Survival of Early Christian Traditions

Visual and Ideological Context of the Chalke Inscription at the Entrance to the Great Palace of Constantinople

Vladimir A. Baranov

Novosibirsk State University of Architecture, Design, and Fine Arts,
Novosibirsk, Russia

baranovv@academ.org

Summary

This article revisits an inscription on the Bronze Doors of the Imperial Palace in Constantinople and addresses the problem of its dating as well as the ideological and theological meaning of the inscription in the wider spatial and symbolical context of Late Antique gate decoration. A tentative reconstruction of the Transfiguration scene which the inscription might have accompanied is proposed, and the wider exegetical context of the Transfiguration, primarily, the interplay of the theological ideas of the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ, embedded in this event are examined against the doctrines of the Byzantine Iconoclasts.

Keywords

Byzantine Iconoclasm – Chalke – Patriarch Germanus – John of Damascus – Transfiguration

The metric inscription on the Bronze Doors of the Constantinopolitan Palace – the Chalke Gate – was preserved in the collection of the Iconoclastic inscriptions, cited and refuted by Theodore the Studite. The inscription mentions Emperors Leo and Constantine and the Cross above the gates of the Imperial Palace, and has been referred to in a number of studies on the origins of Iconoclasm. According to the traditional view, this inscription was associated with the destruction of the Chalke image of Christ by Leo III (717–741), the event which marked the open struggle of the Emperor against images in 725/726, according to Theophanes or in 730 after the deposition of Patriarch Germanus, according to the slightly earlier *Vita Stephani Iunioris*.¹

In his study of the Vestibule of the Great Palace, Cyril Mango pointed to the problem of dating the inscription, associated with the second pair of Byzantine Emperors named “Leo” with a son named “Constantine”: Leo V (813–820) and his son Symbatius/Constantine. As a basis for dating the inscription C. Mango proposed a general consideration: why would Theodore the Studite “abruptly introduce an epigram which, had it belonged to Leo III, would have been almost a century old, and which, in all probability, would have been removed by Irene when she restored the Chalke image?” Mango thus chose the later pair out of the two pairs of Emperors Leo and Constantine, and dated the inscription in question to ca. 815.²

Before going into details, it is worth making a similar general remark. Theodore the Studite was not only an Iconophile champion, but an inscription writer.³ It is natural that in compiling his collection of Iconoclastic inscriptions with the purpose of exposing and refuting them, he might want to get hold of as many inscriptions as he could. Thus, Paul Speck suggested that Theodore received inscriptions twice while being in exile; those reaching him the second time could have been left without his refutation.⁴ Moreover, both the Iconoclasts and the Iconophiles of the second iconoclasm emphasized the continuity of their doctrines with the first period of the Controversy, and the inscription which could have marked the beginning of the struggle against images, would inevitably become the gem of Theodore’s collection and the best aim for his refutation of the Iconoclastic doctrine.

- 1 Ed. C. De Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. 1, Leipzig, 1883, pp. 404–405; ed. M.-F. Auzépy, *La vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre. Introduction, édition et traduction* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 3), Aldershot, 1997, pp. 100, 17–101, 10.
- 2 C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, Copenhagen, 1959, p. 124.
- 3 Ed. and trans. P. Speck, *Theodoros Studites. Jamben auf verschiedene Gegenstände* (*Supplementa byzantina*, 1), Berlin, 1968.
- 4 P. Speck, “The Iconoclastic Verses on the Chalke,” in: *Idem.*, *Understanding Byzantium: Studies in Byzantine Historical Sources*, ed. S. Takács, Brookfield, VT, 1999, n. 3, p. 18.

M.-F. Auzépy moved one step further, not only rejecting the hagiographical description of the destruction of the Chalke image⁵ and the testimonies of the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor as late fabrications by the Iconophiles of the time of Irene's reign made for the purposes of political propaganda, but altogether denying the event.⁶ Though the negative evidence is rather meager, it was accepted by the vast majority of scholars because it was not balanced by compelling positive evidence.⁷

Although the inscriptions refuted by Theodore the Studite were usually treated as a single corpus of approximately the same period and dated, accordingly, as a whole, to either the first or second Iconoclasm,⁸ the collection of the Iconoclastic iambic verses may well have consisted of epigrams from different time periods. The argument for the sophisticated structure of several epigrams with acrostics⁹ which points on philological grounds to the date of the collection some time during the Second Iconoclasm, does not hold up, for example, for two epigrams without acrostics, namely, the Chalke inscription and the last

5 9 August, *De ss. Martyrum Constantinopolitanorum*, AASS Augusti tomus secundus, ed. by J.-B. Sollerio, J. Pinio, G. Cupero, P. Baschio, Antwerp, 1735, p. 441.

6 "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalce par Leon III n'a jamais eu lieu, pour l'excellente raison que cette icône n'existait pas" (M.-F. Auzépy, "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalce par Léon III: propagande ou réalité?" *Byz*, 60 (1990), p. 491). The essence of the argument of M.-F. Auzépy was that no source prior to ca. 800 contains the description of the Chalke image of Christ or a trustworthy account of the event of the destruction of the image, associated with the outbreak of Iconoclasm under the Emperor Leo III. For that, she mainly used the argument *ex silentio* since the generally trustworthy *Short History* of Patriarch Nicephorus (from ca. 780) and the *Acts* of Nicaea II (787) do not mention the event.

7 L. Brubaker and J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: A History*, Cambridge-New York, 2011, p. 135.

8 For the attribution of the collection to early Iconoclasm, see S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, (CSCO, sub. 41), Louvain, 1973, pp. 113-126; W. Wolska-Connus, "De quibusdam Ignatius," *TM*, 4 (1970), pp. 355-256; A. Grabar dated the Chalke inscription to the early Iconoclasm (A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin. Le dossier archéologique*, n. p., 1984, repr. 1998, p. 188). For the attribution of the collection to the second Iconoclasm, see P. Speck, "Die ikonoklastischen Jamben an der Chalke," *Hellenika* 27 (1974), pp. 376-380; the same author comes to the conclusion that the collection may not be homogenous but all inscriptions belong to the second Iconoclasm (P. Speck, "Τα τηδε βατταρισματα πλανα. Überlegungen zur Aussendekoration der Chalke im achten Jahrhundert," in: *Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für Horst Hallensleben zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. B. Borkopp, B. Schellewald, and L. Theis, Amsterdam, 1995, pp. 210-220).

9 By John (possibly, the future Patriarch John the Grammarian), Ignatius (possibly, Ignatius the Deacon, the future repentant author of *Vita Tarasii* and *Vita Nicephori*), Sergius, and Stephan. See ed. C. Mango, *Correspondence of Ignatius the Deacon* (Dumbarton Oaks Texts, 11), Washington, D.C., 1997, pp. 5-6.

inscription in the collection, in which Emperors Leo and Constantine are also mentioned.¹⁰ Cited in many works on Iconoclasm, the Chalke inscription has not yet drawn much attention in regard to its theology, although almost every author who has referred to the inscription also has mentioned the obvious despising of matter reflected in the inscription.¹¹ The examination of textual parallels with the inscription, which may confirm the original dating to 725/726 as well as its theological doctrine which stood behind the open struggle against sacred representations, may show that in spite of the widely accepted opinion that there was an absence of elaborate Iconoclastic doctrine prior to the time of Constantine V (741-75),¹² the earliest stage of the conflict already had a clearly defined theological background.

