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The Graphic Icons of Anastasios of Sinai

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THE GRAPHIC ICONS OF ANASTASIOS OF SINAI

BY

CALUM SAMUELSON

B.A., Olivet Nazarene University, 2013

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Christian Thought
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SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND CONTINUING STUDIES

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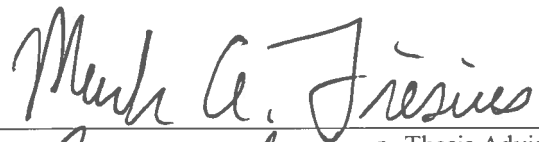
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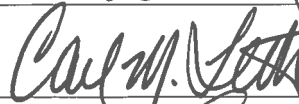
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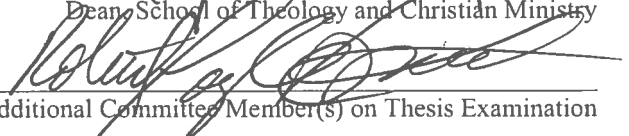
MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT



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Although it might be assumed from the content of this thesis, I view it as a necessity to acknowledge the help of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Although I am constantly fine-tuning my understanding of his influence in my daily life, I have no doubt that my salvation, faith, and hope are rooted in the redemptive reality of the Incarnation. I, along with the Church Fathers discussed in the following pages, marvel at and hope to contribute to the mysterious and scandalous moment of a Crucified God.

Abbreviations

ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ARTS	<i>Arts in Religious and Theological Studies</i>
CC	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i>
MS/MSS	<i>Manuscript/Manuscripts</i>
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca (Greek Fathers)</i>
PO	<i>Patrologia Orientalis (Oriental Fathers)</i>
REB	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines (Byzantine Studies Review)</i>

Introduction

The interactions between Christians and Muslims have long fascinated historians, theologians, and scholars from several other disciplines. In recent decades, a great deal of research has been directed towards the development of Islam in relation to the Byzantine Empire. Archeological studies have delivered fresh insight regarding the tolerance of Christianity by the early Muslims. Numismatic research has demonstrated a strong relation between the political tactics of Byzantium and the Islamic Caliphate. Careful scrutiny of primary texts has also suggested that the early Muslims were far more similar to Jews and Christians than has been previously allowed. This similarity conflates many religious practices, often blurring the view of neat, linear, cause-and-affect progressions.

The first intentional effort of Muslims to distinguish themselves from the other religious entities in the Levant occurs at the end of the seventh century, a period of years that curiously coincide with a particular theological incident. This incident was pioneered by a monk named Anastasios, who resided at the Monastery of St. Catherine at the base of Mt. Sinai. Until now, Anastasios' work has primarily been studied for its value in elucidating internal Christian dialogues and concerns. Some have also analyzed the references to Islam in the writings of Anastasios, but such efforts have been mostly peripheral.

This paper aims to reach a better understanding of the early Islamic interactions with Christianity by considering the specific theological implications of Anastasios' work. One of the most extraordinary aspects of Anastasios' work involves the usage of religious images (icons). Anastasios does not merely offer a modified theological argument in the mold of previous theologians, but pairs his convictions with an explicit call for a new breed of icons. These Crucifix icons are the first to depict Jesus as completely dead, and will be carefully studied in the following pages. After consideration of these icons, this paper will reach a climax in the corollary assessment of the Iconoclastic Controversy. In Byzantium, this controversy lasted from approximately 726 – 843, but was heralded by a slightly earlier controversy in the Islamic world. Although many scholars have attempted to delineate the relation between these iconoclastic movements, none have yet provided a thoroughly conclusive explanation.

Here, an attempt will be made to present a plausible scenario for understanding the multifaceted features of the Iconoclastic Controversy. This will involve a considerable review of the theological debates that precede the Iconoclastic Controversy so that the controversy itself can be better apprehended. Likewise, a thorough survey of icons and their development will establish the backdrop against which Anastasios' radical icons can be juxtaposed. In order to properly decipher the Islamic reactions toward Anastasios' icons, a critical appraisal of Islam's beginnings will also be conducted.

After an adequate contextual foundation has been laid, the specific work of Anastasios will be systematically discussed. As mentioned already, special focus will be given to the theological consequences of Anastasios' work. It is vital to consider how Anastasios' iconographical innovation was received by Muslims, but also by Monophysites and Chalcedonian Christians. During this process, several questions should be kept in mind: (1) What motivated Anastasios to depict what no other Christian artist had dared depict before him? (2) As a monk living under the rule of the Islamic Caliphate, how did Anastasios view the beliefs of his Muslim neighbors? (3) If Christians offended Muslims with their icons, why is it that much of Byzantium seems to react in the same way? In the course of considering Anastasios' work, several persuasive answers to these questions will be proposed.

The final stage of this thesis will seek to determine the impact of Anastasios' upon the immediate Christian posterity. Because the mandates of iconoclasm frequently demanded the destruction of icons, there is a noticeable dearth of pertinent artifacts available for scrutiny. Nonetheless, a glimpse of pristine iconographic thought during the Iconoclasm can be achieved due to the asylum that was provided by several monasteries in the Levant. These religious sanctuaries managed the exceptional feat of isolating monks from *both* their Islamic overlords and the more distant Byzantine authorities. The writings of John Damascene serve as an impeccable example of this phenomenon and also link his work to that of Anastasios. John, like all other Christian writers of history, was influenced by at least one specific theological legacy; by a stand of thinking that inspired him to adamantly oppose the emperor and many of his immediate Christian neighbors. This strand of thinking is of supreme importance, and although it features

multiple offshoots and divisions, it will be presented as a primary impetus of the Iconoclastic Controversy.

Chapter I: Theological, Artistic, and Political Development (325 – 685)

Section 1: The Christological Controversies

In order to properly understand the theological milieu in which Anastasios of Sinai functioned, it is vital to carefully trace the theological evolution of his predecessors. In addition to his knowledge concerning the particular beliefs of contemporary opponents, Anastasios would also have been keenly aware of their intellectual forerunners and the heretical doctrines that they espoused.¹ Thus, it is imperative to diligently traverse the undulating Christological terrain of the late Patristic Period so that the nuances of the arguments during Anastasios' lifetime may be well understood.

The elemental root of theological disagreements in seventh century Byzantium can be traced to the Nestorian Controversy. Although this debate is itself heir to the earlier Arian Controversy, it articulates a particular theological concern. While the Arian Controversy was concerned with the relationship *between* members of the Godhead, future developments led thinkers to ruminate on the specific qualities of the Son, Jesus. Indeed, the fixation on the Son evolved because it produced the best solution to the Arian difficulties. When the Council of Nicaea (325) firmly established the fact that the Son was of the same substance with the Father (ὁμοούσια), the question naturally became, “how exactly was Jesus God?”

Contemporary scholars have adopted an array of different emphases by which they interpret and filter the nuances of the Christological controversies.² No single method or approach is able to competently address all of the peculiarities involved. Given this fact, the theological and philosophical concept of *suffering* (πάθος) will be best suited to the thesis of this paper. It was, after all, the insistence upon Christ's suffering in the flesh that so vigorously animated Anastasios' stance against the Monophysites. Two

¹ Severus of Antioch is the primary culprit; see Anastasios of Sinai, *Anastasioi Sinaitae Viae Dux*, ed. Karl-Heinz Uthemann, CC 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 113.

² Leo Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1988) and Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010) both implement a primarily theological method; Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and of a Heretic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) is especially concerned with the literary exchanges; John Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: HarperOne, 2011) displays a keen interest in the political factors and imperial forces.

corollary principles from Neo-Platonic philosophy accompany the concept of suffering: impassibility (ἀπαθής) and immutability (ἄτρεπτος). These will be necessarily integrated in the following discussion.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the various theologians in these exchanges typically speak of the second person of the Trinity as the Λόγος (Word). This term claims myriad roots in Hellenistic and Alexandrian philosophy, and was a favorite throughout the Christological debates. Furthermore, on both sides of the debate regarding the nature of Christ, the Λόγος remains the subject of the Incarnation.³ This meant that many of the philosophical classifications accompanying the Λόγος were brought into the Church's dialogue concerning the Incarnation.

The customary delineation of the differing theological traditions in the early church identifies the school of Antioch as insisting upon concrete, literal descriptions (πράγματα) while the tradition in Alexandria was content to be allegorical and relatively unconcerned with meticulous details. These stereotypical descriptions leave much to be desired, but still help establish a basic point from which to approach the Nestorian Controversy. One more clarifying categorization deals with the soteriological concerns of each tradition. Generally speaking, the school of Antioch held a more ethical view of salvation, in which Christ acted as the prime exemplar for the life of a human being. This meant that the full humanity of Christ was absolutely crucial. The Antiochenes desired a tangible human Christ whom they could emulate, because only an authentic human being could provide an attainable model of ethical holiness. The Alexandrians, on the other hand, understood salvation to be rooted in *participation*⁴ with the divine. Humanity is able to achieve communion with the divine (as in the Eucharist⁵) only if Christ was fully God. The Alexandrians claimed that the weakness of humanity and the flesh was incapable of truly saving and consequently preached a Christ who was capable of enacting salvation due to his complete divinity. Now the focus must turn to some of the major voices in this competing assembly of thinkers.

³ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 242.

⁴ This concept can be shown to have roots in the Platonic tradition; see. M. J. Edwards, "Justin's Logos and the Word of God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 3 (September 1, 1995): 271.

⁵ Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 3.

Athanasius of Alexandria (296 – 373) is undoubtedly one of the major forerunners of the Christological controversies. His fundamental concern was that of salvation enacted by the Incarnation. As became typical for the Alexandrian theologians, Athanasius grounded his soteriological priority in mankind's participation with the divine. In Genesis, this participation was enabled by the Image of God being imparted to humanity. Athanasius, along with others, viewed the Λογος as the rational nature of God himself. Thus, the Image of God in humanity was a share of this aspect of divinity.⁶ Tragically, the Image of God was lost in the Fall, leaving a profound existential void. The only legitimate means of salvation was for the Λογος himself to restore the Image of God by tangibly revealing himself to humanity.

The Incarnation was central to Athanasius' ultimate soteriological claim: “αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν” (He became man/human, that we might become god/divine).⁷ Even after the term ὁμοούσια had been selected in the decision of Nicaea, Arian heterodoxy persisted. Athanasius fought such heretics by emphasizing his soteriological conviction. Arius' creature was obviously insufficient because it was not fully God, and only God could fully save his creation.

Because Athanasius was tenaciously engaged in preserving the soteriological significance of the Λογος, anthropological inquiries concerning the details of the Incarnation were simply beyond his periphery of concern. As long as he could make the “radical distinction”⁸ between Creator and his creation clear, Athanasius did not care to elucidate how exactly the Creator became like his creation.

The concept of suffering was not yet an explicit concern. Nonetheless, it can be said that Athanasius acknowledged some level of suffering in the Λογος in order to preserve his convictions. Towards the end of his life, Athanasius attempted to clarify the relation between divinity and humanity that was becoming “more explicit”⁹ in contemporary thought. Some of these writings display a somewhat docetic tone. Yet, Athanasius clearly was not docetic, for such a system would have utterly contradicted his

⁶ Athanasius, “On The Incarnation,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers, Icthus Edition*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 55–110; Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 54.

⁷ Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*, 54.

⁸ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 64.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

theology of redemption. Although the impassible Λογος could not be said to suffer, Athanasius wished to assert that he did, in fact, somehow participate in the suffering of his real body.

This rather vague and ambiguous description of the incarnate Λογος all but necessitated further illumination by a future theologian. Apollinarius did just that. His friendship with Athanasius is often attested in scholarship and leaves a fingerprint on his work. Young contends, “Athanasius had argued that only God could save, and this is a frequent refrain of Apollinarius.”¹⁰ Apollinarius came to the reasonable conclusion that two separate, autonomous minds could not simultaneously exist in the person of Christ. A fundamental factor, however, was the way he understood human minds. For Apollinarius, the human mind was *τρέπτος* (changeable).¹¹ This meant that, unlike the qualities of the Λογος, the human mind was markedly weak and corruptible. Therefore, it was absurd to conceive of such a mind co-existing with the impassible mind of the Λογος.

While it may seem that Apollinarius denies the quintessential Athanasian conviction of the Λογος becoming fully man, he actually upholds the soteriological conviction of Athanasius by concluding that a human mind in Christ would have failed in adequately redeeming humanity. Possession of a divine mind was imperative for Christ to successfully save humanity. Apollinarius, being a highly cultured intellectual, was well aware of the dangers of Arian thinking. He did not want to present Christ as a lesser god who could simply bridge the gap *between* man and God, but rather as the sole and unique mediator who fulfilled His role precisely because He was *both* man and God. Although it is difficult to precisely name the peculiarities of Apollinarius’ thought, one thing is clear: his primary objective was to elucidate more fully the profound “unity of this unique mediator,” an idea previously posited by Athanasius.¹²

Ultimately, Apollinarius failed to convey this paradoxical union to the satisfaction of his fellow orthodox bishops,¹³ but his name lingered on the tongues of feuding clergymen (especially from Antioch) for several centuries to come. The basis of his

¹⁰ Ibid., 248.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 252.

¹³ Apollinarius’ view was condemned at the First Council of Constantinople in 381.

heresy was originally determined to be the confounding of the Godhead, but subsequent theologians pointed to an intrinsic flaw in the mixture of natures within Christ. The Antiochene School despised the idea of mixture because they believed it diminished God's love toward humanity. If such a mixture was "natural" (as Cyril would later argue), then it was inevitable and involuntary. Therefore, a natural or organic union implies lack of intentionality on behalf of God and means that he did not consciously *choose* to become incarnate.¹⁴

As became the response to progressive ideas in the Church, successive thinkers soon critiqued Apollinarius' theology. Gregory of Nazianzus strongly argued for a human mind in Christ and rebuked the idea that Christ's flesh could have come from heaven. Christ was perfectly man. It is against Apollinarius that Gregory pens his famous words: "That which he has not assumed he has not healed."¹⁵ For Gregory, the entire purpose of the eternally existent and incorporeal Son becoming corporeal was to affect our salvation so that all of humanity "might be created anew."¹⁶ Therefore, in order to redeem humanity, Christ had to be a perfect man and possess a real, human mind.

Two other notable interlocutors are Diodore of Tarsus and his pupil, Theodore of Mopsuestia. Although the separation of natures is classically attributed to Nestorius, Theodore actually expounded this idea in much more concrete ways prior to the influence of Nestorius.¹⁷ Indeed, Cyril identified Diodore and Theodore as the "true originators of Nestorianism."¹⁸ In a very real sense, Nestorius was simply the rug under which two-nature heresies were swept and the name to which excesses in describing Christ's humanity were attributed. Some have questioned the competency of Nestorius as a theologian and have suggested that he was not entirely capable of articulating his thoughts.¹⁹ To further convolute the situation, there are very few extant writings from Nestorius because of the fact that Theodosius II had most of them burned after the

¹⁴ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 283.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus, *To Cledonius Against Apollinaris*, in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, *Icthus Edition*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 218.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁷ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 295.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 147–148; Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 293; Wessel would contend that Nestorius lacked the rhetorical prowess of Cyril, especially in imitation of Athanasius; see Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 298–302.

Council of Ephesus (431). It is for these reasons that a slightly longer look at Theodore—of whom Nestorius was a pupil—is of considerable value.

Theodore was consecrated as the bishop of Mopsuestia in 392 and seemed to have been quite prolific in his writing (especially on the topic of the Incarnation, about which he was said to have written fifteen books²⁰). Tragically, we now possess only mere fragments of his work. It is clear, however, that Theodore was adamant to portray the legitimate human existence of Jesus. Though he repudiated Apollinarius, such a task was only a feature in his holistic theological system of the Incarnation. One of his favorite descriptions of the Λόγος becoming incarnate was the Johannine phrase: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν (And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us). Taking the *unity* of the two natures for granted, Theodore was best known (and critiqued/condemned) for his emphasis on the separation of the two natures. He claimed that the two natures were united in the πρόσωπον (appearance) as Nestorius will also do later. Although one detects a powerful sense of awe, wonder, and mystery in the writing of Theodore, he did not mince his words. In relation to Nestorius, he clearly appears the more erudite of the two.

We now arrive at the well-known debate between Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria. It is more historically accurate, however, to describe the controversy as a debate between Cyril and the Antiochenes in general. The relative unimportance of Nestorius in comparison to his contemporaries and the dearth of his writings have already been mentioned. Nonetheless, his acts as bishop in Constantinople demand our attention. Nestorius was appointed bishop of Constantinople in 428, shortly after which he made a change to the prevailing liturgy in his city. Having been trained as he was by Theodore, Nestorius was concerned with the usage of the term θεοτόκος (God-bearer) to describe the mother of Jesus because it seemed to imply that Mary had birthed the entire Trinity rather than just one member. Consequently, he suggested an alternative term—χριστοτόκος (Christ-bearer)—which quickly incited strong reactions in Alexandria and Rome.²¹

²⁰ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 269.

²¹ It can also be noted that even his friend, John of Antioch, advised Nestorius to accept the term θεοτόκος; see Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 153.

A heated exchange of letters between Cyril and Nestorius ensued. Cyril began by claiming that the θεοτόκος was the standard understanding (even if not explicitly mentioned) of the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and of course the great Athanasius. The reason seemed obvious to Cyril: it was the Λογος of God Himself who was made flesh, suffered, died, and rose again. Hints of Athanasius' soteriology are perceived through Cyril's insistence upon Christ's divinity to fully effect salvation. Anything less is simply impotent. Practically, this concern becomes especially pertinent in the consideration of the Eucharist.²² Nestorius was overtly agitated and took issue with the concept of the παθητός (passibility) of the Λογος. Nestorius could not allow that the Λογος suffered or was begotten by Mary. He asserted that Paul held the same reservations in Phil. 2:5f.:

[Paul] used the name 'Christ', so indicating the single πρόσωπον (person) of passible and impassible nature; for Christ can be called ἀπαθής (impassible) and παθητός (susceptible to suffering) without any danger—for he is ἀπαθής in his Godhead and παθητός in his body.²³

This approach, of course, was unbearable for Cyril because it so obviously divided the natures of Christ and implied a lack of complete divinity by which humanity could be completely saved. He claimed that the θεοτόκος must be preserved in order to protect Christ's divinity and allow no room for heretical interpretations.

During the course of their dialogue, Nestorius and Cyril repeatedly digressed due to a confusion of vocabulary. Nestorius—like Theodore before him—placed the union of natures in Christ at the level of πρόσωπον, although it is not entirely clear what exactly he wished to communicate.²⁴ Conversely, Cyril insisted that the union must exist at the level of ὑπόστασις (nature). The term ὑπόστασις had been used in philosophical systems as old as Aristotle to convey the underlying state or essence of something (literally “beneath-standing”). Alternatively, in the Trinitarian formula of Nicaea, ὑπόστασις was understood to identify the persons of the Trinity: “one οὐσία (substance) in three ὑποστάσεις (persons).” Yet, Cyril used ὑπόστασις in a new, distinct way from these two previous examples in order to convey a fully “natural union.”²⁵ This, of course, echoed

²² If Christ was not fully divine, the ingestion of bread and wine no longer provided the medicinal, therapeutic, or even salvific benefits that had come to be so deeply cherished by believers. Nestorius' ideas suggested to many that there was no real power in the Eucharist.

²³ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 278.

²⁴ Ibid., 295–96.

²⁵ Ibid., 282.

Apollinarianism to the Antiochenes and implied an *involuntary incarnation* of the Λογος. In this light, it is remarkable that Nestorius, even at the end of his life, still did not seem to comprehend Cyril's use of ὑπόστασις and usually resorted to equating it with the οὐσία.²⁶

Neither the position of Cyril nor that of Nestorius endured without modification. During the course of the controversy, both men seem to have adjusted their position in response to the critiques of the other.²⁷ Young describes Cyril's theology *before* Nestorius as "theologically conservative, even unadventurous; he was mostly interested in clarifying the anti-Arian tenets of his great master, Athanasius."²⁸ It is interesting to note that in the intensification of his polemic against Nestorius and Theodoret, while Cyril was confident that his arguments were of pure Athanasian doctrine, the bulk of his citations actually came from Apollinarian circles.²⁹ Thus, Cyril's anti-Nestorian insistence of the one enfleshed nature of the Λογος can be traced back to none other than Apollinarius. W. H. C. Frend claims that the result of this feuding meant Cyril's concept of Christ became "an abstraction, his humanity so much apart of the divine world as to be unrecognizable in human terms.... There was no biblical ring in his thought."³⁰

Cyril enacted his most aggressive move against Nestorius and the Antiochenes in the writing of his Twelve Anathemas. These reiterated his firm emphasis of the Λογος as the solitary subject of the Incarnation. The final anathema was by far the most provocative: "If anyone does not confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh, and became the first-born of the dead, although he is as God Life and life-giving, let him be anathema."³¹ The response of the Antiochenes (especially Theodoret of Cyrus and John of Antioch) to the implication that the Λογος was *actually* crucified was vehement. The Twelve Anathemas of Cyril signify an important interval for the acknowledgment of suffering. The Antiochenes plainly recognized the suffering of Christ on the cross—they were powerfully opposed to

²⁶ Ibid., 294.

²⁷ Ibid., 313.

²⁸ Ibid., 315.

²⁹ Ibid., 316.

³⁰ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 125.

³¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *The Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius*, in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, Icthus Edition, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 354.

docetism. However, they were unwilling to consent to the thought of the impassible Λογος becoming passible. While they understood Cyril's reasons for emphasizing the suffering of the Λογος in the flesh, they demanded a more rational explication.

