

## Mary as Intercessor in Constantinople during the Iconoclast Period: The Textual Evidence

Textual evidence for the Virgin Mary's growing importance as intercessor in Constantinople during the period of Iconoclasm is abundant\*, yet still awaits detailed analysis.<sup>1</sup> Hymns, homilies, and hagiography all attest to the development of an intercessory role that goes beyond (or perhaps complements) a christological one.<sup>2</sup> As scholars have demonstrated in recent years, this trend began to be manifested in various literary genres from at least as early as the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> It accelerated in the sixth, culminating in the texts associated with the siege of Constantinople by the Avars, Slavs, and Persians in 626 CE,<sup>4</sup> and developed further in the flowering of marian liturgical celebration in the eighth and ninth centuries. The period of Iconoclasm, which questioned devotion not only to icons, but possibly also to saints and the Theotokos, served to consolidate these cults. The mosaic of the Virgin and child in the apse of St Sophia, which was officially inaugurated on 29 March 867, is a striking reminder of orthodox affirmation of the physical reality of Christ's incarnation and of Mary's place in this event.<sup>5</sup> What is not immediately visible in icons, but appears in many middle Byzantine texts, is Mary's role not just as God-bearer or Mother of God, but also as intercessor who has *parresia* ('freedom of speech') with Christ in heaven.

Before we begin to explore this subject, it is necessary to describe the sources that have been selected for this study, to examine the role of literary genre, and to provide a few definitions. Eighth- and ninth-century texts that deal with the Theotokos include a number of genres, such as sermons, hymns, saints' Lives, and apocalypses. To begin with the liturgical sources, sermons and hymns proliferated in honour of recently instituted marian feasts. Germanos I, who was patriarch of Constantinople between 715 and 730, preached on Mary's Presentation, or Entrance, into the Temple, the Annunciation, and Dormition.<sup>6</sup> He also composed a sermon honouring two relics

\* Many of the ideas that are explored in this article will be developed more fully in a forthcoming book on which I am collaborating with Leslie Brubaker. The book will be entitled *The Virgin Mary in the Byzantine World: Images, Texts, Relics, and Ceremony*.

<sup>1</sup> An excellent introduction to Byzantine views of the Virgin Mary in this period can be found in N. Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the iconoclastic controversy', in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin Mary in Byzantine Art* (Milan, 2000), 27–39. I would like to acknowledge here my debt to this article for its suggestions concerning the treatment of the Mother of God in various literary genres.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Price provides a useful discussion of the distinction between christological and devotional reflection on the Virgin Mary in his article, 'Theotokos: the title and its significance in doctrine and devotion', in S. Boss, ed., *Mary: The Complete Resource* (London and New York, 2007), 56–73.

<sup>3</sup> For helpful overviews of this material, see especially Averil Cameron, 'The early cult of Virgin', in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 3–15; eadem, 'The cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: religious development and myth-making', in R.N. Swanson, ed., *The Church and Mary*, Studies in Church History 39 (Woodbridge, 2004), 1–21; S. Shoemaker, 'Marian liturgies and devotion in early Christianity', in Boss, *Mary: The Complete Resource*, 130–45; idem, 'The cult of the Virgin in the fourth century: a fresh look at some old and new sources', in C. Maunder, ed., *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London and New York, 2008), 71–87.

<sup>4</sup> Classic studies of this crucial period for the marian cult include N. Baynes, 'The finding of the Virgin's robe', idem, *Byzantine Studies* (London, 1955), 240–7; idem, 'The supernatural defenders of Constantinople', *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949), 165–77; A. Cameron, 'The Theotokos in sixth-century Constantinople: a city finds its symbol', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 29 (1978), 79–108; eadem, 'The Virgin's robe: an episode in the history of early seventh-century Constantinople', *Byzantion* 49 (1979), 42–56. More recent studies include B. Pentcheva, 'The supernatural defender of Constantinople: the Virgin and her icons in the tradition of the Avar siege', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 26 (2002), 2–41; eadem, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> C. Mango, trans., *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 279.

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted, however, that questions remain concerning the attribution of the whole of this corpus to Germanos I of Constantinople. See M.B. Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY, 2008), 38–41; N. Tsironis, 'From poetry to liturgy: the cult of the Virgin in the Middle Byzantine era', in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), 92; A. Kazhdan (with L.F. Sherry and C. Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)* (Athens, 1999), 59–64.

that were kept in the church of the Chalkoprateia, the Virgin's belt and Christ's swaddling clothes.<sup>7</sup> Another preacher, who flourished sometime between 750 and 850, is the lay courtier Kosmas Vestitor.<sup>8</sup> This otherwise obscure figure produced four sermons on the Dormition of the Virgin,<sup>9</sup> as well as one honouring the Virgin's parents, Sts Joachim and Anna.<sup>10</sup> The tradition developed further in the course of the ninth century, with writers including the monk and abbot, Theodore of Stoudios,<sup>11</sup> the patriarchs Tarasios<sup>12</sup> and Photios,<sup>13</sup> George of Nikomedeia,<sup>14</sup> and many others<sup>15</sup> contributing to the growing corpus of texts. Hymnography also flourished during this century, with short hymns such as theotokia and staurotheotokia being produced along with the kanons and kontakia that adorned the marian feasts.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the intercessory role of the Theotokos was explored in various Lives of saints and collections of miracle stories. Even more importantly, a new genre of hagiography that was concerned with the Virgin Mary herself emerged, flourishing especially in the ninth and tenth centuries. The hagiographical work that can be dated approximately to our period is Epiphanius of Kallistratou's *Life of the Holy Theotokos*,<sup>17</sup> this shares some features, especially in its narrative, with an earlier Life that is attributed to the seventh-century theologian and monk, Maximos the Confessor.<sup>18</sup> Apocalyptic texts, such as the enigmatic *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*,<sup>19</sup> may belong to a long-standing tradition of texts concerning Mary's death and afterlife,<sup>20</sup> but also contain new insights about her willingness to intercede on behalf of faithful Christians. It is clear that by about the middle of the ninth century, Byzantine writers felt free to write about this holy figure not only according to the accepted conventions of liturgical praise, but also with imaginative elaboration of non-biblical and intercessory themes.

Literary genre, which determines the purpose and context of individual texts, must clearly be taken into consideration as we attempt to trace the development of the idea of Mary as intercessor for Byzantine Christians.<sup>21</sup> We might indeed use differences in genre to distinguish a more official view of the Virgin Mary, which is usually expressed in liturgical texts, from a more popular or even 'paracanonical' one that appears especially in apocalyp-

<sup>7</sup> These works are listed in M. Geerard, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. J. Noret, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* (Turnhout, 2003), vol. 3, 505–7 [hereafter CPG], nos. 8007–15. For full references, see the more detailed discussions below.

<sup>8</sup> A. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI<sup>e</sup> au X<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 5 (Paris, 1955), 153; Kazhdan (with Sherry and Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> CPG 8156–8.

<sup>10</sup> CPG 8135.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore wrote one sermon on the Dormition of the Virgin, ed. PG 99, 720–29; trans. B.E. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary. Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY, 1998), 249–57.

<sup>12</sup> One sermon on the Presentation of the Virgin into the temple is attributed to Tarasios, ed. PG 98, 1481–1500.

<sup>13</sup> Photios wrote homilies on the feast of the Annunciation, the Nativity of the Virgin, and on her image in St Sophia. For editions and translations of these texts, see C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, MA, 1958).

<sup>14</sup> George of Nikomedeia's marian sermons are published in PG 100, 1336–1504.

<sup>15</sup> Other ninth-century Constantinopolitan preachers and hymnographers include the Patriarch Euthymios, Joseph the Hymnographer, and Leo VI ('the Wise'). For overviews of their work on marian themes, see 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* (unpubl. PhD thesis, King's College London, 1998), 241–98; T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI* (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1997), 162–72.

<sup>16</sup> For a general introduction to all of these genres, see E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1961). Theotokia and staurotheotokia are treated on pp. 242–3.

