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A RECONSIDERATION OF THE APSE OF HAGIA EIRENE

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 2002 and 2006
Certificate in Medieval and Renaissance Studies,
University of Louisville, 2010

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Art History
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2011

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A Thesis Approved on

April 8, 2011

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ABSTRACT

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The mosaic of the cross in the apse of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople is examined in order to determine the imperial patron responsible for its construction. Key points in this study are Orthodox image veneration, Iconoclast doctrine and the events of the era of Byzantine iconoclasm (726-843 C. E.). Supplementing the written evidence is a study of the architecture of Hagia Eirene and what it reveals about the date of the apse mosaic's construction. Other important monuments discussed in comparison with the mosaic in Hagia Eirene include the apse of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki and the now-destroyed apse of the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea. The conclusion is upheld, contrary to what is commonly stated, that the Iconoclast emperor Constantine V was not the patron of the apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene; it was the Orthodox empress Irene.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of patronage must be a primary consideration in the analysis of buildings, monuments, and other works of art produced during the Byzantine period. Identifying the patron of a work can help to establish the work's date and serve as an aid in its interpretation by providing a historical context for its production. This thesis is focused on the patronage of a monumental work located in Constantinople: the apse mosaic in the church of Hagia Eirene. The immense size and prominent location of this church next to Hagia Sophia and adjacent to the imperial palace are indicative of its considerable importance in the Byzantine Empire. The prevailing theory that the Emperor Constantine V was the apse mosaic's patron will be examined and other alternatives considered. An argument for the possibility that the patron of the mosaic was the Empress Irene will be produced. The impetus for this investigation rests on the difficulties associated with accepting that Constantine V commissioned this mosaic, particularly because of the lack of solid supporting evidence and the fact that his memory was accursed to the Byzantine Orthodox who worshiped in the church.

I

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The era during which the apse mosaic in the church of Hagia Eirene is believed to have been executed was one of marked turmoil for the Byzantine Empire. Hagia Eirene was reported to have been destroyed, amongst many other buildings in the Byzantine capital city of Constantinople, by the tremendous earthquake of 740.¹ This natural disaster occurred during the lengthy reign of the Iconoclast Emperor Constantine V, whose recently deceased father, Leo III, was the founder of the Isaurian dynasty and the first Byzantine Emperor to promote iconoclasm as religious reform. Iconoclasts accused iconophile Christians of worshiping images, or being idolaters. Iconophiles maintained the instrumentality of icons in Christian worship and this controversy produced a schism within the church of the Eastern half of the Roman Empire. Vigorous debate and persecutions followed that sometimes resulted in civil war, as partisans from both sides rallied their sympathizers in a bid for success.

Looming as large as the divisions which formed within the Byzantine Empire were the many and varied forces infringing upon its borders. Over the course of about one hundred years following the Emperor Heraclius' conquest of the Persian Empire,

¹Nikephoros, *Breviarum* ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1880) 59, 2-8. Mango, C. trans. *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History* (Washington, D. C., 1990) 129. Also Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 412, 6-16. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 572.

Muslims had wrested all of the Holy Land and North Africa from Byzantine control and even besieged Constantinople at the start of Leo III's reign in 717.² Although the Byzantines weathered this assault, the Arab invaders had penetrated to the very heart of the Empire and threatened the populace at its core. A second trouble for the Byzantine Empire was the increasing distance between Eastern and Western Christendom which had been growing steadily for centuries. This breach deepened significantly during the years of the Iconoclastic Controversy (circa 726-843). Emperor Leo III made a particularly hostile gesture towards the Papacy in his attempt to assert Constantinopolitan authority over the West by seizing the Papal patrimony of Sicily and Calabria.³ This action, along with the iconoclasts' religious views, caused the Pope to begin to look to the Franks for protection instead of the East. On Christmas Day in the year 800 (still in the midst of the Iconoclastic controversy) Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne the Emperor of the West. The imperial authority in Constantinople played no role in this matter and Italy's autonomy from Byzantine control was fortified. The third pressure exerting force upon the fragmented Empire was the various non-Christian nations on the Northern and Eastern Byzantine frontiers. These peoples were hostile to the Byzantines and included Bulgars, Khazars, and Turks. They took advantage of the decreasing military presence of the Empire, which was preoccupied with other fronts, and pushed their way inside the Byzantine borders. Their incursions and settlements further decreased the amount of land, population, and hence the tax revenue available to the Empire. The Turks and the Bulgars remained powerful rivals of the Byzantines until the fall of the Empire in 1453.

²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 396-8. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 545-6.

³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig 1883, 1885) I, 410. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theopanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 568.

Against this tumultuous backdrop it may seem surprising that there was any time or money for Imperial building activity and, on the whole, there does seem to have been a lull. This can be attributed both to a preoccupation with military matters as well as putting down resistance to iconoclasm. The monasteries throughout the Empire were the strongholds of the iconophiles and Constantine V expended much effort in menacing the monks who refused to conform to his new policy. Another difficulty with enforcing the iconoclastic policy was the ease with which icons could be concealed. For example Leo IV discovered that palace officials, possibly including his wife Irene, had been venerating concealed icons within the imperial palace.⁴ The palace officials were beaten, publicly humiliated, and imprisoned; one of them died.⁵ In part, the Iconoclasts' drastic measures against those who venerated icons must have been to terrify anyone who might think of secretly venerating icons.

Iconoclasm was a policy which required unrelenting vigilance and the utmost severity to enforce. Still, some iconoclasts were reported to have engaged in building projects such as Constantine V's rebuilding of the aqueduct system and Theophilus' expansion of the imperial palace; but these were not churches and the iconoclasts were most noted for their defilement and misuse of religious architecture.⁶ Constantine V was infamous for having destroyed, sold, and used church properties as stables, dumps, and

⁴For the question of Irene's involvement see Herrin, J., *Women in Purple* (Princeton, 2001) 71-2. Cf. Kedrenos, G., *Compendium Historiarum*, ed. Bekker, I., *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1838-9) II, 19-20.

⁵Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 453. Mango C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 625.

⁶Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 440. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 607. "...her [St. Eupehemia's] church which he [Constantine V], like the enemy of churches that he was, had profaned by turning it into an arm-store and a dungheap..."

barracks.⁷ Literary sources that attest to church-building activities among the iconoclast emperors are few. Many of these accounts were written later by iconophiles as polemic with the expressed intent of deriding the iconoclasts' approach to the proper adornment of a church. Not only did the vegetal motifs, hunting, and racing scenes attributed to the patronage of iconoclast Emperors draw criticism from the iconophile party as being profane,⁸ even their dedication to the cross became a sticking point. The Patriarch Nikephoros, in his *Antirrhētikos*, argued that to venerate the image of the cross but not the image of Christ was insensible.⁹ From this it can be inferred that the image of a cross, when set up by an iconoclast, could be viewed as an impious image by an iconophile because it was set up in opposition to icons.

As compared with her immediate imperial predecessors and successors, the Empress Irene was a prolific builder of churches. This is not surprising considering that she was an iconophile who had both resources and an agenda. Her building activity won her prestige and popular support, advantages which she desperately needed since she was in an unprecedented position: she was the first female empress to rule on her own, not as regent, over the Byzantine Empire. These circumstances resulted from the premature death of her husband Leo IV and the young age of Leo's son and heir, Constantine VI. Theophanes relates: "...the most pious Irene together with her son Constantine were

⁷Martin, E. J., *History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London, 1930) 64. "Mammon [Constantine V] dared to spoil the churches and raze them to the ground; he made monasteries habitations of demons; he turned churches of God into stables and manure yards, the effects being still visible. Some consecrated places, such as the monasteries of Florus and Callistratus, were sold." Cf. Nikephoros, *Antirrhētikos*, III, *Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Graeca*, ed. Migne, J.-P. (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 493d

⁸*Vita Stephani iunioris* in Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 1120c.

