Introduction

Hymn, hymn this man, Adam. Worship the one coming to you.
For he appeared for you, as you went forward to observe him,
to grope for and receive him.
This man whom you feared, when you were deceived,
because of you became like you.
He came down to the earth so that he might take you up.
He became mortal so that you might become god
and might put on the foremost dignity.
Wishing to open Eden again he lived in Nazareth.
So because of these things sing, man, and chanting rejoice
in the one who appears and illuminates everything.

Ὕμνησον, ὕμνησον τοῦτον, Ἀδάμ·
προσκύνησον τὸν ἐλθόντα πρὸς σέ·
ἐφάνη γάρ σοι, ὡς ἐχώρεις, θεωρῆσαι αὐτόν,
ψηλαφῆσαι καὶ δέξασθαι·
οὗτος ὃν ἐφοβήθης, ὅτε ἐξηπατήθης, διὰ σὲ ὡμοιώθη σοι·
κατέβη ἐπὶ γῆς, ἵνα λάβῃ σε ἄνω·
ἐγένετο θνητός, ἵνα σὺ θεὸς γένῃ
καὶ ἐνδύσῃ τὴν πρώτην εὐπρέπειαν·
θέλων ἀνοῖξαι πάλιν τὴν Ἐδὲμ ᾤκησε τὴν Ναζαρέτ·
διὰ ταῦτα οὖν ᾄσον, ἄνθρωπε, καὶ ψάλλων τέρπε
τὸν φανέντα καὶ φωτίσαντα πάντα.[1]

On the Epiphany (VI.3)

Singing and worship were intricately intertwined for Romanos the Melodist. His sung verse sermons (*kontakia*) express a vibrant and optimistic theology about the present reign of Christ and the approaching end time and encourage listeners to partake in that optimism as they worship. Romanos addresses Adam, both as a figure for all humanity and as a type for Christ,

[1] The text of the *kontakia* throughout is taken from, and laid out according to, the Oxford edition: Maas and Trypanis (1963). I have also consulted the Sources chrétiennes edition: Grosdidier de Matons (1964–81). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated, but my translations have been informed by the work of Bandy (1975), (1976), Carpenter (1970), Grosdidier de Matons (1964–81), Lash (1995), Schork (1995). I have also consulted Koder (2005), Maisano (2002).

the second Adam. Rhetorical repetition ('Hymn, hymn', line 1) creates a sense of urgency, reflecting Adam's indebtedness to God, who willingly took on human form for his salvation (3). This is the great exchange (5): the second Adam corrects the sins of the first and restores him to perfection. So begins a new creation, a reopening of paradise (7), and one which God freely wills out of love for his first creation. God's actions not only call for worship, in song, but also for expectation of his second advent ('the one *coming* to you', 1).

This passage, from Romanos' *kontakion On the Epiphany*, gives a foretaste of the theological ideas which will be the focus of this book: Christ as the second Adam, who corrects the sins of the first and restores him to perfection; the new creation Christ inaugurates at the incarnation; and how Christians are called to live in that new creation and in preparation for its final consummation in the eschaton. These themes already had a long history in Christian literature and ideas. Reading Romanos' hymns provides evidence for the spread of earlier Christian doctrines presented to a wide audience, largely of lay people, in vibrant poetry and arresting images. Romanos' hymns do not attempt startling theological novelty but he does argue for the truth of a coherent theological vision and seeks to demonstrate its vital importance for Christians living in the sixth century. As preacher, Romanos aims to draw his listeners into deep communion with Christ so that they may anticipate the perfections of heaven in their daily lives.

Romanos' poetics – his clever use of rhetorical techniques and literary devices, his careful choice of vocabulary and the abundant excess of imagery – makes his preaching vivid and emotionally engaging. We have seen Romanos' use of repetition to create a sense of urgency, and his direct address to Adam which transforms Adam, whose plight reflects that of all humanity, into a contemporary figure. Assonance strengthens the link between singing and worship, and the diversity of singing words (lines 1 and 8: 'hymn', 'sing', 'chant') emphasizes the importance of song with deft rhetorical variation. Romanos personalizes God's actions for the life of each member of the congregation by repeating the singular pronoun 'you' ('This man whom *you* feared, when *you* were deceived, because of *you* became like *you*'). In this way, he encourages his audience to identify with Adam. Repeated rhetorical antitheses emphasize the salvific exchange between God and humanity ('He came down to the earth so that he might take you up: He became mortal so that you might become god'). Moreover, alliteration of compounds denoting light and revelation in the final line strengthens the link between Christ's appearance and his dramatic reversal of

human darkness. Romanos' use of language is playful and creative, vibrant and captivating.

