Instrument of Death and Tree of Life

Visual Meanings of the Cross in Some Late Antique and Byzantine Monumental Programs

Vladimir Baranov
Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design, and Arts, Novosibirsk, Russia
baranovv@academ.org

Summary

This article overviews the background of the representation of the Cross in Late Antique and Byzantine monumental art. Several contexts of the usage of the Cross are considered, such as the Cross as a non-anthropomorphic substitute of Christ; the Cross as a cosmic symbol simultaneously framing the surrounding decorative space, and the Theophanic Cross in a vault or conch or as a counterpart to the “Earthly” register below.

Keywords

Cross in Late Antique and Byzantine monumental art

This study into the visual meaning of the Cross in the programs of monumental decoration in Late Antiquity was triggered by the attempts to reconstruct the context for the prominence of the representations of the Cross in monumental church decoration programs of the Byzantine Iconoclasts. It is well known that the Iconoclasts obliterated religious subjects from the decoration of the churches. Yet, at the same time they also installed new programs in their church decoration, mainly consisting of the representation of the Cross in the apse, as in the Hagia Irene and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki,1 as well as the church of the Dormition in Nica-

1 On Hagia Eirene see W.S. George, The Church of Saint Eirine at Constantinople, Oxford, 1912; U. Peschlow, Die Irenekirchent Istanbul. Untersuchungen zur Architektur, Istanbuler
ea. Iconoclastic replacements also included crosses in other parts of the church, as probably are medallions with golden crosses almost identical in shape to that at Hagia Eirene in the south tympanum in the room over the southwest ramp at the Hagia Sophia, replacing the former medallion portraits. We cannot assess how consistently the Iconoclastic program of redecoration was carried out in the short time until the Iconophile interlude since the destruction of very durable mosaics and their replacement for new designs, as for example, described in the *Vita Stephani*, 29, must have been an extremely costly and lengthy enterprise. In most cases, perhaps, the Iconoclasts limited themselves to the installation of plain Crosses in the apses and whitewashing the *naos* decoration, as is prescribed in the fragment of the ascetic Nilus to Eparch Olympiodorus from the Iconoclastic *florilegium* of the Council in Saint Sophia:

In the sanctuary, according to the ordinances of the ecclesiastical traditions, it is sufficient to install the Cross through which all the mankind has been saved; and to whitewash the rest of the nave ...  

Generally, any decoration program adorns an interior or exterior space associated with a certain set of rituals. These rituals may be liturgical in the case of a

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church service with its division of ceremonies and movements outside the
curch, in the narthex, nave, and apse with their corresponding decoration
programs, but also secular, for example, in the case of the imperial or popular
ceremonials, each having its proper space in the city as well as in and around
the accompanying monuments.\(^5\) The tradition of many centuries conditioned
the stability of these rituals, in some way similar to the rigidity of the ecclesiastic
al rituals. Thus, the imperial “liturgy” included the processions of the Em-
peror with his retinue, the ceremonies of triumph and *adlocutio*, in the same
way connected with their proper decorations (reliefs on the triumphal arches,
or statues) and monuments, such as, for example, the Imperial palace, its ves-
tibule or the Chalke,\(^6\) or the Milion (a monument from which all the distances
in the Empire were calculated). The “political” ideas were most likely imple-
mented by means of some decoration activities on the public monuments of
the City: the reworking of the Chalke decoration program, the redecoration of
the Milion with scenes of horse races instead of the previous depictions of the
Six Councils,\(^7\) or possible erection by Constantine V of his monumental statues
in the City, which by itself carried a full-fledged program of Imperial propa-
ganda.

The act of dismantling the churches of their decoration and decorating
them anew with secular motifs was considered by the Iconophiles as a blas-
pheous act against Orthodoxy, similar to the exposition of a Constantinop-
olidan Patriarch sitting on a donkey\(^8\) or a parade of monks and nuns on the
Hippodrome.\(^9\) However, as opposed to these acts which required no great ef-
fort and finances on the part of the Emperor, the installation of completely

\(^5\) On the Constantinopolitan Imperial ceremonial, see G. Dagron, *Empéreur et prêtre: étude sur
Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*,
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 35–79. On the route of the Imperial trium-
phal and *adventus* processions in Constantinople, see C. Mango, “The Triumphal Way of

