



Unit 6 • Byzantine Art and Iconography

Statue of the Roman Emperor
Constantine the Great (Reign 306–337)
and the Chi-Rho symbol

- Definition of **Byzantine art**
- **Periods:**
 - Theology and Iconography of the Icon (6th century)
 - Iconoclasm (8-9th centuries)
 - Triumph of Orthodoxy (the restoration of images in Byzantium in 843)
- **Historical background**
 - Byzantium became a new imperial capital, named Constantinople ("New Rome") in 323
 - **Two parts of Empire:** Western and Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire
 - After the reign of Theodosius I in 395

The Roman Empire in the 4th c.



■ Theocratic Christian state

- 'imperial influence'
- emperor often depicted by patronage of Christ, the highest Majesty



Enthroned Christ in Majesty flanked by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus and Empress Zoe, 11th c. Mosaic Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Istanbul)



- Christ Crowning Emp. Constantine VII (945) ivory carving
- Byzantine Ivory of Christ Crowning the Emperor Romanos (reigned 948-963) and the Empress Eudoxia, ivory carving



Hans Belting: **religious-ecclesiastical state iconography** (*Likeness and Presence*, 1996. p. 135.)

Art and iconography of icons – evolved in the 6th century

- **Definition of the Icon:** (Greek eikon ‘image’, ‘representation’) is a sacred image
- Viktor Bychkov: ”the Icon is one of the main phenomena of **the Orthodox culture**”
- **Icon** is a **sacred image** representing Christ, and the Virgin Mary, the saints, narrative scenes of the Bible
- St. Basil the Great (late 4th c.): icon is ”**book for the illiterate**”
- Wooden panel painting – part of an iconostasion – it could be crafted in all media

Bychkov: ICON *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M.Kelly. Vol.2. N.Y.-Oxford, 1998. Pp. 448-450

<http://www.philosophy.ru/phil/library/bychkov/icon-en.html>

- is a **narrative** about events of the Sacred history
- **expressive-psychological**
 - **moral function**
 - **liturgical function**
 - **humanism**, the all-embracing love for men
- **spiritual joy** to the beholders
- nothing contingent, transient or insignificant: it is a **generalized image**



Transfiguration apse mosaic

St Catherine's monastery, Sinai, Egypt, middle of the 6th c.

Biblical sources : Matt 17: 1-9; Mark 9: 2-8; Luke 9: 28-36

Bychkov: ICON *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. M.Kelly. Vol.2. N.Y.-Oxford, 1998. Pp. 448-450 <http://www.philosophy.ru/phil/library/bychkov/icon-en.html>

- represent the heavenly, celestial realities
- it bears witness to the reality and truthfulness of the Incarnation of the divinity
- it is the imprint of the ideal, pre-existent face of the Pantokrator and Saviour
 - Theodore of Stoudios: "visible image" , symbol
 - pointing to the spiritual phenomena of the celestial world
 - lifting the spirit of the believer up to the spiritual spheres
- anagogical sense (signs of the heavenly Jerusalem)
 - the icon really manifests its prototype
 - the icon is an object of prayer
 - the Church tradition in its artistic form :
THE ICONIC CANON



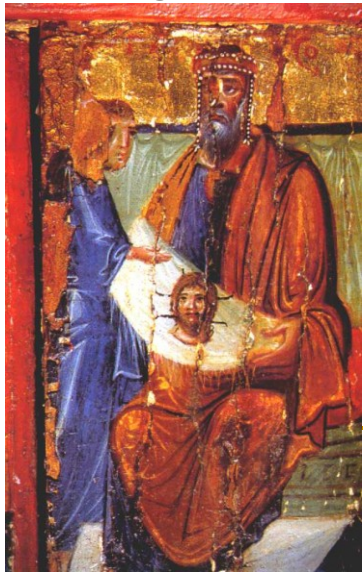
- it has a **dogmatic character** *Transfiguration* mosaic, detail, St Catherine's monastery, Sinai, Egypt, middle of the 6th c.

