THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE KOIMESIS: ITS SOURCES AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

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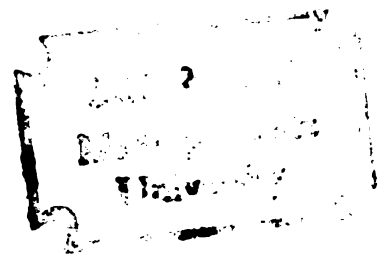

ABSTRACT

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE KOIMESIS: ITS SOURCES AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

By

Rosalie Baryames

The purpose of this study is to investigate possible sources of the iconography of the Koimesis of the Virgin in Byzantine art, decide upon their influence on the development of the scene, and illustrate this influence with visual examples.

The Koimesis of the Virgin does not appear in Byzantine art until after the removal of the Iconoclastic prohibition against images in 843. Because the Koimesis scene which emerges in the late ninth and early tenth century is a fully developed composition, it appears that earlier examples existed which are now lost to us. This lack of pre-Iconoclastic portrayals necessitates the study of certain factors which may have determined the iconography of the scene.

Part One of the thesis covers the description and evaluation of the possible sources of the iconography: apocryphal narrations of the Koimesis of the Virgin, theological explanations of the Koimesis by the Greek Fathers, a seventh-century wall image of the Virgin in death from the Basilica of Holy Sion, western Assumption scenes, ancient Greek and Roman death scenes, and the possibility of a Coptic origin for the scene.

In Part Two, I have divided the tenth- and eleventh-century Koimesis scenes into two categories on the basis of their stylistic and iconographic differences. The scenes are given detailed descriptions and analyses. Attention is given to those features of the Koimesis scenes that stem from the sources discussed in Part One.

The results of this study indicate that both the theological decisions of the Greek Fathers concerning the Koimesis of Mary and the Koimesis apocryphal narrations were instrumental in the formation of the scene. The wall image from the Basilica of Holy Sion not only points to the existence of other early Koimesis representations but gives evidence that the basic compositional form of the Koimesis scene was in use as early as the seventh century. Although western Assumption scenes were not used as models, ancient death scenes were most likely drawn upon by Byzantine artists in the formation of the Koimesis scene. The possibility of an early Coptic origin for the iconography remains in need of firmer supporting evidence.

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Rosalie Baryames

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To my husband whose steady encouragement fueled my determination to accomplish this research, and to my children whose gentle prodding and unshakable faith in my abilities pre-ordained not only a beginning for this project but its completion.

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The enthusiastic encouragement I received from Dr. Molly Teasdale Smith made this undertaking a most rewarding experience. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Smith for her generous assistance and patient guidance. Her numerous suggestions left an imprint on this manuscript and on my budding knowledge in the field of art history.

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INTRODUCTION

A circuitous quest for the possible sources of the iconography of the Koimesis of the Virgin in Byzantine art is recounted in the first eight chapters of this study. To my knowledge, the origin of the iconography of scenes of the Koimesis, a major feast of the Eastern Church, has not been the subject of any published research of an extensive scope. Virgil Vatasianu touches upon several possible sources in developing his hypothesis of a Coptic origin for the iconography.[1] However, he does not investigate classical death scenes or the effects of the theological attitudes of the Greek Fathers toward the feast, both of which may have had an important effect on the type of composition and iconographic format that was selected for the Koimesis scene.[2]

The feast of the Koimesis of the Theotokos,[3] the Mother of God, is celebrated as one of the major holy days of the Eastern

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[1]Virgil Vatasianu, "La 'Dormitio Virginis'," Ephemeris Dacoramana Annuario della Sculoa Romena, 6 (1935), 1-49.

[2]Vatasianu, 2, mentions and discards the suggestion of Olaf Sinding, Mariä Tod und Himmelfahrt (Christiana: 1903), 59-60, 68, that funerary scenes from the Vienna Genesis were the source of the iconography of the Koimesis.

[3]Greek word, meaning bearer of God, from the words Θεός, God, and τόκος, childbirth, according to Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexikon, 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

Orthodox Church. The Greek term Koimesis,[4] which refers to the act of falling asleep, reflects the teachings of the Eastern Church regarding man and death. Central to the faith is the belief that death, which is looked upon as mankind's inheritance from the sin of Adam, was conquered by Christ through his resurrection.[5] The ancient Paschal hymn proclaims that "Christ is risen from the dead, having trampled down death by death."[6] Thus death is not an end but the beginning of a spiritual after-life according to Christian belief. At the time of the last judgment, when the resurrection of the dead is to take place, the body will be awakened to join the soul in participation in the eternal life.[7]

In the tenth century, a fresh outpouring of religious art was created to fill the visual void left by the destructive fury of the Iconoclasts.[8] Numerous scenes of the Koimesis began to emerge

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[4]From the verb, κοιμάω, to fall asleep, ibid.

[5]Sergei Bulgakov, "The Joy of the Church, Sermons and Instructions," trans. Asheleigh E. Moorehouse, Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought, Alexander Schmemann, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 300-309.

[6]Ibid., 309.

[7]As stated in the Nicene Creed. See Isabel Florence Hapgood, Service Book of the Holy Apostolic Church (New York: Syrian Antiochian Archiocese, 1956), 100. Monastics of the Eastern Orthodox Church, to this day, continue to refer to a deceased person as a "sleeping person," not as a "dead person," an affirmation of their belief in the transitory nature of death. Interview with Germanos, Bishop of Arianzos, Istanbul, January 21, 1977.

[8]The Iconoclastic controversies are divided into two periods. The first lasted from 726 to 780 while the second ran from 813 to 843. John Beckwith, Art of Constantinople: An Introduction to Byzantine Art, 330-1453, 2nd ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1961), 172.

at this time (Figure 1). The iconographic format used in these representations remained basically the same throughout the Byzantine era.

The mature manner in which the tenth-century scenes portrayed the Koimesis of the Theotokos strongly suggests the existence of an earlier period of development. Although Koimesis scenes may have been fashioned prior to the close of the Iconoclastic epoch in 843, we know of the existence of only one such Koimesis portrayal: a seventh-century wall image from the Basilica of Holy Sion at Jerusalem (Figure 2).[9]

For a better understanding of the origins and development of the iconography of the Koimesis of the Theotokos, we turn to the formation of the feast of the Koimesis. A brief history of the feast of the Koimesis of the Virgin is contained in the Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst.[10] Edmund M. Jones and Duhr also trace the early development of the commemoration of this event.[11] A more extensive history is found in Jugie's weighty work on the death and assumption of the Virgin.[12]

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[9]Carl Mommert, Die Dormitio und das Grundstück auf dem traditionellem Zion (Leipzig: 1899), 91.

[10]Klaus Wessel, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann), 2:1256-62.

[11]"The Iconography of the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God in Byzantine Tradition," Eastern Churches Quarterly 9 (1951), 101-13; Joseph Duhr, "La Dormition de Marie dans l'art chrétien," Nouvelle Revue Théologique 72 (1950), 134-57.

[12]Martin Jugie, La mort et l'assomption de la sainte Vierge: étude historico-doctrinale, Studi e Testi, vol. 114 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Vaticana Apostolica), 56-186.

Because the death of Mary is not among the events described in the New Testament, it is necessary to examine the apocryphal records of the oral tradition which narrate the death and entombment of Mary. Greek and Latin verions of the Koimesis apocrypha are contained in Tischendorf.[13] The compilations of the Koimesis apocrypha by John of Thessalonika are found in Greek in Patrologia Orientalis.[14] Jugie includes French translations of the two earliest Latin versions and one selection from the collections of John of Thessalonika.[15] English translations of Coptic narrations of the Koimesis apocrypha are included in a work on the apocrypha by James.[16] His volume also contains English translations of Latin, Greek, and Syriac Koimesis apocrypha, some in their entirety and others in abridged form.

The writings of the Greek Fathers provide a primary source which reveals the formation of the orthodox theological interpretation of this supernatural event. Beginning with the works of the Patriarch Germanus,[17] several of the Greek Fathers seek to weave the theological justification of the occurrence into the interlocking

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[13]Konstantin von Tischendorf, Apocalypses apocryphae (Leipzig: 1866; reprint ed., Hildesheim: George Olms, 1966).

[14]F. Graffin, R. Graffin, and F. Nau (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1897-), vol. 19, as in Jugie, La mort, 139.

[15]Jugie, La mort, 139-50.

[16]Montague Rhodes James, The Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

[17]Migne, P. G., 98:339-84.

network of Christian thought. John Damascenos and Theodore Studite contributed to this effort with sermons on the Koimesis of the Theotokos.[18]

References to the wall image from the Basilica of Holy Sion mentioned above are found in certain records of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The journal of the pilgrim Theodosius and the breviary of an anonymous traveler to the Holy Land describe the Basilica of Holy Sion which once contained a wall image of the Koimesis of the Theotokos.[19] Meehan has written a history of the life of Adamnan, a Celtic abbot, whose account of a Holy Land pilgrimage contains a diagram of the Basilica of Holy Sion including the site of the Death of the Virgin (Figure 3).[20] Meehan's volume on Adamnan contains this drawing with an English translation of the Abbot's account. Venerable Bede's abridgment of Adamnan's account is located in Patrologia Latina, Volume 94.[21] A sketch of the wall image from the Holy Sion Basilica taken from a manuscript of Bede's commentary on the history of the Basilica is reproduced in Mommert's volume.[22] His study also includes a history of early pilgrimage accounts of visits to the Holy Land.

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[18] Ibid., 96:699-762; Athanasios Yiebtits, Saint John Damaskenos: The Theotokos [in Greek] (Athens: Blessed John the Russian Society, 1970).

[19] J. Gildemeister, Theodosius: de situ terrae sanctae und der Brevarius de Hierosolyma (Bonn: 1882).

[20] Denis Meehan, ed., Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis (Dublin: 1958).

[21] Migne, 94:1179-90.

[22] Mommert, 90-93.

Western scenes of the Assumption of Mary from the sixth to the ninth century are meticulously illustrated and described by Leclercq in an article on the treatment of the Assumption in art.[23] A two-volume work by Fleury is devoted to the artistic treatment of the Assumption of the Virgin in western art.[24] The perceptive suggestions of Dr. Molly Teasdale Smith were especially valuable for contrasting western scenes of the Assumption with the Byzantine Koimesis in art.

The fact that Byzantine artists made use of classical and late antique models in formulating the iconography of religious scenes calls for an examination of death depictions from both Greek and Roman art. In a published dissertation, Rush examines the influence of Greek and Roman customs on Christian death and burial practices.[25] In addition, the book, Greek Burial Customs, reveals ancient traditions which may have carried over into Christian practice.[26] Both volumes contain illustrations which are included in this work as possible forerunners of Byzantine Koimesis scenes.

For general historic background of the Byzantine milieu, Ostrogorsky's history and a two-volume work by Vasiliev provided the

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[23]Henri Leclercq, "Assumption," in Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, Fernand Cabrol and Henry Leclercq (Paris: 1908-1953), vol. 1, part 2.

[24]Rohault de Fleury, La sainte Vierge: études archéologiques et iconographiques, 2 vols. (Paris: 1878).

[25]Alfred C. Rush, Death and Burial in Christian Antiquity (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1941).

[26]Donna Kurtz and John Boardman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971).

necessary information.[27] Modern day commentators on Orthodox theology, Pelikan, Papadopoulos, and Meyendorff, were of assistance in interpreting the meaning of the pronouncements of the Greek Fathers on the Koimesis.[28]

In the final chapters of this thesis, nine examples of the Koimesis from the early post-Iconoclastic era--tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries--are examined. They have been chosen on the basis of style and iconography to illustrate the early development of the scene. A need yet remains for a comprehensive, chronological study of the iconography of the Koimesis.

Works on early post-Iconoclastic art were examined in a fruitless search for Koimesis examples that might point to a solution of the problem of the origin of the scene. Tenth-century wall paintings from the church of the Koimesis at Nicaia no longer included a Koimesis scene when they were photographed before the destruction of the building in 1922.[29] Early examples of Cappadocian

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[27]George Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, trans. Joan Hussey (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957); A. A. Vasiliev, History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453, 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

[28]Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, vol. 2, The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700) (University of Chicago Press, 1974); Gerasimos Papadopoulos, "The Revelatory Character of the New Testament and Holy Tradition in the Orthodox Church," The Orthodox Ethos, A. J. Philippou, ed. (Oxford: Holywell Press, 1964), vol. 1: 98-111; John Meyendorff, The Orthodox Church: Its Past and Its Role in the World Today (New York: Pantheon Books, Random House, 1962); Byzantine Theology (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974).

[29]Theodor Schmit, Die Koimesis-Kirche von Nikaia (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927).

wall paintings found in a two-volume work by de Jerphanion include Koimesis scenes from this remote area.[30] Because these paintings mirror other Koimesis scenes of that era and are in poor condition, I have not used them among my illustrations. A lengthy article by Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev on the development of the Koimesis in the late medieval art of Serbia and Bulgaria also includes several early post-Iconoclastic scenes which are examined in this thesis.[31]

I have culled illustrations of the Koimesis in Byzantine art from various sources, as credited in the list of figures which accompanies this study. With but few exceptions, the commentary included with these illustrations was minimal. In a brief article, Weitzmann presents an analysis of a Koimesis scene from an ivory triptych.[32] In a collaborative work by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, ivories of the Middle Byzantine period, including a number of Koimesis scenes, are classified stylistically and iconographically.[33] Explanations for the dating of several of the Koimesis ivories are included in this work.

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[30]G. de Jerphanion, Les églises rupestres de cappadocia, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Gauthner, 1925), vol. 1, part 2.

[31]L. Wratislaw-Mitrovic and N. Okunev, "La dormition de la Sainte Vierge dans la peinture médiévale," Byzantoslavica 3 (1931), 134-80.

[32]Kurt Weitzmann, "Central Plaque of a Triptych: the Koimesis," Catalog of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Washington, D.C.: 1972), 3:70-73.

[33]Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.-XIII. Jahrhunderts (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1934).

The evolution of the Koimesis continued well into post-Byzantine times; however, this study will be limited to examples from the tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries.

PART ONE

SOURCES OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE KOIMESIS

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The decision of the Council of Ephesus, 431, that the manhood and divinity of Christ were united in one person, stamping the Church seal of approval upon the doctrine of Incarnation, had the important side effect of verifying a lofty position for Mary. Henceforth the orthodox faithful with the full approbation of the Church hierarchy would call Mary the Theotokos. This Greek term means Bearer or Mother of God. Nestorius, leader of the defeated faction at the Council, insisted that Mary be called Christotokos, a word signifying Mother of Christ, for he believed that she had given birth to Christ the man not the divine Christ. His acceptance of Mary as Christotokos only was an extension of his understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human in the person of Christ. Following the defeat of Nestorius and his adherents at the Ephesian Council, the veneration of the Theotokos was expanded.

In the fourth century, the only feast of the Virgin which was observed was the Annunciation, a scripturally founded event.[1] By the sixth century, the marian cycle included the feasts of the Conception of St. Anne, the Presentation of the Virgin, the Nativity of Mary, and the Koimesis, also referred to as the Falling Asleep of

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[1]Jones, 102; Duhr, 134.

the Theotokos.[2] All are based upon apocryphal, not gospel, narrations. From the ninth century onward, the Koimesis became the most important of the Virgin's feasts,[3] as it remains to this day. The length of the fasting period that precedes the feast, a full two weeks, underlines the importance of the day.[4]

The event was already honored by the time of Justinian's reign, 527-565, with annual liturgical rites held on three different dates in the far-flung Christian world.[5] This explains the pronouncement of Emperor Maurikos [Maurice], at the beginning of the seventh century, selecting August 15 as the universal date for the commemoration of the Koimesis.[6] The feast, initially supported by monastics and laity, gradually gained acceptance by the entire Church and overcame the undercurrent reluctance to acknowledge the miraculous occurrence. However, it never became a matter of dogmatic belief, that is, the faithful were not required to accept the fact that Mary was bodily transported to Heaven.[7]

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[2]Jones, 102; Duhr, 134.

[3]Jones, 102-103.

[4]Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 306. Ware points out that only Easter, Christmas, and at times the feasts of Sts. Peter and Paul are preceded by longer fasting periods.

[5]Duhr, 134.

[6]As recorded by Nikephorus Callistos, a fourteenth-century writer, Migne, P. G., 147:292. Nicephorus' facts are generally accepted as correct.

[7]Ware, Church, 264-65.

