

THE ART OF ICON IN THE CONSTANTINIAN ERA – PATRISTIC FOUNDATION OF THE ICON

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ABSTRACT

The freedom of expression of the Christian faith, acquired by the Church following the edict of Mediolanum, from the year 313, favored the flourishing of church life in all its aspects, including that of sacred art, therefore also of iconography. The one who gave the impetus to this process was, without a doubt, the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great himself. For their part, the Holy Fathers of the Church encouraged the representation in icons of the martyrdom of the holy martyrs and provided, at the same time, the arguments that contributed to the foundation of the presence and role of the icon in the life of Christians and in that of the Church. Therefore, it is not surprising that, starting from this period, a constant development of Christian sacred art followed in all the provinces of the empire, both through the multiplication of iconographic themes, inspired either by the universe of the imperial court, or by the martyrdom of the holy martyrs, or even by the tradition pagan, as well as by using increasingly elaborate techniques. The present study aims to follow the evolution of the older iconographic themes, to identify and shed light on the new iconographic themes, their sources and also their concordance with the teaching of faith synthesized and systematized by the Church during the ecumenical councils from Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), whose teaching is transmitted through these iconographic themes.

Keywords: *chrismon; symbol; icon; mandylion; hetoimasia; mandorla; Constantine the Great;*

INTRODUCTION

Emperor Constantine the Great (324-337), to publicly confess his Christian faith that he embraced after the victory at Pons Milvius (312), first turned to Christian symbols, especially to the sign of the Holy Cross.

One of the most famous Christian symbols, created at the very command of Emperor Constantine, is the monogram of Christ, also called *chrismon*, consisting of the overlap of the first Greek letters of the name of Christ, X(hi) and P(ro)¹ or of a "crossed X of the vaulted letter I at the top"²(fig. 1). Although, according to researchers, as a graphic

¹ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, I.XXXI, PG 20:945-948; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, I.XXXI, a Revised Translation, with Prolegomena and Notes, by Ernest Cushing Richardson, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 1, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1995, pp. 490-491; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, I.XXXI, în vol. *Viața împăratului Constantin și alte scrieri*, studiu introductiv de Emilian Popescu, traducere din limba greacă de Radu Alexandrescu, col. *Părinți și Scriitori bisericești*, s.n., vol. 8, Ed. Basilica, București, ²2012, p. 103.

² LACTANTIUS, *Liber ad Donatum Confessorem, De Mortibus Persecutorum*, XLIV, PL 7:260-262; LACTANTIUS, *Of the manner in wich the persecutors died*, XLIV, translated by the rev. William Fletcher, in: *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, American Edition, Chronologically Arranged, with Notes, Prefaces

abbreviation of the name of Christ the monogram appeared at the end of the 3rd century in Rome, it became the symbol of Christ only after the vision seen by the emperor Constantine before the battle with Maxentius of Pons Milvius³, episode related by Eusebius of Caesarea⁴ and by Lactantius⁵. In the Egyptian space, the monogram acquired a peculiarity in that it was represented in the form of a cross with a vaulted upper end⁶, being also a staurogram.

The monogram flanked by the Greek letters Α(alpha) and Ω(omega)⁷ (Ap: 22, 13) and inscribed in a wreath made up the famous *labarum*(fig. 2), a symbol frequently represented not only on the battle flags of Constantine's soldiers⁸, but also in iconography Christian of that era, especially on sarcophagi, but also in catacombs⁹.

In the accounts of Eusebius of Caesarea, the cross is mentioned alongside the *labarum*, which from the 4th century was no longer represented as a *crux dissimulata*, but as a cross of glory, adorned with precious stones or flowers, *crux florida*¹⁰.

Also, from the notes of Eusebius of Caesarea, we learn that, in order to testify to the victory achieved through the power of the sign of the Holy Cross, Emperor Constantine the Great ordered that a large-scale painting of himself be executed at the entrance to the imperial palace depicted standing, with the sign of the Holy Cross above his head and the symbol of the devil at his feet, painted in the form of a "dragon pierced by a dart in the middle of his body and cast down into the depths of the sea"¹¹. I don't think we are wrong if we consider that from this scene, most likely inspired by the theme of the imperial "triumph", the one of Saint George the Great Martyr slaying the dragon will be evolved, with the difference that Saint George is represented on horseback.

and Elucidations, by Cleveland Coxe, coll. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), vol. VII, 1995, p. 318; LACTANȚIU, *Despre moartea persecutorilor*, XLIV, ediție bilingvă, traducere de Cristian Bejan, studiu introductiv, tabel cronologic, note explicative și anexe de Dragoș Mîrșanu, Ed. Polirom 2011, pp. 139-141.

³ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine. De la simbol la icoană secolele II-VI*, traducere de Elena Buculei și Ana Boroș, Ed. Meridian, București, 2002, pp. 426-427.

⁴ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, I.XXVIII-XXX, PG 20:943-946; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, I.XXVIII-XXX, p. 490; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, I.XXVIII-XXX, pp. 102-104.

⁵ LACTANTIUS, *Liber ad Donatum Confessorem, De Mortibus Persecutorum*, XLIV, PL 7:260-262; LACTANTIUS, *Of the manner in which the persecutors died*, XLIV, p. 318; LACTANȚIU, *Despre moartea persecutorilor*, XLIV, pp. 139-141.

⁶ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 436.

⁷ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 392-392, note that in the first centuries "alpha" was written with a capital letter (Α), while "omega" with lowercase letter (ω).

⁸ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, I.XXXI, PG 20:945-948; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, I.XXXI, p. 491; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin...*, I.XXXI, p. 77.

⁹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 435-437.

¹⁰ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.LXIX, PG 20:1110AB; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.XLIX, p. 532; Cyril MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453: sources and documents*, Medieval Academy reprints for teaching, 16, published by University of Toronto Press, p. 11; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.XLIX, p. 192; F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 444-447.

¹¹ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.III, PG 20:1057-1058B; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.III, p. 520; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, pp. 15-16; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.III, pp. 168-169.

Secondly, the building of new churches, in the new capital¹² and in the holy places of Christendom¹³, at their own expense, and encouraging the restoration of those affected during the last persecution or the building of new ones¹⁴, contributed fully to the flourishing of church art. Eusebius records that these churches were beautified and adorned "with everything that could be more beautiful". The Church of the Holy Apostles in the capital was covered "from bottom to top with stones of all colors"¹⁵, and the one in Jerusalem had a ceiling lined with wood, "like a great sea, extended over the entire basilica in a continuous intertwining"¹⁶, and was embellished with "numerous offerings of indescribable beauty, gold and silver and of precious stones [...]"¹⁷.

Last but not least, Eusebius records that at the public fountains erected by Constantine in the squares of his new capital, the "face of the Good Shepherd" could be seen, as well as the biblical scene of Daniel surrounded by lions, the pieces being made of bronze and encased in plates of gold¹⁸.

Even if from the summary descriptions made by Eusebius of Caesarea of the churches built by Emperor Constantine it does not appear that there were holy images in them, it would seem that an icon of the Savior Jesus Christ, made in mosaic in the apse of the church of Saint John Lateran in Rome, dates from his reign¹⁹. Another source, however late but not without relevance, the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*²⁰, records that, when they took power, the Arians burned the icons of the bishops of Constantinople who had pastored

¹² EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, IV.LVIII-LIX, PG 20:1209-1210AC; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, IV.LVIII-LIX, p. 555; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, IV.LVIII-LIX, pp. 240-241.

¹³ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.XXIX-XLIII, PG 20:1089-1106; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.XXIX-XLIII, pp. 528-531; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.XXIX-XLIII, pp. 184-189.

¹⁴ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, II.XLVI, PG 20:1023-1024B; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, II.XLVI, p. 511; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, II.XLVI, pp. 147-148; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, X.2-3, PG 20:845-848; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *The Church History*, X.2-3, Translated with Prolegomena and Notes by rev. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 1, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 370; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, X.2-3, în: *Scrieri*, I, traducere, studii, note și comentarii de pr. Teodor Bodogae, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, pp. 362-363.

¹⁵ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, IV.LVIII, PG 20:1209-1210; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, IV.LVIII, p. 555; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, IV.LVIII, p. 240.

¹⁶ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.XXXVI, PG 20:1095-1096; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.XXXVI, p. 529; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 13; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.XXXVI, p. 187.

¹⁷ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.XL, PG 20:1099-1100B; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.XL, p. 530; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 13; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.XL, p. 188.

¹⁸ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *De Vita Constantini Imperatoris*, III.LXIX, PG 20:1110AB; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *Life of Constantine*, III.LXIX, p. 532; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 11; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Viața împăratului Constantin*, III.LXIX, p. 192.

¹⁹ C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 322, Paris, 1870, p. 252; Arthur BARNES, "Saint John Lateran", in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1910, p. 15.

²⁰ ****Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, Introduction, Translation and Commentary, Edited by Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, coll. *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition*, William Harris (ed.), vol. X, Leiden, Brill, 1984, 10, p. 69; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 16.

under the emperor Constantine, which had been painted by his order, together with an icon of the Virgin with the Baby Jesus. However, it is evident that, through his care to beautify the churches, Emperor Constantine highlighted the usefulness and importance of art for Christian worship. Thus, he gave that impulse that would lead to the generalization of the decoration of Christian places of worship with sculptures, mosaics and holy images. Besides, there are enough testimonies that attest to the existence of holy images in some churches even before the time of Constantine. In this sense, the example of the house-church from Dura-Europos, decorated with paintings since the middle of the 3rd century, is famous²¹.

In canon 36 of the synod met in Elvira, in Spain, around the year 300, the synodals stated: "We liked to decide that paintings should not be in the church and that what is honest and adored should not be painted on the walls"²². So, in some churches in the region of Spain there were holy images on the walls of the churches, otherwise there would have been no point in the synod adopting such a decision to ban them. Certainly, the ban was not based on the second commandment of the Decalogue, but, taking into account the historical context against the Church, which was at the beginning of the last and cruelest persecution in the Antiquity era, its purpose would have been to protect the icons of desecration. The case of the church in Nicomedia, desecrated and destroyed in 303 by the soldiers of the imperial army in the presence of Emperor Diocletian, is cited in support of this hypothesis, on which occasion, according to Lactantius²³, a "simulacrum dei" was sought²⁴.

