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A gift no more

A Byzantine reliquary of the Holy Cross

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For nearly a century, scholars have interpreted a Byzantine reliquary of the True Cross at the Vatican Museums using the framework of gift-giving, as famously theorized by Marcel Mauss (figs. 1*a*–*b*).[1] Brought to light in 1903, the reliquary is constructed of wood and consists of a shallow base with a sliding lid.[2] Decorated with painted images outside and in, the reliquary's unusual iconography has led scholars to suggest that it must have been designed as a gift from the Byzantine Church to the papacy.[3] The outer surface of the lid displays a dramatic scene of the Crucifixion. Mary, who typically was shown standing beneath the Cross, drawing her hands to her mouth in grief, is instead represented bending forward to kiss her son's feet.[4] Dominating the inner side of the lid is an unprecedented, imposing image of the early bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (340/50–407). Finally, at the bottom of the reliquary's rectangular base, Peter and Paul, the foremost disciple and leading apostle of the Church, flank the relic cavity, a position artists often reserved for Constantine I (306–37) and his mother, Helena, who was believed to have miraculously discovered the True Cross in the fourth century.

It is the latter two sets of images—the depictions of John Chrysostom and of Peter and Paul—that have led to the conclusion that the reliquary was a gift from the Byzantine to the Catholic Church: scholars have claimed that Chrysostom was positioned to "face" the "Western" saints, Peter and Paul, when the reliquary was closed, as a sign of reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches.[5] The present essay, drawing on liturgical texts overlooked by scholars writing about the reliquary, will instead argue that these iconographic features, in combination with the unusual representation of the Virgin, are better understood in relation to an important Byzantine feast: the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. In the first half of the essay, I shall introduce the complexity of the reliquary's design in conversation with earlier scholarship. In the second half, I will show that these features can be explained through the liturgy of the Exaltation.

The design of the reliquary and earlier art-historical literature

The Vatican reliquary was discovered in 1903 in a cypress chest in the Oratory of Saint Lawrence at the Lateran Palace. Before this date, the chest, which was kept in the altar of the Oratory, had not been opened in modern times.[6] The reliquary was first published in 1906 by Philippe Lauer, a member of the École Française de Rome and an official in the Department of Manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, who participated in the excavation. Lauer catalogued this and other reliquaries from the chest on behalf of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and the

I am grateful to Charles Barber, Anthony Cutler, Bradley Hostetler, Maria Alessia Rossi, and the anonymous reviewer for commentary on earlier drafts of this essay. Francesca Pistone and Sean Leatherbury suggested bibliography. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

1. See M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don* (Paris, 1950), translated into English by W. D. Halls as *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York, 1990).

2. On the reliquary, see H. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz: Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 112–13; B. Schellewald, *Byzanz: Die Macht der Bilder*, ed. M. Brandt and A. Effenberger, exh. cat., Dommuseum Hildesheim (Hildesheim, 1998), no. 24 (71–74); A. W. Carr, *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, AD 843–1261*, ed. H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1997), no. 35 (76–77); and A. Legner, ed., *Ornamenta Ecclesiae: Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, exh. cat., Museum Schnütgen (Cologne, 1985), 87. See also below nn. 3, 7, 9, 14, 15, 22.

3. See R. Cormack, "Painting after Iconoclasm," in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. Bryer and J. Herrin (Birmingham, 1977), 147–63, esp. 152–53; J. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art* (London, 1997), 210–14; Carr, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 35 (77); and F. Hyslop, "A Byzantine Reliquary of the True Cross from the Sancta Sanctorum," *Art Bulletin* 16, no. 4 (1934): 333–40, esp. 338.

4. I am not aware of any other instance of this gesture in Byzantine art.

5. See Cormack, "Painting after Iconoclasm," 152–53; Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 211–14; Schellewald, *Byzanz*, no. 24 (72–73); Carr, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 35 (77); Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 338.

6. On the opening of the treasury, see K. Noreen, "Opening the Holy of Holies: Early Twentieth-Century Explorations of the Sancta Sanctorum (Rome)," *Church History* 80, no. 3 (2011): 520–46.

Figure 1*a*. Reliquary of the Holy Cross, tenth century. Tempera on wood, 27 x 12.4 x 3 cm. Rome, Vatican Museums, inv. 61898. Interior of reliquary displaying Sts. Peter and Paul, two archangels, and *Deesis* with Christ Pantocrator and the Virgin Mary (*left*), and outer face of lid portraying Crucifixion (*right*). Photos: © Vatican Museums. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Société des Antiquaires de France.[7] In his published report Lauer described the face of the lid showing the Crucifixion as the outer side of the panel and that showing Chrysostom as the inner (fig. 2). Lauer, however, was contradicted by Hartmann Grisar, another scholar involved in the opening of the treasury.[8] Grisar

7. P. Lauer, *Le trésor du Sancta sanctorum* (Paris, 1906), 95–97, plate 14.

8. Grisar initially planned to publish his findings in the journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, but in 1905 Pope Pius X imposed a "segreto" that kept researchers from circulating information about the artifacts. On Grisar's role photographing the objects, see Noreen, "Holy of Holies," 528–29.

Figure 1*b*. Reliquary of the Holy Cross, tenth century. Tempera on wood, 27 x 12.4 x 3 cm. Rome, Vatican Museums, inv. 61898. *Left*: Inner face of lid portraying John Chrysostom. *Right*: Back of reliquary base showing diamond pattern. Photos: © Vatican Museums. Color version available as an online enhancement.

published a study in which he described the face showing Chrysostom as the outer side and the Crucifixion as the inner side (fig. 3).[9] Unfortunately, no known photographs of the reliquary in situ have survived.[10] Nevertheless, there is good reason to accept Lauer's arrangement. Holger Klein has recently observed that the lid is equipped with a pushing aid consisting of two beveled rails, allowing the board to slide flush with the angled ridges along the sides of the reliquary's

9. H. Grisar, *Il Sancta Sanctorum ed il suo tesoro sacro* (Rome, 1907), 152–55, figs. 47–49, and *Die römische Kapelle Sancta sanctorum und ihr Schatz* (Freiburg, 1908), 112–14, figs. 56–58.

10. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 329.

