Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became "Meter Theou"

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This paper attempts to explain how the motherhood of the Virgin became important for Byzantium. With the demise of Iconoclasm, theologians and artists took a fresh look at the Virgin and began to develop the human and maternal sides of her personality. These qualities, which had been present but dormant in the earlier centuries, made her the perfect intercessor between God and the faithful. As the maternal dimension of Mary's personality was developed, she became even more accessible, as the ordinary woman who understood humankind. I would like to explore how and when this new focus came about.[1]

Mothers have typically been identified in art by being depicted together with their children. However, when such portrayals are merely formal and hieratic, conveying only external relationships, as happens in many family portraits and photographs, there may be little sense of motherhood. The intimacy between mother and child, the emotional interplay, is conveyed through actions or gestures, such as feeding, embracing, or playing. This involvement of mother and child, for example, is found in twentieth-century art in the paintings of Mary Cassatt. These two types of representation of the mother, the formal and the intimate, stand for the two visual poles that we find in Byzantine religious representations of the Virgin. The first is represented by the icon on Mount Sinai in which she is enthroned holding the Christ child on her lap and is flanked by saints and angels. The second, in which a more intimate relationship between mother and child is visible, is depicted, for example, in the fourteenth-century icon from Dečani (Figs. 1, 2).

The earliest representations of Mary as a mother are found in the Roman catacombs. They depict a seated woman holding a baby in her arms, possibly even nursing the child. One cannot be absolutely certain that the woman holding the child is Mary, since the figure is not identified by an inscription and the context is somewhat unclear. Still, Mary is the likely subject in a painting in the catacomb of Priscilla of the first half of the third century. The faded yellowish star above the seated woman, to which a male figure is pointing, is a likely reference to the Nativity of Christ.[2] The scene has an otherwise uncomplicated subject matter, depicting the relationship between a mother and her child. The naturalistic poses and gestures of the figures follow conventions of the Greco-Roman world. Although tied to a religious context, they have not yet been invested with theological connotations. Like other Christian subjects represented in the catacombs, the pictures of Mary are simple illustrations of biblical themes or verses. They should be regarded as private expressions of faith, here specifically funerary, in a period when the church had not yet established an official line regarding which or what kind of images were appropriate in a devotional context.

The pictures of Mary contrast with the many typological images that symbolize salvation for the dead. The difference lies in the human feeling they portray, in an image that is as much of a per-

son as it is of a meaning. But this presentation of Mary's humanity is fleeting, an elusive foreshadowing of what will not be developed for centuries. For the official church did not yet know how to incorporate the devotion that Mary as a mother could elicit, or was afraid to do so.

When the status of the Christian church improved after the Edict of Milan in 313, Christian art took another direction. The early official church compositions became more structured, deriving their formality from the repertoire of official art, which provided them not only with a compositional clarity and hierarchy but also with the authority and respect desired for a fast-growing religion.

The surviving visual evidence for Mary is scanty, which may suggest her relative unimportance at the time. For the imperial dynasty in the fourth century, on the other hand, representations of the mother were an important subject. Helena was prominent as the mother of Constantine. Gold coins were struck with her effigy; on the reverse was a standing female figure holding an olive branch and personifying Securitas. The legend around the figure reads SECURITAS REI PUBLICE. A bronze medallion from Rome (A.D. 325), with Helena's portrait on the obverse, shows on the reverse a standing female figure holding a child in her left arm like the later Hodegetria, and handing an apple to another child on her right. The legend reads: PIETAS AUGUSTES.[3]

Fausta, the wife of Constantine, also adopted an official image of a mother for her coinage. From 324 onward, Fausta was depicted either standing, holding her two sons in her arms, or enthroned with one child at her breast in the position of a nursing mother (Fig. 3). The legends on these coins read SALUS REIPUBLICAE and SPES REIPUBLICAE for the standing figures, and PIETAS AUGUSTAE for the enthroned.[4] It is interesting to note that the legends on these coins associate the notions of hope, safety, and security with a woman, more particularly with a mother. Similar qualities, for example, ΕΛΠΙC or BEBAIA ΕΛΠΙC, will be associated later with the Virgin.

The church, as is well known, developed most of its official images from an imperial or official system of representation, which included the Virgin as the enthroned queen. However, the theme of the nursing mother, as used by Fausta, was not officially appropriated for Mary in this period. We find it only in monuments of Coptic art of the sixth–seventh century, and there it seems to have its origin in the tradition of the goddess Isis suckling Harpokrates.[5] Presumably, the image of the nursing mother, at least in the capital cities of Rome and Constantinople, implied the theme of dynastic succession, which would have been inappropriate to the mystery of the incarnation. The church, in any case, was more comfortable with Mary in an abstract, theological sense rather than as a physical mother, as the acts of the Council of Ephesus illustrate. The council, held in 431, was a pivotal moment in Marian theology. During the theological debate about the incarnation and Christ's divine and human natures, the word "Theotokos" became a point of contention. Nestorios was condemned in what ensued, and the council voted that the title Theotokos should henceforth be given to Mary. Crucial to the definition of the Theotokos were the words of Cyril of Alexandria, which were officially adopted in the records: "Now the Word's being made flesh is nothing else than that he partook of flesh and blood in a like manner as us . . . and proceeded man from a woman without having cast away his divinity . . . In this sense they did not hesitate to call the holy Virgin Theotokos—not as though the nature of the Word or his divinity took beginning of being from the holy Virgin, but that of her was begotten the holy body animated with a rational soul. . . ."[6] Proclus, the bishop of Cyzicus who was appointed patriarch of Constantinople in 434, shortly after the council, preached on the Theotokos: "Happiness has come to all women. Because of the Theotokos the feminine sex is no longer under a curse. She is the temple of God sanctified."[7] While this "happiness" may have served as a small counterweight to the generally anti-feminine tone of the church, the qualities of Mary emphasized at the time were still primarily abstract or theological. This can be seen in one of the monuments built shortly after the council, the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome—the first church in Rome that was dedicated to Mary. The apse originally had a mosaic representing her enthroned, which does not survive. However, representations of Mary can still be seen on the triumphal arch. Although the main

[3] J. P. C. Kent, *Roman Coins* (New York, 1978), nos. 639–40, pl. 162.
[4] Ibid., nos. 641–42, pl. 162. M. Alföldi, *Die constantinische Goldprägung* (Mainz, 1963), nos. 503, 506, pl. 10, figs. 153, 154.