Eventually, the Council of Ephesus was convened to settle the matter. Nestorius' role in the proceedings was negligible and ultimately became severed as he and his followers retreated to the seclusion of his home.³² After Nestorius was officially deposed, it remained the task of Theodoret of Cyrus and John of Antioch to reach a compromise with Cyril. Several schismatic depositions and counter-depositions were announced before a solution was reached by Cyril and John in the Formula of Reunion. The essence of their agreement revolved around the confession of Mary as the θεοτόκος by John, which was based upon an understanding of the "unconfused union" of natures in Christ.³³

This solution, however, proved to be rather feeble. Both sides of the argument ultimately remained unsatisfied. After a disastrous attempt at reconciliation in 449, Emperor Marcion felt obligated to convene the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Notwithstanding the significance of Chalcedon, it primarily served to formalize the basic conclusions already drawn from the Nestorian Controversy. There was, however, a slight addition. With the error of Nestorius condemned, space was left in the other extreme to make the opposite error. Eutyches, an archimandrite in Constantinople, was severely dissatisfied with the verdict reached in the Formula of Reunion and accused Cyril of diluting his theology to reach a compromise. Therefore, his reaction to Nestorianism was so extreme as to conclude that Christ had only one, divine nature. Eutyches declared, "God is born; God suffered; God was crucified."³⁴ Although both he and his Alexandrian ally, Dioscorus, claimed to faithfully expound the teachings of Cyril, they made a noticeable movement beyond what Cyril was hesitant to assert. This new theological position, known as Monophysitism, is what ultimately came to be condemned at the Council of Chalcedon. Additionally, Dioscorus himself was condemned and exiled to

³² Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 154.

³³ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 162.

³⁴ Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 174.

Gangra due to his despicable behavior at the Second Council of Ephesus (449), which was soon deemed an illegitimate council by Chalcedon.³⁵

The tome of Pope Leo I acted as the blueprint for the final statement of orthodoxy. Ultimately, a mediating position was agreed upon that upheld Cyril's position but condemned the more radical stance of Eutyches and Dioscorus. The official decree of Chalcedon read:

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we confess one and the same our Lord Jesus Christ... consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood... [born] of Mary the virgin *theotokos* in manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, unique; acknowledged in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation... combining in one Person and *hypostasis*.³⁶

In addition to re-affirming the consubstantial tenants of Nicaea and firmly validating the term θεοτόκος, this decree professed a hypostatic union. This simultaneously gave sufficient acknowledgement to the two natures while clearly emphasizing the unity in the single person of Christ. To solidify this position and prevent misinterpretation, several qualifiers were necessary. The “without” statements pinpointed the errors of both the Monophysites and Nestorians and effectively excluded their views from the sphere of orthodoxy.

The aftermath from the Council of Chalcedon was no small matter. There were strong reactions to the “new orthodoxy” in both the East and the West, many of which resulted in outright rejection of Chalcedon. Jenkins describes how Alexandria buckled under the blow of the Chalcedonian decision: “Chalcedon had its worst effects in Egypt, where Dioscorus's fall disrupted the near-pharaonic regime painstakingly constructed over the previous 150 years.”³⁷ The proud intellectual and theological heritage of Alexandria meant that in light of the recent discussions concerning the natures of Christ, most Egyptians now identified themselves with a fundamentally Monophysite tradition. Rebellion was inexorable.

³⁵ Everett Ferguson, “Dioscorus,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York: Garland Pub, 1990), 268–69.

³⁶ Edward R. Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers, Icthus Edition* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 373.

³⁷ Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 219.

In the wake of Dioscorus' deposition, Alexandria attempted to depose the Chalcedonian replacement, Proterius, with a Patriarch from their own city. Timothy "the Cat"³⁸ occupied a sort of alternative and rebellious patriarchate that was acutely indicative of the growing schism between the Monophysite position and Chalcedon. The schism gained more momentum when Emperor Zeno issued the *Henotikon* of Acacius in 482. This document, seeking to pacify the Alexandrians, emphasized Cyril's Twelve Anathemas and made no mention of either Chalcedon or Leo's Tome. It gave no comment of "two natures" and condemned both Nestorius and Eutyches.³⁹ Understandably, this irritated supporters of Chalcedon and angered many who were of an Antiochene persuasion. But the *Henotikon* also ironically left the Monophysites even more unsatisfied than before. Thus, while the *Henotikon* "remained the imperially imposed official declaration"⁴⁰ for much of the East, it only served to aggravate the contention between the major parties and resulted in what is known as the Acacian schism of 484.⁴¹ The tale of Alexandrian succession is a tumultuous one filled with much tragedy. Rebellion reigned and much blood was spilled.

From this point forward in the history of Christianity, the previous geographical stereotype of Alexandrian and Antiochene theology must be resolutely deconstructed. Illustrative of this change is a strong "Alexandrian," Severus of Antioch. As a Monophysite, he became the bishop of Antioch and the preeminent advocate for the Monophysite movement. Through his organization and authority, Severus established a separate, unified hierarchy, even commissioning their own consecration of bishops in a final effort to "protect Monophysite orthodoxy."⁴²

Thus, by the sixth century, the schism between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians had become all too apparent. While many Nestorian groups had considered Chalcedon to be a victory that shunned the dominance of Alexandrian propriety (and thus tolerated it), most Egyptian Monophysites were vehemently unwilling

³⁸ Jenkins suggests that a more fitting translation may actually be "weasel" but most scholarship still utilizes the translation of "cat"; see. Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 221.

³⁹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 201–2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴² W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 843; John of Ephesus, "Lives of Five Patriarchs," in *PO*, ed. E. W. Brooks, vol. 18.4 (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, éd., 1924), 687.

to submit to the authority of Chalcedon. Therefore, Emperor Justinian I was especially concerned with reconciling the Monophysite groups back into the fold of the church catholic. After several failed attempts, he devised a clever new tactic. Justinian tried to appeal to the Monophysites' hatred of the two natures.⁴³ At the Council of Constantinople II in 553, he officially condemned Theodore, Theodoret, and Ibas of Edessa, all of whom were strong two-nature proponents. This attempt at reconciliation not only failed, but caused the bitterness of past disagreements to be revisited. Sadly, Justinian repeated the mistake of Acacius and Zeno.

In 680, Emperor Heraclius made one last attempt to restore unity between the now thoroughly disparate factions of the empire. The new doctrines of monoenergism and monotheletism had developed early in the seventh century as new potential solutions to the dispute of natures in Christ. Patriarch Sergius I of Constantinople pioneered these doctrines as an attempt to fuse the two natures with a unified activity and portrayal of Christ. With the empire lying in virtual ruin, Sergius convinced Heraclius to implement his doctrines, which would hopefully produce cohesion and restore vitality. The subsequent ignition of fresh embroilment over past arguments was all too predictable. Although Sergius was able to win Pope Honorius to his side, he was strongly opposed by Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem and others such as Maximus the Confessor who viewed monotheletism as a latent form of Monophysitism.⁴⁴ The foundational theological disagreements could not be escaped. Thus, the Third Council of Constantinople, in attempting to promote the doctrines of monoenergism and monotheletism, failed much in the same way as the Second Council of Constantinople had.

As the end of this section approaches, a few clarifications are in order. At the time of Anastasios, the terms "Monophysite" and "Nestorian" did not sufficiently describe the complexities of each party. Still, they are the predominant terms in current scholarly usage and therefore will be used for the remainder of this paper.⁴⁵ Although many groups at the time referred to Chalcedonians with the pejorative term "Melkite," (meaning

⁴³ It should be noted that Justinian's wife and empress, Theodora, was an ardent Monophysite and functioned as a major advocate for the Monophysite position. See Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 225–31; Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 249–52.

⁴⁴ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 264–66.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that some scholars, such as Susan Wessel, prefer the term Miaphysite; see Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria*.

“king’s men”) the former will be used because it most clearly connotes the theological premises of its adherents. In the most eastern portions of Byzantium some used the term “Jacobites” instead of “Monophysite” due to the incredible influence of Jacob Baradaeus, who acted as the bishop of Edessa from 542 – 578.⁴⁶ Additionally, it is possible that still others in the empire preferred the term “Miaphysitism” to describe the one nature position. This stems from the Cyrillian phrase “μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη” (one nature incarnate of God the Word).⁴⁷ Cyril clearly intended only for this phrase to communicate the unity of Christ against the argument of Nestorius. Unfortunately, many of Cyril’s followers subsequently used it to buttress their strictly Monophysite beliefs. In this light, it is possible that Anastasios and his contemporaries could have used the term “Miaphysite” to differentiate between Cyril’s position and subsequent Monophysitism, but this is only conjecture.

Now that the antithetical positions of the Monophysites and Nestorians have been sufficiently outlined, it is helpful to bear in mind that Anastasios strove to uphold the mediating position—that of Chalcedon. Nonetheless, it is primarily against the Monophysites that he directed most of his energies. This will become important as consideration is given to the ways in which Monophysitism and subsequent anti-Monophysite rhetoric from Anastasios affected the early Muslims and the formation of their theology.

Excursus 1: Political Fragmentation

Because of its plain impact upon iconography, knowledge of the theological landscape of the late Patristic Period is a vital prerequisite for our understanding of Anastasios’ situation. Nonetheless, a simple summation of purely theological developments does not sufficiently cover all the important factors. For instance, even “official orthodoxy” modulated drastically in concord with the specific beliefs and preferences of various emperors. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly consider some of the impact that political mandates and motivations had upon Christianity in the centuries

⁴⁶ Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, 847–49.

⁴⁷ John Chapman, “St. Cyril of Alexandria,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).

leading up to Anastasios of Sinai. These factors include both external threats and internal threats. All this, although not directly related to the theological status of the Eastern Roman Empire,⁴⁸ strongly influenced the way that emperors sought to retain unity and coherence. While it is unlikely that any emperor convened a council for the sole purpose of alleviating political factions, such concerns most certainly played a vital role. Emperors occupied a unique position in relation to the Church and levied a significant amount of influence in matters of theology.

The military threat of foreign empires upon the Roman Empire was a perpetual concern during most of the theological controversies mentioned above. In the west, the empire was frequently involved in fending off barbarian armies. Several of these armies succeeded in conquering the city of Rome itself: the Visigoths in 410, the Vandals in 455, and the Ostrogoths in 546.⁴⁹ At the time of Chalcedon, Emperor Marcion was in dire straits. He assumed the throne of an empire in shambles and was confronted almost immediately by the forces of Atilla the Hun. It seems quite plausible that he convened the council as much for the purpose of a unified empire as for the theological solution it may have yielded.

The external threats most pertinent to our focus on Anastasios were the Persians in the east, the Arabs in the south, and the Avars in the west—who were closely related to the Huns.⁵⁰ Emperor Heraclius was almost literally being pressed on all sides. Like Marcion, Heraclius found himself in charge of a deplorable kingdom: “the Empire lay in ruins, its people demoralized, its finances exhausted, its army and administration in disarray, its frontiers in east and west overrun by alien peoples.”⁵¹ The extremities of the Byzantine Empire were particularly difficult to support. While it may seem that abandoning some the more distant regions would have been wise, Heraclius was largely dependent upon their lucrative trade and provision of natural resources. Egypt is a prime

⁴⁸ The Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire had become thoroughly distinguished by the time of Anastasios. Although it is difficult to neatly demarcate the point at which the Byzantine Empire can be properly so called, an obvious event of interest occurs when Constantine moves the capital from Rome to Byzantium (thus renaming it Constantinople). Many, however, would deem this too early and would view it more as the *beginning* of a separate empire.

⁴⁹ G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds., “Rome,” *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press, December 18, 1999), 673–74.

⁵⁰ Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 257.

⁵¹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 258.

example of such a region. Featuring the bustling port city of Alexandria and the fertile delta of the Nile, Egypt was far from expendable. Egypt nearly seceded from the empire several times due to their strong Monophysite tradition, but the emperors were able to partially pacify them by appealing to their theological views.

Thus, the efforts to promote monoenergism and monotheletism in the seventh century can be interpreted as a last desperate attempt to unite the empire and retain a precious cohesion of economic independence. Although a solution was obviously never reached, the inhabitants were just as aware of their desperate situation and were also eager to reach some type of unity. Most Christians—regardless of their theological persuasion—were convinced that the alien forces were an enactment of God’s judgment for their evil behavior.⁵² This notion of judgment will be considered again shortly.

The Muslim Invasion, although not initially as threatening as the Avars or Persians, signals an important transition in the social makeup of the Eastern Mediterranean. By 636, the Muslims defeated the Byzantines in Palestine. After a six-month siege, Jerusalem itself (which had recently suffered a violent struggle against the Jews and Persians) surrendered to the Muslim forces. In 642, Alexandria also fell to the expanding Rashidun Caliphate. For the first time in several centuries, Christians found themselves living under the jurisdiction of non-Christian rulers. Ironically, this proved to be greatly beneficial to non-Chalcedonian groups such as the Nestorians and the Monophysites, as they were allowed to practice their faith with more freedom than had been previously afforded to them by the government in Constantinople. Still, this was not the immediate interpretation of the Muslim Invasion. Christians of all varieties almost unanimously understood the onslaught of the Muslims to be an eschatological sign demonstrative of God’s displeasure for the schism in his Church.⁵³

The second secular issue to consider is political factions within. The city of Alexandria was particularly known for its violent rejection of Chalcedonian patriarchs after the council in 451. The most infamous event, briefly mentioned above, slightly predates Chalcedon and is commonly known as the Robber Council of Ephesus (449).

⁵² Sidney H. Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 345.

⁵³ Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, “Apocalypse and the Arabs,” in *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

This event vividly portrayed the capability of political forces to exercise coercion. The most notorious figure featured in this event was Dioscorus of Alexandria. Accompanied by a strong collection of his supporters, he essentially implemented physical force to make the bishops in attendance sign his document. Flavian was so brutally treated that he died just days after the council on his way to exile.⁵⁴

At this point, the empire was dominantly Monophysite except for Rome. Chalcedon appeared to reverse the tide, but in reality left an enormous population of Monophysites dissatisfied. Therefore, in 475, Emperor Basiliscus attempted to enact a Monophysite counterrevolution against the decisions of Chalcedon. Following this event, the Monophysite regimes essentially dominated the Roman Empire until 518.⁵⁵ From 518 – 630 the Chalcedonian views were in strong control largely in thanks to Justinian I.

These events are important because they help delineate this period in a more realistic portrayal. Furthermore, when the history of early Islam is reviewed in the third section of this chapter, an awareness of the extreme strife within Christianity will help prevent biased and uninformed judgments concerning the appearance of violence among Muslims.

Section 2: Evolution of Icons

At the outset, it should be observed that this section has carefully been named the “Evolution of Icons” and not the “Evolution of Images.” The latter phrase mainly relates to an immense phenomenon that was drastically shaped by the Greco-Roman world. The former phrase is more pertinent to this paper because it better embodies the nuances that came to be associated specifically with Christian artwork. This can be confusing because the word “icon” is derived from the Greek εἰκών, which simply means “image.”⁵⁶ While these two terms in English are intrinsically related, they are pointedly *not* synonymous. It is often difficult to determine the more fitting term for a historical artifact. In fact,

⁵⁴ Cf. Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, trans., *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 2:156; Nestorius, *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, ed. G. R. Driver and Leonard Hodgson (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 361–62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁶ Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon, Volume I*, trans. Anthony Gythiel (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1992), 35.

scholarly work on this topic has yet to fully agree upon terminology and methods of identification.⁵⁷ With that being said, many scholars of early iconography prefer to employ the phrase, “cult of images” due to the fact that it is virtually impossible to demarcate a point in history at which images “become” icons.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the first period of Iconoclasm (c. 730 – 787) is what forces a functional delineation between images and icons, which will be discussed in Chapter III.⁵⁹

As this paper is focused on the evolving era *before* Iconoclasm, it is necessary to establish an operative understanding of these terms. Here, the term “icon” will be used to connote paintings which elicit religious veneration or worship, while the term “image” will be used more broadly for all other artistic depictions, many of which may possess religious significance and consequently necessitate a level of respect or devotion (as in the case of nascent icons).⁶⁰

To aid this discussion, the work of two influential scholars should be observed. André Grabar, an art historian, was one of the pioneering voices in the area of icon development. In *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*, his main purpose was to demonstrate the utter dependence of Christian artwork upon the ingrained themes and motifs of the Greco-Roman world.⁶¹ He also believed that every Christian image “had a definite religious purpose.”⁶² There was no such thing as Christian artwork created merely for its artistic value. While these notions can be granted, it is far too vague to simply affirm that all Christian images had a “religious purpose.” The more meaningful

⁵⁷ For noteworthy examples see Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers: Number Eight* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968); Anna D. Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁵⁸ Others, however, prefer the term “cult of the icon.” See Norman Baynes, “The Icons before Iconoclasm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 44, no. 2 (April 1, 1951): 93–106.

⁵⁹ It should be noted, however, that in reality the progression is multifaceted, for there was “no century between the fourth and the eighth in which there is not some evidence of opposition to images even within the Church.”; Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 133.

⁶⁰ On this point, André Grabar would most likely disagree. He insists that all Christian images are intended to make some sort of theological statement or declare a truth; see Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, xlix. The distinction the present author would make lies in the *response* to such a theological statement. Much of early Christian artwork reminded viewers of general truths—e.g. salvation—but did not necessarily direct such a notion towards an object of praise or veneration. This is, perhaps, most cogently exemplified in the early depictions of Jonah and the fish.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, xliii.

⁶² *Ibid.*, xlix.

evaluation lies not so much in what purpose early images may have been intended to achieve, but rather how Christians actually responded to and incorporated them in their lives. Grabar made an exceptional contribution to the field, but was not able to adequately assess the theological nuances and implications of the artwork he surveyed.

Thus, partly building upon the work of Grabar, Ernst Kitzinger focused on the literary sources (as opposed to the artwork itself) in order to more accurately trace the development of the “cult of images.” In “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” he invested a considerable amount of time discussing the “magical” and “miraculous” properties of images.⁶³ Some of these images were even believed to be ἀχειροποίητα (not made by human hands), thus boasting divine origination.⁶⁴ Perhaps by the late fifth century, it was not uncommon for some worshippers to consider such a miraculous image as a “channel” by which they could “approach the Deity.”⁶⁵ Kitzinger claimed that the growing fascination with such properties served to “break down the barrier between image and prototype,” and asserted that this development “is the most important feature of the cult of images in the period under review [527-730].”⁶⁶ While the miraculous properties of images is undoubtedly an important corollary to the growing cult, it does not sufficiently explain the theological arguments made in reference to them by early Christian writers. This is especially true in the case of Anastasios of Sinai, about whom new material has recently been published to which Kitzinger did not have access.⁶⁷ Therefore, this present study does not neatly coincide with either the position of Grabar or that of Kitzinger. For this paper, specific focus will be given to icons of Jesus—especially those of his crucifixion⁶⁸—and the specific theological implications attached to them.

The underlying concept of icons has roots extending to the Decalogue of Moses and particularly the Second Commandment.⁶⁹ This prohibition was compounded by the

⁶³ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 100–15.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 112–15.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁷ Namely Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*.

⁶⁸ Crucifix icons are generally referred to as “Χριστός Πάσχων” within the Orthodox Church.

⁶⁹ “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth,” Exod. 20:4 (New Revised Standard Version).

popularity and proliferation of statuary imagery in the Greco-Roman world. As is well known, the making of images was largely opposed by the early Church Fathers, evidenced in writings from Minucius Felix,⁷⁰ Tertullian,⁷¹ and Origen.⁷² However, this early period of opposition towards images significantly predates our study and cannot be considered here. For now, it is most salient to understand the extreme popularity and widespread usage of images by Christians in the centuries leading up to Anastasios of Sinai.

Most scholars credit the initial growth of Christian artwork and images to the legalization of Christianity by Constantine.⁷³ As Christians became more affluent and prosperous, more time and money could be spent on artwork. Christian artwork in general emerged around the beginning of the third century in Roman catacomb frescos,⁷⁴ but became more popular in the fourth century. The most common artistic symbols at this time were the Good Shepherd and Jonah, both of which strongly communicated the hope of salvation.⁷⁵ The image of the fish accompanied by the acronym, “ΙΧΘΥC,” also became prominent by the end of the third century and was used along with other symbolic art for didactic purposes. Indeed, the didactic purposes of Christian artwork and images (especially for the illiterate) became a significant component in their production, the first extant advocacy of which comes from the Cappadocian Fathers.⁷⁶ Here, the position of Grabar is plainly in harmony with the historic evidence. However, as mentioned previously, a simple didactic function or general “religious purpose” fails to explain the unique growth in the popularity of religious artwork and images.

⁷⁰ Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 32, 1-3, trans. G.H. Rendall, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1931), 419-20.

⁷¹ Tertullian, “On Idolatry,” in *ANF*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and S. Thelwall, vol. III (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

⁷² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VII, 64, in *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 448.

⁷³ Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons*, First edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey Spier et al., *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, “Oratio Laudatoria Sancti Ac Magni Martyris Theodori,” in *PG*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 46 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1863), col. 757 D; Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 136.

Icons (as distinct from religious artwork) took longer to develop, but clearly are not unrelated to the preceding artistic milieu. Caution is required in order to avoid exaggerations, but Kurt Weitzmann sufficiently describes the basic process:

The literary sources make clear that the first icons were produced sporadically in the fourth century, that their number increased in the fifth and that only in the sixth was the cult of the images firmly established.⁷⁷

The establishment of the “cult of the images,” a phrase borrowed from the seminal work by Ernst Kitzinger,⁷⁸ is to be understood primarily as a change in the worshippers rather than a change in the artistic content. The crystallization of such “cultic” behavior eventually gave rise to the expansion of the artistic content. This explains the importance of Kitzinger’s goal to demonstrate how the somewhat peculiar and taboo tendency of venerating mere images gradually evolved into an established veneration and worship of icons—which came to be understood as far more than mere images.⁷⁹

The path to such veneration seems to have been gradually paved by the veneration of material objects, shrines, and relics.⁸⁰ As Christians became accustomed with honoring special physical objects, a precedent for the veneration of images was gradually ingrained in the minds of the laity. Epiphanius of Salamis⁸¹ (c. 320 – 403) and Augustine⁸² (354 – 430) are among the first to address the Christian practice of actually worshipping images.⁸³ Both critique the growing contemporary practice as unfit for Christians. Not only is it difficult to determine the universality of such practices from their writings, but their description of “worship” is also rather vague. A key word in determining the precise nature of worship is *προσκύνησις* (prostration). According to Kitzinger, “By the end of the fourth century *proskynesis* before the Sign of the Passion was considered a perfectly

⁷⁷ Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 5.

