From Athena to Theotokos

The Classical Origin of the Mosaic in the Conch of the Apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople

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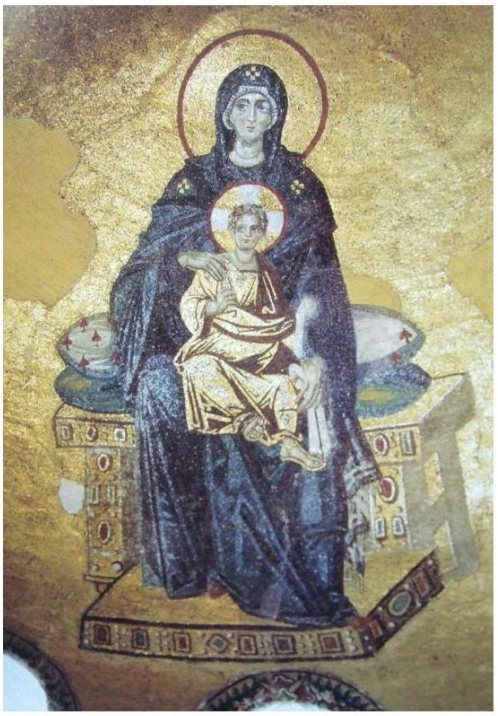

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It is well known that the Greco-Roman, or classical element, exists in Byzantine painting since its very birth. However, besides being a phenomenon which concerns the formation of the artistic style, in particular periods of the historical development of Byzantine painting, the classicism of the human figure constituted also the means of the creative kind of reevaluation of the aesthetics of antiquity. More particularly, preserved archeological examples inform us that, although always present, the classicism of figures in Byzantine painting and mosaics arrived at its most pronounced and artistically most mature manifestations during the period of the so called "Macedonian Renaissance" (867 -1056) and then during the period of the so called "Palaiologan Renaissance" (1261 – 1453).[1] We shall not evaluate the validity of the usage of the problematic term "renaissance" in relation to these two periods here,[2] as the present study will primarily focus on the classical origin of the 9th century mosaic in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

[1] There are certain exceptions in relation to the two aforementioned periods. For example, the frescoes at the Serbian Monastery of Mileševa, which were completed around 1228, are characterised by a rather pronounced classicism of form. Also, it should be mentioned that a certain level of caution is required when we speak of the "artistically most mature manifestations of classicism in Byzantine figures", as such a formulation can potentially cause a confusion. In the present study, with this formulation we are referring to those manifestations of classicism where an artist (or artists) of the highest skill rendered the figures which do not have only a basic morphological connection with the examples of classical statues, but ones that reflect on such examples in the most immediate and impressive way. For example, such are the frescoes at the Serbian Monastery of Sopoćani, which were completed by Greek painters around 1265. In this context, it is noteworthy that precisely in the 13th century, the Byzantines of Nicaea started calling themselves Hellenes in a national sense. Until then the term 'Hellene' referred exclusively to pagan idolatry. See: Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 69.

[2] In our other chapter, entitled *Hesychasm as a Renaissance in Late Byzantine Fresco Painting: A Study of Spiritual Meaning*, the problem of the usage of the term "renaissance" in relation to the Palaiologan period is addressed. Uros T. Todorovic "The Diachronic Character of Late Byzantine Painting: The Hermeneutics of Vision from Mistra to New York" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2012), 68-146.

The mosaic in question was completed in 867, twenty four years after the Council of Constantinople (843) – which irrevocably condemned the beliefs of the Iconoclasts. Set around the semi-dome and accompanying the composition is the following verse inscription in mosaic which makes a strong reference to the victory of the iconophiles against the iconoclasts, probably composed by patriarch Photios: "The images which the heretics had cast down from here, pious emperors have set up again."[3] Both the mosaic and the cited inscription are understood by a number of scholars to be announcing a new turn in the cultural and spiritual orientation of Byzantium. However, as we shall explain, we deem that this new turn, which is obviously favorable of icons and their role in the church, was never quite sufficiently understood in its proper aesthetic depth. It is noteworthy that this work is the first monumental and representational composition that was created inside Hagia Sophia after the period of Iconoclasm. When one considers the cultural output in Byzantium in the period following Iconoclasm, it becomes apparent, especially in the artistic domains, that the Hellenic element prevails. We could even say that along with the restoration of the icons (843), there occurred also a sense of victory of the Hellenic uniqueness, which contributed to the occurrence of the national consciousness within the territory of the Byzantine Empire.[4]

[3] This inscription is now only partially preserved. In regards to this inscription, Robin Cormack explains that: "The text would seem to be historically untruthful in claiming the removal of images from the apse by the Iconoclasts – the only clear evidence of their activity was in the private rooms of the patriarchal palace (mentioned above), where the crosses substituted for portraits of saints are still visible, an act of iconoclasm recorded in the Byzantine histories of the period. Even if Photios is guilty of exaggeration in claiming that the Iconoclasts altered the apse, yet the epigram points to an anti-Iconoclast meaning for the mosaic." See: Robin Cormack, "Interpreting the mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul," *Art History* 4, no. 2 (June 1981):136.

[4] Of course, this victory of the Hellenic uniqueness which followed the restoration of the icons, was not an unexpected phenomenon, as since the beginning of the history of Christianity, the Hellenic culture and civilisation were indivisibly connected with the experience of the Christ's Church encountering the multi-religious (Ancient Greek and Judaic) world. The following excerpt from the chapter entitled *Hellenism and Orthodoxy* by Kostas Papaioannou (included in his book entitled *Byzantine and Russian Painting*) provides a concise picture of the presence of the Ancient Greek culture in Constantinople during the first centuries of Christianity: "Being inhabited by a Greek population, equipped with a university which was a depository of the ancient tradition, Constantinople was a centre of a civilisation deeply marked by Hellenism. Its libraries (the library of Julianus (Julian) is said to have contained 120.000 volumes) preserved all the treasures of ancient thought, and its streets, its forms, its gardens, its palaces, the famous baths of Zeuxippus,* the hippodrome, constituted real museums where the masterpieces of Greek art were gathered." (author's translation) The original excerpt in Greek reads as follows: «Κατοικημένη από ελληνικό πληθυσμό, εξοπλισμένη με ένα πανεπιστήμιο θεματοφύλακα της αρχαίας παράδοσης, η Κωνσταντινούπολη υπήρξε η εστία ενός πολιτισμού βαθιά σημαδεμένου από τον ελληνισμό. Οι βιβλιοθήκες της (εκείνη του Ιουλιανού λέγεται ότι περιείχε 120.000 τόμους) διατηρούσαν όλους τους θησαυρούς της σκέψεις της αρχαιότητας και οι δρόμοι της, οι μορφές της, οι κήποι της, τα ανάκτορά της, τα περίφημα λουτρά του *Ζεύξιππου**, το ιπποδρόμιο, συνιστούσαν πραγματικά μουσεία όπου συγκεντρώνονταν τα αριστουργήματα της ελληνικής τέχνης.» For this particular excerpt in Greek see: Κώστας Παπαϊωάννου, *Βυζαντινή και Ρωσική Ζωγραφική* (Αθήνα: Εναλλακτικές Εκδόσεις, 2007), 23.

Our view is that within this context, it is the particularly classical rendering of the Virgin in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia, that marks the historical beginning of a new cultural as well as spiritual orientation. Thus, when this mosaic is compared to the preserved earlier examples of both the seated and the standing type of the Virgin, such as that of the 6th century icon at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai (image 18), it becomes obvious that these earlier renderings do not manifest such a pronounced relationship with the antique statues of female deities.[5] It is our view that this, previously unobserved phenomenon, entails an indication that the mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia "conceals" a significant creative experience imbued with unexplored aesthetic and theological dimensions.

It is no coincidence that in scholarly literature this mosaic was discussed in a variety of terms. However, to the best of our knowledge, it has hitherto not been demonstrated in any methodological way, *how* precisely the classical element exists within this mosaic and *how* it coexists with other aesthetic aspects. While adhering to both the theoretical and the practical approach respectively, the present study mainly aims at realising this particular task. We shall nevertheless also provide a wider interpretation of the relevant phenomena - those that can potentially lead us to significant conclusions regarding both the ecclesial art and the life of the Orthodox Church of the 9th century. Given the particular scope of this study, we shall not unnecessarily regurgitate those facts that have been exhaustively and sufficiently elaborated on in previous scholarly publications.[6]

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[5] There are of course other early Christian renderings of the enthroned Virgin with child, which could be brought to attention for the benefit of our argumentation. One such example is the depiction (fresco) of the enthroned Virgin with child at the Catacomb of Comodilla in Rome, which was completed around 528. There are also mosaics which could here be brought to attention, such as the mosaic of the standing Virgin with child and with archangels Michael and Gabriel in the Church of the Panagia Angeloktistos in Kiti of Cyprus (dating to either 6th or the first half of the 7th century).

