

LOCATING THE ANCIENT OF DAYS:  
APPROPRIATION AND SYNCRETISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A  
BYZANTINE CHRISTOLOGICAL MOTIF

by

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## ABSTRACT

Constantinople, capital city of the Byzantine Empire established by Constantine in the fourth century, carried the economic, military, and multicultural advantages of a city that had already existed as a desirable settlement location for nearly a millennium under numerous polities and names. Strategically located on the Bosphorus Strait linking the Sea of Marmara and Black Sea, thus the major Euro-Asiatic trade routes, Constantinople benefitted from its position of power as a metaphorical hinge between East and West to gather various stable iconographies and mythologies whose meanings were mutable and could be reconceptualized to fit the Empire's Christian contexts. As didactic devices for translating complicated Christian dogma to the masses became increasingly accepted and necessary in the Byzantine Empire by the second half of the sixth century, Constantinople's transcultural environment facilitated a continuous supply of simplified motifs, like the Ancient of Days used to illustrate Christological preexistence, originating from Greco-Roman, European, Near Eastern, Semite, and Asiatic cultural sources. Depicting neither God the Father nor Christ the Son, the Ancient of Days motif – an aged man with long hair and beard – stood for the eternal, immaterial essence of the Christian god. As the Christian god had not been witnessed in a human existence on earth, the Ancient of Days motif can be understood as the syncretic outcome of various divine, eternal, prophetic, and philosophical types familiar throughout the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world. While no single definitive visual model exists for the Ancient of Days, numerous pagan, philosophical, and monotheistic textual sources mentioning either an aged male figure with white hair and beard who imparts wisdom, an entity called the Ancient of Days, or conceptual notions of eternity, exist as further testament to a syncretic contextual basis for the Byzantine motif. Understandably few examples of the pre-Iconoclasm Ancient of Days motif are known. However, the range of format, media, and geography displayed by the Italian diptych, Constantinopolitan mosaics and icon, and Cappadocian frescoes considered here are suggestive of a much larger tradition where the simplicity of the Ancient of Days motif allowed for adaptability into socio-cultural variants across the Byzantine provinces.

## GENESIS: AN INTRODUCTION

In the first decade of the twenty-first century a painting of the Christian deity was commissioned for the ceiling of a Greek Orthodox parish in Montreal, Quebec (fig. 1). Depicting an aged man with long white hair and beard, round nimbus halo inscribed with a triangle, and dressed in pink and blue robes with a white cape lavishly trimmed in jewels and gold, the painting initially caused an outcry among the most devout. The original fresco on which the painting was modeled omitted IC XC, the designation of Christ, which would successfully identify the figure as Christ in the eternal guise of the Ancient of Days, rather than God the Father who was not to be visually rendered (fig. 2). Contestation only subsided once IC XC was added flanking the figure in the new painting.<sup>1</sup> The Ancient of Days motif – a figural representation of an aged man with long white hair and beard, generally adorned with a nimbus crown – appears in Christian settings dating back to the sixth century Byzantine Empire. Examples include the fresco and tondo paintings in Montreal, a twentieth century fresco in Toledo, Ohio (fig. 3), a seventeenth century wall painting in Gondar, Ethiopia (fig. 4), a fourteenth century fresco in Ubisi, Georgia (fig. 5), the thirteenth century Kursk Root Icon from Kursk, Russia (figs. 6 and 7), numerous eleventh century Constantinopolitan illuminated religious texts (figs. 8-10), and a tenth century fresco at the Vatopedion Monastery on Mount Athos, Greece (fig. 11). Combined, these examples are noteworthy because they provide evidence for the dissemination of the Ancient of Days iconography across various

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the controversy and later retraction, visit <http://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/letter-to-an-iconographer-on-the-ancient-of-days>.

cultures where only slight visual modifications in the color of robes or shape of halo occur, despite changes made to the motif's contextual understanding.

In the original Byzantine sense, the Ancient of Days motif was used as the final third of proto-Trinitarianism, relating to the birth, death, and ascension of Christ to reside with the divine father until Judgment Day. Later, in the mid-eleventh century, the Byzantine context shifts, and the motif becomes Christ as the Ancient of Days, representing only Christ the Son's existence with God the Father before, and again after, his humanity. Relatively concurrent with this contextual shift was the Great Schism of 1054 between the Latin West and Greek East that created the permanent division between Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy. While Byzantine Christianity from the east was certainly known in the provinces and hinterlands before the Great Schism, after the eleventh century Orthodoxy continued to spread in the Near Eastern territories, the Balkan territories to the north, and into Africa where it developed local variations in liturgical rite and iconographic practice. Representative of these derivations are local expressions of the Ancient of Days displaying how Western Orthodoxy applied the title and motif to God the Father, Russian Orthodoxy applied them to God the Son, and Ethiopian Orthodoxy used them to reference the immaterial eternal essence of the Trinity.<sup>2</sup>

Before these evolutions could occur, however, the Ancient of Days had to appear in Christian narrative and visual form within the Byzantine Empire. Established in the early fourth century by Constantine, the Byzantine Empire owes much of its early success

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the role of the Ancient of Days in religious and spiritual settings across multiple cultural practices, see Keene-Lund.

to the capital city, Constantinople. Constantinople had already functioned as a nexus point along the major Euro-Asiatic trade routes under its Greek name, Byzantium, for centuries; and, the city's desirable position as a commercial hub, settler destination, military stronghold, and political center is attested through various Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, and Egyptian texts, as well as its ever shifting early history of Greek, Persian, or Roman control. Putting to use its identity as a center for economic, cultural, political, intellectual, and religious pursuits, Constantinople provided the ideal environment for Christianity, the Byzantine Empire's official religion, to flourish because various dogma, rites, and eventually imagery, could be appropriated or adapted from the various cultural sources encountered by means of trade within, and immigration to, the capital.

During the fifth century, Christological debates inside the Eastern church gave way to emphasizing Christ in his dual, figural natures as Son of God and King of Heaven, rather than relying upon symbolic references, including the cross, fish, and grapevine, previously appropriated from Greco-Roman iconography. Under Justinian in sixth century Constantinople, Christianity first began to struggle with defining a shared visual and theological narrative for Christ as the "God-Man."<sup>3</sup> Taking inspiration from classical philosophy and Near Eastern spirituality, theology is a conceptual approach to comprehending the symbolic, mythic, or analogical language of the doctrine laid out in scriptural texts, which were inaccessible to those outside the church hierarchy or aristocracy. To assist the general public who were not educated in theology at one of the many institutions of higher learning available to the upper echelons in Constantinople,

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<sup>3</sup> "God-Man" is a phrase borrowed from Shepherd to concisely indicate Christ as both a divine being and a human being who had a terrestrial existence, see 101.

didactic religious imagery was deemed necessary and the sixth century multicultural environment of Constantinople provided opportunities for the church to benefit from syncretism – which was seemingly designed to blur differences in cultural practices in order to bolster Christianity with whatever was strongest or most characteristic about its competitors.<sup>4</sup>

While neither an appropriated or syncretic visual model has been confirmed for the Ancient of Days sixth century appearance as a Christian motif, known images including Zeus, *Aion*, seers, and philosophers would have connoted familiar notions of the immortal, eternal, prophetic, and wise. Sourcing from these more ancient forms, bits and pieces could be combined and given a new, Christian, context so that the various parts would equal an innovative whole identifiable as the Ancient of Days. As a distillation of wise and eternal types, in third century Roman Christian funerary contexts Christ is depicted most frequently as the teacher, visually resembling a philosopher with long hair and beard, simple white garments, and no attributes.<sup>5</sup> I will show how this philosopher-esque representation evolved into the earliest sixth century depiction of the Byzantine Ancient of Days, while Christ will iconographically evolve into *Pantokrator*, or supreme judge, who rivals the emperor's status based on pose, regalia, attributes, and placement in architectural settings. Additionally, numerous textual sources mention either an aged male figure with white hair and beard who imparts wisdom, an entity called the Ancient of Days, or conceptual notions of eternity, to form a syncretic contextual basis for the Byzantine motif.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on cultic syncretism, see Elsner.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the iconographic depictions of Christ in Early Christian Roman contexts, see Freeman.

Of greatest interest to me are the cultural interactions that led to the creation and dispersion of the Byzantine Ancient of Days motif beginning in the sixth century. To support this endeavor, I have identified four examples using the Ancient of Days iconography in a variety of mediums as a sample set: a small, personal, carved ivory diptych from Ravenna, Italy (fig. 12), two monumental mosaics from the Church of the Holy Apostles previously in Constantinople, a portable encaustic icon at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt (fig. 13), and the fresco program from the vault of Eđri Taş kilisesi (figs. 14 and 15), a rock-cut church in the Ihlara region of Cappadocia. Rather than take on the theological and Christological implications of the Ancient of Days motif as numerous scholars before me have done,<sup>6</sup> I will consider how the need for a shared language among people who came into contact with one another through trade interactions and migration created a climate conducive to the rise of imagery with an inherently understood universality, even when context and use did not match exactly. Through analysis and comparison of the sample set, it is my intention to demonstrate how the simplicity of the Ancient of Days motif allowed for its mutability into various local adaptations and formats. Particularly useful to my research are the writings of André Grabar, Jas Elsner, Ernst Kitzinger, Cyril Mango, and Kurt Weitzmann, of course; but also, Jennifer Awes Freeman, David Mattingly, and Alicia Walker. Of foremost importance, however, is Gretchen Krehling McKay because without her essay, "Illustrating the Gospel of John: the Exegesis of John Chrysostom and

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<sup>6</sup> Theological and Christological studies featuring the Ancient of Days have been conducted by Avner, Bernabo, Emerton, Panaino, Shepherd, and Tsuji, with numerous others writing on just one occurrence of the motif.

Images of the Ancient of Days in Eleventh-Century Byzantine Manuscripts," I would not have come to my current line of research.

The following thesis has been divided into four chapters and a conclusion to more thoroughly investigate the Ancient of Days motif from the viewpoint of cultural movement. Chapter 1 establishes a historiography of Constantinople from the reign of Constantine through the reign of Justinian in order to situate the cultural climate that allowed figural imagery to appear as decoration within the Eastern Church. Chapter 2 considers recent shifts in the approaches taken towards the study of Byzantine topics and identifies transculturation, globalism, and a relative form of globalism called Mediterraneanism, as the methods most applicable to this study. Chapter 3 compiles pagan, philosophical, and monotheistic textual references dating back to the Bronze Age where the Ancient of Days is identifiable either by name, description, or purpose, and discusses how the cultural climate of Constantinople provided an environment where those texts may have been known and even accessible. Chapter 4 draws on the framework established by the previous three chapters as a way to discuss the location, creation, visual appearance, and meaning of the sample set. I find this layout is most logical for my reader because it starts with concrete notions of time and place before adding abstract methodological concepts and finishing with focused areas of appropriation and syncretism that contributed to the formation of the Byzantine Ancient of Days motif.

## SITUATING THE BYZANTINE CLIMATE

Since its inception in the early fourth century the Byzantine Empire was surrounded in an aura of the superhuman,<sup>7</sup> legendarily bestowed based on Constantine's personal connection with the Christian god who appeared to Constantine in a dream and ordained his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Leaving Rome and selecting the established Greek-speaking city of Byzantium as his new imperial capital for the Empire,<sup>8</sup> renaming it Constantinople after himself, Constantine was able to capitalize on the

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<sup>7</sup> The Byzantine Empire, or eastern portion of the Late Roman Empire, has its heartland in the medieval region of Anatolia and was founded by Constantine in AD 334, with Constantinople as the new imperial capital. Establishment of Constantinople was a tactile move essential for security based on proximity to the frontiers, a socio-political move to distance the imperial court from the entanglement of the conservative Senatorial class of "Old Rome" who opposed the removal of the tetrarchs and Christianity as the official state religion, and an economic and cultural move to increase interactions by positioning his capital at the junction of the major Euro-Asiatic trade routes; see Alchermes, 13-17; Bowersock, 113-122; Sommer. Even though "Byzantine" is a label constructed in the seventeenth century, it will be used here for clarity and distinction from the Roman Empire.

<sup>8</sup> Latinized, Byzantium. According to Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* 4:11, Lygos was the earliest settlement at the site, likely of Thracian origin between the thirteenth and eleventh centuries BC: "On leaving the Bosphorus we come to the Gulf of Casthenes,... Next comes the promontory of Chrysoceras, upon which is the town of Byzantium, a free state, formerly called Lygos, distant from Dyrrhachium 711 miles,—so great being the space of land that intervenes between the Adriatic Sea and the Propontis." The Greek colony Byzantium was established about 667 BC by colonists from Megara, according to legend, the colonists named the settlement for their king, Byzas. Though the Greek colony changed hands – Megarian, Persian, Spartan, and then Roman – over the centuries because of its strategic location and numerous ports, memory of Greek establishment was preserved in the name of Constantine's eastern empire, the Byzantine Empire. For extended reading, see Georgacas; Jonathan Harris, *Constantinople: Capital of Byzantium* (New York: Continuum USA, 2007); Hingley; Adrian Room, *Placenames of the World: Origins and Meanings of the Names for 6,600 Countries, Cities, Territories, Natural Features, and Historic Sites* (2nd ed.), (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2006); Andrew G. Traver, *From Polis to Empire, The Ancient World, ca. 800 B.C.-A.D. 500* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002).

advantages of a city that had existed as a desirable settlement location because of its economically, militarily, and culturally strategic location on the Bosphorus Strait linking the Sea of Marmara and Black Sea,<sup>9</sup> thus the major trade routes of West and East, for nearly a millennium already. Identifiably Christian from its conception,<sup>10</sup> Constantinople benefitted from its position of power as a metaphorical hinge between East and West to gather various stable iconographies and mythologies whose meanings were mutable and could be reconceptualized to fit Christian contexts. As didactic devices for translating complicated dogma to the masses became increasingly accepted and necessary in the Byzantine Empire by the second half of the sixth century, Constantinople's position of power facilitated a continuous supply of simplified motifs, like the Ancient of Days used to illustrate Christological preexistence, originating from Greco-Roman, European, Near Eastern, Semite, and Asiatic cultural sources. In turn, these motifs were carried throughout the Empire to additional new locales where their contexts were again adapted to create various local significations.

