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VISION AND MEANING IN NINTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM

Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus

The Byzantines used imagery to communicate a wide range of issues. In the context of Iconoclasm – the debate about the legitimacy of religious art conducted between ca. AD 730 and 843 – Byzantine authors themselves claimed that visual images could express certain ideas better than words. *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium* deals with how such visual communication worked, and examines the types of messages that pictures could convey in the aftermath of Iconoclasm. Its focus is on a deluxe manuscript commissioned around 880, a copy of the fourth-century sermons of the Cappadocian church father Gregory of Nazianzus which was presented to the Emperor Basil I, founder of the Macedonian dynasty, by one of the greatest scholars Byzantium ever produced, the patriarch Photios. The manuscript was lavishly decorated with gilded initials, elaborate headpieces, and a full-page miniature before each of Gregory's sermons. Forty-six of these, including over 200 distinct scenes, survive. Fewer than half, however, were directly inspired by the homily that they accompany. Instead, most function as commentaries on the ninth-century court, and, carefully deconstructed, both provide us with information not available from preserved written sources and, perhaps more important, show us how visual images communicate differently from words.

DR LESLIE BRUBAKER is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham. She has edited *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, and (with Robert Ousterhout) *The Sacred Image East and West*, as well as contributing chapters and articles to numerous publications in Byzantine studies.

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LESLIE BRUBAKER

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figs. 68, 115, 168, 170, 171, 174: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana
figs. 69, 102, 111, 120, 133, 144, 145, 158, 164, 173: by permission of the Holy Monastery of Pantokrator, Holy Mountain (Mount Athos)
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Preface

The copy of the Homilies (sermons) of Gregory of Nazianzus produced in Constantinople for the Emperor Basil I and his family between AD 879 and 882 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, codex graecus 510) was the subject of my 1983 doctoral dissertation. Since then, the discipline of art history has changed, and so have my conceptions of what art history is about and my areas of interest within the discipline. Few passages remain from the original dissertation; I have retained many of the themes that interested me years ago (though the words have been rewritten and the observations reframed), but have interwoven them with topics that now interest me more. The basic line of enquiry, however, remains the same. How and why was Paris.gr.510 made and used? What did Paris.gr.510 mean to the people who produced and used it? These issues – which boil down to questions of method, function, and meaning – are interrelated, but not simply.

Paris.gr.510 is not, in fact, a simple manuscript. It is arguably the most complex and internally sophisticated illustrated manuscript ever produced in Byzantium. Miniatures that expand upon the sense of Gregory's sermons rather than illustrating his narrative are normal. The relationship between image, text, and audience is often symbiotic and dialectical, and raises methodological problems of interpretation for us today. To circumvent the most obvious of these problems, comparisons and parallels have been drawn whenever possible from roughly contemporary images and texts or from works that scholarly opinion accepts as well known to the Byzantines during the last quarter of the ninth century. This restriction has one indisputable drawback: it excludes the evidence which no longer survives while privileging those ninth-century witnesses that have, for one reason or another, managed to endure. It seems important to signal this potential methodological pitfall, however inescapable.

The complexity of the manuscript also demands a reasonably detailed assessment of each miniature. These analyses are embedded in the following chapters; they provide the skeleton from which hangs the flesh of the surrounding discussion. Usually, each is set off by a subtitle giving the folio number of the miniature,

