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A Dark-Age crisis: aspects of the Iconoclastic controversy

L I K E the religious reform of the Pharaoh Akhnaton (Amenhotep IV, 1385–1358 B.C.), to which it has been likened, the Iconoclast controversy in the eighth-century Byzantine empire has long tantalized the historian: for he seems to be confronted with a rare phenomenon – with a sudden break in the even flow of a society with a reputation for unswerving traditionalism.[1] This view of the Iconoclast controversy dates back to the attitude of the Iconodules in the Council of Nicaea of 787 and the triumph of Orthodoxy of 843.[2] On these occasions it was stated that the icons had been preserved in the church since the days of the Apostles, and so that their removal, between 730 and 787, had been an abrupt hiatus in the continuum of the Christian religion. Iconodule historians were quick to present the Iconoclast movement as a thoroughly un-Byzantine interlude. The Emperors Leo III and Constantine V and their advisers were said to have acted under the influence of persons and of ideas alien to the core of Byzantine civilization.[3] Modern research has removed the more spectacular examples of non-Byzantine scapegoats. Renegade Muslims and Jewish sorcerers have been definitively ousted: in the period between 726 and 730, Leo III took his decisions through the advice of sober provincial bishops, in a thoroughly Byzantine attempt to placate God, Whose anger with the Christian people had been shown by Arab invasions and by volcanic eruptions.[4] Careful study of Byzantine-Arab relations in the eighth century[5]; a re-examination of the Muslim attitude to images in the same

1 By Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, ii, 2 (1953), 414

2 See the masterly study of J. Gouillard, 'Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire', *Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation byzantines*, ii (1967), 1–316.

3. P.J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople. Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (1958), pp. 6–22 discusses the evidence customarily advanced for such views.

4. G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (trans. J. M. Hussey, 1968), pp. 160 ff.

5. A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin. Dossier archéologique* (1957), pp. 101–10 and P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (1971), pp. 31–33.

century[1]; re-assessment of the position of the Jews in the Byzantine empire[2] – these converging studies have led to the greatest caution in invoking the influence of any non-Christian culture in the genesis of the Iconoclast movement. A consideration of the attitude of the early church to images[3] and the discovery of an Iconoclast movement in the totally Christian environment of seventh-century Armenia[4] have led almost all scholars to regard Iconoclasm as endogenic: it was a crisis within Byzantine Christianity itself.

Nevertheless, the perspective of the triumph of Orthodoxy lingers tenaciously in its central tenet. Iconoclasm is still treated in most accounts as representing the momentary emergence of elements in Byzantine culture that were, if not totally alien, at least provincial or non-Hellenic, and the triumph of Orthodoxy is presented as the assertion of the mainstream of the Byzantine tradition over a deviant tributary. Somewhat nostalgically, the re-instatement of the icons is hailed as a victory of the representational traditions of Greece over the non-representational piety of the oriental provinces of the empire.[5] Two recent interpretations have been taken to support this impression. In the first place, Ostrogorsky was able to isolate a strong Monophysite streak in the iconoclastic theology of Constantine V. This discovery has been held sufficient, in itself, to lay the Iconoclast movement under the *praeiudicium* of having originated among an oriental population that was either hostile or indifferent to the Chalcedonian synthesis of the divine and the human in Christ and, consequently, to the showing of Christ in human form.[6] In the second place, it is assumed that the social changes of the late seventh and eighth centuries shifted the centre of gravity of the Byzantine state towards the oriental populations of the countryside of Anatolia, at the expense of the traditional urban culture of the Aegean. These changes were sharpened by the military reforms of the same time. It has been assumed that the armies of the newly-instituted Themes were recruited locally; and, so, in supporting the Iconoclast emperors

1. K. A. C. Cresswell, 'The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam', *Ars Islamica*, xi–xii (1946), 159–66 and U. Monneret de Villard, *Introduzione allo Studio dell' Archeologia islamica* (1966), pp. 249–75.

2. A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry. From Julian to the Fourth Crusade* (1971), pp. 61–81.

3. N. H. Baynes, 'Idolatry and the Early Church', *Byzantine Studies and other Essays* (1960), pp. 116–43 and 'The Icons before Iconoclasm', *Harvard Theological Review*, xliv (1951), 93–106 in *Byzantine Studies*, pp. 226–39.

4. S. Der Nersessian, 'Une Apologie des Images au septième siècle', *Byzantion*, xvii (1945), 58–87 and P. J. Alexander, 'An Ascetic Sect of Iconoclasts in Seventh Century Armenia', *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Matthias Friend, Jr.* (1955), pp. 151–150.

5. Karl Schwarzlose, *Der Bilderstreit. Ein Kampf der griechischen Kirche um ihre Eigenart und um ihre Freiheit* (1890). Note the subtitle.

6. G. Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (1929: photographic reprint 1964), pp. 5, 25–28, 40. This thesis is examined with further elaborations by Alexander, *ubi supra*, pp. 44 ff. Baynes (*Byzantine Studies*. p. 136) was unconvinced: 'there is little if anything to be said for the view and there is no need for us to accept their contention.'

who had originated from the same provinces, the eastern armies are held to have been expressing the sullen hostility of a whole provincial culture towards the alien, Iconodule piety of its capital.[1]

Altogether, the Iconoclast controversy is in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation. It is necessary to raise some *prima facie* objections to the views just stated, if only to free the subject for further investigation along different lines. First: the Christological background of Iconoclasm is far from certain. The *Queries* of Constantine V were alarmingly intelligent[2]; but, on the whole, the discussion of the Christological issues involved in the worship or rejection of icons was remarkably desultory throughout the eighth century. Far away, across the Arab frontier, John of Damascus had seen and stated clearly the Christological background to the controversy. But John's *On Images* was written at a safe distance from the world, in the *wadis* of the convent of Saint Sabas. There is little evidence that the Byzantine clergy knew of it at the Council of Nicaea in 787. The proceedings at Nicaea show none of that certainty of touch, the smooth mobilization of *catenae* of authorities, with which Byzantine prelates had resolved those Christological controversies to which they had become only too well accustomed.[3] As we read about it in eighth-century sources, there is nothing *déjà vu* about Iconoclasm.

Second: in the early eighth-century Byzantine empire, how far east is 'east'? The Iconoclast bishops came from Phrygia. In the sixth century, Phrygia had been thought of as 'a province that naturally loved culture and had a great taste for the study of letters'.[4] Professor Louis Robert has this to say of the countryside around Nacoleia, the see of a leading Iconoclast bishop: 'C'est une épigraphie de la campagne, et elle est grecque autant qu'abondante ... Les dédicaces si nombreuses et intéressantes et les épitaphes n' ont pas été redigées pour une mince couche de citoyens riches des villes, mais, du haut en bas, pour les paysans, aisés ou pauvres, des villages et des hameaux'[5] Thus the idea that Asia Minor was a vast, undifferentiated backlands and a seed-bed of 'oriental' religiosity[6] is contradicted by most of what we know of the immediate Late Roman past of those provinces in which the leading Iconoclast bishops had their sees.

Third: most current explanations of the Iconoclast controversy implicitly ignore the role of Constantinople as the hub of the eighth

1. H. Ahrweiler, 'L'Asie Mineure et les invasions arabes', *Revue historique*, ccxxvii (1962), 1–32 at p. 23, and *Byzance et la Mer* (1966), pp. 40–41; Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme*, pp. 34–36.

2. Ostrogorsky, *Studien*, p. 226 and Alexander, *ubi supra*, pp. 47–49: 'an act of genius' (p. 48).

3. P. Van den Ven, 'La patristique et l'hagiographie du Concile de Nicée de 787', *Byzantion*, xxv–xxvii (1955–7), 325–62 at pp. 332–8.

4. Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii*, c. 1 (Teubner, 1895), p. 58.

5. L. Robert, *Hellenica*, xiii (1965), 54.

6. As Schwarzlose, *ubi supra*, pp. 44 ff.

century Byzantine world. Whatever his eastern origins, the career of
Leo before he became emperor radiated from Constantinople; wherever their sees may have lain, the Iconoclast bishops probably got
all their culture at Constantinople, conducted most of their business
at Constantinople,[1] and regarded their duties as local bishops as
taking them from Constantinople 'into the country'.[2] The whole
unforgettable 'style' of Constantine V – the tone of an Ivan the
Terrible à la Eisenstein – is inconceivable against any other backdrop
than the crowded Hippodrome of the capital.[3]

Fourth: it has now been shown conclusively that the role of the
Byzantine Theme armies in the Iconoclast controversy was far from
simple. Their behaviour in the eighth century was not determined by
any sense of local loyalties among the troops; least of all did the
eastern Themes consistently support the Iconoclast party.[4]

Generally, the study of the Iconoclast controversy has tended to
become a study of the origin of Iconoclast ideas, and this study has,
in turn, been incapsulated in a search for a local, provincial setting
for such ideas. As a result, attempts to assess the significance of the
Iconoclast controversy show a strange mixture of the melodramatic
and the parochial. Melodramatic, for it is neither certain that the
victory of the Iconoclasts would have led to the triumph of a non-representational art in the Eastern empire, nor that their momentary
success was a victory of the Eastern over the European provinces
of the empire. The heady alternative *Orient oder Rom?* was not for a
moment at stake in the course of the eighth century.[5] Parochial, because it is assumed that the crisis, seen in the terms just outlined,
concerned only the Byzantine empire. As a result, the Carolingian
contribution to this debate – the *Libri Carolini* – is treated as an ill-tempered and irrelevant intervention.[6] It is one of the secondary aims
of this paper to show that the other great Christian state, the Frankish
empire, had also been challenged to take up an attitude to its own
religious traditions in a way that synchronized with the Iconoclast
movement in Byzantium. For the alternative between East and West
within the Byzantine empire was trivial compared with the burning
problem shared by all Christian states in the eighth century – how to
adjust to the crevasse that had opened between their rich Late Antique

1. [J. D.] Mansi, [*Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 1759 ff.], xiii. 33CD
(the bishop of Myrai); 108D (Thomas, Iconoclast bishop of Claudiopolis); 430CD and
434CD (canons 10 and 15 of Nicaea).   2. Mansi, xii. 115E.

3. E.g. *Vita Stephani Iunioris*, P[atrologia] G[raeca,] c. 1136B.

4. W. Kaegi, 'The Byzantine Armies and Iconoclasm', *Byzantinoslavica*, xxvii (1966),
48–70.

5. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme* p. 107 exaggerates: 'Les iconodules sont dans la
ligne du christianisme "humaniste", infléchi par la tradition gréco-romaine; les iconoclastes (comme avant eux les monophysites), dans celle du christianisme sémite et
asiatique. Ce fut le dernier grand choix que les chrétiens eurent à faire.'

6. G. Haendler, *Epochen karolingischer Theologie. Eine Untersuchung über die karolingische
Gutachten zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit* (1958) is no more than a beginning.

past and an anxious present overshadowed by the armies of Islam. The first part of this paper, therefore, must concentrate on the problem of why icons were considered so vulnerable in the eighth century, the second, why they had achieved sufficient prominence in the Late Antique period to have drawn attack upon themselves; the third part will suggest some possible implications for an understanding of the changes in eighth-century Byzantine society.

