

The Emperor's Image in Byzantium

Perceptions and Functions

Manuela Studer-Karlen

Several generations of researchers have studied the subject of imperial portraiture in Byzantium from many different points of view.¹ Initially, the primary concerns were the identification and interpretation of individual images on objects or in monumental art, among other more general questions concerning the significance and function of these images. Studies of exegetical texts on the physiognomy of the emperors and the spatial settings for these images have filled many gaps in our understanding.² Since the person of the emperor was inextricable from his cult, recent work has considered more closely the ceremonial aspects of portraiture.³

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- 1 For a select bibliography: André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin* (Paris, 1936); Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine, "L'Image du Pouvoir dans l'art byzantin à l'époque de la dynastie Macédonienne," *Byzantion* 57 (1987), 441–70; Antony Eastmond, "Between Icon and Idol: The uncertainty of imperial images," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies presented to Robin Cormack*, eds. Antony Eastmond, and Liz James (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 73–85; Elisabeta Negrău, "The Ruler's Portrait in Byzantine Art," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 7/2 (2011), 63–75; Alicia Walker, *The Emperor and the World* (Pennsylvania, 2012); Maria Cristina Carile, "Imperial Icons in Late Antiquity and Byzantium. The iconic image of the Emperor between Representation and Presence," *Ikona* 9 (2016), 75–98. For the historiographical debate: Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 14–16; Alexander Angelov, "In search of God's only emperor: basileus in Byzantine and modern historiography," *Journal of Medieval History* 40/2 (2014), 123–41, esp. 125–28. In this paper, I use 'Byzantine Empire' in a broad sense to refer to the art of the so-called 'Byzantine commonwealth.'
 - 2 Tania Velmans, "Le portrait dans l'art des Paléologues," in *Art et Société à Byzance sous les Paléologues* (Venice, 1971), pp. 93–148, esp. 100–01; Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Toronto, 1972), pp. 46–48, 108–13, 117–18, 128, 130–33, 141, 154, 192–99, 220–21, 224–28, 245–46; Paul Magdalino, and Robert Nelson, "The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982), 123–83.
 - 3 See, in particular, various contributions in: *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C., 1997); *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Alexander Beihammer, Stavroula Constantinou, and Maria G. Parani (Leiden, 2013).

Rather than focusing on the identification or contextualization of specific images, this essay will raise questions related to the visual conventions for staging the emperor and for representing his outward appearance. What functions did the body of the emperor have, and how were these functions perceived? Given this set of questions, only 'official' images of the emperor will be examined here.⁴ The supernatural qualities of the sovereign, praised in panegyrics, were conveyed through highly diagrammatic and abstract images.⁵ It has long been accepted that imperial portraits were recognized as efficient symbols of the ruling institution. To ensure that the viewer recognized the figure as imperial, official images showed the emperor as static, idealized, iconic, haloed, and stereotyped – rather than emphasizing his individualized physiognomy. Moreover, the ceremonial vestments came to visually manifest the figure's imperial status: the emperor is dressed in the *chlamys* or the *loros*, the garments worn during the most solemn moments of court ritual and prescribed in ceremonial handbooks.⁶ While the crown was naturally the most recognizable among the insignia, further unambiguous attributes were the sceptre and the *labarum* as well as the *akakia* and the orb.⁷ Frontal and haloed, Byzantine rulers were presented as sacred figures. In this way, imperial images were self-evident; they displayed the sacral and secular authority of the *basileus* and, in doing so, magnified his power and that of the empire wherever his image was

4 On the variety of portraits of the sovereign, especially in a historic context: Velmans, "Le portrait," pp. 97–123; Walker, *The Emperor*. Numerous written sources mention hunting, military, or triumphant scenes featuring the emperor as the central figure. Such imagery adorned, for example, the walls of the palaces in Constantinople. Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 124–30, 140–46.

5 On the stylistic distinction of this convention from the contrasting one visualizing the emperor as a 'garden of grace': Maguire, Henry, "Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art," *Gesta* 28/2 (1989), 217–31.

6 Jolivet-Lévy, "L'Image du Pouvoir," pp. 441–43; Maria G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images. Byzantine material culture and religious iconography (nth-15th centuries)* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 11–27, 37, 49–50; Jennifer L. Ball, *Byzantine Dress* (New York, 2005), pp. 37–56; Maria G. Parani, "Cultural Identity and Dress: The Case of Late Byzantine Ceremonial Costume," *Jahrbuch Österreichische Byzantinistik* 57 (2007), 95–134; Ruth Macrides, J. A. Munitzi, and Dimiter Angelov, *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan court: Offices and Ceremonies* (Birmingham, 2013); Olga Karagiorgou, "The Emperor's New Clothes: Looking anew at the Iconography of the Tondi," in *The Tondi in Venice and Dumbarton Oaks: Art and Imperial between Byzantium and Venice*, eds. Niccolò Zarzi, Albrecht Berger, and Lorenzo Lazzarini (Rome, 2019), pp. 93–150, esp. 103–23. Even if middle and late Byzantine written sources describe other imperial garments, these did not appear in imperial portraiture probably because they were devoid of any specific symbolism.

7 Parani, *Reconstructing*, pp. 27–34; Karagiorgou, "The Emperor's New Clothes," pp. 123–39.

placed.⁸ Maria Cristina Carile has similarly demonstrated that, starting in late antiquity, the Byzantine imperial image was distinguished by a strong iconic character that facilitated the observer's immediate recognition not only of the emperor but also of imperial authority.⁹

1 Imperialization of Christ or Christianization of the Emperor?

Probably the most important criterion for performing the royal body was to demonstrate its benevolent connection to Christ. This relationship between the emperor and Christ had been a central theme of imperial depictions since the 4th century,¹⁰ when, under Constantine, the emperor came to be no longer deemed a god in the pagan sense.¹¹ Likewise, in late antiquity, Christ was not represented in imperial dress, though he was ascribed an imperial air by means of courtly features.¹² Ultimately, a clear assimilation of the image of the emperor and the image of Christ resulted from these circumstances. Rules of courtly etiquette began to determine the forms of encounter with Christ.¹³ On a Constantinian sarcophagus, for example, figures in deep *proskynesis* with veiled hands seek grace from Christ as divine ruler (Figure. 4.1).¹⁴

8 Grabar, *L'Empereur*, pp. 1–5; Antony Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court, Courtly Ceremony, and the Great Byzantine Ivory Triptychs of the Tenth Century,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2015), 71–93, esp. 73.

9 Carile, “Imperial Icons,” pp. 75–98.

10 Jean-Michel Spieser, “Le Christ et le pouvoir impérial à Byzance,” in *Cristo e il Potere teologia, antropologia e politica*, eds. Laura Andreani, and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Florence, 2017), pp. 17–31, esp. 17–18.

11 Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 177–78; Johannes G. Deckers, “Göttlicher Kaiser und kaiserlicher Gott,” in *Epochenwandel? Kunst und Kultur zwischen Antike und Mittelalter*, eds. Franz Alto Bauer, and Norbert Zimmerman (Mainz, 2001), pp. 3–16, esp. 7–8; Johannes G. Deckers, “Der erste Diener Christi. Die Proskynese der Kaiser als Schlüsselmotiv der Mosaiken in S. Vitale (Ravenna) und in der Hagia Sophia (Istanbul),” in *Art, Cérémonial et Liturgie au Moyen Âge*, eds. Nicolas Bock, Peter Kurmann, Serena Romano, and Jean-Michel Spieser (Rome, 2002), pp. 11–70, esp. 11–15; Katherine Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons. Between Reality and Spirituality in Byzantine Art* (Turnhout, 2013), p. 284.

12 While Mathews does not support this thesis, Deckers is in favour of it. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 77–79; Deckers, “Göttlicher Kaiser,” pp. 3–16. This imperialization of Christian art was complete around the 6th century.

13 *Proskynesis* before the emperor as a sign of respect was a common part of court ceremony, but it is rarely illustrated in surviving visual sources. Anthony Cutler, *Transfigurations, Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (London, 1975), pp. 53–110; esp. 79–80.

14 Manuela Studer-Karlen, *Verstorbenen Darstellungen auf frühchristlichen Sarkophagen* (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 202–05.