⁹See Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, (Paris, 1857-66), 100, 428c-433a and trans. in Barber, C., *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, 2002) 98-101.

miraculously entrusted by God with the empire so that in this matter also God might be glorified through a widow and her orphan son...”¹⁰ Their joint rule began in 780 but became turbulent as Constantine VI matured and sought to remove Irene from power. In 790 they had their first conflict which resulted in Irene having Constantine flogged.¹¹ Later that same year, after being acclaimed sole emperor by the army, Constantine had Irene confined in a building of her own construction, the palace of Eleutherios.¹² In January of 792 Irene was recalled to the Imperial Palace and again proclaimed co-ruler with Constantine.¹³ This uneasy balance lasted until 797 when Irene became sole ruler as a result of the blinding of Constantine.¹⁴ Naturally, Irene did not want credit for this dramatic deposition of Constantine VI, but her complicity in the matter should not be doubted too much. They had previously been in open conflict and certainly she was involved in a conspiracy to wrest the imperial power from her son. What remains in doubt is precisely what action Irene ordered to be taken against her son, and especially what the results of Constantine’s blinding were. He may have been killed during the rapid course of events but the dark mystery surrounding his fate eventually allowed for a would-be usurper named Thomas the Slav during the reign of Michael II (820-9) to circulate the claim that he was Constantine VI.¹⁵

Her new period of sole rule spanned from 797 to 802. Further complicating the

¹⁰Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 454. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford: 1997) 626.

¹¹Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 465. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 639.

¹²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 467. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 641.

¹³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 467. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 642.

¹⁴Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 472. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 648-9.

¹⁵Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838) 51-2.

situation, she was an iconophile empress which meant that she had iconoclast enemies who sought her demise as well as that of her iconophile partisans. Church patronage provided an opportunity for Irene to make a positive impression on her subjects while promoting her agenda. The most important church standing today that has been securely associated with her patronage is Hagia Sophia in Thessalonike.¹⁶ The evidence for this association is the presence of Irene's and Constantine VI's imperial monograms in the large sanctuary mosaic. Although it has been altered, the apse decoration is still discernible because the gold tesserae used in the second phase do not exactly match the gold tesserae in the background from the first phase. (Figure 1) Irene's commission consisted of a monumental cross with a solid gold background, which bore a striking resemblance to the current apse mosaic of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople. (Figure 2) This similarity provides a reasonable point of departure for a reconsideration of the common assertion that Constantine V was the patron of the apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene.

An exploration of the issue of patronage relies upon an examination of the textual evidence for the Imperial iconoclasts' policies and activities. However, it is difficult to reconstruct a coherent and comprehensive iconoclast policy from the sources, since iconoclast writings were gathered and then destroyed after the Restoration of Orthodoxy.¹⁷ Therefore, the surviving records were composed almost exclusively by iconophiles who were writing either during the controversy or after the official declaration of iconoclasm as a heretical doctrine. In other words, they were strongly biased. A primary example of this unavoidable problem is evidenced in the proceedings

¹⁶Theocharidou, Kalliopi *Architecture of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki* (Oxford, 1988) 162.

¹⁷Mansi, J. D. ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898) XIII, 200d-e and 430b.

of the Sixth Session of the Iconophile Council of 787 which retold and refuted the *Horos* (Definition) of the Iconoclast Council of 754.¹⁸ Obviously, there is room to question the veracity of the iconophiles' account of the iconoclasts' proclamations, but that does not change the fact that there is no firm evidence to disprove the record and no formulation of iconoclast ideas which serves to contradict them.

Among the most interesting literary sources for this period are records concerning the fate of the Chalke image.¹⁹ This image over the gate to the Imperial palace was changed a number of times during the course of the controversy. An analysis of these changes from Christ to cross and back to Christ will be of value as they speak directly to the type of decoration deemed acceptable by the iconoclasts. There is no evidence for the physical appearance of the iconoclasts' Cross on the Chalke gate, but the surviving records of the inscriptions which accompanied the changes in imagery are indicative of the ideology behind the imagery.

Analysis of Imperial coinage of the time will add to the evidence for policy changes in imperial imagery because numismatic iconography changed with each succession in rulership. For this period it is apparent that numismatic iconography was connected with religious policy because Justinian II (685-95, 705-11) placed, for the first time, a bust of Christ on the obverse of Byzantine coinage. This change corresponded

¹⁸Mansi, J. D. ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898) XIII, 204a-364e. Sajas, D. J. trans. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 47-175.

¹⁹See Mango, C. *Brazen House* (Copenhagen, 1959) 112-132 for a detailed presentation and examination of various accounts. Some examples which Mango cites and translates include: Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 405, *The First Letter of Pope Gregory II to Leo III* in Mansi, Giovanni Domenico ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898) XII, 970d-e, and in *Vita Stephani iunioris* in Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 1085c-d. Also *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitinae: Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, ed. Delehaye, H. (Brussels, 1902) 828-30 *Synaxarion Notice of St. Theodosia of Constantinople* trans. Constanas, N. in Talbot, A.-M. ed. *Byzantine Defenders of Images* (Washington, D. C., 1998) 5-7.

with Canon 82 of the Council of Trullo (692) that Christ be depicted only in human form.²⁰ Christ's bust was soon replaced by the elevated Cross that had preceded it, which was favored by the iconoclasts. After the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843), the iconophile emperors once again stamped a bust of Christ on the obverse, representing a return to pre-Iconoclastic trends. That Irene retained an image of the elevated Cross on some coinage during her rule supports the claim that she was an iconophile and yet still strongly associated with the image of the Cross.

The final evidence that will be presented is Kluge's photograph of the apse of the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea (Figure 3) in connection with Underwood's study of the mosaics.²¹ The much analyzed photograph of the apse mosaic shows evidence of the changes which occurred in the decoration over time. This evidence can be used to support the claim that iconoclast decoration was removed after their defeat. To be clear, it should not be assumed that it was removed because it was a cross, but because it was an image set up by the iconoclasts to replace an image that iconoclasts considered to be unacceptable. The cross mosaic which is visible in early photographs can also be compared to those that existed in Thessaloniki and Constantinople. Unlike the existing mosaics, from the photographic evidence it can be determined that there was no compensation made for the distorting effect that the curvature of the apse would have had on the horizontal cross arms, suggesting that iconoclast work may have been performed hastily, by workers with less experience, or with little concern for its appearance.

It will be argued that Constantine V, hateful as his memory became to the

²⁰Mansi, J. D. ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898) XI, 977. Mango C. trans. *Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto, 1986) 139-40.

²¹Underwood, P. A. "The Evidence of Restorations in the Sanctuary Mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 235-44.

Byzantines, is unlikely to have been the patron of such a conspicuous mosaic as the one in Hagia Eirene. Aside from his violent monastic persecutions and iconoclasm, Constantine V went down in history as someone who tried to destroy fundamental institutions of the Orthodox church such as veneration of the saints,²² relic veneration,²³ and the title of the Theotokos.²⁴ It is far more likely, based upon the evidence, that Irene was the patron responsible for the cross image in the apse of Hagia Eirene.

The primary sources that will be employed to support these claims consist primarily of Byzantine chronicles and texts that participated directly in the Iconoclastic debate. The secondary sources are divided between archaeological surveys of the monuments under discussion, reconstructions of the historical period, and sources concerned with the actual arguments adduced during the controversy: those probing the nature of the image.

²²Nikephoros, *Antirrhети*, II, *Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Graeca*, ed. Migne, J.-P. (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 341d. Translated in Martin, E. J. *History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London, 1930) 62. "He [Constantine V] abolished the use of the title Saint and said the Theotokos could help no one after death, and that the saints had no power of intercession, their martyrdom helping only themselves and saving their own souls from punishment."

²³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 439-40. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 607. Also Nikephoros, *Antirrhети*, II, *Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Graeca*, ed. Migne, J.-P. (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 344a.

²⁴Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 415. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 576.

II

CHRONOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS FOR THE ICONOCLASTIC PERIOD

The general sequence of historical events during the Iconoclastic Period can be reliably reconstructed from literary sources. The correspondence of the Patriarch Germanus, the Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor, the writings of the Patriarch Nicephorus and Theodore the Studite monk, and the records of the Church Councils of 754, 787, and 815 provide sufficiently detailed information regarding the activities of the Byzantine rulers, aristocracy, army, and clergy.¹ Traditionally the years included in the age of Byzantine Iconoclasm were 726-843, with a hiatus from 787-815. The earliest date for Leo III's revealing his antipathy towards icons is recorded by Theophanes the Confessor in an entry for the dates from September 1, 724 to September 1, 725. Leo III had the icon of Christ removed from the gates of the imperial palace in 726.² The iconoclastic movement gained power in 730 when Leo III issued an official iconoclastic decree and the iconophile Patriarch Germanus was succeeded by the iconoclast Patriarch Anastasios.³

Although Constantinople became the center of the iconoclastic movement, iconoclasm had roots elsewhere. Prior to Leo's profession of his iconoclastic beliefs

¹For an extensive list of the primary literary sources see Haldon, J. and Herrin, J. ed. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Oxford:1997).