Even if no such "simulacrum dei" was discovered in the Nicomedia church, the Holy Scriptures being burned instead²⁵, the fact that the soldiers first looked for the "simulacrum dei" would suggest that they were aware of its existence in the church, their failure in discovering it can be attributed to the care of the Christians to have taken it in time from the place of worship. Eugenius of Laodicea (270-335) also testifies to the spread of the custom of decorating churches with holy images during the time of Constantine the Great. In the *Epitaph* prepared for himself, Eugenius, who was bishop of Laodicea for 25 years, shows that he restored from top to bottom the church in which he served and everything that adorned it, "the porticoes, the tetrastoa, the paintings, the mosaics, the water-fountain, the porch and all the works of the stone-masons"²⁶. Although he does not specify what exactly the paintings in the church he restored consist of, we can assume that they refer to holy images.

²¹ Carl Hermann KRAELING, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII, Part II: The Christian Buiding*, with a contribution by Charles Bradford WELLES, New Haven & Dura-Europos Publications, New York, 1967; Michael PEPPARD, *The World's Oldest Church. Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria*, Yale University Press, New Haven&London, 2016; Lisa BRODY and Gail HOFFMAN, *Dura-Europos: Crossroads of Antiquity*, Boston: McMullen Museum of Art / Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

²² G. BAREILLE, "Elvire, Concile d'", in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, IV/2, 1924, col. 2378; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, I. XVIII, 332, p. 608; F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 137.

²³ LACTANȚIU, *Despre moartea persecutorilor*, XII, pp. 68-69.

²⁴ Remus RĂDULESCU, "Icoanele în Biserica creștină primară", în *Cinstirea sfințelor icoane în Ortodoxie, Retrospectivă istorică, momente cruciale de stabilire a teologiei icoane și de criză majoră*, Ed. Trinitas, 2008, pp. 56-59.

²⁵ LACTANTIUS, *Liber ad Donatum Confessorem, De Mortibus Persecutorum*, XII, PL 7:213B; LACTANTIUS, *Of the manner in which the persecutors died*, XII, p. 305; LACTANȚIU, *Despre moartea persecutorilor*, XII, pp. 68-69.

²⁶ W. M. CALDER, "Studies in Early Christian Epigraphy", in: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 10(1920), pp.42-59; W. M. CALDER, *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, vol. I, The Manchester University Press, London, 1928, pp. 89-91; W. M. RAMSAY, "A laodicean Bishop", in: *The Expositor*, 35, 7th series, 1908(november), pp. 409-419; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, p. 14.

Towards the end of the 4th century, the presence of holy images in churches, either painted or in the stucco technique, in relief²⁷, had become "common", as Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) suggests. In *On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit*, written around 383, he testified that he had "often seen" the icon with the theme of *Abraham sacrificing Isaac*, which moved him to tears²⁸, and in the epistle *To Amphilochius*, describing a *martyrium* probably built in honor of the Forty Holy Martyrs of Sevasta, he recorded that above the entrance gate were "represented several images, according to custom"²⁹, without specifying what the images consisted of. In the *Eulogy of Saint Theodore Tiron*, the same author mentions the images painted by painters on the walls of the chapel erected above the tomb of Saint Theodore Martyr, in which the sufferings of the martyr and his happy end, blessed by the Savior Jesus Christ, are also represented by the painters in the images³⁰. Bishop Asterius of Amasia (350-410)³¹ also left a similar description, this time of the icon of the martyrdom of Saint Euphemia, represented on the walls of the chapel built above the tomb of the martyr.

Considering that Saint Basil the Great (330-379) also encouraged painters to reproduce the martyrdom of Saint Varlaam in images³², it can be concluded that in the second half of the 4th century the representation of the martyrdom of the holy martyrs on the walls of the martyria erected above of their graves was beginning to generalize. Moreover, it would seem that the transfer of the holy images from the walls of the catacombs to those of the churches was done by means of these martyria erected in honor of the holy martyrs above their graves, the first faces, the first painted portraits being those of the holy martyrs. With the spread and development of the cult of the holy martyrs, especially of the holy

²⁷ Bente KIILERICH, "The State of Early Christian Iconography in the Twenty-First Century", in: *Studies in Iconography*, 36, 2015, p. 111.

²⁸ S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, PG 46:571C; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 351, p. 357.

²⁹ S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Epistola XXV, Amphilochio*, PG 46:1099-1100A; SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, "Letter 25: To Amphilochius", in: *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, Introduction, Translation and Commentary by Anna M. Silvas, coll. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae*, vol. 83, Leiden / Boston, 2007, p. 201.

³⁰ S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Oratio laudatoria Sancti ac Magni Martyris Theodori*, PG 46:738D-739A; GREGORY OF NYSSA, "A Homily on Theodore the Recruit", Translation by Johan Leemans, in: *Let Us Die That We May Live, Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)*, Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Aller and Boudewijn Dehandschutter (eds.), Routledge, London / New York, 2003, p. 85.

³¹ ASTERII AMASEAE EPISCOPI, *Homiliae*, XI. *Enarratio in martyrium praeclarissimae martyris Euphemiae*, PG 40:335B-338C; ASTERIUS OF AMASEA, *Ekfrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, translated by Elizabeth A. Castelli, in: *Religions on Late Antiquity in Practice*, Richard Valantasis (ed.), Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 464-468; ASTERIUS OF AMASEA, *Ekfrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, translated by Boudewijn Dehandschutter, in: *Let Us Die That We May Live, Greek homilies on Christian martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)*, pp. 173-175; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 351, p. 357; Vasileios MARINIS, "Asterius of Amaseia's Ekfrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia", in: *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 13:2, 2020, pp. 285-307.

³² S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Homilia XVII, In Barlaam Martyrem*, PG 31:489-490AB; Joannes MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, vol. XIII, Florența, 1767, col. 79, col. 605; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 332, p. 252 SF. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia a XVII-a, La Mucenicul Varlaam", III, în: *Omilia și cuvântări*, traducere din limba greacă și introducere de Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, text revăzut și notă asupra ediției de Constantin Georgescu, note de Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Constantin Georgescu și Alexandru Mihăilă, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, serie nouă, vol. 1, Ed. Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2009, p. 269.

military martyrs, their icons became more and more widespread and popular, popular piety playing an important role in this respect³³.

The church with the most and well-preserved faces of martyr saints from this era, executed in mosaic most likely at the end of the 4th century, is the *Rotunda of Saint George* in Thessaloniki³⁴, where the icons of no less than fifteen have been preserved martyrdoms from the twenty that were originally made³⁵(fig. 3).

In the second half of the 4th century, the presence of icons of saints in the daily life of Christians became common. They paid all the veneration to the icons of the saints with the belief that they are protected from all evils through the intercession of the saint thus represented and honoured. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390), Saint John Chrysostom (350-407) and Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457) bear witness to this. In the poem *On Virtue* Saint Gregory shows how a young woman, who had been invited by a young man to his house to seduce her, entering and seeing the icon of Saint Polemon in the vestibule, was seized with a holy fear and left that man's house, thus avoiding of sin³⁶. Saint John Chrysostom recorded the fact that the face of Saint Meletius was represented by Christians everywhere, "on rings, on chalices, on cups and on the walls of the room"³⁷, and Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus wrote in the *Life of Saint Theodore the Pillar* that in Rome, "at the entrance of all shops, those there put an icon of him to be guarded from evil"³⁸.

An extraordinarily important role in the popularization of holy icons in the lives of Christians was played by pilgrimages to the holy places in Jerusalem, first of all, following the model of the Holy Empress Elena, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, as well as to the tombs of the holy martyrs or even to the places where Christians with a holy life were needed. From the places they went, the pilgrims wanted to take home souvenirs that would remind them of the pilgrimage, so around these places a whole network of manufacturing religious objects developed - icons, statuettes, plaques, ampoules, amphorae, pyxides, boxes, rings, glasses, bowls, medallions, made of gold, silver, bronze, glass or terracotta, on which scenes from the Holy Scriptures or from the life and martyrdom of the saints were painted or printed³⁹.

³³ See, regarding the cult and the iconography of the holy military martyrs: Christopher WALTER, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*, Routledge, New York, 2016.

³⁴ Pentru mozaicurile din Rotonda Sfântul Gheorghe, a se vedea B. KIILERICH, "Picturind Ideal Beauty: The Saints in the Rotunda at Thessaloniky", in: *Antiquité Tardive*, 15, 2007, pp. 321-336.

³⁵ B. KIILERICH, "The State of Early Christian Iconography...", p. 117; B. KIILERICH, "Picturind Ideal Beauty...", p. 322.

³⁶ S. GREGORIUS THEOLOGUS, *Poemata moralia, De virtute*, X, 793-807, PG 37:737-738.

³⁷ MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, vol. XIII, col. 7; col. 573; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 351, pp. 356-357; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, pp. 39-40.

³⁸ THEODORETUS, CYRENSIS EPISCOPUS, *Historia Religiosa seu Ascetica Vivendi Ratio*, XXVI, Symeones, PG 82:1473-1474A; THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, XXVI. Symeon (Stylites), 11, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by R. M. Price, coll. *Cistercian Studies Series*, 88, Cistercian Publications, 2008, p. 165; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 41; FERICITUL TEODORET, episcopul Cirului, "Viața Sfântului Simeon Stâlpnicul", 11, în *Viețile sfinților pustnici din Siria*, traducere din limba greacă și note de Dr. Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlad, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2001, p. 146.

³⁹ Margaret FRAZER, "Holy Sites Representations", in: Kurt WEIZMANN (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, V. *The Christian Realm*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1979, pp. 546-548.

