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Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography*

(with plates 36–37)

The figurative art of mediaeval Byzantium that has survived to the present day is predominantly religious in content. It illustrates the biblical narrative and the lives of saints and depicts the Byzantine vision of the Kingdom of God. The aim of Byzantine religious art was to instruct the beholder in the divine mysteries and the eternal truths of Orthodox Christianity and to edify him or her by portraying paradigms of Christian virtue worthy of imitation. More importantly, religious images were meant to serve as vehicles through which the faithful could communicate with the spiritual world, with Christ, the Virgin, and the saints.

It is commonly acknowledged that Byzantine religious art was indifferent to the representation of its contemporary reality. The Byzantine perception that a religious image should constitute an objective reflection of its sacred archetype in heaven promoted the standardization of artistic expression and favoured the repetition of established iconographic types, most of which can be traced back to the art of Late Antiquity¹. The faithful representation of the surrounding material world had to be avoided since it would have resulted in images too specific in terms of time and space. Such specificity would have compromised the timelessness and the universality of the message of a religious image². Yet, the trappings of the material world were a necessary component of religious iconography since they enabled its creators to dress the spiritual in visual form and thus make it accessible to the viewer. Whether as a result of purposeful or unreflective processes, contemporary artefacts (*realia*) were reflected in Byzantine religious art. Therefore, though it would be unwise to regard this art as illustrating everyday life in mediaeval Byzantium, it would be equally unwise to dismiss it off-handedly as a possible source of information on Byzantine material culture supplementing other archaeological and textual evidence.

My aim in what follows is to highlight the potential of using religious figurative art as an additional source of information on secular material culture during the Middle and Late Byzantine periods³. This I hope to achieve through the discussion of a series of case-studies, which have been arranged according to the nature of the information they provide. This information concerns: firstly, the typology and usage of secular artefacts; secondly, foreign influences on Byzantine material culture; thirdly, regional diversification; fourthly, topical concerns of Byzantine society which may be detected behind the iconography of certain compositions, and, finally, Byzantine attitudes towards the material world and its representation. During the discussion I will try to draw attention to the limitations inherent in using Byzantine religious art as a source of information in an “archaeological” investigation. These limitations stem mainly from the conservative and formulaic character of religious iconography and it is important to keep them in mind if the conclusions drawn are to have any validity.

* I would like to express my thanks to Prof. Sharon Gerstel for her willing advice on various aspects of this study.

¹ On the precepts of Byzantine icon theory see, selectively, *Iconoclasm*, eds. A. BRYER – J. HERRIN. Birmingham 1977; A. GRABAR, *L’iconoclisme byzantin: le dossier archéologique*. Paris 1984; L. BRUBAKER, *Byzantine Art in the Ninth Century: Theory, Practice and Culture*. *BMGS* 13 (1989) 23–93; G. DAGRON, *Holy Images and Likeness*. *DOP* 45 (1991) 23–33; K. PARRY, *Depicting the Word. Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*. Leiden – New York – Cologne 1996.

² Cf. O. DEMUS, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*. London 1948, 6–7; H. MAGUIRE, *The Icons of Their Bodies. Saints and Their Images in Byzantium*. Princeton 1996, 47.

³ The following discussion is based largely on the findings of my doctoral dissertation. In it, I explore the potential of using the artistic evidence in the study of Byzantine material culture more fully, see M. PARANI, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images. Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)* (*The Medieval Mediterranean* 41). Leiden 2003.

QUESTIONS OF METHODOLOGY

The first question to ask is how to identify a contemporary artefact in art amidst the multitude of conventional types constantly reproduced as an integral part of established iconographic formulae, especially when there are no extant Byzantine examples to facilitate identification by comparison⁴. The first step is to search for innovations, that is, for iconographical types not encountered in artistic contexts earlier than the monument investigated. Such innovations could have been due to a mistake or a misunderstanding of an artistic model, to the imagination of the artist, or to the fact that he has actually reproduced a contemporary artefact. It is reasonable to assume that pictorial innovations encountered in a number of roughly contemporaneous monuments known to have been created independently from one another were not due to a mistake or the imagination of an individual artist, but had become current in the artistic vocabulary of the period in question. In order to decide whether they actually reflected a contemporary artefact it is necessary to consider the iconographic context, the quality and the amount of detail in the rendering of the artefact, and whether the represented object gives the impression that it could have been functional. These same controls can also be applied in the case of pictorial innovations that occur in artistic contexts only once. Comparisons with extant artefacts from areas beyond the frontiers of the empire but within its sphere of cultural influence, the careful use of ethnographic material in the case of functional objects that were slow to develop typologically, as, for example, agricultural implements⁵, and a consideration of the written evidence can help decide the matter in each case.

To illustrate this methodological approach let us consider the miniature depicting the Birth of St John the Baptist in the gospel-book Vat. urb. gr. 2, fol. 167v (circa 1125) (pl. 36, fig. 1). It is generally assumed that Vat. urb. gr. 2 was intended for imperial usage as it contains a double portrait of emperor John II Komnenos and his son and heir Alexios⁶. To the lower right of the Birth of Saint John the unknown artist has depicted an elaborate brazier with three feet terminating in lion's paws and two handles shaped like lion-heads with rings suspended from the mouth. The brazier is surmounted by a tripod on which a vessel would have been balanced⁷. The representation of the brazier is unique both in terms of the typology of the object itself and its inclusion in the iconographic context of a birth-of-a-saint scene. Water-heaters on a stand and cooking pots on tripods or braziers were a common enough feature of representations of banquets and picnics in Late

⁴ In devising the methodology for identifying representations of contemporary artefacts in pictorial contexts I was greatly aided by the work of M. O. H. CARVER, *Contemporary Artefacts Illustrated in Late Saxon Manuscripts*. *Archaeologia* 108 (1986) 117–45. Methodological questions involved in using the artistic evidence in the study of Byzantine everyday life, arising mainly from the possible imitation and/or adaptation of earlier artistic models by Byzantine artists, have been addressed, among others, by I. SPATHARAKIS, *Observations on a Few Illuminations in Ps.-Oppians Cynegetica Ms. at Venice*. *Thesaurismata* 17 (1980) 22–35; A. BRYER, *Byzantine Agricultural Implements: The Evidence of Medieval Illustrations of Hesiod's Works and Days*. *ABSA* 81 (1986) esp. 50–66.

⁵ BRYER, *Implements*, 48, 49.

⁶ I. SPATHARAKIS, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts*. Leiden 1976, 79–83, fig. 46; *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261*, eds. H. C. EVANS – W. D. WIXOM. New York 1997, no. 144; J. LOWDEN, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*. London 1997, 361–3, fig. 221; *To Βυζάντιο ως Οικουμένη*, eds. M. EUANGELATOU – E. PAPANASTAUROU – T.-P. SKOTTE. Athens 2001, no. 17. In addition to the imperial portrait, there are eight other miniatures in the manuscript arranged in four pairs at the beginning of each of the four Gospels: the Nativity and Saint Matthew; the Baptism and Saint Mark; the Birth of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Luke; and the Descent into Hell and Saint John, see C. STORNAJOLO, *Miniature delle omilie di Giacomo Monaco* (cod. Vatic. gr. 1162) e dell' *evangelario greco urbinense* (cod. Vatic. gr. urbin. 2). Rome 1910, pls. 84–91. The prominence attributed to Saint John the Baptist in the iconographic scheme of the codex (apart from the scene of his birth and the Baptism, he also appears in the Descent into Hell) provides further support to the suggested association of the manuscript with the person of the emperor John II, who could have been either its donor or its intended recipient.