Acheiropoieta Icons "Made Without Hands"

- miraculously created image
- **The legend of the image:** Jesus washed his face in order to imprint his features on the cloth (Belting 1996 p. 211)
- **The first record** from Evargius Scholasticus: *Ecclesiastical History*, in 593.
- The Mandyllion portrait of Christ of divine origin effected the **miraculous aid** in the defence of Edessa against the Persians in 544
- normal human **copies of a miraculously created original archetype** from the early 8th centuries



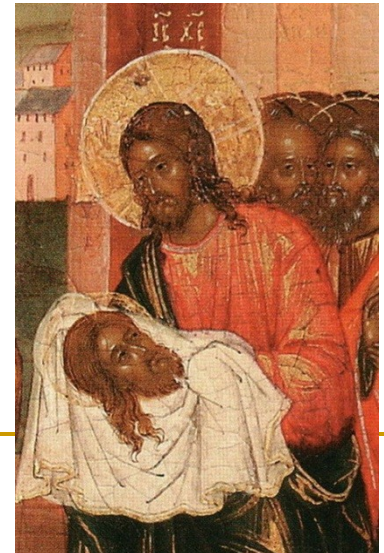
Mandyllion (Image of Edessa), **Acheiropoieta** icon
12th century, Novgorod (Moscow, Tretjakov Gallery)



Icon depicting King Abgar of Edessa receiving the "original" Mandyllion
10th-c. encaustic painting,
Saint Catherine's Monastery.

The legend:

Icon depicting Christ washed his face and imprinted on the "original" Mandyllion
16th c. Russian icon



Early icons from the 6th c.

- Belting *Likeness and presence* 1996 p. 133; 113-114
- The pictorial styles and iconographic themes that characterized Byzantine art were first **codified in the 6th c.**
- **Typical icon themes:** Christ, the Mother of God, Saints



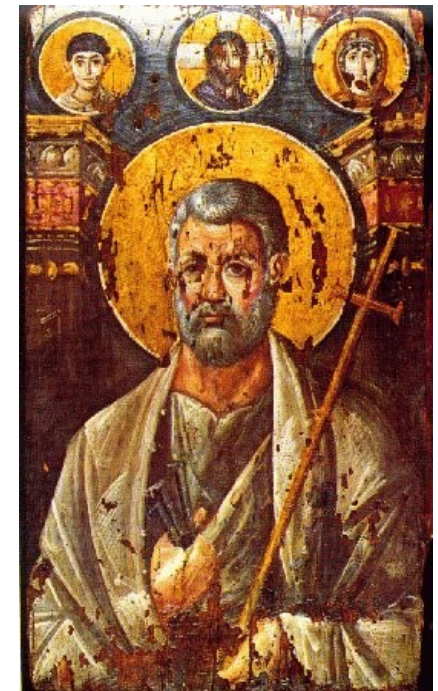
Monastery of St. Catherine at the base of Mount Sinai, Egypt



Christ Pantocrator icon 6th c.



Virgin with Child and St. Theodore, George and angels, 6th c.

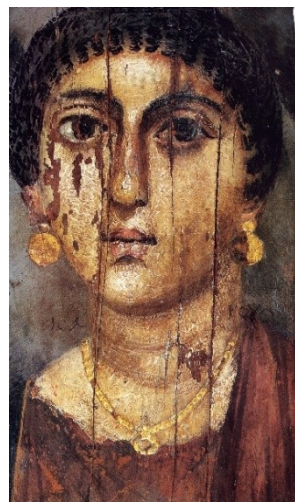
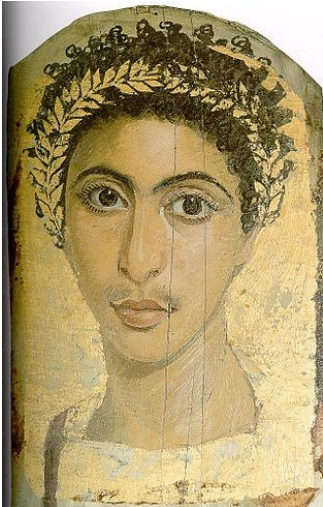


St. Peter icon 6th c.

Technique and portrait type of Byzantine panel icons and the Faiyum portraits



- relationship between the Faiyum portraits and the development of Byzantine icons
- **funerary artefact** from the ancient Greco-Roman Egypt
- Greek painting technique (wax painting) but entirely Egyptian use
- **belief about the afterlife**
It "anticipate the saint's icon... reflects beauty in a general, spiritual way." (Belting 1996 p. 99)



