised the functions of priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Today… God has reddened the royal purple in the blood of David.

Such tropes, however, would intensify. In Exodus, the Bible speaks of Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, who married Moses’s brother Aaron and bore four priestly sons. The ninth century Byzantine monk Theodore of Studios drew on this reference in relation to Mary, who was also the mother of a priest. Though the prayer is difficult to translate, in making this connection, Theodore went so far as to connect Mary to priesthood as well:

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542 Hebrews 7:14.  
545 Exodus 6:23
Hail daughter, young sacrificial priest,
whose purity is amiable and whose vestments are incredibly beautiful, in the eyes
of him who says in the Canticles: ‘How beautiful are your feet in your sandals, o
daughter’ of Amminadab.546

For Theodore, Mary is also compared to a “heap of wheat”547 and a “round goblet which
does not lack wine.”548 Pseudo-Methodius also refers directly to Mary as “royal
priest.”549 Yet another direct reference to Mary as priest in the Byzantine world comes
from Pseudo-Epiphanius (d. 680):

O Virgin, awesome treasure of the Church
Who holds the great mystery.
I call the Virgin both priest and altar,
she, the “table-bearer”
who has given us the Christ,
the heavenly bread for the forgiveness of sins.550

The Syriac language has been a special locus for the understanding of Mary as priest as
well. According to Sebastian Brock, there is an important Syriac parallel between the
hovering of the Holy Spirit over Mary in the Annunciation and the epiklesis of the
liturgy, which calls upon the Holy Spirit. Both these events are described with the same
word.551 This association takes visual form in the apse of the twelfth-century church of
Panaghia Phorbiotissa in Asinou, Cyprus (Fig. 54). Annemarie Weyl Carr argues that the
sacrifice of Abraham that appears on the south side of the triumphal arch at Asinou,

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546 Canticle 7, 1 and 2, Homily on the Nativity, PG XCVI, col. 693A-D. English translation from Kearns, 284. Laurentin discusses the difficulties with the Greek translation in Maria. Ecclesia. Sacerdotium. (Vol. I), 31. He translates it himself as “sacerdotale jouvencelle” (priestly youngster), 61. The original for “virgin priest” is θυηπόλος νεάνις. Alternate translations might be “young priestly woman,” but virgin priest strikes me as a clear possibility.

547 Second Sermon on the Nativity, PG XCVI, 693A, Cited in Laurentin, Maria, Ecclesia, Sacerdotium (Vol. I), 43.

548 Second Sermon on the Nativity, PG XCVI, 689C.

549 Laurentin discusses the problem with the translation in Maria, Ecclesia, Sacerdotium (Vol. I), p 22ff. PG XLIII, 487 a. John Wijingaards, trans., in Kearns, The Virgin Mary, 284. Kearns indicates that “Table bearer” was also a title of the priestesses of Pallas Athene (337).

which flanks Mary in the apse, is “surely Eucharistic in content,” thereby “joining Eucharistic typologies with the Annunciation”\textsuperscript{552} (Figs. 55). Such imagery, Carr suggests, shows Cyprus’s connection to the Egyptian mainland, for the sacrifice of Isaac and Jephthah are features of Syrian and Coptic mainland churches.\textsuperscript{553}

**The Earliest Life of the Virgin**

But perhaps the most intriguing evidence for Mary as priest comes from the earliest known Life of the Virgin, a text surviving in the Georgian language and possibly dating to the seventh century. Though a French translation was produced in 1986,\textsuperscript{554} the text has been relatively ignored until recently,\textsuperscript{555} and it has dramatic bearing on the discussion on Mary’s role in Byzantium. Some posit the author to be Maximus the Confessor (580-662).\textsuperscript{556} This source draws on the Protoevangelium and Dormition narratives, but also expands the established accounts considerably. It is possible that this Life of the Virgin drew upon Late Antique Marian sources that are now lost.\textsuperscript{557}

In this account, the role of Mary and women is amplified considerably in comparison to other Byzantine accounts. It is often remarked that Mary is the great exception that

\textsuperscript{552} Annemarie Weyl Carr, “Iconography and Identity: Syrian Elements in the Art of Crusader Cyprus,” 148, 149.
\textsuperscript{553} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{557} Stephen Shoemaker, “The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus,” 442.
preserves patriarchy by displaying a standard unattainable by other women. But this earliest document gives persistent attention to Mary of Magdalene, whom it identifies as an apostle equal to Peter, suggesting that a woman need not be the sinless virgin mother of God to exercise authority. And yet, among the women leaders in this text, Mary emerges as a sort of bishop:

She was always inseparable from the Lord and King, her son. And just as the Lord was the leader of the twelve disciples and then the seventy, she led the other women who followed him as a holy mother, as the holy gospel says, “There were also many women there who followed Jesus from Galilee and provided for him.” The holy Theotokos was the leader and guardian of them all.

Enduring throughout the passion, Mary is the first to witness the resurrection and is the chief source for all the gospels. However, these themes of Mary in ministry were expunged in later Byzantine versions of the life of Mary, which drew on this earlier account. Such omissions ensured that this account of Mary was little known in the second millennium. However, the tradition survived on Mt. Athos.

Surely the most daring passage of this text (and most difficult to translate) is where Mary offers herself at the Eucharist. In the French translation of this text: “elle se sacrifiait elle-même comme le prêtre et elle était sacrifiée, elle offrait et elle était offerte.” (“She sacrificed herself like the priest, and was sacrificed, she offered and was offered.”) There

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558 As mentioned above, this is the main line of argument in Marina Warner’s influential book, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary.
562 Shoemaker speculates why this may have been so: “Women could be represented as central to the origins of Christianity in an all-male monastic context precisely because there was no danger of these traditions setting a precedent for any real women to claim authority within the contemporary church.” Ibid., 466.
563 Michel Van Esbroeck, trans., Maxime Le Confesseur: Vie de la Vierge, 64.
is, however, a problem with the translation. Shoemaker points out that Georgian verbs do not distinguish between male and female subjects, which means the passage could also refer to Christ, and the French translator may have been taking some liberties. But what has not been sufficiently emphasized in discussion of this text is that the educated Byzantine reading or hearing it would have recognized it to have been lifted directly from the liturgy, where – as we have already mentioned - Christ is both “the one who offers, and is offered.” As we’ve seen, it is this liturgical phrase which provides the key to understanding the Virgin of the Passion. Whether or not the singular passage can be understood as Mary’s self-offering, the earliest Life of the Virgin is an additional witness to the Byzantine view of Mary that connects her closely, if not directly, with her son’s priesthood. Perhaps then, we could consider the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera an accompanying illustration to the earliest Life of the Virgin, where Mary is directly associated with the famous Eucharistic prayer from the Cherubic hymn, which may be the key to the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera.

