Ethiopians and the Others

“Angels in the Guise of Saints”: A Syrian Tradition in Constantinople

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Abstract

The article reconstructs the doctrine of Byzantine Iconoclasts on the *postmortem* inactivity of saints, and finds its background in the early Antiochean and Syrian doctrine on the “sleep of souls,” which occurs in Isaac the Syrian among many other writers.

Keywords

Byzantine Iconoclasm – sleep of souls – Isaac the Syrian – Anastasius of Sinai

Recent Patristic scholarship has been making the boundaries of various cultural and theological landscapes of the past more clear, yet at the same time they turn out to be more sophisticated than had been previously thought. A doctrine on the inactive state of human souls after death and before the general resurrection seems to be a possible point of convergence and, indeed, compatibility of Byzantine and Syrian traditions in Byzantium of the Iconoclastic Age, which later resulted in shaping the doctrine of saints’ *post mortem*

activities and apparitions in Eastern Orthodoxy as we know it from hagiographical sources.

The importance of the saints for Iconoclasts is expressed in their writings and *florilegia*.¹ This importance is testified to by the fact that out of eight testimonies of Hiereia presented in the refutation of Nicaea II, six are dedicated to the “spiritual worship in the heart” and four – to the saints, whose virtues the faithful Christians are to imitate.² However, only two short fragments and two anathemas from the *Definition* of Hiereia mention the saints,³ which makes it hardly possible to reach any definite results on the Iconoclastic doctrine of the saints and only allows us to propose some hypotheses concerning the background of the Iconoclastic doctrine on sainthood.

On the level of arguments the Iconoclasts of the first Iconoclasm could not use their most elaborate Christological arguments against the icon of Christ in relation to the icons of saints, because the saints, as opposed to Christ, had only one, human nature.⁴ The Iconoclasts instead denied not the possibility but the usefulness of the saints’ representations. This doctrine was implemented in two interconnected yet different “heterodox” practises of the Iconoclasts, namely, the denial of the intercession of the Theotokos and the saints, and Iconoclastic rejection or destruction of relics.⁵

- 1 M. Anastos, “The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815,” *DOP*, 8 (1954), pp. 151–160, reprinted in Idem., *Studies in Byzantine Intellectual History*, London, 1979, No. 11.
- 2 The passage, attributed to John Chrysostom (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 300A), St. Basil of Caesarea (ibid., col. 300AB), Amphilochius of Iconium (ibid., col. 301D), Theodotus of Ancyra (ibid., col. 309E–312A); the *florilegium* of the Council of St. Sophia has more passages dedicated to the saints (see Anastos, “Ethical Theory,” pp. 156–158 for the list of passages).
- 3 Mansi, vol. 13, col. 276D, 277CD, 345CD.
- 4 Horos of Hiereia, in Mansi, vol. 13, col. 272AB; cf. Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* III, 49, in *PG* 100, col. 468CD.
- 5 Under the entry of 765/66, Theophanes writes: “Everywhere he [Emperor Constantine V] rejected as being useless, both in writing and orally, the intercession of the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, and of all the saints, thanks to which all manner of help wells forth for us. He suppressed and obliterated their relics” (*Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883–1885, repr. Hildesheim, 1963, p. 439; trans. C. Mango, and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, Oxford, 1997, p. 607). For the rejection of saints’ intercession, cf. the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, 29: πάμπολλα δὲ αὐτῶν βλασφημισάντων καὶ κατὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τῆς ἀχράντου Θεοτόκου αὐτῶν χωρησάντων, ὡς βοηθεῖν μετὰ θάνατον μὴ δυναμένης (*La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, ed. M.-F. Auzépy (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 3), Aldershot, 1997, p. 127.24–26); the rejection of the intercession of the Theotokos after her death is mentioned in the *Adversus Constantinum Cabalinum*, in *PG* 95, col. 337CD.

Not delving into the abundant research on the credibility of Iconophile sources on the subject,⁶ it needs to be emphasized that although the initiative of leipsanoclasm was often ascribed to the Emperor himself, the rejection of the usefulness and authority of relics must have been accepted in the Iconoclastic period Church-wide, since the seventh canon of Nicaea II was especially aimed to correct the fact that many churches dedicated during Iconoclasm did not receive relics, which was a normal practice of the Church from the early Christian times.⁷

It would seem that the most convincing way to prove the validity of saints' icons on the part of the Iconophiles, would be an appeal to supernatural powers, and miracles like visions or supernatural apparitions of saints who are later recognized when seen on an icon, so typical for the later hagiographical literature.⁸ However, at the early stage of the controversy, in their defence of religious images the Iconophile champions John of Damascus and Patriarch Germanus do not pay any particular attention to the miracles which come from icons. In his *Apologetic Treatises in Defence of Icons* John of Damascus does mention several miracles related to religious images predominantly from Church history and hagiography, yet he does not include such testimonies in the main bulk of his text, relegating them to the *florilegium* attached to the *Apologies*.⁹ Instead, building upon the idea that the honor given to the image

