Holy Images and Other Images[*]

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This paper puts forward two simple claims. The first is that the ontology of holy images is exemplary for all images. The second is that the Byzantine theology of images is exemplary for all subsequent image theory.[1] In making these claims, I take issue with some of the methodological and ideological presuppositions of what is certainly the greatest modern study of holy images, Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*.[2] In doing so, I hope to raise for discussion a series of related issues that seem to me to lie at the core of the problem not simply of holy images, but of all images. They emerge directly from the Byzantine arguments about images. The subject requires Byzantium, implicates it, and could not be assessed without it. The Byzantine arguments about images cannot be fully understood outside the ontological and psychological theory to be adumbrated here, in rudimentary form. None of this is to imply a monolithic view of the Byzantine theology of images (indeed one could as well speak of theologies).

One of the glories of Belting's book is its extraordinary and exquisite attention to the historical circumstances of holy images at various critical junctures in Eastern as well as Western Christianity, as well as to their differential development. But underlying the whole complex discussion is a strikingly simple pair of concepts. The first is that for him, the image is the holy image. The holy image, in his definition, is an image of a person which is worshipped. By its very nature, it cannot be its antitype, the narrative image, or *historia*.[3] You cannot, after all, worship a narrative. This is the essence of what is, in the end, a very spare definition.

The subtitle of Belting's book gives the rest of the game away. Right from the outset, Belting claims that the history of art has misjudged the history of images, simply by subsuming it. According to him, the era of art began with the Reformation, or—more strictly—with the iconoclastic movements of the sixteenth century. Since we live in the era of art, we have failed to do justice to the era of the image.[4] Instead of seeing images in their own distinctive terms, they have been seen in terms of the aesthetic categories of our own age, the era of art. Between the era of images and the era of art comes an intermediate one. From the late eleventh century in the East and from the thirteenth century in the West the beginnings of the crisis of the old image and its *Neubewertung* in the Renaissance may be discerned. But Belting's basic structure is strictly polar: images before the Reformation, art after it. Since his position is not irrelevant to the chief concerns of this paper, it deserves elaboration.

Luther's view that the validity of images had nothing to do with the image itself, but was rather a matter of what the viewer made of it, was the defining one.[5] After Luther, roughly, images could no longer be justified as holy images, only as art. They acquired an autonomous aesthetic, as art. This simply confirmed the progress towards an autonomous aesthetic, and the collecting of art for art's sake, that had already been made in the Renaissance (and even earlier, in some places). The way was paved to a purely artistic evaluation even of holy images.[6]

In short, Belting's overall strategy was to set the phenomenon of image-making within a firm historical framework. At every stage in his book, the drive to historicize phenomena is paramount, even at the moments in which one detects the will to generalize them. This happens at some cost, and in terms that go to the heart of the problem not only for the holy image, but for all imagery.

At least part of the difficulty lies in Belting's avoidance of anything but the most minimal ontology. His rigorous historical and philological skills focus

Fig. 4–1 *Constantine with Leprosy*, fresco in the St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

consistently on the place of a particular kind of image, functionally defined, under changing historical and theological circumstances. What this entails is an unparalleled attentiveness to the varieties of aesthetic of the holy image. Indeed the book is at its most subtle as it plots the changes in aesthetic categories across time. He sees these as moving at a different pace in East and West. But he cannot refrain from postulating a gradual and progressive aestheticization of the holy image. And the result is a teleological position, completely at odds with his insistence on observing the *distinction* between the era of the image and the era of art.

When Belting speaks of the *era* of images and the *era* of art he implies, as if by catachresis, a fundamental difference between the *aura* of images and the *aura* of art.[7] But if one turns ones mind, for a moment, to the ways in which people respond to art, then one begins to suspect a certain impoverishment of his historical rigour. The argument could be made that, contrary to what Belting wants to think, and what we lovers of art, free from the thrall of the holy image, like to think, the aura of art continues to partake of the aura of images is to tell only half a story. In his eagerness to emphasize the grand historical change, Belting overlooks the ontological community between image and art, and the psychological constants both categories share. This formed one of the chief arguments of my *The Power of Images*.[8] By undermining this distinction—found as the basis not only of Belting's book, but also of many others—I want to raise for discussion not only a number of topics that would otherwise go unexplored, but also the domain in which, it seems to me, the study of holy images, broadly taken, may find its greatest interest.

It is true that Belting is both canny and cautious enough to acknowledge that his twofold division of history may be a little exaggerated. He even admits, at the end of his first chapter, that people may not entirely have freed themselves from the power of images.[9] They cannot suddenly fail to respond in the ways they always have. But then he gives up. Declaring that the history of religion and the history of the subject are indissolubly bound to the history of the image, he insists that these cannot be approached without a firm historical scheme. Which, in the way outlined above, he claims to have found. It is only, he maintains, in the area of aesthetics that the link between the experience of images then and now is to be found. One has, he insists, to understand the rules of the game.[10] And this seems to entail not only his historical schema, which seems acceptable, broadly speaking; but two renunciations, which do not. The first is the renunciation of

what he calls anthropology, on the grounds that our attempts to understand past behaviour from an anthropological point of view are too rooted in our own culture ever to be acceptable; and the second is the renunciation of the theology of holy images as in any way explanatory, on the grounds that the sole interest of the theologians was to justify images within the Church, and could thus never be regarded as paradigmatic. These renunciations are both based on a vigorous condemnation of the tendency of the modern *Geisteswissenschaften* to regard the mere repetition of old theory as explanatory.[11]

At the heart of Belting's book and crucial to his whole approach, are his two chapters on images in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At the center of the chapter on the East, significantly entitled "Animated painting (his version of *empsychos graphe*, of course), Poetry and Rhetoric in the new type of icon of the 11th and 12th century" ("*Beseelte Malerei." Poesie und Rhetorik in "neuartigen Ikonen" des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts*) stands the rather unreliable Michael Psellos (1018–ca. 1078); at the center of the second (*Statuen, Gefässe und Zeichen. Bild und Reliquie im Westlichen Mittelalter*), which deals with the transition from reliquary to image in the West, stands the Abbot Suger (1080–1151).[12]