I

We should begin again with the considerable and explicit body of evidence for the religious views of the Iconoclasts[1] – most notably the *Queries* of Constantine V[2] and the *Horos* of the Iconoclast Council of 754[3] – and for the repercussion of these views among the Iconodules at the Council of Nicaea in 787. Let us propose a definition of the Iconoclast controversy in the light of this evidence: the Iconoclast controversy was a debate on the position of the holy in Byzantine society. On the issue of what was holy and what was not the Iconoclasts were firm and unambiguous. Certain material objects were holy because they had been solemnly blessed by ordained priests. This blessing had raised them from the material to the supernatural: such was the Eucharistic bread – ὁ διὰ τῆς ἱερατικῆς τελετῆς ἀναφερόμενος ἐκ τοῦ χειροποιήτου πρὸς τὸ ἀχειροποίητον.[4] Only objects so raised were entitled to the attitudes demanded by the presence of the holy; they could be objects of worship in the full sense. For the Iconoclasts, there were only three such objects: the Eucharist, which was both given by Christ and consecrated by the clergy[5]; the church building, which was consecrated by the bishop[6]; the sign of the Cross.[7] This last was not only a traditional sacramental gesture, whose power was shown in the rite of exorcism; for an eighth-century Byzantine, it was a sign given directly by God to men, when it first appeared in the sky to the Emperor Constantine. On this view, no other object could claim to be holy. It appeared to the Iconoclasts that icons had, at a comparatively recent time, sidled over the firmly-demarcated frontier separating the holy from the profane. The Iconoclast bishops of 754 meant to put them firmly

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1. Now available in [*Textus byzantinos ad Iconomachiam pertinentes in usum academicum*, *edidit* Herman] Hennephof (1969).

2. Hennephof, nos. 141–87, pp. 52–57, extracted from Niceph[orus, *Antirrhetici, P. G.* c.] 205–553, also edited with commentary by Ostrogorsky, *Bilderstreit*, pp. 11–45.

3. Hennephof, nos. 200–64, pp. 61–78, extracted from Mansi, xiii. 205–364.

4. Hennephof, no. 168, p. 55 (Niceph. 337C): 'which is raised by rites performed by a priest from being a material object to become a vehicle of the supernatural.'

5. Hennephof, no. 226, pp. 67–68 (Mansi, xiii. 261DE).

6. Hennephof, no. 184, p. 57 (Niceph. 477C).

7. G. Millet, 'Les Iconoclastes et la Croix. À propos d'une inscription de Cappadoce', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, xxxiv (1910), 96–109.

back in their place: οὔτε εὐχὴν ἱερὰν ἁγιάζουσαν αὐτήν ['Η τῶν ψευδωνύμων εἰκόνων κακωνυμία], ἵν ἐκ τούτου πρὸς τὸ ἅγιον ἐκ τοῦ κοινοῦ μετενεχθῇ, ἀλλὰ μένει κοινὴ καὶ ἄτιμος, ὡς ἀπήρτισεν αὐτὴν ὁ ζωγράφος.[1]

Icons could not be holy because they had received no consecration from above. They had received only an illegitimate consecration from below. They were merely thought to be holy, and this for the same deeply sinister reason as pagan cult images were thought to be holy: the devil had taken advantage of the simplicity of the masses to reintroduce into the Christian people the error of idolatry.[2] Icons, therefore, could suffer the same fate as any pagan cult objects: they could be burnt.[3]

It is on this central issue of the holy that the authors of the Carolingian *Libri Carolini* can be seen, over a generation later, to be moving along exactly the same orbit as Constantine V and his bishops. For this author knows exactly where the holy lies, and that it has little to do with icons. For the people of Israel, for instance, it lay in the awesome Ark of the Covenant – 'siquidem illa condita est Domino imperante, istae [the icons] conduntur artis industria iuvante; illa a sancto viro Moyse, istae a quolibet opifice; illa a Legislatore, istae a pictore; illa redundat mysteriis, istae colorum tantummodo fucis'.[4] For the Christians of the present, it tended to lie in the great consecrated basilica. The succession of miracle stories ascribed to icons by the Iconodule bishops at Nicaea leave this author cold; but Gregory the Great had described how the oil lamps of a great basilica had remained unquenched in a torrential flood – that, he concludes, is a *real* miracle![5] Even the Iconodules were unable to wrench themselves free from the gravitational pull of this central problem. Their attitude to icons is incoherent precisely because they accept the terms of their opponents. Iconoclasts and Iconodules of the eighth century are closer to each other, in their obsession with a common problem of the holy, than are the Iconodules of that century to their more refined and cautious successors in the ninth century.

The Iconodules wanted to have their cake and eat it. They had inherited from Late Antiquity a solution of their difficulties that was both impressive (as part of the imagined unalterable tradition of the

1. Hennephof, no. 227, p. 68 (Mansi xiii. 268BC, 269CD): 'For the ill-omened name of "holy" for the icons is misplaced. No prayer of any priest has blessed the icon, so that, through such consecration, it passes beyond ordinary matter to become a holy thing; but it remains common and without honour, just as it leaves the hands of the painter.' (This free translation attempts to render the argument of the whole passage from which the citation is taken.)

2. Hennephof, no. 207, pp. 62ff. (Mansi, xiii. 221CD).

3. *V. Steph. Iun. P.G.* c. 1085.

4. *Lib[ri] Carol[ini]* [ed. H. Bastgen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Legum Sectio III, Concilia, ii (1924)], ii, 26, p. 85.

5. *Lib. Carol.* iv, 12, p. 192.

church) and clear. If pictures can move the beholder, can record, can narrate, can bring faces and deeds to his memory, then they can communicate the Christian message. Standing on the cool walls of the churches, pictures were more permanent reminders to the passer-by than were the liturgy and reading of the gospels of the story of Jesus and the passions of the saints.[1] Because we regard this view as so eminently reasonable we assume that the Iconodules regarded it as eminently natural. For all that, the Iconodules were not deeply concerned to present icons as merely useful. They presented them consistently as holy.[2] An icon, or a wall painting, might be known to have made Saint Gregory of Nyssa weep[3]; it had reminded St Anastasius, at a crucial moment, of the courage of the martyrs[4]; it might lead the mystical devotee, in a more subtle way, 'by the hand' to contemplate the incarnation of Christ[5]; but it could do more than this. The icon was a hole in the dyke separating the visible world from the divine, and through this hole there oozed precious driblets from the great sea of God's mercy: icons were active, πόσαι, εἰπέ μοι, ἐπισκιάσεις, πόσαι ἀναβλύσεις, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αἱμάτων ῥύσεις ἐξ εἰκόνων καὶ λειψάνων μαρτύρων γεγόνασι;[6]

The Iconodules wandered even deeper into the gravitational field of the Iconoclasts. They plainly accepted without question the major criterion of the holy laid down by the Iconoclasts – the criterion of consecration. Their roundabout solutions on this issue betray how important a concern it was for them. For the Iconodules could not claim that an icon produced by an artisan was holy because it had been blessed in the same solemn manner as had the Eucharistic bread or the basilica.[7] Though frequently accused by modern scholars of magical habits of mind, the Iconodule, in fact, had omitted the one element which any self-respecting magician of the time knew to be obligatory – the occult consecration of the image.[8] (For this reason alone, the term 'magical', so lavishly applied by modern scholars to the use of icons, lacks any real meaning, when dealing with the habits of men who lived in an age that knew what real, professional magic was like.) Yet they could not break out of the gravitational field of the problem by denying the relevance of the need for consecration. Some icons, the Iconodules insisted, were of immediate divine origin. They were 'not made with human hands'.[9] They stood above mere

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1. Mansi, xiii. 361A.

2. Mansi, xiii. 39A: 'the venerable icons have the same spiritual status, the same power – ἰσοδυναμοῦσιν – as the Gospel-book and the venerable Cross'.

3. *Ibid.* 9DE   4. *Ibid.* 21A.

5. *Ibid.* 116A.   6. *Ibid.* 48C.

7. *Lib. Carol.* i, 27, p. 87: 'Imagines vero nullius manus impositionis vel consecrationis mysterio indigentes. . . .'

8. M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, ii (1950), 502–5 and T. Pekáry, 'Der römische Bilderstreit', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, iii (1969), 18.

9. E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, Texte und Untersuchungen, xviii (1899) is fundamental.

art.[1] They were given by God to men in a manner that fulfilled
the criteria laid down for the holy by the Iconoclasts. Other icons
that did not enjoy the awesome privileges of a direct other-worldly
origin nevertheless enjoyed a consecration from the past. They were
thought to have originated in the immediate environment of the
holy person that they represented, or to have been miraculously
produced by physical contact with such a person.[2] The *Mandylion* of
Edessa, on which Christ impressed His face on a handkerchief, was
the prototype of such an icon.[3] We should take this idea of conse-
cration by the past very seriously. Eighth-century Iconodules
believed that the icon and the gospel were strictly contemporaneous:
St. Luke had sent to Theophilus not only his gospel, but his portrait
of the Virgin, painted from the life, and copious illustrations of
scenes from the life of Christ, as they had happened.[4] Icons of the
Virgin, therefore, could well be thought of as continuations of St.
Luke's original, much as the clear-cut gargoyles on an Oxford college
are fondly imagined to be medieval, when they are, in fact, the work
of an unbroken chain of cutters who, ever since the fifteenth century,
have renewed the original in soft Cotswold stone.[5] Nothing else
would do. What the icons so palpably lacked in consecration from
above, they made up for by consecration from the past. Taken
altogether, Iconoclast, Carolingian, Iconodule were asking the same
question throughout the eighth century: where is the holy? what
belongs to it and what does not? The Iconoclasts and the author of
the *Libri Carolini* could offer a group of holy objects that were neither
unduly spiritualized nor devoid of strong visual potency: they could
offer the great liturgy of the Eucharist; the basilica with its solemn
association with the Temple of Jerusalem and with the heavenly city[6];
the age-old focus of the figure of the Cross; and – for the Carolin-
gians – the fearsome compactness of the Ark of the Covenant,
'welling over with mystic meaning'.[7] For them, Iconodule supersti-
tion was simply a haemorrhage of the holy from these great symbols
into a hundred little paintings.[8] Iconoclasm, therefore, is a centripetal

1. E. Kitzinger, 'The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm', *Dumbarton
Oaks Papers*, viii (1954), 83–149, at p. 143, n. 257 sees this clearly.
2. Dobschütz, *ubi supra*, p. 269.
3. Evidence collected in Dobschütz, *ubi supra*, pp. 158*-289*.
4. *The Admonition of the Old Man*, [ed. B. Melioransky, *Georgii Kiprianin i Ioann
Ierusalimlianin, dva maloizviestnych bortsa za pravoslavie v VIII viekie*, Zapiski Istor.-Filolog.
Fakulteta Imp. S. Peterburgskago Universiteta, lix (1901)], pp. xxviii-xxx, *cf.* pp.
xxvi-xxvii: see Gouillard, 'Synodikon', *Travaux et Mémoires*, ii. 178.
5. Dobschütz, *ubi supra*, p. 271.   6. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 153–4.
7. V. H. Elbern, 'Liturgisches Gerät in edlen Materiellen zur Zeit Karls des Grossen'
Karl der Grosse (1965), iii. 115-67; Peter Bloch, 'Das Apsismosaik von Germigny-des-
Près. Karl der Grosse und das Alte Bund', *ibid.* pp. 234–61; M. Veillard-Troiekouroff,
'Nouvelles études sur les mosaiques de S. Germigny-des-Près', *Cahiers Archéologiques*,
xvii (1967), 103 ff.
8. Hennephof, no. 102, pp. 38 ff. (Mansi, xiv, 417-22.) Letter of Michael II and
Theophilus to Louis of 824.

reaction: it asserts the unique value of a few central symbols of the Christian community that enjoyed consecration from above against the centrifugal tendencies of the piety that had spread the charge of the holy on to a multiplicity of unconsecrated objects. Seeing that what a society considers holy and what profane is very much a precipitate of that society's needs and structure, it may perhaps prove fruitful to examine what a centripetal reaction of this kind could mean in the social and religious life of eighth-century Byzantium, and so what the centrifugal tendencies of the previous centuries had implied.