⁷⁸ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm.”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 89; For an insightful example of shrines and relics, see Augustine’s description of Monica’s participation in the Cult of Tombs; Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, VI, ii, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 91–92.

⁸¹ Epiphanius, “Panarion,” in *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I, Sects 1-46*, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd ed., Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Olga Solovieva, “Epiphanius of Salamis and His Invention of Iconoclasm in the Fourth Century A.D.,” *Fides et Historia* 42, no. 1 (December 1, 2010): 21–46; Baynes, “The Icons before Iconoclasm,” 93.

⁸² See Augustine of Hippo, “Of the Morals of the Catholic Church,” in *NPNF*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

⁸³ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 92–93.

natural thing for a Christian.”⁸⁴ It is most logical that this was executed in the context of imperial practice and duty,⁸⁵ which would have been a priority for a Roman citizen after Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the empire in 380.⁸⁶ But the degree to which προσκύνησις was practiced before icons is another matter.

After Constantine, the Roman emperors were understood to be the Vicars of Christ upon the earth.⁸⁷ There is no reason to believe that the practice of venerating the emperor’s portrait ceased during the Christian Era, and we accordingly find the “cult of the imperial image” continuing to flourish in tandem with the “cult of images” in general.⁸⁸ This allows both Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus to invoke the “customary honors” of the imperial image as a justification for the worship of Christian images—thereby rendering them icons.⁸⁹ This understanding of honoring the portrait of a real emperor was surely influenced by the hierarchical paradigm of Neoplatonic thought, which would have elevated his status and legitimated the worship of his mere depiction.⁹⁰

Regardless of how normative προσκύνησις before the Sign of the Passion, the practice was surely not integrated into an organized liturgy until several centuries after Constantine. The first known occurrence of προσκύνησις being practiced in a church is in the first half of the sixth century.⁹¹ In a letter to Hypatius of Ephesus, Julian of Atramyction seems to indicate that he was allowing the worship of paintings in his church “in the form of προσκύνησις.”⁹² Although undoubtedly communicating theological truths, the paintings in Julian’s church were causing congregants (especially the “simpler and immature folk”⁹³) to respond with actions of unmistakable worship beyond simple

⁸⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁵ For an intriguing discussion on this topic see Solovieva, “Epiphanius of Salamis and His Invention of Iconoclasm in the Fourth Century A.D.,” 21-46.

⁸⁶ David Olster, “Transformation in the Wake of Islam’s Victory,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity With Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas, 1st ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 48.

⁸⁷ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 127.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 91-92; 100.

⁸⁹ Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 32 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1886), col. 149 C; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Contra Iulianum*, I, 80, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 35 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1886), col. 605 C.

⁹⁰ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 137.

⁹¹ Ibid., 94.

⁹² Baynes, “The Icons before Iconoclasm,” 93–95; Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 94.

⁹³ Baynes, “The Icons before Iconoclasm,” 94.

acknowledgement or respect. This example is also helpful because it contrasts the general popularity of icons among the laypeople with a more developed and mature understanding of the clergy. The bishops (particularly Hypatius) seem to view religious images as a concession for those who have difficulty grasping abstract theological concepts, and might not have been as enthusiastic about the need to display their own devotion to such images.

Although explicit descriptions of the paintings in Julian's church are not given, it is highly probable that they included depictions of Jesus, as his incarnation legitimated the very use of icons.⁹⁴ Initially, icons of Jesus seem to mostly portray him either as the παντοκράτωρ (almighty) or as an infant with the Virgin.⁹⁵ These serve to refute the heresies of Arius and Nestorius, respectively,⁹⁶ which could not be accomplished by the earlier Christian images of a fish or lamb.⁹⁷ Kitzinger makes mention of such an example: "In the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus (d. A.D. 619) we find a story of a hermit who, before undertaking a journey, was in the habit of praying to an image of the Virgin and Child."⁹⁸ It is important to recognize the private and solitary nature of this early example because such devotion was likely not normative in corporate worship.

Explicit depiction of the Crucifixion in Christian artwork is last to develop (in the late sixth century). This is a vital fact to recognize because it is indicative of important theological apprehensions and convictions. Some scholars have contended that the depiction of the Crucifixion actually began much earlier. For example, Larry Hurtado gives a fascinating glimpse into how the Cross was "venerated" in the form of a written monogram—or "staurogram"—in Christian documents dating to the early third century.⁹⁹ He insists that the staurogram is "the earliest extant visual reference to the crucified Jesus."¹⁰⁰ If this proposal is to be accepted, it can only be done on the basis of Grabar's

⁹⁴ "He is the image of the invisible God," (ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου), Col. 1:15 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁹⁵ See Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons Volume I*, plates I, III, IV, XI; Georgios A. Sotiriou, *Eikones Tēs Monēs Sina* (Athēnai: Institut Français d'Athènes, 1956), plates 1, 4, 8, 10.

⁹⁶ Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon, Volume I*, 86.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁹⁸ Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," 97.

⁹⁹ Larry W. Hurtado, "The Staurogram: Earliest Depiction of Jesus' Crucifixion," in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Text and Their World* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 207–26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

understanding. In other words, the staurogram performed a “religious purpose” by reminding readers of the historical occurrence of Jesus’ crucifixion. While it might have stirred feelings of devotion or admiration within Christian observers, it did not elicit the προσκύνησις appropriate for a portrait of Christ or the emperor. Therefore, in response to Hurado, the staurogram should not be considered a full depiction of the Crucifixion because it lacks the person of Jesus. Again, Hurtado’s findings are best understood in correlation with the affirmations of Grabar.

While the staurogram is not a satisfying normative example of early depictions of Christ’s crucifixion, several other extant artifacts can be presented for consideration. One such example is a well-known image from Rome—the Alexamenos Graffito—depicting crucifixion sometime in the third century. However, this is clearly not a Christian drawing, and represents crucifixion in a mocking way—not as an image to be venerated. In fact, the shamefulness associated with crucifixion and the social repercussions of worshipping a crucified deity are partly what caused Christians to be so hesitant about displaying the Crucifixion in the first place. Additionally, there was a desire—possibly stemming from the imperial court of Constantine—to depict Christ in a victorious and triumphant manner.¹⁰¹ Depictions of the Crucifixion communicated the opposite message.

Another important cause for the late emergence of the Crucifixion in Christian art is related to the personal nature of such depictions. Religious images (particularly those of the Crucifixion) were most likely used in private devotions before they became widespread in corporate usage.¹⁰² At least three extant artifacts can support this idea. Dating from the early third century on a small gemstone is “the earliest extant depiction of Jesus crucified,” but its peculiarity suggests a pagan origin and therefore does not constitute a representative Christian example.¹⁰³ Engravings on other small gemstones from the fourth century similarly depict Christ’s crucifixion in a very crude manner (very

¹⁰¹ Carlo Cecchelli, Giuseppe Furlani, and Mario Salmi, eds., *The Rabbula Gospels: Facsimile Edition of the Miniatures of the Syriac Manuscript Plut. I, 56 in the Medicaean-Laurentian Library* (Olten and Lausanne, Switzerland: Urs Graf - Verlag, 1959), 34.

¹⁰² Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 98.

¹⁰³ Spier et al., *Picturing the Bible*, 228.

little detail), obviously for personal use and arguably modeled after magical pagan amulets.¹⁰⁴

Two small panels from Rome also depict the Crucifixion (one in wood and one in marble), and are dated to approximately the 420-30s. These both appear to be less private than the small gemstones just described. But there is a more significant factor that excludes them from qualifying as normative representations of the Crucifixion. These two early examples both portray Christ in a very rigid, unnatural way. The eyes of Jesus are clearly open, and he seems to exude a stoic countenance, totally unaffected by the circumstances around him. The marble panel vividly contrasts the strong, upright body of Jesus on the cross with the limp body of Judas hanging from a tree just inches away. In the panel depiction from the wood door of Santa Sabina, Jesus hardly appears to represent a typical human being, as he towers over the flanking thieves who are nearly half his size. Thus, while the Crucifixion is beginning to be portrayed, the artists shy away from emphasizing the full humanity and suffering of Christ.¹⁰⁵ It may be that the artists were attempting to fuse the Crucifixion with the previously mentioned preference for a victorious Christ. Kartsonis expounds this conviction:

The wide open eyes and the rigid body of Christ remain characteristic of the iconography throughout the Early Christian Period... It would seem then that the art of the early period circumvented the representation of the Death of Christ on the cross.¹⁰⁶

This seems to be even more lucid in the East, where monastics felt a deep shame about the nakedness of Christ, and better explains why the above-mentioned panels are found in Rome.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, it appears that these depictions of Jesus' crucifixion were hardly used as subjects of worship.¹⁰⁸ While it is true that the "cult of the Christ image" in general can be observed in the latter half of the sixth century, the more specific portrayals of the Crucifixion achieve widespread status only in the next century.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 228–29.

¹⁰⁵ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Cecchelli, Furlani, and Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ The small wooden panel in Santa Sabina in Rome is some 20 feet above the ground and the small marble panel (probably part of a reliquary) depicts a very crowded, busy scene, which includes the hanging body of Judas. Thus, this piece probably performed some sort of didactic function similar to that performed by earlier Christian art.

¹⁰⁹ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 83–86.

This can be at least partially explained as a reaction to the growing theological position of Monophysitism. It is likely that Chalcedonian artists believed painting a more realistic scene of the Crucifixion would help combat the Monophysite errors.¹¹⁰ The first painting of a complex and realistic Crucifixion scene is found in the Rabbula Gospels, dating from 586.¹¹¹ This document features the four gospels in Syrian accompanied by twenty-six miniature illustrations.¹¹² Here, for the first time, there seems to be a real emphasis upon the humanity of Christ. Blood can be seen spilling from his side and from the wounds in his hands and feet. Furthermore, the recognition of Christ's humanity seems to be articulated by the fact that he is fully clothed.

As simple as it may sound to the modern reader, this artistic enterprise was accompanied by palpable difficulty. The seemingly impassible Jesus of the two panels from Rome wore only a small loincloth, which served to amplify his apparent deity (common in the statuary imagery of the Greco-Roman world). When considering the painted images of Jesus' crucifixion from the sixth and seventh centuries, however, there is a great hesitancy to inflate the frailty of his humanity by depicting the shamefulness of his nakedness.¹¹³ Blood was helpful in accentuating Jesus' humanity, but nakedness could be too easily associated with the lustful and promiscuous behavior that was embodied in the statues of the Greek gods. With this in mind, one can discern some of the conflicting motivations for a Christian artist of this time.

As Grabar points out, such conflict cannot be explained by a lack of theological understanding or precedence, for the Church Fathers had long discussed the event and significance of the Crucifixion in vivid detail.¹¹⁴ He attempts to explain this hesitancy by insisting that the "truth" proclaimed in depictions of the Crucifixion was not the death of Christ, but rather his resurrection.¹¹⁵ However, Grabar misunderstands the theological implications of depicting the Crucified Christ. The theological debate with the Monophysites (especially with the so-called Theopaschites) revolved almost exclusively

¹¹⁰ Cecchelli, Furlani, and Salmi, *The Rabbula Gospels*, 35.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹² See Helen C. Evans, ed., *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 67–68; Ingo F. Walther, *Codices Illustres : The World's Most Famous Illuminated Manuscripts, 400 to 1600*, [25th anniversary ed.] (Köln: Taschen, 2005), 65.

¹¹³ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 33–34.

¹¹⁴ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 132.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

around the death of Christ. Kartsonis rightly denies Grabar's conclusion by insisting that it "is not supported by the surviving pictorial evidence."¹¹⁶

The truth proclaimed by the depiction of Christ's crucifixion was, in fact, the truth that he died. And although this was not a new concept *per se*, the act of transferring it into a visual image presented a new dilemma. Once again contradicting the position of Grabar, the Crucifixion icons did not merely communicate a theological truth, but also directed the devotion and praise of the viewer towards a specific object—namely Jesus himself. Was a dead man on a cross worthy of such praise? At this time, Christians cherished many icons of deceased martyrs. But they were always portrayed as alive, not dead. Would worshippers be too distracted by the *appearance* of Jesus' death to understand the *purpose* of his death? Most importantly, how could a Chalcedonian artist illustrate the death of Jesus without insinuating the death of the Godhead? Thus, the depicting of the Crucifixion presented very real and potent challenges for Christian icon-makers. Much was at stake and most were unwilling to portray the actual death of Christ in an icon.

This changes with Anastasios of Sinai, and in the next chapter significant shifts and advancements in the depiction of Christ's crucifixion will be studied. The struggle of the Christian "image-makers" can fairly be called the struggle of Christian "icon-makers," because the very reality of a struggle demonstrates a realization on behalf of the artist that their artwork would be viewed as more than a mere painting.

It should be noted that Anastasios comfortably predates the Iconoclastic Period of Emperor Leo III (begins sometime between 726 and 730). Indeed, it will be part of the thesis of this paper to suggest that the program of Anastasios against the Monophysites contributes to the Islamic ban of icons, which consequently influenced Leo III and played at least a partial role in his own decree against icons.

Excursus 2: Images in Coinage

The study of iconography in the time leading up to Anastasios is complicated by a lack of artifacts due to the destructive nature of the Iconoclastic Period.¹¹⁷ Therefore, one

¹¹⁶ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 33.

of the primary sources for knowledge concerning Byzantine art during the seventh century is derived from imperial coinage.¹¹⁸ André Grabar and James Breckenridge have provided landmark studies in this field of numismatics.¹¹⁹ One of the primary assertions of Breckenridge is the noticeable change in coinage beginning with the reign of Justinian II (685).¹²⁰

Coinage in the Roman Empire had long been utilized by emperors to communicate pictorial messages to the general populous.¹²¹ In the pre-Christian era, these messages mostly relayed the rightful authority of the emperor by incorporating familiar symbols of triumph and victory from Greek mythology. The Christian emperors continued this program with the addition of and transformation into new Christian symbols.¹²²

Although Christ had been featured on coins for some time prior to his rule, “Justinian II was the first Byzantine emperor to place the [exclusive] image of Christ on his regular official coinage.”¹²³ What is more, Justinian II placed the image of Christ on the obverse side of the coin and allowed his own imperial portrait to occupy the reverse. Thus, he acknowledged to the entire empire that he was subservient to Christ.¹²⁴

This was mostly likely a result of the Council in Trullo (691 – 692),¹²⁵ which regularized practical expectations for Christian laity.¹²⁶ Canon 82 of the council insisted that, “Christ our God, who removes the sins of the world, should henceforward be set up in human form in images...”¹²⁷ This is reflective not only of the popularity of icons, but

¹¹⁷ Additionally, because iconographers viewed their work as transient and temporal, dilapidated icons were frequently burned and replaced by new ones.

¹¹⁸ James D. Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II: 685-695, 705-711* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1959), 7.

¹¹⁹ André Grabar, *L'empereur Dans L'art Byzantin: Recherches Sur L'art Officiel de L'empire d'Orient* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1936); Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*.

¹²⁰ Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, 1–7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 1; cf. Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 126.

¹²⁴ Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, 63–65.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78; Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers: Number Seven* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 22.

¹²⁶ Some have suggested that the new coin types of Justinian II were influenced by the reforms of the Umayyad Caliphate under ‘Abd al-Malik. This theory will be dealt with in more detail in the final chapter.

¹²⁷ Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*, 83.

also the believe in their apotropaic power. There is a possibility that one of the types commissioned by Justinian II was based on the renowned and miraculous Image of Edessa.¹²⁸ Regardless, it is clear that the new coins featuring the image of Christ were not only intended to communicate the message that Christ was Lord, but also that he was worthy of religious praise and devotion. Consequently, we can deduce from the study of Byzantine numismatics that the attitude towards icons of Christ in the late seventh century was popular and favorable.

Section 3: The Birth of Islam

The traditional story of Islam's beginnings can be quickly summarized. Muhammad was born circa 570 in Mecca and was orphaned as a young boy, which meant that he had very little status in the tribal milieu of the Arabian Peninsula. He seemed to demonstrate religious zeal as a young man, and eventually received many revelations from God through the angel Gabriel. These revelations began in 610 and were primarily concerned with polytheistic religion, which was portrayed as a grievous deviation from the original faith given by God to Abraham and the prophets. Thus, Muhammad began preaching a message of monotheistic reform in Mecca and was eventually expelled by the leaders of competing tribes. Having made previous arrangements with the leaders of Yathrib (later renamed "Medina"), he traveled there in 622. This trek is known as the Hijra and marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.¹²⁹

After suppressing initial opposition from some of the Jewish population in Medina, Muhammad was able to successfully unite the various tribes (three Jewish and two Arab) under a constitution, replacing the tribal mentality with a sort of "theocracy" based upon religion. In 630 Muhammad marched upon Mecca with 10,000 men in response to the violation of The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which had affirmed a ten year

¹²⁸ Ibid., 98. According to legend, the Image of Edessa was a piece of cloth bearing the imprinted image of Jesus' face. Apparently, Jesus left his impression on the piece of fabric and had it sent to King Abgar of Edessa in response to a request for healing.

¹²⁹ It is fascinating to note the correlation between the life of Muhammad and the reign of Heraclius. For example, the first year of Heraclius' rule (610) also marks the first occurrence of Muhammad's revelations from God. Furthermore, the year in which Heraclius launched his campaign against the Persian Empire in the East (622) coincides with the Hijra; see Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 268.

period of peace between Mecca and Medina. He subsequently conquered the city and destroyed its host of pagan idols in the process (both those in the Ka'ba and in surrounding areas). In 632 Muhammad completed the first Hajj (pilgrimage) and in doing so established a powerful example for his followers.

Muhammad died later that year, by which time the majority of the Arabian Peninsula had been subsumed into his new monotheistic community. This community continued to expand under Muhammad's successors, and soon claimed a vast region of land comparable to the Byzantine and Persian Empires. The revelations of Muhammad were carefully preserved in the years after his death and were promptly organized under the rule of 'Uthman (644 – 656), forming what is known as the Qur'an. Disagreements regarding leadership resulted in civil wars (pl. *fitan*; sing. *fitna*) from 656 – 661 and 680 – 692. One of the results of these political contentions was the formation of a distinct sect of Islam, known as Shi'a, which claimed that Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law) was the rightful successor to Muhammad. The remaining Muslims comprised the opposing sect known as Sunni and affirmed the legitimacy of Abu Bakr as the first caliph of the Rashidun (rightly guided) Caliphate. 'Abd al-Malik (685 – 705) served to significantly unite Muslims through many reforms and standardizations during his rule in the Umayyad Caliphate, which eventually stretched all the way to Spain.

Traditionally, the historiography of Islam was obtained solely from Islamic texts. In the past several decades, however, development in the field of Islamic Studies has illuminated manifold new avenues for exploring this area of history. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook initiated this trend with their seminal and controversial work, *Hagarism*.¹³⁰ Their thesis¹³¹ was not well received and was eventually rejected by most scholars of Islam.¹³² Regardless, *Hagarism* established a precedent of looking beyond

¹³⁰ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹³¹ Crone and Cook proposed that prior to the rule of 'Abd al-Malik, the Islamic community basically functioned as a messianic Jewish sect whose primary concern was to reestablish their faith in the Promised Land; see Part I: "Whence Islam?" in Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3-38.

¹³² See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1998); E. I. Manheimer, "Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (February 1, 1978): 240–41; M. G. Morony, "Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 41, no. 2 (April 1, 1982): 157–59; Fred McGraw Donner, "Review of Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (December

Islamic texts for information regarding the birth of Islam. While it is certainly correct to reject the bulk of their thesis, one fundamental premise should be noted. Crone and Cook imply that the first seventy-five years of Islam are characterized by a great deal of fluidity.¹³³ This concept is gaining momentum and is pivotal for an accurate understanding of Islam's relationship to Christianity.¹³⁴

The primary foundation for this section's review of early Islam comes from the work of Sidney Griffith¹³⁵ and Fred Donner.¹³⁶ Both of these scholars have made a significant impact upon the field of Islamic Studies by utilizing non-Islamic primary texts in an unparalleled manner. Their work is vital for understanding the dynamic relationship and interactions between Christians and early Muslims. Despite their preference for non-Islamic sources, both scholars necessarily employ texts from the Qur'an in order to construct their picture of early Islam. On that subject, textual criticism of the Qur'an is gaining approval, and has also played a role in re-examining early Islamic development.¹³⁷ Ultimately, the task at hand is to realistically weigh the testimony of the Qur'an against the testimony of secular sources in order to determine the most plausible scenario.

Very little is known about the Arabian Peninsula in the first five centuries of the Common Era. Roughly speaking, the region consisted of many independent nomadic tribes and did not possess any unified system of rule, religion, or trade. What is clear, however, is that Muhammad and his followers encountered Christians at a very early

1, 2006): 197–99; John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹³³ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8.

¹³⁴ Some notable works include: Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 1995); M. J. Kister, *Studies in Jahiliyya and Early Islam* (London: Variorum, 1980); Michael Lecker, *The "Constitution Of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2004); G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³⁵ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

¹³⁶ Fred McGraw Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2003): 9–53; Fred McGraw Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Reprint (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

¹³⁷ Due to religious implications, the field of Qur'anic Criticism is quite volatile and will not be discussed in this paper.

stage in their campaign—if not from the very beginning itself.¹³⁸ Later, it was even postulated by some writers that Muhammad modulated Christian theology after he was taught by a monk.¹³⁹ This notion will not be entertained here. More certain is the extensive interaction Muhammad shared with the Jewish people.

