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AN INNOVATION OF THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE PERIOD

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THREE IVORY TRIPTYCHS:

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By

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ABSTRACT

THREE IVORY TRIPTYCHS:
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By

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This thesis investigates the possible imperial and religious uses of three ivory triptychs of the Middle Byzantine Period representing the Deesis with Saints. Neither this subject as a type of art object nor the triptych were known before this period. The Deesis became a popular subject and was depicted in a variety of media such as enamel and mosaic throughout the period. To discover the use of these Deesis triptychs I have studied examples of imperial and religious ivory sculpture throughout the ancient world including Byzantium and I have looked at liturgical practices and doctrines of the Byzantine church to which the triptychs may be related. I have also investigated the possible connections between the triptychs and certain Byzantine emperors. The thesis, then, is an attempt to show how religious and imperial iconography and uses of each triptych reflect the needs and ideas of the people who used them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Deesis with Saints was an important subject in the art of Constantinople during the Middle Byzantine Period. It was represented in various media for public and private devotion. The Deesis comprises the Virgin and John the Baptist standing before Christ with their arms raised in supplication on behalf of the faithful viewer. The Deesis is believed to have been derived from representations of the Last Judgement, where the Virgin acts as intecessor for the souls of the faithful before Christ, and the Baptist as intecessor for the sinners.[1] The earliest known example of the Deesis is located at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai, dated to the early sixth century. Just above the apse mosaic of the Transfiguration are the faces of the Virgin and the Baptist in roundels. They are not part of the Transfiguration but still occupy the right and left area beside Christ.

The Deesis is also found in Byzantine representations of the Crucifixion. John the Baptist rather than John the Evangelist stands with Mary beside the cross, as they stand beside Christ in the Deesis, with their hands raised in supplication. This representation of the Deesis

was depicted on ivory plaques and diptychs possibly as early as the sixth century.

The Iconoclasts of the eighth and ninth centuries decreed that images of the saints, apostles, and Christ should not be produced. Byzantine icons, including representations of the Deesis, were either hidden from public view or destroyed. When the Iconoclastic Controversy ended in the mid-ninth century the defenders of iconic images were victorious. This event marks the beginning of the Middle Byzantine Period, and a flourish of religious art occured as a joyous response to the victory. The Middle Byzantine Period ended when the Crusaders captured Constantinople in 1204. For information concerning the history of the Byzantine Empire a good source is Cyril Mango's Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome[2] in which the history and ideology of the Middle Byzantine Period is discussed. Also, the art of the period and the role of the emperor cult is examined here in conjunction with historical development.

The depiction of the Deesis accompanied by other saints seems to have appeared after the Iconoclastic Controversy. The best surviving examples of this subject are three ivory triptychs which date from the late tenth to early eleventh century. They are commonly known as the Palazzo Venezia, Harbaville, and Vatican triptychs. Neither the representation of the Deeis with Saints, nor ivory triptychs, were known before this period. The

depiction of the Deesis with Saints on ivory triptychs may have related to the iconostasis which stood before the altar in many Byzantine churches from possibly as early as the tenth century.[3] Representation of the Deesis with other saints had been painted on the iconostasis, which is like a wall with three doors. The triptychs may have resembled this format, however, they were smaller than the iconostasis, approximately 12 inches long and 10 inches high, a size which implies personal use.

The focus of this study is the function of the triptychs and their relationship to the people who used them. My purpose is to consider the relationship between the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs and liturgical prayers and practices of the Byzantine Orthodox Church and the Byzantine concept of icons. The figures of the Deesis correspond to saints called upon in prayer to intercede for faithful members in the church community including the emperor. The figures also correspond to saints commemorated in the Eucharistic ritual. I propose that the triptychs may have been placed on the altar to be used by a priest for guidance during the commemoration of the Eucharist. For information concerning the liturgical functions of the triptychs, Ernst Kantorowicz's article "Ivories and Litanies" is indispensible.[4] He associates the triptychs with prayers known as the Litany of Saints, to which the figures on each triptych correspond. He also argues the imperial use of the these triptychs. He does

not, however, discuss the triptychs as icons. The concept of an icon as a vehicle for prayer can be discerned in the three triptychs. To my knowledge no author has discussed the three ivory triptychs as icons. For a better understanding of the Deesis and the role of the other saints, the two works which are most helpful are The Byzantine Divine Liturgy by M. Solovey[5] and The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom by C. Kucharek.[6]

The triptychs may have been made for certain Byzantine emperors to use during personal devotions or to accompany the mass. The Palazzo Venezia triptych bears an inscription dedicated to a ruler named Constantine. Most scholars agree that this is Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who ruled from 913 to 959.[7] The Harbaville and Vatican triptychs have no inscriptions, but because of their increased imperial imagery it is likely that all three were intended for Byzantine emperors. The definitive study of Middle Byzantine ivory sculpture is Goldschmidt and Weitzmann's Die Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen.[8] It is the only major work on the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs before this study, and it forms the basis for the dates assigned to each triptych and relationships with other imperial ivory reliefs. It does not, however, discuss the triptychs as liturgical objects or icons. Information on the integration of imperial imagery into Christian art is presented in Grabar's Christian Iconography[9]

and Kitzinger's Byzantine Art in the Making.[10] Both of these studies investigate the sources for the seemingly imperial images of Christ and the Virgin in Byzantine art.

Representations of the Deesis with Saints can be found in the tenth and eleventh century, but no surviving examples remain after the mid-eleventh century. The Deesis was depicted in mosaic throughout the rest of the period but without the accompaniment of other saints. The triptychs, then, seem to have been made for a distinct purpose or person of the Middle Byzantine Period.

I have examined several examples of imperial and religious works of art made from ivory in ancient history. Ivory was used in ancient Egypt and Greece for images of rulers and gods in which their kingly and divine manifestations are suggested. Ivory images of God and emperors in Early Christian and Byzantine art imply a similar intention.

I have especially examined the ancient Pheidian statue of Zeus as an iconic image. The Greek concept of an image of God as a symbol can be applied to this statue and to the three ivory triptychs as icons. To my knowledge this relationship has not been stated before. To better understand the Greek concept of images, Boman's Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek explains the Greek meaning of 'icon' which is continued in the Byzantine concept of images.[11] The "Olympic Discourse" of Dio Chrysostom presents a first century A.D. look at the ancient statue of

Zeus as a symbol of the power and glory of god.[12] Aspects of Dio's philosophical ponderings are recalled in thoughts by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. A comparison of the ideas of these two men, concerning the use of symbols to represent God, have not been suggested before this study.

Dionysius was a Christian mystic whose writings influenced Byzantine Church fathers and the development of iconic images. His works, such as The Celestial Hierarchies, were known in Constantinople in the sixth century and helped form the basis of the arguments presented by the defenders of icons during the Iconoclastic Controversy.[13] In this way, the Greek concept of images enters Byzantine theology.

FOOTNOTES

[1]E. Kantorowicz, "Ivories and Litanies," Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 5 (1942), p. 71.

[2]C. Mango, Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome, London, 1980.

[3]T. Mathews, The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy, Pennsylvania, 1971, Chapter 7.

[4]Kantorowcz, pp. 56-81.

[5]M. Solovey, The Byzantine Divine Liturgy, Washington D.C., 1970.

[6]C. Kucharek, The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Allendale, 1971.

[7]All of the authors cited in this study agree with this conclusion.

[8]A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, Die Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.-XIII. Jahrhunderts, Berlin, 1934.

[9]A. Grabar, Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins, Princeton, 1968.

[10]E. Kitzinger, Byzantine Art in the Making, Cambridge, 1980.

[11]T. Boman, Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek, New York, 1970.

[12]D. Chrysostom "Twelfth or Olympic, Discourse: On Man's First Conception of God," Discourses XII-XXX, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, 1977.

[13]Dionysius the Areopagite, Mystical Theologies and Celestial Hierarchies, ed. Surrey, 1965.

CHAPTER II

THREE DEESIS-WITH-SAINTS TRIPTYCHS

A trio of ivory triptychs known by the title Deesis-with-Saints are exceptional examples of imperial and religious art of the Middle Byzantine Period. These triptychs may have been made in a workshop in Constantinople, the capital of the empire and center of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Middle Byzantine Period (867-1204) witnessed a prolific production of imperial and religious art. The three triptychs may have been commissioned from a local workshop by an emperor or ecclesiastic for public or personal use. Collectively the triptychs date from between the middle of the tenth to the early eleventh century and reflect the tastes of the empire during that time. The format of the ivory triptych is unique to Byzantine art, and no previous examples of Deesis-with-Saints triptychs are known. They are also important for their stylistic similarity to imperial imagery found in Byzantine art of the same period.

The triptych in the Palazzo Venezia Museum, Rome, may be the earliest of the trio. It is dated to the middle of the tenth century by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, on stylistic grounds and the evidence of several inscriptions

carved in the ivory.[1] The height of the triptych is 9.5 inches; the width of the center panel is 6.5 inches, and the total length is approximately 12.5 inches. All three triptychs are similar in size, which is small enough to suggest private use.

The second triptych is known as the Harbaville triptych and is now located in the Louvre. It still bears the name of the collection to which it belonged before it came here. A mid-tenth century date is usually assigned to this triptych, although art historians are not all agreed as to when in the century it was made. The Harbaville triptych is in near perfect condition and often considered one of the finest Byzantine ivories in existence. The height of the triptych, 9.5 inches, is the same as that of the Palazzo Venezia triptych; the width is 6.6 inches, and the total length is 12.5 inches.

The third triptych is in the Museo Sacro in the Vatican, and is generally called the Vatican triptych. It has been dated to the early eleventh century on the basis of stylistic variations from the other two ivories. This date is again disputed among scholars. Part of the background of the center and left panel, including arms of the Virgin and John the Baptist, was replaced prior to 1775 when it was part of a collection in Todi, Italy. The height of the triptych is about 10 inches, the width of the center panel is 6.5 inches, and the total length is approximately 13 inches.

Collectively, the triptychs are the earliest known sculptural examples of the Deesis-with-Saints. The Deesis, which appears in the upper portion of the center panel, was a frequent subject in religious art of the Middle Byzantine Period. Similar representations were produced in different media such as mosaic and enamel. The depiction of the Deesis with Saints in ivory and other media of the same period indicates the importance of the subject, which may have appeared initially in sculpture, such as ivory triptychs. The composition of the Deesis-with-Saints is similarily carved on the three triptychs. The subject comprises the Virgin and John the Baptist in supplication to Christ on behalf of the faithful. Along with the Deesis on the trio of triptychs are figures of bishop, martyr, and soldier saints who were popular in the eastern church. The arrangement of the figures is symmetrical, and they are dressed in similar garments and hold like objects. A repetition of poses and patterns is created, which produces a unifying rhythm of forms and a sense of balance and harmony. With a closer look, however, decorative additions, individual characteristics, and inscriptions appear, making each triptych significantly different from the other. These stylistic changes can act as suggestions for the dating of the three works and may possibly help to reveal their purpose.