1. PATRISTIC FOUNDATION OF THE ICON

In parallel with the process of building churches and decorating them with holy images, the work of theological substantiation of the icon was carried out by the Holy Fathers of the Church, against the background of the reservation expressed by some important representatives of the Church of that era towards the veneration icons. From this moment, Holy Fathers with great theological authority in the life of the Church, such as Athanasius the Great (295-373), Basil the Great (330-379), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), John the Golden Mouth (350-407), Asterie al Amasiei (350-410), Paulin de Nola (355-431) and others, testified about the benefit of representing the holy icons and honoring them.

There are a number of texts in the writings of these Holy Fathers that confirm the presence of icons in the life of the Church and Christians of that era and their use both for catechetical and spiritual purposes, as defenders against all evil through the mediation of the Saint who was represented, as well as some texts fundamental for the theology of the icon.

Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa wrote about the catechetical role of icons in the 4th century. Thus, Saint Basil the Great urged the Christian painters to glorify in their colors the life and deeds of Saint Mc. Varlaam, saying that they can do it better with colors than he can with words.

"Let us then cede his praise to grander tongues! Let us call for him trumpets which are louder than teachers! Arise now, brilliant painters of heroic achievements! Glorify by your art the mutilated image of the general!", said the Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, "Brighten by the colours of your skill this victor who has been described in less bright tones by me! Let me depart defeated by you in outlining the triumphs of the martyr! I am glad to be defeated by such a victory of your might today! Let me see the struggle against the fire being depicted by you with greater precision! Let me see the combatant being depicted even more joyful on your image! Let the demons weep also now, being afflicted by the feats of the martyr in your work! Let once again the burning hand be shown defeating them! And let also Christ, the master of the fighting contest, be depicted on the panel!"⁴⁰.

In the homily *To the Holy Forty Martyrs*, Saint Basil the Great asserts the equivalence and complementarity of the spoken word and the one embodied in the image through form and colors, showing that "the facts which the historical account present by being listened to, the painting silently portrays by imitation"⁴¹. Saint Gregory of Nyssa also expressed himself in similar terms, who, in a sermon on the occasion of the feast of Saint Theodore Tiron, affirmed that "the painter coloured the blooms of his art, having depicted on an image the martyr's brave deeds, his opposition, his continuous pain, the beastly appearance of the tyrants, the insults, the blazing furnace that was the athlete's most blessed end, the representation of the human form of Christ, who was the president of the games – having fashioned all these things for us by his use of colours, he portrayed, as if in a book that uttered speech, in great detail the martyr's contest and at the same time he also adorned

⁴⁰ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Homilia XVII, In Barlaam Martyrem*, PG 31:489-490AB; Joannes MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, vol. XIII, col. 79; 605; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, t. IV, l. XVIII, 332, p. 252; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 37; în română: SF. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia a XVII-a, La Mucenicul Varlaam", III, în: *Omilii și cuvântări*, p. 269.

⁴¹ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Homilia XIX, In sanctos quadraginta martyres*, PG 31:509-510A; BASIL OF CAESAREA, "A Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste", 2, in: *Let Us Die That We May Live*, p. 68; în română: SF. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia a XIX-a, La Sfinții Patruzeci de Mucenici", II, în: *Omilii și cuvântări*, p. 283.

the church as a beautiful meadow. For even though it remains silent, painting can speak on the wall and be of the greatest profit"⁴².

The foundation of the teaching of faith about the veneration of holy icons is largely due to Saint Basil the Great. In the dogmatic writings against the Arians, to argue the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, Saint Basil used the paradigm of honoring the emperor through the mediation of the statue or his painting, the imperial portrait, called *lauraton*⁴³. This paradigm was to be used by iconodule theologians during the iconoclastic disputes to demonstrate that the veneration of the icon passed to its prototype and that, as the emperor was honored through his image, before which the subjects bowed as before the emperor himself, so also the savior Jesus Christ was honored through the mediation of his icon. The most important text of all is found in the treatise *De Spiritu Sancto*, in which it shows that "the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; since such as is the latter, such is the former, and such as is the former, such is the latter; and herein is the Unity. So that according to the distinction of Persons, both are one and one, and according to the community of Nature, one. How, then, if one and one, are there not two Gods? Because we speak of a king, and of the king's image, and not of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one; because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype. Now what in the one case the image is by reason of imitation, that in the other case the Son is by nature; and as in works of art the likeness is dependent on the form, so in the case of the divine and uncompounded nature the union consists in the communion of the Godhead"⁴⁴.

This text is fundamental to the theology of the icon, although the theological approach of St. Basil the Great aimed at Trinitarian theology. Starting from the teaching of Paul Apostle according to which the Son is the natural icon of the Father, Saint Basil defines in an antinomic way the relationship between image and prototype, as similarity and difference at the same time: identity by nature, but difference by hypostases in the case of the Son and the Father, similarity by form or according to the image with the prototype, but different according to the nature, in the case of the icon's relationship by imitation with its prototype. The same concept about the similarity in form but the difference in nature between the prototype and its representation is also found in Saint Gregory of Nyssa in his work *Against Eunomius*, in which he wrote: "when the lifeless material is shaped by art, whether carving, painting, or modelling, into an imitation of a living creature, the imitation is

⁴² S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Oratio laudatoria Sancti ac Magni Martyris Theodori*, PG 46:738D-739A; GREGORY OF NYSSA, "A Homily on Theodore the Recruit", Translation by Johan Leemans, in: *Let Us Die That We May Live*, p. 85; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, pp. 36-37.

⁴³ John BECKWITH, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, col. *The Pelican History of Art*, Penguin Books, 1979, p. 78.

⁴⁴ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Liber de Spiritu Sancto*, XVIII, PG 32:149-150BC; ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *The Treatise De Spiritu Sancto*, Translated with Notes by rev. Blomfield Jackson, in: *Letters and Select Works*, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 28; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 47; SF. VASILE CEL MARE, *Despre Sfântul Duh*, XVIII, în: *Scieri*, III, traducere, introducere, note și indici de pr. Constantin Cornițescu și pr. Teodor Bodogae, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, 12, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1988, p. 60.

said to be «like» the original. For in such a case the nature of the animal is one thing, and that of the material, which cheats the sight by mere colour and form, is another"⁴⁵.

Using the theme of honoring the emperor's painting or statue as an analogy for honoring the Savior through His icon would become a true *locus classicus* for the iconodules theologians⁴⁶. It made a theological career during the iconoclastic disputes and the expression "the honor given to the image passes over the prototype", often quoted by the defenders of the veneration of icons.

In addition to highlighting the relationship of *formal similarity* that exists between the icon through imitation and its prototype, Saint Basil also owes the definition of the relationship of *homonymy* between the icon and the prototype.

In *The 24th Homily, Against the Sabellians, Arians and the Anomoeans*, in which he appeals to the same theme of honoring the emperor's portrait, Saint Basil showed that the honor given to the representation rises to the prototype and as a result of naming it a painting or statue, with the prototype name:

"He who looks at the picture of the emperor in the square says that the one in the picture is the emperor, but he does not maintain that there are two emperors, one the picture and another the one whose picture it is; nor is the original of the emperor's name missing, if he would say, pointing to the one painted in the painting, «This is the emperor». Nay, on the contrary, he further strengthened the honor given to the original by his testimony. And if the emperor's picture is the emperor, how much more is he who is the cause of the one in the picture right to be emperor"⁴⁷. Homonymy, as an intrinsic connection between the icon through imitation and the prototype through the resemblance of the pose with whose name the face is also called, was also emphasized by Saint Gregory of Nyssa in the treatise *On the Making of Man*, in which he stated that "the image is properly so called if it keeps its resemblance to the prototype ; but if the imitation be perverted from its subject, the thing is something else, and no longer an image of the subject"⁴⁸.

The paradigm of the emperor and his representation was not only specific to the theology of Saint Basil the Great, it was also used, also in a Trinitarian context, by Saint Athanasius the Great. Moreover, in the Alexandrian Father we find expressed, as in the Antiochian, the teaching about honoring the prototype by honoring its image. In *The Third*

⁴⁵ S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Contra Eunomium*, II.12, PG 45:981D; SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Against Eunomius*, Book II.12, in: *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, translated, with prolegomena, notes and indices by William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. V, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), New York, 1917, p. 123; Ștefan IONESCU-BERECHET, "Premise ale iconologiei patristice în scrierile Sfântului Vasile cel Mare", in: *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani*, Actele Symposionului Comisiei Române de Istorie Eclésiastică, București-Cernica, 2-3 octombrie 2008, Studia Basiliana 3, Ed. Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, 2009, p. 319.

⁴⁶ Mihăiță BRATU, "Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, autoritate patristică de referință în timpul disputei iconoclaste", in: *Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, închinare la 1630 de ani*, p. 299.

⁴⁷ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Homilia XXIV, Contra Sabellianos, et Arios, et Anomoeos*, 4, PG 31:607-608A; SF. VASILE CEL MARE, "Omilia a XXIV-a, Împotriva sabelienilor, a lui Arie și a anomeilor", IV, în *Omiliile și cuvântări*, p. 354; MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, vol. XIII, col. 71, 603.

⁴⁸ S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *De Hominis Opificio*, XVI, PG 44:179-180C; SAINT GREGORY OF NYSSA, *On the Making of Man*, XVI.3, in: *Select Writings and Letters of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa*, translated, with prolegomena, notes and indices by William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. V, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), New York, 1917, p. 404; SF. GRIGORIE DE NYSSA, "Despre crearea omului", XVI, în vol. *Scrieri*, II, traducere și note de Pr. Teodor Bodogae, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, 30, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, p. 47.