Regardless of the precise dating and composition of the Qur'an, the mention of Christians and Jews within its pages is pellucid. The classic dilemma deals with the amount of theological cross-pollination between these groups. It is difficult to affirm that Muhammad had interactions with these “People of the Book” without being theologically influenced by them in some way (Jews, Nestorians, Monophysites, and Orthodox Chalcedonians were all active at this time). The situation is further compounded by the fact that the Qur'an clearly “presumes in its audience a ready familiarity with the stories of many of the principal narrative figures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as with an impressive array of Jewish and Christian lore.”¹⁴⁰ The answer, of course, for traditional Muslim scholars is to aver the divinity of the Qur'an and insist that Muhammad received his revelations directly from God, not from Christian or Jewish neighbors.

In general, Griffith conducts an admirable survey of these complex Muslim-Christian relations. His project uses non-Islamic literary sources to shed new light on current understandings of these relations. Griffith elucidates the abundance of interactions and demonstrates the vibrancy of these exchanges. He is not concerned with overturning the traditional understanding of Islam; the period before 'Abd al-Malik contains a paucity of primary texts anyway. Griffith's main concern is to trace the gradual “overshadowing” of Christianity by Islam and to refute the apologetic claims that depict early benevolence and cooperation between the two faiths.

Griffith claims, “perhaps 50 percent of the world's confessing Christians from the mid-seventh to the end of the eleventh centuries found themselves under Muslim rule.”¹⁴¹ Although such an assertion could strengthen the case for theological cross-

¹³⁸ See Irfan Shahîd, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 AD,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark N. Swanson, and David Thomas, 1st ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 9–31.

¹³⁹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 42.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

pollination, Griffith understandably chooses to emphasize the growing disparity between the two groups. One poignant example is the negative response of *all* Christians to the early Muslim invaders (not just the Chalcedonian Christians). Griffith writes, “Christians of all communities unanimously regarded the conquest as a disaster.”¹⁴² Granted, Griffith illustrates the rich intellectual interactions of *later* Islamic history, but makes it clear that this functioned under the auspices of Islamic hegemony. An awareness Griffith’s work will be helpful in Chapter III, where an effort will be made to analyze the aftermath of Anastasios’ theological legacy. It is now time to inspect the invigorating thesis of Fred Donner.

Donner focuses his energies on the dynamic period of early Islam before ‘Abd al-Malik. In relative contrast to Griffith, Donner tends to downplay the profound distinction between early Muslims and their religious counterparts. He fundamentally challenges the traditional account of Islam’s development on several fronts. His combined usage of primary texts, archaeology, and numismatics lends strength to his argument that Griffith’s seems to be lacking. Donner summarizes his position by explaining how Islam “began to emerge as a self-consciously distinct form of religion in the time of ‘Abd al-Malik following the Second Civil War.”¹⁴³ Until ‘Abd al-Malik, this community included Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians, and basically any other groups who were willing to assent to a general monotheistic belief (including belief in the End and good moral behavior).

Donner’s insight on the term “muslim” is integral to his thesis. He insists that the earliest Muslims did not call themselves Muslims. Rather, they identified themselves and each other as “Believers.” This is shown to be true in many early documents (such as the Umma Document) and especially in the Qur’an itself. In fact, within the pages of the Qur’an, the term *mu’min* (one who believes) is used to describe Muhammad and his followers nearly one thousand times. In comparison, the term *muslim* (one who submits) is used only seventy-five times—some occurrences of which are vague and open to

¹⁴² Ibid., 28.

¹⁴³ G. R. Hawting, “Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam,” *Journal of Religion* 91, no. 2 (April 1, 2011): 284.

dispute.¹⁴⁴ Thus, Donner prefers to describe early Islam as an expansion of the “Community of Believers.”¹⁴⁵

Following this observation about the usage of terminology is a concern about the name of the Prophet, Muhammad. It is significant that the *shahada* (statement of faith), until about 685, contained absolutely no mention of Muhammad.¹⁴⁶ It simply read: “There is no god but God.” Similarly, Muhammad’s name seems to be dwarfed in importance by the frequent reference to the Community of Believers in the early literature.¹⁴⁷ This has led scholars to question the significance of Muhammad’s spiritual identity. On this topic Donner writes,

The early Believers were not particularly concerned with defining precisely what was [Muhammad’s] status as messenger or prophet. This they simply accepted as uncontroversial, turning their main attention to the essence of his message—the need to recognize God’s oneness and omnipotence, and to live by God’s law in preparation for the End.¹⁴⁸

The confession of a basic “moralistic monotheism,” including the idea of God as Creator and impending Judge, was of utmost importance. The unique identity of Muhammad was not championed as a distinctive trait of the Believers.

Diversity and cooperation in the early Community of Believers is strongly supported by the records of the groups it contained. Several Jewish tribes and at least two Christian tribes (the Kalb and the Taghlib) functioned within the Community of Believers as legitimate participants, even going to battle alongside their fellow monotheistic “Believers.”¹⁴⁹ On this point the following excerpt from the Nestorian patriarch, Isho’yahb III, demonstrates the tolerance and cooperation among the early Believers: “[they] not only do not fight Christianity, they even commend our religion, show honor to the priests and monasteries and saints of our Lord, and make gifts to the monasteries and churches.”¹⁵⁰ Another famous example is the fact that early Believers comfortably used the church of St. John in Damascus as their place of prayer.¹⁵¹ The emphasis of the

¹⁴⁴ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 10.

¹⁴⁶ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 112.

¹⁴⁷ Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 38.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴⁹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 181.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵¹ Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” 51.

Monophysites on the one *divine* nature of Christ might have enabled them to affirm with the Believers that “God is one” without much difficulty. Ironically, the Nestorians might also have been capable of affirming the oneness of God because they were so focused on espousing the *humanity* of Christ (which would not have sounded like a rival deity). These specific theological motivations, however, are largely speculative and greatly hinge upon the peculiarities of the various Christian groups.

The Umma Document, or Constitution of Medina, is one of the most convincing evidences of the inclusivity of the early Believers. It clearly grants certain rights to some of the Jews in Medina as long as they adhere to the monotheistic beliefs and pay the basic tax.¹⁵² In fact, some of the inconsistencies in the text can only be properly understood if the Jews are functioning as members of the Community of Believers.¹⁵³ For example, the Jews of Banu ‘Awf are identified as being in community (*umma*) with the Believers, but it is simultaneously acknowledged that they possess their own religion/law (*din*).¹⁵⁴ Thus, although the Jews were clearly a distinct religious group, they were allowed to be included in the Community of Believers because they conformed to the more general requirements by which it operated.

In all reality, religious zeal and commitment are probably not the best way to measure the coherence of the Community of Believers. Rather, it is more effective to evaluate the complex system of tribal allegiances and bloodlines that were being added to the community. The significance of tribal associations is evidenced all too clearly by the two civil wars (*fitan*). In stark contrast to the contemporary Christian factions, these wars were not primarily concerned with theological orthodoxy. Rather, they were concerned that the rightful successor would lead their bold new monotheistic campaign of purification.

A rebuttal to this assertion is well heeded because religious factors were clearly at play in the Community of Believers. After all, the leader of the Believers was widely understood to function as some sort of liaison between God and the Believers.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid., 28–34.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 30–31.

¹⁵⁵ The term “prophet” has been carefully avoided here because Muhammad occupies the indispensable position as the “last prophet” of Islam. Furthermore, the caliphs in Islam must not be conflated with Christian leaders, who are able to hear directly from God. Rather, the caliph’s role as

Nonetheless, the ultimate point to be made here is that membership in the Community of Believers was defined much more by adherence to the socio-political mandate of the community than by a recitation of a precise religious statement or the performance of certain cultic rites. Furthermore, as the success of the Believers' military campaigns continued to grow, a share of the economic and political gains became enticing motivation for the enlistment of new members. Donner claims that by the time of the Second Civil War, the conquests "had become less a matter of personal zeal... and more a lucrative form of state policy intended to keep revenues and plunder flowing into the treasury."¹⁵⁶ This description stands in vivid contrast to the Christian debates discussed in Section 1—no pope, emperor, or patriarch ever equated the religious conversion of citizens with a consistent source of revenue. It is too facile to say that the conquests and raiding parties of the Community of Believers were solely motivated by materialistic gain, but it was a powerful incentive and helps explain the rapid success of such a diverse group. Still, the classic explanation remains wanting.

The swift dissemination of early Islamic hegemony is an impressive fact of history. There are multiple theories that attempt to explain this occurrence. One major factor concerns the depleted condition of the Roman Empire.¹⁵⁷ This alone, however, does not convincingly explain the astonishing success of the early Muslims. Donner, among others, seriously questions the "traditional narrative of violent conquest,"¹⁵⁸ in which the young community of Muhammad's followers quickly and decisively conquers the surrounding regions through physical force. The archeological evidence simply does not substantiate such a radical claim. Here Donner must be quoted at length:

The "violent conquest" model thus presents the historian with the double problem of explaining, first, how the conquest could have succeeded in the face of certain opposition to it by these articulate religious communities, and second, how the minute number of conquerors could have maintained their hegemony over a vastly more numerous hostile population. The "violent conquest model" also

"liaison" was to faithfully steward the entrusted guidelines of the Qur'an and deliberate with the understanding that God has bestowed upon them the responsibility of righteous leadership.

¹⁵⁶ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 190.

¹⁵⁷ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 23; This also involves the plague of 541 which killed a quarter of the population in Europe, Africa, and Asia. See Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, 252; Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, Volume 2, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2002).

¹⁵⁸ Steven C. Judd, "Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 763.

makes it difficult to understand how the Believers could have maintained their distinctive identity and avoided acculturation or assimilation into this large conquered population, particularly during the first few years when they had no local infrastructure of their own on which to rely.¹⁵⁹

It seems that the so-called “conquests” mostly involved a simple shift in political allegiance. This helps to further explain how such a small group was able to so rapidly take control of such a large area. This model becomes all the more convincing when understood in the light of various tribal alliances. The agenda was not so much the imposition of a brand new religious system, but rather an “ousting [of] often unpopular overlords.”¹⁶⁰ It was a “gradual process of social and cultural transformation”¹⁶¹ which can be strongly supported by the archeological evidence.¹⁶²

As mentioned previously, the role of ‘Abd al-Malik marks a decisive turning point in the development of the Community of Believers. Concurrent with his reign emerged a strong new assertion of what it meant to be a Muslim as distinct from a monotheist. In order to create this new identity, ‘Abd al-Malik inscribed the newly built Dome of the Rock with anti-Trinitarian paraphrases from the Qur’an.¹⁶³ The “double *shahada*,” which included the addition of the phrase “Muhammad is the apostle of God,”¹⁶⁴ began appearing in literature at this point and is also noticed in ‘Abd al-Malik’s significant revision to coins.¹⁶⁵ Concomitant was the intentional “campaign to erase the public symbols of Christianity, especially the previously ubiquitous sign of the cross.”¹⁶⁶ Although these new religious specifications seem to be intentionally aimed against Christianity, they should be at least partially understood as part of a broader effort to unite the empire after two civil wars by establishing a common sense of unity. In fact, many other reforms were made that were not associated with religious belief, such as the standardization of weights and measures.

¹⁵⁹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 109.

¹⁶⁰ Judd, “Muhammad and the Believers,” 763.

¹⁶¹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 107.

¹⁶² Construction of new churches and use of current churches continued in areas under Muslim rule for approximately one century after the initial “conquest.”

¹⁶³ For example, “O people of the book, do not exaggerate in your religion (din), and speak of God only the truth. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary was only the apostle (rasul) of God and His word, which He cast unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His apostles and do not say ‘three.’” [cf. Q. 4:171]; cf. “Appendix B” in Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 233-35.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 210.

¹⁶⁶ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 14.

In this process of reform, it seems that the Islamic relation to Christians and Jews had to be reconsidered. It was eventually (as well as gradually and inconsistently) determined that the Christians were to be placed *outside* the new community of Islam. It is fascinating to note that the contemporary Christian polemics are only concerned with refuting internal heresies (such as Monophysitism) until well into the eighth century. Many scholars have sought to explain this lack of Islamic mention by claiming that Christians did not yet understand Islam well enough to refute it. This is unsatisfying and lends all the more credibility to Donner's position. The evidence suggests that Christian writers before the time of 'Abd al-Malik (as well as several years after) simply saw no need to refute the Community of Believers as a religious system because it did not yet possess an identity distinct from simple monotheistic belief.¹⁶⁷

After considering the recent scholarship, the portrait of early Islam that emerges is one of dynamic and tangible relations with other cultural and religious communities. By no means can Islam be said to have developed a unique, original theology in isolation from other influences before imposing authority upon its subjects. Thus, it seems that the evidence allows one to assert with reasonable confidence that Islam was still in a state of considerable flux as history approached the end of Anastasios' life and the beginning of 'Abd al-Malik's reign.

¹⁶⁷ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 222.

Chapter II: Anastasios of Sinai (630 – 700)

Section I: Biography

The first extant icon of Jesus dead on the cross, with his eyes completely closed, dates from the first half of the eighth century and comes from the monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai.¹⁶⁸ However, the first *description* of such an icon is found some fifty years earlier in a work from Anastasios¹⁶⁹ of Sinai known as the *Hodegos* (“guidebook”¹⁷⁰), which dates from the late seventh century. Considering the iconographical hesitations of portraying the death of Christ (discussed in Chapter I), this is a significant and unprecedented theological advancement. The purpose of this chapter is to carefully examine the theological positions of Anastasios and how he implements a new program of “pictorial weapons”¹⁷¹ in order to refute the most threatening heresy of his day—namely Monophysitism.

There has always been a dynamic relationship between theology and the icon. Kitzinger states, “The areas of theology and image cult overlapped, but it was only in the course of the Iconoclastic controversy that they were made to coincide.”¹⁷² The thesis of this paper is partly to challenge, or at least modify this statement by demonstrating that Anastasios actually forced a synthesis of theology and the icon well before the Iconoclasm of Leo III. As will be shown, Anastasios brilliantly utilized icons to explicitly and unequivocally castigate the position of the Monophysites.

Biographical information regarding Anastasios is relatively sparse and has been infamously confused since the earliest Christian chroniclers. For example, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (c. 1320) caused more than 300 years of confusion because he conflated “Anastasios the Sinaite with Anastasios I, patriarch of Antioch (559-598), [and] added to this composite Anastasios the martyr-patriarch Anastasios II of Antioch (599-

¹⁶⁸ This is the opinion of Anna Kartsonis, among others. Kurt Weitzmann believes this icon (B. 36) originates in Palestine, but can provide no absolute evidence. See Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 40; Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 61–64.

¹⁶⁹ This spelling has been used due to its correlation with the Greek Ἀναστάσιος. The alternative spelling, “Anastasius,” is also prevalent in scholarship and will be seen at some points in this paper when the works of other scholars are quoted.

¹⁷⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all translations to English are from the present author.

¹⁷¹ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 58.

¹⁷² Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 121.

609).”¹⁷³ Additionally, Sidney Griffith notes the way in which Eutychios of Alexandria (877 – 940) associates Anastasios with the general Mahan/Βαανής.¹⁷⁴ Eutychios explains how Mahan chose the monastic lifestyle in order to escape punishment for his failure to save Syria from the invading Arab forces.¹⁷⁵ Most modern scholarship disregards this story because the evidence of Anastasios’ extensive theological training seems incongruent with the life of a military general.¹⁷⁶ This conflation of Anastasioi is now mostly sorted, but has resulted in even less biographical material concerning the actual Anastasios of Sinai.

Anastasios appears to have been born in the town of Amathus on the island of Cyprus, which is where he first began his “ecclesiastical career.”¹⁷⁷ He most likely functioned as a deacon and perhaps served as a priest under the leadership of the local bishop, John.¹⁷⁸ He left Cyprus shortly after the Arabs invaded in 649 and traveled to the Holy Land in order to become a monk. He soon joined the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai and was eventually ordained as a priest. But this does not mean that Anastasios was an isolated ascetic. Quite to the contrary, it is apparent that he did a great deal of traveling throughout Palestine, Egypt, and Syria, and even seems to have held some type of a missionary role.¹⁷⁹ During his travels outside the monastery, he probably participated in the popular public debates of his day, and was especially concerned with refuting Monophysitism.¹⁸⁰ He specifically spoke against Monophysite groups in Alexandria.¹⁸¹

In the past, some have averred that Anastasios had no knowledge of Islam.¹⁸² This view was based upon the surprising fact that Islam is never explicitly mentioned in

¹⁷³ P. Allen, “Anastasii Sinaitae Viae Dux,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 36, no. 3 (September 1, 1982): 294.

¹⁷⁴ Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims,” 343f.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Jean Maspéro, *Histoire des Patriarches d’Alexandrie depuis la mort de l’empereur Anastase jusqu’à la réconciliation des églises Jacobites (518 - 616)* (Paris: Champion, 1923), 337.

¹⁷⁷ David Thomas et al., eds., “Anastasios of Sinai,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 193.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ For a more detailed account of such practices see Shahîd, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 AD.”

¹⁸¹ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 1.3.29.

¹⁸² “Islam” was likely not even known by such a name until the end of Anastasios’ life.

the work of Anastasios.¹⁸³ However, it has now been thoroughly demonstrated that Anastasios was, in fact, aware of Islam.¹⁸⁴ By the time of his travels, everywhere Anastasios journeyed was under the total control of the early Muslims; it was readily apparent that a new religious force was active. Indeed, it seems that one of Anastasios' main motivations for traveling was to help Christians who were faced with the new challenge of living under Islamic hegemony. This reality makes his general awareness of Islam quite conceivable. Anastasios must have recognized Islam as some type of group distinct from Christianity.

Anastasios' grasp of specific Islamic *belief* and *teaching*, however, is slightly more difficult to verify. In addition to encouraging his Christian brethren in his writings, Anastasios probably fulfilled some type of pastoral duties during his travels. Whether by direct contact with Muslims themselves or by interacting with Christians under their rule, Anastasios seems to have become impressively cognizant of what he calls the error of the "Arabs."¹⁸⁵ Although he never directly confronts Muslims like the later John of Damascus (c. 676 – 749), Anastasios mentions their beliefs several times in his writing.¹⁸⁶ As will be seen below, Anastasios possessed a keen knowledge of the Qur'an and accurately mentions the basic tenets of Islam in the *Hodegos*.

The written works of Anastasios offer a fascinating glimpse into seventh century Christianity. His primary goal was to provide guidance for Chalcedonian Christians, particularly in response to the various heresies that were circulating at the time. Owing to the comprehensive scope of the *Hodegos* and the stature of Anastasios, it may seem surprising that the beliefs of the Muslims are not directly considered in his refutation of heresies. Moreover, Anastasios fails to mention some of the most basic terminology associated with the error of the "Arabs."¹⁸⁷ This conundrum is easily resolved when one realizes that Anastasios understands Monophysitism as the root of error of the "Arabs."¹⁸⁸ It is true that at certain points Anastasios simply uses the term "Arabs" (or

¹⁸³ Maspéro, *Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie*.

¹⁸⁴ See Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims."

¹⁸⁵ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 1.1.46.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.1.41–52; 7.2.117–120; 10.2.4.5–12.

¹⁸⁷ Anastasios' never once uses the term "Muslim," "Qur'an," "Muhammad," or "Islam."

¹⁸⁸ Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the *Hodegos*, and the Muslims," 342; Thomas et al., "Anastasios of Sinai," 196.

“Saracens”) as a geographical distinguisher. However, his quotation of the Qur’an (often with identical vocabulary¹⁸⁹) in connection with the use of “Arabs” clearly demonstrates his allusion to early Muslims.¹⁹⁰

Although Anastasios wrote in Greek, he clearly knew a great deal of Arabic as well. The fact that Anastasios makes accurate reference to the ideas of the Qur’an does not mean that he had access to a written copy. Indeed, it would be difficult to assert that the Qur’an was even available in written form at this point. Rather, Anastasios was most likely recalling the verbal recitation of the Qur’an, which he would have frequently encountered in his travels. Such recitation of the Qur’an¹⁹¹ is an integral feature of Islam and played an especially important role in providing practical social and civil guidelines. Due to his own role as an orator, it is not unreasonable to assume that Anastasios could have recalled a great deal of content from the Qur’an with impressive accuracy.

In his *Homily 3*, Anastasios interprets the conquest of the early Muslims as punishment for the heresies of Monophysite rulers, specifically the heresy of Monotheletism espoused by Emperor Heraklios.¹⁹² Consequently, Anastasios devoted his energies to refuting the paramount Monophysite errors. He accomplished this both in his writings and by means of public debates in his travels. His knowledge of Islam is not crucial to his main argument, and is therefore only used to instantiate how the Monophysites have produced new heretical groups. In this respect, Anastasios is convinced that the beliefs of the Muslims—although clearly distinct from those of the Monophysites—were developed at least partially in reaction to the Monophysite beliefs.¹⁹³ According to Anastasios the Muslims were not convinced by Monophysite doctrine, which they believed represented normative Christianity. Consequently, the Monophysites misled the early Muslims in a way that birthed a distinct religious movement rather than in a way that might have led to a fresh expression of Monophysitism.

Perhaps the most potent example of such misleading can be observed in the ardent loyalty to the θεοτόκος by the Monophysites. Their protection of the θεοτόκος in

¹⁸⁹ Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims,” 352.

¹⁹⁰ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 1.1.44-49.

¹⁹¹ The word “Qur’an” means “the recitation.”