[5] A. Grabar, *The Golden Age of Justinian* (New York, 1967), figs. 190, 194.
[6] PG 77, col. 44–49.
[7] PG 65, col. 753.

concern in the arch mosaics is christological, in the narrative Mary is given a place of respect appropriate to her new status as Theotokos. She appears dressed as an empress, and is even enthroned in the scene of the Annunciation. Her child, who in the early Christian representations of the adoration of the Magi sat on her lap, is here, in the same scene, separated from her and placed on a huge throne of his own. Mary, another woman, and the Magi are placed on either side, creating an almost symmetrical, hierarchical composition known from imperial art.[8]

Just as the term Theotokos, "the One Who Bore God,"[9] avoids saying anything about the person who bore him and does not imply any further relationship between the two, so the mosaic on the triumphal arch in Santa Maria Maggiore avoids establishing a personal relation between Mary and Christ. By the fifth century, then, the Church had incorporated Mary into its art, but only as Theotokos. Though the visual evidence is admittedly sparse, the prolific literary evidence makes it clear that the early church fathers were reluctant to call Mary "Mother of God." Ambrose, writing in the West in the second half of the fourth century, is the first to use the title Mater Dei, and then only twice.[10] One way to avoid dealing with the mother-son relationship as a human relationship was to make use of the numerous metaphors of Marian typology drawn from the Old Testament: the Virgin mother as the new Eve, the tabernacle, the gate, the ark, the rod of Aaron. The Church was less than eager to confront the paradox of the humanity of the mother of God. However, at the same time other aspects or dimensions of the Virgin were being explored. Particularly, Mary's role as mediatrix or intercessor begins to take shape. This is mainly recognizable in the exegetical and homiletic literature. For example, in a commentary on the Miracle of Cana, Cyril of Alexandria, writing in the first half of the fifth century, comments on the exchange of petition and response between Mary and her son. He says that: "Christ shows that the greatest honor is due to parents when, through reverence for his mother, he undertakes to do that which he did not wish to do,"[11] that is, to transform the water into wine. We find this idea elaborated in the sixth-century Kontakion by Romanos the Melodos, "On the Marriage at Cana." First, Mary herself tells how her motherhood has given her recognition and honor. Then, in the dialogue that develops between Christ and Mary, Romanos shows her to be quite insistent that her son should perform the miracle. After some reluctance on Christ's part, including the excuse that her request falls "out of order," he yields and says: "since it is necessary that parents be honored by their children, I shall pay observance to you, Mother."[12] The Cana episode becomes an illustration of Mary's successful intercession. Both Cyril and Romanos explain that Mary is successful because she is Christ's mother. The general emphasis in this period is on her ability to intercede with her son for humankind, but beyond that there is no further development of her character as a mother.[13]

In the Akathistos Hymnos as well, Mary is praised for numerous characteristics in various metaphors: as vessel, bridechamber, pillar of virginity, table, heavenly ladder, and so on. Although she is called mother of the lamb and nursing-mother of virgins, her motherhood as such is not praised independently. She is the one who provides for and protects her people.[14]

When we turn to the sixth century, we find that the visual evidence corroborates that found in the texts. In the large number of images that are now

[8] W. Oakeshott, *The Mosaics of Rome* (New York, 1967), fig. 55; E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), fig. 127; B. Brenk, *Die frühchristlichen Mosaiken in S. Maria Maggiore zu Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1975), esp. 50–52.

[9] It is important to note here that the term *Theotokos* encountered in the Greek texts, especially of the pre-iconoclastic period, is all too often translated as "Mother of God" rather than "bearer of God." This translation eliminates the careful use of the term by the Greek authors: see, e.g., C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972).

[10] M. O'Carroll, *Theotokos* (Wilmington, 1982), "Ambrose," p. 20.

[11] PG, 73, col. 225C. Although terms like μεσίτης, μεσιτεύει are not specifically used here, the role she plays in the story of the successful miracle is that of the intercessor. It is a role taken directly from the New Testament and her actual life.

[12] M. Carpenter, trans. and ed., *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist,* 2 vols. (Columbia, Missouri, 1970), "The Marriage at Cana," I, 67–72.

[13] The only writer who brings out more strongly Mary's motherly care toward her son in this period seems to be Romanos Melodos. If one compares, for example, his imagery to the Akathistos Hymnos, a contrast is immediately recognizable; P. Maas and C. Trypanis, eds., *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica* (Oxford, 1963). On this topic see V. Limberis, *Identities and Images of the Theotokos in the Akathistos Hymn,* Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1987, 145.

[14] G. G. Meersseman, *Hymnos Akathistos* (Freiburg, 1958). On the role of the Virgin in the 5th–7th centuries, see the studies by Averil Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *JTS,* n.s. 29 (1978), 79–108, repr. in *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London, 1981), no. XVI; and idem, "The Virgin's Robe: An Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Constantinople," ibid., no. XVII.

being produced, images in which she is the central focus, her role as mother is not brought out. When she is identified by an inscription, she is called simply MAPIA or H AΓIA MAPIA, not even Theotokos.

Her image can be seen in apse compositions, on icons, and on a number of ecclesiastical objects. In most of these pre-iconoclastic representations, Mary is holding the Christ child and presenting him to the world.[15] She is not only venerated as the means through which the incarnation was made possible, but her intercessory function is also recognizable. Among the many examples is the Cleveland tapestry icon, in which Mary is enthroned holding the child before her (Fig. 4). She is identified by an inscription as H AΓIA MAPIA and is flanked by the archangels. A suggestion of her role as intercessor is made by the enthroned figure of Christ placed directly over her.[16] Another example, in this case an apse decoration, is the sixth-century church at Parenzo built by Bishop Eufrasius. Although heavily restored, the mosaic has not been changed iconographically (Fig. 5). The Virgin is enthroned on a meadow-like ground. She is flanked by angels and approached on either side by saints and Eufrasius himself, who is presenting his church to her. She is set up like a queen holding her child before her, guarded by her attendants. She is receiving the honor and respect of the saints and the bishop, who hopes for a place in heaven through her intercession. A wreath is placed in the center, and heavy, colorful clouds cover the sky above. In this case Christ, seated among the Apostles, is represented on the wall of the triumphal arch above.[17]

The compositions in these early non-narrative representations are formal; symmetry and hierarchy are important for focus and emphasis. In all these representations Mary is depicted frontally and always holding the child. Except for the hand on the shoulder of the child, which could be read as a motherly touch, these images more than anything else are unemotional and distant. Mary is still the Theotokos as defined at the council, a concept which precludes the establishment of any direct emotional connection between her and her son that could imply a family relationship.[18]

Let us now turn to art after the period of Iconoclasm. Anna Kartsonis dates a number of pectoral crosses and small cross reliquaries to the late eighth and ninth centuries.[19] She points out that suddenly we find, next to the representation of the Virgin, the label ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC and occasionally also MHTHP ΘΕΟΥ, which had not appeared in art earlier. What does the introduction of these titles suggest? For my argument, it is important to establish when these terms are introduced and why. Both labels appear on the same type of objects: the pectoral crosses depict the Crucifixion on the obverse and the standing Virgin holding the Child in front of her on the reverse. Additional medallions of the evangelists and other saints are placed on the crossarms. These scenes and figures can be seen, for example, on the silver-plated crosses in Venice and Athens (Figs. 6, 7).[20] On the cross in Venice, Mary is identified as H AΓIA ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC; on the fragmentary reverse of the Athens cross, she is labeled MHTHP [ΘΕΟΥ].