“Propilei e Chalké, ingresso principale del Palazzo di Constantinopoli,” in *Bisanzio e l’Occidente: arte, archeologia, storia. Studi in onore di Fernanda de Maffei*, ed. M. Bonfioli, Rome, 1996,

\(^7\) Ed. M.-F. Auzépy, *La vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le diacre*, Aldershot; Brookfield, VT:

\(^8\) Ed. C. de Boor, *Theophanes Chronographia*, Leipzig, 1883–1885, repr. Hildesheim, 1963,
pp. 420–21.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 437–38.
different designs into churches must have been too high-cost for the satisfaction of the peculiar sense of Constantine V’s humor, and this “practical” reason offers another explanation. Even with the “caesaropapist” leanings of the Iconoclastic Emperors, it is unlikely that they would have used images of their Imperial propaganda in such an inappropriate context for it as the walls of churches without a radical change in the ritual which the decoration program was intended to frame, interpret, and enhance. In view of the importance of the Cross as the palladium of victorious Emperors Constantine the Great and Heraclius, indeed, it was only natural for the Iconoclastic Emperors to promote the Imperial connotation of the Cross, for example, on their coinage, but if a purely political Imperial context would have been implied in the inclusions of the Cross in the apses by the Iconoclasts, for this context the apse was not the right place.

We have argued elsewhere that the representation of the Cross in the apse as well as in other parts of the church might have served for the Iconoclasts as the image of Resurrected Christ in his Resurrected state with an unrepresentable subtle body, which went along with iconoclastic general denigration of matter and the material realm. Their attempt at a change of church decoration programs may be interpreted as a conscious attempt on the part of the Iconoclasts to create a church decoration program coherently embedding both the image of the Tabernacle (or the succeeding Temple of Solomon), and a model of reality consisting of two katastases – material and spiritual. Thus, in the Iconoclastic church-tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, the altar, might represent the noetic reality with the image of the plain Cross – both the symbolic representation of Resurrected Christ in his present spiritual body and the future Parousiac Theophanic vision.

For seeing a wider context for the installation of Iconoclastic crosses, particularly in the apses of churches, it would be helpful to go backwards and review the background behind the use of the Cross in Late Antiquity.

The Cross is the instrument of Christ’s death, the redemption of mankind, and the ultimate symbol of Christianity. However, its ubiquity in Christian art often blurs the specific connotations of the Cross in each particular occasion.


In individual cases they may be more or less self-evident (coins, signet rings, sarcophagi, narrative cycles, floor decoration) but in some cases, particularly when the representation is connected to and juxtaposed with the surrounding images, the exact meaning needs to be deciphered.

The tradition of representing the Cross in the Resurrection scenes is, in fact, well attested to in early Christian art. The representation of the Cross was the sign used for the Resurrected Christ as opposed to Christ’s anthropomorphic images in other scenes; so, for example, in the Resurrection scenes at Christ’s Sepulchre, the Sepulchre often exposes the curtains open on two sides with the Cross inside. In many instances, some of which will be presented below, the Cross featuring in monumental decoration represents not (or not only) the instrument of Christ’s death, or the sign of the Son of Man of the Second Coming, but serves a non-anthropomorphic representation of Christ Himself. Before starting the argument, it would be helpful to present the main methodological principles which will guide further analysis.

1. The space of ecclesiastical buildings is public social space not limited to just form and function; its decoration does not merely illustrate the ritual but frames it, visually enriches the ritual, and communicates the meaning to the participants in the ritual creating a particular temporal and special continuum of sacred space. Programs of monumental decoration unify the chains of thought, which arise in the congregation while participating in the ritual.

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2. The spatial location of decoration in microcosmic church space corresponds to the physical location in the macrocosmic, earthly and heavenly world with particular emphasis on the vertical extremities such as apses and vaulting, particularly, domes in domed structures. Architecture coupled with its monumental decoration creates “sacred” space, metaphorically speaking, similar to an extraterritorial Embassy of the Heavenly Kingdom on Earth with a particular space of the sanctuary similar to an office, not accessible to the general public but only to designated officers (the clergy).

3. Conscious reproduction of iconographies with the change of a single constituent element implies interchangeability in the primary meaning of the element and changes only in its connotation or secondary meaning. Both single images and compositions must be seen in context of the surrounding images and in juxtaposition with them as creating continuous space with the meaning “flowing” through images and “irradiating” from the particularly semantically saturated areas of sanctuary in basilicas or sanctuary and dome in the domed structures.