We can at least set aside certain problems: a debate on the holy need have nothing whatsoever to do with art. Indeed, the only two men in the Dark Ages whom we know to have been deeply interested in art – the Emperor Theophilus[1] and Bishop Theodulf of Orléans (if Theodulf is the author of the *Libri Carolini*, as is very likely)[2] – were Iconoclast or at least, anti-Iconodule. To love art meant knowing artists; and every ancient man knew what artists were like; they slept with their models[3]; they designed theatre posters[4]; in 692 they had been caught still painting classical pornographic scenes.[5] To the author of the *Libri Carolini*, indeed, the artist was free to do what he liked (for this reason he has been acclaimed as one of the first exponents of Art for Art's sake),[6] but provided that he remained irremediably profane.[7] For a cultivated man of the eighth century, whether he was a western European, a Byzantine or a Muslim, art was part of a man's comfort: Byzantine and Ummayad baths and pleasure palaces show this clearly.[8] Furthermore, in Byzantium and in the West, art had also become a branch of Classics. The works of art most appreciated in Carolingian and Byzantine court circles at this time were those manuscripts and ivories that faithfully preserved the art of the Classical world, with a heavy *décor* of pagan deities and personified natural forces.[9] The works of the artist, therefore, that were most sought at the time of the Iconoclast controversy were precisely those which had least to do with the idea of the holy in the minds of any west European, Byzantine or Muslim.

II

It is the identification of the icon with the holy and the rejection of this claim by the Iconoclasts, and not the status of the arts in

1 Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 143 ff.

2. Ann Freeman, 'Theodulf of Orleans', *Speculum*, xxxii (1957), 663–705, esp. pp. 695–703.   3. Justin, *Apologia*, i, ix, 4.   4. Mansi, xiii. 241B.

5. *Concilium Quinisextum*, canon 100.   6. Freeman, *ubi supra*, p. 695.

7. *Lib. Carol.* i, 16, p. 39; iii, 22, p. 149; iii, 23, pp. 151–2.

8. F. Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam* (1965), pp. 357 on paintings in bath-houses.

9. E. Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Paladin, 1970), pp. 49–52.

Byzantine society, that was at stake in the eighth century. Two masterly treatments by Professor André Grabar and Professor Erwin Kitzinger,[1] have drawn attention to the comparatively rapid, and piecemeal, nature of the rise of the icon to holiness: Grabar begins with one of those irrefutable surprises such as only the archaeologist and the art historian can hold in store for us: some of the greatest shrines of the Byzantine period, most notably the Hagia Sophia itself, would have struck any eighth-century worshipper as almost entirely an-iconic.[2] Even if we accept the Iconodule argument, that icons had come to stay, we must think of their presence in the churches as more atomized, as less integrated in the overall decoration and meaning of the building than in later centuries.[3] The rise of the cult of icons, therefore, in the sixth and seventh centuries, and not the origins of Iconoclasm – this is the central problem of the Iconoclast controversy. It is the singular merit of Kitzinger to have made this clear, and to have suggested an explanation. At the risk of simplifying a study of great richness and differentiation, the explanation of the rise of the worship of icons that he proposes is as follows.

A tendency to worship the individual icon had always existed among Mediterranean people. Up to the late sixth century, however, the élite of the Christian church had offered a constant resistance to 'the naive, animistic ideas of the masses'.[4] In the late sixth century, 'the resistance to such pressure on the part of the authorities decreased . . . and this relaxation of counter pressure from above was at least a major factor in the development'.[5] It was the imperial court rather than the bishops who were responsible for this change. For Kitzinger emphasizes that one privileged oasis of religious feeling for an image had survived intact since pagan times – the veneration of the imperial images.[6] Religious images began to receive marks of veneration analogous to the imperial images in the sixth century or even earlier; but, at the end of the sixth century, the emperors, in Kitzinger's opinion, took the final conscious step in fostering these practices. They allowed icons of Christ and of the Virgin to stand in the place of the imperial images, and so to receive the same frankly pagan worship as their own images had always received.[7] By the seventh century, such icons were firmly established as part of the public cultus of the Byzantine empire.[8] This study

1. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*; Kitzinger, 'Cult of Images'.

2. Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, ii (1946), 284 and *Iconoclasme*, pp. 153 and 166.

3. But Nicole Thierry, 'Un décor pré-iconoclaste de Cappadoce: Açikel ağa Kilisesz', *Cahiers archéologiques*, xviii (1968), 33–65, is a warning against generalizing from the apparent absence of such decoration. E. Kitzinger, 'Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm'; *Berichte zum XI. internationalen Byzantinistenkongress* (1958), pp. 41–50 is the best treatment of a delicate matter.

4. Kitzinger, 'Cult of Images', p. 146.

5. *Ibid.* pp. 119–20.   6. *Ibid.* p. 91   7. *Ibid.* pp. 125–6.

8. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 45 and 70–77.

would disagree through pointing away from analogies to the cult of the imperial icons to other, sizeable areas of the social life of the Late Antique world. The taking up of the icon into the public ceremonial of the empire is one pillar only, on which the edifice of Iconodule piety came to rest. This study would suggest that it was neither the most profoundly rooted nor the most enduring. Put bluntly: Byzantines of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries were getting from the icons what they never expected to get from an imperial image – they got the miracle of healing and the greater miracle of a flood of tears of repentance for their sins.[1]

Imperial images could be surrounded by impressive ceremonies, that stressed the emperor's presence and his symbolic 'arrival' in town.[2] Again, disrespect for the imperial image released a very real charge of feeling. (Did not the good soldier Schweik share his first prison cell with an unfortunate who had allowed a photograph of the Emperor Franz Josef to become flyblown?) Iconodule texts should be interpreted in the light of this release of feeling. When they appealed to the respect due to the imperial images the centre of gravity is usually negative: they argue, *a fortiori*, from the dire consequences of *dis*respect for the imperial image to be impiety of *dis*respect for the image of Christ the Emperor.[3] What they envisage is less the psychology of worship than the psychological mechanisms of contempt for a figure of authority, and the very real mixture of horror and delight which an attack on his picture does indeed stir up. The 'psychodrama' of attacks on the images of emperor and bishops was very common in the great towns of the Eastern empire.[4] Yet it would be wrong to conclude that, when the emperor's images were not being either welcomed or pelted, they were being worshipped. Far from it. They were being taken absolutely for granted. They were in constant danger of being obscured, in the public places, by great portraits of more exciting figures – by portraits of great pantomime actors, charioteers and wild beast fighters.[5] To the best of my knowledge, no man, on catching the eye of the emperor in his portrait, burst into tears 'like a cloud-burst from a rain-laden sky'[6]: and this is what a man of the eighth century was supposed to do

1. Mansi, xiii. 12A 'for spiritual profit and an outflowing of tears'.
2. S. G. MacCormack, 'Change and Continuity in late Antiquity: the Ceremony of *Adventus*', *Historia* (to appear).
3. Mansi, xii 1067 and xiii. 161AB; *V. Steph. Iun., P. G.* c. 1157D; Severianus of Gabala, *de mundi creatione, P. G.* liv. 489. For a Near Eastern example: G. Strohmaier, 'Hunain ibn Ishaq und die Bilder', *Klio*, xliii (1965), 527.
4. See evidence collected in R. Browning, 'The Riot of 387 in Antioch', *Journal of Roman Studies*, xiii (1952), 23–20 at p. 20. Also Kazimierz Majewski, 'Bezobrozowość oraz burzenie świątyn, posągów bogów i pomników władców w świecie greckorzymskim'; *Archeologia*, xvi (1965), 63–82, at p. 69.
5. *Codex Theodosianus*, xv, xvii, 12 (394) =*Codex Justinianus*, xi, xli, 4.
6. The supposed letter of Gregory II to Leo III, ed. J. Gouillard ['Aux origines de l'iconoclasme: le témoignage de Grégoire II', *Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'histoire et civilisation byzantines*, iii (1968)], 285, line 114.

when faced by an icon. We should look more closely, therefore, at another area of the religious life of the Late Antique world in order to find the remainder of that charge of feeling that had come, by the eighth century, to make an icon appear holy.

I would suggest that we look more closely at the holy man. From the fourth century onwards, the holy man was a living icon. To the theologian he was man at its height, man as first made 'in the image of God'.[1] One of three hermits who used to visit St. Anthony came every year and sat there while the others talked, without saying a word: 'It is sufficient for me, Father', he explained, 'just to look at you'.[2] Merely to see a holy man could be enough for a visitor.[3] At his death, he instantly became an icon: 'for by the archbishop's orders the plank was stood upright – the body [of Daniel the Stylite, died 493] had been fixed to it so that it could not fall – and thus, like an icon, the holy man was displayed to all from every side; and for many hours the people all looked at him and also with cries and tears besought him to be an advocate with God on behalf of them all'.[4] The holy man was a clearly-defined *locus* of the holy on earth. The 'presence of the Lord' overshadowed him.[5] A long social and religious history lies behind the position of the holy man in the Late Antique period.[6] What is relevant to our purpose are those psychological needs which the holy man had long met, that might find satisfaction, also, in the icon.

The holy man's position in the collective mentality of the Byzantine world of the sixth and seventh centuries rested on a deeply-embedded mechanism: one might call it a focusing mechanism. Put briefly: it was possible to bring to bear on a single object (in this case, on the silent figure of the hermit) hopes and fears that would otherwise have been scattered and lost on the distant vault of heaven. For the holy man could be approached directly; he could receive unflinchingly a heavy charge of entreaty, cajolery, even threats; and the prayers that he sent up to heaven were thought capable of rendering precise and relevant to his individual petitioner the inscrutable workings of God's providence.[7] Thus the core of the holy man's

1. Leontius of Neapolis, *P. G.* cxiii, 1064CD: 'An image of God is man, man created after His image and especially that man who is worthy to be the dwellingplace of the Holy Spirit'; Mansi, xiii. 49B. He cites Leviticus 26, 12 in the LXX: Ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω in the literal meaning: 'I (God) will dwell in them (the individual holy men) and will walk around in them.'

2. *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Antonios 27, *P. G.* lxv. 84D.

3. *E.g.* Cassian, *Collationes*, xi. 2 (*C.S.E.L.* xiii. 315).

4. *Vita Danielis Stylitae*, c.99, ed. H. Delehaye, *Les saints Stylites*, Subsidia Hagiographica, 14 (1923), 92. It is not even certain that the original manuscript contained the comment 'like an icon'.

5. On ἐπισκίασις, see *Vita Symeonis Iunioris* c. 118, ed. P. van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon le Jeune* (pp. 521–92), Subsidia Hagiographica, 32 (1962), 97–98, and *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (1961), *s.v.*, p. 531,

6. Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Roman society', *Journal of Roman Studies*, lxxi (1971), 80–101.   7. Brown, *ubi supra*, pp. 69–97.

power in Late Antique society was the belief that he was there to act as an intercessor with God. Whether living or dead he was a favoured courtier in the distant empire of heaven: he had gained a 'boldness' to speak up successfully for his protegés before the throne of Christ.[1]

If Byzantines had not believed that it was possible for created beings to sway the will of God by their intercessions, then the rise of the holy man and the rise of the icon would not have happened. For the icon merely filled a gap left by the physical absence of the holy man, whether this was due to distance or to death. The same mechanisms that had focused on the figure of the holy man (who was often as silent or as far removed above the beholder, as would have been the case with St. Symeon Stylites, as was any icon[2]) could be brought to bear on the icon: they could even be heightened by the capacity of the silent portrait of the dead to take an even heavier charge of urgency and idealization without answering back. The figures of the saints at Saqqara, in Egypt, standing with outstretched arms in the traditional pose of the praying holy man, actually have scratched upon them the prayers which the believer wished them to address, on his behalf, to God.[3]

As a religious system, early Islam consciously rejected these pre-occupations. Unlike the Byzantine Christ, Allah was an absolute monarch whose will was untrammelled by the pressures of his heavenly bureaucracy. To admit angelic powers as intercessors with Allah had been the last temptation of Mohammad. He had resisted it.[4] At the time of the Iconoclast controversy, the idea that any created being – angel or dead saint – could intercede with Allah was out of the question: 'cry ever again, There is no power nor might but through Allah; for this comes from the very treasure that is hidden beneath the throne of God'.[5] At a stroke, the icon became unnecessary. The whole drama of focusing on a particular figure was pointless if this figure had no power to move the will of God on your behalf. The Muslim rejected icons, just as he rejected the building of churches over the tombs of Christian saints[6] and the offering

1. The idea is central to the letters of the Patriarch Germanos in the opening phase of the Iconoclast controversy: to John of Synnada (Mansi, xiii. 104A) and to the Iconoclast Thomas of Claudiopolis (Mansi, xiii. 132C); compare *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, P. G. xcv. 340C. See Brown, *ubi supra*, p. 94, on the Late Roman background.