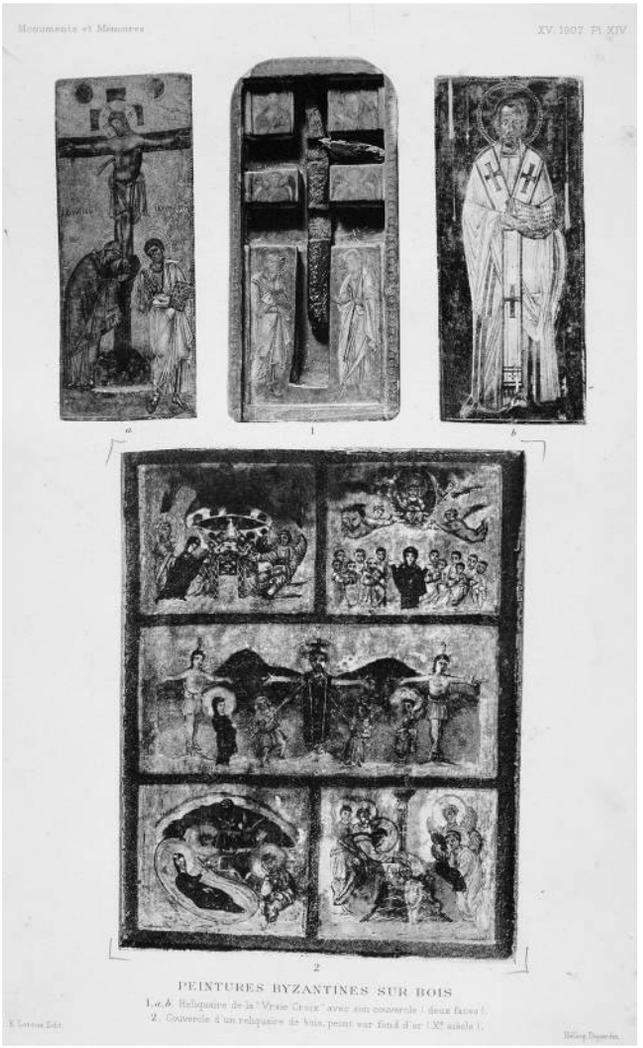

Figure 2. Reliquary of the Holy Cross (fig. 1) depicted in Philippe Lauer, *Le trésor du Sancta sanctorum* (Paris, 1906), plate 14, with lid labeled "couvercle (deux faces)." Elsewhere, Lauer states that the Crucifixion is "sur le couvercle" and Chrysostom "au revers" (96). Photo: Courtesy of Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. Color version available as an online enhancement.

base.[11] This feature, which is also found on an eleventh- or twelfth-century Cross reliquary with a sliding lid at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, entails that the lid could only have been slid into the box one way, with the Crucifixion facing outward.[12]

In the Crucifixion the painter underscores the trauma of Christ's death. Such graphic detail is not necessarily to be expected on reliquaries closely related to the liturgy. For example, on the slightly smaller Fieschi *staurotheke* (box-shaped Cross reliquary) in New York (fig. 4), the enamelist depicted Christ clothed, his eyes wide open, hardly fazed as he faces a certain death. By contrast, on the Vatican cover the painter portrays Christ's nude, muscular body discharging a stream of blood, his lips pulled taut, his eyes scrunched up, and his cheeks sunken into the sides of his face. Perhaps even more unexpectedly, the painter pulls John forward into the picture plane, away from his usual place at the foot of the Cross. Closer to the viewer, John introduces the tone of the scene: his heavily furrowed brow darkens his expression and contrasts sharply with his soft, rosy cheeks. In a remarkable play of gesture, the disciple tilts his head toward Christ as he raises his palm in distress. Stepping forward, he shifts his weight onto his right foot. He is depicted turning away from the dreadful sight of his beloved lord. Through these gestures he draws the viewer's eyes back, if hesitantly, to the tragedy close behind him.

In another unexpected choice, the painter shows Mary kissing Christ's feet. Her nimbus eclipsed by the vertical pole of the Cross, Mary rests her head against her son's feet, even as she is thematically associated with John, whose hands the painter has positioned close to hers. In this way, the artist tethers their movements to a pictorial zone defined by grief and uncertainty. Death, expressions of horror and intimacy, a recasting of familial bonds—these elemental life experiences occupy the space between the sunken head of Christ, the Second Adam, and its counterpart, Adam's skull, in the bowels of the earth below. Following an older tradition, also seen on the Fieschi reliquary, and further linking Mary and John, the painter writes over their heads Christ's parting words to each of them, even though he shows Christ already dead: "Behold, your son! . . . Behold, your mother!" (John 19:26–27). Hovering fatefully above her and John, these words throw into relief the Virgin's actions: she is shown kissing the feet of her biological son even as she casts a sorrowful gaze

11. Klein, *"Wahre" Kreuz*, 112.

12. I am grateful to Yuri Pyatnitsky, who has examined both reliquaries, for answering several questions regarding the construction of their lids. See A. V. Bank, "Vizantiiskie serebrianye izdeliia XI–XII vv. v sobranii Ermitazha," *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 14 (1959): 234–42. See another Cross reliquary that very likely showed the Crucifixion on its (now lost) sliding cover in I. A. Sterligova, ed., *Byzantine Antiquities: Works of Art from the Fourth to the Fifteenth Centuries in the Collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums* (Moscow, 2013), no. 8. Sterligova cites a seventeenth-century inventory that may describe this *staurotheke*: "the Cross, in a casket, with relics, the Crucifixion on a metal plate on it" (123n4).

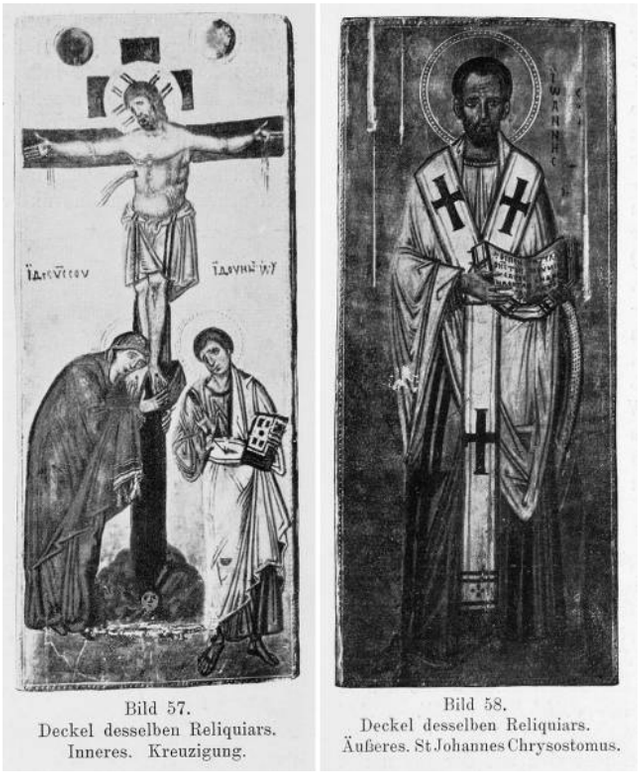

Figure 3. Reliquary of the Holy Cross (fig. 1) depicted in Hartmann Grisar, *Die römische Kapelle Sancta sanctorum und ihr Schatz* (Freiburg, 1908), 113–14, with Crucifixion labeled "Inneres" and Chrysostom "Äußeres." Photo: Courtesy of Marquand Library of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. Color version available as an online enhancement.

upon her newly adopted son. Gospel book in hand, John will make a faithful record of this day when he became Christ's "brother."[13]

Unfortunately, the Vatican reliquary cannot be firmly dated. The Russian scholar Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov argued for a twelfth-century date on the evidence of the painter's masterful handling of Chrysostom's figure and the elegantly styled garments worn by Peter and Paul. Kondakov observed that the flowing garb of the latter two saints copies classicizing twelfth-century models where the figures engaged their robes with their left hand, which was free, though in this case that hand is occupied.[14] The date was pushed back by the reliquary expert Anatole Frolow, who claimed that this style, imitating antique statuary, more closely resembles the "*maniera greca* than Byzantine art," and placed the reliquary in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, attributing it to "an atelier of a Byzantine artist in central Italy."[15] By far the most influential hypothesis was sketched in 1934 by Francis Hyslop, who suggested that the reliquary may date to the tenth century and proposed that it was a gift to the papacy. Because Hyslop first outlined the widely accepted gift-giving narrative and drew attention to the liturgy of the Passion, whereas the present essay emphasizes the liturgy of the Exaltation, his discussion deserves further comment.