Conclusion

It has been my aim to show that the theme of Mary as priest has precedent in the texts, and especially the art, of the art of Christian East. Theodore Apsevdis may have drawn on a Eucharistic controversy when he painted the first known Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera, which illustrates the prayer, “You are the one who offers, and is offered.” The earliest Life of the Virgin associates Mary with this prayer as well. While Apsevdis may have deliberately distanced Mary from priesthood in the Lagoudera fresco program, later manifestations of the icon type forsaked such reticence, and – perhaps
unintentionally – conflated the role of Mary and Simeon to reflect Mary as priest more strongly. But this was not a compositional foible. Examining additional textual and visual evidence showed there to have been ample precedent for the association of Mary and priesthood in the Byzantine world, associations which are especially amplified in the realm of art.

To be sure, rhetoric regarding Mary as priest sometimes went beyond Byzantine Orthodoxy. Theophanes of Nicæa, a disciple of Gregory of Palamas, supplemented Pseudo-Dionysios’s Ecclesiastical Hierarchy by directly referring to Mary as a high priest, even bishop. Owing to the fact that there is no male or female in heaven, Theophanes even called Mary “father,” and goes on to teach Mary’s pre-existence, suggesting that if the Incarnation had not taken place she would have retained a rank first among the seraphim. Isidore Glabas (d. 1396), bishop of Thessaloniki, takes such rhetoric even further, riffing off of John 1:13 to write, “We have seen her glory, as the glory of the only-begotten Mother of God.” But, I have attempted to demonstrate, the association with Mary as priest need not necessarily be conflated with excessive moments

564 “After the first high priest Jesus Christ, another high priest, Mary stands between God and the angels because it is she who first receives paternity and filiation, indeed the principle all paternity and all filiation, and to whom we can abandon ourselves, we and the super celestial powers, to this treasure of grace by which the spirits resembling God derive their names.” René Laurentin, Marie, L’Eglise (Vol. I), 102. Translation is my own.
565 René Laurentin, Marie, L’Eglise (Vol. I), 102, note 7; The bishop translation of ἱεραρχὴς is suggested by Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, 264.
566 Ibid.
567 Ibid., 265. Theodore also uses Trinitarian language.
568 Glabas, riffing off of John 1:13, writes: “We have seen her glory, as the glory of the only-begotten Mother of God.” Doing the same to Colossians 3:3, he writes: “Our life is hidden with her, and when she, our life, shall appear, we shall also appear with her in glory.” Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, 270. For Isidore, Mary is even a co-crestress, (ibid., 271).
of Marian piety. The well-attested theme seems instead to be a rather normative aspect of Byzantine liturgy, theology and art - a theme which is especially well reflected in the Virgin of the Passion.

In the nineteenth century, Pope IX wrote: “The Mother of God… is so closely united to the sacrifice of her divine Son that she has been called the Virgin Priest by the Fathers of the Church.” Strangely – or perhaps not so strangely - it was in the context of these controversial declarations of Mary’s priesthood by Popes that the Virgin of the Passion was rediscovered and popularized. Is it possible that Pius IX intuited the connection of the Virgin of the Passion type to Mary’s offering her son? Whatever the answer, his was the order that turned this Byzantine icon into the worldwide phenomenon of the Mother of Perpetual Help, eventually to arrive on an altar in Coptic Cairo. According to Nancy Jay, the patriarchal features of sacrifice, across all cultures, have “not been hidden, but only ignored.” But it may also be possible this Mary of priestly agency, who subverts such patriarchy has also not been hidden, but only ignored.

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569 In this I follow the methodology of Tina Beattie, who suggests that liberating Mariology need not be sought in heterodox sources, but is available – and more potentially influential - when discovered in the mainstream tradition. Tina Beattie, God’s Mother, Eve’s Advocate, 60.
570 The statement has be traced to the book given to him by Mgr. Van den Berghe entitled Marie et le Sacerdoce. Michael O’Carroll, Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary, (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 293. It seems to be what spurred Laurentin’s two volume work on Mary as Priest.
571 Nancy Jay, Throughout Your Generations, 147.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE VIRGIN AND PREDESTINATION

χαῖρε, ὅτι ὑπάρχεις βασιλέως καθέδρα
Hail, since you are the chair of the king.

“Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” - Matthew 25:34

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” - Ephesians 1:4

Introduction

The previous chapter explored a mid-twelfth century Eucharistic controversy, arguing that it was directly reflected in the fresco program at Lagoudera, leading to the association of Mary and priesthood in the Virgin of the Passion, especially in its later formulation. This chapter returns to this same theological dispute to further pursue its implications. The inclusion of the Hetoimasia (Prepared Throne) in Middle-Byzantine fresco programs was a result of the Council of 1156/57, but such directives were not realized monolithically. The Hetoimasia could take on different meanings depending on the artistic choices made at a given monument. Art historians have suggested various interpretations of what the Prepared Throne might mean in a given context, but one possibility has not – so far as I know – been suggested: The Prepared Throne, specifically as it is conceived at Lagoudera, conveys a theology of predestination. If, furthermore, the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera is connected to the Hetoimasia above it, then the Virgin of the Passion is a statement about predestination as well. Making this case will involve a brief examination of the doctrine of predestination, with specific attention to how it has been understood in Eastern Christianity. I will then review the
decision of the Council of 1156/57, and the various interpretations of the *Hetoimasia*. My claim is that the Lagoudera fresco program intentionally conveys a throne not “prepared” for Judgment – as *Hetoimasia* has most commonly been understood - but also “prepared” from the foundation of the world.

**The Theology of Predestination**

In Athanasius’s fourth century debate with the Arians, the eighth chapter of Proverbs was hotly disputed: “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”\(^{572}\) The Arians had interpreted these words as Scriptural evidence that Christ was created, and therefore not fully divine. Athanasius, however, committed as he was to Christ’s divinity, suggested otherwise. He argued that the passage referred not to Christ, but to God’s plan of salvation, established *in Christ* before the world was made. Which is to say, the eighth chapter of Proverbs referred to the predestination of humanity. Athanasius expanded upon his suggestion with an architectural analogy. Just as a wise builder would first design a rebuilding plan for a given house in case it is destroyed, “so in the same manner our salvific renewal was established in Christ before we existed, in order that we may be enabled to be created anew in him.”\(^{573}\) Athanasius continues: “It was his purpose, for our sake, to take upon himself, through the flesh, the whole inheritance of judgment against us and thus henceforth to adopt us in himself… antecedent grace was stored up for us in Christ.”\(^{574}\) Athanasius found Scriptural support for this perspective on predestination from the book of Ephesians: “He chose (ἐξελέξατο) us in him before the

\(^{572}\) Proverbs 8:22-23


\(^{574}\) Ibid., 136.
foundation of the word.” Likewise, he cited Second Timothy’s reference to the “grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested.”