²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 405. Mango, C. and Scott, R. Trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 559.

³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 408-9. Mango, C. and Scott, R. Trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 565.

there were other iconoclasts in and around the Byzantine Empire. The bishops Thomas of Claudiopolis, John of Sinada, and Constantine of Nacolia were iconoclasts with whom the Patriarch Germanus was familiar and, Thomas and Constantine, having each made official visits to the capital, may have influenced Leo III's opinions⁴. Also, the Arab Emir Yezid ordered an iconoclastic campaign against Christians who lived in his domain only a few years before Leo III began his own.

Iconoclasm was not declared an official Church policy in the Byzantine Empire until the Council of Hieria in 754. For roughly three decades then, iconoclasm was an attempt to impose imperial power upon the Church. After the iconoclastic edict of 730, the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V used this imperial decree to either force bishops to accept iconoclasm or be replaced by an iconoclast.⁵ The iconophile inhabitants of Byzantine monasteries suffered even more for their convictions. Once iconoclasm became both imperial and Church policy, the destruction of images and the persecution of those who would not accept the iconoclastic doctrine were rampant. The prohibitions of the iconoclasts included making or venerating images of Christ, the Theotokos, and the Saints. Constantine V went beyond the decisions of the Council of Hieria, over which he presided, by destroying relics of saints and waging war against monastic habit, as the Patriarch Nikephoros reported: "The attack fell most severely on the holy order of the monks" whom Constantine V dubbed "the idolaters worthy to be forgotten forever".⁶

⁴The Patriarch Germanus addressed epistles in defense of icons to each of these iconoclast bishops. *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, series Graeco-Latina, ed. Migne, J. -P. (Paris, 1857-66) 98, 156B-188B.

⁵Nikephoros, *Breviarum* ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1880) 62, 1-8. Mango, C. Trans. *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History* (Washington, D. C., 1990) 131.

⁶Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, 195, summarised in Alexander, P. J., *Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford, 1958) 247. *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, series Graeca, ed. Migne, J.-P. (Paris, 1857-66) 100, 981d and 517a. Trans. in Martin, E. J., *History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London, 1930) 54.

Constantine V's tyrannic persecution of monks steadily intensified over the course of his reign, which lasted until 775.

When Irene assumed the throne for her son in 780, the iconoclasts' activity officially ceased. However, the iconoclastic party maintained partisans in the ranks of the army, including enough to disrupt Irene's first attempt at an Ecumenical Council in 786.⁷ Once Irene discharged her iconoclast enemies from the army, the Council of Hieria was overturned in 787 by the Second Council of Nicaea which reinstated the veneration of icons. The Council of St. Sophia, assembled during the reign of Leo V in 815, reversed the decision of 787 and again proclaimed iconoclasm as the position of the Church. The persecution of the iconophiles resumed. In 842, following the early death of the last iconoclast emperor, Theophilos, his wife, the iconophile Empress Theodora assumed the throne as regent for the five year-old Emperor Michael III. This event was followed by the replacement of the iconoclast Patriarch John with the iconophile confessor Methodios, and culminated in the Triumph of Orthodoxy on March 11, 843. This heralded the final restoration of icons to the Church and closed the book on the Iconoclastic Controversy in the Byzantine Empire.

In the beginning of the movement, during the reign of Leo III, iconoclasts attacked icons on the basis of the second commandment given by God to Moses: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down to serve them..."⁸ This claim was thwarted by the Orthodox with the common

⁷Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 461. Mango, C. and Scott, R. Trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 635.

⁸Exodus 20:4-5 (King James version).

sense reply that Mosaic law prohibited the making of idols, and that icons and idols are not the same. The key to this argument was the Orthodox explanation that an idol was the form of a false god, while an icon was understood to be the likeness of a holy person. The iconoclasts' accusation was further reprieved by pointing out that God commanded Moses to have images made for the ark and tabernacle.⁹ Probably because of the effectiveness of the Orthodox response to the iconoclasts' accusation, the charge of idolatry against those who venerated icons was eventually dropped from the iconoclasts' argument.¹⁰ By the time of the Iconoclasts' Council of 754, their argument had turned from the Old Testament prohibition to its final target: Orthodox Christology. Orthodox Christology states:

“Thus, He [Christ] was in all things and above all things, and at the same time He was existing in the womb of the holy Mother of God, but He was there by the operation of the Incarnation. And so, He was made flesh and took from her the first-fruits of our clay, a body animated by a rational and intellectual soul, so that the very Person of God the Word was accounted to the flesh. And the Person of the Word which formerly had been simple was made composite. Moreover, it was a composite from two perfect natures, divinity and humanity. And it had that characteristic and distinctive property of sonship by which God the Word is distinct from the Father and the Spirit, and also had those characteristic and distinctive properties of the flesh by which He is distinct both from His Mother and from the rest of men. It further had those properties of the divine nature in which He is one with the Father and the Spirit, and also had those features of human nature in which he is one with His Mother and with us. Moreover, He differs from the Father and the Spirit and from His Mother and us in yet another way, by his being at once both God and man. For this we recognize as a most peculiar property of the Person of Christ.”¹¹

Constantine V put forth the notion that an icon of Christ, by circumscription, must

⁹Exodus 25:18–20.

¹⁰The Iconoclast Council of 815, which ratified the Iconoclast Council of 754, went so far as to explicitly state that they did not consider icons to be idols.

¹¹St. John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith: Book 3*, trans. F. H. Chase Jr. *Fathers of the Church* vol. 37, 282.

either divide the divinity of Christ from the humanity or it must circumscribe the divinity.

From Constantine V's reign until the controversy was finally resolved, the circumscribability of Christ became the central issue of the debate. The iconoclasts added that, if icons of Christ were illicit, then all icons (those of Saints and the Theotokos, too) were to be condemned.¹² The argument against Christ's icon arose from the observation that to depict Christ is to circumscribe Christ. Therefore, the iconoclasts stated, since Christ as God has the divine property of being uncircumscribable, the icon of Christ must either depict His divinity, confusing the human and divine natures, or His humanity, dividing the two natures. The Orthodox refutation of this claim was that the divinity of Christ was hypostatically united to the humanity of Christ by the Incarnation such as to retain all of its divine qualities, one of those being uncircumscribability. However, to deny that Christ was circumscribable would deny Him an attribute of his human nature, that of circumscribability. The Orthodox pointed out that the iconoclasts' own position on icons, as made clear by the dilemma they presented, was heretical because they denied the hypostatic union of the Incarnation that preserved both of Christ's natures completely intact in His Person. If the iconoclasts believed that Christ's icon circumscribed His divinity, then they held Monophysite views and confused Christ's natures. If they believed that the icon shows only Christ's humanity and divides the two natures, then they introduce a division into the hypostatic union and add a fourth person to the Trinity. The Orthodox demonstrated that Christ's icon did not divide His two natures because there is a difference of essence between an icon and its prototype; that is, an icon circumscribes only the visible aspect of a person. An icon is wood and paint, not

¹²Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898)13: 272 D-E. Trans. in Sajas, D. J. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 100.

flesh and blood; it has no soul. It therefore could not be held that an icon divides Christ's humanity from his divinity. However, insofar as the icon shows the likeness of Christ in the flesh, it shows the divine nature circumscribed, the Incarnation of the Word.