Hyslop granted that the reliquary's iconography is consistent with twelfth-century Byzantine painting, since, as he asserted, it was only then that artists abandoned a prevailing aesthetic of "stiffness" and began allowing *pathos* to be "generously expressed" in scenes of the Crucifixion.[16] Hyslop then added two crucial caveats. First, he calls attention to a passage in the mid-twelfth-century inventory of the treasury of the Sancta Sanctorum drawn up by John Diacanus, a canon of the Lateran basilica:[17] "and there are other gilded works wherein is the wood of the Holy Cross" (*est itera ibi alia deaurata, ubi est de ligno illa sanctae crucis*). Invoking an "economy of supposition" to identify this remark with the reliquary in question, Hyslop dismissed Grisar, who had judged it too vague to be identified with any known object.[18] Observing that the Oratory was "repaired" and "closed" during the third quarter of the thirteenth century, presumably not to be reopened until the sixteenth century, when another inventory appears, and then again only in 1903, Hyslop believed that he had identified the reliquary mentioned by John and so had secured an earlier date than stylistic considerations alone might suggest.[19] However, his interpretation is speculative at best. It is hardly certain that every opening

13. On the theology of this moment in the Western tradition, see J. F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 165–78.

14. N. P. Kondakov, *Russkaia ikona*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Prague, 1931), 52, 54, figs. 9–10.

15. A. Frolow, *Les reliquaires de la vraie croix* (Paris, 1965), 95n1, 149, fig. 50, quotes at 98–101 and 105–6. See also A. Frolow, *La relique de la vraie croix: Recherches sur le développement d'un culte* (Paris, 1961), 487 (no. 667). O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1911), 318, also favored a later date and objected to Lauer and Grisar placing the reliquary in the eleventh century, but he did not explain his reasoning, nor did he offer a specific time frame.

16. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 334.

17. For the text, see Lauer, *Trésor*, 28–31. On the inventory, see T. Marani, "The Relics of the Lateran according to *Leiðarvísir*, the *Descriptio Lateranensis ecclesiae*, and the Inscription outside the *Sancta Sanctorum*," *Medium ævum* 81, no. 2 (2012): 271–88.

18. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 339.

19. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 338.

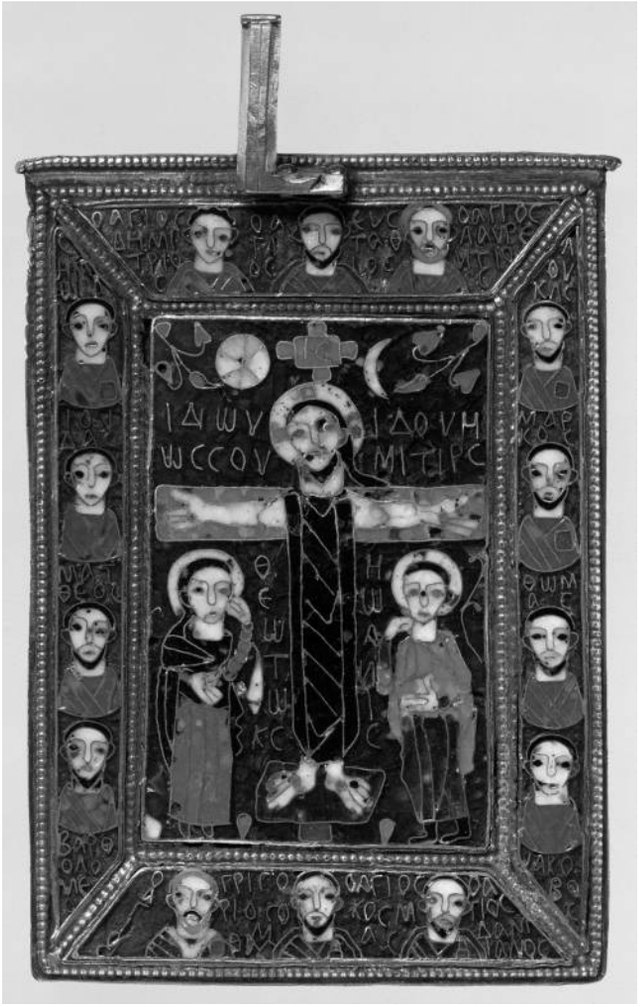

Figure 4. Fieschi Staurotheke, ninth century. Silver, gold, enamel, and niello, 10.3 x 7.1 x 2.7 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.190.715a, b. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

of the treasury would have been recorded, and the reliquary could have been added later.

Second, Hyslop observed that George of Nikomedia, a ninth-century theologian, in a sermon for Holy Week (the week leading up to Easter), described the Mother of God embracing the suppedaneum (footstool of the Cross): "approaching boldly so close as to be able to grasp the cross, she kissed His unblemished feet."[20] In Hyslop's view, George provided a literary precedence for imagining Mary bent over to caress her son's feet. That being said, he did not take George's remarks as proof of the reliquary's early date, as later scholars have. In an important essay from the 1970s on post-Iconoclast art, Robin Cormack cited George's homily to argue that the scene of the Crucifixion is so "startlingly unusual" as to betray a "theologian in its invention"—a theologian of the kind that Hyslop had identified—and tentatively dated the reliquary to the tenth century.[21] Following Cormack, additional scholars including Hans Belting, Barbara Schellewald, Anton Legner, Annemarie Weyl Carr, and Glenn Peers have interpreted the reliquary through the lens of George's homily and the liturgy leading up to Good Friday, and have generally agreed that the reliquary probably dates to the tenth century.[22] However, the iconographic aspects of the reliquary—such as Mary's grasping of the Cross—indicate that it ought to be understood in dialogue with the liturgy of the feast of the Exaltation rather than the Passion. Its date should likewise be revisited in future studies in light of the liturgical evidence.

On the inner side of the reliquary's lid, Chrysostom presides over the relics. His "prominent position," as John Lowden has written, "seems to demand explanation."[23] Portrayed according to convention, Chrysostom wears the white stole (*omophorion*) of a bishop. Decorated with black crosses, it falls down from his narrow shoulders almost to his feet, and its Y-shape subtly echoes the Cross. Framed thus, Chrysostom plays a visual counterpoint to the cruciform storage cavity for the relics, which he would have faced when the lid was slid shut. It was not this correspondence, though, but Chrysostom's way of facing the "Western" saints, Peter and Paul, that Lowden considered important. Lowden also noted that the painter chose to show these two saints instead of Constantine and Helena at the foot of the Cross.[24] Peter is depicted holding a martyr's

20. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 339.

21. Cormack, "Painting after Iconoclasm," 153.

22. See H. Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Meyer (New Rochelle, NY, 1990), 96–97; Legner, *Ornamenta Ecclesiae*, 87; Schellewald, *Byzanz*, no. 24 (71–74); Carr, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 35 (76–77); G. Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2004), 50–52; and P. L. Vocotopoulos, "Funzioni e tipologia delle icone," in *Icone: Il grande viaggio*, ed. T. Velmans (Milan, 2015), 109–49, esp. 130, fig. 36.

23. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 209. Compare Chrysostom alongside St. Nicholas on the doors of a now-lost twelfth-century Cross reliquary in B. Hostetler, "The Function of Text: Byzantine Reliquaries with Epigrams, 843–1204" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2016), 195–96.