A scene of such humility comes not from the Gospels but rather from the repertoire of contemporary imperial iconography. In this assimilation process, however, both the image of Christ and that of the emperor transformed. The latter came to be regarded as a direct representative of God on earth, following the theory formulated by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–c. 340).¹⁵ Katherine Marsengill concludes that the understanding of the emperor as a divine being disappeared over the course of late antiquity and was replaced by a notion of the imperial office as itself sacred, with the emperor being divinely appointed.¹⁶ Considered the vice-regent of Christ on earth, the *basileus* gained a quasi-saintly and quasi-priestly status.¹⁷ His military successes were seen as the result of divine help¹⁸; indeed, in the 5th century, Procopius designated the Cross as the emblem through which every emperor obtained victory in war.¹⁹ And reciprocally, among the Christian emperor's perceived abilities was that he held sway in the supernatural realm and, therefore, could act as mediator on behalf of his subjects. Yet, the promise of salvation that was associated with the image of the emperor was never exclusive of the political connotations the image could simultaneously transfer.²⁰

The written and visual evidence attests to the impact of pagan predecessors on the depiction of the royal body in Byzantium, particularly in terms of its rigidity, which encapsulated the state-bearing authority of the emperor and his image. The image consolidated a supra-individual, timeless, God-willed, hierarchical world order in which the reigning emperor realized God's will on earth, on behalf of Christ.²¹ The divine attributes of immobility and

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- 15 Eusèbe de Césarée, *Vie de Constantin*, introduction Luce Pietri, trans. Marie-Joseph Rondeau, *Sources chrétiennes* 559 (Paris, 2013), 1.27–32, pp. 217–25; Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 14–15, 89–91; Robin Cormack, “The Emperor at St. Sophia: viewer and viewed,” in *Byzance et les Images*, ed. André Guillou (Paris, 1994), pp. 225–53, esp. 234; Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre. Étude sur le ‘césaropapisme’ byzantin* (Paris, 1996), pp. 145–48; Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court,” p. 76. On the development of the political theology of the Christian empire, as theorized by Eusebius: Carile, “Imperial Icons,” pp. 77–78.
- 16 Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, pp. 142–58, 203–31, 284.
- 17 Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre*, pp. 159–68. He explores the changing relationship between the emperor's political and religious duties.
- 18 Grabar, *Empereur*, pp. 5–11; Magdalino, and Nelson, “The Emperor,” pp. 165–66; Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (Paris, 1986); Cormack, “The Emperor,” p. 234; Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, p. 14; Parani, *Reconstructing*, p. 23; Robert S. Nelson, “‘And so, with the Help of God’: The Byzantine Art of War in the Tenth Century,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 65/66 (2011–12), 169–92.
- 19 Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.2.12. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 111; Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London, 2001), p. 140.
- 20 Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, pp. 142–45.
- 21 Deckers, “Göttlicher Kaiser,” pp. 3–16; Spieser, “Le Christ,” pp. 17–18.

frontality carried clear messages about imperial power and status. A thousand years later, the imperial court repeated the same visual formula: John v Paleologos is portrayed as part of a Deisis on the great eastern arch of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (c. 1355).²² Haloed and wearing rich imperial insignia, he faces the viewer. This prominent statement was especially important in the context of the political instability and economic devastation of that moment.

Throughout the history of the Byzantine Empire, the imperial body was consistently staged with reference to a well-defined typology.²³ Lending the empire his body, the emperor assumed a role – what Ernst Kantorowicz qualified as the ‘second’ body, that is, the imperishable public body.²⁴ These inherently generic representations made no attempt at likeness to the individual person of the emperor.²⁵ Rather, depicted in his public body – haloed and in official costume – the *basileus* represented and affirmed imperial power.²⁶ Such images served a public function as explicit statements of sacral and secular authority.²⁷

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- 22 John's portrait, below the Virgin, is lost. John Prodromos gesturing towards the Hetimasia refers to eternal salvation for the worshippers. Cyril Mango, *Materials for the study of the mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1962), pp. 71–76; Velmans, “Le portrait,” pp. 120–21; Cormack, “The Emperor,” pp. 232–34; Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, p. 153. On the interpretation and contextualization of the depiction, see: Natalia Teteriatnikov, “The Mosaics of the Eastern Arch of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: Program and Liturgy,” *Gesta* 51.1 (2013), 61–84.
- 23 Jolivet-Lévy, “L'Image du Pouvoir,” pp. 441–70; Carile, “Imperial Icons,” pp. 76–82.
- 24 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957).
- 25 Velmans, “Le portrait,” p. 93; Ioli Kalavrezou, “Imperial Portraits,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds. Alexander P. Kazhdan, and Alice-Mary Talbot (Oxford, 1991), 1703–04; Gilbert Dagron, “L'Image de Culte et le Portrait,” in *Byzance et les Images*, ed. André Guillou (Paris, 1994), pp. 124–51, esp. 126–31; Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et peindre: essai sur le portrait iconique* (Paris, 2007), pp. 135–47; Anthony Cutler, “The Idea of Likeness in Byzantium,” in *Wonderful things: Byzantium through its art*, eds. Anthony Eastmond, and Liz James (Ashgate, 2013), pp. 261–81. As the authors confirm, a tendency towards similarity can be seen in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coislin ms. 79 (fol. 2v), where the features of Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–1078) were retouched and adapted to those of his successor, Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078–1081). It is important to note that this is not a public image.
- 26 James, *Empresses*, p. 133. It is important to note that chroniclers sometimes distinguished the two natures/bodies of the emperor, for example, when he was murdered or deposed for usurpation, see: Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court,” pp. 76–79.
- 27 Not every image of the emperor had the same function: Carile, “Imperial Icons,” pp. 75–77.

2 The Public Body

From late antiquity onwards, the representation of the emperor was understood as a substitute for the emperor himself, especially in legal contexts.²⁸ The basis for this function is made particularly clear in a quotation from Severianus of Gabala (d. c. 408):

Since the emperor cannot appear before everyone, it is necessary to set up a portrait of the emperor at tribunals, in marketplaces, at meetings and in theatres. In fact, a portrait must be present in every place in which a magistrate acts so that he might sanction whatever transpires.²⁹

The visual examples that survive from late antiquity confirm that portraits acted as surrogates for the sovereign. In the *Notitia Dignitatum* (5th century), the insignia of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* features an imperial icon given to the official as an attribute of his rank.³⁰ Likewise, in a miniature from the 6th-century Gospel book in Rossano, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate is shown enthroned, during the trial of Christ, between two stands bearing double portraits of emperors.³¹ Several consular diptychs commemorating accession to high office display the emperor and empress in roundels or as busts above the depiction of the consul.³² The practice of marking authority with the image of the emperor is illustrated most remarkably by the presence of the empress Ariadne (before 457–515) on the diptych leaf of Anastasius,

28 Josef Engemann, "Herrscherbild," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 14 (Stuttgart, 1988), pp. 966–1047, esp. 1038–39; Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (München, 1990), p. 119; Sergey Ivanov, "A Case Study: The Use of the Nominative on Imperial Portraits from Antiquity to Byzantium," in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Ashgate, 2013), pp. 47–58, esp. 54–55.

29 Severianus Gabalae episcopi, *In mundi creationem*, PG 56:489–90. Ivanov, "A Case Study," p. 54; Carile, "Imperial Icons," pp. 78, 86.

30 For this context, see: Pamela C. Berger, *The Insignia of the Notitia Dignitatum: A Contribution to the Study of Late Antique Illustrated Manuscripts* (New York, 1981); Belting, *Bild und Kult*, pp. 118–19, Figure. 53; Antony Eastmond, "Consular Diptychs, Rhetoric and the Languages of Art in Sixth-Century Constantinople," *Art History* 33/5 (2010), 742–65, esp. 750; Ivanov, "A Case Study," p. 55. The lost 5th-century original survives only in late medieval copies. While the personifications of virtues are carefully identified, all the emperors are anonymous.

31 Petra Sevrugian, *Der Rossano-Codex und die Sinope-Fragmente* (Worms, 1990), pp. 67–74, esp. 71, figs. 15–16; Ivanov, "A Case Study," pp. 54–55; Carile, "Imperial Icons," p. 78. The rulers' portraits do not bear any caption.

32 Eastmond, "Consular Diptychs," pp. 740–65.

today in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. By 517, the year for which Anastasius was consul, she had been dead for two years. Liz James is right to note that this post-humous character of the diptych diverts the focus from the image of the empress herself to her office and the workings of the Byzantine imperial hierarchy.³³ It is not an image of the private body; it is an image of the political body. This is reinforced by a comparison of her portrayal on two similar ivory plaques, one in the Bargello Museum in Florence and the other in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.³⁴ The evidence of the body of the empress indicates that the two ivories in Florence and Vienna represent Ariadne at two different stages in her life.³⁵ Her rich jewellery is an imperial attribute rather than an expression of femininity. Likewise, her elaborate robes; hieratic, frontal, immobile pose; imperial gesture; and insignia set her apart. She is designated a powerful regent, a personification of authority.³⁶ Another useful comparable example is the representation of Anicia Juliana in the Herbal of Dioscorides.³⁷ The noblewoman is flanked by two personifications, whereas Ariadne herself appears as the personification of majesty on the two ivories. While the former is clearly recognizable as female and individual (i.e. with her private body), the latter appears unfeminine in her public portrayal.³⁸ It has been suggested that the Florence and Vienna ivories of Ariadne, like the famous Barberini Diptych, were sent to provincial elites as a substitute for the emperor's presence.³⁹ Their purpose was to present the sovereign as ubiquitous in authority. Textual evidence confirms this for later periods. For instance, in the 12th century, Malakes relayed that imperial portraits were to be found in every town.⁴⁰

33 James, *Empresses*, pp. 136–39.

34 On the two plaques: James, *Empresses*, pp. 136–45; Diliانا Angelova, “The Ivories of Ariadne and Ideas about female imperial Authority in Rome and early Byzantium,” *Gesta* 42/1 (2004), 1–15; Eileen Rubery, “The Vienna Empress Ivory and its Companion in Florence: Crowned in different Glories,” in *Wonderful things*, eds. Eastmond et al., pp. 99–114 (which includes a detailed bibliography on the two ivories). The debate has focused for a long time on the identity of the figure, with Ariadne being the most popular interpretation.