Mumm

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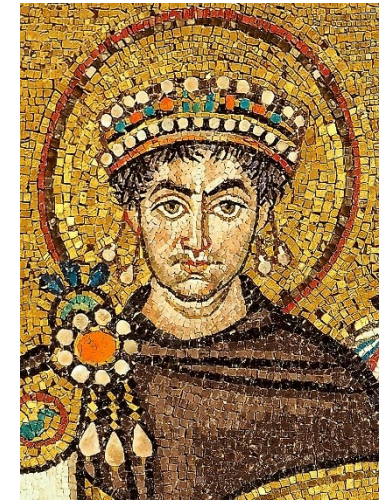
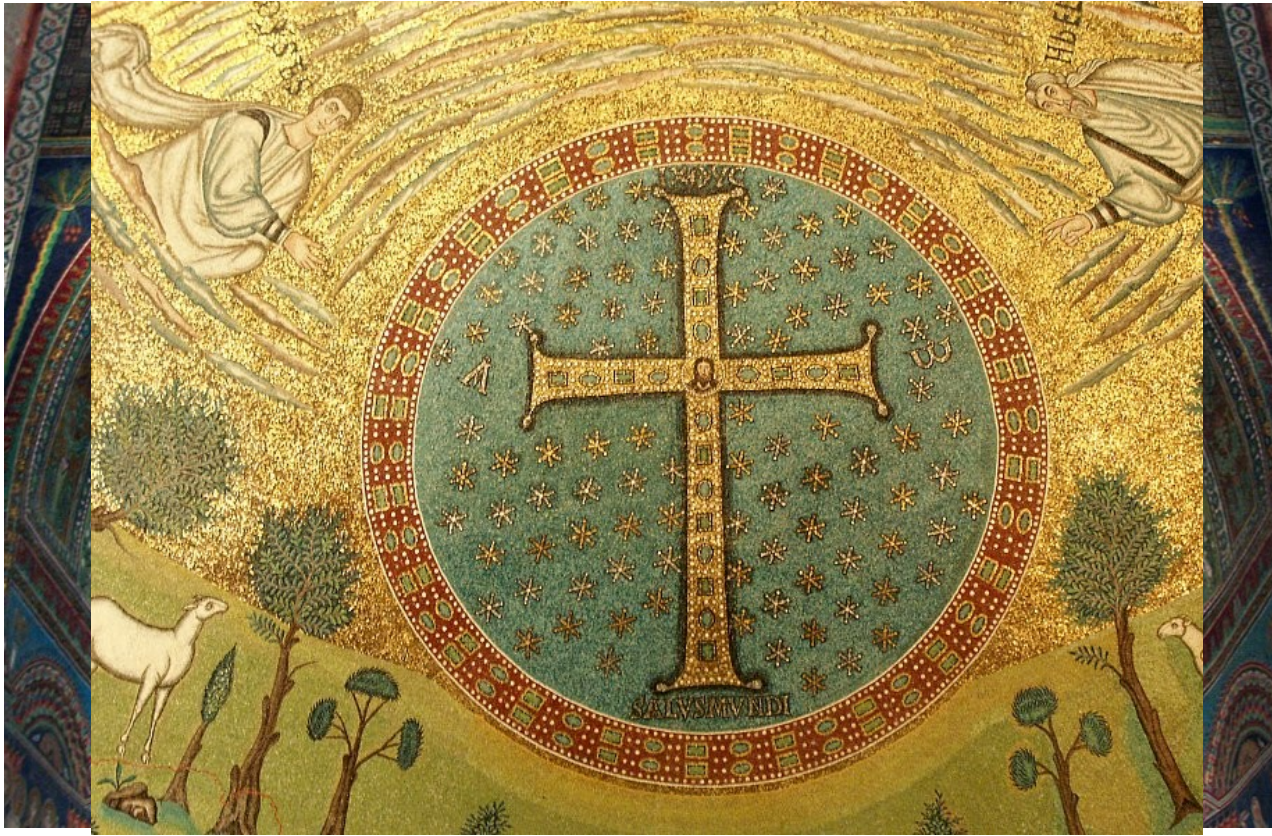
Mummy portraits from the 1st to 3rd centuries

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Evolution of the style of icon based on mosaics of Ravenna from the 5th to the 6th centuries

Ravenna: the capital of the **Western Roman Empire** in the **5th c.**
than **capital of Ostrogothic Kingdom**
The capital of the **Byzantine Exarchate** of Ravenna **between 540 and 750**

Christ as the Good shepherd
Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, middle of the **5th c.**

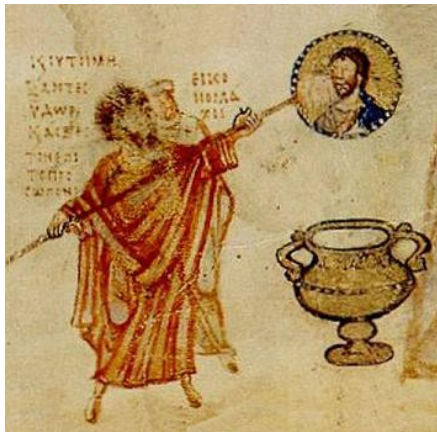


Mosaic of the Emperor Justinian from the Basilica of San Vitale, 6th c.