Discours Against the Arians, Saint Athanasius appealed to the analogy with the face of the emperor to explain the words of the Savior Jesus Christ "I and the Father are one" (John: 10, 30), "I am in the Father and the Father in Me" John:10, 38) and "He who sees me sees the Father" (John:14, 9), writing that "in the image is the shape and form of the Emperor, and in the Emperor is that shape which is in the image. For the likeness of the Emperor in the image is exact; so that a person who looks at the image, sees in it the Emperor; and he again who sees the Emperor, recognises that it is he who is in the image. And from the likeness not differing, to one who after the image wished to view the Emperor, the image might say, «I and the Emperor are one; for I am in him, and he in me; and what thou seest in me, that thou beholdest in him, and what thou hast seen in him, that thou holdest in me». Accordingly he who worships the image, in it worships the Emperor also; for the image is his form and appearance"⁴⁹.

Another fundamental text for the theology of the icon is the one from book V *Against Eunomius*, attributed to Saint Basil the Great, but belonging rather, it seems, to Didymus the Blind of Alexandria⁵⁰. The author of this text recorded that "the hand-made icon, transposed according to the prototype, has received the likeness in matter and participates in the figure of that one, through the craftsman's mind and the pressure of the hand. Thus, the painter, the sculptor in stone and the one who casts statues of gold and bronze, took matter, looked at the prototype, received in himself the impression of the thing seen and then reprinted it in matter"⁵¹.

In addition to the idea of the existence of a mental icon, as a transitory image that is created in the craftsman's mind between the moment of seeing the prototype and that of its transposition into matter, in this text is extremely important the statement according to which the icon, being transposed according to the prototype whose likeness it receives, participate in the image of the prototype. This means that, participating in the image of the Savior Jesus Christ or the saint he represents, the icon also participates in the glory and holiness of the prototype and therefore shares the sanctifying grace of the prototype to its worshipers.

From the perspective of the iconological approach, the assertion that the painter reproduces the likeness of the face looking at the prototype should not be neglected either, an assertion that we also find in another writing, authentic this time, of Saint Basil, who wrote to Saint Gregory of Nazianzus that, "just as artists, when they are using models, strive by looking at the original to transfer its distinctive features to their own canvas, so he who is

⁴⁹ S. ATHANASIUS ALEXANDRINUS, *Orationes adversus Arianos*, Oratio tertia, 5, PG 26:331-332AB; ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Discours III.5, in: *Selected Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, Edited, with Prolegomena, Indices, and Tables by Archibald Robertson, coll. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. IV, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1917, p. 396; SF. ATANASIE CEL MARE, "Trei cuvinte împotriva arienilor", III.V, în *Scrieri*, I, traducere din grecește, introducere și note de Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, 15, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, pp. 329-330.

⁵⁰ Bernard SESBOÛÉ, "Introduction", in: BASILE DE CÉSARÉE, *Contre Eunome*, introduction, traduction et notes de Bernard SESBOÛÉ, Georges-Matthieu de DURAND et Louis DUTRELEAU, col. *Sources Chrétiennes*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1982, pp. 61-63.

⁵¹ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Adversus Eunomium*, V, PG 29:723-724BC; SF. VASILE CEL MARE, *Împotriva lui Eunomiu, Expunere a credinței niceene*, V, traducere și note de ierom. Lavrentie Carp, Ed. Crigarux, Piatra Neamț, 2007, p. 176.

striving to reach perfection in all the virtues in turn, by looking steadfastly at the lives of the saints, as if at living models..."⁵².

These statements are important from the perspective of identifying the prototype face of the Savior Jesus Christ and that of the Mother of God, which ensures the real resemblance to Christ the Lord and to the Virgin Mary, without which one cannot speak of homonymy or the participation of the representation in the prototype, and, therefore, to the glory of the prototype to share with the worshippers.

Painting the icon according to the model implicitly leads to capturing some features specific to the person represented, which individualize his face, so that, no matter how many painters represented the person in question and in how many copies, all the representations resemble each other and the prototype, an idea emphasized by Saint Basil the Great, who said: "If several painters should depict the lineaments of one face, all the pictures would be alike, because they would be likenesses of one and the same individual; similarly, if many types of character are intent upon the imitation of one model, all alike will bear the good impress of his life"⁵³. This affirmation of the theology of the icon was necessary because at that time there were still voices that had reservations about the veneration of holy icons, following the line of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

In the 4th century Saint Epiphanius of Salamis seems to have even written a *Treatise against the veneration of icons* and addressed an *Epistle to the Emperor Theodosius* on the same subject⁵⁴. Moreover, in a *Testament* to his community, he would have cast anathema on anyone who dared to represent the image of the Savior Jesus Christ iconically⁵⁵, and during a visit to Palestine, carried out between 387-393, he broke the door of the church in the village of Anablata, on which the face of the Savior was represented⁵⁶.

The aniconic attitude also characterized Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea Palestine, who stated that the representation of the face of the Savior Jesus Christ with lifeless lines and colors cannot be allowed. In *The Epistle to Constantia Augusta*, Eusebius states: "Who, then,

⁵² S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Epistola II, Gregorio*, PG 32:229-230A; ST. BASIL OF CAESAREA, "Letters, 2, To Gregory", in: *Letters*, vol. I, translated by Agnes Clare Way, notes by Roy Deferrari, coll. *The Fathers of The Church, A New Translation*, vol. 13, New York, 1951, pp. 8-9; SF. VASILE CEL MARE, "Epistola 2, Către prietenul Grigorie (Teologul)", III, în *Epistole*, traducere din limba greacă, introducere și note de Pr. Teodor Bodogae, ediție revizuită de Tudor Teoteoi, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, serie nouă, 3, Ed. Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 34.

⁵³ S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, *Sermo Asceticus*, 2, PG 31:883-884B; ST. BASIL THE GREAT, *An Ascetical Discourse*, in: *Ascetical Works*, vol. I, translated by Monica Wagner, coll. *The Fathers of The Church, A New Translation*, vol. 9, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1962, p. 218; SF. VASILE CEL MARE, *Cuvânt ascetic*, III, 2, în: *Scrieri*, II, traducere, introducere, note și indici Iorgu D. Ivan, col. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, 18, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1989, p. 206.

⁵⁴ Pr. Nicolae CHIFĂR, *Icoană, iconologie, iconomahie*, Ed. Basilica, București, 2018, pp. 36-55 presents the claims of the main scholars of the work of Saint Epiphanius regarding the authenticity of these writings of his, concluding that "as long as we do not possess convincing arguments about the authenticity of these writings, Ostrogorsky's opinion is correct, and these writings are iconoclastic forgeries of the 8th century. [...] However, we cannot absolve Saint Epiphanius of hostile manifestations towards icons, but his positions must be analyzed from the perspective of the one who opposes idolatrous worship and sees in the worship of icons a possible return to the old pagan practices. Added to this his Jewish origin. Therefore, he was not an iconodul, but he neither can be considered a promoter of iconoclasm", pp. 54-55.

⁵⁵ P. NAUTIN, "Épiphane (Saint) de Salamine", în R. AUBERT et É. VAN CAUWENBERGH, *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie ecclésiastiques*, t. XV, Paris, 1963, col. 628; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ P. NAUTIN, "Épiphane (Saint) de Salamine", col. 622; C. MANGO, *The art of the Byzantine Empire, 312-1453*, pp. 42-43.

would be able to represent by means of dead colors and inanimate delineations (skiagraphiai) the glistening, flashing radiance of such dignity and glory, when even His superhuman disciples could not bear to behold Him in this guise and fell on their faces, thus admitting that they could not withstand the sight?"⁵⁷

The same Eusebius of Caesarea, however, recorded in his *Church History* the fact that the woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years and was healed by touching the lap of the Savior's garment had erected a statue of Him in front of her house⁵⁸, concluding that: "Nor is it strange that those of the Gentiles who, of old, were benefited by our Saviour, should have done such things, since we have learned also that the likenesses of his apostles Paul and Peter, and of Christ himself, are preserved in paintings, the ancients being accustomed, as it is likely, according to a habit of the Gentiles, to pay this kind of honor indiscriminately to those regarded by them as deliverers"⁵⁹.

The testimony from the *Church History* of Eusebius of Caesarea is extremely important because it confirms, once more, that at the beginning of the 4th century there were already representations of the face of the Savior Jesus Christ and of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul. In other words, at the beginning of the 4th century, the evolutionary process of Christian iconography records the transition from the symbols and anecdotal representations from the catacombs to the representations of the faces of the Savior Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary, of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, but also of the other saints, especially of the holy martyrs, reaching the last phase, that of the portrait.

2. REPRESENTATION OF THE FACE OF THE SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST - THE ACHIROPOIETA

Starting from the 4th century, the Savior Jesus Christ was no longer represented analogically, as in the previous period, as Christ-Apollo, Christ-Orpheus or Christ-Helios⁶⁰, but with His own image, identifying himself through himself. Analyzing the face of the Savior Jesus Christ, as it has come down to us, "emaciated (weak beyond measure), black and grave eyes deep in the sockets, long straight hair falling on his shoulders, unkempt beard"⁶¹, F. Tristan is of the opinion that in elements of Roman, Hellenic, Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian influence are twinned in this face. Or, in other words, the association of the image of the shepherd-philosopher, with long hair and beard, of Hellenic-Roman origin, with a face sucked beyond measure, of Syro-Palestinian influence, over which was superimposed that of black and serious eyes, of Egyptian influence, similar to those in the portraits of the deceased at El Fayoum, they finally constituted the face of the Savior⁶².

However, beyond this iconological analysis of the face of the Savior Jesus Christ, the iconologist cannot abstract from the Church's belief regarding the existence of an archetypal model of all the icons of the Savior Jesus Christ, a prototype miraculously imprinted by Himself, nor from the tradition that argues and substantiate this belief. The first

⁵⁷ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Epistola ad Constantiam Augustam*, PG 20:545-1546C; MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, vol. XIII, col. 313-314; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ This fact was also recorded by Antipater of Bostra, his account being quoted in the 4th session of the 7th ecumenical synod, not that of Eusebius of Caesarea, cf. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, vol. XIII, col. 14, 575; C. J. HEFELE, *Histoire des conciles...*, I. XVIII, 351, p. 766.