The Palazzo Venezia Triptych

In the scene of the Deesis, Christ stands upon a platform between the Virgin and John the Baptist (Figure 1). The platform elevates Christ above the ground on which the others stand, to symbolize His divinity. A fragment of ivory is missing from the right side of Christ's face but it is still easy to see that His head is turned toward the right. He holds a jeweled book cover in His left hand which probably represents His Gospel. His right hand is raised in a sign of blessing or greeting. The Virgin and John the Baptist stand in a three-quarter position with their hands raised toward Christ in a gesture of supplication. Below the Deesis are depicted the apostles Peter, Paul, Andrew, John, and James. On each of the wings two pairs of saints stand one above the other. On the front of the left wing is Theodore the Tyro (from Tyre), Saints Eustathios, Procopius, and Arethas. On the back are Saints Basil, Gregory the Theologian (Nazienzus), Gregory the Wonder-Worker, and Severian. On the front of the right wing is Theodore Stratelates, Saints George, Demetrius, and Eustratius. On the back are Bishop-saints John Chrysostom, Clement of Ancyra, Agathonikas, and Saint Nicholas.

Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, and the other saints exhibit human characteristics. The facial features of each figure have been carefully carved so each appears individualized. This is especially true of the apostles, who are depicted in different poses and have different

Figure 1. The Palazzo Venezia Triptych

hairstyles and appear quite naturally portrayed. The figures on the wings, however, stand in a frontal pose with each pair assuming the same attitude and holding objects in the same fashion. Their garments vary depending on the type of saint, such as soldier or bishop, but the drapery falls in straight folds without much evidence of a body beneath except for the feet, which are visible. This is different, however, for the apostles and the figures which comprise the Deesis. A contrapposto stance is evident by the way the drapery is pulled taut across the bent knees while it falls straight over the tensed leg. This suggests that the sculptor was familiar with Greek and Roman sculpture by the way the drapery is used to reveal and enhance the pose.

It was common practice in Christian art to surround the head of a saint with a halo. Each figure on the triptych has been given a halo but those around the head of Christ, Theodore the Tyro, and Eustathios (all three figures are on the front of the triptych) have a decorative band carved around the edge, and the others are left plain. The effect from this detail is one of incompleteness. This may imply that the triptych was not finished before it was needed for its intended purpose or it may be evidence that more than one sculptor was responsible for carving the triptych.

On the back of the center panel is a cross sparsely adorned with rosettes at the end of each arm and one in the

center; the background is devoid of decoration (Figure 2). The simplicity of the design produces an effect of purity and beauty. No color is evident on the triptych today, but this does not mean none had ever been applied. Other ivories of the same period exhibit paint or stain on figures, borders, and other objects, or placed inside carved letters, as happens in the Vatican triptych. The letters on the Palazzo Venezia triptych may have been filled with color or even gold to make them easier to read. Garments, hair, and held objects may also have been painted or even gilded. The omission of paint, stain, or gilding may again imply that this triptych is not finished.

Greek inscriptions are carved across the bands which separate the figures on the wings and center panel into two halves. These have been translated by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, who believe the inscriptions can be used to assign a specific date and function to the work. The inscriptions presented here were rendered into English by Ernst Kantorowicz. The inscription on the band of the center panel reads:

> At picturing Christ, how weak are hand
> and chisel. The spirit's teacher and
> transmitter, Christ consults his mother
> and the Baptist John, and thus in
> sending out His pupils speaketh:
> Deliver Constantine from every evil
> for I shall give to him the fullest glory.[2]

It is generally agreed among scholars that the ruler mentioned is Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who ruled jointly with his father-in-law, Romanos II, from 913 to 944

Figure 2. The Palazzo Venezia Triptych
Back Panels

and was sole emperor from 945 to 959. The inscription resembles a commemorative prayer offered up to God for the safety of the emperor Constantine. It is possible that the triptych was made for Constantine to commemorate his coronation as sole ruler and dedicated to him through the inscription. There are two other inscriptions carved in the ivory. On one wing is an inscription which reads:

> The Lord who created this set of four martyrs
> Victoriously chases the foes with their aid.

On another wing is this inscription:

> Three priests, one martyr joined for meditation.
> This is the world subdued beneath a crown.[3]

All of the saints pray together for the emperor's welfare and ability to secure the empire. The soldier saints oversee the army and wars, the bishops provide spiritual powers and represent peace. Together they safeguard the emperor, who has the duty of maintaining peace and defending the empire. According to Kantorowicz this resembles a commemorative prayer recited in the Eastern liturgy during special church festivals. The priest would commemorate all saints, call the Virgin and John the Baptist by name, then begin supplications for the favored living and dead and for the emperor.[4] The inscriptions on the Palazzo Venezia triptych, then, are intecessory prayers in honor of the emperor. The figures on the triptych correspond to the saints called upon in the liturgical prayers. Along with honoring an emperor, the triptych may have been used by a priest during the mass to read the

inscriptions aloud.

An ivory relief from Constantinople, dated 945, is believed to represent Constantine VII being crowned emperor by Christ (Figure 3). An inscription in Greek is carved between the two figures which is rendered into English by D. T. Rice:

> Constantine, through God, Autocrator,
> King of the Romans.[5]

It is plausible that both of these ivory reliefs were commemorate Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. He was one of the best known and liked emperors of the Middle Byzantine Period and a great patron of the arts. Other rulers named Constantine can be found in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but according to Rice the style of the coronation relief is unlike that of those centuries.[6] Goldschmidt and Weitzmann note that the depiction of the emperor being crowned is "a figure with long straight beard and long hair visible under the crown who very much resembles the pictures of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus as represented on his coins."[7] Furthermore, commemorative works of art would almost certainly have been made to mark his succession to the throne as sole ruler in 945. Thus, it is possible that both the triptych and coronation relief were made to mark Constantine's passing from joint ruler to sole emperor in 945. There are three other ivory reliefs discussed by Rice which have inscriptions dedicated to a ruler named Constantine. One such inscription on an ivory panel depicting St. John the Evangelist and St. Paul reads:

Figure 3. Crowning of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus by Christ

"The instrument of God (St. Paul) holds colloquy with the chaste man (St. John) to preserve the emperor Constantine from harm."[8] Inscriptions on the other panels are similar and all three are dated to the mid-tenth century. Thus it seems as though other ivory reliefs dedicated to the emperor Constantine VII were produced in the mid-tenth century and that the Palazzo Venezia triptych may have been one of several commissions for the emperor.

If the Palazzo Venezia triptych was indeed the first of the trio to be produced, it may have established the iconography of the Deesis with Saints. The function of all three triptychs may have been the same as well. The Palazzo Venezia triptych may have been commissioned as a dedicatory gift for the emperor to mark his coronation or to use during the mass. Inscriptions are found on this triptych only, however. The possible correspondance of the figures to liturgical prayers is discussed below, in Chapter III.

The Harbaville Triptych

The composition of the Deesis-with-Saints on the Harbaville triptych is similar to that on the Palazzo Venezia triptych, with a few exceptions (Figure 4). One difference in the depiction of the Deesis is that Christ is seated on an elaborate throne between the Virgin and the Baptist. Christ now appears as an enthroned ruler while on the Palazzo Venezia triptych He is standing. The throne is

richly decorated to resemble an elaborately carved chair with gems inset into the surface. Another variation in the composition is the addition of roundels beside the head of Christ depicting the archangels Michael and Gabriel. All four figures around Christ have their hands raised in a gesture of supplication. Below the Deesis are the same five apostles found on the Palazzo Venezia triptych. Clearly defined facial features, variations of hair styles, and the addition of platforms under every figure produces a more intricate design on the Harbaville composition of the Deesis-with-Saints than that of the Palazzo Venezia ivory. The poses, objects held, and garments are the sam, however. The saints on the wings include some of the same as on the other triptych but new saints, depicted in roundels, have been added. The additional figures in the roundels on the front of the left wing are St. Mecurius and Thomas. In roundels on the back of the wing are Sts. Cosmos and Damien and, standing, James the Persian. In the roundels on the front of the right wing are Sts. Philip and Pantaleon, on the back of the wing are Sts. Phocas and Blaise. In little disks on the upper border of the center panel are Jeremiah, Elijah, and Isaiah. Even though the roundels have been aded, the composition is not crowded and it remains very close to that on the Palazzo Venezia triptych. On the back of the center panel is a cross surrounded by plants, papyrus, one olive tree, and two cypresses around which lions, rabbits, and birds are

Figure 4. The Harbaville Triptych

gathered (Figure 5).[9] An image of Paradise seems to be represented, presided over by Christ whose presence is symbolized by the cross and a monogram of His name flanking the cross. Inscribed are the Greek letters, IC-XC over NI-KA signifying 'Jesus Christ Conquers'.[10] The cross is surrounded by stars, which may symbolize the heavens. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann suggest this "is a nightly sky of stars, hinting that it represents the Divine Manifestation."[11] This panel, carved with rich decoration, is in stark contrast to the sparsely adorned back panel of the Palazza Venezia triptych.

By comparing the figures of each triptych another variation in style becomes evident. The Harbaville figures are slender and elegant and appear softly shaped in their long garments. The Palazzo Venezia figures now look short and broad in comparison. In fact, the overall scheme of the Palazzo Venezia triptych exhibits a simplicity of design next to the more elaborate Harbaville triptych. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann suggest that the forms of the Harbaville figures are more three-dimensionaly rounded and appear more softly shaped due to the "wilder and shaggier hair styles" which are apparent on most of the saints.[12] The clothing of the soldier saints resembles appropriate military dress of the Roman army, with cuirass and kilt, and a sword at the hip, rather than the long, bulky garments of the Palazzo Venezia soldiers who hold crosses instead of swords. The halos behind all the heads of the

Figure 5. The Harbaville Triptych - Back Panel

Harbaville figures have a decorative border along the outer edge, although Christ's is more elaborate. All of the apostles on the center panel are deeply undercut and cast shadows onto the background (Figure 6). Each of these figures look more like small statues because of the softly falling shadows created by the high relief. The saints on the wings are carved in a lower relief and thus look flatter than the figures on the center panel.

The Harbaville triptych is in very good condition today, with only a few cracks in the background ivory. Carved letters of the saint's names clearly stand out and, just like the Palazzo Venezia triptych, may have been filled with paint or stain or even silver or gold although no evidence of this remains on the ivory today. The entire surface of the Harbaville triptych has been polished and it still has a smooth, softly shining surface. Stain, paint, or gilding may also have been applied to the figures.

The Harbaville triptych is often compared to an ivory relief which depicts the crowning of Romanos II and his wife Eudocia by Christ (Figure 7). This relief dates to around 945.[13] Romanos II was the son of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and was proclaimed as co-emperor with his father when he was still a child, about 945. Romanos II became sole emperor upon the death of his father in 959 and ruled until 963. The relief depicting the coronation may have been commissioned around 945 when the joint rule was established. Yet the young age of Romanos, six years old,

Figure 6. The Harbaville Triptych - Center Panel

Figure 7. The Crowning of Romanos II and Eudocia By Christ

makes this seem unlikely. It has been noted by Goldschmidt and Weitzmann that the figure of Romanos II is beardless. Byzantine emperors were always pictured on reliefs and coins with a beard as is Constantine on his coronation ivory (see Figure 3), while their sons were always pictured without a beard.[14] Furthermore, according to Peirce and Tyler, Romanos II married Eudocia in 942 or 943 while still a child.[15] It is possible, then, that this relief commemorates Romanos II as co-emperor. Thus, like the coronation relief of Constantine VII, the relief of Romanos II and Eudocia may commemorate either the joint-rule or sole rule of Romanos and therefore date between 945 and 959.

