

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE EMPEROR AND THE WORLD

Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power,
Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Byzantine imperial imagery is often perceived as a static system. In contrast to this common portrayal, this book draws attention to its openness and responsiveness to other artistic traditions. Through a close examination of significant objects and monuments created over a 350-year period, from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, Alicia Walker shows how the visual articulation of Byzantine imperial power not only maintained an artistic vocabulary inherited from Greco-Roman antiquity and the Judeo-Christian tradition, but also innovated on these precedents by incorporating styles and iconography from contemporary foreign cultures, specifically the Sasanian, Chinese, and Islamic worlds. In addition to art and architecture, this book explores historical accounts and literary works as well as records of ceremonial practices, thereby demonstrating how texts, ritual, and images operated as integrated agents of imperial power. Walker offers new ways to think about cross-cultural interaction in the Middle Ages and explores the diverse ways in which imperial images employed foreign stylistic and iconographic elements in order to express particularly Byzantine meanings.

Alicia Walker is Assistant Professor of Medieval Art at Bryn Mawr College. She is the recipient of research fellowships from the Mellon Foundation, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Dumbarton Oaks, and the Program for Hellenic Studies at Princeton University, among others. She has published articles in *The Art Bulletin*, *Gesta*, *Ars Orientalis*, and *Muqarnas* and is the coeditor (with Amanda Luyster) of *Negotiating Secular and Sacred in Medieval Art*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE EMPEROR
AND THE WORLD

EXOTIC ELEMENTS AND
THE IMAGING OF MIDDLE
BYZANTINE IMPERIAL POWER,
NINTH TO THIRTEENTH
CENTURIES C.E.

ALICIA WALKER
Bryn Mawr College



Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107004771

© Alicia Walker 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Walker, Alicia.

The emperor and the world: exotic elements and the imaging of middle Byzantine
imperial power, ninth to thirteenth centuries C.E. / Alicia Walker.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00477-1 (hardback)

1. Power (Social sciences) in art. 2. Emperors in art.
3. Art and society--Byzantine Empire. 4. Art, Byzantine. I. Title.
N8236.P695W35 2011
709.02'14--dc22 2011000378

ISBN 978-1-107-00477-1 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs
for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not
guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

*To Eduardo
For setting the pace
and Azalea
For slowing things down*

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxiii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxv
<i>Author’s Note</i>	xxvii
INTRODUCTION: IMAGING EMPEROR AND EMPIRE IN THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE ERA	I
1 EMULATION: ISLAMIC IMPORTS IN THE ICONOCLAST ERA – POWER, PRESTIGE, AND THE IMPERIAL IMAGE	20
2 APPROPRIATION: STYLISTIC JUXTAPOSITION AND THE EXPRESSION OF POWER	45
3 PARITY: CRAFTING A BYZANTINE-ISLAMIC COMMUNITY OF KINGS	80
4 EXPROPRIATION: RHETORICAL IMAGES OF THE EMPEROR AND THE ARTICULATION OF DIFFERENCE	108
5 INCOMPARABILITY: THE AESTHETICS OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY	144
CONCLUSION	165
<i>Appendix</i>	175
<i>Notes</i>	177
<i>Bibliography</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	255

ILLUSTRATIONS

1a. <i>Histamenon Nomisma</i> of John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–76), Byzantine, 969–76.	page 3
1b. <i>Hyperpyron Nomisma</i> of John II Komnenos (r. 1118–43), Byzantine, 1122–37 (?).	3
2. Plaque showing the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r. 945–59) crowned by Christ, Byzantine, mid-tenth century.	4
3. John II Komnenos (r. 1118–43) and his son Alexios, frontispiece to a Gospel book, Byzantine, twelfth century.	5
4. <i>Histamenon</i> of Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057–9), Byzantine, 1057–9.	6
5. Relief showing the <i>proskynesis</i> of conquered foreigners, Obelisk of Theodosius I (r. 379–95), Constantinople (Istanbul), Byzantine, ca. 390.	7
6. Barberini polyptych, Byzantine, first half of the sixth century (?).	9
7. Fragment of a textile depicting an imperial charioteer, Byzantine, 700–900.	26
8. Fragment of a textile showing archers and tigers, Byzantine, eighth or ninth century.	27
9. Fragment of a textile showing hunters, Byzantine, 800–50.	29
10. Plate showing a king hunting lions, Sasanian, third to early fourth centuries.	30
11. Pilaster relief from the exterior façade of the large <i>ayvan</i> of Khusrau II (r. 590–628) at Taq-e Bostan, Iran, early seventh century.	31
12. Fragment of a textile showing imperial hunters, Byzantine, silk, eighth century.	32
13. Hunters pursuing a lion, Byzantine, eighth to ninth centuries.	33
14. Plate showing enthronement and hunting scenes, Sasanian, sixth to seventh centuries.	34
15. Plate depicting a lion hunter, post-Sasanian, seventh to eighth centuries.	35
16a. <i>Solidus</i> of Justinian II (r. 685–95 and 705–11), Byzantine, ca. 705.	47
16b. <i>Solidus</i> of Leo III (r. 717–41), Byzantine, 717–20.	47
16c. <i>Solidus</i> of Michael III (r. 842–67), Byzantine, 843–56.	47
17. Troyes Casket, Byzantine, tenth century.	49
18a. <i>Solidus</i> of Alexander (r. 912–13), Byzantine, 912–13.	51
18b. <i>Solidus</i> of Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–44), Byzantine, 921.	51
19. Textile depicting an emperor, Byzantine, late tenth century.	54

ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
20. Textile depicting an emperor, Byzantine, late tenth century.	55
21. Detail of lid, Troyes Casket, Byzantine, tenth century.	58
22. Electrotype of a gold medallion of Constantius I Chlorus (r. 293–306), Roman, ca. 296.	59
23. <i>Largitio</i> dish of Constantius II (r. 337–61), Roman-Byzantine, mid-fourth century.	60
24. Detail of front panel, Troyes Casket, Byzantine, tenth century.	64
25. Detail of back panel, Troyes Casket, Byzantine, tenth century.	65
26. Hunting Scene, House of the Worcester Hunt, Antioch, Byzantine, sixth century.	66
27. Scene of a boar hunt, Villa del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily, Roman-Byzantine, third or fourth century.	67
28. The hunt of Orion and Atalanta, Byzantine, mid-eleventh century.	68
29. <i>Largitio</i> plate of Valentinian I (r. 364–75), Roman-Byzantine, second half of the fourth century.	70
30. a and b. Details of short panels showing the <i>feng huang</i> , Troyes Casket, Byzantine, tenth century.	72
31. Ornaments in the shape of the <i>feng huang</i> , Chinese, Tang dynasty, late seventh to early eighth centuries.	73
32. Floor from the House of the Phoenix, Daphnis near Antioch, Roman-Byzantine, late fifth century.	74
33. <i>Nummus</i> of Constans I (r. 337–50), Roman-Byzantine, 348–50.	75
34. Innsbruck Dish, Byzantine (?), first half of the twelfth century.	95
35. The crowning of Solomon, Bible of Leo Sakellarios, Byzantine, tenth century, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS. Reg. gr. 1, fol. 281r.	100
36. King Solomon on the Throne of Lions holding the symbol of his seal, Mesopotamia, thirteenth century, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Museum, H.2152, fol. 97a.	101
37. Front and back panels of the Darmstadt Casket, Byzantine, twelfth century.	110
38. Side panels of the Darmstadt Casket, Byzantine, twelfth century.	111
39. Sarcophagus depicting the Labors of Herakles, Via Cassia, Rome, 180–90.	114
40. Bowl, Byzantine, twelfth century.	115
41. Detail from the Darmstadt Casket showing Herakles with two women, Byzantine, twelfth century.	116
42. Skyphos, Attic Greek, Pistoxenos painter, early fifth century B.C.E.	117
43. Nine Muses Sarcophagus, Roman, 240–70.	117
44. Detail of the Darmstadt Casket showing Herakles consulting an oracle, Byzantine, twelfth century.	118
45. Plaque from a box showing Herakles, Byzantine, eleventh century.	119
46. Priests at the Tripod of Delphi, Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Byzantine, eleventh century, Jerusalem, Patriarchal Library, Taphou 14, fol. 101r.	120

47.	Coin depicting (obv) Herakles making an offering and (rev) the Tripod of Apollo, Greek, 420 B.C.E.	121
48a.	Plaque from a box depicting a warrior, Byzantine, tenth or eleventh century.	122
48b.	Plaque from a box depicting a warrior, Byzantine, tenth or eleventh century.	122
49.	Detail from the Darmstadt Casket showing Herakles and Auge, Byzantine, twelfth century.	123
50.	Coin of Antoninus Pius (r. 138–61), Roman Provincial, 138–61.	124
51.	<i>Aspron Trachy</i> of John II Komnenos (r. 1118–43), Byzantine, 1122–43 (?).	126
52.	Bowl, Iran or Afghanistan, eleventh or early twelfth century.	128
53.	Bowl depicting a lute player, Iran, Seljuq, eleventh century.	129
54.	Initials for the letter “tau,” Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus, Byzantine, ca. 1062, Turin, National University Library, Cod. C.I.6, fols. 72r and 76v.	138
55.	Mold with applied decoration, reportedly from Ghazni, Afghanistan, twelfth to thirteenth centuries.	139
56.	Plaque from a casket depicting the drunken Herakles supported by Priapus, Byzantine, late tenth or early eleventh century.	140
57.	Plaque from a casket depicting an aged warrior, Byzantine, eleventh century.	141
58.	Remains of the Kiosk of Kılıç Arslan II (r. 1155–92), Konya, Seljuq, mid- to late twelfth century.	148
59.	Tile panel, Turkey, probably from Konya, Seljuq, thirteenth century.	149
60.	Cross-shaped wall tiles interspersed with small square tiles, Turkey, Seljuq, early thirteenth century.	150
61.	Elevation drawing of the staircase in the Seljuq alterations to the Roman theater at Aspendos, Turkey.	150
62.	<i>Muqarnas</i> ceiling of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, Sicily, Norman, ca. 1132.	151
63.	Wall tiles from the kiosk of Kılıç Arslan, Konya, Turkey, Seljuq, thirteenth century.	152
64.	Motif of a seated figure from the remains of a <i>muqarnas</i> vault, Fustat (near Cairo), Fatimid, mid-tenth or mid-eleventh century.	153
65.	Diagram of the family tree of John “the Fat” Komnenos.	154
66.	Hypothetical plan of the imperial palace in Constantinople.	160
67.	Portrait of Roger II (r. 1130–54) blessed by Christ, Church of the Martorona, Palermo, Sicily, Norman, twelfth century.	168
68.	Alexander confronts a race of wild women, <i>The Alexander Romance</i> , Byzantine (Trapezuntine), second half of the fourteenth century, Venice, Hellenic Institute for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Cod. 5, fol. 99v.	170