We will see throughout the corpus Romanos' skilful elaboration of scripture, his vivid language and abundant use of imagery. Take, for example, the *kontakion On the Entry into Jerusalem* (XVI.12):

For was I not dissatisfied with angels? I loved you, the beggar,
I hid my glory
and I, the rich one, have willingly became poor. For I long for you very much.
I hungered, I thirsted and I suffered toils because of you.
Among mountains, cliffs and woodland vales I went about, seeking you,
the wandering one.
I was called lamb, so that, having somehow enchanted you with my voice,
I might lead you.
[I was called] shepherd, and for you I wish to lay down my life,
so that I might pull you up out of the grasp of the wolf.
I suffer everything, wishing that you might cry,
'You are blessed who comes to call up Adam.'

Μὴ γὰρ ἀγγέλους ἔστερξα; σὲ τὸν πτωχὸν ἐφίλησα,
τὴν δόξαν μου ἔκρυψα
καὶ πένης ὁ πλούσιος ἑκὼν γέγονα· πολὺ γὰρ σὲ ποθῶ·
ἐπείνασα, ἐδίψησα διὰ σὲ καὶ ἐμόχθησα·
ἐν ὄρεσι, κρημνοῖς καὶ νάπαις διῆλθον σὲ τὸν πλανώμενον ζητῶν·
ἀμνὸς ὠνομάσθην, ἵν' ὅπως τῇ φωνῇ μου σὲ θέλξας ἄξω·
ποιμήν, καὶ διὰ σὲ ψυχὴν θέλω θεῖναι,
ἵνά σε τῆς χειρὸς ἐκσπάσω τοῦ λύκου·
πάντα πάσχω θέλων σε βοᾶν·
'εὐλογημένος εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἀνακαλέσασθαι.'

Romanos contrasts Adam and Christ through images of wealth (made more prominent by 'p' alliteration in words for poverty and riches, line 2) and of shepherding. Here, as elsewhere, biblical images are juxtaposed with Romanos' own creations as he expands and reframes biblical stories in their re-performance. The tireless shepherd of the Gospels who seeks out his lost sheep (Matt. 18:12; John 10:11–17) has a more specific and varied journey than in those biblical accounts, creating a visual picture in the minds of listeners.[2] By placing the (biblical) images of Christ as lamb and as shepherd in close proximity, Romanos emphasizes the varied roles God plays in human salvation.

[2] This was the purpose of the rhetorical device *ekphrasis*, which we will investigate in more detail shortly. See Webb (2007), 16.

Human images for Christ abound. The rich and poor images suggest a descent in social status: from lord to beggar. Christ has human-like desire and experiences a tricolon of human physicality: hunger, thirst, hardship. The physicality of Christ is both central to human experience of him and the paradox of Christianity: through Christ's humanity Christians come to know (and ultimately partake in) divinity.

Romanos often uses overflowing imagery to describe the incarnation and virgin birth, as a symbol of the incomprehensible miracle of God becoming human and perhaps also an expression of Romanos' own abundant joy which he wants the congregation to share. So, in *On the Annunciation II* Mary is the blossom, the rod and the ark all in the one line (XXXVII.6.3), and throughout that *kontakion* Romanos uses multiple images for Mary and the marvel of her virginal conception. These images are usually biblical and the convergence of such different symbols also signifies the fulfilment of history in the incarnation.

