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Iconoclasm & Byzantine Control over the Eastern Adriatic Littoral

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The iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium and the subsequent disagreement with the Church of Rome seems to have provided new grounds for competition between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople over the subjugation of the eastern Adriatic littoral in terms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This paper problematises the ways in which art seems to have been used in ideologically orientating these regions towards the Byzantine capital. Taking as a starting point the firm dating of the Ulcinj ciborium to the reign of co-emperors Leo III and Constantine V (720–741 AD), based on iconographic analysis of its representations, and the convincing dating of the Kotor ciborium to the reign of Emperor Nikephoros I (802–811 AD) by Ivan Stevovic (2016), I investigate another sculptural fragment from the wider region (from Dyrrhachium (Durrës/Drač) – in Greek called Dyrrhachion/Δυῤῥάχιον, to the Dalmatian littoral), which has hitherto been overlooked or wrongly dated. The existence of a number of sculptural fragments, a portion of which is published here, points to iconoclastic iconographical idioms, contextualised in the interest that the Byzantine emperors of the period had in the regions stretching from Dyrrhachium up to the Dalmatian littoral. Though still small in number, these sculptures lead me to suggest some sort of engagement of iconoclasm or iconoclastic iconography in this region, in order to keep it within the zone of influence of Constantinople.

Building on previous survey work on iconoclasm as an essential history of image studies (Giakoumis 2021), this paper is structured with four parts. The paper's first part deals with iconoclasm as a phenomenon; its second part pays attention to the politics and pragmatics of the period in the centre of the imperial capital, while the third part shifts its focus to the region under consideration. Finally, the last part of this paper focuses on the artworks taken under consideration.

1. Iconoclasm

The matter of whether images are conducive to believing or are blasphemous haunted the great Eastern Roman (i.e. Byzantine) Empire for more than a century (ca. 726 to 843 AD) and shook it to its foundations. This section thus presents the political and religious background against which the artworks under consideration were created. The controversy under discussion has been termed as **iconoclasm** or **iconomachy**. Both terms have been used to describe a period of political and religious controversy over whether or not the use of images in worship constitutes idolatry and, as such, whether it should be banned, as well as the controversy itself (Brubaker and Haldon, 2015, 7; Bogdanović, 2020, 199). The difference between these terms is subtle. Iconomachy (Gk. εἰκονομαχία), as the Byzantines more often than not called the controversy, denotes a struggle (Gk. μάχη; machy) in regard to icons (Gk. εἰκών; icon), while iconoclasm (Gk. εἰκονοκλαστία) is the phenomenon of breaking icons. Those in favour of venerating icons called themselves **iconophiles** (Gk. εἰκονόφιλοι), literally 'friends (or lovers) of icons', while the proponents from the opposing camp called them **iconolatres** (Gk. εἰκονολάτρες), i.e. worshippers of icons, or even **iconodules** (Gk. εἰκονόδουλοι), meaning

'slaves of icons'. Conversely, those against the use of icons in worship were called by their opponents, among other names, **iconomachs** or **iconoclasts**. Derivative terms were used to describe the practices of each camp as a phenomenon: **iconophily** was thus used to denote the phenomenon and practice of using icons in church services, which was termed **iconoduly** or **iconolatry** by the opponents of such practices. Though both factions claimed they were striving for orthodoxy, for reasons related to the scarcity of iconoclastic sources, it is not clear how the iconoclasts referred to themselves. It is therefore evident that the referent terms of the controversy that prevailed reflect the victory of the iconophiles over the iconoclasts.

Several scholars have viewed the choices of iconoclastic emperors to shake up the religious practices of their times to their foundation primarily to be a pursuit of pro-Eastern policies, after decades of warfare with the Arab world, decisive defeats and territorial losses of the Empire's eastern provinces. Towards the end of the 7th century AD, the advances of Arab forces in the Empire's eastern territories were not only a threat to its integrity, but had also left its cultural imprint of aniconism on the compact populations of the Eastern provinces, including the armies of the *themata* (provinces) of Anatolikon and Armeniakon of the Empire (Herrin 1977, 16–17). It also seems that these parts of the Empire contained a larger percentage of heretics and others strongly impacted by Jewish (Aron-Beller 2017) and Muslim perceptions of icons as idols (Brubaker & Haldon 2015, 337–348; Alhassen 2019), thereby presenting the altercation as some sort of clash of civilisations (cf. Brown 1973). The endeavours of Leo III (who ruled 717–741 AD), the first emperor to actively pursue iconoclastic policies, have thus been interpreted as an attempt to control the domestic affairs of the state (Ahrweiler 1977; cf. Boeck 2015) in the course of the Empire's introversion, in an attempt to contain damage in the eastern frontiers of the Empire and concerns encountered in both the first (Brubaker & Haldon 2015, 348–364) and the second iconoclastic period (Codoñer 2014).