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ILLUSTRATIONS	xi
69. Portrait of Alexios III, <i>The Alexander Romance</i> , Byzantine (Trapezuntine), second half of the fourteenth century, Venice, Hellenic Institute for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Cod. 5, fol. 1r.	172
70. The crowning of Alexander, <i>The Alexander Romance</i> , Byzantine (Trapezuntine), second half of the fourteenth century, Venice, Hellenic Institute for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, Cod. 5, fol. 29r.	173

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

This book considers how exotic iconographic and stylistic elements from Sasanian, Islamic, and Chinese sources were incorporated into middle Byzantine (ca. 843–1204) art and architecture in order to project a cosmopolitan concept of imperial authority. It focuses on objects and monuments produced for and by the imperial and court elite at the Byzantine capital, Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), and explores the meanings that this select circle of viewers, users, patrons, and designers ascribed to artistic adoptions from other cultures. In so doing it revisits the long-standing question of the nature and meaning of imperial imagery, an issue that has been a central and perennial concern in the study of Byzantium.¹

The “official” depiction of the emperor is usually understood to operate within a conservative and hermetic system dominated by an essentially Christian iconography that promoted divine endorsement of the ruler’s universal dominion. Through reconsideration of objects and monuments that depart from this standard visual vocabulary, I argue that imperial imagery could also be open and responsive, and that its innovative features carried ideological significances that contributed in important and unique ways to the construction and promotion of middle Byzantine imperial power. The present study is concerned not with the individual portraits of specific emperors, but with the visual representation of the imperial concept.² I take a broad view of the media that contributed to the representation of the ruler, which I understand to have been constructed not only through works of art and architecture but through ceremonial performances and textual accounts as well. The “image” of the emperor that unfolds over the course of this book is one depicted in the verbal record as much as the visual, demanding that we think of texts and images as integrated agents of imperial power.

The works of art that form the focus of this study include portable objects, such as textiles, ivory boxes, enamel containers, and metal vessels, as well as architecture, particularly buildings at the imperial palace, which today are preserved only in the textual record. In these objects and monuments, visual reference to foreign art is selective, often constituting a single element in an assemblage of diverse iconographic or stylistic features. I argue that this recontextualization of non-Byzantine visual languages in a variety of media

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

bespeaks a meaningful and sustained dialogue between Byzantine and non-Byzantine art, and between Byzantine and non-Byzantine identities. This book offers a novel contribution to the evolving definition of what it meant to “be Byzantine,” expanding beyond the trajectories of Greco-Roman and Christian culture that are usually privileged in such discussions.³

Many of the objects and monuments considered here are well-known works of middle Byzantine luxury art, and all of them evince complex programs executed with the highest artistic caliber. Yet the significance of their exotic features – and in some instances, the works of art themselves – are often neglected or marginalized in discussions about the nature and meaning of imperial art. Their reconsideration here provides insight into the limitations of existing interpretive strategies and the benefits to be gained from a fuller consideration of how exotic elements operate within middle Byzantine visual culture. Foreign adoptions were not limited to obscure objects and monuments or to the periphery of middle Byzantine artistic production. Rather, exoticizing works of art were manufactured and used at the epicenter of Byzantine culture, the imperial court. Although their visual content diverges from normative Byzantine ruler iconography, their programs employ strategies of visual communication that are found in other works of middle Byzantine art and literature. By analyzing foreign features in relation to traditional motifs and themes, this study integrates exoticizing objects and monuments into the mainstream of middle Byzantine art. At the same time, through consideration of the cross-cultural dimension of imperial imagery, it expands appreciation for the cosmopolitan nature of the court at Constantinople and enriches our conception of elite culture and identity in Byzantium. By crossing disciplinary boundaries that typically divide the study of Byzantine art from that of other cultural traditions, this book responds to the current call for an expanded approach to the exploration of medieval art. At the same time, by grounding inquiry in the Byzantine dimension of these interactions, cultural and historical specificity is maintained in the analysis of cross-cultural phenomena.