<sup>17</sup> Ed. A. Dressel, *Epiphani monachi et presbyteri edita et inedita* (Paris–Leipzig, 1843), 13–44; cf. PG 120, 186–216. The recensions of the text are somewhat different in the two editions.

<sup>18</sup> M. van Esbroeck, ed. and trans., *Maxime le Confesseur. Vie de la Vierge*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 478–9, Scriptores Iberici 21–2 (Leuven, 1986); a new English translation of the text, with revision of van Esbroeck's edition, is provided by Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Maximus the Confessor: The Life of the Virgin, translated with an introduction and notes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Various editions are listed in J. Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge, 2007), 425. I am using that by M.R. James, ed., *Apocrypha Anecdota*, Texts and Studies 2.3 (Cambridge, 1893), 109–26. Baun provides a translation of this text in *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 391–400.

<sup>20</sup> S. Shoemaker, 'Early evidence for Marian intercession in Palestine from ancient Dormition apocrypha', paper delivered at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, August 2011); idem, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford, 2002), 190–3.

<sup>21</sup> For orientation on Byzantine literary genres, see A. Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford, 1991), vol. 2, 832; E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008), 827–914; P.A. Agapitos, 'Literary criticism', *ibid.*, 77–85; E. Patlagean, 'Discours écrit, discours parlé: Niveaux de culture à Byzance aux VIII<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Annales ESC* 34 (1979), 264–78.

tic sources, but also sometimes in hagiography.<sup>22</sup> One problem with this approach, however, is that whereas scholars may assign individual texts to particular genres, such as ‘homiletics’ or ‘hagiography’, the boundaries between them are porous. Where, for example, do *enkomia* – which is how festal sermons are frequently described in manuscripts – merge into Lives of the Theotokos? Epiphanius of Kallistratou’s *Life of the Holy Theotokos* could also be described as a sermon or *enkomion* (and appears as such in the Migne edition of the text).<sup>23</sup> The association of particular literary – or liturgical – genres with interest in Mary’s intermediary power is also not always consistent. It becomes clear as we study the corpus of festal sermons that some preachers, such as Germanos of Constantinople, embrace this aspect of the Virgin’s role more than do others. Hagiographers also offer varied approaches to the subject: whereas Maximos the Confessor devotes considerable space to the topic of intercession, Epiphanius neglects it almost entirely, providing instead what he regards as an accurate historical narrative of Mary’s life. It appears therefore that while literary genre and liturgical context are significant, individual authors’ approaches to the theme must also be taken into account. Just as important as liturgical context or authorial intention, however, is chronological development. Is it possible to discern increasing emphasis on the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary in the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, leading to the integration of this theme into liturgical as well as hagiographical and apocalyptic texts? This article will attempt to draw some preliminary conclusions concerning the way in which the various strands of marian devotion are handled by individual writers, and according to literary or liturgical genres. More important than ‘genre’, perhaps, is the reception of texts by Byzantine Christians; this is a subject on which much work remains to be done.<sup>24</sup>

To conclude this introduction, let us turn to definitions. The word that has been chosen as a unifying concept for this volume, *presbeia* (‘intercession’),<sup>25</sup> is usually taken to mean Mary’s mediation between God, or Christ, and humanity. It should be clear on the basis of all the texts that will be treated in this article that the Virgin does not wield power in her own right, but merely seeks to influence her son, Jesus Christ, to act on behalf of the beneficiary. Individual writers treat such intercession in different ways, however; it is also clear that emphasis on Mary’s human sympathy develops slowly, taking shape especially during the period of Iconoclasm. Whereas early sources such as the *Akathistos Hymn* or Theodore Synkellos depict Mary as an invincible defender who offers physical protection to all the inhabitants of Constantinople,<sup>26</sup> liturgical writers from the sixth century onward, beginning with Romanos the Melodist, may also allude to her sympathetic relationship with individual Christians.<sup>27</sup> The epithets that are applied to the Virgin Mary may or may not be related to the understanding of *presbeia* that characterises each of these positions: the title ‘Meter Theou’ (‘Mother of God’), for example, sometimes appears in the first category, but is not always linked with feelings of maternal love or tenderness. It is thus important to be careful when drawing conclusions about changes in spirituality on the basis of the names or images that are applied to the Virgin Mary by individual authors.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it is worth discussing the meaning of *parresia*, that ‘freedom of speech’ with Christ, which is understood by writers beginning with Romanos to be an essential aspect of Mary’s intercessory function. This concept is based both on the fact that Mary, as Christ’s mother, enjoys a close personal bond with him and that, after her death and assumption into heaven, she is currently in close physical proximity to him. Most Byzantine writers avoid exploring this idea in a systematic way, but they do assume that

<sup>22</sup> Jane Baun provides a thought-provoking description of these two forms of Marian literature in her recent article, ‘Discussing Mary’s humanity in medieval Byzantium’, in Swanson, *The Church and Mary*, 63–72.

<sup>23</sup> The title reads: Λόγος περὶ τοῦ βίου τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ τῶν τῆς αὐτῆς χρόνων. PG 120, 185–6.

<sup>24</sup> For a broad discussion of this question, see M. Mullett, ‘No drama, no poetry, no fiction, no readership, no literature’, in L. James, ed., *A Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2010), 227–38.

<sup>25</sup> The word has various meanings in ancient Greek, including ‘age’, ‘seniority’, and ‘dignity’, along with those that relate to intercession, such as ‘advocacy’. It is used frequently in connection with the Virgin Mary in medieval Greek texts. See G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961), 1128.

<sup>26</sup> L.M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2001), esp. 3, *Prooemium* II.1–7, 19.1, 23.13; CPG 7936; BHG 1061; *De obsidione Constantinopolitana sub Heraclio imperatore*, ed. L. Sternbach, *Analecta Avarica* (Krakow, 1900), 298–320.

<sup>27</sup> Tsironis traces this development in *The Lament of the Virgin Mary*, 109–18, 214–40; eadem, ‘The Mother of God in the iconoclastic controversy’, esp. 36.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ioli Kalavrezou’s demonstration of growing emphasis on Mary’s maternal qualities, first in texts of the eighth and ninth centuries and then in icons. This thesis is ground-breaking, but it does not highlight the fact that, from the seventh century onward, preachers and hymnographers used the epithet ‘Mother of God’ in much the same way that they did ‘God-bearer’, as an honorary title, without always endowing it with ‘maternal’ significance. I. Kalavrezou, ‘Images of the Mother: when the Virgin Mary became the *Meter Theou*’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 165–72; eadem, ‘The maternal side of the Virgin’, in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 41–45.

the Virgin Mary has direct access to God and that he will listen to her. Romanos the Melodist, for example, addresses Christ in his kontakion *On the Second Coming*, in the following words:

*But I implore you, give me time for repentance,  
and, at the intercessions of the Ever-Virgin and Mother of God, spare me  
and do not cast me away from your presence, Judge most just.*<sup>29</sup>

Romanos implies here that Mary, in her privileged position in heaven, will exercise her *parresia* before her Son, the Righteous Judge, in order to alleviate the punishment that awaits all sinners.