4. Textual parallels to the monumental imagery need to be treated with caution: ekphrasis, encomia, inauguration hymns, homilies and kontakia mentioning architectural space and its decoration do not help much; they are relatively rare and are subject to the rhetorical laws of their genre and the general


17 Cf. John Chrysostom, “… the church is no barber’s, neither perfumer’s shop nor any other merchant’s warehouse in the market-place, but a place of angels, a place of archangels, a palace of God, heaven itself. Therefore if one had rent the heaven and had brought you in here, though you should see your father or your brother, you would not venture to speak, so none here ought to utter any other sound but only those which are spiritual. For in truth the things in this place are also a heaven” (Homily 36 in 1 Cor., 6; PG 61, col. 313, quoted in I.-E. Gavril, “Archi-Texts” for Contemplation in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The Case of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Sussex, 2012), p. 164 at http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/40497/1/Gavril%2C_Iuliana-Elena_-_Volume_1.pdf, accessed on 10/20/2015; pseudo-Germanus, Historia ecclesiastica et mystica contemplation: “the church is the heaven upon earth, where the heavenly God dwells and walks” (F.E. Brightman, “The Historia Mystagogica and Other Greek Commentaries on the Byzantine Liturgy,” JTS (1908), p. 257.11–12).
purpose of spiritual uplifting on the basis of architecture or “architectural theoria” rather than describing actual architectural experience.

5. Late antique hermeneutical principles which were implemented in exegesis do not follow the law of the excluded middle, that is to say, if we detect several valid meanings in our visual sources, we do not have to postulate the “either...or” relationship between them, but rather the “and... and” relationship, which is brilliantly illustrated by Maximus the Confessor’s exegesis of church building in his Mystagogia, where Maximus symbolically interprets the Church as simultaneously, and not mutually exclusively, the image of God, the image of the world consisting of visible and invisible natures, the image of the sensible world, the image of the human being, and the image of the human soul.18

6. The iconographies on the periphery of the Byzantine works may preserve the archaic motives of the center, which had been pushed into oblivion by the later changes in metropolitan iconographical patterns caused by theological, political, or social reasons such as ecclesiastical and political regulations of iconographies by the Quinisext or Iconoclasm. This is true that being detached from the mainstream developments they may also expose local developments, but if we have textual or visual corroboration on the part of the mainstream artistic developments from the center, provincial art may often “explain” the iconography of now largely lost central art being essentially its simplified and “petrified” version.19

Keeping these six methodological points in mind, we will examine the usage of the Cross in various geographical regions such as Cappadocia, Caucasus, and Africa, appearing in church space, and stemming from some common Late Antique solutions of monumental decoration. The space under the conch of the apse is the space housing the altar table and the planned coming of Christ in the form of Eucharistic Gifts as the focus of the liturgy. Naturally the


decorative space above the altar table would be dedicated to Christ. Its specific connotations, however, may be different, emphasizing his power, his glory shared with the saints, or his everlasting presence in the Church culminating in the Eucharist as the first fruits of the bliss after the Second Coming. Several pictorial solutions of this concept were proposed.20

For rendering a complex theological idea, early Christian art often utilized the principle of registers within a single space, which had to be read together, mutually enriching each other’s meaning with a particular message. This solution can be found as early as the art of the catacombs. Two registers in this fresco from the Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus21 (Fig. 1) show two interdependent aspects of Christ: His glorious power (enthroned figure in the upper register), and His sacrifice and redemption of mankind (Lamb in the lower register). The composition is unambiguous: both scenes create a single message of the Epistle to the Philippians 2: 6–11: Christ atoned mankind being God in nature, humbling himself to death and becoming the sacrifice, and is exalted to the higher place and worshipped by every knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth.