[6] The bibliography which concerns this mosaic is of considerable magnitude. We here note only those publications which are most immediately related to our present topic:

- Cyril Mango and Ernest J.W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Report on Work Carried out in 1964," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965): 113-151.
- Robin Cormack, "Interpreting the mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul," *Art History* 4, no. 2 (June 1981).
- Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London: George Philip, 1985); fourth chapter (pp. 141 -178) interprets the mosaic within its social, religious and political context.
- Liz James, "Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (September 2004): 522-37.

Who was the creator of this mosaic? Our hope in answering this question is minute. However, as we shall demonstrate, the artist in question is – in a manner of speaking – an *archetypal and anonymous El Greco*. It is precisely this, at first consideration perhaps all too creative hypothesis, that will assist us in the assessment of the morphological and spiritual sources from which our artist (and his assistants?) drew his inspiration. In other words, in our opinion, it is most clearly projected from the collective aesthetics of this mosaic that we are speaking of an artist with a profound Hellenic consciousness. As such, this hypothesis invites us to assess more studiously the phenomena which concern the pronounced classical element.

The mosaic in question constitutes one of the most significant examples of the Byzantine reevaluation and reinvention of both the artistic and the religious experience of the polytheistic Greco-Roman world. As in the given instance this reinvention is rather esoteric, it would be hard to speak immediately of the enigmatic kind of its originality and of its mysterious aesthetic effect. Accordingly, in order to arrive at certain delicate aesthetic and theological analyses and interpretations of the functioning of the classical element in this mosaic, it does not suffice to merely establish that the classical element exists. Rather, we ought to start this comprehensive enquiry by posing the following question: What is the particular morphological origin of this mosaic?

The classical roots

The renderings of female deities of the period of mature Classical Greek sculpture (450-390 BC), reveal their inspiration from a centuries-long experience. In continuation, the Greek sculptors, who inherited this experience and contributed to the

- Cyril Mango, "The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia," in *Hagia Sophia: With a chapter on the mosaics by Cyril Mango*, ed. Heinz Kähler. trans. Ellyn Childs (New York: Praeger,1967), 47-60.
- Cyril Mango, *The Mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington D.C.: The Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1962), especially pages: 80 – 83.
- Henry Maguire, "Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism," in *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art*, authored and edited by Henry Maguire (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate,1998), 101-114.
- Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963).
- Robert S. Nelson, "To Say and to See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143 -168.

classical tradition, and subsequently also the Roman sculptors, have either copied from or were directly inspired by already well established prototypes. Notwithstanding the variety of versions of classical representations of female deities and of their Roman copies, the present assessment will focus on two basic types: the seated and the standing. As shown in images 1, 2, 3 and 7, the classical rendering of a seated female deity has the immediately recognisable aura of the enthroned sacred personage, which is positioned on top of a pedestal with (almost by rule) one foot discreetly placed forward.

1. Statuette of a seated woman. Island marble. Found in Sounion. It probably represents a goddess or nymph. It belongs to the pedimental decoration of the temple of Poseidon at Sounion. c. 440-430 BC. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

2. Left: Statuette of a woman seated on a rock. Marble. Found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. It is attributed to the pediment of the Roman temple F at Eleusis and copies a figure from the west pediment of the Parthenon. 2nd century AD.

Right: Statuette of a seated woman. Marble. Found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. The woman is shown seated on a kiste, holding a girl in her lap. The statuette is attributed to the pediments of the Roman temple F at Eleusis and copies a figure from the West pediment of the Parthenon. 2nd century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

3. Statuette of a goddess seated on a rock. Marble. Found in Epidaurus. Roman work (date unknown). Inspired by a statue of the west pediment of the Parthenon. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

The renderings of standing female deities also share common aspects: the sense of the divine presence expressed through the emphasised size of the pedestal (image 10), the distinct monumentality of the posture, and often an insinuated or even a clearly expressed motion towards the front – as shown in images 4, 5 and 6.

Both the seated and the standing type of the sculptural renderings of female deities are characterised by one very distinct feature. In particular, in spite of their three-dimensionality, their main view is most obviously the frontal. This emphasis on the frontal view is owed to the carefully calculated placement of these statues either within the interior or within one of the pediments of the temple for which they are created. We note that a number of the preserved examples which interest us here are of a relatively small size (20 -30 cm high), as is the statue shown in image 7.

4. Above: Statuettes of Nike. Parian marble. Found in Epidaurus. The figures belong to the pediments of the temple of Artemis. Late 4th century BC. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

5 & 6. Below: Female statue. Marble. Found in Athens, near the Theseion. It probably represents an Aura or Hebe in animated forward motion, with her peplos blown by the wind. She is thought to have been the central acroterion of one of the pediments of the temple of Ares in the Athenian Agora. C. 440 BC. The torso is probably associated with the head no. 381 – in the National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

7. Statuette of Cybele. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens. The goddess sits on a throne and would have held a sceptre in her raised hand. A lion stands at her right. 400-350 BC. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

However, irrespective of the size, in antiquity the traditional emphasis on the frontal view of the otherwise fully three-dimensional form effectively alluded to the fact that the theme concerns a supernatural being, one which cannot be approached in natural space in the same manner a mortal human being can. This theological dimension of the aesthetic consideration meant that the existence of the deity becomes objectified for the viewer only when that deity itself decides to enter from the mythological and invisible space of the heavens into the visible and perishable human world of actions and interventions – acquiring therein, through its "intervention", a definite visual hypostasis as well as an absolute (frontal) view.

As shown in images 8 and 9, the author of the incomplete statuette "Lenormant Athena" leaves the rendering of the details of the back and the profile of the work for later, while as shown in image 10, on the frontal view of the same work he has progressed much further towards a detailed rendering of the face and the clothing. This observation contributes to our understanding that the theologically conceived emphasis on the frontal view exercised an influence even on the practical process of making the relevant statues.

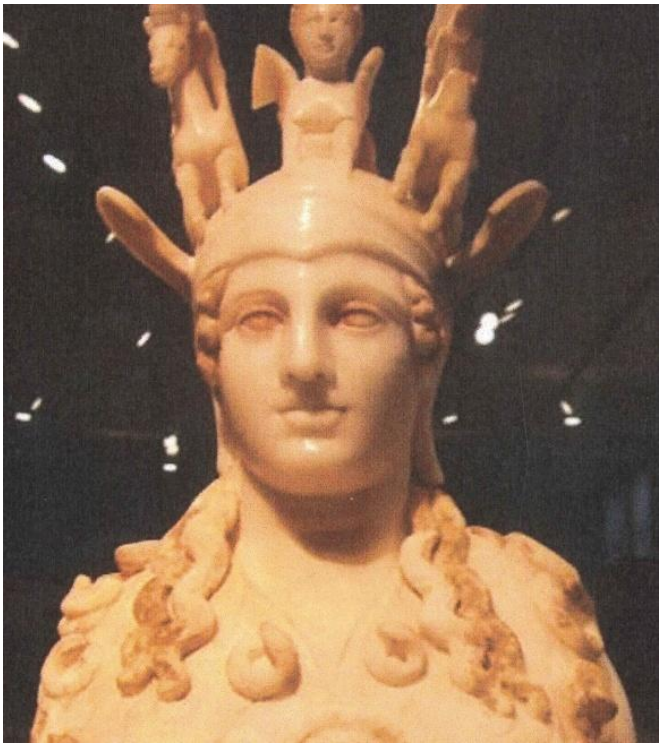


8, 9 & 10. Statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens, near the Pnyx. Known as the "Lenormant Athena", this statuette copies the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias. Although unfinished, the work is important because it preserves the relief representation of the Amazonomachy on the exterior of the shield and the relief image of the Birth of Pandora on the base – themes that adorned the original statue of Athena. The copy probably dates to the 1st century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

In numerous examples of colossal statues of female deities of both the Classical and the Roman period, where the observer has the opportunity to walk around them and see all of their sides, the emphasis on the frontal view as well as on monumentality is also prevalent.