It is beneficial to establish the date of the Romanos II relief because of its stylistic similarity to the Harbaville triptych. The depiction of Christ on both ivories is strikingly similar. The proportions of both figures of Christ are slender and elegant and the facial features are well defined. The hair and beard are similar as are the garments, which fall softly around the body. Careful study of these characteristics reveal both figures of Christ as nearly identical. It is possible both ivories were made in the same workshop, carved by the same sculptor, or commissioned by the same person.

Both the Harbaville and Palazzo Venezia triptychs can be associated with two ivory reliefs showing the coronation of a Byzantine ruler. The Harbaville triptych

however, unlike the Palazzo Venezia triptych, bears no inscriptions of dedication or prayers. Yet, based on the above similarities, it is probable that both ivory triptychs were made between 945 and 959 to honor either Constantine VII or Romanos II. Both triptychs were probably made by an imperial commission for public liturgical use or for private use by an emperor. The emperor could have used the triptychs during the mass in the palace church of Hagia Sophia, or they could have been imperial gifts to the church for a priest to use when reciting liturgical prayers in honor of certain saints and the emperor. Furthermore, the present worn condition of the Palazzo Venezia triptych implies repeated use. Opening and closing it, carrying and moving it would weaken the hinges and remove the polish from the surface. The Harbaville triptych, on the other hand, appears well preserved suggesting that it may have been infrequently used or served a private function. If it was made for Constantine VII in 959, the year he died, it may have been placed in a royal or religious treasury, which could account for its excellent state of preservation. The refined and intricate additions to the Harbaville triptych seem to indicate that it was made after the Palazzo Venezia triptych but followed the composition of that work very closely. Analysis of the third triptych may yield further clues as to the use and date of each triptych.

The Vatican Triptych

The Vatican triptych exhibits a further development of the stylistic representation of the Deesis with Saints while following the now established composition of the other two triptychs (Figure 8). The Deesis appears at the top of the center panel. Christ is seated on a heavily jeweled throne and holds a book cover which is also elaborately decorated. The archangels Michael and Gabriel guard the throne and the Virgin and the Baptist, standing on platforms, occupy the right and left sides of Christ. This composition resembles the Deesis of the Harbaville triptych except here the archangels are full length figures with long feathered wings and the throne is larger and heavier. Below the Deesis are the same five apostles who are depicted on the other triptychs: Peter, Paul, Andrew, John, and James. A frieze of roundels containing the busts of five apostles separates the top and bottom frames. In the roundels from left to right are St. Mercurius, Stephen, Philip, Luke, and Matthew. The figures on the wings are the same as those on the Palazzo Venezia triptych except for additional roundels as in the center panel. In the roundels on the back of the left wing are St. Mark and Thomas; on the front are St. Pantaleon and Mennas. On the back of the right wing are St. Cosmos and Damien; on the front are St. Phocas and Blaise. Now that the figures on all of the triptychs have been named it can be seen that the identities of the figures are nearly the same from one

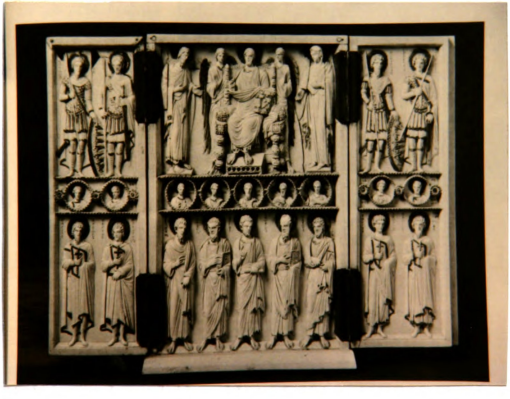

Figure 8. The Vatican Triptych

example to the next. The only saints not depicted on all three are James the Persian on the Harbaville triptych and Stephen, Luke, Matthew, Mark and Mennas on the Vatican triptych. This addition of apostles and other saints on the Vatican triptych may correspond to changes in liturgical prayers to which the triptychs may be related, as discussed in Chapter III. The Vatican soldier saints are dressed as the Harbaville soldiers except a shield has been added between each pair. All the other standing saints and apostles hold books or crosses as seen on the two other triptychs, and wear like garments.

A cross is carved on the back of the center panel, following the style of the earlier triptychs, except that the design of the Vatican cross has a greater amount of ornamentation (Figure 9). Simulated jewels are carved on each arm and elaborate rosettes appear at each end and in the center. The entire surface around the cross is covered with vines and leaves. Within the tendrils of the vines are various birds symmetrically placed beside the cross. A progression of adornment has occured beginning with the cross panel of the Palazzo Venezia triptych, which is sparsely adorned, to the Harbaville triptych, where plants, animals and stars appear, to the Vatican triptych, where no space is left empty of decoration. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann have identified the animals in the crowded composition. Around the sides of the cross are "birds and flowers which have strong Oriental characteristics. For

Figure 9. The Vatican Triptych - Back Panels

instance, a Chinese phoenix appears on both the upper right and left . . . and the guinea fowl in the middle row as well as flowers with Persian characteristics."[16] Also present are eagles and peacocks. The Oriental characteristics may be of Islamic origin in view of the contacts between Byzantium and Islam through trade.

The design is very elaborate and yet not unusual to Byzantine art. A cross presented to a pope by Justin II around 575 had real gems inset in the four arms and a round disk at the center.[17] A jeweled cross in Byzantine art follows a tradition of depicting the true cross of the Crucifixion as inset with jewels. Two marble reliefs of the sixth century exhibit elaborate vines with grapes hanging from leafy tendrils. Peacocks and guinea fowl stand on or near the vines. The same design can be found on the ivory chair of Bishop Maximian made around 547.[18] The ornamental designs of these reliefs are similar to the cross panel of the Vatican triptych and all of them are believed to have been made in Constantinople. Again, it is possible that the triptych was carved in a workshop of the capital of the Byzantine Empire.

Other variations of style occur between the Vatican, Harbaville, and Palazzo Venezia triptychs besides the design of the cross panel. The figures on the Vatican ivory seem to be less naturalistically portrayed. They are leaner and have small heads causing them to look elongated. All of the figures are deeply undercut and look

more three-dimensional than the Harbaville saints but they are not as well defined. Goldschmidt and Weitzmann note that "the characterization of the individual apostles is weakened; the expression on the faces, with the little eyes and the wooly hair, is sweetened and trivialized."[19] There is a lack of modelling in the bodies and a sense of volume is missing. These characteristics are seen in works of art from the end of the tenth to the early eleventh century, when a change in style occurred that is especially evident in ivory carvings. John Beckwith concisely sums up aspects of these changes:

> The ingredients of the new style consist of high relief, deep undercutting, angular crisp drapery, the hair treated in tight curls, rather jagged profiles and a tendency to treat some of the figures as puppets.[20]

Aspects of the Vatican triptych which correspond to this change in style are the deep undercutting and jagged profiles created by long beards and lean faces. The figures could also be described as puppet-like because of the lack of volume and the elongation of the bodies. The inclusion of more figures, which make the composition seem crowded, and extra ornamentation are two more characteristics of the new style. The Vatican triptych has the greatest number of figures of the three triptychs because of the addition of roundels on all three panels. It is also the most decorative of the three ivories. Traces of paint and gilding remain on the triptych, highlighting its decorative appearance. On Christ's garment, book, halo and

throne, traces of green paint or stain are clearly visible (Figure 10). The wings, robes, and sandals of the archangels, are also colored green. A detail of two saints on the wing reveals bright blue remaining on the halos, clothes and books (Figure 11). Traces of color can also be seen within the carved names and on the fluted borders. For these reasons the Vatican triptych seems to typify the new style and therefore may have been carved at the end of the tenth or beginning of the eleventh century. There are no inscriptions on the triptych and its recipient is not known. The subject and arrangement of the figures, however, is almost identical to the Palazzo Venezia and Harbaville triptychs.

The Deesis-with-Saints triptychs are a new form of art peculiar to the tenth and eleventh century of the Middle Byzantine Period. The three triptychs may in fact have been commissioned by members of the same ruling family. Of the three Byzantine rulers during the late tenth to early eleventh century who had been born or married into the family line of Constantine VII Porphygenitus, any one could have been the recipient or the donor of the Vatican triptych. The general Nicephorus II Phocas married the widow of Romanos II, usurped the throne and became joint ruler with Romanos' two sons (963-69). After Nicephorus II was assinated, he was succeeded by a fellow general, John Tzimiskes (969-76), who married Theodora, the daughter of Constantine VII. When he died,

Figure 10. The Vatican Triptych - Detail of Deesis

Figure 11. The Vatican Triptych - Detail of Saints

Basil II, son of Romanos II, took the throne (976-1025).[21] Representations of the Deesis-with-Saints can be found in art during the reign of Nicephorus II and Basil II. A rectangular ivory reliquary for fragments of the true cross, dated to the reign of Nicephorus II, is carved with a reduced version of this subjcet. A bust of Christ carved in a roundel is located in the center of the top edge. He is flanked by roundels with busts of the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Below them stand full length figures of the Virgin and John the Baptist with their arms raised in a gesture of supplication. Two saints are depicted below with their hands again raised in supplication. These four figures stand in spaces designated by a cross decorated with curled vines. In roundels at the bottom, a ruler is depicted in the center, his queen to the left, and another figure to the right.[22] The placement of the Virgin and the Baptist is reversed from their positions on the three Deesis-with-Saints triptychs and only two saints are included. This seems to imply that the triptychs and the reliquary did not serve the same purpose.

An enamel and silver-gilt reliquary for a fragment of the true cross, today in the cathedral treasury of Limburg an der Lahn, presents a Deesis-with-Saints on the cover and dates to the reign of Nicephorus II (c965). It is set with pearls and precious gems and has an inscription carved along the border. The inscription provided by

Beckwith reads: "In deepest honoring of Christ, Basil the Proedrus caused this repository to be decorated."[23] This is not the emperor Basil but the President of the Council (Proedrus) and a patron of the arts who was an illigitimate son of Romanos I and made president by Nicephorus II. The arrangement of the Deesis on the reliquary is not the same as the three triptychs but many of the same saints are depicted. The same five apostles and archangels are present but five other apostles and a few saints appear new to the theme. Thus, this composition varies from that of the triptychs also.

These examples seem to indicate that imperial patronage of religious works of art in the Middle Byzantine Period reached a climax from the reign of Constantine VII until the death of Basil II in 1025. After the death of Basil II there occurred a period of change which lead to a decline, then collapse, of the military and the financial state of the government.[24] There is also evidence that ivory became scarce in Constantinople after the eleventh century. The representation of the Deesis with Saints on ivory triptychs seems to have appeared during this period alone based on the lack of other surviving examples. This may further indicate that an artistic climax occurred from the mid-tenth to the early eleventh century. Dipictions of the Deesis continue after the early eleventh century in mosaics and ivory but usually without the accompaniment of saints.