The same principle may be applied to “reading” the decoration in the apses of late antique churches. Apses decoration of Sta. Pudenziana (late fourth–early fifth century) represents Christ enthroned, flanked by the groups of Apostles and the female personification of ecclesia ex gentibus and ecclesia ex circumcisione, crowning Paul and Peter against the background of the buildings of heavenly Jerusalem and a Mount with a towering Cross and four apocalyptic animals against the background of the clouds of heaven – a standard group of Apocalyptic imagery based on the New Testament predictions of the Second Coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30, Mk. 13:25, Lk.21:27 and Rev. 1:7) (Fig. 2). The sketch of Ciacconio from 1595 shows an additional register showing the Lamb and the descending dove of the Holy Spirit, now destroyed by the baldachin. The juxtaposition of registers is very similar to the above image from the catacombs:

from bottom to top we can read the composition as Christ the Redeemer – Christ the Law-giver, and the glorious coming of Christ in the end of times.\footnote{On the apse, see F.W. Schlatter, “Interpreting the Mosaic of Santa Pudenziana,” \textit{Vigiliae Christianae} 46 (1992), pp. 276–295; the drawing of Ciacconio represented on p. 278. There is a possibility that the lamb may be an addition of the late eighth century, if the monogram of HRĐ on the sketch was rendered correctly, and if it belongs to Pope Hadrian (772–795). For the survival of the juxtaposition of the Lamb and the Cross in the Ethiopian tradition, see E. Balicka-Witakowska, \textit{La Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l’art éthiopien. Recherches sur la survie de l’iconographie chrétienne de l’Antiquité tardive}, Warsaw–Wiesbaden: Piotr O, Scholz, 1997.}

If the vertical axis of the composition represents Christ, can it be that the image of the Cross in the upper register is not only the “sign of the Son of Man” but also the image of Christ Glorified in the Second Coming?

The theophanic and eschatological dimension of the scene of non-anthropomorphic Transfiguration in Sant’Apollinare in Classe (Fig. 3) is confirmed by the juxtaposition of the image of anthropomorphic Christ surrounded by the symbols of the Evangelists in the triumphal arch above the apse. Two groups of six sheep flank the full-sized figure of Saint Apollinaris with his arms expanded.

\textbf{Figure 1}
\textit{Enthroned Christ with Peter and Paul and the Lamb with Martyrs. Fresco from the Catacombs of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, late 4th century}
in prayer and together with his body forming a Cross-like figure\textsuperscript{23} in the lower register of the apse. This element of the composition has a counterpart in the form of two groups of sheep and four creatures flanking a medallion with the

bust representation of Christ in the triumphal arch. Visually referring to Ezekiel's vision from the Old Testament, the Transfiguration as a fulfillment of the vision in the New Testament, and the future vision of the sign of the Son of Man in his Second Coming, the apse and triumphal arch constitute a joint theophanic program which makes the viewer, participating in the divine service, a participant in the timeless theophanic vision and a partaker of the flesh and blood of the One Who reveals Himself in the visions and in the Eucharistic Gifts. The latter aspect of the Incarnation is emphasized by the representation of the face of Christ in a small medallion at the intersection of the crossbars of the jewelled Cross – a “synthetic” iconographic expression operating with both sets of imagery: anthropomorphic, and non-anthropomorphic.24

The composition of another famous sixth century image of the Transfiguration in the apse of the basilica of Transfiguration in St. Catherine Monastery in

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Sinai (Fig. 4) mirrors Sant’Apollinare’s mosaic, but is based on completely different, much more narrative principles due to its “memorial” geographic location in Sinai, the Old Testament *typos* of Mt. Tabor: all the figures are represented in full size in the human form. However, the timeless “heavenly register” is present on top in the form of the Cross in *mandorla* of radiating circles, echoing the *mandorla* of Transfigured Christ, and a Deisis composition in the triumphal arch centered around the medallion with the Lamb flanked by flying angels and medallions with the Theotokos and John the Baptist on the sides. The Lamb and the Cross complete the vertical axis of the composition and set its historical narrative meaning into an eternal outwardly context.

The Theophany of Christ juxtaposed with the Cross or expressed by means of the Cross was something very important for the monumental programs of the time. It appears in the most elevated and/or sacred zones of vaulting, dome and apse, not only of churches, but also of ecclesiastical buildings intended for other purposes, namely, *mausolea* and *baptisteria*. The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (400–450) (Fig. 5) features the theophanic cross accompanied by the animals of the apocalypse in the vault; the tabernacle-like composition is organized by the cross serving as its ultimate focus.