2. One should remember that the ideal holy man was thought of as immobile as a statue: Gregory Nazianzenos, *Eulogy on Basil of Caesarea*, 52, 2. P. G. xxxvi. 569A – at a moment of crisis, Basil had stood in church 'his body, his gaze, his whole attention fixed rigid, like a statue set up in honour of God and His altar'. See Brown, *ubi supra*, p. 93, n. 163 and p. 97, n. 206.

3. David Howell, 'Saint George as Intercessor', *Byzantion*, xxxix (1969), 133.

4. Tor Andrae, *Mohammed. The Man and his Faith* (1936), p. 28.

5. I. Goldziher, *Vorlesungen über den Islam* (1910), p. 45. Compare A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (1932), p. 61.

6. Monneret de Villard, *ubi supra*, p. 272.

of incense in their names,[1] not because he disliked the human face (which we know not to have been the case in many of the monuments of the eighth century), but because his heaven was without human intercessors.

The belief in intercession, and the consequent psychological need to focus one's attention and hopes on the face of the intercessor, was the lever that shifted the religious art of the early Byzantine world. The earliest icons are those that make plain the mechanism of intercession: from the late fifth century, *ex-voto* icons published scenes from the court-life of heaven – the Virgin and Child enthroned, flanked by angels, with little donors supported by towering saintly patrons.[2] Angels appear early, despite genuine theological scruples about giving them a human form.[3] They appear not because they were faded relics of winged victories. They had been men's guardian spirits from time immemorial, and they were those courtiers whose rank placed them nearest to the ear of God.[4] The Virgin is of crucial importance. For she represented the acme of a mortal's intercession in heaven. She was invariably portrayed with Christ sitting on her lap. For her intercessions had the infallible efficacy of a blood-relative. This is what the icon of the Virgin meant that was set up on the gate of Constantinople at the time of the Avar attack of 626: let 'the brood of darkness' beware: 'for she is indeed the mother of Him who drowned Pharaoh and all his hosts in the depths of the Red Sea'.[5] Icons also showed the saints interceding with Christ placed on the lap of the Virgin[6] or being acknowledged, in the familiar yet solemn gesture of the arm placed over the shoulder that we can see on statues of Diocletian and his colleagues, as the intimates of Christ in the government of the universe.[7]

The holy man, therefore, was the impresario of the piety that focused on the icon, as it had focused on himself, as the tangible presence of an intercessor before God. He had been the impresario,

1. Grabar, *Martyrium*, ii. 83 notes 2 and 3 and S. M. Stern, "Abd al-Jabbār's Account of how Christ's Religion was falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs', *Journal of Theological Studies*, xix (1968), 128–85, at p. 147.

2. See Grabar, *Martyrium*, ii. 81: some of the earliest religious icons of public importance were in the form of *ex-votos* set up by members of the imperial family. Now see R. Cormack, 'The Mosaic Decoration of S. Demetrios of Thessaloniki', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, lxiv (1969), 17–52, a most important study.

3. Raised by John, bishop of Thessalonica (610–649): Mansi, xiii. 164D.

4. Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (1970), p. 5 and n. 3; *Anthologia Palatina*, 1 35 and 36: poems on *ex-voto* icons of angels marking successes in the careers of lawyers.

5. A. Mai, *Patrum Nova Bibliotheca*, vi, 2 (1853), 427. Compare *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, P. G. xcv. 340A.

6. Mansi, xiii. 57E and 64D. Of the Byzantine signet-rings and pectoral crosses on show in the British Museum, all those of the fifth to seventh centuries show either the human protégé with his supernatural protectors or these protectors interceding with Christ. See E. Kantorowicz, 'Ivories and Litanies', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, v (1942), 70–72.

7. Icon of St Menas, Bawit, illustrated, with comment, in Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971), p. 102, pl. 72.

also, of parallel development: the tendency to regard a material object as the vehicle of cures. Objects blessed by the holy man had been the vehicles of cures since the fourth century. These *placebos* (often no more than drinking a cup of blessed cold water) had made divine protection for the sufferer tangible and so efficacious.[1] By the end of the sixth century, icons associated with holy men, or blessed by them, had joined the more impersonal blessed objects.[2] A woman cured by St. Symeon the Younger carried his portrait back home with her. But the very mechanism of focusing, which had made possible the first cure in the face-to-face encounter with the living holy man, could be brought to bear equally efficaciously around the silent portrait. Another woman came to the icon, confident that 'if I can only see his face, I shall be saved'.[3] Altogether, the role of the holy man in Late Antique society – whether speaking, blessing or just being seen to be standing in prayer – had been to translate the awesomely distant loving-kindness of God into the reassuring precision of a human face.[4]

The momentum of the search for a face made itself felt throughout the sixth century in changes in the traditional type of relics. Icons came to join the relics. In relation to the relic they played a psychological role strictly analogous to the holy man. They were human figures filling the gap between awesome holy things and the frail believer. In Rome, a saint's sarcophagus could kill the workmen who had dislodged it.[5] In Thessalonica, the deep-buried grave of St. Demetrius could flash out tongues of fire with an unearthly smell.[6] Understandably, the sufferer preferred to press his face against the handsome, idealized face on the casing of the relics of St. Demetrius[7]; and the inscrutable, deep-buried power of the martyr became bearable, in dreams, by appearing to the believer 'as he appears on ancient icons'.[8] The icon was the go-between. St. Mary the Egyptian, a prostitute, was pushed away from the Holy Sepulchre by an invisible force surging up against her in the vast impersonal throng of the congregation; but she was able to turn to an icon of the Mother of God that hung near the door, to promise that she would repent. Faced by too crushing a sense of the holy Late Roman men had turned to the homely figure of the holy man in the same way as St. Mary had turned to the icon. The holy man was prepared to act as a guarantor with God for the forgiveness of their sins. So, having prayed, gazing unflinchingly into the face of the Virgin, Mary went back into the

1. Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 96.
2. Mansi, xiii. 81B, with the commentary of Kitzinger, 'Cult of Images', pp. 108 ff.
3. *V. Symeon. Iun.* c. 118, ed. P. van den Ven, 98: cited in Mansi, xiii. 76C. The passage makes plain that the power of God that 'overshadows' the living holy man 'overshadowed' the icon.   4. Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 97.
5. Gregory I, Ep. IV, 30.
6. *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, ii [*P. G.* cxvi.], 1241C.
7. *Mirac. S. Dem.*, 1217D; see Grabar, *Martyrium*, ii, 25–26.
8. *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1317BC.

crush.[1] She had gained from the icon precisely what the Byzantine layman gained from an interview with the holy man – confidence in approaching the Holy of Holies.

Altogether it is as well to linger on the psychological needs that sought resolution through investing the icon with that same charge of holiness as had previously surrounded the living holy man. For until these needs are stated with precision, the historian cannot go forward with a historical explanation. The idea that the rise of icons can be explained as a resurgence of the animistic beliefs of the masses[2] seems to lack just this element of precision, both psychological and, so, historical. Animism is a concept that was first put into circulation among historians of religion by the anthropological theorists of the nineteenth century. Few modern anthropologists would now treat it as valid currency. Nor is it wise to label in an easy – and dismissive – manner mechanisms of focusing on a single 'vested' object which had been observed still to play an essential role in the healing processes of patients in the most modern of modern hospitals.[3] We may safely leave to any surviving Byzantines the delicate task of deciding whether their beliefs were superstitious, animistic or backward. Yet it is necessary for the historian to question this attitude to the religious beliefs of the Byzantine world. Just such an attitude has provided the *deus ex machina* that underlies Kitzinger's account of the rise and establishment of icons in the late sixth and seventh centuries. For his explanation of the public 'reception' of icons in terms of changes in official circles in the late sixth and seventh centuries can carry full conviction only if we are prepared to accept his presupposition, that these changes must have been a concession to an ineluctable, and ill-defined, popular pressure.[4] It can be clearly shown that the holy man did not rise to influence in Late Roman society in so simple a way.[5] No more did icons. Rather than assume that the worship of icons rose like a damp stain from the masses, we should look into the needs which the piety of Late Antique men sought to satisfy in looking at them. These needs were 'human', not 'popular'. They have no very precise location in any one stratum of Byzantine society, nor do they affect only those of a low level of education. The two-tiered model of ancient society,

1. Mansi xiii. 88A; compare Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 98.
2. Kitzinger, 'Cult of Images', p. 146: 'the naive animistic ideas of the masses'; p. 147 'a last minute withdrawal from the abyss of sheer animism'.
3. *E.g.* C. Binger, *The Doctor's Job* (1946), p. 48.
4. Kitzinger. 'Cult of Images', pp. 119–20: 'to try to identify with any precision the forces which seem to have pressed from below could only be guesswork. What can be suggested is that the resistance to such pressure on the part of the authorities decreased in that period. . . .'
5. Brown, 'Holy Man', pp. 81–82. For an acute and instructive criticism of similar views long held by scholars of Western hagiography, see František Graus, *Volk, Herrscher und Heiliger im Reich der Merowinger. Studien zur Hagiographie der Merowingerzeit*, Česká akademie věd (1965), esp. pp. 31–36.

by which any notable change in belief can be ascribed to the upward pressure of popular superstition on a Greco-Roman élite fits few cases – and least of all this one. If anything, it was the élite of the Byzantine world whose needs were more effectively satisfied by the cult of icons than were those of the supposed masses of the population.[1] The great prominence given to the icon in the late sixth and seventh centuries does not represent a final, ineluctable triumph of popular feeling; still less does the Iconoclastic reaction represent an ineffective attempt to control the superstition of the emotional lower classes – as has been frequently suggested, with the unpleasant rider that Byzantine women are, automatically, to be treated by the historian as a 'lower class'.[2] The concluding words of a lecture by a great connoisseur of the ancient world could well serve as a warning to the religious historian of this period also:

Thus my inquest into popular religious beliefs in the late Roman historians ends in reporting that there were no such beliefs. In the fourth and fifth centuries there were of course plenty of beliefs which we historians of the twentieth century would gladly call popular, but the historians of the fourth and fifth centuries never treated any belief as characteristic of the masses and consequently discredited among the élite. Lectures on popular religious beliefs and the Late Roman historians should be severely discouraged.[3]

We should look for changes in a different direction.

The most influential single feature of the religious life of the sixth century was the new effervescence of civic patriotism in the Eastern empire.[4] It was in this century that the Christian church was finally established as the focus of collective feeling.[5] The alarms of warfare alone heightened the need for common symbols of loyalty and protection.[6] The cult of the civic saints of the empire provided such symbols. At least St. Demetrius (and the clergy who fostered his cult and recorded his interventions in long sermons) was interested in maintaining the ancient civic ideals of harmony in the demoralized city of Thessalonica.[7] The icon became the visible expression of the invisible bond that linked the community with the intercessions of

1. See Cameron, *ubi supra*, p. 5: 'Agathias either had money to spare or was desperate enough about his examination chances to dedicate to the Archangel an *ex voto* mosaic . . .'

2. D. Savramis, 'Der abergläubliche Missbrauch der Bilder in Byzanz', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, ix (1960), 174–92 at p. 180: 'Die Rolle die die Frauen in der Bilderverhrung spielten, spricht auch für das Eindringen dieser Gewohnheit von unten her, aus den Massen.'

3. A. D. Momigliano, 'Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians', *Studies in Church History*, viii (1971), 18.