⁷ References to braziers of various sizes are found in a number of eleventh- and twelfth-century texts. Interestingly enough, the braziers are mentioned as part of the equipment prescribed for hospitals or hospices and were to be used for cooking as well as for keeping the guests warm, see A. I. PAPANASTAUROU-KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae*. *Zbornik vizantijskih tekstov, XII–XIII vekov*. St. Petersburg 1913, 74; P. GAUTIER, *Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*. *REB* 32 (1974) 99; *idem*, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Évergétis*. *REB* 40 (1982) 87; *idem*, *Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos*. *REB* 42 (1984) 113. References to cooking tripods can also be found in Middle Byzantine sources, see, for example, F. MIKLOSICH – J. MÜLLER, *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, VI. Vienna 1890, 243. For a thirteenth-century iron cooking tripod recovered from the Frankish layers at Sparta see *Καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο*, (ed. D. PAPANIKOLA-MPAKIRTZE). Athens 2002, no. 402. Such tripods would have been used in association with the ceramic cooking vessels with the rounded bottom that were in use in the empire from the tenth down to the fourteenth centuries, see Ch. MPAKIRTZES, *Βυζαντινά τσουκαλολάγνα*. Athens 1989, 39–40, 41.

Antique art and in Middle Byzantine dining scenes imitating Early Byzantine models⁸. However, they did not constitute part of the iconography of the Late Antique mythological cycles illustrating the birth and childhood of gods and heroes that had served as sources of inspiration for Byzantine birth-of-a-saint scenes⁹. Therefore, the introduction of the brazier into the twelfth-century miniature under investigation may be understood as a realistic touch on the part of the painter: it alludes to the heating of the water needed for the labour and the bathing of a newborn child. That the water for the newborn's bath was indeed hot is indicated in this image also by the fact that the young woman pouring it is represented holding the jug with one hand covered by a towel. As for the typology of the brazier, furniture with animal-shaped supports, quite popular during Classical, Roman, and Late Antiquity, was also employed in mediaeval Byzantium as suggested by finds of zoomorphic metal fittings in the mediaeval contexts at Corinth¹⁰. It is, thus, reasonable to assume that here we are faced with a representation of a contemporary artefact.

Equally interesting from our particular point of view is the representation of the cradle in the same miniature. In contrast to the brazier, the cradle constituted a common feature of birth-of-a-saint scenes from the eleventh century onward. Borrowed from the Late Antique biographical cycles mentioned above, it served as a picturesque detail conveying the atmosphere of activity that accompanied the birth of a child¹¹. It is tempting to think that this borrowing from Late Antique art was prompted by the Middle Byzantine festive ceremonies associated with the birth of a male child to the emperor. During these ceremonies the newborn was displayed to the members of the court in its cradle¹². It is worth noting in this respect that the presence of visiting women bearing gifts to the mother in birth-of-a-saint scenes has also been associated with these same court rituals¹³. Notwithstanding the ultimate antique derivation of the cradle-theme, the outlook of the cradle in the twelfth-century miniature here under discussion was apparently updated to reflect current Middle Byzantine woodcarving styles. As attested by extant examples of mainly ecclesiastical furniture dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, minuscule arcades, balusters, and knobs were a popular feature of woodcarving in the Balkans during the Middle Ages¹⁴. The twelfth-century representation could indicate that this woodcarving style was practiced already in the Middle Byzantine period, even though preserved examples

⁸ For a survey of Early Byzantine representations of dining scenes incorporating such objects see M. D. DUNBABIN, *Wine and Water at the Roman Convivium*. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 6 (1993) 129–40. Water-heaters on a stand and cooking pots on a tripod or a brazier can be seen in a number of meal scenes in the gospel-book Par. gr. 74 (Constantinople, Monastery of Studios, second half of eleventh century) see H. OMONT, *Évangiles avec peintures byzantines du XI^e siècle*. Reproduction des 361 miniatures du manuscrit Grec 74 de la Bibliothèque nationale, I–II. Paris 1909, pls. 25, 42, 61, 69, 82, 117, 126, 133, 166, 167. The inclusion of such picturesque details even in the iconographic context of the Last Supper (*ibidem*, pls. 133, 167) where they are obviously inappropriate, suggests that in the case of these representations we are faced rather with the mechanical repetition of an iconographic formula and not with a conscious depiction of eleventh-century dining practices. For a representation of a water-heater in a late eleventh-century illuminated Book of Job of possible Constantinopolitan origin see K. WEITZMANN – G. GALAVARIS, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Illuminated Greek Manuscripts, I: From the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*. Princeton 1990, colour plate XVII:b, fig. 307 (Sinait. gr. 3, fol. 17v: Job's children at the banquet).

⁹ See, for example, W. A. DASZEWSKI – D. MICHAELIDES, *Guide to the Paphos Mosaics*. Nicosia 1988, fig. 44 (the first bath of Achilles in the Villa of Theseus; fifth century) fig. 46 (scene from the childhood of Dionysus in the House of Aion; mid-fourth century). On the iconographic theme of the bath of the newborn and its introduction into the Birth of the Virgin and other birth-of-a-saint scenes see G. BABIĆ, *Sur l'iconographie de la composition "Nativité de la Vierge" dans la peinture byzantine*. *ZRVI* 7 (1961) 170–2; J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'empire byzantin et en occident, I*. Brussels 1964, 94–7; D. MOURIKI, *Περί Βυζαντινού κύκλου του βίου της Παναγίας εις φορητήν εικόνα της Μονής του Όρους Σινά*. *Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς* 1970, 131.

¹⁰ G. R. DAVIDSON, *Corinth XII. The Minor Objects*. Princeton 1952, nos. 839, 840, 842, pl. 62.

¹¹ On the iconographic theme of the cradle and its origins see LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance*, 104; MOURIKI, *Περί Βυζαντινού κύκλου*, 131.

¹² *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. I. REISKE, I. Bonn 1829, 618–9. Cf. P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*. Cambridge 1993, 243, for a twelfth-century description of the cradle being prepared in the chamber of the Porphyra in the imperial palace in anticipation of the birth of a child to Manuel I Komnenos.

¹³ BABIĆ, *Sur l'iconographie*, 174–5; LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE, *Iconographie de l'enfance*, 97. It should be pointed out that the practice of bearing fortifying foodstuffs and gifts to a woman who had just given birth need not have been limited to the context of imperial ceremonial alone, but could have had a more widespread application, see Ph. KOUKOULES, *Βυζαντινών Βίος και Πολιτισμός, IV*. Athens 1951, 31–2, 34–5.