The Cross-monogram with the wreath and letter alpha and omega appears in the central medallion of starry heavens in the dome of the Baptistery of San

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Giovanni in Fonte (fourth–fifth century) in Naples. The squinches of the vault carry the representations of the apocalyptic animals.26

The Theophanic cross in the apses and domes was a popular arrangement which survived until the end of the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium and much longer in the periphery of the Byzantine world, in Cappadocia, Caucasus,27 (Fig. 6–8), Egypt, and Nubia. The interchangeability of Christ and the Cross in these compositions is confirmed by a variety of cases, including “hybrid” Christ-Cross theophanic images (Fig. 9–11).

Theophanic crosses as decoration of domes, one of which, incidentally, is mentioned by Paul the Silentiary as decoration of the dome of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople in the sixth century,28 were a successful solution, and could

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27 For example, the cross in the mandorla in the apse of T'et'ri Udabno (Z. Skhirtladze, “Early Paintings in the Gareja Desert,” in Eastern Approaches to Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, March 1999, ed. A. Eastmond, Ashgate: Variorum, 2001, pp. 150–155, and fig. 10.3).
28 “At the very navel the sign of the cross is depicted within a circle by means of minute mosaic so that the Savior of the whole world may forever protect the church” (Paul the
have persisted until later times in full or abbreviated forms, as they did in the Caucasus or in Cappadocia. However, the victory of the Iconophiles in

Byzantium resulted in the preference given to figural compositions in monumental programs, thus making the scene of the Ascension, the “mirroring” prefiguration of the Second Coming the standard Byzantine scheme of dome decoration, later abbreviated to the image of Christ Pantocrator. It should, however, be pointed out that the image of the Pantocrator – the abbreviated form of the Ascension in the dome,29 freed from the narrative connotations of

29 O. Demus, Byzantine Mosaic Decoration, p. 19.
its Ascension prototype, returned to the original meaning of the divine omnipresence and an on-going theophany radiating downwards from beneath the dome in the sacred space of the church.

On the territories unaffected or almost unaffected by the Iconoclastic controversy, the abbreviation of the theophanic scene in the elevated part of the building moved in the opposite direction, and in spite of some Byzantine influences led to the persistence of the cross in the dome or vault both as a theophanic sign of the everlasting presence of Christ in the structure, and a device of the formal organization and structuring of space. The decoration of several Cappadocian churches is entirely built on aniconic principles (mostly geometric and floral designs, sometimes human beings are represented by symbols: animals or crosses)\textsuperscript{31} with great importance given to the sign of the

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\item \textsuperscript{30} P. Van Moorsel, J. Jacquet, and H. Schneider, \textit{The Central Church of Abdallah Nirqi}, Leiden: Brill, 1975, pl. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{31} The bibliography is vast; some studies, relevant to our discussion, include G. de Jerphanion, \textit{Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin. Les Églises rupestres de Cappadoce}, Paris, 1925–1942; N. Thierry, “L’Iconoclasme en Cappadoce d’après les sources archeologiques. Origine et modalités,” in \textit{Rayonnement grec. Hommage à Ch. Delvoye}, ed. L. Hadermann-Mis-
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sole Cross, especially in the area of the altar part or the vault. Gabriel Millet first enthusiastically connected the decoration of some Cappadocian churches with Iconoclastic decor\textsuperscript{32} on the basis of external similitude. His hypothesis led him to even date some churches to the Iconoclastic time on the basis of style. He was further followed by Nicole Thierry and Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne who established the type of church edifices, especially densely located in Cappadocia and Naxos, coined on the basis of their common aniconic style as “Iconoclastic churches.”

The main objective to their method is, however, that it is very problematic to use the style of decoration as a basis for dating, and for the dating of the “Iconoclastic churches” we do not possess enough written sources (beyond a few inscriptions) enhancing the establishing of the date for a particular monument after which art historians could establish a typology and define a tentative generic line of the decoration. Moreover, Leslie Brubaker noted that the tendency to prefer aniconic decoration might have been caused by economic reasons – for example, by the inability to find or hire a skillful team of painters.\textsuperscript{33} The low skill of local monumental decoration, however, does not preclude that in choosing an “easily executed” non-figurative language the artisans


might still use the “standard” arrangement for spatially well-established structures of imagery, albeit often expressed in a simplified aniconic form.