From the eleventh century on in the East, according to Belting, there is a new aesthetic of images, and new kinds of images. These partake increasingly of narrative, and devote unprecedented attention to showing the emotions of the figures represented. Transitory, temporal elements shift the old striving for timelessness aside. Icons have emotions. They begin to speak. But they begin to speak in the purely rhetorical sense. It is only in this sense that they are said to be *empsychos*. In these aims, painting is exactly like contemporary poetry, which aimed above all at lively expression and the rhetorical elaboration of its chief subject, whether in the emotional or the narratival sense.[13] We see this in countless epigrams of the eleventh century. Belting refers his readers to Henry Maguire for the literary context and Kazhdan and Epstein for the more complicated political one.[14] In a writer like Michael Psellos, beauty itself becomes an ethical category. In the monastic founder Prince Isaac, on the other hand, the new images, as Belting puts it, are not understood in terms of their poetic truth, but rather in terms of their serviceability as *Andachtsbilder*.[15] Self-evidently they had become more emotionally involving (though upon reading these claims one is also likely to think of the famous case of Gregory of Nyssa bursting into tears before an image of Abraham and Isaac).[16] When someone like the Emperor's daughter Anna Komnenos

wrote about the appearance of her parents, she did so wholly in terms of the current aesthetic of images. The image has no life itself; it acquires its liveliness solely from the face of whom it represents.[17]

In the West (or so Belting affirms) the situation is different. He begins with the problem of reliquary images, such as that of Ste Foy at Conques, and the famous head and arm reliquaries, such as that of St Alexander in Brussels. Unlike the Byzantine icons of the eleventh century, the saint is somehow actually present in the image, for the obvious reason that a part of him is present in it. Neither this type of image nor the habit of placing it on the altar has a Byzantine equivalent.[18] But it would be misleading, Belting acknowledges, to think of the relics themselves as a kind of catalyst for the cult of images. Instead the image was a kind of catalyst for the effect, the *Wirkung*, of the relics. The image, he says, "inszenierte die Erscheinung der Reliquie und fesselte die Phantasie der Gläubigen."[19]

This commands immediate agreement; but again the aesthetic direction of the argument could not be clearer. What kind of aesthetic, however? The reliquary images are studded with jewels, and clad in silver and gold. They shine, glitter, and blaze like the heavenly hierarchies. Their adornment is central to their effect, quite unlike, says Belting, the Byzantine icons of the eleventh century, where adornment must always be secondary and not detract from the representation of narrative and emotion; where the image, to put it simply, has its own aesthetic.[20]

But when the Abbot Suger writes about glittering adornment he does so, as everyone knows, in purely anagogical terms.[21] The brilliance of the gold is no aesthetic end in itself. It is only intended to enrapture the beholder and lead him to the true brilliance of God. Away, of course, from the spurious brilliance of earthly matter.[22] According to Belting, therefore, Suger's aesthetic is a purely theological aesthetic, to be understood solely in terms of the justification of such imagery, and such sumptuous decoration.[23] It was only at the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the growing concern, especially in Rome, about the status of particular images as originals, that images could finally begin to have their own aesthetic, such as had existed for at least a century already in the East.[24] Or so the claim runs.

As if inevitably, Belting moves his discussion on to the importation of Byzantine icons into the West from 1200. They resolve the problem of originals in Rome, for long the focus of debates about who had the original image of the Virgin; and they provide the spur to the great flowering of panel painting from the early thirteenth century on. The way is prepared for the Renaissance; art acquires an autonomy of its own; devotional images are subject to critique; the autonomy of purely aesthetic categories is confirmed; icons finally lose their centrality in Western culture; and the era of art is born.

For the sake of brevity and for the sake of this argument I have schematized an immensely subtle discussion. But its difficulty seems clear enough. It is too neat and too teleological. In his attentiveness to historical particularity, Belting often misses what is generalizable about holy images; and what is generalizable about them emerges from the psychology of response. Precisely since the psychology, like all psychology, is general, it cannot be teleological. Of course psychology is subject to pressures and modification by historical, social, and even personal circumstance; but first one has to try to identify the psychological *principles*—in this case those that pertain between the beholder and the image we call holy; and then move on to how contexts change and beholders differ.

It is not just psychology that is at stake, but also the relations between theology and psychology. At the core of much of Belting's discussion—and this must needfully lie at the core of any discussion of holy images—is the problem of what he calls the relations between image and person. He cannot bring himself to call it the problem of inherence. Inherence comes about as a result of the conflation between image and person, between representation and what is represented on it, between (and here the old terms, in my opinion, are most useful of all), between image and prototype. Here the relevance of old theory becomes very apparent. It is true that near the beginning of his book Belting approvingly quotes Otto Weinreich on the image as the locus of the divine being, on the *Beseelung des Abbilds*, and he acknowledges that the image may sometimes seem to have the same powers as its prototype. But Belting, after the rather vague declaration that this phenomenon has age-old roots, is clearly ill at ease with this notion, and swiftly abandons it.[25] As a result, he fails to realize, because he is so concerned to historicize and therefore particularize, that with images—and not just holy images—there is always a problem of inherence. And he fails to see that the general psychological theory is already present in the Byzantine theory of images.

Not that Belting is not consistent. It is characteristic, as we have seen, of the rigor and honesty of his methodological decisions that he should have concluded his fundamental introductory chapter with the admit-

tedly brief acknowledgment that his twofold division of history may indeed be a little exaggerated—precisely on the grounds that people cannot suddenly fail to respond in the ways they always have. But he stops short, and insists not only that we renounce psychology of the kind suggested here (he calls it anthropology), but also that we renounce the possibility that the theology of holy images could in any way be explanatory.[26] I cannot do so, because I find the Byzantine theory of images to be both *massangebend* and paradigmatic, in the historical as well as in the psychological sense. It is true that Belting is quite clearly aware of the possibilty of invoking old theology; but for him, characteristically, history is the safer category. In reclaiming both theology and ontology, and Byzantine theology in particular, I admit to breaking the rules of the game.

It is in the course of the one brief and tentative occasion in which Belting discusses inherence as a general problem that he cites Artemidorus of Daldis, the writer of the famous late second century book of dreams, the *Oneirocritica*. Artemidorus says that there is no difference between seeing Artemis herself in a dream, and just a statue of her in the dream.[27] The reason is that the ancient statues had the same meaning as when the gods themselves appeared. Belting relates this to the problem of the enlivening of the prototype,[28] to what I have here called inherence, but cannot go much further. He sees it as a particularly antique problem (and it is obviously related to the phenomenon of the incubation of dreams in antiquity). But one can see Artemidorus's point. It is all the same, whether we see a statue of a god in a dream or the god himself, since both, after all, are images. It is in dreams, above all, that we fail to distinguish—however hard we may feel ourselves trying—even within the dream itself, between image and reality. But when Artemidorus speaks of statues of gods, does he really mean all statues, or just statues of the gods? The latter would clearly seem to be the case. And what is one really to make of his claim about the inherence of the god in the image? Is this pure superstition, of the same order as the countless tales of animated statues to be found find in a tract such as that guide to the adornments of ancient Byzantium, the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*?[29] My own view is that there is more to it than just superstition.