Some purely logical argumentation was employed by contestants in the Iconoclastic debate. Although few sources remain that were issued by the iconoclasts, it is indicated that the iconoclast side first resorted to categorical reasoning against the legitimacy of the icon and this forced the iconophiles' logical refutations.¹³ Theodore the Studite monk at the start of his *First Refutation of the Iconoclasts* commented on the iconoclasts' appeal to reason in these terms, "You try to evade our [the iconophiles'] argument with non-argument, to refute what is undemonstrated by your demonstration and what is illogical with your logic."¹⁴ This quotation suggests the impropriety of the iconoclasts' attempt to employ logic in the field of theology. "What is undemonstrated" and "what is illogical" refers to the dogma (Orthodox church's teaching) of the Trinity and the Incarnation, matters of faith which are beyond demonstration and logic. It also shows that the iconoclasts' convictions undermined fundamental precepts of the Orthodox faith. The ultimate test of a statement's truth had to be based upon its consonance with Scripture and Patristic texts. Some arguments consisted entirely of quotations from Scriptural and Patristic sources. A compilation of this sort is called a florilegium, and a florilegium was composed by each of the Church Councils convened during the Iconoclastic Period. Iconoclasts and iconophiles both wanted to show that their views were not innovative and could be traced to the foundation of the Church, as

¹³Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, 225, summarised in Alexander, P. J., *Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford, 1958) 253.

¹⁴Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons* trans. Roth., C. (Crestwood, 2001) 23.

this would lend essential credibility to their positions.

Both sides managed to find Biblical and Patristic sources to support their views. The iconophiles' critique of the iconoclasts' florilegia was that they misunderstood and misapplied Scriptural quotations. The iconophiles offered their own interpretation of the iconoclasts' quotes, and argued that the iconoclasts had either purposely or ignorantly distorted the meaning of their Patristic sources. If the iconoclasts' chosen Patristic authority was arguing against the use of icons, then the iconophiles stated that their authority was a heretic. This was the case with both Eusebius of Pamphilus and Epiphanius.¹⁵

John Chrysostom serves as an excellent example of an eminent Patristic Authority who was quoted by both iconoclasts and iconophiles. The iconoclasts, in the *Horos* of the Council of 754, quoted from John's *Epistle to St. Gregory*:

"We enjoy the presence of the saints through their writings, thus having the icons not of their bodies but of their souls. For, what has been said by them are icons of their souls. The study of writings inspired by God, St. Basil said, is a most effective way of discovering what is proper. For in them one can find the deposits of the deeds as well as the biographies of blessed men, handed down like animate icons of the conduct according to God, placed in front for the imitation of the works which are in accordance with the will of God."¹⁶

This quote, as the iconoclasts would have it, meant that John Chrysostom opposed icons of saints and, instead, supported written records of their deeds. However, the quote does not explicitly state any opposition to icons. The iconophiles pointed out that fact and quoted further evidence from another of John's writings: "I have also loved the

¹⁵For Eusebius' refutation see Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898)13: 313-7. Trans. in Sajas, D. J. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 134-8. For Epiphanius' refutation see Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, 206-8, summarised in Alexander, P. J., *Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford, 1958) 249-50.

¹⁶Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898)13: 300 A-B. Trans. in Sajas, D. J. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 123.

painting on melted wax for reasons of piety. For I saw on an icon an angel pushing hordes of barbarians and barbarian races being traded. Thus I saw what David said truthfully: *O Lord in thy city thou wilt despise their image.*"¹⁷

A fundamental precept for the defenders of icons was that "the honor rendered to the image belongs to the prototype."¹⁸ It follows from this assertion that the destruction of Christ's icon, or the icon of any holy person, was an assault on the person represented in the icon. After establishing the validity of the veneration of the icon of Christ, it fell upon the Orthodox to contend with the Iconoclasts' claim that worship was due only to God and that to venerate the icon of a saint or the Virgin was a form of idolatry.¹⁹ St. John of Damascus refuted this with the concept of relative veneration. He argued that images of the saints and the Virgin were due veneration because of their degree of relative participation in divinity. Here again the iconoclasts' conviction that the image of the cross was worthy of veneration became instrumental in the downfall of their argument. Since the image of the Cross was capable of being venerated through its participation with divinity, the same was true of all the holy icons. Denying the relative veneration of the icons of saints and the Virgin, but allowing that of the Cross, meant that they must deny the saints' and Virgin's participation in divinity.

This evidence amounts to the fact that the Byzantine Iconoclastic Emperors, especially Constantine V, were held by the Byzantines to have been violent persecutors

¹⁷Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898)13: 300 C-D. Trans. in Sajas, D. J. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 123-4. From John Chrysostom, *That the law-giver of both, the Old and the New Testament is one. Also on the vestments of the priest; and on repentance*, in *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, series Graeco-Latina, ed. Migne, J. -P. (Paris, 1857-66) 56, 407.

¹⁸St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17: 44F in *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, series Graeco-Latina, ed. Migne, J. -P. (Paris, 1857-66) 32, 149.

¹⁹Mansi, G. D., ed. *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-1898)13: 277 C-E. Trans. in Sajas, D. J. *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 105.

and illicit, unlearned, heretical interlopers in Church affairs. This fact bears directly upon the question of patronage for the apse in Hagia Eirene because it shows that the Iconoclastic Emperors were held responsible for the Iconoclastic heresy and persecution. That Constantine V was considered an enemy of Orthodoxy, while Irene was considered a champion of Orthodoxy, is apparent from Orthodox authors of the primary sources for the Iconoclastic Period. It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that the Empress Irene's commissioned work would have been preserved in an Orthodox Church of Imperial patronage, while Constantine V's commissioned work would not have been.

III

HAGIA EIRENE AND THE FIRST PHASE OF BYZANTINE ICONOCLASM

(717-780)

Before the founding of Constantinople there was a church in Byzantium where Hagia Eirene stands today. With the transfer of the capital of the Roman empire to Byzantium, that church “was enlarged and beautified by the Emperor [Constantine I] in order to fit it for its place in the grander world of Constantinople.”¹ Constantine’s edifice stood until it was burned to the ground during the Nika Riot in 532.² Justinian I rebuilt Hagia Eirene again sometime before 564 when its outer court and narthex were burned in another fire.³ No further damage to the structure is recorded until the Iconoclastic period.

According to the analysis of W. S. George, the huge earthquake that occurred in Constantinople on October 26, 740 “seems to have shaken down or rendered unstable all the upper parts of [Hagia Eirene], but to have left the narthex, the gallery above it, and the lower part of the walls still standing.”⁴ He notes elsewhere: “A consideration of the structural evidence at S. Eirene suggests that the upper part of the bema, and therefore the mosaic, cannot be earlier than the Iconoclastic period.”⁵ The terminus post quem for the execution of the apse mosaic is October 26, 740. From that date until 780 the Byzantine

¹Van Millingen, A. in George, W. S., *Church of Saint Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 1. Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. unknown (London, 1874) 96.

²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 181. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 277.

³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 240. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 353.

⁴George, W. S., *Church of Saint Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 70.

⁵George, W. S., *Church of Saint Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 54.

Empire was ruled by four emperors and, therefore, during these four decades there were four possible patrons who may have been responsible for the rebuilding of this important church.⁶ In chronological order, the rulers and their regnal years were: Leo III from 717-741, Artavasdos from 741-743, Constantine V from 743-775, and Leo IV from 775-780.

On June 18, 741 Leo III died with slightly less than eight months having passed since the destruction of Hagia Eirene.⁷ During those months between the earthquake and his death, Leo raised taxes in order to repair damage inflicted by the earthquake in Constantinople. Theophanes specifies that this money was levied for the restoration of the land walls.⁸ Bricks from the fortifications have been found with stamps that indicate this project continued during the joint rule of Constantine V and Leo IV.⁹ The amount of time required to repair the walls might indicate either heavy damage from the earthquake or an investment to improve on the strength of the walls, given the fairly recent siege of the capital by the Arabs. Whatever the case may have been, defending the city was Leo III's main concern and the repair of Hagia Eirene is not recorded in the sources.