In this way, since in the rendering of a colossal statue a prevailing emphasis is given on its frontal view, the aesthetic consideration of that view presupposes, not a three-dimensional, but almost an iconic approach of the presented supernatural being. Therefore, when a statue of this kind is observed, the sense of its three-dimensional hypostasis is not the dominant quality, but due to the theological dimension of the emphasis on the frontal view, a tendency towards a visionary and an iconic-like consideration of the rendered divine personage is realised. In this sense, we could say that while in the experience of the author (sculptor), the envisioned theme becomes a statue, in the experience of the observer the statue is conceived as an iconic kind of vision. It is doubtless that this iconicity, which is observed as a tendency towards a

two-dimensional consideration of the frontal view of the relevant statues, constitutes a deliberate aesthetic result as well as one of the deeply rooted aesthetic experiences of the polytheistic religiosity of the ancient Greco-Roman world.



11 & 12. Detail of the statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens, near the Varvakeion school. Known as the "Varvakeion Athena", this statuette is the truest and best preserved copy of the cult statue of the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias, which was erected in the Parthenon in 438 BC. In the original, which was approximately twelve times larger than the Varvakeion copy, the naked parts of the body were made of ivory, whereas the rest of the statue was covered with leaves of gold. First half of the 3rd century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

Characterised by a highly idealised realism, the sculptural presentations of the goddess Athena, as well as their Roman copies, often hold a shield and a spear. The statues of Athena radiate a majestic kind of grace, their clothing folds in a particularly harmonious manner while the expression of divinity is observed in view of their monumental stance. This, commonly firm stance is softened by the rendering of the discreet motion of one foot (see image 11). As shown in image 12, the basic characteristics of Athena's face are: the perfectly straight nose, the schematically rendered almond-shape eyes, the barely opened lips, and a deceiving impression of the perfect symmetry of the face.

In antiquity, the most famous of the sculptural presentations of Athena was the statue of "Athena Parthenos" (Virgin Athena), a masterpiece created by Pheidias between 447 and 438 BC, and a main point of attention within the interior of Parthenon. The internal construction of this work was wooden, with metal joints, its clothing was of gold, whereas the naked parts of the body were made of ivory. Its colossal size reflected the great significance of the goddess Athena as the protectress of the Athenians. Image 11 shows the so called "Varvakeion Athena", which is the most faithful copy of the statue "Athena Parthenos". It is noteworthy that Pheidias constructed the golden clothing of "Athena Parthenos" as dismountable, so that it can be sold in a time of need and then later be reattached. It is likely that this device provided a certain kind of reassurance to the Athenians, convincing them that they are not participants of a merely visual experience, but that they also have the possibility of a tangible contact and a complete theologico-economic or even a "mother-child" relationship with Athena. Therefore, besides its practical purpose, the device in question can also serve to explain how the viewers of that period had a distinct desire for the theological vision of Athena to become objectified and to come from its heavenly dimension into the realm of their earthly existence. This ancient religious experience is characterised by a dialectic, but also antithetic, relationship between the tendency towards the iconic consideration of the statue of "Athena Parthenos" and the expectation of Athena's divine intervention in the three-dimensional, material world.

Before we proceed to the practical part of our study, we note that after the legalisation of the Christian faith in 313, in spite of the aggression against the shrines and statues of antiquity during the period of Theodosius I (379-395), many examples of either preserved or damaged antique statues remained visible within the territory of the Byzantine Empire. Many of these were transferred to Constantinople during the period of Constantine the Great (306-337).[7] This means that during the early Byzantine period, but also later, the deeply rooted aesthetic experience of the polytheistic religiosity which is observed in the relevant antique statues, was present and visible in the big artistic centre, that is, in Constantinople, and therein it also constituted a source of inspiration for the most skilled Byzantine artists. We are

[7] Cyril Mango has noted that the last instance of the importation of antique statues into Constantinople that he has been able to find is of the two horses from the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, which were brought under Justinian. See: Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 58.

partially informed of this by two manuscripts: the first manuscript (image 13) shows the meeting of Hector and Hecuba from the *Ilias Ambrosiana* (5th century or early 6th century manuscript which depicts Homer's *Iliad*), while the second (image 14), also from the *Ilias Ambrosiana*, shows Aphrodite complaining to Zeus about her wounded hand, whereas on the right of the same composition, Hera and Athena are depicted to be laughing at Aphrodite.

Although both of these manuscripts date to the 5th century or the 6th century (a period in which the statue of "Athena Parthenos" was brought to Constantinople), Thomas F. Mathews notes that the inscriptions of names and notes entered in red and black ink during the 11th century on the manuscript shown in image 13, testify to the continued use of that manuscript through the Middle Ages.[8] This further contributes to our understanding that Byzantine artists and art-patrons of the post-iconoclastic period drew their inspiration both from the preserved statues of the Classical and Roman periods, as well as from the memory of the most famous of these, a memory which was preserved on parchment and paper.

Accordingly, we observe in the second of the two aforementioned manuscripts (image 14) that the depiction of Athena (on the far right) has the same characteristics which can be observed in the copies of the famous statue "Athena Parthenos". In particular, in this manuscript Athena is depicted as standing, her right hand is raised towards Hera, while with her left hand she holds a shield which touches the ground. According to the description by Pausanias, the raised right hand of the original statue "Athena Parthenos" held a Nike while her left hand held a shield which was touching the ground; the same motifs are observed in statues that copy "Athena Parthenos".

In a significant study entitled *Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder*, which was published in 1963, Cyril Mango leaves no doubt that the antique statues exercised a certain influence both on the intellectuals of Byzantium and on the common people. However, Mango ends his study by expressing a regret for the fact that "the Byzantines derived so little benefit from the statues that they took care to

[8] Thomas F. Mathews, *The Art of Byzantium* (London: Calmann and King Ltd, 1998), 25.

preserve", and by saying that "Byzantium fulfilled its historic role by transmitting to the more receptive West the Greek heritage on parchment and paper".[9]

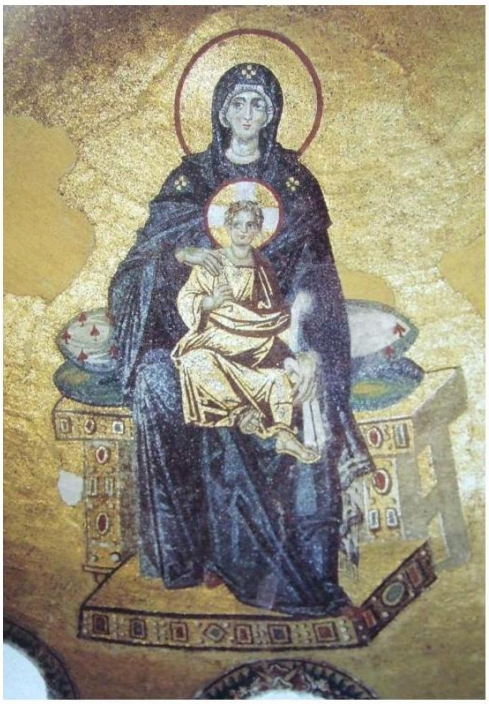
In our view, the first of the two above cited conclusions offered by Mango does not coincide with the creative experience of certain byzantine artists, the best indication of this being, as we shall demonstrate below, the mosaic in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Although the second conclusion by Mango shall not concern us in the present study, it should be briefly noted that it constitutes a view which would be effectively argued against by a number of contemporary scholars.[10] The following, practical part of the present study, although concerning mainly a single mosaic example, shall inevitably further clarify our disagreement with the first of the two cited conclusions by Mango. More importantly, our hope is that besides its already outlined aims, the practical part of the present study makes a contribution to a deeper understanding of *how* Byzantine artists creatively reinvented the aesthetic experience of the antique statuary and employed it anew in the two-dimensional media of mosaic and painting.

[9] The entire citation reads as follows: "Here ends our sad story –sad, because the Byzantines derived so little benefit from the statues that they took care to preserve. Byzantium fulfilled its historic role by transmitting to the more receptive West the Greek heritage on parchment and paper; it was unable to transmit in the same fashion and at the right time the heritage in bronze and marble." See: Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963): 75. This study is also included in: Cyril Mango, *Byzantium and its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire and its Heritage* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984).

[10] The overall argument of the book entitled *The Byzantine Malevich* (*Ο Βυζαντινός Μάλεβιτς*) by Yannis Ziogas, is in our opinion the most characteristic example of a contemporary view which does not agree with the second conclusion offered by Mango. This book is written in Greek and published in 2000. See: Γιάννης Ζιώγας, *Ο Βυζαντινός Μάλεβιτς* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Στάχυ, 2000).