¹⁴ See, for example, G. A. SOTERIOU, *La sculpture sur bois dans l'art byzantin*, in: *Mélanges Charles Diehl, II*. Paris 1930, 173–4, pl. XIV.2; V. HAN, *Srednjovekovni primerak nameštaja iz manastira Dečana*. *Muzej Primenjene Umetnosti. Zbornik* 14 (1970) 31–41; E. BAKALOVA *et alii*, *Trésors d'art médiéval bulgare, VII^e–XVI^e siècle*. Berne 1988, no. 120.

suggest that it was during the Late Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods that it achieved its greatest popularity¹⁵. The practice of updating the appearance of artefact-types traditionally represented in religious iconography so that they reflected contemporary fashions and tastes was quite common throughout the history of Byzantine art and may be observed not only in the case of furniture and furnishings, but also in the case of dress, weapons, tableware, and writing implements¹⁶.

The second question that arises when using the artistic evidence in order to trace developments in Byzantine material culture is that of chronology. It is not always possible to estimate with confidence the time that elapsed between the appearance of a new type of artefact in real life and its first reflection in art. Certain fashionable items appear to have been introduced into religious iconography roughly at the same time as their adoption in real life. This, for example, seems to be the case of the dresses with the trumpet-shaped sleeves, which are attested for the first time in imperial portraiture around the middle of the eleventh century and which also appear in roughly contemporaneous religious iconographic contexts¹⁷. On the other hand, the representation of other categories of artefacts became fashionable only at a later stage in their development. It is interesting to note, for example, that despite the well-attested importance of archery in hunting and military tactics in the Middle Byzantine period representations of quivers and bows are encountered as part of the equipment of military saints only from the late thirteenth century onward¹⁸. This departure from the earlier iconographic tradition that wanted military saints armed only with spear and sword was perhaps brought about by artistic considerations, namely the pronounced predilection of Late Byzantine art for narrative detail¹⁹.

When using the artistic evidence to study aspects of material culture it is important to keep in mind that Byzantine art does not offer a complete inventory of the artefact-types in use in Byzantine lands at any given period. The choice of which artefacts were represented and which were not appears to have depended firstly, on the semiotic potential of the objects, secondly, on the availability of iconographic contexts suitable for their introduction, and, lastly, on the attitude of religious art towards the depiction of particular artefact-types, an attitude which could vary from one period to the next. The treatment of dining scenes in religious contexts provides an interesting case-study in this respect. In no way does the inventory of tableware represented in artistic contexts reflect the variety of such objects that were actually employed in Byzantium during

¹⁵ The absence of finds of furniture with turned elements from Middle Byzantine archaeological contexts may be due to accidents of survival. Cf. finds of balusters employed for the decoration of wooden furniture from Early Byzantine sites in Egypt, where environmental conditions are favourable to the preservation of wood, M.-H. RUTSCHOWSCAYA, *Catalogue des bois de l'Égypte copte*. Musée du Louvre. Paris 1986, 95–7 (nos. 318–35).

¹⁶ K. WEITZMANN, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex. A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration*. Princeton 1970, 157–60; PARANI, *Reconstructing, passim*.

¹⁷ Compare, for example, OMONT, *Évangiles*, pl. 69; E. DE WALD, *The Illustrations in the Manuscripts of the Septuagint. III. Psalms and Odes. Part 2: Vaticanus Graecus 752*. Princeton – London – The Hague 1942, pls. XXX, LIII, LIV, with G. ZACOS – A. VEGGLERY, *Byzantine Lead Seals, I*. Basel – Berne 1972, nos. 92, 93a–d [p. 82–4, pl. 24]; P. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the Whittemore Collection, III/2*. Washington, D.C. 1973, pl. LXV [Romanos IV, nos. 1.2, 2.1].

¹⁸ For the importance of archery in the Middle Byzantine army see, indicatively, *Sylloge Tacticorum, quae olim Inedita Leonis Tactica dicebatur*, ed. A. DAIN. Paris 1938, § 39; E. McGEER, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century (DOS 33)*. Washington, D.C. 1995, 14, 36, 38, 90, 207–8; John Kinnamos, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Manuele Comnenis gestarum*, ed. A. MEINEKE. Bonn 1836, 125. For portrayals of military saints armed with bows and quivers see G. MILLET – A. FROLOW, *La peinture du Moyen Âge en Yougoslavie, Fasc. III*. Paris 1962, pl. 17.2; KALLINIKOS (monachos), *Η τεχνική της αγιογραφίας. Με παράρτημα τοιχογραφιών του Πανσέληνου από το Πρωτάτο του Αγίου Όρους*. Nicosia 1996, pls. 67, 70, 91; C. STEPHAN, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble: Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche zu Thessaloniki*. Baden-Baden 1986, fig. 100; M. CHATZIDAKIS, *Mistra. La cité médiévale et la forteresse. Guide*. Athens 1987, fig. 56.

¹⁹ Elizabeth ZACHARIADOU in her study of a Late Byzantine steatite icon of Saint Demetrios now at the Louvre considers the attribution of a bow and three arrows to the saint as a result of the influence of Turko-mongol traditions on Byzantine practices. According to these traditions, the bow and the arrow were symbols of sovereignty. The Turko-mongol mercenaries and the christianised Turks serving in the Late Byzantine army may have acted as the vehicle through which this conception of the bow and arrow infiltrated Byzantium. It is perhaps because of their symbolic significance that the bow and arrows were considered worthy to be included among the equipment of a military saint. E. ZACHARIADOU, *Les nouvelles armes de saint Dèmètrius*, in: *Εὐψυχία. Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler, I–II (Byzantina Sorbonensia 16)*. Paris 1998, II 689–93.

the Middle and Late Byzantine periods²⁰. Down to the eleventh century, a great bowl, accompanied sometimes by two goblets arranged symmetrically on the table, a small number of knives and, rarely, forks, as well as some pieces of bread on the table, were considered adequate to invoke the impression that a meal was taking place²¹. By the end of the eleventh century, however, the repertoire of the represented tableware began to expand, with the representation of ceramic and glass bottles, glass beakers and goblets, and bowls with lids²². The tendency to expand the inventory of tableware was intensified in the Late Byzantine period, accompanied by a parallel diversification of the types of foodstuffs represented on the table. In fact, in certain representations of dining scenes dated to the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the artists managed to convey the impression of veritable feasts with richly set tables, attendants carrying more food and drink, and guests eating, drinking, and conversing²³. Such a dramatic change in the artistic treatment of dining scenes, which, it should be pointed out, did not serve any obvious iconographic necessity, indicates that a change in attitude towards their representation had taken place. It is interesting to note that during the twelfth century, when the inventory of serving utensils in dining scenes began to expand, a notable increase in expressing an interest in the quality and variety of foodstuffs is observable in contemporary literary works like the writings of Eustathios of Thessalonica and the poems of Ptochoprodromos²⁴.