However, it is possible that Leo III at least initiated the reconstruction of Hagia Eirene before his death. He was in the city, not campaigning against any of the Byzantine

⁶Concerning the importance of Hagia Eirene to Constantinopolitan affairs: Van Millingen, A. in George, W. S., *Church of Saint Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 2. "Until the year 360, when the Church of S. Sophia was opened to public worship by the Emperor Constantius, S. Eirene appears to have been the cathedral of the city. From this, probably, came the name sometimes given to it, the Patriarchate... Nor did the church lose its primacy altogether even after the erection of S. Sophia. On the contrary, the two churches were regarded as forming one sanctuary; they were enclosed within the same court, served by the same clergy, and known by the same name, 'the great Church'..."Van Millingen notes two sources in this passage. For the epithet "Patriarchate" see Bansuri, A., *Imperium Orientale, sive Antiquitates Constantinopolitanae* (Paris, 1711) II, 52. For "the same clergy" see Krueger, P. ed., *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Novella III*, Ch. 1, 1 (Berlin, 1888).

⁷Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 413. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 572.

⁸Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 412. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 572.

⁹Foss, C., *Byzantine Fortifications* (Pretoria, 1986) 53-4.

Empire's enemies, and, presumably, a Byzantine emperor with the opportunity and resources would not let such a prominent structure remain in ruins on imperial property unless there were even more pressing concerns. Moreover, regarding the monumental cross mosaic in Hagia Eirene, there is evidence that Leo was especially fond of the cross. For example, in 726, Leo ordered the destruction of the icon of Christ on the Imperial Palace gates and put a cross in its place.¹⁰ This significant act on Leo's part marked the beginning of an imperial policy of iconoclasm and the cross became its preferred symbol. The accompanying inscription for the cross was a poem entitled: "At the Chalke Gate, underneath the Cross." It read: "The ruler does not tolerate that Christ be depicted [as] a voiceless shape and bereft of breath, with earthly matter, [which is] condemned by the scriptures; Leo, with his son Constantine, marks the thrice-blessed image of the cross, the glory of believers, upon the gates of the royal palaces."¹¹

The best arguments in favor of Leo III's patronage of Hagia Eirene are: he was the first ruler to have an opportunity to rebuild the church and he was associated with the cult of the cross. Aside from the Chalke Gate inscription, this association can be made based upon records of Leo's actions during the siege of 717. Upon receiving a threatening letter from the Arab general, Leo replied: "If the rod of Moses, which was the archetype of the cross of Christ, made Pharaoh sink, even more the [banner] of the holy cross will destroy you." Subsequently it was recorded: "And the king [Leo III] himself took the

¹⁰Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 412. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 572.

¹¹Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), 99, 437c. Gero, S. trans. in *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain, 1973) 114-5. See also Mango, C., *Brazen House* (Copenhagen, 1959) 122-125 for a discussion that argues that the iconoclast poem should be considered the inscription which accompanied Leo V's Cross over the Imperial Palace Gate. There is reason to suppose that this inscription was used by both Leo III and Leo V, the latter being known to imitate the former.

unconquerable standard upon his shoulders...The king struck with the standard of the cross the waters of the sea, saying thrice, 'Help us, Christ, Savior of the World'."¹² This account provides evidence for Leo's devotion to the cross before his eventual adoption of an iconoclastic position. Further support could be adduced from the failure of Byzantine sources to mention those responsible for the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene. It might be assumed that, if Leo III (or another iconoclast) were the patron of Hagia Eirene, the succeeding generations of iconophile Byzantines would have wanted to suppress this information. However, it stands to reason that the iconophiles would have also wanted to remove any decoration installed by the iconoclasts.

The main evidence against assigning the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene to Leo III is the short span of time that elapsed between the earthquake and Leo's death, and there is no surviving church decoration ascribed to the patronage of Leo III.¹³ This could be due to the fact that the work he had installed was removed, as was the case with his Chalke cross, or, more likely, that Leo III was not a significant patron of church buildings.

Literary sources do not contradict this conclusion: there are many accounts of Leo's iconoclastic measures but none attribute the foundation of a church in the capital to him. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that Leo III's last building effort was the re-fortification of Constantinople.

Leo III intended for his son and co-emperor Constantine V to be heir to the Byzantine throne. Artavasdos, Leo's son-in-law and general of the Opsikian theme (this

¹²Stephen of Taron, *Universal History* ed. S. Malxaseancc, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg, 1885) 127-30. Gero, S. trans. in *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain, 1973) 135-6.

¹³The monasteries of St. Anne and Spoude in Constantinople were attributed to the patronage of Leo's wife, Anne; that is as closely as Leo III can be associated with the patronage of ecclesiastical buildings in Constantinople. Ruggieri, V., *Byzantine Religious Architecture (582-867)* (Rome, 1991) 188, 195.

was the largest theme in the Byzantine army), used his powerful position to claim the throne for himself. When Constantine V entered the Opsikion region with his army on a campaign against the Arabs, Artavasdos and Constantine V, with their respective armies clashed. When Artavasdos's side emerged victorious, Constantine fled to the Anatolic theme for protection.¹⁴ Having removed Constantine V from power, Artavasdos controlled the throne and city of Constantinople while battling with Constantine V for roughly two years before he was forced to flee.¹⁵ Although his reign was brief and turbulent, Artavasdos is noted to have quickly reversed Leo III's ban on icons and restored their place in the churches.¹⁶

For Artavasdos to have chosen the cross as decoration for the apse of Hagia Eirene might seem somewhat at odds with his iconophile sympathies because the cross was a symbol particularly associated with the iconoclastic tendencies of his immediate predecessor, Leo III, and his son, Constantine V, from whom Artavasdos would have wished to distance himself. On the other hand, Artavasdos would not have been violating the iconophiles' principles by depicting the cross, so it would have been a safe choice given his position. Artavasdos may have acquiesced to the iconophiles' wishes to restore icons in order to gain their support in opposition to Constantine V's iconoclast adherents. Artavasdos's coinage does not change from the elevated cross and emperor portrait reinstated by Leo III following the significant numismatic changes instituted during Justinian II's reign, but this could have been done out of expediency. Perhaps Artavasdos

¹⁴Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 414. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 575.

¹⁵Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 414-20. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 575-81.

¹⁶*Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History*, trans., Mango, C. (Washington, D. C., 1990) 135.

played to both sides of the image debate in his short bid for dominance.

Artavasdos's reign can best be described as a struggle for survival and this works against the possibility of his patronage in Hagia Eirene. His iconophile sympathies do not seem to support the idea much either because after having restored icons to the churches, he could have celebrated this triumph over iconoclasm by setting up one of the images they had prohibited in Hagia Eirene. The only real argument to be made for Artavasdos's involvement in the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene is that he may have had the time and opportunity: he was the second emperor to have a chance to restore the church and, technically, had more time to do so than his predecessor, if not the opportunity. The best argument against his involvement in rebuilding the church is that his reign was too insecure, disorganized and preoccupied with battling Constantine V to engage in any large scale building projects.

Theophanes recorded the circumstances of Constantine's re-accession as follows:

"On the evening of November 2, [743] Constantine suddenly moved his troops against the land wall in battle array and took the city [Constantinople]. While it was still possible Artavasdos and the Patrician Baktangios boarded a naval vessel for the theme of the Opsikion. They went to the fortress of Pouzanes, in which they shut themselves up. The Emperor overcame them; he blinded Artavasdos and his two sons, but decapitated Baktangios in the Kynegion and hung his head on the Milion for three days."¹⁷

This bloody transition occurred a little more than three years after the collapse of Hagia Eirene. If it had not yet been rebuilt, Constantine V could have begun reconstruction immediately upon his re-installation as emperor. His first recorded act was to mete out a series of punishments to those who had conspired against him; and one year

¹⁷Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 420. Turtledove, H. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes* (Philadelphia, 1982) 110.

lapsed before Constantine resumed the Byzantine campaign against the Arabs.¹⁸ It was a particularly opportune time for him to do so because the Arab armies had been fighting each other in a power struggle that started in 743 with Yazid's murder of the Arab leader al-Walid.¹⁹ Throughout 747 and 748 the bubonic plague ravaged the Empire and so devastated the capital city that Constantine was obliged to repopulate Constantinople with citizens from other parts of the Empire.²⁰ Thus, it seems unlikely that Constantine, during these troubled early years of his reign, would have prioritized the rebuilding and decoration of Hagia Eirene.