4. Dietrich Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert*, Byzantinisches Archiv, 13 (1969).

5. Claude, *ubi supra*, p. 95 and A. Grabar, 'La mosaïque de pavement de Quasr el-Lebya', *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, June 1969, p. 264–82.

6. Claude, *ubi supra*, pp. 139 ff.

7. *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1225B, 1232A, 1252C, 1268A, 1301A, 1324B, 1341BC.

its patron saint. In this way, icons come to appear on the walls of a Syrian town,[1] and the *Mandylion* of Edessa, its great Christ icon, was said to have destroyed the siege-works of Khusro I in 544.[2] The shift to the icon is most revealing in this case. Two centuries previously, it was believed that Nisibis had been saved from Shapur II through the curse of the local holy man.[3] Now, in Edessa, it was the direct pledge of Christ, given to King Abgar in the form of a miraculous impression of His face, that reassured the citizens that their town, at least, would never fall: and even in Edessa, His face was thought a more suitable pledge than His letter to Abgar, which had satisfied earlier centuries. In exactly the same way, the icon of the Virgin, placed on the gate of Constantinople in 626, was a tangible reminder of the manner in which the absent Emperor Heraclius had pledged the city to her protection.[4]

The need to express collective feeling went beyond the occasional emergency. The prosperous and potentially fissile villages of Asia Minor also found a similar focus in great intercessory processions and solemn junketing, among which icons began to play a part.[5] In the western Mediterranean, the plague replaced the Slav and the Persian as the catalyst of the same development.[6] When the monks of St. Augustine entered Canterbury in 598 'carrying a holy cross and the image of a great King, the Lord Jesus Christ'[7] they were bringing to heathen Kent a method of supernatural prophylaxis that had been developed, comparatively rapidly, from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. In the late sixth century, therefore, the icon was not only a successor of the imperial image. It was a new dialect for the ancient language – for good or ill, the Roman Empire had remained a 'commonwealth of cities': and the icon was there to show that, in this commonwealth, the civic saints did their job.[8]

The diffusion of the icon in the sixth century demonstrates this. Many Byzantines travelled widely throughout the cities of the Mediterranean, as had their Greek forebears in the age of the Antonines.[9] They felt quite as homesick. For them, the icon was a

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1. Claude, *ubi supra*, pp. 140ff.

2. Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, iv, 27, cited in Mansi, xiii. 192A, speaks of the *Mandylion* Christ-Icon; Procopius, *Bella*, ii, xii, 26, still of the letter of Christ to Abgar, not of an icon.

3. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, P. G. lxxxii, 1304D.

4. Mai, *Bibliotheca Nova Patrum*, vi. 2, 426.

5. The icon 'not made with human hands', in the possession of the village of Diboulion, was carried in procession through the other villages of the province in order to raise funds: Dobschütz, *Christusbilder*, pp. 5**–7**. On the general evolution Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 90.

6. S. N. Biraben – J. Le Goff, 'La peste du haut moyen-âge', *Annales*, xxiv (1969), 1498.

7. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, i, 25.

8. *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, P. G. xcv. 340D.

9. See L. Robert, *Hellenica*, xiii (1965), 120–4 on copies of the statues of the home town in the second century A.D.

reminder of the saint of their homeland.[1] Furthermore, the sense of living in a world with frequent interchange pushed to the fore the standardized images of universal figures – icons of Christ and the Virgin.[2] Yet local associations remained very strong. There is no more touching story than that of the citizen of Thessalonica who went blind in Constantinople. Pious reminders that God was everywhere meant little to him. His cure came only when a voice told him in which church he could find a portrait of Demetrius. He stumbled in, crying, 'where is the great Demetrius?' – and looked up to see on the wall the beloved well-known face of Demetrius – *his* saint.[3]

Though the renewed civic sense of the sixth century made icons public and put them into rapid circulation in the Mediterranean, it was the holy man who kept them beloved and gave them a more intimate and permanent religious status. The icons of the city avoided some problems. They faced the profane world from the arcades of churches, on town gates.[4] It was the monks who helped to bring them into the church, the preserve of the holy. In the cult of icons, scholars have surely been right to see the monks as the *Tonangebende*. For the secret of the holy man's popularity was precisely that he had remained, for all his awesome sanctity, very much an average Byzantine. Monastic piety was the piety of the Byzantine layman writ large – hence its enormous appeal. The desperate need of the lonely hermit to focus his attention on some enduring and resilient figure had, also, found a resolution in the icon hanging in his monastic cell. There is a deep psychological authenticity in the account of the monk who felt tempted to rid himself of the 'spirit of fornication' that tormented him, by trampling on the beautiful idealized portrait of the Virgin with which he lived.[5] There was more to this perhaps than the case of individual monks. The mystical theology of the monks articulated a more sophisticated, psychological theory

1. Compare A. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* (1907), 13, pp. 132 ff, cited in Mansi, xiii. 65C, where the icon consoles a lady whose husband had been transferred from Constantinople, that the saints of this quintessentially Constantinopolitan shrine would still be able to 'visit' her even at Laodicea. The icon enables a ship's captain to recognize that it was St. Demetrius who spoke to him in a dream: *Mirac S. Dem*. 1253B. Two Galatians, stranded in the desert, recognize 'Plato, the martyr of their home-town', who had led them in a vision, by comparing his face with their icon: Mansi, xiii. 32E. In the shrine of St. Cyrus and John (Aboukir, Egypt), an inhabitant of Damascus is not fully cured until he dreams that the patron-saint of Damascus had shared in the cure administered by the two Egyptian saints: *Miracula Sanctorum Cyri et Johannis*, P. G. lxxxvii, 3664B ff. at 3672C.

2. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 90 ff. Compare L. Robert, *Hellenica*, xiii (1965), 124: 'De plus en plus, au cours de l'époque hellénistique et de l'époque romaine, il y a des transferts de culte, des transferts de copies de statues divines. En face des cultes locaux s'établit le grand dieu, aux pouvoirs éprouvés, sous la forme canonique de son idole'.

3. *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1384C – 1385A.

4. *Mirac S. Dem*. 1220B; Th. Nissen, 'Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, xxxviii (1938), 367, on the Christ Icon at Antioch.

5. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* cited in Mansi, xiii. 193A–D. The Iconoclasts apparently cut out these passages in the *Pratum Spirituale*: Mansi, xiii. 192D.

of the function of the image as an aid to contemplation.[1] The monastic church may well have been the first milieu in which this contemplative theory was put into practice. In such a church, the icon gained meaning through being part of the liturgy, and became a chosen vehicle for expressing the majestic rhythms of the divine plan of salvation.[2] The fundamental presupposition of a theory of the contemplative function of the icon – which is, quite crudely, that the worshipper should be able to spend long hours at his ease before the visible images of invisible presences,[3] was best met in the precincts of a monastery, just as pagan apologists of images had, also, envisaged the continued lingering of the devotee among the statues of the gods in a cherished holy spot.[4] Furthermore, monastic craftsmanship in producing icons would raise the icon above the suspicions that, as we have seen, still clung so heavily to the artist in any urban secular context.[5]

Perhaps the monks contributed more to the cult of icons than through the example of individual religious habits. For the holy man had become the arbiter of Christian discipline in the community. It was to the holy man, and not to the bishop, that the early Byzantine layman instinctively turned to find out how he should behave.[6] When visiting Constantinople, Theodore of Sykeon laid down the law about the propriety of going to the baths after church; the ruling caused quite a stir; the clergy of the Hagia Sophia sent a delegation to him – had the holy man derived his ruling from the Scriptures?[7] The propriety of icons belonged to the same penumbra of Christian behaviour as having a bath. In the early fifth century, a courtier would approach the holy man Neilos, to ask where in his new church he should place the cross, and where the delightful foliage and hunting scenes of fashionable mosaics.[8] The holy man retained this role up to the eighth century. When the Iconoclast bishop appeared in a provincial town, the locals promptly trooped off to their local holy man to ask what they should think. 'With tears',

1. Kitzinger, 'Cult of Images', pp. 139 ff. on the arguments.

2. See, for example, the role of the mosaic of the Transfiguration, in the church in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai: G. H. Forsyth, 'The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai: the Church and Fortress of Justinian', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xxii (1968), 14: 'To the ordinary pilgrim the Burning Bush [where the monastery was supposed to stand] was a numinous object which he viewed with awe and wonder. . . . For the monks in their nave, however, the Burning Bush was evidently just a local memento, a reminder of the unfolding of God's plan of salvation, so subtly and profoundly set forth in the mosaic [of the Transfiguration] over their main altar. Between the relic and the mosaic is only a wall, the wall of the main apse, but in idea they are very far apart.'

3. Mansi, xiii. 304E.

4. Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, cited in Alexander, *ubi supra*, p. 27.

5. Theodore of Stoudion, Ep. 1, 15, *P. G.* xcix. 957C.

6. Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 98

7. *Vita Theodori Syceotae*, c. 137, ed. Festugiére, Subsidia Hagiographica, 48 (1970), 109.

8. Nilus, *Ep. ad Olympiodorum, P. G.* lxxix. 577D.

the old man proceeded to tell them (for the next 34 pages of Melior-
ansky's printed text!), to the great annoyance of the Iconoclast bishop.[1]

Holy men and icons were implicated on an even deeper level. For
both were, technically, unconsecrated objects. Not only was the holy
man not ordained as a priest or a bishop: his appeal was precisely
that he stood outside the vested hierarchy of the Byzantine church.[2]
He was holy because he was held to be holy by his clientele, not
because any bishop had conferred holy orders on him. By the end of
the sixth century, the exceptional position of the holy man was made
explicit in formal gesture: a mystique of its own surrounded the
monastic dress, the *schema*.[3] It was the *schema*, and not consecration
by the bishop, that conferred spiritual powers on the holy man. Like
the icon, therefore, the monastic *schema* could only claim indirect
consecration from the past: it was said to have derived its holiness
from being the same garment as that which angels had conferred on
St. John the Baptist in the wilderness.[4]

Icons were invested with holiness in the late sixth and seventh
centuries because they still expressed the continuing needs of the
ancient city; they were backed up by continued loyalty to particular
cult-sites, which still boasted the physical remains of supernatural
protectors; they entered circulation, also, as part of the relationship
between the holy man and his largely urban clientele. They had
inherited, therefore, both the strength and weakness of the religion
of the ancient city. These weaknesses proved their undoing.