Although clashes over the use of icons in worship in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire occurred much more frequently than were recorded, iconoclastic disputes in Byzantium are overall classified into two periods. The first icon-oclastic period was initiated in 726 or 730 AD, when Leo III the Isaurian, born in Germanikeia, Maraş (modern-day Kahramanmaraş, Turkey), destroyed the icon of Christ Chalkites on the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), and lasted until 787 AD, when the 7th Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (the 2nd Council of Nicaea) reversed it with the active role of the Athenian-born Empress-Regent Eirene (752–803 AD), widow of Leo IV and co-ruler (ruled 780–802 AD) with her son Constantine VI. Once iconomachy became settled and icons were restored back into worship, although not definitively, there followed a period of lull, which lasted until ca. 815 AD, when another iconoclastic emperor, Leo V the Armenian (775–820 AD) ordered the removal of the icon of Christ from the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace and its substitution with a cross, thereby initiating the second Byzantine iconoclasm. Iconoclasm was finally suppressed in 843 AD by another empress-regent, Theodora (ca. 815–after 867 AD), who assumed power after the death of her husband, Emperor Theophilos in 842 AD as a regent to her underage son Michael III and remained empress until 867 AD.

Although both periods have been labelled with the single term 'iconoclasm', each of them had its own unique characteristics. The start date of the first iconoclastic period, for example, has been debated. Although the symbolical act of the removal of the icon of Christ by Leo III the Isaurian (726 or 730 AD) has been conventionally accepted as the date of the start of the controversy, Brubaker and Haldon have argued that already from 650 AD soldiers of the Byzantine armies had started developing some interest in imperial affairs. In 681 AD soldiers of the Anatolic *Theme* (district) assembled at Chrysopolis and demanded that Emperor Constantine IV concede part of his rule to two co-emperors, in their conviction regarding the power of the Holy Trinity. This shows the importance of armies as alternative power, which forced Constantine IV to acknowledge the army's political power in his inaugural address at the 6th Ecumenical Council of 680 AD (Brubaker & Haldon 2015, 27–29). The second period of iconoclasm was more restrained in its style of disputation than the controversy's first phase and placed emphasis on certain themes, most notably the Christological

argument, while iconophiles were no longer called or treated as idolaters (Barasch 1995, 261–266).

The eventual 'triumph of Orthodoxy' resulted in the forceful collection and destruction of iconoclastic literature (cf. Noble 2009, 69). We are therefore left only with a body of unilateral polemical literature depicting the views of the iconophiles. Hence, the stances, refutations and arguments of the iconoclasts are only indirectly revealed to us by conjecture from their refutations in iconophile literature. Yet, one should single out the pioneering work of Brubaker and Haldon (2001) in supplying us with a large variety of annotated sources, textual and material, which, however, does not remedy the fact that their majority was only partial. Yet, as I shall argue in this paper, artworks of the iconoclastic period can also be used to penetrate into the iconoclasts' ideology and aesthetics.

For the earlier iconoclastic views on the use of icons in worship, the sole source at our disposal is a letter from Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339 AD) to Constantia Augusta dealing with the distinction between form and image (Florovsky 1950, 84–87; Gero 1981). For the first iconoclastic period the single most important narrative source is the Chronography of Theophanes the Confessor (1997), which covers Byzantine history up to 813 AD, followed by the work of Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople (Alexander 1958). Furthermore, the acts of the 7th Ecumenical Council are also an important primary source for the issues and concerns of this first period of iconoclasm in Byzantium (Guillard 1967; Davis 1983, 186–232; Stauridis 1987). The most prominent theological figure to refute the arguments of iconoclasts in both the first and the second iconoclastic period was St Theodore of Studion, whose theological thought was deeply influenced by the earlier works of St Dionysios the Areopagite and St John of Damascus (Barasch 1995, 185–290; Karlin-Hayter 2002, 154; Dalkos 2006). The *homily* delivered by Patriarch Photius of Constantinople on Holy Saturday, 29 March 867 AD before Emperors Michael III and Basil I, on the occasion of the presentation of the great mosaic with the image of the Theotokos and Christ in the eastern apse of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia (Mango 1958, 279–296), though almost a quarter of a century after the 843 AD restoration of the veneration of icons, is a masterpiece of public theological rhetoric on the issues debated throughout the iconoclastic altercations in Byzantium. On the events of the two major iconoclastic periods, from a historiographical genre perspective, one should refer to the Brief Chronicle (Muralto 1863) of George the Monk (842–867 AD), a work dated to 843–845 AD (Afinogenov 1999), as well as to Books 15 and 16 of Ioannis Zonaras' Chronicle (Zonaras 1864, Book 15; 1867, Book 16).

One is also to discern diverse theological aspects of the debate intertwined with the daily practices, folklore, philosophy, popular feeling and emotions in hagiographical sources of both the first and the second iconoclastic period. The arduous task of distilling down the vast critical literature on the subject (Shevchenko 1977; cf. Brubaker & Haldon 2001, 199–232) has revealed a number of hagiographical texts of several saints of the period, the vast majority of them appertaining to the iconophiles, but also two or three *vitae* belonging to saints with iconoclastic or, at least, non-iconophilic proclivities. Deep insights into the critical aspects of each one's life, works, praises (*encomia*) and texts associated with them is clearly not in the scope of this chapter. However, considering that in each of these saints' *vitae* the student of image studies can trace useful aspects of how theoretical perspectives debated in image theory were perceived and lived in the context of 8th- and 9th-century Byzantium, I have organised and cited their names in the table below for reference purposes.

Table 1: List of saints involved in the iconoclastic periods in Byzantium (compiled on the basis of Shevchenko 1977; Talbot 1998 and Brubaker & Haldon 2001, 199–232).