- 6 See, for example, J. Wortley, "Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V and the Relics," *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 8 (1982), pp. 253–279; S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (CSCO, Sub. 52), Louvain, 1977, pp. 152–165. J. Wortley thinks that the earlier campaign against relics at the time of Leo III, which is mentioned in the *De haeresibus et synodis* of Patriarch Germanus (PG 98, col. 80) is a later interpolation (Wortley, "Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm," pp. 259–261).
- 7 Nicephorus also accuses Constantine V of destroying relics (*Antirrheticus* II, 4, PG 100, 341D) and of removing relics from altar tables (*Antirrheticus*, II, 5; PG 100, col. 344A). On early Christian altars with relics, see U. Peschlow, "Altar und Reliquie. Form und Nutzung des frühbyzantinischen Reliquienaltars in Konstantinopel," in: *Architektur und Liturgie. Akten des Kolloquiums vom 25. bis 27. Juli 2003 in Greifswald*, ed. M. Altripp and C. Nauerth (Architektur und Liturgie, 21), Wiesbaden, 2006, pp. 175–202.
- 8 See M.-F. Auzépy, "L'iconodulie: défense de l'image ou de la devotion à l'image?," in: *Nicée II, 787–1987. Douze siècles d'images religieuses. Actes du Colloque international Nicée II tenu au Collège de France, Paris les 2, 3, 4 Octobre 1986*, éd. N. Lossky et F. Boespflug, Paris, 1987, p. 163; G. Dagron, "Holy Images and Likeness," *DOP*, 45 (1991), pp. 30–31; A. Kazhdan, and H. Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art," *DOP*, 45 (1991), pp. 5–7.
- 9 This polemical strategy contrasts the strategy of the Council of Nicaea II, where a significant amount of time was devoted to reading the testimonies on the miracles from the icons at the Sessions 4 and 5. This changing attitude is in line with the conclusions of

passes to the prototype, John of Damascus dedicates a lengthy part of the *Apolo-
gies* to the issue of honoring saints, who in the lifetime acquired the grace of
the Holy Spirit which continues to act in their representations and relics after
their departure to the other world.¹⁰ I would like to propose that John of Da-
mascus did not want to touch upon the doctrine of saints' *post mortem* activity
which had not been defined by the previous Conciliar tradition and which had
many possible trends and interpretations in his time, as we shall shortly see.

What do we exactly know about the Iconoclastic doctrine of saints, apart
from the testimonies of the Iconophiles? Two subsequent passages from the
Definition of Hieria give insight into the theology of sainthood of the Byzan-
tine Iconoclasts:

For those saints who have well-pleased God and are honoured by Him
with the dignity of sainthood, are eternally alive to God even if they have
departed from here: the one who tries to set them up with dead and
abominable art which has never been alive but was invented from the
things which were the subjects of pagan vanity, shows himself as blas-
phemous.¹¹

And again those who are to reign with Christ, and to sit on the throne
with him and to judge the Universe and to become of the same form with
his glory – those, whom, as Scripture says, the world was not worthy, are
they [*the Iconophiles* – V.B.] not ashamed to depict them by means of
pagan art? It is not fit for Christians who have a hope in the Resurrection
to make use of customs of demon-worshipping peoples and to insult
saints who are going to shine in such glory by inglorious and dead mat-
ter.¹²

M.-F. Auzépy concerning the process of institutionalizing saints' roles as miracle-workers in
the pre-Iconoclastic and Iconoclastic period (M.-F. Auzépy, "L'évolution de l'attitude face
au miracle à Byzance (VII^e–IX^e siècle)," in: *Miracles, prodiges et merveilles au Moyen Âge.*
xxv^e Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S. (Orléans, juin 1994), Paris, 1995, pp. 31–46.

10 *Apology* I, 19–22; III, 33, in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. B. Kotter, vol. 3,
Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres (PTS, 17), Berlin – New York, 1975, pp. 94–95,
137–139.

11 "...ὁὶ γὰρ τῷ θεῷ εὐαρεστήσαντες ἅγιοι, καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ τιμηθέντες τῷ ἀξιῳματι τῆς ἀγιότητος,
ζῶσιν αἰεὶ θεῷ καὶ ἐνθένδε μετέστησαν, οὓς ὁ ἐν νεκρῇ τέχνῃ καὶ στυγητῇ, μηδέποτε ζησάσῃ, ἀλλ'
ἐξ ἀντικειμένων Ἑλλήνων ματαιῶς ἐφευρεθείσῃ, λογιζόμενος ἀναστυλοῦν, βλάσφημος
ἀποδείκνυται" (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 276D).