First: The public use of icons depended on a close association
with intense feelings of local patriotism. In the seventh century these
feelings had become dangerously centrifugal. Byzantium did have to
face a crisis of 'regionalism and independence' in the face of the first
Slav and the first Arab attacks.[5] In Thessalonica, for instance, St.
Demetrius tended to eclipse the emperor and his officials. In the
Miracles of Saint Demetrius we see local opinion viewing imperial
governors of the seventh century with the same misgivings as had the
town council of Antioch in the fourth century, as we see it through
the writings of Libanius. Like Libanius, St. Demetrius knew a dif-
ficult governor when he saw one. Like Libanius, St. Demetrius (and
the clergy who reported his actions) could make or break a foreign
official's reputation in the city.[6] Some never learnt. When the town

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1. *The Admonition of the Old Man*, ed. Melioransky, p. v.
2. Brown, 'Holy Man', pp. 91–92 and 95.
3. See K. Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Busgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum*, (1898), 205 f.
4. See, especially, the long and passionate digression on the holiness of the monastic
schema, in a text concerned, ostensibly, with the holiness of icons: P. Peeters, 'Saint Romain
le néomartyr († 1. mai 780) d'après un document géorgien', *Analecta Bollandiana*, xxx
(1911), 417.
5. See now A. Guillou, *Régionalisme et indépendance dans l'empire byzantin au vii. ème
siècle* (1969), pp. 248–52.
6. *Mirac S. Dem.* 1204A – for a 'good testimonial' on a governor, couched in entirely
traditional terms.

council swore on the grave of St. Demetrius that they were innocent of cooking their tax accounts this was too much for the governor: 'He said that the most glorious martyr was hand in glove with the townsmen.' The council trooped out, covering their ears lest they hear further blasphemies. In two days the governor was down with a stroke.[1] This essentially Late Antique friction was suddenly magnified in the crisis of the seventh century. When there was a rumour that the town would have to be evacuated, a citizen dreamt that St. Demetrius had refused the imperial mandate of God to leave his city: he would not desert his 'fellow citizens' for any emperor.[2] Similar feelings had crystallized in the smaller towns of Asia Minor and Syria. They could either be disruptive to the unity of the empire, or they would have their bluff called in any really serious crisis.[3]

Second: while the icon focused strong collective feelings, it also bore the brunt of that urge for privacy, for a special relationship with the divine, for advice and blessing in competitive situations, that had existed in the great Mediterranean cities since Roman times.[4] Hence the growing popularity of the icon among the upper classes of the Byzantine world. The courtiers and the educated clergy of the sixth and seventh centuries are the direct descendants of Aelius Aristeides. Like him, they needed the constant special attentions of private protectors in a competitive world.[5] Some of the first references to icons come from just such men, facing such difficulties.[6] In every class, the icon overcame the great loneliness of men and women in an urban setting. Its well-known face, rather than the crowded, frighteningly impersonal shrines, ministered to the day-to-day needs of the *Quartier*.[7]

Hence an important shift in the religious topography of the Late Antique city. The great Christian basilicas of the previous centuries tended to stand empty, except for great occasions. In these, the solemn liturgy of the Eucharist was celebrated. But this liturgy had become awesome and distant. In it, Christ was withdrawn from the masses in a deliberate attempt to surround the Eucharist with the trappings of an imperial ceremonial.[8] Personal piety, therefore, leaked away towards the icons. For the icons were the way to the

1. *Ibid.* 1272BC.   2. *Ibid.* 1352A   3. Claude, *ubi supra*, 127–144.
4. E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (1965), p. 45.
5. St. Demetrius is represented as the 'intimate friend' (with all the political overtones of such designation – 'a friend at court') of the bishop and of individual leading figures of Thessalonica: *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1212A; 1213A; 1336A.
6. The Patriarch Germanus appealed to his own experiences of cures, of the resolution of difficulties, of dreams, all connected with icons: Mansi, xiii 125A.
7. On the role of the icon of the Virgin at Blachernae in the conception and childhood of St. Stephen: *V. Steph. Iun. P. G.* c. 1176B – 1080A.
8. K. Holl, 'Die Entstehung der Bilderwand in der griechischen Kirche', *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ii (1928), 225–37, if he exaggerates the speed with which the monumental chancel became the fully-fledged iconostasis, separating the faithful from the altar, is nevertheless right on the growing solemnity of the ceremonies surrounding the Eucharist in the late 6th century (at pp. 231–2).

intercessions of the saints who formed the back-stairs government
of that awesome throne.[1] Even when the basilica remained the focus
of attention, as in Thessalonica, its collective meaning was increas-
ingly blurred by the encroachment of *ex-voto* icons. Plainly to have
St. Demetrius as one's personal protector, by making him the god-
father of one's children and by recording the transaction in a votive
icon, meant more to individuals than did the imposing collective
liturgy of the Eucharist. 'Released from the serried ranks of a narra-
tive cycle or of a pictorial litany or calendar and no longer part of a
universal scheme, an objective, supra-personal order, the sacred repre-
sentation may become the object of a more intimate rapport, a more
personal relationship'.[2] Not every age can afford such luxury. The
untidiness implicit in the need for 'a more intimate rapport' might
strike a more orderly and militant age as superstition.

III

The Arab raids of the late seventh century fell like a hammer-blow
on the rich and loosely-knit world that we have described. They
created a deep demoralization. Only one city, Nicaea, felt that it
could convincingly ascribe its deliverance to its local icons.[3]
Pergamon, by contrast, fell after a resort to the most grisly form of
pagan sorcery.[4] Incidents such as this show that the problem of mor-
ale was too big to handle by traditional methods.[5] Loss of confidence
is not a feeling that we can expect to find on the surface of the
official historiography of the Byzantine empire; but in the course of
the seventh century, this human fact can be felt pressing in on every
facet of the Byzantine world.

Yet demoralization, in itself, cannot explain why any particular
society chooses a particular scapegoat. This is true of Byzantine
society in the eighth century. Byzantines had faced enough crises to
know what to do. They knew that God was frequently angry with
them for their sins. They knew what these sins were: homosexuality,
blasphemy, tolerance of pagans, Jews and heretics.[6] They had
frequently punished such sins. Even Leo III had done his best in a
tradition inherited directly from Justinian. He had ordered the
forcible baptism of all Jews within the empire.[7] Plainly, however,
this time it was not thought enough. What the Iconoclasts were intent

1. *V. Steph. Iun. P. G.* c. 1080A – the icon of the Virgin is, for the mother of Stephen,
'my surety, my patron, my helper'.
2. Kitzinger, 'Byzantine Art', *Sitzungsberichte* (1957), p. 44. Compare Grabar, *Mar-
tyrium*, ii. 87 f.; *Iconoclasme*, 84–88 and 203.
3. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6217, ed. de Boor, pp. 404–6: Hennephof, no. 3,
p. 3.
4. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6208, de Boor, p. 390.
5. *E.g.* Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6201, de Boor, p. 377.
6. Theodosius II, *Novella*, iii, 8 (438)– Jews, Samaritans, pagans, and heretics; Justinian
Novella, cxli (559) – homosexuals.   7. Sharf, *ubi supra*, 61.

on removing and punishing was not particular sins but something
more serious: the root sin of the human race, the deep stain of the
error of idolatry.[1] Only a change in the mental climate of the age
can account for such a drastic shift of emphasis.

Muslim propaganda can be discounted. Even if the Arab armies
contained a high proportion of Syrian and Egyptian adventurers who
might have been renegades and so could have provided Greek-speak-
ing propagandists of Islam, it is unlikely that the Muslims used such
methods and, in any case, that they would have been listened to by
those at the receiving end.[2] (If we wish to find debates about icons
between Christians and Muslims, we must go to the humdrum life
of the Syrian coast, where Cypriot merchants still frequented Gabala
and passed the time of day by arguing with the customs officers.[3])
Islamic propaganda was unnecessary. The influence of the Old
Testament upon the public image of the Byzantine empire had
grown steadily since the reign of Heraclius: the Byzantines were the
'true Israel'.[4] The post-Justinianic law was presented, by Leo III in
the preface to his *Ecloga*, as no more than an elaborate implemen-
tation of the law of Moses.[5] This evolution gave the Byzantine
clergy what they sorely needed in a time of crisis. It provided them
with a body of ideas that, to quote an anthropologist 'allows the
verbalisation of anxiety in a framework that is understandable and
that implies the possibility of doing something about it'.[6]

The savage and raw mood of the Iconoclasts, and the determin-
ation with which they attacked images as idolatrous, owes most to
their ability to verbalize their anxiety. It is our first impression of
them. When in the 720s the Patriarch Germanos wrote to Thomas of
Claudiopolis, the worship of icons was an issue on which he was
quite prepared to compromise. It was a practice which, like the
taking of wine among the sages of the Book of Proverbs, should be
treated 'μετὰ βουλῆς'.[7] What shocked Germanos was that, as a
provincial bishop, Thomas was formulating the public mood in
unusually stark terms[8]: Thomas had been saying that 'the Christian
people have gone astray'.[9] It was the presupposition that 'the
Christian people' could err so seriously as to lapse back into idol-
atry, and not the attack on icons themselves, that shocked the

1. Horos of 754: Hennephof, no. 205, p. 62.

2. *P. G.* xcii. 1365D – an Arab insulted the inhabitants in the siege of 717: 'calling
the city "Constantia" and the Great Church merely "Sofia"'.

3. Mansi, xiii. 80A.

4. *E.g.* George of Pisidia, *In restitutionem S. Crucis*, line 25 f., ed. A. Pertusi, *Giorgio di
Pisidia, Panegirici epici*, Studia Patristica et Byzantina, 7 (1960), 226.

5. Ecloga, *Proemion*, transl. E. H. Freshfield, *A Manual of Roman Law* (1926), pp. 66–70.

6. Clyde Kluckhohn, cited in G. Lienhardt, *Social Anthropology* (1966), p. 125.

7. Mansi, xiii, 109B.

8. *Ibid.* 105A. Thomas of Claudiopolis is told that he would be better occupied pray-
ing that the empire should have peace.

9. Mansi, xiii. 124D. Thomas preached this 'as if it was a matter of common and
irrefutable doctrine' – *ibid.* 109E.

patriarch.[1] It was a presupposition which the Iconoclasts found
writ large in the Bible. In the Old Testament, Israel had apostasized
on many occasions; according to St. Paul, the 'wrath of God' was
'poured out' over the human race for its idolatrous tendencies.[2]
Such a perspective stated nothing less than the truth. The Arab
invasions had come to assume proportions of 'a great aboriginal
catastrophe'; only national apostasy, and no amount of individual
laxity, could explain them. The apostasy of Israel had always taken
the form of a return to idols,[3] and the slow decline of mankind into
the mire of sin had taken the form of a steady increase in idolatry.[4]
Thus Iconoclasts could appeal to a fact which even the most elemen-
tary historical awareness could discover about their immediate past
– there had been an apparent increase in the use and prominence
accorded to images. Last, like all melodramatic verbalizations of
anxiety, its appeal lay in an implicit optimism. Blasphemy and
homosexuality were likely to be always with the people of God; but
it had been known that the pious kings in Judah[5] and pious Christian
emperors after Constantine had effectively extirpated idolatry.[6] A
quite unmistakable streak of reforming zeal, a frank admission that
institutions can get worse and a confidence that they can be made
better, is one of the most tantalizing features of the Iconoclast move-
ment.[7] But it is perhaps not as isolated as we had thought. All over
Europe, Christians were drawing concrete historical and political
conclusions from the Old Testament. In Northumbria, Bede was
meditating on the account of Gildas of how the Britons had once
lost their promised land to the Saxons, with an anxious sense that
perhaps the turn of the Saxons might come round.[8] His exact
contemporary, Thomas of Claudiopolis, was drawing equally bleak
conclusions 'from too straightforward a rumination on the Holy
Scriptures'.[9] The elemental and stark theme of the apostasy, dere-
liction and repentance of the people of Israel had become contem-
porary to men who were beginning to feel the cold chill of the
advance of Islam.