It seems rather that in Cappadocia and Naxos, which were on the periphery of the Byzantine world, different styles could co-exist simultaneously, reflecting new developments and preserving the old ones, while not being dominated by a single artistic center as was the case of Constantinople. The world in the age of Iconoclasm was not by any means a rigid structure and the echoes from the Byzantine Councils of the time can be detected as far as Syria, Palestine, and the Carolingian Empire. However, the local responses to Iconoclasm took a very distinct form as opposed to what happened in Byzantium, and, on the contrary, some artistic developments beyond Byzantium were appropriated in Byzantium in their distinctive forms. Thus, in his analysis of the Cappadocian church programs, Robin Cormack singled out at least four iconographic strata: pre-Iconoclastic art, contemporary Byzantine iconographic developments, Armenian influences and the influences from the Islamic world.

In addition, the Cross in the apse or in the dome of a church (and both are the loci of the church space which signify the most sacred realities) was not a monopoly of either the Byzantine Iconoclasts or of the Cappadocian artists – such motives, for example, exist in another periphery of the Byzantine cultural universe, such as Georgia. Stylistically among the Cappadocian churches there exists a whole spectrum of languages, ranging from anthropomorphic decoration, through some “transitional” monuments which include simultaneously aniconic and iconic/anthropomorphic elements in their decoration program, and, finally, to purely aniconic designs (Fig. 12–13).

The Cross has four arms pointing in four directions, and thus can be used for the formal organization of architectural space of domes and vaults, visually expressing the tradition which connected the four extremes of the Cross with the four limits of the world, the metaphor suggested by the form of the Cross itself, combined with the verse from the Epistles, “Rooted and strengthened in love, in order to be able to understand with all the saints what is the width and the length and the depth and the height” (Eph. 3: 18).

37 The chapel of Kizil Cukur has images of saints and the Cross in the vault (J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Pour une problématique de la peinture d’église byzantine à l’époque iconoclaste,” DOP 41 (1987), pl. 3) see also R. Cormack, “Byzantine Cappadocia: The Archaic Group of Wall-Paintings, p. 29.
Figure 12
St. Barbara Church, Cappadocia, second half of the 11th century

Figure 13
Kokar Kilise, Cappadocia
Such cosmic perception of the Cross is best reflected in several writings of Gregory of Nyssa. The visible shape of the Cross manifests Christ who, through his passion on the Cross, unified and brought harmony into the whole world enclosed within its four boundaries. The same “four-partite” interpretation of the Cross may be found in the fragment from Basil’s *Commentary on Isaiah*, excerpted by John of Damascus for his Chapter on the Cross from the *Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith* (IV, 11):

... as the four extremes of the Cross are held and connected by the center of the middle, the same way by God's power, the height and the depth, the length and the width, truly all visible and invisible creation is kept together.

The Cross as a figure with a naturally extending apex was convenient not only for apses, but also for decorating niches of various kinds and purposes. The Cross was actively used in the decoration of niches in monastic oratory rooms in Egyptian monasteries (Fig. 14). Of course, constant Jesus prayer as the main occupation of solitary or semi-solitary monks could and would be made in any position and during any activity of the monk; however, in the moments of temptations, when demons bombarded the mind of the monk with distracting...
imagery, niches with representations might provide a psycho-physiological “focusing device” assisting the monk in staying focused on the prayer. It is notable that the niches in Kellia contain only crosses, whereas the niches in other Egyptian monasteries, such as the Monastery of Apa Jeremias in Saqqara (sixth–seventh century) (Fig. 15) contain anthropomorphic images of Christ alone or accompanied by the representations of the Theotokos, which may

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point to the interchangeability of the Cross and Christ which we have already seen, as well as the echoes of the Evagrian traditions favoring non-figural imagery.

Yet there seems to exist one more role of the Cross in the monumental decoration, that of the structural organizer of space. The Cross in general is a formally convenient sign; it can be extended or expanded, fitting any architectural space which is difficult to decorate by other means. This does not mean that cross in these scenes plays a pure decorative role; this means that scenes with the theophanic cross/heavenly Christ could be depicted in virtually any part of any building regardless of its configuration, and successfully open the “theophanic windows” in the surface of the wall, framing other scenes which could not be depicted as freely.

However, our claim on the interchangeability of the representations of the Cross and Christ in Late Antique and Byzantine monumental programs will remain only a hypothesis unless we present the voice of the original beholders of the presented monumental programs. Did they mention such an interchangeability or mechanism behind it?