According to Pelikan, many of the mariological observances were first believed and practiced by the laity and even celebrated in the liturgy before being fully developed by the religious thinkers of the Church.[8] Thus the early veneration of the Koimesis of the Theotokos by the faithful before the hierarchy fully accepted the feast was not unusual. Nor was it unusual that the bodily assumption of Mary into Heaven was never the subject of conciliar action in the Eastern Orthodox Church. A twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theologian states that the Ecumenical Councils are not the "ultimate criteria" of the faith.[9] Rather, the responsibility of establishing and preserving the faith is shared by the Councils with apostolic heritage and with tradition. By tradition he means those practices and beliefs of the Church that are a "continually evolving interpretation and development of . . . apostolic teachings," in contrast to the fixed character of dogmatic decisions.[10]

The early popular interest in the Koimesis of the Theotokos, prompting liturgical rites for the feast by the mid-sixth century, followed by the delayed official recognition in the seventh century, may explain the lag in honoring the Koimesis in art. It is in the seventh century, when the universal observance of the feast is decreed, that the Greek Fathers begin to pen lengthy works on the Koimesis and the scene of the death of the Virgin in the Church of Holy Sion is first noted (Figure 2).

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[8]Pelikan, 141.

[9]Papadopoulos, 101.

[10]Ibid., 102.

CHAPTER II

APOCRYPHA

Much of the voluminous apocryphal material written about the major New Testament figures satisfied a popular demand for details, not offered by the Scriptures, about the lives of persons highly venerated and revered by the Christian faithful. It is not surprising to find Mary the subject of a number of apocryphal stories.

The growing devotion to the Virgin, noticeable at the Council of Ephesus, quite probably necessitated an explanation for the circumstances of her death. The anniversary of the death of a saint marked the feast day of the holy person in the Christian church and was celebrated as the glorious occasion of his entrance into Paradise.[1]

A remark of Epiphanius Constantiensis (died A.D. 493) that no one knows anything about the last days of Mary is followed by a passage from Luke 2:35, "a sword shall pierce through thy own soul," which Epiphanius implies may indicate a martyr's death for Mary.[2] In his reference to the lack of any knowledge about Mary's death and

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[1] Rush, 72-87.

[2] Migne, P. G., 42:715-16; 737-38. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1910), 3:426-27, dates the original association of the passage from Luke with Mary's death and possible martyrdom to the time of Origen (ca. 185-254) but gives no source for this early date.

burial, he pointedly brings in remarks about Elijah who did not suffer death but was borne to heaven in a chariot (II Kings 2:11) and to John the Theologian who also was transferred to heaven after his physical death, according to then current apocryphal stories. However, Epiphanius avoids attributing such a final destiny to Mary.[3] He sets a tone which will henceforth characterize the Byzantine concept of the Koimesis: an incomprehensible event, partially shrouded in mystery.

By the sixth century, this interest in the death of Mary is attested to by the voluminous amount of apocryphal literature that had been written on the subject.[4] It is generally agreed that the surviving texts are compilations of earlier Koimesis apocrypha but opinions differ as to the approximate date of the origin of the story. None of the extant texts can be placed earlier than the beginning of the fifty century according to Hennecke.[5] James believes the nucleus of the story was formed in the third century and suggests an Egyptian origin for the legend.[6]

Some twenty versions of the Koimesis story have survived, including several fragmentary manuscripts. A list of the apocryphal

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[3]Wessel, Reallexikon, 2:1256.

[4]Edgar Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), 1:429; Jugie, La mort, 103-06.

[5]Ibid., 106.

[6]James, xix, 194. The possibility of an Egyptian origin for the Koimesis iconography will be considered in Chapter VII.

stories which are used in this study is located in Appendix A. Included are the dates which have been assigned to them and the locations of these versions.

Transistus Mariae B[7]

This Latin apocryphal story, probably dated about 530,[8] pseudonymously told by Meliton, a second-century bishop of Sardis, begins twenty-two years after Christ's death and resurrection when Mary is living in the house belonging to John the Theologos' parents. An angel appears to Mary with the news of her approaching death. The angel presents Mary with a palm branch which is to be carried before her bier as it is taken to the tomb three days hence. Mary asks that all the apostles be present at her death. In answer to her request, John is miraculously transported to the Virgin upon a cloud. Later the other apostles arrive by the same marvelous method. Mary tells John that she will die in three days and shows him her burial garments as well as the palm branch left by the angel.

Three days later as Mary, the apostles, and three unnamed virgins are gathered, Christ appears to them with a host of angels. Shortly Mary dies, having already placed herself upon her funeral bed. A light of inexpressible whiteness is seen by the apostles.

Christ orders Peter to carry Mary's body toward the east of the city where he will find a new sepulchre awaiting. Christ then

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[7]See Appendix A.

[8]Jugie, La mort, 112.

entrusts his mother's soul to the care of the Archangel Michael. Accompanied by Gabriel, Michael carries the soul to heaven.

As the three virgins prepare the body for entombment, they find it pure and undefiled, emitting a sweet fragrance. The body is carried to the sepulchre by the apostles with John leading the procession and carrying the palm, Peter walking at the head of the bier and Paul at the foot. During the procession a Hebrew, Jephonias, attempts to upset the bier, but an angel with a sword of fire cuts off his hands which remain dangling from the side of the bier. Jephonias begs Peter for assistance. Peter causes his hands to be rejoined to the mutilated arms. Following this delay, the apostles deposit the body within the new sepulchre in the Valley of Josaphat, also known as the Valley of Gethsemane. Then they place themselves at the entrance to the tomb.

Christ reappears to the disciples asking their advice concerning the proper deposition of Mary's body. They recommend the resurrection of her body and its removal to heaven. Christ bids the Archangel Michael to bring the soul of Mary to him. After the archangel delivers the soul to Christ, he removes the stone from the tomb entrance. Christ commands Mary to arise from her tomb whereupon he delivers her body to the angels for its transport to heaven.

Observations

The portion of the story with a messenger angel bearing a palm branch to Mary corresponds to the scene found in the earliest-known Koimesis, that of the Basilica of Holy Sion (Figure 2). Early

post-Iconoclastic Koimesis scenes (Figures 1, 18-26) appear to draw heavily upon the apocryphal stories. The presence of Christ at the death scene and his entrusting of the soul of Mary to Michael mirror the apocryphal descriptions. The placement of John, Paul, and Peter in the funeral procession, the presence of all or at times eleven of the apostles, the feeling of dignity and sanctity which imbues the scene may also be traced to the apocryphal narrations.[9] In the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, the scene was expanded to include the arrival of the apostles on clouds, the three virgins present at the death, and the incident of Jephonias.

The description of Mary's resurrection from the tomb and her removal to heaven varies considerably in certain of the other narrations. One may conjecture that these variances are an indication of contemporary discussions concerning the manner of Mary's translation to heaven.

Note should also be taken of the emphasis on the purity and fragrance of Mary's body, a point repeated in most of the other versions. This point may be indicative of the Coptic origin for the apocrypha, as James suggests.[10] Vatasianu brings in the possibility of a Coptic origin for the apocrypha to support his hypothesis that

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[9]The presence of only eleven apostles in some of the Koimesis scenes is attributable to apocryphal stories in which Thomas is unable to be present at the death of the Virgin, James, 216.

[10]Ibid., 194.

the iconography of the Koimesis was based on ancient Egyptian death scenes.[11]

Homily of John of Thessalonika[12]

As this Greek narration does not contain any mention of the feast of the Koimesis, Jugie suggests a date shortly before the imperial edict proclaiming that the feast should be celebrated throughout the realm on the fifteenth of August. He places it between the years 550 and 580, approximately.[13]

The story begins with Mary, as was her custom, praying at the Holy Sepulchre when the Archangel Gabriel appears to her and announces that she will soon depart from this world. Upon learning this, Mary immediately leaves for Bethlehem, accompanied by three virgins. Her journey completed, she asks for an incense burner that she might pray, beseeching Christ to send John to her as well as the other apostles. John quickly arrives, having been swooped up in a cloud through the power of the Holy Spirit. From this point the narrative changes to the first person with John continuing the story.

The Theotokos tells John of her approaching death and of her fear that the Jews have sworn to burn her body. He assures her that her body will remain inviolate. The remainder of the apostles are

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[11]Vatasianu, 37. For further discussion of this hypothesis, see Chapter VIII.

[12]See Appendix A.

[13]Jugie, La Mort, 117.

now gathered up on clouds and brought to Mary from all the far-flung regions in which they were preaching. Those who had already died are resurrected to be brought to the Theotokos.

The entire group is wondrously transported back to Jerusalem where Mary's death takes place. The Theotokos is preparing incense that she might pray when Christ appears in the room with a host of angels. He tells Mary that her body will be translated into Paradise where her soul will reside for eternity. Christ turns to Peter to tell him that the time has arrived to begin "the song of praise." When the Theotokos dies, Christ receives her holy and spotless soul into his hands. A sweet odor and an indescribable light fill the room.

The procession to the sepulchre is interrupted by the Jephonias incident. After depositing the body in a new sepulchre, the apostles remain at the entrance. For three days, voices of angels can be heard from within the tomb. On the third day, all is silent. Although they do not witness the event, the apostles realize that the pure body of the Theotokos has been translated into the heavens.

Observations

The details noted in the Latin narration, which later became a part of the traditional iconography of the Koimesis, are also included in the Greek version. The use of censers and incense, described in the Greek version, is incorporated into the Koimesis scene. Christ's instructions to Peter to begin the "hymn of praise"

may have suggested the placement of the apostle at the head of the bier. Peter's use of the censer (Figure 1) may also have been suggested by these instructions for it was customary to burn incense while chanting prayers.[14]

A major difference arises in the description of the assumption of Mary. In the Greek narration, the bodily assumption is predicted by Christ and is presumed by the apostles to have taken place, yet no one witnesses the event. Through the ensuing centuries, Byzantine tradition will reflect this version. In contrast, early western Assumption scenes are often centered on the bodily ascension of Mary (Figures 4-7) which is witnessed and described in the Latin version.[15]

A large number of extraneous details included in this story are omitted in the condensation. This characteristic, shared with "Transistus Mariae B," strongly points to earlier tales that served as sources for these later versions.[16] Mary's unexplained departure for Bethlehem, in the Greek narration, is but one example of these numerous, lengthy embellishments. Here, too, we encounter items that hint at a possible Coptic origin, such as Mary's concern that her body remain inviolate and the noticeable fragrance of her body after death.

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[14]Hapgood, 74, 78.

[15]See Chapter V.

[16]James, xix.

Coptic Discourse of Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem[17]

Two additional persons mentioned by name who are present when Mary's final hour arrives are James the apostle and Mary Magdalene. Peter and James are sent to fetch linen clothes, spices, and perfumes for the burial. Mary explains that Jesus has told her he will hide her body in the earth until the day when he raises it from its resting place. She tells of his promise to her that her body will remain incorruptible. After preparing her burial clothes, Mary places herself upon the bier, facing east. When Mary dies, her soul leaps to the bosom of Christ who wraps it in a garment of light. As the apostles bear the body to the Valley of Josaphat, a group of Hebrews approach the bier to burn it. The apostles flee, dropping the bier. The Hebrews find the bier to be empty with a sweet odor pervading the spot where the body had rested.

Observations

The preparation of the body for burial is included in this version, in addition to Mary's concern that her body remain unsullied.[18] The use of spices and perfumes, coupled with the reference to preservation of Mary's body in this story, customs which were important and essential to the practice of the ancient Egyptian

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[17] See Appendix A.

[18] Similar preparations are contained in two other Coptic narrations: "Discourse Attributed to Theodosius, Patriarch of Alexandria," James, 198-99, and "Homily Attributed to Evodius, Bishop," James, 194.

religion,[19] may indicate a Coptic origin for this version or merely reflect the background of the Coptic narrator. This interest in the care and purity of the body may also be the result of the Christian attitude toward the deceased.[20] Mary's willing acceptance of death after Christ's reassurances is recaptured in the attitude of the Virgin in the Koimesis scenes. The description of the soul leaping to Christ's bosom calls to mind the small human figure, held by Christ in the Koimesis scene. The fact that in this version, Mary lies facing towards the east, that is, to the right, corresponds to the usual orientation of the body in the Koimesis.[21] It is the exception when the arrangement is reversed (Figures 1 and 26).

Although the events at the sepulchre differ, here as in the Greek story the ascension of Mary is not witnessed. It should be pointed out that in two other Coptic apocryphal homilies, the apostles are present at Mary's ascension.[22] As noted above on page 18, the various methods ascribed for Mary's bodily removal to heaven may be the result of the uncertainty that existed concerning the manner of that transfer.[23]

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[19] The Columbia Encyclopedia (New York: P. F. Collier, 1936), s. v. "Egyptian Religion."

[20] Rush, 103; see below, 51-52.

[21] The directional concepts of right and east were identical for the ancients and for Christians, F. Dölger, "Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit und der Schwarze," Liturgie geschichtliche Forschungen, 2:37-48, as in Rush, 69.

[22] James, 197, 200-01.

[23] Epiphanius, Migne, P. G., 42:715-16.

Conclusions

The apocrypha offered a wealth of material for the artist searching for highlights and details for the Koimesis scenes. Starting with the early post-Iconoclastic works, new elements were continually added to representations of the Koimesis throughout the Byzantine period. These additions very likely were derived from descriptions in the apocrypha.

In each of the narrations summarized above, as well as those not included herein, the ascension or assumption of Mary's body is the climax of the story. This glorification of the body of Mary is the heart of the feast of the Koimesis.[24] Yet Byzantine artists shunned any representation of this miraculous high point of Mary's death and concentrated on her dormant body and Christ's appearance at her death to receive her soul. To uncover the possible reasons for this emphasis, we turn to the Fathers of the Church.

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[24]John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 165.

CHAPTER III

THE GREEK FATHERS

A century elapsed following Epiphanius Constantiensis' reflections on the Koimesis of the Virgin before we find mention of this event in the manuscripts of the Greek Fathers. A brief notation occurs in the essay, "On the Divine Names," by the late fifth-century mystic, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Pseudo-Dionysius touches on the moment when he and Hierotheus, together with Jacobus [James], Peter, Timothy, and other of their "holy brothers," are gathered to behold the body of the "source of Life which received the incarnate Body," that is, the body of Mary.[1] These sparse remarks are noteworthy for they contain the first patristic mention of Mary's death which accepts her death as an actuality.

Not until the seventh century, after the Koimesis apocryphal stories had been circulating for two or more centuries to an increasingly wide-spread and receptive audience,[2] do the Fathers begin to write at any length on the subject of the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos. John of Thessalonika, around the year 620, took on the task of collecting and correcting the extensive Koimesis apocryphal stories that were known by that time, filling some fifteen manuscripts

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[1] Migne, P. G., 3:681.

[2] Vatasianu, 6.

with his editions.[3] John remarks that in his day, the feast was celebrated almost everywhere except for certain localities.[4] He explains that he undertook the work of editing the texts because he believed they suffered from heretical distortions, inconsistent with Christian beliefs. He reasons that these distortions resulted in a neglect of the feast by the Church. Thus, he continues, the event was not commemorated as fully as its importance warranted.[5] It has been suggested by Künstle that the Iconoclasts displayed an especial hatred for the Koimesis of Mary.[6] This hatred may have been an outgrowth of the reluctance to which John refers and which existed among the hierarchy rather than among the monastics and laity, the strong supporters of Mary and of the feast of the Koimesis.[7] Perhaps this Iconoclastic phenomenon was a continuation of an undercurrent of opposition to certain facets of the veneration of Mary noted by

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[3]Jones, 104. The compilations of the Koimesis apocrypha by John of Thessalonika are found in Patrologia Orientalis, 19:344-438; selections from the compilations made by John of Thessalonika are contained by Tischendorf, 95-112.

[4]Patrologia Orientalis, 19:376, as in Jugie, La Mort, 139. John's episcopal seat, Thessalonika, was one of the localities which did not celebrate the feast at that time.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Karl Künstle, Ikonographie der Christlichen Kunst (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1928), cited by Jones, 106; Steven Runciman, Byzantine Style and Civilization (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975), 83, remarks on the hatred which Emperor Constantine V, 741-775, directed toward the veneration of Mary.

[7]Vatasianu, 5.

John of Thessalonika and evident as early as the Council of Ephesus.[8] John does not describe the nature of the distortions.

It should be noted that his editions include both types of ascensions for Mary, those with witnesses and those that occurred unobserved. The Greek narrations that have survived are those that were recorded by John of Thessalonika.

It appears that by the early seventh century the hesitancy and uncertainty about the feast of the Koimesis, noted in Epiphanius' writings, were evaporating because of the increasingly strong devotion of the laity for the Virgin.[9] Sophronios, an early seventh-century Patriarch of Jerusalem (d. 638), in his poem of praise to Mary includes her death among the wondrous occasions in Mary's life.[10]

The theological justifications for the unusual events of the Koimesis are set forth by Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 733), in one of his sermons on the Koimesis.[11] The occasion was the consecration of a church to the Holy Theotokos. Germanus points out that Mary actually experienced death for she, as all human beings must, bowed to the laws of nature with her death.[12] The miraculous transfer of her body to heaven was a prefiguration of

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[8]Ware, Church, 33.