There are reasons to think that this perspective on predestination endured in Maximus the Confessor and other Orthodox thinkers, becoming especially central in the twentieth century Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov. On the other hand, a more fatalistic understanding of predestination may have informed Orthodox popular culture. In general, historical theologians have suggested that this Athanasian, Christocentric perspective on the doctrine predestination was bypassed, replaced by less satisfying treatments of Augustine in the West or John Cassian in the East. “The Augustinian doctrine of predestination is, in principle, Arian; the Cassianite doctrine avoids Arianism only at the cost of ceasing to be a doctrine of predestination.”

575 Ephesians 1:4.
576 2 Timothy 1:9-10.
578 According to Cata Galataritou, “Predestination never formed part of the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church, but it was both a constant motif in Orthodox teaching under guise of God’s foreknowledge of human action and, in a fatalistic sense, deeply embedded in popular culture.” Galataritou, The Making of a Saint: The life, times and sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse, 83.
579 The point is reasserted by F. Stuart Clarke, who concludes, “The Augustinian doctrine of predestination is, in principle, Arian; the Cassianite doctrine avoids Arianism only at the cost of ceasing to be a doctrine of predestination.” F. Stuart Clarke, “Lost and Found: Athanasius’ Doctrine of Predestination,” Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 29, 450.
Augustine’s perspective has been especially influential, leading to centuries of debate on both Catholic and Protestant fronts. In his fifth-century conflict with Pelagius, Augustine seemed to suggest that if salvation is dependent upon God’s grace and not human effort, then the very possibility of an individual’s rescue resides entirely in God’s primordial decision for or against them. Salvation is entirely the work of God, with no human involvement. Augustine, however, never went so far as to posit the logical corollary to this doctrine, that by not choosing some, God actively chose others to be damned. The sixth century Council of Orange even forbade pursuing this line of thought, lest God seem the author of evil. But in the sixteenth century, the rational humanist John Calvin, did expressly articulate this logical consequence, resulting in double predestination. God predestined, before the world was made, some to be saved, and some to be damned, a state of affairs that circumvented the Catholic sacramental system entirely, and is especially far removed from Athanasius. The Calvinist doctrine, as it spread to Dutch, German and English speaking Protestant communities, became the decretum horribile, or as one scholar called it, the “werewolf of Reformed theology.”

The Calvinist system calcified in the seventeenth century with the Synod of Dort (1618-

581 The Eastern theological perspective instead developed a more synergistic understanding of human and divine action. See the discussion of predestination and self-determination in Basil N. Tatakis, Christian philosophy in the patristic and Byzantine tradition, George Dragas trans. (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2007).
19) and Westminster Confession (1647), and migrated with fleeing Puritans into Britain’s New World colonies, where it had considerable impact.\textsuperscript{586}

Assessing the effect of Calvinist doctrine in both Europe and the United States, the nineteenth century German-American church historian Philip Schaff concluded his survey of predestination with a bold claim: "A system [Calvinism] can only be overthrown by a system. It requires a theological genius of the order of Augustine and Calvin, who shall rise above the antagonism of divine sovereignty and human freedom, and shall lead us to a system built upon the rock of the historic Christ, and inspired from beginning to end with the love of God to all mankind."\textsuperscript{587} Arguably, the twentieth-century Swiss theologian Karl Barth answered Schaff’s call. Combing through the precise Latin debates of the Reformed scholastics, Barth radically revised the Calvinist system.\textsuperscript{588} He did not do so by rejecting double predestination. Instead, he relocated the doctrine in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ was both elect and damned on behalf of all.\textsuperscript{589} In Barth’s words: “Predestination means that from all eternity God has

\textsuperscript{586} Broadly speaking, the doctrine - now Americanized - led to protests both within Protestantism (Wesleyanism, Methodism); and outside of it (Unitarianism, Universalism, and Transcendentalism). For a focus on the doctrine’s role in shaping American consciousness, see Peter Thuesen, Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine.


\textsuperscript{589} This is not to suggest that the message in “universalist” (the necessary salvation of all). Adam Neder explains that Barth’s inclusivism does not annihilate human freedom: “While the sad fact is that human
determined upon man’s acquittal at His own cost… There is, then, no background, no
*decretum absolutum*, no mystery of the divine good-pleasure, predestination is the non-
rejection of man. It is so because it is the rejection of the Son of God.”

But Karl Barth’s revision of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination did not come without assistance. Some of his support for the idea came from the church father so central to Byzantine thought, Athanasius, who had pioneered this doctrinal ground before. In his debate with the Arians referenced above, Athanasius made an argument quoted approvingly by Barth, “The God of all things, who created us by His Word, knew what should befall us better than we ourselves… He prepared beforehand (προετοιμάζει) in His Word, through whom He created us, a provision for our salvation.”

“In spite of its great richness,” explains Barth, “this [Athanasian] insight had little or no influence upon the later development of the doctrine of predestination, of which it might well have given a completely different aspect. Not only Thomas [Aquinas], but the Reformers too, ignored it altogether.” However, it is the claim of this chapter that this “completely

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590 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 167.
591 Or. II. c. Arianos, cap. 75-77. Quoted in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II.2, 108. For the full passage, see Khaled Anatolios, trans., *Athanasius*, 135ff.
592 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 110.
different aspect,” while perhaps not verbally attested, has long been on offer in Byzantine art, being implicitly present wherever the Virgin of the Passion appeared.  