12 "...ἢ πάλιν τοὺς μέλλοντας συμβασιλεύειν τῷ Χριστῷ συγκαθέδρους τε γίνεσθαι, καὶ κρίνειν τὴν
οἰκουμένην, καὶ συμμόρφους τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἔσεσθαι. ὦν, ὡς τὰ λόγια φασιν, οὐκ ἦν ἄξιος ὁ
κόσμος· οὐκ ἐντρέπονται τῇ τοῦ Ἑλλήνος ἀναγράφασθαι τέχνῃ; οὐ θεμιτὸν γὰρ τοῖς ἐλπίδα

Some observations can be made on the basis of these passages: first, the “glory” of the righteous seems to be postponed until a certain moment in the future (“those, who are to reign ... to sit ... to become ... who are going to shine...”); second, the phrase about the attempts of the Iconophiles at “setting up” the saints by means of art requires an explanation. If we understand the word in the sense of physical raising up, for example, in the form of a mosaic on the wall, confusion is caused by the Iconoclastic usage of the word “saints” as a direct object of the verb. In this case, incidentally, the Iconoclasts speak in the manner of Iconophiles, who can perfectly equate “saints” with “images of the saints,” which are, in fact, raised up by the Iconophiles.¹³ Would not we rather assume the Iconoclasts to say in this case something like “the idols” of the saints or “the falsely-so-called images” of the saints as they did in other places? Why would the Iconoclasts object to the practise of depicting saints if they were just living humans appearing and helping in the world, thus being the subjects of portraiture just like the Iconoclastic Emperors themselves? Instead, alluding to the future general resurrection, the Iconoclasts seem to accuse the Iconophiles of some sort of magical practise, aimed at “resurrecting” the saints

ἀναστάσεως κεκτημένοι Χριστιανοὶ δαιμονολατρῶν ἐθνῶν ἔθελαι χρῆσθαι, καὶ τοὺς τοιαύτῃ μέλλοντας δόξῃ φαιδρύνεσθαι ἁγίους ἐν ἀδόξῳ καὶ νεκρᾷ ὕλῃ καθυβρίζειν” (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 277CD).

- 13 The word ἀναστηλοῦν originates from ἀναστηλόω (“set up as or on a monument”: H. G. Liddle, and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1843, repr. with rev. suppl. 1996), p. 121). Cf. the translation of D. Sahas: “...he, who thinks to reinstate them [the saints – V. B.] on the poles by means of a dead and accursed art... (D. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations, 4), Toronto – Buffalo – London, 1986, p. 103). Sahas explains his translation by referring to a kind of proto-iconoclasis (Ibid., n. 20, p. 103); S. Gero: “He who intends to raise up a memorial to them by means of a craft which is dead and hateful, not one which vivifies...” (Gero, *Constantine v*, p. 79). In a footnote S. Gero states that Mendham (J. Mendham, *The Seventh Ecumenical Council*, London, 1849) erroneously translated the passage as “endeavour to raise them up among us again (Gero, *Constantine v*, n. 84, p. 79); another English translation also has the meaning of raising in the sense of “resurrection”: “If anyone thinks to call them back again to life by a dead art, discovered by the heathen, he makes himself guilty of blasphemy” (*Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wall (Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), p. 544). The latter translations seem to take the verb ἀναστῆλω (“set back, draw back,” “raise back”) as the original form. In the famous Canon 82 of the Quinisext the verb is used in the sense of “setting up” or “rendering” (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 41B; H. G. Thümmel, *Die Frühgeschichte der ostkirchlichen Bilderlehre. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreit* (Texte und Untersuchungen, 139), Berlin, 1992, p. 374.9–10); the Latin translation of Anastasius the Librarian has “pensat erigere” (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 275D).

on their icons and treating them as present *here and now* in a prayerful communication, which is reinforced by contrasting the (“correct”) views of the Iconoclasts patiently waiting for the resurrection to celebrate it with the glorified saints, and the Iconophiles, “insulting” the saints by prematurely representing them through dead (“unresurrected”) matter.¹⁴

We can propose a possible explanation in the old Antiochean doctrine on the “sleep of souls.”¹⁵ This “sleep” means that the soul of the deceased person, be he good or bad, is kept deprived of all sensation in utter inactivity from the moment of the death of its body until the Judgement, when, after the general resurrection, the souls will be joined to their bodies and everybody will receive the deserved reward or punishment. If this is the case, the meaning of both fragments becomes clear: according to Iconoclasts, the souls of the saints are in the state of sleep waiting for the general resurrection when they will reconnect with bodies and shine in great glory which they gain by their earthly feats. Until then they cannot be of any help for those who address them in prayers before the relics or icons – their prayers are not heard since hearing as a corporal sense is not available to the sleeping soul. By depicting the saints on the icons and appealing to them in prayers and supplications, the Iconophiles attempt in vain to “activate” the inactive souls of the departed (even, though, definitely righteous) people.

It would indeed seem premature to offer the explanation based on just two passages of the Iconoclastic source no matter how important this document is in expressing the Iconoclastic doctrine firsthand. However, thanks to the

14 Thus, Nicephorus says that Constantine V launched his war on relics and representations of saints because they were “dead in his eyes” (*Antirrheticus* II, 6, in PG 100, col. 344C; cf. *Antirrheticus* III, 52, 53, in PG 100, col. 476A, 477B).