⁵⁹ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII.XVIII, PG 20:679-680C; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *The Church History*, VII.XVIII, p. 304; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, VII.XVIII, p. 288.

⁶⁰ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 307-317.

⁶¹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 355.

⁶² F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 355-359.

documentary attestations of these traditions concerning the existence of some archetypal icons of the Savior Jesus Christ belong to Eusebius of Caesarea.

In *Church History*, he recorded, based on a text in Syriac, discovered, contrary to his own testimony, in an archive in Edessa, the episode of the coming to the Savior Jesus Christ of an envoy of King Abgar V of Edessa, who asked Him to he goes to cure the toparch of the kingdom of Osroene from an illness for which doctors have not found a cure. The account of Eusebius⁶³, according to which the Savior Jesus Christ answered the soil that he could not interrupt his activity to go to Abgar, but that, for that one's faith in Him, after His resurrection and ascension to heaven, He would send him a disciple to heals him, accomplished by the coming to Edessa of the disciple of Saint Jude the Apostle Thaddeus, Thaddeus⁶⁴, is completed and enriched with very important details for our topic from two other sources, *The Doctrine of Addai* and *The Acts of Mari*.

According to the writing *Doctrine of Addai*⁶⁵, which dates from the beginning of the 5th century, Abgar's envoy, Hannah, was also a royal painter and he painted the face of the Savior Jesus Christ on a canvas which he then took to the toparch of Osroene, who he was healed by touching the cloth with the face of the Lord. The *Acts of Mari*, dating from the end of the 6th century, add an extremely important new element by affirming the miraculous imprinting of the face of the Savior Jesus Christ on the cloth. The author of this writing reports that, not being able Hannah to capture face of the Savior in forms and colors due to His unspeakable glory, the Lord Himself, knowing, as an All-Knowing, the impasse of the painter, imprinted His face on the canvas, placing it on His holy Face⁶⁶.

This cloth, called *The Mandyllion*⁶⁷ (fig. 4), which Evagrius the Scholastic was the first to call "made by God" or "not made by hands", i.e. *acheiropoietos*⁶⁸, was kept with all honor in the city of Edessa, and in the year 944 it was redeemed from Arabs by the emperor Romanos I Lekapenos, brought with great honor to Constantinople and placed in the church of Saint Mary in Blacherne⁶⁹. The icon of the Holy Face of the Savior on the *Mandyllion* is one of the two prototype icons for the representation of the Savior Jesus Christ.

A second icon "not made by hands" appears in the West, the beginning of its tradition being also linked to a mention by Eusebius of Caesarea, according to which in the city of Panea (Caesarea of Philip) there was a statue of the Savior Jesus Christ, erected by the woman who he had suffered twelve years from the flow of blood and was healed by touching the hem of His garment (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk. 8:43-48)⁷⁰.

⁶³ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I.XIII, PG 20:119-130; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *The Church History*, I.XIII, pp. 100-102; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, I.XIII, pp. 59-63.

⁶⁴ According to the other sources, Thaddeus would have been a disciple of Saint Thomas the Apostle, cf. Ștefan IONESCU-BERECHET, "To αγιον μανδηλιον: istoria unei tradiții", în *Studii Teologice*, seria a III-a, VI, 2/2010, p. 117, nota 32.

⁶⁵ ****The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*, first edited in a complete form in the original syriac, with an english translation and notes by George Phillips, London, 1876.

⁶⁶ ****The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Amir Harrak, Atalanta, 2005, pp. 5-7.

⁶⁷ For the full history of the tradition of this cloth, see the study: Ștefan IONESCU-BERECHET, "To αγιον μανδηλιον: istoria unei tradiții", pp. 109-150.

⁶⁸ MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum...*, vol. XIII, col. 191.

⁶⁹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 360.

⁷⁰ EUSEBIUS PAMPHILI, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII.XVIII, PG 20:679-680; EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, *The Church History*, VII.XVIII, p. 304; EUSEBIU de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, VII.XVIII, pp. 287-288; this information is also presented in *The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle*, p. 5; PHILOSTORGIUS, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VII, 3, P G 65:538-542; PHILOSTORGIUS, *Church History*, VII, 3-3a, Translated with an

Like the Eastern tradition of the *mandylion*, the Western tradition of the *sudarium* would be shaped by the appearance of apocrypha that added new elements to Eusebius' account, enriching it⁷¹. First, *The Acta Pilati*, fourth-century apocrypha, calls the woman healed by the flow of blood Berenike or Berenice. Veronica, the Latin form of the name, is derived from the phrase *vera icon*, meaning that this woman possessed the true icon with the Savior's face. The connection between Veronica and this *vera icon* of the Savior, also *acheiropoietos*, would be made by another apocrypha, *Mors Pilati*⁷², which appeared in the 7th century, around the same time as the *Acts of Mari*. The author of this apocrypha mentions that the Roman emperor Tiberius, who was suffering from leprosy, sent Volusianus to Palestine to bring to Rome the Savior, who had been heard to work miracles, curing every disease. Volusianus arrived in Jerusalem after the time of the crucifixion, but met with Veronica, who revealed to him that Christ had been crucified but that she possessed His portrait, which He Himself had wonderfully imprinted on an eraser. Veronica accompanied Volusianus to Rome, where she healed Tiberius with the cloth on which was printed the unmade image of the Savior Jesus Christ.

The Eastern Christian tradition also knows the *acheiropoietos* from Memphis, in Egypt, and from Camouliana, in Cappadocia, which may be wonderful self-replications of one of the two mentioned above⁷³.

3. NEW ICONOGRAPHIC THEMES, WHICH REFLECT THE DOGMATIC DECISIONS OF THE ECUMENICAL SYNODS

From an iconographic point of view, the sacred art of the Constantinian era would record not only the definition of the type of representation of the face of the Savior Jesus Christ, that of the Holy Virgin, the faces of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the martyrs and the theme of martyrdom, but also the appearance of new iconographic themes, inspired either by the ceremonial of the Imperial Court or even by the pagan imaginary. From an iconological point of view, these new iconographic themes aimed to convey the main teachings of faith affirmed by the Church during the ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

The transition from the symbols and anecdotal representations of the catacombs to the representations of the faces of the holy persons in the history of salvation did not mean the complete abandonment of symbols. On the contrary, it can be observed that in the IV-V

Introduction and Notes by Philip R. Amidon, coll. *Writings from the Greco-Roman world*, v. 23, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2007, pp. 89-91; FILOSTORGIU, *Istoria Bisericească*, VII, 3-3a, ediție bilingvă, traducere de Dorin Garofeanu, studiu introductiv, tabel cronologic și note explicative de Dragoș Mirșanu, Polirom, Iași, 2012, pp.195-199; S. THEOPHANES CONFESSOR, *Chronographia*, A. M. 5854 / A. C. 354, PG 108:158D-159A; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813*, A M 5854 / A D 361/2, Translated with Introduction and Commentary by Cyril Mango and Roger Scott with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 59; SF. TEOFAN MĂRTURISITORUL, *Cronografia*, traducere, introducere și note de Mihai Țipău, Ed. Basilica, București, 2012, p. 71; some scholars believe that the statue represents a Roman emperor and that it was wrongly attributed to the Savior – John C. L. GIESELER, *A Text-Book of a Church History*, I, a new american edition, revised and edited by Henry B. Smith, New-York, Harper and Brothers, 1868, note 4, pp. 70-71.

⁷¹ Pentru istoria amănunțită a *sudarium*-ului, a se vedea Ștefan IONESCU-BERECHET, "To *αγιον μανδηλιον*: istoria unei tradiții", pp. 150-185.

⁷² *Evangelia apocrypha*; *adhibitis plurimis codicibus graecis et latinis maximam partem nunc primum consultis atque ineditorum copia insignibus, collegit atque recensuit Constantin von TISCHENDORF*, Lipsiae, 1876, pp. 456-458.

⁷³ Ștefan IONESCU-BERECHET, "To *αγιον μανδηλιον*: istoria unei tradiții", pp. 112-113.

centuries new symbols appeared, which were used in Christian iconography in parallel with some from the previous period, such as the lamb, the fish or the bread. Thus, in order to highlight the Royal dignity of the God-Man Jesus Christ, Christian painters borrowed from the universe of Roman imperial symbolism some elements specific to the manifestation of the emperor's authority and triumph.

A first element of imperial influence is the throne, which in the 4th century replaced the gilt in which the Savior was represented in the catacombs, in the previous century. *Traditio legis*, the composition in which Christ the Redeemer, sitting on the throne under which Caelus is located, as a symbol of heaven, hands the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul the rotulus of the new Law⁷⁴, or the one in which, flanked by the two Apostles, he holds in his hands the scepter and the imperial globe are reflections of specific images of the imperial "triumph", like Christ standing, holding the cross of glory on the right, after the model of the emperor holding the lance, in the same attitude⁷⁵. The theme of the imperial "triumph" inspired the Christian iconographers, it seems, also for the *Savior's Entry into Jerusalem*⁷⁶. There is the opinion that other Christian themes, such as the *Adoration of the Magi* or *Christ in the midst of the Apostles*, would have been inspired by the adoration or acclaim of the Roman emperors by the crowds⁷⁷.

A second element borrowed from the imperial props is the purple in which Christ is represented, it being known that the purple was the exclusive attribute of the emperor.

One of the newly appearing symbols in the Christian iconography of the 5th century is that of the *hetoimasia/etimasia*⁷⁸ (fig. 5). It was originally a symbol of imperial origin, designating the imperial throne on whose cushion the other insignia of power were placed as a manifestation of the emperor's authority in his absence. In imperial symbolism the Greek *hetoimasia* was used with the meaning of "foundation", the majesty of the throne and the imperial insignia being the foundation on which the worship of the absent emperor by his subjects was based⁷⁹.

