

“Cease your lamentations, I shall become an advocate for you.”
 Mary as Intercessor in Romanos’ Hymnography

The first Byzantine author whose literary characterizations make Mary a real personality is the great poet and *kontakion* composer Romanos Melodos from the Justinianic era (518–565).¹ Romanos’ hymnography is well-studied,² but only some few of the corpus of ca. sixty authentic hymns are dated.³ Nevertheless, Romanos’ works altogether serve as a noteworthy source of assessing *Zeitgeist*, dominant ideology and values in Justinianic society.⁴ The feature that brings historical validity in Romanos’ poetry is his dramatic technique by use of dialogue.⁵ Where “Romanos’ gift as a raconteur” invited his audience to enter biblical stories, as Georgia Frank puts it,⁶ there the poet’s talent allows us to have a look at the world he was observing. To a certain extent, the imaginary additions and modifications that were to enliven and enrich the original stories come to betray some of the conditions of life in sixth-century Byzantine society.

Romanos’ portrayal of Mary is unique amongst Patristic authors.⁷ It is typical of him that he makes biblical figures active subjects by letting them voice their “own” thoughts. Six dialogues by which the poet gives expression to what he imagines to have been Mary’s feelings and thoughts in those situations are found in Romanos’ “Marian corpus”.⁸ Considering the lack of accurate information about the earliest development of the cult, it is of historical importance that this corpus allows for a detailed analysis of Mary’s role as intercessor.⁹

There is, for instance, a hymn relating how Mary came to adopt this role.¹⁰ Thus, according to Romanos, on the day of Nativity it happens that Adam and Eve wake up from deathlike sleep. Hearing Mary’s praise to the “One whom she bore”, they grasp that the redemption from the curse has come.¹¹ Adam cries: “Look at me at your feet, O Virgin, Mother without blame, and by me the whole human race at your footsteps.”¹² Eve also begs the “hope

¹ On *das justinianische Zeitalter*, Romanos’ life and hymnography (*kontakia*), consult J. Koder, Romanos Melodos. Die Hymnen I. *Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* 62. Stuttgart 2005, 9–48. Justinian I was sole ruler from 527 to 565, but he participated in decision-making during the reign of his uncle, Justin I (518–527). Romanos died probably before 562.

² A bibliography up to 2005 is included in the two volumes by J. Koder, Romanos Melodos. Die Hymnen I–II. *Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* 62 and 64. Stuttgart 2005 and 2006.

³ See Koder, Romanos Melodos I 34.

⁴ E.g., in studies by Paul Magdalino, Misha Meier, Derek Krueger, Leena Mari Peltomaa.

⁵ See Koder, Romanos Melodos I 41ff.

⁶ G. Frank, Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Century, in: D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity. A Peoples’s History of Christianity* 3. Minneapolis, MN 2006, 59–78, loc. cit. 60.

⁷ The same can be said of all the biblical female figures Romanos characterized: the sinful woman, Herodias, the wife of Potiphar, the Samaritan, Sarah, the widow of Elias.

⁸ The corpus consists of altogether thirty-seven hymns with references to Mary, included in the fifty-nine hymns that Paul Maas and C.A. Trypanis considered authentic in their Greek edition, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica genuina*. Oxford 1963. This paper follows *Cantica genuina*. The other editions are: J. Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélode. Hymnes, 1–66. *Sources Chrétiennes* 99, 110, 114, 128, 283. Paris 1964–1968; M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist. I–II*. Columbia 1970, 1973; R. Maisano, *Romano il Melodo. I–II*. Turin 2002 and J. Koder, Romanos Melodos I–II. In *Cantica genuina* Mary appears as the central figure in eight hymns and in nine hymns, if a stichera praising Mary as the Theotokos is taken into account. This stichera is No. 83 in *Sancti Romani Melodi. Cantica dubia* by P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis. Berlin 1970 and it is included in Romanos’ authentic works by Grosdidier de Matons, Maisano and Koder. The six dialogues appear in: No. 1, On the Nativity (Mary and the Magi), No. 2, On the Nativity II (Adam and Eve and the Nativity), No. 7, On the Marriage at Cana, No. 19, On Mary at the Cross, No. 36, On the Annunciation I, No. 37, On the Annunciation II. For the concordance of the numbering between *Cantica genuina* and the French edition, see Maisano, *Romano* I 103, or Koder, *Romanos* I 58–60.

⁹ See L. M. Peltomaa, Roles and Functions of Mary in the Hymnography of Romanos Melodos. *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010) 487–498, esp. 496, 498; eadem, Romanos the Melodist and the Intercessory Role of Mary, in: K. Belke, E. Kislinger, A. Külzer and M. A. Stassinopoulou (eds.), *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*. Wien–Cologne–Weimar 2007, 495–502.