By the time Constantine took control of Byzantium the city had been an autonomous part of the Roman Empire for nearly four centuries, although late Byzantium was Roman in appearance due to Septimius Severus's late second century siege,

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<sup>9</sup> Constantinople is situated on a promontory known as the Golden Horn.

<sup>10</sup> In AD 313 Constantine's Edict of Milan made Christianity the official language of the Roman Empire, which included Byzantium. While it is not possible to determine how much of the city's population followed the religion, the growing presence of Early Christians in the Roman Empire that led to the Edict and geographic relationship to the Holy Lands suggest Byzantium would have had a Christian population before Constantine's arrival.

destruction, and reconstruction.<sup>11</sup> Conceiving his city in the image of “Old Rome” because Rome, as the center of the Empire, was wherever the emperor resided, Constantine borrowed a selection of Roman significations of power from both the Republic and Imperial periods. For its Republican inheritance Constantinople was divided into fourteen districts with urban prefectures and a municipal council, or senate. For its Imperial inheritance, Constantine followed the lead of emperors including Vespasian, Trajan, and Hadrian by creating the Forum of Constantine as a public plaza from which more than fifty colonnaded streets extended throughout the city. Constantine ornamented his forum with a central porphyry column surmounted by a bronze statue of himself. Originally, this bronze statue may have been a sculpture of Apollo Parnopius created by the Greek artist, Pheidias, for the Athenian Acropolis, now refitted in Constantinople with Constantine’s own portrait head. In the statue’s left hand an orb containing a relic of the True Cross was placed; the Byzantine Palladium, a Christian cult object in contrast to the pagan Roman Palladium, is fabled to have been buried at the foot of the column.<sup>12</sup> Constantine rebuilt the Severan forum, the colonnaded *Tetrastoon* plaza,

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<sup>11</sup> Roman elements in Byzantium included public baths, imperial residence, amphitheater, theater, and forum with Milion, or mile-marker from which to measure the distance to Rome, see Alchermes, 17-20; Evans, 16-34.

<sup>12</sup> Porphyry is a costly purple stone imported from Egypt for use by the Roman emperors. For more on imported stone, see Kinney, 142; for potential reuse of the statue, see Pausanias 1.24.8; Garth Fowden, “Religious Developments in Late Roman Lycia” *Poikila* 10 (1991): 119-131; Alison Frantz, *The Athenian Agora XXIV. Late Antiquity AD 67-700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 75-76; for more on the column in its entirety, see Evans, 18-19.

renaming it the *Augusteion* after his imperial title, Constantinus Augustus.<sup>13</sup> Adjoining the *Augusteion* and the preexisting Baths of Zeuxippos, Constantine built his most prominent structures: the Great Palace, Senate House, Christian churches Hagia Irene and Hagia Sophia, patriarchal residence, and the Hippodrome for public entertainment. A carryover from his own prior practices in “Old Rome,” Constantine used extensive amounts of *spolia*, especially statuary, for public decoration throughout the city to visually emphasize Constantinople’s dominance and permanence.<sup>14</sup> From the cities position on the Golden Horn, waterways provided natural defenses on three sides. On the fourth, public cisterns placed in the suburban outskirts provided fresh drinking water to the city center through a series of aqueducts. Beyond the cisterns, Constantine constructed a fortification wall with farmland just inside to accommodate livestock and

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<sup>13</sup> Evans alternately suggests the *Tetrastoon* was renamed for Constantine’s mother, the Augusta Helena, based on a porphyry column placed there bearing her portrait statue, see 16-18.

<sup>14</sup> *Spolia* is a sixteenth century term attributed to Raphael meaning “spoils,” with a general reference to military spoils. Constantine was the first Roman emperor to employ extensive *spolia* because it was the most cost-effective way to procure marble decoration after the Carrara quarries were abandoned, see Kinney 138-143. The appearance and figural types of *spolia* in Constantinople are recorded by Christodorus of Thebes in the early sixth century and Niketas in the late seventh century. Neither author records the source of *spoliation*, but they are mentioned as classical types from pagan antiquity whose original meaning was lost on contemporary viewers. For a discussion of the *spolia* statues in Constantinople, see Cyril Mango, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), 55–75; Sarah Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For their multiple potential interpretations, see Cyril Mango, “L’Attitude Byzantine à l’Égard des Antiquités Greco-Romaines,” in *Byzance et les images*, eds. by A. Guillou and J. Durand (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1994), 95–120. For a list of extant early Byzantine statues, see *The Last Statues of Antiquity*, a database compiled by R. R. R. Smith and B. Ward-Perkins (laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk).

agriculture that would sustain the city if attacked.<sup>15</sup> Combined, Constantine's actions in Constantinople represent his strategic plans for a steadfast empire that, while identifiably Christian, is accepting of outside cultural traditions in order to create a dominant global presence.

After Constantine's death Constantinople continued to grow as a religious, commercial, and cultural center in the Mediterranean, so by the reign of Justinian I in the sixth century, imperial patronage had transformed the city, allowing it to compete with the long established cities of Alexandria and Antioch. For his own part, Justinian actively embraced Constantine's vision for Constantinople as a single, unified example for the might of the Byzantine Empire, the inheritor of Greece and Rome codified under Christian dogma. Modeling himself after Constantine, Justinian is espoused by Procopius of Caesarea as successful, at times visionary, in his decisions of empire based once more on a special connection to the Christian god.<sup>16</sup> In Justinian, this connection was most clearly expressed by the successful raising of the massive central dome on his new, post-

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the urban development of Constantinople during and after the reign of Constantine, see Alchermes, 17-34.

<sup>16</sup> Procopius was a lawyer born in late fifth century Palestine (Syria-Palestina to the Byzantine Empire). He provides a contemporary history, satire, and panegyric of Justinian's rule. His history, *History of the Wars*, details Justinian's military campaigns in Italy and Africa to reunite the lost territories of Rome under the purview of the Byzantine Empire, and his ill-fated attempts to control the eastern frontiers. His satire, *Anekdotia*, popularly titled *The Secret History*, is a puzzling text seemingly written as a companion to *History of the Wars* for the disgruntled underground in Constantinople. His panegyric, *de Aedificiis*, or *On Buildings*, while raising questions as to the structures omitted, is overwhelmingly laudatory. While Procopius's support of Justinian dwindles by the end of his reign, his writings provide the closest to a complete history of Justinian's reign available. For further reading see, Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Evans; J.A.S. Evans, "Procopius and the Emperor Justinian," in *The Canadian Historical Association: Historical Paper* (1968), 126-139.

Nika Revolt,<sup>17</sup> Hagia Sophia. Furthering his agenda to display the might of the Byzantine Empire, Justinian orchestrated military campaigns to reclaim the lost territories of Rome – Africa, Greece, and Italy – marking each success Byzantine through the construction of Christian churches and monasteries.

A second Constantine, as he worked to characterize himself, Justinian's reign could not be a direct emulation of his predecessor's two centuries earlier. The Justinianic era is identifiable as a period of transition, during which the Greco-Roman identification of the Late Antique Byzantine Empire was put to rest, and the Byzantine world, codified by Christian allegiance, began to exist in its own right. Sixth century inhabitants of the Empire did not take note of this change and continued to call themselves *Romaioi*, Roman, and it is only through the distance of history that we can see this distinct shift. By Justinian's reign the streets of Constantinople were lined with the workshops of artisans and craftsmen, attesting to the economically stable environment focused on cultural production and fostered by two centuries of wealthy court patrons because imperial social interaction was the most prominent form of exchange, whether performed in person or

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<sup>17</sup> In January 532, the two political factions in Constantinople, the Blues and Greens, publically aired their grievances during races at the Hippodrome. Largely dismissive of them, Constantine imprisoned members from both sides who were to be executed for prior crimes. During the executions, the scaffolding broke and a member from each party survived. Justinian refused to pardon the two men, leading the parties to join together and revolt against the emperor under the battle cry "*Nika*," meaning conquer. The revolt was quashed days later when Justinian had his armies slaughter the participants as they gathered in the Hippodrome to crown their own emperor, it is estimated more than 30,000 died that day. The course of the revolt led to significant destruction in Constantinople and fires set in the heart of the city destroyed Constantine's Hagia Sophia and the grandstands in the Hippodrome. Versions of the revolt are recorded in three contemporary texts which Evans has skillfully knitted together, 119-125.

enacted through ambassadors.<sup>18</sup> Produced in Constantinople's workshops were manuscripts, painted icons, textiles, along with works crafted of ivory, gold, and silver that were exchanged throughout the known world as evidenced by Viking, Russian, Indian, and Mediterranean documentation, as well as by the dispersal of objects featuring the Byzantine Ancient of Days motif that will be considered in the following chapters.<sup>19</sup> Not to be overlooked in preference of artistic patronage were the social services – hospitals, orphanages, and numerous schools, imperial and patriarchal, teaching philosophy, rhetoric, classics, political administration, and theology<sup>20</sup> – provided in Constantinople through generous endowments by the imperial court and aristocracy.

Due to the combination of trade, and therefore economic, opportunities inherent to Constantinople's location and the intellectual, inclusive, socio-cultural environment fostered in the city by the joint legacy of Constantine and Justinian, peoples migrated to Constantinople in droves. While one source alleges all seventy-two languages known to man at the time were represented in the city, this cannot be substantiated through contemporary documentation.<sup>21</sup> However, immigrants certainly came from the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Near East, with majority being folk peoples from the Asiatic steppes east of the imperial boundary. Together, these immigrants combined with

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<sup>18</sup> Mathews and Mathews provide an example of imperial exchange where an ambassador of Emperor Theophilos to the Caliph in Baghdad introduced Islamic building plans, as cultural objects, to the Byzantine court despite political tensions between the empires.

<sup>19</sup> For examples, see Georgacas.

<sup>20</sup> Classical texts formed the heart of academic education in the Early Byzantine period. By the mid-late sixth century nearly all schools were Christian in their teachings. For education in the Byzantine Empire, see Markopoulos.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center Studies, 1967), 14.

native Constantinopolitans to create a racially diverse city united by the common official language, Greek, and religion, Christianity.<sup>22</sup> It is estimated the population swelled from approximately fifty thousand to as many as five-hundred thousand citizens in just over the course of a century, and Justinianic legislation dealing with the consequences of large-scale migration on both urban and rural locales exists. Nevertheless, immigrants continued to arrive in Constantinople and by the middle Byzantine period ethnic neighborhoods were established on properties designated by imperial authority.<sup>23</sup> When combined, each of these factors contributes to a picture of medieval Constantinople as the Mediterranean's model cosmopolitan city.

#### Introduction of Images to Byzantine Christianity

Iconography, as evidence of cultural exchange in Constantinople, demonstrates acceptance of foreign influence encountered through exchange, including immigration, in each level of society. Resulting from exchange, local Christian traditions were combined with those of Hebraic, Semite, and pagan moralizing mythologies into a respectful visual program that maintained dominance until the AD 726 start of the Byzantine Iconoclastic controversy. Such is evidenced by the decorative programs of Constantinopolitan works. Considering imported global mythologies were freely appropriated in ways that are emblematic of the diverse contemporary cultural environment, Constantinopolitan, and

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<sup>22</sup> Neither Latin nor ethnic languages were dead in Constantinople and the greater Byzantine Empire, Greek was the official language of laws and administration common to all inhabitants., Christianity was the religion ordained by the state and followed by the imperial court, but Paganism, Judaism, and Islam continued as well.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the productions, people, and institutions of Constantinople, see Alchermes 28-32; Evans, 23-65; I. Ševčenko (1979).

therefore Byzantine, iconographies showcase an awareness of the entire mythic world.<sup>24</sup> As sources of entertainment, literature, and iconography, mythologies functioned to create a community culture because they were adaptable and could be recontextualized into local variants. In their new, composite forms, these iconographies could not be tied to one specific origin, and were dispersed as signs of the Byzantine Empire to cultures who would once more adapt their meanings.<sup>25</sup>

Originally, secular works were seamlessly used alongside of, or syncretically with, Christianity providing the represented myths only dealt in the physical world and did not cross into the religious realm of spiritual protection, apotropaea. While art, due to its abstract nature, is usually exempt from the limitations of theoretical language that evades the grasp of rational understanding – as is the case with apotropaics – when art is employed to represent theological ideologies or religious experiences it “cannot portray or comprehend in either symbolic or iconic forms a full, final expression of numinous reality.”<sup>26</sup> This means religious iconographies, like the Ancient of Days motif, cannot be viewed as complete signs of the messages they carry and their signification is mutable across time and space. Rather, each visual is merely a reference point to direct the viewer’s spiritual path to understanding. So, while original, independent thoughts can

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<sup>24</sup> Individually, mythologies were not seen as global, but as the cornerstones of the cultures to which they belonged. The combination of cultural mythologies from across the Late Antique world in Constantinople is what creates global mythology.

<sup>25</sup> From a historically removed viewpoint, Greek, Roman, and Persian mythic canons seem to be the most frequently incorporated. Greek and Roman sources are self evident given the origins of the settlement, and Persian sources, Sasanian specifically, will be addressed in the following chapters.

<sup>26</sup> Shepherd, 101.

transcend accepted ideologies and modes of expression, both theological thought and art have a tendency to be culturally conditioned.<sup>27</sup>

The rise of the cult of images to enhance theological ideologies in Christian settings during the sixth century in the Byzantine Empire served as a catalyst for the syncretism, and at times appropriation, of secular forms. Unlike in the Western Roman Empire where classical figural pictographs – independent images developed to stand for greater narratives – had been used in funerary and didactic contexts since the third century, and were reliant on their familiar significations to represent the central tenets and larger ideologies of Christianity,<sup>28</sup> prior to the sixth century in the Byzantine Empire “there was really no systematic attempt to establish a Christian theory of images.”<sup>29</sup> History is unclear as to the specific reason the cult of images suddenly replaced the earlier cult of the cross and cult of relics that had dominated Christian practices throughout the Byzantine Empire since the Constantinian era. Theories include the persuasive power of Neoplatonism with its ancient philosophical foundations regarding the animalistic tendencies of man emanating from one universal source and the quest for divine intervention in the face of eminent threat from the growing Arab presence along

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<sup>27</sup> John Lowden quantifies the number of times an image appears in a given format, mostly illuminated manuscripts, as evidence for hypothesizing it was probably developed at the time of greatest occurrence, rather than introduced from extent models. This argument falls short when one motif is examined across multiple formats, time periods, and cultures. Additionally, material evidence in the Byzantine Empire must always be considered in relation to Iconoclasm.