13. Hector Meeting Hecuba, from the *Ilias Ambrosiana*, 5th century. Tempera on parchment, 13.5 x 22 cm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Cod. Ambros., fol. 205 Inf., sheet xxiv).

14. Aphrodite Complaining to Zeus of her Wounded Hand, while Hera and Athena Laugh at Her, from the *Ilias Ambrosiana*, 5th century. Tempera on parchment, 8.5 X 21.5 cm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Cod. Ambros., fol. 205 Inf., sheet xix).



15. Left: Statue of a seated goddess. Marble. Found in Athens, at the junction of Aiolou and Sophokleous streets. Roman copy of the cult statue of the Mother of the Gods by Agorakritos (c. 440 BC.), which was erected in the Metroon in the Agora. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

16. Centre: A drawing on top of the image 15 (Visual demonstration I). Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

17. Right: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, 867 AD.

Although the basic type of the enthroned Virgin with a child was already established in the period of early Byzantine art (image 18), as we shall see, the memory of the antique sculptural examples which represent *mother goddess* female deities (memory preserved by visual means: parchment and paper), as well as the actual antique statues and statuettes which would have been visible in the big centres of the Byzantine Empire during the 9th century, appear to have significantly influenced the overall rendering of the enthroned Virgin with the child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

Our first visual presentation comprises images 15, 16 and 17, and it demonstrates how the author of the mosaic in question was most likely significantly inspired by the most typical rendering of the frontal view of the antique sculpture examples of seated female deities (image 15). As demonstrated in image 16, with minimal drawing interventions the author of the mosaic seems to have adapted the form of a seated antique statue to the already existent type of the seated Virgin with a child.[11] The mosaic is located 30 meters above the floor of Hagia Sophia, the height of the Virgin exceeds 4 metres, while the height of the child Christ is slightly less than 2 metres. Its unique drawing, its colours, its characteristic placement above the observer and the enigmatic effect of its distance from the observer, are aspects which collectively amount to a rather original aesthetic result, unparalleled in the period in which the mosaic was created. Although the Virgin is depicted as seated on a throne, at first glance, her vertical and monumental bearing gives out the effect of a standing figure.[12]After this first impression, we note the discreetly implied movement of the Virgin towards the observer. The impression of this movement is enhanced by the fact that one of the Virgin's feet, just like in examples of antique statues which we have examined earlier, is placed slightly forward. As seen in image 36, the overall result is such that the observer is not certain whether the Virgin is truly seated or approaches those who are inside the church from above.

It could be said that the depiction of the pedestal and the throne on which the Virgin is seated is not necessary, since the Virgin's central position in the conch is in any case rather dominant and majestic. Yet we can better understand the role of the drawing of the pedestal and throne in view of the Virgin's left foot which is positioned forward - precisely at the corner edge of the pedestal. As we already said, this carefully calculated detail contributes to the impression that the Virgin is making a step towards the observer. Also, in both the pedestal and the throne the prevailing colour is golden. Because of this, when viewed from the floor of the church, the pedestal and the throne

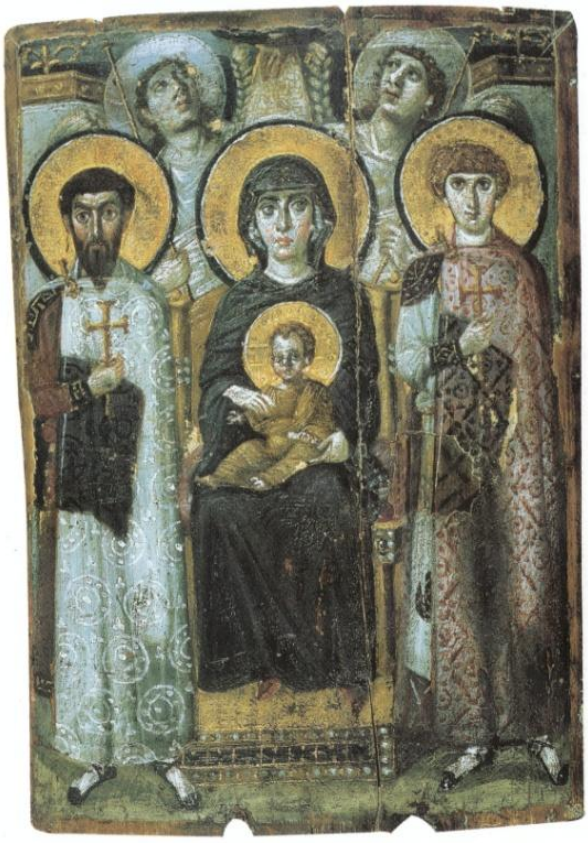
[11] Our drawing shown in image 16 deliberately does not copy all the particularities of the drawing of the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Sophia, as it aims at demonstrating only the most essential connection between the antique statue and the mosaic.

[12] Perhaps this is the reason why in his homily at the day of the inauguration of the mosaic, on the 29th of March 867, patriarch Photios was referring to a standing figure of the Virgin. Because of Photios' reference to a standing figure of the Virgin, certain scholars have argued that Photios was not at all referring to the image of the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Sophia. See: Nicolas Oikonomides, "*Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic of St. Sophia*," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 39 (1985):111-15. These views have been surpassed by subsequent publications.

become almost absorbed by the golden background but also, to a degree, create an impression of depth.

It should be noted that in the drawing of the pedestal and throne, the author (or authors) of the mosaic did not attempt to give the impression of natural perspective, but tended discreetly towards the opposite, that is, they almost adhered to the depiction of the reversed perspective. All of the so far mentioned details have been considered carefully before the actual rendering of the mosaic and the final overall result informs us that, with the exception of the tendency towards depicting the reversed perspective, these drawing and morphological aspects of the mosaic are also observed in the seated and standing antique statues of female deities.

While standing inside Hagia Sophia, we could even say that, that which approaches us from the conch of the apse is a classical statue which became liberated from its three-dimensional hypostasis and which now holds in its hands the Path towards the heavenly existence, that is, it holds Christ the Savior. For such an interpretation of this scene there are two very significant bases: the first is the strictly central position of the child Christ as well as the golden colour of his clothing, which corresponds to the golden background of the mosaic. The second aspect concerns the unique expression of the Virgin's portrait. In the following, we shall assess these two aspects respectively. Within the blue clothing of the monumental figure of the Virgin, the position of the child is quite deliberately firmly central. As shown in image 37, due to the intense contrast between Christ's golden clothing and the deep blue colour of the Virgin's clothing, and due to the distance between the observer and this mosaic, the ethereal figure of Christ appears to be weightless and suspended within the deep blue, it appears to be arriving from the endless universe. Accordingly, by presenting to us the incarnate Creator of the universe dressed in gold, in a sense, the Virgin is portrayed as a mediator between the symbolic meaning of the golden background of the apse, being the divine grace and infinity, and those who are on earth.



18. Left: *Enthroned Mother of God Between St Theodore and St George*, 6th century. Encaustic on board, 68.5 X 49.7 cm. Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai. Note: There are no inscriptions to identify the figures, but the angels are probably Michael and Gabriel and the soldiers, holding crosses symbolic of their martyrdom, are most likely St Theodore the General, bearded, and St George.

19. Right: *Mother of God "Nikopoios"*, 12th century. Tempera on board, 48 X 36 cm. St. Marco, Venice.

It could of course be argued that such a theological aesthetic interpretation is entirely subjective and that it may not correspond significantly to the actual intentions of the author of this mosaic. However, our interpretation of the golden Christ as the child coming from the endless universe finds even stronger aesthetic basis in view of the 12th century portable icon of the Virgin "Nikopoios", which is of Constantinopolitan provenance.

As shown in image 19, in this icon, three centuries after the completion of the mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia, it appears that the conception of Christ child coming from the depths of the universe was still popular. Besides the similarity shared in the very clear sense of weightlessness, in this icon the strictly central position of Christ child appears to be even more pronounced than that in the mosaic at Hagia Sophia.

Also, given that in this icon the clothing of the Virgin is dark blue, the contrast between her clothing and the gold-like clothing of the child projects the figure of the child as an approaching planetary object, or a star. This cosmic appearance of the Christ child could therefore even be related to the star which according to the Gospel was followed by the three Magi from the East.