There is good evidence that after the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, which reinstated the worship of relics and images, phylacteries of the true cross and illustrated crosses like these were worn by the iconophiles as statements of their orthodoxy during the interim period 787–815. This use probably continued during the second period of Iconoclasm.[21] These pectoral crosses were one of the first types of object to be decorated with figures, possibly because of the attention given the cross during Iconoclasm as the only image or symbol to receive veneration. The Crucifixion was obviously an apropriate theme. But I would like to show that the cross and the scene of the Crucifixion were consciously chosen by the iconophile movement to defend the depiction of Christ.

At the Crucifixion, Christ, shortly before his death, turns to Mary and says: "behold, this is your son" and to John: "behold, this is your mother" (John 19:26–27). These words have received varying interpretations in different periods.[22] The

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[15] G. A. Wellen, "Das Marienbild in der frühchristlichen Kunst," *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* (Freiburg, 1971), vol. 3, 156–211.

[16] K. Weitzmann, ed., *Age of Spirituality* (New York, 1979), no. 477, pl. xiv.

[17] G. Cuscito, *Parenzo* (Padua, 1976).

[18] An icon on Mt. Sinai depicts the Virgin as a supplicant, turned toward the right in a pose known later as the AΓIOCOP-

ITICCA. This icon has been dated 6th–7th century, an early date for this type. The icon was repainted in the 13th century, and only the face and hand are original and in the encaustic technique. The wooden panel is also put together from a number of pieces, so it is not clear how the head and face related to each other in the original composition; K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons*, I (Princeton, 1976) no. B.4., 21–23.

[19] Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 105–7

[20] Ibid., fig. 33; *Venezia e Bisanzio* (Venice, 1974), no. 17, with literature.

[21] Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 118–20, for textual evidence.

[22] T. Koehler, "Les principales interprétations traditionnelles de Jn 19, 25–27 pendant les douze premiers siècles," *Bulletin. Société Française d'Etudes Mariales* 16 (1959), 119–55. There is a

church fathers generally considered the text to show Christ's thoughtfulness toward his mother, his intention to provide for her. More precise explanations were offered after the patristic period, particularly in the ninth century. In a homily of George of Nikomedia, for example, the analysis of these two statements reveals the general effort after Iconoclasm to emphasize Christ's human nature. This was done, in part, by stressing Mary's humanity.

George of Nikomedia was a diakon and chartophylax of Hagia Sophia who became a well-known preacher. He was a personal friend of Patriarch Photios, who appointed him Metropolitan of Nikomedia in 860. Of the great number of his homilies which survive, the best known are those on various subjects related to the Theotokos. In his homily entitled "When his Mother stood next to the cross at the Crucifixion," he elaborates on the words Christ says to his mother: IΔE O YIOC COY. Christ himself explains his statement: "for through him (John) I bequeath also the rest of my disciples. And as long as you will live with them and stay with them, as it shall be my will, you will give them your bodily presence in place of mine. Be for them all that mothers are naturally for their children, or rather all that I should be by my presence; all that sons and subjects are, they will be for you. They will pay considerable respect to you because you are the mother of the Lord and, because I came to them through you, they acquire in you the placatable intercessor toward me."[23]

Christ explains in the following way his words to John IΔOY H MHTHP COY: "It is not only for you, but also for the others that I have made her mother and guide, and it is my will that she should be honored in the fullest sense with the dignity of mother. Though I have forbidden you to call anyone on earth father, I wish nonetheless that you call her mother and honor her as such, she who was for me an abode more than heavenly, and showed me an affection with which nature is unacquainted."[24]

These words unmistakably make Mary the mother not only of Christ but of all his disciples. This is to be understood in the widest sense—she is the mother of all. Mary becomes the most approachable intercessor between the faithful and her son. She is to be called mother, for she was not only a *skevoma* (abode) for him, which was the traditional image for her maternity, but also because she showed a *proairesis,* an affection or devotion that makes reference to her maternal feelings and disposition, an aspect in her relation to Christ not encouraged until now. Why does the motherly aspect of Mary become so important at that time? Her human relationship to Christ had become most important in this period since Christ's human nature depended on her humanity. The most important argument in the debate about the icons of Christ of the iconophiles was that, according to the acts of the Council of 787, "Christians have been taught to portray his image in accordance with his visible nature, not according to the one in which he was divine. . . ."[25] The desire to represent the visible nature of Christ resulted in the emphasis on his human aspect, and the representation of the human nature is necessarily tied to the miracle of the incarnation through the Virgin Mary. Her human qualities rather than her utility as a source of doctrine had to be brought out directly, and emphasizing her motherhood was the most obvious means of achieving this.

In the scene of the Crucifixion, the suffering of Christ and the sorrow of Mary depicted the human nature of both. The Crucifixion was also the scene in which the theme of Mary as the human mother was first clearly depicted. The source was the text of the New Testament itself and not a theological interpretation. Visually this was done by the addition of Christ's own words as a quotation in the image. Under the arms of the cross, we read: IΔE O YIOC COY and IΔOY H MHTHP COY. This can be seen on the two crosses mentioned above (Figs. 6, 7) and can be found on a number of other early pectoral crosses.[26]

In two crucifixion icons from Mount Sinai (prob-

large body of literature on the specific verses of John 19: 25–27; see the bibliography in O'Carroll, *Theotokos,* 374–75.

[23] PG 100, col. 1476D: Σοὶ γὰρ δι᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς παρατίθημι μαθητάς · καὶ ἐφ᾽ ὅσον βούλομαί τε [ἴσ. σε] συνεῖναι τούτοις, καὶ ἐν τῷ βίῳ διατελεῖν, τῆς σαρκικῆς μου παρουσίας τὴν οἰκείαν αὐτοῖς ἀντιπαρέχοις. Γένου μὲν αὐτοῖς, ὅσα μητράσι πρὸς υἱοὺς γενέσθαι πέφυκε · μᾶλλον δὲ, ὅσα ἐγὼ συμπαρών · αὐτοὶ δὲ τὰ τῶν υἱῶν καὶ ὑπηκόων σοὶ γενήσονται. Ἀξιόλογόν σοι τὸ σέβας, ὡς τοῦ οἰκείου Δεσπότου ἀποτίσουσι Μητρὶ, ὡς διὰ σοῦ τούτοις ἐπιδημήσαντός μου, καὶ μεσιτείαν σε πρός με εὐδιάλλακτον αὐτοὶ κεκτημένοι.