24. See on this iconography N. Teteriatnikov, "The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena: A Study in the Light of the Post-Iconoclastic Re-evaluation of the Cross," *Δελτίον Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 18 (1995): 169–88, and H. Klein,

cross, gazing downward to his right and gesturing across the foot of the Cross toward Paul, who holds a book of his epistles in both of his hands and appears to gaze toward Peter. Explaining Chrysostom's relation to these two saints, Lowden observed: "[Chrysostom] holds an open book displaying the text: 'The Lord said to his disciples, These things I command you, that you love one another' (John 15:17—the opening words 'The lord said . . .' are a liturgical formula)."[25] But instead of pursuing a liturgical analysis, Lowden cites a passing remark in Hyslop's article to the effect that the reliquary "may" have been sent to Rome from the Patriarchy of Constantinople as a gift of reconciliation after the schism.[26] Lowden continues: "Perhaps St. John Chrysostom, who had been Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 407), was pictured speaking these words of Christ to the apostles' successor in Rome, as a reminder of the need for *agape* (a complex word approximately equivalent to 'love'). It is difficult to see the image of Chrysostom as having a specific connection with the relic of the Holy Cross, but the making of the object may recall a tradition of donations to the papacy."[27] In the absence of any liturgical explanation, Lowden invoked the gift-giving narrative that has persistently defined the reliquary.

On the lateral insets, tucked between the two horizontal bars of the Cross, the painter depicts two, bust-length archangels, who are dressed in the imperial *loros* decorated with gold and black checkers and pearls, and who hold staffs in their right hands. Margherita Spinucci has pointed out that Byzantine Cross reliquaries often combine archangels on both the middle and upper insets but that on this object the artist has instead included bust-length images of Christ and Mary on the upper insets.[28] The painter represents Christ and his mother here in the form of a *Deesis*: Christ is shown as the Pantocrator, or "Ruler of All," while Mary, at his left, is portrayed beseeching him in prayer. This configuration identifies the object with images adorning the bema (the raised area containing the altar) of Middle Byzantine churches.[29]

Finally, it is worth elaborating on the complex relationship between the wood relic and its wooden container. In Lauer's reproductions the relic lies uncovered and bare but it likely would have originally been mounted, or perhaps wrapped in a protective cloth (see fig. 2). Exactly how the relic would have been stored remains uncertain given that no detailed archaeological report survives and the early history of the object remains obscure. Like many reliquaries, it may have been stored in a bema, since at some point, perhaps before being brought to Rome, the upper corners of the base were rounded off, probably in order to fit it into a shrine or arched niche.[30] Wooden reliquaries were not uncommon in Byzantium and were owned by the foremost religious institutions. Hagia Sophia, the Pantocrator Monastery, and the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, all in Constantinople, are just three foundations that are known to have housed a wooden Cross reliquary.[31] Holger Klein has observed that Byzantine craftsmen often hearkened back to late-antique applied arts in the eastern Mediterranean. Simply by being a wooden box (*thêkê ksulinê*), the reliquary could have evoked associations with antiquity, the period during which, historically speaking, the Crucifixion had occurred.[32] Probably equally important is Cynthia Hahn's recent assertion that the "first maneuver" of reliquaries is to contrast the antiquity of the sacred matter with the newness of the container—an effect accomplished here by "rhyming" the container with the contained, the wooden box with the fragment of the wooden Cross.[33] Contrasting a brightly painted exterior with an unadorned relic (however presented),

"Constantine, Helena, and the Cult of the True Cross in Constantinople," in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. J. Durand and B. Flusin (Paris, 2004), 31–59. Frolow, *Reliquaires*, 218, observes just one other instance where Constantine and Helena are replaced; the reliquary in question is catalogued in Frolow, *Relique*, 512–13 (no. 729).

25. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 211. In the Greek, the inscription reads: Εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς· ταῦτα ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.

26. Hyslop, "Byzantine Reliquary," 338.

27. Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, 214.

28. M. Spinucci, "Nota sulle stauroteche medievali in Italia," *Rivista dell'Osservatorio per le Arti Decorative in Italia* 3 (2011): 23–42, esp. 33. S. Gilsdorf, "Deēsis Deconstructed: Imagining Intercession in the Medieval West," *Viator* 43, no. 1 (2012): 131–74, esp. 135, notes that Mary's placement is unusual, since medieval artists typically position intercessors on Christ's right.

29. See R. S. Nelson, "Image and Inscription: Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion," in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James (Cambridge, 2007), 100–120, esp. 103, 112.

30. On the storage of relics in the bema, see V. Marinis and R. Ousterhout, "'Grant Us to Share a Place and Lot with Them': Relics and the Byzantine Church Building (9th–15th Centuries)," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. Hahn and H. A. Klein (Washington, DC, 2015), 153–72, esp. 157–59.

31. See A. Cutler and M. E. Frazer, "True Cross," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan (New York, 1991), 3:2125–26.

32. H. Klein, "Die Elfenbein-Staurothek von Cortona im Kontext mittelbyzantinischer Kreuzreliquiarproduktion," in *Spätantike und byzantinische Elfenbeinbildwerke im Diskurs*, ed. G. Bühl, A. Cutler, and A. Effenberger (Wiesbaden, 2008), 167–90, esp. 170.

33. See C. Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object* (London, 2017), 7, 35–37.

the reliquary contributed to the spiritual logic of the feast of the Exaltation, as I will demonstrate below. In this respect, the play of light may have been crucial. For instance, at the Pantocrator Monastery the Exaltation was one of only a few feasts during the year in which chandeliers were let down from the ceiling, candles were hung on the iconostasis, and candelabra were lit in the choir, narthex, and entrance.[34] The sanctuary would have been ablaze with light. Coated in gold leaf, the Vatican reliquary, even as it stood in material sympathy with the wood of the Cross, could intimate the relic's refulgent essence through a dazzling display.

The reliquary within the liturgy of the Exaltation

The three elements that have been identified as iconographically atypical—Mary's gesture, the striking figure of Chrysostom, and the presence of Peter and Paul at the foot of the Cross—can all be explained by way of the liturgy for the feast of the Exaltation. That this feast featured prominently in the imagination of the designer is logical given that, as John Wortley has observed, the Cross was the only relic to which a major feast was dedicated in Byzantium, and the Exaltation marked an important day in Constantinople.[35] While the wood of the Cross was venerated during Lent and at imperial ceremonies,[36] these can be understood as secondary contexts: the feast of the Exaltation was the primary context for which this reliquary was designed.

Mary's gesture can be understood as fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy. In the tenth-century typicon (a rubricated liturgical book) for Hagia Sophia, the fourth troparion, or hymn, for the feast declares: "Today, the prophetic word has been fulfilled! For behold! We worship at the place where your feet stood, Lord [Ps. 131:7]. And receiving the tree of salvation [*ksulon sôtêrias*], we have obtained through the prayers of the Theotokos [literally "God-bearer"] liberation from the passions brought about by sin, O sole Lover of Mankind!"[37] The typicon explains that when worshipers approached the Cross, the choir would sing: "We adore your Cross, Lord," to which they were to respond: "Exalt ye the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain" (Ps. 98:9). Other typicons read: "Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool, for he is holy" (98:5).[38] As Anthony Cutler has observed, so closely were these verses from the Psalms identified with the Exaltation that the illuminators of ninth-century psalters represented the "mountain" as Golgotha and the "footstool" as the Cross.[39] In the eleventh-century Theodore Psalter, the painter similarly illustrates Psalms 98 with the Exaltation (fig. 5).

The painter of the Vatican reliquary can be seen as offering a related visual gloss. He draws attention to "the place where your feet stood"—the footstool of the Cross—by picturing Mary bent down to kiss her son's feet. Given, however, that this is a reliquary housing a fragment of the Cross itself, he is able to lend the gesture literal meaning. Showing the Virgin folded over Christ's feet, he invites worshipers to mimic her act of reverence as they approach the Cross just as she has done. The reliquary thereby solicits believers to comport themselves meekly toward the relic in an attitude that Peter Brown calls *reverentia*, "an etiquette toward the supernatural" that was part of the medieval belief in the cult of relics.[40] Such *reverentia* is known from earlier periods. The fourth-century pilgrim Egeria says that she first touched the Cross with her forehead, then her head, and finally her lips.[41] In eleventh-century

34. P. Gautier, "Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator," *Revue des études byzantines* 32 (1974): 1–145, esp. 38–39.