The period under consideration spans the mid-ninth to the early thirteenth centuries and is typically referred to as the middle Byzantine era (ca. 843–1204). It was a time of great change in Byzantium, particularly as regards its relations with foreign cultures. In the ninth century, Byzantium was largely on the defensive against encroaching powers, especially along its eastern frontiers, where Islamic armies made rapid and extensive claims on Byzantine territories beginning in the mid-seventh century, shortly after the advent of Islam.⁴ Confrontations with Islamic forces, including those of the earliest dynasties, the Syrian Umayyads (661–750) and the Abbasids (750–1258), largely continued the adversarial relationship that Byzantium had maintained with the late antique Persian dynasty, the Sasanians (226–651), whom the early Islamic armies conquered and assimilated.⁵ Particularly during the reign of the last Iconoclast

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

emperor, Theophilos (r. 829–42), Byzantium established more secure footing against the Abbasid Empire, marking a turn in the tide of the Byzantine–Islamic balance of power. By the tenth century, optimism for Byzantine fortunes was on the rise. Particularly with the successes of the military emperors of the late tenth century – including Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–69) and John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–76) – Byzantium enjoyed increased security on multiple fronts and was able to regain and solidify territories along its eastern edges. In addition, trade relations between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds grew significantly in the tenth century, and merchants and diplomats traveled regularly between the capitals and courts of Mediterranean and Near Eastern polities. Commercial and political networks served as conduits for the circulation of works of art, artists, and consumers across a vast geographic and cultural sphere from Byzantium to China.

By the mid-eleventh century, however, Byzantine political and economic stability began to erode. Especially with the rise of the Seljuq dynasties of Anatolia (the Great Seljuqs [ca. 1040–1194] and the Seljuqs of Rum [ca. 1081–1307]), Byzantium was again under threat and suffered significant truncation of its eastern territories, a process marked by the loss of Mantzikert in 1071 and by the Byzantine defeat at Myriokephalon in 1176. Despite periodic improvements in Byzantium’s position, overall the twelfth century saw mounting anxiety over the empire’s diminished stature and the very real threat of territorial loss and political irrelevance. This trend reached catastrophic proportions with the Sack of Constantinople by Western European Crusaders in 1204, after which the remaining power structure of the Byzantine elite was dispersed to exile courts at Epiros, Nicaea, and Trebizond until the reestablishment of Byzantine control of Constantinople in 1261.

Given the long-standing contacts between Byzantium and Sasanian–Islamic political powers, it is perhaps surprising that evidence for the impact of these foreign cultures on Byzantium is not more extensively or overtly attested in the textual and material records. Indeed, the objects and monuments immediately relevant to this study are few in number, and each is unique in terms of its iconographic program, representing individual responses to particular moments in Byzantium’s relations with foreign cultures.⁶ Because of the diversity among these works of art and architecture, it is impossible to contend that there exists a unified “corpus” of exoticizing works of middle Byzantine art. Still, as Paul Magdalino observes regarding the study of Byzantine–Islamic scholarly interaction,

one cannot judge the impact of foreign culture on Byzantine intellectual life simply by a literal reading of explicit comments in Byzantine sources. One has to recognize that rejection, whether expressed through adverse comment or through silence, may be a rhetorical attitude, which does not preclude reception and may actually be used to disguise it. The important thing is to look carefully for evidence of contacts.⁷

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Although the adoption of exotic iconographic and stylistic features in middle Byzantine art is limited in scale, individual objects and monuments display complex and meaningful programs that make firm statements about the importance of these interactions. Their small number belies what must have been the deep and pervasive impact of foreign cultures on Byzantine consciousness, particularly as concerns the conception and visual articulation of imperial power.

While this book by necessity considers Sasanian, Islamic, Chinese, and Byzantine evidence, it focuses on the Byzantine perspective of these cultural contacts and in this sense is less concerned with the mechanics of cross-cultural processes, focusing instead on how exotic elements were negotiated within Byzantine art. Byzantine adoption of foreign artistic motifs and styles is a topic that has received relatively minimal and isolated scholarly attention. When addressed as a large-scale phenomenon, it tends to be treated in generic terms, with different objects and monuments proposed to operate according to a single dynamic of aesthetic imitation that lacked deeper meaning or purpose.⁸ In more focused studies, the subtleties and significance of artistic interactions often come to the fore, but the larger picture of intercultural relations can be lost.

The present study attempts to address these shortcomings by combining multiple analyses of individual works of art and architecture with a diachronic perspective that reveals the diverse motivations behind Byzantine adoptions of foreign artistic elements. This perspective is articulated through chapter titles – emulation, appropriation, parity, expropriation, and incomparability – that characterize distinct dynamics at play in the artistic interface between Byzantium and the foreign cultures with which it engaged. Each chapter focuses on select objects and monuments, foregrounding close readings of the visual and textual evidence in order to yield interpretations firmly rooted in the works of art themselves. Objects and monuments are analyzed in relation to their historical contexts so that cross-cultural artistic interaction can be situated within broader trends of Byzantine sociohistorical and ideological transformation. This approach also brings to light the diversity of messages embedded in programs that incorporate exotic features.