In his creative re-presentation of biblical narratives, Romanos is a master of dialogue and characterization. He portrays emotional states with sensitivity as well as vividness. The *pathos* which permeates his *kontakia* enables his audience to feel the characters' emotions, to identify and sympathize with them.[3] This both makes the *kontakia* engaging and is one rhetorical strategy by which Romanos' liturgically performed text aims to shape its listeners' lives. In *On Mary at the Cross*, for example, Romanos characterizes Mary as mother by giving her the reproaches any mother would make to her son's absent friends (XIX.3). Listeners are encouraged to see Mary as a suffering and uncomprehending ordinary mother, human and possible to emulate, who is nevertheless holy and faithful.[4] Christians are called into imitation of Christ and Christ-like models as they live out the new creation in preparation for its consummation and Christ's second coming. Dialogue and characterization enable Romanos to draw his listeners into these desired patterns of behaviour.

Just as characterization enables identification with biblical characters (and therefore emulation of them), imagery in the *kontakia* often gives the audience a personal link to the narrative by drawing on the memory (or imagination) of physical sensations. Taste and scent images may conjure up the sensations associated with the eucharist, and water imagery sometimes

[3] Kustas (1973), 55.

[4] For the most recent contribution to the study of Mary in Romanos, see Arentzen (2014). For my own take on Romanos' characterization of Mary, see Gador-Whyte (2013a), 77–92. On Mary's grief in Romanos and the Greek fathers, see Alexiou (1974), Dobrov (1994), 385–405.

makes the congregation recall their baptism.[5] Imagery from everyday life brings biblical narratives close to the everyday lives of Romanos' congregation. Romanos draws on legal terminology, using images of legal justice and judgement to investigate the realm of divine judgement.[6] Imperial imagery depicts Christ as King and his forgiveness of human sin is depicted as imperial pardon;[7] medical imagery makes Christ into a healer and associates physical health with spiritual well-being.[8] Sin is sometimes figured by financial imagery: Romanos employs the language of debts to explore concepts of sin and human failings. Soldiers and athletes provide models of strength and endurance for those fighting against sin and temptation.[9]

Thus, Romanos' rhetorical and literary techniques are constituent elements of the ideas which they communicate. In this Romanos is firmly situated within earlier traditions of Christian literature. The embodiment of language in the divine Logos brought with it a new conceptualization of rhetoric: a means of understanding humanity and the divine economy.[10] The different rhetorical devices reveal elements of this divine economy and contribute to human understanding of it in varied ways: vivid description (*ekphrasis*) unveils personal experience of the divine; typology interprets history christologically; characterization (*ethopoeia*) enables human participation in the divine, and so on.[11] As we will see in subsequent chapters, Romanos' employment of rhetorical techniques is part of his attempt to elucidate and present God's message as he understands it.

Romanos' *kontakia* have been called 'poetry as proclamation'.[12] While the *kontakion* is not strictly a homily, and some take issue with calling it a homily in verse,[13] it does perform some homiletic functions.[14] It was performed in a liturgical setting (on which, see further below) and Romanos uses his compositions to expound the scriptures and educate his listeners about the demands of the Christian life. As proclamation, then, the *kontakion* had a

[5] On this use of the senses in Romanos, see Frank (2005), especially 166–8. On similar uses of the senses in wider homiletics (and Romanos), see Frank (2001), (2013b).
[6] See, for example, Romanos' use of συγχώρησις in XVIII.6: Krueger (2004), 161.
[7] For imperial imagery in Romanos, see Barkhuizen (1991b), 1–15.
[8] See, for example, XXI.1–2. On medical imagery in the *kontakia*, see Krueger (2010), Schork (1960).
[9] Romanos describes Joseph as an athlete as he triumphs over passion and temptation: XLIV.22.1–2. See Schork (1995), 23–5.
[10] Kustas (1973), 56.
[11] Kustas (1973), 54–8.
[12] Louth uses this phrase to contrast the *kontakion* ('poetry as proclamation') and the canon ('poetry as meditation'): Louth (2005), 200.
[13] Arentzen (2014), 48–9.
[14] Cunningham (1990), 36–7.

broader reach than other forms of theological composition, whether poetry or learned treatises. As a form of homiletics, and performed in a popular vigil setting, the *kontakion* reached a wide lay audience and was thus an effective means of theological instruction across different social groups. The *kontakion* was also more interactive than ordinary preaching, which had no refrain in which the congregation could take part. Its participatory nature, as well as other devices, such as dialogue and characterization, make the *kontakion* potentially more involving and more effective in its communication than other forms of homiletics. By studying Romanos' ideas, as expressed in the *kontakia*, we can therefore infer more about lay piety and theological understanding, giving us a broader appreciation of Christian faith in this period.