¹⁰ Maas/Trypanis No. 2, On the Nativity II (Adam and Eve and the Nativity).

¹¹ Str. 3–9.

¹² Str. 8.1–2: Ἰδοὺ εἰμι πρὸ ποδῶν σου, παρθένε, μητὲρ ἁμῶμε, / καὶ δι’ ἐμοῦ πᾶν τὸ γένος τοῖς ἰχθεσὶ σου πρόσκειται ...

of her spirit”, but her entreaty concerns the abolition of the consequences of the Fall.¹³ Mary’s eyes fill with tears as she understands the straits in which “her parents” are. That is the moment at which Mary takes the initiative in interceding: “Cease your lamentations, I shall become advocate (πρέσβις) for you in the presence of my Son.”¹⁴ She even asks them to accept her mediation: “Thus restrain your tears and accept me as your mediator (μεσίτιν) in the presence of my Son.”¹⁵

Romanos’ approach to the theme reflects the great Patristic idea – prevalent already by his time and best known from Irenaeus of Lyons’ (d. 204) influential work *Adversus haereses* – that Mary, “the new Eve” by virtue of her obedience, becomes the advocate of Eve.¹⁶ Here, as the Irenaeian notion of Mary’s meaning in salvation – meanwhile crystallized in Patristic usage into the slogan “through Eve the death, through Mary the life” – is offered by a master of poetics, Mary becomes the tender-hearted mother of Christ who both understands her unique position and uses it for the benefit of “her race”.¹⁷ The imaginary situation where Mary finds herself results in her conscious choice, whereby she adopts her role as intercessor and mediator. Of course Mary’s willingness was regarded as a fact,¹⁸ but this is the first time in a Byzantine source when the motive is presented from Mary’s point of view, viz., that she becomes intercessor at her own (free) discretion. From the Christian saints’ cults we know that people were convinced that their saints acted freely and out of love, and this is the point with Mary, too.

On the other hand, Romanos suggests that Mary’s intercessory role was considered valid also in an “earthly” context, in terms of right social order. This appears in the hymn on “Mary at the Cross”,¹⁹ depicting Mary’s struggle, distress and inner development before she accepts her son’s voluntary death on the cross. Romanos completes the poem by the following phrase: “You granted (παρέσχες) the honoured Lady the freedom of speech (παρρησίαν) to cry to you, ‘My Son and my God’.”²⁰ The fact that *parrhesia* is granted by Christ does not change the matter, for the same model was used in social intercourse as well – freedom of speech was given by an authority or by “*laos*”.²¹ Put in juridical terms, Romanos observed the norm, according to which Mary obtained her son’s sanction for her intercessory role.²²

Undoubtedly, the way of reasoning by which Mary’s intercessory role is justified by Romanos in the scene with Adam and Eve was intended to urge emotional reception.²³ Even a value judgment seasons the poet’s characterization of Mary as a tender mother:

*The eyes of Mary as she beheld Eve
And she looked on Adam, quickly filled with tears;
However she held them back, and tried earnestly to conquer her nature –
She who had given birth to her Son, Christ, in a manner beyond nature.
But, sympathizing with her parents, her heart was troubled,
For a compassionate mother was fitting for the Merciful One.*²⁴

¹³ Str. 9.

¹⁴ Str. 10.7–8: Παύσασθε τῶν θρήνων ὑμῶν, καὶ πρέσβις ὑμῖν γίνομαι πρὸς τὸν ἐξ ἑμοῦ.

¹⁵ Str. 11.7–8: Τὰ δάκρυα οὖν στείλαντες, ἐκδέξασθέ με / μεσίτιν ὑμῶν γενέσθαι πρὸς τὸν ἐξ ἑμοῦ.

¹⁶ *Adversus Haereses* V.19.1: uti virginis Evae virgo Maria fieret advocata (παράκλητος); ed. A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *Contre les hérésies*, livre V. SC 152. Paris 1982. Cf. *Demonstratio Praedicationis Apostolicae* (Epideixis) 33; A. Rousseau (ed.), *Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*. SC 406. Paris 1995. The influence of Irenaeus on all Patristic reflection is evident from the universal use of the parallel “Eve-Mary”. The juxtaposition of Eve-Mary implies recapitulation, which is an indispensable part of Irenaeus’ theory. E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Cambridge e. a. 2001. Part III is dedicated to the theme of recapitulation.

¹⁷ See note 24 for the whole passage (str. 10.1–6).