Changing the meaning used at the Court with another meaning of the term, that of "preparation", the Christians took the symbol and used it to denote the presence of the King Christ by representing on the cushion of the imperial throne a cloth on which the Holy Gospel is placed. In some representations, the Dove or the crown of thorns rests on the Holy Gospel and behind the throne is the Holy Cross in glory, adorned with precious stones, framed by the spear with which the Savior's rib was pierced and the reed with the sponge from which He was given to drink wine mixed with gall. On the step at the foot of the throne are represented the nails of the crucifixion.

From an iconological point of view, the presence of the dove, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, on the Holy Gospel shows that the authentic understanding of the Word is

⁷⁴ Viktor LAZAREV, *Istoria picturii byzantine*, I, traducere de Florin Chirițescu, prefață de Vasile Drăguț, ditura Meridiane, București, 1980, p. 97; Jaś ELSNER, "Inventing Christian Rome: the role of Early Christian Art", in: Catharine EDWARDS and Greg WOOLF (eds), *Rome the Cosmopolis*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 83; Jaś ELSNER, "Art and Architecture", in: Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History, XIII, The Late Empire A.D. 337-425*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 759.

⁷⁵ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 348-350.

⁷⁶ V. LAZAREV, *Istoria picturii byzantine*, I, p. 97; J. ELSNER, "Art and Architecture", p. 759.

⁷⁷ V. LAZAREV, *Istoria picturii byzantine*, I, p. 97.

⁷⁸ A se vedea, pentru tema Hetimasiei, studiul: Ștefan MERA, "Hetimasia's Throne", în: *Anastasis*, Research in Medieval Culture and Art, vol. I, nr. 1/November 2014, Artes 2014, pp. 134-160; an image of Hetoimasia from the 5th century is preserved in Rome, in Santa Maria Maggiore church: *** *Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome*, ed. Schnell & Steiner GmbH, Regensburg, 2023, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 352.

conditioned by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the One who also inspired its writing. The cloth on the throne reminds, according to F. Tristan, of the shroud left in the tomb after the Resurrection, a silent but indubitable witness of the resurrection, which symbolizes the Risen Christ in glory. To the same symbolism send the cross adorned with precious stones and the objects that flank it⁸⁰. Since the glory is related to the second coming of the Savior Jesus Christ, *Hetoimasia* also symbolizes the throne of the Last Judgment. Beginning in the 11th century, when the name *Hetoimasia* began to be inscribed next to the image of the throne, this symbolism seems to have become prevalent.

Hetoimasia was also used to symbolize the Holy Trinity, the throne being the symbol of God the Father, the Gospel and the Cross the symbols of God the Son and the dove the symbol of God the Holy Spirit. This understanding is also supported by the fact that, in some representations of *Hetoimasia*, on one side and on the other side of the throne are represented angels carrying a labarum on which is inscribed the tri-holy chant "Holy, Holy, Holy".

Another symbol that in this period imposes itself with a new meaning compared to the uses of the previous era is that of the right-hand blessing, which also appears in some representations of *Hetoimasia*.

The gesture of raised right hands, which was not specific to Christianity, being quite common in the art of pagan antiquity, had different symbolic meanings, from marking the sovereign attitude of the emperor or his majesty, to that of the teacher who announces or instructs. This attitude of the sovereign emperor, in glory, proclaiming and teaching, befitting the Savior Jesus Christ, was taken over by Christian painters. Only from the 7th century, however, was the right hand represented as a sign of blessing with the fingers signifying the sign of the Holy Cross but symbolizing, through the position of the fingers, both the dogma of the Holy Trinity and the dogma of the Incarnation⁸¹.

The right hand emerging from the clouds symbolizes God the Father and has different meanings depending on the era we are referring to. During the 4th-6th centuries, the hand thus represented seems to symbolize rather the idea that God expresses himself, as in the case of the *Baptism of the Savior*, in which the hand expresses the words spoken by God the Father. The hand also symbolizes the work of God⁸². During this period, it is necessary in Christian iconography to depict the glory of God by means of three symbols, inspired by pagan art, in Christian art each of them has its own, extremely precise function.

The first, *the luminous nimbus*, represented in the form of three concentric circles, is used exclusively for epiphanies, being, according to Sorin Dumitrescu, the equivalent of the luminous cloud in the Holy Scriptures. We find it in the icons of the *Ascension of the Lord*, the *Virgin in glory* and the *Parousia*. Very often the nimbus appears fragmentary in icons, either as a circular arc in the upper right of the icon, or as a semicircle in the middle of the upper side of the icon, never on the left, since the grace is shared by the Holy Spirit from right to left or perpendicularly from above down⁸³.

The second symbol, *the triple ray*, is used to symbolize God's action in the world through the work of His uncreated energies. The triple ray is always depicted breaking out of

⁸⁰ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 354.

⁸¹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 421-424.

⁸² F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 421-424.

⁸³ Sorin DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, Ed. Anastasia, 2010, p. 203.

the luminous nimbus symbolized by the arc or semicircle at the top of the icon. It is used in the *Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, Descent of the Holy Spirit* icons⁸⁴.

The third, *the mandorla*, is the symbol used in only three icons, the *Transfiguration*, the *Resurrection* and the *Dormition of the Mother of God*. According to the dictionary of symbols, the mandorla is the geometric figure in the shape of an almond, from which it derives its name (lat. *amandula* – almond).

"In traditional iconography, painted or sculpted, it is the oval in which the holy characters, Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, as in an immortal glory, are inscribed. Through its geometric shape, the mandorla is linked to the symbolism of the rhombus, as it appears as a rhombus with rounded lateral angles. It also signifies, like the rhombus, the union of heaven and earth, of the lower and upper worlds, and, if only for this reason, it perfectly suits the framing of sanctified human beings. It symbolizes overcoming the dualism of matter-spirit, water-fire, sky-earth in a harmoniously achieved unity"⁸⁵.

Interpreting the way the mandorla is depicted in Christian iconography, especially in the *Dormition of the Mother of God* icon, Sorin Dumitrescu observes that only the upper half of the mandorla is depicted, which is why he associates it with the ogiva, so that he "reads" the mandorla as two ogives, oriented one up, towards the Kingdom of God, and the other down, stuck in the depths of hell, as in the icon *Descent into Hell - Resurrection of the Lord*. The same author opines that the mandorla-ogive signifies *the threshold or the gate of the Kingdom*, in which Christ is depicted emerging from *the threshold*⁸⁶.

The oldest Christian images in which the mandorla appears as a symbol of divine glory belong to the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century, one being painted in the catacomb of Domitilla and the other in the church of Santa Pudenziana, both images depicting the theme of *Christ in majesty*⁸⁷.

Considering the period in which the mandorla was first used to depict the divine glory of the Son of God incarnate and the theme in which it was used, *Christ in majesty*, it is very likely that the intention of the painters was to testify iconographically the teaching about the divinity of the Son, as established at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Very probably the same was the intention of the author of *Philoxenia of Abraham*, an iconological type belonging to the *Triandric Trinity* theme, executed in the catacomb on the Via Latina in the first half of the 4th century, during the period of theological disputes caused by the Arian heresy. In this composition, the Three Youths, as *typoi* of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, are of the same size, have the same gesture and the same clothing, suggesting that they are equal in honor and glory. It is, therefore, a visual transposition of the confession of faith about the equality in glory and honor of the Son with the Father, as recorded in the dogmatic decision of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.

A similar testimony is also found on the frieze of the sarcophagus kept in the Pio Cristiano Museum in the Vatican⁸⁸, on which the *Creator Trinity* is figured, another

⁸⁴ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, p. 203.

⁸⁵ Jean CHEVALIER, Alain GHEERBRANT, *Dicționar de simboluri*, 2, E-O, Ed. Artemis, București, p. 267.

⁸⁶ S. DUMITRESCU, *Noi și Icoana*, pp. 204-209.

⁸⁷ Rostislava TODOROVA, "The Aureole and the Mandorla: Aspects of the Symbol of the Sacral from Ancient Cultures to Christianity", in: *Studia Academica Șumenensia*, 3, 2016, p. 215.

⁸⁸ Robin M. JENSEN, "The economy of the Trinity at the Creation of Adam and Eve", in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 7:4, 1999, p. 530; Adelheid HEIMANN, "Trinitas creator mundi", in: *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1938, pp. 43-44.

iconological type of the *Triandric Trinity* theme. In the scene on this sarcophagus, the Persons of the Holy Trinity are represented in the form of three identical men, having the same size and physiognomy, thus highlighting the equality in honor and glory, thus also the consubstantiality of the Trinity Persons.

The period following the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus would record the development of the iconography of the Virgin Mary as Theotokos. On the one hand, during this period the old representations of the *Virgin with the Child* type were developed, the prototype of which seems to be the 3rd century fresco from the catacomb of Priscilla, which shows a woman covered with a veil carrying a baby who seems to be outlines a sign of benediction, while a man points to a star, and the 4th-century *Virgin Oranta* from the Coemeterium Majus, which depicts a female bust in orating posture, veiled, with a ten-year-old child depicted at her breast they also bust, having on the right and on the left the monogram of Christ⁸⁹. On the other hand, a new type of representation appears, that of the Virgin in majesty, sitting on the throne, flanked by two or more angels, or surrounded by the Holy Apostles, following the model of Christ in majesty, either alone or with the Baby Jesus⁹⁰. During this time, therefore, "a profound mutation" took place in Marian iconography, the image of the Virgin being "freed from the narrative context" in which it originally appeared in the 3rd-4th centuries, as in the scene of the *Adoration of the Magi* from the catacomb of Priscilla, to put in evidence the "transcendental presence" of the Mother of God with her Child. This mutation, occurring after the proclamation of the Virgin Mary as Mother of God, marked the beginning of the process of creating the Mariological iconographic types *Kyriotissa* (fig. 6) and *Hodegetria* (fig. 7) from which others would develop⁹¹. The iconography of the Mother of God experienced a special evolution in Rome, where the attribute of the Virgin as Empress was emphasized. If in the East, under the influence of the Syro-Palestinian style, the Virgin was represented with a long veil and a mantle that exclusively covered the hair, as in the dress of Syrian women, in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore she was represented as the Roman Augusta, later being painted with an imperial diadem, imperial garments and jewels, thus developing the cult of the Virgin as *Mary the Queen*⁹².