Romanos takes his listeners on journeys through biblical stories, shaping their understanding of the text in often subtle and emotive ways. He forms their faith by making them participate in the biblical narratives: he introduces them to characters and draws them into conversation to help them identify with those characters; he creates visual images of events and positions his listeners as eyewitnesses. Such emotional engagement with characters and events draws listeners into deeper understanding and faith. Romanos and his *kontakia* played an important role in theological education and shaping popular theology and piety in sixth-century Constantinople.

This book is an attempt to explore the theology of the most celebrated Byzantine hymnographer, whose ideas have nevertheless been little studied, and to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these theological ideas and the rhetorical forms used to communicate them. To this latter end, in Chapter 1 I analyse one *kontakion*, *On the Passion of Christ*, to illustrate how the form of the hymn and its rhetorical techniques allow Romanos to explore numerous ideas in a single *kontakion*. All of the theological concepts which will be the focus of subsequent chapters are present (to a greater or lesser extent) in this one *kontakion*.

Chapters 2 to 4 focus on Romanos' theology. It is a theology of salvation, of the recapitulation of human life by God in the person of Jesus Christ: the correction of human sin and perfection of humanity, the inauguration of a new reality in Christ and the anticipation of the second coming and final consummation of that new creation. Humanity is a fallen race, suffering since Adam, sinful in its separation from God. In order to restore humans to relationship with God, God himself took on human form in the person of Jesus Christ: he became the second Adam. In Chapter 2, I explore Romanos' conceptualization of the second Adam and how he corrects the sins of the first Adam and restores humanity to perfection. This

renewed perfection, the subject of Chapter 3, begins a new reality, a second creation, in which the norms of the previous creation are dramatically challenged and Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled. This second creation calls for a change of life for Christians. Romanos works hard, as we will see in Chapter 4, to encourage his congregation towards Christ-like living. He sees the responsibility of Christians as one of participation in anticipation: participation in the life of Christ now, in anticipation of the future advent of Christ. Romanos' *kontakia* are marked by optimism. They look forward with great hope and joy towards the second coming of Christ. This book thus moves through Romanos' theology from correction of human sin to apprehension of divine glory.

Like many other great preachers, Romanos made use of the tradition to teach his congregation about theological concepts which he believed were vitally important for their salvation. Therefore, each chapter seeks to situate Romanos' thought within wider themes in Christian thinking through introductory sections which identify resonances with earlier strands of the tradition. These sections enable an evaluation of Romanos' distinctive contributions and aim to outline key aspects of his thought-world, but do not seek to pin down direct influence. The chapters then go on to analyse how Romanos employed earlier ideas in his own synthesis. These investigations of the tradition with which Romanos could have been familiar are by no means exhaustive but are aimed at illuminating the distinctive characteristics of Romanos' own ideas and rhetorical practices. By thus setting Romanos in his wider intellectual context, I hope to show which ideas were strange for the time, which were common and which ideas were controversial and stemmed from contemporary debates. Similarly, I will seek to contextualize Romanos' ideas within his wider society as the book progresses, to help to identify his reasons for emphasizing a particular idea.

Romanos

What little we know about Romanos, apart from his writings, comes from the *Synaxaria*.[15] According to these documents, the earliest of which dates to the tenth century, Romanos was born in Emesa, modern Homs, in Syria. He became a deacon in Berytus (modern Beirut), in the Church of the Resurrection, and then moved to Constantinople some time during the

[15] The relevant sections of the *Synaxaria* are reproduced in Grosdidier de Matons (1977), 162.

reign of Anastasius.[16] In Constantinople he was attached to the Church of the Theotokos in the Kyros district. According to legend, the Virgin Mary inspired him to compose his most famous hymn, *On the Nativity I*, after which he composed about one thousand *kontakia* before he died.[17] He is a saint in the Orthodox Church and his feast day is celebrated on 1 October.