Indeed, the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena describe the vision of Xanthippe, who after prayer sees the Cross on the eastern wall. A beautiful youth surrounded by the rays of light immediately enters through the cross. Xanthippe recognizes him and addresses him in the following way, “You are the One, whose precursor was the Cross (σὺ εἶ ἐκεῖνος ὦ πρόδρομος ἐτυχεν ὁ σταυρός).”

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43 Acta, 15, ed. M.R. James, Apocrypha Anecdota, Texts and Studies 2.3, Cambridge, 1893,
The idea that the Cross not just refers the viewer to Christ but reveals him, which we have seen in the Acta, appears in one of the pseudo-Chrysostomian homilies on the Adoration of the Cross (CPG 4671), which directly states that the Cross is the revelation of Christ just as Christ is the revelation of the invisible Father, referring to Ps. 4:6 (“Lord, Let the light of your face shine upon us”):

What then is the light if not the Cross of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ through whom [or through which, the Cross] the world has been saved and the believers have been freed from the captivity of Belial and the list of our transgressions has been torn. The Face of the Father is Christ: The one who saw me, he says, saw the Father. Light of the Lord’s Face, that is the Cross...44

The discussion concerning the precise meaning of the Cross intensified during the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium, since the Iconophiles with the same reverence accepted crosses, crucifixions, and images of Christ, whereas the Iconoclasts accepted only crosses and rejected the two other image categories. All major authors of the Iconoclastic time addressed the subject of the Cross. In his Chapter on the Cross, John of Damascus expresses the traditional doctrine that the Cross reveals Christ as his sign of the Second Coming and is the ultimate image of the Crucifixion:

Thus, when He explained to His disciples saying: “Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven,” He meant the Cross. For this reason, also, the angel of the resurrection said to the women: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.” Likewise, the Apostle: “But we preach Christ crucified.” Now, there are many Christs and Jesuses, but only one Crucified, and he did not say “pierced by a lance” but “crucified.” Therefore, the sign of Christ is to be adored, for, wherever the sign may be, there He, too, will be.45

The Homily on the Cross and Icons against the Heretics, ascribed in the manuscripts to Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, uses the unconditional adoration of the Cross, shared by the Iconoclasts, for building up the argument, that the Cross is the image of Christ just as the icon. The argument gives us a

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45 ed. B. Kotter, pp. 189.64–70.
For I will ask you: as the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father, in the same way the Image is in the Cross and the Cross is in the Image, for the Cross and the Image are the same thing. Moses the God-beholder showed this when he defeated sensible Amalek, stretching his arms crosswise on the mountain, representing through himself the Cross as in an Image, that is Jesus in the Cross for the sake of our flesh, and the Cross in Jesus Christ. For the one who honors and venerates His honorable Cross also in honor venerates His honorable Image...⁴⁶

The Cross is venerable not only as a memorial of Christ's death, but because it represents the figure of Christ with outstretched arms on the Cross. It is this image of Christ which was reproduced by Moses (and is represented on a mosaic panel in Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome), which appears on early Christian reliefs from the doors of Santa Sabina in Rome (Fig. 16), and it is this image,
that is still born by Orthodox novices during their tonsuring, and by pilgrims seeking for the healing.47

The later Iconophiles further developed the argument against the Iconoclasts around the mutual acceptance of the Cross as a legitimate and venerable image of Christ. In his oration In Adorationem Crucis Theodore the Studite points to what may be the Iconoclastic reasoning behind the veneration of the Cross:

You see, my friend, what power is in the *typos* of the Cross! If it is so, then it is also in the *typos* of the crucified Christ: for surely, inasmuch as the prototypes are more perfect, the copies are also more useful. And what if anybody asks: “I want to know: who prefigured the *typos* of Christ in the ancient times?” – Those, I say, who prefigured the Cross. For as the stretching of Moses’ hands was the image of the Cross, thus also Moses himself prefigured crucified Christ, defeating the invisible Amalek, and the same can be understood with other examples when one is revealed by the *typos* of the other. “But that one,” – you say, – “was an animated *typos*. Then why do you speak about the soulless one?” As with the *typos* of the Cross – when a visible yet soulless thing makes a miracle, [then] similarly to the Cross-like image, the Christ-like image makes miracles in the animated and soulless, as having in itself the shape and form of the archetype and by this appropriating the same honor and veneration, as well as the name – this is obvious.48

This fragment elucidates another short fragment from the *Inquiries* of the Iconoclastic Emperor-theologian Constantine V, also pertaining to the Cross: “We venerate the *typos* of the Cross because of the One stretched (ἐκταθέντα) upon it.”49 The participle “stretched” would not have particular significance by itself50 (except that it would be, perhaps, more appropriate to use the more concrete “crucified (σταυρωθέντα)” if exactly the same meaning was implied) but Theodore the Studite’s text helps us to reconstruct the possibly more precise meaning of the participle. The Cross-like figure of Moses with his hands

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48 PG 99, col. 697 B.C.