Another instance of Constantine V's repopulation of the capital occurred in 766 when a serious drought struck the city.²¹ He sensibly undertook the rebuilding of a major aqueduct that had been wrecked during the Avars' siege of Constantinople in 626. In order to execute this project, Constantine was obliged to employ: "from Asia and Pontos 1,000 masons and 200 plasterers, from Hellas and the islands 500 clay workers, and from Thrace itself 5,000 labourers and 200 brickmakers."²² The necessity of importing workmen for this project argues against the idea of Constantine V's building of churches prior to this time. As Treadgold observes, "That he [Constantine V] could not find skilled labor closer to hand showed how little building had been going on before him."²³

¹⁸Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 422. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 584.

¹⁹Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 418-9. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 580.

²⁰See Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 423-4. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 585-6 for the devastation. See Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 429. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 593 for the resettlement.

²¹Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 440. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 608.

²²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 440. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 608.

²³Treadgold, W., *History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997) 401.

For many years prior to the completion of Cornell University's dendrochronological research project in 1995, it had been supposed that Constantine V rebuilt Hagia Eirene around the time that the Iconoclastic Council of 754 was convened. This was the prevailing theory largely because, by that date, Constantine had firm control of the Byzantine state and was directing his attention towards church affairs. He was no longer preoccupied with insurrection, external threats to the Empire, or natural disasters. Cornell University's dendrochronological investigation strengthens this theory because the dating of the wood sample taken, presumably,²⁴ from the wooden tie-beam system used in the aisles of the reconstructed church indicates that the tree was cut down no earlier than 753.²⁵ The study notes that some of the outermost rings are missing, which may push the date of the tree's felling forward. If the wood samples in the Cornell University study are the same as those studied previously in Kuniholm's and Striker's work in the late 1970's, they were extracted from the south nave arcade. Further, their conclusions are relevant in that the samples were from trees in the same area of the forest (meaning that the dating of the other beams used in the reconstruction coincides with the sample) and that the timbers were all installed soon after their felling.²⁶ This last fact emphasizes the close correlation of the date that the wood was cut with its usage in the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene.

Even with this secure dating of the wood used for the reconstruction there are strong reasons to question Constantine's patronage of the church's surviving decoration.

²⁴There is no indication of where in Hagia Eirene the wood sample was taken from in my copy of Kuniholm's 1995 report.

²⁵P. I. Kuniholm, 'New Tree-Ring Dates for Byzantine Buildings', *Byzantine Studies Conference Abstracts of Papers* 21 (1995) 35.

²⁶Peschlow, U., *Die Irenenkirche in Istanbul: Untersuchungen zur Architektur* (Tubingen, 1977) 240.

The main problem with accepting a date of 753 or slightly later for the mosaic in the apse of Hagia Eirene is how definitely it would have linked the apse's an-iconic decoration with Constantine V's iconoclast silention in 753²⁷ and the condemned Council of Hieria in 754. This council, which claimed to be ecumenical, promulgated a policy of iconoclasm for the entire Christian church. If Constantine celebrated the temporary triumph of his iconoclastic policies by rebuilding and redecorating Hagia Eirene, then the apse mosaic he commissioned would dramatically connect Iconoclasm, the Emperor, and the Patriarch. Why would those who wished to dispose of reminders of Constantine's policies not have targeted this cross? It would be a glaring exception to the widespread suppression of Imperial iconoclastic monuments and documents.

Constantine V's connection with the cult of the cross is less frequently attested than his father's, but there are a few instances in which he can be connected with a specific interest in the cross as a decorative motif. Nikephoros quotes from Constantine V's *Enquiries*: "We bow down before the figure of the cross because of him who was stretched out upon it."²⁸ Also the *Letter of St. Nilus to Olympiodorus* (late fourth or early fifth century) was part of the iconoclasts' florilegium that had been assembled at their Council in 754, which Constantine V convened. The primary use of this epistle for the iconoclasts was its assertion that the cross alone should be depicted in the apse of a church.²⁹ Problematically, much of the rest of the letter expresses disapproval of secular

²⁷Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 427. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 591.

²⁸Nikephoros, *Antirrheticus*, ed. Migne, J. -P., *Patrologia cursus completus, Series Graeca*, (Paris, 1844-66) 100, 425d. Barber, C., trans. *Figure and Likeness* (Princeton, 2002) 90.

²⁹Nikephoros, *Refutatio and eversio*, ed. Featherstone, J. CCSG (Brepols, 1997) 33, 248. Barber, C., trans. *Figure and Likeness* (Princeton, 2002) 89, "What you have spoken of appears childish and infantile. It will lead to wandering eyes and is more than sufficient for a man of sound judgement. It is enough according to ordained ecclesiastical tradition, for a cross to be inscribed in the sanctuary; for the whole race of man has been saved by the cross. The remainder of the house should be whitewashed."

scenes such as hunting and animal motifs, while also directly approving of icons.³⁰

Neither the approval of icons nor the disapproval of secular scenes in churches accord well with other sources on Constantine V's policies, which is apparently why the iconoclasts distorted the character of the writing to exclude those points and even added the detail about white-washing the church. Another source which connects Constantine V with cross imagery claims that he destroyed an image of the *Annunciation* in the apse of the Chalkoprateia church and replaced it with a cross. According to the same report, "Having removed the cross, the iconophile patriarch Tarasios (784-806) restored the images of Christ and his mother."³¹

These three examples of Constantine V's dedication to the cross show that it is quite possible that he would have decorated the apse of Hagia Eirene with a monumental cross mosaic; but the last example shows the alacrity with which his work was removed by the iconophiles. It was not only his commissioned artworks that were treated with derision. Following the Triumph of Orthodoxy, Constantine V's remains were burned by

³⁰Nilus of Sinai, *Letter to Olympiodorus*, Migne, J. -P. ed., *Patrologia cursus completus, Series graeca* (Paris, 1844-66) Mango, C. trans., *Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Toronto, 1986) 32-3, "Being, as you are, about to construct a large church in honor of the holy martyrs, you inquire of me in writing whether it be fitting to set up their images in the sanctuary inasmuch as they have borne testimony of Christ by their martyrs' feats, their labors and their sweat; and to fill the walls, those on the right and those on the left, with all kinds of animal hunts so that one might see snares being stretched on the ground, fleeing animals, such as hares, gazelles and others, while the hunters, eager to capture them, pursue them with their dogs; and also nets being lowered into the sea, and every kind of fish being caught and carried on shore by hands of the fishermen; and furthermore to exhibit a variety of stucco-work so as to delight the eye in God's house; and lastly, to set up in the nave a thousand crosses and the pictures of different birds and beast, reptiles and plants. In answer to this inquiry may I say that it would be childish and infantile to distract the eyes of the faithful with the aforementioned [trivialities]. It would be, on the other hand, the mark of a firm and manly mind to represent a single cross in the sanctuary, i.e., at the east of the most-holy church, for it is by virtue of the one salutary cross that humankind is being saved and hope is being preached everywhere to the hopeless; and to fill the church on both sides with pictures from the Old and New Testaments, executed by an excellent painter, so that the illiterate who are unable to read the Holy Scriptures, may, by gazing at the pictures, become mindful of the manly deeds of those who have genuinely served the true God..."

³¹Brubaker, L., and Haldon, J. *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (Birmingham, 2001) 23.

the emperor Michael III and the Empress Theodora.³² This ignominious fate is commensurate with that of his polemical writings.³³ Shortly after the burning of his remains and the destruction of his sarcophagus, Constantine V's Pharos Chapel, on imperial property, was re-dedicated and redecorated by Michael and Theodora.³⁴ Certainly, it would merit some explanation or comment in the sources if this most conspicuous mosaic in Hagia Eirene, erected by Constantine V, was left unaltered. It seems highly unlikely that Tarasios would selectively remove one of Constantine's cross mosaics in one church and leave another for posterity in Constantinople's second largest church. It is difficult to imagine the succession of Orthodox Patriarchs, for hundreds of years after the condemnation of iconoclastic doctrine, performing the liturgy for their congregation in Hagia Eirene, with Constantine V's giant cross mosaic looming overhead. A church council held in Constantinople in 869-70 proclaimed in their seventh canon that: "Setting up holy and venerable icons and teaching the similar disciplines of divine and human wisdom are very beneficial. It is not good if this is done by those who are not worthy. For this reason no one is to paint the holy churches who has been anathematized by what has been decreed..."³⁵ Those who held iconoclastic beliefs, such as Constantine V, were anathematized by the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea at the closing of the fourth session.³⁶

There is another architectural feature of the building which deserves consideration

³²Grierson, P., 'Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962) 34.