[24] PG 100, col. 1477B: Νῦν γὰρ ταύτην, οὐ μόνον σοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν, ὡς τεκοῦσαν, καθηγουμένην τίθημι μαθητῶν,

καὶ τῷ τῆς Μητρὸς ἀξιώματι τιμᾶσθαι βούλομαι κυρίως. Εἰ τοίνυν καὶ πατέρα καλεῖν ὑμῖν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀπηγόρευσα, ὅμως θέλω ταύτην Μητέρα καὶ τιμᾶσθαι καὶ καλεῖσθαι παρ᾽ ὑμῶν, ὑπερουράνιόν μοι χρηματίσασαν σκήνωμα, καὶ ξένην τῆς φύσεως ἐπιδεδειγμένην προαίρεσιν. In the writings of George of Nikomedia, Henry Maguire has also observed that through Mary's lament and gestures of affection Christ's human nature is brought out; see *DOP* 31 (1977), 162.

[25] Mansi, XIII, 252; also Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire,* 172.

[26] A number of them are illustrated in Kartsonis, *Anastasis,* figs. 25–27.

ably eighth century),[27] Mary is still ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ and the quotation is absent. In fact, none of the pre-iconoclastic examples have it, whereas it had become a commonplace by the tenth century.[28]

The use of the title Theotokos on these crosses emphasizes the definition of the Council of Ephesus that through her humanity Christ became man. But in the end the word ΜΗΤΗΡ, as found in the Gospel text in the scenes of the Crucifixion, expressed more directly the quality newly invested in the Virgin and became the only way to refer to her in images in the following centuries. In a word, Theotokos is now μήτηρ as well.

Byzantine artists commonly turned to inscriptions in their paintings, either as epigrams or labels, when a specific or new meaning, not immediately perceivable through the iconography, was to be read in an image. The addition to the Crucifixion of the biblical quotation and the introduction of "Theotokos" and "Meter Theou" should be seen as parallel efforts to state the Iconophile position in the images.

Within the context of the Church, it appears that new concepts or meanings were more easily introduced through language than through images, especially when, as in Byzantium, very strict definitions about religious representations were in force. New ideas were first expressed in hymns and other religious texts, such as homilies, before they appeared in the visual iconography.

The promotion of the motherhood of Mary after Iconoclasm is also noticeable in the homilies of Photios. For example, in his homily on the image revealed in Hagia Sophia in 867, he brings out in florid terms the maternal qualities of the Virgin by describing the way she is holding and looking at her child (Fig. 8). His description, it has been argued, is inconsistent with the mosaic visible today in the apse, and thus the mosaic that we see today in Hagia Sophia cannot be that of the ninth century.[29] Cyril Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins have suggested that lofty rhetoric explains the discrepan-

cies between the visible mosaic and the sermon of Photios.[30] I believe this to be partly true, but Photios intended to read into the mosaic image the aspect of motherhood which previously was not present, or was not meant to be present, in Mary's portraits.

Among a number of descriptions of Mary's motherly gestures, as she holds the child, Photios says that she "fondly turns her eyes on her begotten Child in the affection of her heart, yet assumes the expression of a detached and imperturbable mood."[31] I would argue here that the visual representation of this action on the part of the Virgin, that is, to turn and look at the child, is impossible in this period and impossible in an apse composition at any period. Even in the church of St. George at Kurbinovo of the late twelfth century (Fig. 9), whose paintings offer the most dramatic expressions of motherly sentiment and suffering, the enthroned Virgin in the apse, who admittedly holds her child in her lap in a rather relaxed position, does not turn her gaze toward her child.

This statement of Photios, concerning Mary's affectionate gaze upon her son, should be seen as an attempt on his part to evoke her motherly tenderness and care for her child. He projects an emotional expression that could at this point not yet be seen in images. He attempts to create a motherly image of the enthroned Theotokos by reading maternal gestures and invoking feelings into the picture that were present in the homiletic tradition by the late ninth century, but not yet in the art. In contrast to the earlier apse compositions, the originality of the apse of Hagia Sophia is that for the first time the beholder has a direct approach to the mother and child. They are represented against a plain golden background, without clouds or ground to stand upon, and the composition has been stripped of the narrative crowding of other figures. The image of Mary presenting her child becomes accessible to the viewer in a one-to-one relationship, which is not disturbed by the overcrowding of the space around her. The archangels, although still present, have been placed in a different architectural space, the bema arch. This separation was a conscious choice rather than a matter of limited space, since the same compositional approach is present in the apse decorations that fol-

[27] Weitzman, Sinai Icons, I, B.32 and B.36. Another icon of the Crucifixion, B.50, of the late 8th or first half of the 9th century, has the quotation from John 19:26–27 under the crossarms and identifies Mary as ΜΗΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΥ.

[28] In the 10th century there are a number of monuments with the representation of the Crucifixion that incorporate the inscription. A dated one is the enamel plaque from Georgia, whose donor was King George II of Abkhazia (922–957), which also includes the quotation from John.

[29] N. Oikonomides, "Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic of St. Sophia," DOP 39 (1985), 111–16, which cites earlier literature.

[30] C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul," DOP 19 (1965), 113–51.