¹⁸ Founded on Mary’s consent in Luke 1, 38: Εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γενοιτὸ μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου.

¹⁹ Maas/Trypanis No. 19.

²⁰ Ibid., str. 17.8–9: σὺ παρέσχες τῇ σεμνῇ / παρρησίαν κράζειν σοι· Ὁ υἱὸς μου καὶ Θεὸς μου’.

²¹ Cf. H. G. Liddell – R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon*, with a revised supplement. Oxford 1996, 1344 s. v. παρρησία; G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford 1995, 1044f. s. v. παρρησία.

²² The connection between Christ’s salvific work and his mother’s role appears in the hymn “On the Nativity” II (Maas/Trypanis No. 2, str. 17.9–11): Παῦσαι, μήτερ, κλαίουσα ὃ ἀγνοεῖς / ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ τελεσθῇ, ἀπολοῦνται οὗτοι πάντες / ὑπὲρ ὧν ἱκετεύεις με, ἡ κεχαριτωμένη. – “Cease crying over what you know not, mother; if that [i.e. his sacrifice] is not accomplished, all those for whom you intercede to me will not be saved, [o, Mary] full of grace.” (Trans. from N. Tsironis, *The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nicomedia. An Aspect of the Development of the Marian Cult*. An unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, King’s College, London, June 1998, 103.)

²³ Cf. D. Krueger, *Christian Piety and Practice in the Sixth Century*, in: M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge e. a. 2005, 291–315, esp. 297–300 (Romanos the Melodist and the Night Vigil).

²⁴ Maas/Trypanis No. 2, str. 10.1–6: Οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ δὲ Μαρίας τὴν Εὐάν θεωρήσαντες / καὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ κατιδόντες δακρύειν κατηπείγοντο· / ὁμῶς στέγει καὶ σπουδάζει / νικᾶν τὴν φύσιν ἢ παρὰ τὸν Χριστὸν σχοῦσα υἱόν· / ἀλλὰ τὰ σπλάγχνα ἐταράττετο γονεῦσι συμπάσχουσα

In no case does Romanos fancy anything that contradicts Patristic teaching. Related even to the authoritative text of the famous Akathistos hymn that provided preachers with the “standards” for the doctrine on Mary as the Virgin Theotokos in Byzantine theology,²⁵ the portrayal of Mary by Romanos is consistent and doctrinally correct. The Akathistos is a hymn on the incarnation, but it is a composition in praise of Mary. As a matter of fact, being a proclamation of the Ephesian dogma of the Theotokos (431), it is through and through a theological work, in every detail balanced according to the christology represented by Cyril of Alexandria and Proclus of Constantinople.²⁶ Considering our topic – the intercessory role of Mary – it is striking that the Akathistos lacks Mary’s “personality”, which again is the essential characteristic of Romanos’ Marian image.²⁷ While Mary in Romanos volunteers to become Eve’s advocate, the “Second Eve” of the Akathistos – the dominant theme of the abstract image of Mary in the hymn – links her with the story of the Fall.²⁸

*Hail, through whom joy shall shine forth;
Hail, through whom the curse shall cease;
Hail, recalling of fallen Adam;
Hail, deliverance of the tears of Eve.*²⁹

These lines, the very first salutations to Mary, reveal the early Christian pattern of thought typical of the Greek tradition, whereby the incarnation signifies redemption from the Fall and its consequent effects.³⁰ Accordingly, as the incarnation also is a sign of Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time, the last strophe of the Akathistos alludes to the *parousia*. Though indirect, the allusion is unambiguous because Mary’s intervention at the Last Judgment is anticipated:

*O Mother hymned by all ...
accepting this present offering
deliver from every evil and from the punishment to come
all those who cry to you:
Halleluia.*³¹

So, this early Byzantine text associates Mary with the Last Judgment – it even salutes Mary as the “conciliation of the Righteous Judge”.³² The causality, which the Christian Byzantines took for granted, viz., that the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time is the consequence of the Fall, explains Mary’s appearance as intercessor of “her race” in the end-time visions. The incarnation and the death on the cross were understood to be part of *oikonomia*, the plan of God or divine economy, to redeem man from doom and death and restore him to his original state of glory,³³ and all this is taken for granted in the Akathistos’ narrative on the incarnation.³⁴ Thus, in the light of the Akathistos, considering the development of the cult, the point is that it was the second Eve theme that carried the original notion of Mary as intercessor and not the christological term “Theotokos”. On this ground it can

/ τῷ γὰρ ἐλεήμονι μήτηρ ἔπρεπεν εὐσπλαγχνος. (My italic, trans. modified from Carpenter.) Liddell – Scott: *πρέπει*, is fitting, it beseems, suits, becomes.