A well-known group of accounts of dreams allows these issues to come strongly to the fore. In them the tales in which the protagonists in the dream are recognized only on the basis of a real image, often seen after the dream. They raise a number of questions, not only about categories of holy image, but also about what we might roughly and provisionally call degrees of re-

ality. They force us to think both about the ways in which the image in the dream (and in the representation) partakes of reality, and about the extent to which they may only be said to act as a reminder, as a token. The exercise, it is true, places high demands on the logic of imagination.

A beginning may be made with pictures. The small chapel of St Sylvester adjacent to Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome was dedicated in 1246 by the Bishop of Ostia, but it was built by Stephen, cardinal presbyter of Santa Maria in Trastevere.[30] The subject of its fresco cycle, needless to say, was the life of Saint Sylvester (Figs. 4–1 to 4–8). Its iconography depends on two perfectly predictable sources, the *Life* of St Sylvester allegedly composed by Eusebius of Caesarea, but probably from the fifth century, and the *Constitutum Constantini*, the famous—or rather notorious—Donation of Constantine.[31] There are several pictorial parallels and precedents for several of the scenes in this cycle, but it was only in the cycle illustrating the lives of Saints Peter and Paul above the arches of the porch of Old St Peters that parallels are to be found for the two important scenes of Sylvester's dream and the showing of the picture of the apostles.[32]

In the first scene, on the lower left (Fig. 4–1), Constantine has leprosy. Fortunately for the rather anxious mothers who brought their innocent children to him, he declined to attempt a cure by bathing in their blood. Next (Fig. 4–2), still obviously stricken with leprosy, he has a dream, in which two men (whom we beholders know to be Saints Peter and Paul) tell him that he had better go and bathe in a font of love. Off go his emissaries (Fig. 4–3) to search for Sylvester, in hiding on Mount Soracte (Fig. 4–4). In Rome, Sylvester shows Constantine a portrait of Peter and Paul (Fig. 4–5), whereupon the Emperor recognizes the men in his dream, his "nocturnal" visitors, for whom they really are. In the next scenes, Constantine bathes in the baptismal font (Fig. 4–6), is cured, and surrenders all his authority in Italy and the West to the Pope (Fig. 4–7). In the final scene on the North wall, the Emperor even stoops to perform the *Officium Stratoris*, or service of equerry, for the Pope as he conducts him to Rome, the city he has donated to him (Fig. 4–8). On the south wall are painted two miracles of St Sylvester, but they are not directly relevant here. The crucial scenes are the depiction of the dream and the showing of the portrait (Figs. 4–2 and 4–5).

This part of the cycle can be related to a large group of tales involving images and dreams. But these tales, as far as I know, have neither been collected nor, like so much else in the ethnography of cult images and

the miracles attributed to them, exploited for what they might reveal about the pyschology of response, or even for the psychology of dreams. There is, for example, a story of a dream in the *Miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian* that has as its center a rather different and much smaller kind of holy image, but which forms an effective textual parallel to the two scenes from the St Sylvester cycle.

Whenever he was posted abroad, a soldier called Constantine used to take with him, out of faith and for his own protection, a kind of pocket painting—an *ektupôma*—of Saints Cosmas and Damian. When he came to Laodicea, he married a woman, who soon after developed a pain in her jaw. Constantine, having forgotten about the picture, had no idea what to do. But that night, when she fell asleep, she saw two men standing by her bed; and they said to her "stop causing distress to your husband. We are here with you. Do not worry." Evidently she had some idea who they were, since when she woke she asked her husband about the appearance, the *schêmata*, of Saints Cosmas and Damian. He told her what they looked like and what blessings they confer; but it was only when he showed her his picture of the saints which he suddenly remembered he had with him in his wallet, that she realized that the saints were indeed present with her, just as they had said.[33]

Two specific observations may be made about this story, before moving on to more general considerations. The first is that even the narrator of the story cannot resist observing, proleptically, that the figures in the dream appeared in the very form in which they were depicted; and the second is that he remarks, as do the narrators of almost all such stories, that though a dream, the saints were indeed present.

All these are experiences with which, in one form or another, we are familiar. Within a dream, dream-event and our sense of being in a waking state often coincide. There is no other condition in which the everyday distinction between image and reality collapses so readily. So the stories, rather than simply being legends explicable in terms of the need to justify images and dogma, ring true. When the Emperor Constantine saw his visitors or when the soldier Constantine's wife saw them (the fact that the two had the same name is not insignificant), neither realized that their nocturnal visitors were, in fact, saints. This they only discovered upon seeing the picture. When we look at a cycle such as that of St Sylvester, we too are likely to have some difficulty in distinguishing between the various levels of reality to which the different protagonists belong. In fact, in order to understand the

story, we must somehow invest the figures—in the narrative scene—with the same degree of life as we do with Constantine.

But is this importation of the generalized modern spectator not breaking the rules of the game too much? After all, is not the Sylvester cycle simply one of the many fanciful and inventive ways devised in order to emphasize an event of such polemical significance as the Donation of Constantine? And is the Cosmas and Damian scene not really of the same superstitious order as that farrago of nonsense, the *Parastaseis*? It may be that to claim more is to play (briefly) by phenomenological rules, rather than historical ones (can one really use historical data in this way?); but there is at least one case where the problem of inherence, as illustrated by the phenomenology of dreams and visions, actually informs the historical and philological tradition.