[31] C. Mango, The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 290.
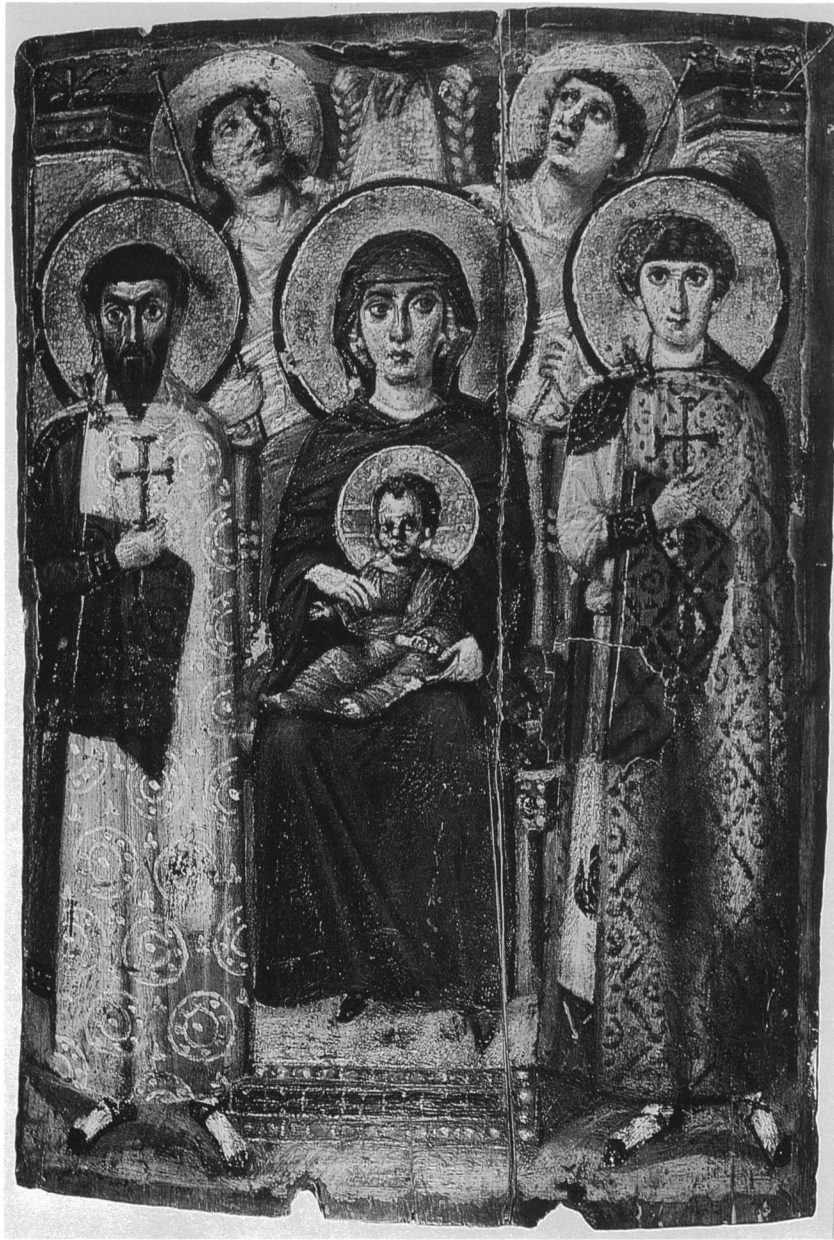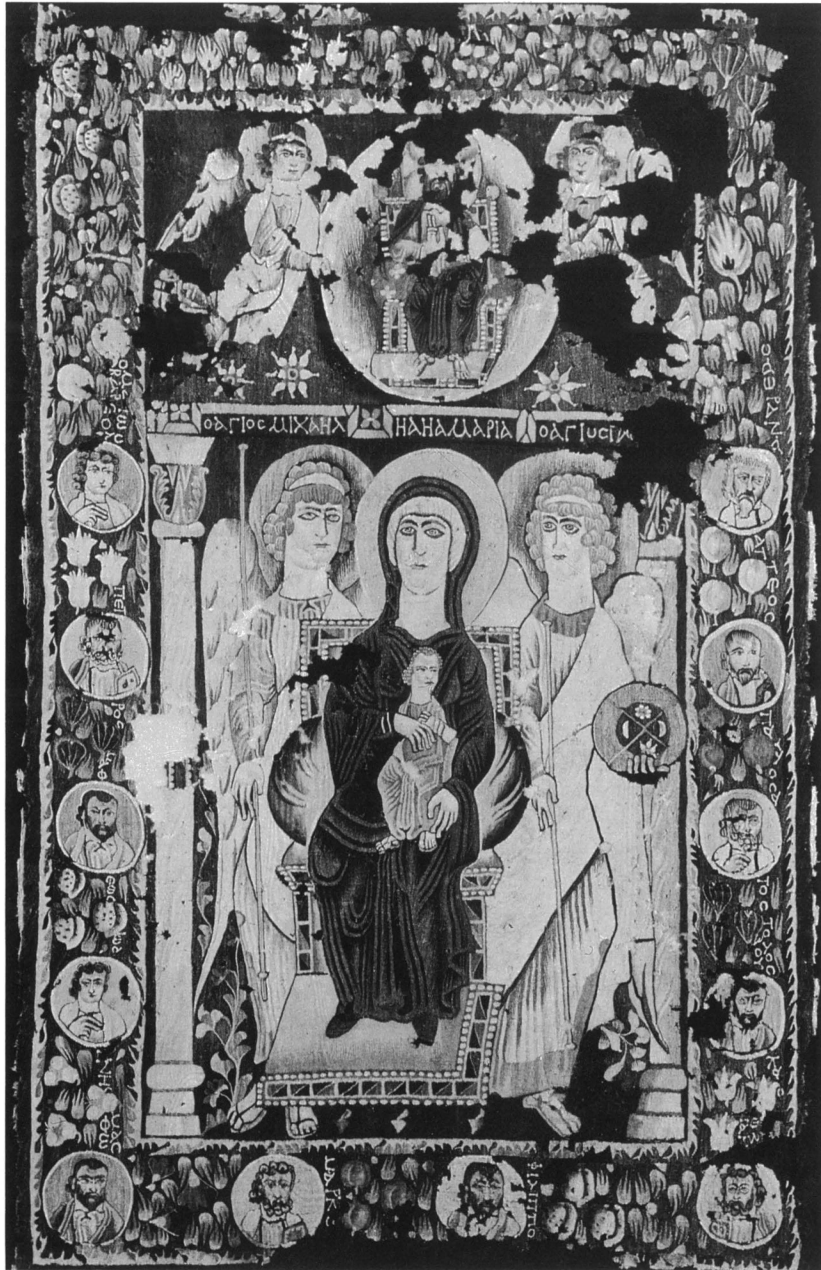
1   Mount Sinai, icon of Virgin and Child
      (after K. Weitzmann, *The Icon: Holy Images . . .*
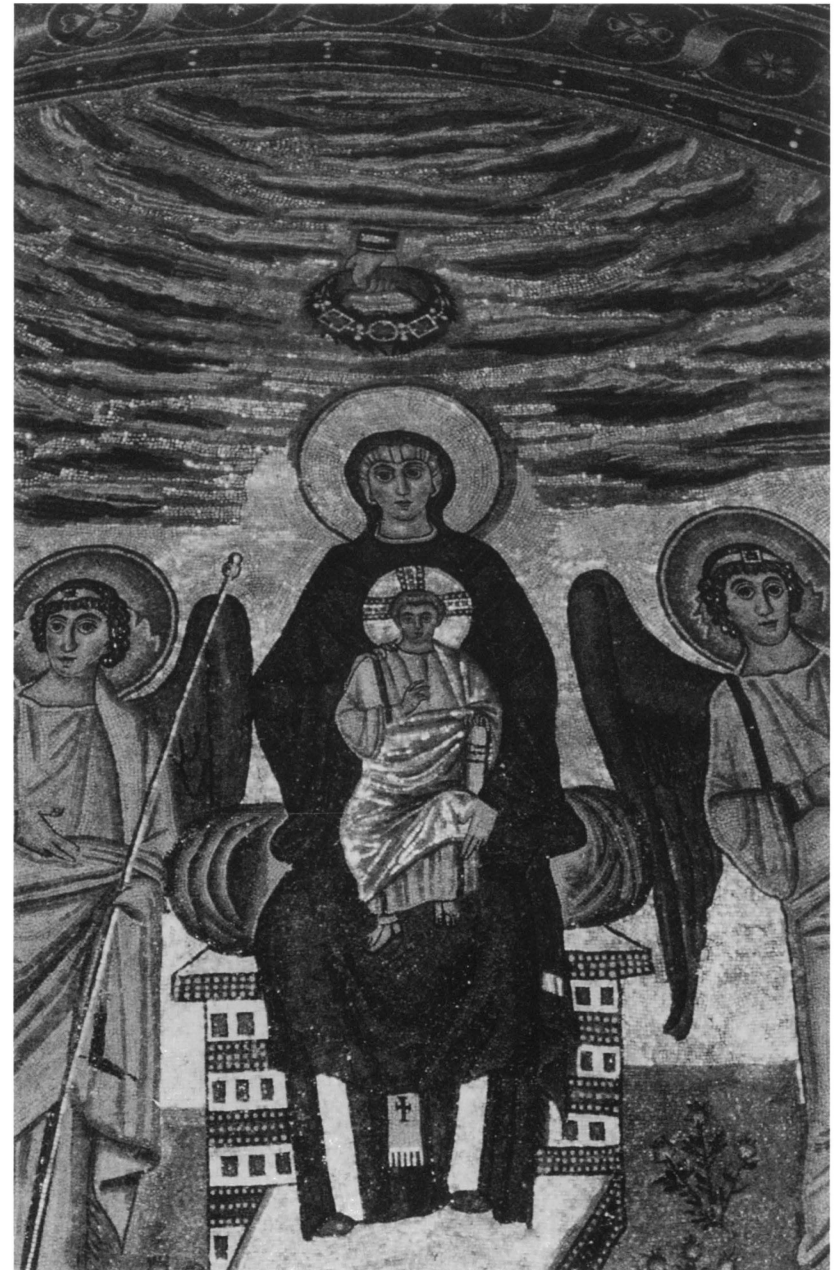   [New York, 1978])