Saint's name	Year of death (AD)	Iconoclastic period	Theological conviction
Theodosia of Constantinople	726 or 330	I	Iconophile
Ten Martyrs of Constantinople	730	I	Iconophile
Patriarch Germanos	740	I	Iconophile
Stephen the Deacon or Younger	764	I	Iconophile
Andrew of Crete in Krisei	766 or 767	I	Iconophile
Anthousa of Mantineon	771	I	Iconophile
Paul the Younger	?	I	Iconophile
Stephen of Sugdaia, Crimea	?	I	Iconophile
Romanos the Neomartyr	780	I	Iconophile
Philaretos the Merciful	792	I	Iconoclast
David (of the three brothers) from Lesbos	end of 8th century	I	Iconophile
George, autocephalous Archbishop of Amastris	805	I	Iconoclast
Patriarch Tarasios	806	I	Iconophile
Anthousa, daughter of Constantine V	808 or 809	I	Iconophile
Nikephoros of Medikion	813	I	Iconophile
Plato, abbot of Sakkoudion	814	I	Iconophile
Gregory the Decapolite	816	II	Iconophile
Theophanes the Confessor	818	II	Iconophile
John, abbot of Psicha Monastery	soon after 820	II	Iconophile
Patriarch Nikephoros the Confessor	822	II	Iconophile
Niketas of Medikion	824	II	Iconophile
Theodore of Studion	826	II	Iconophile
Makarios, abbot of Pelekete	after 829	II	Iconophile
Euthymios, Bishop of Sardis	831	II	Iconophile
Niketas, patrician and monk	836	II	Iconophile
Peter of Atroa	837	II	Iconophile
Theodore Graptos	841?	II	Iconophile
Eudokimos	before 842	II	Iconoclast
Symeon (of the three brothers) from Lesbos	843	II	Iconophile
George (of the three brothers) from Lesbos	844	II	Iconophile
Theophylaktos of Nikomedia	840-845?	II	Iconophile
Michael Synkellos	846	II	Iconophile
Ioannikios	846	II	Iconophile
Patriarch Methodios	847	II	Iconophile
Theodora, the Empress	867?	II	Iconophile

2. Iconoclast politics & pragmatics at the centre of the capital

A combination of external threats from rising international powers claiming a share of Byzantium's splendour and stiff internal strife created conditions of introversion and introspection throughout the period of the iconoclastic disputes in Byzantium, thereby favouring the rise of metaphysical quests and theories of divine retribution. From the end of the 7th century until the middle of the 9th century AD the Byzantine Empire had to counter various threats originating from regions close to its eastern (Arabs), north-eastern (Bulgars), northern (Avars and Slavs) and western (Lombards) borders.

Among these, of particular interest to this chapter is the Empire's western frontier. Here, the Empire was also shaken by the advances of the Lombards. Their uneasy relations with Byzantium turned firmly antagonistic in the Italian holdings of the Byzantine state when they occupied Ravenna in 751 AD, thereby ending Byzantine rule in central and northern Italy. Such external threats would not have been so crushing for Byzantium had they not been accompanied by domestic strife. Phenomena such as poor leadership, the engagement of populist policies for petty power gains by many emperors, especially of the pre-iconoclastic period, and the subsequent polarisation of Byzan-

tine society, particularly during the first Byzantine period of iconoclasm, resulted in a decline of the culture of compromise and ideological synthesis. These, combined with a rather inefficient central government and weakened institutions, caused, at times, a decisive weakening of the Empire. In conclusion, the explosive mixture of domestic uneasiness and external threats created conditions of considerable insecurity for the Byzantine state, which favoured scapegoating and the increasing loudness of voices attributing the political situation to divine retribution for alleged dogmatic deviations.

With this backdrop, the question of the use of images in the worship of God became the epicentre of the theological debate. The principal objections of the iconoclasts were that the veneration of icons was idolatrous or resulted in multiple veneration, that the circumscription of Christ is a diminution of God through his depiction in perishable material, that an image can never be a symbol of the sort that the Holy Cross is, on account of their perceived impossibility of identification of the prototype with the image, thereby leaving only the Holy Eucharist as the sole permissible image of Christ (Dalkos 2006, 25 & 31). The principal refutation of these objections can be summarised in the words of St. Theodore of Studion (the Studite) that "every image does not portray the nature, but the hypostasis of the depicted", considering that an icon has no hypostasis (Dalkos 2006, 32).

When Leo III the Isaurian, the first iconoclastic emperor, came to power in 717 AD, he was perfectly aware of the situation on the eastern borders of his empire, which was heavily influenced by Origenistic Christological ideas of all sorts (Florovsky 1950, 86–87). Leo III was from the eastern provinces and, as a speaker of Arabic, he could directly appreciate the sensitivities of the Jewish and Muslim populations in or near his home territory predicating aniconic art and considering the veneration of images as idolatry, especially when witnessing people "falling down and worshipping images" (Karlin-Hayter 2002, 157; cf. Deuteronomy 5:9). Hence, in 726 (or 730 AD) Leo III gave an order of major symbolical significance – the destruction of the icon of Christ *Chalkites* which once stood on the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace, the most prominent artwork placed there (cf. Mango 1959). The subsequent mob action of

the iconophiles escalated to the brink of a rebellion which was suppressed in 727 AD. Three years later the saintly patriarch Germanos I of Constantinople, an iconophilic eunuch, was deposed (Karlin-Hayter 2002, 155) and replaced by Anastasios, who had no hesitation or remorse in following the iconoclastic policies of the emperor. In the same year (730 AD), Leo III issued an iconoclastic edict which was the culmination of a number of similar decisions that had been made since 728 AD. Although Leo III managed to repel the Arab threat from Constantinople and stabilise the state through reform, not only did he not invest similar efforts in appeasing the iconoclastic altercation, but he rather polarised Byzantine society.