49 PG 100, col. 425 D.

50 Cf. Theodore the Studite, *Anthrheticus II*, 14; PG 99, col. 360 C.
stretched apart is also called “the stretching out (ἔκτασις)” and is considered by Theodore’s interlocutor as the “animated type” of Christ. It is, thus, possible that the Iconoclasts venerated the typos of the Cross referring back not to the wooden structure of the historical Cross established on Golgotha according to the Gospels’ narrative but implying the animated figure of Christ with his hands stretched apart, the Cross as the non-anthropomorphic symbol (or typos, “impression,” in the Byzantine terminology) – the unique and univocal representation of deified and God-like Christ after His Resurrection.

In this case, the verbal meaning of the term typos which always related to the image of the Cross, becomes significant: typos is an imprint or seal of the original executed in certain material. Then, the typos of the Cross may be understood as the schematic representation of the animated Cross-shape figure of Christ engraved in stone or made of mosaics or colors. In another passage Theodore the Studite refutes this relationship, established by the Iconoclasts, stating that the typos of the Cross only signifies Christ but does not “typify” Him as does the icon: “Christ is signified in the Cross; in his icon he is represented (Ὡς οὖν ἐν σταυρῷ ἐστι Χριστὸς σημαινόμενος· οὕτως ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ εἰκόνι τυπούμενος).”

The fourth syllogism from Patriarch Nicephorus’ ten syllogisms on the preference of Christ’s icon over the Cross, which constitute the refutation of the above fragment from the Inquiries, confirms our hypothesis. Patriarch Nicephorus writes:

The typos of the stretching out of Christ’s hands and of this figure is venerable: however, as much as the body differs from a figure, to the same extent differ these things which are from those two. For the things of more honorable archetypes are themselves more honorable too, since the figure and the stretching out are because of the body... Thus, those things which belong to the body are better than those things which belong to the figure, and if this is so, the typos of the body is more venerable than the typos of the figure.

In brief, according to Nicephorus’ argument, the icon of Christ more efficiently represents Him than the Cross, being a step closer to Christ than a cross, which is the image of the Cross, which is the image of Christ.

51 PG 99, col. 457C.
52 PG 100, col. 429BC.
Conclusions

Since early Christian times the Cross accumulated a number of mutually enriching meanings in Christian consciousness, becoming a “condensed Christological symbol”\textsuperscript{53} suitable for being represented in a variety of visual contexts indicating Christ’s voluntary suffering and death, redemption of the mankind, as well as glory and power in the heavens, which will be fully manifested in Christ’s Second Coming, preceded by the theophanic sign of the Son of Man. These meanings did not cause tension, since the primary meaning remained one and the same – the Cross \emph{par excellence} was the representation of Christ: just as Christ is inseparable from his Cross which completed Christ’s earthly historical mission, the Cross is inseparable from Christ who took the shape of the Cross with His outstretched arms during the Crucifixion. The theophanic cross alone or as a part of compositions thus became a customary composition of the most sacred parts of ecclesiastical building – apses, domes, and vaults. It is this latter meaning that the Iconoclasts implemented in their apse programs with representations of Christ Resurrected whom they considered to be incircumscribable as a plain Cross against the golden background which they regarded as a pledge of the future destiny of the faithful and the presence of the heavenly kingdom here on Earth. The Iconophiles retained the primary meaning of apse programs, and changed the secondary meaning, stressing the true Incarnation and circumscribability of Christ according to his flesh, and expressing this set of ideas by the images of Mary with Christ the Child on her lap which replaced the Iconoclastic Crosses after the victory of icon veneration.

\textsuperscript{53} G. Hellemo, \emph{Adventus Domini: Eschatological Thought in the Fourth-Century Apses and Catecheses}, p. 102.