35 Rubery, “The Vienna Empress Ivory,” pp. 112–13.

36 James, *Empresses*, pp. 136–44; Angelova, “Ariadne,” p. 2.

37 Ioannis Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 145–46, Figure. 95.

38 The same conclusions can be drawn from analysing the coins, seals, and counterweights, i.e. as soon as the portrait is illustrated as an official authority to legitimize commercial values, the figure is ascribed an unfeminine appearance: James, *Empresses*, pp. 101–32.

39 Nelson, “With the Help of God,” pp. 171–74.

40 Magdalino, and Nelson, “The Emperor,” pp. 132–35.

With the image of the emperor serving as a substitute for the institution, it seems obvious that such images would have been exhibited not only on coins and seals but also in deeds of donation and investiture.⁴¹ Indeed, the emperor's presence was considered a guarantee of legal authenticity.⁴² In a numismatic context, the case of the powerful empress Sophia, wife of Justin II (r. 565–578), is significant. Corresponding to her official role as an effective sovereign, her portrait appears on bronze coins (and a few silver ones from Africa), conveying exceptional authority and prestige.⁴³

In other media, the function of the emperor's image is less clear, in part due to the smaller viewing public. It may be assumed that the imperial image was not only a symbol of office but also an object of cultic reverence. As Antony Eastmond has pointed out, imperial images evaded the theory elaborated by iconophile theologians.⁴⁴ They were not icons, yet veneration should be paid to them; and indeed, in practice the Byzantines regarded imperial portraits as icon-like.⁴⁵ Eastmond examined this ambivalent status of imperial images in the context of icon theory by comparing their function to that of icons and idols. Among his findings, it is interesting to note that the Church Fathers of the 4th century (as well as later theologians) accepted the cult of the emperor in return for official recognition of the Church. They supported the theoretical absolute of the concept of the emperor as God's ruler on earth. The body of the emperor thus played an important role in explaining aspects of Christianity.⁴⁶ The *basileus* represented every pious person, via his direct access to Christ.

41 For the emperor on seals, see: Maria Campagnolo-Pothitou, and Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Sceaux de la Collection George Zacos au Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève* (Genève 2016), pp. 15–38.

42 The image of the emperor does not appear on chrysobulls or acts of councils until the Palaeologan era. Spatharakis, *Manuscripts*, pp. 246–47. Moreover, in the case of coinage it can be assumed that none of the portraits were intended as a physiological likeness of the person depicted. Cutler, "Likeness," pp. 266–67; Cécile Morrisson, "Displaying the Emperor's Authority and Kharaktèr on the Marketplace," in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Ashgate, 2013), pp. 65–82, esp. 67. Nonetheless, the imprint of the ruler's figure is the guarantee of the coin or seal's authenticity.

43 Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington, D.C., 1999), p. 27; James, *Empresses*, pp. 109–10; Leslie Brubaker, and Helen Tobler, "The Gender of Money: Byzantine Empresses on Coins (324–802)," in *Gender & History* 12/3 (2000), 572–94; Morrisson, "Displaying," p. 71.

44 Eastmond, "Icon and Idol," p. 74.

45 Dagron, *Décrire et peindre*, 15–30; Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, pp. 17, 23–33, 83–86, 142–58, 203–32; Carile, "Imperial Icons," pp. 75–98, esp. 87.

46 Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 177–79; Eastmond, "Icon and Idol," pp. 73–84 (with sources).

The relationship between the image and its royal model – coming from theories concerning both icons and idols⁴⁷ – fluctuated according to need and circumstance.⁴⁸ Following the battles over iconoclasm in the 9th century, there appeared depictions of religious councils featuring the emperor front and centre. His central position has its origins in earlier imperial art since the purpose of these images was to reinforce Byzantine orthodox doctrine via the authority of the royal body.⁴⁹

3 The Public Body as Living Ceremonial Image

Certain visual examples provide more specific information about the function of imperial images and their staging. Images depicting the refusal to worship before Nebuchadnezzar, predominantly found on Roman sarcophagi from the early 4th century and later, are linked to the imperial cult of rulers. In such instances, the ‘image of gold’ from the biblical text (Dan. 3:1–50) has been transformed into an image of a contemporary ruler.⁵⁰ In view of the fact that, according to the text, the young men were burned in a fiery furnace for refusing to worship, this update to the picture suggests the importance assigned to the cult of the emperor already in the 4th century.⁵¹ A miniature from the Theodore Psalter (1066) illustrates the same theme. In place of the cult image, a painted panel of a *loros*-clad imperial figure hangs on the wall.⁵² This reflects the practice of displaying imperial portraits in cities throughout the empire. It

47 In the case of icons, the relationship between prototype and image is firm yet unidirectional, i.e. when the icon is harmed, the saint is not. This does not translate to the imperial image since it could be affected by the *damnatio memoriae*. In the case of the idol, it is the exact opposite; the idol has no prototype to refer to (which, of course, does not apply to imperial portraits, either).

48 Eastmond, “Icon and Idol,” pp. 77–78. See as well: Carile, “Imperial Icons,” pp. 87–88.

49 Christopher Walter, *L’Iconographie des Conciles dans la tradition byzantine* (Paris, 1970); Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre*, pp. 159–68. The content of the inscriptions accompanying the images is not doctrinal, which is further reason to assume that the images met an imperial rather than an ecclesiastical need.

50 Josef Engemann, “Zur Interpretation der Darstellungen der Drei Jünglinge,” in *Sarkophag-Symposium Frühchristliche Sarkophage*, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz, 2001), pp. 81–91.

51 Belting, *Bild und Kult*, pp. 117–18; Engemann, “Drei Jünglinge,” pp. 90–91. With another interpretation: Robin M. Jensen, “The Three Hebrew Youth and the problem of the Emperor’s Portrait in Early Christianity,” in *Jewish Art in Its Late Antique Context*, eds. Uzi Leibner, and Catherine Hezser (Tübingen, 2016), pp. 302–20.

52 London, Cod. Add. 19.352, fol. 202r. Sirapie Der Nersessian, *L’Illustration des psautiers grecs du Moyen Âge: Londres, Add. 19.352* (Paris, 1970), pp. 104–05, Figure. 318.

is important to note that the veneration of the imperial image could only work when the emperor was portrayed in his public body.⁵³

In addition, in many preserved paintings the emperor presents himself *en face*, addressing the viewer and thus inviting veneration in a manner similar to icons.⁵⁴ This mode of address can be found across various media spanning late antiquity and the 15th century, for example, in two large stone *tondi*⁵⁵; numerous ivories⁵⁶ and manuscripts⁵⁷; as well as monumental paintings in Hagia Sophia.⁵⁸ Images adhering to the *en face* formula, beyond indicating the emperor's God-given and God-like power, held further meanings when activated within particular ceremonies. With its iconic power, the imperial portrait served both as an insignia of delegated power, legitimizing the emperor's office, and as a declaration of the politico-theological ideology of the empire.⁵⁹

In these portraits, the *basileus* was himself the object of ritual veneration; he embodied the theatre of court ceremonial.⁶⁰ All evidence suggests that these images performed the same functions as their living model. They convey a sense of realism, like what we find in the written descriptions of emperors at ceremonies.⁶¹ For example, the late 14th-century ivory pyxis from Dumbarton Oaks shows the imperial family rigidly lined up, followed by musicians and dancers. The depicted ceremony can be understood as the *prokypsis* (apparition).⁶² In

53 Grabar, *Empereur*, pp. 4–8; Magdalino, and Nelson, “The Emperor,” pp. 133–34; Parani, *Reconstructing*, pp. 49–50; Eastmond, “Icon and Idol,” pp. 78–79. Thus, we cannot be certain that imperial portraits were objects of worship in Byzantium, see: Carile, “Imperial Icons,” p. 86.

54 Eastmond, “Icon and Idol,” p. 78.

55 The roundels were originally embedded in an external wall; see the different contributions in: *The Tondi in Venice and Dumbarton Oaks*, eds. Zarzi et al.

56 On these ivories as a group, see: Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court,” pp. 77–83.

57 Spatharakis, *Manuscripts*.

58 Mango, *Materials*; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, “Présence et figures du souverain à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople et à l'église de la Sainte-Croix d'Aghtamar,” in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. Maguire, pp. 231–46. There are many more examples, of course.

59 Nelson, “With the Help of God,” p. 174; Carile, “Imperial Icons,” p. 82.

60 Elisabeth Pilz, “Middle Byzantine Court Costume,” in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. Maguire, pp. 39–51.