In order to underscore distinctions among these various dynamics of cross-cultural interaction, special attention is given to defining a set of key terms employed throughout this study. They draw to some extent from earlier literature on the topics of Byzantine imperial imagery and medieval cross-cultural interaction, but also introduce new concepts and frameworks that merit further explanation. In structuring my discussion according to a standard vocabulary, I do not intend to diminish the complex phenomena discussed here to reductive formulae. Rather, engaging with a set of fixed terms is intended to clarify connections among the disparate and multifaceted objects and historical moments examined in this study.

In distinguishing among different types of imperial imagery, I introduce two domains for its production and circulation: the official and the unofficial.⁹ The “official” represents the traditional ideology of divine endorsement that remained largely unchanged over time. In the visual record, it is best attested in the iconography of coins and seals produced under the auspices of the emperor and disseminated throughout the empire and beyond. It was also found in a diversity of other media including ivories, manuscripts, textiles, wall painting, mosaic, and sculpture, which saturated Byzantine visual culture at both the elite and popular levels. In contrast to these highly regulated and conservative depictions of the emperor, I propose that there also circulated “unofficial” images, which departed from the standard iconography and were intended for consumption by a more limited audience of court elites. It is in this unofficial domain that innovative images of imperial power were conceived and promoted. Such representations allowed the emperor and his court to respond to the shifting political realities of the medieval world stage and Byzantium’s position within it. Unofficial imagery could be constructed by nonimperial individuals, in particular the courtiers who had privileged access to the ruler and who would have been well informed about contemporary political, military, and economic developments. As a result, imperial imagery could become a site for presenting varied and even contested notions of imperial power, which sometimes critiqued the emperor instead of – or in tandem with – celebrating him.

Throughout this study, the words “element” and “feature” refer to any discrete physical or visual aspect of a work of art. The two primary types of elements I discuss are stylistic and iconographic, and I follow conventional art historical definitions for both. “Style” refers to the physical attributes that characterize the form of a work of art and that can be used to coordinate the work of art with other objects or monuments showing similar features.¹⁰ “Iconography” refers to a motif as a semantic entity that expresses meaning through symbolic associations, which are further dependent on the socio-cultural matrices within which the element was created and viewed. I do not, however, deny the potential for style to convey meaning. Indeed, the use of a foreign style as an iconographic feature emerges as a primary strategy in the programs of some objects considered here.

In addressing the individuals responsible for the production and reception of works of art and architecture, I generally exclude the category of “artists” or “craftsmen” from the equation, focusing instead on “patrons,” “designers,” “viewers,” and “users.” In the Byzantine world, there is little evidence to suggest that those responsible for the physical crafting of objects (i.e., artists or craftsmen) made significant contributions to devising the complex iconographic programs found in the works of art considered here. That task likely fell instead to designers and patrons, who may or may not have been the same

individual(s).¹¹ The craftsman’s hand is certainly relevant to questions of technical or stylistic attributes of medieval works of art, but these topics are not the primary focus of the present study. In terms of reception, I recognize the role of the intended audience to entail not only viewing objects and monuments but also using them. This point draws to the fore the special nature of medieval works of art and architecture, whose functional aspects were rarely, if ever, entirely separable from their aesthetic qualities.

The term “Byzantium” is a modern invention, coined in the sixteenth century by scholars who wished to distinguish the eastern Christian Roman Empire from the earlier western Roman Empire of the pre-Christian era.¹² As is well known, the Byzantines referred to themselves as “Romans” and in some instances “Hellenes,” viewing their own society as an unbroken continuation of the Roman Empire and – at certain points in time – drawing a connection between their Christian-Greek culture and the pagan-Greek world of antiquity.¹³ Nonetheless, I follow current convention, using the term “Byzantine” to refer to the culture that embodied a political continuation of the Roman Empire following the transfer of the capital from Rome to Constantinople in 324, but a religious break from Roman paganism following the legalization and later official adoption of Christianity over the course of the fourth century. At the same time, I recognize that the transition from “Roman” to “Byzantine” was gradual, with many cultural practices and identities extending across the centuries. For this reason, I employ the term “Roman-Byzantine” when discussing phenomena of the late antique period that were common to pagan (Roman) and Christian (Byzantine) phases. I follow the convention of taking the period of Iconoclasm (726–843) – when the production of sacred imagery in Byzantium was banned and existing works of figural religious art were destroyed – as a dividing mark between the early and middle Byzantine periods. Yet, while focused on the middle Byzantine era (the period between the end of Iconoclasm in 843 and the Sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204), this study extends beyond these chronological parameters in order to consider the roots of middle Byzantine attitudes toward cultural others in the latter years of Iconoclasm as well as the possible impact of material considered here on post-1204 conceptions of imperial power.