## HOMILETICS AND HYMNOGRAPHY

To begin with texts that were composed for specific liturgical contexts, eighth- and ninth-century marian homilies and hymns deal, in some cases possibly for the first time, with feasts that had been added to the liturgical calendar between about the middle of the sixth century and the beginning of the eighth.<sup>30</sup> These include the feasts of the Virgin Mary's Nativity (8 September), Presentation or Entrance into the Temple (21 November), Annunciation (25 March) and Dormition (15 August). Other commemorations (or minor feast-days) include those of Mary's parents, St Joachim and St Anna (9 September), her Conception (9 December), and the translation of the two most important marian relics, the robe and the belt, to Constantinople (2 July and 31 August, respectively). The feast of Christ's Presentation into the Temple, known in liturgical texts as 'Hypapante' or 'Meeting' (2 February), also offers an opportunity for marian praise in that it celebrates her purification and encounter with Simeon (Luke 2: 25–35).<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that the main emphasis of these liturgical texts is christological: preachers and hymnographers seek to instruct their audiences, by means of biblical exegesis, narrative, and poetic imagery, of the essential role that the Theotokos played in the incarnation of Christ. Her virginity, which was perpetual, revealed the divinity of her son while her human nature provided him with his true physical embodiment as a man. The relationship between homilies and hymns in this period is close, as scholars have convincingly argued, with much cross influence between the two liturgical forms.<sup>32</sup>

Within this large corpus of liturgical material, it is worth noting that individual writers may interpret the concept of *presbeia* in different ways. It is also evident, as Tsironis has convincingly demonstrated, that Mary's role as intercessor shifted gradually from a detached to a more personal, or emotional, form of interaction in the course of the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>33</sup> In spite of such a development, it is worth remembering that both styles of marian invocation continued to be used throughout our period. Thus the Virgin Mary may be described as defender and protector of all Constantinopolitan Christians *or* as a personal mediator to whom individuals pray for special help. Some writers, such as the patriarch Germanos, elaborate on both aspects of Mary's intercession, while others continue to stress the protective role that had developed especially in connection with the Persian and Avar siege against Constantinople in 626 CE.<sup>34</sup> Finally, it is worth emphasising again that this aspect of marian devotion (whether expressed in an impersonal or personal manner) never supersedes, or dominates, the christological content of marian sermons and hymns. Invocation of the Virgin's intercessory power is seamlessly united with theological

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, *Kontakia on the Life of Christ. St Romanos the Melodist* (San Francisco, 1995), 230; P. Maas and C.A. Trypanis, eds, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963), 275.

<sup>30</sup> For recent overviews of the introduction of marian feasts into the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar, see Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 19–28; D. Krausmüller, 'Making the most of Mary: the cult of the Virgin in the Chalkoprateia from late antiquity to the tenth century', in L. Brubaker and M.B. Cunningham, eds, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Aldershot, 2011), 219–21.

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent overview of early homiletic texts associated with this feast, see P. Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek homiletic literature (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries)', in Brubaker and Cunningham, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, esp. 78–84.

<sup>32</sup> See especially Tsironis, 'From poetry to liturgy', 91–99; C. Hannick, however, emphasises the differences between the two genres in his article, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography: typology and allegory', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, 69–76.

<sup>33</sup> Tsironis, 'From poetry to liturgy', 92–5.

<sup>34</sup> For historical studies of the siege of 626, see J.D. Howard-Johnson, 'The siege of Constantinople in 626', in C. Mango and G. Dagron, eds, *Constantinople and Its Hinterland* (Aldershot, 1995), 131–41; F. Barisic, 'Le siege de Constantinople par les Avars et les Slaves en 626', *Byzantion* 24 (1954), 371–95; P. Speck, *Zufälliges zum Bellum Avaricum des Georgios Pisides*, *Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia* 24 (Munich, 1980); V. Grumel, 'La défense maritime de Constantinople du côté de la Corne d'Or et le siege des Avars', *Byzantinoslavica* 25 (1964), 217–33. Leena Mari Peltomaa, 'Role of the Virgin Mary at the Siege of Constantinople in 626', *Scrinium* 5 (2009), 284–299.

teaching in both homiletics and hymnography. Considering that formal integration of the christological and devotional strands of marian tradition had only recently been initiated, the success with which eighth – and ninth – century liturgical writers achieved this fusion is remarkable.

Germanos of Constantinople dwells frequently on Mary's intercessory role in his festal sermons, referring to both her protective and merciful qualities. To begin with the first of these roles, we may cite a passage from his oration commemorating the Virgin's belt, a relic that was kept in the church of the Chalkoprateia.<sup>35</sup> In this sermon, Germanos emphasises Mary's role as defender and protector of Constantinopolitan Christians:

*O all-pure, all-good, and most merciful Lady, consolation of Christians, warmest remedy for the afflicted and most ready refuge for those who sin; do not abandon us as orphans, bereft of your succour! For if we should be abandoned by you, where would we now run? What will become of us now, O all-holy Theotokos, the breath and life of Christians ... Shelter us with the wings of your goodness! Watch over us with your intercessions! May you, hope of Christians, who cannot be put to shame, offer us eternal life! ... We, who were driven from God in the multitude of our sins, have sought God through you and we have found [him]. And on finding [him], we have been saved. Therefore your help is powerful with regard to salvation, Theotokos, and it has no need of any other mediator before God.*<sup>36</sup>

This is a collective plea, on behalf of all Christians, which evokes the protective power of the Virgin Mary that was by now universally acknowledged in the capital city. In the context of a sermon that celebrates this important physical link to Mary's ongoing presence and power in Constantinople, it is not surprising that Germanos is so explicit in his prayers for intercession. Later in the same sermon he implies that those who approach the Virgin's holy belt experience feelings of health and happiness:

*Who, having gazed earnestly and with faith on your honoured belt, Theotokos, is not filled at once with delight? Who, on fervently falling down before it, has left without his petition being granted? Who, on contemplating your token, does not immediately forget every affliction? Words cannot express the nature of joy, well-being, and happiness that have been enjoyed by those [people] who come and stand in your sacred church, in which you have been well-pleased for your honoured belt to be placed ...*<sup>37</sup>

The sermon that offers the fullest analysis of Mary's intercessory power is that on the feast of the Dormition.<sup>38</sup> The subject matter allows Germanos a chance to meditate on the manner in which the Theotokos now resides in heaven but remains present 'in spirit' among Christians. While suggesting that her body and spirit were separated at the time of her death, Germanos asserts that the former remained uncorrupted: 'it has been changed, in its humanity, to the highest incorruptible life; it is preserved and supremely glorified'.<sup>39</sup> Now the Virgin is God's 'permanent guest' in heaven; in this exalted position she exercises a privileged relationship with Christ, her son:

*So whatever you desire of him, he gives you with a son's affection; and whatever you ask from him, he brings to fulfillment with a God's power – he who is blessed for all ages!*<sup>40</sup>

The first sermon on the Dormition thus attempts to explain the way in which the Theotokos can act as intercessor in her glorified state after dying and being assumed into heaven. Like other Byzantine liturgical writers who deal with this subject, Germanos is deliberately vague about exactly what has taken place with regard to Mary's resurrection prior to the rest of humanity; nevertheless, he declares faith in her intercessory power both on earth and in heaven. In fact Germanos goes so far as to say, no doubt hyperbolically, that the Theotokos is the *only* redeemer and protector of Christians:

*No one is filled with the knowledge of God except through you, all-holy One; no one is saved but through you, Mother of God; no one is free of danger but through you, Virgin Mother; no one is redeemed but through you, Mother of God; no one ever receives mercy gratuitously except through you, who have received God.*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The commemoration of Mary's belt, or girdle, was celebrated in Constantinople on 2 July. Strangely, the homily is rarely – if ever – included in later liturgical collections as a reading for this date. See A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche* (Leipzig, 1936–39), 3 vols, passim.

<sup>36</sup> Germanos of Constantinople, *In s. Mariae zonam*, CPG 8013, PG 98, 377D–80A; trans. (with small adjustments) Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 252–3.

<sup>37</sup> Germanos, *In s. Mariae zonam*, PG 98, 381C; trans. (with small adjustments) Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 254–5.

<sup>38</sup> Germanos, *In Dormitionem* I, CPG 8010, PG 98, 340–57; trans. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 153–68. As Daley notes on p. 167, n.1, this single work is published as two separate sermons in the PG edition.

<sup>39</sup> Germanos, *In Dormitionem* I, PG 98, 345B; Daley, *On the Dormition*, 157.5.

<sup>40</sup> Germanos, *In Dormitionem* I, PG 98, 348C; Daley, *On the Dormition*, 159.6.

<sup>41</sup> Germanos of Constantinople, *In Dormitionem* I, PG 98, 349C; Daley, *On the Dormition*, 160–1.8.