2   Dečani, icon of standing Virgin and Child
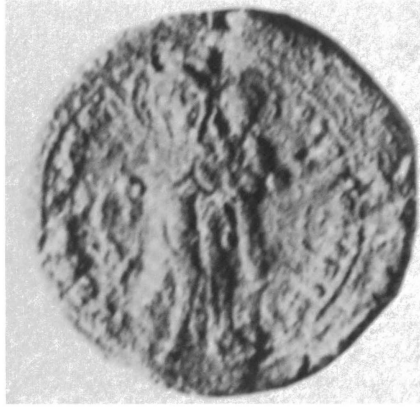   (after A. Grabar, *Zograf* 6 [1975], fig. 1)

4 Cleveland, tapestry icon of Virgin and Child
(after Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, pl. XIV, no. 477)

5 Parenzo, Eufrasiana, apse
(photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

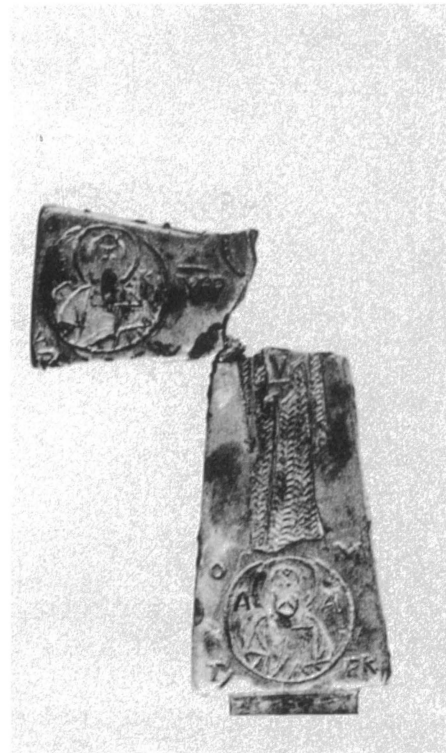3 Gold medallion of Empress Fausta (after Kent, pl. 162, no. 641)