To revisit the previous chapter, Constantinople in the mid-twelfth century was embroiled in a Eucharistic controversy. Against those who suggested that the entire Trinity did not receive the Eucharistic sacrifice, Nicholas of Methone presented the famous prayer embedded at the end of the Cherubic hymn: “For you are the one who offers and is offered, who receives, and is distributed.” The Eucharistic offering of Christ and the reception of that perfect offering by the entire Trinity were not abstract or overly juridical, but mysteriously unified. The Council of 1156/57 determined that the entire Trinity received the Eucharist, with an art historical result: Fresco painters placed an image of the entire Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - near the locus of Eucharistic consecration. Known as the ἑτοιμασία (Hetoimasia), or “Prepared Throne,” the symbol depicts the invisible Father on the throne, the Son represented by the Gospel book and/or instruments of the Passion, and the dove of the Holy Spirit. One of these churches was on the island of Cyprus, where both the Prepared Throne decreed by the Council, and the first known Virgin of the Passion, appear. The instruments of the Passion on the Prepared Throne and the Virgin of the Passion, I believe, are connected. The relation of the two images at Lagoudera is clear (Fig. 56 and 57), as Mary appears to be an

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593 This lends a level of irony to the fact that Allan Marquand, the College of New Jersey’s (now Princeton University) first professor of art history, dissenting from Calvinist Orthodoxy, himself acquired a Virgin of the Passion icon. For the details of the controversy, see Betsy Rosasco, “The Teaching of Art and the Museum Tradition: Joseph Henry to Allan Marquand,” Record of the Princeton University Art Museum, Volume 55/ Numbers 1 and 2/ 1996, 30.

594 The liturgical consequences of the controversy and a bibliography are discussed in Robert Taft, The Great Entrance. See also John Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought, 153.

595 “Σὺ γὰρ εἶ ὁ προσφέρων καὶ προσφερόμενος, καὶ προσδέχόμενος καὶ διαδίδομενος” Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom, 23.
“activated,” living *Hetoimasia*, though within the sphere of time.\(^{596}\) Of course, angels bearing the instruments of the Passion were in existence long before Lagoudera.\(^{597}\) But the angels here take on a new significance. The fresco program seems to imply that the angels got their instruments from the Prepared Throne itself.

**The History of the Hetoimasia**

The image of the Prepared Throne has a long history, first appearing in the Christian art of the fourth century. The symbol was adopted from the visual norms of the late antique world, where it evoked the presence of a deity or emperor.\(^{598}\) The symbolic quality of this motif made it a suitably reverent non-literal depiction of the Trinity. In one early example from the turn of the fifth century, probably from Constantinople, an empty throne appears with a wreath, with deer below probably representing the faithful (Fig. 58). The symbol appears widely in early Byzantine art. Being non-figurative, it could fly beneath Iconoclastic radar, as evidenced in the seventh-century mosaics at the church of the Dormition at Nicaea.\(^{599}\) Whereas Mary and Christ in this apse mosaic were altered by the Iconoclasts, the less offensive throne imagery was not (Fig. 59).\(^{600}\)

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\(^{596}\) For sources contemporary to the Lagoudera program that refer to Mary in this way, see note 17 in chapter three of this dissertation. The line from the Akathistos hymn at the start of this chapter makes this association as well.

\(^{597}\) Angels with lance, rod and sponge emerge as guardians of the throne of the resurrected Christ in the sixth century mosaics from Ravenna, or later in, for example, Nicholas of Verdun’s Klosterneuberg Altar (1181). Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art, Volume I*, (New York Graphic Society, 1971), 186 and 188.

\(^{598}\) For the classical iconographical backdrop to early Christian use of the throne imagery, with an emphasis on the theme of majesty, see “Thrones” in Glen Warren Bowersock, Peter Brown and Oleg Grabar, eds., *Late antiquity: a guide to the postclassical world* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 727ff.


\(^{600}\) Charles Barber, “Theotokos and *Logos*: the interpretation and reinterpretation of the sanctuary programme of the Koimesis Church, Nicaea,” in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, 51-59.
At the turn of the millennium, however, the image gained the name “Hetoimasia,” or Prepared Throne, and this later verbal connection has influenced its interpretation, leading art historians to interpret it as a sign of the Second Coming. The first Byzantine art historian to tackle the meaning of this type was Paul Durand in the nineteenth century, who projected this later understanding onto all instances of the *Hetoimasia*. He understood the symbol to be the throne “prepared” for Judgment, derived from Psalm 9.

Nearly a century later, the German scholar Von Bogyay pushed for a wider understanding. He argued that the image was more complicated, and that the understanding of Judgment should not necessarily be projected backward. Since Von Bogyay, art historians have expanded upon his suggestion, interpreting the throne imagery on a case-by-case basis. The range of colorings and the inclusion or exclusion of elements vary the meaning in each given context. The iconographical complexity is amplified when throne imagery is merged with the history of the *Arma Christi*, which also varies by context, and takes on new meanings throughout medieval and Byzantine

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602 Psalm 9:7 (9:8 in the Septuagint) reads “καὶ ὁ κύριος εἰς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ, ἥτοιμασεν ἑν κρίσει τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ.” (and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness.)
As we’ve seen, the image was marshaled after the Council of 1156/57 to make a specific liturgical point about the entire Trinity receiving the Eucharist.

Throne imagery takes on even more nuance of meaning when it appears in domes, especially on the island of Cyprus where it was frequently flanked by venerating angels. The Prepared Throne with the Arma Christi was uniquely popular in Cyprus, no doubt because of the island’s connection with the true cross, a part of which Constantine’s mother Helena had deposited at Cyprus’s Stavronikita monastery.

Recent Byzantine art historians have interpreted these Cypriot manifestations in various ways. Hélène Grigoriadou sees the Prepared Throne in the domes of Cyprus (and elsewhere) as a reference to the Ascension. Because the Ascension is connected to the Second Coming in the beginning of Acts, the throne with the instruments of the Passion

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605 Schiller, “The ‘Arma Christi’ and the Man of Sorrows,” in Iconography of Christian Art, Volume I, (New York Graphic Society, 1971), 184. Schiller’s account of the Arma Christi parallels, in some ways, Rachel Fulton’s thesis in From Judgment to Passion. Which is to say, the Arma Christi begin as symbols of triumph, but “it was not until the end of the twelfth century that the Arma Christi began to draw ever closer to the Passion in sense, although they did not cease to refer to victory,” (ibid., 184). The later detachment of the Arma Christi in the West as a “shorthand pictogram” of Christ’s suffering resulted because of the relics of the passion being imported to the West after 1204, and a new isolated focus on the suffering of Christ (ibid., 189-191). This is far different from the more symbolic, protological role of the instruments of the passion that I am claiming here may have been operative in Byzantium.

606 Annemarie Weyl Carr, A Byzantine Masterpiece Recovered, 50 and 53. For a list of domes with such themes in Cyprus, see Athanasios Papageorghiou, “The Paintings in the Dome of the Church of the Panagia Chryseleousa, Strovolos,” in Ševčenko and Moss, Medieval Cyprus, 151.