[9]Vatasianu, 6.

[10]Migne, P. G., 87:3821.

[11]Ibid., 98:339-84.

[12]Ibid., 98:376-77.

the Paradise that is attainable to all men. Germanus looks upon Mary's metastasis as an anticipation of man's resurrection from the dead when the day of the Last Judgment arrives.[13] In his interpretation of the event, Germanus appears to identify Mary's bodily transfer to heaven with the Christian belief that the body will be reunited with the soul after the final judgment.[14] The Paradise referred to by Germanus is the final destination of the good after the Last Judgment which will take place before Christ.[15]

The Eastern Church, noting the silence of the scriptures on the state of the soul between the time of death and the Last Judgment, refrained from offering explanations or descriptions of that interim period.[16] Thus, Christ's presence at Mary's death, as well as her bodily transfer which united her soul and body in heaven by-passing an intermediate period, became a prefiguration of the Last Judgment and its consequences. Moreover, the knowledge of Mary's bodily transfer assured the Christian worshipper that the Mother of God was of such pure spirit that upon her death she was taken to Paradise without undergoing the intervening period necessary for all other human beings.

Germanus continues that through Mary, the gates of Paradise, which Eve had closed to mankind, were now reopened.[17] Germanus

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[13] Ibid., 98:304-D.

[14] I Corinthians 15.

[15] Matthew 25:31.

[16] Ware, 259.

[17] Migne, P. G., 98:361-62.

demonstrates the necessity of Mary's death: she could not be spared this happening, for it is "the mortal bowing to nature."[18]

The significance of the fact that Mary suffered death is repeated by John Damascenos (d. 749), a contemporary of Germanus. "O, how she, who in giving birth was placed beyond the laws of nature, now obeys the physical order and the unsullied body is subject to death . . . for even her Lord did not shun the taste of death."[19]

John Damascenos clearly describes the "heavenly journey" of Mary's soul, but when he refers to her metastasis, implying her bodily transfer, he gives no indication of the method of this removal.[20] After discussing the funeral procession of Mary's "unsullied, unblemished, uncorrupted body" to the sepulchre, he marvels: "Your soul did not descend to hades nor was your body corrupted, for your pure body did not remain in the earth, but with your metastasis became a resident of heaven."[21] John Damascenos instructs his congregation that the supernatural event of Mary's death has inspired a confident welcome for death and acceptance of its arrival in place of the age-old fear of death.[22]

Theodore Studite (759-826), who played a major role in the final Iconodule victory, states that Mary suffered death as the

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[18] Ibid., 98:357-58.

[19] Yiebtits, 128.

[20] Ibid., 128-31.

[21] Ibid., 138-39.

[22] Ibid., 134-37.

dutiful daughter of Eve. Her passage to heaven, according to the Studite, which is celebrated on the feastday of the Koimesis, cannot be described in words nor by any other means. The event is beyond human comprehension.[23] In awesome tones, he lauds her life-giving entombment and the life-giving Koimesis through which Mary has vanquished death, man's inheritance from Eve.[24] His comments serve to reinforce those of his predecessors, Germanus and John Damascenos.

Conclusions

From the writings of these Greek Fathers, it is evident that both the bodily as well as spiritual assumption of Mary was firmly believed and celebrated in their times as part of the miraculous occurrences accompanying her death. Yet no explanation or description of the wondrous transfer of Mary's body to heaven is proffered. The reception of her soul by Christ after her death is clearly described in their homilies but, as the Studite explains, the transfer to heaven is an indescribable mystery. Thus, it would appear that at that time the bodily transfer of Mary was accepted without question and without knowledge of the wherewithal.

Such an acceptance is in line with the apophatic approach of the Eastern Church which avoids analytical probing into the meaning of the mysteries of the faith and prefers to refer to them in

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[23] Migne, P. G., 99:721-22.

[24] Ibid., 99:723-24,A; mortality, not original sin, is considered to be mankind's inheritance from Eve, according to Meyendorff, Theology, 165.

negative terms.[25] The religious mysteries were to be accepted on faith as divinely inspired beliefs and were not appropriate subjects for rational analysis and definitions, except when arguments were needed to protect them from heretical distortions.[26]

An additional reason for the avoidance of any description of Mary's bodily assumption may have been the result of the opposition to the growing marian devotion which probably existed before and continued through the Iconoclastic era. Künstle has proposed that scenes depicting the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos did exist before Leo the Third's decree against images but were singled out for violent destruction during the Iconoclastic rampages.[27] Image breaking was not the only activity of the Iconoclasts. They also strove to attain the secularization of the monasteries, monks, and nuns, as well as the removal and destruction of church relics.[28] In addition, they pursued a "particularly violent . . . persecution of the cultus of the Blessed Virgin" which suggests that the Iconodules and their predecessors may have felt the need for cautious moderation in defining the events surrounding Mary's death, an occurrence without the backing of scriptural sources.[29] Thus,

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[25]Ware, Church, 72-73. This approach is embodied in the "negative theology" of Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) and Maximus the Confessor (d. 662).

[26]Ibid., 28, 72.

[27]Künstle, cited by Jones, 106.

[28]Vasiliev, 1:26.

[29]Ibid., 261, citing G. Ostrogorsky, Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites (Breslau: 1929), 29-40; Sinding, 15.

Mary's miraculous assumption, which bordered on a replay of Christ's resurrection, was accepted as a genuine but unwitnessed ascension, therefore indescribable.

An uncertainty among the higher church authorities about the character of the Koimesis, an occurrence that was nurtured and cherished by the Christian laity, as well as the concern, such as that voiced by John of Thessalonica, that heretical distortions must be removed from the story of Mary's death may have brought about a purification of the visual representations of the Koimesis. Thus, only revised depictions of the post-Iconoclastic age would be preserved, while earlier types that had missed the havoc of the image breakers would be eliminated. This may have been a factor in the establishment of the Koimesis portrayals of the post-Iconoclastic age with a uniform compositional format, subject matter, and iconography. It would also explain the absence of pre-Iconoclastic examples of the Koimesis.

The Fathers emphasized Mary's mortality, relating her death in detail. Christ's removal of the soul of his mother to heaven provided a dramatic climax and an aura of sanctification to the death scene. By accepting her death without fear, Mary became an example for the faithful of the proper Christian attitude toward death. Death was not to be looked upon as the end of existence but as a rebirth into the life eternal.

The well-developed artistic compositions of the scene, which appear after the return to the use of images in the year 843, follow the lead of the Fathers in their emphasis on Mary's human death and

Christ's role in the immediate aftermath. The iconographic format leans upon the apocryphal editions of John of Thessalonika. It appears that strong, firm guidance and direction from the theologians shaped the iconographic plan which bursts forth in the polished post-Iconoclastic Koimesis.[30] Mary's Falling Asleep, which results in her deification, is offered as an example and a reminder that death holds no horrors for the believer. The Sticheron, Tone 1, of the Koimesis Vespers service sung in the Eastern Orthodox Church describes the Theotokos' death as her reception of that "glory which belongs to God."[31]

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[30]Ernst Diez and Otto Demus, Byzantine Mosaics in Greece (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 40.

[31]Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, The Meaning of Icons, (Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1969), 215.

CHAPTER IV

A WALL IMAGE FROM THE BASILICA OF HOLY SION

The city of Jerusalem and its environs contained a number of renowned basilicas and other pilgrimage sites which were frequently visited by Christians on their journeys to the Holy Land. One well-known place of worship was the Basilica of Holy Sion, located to the south of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Golgotha.[1] The Basilica of Holy Sion became the repository for the pillar at which Christ was scourged, known as the Column of Flagellation, and was believed to be located at the site of the Pentecost.[2] In the sixth century, pilgrim accounts begin to identify the basilica as the site of Mary's death. It was the location of the only pre-Iconoclastic representation of Mary's death that has survived, a sketch found in Venerable Bede's account of Adamnan's writings (Figure 2).[3] This same century also contained the first reports of a church situated to the east of Jerusalem in the Valley of Josaphat. It contained the sepulchre of the Virgin and was known as the Basilica of Holy Mary.

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[1]Cabrol and Leclercq, s. v. "Jérusalem," M. Abel.

[2]Wilkinson, 157.

[3]Migne, P. L., 95:1182; Mommert, fig. 5.

Basilica of Holy Mary in the Valley of Josaphat

Around the year 530, the pilgrim Theodosius makes mention in his journal of his visit to the church of "Lady Mary" in the Valley of Josaphat.[4] The Brevarius, a journal account by an anonymous Holy Land pilgrim, also records the location of a Basilica of Holy Mary in the Valley of Josaphat. This manuscript, assigned the same date as Theodosius' writings, describes the Basilica as containing the sepulchre of Mary.

Adamnan, abbot of the Celtic monastery of Iona from 679 to 704, preserved in writing the oral account of the Holy Land pilgrimage of Arculf, a bishop of Gaul. Arculf's travels probably occurred between the years 679 and 682.[5] Adamnan records that the bishop often visited the Church of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat while he was in the Holy Land. He describes the church as a two-storied, circular structure. Next to the altar, in the eastern portion of the edifice, an empty stone sepulchre was located. According to the text, it was the sepulchre where the Theotokos had been laid to rest. "But how, or when, or by what persons her holy remains were removed from this sepulchre, or where she awaits the resurrection, no one, as it is said, can know for certain," states Adamnan, echoing Epiphanius' comments.[6]

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[4]Migne, P. G., 33:924; Gildemeister, 34.

[5]Wilkinson, 157.

[6]Meehan, 57-59; Migne, P. G., 42:737-38.

The location of this Basilica in the Valley of Josaphat coincided with the site of Mary's tomb according to the apocryphal stories. Adamnan's comments on the wherewithal of Mary's bodily removal straightforwardly point out that the means is unknown. The Christian worshippers of the Holy Land, headed by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, consistently adhered to the beliefs and practices of the Eastern Church, even after the arrival of their Arab conquerors in the seventh century. Therefore, it is likely that Arculf's impressions of Mary's assumption, as recorded by Adamnan, reflect the attitude of the majority of the faithful in the Eastern Church.

Basilica of Holy Sion

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, is the first to mention a church that appears to be the Basilica of Holy Sion. In his "Catechetical Lectures," dated around 348, he describes an "upper Church of the Apostles," believed to be located on the site of the Pentecost.[7] The aforementioned Theodosius also includes a visit to the Basilica of the Holy Sion in his Journal.[8] Neither he nor Cyril associate the basilica with anything pertaining to the Virgin. But The Brevarius speaks of the Basilica of Holy Sion within which was the "renowned Virgin, enclosed in death in a vaulted receptacle."[9] Exactly what is meant by this remark is difficult to ascertain, yet

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[7]Wilkinson, 157.

[8]Gildemeister, 34.

[9]"Ibi est ella virga inclusa + de arco uuolso," Gildemeister, 35.

it can be said that the remark definitely links the basilica with Mary's death in some inexactly defined manner.

Constantinian Jerusalem was pillaged and burned by the Persians during an attack in 614. After the city was retaken by Emperor Heraclius, between 622 and 628, the reconstruction of the destroyed churches was undertaken by Higoumenos Modestus at the Emperor's behest.[10] A seventh-century Typikon, a book of rubrics used in the Eastern Orthodox Church, indicates that the Church of Sion was among the structures restored by Modestus.[11]

A sketch of the interior of the Basilica of Holy Sion is included in Chapter 18 of Adamnan's manuscript (Figure 3).[12] It identifies the location of famous relics contained in the huge basilica, that is, the Rock of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (his death was the result of stoning), the stone upon which Christ stood when he was scourged, the Column of Flagellation, and it includes the Latin words, HICSA MARIA OBIIT, designating the place where Mary was thought to have died. In several Greek apocryphal versions, Mary is said to have lived in a house on Sion after Christ's death and to have died in this house. The fact that the words were written in Latin, as was the entire acccount, does not make clear whether they are a direct translation of an inscription

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[10] Vasiliev, 1:85.

[11] Jerousalimskii Kanonaar [in Russian], ed. Kekelidze (Tiflis: 1912), according to Meehan, 20, 23.

[12] Meehan, 63, from Vienna, Cod. 458, f. 11^{v}.

or are only meant to designate the site where Mary was believed to have died.

Evidence from Venerable Bede's synopsis of Adamnan's account supports the fact that, at the time of Arculf's visit, a section of the site of the Basilica of Holy Sion was believed to contain the place of the death of Mary. In Bede's abridgment of Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis, probably written around 702-703, a descriptive paragraph about the Basilica of Holy Sion states that "here Mary dies."[13] A sketch of a Koimesis scene from the wall of the Basilica is included in this paragraph (Figure 2).[14]

The sketch depicts the Virgin on what appears to be a bier or more likely in a tomb. The shaded area of the receptacle, implying depth, and its angular shape, reminiscent of a sarcophagus, suggest that the form is a tomb. This would explain the reference to the "vaulted receptacle" which enclosed the Virgin in death, according to The Brevarius.[15] Mary is wrapped in a shroud. Only her face is exposed. She appears to be alive for her eyes are open. The

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[13]Migne, P. L., 95:1182; Tobler-Molinier, Itinera et descriptiones Terrae Sanctae (Geneva: 1877), 218; M. L. W. Laistner and H. H. King, A Handlist of Bede Manuscripts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1943), 83.

[14]Migne, P. L., 95:1182. The abridgment of Bede's De Locis Sanctis contained in this volume does not include a copy of the sketch but a parenthetical insertion indicating that the manuscript contains a sketch in that location. A reproduction of this sketch is contained in Mommert, fig. 5. No indication is given of the medium used for the original image. Whether the sketch originated with Bede or was copied from a drawing by Adamnan or even by Arculf, is not known. No such sketch is found or alluded to in Adamnan's account.

[15]See above, 36.

receptacle she rests upon is inscribed with the words, Hic Sancta Maria obiit.

An angel, holding a palm branch, stands next to the recumbent Virgin. According to the apocryphal version of Transistus Mariae B, the angel who appeared to Mary to announce her impending death carried a palm branch which he presented to her.[16] In several of the apocryphal versions, Mary prepares her burial clothes and arranges herself upon her bier in anticipation of her death.[17] The scene, therefore, can be interpreted as a conflation of two events: the angel's announcement of the approaching death of Mary and Mary's compliant preparation for death.

The sketch locates the depiction on the south wall of the church. Superimposed upon the figure of the Virgin is the marble column at which Christ was scourged. In Adamnan's drawing (Figure 3), the column is shown in the center of the church and is described as being located there in the text as well.[18]

Latin inscriptions locate other holy sites which were commemorated in the church. The place of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, known as the feast of Pentecost, is shown in the upper right corner. The upper left corner is identified as the site of the Last Supper of Christ and his apostles. A small rectangular

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[16] Ibid., 16.

[17] Ibid., 16, 22. Wratislaw-Mitrovic, 136-37, fig. 1, comments upon a manuscript painting of a Koimesis in which the Virgin is shown with her eyes open. The scene is contained in an eleventh-century Evangelary from the Iviron Monastery, Mount Athos.

[18] Meehan, 60.

chamber, jutting from the south wall, is described as the marble rock upon which St. Stephen, the protomartyr, was stoned. A similar chamber, attached to the west wall, contained the rock upon which Christ stood when he was scourged.

The location of the death of Mary differs in Adamnan's sketch from that in Bede's drawing. The eastern end of the south wall is selected by Adamnan while the western end of the same wall is indicated by Bede as the place of Mary's death. This difference remains unexplained.[19]

An additional mention of the Virgin's death scene at Sion is found in the "Sermon on the Koimesis" by Andrew of Crete given in 720. After describing the laying out of the Virgin and her funeral procession from the Church of Holy Sion, he continues, ". . . an impression of this is displayed on a likeness as a result of the aforesaid occurrences,"[20] indicating that this representation was located in the Basilica of Sion.

Conclusions

With the obscure remark about the Virgin enclosed in death made in The Brevarius manuscript, the first connection is made between the Church of Holy Sion and Mary's demise. But it cannot be determined whether the writer saw a non-pictorial indication of the site of the Virgin's death or an earlier version of the image, later recorded by Bede and described by Andrew of Crete. The destruction

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[19]Mommert, 90.

[20]Migne, P. G., 97:1063-64.

of the Basilica by the Persians forces us to conclude that Bede's scene can date no earlier than 628, even though the location of this scene was honored from around 530.

It is significant that the earliest known eastern representation of the Koimesis was located at the site of Mary's death, not at her sepulchre in the Valley of Josaphat, perhaps an indication that the emphasis on Mary's death had already begun to take precedence over her assumption. The scene itself presents nothing beyond the moment of death, for only the messenger angel and the dormant Virgin are shown. A forerunner of the later Byzantine Koimesis appears to exist in the Sion scene with the horizontal placement of the Virgin and the vertical angel standing next to her.