In the following, I propose to revisit the Chalke inscription, re-examine its spatial, ideological and theological content, and suggest a reconstruction of the composition with the Cross which it accompanied. If we succeed in “acquitting” the Chalke inscription, returning it into the body of sources for the early Iconoclasm and showing its ideological and theological meaning, it will be an important step towards returning to the traditional view of the Iconoclastic controversy as primarily caused by ideological reasons.

This is the text of the inscription:

Ἄφωνον εἶδος καὶ πνοῆς ἐξηρμένον,	Since the Ruler does not bear Christ to be depicted
Χριστὸν γράφεσθαι μὴ φέρων ὁ δεσπότης	As a voiceless image bereft of breath, By earthly matter, trampled down by the Scriptures.
Ὑλῃ γεηρᾷ, ταῖς γραφαῖς πατουμένη, Λέων σὺν υἱῷ τῷ νέῳ Κωνσταντίνῳ	Leo with his son, the young Constantine Engraves the thrice-blessed representation of the

10 PG 99, col. 477A. This consideration was shared with me by Dr. Ihor Ševčenko in a conversation.

11 Grabar, *L'iconoclasme*, pp. 189-190; Ch. von Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ: Fondements théologiques*, Paris, 1986, p. 159.

12 The typical opinion was expressed by J. Meyendorff, “It was in the reign of Constantine V Copronymus (742-775), that the iconoclastic party was given a theology that contemporaries attributed to the Emperor himself, and which some modern authors consider a work of genius” (J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, Crestwood, NY, 1975, p. 180). Christoph von Schönborn held the same opinion, “Il est hors de doute que c'est Constantin V qui a hissé le débat sur les images sacrées au niveau explicitement christologique” (von Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ*, p. 170); see also Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: A History*, p. 101.

Σταυροῦ χαράττει τὸν τρισόλβιον τύπον,
Καύχημα πιστῶν ἐν πύλαις ἀνακτόρων¹³

Cross –
A boast of the faithful – on the
gates of the palace

In order to place the inscription back in the early Iconoclasm, it is necessary to find positive evidence – both textual and visual parallels, and convincing correspondences in terms of space, function, time, and contents, and establish a wider framework for the contested interpretations of the inscription, the image it accompanied, and the general issue of the origins of Iconoclasm. The argument will proceed in several steps: first, the semantic meaning of the entrance to the Imperial palace will be explored; the reconstruction of the composition which the inscription accompanied will be proposed, and then the theological meaning of the composition will be connected with the internal theological doctrine contained in the Chalke inscription, which will confirm the authenticity and early date of the inscription.

Imperial decrees and letters in Late Antiquity were often eternalized in the form of monumental inscriptions with the main points of the original document. The monumental inscription would carry ideological self-representation of the Imperial power and represent the Emperor's outreach and manifestation of the Emperor's power associated with a particular civic or ecclesiastical occasion. Already in the early Roman period, imperial documents were considered both legal and sacred, and, as such, were exhibited in the shrines of the imperial and/ or civic cults or on prominent civic buildings. After Justinian, monumental Imperial inscriptions manifested a shift in Imperial power towards granting considerable administrative power to ecclesiastical institutions. As a result, inscriptions with decrees on exclusively civic matters became very rare, while inscriptions with Imperial acts on ecclesiastical, and, more widely, religious issues continued into subsequent centuries. Heraclius' *Ekthesis Nea* and the decree of Constantine IV related to the decisions of the Third Council of Constantinople (680/681) at different times were displayed in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which suggests that the Emperor's decisions on theological controversies were posted in an epigraphic medium for authorization and proliferation.¹⁴

¹³ PG 99, col. 437C. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁴ I. Toth, "Consecrated to God, Written for the Salvation of His People: The Agency of Normative Epigraphy Across Space and Time," in: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016. Round Tables*, eds. B. Krsmanović and L. Milanović, Belgrade, 2016, pp. 911-913.

When normative texts received the form of monumental inscriptions, they gained additional power due to their capacity to last and perpetuate the actions they prescribe, to convey complex meaning through their verbal, symbolic and visual language, and to address various reading audiences; such inscriptions were recognized as legally binding. Moreover, some scholars associate the metric form of the dodekasyllabic verse of Byzantine inscriptions precisely with the desire of the authors to demonstrate “the sound dimension of speech”¹⁵ and thus, in the case of Imperial inscriptions, to objectify the voice of the Emperor in the official promulgation of legislation. Thus, it will make much more sense to look at the Chalce inscription not as a testimony of the personal Iconoclastic action of Emperor Leo III, but as a form of authorization for a certain legislative action. Even if we follow C. Mango and other scholars in taking the later hagiographical and Theophanes’ accounts on the destruction of the Chalke image out of the equation, the Chalce inscription in itself would very well fit the legal practices of Late Antiquity. If this was the case, what could be the legislation which it was supposed to promulgate?

We know that Leo III undertook a comprehensive system of social and institutional reforms in administration, the agrarian system, taxes, and law culminating in the *Ecloga* legal code of 726. It is likely that the edict of Leo III of 726, which we know as the edict against images, was a part of his reforms regulating religious practices, which he conceived as a prerogative of his not only political but also sacred office. Such a perception of the Emperor’s mission as a sacred leader of the people is reflected in the Preface to *Ecloga*,¹⁶ and continues the “priestly tradition” of the Byzantine Emperors which may be traced as far back as Constantine the Great.¹⁷

15 See V. Debiais, “In Kendall’s Footsteps. The Agency of Verse Inscriptions on Romanesque Doors,” in: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, p. 918. See also A. Papalexandrou, “Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium,” in: *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 161–187 and *Eadem.*, “Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 17.3 (2001), pp. 259–283.

16 Gero, *Leo III*, p. 51.

17 In claiming the “caesaropapist” attitude of the Iconoclastic Emperors many scholars overlooked the fact that Emperor Marcian was greeted at the Council of Chalcedon almost three hundred years before with almost exactly the same words, “Many years to the Emperor! Great is the faith of the Emperors! Many years to the guardians of faith! Many years to Orthodox Emperors, to the pious and Orthodox! To the pious Emperor, Emperor Archpriest!” (*Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 1, pt. 1, ed. E. Schwartz, Berlin–Leipzig, 1933, p. 138, 25–29). See G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: étude sur le césaropapisme byzantin*, Paris, 1996, pp. 141–154 and 169–189 (on Leo III), and C. Rapp, “Imperial Theology

The location of the inscription should be viewed both in spatial and semantic contexts. The façade of the Chalke Gate was a conspicuous place which must have been well visible and accessible from the main avenues of Constantinople.¹⁸ The gates to the Imperial palace also carried symbolic connotations. Although by Late Antiquity the city and palace gates had largely lost their defensive function, they acquired supplementary religious, juridical, and administrative significance. In Antiquity, the religious function of the gates, associated with their nature as a passage and a border between secluded and open, sacred and profane areas, could be expressed in the gate itself by employing special imagery providing protection for both the gate and the space where the gate led to.