While Christianity was certainly the defining aspect of Byzantine culture, the Iconoclast controversy evinces the labile character of even the Christian dimension of this identity. Furthermore, as noted already, certain aspects of Greco-Roman tradition were still part of Byzantium’s self-perceived heritage, particularly at the upper echelons of Byzantine society, the environment in which the works of art studied here circulated. In some instances, objects claim this antique heritage as part of Byzantine identity, but in other cases the classical is treated as foreign to Byzantine (qua Christian) culture. Indeed, Byzantine authors’ perceptions of their relation to Greek and Roman tradition

shifted over time and even varied among writers of the same era.¹⁴ Yet despite the persistent internal reformulations of what it meant to “be Byzantine,” they consistently maintained a rhetoric of distinction between themselves and cultural “others,” referring to these non-Byzantine groups by a variety of terms, including “barbaros” (barbarian) and words employing the prefix “allo-” (lit., “other”).¹⁵ While these labels sometimes encode a perception of binary relations between “self” and “other,” in certain instances an attitude of shared culture or a practice of strategic assimilation of foreign elements reveals more responsive and flexible conceptualizations. As the following analyses of individual monuments and objects demonstrate, Byzantine identity was constantly negotiated in relation to internal and external factors. At the same time, it was consistently articulated as something ultimately distinct from “other” traditions, even when those differences were nuanced and mutable.¹⁶

Sasanian, Islamic, and Chinese elements found in middle Byzantine art have often been categorized as “oriental” or “Eastern.” I avoid these reductive terms because they fail to situate foreign sources within the specific cultural and historical milieus from which they derive.¹⁷ Furthermore, they are limited by a directional designator, orient or East, which is not always accurate. Some foreign cultures that acted as mediators of “oriental” motifs were located to the south (e.g., the Fatimids [909–1171]) or west (e.g., the Spanish Umayyads [756–1031]) of Byzantium. In instances where the sources for foreign elements can be associated with a specific dynasty or polity, I use these designators in order to achieve greater chronological, geographic, political, and cultural specificity for the original artistic model and to recognize the diverse groups that fall within the more general rubric of “medieval Islamic” culture. Of course the term “Islamic” is itself problematic, not least of all because the elements appropriated by Byzantium were rarely, if ever, related to the practices, beliefs, or material culture of the Islamic religion.¹⁸ Nonetheless, Islam is the primary unifying factor of the diverse groups from which Byzantium adopted these artistic elements and therefore provides the most encompassing cultural indicator possible. Furthermore, this term is in keeping with Byzantine perception, which recognized Islam as a common denominator among these groups, while at the same time acknowledging the political, historical, and geographic distinctions that separated them.¹⁹ In recognition of artistic continuity between the late antique Sasanian dynasty of Iran and subsequent Islamic groups – particularly the Syrian Umayyads and the Abbasids, who adopted and adapted Sasanian traditions – I employ the conflation “Sasanian-Islamic” in instances where an object or model cannot be readily distinguished as specifically Sasanian or Islamic or where insisting on a distinction would undermine appreciation of the artistic and ideological continuity between these groups.²⁰

When discussing Byzantine iterations of Islamic models, I employ the term “Islamicizing,” which expresses the fact that such material interprets Islamic

traditions for Byzantine purposes. Similarly, “classicizing” is used to refer to the Byzantine recasting of elements from Greco-Roman tradition. In both cases, I recognize that the use of foreign or past artistic forms by Byzantine artists was a process of translation, in which the original meanings of the adopted forms were unavoidably altered as they were made comprehensible within new contexts and for new viewers/users.²¹

I employ “indigenous” and “foreign” to distinguish between elements that can be associated with the artistic production of Byzantium (indigenous) versus elements that derive from outside that society, but can still be associated with a specific external cultural, historical, and/or geographical group (foreign). The term “hybrid” is used to denote an object or monument that draws from indigenous and foreign traditions, juxtaposes these sources in a manner that maintains consciousness of their mutual alterity, and generates meaning from the friction between disparate parts. I employ this definition while acknowledging, as noted earlier, that the “indigenous” and “foreign” cultures to which I refer were themselves the products of hybrid combinations that were in constant reformulation. I pay attention to the particular ways in which “Byzantine” or “foreign” artistic forms are constituted in specific objects.²²

The term “exotic” is a key concept for this study and merits detailed explanation. It shares with “foreign” a position in contrast to “indigenous,” but it also expresses a more complex and inflected set of relationships and ideas. While “foreign” conveys the fact of difference in an objective sense, “exotic” can be understood “more dynamically, as a mechanism regulating the fear and desire associated with awareness of the foreign (fear of difference, desire to know).”²³ The exotic represents a fluid, generative process through which cultural difference is negotiated and both foreign and indigenous identities are defined. Essential to the argument of this book is an understanding of exotic elements as active agents of meaning. Their adoption in Byzantine art is not the result of passive aesthetic “influences” or casual formal “borrowings.” Exoticizing motifs and styles represent powerful gestures aimed at the resolution of the curiosities, pleasures, and anxieties spurred by encounters with cultural others and their artistic traditions.²⁴

A second key concept employed in this study is “cosmopolitanism,” which I understand as an awareness of cultural traditions beyond one’s own and, more importantly, a willingness to draw from these nonindigenous sources in the formulation of one’s own identity. Being cosmopolitan is not limited to participation in a common visual culture, in which forms and meanings operate consistently across divisions of geography, religion, ethnicity, and political allegiance. Rather, the inversion or distortion of other visual languages – demonstrating the desire and ability to translate the foreign into something meaningful in indigenous terms – is here considered to be equally,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.