15 There were at least two trends behind the idea of the *post mortem* inactivity of the soul: the sleep of the soul and the dissolution of the soul with its subsequent resurrection together with the body. The *thnetopsychists* are mentioned by Origen in his *Dialogue with Heraclides* (*Entretien d'Origène avec Héraclide*, ed. J. Scherer (SC, 67), Paris, 1960, p. 76.16–78.20); Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 6.37: “...others arose in Arabia, putting forward a doctrine foreign to the truth. They said that during the present time the human soul dies and perishes with the body, but that at the time of the resurrection they will be renewed together” (*Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, vol. 1, Eusebius. *Church History. Life of Constantine. Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wall, Grand Rapids, MI, 1965, p. 279; John of Damascus, *Liber de Haeresibus*, 90, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, ed. B. Kotter, vol. 4 (PTS, 22), Berlin – New York, 1981, p. 57; see also N. Constas, “An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, On the State of Souls after Death (CPG 7522)*,” *J ECS*, 10.2 (2002), n. 14, p. 273, n. 27, p. 278 on the two groups mentioned in Eustratius the Presbyter.

recent research on the problem of the “middle state of souls,”¹⁶ we now have ample evidence for the presence of the doctrine of the “sleep of souls” in Byzantium both before and after the Iconoclastic Controversy.

Anastasius of Sinai, who lived shortly before the outbreak of the Iconoclastic Controversy, gave us a valuable view of the problematic theological issues of his time. *Question 19* of his *Questions and Answers* says that visions of saints do not occur by the actions of the saints’ souls but through angels who take on the appearances of the saints after saints’ separation from the body.¹⁷ In the same *Question* Anastasius explains that the soul cannot function without its body’s receptive organs and remains in a comatose state, although as opposed to ordinary sinners, through the grace of the Holy Spirit the saints can feel joy, praise God and intercede for each other.¹⁸ Anastasius’ change of mind on the issue is further revealed in another treatise of his in the discussion of the soul as the

16 N. Constatas, “To Sleep, Perchance to Dream. The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature,” *DOP*, 55 (2001), pp. 91–124; D. Krausmüller, “God or Angels as Impersonators of Saints: A Belief and its Context in the ‘Refutation’ of Eustratius of Constantinople and in the Anastasius of Sinai,” *Gouden Hoorn*, 6.2 (1998), <<http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/goudenhoorn/62dirk.html>>, accessed August 23, 2013; M. Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford Studies in Byzantium), Oxford, 2012.

17 “One should realize that all the visions that take place in church buildings or at the tombs of the saints are brought about through the holy angels at God’s command for before the resurrection of bodies has taken place, and while the bones and fleshy parts of the saints are scattered, how is it possible for them to be recognized as fully formed men, often seen armoured and on horseback? And if you intend to disagree with me, then you tell me, please, how Paul, or Peter, or any other Apostle or martyr, each being a single person, came to be seen at the same moment very often in different places. Not even an angel can find itself at the same moment in different places or in different countries; the only one who can do that is God, the uncircumscribed” (*PG* 89, col. 717C = *Anastasi Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones*, ed. M. Richard, J. Munitiz (CCSG, 59), Turnhout – Leuven, 2006, 33, 64–75, trans. J. Munitiz, *Anastasios of Sinai. Questions and Answers* (Corpus Christianorum in Translation, 7), Turnhout, 2011, p. 91–92). *Question 26* of the collection attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, which was close in time and contents to Anastasius reiterates the same argument on angels appearing in the guise of saints in visions (Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, 26, in *PG* 28, col. 613B; Krausmüller, “God or Angels as Impersonators of Saints,” n. 3. On the collection, see C. Macé, “Les *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem* d’un Pseudo-Athanase (CPG 2257). Un état de la question,” in: *La littérature des questions et réponses dans l’Antiquité profane et chrétienne: de l’enseignement à l’exégèse*, éd. M.-P. Bussières (Instrumenta patristica et mediaevalia, 64), Turnhout, 2013, pp. 121–150; M. Bandini, “*La Doctrina ad Antiochum ducem* pseudo-athanasiana. Tradizione diretta, struttura, datazione,” *Prometheus*, 23 (1997), pp. 171–187.