<sup>28</sup> For evidence we need look no farther than the catacombs beneath St. Peter’s Basilica where images of Helios ascending, the *kriophoros*, fish, and grape vines were all used in Christian applications, see Kitzynger (2002), 330-6-368 and 371-415; Shepherd, 103-110.

<sup>29</sup> Kitzynger (1976), 135.

the southern borders of the Empire's Anatolian heartland.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the least theoretical suggestion has been made by André Grabar, who stresses the pagan heritage of the continually growing presence of Greek and Hellenized Semite – Syrian, Phoenician, Israeli, Hebrew, and Arab – ethnic factions in the Byzantine Empire during the eras following Justinian's reign made the Empire susceptible to the innate power of images because of the pagan concept that divine presence is accessible through religious imagery, a concept whose popularity eventually led to Iconoclasm.<sup>31</sup> Building on Grabar's theory, I suggest it was the presence of these many different peoples that made imagery necessary. As a form of shared language, the people of the Byzantine Empire could communicate through visual forms because even though Greek was the official language of secular administration and the church, native tongues would have been prevalent, especially among traders and the newest immigrants. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the Ancient of Days motif is an outcome of the interactive power position held by Constantinople along the major Euro-Asiatic trade routes, the Byzantine shift to the cult of images, and the ever growing multicultural presence in the Empire; these factors are attested by the motif's first appearances in Ravenna, Italy, in Constantinople, and at the Byzantine monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai during the sixth century.

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the cults of relics, the cross, and images in the Byzantine Empire, see Kitzinger (1976).

<sup>31</sup> *Maryrium: Recherches sur le Culte des Reliques et l'Art Chrétien Antique, Vol. 1* (Paris : College de France, 1943-1946), 343-391.

## BYZANTINE CULTURAL AGENCY:

## A METHODOLOGICAL BREAK FROM SCHOLASTIC TRADITION

The seventh and eighth century Persian and Arab conquests in the Eastern Mediterranean brought about the resultant loss of many great cultural centers, among them Alexandria, Berytus, Antioch, and Jerusalem. A tragedy to be certain, these losses provided unforeseen advantages for Constantinople: the loss of political, economic, intellectual, and cultural competition allowed Constantinople to claim a near monopoly on cultural import and export, a position it enjoyed relatively unchallenged from the eighth century on.<sup>32</sup> Until the mid-late twentieth century historical, archaeological, and classical academic disciplines tended to overlook the powerful position of the Byzantine Empire, and the increased power these conquests gave Constantinople, as the long-standing preservers of the classical past who interpreted culture with their own agendas, namely Christianity. Instead, the Byzantine Empire was previously characterized in scholarship as a carrier or receptacle for classical paraphernalia.<sup>33</sup> Papers provided at the Thirteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, held in Birmingham in 1978, show an overwhelming willingness to break with the conception of the Byzantine Empire as a

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<sup>32</sup> For further reading on the effects of the conquests for Constantinopolitan, and greater Byzantine, interests, as well as how their fortuitous monopoly was viewed from neighboring provinces, see I. Ševčenko (1979 and 1984).

<sup>33</sup> Sources perceiving the Byzantines as mere carriers of classical ideologies include Paul Maas, *Textual Criticism*, trans. Barbara Flower (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1958); Martin Litchfield West, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973). This position is lamented by Cameron, xviii-x; Judith Herrin *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 10-11; with possible approaches to the methodology of Byzantine studies suggested by E. Jeffreys; M. Jeffreys.

cultural conduit between classical traditions and the Italian Renaissance.<sup>34</sup> Through their consideration of new material evidence, or old material evidence in new ways, the Birmingham papers form a composite statement of the approaches that may be undertaken towards understanding Byzantine reception of the classical world.<sup>35</sup> The early attempts to change academic views of Byzantine reception found in the Birmingham papers are predominantly based on tracking evidentiary sources, influences, and quotations in individual cases, rather than creating a theoretical model of reception and use. Regardless, these papers bring to light the bigger questions of why and how certain cultural elements were chosen for incorporation in the Byzantine canon whereas others were cast aside.

In his famous “distorting mirror” theory, Cyril Mango asserts artifacts could fit their contemporary environment while providing a timeless veneer of culture that wittingly concealed the alteration of socio-cultural milieu.<sup>36</sup> As the imperial capital, Constantinople possessed a dominance that could speak generally for the culture and ideologies of the greater Empire. So, when Constantinople’s evolution from Greek heritage to Christian society is considered, Mango’s “distorting mirror” accurately explains why most surviving objects from the Byzantine Empire are Christian, not

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<sup>34</sup> Symposium organized by the Classical Association.

<sup>35</sup> A selection of papers from the symposium was compiled by Margaret Mullett and Roger Scott in 1981. Presented at the symposium and included in the resultant publication, the papers with the clearest aim towards restructuring thought on Byzantine reception are provided by Robert Bolger (7-19), Herbert Hunger (35-47), Cyril Mango (48-54), and Constantine Niarchos (127-135). The belatedness of these approaches is commented on in the editor’s notes of Cormack, Haldon, and Jeffreys, 13-16. For more on the shifting academic view of the Byzantine Empire, see E. Jeffreys.

<sup>36</sup> Mango (1974).

secular. Artifacts from the cultural heritage of Constantinople were not casualties of the city's evolution, they were given new significations in order to continue functioning as "selection of material for inclusion was very often intelligent and purposive" in order to reflect both local autonomy and the importance of viewer understanding to an artwork's function.<sup>37</sup> At the risk of overgeneralization, I find the artifacts – here meaning imagery, philosophy, mythology, and literature – most befitting their new socio-cultural environment were those already reduced down to simple, identifiable forms that could be recontextualized with Christian significations. Mango and the authors of the Birmingham papers focus largely on Byzantine reception of classical artifacts. But, as Chapter 1 has shown, Greece and Rome were only two sources for the cultural material present in the Byzantine Empire. Based on narrative descriptions found in Greek texts that could refer to the Ancient of Days, it is possible the motif had a Greco-Roman predecessor, but extant material will show the description of a wise, aged, male figure more likely has eastern origins. Beneficial to discussing how an eclectic range of materials from the Byzantine periphery moved across borders of culture and empire are a variety of methods, most of which art history has borrowed from the discipline of cultural anthropology. Of these methods transculturation, globalism, and a relative form of globalism known as Mediterraneanism, along with the supporting theories of hybridity, performativity, and middle ground, will prove to be most beneficial in following the disparate literary and visual threads that combined in Constantinople during the sixth century to create the Christian Ancient of Days motif.

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<sup>37</sup> Quote from E. Jeffreys providing a distillation of Amy Papalexandrou's conclusions in her unpublished work of a ninth century church at Skipou in Boetia that have sparked a theoretical following since they emerged in 1998; 163.

### Means of Movement

Transculturation, the merging and converging of cultures initiated by an influx of new cultural elements that instigates the alteration or loss of extant ones, is a method befitting studies of material culture in Constantinople.<sup>38</sup> Transculturation is a valuable method for art history because, unlike the unilateral model of diffusion theory, it requires multilateral exchange of concepts, ideologies, symbolic technologies, and material goods without regard for modern notions of nationalism.<sup>39</sup> As the Byzantine heartland encompasses the geographic region of Anatolia, suggestions that Anatolia functioned as an ideology of aesthetic discourse, rather than a specific geography or people, serving to build a cohesive nation over time through inclusion and syncretism, support the transcultural model.<sup>40</sup> As such, it is reasonable that research on the exchange of cultural identifiers, specifically iconographic tendencies and material forms, still provides the bulk of contemporary Byzantine art history, though scholars have moved beyond the Birmingham focus on classical elements to consider global exchange with European, Near Eastern, Persian, Baltic, Asian, Hebrew, and Arab cultures.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Transculturation was coined in 1947 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz for his study on the social and ethnic relationships in Cuba. Ortiz finds transculturation has a mediating affect on all cultures involved, which I find to be shown through the tolerant environment of Byzantine Constantinople.

<sup>39</sup> For more on theories of movement that exist outside of modern geographies, see Kaufmann, 187-189.

<sup>40</sup> In Anatolia cultures coexisted both before and after the Byzantine Empire and in the ancient world were even united by a common language – Proto-Indo European. For more on Anatolia as an ideology, see Can Bilsel 223-241; Bowersock, 32-63.

<sup>41</sup> Many studies focused on non-classical Byzantine interactions exist. For a sampling, see Antonaccio, Can Bilsel, Gonosovà, Hingley, Hoffman (2001), Maranci, Niewöhner et al., Peers (2007), I. Ševčenko (1979 and 1984), and Sommer.

Historically based discourses traditionally avoid the term globalism in discussions predating eighteenth century nationalistic ideologies because “a truly global network” did not exist before then,<sup>42</sup> and “universal” or “world” history conceptions of globalism prioritize comparative patterns across time and space over regional connections, and are generally constructed from a Western perspective. However, globalism can be viewed as relative through comparative studies of common themes spanning distinct cultural groups, where regions are understood from their larger patterns of interaction with one another based on the resultant impact of systemic contact and exchange.<sup>43</sup> Within this system focus shifts away from constructed limits and origins to consider movements, allowing globalism to serve as a container for a wide variety of conceptual methods tied to the humanities, medieval art history in particular, that share the common goal of shifting scholarship to consider movements across boundaries conventionally defined by language, religion, ethnicity, and geography, not nationality.<sup>44</sup> While scholastic art history has a tendency to focus on multicultural nexus points,<sup>45</sup> like Constantinople, as

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<sup>42</sup> Walker (2012), 183.

<sup>43</sup> Globalism through interconnected zones hinges on the model created by Janet Abu-Lughod to discuss the thirteenth century Afro-Eurasian economic network. For more on globalism with an emphasis on the medieval Mediterranean world, see Walker (2012).

<sup>44</sup> Walker determines the following concepts as fitting within art historical globalism: “intercultural or cross-cultural relations, exchange, transmission, interchange, contacts, encounters, translation and networks; syncretism; multiculturalism; transculturation; hybridity; appropriation; expropriation; portability; exoticism; cosmopolitanism; and the transgression of both actual and conceptual borders and frontiers” (2012), 183-187, at 185. For further information the rejection of modern boundaries in the study of art, see Braudel and Kaufmann.

<sup>45</sup> Walker (2012) considers medieval Norman Sicily, Armenia, Iberia, and the Crusader states to be primary nexus points. Reaching back to the earliest years of the medieval era, I include Constantinople among the most important multicultural nexus points with regards to globalism of the time.

locations for the emergence of distinct visual traditions,<sup>46</sup> the introduction of globalism to the traditional object-based methodologies of Byzantine art history opens up the discipline to consider each visual tradition as a hybrid type developed from various cultural groups interconnected through trade, diplomacy, migration, or war.<sup>47</sup>

Globalism, within the greater Mediterranean scope, can be separated into three categorical networks of exchange based on the commodity and associated ideologies carried; even so, each category generally follows the same interconnected routes. Referencing the Chase-Dunn and Hall model, there are bulk good networks, prestige good networks, and information networks. Bulk good networks cover the least physical space and transport necessities including livestock, grains, and corn. Prestige good networks often span Eurasia, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent to transport luxury items including spices, gemstones, silk, and ivory prized for their artistic value or inherent status. Information networks are not physically definable and carry both tangible and intangible resources of language, religion, ritual, and symbolic technology.<sup>48</sup> Given

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<sup>46</sup> As sources used here, Alchermes, McKay, and I. Ševčenko all allude to Constantinople as the source of any new tradition in the Byzantine Empire. Alchermes does not look outside Constantinople. McKay looks to the final Byzantine evolution of the Ancient of Days in Constantinople as proof of the motif's Constantinopolitan creation. Ševčenko suggests this is due to cyclical reasoning because we assume the capital to have had the best artisans, with the most creativity, who would produce the best works. What Ševčenko omits is that artisans need patrons, and the imperial court in Constantinople provided a large, wealthy patron pool to support creativity and production.

<sup>47</sup> Hybridity best fits the Byzantine context because of the existence of long-standing relationships between distinct religious, political, and cultural groups that developed shared artistic forms, techniques, and visual vocabularies. Alternately, spoliation can be used to explain instances where a visual motif is appropriated and modified to fit local artistic programs. See Walker (2012), 186-187 and Seidel.

<sup>48</sup> For an investigation of the underlying processes in political, economic, and social interactions, see Chase-Dunn and Hall, 11-57.

its concern for iconography, art history is most concerned with information networks and the impact they can have on prestige good networks. However, information networks prove most susceptible to fall-off, similar to the children's game of telephone where understanding can be distorted, grossly misinterpreted, or lost all together in transmission.<sup>49</sup> Along information networks, fall-off leads to ideas, goods, and technologies arriving at destinations without their original context, explaining how visually similar objects and iconographies develop independent meanings in cultures connected through global exchange.<sup>50</sup> In these instances myths, motifs, and art forms are transported outside their originating cultures and anchoring cultural cosmologies, where they are adapted at their destination by the addition of new meanings befitting local cultural identities and contextual usage.

Seen from a global perspective, identity is “the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which something or someone is recognizable or known.”<sup>51</sup> While this subtext inherently implies a need for contrast, that need is altered based on the form of identity recognized: cultural, personal, or social. Whereas personal identity refers to the general “I,” and social identity refers to “we,” cultural identity has the ability to exist as a shared practice because it encircles the social production and reproduction of meanings, most often through material objects and iconography. Thus, cultural identity allows heterogeneous regional cultures to work together on the creation of a broader unity while

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<sup>49</sup> I am indebted to Pollard for the relatable metaphor of telephone, 4.

<sup>50</sup> This process is explained by Saussure's technical language of semiotics in art history. The sign (actual thing) remains consistent while the signifier (physical expression of the thing as sound, word, or image) and the signified (the mental concept) change.