Another, slightly later Constantinopolitan preacher who nevertheless reveals close ties with Germanos – in the sense that he freely made use of the patriarch's writings – is Kosmas Vestitor.<sup>42</sup> This somewhat obscure writer was, as we saw above, a lay dignitary in the imperial court who was active sometime after about 750 CE.<sup>43</sup> Several sets of sermons are attributed to Kosmas, including one commemorating Joachim and Anna,<sup>44</sup> and four on the feast of the Dormition.<sup>45</sup> The latter reveal Kosmas's adaptation of Germanos's festal sermons, although he also makes use of other homiletic and apocryphal works.<sup>46</sup> A. Wenger has argued that, notwithstanding the plagiaristic tendencies of this lay preacher, he is an important figure in the Byzantine homiletic tradition.<sup>47</sup> Kosmas's sermons were translated into Latin at a fairly early date and, once they began to be disseminated in the West, influenced later writers including James of Voragine, author of the *Golden Legend* (ca. 1230–98).<sup>48</sup>

Kosmas Vestitor alludes to Mary's intercessory function in some passages of his sermons on the Dormition, although he is also interested (like most other preachers of this period) in exploring the apocryphal narrative of Mary's death and assumption into heaven. In the first sermon of the series, Kosmas has Christ say to his mother:

*I shall establish you as a wall for the whole world, a bridge for the wavering, a citadel for those who need to be saved, a staff for those who are being led by the hand, a respite for sinners, a ladder to deliver men to a secure heaven.*<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere in this series of sermons, the preacher himself addresses the Virgin Mary with prayerful supplication, expressing his recognition of her universal presence and ability to rescue Christians.<sup>50</sup> Kosmas's festal sermon on Joachim and Anna, however, is reticent on this theme; apart from one passage in which sinners who 'are pitied through the intercessions of the Theotokos' are remembered,<sup>51</sup> the oration focuses for the most part on the qualities of the Virgin's holy parents.

It is worth mentioning here, for the sake of comparison, the more restrained approach that certain preachers, such as Andrew of Crete, adopt with regard to marian intercession.<sup>52</sup> Whereas Andrew's trilogies of festal sermons on the Nativity and Dormition of the Theotokos, along with his oration on the Annunciation,<sup>53</sup> testify to his belief in Mary's important place in God's dispensation, he tends to avoid explicit pleas for mercy or intercession. It is possible that, as some scholars have suggested, some form of reassessment of the marian cult, along with the veneration of saints and icons, was taking place in the eighth and ninth centuries.<sup>54</sup> If so, it is likely that bishops such as Germanos and Andrew would have been aware of this process and of the need to position themselves correctly with regard to marian devotion. Not only the issue of marian intercession, but also the efficacy of the 'contact' relics (that is, her robe and belt) and the authority of apocryphal writings may have featured in this de-

<sup>42</sup> For orientation, see Kazhdan, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, 1153; Kazhdan (with Sherry and Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> The most extensive treatment of Kosmas Vestitor's marian homilies so far appears in A. Wenger, 'Les homélies inédites de Cosmas Vestitor sur la Dormition', *Revue des Études Byzantines* 11 (1953), 284–300; idem, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 140–72; 315–33.

<sup>44</sup> CPG 8151; PG 106, 1005–12; trans. Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 139–44.

<sup>45</sup> CPG 8155–8; ed. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 315–33. These sermons survive only in an old Latin translation which is preserved in a tenth-century manuscript, Augiensis Reichenau-Karlsruhe LXXX, ff. 49–69.

<sup>46</sup> See the analysis of these borrowings in Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 140–72.

<sup>47</sup> Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 141.

<sup>48</sup> T. Graesse, ed., *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda aurea, vulgo Historia Lombardica dicta* (Dresden and Leipzig, 1846); G. P. Maggioni, ed., *Iacopo da Varazze: Legenda aurea* (Florence, 1998); trans. W.G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine* (New York, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> Kosmas Vestitor, *In dormitionem* I, ed. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 316.7.36–9.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *In dormitionem* IV, ed. Wenger, *L'Assomption de la t.s. Vierge*, 333.24–25.21–40.

<sup>51</sup> Kosmas Vestitor, *In Ioachim et Annam parentes deiparae*, PG 106, 1009; trans. Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 142.6.

<sup>52</sup> In treating Andrew of Crete here, I am departing from the stated objective of examining only Constantinopolitan preachers and hymnographers. One justification for making this exception in the case of Andrew, apart from the need to demonstrate a quite different, although contemporary, approach to the marian cult from that of Germanos, is that it is possible (although unlikely) that he preached some of his sermons in the capital city. This writer, who originated in Damascus and was educated in Jerusalem, spent some years in Constantinople after 785 before being ordained metropolitan of Crete. See S. Vailhé, 'S. André de Crète', *Échos d'Orient* 5 (1902), 278–87; M.-F. Auzépy, 'La carrière d'André de Crète', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88.1 (1995), 1–12.

<sup>53</sup> CPG 8170–4, 8181–3. Andrew's homilies are published in PG 97, 805–913, 1045–1109 and translated in Cunningham, *Wider Than Heaven*, 71–138, 197–219; Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 103–52.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, the provocative study of G. Dagron in 'L'ombre d'un doute: l'hagiographie en question, VI<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992), 59–68; Kazhdan (with Sherry and Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 147–9.

bate.<sup>55</sup> If this is the case, Germanos of Constantinople and Andrew of Crete may deliberately have adopted different methods of celebrating the Theotokos in their festal sermons. Whereas, as we saw earlier, Germanos devotes considerable space to Mary's role as intercessor, Andrew tends to avoid this topic, focusing instead on theological teaching. Throughout his trilogy of sermons on the Dormition, for example, he explores the manner in which the Theotokos bridges the divine and created states of existence. Her humanity was witnessed in her own natural conception and birth, as well as in the separation of body and soul that took place (as for all other human beings) after her death. However, an ineffable mystery also occurred when Mary was resurrected and assumed into heaven. Andrew alludes to this mystery with reverent restraint; it is interesting to note that he reveals his awareness of an apocalyptic account (or accounts) in the second sermon on the Dormition, even if he does not cite explore the implications of this source in detail.<sup>56</sup> Andrew does address the theme of Mary's intercession towards the end of his third sermon, asking her to 'be an intercessor with the Lord on behalf of the corporeal reality that we share.'<sup>57</sup>

Such measured and didactic rhetoric is echoed in the festal sermons of ninth-century preachers such as Theodore of Stoudios, and the patriarchs Tarasios and Photios. Theodore, like Andrew of Crete, emphasises both Mary's humanity and exaltation after death in a passage from his sermon on the Dormition:

*Now the Mother of God shuts her material eyes, and opens her spiritual eyes towards us like great shining stars that will never set, to watch over us and to intercede before the face of God for the world's protection. Now those lips, moved by God's grace to articulate sounds, grow silent, but she opens her [spiritual] mouth to intercede eternally for all of her race. Now she lowers those bodily hands that once bore God, only to raise them, in incorruptible form, in prayer to the Lord on behalf of all creation ... departing from her body, she is with us in spirit; gathered up to heaven, she banishes demons by her intercession with the Lord.<sup>58</sup>*

While individual preachers of the iconoclast period may thus approach the theme of Mary's intercession with varying degrees of intensity, a growing emphasis on Mary's human qualities is discernable in this period. This appears not only in connection with the Virgin's intercessory role, but also in passages dealing with her life or with particular events such as the nativity of Christ or the crucifixion. The willingness of some eighth- and ninth-century preachers to employ apocryphal accounts such as the *Protoevangelium of James* allowed them to develop a more rounded picture of the Virgin Mary.<sup>59</sup> Building on the dramatic treatment of her personal response to Christ's nativity or death on the cross that had been initiated by earlier writers such as Romanos the Melodist<sup>60</sup> and Maximos the Confessor,<sup>61</sup> preachers such as Germanos began to present this holy figure to their audiences as a human, motherly figure who experienced both joy and extreme grief in her relationship with Christ.<sup>62</sup> This tradition received full expression in George of Nikomedeia's remarkable sermon on Mary's lament at the foot of the cross.<sup>63</sup> The suggestion that such developments in marian homiletics reflect iconophile preachers' desire to stress Christ's

<sup>55</sup> A recent discussion of these issues appears in E. Panou, *The Cult of St Anna in Byzantium* (unpubl. PhD thesis, The University of Birmingham, 2011). I am grateful to the author for showing drafts of this thesis to me.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew of Crete, *In Dormitionem* II, PG 97, 1053A-B; trans. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 121-2: 'If, as the saying goes, "there is no one who will live and not see death," then she whose praises we sing today is clearly both human and more than human, since she kept the same law of nature that we must keep, yet in a way not like us but beyond us, it seems, and beyond the reason for which we are forced to suffer it. This, then, is how I suggest you understand her descent into the underworld; the period of time for which death and bodily decay held power over her – in my judgement, at least – was only as long as was necessary for her to move, at natural speed, through unknown regions and to come to know them first-hand, regions where she had never set foot before and which she was now crossing as in a journey through foreign, uncharted territory.'