18 *Anastasi Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones*, 33, 58–64; Krausmüller, “God or Angels as Impersonators of Saints,” n. 2, n. 21.

image and likeness of God, where Anastasius argues that after separating from the body, the soul is more spiritual and bright in its substance, revealing the image of God in a purer form.¹⁹ Having said that, Anastasius recourses to his former opinion that the task of being sent back to Earth rather befits angels as servant spirits, but not the souls of the saints.²⁰ These inconsistencies may be explained by the tension of harmonizing his “theoretical” and “pastoral” approaches as well as different sources he relied upon while composing his *Questions and Answers*. One of his sources for *Question 19* might have been close to the argument of the opponents of Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople from his *Refutation of Those Who Say That the Souls of the Dead Are Not Active and Receive No Benefit from the Prayers and Sacrifices Made for Them to God* (CPG 7522), dated to the time after 582. The treatise contains the refutation of those who taught that after departure from their bodies, the souls are kept in some place (ἐν τινι τόπῳ, p. 5, 58), they remain inactive and cannot appear on earth to the living, have no activity and do not profit from prayers and sacrifices,” but their apparitions should be attributed to the “divine power” giving forms (σχηματίζόμενοι, p. 5, 57) and acting (ἐνεργούσας) as apparitions of saints.²¹ Building his apology on the Biblical precedents of miracles and apparitions, Eustartius also argues that “...whoever has a vision of the angels, sees the angels, and whoever beholds the saints’ souls, sees the saints’ souls,”²² implying the existence of the same argument as that of Anastasius, among his opponents. In his study of the cult of saints in Late Antiquity, M. Dal Santo argues that the compilers of the numerous collections of miracles, such as *Miracles of Cosmas and Damian* or *Miracles of St. Artemius*, were aware of the arguments of Eustratius and aimed their collections largely at fostering the saints’ cult against the challenges it faced at the time.²³

19 *Anastasioi Sinaitae Sermones duo in constitutionem hominis secundum imaginem dei*, ed. K.-H. Uthemann (CCSG, 12), Turnhout – Leuven, 1985, I, 6, p. 29, 1–9, Krausmüller, “God or Angels as Impersonators of Saints,” n. 41.

20 *Anastasioi Sinaitae Sermones duo*, I, 6, pp. 30.43–31.50.

21 Eustratius presbyter Constantinopolitanus *De statu animarum post mortem*, ed. P. Van Deun (CCSG, 60), Turnhout – Leuven, 2006; the analysis of the treatise see in Constanas, “Apology,” pp. 267–285. The parallel between Anastasius and Eustratius was first noticed by G. Dagron, “L’ombre d’un doute: l’hagiographie en question, VI^e–XI^e siècle,” *DOP*, 46 (1992), pp. 61–64. Pope Gregory the Great is forced to meet similar challenges to the cult of saints in the same period (ca. 575 – ca. 625) in Italy in his *Dialogues on the Miracles of the Italian Fathers*, see Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, pp. 27–31 and passim.

22 *De statu animarum post mortem*, p. 60, 997–1000, quoted in Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, p. 73.

23 Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, pp. 153–248, esp. pp. 153–156, 161.

...those who are near to reaching the stage of purity, are deemed worthy of seeing perpetually holy men in nightly visions... It is said that the holy angels assume the appearance of honoured and excellent men and show themselves to the soul in visions during sleep when the emotions are distracted, for the sake of joy and higher incitement.²⁴

24 אִשָּׁא קְדִישָׁה לְיַחְזָקָה יוֹסֵף בֶּדְיָן. לְיִשְׂרָאֵל נִכְרָם מִתְּמֻנָּה מִבְּרֵית הַחַיִּים חֲסִידָה וְלִלְלָה
 דְּעִירָא... וְכוּ'. גְּבִירָא מִתְּמֻנָּה מִבְּרֵית הַחַיִּים נִכְרָם מִתְּמֻנָּה מִבְּרֵית הַחַיִּים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
 ... וְכוּ' (P. Bedjan, *Mar Isaacus Ninevita* "De perfectione religiosa", Paris – Leipzig, 1909, 381; trans. A. J. Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeeling letterkunde, nieuwe reeks, xxiii, 1), Amsterdam, 1923, pp. 255–256). On the context of the passage see H. Alfeyev, *L'universé spiritual d'Isaac le Syrien* (Spiritualité Orientale, 76), Bégrolles-en-Mauges, 2001, pp. 263–264. I am grateful to Basil Lourié for his help with citing the Syriac text of the passage.

26 See the references in R. Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha, mystique syro-oriental du VIII^e siècle* (Théologie historique, 83), Paris, 1990, pp. 492–494.

306–373),²⁷ and Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428).²⁸ The doctrine can be found in such doctors of the Eastern Syrian Church as Narsai (d. 502),²⁹ Babai the Great (ca. 550 – after 628), Dadisho Qatraya (second half of 7th c.), and many others.³⁰ The most detailed elaboration of the doctrine, however, can be found in the *Letters* of the Nestorian Catholicos Timothy I (consecrated in 780). He says that only rationality and will belong to the soul proper out of its four faculties, most of which (i.e. irascibility or concupiscence) relate to the soul in its union to the body, and thus, after the departure of the soul from its body, it remains in a state which Timothy compares to a human *foetus*, limited in its movements and sensations. Thus, the departed souls are deprived of all sensation, associated with bodily functions, as well as of all efficient functions, which are, again, associated with the participation of bodies.³¹ This theory was canonised in the Council of 786–787, presided over by Timothy I.³²

However, this dominant theory did not undermine the cult of the saints in the East Syrian Church. Indeed, there was much less emphasis on miracles, apparitions, and intercession of saints, as it was customary in the Byzantine Church. The Syriac writers admit that the souls of the saints may be in Paradise, but at the same time the souls are unaware of the things below, even though God may provide healing and miracles through their relics,³³ and their liturgical feasts are useful for moral edification of the flock and imitation of their virtue.³⁴

27 See references in Ibid., pp. 494–495; Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, pp. 244–254.

28 *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste*, éd. R. Tonneau, R. Devreesse (Studi e Testi, 145), Vatican City, 1949, p. 177, Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, p. 495.