35. See J. Wortley, "The Wood of the True Cross," in *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204* (Burlington, VT, 2009), vi, 1–19, esp. 15–16.

36. Relics of the Cross were celebrated at the Procession of the Holy Wood on August 1 and in imperial ceremonies. See Klein, "Cult of the True Cross," 48–54, and H. Klein, "Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople," in *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen—Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. F. A. Bauer (Istanbul, 2006), 79–99, esp. 89–91.

37. Σήμερον τὸ προφητικὸν πεπλήρωται λόγιον· ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσκυνοῦμεν εἰς τὸν τόπον οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες σου, Κύριε, καὶ ξύλον σωτηρίας δεξάμενοι, τῶν ἐξ ἁμαρτίας παθῶν ἐλευθερίας ἐτύχομεν, πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου, μόνε Φιλάνθρωπε. , J. Mateos, ed. and trans., *Le typicon de la grande église: Ms. Sainte-Croix no. 40, X^e siècle* (Rome, 1962–63), 1:28–31, and B. Flusin, "Les cérémonies de l'exaltation de la croix à Constantinople au XI^e siècle d'après le *Dresdensis* A 104," in Durand and Flusin, *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, 61–89.

38. *Le typicon du monastère du Saint-Sauveur à Messine: Codex Messinensis gr. 115, A.D. 1131*, ed. M. Arranz (Rome, 1969), 25.

39. A. Cutler, "Liturgical Strata in the Marginal Psalters," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980): 17–30, esp. 22–23, contrasting Moscow, Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, MS 129, fol. 98v with Mount Athos, Pantocrator, MS 61, fol. 140r.

40. P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981), 119. Quoted in C. J. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park, PA, 2012), 9, who uses the concept of *reverentia* as a starting point for her analysis of medieval reliquaries; see also Hahn, *Reliquary Effect*, 21.

41. *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, trans. G. E. Gingras (New York, 1970), 111.

Figure 5. Theodore of Caesarea, depiction of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Theodore Psalter, ca. 1066. London, British Library, Add 19352, fol. 131v. Photo: © The British Library Board. Color version available as an online enhancement.

lectionaries depicting commemorative rituals for the feast—ceremonies outside of the festal liturgy—worshipers were depicted variously bending down, caressing, and kissing the Cross relic (fig. 6).[42] In this light, it would not have been unexpected for the reliquary to stage worshipers' approach, entreating them to fall down at the "mountain" where the Cross stood and, like Mary, adore the "footstool" on which Christ's feet were placed, the very footstool that she herself had caressed. In so doing, worshipers were kneeling at and caressing the same wood that she had knelt before and caressed. Showing worshipers how to venerate the relic, the depicted Cross on the cover blended seamlessly into its referent, a sign that remembered her touch in order to anticipate theirs.

In offering worshipers an entry point into worship, the Virgin's gesture encouraged believers to comport themselves in accord with the temporality of the object and its way of presenting divinity. During the rite of veneration, worshipers presumably would have beheld the deacon, or perhaps the priest, pulling back the lid of the reliquary to reveal the Cross relic, above which, marvelously, Mary was now shown interceding on their behalf. Having first portrayed her on the cover, bent down at the foot of the Cross, on the interior the painter reveals Mary praying for believers, who, as the above-cited troparion says, receive forgiveness "through the prayers of the Theotokos." In this doubling of her, as well as her son's, figure, the reliquary enacted a drama discursively through its moving parts, which were coordinated with the movement of the worshiper in the act of veneration. Staging the disclosure of the sacred matter through the gesture of Christ's mother, the last person to have touched the historical Cross, the reliquary's decoration and design enabled it to ratify the spiritual renewal of devotees. This process involved a translation of the Cross from the site of Mary's mourning

Figure 6. Worshipers venerating relics of the Holy Cross depicted in an eleventh-century lectionary. Vatican Library, BAV gr. 1156, fol. 248v. Photo: © 2019 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved.

42. As J. C. Anderson, *The New York Cruciform Lectionary* (University Park, PA, 1992), 23, notes, the miniatures do not illustrate "readings associated with the feast" but "elements of a commemorative service." On the images, see K. Weitzmann, "Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting in the Eleventh Century," in *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, ed. H. L. Kessler (Chicago, 1971), figs. 297–99.

to that of her intercession on their behalf.[43] Brought humbly to the mountain and footstool, explored on the cover as a liturgical memory, worshipers entered the reliquary's interior through a play between history and presence, iconographic archive and the thing itself. Seen in this light, Mary provided a gestural outline and through-line for participating in the mystery of the feast. When the lid was pulled downward, worshipers came to embody her posture at the foot of the Cross, filling her memory space even as she ascended up over its top to pray on their behalf.

If Mary prefigured worshipers' encounter with the Cross relic, she also echoed the archetypal origin of sin in the Garden of Eden. During Lent and other seasons, at the morning service (*orthros*), worshipers proclaimed their sins in a penitential canon by Andrew of Crete. Composed of nine odes, the fourth stanza of the first ode, which dealt with the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, read: "Alas wretched soul! How much are you like the first Eve! You saw evil and you were grievously wounded, and you grasped the tree [*êpsô tou ksulou*] and rashly tasted the food of unreason (1.4)."[44] In these verses, believers were brought to identify the origin of evil with Eve's seizing of the fruit of the Tree in the Garden. The word for "tree," *ksulon*, was ambiguous and could also mean simply "wood." It was this ambiguity that allowed Eve's action to serve as a negative mold in which to cast worshipers' *reverentia* toward the Cross relic. In a popular homily on the wood of the Cross, widely read at the Exaltation,[45] Chrysostom explained the frame of mind in which believers should approach the Cross relic. He observes that the serpent tempted Eve, saying: "'How beautiful is the tree to look upon and desirable to eat!' And [he added], 'On the day that you eat from it, you will be as gods, knowing everything!'" (Gen. 3:5–6).[46] Letting down her guard, Eve took the fruit, ate it, and gave it to her husband: "But, when God saw that the human race was being defeated by the devil's wile, he decided to enter into our first fruits [i.e., the flesh], and he nailed it to a tree. So that, just as transgression came through a tree [*dia tou ksulou*], salvation might also come through a tree [*dia tou ksulou*]."[47] In these sentences, Chrysostom characterizes the worshiper's encounter with the wood of the Cross in light of mankind's archetypal encounter with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Cross is the "tree" that reverses the origin of sin at the tree in the Garden. In this way, Chrysostom historicizes veneration and provides a heuristic lens through which the wood of the two trees dissolves into a material embodying the essence of sin and salvation. Doing so, he enables worshipers to think toward an experience of the Cross relic as an encounter with a dialectical material that, through repetition, reverses the meaning of an original touch and kiss, Eve's grasping the tree and eating of its forbidden fruit. Even as worshipers inhabit the posture of Christ's mother, they embody the gesture of Eve, the archetypal woman—the mother of every human being and yet the one through whom death entered the world. In this way they enacted the tension between sin and salvation that was memorialized in iconography of the Crucifixion where Adam's skull was placed, as it is on the Vatican reliquary, below the foot of the Cross on Golgotha (literally "the place of the skull").[48] The Mother of God was the New Eve, and Christ was the New Adam. Hearkening back to and reinterpreting Eve's gesture, which entailed death and the misery of history, believers' reverence leads to the salvation of their own souls.[49]

Chrysostom's homily thus adds a layer of complexity to the Virgin's gesture. It also offers a way of

43. On the distinction between the historical Cross and its ritual embodiments in the liturgy, see B. Kitzinger, *The Cross, the Gospels, and the Work of Art in the Carolingian Age* (Cambridge, 2018), 25–92.