61 On these *ekphrasis*: Velmans, “Le portrait,” pp. 101–02. On their realism: Henry Maguire, “Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1974), 113–40; Cutler, “Likeness,” pp. 263–65, 271.

62 Macrides, et al., *Pseudo-Kodinos*, pp. 80–81, 132–35, 401–11; Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, p. 87. On the pyxis: Anthony Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory* (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 34, figs. 19, 32, 33. Oikonomides suggests that the pyxis celebrated the entry of John VII Palaeologus into Thessaloniki (1404). Nicolas Oikonomides, “John VII Palaeologus and the Ivory Pyxis in Dumbarton Oaks,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), 329–37. See also: Ioannis Spatharakis, “The Proskynesis in Byzantine art. A Study in Connection with

front of the church of Blachernai, the emperor – standing immobile amid his family while dressed in rich robes and holding a cross in his right hand – is ritually uncovered with a curtain. Singers, musicians, and dancers accompany this. The frontal, hieratic, immobile portrait of the emperor with his family is thus typical not only of art but also of ceremonies. More uncommon is the representation of such ceremonies in art, as in the Dumbarton Oaks pyxis. In real ceremonies, the *basileus* served as a living image, and this in turn had an effect on images.

4 Intersection of the Real and the Imaginary Emperor

This section will examine how the emperor chose to make official statements using portraits of his two-bodied self. Each Byzantine emperor was regarded as a ‘likeness’ of God, a notion that images lent themselves to with their own logic of resemblance.⁶³ As Anthony Cutler has pointed out, the image internalized imperial qualities without changing its traditional appearance.⁶⁴ The inclusion of royal virtues as generosity, humility and piety is linked to a formula that had been consolidated as early as the 4th century.

As the progenitor of this tradition, Constantine is the omnipresent model in texts as well as images.⁶⁵ On the ivory reliquary of the True Cross from Cortona (late 10th century), the central position of Christ, Constantine, and the True Cross expresses a transfer of power from one to the other. The inscription on the back states that, since Christ gave the Cross to Constantine, the emperor Nikephoros II Phocas, who now possesses it, is victorious.⁶⁶ One of the most eloquent examples in this context is the 9th-century mosaic in the south-west entrance vestibule of Hagia Sophia, proclaiming Constantine the founder

a Nomisma of Andronicus II Paleologue,” in *Studies in Byzantine manuscript illumination and iconography*, ed. Ioannis Sphatharakis, (Bristol, 1996), pp. 216–17.

63 Cormack, “The Emperor,” p. 234.

64 Cutler, “Likeness,” pp. 279–80. The incarnation of virtues corresponds to a standard topos of panegyric literature: Magdalino, and Nelson, “The Emperor,” pp. 142–46.

65 See the various contributions, in: *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th centuries*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Cambridge, 1994); Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre*, 141–68.

66 Nelson, “With the Help of God,” pp. 83–85, figs. 13–14; Holger A. Klein, “Die Elfenbein-Staurothek von Cortona im Kontext mittelbyzantinischer Kreuzreliquiarproduktion,” in *Spätantike und byzantinische Elfenbeinbildwerke im Diskurs*, eds. Gudrun Bühl, Anthony Cutler, and Arne Effenberger (Wiesbaden, 2008), pp. 167–90; Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court,” pp. 77–78.

of the city and Justinian the builder of the church.⁶⁷ The mosaic presents the emperors as they were meant to be viewed, in their public bodies and as models for the current *basileus*. It should be noted that in Hagia Sophia every viewer – from members of the ecclesiastic hierarchy to simple pilgrims – could actually see the emperor, both in person and in images.⁶⁸ In this space, there was thus an intersection between the real and the imaginary emperor.

Moreover, in the case of coinage, contemporaries clearly recognized and understood various motifs for depicting rulers.⁶⁹ A question then arises as to the subtle modifications among such imagery. The well-established visual terminology of coins set certain limitations, to which the emperor had to adhere in order to meet the expectations of viewers. Here we see the great paradox that imperial art, once established, was maintained by the audience, not by the emperor.⁷⁰

Another commonly illustrated element relates to the emperor's military successes. It was crucial that such victories be marked as clearly God-given – something Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057–1059) failed to do in a series of coins he issued.⁷¹ Instead of a cross or a *labarum* and a sheathed sword, as on his first series (figures. 4.2a-b),⁷² his second series featured a drawn sword and no Christian symbol (figures. 4.3a-b).⁷³ Contemporaries explicitly lamented that Isaac had not given credit to God but rather had celebrated his own military force and skill.⁷⁴ While such displays were not appreciated in public, descriptions of images suggest that there was more tolerance in private space.⁷⁵

67 Grabar, *Empereur*, pp. 109–10; Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold* (London, 1985), p. 160; Cormack, "The Emperor," pp. 237–39, figs. 8–10. The image also accentuates the Virgin protecting the city, church, and emperors. The mosaic has been convincingly re-dated to the first half of the 9th century: Leslie Brubaker, "Gifts and prayers: the visualization of gift giving in Byzantium and the mosaics of Hagia Sophia," in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy Davies, and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 43–55.

68 Cormack, "The Emperor," pp. 237, 240.

69 Morrisson, "Displaying," pp. 65–82.

70 Cormack, "The Emperor," p. 235; Negrău, "The Ruler's Portrait," p. 74; Spieser "Le Christ," pp. 29–31.

71 Nelson, "With the Help of God," p. 177; Morrisson, "Displaying," p. 80 (with sources).

72 Philip Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection. Leo III to Nicephoros III, 717–1081* (Washington, D.C., 1973), pp. 759–61, plate LXIII, 1.2, 1.3; Cécile Morrisson, *Byzance et sa monnaie* (Paris, 2015), pp. 148–49.

73 Grierson, *Leo III to Nicephoros III*, p. 762, plate LXII, 2.1–2.5; Morrisson, *Byzance et sa monnaie*, p. 149. It is possible that the iconography was borrowed from contemporary images of soldier saints.

74 Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 154–59.

75 See an *ekphrasis* from the now-destroyed bath of Leo VI in the Great Palace in Constantinople, depicting an emperor holding a sword. Paul Magdalino, "The Bath of

A comparison of the so-called Barberini Diptych (6th century) with the Psalter of Basil II (Venice, cod. Marc gr. 17; between 1001 and 1005) reveals that God-given power and martial victory were persistent and interrelated concerns in Byzantine art.⁷⁶ The thematic similarity between the ivory and the psalter is evident; in both, a triumphant emperor is depicted in a generic victory scene, surmounted by Christ. It is noteworthy that in the psalter, the poem on the page facing Basil describes Christ crowning the emperor – explaining the supernatural event shown in process.⁷⁷ It has been emphasized that the presence of the divine hand or of Christ blessing the emperor accentuated the latter's God-given power.⁷⁸ This pictorial interdependence between Christ and the emperor corresponded to the imperial ideology formulated by Eusebius. It also reflected a long tradition in Byzantine imperial images. Therefore, such imagery embodied the continuity of the values of the Byzantine Empire, conveying these values and showing the emperor's intervention on their behalf, as well as his role as an intercessor for his subjects. His body became – and was perceived as – a symbol. The motif of Christ blessing or crowning the emperor appears often, especially in manuscripts.⁷⁹ Written sources indicate that there were also icons featuring this iconography.⁸⁰ We must keep in mind that these pictures would only have been visible to a very small audience. They were either gifts to the emperor or made on imperial orders.⁸¹ Via coins, however, the same motif was circulated to a much larger viewing public (figures. 4.4a-b).⁸² On

Leo the Wise and the 'Macedonian Renaissance' revisited: Topography, Iconography, Ceremonial, Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 42 (1988), 97–118, esp. 104, 116; Nelson, "With the Help of God," p. 177. For unofficial images intended for a smaller audience and with a far more varied range of iconographic options, see: Walker, *The Emperor*, pp. 108–43.

76 On this comparison and the relevant bibliography: Nelson, "With the Help of God," pp. 171–74; Spieser, "Le Christ," pp. 22–23.

77 Jolivet-Lévy, "L'Image du Pouvoir," pp. 445–52; Anthony Cutler, "The Psalter of Basil II," in *Imagery and Ideology in Byzantine Art*, ed. Anthony Cutler (Ashgate, 1992), 1–36; Nelson, "With the Help of God," pp. 173–74.

78 Spieser, "Le Christ," pp. 19–24.

79 Spatharakis, *Manuscripts*, pp. 6, 7, 10, 14, 39, 46, 66, 70, 79, 93, 102, 105, 136, 147–48, 150–51. It should be noted that this type of monumental painting is found only in the medieval Kingdom of Serbia. See the contribution by Branislav Cvetković in this volume.

80 See the 12th-century *ekphrasis* on an icon featuring a representation of the emperor and the empress blessed by Christ: Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 138–40. The text underlines that through this picture the emperor was made God on earth.