With the advent of Christianity, the presence of crosses not only on the gates, but virtually on all buildings became more and more ubiquitous throughout Late Antiquity. Crosses were incorporated into the brick stonework of Thessalonica walls; niches with crosses protected the East Gate of Resafa. All passages were marked with crosses in relief at the Golden Gate of Constantinople. The lintel of the North-East Gate at Aphrodisias had a cross with alpha and omega engraved over the original building inscription possibly at the time when a renovation inscription was made in the mid fifth or late sixth century.¹⁹

The presence of the cross above the vestibule of the Imperial Palace could have been introduced by Emperor Constantine the Great himself, who, according to Eusebius, “displayed on a very high panel set before the entrance to the palace for the eyes of all to see, showing in the picture the Saviour’s sign placed above his head”²⁰ In the passage describing the decoration above the

in the Making; Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as a Bishop,” *JThS* 49 (1998), pp. 685–695. The notion of the king-priest has a basis in the Biblical figure of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18), see Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre*, pp. 184–190. On the edict of Leo III, see M. V. Anastos, “Leo III’s Edict Against the Images in the Year 726–727 and Italo-Byzantine Relations between 726 and 730,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 3 (1968), pp. 5–41.

18 On the excavations at the Chalke site, see N. Westbrook, “The Chalkê: The Bronze Gate of the Byzantine Great Palace,” in: *Cultural Crossroads: Proceedings of the 26th International SAHANZ Conference. The University of Auckland, 2–5 July 2009*; <https://www.academia.edu/24895804/The_Chalkê_The_Bronze_Gate_of_the_Byzantine_Great_Palace>, accessed on May 26, 2017.

19 This evidence is summarized from I. Jacobs, “Gates in Late Antiquity in the Eastern Mediterranean,” *BABESCH*, 84 (2009), pp. 204–205, 208.

20 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* III, 3, trans., intro., and comm. A. Cameron, and S. G. Hall, *Eusebius. Life of Constantine*, Oxford, 1999, p. 122. P. Magdalino, “The Other Image at the Palace Gate and the Visual Propaganda of Leo III,” in *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, ed. D. Sullivan, E. Fischer, and S. Papaioannou (Medieval Mediterranean, 92), Leiden–Boston, 2012, p. 143.

entrance to the Palace, Eusebius went on to mention that the composition of the Emperor with the “salutary symbol” above his head and the devil in the form of the dragon thrown into the abyss was the visual expression of the Scriptural verse from Isaiah 27:1.

Thus, the setting of the Chalke inscription together with the cross above the entrance to the Imperial Palace constituted a continuation of the standard practices of Late Antiquity, especially epitomized and preserved in the palace ensemble where the Emperor and the court tried to maintain continuity with the Imperial practices and rituals of Antiquity in the centuries of waning connection with Antiquity among the general population.²¹ Yet, is it possible to find any independent testimonies and parallels for establishing a more precise time of setting up the Chalke inscription?

The *Liber Pontificalis* describes an edifice built by Pope Zacharias (741–52) in front of the papal Lateran Palace:

He built from the ground up in front of the Lateran office a portico and a tower, where he installed bronze doors and railings, and in front of the doors he adorned it with a figure of the Saviour; making use of the stairs which went upwards to the top of that tower he constructed there a triclinium and bronze railings, and there he painted a representation of the world and decorated it with various verses.²²

The description is not very detailed and clear in some points, for example, it does not tell what the image of Christ was made of, nor where exactly it was situated. Yet, the building “in front of the offices” was obviously a self-represen-

21 “The Palace was, furthermore, the quintessential site where any intentional continuity of cultural practices would likely be maintained, as the imperial office derived its own authority from tradition” (N. Westbrook, “Architecture of Traces and Ascriptions: Interpreting the Vanished Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors in Constantinople,” *Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, 16.1 (2006), p. 53).

22 “Fecit autem a fundamentis ante scrinium Lateranensem porticum atque turrem ubi et portas ereas atque cancellos instituit et per figuram Salvatoris ante fores ornavit; et per ascendentes scalas in superioribus super eandem turrem triclinium et cancellos aereos construxit, ubi et orbis terrarum descriptione depinxit atque diversis versiculis ornavit” (ed. L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis; texte, introduction et commentaire*, vol. 1 (Bibliothèque des Ecoles françaises d’Athenes et de Rome), Paris, 1955, p. 432); trans. R. Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis). The Ancient Biographies of Nine Popes from AD 715 to AD 817*, 2nd ed. (Translated Texts for Historians, 13), Liverpool, 2007, p. 43. See also J. Haldon, and B. Ward-Perkins, “Evidence from Rome for the Image of Christ in the Chalke Gate in Constantinople,” *BMGS*, 23 (1999), p. 286, and Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History*, p. 178.

tational edifice and it was modelled on the Chalke vestibule in Constantinople,²³ which was a well-known monument in Italy.²⁴ Though the source does not mention that the Pope consciously did the imitation, it fit the general policy of the Papacy – half a century later Pope Leo III (795-816) was inspired by the Great Palace in Constantinople for his building program at Lateran.²⁵

One significant detail of Pope Zacharias' composition is that at the moment of the construction between 741 and 752 (the time of the pontificate of this Pope), the original in Constantinople was not in existence anymore, after the years of the Iconoclastic policy of Leo III (717-741) and Constantine V (741-775). Thus, in his replica of the Chalke, the Pope might have followed the earlier, "anthropomorphic" version of the ensemble which, by itself fits quite well the general papal policy for increasing independence and support of Iconodulia.²⁶ However, there is some evidence for the earlier dating.

Two textual parallels found among the early witnesses of Iconoclasm Patriarch Germanus and John of Damascus seem to corroborate the early dating of the inscription to the initial stages of the Controversy after Constantine V became the co-Emperor in 720 and prior to the resignation of Patriarch Germanus in 730. We will try to propose a new reading of the text which will allow us to draw such a connection.

In a passage from the letter to the Iconoclastic bishop Thomas of Claudiopolis by Patriarch Germanus, when Germanus mentioned a composition which

- 23 R. Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City, 312-1308*, Princeton, N.J., 1980, p. 121; B. Ward-Perkins, "Constantinople: A City and its Ideological Territory," in: *Towns and Their Territories Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. G.P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier, and N. Christie, Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 2000, pp. 331-333.
- 24 There exists a record that the entrance to the palace in Ravenna was also called "ad Calchi:" "in fronte regiae quae dicitur Ad Calchi istius civitatis, ubi prima porta palatia fuit ..." (Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, in: *MGH Scriptores rerum langobardicarum et italicarum*, ch. 94, p. 337). On Agnellus of Ravenna, see C. Nauwerth, *Agnellus von Ravenna, Untersuchungen zur archäologische Methode des ravennatischen Chronisten*, Munich, 1974; and D.M. Deluyannis, "Agnellus of Ravenna and Iconoclasm: Theology and Politics in a Ninth Century Historical Text," *Speculum*, 71.3 (1996), pp. 559-576.
- 25 Krautheimer, *Rome, Profile of a City*, p. 121; and *Idem*, "Die Decanneacubita in Konstantinopel: ein kleiner Beitrag zur Frage Rom und Byzanz," *Römische Quartalschrift*, suppl. 30 [= *Tortulae: Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten*], (1966), pp. 195-199, see also Haldon and Ward-Perkins, "Evidence from Rome," p. 287. On the Lateran Palace, see M. Luchterhandt, "Vom Haus des Bischofs zum Locus Sanctus: Der Lateranpalast im kulturellen Gedächtnis des römischen Mittelalters," in: *The Emperor's House. Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism*, eds. M. Featherstone, J.-M. Spieser, G. Tanman, and U. Wulf-Reidt (Urban Spaces, 4), Berlin, 2015, pp. 73-92.
- 26 See Haldon and Ward-Perkins, "Evidence from Rome," n. 5, p. 288.

was erected by “the most pious and Christ-loving Emperors.” Germanus describes this image as follows:

What does it mean then, that our in every respect most pious and Christ-loving Emperors, truly erected the stele of their own love for God, I mean the image raised before the Imperial palace, where they represented the forms of the apostles and the prophets and inscribed their words about the Lord, and have announced with boast their faith: the saving Cross.