³³See first section, note 16.

³⁴Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Reiske, I. I. (Bonn, 1829) II, ch.42, 645, 5-9.

³⁵Ioannou, P.-P. ed., *Counciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (Freiburg, 1962). 148. Barber, C., trans. in *Contesting the Logic of Painting* (Leiden, 2007) 21.

³⁶Sajas, D. J., *Icon and Logos* (Toronto, 1986) 39.

regarding Constantine V's patronage of Hagia Eirene. "Fragments of marble plaques, no longer in position but broken up some time after 1453, survive as bases for the present disturbed north aisle colonade. Their decoration with a monogram of Constantine [V] suggests that these formed part of a decoration between 741 and 775..."³⁷ A few observations can be drawn from Cormack's statement. The location of these plaques before their re-use as spolia in Hagia Eirene remains a mystery. They could have been taken from their original position before being broken up and re-situated or, as seems more likely, they had previously been discarded from their place before their application to the column bases. The reason this seems more likely is that the plaques displaying the monogram of Constantine V would have been odious to the Orthodox faithful and most probably removed, not preserved. While the plaques could have come from any number of places, the idea that they formed part of a templon screen installed by Constantine V should not be ruled out.³⁸ The presence of Constantine V's monogram in the current building increases the likelihood that Constantine V installed decoration in Hagia Eirene, but this information does not confirm the argument that Constantine V was the patron of the apse mosaic.

The primary evidence in support of Constantine V's patronage of the mosaic in Hagia Eirene, then, is: the dating of the wood; the marble plaques featuring Constantine V's monogram; and that his lengthy reign was punctuated by sufficient periods of prosperity and stability for such a building project. The argument against this theory is that Constantine V's mosaic would have been considered the offensive work of a

³⁷Cormack, R., 'Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm' in Bryer, A. and Herrin, J., eds., *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977) 36.

³⁸Cormack, R., 'Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm' in Bryer, A. and Herrin, J., eds., *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977) 36.

tyrannical heretic and removed. There is the evidence that the iconoclasts' work in the Chalkoprateia church and on the Chalke Gate was undone after their doctrines were officially denounced. The Empress Theodora oversaw the restoration of the Chalke icon, replacing Leo V's cross and acrostic poems. The current apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople was erected with an accompanying inscription that reads: "The images which the heretics had cast down from here, pious emperors have set up again."³⁹ This inscription resembles the Empress Irene's inscription on the Chalke gate when she restored the Christ image during her sole reign. Irene's inscription read: "[The image] which Leo the emperor had formerly cast down, Irene has re-erected here."⁴⁰ These inscriptions provide more evidence for the undoing of the iconoclasts' activities as well as the deterioration of their reputation, which is apparent in the change from the neutral tone which Irene's inscription conveyed, to an outright condemnation in the later inscription in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Constantine V's particularly awful reputation is revealed by the epithets that were attached to his name. He is commonly referred to as Constantine "*Copronymus*" and Constantine "*Caballinus*", both names referring to a piece of crap.⁴¹ The latter nick-name can be traced at least as far back as 821,⁴² or even to between 765-787,⁴³ if the name of the treatise *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum* is not a later interpolation.⁴⁴

³⁹Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London, 1989) 136.

⁴⁰*Scriptor incertus de Leone Armenio* Bekker, I. ed. (Bonn, 1842) 355. Mango, C. trans, *Brazen House* (Copenhagen, 1959) 121.

⁴¹See Gero, S., *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign Constantine V* (Louvain, 1977) 169-75 for full discussion of Constantine's nick-names.

⁴²Gero, S., *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign Constantine V* (Louvain, 1977) 170. Constantine V is called *Caballinus* in an epistle of Theodore of Studios.

⁴³See Alexander, P. J., *Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford, 1958) 14 for the dating of this work.

⁴⁴This possibility is suggested in Gero, S., *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign Constantine V* (Louvain, 1977) 169.

The next Emperor who could be considered as a possible patron of Hagia Eirene, including its apse mosaic, is Leo IV. His reign lasted five years until, at the age of thirty, his inordinate affection for a luxurious crown caused carbuncles on his head, which led to a fever and death.⁴⁵ Leo IV's excessive passion for fine things hurt his reputation and, like Leo III and Constantine V, he was an iconoclast, which raises the same suspicions concerning the preservation of the apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene, if it is to be attributed to Leo IV. However, his reign does mark the beginning of the ascendancy of the iconophiles. Theophanes notes that: "[Leo IV] appointed from among monks metropolitans of the foremost sees."⁴⁶ Since monks had been the most outspoken iconophiles, it can be inferred that Leo IV ended Constantine V's monastic persecutions, and was more tolerant of icons. However, as he later censured his wife Irene for possessing icons⁴⁷ and publicly punished and imprisoned iconophiles, it can be asserted that either his convictions wavered or his conciliatory measures were inspired by pragmatism and not personal sympathies.

Aside from the continuing conflict over icons, and a conspiracy for the throne that resulted in the exile of his half-brother Nikephoros, Leo involved himself in a successful campaign against the Arabs and also effectively fended off their retaliation the following year.⁴⁸ The Bulgar threat was temporarily neutralized by internal disorder as their leader

⁴⁵See Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 453. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 625 for Leo's death. Also Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 449. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 620. And George Kedrenos, *Compendium Historiarum*, Bekker, I. ed. (Bonn, 1838-9) II, 18 for other instances of Leo IV's indiscretion with wealth.

⁴⁶Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 449. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 620

⁴⁷George Kedrenos, *Compendium Historiarum*, Bekker, I. ed. (Bonn, 1838-9) II, 19-20.

⁴⁸Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 451-2. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans. *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 623-4.

Telerigos fled to Constantinople for his own safety. So it appears that from a purely logistical point of view, there would have been sufficient opportunity for the rebuilding and redecoration of Hagia Eirene under the patronage of Leo IV.

Ultimately, of the four Emperors reviewed in this section, the most likely candidate to have financed the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene, including its apse mosaic, is Constantine V. The dendrochronological date certainly reduces the likelihood that either Leo III or Artavasdos was the patron of the church. Leo IV is still a candidate, but his reign was later and far shorter than Constantine V's.

On the other hand, Constantine V is the candidate with the greatest weight of evidence against his patronage. There is no telling how much the events of Constantine V's reign may have been embellished by polemical authors, but it is important to note that the Byzantines treated them as undisputed fact. None of the other three emperors had their remains burned and their memories cursed. None of the other emperors were held to be as extreme in their iconoclastic views or as violent in their anti-monastic policies. In this respect, Constantine V is the least likely of the four candidates to have had his work preserved in Hagia Eirene. If there were no other candidates for the patronage of the apse mosaic, this conundrum would be perplexing, indeed.

IV

HAGIA EIRENE AND THE EMPRESS IRENE (780-802)

There are numerous factors that favor the Empress Irene as a candidate for the patronage of the Hagia Eirene apse mosaic. Importantly, if the apse can be associated with Irene, the mosaic's preservation can be explained and its significance re-envisioned. Irene's call for the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 initiated the first phase of the restoration of Orthodoxy, which included icon veneration, for the Byzantine Empire. By 880 that council was recognized and celebrated throughout the Empire as the 'Seventh Ecumenical Council'.¹ In the apse of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople is an icon, dated to 869, depicting Christ and the Theotokos (Figure 4) that symbolized the Triumph of Orthodoxy and the defeat of Iconoclasm.² In the nearby apse of Hagia Eirene there would be a mosaic erected by the empress who called the decisive council. These two apse mosaics, in the capital's two largest churches, would have been a pair of permanent visual reminders connected with the establishment of the Orthodox faith and the rulers who victoriously perpetuated the tradition.

The survival of Hagia Eirene's mosaic through the second phase of Iconoclasm (815-843) would be understandable because the imagery is non-figural. Irene's choice of

¹Sajas, D. J., *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth Century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986) p. 42.