<sup>57</sup> 'Μεταναστεύου τῶν ἐν τῇ κτίσει μονῶν' ἐξιλάσκου τὸν Κύριον ὑπὲρ τοῦ κοινοῦ πλάσματος.' Andrew of Crete, *In Dormitionem* III, PG 97, 1100C; trans. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 144.

<sup>58</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, *In Dormitionem*, PG 99, 721B; trans. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 250.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of this process, especially with regard to preachers such as John of Euboea, Tarasios, and George of Nikomedeia, see Panou, *The Cult of St Anna*, chap. 2; Cunningham, 'The use of the *Protevangelion of James* in eighth-century homilies on the Mother of God', in Brubaker and Cunningham, *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, 163-78.

<sup>60</sup> Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion on Mary at the Cross*, P. Maas and C.A. Trypanis, eds, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Ge-muina* (Oxford, 1963), 142-9.

<sup>61</sup> Van Esbroeck, *Maxime le Confesseur. Vie de la Vierge* (see note 17).

<sup>62</sup> See especially the sermon (which may be spurious), *In dominici corporis sepulturam*, CPG 8031, PG 98, 244-90.

<sup>63</sup> George of Nikomedeia, *Oratio in illud*: 'Stabant autem juxta crucem Jesu Mater ejus ...', PG 100, 1457-89. An extensive discussion of the homily appears in Tsironis, *The Lament of the Virgin Mary*, 279-89. Strictly speaking, of course, this work belongs to the post-iconoclast period. George was active as a preacher after ca. 860 when he became metropolitan of Nikomedeia.

physical incarnation, to the extent that he can be depicted in icons,<sup>64</sup> is entirely convincing – notwithstanding the variations with regard to the Virgin's intercessory role that were noted above. In the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, and in connection with the controversy over images, the Mother of God was increasingly perceived as the physical link that guaranteed Christ's true humanity. As such, she provided access, in both theological and spiritual terms, to the protection and salvation that he grants to Christians.

It is also worth noting, in general terms, that the allusions to the Virgin's intercessory role tend to occur in particular homiletic contexts. Celebration or invocation of her mediation usually appears at the end of sermons, when the preacher calls on his congregation to offer praise, follow better ethical practices, or seek help from the holy subject of his oration. Such use of the epilogue in marian festal sermons may correspond to the way in which theotokia, the short hymns to the Virgin that are added to the end of each canticle in kanons, act as conclusions to groups of stanzas in hymnography. It is likely that both conventions developed in the formative period of Iconoclasm, in connection with the full elaboration of the Byzantine liturgy.

Having mentioned hymnography, it is necessary now to discuss this body of literary evidence in connection with the theme of *presbeia* or intercession. This represents a large, and extremely significant, liturgical genre which should feature prominently in any study of the development of Mary's intercessory role during the formative period of Iconoclasm. Hymnography, as one of the movable elements in the daily as well as festal offices, represents an essential component of liturgical celebration in the Byzantine church. It is in fact probable that the faithful were more influenced on a daily basis by the dogmatic teaching that hymnography delivered than they were by homiletic instruction. Many types of hymns were composed in the course of the eighth and ninth centuries for services throughout the liturgical year, including the recently established marian feasts.<sup>65</sup> Much of this material, which survives largely in service books that have been published on the basis of single – and often late – manuscripts, remains uncertain in its attribution and provenance. While the literary, theological, and exegetical aspects of Byzantine hymnography have received some attention from scholars in recent years, much work remains to be done.<sup>66</sup> There is not space in this article to do more than describe some of the main hymnographic genres that concern the Theotokos and to draw some tentative conclusions concerning their treatment of her intercessory role.<sup>67</sup>

Kanons, whether or not they originated in the early eighth century, certainly began to be composed in profusion from that time onward.<sup>68</sup> This form of hymn, which is sung in the morning office of *orthros*, is made up of nine odes based on the biblical canticles, each of which consists a number of shorter troparia. Many kanons, such as one that Andrew of Crete composed for the Nativity of the Theotokos, address her as intercessor both in the last troparion of each ode and especially in the final, ninth ode, which has the Virgin Mary's *Magnificat* as its inspiration. Andrew writes, for example:

*You have contained in your womb, O Virgin Mother, one of the Trinity, Christ the King, whose praises all creation sings and before whom the thrones on high tremble. O all-venerated Lady, entreat him for the salvation of our souls.*<sup>69</sup>

Troparia such as this were later detached from their original sources and distributed, along with stichera, throughout liturgical books such as the *Oktoechos*<sup>70</sup> and the *Triodion*,<sup>71</sup> becoming known collectively as theotokia. Such separation of individual hymns from their original liturgical contexts, not to mention from their authors, means that dating and attribution of this enormous body of material is difficult.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the best way to evaluate Byzantine hymnography is to regard it as a body of evidence that reflects above all the spiritual and devotional

<sup>64</sup> Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the iconoclastic controversy', esp. 35–38; eadem, 'From poetry to liturgy', 99.

<sup>65</sup> One of the most useful introductions to this material, which offers a glossary of marian images and epithets, can be found in S. Eustratiades, *Ἡ Θεοτόκος ἐν τῇ ὑμνογραφίᾳ* (Paris and Chennevières-sur-Marne, 1930). See also idem, *Θεοτοκάριον* (Chennevières-sur-Marne, 1931), vol. 1, which presents 106 kanons in the first three modes. Hannick, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography', 71.

<sup>66</sup> C. Hannick provides a useful introduction to this material, along with an assessment of its relationship to homiletics, in his article, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography: typology and allegory', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, 69–76.

<sup>67</sup> As I indicated above (note \*), Leslie Brubaker and I will explore this subject in more detail in a forthcoming book.

<sup>68</sup> Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 198–245; J. Szövérfy, *A Guide to Byzantine Hymnography* (Brookline and Leiden, 1978–79), vol. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew of Crete, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Ode Nine*, trans. (with adjustments) Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion* (London, 1969), 124.

<sup>70</sup> D. Guillaume, ed. and trans., *Paralitique ou Grande Octoèque* (Rome, 1977–79), 2 vols.

<sup>71</sup> *Τριόδιον ἐπινυκτικόν* (Athens, 1983); trans. Mother Mary and Ware, *The Lenten Triodion*.

<sup>72</sup> Hannick, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography', 69.

mind of the church rather than the creative work of individual writers. Tsironis has further argued that what we see in hymnography (which incidentally continues to be sung in modern Orthodox liturgical services) represents a distillation of liturgical material that is drawn not only from early hymns, which include Romanos's kontakia, but also from homiletics.<sup>73</sup> Much of the work of compilation, which led to the production of liturgical books including the *Triodion*, the *Menaia*,<sup>74</sup> and the *Sticherokathismatarion* appears to have taken place in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>75</sup> Short hymns commemorating the Mother of God were scattered throughout liturgical services from at least this period onward, reflecting her central position both in the dogmatic teaching and the devotional practice of the Byzantine church.