81 Spieser, "Le Christ," pp. 25–26.

82 Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, pp. 37–38; Morriison, *Byzance et sa monnaie*, p. 150; Vangelis Maladakis, "The Coronation of the Emperor on Middle Byzantine Coinage: A Case of Christian Political Theology (11th–mid 11th c.)," *Acta Musei Varnaensis* 7/1 (2005), 342–60.

the gold *histanenon* depicting Basil II with his brother Constantine VIII, the crown suspended above Basil's head marks him as the true sovereign.⁸³

The emperor was portrayed as upholding the traditional values of generosity, humility, and in particular piety.⁸⁴ In a famous example, the depiction of Justinian and Theodora in the apse of San Vitale in Ravenna (547) was intended to demonstrate the statements: piety and, above all, generosity (Figure. 4.5). The *en face* couple, richly adorned and haloed, is accompanied by personalities from their court as well as Church authorities carrying liturgical utensils.⁸⁵ Gender also plays a role in the construction of hierarchies here: Justinian is shown in the privileged position to Christ's right, as beneficiary of his gesture.⁸⁶ Mosaics in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia portray two imperial couples: Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055) and his wife Zoe, along with John II Komnenos (r. 1118–1143) and his wife Irene/Piroska (and his son Alexis). Here as well, the emperor is depicted to Christ's and the Virgin's right, respectively. Both couples are engaged in an act of financial sponsorship, and consequently they impart the *philantrophia* and piety of the imperial family.⁸⁷ The almost frontal representation of the latter pair is a bold instance of visual propaganda, as they were in fact less powerful than the former.⁸⁸ The south gallery was of particular importance for ceremonies. Here, the emperor followed, whether in full or part, the liturgical office on certain

83 Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, p. 37, Figure. 13; Grierson, *Leo III to Nicephorus III*, pp. 607–08, 621, plate XLV, 6.

84 Alongside these visual conventions, the performance of the *basileus* as the incarnation of traditional virtues is a stable component of *ekphrasis*. Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 142–44.

85 Grabar, *Empereur*, pp. 106–07; Deckers, "Der erste Diener Christi," pp. 22–38; Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, pp. 145–47; Rico Franses, *Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art. The Vicissitudes of Contact between Human and Divine* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 57–60, 195–98; Brittany Thomas, "A Case for Space: Rereading the Imperial Panels of San Vitale," in *Debating Religious Pace & Place in the Early Medieval World*, eds. Chantal Biemann, and Brittany Thomas (Leiden, 2018), pp. 61–76; Rudolf H. W. Stichel, "'Privatporträts' in den Kaisermosaiken von San Vitale in Ravenna," in *Privatporträts*, eds. Vasiliki Tsamakda, and Norbert Zimmermann (Wien, 2020), pp. 137–45. On Theodora's robe, a figural embroidery of the Adoration of the Magi suggests that the gifts of the imperial couple mimic those of the Three Kings to the infant Jesus.

86 Leslie Brubaker, "Gender and gesture in Byzantine images," in *The Eloquence of Art. Essays in Honour of Henry Maguire*, eds. Andrea Olsen Lam, and Rossitza Schroeder (London, 2020), pp. 50–54.

87 Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, pp. 184–200; Cormack, "The Emperor," pp. 240–43, figs. 11–12.

88 On the stylistic differences between the two panels and the analogies in contemporary panegyrics: Maguire, "Style and Ideology," pp. 228–29.

feasts.⁸⁹ According to the sources, a Pantocrator was originally depicted in the central vault, directly adjacent to the tribunes.⁹⁰ In this location in Byzantine churches, the image of the Pantocrator surrounded by angels was often mirrored by the emperor surrounded by his dignitaries; even in the absence of the person of the emperor, he and his court were made present in the church either by a throne⁹¹ or a portrait,⁹² visually paralleled yet superseded by the Pantocrator in the central vault above. In this way, the hierarchical composition visually expressed the relationship between the celestial and earthly courts. For the case of Hagia Sophia, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy correctly asserts that the representation of Pentecost in the neighbouring vault underlined the parallels between the descent of the Holy Spirit and the mission of the emperor; the former imparted authority to the apostles to lead the Christian people, and the latter continued that work by shepherding the new chosen people.⁹³ The image of Pentecost thus serves to remind the audience of the religious rights and duties of the emperor.⁹⁴ The decoration of the tribunes of Hagia Sophia – including the vaults and the depiction of the two imperial couples – therefore had a politico-religious significance in connection with the liturgical function of these tribunes. As a living image, the emperor completed the composition, his portraits substituting for him in his physical absence. This guaranteed a permanent imperial presence at this place. However, it must be noted that this composition was only viewed by the court and the clergy of Hagia Sophia; they were inaccessible to a larger viewing public.

In the same church, a famous mosaic of an anonymous emperor in *proskynesis* at the feet of the enthroned Christ was accessible to a wider public due to its placement above the main entrance of the narthex. Research has suggested

89 For example, the Sunday after Easter, the Exaltation of the Cross, and Orthodox Sunday: Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (London, 1971), p. 132; Nicolas Oikonomides, "The Mosaic Panel of Constantine IX and Zoe in Saint Sophia," *Revue des études byzantines* 36 (1978), 219–32; Jolivet-Lévy, "Présence," pp. 231–32; Franses, *Donor Portraits*, pp. 28–31.

90 Mango, *Materials*, pp. 29–38. The relocation of a theme from the dome to a secondary vault of the church confirms that the latter was used as a private sanctuary within the church.

91 However, the presence of a throne at Hagia Sophia has not been firmly established: Mathews, *Early Churches*, pp. 133–34 (with the reconstruction).

92 The testimony of Antony of Novgorod suggests that several imperial portraits were originally found here. The archbishop made a pilgrimage to Constantinople in 1200. Mango, *The Art*, pp. 237, 266; Jolivet-Lévy, "Présence," p. 232.

93 Jolivet-Lévy, "Présence," pp. 232–37.

94 Pentecost is rarely absent from imperial foundations. For further examples, see: Jolivet-Lévy, "Présence," pp. 234–36.

that it depicts Leo VI (r. 886–912) publicly humiliated,⁹⁵ though André Grabar proved, already early on, that the meaning of this image was much more complex.⁹⁶ At particular feasts, the emperor and the patriarch passed through this door, right under this panel, bowing three times before it,⁹⁷ which set the tympanum mosaic into temporary dialogue with the living imperial icon below. A tripartite *proskynesis* was perpetuated in the mosaic, where the anonymous emperor is shown in the act of worshipping three miraculous icons related to the theme of the church entrance, thus characterizing him as pious and penitent.⁹⁸ The emperor undoubtedly made his entrance as the institutionalized ceremonial image of Christ on earth.⁹⁹ However, the simultaneous *mise-en-scène* of his personal piety was significant as well. Veneration and humility can easily be understood as Christian virtues, and the repentance of any emperor followed the model of David, the most important exemplum of repentance in biblical exegesis.¹⁰⁰ The idea of penitence did not conflict with the fundamental concept of imperial investiture; these two messages could co-exist within the same image.¹⁰¹ By performing the *proskynesis*, the Byzantine emperor affirmed, first of all, his allegiance and established his status as vice-regent of Christ. Further examples showing an emperor in *proskynesis* before Christ

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- 95 Mango, *Materials*, Figure. 8; Ernest J. W. Hawkins, "Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968), 151–66; Nicolas Oikonomides, "Leo VI and the Narthex Mosaic of Saint Sophia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 151–72.
- 96 Grabar, *Empereur*, pp. 101–04; Zaga A. Gavrilović, "The Humiliation of Leo VI the Wise (the Mosaic of the Narthex at Saint Sophia, Istanbul)," *Cahiers archéologiques* 28 (1979), 87–94; Franses, *Donor Portraits*, pp. 63–86.
- 97 Grabar, *Empereur*, p. 101 (with sources); Robert S. Nelson, *Hagia Sophia, 1850–1950* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 3–12; George P. Majeska, "The emperor in His Church: Imperial Ritual in the Church of St. Sophia," in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. Maguire, pp. 1–12; Nelson, "With the Help of God," p. 171.
- 98 Alexei M. Lidov, "The Creator of Sacred Space as a Phenomenon of Byzantine Culture," in *L'artista a Bisanzio e nel mondo cristiano-orientale*, ed. Michele Bacci (Pisa, 2007), pp. 135–76.
- 99 Cormack, "The Emperor," pp. 225–53, 246–50, figs. 15–16; Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre*, pp. 122–24, 129–38; Nelson, "With the Help of God," pp. 170–72, Figure. 1.
- 100 Dagron, *Empereur et Prêtre*, pp. 123, 137; Vasiliki Tsamakda, "König David als Typos des byzantinischen Kaisers," in *Byzanz – das Römerreich im Mittelalter*, eds. Falko Daim, and Jörg Dauschke (Mainz, 2010), pp. 23–54, esp. 23–25, 36–37. Psalm 50 (51) is considered the psalm of repentance. The most important genre to draw comparisons between David and the Byzantine emperor is the panegyric.
- 101 Deckers, "Der erste Diener Christi," pp. 39–55; Lidov, "The Creator of Sacred Space," pp. 155–56.