¹⁹² Griffith, “Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims,” 345.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 350.

response to the Nestorian Controversy arguably evolved into a cultic worship parallel to that of Jesus Himself. It is not difficult to imagine how non-Christians might have misunderstood such cultic activity and conflated it with polytheistic worship.¹⁹⁴

In the early sixteenth surah of the Qur'an, we find the clear admonition: "Take not to you two gods. He is only One God; so have awe of Me."¹⁹⁵ As already outlined in Chapter I, the primary mission of Muhammad was to reject polytheism and preach the oneness of God. Although this certainly applied to the popular pagan practices of Arabia, it also became an important way for Muhammad to assess the position of Christians. The Christian profession of Jesus as the fully divine Son of God obviously clashed with the radical monotheistic edict of Muhammad, but the idea of Mary's divinity further augmented the apparent tritheism of Christians. The fifth surah of the Qur'an specifically identifies these ideas as a polytheistic error of Christians: "God said, 'O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, "Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God"?"¹⁹⁶ Therefore, Griffith claims:

Whoever among the Arabs who invaded Syria/Palestine, who had heard the Qur'an proclaimed, would certainly have thought, on the basis of *al-Mā'idah* (5).116, that Jesus' disbelieving followers taught that he and his mother were two gods.¹⁹⁷

What is more, the Christian affirmation of Jesus as the "Son of God" additionally implied that Mary was God's consort.¹⁹⁸ When the early Muslims (including Muhammad) heard the term "Trinity" being preached in the public market places they somewhat logically concluded that the three members were God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus the Son. Consequently, Anastasios mentions these false Trinitarian perceptions of Christianity held by the "Arabs" in the beginning of *Hodegos*.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ See C. John Block, "Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of 'Thalātha' in Qur'ān 4.171 and 5.73," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 50–75; Also see Peter of Callinicum et al., *Peter of Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1981).

¹⁹⁵ Qur'an 16 (*An-Nahl*): 51, (Arberry).

¹⁹⁶ Qur'an 5 (*Al-Mā'idah*): 116, (Arberry).

¹⁹⁷ Griffith, "Anastasios of Sinai, the Hodegos, and the Muslims," 349.

¹⁹⁸ It is fascinating to consider the Islamic story of Mary. The miracle of Jesus' birth is clearly a miracle from Allah, but the Qur'an firmly emphasizes Mary's purity as a virgin and her honorable reputation among the community. Joseph is never mentioned. See Qur'an 19 (*Maryam*), (Arberry).

¹⁹⁹ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 1.1.41–52.

Still, Anastasios viewed the Monophysite heresy as a far greater and more serious problem than the misinformed beliefs of the “Arabs,” which he simply calls “false notions.”²⁰⁰ In his mind, if he could correct the Monophysite errors, he could simultaneously correct the majority of the errors of early Islam. If Christians could properly understand the distinction of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus, there would be no need to deify Mary as the θεοτόκος. Anastasios believed that the superficial arguments of the Muslims could be easily countered by his primary focus upon orthodox Christology. Here it is also worth recalling the thesis of Fred Donner (discussed in Chapter I). Donner convincingly argues that the early Muslims (or “Believers,” as they called themselves) did not clearly establish a distinct religious identity until after the reform of ‘Abd al-Malik, which would not have occurred until the very end of Anastasios’ life.²⁰¹ Therefore, while Anastasios was certainly familiar with the beliefs of the “Arabs,” he apparently saw them as similar to and no more threatening than those of the Monophysites.

Anastasios was not an iconophile (icon lover), a term that became common during the Iconoclasm. He was not concerned with defending the legitimacy of icon use *per se* as others would later do during the Iconoclasm. Instead, Anastasios focused on appropriating the icon for a larger theological purpose. As already mentioned, this purpose was to defeat the Monophysites with sound Chalcedonian theology. Monophysites had been opposed to religious images since the late fifth century when Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523) passionately rejected depictions of Christ, and so Anastasios might have been especially eager to use the icon against them.²⁰² It seems that many well-meaning Chalcedonian groups were negatively influenced by the iconoclastic attitude of the Monophysites to the point that they quit using icons, concerned that they were violating the Second Commandment.²⁰³ In this light, Anastasios’ promulgation of

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.1.44–49.

²⁰¹ ‘Abd al-Malik came to power in 685, and Anastasios is thought to have completed the *Hodegos* between 686 and 689. The proximity in time presents enticing possibilities for historical theories, but it seems most reasonable to the present author that the reform of ‘Abd al-Malik had not become universally or unilaterally incorporating to point of seriously impacting Anastasios at the time he completed the *Hodegos*. This position might be further supported by the fact that John of Damascus still classifies Islam as a Christian heresy approximately fifty years after Anastasios.

²⁰² Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 131.

²⁰³ Ibid.

icon usage against the Monophysites becomes even more understandable. He believed that the production of physical icons (which would encourage Chalcedonians and irritate the Monophysites) could be combined with persuasive theology (which would overtly censure heresy) in order to execute a double blow against the Monophysites.

It is unclear whether Anastasios attended the Third Council of Constantinople (680 – 81). What is clear, however, is his knowledge of Monotheletism (one will) and the decision made against it at Constantinople III. The council—convoked by Emperor Constantine IV—anathematized Monotheletism and affirmed two separated wills in Christ. Thus, even if he was not physically present, Anastasios seems to be aware of the significance of Constantinople III.

It is also unclear whether or not Anastasios attended the Council of Justinian II in Trullo (691 – 692), which would have transpired when Anastasios was approximately sixty years old. Among other things, the council made crucial decisions regarding the production and usage of icons. Specifically, the council required that Christ be depicted in human likeness rather than symbolic fashion (such as the lamb). Since Anastasios was a monk and not a bishop, it is unlikely that he was present at the Council of Trullo. Nonetheless, his explicit usage of the Christ icon is certainly in accordance with the general decisions of the Council in Trullo, and many have tried to draw a correlation between the two. More details of such a correlation will be considered in the third section of this paper, but next a careful study of Anastasios' defining work, *Hodegos*, is in order.

Section 2: Hodegos (ὉΔΗΓΟΣ)

Anastasios wrote many works, including the important *Questions and Answers*, but his most famous is *Hodegos*.²⁰⁴ His works were widely circulated in iconophile florilegia and thus endured considerable copying and reproduction. As a result, lively discussion is involved in determining precisely how much of *Hodegos* is original to Anastasios. It is certainly clear that the present form of *Hodegos* has undergone an appreciable editing process. This is most plainly shown by the addition of σχόλια (notes).

²⁰⁴ The Latin title for this work is *Viae Dux*, by which the most recent edition of the text from Uthemann is titled. See Uthemann, *Viae Dux*.

These σχόλια vary in their purpose, but demonstrate a development in thought by attempting to clarify the contents of *Hodegos*. For example, the σχόλιον at the end of the second section of chapter twenty-two speaks about the importance of observing σχόλια so that the reader will not be ill disposed (κακοθελῶς).²⁰⁵

Another factor that reveals the occurrence of redaction relates to the stylistic content of *Hodegos*. Allen notes that *Hodegos* contains a variety of genres including “erotapokriseis, aporiai, dialexis, epilysis, etymologies, a synopsis of synods, patristic florilegia, and even a satirical sketch directed against the Severans.”²⁰⁶ Such a variety strongly suggests that *Hodegos* is composed of several distinct and previously written works.

Still, the *Hodegos* maintains an overall polemic tone. Thus, it appears that Anastasios contributed original work in addition to redacting the existing contents of *Hodegos*. It is unlikely that scholarship will ever determine exactly which portions were originally composed by Anastasios, but it is safe to conclude that his contributions extend far beyond the mere addition of σχόλια. Even if Anastasios was not the source of all the ideas in *Hodegos*, it is cogent to credit him with an expertise of all the material discussed therein.

Determining dates for *Hodegos* seems to be mostly a speculative task. Karl-Heinz Uthemann agrees with the basic dates established by Marcel Richard in 1958,²⁰⁷ but interprets them in a somewhat different manner. Richard placed the composition of original materials in *Hodegos* between 641 – 681 due to an apparent lack of knowledge concerning the Third Council of Constantinople. In the σχόλια there is mention of the Harmasites, a Monophysite sect, which is thought to have been formed in reaction to Constantinople III.²⁰⁸ This led Richard to conclude that the addition of the σχόλια occurred between 686 – 689. Uthemann believes that the separate sections of *Hodegos* were completed before Constantinople III and were eventually compiled into one work between 686 – 689, at which point the σχόλια were added to provide congruence and clarity. Thomas contends that this suggestion “does not rest on solid evidence or fit with

²⁰⁵ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 22.2.109–112.

²⁰⁶ Allen, “Anastasii Sinaitae *Viae Dux*,” 296.

²⁰⁷ Marcel Richard, “Anastase Le Sinaïte l’Hodegos et Le Monothélisme,” *REB* 16 (1958): 29–42.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 30ff.

the life history of Anastasius, so it would be better to assume that the work as a whole was compiled between the 680s and 690s.”²⁰⁹ Accordingly, the present author concurs with the position of Thomas.

Anastasios cites frequently from Severus of Antioch, who was mentioned as one of the most important pioneers of Monophysitism in Chapter I. Anastasios is keenly aware of the tendency for written works to become skewed by later copyists. He specifically accuses the Monophysites of altering the work of the Church Fathers in order to support their theological agenda:

Now one of the reproaches which An. levels continually at the Monophysites of Alexandria is forgery of patristic texts, or tampering with codices containing Christological works, especially those of Cyril of Alexandria.²¹⁰

Thus, he encourages those who would copy his work to do so with precision and without altering his crude and strong language. This is critical to the point concerning his inclusion of icons, as he does not want the included icon to be altered. It is important to note here that Anastasios is speaking about intentional alterations of texts. Anastasios actually quotes the Fathers from memory because he did not have sufficient access to their works and gladly invites future copyists to correct his mistakes.²¹¹

The manuscript (MS) tradition for *Hodegos* is rather convoluted, but Uthemann has made considerable progress in delineating the proper understanding of redaction and development. His edition, *Viae Dux*, is regarded as the most accurate recreation of the archetype. There are more than twenty extant MSS, all of which vary considerably in their content.²¹² Most significant for this study is the specific usage of words σταυρός (cross) and σταύρωσις (crucifixion). While it may seem paltry to some, this discrepancy merits consideration because of the way it potentially affects the depiction of Christ. It must be remembered that in the *Hodegos* Anastasios is using these words in the specific context of his tactic for negating the Monophysite heresy. Simply put, he is primarily speaking about *visual* and *tangible* representations of these words. Therefore, the use of σταύρωσις seems to necessitate an image of Christ, while σταυρός could simply suggest

²⁰⁹ Thomas et al., “Anastasius of Sinai,” 196.

²¹⁰ Allen, “Anastasii Sinaitae *Viae Dux*,” 300.

²¹¹ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 10.1.2.

²¹² Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 45.

a picture of the cross by itself. The majority of the extant documents favor the depiction of a solitary cross as opposed to a cross with the body of Jesus.

All of the MSS share five common usages of σταυρός, but only one common usage of σταύρωσις.²¹³ It is highly probable that these facts suggest the later influence of the Iconoclasm. However, the situation is not as neat as one might hope, for even the individual MSS are not internally consistent. A fitting example of this inconsistency is found in the introduction to chapter twelve where Anastasios writes, “Therefore, while arguing against them again concerning the salvific Passion and the *cross* (σταυρού) of Christ...” (emphasis added)²¹⁴ Here, it is readily apparent that Anastasios uses the genitive form of σταυρός to describe the event of Christ’s crucifixion. While it is tempting to pursue an absolute explanation for the different occurrences of σταυρός and σταύρωσις, the evidence suggests that the divergence is basically nominal. Those familiar with the Greek literature of Late Antiquity and Byzantium will recognize the prevalence of such elusive niceties. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude with Kartsonis that the original author(s) of the *Hodegos* used σταυρός and σταύρωσις as essentially interchangeable words.²¹⁵

Nonetheless, despite the intentions of the original author(s), successive redactors seem to stress the semantic values of σταυρός and σταύρωσις in a necessary response to the new demands of Iconoclasm. Because σταύρωσις more strongly insinuated the vivid depiction of Jesus on the cross, redactors apparently favored σταυρός wherever possible in order to promote the more modest illustration of a simple cross. Such a preference is indicated by the previously mentioned predominance of σταυρός in the extant MSS.

An immediate derivative of these linguistic anomalies is the more obvious dilemma of the actual icons, and several MSS contradict themselves regarding the icon contained in their pages. Based upon Anastasios’ ardent insistence concerning the use of tangible arguments against the Monophysites, the precise nature of the original illustration in the *Hodegos* is a crucial factor. According to Kartsonis, “There can be no doubt that the text of chapter twelve, no matter which its correct editorial variant,

²¹³ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 12.1.29.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 12.1.22–24.

²¹⁵ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 47.

demanded the inclusion of an illustration.”²¹⁶ However, the MSS are rarely in agreement regarding the nature of such an illustration. Demonstrative of such disagreement are three MSS (I, Ξ, Ψ), which repeatedly call for an illustration of the Crucifixion (σταύρωσις), but only include a diagrammatic cross.²¹⁷

In order to sort through the various MSS of the *Hodegos*, Kartsonis divides them into four unique groups.²¹⁸ The first group includes those MSS (of which there are five) that contain an illustration of the dead Christ hanging on the cross. The second group is larger than the first and features illustrations of the cross within a circle, the purpose of which seems to have been to imply “the presence of a body affixed on the cross.”²¹⁹ The third group features only a bare cross, and the MSS of the fourth group contain no illustration at all. The most curious of this last group is the (x) Paris, Bib. Nat., cod. Gr. 1115. Although it does not feature an illustration, it contains an empty space in its pages that the drawing should have occupied.

This variety of MSS was almost certainly caused by the Iconoclasm. The *Hodegos* was a precious and highly prized work for many church leaders, and during the Iconoclasm many likely chose to remove the illustration of the Crucifixion in order to save the rest of the text. This is somewhat surprising considering Anastasios’ insistence upon the drawing, but may be the best explanation of divergent MSS. It is possible that editors believed the circumscribed cross (Kartsonis’ second group) could adequately communicate the emphasis of the Crucifixion while carefully observing the iconoclastic mandates by not explicitly featuring the body of Jesus. Furthermore, the more frequent occurrence of σταυρός instead of σταύρωσις may reflect the changes in the illustration itself; once the body of Christ was removed from the illustration, editors may have substituted σταυρός for σταύρωσις to make the text match.

Still, it seems that the influence of the Iconoclasm was neither universal nor uniform. Consequently, the collective MSS display a spectrum of editorial tendencies. Some redactors removed the explicit illustrations despite the instructions of their text. Others added explicit illustrations as a reaction to the iconoclastic sensitivities of their

²¹⁶ Ibid., 48.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 47f.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 48.

text. These processes result in what Kartsonis fittingly describes as “cross-breed variants” in the MS tradition of the *Hodegos*.²²⁰

Based upon these editorial assumptions, Uthemann ultimately includes an illustration of the Crucifixion (σταύρωσις) in his reconstruction of the archetype.²²¹ The illustration he includes is the (M) Munich, State Lib., cod. Gr. 467, fol. 147^r from the first group of MSS described by Kartsonis. This MS is unique because it features both the body of Christ on the cross and the inscription within a circumscribed circle, all of which agree with the descriptions in the text. In addition to the harmony between the illustration and text, the illustration is fully incorporated into a page of text. This incorporation is juxtaposed by the other illustrations in Kartsonis’ first group, which occupy their own separate page and reflect the developed artistic style of much later Byzantine iconography. Therefore, Uthemann is justified in his selection of the Munich MS because it strongly suggests an affinity with the most original illustration.

Uthemann’s archetypal conclusion is important because of the way the illustration functions in the overall argument of *Hodegos*. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Anastasios passionately advocates the use of “pictorial weapons” in refuting heresies. This agenda is a vital key in understanding how Anastasios views the cooperation of theology and the icon. At one point he writes:

Faithful, guard these for my sake in time of war against the enemies, wielding as a two-edged sword the cross of Christ and the tomb. And when they put forth their convoluted foolery about Theopaschism, lead them to the presented cross and there, *after stabbing them, kill them.* (emphasis added)²²²

Here, Anastasios is describing a typical debate with Monophysites (probably in Alexandria), with which his readers would have been familiar. Although he acknowledges the usefulness and importance of quoting Scripture in such debates, Anastasios is convinced that there is a more powerful method. Mere words—like those of the Church Fathers—can be easily altered. Here, it is highly probable that Anastasios is not only considering written words, but also those of the lively oral debates in which he was so invested. It was not uncommon for these debates to be recorded and distributed as polemic propaganda. Anastasios realized that despite a legitimate victory over a

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Uthemann, *Viae Dux*, clxxxviii–cxciii.

²²² Anastasios, *Viae Dux*, 13.9.91–96.

Monophysite opponent in public, his words could still be twisted and later made to advance the Monophysite cause in writing.

In such an environment, even the words of the Holy Scriptures could be shrewdly contorted to serve the purposes of a theological agenda. Indeed, it seems that such debates in Alexandria frequently made use of the Scriptures. Anastasios was likely frustrated by the fact that both he and his opponents could quote the same passage of Scripture in different ways. Thus, Anastasios promotes a method that is superior to the use of words, that of *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις*. In general, this term is best translated as “representations,” “figurines,” or “material productions.”²²³ In other places Anastasios uses *πραγματικαὶ ἀποδείξεις* to mean “material proofs.”²²⁴ These two phrases can be understood as functionally synonymous. Anastasios claims that these *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις* are “mightier by far than the verbal words, and biblical quotes,”²²⁵ presumably because they cannot be twisted or perverted by the Monophysites.

As mentioned at the outset, this method of defense proposed by Anastasios is simply unprecedented in the history of Christianity. Later in history, the general method of *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις* is advanced and popularized by many iconophiles. But the project of Anastasios must have seemed quite audacious during his own lifetime. Kartsonis confirms the significance of Anastasios’ method by writing, “The tactical use of Christological imagery for polemical purposes is most unusual for the seventh century, though it becomes standard practice in the post-Iconoclastic period.”²²⁶

The *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις* clearly constitute the most powerful defense against the heretics, and the apex of all such material proofs is the Crucifix icon. The Crucifix icon (or illustration) is first featured and described in chapter twelve of the *Hodegos*. In the next chapter, Anastasios continues to explain how the Crucifix should be used against the Monophysites and continually makes reference to the Crucifix included in chapter twelve. Therefore, the contents of chapters twelve and thirteen will be carefully studied in the next several pages.²²⁷

²²³ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 42.

²²⁴ Ibid., 43.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., 58.

²²⁷ Due to the innovative concepts discussed in these chapters, the present author assumes that they are the original and unique contribution of Anastasios.

The overall structure of the *Hodegos* begins with general statements against heresies and affirmations of true, orthodox belief. As the text continues, Anastasios systematically addresses specific heretical groups in order to expose their weaknesses and flaws. Having just clarified the correct understanding for Cyril's usage of φύσεις and ὑποστάσεις in chapter eleven, Anastasios proceeds in chapter twelve to rebuke a Monophysite sect known as the Theopaschites. Chapman claims that the difficulty of the Crucifixion forced the Monophysites to profess only one of two options²²⁸: "either that the whole Divine Nature became man and suffered and died, or else that each of the three Persons had a Divine Nature of His own."²²⁹ The Monophysites were sharply divided on this issue. The Theopaschites sided with the first view and proclaimed that "Christ's divinity had also suffered during the Passion."²³⁰ Apparently, they were active in Alexandria and seem to have been especially convincing in their arguments. Therefore, Anastasios specifically mentions the Theopaschites as his targets in the beginning of chapter twelve.

Contrary to other near contemporary works of this period (e.g. the Rabbula Gospels), Anastasios' use of an illustration was not merely a decorative addition or embellishment of the text. Although the Rabbula Gospels feature an image of Christ's crucifixion, the image is of a very different nature²³¹ and an entirely different purpose from the Crucifixion in *Hodegos*. For Anastasios, the illustration of the Crucifixion is "the core material around which the Orthodox defense is constructed."²³² Anastasios frequently explains this vital feature and how he implements the Crucifixion when debating with the Monophysites. At one point, he recounts a particular argument with Theopaschites:

²²⁸ Contrary to Chapman's understanding, there seems to be another and even more radical view. Many Monophysites (especially those in the eastern portions of Byzantium) dealt with concept of the Crucifixion by adopting Docetic views. They asserted that Christ had only appeared to be crucified but in reality suffered no harm.

²²⁹ John Chapman, "Monophysites and Monophysitism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

²³⁰ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 43.

²³¹ The image in the Rabbula gospels is different in many ways. One of the most obvious is the inclusion of many other people in the image, thus detracting from a central focus on Christ. Furthermore, Jesus eyes are clearly open and focused on the viewer. Finally, the image makes no statements about the nature of the Crucifixion like the included inscriptions in Anastasios' diagram.

²³² Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 57.

Therefore, while arguing against them again concerning the salvific Passion and the cross (σταυρού) of Christ, we realized from watching their arguments that they were fighting to prove God the Logos passible and mortal along with his own flesh. So, we no longer spoke verbally, but answered them by means of material figures and marks (πραγματικῶν σχημάτων καὶ ὑποδειγμάτων) by carving on some [wooden?] tablet the Crucifixion (σταύρωσιν) of the Master and an inscription.²³³

The importance of the complementary inscription should not be neglected. Based upon the drawing included in Uthemann's archetype, it read: "The Word (λόγος) of God on the cross (ἐν σταυρῷ) and the reasonable soul (ψυχὴ) and body (σῶμα)."²³⁴ This crucially identified the various elements portrayed in the Crucifix icon and allowed Anastasios to challenge his Theopaschite interlocutors in a direct, unequivocal manner:

"Look at Christ, the Son of the living God, complete and indivisible on the cross; that is God the Logos and the reasonable soul which is hypostatically united to him and the body. Which one of these three was mortified and died and became inert and immobile. Watch carefully: I did not ask you which was crucified, but which of these three (which exist) in Christ was killed and remained dead for three days?" Thus questioned by us, the heretics answered in unison utterly dishonored: "The body of Christ died." We address(ed) them again: "Maybe his soul was killed or died or suffered?" They answer(ed): "Impossible."²³⁵

Thus, Anastasios demonstrates how his method could be effectively practiced to correct the errors of the Theopaschites. He repeatedly implores his readers to consider and reflect on the icon of Jesus' body hanging dead on the cross. Thus, "The body of Christ offers the crux of Sinaites' answer to Theopaschism."²³⁶ By arguing against the specific one-nature beliefs of the Theopaschites, Anastasios confirms the two-natured, hypostatic union of Chalcedon. This specific treatment of the Theopaschites is just another point in his overall attack on the Monophysites.