His successor and son, Constantine V (741–775 AD), furthered his father's policies and cemented them by elevating iconoclasm to a matter of theological discourse. Claiming that image making was heretical as a practice in its attempt to circumscribe the divine nature, Constantine V organised the Council of Hieria (754 AD), the first of the two known iconoclastic Councils, in which the making and veneration of icons was declared a heresy (Karlin-Hayter 2002, 157–158; Dalkos 2006, 33 & 37–38). Already from Leo III's rule, imperial iconoclastic policies were being enforced with coercion; the persecution of iconophiles, however, intensified from 762 to 768 AD, although primarily on political grounds, as exemplified in the case of St Stephen the Younger (Karlin-Hayter 2002, 157–158).

The Council of Hieria was not a wholesale rejection of all art forms (Florovsky 1950, 92–93), but rather a condemnation of images on account of the full sensory mobilisation they prompted, as I have aspired to demonstrate in the previous subsection of this chapter. As one decree of the Council of Hieria stipulated, "no one in charge of a church or pious institution shall venture, under the pretext of destroying the error in regard to images, to lay his hands on the holy vessels in order to have them altered, because they are adorned with figures, … [as well as on] the vestments of churches, cloths, and all that it dedicated to divine service" (cited in Bogdanović 2020, 201). The absence of black-and-white reasoning at the Council of Hieria has been interpreted as an attempt by the Synod to come to a compromise between imperial orders and the views of its members (Dalkos 2006,

33–38). With this in mind, one can appreciate why, of all images, iconoclasts would only accept those of the Holy Eucharist (Gero 1981, 467). By extension, it has also been argued that architectural elements portraying the Holy Eucharist were preserved precisely because they can be considered to be an 'icon' (Bogdanović 2020).

We previously believed that iconoclastic policies seemed to be more popular in the eastern parts of the Empire than in the western parts, while the regions in between, such as those where Melkite Christians were situated, seemed to stand somewhere in between, with no homogeneous attitude towards icons (Codoñer 2013). Ahrweiler (1977) has argued that the Balkan and western provinces of the Empire, unlike their eastern counterparts, maintained an iconophilic stance throughout the period of iconoclasm. After this period, the Roman Synod of 769 AD held by Pope Stephen III[1] confirmed that the Balkan and western provinces of the Byzantine Empire remained loyal to their ancestral iconophilic traditions, although the official line of the Empire remained iconoclastic also under both Leo IV (775–780 AD) and his son Constantine V. The artworks under consideration in this paper corroborate the findings of Auzépy, according to which the ecclesiastical provinces of *Illyricum*, a term denoting pretty much the entire Balkans, were as susceptible to iconoclasm as any other province of the Empire (Auzépy 2014, 135–141).

As of 780 AD, in the course of the rule of Co-Empress Eirini the Athenian (ruled 780–802 AD), later recognised as a saint, who ruled intermittently with her son Constantine VI, the development of the iconomach controversy went in another direction. Initially, the iconoclast Patriarch Paul IV (780–784 AD) was forced to abdicate and was replaced by the iconophile Patriarch Tarasios, later also proclaimed a saint, who was preparing for the 7th Ecumenical Council, alternatively known as the 2nd Council of Nicaea, in 787 AD. This restored the veneration of icons, which had only temporarily been restored between June 741 and November 742 AD under the usurper Artavasdos, and refuted the theological treatises of iconoclasts utilising the theological writings of St Dionysios the Areopagite and of St John of Damascus (d. 749), which laid the foundations for

the restoration of icons and the subsequent iconophilic theological treatises that were to emerge during the lull between the first and the second iconoclastic disputes (787–ca. 815 AD), the second iconomachy and the period from 843 AD – the second restoration of icons – thereafter.

Theological refutations of iconoclasm started well before the 7th Ecumenical Council with St John of Damascus (ca. 675–ca. 749), whose teachings became the basis of the Synod's works. Icons "reveal what is distant, or invisible or to come", he wrote, thereby manifesting the divine presence. The distinction between the image and its prototype would henceforth become key in subsequent theological thought (Karlin-Hayter 2002, 157; Ivanović 2020, 82; cf. Stauridis 1987, 30). Two other major theological scholarly saints also became the basis of the 2nd Council of Nicaea: St Dionysios the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius) and St Maximos the Confessor.

Dionysios' thought on the anagogical function of images and the property of symbols to provide a material and sensible support to the knowledge of the immaterial and invisible reality (Mainoldi 2020, 6; Vlad 2017; Tavolaro 2020, 42) became essential parts of Orthodox Christian aesthetics. In Dionysios' gnosiology, cognition does not only occur through human 'noetic' functions, but also through the senses (Ivanović 2020, 77–81). Dionysios' 'image' does not describe some kind of shadowy imitation of the ideal, but rather has an ontological value. His lack of interest in artistic aspects of images is justified: in view of the anagogical function of icons, their purpose is not aesthetic and artistic pleasure, but the revelation of hidden, transcendent beauty, as a sign of God's will to facilitate human perception of the revelation (Ivanović 2020, 77–81).