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and, in parentheses, its order in the manuscript. Each contains a brief description, an examination of the relationship between the image and the text it illustrates or originally illustrated, and a discussion of the imagery; it is intentional that the dialogue between text and image, which (as in most manuscripts) is very important in Paris.gr.510, introduces each discussion. Occasionally aspects of a miniature are treated in more detail outside this primary discussion; in these cases, cross-references appear in the notes. Formal characteristics that affect the meaning of the miniature – and, in Paris.gr.510, that especially includes composition – are also incorporated; signposts of individual painters ('hands') are noted as relevant.[1] The miniatures are not, however, considered in the order that they appear in the manuscript (an inventory of the miniatures, listing them in their present order of appearance, appears in Appendix A; Appendix B lists the textual bases for the scenes). Although the exegetical approach of the designer and painters matured as the manuscript progressed,[2] the conceptual development of particular themes is not linear. Many miniatures in Paris.gr.510 have multiple levels of meaning and all are essentially self-contained units; but most also correlate thematically with others, often far distant in the manuscript. To garner the collective evidence provided by these thematic groups I have assembled the miniatures around them. The reproductions of the miniatures, however, follow the order of the manuscript and, for ease of reference, are all grouped together between pp. xxiv and 1. The miniatures from Milan, Ambrosiana cod. E.49/50 inf. are grouped between pp. 18 and 19.

The interpretive role of many of the miniatures and the limited afterlife of the Homilies images in the Byzantine world – far more people are familiar with them today than were cognizant of the manuscript during its entire 600 years in Constantinople – suggested a focus on the original group of artisans, their employer, and the family for whom Paris.gr.510 was made. The intentions of this group are not recoverable, and in any event images convey socially constructed meaning within a constrained set of boundaries, in this case the parameters of what was visually thinkable around the year 880 in the élite circles of Constantinople. At the same time, however, Paris.gr.510 is a real object; it is part of, but not reducible to, the larger discourse in which it participated.[3] The particular people involved with the manuscript seem to have affected it, sometimes in unconventional ways. This issue, too, raises methodological problems. I am less concerned about over-interpretation – as Robert Taft pointed out long ago, ninth-century Byzantines preferred multi-level metaphors to simple allegory, and were happy 'to hold in dynamic tension several levels of meaning simultaneously'[4] – than with anachronistic interpretation, a tendency to impose (or to recognize only) meanings that are

[1] On the style of the miniatures as a whole, see chapter 2. [2] See chapter 3.
[3] See the perceptive comments in Spiegel (1990). [4] Taft (1980/1), esp. 60, 73–74 (quotation 74).

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significant to us today. I have tried to balance the evidence of individual miniatures against the patterns revealed by groups of images, and to understand Paris.gr.510 as a dialogue, expressed in the language of images, between the people involved in its making and their world.

After introducing the manuscript, in the first chapter I have therefore turned immediately to a consideration of ways to understand the visual – and especially the colloquium between image, audience, and text in manuscripts – in ninth-century Byzantium.[5] Against this backdrop, chapter 2 turns to how this colloquium works in Paris.gr.510. In the following five chapters, the miniatures are arranged in thematic groups: the biographical miniatures, which focus on Gregory of Nazianzus and his fourth-century friends; the visual panegyrics that laud the Emperor Basil I; the exegetical miniatures that betray the involvement of the patriarch Photios; the group of miniatures that concentrate on saints and sinners; and the scenes that provide visual expressions of divinity. By then, we shall have considered most of the miniatures in Paris.gr.510; in chapter 8, the connections between Paris.gr.510 and other works are reconsidered, primarily from an iconographical point of view. Finally, in the conclusion, a number of sub-themes that run across chapters are addressed, along with the vexing question of why this curious manuscript was made.

I should note at the outset that neither I nor, apart from Charles Astruc, any scholar known to me has been permitted to see the manuscript, a ban that was apparently imposed before the Second World War; even the huge Louvre exhibition 'Byzance' in 1992 could not obtain the manuscript, though it appears in the catalogue. The paint is flaking so badly from the miniatures that Christian Förstel, the current Conservateur de la Section Grecque in the manuscript department of the Bibliothèque Nationale, has himself never opened the book.