13 Seal of Patriarch Photios (858–867, 877–886), Hodegetria (after Zacos, II, no. 7a)
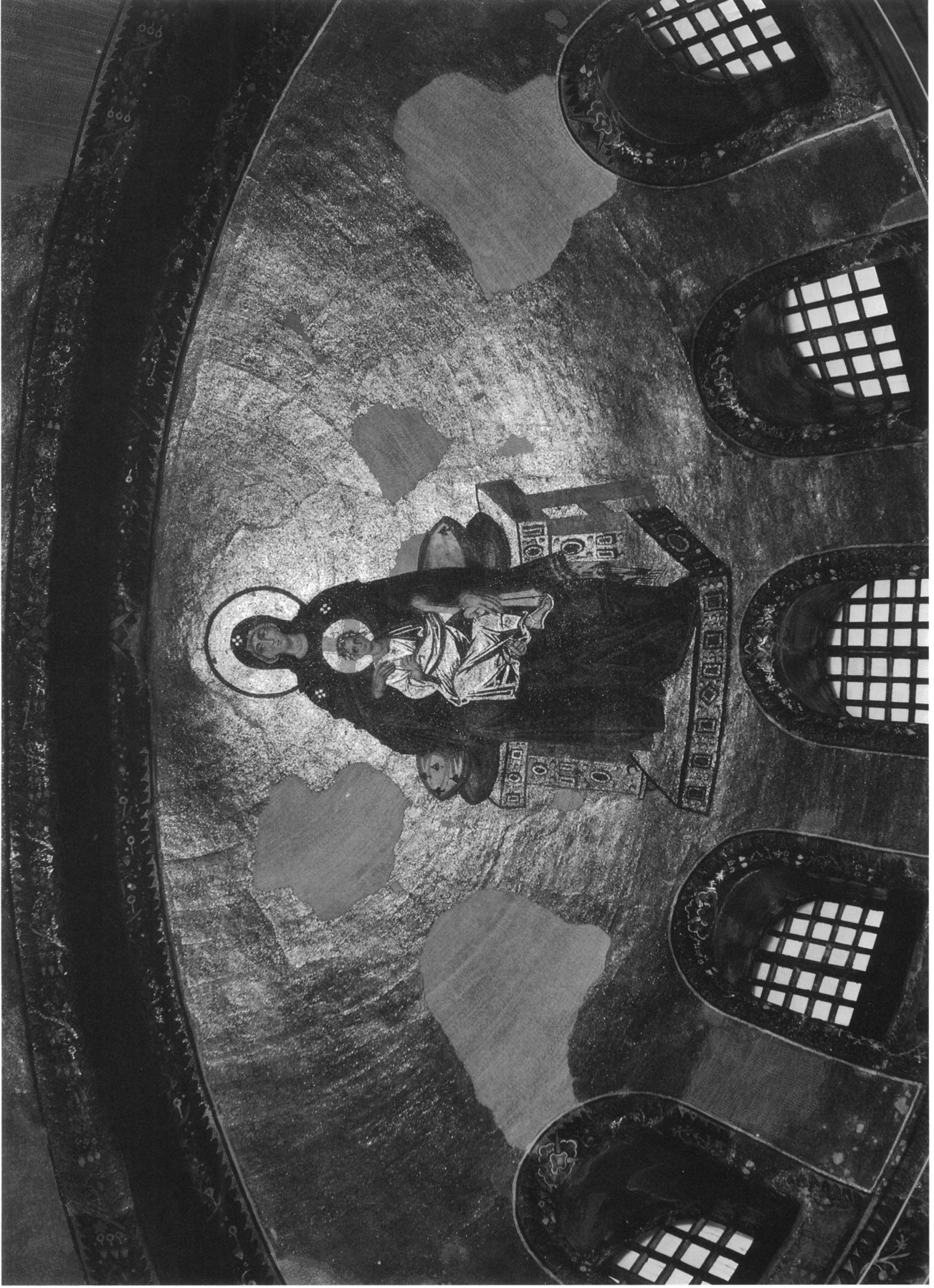
14 Seal of Patriarch Sergios II (1001–19), Hodegetria (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

6 Venice, church of St. Nicolò di Mendicoli, silver cross (after *Venezia e Bisanzio,* no. 17)

7 Athens, Benaki Museum, silver cross (after Kartsonis, fig. 33)

8 Constantinople, Haghia Sophia, apse (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

9   Kurbinovo, church of St. George, apse (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

10   Constantinople, Haghia Sophia, vestibule mosaic (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)
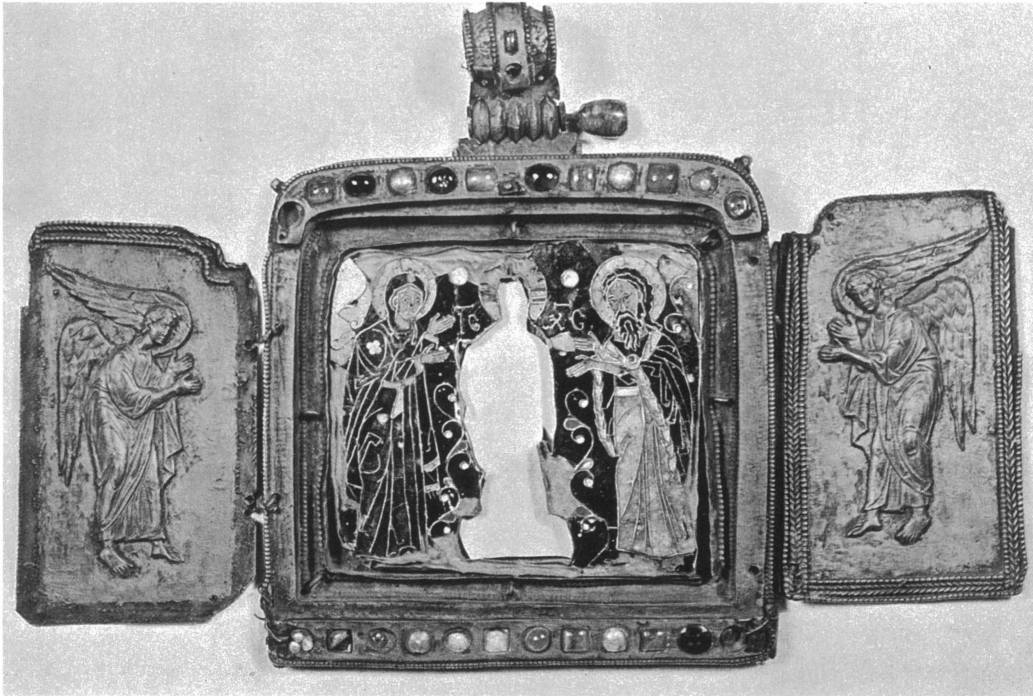
11 Tbilisi, State Art Museum, the Martvili triptych, Deesis
    (after L. Z. Khuskivadze, *Medieval Cloisonné Enamels at Georgian State Museum of Fine Arts*
    [Tbilisi, 1984], no. 5)

12 Berlin, Staatliche Museen, ivory icon, Deesis
    (after A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann,
    Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen. . . [Berlin, 1979])

15 Constantinople, patriarchal room over vestibule, Deesis
(after Cormack and Hawkins, *DOP* 31 [1977], fig. 27)

16 Cappadocia, Tokalı Kilise, niche with Virgin and Child
(photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

17 Constantinople, church of the Chora, parekklesion, Virgin and Child
(photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

18 Constantinople, church of the Chora, main church,
Virgin and Child   (photo: Dumbarton Oaks)

lowed, such as Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni, etc.

The mosaic of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople also lacks the title MHTHP ΘΕΟΥ on either side of the image, which implies that it is of the ninth century when the label was not yet common; it was possibly too daring for the first and most important image in Hagia Sophia. The same can be said for the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, which also lacks the inscription.[32] The preference for this title by the tenth century can be seen on the enthroned Virgin and Child mosaic in Hagia Sophia over the narthex entrance from the vestibule which, I think, must have the largest and boldest inscriptions of these words ever made (Fig. 10).