Emphasis on the Virgin Mary's intercessory role, which may include direct invocation of her protection or aid, features prominently in hymns that may have originated in eighth- or ninth-century Constantinople. As we have seen, it is possible to state in general terms that, as in the case of sermons, christological teaching and devotional content are successfully intertwined in this liturgical material. The Virgin Mary is powerful and receptive to Christian supplication both because she gave birth to God and because, throughout this process, she remained human, providing Christ with his physical nature. Joseph the Hymnographer's *kanon* for the Saturday of the *Akathistos Hymn* illustrates this successful marriage of christological and devotional themes, as we see in the following stanzas:

*You have been made our light and confirmation, and so we cry to you, 'Hail, never-setting star that brings into the world the mighty Sun; hail, pure one who opened the gate of Eden that was closed; hail, pillar of fire, leading humankind to the life above.*

*Let us stand reverently in the house of our God, and let us cry aloud: hail, Mistress of the world; hail, Mary, sovereign over all of us; hail, one who is alone among women blameless and fair; hail, vessel that received the inexhaustible myrrh that was emptied out on you.*

*Hail, ever-Virgin, the dove that has conceived the Merciful One; hail, glory of all the saints, crown of the martyrs; hail, divine adornment of all the righteous and salvation of us, the faithful.*<sup>76</sup>

## HAGIOGRAPHY AND APOCALYPTIC TEXTS

Let us turn now to the other two literary genres that were mentioned in the introduction, namely, hagiography and apocalyptic texts. Hagiography of the iconoclast period frequently mentions the Virgin Mary, often with reference to her activity as intercessor or protector of Constantinopolitan Christians. As Niki Tsironis has noted, many saints' Lives describe the Mary's role in helping sterile parents to conceive;<sup>77</sup> this is a theme that evokes biblical parallels such as Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17–18), Elkanah and Hannah (Sam [1 Kings]: 1), and others, not to mention the Virgin's own parents, Joachim and Anna.<sup>78</sup> The Theotokos performs many other miracles in the course of these narratives, sometimes in person but occasionally also by means of her icon.<sup>79</sup> In the ninth-century Life of

<sup>73</sup> Tsironis writes, for example, 'Most of the kontakia and even the theotokia and staurotheotokia found in the *Triodion* and the *Menaia* are anonymous or attributed erroneously, but leaving aside the question of provenance, it is a relatively easy task to identify the images, most of which derive from the hymnography of the iconoclastic and immediate post-iconoclastic period. However, on a few occasions, extracts from a particular hymn or homily are included in the liturgical texts in their original form. This suggests an interesting procedure, a kind of "selection process" taking place within the day-to-day practices of the Church, whereby the most beautiful – that is, the most poetic and emotionally charged – images from hymns and homilies were detached from their original contexts, set to music, and then incorporated in liturgical texts such as the *Triodion*,' in her article 'From poetry to liturgy', 97.

<sup>74</sup> *Μηναία τοῦ ὁλοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ* (Rome, 1888–1902), 6 vols.; the major feasts are translated in Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion*; English translations of the *Menaia* including every day in the liturgical year are also now obtainable from various Orthodox publishers.

<sup>75</sup> Hannick, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography', 69; Tsironis, 'From poetry to liturgy', 96–7.

<sup>76</sup> Joseph the Hymnographer, *Kanon on Saturday of the Akathistos Hymn, Ode Nine; Triodion Katanyktikon* (Athens, 1983), 331. Trans. (with adjustments) Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware, *The Lenten Triodion* (London and Boston, 1978), 443.

<sup>77</sup> Tsironis, 'The Mother of God in the iconoclast controversy', 32. The saints whose births were brought about by such miraculous intervention include Stephen the Younger, Peter of Atroa, and Michael Maleinos.

<sup>78</sup> According to the *Protoevangelium of James*, ed. Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig, 1976; repr. Hildesheim, 1987), 1–50; trans. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, rev. ed., 1993), 57–67.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, the healing of a soldier in the Life of St Stephen the Younger, when the saint instructs him to pray to icons of Christ and of the Mother of God. M.-F. Auzépy, ed., *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre. Introduction, Édition et Traduction*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, vol. 3 (Aldershot, 1997), 154.1–4.

St Irene, abbess of the monastery of Chrysobalanton, the saint helped one of the nuns in her care who has become possessed by demons by taking her to the church at Blachernai. After keeping vigil here for many hours and '[wetting] the sacred church-floor with tears', St Irene saw a vision of the Mother of God who, with the help of several saints, effected a cure by eradicating the demons in Cappadocia who were responsible for the illness.<sup>80</sup> Miracles connected with the vigil that was held on Friday nights at the church of Blachernai were of course beginning to be common in this period,<sup>81</sup> with the most complete account of the Virgin's weekly appearance at the shrine appearing in the (probably) tenth-century Life of St Andrew the Fool.<sup>82</sup> According to her hagiographer, the saintly empress Theodora, who suffered through the difficult final days of her husband Theophilos, dreamed that she saw 'the supremely holy Mother of God holding in her arms the infant [Christ] with his cross and a terrifying ring of beautiful angels violently reproaching the emperor... and beating him without cessation because of the holy and venerable icons'. After this vision, Theodora 'kept vigil, dedicating her heart and mind to tearful intercession with the supremely holy Mother of God'.<sup>83</sup> Whereas miracles resulting from the Virgin Mary's intercession thus become increasingly common in ninth-century hagiographical texts, it is important to note that these sources also describe Christ and well-known saints responding to Christians' prayers. The Mother of God is thus acknowledged as an important figure in the celestial hierarchy, but she does not fully supplant other mediators of divine aid.

Epiphanius of Kallistratou's *Life of the Holy Theotokos* belongs to a marian hagiographical tradition which, if van Esbroeck and Shoemaker are correct, began in the middle of the seventh century.<sup>84</sup> Hans-Georg Beck and Alexander Kazhdan accept the authenticity of this work, dating it to the early ninth century;<sup>85</sup> it is possible that the same author, who was a monk in a well-known monastery in Constantinople, also produced a Life and Acts of the apostle Andrew on the basis of an earlier, quite apocryphal, text on the same subject.<sup>86</sup>

Stephen Shoemaker has recently studied Epiphanius's *Life of the Holy Theotokos*, especially on the basis of its connection with the earlier Life that is attributed to Maximus the Confessor (which survives only in Georgian) and the tenth-century ones written by Symeon the Metaphrast and John Geometres.<sup>87</sup> The four texts, while differing in many ways, reveal certain striking resemblances which suggest that their authors were influenced by each others' work and consciously followed a narrative tradition that diverged – at times quite radically – from the biblical or even apocryphal sources. Elements such as the annunciation to Joachim in the temple rather than in the wilderness and, in a similar vein, Mary's vision before the doors of the sanctuary (or 'holy of holies') appear in the hagiographical narratives but not in any homiletic or hymnographic sources of this period. The four Lives of the Virgin Mary (aside from that of Maximus) still await detailed analysis not only from a narrative point of view, but also with regard to their theological, exegetical, and literary content. The late tenth-century Life that is ascribed to John

<sup>80</sup> J.O. Rosenquist, ed. and trans., *The Life of St Irene, Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (Uppsala, 1986), 52–64. Tsironis notes that this passage also provides an early account of the procession of the icon of the Mother of God from the church of Blachernai to the chapel of the *Hagia Soros*: eadem, 'The Mother of God in the iconoclast controversy', 32.

<sup>81</sup> The first example of such a miracle occurs in the Life of St Stephen the Younger, after his mother attends the all-night vigil on Friday night, praying before the *χαράκτηρ* ('icon') of the holy Virgin and asking for her intercession. See Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, 92.4.

<sup>82</sup> J. Rydén, ed., *The Life of St Andrew the Fool* (Uppsala, 1995), 254.3732–58.

<sup>83</sup> BHG 1731; ed. A. Markopoulos, 'Βίος τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας Θεοδόρας (BHG 17331)', *Symmeikta* 5 (1983), 264; trans. M. Vinson in A.-M. Talbot, ed., *Byzantine Defenders of Images. Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 372.

<sup>84</sup> Ed. A. Dressel, *Epiphani monachi et presbyteri edita et inedita* (Paris–Leipzig, 1843), 13–44; cf. PG 120, 186–216. The recensions of the text are somewhat different in the two editions. The first example of this genre may be found in Maximus the Confessor's *Life of the Virgin*, whose authenticity is defended by both M. van Esbroeck and S. Shoemaker. See above, note 17.