Conclusion

The iconography of the Deesis-with-Saints is almost identical on each of the ivory triptychs. The figure of Christ is shown standing on the Palazzo Venezia triptych and enthroned on the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs. The Virgin and John the Baptist stand on either side of Christ in an attitude of supplication. The archangels Michael and Gabriel are included on the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs. The same five apostles are located below the Deesis on each triptych. These apostles are especially important because they are considered as the foundation of the church. There are only six saints who do not appear on all three triptychs, otherwise the bishop and soldier saints are the same. All of the saints depicted on the triptychs are Eastern in origin and were given a prominent position within the Byzantine Orthodox Church. For example, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and Gregory the Theologian were Orthodox bishops from the fourth century. Special feast days were set aside in the honor of all three bishops. Eastern martyrs and soldier saints are depicted such as Demetrius and George. Demetrius was a consul in Thessalonica who was martyred (c306) for refusing to persecute Christians. George was a Cappadocian army officer under Diocletian at Nicomedia. He was killed for criticizing the emperor for his cruely toward Christians.

The similarity in figures and composition from one triptych to the next suggests they were made for a

particular purpose or person. The inscription on the Palazzo Venezia triptych is dedicated to a ruler, Constantine, probably Constantine VII. The Harbaville and Vatican triptychs show an enhanced imperial imagery of the same subject. Furthermore, the Palazzo Venezia and Harbaville triptychs have been stylistically compared to two ivory coronation reliefs and therefore probably date to the same years. Assuming that stylistic similarities can be relied on as evidence, these two triptychs may well have been made to commemorate the coronation of one or two emperors. For these reasons it seems possible that the three triptychs were imperial commissions. Thus, the triptychs may have been gifts given to the emperor, or commissioned by the emperor himself for private use in the palace church of Hagia Sophia during the mass. Before or after the recipients died, the triptychs may have been donated to the church.

The format of the triptych seems to have been an innovation of the Middle Byzantine Period. The theme of the Deesis with Saints on ivory triptychs appears specifically in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This may be a reflection of the aesthetic tastes of a particular ruler or correspond to liturgical practices of the church. Imperial and religious patrons of Byzantine art had a fondness for precious materials such as ivory, gems and gilding. The triptychs may have been stained or gilded, reflecting the tastes of their patrons. It is important to

study the use of ivory by some of the greatest civilizations of the ancient world, including Byzantium, in order to understand ivory's appeal and how it served religious and imperial sacred cults.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, I, p. 32.

[2]Kantorowicz, p. 74.

[3]Ibid., p. 75.

[4]Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[5]David Talbot Rice, The Art of Byzantium, New York, n.d., p. 313

[6]Ibid., p. 314.

[7]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, I, p. 35.

[8]John Beckwith, Early Christian and Byzantine Art, 3d ed., London, 1979, p. 207.

[9]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, pp. 35-36.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]H. Peirce and R. Tyler, "An Ivory of the Tenth Century," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 2 (1941), p. 15.

[16]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, p. 36.

[17]Beckwith, pp. 98-100.

[18]Ibid.,, pp. 122-123 for information and pictures of the marble reliefs, and pp. 116-117 for information and picture of the chair of Maximian.

[19]Goldschmidt and Weitzmann, p. 33.

[20]Beckwith, p. 226.

[21]R. Browning, The Byzantine Empire, London, 1980, pp. 87-92.

[22]Beckwith, pp. 209-210. A transcription of the Greek letters on the reliquary was not possible because of the blurred quality of the photograph.

[23]Beckwith, pp. 210-211.

[24] Browning, p. 92.

CHAPTER III

IMPERIAL AND RELIGIOUS IVORY SCULPTURE FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD

The word ivory, through the history of the world, has carried a connotation of value. It has a precious quality and color that will only increase with age. Ivory, from any period in history, was considered a luxury item and commonly used by kings and sacred cults. It was expensive, due to its need to be imported and small availability, and desired for its rich and durable character. Sculpture made from ivory has usually been classified as 'minor sculpture'. This is a deceptive classification since it refers to the small size and intricate details of most ivory sculpture. However, it was never of minor importance. The small size is dictated by the size of the tusks. Elephant tusks were the most widely used although tusks of the walrus and hippopotamus were available. African and Asian elephant tusks vary in size, color, and shape. Tusks were somewhat difficult to transport due to their size and weight. The tusks of an African elephant could be as long as twelve feet and weigh fifty pounds while Asian tusks averaged five feet in length and weighed thirty-five pounds. According to Charles

Woodhouse: "the softer eastern tusk was pure white in color, more curved and twisted, and with a blunt point; the harder western tusk is not so densely white and is narrower and straighter in shape."[1] The shape of the tusk would determine the type and size of an object to be carved. The straighter African tusk would be suitable for relief carving while the curvature of the Asian tusk necessitated a smaller object.

Sculpture carved from ivory is known from as early as the Paleolithic period but the best preserved works date from the beginning of the Bronze Age. Ivory as a medium for sculpture was especially appealing to two types of people throughout the history of mankind, rulers and those associated with religious and imperial cults. Religious and imperial ivory sculpture from the ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and Roman cultures exhibit characteristics also seen in sculpture of the Middle Byzantine Period and there are several good examples from these cultures which may be examined.

Egyptian Ivory

The Egyptians were the earliest people to establish workshops where craftsmen were employed to produce objects from ivory. These workshops were usually located in the vicinity of the king's palace or a temple dedicated to a god. Egyptian art was made especially for the pharaoh and wealthy nobility, usually for funerary purposes, and of

gods for sacred cults. Most examples of ivory sculpture have been found in royal tombs from almost every period of ancient Egyptian history. The best known and best preserved examples are those from the tomb of King Tutankhamun. One lovely object is the lid of a coffer depicting the King and his wife, Ankhesenamun, in a garden (Figure 12). The lid is inlaid with ivory and stained with a variety of colors: off-white, rose, ochre, and slate blue. The height of the lid is approximately 12 1/4 inches; the width, 8 inches.[2] The dimensions resemble those of the three ivory triptychs. The scene is intricately carved and the colors are very well preserved. Here may begin a tradition of staining ivory to enhance the lifelikeness of the image. Because of the applied color facial features, modelling of the bodies, and garden details are well defined.

A throne found in the tomb is inlaid with various semi-precious stones, pieces of colored glass-paste, and ivory. Desroches-Noblecourt says of this throne: "It is generally agreed that this piece of furniture . . . must have been the King's ecclesiastical seat used during religious ceremonies."[3] These two examples from the several found in the tomb best exhibit the different manifestations of the Egyptian pharaoh: as King, priest and god. On the coffer lid, Tutankhamun, as king and husband, spends a private moment with his wife. The chair apparently refers to the pharaoh's role of chief-priest.

Figure 12. Tutankhamun and Ankhesenamun in a Garden

According to Egyptian beliefs, the pharaoh was the son of Amun-Re, the sun-god and god of Upper and Lower Egypt, and was thus chief-priest and considered divine. All of the tomb objects were made for the king who, after dying, would rise again as the god Osiris:

> The transfiguration of the dead King, deified in the person of Osiris, took place on earth by a double phenomenon. Re rose on the horizon and, on the throne of the living, the young Horus, visible form of Anubis, the new pharaoh, renewed image of the god, would continue to exercise divine rule on earth.[4]

Thus ivory seems to have been used for objects that indicate the kingly and divine manifestations of the pharaoh.

Assyrian Ivory

Ivory sculpture, known as the 'Nimrud Ivories' has been found in the remains of Assyrian palaces at Nimrud. One example has been identified as a representation of King Ashurbanipal and his wife, and may have been used as a religious and imperial cult object like the coffer lid of Tutankhamun.[5]

Panels of wood inlaid with ivory and joined with golden hinges were found at Nimrud at the palace of Ashurnasirpal (883-859). This 'book' consisted of small panels covered with darkened wax, on which several thousand lines of cuneiform remain. The edge of each tablet is raised to protect the area where wax had been applied. On the cover is the name of Sargon II and a note which says

the book should be kept in the "King's new palace at Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad)."[6] Ivories lightly stained and covered with gold leaf were also found in the palace of Ashurnasirpal. It is probable that a court workshop was located here and produced fine works in ivory for the royal house.

Greek Ivory

The best known use of ivory in ancient Greece is in the chryselephantine (gold and ivory) images of the gods. In his Description of Greece Pausanias describes no less than twenty-six statues of gods made of chryselephantine. The largest of these were of Zeus and Athena by Phidias, Hera by Polykleitas, and Asclepius by Thrasymedes. The most famous by far was the statue of Zeus.

Located at Olympia, the statue of Zeus was praised by Greek writers and considered as one of the wonders of the ancient world. The image of Zeus, forty feet high, was one of an enthroned ruler. The throne was adorned with gold, jewels, ivory, and ebony. He held a sceptre in his left hand, a Victory in his right, and a garland circled his head resembling olive branches. The visible areas of flesh were of ivory, and his robe and sandals were of gold.[7] The wooden core of the statue was overlaid with gold and ivory. This technique of overlaying ivory or bending it, as for an elbow, is not known today. With age this material takes on a soft mellow color and its glow is

subtle, two characteristics which make it very desirable. Marble's grain is clearly visible and its color cannot match the soft golden glow which ivory acquires with age. Plato says in the Laws that "white is the color most proper for the gods, in tapestry as in other materials."[8] Thus ivory was considered suitable for images of the gods.

Another striking aspect of Zeus, aside from its size and embellishment, was its attempt to portray the physical and the spiritual simultaneously. He was naturalistically represented as a human king but exhibited aspects which emphasized his divinity. According to Strabo, when Phidias was asked what model he would use for his image of Zeus Phidias replied:

> By the pattern exhibited by Homer in the following lines: So spoke the son of Kronos and nodded his dark brow, and the ambrosial locks waved from the King's undying head, and he made great Olympus to quake.[9]

Homer's description of Zeus is of a glorified king of the Greeks whose very movement stirred the heavens. The image is based upon real attributes of a human being. The flesh of Zeus appeared human, causing the image to look like an earthly ruler. But, through the use of beautiful materials and great size, an image of overpowering majesty was created. The figure of Zeus became in this way a vision of divine beauty, and thus recognized as being beyond the human experience. Plotinus, a Neo-Platonic philosopher from the 3rd century A.D, commented on the statue saying:

> Thus Phidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight.[10]

In contemplation of the image, the mind, assisted by the rich materials, would be elevated from the earthly, human image and instead perceive an image of the divine beauty of Zeus. It is not only through the senses but through the mind that one can begin to perceive spiritual beauty in order to grasp the essence of divinity. A summation of the effect of the statue by Phidias is given by Quintillian:

> The Olympian Zeus in Elis, whose beauty seems to have added somewhat to the received religion; so adequate to the divine nature is the grandeur of his work.[11]

Roman Ivory

In the Roman Empire ivory was used to create religious and secular works of art for the imperial court, sacred cults, and upper class families. Writing tablets in the form of diptychs were used by government officials to record laws or other official business. The diptych, two tablets joined together by pins or hinges, is similar to the Assyrian ivory 'book' in that wax was placed into a recessed area where inscriptions could then be incised. The diptych format may have descended from writing tablets such as Sargon's from Nimrud.