44. Οἴμοι, τάλαινα ψυχή! τί ὡμοιώθης τῇ πρώτῃ Εὔᾳ; εἶδες γὰρ κακῶς καὶ ἐτρώθης πικρῶς, καὶ ἥψω τοῦ ξύλου, καὶ ἐγεύσω προπετῶς τῆς παραλόγου βρώσεως. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completes, Series graeca* (Paris, 1844–66), 97:1332A (hereafter: PG). On this canon see D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia, 2014), 130–63, esp. 147. I here follow Krueger's translation.

45. *In venerabilem crucem sermo*, Clavis Patrum Graecorum 4525. G. M. Browne, "Ps.-Chrysostom, *In Venerabilem Crucem Sermo*: The Greek Vorlage of the Syriac Version," *Le Muséon* 103 (1990): 125–38, esp. 125, records eight Greek manuscripts from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries that include this homily. At the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, this homily was read at *orthros* on the feast of the Exaltation. See *The Synaxarion of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis*, ed. and trans. R. H. Jordan (Belfast, 2000–2007), 1:56–57. On the popularity of the homily, see also A. Suciu, *The Berlin-Strasbourg Apocryphon* (Tübingen, 2017), 44–45. I shall follow the text as printed under Chrysostom's *spuria* in PG 50:815–20.

46. ὅτι καλὸν τὸ ξύλον τοῦτο καὶ ὡραῖον εἰς βρῶσιν· καὶ, ἐν ᾗ ἂν ἡμέρᾳ φάγησθε ἀπ᾽αὐτοῦ, ἔσεσθε ὡς θεοὶ πάντα γινώσκοντες. PG 50:820, lines 21–23.

47. Ἰδὼν δὲ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος νικώμενον ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ διαβόλου κακίας, ἐβουλήθη τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐνδύσασθαι, καὶ προσηλώσαι αὐτὴν ἐν τῷ ξύλῳ, ἵν᾽, ὥσπερ διὰ τοῦ ξύλου ἡ παράβασις, οὕτω πάλιν διὰ τοῦ ξύλου ἡ σωτηρία. PG 50:820, lines 10–15.

48. See B. Bagatti, "Note sull'iconografia di 'Adamo sotto il Calvario,'" *Liber annus: Studium biblicum franciscanum* 27 (1977): 5–32.

49. On Eve and Mary as analogues, see E. Guldan, *Eva und Maria: Eine Antithese als Bildmotiv* (Cologne, 1966).

understanding the reliquary's contrasting interior and exterior moods, and densities of time. On the cover the painter shows a pitiful scene: Mary and John, filled with uncertainty, desire an answer to, or reprieve from, the finality of death that colors their plaintive expressions. Moving inside, Christ's limitations are overcome. Here, the painter depicts Christ and Mary at the summit of a cross, the arms of which stretch across the entirety of the cosmos, which it carves up into human beings, angels, and the godhead. Built into the reliquary's design is a reflection on the complexity of Christ's two natures. When the lid is pulled down to reveal a celestial hierarchy, Christ's disclosure of his humanity unfolds as a revelation of his divinity.

In his homily Chrysostom offers a similar reflection, inquiring into the title of "Christ":

> When you hear 'Christ,' do not think only of God or the economy of the flesh but both together. Think of *both* God the Logos and the fleshly economy. Because I know that Christ hungered, and I know that Christ fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves of bread and two fish. I know that Christ thirsted, and I know that Christ changed water into wine. I know that Christ sailed, and I know that Christ walked on water. I know that Christ died, and I know that Christ raised the dead. I know that Christ stood before Pilate, and I know that Christ sits enthroned with the Father. I know that Christ was spat upon by the Jews, and I know that Christ is worshiped by the angels. And the latter things I declare because of his divinity, and the former things because of his humanity; and the two are spoken together, since I know that Christ was born of Mary, and I know that Christ existed before the ages. Therefore, let us glorify Jesus Christ, the unbreakable wall, the foundation erected upon a rock [cf. Eph. 2:20]. For he himself said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail over it" [Matt. 16:18]. And likewise, Paul said, "No other foundation can a man lay, apart from that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" [1 Cor. 3:11].[50]

Chrysostom here draws attention to both Christ's mortal and divine nature, asking that they be thought together. He observes that the first subjected Christ to hunger, suffering, humiliation, and death, while the second enabled him to perform miracles and be resurrected and enthroned at the right hand of God the Father where he would be worshiped by angels. At each step in the meditation, Chrysostom reveals the weakness of the mortal nature to be a moment of immediate reversal in which a transcendental power issues from the finitude of Christ's fragile humanity.

It is this reversal that the craftsman and painter stage in the construction of the reliquary. Crucial in this regard are the figures of Chrysostom, Peter, and Paul, who control the delivery of the historical relic and so mediate its sacred power. The latter two saints stand at the foot of the Cross relic occupying the space that Golgotha fills on the cover. Whereas on the lid the Cross rests upon a geological outcrop, on the interior it stands on the shoulders of church leaders, who serve as its human bedrock and who present the Cross to worshipers. In the above passage Chrysostom suggests just such a slippage between the earthy Golgotha and the ecclesiastical foundation of the Cross when he says that Christ was a "foundation erected upon a rock." Quoting a pun in the Gospel of Matthew, Chrysostom notes that Christ declared that he has built his Church on the shoulders of Peter, whose name literally means "rock" (Gk. *petra*). Christ spoke these words to the apostle when he confessed that Jesus was the Christ—the messiah, or "anointed one"—and was rewarded with the proverbial keys to the kingdom of heaven. Standing at the foot of the Cross itself, holding a cross in his hands, Peter represents the believer who first recognized the salvific nature of Christ's mission in the world—a recognition that Chrysostom echoes in his paean about who Christ is. By the same token, the painter shows Paul carrying his epistles, gathered into the New Testament, indicating that his fecund pen was his contribution to the legacy of Christ's Cross. Quoting a similar play on words in his epistles, Chrysostom says that Paul confessed that there was no other foundation (*themelion*) to be laid than Christ himself. Founders' dedications commonly describe churches as built "from the ground up" (*ek tôn themeliôn*), and it is this trope that lies behind

50. Χριστὸν δὲ σὺ ὅταν ἀκούσῃς, μὴ τὸν Θεὸν λογίζου μόνον, μήτε τὴν ἔνσαρκον οἰκονομίαν μόνην, ἀλλὰ τὸ συναμφότερον, καὶ τὸν Θεὸν Λόγον καὶ τὴν ἔνσαρκον οἰκονομίαν. Ἐπεὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν πεινάσαντα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν ἐκ πέντε ἄρτων καὶ δύο ἰχθύων θρέψαντα πεντακισχιλίους χωρὶς γυναικῶν καὶ παιδίων· οἶδα Χριστὸν διψήσαντα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν τὸ ὕδωρ εἰς οἶνον μεταβαλόντα· οἶδα Χριστὸν πλεύσαντα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων περιπατήσαντα· οἶδα Χριστὸν ἀποθανόντα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν νεκροὺς ἐγείραντα· οἶδα Χριστὸν Πιλάτῳ παρεστῶτα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν τῷ Πατρὶ συγκαθεζόμενον· οἶδα Χριστὸν ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἐμπτυόμενον, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων προσκυνούμενον· καὶ τὸ μὲν ἐπάγω τῇ θεότητι, τὸ δὲ τῇ ἀνθρωπότητι. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο συναμφότερον εἴρηται, ἐπεὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν ἐκ Μαρίας γεννηθέντα, καὶ οἶδα Χριστὸν πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων ὄντα. Δοξάσωμεν μὲν οὖν Ἰησοῦν τὸν Χριστὸν, τὸ τεῖχος τὸ ἄῤῥηκτον, τὸν θεμέλιον τὸν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν τεθεμελιωμένον. Αὐτὸς λέγει τῷ Πέτρῳ· Σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι ᾅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς. Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Παῦλος λέγει· Θεμέλιον ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. PG 50:818, lines 26–50.