Proof of the rising interest in Mary's death is offered in sixth-century records of pilgrims' visits to the church at Sion and the one in the Valley of Josaphat. These records coincide with the earliest written records of the Koimesis apocrypha. The seventh-century pilgrims who continued this custom found at Sion a wall image of Mary on her deathbed. We cannot ascertain whether there were other Koimesis representations at this time but we should keep in mind that the location of this scene in the important Basilica of Holy Sion, a stopping-place for many pilgrims, gave it a prominence that may have marked it as a model for later Koimesis scenes.

CHAPTER V

EARLY WESTERN ASSUMPTION SCENES

Faced with the absence of pre-Iconoclastic Byzantine Koimesis scenes, other than the wall image at the Basilica of Holy Sion, we look to early western examples from the sixth to ninth century for additional possible sources of the iconography for the eastern Koimesis.

An encolpium from the Dzalinska cabinet contains a cloisonné cross imprinted on the reverse with an Assumption scene worked in niello (Figure 4), probably a work of the late seventh or early eighth century.[1] The Virgin, inscribed in a vertical position, one hand raised in benediction, appears to be ascending from her worldly abode, for she is shown hovering in midair above a grounded pedestal.[2] Mary is frequently placed upon a pedestal in Byzantine depictions of important scenes from her earthly and heavenly life. Mother and Child scenes and Annunciation scenes are among those which

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[1] Cabrol and Leclercq, vol. I, part 2, col. 2994-95, by H. Leclercq, fig. 1027; E. Molinier suggests a sixth-century origin for the cross, ibid., col. 2995.

[2] In Christian art, the presence of a footstool frequently refers to a passage from Isaiah 66:1, in which the Lord is quoted as stating that heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool.

employ this device.[3] A medallion above Mary contains an enthroned Christ, awaiting Mary's arrival in the heavens. Christ and Mary occupy the vertical bar of the cross. Ten apostle figures are stretched along the arms of the cross with the ascending Mary intersecting their horizontal alignment.[4]

A second early western example is found on the remnant of a fabric belonging to the Treasury of the Cathedral of Sens (Figure 5).[5] The brocade patterning of the cloth contains medallions which frame a scene of the Assumption of Mary. Ten small figures of the apostles are again shown, eight erect and two placed in a prone position. Each of the figures hold a small cross in his hand. They are arranged below the central figure of the Virgin who is shown in an

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[3]Christa Schug-Wille, Art of the Byzantine World, trans. C. M. Hatt (New York: Abrams, 1969), 152, Mother and Child, apse mosaic, seventh century, Panagia Angeloktistos, Chiti, Cyprus; André Grabar, The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Byzantine Art in the Middle Ages, trans. Betty Forster (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969), pl. 20, Mother of God mosaic, ca. 1000, Hosios Lucas; Kostas Papaioannou, Byzantine and Russian Painting, trans. Janet Sondheimer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1965), 75, Annunciation icon, fourteenth century, St. Clement, Ochrid. The use of a pedestal or footstool for figures of importance can be traced to scenes from ancient art. For example, the gold-covered throne of King Tutankhamen, c. 1355-1342 B.C., contains a carving of the Pharaoh who is seated upon his throne, his feet resting on a footstool, Frederick Hartt, Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, 2 vols. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973; New York: Abrams, 1976), vol. 1, fig. 85. The development and meaning of the pedestal or footstool in Christian art is too complex to be included in this thesis.

[4]The fact that only ten apostles are present is not unusual, for the number of disciples present at Mary's death varies in several of the apocryphal stories.

[5]Cabrol and Leclercq, col. 2984-87, fig. 1022; E. Chartraire, "Les tissus anciens du trésor de la cathédrale de Sens," Revue de l'art chrétien (1911), 227-29.

orans position. Two angels on each side of the Virgin assist in her assumption into heaven. There is no doubt that this is a depiction of the Assumption, for an inscription woven into the border of the medallion reads: "Cum transisset Maria Mater domino de apostolis." The epigraph also serves as a valuable aid in dating the fabric. The type of lettering used and the grammatical forms contained in the epigraph indicate an eighth-century date.[6]

An ivory from a book cover now found at the Abbey of Saint Gall (Figure 6) is believed to be a work of the ninth century.[7] An orant Mary, the central figure, is flanked by four angels who appear to be assisting or encouraging the Virgin in her ascension into heaven. Here, too, the meaning of the scene is clear from the inscription which forms the upper edge of the carving, "Ascensio Sce Marie." Christ is not present in this depiction nor in the Sens weaving.

A fresco from the Church of San Clemente at Rome provides an additional ninth-century Assumption (Figure 7).[8] An accompanying inscription dates the painting to the reign of Pope Leon IV, 844-47. Christ appears in the upper center of the fresco, ensconced in a large mandorla and supported by winged angels. In the midsection of the picture, Mary stands with upraised arms. Located in the lower right and left sections are the apostles, arranged in various

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[6]Cabrol and Leclercq, col. 2987.

[7]Ibid., col. 2987-88, fig. 1023.

[8]Ibid., col. 2988-90, fig. 1024.

attitudes of sorrow and surprise. Their gestures and placement call to mind the composition and actions of mourners in Byzantine Koimesis scenes. These actions and poses are also noticeably similar to those of the witnesses in a sixth-century scene of the Ascension of Christ from the Rabula Gospel, a Syriac manuscript (Figure 8). It can only be conjectured that the San Clemente painting may have been directly influenced by an Ascension scene such as that in the Rabula Gospel manuscript or by a pre-tenth-century type of Byzantine Koimesis no longer available. A third possibility is that this Assumption scene was superimposed upon an Ascension painting.

The large, crudely fashioned structure beneath Mary appears to be her sepulchre which would locate the scene at the tomb, thus conforming to several apocryphal descriptions of Mary's assumption.

Conclusions

Leclercq describes the appearance of Assumption scenes in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries as an abrupt debut, lacking antecedents in manuscripts or other art forms. He suggests that their appearance is the result of the increasing importance of the feast day honoring this event.[9] We have noted a similar growth in the eastern realm of the Christian world. It is probable that depictions of the Koimesis were created in response to this interest prior to the ninth century. If so, the loss of such early examples may be attributed to the prohibition and destruction of images under the Iconoclast emperors.

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[9] Ibid., col. 2990.

The possibility exists that scenes of the Ascension of Christ may have served as prototypes not only for the San Clemente fresco of the Assumption, but for other western Assumption scenes.[10] Mary rises to the heavens with hands held in prayer in the Assumption depictions on the fabric from the Sens Treasury (Figure 5) and the ivory from Saint Gall (Figure 6). The orant attitude which Mary takes in early Ascension portrayals, such as the miniature from the Rabula Gospel (Figure 8), may have been transposed to the figure of the ascending Virgin in initial Assumption scenes. The artists' search for models upon which to pattern the debuting Assumption depictions would logically include the Ascension, an event similar to the Assumption of Mary. In the scene on the Dzalinska cross (Figure 4), Mary stands in the midst of the row of apostles, reminiscent of her position in the Rabula Ascension painting. The Virgin is centered between angels in the ivory from Saint Gall (Figure 6) and on the Sens fabric (Figure 5). Angels also attend Christ in Ascension portrayals.

In each of the western scenes we have examined, Mary is shown ascending to heaven, visually reflecting the name of the feast day in the west. Christ does not actively participate in the assumption when he is present among the observers but passively awaits the arrival of Mary in Paradise. On the Sens fabric (Figure 5) and the ivory from Saint Gall (Figure 6), angels appear in attendance upon the Virgin, a sign of divine help, but the Virgin on the Dzalinska cross

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[10] I am indebted to Dr. Molly Teasdale Smith for this observation.

(Figure 4) and in the fresco of San Clemente (Figure 7) accomplishes her miraculous feat with no indications of divine assistance.

The Koimesis in early medieval Byzantine art differs from western Assumption scenes in focusing upon the physical death of Mary and the reception of her soul by Christ rather than the ascension of her body into heaven.[11] In addition, Christ's role in the Byzantine scene is indispensible if the accepted theological interpretation of the event in the Eastern Church is to be illustrated.[12] Whereas the Assumption scene in the west is concerned with a single moment, the Koimesis portrayal uses a typically Byzantine device by treating non-concurrent events as though they were simultaneous occurrences. The time span covered by the Koimesis begins with the moments before or immediately after the death of Mary, includes the reception of her soul by Christ, and ends with the heavenward journey of her soul.

Early post-Iconoclastic Byzantine Koimesis scenes, limited as they were to portraying the death or dying of the Virgin, do not seem to have been influenced by western Assumption depictions. Not until the fourteenth century do Byzantine portrayals of the Koimesis occasionally include the Assumption among the events in the representation. It is shown, though, as a fait accompli. The Virgin, surrounded by a mandorla and supported by angels, is placed in the heavens directly above the figure of Christ. A sixteenth-century

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[11] This observation was suggested by Dr. Molly Teasdale Smith.

[12] For this interpretation see above, 27-30.

Cypriote icon of the Koimesis (Figure 28) typifies the manner in which the Assumption of Mary was incorporated into the Koimesis scene.[13] An icon of the Koimesis, now located in the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, painted around 1380, includes the figure of Mary shown in heaven after her Assumption.[14] A fifteenth-century wall painting from Cucer, Yugoslavia,[15] also contains a similar Koimesis.

The dissimilar focal points and emphases, evident in medieval eastern and western artistic treatment of the death of the Virgin and the ensuing events, presage the differing theological interpretations of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven which will evolve in the two divisions of Christendom.

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[13]Athanasius Papageorgiou, Icons of Cyprus (New York: Nagel, 1970), pl. 67.

[14]David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Painting: The Last Phase (New York: Dial Press, 1968), pl. 26.

[15]Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev, pl. 14, 2.

CHAPTER VI

ANCIENT AND ANTIQUE DEATH SCENES

Weitzmann points out the frequency of "Byzantine adaptations of classical models" in Byzantine art.[1] These adaptations and recurring returns to classical antecedents promote the possibility that ancient models served as archetypes for the Koimesis iconography. The ancient Greeks and Romans customarily displayed the body of the deceased on a flat, padded bed which rested upon an elevated pedestal.[2] The head of the dead person was placed upon a pillow or pillows. This treatment of the dead continued into the Byzantine age,[3] an indication that classical death scenes might offer an iconographical formula compatible with Byzantine custom.

An amphora by the Sappho painter, ca. 500 B.C. (Figure 9), contains a prothesis (preparation of the body for burial) scene in which the deceased rests upon a longitudinal, raised bier. The bier is partially hidden by the figures encircling it. These figures are probably mourners for they are shown with upraised arms, a

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[1]Kurt Weitzmann, "The Origin of the Threnos," De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky, ed. Millar Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 81.

[2]Kurtz and Boardman, 144; James Kyriakis, "Byzantine Burial Customs: Care of the Deceased from Death to the Prothesis," Greek Orthodox Theological Review 10(1): 56.

[3]Kyriakis, 38-56.

gesture indicating grief in Greek tradition.[4] The bier or kline is draped with a skirting similar to that often used on the Virgin's deathbed in Koimesis scenes.

In a second prothesis scene painted on an Attic black-figured plaque (Figure 10), the compositional arrangement painted on the amphora (Figure 9) is repeated. Three attendants prepare the body for burial. Two figures to the left of the scene appear to be proffering gifts to a central figure or gesturing toward him. The shorter figure standing between the group is not a child, according to Kurtz and Boardman.[5] It should be noted that in this prothesis scene and in the one by the Sappho painter, as well as in other prothesis scenes, mourners stand between the bier and the viewer, their backs to the viewer. In Koimesis scenes, mourners were never depicted in such positions. Byzantine art called for a frontal depiction with an unimpeded view of the major elements of a scene. Figures were seldom shown with their faces completely hidden from view.[6]

A prothesis provides the subject matter for a tomb painting at Paestum, fourth century B.C. (Figure 11).[7] The actions of the attendants do not interest us, but the horizontal composition, the

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[4]Kurtz and Boardman, 27, 59.

[5]Ibid., 59.

[6]Leonid Ouspensky, The Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church: The Meaning and Content of the Icon, trans. Jane M. Horka (East Lansing, Mich.: By the Author), 29.

[7]Dr. Paul W. Deussen assigned this date to the tomb painting.

central placement of the body on a raised bier, and the approach of the attendants from the right and left sides on the same horizontal plane warrant consideration for this scene as a possible source for the Koimesis iconography. The Paestum painting is but one example of this type of prothesis depiction in Greek and, later, in Roman art.[8]

By Roman times, the mourners have been moved to the sides and rear of the scene, leaving the body in full view. In Roman art, the horizontal layout continued in use for death scenes, as evidenced by three comclamatio scenes (Figures 12, 13, 14).[9] In each of these examples, the funeral urn of Julia Eleutheris, the Haterii relief, and the grave relief from the Via Latina, the body is prominently displayed on an elevated bier. Of the three, only the Haterii relief is dated. It belongs to the first Christian century.[10]

An early sixth-century manuscript, the Vienna Genesis, contains several death scenes. One such scene portrays the Death of Deborah (Figure 15). The Old Testament prophetess, depicted in a position which resembles that of the central figure in the Via Latina grave relief (Figure 14), lies on a bed arranged horizontally. Her torso is partially raised and a coverlet rests upon her lower body.

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[8]Kurtz and Boardman, 142-62; Rush, 108-09.

[9]Conclamatio, a Latin word, referring to a Roman custom which required loud shouting and other noises at the death wake to awaken the "deceased" if he were not actually dead.

[10]Rush, Plate 3, as in T. Klauser, no title given.

This miniature also shows a marked resemblance to an eleventh-century ivory Koimesis from the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 20). The manner of exhibiting Mary's body with stiffened legs, awkwardly raised head and shoulders, and outstretched arm is similar to the handling of the body of Deborah in the miniature. Moreover, both biers are adorned with a skirt which is draped between the carved front legs of the bed. We may recall that a skirt also hung from the bier in the Sappho amphora (Figure 9).

Conclusions

The classical tradition for portraying the prothesis and conclamatio, no doubt familiar to Byzantine artists, presented an arrangement that was also suitable for Christian deathbed scenes. The miniature painting of the Death of Deborah from the Vienna Genesis strongly suggests that the ancient format was retained in Byzantine art. Vatasianu suggests that scenes of the Koimesis of Mary predated the sixth-century manuscript scenes from the Vienna Genesis.[11] Sinding, however, looks upon the Vienna Genesis death scenes as prototypes of the Koimesis.[12] Because more than a century separates the Vienna Genesis from the earliest known Koimesis scene, the wall image from the Basilica of Holy Sion (Figure 2), I must concur with Sinding's opinion.

Christian death beliefs and customs may also have encouraged the selections of a format for the Koimesis scene similar to ancient

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[11] Vatasianu, 36.

[12] Sinding, 39.

prothesis and conclamatio portrayals in which the body of the deceased was prominently displayed. Christians had accepted a new outlook on death. No longer was a stigma of contamination attached to physical contact with the deceased.[13] Because of their belief in an afterlife in which the body would be resurrected and reunited with the soul, the body was regarded as sacred and holy, even in death.[14] Indeed, during the funeral rites, a kiss of peace was bestowed upon the deceased by each person present.[15] In seeking a format for presenting the Koimesis of the Virgin, a death scene patterned on the prothesis type would serve to show the respect and importance which Christians held for the body of the deceased.

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[13]Kurtz and Boardman, 146-50. Purification rites, required in ancient times after contact with the body of the deceased, were discarded by the Christians.

[14]Didascalia, 6, 22, 4 (Funk I, 374), as in Rush, 103.

[15]Rush, 102. This custom is still observed in the Eastern Church.

CHAPTER VII

COPTIC INFLUENCE

With an ingenious proposal, Vatasianu has advanced a Coptic origin for the iconography of the Koimesis.[1] He bases his hypothesis on the Coptic prototypes of certain other early Christian images, such as the Virgo lactans, believed to have developed from representations of the Egyptian divinities, Isis and Horus.[2] He initiates his proposal by pointing out the likelihood of a Coptic origin for the Koimesis apocryphal legends.[3] As further support, he describes the Coptic allegiance to Mary. Not only did the Copts strongly back the recognition of Mary as the Theotokos by the Council of Ephesus,[4] Vatasianu explains, but at the Council of Chalcedon they unsuccessfully demanded the recognition of the Koimesis of Mary, as described in the apocryphal stories.[5]

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[1]Vatasianu, 1-49.

[2]Pierre M. de Bourguet, The Art of the Copts, trans. Caryll Hay-Shaw (New York: Greystone Press, 1971), 92, figs. 16, 25.