Having observed the aforementioned aesthetic analogies and similarities between the 9th century mosaic in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia and the 12th century portable icon of the Virgin with child, and having in mind that given the Constantinopolitan provenance of the latter, its author undoubtedly was familiar with the famous mosaic, we can make the following additional conclusions: As subjective as our interpretation of the golden Christ child coming from the endless universe may seem at first hand, it is an interpretation which is characteristically Byzantine. More particularly, this interpretation effectively relates the aesthetics of both the 9th century mosaic and the 12th century icon to the theological experience of the differentiation between the *created* and the *uncreated* – a differentiation which constitutes the basis of dogmatic teaching of the Orthodox Church. Christ as God, Who is uncreated, gently approaches us, who are created, so that we can be deified in Him. This is the essential theological theme of both of the works discussed here, a theme which endured as a diachronic inspiration throughout the centuries.

Also, the comparison of the 9th century mosaic at Hagia Sophia with the 12th century icon practically shows that the author of the latter found more inspiration in the theological meaning that he was able to conceive in view of the mosaic than in its formal qualities (without that meaning that he did not have other inspirations). The same cannot easily be said about the author of the 11th century mosaic which depicts the Virgin with child in the apse of Hosios Loukas. As seen in image 20, the basic drawing of this work is obviously based on the drawing of the Virgin's figure in Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, and the artist has even positioned the hands of the Virgin in precisely the same places. However, although in the mosaic at Hosios Loukas Christ is also in the central position and his clothing is golden, while the clothing of the Virgin is blue, we deem that the final aesthetic outcome is considerably less authentic and less impressive than the 12th century icon of the Virgin "Nikopoios".

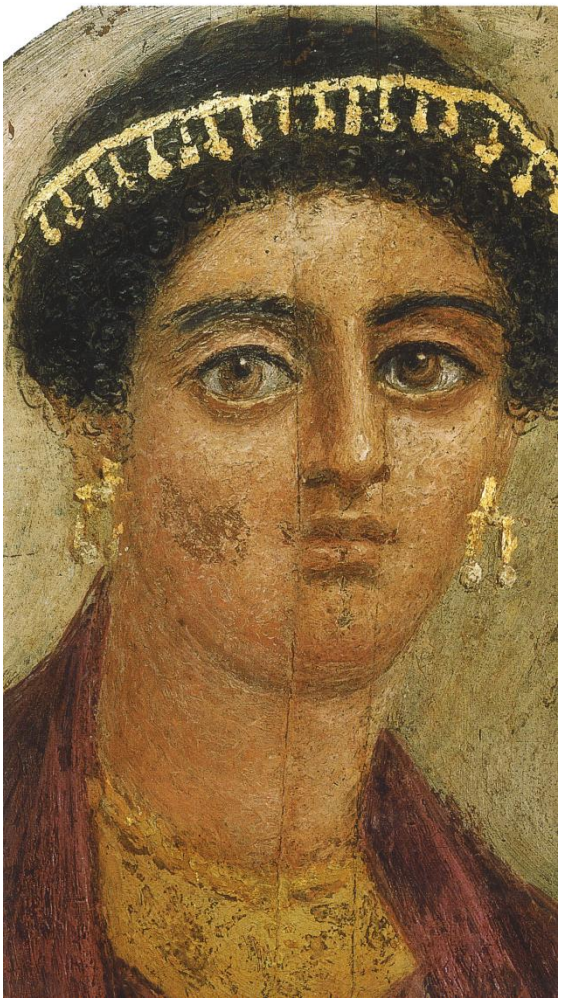
20. Mosaic of the *Virgin with child* in the conch of the apse of the katholikon of Hosios Loukas, 11th century, Stiris, Greece.

On the Virgin's gaze

We shall now analyse the enigmatic expression of the Virgin's gaze in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople. Firstly, the Virgin's portrait comprises the following classical characteristics: the perfectly straight nose, the schematically rendered almond-shape eyes, the impression of the barely opened lips, and a deceiving impression of the perfect symmetry of the face (image 24). However, in our view, closer attention should be given to the likelihood that the Virgin's eyes, whose size is notably emphasised, and her expressive lips, are significantly influenced by the mysterious portraits from the Egyptian region of Fayum (1st -3rd century AD – images 21, 22 and 23).

It is of course very well known that the Fayum portraits significantly influenced the formation of Byzantine iconography,[13] and thus the existence of that influence in the mosaic in Hagia Sophia might not at first glance appear as a phenomenon which merits special attention. However, critically observing just how the *Fayum aspect* functions in this mosaic, and how it imbues it with life, may well confirm the unique significance of the influence which the Fayum portraits would have had on the rendering of the Virgin's enigmatic gaze. In spite of the noted schematised features, a distinctly eastern physiognomy of the Virgin's face, her expressive gaze and her almost realistically rendered lips, are aspects which might be indicative of the fact that the author (or authors) of the mosaic was inspired either by one or more Fayum portraits, or less likely, by a young female with alike facial physiognomy from their own environment. A combination of these two possibilities is of course also plausible. The following comparisons will aim at confirming the existence of a very particular influence of Fayum portraits in the discussed portrait of the Virgin, as well as at demonstrating the aesthetic significance of that influence.

[13] The most comprehensive publication regarding the burial portraits from the region of Fayum is a book by Euphrosyne Doxiadis, *The Mysterious Fayum Portraits: Faces from Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995). This work is also published in Greek: Ευφροσύνη Δοξιάδη, *Τα πορτρέτα του Φαγιούμ* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αδάμ, Γ' Έκδοση, 1997). Regarding the influence of the portraits from the Egyptian region of Fayum on Byzantine iconography, there is also a short book by George Kordis, written in Greek and entitled *The Fayum Portraits and the Byzantine Icon*: Γεώργιος Κόρδης, *Οι προσωπογραφίες του Φαγιούμ και η βυζαντινή εικόνα* (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αρμός, 2001).



21. Left: A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

22. Right: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

If we compare the three Fayum female portraits shown in images 21, 22 and 23 with the portrait of the Virgin shown in image 24, we observe that even irrespective of their obvious physiognomic similarities, their gazes alone manifest a rather strong relationship. Accordingly, if in images 25, 26, 27 and 28, we focus exclusively on the expression of the eyes of these four portraits, in each instance we encounter a very tangible spiritual world of an undoubtedly existent personage – wherein very fine differences amongst their gazes might be discerned. Having been intermixed with the

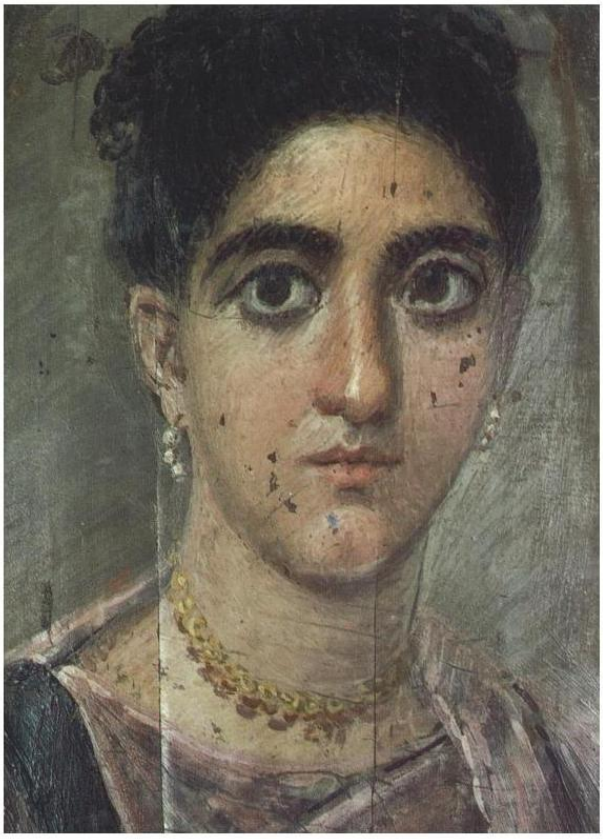
Fayum burial portraits in this way, the Virgin's portrait equally convinces us of the historical existence of its own model.

We then focus on the lips of the three selected portraits, and observe therein that the very specific drawing of the Virgin's lips (image 30) is precisely the same as the drawing of the lips which we observe in two of the Fayum portraits (images 29 and 31). Of the outmost significance here, is the fact that in the Virgin's portrait, the *Fayum aspect* is essentially defined by a pronounced expression of spiritual and human idiosyncrasies of an undoubtedly existent historical personage. As such, beyond its artistic significance, the *Fayum aspect* in the portrait of the Virgin becomes the catalyst for declaring anew the historicity of both the person of the Virgin and the incarnation of Christ, an incarnation which occurred through Her in a unique way. Due to the *Fayum aspect*, in contrast with the mythological female deities sculpturally rendered in antiquity, the Virgin, while retaining much of the noted classical elegance, is presented as a historical person, and at the same time, as a mother of an existent child of God.