Ivory diptychs were also used to commemorate Roman consuls. These are called Consular diptychs and appeared from about 400 to 541 when the consulate was abolished by the Byzantine emperor Justinian. On one side of the diptych was usually carved a representation of the consul in ceremonial clothes and participating in activities of

official life. The name of the consul was often carved along the top of the relief along with inscriptions indicating his title and position. The diptych of Probianus (c400) is an example of such a composition (Figure 13). The reliefs on the two panels are practically identical; both depict the consul in the same way. The figure of the consul Probianus is seated in the center of the upper frame in a frontal position on a throne-like chair. Attendants on a smaller scale flank the consul and hold plain ivory diptychs to record his decrees. In the frames below are figures on another scale saluting the consul. Ernst Kitzinger says of this composition that " . . . abstract principles of symmetry, frontality, and differentiation by scale and registers serve to express power and authority."[12] Indeed Probianus, elevated on his chair, is the the most important person and therefore the largest. His frontal, almost confrontive, stare again conveys a visual message of his importance.

All of the bodies are well articulated, and their garments fall into soft natural folds. This naturalistic depiction is emphasized by the protrusion of several feet beyond the edge of the ivory, causing shadows to fall. A decorative border of finely carved palmettes frames the four scenes and creates a spatial division within the composition. The reverse side of the diptych is plain with a raised edge to hold a thin layer of wax. The surface of the wax was usually colored black or green so the inscribed

Figure 13. Consular Diptych of Probianus

letters would appear white and thus be easy to read.

The diptychs were usually made in Rome or Constantinople and officially announced the consular appointment, which would begin on the first of January each year. They were generally commissioned by the consul to be presented as a gift to the emperor, friends, and peers. Many consular diptychs came to be preserved in churches, having been presented to bishops or priests as gifts, and adapted to Christian religious practices.

Early Christian Ivory

Many Consular diptychs may have been given to the church, or to individual clergymen, after the fall of the Roman Empire, or after the consulate was abolished. Some of them took on religious significance by means of substituting the names of benefactors, bishops, or saints for the titles or name of the consul. These names were often written in ink upon the surface and in some cases carved into wax on the reverse side. One example of this transformation is the diptych of Flavius Taurus Clementinus in Liverpool. One side of the diptych retains the relief of the Roman consul while on the other side is an inscription and prayer dedicated to a Pope Adrian. Thus, despite its new found use the diptych still honors an official, but a religious one rather than secular. Other prayers found on the same diptych were rendered into English by Eric Maclagen. Although partially obliterated, they clearly

establish the liturgical use of the diptych:

> +Let us stand well. +Let us stand reverently. +Let us stand with fear. Let us attend to the Holy Oblation, to make offering in peace to God.[13]

This diptych may have been placed on the altar during the mass so the priest could read the prayer aloud, or it may have been used for private devotion possibly by Pope Adrian.

The adoption of Consular diptychs for church service may be a source for the official, imperial images of Christ and Mary. As seen on the Probianus diptych, the consul is depicted as an imperial type of image by being elevated on a throne which has a cushion and footrest. The image of the consul, then, may have been inspired by depictions of an emperor. A. Grabar believes that "in the representations of Christ and the Virgin in majesty . . . the formulas were furnished by the official imagery of the Roman state."[14] The Missorium of Theodosius I is a fourth century example of a Roman emperor enthroned in majesty. The sliver plate was issued in 388 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Theodosius' reign. Represented on the plate are Theodosius, his two co-emperors, and bodyguards. Kitzinger's description notes that the emperor, haloed like a god, is "solemnly enthroned before a ceremonial palace architecture as he hands a diploma of appointment to a high official depicted in much smaller size."[15] Such images of the Roman emperor may have been the source for the depictions of Roman consuls and, by adoption into the church,

imperial-like images of Christ. On the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs, Christ is enthroned in a frontal position and flanked by members of His heavenly court. This type of image may derive from depictions of Roman officials such as Theodosius and Probianus. As Christ can be viewed as the ruler of the universe and King over his Christian subjects, so a representation of Him enthroned as a ruler may seem appropriate.

Another imperial portrait known today is the broken statue of Constantine the Great which once stood in his basilica in Rome. The exposed flesh was carved from marble whereas other parts were made from colored materials, probably stone. The emperor was represented sitting on a throne, and the figure reached a height of about thirty feet. The description of the statue of Constantine recalls the Greek statue of Zeus, who was also depicted as an enthroned ruler. Zeus, however, was made from precious materials considered suitable for a god, whereas the image of Constantine was not as richly embellished.

One of the earliest (early fifth century) and best preserved examples of Christ enthroned in majesty is the apse mosaic of the same name in the church of Sta. Pudenziana in Rome (Figure 14). Christ is enthroned in imperial splendor in the center of the apse amidst His apostles. He is elevated above the others on a jeweled throne and dressed in purple and gold, the colors often worn by Roman and Byzantine rulers. Christ's raised right

Figure 14. Christ Enthroned in Majesty

hand issues a gesture of address or discourse used by Roman magistrates and orators. This gesture was assimilated into Christian iconography indicating benediction and thus becoming a common motif in Christian art.[16] Christ is surrounded by two groups of disciples dressed as Roman officials who gesture toward Christ. This scene has the appearence of a ruler meeting with his court, but it is a heavenly court with Christ as King. A jeweled cross, representing the cross of the Crucifixion, stands on the mound of Golgatha before an image of the heavenly Jerusalem. This mosaic shows the integration of Roman imperial imagery with Christian iconography, a practice which flourished in the art of the Byzantine Empire.

Byzantine Ivory

Consular diptychs continued in the Eastern Roman Empire until Justinian abolished the consulate in 541. The production of ivory diptychs did not stop but religious subjects were represented instead. A diptych which dates from the reign of Justinian shows the Virgin and Child enthroned between angels and Christ enthroned between St. Peter and Paul (Figure 15). The Virgin and Christ are flanked by two figures as though they were palace guards. Both figures sit under a canopy on elaborate lion-legged thrones with embroidered cushions. Beckwith describes them as resembling imperial images of the Byzantine emperor-cult.[17] Religious and imperial iconography have merged,

Figure 15. The Virgin and Child Enthroned Between Angels

Christ Enthroned Between Saint Peter and Paul

and heavenly scenes of Christ and the Virgin enthroned accompanied by dignitaries have been created. They appear as spiritual beings, however, rather than human beings. They do not sit convincingly on the thrones if they can even appropriately be described as sitting at all. The space is very crowded and the figures are so flattened that they appear almost two-dimensional. The composition is very similar, though, to the Consular diptych of Clementinus.

The enthroned image of Christ on the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs seems to have been derived from this integration of imperial and religious imagery. Both figures of Christ sit on an imperial throne carved to simulate inlaid gems similar to the throne in the Sta. Pudenziana mosaic. According to Anthony Cutler, in the Book of Ceremonies, written by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, "the imperial throne recurs frequently . . . and is described as made of gold, encrusted with precious stones and covered with cushions and precious carpets."[18] Thus the image of the emperor's throne may be reflected in the carved ivory throne of the triptychs. Also, the inscriptions on the Palazzo Venezia triptych, which were probably dedicated to Constantine VII, provide evidence of religious works of art associated with an emperor.

This similarity between images of the Byzantine ruler and Christ is not surprising when one considers the ideology of the emperor-cult. The emperor was believed to

be the representative of God on earth; he was called the Vicar of God and was thought to be holy. The emperor, then, acts as the earthly counterpart to the heavenly Christ. Because of this unique relationship he was viewed as sacred and divine. Cyril Mango states,

> There was an art of imperial propaganda with its own iconography: the emperor always appeared triumphant, bigger than life-size, frozen in an immobile pose, receiving tribute, distributing honors . . . What was appropriate to the earthly emperor was equally appropriate to Christ, and so the art of the Church did not hesitate to borrow from the pre-existing art of the court.[19]

The imperial imagery of the emperor and Christ merged in art as it did in the ideology of the emperor-cult. Images of both figures were also used to stimulate veneration and instill a sense of awe in the viewer. The image of Christ on the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs, accompanied by the other saints, resembles an imperial court but a spiritual or other-worldly nature is emphasized.

Conclusion

Ivory was used throughout the western ancient world as an emblem of luxury and wealth. It was used to glorify gods and rulers, an association which gave ivory a distinctive status. Ancient works of art made from ivory created an impact on the art of the Middle Ages, especially in Byzantium. These examples of the religious and imperial uses of ivory aid in the discovery of the tastes, beliefs, and ideals of past cultures.

The Deesis-with-Saints triptychs are in many ways the result of some of these traditional practices. They can be associated with certain rulers of the Byzantine Empire and also present imperial-style images of Christ and other saints. Traces of paint remain on one of the triptychs and all of them may have been colored as well as gilded. Indeed, as seen in some of the examples in this chapter, it was not unusual to add color to imperial or religious ivory sculpture. Only in Byzantine art have ivory triptychs been found and, although they may have derived from ivory diptychs, they are an innovation of the Middle Byzantine Period.

FOOTNOTES

[1]C.P. Woodhouse, Ivories: A History and Guide, Canada, 1976, p. 16.

[2]C. Desroches-Noblecourt, Tutankhamun, Boston, 1963, p. 295.

[3]Ibid., p. 296.

[4]Ibid., p. 274.

[5]S. Lloyd, The Archaeology of Mesopotamia, London. 1978, p. 220.

[6]Ibid., p. 214

[7]Pausanius Description of Greece, II, Loeb Classical Library, p. 437.

[8]E. Hamilton, and H. Cairns, Plato: The Collected Dialogues, Laws, 12. 956a

[9]H. Stuart-Jones, Select Passages from Ancient Writers on Greek Sculpture, Chicago, 1966, p. 92.

[10]Plotinus The Six Enneads, Trans. S. MacKenna, 5, VIII. 1.

[11]Stuart-Jones, p. 93.

[12]Kitzinger, Byzantine Art, p. 36.

[13]G. Williamson, The Book of Ivory, London, 1938, p. 135.

[14]Grabar, p. 79.

[15]Kitzinger, Byzantine Art, p. 31.

[16]Grabar, p. 79.

[17]Beckwith, pp. 85-86.

[18]A. Cutler, Transfigurations: Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography, Pennyslvania, 1975, p. 39.

[19]Mango, p. 261.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEESIS WITH SAINTS TRIPTYCHS AS LITURGICAL OBJECTS

Roman Consular diptychs had been adapted to liturgical practices when they were aquired by the church in the sixth century. In this chapter I propose that the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs correspond to liturgical prayers as well. Their part in the liturgy may have derived from the pre-existing use of ivory diptychs. Both the diptychs and triptychs could also have been used for private devotion since dedicatory inscriptions have been found on several examples of both types of ivories. The diptych of Clementinus and the Palazzo Venezia triptych provide examples of such inscriptions. The way in which the diptychs and the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs correspond to the mass needs to be studied in order to gain a better understanding of their role as liturgical objects.