[3]A Coptic origin is also suggested by James, xix, 194.

[4]Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, emerged as champion of the Virgin as Mother of God, a belief which had been fostered by the monks of the Egyptian desert, according to H. W. Haussig, A History of Byzantine Civilization, trans. J. N. Hussey (New York: Praeger, 1971), 43.

[5]Vatasianu, 5, 11. The author does not indicate the source of this information.

Vatasianu states that the Byzantine Koimesis representation emerged before the composition of the Vienna Genesis.[6] He discounts the possibility of a sudden appearance. He proposes that the scene was an adaptation of an ancient form based on ancient Egyptian models.[7]

Several examples from ancient Egyptian mummy cases are used to demonstrate this point. In Figures 16 and 17, the dead body is displayed on a high bier with one or two goddesses at the head and foot of the bier, serving as attendants. The author points out that these scenes are constructed with the horizontal and vertical arrangement seen in the Koimesis depictions. He likens the placement of the goddesses to the positions of the apostles.[8] In the first painting the spirit Bha hovers over the corpse. The god Anubis replaces the Bha in the second painting.

An important article of faith in the Egyptian religion was man's existence after death. It was believed that the individual possessed several soul types. The Kha was the primary soul. It assumed the exact image of the body to which it belonged at all times, in life and in death.[9] The Bha emerged from the body at the time of death. This spirit wandered abroad, capable of selecting any

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[6] Ibid., 36.

[7] Ibid., 37.

[8] Ibid., 43.

[9] Adolf Erman, Life in Ancient Egypt, trans. H. M. Tirard (New York: Dover, 1971), 307.

shape it desired.[10] At times it took the form of a bird as in Figure 16.[11] The Kha contained the personality of the individual within the exact replica of the individual's body which it assumed, whereas the Bha was limited to the spiritual self of the person.[12] It was thought that if the mummy should be defiled or destroyed, the Kha, Bha, and other soul types of the mummified person would perish.[13]

The jackal-headed Anubis, seen in Figure 17, takes part in the Osiris legend. He accompanied the goddess Isis in her search for the body of her murdered husband, Osiris. After the body was found and buried by Isis, with the assistance of Anubis, Osiris arose to new life. In Egyptian funerary art, Anubis is shown holding the body of the deceased just as he held by body of Osiris while Isis mourned her husband.[14] In Figure 17, Anubis takes part in preparing the mummy of Osiris. In similar scenes, showing the mummification of a human, rather than Osiris the god, the participating priest, who replaces Anubis, is dressed to resemble the god. He wears a jackal-type head covering.[15] Anubis, who was known as the protector of the dead, also assisted in the judging of the individual after

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[10]John Manchip White, Everday Life in Ancient Egypt (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1963), 81.

[11]Ibid., fig. 4.

[12]Ibid., 81.

[13]Ibid., 84.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 89.

death. The god weighed the heart of the deceased to determine his worthiness before Osiris, the judge of the dead.[16]

We are reminded by Vatasianu that Christianity spread with lightning speed through Egypt and artists were hard pressed to satisfy the demand for visual representations of the major figures of the new faith. As pagan temples were converted to Christian use, bas reliefs and murals of ancient gods were covered with lime so that figures of Christ and of Christian saints could be superimposed upon the old gods. The arrangements of the original scenes were retained. Only the figures were changed. Mummy cases and other funerary art from Egyptian cemeteries were adopted by the Copts who often used these burial grounds.[17] By substituting the figures of the Virgin and Christ for those of the mummy and Anubis, and replacing the goddess attendants with the apostles in scenes such as Figure 17, the author theorizes that the Copts created the iconography of the Koimesis of the Virgin.[18]

Because no early Coptic examples of the Koimesis have been found, the author notes the existence of other scenes in which Christian personages have been superimposed upon the figures of the

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[16] Ibid., 183.

[17] Vatasianu, 47.

[18] Ibid.

original Egyptian composition. These are located at churches in Luxor, Wadi-Essebuah, and Kalabscieh.[19]

Perhaps the figure of the Bha which hovers over the mummy in Figure 16 suggested the departure of Mary's soul from her body to the Coptic artists. Vatasianu proposes that the small figure which Christ holds in the Koimesis scene is based upon the Egyptian Kha, an exact replica of the deceased. He rejects suggestions that the figure represents the infant Mary. The author sees a miniaturized adult in the figure which Christ holds.[20] As further proof for the Kha origin of this figure, Koimesis scenes are included in which the miniature figure wears mummy wrappings, according to the author,[21] not swaddling clothes.

A further argument for a Coptic origin of the Koimesis is the possibility that artists may have been among the Coptic workers who were recruited to rebuild the badly damaged Basilica of Holy Sion after the Persian attack in 614.[22] The author suggests that Coptic artists may have created the wall representation of the death of Mary

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[19]Ibid., the reader is referred to Lepsius, Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien, vol. III, pl. 181; Ippolito Rosellini, I monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia (Pisa: 1844), vol. 3:59, 61, 83-84; Freiher von Bissing, Altchristliche Wandmalereien aus Ägypten in Festschrift für Paul Clemens (Düsseldorf: 1926), 181-88.

[20]Vatasianu, 39-41.

[21]Ibid., fig. 4, miniature from Manuscript of Master Bertold, Library of the Monastery of St. Peter, Salzburg, a work of Western artist, copy of a Byzantine Koimesis; fig. 6, ivory from Darmstadt, late tenth century.

[22]Theodore Zahn, Die Dormitio Sanctae Virginis, 7, as in Vatasianu, 48.

in the Church of Holy Sion. This is the same representation which is referred to in Bede's abridgment of De Locis Sanctis,[23] a manuscript that contained a sketch of this representation (Figure 2).[24]

Conclusions

The crux of Vatasianu's argument rests upon an early emergence of the Koimesis by the fifth century, predating not only the Vienna Genesis but also the Council of Chalcedon in 451, after which the Copts permanently broke away from the main body of the Church. Coptic influence in the development of Christian art as well as in other religious matters was no longer a significant force after this break.[25]

This theory of a Coptic origin is hampered by a lack of Coptic or early Byzantine Koimesis examples to illustrate its validity. Furthermore, it is difficult to explain the reason that no early Koimesis scenes surved in Egypt, a land which lay beyond the reach of the destructive fury of the Iconoclasts. Nevertheless, because the Koimesis apocrypha contain many elements that reflect Egyptian practices and because the cultus of the Virgin was nurtured by the Copts, a Coptic beginning for the Koimesis depictions cannot be totally discounted. It must remain a hypothesis, however, until new evidence of a pre-Iconoclastic Koimesis representation is uncovered.

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[23]Migne, P. L., 95:1182; see above, 38-39.

[24]Mommert, fig. 5.

[25]For Coptic influence on early Christian art see O. M. Dalton, East Christian Art: A Survey of the Monuments (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 42.

CHAPTER VIII

ICONOGRAPHIC ORIGINS

The numerous, widely circulated apocryphal stories of the Koimesis of the Theotokos appear to have served as a treasury of iconographical material for the Byzantine artist. Their lengthy and detailed descriptions offered ideas for the development of the Koimesis scene throughout the Middle Byzantine age. The use of the apocryphal narrations will be illustrated in Part Two of this thesis with an analysis of Koimesis scenes from the tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries. Koinesis depictions in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries were frequently expanded to include additional new elements.[1]

However, the artist was not given free rein in creating his representations of the Koimesis. Almost unfailingly, only one moment was selected from the series of events related in the apocrypha: the death of the Theotokos and the reception of her soul by Christ. The basic composition of the scene also remained unchanged. It would seem that theological dicta, concerning the Koimesis, such as those

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[1] Irmgard Hutter, Early Christian and Byzantine Art (New York: Universe Books, 1971), ill. 162; Viktor Lazarev, Old Russian Murals and Mosaics (London: Phaidon Press, 1966), pl. 82; Konstantin Kalokyris, The Byzantine Wall Paintings of Crete (New York: Red Dust, 1973), fig. C10; Schug-Wille, 219.

of the post-Iconoclastic fathers, Germanus, John Damascenos, and Theodore the Studite, directed the emphasis to the death of the Virgin and the attendance of Christ at her death to transfer her soul to heaven. The repercussions of the violent Iconoclastic years may have furthered the adherence to a carefully planned format, drawn to concur with the orthodox attitude towards the Koimesis.

In the only known eastern example of a Koimesis scene predating the Iconoclastic disturbances, the portrayal from the Basilica of Holy Sion, the horizontal figure of the Virgin is counterpoised against an upright angel. The arrangement is similar to that found in post-Iconoclastic depictions where Christ stands behind the recumbent Mary. This may suggest that the basic composition of the scene was formulated during a pre-Iconoclastic development period. The subject matter of the portrayal from the Holy Sion Basilica indicates that as early as the seventh century Byzantine artistic interest centered upon the death of the Theotokos, not her ascension into heaven.

The search for the possible sources of the iconographic format of the Koimesis leads beyond the Sion example to Greek and Roman death scenes, bypassing early western Assumption scenes which portray only the ascension of Mary into Paradise. Late antique depictions of death scenes, part of a continuum from classical times and quite possibly available to the artists who formulated the Koimesis iconography, are likely sources for the iconographic format of the Koimesis.

The evidence of Coptic influence in the apocryphal stories and the strong Coptic devotion to the Virgin, especially in her role

of Theotokos, Mother of God, supports the theory of a Coptic origin for the Koimesis iconography offered by Vatasianu. Yet, the lack of any Coptic examples predating the termination of the Iconoclastic controversies is a serious drawback to the acceptance of this theory. The Egyptian Christians, cut off as they were from the ecclesiastical mainstream, were not embroiled in the Iconoclastic controversies, thus Coptic art was not subject to the ruinous destruction wrought by the Iconoclastic adherents. If the Koimesis scene did originate with the Copts, it is unusual that no examples have survived that predate Byzantine portrayals.

PART TWO

THE KOIMESIS SCENE

CHAPTER IX

THE KOIMESIS SCENE IN THE ART OF THE POST-ICONOCLASTIC PERIOD

Having considered several artistic and religious factors which may have affected the early development of the Koimesis scene, we shall now consider Koimesis depictions in the early post-Iconoclastic centuries. These scenes belong to a new type of portrayal referred to as the festival scene.[1] As the name implies, they are visual presentations of the various festivals of the church.

Few Koimesis works from the ninth century have survived. Two poorly preserved wall paintings from Cappadocia, one from the New Church of Toqale Kilisse and the other at Qeledjlar, have been assigned to the ninth or tenth century by G. de Jerphanion.[2] J. Strzygowski believes the oldest known Koimesis scene is located in the Monastery of Deïr-es-Sourjani in El-Hadra, Egypt.[3] Because the condition of the Cappadocian paintings precludes a detailed analysis and the Koimesis from Deïr-es-Sourjani is not readily available, this study will start with examples from the tenth century.

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[1]Otto Demus, Byzantine Mosaic Decoration (London: Trubner Ltd., 1947), 54.

[2]Vol. 1, part 2, 232, 357.

[3]"Der Schmuck der älteren el-Hadrakirche im syrischen Kloster der sketischen Wüste," Oriens Christianus, 1 (Rome), 361-62, as in Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev, 134-35.

In examining Koimesis portrayals from the tenth and eleventh centuries, two distinct types can be distinguished. The first type, which shall be referred to as the Monastic type, is usually found in ivory carvings (Figures 18-21). These Koimesis ivories are fashioned in an inelegant, provincial style. They are imbued with an austere quality. The scene is presented in a straightforward fashion, avoiding distractive elements. The angel or angels, seldom absent from the Koimesis scene, are usually shown as moving from left to right in the Monastic type. The presence of the rear apostles is revealed only by the sight of their tightly grouped heads, behind and above the forward figures.

The second group shall be called the Classic type. In creating Koimesis works in this style, the artists used the Byzantine Classical Style. The scenes project depth; the participants are allowed to display their emotions and are given individual treatment; and new details are frequently added to the compositional arrangement. The angels, usually two in number, approach from opposite sides, moving toward the center in rhythmic symmetry.[4]

The style in which the Monastic type Koimesis ivories are fashioned is variously referred to as provincial, rustic, Cappadocian,

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[4]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, vol. 2, pl. XLI, 111, a, b, contains a Koimesis scene which combines characteristics of both the Monastic and Classic style. The scene, an eleventh-century ivory from the Treasury of the Liebfrauen Church, Trier, is carved in the Monastic style, yet depicts the angels moving to the center from the opposite sides as in the Classic type. Furthermore, a low wall is placed behind the apostle figures, an added feature, which is also characteristic of the Classic type.

or monastic.[5] The artist, untrained or uninterested in the elegance and refinement of court art, used a direct, simple, sometimes crude manner in presenting the essentials of the scene. Hutter attributes this style to a return to the abstract, linear methods of the pre-Iconoclastic era.[6] Draperies are flattened and bodies concealed. The narrative element is downplayed; the refinement and grace of Hellenistic art are by-passed. Focus is on the hieratic aspect of the event.

The term monastic, which is frequently given to the style, refers to its association with the monastic element of the church.[7] Works in this style are found on monastic chapel walls, including the Cappadocian rock-cut churches and the Cypriot monastic churches of Ayios Neophytos, Asinou, and Pedhoulas.[8] This style appears concurrently with the Classical style of the middle Byzantine period. The mosaics of the monastery church of Hosios Loukas near Parnassus, 1020, appear to be a synthesis of the monastic style with the Classical, resulting from the joint efforts of local provincial artists and court artists sent from Constantinople by the emperor.[9]

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[5]Gervase Mathew, Byzantine Aesthetics (New York: Harper and Row, Icon Editions, 1971), 142; Demus, Mosaic, 57; Hutter, 30.

[6]Hutter, 109.

[7]David Talbot Rice, Byzantine Art (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 197.

[8]Mathew, 143.

[9]Ibid.

The Classical Style, which is encountered in the Classic type Koimesis scene, appears early in the post-Iconoclastic era in book illuminations.[10] The period during which this style flourished, beginning with the restoration of the images in 843 and ending with the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, is variously referred to as the Classical Period, the Second Golden Age, the first Byzantine Renaissance, and the Macedonian Renaissance.[11]

Demus disagrees with those who would describe the style as a rebirth of the art of the Hellenistic past. He points out that, in Byzantine art, the return to the past was a continual process, not a recurring event.[12] He characterizes the process as a spiralling movement by which each trend away from the past revolved into a return to ancient models. Such a viewpoint is consistent with the attitude of the Byzantines toward the learning and culture of the Greeks which they treasured and dutifully preserved as their heritage.[13] Demus' interpretation suggests the presence of varying degrees in the adherence to the past rather than lapses of total rejection. It also offers a convincing explanation for the stylistic changes in the Classical Style, which were not the result of repeated

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[10]Schug-Wille, 166-67.

[11]Demus, Mosaic, 52; Rice, Byzantine Art, 262; ibid., 266-67; Mathew, 122.

[12]Otto Demus, Byzantine Art and the West (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 3.

[13]Deno J. Geanakoplos, Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 8.

returns to the past, rebounding from rejections of the classical heritage as some scholars insist,[14] but the outgrowth of a persistent Byzantine attachment to the Greek past. The development of the Koimesis scene would appear to bear out the viewpoint of Demus, in that both the Classic type of Koimesis and the Monastic type appear to develop simultaneously. There appears to be no time break when the Classic type was discarded, but a gradual and consistent development period of that style during the Byzantine Middle Age.[15]

The manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, 867-868, contains some of the earliest examples of the Classical Style.[16] The use of classical models is evident in the adept and graceful handling of fabrics and the skillful depictions of the human body. A painting of the Old Testament king, David, from the Paris Psalter, early tenth century, contains a seated figure, the personification of Melody, which is quite likely copied from a Hellenistic image of the goddess Io.[17]

In the Classical Style, the body is not concealed, as in the rustic style, but clearly defined through the draped garments which

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[14]Rice, Byzantine Art, 266-67.

[15]Marina Sacopoulo, Asinou en 1106 et sa contribution á l'iconographie (Brussels: Editions de Byzantion, 1966), 15-18, comments on the divergent trends, present in the art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries: a neo-classic, Constantinopolitan type and a monastic, hieratic, Cappadocian style.

[16]Ms. Grec 510, Bibliothèque-Nationale, Paris; Hutter, 166-67; Grabar, Middle Ages, 150-52.

[17]Ms. Grec 139, Bibliothèque-Nationale, Paris; Rice, Byzantine Art, 339-41; Schug-Wille, 170; Grabar, Middle Ages, 150-52.

are molded to the shape of the body. Figures are united by optical devices, such as grouping by color or the use of interrelated gestures and stances.[18] Gervase comments on the rhythmic movement of the composition in this style.[19] Borrowing from ancient examples, the style incorporates a scenic background into the composition when appropriate. Such backgrounds will be encountered in the Classic type of Koimesis which we shall examine (Figures 23, 25, and 26). The twelfth-century wall mosaics of the Monastery of Daphni belong to the Classical Style.