²⁵ L. M. Peltomaa, The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn. *The Medieval Mediterranean* 35. Leiden–Boston–Cologne 2001. There is no doubt that Romanos knew the Akathistos, see Koder, Romanos Melodos II 795–796.

²⁶ Peltomaa, The Image 85–113.

²⁷ If the question of different modes of poetical expression is left aside, it can be argued that the impersonal image is indicative of a relatively early stage of the cult. On this development, see I. Kalavrezou, The Maternal Side of the Virgin, in: M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*. Milan 2000, 40–45; eadem, Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became *Meter Theou*, *DOP* 44 (1990), 165–172, loc. cit. 166; Peltomaa, The Image 73–74.

²⁸ See Peltomaa, The Image 211–212, 216.

²⁹ Ak. 1.6–9: Χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς ἡ χαρὰ ἐκλάμψει / χαῖρε, δι’ ἧς ἡ ἀρὰ ἐκλείψει / χαῖρε, τοῦ πεσόντος Ἀδάμ ἡ ἀνάκλησις / χαῖρε, τῶν δακρῶν τῆς Εὐᾶς ἡ λύτρωσις. Ed. by C. A. Trypanis, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica*, *Wiener Byzantinistische Studien* 5. Vienna 1968, 17–39.

³⁰ Cf. Peltomaa, The Image 35.

³¹ Ak. 24.1–6: Ὡ πανύμνητε μήτηρ ... δεξαμένη τὴν νῦν προσφοράν, / ἀπὸ πάσης ῥῦσαι συμφορᾶς ἅπαντας / καὶ τῆς μελλούσης λύτρωσαι κολάσεως τοὺς σοὶ βοῶντας / “Ἀλληλούια.” (My italic.)

³² Ak. 13.14: Χαῖρε, κριτοῦ δικαίου δυσώπησις.

³³ E.g. Romanos, Hymn on the Nativity, Maas/Trypanis No. 2, str. 17.1–4: Ὅλων δὲ τούτων ἐν πείρᾳ βουλῇσει μου γενήσομαι, / καὶ πάντων τούτων αἰτία διάθεσις γενήσεται / ἦν ἐκ πάλαι ἕως ἄρτι / πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐπεδειξάμην ὡς Θεός, σῶσαι ζητῶν. – Of my own will shall I experience these things [i.e. death on the cross], / and the cause of all these things will be my dispensation / the plan which long ago, from the beginning until now / I have shown for men. As God, I live to save (trans. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos I*, cf. Koder, *Romanos Melodos I* No. 6).

³⁴ Cf. Peltomaa, The Image 212.

be supposed that Mary was considered to be an advocate/intercessor/mediator as long as the idea of the second Eve existed – probably long before Irenaeus, who elaborated the antithesis Eve-Mary, which Justin Martyr (d. 165) as the first of the church Fathers had introduced.³⁵

It must of course be taken into consideration that our reading may have gathered only the learned author's thoughts of Mary's meaning in *oikonomia*, rendering the Patristic reflection about how things actually should be. Moreover, we do not know whether the Dormition tradition had by then already influenced Constantinopolitan piety.³⁶ However, even though it is impossible to prove, the Akathistos allows the assumption of the character of the early development of the cult that, in social consciousness, Mary's intercessory capacity was related to *oikonomia*, God's plan. In no case can the pertinent rhetoric in the four salutations, referring to kings, priests, church and kingdom, by which Mary's official status as the Theotokos is confirmed,³⁷ be taken as a proof of the virtual state – scope and character – of the developing cult in the imperial city.³⁸ Thus, on the basis of this hymn no generalized conclusion can be drawn from Mary's intercessory role. Yet, even though it is impossible to say anything about the average churchgoers' relationship with Mary, we can notice that devotion to Mary seems to have been a trend in the early fifth-century Constantinopolitan circles of female ascetics.³⁹ Being an expression of ascetical idealism and a product of the value-system of the society,⁴⁰ whose female members of its highest aristocracy demonstratively promoted asceticism,⁴¹ the Akathistos manifests the constant awareness of the Last Judgment prescribed for those living in virginity.⁴² Hence we can assume that in such an intellectual atmosphere knowledge of Mary's intercessory role was not forgotten.

The Akathistos' structure and themes betray that, as a hymn on the incarnation, it was composed for the feast of the Nativity and not for the feast of the Annunciation as the oldest sources suggest.⁴³ Liturgical documents from the period from which the hymn derives – to the early fifth century – provide no sorts of evidence that intercessions of Mary had been included in eucharistic liturgies.⁴⁴ Gabriele Winkler's supposition that a respectful mention of the Theotokos may have been added rather soon after the christological [i.e. Nestorian] struggles to the anaphoral prayers of intercession, is worthy of reconsidering in the light of a later case.⁴⁵ Be that as it may, in the Akathistos

³⁵ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*. London 1989, 493; Peltomaa, *The Image* 128.