<sup>51</sup> Hodos, 3.

still emphasizing their distinctiveness.<sup>52</sup> As a key concept in classical studies and archaeology, identity construction is currently being reevaluated against what David Mattingly terms the problematic “-ization” trend. Imposing frameworks of identity like Hellenization, Romanization, or even colonization and civilization, on groups from the perspective of historical power structures, the “-ization” trend removes native agency and marginalizes cultural identity as the outcome of processes rather than experiences. Paradoxically, globalization works counter to the other “-izations” because instead of emphasizing homogeneity of the whole, it highlights and reinforces cultural heterogeneities and diversity in the same way the term “identity” does.<sup>53</sup>

Practices of extensive cultural interaction like those experienced in Byzantine Constantinople are not homogenous, inherent, or stable conditions, but are created and modified by continuous social performance, leading to an understanding of performativity. As put forth by Judith Butler, performativity advocates that an understanding of identity is predicated on the repetition and sustainability of social performance, including the performance created by usage of both native and appropriated material culture.<sup>54</sup> Revolving around the methods in which identity produces and exerts itself, performativity takes the internalized essence of identity and manufactures it for availability to others through a repeated set of actions that allow it to develop into a materialized act, or set of acts, that must then be contextualized as a form of universality

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<sup>52</sup> For more on the division and construction of identity, see Hodos and Shanks (2001).

<sup>53</sup> Mattingly cautions that when identity is oversimplified by sole consideration of global aspects, local variation is lost.

<sup>54</sup> For a further explanation of performative theory and how it relates to group action and experience, see Butler.

conjuring a new, local, reality. Though not explicitly mentioned by Butler, theoretical performativity is applicable to the development and repetition of belief and ritual, such as those of Christianity, within societies displaying shared cultural identities, like the *Romanoi* identity of the Byzantine Empire discussed in Chapter 1.

When connected to the Mediterranean world, performativity develops a natural coexistence with the early processes of globalism where local histories must be considered in relation to their broader interactions before interconnected zones can be shown to formulate a world system. Hierarchic models like the world system concept provide scholars the advantage of analytical flexibility because they do not impart puzzling modern notions of nationality on the cultural identities of ancient societies. Given the particularly well documented network of trade and interaction between Mediterranean and eastern peoples,<sup>55</sup> it is clear to see how the a global culture, composed from sets of practices or bodies of knowledge, transgressed individual cultural ideas to form overlapping circles of cultural identity rather than unilateral acceptance of one dominant culture or model. For proof, we need look no farther than the iconographic representations found with extant material objects as these are evidence of a thematically united “material culture point[ing] towards a diasporic, as it were ‘cosmopolitan,’ collective identity”<sup>56</sup> that compliments various individual civic identifiers in a manner that has come to be known as “Mediterraneanism.”

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<sup>55</sup> The documented record includes ancient written sources and archaeological evidence, see Hodos, 23.

<sup>56</sup> Sommer, 133.

One method for interpreting how Mediterraneanism perceives an interregional common culture is by focusing on how assemblages of material objects from multicultural nexus points are developed over time. Drawing from a range of objects gathered at points along complex socio-economic networks, rather than through unilateral exchange as often seen in post-medieval periods, it is possible to trace the impact of objects and underlying ideologies on disparate cultures through the creation of hybrid spaces where origins pale in comparison to the opportunities, primarily economic, offered. Though it was not his intention to apply middle ground theory to pre-modern periods, Richard White's destabilization of the center to periphery and frontier models in favor of a centrally located, mutually beneficial, zone of assimilation and mediation as a way to discuss the colonial practices of Anglo and Anglo-American interaction with Native peoples in the Great Lakes region of North America is fitting. Within occurrences of middle ground, distinct traditions and customs of language, iconography, material culture, diet, and religious belief combine to produce a natural blend rather than an *a priori* decision of one entities dominance over the other because transplanted narrative frameworks do not have to fit the constrictions of local connotations. In examples of middle ground a "third space" not belonging to any one entity is created and marked by a fusion of elements taken from each originating culture. Within this "third space," elements cannot be disregarded or returned to their original form because "they no longer exist in a 'pure' state but have been permanently 'translated.'"<sup>57</sup> Generally, a mediated understanding of the original form is preserved, while assimilation or juxtaposition

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<sup>57</sup> Sommer, 129.

creates a new system of meaning: in art history this is referred to as syncretism and can take place between cultures, or between the traditional, religious, political, and secular aspects of one culture. As a theoretical model applied to the multilateral movements along trade routes linking pre-modern nexus points, middle ground proves relevant to Mediterraneanism by evoking the intricacies of encounter and the resultant cultural creations.

Sources ranging from Homeric epics to cuneiform documents and Egyptian texts record diverse peoples traveling great distances along arterial exchange networks in the Mediterranean, making it understandable that portable items – personal icons, textiles, jewelry, texts, et cetera – were among the most prominent sources for the cultural development of new semiological systems.<sup>58</sup> While the inherent material value of portable objects made them economically convertible to disparate cultures, accompanying iconographies could only continue to function in their original form if recipient cultures understood the semantic code used. As has been demonstrated by the previous methods, recipients most frequently adapted and recontextualized objects and iconographies to fit their cultural needs because the original meaning could not transcend the physical, ideological, and linguistic barriers of exchange. Thus, items intended for trade required iconographic themes that could provide notions of commonality in order to be functionally viable. Proving their transitional success, iconographic imagery frequently recovered from objects pre-dating the Renaissance across the combined geography of the Euro-Asiatic exchange networks feature motifs that have been pared down to their essential characteristics. Such images find strength and flexibility in their

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<sup>58</sup> For documentary sources, see Sommer, 114.

simplicity, where contexts can fluctuate over time and space to evoke multiple, and times contradictory, meanings<sup>59</sup> – a simplified motif of an aged man with white hair and beard becomes the divine leader of a polytheistic pantheon, a philosopher, and the Ancient of Days for this reason. Imagery in texts has proven to be a particularly strong example of iconographic continuity based on the new significations created by the joining of culturally unrelated writings and images gained during exchange.<sup>60</sup> Taking the adoption and eventual recontextualization of both textual and visual narratives into what would become the Byzantine iconographic canon, meaning the eastern Christian canon as by the late sixth century nearly all works were in service of the church, it is clearly discernible how the relative variant of globalism, Mediterraneanism, created the cultural forms some unconvincingly reference as artistic innovation.<sup>61</sup>

### The Equestrian Dragon-Slayer Model

The Byzantine Empire, Constantinople specifically, is unique within cultural expressions of arterial exchange because it never becomes part of the “-ization” trend. Instead, as an inherently multicultural middle ground, Constantinople creates at the local level a stable socio-cultural identity of heterogeneity emphasized by both imperial and spiritual authority. Here, global aspects of inherited cultural heritages and trade cultures

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<sup>59</sup> Freeman cites similar arguments on associations of use occurring outside the iconographic realm. In the fourth century, Augustine raises the argument regarding language, and in recent years, Dale Kinney does so for Roman architecture, specifically the basilica; see 165-165.

<sup>60</sup> Evidence of medieval globalism is prominent in illuminated manuscripts, ivory carving, metal work, painted icons, and monumental painting.

<sup>61</sup> See note 15 above.

are combined with locally understood connotations to produce a fluid Constantinopolitan variation that reinforces a Byzantine cultural identity to be globally disseminated along exchange networks in a reciprocal fashion. While the following chapters will look to literary and iconographic sources outside of Constantinople for the Byzantine Ancient of Days, the motif experienced a relatively brief period of popularity in the Byzantine Empire. Consequently, the motif does not have a robust historical record to fully map its evolution, leaving frequent gaps for theoretical suggestion. The Ancient of Days is not unique in its difficulties; in fact, it is “virtually impossible to delineate the chronological and geographical development of any type of representation, whether narrative or visual, with precision or certainty.”<sup>62</sup> However, the frequent occurrence of certain iconographies in Anatolia, such as the universally adaptable equestrian dragon-slayer motif, can provide a parallel model for how other formally static motifs were incorporated, recontextualized, and reincarnated across cultures to fit a new need.<sup>63</sup>

The equestrian dragon-slayer can be traced in Anatolia from Late Antiquity through the establishment of the Turkic principalities of the Seljuk Empire as heroic sainthood iconography on amulets, coins, icons, secular and spiritual decoration, and in funerary settings. The equestrian dragon-slayer depicts a figure on horseback holding a spear in his raised hand; the tip of the spear is either aimed at or entering the mouth of a serpent whose midsection is twisted, frequently into a knot (fig. 16). While early sixth century pagan iterations decorating apotropaic amulets from Byzantine Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine replace the serpent with a long-haired female demon and later Christian

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<sup>62</sup> Pancaroğlu, 152.

<sup>63</sup> Anatolia, as the geographic region, is used here because iconographies did not necessarily disappear with the change of empire, politics, or religion in a region.

versions replace the serpent with identifiable pagan or tyrant rulers, such as a panel featuring Saint George and Diocletian at Saint Catherine's Monastery (fig. 17),<sup>64</sup> symbolically, the iconography continually functions to display the universal theme of man's ability to triumph over evil.<sup>65</sup> Forging associations between the traditions and narratives of sainthood and heroism amid magical, Christian, and Muslim contexts, the equestrian dragon-slayer connotes the psychological primacy of certain image types, expressed by their ability to transcend time and peoples where each mutation or regeneration challenges assumptions of encounter, difference, and assimilation. In instances where the identity of an image evolves through changing contexts within a static location, here Anatolia, it provides an opportunity to map appropriation across complex cultural experiences.

In the Early Byzantine period the equestrian dragon-slayer motif is variously seen as Alexander the Great, the Christian Saint Sisinnios, or Solomon, with his magical associations, when the original apotropaic nature of the motif is joined with Early Christian meaning. Continuing Christian usage, the Middle Byzantine period solidly identifies the equestrian dragon-slayer as a motif of military sainthood to provide a visual vocabulary for heroic power as emblematic of imperial prowess. By the late eleventh

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<sup>64</sup> Saints George and Theodore are the most common Christian military saints associated with the equestrian dragon-slayer motif.

<sup>65</sup> Commentary in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* on the fourteenth chapter added to Greek versions of Daniel, the Babylonian god Bel, and epithet of Marduk, takes the living form of a dragon, more likely meaning a serpent. No independent evidence of Babylonian snake worship is known, but dragons and snakes could symbolize the divine in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures, see "Bel and the Dragon," 1552-1553. Following this symbolism, in a Christian iteration the equestrian dragon-slayer motif can be read as Christianity vanquishing pagan beliefs.

century Turkic Anatolia is under Seljuk control and, within the century, the equestrian dragon-slayer shows up in Muslim contexts. In mid-twelfth century Constantinople, Muhammad Tusi writes a cosmography referencing a group of three talismanic statues in the city, purporting them as the Prophet Muhammad and his trusted companions Bilal and Ali, the latter of who became the fourth caliph. Tusi describes the statue of Ali as a figure on horseback spearing a dragon to “signify the divinely preordained victory of Islam in the world,” recording both the associations medieval Constantinopolitan Muslims created from the locally familiar equestrian dragon-slayer iconography and the marvelous collection of statuary within the city.<sup>66</sup> Later still, Baba Ilyas, who is credited with leading the Baba’i revolt against the Seljuks of Rum in the mid-thirteenth century, is posthumously made part of the Turkic mythic tradition in Northern Anatolia as the equestrian saint Chederle due, at least in part, to the familiarity of inscriptional and visual remains of the dragon-slayer motif found nearby at Saint Theodore’s Monastery.<sup>67</sup>

Together, this sampling shows how the iconographic stability of one motif was reincarnated with different contextual identities befitting a variety of cultural experiences, where each manifestation highlights the role of nexus points in recognition and adaptation. Universal identification was possible because the limited selection of attributes associated with the equestrian dragon-slayer motif provided formal consistency to allow demonstration of the mechanisms of continuity. As a simplified image of

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<sup>66</sup> Pancaroğlu, 155.

<sup>67</sup> For further reading on the equestrian-dragon slayer motif and power changes in Anatolia, see Maguire, 120-145; Pancaroğlu; Oya Pancaroglu, "Signs in the Horizons: Concepts of Image and Boundary in a Medieval Persian Cosmography," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* XLIII (2003), 31-41; Walker (2012), 187-192; Weitzmann (1976), 71-73.

triumph over evil, the equestrian dragon-slayer demonstrates how a single motif could have contextual freedom. Thereby, simplicity ensured its regenerative power and popularity across associated cultural and demographic groups, because as visual currency, it was reflective of a shared identification in the face of challenges brought on by globalism. As a method, the equestrian dragon-slayer works to demonstrate how the Ancient of Days could move between pagan and monotheistic, visual and narrative, contexts. Even so, the medieval equestrian dragon-slayer becomes ubiquitous in the secular and spiritual realms by the Late Medieval Period for its associations to knighthood and the aristocracy, while the Ancient of Days reaches peak popularity in the eleventh century before declining to the occasional appearance in Trinitarian and Patriarchal Orthodox Christian decoration. Despite their different evolutions, the equestrian dragon-slayer and Ancient of Days motifs similarly express the fluid relationship of representation acquired through multi-directional, multi-cultural interaction.

## AN AGED MAN WITH WHITE HAIR AND BEARD

With specific regard to the Early Christian appropriation of the Ancient of Days motif in Constantinople, no visual or descriptive model has been identified as the definitive source. This does not prove an ancient model never existed as Early Christian works do feature the aged Christ, and Early Christian art is known to appropriate familiar imagery. Regarding a descriptive model in narrative form, there are numerous possibilities and Ernst Kitzinger believes manuscripts were the most likely means of transmission for motifs to reach Byzantine, and therefore Christian, practices because of their transitive format.<sup>68</sup> Kurt Weitzmann echoes Kitzinger's adoption theory, suggesting Byzantine artists were likely able to access one of the many great libraries of Constantinople to copy narrative and iconographic types from manuscripts of classical and Near Eastern antiquity.<sup>69</sup> Through the transformation and transfiguration of fragments inherited from the Byzantine hinterlands, Christian artists were able to emphasize the Word becoming man in a language indicative of the ideal Byzantine aesthetic. Consideration of textual sources for the Byzantine Ancient of Days leads to a number of Near Eastern, pagan, and philosophical writings that serve as potential

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<sup>68</sup> For more on Hellenistic influence and incorporation, see Kitzinger, "Hellenistic Heritage," 378-415.