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[18] Demus, Mosaic, 54.

[19] Gervase, 122.

CHAPTER X

MONASTIC TYPE OF KOIMESIS SCENE

Ivory Koimesis, Ducal House of Mecklenburg, End of Tenth Century

An ivory Koimesis, assigned to the end of the tenth century, now located in Mecklenburg, is the first example of the linear Monastic style (Figure 18).[1] The carving measures 14.5 centimeters in height and 11.5 centimeters in width. Weitzmann identifies the ivory as a product of a Constantinopolitan workshop, one of the triptych group.[2] He compares the triptych type with the Romanos group which is of known Constantinopolitan origin to determine its provenance.[3] He bases his decision on certain similarities the triptych group shares with the Romanos group. In particular, the details of the heads are noticeably similar in both types. The beaded ornamentation of the nimbus in ivories of the triptych type is the same as that used in ivories of the Romanos group. But, whereas ivories of the Romanos group were fashioned for court art, the carvings of the triptych group were manufactured as a product for the lower classes.[4]

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[1] Weitzmann, "Triptych," pl. 29.

[2] Ibid., 72. The triptych group is one of several classifications for Byzantine ivories from the middle period used by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:27.

[3] Weitzmann, "Triptych," 72.

[4] Ibid.

Furthermore, they were carved in the monastic style, not the Classical style of the Romanos group.[5]

A tenth-century date for the ivories belonging to the triptych group is indicated by Weitzmann because one of the triptych ivories was reused on a bookcover belonging to an eleventh-century Reichenau lectionary.[6] By taking into account the time-lag from the Byzantine religious use of the ivory in a triptych grouping to its dismantling and resetting on the cover of a Latin manuscript, Weitzmann arrives at the tenth-century date.[7] He does not mention the possibility of a ninth-century date, no doubt because the half century remaining after the return of the images in 843 did not allow sufficient time for the subject to become a part of the repertory of workshops.

An angel approaches from the left. A veil covers his hands. A second angel to the right of the figure of Christ moves away from the scene, carrying the small figure of Mary's soul. This arrangement and movement of the angels are characteristic of the Monastic type. The angel approaches Paradise which is represented in the upper corner by a small arc centered with a star. Although the

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[5]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:27; Papaioannou, 50, points out that the monastic style was practiced in Constantinople along with the courtly Classical style.

[6]Wolfenbüttel, Landesbibliothek cod. 84.5 Aug. fol., described in K. Weitzmann, "Various Aspects of Byzantine Influence on Latin Countries from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 20 (1966), 15ff., figs. 27-28, as in Weitzmann, "Triptych," 72.

[7]Weitzmann, "Triptych," 72.

angel carries the soul figure, Christ is shown with the small figure still in his hands. Such a conflation of non-simultaneous events is a device frequently encountered in Byzantine art.

The rustic or monastic style of carving is shallow, draperies are stylized, and bodies ill-defined. All the figures are presented frontally and on the same plane, close to the surface or projecting outward from the picture plane. Only the heads of the rear apostles are visible. The gaze of John toward the Theotokos and the tender gesture of Paul at the foot of the bier are the only emotional touches permitted in the scene.

The essential elements of the Koimesis are all present: Christ holding the small figure, the prone Virgin on her bier, and the attendant apostles. The four additional figures included in the scene may be traced to apocryphal narrations in which other mourners, such as the parents of John the Evangelist, were present at the death of Mary. Most likely, the new figures are the persons mentioned by pseudo-Dionysius in his reference to the death of the Theotokos.[8] Dionysius relates that he, along with Hierotheus, Timothy, and others of their holy brothers, were present at the event. Peter is shown swinging a censer at the head of the bed while John and Paul are assigned positions which correspond to descriptions in the apocryphal stories.

With the exception of the apostles John, Paul, and Peter, no attempt has been made to identify the remaining disciples. The two

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[8]Migne, P. G., 3:681.

massed groups of apostles mirror each other in spatial arrangement and in their total concentration on the event. The artist has used this concentration to emphasize the central actions of the participants of the Koimesis: the dying or death of the Theotokos, her obedient acceptance of death, and the reassuring appearance of Christ to transport the soul of Mary to Paradise.

A footstool, an accessory in nearly all Koimesis depictions, is included in this composition. The footstool may signify the earth, a symbolism based on a phrase from Isaiah 66:1, which refers to the earth as the footstool of God. Placed next to her deathbed but no longer of use to Mary, it could indicate that Mary left her worldly abode when she stepped off the stool onto her bed. However, the use of such an obscure reference was not characteristic of Byzantine art where clarity of meaning was paramount. The inclusion of the footstool may have a more prosaic meaning, based on certain apocryphal versions. It may refer to descriptions of Mary's arrangements for her death wherein she completes her preparations by placing herself upon her deathbed. The second explanation is more in keeping with the Byzantine approach.

Ivory Koimesis, Cluny Museum, Paris, End of Tenth Century

Bearing a strong resemblance to the Mecklenburg work, is an ivory Koimesis, measuring 12 centimeters in height and 11 centimeters in width, apparently a product of the same workshop (Figure 19).[9]

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[9]Künstle, fig. 314.

The piece is now located in the Cluny Museum of Paris. Its close similarity to the Mecklenburg ivory and the fact that the nimbus surrounding the head of Christ is decorated with a central row of pearl-like forms, which are similar to the ornaments of the Romanos group, point to a late tenth-century origin for this ivory.[10]

Most of the scene is nearly identical to the Mecklenburg piece except that the symbol of the orb of heaven has been omitted, the carved legs of the bier are visible, and the figure of Christ has been altered somewhat: he holds the small figure representing the soul of Mary slightly higher and turns his body to look outwards rather than down at Mary. The footstool is completely flattened. It appears to be on the same plane as the drapery fabric it is imposed upon. The apostles are again massed in a vertical, polycephalic group.

Neither this example nor the Mecklenburg ivory carries an identifying inscription, as is customary in post-Iconoclastic Byzantine religious scenes.

Ivory Koimesis, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Second Half of Tenth Century

A tenth-century ivory plaque, measuring 26.7 by 13 centimeters, now found in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, includes

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[10]Künstle, 566, does not date this ivory but groups it with others from the late tenth century and early eleventh century. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:70, assign this ivory to the triptych group and place its origin near the end of the tenth century.

a Koimesis scene in its upper third section (Figures 20 and 21).[11] Two iconographic features characteristic of the Monastic style of Koimesis are found in the scene. The angels are shown moving from left to right and only the bodies of the foremost apostles are visible.

Although the work resembles the two Monastic type ivories discussed above, several changes in the scene indicate that it was not produced in the same workshop. The faces of the rear apostles are no longer visible; only the crowns of their heads can be seen. Except for the front figures, no attempt is made to present each apostle individually. Two angels are shown approaching from the left of the scene in place of the one angel found in each of the two previous carvings that were discussed. A single angel, as is customary, is shown departing with the figure of Mary's soul which is now missing.

It appears that the head of John is missing, as well. In the inscription which runs across the area where the figure of John is usually placed, an empty space has been left between the letter K and the dipthong OI. This spacing was probably intended to allow for the placement of the head of John next to the recumbent figure of Mary. The absence of John from the scene is unusual; not only was he an active participant in the two previous scenes, but his presence

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[11] Victoria and Albert Museum, Late Antique and Byzantine Art (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963), fig. 35. An eleventh-century date is assigned to the ivory in this work. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:57, designate the second half of the tenth century as the date of origin.

is customary in all Koimesis scenes. Therefore, it is likely that his figure was part of the original grouping.

The placement of the reticulated segment, a symbol of Paradise, in the upper right edge of the carving, may be related to the belief that Paradise lay to the east.[12] As was pointed out, Christians identified the east with a direction to the right.[13] This would also explain the action of the Theotokos who is described as placing herself upon her bier so that she could face the east, according to the "Coptic Discourse of Pseudo-Cyril."[14]

A crudely carved insciption in Greek, reading H KOIMHCIC, THE KOIMESIS, is found in this scene. Inscriptions are usually included in Byzantine depictions to identify either or both the scene and the figures. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann indicate that this inscription is a later addition.[15]

The Koimesis scene occupies only the upper third of the ivory plaque which was once the central panel of a triptych (Figure 21). Three scenes, each of equal size, are carved on the plaque. The figures in all three sections are less flattened than in the two preceding ivories. The rounded shapes of the limbs of the apostles, Christ, and the angels in the Koimesis scene and the saints in the lower bands are characteristic of the Classical style. Greater care

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[12]Genesis 2:8.

[13]See above, 23.

[14]See above, 22-23.

[15]2:57.

is also taken with these figures in arranging their garments in graceful folds. It appears that the use of the Classical style would exclude this ivory from inclusion in the Monastic type of Koimesis.

However, I would suggest that although the entire plaque is carved in the Classical style, the Koimesis scene is a copy of a Monastic type Koimesis, not only iconographically but also stylistically. It should be noted that the saints of the lower two panels are elongated, stately forms. Each saint occupies his own separate zone. In contrast, the stocky figures of the Koimesis appear to be crowded into the frame. The apostles are compressed, one upon the other. Even though the drapery treatment and the corporeality of the figures is the same in the Koimesis scene as in the lower panels, the squatty, compacted figures do not exude the same air of classical elegance. It appears that the artist, using a Monastic type of Koimesis as a model, has adopted the rustic style of the model in rendering the scene. Although the artist has added depth to the carving by giving greater volume to the forms, he has retained the flattened Monastic type of footstool, superimposed upon the draperies, thereby denying the illusion of depth for this object. Because the work parallels other Monastic types iconographically and stylistically, I would classify this Koimesis with the Monastic type.

The entire plaque appears to be the work of one artist because of the similarity of drapery treatment, the type of head used for the figures, and the shape of the bodies. The quality of the carving is especially poor in the handling of the heads. The

inept carving of the heads of the figures coupled with the worn condition of the ivory give a rough, unfinished appearance to the heads. A fragmentary ivory of the Virgin crowning the Emperor Leo VI (886-912) presents figures with the same type of faces, especially noticeable in the dull, lifeless eyes.[16] The similarity between this fragment belonging to the late tenth or early eleventh century and the ivory from the Victoria and Albert Museum gives further support to a late tenth-century date for the work as suggested by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann.[17]

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[16]Beckwith, ill. 79, from Berlin-Dahlem, Ehemals Staatliche Museum.

[17]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:57.

CHAPTER XI

CLASSIC TYPE OF KOIMESIS SCENE

Ivory Koimesis, Bayerische Staatsbiblithek, Munich, First Half of Tenth Century

An early Koimesis example of the Classic type, an ivory carving now located in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, has been assigned to the first half of the tenth century (Figure 1).[1] The appearance of this ivory within a century after the return of the images and the careful arrangement of its participants to form a compact, forceful composition suggest the possibility that the carving was based upon earlier, possibly pre-Iconoclastic, Koimesis scenes. Weitzmann states that Byzantine ivories are "a derivative material dependent chiefly on miniature and icon painting" from an earlier time.[2]

The plaque (which is in excellent condition) is encased in an Ottonian manuscript cover for the Gospels of Otto III. The sacred importance of the event is brought out by the delicately latticed canopy which covers the grouping. Traces of gilding remain on the nimbus of Christ, the inscription, the canopy, the cushion on the

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[1] Hutter, fig. 129; Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 1:pl. 1. The plaque is encased in the cover for the manuscript cod. lat. 4453, cim. 58.

[2] Weitzmann, "Threnos," 485.

deathbed, and the wings and nimbi of the angels.[3] With the exception of the arc in the sky, representing Paradise, all the components found in the Monastic type of Koimesis scene are also present in this Classic type ivory. Nevertheless, both stylistically and iconographically, it belongs to the Classic type, as will be shown below.

Two iconographic changes that separate this Koimesis and other examples of the Classic type from the Monastic type occur in the placement of the angels and the depictions of the apostles. The angels no longer move in the same direction but swoop down from opposite sides to receive the soul of Mary. In addition, each apostle receives individualized treatment. The rear figures are not depicted as a mass of unidentifiable, nondescript heads but as separate persons displaying varying reactions to the event.

The piece is carved in the Classical style used for court art, as are all Koimesis works classified as the Classic type. Characteristics of the style can be seen in the graceful postures of the figures, the cascading folds of the carefully draped garments, the rhythmic compositional arrangement with a flowing interplay between the figures surrounding the Virgin, the use of light and shadow which is emphasized by the deep carving of the forward figures, the sense of depth achieved by a graduation of the carving from deep to shallow, and a decrease in the size of the background figures.

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[3]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 1:8.

Goldschmidt and Weitzmann include this ivory with a group of tenth-century ivories which they classify as the painterly group.[4] Ivories belonging to the painterly group can be distinguished by the "trumpet folds" of the garment hem lines and the corporeality of the figures brought out by interspersing a network of juxtaposed garment folds.[5] The name "painterly" stems from the use of lightly etched lines paralleling deeply carved lines to create a highlighting effect against the deep furrows. This use is based upon a painting technique.[6]

The small plaque measures 14 by 11 centimeters. It has been dated as belonging to the first-half of the tenth century. We know that the piece is presently recessed in a manuscript cover for the Gospels of Otto III, a Germanic emperor, who ruled from 980 to 1002.[7] The carving, a product of a Constantinopolitan workshop, was the center of a triptych prior to its insertion in the manuscript cover.[8] It probably came to the Ottonian court as a gift when the Byzantine princess Theophano married Otto II in the year 972.[9] Allowing for the time necessary for its creation as a Byzantine

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[4]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 1:8; Hutter, 125.

[5]Kurt Weitzmann, The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai: The Icons, vol. 1: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 83, 93, 98.

[6]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 1:8; Hutter, 120.

[7]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 1:8.

[8]Hutter, 120. The author does not give her reason or source for stating that the plaque once was a part of a triptych.

[9]Ostrogorsky, 296-97.

votive object, its arrival as a gift in the Ottonian court, its dismantling and subsequent resetting on the manuscript cover, the dating, first-half of the tenth century, seems correct.

In the scene, Mary reclines upon her deathbed which is pushed against the right column of the canopy. In later scenes, the Virgin is centered between the two groups of attendant apostles and hierarchs. Twelve apostles and three prelates, probably Dionysius, Hierothesus, and Jacobus, as recorded by Pseudo-Dionysius, witness the death of Mary.[10] The presence of the three prelates later becomes a standard feature of the Koimesis iconography. Several of the attendants hold bejeweled volumes, no doubt liturgical books. Christ is centered directly behind the body of Mary, holding the small figure which represents her soul. All present focus upon Mary, including Christ, who is shown in profile, a view not favored in Byzantine art and one that is discarded in later Koimesis scenes. Paul bends over the foot of the bed. Meanwhile, Peter, at the head of the bed, swings the censer in front of an apostle, probably John. This awkward maneuvre of Peter is avoided in later scenes by placing him towards the front of the bier so that he is able to swing the censer freely. The two angels above the scene approach in a balanced formation, forming curves with their gracefully arched bodies. Their hands are veiled in anticipation of their reception of the

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[10]Migne, P. G., 3:681.

soul of Mary. Thus they honor the religious custom of covering the hands to carry or hold sacred objects.[11]

The small soul figure which Christ holds is clothed in garb similar to that worn by the other participants. In the following century, the soul figure is sometimes wrapped in a winding cloth arranged in herringbone fashion about the figure (Figure 25).

A darkened area surrounding the inscription indicates that it may be a later addition. The precision and care used in carving the event is lacking in the inscribing of the letters. The words appear to be abbreviated forms of THE THEOTOKOS' KOIMESIS, in that order, Η Τ•Θ•ΚΟΥ ΚΟΙΜΙϹ.

The adept use of geometric shapes in composing the scene creates a vibrant carving with a central focal point. The curved open space below the arched bodies of the angels gives added buoyancy to these heavenly messengers. The slightly flattened curve is repeated by the top row of apostles. The artist also echoes the arm movements of the angels with the raised arm of Christ and the swinging censer of Peter. The triangular, wedge-shaped grouping of apostles on each side of the scene directs the eye of the viewer to the central action which depicts the theme of the Koimesis, Christ's reception of the soul of his mother, Mary.

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[11] In a miniature painting of Moses Receiving the Law, the prophet's hands are veiled, Vatican Library, Reg. Suev. gr. 1, as in Grabar, Middle Ages, pl. 35. In the Eastern Orthodox Liturgy, the celebrant uses veiled hands to carry the paten and chalice containing the elements for the Eucharist.