The emergence of these dogmatic themes did not diminish Christians' taste for anecdotal or narrative imagery. On the contrary, they experienced a remarkable development in the 5th century, especially in the Roman environment. Thus, in the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, which still preserves mosaics executed around the year 430, we discover, in the upper part of the central nave, a number of 21 pairs of mosaic "painting" type scenes, the ones on the left side telling the history of the ancestors of the chosen people, beginning with Melchizedek and Abraham to Moses, and those on the right, the events of the time of Moses and Joshua. Among these images, the *Sacrifice of Melchizedek* and the *Philoxenia of Abraham*, being not far from the Holy Altar, are certainly related to the Holy Sacrifice that is offered on the Holy Table⁹³.

Also, on the triumphal arch there are images that are part of the cycle of Jesus' childhood. In the upper register are represented the *Annunciation*, the *Dream of Joseph*, the *Bringing of the Baby Jesus to the Temple after 40 days* and the *Annunciation of Joseph to*

⁸⁹ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 246.

⁹⁰ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 412-416.

⁹¹ E. SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 74.

⁹² J. BECKWITH, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, p. 94.

⁹³ *** *Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome*, pp. 5-8.

flee from Bethlehem. In the second register is represented the *Adoration of the Three Magi*, an image in which the Baby Jesus is depicted as Emmanuel in majesty on the throne, and the *Reception of the Holy Family in Egypt* by the representatives of the Roman imperial authority, according to some interpretations, or, according to others, the emperor Augustus with the Roman poet Virgilius, who prophesied in *Bucolic* the coming of a golden age for mankind after the birth of a "divine child". In the third register are two other scenes, *Herod interrogating the Magi* and the *Slaying of the Infants*, so that in the lower register are represented the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the places through which salvation came to the world⁹⁴.

Being inspired, most likely, by the painting that adorned the Palestinian martyrs, these images aim to visually testify to the doctrine established at the 3rd Ephesus Ecumenical Synod, according to which the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God - Theotokos and the Baby Jesus is the Son of God Who became incarnate. Especially the *Adoration of the Three Magi* and the *Reception of the Holy Family in Egypt*, being inspired, from a compositional point of view, by the theme of imperial triumph, highlight the teaching about the divine nature of the Infant Emperor and, implicitly, the Theotokos attribute of His Mother⁹⁵. The 5th century also records the appearance of the first Christian representations of the theme of the *Crucifixion of Christ*⁹⁶. The clarification that these images are produced by Christians is necessary, since some representations of the Crucifixion from the 4th-5th centuries are believed to have been produced in heretical, gnostic environments. However, on one of the gems discovered in Gaza, belonging to the 4th century, which some researchers believe comes from the Gnostic environment, the representation of the Crucifixion is almost identical to the one that from the 8th century would become the consecrated image of the Church. On this gem, Christ appears naked, with outstretched hands, but without the cross being represented, marked by the passions he endured, with his head drooping to one side, on his right being a woman, who refers to the Mother of God, and on his left a man, in which we identify Saint John the Apostle⁹⁷.

It is difficult to appreciate whether the representation of the Crucifixion of the Savior Jesus Christ was made to witness and visually the teaching of faith adopted by the Chalcedon synod about the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the incarnate Person of the Son of God. Considering the possible and likely heterodox origin of most of these 4th-5th century representations, their relatively small number and, with one exception, their private character⁹⁸, this was most likely not the intention of those who executed them.

Despite this enrichment of Christian iconography in the IV-V centuries, through the appearance of new themes, through the adoption of a new way of representing the Savior Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, in accordance with the dogmatic decisions of the first four ecumenical councils, Christian sacred art did not he completely got rid of the themes of pagan influence, which reproduce fishing, hunting, idyllic or bucolic scenes. Saint Nilus the Sinaite, the disciple of Saint John Chrysostom, testifies to this. In an epistle to the prefect Olympiodorus, who intended to depict on the walls of the church he had just founded scenes of hunting and fishing – “snares being stretched on the ground, fleeing animals such as

⁹⁴ *** *Papal Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome*, pp. 9-11.

⁹⁵ V. LAZAREV, *Istoria picturii byzantine*, I, pp. 113.-114.

⁹⁶ Herbert L. KESSLER, “Narrative Representations”, in: Kurt WEIZMANN (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, V. *The Christian Realm*, pp. 502-504.

⁹⁷ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, p. 454.

⁹⁸ F. TRISTAN, *Primele imagini creștine...*, pp. 454-457.

hares, gazelles, and others, while the hunters, eager to capture them, pursue them with their dogs [...] every kind of fish being caught [...] pictures of different birds and beasts, reptiles and plants"⁹⁹ - following the aesthetic delight produced in the viewer by such images, Saint Nilus wrote to him: "it would be childish and infantile to distract the eyes of the faithful with the aforementioned. It would be, on the other hand, the mark of a firm and manly mind [...] to fill the holy church on both sides with pictures from the Old and the New Testament"¹⁰⁰. The representation of such scenes, either on the walls of churches or on their floors, seems to have been a fairly widespread custom¹⁰¹, and it was perpetuated in the following century, as it appears from the records of the rhetorician Choricius from Gaza¹⁰².

CONCLUSIONS

The development of Christian art after the Edict of Mediolanum was a remarkable one, and the role of Emperor Constantine the Great was an extremely important one in this sense, both by promulgating the edict by which Christians received the freedom to confess their faith, including through the mediation of visual art, as well as through the personal example, offered by painting icons of the Mother of God, portraits of bishops of Constantinople or images reflecting the theme of imperial triumph, in which the sign of the Holy Cross appears, even in the imperial palace and in public places. In this context, Christian sacred art not only develops, enriching itself with new iconographic themes and spreading throughout the Christian area, but is also theologically grounded by the great personalities of the Church life of the era, such as Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Asterius of Amasia, and others.

The effervescence of church life from the 4th-6th centuries, theological, missionary, administrative, cultural, artistic, corroborated with the meeting, especially in the new capital of the Empire, of the artistic currents of the West, with its centres Rome, Milan, Ravenna, and of the East, with the main centres Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, led to the formation in Constantinople, in the 5th century, of the Constantinopolitan pictorial school, with its own style, which "manifested itself for the first time, as an organic whole during Justinian, in the 6th century"¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ S. NILUS ABBAS, *Epistolarum libri IV. LXI Olympiodoro eparcho*, PG 79:578C; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, p. 33; Tomasz POLAŃSKI, "The Mosaic and Painting Decoration in the Church of Saint Stephen of Gaza and the Christian Ecphrasis (Choricius of Gaza, Asterius of Amaseia, Nilus of Sinai)", in: *Folia Orientalia*, 48, 2011, p. 204.

¹⁰⁰ S. NILUS ABBAS, *Epistolarum libri IV. LXI Olympiodoro eparcho*, PG 79:578D; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, p. 33.

¹⁰¹ J. BECKWITH, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, pp. 64-67.

¹⁰² T. POLAŃSKI, "The Mosaic and Painting Decoration in the Church of Saint Stephen of Gaza Charles...", p. 184; C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, pp. 71-72; C. DELVOYE, *Arta bizantină*, vol. 1, traducere de Florica-Eugenia Condurachi, prefată de Vasile Drăguț, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1976, p. 108.

¹⁰³ V. LAZAREV, *Istoria picturii bizantine*, I, pp. 108, 122.