29 Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, pp. 498–499; Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, pp. 254–273.

30 See Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, pp. 492–510 for the review of this doctrine among the Syrian authors. R. Beulay, however, does not mention Isaac the Syrian in relation to the doctrine.

31 For the primary references see Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, pp. 491–492; Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, pp. 299–318.

32 In more detail on the Synod see O. Braun, “Zwei Synoden des Katholikos Timotheos I,” *OC*, 2 (1902), pp. 283–311.

33 Cf. the passage from Ishai of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (ca. 540–582), defending the practice of relic veneration from the charges of idolatry: “These bones of the blessed are not themselves aware of the miracles that flow from them” (Ishai of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, *On the Martyrs*, in: *Traité d'Išai le docteur et de Hnana d'Adiabène sur les Martyrs, le Vendredi d'Or et les Rogations*, éd. A. Scher (PO, 7), Paris, 1911, p. 41.9–10, quoted in Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, p. 292).

34 Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult*, pp. 282, 284, 294–299. In only one place Ishai refers to

How might the Eastern Scripture-based doctrine³⁵ end up and take roots in Byzantium? Besides common Scriptural background, it seems that the Syrian doctrine of the sleep of souls provided the answers which were sought for by the Christian anthropology and medical science of Late Antiquity, trying to overcome the Platonic dualism (and essential independence) of the intellect and body as well as ambiguous state of the soul.³⁶ The fate of the doctrine in Byzantium did not end with the restoration of icon-veneration. An interesting example is the *Encomium to St. Agatha* by the Iconophile Patriarch Methodius, where Methodius describes the apparition of Apostle Peter to the saint, considering the second possibility that it was an angel, impersonating Apostle Peter and taking his appearance, and finally reconciling the two opinions.³⁷ In

the intercession, but urges his readers to imitate the virtues of the saints, painting their image “on the canvas of the heart” (*Traités*, 24, Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, pp. 281–282, which is strikingly close to the doctrine of the Iconoclasts, expressed in their *florilegia*. According to Timothy I, prayers and offerings for the dead may be useful, but their usefulness should be postponed until the Resurrection (Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, pp. 316–318).

35 Cf. “sleep in the dust” of Dan 12:2, and Job. 21: 26, and sleep as a metaphor for death in Mt 9:24, Mt 27:52, Mk 5:39; Lk 8:52, Jn 11:11–14, Ac 7:60, Acts 13:36, 1 Th 4:13–15, 2 Pe 3:4; however, see F. Gavin, “The Sleep of Soul in the Early Syriac Church,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* 40 (1920), pp. 103–120 on the Aristotelian rethinking of the old Syrian paradigm since the seventh century. See also Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, pp. 304–307 for the Aristotelian parallels to the anthropological doctrine of Timothy I.

36 See the overview in Conostas, “Middle State”. According to Gregory of Nyssa, no intellectual perception without material substrate is possible; the soul is so intimately connected to the body that after death it remains with it down to the tiniest particles (see the ref. in *Ibid.*, p. 98). In an earlier paper I argued that the specific Iconoclastic Christology of Constantine V (Virgin Mary gave birth only to the flesh of Christ) may be explained by the Aristotelian anthropology, which postulates that the form of the body and bodily organs is endowed by the soul during gestation (V. A. Baranov, “Condensing and Shaping the Flesh...”: The Incarnation and the Instrumental Function of the Soul of Christ in the Iconoclastic Christology,” in: *Origeniana Decima*, ed. S. Kaczmarek, H. Pietras (BETL, 244), Leuven, 2011, pp. 919–932).

37 Thus, Saint Agatha thanks Christ, who “had sent his apostle or an angel as apostle” (*Encomium of Agatha*, 23, ed. E. Mioni, “L’*encomio* di S. Agata di Metodio patriarca di Costantinopoli,” *AB*, 68 (1950), p. 88.12–14, D. Krausmüller, “Being, Seeming and Becoming: Patriarch Methodius on Divine Impersonation of Angels and Souls and the Origenist Alternative,” *Byz*, 79 (2009), p. 172); Methodius introduces this statement with a comment, that God is capable “both to shape and to resurrect whatever he wills (πάντα γὰρ δυνατόν τῷ θεῷ καὶ πλάττειν <καὶ> ἀνιστάν ὅσα βούλεται) (*Encomium of Agatha*, 23, p. 88, 1–4; Krausmüller, “Being, Seeming and Becoming,” p. 173); in a gloss to the *Passion of St. Marina*, Methodius notes that the divine grace acts through the relics of the saints if they are