The author of the mosaic at Hagia Sophia has essentially adapted the appearance of the front view of the common classical sculptural rendering of a seated female deity to the already existent iconographical type of the seated Virgin with a child. He then crowned the "former statue" with the *Fayum aspect* and therein expressed with great originality the theological experience of the Orthodox Christian faith, as well as reaffirmed the victory of Orthodoxy against the teachings of the Iconoclasts. In other words, through artistic means he has materialised the teaching of the historical presence of the incarnate Word – Whom the Virgin holds in her hands. Thus, as shown in images 36 and 37, in view of this mosaic the observer can see how the memory of a typical classical statue is irreversibly absorbed into the layers of theological meaning resident in the golden apse.

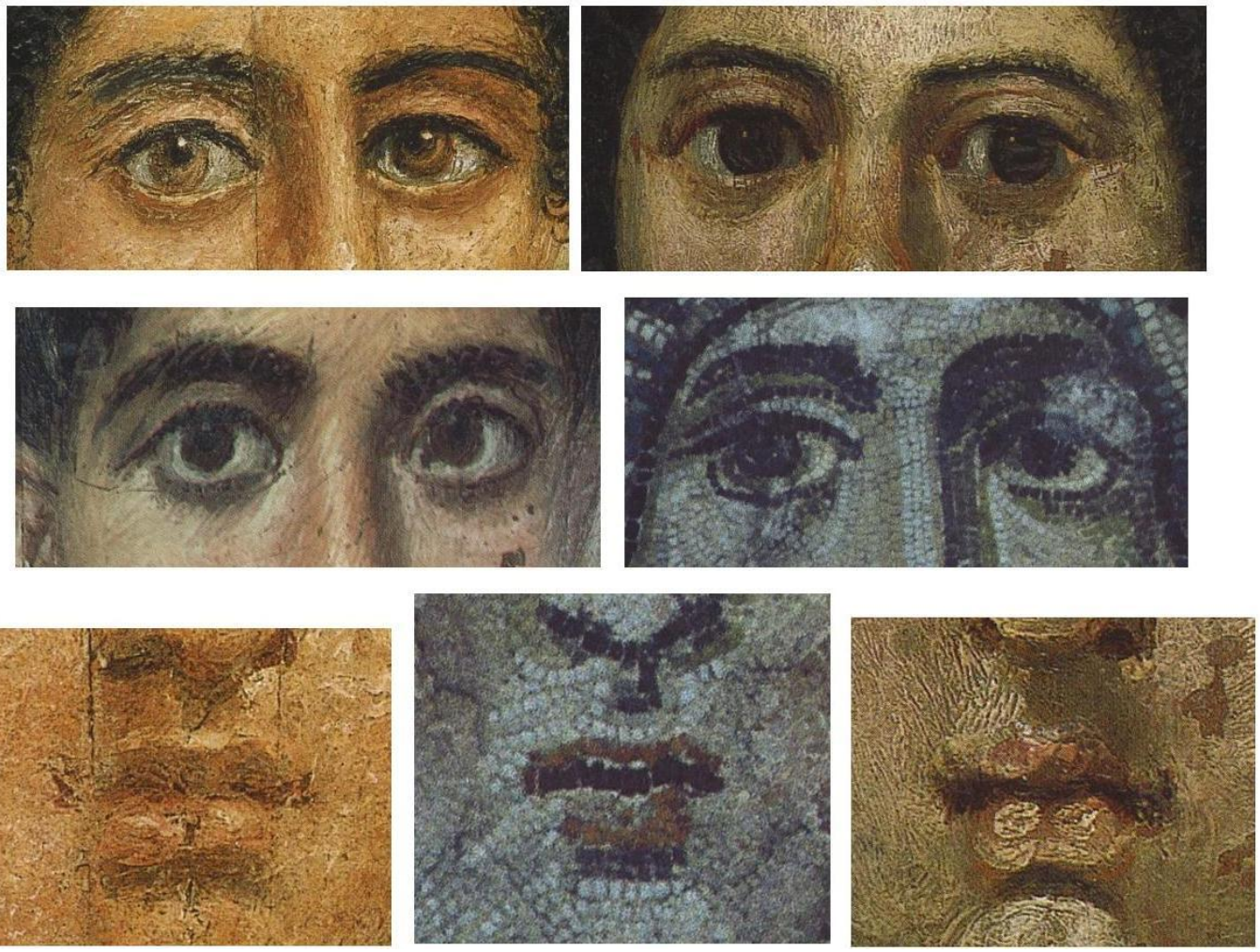
In a certain sense, having in mind what has hitherto been said in this chapter, the mosaic studied here can be interpreted as a phenomenon which in its nature is directly opposed to the notions of heresy and schism, as it is characteristic for reconciling in an artistic manner the contrasting experiences of the ancient polytheistic and the Christian worldview, and as it brings the victory against a then contemporary heresy (Iconoclasm) to a new level – the level of creativity. Through this creativity, the

dogmatically based answer to the heretical beliefs of the Iconoclasts assumes simultaneously an aesthetic dimension. In this sense, the mosaic in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia constitutes an aesthetic result of the encounter of the Church with the world of the 9th century, wherein the multifaceted crisis of Iconoclasm is successfully annihilated.



23. Left: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 117 – 138 AD.

24. Right: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.



According to the order starting from left towards right:

25. Detail (eyes) from the image 21: A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

26. Detail (eyes) from the image 22: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

27. Detail (eyes) from the image 23: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 117 – 138 AD.

28. Detail (eyes) from the image 24: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

29. Detail (lips) from the image 21: A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

30. Detail (lips) from the image 24: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

31. Detail (lips) from the image 22: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum; approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

32. Left: The first stage of a female portrait, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm.
Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

33. Right: *A female portrait*, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

34. Left: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

35. Right: *A female portrait*, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

36. The apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

37. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, 867 AD.

A practical insight into the creative rendering of the Virgin's portrait

With the following visual experiment we shall aspire to practically demonstrate how the particular influence of the Fayum portraits actually covers the generally classical features of the portrait of the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Sophia. Image 38 shows the portrait of an incomplete statuette of Athena, known as "Lenormant Athena". The fact that this portrait is incomplete assists us in our visual experiment, since we aim at

observing and demonstrating how the *Fayum aspect* becomes practically applied to the mosaic rendering of the Virgin's face - a face that already has a basic classical structure. The following intervention was made over a deliberately small photograph of the portrait of "Lenormant Athena". The first phase of our experiment is shown in image 39, where, while using ink and water over the black and white photograph, with a soft brush we have added on top of Athena's head a byzantine-shape headscarf.

In continuation, as shown in image 40, while using also the colour white and adhering to the pointillist method of the brush, we have painted half of the face of "Lenormant Athena". During this process, we have deliberately used a brush which is slightly bigger than what it ideally should be for the rendering of fine details, in order to impose, as much as possible, those limitations which are normally encountered by artists who work in the medium of mosaic. As can be seen in image 40, throughout this process we have strictly followed the already existent features of Athena's portrait, and therein our intention was to create from the existing sculptural portrait its precise mosaic version. Although there are no eye pupils in the portrait of "Lenormant Athena", the one eye which we have painted in our experiment, looks strictly towards the front, just like the eye pupils of Athena in other sculptural examples (for example see "Varvakeion Athena" in image 12). Therefore, in image 40, we are shown how a half-completed mosaic portrait of the Virgin inspired solely by classical sculpture would look like.

Finally, as shown in image 41, in the last phase of the experiment, having painted over the new copy of the same photograph, we have applied to Athena's portrait the basic Fayum features and indeed have slightly exaggerated them - for the sake of clarity in this demonstration. More particularly, we have borrowed the drawing of the lips from the two Fayum portraits (from images 29 and 31) and applied it to the lips of "Lenormant Athena". We have also borrowed the basic drawing of the eyes from Fayum portraits and applied it to Athena's eyes, while we have also slightly emphasised the size of Athena's eyes – in as much the size of the eyes of the previously discussed Fayum portraits is emphasised (see images 25, 26 and 27). We have also deliberately emphasised the discreetly asymmetrical rendering of the face – a phenomenon which is common both to antique sculptural portraits and to Fayum portraits. The eye-pupils which we have rendered do not look forward but slightly to the side – this is done in an attempt to convey the intensely contemplative spiritual

gaze of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia (see image 24). It is important to note that throughout the entire experiment the basic outer contours of the portrait of "Lenormant Athena" are retained. The final outcome, shown in image 41, indicates that the application of the *Fayum aspect* over the classical portrait of Athena produces an aesthetic result which is related to the portrait of the Virgin in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in a very specific way. In particular, the result of the experiment is a humanistic gaze of the portrait highly reminiscent of the portrait of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia, despite the differences in terms of the specific proportions of the features of the portrait (compare images 24 and 41).