reveal that this action did not have to be connected with the humiliation of any specific emperor.¹⁰²

Since his power was given by God, the emperor's piety became an institutional attribute: the body of the emperor must, after all, serve the office of the emperor. The notion of *εὐσέβεια* (piety) appears for the first time in the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), as a noun for a specific characteristic of the emperor.¹⁰³ The religious and political nature of this relationship reached its visual climax in the portrayal of Michael VIII Paleologos (r. 1259–1282) kneeling before Christ on his *hyperpyron*, in gratitude for the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261.¹⁰⁴

From this point of view, the depiction of Nikephoros II Phocas (r. 963–969) with the empress Theodora and other family members in the conch of the north apse of Pigeon House Church in Çavuşin in Cappadocia is unique (Figure. 4.6).¹⁰⁵ The context and the placement of the royal portrait suggest a permanent commemoration of the emperor. In addition, Constantine and Helena are represented in the semicylinder of the central apse, sharing with the imperial couple not only the same costume but also the same space.¹⁰⁶ These diachronic images of the emperor and defender of the faith were arranged to be seen together: the founding emperors support the reigning emperors, testifying to the piety of the latter.¹⁰⁷ This visual strategy may be classified as commemorative in purpose,¹⁰⁸ something not generally so easily understood

102 On the parallels: Spieser, "Le Christ," pp. 28–29.

103 Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, pp. 38–39; Victoria Kepetzi, "Images de piété de l'empereur dans la peinture byzantine (X^e/XIII^e siècle) – Réflexions sur quelques exemples," in *Byzantinische Malerei*, ed. Guntram Koch (Wiesbaden, 2000), pp. 109–45, esp. 109–10.

104 Latin merchants noticed this innovation, see: Morrisson, "Displaying," p. 78. This type was repeated by his successors, for example Andronikos II, on *hyperpyra*: Spatharakis, "The Proskynesis," pp. 193–224; Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, p. 25, Figure. 18.

105 Lyn Rodley, "The Pigeon House Church, Çavuşin," *Jahrbuch Österreichische Byzantinistik* 33 (1983), 301–39; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce: le programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords* (Paris, 1991), pp. 15–22, figs. 1–2.

106 As Constantine and Helena were visible only to one standing at the north side of the aisle of the naos, the gaze of the viewer would simultaneously encompass both the portraits of the imperial saints and those of the emperor Nikephoros II Phocas and his family. Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises*, pp. 18–19.

107 Kepetzi, "Images de piété," pp. 112–19, figs. 1–4; Eastmond, "The Heavenly Court," pp. 74–77.

108 It is significant that this image, in contrast to other images of this emperor, was not part of his *damnatio memoriae*. A poem by John Geometres records the destruction of images of Nikephoros by his usurper and successor John Tzimiskes (r. 969–976): Calliope Bourdara, "Quelques cas de *damnatio memoriae* à l'époque de la dynastie macédonienne," *Jahrbuch Österreichische Byzantinistik* 32 (1982), 337–42; Eastmond, "Icon and Idol," pp. 79–80; Negrău, "The Ruler's Portrait," pp. 63–74.

for monumental paintings. The image's placement in the sanctuary at Çavuşin more explicitly proclaimed the religio-political understanding of the emperor.

5 'Likeness' of God

One of Eusebius's crucial ideological points was that the court theatre of Byzantium mirrored the harmonious movement of the universe.¹⁰⁹ We find in many images this juxtaposition and interchange between the earthly and heavenly cosmos. One famous example is an ivory in Berlin, sometimes referred to as the "Leo Sceptre" but whose original function is still debated.¹¹⁰ The Virgin is at the centre, turning to her right to either crown or adorn with a pearl Leo VI, who is identified by an inscription; to her left is the archangel Gabriel. The emperor and the archangel mirror one another not only in their costumes but also in their attributes, namely the orb and sceptre, which they hold in identical poses.¹¹¹ As Kathleen Corrigan pointed out, the design of each side of the ivory echoes the liturgical setting of Hagia Sophia.¹¹² Henry Maguire underlines that the ivory visualizes the earthly architecture of Hagia Sophia, which implied that the church was populated by the heavenly court, with the emperor at the rank of an archangel.¹¹³ The picture pursues a double strategy: it is a prayer for the sovereign's (and thus each of his subjects') reception into the court of heaven and, simultaneously, a statement about the emperor's current religio-political power on earth.

109 In the following centuries, the Eusebian tradition was developed further. Cormack, "The Emperor," p. 234; Henry Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture*, ed. Maguire, pp. 247–58; Eastmond, "The Heavenly Court," pp. 71–93; Carile, "Imperial Icons," pp. 77–78.

110 Kathleen Corrigan, "The Ivory Sceptre of Leo VI: A Statement of Post-Iconoclastic Imperial Ideology," *The Art Bulletin* 60 (1978), 407–16; Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, pp. 163–65; Arwed Arnulf, "Eine Perle für das Haupt Leons VI.," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 32 (1990), 69–84; Gudrun Bühl, and Hiltrud Jehle, "Des Kaisers altes Zepter – des Kaisers neuer Kamm," *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz* 39 (2002), 289–306 (they postulate that this unique object was a comb); Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," pp. 249–50; Maria G. Parani, "The Romanos Ivory and the New Tokalı Kilise: Imperial Costume as a Tool for Dating Byzantine Art," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 49 (2001), 15–28, esp. 15; Anthony Cutler, and Philipp Niewöhner, "Towards a History of Byzantine Ivory Carving from the late 6th to the late 9th century," in *Mélanges Catherine Jolivet-Lévy*, eds. Sulamith Brodbeck, Andreas Nicolaïdes, Paul Pagès, Brigitte Pitarakis, Ioanna Rapti, and Elisabeth Yota (Paris, 2016), pp. 89–107, esp. 98–101.

111 Maguire, "Style and Ideology," p. 223.

112 Corrigan, "The Ivory Sceptre," p. 413.

113 Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," p. 247–50; Carile, "Imperial Icons," p. 82.

Similarly, the front of the Holy Crown of Hungary, gifted by the Byzantine emperor Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071–1078), bears a tripartite composition of enamel plaques illustrating Christ enthroned making a gesture of benediction, with the archangels Michael and Gabriel below. The trio is flanked by the soldier Saints George and Demetrius on one side, and Saints Cosmas and Damian on the other. They turn their eyes towards Christ as a sign of recognition of his supremacy. The arrangement on the back mirrors the front. Michael VII Doukas – the most important figure – is centred above his son Constantine and King Geza of Hungary (r. 1074–1077), the latter the recipient of this crown as a diplomatic gift.¹¹⁴ The image of the haloed emperor emphasizes his role as an embodiment of the virtues and qualities of the heavenly court. The object's decorative programme contains further biographical, historical, and ideological statements stressing the superordinate position of Michael VII.¹¹⁵ The hierarchical object is governed by difference rather than commonality; indeed, the visual language of the gift is entirely Byzantine. Objects used as diplomatic gifts, in general, articulated the key political and religious ideologies of the empire.¹¹⁶ Of course, the question arises here as to the audience for these images. These imperial representations unite various orders of reality. The crown gifted to the king of Hungary conveys and validates power, and the evidence of the rulers on it confirms for whom this message was meant. Power was exemplified in relation to and through the body of the emperor.

Michael VII Doukas and his wife, Maria/Marta, are depicted on an enamel that the empress probably brought to her native Georgia in 1072 when she visited her dying father Bagrat IV (Figure. 4.7).¹¹⁷ Analogous to the picture on folio

114 It is, therefore, not an exact reflection: the angels wear the imperial costume, not Christ. The second difference between the two courts is that Christ is enthroned, in contrast to the bust portrait of Michael VII. On the crown, see: Cecily J. Hilsdale, "The social life of the Byzantine Gift: The Royal Crown of Hungary re-invented," *Art History* 31/5 (2008), 603–31. On the multiple layers: Brubaker, "Gender and gesture," 48, 68.

115 Robin Cormack, "But is it art?" in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, eds. Jonathan Shepard, and Simon Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 219–36, esp. 229–31, figs. 2–3.

116 On the diplomatic importance of the Holy Crown of Hungary: Hilsdale, "The social life of the Byzantine Gift," pp. 608–22. Other examples: Cormack, "But is it art?," pp. 219–36.

117 Hilsdale, "The social life of the Byzantine Gift," pp. 613–15; Lynda Garland, and Stephen Rapp, "Maria 'of Alania': Women and Empress Between Two Worlds," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 91–122; Ioli Kalavrezou, "Female popular Beliefs and Maria of Alania," *Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (2011), 85–101; Antony Eastmond, "Greeks Bearing Gifts. The Icon of Xaxuli and Enamel Diplomacy between Byzantium and Georgia," in *Convivium supplementum. The Medieval South Caucasus: Artistic Cultures of Albania, Armenia and Georgia*, eds. Ivan Foletti, and Erik Thunø (Turnhout, 2016), pp. 88–105.