³⁶ S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*. Oxford 2002, 281: "[Dormition and Assumption narratives] were clearly influential on the emerging belief in the effectiveness of Marian intercession."

³⁷ Ak. 23.10–13: χαῖρε, τίμιον διάδημα βασιλέων εὐσεβῶν· χαῖρε, καύχημα σεβάσμιον ἱερέων εὐλαβῶν· χαῖρε, τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀσάλευτος πύργος· χαῖρε, τῆς βασιλείας τὸ ἀπόρρητον τεῖχος. – Hail, precious diadem of pious kings; Hail, holy exaltation of devout priests; Hail immovable tower of the Church; Hail, impregnable wall of the kingdom.

³⁸ There is no doubt about that the "powerful figure" (Limberis) manifests the Ephesian dogma of the Theotokos, related to the doctrine of the incarnation and that the four acclamations (above) refer to the great significance of the orthodox faith for political affairs in the empire. However, reading the Akathistos' last two strophes as evidence of the factual stage of development in the cult of Mary would need much more methodological and historical considerations than Vasiliki Limberis (*Identities and Images of the Theotokos in the 'Akathistos Hymn'*, Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 1987, and *Divine Heiress. The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople*. London–New York 1994) and Bissera Pentcheva (*Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium*. University Park, Pennsylvania 2006, 15) have presented.

³⁹ Cf. Peltomaa, *The Image* 72–73.

⁴⁰ Peltomaa, *The Image* 205.

⁴¹ Cf. K. G. Holum, *The Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1977, 93.

⁴² Life lived according to the Gospels must never forget the fearful and unavoidable court of justice, cf. Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 173, Πρὸς Θεοδώραν κανονικὴν, Y. Courtonne (ed.), *Saint Basil, Lettres Tome II*. Paris 1961, 31–39. Cf. S. Elm, 'Virgins of God'. *Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford 1994, 145.

⁴³ R. A. Fletcher, *Three Early Byzantine Hymns and Their Place in the Liturgy of the Church of Constantinople*, *BZ* 51 (1958) 53–65, esp. 62, cf. Peltomaa, *The Image* 66–67. Justinian confirmed the feast of the Annunciation around 530–550.

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Winkler, *Die Intercessionen der Chrysostomusanaphora in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (I. Teil). *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36 (1970) 301–336, esp. 309.

⁴⁵ R. F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. Vol. IV. *The Diptychs*. *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 238. Rome 1991, 100–101: "One of the most important developments in the Constantinopolitan diptychs of the dead during this critical post-Chalcedonian phase of the Monophysite struggle was the interpolation of the Theotokos ekphonesis into the liturgy of Constantinople by Patriarch Gennadius I (458–471), at the command of Emperor Leo I (457–474), an innovation provoked by Patriarch Martyrius (459–470) of Antioch's refusal to grant Mary the Theotokos title."

we have an early fifth-century liturgical prayer to Mary.⁴⁶ First in the annual cycles of christological festivals and later of the festivals of the Akathistos,⁴⁷ this very prayer with the focus on *ta eschata* was repeatedly recited:⁴⁸

*“Deliver from every evil and from the punishment to come.”*⁴⁹

A historical tradition connects the Akathistos with seventh-century Constantinople, transmitting the explanation for the hymn’s current name as well as the prooemium Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ from time of the siege of the capital by the Avars and Persians in 626.⁵⁰ But the hymn’s internal aspects connect it with fifth-century Constantinople. Besides, four references to imperial and ecclesiastical power, the hymn’s distinctive features – rhetoric, teaching on the Theotokos and the ascetical emphasis – point to Constantinopolitan influence: Proclus, the archbishop of Constantinople (d. 446), a brilliant rhetor and apparently a devotee.⁵¹ Nevertheless, due to the lack of hymnographic literature for comparison,⁵² it is not possible to evaluate how typical the eschatological emphasis of the Akathistos was.