38. Above left: Portrait of the unfinished statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. The statuette is found in Athens, near the Pnyx. Known as the "Lenormant Athena", this statuette copies the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias. Although unfinished, the work is important because it preserves the relief representation of the Amazonomachy on the exterior of the shield and the relief image of the Birth of Pandora on the base – themes that adorned the original statue of Athena. The copy probably dates to the 1st century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

39. Above right: Visual demonstration II, phase 1. Author: Uroš T. Todorović

40. Below left: Visual demonstration II, phase 2. Author: Uroš T. Todorović

41. Below right: Visual demonstration II, phase 3. Author: Uroš T. Todorović

This aesthetic result of our experiment demonstrates that the influence from Fayum portraits in the portrait of the Virgin functions as a catalyst of the classical notion of the face of a female deity, therein achieving the following: (a) the sense of historicity in portrayals of the Virgin and Christ, and (b) the reinvention of the aesthetics of the ancient polytheistic world within a monotheistic expression.

In terms of artistic quality, the adaptation of the classical sculptural approach within the limitations of the mosaic technique can be regarded as entirely successful in this mosaic. It should be noted that in rendering the details of the Virgin's portrait in Hagia Sophia, the limitations of the mosaic technique did not prevent its author from achieving a refined result. On the contrary, he used these limitations to his advantage and managed to convey his profound inspiration with particular clarity. Thus, the mosaic squares do not diminish the clarity of the enigmatic impression of the Virgin's gaze, but on the contrary, as rightly observed by Henry Maguire: "The ambiguity of her gaze is much more apparent in a photograph taken from the floor of the church, beneath the mosaic, than in a head-on view from modern scaffolding".[14]

Maguire's observation has further enhanced our inspiration from the mosaic at Hagia Sophia, and our recent visitation to this magnificent church (2010) has also contributed to the painting of a female portrait, shown in images 32, 33 and 35. In spite of its predominately artistic nature, we have included this portrait in our visual material as an additional practical example that may assist the reader in understanding our overall argumentation in this study. In view of this portrait, the following words by patriarch Photios, uttered during his homily on the 29th of March 867, the day of the inauguration of the mosaic of the Virgin, can be read: "A virgin mother with both a virgin's and a mother's gaze, dividing in indivisible form her temperament between both capacities yet belittling neither by its incompleteness".[15] Photios delivered this homily inside Hagia Sophia from a pulpit close to the mosaic, and this fact assists us in reconstructing the scene of his close encounter with, and immense impression from, the Virgin's portrait.

[14] Henry Maguire, "Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism," in *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art*, authored and edited by Henry Maguire (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 109.

[15] Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople: Translation and Commentary*; English Translation, Introduction and Commentary by Cyril Mango (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 290.

As is very well known, in the same homily, Photios described the Virgin's portrait as realistic and the lips as real and capable of speaking. Of course, from the perspective of contemporary art criticism, claiming the existence of realism in view of the Virgin's portrait in Hagia Sophia is an evident hyperbole which ignores the obviously schematised features of the face. However, Photios did not speak of the kind of realism as it is meant in contemporary terms, that is, he was not speaking of naturalism. Rather, he was speaking of the kind of realism which is identified more with an experience of a theological truth - an experience expressed through visual means.

Henry Maguire's study entitled *Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism* (1995) assists us significantly in understanding this particular phenomenon. In his study, Maguire explains how "Byzantine writers adopted the old critical vocabulary of late classical *ekphrasis*, and used it to describe both the classical and the unclassical features of the art of their own period."[16] This means that those who listened to Photios' homily would have understood what kind of realism he was speaking of, because they would have been familiar with the conventions of contemporary rhetoric.[17] It is in this context that the earlier mentioned Fayum-like portrait which we have painted with egg-tempera on paper (images 32, 33 and 35), aims at creatively visualising Photios' experience of the theological kind of realism of the Virgin's portrait in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

Conclusion

In this study we have established that the drawing of the figure of the Virgin in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is significantly influenced by the frontal view of the two types of antique statues representing a female deity: the seated and the standing type. This particular influence constitutes a creative recapitulation of the classical sculptural tradition of female deities, as well as a unique example of the

[16] Henry Maguire, "Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism," in *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art,* authored and edited by Henry Maguire (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 101-114.

[17] *ibid*, p. 102.

absorption of the Greco-Roman polytheistic experience into the worldview of the Orthodox Church.

On the basis of our study we can acknowledge the existence of the following original aspects of this mosaic. Firstly, we have observed how an ancient conception of the colossal and three-dimensional form of the female deity completes its characteristic tendency towards the rendering of only the frontal view, wherein the sense of the corporeal as well as the need for the three-dimensional comprehension of the divine personage, are aspects which are transformed into an original visualisation, an almost immaterial, sacred vision. Through this mosaic the ancient mythological becomes a byzantine *iconic* vision.

Of course, the distance of 30 metres between the observer and the mosaic significantly contributes to this effect. Due to that distance, within the reflections of the golden background, the ethereal figure of the Virgin appears to expand from the conch of the apse and acquire a three-dimensional yet simultaneously a transfigured hypostasis, therein approaching the observer (images 36 and 37).

It is noteworthy that the natural light which illuminates the concave surface of the conch from the windows, changes both its angles and its intensity throughout the day, so that the golden background reflects a continuous sense of slow, unceasing transfiguration. Within this numinous atmosphere of the arrival of the Mother of the Savior, a sense of relativity of the natural (three-dimensional) space is created, and this phenomenon deserves special attention here.

In particular, the transformation of the ancient emphasis on the front view of the classical statue of a female deity and the completion of that emphasis in the presentation of the Virgin in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia, where the spatial distance from the observer plays a crucial role, are phenomena which, according to their nature, are associated both with the characteristics of the sculptural and with those of the painting practice. In the course of the following centuries, given that the formation of the iconographical program of the decoration of the church was directly influenced by developments in the domain of church architecture and by particular characteristics of the interior of the Byzantine church, the proper approach of Byzantine fresco-painting and mosaics became conditioned by the characteristics of