Ivory Diptychs as Liturgical Objects

Prayers and dedicatory inscriptions were carved on the plain sides of the Consular diptychs, while little regard was given to the secular significance of the reliefs. These commemorated church officials, benefactors, an emperor, and other favoured persons, living and dead.

The Consular diptych of Clementinus, probably carved in Constantinople in 513, has such inscriptions on its panels. The curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Eric MacLagen, has rendered these into English. According to the inscriptions, it was dedicated to a Church or Convent of St. Agatha by a priest named John during the pontificate of Adrian I (772) or Adrian II (867).[1] Written in Greek horizontally across the two ivory panels is the following inscription:

> +Let us stand well. +Let us stand reverently. +Let us stand with fear. Let us attend to the Holy Oblation, to make peace in offering to God. Mercy, peace, the sacriface of praise. The love of God the Father and the grace of Our Lord and God the Saviour Jesus Christ be upon us. Remember O Lord thy servant John, the least among the priests of the habitation of St. Agatha.[2]

Below this in smaller letters is a final inscription:

> +Remember O Lord thy servant Andrew Machera. +Remember O Lord thy servant John, a sinner, Priest. +Remember O Lord thy servant and our shepherd Adrian the Patriarch. The Holy St. Agatha. The Holy Mother of God.[3]

These prayers of commemoration are in the form of a litany. The Greek word ektene, or litany, means to entreat or supplicate. Such prayers of supplication were read out loud by the priest during the mass for those who were to be given special consideration. Diptychs such as that of Clementinus may have been placed on the altar in order for the priest to read the prayers inscribed on the ivory. The names read could be ammended by an ecclesiastic when someone died or fell out of favor with the church. Also, the names were listed in a hierarchical order, with the

emperor and ecclesiastics taking precedence.

The litanies on the Clementinus diptych correspond to prayers recited before the preparation of the bread for the Eucharistic ritual. Such prayers begin with an invocation glorifying the Holy Trinity as in the first inscription on the diptych. Then the names of a Patriarch, church, emperor, saints or other favored people would follow, as in the second inscription on the diptych. The priest would ask God to give these people special consideration. Then litanies for the benefit of the church community would follow. According to M. Solovy, this type of litany is among the oldest parts of the Eastern Liturgy and is still part of the mass today.[4] Other types of litanies were recited during the mass to commemorate various saints and the breaking of the Eucharistic bread. It is to these types of litanies that the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs would seem to correspond.

The Deesis-with-Saints triptychs as Liturgical Objects.

The reliefs on the trio of triptychs correspond to prayers of the Eastern Liturgy known as a Litany of Saints. This type of litany consists of several prayers of intercession or mediation sung or recited by the priest during the preparation rite of the Eucharist. The Litany of Saints was a request to the saints, the Virgin, and John the Baptist, to intercede with God for the church, the faithful, or an emperor. According to Solovy, the theme of

the petitions is a request for the salvation of man's soul.[5] Ernst Kantorowicz provides an example of such a litany. The priest would read the following prayer aloud:

Holy Mary . . . intercede for us
Michael . . . intercede for us
Gabriel . . .
John the Baptist
Peter
Paul
Andrew
John
James . . . intercede for us[6]

The faithful in the church may have replied "pray for us" aloud with the priest, or silently to themselves. By reading the names of the figures in the center portion of each triptych, Mary, John the Baptist, Peter, John, and the rest, the Litany of saints can be visualized. The Deesis alone is a visual image of such an intecessory supplication offered up before Christ. The names of the other saints and martyrs may have been included in the litany on special occasions such as Easter, Christmas, or a saint's name day. Thus the figures on each triptych correspond with the saints called upon in the litany. This connection may reveal the original function of the triptychs and provides a reason for their similar composition and the repetition of certain saints. The triptychs, then, represent a harmony between the verbal image and the visible image and become an image of prayer itself. A triptych may have been placed on the altar, as diptychs may have been, for the priest to read the name of each saint inscribed in the ivory as well as to look at their images.

Another parallel between the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs and the Orthodox liturgy exists in the ritual breaking of the bread for the Eucharistic offering. Beginning in the tenth century, the Eucharistic rite, or Proskomide, becomes enriched with new ceremonies.[7] The bread used in the offertory was stamped with the Greek inscription IC-XC-NI-KA surrounding a cross. This inscription is the monogram for 'Jesus Christ Conquers' and also appears around a cross on the back panel of the Harbaville triptych (see Figure 5). The monogram acts as a statement symbolizing Christ's triumph over death. Stamped on the Eucharistic offering, the monogram becomes the motto of the church and sums up the meaning of the Eucharistic ritual. During the offertory the priest cuts into the bread and removes the cube bearing the inscription and places it on a paten. This cube is called the Lamb of God and symbolizes Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of the world. A separate offering is then cut and divided in memory of certain saints and arranged in order next to the Eucharistic Lamb. The Virgin is the first to be commemorated, with a particle of the bread placed to the right of the Lamb. A second particle is removed in honor of John the Baptist and placed to the left of the Lamb. Other particles in memory of the archangels Michael and Gabriel and the apostles are placed to the left side as well. The final particles were removed and placed to the left of the Lamb in memory of past Orthodox bishops and the

officiating priest.[8] Prayers would accompany the rite creating a dramatic representation of Christ's sacrifice.

Any one of the three triptychs discussed here would suggest a correspondence with the Eucharistic ritual. Such a correspondence might account for the arrangement of the figures on these triptychs. Christ, symbolized by the Lamb, occupies the center position and the Virgin stands to the right. This agrees with the order in which the particles of the bread were removed in the offertory as well as their placement on the paten. A particle for the archangels was removed next and on the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs figures of the archangels surround the image of Christ. A particle in honor of John the Baptist was placed to the left of the Eucharistic Lamb and on the triptychs he stands to the left of Christ. Furthermore, the stamp on the bread parallels the inscription on the back of the Harbaville triptych. The monogram symbolizes Christ's triumph over death. Both the monogram and cross become visual symbols to the faithful that through Christ they too can triumph over death and gain everlasting life. If an emperor used a triptych during the mass, the meaning of the Eucharistic ritual as a sacrifice to save mankind would be better comprehended with the help of visual images. The depiction of the Deesis along with other saints indicates, to the one who uses the triptych, that he does not pray alone and his prayers for salvation will be strengthened by the intecessory powers of the saints.

Thus the Deesis-with-Saints triptychs as liturgical objects can be seen to correspond to the Eucharistic liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The act of cutting particles from bread in memory of certain saints is a practice which came about in the tenth century, possibly, then, at the same time that the first Deesis-with-Saints triptych was produced. Because of the small size of the triptychs and the personal message of salvation which they deliver, it is likely that they were used by private individuals. Because of the rich imperial imagery of the tripychs, carved from precious ivory, they were probably used by an emperor. The inscriptions on the Palazzo Venezia triptych only help to strengthen this idea since they resemble a short intecessory prayer offered up for the emperor.

The Iconostasis

It is likely that curtains or an iconostasis, an altar screen, were placed in churches since the Early Byzantine Period. Curtains were probably hung in the aisles early in the period to conceal the women on one side of the church from the men on the other side. Curtains also may have hung from a ciborium which may have concealed the altar. These curtains were described by a ninth century source as "veils of gold and purple interwoven, embroidered with marvelous holy images."[9] Such curtains may have been replaced with an altar screen in some

churches. According to Kitzinger, after 558 A.D., an altar screen was placed in Hagia Sophia, and "was adorned with a rich array of silver reliefs depicting Christ, angels, the Virgin, prophets, and apostles."[10] A true iconostasis, a wall with three doors on which images of saints were painted, might have been used after the Iconoclastic Controversy.[11] These images, or icons, of saints may have been similar in subject matter to the representations of saints on the three ivory triptychs. A row of small images filled the top, and larger images of Christ, the Virgin, and John the Baptist, flanked by apostles, occupied the lower area. Thus, the Deesis with other saints may have been depicted on the iconostasis in an arrangement similar to that on the triptychs. Behind the center, or Royal Door, of the iconostasis was the altar where the Eucharist was consecrated. This area corresponds to the center panel of each triptych where the image of Christ is located. Christ, as the Lamb of God, occupies a central position in the Eucharistic liturgy and in the representation of the Deesis. A triptych with its leaves closed would conceal the image of Christ, as the closed doors of the iconostasis conceals the sanctuary (Figure 16). Opening the leaves of the triptychs revealed the image of Christ and his court of saints. Opening the door of the iconostasis revealed the sanctuary where the consecration of the Eucharist took place. In both instances, what is revealed is the mystery and divinity of Christ. George Galavaris relates the two

Figure 16. The Harbaville Triptych with the wings closed

objects in the following way:

> A triptych resembled in form the Royal Doors of the iconostasis. When the triptych was closed, it provided the believer with the same feeling he experienced when he stood in front of the closed doors of the iconostasis. The open triptych simulated one's seeing through the Royal Doors into the inner part of the sanctuary with the altar, where the Sacrement was performed; thus, one contemplated the meaning of one's participation in the divine.[12]

Because the iconostasis was placed in front of the altar, the faithful may not have been able to see the performance of the liturgy at all, only hear and respond. The images on the iconostasis would help them to visualize the rite instead. In the same way the triptychs might have helped their owners participate in the ritual. For an emperor, who sat in a royal box in the palace church of Hagia Sophia, a triptych would be an important visual aid since he would not be able to observe the rite. Indeed, it would have been imperative for the emperor to see the ritual in some sense as he was considered to be God's representative on earth. The iconostasis would likewise serve the faithful, but in a less personal or private way.

The idea of revealing the sacred image in order to enable one to participate in the divine has appeared elsewhere in religious art. The statue of Zeus, located in the center of his temple at Olympia, was concealed by a woolen curtain. The divine image of Zeus would be revealed to the viewer when the curtain was raised.[13] The significance of the sacred image was emphasized by revealing the statue only during certain festivals. In the same way the

Torah, the essential object of Jewish worship, was placed behind a Torah curtain, which emphasized its sanctity. When the curtain was moved the divine word of God was revealed. Thus, the ancient idea of concealing a sacred object is found in the Byzantine church as well, through the use of curtains, and the iconostasis. The images on the triptychs were concealed in a similar way when the leaves were closed. In all cases, concealing and revealing the image is an indication of its sacredness.

Conclusion

Roman Consular diptychs were converted to use in the Orthodox mass as the litanies inscribed on them were read aloud by a priest. These litanies were short intercessory prayers for certain people in the church community. Such prayers were inscribed on the Palazzo Venezia triptych dedicated to the emperor Constantine VII and may have been read aloud in the mass in his honor. The three Deesis-with-Saints triptychs have a more profound connection, however, with the liturgy of the Orthodox church. The figures depicted on each triptych correspond with names in the Litany of Saints, intecessory prayers recited before the preparation of the Eucharist. The saints are asked to intercede with God on behalf of the faithful. The center panels of the triptychs also can be seen to correspond to the breaking of the Eucharistic bread. Particles of bread are offered to the Virgin and the Baptist while the main

portion symbolically represents the Lamb of God. This division into particles agrees with the figures who comprise the Deesis. Other particles are cut in memory of the archangels, Michael and Gabriel, and the apostles. Thus, the other figures on the triptychs may have been included in the rite as well. Also, the monogram, IC-XC-NI-KA, stamped on the Eucharistic bread, is found on the cross panel of the Harbaville triptych. Finally, the figures of saints on each triptych may correspond to images of saints on the iconostasis.