2v of the Codex Parisinus, Coislin 79, the couple stands beneath a depiction of Christ *en buste*, his hands touching each of their crowns in a gesture of blessing.¹¹⁸ The formula underlines the identity of the *basileus* as the superior regnant, whose power comes from God. The integration of the enamel plaque into the Khakuli triptych in the 1120s changed the statement significantly.¹¹⁹ Since the enamel holds the position directly at the front of the triptych, it is the only representation that can be seen when the wings of the triptych are closed. Set into this new and privileged position, the once-decontextualized Byzantine enamel can be read as a statement of Georgian equality with Byzantium.¹²⁰ There was definitely an awareness of visual rhetoric in this case.

Both the identification and the dating of the two imperial figures on the Romanos Ivory, today in the Cabinet des Medailles in Paris, have a controversial history. The options that have been proposed are Romanos II (r. 959–963) and his first wife Eudokia/Bertha or Romanos IV (r. 1068–1071) and Eudokia Makrembolitissa.¹²¹ The typology and symbolism of the costume of the imperial couple favour the 10th-century attribution.¹²² While Romanos wears the *loros*, his wife is clad in the *chlamys*.¹²³ The emperor in the *loros* became the image of God because this garment was worn by the emperor on particular feast days.¹²⁴ Thus, the *loros* designated the wearer as the vicar of Christ, and this explains its predominance in official portraiture. More important than the identification is the way in which the ivory encapsulates the ideological circumstances of its moment. Maria Parani identifies it as a diplomatic gift to Hugh of Arles, the father of Eudokia/Bertha.¹²⁵ The coronation ivory in Moscow

118 Spatharakis, *Manuscripts*, pp. 107–18, Figure. 70; Maguire, “Style and Ideology,” pp. 220–22, 224; Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court,” p. 80.

119 Titos Papamastorakis, “Re-Deconstructing the Khakhuli Triptych,” *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaologikes Hetaireias* 23 (2002), 239–45; Leila Z. Khuskivadze, *The Khakhuli Triptych* (Tbilissi, 2007).

120 Eastmond, “Greeks Bearing Gifts,” p. 104.

121 Ioli Kalavrezou, “Eudokia Makrembolitissa and the Romanos Ivory,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977), 307–25. A discussion of differing opinions, along with additional bibliography, can be found in: Parani, “The Romanos Ivory,” pp. 19–28.

122 Anthony Cutler, “The Date and Significance of the Romanos Ivory,” in *Late Antique and Byzantine Ivory Carving*, ed. Anthony Cutler (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 605–10, esp. 610; Parani, “The Romanos Ivory,” p. 20.

123 Just as beardlessness distinguished the junior emperor from the senior, the *chlamys* emphasized the difference between a junior and senior empress. Parani, “The Romanos Ivory,” p. 22.

124 Parani “The Romanos Ivory,” p. 21; Parani, *Reconstructing*, pp. 23–24.

125 Parani, “The Romanos Ivory,” p. 23.

conveys an even closer intertwining of Christ and the emperor through a visual correspondence between Christ and Constantine VII.¹²⁶

The images on these gifted objects – the crown of Hungary; the enamel brought to Georgia and later incorporated into the Khakuli triptych; and the Romanos Ivory, gifted to a western king – communicated to an international and cosmopolitan audience the divine origin of Byzantine imperial authority. With these pictures, the Byzantine emperor claimed himself to be Christ's vicar on earth, the unique successor of Constantine, and the only and rightful head of the universal Christian empire.¹²⁷

Beyond this parenetic function and their role in individual piety, imperial portraits illustrate the religious concept based on the divine origin of power in a socio-political context. These institutional images of the emperor's body in fact suggest that it was intellectuals and theologians who conceived the conventions for representing the emperor in art.¹²⁸ Indeed, the piety of the emperor belonged to the imperial institution itself. When a given emperor was politically weaker, a different strategy – one drawn from western conventions – was needed: Christ as emperor.

6 Christ as Emperor

Starting in the 14th century, a new iconography lent the imperial garb to Christ, as King of Kings. The earliest known example, at Treskavec Monastery (1334–43), is featured within an extraordinary iconographic programme in the dome of the north-western compartment as a part of the royal Deisis.¹²⁹ At the high point of the dome, Christ is shown wearing royal garb and the *kamelaukion*. The lower register contains a composition with the Hetimasia, flanked by the

126 Deckers, "Der erste Diener Christi," pp. 16–17; Eastmond, "The Heavenly Court," pp. 77, 106. On the concept of the *Christomimesis*: Marsengill, *Portraits and Icons*, pp. 284–87.

127 Parani, "The Romanos Ivory," pp. 23–24. This aspect is emphasized by the inscriptions on the Romanos ivory. Angelov, "In search of God's only emperor," pp. 123–41. Focusing on historical sources from the early Byzantine period, Angelov argues that there was no Byzantine titular exceptionalism. Byzantine intellectuals applied the title *basileus* to various foreign rulers, without any concern for Christian theological notions. It is important to note that the visual rhetoric of the official image points in a different direction.

128 Cormack, "The Emperor," p. 235; Negrău, "The Ruler's Portrait," p. 74; Spieser, "Le Christ," pp. 29–31.

129 Saška Bogevska, "Les peintures murales du monastère de Marko: un programme iconographique au service de la propagande royale," in *La Culture des commanditaires*, eds. Quitterie Cazes, and Christian Prigent (Paris, 2011), pp. 1–21, esp. 3–4, 7–8 (with numerous references to earlier literature).

Theotokos and King David, both crowned. Behind them are various heavenly powers. The textual origin of the iconography of Christ as king and the Mother of God as queen is Psalm 44 (45).¹³⁰ In the decorative programme at Treskavec, David is depicted as both the author of the psalms and the royal ancestor of Mary and Christ. A slightly later example is found nearby in the western part of the monastery of the Theotokos in Zaum (1361),¹³¹ where, at the centre of the composition, Christ is enthroned as king. He is flanked this time by John Prodromos and the Mother of God, the latter in royal and priestly robes. Here too, the royal Deesis can be traced back to Psalm 44 (45). It appears again, a little bit later, at Markov Monastery near Skopje, founded by the Serbian king Vukašin (r. 1365–1371) and dedicated to Saint Demetrius.¹³² In the composition of the lowest register on the northern wall of the naos, right next to the iconostasis, Christ is shown enthroned. He wears the *kamelaukion* and the *loros*. The two angels flanking him, along with the fire wheels at his feet, signal the heavenly powers. The winged John Prodromos turns to Christ and, on the other side, the Theotokos appears again as queen.¹³³ Another royal Deesis can be found on the northern wall of the naos of the church of Hagios Athanasios tou Mouzaki in Kastoria (1383/84).¹³⁴ Within the zone of saintly representations that encircles the entire church, the three figures are highlighted by being placed beneath a painted arcade. At the centre, Christ is enthroned and dressed again in the *kamelaukion* and the *loros*. To his left is John the Baptist, with his left hand raised and, to his right, the crowned Theotokos followed by various saints, all of whom are dressed like contemporary courtiers.¹³⁵ Clearly,

130 For an interpretation of this psalm describing the king's wedding to his betrothed in golden robes, in this context: Agnes Kriza, "The Royal Deesis – An Anti-Latin Image of Late Byzantine Art," in *Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West 1204–1669: Whose Mediterranean is it anyway?*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou (London, 2018), pp. 272–90, esp. 275–78.

131 Bogevska, "Marko," pp. 7–8.

132 Bogevska, "Marko," pp. 1–21. According to the inscriptions, the monastery had already been founded in 1345, but the paintings were executed under the son of Vukašin, King Marko (r. 1371–1395), in 1376/77.

133 Ida Sinkević, "Prolegomena for a Study of Royal Entrances in Byzantine Churches: The Case of Marko's Monastery," in *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration. Studies in Honor of Slobodan Ćurčić*, eds. Mark J. Johnson, Robert Ousterhout, and Amy Papalexandrou (Ashgate 2012), pp. 121–42, esp. 135; Warren T. Woodfin, "Orthodox Liturgical Textiles and Clerical Self-Referentiality," in *Dressing the Part: Textiles as Propaganda in the Middle Ages*, eds. Kate Dimitrova, and Margaret Goehring (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 31–51, esp. 40. The Deesis is linked to the Great Entrance.

134 Léna Grigoriadou, "L'Image de la Déesis royale sur une fresque du XIV^e siècle à Castoria," in *Actes du XIV^e Congrès international des études byzantines* (Bukarest, 1975), pp. 47–59.