    The Iconoclasts could not, perhaps, have gone so far if they had
not been able to state their case with such irrefutable clarity. The
anxieties they mobilized were less tidy. Savage disillusionment and

1. *Ibid* 109B–D; 121D – 'that the accusation of the Scriptures on the fate of idolaters
is not applicable to us'; 128D – the critics are 'accusers of the Christians'.
2. *Ibid.* 121D and *Admonition of the Old Man*, ed. Melioransky, p. xviii: the Iconoclast
bishop, 'raising his voice, asked the people directly: "What think you of the Wisdom
of God?"' and pp. xxiii–xxiv.
3. *The Admonition of the Old Man*, ed. Melioransky, p. xxiv. Cf. *Adversus Constantinum
Caballinum, P. G.* xcv. 320C.
4. Mansi, xiii, 121D and *The Admonition of the Old Man*, p. xvi quoting *Wisdom*, xiv.
5. Gouillard, *ubi supra*, p. 287, lines 138–40, also in Hennephof, no. 79, p. 34.
6. Letter of Epiphanius of Salamis to Theodosius II: Hennephof, no.111, p. 45.
7. Mansi, xiii, 228B. Compare *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum, P. G.* xcv. 341B.
8. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (1971),
p. 74.   9. Germanos, *de haeresibus*, c. 40 *P. G.* xcviii. 77A.

contempt for failed gods are important factors in the Iconoclast movement. They are neither surprising nor peripheral. Faced by real distress, the Byzantine Age of Faith was as skin-deep as any other. An old man who had failed to receive a cure from the shrines of St. Cosmas and Damian stormed out: ἐπιθέτας 'ἀποκαλῶν τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ μηδεμίαν ἐνέργειαν εὐεργεσίας κεκτημένους, ἀλλὰ μάτην καὶ ἔκ τινος προλήψεως τὴν δόξαν τοῦ δύνασθαι παρὰ θεῷ ἔχοντας.[1]

The Iconoclast controversy has a blustering inconclusive character. The Arab invasions of the late seventh century account for this. For these invasions marked the end of the ancient world in Asia Minor: 'in the days of old cities were numerous in Rūm (Anatolia) but now they have become few.'[2] At a stroke, therefore, the icons lost half their backing. We have seen to what an extent the icons of the immediately previous age had owed their charge of holiness to acting as the focus of very real civic patriotism. By the eighth century, this had vanished. The morale of the towns was broken. The pilgrimage-sites that had dotted Asia Minor were deserted.[3] The relics of the saints were abandoned or hurriedly transferred.[4] The icon had circulated largely on the security of these firm local associations. Now icons were in danger of a giddy inflation. Refugees were bringing, from all corners of the empire, icons that lacked local approval.[5] Craftsmen were turning out increasingly standardized images of Christ and of the Virgin that had none of the homely familiarity of the image of one's local martyr.[6] It is not surprising that the crisis was first felt in the western provinces of Asia Minor. This was not because Iconoclasm had strong local roots in these areas. Far from it: it was Iconodulism which had the local roots;[7] but these roots had been shaken by the Muslim invasions.

Icons suffered, in part, because they were the symbols of a style of political life that was out of date. The Byzantine empire could no longer afford the luxury of remaining a 'commonwealth of cities'. Self-help had proved to be either treasonable or ineffective. The emperor had to be omnicompetent, and be seen to be omnicompetent.[8]

1. Deubner, Kosmas und Damian, p. 145, 32: 'calling the saints impostors, who possessed no real power to do anybody any good, but who enjoyed an imagined reputation for power to move God, due to prejudice.'

2. Ḥudūd al 'Ālam: the Regions of the World, transl. V. Minorsky (1937), p. 157. H. Ahrweiler, ubi supra, pp. 28–32.

3. Mansi xiii. 125AB – recognizes the decline in the powers of the icon of the Virgin at Sozopolis. See H. Ahrweiler, ubi supra, p. 3, n. 4 on how numerous such cult-sites had been.   4. Grabar, Martyrium, ii, 351, 354–5.

5. E.g. Mansi, xiii. 21D – on the resistance of a woman of Caesarea to the relic and icon of a new saint.

6. Grabar, Iconoclasme, pp. 90 ff.

7. As seen by Dobschütz, Christusbilder, p. 265, n. 3.

8. Thus the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V took over the building of local town walls: Theophanes, Chronographia, A. M. 6232, de Boor p. 412. These were marked only by traditional prophylactic signs of the Cross: A. Frolow, 'IC XC NIKA', Byzantinoslavica, xvii (1956), 106.

For the collapse of the city left a void in men's view of the empire. A new patriotism had to be created. The void was filled by more concrete emphasis than ever previously on the Byzantines as a people of God, whose political imagery was borrowed from the Old Testament. We have already seen the repercussion of this grave awareness on the ideology of the Iconoclasts. This was decisive. What was at stake was not only that images had been forbidden in the second Commandment (this everyone knew, and the patriarch's copy of the Old Testament even had a marginal note at the place),[1] but that the Byzantines were the people of God to whom this holy law had been delivered. Therefore, the idea of the church as the core of Byzantine identity hardened. From the seventh century onwards, Byzantines thought of themselves as the 'baptized people'.[2] It was an attitude that had spasmodic repercussions in forcible attempts to baptize Jewish communities on Byzantine territory.[3] They found that they were not only all baptized, but, also, far more united than previously. The Christological rancours of the sixth century had diffracted the religious life of the towns.[4] Now this religious life could fall into place: and it fell into place around the basilica and the liturgy of the Eucharist.[5] The Eucharist, as we have seen, was one of the potent symbols of the holy which the Iconoclasts presented as the correct alternative to icons. How very potent it was to men of the early eighth century can be appreciated in a sculpture of a colleague and contemporary of the Iconoclast bishops – the cross of Bishop Acca of Hexham of 740. 'Acca's cross and its decorations are distinguished by an almost iconoclastic dismissal of figural panel . . . . The vine scroll, the symbol of the church in union with Christ, or Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist, covers the whole surface. . .'.[6] Such a symbol had not been shared by the urban populations of the great towns of the sixth century. In the Little Byzantium left over by the Arabs, it could regain its position.[7]

The emperors had to win in battle if they were to survive at all. For this purpose the sign of the cross, with its unbroken association with victory over four centuries, was a more ancient and compact symbol than any Christ-icon could be.[8] When it came to winning

1. Mansi, xiii. 188B.
2. The Jews are juxtaposed with 'the baptised people': *Mirac S. Dem.* 1332B.
3. Sharf, *ubi supra*, pp. 53 and 61.
4. *E.g.* John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, P. G. lxxxvii 2877C, where the Eucharistic elements pass between a wife and her Chalcedonian woman neighbour, to the predictable annoyance of the Monophysite husband.
5. *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1349A – it is assumed that in Thessalonica everyone is present at the Eucharist.
6. Rosemary Cramp, *Early Northumbrian Sculpture*, Jarrow Lecture 1965, p. 7.
7. Mansi xiii. 124B. Germanos appeals to the solidarity of the solemn celebration of the Eucharist, which he has in common with the Iconoclasts.
8. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, p— 153: 'Sainte-Sophie n'offrait primitivement aucune figuration chrétienne en dehors de la croix repétée maintes fois, et cet exemple illustre rappelle la tradition à laquelle se rattachaient les iconoclastes.'

battles, the cross was stronger medicine: Heraclius,[1] Oswald of Northumbria,[2] the Armenians[3] all realized this; and the Arabs repaid the compliment – for them, Christians were not icon-worshippers, they were 'worshippers of the wood' (of the cross).[4] In a word: by asserting that only a limited number of symbols were invested with the idea of the holy, the Iconoclasts were choosing just those symbols that best suited a more collective and more highly centralized society. Norman Baynes has talked of the 'steel framework' of the Byzantine state.[5] Leo III and Constantine V attempted to ensure that this 'steel framework' stood out with a streamlined austerity, after generations of cluttering up by the traditions of a more affluent and easy-going age. Let us examine how the Iconoclast controversy reflects this change.

In the first place, it may explain the inconclusive quality of the Iconoclastic controversy. Iconoclast persecutions of Iconodules amount to very little. One might easily dismiss them as a 'chopping at twigs'.[6] But this is just the point. The Iconoclasts were only faced with twigs. Their policy had a firm, traditional basis, very much in tune with the average sentiments of the Byzantine secular clergy. It amounted to strengthening the backbone of the Byzantine church at the expense of pockets of centrifugal and illegitimate spiritual power. Their measures, therefore, though histrionic and brutal, were more like the clearing away of undergrowth in a well-established forest. The symbols to which the Iconoclasts appealed as the true repository of the holy carried implications that summed up a system of strong centralized government. It was Iconodulism rather than Iconoclasm that polarized strong local feelings. This is suggested by the fact that it was only after the reversal of Iconoclasm that some provincial cities regained, from the Empress Irene, a shadow of those lavish exemptions and privileges, which, in the seventh century, had been granted on the pretext of honouring the patron saints of these cities.[7] There was indeed a radical wing in Iconoclasm that denied the intercession of the saints, and so denied their role as the special protectors of individuals and localities.[8] There could have been no

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1. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 29 and 155, and 'La précieuse Croix de la Lavra de S. Athanase au Mont Athos', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, xix (1969), 113 – on the revival of the use of the simple Cross at the time of the Byzantine military successes of the tenth century. See also Frolow, *ubi supra*, pp. 98–110.

2. Rosemary Cramp, *ubi supra*, p. 5.

3. B. Arakelian, *Armenian Reliefs of the IVth to VIIth centuries* (1949) – in Armenian, pp. 60–61. Fig. 49.   4. Mansi, xiii. 357D.

5. N. H. Baynes, 'The Decline of the Roman Power in Western Europe', *Byzantine Studies*, p.94.

6. Examined by Melioransky, in his preface to *The Admonition of the Old Man*, pp. 25–29.

7. A. A. Vasiliev, 'An Edict of the Emperor Justinian II', *Speculum*, xviii (1943), 1–13. See G. I. Bratianu, *Privilèges et franchises municipales dans l'Empire byzantin* (1936), 88–98 and H. Ahrweiler, *ubi supra*, 25, n. 4.

8. G. Ostrogorsky, *Studien*, 29–40 – for a differentiated account of this evidence.

more drastic rebuttal of the ideology of the civic saints than such a categorical denial. There was an Iconoclast Jacobinism that ruthlessly sacked local cult-sites.[1] In Constantinople itself pockets of 'illegitimate' power were, spasmodically, mopped-up.[2]

It would be misleading to regard the Iconoclasts as anti-urban.[3] Rather, Constantine V acted as the midwife of a new style of urban life, by which the cities, from being pockets of local autonomy, became centres for the operation of the central government.[4] The success of Constantine V in Constantinople was spectacular. He did nothing less than recreate a city and its morale when it had been emptied by plague.[5] The immigration caused by the aftermath of this plague was an opportunity which Constantine V grasped with both hands. And he did so in the ancient, resolutely secular manner of an emperor such as Anastasius I. The images of the six Oecumenical Councils disappeared from the Milion, the hub of the city.[6] They were replaced by portraits of the emperor's favourite charioteer.[7] In so doing, Constantine V revived the full-blooded and concrete mystique of the Hippodrome, with its associations of the victory of the good luck of the city and of its emperor.[8] This was, perhaps, a welcome change from anxious dependence on the invisible Virgin.[9] It contrasts with Heraclius, who was prepared to leave the city in pledge to an icon of the Virgin. Constantine, by contrast, stayed put. And he reaped a reward of almost mystical popularity.[10] In making Constantinople the unchallenged hub of the empire, Constantine V, rather than Heraclius, deserves the title of the founder of medieval Byzantium.

1. The Iconoclast bishops in 754 feared extensive looting: Mansi, xiii. 332DE, Hennephof, no. 247, p. 73. See also Germanus, *de haeresibus*, c. 41, *P. G.* xcviii. 80AC.

2. On the fate of the relics of S. Euphemia see the material in R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin: Le siège de Constantinople* (1953), pp.126–36, and F. Halkin, *Euphémie de Chalcédoine*, Subsidia Hagiographica, 41 (1965), 81–106. The shrine in question was near the Hippodrome, of comparatively recent origin (the relics were translated from Chalcedon at the time of the Persion invasion in 615), and credited with miraculous powers. It was eminently vulnerable according to the criteria we have discussed: it had only popular recognition. By contrast, Constantine V appears to have used the more securely 'vested' relic of the Cross for formal occasions, such as the swearing of oaths: Theophanes, A. M. 6257, de Boor, p. 437, 13f.

3. As H. Ahrweiler, *ubi supra*, p. 24 implies.

4. M. J. Sjusjumov, 'Vizantijskij gorod (seredina vii – seredina ix. vv.)', *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, xxvii (1967), 38–70 is the most recent treatment of this aspect of town life.

5. P. J. Alexander, *ubi supra*, pp. 123–4: 'It does seem that Constantine V made the city population prosperous at the expense of the peasants.'

6. *V. Steph. Iun. P. G.* c. 1113A.

7. *Ibid.* c. 1169B, on the celebration of the Brumalia.

8. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, pp. 156–60. Now see Alan Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer*, 1972.

9. Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, p. 35.

10. See the remarkable incident in the tense mood before the defeat of the Byzantine army by the Bulgars: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6304, ed. de Boor, p. 501. The crowd surged round the tomb of Constantine V calling on him to arise and save the Roman state.