St Maximos the Confessor is among the authors credited with the integration of Origen's spiritualist ideas into the Orthodox theological synthesis (Florovsky 1981, 86). In particular, Origen's seemingly iconoclastic views were interpreted on the basis of other passages of his work, in which he stated that Christ, in the course of his lifetime, appeared to different persons according to their ability to receive him (*op. cit.* 90–91). Such syntheses were to be used thereafter in the course of the theological debate on iconoclasm and the 2nd Nicene Council (787 AD), which incorpo-

rated such views, to determine what constituted an icon. It highlighted that icons are "just as the figure of the precious and life-giving Cross, [and] also venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials" (Stauridis 1987, 30), and that icons "should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all Saints and of all pious people" (Stauridis 1987, 30; Bogdanović 2020, 200).

It seems that both the pursuit of iconoclastic policies in the period from 780 to 787 AD and the restoration of icons in that year were mostly based on the political decisions of the imperial elite, rather than the maturation of some sort of social and theological consensus. While the 'iconic' image of Christ on the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace was gloriously restored not too long after the 2nd Council of Nicaea, even within the iconophile faction, the figure and teaching of St Theodore the Studite would rather divide different iconophilic tendencies. In 806 AD the saintly Patriarch Nikephoros I, an iconophile with anti-Studite convictions, succeeded Tarasios' patriarchal throne and remained until 815 AD, while in 811 AD the pro-Studite Emperor Michael I Rangabe (811–813 AD) took over the imperial throne from Emperor Nikephoros I (802–811 AD). In 814 AD, a year after the rise to the imperial throne of the iconoclastic Emperor Leo V, of Armenian descent, the icon of Christ on the Chalke Gate of the Great Palace was once again removed and replaced with a cross. When the fragile lull was abruptly interrupted, the second iconoclast dispute in Byzantium started.

This second iconoclast dispute in Byzantium lasted less than 30 years. In 815 AD the new iconoclastic Patriarch Theodotos Melissenos Kassiteras was elevated to the patriarchal throne and on the same year he organised another iconoclastic council in Hagia Sophia, which issued a new edict on iconoclasm. Its definition (*Horos*) remained in force until the end of the reign of the last iconoclastic Emperor Theophilos (829–842 AD) and the patriarchy of the last iconoclastic patriarch, John VII the Grammarian (in office: 837–843 AD), the emperor's personal tutor. After Theophilos' death, his underage son Michael III succeeded him, although the Empire was *de facto* ruled by his mother, Empress Theodora, who deposed Patriarch John VII and had Methodios I, an iconophile, replace him on the patriarchal throne. On 11 March 843 AD the veneration of icons was restored in Hagia Sophia, thereby initiating what has since then been celebrated as the Feast of Orthodoxy.

Although the second iconoclastic dispute in Byzantium revolved around virtually the same issues as the first, the debate was significantly more sober and subtle. The leading theological figure of the debate was now St Theodore the Studite, who was behind most iconophilic refutations of the iconoclastic teachings. In his understanding, the shadow dwelt in the body, hence, shadows originating from a holy body could perform miracles (Barasch 1995, 266–271).

3. Iconoclastic Politics & Pragmatics in the Westernmost Provinces of the Byzantine State

From an ecclesiastical standpoint, the region of the eastern Adriatic coast was a pendulum swinging between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople. While until the 7th century AD the ecclesiastical provinces of these regions were mostly under the jurisdiction of the Pope, Bishop Sissinios of the Metropolis of Dyrrhachium attended the Council in Trullo (Quinisext Council) in 691–692 AD and signed its deliberations with "Σισσίνιος χάριτι Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπίσκοπος Δυρραχηνῶν μητροπόλεως ὁρίσας ὑπέγραψα" (Thallóczy, Jireček & Sufflay 1913, 11, Act No. 49; Meksi 2004, 50) – an act that was never signed by the Pope. But then, again, in a letter from Pope Nicholas to Emperor Michael III, dated 25 September 861 AD, Epirus Nova with its capital centre in Dyrrhachium appeared to be under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Church of Rome (Darrouzès 1981, 18), a codification apparently earlier than the *Taktikon Uspensky* (842–843 AD), in which the region appears to be outside of Rome's jurisdiction (Darrouzès 1981, 19). In the meantime, while we are not aware what was the stance of the region in the Iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754 AD), as no lists of participants have

been preserved, in 787 AD Bishop Nikēphoros of Dyrrhachium actively participated in the deliberations of the 7th Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (2nd Council of Nicaea) and made a clearly iconophilic statement (Mansi & Labbe, 1766, 994, 1090; Thallóczy, Jireček & Sufflay, 1913, 12, Act No. 51; Meksi, 2004, 50):