135 Grigoriadou, "L'Image," pp. 48–51; Sinkević, "Prolegomena," 134–36.

this heavenly court was meant to reflect the earthly one. Lastly, a royal Deisis is depicted in a miniature in the Serbian Psalter in Munich (c. 1370–90, Figure. 4.8) as well as in a 14th-century icon from Veroia.¹³⁶

Though, in the framework of this essay, we cannot discuss the liturgical function associated with this image, with regard to the royal representation of Christ it is worth recalling Henry Maguire's remark that the socio-political weakness of the 14th-century empire could have motivated this innovative arrangement showing Christ in imperial garments.¹³⁷ It finally proclaimed a heavenly court that truly mirrored the earthly one – yet only at a moment when the court at Constantinople was extremely powerless. The Emperor's authority waned while, that of the Church increased.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the appearance of the emperor held significance in the eyes of contemporaries because the Byzantine imperial insignia was the basis for the Byzantine concept of imperium, i.e. that there is only one Christian empire on earth. And, since Christ has the Byzantine insignia, this must be the Roman one, which is based in Constantinople. This clear statement, together with the counter-movement to western coronation iconography from the beginning of the 14th century, made the royal Deisis a striking, controversial, and anti-unionist piece of propaganda, one that would become highly popular in later Byzantine art.¹³⁹

7 The Body as Continuum

Imperial effigies were characterized by a strong iconic character that facilitated the immediate recognition of the emperor as well as of imperial authority. A 12th-century Epiphany oration, delivered by John Kamateros, describes the purpose of imperial art, explaining that imperial iconographies had a real relevance to the everyday experience of contemporary Byzantines.¹⁴⁰ He is

136 On the Serbian Psalter (Munich, BSB, Cod. Slav. 4, fol. 58v): Hans Belting, *Der Serbische Psalter. Faksimile-Ausgabe des Cod. Slav. 4 der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München* (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 203–04. On the icon from Veroia: Thanasis Papazotos, *Η Βέροια και οι ναοί της (11ος-18ος αι)* [Veroia and its churches (11th-18th centuries)] (Athens, 1994), pp. 62–63, pl. 76.

137 Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," pp. 257–58.

138 Vapheiadis, Constantine, "Sacerdotium and Regnum in Late Byzantium: Some Notes on the 'Imperial Deesis,'" *American Journal of Arts and Design* 2/4 (2017), 79–83; Vapheiadis, Constantine, "Sacerdotium and Imperium in Late Byzantine Art," *Niš i Vizantija* 18 (2020), 55–87.

139 Kriza, "The royal Deesis," pp. 272–90.

140 Magdalino, and Nelson, "The Emperor," pp. 177–79. The passage is largely a paraphrase of one by Gregory of Nazianzos.

absolutely aware that current imperial art is a perpetuation of an ancient tradition, and he assesses this point positively. This attests to the intended continuity of the imperial portrait. The construction of imperial status in Byzantium derived largely from Eusebius, who defined the strong relationship between Christ and the sovereign. Portraits of the emperor conveyed imperial authority through the topos of divine support, with the emperor being considered the earthly intercessor for salvation.

The body of the emperor became a vehicle not only for explaining the Christian salvation narrative but also for serving a number of socio-political tasks, such as installing a royal presence throughout the empire or guaranteeing the authenticity of official documents, seals, or coins. As a symbol of the power of Christ, the *basileus* became a component of both the religious and the secular orders. There are even some indications that the image of the emperor was meant to be a proxy for the living individual, with only a few exceptions. All these images were primarily a staging of the operations of the Byzantine Empire. The consistent external appearance of a ruler had a significant function in medieval imagination; it referred to the values, virtues, vices, and authority of the empire. The image of the royal body was less propaganda and more a dynamic dialogue between ruler and subject.¹⁴¹ As soon as the audience changed, the images, despite their narrow iconographical spectrum, changed, too, conveying through visual means another message. This is evident in the political or diplomatic functioning of the body. The parenetic portrait of imperial virtues and qualities underlined the superiority of the Byzantine Empire as the only real empire, its power God-given. As a result, emperors exploited these imperial images in dialogue with other rulers and nations.

It is important to stress that viewers were able to perceive the ambiguity between the person of the emperor and his political body. The emperor assumed the public body and thus placed himself at the centre of the empire; though he did not control imperial art, the emperor himself was an expression of public expectations, and his bodily appearance could shape and manipulate public opinion.¹⁴² The static treatment of the imperial body was polyvalent and depended upon the circumstances in question. With all these complex and manifold connections and interactions, it must be noted that the recognition and veneration of the imperial image was premised upon a perception of it as representing only the official body of the *basileus*. Therefore, the staging

141 Jolivet-Lévy, "L'Image du Pouvoir," pp. 468–70; Cormack, "The Emperor," p. 232.

142 Cormack, *Writing in Gold*, p. 179.

of the imperial body was an enormously important element in the religious, domestic, and diplomatic-political functioning of Byzantine hegemony.

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Illustrations



FIGURE 4.1 Sarcophagus of Arles, Musée d'Arles antique
PHOTO: AUTHOR



FIGURE 4.2 Isaac I Komnenos (1057–1059), *histamenon*

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FIGURE 4.3 Isaac I Komnenos (1057–1059), *histamenon*

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FIGURE 4.4 Roman IV Diogenes (1068–1071), *histamenon*

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FIGURE 4.5 Ravenna, San Vitale, Theodora (547)
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FIGURE 4.6 North apse of the Pigeon House church in Çavuşin in Cappadocia (963–969)
PHOTO: AUTHOR



FIGURE 4.7 Enamel plaque with Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078) and his wife Maria/Marta. Xaxuli Triptych. Tbilisi: Georgian National Museum, Museum of Fine Arts
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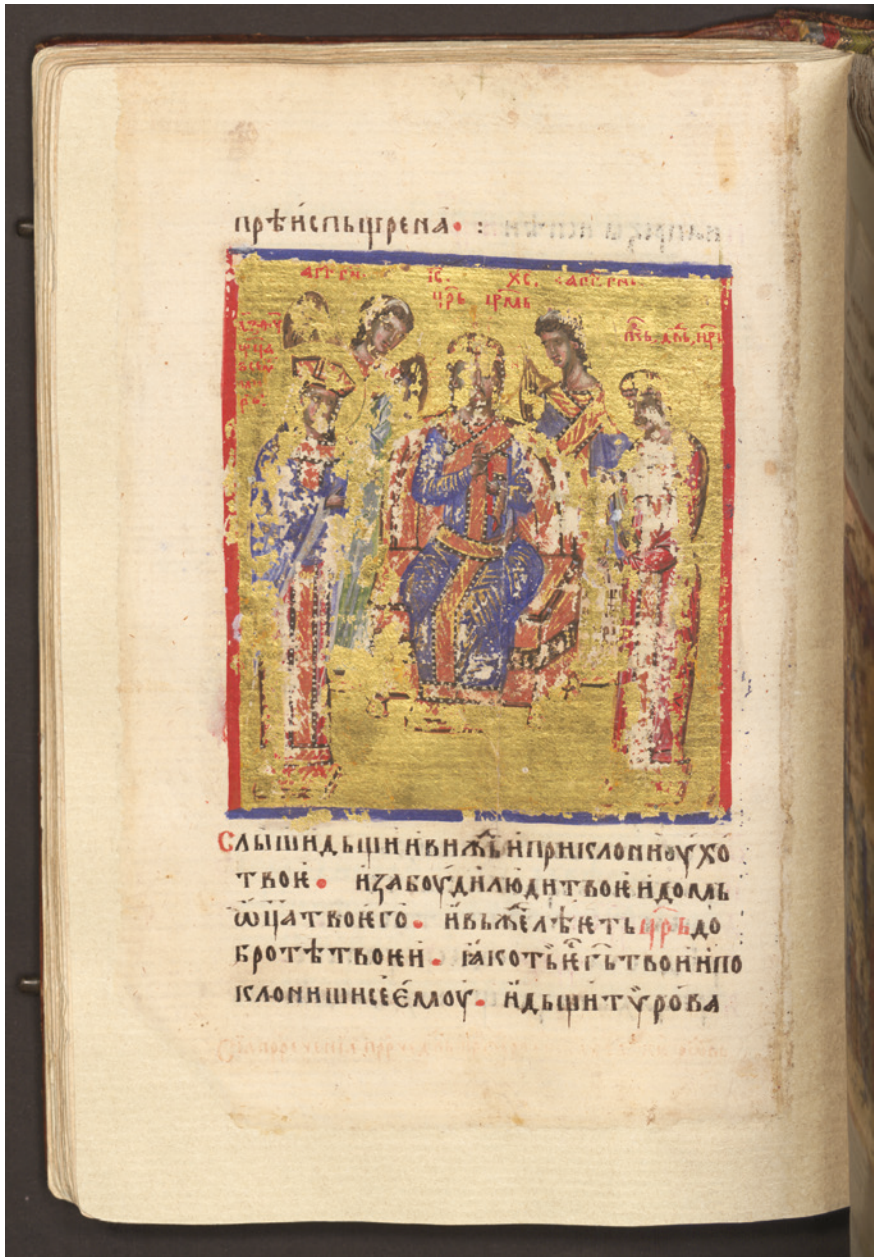


FIGURE 4.8 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Cod. slav. 4, fol. fol. 58v
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