Once an artefact-type was introduced, for whatever reason, into the pictorial vocabulary of Byzantine art it would often continue to be represented long after it had become obsolete in real life. This is especially true of artefacts that had become an integral component of an established iconographic theme. The depiction of imperial dress in religious iconography is an interesting case in point. Byzantine imperial garments and insignia were consistently, if anachronistically, employed in Byzantine religious art as marks of sovereignty in the portrayal of rulers, both biblical and non-biblical. Already in the Early Byzantine period, the prophet-kings David and Solomon, to mention those most commonly portrayed, were represented in the purple imperial *chlamys*, the stately mantle that was, as a rule, fastened at the right shoulder²⁵. They continued to be similarly portrayed in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, especially in the iconographic context of the Descent

²⁰ These are well-attested in the written and the archaeological records, see, for example, J. F. HALDON, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions (CFHB 28)*. Vienna 1990, 106, 108, 112; Actes de Saint Pantéléèmon, eds. P. LEMERLE – G. DAGRON – S. ĆIRKOVIĆ (*Archives de l'Athos* 12). Paris 1982, 75 (inventory of the Monastery of Xylourgou, 1142); Actes de Xéropotamou, ed. J. BOMPAIRE (*Archives de l'Athos* 3). Paris 1964, 80 (will of Theodore Skaranos, 1270–1274); Actes de Vatopédi, I, eds. J. BOMPAIRE – J. LEFORT – V. KRAVARI – C. GIROS (*Archives de l'Athos* 21). Paris 2001, 357 (will of Theodore Sarantenos, 1325); DAVIDSON, *Corinth XII*, nos. 540–1, 543–5, 556, 559, 685–749, 759–65, 769–84, 790–800, 803–15, 1405–9, 1411–3, pls. 50–2, 56–60, 85; C.S. LIGHTFOOT *et alii*, *The Amorium Project: The 1997 Study Season. DOP 53 (1997)* 341–2, 343, figs. H, I; C. H. MORGAN, *Corinth XI. The Byzantine Pottery*. Cambridge, MA 1942; D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI, *Byzantine Glazed Ceramics. The Art of Sgraffito*. Athens 1999; D. PAPANIKOLA-BAKIRTZI – F. MAVRIKIOU – Ch. BAKIRTZIS, *Byzantine Glazed Pottery in the Benaki Museum*. Athens 1999; Καθημερινή ζωή στο Βυζάντιο, nos. 355–79.

²¹ See, for example, A. WHARTON-EPSTEIN, *Tokali Kilise. Tenth-century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*. Washington, D.C. 1986, figs. 27, 34; N. CHATZIDAKIS, *Hosios Loukas*. Athens 1997, fig. 79; M. RESTLE, *Byzantine Wall-painting in Asia Minor, I–III*. Recklinghausen 1967, II, fig. 235. For an alternative opinion, maintaining that these representations have a general historical accuracy see J. VROOM, *Byzantine Garlic and Turkish Delight. Dining Habits and Cultural Change in Central Greece from Byzantine to Ottoman Times. Archaeological Dialogues 7/2 (2000)* 206–7. Though it is quite probable that the dining habits of the Byzantines during the eleventh century involved eating from a large communal plate, I am sceptical as to whether representations of meals in eleventh-century artistic contexts may be used as corroborative evidence to prove it. As far as Last Supper representations are concerned, the theme of a single large plate in the middle of the table, often containing one or two fish, can be traced back to Late Antiquity, see, indicatively, F. W. DEICHMANN, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna*. Wiesbaden 1995, pls. 180–1. Here I take the opportunity to thank Dr. Joanita VROOM for kindly providing me with a copy of her article.

²² See, for example, T. VELMANS, *Le tétraévangile de la Laurentienne*. Florence, Laur. VI. 23. Paris 1971, figs. 240, 289.

²³ See, for example, A. TSITOURIDOU, *Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη. Συμβολή στη μελέτη της Παλαιολογείας ζωγραφικής κατά τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα*. Thessalonica 1986, pl. 50; E. TSGARIDAS, *The Mosaics and the Byzantine Wall-paintings, in The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi. Tradition – History – Art, I*. Mount Athos 1998, fig. 231; *The City of Mystras*, acad. supervision P. KALAMARA – A. MEXIA. Athens 2001, fig. 109; V. DJURIĆ, *Byzantinische Fresken in Jugoslawien*. Munich 1976, figs. 48, 115.

²⁴ A. KAZHDAN – A. WHARTON-EPSTEIN, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the 11th and the 12th Centuries (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 7)*. Berkeley 1985, 80–82; H. EIDENEIER, *Ptochoprodromos. Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar (Neograeca Medii Aevi 5)*. Cologne 1991.

²⁵ See, for example, G. CAVALLLO *et alii*, *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis, Commentarium*. Rome 1987, pl. XXIV.32; A. GRABAR, *Les peintures de l'évangéliste de Sinope*. Geneva 1953, pls. I–V.

into Hell²⁶, and this, despite the fact that in Palaeologan times the *chlamys* no longer constituted part of the imperial wardrobe²⁷.

QUESTIONS OF ARTEFACT TYPOLOGY AND FUNCTION

Despite the methodological problems and limitations just outlined, the typological study of various artefact-categories for which there is otherwise little physical evidence can benefit from the careful examination of pictorial contexts²⁸. The artistic evidence can be most useful in the study of dress, whether this is imperial, official, aristocratic, or pertaining to the common people²⁹. The marble inlay icon of Saint Eudokia from the Monastery of Lips in Constantinople (907), to mention one example, provides the earliest evidence we have for the change in the design of the female imperial *loros*, the long bejeweled scarf which Byzantine empresses wore wound around their bodies on specific ceremonial occasions³⁰. To mention a second example, the depiction of a tunic with exceedingly long narrow sleeves worn by the attendant to the ruler in the miniature illustrating the Martyrdom of Saint Artemios in the eleventh-century Menologium Esphigmenou 14, fol. 90v, may be taken as an indication that, by that time, Byzantine courtiers had adopted this garment of ultimate oriental origin³¹. As one last example one may refer to certain Middle Byzantine representations of the Martyrdom of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, which provide interesting evidence on the design of Byzantine trousers at the time (pl. 36, fig. 2)³².

Another artefact-category the study of which can equally benefit from a perusal of the artistic evidence is that of arms and armour³³. In the case of military dress, realistic elements can be found portrayed side-by-side with conventional and fanciful ones, thus creating a composite outfit that was never in use at any given period. Still, artistic representations may prove extremely informative in the study of individual components of military dress, such as garments worn over the cuirass, shields, swords, bows, and quivers³⁴. As far as body-armour is concerned, its depiction in religious contexts was, as a rule, conventional and, on occasion, highly

²⁶ See, for example, CHATZIDAKIS, Hosios Loukas, fig. 20; D. MOURIKI, The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios, I–II. Athens 1985, pls. 48, 52; P. A. UNDERWOOD, The Kariye Djami, I–IV. New York–Princeton 1966–1975, pls. 341, 352; TSITOURIDOU, Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος, pl. 29.

²⁷ PARANI, Reconstructing 13–7.