Chrysostom's remarks and the reliquary's design.[51] Standing beside Peter at the foot of the material Cross, Paul serves as yet another rock on which was laid the foundation of Christ's ecumenical legacy. Far from drawing a mere visual parallel, the painter can be seen as identifying the labor of these two saints with the sacrificial work on which the historical Cross stakes its existence in the world. In the process, the reliquary confers real power on those who mediate the traces of Christ's life. When the faithful approach the Cross's footstool, they lay themselves at the feet of Christ's "foundation," his successors, the priests, who carry out the ceremony and hand down, care for, and make the Cross available.

The figure of John Chrysostom

Chrysostom's appearance on the reliquary can be explained by way of his feast day.[52] Chrysostom's feast was celebrated on November 13 in the Middle Byzantine era, but the actual day of his death was September 14, the day of the feast of the Exaltation. Chrysostom was still widely remembered as having died on the feast of the Exaltation. In the twelfth-century typicon for St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai, a scribe writes in the margin of the manuscript at the entry for September 14: "We declare the death of our father St. John Chrysostom [on this day]."[53] Similarly, in the typicon for Hagia Sophia, the incipit for Chrysostom's vita, penned by Georgius I, bishop of Alexandria (ca. 620–ca. 630), refers to the feast of the Exaltation as the day of his death: "The commemoration of the banishment of the holy archbishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom: it is celebrated on this day rather than on the day of his death, since the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross falls on that day."[54] An illumination featuring Chrysostom's banishment from the capital accompanies his vita in the Menologion of Basil II (976–1025), produced sometime after 979. In the space between the incipit and the beginning of Georgius's vita, the illuminator, Michael of Blachernai, depicts Chrysostom riding away from the city on a horse (fig. 7).[55] What these manuscripts demonstrate is that there was a cross-fertilization of liturgical memory between Chrysostom's feast day—which began ominously with the remembrance of his banishment—and the feast of the Exaltation, a memory that could have guided the Vatican painter's choice to portray the bishop on a Cross reliquary.

Consequently, Chrysostom would have been remembered on the Exaltation not as the patriarchal representative of Byzantium to Western Christendom, but as the bishop who had been exiled from Constantinople. The fifth-century historian Sozomen recounts how Chrysostom aroused the ire of Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379–95) and scores of priests. Seeking to reform the Church, which in his eyes was glutted by the patronage of wealthy parishioners, Chrysostom stirred the people with his fiery preaching. Theodosius and several church leaders, whom Sozomen portrays as an extension of the imperial office, convened a series of councils to depose the patriarch.[56] In his vita Georgius brings the story of the bishop's tenure to a climax, stating that Chrysostom "had the doors of the church

51. S. V. Leatherbury, "Reading and Seeing Faith in Byzantium: The Sinai Inscription as Verbal and Visual 'Text,'" *Gesta* 55, no. 2 (2016): 133–56, esp. 145. See also I. Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2016), 80.

52. There is little in Chrysostom's theology to motivate his presence on a reliquary of the Cross. See P. Stockmeier, *Theologie und Kult des Kreuzes bei Johannes Chrysostomus: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Kreuzes im 4. Jahrhundert* (Trier, 1966).

53. Ἠκοίμησις τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου καὶ διοριζόμεθα. A. A. Dmitrievskii, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisei khraniashchikhsia v bibliotekakh pravoslavnago Vostoka* (Kiev, 1895–1917), 3:30 (Mount Sinai, St. Catherine's, MS 1096, fol. 31r). The verb *diorizometha* (declare, acknowledge) is ambiguous, and more work needs to be done to determine whether this note implies paraliturgical celebrations or commemorative rites for Chrysostom.

54. μνήμη ἤτοι ἡ ὑπερορία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. Τελεῖται δὲ ἀντὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως αὐτοῦ διὰ τὸ ταύτην τῇ Ὑψώσει τοῦ τιμίου συμβαίνειν Σταυρου. Mateos, *Typicon*, 1:98–100. For Chrysostom's vita in the synaxarion, see H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi adiectis synaxariis selectis* (Brussels, 1902), 217–18.

55. Ἠνάμησις τῆς ἐξορίας τοῦ ἐν ἁγίους Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. / [miniature of Chrysostom's exile] / Ἐπιτελεῖται ἡ μνήμη αὐτὴ νῦν ἀντὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως αὐτοῦ, διὰ τὸ ταύτην ἐν τῇ ὑψώσει τοῦ τιμίου συμβαίνειν Σταυροῦ. PG 117:157. A. Luzzi, "El 'Menologio de Basilio II' y el semestre invernal de la *recensio* B* del Sinaxario de Constantinopla," in *El 'Menologio de Basilio II': Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1613, Libro de estudios con ocasión de la edición facsímil*, ed. F. D'Aiuto and I. Pérez Martín (Madrid, 2008), 60, cites three other instances of this reading in recensions of the Constantinopolitan synaxarion: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 1589; Grottaferrata, Biblioteca della Badia greca, B.γ.I + B.γ.II; and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 2046. See the catalogue of artists in D'Aiuto and Pérez Martín, *'Menologio'*, 324.

56. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, *Sozomenus Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin, 1960), 358–62, 370–73; E. Walford, *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen* (London, 1855), 371–76, 385–88.

Figure 7. Michael of Blachernai, Chrysostom's Exile, Menologion of Basil II, after 979. Vatican Library, BAV gr. 1613, fol. 78. Photo: © 2019 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved.

closed on the Empress Eudoxia (d. 404), so that she could not participate in the celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross, because of some discord between them [i.e., John and the emperor]."[57] It is this detail to which Christopher Walter has pointed to explain the marginal illumination of the Exaltation in the Theodore Psalter, where Chrysostom, who is labeled, is shown elevating the Cross at the ambo, the raised ceremonial platform at the front of the church.[58] Extending Walter's observations, Irina Aleksandrovna Shalina has pointed to the aforementioned liturgical manuscripts to explain the presence of Chrysostom in later miniatures and frescoes.[59] Chrysostom's relatively widespread appearance in scenes of the Exaltation is thus hardly surprising, but this in no way detracts from the powerful message his figure could send believers. Emblematizing resistance to the emperor, he marked the competing interests of church and state, both of which derived authority from relics.