In his book on the vestibule of the Imperial Palace, Cyril Mango brilliantly analyzed the evidence for the date of the setting up of the image of Christ on the Chalke Gate.[34] In the course of doing so, he brought several legends about it to the fore. Theophanes (752–818) tells of how the Emperor Maurice suspected his brother Philippicus as a possible usurper. But he felt ashamed of his suspicion, and in this state of anxiety had a dream. "While Maurice was asking God to have mercy on his soul, he fell asleep, and saw in a vision that he was standing in front of the image of the Saviour at the Bronze Gate ... and a voice came forth from the image ... saying "Bring Maurice hither." The servants of the law seized him and placed him by the porphyry plaque. And the divine voice said to him "Where do you wish me to give you your due, here or in the world to come?". Of course, Maurice opts for present punishment, and so the voice of the image in the dream commands that Maurice with his whole family be delivered over to Phocas the soldier. "And when Maurice awoke, he summoned Philippicus ... and asked forgiveness."[35]

The story vividly illustrates the problem of inherence. It seems to be the image that speaks, or rather, the voice of Christ that issues from the image—exactly as in the countless tales of speaking images, from seventh century Byzantium to the fifteenth century in the West. What, therefore, speaks: the image or the prototype? The difficulty of resolving the phenomenological problem is intensely heightened by the fact that the image is seen—and heard—in a dream. Artemidorus' statement that in a dream it makes no difference whether one sees God himself or just his statue is of some moment here.

It may be felt that historical evidence ought not to be used in this way, or that if a psychological lesson is to be drawn from such a story then some form of projection ought to be invoked, or a phenomenon like wish-fulfilment—which would naturally enough be justified in terms of the story itself. But the variations of the text of this story offer an interesting corroboration of the approach I have outlined. When John of Antioch tells it, in the first part of the seventh century (in more or less the same words as Theophanes), the vision is recounted, but there is no mention at all of the image. Some scholars argue that the text is incomplete and that it once may have referred to the image; but the fact remains that in John's very early account, Maurice sees a vision of Christ, and the voice in the vision speaks.[36] On the other hand, when the story is repeated by later authors, not only does the image speak, it does so in reality, and not as a dream. This, needless to say, is the case with the later stories of speaking images, and it points to the difficulty of simply dismissing them as dreams and visions. But it is worth remembering these textual variations simply as demonstrations of how a complex and general psychological problem, that of the belief in the inherence of the prototype, illustrated most sharply by the phenomenology of dreams, actually informs and determines the philological tradition and the history of a text.

At this point I wish to take the argument one step further. The problem of inherence, I would argue, is general for all images and not just holy ones. In this respect, just as in every other, the Byzantine theology of images is exemplary for all subsequent image theory. It may not be wholly explanatory, but it is paradigmatic. Let us turn again to old theory.

To do so is not, as I indicated at the outset, to think of the Byzantine theology of images as if monolithic. On the contrary; it varies much over time and place. To speak of the Byzantine theology of images is to refer broadly to the whole vast apparatus of issues that emerged with such repetitive force in the course of the great arguments about images from the beginning of the first iconoclastic period to the end of the second. It is also to refer to the crucial statements and arguments cited both for and against images in the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, above all. Nor is this by any means to ignore the fact that that this theology had its roots in earlier arguments and theories, often not even directly concerned with images, as with St Basil's most famous statement that the honour paid to an image passes to its prototype.[37] To speak of the Byzantine theology of images, then, is to speak heuristically, not definitively, to posit something amorphous and flexible, not monolithic and hard-edged.

Every student of Roman, Early Christian and Byzantine art is familiar with one or another form of the dogmatic use of the view that the homage paid to an image of an Emperor is the same as the homage paid to the Emperor himself, that when the image of the Emperor is there, so too is the Emperor. "The image might well say," wrote Athanasius, "'I am in him, and he is in me'."[38] Admittedly Athanasius used this well-known passage on the identity of the Emperor with his image to illustrate the relation between father and son in the Trinity,[39] but it is precisely because of the perceived validity of the notion of inherence that the illustration is so effective. The number of statements that sought to argue away that troublesome notion is seemingly endless. The Byzantine theory of images is paradigmatic precisely because it, more than any other, reveals an intense awareness of the need to clarify the distinction between image and prototype. I do not believe that there is a single new argument about the ontology of images, pro or con, every afterwards. Nor do I believe, as Belting would, that to repeat these old arguments is to be merely reproductive. They may not be explanatory, but they contain within them the whole of the general problem of all images, precisely because the issue is psychological and phenomenological; not historical or merely justificatory.

If one considers again the ways in which one responds even to so-called narrative pictures, such as the two scenes from the Sylvester cycle, the issue is illluminated still further. To speak of "reading" these pictures would be to use the wrong word. It implies a kind of sequentiality of attention, quite inappropriate to the way in which all pictures are grasped, even narratival ones. And if one doesn't know the story, the word "read" is even more inappropriate. In any event, it conveys only very little of the extent to which the beholder invests these figures with life in order to grasp them. They must, in some sense, be considered living actors. Certainly, if we don't know the story well, there is nothing, in terms of levels of reality, to help distinguish between Constantine and the Saints who visit him (the haloes are irrelevant here). The images of the saints are truly images in a dream, but we, like Constantine, wouldn't know that. And then there is the holy picture (Fig. 4–5): it seems something different, something apart, something clearly marked out as an artistic object, with its frame, its gold background, its half-length close-up depiction. We may think that we modern responders, who are supposed to have our categories clear, do not invest so purely artistic an object with life; and yet, as we know from history, this is precisely the kind of image which came alive, which spoke, which reached out to devout beholders and salved them, just as the large image of Christ at the Bronze

Gate. But we, we believe, are immune to such categorial mistakes.

The processes that force enlivenment and fusion (as well as their consequences) are held at bay by the assignment of status as art, by narrative, even by the confinement of an image within a frame. Such are the means whereby we detach ourselves from these processes; but we cannnot avoid them entirely. While modern beholders may resist the suggestion that response to a picture is predicated on the investiture with life, and while the pertinent psychological mechanisms are still wholly unexplored, the historical and phenomenological evidence demands to be allowed beyond the restrictions of context.

It is indicative of current analysis of these problems that in reviewing *The Power of Images* Rudolf Arnheim mildly reprimanded me for the use of terms like fusion, elision, and the investiture of an image with life; and insisted that these terms only applied to past practices.[40] He refused, in other words, to see old theory as in any way based on psychological reality. Similarly, when E. H. Gombrich took me to task for suggesting that the power of images might reside—at least in some cases—on the fusion of image and prototype, he suggested that this application of what he called Saussurean terminology and the language of semiotics obscured the problem.[41] But the terminology was not Saussurean, it was Nicaean.

To confine the Byzantine arguments about the relations between image and prototype is to shrink from their implications. These are exemplary and psychologically paradigmatic arguments; and they are so because of what one might usefully call projection. We project onto the image the qualities we want it to possess. If we want it to be alive, we attribute living qualities to it. This might be a rational enough way of explaining the phenomenon of inherence. But the Belting-Arnheim-Gombrich position is that—since we know what art is, since we live in the era of art, as Belting would put it—we view the work in artistic terms; we do not conflate; and image and prototype do not become fused.