607 An excellent book-length exploration of the theme of the cross with a focus on Cyprus can be found in Andreas and Judith Stylianou, By This Conquer, (Publications of the Society of Cypriote Studies, No. 4, Nicosia, 1971). Schiller makes a very important distinction between the actual Arma Christi and the legend of Constantine and Helena’s discovery of them: “The division of the relics was, of course, a contradiction in logic of the idea that the Cross had been taken to heaven and was a symbol of the risen Christ. However, since the Cross always refers both to the historical event and to the triumph in heaven, it was possible for the historical Cross to be divided and the Cross of Golgotha to be regarded as the likeness of the heavenly Cross.” Schiller, “The ‘Arma Christi’ and the Man of Sorrows,” 189. The Arma Christi at Lagoudera, I believe, lean more towards the heavenly cross itself, unlike later Cypriot frescoes which focus on Constantine and Helena, as outlined by Stylianou.
signifies this theme as well. The “cardinal achievement” of twelfth century Byzantine domes, according to Lydie Hadermann-Misguich, may have been their analogical relationship between the heavenly and earthly liturgies. Again, this recalls the use of the symbol by the Council of 1156/57. Another scholar, Tania Velmans, reasserts the traditional interpretation that the Prepared Throne in twelfth-century Cypriot domes are to be understood eschatologically.

“Prepared” from the Foundation of the World

Without negating these interpretations, I’d like to argue for an additional level of meaning, one that, so far as I am aware, has not yet been considered. At least as it operates at Lagoudera, the Prepared Throne is more than a Last Judgment, and it does more than make a liturgical point, however important that may be. The Hetoimasia at Lagoudera may also signify God’s primordial intention to save the world before it falls. Which is to say, it can be understood to symbolize predestination in the Eastern sense conveyed by Athanasius, who describes God’s preemptive provision for a soon to be troubled world, “preparing beforehand (προετοιμάζει) in His Word, through whom He...
created us, a provision for our salvation.” The term, προετοιμάζει is obviously related to the words frequently depicted by Byzantine artists near the Prepared Throne, ἑτοιμασία (also ἐτημασία) literally meaning “preparation.” The Prepared Throne at Lagoudera, therefore, is not merely eschatological, but protological as well. If, as Annemarie Weyl Carr argues, “though united in basic order, no two Byzantine church programs are the same,” then this may be one of the specific inflections of fresco program at Lagoudera.

Support for this interpretation comes from the fact that Psalm 9, the basis for the eschatological interpretation of the symbol, was not the only Septuagint verse associated with it. There was another Psalm quotation with the Greek word ἑτοιμασία in it, Psalm 89. In the context of speaking of God’s covenant faithfulness and creation, the Psalm reads, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation (ἑτοιμασία) of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.” There is little eschatological about this Psalm. In fact, it resonates with Athanasius’s understanding of predestination described above: “And I will appoint him [David] to be my firstborn...” If this verse is listed by Von Bogay as another source for the Byzantine understanding of Hetoimasia, can it be understood as referring to predestination in addition to Judgment?

612 Quoted in Barth, Church Dogmatics II.2, 108.
613 In addition to the liturgical meaning, Nicolaides suggests that the Hetoimasia at Lagoudera signifies the sovereignty of Christ, connected as it is to the cupola, and he interprets the instruments of the passion as soteriological. I do not see this as mutually exclusive with my protological interpretation. Andréas Nicolaïdès, “L’église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre, 40.
614 Annemarie Weyl Carr, A Byzantine Masterpiece, 43.
616 Psalm 89:27 (88:28 in the Septuagint). A reference to David could also be read Christologically.
The frescoes at Lagoudera seem to suggest this possibility. It contrast to later monuments, the Lagoudera dome and drum is not exclusively eschatological. To be sure, the scrolls held by Jonah, Gideon, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel and David do bear messages related to Judgment (Fig. 40). But this is complicated by the image of Moses also in the drum, whose scroll contains the standard verse about creation, Solomon and Isaiah who prophecy the birth of Mary just below him, Habakkuk, who speaks of how God’s praise fills the earth, and Jeremiah who speaks of wisdom. Rather than focus exclusively on the theme of Judgment, the Lagoudera drum and dome offer a combination of references to Creation, Salvation and Judgment.

Should the artist at Lagoudera have wished to sound the exclusive note of Judgment, he could have included Mary and John in the Deesis, a clearly eschatological reference which is evoked in another twelfth-century Cypriot dome at Trikomo (Fig. 60). But he did not. Instead he depicted the Hetoimasia in its own medallion, flanked by angels (Fig. 61). He might also have included the Virgin, as at the very similar dome at St. Nicholas Chalidou in Attika, but he chose to present the Prepared Throne in isolation,

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617 For example, Jonah’s inscription reads: “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.’” (Jonah 1:1-2).
618 “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). For the other inscriptions, see David and June Winfield, *The Church of Panaghia tou Arakos at Lagoudhera, Cyprus: The Paintings and their Painterly Significance*, 130ff.
619 “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all” (Proverbs 31:29). “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”
620 “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise” (Habakkuk 3:3).
621 “He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved” (Baruch 3:36).
622 For Trikomo, see Annemarie Weyl Carr, *A Byzantine Masterpiece*, 49
which makes the protological interpretation I am suggesting possible.\textsuperscript{623} This combination of visual choices infers that the cross on the throne of the \textit{Hetoimasia} depicts not the future, but the past - the plan of salvation prepared before the foundation of the world. Perhaps the most interesting evidence for this interpretation comes from David and June Winfield’s suggestion that the Prepared Throne would have been the first medallion painted in the church.\textsuperscript{624} Perhaps Theodore Apsevdis – who may have painted the Lagoudera program – would have wanted to start his artistic project where God did: In the beginning.