Some technical notes. References specific to individual miniatures are collected into a bibliographical footnote near the beginning of the primary discussion of each miniature; here all secondary literature appears in chronological sequence. I have omitted clearly derivative descriptions or comments such as those in standard handbooks. References appear in abbreviated form (author and year of publication); full details appear in the Bibliography. English quotations from the Old Testament have been taken, with some modifications, from *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, Greek and English*, translated by L. L. Brenton (London, no date). Those from the New Testament are either my own translations from the Greek or follow the Authorized Version. The anglicization of Greek words and names follows current standard usage; it is not, therefore, entirely consistent (e.g. Makedonios and Romanos, but Macedonian and Lazarus).

[5] Parts of chapter 1 originally appeared as Brubaker (1989b).

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making, and I have acquired many and various debts to a huge number of people and institutions. My parents and family have been extremely supportive throughout. I am also happy to thank Anthony Cutler, who first introduced me to Paris.gr.510; the Johns Hopkins University, which granted me the Samuel H. Kress travel fellowship that enabled me to start this project; the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, where I have been accommodated as a Fellow or a simple scholar many times over the past fifteen years; the Getty Fellowship programme, which funded a year of released time when much of this book was written, and, later, a second year when much of it was revised; the British Academy for a generous publication subvention; and Wheaton College, which provided research funds during the years that I taught there. To my former colleagues Ann Murray, Dick and Jean Pearce, Mary Skinner, Sue Standing and especially Donna Kerner – who listened, criticized, recommended bibliography, and supplied unfailing intellectual and emotional support – I am grateful beyond words. My thanks, too, to the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham, my home away from home between 1987 and 1993 and since then my academic base, where much of this book was written under the inspiration and occasional prodding of A. A. M. Bryer and John Haldon.

Many libraries, and their staffs, have allowed me sometimes unprecedented access to manuscripts, and I should like particularly to thank Paul Canart at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana for putting me in a room with every manuscript I wanted to examine in order that I might make comparisons between them. I must thank, above all, the staffs at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan and, especially, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris; also the staffs at the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana in Florence, the British Library in London, the Monastery of St John on Patmos, the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, and the Palazzo Venezia in Rome (where I was allowed to study the ivory casket reproduced here as figs. 84, 93, and 95). For helping me to understand manuscripts in the fullest sense,

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I thank Guglielmo Cavallo, who has discussed Paris.gr.510 with me for over a decade, and whose kindness has never faltered.

For help with securing photographs, I thank Anna Ballian for arranging contact with the Mount Athos monasteries, Monique Bourin for last-minute prints from Paris, and Sandro Carocci for sifting through hundreds of plates in the archives in Rome. I am also grateful for the assistance of Annemarie Weyl Carr, Graham Norrie, John Osborne, Lyn Rodley, Nancy Ševčenko, and Natalia Teteriatnikov.

At Cambridge University Press I especially thank William Davies, the 'anonymous' readers (John Haldon and Lyn Rodley), my copy editor, Rosemary Morris, my two editors, Kate Brett and Hilary Gaskin, and the editor of the series, Rosamond McKitterick, whose perceptive comments on the final draft of this book were immeasurably helpful.

Parts of what follow have been presented in various scholarly fora, and I have received so many valuable comments that to acknowledge them all here would extend this section beyond reason. I have tried to credit the ideas that I owe to others in the footnotes, but would like to single out here Annemarie Weyl Carr for convincing me that form was as important as content, if inextricably mixed with it; Justin Mossay for his generosity in sharing his knowledge of the textual tradition of the sermons of Gregory of Nazianzus; Ihor Ševčenko for his many kindnesses and especially for discussions of the *Vita Basilii* and the *Life of Tarasios*; and Susan Young for friendship and for arranging visits to the ninth-century churches on Naxos. Four people have been particularly important to me at various stages in the development of this book. Herbert Kessler directed my PhD dissertation on Paris.gr.510 and has been supportive ever since. Kathleen Corrigan first made me ask 'why?' in 1980 and has quietly continued to do so in the following years. Nancy Ševčenko has consistently reminded me of the importance of meticulous scholarship through her own example, which I can never do more than falteringly emulate. My final thanks are to my husband, Christopher Wickham, without whom a less nuanced book would have been published a long time ago and to whom this one is dedicated.