the *Life of Constantine the ex-Jew*, composed before 912, the saint is delivered from being beaten to death by the supernatural appearance of a “phantom of a woman (φάσμα γυναικός)” which is recognized as Virgin Mary, since it was in her chapel that the help occurred. However, in the end of the passage the hagiographer adds a telling statement, “it was not a woman but divine grace.”³⁸ Such views caused polemics and opposition. In the same reign of Leo VI (886–912) in his *Encomium to St. Agathonicus*, Anastasius Traulus urges his readers not to be deluded by those who claim that the apparitions of saints should be attributed to angels,³⁹ while in his *Encomium to Patriarch Ignatius* (BHG 818), *syncellus* Michael appeals to the synod, declaring “if someone says that it is not saints that appear to us but angels, he shall be anathema!”⁴⁰ The manuscript *Vaticanus graecus* 551, a collection of patristic works with the addition of an Iconophile *florilegium*, acclamations and anathemas from the *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy, and the account of the miraculous image of Christ from Edessa ends up with the treatise of Eustratius. The doctrine of the sleep of souls became once more an object of polemics in the eleventh century Byzantium, possible due to the renewed interest in Platonism on the part of Byzantine intellectuals.⁴¹

Yet there remains one problem which needs to be resolved before we can draw any (even provisional) conclusions. One of the passages from the same *Definition* of the Iconoclastic Council seems to contradict our hypothesis. Two anathemas in the end of the *Definition* are related to the saints. The first one urges the Christians to imitate saints’ virtues rather than depict them on the icons with material pigments;⁴² the second one, however, defends the tradi-

present in the church, named after the saint; if the relics are not present, God sends his angels to work miracles (*Scholion* 18, in *Acta S. Marini et S. Christophori*, ed. H. Usener, Bonn, 1886, p. 53.4–7), which seems to argue with the doctrine that all supernatural interventions are exercised through the angels (see Krausmüller, “Being, Seeming and Becoming,” p. 173).

38 *Life of Constantine*, 51, in: *AASS Novembris IV*, ed. H. Delehaye, Brussels, 1925, col. 642F–643A; quoted in D. Krausmüller, “Denying Mary’s Real Presence in Apparitions and Icons: Divine Impersonation in the Tenth Century Life of Constantine the Ex-Jew,” *Byz*, 78 (2008), p. 291.

39 G. van Hoof, “Encomium in s. Agathonicum Nicomediensem martyrem,” *AB*, 5 (1886), p. 414; Krausmüller, “God or Angels as Impersonators of Saints,” n. 55.

40 Mansi, vol. 13, col. 293D, quoted in Krausmüller, “Denying Mary’s Real Presence,” p. 297.

41 See John the Deacon, *On the Veneration of the Saints. Addressed to Those Who Say That They Are Unable to Help Us after Their Departure from This Life* (ed. J. Gouillard, “Léthargie des âmes et culte des saints : un plaidoyer inédit de Jean diacre et maïstôr,” *TM*, 8 (1981), pp. 171–186).

42 Mansi, vol. 13, col. 345CD.

tional doctrine on the saints as intercessors for the world who may and should be addressed to with prayer:

If anyone does not confess that all saints from before old times until now under the Law and in the [time of] grace pleased God, and are honoured in His presence in their soul and body, and does not ask for their prayers as having confidence to intercede for the world, according to the ecclesiastical tradition, let him be anathema!⁴³

In the face of this contradiction we should attempt to suggest some plausible reasons for this statement. In his study on Constantine v, Stephen Gero pointed out both consistencies and inconsistencies between the theology advanced by the Emperor in his *Inquiries* written as the Hiereia's guidelines and the *Definition* of the Council, concluding that the theology of Hiereia constituted a partial compromise with the theological ideas of the Emperor.⁴⁴ In this manner the Council omitted the Imperial doctrine of the "consubstantial image," though retained its ramifications on the Eucharist being the only true image of Christ.⁴⁵ The problem of compromise must have been even more acute in relation to the beliefs of the Emperor concerning Christ's material body and its state after the Resurrection.⁴⁶ Patriarch Nicephorus mentions unimplemented reforms of Constantine v, aimed at the exclusion of the term of "Theotokos" from use,⁴⁷ since according to Constantine v, the Virgin Mary conceived and gave birth only the flesh of Christ. Yet this radical position is not in any way reflected in the *Definition* of Hiereia, but is ascribed by all sources to Constantine v alone. Other sources report a similar position of Constantine v concerning the saints.⁴⁸ We need to take into account that the high clergy of

43 "Εἴ τις οὐχ ὁμολογεῖ ἅπαντας τοὺς ἀπ' αἰῶνος καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ἁγίους, πρὸ νόμου, καὶ ἐν νόμῳ καὶ ἐν χάριτι τῷ Θεῷ εὐαρεστήσαντας, τιμίους εἶναι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ψυχῇ τε καὶ σώματι, καὶ τὰς τούτων οὐκ ἐξαίτεται προσευχάς, ὡς παρῥησίαν ἔχόντων ὑπὲρ τοῦ κόσμου πρεσβεύειν, κατὰ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν παράδοσιν, ἀνάθεμα" (Mansi, vol. 13, col. 348DE).