The interspersed lines which enliven the elegant drapery treatment can be seen upon the wings of the angels, the robe of Paul, and the deathbed fabrics. The deeply carved, angulated folds of the fabrics contrast with the lightly carved, parallel draping of the garments of the flattened figures in the Monastic type of Koimesis. The body of the Virgin delicately takes shape through her clinging robes. Such treatment is reminiscent of ancient Greek sculptures of the fourth century. A marble carving of the goddess Nike from the paraphet of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Athenian Acropolis illustrates the ancient style.[12] In Byzantine art, it is unusual to define the body of the Virgin as clearly as in this ivory.

In place of the cursory treatment of facial features and accessories as in the Monastic type, details have been meticulously carved. With exquisite care, faces, coiffures, and small items, such as the censer and legs of the bier, are precisely delineated. Although the show of grief is greater than in the Monastic type, the artist depends mainly on hand gestures and body positions to convey the grief of the attendants. The faces of the participants, though serious of mien, do not reflect sorrow. Some of the mourners place a hand over their mouth, or their eyes, or clutch at their beard. Several lean forward with intent concern.

The scene appears with increasing frequency, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in manuscripts and in wall paintings and mosaics.

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[12]Gisela M. A. Richter, A Handbook of Greek Art, 6th ed. (New York: Phaidon, 1959), fig. 80.

Koimesis, Miniature Painting, Lectionary, Fol. 134^{v}, Grand Lavra, Mount Athos, Early Eleventh Century

A jewel-like Koimesis scene is preserved in an early eleventh-century Lectionary from the Monastery of the Grand Lavra at Mount Athos (Figure 22).[13] Weitzmann has traced the origin of the Lectionary to determine the date of the miniature painting.[14] The manuscript was a royal gift to Saint Athanasius, the founder of the first monastic community at Mount Athos.[15] Tradition says that Emperor Nikephorus Phocas (died 969) was the donor, but Weitzmann believes the style of the painting points to a slightly later date. He suggests that the emperor Basil II (976-1025) presented the volume to the monastery.[16] Weitzmann does not explain the stylistic characteristics which indicate an early eleventh-century date for the origin of the painting. However, the fluttering, clinging garments of the apostles on the left of the scene are fashioned in a freer, looser style than found in earlier works and may be the change which led to Weitzmann's decision.

The artist has individualized each of the participants. He has allowed them to express their sorrow through their facial expressions rather than by using gestures as in the Munich Koimesis

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[13]Kurt Weitzmann, Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), fig. 259.

[14]Ibid., 269.

[15]John Julius Norwich and Reresby Sitwell, Mount Athos (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 29.

[16]Weitzmann, Manuscript Illumination, 269.

(Figure 1). Only Paul holds his mantle to his face in a traditional gesture of grief. It is evident that Mary has yet to succumb even though Christ already holds the figure of her soul. Again, a conflation of events has been used. Not only are Mary's eyes open but her hand is raised as if to bless or bid farewell to the apostles.

The figure of Christ is emphasized by its central, focal position and a slight enlargement of the body. The body of Mary has also been elongated slightly. Such enlargment or elongation of a divine figure and of Mary was standard in Byzantine art. The device served to ensure a clear understanding of the scene. Christ looks out from the scene engaging the eye of the viewer as if to impart the meaning of the occurrence to the worshipper.

The delicate carving of the Munich ivory has been replaced by skillful painting, especially admirable in the handling of the apostles' garments. For the figures of Christ, Mary, and the apostles on the right, the painter has allowed little movement. He has clothed the apostles to the left of Mary with softly clinging robes which billow in a gentle breeze. In Koimesis scenes of the next three centuries, especially those from Serbia, the apostles surround the bier in a sea of flowing, undulating garments.[17]

The figure held by Christ which symbolizes the soul of the Virgin appears to resemble that of an infant rather than the miniaturized adult of earlier scenes. By the fourteenth century,

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[17]Schug-Wille, 219, wall painting of the Koimesis of the Virgin, at Gracanica, ca. 1320.

the figure of the soul of the Virgin is usually that of an infant, as in the mosaic of the Koimesis at the Khariye Djami in Istanbul.[18]

In the inscription which reads H KIMICIC TIS ΘKX̄, THE KOIMESIS OF THE THEOTOKOS, an abbreviated form of Theotokos is used. The spelling of the word KIMICIC and of the article TIS vary from the usual form found in inscriptions. The iota in the TIS and the first iota in KOIMESIS have replaced the letter eta for the article and the diphthong OI in the word Koimesis.

In church decoration of the post-Iconoclastic era, each scene was placed so that its frame was formed architecturally. In the Lavra miniature, the scene is contained by a stylized decorative floral border.

The bier has not been placed near the bottom edge of the painting as was customary. Raising the scene within the frame creates the impression that the viewer is looking upwards at the event, thereby heightening the importance or sanctity of the occurrence.

Ivory Koimesis, Biblioteca, Ravenna, Eleventh Century

An ivory Koimesis, now located in the Biblioteca of Ravenna, is more crudely fashioned than the miniature painting that was just discussed, yet follows the same basic iconographical plan (Figure 23).[19] The scene has been compressed, resulting in a shortening and heightening of the bier and an abbreviated length for the figure

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[18] Rice, Byzantine Art, pl. IV.

[19] Fleury, 1:pl. 64.

of the Theotokos. A portion of the face of Christ appears to be missing. The soul figure which Christ holds is similar to the adult-faced figure seen in the Munich ivory. The actions and placement of the apostles have been altered somewhat. Such changes are encountered in Koimesis depictions since the artist could alter movements and participants as long as he did not disturb the basic iconography.

A new element is introduced into the scene: an architectural half-wall behind the two apostle groups. The fact that four mourners stand behind the wall suggests that the ivory may belong to the late eleventh century.[20] Although architectural backdrops are found in Koimesis scenes in the early eleventh century, mourners are not added to these structures, with the exception of this ivory, until the early twelfth century (Figure 27). Architectural elements become increasingly fanciful and elaborate in thirteenth-century scenes from Serbia.[21]

Ivory Koimesis, Werner Collection, Luton Hoo, Eleventh Century

A Koimesis scene, carved on an ivory plaque together with a Threnos scene, is found in the Werner Collection (Figure 24).[22] Similarities abound between this ivory and the Ravenna Koimesis.

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[20]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, 2:75, and Fleury, 1:pl. 64, are no more specific than the eleventh century in dating this ivory.

[21]Hutter, fig. 162, wall painting of the Koimesis at Sopocani, dated 1260-65; Papaioannou, 62, wall painting of the Koimesis at church of St. Clement, Ochrid, 1295.

[22]Weitzmann, "Threnos," fig. 12.

The fact that no architectural wall is included suggests that this plaque predates the Ravenna scene. It also gives added weight to the suggestion that the Ravenna Koimesis belongs to the late eleventh century.[23]

Although not on a level with the Munich ivory, the deep carving contains the interplay of shadow and light seen in the Munich piece. Even though the artist has little space for the figures, the apostles receive individual treatment and are not compressed into a mass of heads as in the Monastic type of Koimesis. The angels also hover above Christ as is usual in the Classic type of Koimesis. The ivory appears to be the work of a second-rate artist, modeled on the Classic type of Koimesis.

Koimesis, Miniature Painting, Gospel Lectionary, Codex 587, Monastery of Dionysiou, Mount Athos, Eleventh Century

New elements continue to be added to the Koimesis scene. A Lectionary from Mount Athos contains a Koimesis in which the background includes two structures to the rear of the apostle groups (Figure 25).[24] Draperies hang from these architectural backdrops. Background structures decorated with hanging draperies are encountered in Byzantine art as early as the fourth or fifth century in the mosaics of the church of St. George in Thessalonika. Placing architectural elements to the rear of a scene in Byzantine works

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[23] Ibid.

[24] S. M. Pelekanides et al., The Treasures of Mount Athos: Illuminated Manuscripts, trans. Philip Sherrard, 4 vols., 2 forthcoming (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1973), 1:fig. 272.

denotes that the event took place indoors as opposed to scenes where trees, greenery, and other objects of nature are included to indicate the setting is out-of-doors.[25]

Christ is depicted with his head twisted toward Mary at an unnatural angle while his arms extend in the opposite direction to hand the small figure of Mary's soul to the waiting angel. The other figures stand less awkwardly, although the upper torso of their bodies is shorter in proportion to the length of the rest of the body. Arms are also shortened. Legs, enclosed under lightly draped garments, are lengthened. This treatment may be copied from wall mosaics or paintings in which such distortions were employed to give the depiction a natural appearance for the viewers below.[26]

The shimmering gold background which affirms the sanctity of the occurrence contrasts effectively with the plainly garbed, unpretentious figures set before it. With economy of line, the apostles are quietly placed next to the Virgin. A flat panel with gold trim and embellishments replaces the gathered drapery usually hung along the length of the bier. This flat panel will be used intermittently with the older drapery form henceforth.

A lone angel arrives to receive the figure, representing the soul of Mary, which is wrapped in a winding cloth or in swaddling clothes. Vatasianu refers to this type of wrapping in establishing

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[25] Nicholas Osolin, "The Icon of the Nativity," Concern 9, No. 4 (1974):7.

[26] Demus, Mosaic, 31-34.

his theory of a Copic origin for the Koimesis iconography.[27] In that such wrappings are not used for the figure representing Mary's soul until the end of the tenth century, their use is not likely to be the result of Coptic influence.

Koimesis, Wall Painting, Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa, Asinou, Cyprus, 1105-1106

The last example of the Classic type of Koimesis to be discussed is an early twelfth-century wall painting, located in a remote mountain chapel at Asinou on the island of Cyprus (Figure 26).[28] The small chapel is called the Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa. The quality of the workmanship of the painting suggests a Constantinopolitan background for the artist.[29] A wall inscription firmly dates the founding of the church and the original series of wall paintings which include the Koimesis scene. An inscription records that the church was built in the year 6614 according to Byzantine reckoning, which is the date 1105/6 by the Gregorian calendar.[30]

The painting contains subtle juxtapositions of contrasts. The delicate pastel coloring of the apostles' robes is contrasted with the somber shades of the garments of Christ and Mary. The artist has used large ovals of shaded color heightened with white to

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[27]See above, 58.

[28]Sacopoulo, fig. 42a.

[29]Andreas Stylianou and Judith Stylianou, The Painted Churches of Cyprus (Stourbirdge, England: Mark and Moody, 1964), 15-18.

[30]Sacapoulo, 22.

shape the limbs of the apostles. The long limbs, focal points of the apostle groups, serve as geometrical exclamation points. The interaction of subdued agitation and sorrow which flanks the static figures of Christ and Mary can be related to mankind's grief and anxiety at the sight and thought of death. The two central figures offer the comforting reassurance of the reality of the life eternal. Placed in formal, frontal poses and painted in dark colors, the somber Mary and Christ also convey the significance of the event: the deification of man.

An interplay of contrasts serves to separate actions of the temporal world from the central action which has a timeless quality. Deep central colors are counterpoised against the pale, softly washed hues of the apostles' robes. A stiff, unmoving Virgin and Christ are centered in the midst of the fluid movements of the apostles. A classical treatment is applied to the apostle figures but a frontal, hieratic pose is used for Mother and Son. The emotional display of the apostles augments the aura of unbroken calm which encapsules the central figures.

The two galleries in the background contain four grieving women. An exact identification of these female mourners is not possible. The various apocryphal narrations on the Koimesis of the Theotokos do not agree in naming the women mourners nor in their number.[31] The

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[31]James, 196, the Coptic narration attributed to Evodius mentions a woman, called Salome, who was present at the Koimesis of Mary; 216, in the Latin version, Transistus Mariae A, three virgins are present at the Koimesis, named Sepphora, Abigea, and Zael; 220, in a Syriac narration, the virgins are called Calletha, Neshra, and Tabitha.

placement of these women in an upper story may be based upon a custom of the Eastern Church: women were restricted to the galleries of the churches.[32]

The bier is constructed with the same type of smooth front panel as was seen on the Dionysiou miniature (Figure 25). The placement of the headboard at a right angle to the head of the bier allows the Virgin to rest her head upon it without disturbing her frontal pose.

The figure representing the soul of Mary wears a jewel-encrusted capelet. In an adjacent wall painting of the Raising of Lazarus, the revived Lazarus is clothed in a similar garment. Vatasianu refers to this similarity but offers no examples of its occurrence.[33] The Asinou example belonging to the twelfth century is of too late a date to be considered an example of Coptic influence in the iconography of the Koimesis.

The composition has been reversed with the Theotokos facing the left of the scene. The chapel which contains the painting has two entrances: a west one immediately under the wall painting of the Koimesis and a second entrance on the south wall. The reversal of the Koimesis scene may have been arranged so that the Virgin would be facing the worshipper should he enter through the south doorway.

The location of the painting within the nave above the west entrance conforms to a tradition that is evident by the mid-eleventh

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[32]Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev, 144.

[33]Vatasianu, 40.

century. The Koimesis depiction was not included in the decorative scheme of the monastery church of Hosios Loukas, dated at 1120.[34] However, it is ensconced above the western doors of the nave in the church of Aghia Sophia at Ochrida, Serbia, which dates from 1050.[35] In churches that were built or decorated after that date, the Koimesis portrayal was almost always placed above the western entrance of the nave.[36] Among the churches which adhered to this placement were the church at Daphni, built around 1100, the church of Martorana at Palermo, dated at 1151, and Khariye Djami in Constantinople, 1315.[37]

The placement of the Koimesis scene directly opposite the figures of Virgin and Child in the apse suited the Byzantine sense of balance and order. Mary's death, the end of her earthly life, is depicted on the west wall, the direction of the setting of the sun and the close of the day. On the opposite wall in the eastern apse, the Virgin looks down as a living presence, holding the source of life eternal in her arms, who like the rising sun will become the light of the world.

The scene completes the cycle of events which, according to Christian thought, was initiated by the incarnation of Christ, represented in the apse with the figures of Mary and Child. The

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[34]Diez and Demus, Appendix: plan of mosaic decoration.

[35]Rice, Byzantine Art, 234.

[36]Sacopoulo, 37.

[37]Diez and Demus, Appendix: plan of mosaic decoration.

ultimate destiny of an eternal life in Paradise offered to the faithful followers of Christ through his intercession is foreshadowed by the events of the Koimesis of the Virgin. Thus, upon entering a church decorated according to such a plan, the worshipper was greeted by the sight of the Theotokos. Upon leaving he was visually reminded of the rewards available to those of the faithful who live and die according to the teachings of the church.

An inscription identifies the event as the Koimesis of the Theotokos. In addition, abbreviations are inscribed to identify Jesus Christ, IC XO, and Mary Theotokos, MP ΘV.[38]

This Koimesis representation concludes the study of the development of early Koimesis depictions. However, Koimesis scenes continue to appear throughout the Byzantine and post-Byzantine era. Many new elements, probably based on the apocrypha, are added to the Koimesis scenes of Serbia and Bulgaria.[39] The apostles are seen arriving on clouds, even as they are also standing in attendance at the bier. The incidence of Jephonias, the Hebrew who attempted to desecrate the bier of the Theotokos according to several apocryphal narrations, is included in the lower section of Koimesis scenes beginning with the fourteenth century (Figures 27 and 28).[40] Hosts of

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[38]Although the abbreviation for Jesus Christ is usually IC XC, the letters XO are sometimes used for the word Christ, according to P. D. Whitting, Byzantine Coins (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1973), 33.

[39]Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev. The main subject of their article is the Koimesis scene in the art of Serbia and Bulgaria.

[40]See above, 17, 20.

angels hover above the bier in some depictions. The well-known Koimesis mosaic from Khariye Djami in Istanbul, dated 1315, contains such a group of angels.

The late Byzantine age also saw a return to a simplified version of the Koimesis, stripped of many additions. A late fourteenth-century icon by Theophanes, a Greek monk who executed the majority of his work in Moscow and Novgorod, concentrates on the essentials. The commanding presence of Christ dominates the assemblage. The angels have been omitted and only two prelates are present in addition to the apostles. The background buildings which by this time had grown noticeably complex and extensive become slender stylized structures receding into the background. The restraint of the artist results in a heightened spiritual quality in the icon.

Additional study of the later development of the Koimesis in Byzantine art is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a need exists for further work on the evolution of the Koimesis in the art of the Middle and Late Byzantine eras as well as in the post-Byzantine centuries.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSIONS

An evaluation of the factors, described in the preceding chapters, which may have helped shape the iconography of the Byzantine Koimesis scene, leads me to suggest that late antique death scenes appear to be the most likely source for the origin of the compositional layout of the scene. These scenes recorded an iconographic tradition retained from ancient Greek prothesis depictions and Roman conclamatio scenes. Because the classical past, so dear to the Byzantines, frequently furnished models for artistic scenes, it is plausible that artists turned to late antique art for the selection of a suitable compositional arrangement for the Koimesis depiction.