Thus, the trio of triptychs harmonize with the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Through the sacred image the liturgy is made visible. Since the triptychs are so small and probably would not have been seen by the congregation in the church, they were probably intended for private use. They may have been placed on the altar where the priest could consecrate the Eucharist in front of the image of Christ and then offer up other particles in memory of other saints depicted on the ivories. They may also have accompanied the emperor who, in his royal box, may not have been able to observe the rite. The triptychs would be his guide to visualize the sacred ritual.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Williamson, p. 137.

[2]Ibid. Eric Maclagen was curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum at the time of this publication. The Diptych of Clementinus is located at this museum.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Solovy, p. 123.

[5]Ibid., p. 241.

[6]Kantorwicz, p. 66.

[7]Solovey, p. 125.

[8]Ibid., p. 126-128.

[9]Mathews, p. 167.

[10]Kitzinger, The Art of Byzantium, p. 198.

[11]Mathews, p. 167.

[12]G. Galavaris, Icons from the Elvehjem Art Center, Madison, 1973, p. 11.

[13]Pausanias, p. 447.

CHAPTER V

THE DEESIS-WITH-SAINTS TRIPTYCHS AS ICONS

The trio of triptychs are apparently related to the Eastern Orthodox liturgy by their visualization of the Litany of Saints and the Eucharistic commemoration. A further aspect of the sacredness of the triptychs is their function as icons. An icon is a device through which the faithful may communicate with God and other saints. Sacred images of Christ, the Virgin, John the Baptist, or other saints, help the believer to communicate with that person. The icon is also acts as a mediator between God and the worshipper. During private devotions, then, the triptychs engender communication between the worshipper and the interceding saint. The triptychs also act as a channel for prayer during the Litany of Saints. The figures depicted on the triptychs are the same saints who are called upon in the Litany to intercede with God for the believer. In this endevor they become what the Eastern Orthodox Church calls an icon. Byzantine icons also have a deeper theological meaning concerning the sacred word and the sacred image to which the triptychs can be related.

The Word

An ordinance of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) declared that the veneration of icons should be on the same level as the cross and the gospels.[1] All three religious objects are distinctive symbols of Christianity. The cross is a symbolic image of Christ's crucifixion and triumph over death. The gospels create visual images of the word of God. Icons present the word of God in visible form representing an analogy between the sacred word and sacred image. Each triptych's figures are the visible image of the saints who are petitioned in the Litany of Saints. The image and the word then express the same thing; they are both counterparts of the person represented. The name of each saint inscribed beside his head emphasizes this likeness between the word and the image. In this way the triptychs become an image of the prayer as well as a vehicle for that prayer.

The concept of the image as equivalent to the word appeared in the writings of Philo, a Jewish Biblical scholar and Neo-Platonist of the first century A.D. His philosophy is an important link between the Platonic and Christian concepts of the image. Gerhard Ladner presents Philo's theology of the rational word of God symbolized by the Divine Logos or sacred word:

> Philo explains that the intelligible world of invisible light . . . is nothing but the Word of God which is the Divine Image. Elsewhere the Logos is called the eldest or first Image of God.[2]

The Greek word logos means more than simply 'word'. It can also mean utterance or thought, and its basic meaning involves order, reason, and mind.[3] The word logike, or verbal, can be translated as rational or spiritual.[4] Thus, Divine Logos is the word of God, the image of God and the essence of God, whereas the 'verbal' word reveals His spirituality. It is through the Logos, the likeness or image of the invisible God, that the knowing and understanding of God is possible.

This concept enters the Byzantine doctrine on images through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. He was a Christian mystic and Neo-Platonist whose writings became known in the East beginning in the sixth century. In his Celestial Hierarchies Dionysius says that celestial beings are depicted in "material images in the inspired writings of the sacred word so that we might be guided through the sensible to the intelligible."[5] The triptychs as sensible, tangible objects reveal the Logos as the visible image of Christ. His sacred name written as a monogram beside His head has the same function as his image. His name and His image represent one concept just as the visible image of Christ represents the invisible God. The monogram on the back panel of the Harbaville triptych emphasizes the analogy between the word and the image. It symbolizes God's presence in Paradise in the same way that the stamped monogram on the Eucharistic bread symbolizes the Lamb of God. Visible images, then, help

make intelligible the Logos of God, and are an essential aspect of an icon. The worshipper can perhaps establish communication more easily with a visual image as a channel for prayer.

The Image

In the words of John of Damascus, an eighth century defender of icons: "An image is a likeness, an exemplar or a figure of something, such as to show in itself the subject represented."[6] So an icon is a likeness of a person, the prototype, which is defined by John of Damascus: "Now a prototype is that which is imaged, from which the derivitive is obtained."[7] Honor given to the image passes through the icon to the original, the prototype. Thus the faithful venerate the icon for whom it represents. Christ, the Virgin, the Baptist, or another saint are prototypes. The icon itself is not worshipped, just as the cross and the gospels are not worshipped in themselves, but rather are vehicles in the worship of God. An icon, however, is different from the cross and gospel in its capacity as a channel for communication. Prayers directed to the icon are believed to be transmitted to the prototype through the image. Each of the three triptychs discussed here is such a vehicle for prayer. If one of these triptychs were standing on the altar during the consecration of the bread, the priest could hold up the offering in front of the images of the saints to transmit

the offering to the prototype. During personal devotion, the triptychs as icons provide a focus for contemplation and provide assurance to the faithful that his prayers will reach the prototype.

The depiction of the Deesis with saints is a visual image of intercession. The basic meaning of the word 'deesis' is petition, which implies a request to a superior authority, in this case, God. The Virgin and John the Baptist stand in continuous supplication to Christ on behalf of the faithful. The plea is taken up by the other saints who, through their repetition, reinforce the prayers of the faithful.

According to Gervase Mathew: "New optical contrivances . . . were aimed to emphasize or facilitate a personal link between the image and the believer."[8] Since an ease in communication was the necessary link between the faithful and the image, when making icons, the Byzantine artist used several devices to make the figures look believable and natural so a common sense of identity could be established. The frontal stance of most figures is one optical device used on each triptych. The frontal pose helps to establish communication with the viewer. The saints on the wings and the five apostles face the viewer ready for address. The Virgin and the Baptist stand in a three-quarter position, which symbolizes their intercessory powers. The Virgin and the Baptist are mediators between the earthly world of the faithful and the spiritual world

of God. Their stance indicates they serve both worlds. They stand in an almost frontal position, ready to recieve the prayers of the faithful, and turn their profiles to Christ to make supplication to Him with their prayers. Concerning a frontal and profile stance Meyer Shapiro says:

> The contrast of frontal and profile . . . is a means of distinquishing a past symbolic event and a present symbolized one, the first a unique historic action, and the second a recurrent liturgical performance.[9]

Thus, on each triptych, the Virgin and the Baptist perpetually intercede for the faithful.

Another optical device used on the triptychs to enhance communication is the depiction of the figures in a naturalistic attitude while simultaneously expressing their spiritual nature. The dual representation of a human and divine nature is an essential characteristic of an icon. A human image of the divine prototype is more understandable to the viewer and makes the iconic image more approachable. The human nature of the saints is made visible by portraying them as individuals. Short hair, long hair, baldness and beards, youth and old age are human characteristics which the viewer would be able to identify in himself. Although the bodies of the apostles are relatively frontal, their heads are turned in different directions creating a sense of movement and variety. This idea is also conveyed by the turned stance of the Virgin and Baptist.

Christ is the central focus of each triptych as well

as the focus for prayer. Since Christ was once man He can be depicted in human form. He is portrayed naturalistically, and, besides, He is not much larger than each of the other figures on the triptychs. Thus it is easy to perceive His human proportions. This is especially evident on the Palazzo Venezia triptych where, even though He stands on a platform, He is of the same height as that of the Virgin and the Baptist. On the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs he is enthroned as an earthly king. Also, Christ's willingness to hear the prayers of the faithful encourages the believer to approach His image.

The spirituality of Christ and the other figures is symbolized by their attributes: halos, crosses, scrolls, gestures of supplication and benediction, and jeweled covers of the gospel. The names inscribed beside each head affirms their human as well as their divine nature. The name of Christ indicates at once His human and divine natures. The spiritual authority of Christ is revealed through the jeweled imperial throne on which He sits in the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs. The symmetry of each composition, the formal arrangement of the saints, and the kingly image of Christ produce an image of a heavenly court. Thus the human and spiritual natures unite to create an iconic image. The presentation of the Deesis with saints has been appropriately portrayed so an ease in communication can occur between the viewer and the image. As a vehicle for prayer, the function of the Deesis-with-

Saints triptychs as icons is secured. They are able to give an idea of God and the saints and to inspire veneration in the viewer.

An Ancient Greek Icon

The doctrine of a Byzantine icon, as exhibited by the three ivory triptychs, was heavily influenced by the ancient Greek concept of sacred images. The word 'icon' is Greek in origin, eikon, which means likeness or image. Boman discusses the Greek meaning of the word icon:

> For the ancients 'image' is not only a copy of a visible object, but it can also mean a radiating, a becoming visible and manifest of the essence in such a way as to have a share in the very substance of the thing itself. Thus, eikon means the coming into appearance of the kernal, the essence, of a thing; it particiates in reality.[10]

This adequately describes the doctrine of a Byzantine icon as well. But since the word and its meaning is Greek in origin there must have been something in ancient Greece to fit this description.

The most famous statue of a god in the Greek world was the chryselephantine statue of Zeus by Phidias. Pausanias always refers to the 'image' of Zeus rather than the 'statue'. The reasons for this are similar to why a Byzantine icon is called an image. A duality of human and divine natures is expressed by this image as by the images on the trio of triptychs. Zeus was portrayed naturalistically as a king. He was enthroned, crowned with a garland around his head, and held a sceptre in his hand.

His ivory flesh appeared natural and would have taken on a soft golden color with age. The divine nature of Zeus was revealed by his great size and the rich materials used to embellish the image. He was surrounded by Victories and other gods including the Graces and the Seasons. Zeus was thus portrayed as the ruler of men and gods alike. He sat in a frontal pose facing the entrance of the temple. Upon entry the viewer would stand in front of a curtain behind which sat Zeus. When the curtain was removed the splendor of the image would have been revealed. The image of Zeus did participate in reality by resembling a human being but he clearly was beyond any physical being. Phidias made the image based on the verbal description of Homer. That verbal image and the visible image expressed the same thing; the divinity of Zeus.