44 Gero, *Constantine v*, pp. 40, 96, 100.

45 PG 100, col. 225A.

46 V. Baranov, and B. Lourié. "The Role of Christ's Soul-Mediator in the Iconoclastic Christology," in: *Origeniana Nona*, ed. G. Heidl and R. Somos (BETL, 228), Leuven, 2009, pp. 403–411.

47 Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* II, 4, in PG 100, col. 341C; Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* I, 9, in PG 100, col. 216.

48 Cf. the case of the relics of Euphemia of Chalcedon, which Constantine v threw into the sea together with the reliquary (Theophanes under year 765/66, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. de Boor, p. 440; trans. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*

Constantine's time could not have an independent doctrinal position and it is only logical to expect inconsistency in the compromise decisions produced by them for the Council. The resulting outcome was "a certain balance of interests of the Imperial dynasty and ecclesiastical authorities."⁴⁹

Thus, the doctrine of the "sleep of souls," originating in the Christian East, was accepted in some circles of Byzantium along with the dominant doctrine of saints' apparitions and help, based on their continued activity *post mortem* and their capacity of hearing (and acting upon) the prayers of those in need of help. The two doctrines were discussed and debated upon in various periods of Byzantine history. The doctrine of the sleep of souls might have been in the background of the rejection of saints' icons in the circles close to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine V who ardently rejected saints' intercession and efficacy of their relics. At the same time there could have existed more "traditional" parties among the Iconoclastic hierarchy and clergy.⁵⁰ The tension caused by

Confessor, p. 607; cf. Constantine of Tios, *History of the Relics of St. Euphemia* (written in 796–806), in: *Euphémie de Chalcédoine: Légendes byzantines*, ed. F. Halkin, Brussels, 1965, ch. 10, who attributes the action to Leo III). On the relics of St. Euthymia, see A. Berger, "Die Reliquien der heiligen Euphemia und ihre Translation nach Konstantinopel," *Hellenika*, 39 (1988), pp. 311–322, C. Mango, "The Relics of St. Euphemia and the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople," in: *Studi in onore di mgr Paul Canart. Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, 53 (1999), pp. 79–87. Cf. *Adversus Constantinum Cabalinum* (775–787), "Once he acceded to empire his arrogance was revealed to all. He sent out a proclamation to every province in his sway that everybody was to subscribe to a for-swearing and rejection of the *proskynesis* of holy images. And as we today say 'Let us go to the All-holy Theotokos' to pray' or 'to Holy Apostles' or 'to the Holy Forty martyrs' or 'to the Holy Protomartyr Stephen's,' this guileful man would not bear to hear such a thing, but took away the name of 'saint' from the saints. Panagia he called Theotokos, and said she could offer no aid after her death, and that neither the holy apostles nor any of the blessed ones could offer intercessions on our behalf, for they had profited none but themselves by their sufferings, to the extent of saving their souls from hell. Thus they were of no benefit to those who called upon them and went running to them" (PG 95, col. 337CD, quoted in Wortley, "Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm," p. 266).

49 This statement of D. E. Afinogenov concerning Nicea II seems to be utterly applicable to our case (Д. Е. Афиногенов, *Константинопольский патриархат и иконоборческий кризис в Византии (784–847)* [*Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Iconoclastic Crisis in Byzantium (784–847)*], Moscow, 1997, p. 116).

50 Cf. the hypothesis of I. Ševčenko that some Lives of the saints might have been composed by the Iconoclastic hagiographers (I. Ševčenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," in: *Iconoclasm, Papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. Bryer, J. Herrin, Birmingham, 1977, pp. 120–127); this idea was supported by M.-F. Auzépy ("L'analyse littéraire et l'historien: l'exemple des vies de saints iconoclastes," *Byzantinoslavica*, 53 (1992), pp. 58–62); Eadem, "À propos des vies de

the two incompatible doctrines of saints may explain the inconsistency of our sources. If the Iconoclasts (or their certain factions or groups) upheld the doctrine of saints' inefficacy as intercessors on the basis of the doctrine of the sleep of souls, which consequently led to rejection of the icons of saints as the *foci* of prayer, this doctrine could have been countered on the popular level triggering the unprecedented flourishing of the Iconophile hagiography roughly coinciding with the Iconoclastic and post-Iconoclastic period. This process may and should be viewed in a wider context of the polemics with the doctrine, denying saints' "real" apparitions and their fast help after prayer and *proskynesis* before the icons or relics.

saints Iconoclastes," *Revista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, 30 (1993), pp. 3–5); see also A. Acconcia Longo, "A proposito di un articolo recente sull'agiografia iconoclasta," *Revista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*, 29 (1992), pp. 3–17.