Not even for a moment? When the pro-image writers and theologians insisted, against Basil, against Athanasius, and against the iconoclasts, that the honour paid to an image passed to its prototype, they were implying *ex negativo* that image and prototype might not always be so strictly separated. They did so in order to purify image doctrine, in the face of the evidence for miracle-working images brought forward by the bishops from the smaller towns and provinces, in

the face of the speaking images in miracle legends, dreams, and visions, and in the face of the powers exemplified by images that acted as effectively as the well-known palladia and apotropaia did.[42]

The defenders of images may also may also have insisted on the separation of image and prototype in order to deal with a tendency which they saw in themselves, the tendency to conflate; or, to put it in another way, to attribute to an image powers that transcend its dead materiality, because, precisely, of the wish to project these powers, that life, onto it. I am aware that when *we* speak of the attribution of life to images we do not generally mean anything more than the projection of our own desire that the image come to life. We do not mean that the image actually was (or came) alive. Nor, when we read reports of live images (as, say, in the case of popular local images) do we believe that they actually came alive either. Except on those quite frequent occasions when they were manipulated by those who stood to gain in one way or another from deceitful liveliness, from the mechanical devices and tricks that made liveliness literal.

We do not believe either that the animated statues mentioned so often in the *Parastaseis* were really animated. It was, we say to ourselves, just as with us: we project on to the image the full force of our imagination; and we know, that however hard we project, although we can make the image come alive for an indefinably fleeting moment, it is never really alive. We may want it live, passionately; but it stays dead. This we know; and we regard as deluded and irrational and superstitious, all those souls who saw images move, weep, cry, fly, hand over wedding rings, take wedding rings, come into bed with one, or eject milk from their breasts. And so we must also regard as deluded and superstitious all those who think that dead images can mediate between the present and the beyond, between the material and the spiritual.

But once *we* project in this way, once we, in other words, conflate image and prototype, we often restrain ourselves by reminding ourselves that the image is only art. The counter-claim is thus likely to be that this is one basic process that is historically determined, at least amongst sophisticated modern viewers. But in none of these respects is there any ontological difference between holy images and other images. Nor is the withdrawal from the projection that results in enlivenment in favour of a more purely artistic—aesthetically autonomous—position purely a matter of history; and we moderns are not necessarily the beneficiaries of this new detachment. There is simply too much evidence to the contrary, both for the way we

respond now, and for the way others responded then. Meyer Schapiro's still powerful article on "The Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art" was written, he declared, to combat the view held by "modern critics of art who have contrasted the place of art in our society with its role in the Middle Ages. In the latter they suppose it was an essential part of social life, while today art is 'mere ornament.'"[43] Schapiro justly recalled writers like Hildebert of Mans, for example, who articulated the recurrent charge from Byzantium to the Reformers and the Counter Reformers, that "the faces of the divinities are worshipped rather for their maker's skill than for their godliness,"[44] and he noted the dilemma of a Guibert of Nogent, who claimed that although "we praise the rightness of proportion in an idol of any material, and although where faith is concerned an idol is a thing of naught (I.Cor. viii, 4), nor could anything be imagined more profane, yet the true modelling of its members is not unreasonably commended"?[45]

What Belting's historicizing position implies is that the issue of identity, conflation, and enlivenment are not ontologically exemplary, and that the power of images is nothing more than what beholders attribute to them, or that it resides solely in their contextuality. The view is certainly modern, decisively (one would think) post-Luther. In Belting's opinion, it will be recalled, holy images have in themselves only two very basic and simple requirements. The rest has to do with species of assignment, like consecration and similar contextual processes. Contextual, it will be noted, and not psychological. As if the two were mutually exclusive.

For Belting, then, the image has no power of its own (other than a purely aesthetic one); what power it has is a matter of attribution and projection. This seems also to be one of the chief arguments of Gombrich's review of *The Power of Images*.[46] But what the proponents of projection forget, from Hegel[47] to Gombrich and Belting, is the other half of the equation. Projection takes place on to something; and so the ontology of images must come into play, as much as the accidents and pure aesthetics of images. This may seem too strictly ontological, but it entails a further position as well, namely that an image would not be an image did it not have an independent ontology, even, I would now say, prior to the viewing subject. Furthermore, if we examine the intersection of ontology with history— which of course, *does* entail specific viewers and the full phenomenology of imagery—certain further benefits accrue, even historical ones, that do not emerge so clearly from the purely historical point of view.

The first chapter of Romans outlines an apparently hostile position to images. It is wicked, Paul implies, to make them, because God's invisible attributes have been visible ever since the world began in the things he has made. The Romans boast of their wisdom, but they have made fools of themselves, exchanging the splendour of immortal God for an image shaped like mortal man, even for images like birds, beasts and creeping things. They have served creatures instead of the Creator. For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. "For their women changed the natural use into what is against nature"; and the well-known tirade against homosexuality and other vices follows (Rom. 1: 18–27).

Of course one cannot make an image of God. He is his own image. His creations are his own image, but his images are, clearly, not him.[48] The passage in Romans is a perfect statement of the equivalence of all images. Belting's view that since one cannot conceive of making an image of God look like God, only like something else, the only thing that makes it holy must be some process like adornment, and consecration, or possibly worship (which, as we well know, carries with it the possibility of idolatry), commands *prima facie* assent. But is it really this that one wants to claim of holy images, that it is only in these external processes that their holy status consists? What is omitted in accounts such as this is the fact of projection and its consequences. In order for the image to be an image of God, it has, somehow, to be made to partake of God; God must inhere, somehow, within the image; and thus it has to be alive. Its divinity resides precisely in the fact that dead material, in the end, cannot be immune from enlivenment.

And all *this* is to repeat old theory, very straightforwardly. It is only when one thinks in these terms that one can perceive both the ideological and the psychological reasons both for the charge of idolatry (God cannot be a bird, or a beast, or even a stone) and for the failure of the lamb or the cross ever to take root as the sole representation of Christ. The referentiality of such things is too like something else, *too* symbolic, for them ever to take root as holy images. The projective beholder makes the image live; but it must be graspable as representation of the desired prototype; not as something else. It is not enough to say, as with Hegel and with Gombrich, that any daub can serve as a holy image, provided it only acts as a reminder. All images may act *pro memoria*; but so may signs and symbols. What is constitutive of images—all of them— is that they are replete with the possibility of inherence, fusion and enlivenment.