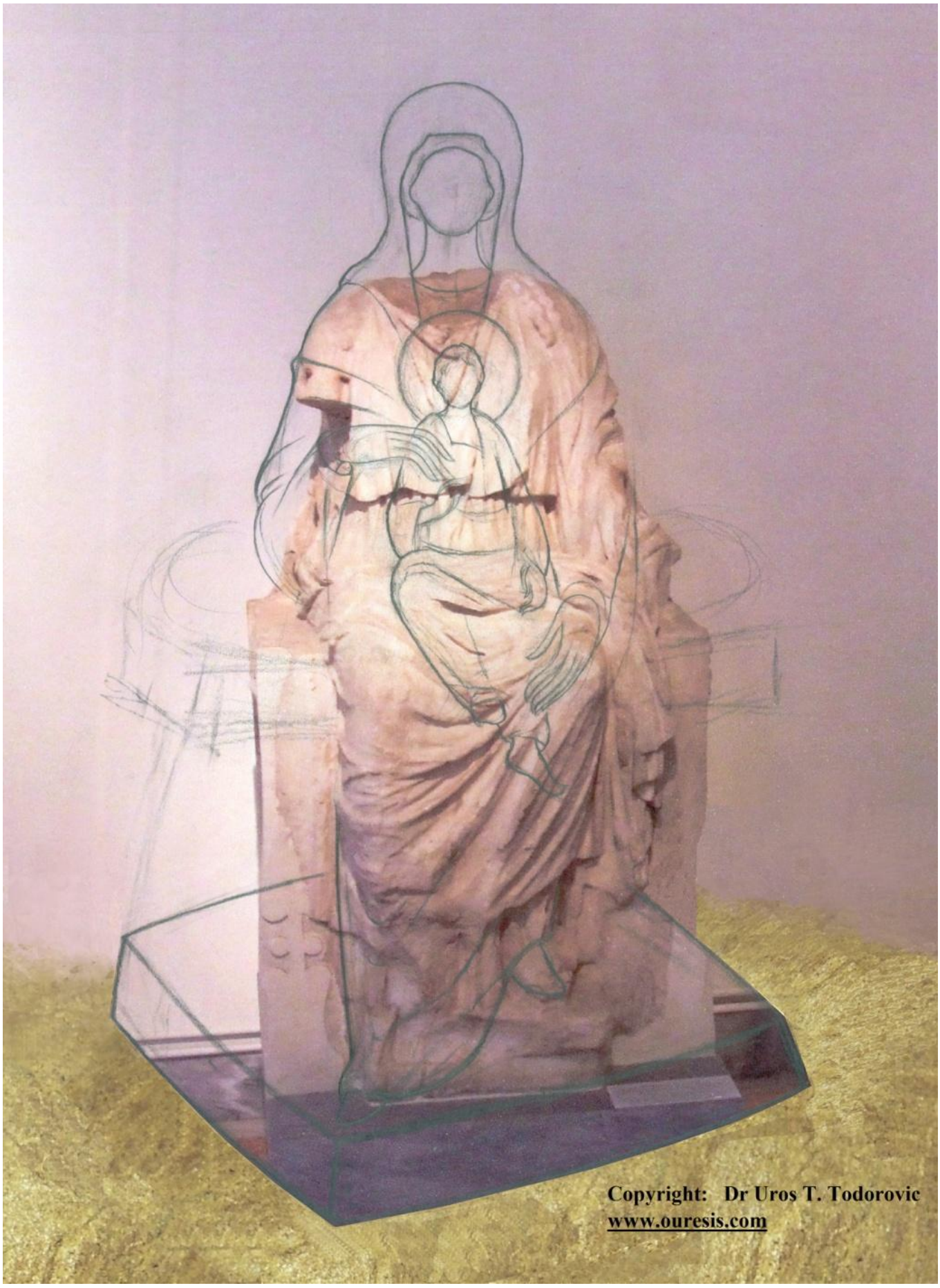
the *heavenly microcosm* – being the interior of the Byzantine church. The mosaic of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia constitutes one of the significant milestones of this development. It is quite noteworthy that in her study entitled *Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium*, Liz James insightfully compares the mosaic in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia to the contemporary concept of installation, where all the senses are equally engaged.[18]

Thus, within a certain macro-historical interpretation, we could say that Byzantine art "took" the classical sculptural form, and by applying it in a two-dimensional (painterly) manner within the *heavenly microcosm* of the Byzantine church, it has liberated it from its initial limitations, that is, Byzantine art has liberated the classical sculptural form from its three-dimensional (material) hypostasis. Having said this, a point should be made, that the overall aesthetic result which can be gathered inside a typical Byzantine church amounts to a foretaste of the "fourth dimension". This experience is not so much the experience of painting, neither of art as we understand it in today's terms, as it is an experience which exceeds the realm of both space and time. In this particular sense, the mosaic of the Virgin in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia can be interpreted as the first clear example of the *transfigured Byzantine sculpture*, where the body is less bodily than what it was in antiquity.

Therefore, the attentive viewer inside Hagia Sophia can witness the effect of the figure of the Virgin slowly expanding towards the space beneath her, wherein the three-dimensional space seems to transfigure (images 36, 37 and 42). Within this aesthetic experience, the viewer is called to transfiguration which is manifested from the mosaic. Through the studious observation the viewer acquires a sense of participating in the sacred vision, a sense of being less bodily, as if lifted towards the mosaic in the conch. In essence, through the observation of this mosaic, a man as a created being is called to deification which is offered by the uncreated God, and thus the authentic artistic answer to the heretical views of the Iconoclasts becomes also a unique calling to deification.

[18] Liz James, "Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (September 2004): 524.

42. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, 867 AD.



43. A drawing on top of the image 15 (Visual demonstration I). Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

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2. Left: Statuette of a woman seated on a rock. Marble. Found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. It is attributed to the pediment of the Roman temple F at Eleusis and copies a figure from the west pediment of the Parthenon. 2nd century AD. Right: Statuette of a seated woman. Marble. Found in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis. The woman is shown seated on a kiste, holding a girl in her lap. The statuette is attributed to the pediments of the Roman temple F at Eleusis and copies a figure from the West pediment of the Parthenon. 2nd century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

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8, 9 & 10 Statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens, near the Pnyx. Known as the "Lenormant Athena", this statuette copies the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias. Although unfinished, the work is important because it preserves the relief representation of the Amazonomachy on the exterior of the shield and the relief image of the Birth of Pandora on the base – themes that adorned the original statue of Athena. The copy probably dates to the 1st century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

11. Statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens, near the Varvakeion school. Known as the "Varvakeion Athena", this statuette is the truest and best preserved copy of the cult statue of the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias, which was erected in the Parthenon in 438 BC. In the original, which was approximately twelve times larger than the Varvakeion copy, the naked parts of the body were made of ivory, whereas the rest of the statue was covered with leaves of gold. First half of the

3rd century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

12. Detail of the statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. Found in Athens, near the Varvakeion school. Known as the "Varvakeion Athena", this statuette is the truest and best preserved copy of the cult statue of the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias, which was erected in the Parthenon in 438 BC. In the original, which was approximately twelve times larger than the Varvakeion copy, the naked parts of the body were made of ivory, whereas the rest of the statue was covered with leaves of gold. First half of the 3rd century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

13. Hector Meeting Hecuba, from the *Ilias Ambrosiana*, 5th century. Tempera on parchment, 13.5 x 22 cm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Cod. Ambros., fol. 205 Inf., sheet xxiv).

14. Aphrodite Complaining to Zeus of her Wounded Hand, while Hera and Athena Laugh at Her, from the *Ilias Ambrosiana*, 5th century. Tempera on parchment. 8.5 X 21.5 cm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan (Cod. Ambros., fol. 205 Inf., sheet xix).

15. Statue of a seated goddess. Marble. Found in Athens, at the junction of Aiolou and Sophokleous streets. Roman copy of the cult statue of the Mother of the Gods by Agorakritos (c. 440 BC.), which was erected in the Metroon in the Agora. National Archeological Museum of Athens. (Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović)

16. A drawing on top of the image 15 (Visual demonstration I). Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

17. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, 867 AD.

18. *Enthroned Mother of God Between St Theodore and St George*, 6th century. Encaustic on board, 68.5 X 49.7 cm. Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai. Note: There are no inscriptions to identify the figures, but the angels are probably Michael and Gabriel and the soldiers, holding crosses symbolic of their martyrdom, are most likely St Theodore the General, bearded, and St George.

19. *Mother of God "Nikopoios"*, 12th century. Tempera on board, 48 X 36 cm. S. Marco, Venice.

20. Mosaic of the *Virgin with child* in the conch of the apse of the katholikon of Hosios Loukas, 11th century, Stiris, Greece.

21. A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

22. A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

23. A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 117 – 138 AD.

24. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

25. Detail (eyes) from the image 21: A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

26. Detail (eyes) from the image 22: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

27. Detail (eyes) from the image 23: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 117 – 138 AD.

28. Detail (eyes) from the image 24: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

29. Detail (lips) from the image 21: A portrait of a young female from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 54 -79 AD.

30. Detail (lips) from the image 24: The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

31. Detail (lips) from the image 22: A portrait of a woman from the region of Fayum, approximately dates to 98 -117 AD.

32. The first stage of a female portrait, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

33. *A female portrait*, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

34. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople (detail), 867 AD.

35. *A female portrait*, 2010, egg-tempera on paper, 29.5 X 21 cm. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

36. The apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

37. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, 867 AD.

38. Portrait of the unfinished statuette of Athena. Pentelic marble. The statuette is found in Athens, near the Pnyx. Known as the "Lenormant Athena", this statuette copies the Athena Parthenos by Pheidias. Although unfinished, the work is important because it preserves the relief representation of the Amazonomachy on the exterior of the shield and the relief image of the Birth of Pandora on the base – themes that adorned the original statue of Athena. The copy probably dates to the 1st century AD. National Archeological Museum of Athens. Photograph: Uroš T. Todorović.

39. Visual demonstration II, phase 1. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

40. Visual demonstration II, phase 2. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

41. Visual demonstration II, phase 3. Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

42. The mosaic of the Virgin with child in the conch of the apse of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, 867 AD.

43. A drawing on top of the image 15 (Visual demonstration I). Author: Uroš T. Todorović.

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