²⁸ In addition to the artefact-categories briefly discussed in this section, that of Byzantine musical instruments may also profit from a systematic examination of representations in monumental and miniature religious painting, see F. DE MAFFEI, Gli strumenti musicali a Bisanzio, in: Da Bisanzio a San Marco. Musica e Liturgia, ed. G. CATTIN. Venice 1997, 61–110; G. GALAVARIS, Musical Images in Byzantine Art, in: Λιθόστρωτον. Studien zur byzantinischen Kunst und Geschichte. Festschrift für Marcell Restle. Stuttgart 2000, 79–91.

²⁹ A number of studies on Byzantine dress and, especially, on imperial costume and insignia make extensive use of the artistic evidence, see, indicatively, G. DE JERPHANION, Le “thorakion” caractéristique iconographique du onzième siècle, in: IDEM, La voix des monuments. Études d’archéologie. Nouvelle série. Rome–Paris 1938, 263–78; M. SOTERIOU, Το λεγόμενον θωράκιον της γυναικείας αυτοκρατορικής στολής. *EEBS* 23 (1953) 524–30; W. H. RUDT DE COLLENBERG, Le “thorakion”. Recherches iconographiques. *MEFRA. Moyen Age – Temps Modernes* 83 (1971) 263–361; E. PILTZ, Middle Byzantine Court Costume, in: Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204, ed. H. MAGUIRE. Washington, D.C. 1997, 39–51; P. KALAMARA, Le système vestimentaire à Byzance du IV^e jusqu’ à la fin du XI^e siècle. Lille 1997. See, also, PARANI, Reconstructing, 11–100.

³⁰ PARANI, Reconstructing, 25–26. On the icon of Saint Eudokia see S. E. J. GERSTEL, Saint Eudokia and the Imperial Household of Leo VI. *The Art Bulletin* 79 (1997) 699–707.

³¹ PARANI, Reconstructing, 55. On Esphigmenou 14, a manuscript of probable Constantinopolitan origin, see S. PELEKANIDES – P. CHRISTOU – Ch. TSIOMIS – S. KADAS, The Treasures of Mount Athos. Illuminated Manuscripts, II. Athens 1975, 365–6.

³² One should also mention the two tenth-century ivory panels of the Forty Martyrs, one in the Hermitage and one in Berlin, see Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century, eds. Y. PIATNITSKY *et alii*. London 2000, no. B44; A. EFFENBERGER – H.-G. SEVERIN, Das Museum für Spätantike und byzantinische Kunst. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Mainz 1992, no. 124.

³³ A discussion of portrayals of military saints is often introduced into studies of Byzantine military equipment, see, for example, T. KOLIAS, Byzantinische Waffen (*BV* 17). Vienna 1988; D. NICOLLE, Arms and Armour of the Crusading Era, 1050–1350, I–II. White Plains, NY 1988, 26–52; M. BARTUSIS, The Late Byzantine Army. Arms and Society, 1204–1453. Philadelphia 1992, 322–41.

³⁴ PARANI, Reconstructing, 118–21, 125–36, 141–2.

decorative. There are, nevertheless, examples of realistic representations of cuirasses, which can be demonstrated to reflect ceremonial armour as well as armour worn in the field (pl. 36, fig. 3)³⁵.

The artistic evidence can also be very informative in the case of writing implements³⁶. Such implements were introduced into the portrayals of the evangelists and other saintly authors with the purpose of identifying them as such. A single pen and an ink-well would have been adequate for this purpose, but in many instances, especially in miniature painting, the artists chose to depict a veritable inventory of the equipment used in mediaeval scriptoria³⁷. Changes in the types of implements represented might reflect a concomitant change in the working practices of scribes or in the writing materials they used. The inclusion of scissors, for example, among the writing implements attributed to saintly authors from the eleventh century down to the Late Byzantine period could be a reflection of the increasing use of paper in the manufacturing of codices in Byzantium observed from the eleventh onward³⁸.

By contrast, the artistic evidence is less forthcoming from an archaeological point of view in the case of elements of setting such as furniture and furnishings. It is not clear, for example, whether the preference of Palaeologan art for the representation of box-like furniture, thrones with a curved back like niches, and textile furnishings of a relatively sober appearance reflected a development in the typology of the actual artefacts or should be better explained in the light of stylistic developments in the Late Byzantine period, which favoured volume and monumentality at the expense of decorative effect³⁹. Despite these reservations, there exist certain depictions of elements of setting which may be taken to reflect contemporary artefacts⁴⁰. One such representation is the elegant folding stool in Christ before Pilate in the fourteenth-century church of Saint Nikolaos Orphanos at Thessalonica (pl. 37, fig. 1).

Religious pictorial contexts should be tapped with caution for evidence concerning working practices in mediaeval Byzantium. It has been shown, for example, that certain agricultural implements suitable for the cultivation of cereals were mistakenly depicted employed in a vineyard⁴¹. Such oversights were probably due

³⁵ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 104–16. In a thought-provoking article by T. DAWSON, *Kremasmata, Kabadion, Klibanion: Some Aspects of Middle Byzantine Military Equipment Reconsidered*. *BMGs* 22 (1998) 38–50, the author attempts to reconstruct the method of assembly of Middle Byzantine lamellar cuirasses on the basis of representations of such armour in certain portrayals of military saints. Though I do not doubt that these representations indeed reflect lamellar cuirasses, I have certain reservations as to whether their rendering is exact to the point of reproducing the finer details of the lacing together of the lamellae. First of all, it seems unlikely that Byzantine artists had the specialized knowledge that would allow them to be so precise. Secondly, their treatment of these cuirasses appears to have been dictated to a large extent by the search for decorative effect and not by a wish to be accurate. The narrow bands spacing the rows of lamellae in some representations, which, according to Dawson, indicate that these rows were first attached on a band of leather and then assembled, could very well be an artistic invention or a schematized rendering of the bands of darker colour employed in some other representations to indicate that the rows of lamellae are overlapping upwards, as was indeed the case in generic lamellar construction, see, for example, RESTLE, *Wall-painting in Asia Minor, II*, figs. 230 [left], 232; C. JOLIVET-LÉVY, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l'abside et ses abords*. Paris 1991, pls. 55.2, 168.1.

³⁶ The usefulness of the evidence provided by the portraits of the evangelists in the study of writing implements has been highlighted by H. HUNGER, *Schreiben und Lesen in Byzanz*. Munich 1989, 85–9. For a survey of representations of writing implements in mediaeval Serbian painting see I. ĐORĐEVIĆ, *Predstave pribora za pisanje i opremu knjige u srpskom srednjovekovnom slikarstvu*, in: *Zbornik Vladimira Mošina*, eds. D. BOGDANOVIĆ *et alii*. Belgrade 1977, 87–112. I owe the latter reference to Dr. Branislav Cvetković, whom I here thank. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Dorotei Getov for translating this article for me.

³⁷ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 205–10.