<sup>69</sup> Weitzmann suggests one of these ancient manuscripts was the *Bibliothèque*, thought to be composed by the second century BC grammarian, Apollodorus of Athens, and referenced by multiple extant sources; see Weitzmann, *Greek Mythology*, 77-78. In the Early Byzantine period an educated court actively sponsored the pursuit of classical learning. Post-Iconoclasm, the Macedonian Renaissance and Komnenian Era were again led by scholarly emperors who encouraged philosophical learning through the establishment of universities and expansion of libraries to teach and copy texts from classical antiquity. In turn, renewed popularity of literary art revived usage of mythological iconography in visual art.

descriptive foundations – all of which would likely have been present in the libraries of Constantinople.

Text accompanied by a series of pictures to translate a narrative into easily understood pictorial language is the Greek concept of an illuminated manuscript, or early book. With origins stemming from Hellenistic literary classics including Homer and Euripides, the Bible was conservatively crafted in the Greek manner as the “great classic of the Christian era,”<sup>70</sup> especially in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. The Hellenists,<sup>71</sup> Greek-speaking Jews colloquially named *Christiani* by Roman authorities in the first century, were among the earliest converts to Christianity within the Greco-Roman world. Persecuted for their beliefs, they fled to the city of Antioch in southeastern Anatolia, later incorporated by the Byzantine Empire, where they established a religious base from which to interpret and transcribe the “original oral traditions” of Jesus Christ.<sup>72</sup> Even within this earliest, purely textual, practice there is evidence of appropriation in both the metaphorical titles and descriptive imagery used to signify Christian ideology.<sup>73</sup> From the Aramaic tradition the Hellenists borrowed concrete titles including “Son of Man,” “Son of God,” “Lord,” and “Savior.” From Judaism the titles borrowed display a more abstract character, understandable as the Jewish tradition does not focus on the life of Christ as the man, Jesus. Appropriated Jewish titles include “Power,” “Wisdom,” and

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<sup>70</sup> Weitzmann, “Manuscripts,” 291.

<sup>71</sup> Both “Hellenistic” and “Hellenists” will be used here. Hellenistic will refer to Greek culture and Hellenists will refer to the earliest Christian Greek population.

<sup>72</sup> Shepherd, “Christology,” 102.

<sup>73</sup> In the early centuries of Christianity, artwork was avoided for its link to polytheistic religions and the worship of graven images.

“Word,” and generally appear as *Logos* in the Greek vernacular.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, “Messiah,” previously used to refer to Jesus as the deliverance of God on earth, was transferred to the more familiar Greek “*Christos*,” as Jesus the man became equated with God in the late first or early second century.<sup>75</sup>

As the notion of Christ and God existing as one coessential being spread during the second century, Early Christians struggled to explicate this theological development. In part because Early Christians were still wary of images for their link to pagan religious practices in the Greco-Roman world, independent Christian sects emerged with various doctrinal explanations for coexistence. Alexandrian Christology placed emphasis on Christ’s assumption of humanity as the man Jesus, while still being coessential with the Father. Antiochene theology saw the two natures, Jesus and God the Father, united in the one figure of Christ. Yet, what is perhaps the most pervasive trend in the east is not identifiable with any one sect, but is a shared ideology contemporarily termed proto-Trinitarianism, where the infant born of the Virgin, Christ, and the eternal Ancient of Days are acknowledged as various iterations of the same Christian god.<sup>76</sup> Despite their division, each doctrine emphasizes Christ, appearing in the earthly realm as the man Jesus, as an element of God’s spiritual essence. When God and Christ are united, their nature is described as an old man to demonstrate the duality of Christ’s existence with

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<sup>74</sup> For more on titular Shepherd, “Christology,” 102-103.

<sup>75</sup> *Christos* is a term that originates in Early Christian copies of the prolifically illustrated Byzantine *Septuagint*, or Greek Old Testament. Examples of Byzantine art in Early Christian *Septuagint* and *Octateuchs* manuscripts, as well as in Books of Kings, display compositional schemes borrowed from Greek classics melded with a considerable amount of Greco-Jewish legendary material. It is unclear whether Christian adoption of Jewish narrative for these manuscripts was wittingly or unwittingly done.

<sup>76</sup> The following chapter will examine how proto-Trinitarianism appears in iconography.

God before and after his terrestrial humanity. Such a uniform description across the sects suggests it was a familiar idea adopted for its mutability and ease of understanding.

Perhaps the earliest textual references for divine duality come from the Canaanite Ugaritic texts, dating from the Bronze Age in modern Syria.<sup>77</sup> Within the Canaanite religion, El, as *'ab shnm* or “father of years,” was the ruler of the pantheon; he is described as an aged man with grey hair. Baal, a secondary deity, is indicated as El’s subordinate. Despite this hierarchy El granted Baal kingship and both are described enthroned: these descriptions have direct parallels to the relationship of God and Christ in Christianity, as well as to the iconographies of the Ancient of Days and Christ *Pantokrator* in Byzantine artworks. Writing on the feast of Hypapante centuries later in the same region, the fourth century Jewish hymnographer, Ephraem the Syrian, indicates that the infant Christ who Mary brought to the temple “truly was the Ancient of Days,” and Simeon, the high priest who accepted the infant into his arms, recognized the babe as such.<sup>78</sup> In relation to one another, these writings propose the Ancient of Days was a familiar descriptive within the Syrian region and its use changed over time in accordance with popular religion.

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<sup>77</sup> Canaanite is the term used to refer to the Bronze Age ancestors of the Phoenicians in the Eastern Mediterranean. Found in the Syrian town of Ugarit, the Ugaritic texts, clay tablets inscribed with alphabetic cuneiform, have not survived well. The only substantial accounts scholars have of the Canaanite religion come from its later reference in Biblical texts. For more information on Canaanite religion and its link to the later monotheistic religions, see Emerton, 225-242.

<sup>78</sup> Ephraem the Syrian’s hymn is used in the Byzantine liturgy. Many related hymns and ekphrasis directly mentioning the Ancient of Days exist for use during the feast of Hypapante and all seem to predate the fifth century. For translations of these hymns, see Ernst Kantorowicz, “Puer Exoriens: On the Hypapante in the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore,” *Selected Studies* (Locust Valley, NY: J. J. Augustin, 1965), 28.

Within Hebraic canonical works are the apocalyptic texts of *I Enoch*, *The Book of Giants* and *Daniel vii* from The Dead Sea Scrolls, each describing a figure appearing as the Ancient of Days. While scholars have determined all three texts were composed between the second and first centuries BC and derive from a common tradition, there is no consensus as to which came first. However, out of the three, *Daniel vii* contains the clearest ekphrasis of the Ancient of Days and is the only one of the three texts to become part of the Christian Bible. It says: “As I looked, thrones [were] placed and the one that was Ancient of Days took his seat; his raiment was [the] white of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire.”<sup>79</sup> While the reference to fire is more befitting scenes of the Last Judgment, it is clear *Daniel vii* refers to the same ancient Christ-type used in Byzantine Christianity based on both title and description. Continuing on, *Daniel vii* introduces the relationship between the Ancient of Days and Christ: “I saw in the night visions and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man and he came unto the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.”<sup>80</sup> In this passage, Son of Man, an appropriated Aramaic title, refers to Christ who is given terrestrial humanity and honor by the Ancient of Days, here meaning God the Father. Additionally, scholars have discovered religious references likely signifying the Ancient of Days in his dominant splendor within early versions of the Hebraic Leviathan and the eighteenth century BC Babylonian myth of Tiamut, though the later is not a monotheistic legend but a potential pagan referent from same geographic

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<sup>79</sup> *Daniel vii*: ix.

<sup>80</sup> *Daniel vii*: xiii-xiv.

region.<sup>81</sup> While each aforementioned source features an aged figure, with either grey or white hair, they deal most directly with the coexistence of said ancient figure and a younger incarnation that vanquishes evil on behalf of humanity. Given this format, it is clear to see how each could have influenced not only the semiotic system created for the Ancient of Days, but for Christ himself as the Son of God.

While the Ugaritic texts, Ephraem the Syrian's hymn, the apocalyptic texts from The Dead Sea Scrolls, the early Leviathan, and the Babylonian myth of Tiamut provide evidence for a potential Near Eastern pagan or monotheistic syncretic association where an abstract religious context is maintained, scholars have frequently located the Ancient of Days within philosophical texts as well, which would imply a contextual alteration more befitting Byzantine appropriation. One philosophical text in particular, Justin Martyr's second century *Dialogue with Trypho*, has long been debated on the basis of its inspiration and signification in relation to Christianity. Within the dialogue, Justin, himself a Christian convert, meets an old man near the sea. Here, the men have a discussion circling religious dogma that lasts for two days, the contents of which forms the basis of Justin's text. Although Justin never identifies the man by any religious epithet, he does refer to him as ancient, leading scholars to see Justin as drawing from both the elderly, white-haired man in Plato's *Parmenides* and the wise man with grey hair and beard in Lucian's *Menippus* to form a representation of the aged Christ-philosopher as *Logos* and Teacher.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> For additional information on these sources or to read a useful distillation of the current scholarship on the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Emerton and Stokes.

<sup>82</sup> For a distillation of current scholarly debate on *Dialogue with Trypho*, see Hofer, 1-21. For translations of the original sources mentioned, see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with*

Written before AD 775 in Christian the monastery at Zuqnin, Syria, Syriac codex 162 from the Assemani Collection in the Vatican Library preserves the only known copy of the *Zuqnin Chronicle*,<sup>83</sup> providing one example of Sasanian Persian literature revived to fit a Byzantine Christian agenda. Closely following an excerpt from the fifth century Persian secular romance, *Religious Disputes in the Sasanian Court*, Syriac 162 includes one adaptation of the legend of the Magi in the section *Revelatio Magorum*.<sup>84</sup> Here, the twelve Magi hail from the mythical eastern realm of Shir and are the decedents of Seth, third son of Adam and Eve. From Seth, the Magi heard Adam's prophesy about the star of Bethlehem. One night, the star appears to the Magi in the form of a luminous being, Christ in the Syriac codex, with instructions for their journey. Upon arrival in Bethlehem, the star transforms into the infant Jesus in the manger. Returning to Shir from Bethlehem, the twelve Magi inform their people of the star-child and each recalls their individual impressions of Christ in the mood "of liturgical Remembrance."<sup>85</sup>

The concept of Remembrance serves an important role in Sasanian, Jewish, and Christian religious practices. From a Sasanian context, Remembrance was

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*Trypho*, trans. by Thomas P. Halton (Pickerington: Beloved Publishing, LLC, 2015).; "Plato's Parmenides," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified July 30, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-parmenides/>.; Lucian, *Menippus, or The Descent into Hades*, Harvard University Press, 2016, [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/lucian-menippus-descent-hades/1925/pb\\_LCL162.71.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/lucian-menippus-descent-hades/1925/pb_LCL162.71.xml).

<sup>83</sup> The *Zuqnin Chronicle* is divided into four sections giving a moralized history from Creation to 775 AD, specific attention is paid to the history of the Byzantine Empire. For a translation from the Syriac with notes and introduction, see Amir Harrak. *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV: A.D. 488-775*. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 1999).

<sup>84</sup> John of Damascus adapted the Magi legend into the Christian Nativity story, late seventh or early eighth century. For more information, see Avner, 460-464.

<sup>85</sup> Avner, 464. For translation of *Revelatio Magorum* and related texts, see Landau.

indistinguishable from the Zoroastrian notion of deified time, variously recalled by the Magi in Syriac 162 as Christ's polymorphous natures – infant, suffering adult, and old man received by angels.<sup>86</sup> In Judaism, Remembrance is Zikronot, the second of three Rosh Hashanah prayers, and is intended to remind God of their people's early following of him. For Christians, Remembrance is a verbal evocation of Christ's terrestrial history as the man, Jesus, in order to reveal the deity, and was especially prominent in Byzantine liturgy. While many such Christian evocations exist, one of the longest enduring is the "Apostles Creed," purporting the tripartite idea of incarnation, suffering of human life on earth, and triumph over death in a way most similar to the earlier signification of Sasanian deified time.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Sasanian Persia was an important intermediary of luxury goods between East and West, despite near constant conflict with the Roman and Byzantine Empires. The fifth century provided a time of peace, and it is from this period that Sasanian motifs appear in Roman and Byzantine repertoires. Sasanian art primarily chronicles imperial patronage and communication, meaning portable luxury objects exchanged as court and ambassadorial gifts transported Sasanian iconographies to new geographies. For an extended commentary on Sasanian interaction and objects, see Gonosová. Writing an account of his eastern travels, Marco Polo directly reference the Magi scheme for explaining the symbolic pattern of divine polymorphic natures used to represent aspects of the cosmocrator in the Persian cultural framework, see Williams Abraham Valentine Jackson, "The Magi in Marco Polo and the Cities in Persia from Which They Came to Worship the Infant Christ" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 26 (1905): 79–83; Panaino, 170-171; Marco Polo, *Milione*. Versione toscana del Trecento; Edizione critica a cura di Valeria Bertolucci Pizzorusso (Milano: Indice Ragionato di Giorgio Raimondo Cardona, Adelphi, 1994); Henri-Charles Puech, "Histoire de l'Ancienne Église et Patristique" *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses* 74 (1965): 128–138 ; Alois van Tongerloo, "Ecce Magi ab Oriente Venerunt" *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 7 (1992): 57–74.

<sup>87</sup> The "Apostles Creed" originated in the fourth century Roman Catholic Church and was invoked by the Western and Eastern liturgies. It reads:  
 I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
 creator of heaven and earth.  
 I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Presuming that the prevalence of Christian evocations of liturgical Remembrance can be tied to the early Byzantine doctrines emphasizing Christological duality, and the eastern tendency towards ideological proto-Trinitarianism, Sasanian Zoroastrianism, specifically deified time, occurs as a natural source for Remembrance. Defining descriptions and iconographies for the prophesied infant incarnate, Emmanuel,<sup>88</sup> and Christ would have been straightforward theological tasks as both iterations had terrestrial form as the human being, Jesus. Defining the Ancient of Days, as the abstract eternal deity, would have proven more complicated as is established by the various doctrinal explanations for the duality of these divine essences. Benefitting from the transitive format of manuscripts that made them easily accessible through trade and Constantinople's identity as a cosmopolitan cultural center able to compete with well-established cities, including Alexandria whose library is legendary, it is near certain

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born of the Virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried;  
 he descended to the dead.  
 On the third day he rose again;  
 he ascended into heaven,  
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
 and he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
 the holy catholic Church,  
 the communion of saints,  
 the forgiveness of sins,  
 the resurrection of the body,  
 and the life everlasting. Amen.