<sup>85</sup> H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 513; Kazhdan (with Sherry and Angelidi), *A History of Byzantine Literature*, 307 and 396. However, see also J. Dräseke, 'Der Mönch und Presbyter Epiphanius', *BZ* 4 (1895), 350, who identifies two authors for the Lives of the Virgin and of the Apostle Andrew, and E. Kurtz, 'Ein bibliographisches Monitum', *BZ* 6 (1897), who thinks that the Life of the Virgin belongs to the eleventh century.

<sup>86</sup> See above, n. 15.

<sup>87</sup> S. Shoemaker, 'The Virgin Mary in the ministry of Jesus and the early Church according to the earliest Life of the Virgin', *Harvard Theological Review* 98:4 (2005), 441–67. The Metaphrastic Life is published in B. Latysev, *Menologii anonymi byzantini saeculi X* (Petropolis, 1912), vol. 2; that of John Geometres remains unedited, except for its final section which is published in A. Wenger, *L'assomption de la très sainte Vierge dans la tradition Byzantine du VI<sup>e</sup> au X<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1955), 364–415. The rest of the text survives in Cod. Vat. Gr. 504, fols. 173v–194v.

Geometres in fact also awaits publication since the late Michel van Esbroeck's critical edition of the text appears to have been lost.<sup>88</sup>

Epiphanius declares his reasons for composing a *Life of the Virgin* near the beginning of the text and adheres to this agenda with some consistency. According to this hagiographer, none of the apostles or early Fathers who wrote about Mary provided full accounts of her life from start to finish; further, in addition to the lacunae that exist in their texts with regard to the Theotokos, they sometimes got their facts wrong.<sup>89</sup> Epiphanius's purpose, in simple terms, is to provide a full narrative concerning the life of the Virgin Mary, beginning with her conception from Joachim and Anna and ending with her death and assumption into heaven. He deals, in minute detail, with Mary's genealogy (looking at both her paternal and maternal lines, based on the assumption that Joachim and Anna were her parents) and finishes by carefully calculating that she died at the age of seventy-two.<sup>90</sup> Without going into detailed analysis of this interesting text, it is worth pointing out a few of its more intriguing features. Firstly, although Epiphanius may perhaps not emphasise Mary's importance in relation to Christ's ministry to the same extent that Maximus the Confessor does, he does suggest that she accompanied her son everywhere and guided the spiritual lives of his female followers. Secondly, perhaps inspired by the Gospels' silence on many aspects of the Virgin's life, Epiphanius emphasises the fact that she waited until Christ's ascension and her own 'falling asleep' to reveal the mysteries that had been disclosed to her at the two annunciations that she experienced in the course of her life.<sup>91</sup> And finally, it is worth noting that Epiphanius avoids explicit reference to apocryphal texts such as the *Protoevangelium of James* or the various accounts of the Dormition. He frequently cites the sources that he regards as authoritative, which include not only the Gospels and a few apostolic or Patristic writings, but also ps-Dionysius the Areopagite's *On the Divine Names* and Andrew of Crete's sermons on the Dormition of the Virgin.<sup>92</sup>

To return to the question of Mary's intercessory role, it is noticeable that Epiphanius of Kallistratou's *Life of the Holy Theotokos* concerns itself very little with this question. There is a passage near the end of the narrative in which Epiphanius refers to the many miracles that occurred both during the Virgin's lifetime and after her death, especially at the site of her tomb in Gethsemane.<sup>93</sup> However, her role as intercessor is not his primary concern; Epiphanius instead seeks to break the silence that has traditionally surrounded the Virgin's life and death, and to eradicate errors that have appeared in those narratives that do exist.

Turning to our final category of marian text, that of the apocalypse, it is important to emphasise again the fact that this literary genre may sometimes overlap with – or to put it more accurately, stray into – hagiography or even homiletics. The *Lives* of St Andrew the Fool and St Basil the Younger, for example, contain extensive apocalyptic sections that describe the fate of human beings in heaven and hell.<sup>94</sup> Some texts, however, such as the ninth- or tenth-century *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*<sup>95</sup> or the slightly later *Apocalypse of St Anastasia*,<sup>96</sup> deal specifically with a visionary narrative that is concerned exclusively with holy figures' tours of the afterlife.<sup>97</sup> Such texts, although probably redacted in the middle Byzantine period, are based on long-standing traditions that may go back to the fourth century or even earlier. The Virgin Mary's tour of paradise and hell, for example, appears in some versions of the Dormition narratives, many of which were known in the early Patristic period.

<sup>88</sup> Shoemaker, 'The Virgin Mary in the ministry of Jesus', 449, n.27. A critical edition is being prepared by Fr. M. Constat.

<sup>89</sup> Epiphanius of Kallistratou, *De Vita b. Virginis*, PG 120, 185B.

<sup>90</sup> Epiphanius of Kallistratou, *De Vita b. Virginis*, PG 120, 216.

<sup>91</sup> Epiphanius of Kallistratou, *De Vita b. Virginis*, PG 120, 197A and 213C.

<sup>92</sup> Epiphanius of Kallistratou, *De Vita b. Virginis*, PG 120, 212–13.

<sup>93</sup> Epiphanius of Kallistratou, *De Vita b. Virginis*, PG 120, 212B.

<sup>94</sup> The former (BHG 115z-117k) is edited by L. Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool* (Uppsala, 1995), vol. 2: *Text, Translation and Notes*. The latter (BHG 264–264f) appears in three separate manuscript versions which are edited in A.N. Veselovskii, 'Razyskaniia v oblasti russkogo dukhonnogo stikha', *Sbornik Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka I slovesnosti Imperatoroskoi akademii nauk* 46 (1889–90), supp., 3–89; 53 (1891–92), supp., 3–174; S.G. Vilinskii, *Zhitie sv. Vasiliia Novago v russkoi literature* (Odessa, 1911), Part 2; *Acta Sanctorum*, 26 March, 20–32; D.F. Sullivan, A.-M. Talbot, and S. McGrath, eds. and trans., *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version* (Cambridge, MA, 2014). See the discussion of these texts in Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 112–20.

<sup>95</sup> Ed. M.R. James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, Texts and Studies 2.3 (Cambridge, 1893), 115–26. For a full list of editions, see Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 425.

<sup>96</sup> Ed. R. Homburg, *Apocalypsis Anastasiae, ad trium codicum auctoritatem Panormitani Ambrosiani Parisini* (Leipzig, 1903).

<sup>97</sup> Here I am following the dating suggested by Jane Baun in her study of this and other Byzantine apocalypses. See especially Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 16–17. Baun notes that medieval apocalypses, including this one, circulated in a bewildering number of languages and versions. For an attempt to classify and date this material, see R. Bauckham, 'The four apocalypses of the Virgin Mary', in idem, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden and Boston, 1998), 332–62.