This is the hagiographical story we are given of Romanos' life, from which we can infer a few things. First, his birth in Emesa suggests that he was bilingual and 'bi-cultural'.[18] He would have been able to speak and read both Syriac and Greek and was familiar with the literature and culture of these linguistic communities. There are clear congruencies between Romanos' thought and compositions and those of fourth- to sixth-century Syriac theologians, preachers and poets, and the overlap of ideas and images will be significant for the investigation and reconstruction of Romanos' ideas.

Second, if he became a deacon in Berytus he may have been educated there, if not previously educated in Greek grammar and rhetoric in Emesa.[19] Berytus was a centre for education in late antiquity and, although primarily associated with a legal education in the Latin language and in Roman law, may have provided Romanos with the opportunity to study rhetoric.[20] Some have argued that Romanos was a converted Jew,[21] and it may be that he went to Berytus as a Jew (or even a pagan), intending to study law, and converted to Christianity while a student there. We know that groups like the *philoponoi* operated in Berytus, aiming in part to expose and convert pagan and Jewish students.[22] Zacharias Scholasticus, for example, vividly describes student life in the period and records several such attempts.[23] In his *Life of Severus*, we learn that the future bishop of Antioch was converted to Christianity while a law student in Berytus.[24]

[16] The current consensus is that Anastasius I is meant. For the debate about which Anastasius, see Petersen (1985b), 2–3. Aslanov suggests that Romanos chose Constantinople because of the power and prestige it offered: Aslanov (2011), 614.

[17] For various interpretations of the legend, see Arentzen (2014), 43–4, Carpenter (1932), 3–22, Maisano (2002), 25.

[18] Brock (1994), 154.

[19] Eva Topping suggests that Romanos would have been trained in the classics in Emesa. See Topping (1976), 239.

[20] See, for example, Libanius' letter to Domninus, epistle 163 in Bradbury's numbering, in which Libanius introduces a student of his who, having studied rhetoric, is now turning to the law: Bradbury (2004), 201–2. See also Hall (2004), 192–3.

[21] Grosdidier de Matons cites an anonymous *kontakion* which celebrates St Romanos as saying that Romanos was the child of Jews: Grosdidier de Matons (1977), 169. Cf. also Yahalom (1987), 122. And see further in Chapter 3 below.

[22] On the *philoponoi*, see Haas (1997), 238–40, Watts (2006), 213–16.

[23] Hall (2004), 163.

[24] Hall (2004), 159.

Yet Romanos' putative conversion is mere conjecture. Most likely he was born into a Christian family and went to Berytus to study law or simply rhetoric and while there became interested in a career in the church. He may even have been connected with Christian schools in Berytus, or have been drawn there by stories of ascetic monks. Whatever Romanos' connection with Berytus may have been, it will be clear from analysis of his *kontakia* that he was rhetorically trained and familiar with earlier homiletics and poetry in Greek and Syriac.

Finally, the image of Mary as Romanos' muse echoes the importance of Mary in Romanos' work and thought, the high esteem given to Romanos' hymns after his death – to the extent that he was considered divinely inspired – and the theological importance given to Mary, as an active intercessor and means of divine revelation, both in the sixth century and subsequently.[25] Although Mary is not the central focus of this book, we will see that Romanos envisaged Mary's role in salvation as a significant one, not least as the new Eve, the near-perfect woman who redeems fallen womankind. The prominence of Mary in the *kontakia* may also reflect Romanos' position as deacon at the Church of the Theotokos.

The *Kontakion*

The word *kontakion* is of ninth-century origin and probably comes from the rod or stick (*kontax* or *kontos*) around which the hymns were wound.[26] Romanos did not use this word to describe his own compositions; a variety of names for the *kontakion* appear in the acrostics, including 'hymn', 'word', 'story', 'psalm', 'poem', 'song', 'entreaty' and 'prayer'.[27] It seems that there was not a definitive term for the *kontakia* at the time. Romanos' compositions differ from other (both earlier and later) *kontakia*, tending more towards homiletics than hymns of praise,[28] justifying the description of the *kontakia* as 'verse sermons' or 'sung sermons'.[29] Classifying the genre of this

[25] On Mary in Romanos, see Arentzen (2013), 125–32, (2014).