Τί δέ, ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ τὰ πάντα εὐσεβέστατοι καὶ φιλόχριστοι ἡμῶν βασιλεῖς στήλῃν ἀληθῶς τῆς οἰκείας φιλοθεΐας, τὴν πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων λέγω εἰκόνα, ἐγείραντες, ἐν ᾗ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν ἀναθέμενοι τὰς ἰδέας καὶ τὰς τούτων περὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἐγγράψαντες φωνὰς τῆς ἑαυτῶν πεποιθήσεως τὸ καύχημα, τὸν σωτήριον σταυρόν, ἀνεκήρυξαν;²⁷

It seems striking that in describing the Iconoclastic Emperors Leo III and his son, Iconophile Patriarch Germanus uses positive epithets indicating their piety and Orthodoxy. In fact, these titles were the customary titles of Byzantine Emperors *ex officio*; these titles are applied to the same Emperors at the Council of Hiereia²⁸ and even if he disagreed with the Imperial policy, Germanus, as well as any other Byzantine officials, had to use these titles to acknowledge the divinely given power of the Emperors and their own loyalty to the State, which places the Letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis to the time when Germanus still held the official title of the Patriarch, that is, prior to 730.²⁹

27 *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 2, ed. E. Lamberz, Berlin and Boston, 2012, p. 474, 26-476, 2.

28 *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 3, ed. E. Lamberz, Berlin and Boston, 2016, p. 754, 30; cf. the epithet “New Constantine, the most-pious Emperor” as applied to Constantine V in the final acclamations of Hiereia (Ibid., p. 778, 17-18).

29 A fine example of an attempt to turn the theological argument into a political one with all which the dreadful consequences which the disloyalty toward reigning Emperors entails, can be seen in the *Nouthesia gerontos*, the disputation over images not long before the Iconoclastic Council of Hiereia. Cosmas, the Imperial inquirer says, “If this is a blasphemy, not only I but the Emperor and the Court are in error. The old man [the Iconophile monk] said: It seems to me that the Emperor does not think as you do, and I do not have anything to say about it” (B.M. Melioranskij, *Georgij Kiprianin i Ioann Ierusalimlyanin, dva maloizvestnykh bortsa za pravoslavie v VIII veke* [George of Cyprus and John of Jerusalem, two little known fighters for Orthodoxy in the eighth century], St. Petersburg, 1901, p. x). Similar arguments are abundant in the treatise: cf. Ibid., pp. XIII, XVIII, XXIV, XXV, XXVIII. The elderly monk “refutes with indignation his opponent’s attempts to catch him in disloyalty towards the reigning Emperors” (C. Zuckerman, “The Reign of Constantine V in the Miracles of St. Theodore the Recruit (BHG 1764),” *RÉB*, 46 (1988), n. 7, p. 193).

Four points draw our attention to the testimony of Patriarch Germanus. First, it seems that we have here the coincidence of place, for Germanus describes the monument at the entrance to the palace.³⁰ Second, there is a coincidence of time, since the authorship of the source shows that the monument was erected by the Emperors before Germanus left the Patriarchal see after 730. Third, it was the reigning Emperors, at that time, Leo III and young Constantine V, who erected the monument, and most important: the Cross occupies the central part of the monument. The hypothesis that the Cross at the entrance to the Imperial Palace mentioned by Germanus is the same Cross of the Chalke inscription is also confirmed by a textual parallel: Germanus' "τῆς ἑαυτῶν πεποιθήσεως τὸ καύχημα τὸν σωτήριον σταυρὸν," seems to be an allusion to the Chalke inscription: "Σταυροῦ χάραττει τὸν τρισόλβιον τύπον, καύχημα πιστῶν." The image of the Cross as a "boast" of the faithful was part of the Church tradition and was utilized as such in the inscription,³¹ Patriarch Germanus, however, used this simile while describing the real monument, which, according to our hypothesis, had an inscription with a close verbal parallel.

In this passage, Patriarch Germanus describes a real image that he saw with his own eyes. Is it possible, then, to attempt a reconstruction of the iconography of the monument on the basis of extant pre-Iconoclastic monuments using the evidence of, first, the Cross as the central part of the composition, and, second, of the "apostles and prophets," present together in the monument? This combination of clues may possibly point to the image of the Transfiguration which also includes the images of the Apostles, the Prophets and Christ (or the Cross).³² The composition could be similar to a scene in a mosaic of the Transfiguration in the apse of the basilica of S. Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna³³ with a large jeweled Cross in a blue, star-decorated sphere, representing

30 Germanus' "πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων" and "ἐν πύλαις ἀνακτόρων" from the Chalke inscription is echoed in "ὑπερθεῖν τῶν βασιλικῶν πυλῶν, ἐν οἷσπερ διὰ τὸν χαρακτῆρα ἡ ἀγία Χαλκή λέγεται" of the *Vita Stephani Iunioris* (ed. Auzépy, *La vie d'Etienne le Jeune*, p. 100, 19).

31 The image of the Cross as a "boast," certainly, goes back to Apostle Paul (Gal. 6: 14). This Paulinian quote, as can be judged by Theodore the Studite's *Antirrhethici*, was one of the standard "weapon-quotes" of the Iconoclasts in favor of the Cross over icons (see, for example, PG 99, col. 337B).

32 Cf. "Ἐκ σαρκὸς σου βολίδες θεότητος ἐξεπορεύοντο προφητῶν καὶ ἀποστόλων, ὅθεν οἱ πρόκριτοι μέλλοντες ἀνεβόων· Δόξα τῇ δυνάμει σου Κύριε" (John of Damascus, *Carmina in Transfigurationem Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, PG 96, col. 847B). This idea behind the identification of the Chalke iconography was suggested to me by Irina Kolbutova to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

33 On the monumental program of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, see E. Dinkler, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe*, Cologne, 1964; R.-L. Fox, "Art and the Beholder: The Apse Mosaic of S. Apollinare in Classe," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995), p. 249), C. Milner, "The Role of the Prophet Elijah in the Transfiguration Mosaics at Sinai and Classe," *Byzan-*

FIGURE 1 *Apse and triumphal arch of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, 533-549*

Christ transfigured. Three sheep on the ground below the sphere symbolize the Apostles. The “theophanic” dimension of the apse composition is reinforced by the “heavenly” theophany through anthropomorphic depiction of the bust of Christ in a medallion flanked by the animals of the Apocalypse among the clouds and twelve sheep-apostles in the triumphal arch framing the apse.