<sup>88</sup> Matthew 1: 18-25 recounts an angel telling Joseph not to cast aside Mary in shame, because she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit as was foretold by God speaking through an Old Testament prophet. Upon the child's birth, Joseph is to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1: 23 records the referenced prophesy: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

*Religious Disputes in the Sasanian Court*, the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, and the numerous other textual sources described in this chapter would have been available in Constantinopolitan libraries for scholastic and theological reference alike. Based on their accessibility, identification of a common descriptive shared across cultures and time periods – a wise aged man who at times is either the leader of a pantheon or a philosophical guide – would provide a promising descriptive model for Christianity to appropriate and define as the amorphous Ancient of Days.

## IMAGING THE DIVINE

Legendarily, the night before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge the sign of the cross materialized in front of the sun in Constantine's dreams and a disembodied voice, presumably the Christian god, told Constantine he would be victorious under this sign.<sup>89</sup> The next morning, Constantine instructed his troops to mark their shields with the Christian cross; they did, and Constantine emerged from battle the victorious sole ruler of the Roman Empire. Following the lore of this celebrated beginning for the Byzantine Empire, it is not surprising the cult of the cross dominated Christian ideology in Constantinople during the earliest centuries. During Constantine's reign, it is also alleged remnants of the True Cross were discovered within the Empire, leading to the rapid popularity of the cult of relics. Relics acted for the devotee as a tool for conjuring the physical divine presence, and Ernst Kitzinger suggests a belief in their magical power was the source of cultic popularity because it related to the familiar practices of the city's Greek cultural heritage. As practices, both the cult of the cross and cult of relics can trace their impetus to definitive events. Yet, the next cultic evolution, the cult of images, has more nebulous beginnings as laid out in Chapter 1.

Near the end of the Justinianic era and as a natural derivative from the cult of relics, the cult of images began to spread across a wide church audience. In these early phases, the cult of images was usually concerned with an object, which because of origins or associations was able to partake in the magic nature of relics. The earliest images were

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<sup>89</sup> The sun is symbolically important as a reference to Constantine's, and his father before his, belief in Sol Invictus, the Roman sun god. The sign of the cross in front of the sun symbolically places Christianity before other religions.

often mechanical creations, the by-products of relics as it were, thought to have had physical contact with a divine person.<sup>90</sup> Evolving into representative forms that encased the presence of a divine person, though never having had contact with them, figural images acted as iconic intercessors to determine the many theological mysteries held by the religion in its first centuries.

However, the relationship between the cult of relics and the cult of images was tenuous at best because, unlike with relics and their required attachment to sainthood, theology can only be considered one contributing factor to the expansion of image use, and by the beginning of the seventh century images had fully distinguished themselves from relics. Theology, particularly Christology, does not seem to have been a primary impetus for the rising trend of images, even though it was under Justinian that the church truly began to struggle with reconciling a proper interpretation of Christ, the “God-Man,” that could be shared by theology and art. Rather, in Constantinople official promotion of imagery in the second half of the sixth century ties the cult of images to secular developments. At the imperial court in Constantinople, portrait images never lost their inherited Greco-Roman vogue as objects of veneration. Imperial portraiture, as part of the Emperor cult, was accepted as a stand-in for the absent ruler and the cult of images afforded the same presence to absent divine persons, thus setting the scene for numinous contestation and eventual Iconoclasm.<sup>91</sup> Well established by this point in time as a center

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<sup>90</sup> For more on cultic evolution, the power of magic, and the rise of images, see Chapter 1 here; Kitzinger (1976), 117-122; Grabar.

<sup>91</sup> In Roman times the Emperor cult focused on the emperor’s semi-divine nature and was iconographically promoted in all his images, whether fixed in place throughout the Empire or mobile for use in processional ceremonies. During Constantine’s reign, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea crafted the Christian theory of divine kingship where the emperor

for economic, political, intellectual, cultural, and theological pursuits, Constantinople, as an identifiably Christian cosmopolitan nexus, needed a way to transmit cultural beliefs to both multilingual immigrants and those with whom the city's inhabitants had contact. The cult of images provided just that: a visual language for Constantinople to communicate through when native tongues failed.

Concurrent with the rise of the cult of images in Constantinople is the appearance of the Ancient of Days motif used in proto-Trinitarian iconography. Proto-Trinitarian iconography represents Christ's polymorphic nature through the individual or united motifs of Emmanuel, Christ *Pantokrator*, and the Ancient of Days, where the combination reiterates conceptual awareness, and possible syncretism, of Sasanian deified time, Jewish Zikronot, and Christian liturgical Remembrance by conveying notions of past, present, and future or birth, life, and resurrection.<sup>92</sup> Emmanuel is the Christ incarnate born of the Virgin Mary and appears as a child or youth, often in gold, and with a nimbus crown that can be crossed or not as no pattern of use has been

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has the divine right to rule as vice-regent of Christ, serving as an apostle in his own right by enacting control over the secular and earthly sphere in Christ's absence. In this way the Byzantine Emperor cult slowly shifted focus to the subservient relationship of the emperor to Christ. This not only influenced the use of images in Christianity to visually shown the relationship between Christ and emperor, but formed the ideology of the Emperor Mystique, to which many scholars have contributed. However, the visual similarities between images of Christ and the emperor will not be covered here. For the Emperor cult and Emperor Mystique, see André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'Art Byzantin: Recherches sur l'Art Officiel de l'Empire d'Orient* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1936) ; Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); H.P. L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Mathews, especially 3-22.

<sup>92</sup> Panaino provides a very thorough investigation of the known occurrences and scholarly work done on Christ's polymorphic nature from both textual and visual types, so a detailed discussion will not be repeated here.

established (fig. 18). Christ *Pantokrator* is the mature iteration enacting his role as supreme or eternal judge and is dressed in the purple and gold robes of the emperor with a crossed nimbus halo to evoke his corporeal crucifixion as the man, Jesus (fig. 19). When depicted full length or as part of a larger scene, Christ *Pantokrator* sits upon a throne or globe, raises his right hand in blessing, and carries a text in his bent left arm (fig. 20). The Ancient of Days is perhaps the hardest to define as from its Byzantine inception it was intended as a contemplative motif, a sign of God the Father's essence rather than an identifiable being who had been witnessed through human incarnation. When Christ is referenced as the Ancient of Days in literature, the author is using the name to connote an image that signifies the complex Christological issue of Christ's preexistence with God the Father. United, these three Christ-types are aspects of the same divine being, the Christian god, repeatedly represented in dogmatic, liturgical, and visual representations of the church.<sup>93</sup>

While the previous chapter entertains possibilities for a literary referent, no definitive visual model, regardless of origin, has been determined before the Ancient of Days appears on an ivory diptych believed to have been carved in Ravenna, Italy in the mid-sixth century.<sup>94</sup> With nearly parallel creation dates are two mosaics at the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and an encaustic icon at Mount Sinai in Egypt that prove the Ancient of Days motif was either dispersed throughout the Byzantine Empire

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<sup>93</sup> Tsuji provides a compilation of the relevant literature determining the three types, 175 and note 38.

<sup>94</sup> Occurring in the now destroyed sixth century Church of the Holy Apostles, it is unclear if the mosaic was original or created post-Iconoclasm. Here, we will cautiously propose a sixth century creation because the rise of figural decoration in churches accompanies the rise of the cult of images.

as soon as it appeared, or that it entered the capital and provinces at nearly the same time from another shared source. Understandably few examples of the pre-Iconoclasm Ancient of Days motif are known, but the range of media displayed by the three considered here are suggestive of a much larger tradition.<sup>95</sup>

Concerning the earliest Byzantine visual expressions of the Ancient of Days, aside of their sixth century creation much of the scholarship is theoretical conjecture: only the first provides an object and history, the second is no longer extant but known from contemporary documentation, and the third can be viewed today but little is known about its history. The first example is a carved ivory diptych featuring the Ancient of Days on the left panel and the Virgin and Child, Emmanuel, on the right (fig. 12). A small devotional item meant to be held and made of costly, exotic ivory, the contemplative experience of this diptych would have been personal, forming an individual connection between viewer and subject matter. The bottom of both panels has been trimmed, but the remaining top stigmas of a monogram are assumed to belong to Bishop Maximianus of Ravenna – whose position of power in the church is preserved alongside Justinian in the mosaics of San Vitale – based on the closely related style of an ivory cathedra, or bishop’s throne, famously made for him (fig. 21). This being the case, it is likely both ivory works were either crafted in Ravenna by Constantinopolitan artists or by local Italian craftsman trained by them.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> To the best of the author’s knowledge, these are the only three pre-Iconoclastic examples.

<sup>96</sup> Folding diptychs originated as ancient writing tablets. Most frequently, the diptych was made of wood, but the fifth and sixth century more ivory was used, especially for the consular diptychs from which the Christian use evolved. To read further on the diptych’s attribution, see Weitzmann (1978), 10-11 and 44-45.

The Ravenna diptych, occasionally called the *Christus-Maria-Diptychon* in museum settings, bears the appearance of contemporary secular diptychs with the primary figures of the Ancient of Days and the Virgin and Child seated in the foreground upon *sella curulis*, backless consular seats, instead of high-backed imperial thrones. These figures and *sella curulis* are placed below decoratively carved renditions of arched palace architecture. Placement below architectural ornamentation instead of imperial baldachins is evidence of the diptych's early creation because it shows Christian divine persons had neither met, nor surpassed, the emperor's status among the Byzantine Empire's wide audience. In the background are Saints Peter and Paul, and the archangels, Michael and Gabriel, dressed in military attire, respectively flanking the Ancient of Days and the Virgin and Child. Though all are divine persons entitled to nimbus haloes, none are present, attesting once more to an early secular derivation because, following Roman tradition, nimbus haloes were only used to crown personifications or the emperor, as an expression of inherent divinity. The seven figures of the diptych have soft, fleshy faces with enlarged eyes to enhance their hieratic quality, and their rounded bodies are clearly visible beneath their robes. The three main figures are seated uncertainly, looking more apt to slide out of the scene than remain in their seats; even so, their seated positions show they are of highest authority in the grouping as, stemming once more from Roman practice, it was procedure that the person of highest importance would sit in any meeting. The Ancient of Days and Child, Emmanuel, are both in the pose of Christ *Pantokrator* with their right hands raised in blessing and their left holding texts to demonstrate the Ravenna diptych is an example of proto-Trinitarian iconography. The Ancient of Days is

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distinguishable from Christ *Pantokrator* by his long hair and beard, which would appear white if the Ravenna diptych were colored. The text held by the Ancient of Days is a large book with bejeweled cover, alluding to a liturgical implement that would have been placed upon the altar table and thus provided additional support for ownership by Bishop Maximianus. More importantly, the addition of a book in the hands of the Ancient of Days signals to the viewer that the Word has become flesh. Though their meaning is ambiguous, four figures carved above the decorative arches in the top corners of each panel are determined by their dress and attributes as Greco-Roman inclusions. While obscure, their presence may signify either a connection to Roman-Italian cultural heritage, absorption of Hellenistic culture into Christianity, or a display of the accepting nature of the Byzantine Empire and Christianity.

Transitioning in usage from personal to public, the second example featuring the Ancient of Days is a pair of mosaics from the main dome and apse of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. In the fourth century, Constantine built the Church of the Holy Apostles as part of his structural program in Constantinople. Destroyed in the 1453 fall of the Byzantine Empire, existence of the church is confirmed by numerous literary sources, including several detailed medieval ekphrases on its decoration.<sup>97</sup>

Whether the Church of the Holy Apostles was damaged in the Nika Revolt, or otherwise in need of repair, is uncertain, but Procopius describes Justinian's sixth century rebuild as

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<sup>97</sup> After the Church of the Holy Apostles was destroyed, a fifteenth century mosque was built on the site. Today any remnants are deeply buried beneath the eighteenth century Fetih Mosque. Authors writing about the Church of the Holy Apostles before its destruction include Procopius, Theophanes, Theophanes Continuatus, Constantine of Rhodes, and Nikolaos Mesarites. To read specific passages by each, see Epstein, 79-85.

a quotation of Hagia Sophia, to which it followed as the second most important church in Constantinople because it housed the imperial burials since the fourth century.<sup>98</sup>

Architectural descriptions display limited change throughout the church's existence.

Contrastingly, interior decoration seems to have fluctuated – following the same linear progression from simple, isolated, iconic forms to narratives densely crowded with detail in the centuries proceeding, and again following, Iconoclasm.<sup>99</sup> In *Chronographia*, Theophanes notes Justin II, sixth century successor to Justinian, provisioned the church with its first figural decoration, which was formulated to stress both Christ's divine and human natures.<sup>100</sup> The extent of the damages caused to Justin's decorative program during Iconoclasm is also unclear. But, Theophanes Continuatus provides that in the mid-ninth century Basil I reconstructed the church's broken parts and "made it once more beautiful and new," while Constantine of Rhodes and Nikolaos Mesarites give descriptions for Church of the Holy Apostles' medieval appearance.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Construction of Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles comes from *De Aedificiis* 1.4.9-24. Translation is available in the public domain from: <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Procopius/Buildings/>.

<sup>99</sup> Evidence showing Byzantine church decoration would have been densely detailed within narrative cycles before Iconoclasm comes from provincial churches in Italy and Cappadocia where the effects of Iconoclasm were not so strongly felt, see Epstein, 90-92. Despite the Council of Nicaea decision in favor of images during Iconoclasm, Constantinopolitan reluctance post-Iconoclasm influenced a return to simplified iconic motifs and would not return to pre-Iconoclasm decorative styles until the mid-twelfth century.

<sup>100</sup> For an English translation with added introduction and notes, see *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, trans. Harry Turtledove (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

<sup>101</sup> For a translation of the relevant portions of Theophanes Continuatus and Nikolaos Mesarites, see Mango (1972), 192 and 229-233. For translation of the relevant portions of Constantine of Rhodes, see E. Legrand, "Description des Œuvres d'Art et de l'Église des Saints Apôtres de Constantinople," *REG* 9 (1895) 32-65.