Anastasios also addresses the specific Monophysite sect known as the Akephaloi, who apparently believed that the human nature became deified when joined with the divine nature and was therefore like a "drop of vinegar in the ocean."²³⁷ This polemic elicits even stronger language from Anastasios as he explicitly describes Christ's death:

²³³ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 12.1.1–30.

²³⁴ Uthemann does not include the phrase "ἐν σταυρῷ" in the text of his archetype.

²³⁵ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, 12.3.16–28, trans. Kartsonis.

²³⁶ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 49.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

In the likeness of dead men God became truly a corpse in the flesh. In the likeness of man he was laid in the grave. And we saw him lying dead full of divinity, divorced from the soul, the body truly dead, soulless, soundless, breathless, speechless, motionless, sightless, unable to move, unable to teach, unable to feel, just the body of God truly dead like all corpses. And upon seeing this vision and mighty sight of the deadness of God's body we were stupefied. And getting back to those words which the heretics think they (can) utter against us, we questioned them perplexed while *observing* intently the all holy body of Christ: "If the Logos became flesh, so that his body may become Logos, how (is it possible that) the body of Christ, which spoke from the cross a short while ago, does not utter one word now in the grave even though it has in itself the unsilenceable God Logos... If upon deification the body of Christ became divinity, too, how (is it possible) it does not watch and see as the divinity which watches everything, but the body, which has in itself the light that enlightens every man, has *the eye(s) closed*? How (is it possible) it does not live, that which has inside the life of the world? How (is it possible) it does not breath, since it is unseparated from God, who is the breath and life of everything? (emphases added)²³⁸

The fact that they were "observing intently the all holy body of Christ" together is indicative of there being some type of illustration or drawing at hand. Furthermore, the fact that the eyes of Jesus in this particular illustration were closed seems to confirm that it came from Anastasios since such a feature was nonexistent in other artwork. Without a doubt, Anastasios felt comfortable and justified in displaying the death of Jesus in as graphic a manner as artistic abilities allowed. Thus, a strong affirmation of the death of Jesus' body was the cornerstone of Anastasios refutation of Monophysitism, regardless of the particular sects he was confronting.

Section 3: The Council in Trullo (691-692)

The Council in Trullo²³⁹ was convened by Justinian II in order to deliberate on disputed practices in the Church. The earlier Councils had firmly established the official doctrinal positions of the Church, but not much attention had been given to the practical needs of the laity. This was most evident in the liturgical differences between the East

²³⁸ Anastasios of Sinai, *Viae Dux*, trans. Kartsonis, 13.9.29–70.

²³⁹ Also known as "The Quinisext Council," from the Latin *Concilium Quinisextum*. Because the previous two councils (the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils) had neglected particular details relating to the laity, this "fifth-sixth council" sought to adjudicate on these important concerns.

and the West, especially in relation to the number of Apostolic Canons.²⁴⁰ Of the 215 bishops in attendance at The Council in Trullo, only one was from a Western patriarchate, and the deliberations were noticeably swayed by such a showing.²⁴¹ This meant that despite the West's preference for maintaining certain practices in the Latin speaking Church, the East deliberately opposed Western practices and reiterated the typical Eastern positions. The difference was primarily related to the Apostolic Canons, fifty of which were accepted by the West while all eighty-five were accepted by the East.²⁴² Perhaps the most notable disagreement concerned the celibacy of clergy. The Greek Church of the East determined that all clergy except bishops were allowed to marry and delivered harsh punishments on any who attempted to separate a cleric from his wife.²⁴³

Although Anastasios was certainly ahead of his time in the way he emphasized *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις* and the Crucifix as a way to refute heresy, he was not necessarily original in his depiction of Christ in general. The Council in Trullo played a major role in standardizing the orthodox use of icons across the empire. Some examples include Canons 73, 82, 100. These canons demonstrate an official approval of the use of all beneficial and desirable icons in the Church. One of the most significant icons was that of the cross. Canon 73 demanded the removal of all crosses in the form of floor mosaics to prevent them from being tread upon, thereby protecting their honor. Reciprocally, Canon 100 forbade the use of all undesirable and corrupting images. For the purposes of this paper, however, Canon 82 is most significant. Here, it must be quoted at length:

In some pictures of the venerable icons, a lamb is painted to which the Precursor points his finger, which is received as a type of grace, indicating beforehand through the Law, our true Lamb, Christ our God. Embracing therefore the ancient types and shadows as symbols of the truth, and patterns given to the Church, we prefer grace and truth, receiving it as the fulfillment of the Law. In order therefore that that which is perfect may be delineated to the eyes of all, at least in coloured expression, we decree that the figure in human form of the Lamb who takes away

²⁴⁰ Thomas Shahan, "Council in Trullo," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908).

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Thomas Shahan, "Apostolic Canons," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908); Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "Council in Trullo," in *NPNF*, trans. Henry Percival, vol. 14, Second Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1900), Canon 2.

²⁴³ Shahan, "Council in Trullo."

the sin of the world, Christ our God, be henceforth exhibited in images, instead of the ancient lamb, so that all may understand by means of it the depths of the humiliation of the Word of God, and that we may recall to our memory his conversation in the flesh, his passion and salutary death, and his redemption which was wrought for the whole world.²⁴⁴

The similarities between this canon and the work of Anastasios in *Hodegos* are easily apparent. This is probably indicative of the growing preference in the Chalcedonian Church of the East to display Jesus as a human rather than as a lamb in accordance with the practices of the Western Church, which began in the catacombs of Rome. Some scholars²⁴⁵ have asserted that Anastasios received his inspiration from this canon. The present author finds such a theory untenable. Anastasios had been debating with Monophysites for several decades before Canon 82 was penned. It seems most logical that he gradually developed his usage of *πραγματικαὶ παραστάσεις* as a response to these debates rather than as a result of Canon 82. Even if for the sake of argument it is allowed that Anastasios was inspired by the verdict of Canon 82, it seems highly unlikely that a sixty-year-old monk could have adopted such a new position, personalized it, and then written about his experience of its implementation in a matter of eight years.

Furthermore, Christ's crucifixion is never mentioned specifically in proceedings of the Council in Trullo.²⁴⁶ In fact, the singular allusion to the Crucifixion is in a *negative* context.²⁴⁷ This makes Anastasios' work even more significant. Canon 82 seems to make apparent that the "human form" of Jesus should be depicted, but then suggests that it will serve to "recall to our memory... his passion and salutary death." In short, the actual portrayal of the Crucifixion was not necessary to recall it to memory. Perhaps they had in mind that the nearly ubiquitous image of the cross would further remind congregants of the event of the Crucifixion.²⁴⁸ Regardless, no specific commission of the Crucifix is given.

A final insight relates to Canon 100. This canon prohibits any pictures that could potentially "attract the eye and corrupt the mind, and incite it to the enkindling of base

²⁴⁴ Schaff and Wace, "Council in Trullo," Canon 82.

²⁴⁵ Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 67.

²⁴⁶ In Canon 81, when discussing the hymn called Trisagion, they note how some regions add the phrase, "Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us." See Schaff and Wace, "Council in Trullo," Canon 81.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., Canon 81.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., Canon 73.

pleasures.”²⁴⁹ It should be assumed that this canon is primarily referring to images of a sexually explicit nature. However, the council as a whole is quite clear about keeping “base” things out of the church, including jewelry,²⁵⁰ food,²⁵¹ and animals.²⁵² While the attendees of the council were probably not consciously prohibiting the graphic portrayal of the Crucifixion, it is reasonable to presume that they would have done so based upon the way it would distract from the goal of pure and focused worship.

The assumption that a Crucifix icon would distract the laity is rooted in the novelty of such an object. It is reasonable to assert that such distraction would only be temporary, and the reality is that most Christian groups eventually integrated Crucifix icons in their worship. Nonetheless, the full ingeneration of the Crucifix required several centuries of hard-fought theological dispute, the beginning of which required a bold step of normalizing the Crucifix. The Council in Trullo normalized the depiction of Christ’s human figure, but it did not normalize the depiction of the Crucifixion. Because the council diligently considered the concerns of the laity, the complete absence of the Crucifixion from their discussion makes a powerful argument from silence.

The profound hesitancy in early Christian artwork to depict a dead Christ strongly documents the controversial nature of the Crucifixion in visible form. It follows that the use of any Crucifix icons would have incited enough controversy to reach the ears of the bishops at Trullo. Therefore, the silence regarding Crucifix icons at the Council in Trullo indicates at least that they were not yet popular, and perhaps that they were not yet even existent.

Based upon these observations it is rather curious that Kartsonis does not recognize a clear distinction between the work of Anastasios and the Council of Trullo. Obviously, Anastasios implements the depiction of Christ’s human figure with alacrity. But he goes far beyond what the council was willing to condone. Otherwise, they would have been clear to instruct how the Crucified image of Jesus was necessary for accurately recalling His Passion and how it was helpful for the Church. Therefore, it is important to recognize that Anastasios does, in fact, pioneer a radical approach for defeating heresy. It

²⁴⁹ Ibid., Canon 100.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., Canon 45.

²⁵¹ Ibid., Canon 76.

²⁵² Ibid., Canon 88.

will be argued in the next chapter that Anastasios initiates an iconographic model that profoundly affects the next several centuries.

Section 4: St. Catherine's Monastery

It is evident that Anastasios spent much of his time at St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai, and therefore a brief study of its own heritage and legacy is clearly pertinent to a discussion of Anastasios. Mt. Sinai was an important destination for Christian pilgrimage from an early period and boasts a monastic presence dating to the late fourth century.²⁵³ The monastery building itself was commissioned and built by Justinian in the middle of the sixth century. This provided the area with imperial recognition and more safety for travelers.

Egypt was one of the first places to fall beneath Islamic hegemony in 642, and St. Catherine's was quickly subsumed into the Muslim world. Yet, even before 642, the monks at St. Catherine's could claim interactions with the earliest Muslim's. Muhammad himself signed a document in which he agreed to offer the monks safety and protection.²⁵⁴ This allowed the monks there to enjoy a unique relationship of congeniality with the Muslim rulers. In addition, Mt. Sinai was a revered location for the Muslims, so they appreciated the fact that ascetic Christians were carefully protecting its purity and importance. Thus, monks continued to operate, worship, and study in peace even under Muslim rule.

Because of the pact with Muhammad and remoteness of location, the monks were able to develop their doctrine in unusual isolation. During the Iconoclasm, for example, the monks continued to produce beautifully painted icons.²⁵⁵ This is perhaps one of the main factors that allowed Anastasios to be so bold in his theology and subsequently propagate his iconographical wishes in the form of icons.

²⁵³ Hieromonk Justin of Sinai, "Sinai from the Seventh to the Ninth Century: Continuity in the Midst of Change," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 50.

²⁵⁴ Sidney H. Griffith, "Arab Christians," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 60–65.

²⁵⁵ Hieromonk Justin of Sinai, "Sinai from the Seventh to the Ninth Century: Continuity in the Midst of Change," 51.

Here, it is valuable to distinguish the *illustrations* contained in the *Hodegos* from the icons that later emerge from St. Catherine's. The illustrations of the *Hodegos* should not be considered as proper icons for several reasons. First, it is evident that their purpose was not to achieve a precise, aesthetic appearance, but rather to communicate the central truths of Anastasios' argument. Therefore, the illustrations can be better understood as rough diagrams or templates for the creation of more precise and careful illustrations (icons) later on. Second, because they are contained in the thin pages of the *Hodegos*, the illustrations were most likely not physically used during public debates or in times of worship. In the passage quoted above from 12.1.1–30, Anastasios seems to communicate that he carved or etched the image of the Crucifixion on a more solid medium, such as wood. Thus, the rather fragile illustrations on the pages of the *Hodegos* serve more as representations and prototypes of the physical depictions to be used in debate. A final related point involves the eventual worship practices of icons. Such icons were featured in visible locations so that many people could observe them. The illustrations in the *Hodegos* would not have achieved this purpose, and therefore should be understood as the *precursors* to the production of Crucifix icons that quickly followed.

In addition to the icon mentioned at the beginning of this chapter from the eighth century (B. 36), St. Catherine's houses several other Crucifix icons that feature Jesus with his eyes completely closed. B.32 is actually the "earliest Crucifixion icon in existence."²⁵⁶ But while the B.32 icon may in fact feature a Christ with closed eyes, the face of Jesus is one of the few details of the icon that cannot be properly discerned. Nonetheless, the tradition of Crucifix icons at Sinai is easily discernable from the extant icons housed there. They all seem to follow the same artistic style and format, including the sloping head of Christ, blood flowing from Christ's side, Mary and John at the foot of the Cross, and angels above the cross. Most importantly, every Crucifix icon after B.36 includes Christ with his eyes closed and completely dead on the Cross.²⁵⁷

The B.36 icon is almost certainly the result of Anastasios' prototype in the *Hodegos*. Although Weitzmann believes the B.36 icon originates from Palestine, he also

²⁵⁶ Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 57f.

²⁵⁷ See Ibid., B. 50 and B. 51.

admits that it is very difficult to precisely determine the place of origin for the icons.²⁵⁸ Sotirious, on the other hand, believes that most of the icons come from Egypt, based upon the inscription “H AΓIA MAPIA” (common in Egypt) above Mary’s head rather than “MHTHP ΘEOV.”²⁵⁹ Weitzmann primarily asserts a Palestinian origin for the icon based upon the artistic style, which he claims is clearly Palestinian and not Egyptian.

There may, in fact, be a simple solution to this dilemma. Weitzmann notes, “Geographically Sinai is as close to Egypt as it is to Palestine, and it has been politically more or less part of Egypt since the Arab conquest.”²⁶⁰ This author believes that based upon the history of St. Catherine’s, both B.32 and B.36 could have been produced at the monastery itself while easily being influenced by the artistic style and tradition of Palestine. This hypothesis would help explain the unique theological content (the closed eyes of Jesus inspired by Anastasios) while also explaining the artistic style that seems to reflect that of the Palestinian region.

However, even if one chooses to side with the conclusion of Weitzmann, the novelty of Anastasios’ work need not be dismissed. The surviving manuscripts of *Hodegos* strongly indicate how widely spread his work was. Because of the proximity of Sinai to Jerusalem, it is likely that Jerusalem would have been the first significant ecclesial center to genuinely inherit the iconographical innovation of Anastasios. Therefore, it would have been quite feasible for the strong iconographic tradition in Jerusalem to adopt the ideas of Anastasios with vigor and produce many of the icons that are now housed in St. Catherine’s. This possibility is further strengthened by the later activity of John of Damascus at the St. Sabas Monastery just outside Jerusalem. John is well-known as an adamant spokesperson in the defense of icons during the Iconoclasm. It is at least possible that his beliefs were formed by the powerful and explicit Crucifix icons of Anastasios. Regardless, there is certainly a strong affinity between St. Catherine’s and the monasteries of Palestine, which strongly resisted iconoclasm.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁵⁹ Weitzmann attempts to disprove this conclusion by pointing to the fact that “H AΓIA MAPIA” is also found in a mosaic on Cyprus. It is probably just a coincidence, but fascinating to observe that Cyprus was the birthplace and original home of Anastasios.

²⁶⁰ Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 7.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

Weitzmann's findings shed light on the general traffic of icons to and from Mt. Sinai. The lack of communication and interaction between the Muslim controlled Egypt and Byzantine Constantinople only further emphasizes the originality of Anastasios' work. Although the transport of icons to and from St. Catherine's was mostly restricted during the Iconoclasm, icons continued to be produced in Constantinople, Sinai, and Jerusalem. This fact suggests that Muslims might have continued to be confronted by icons even during the Iconoclasm. If it is true that the work of Anastasios was enthusiastically implemented in the monasteries of Egypt and Palestine, the clash of such icons with Muslim inhabitants in these areas is not difficult to imagine. The next and final chapter will consider the impact of these icons in more depth.

Chapter III: Aftermath (700 – 787)

Throughout the previous two chapters, the impact and significance of the Byzantine Iconoclasm has been alluded to. Now, in this final chapter, the hope is to address this historical occurrence directly. The goal is not to determine an exact or absolute causality, but rather to present a reasonably plausible argument from the best and most recent scholarship available. Although many elements of the Iconoclastic Controversy will remain obscure throughout this study, a fascinating new perspective will be presented that might possibly shed light on many other related areas. The fact that Anastasios' *Hodegos* contains some of the earliest Greek references to Islam²⁶² is compelling, and likely gives insightful clues concerning the interactions of early Islam with Byzantium. If the conclusions of the previous chapter are correct and the *Hodegos* was, in fact, completed before the reforms of 'Abd al-Malik, Anastasios—not 'Abd al-Malik—can be seen as the primary catalyzing agent of the Iconoclastic Period. This means that the Muslim Iconoclasm was a political reaction to Christian theology rather than the product of fundamental theological innovation within Islam.

The predominant claim that will be presented in this chapter is that the role of the Cross and Crucifix icon (especially in connection with Anastasios) played a far more momentous role in the Iconoclastic Controversy than is typically allowed. In order to substantiate this claim, information will be drawn and compiled from a variety of different fields. As was typical of Byzantium, many factors of the Iconoclastic Controversy were likely more political than anything else. G. E. von Grunebaum articulates this truism:

Muslim action as a reaction to internal Christian developments and, more generally, actions within both communities in conformity with shared attitudes and dispositions are observable and these become impediments to too facile an assumption of a flow of ideas in a single direction.²⁶³

This study acknowledges Grunebaum's important observation regarding mutual ideological influences between Muslims and Christians. However, an effort will be made

²⁶² Thomas et al., "Anastasius of Sinai," 197.

²⁶³ G. E. von Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," *History of Religions* 2, no. 1 (July 1, 1962): 4.

in the following pages to demonstrate a plausible explanation for how such interchange first began.

One of the largest conundrums within Byzantine Studies is how the iconoclasm of the Islamic caliphates relates to that of the Byzantine Empire. This author is not aware of any scholars who would categorically deny any relation between Muslim and Byzantine iconoclasm whatsoever. The task of great difficulty is to determine precisely *how* these two pivotal points of history relate. Clearly there are many similarities between the two, but the distinctions are far more prevalent. For this paper, focus will be mostly limited to the edicts of Leo III and Yazid II because they are the first of their kind and nearly contemporaneous with each other.

In the past century, many theories concerning the cause of Byzantine Iconoclasm have been advanced. Initially, these were largely dependent upon John of Jerusalem's classic explanation of iconoclasm (discussed below). This view held that the Byzantine Iconoclasm was *caused* by the Muslim Iconoclasm. When examining the data, this explanation initially appears to be valid based upon the sequence of events and the political/religious attitudes in each empire. As explained by Grunebaum, "Spirit and chronology—both seem to justify the explanation of [Byzantine] iconoclasm as an effect of Muslim and Jewish influences."²⁶⁴

However, with the discovery of more primary texts and the evolution of scholarship in the field, increasing numbers of new and intriguing explications have been offered. Grunebaum, for instance, claimed that iconoclasm "should be written as a history of the religious motifs that are being articulated and lived through as a means to accede to the divine."²⁶⁵ In other words, he believed that both the Islamic and Byzantine Iconoclasm were related in the sense that they dealt with "religious motifs," but that these religious motifs were drastically different from each other. The present author does not find this theory satisfying, because it underestimates the impact of political forces.

Another view is the one espoused by Kitzinger in his influential work, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm." Kitzinger essentially claimed that the cult of the image had grown out of control and become especially obsessed with various

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

apotropaic powers.²⁶⁶ This view will play a part in the following pages. Genevieve Young believes that the efforts of Leo III in his iconoclasm were primarily intended as a political method of unification for the Byzantine Empire, claiming “both Leo III and Muslim opponents of Christianity utilised accusations of idolatry in order to assert a superior understanding of monotheism.”²⁶⁷ Young grounds her argument in the apocalyptic use of the cross as an image of victory, especially in the well-known story of Constantine. Parts of Young’s thesis are also valuable for this study. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen takes a unique approach to Leo’s iconoclasm and claims that it was directed as a corrective measure against a corruption in the Church. Ultimately, Leo understood the church building, the Eucharist, and the Cross to be the only pure and acceptable icons for the empire.²⁶⁸ Certainly there is an element of truth in this view that must be considered. Breckenridge believes that the key to unlocking Leo’s iconoclasm lies in the numismatic iconographical evidence, but he is unable (or unwilling) to suggest a coherent interpretation of such data.²⁶⁹ Barnard believes the best explanation for Byzantine Iconoclasm lies in the “personality of Emperor Leo alone.”²⁷⁰ Although Barnard’s study is somewhat dated, it still retains a great deal of historical validity.

Perhaps the view most pertinent to this paper is that of Oleg Grabar. The argument of Grabar is similar to the above-mentioned argument of Grunebaum in the sense that it is constructed within an ideological paradigm. From an ideological standpoint, Grabar denies that there is any connection between the iconoclastic attitude of Islam and the official Iconoclasm of Byzantium.²⁷¹ His assessment, however, fails in at least two ways. First, he does not adequately consider the vital doctrinal issues at stake in

²⁶⁶ “Apotropaic” essentially communicates the idea of averting or shunning evil. Additionally, palladia are objects believed to provide protection and safety. See Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 100–28; especially 104, 110, and 123.