Bishop Sant Apollinare with the symbolic image of *Transfiguration*
San Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, **6th c.**

Iconoclasm ('image breaking') in the Byzantine Empire

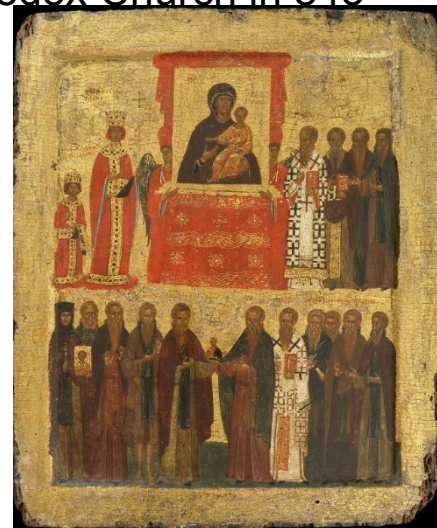
- a theological debate involving both the Byzantine church and state
- Hans Belting : „...images were merely the surface issue for deeper conflicts existing between church and state... in Byzantine society.” (Belting 1996. 146.)
- Periods of iconoclasm were in 726–787 and in 815–843
- **Iconoclastic Council in Constantinople in 754**
- „...the unlawful art of painting living creatures blasphemed the fundamental doctrine of our salvation--namely, the Incarnation of Christ.”
- **”Thus he is guilty of a double blasphemy--the one in making an image of the Godhead, and the other by mingling the Godhead and manhood. Those fall into the same blasphemy who venerate.”**
<http://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/icono-cncl754.asp>
- **cross** was promoted the most acceptable decorative form
- **”Triumph of Orthodoxy” the restoration of images in Orthodox Church in 843**



Khudov Psalter (detail), 9th c.
State Historical Museum, Moscow



Mosaic on the apse of the
Hagia Irene, 8th c. Constantinople



Triumph of Orthodoxy-icon,
Constantinople 15th c.
London, British Museum

Theotokos ('Bearer of God') of Vladimir

- finest quality of icon-painting in Constantinople
- "one of the most outstanding religious paintings of the world" (David Rice art historian)
- universal feelings of motherly love and anxiety for her child
- expressing compassion and commiseration for believers, humankind
- **Agathias Scholasticus** (6th c.) *On an Image of the Archangel*
- "for a man looking at the image directs his mind to higher contemplation"
- "The eyes stir up the depths of the soul."

Theotokos of Vladimir, 12th c., Constantinople
Moscow, Tretjakov Gallery



"...rooted in **Plato's view that the products of nature are reflections of primal images**, in which they exist in a purer form." (Belting 1996. 154)

SOURCES of the icon theory

"He is the **image** (eikon) of the invisible God" Col 1:15

Neoplatonic tradition: according to **Porphyry** the image was the **visible outward manifestation of invisible mysteries and religious truth.**

Basil the Great (229-379) "the honour given to the image is transferred to its prototype."

"An icon is always a copy (mimesis) of a model or prototype"

Pseudo-Dionysius "We ascend by means of images perceived through the senses to the divine contemplations." (*De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 1.2)

the **7th Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787**

"The making of icons was not the creation of the painters, but an accepted institution and tradition within the universal Church... **The idea and tradition came from the Fathers, not from the painters.** Only the art belongs to the painter, whereas the form without doubt comes from the Fathers who founded the Church."



Pantocrator, Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, 13th c.

Iconostasis

- Evolved after iconoclas period, complete by the 15th century
- **Iconostasis** is a solid screen of stone, wood, or metal, usually separating the sanctuary from the nave
- Florensky : “The iconostasis is a boundary between the visible and invisible worlds...”
- “...thereby making it accessible to our consciousness by means of its unified row of saints that surround the altar where God is...”
- “Iconostasis is vision... Iconostasis is the saints themselves.”
- “a doorway to the transcendent reality of heaven.” (Florensky, Pavel 1996 *Iconostasis*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, p. 62)



Iconostasis at the Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Gregory Palamas, Thessaloniki