Alicia Walker

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

if not more, evident of a truly cosmopolitan identity.²⁵ In this respect, my definition emphasizes the local character of cosmopolitanism, which remains specific and self-interested even while purporting an alliance with universal values and identities.²⁶ I see Byzantine imperial cosmopolitanism as an attitude that claims participation in the world as a means to express control over it and understand it as fundamentally linked to an attitude of and ambition for cultural and political hegemony.²⁷

The word “adoption” is employed as a neutral term for the Byzantine use of foreign artistic elements.²⁸ As noted earlier, in order to characterize the diversity of artistic adoptions at work in the objects and monuments studied here, I also propose the terms “emulation,” “appropriation,” “expropriation,” “parity,” and “incomparability.” Each of the latter terms represents a particular dynamic of adoption that is inflected differently from the others. “Emulation” is understood as a form of competitive imitation, in which foreign artistic sources were copied in order to demonstrate the Byzantines’ ability to master the artistic language of an adversary and thereby express symbolic domination over an opposing group. Emulation also entails the assimilation of foreign elements into Byzantine programs.²⁹

“Appropriation” represents the self-conscious adoption of a foreign element in a strategic fashion. In contrast to emulation, which involves a degree of assimilation, appropriation preserves distinctions between indigenous and foreign forms, and it juxtaposes these disparate elements in a meaningful way. In instances of appropriation, foreign features cooperate with indigenous elements to produce a unified message.³⁰ “Expropriation” embodies an extreme form of appropriation in which an element that has been extracted from a foreign artistic tradition is modified so as to create a new meaning that departs radically from its original significance. Expropriation can involve the intentional distortion or inversion of a foreign motif or style in order to serve the purposes of the adopting group.³¹

“Parity” entails the careful selection and promotion of artistic forms or symbolic references that possess consistent meaning in both the foreign and indigenous contexts. It can be used to express notions of shared identity between otherwise distinct cultural groups. Finally, “incomparability,” a mode antithetical to parity, highlights the perception of irreconcilable differences between indigenous and foreign artistic elements and the cultures they represent. As in processes of appropriation and expropriation, incomparability emphasizes fundamental disparities through strategies of visual and conceptual juxtaposition, but incomparability does not entail the cooperation of foreign and indigenous elements in a single program. All of these terms – adoption, emulation, appropriation, parity, expropriation, and incomparability – avoid the passive, temporary, and unmotivated connotations that burden terms such as “borrowing” and “influence.”³² They emphasize instead the active and self-conscious nature

of Byzantine deployments of foreign artistic elements and the meaningful role that exotic features play in imperial programs.

Throughout this study, I foreground the particular sociohistorical situations enveloping processes of artistic interaction in order to highlight the possible motivations behind them. The main chapters follow a roughly chronological sequence, allowing for larger patterns to emerge over time. Yet I do not wish to suggest that the dynamics of adoption at play in a given work of art are necessarily limited to its particular historical circumstance, or to imply a hierarchy of sophistication between strategies employed in earlier periods as opposed to later ones. Rather, I see the various solutions for incorporating foreign elements into middle Byzantine imperial art and ideology to be different – but equally valuable and viable – possibilities for accomplishing a common task: the effective articulation of imperial power. Furthermore, the modes highlighted in each chapter are not entirely discrete. They represent nuances in the ways particular motifs or concepts are deployed rather than finite distinctions between individual works of art.