A good century later a broader basis for considering the question is found in Romanos’ hymnography. The existing analysis, based on the corpus,⁵³ can be deepened by the analysis to the references to the *presbeia* of Mary that are scattered around his *oeuvre*.⁵⁴ As it is impossible to present them in detail here,⁵⁵ it may suffice to state that the fear of the last judgment is one of the articulated anxieties, to which Mary’s intercessions are hoped to bring relief.⁵⁶ Predictably, orthodoxy or religious intolerance prescribed on whose side Mary was thought to act as intercessor in the end:

*Drive off from here all who are of ill repute,
The villains who dilute Thy holy wine with water
The ones who always water down Thy dogma
Are condemned to Hell fire:
But deliver us, O Sinless One
From the lamentations of Thy judgment, O Merciful God,
By the prayers of the holy Theotokos and Virgin.*⁵⁷

⁴⁶ This is remarkable, since according to Kelly (Early Christian Doctrines 491), “reliable evidence of prayers being addressed to her [Mary], or of her protection and help being sought, is almost (though not entirely) non-existent in the first four centuries.”

⁴⁷ No example of a festival of the Akathistos before the ninth century has been found, cf. M. D. Spadaro, Sulla liturgia dell’ inno ‘Akathistos’: questioni cronologiche, in: S. Felici (ed.), La mariologia della catechesi dei padri (Età postnicena). Roma 1989, 247–264.

⁴⁸ On the meaning of repetition: “The church congregations, which gathered at regular and frequent intervals, presented the most timely and effective possibility for a lasting and stable influence over the masses throughout the Byzantine empire.” (J. Koder, Imperial Propaganda in the *Kontakia* of Romanos the Melode. *DOP* 62 (2010) 275–291, loc. cit. 277.)

⁴⁹ The eschatological reference is clear, but the other idea in the same context, ἀπὸ πάσης ῥύσαι συμφορᾶς (here rendered: “deliver from every evil”), is ambiguous. In addition to the obvious thought that Mary is invoked to rescue all those who cry her [i.e. those who defended the Theotokos dogma = orthodoxy] the idea seems to have the connotation that – since heresies were considered to be sin – Mary is begged to protect the orthodox from that kinds of evil – calamities and hardships – which the Nestorian heresy just had made them endure. In view of eschatological future such entreaty is certainly sensible. On the period, see B. Bleckmann, Apokalypse und kosmische Katastrophen: das Bild der theodosianischen Dynastie beim Kirchenhistoriker Philostorg, in: W. Brandes – F. Schmieder (eds.), Endzeiten. Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen. Berlin–New York 2008, 13–40.

⁵⁰ L. M. Peltomaa, The Role of the Virgin Mary at the Siege of Constantinople in 626. *Scrinium* 5 (2009) 284–299.

⁵¹ Consult Peltomaa, The Image, 101–113: “Proclus of Constantinople as a Marian Preacher”; N. Constan, Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Late Antiquity. Homilies 1–5, texts and translations. *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 66. Leiden–Boston 2003.

⁵² J. Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance. Paris 1977, 28–32.

⁵³ Peltomaa, Roles and Functions of Mary; eadem, Intercessory Role, *Festschrift Koder*.

⁵⁴ Maas/Trypanis: No. 3, On the Massacre of the Innocents, Str. 18; No. 4, On the Presentation in the Temple, Str. 18; No. 7, On the Marriage at Cana, Str. 21; No. 8, On the Healing of the Leper, Str. 18; No. 11, On the Man Possessed with Devils, Str. 25; No. 32, On the Ascension, Str. 18; No. 34, On the Second Coming, Str. 24; No. 39, On the Healing of the Lame Man by Peter and John, Str. 24; No. 44, On Joseph II, Str. 22; No. 49, On the Prodigal Son, Str. 22; No. 51, On Fasting, Str. 24; No. 52, On Repentance, Pr.; No. 58, On the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia II, Str. 18; No. 59, On All Martyrs, Pr.

⁵⁵ That would be a subject on its own right. A succinct exposition is included in Peltomaa, The Intercessory Role, *Festschrift Koder* 498–501.

⁵⁶ Maas/Trypanis No. 34, On the Second Coming, Str. 24.3–10: οὕτως ὡς οἰκτῖμων ἀοράτως ἐμφάνηθι / καὶ ἐμοί, ἀνεξίκακε· / ἐν πολλαῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἐμὲ κατακείμενον ἐξανάστησον, δέομαι, / ὅτι ἃ λέγω καὶ συμβουλεύω τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐ φυλάττω· / ἄλλα, σὲ καθικετεύω, δὸς καιρόν μοι μετανοίας, / καὶ ταῖς ἱκεσίαις τῆς ἀειπαρθένου καὶ θεοτόκου φείσαι μου / καὶ μὴ ἀπορρίψης με ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου σου, / κριτὰ δικαιοσύνη. – Invisible reveal Thyself to me, as Merciful, O Forbearing One, / Raise me up, I pray, as I lie in much sin, / for what I say and advise others I do not keep myself! / But I beseech Thee, grant me time for repentance, / through the intercessions of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos spare me, / and do not tear me from Thy sight, / O most just Judge!