We resist this notion for the reasons people always have. Only simple people think that images can come alive, or that they actually do so. If we respond like them then it is only because we rely on our lower senses. Two of the writers cited at Nicaea, from opposite sides of the camp, may be cited here. But first: in insisting on the significance of fusion for responses to all imagery, it may have been felt that the present argument has fallen too much under the sway of the iconoclastic arguments. It may also have been felt that the danger, identified by Belting, has been incurred of mistakenly making old theory reproductive, in the hope of finding an explanation. But in claiming its paradigmatic status I have not suggested that it is explanatory, only that it is fully illustrative. What it does *reveal*, however, are precisely the social and ideological bases of our resistance to fusion and our attribution of the inclination to the vulgar—whether people or taste.

In Hypatios's letter, in the sixth century, to Julian of Atramyttion, Hypatios insisted that sculpture and painting are for the simple people, on the grounds that they can learn about sacred things by means of the sense of sight. This, he says, is more appropriate to their natural development. We, he claims, do not even take pleasure in painting and sculpture. The temples may be adorned, not because God thinks that gold and silver are sacred, but because they are appropriate channels for simple people to be led up to him.[49]

The last idea is not dissimilar to Suger's anagogical views; but here its social base is made clear. This is not simply a justificatory or theological aesthetic, as Belting would put it. It has exactly the same roots as those which determine his own divisions between art and images. Belting might protest. The problem must surely be more complicated than the cold logic of Hypatios' position will allow. After all, Belting does not claim, with Hypatios, that he and his ilk take no pleasure in painting or sculpture. But sometimes one wonders.

In turning to one of the very great writers on images, John of Damascus, one finds a thoroughgoing redemption both of art and of the sense of sight; but it has exactly the same psychologically repressive and socially critical tone as Hypatios, and, indeed, that of many of his opponents. This is how he redeems the sense of sight, and how he tries to exonerate the image on the grounds, precisely, that it is merely a reminder.

"When we set up an image of Christ in any place, we appeal to the senses," he admits; but then he immediately adds "and indeed we sanctify the sense of sight, which is the highest of the senses." We should

be grateful that is no longer low like the other senses. An image, after all, continues John, is just a reminder ... It is to the illiterate what a book is to the literate. The position could not be clearer.[50]

To reflect on this position—a common enough one—is also to reflect on the distinction, so firmly upheld by Belting, between holy images and narrative images. The distinction rests precisely on the basis of the belief that we *read* narrative images; and that the age of art develops along with the evolution of the holy image toward narrativity, toward an investment with emotions that can be read. John of Damascus must also deal with the matter of glitter; and he must do so on exactly the same grounds as Paul: God cannot be reproduced. And so for the Damascene the vessels of wood that do not rot, gilded inside and out, are but reminders of what had taken place and the foreshadowing of what is to come. These are visual images, which he admits are more compelling than any sermon. It is as well that he has just elevated the sense of sight and reminded his listeners that pictures are the books of the illiterate. But then comes the real denial, the point of the passage, when even the people must be exonerated from their need for images and from their need for display: They were *of course,* he continues, not worshipping the things themselves—they were being led through them to recall the wonderful works of God.[51]

The basic deception thus emerges. It is that *we*, who are educated, who talk about holy images, do not believe in inherence, do not conflate image and prototype, are not attracted by gold and glitter, at least not as much as the vulgar. We restrain ourselves, at best from responding in such terms by judging the works as art, by applying autonomous aesthetic criteria. We, after all, live in an era of art, in which we judge images in artistic terms.

There can be no doubt of the general historical validity of Belting's schema (although some might want to locate his basic change a little earlier, and others might have a little difficulty in his leaving the transitional stage for the image in the West till the the thirteenth century). But in separating holy images from art, he is at least as reproductive of old theory and old cliché as this paper has been, if not more so. In so doing he blinds himself to the continuities between holy images and all art. In *The Power of Images* I was concerned to demonstrate how we have impoverished our view of art by denying the ways in which our responses to art partake of the same elements as our responses to holy images. The aim of the present account has been to suggest that we impoverish our view of holy images by refusing to examine the extent to

which our responses to art may in the end be continuous with those recorded in the case of holy images. A neat historical schema does not allow us all the detachment we like to think analysis requires. The category of holy images is certainly one which may be historically and functionally defined; but it is not phenomenologically and ontologically independent of other kinds of images. To claim that it is is simply to hold a social theory of response, not a valid psychological one. Nor can it be sufficient to define the evolution of the image in terms of an evolution from holy image to art. To claim *this* is to do violence to the facts of history, by pressing them into the service of a teleology that culminates, all too satisfactorily, in ourselves.

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Notes

*   This article was first presented in slightly modified form as a lecture at the Conference on *The Holy Image* at Dumbarton Oaks on 22 April, 1990, and—as will be apparent—was written in specific response to the work by Hans Belting cited in note 2 below, and was conceived as a means of reflecting on the major differences in outlook between two books which dealt with substantially similar topics—namely his *Bild und Kult* (as in note 2), and my *The Power of Images* (as in note 1).

1   See also my *The Power of Images: Studies in the History of Response*, Chicago, 1989, where the first of these claims is made outright (cf. especially pp. 76–77, and 96–97), and the second strongly implied (cf., for example, pp. 161 and 392–402).

2   Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich, 1990.

3   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 9 and 20.

4   *Bild und Kult*, especially p. 19.

5   *Bild und Kult*, p. 517.

6   Cf. *Bild und Kult*, pp. 26–27 and pp. 517–526.

7   *Bild und Kult*, p. 9. Cf., of course, Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, London, 1973, pp. 219–253.

8   As cited in note 1 above.

9   *Bild und Kult*, p. 27.

10   *Ibid.*

11   *Bild und Kult*, p. 19.

12   *Bild und Kult*, chapters 13–14, pp. 292–347.

13   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 292–296.

14   Henry Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton, 1981; and Alexander P. Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Los Angeles, 1985.

15   *Bild und Kult*, p. 295.

16   Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio de deitate filii et spiritus sancti*, in *P.G.*, 46, col. 572C.

17   *Ibid.*

18   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 333–339.

19   *Bild und Kult*, p. 336.

20   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 333–339.

21   Still see Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger and the Abbey Church of Saint Denis and its Art Treasures*, Princeton, 1946, 2nd edition, 1979.