If we juxtapose the “non-anthropomorphic” Transfiguration of Sant'Apollinare with another sixth century image of the Transfiguration – that of St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai (Fig. 1-2),³⁴ where all the figures are represented in full size in human form, while the theophanic cross appears in the apex of the apse, we can pose a question: could it be that Leo III's “destruction” of the Chalke icon described by Theophanes was, in fact, the replacement of

tinische Forschungen 24 (1997), p. 216; A. Michael, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe: seine Deutung im Kontext der Liturgie*, Frankfurt am Main, 2005.

34 On the composition, see K. Weitzmann, “The Mosaic in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai,” in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 110.6 (1966), pp. 392-405; J. Miziołek, “*Transfiguratio Domini* in the Apse at Mount Sinai and the Symbolism of Light,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 53 (1990), pp. 42-60; J. Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse,” *Art History*, 17.1 (1994), pp. 81-102; A. Andreopoulos, “The Mosaic of Transfiguration in St. Catherine's Monastery of Mount Sinai: A Discussion of its Origins,” *Byz*, 72 (2002), pp. 9-41.

FIGURE 2 Apse mosaic of the Transfiguration from Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, c. 565

the anthropomorphic representation of Christ by the Transfiguration scene with the Cross?

Several arguments can be drawn in support of this hypothesis. First, the representations of Christ and the Cross in the Byzantine tradition were often interchangeable, particularly in the “theophanic” contexts.³⁵ One more example of a program featuring the scene of the Transfiguration and adoration of the Cross can be found in the church of Sts. Nereus and Achilleus in Rome. The triumphal arch carries the representation of the Transfiguration with kneeling apostles and full-figured representation of Christ flanked by Moses and Elias. The Christological meaning of the arch is reinforced by depicting a small scene of the Annunciation in the right corner, and the Virgin with the Child Christ on her lap accompanied by an angel, in the left corner of the arch. Although the original ninth century decoration of the apse did not survive the restoration by Cardinal Caesar Baronius in 1596-1598,³⁶ the drawing which was discovered by De Rossi shows that a jeweled cross on a mountain with an overhanging

35 See V.A. Baranov, “Instrument of Death and Tree of Life. Visual Meanings of the Cross in Some Late Antique and Byzantine Monumental Programs,” *Scr*, 11 (2015), pp. 22-48.

36 See A. Herz, “Cardinal Cesare Baronio's Restoration of ss. Nereo ed Achilleo and S. Cesareo de'Appia,” *The Art Bulletin*, 70.4 (1988), pp. 590-620.

FIGURE 3 *Transfiguration of Christ and adoration of the Cross in the church of Sts. Nereus and Achilleus, Rome, early 9th C. (after R. Krautheimer, S. Corbett, and W. Frankl, Corpus Basilicarum Christianarum Romae: The Early Christian Basilicas of Rome (IV-IX Cent.), vol. 3, Vatican City, 1967, fig. 130, p. 149).*

curtain used to be depicted in the middle of the apse; the cross was flanked by three sheep on each side.³⁷ The program of Sts. Nereus and Achilleus represents in a way the “inversion” of Sant’Apollinare’s program by depicting the “narrative” theophanies on the triumphal arch (Fig. 4) and the “heavenly” theophany – the adoration of Christ represented by the jeweled Cross – in the apse.

Second, judging by the early seals of Emperor Leo III, which bear the representation of the Virgin, at the initial stages of the Iconoclastic Controversy, Leo III could indeed have been focused on the prohibition of the anthropomorphic image of Christ, subsequently expanding the prohibition on the entire array of religious imagery.³⁸

37 W. Oakeshott, *Mosaics of Rome from the Third to the Fourteenth Centuries*, London, 1967, p. 383, and fig. 4.

38 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680-850: A History*, p. 103. G. Zacos, and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, vol. 1, Basel, 1972, nos. 23, 25, 27-33; see also <<https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/gods-regents-on-earth-a-thousand-years-of-byzantine-imperial-seals/rulers-of-byzantium/leo-iii-717-201320>>, accessed May 26, 2017. A curious testimony of this initial trend can be found in *Apology 1*, 19 of John of Damascus, where the author rebukes his adversaries in allowing for the representations of Christ and the Theotokos, but rejecting representations of saints (ed. B. Kotter, *Contra*

FIGURE 4 *Transfiguration of Christ. Mosaic in S. Zeno's Chapel in the church of Santa Prassede, Rome, early 9th C.*

We do not have surviving parallels to the image of the Transfiguration on the outer wall of a non-ecclesiastical building. All the pre-Iconoclastic monumental images of the Transfiguration that we have at Sinai, in S. Apollinare in Classe, and in Poreč on the Istrian coast of the present-day Croatia, of which only a fragment survived are associated with the Eastern part of an ecclesiastical building. Yet, one of the above compositions (in Poreč) is situated on the outer Eastern wall of the church, and all of them testify to the great variety of iconographic experiments and to the absence of a “standard” iconography of the Transfiguration, which appeared only in the post-Iconoclastic art: all of the scenes are isolated images and not a part of the feast. A characteristic example of the “fluid” iconography of Transfiguration is the mosaic in a lunette above the altar in S. Zeno's chapel in the church of Santa Prassede in Rome, decorated in the early ninth century, where the subject matter can be identified by the set of personages and an outline of the mandorla around Christ, Moses and Elias.³⁹ (Fig. 5).⁴⁰

imaginum calumniatores orationes tres, Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, 3 (PTS, 17), Berlin, 1975, pp. 94-95).

39 On the chapel of St. Zeno, see G. Mackie, “The Zeno Chapel – A Prayer for Salvation,” *Papers of The British School at Rome*, 57 (1989), pp. 172-199, and B. Brenk, “Zum Bildprogramm der Zenokapelle in Rom,” *Archivio Español de Arqueología*, 45-47 (1972-1974), pp. 213-221; on Transfiguration as a popular theophanic subject, see J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, “Théophanes-visions auxquelles participent les prophètes dans l'art byzantin après la restauration des images,” in: *Synthronon, art et archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen âge*, ed. A. Grabar (Bibliothèque des Cahiers archéologiques, 2), Paris, 1968, pp. 135-143.

40 G. Mackie, “The Zeno Chapel: A Prayer for Salvation,” *Papers of The British School at Rome*,

An indirect argument in support of this hypothesis can be drawn from the Iconography of the later restored image of Christ the Chalkites, the image which due to its fame began to be subsequently associated with the Imperial tradition⁴¹ and even occupied a prominent place on some Byzantine coins and seals.⁴² On this image the unusual full-size standing figure of Christ is represented with his right hand blessing. His position is identical to that in the scene of the Transfiguration with the exception that Christ the Chalkites may hold the book of the Gospels instead of a scroll. In another image of Christ the Chalkites, from the Monastery of Chora in Constantinople, the unusual position of Christ's left hand holding a fold of His garment indicates that the model for this fresco was likely to have held a scroll just like Christ in the Transfiguration image (Fig. 5).