⁵⁷ Ibid. Str. 21.2–9: κακοδόξους δὲ πάντας [ἐν]τεῦθεν ἀπέλασον, / οἵτινες ὡς πανοῦργοι μίσγουςί σου [τὸν] οἶνον τὸν πανάγιον ὕδατι· / τὸ δόγμα γὰρ τὸ σὸν αἰεὶ ἐξυ[δαρ]οῦντες, (5) κατάκριτοὶ εἰσι τῷ πυρὶ τῆς γενένης· / ἄλλα [ῥύσαι] ἡμᾶς, ἀναμάρτητε, / τοῦ ὄδυρμου τῆς κρίσεως τῆς [σῆς], ὡς ἐλεήμων Θεός, / ταῖς εὐχαῖς τῆς ἁγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ παρθένου.

The self-evident manner by which Romanos puts the intercessions into different contexts by means of the formulas, like “through/by the intercessions/prayers (πρεσβείαις/ικεσΐαις/εὐχαΐς) of the Theotokos/Virgin/your Mother”, gives to understand that by Romanos’ time the practice of invoking Mary to intercede with God had established itself in the Constantinopolitan liturgical rite. In itself this would not be surprising because we know that “the Church’s confidence in the prayers and patronage of the saints” had begun to manifest itself already in the third century.⁵⁸ However, even though it can be assumed that belief in Mary’s intercessory powers grew in the context of the saints’ cult, it is evident that it was not the growing general interest in holy people that pushed Mary to the fore, but the Theotokos controversy. That made Mary really famous across the empire. The quintessence of Mary’s unique saintly category, simultaneous virginity and divine motherhood, distinguished her from all other saints whom God had appointed “both as an example and as a defence to Christians”.⁵⁹ The distinction between Mary and other saints can be subtle, but it is there as the hymn “On All Martyrs” shows:

*To Thee, O Lord, the Gardener of creation, the civilized world
Offers as the first fruits of nature the God-inspired martyrs.
Through their prayers (ικεσΐαις) preserve Thy church, Thy empire, in deep peace
By the mediation (διὰ) of the Theotokos,
O, All-Merciful.⁶⁰*

This distinction, at first sight insignificant – the martyrs are suppliants,⁶¹ whereas Mary is the agent through whom the peace in the church and the empire is preserved – is important. On the one hand it reveals that the hymn writer is sensitive to Mary’s status. On the other hand it reveals that a capacity was associated with her status, the social implications of which unfolded in the period of Justinian. Irrespective of their religious backgrounds or convictions, Justinian’s subjects came to feel the impact of the increasing veneration of Mary in the course of his regime. Romanos as the emperor’s mouthpiece articulated the imperial interest in the proper way:

*Anticipating the despair of Nineveh [i.e. Constantinople],
you did turn aside the doom that had been proclaimed.
And, O Lord, your pity conquered pride.
Even now, have pity on your people and your city.
With mighty hand cast down those opposed to us,
through the intercessions of the Theotokos,
when you have received our repentance.⁶²*

This hymn ends with the poet’s prayer that the merciful God would deliver from the future threads and redeem from judgment those who sing to Him.⁶³ Paul Magdalino has shown that Romanos’ hymnography echoes the eschatological atmosphere that prevailed in the Roman Empire during Justinian’s reign.⁶⁴ It seems evident that the emperor had internalized the idea that – in Magdalino’s words – “the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Heaven were in the process and on the point of becoming one”.⁶⁵ There is no place for considering the ideological background here, but Procopius’ *De aedificiis* shows that Mary was involved: marian churches were constructed all over Roman territory, down to the furthest border.⁶⁶ The hypothesis presents itself that Mary’s position as the

⁵⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 490.

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* 491.

⁶⁰ Maas/Trypanis No. 59, *On All Martyrs*, Pr. (trans. modified from Carpenter): Ὡς ἀπαρχὰς τῆς φύσεως τῷ φυτουργῷ τῆς κτίσεως / ἡ οἰκουμένη προσφέρει σοι, κύριε, τοὺς θεοφόρους μάρτυρας / ταῖς αὐτῶν ἱκεσΐαις ἐν εἰρήνῃ βαθεΐα / τὴν ἐκκλησίαν σου, τὴν πολιτείαν σου / διὰ τῆς θεοτόκου συντήρισον, / πολυέλεε. (My italic.)

⁶¹ Cf. Liddell – Scott, ἱκεσία, the prayer of a suppliant.