Νικηφόρος ὁ θεοφιλέστατος ἐπίσκοπος τοῦ Δυρραχίου εἶπε· κατὰ τὴν σταλεῖσαν ἀναφορὰν παρὰ Ἀνδριανοῦ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου πάπα τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ρώμης πρὸς τοὺς εὐσεβεῖς βασιλεῖς ἡμῶν, καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸν ἁγιώτατον καὶ οἰκουμενικὸν πατριάρχην Ταράσιον, καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου Ταρασίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου διδασκαλίαν καὶ πίστιν καὶ ὁμολογίαν, φρονῶ καὶ κρατῶ καὶ διδάσκω· καὶ μετὰ ταύτης μου τῆς ὁμολογίας τὸν βραχὺν χρόνον τῆς ζωῆς μου τελέσω, καὶ τῷ φοβερῷ βήματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ παραστήσομαι (Nikephoros, His Grace, Bishop of Dyrrhachium said: I think and hold and teach according to the sent report of Adrian, the most holy pope of the elderly Rome, to our pious kings and to the most holy Tarasios, the ecumenical patriarch, and [the very report] of the most holy Archbishop Tarasios; and I will expend the short time of my life and present myself before the terrifying podium of Christ together with this statement, Mansi & Labbe 1766, 1090).

As was mentioned above, it is certain that in the Dalmatian regions to Dyrrhachium there certainly was an iconoclastic movement, as vivid as in the eastern provinces of the Empire (Auzépy 2014, 135–141). Already in the acts of the 7th Ecumenical Council (787 AD) the same Bishop Nikephoros of Dyrrhachium, before swearing allegiance to the iconophilic dogma, stated "[δ]έει πολλῷ συνεχόμεθα, δέσποτα, ὅτι πλεῖστα κακὰ διεπράξαμεν καὶ συντόνου μετανοίας καὶ ἐξαγορεύσεως, δεόμεθα" ("We are in great fear, o lord, because we have done many bad things and ask [for pardon] in synchronised repentance and in public confession; cf. Basić 2021, 109, n. 57). In pursuit of the same line, the bishops of the Illyrian provinces also apologised in these words: "Πάντες ἐσφάλημεν, πάντες συγγνώμην ἐξαιτοῦμεν" ("We have all erred; we all ask for pardon; cf. Mansi & Labbe 1766, 1034). Later on, two letters from Theodore the Studite addressed to Bishop Antonios of Dyrrhachium (dated 816–821 and 821–826 AD respectively) make it clear that in the Archdiocese of Dyrrhachium there were both iconophiles and iconoclasts (Thallóczy, Jireček & Sufflay 1913, 12–13, Acts Nos. 52–53).

These letters are important from other viewpoints, as well. On their premises Jadran Ferluga has suggested that the date in which Dyrrhachium became a *theme*, thereby upgrading the previous *archontia*, should be traced using these letters as a *terminus ante quem* (Ferluga 1963, 83; *ibid.* 1976, 218–224; Meksi 2004, 51). The territory of the new *theme* would extend as far north as the *Archontia* of Dalmatia (Meksi 2004, 52 & 55), the border being at some place between modern-day Ulcinj/Ulqin and Bar/Tivar, which one can infer from information provided about the castles of the *Theme* of Dyrrhachium by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (b. 905, d. 959 AD) in his book *On Imperial Administration*, in which he states that "[ἐ]κ παλαιοῦ τοίνυν, ἡ Δελματία τὴν ἀρχὴν μὲν εἶχεν ἀπὸ τῶν συνόρων Δυρραχίου, ἤγουν ἀπὸ Ἀντιβάρεως…" ("In olden times, therefore, Dalmatia used to start at the confines of Dyrrachium, that is from Antibari") (Constantine Porphyrogenitus 1967, 138–141).

The detailed account of Dalmatia and its regions by Constantine Porphyrogenitus did not come out of nowhere. The keen interest of the Byzantine state in the westernmost parts of Via Egnatia and its northern confines had already been expressed during the reign of Leo III well before he decreed the subjugation of Illyricum and southern Italy to the Patriarch of Constantinople (732–733 AD), thereby removing them from the guardianship of the Pope of Rome (Anastos 1979, IX, 14–31; Treadgold 1977, 355). In particular, the Umayyad siege of Constantinople (717–718 AD) triggered a riot on the island of Sicily in 718–719 AD, aimed at removing Emperor Leo III from his throne. In response, Leo III appointed *Strategos* Paul to counter the rebels with an army to be raised locally and on the western Balkan coasts by force of orders and commands addressed to the western *archontes*, Slavic chieftains and Byzantine noblemen from Dyrrhachium and, possibly Iader (Zadar) (Živković 2004, 161–176; Stevovic 2016, 63–64). The interest of the Byzantine state to maintain firm control over the Adriatic coast remained keen both during and after the iconoclastic controversies (Ferluga 1976, 215-24), as evidenced also by the upgrading of another *archontia* in the region, that of Dalmatia, to a *theme*, with a *strategos* based

in Iader (which had previously been a seat of an *archon* at least since 805 AD), established between 867 and 878 AD (Chevalier 1997, par. 17), possibly to counter the Carolingians who had occupied Istria since 788 AD (*op. cit.* 1997, par. 12).