We can only speculate on the way the figure of the standing Christ from the scene of the Transfiguration might have become extracted from the original composition. First of all there was a time span of some sixty years or three generations between the beginning of Iconoclasm by Leo III and the restoration of icons by Irene, which made it objectively difficult to restore the original composition the way it used to be. Secondly, probably Irene and certainly Theodora might have tried to combine the co-existing images of the Cross and of Christ in the same composition when they attempted to re-erect the original composition,⁴³ thus there appeared a confusing duplication in the iconographic scheme (for, according to our hypothesis, initially, the Cross had been installed *instead* of the image of Christ), and thus the original iconography of the monument was ultimately distorted and, consequently, forgotten after the Restoration of Icons in 843.⁴⁴

57 (1989), p. 181; see also J. Elsner, "Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium," *Art History*, 11.4 (1988), pp. 474-475.

41 See G.P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Washington, D.C., 1984, pp. 210-212.

42 P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982, pp. 241-242, 253, 332, No. 1150, 1151; N.R. Pitamber, *Replacing Byzantium: Laskarid Urban Environments and the Landscape of Loss (1204-1261)*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015, p. 189-201. For the iconography of Christ Chalkites, see: Mango, *Brazen House*, pp. 135-142, figs. 17-19, 21-23, pp. 132-139, with references.

43 PG 108, col. 1029B; *Theophanes Continuatus* I, 9, Bonn, p. 18, 21; see Grabar, *L'iconoclasme*, p. 187.

44 P. Speck, "Τὰ τῆδε βατταρίσματα πλάνα. Überlegungen zur Außendekoration der Chalke im achten Jahrhundert," in *Studien zur byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte. Festschrift für Horst Hallensleben zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. B. Borkopp, B. Schellewald, and L. Theis, Amsterdam, 1995, p. 218.

FIGURE 5

Christ the Chalkites, the Deisis mosaic, the Monastery of Chora in Constantinople, early 14th C.

But why exactly the Transfiguration? In many theophanic contexts, the Cross acted as the image of Christ in His heavenly glorious state. It can be suggested that the Transfiguration with the Cross above the Chalke Gates might have been intended by the Iconoclasts as a representation of Christ in His Resurrected and Parousiac immaterial state, the first fruits of which were revealed at the Transfiguration.

In representing the Resurrection theme, the Early Christian art relied on the juxtaposition of the Gospels narratives with the predominant images of the Sepulchre with the sleeping soldiers or the Myrophores until the introduction of the Anastasis, the Descent of Christ into Hell, in the second half of the eighth century, which was to become the standard iconographic expression of the Resurrection.⁴⁵ The main problem with earlier iconographies was that

45 E. Kitzinger, "Reflections on the Feast Cycle in Byzantine art," *Cahiers archéologiques: fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen Age*, 36 (1988), pp. 63-65.

these scenes implied a narrative cycle, and Christ was absent in most of them or appeared in the scenes which implied problems with recognizing him (the Apparition of Christ to the Holy Women, or “Chairete”). Moreover, these scenes focused on historical, narrative Gospel testimonies of the Resurrection⁴⁶ and were not suited for the individual scenes of Christ’s mystical Resurrection, which was meant to be depicted above Chalke. For this purpose the Transfiguration with the theophanic Cross was the best choice, and must have been easily recognized on the basis of a rich exegetical tradition, connecting Transfiguration with Resurrection,⁴⁷ which also influenced the emergence of the iconography of the Resurrection.⁴⁸ An iconographic example of the Transfiguration as a substitute of the Resurrection is the scene on the Brescia ivory casket where the Transfiguration takes the place of the Resurrection in the visual narrative of the casket.⁴⁹

Written evidence of the Transfiguration also comes from the apocryphal treatises from the second century, such as the *Acts of John*, where not only luminosity but also the polymorphic nature of Christ Transfigured is emphasized.⁵⁰ In fact, the Iconoclasts were accused of building their theological doctrine on the basis of the *Acts of John* and other apocryphal treatises at the Fifth Session of the Council of Nicaea II. Although the former Iconoclasts at Nicaea II claimed⁵¹ that they had not read the entire *Acts* but were deceived at the Council of Hiereia by “loose sheets” with the story of Licomedes which told how the Apostle John reproached his disciple for secretly making his portrait and revering it, it is quite likely that those who stood behind the distribution of

46 Anna Kartsonis aptly points out concerning pre-eighth century images of the Resurrection that despite existing images signifying the Resurrection such as the Tomb of Christ or the Myrophores, “the absence of a literal image of the Resurrection must have been conspicuous in the fifth and the sixth centuries when there was an interest in christological cycles with a historical bent. Evidence of such interest in the dynamics of the Resurrection comes from the response to this iconographic vacuum. Efforts to fill it produced a series of variations on the theme of the tomb of Christ” (A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image*. Princeton, N.J., 1986, p. 21). “In all of these pictorial expressions artists chose to remain consistently and conspicuously on the periphery of their subject matter, since Christ, its protagonist, is glaringly absent from all of them” (Ibid., p. 27).

47 A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood, N.Y., 2005, pp. 60-65.

48 Ibid., pp. 161-167.

49 Ibid., pp. 106-108.

50 See J.-D. Kaestli, “Le mystère de la croix de lumière et le johannisme. Actes de Jean 94-102,” *Foi et vie* 86 = *Cahier biblique*, 26 (1987), pp. 35-46.

51 *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 556, 15-27.

the Licomedes story at Hiereia, most likely, the “Emperor’s party,”⁵² knew the entire *Acts* and were inspired by its doctrines. Thus, by quoting two more passages from the *Acts of John* on the immateriality of Christ’s body and His theophany in the form of the cross of light,⁵³ the Iconophiles at Nicaea probably aimed both at discrediting the *Acts* and similar Iconoclastic doctrines.⁵⁴ But can we find the evidence of such a doctrine in our inscription?

At first sight, the Chalke inscription seems to convey a simple meaning: the Emperor replaced the image of Christ executed in material media (for example, in mosaic form) by the image of the engraved Cross – the sign of the Christian faith, so much beloved by the Byzantine Emperors since the time of the vision of the Cross and historical victory by Constantine the Great.⁵⁵ In his refutation of the Iconoclastic poems, Theodore the Studite associated the attitude towards matter contained in the inscription with that of the Manichees who disregarded matter in a similar way.⁵⁶ Patriarch Methodius in his epigram on the image of Christ on Chalke restored by Empress Theodora (843-847) reit-