⁶² Maas/Trypanis 52, *On Repentance*, Pr.: Ἀπεγνωσμένην τὴν Νινευὶ προέφθασας, / ἐπηγγεμένην τὴν ἀπειλὴν παρήγαγες / καὶ τὴν ὀργὴν ἐνίκησε τὸ ἔλεός σου, Κύριε / σπλαγχνίσθητι καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ λαὸν καὶ πόλιν σου, / παλάμη κραταῖα τοὺς καθ’ ἡμῶν κατάβαλε / πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου, / προσδεχόμενος ἡμῶν τὴν μετάνοιαν.

⁶³ Ibid. str. 17.1–5: ῥῦσαι ὡς εὐσπλαγχνος ἐκ τῆς μελλούσης ἀπειλῆς / ... λύτρωσαι τῆς κρίσεως.

⁶⁴ P. Magdalino, *The History of the Future and Its Uses: Prophecy, Policy and Propaganda*, in: R. Beaton – Ch. Roueché (eds.), *The Making of Byzantine History*. Aldershot, Hampshire 1993, 3–34, esp. 6–7.

⁶⁵ Magdalino, *The History* 11.

⁶⁶ Procopius, *De aedificiis*, H. B. Dewing – G. Downey (eds.), *Procopius VII, Buildings*. London 1940. The churches were situated: at Blachernae (I 3,2; I 6,3; I 8,20) and Pege, (I 3,6–9) outside the Theodosian wall, and at Heraeum (I 3,10) in Constantinople, in Antioch (II 10,24), Theodosiupolis (III 4,12), Jerusalem (V 6,1–26), Sinai (V 8,4–10), Jericho (V 9,5), Porphyreon (V 9,23), Augila (VI 2,20), Leptis Magna (VI 4,4), Carthage (VI 5,9) and in Septem (VI 7,16).

foremost of the holy intercessors was built up in Justinian's time, when waiting for the *second parousia* to take place made the emperor nervous.⁶⁷ At Christmas in 562, when the second inauguration of Hagia Sophia took place, a *kontakion* writer other than Romanos was commissioned.⁶⁸ There is no doubt that he confirmed the course which the emperor pursued: "Make this [= Hagia Sophia] eternal firm / and receive favourably the prayers that we in this church bring to you unceasingly / by the intercessions of the Theotokos."⁶⁹

It is natural that the imperial city, through its political, intellectual, and material resources, gave the impetus to the development of the cult of Mary that met the needs of the whole *oikoumene*. The intercessory role of Mary, as it appears in the Akathistos and Romanos, is inseparable from *oikonomia*, the Byzantine worldview, the foundation of which rested on the Bible and prophecies.⁷⁰ The Akathistos and the greatest of Byzantine poets, Romanos *melodós*, convey the imperial and societal ethos of the period and place. Peter Brown has convincingly shown that an "emotional joining point" was necessary for the rise of the cult of the saints, but how it was in the very special case of Mary is not known.⁷¹ Now, in Justinian's time, in the light of Romanos, the emotional pivotal point implying human need for protection was associated with Mary's intercessory capacity. By tracing this clue we can probably gather together some genuine parts for the puzzle of the rise of the cult of Mary.

⁶⁷ M. Maier, *Das Andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr. Hypomnemata* 147. Göttingen 2003, 570–641.

⁶⁸ C. A. Trypanis, *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica, Wiener Byzantinistische Studien* 5. Vienna 1968, 141. The hymn's acrostic reads ΤΩΝ ΕΓΚΑΙΝΙΩΝ Ο ΥΜΝΟΣ.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, No. XII, Anonymous, Pr. 4–6 (transl. Peltomaa): Στερέωσον αὐτὸ εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος / Καὶ πρόσδεξαι ἡμῶν τὰς ἐν αὐτῷ ἀπαύστως προσαγομένας σοι δεήσεις / Πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου.

⁷⁰ Magdalino, *The History* 30: "Prophecy was not science fiction, but science." We could also say that prophecy was the method by which divine will or design made known itself to the rulers of the empire.

⁷¹ Peter Brown's fundamental study, *The Cult of the Saints. The Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago 1981), provides a brilliant analysis of the close emotional relationship of the ordinary Christians with those individuals whom they regarded as saints. Brown does not discuss Mary's cult, but his work makes it clear that the emergence of the emotional relationship between Mary and her devotees is an issue that urgently needs clarification because the most popular explanation found in research literature is not credible in a Christian context. According to the so-called goddess theory, early Christians projected onto Mary their need for motherly love, because along with Christianity's victory over paganism motherly goddesses had disappeared. This topic will be handled in my forthcoming book.