In this context the verse that Chrysostom displays on his open book (John 15:17) acquires significance. Often this text has been identified as a reading from a vigil held on the Thursday before Easter.[60] That reading, however, begins at John 13 and runs through chapter 18, and the verse in question receives no special emphasis.[61] Rather, this text was probably chosen because it introduces a well-known reading in the lectionary apropos for a bishop who had been exiled. With one exception, this verse introduces the most frequently read lection in the entire liturgical year, John 15:17–16:2, which appears at the entry for nine feast days in the typicon of Hagia Sophia.[62] In the passage, Christ exhorts his disciples to love one another, predicts his death on the Cross, and says that his followers will be driven out of the church by those who hate them. Such an oft-repeated passage would likely have been called to mind in its entirety by worshipers when they saw the first verse. Held in Chrysostom's hands as he stands between the Crucifixion and the Cross relic, the inscription could have been interpreted as an exhortation to build community around a cult object and a feast that had proven divisive in Chrysostom's own lifetime. Chrysostom was a Christ-like leader who had carried on the legacy of the Cross.

It remains to situate the figure of Chrysostom within the gestural dialogue the reliquary takes up with the worshiper. In the centuries after the end of Iconoclasm (843 CE), the feast culminated when the reliquary was lifted three times from the ambo. As the typicon for Hagia Sophia relates:

> While the troparia are being sung several times . . . the patriarch ascends to the ambo, and the holy wood is

57. L. van Tongeren, *Exaltation of the Cross: Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in Early Medieval Liturgy* (Leuven, 2000), 38n95. The church in question is the second Hagia Sophia built under Theodosius II and dedicated ca. 415.

58. C. Walter, "Biographical Scenes of the Three Hierarchs," *Revue des études byzantines* 36 (1978): 233–60, esp. 255, where the author also cites Mount Athos, Panteleimon, MS 2, fol. 189v. See also C. Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London, 1982), 153–55.

59. I. A. Shalina, *Relikvii v vostochnokhristianskoi ikonografii* (Moscow, 2005), 158–59n196.

60. See Klein, *"Wahre" Kreuz*, 113n100; Carr, *Glory of Byzantium*, no. 35 (77); Cormack, "Painting after Iconoclasm," 151.

61. See Mateos, *Typicon*, 2:77 and 79n1.

62. Mateos, *Typicon*, 1:78–80, 96–98, 102–4, 112–14, 214–16, 270, 274, 280–82, 292 (Oct. 26; Nov. 11, 15, and 25; Jan. 29; Apr. 23 and 26; May 4 and 14). The exception is Matt. 5:14–19, which was read on eleven feast days (ibid., 2:224). John 10:9–16 also appears at nine feast days, whereas the next two most common readings (Matt. 16:13–18 and Luke 21:12–19) appear at six (ibid., 2:226, 224, and 226).

> brought up and presented to him in a container. Once these things [i.e., the relics] have been delivered, the archdeacon removes the omophorion from the patriarch's shoulders, and the latter bends his knee and, leaning on the ground, performs a *metanoia* [i.e., bow], even if it is a Saturday or a Sunday, and he prays on the ambo. Then, he stands up, takes the Cross with his hands, and raises it,[63] and the syncellus assists him from the rear while the people proclaim: *Kyrie, eleison*. Then, he makes the first, the second, and the third exaltation. After the third, he descends to the bema, and then follows the adoration of the holy wood [*proskunêsis tôn timiôn ksulôn*].[64]

If one imagines the patriarch officiating with this reliquary in Hagia Sophia, then the figure of Chrysostom on the inner face of the lid, presumably displayed to worshipers as they approached the bema, could have been seen as his eminent predecessor. Chrysostom had faithfully overseen the Exaltation in this sacred place in earlier centuries before he was driven into exile by rival factions within the capital. Alternatively, if one imagines the rite being performed in a monastery or another major church, Chrysostom could still have served as a figurehead presiding over and guarding this central feast against nefarious powers. Byzantine liturgical commentaries interpret the archdeacon's removal of the bishop's omophorion as a sign of humility insofar as it was believed that Christ himself then appeared in the liturgy, during the elevation of the Cross.[65] It was at the removal of his garment that the congregation would begin singing *Kyrie eleison*, "Lord, have mercy."[66] Portraying Chrysostom still wearing the Y-shaped omophorion decorated with crosses, the painter allowed the bishop's body to be visually assimilated to the cruciform cavity of the base and the Cross relic itself. In short, Chrysostom mediates the worshiper's passage from an image of Christ's body hanging limp on the Cross to the actual Cross itself. In turn, the patriarch or priest carrying out the ritual elevations of the Cross, in presenting the relic, stood between the worshiper and the reliquary, and so his own body could become the object of the worshiper's desire for Christ's absent body—a desire displaced onto him by the reliquary's design. Chrysostom's image, seen in this way, is merely the sediment of an artistic reduction and reconstitution of the cultic body in the one carrying out the ritual in Christ's honor.

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In sum, the various parts of the Vatican reliquary participated in and helped cultivate an attitude of *reverentia* on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Whatever circumstances brought the reliquary to Rome, clearly the design and iconography of the reliquary box were crafted with the liturgical environment, and worshiper, of the Eastern Church in mind. On the cover, it was the sorrowful gesture of the Virgin Mary that brought worshipers into a posture of meekness, beckoning them to draw near to the footstool of the Cross where she had kissed her son's feet as she wrapped her hands around the wood. Inviting the faithful to bow down, just as she had done, and as was traditionally done when venerating relics, she brought worshipers to the base of the Cross, inaugurating a conceptual division between, on the one hand, the remembered historical Cross and the foundation upon which it stood and, on the other, the Cross itself supported on the interior by the apostolic and ecclesiastical institution. This inner, cultic space was presided over by the figure of the bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, who was intimately associated with the feast of the Exaltation and the sense of community built around it. Visually assimilated to the Cross relic, Chrysostom enjoined the worshiper to "love thy neighbor," a command given by Jesus himself, the original example of a leader who had been unjustly driven from his flock. Chrysostom, and by extension the officiant standing in his place during the liturgy, thus became the recipient of the worshiper's affection, an adoration transferred to him through a desire for the body of Christ, shown dead on the cover and absent on the interior but reconstructed in and by his representatives in the Church. It is they who were possessed of a charisma that could make it seem as if Christ were still present in the material that his body had touched.

63. On the ceremonial raising of the Cross, see especially Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 85.

64. Ψαλλομένων οὖν τῶν τροπαρίων πολλάκις . . . ἀνέρχεται ὁ πατριάρχης ἐν τῷ ἄμβωνι, βασταζομένων ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ τῶν τιμίων ξύλων σὺν τῇ θήκῃ, καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἀνερθεῖν αὐτά, ὁ ἀρχιδιάκονος ἀφαιρεῖ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ ὠμοφόριον, καὶ εἰς γόνυ κλιθεὶς ὁ πατριάρχης καὶ προσερεισθεὶς τῇ γῇ, βάλλει μετάνοιαν, κἂν τε σάββατόν ἐστιν κἂν τε κυριακή, καὶ εὔχεται ἐν τῷ ἄμβωνι. Καὶ οὕτως ἐγειρόμενος, λαμβάνει τὸν Σταυρὸν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦτον ὑφοῖ, συνόντος αὐτῷ τοῦ συγκέλλου ὄπισθεν καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ κραζόντων τὸ Κύριε, ἐλέησον. Καὶ εἶθ᾽οὕτως ποιεῖ τὴν α′ καὶ β′ καὶ γ′ ὕφωσιν. Καὶ μετὰ τὴν τρίτην ὕφωσιν κατέρχεται ὁ πατριάρχης ἐν τῷ βήματι καὶ γίνεται προσκύνησις τῶν τιμίων ξύλων. Mateos, *Typicon*, 1:30–31.

65. For the commentaries, see W. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford, 2012), 19–20.

66. On this moment, see esp. N. Moran, *Singers in Late Byzantine and Slavonic Painting* (Leiden, 1986), 59–65.