- 52 On certain inconsistencies between the doctrines of Constantine V and the Council of Hiereia, see S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (CSCO, sub. 52), Louvain, 1977, pp. 40, 96, 100, and V.A. Baranov, “Angels in the Guise of Saints”: A Syrian Tradition in Constantinople,” *Scr*, 12 (2016), p. 17.
- 53 *Acts of John*, 27-28 = *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 2, pp. 548, 10-550, 3 (the story about Licomedes); *Acts of John*, 93-95 = *Ibid.*, 550, 5-552, 6 (immateriality of Christ’s body), and *Acts of John*, 97-98 = *Ibid.*, 552, 6-552, 23 (the cross of light). On the use of the *Acts of John* at Hiereia and Nicaea II, see É. Junod, and J.-D. Kaestli, *L’histoire des Actes apocryphes des apôtres du IIIe au IXe siècle : le cas des Actes de Jean* (Cahiers de la Revue de théologie et de philosophie, 7), Genève–Lausanne–Neuchâtel, 1982, pp. 119-126.
- 54 Cf., for example, an anathema at the Council of Hiereia, “If anyone does not confess our Lord Jesus Christ with the assumption of his flesh animated by reasonable and intellectual soul, to sit together with God and Father, and to come again to judge the living and the dead with his paternal glory, though neither flesh, nor without body, of the God-like body by the reasons which he knows himself, so that he may be seen by those who stabbed him remaining God without coarseness, anathema!” (*Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 3, p. 758, 24-760, 2).
- 55 P. Speck, “Byzantium: Cultural Suicide?” in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive? Papers from the Thirtieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies. Birmingham, March 1996*, ed. L. Brubaker (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, Publications, 5), Aldershot, 1998, p. 78.
- 56 “How then, does he not bear to see in the image of Christ who is similar to all men in everything sharing likewise in flesh and blood, as is written, that which is appropriate for every image of a man, if not because he disbelieves what is written and wants to invent for himself a fleshless and bloodless Christ thinking in the manner of the Manichees?” (*PG* 99, col. 461C).

erated the same charge.⁵⁷ However, the doctrine appears to be more complex if we take a closer look at the text.

The inscription starts with the phrase “bereft of breath, “πνοῆς ἐξηρμένον.” The question is: what if it is not simply an epithet but a precise theological formulation of the Iconoclastic objection against artificial images of Christ? In order to decipher the theological meaning of “breath” in the inscription, we should turn to the passage from the Book of Genesis on the creation of man: “and God shaped man, ash from the earth, and breathed in his face the breath (πνοήν) of life, and man became a living soul (ψυχὴν ζώσαν)” (Gen. 2: 7). In the light of the important mediatory function of Christ’s soul in the Christological union according to the Iconoclasts,⁵⁸ the meaning of the parallel becomes clear. Since the icon of Christ for obvious reasons does not represent the soul of Christ, Christ’s representation on the icon according to the Iconoclasts would merely be an invention of the artist with no access to the divinity and with no relation to the true person of Christ simply because it lacks the soul which alone has a mediatory function with the divinity of the Word.⁵⁹

57 “Yet the disciples of Manes’ teachings who chatter foolishly in their imaginings to the point of saying ignominiously that the Incarnation ... was but a phantom” (quoted in Mango, *Brazen House*, p. 126-127).

58 See V.A. Baranov, and B. Lourie, “The Role of Christ’s Soul-Mediator in the Iconoclastic Christology,” in: *Origeniana Nona. Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time*, eds. Gy. Heidl, and R. Somos (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 228), Leuven, 2009, pp. 403-411, and 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. Origen as Writer*, eds. S. Kaczmarek and H. Pietras (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 244), Leuven, 2011, pp. 919-932.

59 In Eusebius’ refutation of *De cultu simulacrorum* of Porphyry, there is a passage on the image of God in man which might have inspired the author of the inscription, “Insofar as God is intellect, how can one make His image, what resemblance may have the human body with the intellect of God? I think it is not the same with the intellect of man. For this one is incorporeal, not composite, without parts, whereas the work of ignoble men imitates the nature of mortal bodies and represents in dead and soulless matter the deaf and mute image of living flesh (ἐπεὶ ὁ μὲν ἀσώματος καὶ ἀσύνθετος καὶ ἀμερῆς, τὸ δὲ βαναύσων ἀνδρῶν ἔργον θνητοῦ σώματος φύσιν ἀπομεμίμηται καὶ ζώσης σαρκὸς ἀψύχῳ καὶ νεκρᾷ ὕλῃ κωφὴν καὶ ἀναυδὸν εἰκόνα καταγράφεται). For the soul is reasonable and immortal and passionless intellect in the nature of man which, as it seems to me, is called the image and likeness preserved from God, insofar as it is associated with the immaterial and incorporeal, intellectual and reasonable nature, susceptible of virtue and wisdom” (Eusebius of Caesaria, *Praeparatio euangelica* III, 10, 14, 6-16, 5, ed. E. des Places, *Eusèbe de Césarée. La préparation évangélique* (SC, 228), Paris, 1976, pp. 204-206). See also von Schönborn, *L’icône du Christ*, p. 72. Cf. sixteenth anathema of the *Horos* of Hieria: “Εἴ τις τὰς τῶν

Our reconstruction is confirmed by a principal point of the epigram, the expression, “ταῖς γραφαῖς πατουμένη,” that was translated as “trampled down by the Scriptures” here. This phrase, where the verbal translation is very important, was not translated faithfully by the majority of scholars: Cyril Mango’s translation is “which the Scriptures reject,”⁶⁰ Stephen Gero translates it as “condemned by Scriptures,”⁶¹ and Christoph von Schönborn as “méprisée dans les Ecritures.”⁶² Marie-France Auzépy also renders her translation with an interpretation: “rejetée (mot à mot, piétinée) par les Ecritures.”⁶³

However, not only does πατέω not mean either “condemn,” “despise,” or “reject,” but also matter is nowhere explicitly condemned, despised, or rejected in the Scriptures. This contradiction can, however, be solved by comparing this text with the Easter Troparion of the Byzantine Church:

Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

Χριστός ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν, θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας καὶ τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι
ζωὴν χαρισάμενος.

In fact, the two texts have a parallel structure centered on the same verb “πατέω, to trample down”: Christ trampled down death by death, and earthly matter is trampled down by the Scriptures. Thus, if the author of the epigram when he composed this verse had in mind the Easter Troparion,⁶⁴ or the litur-

ἀπάντων ἁγίων ιδέας ἐν εἰκόσιν ἀψύχοις καὶ ἀναύδοις ἐξ ὕλικῶν χρωμάτων ἀναστυλοῦν ἐπιτηδεύει ...” (*Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* II, vol. 3, pt. 3, p. 770, 8-9).

60 Mango, *Brazen House*, p. 123.

61 Gero, *Leo III*, p. 114.

62 Von Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ*, p. 159.

63 M.-F. Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalcé,” p. 450. Cf. L. Moorhead: “condemned by the Scriptures” (J. Moorhead, “Iconoclasm, the Cross and the Imperial Image,” *Byz*, 55 (1985), p. 166; A. Grabar: “... l’Écriture de son côté s’oppose à la figuration de Christ par sa (seule) nature humaine ...” (Grabar, *L’iconoclasme*, p. 186); T. Towers, probably adopting the translation of Grabar: “... and Scripture is opposed to a representation of Christ in One Nature ...” (T. Towers, “The Antiphonetic Icon – Footnote to the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *Downside Review*, 93/310 (1975), p. 23); cf. “... die die (heiligen) Schriften verachten” (C. Hecht, “Das Christusbild am Bronzetur. Zum Bilderstreit als theologischem Phänomen,” in: *Streit um Bilder von Byzanz bis Duchamp*, ed. K. Möseneder, Berlin, 1997, p. 8).