The introduction of Mary as the mother of God and as the most accessible and understanding intercessor expanded the artistic possibilities of her image. Change was slow, and she did not appear as the sentimental mother embracing her child until later in the tenth century, and then only in images of special devotion and possibly in limited geographical areas. First we see her in her role of mediatrix who intercedes for mankind with her son. From this period onward, the theme of intercession has a distinct iconography and becomes a favorite subject on a number of objects of devotion for personal use as well as for the Church. For example, on the Martvili enamel reliquary of the second half of the ninth century (Fig. 11), we see Mary in an intercessory position of address and prayer to her son. Together with John the Baptist, she represents the theme of the Deesis. Another Deesis is found on a small ivory icon of probably the same period in Berlin (Fig. 12), which has the composition in reverse. We can see that the label MHTHP ΘΕΟΥ is not yet standard; it is visible on the ivory but not on the Matvili enamel. Emperor Leo VI introduces on his solidus, for the first time on a Byzantine coin, a Virgin orans, that is, the Virgin as his intercessor. This coin has a double inscription: Mary is called MAPIA but also M̅P̅ Θ̅Y̅.[33] As a particular intercessor for Leo, she appears on the ivory scepter in Berlin, where she

crowns the emperor.[34] This is the first time in Byzantine art that she is depicted performing this act. In a general way, one can say that from the late ninth century Mary becomes more active, that is, she is more of a participant in the religious images of the Byzantine Church. Here I am not referring to the scenes that derive from and are tied to the Gospel narrative. I refer to the images of an iconic, devotional, or even political nature, often called symbolic, that the church and the state are creating.

Her important theological position after Iconoclasm is also evident in the decision of the patriarchs of Constantinople to adopt her image as a representative symbol on their seals. Before Iconoclasm she was part of the repertoire of imperial seals. Two types were common then: the Virgin was depicted either as a bust with the head of the child showing in front of her breast or as a standing Hodegetria. The first patriarch to place her image, a standing Hodegetria, on his seals was Patriarch Methodios (843–847).[35] Photios had two types: one was the abbreviated bust with the Christ child in front, while the other was the standing Hodegetria (Fig. 13). They are both types that were used on imperial seals before Iconoclasm.[36] After Photios, the older bust type disappears altogether, and the Hodegetria continues until she is replaced by the seated Virgin and Child in 1059 in the seals of Constantine III Leichoudes.[37]

However, already with the patriarchate of Sergios II (1001–19), a change in the iconography of the frontal Hodegetria is recognizable (Fig. 14). The Virgin holds her head slightly inclined toward her child, a gesture of affection and a sign of her motherly nature. Now also the label M̅H̅P̅ Θ̅Y̅ enters the iconography of the seals and appears on either side of her figure.[38]

She possibly becomes the protectress of the patriarchs because Christ was used on the imperial seals—an appropriate choice for the emperors, since Christ invested them with their power. In any case, the Virgin seems more appropriate than Christ for the patriarch who, in his capacity as head of the clergy is, like the Virgin, the mediator between the people and God.

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[32] R. Cormack, "The Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 37, fig. 4. Cf. idem, "The Apse Mosaics of S. Sophia at Thessaloniki," Δελτ.Χριστ.'Αρχ.'Ετ. 10 (1980–81), 111–35; he redates the mosaic of the Virgin to the 11th century.

[33] P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and the Whittemore Collection*, III, Part 2 (Washington, D.C., 1973), 508, 512, pl. xxxiv.

[34] K. Corrigan, "The Ivory Scepter of Leo VI: A Statement of Post-Iconoclastic Imperial Ideology," *ArtB* 60 (1978), 407–16.

[35] G. Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, II, ed. J. Nesbitt (Berne, 1984), no. 5.

[36] Ibid., no. 7.

[37] Ibid., no. 16A.

[38] Ibid., no. 12.

The mosaic of the Deesis in the patriarchal room above the vestibule (Fig. 15), restored after Iconoclasm (second half of the 9th century),[39] should be seen as a direct reference to this particular intercessory function of the Church, symbolized here by the theme of the Deesis as such. It is not accidental that in the later centuries, probably after the reconquest of Constantinople, the same theme of the Deesis was set up again in the south gallery when this was used as a hall for the assembly of church councils.[40]

Mary, although now mother and more actively participating as the closest intercessor with Christ, retained, in representations of an official nature such as the decoration of an apse, what Photios described as an "expression of a detached and imperturbable mood." On the other hand, the intimate and emotional side of Mary's motherhood began to enter images used in more private circumstances, whether in a private chapel, on an icon in one's home, in a manuscript, or on a seal. There, artists and patrons felt more free to minimize the formality of the Virgin and give rein to the exploration of her more emotive and motherly qualities. A dimension that had been missing before entered into Byzantine art. The results of this more expressive direction include many of the well-known later Byzantine works, mainly icons, for example, the famous Vladimir icon of the twelfth century.

One of the earliest surviving depictions of this maternal sentiment is in a wall icon in the New Church of Tokalı dating to the tenth century.[41] In a niche to the left of the central apse is a remarkable Virgin with the Christ child (Fig. 16). She holds the relatively small child pressed against her cheek in a tender embrace. One hand supports the head, the other the child's knees. This image seems to have been of special importance since, as Annabel Wharton has pointed out, the slab of the parapet in front of it was cut down to make it more

visible.[42] A thick layer of soot covering the painting indicates that it had an oil lamp burning in front of it. We do not know whether a specific meaning was attached to the theme of the embrace at this period, but it seems that this type of tender relationship of Mary with her child became a favored subject in Cappadocian churches during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Several examples survive, unfortunately not in very good condition.[43]

A large number of these depictions in Cappadocian churches, expressing Mary's intimate relationship with her child, are clearly votive icons, according to Nicole Thierry. They are set up with painted frames as if they were panel icons, and are frequently found on the south wall of the church.[44] A Palaiologan example of this tradition is found in the Parekklesion of the fourteenth-century Chora church of Theodore Metochites (Fig. 17). On the south wall, a standing Mary embraces her child by almost bending her whole body over him.

Interestingly, even at this late period the distinction we have observed between the formal and the intimate representations of the Virgin is still maintained. In the larger church with the mosaic decoration, the more official church of the monastic foundation, the type chosen for the wall icon of the Virgin is that of the Hodegetria rather than the affectionately embracing mother (Fig. 18). The child is held a bit further away, which now allows the mother to "turn her affectionate gaze toward her offspring," to quote Photios once again. In this case too, the image is an icon and not an apse painting. However, we perceive the influence of motherly qualities even on one of the oldest images, the Hodegetria.

The extent and degree of this human dimension in the art of late Byzantine society provides ample visual testimony—in this case, if I am not mistaken, more impressive than the textual evidence—for the emotive power of motherhood.

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[39] R. Cormack and E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp," *DOP* 31 (1977), 175–251, esp. 213–19.

[40] T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul* (Boston, 1952).

[41] A. W. Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise: Tenth-Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*, DOS 22 (Washington, D.C., 1986), 26.

[42] Epstein, *Tokalı*, 9, 26.

[43] N. Thierry, "La Vierge de tendresse à l'époque macédonienne," *Zograf* 10 (1979), 59–70.

[44] Ibid., 63.