[26] See Grosdidier de Matons (1977), 37–8; Rosenqvist (2007), 24–5.

[27] ΥΜΝΟΣ, ΕΠΟΣ, ΑΙΝΟΣ, ΨΑΛΜΟΣ, ΠΟΙΗΜΑ, ΩΔΗ, ΔΕΗΣΙΣ, ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΗ. 'Hymn' occurs four times (I, XXXVII, XLI, LI), 'word' six (IV, VII, XXIII, XXXIV, XXXIX, XLIV), 'story' nine (IX, XVIII, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVIII, XL, LIII, LIX), 'psalm' eight (XI, XII, XX, XXIX, XXXI, XLVI, LIV, LV), 'poem' four (XIII, XVII, XLVII, L), 'song' twice (XXVI, XXXV), 'entreaty' once (XLIX), and 'prayer' once (LVI).

[28] Grosdidier de Matons (1977), 3.

[29] See, for example, Grosdidier de Matons (1977), 3. There is no evidence, however, that it replaced a spoken prose sermon. See Cunningham (1996), 176. Against the use of 'sermon' to describe the *kontakion*, see Arentzen (2014), 48.

hymn has therefore posed some problems for scholars. Romanos seems to have been conversant in both Greek and Syriac culture and thus his compositions bridge various genres to form a new, combined genre which, for the sake of simplicity and in keeping with tradition, we will continue to call 'the *kontakion*'.

Romanos' *kontakia* were divided into strophes (or 'stanzas', *oikoi*) and open with one or more proems (*prooimia* or *koukoulia*).[30] The *kontakia* have accentual metres; each strophe has the same metrical form within one hymn, but the metres vary between *kontakia*.[31] The proems differ in metre and may be later additions, or it may be that Romanos himself wrote new proems whenever the *kontakia* were used a second time or in a different context. The first letters of all the strophes make up an acrostic, which usually includes Romanos' name. It often takes the form 'Of the Humble Romanos' or 'The Poem of the Humble Romanos'.[32] Once, Romanos uses an alphabetic acrostic, but it still includes his name.[33] The acrostic would have been hidden to audiences who heard the *kontakia* being sung, but Romanos' mark is clear when one looks at the written text: Romanos has inscribed his ownership of the *kontakia* into them. The acrostic may have functioned as a mnemonic device, enabling easier memorization of the *kontakion* for himself and other cantors.[34] But such devices were also employed in late antique spiritual exercises, and, as such, it may have been part of an ascetic discipline for Romanos, in which he focused on his own humility as he wrote and sung his compositions.[35]

The *kontakia* usually have biblical themes, and are often dominated by dialogue between biblical characters. The narrative generally expands on the biblical one by including more dialogue and sections of exegesis,

[30] The number of strophes varies between eleven and forty, but most of the *kontakia* have about twenty strophes. For example, *On Joseph I* has forty strophes, whereas *On the Resurrection II* has eleven. The frequency of the acrostic 'of the humble Romanos' (ΤΟΥ ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ) means many of the *kontakia* have eighteen strophes.

[31] On the metrical structure of the different *kontakia*, see the Metrical Appendix in Maas and Trypanis (1963), 510–38.

[32] 'Humble' is spelt three different ways in the acrostics: *tapeinou* (ΤΑΠΕΙΝΟΥ) (e.g. in *kontakion* 8), *tapinou* (ΤΑΠΙΝΟΥ) (e.g. in *kontakion* 9) and *tapeeinou* (ΤΑΠΕΕΙΝΟΥ) (e.g. in *kontakion* 7). In some cases, variations like this are taken as evidence that a stanza was added (or removed) later.

[33] The acrostic of *On Joseph I* is ΑΒΓΔΕΖΗΘΙΚΛΜΝΞΟΠΡΣΤΥΦΧΨΩ ΑΛΦΑΒΗΤΟΝ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ. That is, all the letters of the alphabet followed by the words 'The Alphabet of Romanos'.

[34] Grosdidier de Matons (1980–1), 41. This is a very common interpretation of alphabetic acrostics in biblical poetry, according to Assis (2007), 712.

[35] On the acrostic as ownership and self-imposed discipline, see Krueger (2003), 19–24, (2004), 170–4.