Mesarites transcribes his musings of the church in a subjective and personal tone, as if describing to an audience his observations as he wanders through the structure. While the detailed nature of the narrative mosaics lining the walls makes it improbable they survived Iconoclasm unscathed, it is at least likely the mosaic images of Christ *Pantokrator* in the central dome and the Virgin and Child in the conch of the apse – architectural spaces previously reserved for zodiac symbols and images serving the Emperor cult, respectively<sup>102</sup> – were faithful reconstructions of sixth century imagery because Mesarites describes them as simple, iconic, motifs lacking narrative additions that follow the typical Byzantine decorative plan for these most important church spaces.<sup>103</sup> The simplicity of the Christ *Pantokrator* and Virgin and Child motifs would have allowed artistic flexibility in the specific details, and Mesarites comments that, “He who existed before time was, is a new-born babe; the Ancient of Days is an infant at the breast,” suggesting the infant Emmanuel, held by the Virgin in the Church of the Holy Apostles, was, in fact, aged.<sup>104</sup> Providing Mesarites account is faithful, the Virgin and Child mosaic could have been suggested by Ephraem the Syrian’s hymnography or one of the texts excerpting the tales of the Magi from *Religious Disputes on the Sasanian Court*, where one Magus sees the child as if he were an old man. By his description and its textual predecessors, Mesarites provides for the careful reader an indication that the

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<sup>102</sup> Mathews discusses the decorative evolution of architectural spaces from secular to Christian. For the dome, see 148-171; for the apse, see 92-114.

<sup>103</sup> In medieval churches the dome was representative of the heavenly realm and the conch was behind the altar table, in direct view of worshippers. For more on the appropriateness of decoration, see Epstein, 901-92.

<sup>104</sup> Glanville Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites: Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47 (1957): 855-924, quote at 878. See also Epstein 82-87.

Christ *Pantokrator* and Virgin and Child mosaics in the Church of the Holy Apostles functioned together as proto-Trinitarian iconography to create a contemplative group mentality of Remembrance within the congregation gathered in the nave for worship.

Shifting from a monumental, fixed, public setting to a smaller, mobile, but still public format is the third example. The Ancient of Days appears as the sole figure on a sixth century encaustic on wood panel icon – a term generally referencing an image of veneration bearing a distinct hieratic quality – from Saint Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai in Egypt. Assumed to have been created in Constantinople, the icon’s continued existence is taken as proof it was likely in Egypt, or another provincial site, before the onset of Iconoclasm (fig. 13).<sup>105</sup> From an inscription on the wooden rafters at Saint Catherine’s, it is known that Justinian created the monastery between AD 548 and 565 in memory his wife, Empress Theodora. And Kurt Weitzmann documents that until the mid-twentieth century numerous icons could be viewed lining the north and south walls of the monastery’s basilica-plan church, where they waited until the appropriate feast days when they were moved to a place of prominence near the altar. Painted cult images were not a Christian invention, but had various roots in Late Antiquity, best known of which are the encaustic on wood Fayum portraits found over the faces of mummies in Roman Egypt (fig. 22). While the arid climate of Egypt preserved a great quantity of this funerary art, a more decisive source of reference for Byzantine icon painters may have been panel paintings featuring imperial portraiture. While very few panel paintings of this time period have survived outside Egyptian funerary contexts, by

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<sup>105</sup> Creation of the icon is debated between the sixth and eighth century, following the lead of Weitzmann (1976), I will be using a sixth century creation date.

chance a painted imperial portrait of Septimius Severus with his wife and sons has been preserved (fig. 23).<sup>106</sup> Now in Berlin, the Septimius Severus tondo panel is painted in a medium similar to tempera, so it is likely Egyptian funerary art was more beneficial to the artist of the Sinai icon by providing the durable encaustic technique, where pigment is trapped in melted wax, and painterly style. Painted imperial portrait panels, like that of Septimius Severus, would have played a role in the Emperor Cult, which provided secular inspiration for the Christian cult of images and to icons, specifically, because both imperial images and icons were intended to be transitive products so that their physical position could best fit the current social need.

The Sinai icon is a painterly display of the Ancient of Days sitting upon a rainbow inside of a mandorla.<sup>107</sup> The rainbow is a well established symbol of prophesy, eternity, and the spiritual realm – pagan and monotheistic. Here, by reversing the natural order of the colors so purple, the color of imperial significance, is on top, a secular dimension is added to the rainbow’s symbolic meaning. The icon’s coloration is opaque and the artist has used sienna pigment for the line work that delineates form in place of more naturalistic shading. The mandorla is surrounded by gold with scant indications of the tetramorphs,<sup>108</sup> likely the symbolic Evangelists, who once carried it. Surrounding the icon is a simple frame with Greek lettering. The Ancient of Days, with white hair and

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<sup>106</sup> A succinct history of icons and other painted cult images is provided in Weitzmann (1978), 7-23.

<sup>107</sup> The Ancient of Days is pictured on a rainbow in a handful of other expressions. One mid-eleventh century gospel book at the Bibliothèque National de France, Parisinus Graecus 64, fol. 158v, depicts both the Ancient of Days and Christ upon rainbows in their individual mandorlas to the top left and right of the page.

<sup>108</sup> Tsuji suggests these beings were tetramorphs, not cherubim or seraphim, after an exchange with Weitzmann, 175 and note 39.

beard, is flattened and elongated in the typical Byzantine style of figural abstraction. His exposed neck and face display slight modeling and his eyes are enlarged to accentuate his heightened spirituality. The Ancient of Days is seated frontally with his right hand raised in blessing and his left holding an open book – any number of religious text based on its context and gold coloration. He is crowned by a gold, cross nimbed halo, wears golden robes, and his bare feet appear to rest upon a rounded form, assumedly representative of the Earthly sphere, marked out from the rest of the background by a series of thin white lines. The interior of the mandorla represents the divine realm of heaven and is deep blue with stylized, six-pointed, gold stars. Among the stars, above the Ancient of Day's hands, an equilateral Greek cross and E[MMA]NOYA, Emmanuel in Greek, are inscribed. The inclusion of this naming inscription alongside the traditional iconography of the Ancient of Days and the cross nimbed halo and posture of Christ *Pantokrator*, make the Saint Catherine's icon an example of proto-Trinitarian iconography where each Christ-type is united in one figure.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the limited and greatly theoretical evidence for these examples, the Ravenna diptych, the mosaics in the Church of the Holy Apostles, and the Sinai icon together provide the earliest visual expressions of the Christian Ancient of Days motif, where their variety is suggestive of a much larger tradition. Whether in means of depiction, placement, or medium, each example shows inspiration drawn from the imperial order, known figural types, and from the more ancient, pagan, Sasanian deified time to provide a basis outside theology for the late sixth century rise of images in

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<sup>109</sup> For the most inclusive studies of the icon, see G. and M. Soteriou, *Εἰκόνες της Ηουης Σωά* (Athens, 1958): 23-25, figs. 8, 9; Tsuji, 175; Weitzmann (1976), 41-42.

Byzantine religious settings. Additionally, the diverse locations witnessed by each example, and their formal variations, are evidence of network exchange in the creation of local iconographies. As all are merely dated to the mid-late sixth century, the imperial reigns of Justinian and Justin II under which the Ravenna diptych and Church of the Holy Apostles mosaics are assumed to have been created make it probable the Ravenna diptych was crafted first, and the iconography was then exported to Constantinople, either through material object or artisan, where it took on a distinctly more divine appearance.

One additional early example featuring the Ancient of Days as part of proto-Trinitarian iconography proves difficult to date, but demonstrates how movement outside Constantinople provided for the creation of local variations even within the greater Empire. Frescoes on the south side of the vault in Eđri Taş kilisesi, a rock-cut church in the Ihlara region of Western Cappadocia, depict three Magi – one young, one mature, and one aged – in five different scenes. The first two appearances are part of the Nativity narrative. Lacking the Ancient of Days or Emmanuel iconography in favor of Jesus as the traditional infant in the manger, the Nativity frescoes only point of note here is as a further demonstration Sasanian-Christian syncretism (fig. 24). In their three additional appearances, the Magi are represented in individual scenes where they are each paired with an iteration of Christ matching their own life phase (figs. 14 and 15). These three scenes do not follow a chronologic order, but the mature Magus and Christ come first, the aged pair is second, and the youngest Magus and infant are last. At Eđri Taş kilisesi, only the adult Christ and the Ancient of Days have nimbus crowns and both are crossed, even though the Ancient of Days' was traditionally uncrossed in Constantinopolitan examples until the mid-late eleventh century. The infant's lack of a nimbus halo, or any other

traditional iconographic element, precludes his identification as Emmanuel. Instead the infant's placement in a manger creates a more likely scenario where he is identifiably Jesus, the flesh and blood expression of the Christian god. Demonstrating further alterations to the Ancient of Days iconography in this provincial iteration are his decidedly dark gray hair and beard and his red robes matching those worn by the other divine iterations in the frescoes. Only the Ancient of Days' sunken cheeks and bent posture clearly indicate he is an aged man at Eđri Taş kilisesi.

Regarding a creation date for the frescoes, a dedicatory inscription on the eastern wall of the nave, just before the apse, commemorates the decorative program with the donor's name, provincial aristocratic titles, and a list naming multiple emperors that indicates a date no earlier than 921, but not after 927.<sup>110</sup> However, it should be noted that the awkward framing of the inscription within the decorative program implies it may commemorate a transformation or repair of the frescoes, instead of their original execution. With this in mind, Nicole and Michel Thierry conclude Eđri Taş kilisesi was decorated before Iconoclasm based on its existence as a unique iconographic example in Cappadocia where the frescoes blend Early Christian hieratic figures with Byzantine elongated forms and iconography.<sup>111</sup>

Even with distinct secular overtones, the proto-Trinitarian underpinnings found within the Ravenna diptych, Church of the Holy Apostles mosaics, and Sinai icon are suggestive of contemporary difficulties in reconciling the Christological issues caused by

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<sup>110</sup> A technical analysis of this inscription is provided by Oikonomides, 501-506.

<sup>111</sup> Nicole and Michel Thierry conducted the earliest, and to date most conclusive, study of the rock-cut churches in Cappadocia, see 5-52 and 66-67; Panaino, 192.

multiple aspects originating from the essence of one divine being. Adding the frescoes at Eđri Taş kilisesi to this grouping, we can see how those issues are fully played out in a narrative format. At Eđri Taş kilisesi, Christ's polymorphous nature is fully depicted, rather than uniting two aspects, or all three in the case of the Sinai icon, into one figural form. I suggest all iconographical disparities, especially those of the infant incarnate, and lack of symbolic attributes in the frescoes is representative of their provincial location. Most important to the artist was not elucidation of complex Christology in visual form, instead these frescoes would have better served the idea of Remembrance for worshippers gathered in the church and partaking in verbal evocations of the same concept. While this is similar to the public function of the mosaics decorating the Church of the Holy Apostles, I feel the explication of all three figures was necessary at Eđri Taş kilisesi because its distance from Constantinople likely meant knowledge of, or engagement in, Christological development was less pronounced. The medium used at Eđri Taş kilisesi provides undeniable proof that it was created in the provincial region of Cappadocia, rather than in Constantinople as can be argued for the Ravenna diptych, so that when the scene showing the Ancient of Days is compared against the other Byzantine versions it becomes clear that the frescoes display a local variant comprised from a known motif. As a thing, or in Richard Brilliant's terms, a "what," the Ancient of Days motif only had to be known in order to function because the "who," the identity of the depiction, is adaptable based on locale or culture.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Cappadocia was significantly closer to the Jewish Holy Lands and Sasanian borders than Constantinople, suggesting visual

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<sup>112</sup> Brilliant uses the association of "what" and "who" to discuss imperial symbolic manifestation in portraiture, see 102-104.

discrepancies between Eđri Taş kilisesi and the Sinai icon or the Church of the Holy Apostles mosaics, given their Constantinopolitan creation, result from a stronger non-Byzantine cultural influence. Regardless of their disparities, when these four occurrences are considered as a united group they provide evidence for the expansive use – in geography, medium, and audience – of the Ancient of Days motif as part of the cult of images in the Byzantine Empire before Iconoclasm, where the value of an image was its ability to communicate across boundaries of language, religion, and culture.

## INTO ETERNITY

Figural representations in religious settings took time to reappear in Constantinople after Iconoclasm, and the Ancient of Days motif is absent from the record between the pre-Iconoclasm frescoes at Eđri Taş kilisesi and the eleventh century, when a cross is added to the nimbus halo. While nimbed haloes are traceable to early Roman art where they were used to distinguish deified emperors, as well as personifications and gods, linking political and religious authority, the addition of the cross to the nimbus definitively separates the divine and terrestrial rulers, as well as pagan and Christian contexts, to become symbolic of Christ in his preexistence with the divine creator.<sup>113</sup> Modified to fit this new post-Iconoclasm context of preexistence rather than the eternal nature of the divine as it was used in proto-Trinitarian iconography, extant appearances of the Ancient of Days motif occur as painted miniatures in numerous Byzantine illuminated manuscripts,<sup>114</sup> at least until the end of the eleventh century when the motif's resurgent popularity subsides.<sup>115</sup> Specifically, illuminated religious texts based on Early Christian and classical models flourished once more in Constantinople to reemphasize the cosmopolitan nature of the Byzantine Empire as the lasting effects of Iconoclasm faded.

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<sup>113</sup> For more on Roman use of the nimbus, see Deckers, 95.

<sup>114</sup> Manuscripts created in eleventh century Constantinople that feature at least one example of the Ancient of Days include: Dionysiou codex 587, Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece (fig. 8); codex Tahpou 14, Greek Patriarchal Library, Jerusalem; the Theodore Psalter, Add MS 19352, British Library, London; Parisinus Graecus 64, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (fig. 9); Parisinus Graecus 74, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (fig. 10); Sinai codex 205, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

<sup>115</sup> Dates of use can only be approximate as they are based on extant objects. Use of the Ancient of Days motif as church decoration is appropriated from Byzantine into Baltic Christian Patriarchy and African Trinitarian Christianity settings.