The writings of the Greek fathers on the subject of the Koimesis of the Theotokos, as well as the wall image of the death of Mary from the Basilica of Holy Sion, should also be considered as possible determinants in the formation and iconographic content of the scene and in the orientation of the participants in the portrayal.

However, our meager knowledge of pre-Iconoclastic Koimesis scenes hinders us from reaching a factually substantiated conclusion concerning the source or sources of the Koimesis composition and iconography. The Iconoclastic controversies quite likely caused the

destruction of the materials needed for an uninterrupted view of the evolution of the Koimesis in Byzantine art. The strong distaste which the Iconoclasts apparently expressed for the feast of the Koimesis gives rise to the suggestion that the formation of the iconography of the event in the middle Byzantine period, limited as it was to the death of the Theotokos, may have been affected by a reaction to the diatribes and accusations of the Iconoclasts. Repercussions from the Iconoclastic troubles may have resulted in the firmly unified approach which the influential prelates, John Damascenos, Theodore Studite, and Patriarch Germanus, took when discussing the feast of the Koimesis.

In characteristic middle Byzantine fashion, the post-Iconoclastic Koimesis portrayal is presented in an open, easily understood manner. The emphasis clearly centers on the obedient acceptance of death by Mary and the comforting presence of Christ who partakes in the transfer of her soul to heaven. Without factual proof, we may only conjecture that pre-Iconoclastic scenes may have existed which contained heretical distortions, paralleling certain of the written distortions which John of Thessalonika felt called upon to remove from the Koimesis apocryphal narrations. If such scenes did indeed exist, their heretical content would account for their apparent total disappearance following the Iconoclastic disputes.

The narrations recorded in the apocryphal writings on the Koimesis of the Theotokos, as well as the oral tradition which preceded these written accounts, appear to have provided ample subject

matter for the depiction of the scene throughout the Byzantine age. Each of the additional secondary events which were gradually inserted into the Koimesis portrayals is contained in the apocryphal stories. Yet the apocrypha cannot be said to have shaped the arrangement of the scene nor to have determined the concentration of interest on the dual events: the death of the Theotokos and the presence of Christ at that moment to receive her soul. In the majority of the Koimesis apocryphal versions which have come down to us, the bodily transfer of the Theotokos to Paradise, not her death, is the high point of the story. Nevertheless, this emphasis is not reflected in the Byzantine Koimesis scene.

The homilies and encomia on the Koimesis written by the Greek fathers of the seventh, eight, and ninth centuries elaborate on the death of the Theotokos and the transfer of her soul to heaven but do not set forth the manner of her bodily transfer to Paradise. The attitude of the church, as exemplified by the writings of these church fathers, most likely furnished the guidelines for the subject matter of the Koimesis depictions, limiting it to the death of the Theotokos and the reception of her soul by Christ.

Theodore Studite describes the Koimesis of the Theotokos as a foreshadowing of the deification of man, made possible through the efforts of Christ. According to the Studite, this deification will be conferred on worthy Christians on the day of the Last Judgment. The privilege of participating in this heavenly state immediately after death is granted only to Mary, for she was the instrument of the Incarnation. Art of the middle Byzantine period

was designed to visualize Christological dogma.[1] In line with this practice, the Koimesis portrayal conveyed to the viewer, in a material form, an abstract theological concept: the deification of man.

Early western scenes, predating the appearance of the Byzantine depictions in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, dealt with a different aspect of the death of Mary. The assumption of the Virgin into heaven was favored in the west. The figure of Christ, indispensable for the Byzantine scene, was at times absent from western scenes or present in a non-active role. In that the scenes from the west concentrated on the event of the assumption and used several iconographic arrangements, none of which resemble the Koimesis composition, it does not appear that the Byzantine scene drew upon the western Assumption depictions for its origin.

The sole existing pre-Iconoclastic portrayal of the Koimesis of Mary, the Sion depiction, which deals with the death of Mary but not her subsequent transfer or assumption into heaven, reinforces the probability that western art did not play a role in the formation of the iconography of the Koimesis scene. The arrangement of the figures in the Sion scene, placing the Virgin in a horizontal position with an upright angel standing behind her, suggests the composition which is used for later Byzantine Koimesis portrayals. The early pilgrims whose records of their devout travels describe visits to the Basilica of Holy Sion and the Church of the Virgin at the

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[1] Demus, Mosaics, 5.

burial place of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat do not mention any visual presentation of the Assumption of Mary at either of the above churches or elsewhere, although several of the pilgrims mention or describe the Sion portrayal. Perhaps this indicates that at that early date the death of Mary and not her bodily removal to heaven had been selected for artistic renditions concerned with her demise.

The Coptic origin for the Koimesis iconography suggested by Vatasianu cannot be discounted. However, the fact that all the Koimesis depictions known to us begin to appear two or more centuries after the break between the Coptic Christians and the Eastern Church presents a problem. The veneration of the feast of the Koimesis appears to have gathered its greatest momentum after the Coptic Church separated from the main body of the Church. Subsequent to this break, Coptic Christian belief and custom no longer were influential in Byzantine art or religious thought. Therefore, examples which predate the known Koimesis scenes are needed to bridge the time gap and strengthen this hypothesis.

The study of selected Koimesis examples from the tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries, contained in the final chapters of this thesis, was included to illustrate the possible influence of those forces which are described in the earlier chapters. These examples are but a small sampling of the large number of Koimesis portrayals which have been preserved from those centuries. A need exists for further classification of these works. In addition, the development of the iconography of the Koimesis up to the mid-fifteenth century saw numerous additions to the scene. Research

concerning the chronology of their appearance and the sources which may have furnished them has yet to be done on a scope which would cover the developmental period as a whole rather than on a piecemeal basis.[2]

The Christian concept of an afterlife with the prospects of an eternal life in Paradise introduced a new outlook on death.[3] The ancient Greeks looked upon death as an eternal sleep.[4] For the Christians, however, it was only a temporary sleep which would be interrupted at the time of the resurrection of the dead.[5] In Christian thought, death was a summons from Christ not to be dreaded but awaited with gladness.[6] The visual portrait of Mary's willing acceptance of death, certain of the Paradise that would follow, offered the example par excellence for the believer, as illustrated in the description of the death of a monk of the Eastern Orthodox Church: "Instead of the agony that an unbeliever feels before death, the old monk lay down to sleep joyfully, for he looked forward to the resurrection of the dead."[7]

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[2]Sacopoulo, 39, presents a chronology of the mandorla used for the figure of Christ, commencing with the second-half of the twelfth century. Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev take note of other new features, such as the rear structures, but do not focus their main attention on them.

[3]Rush, 1.

[4]Ibid., 12.

[5]Ibid.; I Corinthians 7:39.

[6]Cyprian, De Mortalitate 24 Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 312, as in Rush, 25.

[7]Pandelis Prevelakis, The Angel in the Well, trans. Peter Mackridge, The Charioteer 16/17 (1974/1975): 63.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APOCRYPHAL NARRATIONS

Transistus Mariae B, written in Latin.

Date: Probably written around the year 530, according to Jugie, La Mort, 112.

Text: [Pseudo-] Meliton of Sardis, Migne, P. G., 5:1231-40. Tiscendorf, Apocalypses, 124-36.

English translation: James, 209-16.

John of Thessalonica, Homily, written in Greek.

Date: Probably dating from 550-580, according to Jugie, La Mort, 117.

Text: Patrologia Orientalis, 19:344-438. Tischendorf, Apocalypses, 95-112.

English translation: James, 201-209.

"Discourse of pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem," written in Boharic.

No date assigned.

English translation: W. Budge, ed., Miscellaneous Coptic Texts (1915), 642ff., cited by James, with condensation, 197-98.

APPENDIX B

THE KOIMESIS IN THE GREEK FATHERS[1]

Epiphanius Constantiensis

Fourth century.

Ab haeresi 65,
Migne, P. G., 42:715-16.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Fifth century.

De divinis nominibus,
Migne, P. G., 3:681.

Nikephorus Callistos

Fourteenth century writer.
Account of the ecclesiastical events during reign of Emperor Maurikios (582-602).

Historia ecclesiastica,
Migne, P. G., 147:292.

Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem

Written in the year 614.

Anacreontica,
Migne, P. G., 87:3821.

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[1]Only passages related to this thesis are included.

John of Thessalonika, Bishop

Written around the year 620.

Patrologia Orientalis, 19:344-438.

Modestus, Patriarch of Jerusalem

Died in the year 634.

In Dormitionem,
Migne, P. G., 86:3277-312.

Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople

Died in the year 733.

In Dormitionem Deiparae,
Migne, P. G., 98:339-84.

Andrew of Crete, Archbishop

Died in the year 740, writings dated around 720.

In Dormitionem S. Mariae,
Migne, P. G., 97:1063-64.

John Damascenos

Died in the year 749.

In Dormitionem B. V. Mariae,
Migne, P. G., 96:699-762.

Theodore Studite

Lived from 759 to 826.

In Dormitionem Deiparae,
Migne, P. G., 99:720-29.

APPENDIX C

CHRONOLOGY OF ACCOUNTS OF THE CHURCH OF HOLY SION

348	Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem	Visits "Upper Church of Apostles."
530	Theodosius, pilgrim	Visits two churches of Mary: in Jerusalem and in Valley of Josaphat.
530	The Brevarius	Mention of the Virgin enclosed in death at Church of Holy Sion.
614	Jerusalem burned by Persians	
622-628	Church of Holy Sion rebuilt	
679-682	Arculf's pilgrimage to Holy Land	Recorded by Adamnan with sketch of Holy Sion Church indicating site of Mary's death.
702-703	Venerable Bede's account	Sketch of a Koimesis scene from wall of Church of Holy Sion.
720	Andrew of Crete	Mention of image of Koimesis in Church of Holy Sion.

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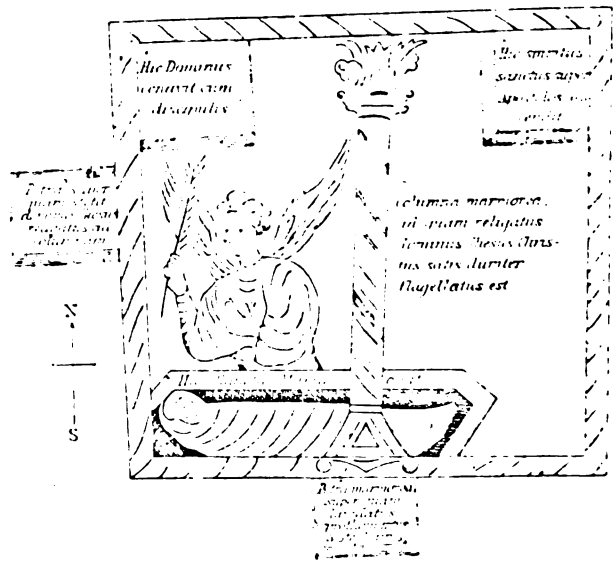

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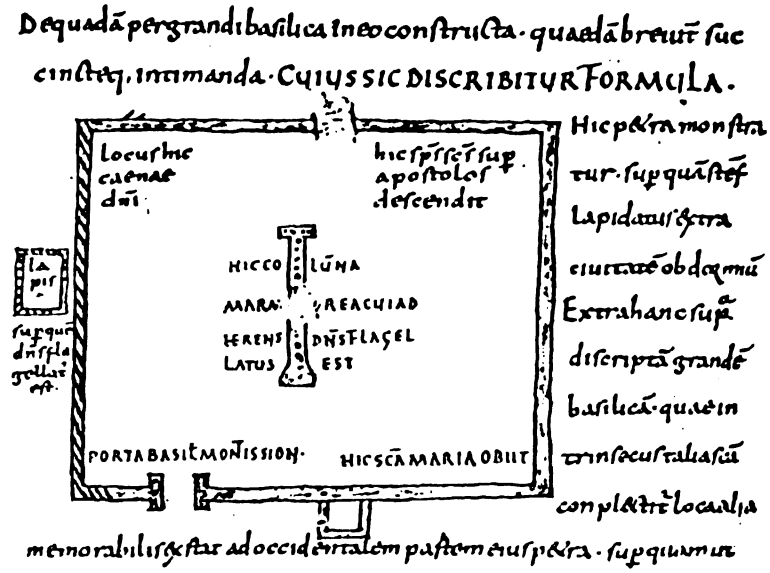

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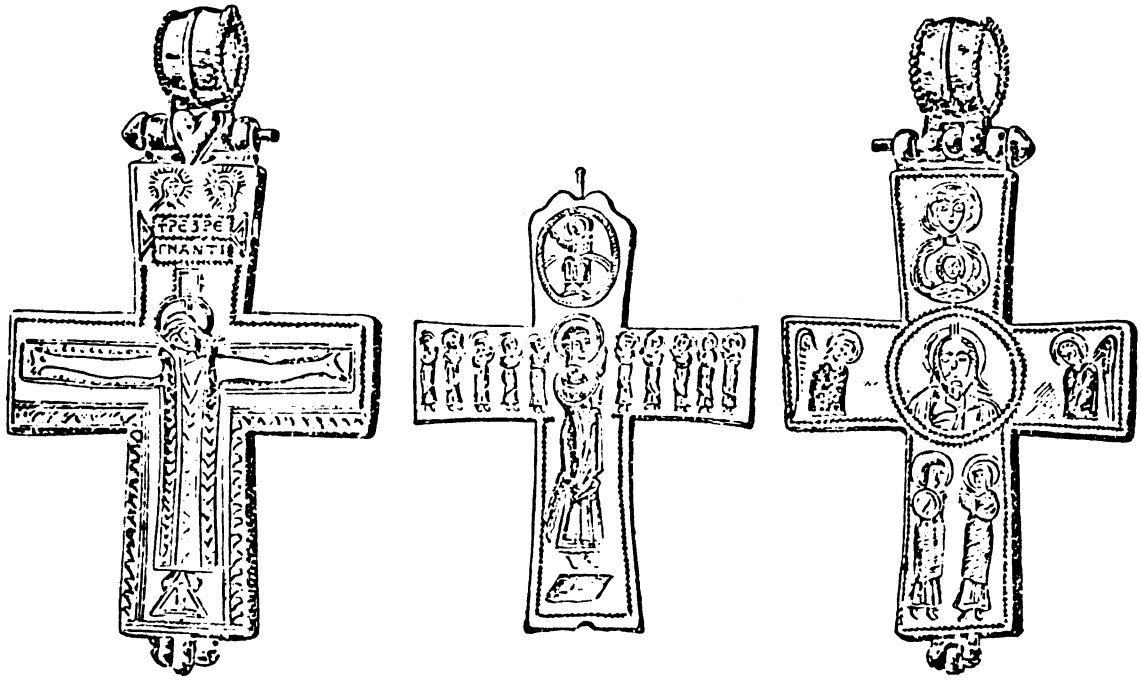

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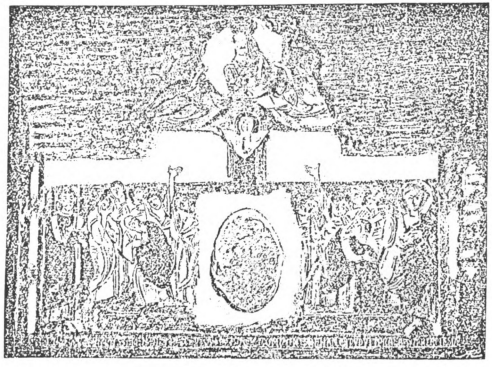

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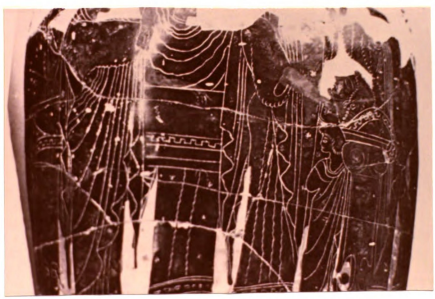

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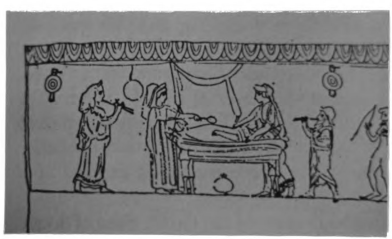

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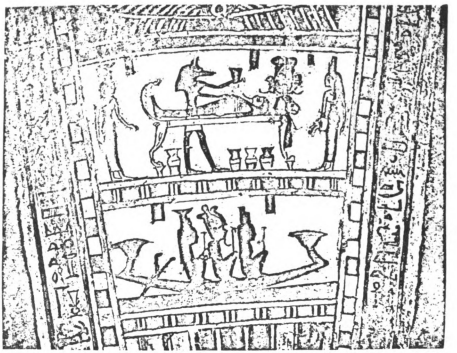

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