²⁶⁷ Genevieve Young, “Byzantine Iconoclasm: An Imperial Religious Policy Aimed at Unification?,” *Phronema* 23 (January 1, 2008): 45.

²⁶⁸ Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, “Smashing God’s Face: Art, Theology, and Violence in the Byzantine Empire,” *ARTS* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 50.

²⁶⁹ He primarily debunks the idea that Justinian II’s reform in coinage was simply a reaction to the reform of ‘Abd al-Malik. See James D. Breckenridge, “Justinian II and the Moslem Reform,” in *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II: 685-695, 705-711* (New York: American Numismatic Society, 1959), 69–77.

²⁷⁰ Leslie W. Barnard, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy: Leo III and Yazid II - a Reconsideration,” in *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981), 37.

²⁷¹ Oleg Grabar, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 48.

the late seventh and early eighth centuries. In conjunction with this oversight, Grabar fails to thoroughly distinguish between religious artwork (which could be commissioned and controlled by the state) and private artwork. Ultimately, Grabar's statements are more relevant for later centuries of Islam, at which point their theology was more fully developed.

Having considered these various perspectives of the Iconoclastic Controversy, the unique points of this chapter's argument will be adumbrated now. Essentially, this author avers that the work of Anastasios (or that of his "school" at St. Catherine's) catalyzed vehement disagreement among the Christians in Egypt. This elicited an abrupt and unprecedented response by the Islamic governor of Egypt, causing him to ban all signs of the Cross. The gradual iconographic changes of 'Abd al-Malik utilized political means to accomplish social cooperation within the caliphate. The following iconoclastic decisions of Yazid II and Leo III, were related in several important ways. The epoch of iconoclasm comes full circle when iconoclasm is attacked by John of Damascus who was, quite plausibly, influenced by the original work of Anastasios.

The unique contributions of this study are as follow: (1) The seed of the Iconoclasm(s) was *theological* and can be traced to Christian arguments in the mid or late seventh century in Egypt; (2) The initial Islamic response was almost entirely *political* and persisted as such; (3) The Byzantine Iconoclasm was also essentially *political* rather than religious; (4) The Byzantine defense of icons throughout the controversy was *theological* and can be plausibly connect to the original *theological* ideas from Egypt that sparked everything else.

Section 1: Yazid II and 'Abd al-Aziz

The most important element of this entire section is an occurrence that took place in Egypt during the reign of the Alexandrian Patriarch, Isaac (686 – 689). The governor of Egypt, 'Abd al-Aziz, had been recently instated by his brother, 'Abd al-Malik in 685. According to Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa', 'Abd al-Aziz,

commanded that all the crosses in the district of Egypt be destroyed, even the crosses of gold and silver, and thus the Christians of the land of Egypt were disturbed. Then he wrote a number of notices and placed them on the doors of the

churches of Misr and lower Egypt, saying in them: “Muhammad is the great apostle of God, and Jesus also is an apostle of God. Verily God has not begotten and has not been begotten.”²⁷²

This event is monumental on several fronts. First, it clearly demonstrates that ‘Abd al-Aziz issued this decree specifically against Christians. Secondly, this decree would have affected *all types* of Christians in Egypt. The previous chapter demonstrated the tremendous schism that existed between Chalcedonians and Monophysite groups in Egypt, but there were several other Christian sects in Egypt as well. As will soon be demonstrated, this edict from ‘Abd al-Aziz starkly opposes those of later Islamic iconoclasm. Indeed, this apparent historical anomaly in Egypt has caused difficulty for several historians.

Most iconoclastic edicts in the caliphate were directed against images of *living creatures* and applied to all citizens—Muslims and Christians. Furthermore, ‘Abd al-Aziz was compelled to mention Jesus and rebuke the idea of his divine begottenness, which contradicts the general understanding of his brother’s dislike for the Cross. Breckenridge has carefully shown that ‘Abd al-Malik gradually altered the Byzantine coin type of Justinian by removing the horizontal beam of the cross.²⁷³ Such a transformation of imagery represents a clear *political* opposition, in which the cross functioned as a political and military symbol of the Byzantine Empire. But the near contemporaneous condemnation of crosses in Egypt by ‘Abd al-Aziz is quite different in nature, as demonstrated by the clear theological rebuttals concerning Jesus. Apparently, the theological and religious situation in Egypt in the late seventh century was especially concerned with Jesus and the Cross.

Based upon the study of Anastasios in the last chapter, a convincing solution may be suggested. The passionate disagreement *among Christians* is the most likely explanation for this unique edict in Egypt and in no other part of the caliphate. The explanation for ‘Abd al-Aziz’s specific prohibition of crosses is more difficult to ascertain. However, there are at least three possibilities for this action. First, we already know that Monophysites occupied the majority of the population in the Levant at this

²⁷² Mark Nathanael Swanson, “The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.” (Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d’Islamistica, 1995), 94.

²⁷³ Breckenridge, *Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II*.

point in history. Therefore, because many of them did not approve of icons, simple crosses might have been most prevalent. Secondly, the radical iconographical thoughts of Anastasios might have been apparent at St. Catherine's and in written form, but were not likely to have yet existed in any obvious public way. In other words, Anastasios' theological insistence probably did not gain the necessary approval to overturn the standard display of a plain cross in most public places. Thus, the plain cross remained as the most popular icon. Last, and most convincing, the iconographical effort of Anastasios and his associates focused a great deal of renewed theological debate upon the Cross itself. Even if a plain cross remained most popular, Christians influenced by Anastasios might have boldly argued that the Crucifixion was the "Word (λόγος) of God on the cross." It follows that 'Abd al-Aziz could have recognized the crosses of Christians to be the single greatest source of disagreement and strife among them.

As a new governor in a young Umayyad Dynasty, 'Abd al-Aziz understood the priority of maintaining social peace—especially in the context of the ebbing Second Fitna. Consequently, he probably destroyed all of the crosses as a political method of creating social equality. One must remember (based upon recent findings by Fred Donner) that Muslims were only just beginning to distinguish themselves as Muslims at this point. Therefore, it is not likely that 'Abd al-Aziz primarily opposed crosses on a religious premise.²⁷⁴ However, 'Abd al-Aziz understood that debates about the Cross were indicative of intense religious disagreement *among Christians*. He provided a political solution to a religious issue because for him, it was causing political problems.

Even though the statement of 'Abd al-Aziz may seem very religious, the inclusion that "Jesus also is an apostle of God" is quite unusual. The statement condescends to the level of the Christians by including their "prophet." It demonstrates a specific effort to *reconcile* the disparate Christian groups under a common, unified socio-religious movement (this might have been particularly attractive to the Monophysites). Consequently, this author believes the edict of 'Abd al-Aziz against crosses was overwhelmingly political.

²⁷⁴ According to Germanus, Muslims at the time of Yazid II venerated "in the desert an inanimate stone [λίθος ἀνύχου] which is called Khobar [Χοβάρ]." See A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (January 1, 1956): 26.

The figure most commonly connected to Islamic iconoclasm is Yazid II. Yazid issued his iconoclastic decree in July of 721. Unlike the previous decree of ‘Abd al-Aziz in 686 (and also the later decree of Leo III in 726) this decree applied to *all* images living creatures. Furthermore, this order from Yazid II was “directed against Christian *as well as Muslim* images in the Caliphate.” (emphasis added)²⁷⁵ Although Muslim identity was certainly stronger at this point than at the time of ‘Abd al-Aziz, there was still a great deal of fluctuation within the caliphate. This is a strong indicator that the decree of Yazid II was aimed at general religious and social unanimity.

According to historians, this method of uniformity was quite successful. However, the execution of Yazid’s iconoclasm seems to have been somewhat inconsistent.²⁷⁶ Many artistic images in private places survived and many Christians were able to retain a physical replica of the cross.²⁷⁷

One particularly revealing example is attributed to Al-Walid II (caliph from 734 – 744). Mesmerized by a beautiful Christian girl going to church, he describes his experience:

I continued to watch her with my gazing eye until I observed her kissing a wooden rod—the wood of the cross. Alas for my soul! Who of you has seen a cross like it worshipped? But then I asked my Lord that I should take its place, even though I become fuel for the flames of Hell. The conceit is charming, but its underlying assumption is clear: the cross is tantamount to an idol, and its destiny is to burn in the eternal Fire.²⁷⁸

This reveals the fact that Christians were permitted to engage in this type of worship quite freely. It is highly possible that at this point (*after* the iconoclastic decrees of Leo III) an even more drastic schism had developed between Constantinople and the Christians in the more eastern regions. Earlier caliphs were likely concerned about the cult of images allowing Christians to maintain a rebellious loyalty with their Emperor and Pope. By the time of Al-Walid, not only were the Monophysites probably opposed to Western authority, but even the “Melkite” Christians seemed to be disgruntled with the emperor. Thus, venerating icons no longer automatically meant that the Christians were

²⁷⁵ Barnard, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” 30.

²⁷⁶ Consider the fact that in 785 “a governor of Medina had the human figures erased from a censer which the first ‘Umar had brought from Syria to perfume the mosque of the Prophet.” See K. A. C. Creswell, “The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam,” *Ars Islamica* 11/12 (January 1, 1946): 160.

²⁷⁷ See Grabar, “Islam and Iconoclasm.”

²⁷⁸ Swanson, “The Cross of Christ,” 85–86.

being rebellious. Many Christians were quite vocal about their preference of Islamic rule instead of Byzantine authority.

Christian iconography was allowed to persist because political and social harmony was the primary motivation of the caliphs. The fact that they disagreed with Christian icon veneration was obvious, but it was allowed to continue when the caliphs realized it no longer coincided with subversive loyalty to the Byzantine Emperor (who had recently forbidden icon veneration). In fact, it is likely that the caliphs permitted what they saw as pathetic icon veneration in order to gain the favor and cooperation of Christians within the caliphate, who were becoming increasingly enraged with the decisions of the emperor.

Returning to the story of the Christian girl, it is valuable to note some interesting vocabulary from Al-Walid II. Instead of calling the cross an idol, Al-Walid claims that it is “tantamount to an idol.” Yet, this seems to be the sole reason for his critique. The cross is simply an idol. No allusion is made to the person of Jesus, and there does not seem to be the same understanding that ‘Abd al-Aziz had some fifty years earlier in Egypt.

It is extremely difficult to tell how much theological potency Christians were able to retain in the caliphate with decreasing resources. In a way, one is tempted to think that the Christian girl in Al-Walid’s story is able to maintain the vitality of her faith by understanding or reading certain distributed works like the *Hodegos* of Anastasios. Of course, there is no way of discerning to which sect of Christianity the Christian girl belonged. Nonetheless, insight can be gleaned from a consideration of *Hodegos*. The extant MSS of *Hodegos* indicate that it was distributed *during* the epoch of iconoclasm and was somewhat popular. The fact that an illustration of the diagrammatic cross was preferred in most MSS over that of the crucifixion is of great importance. This preference seems to indicate that the plain cross was somehow more permissible in the caliphate than the image of Jesus on the cross. Multiple hypotheses may be offered for this theory. First, the simple cross keeps Jesus’ figure hidden from sight and thereby avoids the blasphemous assertion of Jesus’ divinity. An additional explanation could include the fact that Melkite Christians now faced nearly insurmountable odds in the task of iconography. If a Melkite were to create a graphic and bloody Crucifix icon as called for by the *Hodegos*, he would first risk blasphemy and rebellion in the sight of the Muslims.

Additionally, he would likely be strongly confronted by the Monophysites, growing as they were under the permissive Islamic Caliphate. Finally, until 787 the hypothetical Melkite would have been deliberately violating the edict of the holy Byzantine Emperor.

Therefore, this author believes that a bold Christological declaration was maintained in connection with a simple cross throughout the Iconoclastic Period. Surely this was not true for all Christians, but the belief that the Hypostatic Union of Christ perished on the Cross would have been a central affirmation for all Melkite Christians after the Council of Chalcedon. Their reasons for not producing the explicit Crucifix icon called for in *Hodegos* are sensible and could even be considered as shrewd methods of safeguarding Chalcedonian theology, for that is clearly how the cross functioned. Those who argue that crosses continued to function as a political and military symbol for Christians under the caliphate misunderstand the attitude of Christians towards their Muslim rulers. As already stated, religious freedom of those in the caliphate was tolerated as long as practitioners faithfully submitted to the political and social requirements. For many Christians, this was *precisely* the situation they had long desired within Byzantium, and most had no reason to rebel against Islamic hegemony.

Therefore, the cross for Christians within the caliphate did not serve a political or military purpose. Its purpose was religious, and continued to attract sincere devotion from those like the Christian girl mentioned previously. When Christians kissed the sign or replica of the Cross, they were not offering their loyalty and allegiance to Leo III; rather, they were demonstrating their faithfulness to Christ. Granted, this theory would be difficult to support without explicit evidence that Christians within the caliphate envisioned the Crucifixion when speaking of the Cross. In order to procure such evidence, the conversation will now turn towards a monk who speaks quite plainly about the significance of the Crucifixion—John Damascene.

Section 2: John Damascene and Leo III

It is surprising that so little attention has been given to the connection between John of Damascus and Anastasios of Sinai. Not only did John defend icons by emphasizing the Crucifixion, his monastery has been shown to have strong connections

with Anastasios' monastery in Egypt.²⁷⁹ Weitzmann claims that John "did everything in his power to guarantee the continuation of the cult of the images, not only the preservation of the old, but the production of the new."²⁸⁰ This is a vital element for the consideration of iconoclasm. Therefore, this section will begin by considering the work and theology of John Damascene.

John Damascene was born to a wealthy family in Damascus and lived from 676 to 749. Although he functioned as an honored member of the caliph's court for the first part of his life, he eventually gave up this esteemed position to become a monk. Traditional accounts claimed that John "retreated" to St. Sabas Monastery (southeast of Jerusalem) towards the end of his life, but scholarship now agrees that he wrote his early works against Leo III between 726 and 730 while at St. Sabas.²⁸¹ This is significant for at least two reasons.

First, John's residence at St. Sabas before the year 726 demonstrates how Christians functioned immediately after the edict of Yazid II. In other words, John felt compelled to write against Leo's iconoclasm but *not* the iconoclasm of Yazid, even though St. Sabas was under the direct control of Yazid's caliphate. Apparently, monks within the caliphate were treated quite well (better than those in Byzantium after Leo's edict), but this should not indicate that John was content with Muslim iconoclasm. This paper suggests that John (as well as all other Christians in the caliphate) understood Yazid's edict to be primarily political—it did not fundamentally threaten the theological legitimacy of the icon. The best example of this perspective is the fact that monasteries continued to produce a great amount of icons during the Muslim iconoclasm.²⁸² The caliphs viewed the activity of the monasteries as primarily religious, and thus had little concern for their impact upon the political realm. The only reason icons were destroyed in the caliphate is because of the way they threatened the political realm by inciting passionate arguments and social unrest.

Leo's edict, however, John perceived to threaten the essential importance of the icon for the Church. This also means that—contrary to the opinion of some scholars—it

²⁷⁹ Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 7.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 298.

²⁸² Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 5–6.

did not take Christians a long time to formulate a theological defense for icons. While it is true that the iconographic debates between Muslims and Christians are found mostly *after* 750, this is due to a lack of theological substance on behalf of the Muslims, not the Christians. Indeed, Islam had hardly come to an agreement upon images by the time of Leo's decrees.²⁸³ Christians, on the other hand, already possessed sophisticated arguments from entangled debates with Jews. If the assumptions of this study are correct, John of Damascus had also received a rich Christological legacy from his time at St. Sabas.

Second, John's early residence at St. Sabas strengthens the argument that he was influenced by Anastasios. This author does not insist that John was *directly* influenced by Anastasios—there is simply no historical evidence to support such a claim. However, it is very plausible that the legacy of Anastasios (perpetuated as it was by monks at St. Catherine's) had an impact on John's theology. The fact that Anastasios is believed to have died around 700, places John in close proximity with Anastasios both chronologically and geographically.

Perhaps the most convincing clue to an affinity between John and Anastasios can be found in the work of Kurt Weitzmann. He claims that in addition to theological ties, there is a strong artistic relation between the icons of St. Catherine and the icons of St. Sabas.²⁸⁴ More to the point, Anastasios' influence on John can be seen in the way that John formulates arguments against iconoclasm by specifically mentioning and drawing upon the theological consequences of the Crucifixion. Consider the following excerpt from *Against Those who Decry Holy Images*:

If we adore the Cross, made of whatever wood it may be, how shall we not adore the image of the Crucified?²⁸⁵

Contrary to other Christian arguments made to Muslim rulers within the caliphate, which sought to valorize the veneration of the simple cross, this argument from John intends to espouse adoration of the "Crucified." Later, in an even more suggestive passage, John defends icons with the specific idea of death:

²⁸³ See Grabar, "Islam and Iconoclasm."

²⁸⁴ Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai; The Icons Volume I*, 6–7.

²⁸⁵ John of Damascus, *Apologia of St John of Damascus Against Those Who Decry Holy Images*, 1.43, trans. Mary H. Allies (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 14.

We worship Thy sufferings. Who has ever known death worshipped, or suffering venerated? *Yet we truly worship the physical death of our God and His saving sufferings.* (emphasis added)²⁸⁶

This is an incredibly strong statement! To say that Christians worship death is extreme, especially in the context of Muslim rulers who were still trying to understand the finer points of Christianity. No other extant Christian work from this period makes such a claim except for the *Hodegos* of Anastasios. A final statement from John that is reminiscent of Anastasios' work contains the word "engrave":

Thus both by writing and by engraving we are ever mindful of our Lord's sufferings, and of the holy prophets in the old law and in the new.²⁸⁷

Just as Anastasios repeatedly mentioned "engraving the Lord's suffering" so also does John seem to possess the goal and motivation to make permanent the reality of Jesus' suffering in a tangible form.

Based upon these quotes from John of Damascus, it seems that a connection with Anastasios' theology is more than merely coincidental, especially when one considers the theological atmosphere under Muslim rule at this point in time. John's proclamation concerning the worship of "the physical death of our God" has no better potential source than the revolutionary Crucifix icon of Anastasios depicting a dead Jesus with his eyes closed. Despite the fact that the cross itself was a popular method of Roman execution, it had come to represent a *living*, victorious Christ who actively worked on behalf of Byzantium, not a dead and bloody body. If a cross can be said to represent the physical death of Jesus in the twenty first century, such a representation was by no means the norm in seventh and eighth century Byzantium.

John's audacious statements require a source of alternative theological inspiration and the Crucifix icon of Anastasios is most germane. It is entirely conceivable that John was inspired by precisely such an icon of the Crucifixion. In fact, art historians concur that the earliest extant replica of Anastasios' Crucifix illustration²⁸⁸ was most likely produced in Palestine instead of Egypt. The fact that this icon survived the Islamic Iconoclasm practically guarantees that it was preserved within the walls of a monastery.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 1.53.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 1.128.

²⁸⁸ B.36, discussed in Chapter II, dates from the first half of the eighth century.

Thus, even though B.36 is presently housed at St. Catherine's, it is highly probable that it was protected at St. Sabas after Yazid's edict in 721.

John also wrote specifically against the Monophysites of his region (known as the Jacobites) just as Anastasios did. One cannot help but wonder why so many works were directed against Christians instead of the "common" Muslim enemy. The likeliest solution is that John saw the iconoclasm of Leo as theologically threatening while viewing the iconoclasm of Yazid as merely political in nature. This leads to a consideration of Leo III and the condition of Christianity under his rule.

Leo III was crowned Emperor on March 25th, 717.²⁸⁹ He came from Germanica (Mar'ash) in northern Syria, but a great deal of speculation is involved with the specific details of Leo's life before his rule. Germanica was certainly an area of "constant battles between Muslims and Greeks,"²⁹⁰ but no precise information is known about Leo's time there. Barnard claims that we cannot know of Leo's interaction with "Muslim iconoclasm" during his time in Syria,²⁹¹ but Jeffrey provides quite a different picture: "In the days of Leo's youth [Germanica] probably contained more Muslims than it did Greeks, so that he must have been in constant contact with Muslims at Mar'ash."²⁹² Even if this report from Jeffrey is true, it cannot significantly contribute to this study. While some later writers would blame Leo's iconographic decisions on his "Arabic Heart,"²⁹³ this is best understood as a retrospective polemic from the perspective of an iconodule. Therefore, this paper cannot conclude with any certainty how Leo's upbringing affected his decision for iconoclasm.

Leo first became known for his military involvement. Here, there is no question of his "interaction" with the Muslims, although it would be naïve to assume that he had any meaningful theological conversations with his Muslim enemies on the battlefield. One of the first accomplishments of Leo's reign was his defeat of the Muslims under

²⁸⁹ Barnard, "The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," 30.

²⁹⁰ Arthur Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," *Harvard Theological Review* 37, no. 4 (October 1, 1944): 272.

²⁹¹ Barnard, "The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," 30.

²⁹² Jeffrey, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III," 272.

²⁹³ Theophanes the Confessor and Harry Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes: Anni Mundi 6095-6305 (A.D. 602-813)* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

Maslama in 717. Further victories in the winter of 717 – 718 earned Leo the name of “champion of Christianity against the Muslims.”²⁹⁴

The methods and behavior of Leo III in battle during these early years is especially important for this study. Not only did he enthusiastically carry the cross in battle, but Leo also included the *Hodegetria*,²⁹⁵ a painting of the Virgin and child believed to have special powers.²⁹⁶ After the twelve-month siege of Constantinople by Maslama’s forces, a famous interchange occurred between the two commanders.

Maslama said to Leo:

“Know that if you refuse to become subject to our power, I declare to you that I have committed myself by oath not to return to my native country before I have broken your Empire, pulled down the fortifications of this capital in which you put all your trust, made out of the place of your cult, the basilica of Sancta Sophia, a bathhouse for my troops, and broken upon your head the wood of the cross which you adore.”²⁹⁷

Here, the reference to the cross is of considerable importance. Maslama recognized not only the devotion of the Byzantines in general, but more importantly the devotion of Leo (“broken upon *your* head”). Such behavior from Leo leads Theophanes to refer to him before the iconoclasm as “the pious emperor.”²⁹⁸

Based upon this data, the question that looms large in the minds of many historians is, “what caused Leo III to issue his iconoclastic decrees?” This is certainly an inquiry of great importance and one this paper is not capable of fully answering. Instead, a few suggestions may be posited.