³⁸ For representations of scissors see, among others, RESTLE, *Wall-painting in Asia Minor, II*, fig. 197; H. BUCHTHAL – H. BELTING, *Patronage in Thirteenth-century Constantinople. An Atelier of Late Byzantine Book Illumination and Calligraphy (DOS 17)*. Washington, D.C. 1978, pl. 78b. For general information on the production and use of paper in Byzantium see E. MIONI, *Introduzione alla paleografia greca*. Padova 1973, 23–8; *ODB*, 1579; N. OIKONOMIDES, *Caratteri esterni degli atti*, in: *La civiltà bizantina, oggetti e messaggio: Fonti diplomatiche e società delle province*, ed. A. GUILLOU. Rome 1991, 26–8; *idem*, *Writing Materials, Documents, and Books*, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. E. LAIOU. Washington, D.C. 2002, II 589–90.

³⁹ This clearly constitutes a departure from the highly decorative furniture and furnishings favoured by Komnenian art. Compare, for example, the valance of the bed in the Dormition at Kurbinovo (1191) with that of the bed in the same scene at the Protaton (circa 1300). C. GROZDANOV – L. HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo*. Skopje 1992, fig. 46; KALLINIKOS (monachos), *Η τεχνική της αγιογραφίας*, fig. 27.

⁴⁰ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 160–91. For a survey of representations of contemporary furniture in mediaeval Serbian painting see V. HAN, *Profani namještaj na našoj srednjovekovnoj fresci*. *Muzej Primenjene Umetnosti, Zbornik 1* (1955) 7–52.

⁴¹ BRYER, *Agricultural Implements*, 50.

to the fact that the artists were not familiar with agricultural practices. On the other hand, painters, especially miniaturists, knew very well that the bifolios of a codex were bound only after the copying and the illumination of the pages had been completed. Yet, they often represented the evangelists writing directly on open codices, sacrificing, it would seem accuracy for the sake of iconographic necessity. Most probably, their intention was to identify these figures as the authors of the books they held in their hands, not as real scribes at work.

Realistic depictions of people at work do, of course, occur in religious pictorial contexts. One such instance is the unique portrayal of Saint Matthew at the Protaton on Mount Athos, dated to around 1300⁴². The evangelist is portrayed trimming the pages of a book-block that has the wooden boards of the cover stitched on and is held tightly in a screw-press. This is in accordance to the Byzantine bookbinding practice to have the boards flush with the book-block. For the trimming the evangelist is using a broad-bladed instrument with wooden handles on either end. Other implements employed in the bookbinding process, namely the hammer, the awl, and the scissors, are shown lying on the desk next to him. The activity of bookbinding workshops on Mount Athos in the Late Byzantine period might have prompted this representation and could account for its accuracy⁴³.

THE QUESTION OF FOREIGN INFLUENCES

While surveying Byzantine religious pictorial contexts one often encounters representations of clearly non-Byzantine artefacts. Some were introduced into Byzantine religious contexts deliberately for the purpose of identifying a figure as belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group. Such depictions are very interesting as they indicate Byzantine familiarity with the material culture of neighbouring peoples. Saint James the Persian, for example, portrayed at Protaton around 1300, was given a distinctive Mongol hat with a fur brim that was meant to identify him as “Persian”⁴⁴. Iran had come under Mongol rule at the beginning of the thirteenth century⁴⁵. Consequently, whoever decided to attribute this head-dress to the particular saint made a well-informed choice.

Other non-Byzantine artefacts appear to have infiltrated into Byzantine religious contexts because they constituted an integral part of foreign artistic models imitated by Byzantine artists working in a particular region⁴⁶. This, for example, appears to be the case of the oriental-looking tunic, which is encountered in a small group of Cappadocian monuments dated to the ninth and tenth centuries⁴⁷. The occurrence of this tunic in this particular group of churches has been attributed to artistic influences from the Christian Orient, postulated for these ensembles on the basis of other iconographic, stylistic, and epigraphic considerations⁴⁸.

Lastly, there exist a number of oriental- and western-looking artefacts which were reflected in Byzantine religious contexts because they were actually in use in Byzantine lands. The artefacts belonging to this group may be distinguished from those in the previous two because, unlike the first, they do not serve as attributes

⁴² KALLINKOS (monachos), Η τεχνική της αγιογραφίας, fig. 47.

⁴³ J. IRIGOIN, La reliure byzantine, in: E. BARAS – J. IRIGOIN – J. VEZIN, La reliure médiévale. Trois conférences d’initiation. Paris 1978, esp. 26–8; Byzance. L’art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises, eds. J. DURAND *et alii*. Paris 1993, 467–71; A. MUTHESIUS, Byzantine Silk Weaving, AD 400 to AD 1200. Vienna 1997, fig. 13. On bookbinding workshops on Mount Athos and northern Greece in the Late Byzantine period see J. IRIGOIN, Un groupe de reliures byzantines au monogramme des Paléologues. *Révue française d’histoire du livre* 36 (1982) 274.

⁴⁴ KALLINKOS (monachos), Η τεχνική της αγιογραφίας, fig. 86. Saint James the Persian wears a similar hat at Staro Nagoričino (1317/8) see DJURIĆ, Byzantinische Fresken, pl. XXXIV. Cf. J. M. ROGERS, The Topkapı Saray Museum. The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts. London 1986, figs. 38, 49.

⁴⁵ D. MORGAN, The Mongols and the Eastern Mediterranean, in: Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204, eds. B. ARBEL – B. HAMILTON – D. JACOBY. London 1989, 198–211.

⁴⁶ Cf. D. MOURIKI, Palaeologan Mistra and the West, in: Βυζάντιο και Ευρώπη, Α΄ Διεθνής Βυζαντινολογική Συνάντηση, 20–24 Ιουλίου 1985. Athens 1987, 239.

⁴⁷ See N. and M. THIERRY, Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Région du Hasan Dağı. Paris 1963, fig. 11 (Eğri taş kilisesi) pls. 45–7 (Yılınlı kilise) 59 (Kokar kilise) 65a (Pürenli seki kilisesi); G. DE JERPHANION, Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin: Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce, I–II in 4 pts., 3 albums. Paris 1925–1942, pls. 37.4 (Göreme, chapel 11: Saint Eustathios), 141.2 (Çavuşin, Pigeon House church).

⁴⁸ JERPHANION, Une nouvelle province, I, 162–3; II, 94–7, 229–34, 398; THIERRY, Nouvelles églises rupestres, 66–7, 98–100, 113–4, 139 note 2, 163, 218–20.

for foreigners and, unlike the second, their depiction became current in the pictorial vocabulary of a given period and was not confined geographically to a particular area. The fact that in some cases these artefacts are accurately represented argues in favour of the artists having first-hand knowledge of the actual objects⁴⁹. Such foreign influences are clearly reflected in the depiction of arms and armour in Late Byzantine monuments. The typology of the weapons attributed to military saints clearly attests to the influence of both Western and Eastern military traditions on Byzantine practices at the time⁵⁰. The portrayal of Saint Merkourios at the Peribleptos in Ohrid (1294/5) is a very interesting example in this respect. The saint's outfit combines a western chapel-de-fer (type of helmet) with two items of oriental derivation, a sabre and a protective outer garment lined with mail (pl. 37, fig. 2).