Jane Baun, in her innovative study of a group of medieval apocalypses, has recently emphasised the extent to which such texts reflect their local settings, expressing down-to-earth problems and ethical issues.<sup>98</sup> For our purposes, the chief interest of the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* is its concern with Mary's interest in redeeming the sinners that she encounters on the course of her journey through Hell. She extends mercy to most of these unfortunate souls (except those who have committed the most terrible crimes), provided that they have faith in the Christian God and have kept his commandments during their lives.<sup>99</sup> The author states that eventually, after not only the 'all-holy' Virgin Mary but also the archangels, angels, apostles, prophets, martyrs, and saints all prayed to God, he consented to allow them rest from their torments during the period of Pentecost.<sup>100</sup> Baun has provided a striking analysis of Mary's role as intercessor in this text.<sup>101</sup> She is an independent matriarch who demands to see the punishments in Hell and acts courageously to reverse them. God the Father, as the righteous Judge whose orders are carried out by his Son, Jesus Christ, reluctantly accedes to her wishes, apparently bowing to the *force majeure* that she, along with all the ranks of angels and saints, comes to represent. This is not a picture of a tender mother prevailing on the affection of her beloved Son or his Father, but rather that of a strong-minded female partner who knows how to get her way! This, along with related texts that began to be compiled a century or two later, represents the culmination of the growing belief in the efficacy of the Mother of God's intercession on behalf of Byzantine Christians. As Baun has suggested, the *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* verges on heterodoxy in the extent to which it depicts the adversarial freedom with which she approaches the Righteous Judge in what Baun describes as the 'Heavenly Establishment'.<sup>102</sup> The gulf between this audacious text and the more restrained sermons and hymns of approximately the same period seems wide indeed.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is time now to draw some conclusions on the basis of the diverse material that has been presented in this chapter. Firstly, it is necessary to reiterate the limits of this brief study, owing both to the large corpus of marian sources that survive from Constantinople in the eighth and ninth centuries and to the need to be concise.<sup>103</sup> The choice of texts from a variety of literary genres, including homiletics, hymnography, hagiography and apocalypses, has offered a chance for comparison on the basis of literary genre. However, it is important to recognize that some genres have not been studied; these include historical sources, such as chronicles, letters, and the Acts of councils. It is likely that if this investigation were expanded to include every available literary source, its conclusions would be even more revealing. Suffice to say that such a study of marian intercession, with focus not only on Constantinople in the eighth and ninth centuries, but throughout the empire (as well as Christian areas under Islamic rule) in the middle and late Byzantine period remains a *desideratum*.

On the basis of the material that has been explored in this chapter, it is possible to draw a few conclusions. It is clear that literary genre plays some part in determining the manner in which the Virgin Mary's intercessory role is invoked in Constantinopolitan texts of the iconoclast period. While acknowledging that the classification of texts into particular genres may be problematic, the variations that appear between, for example, liturgical sermons and apocalypses is striking. In the former, preachers may invoke Mary's protection or intercession, especially in the closing sections of their orations; such passages are, however, carefully interwoven with elucidation and praise of the christological importance of the Theotokos. This is also true of marian hymnography in this period, which reveals close ties with homiletics. Eighth- and ninth-century liturgical writers achieved an extraordinary mixture of theological teaching, intertextual biblical exegesis, encomiastic praise, and penitential supplication in their

<sup>98</sup> Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, esp. 1–6.

<sup>99</sup> James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, 125.28.

<sup>100</sup> James, *Apocrypha Anecdota*, 126.29.

<sup>101</sup> Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 267–318, and esp. 278–9.

<sup>102</sup> Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 272.

<sup>103</sup> It should also be noted here that, in response to the editorial directive to focus primarily on Constantinople in the iconoclastic period (ca. 726–843 CE), this chapter has dealt for the most part with texts that were written in the eighth or first half of the ninth century. Some of the most interesting material, such as George of Nikomedeia's marian sermons, will therefore be treated in more detail in Brubaker's and my forthcoming study. The boundaries of this present chapter have also led to the exclusion of important eighth- and ninth-century liturgical writers such as John of Damascus and Kosmas of Maiuma.

retorical works. While individual preachers or hymnographers of this period may blend these components in different ways, as we have seen, their oeuvre as a whole shows a movement towards emotional and prayerful celebration of the Mother of God that is not yet visible in the works of fifth-century preachers such as Proklos of Constantinople.<sup>104</sup> Apocalypses, meanwhile, display less concern with Mary's christological role and more with her personal qualities and intercessory function. The *Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos* portrays a determined and independent figure who dares to challenge her son, the Righteous Judge, with regard to the fate of dead Christians. Such a view was no doubt inspired by texts on the Dormition, which had circulated for centuries in orthodox circles and had even been accepted as sources for mainstream liturgical writings.<sup>105</sup> Contemporary Lives of saints also reflect this tradition, depicting Mary in the company of other saints, dispensing mercy from her privileged position in heaven.

It is perhaps worth returning to the questions that Jane Baun has posed with regard to the marian cult in the middle Byzantine period.<sup>106</sup> Firstly, we should consider whether, especially in texts such as the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of the celestial hierarchy, with the Virgin Mary taking on an intercessory role as Christ ceases to function in his biblical one as mediator between divinity and humanity.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, it is worth asking, as Baun does, whether two levels of Christian discourse existed in this period, including the official, safely christological form, which is for the most part adopted by preachers and hymnographers, and a more popular one that is in some ways both subversive and heterodox.<sup>108</sup> Do we then have two different Virgins, one of whom is important above all for her role in the incarnation of Christ while the other begins to exercise a surprising degree of autonomy and power? Is the Byzantine Orthodox tradition in fact disjointed in its portrayal of the Mother of God or were her various images successfully incorporated into a composite whole? One key to solving this problem, apart from continuing work on the editing and attribution of middle Byzantine marian texts, may be to establish more clearly the contexts in which these works continued to be read and how seriously their teaching was assimilated by various audiences. We assume, for example, that sermons continued to be used in liturgical settings while hagiography or apocalypses were read outside church or in private. This is a hypothesis that remains to be tested; it is quite possible, as in the case of the *Protoevangelium of James* and the apocryphal accounts of Mary's Dormition, that it will prove to be false.<sup>109</sup>

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the assimilation by Byzantine audiences or readers is a key factor in relation to the various strands of marian devotion that are woven together in different ways in the various literary genres that we have been examining. While it is possible that such audiences heard and enjoyed everything concerning the Mother of God, from christological praise to narratives that are judged today as 'subversive', and were able in a sophisticated way to contextualise this material, it is also arguable that they did not see variations in Mary's treatment by different authors as scandalous. Apart from hints in eighth- and ninth-century sermons that opposition to the marian cult existed, there is no evidence to suggest that ecclesiastical authorities of the middle Byzantine period attempted to suppress texts such as the *The Apocalypse of the Holy Theotokos*. On the contrary, such 'popular' texts appear to have circulated widely, besides being translated into Slavonic, Georgian, Armenian, and other languages. The literary evidence, along with a growing body of material artifacts such as pectoral crosses and icons,<sup>110</sup> suggests that after the end of Iconoclasm, praise of the Mother of God could take many forms. The

<sup>104</sup> N. Constatas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity. Homilies 1–5, Texts and Translations* (Leiden and Boston, 2003).

<sup>105</sup> S. Mimouni, *Les traditions anciennes sur la Dormition et l'Assomption de Marie. Études littéraires, historiques et doctrinales* (Leiden and Boston, 2011); S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>106</sup> See especially her article, 'Discussing Mary's humanity in medieval Byzantium', esp. 66–72.

<sup>107</sup> Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 270.

<sup>108</sup> Baun, *Tales From Another Byzantium*, 279–82.

<sup>109</sup> See P. Tóth, 'Way out of the tunnel? Three hundred years of research on the apocrypha: a preliminary approach', in L. Dolezalova and T. Visy, *Retelling the Bible: Literary, Historical and Social Contexts* (Bern, 2011), 45–84, and especially 46, who points out that many such texts were read publicly in Christian liturgical celebrations throughout the Byzantine period. See also the secondary material that he cites in his note 2, including S.C. Mimouni, 'La lecture liturgique et les apocryphes du Nouveau Testament. Le cas de la *Dormitio* grecque du Pseudo-Jean', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 59 (1993), 403–25, and idem, 'Les *Transitus Mariae* sont-ils vraiment des apocryphes?', *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993), 122–8.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, A. Yeroulanou, 'The Mother of God in jewellery', in Vassilaki, *Mother of God*, 227–35; C. Baltoyanni, 'The Mother of God in portable icons', *ibid.*, 139–53; B. Pitarakis, 'Female piety in context: understanding developments in private devotional practices', in Vassilaki, *Images of the Mother of God*, 153–66.

foundations for this intercessory role, as we have seen, can be found in liturgical texts dating from at least as early as the fourth century;<sup>111</sup> however, as we have seen on the basis of a variety of literary sources, the marian cult gained both official and popular affirmation in Constantinople in the course of the iconoclast controversy and especially after the restoration of images in 843.

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<sup>111</sup> See above, note 3.