Since this book went to press in February 1997, a number of studies have appeared that could usefully have been incorporated. I signal four in particular: Marie-France Auzépy's *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre. Introduction, édition et traduction*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 3 (Aldershot, 1997); Gilbert Dagron's *Empereur et prêtre: Etude sur le 'césaropapisme' byzantin* (Paris, 1996); Glenn Peers's 'Patriarchal Politics in the Paris Gregory (B.N. gr. 510)', in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 47 (1997), 51–71; and Christopher Walter's 'IC XC NI KA: The apotropaic function of the victorious cross', in *Revue des études byzantines* 55 (1997), 193–220. In addition, Shaun Tougher's PhD thesis on Leo VI, cited in chapter 5, has appeared as a monograph in the series The Medieval Mediterranean (Brill: Leiden, 1997).

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Abbreviations

BHG	F. Halkin, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca.* 3 vols. Brussels, 1957.
CLA	E. A. Lowe, ed., *Codices Latini Antiquiores. A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century.* 12 vols. Oxford, 1934–1971.
DACL	F. Cabrol and H. Leclerq, eds., *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie.* 15 vols. Paris, 1907–1953.
LCI	E. Kirschbaum, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie.* 8 vols. Rome, 1968–1976.
Mansi	J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio.* 53 vols. Paris, 1901–1927. Florence, 1759–1798.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
NCMH 2	R. McKitterick, ed., *New Cambridge Medieval History* II, *c.700–c.900.* Cambridge, 1995.
NPNF	P. Schaff and H. Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* ser. 2, 7: *S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen.* Grand Rapids, 1978 reprint.
ODB	A.P. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium.* 3 vols. New York and Oxford, 1991.
PG	J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca.* 161 vols. Paris, 1857–1866.
RBK	K. Wessel, ed., *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst.* Stuttgart, 1963– .
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes*
SC 99	J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed. and trans., *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes* I: *Ancien Testament (I–VIII).* Paris, 1964.
SC 110	J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed. and trans., *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes* II: *Nouveau Testament (IX–XX).* Paris, 1965.
SC 114	J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed. and trans., *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes* III: *Nouveau Testament (XXI–XXXI).* Paris, 1965.
SC 128	J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed. and trans., *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes* IV: *Nouveau Testament (XXXII–XLV).* Paris, 1967.

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SC 141	W. Wolska-Conus, ed. and trans., *Cosmas Indicopleustes, Topographie chrétienne* I. Paris, 1968.
SC 159	W. Wolska-Conus, ed. and trans., *Cosmas Indicopleustes, Topographie chrétienne* II. Paris, 1970.
SC 197	W. Wolska-Conus, ed. and trans., *Cosmas Indicopleustes, Topographie chrétienne* III. Paris, 1973.
SC 247	J. Bernardi, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 1–3*. Paris, 1978.
SC 250	P. Gallay, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 27–31*. Paris, 1978.
SC 270	J. Mossay, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 20–23*. Paris, 1980.
SC 284	J. Mossay, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 24–26*. Paris, 1981.
SC 309	J. Bernardi, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 4–5*. Paris, 1983.
SC 318	P. Gallay, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 32–37*. Paris, 1985.
SC 358	C. Moreschini, ed., and P. Gallay, trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 38–41*. Paris, 1990.
SC 405	M.-A. Calvet-Sebasti, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 6–12*. Paris, 1995.

Manuscripts are normally cited in full at their first mention. For clarity, however, it may be noted that the following abbreviation for the main manuscripts under consideration are as follows:

Khludov Psalter = Moscow, Historical Museum, codex 129
Milan, Amb. E 49 inf. = Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, codex E 49
Milan, Amb. E 50 inf. = Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, codex E 50
Pantokrator 61 = Mount Athos, Pantokrator Monastery, codex 61
Paris.gr.510 = Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, manuscrit grec 510

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