QUESTIONS OF HOMOGENEITY AND REGIONAL DIVERSIFICATION

At different periods certain types of artefacts, like items of imperial, official, and military dress, thrones and upholstered footstools, wooden furniture with turned elements, richly patterned valances, even distaffs on a stand, came to constitute stock types in the pictorial vocabulary of religious art⁵¹. The fact that they are encountered in monuments created all over the empire is more likely to be a function of the working practices of Byzantine artists and of the availability of common artistic models, rather than a reflection of a supposed homogeneity of material culture in Byzantine provinces. It is, of course, possible that some of these artefacts were indeed in use in different parts of the empire, but this cannot be claimed on the basis of the artistic evidence alone.

The evidence on regional diversification in Byzantine material culture provided by artistic representations of objects is admittedly scarce and concerns largely the dress of the common people. On the basis of their uniqueness, certain items of dress attributed to secondary figures in narrative scenes can be assumed to reflect local practices. This could very well be the case of the garment of young Salome at Kılıçlar Kuşluk in Cappadocia, dated to the first half of the eleventh century, and of the elegant head-dress of the midwife at Panagia Arakiotissa in Cyprus, dated to 1192⁵². Another instance of a possible reflection of local fashions is the attribution of earrings to boys and young men at Kurbinovo in Byzantine Macedonia, dated to 1191⁵³.

TOPICAL CONCERNS

The preceding sections explored the ways in which the study of *realia* in religious art may be employed to elucidate various aspects of the development of material culture in mediaeval Byzantium, aspects ranging from the typology and function of artefacts to questions of foreign influences and regional diversification. The artistic evidence was evaluated primarily from an archaeological point of view with the purpose of demonstrating that it may be used successfully to supplement the evidence provided by extant artefacts and the written sources. The examples discussed so far indicate that contemporary secular artefacts were introduced into Byzantine religious artistic contexts to a degree greater than what is usually assumed. These *realia*, however, were represented in the same iconographic contexts along with fanciful and conventional types, creating a whole that had never existed at any particular point in time, that was, one might say, 'ageless'. Byzantine religious art does not illustrate daily life in mediaeval Byzantium nor was it ever meant to do so. Nevertheless, the occurrence of particular types of artefacts in particular iconographic contexts may serve on occasion as an 'objective' pointer to certain temporal concerns and popular beliefs of Byzantine society as well as to living conditions in the lands of the empire. A most illuminating example in this respect is the

⁴⁹ See, for example, TSITOURIDOU, Ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος, pl. 90, for a representation of a sword with the characteristic disc pommel, a type which was particularly popular in the West during the Late Middle Ages. On the development of the disc pommel in the West see E. OAKESHOTT, *The Archaeology of Weapons. Arms and Armour from Prehistory to the Age of Chivalry*. London 1960, 225, fig. 106 (types H–K); A. B. HOFFMEYER, *From Medieval Sword to Renaissance Rapier. Gladius 2* (1963) 11–8.

⁵⁰ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 120–1, 125, 134–6.

⁵¹ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 244–5, 247, 251, 267–8, 270–71.

⁵² RESTLE, *Wall-painting in Asia Minor, II*, fig. 284; A. H. S. MEGAW – A. STYLIANOU, *Cyprus: Byzantine Mosaics and Frescoes*. New York 1963, pl. XVI.

⁵³ GROZDANOV – HADERMANN-MISGUICH, *Kurbinovo*, figs. 39, 42, 44.

representation of the damned in distinctive dress or with the instruments of their sins around their neck in the iconographic context of the Last Judgement. It has been demonstrated that the inspiration for the portrayal of the damned tormented by the instruments of their sin is to be sought in popular beliefs concerning the nature of the punishment awaiting transgressors in Hell⁵⁴. At the same time, the portrayals of the damned provide an interesting inventory of the evils of mediaeval society like the abuse of power, alluded to by the inclusion of anonymous figures in imperial and official dress, usury, represented by the figure with a purse around the neck, and the falsification of weights, represented by the figure with the balance scales around the neck. In the case of the depiction of the Last Judgement in the small, thirteenth-century church of Saint George at Kalybia in Attica, the painter has given a graphic inventory of the problems faced by the inhabitants of this rural area⁵⁵. To the right of the figure of the rich man from the parable of Poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19–25), is a row of nine heads of sinners. The first is the falsifier of weights. Then follows a royal couple, which is identified by inscriptions as Herod and Herodias; both were exemplars of human cruelty and lustfulness. Next comes the evil-minded archimandrite with a moneybag around his neck, an allusion, according to Mouriki, to the attachment of the clergy to material wealth. The next figure to the right is that of an official, if one is to judge by the head-dress he is wearing. Around his neck he has a *kalamarin*, a portable pen-case-and-ink-well. The presence of this figure stigmatizes the abuse of power by state officials, but it could also be referring to a particular problem like the forging of legal documents, the falsification of tax-registers, or the issuing of unjust verdicts in court⁵⁶. The last four sinners are punished for offences associated with the life of agricultural communities. The first has a plough around his neck as punishment for plowing another man's field. The second, judging by the sickle at his neck, has harvested someone else's field. The third, with the axe at his neck, is probably being punished for cutting wood in someone else's property. The pair of shears at the neck of the last one suggests that he is probably being punished for shearing another's sheep⁵⁷.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE MATERIAL WORLD AND ITS REPRESENTATION

It has become clear that the acknowledged indifference of Byzantine religious art towards the representation of the material world was often tempered by a variety of considerations, be they artistic or other. Iconographic necessity, concessions to fashion and prevalent artistic tastes, the intellectual interests and temporal concerns of Byzantine society – to mention but a few – all played a part in the introduction of *realia* into religious pictorial contexts. Byzantine attitudes towards the material world in general or certain aspects of it in particular must have also affected its reflection in religious art, but these are infinitely more difficult to identify. Still, the monuments themselves provide us with a number of 'indicators' towards tracing such attitudes. The inventory of artefact-types represented, the amount of detail and care with which they are rendered, their semiotic function within iconographic contexts, as well as the geographic and chronological distribution of their representations are the most significant of these pointers. To discuss but one example, even a superficial survey of Byzantine art reveals that the majority of contemporary secular artefacts re-

⁵⁴ D. MOURIKI, An Unusual Representation of the Last Judgment in a Thirteenth Century Fresco at St George near Kouvaras in Attica. *DChAE* 8 (1975–1976) 160–64.

⁵⁵ MOURIKI, Representation, 149–50, 156–60.

⁵⁶ The first two alternative interpretations of the figure with the *kalamarin* have been put forward by MOURIKI, Representation, 149–50. The possibility of this figure being associated with the workings of Byzantine courts suggested itself to me because of the fact that depictions of writing implements constitute a regular feature of trial scenes in religious artistic contexts. Their introduction into these images was, in all probability, inspired by the stipulation of Roman law that, in order to be valid, all decisions of Roman judges should appear in written form; this stipulation was still in force in the Late Byzantine period, see PARANI, Reconstructing, 211–2.