22   The theology of anagogical images comes, as is well-known, from works such as the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.

23   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 339–347.

24   Cf. *Bild und Kult*, chapter 15, "Die Ikone im Städtischen Leuen Rom," especially pp. 348–358.

25   See *Bild und Kult*, pp. 49–50, concluding "Dieser Bildgebrauch hat uralte Wurzeln, die weit vor die gräkorömische Kultur zurückreichen, und bedarf keiner besonderer Erklärung.".

26   *Bild und Kult*, p. 19.

27   Artemidorus of Daldis, *Das Traumbuch*, ed. K. Brackertz, Munich, 1979, pp. 163–164.

28   *Bild und Kult*, pp. 49–50.

29   Now available in Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, eds., *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 10), Leiden, 1984.

30   Now see John Mitchell, "St Sylvester and Constantine at the SS. Quattro Coronati," in *Federico II e l'arte del Duecento italiano: atti dell III Settimana di Studi di Storia dell'arte medievale dell'Università di Roma, 15–20 maggio 1978* (Collana di Studi e Testi 20), ed. A.M. Romanini, Galatina, 1980, II, pp. 15–32, with earlier bibliography.

31   For these, see B. Mombritius, *Sanctuarium, seu Vitae Sanctorum*, ed. H. Quentin and A. Brunet, II, Paris, 1910, pp. 508–531, and H. Fuhrmann, *Das Constitutum Constantini (Fontes iuris germanici antiqui in usum scholarum ex monumentis germaniae historicis separatim editi, X)*, Hanover, 1968.

32   For the parallels and precedents, see the article by Mitchell cited in the preceding note.

33   L. Deubner, *Kosmas and Damian*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1907, pp. 132–134; English extracts available in the excellent anthology by Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire (Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series*, ed. H. W. Janson), Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972, pp. 138–139.

34   Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (with an Appendix by E. Mamboury), Copenhagen: Arkaeologisk-Kunsthistorisk Mcddelelser udgevet af De Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selsk ab Bind 4, Nr. 4, 1959, pp. 108 ff.

35   *Ibid.*, p. 110.

36   *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

37   For the full passage in St Basil, *De spiritu sancto*, 18, 45, see *P.G.* 33, col. 149.

38   Athanasius of Alexandria, *Oratio III contra Arianos*, 5, in *P.G.* 94, col. 1405.

39   See also Gerhart B. Ladner, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Father and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 7, 1953, p. 8.

40   *The Times Literary Supplement*, No. 4512, September 22–28, 1989, p. 1033.

41   E. H.Gombrich, "The Edge of Delusion," *The New York Review of Books*, XXXVII, No. 2, February 15, 1990, p. 7.

42   Cf. Hans-Georg Beck, *Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone*, as *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte*, Heft 7, Munich, 1975, pp. 20–27.

43   Meyer Schapiro, "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art," *Art and Thought. Issued in Honor of Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy on the Occasion of his 75th Birthday*, ed. K. Bharatta Iyer, London, 1947, reprinted in Meyer Schapiro, *Selected Papers. Romanesque Art*, New York, 1977, p. 1.

44   Hildebert of Mans, *De Roma*, in *P.L.*, 121, col. 1409.

45   *The Autobiography of Guibert*, translated by C.C.S. Bland, London, 1925, p. 91; *P.L.*, 106, col. 840.

46   Cf. Gombrich (as cited in note 41 above), pp. 6–9.

47   Cf. *Aesthetics*, Pt. III, Sect. 2, chapter 2.: "Any poor figure is adequate provided only it reminds one of the subject it is intended to signify. For this reason piety is also satisfied with poor images, and will always worship Christ, Mary or any saint in the merest daub," quoted in Gombrich (as in note 41 above), p. 7.

48   For the crucial distinction between *eikon* and *eidolon*, see now the excellent article by Suzanne Said, "Deux noms de l'image en grec ancien: idole et icone," *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Comptes-Rendus*, pp. 309–330.

49   *Miscellaneous Enquiries*, ed. F. Dickamp, in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 117 (1938), pp.

127–129. Translation in P.J. Alexander, "Hypatios of Ephesus. A Note on Image Worship in the Sixth Century," *Harvard Theological Review*, 44, 1952, pp. 178–181.

50   John of Damascus, *Oratio de Imaginibus* I, in *P.G.* 94, col. 1248 C–D.
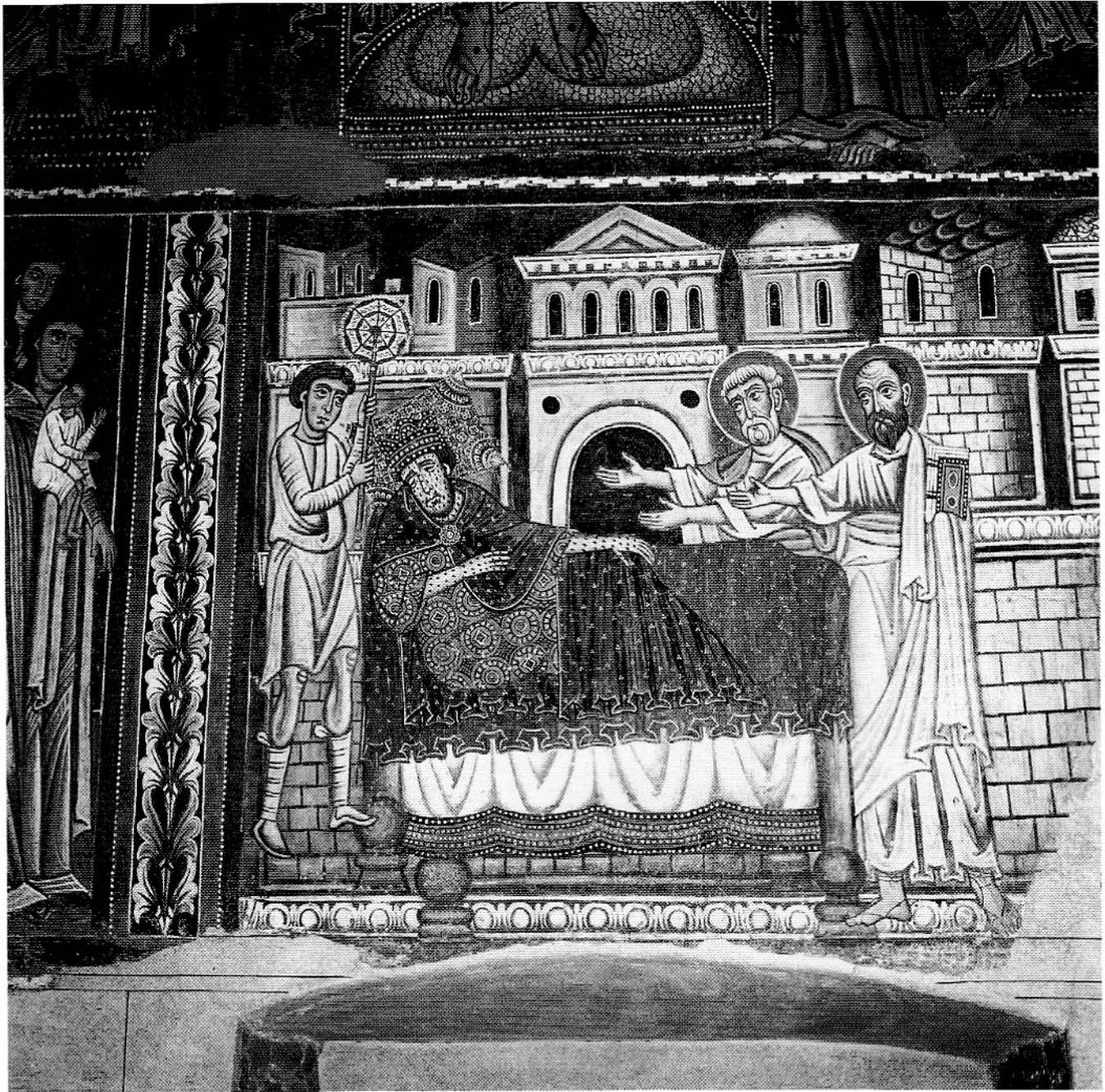
51   *Ibid.*