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ANNEXES



fig. 1. Chrismon, The Catacombs of St. Callixtus, Antonio Baruta



fig. 2. Labarum, Museum Pio Cristiano, Vatican

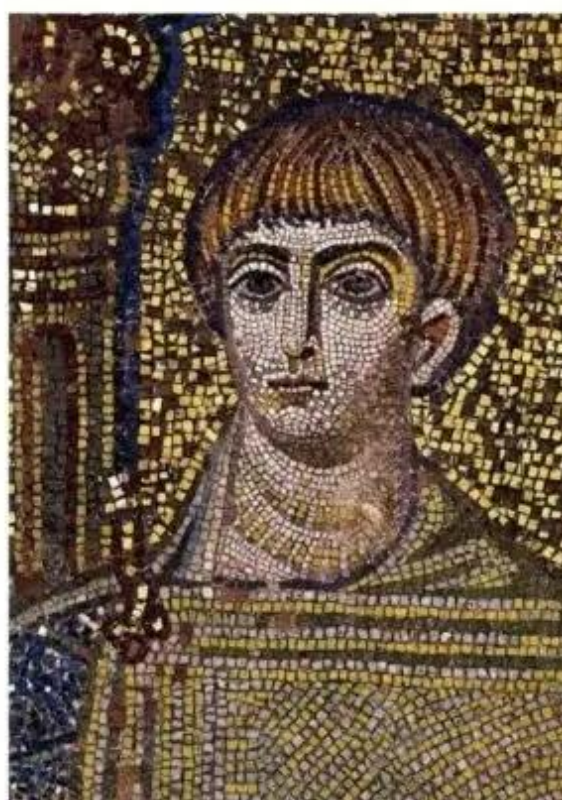
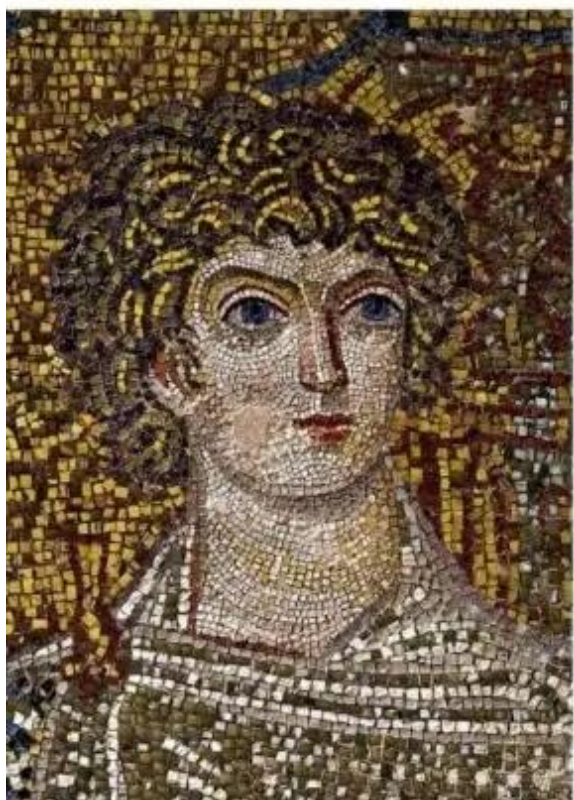
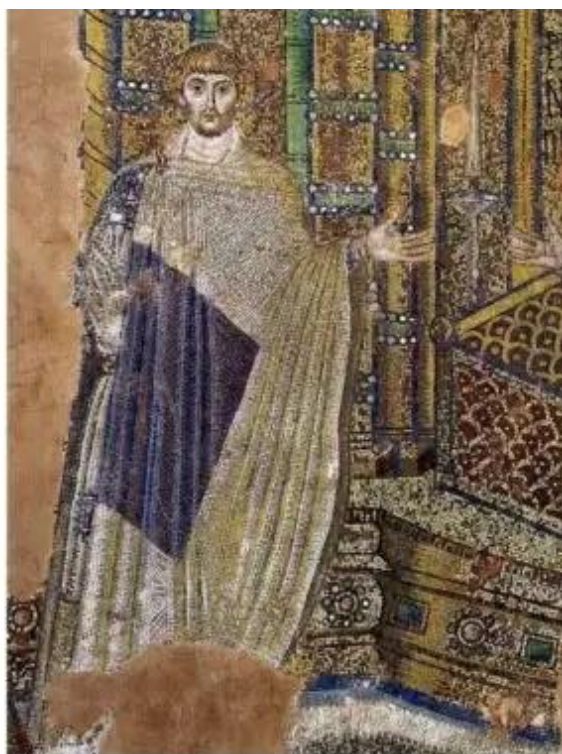
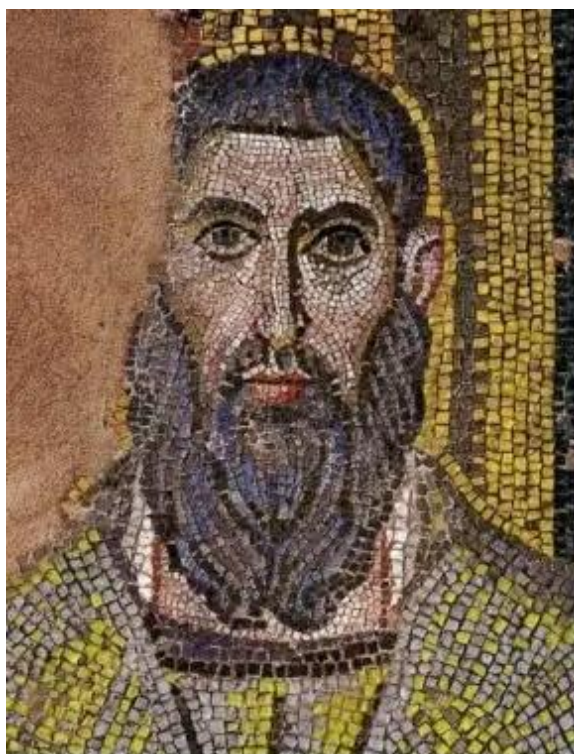


fig. 3. St. Martyrs, Damianos, unknow - up, Onesiforus and Priscus - down, by D. Stachowiak, TheCollector.com

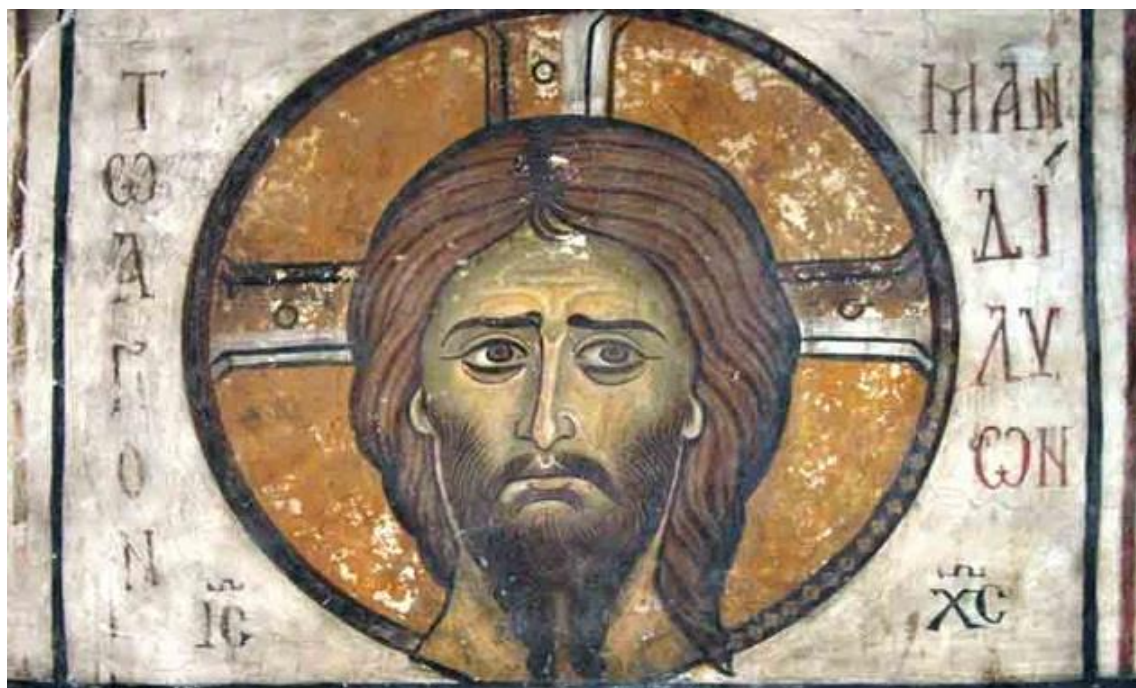


fig. 4. The Holy Mandylion, Pemptousia

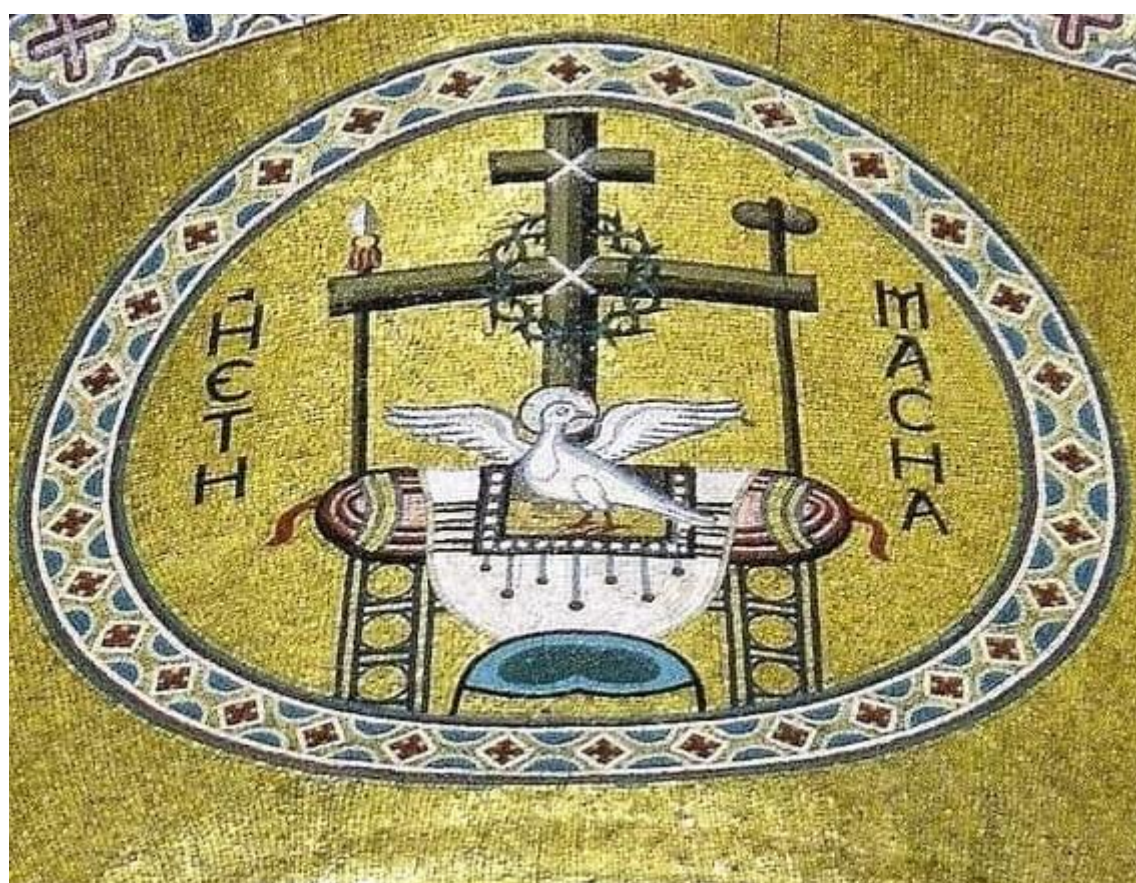


fig. 5. Hetoimasia, Palatine Chapel, Palermo, 12th century



fig. 6. The Vergin Kyriotyssa, Hagia Sophia, 12th century



fig. 7. The Vergin Hodegetria, Santa Maria Assunta, Torcelo, 12th century (2)