In this obscure and rancorous debate on the fate of the Byzantine town, the bishops almost invariably sided with the centralized hierarchy of the empire. Their tastes had kept them within the firm horizon of the town. In their consecrated basilicas they celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy that was the symbol of the unity of the Christian city. In their palaces (which, frequently, were no more than a wing of the governor's palace)[1] they imposed the stern disciplinary norms of the ancient Christian penitential system on the townsfolk. They had their jails for recalcitrant country clergymen.[2] They were so used to participating with the governor in the secular ceremonial of city life that a bishop of seventh-century Thessalonica found it only too easy to dream that he was sitting in the theatre watching a tragedy.[3] When in the fifth century monks had protested to the bishop of Chalcedon that the governor was staging pagan games in the Hippodrome, the bishop told these zealots to mind their own business.[4] The situation plainly continued, and was reactivated in the course of the eighth century.[5] It is very significant that we should see the urban reforms of Constantine V in high relief, by the oblique light of monastic disapproval. For bishop and governor stood together, in the Iconoclast period, against the holy man of monastic background. *Cherchez le moine*: this remains the key to most Iconoclast policy, to all Iconoclast persecution, and to the overwhelming bulk of the contemporary Iconodule evidence from which we draw our impression of the period. Iconomachy in action is monachomachy. What was at stake, however, was not the dissolution of the Byzantine monasteries. It was, rather, a singularly consequential, if spasmodic, determination to break the power of the holy man in Byzantine society, both as a principal bulwark of the power of the icon and, so one might suggest, as a force in itself.

The holy man, of course, was a monk. He wore the badge of the monastic *schema* and, often, he practised from the shelter of a great monastery or great traditional grouping of hermits in single place.[6] But the Iconoclast attacks on monasteries are incidental to their main purpose. This was the severing of the links between the individual holy man and his clientele. The attack is a final illustration of the variety of the issues at stake in the eighth century. The evidence allows us to appreciate the situation very fully. We are faced with a situation strictly analogous to the notorious sorcery purges of the fourth century. These purges had happened at a time when two

1. Claude, *ubi supra*, p. 82.
2. John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, P. G. lxxxvii. 2969D.
3. *Mirac. S. Dem.* 1296B.
4. *Vita Hypatii*, c. 33, p. 108.
5. *V. Steph. Iun.* P. G. c. 1120A; 'Vie de S. Romain', *Analecta Bollandiana*, xxx (1911), 413.
6. *E.g.* Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6256, ed. de Boor, p. 442: Hennephof, no. 12, p. 9. *V. Steph. Iun.* P. G. c. 1092D – the mountain of St. Auxentios, a notorious lair of holy men, was turned into an imperial hunting reserve.

structures of power were sensed to conflict: the explicit, articulated vested power of the Imperial servants conflicting with the inarticulate power of the traditional classes of the Roman world – with the *je ne sais quoi* of their prestige and education, and the labyrinthine tentacles of their actual political and social influence. The sorcery accusations of that period were a way of ferreting out and destroying hard nuclei of such inarticulate, un-vested power. It is the same with the holy men of the reigns of Leo III and especially of Constantine V.[1] We have already seen the extent to which the Iconoclast clergy were committed to a structure of vested power. It was implicit in their contention that only objects that had been properly blessed by the appropriate authority could be treated as holy. We have seen how a whole set of social and administrative developments in the eighth century clustered behind this statement. We have seen, also, how, up to that century, holy man and icon had developed concomitantly. They were the foci of a totally different form of unvested inarticulate power. They were not blessed by anybody.[2] Both met needs that were private and not collective. Both very often lay outside the very horizon of the city – in suburban monasteries or on the tops of the nearest mountains. Both icon and holy man were consecrated from below. This meant, in practice, that both stood at the centre of a whole world of needs and relationships that were not included in the vested structure of the church and its collective rites.

The conflict latent in this situation was brought into the open by the events of the late seventh century. The equilibrium between collective overtones of the civic cult of the icon and the private ministrations of the holy man and of the miraculous icon, which had been perfectly maintained in a previous age, was brutally upset by the depletion of the cities. This meant that the centrifugal, the ascetic, and the non-collective and potentially non-urban elements in the worship of icons were suddenly exaggerated. It became brutally plain for the first time that either the bishop or the holy man must be the moral arbiter of Byzantium.[3] The holy man had tended to bless and foster the growth of the icon; the bishop, as the famous *Admonition of the Old Man* showed clearly, now found that this was against the law of God as he and his emperor interpreted it.[4] The holy man had played a large role in lightening the load of the early Christian penitential system; the bishop felt more strongly than ever previously that if the Byzantine empire was a new Israel living under a single

1. *V. Steph. Iun. P. G.* c. 1129B: 'that sorcerer', is Constantine V's view of Stephen the Younger. See P. Brown, 'Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity', *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (A. S. A. Monographs 9), 1970, pp. 20–25: (*Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine*, 1972, pp. 123–31).

2. Hence the constant pairing of arguments on the holiness and supernatural origin of the monastic *schema* with arguments for the similar position of the holy icons.

3. *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum, P. G.* xcv. 329D and 332A.

4. *The Admonition of the Old Man,* ed. Melioransky, p. xviii. 'We should believe what has been said by God (in the Scriptures) and commanded by our holy Emperor.'

divine law, then it was he who should be its leader and the admin-
istrator of its laws for the believer.[1] The holy man had drawn his
prestige largely from having opted out of urban society for the desert,
while remaining within comfortable travelling distance for his urban
clientele;[2] bishop and governor were committed to ensuring that
many a small town did not sink back into the surrounding country-
side.[3] The holy man, like the icon, was holy without having had this
holiness delegated to him by the bishop. All this was no purely
symbolic debate in eighth-century Byzantium: for, in Byzantium, as
in other early medieval societies, holiness was power; and the symbol
of the holy could cover a very real nexus of social influence. Hence
the concern of Constantine V. We can follow it in the fully-docu-
mented account of the life and martyrdom of St. Stephen the Younger.
Once established on the mountain of Auxentios on the Chalcedon
side of the Bosphorus, Stephen became the focus of a large clientele
from Constantinople.[4] He was approached to handle large sums of
money.[5] Aristocratic ladies were attached to him as their spiritual
father. Later, his clientele included army officers, and his consul-
tations involved the worship of two private icons.[6] The presence of
these icons in Stephen's cell was rather less important than Stephen
himself. Like the supposed sorcerer of the fourth century Stephen
was the nucleus of inarticulate power: 'Sitting on top of his moun-
tain', wrote the Imperial spies, 'he is digging pits for you'.[7] Constan-
tine V and his agents were right to be suspicious. The Byzantine
upper class had remained, for all its new emphasis on centralized
power, a singularly fluid and competitive body of men. The holy
man as spiritual father (joined in the seventh and eighth centuries by
the private collection of icons and by the icon of the patron saint as
protector and godfather) was but one figure in a tangled skein of
alternative and conflicting power structures. A politician's success
depended on his ability to manipulate these alternative power struc-
tures.[8] Put crudely, success needed constant personal blessing: there
is hardly a single emperor from the fifth century onwards whose
career to the throne did not involve an interview with either a holy

1. *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, P. G. xcv. 329D.
2. As with *V. Steph. Iun.* 1088A f.
3. On the profoundly non-urban quality of the position of the holy man see E.
Patlagean, 'À Byzance: ancienne hagiographie et histoire sociale', *Annales*, xxiii (1968),
120–3.
4. *V. Steph. Iun.* P. G. c. 1088A; 1104.
5. *Ibid.* 1105B.
6. *Ibid.* 1153A – 1156C. The degree to which Stephen continued an older tradition of
the ministrations of the holy man, or was seen in that light, is shown by the use made
by his biographer of the *Vita Euthymii* of Cyril of Scythopolis: J. Gill, 'The Life of Stephen
the Younger by Stephen the Deacon: Debts and Loans', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*,
vi (1940), 115.
7. *V. Steph. Iun.* P. G. c. 1164A and 1169A.
8. H. G. Beck, 'Byzantinische Gefolgschaftswesen', *Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen
Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1965, no. 5 shows this very clearly.

man or, for his opponents, with a sorcerer.[1] The circumstantial attention which Iconodule writers lavished on the seances of Iconoclast emperors with sorcerers, and on the influence on the careers of these emperors of the engagements entered into at such seances, is only the obverse of the readiness with which Iconodule holy men blessed would-be emperors.

Political prophecies by holy men are particularly rife in the literature of the eighth and ninth centuries. Whether these prophecies were made in answer to direct consultations with the holy man conceived of as an oracle, or whether (as is much more likely) the remark of the holy man in the course of a conversation was seized upon as significant in the light of what later happened, or was interpreted as tacit permission to act on the intentions of the group, politics were being talked on the top of the mountains around Constantinople.[2]

Nothing illustrates more vividly the determination of Constantine V and his agents to avoid a confusion of authority than the way in which he handled these insidious links between the holy man and the society around the imperial court.[3] Those holy men who are executed are those whose clientele had become the most tenacious.[4] Execution was the fate of the spiritual father of the courtier who had heard all the details of the courtier's homosexual love affair with the emperor.[5] Nothing if not consequential and histrionic, Constantine V deconsecrated the potential holy man quite as thoroughly as he deconsecrated the icons.[6] His measures were designed to cut the links between the monastic spiritual adviser and the laity. The books of *Sayings of the Fathers*, from which monks drew on a huge reservoir of ascetic anecdotes to guide their charges through life's great casuistry, were burnt.[7] It was forbidden to visit an *Abba*. It was forbidden to take communion from him (which process might have involved the sort of embarrassing revelations to which we have just referred).[8] With an unfailing eye for the symbolic significance of great public gestures, Constantine V attacked the monastic *schema*. He performed a solemn deconsecration ceremony in the Hippodrome of Constantinople.[9]

1. Brown, 'Holy Man', p. 98, for Late Roman evidence. See Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6198, de Boor, p. 375, 14 and A. M. 6203, de Boor, p. 381, 6 for two vivid examples.
2. *Vita Iohannicii*, c. 15, 25, 28, 30, 33, *Acta Sanctorum*, 4 Nov, 11, 1 (1894), 346B – 347B; 355C; 357C – 358A; 361C.
3. On the fate of the settlements on the Mountain of St. Auxentios: *V. Stepb. Iun. P. G.* c. 1092D.
4. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6257, de Boor, p. 438: 'on the charge that they had been in the habit of visiting the above-mentioned recluse' (Stephen).
5. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6259, de Boor, p. 442.
6. *V. Stepb. Iun. P. G.* c. 1112A sq; 1136A f; 1140A; 1148B.
7. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6263 ec. de Boor, pp. 445–6: Hennephof, no. 13, p. 10.   8. *V. Stepb. Iun. P. G.* c. 1109B – 1112B.
9. *Ibid.* 1137BD; 1164B; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A. M. 6257, ed. de Boor, p. 438: Hennephof, no. 10, p. 8.

His intimate agent at Ephesus, Michael Lachonodracon understood his master's theatrical gifts only too well. He made the monks in his province parade in the robe of a bridegroom.[1] The *schema* that had symbolized the holy man's position as standing outside normal human relations, as had been the case when this *schema* had first been conferred by angels on St. John the Baptist in the Judaean desert, was replaced by that garment which a man wore when he was finally and irrevocably committed by marriage to the world of human kin-relationships. This clear and witty comment by an Iconoclast governor reinforces the impression with which we began, that the Iconoclast controversy was a debate on the holy in Byzantine society. But only the historian of the social evolution of the Late Antique and Early Byzantine worlds can appreciate what a variety of factors lie behind such a debate. The scene in the Hippodrome of Ephesus, quite as much as the destruction of the icons, is no less than an attempt by a group of Byzantines to challenge three centuries of unofficial leadership in the Christian community.

All Souls College, Oxford   PETER BROWN

1. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A.7. 6263, de Boor, p. 446.