Fig. 4–2   *The Dream of Constantine*, fresco in the St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.
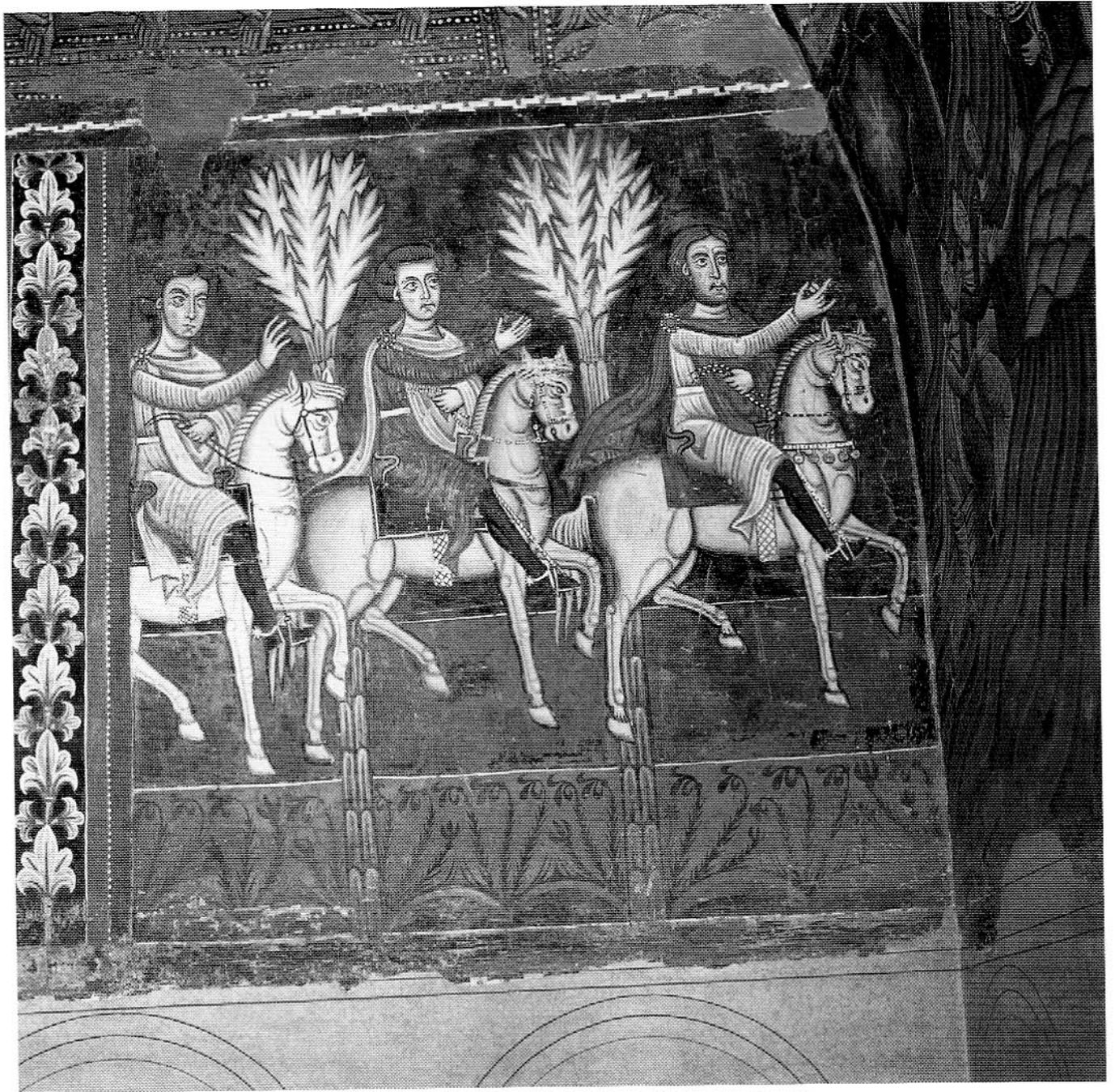
Fig. 4–3   *Emissaries in Search of Sylvester*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 4–4   *The Emissaries with Sylvester on Mt. Soracte*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 4–5   *Sylvester Shows Constantine a Portrait of Peter and Paul*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 4–6   *Constantine Bathes in the Baptismal Font*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 4–7   *Constantine Surrenders his Authority*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 4–8   *Constantine performs the Officium Stratoris for the Pope*, fresco, St. Sylvester cycle, Cappella S. Silvestro, SS. Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo courtesy of the Getty Center, Resource Collections.

Fig. 5–8   *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks*. Northern Song.
Attributed to Li Cheng (919–967). Hanging scroll, ink and
slight color on silk. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,
Kansas City, Missouri (Nelson Fund) 47-71.