⁵⁷ Mouriki identified the implement around the last sinner's head as pruning shears, see MOURIKI, Representation, 160. However, according to the written and the artistic evidence, it was a vine-dresser's knife that was employed for pruning in Byzantium, not a pair of shears, see BRYER, Agricultural Implements, 78. Bryer, in fact, was the first to suggest that the implement at the church of Saint George looked more like a pair of sheep shears. I owe the suggestion that the last sinner is being punished for shearing someone else's sheep to Dr. A. Dunn, whom I here thank. For a more detailed discussion of Last Judgement compositions in village churches as sources on daily life in Byzantine rural areas and its mundane and spiritual concerns see S. E. J. GERSTEL, The Sins of the Farmer: Illustrating Village Life (and Death) in Medieval Byzantium, in: Word, Image, Number. Communication in the Middle Ages, eds. J. J. CONTRENI – S. CASCIANI. Tarnuzze 2002, 205–17; see also M. GARIDES, Les punitions collectives et individuelles des damnés dans le jugement dernier (du XII^e au XIV^e siècle). *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti* 18 (1982) 1–18.

flected in religious pictorial contexts at any given period in all parts of the empire was derived from the imperial milieu of Constantinople⁵⁸. Rulers and officials were identified as such by being attributed characteristic items of Byzantine ceremonial dress and stately seats and footstools, as well as by being flanked by attendants and bodyguards reminiscent of the imperial retinue⁵⁹. The martyrs were dressed in the *chlamys*-costume of Byzantine officials⁶⁰. In certain Middle Byzantine artistic contexts, military saints appear wearing a type of body-armour that probably reflected the ceremonial armour of the emperor and his generals⁶¹. Even elements of setting, like thrones and footstools, red and purple hangings, fans made of peacock feathers, and richly patterned valances, allude to the luxuriousness of the imperial ambience⁶². The evidence adduced here clearly indicates that the avowed detachment of Byzantine religious art from its surrounding material reality did not apply to the representation of the trappings of imperial government and ceremonial. Why this was so appears to have been the result of a variety of reasons, both artistic and ideological. The splendour of the attire and the luxuriousness of the furniture and the furnishings of the imperial court were perhaps considered as conferring additional honour to the saintly archetypes of the images and as imbuing the compositions with a stateliness appropriate to their sacred content⁶³. Furthermore, the trappings of imperial ceremonial and administration, familiar to both the creators and the audience of the images through their day-to-day experience or through the medium of official art, must have presented themselves as the most appropriate and easily recognizable iconographic devices for expressing the concepts of sovereignty, authority, and rank⁶⁴. The Byzantine belief that the hierarchical structure of the earthly empire mirrored that of the heavenly kingdom⁶⁵ could have justified, if not prompted, borrowings from imperial imagery for the visualization of the Kingdom of God. The conviction that the imperial rites reflected the universal order⁶⁶ was enough to detach the imperial milieu from the sphere of transitional, everyday existence⁶⁷. The material trappings of imperial ceremonial, in their magnificence and conservatism, were probably considered as impersonal and as ageless as the

⁵⁸ PARANI, *Reconstructing*, *passim*.

⁵⁹ Compare, for example, the representation of the Enrolment for Taxation at the Chora Monastery (1315–1321) with the miniature portraying John VI Kantakuzenos presiding over the Church Council of 1351 (Par. gr. 1242, fol. 5v; completed in 1375). The manner in which the bodyguard behind Kyrenios holds the sword high up with the hilt upwards in the Chora mosaic reflects the manner in which the dignitary to the right of John VI holds the imperial sword. UNDERWOOD, *Kariye Djami*, pls. 159, 160; Byzance, 419 (colour reproduction).

⁶⁰ Compare, for example, the costume of the chorus of martyrs from the Last Judgement composition in the ossuary chapel at Bačkovo (mid-twelfth century) to the costume of the protospatharios Basil in Kutlumousiou 60, fol. Iv (*terminus ante quem* 1169). E. BAKALOVA, *Bachkovskata kostnitsa*. Sofia 1977, fig. 29; PELEKANIDES *et alii*, *The Treasures of Mount Athos*, II, fig. 295.

⁶¹ This is best illustrated by the miniature portrait of the emperor Basil II in his famous Psalter (Marc. gr. Z.17, fol. IIIr; early eleventh century). The emperor, who is portrayed in ceremonial military dress triumphant over his enemies, is surrounded by the busts of six military saints, who wear exactly the same type of cuirass as he does. SPATHARAKIS, *Portrait*, 20–26, fig. 6; A. CUTLER – J.-M. SPIESER, *Byzance médiévale, 700–1204*. Paris 1996, fig. 254 (colour reproduction).

⁶² MOURIKI, *Περί Βυζαντινού κύκλου*, 130–1; PARANI, *Reconstructing*, 160–7, 170–3, 179–84.

⁶³ Cf. the comments of the emperor Leo VI (886–912) à propos the pictorial decoration of the church of the Monastery of Kauleas in Constantinople, translated by C. MANGO, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: 312–1453, Sources and Documents*. Toronto 1986, 203: The craftsman has made abundant use of gold whose utility he perceived: for, by its admixture, he intended to endow the pictures with such beauty as appears in the apparel of the emperors' entourage. Furthermore, he realized that the pallor of gold was an appropriate colour to express the virtue of [Christ's] members.

⁶⁴ Having recourse to the imperial environment and official art in search of the appropriate iconographic means for expressing the ideas of power and sovereignty was a practice established since the beginnings of Christian iconography, see A. GRABAR, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*. Paris 1936, 189–261; IDEM, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne*. Antiquité et Moyen Age. Paris 1979, 41–50.

⁶⁵ See, for example, H. AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin*. Paris 1975, 137–8. For the origins of this belief, which date back to the time of Eusebius and Constantine the Great, see F. DVORNIK, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, I–II. Washington, D.C. 1966, II 614–21.

⁶⁶ The classical statement of this idea in the mediaeval period is found in the *Book of Ceremonies* compiled by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos in the tenth century, see *De cerimoniis*, ed. I. REISKE, II. Bonn 1830, 5.6–8, 638.3–5.

⁶⁷ Cf. the anecdotal story about Leo VI recounted by Liudprand of Cremona in his *Antapodosis*. According to the story, when the disguised Leo, who had ended up in a prison cell, asked the jailer whether he knew the emperor, the jailer replied How could I know him when I do not remember ever having seen him properly? Certainly I have gazed at a distance once or twice, when he has appeared in public, but I could not get close, and it seemed to me that I was looking at a wonder of nature rather than at a human being. *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, transl. F. A. WRIGHT. London 1930, 39; see also R. CORMACK, *The Emperor at St. Sophia: Viewer and Viewed*, in: *Byzance et les images*, eds. A. GUILLOU – J. DURAND. Paris 1994, 248, 250.

establishment they epitomized. Consequently, their presence in religious pictorial contexts would not have compromised the transcendental character of Christian iconography and was, therefore, acceptable.

To conclude, it is surprising at how many different levels and in what variety of contexts one may detect the reflection of contemporary reality in Byzantine religious art, despite this art's avowed indifference towards things material and transitional. The process of locating and understanding such reflections is a painstaking one and requires familiarity with the formation processes of religious iconography if one is to avoid the many pitfalls. Nevertheless, considering the rewards, I believe that it is well-worth making the attempt.