In 97 A.D., a man from Asia Minor, Dio Chrysostom, delivered a discourse in front of the Temple of Zeus in Olympia concerning the image of Zeus. He describes the human characteristic of this statue as a symbol the god's attributes:

> For his sovereignity and kingship are intended to be shown by the strength in the image and its grandeur; his fatherhood and his solicitude by its gentleness and kindliness; . . . the Kingship between gods and men . . .by the mere similarity in shape, being already in use as a symbol.[11]

Thus the image symbolizes all these aspects of Zeus. The image provided an idea of the god and his goodness and it inspired awe and veneration in the viewer. It revealed the

beauty and authority of Zeus, and, in the words of Dio: "nobody, not even an insane person, would liken it to any mortal man soever, if it be carefully examined from the point of view of a god's beauty or stature."[12] In almost any religion there seems to be a desire to represent an image of God in human form. One reason the human form is chosen is because no mortal knows what form God takes. Another reason is provided by Dio:

> Men, having no mere inkling thereof . . . fly to it for refuge, attributing to god a human body as a vessel to contain intelligence and rationality, in their lack of a better illustration, and in their perplexity seeking to indicate that which is invisible and unportrayable by means of something portrayable and visible, using the function of a symbol.[13]

The idea of an image as a tangible and believable symbol of the deity is what inspired the making of icons, pagan or Christian. They act as the visible expression of one's belief in a god.

The idea stated by Dio can be found in similar fashion in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. Dionyius was a Christian mystic and influenced by the philosophy of Plato. He inspired Christian writers such as John of Damascus and stimulated the development of iconic images. He presented an idea similar to Dio's concerning material images of God:

> For it might be said that the reason for attributing shapes to that which is above shape, and forms to that which is above forms, is not only the feebleness of our intellectual power which is unable to rise at once to spiritual contemplation, and which needs to be encouraged by the natural and suitable support and upliftment which offers us forms perceptible

> to us of formless and and supernatural contemplation but . . . because . . . the secret doctrines should veil and render difficult access for the multitude the sublime and powerful truth of the supernatural intelligence. For . . . not everyone is holy, nor have all men knowledge.[14]

According to Dionysius, the material forms are necessary because our minds are too feeble to comprehend the divine in its invisible form. Also, because man needs encouragement and assistance to contemplate the divine. Dio and Dionysius are saying that the material image is a concession to the weakness of human nature. An icon of Zeus or Christ presents an image of the deity manifested in human form which our human minds can comprehend.

The Byzantine world did not need to see the image of Zeus to adopt a similar doctrine. The Greek concept of the image was adopted and developed by Christian writers such as Pseudo-Dionysius and John of Damascus. Through them, the Greek concept of images formed the basis for the Byzantine doctrine of images. A rational and tangible image was desired not for image-worship, but because of what the images do for the believer; enhance communication and contemplation, and provide a link with the divine.

Contemplation

The Deesis-with-Saints triptychs as icons provide a focus for contemplation of the divine. They are the means by which the faithful can try to elevate their minds from the human, physical nature of the images to understand the

spiritual, divine nature of the prototypes. There are several ways the triptychs can enhance contemplation. In his Celestial Hierarchies, Pseudo-Dionysius put forth the idea that through a hierarchy of beings the soul can rise from earth to heaven as though ascending a spiritual ladder: "The aim of Hierarchy is the greatest possible assimilation to and union with God . . . by contemplating intently His most Divine Beauty . . . it molds and perfects its participants in the holy image of God."[15] A hierarchy of images is established on each triptych by placing the figures in order of rank under Christ. On the exterior of the wings are bishop saints and on the interior are martyrs and soldier saints. They provide a starting point for the believer, as the bottom of a ladder. These figures were well known within the Byzantine church and close to the believer's physical world. On the central panel are those saints who are closest to God. The apostles, as the foundation of the church, receive the prayers of the faithful from the saints on the wings and present them to the Virgin and the Baptist. John the Baptist was during his lifetime an intermediary between God and His people and maintains that same position after death. Mary is the Mother of God and traditionally the intecessor nearest to God. Christ is symbolically and visually the central axis. He recieves the prayers from the Virgin and Baptist and transmits them to God. Thus the triptychs used in prayer provide a hierarchical approach to God. In this

way, the minds of the faithful might be elevated from the material world to the realm of the divine. The faithful becomes a participant in prayer through this hierarchical approach. According to Dionysius, through this approach the soul of the believer becomes enlightened and purified:

> For even of those who are allotted a place in the Divine Order finds his perfection in being uplifted, according to his capacity, towards the Divine Likeness . . . he becomes . . . a fellow-worker with God, and shows forth the Divine Activity revealed as far as possible in himself.[16]

Thus the believer might become a likeness of God, a living icon, by participating in his divinity. God created man in his image so man might become God-like. With the help of icons such as the triptychs, such a state might be attained.

There is yet another way in which the triptychs can enhance contemplation. The mind of the faithful can be elevated from the material world to the spiritual through contemplation of the beauty of the material image. Contemplation of material beauty as a guide to the spiritual world is an anagogical approach found in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius:

> For the mind can by no means be directed to the spiritual presentation and contemplation of the Celestial Hierarchies unless it use the material guidance suited to it, accounting those beauties which are seen to be images of the hidden beauty.[17]

The triptychs, as icons, may implement such an anagogical approach in several ways. Material beauty in the form of color or gilding applied to the triptychs, stimulate the

mind to contemplate divine beauty. Traces of paint and gilding can be seen on the Vatican triptych (see Figure 10). Also the throne of Christ is carved to simulate inlaid jewels. Through his experience of the applied material beauty the viewer may better comprehend the hidden beauty of God. Plotinus, the Roman Neo-Platonic philosopher of the third century, had already developed a similar idea. He believed that the material object becomes beautiful by communicating with the divine.[18] Thus, the images on the triptychs are purifed and radiant since they represent an image of holiness. The iconic images on the triptychs put forth a radiant light which is inherent in the ivory and would be enhanced by additional color and gilding. Plotinus says that "even material forms containing light incorporated in them still need a light apart from their own."[19] Even the image of Zeus at Olympia was embellished with color and gems. The chryselephantine work would have projected an image of the god's radiance. His throne was adorned with gold and jewels, ivory and ebony. The viewer would immediately confront the divine beauty of Zeus. The same is true of the triptychs although their embellishment is more subtle and they are smaller in size.

A stress on symmetry and rhythm is evident on each triptych and reinforced through repetition. On the wings pairs of saints are arranged one above the other. A repetition of line and pattern is also evident. Symmetry

exists among the apostles of the center panel by the use of an odd number of figures. The center saint on the Harbaville triptych stands on a separate platform so his cental position among the other figures is emphasized. Through the use of symmetry and repetition a hypnotic rhythm is created and a sense of unity within the composition is perceived. This sense of balance and unity may act as a focus for contemplation. Plotinus says of symmetry that: "Beauty is that which irradiates symmetry rather than symmetry itself and is that which truly calls out our love."[20] Icons embellished with color and gilding and composed symmetrically and rhythmically are a reflection of the ordered and beautiful realm of the divine. By contemplating such images the mind of the faithful is ordered, uplifted, and hence prepared to communicate with God.

An Emperor's Triptych

The trio of triptychs might have been made for certain emperors of the Middle Byzantine Period, such as Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. It is likely that all three triptychs were owned by emperors who may have used them as icons for personal devotion or to accompany the mass. In the palace church of Hagia Sophia, the emperor sat on a throne in a royal box located in the south aisle near the apse.[21] It was screened off with either a curtain or a wall and he would not have been visible to the

congregation. Likewise the emperor may not have seen the people and his view of the mass may have been obstructed. However, if the emperor had a Deesis-with-Saints triptych with him it would not have been necessary to view the liturgy, only listen. Because the triptych figures correspond to the Eucharistic ritual he could have visualized the rite through the triptych. He may also have used the triptych as an icon for use in prayer and contemplation.

The iconic images of Christ on the Harbaville and Vatican triptychs are especially suited for an emperor to pray through since they depict Christ enthroned as a ruler. The image of Christ on a jeweled throne surrounded by beautiful colors and gold would have been a reflection of the Byzantine ruler on his decorated throne. An emperor-cult had existed in the Byzantine Empire since the time of Constantine the Great. Cult images were made of the emperor and available for the people to revere. According to Cyril Mango, the emperor was thought of as holy and in his portraits was usually represented wearing a nimbus. This type of representation appears as early as the fourth century in the depiction of Theodosius I on the silver Missorium. A halo surrounds his head, and is emphasized by the arch in the pediment above.

The relationship between the emperor and his subjects was formal and composed of ceremonious rituals. Mango provides the following description:

> The emperor's subjects communicated with him by means of acclamations which were rhythmical and repetitive as in the Divine Liturgy, and when received in audience prostrated themselves on the ground . . . What the emperor was to his subjects, God was to the emperor.[22]

The Byzantine people imagined that the emperor together with his court was a reduced reflection of the heavenly court of God. The emperor gleaming with gold and jewels, and dressed in the imperial purple robes was supposed to be a living image of Christ whose divine light shone through the person of the emperor.

Beholding a Deesis-with-Saints triptych an emperor might better understand the glory of God and His heavenly court. He presided over an earthly court based on a heavenly model and was a reflection of the divine image of God. The trio of triptychs, then, are suitable icons for an emperor. He would quickly percieve a commom sense of identity with the image of God's court. He would be prepared to communicate with the divine. By participating in God's divinity, the emperor, as a fellow-worker with God, becomes a living icon.

FOOTNOTES

[1]L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, The Meaning of Icons, Boston, 1952, p. 32.

[2]G. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 7 (1953), p. 7.

[3]J. Pelikan, Jesus Through the Centuries, New Haven, 1985, Chapter 5.

[4]Solovey, p. 292.

[5]Dionysius the Areopagite, p. 22.

[6]C. Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453, Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series, New Jersey, p. 171.

[7]Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, VIII, Grand Rapids, 1955, p. 88.

[8]G. Mathew, Byzantine Aesthetics, New York, 1971, p. 107.

[9]M. Schapiro, Words and Pictures, Netherlands, 1973, p. 41.

[10]Boman, p. 121.

[11]Dio Chrysostom, p. 63.

[12]Ibid., p. 67.

[13] Ibid., p. 79.

[14] Dionysius the Areopagite, p. 24

[15] Ibid., p. 29

[16] Ibid., p. 30.

[17] Ibid., p. 22.

[18] Plotinus, 1, VI. 2.

[19] Ibid., 6, VII. 21.

[20] Ibid., 6, VII. 22.

[21] Mathews, p. 134. Based on archaeological evidence, Mathews believes the throne was located between the last column of the nave arcade and the southeast pier. A complex of ceremonial places reserved for the emperor was located near the sanctuary end of the southern aisle east of his royal box.

[22] Mango, Byzantium, p. 219.

[23] Ibid., p. 157.

CONCLUSION

The Deesis-with-Saints triptychs exhibit a blending of imperial and religious iconography and ideology of the Middle Byzantine Period. As suggested in this study, imperial inscriptions and associations with ivory coronation reliefs suggest that the triptychs may have been intended for use by Byzantine emperors from the mid-tenth to early eleventh centuries. The apparent association of the triptychs with the Byzantine Orthodox liturgy and the doctrine of icons would indicate that they were intended for personal use during the mass and in private meditations. At the same time they also recall the traditional iconography of the emperor and his court. Ivory was used in ancient Egypt and Greece for images of kingly and divine manifestations. Ivory was used for the same purpose in art of the Middle Byzantine Period for images of God and the emperor. The three Deesis-with-Saints triptychs then, achieve a harmony among liturgical, iconic, and imperial imageries.

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