\textbf{Byzantine Time}

The complex understanding of time developed by Byzantine theologians supports this understanding. In his \textit{Hexamoron}, Basil the Great argued against the eternity of the world. “The birth of the world,” he explained, “was preceded by a condition of things suitable for the exercise of supernatural powers, outstripping the limits of time, eternal and infinite.”\textsuperscript{625} Angels – such as those in depicted in the dome at Lagoudera and in the Virgin of the Passion - inhabited this realm. A new realm, however, was created, “a school and training place where the souls of men should be taught.”\textsuperscript{626} Creating this earthly realm involved “the succession of time, forever pressing on and passing away and

\textsuperscript{623} The protological theme, furthermore, also directly addresses the concern for devotional worship and individual salvation that Carr identifies in the dome of Lysi. Annemarie Weyl Carr, \textit{A Byzantine Masterpiece}, 54-55.
\textsuperscript{624} “The Etoimasia shows considerably more evidence of plaster working than do the roundels of the angels, and it is reasonable to assume that this is the roundel where the painter started to work.” (Ibid., 123).
\textsuperscript{626} Ibid.
never stopping in its course.”627 Likewise for Gregory Nazianzus, “things which produce
time are beyond time.”628 Gregory continually devises strategies to thwart the human
(and especially Arian) tendency to reduce God to temporal terms. John of Damascus
summarizes this Byzantine mentality: “And there is His distinctly seeing with His divine,
all seeing, and immaterial eye all things at once, both present and past and future, before
they come to pass.”629

Should we add Athanasius’s view of predestination to this perspective on time, my
interpretation of the Prepared Throne at Lagoudera is amplified. The art historian’s
assumption that the Prepared Throne is usually eschatological, or merely liturgical, may
in part be based on a lack of theological imagination. Drawing on early twentieth century
Russian theology,630 Clemena Antonova suggests that “a structural analogy can be drawn
between [the Orthodox icon’s] principle of ‘reverse perspective’ and the simultaneity of a
timelessly eternal god.” The icon, therefore, becomes the “‘the way God sees the
world’… a simultaneously existing god [sic], who is outside space (i.e., has no ‘point of
view’) and time (i.e., has no ‘successive vision’) would perceive the various aspects of
objects all at once.”631 Antonova concludes her by suggesting, “There are many other
aspects of the role of time in icon art that should be explored before we come to a
satisfactory idea of its significance… leading towards an Eastern Orthodox

627 Ibid.
628 Gregory Nazianzen, Faith Gives Fullness To Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory
Writings (New York, 1958), 203.
630 “While pictorial time is still an understudied problem in Western scholarship,” explains Clemena
Antonova, “it is rarely realized that it was a mainstream topic of study in Russia at the beginning of the
twentieth century.” Antonova, Space, Time and Presence in the Icon, 28.
631 Ibid., 153
The interpretation of the Prepared Throne suggested here is one such instance. Successive vision can also function soteriologically. Which is to say, God – who is beyond time - sees election, salvation, and judgment – each typified in the cross - all at once. This interpretation of the Prepared Throne has the advantage of retaining the established title, ἑτοιμασία, which is clearly inscribed above the image at Lagoudera (Fig. 56). But while the title is retained, a new level of meaning arises: A throne prepared not just for Judgment, but also prepared before the foundation of the world. The Hetoimasia in the dome depicts God’s salvific intent beyond time, whereas the Virgin of the Passion below depicts that same intent activated in time. Karl Barth suggested that viewed sub specie aeternitatis (from the vantage of eternity), “the cross of Christ, the Last Judgment, and pre-temporal election are not three different events, but three different forms of one and the same event.” The artist-theologian at Lagoudera, drawing on similar understandings in Byzantine theology, may have suggested this in his depiction of the Hetoimasia as well.

But could an idea of this complexity have been transmitted to the ordinary believer? Robin Cormack has suggested “the [Byzantine] viewer may have been less concerned

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632 Ibid., 154.
633 For a similar example, Robert Ousterhout suggested this element in Byzantine art when he explained that a funeral chapel at Chora “dramatically emphasizes the promise of salvation by means of imagery simultaneously invoking past, present, and future.” “Temporal Structuring in the Chora Parekklesion,” Gesta, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1995), 65.
634 At Lagoudera, it is spelled HETYMACIA.
635 George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” Modern Theology, 24:2 April 2008, 183. In the words of Barth: “It is not merely that these three forms are interconnected in the totality of the action presented in them all, or in each of them in its unity and totality, but that they are mutually related as forms of this one action by the fact that each of them also contains the other two by way of anticipation or recapitulation, so that, without losing their individuality or destroying that of the others, they participate and are active and revealed in them.” Church Dogmatics, IV/3, 296. Karl Barth’s reflections on time are expanded in “God's Time and Our Time,” Church Dogmatics I/2 §14.1, 45-70; “Jesus, Lord of Time,” Church Dogmatics III/2 §47.1, 437-510.
with Christian theology than with the hope of favour or salvation." There is certainly an element of truth to this observation. But at the same time, the divide between intellectual, word-based leaders and popular, image-based laity has been seriously challenged by multiple studies. To not recognize that art can be as theologically sophisticated as literature, “consigns even the most refined examples of artistic production to the category of ‘popular culture’ for a mass audience and erroneously opposes it to a ‘higher’ forms of theological discourse carried on from pulpits, lecterns, and in the bookstacks.” A perspective that involves taking theology very seriously, even for the illiterate Byzantine believer, is emerging, giving us reason to believe that theological ideas of this complexity were transmitted not only to the educated. Antonova provides a compelling case that such theological notions of time reached any Byzantine believer – educated or not – who participated in the liturgy, which was saturated with the timelessness explored by theologians such as Basil. Intentional use of verb tenses in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, such as “this is the night” in the Easter Vigil, transmitted concepts from “high” theology to the level of the normal believer or the illiterate monk. This provides an important compliment to Cormack’s viewer perspective, showing a high level of theological sophistication to have saturated Byzantium more deeply than we might have previously assumed.

636 Ibid., 82.
638 Robin Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, 3.
639 Ibid., 130ff.
The Alpha and the Omega of the Later Byzantine Fresco Program

Should this interpretation of the Prepared Throne be correct, the Virgin of the Passion takes on a new, protological meaning. The hovering angels are not merely of signs of political catastrophe, reflecting the suffering of a Byzantine nobleman. Nor are they merely proleptic anticipations of the Passion, illustrating the prophecy of Simeon, who is depicted across the nave. They are also inhabitants of Basil’s timeless realm who convey Athanasius’s understanding of predestination. Where and when precisely these angels began to appear is difficult to say. What we can say is that the motif spread rapidly. As shown in chapter two, the angels with the instruments of the Passion appear throughout the Balkans and the Mediterranean. However, such angels do not appear only in the Virgin of the Passion. The angels with the instruments of the passion at Lagoudera are only the most ancient example of a theme that would appear elsewhere, as in the Anapeson or the Anastasis. Examples are numerous, but instances from an Anapeson at King Marko’s Monastery (Fig. 62) and an Anastasis at Studenica convey this development, which would also be drawn upon in the fifteenth century by Andreas Ritzos (Fig. 63). The forerunner of these motifs with the instrument-bearing angels, however, was the Virgin of the Passion. Todić suggests that the Virgin of the Passion is the oldest of these related motifs, influencing later iconography. These angels convey

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642 See, for example, the cross-bearing angel hovering above the Anastasis fresco at Studenica, which dates to 1314-14. David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 128. For a more complete treatment, see Gordana Babić, Kraljeva crkva u Studenici (Belgrade: Prosveta ; Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1987).
a special mood to the scenes they inhabit, bringing a sobriety even to scenes as boisterous as the Resurrection.