4. Artworks

This interest was not confined only to administrative acts, but it must have extended to all fields where imperial ideology from the centre of the capital could exert its influence. In the context of Leo III's attempt, after his first iconoclast provisions in 726–727 AD, "to expound his dogma to the people" ("ἐκδιδάσκειν τὸν λαὸν τὸ οἰκεῖον δόγμα," Anastos 1979, VIII, 9; cf. Nicephoros 1880, 57), art seems to have been used in ideologically orientating these regions towards the Byzantine capital and its iconoclast convictions. Using as a starting point the firm dating of the Ulcinj ciborium to the reign of Co-Emperors Leo III and Constantine V (720–741 AD), based on iconographic analysis of its representations, consideration of the Novigrad ciborium and the convincing dating of the Kotor ciborium to the reign of Emperor Nikephoros I (802–811 AD) (Stevovic, 2016), I am investigating another sculptural fragment from the wider region (from Dyrrhachium, in Greek Dyrrhachion/Δυρράχιον to the Dalmatian coasts), which has hitherto been overlooked and incorrectly dated. In this section I am thus demonstrating that an "iconographic syntagm [on] stone", which Stevovic (2016, 65) was hesitant to accept on account of the scarcity of evidence, enjoys greater support than was previously thought.

4.1. The Ulcinj Ciborium

Disassembled and then reassembled in different cities, the Ulcinj ciborium is nowadays kept in Ulcinj's Regional Museum and Belgrade's National Museum (**Figs. 1–2**). Its fragments were recently studied by Ivo Stevovic (2016; cf. Bošković 1977, 79 and Fig. 7 on Pl. IV). The preserved parts of the inscription do contain indisputable evidence of the time of creation of the ciborium. The text inscribed on one of the ciborium's beams provides firm evidence for the dating of the object: SVB TEMPORIBVS DOMINI NOSTRI PIS PERPETVO AVGVSTI DN LEO ET DN CS [...]. Detailed iconographic and epigraphic analysis led Stevovic

to conclude that the ciborium should be dated to the reign of Co-Emperors Leo III and Constantine V (who co-ruled from 720 to 741 AD). In his research of the coinage of this period, Philip Grierson found that the abbreviations in the form of DN for 'Dominus noster' and the invocation 'Pis perpetuo augusti' abbreviated in coinage as PPAVC do not appear on coinage after the reign of Constantine V (Grierson 1973, 177). Additional evidence of the intensive use of such abbreviations is provided by one of the surviving pairs of seals. The reading of the very damaged related inscription of the obverse side of the seal reveals only three letters MUL; its suggested reading is: [D(omino) n(ostr)o Leon(i) p(erpetuo) a(ugusto)] mul(tos) [a(nnos)]. The fragment of the inscription of the reverse side of the seal bears the abbreviation DN.CN, standing for D(ominus) n(oster) C[o]n[stantinus] (BZS.1951.31.5.1643).

The ciborium's front arcade (**Fig. 3**) presents an image of a lioness, opposite the image of a lion, distinguishable due to his mane, rendered through several successive shallow incisions. Under the lioness there is a motif, which can be identified as one of her cubs, being fed amongst young lions and learning to catch prey and devour men, as described in Ezekiel 19:2–3: "What is thy mother? A lioness: she lay down among lions, she nourished her whelps among young lions. And she brought up one of her whelps: it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men." The prey is in the form of a bird (Stevovic 2016, 60–61).

The lioness has been identified as Hamutal, the wife of King Josiah and mother of Kings Jehoahaz and Zedekiah whose reign brought to the end the dynasty of Judah, i.e. the lineage of David. As the female of her species, the lioness has also been interpreted as a metaphor for Jerusalem, as an echo of Ezekiel's allusion to the activity of Jehoiachin, eldest son of Josiah by Zebidah (Stevovic 2016, 61). Stevovic interprets the core message as: "although greater evil was certainly inflicted by the enemy of non-believers, a considerable contribution to the downfall of the kingdom of Judah was made by its inept or tyrant kings, especially Zedekiah", also on the basis of intertextual references (cf. 2 Kings 23:31–32) and general description of the reign of King Josiah, his banishment of idol worshippers from the temple at Jerusalem and the issues emerging from his heirs (Stevovic 2016,

61–63). These are undoubtedly linked with the iconoclastic debates. The combination of text and image has led Stevovic to associate the lion with Christ, as the lion from the tribe of Judah, but also with Leo III (*op. cit.* 2016, 62–63).

As far as the dating of the ciborium is concerned, the combination of Leo III's 732–733 AD transfer of Illyricum, Calabria and Sicily to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (Anastos 1979, IX, 14-31) and his efforts "to expound his dogma to the people" (*op. cit.* VIII, 9) compels me to narrow down the dating of the ciborium to the interval between 732 and 741 AD.

4.2. The Durrës Ciborium

In the late-Antiquity pavilion of the National Historical Museum there is an object identified as an 'architectural fragment (medieval framework)' classified with Inventory No. 1383 (**Fig. 4**). According to its description, its dimensions are 40 cm × 36 cm × 11 cm, its provenance is from Durrës and it is ascribed as a local cultural object from the 4th century AD. It needs no second glance to determine that the object under consideration is not a frame (on account of the start of an arch on its left side, which deviates from the usual orthogonal form of a frame). Its comparison to the Ulcinj ciborium (**Fig. 2, detail** vs. **Fig. 4**) demonstrates that the sculptural part from Durrës is the lower right part of a ciborium's tympanum. We are therefore dealing with another ciborium.