As has been shown in the previous chapters, the earliest examples of the Ancient of Days in Byzantine contexts feature the motif as one third of the proto-Trinitarian iconographic scheme that inherently displays the influence of secular and non-Christian multicultural interactions. In compiling a brief history of the cultural, political, economic, intellectual, and religious associations of Constantinople between the fourth and sixth centuries, it is my intention to show how the syncretic climate of the capital proved influential throughout the Empire and provided for the emergence of the Ancient of Days motif. Additionally, the investigation of potential descriptive sources dating back as far as the Bronze Age provide evidence of interrelated concepts among cultures associated with one another through Mediterraneanism that is not yet possible from a visual model. While no two textual sources provide the same description, each contains an aged figure, with either grey or white hair and beard, who is exalted for either his wisdom or divinity. Further still, this narrative figure is often, though not always, used in discussions of eternity, regardless of if the text is pagan, philosophical, or from one of the emerging monotheistic religions.

Presently, Byzantine, scholarship tends to disregard Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, and Jewish narrative traditions as early models by focusing on links between the Post-Iconoclasm reappearance of the Ancient of Days and concurrent repopularization of the fourth-century exegeses by the Early Christian theologian, John Chrysostom. Basis for this belief follows Pope Gregory's AD 787 statements at the Council of Nicaea that images of God the Father cannot be attempted as he has never had a corporeal

existence;<sup>116</sup> rather, only artworks of God the Son were possible as inferences of God the Father's essence.<sup>117</sup> Through his homilies on the Gospel of John, Chrysostom reasserts the second century doctrinal agreement among the Christian sects that Christ and God coexisted from the beginning of time; consequently, Chrysostom determines Christ is accurately described by and depicted as the Ancient of Days.<sup>118</sup> Based on this logic, it is understandable Chrysostom's writings experienced a popular revival because Christians were attempting once more to reconcile religion and imagery. However, while Chrysostom frequently uses the phrase "the Ancient of Days" in his homilies on John, this title never appears within the Gospel and the Ancient of Days is only directly mentioned in the Christian Old Testament on one occasion: the apocalyptic visions of Daniel discussed here in Chapter 3. Setting aside Chrysostom as a source for the Ancient of Days iconography because he seems to apply a known description as an epithet to elucidate complex Christological concepts rather than construct something new, a

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<sup>116</sup> J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, vol. 12 (Graz: Akade mische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 963E; McKay, 62.

<sup>117</sup> The strongest advocates for Post-Iconoclasm creation of the Ancient of Days iconography are McKay and Lowden. McKay does acknowledge earlier Constantinopolitan examples with similar iconography; however, she does not believe they can be definitively identified as the Ancient of Days because they lack inscriptions and cross-nimbed haloes.

<sup>118</sup> For a recent edition of Chrysostom's exegesis see John Chrysostom and Anne Marie Malingrey, *De incomprehensibili dei natura*, in *Sur L'Incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, Sources chrétiennes 28, 244-45 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000). For Chrysostom's homilies of the Gospel of John and further discussions of the Ancient of Days in the original Greek and modern translation, see PG 59:23 482; *In Daniele* (PG 56:231-34); *Ad Theodorum lapsus* (John Chrysostom and Jean Dumortier, *A Theodore*, Sources chrétiennes 117 [Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1966], 80-218); *De incomprehensibili dei natura* (John Chrysostom and Anne Marie Malingrey, *Sur L'Incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, Sources chrétiennes 28 [Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2000]; PG 48: 701^18; and John Chrysostom and Anne Marie Malingrey, *Sur L'Égalité du père et du fils, Contre les Anoméens*, Sources chrétiennes 396 [Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1994]).

plausible explanation for the sudden reappearance of the Ancient of Days in eleventh century Constantinople is a resurgence of classical learning and artistic production encouraged by the Macedonian Renaissance and Komnenian Era emperors to subside lingering fears of Iconoclasm.

Considering the Ancient of Days emerges in Byzantine artworks during periods where learning and art are emphasized – first in the sixth century and again in the ninth – and given the vast array of more ancient cultures describing a figure visually and contextually similar to the Byzantine Ancient of Days, I do believe Mediterraneanism provided an environment where a yet discovered visual model was encountered by each interrelated culture. Perhaps the model came from a Near Eastern idol, a representation of Eternity, a Greek philosopher, a Greco-Roman cosmocrator who “ruled supreme, dominating the elements at will and mastering time,” or any number of representations of cosmic kingship.<sup>119</sup> The changing appearance and multiplicity of *Aion*, Eternity, in Rome from aged bearded figure to youth with first a zodiac wheel than a globe, appears to provide the closest relationship to the post-Iconoclasm Ancient of Days, where Christ, who would often sit upon a globe in his guise of *Pantokrator*, preexists with God the Father, the eternal, aged, Christian being, to whom he will ascend and unite with once again.<sup>120</sup>

Proving an inherited, appropriated, or syncretic visual model either from the previous suggestions or a source I am unaware of, would be rife with complications unless an extant model, and documentation stating it as such, is discovered. However,

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<sup>119</sup> Davies, 91.

<sup>120</sup> For more on the role of the cosmocrator, cosmic kingship, and representations of Eternity, see Davies, 86-101.

pursuing this avenue in a theoretical manner provides an area of further research for the dedicated scholar. Should the project of determining a visual model be undertaken, I believe the most promising direction will be to follow representations of eternity across the cultures interconnected by the Mediterranean exchange networks. Frequently associated with sun cults, eternity is often represented in funerary settings to evoke rebirth. Contained in the ancient Mediterranean world as inherent aspects of rebirth, or the cyclical renewal of life and thus eternity, are the concepts of time, joining of the celestial and terrestrial realms, and authority; together, each of these concepts are enclosed by the Byzantine Ancient of Days motif as a visual referent to the eternal preexistence of Christ and the Christian god.



Figure 1. Christ as the Ancient of Days. Painted roundel. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, early twenty-first century. (Photo: [www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/letter-to-an-icoographer-on-the-ancient-of-days](http://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/letter-to-an-icoographer-on-the-ancient-of-days).)



Figure 2. The Ancient of Days supported by angels. Fresco. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, twentieth or twenty-first century. (Photo: [www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/letter-to-an-icoographer-on-the-ancient-of-days](http://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/letter-to-an-icoographer-on-the-ancient-of-days).)



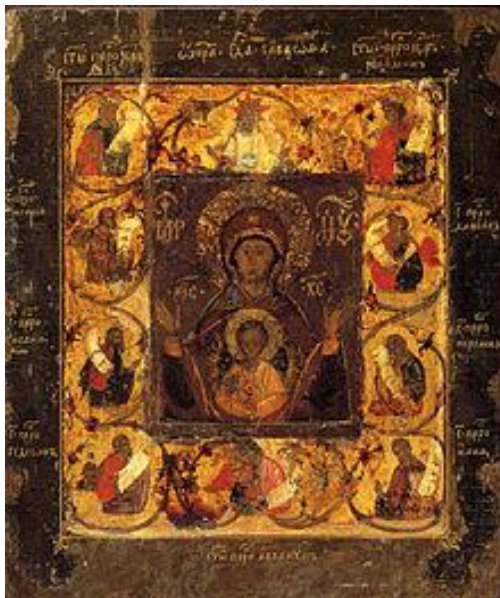
Figure 3. Felix Lieftuchter, Christ and the Ancient of Days crowning the Virgin Mary Queen of Heaven below the dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit. Apse fresco. Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Cathedral, Toledo, Ohio, first half of the twentieth century. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 4. The Ancient of Days as the eternal Trinity. Wall painting. Debre Birhan Selassie Church, Gondar, Ethiopia, seventeenth century. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 5. Christ as the Ancient of Days. Fresco. Saint George's Monastery, Ubisi, Georgia, fourteenth century. (Photo: Pinterest.)



Figures 6 and 7. Kursk Root Icon depicting the Virgin and Child "of the sign." The Virgin and Child are surrounded by the nine prophets who wrote of Christ's birth and surmounted by the Ancient of Days with a red and blue eight-point star halo. Left: painted wood icon. Right: metal and enamel cover. Kursk, Russia, thirteenth century. Presently property of the Russian Orthodox Church (Photo: <http://www.saintjonah.org/articles/ancientofdays.htm>.)



Figure 8. “Theta” initial enclosing the seated Ancient of Days and Emmanuel motifs. The addition of the cross to the Ancient of Days’ nimbus halo makes this proto-Trinitarian iconography. Believed to have been created at the court scriptorium, Constantinople; possibly commissioned by Isaac I Komnenos as a gift for the Studios Monastery. Lectionary, painted vellum, cod. 587, fol. 3v, eleventh century. Presently at Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece. (Photo: Makis Skiadaresis, *The Treasures of Mount Athos: Illuminated Manuscripts: Miniatures, Headpieces, Initial Letters, Vol. 1, The Protaton and the Monasteries of Dionysiou, Koutloumousiou, Xeropotamou, and Gregoriou* [Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1974], 164, fig. 191.)



Figure 9. The Ancient of Days and Christ *Pantokrator* illustrated above John the Baptist and a figural group generally identified as Israelites. Gospel book, painted parchment, BnF, Parisinus Graecus 64, fol. 158v. Constantinople, eleventh century. (Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr>.)



Figure 10. Matthew Headpiece; the Ancient of Days is a roundel protruding from the top of the headpiece, Matthew is in the large, center roundel righting his Gospel, and the remaining roundels illustrate early versus. Gospel book, painted parchment, BnF, Parisinus Graecus 74, fol. 1r. Believed to have been created at Studios Monastery, Constantinople, eleventh century. (Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, <http://gallica.bnf.fr>.)



Figure 11. The Ancient of Days as one third of the Trinity. Fresco. Vatopedion Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece, tenth century. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 12. *Christus-Maria-Diptychon*. Carved ivory. Believed to have been created in Ravenna, Italy, sixth century. (Photo: Sculpture Collection, Staatliche Museum, Berlin, <http://www.smb-digital.de>.)



Figure 13. The Ancient of Days Icon. Encaustic on wood. Believed to have been created in Constantinople, sixth century. Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt. (Photo: *The Sinai Icon Collection*, <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6453>.)



Figure 14. From the Vision of the Magi sequence: two Magi, identified by inscription as Melchion and Gaspar, presenting gifts to the adult Christ and Christ as the Ancient of Days. Fresco. South side of the vault, Eğri Taş kilisesi, Ihlara region, Cappadocia, pre-Iconoclasm. (Photo: Nicole and Michel Thierry, plate 32.)



Figure 15. Vision of the Magi sequence from south side of the vault. Eğri Taş kilisesi, Ihlara region, Cappadocia, pre-Iconoclasm. (Sketch: Nicole and Michel Thierry, 51.)



Figure 16. Saint Theodore on horseback slaying a dragon. Carved relief. Northwest façade, Church of the Holy Cross, Akdamar, Turkey, AD 915-921. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 17. Saints Theodore and George on Horseback. Two wings of an encaustic on wood triptych. Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt, ninth or tenth century. (Photo: *The Sinai Icon Collection*, <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/items/show/6420>.)



Figure 18. Virgin and Child (Emmanuel). Mosaic, detail from deesis. Upper south gallery, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, 1261. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 19. Christ *Pantokrator*. Mosaic, south dome of the inner narthex. Church of the Holy Savior in Chora (Chora Museum), Constantinople, 1315-1321. (Photo: Pinterest.)



Figure 20. Christ *Pantokrator*. Mosaic, conch of the apse. San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy, sixth century. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons.)



Figure 21. Cathedra of Bishop Maximianus. Carved ivory. Ravenna, Italy, sixth century. (Photo: <https://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/an-icon-of-the-kingdom-of-god-the-integrated-expression-of-all-the-liturgical-arts-part-6-furniture/>.)



Figure 22. Fayum mummy portrait of a youth. Encaustic on wood, linen, and human remains. Hawara, Egypt, ca. AD 50. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (Photo: by author.)



Figure 23. Septimius Severus with his wife, Julia Domna, and their two sons, Geta (removed) and Caracalla. Tempera on wood panel. Egypt, ca. AD 200. (Photo: Antikensammlung Collection, Staatliche Museum, Berlin, <http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=681547&viewType=detailView>.)

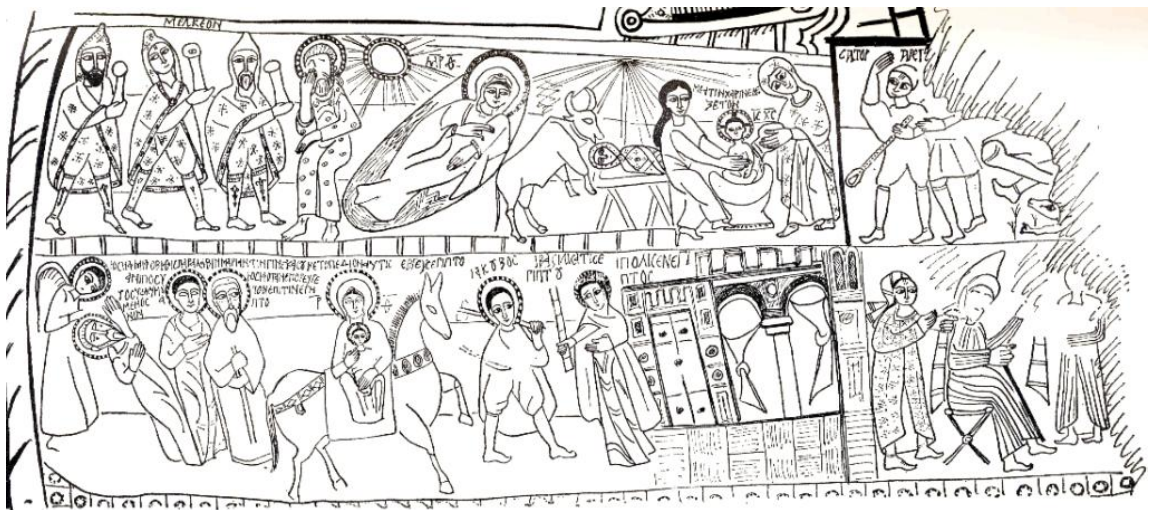


Figure 24. Nativity narrative. Fresco, south side of the vault. Eğri Taş kilisesi, Ihlara region, Cappadocia, pre-Iconoclasm. (Photo: Nicole and Michel Thierry, 51.)

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