Leo issued two separate edicts, one in 726 and one in 730. His first decree seems to have been less strict while the second was backed with more imperial force.²⁹⁹ Despite the fact that Leo made use of icons in his early years as a commander, he was “clearly unhappy with the growth of superstitious practices within the Byzantine world itself.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁴ Jeffrey, “Ghevond’s Text of the Correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III,” 272.

²⁹⁵ “She who shows the way”

²⁹⁶ Ihssen, “Smashing God’s Face,” 43; Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 294.

²⁹⁷ Barnard, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” 36.

²⁹⁸ Theophanes the Confessor and Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, Annus Mundi 6209.

²⁹⁹ Barnard, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” 29.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 36. In connection to this is the theory that Leo may have been scared by a massive volcanic eruption in 726, leading him to believe that God was upset with the excesses that had developed in the Cult of the images. This author does not find such a theory tenable. Sources clearly demonstrate that a large portion of the populous interpreted the volcanic eruption as a sign from God, but Leo’s personality was not prone to such superstition; as already mentioned, Leo was opposed to the increasing superstition of

More significantly, Leo was painfully aware of the growing gap between the different Christian sects. By the time of Leo's second edict against icons, more than half of the former Byzantine Empire was under the hegemony of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750).³⁰¹ Furthermore, the *conquered* Christian population of the Byzantine Empire (who constituted the majority of the population³⁰²) was by no means uniform in its belief. In fact, there is reason to believe that arguments between the Christian sects were actually at a high point.³⁰³ Leo desperately needed the eastern portions of the empire to supply his armies on the frontlines of battle with the Muslims, and consequently sought to win their approval. Some claim that Leo III “hoped to pacify the Moslem and Jewish elements within the empire,”³⁰⁴ but that certainly could not have been the main motivation.

Despite the fact that icons had “succeeded” as apotropaic devices at Constantinople, the eastern regions of the empire were losing more and more ground to the invasions of the Muslims. In the words of Ihssen, “Morale sank.”³⁰⁵ It is likely that the very icons many Christians in the east trusted to grant them victory were not only failing, but also invoking particular persecution from the Muslim victors. One must also remember that the predominant sect of Christianity in the eastern portions of Byzantium was Monophysitism, which was largely opposed to icons. On this Barnard writes:

We need not doubt that opposition to images was particularly marked in those eastern districts of the Empire where remnants of Monophysitism persisted—nor that the spread of Muslim civilization in Asia Minor in the wake of the Arab invasions did not presuppose the population towards an iconoclastic position.³⁰⁶

These eastern Monophysites were not merely opposed to Crucifix icons and depictions of Jesus. Instead, they went so far as to oppose “the representation of angels in human form and even the rendering of the Holy Ghost in the shape of a dove.”³⁰⁷ Grunebaum's view on this matter may shed more light:

his empire. Therefore, the volcanic eruption might have moved Leo to action, but only because it accentuated the superstition of his people and the division that such superstition could cause.

³⁰¹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque*, 11.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid., 13.

³⁰⁴ Joseph, Metr Bossakov, “The Iconoclastic Controversy--Historical Perspectives,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 38, no. 1–4 (March 1, 1993): 216.

³⁰⁵ Ihssen, “Smashing God's Face,” 44.

³⁰⁶ Barnard, “The Sources of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” 37.

³⁰⁷ Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” 131.

The attacks on Christianity which were becoming more and more frequent in Muslim circles never failed to give the charge of idolatry through image worship a prominent place. This charge must have struck home especially in eastern Asia Minor, the home of the most important sections of the army with which Leo III rescued the Empire from the great Arab invasion of 715-18, and we know that his anti-iconic measures were as loyally endorsed in Eastern Anatolia as they were bitterly opposed in the Hellenic centers of the western part of the Empire. In other words, the Muslim and the eastern Byzantine populations shared a predisposition of hostility to figural representation in the cult.³⁰⁸

Leo's iconoclastic edict, then, was largely aimed at appeasing these eastern Christians in the hope of strengthening his army. However, Leo was no fool. He knew he could not possibly condemn the use of crosses (as Maslama had insinuated in his speech). To do so would incite rebellion from *all* sects of Christianity within the empire. Thus, it is vital to bear in mind that while the edict of Yazid II clearly opposed images of the Cross, Leo's edict demanded no such thing.³⁰⁹ To the contrary, when Leo had the portrait of Christ removed from the city gate in Constantinople, it was replaced with a cross.³¹⁰ In fact, Leo was able to rally his troops behind the unifying sign of the Cross by drawing upon the famous story of Constantine's victorious use of the symbol. After Leo's edict of 726, many military victories were achieved and Byzantine forces were actually able to drive back the Muslim invaders. It is not unreasonable to assume that the military began to approve of Leo's iconoclasm due to their victories in battle. It becomes a vital factor later on for Constantine V that the army is loyal to iconoclasm (as discussed below).

Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople was a primary critic of Leo's edict in 730, and was eventually deposed because of his resolute opposition. Grunebaum speaks of two letters from Patriarch Germanus defending icons, probably written between the periods of Yazid's decree (721) and Leo III's decree (730).³¹¹ Pope Gregory II was also staunchly opposed to the iconoclasm of Leo and absolutely refused to cooperate. It is interesting to note that although sources from Rome (such as the *Liber Pontificate*) portray Leo's iconoclasm in a very violent way, the accounts from those closer to Constantinople are

³⁰⁸ Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," 6-7.

³⁰⁹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 299.

³¹⁰ Ihssen, "Smashing God's Face," 40.

³¹¹ Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," 3-4.

much milder.³¹² On this note, Ihssen reminds us that Leo never actually demanded the *destruction* of images of Christ, “merely their removal.”³¹³

In light of these facts, it seems that although Leo’s iconoclastic edicts were mostly political, even if tempered by religious concerns. Leo had the best interest of his empire in mind.³¹⁴ Furthermore, while Leo’s decrees were clearly related to the pressures of Islam (both military and social) it is too facile to assert that Leo’s decision was *directly* based upon those of Yazid II. Without a doubt, many (if not most) Christians of Byzantium interpreted Leo’s edict as a religious threat. Those who understood the *political* repercussions of iconoclasm likely lived in close proximity to Muslims, Monophysites, or both.

John Damascene clearly understood Leo’s edict primarily as a religious and theological threat. Because John lived under the protection (and good will) of Islamic caliphates his entire life, he probably did not perceive any political motivation for Byzantine Iconoclasm or notice any effects of its institutionalization. John could forgive the Iconoclasm of Yazid because it was based upon political greed and misguided religious beliefs. But as the emperor of the Holy Byzantine Empire, Leo’s edict was unforgivable and John responded with due severity.

Section 3: The Councils of Nicaea II (787) and Hieria (754)

Nearly thirty years after the death of John Damascene, the imperial stance regarding icons was reversed. Convened by the Empress Irene, Nicaea II was primarily organized to restore the use of icons in the empire and anathematize the decisions of an earlier “council”—Hieria (discussed in more detail below). Like other councils before it, a major concern was the unity of the Church in the Byzantine Empire. During the first period of Iconoclasm (c. 726 – 787) divisions in the Church had become increasingly augmented. From Irene’s perspective, the restoration of icon veneration would surely restore much needed unity to the empire.

³¹² Ihssen, “Smashing God’s Face,” 45.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Gerhart B. Ladner, “Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy,” *Mediaeval Studies* II (1940): 135.

Ironically, although iconoclasm had itself originally been initiated by Leo III as a method of unification, most of the empire had remained stoutly opposed to it. Four of the five Patriarchates³¹⁵ were essentially able to avoid the mandates of Leo because of geographic and political separation.³¹⁶ Even in Constantinople the patriarch, Germonos II, remained strongly opposed to iconoclasm. The only people who ever genuinely approved of the Iconoclasm seem to have been closely connected with Leo III.

Thus, the majority of bishops in attendance at Nicaea II were eager to erase the “satanic evil” (see excerpt below) of iconoclasm for several reasons, one of the most prominent of which surely involved the implication of iconoclasm that “for centuries the Christians had, in fact, practiced idolatry.”³¹⁷ Many bishops were curious how such a ridiculous and blasphemous order was ever decreed. Consequently, they called upon the historian, John of Jerusalem, to give an account explaining the beginnings of the Iconoclasm. At the fifth session of Nicaea II, Patriarch Tarasius claimed that John of Jerusalem had a document that would explain, “how the subversion of images began [πόθεν ἤρξατο ἡ τῶν εἰκόνων καταστροφή].”³¹⁸ The story told by John is so important to this study that it must be quoted in its entirety:

And on the death of ‘Umar Ezid [Ἐζίδος, Yazid II, 720-4] succeeded him, a vain and easily distracted man. And there was in Tiberias a ringleader and sorcerer of the accursed Jews, an instrument of the soul destroying spirits, by name Tessarakontapechys [Τεσσαρακοντάπηχυς, i.e. 40 cubits high], an evil enemy of the Church of God. And when he learned of the vanity of the Ruler Ezid, and when this most wicked Jew approached him, he tried to make some predictions and to speak out to Ezid. When as a result of these things he became acceptable and very affable to the Ruler he said, “O Caliph, out of regard I bear towards you, to suggest some means which will be readily and easily satisfying to you, by which length of life will be added to you, and you will remain thirty years in your rule if you will bring my words to action.” And that witless tyrant, his mind easily cajoled by a desire for long life (for he was a luxury lover and an unbridled man) replied “whatever you urge of me, I will readily do; and if I chance on gain I will respond with the greatest rewards.” And the Jewish sorcerer said to him, “Order immediately and without delay and postponement that a circular decree [ἐγκύκλιον ἐπιστολήν] be written and sent throughout all your

³¹⁵ The five Patriarchates, in order of prestige, were: (1) Rome, (2) Constantinople, (3) Alexandria, (4) Antioch, and (5) Jerusalem.

³¹⁶ Adrian Fortescue, “Iconoclasm,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

³¹⁷ Grunebaum, “Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment,” 3.

³¹⁸ Vasiliev, “The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721,” 28.

dominion, to obliterate and overthrow absolutely every painting and image in different colours whether on canvas, in mosaics, on walls, or on sacred vessels, and alter coverings, and as many such things as are found, in all the churches of the Christians, not to mention also everything of the same kind set up for the ornament and decoration of the forms of the various cities in your Empire.” Under the influence of *satanic evil*, the false prophet added this ‘every likeness,’ contriving thereby to display his hostility towards us without being suspected [ἀνυπόρατον]. And the sinful tyrant, persuaded by this vanity of mind, sent out and destroyed in every province under him the holy images, and all other things of the same kind. And in this way he stripped the churches of God unsparingly through the agency of the Jewish sorcerer, before the evil reached this land. As the devout Christians fled, lest they should have to overthrow holy images with their own hands, the emirs who were dispatched for this purpose sent as their envoys abominable Jews and wretched Arabs; and so they burned the holy images, and either smeared or scraped the church buildings.

When he heard of these events, the pseudo-bishop of Nacoleia and his followers imitated the lawless Jews and godless Arabs in insulting the churches of God. And I judge your holy cries right and whatever that craven Jewish sorcerer received. When after doing this the first Caliph Ezid died, no more than two and a half years later, and went into the eternal fire, the images were restored to their original position and honour. And his son Walid [Οὐλιδος], very angry, ordered the magician to be put to death for his father’s murder, as just punishment for his false prophecy.”

Immediately following the reading of John’s roll the bishop of Messana said: “I was a lad living in Syria when the Caliph of the Saracens destroyed the images [κἀγὼ παιδίον ἤμεν ἐν Συρια ὅπνῃκα ὁ τῶν Σαρράκηων σύμβουλος τὰς εἰκόνας κατέστρεφεν].” (emphasis added)³¹⁹

Although no scholars currently accept the explanation of John as the true source of Iconoclasm, it is valuable because it represents the actual views of those in attendance at Nicaea II. In this regard, several observations must be made. First, the story of John is *believable*. Many bishops in attendance had come from their locations in the Islamic Caliphate. If the essential theme of John’s story had been fabricated or unreasonable, the bishops in disagreement would surely have voiced their opinions. More importantly, John does not ultimately place the blame upon Yazid II, but traced the *theological* error to the Jews—a classic method of polemic for Christians in the Levant. This is significant because it demonstrates that the Christians primarily understood Yazid’s edict to be *political*. If they had understood Yazid’s edict to be primarily theological, contemporary Christians would have surely portrayed him to be an evil or false prophet similar to the

³¹⁹ John of Jerusalem, “Theophanes Continuatus,” in *PG*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, trans. Leslie W. Barnard, vol. 109 (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1863), 517–20.

Jew, Tessarakontapechys. Instead, Yazid is portrayed mostly as a proud and “witless tyrant,” unaware of the theological significance of his decree. In addition to this account from John, several later versions are recorded and elaborated.³²⁰ They all follow the same pattern by tracing the true theological error to the Jews.

The council eventually agreed to reinstate the veneration of icons in the Church. This act was monumental because it once again reunited the five patriarchs. Curiously, all patriarchs except Constantinople had always been in agreement. This was made manifest when,

two monks, Thomas, abbot of an Egyptian monastery and John Syncellus of Antioch, appeared with letters from their communities explaining the state of things and showing that the patriarchs had always remained faithful to the images. These two seem to have acted in some sort as legates for Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.³²¹

This leads one to consider how iconoclasm was able to gain such a stronghold in Byzantium.

In 754, Constantine V convened the Council of Hieria. He deeply prized the loyalty of the army he had inherited from his father and sought to retain it at all costs. Unlike his father, Constantine V realized (or admitted) that a significant rift still existed in his empire due to the theological disagreement of the Church against iconoclasm. In a manner almost reminiscent of the “Robber Synod” of Dioscorus, Constantine V demanded the presence of 338 bishops³²² and placed pressure³²³ on them to theologically endorse iconoclasm. At this point, caution must be exercised. It is unclear to what extent these bishops operated of their own free will. However, it seems that by 754, iconoclasm had gained enough popularity in the empire to strongly affect the theological predispositions of many clergy. Indeed, there was plenty of Scriptural evidence to support a position of iconoclasm. This was especially true in the Old Testament.³²⁴

Nonetheless, the Council of Hieria was more political than theological. The bishops were likely more swayed by the success of the empire since the edicts of Leo III

³²⁰ See Grunebaum, “Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment”; Vasiliev, “The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721.”

³²¹ Fortescue, “Iconoclasm.”

³²² Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 302.

³²³ This pressure involved the implicit understanding that Constantine was likely to employ military force against any bishop who would not cooperate.

³²⁴ See especially Exodus 20:4-6 and 2 Kings 18:1-4

in 726 and 730. Many interpreted this success as the divine approval of God.³²⁵ While it is true that a great deal of genuine theological discussion transpired during the council, the bishops were well aware of the consequences in store for those who would not comply with the wishes of Constantine V. Even if some of the bishops fostered reservations concerning iconoclasm, they were likely persuaded by the “evidence” of military success and the potential of unifying the empire.³²⁶ The council ultimately agreed to issue a statement against icons. Still, contrary to the hopes of Constantine V, the decisions of Hieria only intensified the discord and unrest among Christians of Byzantium.

In conclusion, it is safe to assume that Anastasios’ daring iconography never took root in Byzantium during the Iconoclasm because there was already so much turmoil and disagreement regarding icons. Furthermore, it is no wonder that Anastasios’ audacious iconography was largely squelched by the caliphate. The cross that had once been so incredibly potent and offensive to ‘Abd al-Aziz was slowly stripped of its meaning so that it could survive only in anemic form. However, one must not forget the thriving legacy that survived in the icons of several monasteries—protected as they were in remote deserts of the caliphate. John of Damascus was able to preserve much of the scandal of the Cross found in Anastasios and reignite the Byzantine Christians to the task of “worshipping death.” Ultimately, the very Monophysites who could have been saved were likely never given the visual message that Anastasios had so passionately designed for them, and most Christians under Islamic hegemony were slowly subsumed by politically acceptable aniconic monotheism.

³²⁵ Young, “Byzantine Iconoclasm,” 40.

³²⁶ This scenario helps explain how so many bishops were eager to be reinstated. See Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 308.

Conclusion

While much of the Iconoclastic Controversy remains an enigma to contemporary minds, this study has provided new lenses of understanding by which several historical riddles may be solved. The artistic portrayal of the Crucifixion in the first several centuries of Christianity has been carefully studied. This paper has averred that the creation of Crucifix imagery was intrinsically related to the Christological controversies of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. Additionally, it has been shown that despite the conclusions reached at the Council of Chalcedon regarding the natures of Christ, depictions of the Crucifixion forced the articulation of Christ's death to new degrees. Such an articulation was specifically leveled against the Monophysites.

The idea that Monophysites strongly influenced the Islamic Iconoclasm is not new, but the proposal that a Chalcedonian polemic *against* Monophysites sparked iconoclasm in the caliphate certainly covers new territory. The previous pages have asserted that the specific topic of Christ's death on the Cross proved to be *religiously offensive* to the Monophysites and *politically unacceptable* to the caliphs. This offensive idea elicited disciplinary action from the Muslim leaders in order that peaceful cooperation of their socio-political system might be maintained. In the beginning, hardly any religious motivations could be found in the iconoclastic orders of the Muslim authorities. However, the depiction of Christ's death clearly incited religious rebuttals among the Christian population.

This scandalous idea was pioneered at the Monastery of St. Catherine and epitomized in the illustration in Anastasios' *Hodegos*. There should be no doubt that Anastasios' work was known in Alexandria, and it is probable that his contentious theological tactics were adopted by other Chalcedonian Christians engaged with their Monophysite neighbors. The cross was already a powerful symbol of the Church, and Anastasios provided a way for Chalcedonian Christians to appropriate that symbol for their fervent theological convictions.

Contrary to the mighty and victorious cross paraded by the military of Byzantium, the Crucifix icon invented by Anastasios emphasized the shame and defeat of death. Within fifty years of Anastasios' death John Damascene would even claim that Christians

“worship death.” Despite the fact that both Anastasios and John Damascene lived and wrote under Islamic hegemony, the records show that they were largely unconcerned with the theology of the strange, new, quasi-spiritual movement. Instead, the works of these Chalcedonian Christians were thoroughly entangled with the sect of Monophysitism. It is likely that the writings of Anastasios and John would have been only marginally significant in the capital of Constantinople. However, both Egypt and Palestine featured a primarily Monophysite demographic where apologetics for Chalcedonian orthodoxy were in high demand.

The insistence upon Christ’s death was far from preferential. The first chapter of this paper illuminated the important theological motivations that would later form the foundation of Anastasios’ school. Salvation was rooted in Christ’s solidarity with humanity. As Gregory famously wrote, “That which he has not assumed he has not healed.”³²⁷ Anastasios depicted a fully dead Christ on the Cross because that was precisely the point at which God demonstrated his most radical and revolutionary commitment to the salvation of humankind.

In addition to the soteriological motivations of Anastasios was the growing momentum of Monophysitism. The sources corroborate an increasing aniconic trend within Monophysitism, and the development of regulations within the Islamic Caliphate would have only augmented a disdain for depictions of living creatures. While both Muslims and Monophysites generally scorned the use of religious images, it is likely that such mutuality partly existed due to the theological precedence established by the Monophysites. The Muslim caliphs primarily acted *politically* against a *religious* feud within Christianity because it was causing social unrest. Similar perspectives were apparently held by many Christians in the caliphate. This is most persuasively instantiated by the fact that John Damascus chose to write against the Byzantine Emperor, Leo III, rather than the man who had originally issued an iconoclastic decree, Yazid II. It is impossible to ascertain whether the Byzantine Iconoclasm would have occurred had Muhammad never birthed the movement that eventually came to be known as Islam. The reality is that Islam was a dominant force at the time of Leo III, and therefore its possible influence upon Byzantium must never be dismissed.

³²⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius Against Apollinaris,” 218.

In a derivative manner, this study may lend important insights related to the formation of Islam as a whole. If Islam primarily responded to the religious peculiarities of Christianity by means of political mandates and legislation, it may be that Islam lacked substantial theological claims by which to contest the troublesome doctrines of Christianity. This viewpoint is in harmony with the archeological and textual findings of Fred Donner. Furthermore, it may be suggested that the intensified polemics of Christians against Monophysites incited the Muslims to form their own unique theological convictions. This hypothesis, of course, correlates with the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik and the contemporaneous polemics of Anastasios. It is even possible that ‘Abd al-Aziz encouraged his brother, ‘Abd al-Malik, to enhance the distinction of Islam by employing the intentionally counter-Christian messages he had used in Egypt.

In light of all these possibilities, one thing can be asserted with confidence: Anastasios’ Crucifixion icon represents a radical and unprecedented occurrence in Christianity. The monastery of St. Catherine has maintained Anastasios’ theological legacy in its collection of icons and the extant MSS of *Hodegos*—even when differing in regard to the included “illustration”—have preserved Anastasios’ firm attack against the Monophysites. By all accounts, it appears that the polemics of Anastasios and his followers were entirely unsuccessful in winning the Monophysites to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy. The above pages have suggested a strong affinity between the theological motivations of the growing Islamic Caliphate and the Monophysites of eastern Byzantium, and the sources illustrate a clear and consistent trend of conversion to Islam among the predominantly Monophysite populations of the Levant. Ultimately, it might be that the simpler Monophysite theology which so strongly opposed Anastasios’ Crucifix icon was precisely the theology that was gradually absorbed by the socially agreeable monotheism of the Islamic Caliphate.

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