But this is not all that they signify. When connected to the Hetoimasia, these angels with the instruments also convey God’s providential plan for salvation. Perhaps we can understand the Prepared Throne as the beginning and the end of the later Byzantine fresco program – depicting both God’s predestined plan for salvation in Christ and Judgement. If so, then the angels bearing the instruments of the Passion are beings beyond time who stitch the late Byzantine fresco program together, bearing God’s original benevolent intent for creation, from its inception to its end. On the Prepared Throne they signify God’s intent to “prepare beforehand (προετοιμάζει) in His Word, through whom He created us, a provision for our salvation.” Then, they appear in the Anapeson and the Virgin of the Passion, urging salvation history on toward its consummation. Obviously their arms would be empty at Golgotha because the cross has found its predestined victim. But the angels appear again bearing the cross at the Resurrection, until finally, they placed the cross on the seat of Judgment (Fig. 64). In short, the Arma Christi may have a special eschatological and protological significance in Byzantium that they did not enjoy in the medieval West. The most direct proof for this interpretation comes from a late Byzantine, bilateral icon of Mary with Christ, on the

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645 Or. II. c. Arianos, cap. 75-77.
646 Examples of mourning angels above the cross are innumerable. See, for example, the Way to the Cross (c. 1200) at the Church of the Holy Cross, Pelendri, where the mourning angels almost appear to have freshly deposited the cross on Golgotha. Athanasios Papageorghiou, Icons of Cyprus, 23.
647 This is admittedly a mere suggestion, the full pursuit of which would require an independent study beyond the scope of this chapter.
reverse of which is a Hetoimasia\textsuperscript{648} (Fig. 65). The Gospel book is open to a verse from the Gospel of Matthew which reads: “Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared (ἡτοιμασμένην) for you from the foundation of the world.”\textsuperscript{649} The scenes surrounding the Virgin and Child on the opposite side enact this pre-ordained plan of salvation. The “prepared” in “Prepared Throne” clearly meant more than mere Judgment or presence in Byzantium. It also signified predestination – and this meaning was implicitly retained on a one-sided icon wherever the Virgin of the Passion appeared.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Arguably, it was Byzantium that defined art’s theological potential most explicitly. For Gregory of Nyssa, “the painter wrought by means of colors as if it were a book that uttered speech,”\textsuperscript{650} and for Basil the Great, “what the word transmits through the ear, that painting silently shows through the image.”\textsuperscript{651} These insights were vindicated at the Seventh Ecumenical council, which forcefully equated verbal and visual witnesses to God: “If any one sets at nought ecclesiastical tradition, written or unwritten, let him be anathema.”\textsuperscript{652} And yet, the words of John of Damascus could equally be directed to some theologians as to Iconoclasts: “Since so much that is unwritten had been handed down in the Church and is still observed now, then why do you despise images?”\textsuperscript{653}

\textsuperscript{648} Maria Vassilaki, ed., \textit{Mother of God: Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art}, catalog entry 64, 410-413.
\textsuperscript{649} Matthew 25:34.
\textsuperscript{652} John Mendham, trans., \textit{The Seventh General Council} (London: William Painter, 1850), 442.
This chapter has argued that the question of predestination has never been considered visually, and that the Byzantine art historical record makes that contribution. If “the historical theologian must look not only to explicitly theological texts, but also to works of art,” then the theological record is altered. Art historians have slowly come to realize the multiple layers of meaning in Hetoimasia imagery, and predestination can be added to those dimensions. The Athanasian perspective on predestination, therefore, was not buried until it was rediscovered in the twentieth century. It endured through the Hetoimasia, which was itself reflected wherever those timeless messengers with the instruments of the Passion appeared. Far and away the most abundant example of this iconography is the Virgin of the Passion, a small fragment of a complex sequence of later Byzantine visual theology. In his book on predestination, the twentieth century Catholic theologian Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange wrote, “The chiaroscuro effects of this sublime doctrine are incomparably greater than those we admire in the works of the greatest artists.” But at least one artist – the painter at Lagoudera - was able to communicate the sublimity of that doctrine as well.

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654 Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 127.
CONCLUSION

χαῖρε, σεπτοὶ μυστηρίου θύρα
Hail, gate of hallowed mystery

Summary

This dissertation began by making a case that the category “Virgin of the Passion” – while an art historical construct – is a legitimate one. The category unifies related images of Mary, thereby making it possible to trace the history of an icon type. The term also calls attention to the Byzantine roots of an image that has been primarily understood from a Roman Catholic perspective under the title “Mother of Perpetual Help.” Studying the icon’s Byzantine provenance is possible because of the recent proliferation of scholarly work on the Virgin Mary in Byzantium. Mapping this output, I identified “Maximalist” and “Minimalist” Mariologies, arguing for the necessity of both viewpoints, but aligning myself – for the purposes of this dissertation - with the former.

The first chapter highlighted the political context of the first surviving Virgin of the Passion, namely the loss of Byzantine Cyprus to the Crusaders. I then wove this account into a wider understanding of Mary throughout the Byzantine world. The imperial family did not invent the cult of the Virgin. On the contrary, the emperors assimilated and amplified a previous cult, the “original template” of which was disassociated from political power, and therefore transcended such power as well. I showed how Mary and imperial power were distinguished iconographically, and how Mary and Athena are not so easily conflated. I then pointed to the multiple instances where Mary is not connected.
to political victory, but defeat - the Virgin of the Passion being perhaps the clearest instance of this association.

In my second chapter, I traced the history of the type, connecting it to the theological and artistic currents of Komnenian Constantinople. Theodore Apsevdis accommodated the Komnenian tradition to the needs of his respective patrons, whether the monastic patron Neophyton or – if Apsevdis also painted Lagoudera - the lay patron Leontios. Apsevdis can be understood as a visual theologian who created an original type at Neophyton’s Enkleistra, and arranged what were probably pre-existing types at Lagoudera to minister to his grieving patron. This activity was anything but slavish copying, the way Giorgio Vasari presumed “Greek” artists to operate. After Apsevdis, the Virgin of the Passion type continued to appear throughout the Byzantine world, especially in the Balkans, but never in quite the same way. This diversity culminated in Crete, where another personality, Andreas Ritzos, arranged what would become the icon’s “final formulation.”