64 The usage of the Easter Troparion is attested to in the pre-Iconoclastic liturgy in the Vespers of Great Saturday (M. Tarnichsvili, *Le grand lectionnaire de l’Église de Jérusalem (ve-viii siècle)*, vol. 1, (CSCO, 189), Louvain, 1959, p. 113).

gical hymn “O, Only-begotten Son” ascribed to Justinian, which also bears the same expression “trampled down death by death,” we can propose as a probable interpretation that the epigram has a double meaning, containing a clearly defined Christological doctrine: “earthly matter” which is death for the incarnate soul, is “trampled down” by the Scriptures, representing the Incarnation of Christ which itself is considered as his death, the *kenosis*. According to the sense of the epigram, it is not allowed to depict Christ by means of earthly matter because His earthly and bodily existence was “trampled down,” that is, abolished by His death and Resurrection, which is the summit of the Scriptural message. Moreover, there is the correspondence between “γράφεσθαι, described, depicted” and “ταῖς γραφαῖς, the Scripture.” According to the epigram, it is not permitted to describe Christ by earthly matter because his circumscribed material and corporeal existence has been “trampled down,” that is, abolished by His death and resurrection.⁶⁵

We may find another interesting feature in the second part of the Chalke inscription. Besides the Chalke inscription, the relatively rare adjective, “thrice-blessed” (τρισόλβιος) as applied to the Cross can be found in two pseudo-Chrysostomian homilies on the Cross,⁶⁶ in one of the *Homilies*, the “trice-blessed Cross” clearly serves as a manifestation of Christ who, in turn, manifests the invisible Father.⁶⁷

In the sixteenth chapter of the first *Apologetic Treatise Against Those Who Calumniate the Divine Images*, John of Damascus presents his concept of honourable matter.⁶⁸ When he poses the seemingly rhetorical question, “Is not matter the thrice-blessed and thrice-praiseworthy wood of the Cross? (Ἡ οὐχ ὕλη τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ξύλον τὸ τρισόλβιον καὶ τρισμακάριστον;)”⁶⁹ he seems to refer directly, or at least not to ignore, the “thrice-blessed representation of the Cross (σταυροῦ χαραττεῖ τὸν τρισόλβιον τύπον)” in the Chalke inscription. Al-

65 This doctrine also appears in the *florilegium* of the Iconoclastic Council of Saint Sophia which contains the following excerpt from the *Homily on the Lazarus* by Asterius of Amasea, “Do not depict Christ – for one humiliation of Incarnation which he received voluntarily for our sake, is enough for him, but carry the incorporeal Word in your soul holding Him in an intelligible manner!” (Patriarch Nicephorus, *Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815*, ed. J.M. Featherstone (CCSG, 33), Turnhout and Leuven, 1997, p. 148, 4-149, 9). See also P. Speck, “Asterios von Amaseia auf den Konzilen von 754 und 787,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen*, 45 (2003), pp. 361-372.

66 *De adoratione pretiosae crucis*, PG 52, cols. 835-840; *In adoratione venerandae crucis*, PG 62, cols. 747-754.

67 PG 62, col. 747, 9-17.

68 *Apology I*, 16, 18, ed. B. Kotter, p. 90 = *Apology II*, 14, 21, ed. Kotter, pp. 105-106.

69 *Apology I*, 16, 17-18, ed. Kotter, p. 90.

though John of Damascus was aware of the latter pseudo-Chrysostomian *Homily* and used it in his compendium *Expositio fidei* in the chapter on the Cross,⁷⁰ the use of the adjective in the *Apology* seems more likely to refer to the inscription. This rhetorical question starts the long list of honourable material objects presided by the most exalted one – the Cross. The whole contents of the “hymn of matter” which follows this reference, corroborates our hypothesis: the Chalke inscription with its disdain of “earthly matter” and its glorification of the “thrice-blessed *typos* of the Cross” might have triggered John’s refutation of the Iconoclastic attitude to matter expressed in the inscription.⁷¹

All the parallels presented, both textual and visual reveal the context of the Chalke inscription. This inscription very well fits the legal setting of introducing reform in ecclesiastical reforms by the Emperor Leo III, which inaugurated the Iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium in 726 both in procedural and spatial terms. Its place above the entrance to the Imperial palace and the inclusion of the cross into the context of the inscription continues the traditions of Late Antiquity. The Chalke inscription does not simply testify to Leo III’s substitution of Christ’s image for the Cross; it constitutes, in a certain sense, a condensed “manifesto” of both the Iconoclasts’ policies and beliefs concerning religious imagery. Almost every term employed in the inscription has particularly great weight and is especially significant when compared with contemporary writings and monuments, which help us to reveal its precise connotation.

By the beginning of the Iconoclastic Controversy, the Transfiguration had been an “open” event represented through a variety of iconographic schemes including the non-anthropomorphic representation of Christ as the Cross, and possessing a variety of exegetical meanings. Not only Christ’s Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the Second Glorious Coming were “packed” into the Transfiguration,⁷² but also such meanings as putting away flesh and “leather

70 PG 62, col. 749, 9-16 = Ed. B. Kotter, *Expositio fidei*, Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos, 2 (PTS, 12), Berlin and New York, 1973, p. 188, 44-48.

71 As far as the contacts between Constantinople and Palestine around the beginning of the Iconoclastic Controversy are concerned, at least one visit by a monk of Mar Saba, St. Stephen, to Constantinople during the reign of Leo III and before the deposition of Patriarch St. Germanus, is attested to by the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople as well (January 14; *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitae*, ed. H. Delehay, Brussels, 1902, cols. 392, 1-393, 1). On the correspondence of the doctrines, refuted by John of Damascus in his *Apologies*, with the Iconoclastic doctrines, attested in the later sources, see V.A. Baranov, “Theology of Early Iconoclasm as Seen in the *Apologies in Defence of Images* by St. John of Damascus,” *Khristianskij Vostok*, 4 (10) (2002), pp. 23-55.

72 See, for example, Anastasius of Sinai, *Sermo de transfiguratione*, ed. A. Guillou, “Le monastère de la Théotokos au Sinaï. Origines; épîclèse; mosaïque de la Transfiguration

garments” and becoming clothed in garments of light,⁷³ casting away the senses and entering the height of intellectual contemplation, true knowledge, and mystical vision⁷⁴ – all notions upon which the Iconoclastic epistemology was built.⁷⁵

The composition of the Transfiguration/Resurrection, which the inscription accompanied according to our reconstruction, perfectly corresponds to the theological meaning of the inscription, and to the Iconoclastic doctrine of the immaterial Christ in His eternal glorious and luminous form, represented by the Cross, which we know from later Iconoclastic writings. The Chalke inscription bears witness to early Iconoclasm as a theological movement using a particular system of non-anthropomorphic images based upon a sophisticated theology and a clearly defined doctrine of the image of the Cross – the representation of Christ in His Resurrected state.

Homélie inédite d'Anastase le Sinaïte sur la Transfiguration (étude critique),” *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome*, 67 (1955), p. 238, 7-10; 239, 18.

73 Ibid., p. 239, 12-13.

74 Andrew of Crete, *Homilia in transfigurationem domini*, PG 97, cols. 941C, 945C, 949CD.

75 See. V.A. Baranov, “Origen and the Iconoclastic Controversy,” in: *Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition*, ed. L. Perrone (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 164), vol. 2, Leuven, 2003, pp. 1043-1052.