As explained in the Introduction, this book responds to a formulation of the official imperial image first articulated in the early twentieth century, which was shaped in part by nationalist values that, despite their varying forms, ultimately promoted a concept of empires as essentially hegemonic entities preserved by virtue of their ancient authority and immutable natures. My own perspective endorses a model that allows for difference and fluidity to enrich, rather than undermine, imperial integrity and control. This vision is, of course, a product of the present historical moment. Currents of late twentieth-century thought – specifically the social and academic ideologies of multiculturalism, transculturalism, and postcolonialism, which were moving at full force during my own intellectual formation – fundamentally shape how I and others of this era think about identity, power, and their representation and dissemination. Rather than resisting the intellectual legacy of the present historical moment, it seems more profitable to give voice to the new perspectives it affords while remaining conscious of its constructed and impermanent nature, and thereby open to the ways in which it both explains and occludes the past.³³ Furthermore, in staking a claim for what this moment contributes to our understanding of history, it is also essential to credit the ways in which earlier scholars made essential and enduring contributions to the present dialogue. While critiquing late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars’ approaches and biases, I make every effort to retain and foreground those aspects of their work that stand the test of time and hope that despite the experiences and biases that shape my own perception of the past, the following interpretations might offer, in their own ways, some contributions of lasting value.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The majority of this book was produced during my years as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis, and I am deeply grateful to that institution for the financial support and academic leave that made possible my research and writing. In addition, I thank the Program in Hellenic Studies at Princeton University and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation for fellowships that enabled the completion and revision of the manuscript. At Washington University, I was fortunate to enjoy colleagues whose support of and engagement with this project greatly enhanced both the process of its creation and its final form. In particular, I thank Melia Belli, Elizabeth Childs, Rebecca DeRoo, Jennifer Josten, Meredith Malone, Igor Marjanovic, Angela Miller, Jessica Rosenfeld, Susan Rotroff, and William Wallace. My current institution, Bryn Mawr College, generously funded the illustration and indexing of this book.

Although the foundation for this project was laid in my dissertation, the superstructure is newly built. This reconstruction of ideas and arguments was significantly aided by a number of people who in various ways have remained an important part of my personal and intellectual life from graduate school to the present, especially Diliانا Angelova, Christine Zitrides Atiyeh, Persis Berlekamp, Ivan Drpic, Emine Fetvacı, Amy Gansell, Elizabeth Gittings, Amanda Luyster, Anne McClanan, Oya Pancaroğlu, Pagona Papadopoulou, and Amy Powell. I am continually indebted to my doctoral advisors, Ioli Kalavrezou, Irene Winter, and David Roxburgh, who have shaped this project and the person behind it in manifold and essential ways.

The development of this book happened in tandem with a gradual expansion of my academic circles. New colleagues and friends – especially Elena Boeck, Anthony Cutler, Maria Georgopoulou, Sharon Gerstel, Ludovico Geymonat, Heather Grossman, Cecily Hilsdale, Eva Hoffman, Veronica Kalas, Kriszta Kotsis, Eunice Maguire, Henry Maguire, Vasilis Marinis, Glenn Peers, Scott Redford, and Kathryn Smith – have been particularly important in the evolution of this project, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge them here. Numerous individuals heard or read portions of my work in earlier forms as conference papers, articles, and manuscript drafts and made generous and insightful comments. This book has benefited greatly from their many contributions, and

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

I regret the degree to which my own responses to their valuable and collegial offerings have fallen short. I thank the two anonymous readers who provided perceptive and careful criticism on an earlier draft of the manuscript. Of course, any errors or deficiencies in the final text remain mine alone.

The editorial staff at Cambridge University Press has shown immense patience and professionalism in the production of this volume. I thank especially Beatrice Rehl, Holly Johnson, Amanda Smith, and Becca Cain. John Witty and Nancy Rubin kindly assisted with securing illustrations and permissions to publish; their tenacity and unfailing good humor deserve special commendation.

I thank my family and friends, particularly my parents, Sylvia and Charles Walker, for their continued interest in and enthusiasm for my work. Above all, I am indebted to my husband, Eduardo Martinez, for enduring the countless late meals, long absences, distracted conversations, and messy desks that made this book possible. Our daughter, Azalea Kalliope, was born during the last phases of manuscript production, and I am grateful to her for warmly accepting a preoccupied mother and for providing a fresh perspective on this project during its last months.

ABBREVIATIONS

BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae</i> , edited by Barthold Georg Niebuhr et al. 50 vols. Bonn: E. Weber, 1828–97.
DOC	<i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection</i> , edited by Alfred R. Bellinger and Philip Grierson. 5 vols. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1966–99.
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EI	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd ed. 12 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2005.
GOB	<i>The Glory of Byzantium</i> , edited by Helen Evans and William Wixom. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997.
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , edited by Hans Christopher Ackerman and Jean-Robert Gisler. 8 vols. Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1981–97.
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> , edited by Alexander Kazhdan et al. 3 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Unless otherwise noted, all dates are C.E. (Common Era).

The spellings of proper names and specialized terms are adapted from the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. To facilitate readability for the nonspecialist, diacritical marks have been simplified or eliminated in the main text and notes; when used in sources, however, they are retained in the bibliographic citations so as to remain faithful to the original publications.

An earlier version of Chapter 5 appeared as Alicia Walker, “Middle Byzantine Aesthetics and the Incomparability of Islamic Art: The Architectural Ekphrasis of Nikolaos Mesarites,” *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 79–101.

In the following text, “Iconoclasm” is capitalized when referring to the historical era (ca. 726–843) in Byzantium, as well as to groups on either side of the controversy (i.e., “Iconophiles,” “Iconoclasts”). The same term in lowercase (i.e., “iconoclasm”) refers to anti-image attitudes or actions in general.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00477-1 - The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine
Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.
Alicia Walker
Frontmatter
[More information](#)