It was only at this time, during the Renaissance, that the Virgin of the Passion type was codified and replicated on an almost industrial scale, with accompanying miracles. The history of the Virgin of the Passion, therefore, gives us traditional art history in reverse, and reveals how medieval artists could function as creative theologians. I concluded by calling attention to overlooked precedents for this non-Vasarian perspective.

In the next chapter, the theological aspects of this study grew more explicit. I connected the fresco program at Lagoudera, where the first surviving Virgin of the Passion was painted, to a Constantinopolitan Eucharistic controversy in 1156/57. When this highly
refined theological debate was settled, it was enforced not just verbally, but iconographically through the inclusion of the *Hetoimasia*, the “Prepared Throne,” in fresco programs near the locus of Eucharistic action. I then associated the *Hetoimasia* at Lagoudera, and the instruments of the Passion upon it, with the same instruments borne by the angels in the Virgin of the Passion just below the Prepared Throne. One implication of this Eucharistic interpretation was the possibility of seeing Mary as priest. Such associations were intensified, perhaps unintentionally, in the icon’s “final formulation” in fifteenth century Crete. Contextualizing this curious dynamic required another tour through the Byzantine Empire, this time exploring the verbal and visual attestations of Mary as priest. I showed how textual references to Mary as priest, which are not uncommon, are occasionally intensified in the realm of visual art. As with the first chapter, an overlooked dimension of Byzantine culture was uniquely encapsulated by the Virgin of the Passion.

Another, more subtle implication of the inclusion of the *Hetoimasia* in Middle Byzantine fresco programs is the possibility that the Virgin of the Passion at Lagoudera signifies predestination in the Eastern sense conveyed by Athanasius. This I explored in my final chapter by suggesting that the “prepared” in “Prepared Throne” refers not only to the coming throng of Judgment, but to God’s redemptive intent to save the world even before it was made. Art historians have slowly expanded the range of meanings associated with the Prepared Throne, but the protological interpretation – for which there is ample evidence – needs be considered as well. Theologians have contested predestination verbally for centuries, most especially in the last century, when Athanasius’s insights
were recovered. But nowhere, so far as I am aware, is the visual evidence seriously considered; and when it is, the theological record changes. The Eastern understanding of predestination was not submerged until it was rediscovered in the twentieth century by Sergei Bulgakov or Karl Barth, but has long been reflected in the Prepared Throne, and consequently in the enormously popular Virgin of the Passion icon type as well.

Theology has come to us through the paintbrush, just as much as the inkwell or typewriter.

**Byzantine Art as Theology**

What ties each of these chapters together – power, painters, priesthood and predestination - is the ambition to take the Virgin of the Passion icon type seriously as visual theology.

Byzantine art history, I am convinced, does not take its place underneath the queen of the sciences, but participates in her reign. This dissertation has been a foray in this direction, an approach that has already drawn criticism on historical grounds. But while I share the concern that Byzantinists might lose their historical bearings, it does not seem to me that Byzantine art historians need to choose between art history and theology. An appeal to Byzantine timelessness, for example, does not necessitate historical confusion because the notion is a Byzantine one. To refuse the possibility that Byzantine art history

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657 Such as when Marie José Mondzain claims, “There are no great differences between submitting to a church council or to CNN.” Marie José Mondzain, *Image, icon, economy*, 223.
can be theological – and that a Byzantine art historian can thereby function as a theologian - risks reverting to earlier, formalist stages in the discipline, with the logocentric repercussion of theology remaining exclusively in the hands of textually-focused theologians.

Of course, theological interpretation can operate ahistorically. Clement Henze, for example - with whom this dissertation began - suggested that the Virgin of the Passion illustrates the very un-Byzantine doctrine of Mary as Co-Redemptrix.\(^{658}\) Such interpretations have their place, but not in formal art history. When, however, theological interpretation of Byzantine art is grounded in Byzantine history, it remains historical, and it is just this kind of historical focus that leads to contemporary relevance.\(^{659}\) The indigenously Byzantine theology of power expressed by the Virgin of the Passion can help break the generic grip of “power” on art historical discourse.\(^{660}\) Conceiving medieval artists as theologians both reconceptualizes Vasarian art history and affords new models for the present.\(^{661}\) The idea of Mary as priest has direct bearing on feminist discussions, which have centered on the event of the Annunciation, but might be more

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\(^{659}\) Charles Barber exemplifies this approach: Eleventh-century viewers of Byzantine images, “provide language that allows us to explore paths that might allow the more adventurous among us to break from the horizon of our crumbling age of the world picture and thence to learn to understand an horizon defined by an age of the world icon.” Charles Barber, *Contesting the Logic of Painting* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), xii-xiii.


\(^{661}\) According to Jean-Luc Marion, “the image-affirming doctrine of the Second Council of Nicæa concerns not only first of all a point in the history of ideas, nor even a decision of Christian dogma: it formulates above all an – perhaps the only – alternative to the contemporary disaster of the image.” Jean Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, James K.A. Smith, trans. (Palo Alto: CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 87. In addition, the artist at Lagoudera, which responded to political crisis iconographically, can be fruitfully compared to the contemporary Lebanese artist Walid Raad, who intentionally responds to political tragedy with blank spaces and the “language of disappearance.” Alan Gilbert, *Another Future: Poetry and Art in a Postmodern Twilight* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 63.
fruitfully shifted to the “second Annunciation,” the Virgin of the Passion. Finally, the Eastern understanding of predestination as expressed in the Prepared Throne and the Virgin of the Passion can expand the contours of historical theology. Each of these insights is grounded in Byzantine history, and each - I hope - bears on contemporary concerns.

While the possibility of viewing the Virgin of the Passion theologically may be a late development in the discipline of Byzantine art history, it should come as no surprise that the icon has long functioned in this way. Clement Henze recorded the thoughts of one Catholic observer of the image: “Si coram hac Imagine sto, videor mihi mare videre, oceanum idearum”663 “If I stand before this Image, I seem to see a sea, an ocean of ideas.”664 I do not claim to have reached the floor of this ocean – only to show that the ocean is far deeper than it may initially appear.

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662 A recent treatment of the issue, while excellent regarding the written material, does not take visual evidence into account. Matthew Levering, Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
663 The speaker is identified as “Father Beetz, counselor to the Archbishop of Freiburg.” Clement Henze, Mater de Perpetuo Succursu, 28.
664 Clement Henze, Mother of Perpetual Help, 44.
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