As the fragment remains unpublished, there is no evidence as to why this part was dated to as early as the 4th century AD. Even if it was found near other objects convincingly dated to that period, Dyrrhachium/Drač/Durrës's continuous habitation from antiquity to modern times, when not stratified, is a headache for archaeologists, as many objects from different time periods are found together. It is therefore always safer to draw conclusions with regards to the date of an object based on detailed comparisons and iconographic analysis. As I shall demonstrate below, the object should be dated to the same period as the Ulcinj ciborium, on account of its iconographic similarities.

Indeed, the iconographic similarities between the Durrës and the Ulcinj ciboria are remarkable. The Durrës fragment's lower part is also divided into two vertical zones, while at its upper part the lower triangular frame of a third zone is obvious,

yet, without any convincing clues of what could have been illustrated above. The left zone (**Fig. 4**) presents vegetal strip-like tendrils, which sink successively one under the other. Floral motifs decorate the right-hand zone. Although these symbols are already known from Antiquity, the similar form and decorative structure of our fragment with the Ulcinj ciborium, as well as the absence of earlier such fragments from the wider region, lead me to suggest that the fragment from Durrës is also part of a ciborium nowadays thought to be lost and dates from the same period suggested for the Ulcinj ciborium (732–741 AD).

The exquisite quality of the carving and the higher relief compared to the Ulcinj ciborium indicates masons from a refined workshop with exposure to a major artistic centre of the Empire. I am not aware whether Leo III, in his pursuit "to expound his dogma to the people" had artists transferred in the zone to propagate the new iconoclast iconographic idiom, while enhancing imperial imagery through ecclesiastical artworks; if this were the case, however, it would only make sense for such an artwork to function as a model for local ateliers of the sort that carved the Ulcinj ciborium. On account of these differences in the quality of carving, I would chronologically place the Durrës ciborium before the Ulcinj ciborium.

4.3. Group of Istrian Ciboria

In his study of the Novigrad ciborium dated to the end of the 8th century AD, Miljenko Jurković made comparisons with two other known ciboria from the wider Istrian region: the baptistery ciborium of Patriarch Callisto (730–756 AD) from Cividale, currently kept in the city's Christian Museum (Jurković 1995, 144 and Fig. 6), comparable to a number of other sculptures of the same period (Chinellato 2011 & 2012), pointing to local workshops. The second comparable object is the Valpolicella ciborium (Jurković 1995, 144 and Fig. 7), dating to earlier in the 8th century AD. Other Istrian ciboria related to the ones mentioned here are in Sedegliano, dating to the period under the cultural preferences of Callisto, and in Zuglio, dating towards the end of the 8th century AD (Jurković 1995, 146, Figs. 11–13). Though contemporary to the group of ciboria considered in this study, all of these are thematically stylistically quite divergent from the ciboria of Durrës, Ulcinj and Kotor.

4.4. The Kotor Ciborium

The city of Kotor is located quite close to Ulcinj. It was also part of the strategically significant Otranto Triangle. It was there that a fragment of a ciborium arcade was found (Stevovic 2016, 57; Bošković 1977, 79 and Fig. 8 on Pl. IV). The fragment under consideration bears the same iconographic programme as the Ulcinj ciborium (and that of Durrës) and is inscribed with the name: ...IKIFORIVS N... Considering the actions of Nikephoros I (802–811 AD) and other Byzantine emperors in the regions of the Adriatic before and after the Peace of Aachen (812 AD), alternatively known as *Pax Nicephori*, by which most Adriatic regions came under Frankish control, led by Charlemagne, it is only reasonable to attribute this name to Emperor Nikephorus I (802–811 AD). This fragment is indicative of the still strong influence of Byzantine iconoclastic aesthetics in this region, although the city of Kotor was incorporated as the southernmost city of the *Theme* of Dalmatia only during the reign of Basil I (Stevovic 2016, 57).

Conclusions

The mentioning of imperial names in altar spaces in the regions of the southern Adriatic coastline is indicative of the Byzantine aspirations for them and the nature of their presence. As I hope to have demonstrated, in the context of these aspirations, Leo III, Nikephoros I and possibly other Byzantine emperors engaged in spreading iconoclastic iconography in ciboria, parts of the altar space, in the region. The existence of at least three objects with very similar features is indicative of this. I was unable to determine whether there are many more such fragments in the wider region. First, because, in Dyrrhachium, the region's southernmost centre, most objects were the result of casual findings in haphazard construction activities and few come from organised and systematic archaeological work. Second, because other rumoured similar parts of ciboria are scattered in diverse regions of modern-day Montenegro and have been insufficiently published. I was unable, for instance, to check the fragments of ciboria reported to be in the Danilovgrad Museum in Montenegro, a suggestion that, if my memory does not fail me, was made by Montenegrin archaeologist Predrag Lutovac.

Be this as it may, these fragments also reveal something of wider significance. On account of the aniconic art of the iconoclasm and the intermittently turbulent times characterising it, archaeologists in the region are compelled to avoid dating objects to the 8th or 9th centuries. The scarcity of firmly dated prototypes on whose basis comparisons can be made is a good reason for this. Hence, the fragments published in this paper, two of which have rather firm dates, pave the way for a reconsideration of the dating of various architectural and other fragments from that time. I am thus convinced that, in the future, this period of time will no longer appear as 'dark' as it currently does.

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