²See Section III, 12 for the mosaic's accompanying inscription. Also from Photios' Homily on the image: "[The Theotokos] now regains the ancient dignity of her comeliness, and sheds the rude mockery of those who have insulted her, pitying their [the iconoclasts'] truly absurd madness. If one called this day the beginning and day of Orthodoxy (lest I say something excessive), one would not be far wrong." Photios, *Homilies of Photios*, Mango, C. trans. (Cambridge, 1958) 290.

a cross as the image for the apse can easily be explained. The cross was a symbol that was objectionable to neither the iconoclasts nor iconophiles, and so could simultaneously mollify her enemies and win Irene supporters. It is also appropriate that in the church dedicated to Holy Peace (Irene's namesake), Irene would feature this symbol prized by both sides of the conflict, accenting the common ground of two widely disparate groups. There is also the direct statement from the proceedings of the Second Council of Nicaea that a single cross was appropriate decoration for the sanctuary.³ It is a possibility that following the Council, Irene decorated Hagia Eirene precisely as the Council of Nicaea described: with a cross in the apse and pictures from the Old and New Testaments on both sides. It would have been a remarkable reinforcement of the Council's proclamations to immediately implement them, and this speculation could also explain the peculiarity that nothing but the apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene has survived. The images from the Old and New Testament would have been targeted during the second phase of Iconoclasm.

There is support for the proposal that Irene could have been responsible for the structure of Hagia Eirene as it is today. The new design of Hagia Eirene which was built upon the remnants of the original basilica-style layout is one thought to have originated in a monastic context and Irene is associated with many monks and monastic foundations.⁴ The monk and abbot Plato, uncle of Theodore of Studios, is reported to have designed

³See Section III, footnote 29 for the text's translation. See Mansi, G. D., *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence, 1859-98) 13, 36a-d for its quotation during the Council's proceedings.

⁴Ruggieri states: "It is worthy of note that the design [of Hagia Eirene] at the gallery level calls to mind 'plan b' [tetrakamaron or cross-in-square type church]." Ruggieri, V., *Byzantine Religious Architecture (562-867)* (Rome, 1991) 155.

churches with the new cross-in-square plan.⁵ Irene's close association with Plato is attested by the fact that she recalled him from exile, that she married her son, Constantine VI, to Theodote (one of his relatives),⁶ and that he was the advisor of Irene's Patriarch Tarasios during the Second Council of Nicaea.⁷ Plato could have been consulted about the plan of Irene's construction.

Additional support for Irene's patronage of the Hagia Eirene mosaic is lent by her patronage of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki. Irene's decoration of this church took place around 783,⁸ after Staurakios's victorious campaign against the Slavs,⁹ and during her joint reign (780-790 and 792-797) with Constantine VI as indicated by the presence of both rulers' monograms in the mosaic decoration. Before the insertion of the Theotokos and Christ child, which replaced the monumental cross in the apse, the mosaic program which Irene had executed in Thessaloniki (Figure 1) was almost exactly like the decoration in Hagia Eirene (Figure 2). "The crosses, with flared ends terminated in teardrops, are virtually identical to those at Hagia Eirene and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople...The inscription arching over the apse that accompanied the cross [in Thessaloniki], now disrupted by the seated Virgin, was taken from Psalm 64 and was identical to that at Hagia Eirene."¹⁰ The three registers of green below the field of gold tesserae also occur in both works.

⁵Cf. Ruggieri, V., *Byzantine Religious Architecture (562-867)* (Rome, 1991) 139. *Vita Theodori Studitae* Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia cursus completus, series graeca* (Paris, 1857-66) 99, 244b and 263. And Nicole, J. ed., *Eparchikon Biblion* (London, 1970) XXII, 4.

⁶Herrin J., *Women in Purple* (Princeton: 2001) 96-8.

⁷*Vita Theodori Studitae* Migne, J.-P. ed., *Patrologia cursus completus, series graeca* (Paris, 1857-66) 99, 240c.

⁸Theocharidou, K., *Architecture of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki* (Oxford, 1988) 162.

⁹Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 457. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 630.

¹⁰Brubaker, L. and Haldon, J., *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680-850)* (Aldershot, 2001) 24. See also Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (Pembroke, 1989) 118-9 for similar observations.

The two most plausible explanations for the similarity of these apse mosaic programs are: either the apse mosaic in Thessaloniki was an imitation of Constantine V's mosaic from Hagia Eirene or Irene employed the same design for both the Hagia Eirene apse mosaic and the Hagia Sophia apse in Thessaloniki. In favor of the first possibility, it might be suggested that Constantine VI wished to imitate his grandfather's work. This theory would depend upon two questionable requisites: that Constantine V was the patron of the cross mosaic in Hagia Eirene and that the choice of decoration in Thessaloniki was Constantine VI's. However, when the apse in Thessaloniki was decorated, Constantine VI would have been only about twelve years old with Irene's regency firmly established; it was not until 790 that Constantine temporarily wrested control of the government from Irene. Therefore, the choice of decoration would have been the Empress's. Despite Irene's reversal of Constantine V's policy against icons, she may not have wanted to entirely dissociate herself from him because her hold on imperial power depended upon his grandson's succession. If Irene had immediately denounced the rule of Constantine V as illicit, it would have provoked Constantine V's surviving sons to rally supporters and usurp the throne; declaring their fidelity to Constantine V's policies as well as their own right to rule as his legitimate successors. It is especially clear that the Caesar Nikephoros, eldest of Constantine V's surviving sons, had powerful supporters and his own designs on imperial power because of his attempted rebellions in 780 and 792.¹¹ Irene had to be careful in her approach to maintaining the legitimacy of the Isaurian dynastic succession while severing their ties with iconoclastic doctrine. Some coins issued during Irene's

¹¹Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 454. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 627. Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 468. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 643.

regency depict Irene and Constantine VI on one side and Leo III, Constantine V, and Leo IV on the other (Figure 5). The coin's imagery traced their imperial lineage (from Leo III to Constantine VI) and emphasized Irene's role as Empress, alongside the legitimate Emperor Constantine VI.

Though Irene acknowledged her association with the iconoclastic Isaurian dynasty for the sake of credibility, she promptly demonstrated her different attitude towards ecclesiastical matters. Three and a half months after her accession to the throne, on Christmas Day, Irene forced Constantine V's remaining sons to "take holy orders and administer communion to the people."¹² On that same day: "she went in public imperial procession together with her son and offered to the church the crown that had been removed by her husband [Leo IV], which she had further adorned with pearls."¹³ This action may have had significance beyond Irene's reproof of her husband's actions. It would depend upon the distinct appearance of Irene's further adornment of the church's crown with pearls because the Empress's crown prominently featured strings of pearls (*pendilia* or *prependulia*) which dangled from the sides (Figure 5).¹⁴ If the crown she placed in Hagia Sophia had been changed to resemble her own crown, then not only would she have been seen as restoring and beautifying the church, she would have been focusing attention upon her role as the church's restorer.

Thus, it appears that, from the beginning of her rule, Irene signaled a drastic shift

¹²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 454. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 627.

¹³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 454. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 627.

¹⁴Head, C. *Imperial Byzantine Protraits* (New Rochelle, 1982) 62 and Grierson, P., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, II, 81 (Washington D. C., 1968).

from Constantine V's religious measures. Her immediate and complete abandonment of the iconoclasts' monastic persecution and suppression of iconophiles is mentioned by Theophanes.¹⁵ Her measures to reverse the iconoclasts' official doctrine soon followed. It is unlikely that Irene would have continued decorating churches in the same manner as Constantine V when his ecclesiastical policy is precisely what she challenged. Thus the idea that Irene may have commissioned a copy of Constantine V's Hagia Eirene apse mosaic to be made for Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki seems unlikely. However, the possibility that Irene would decorate the apses of Hagia Eirene and Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki in the same way is a strong one. After concluding peace with the Arabs and triumphing over the Slavs in Greece, Irene gathered workers and began a rebuilding tour of Thrace.¹⁶ It has been proposed that at this time (783-4) Irene had the mosaic program in Thessaloniki executed.¹⁷ Likewise, this would have been an opportune time for her to have commissioned the mosaic program in Hagia Eirene. The seeds for the council which would overturn the decrees of the iconoclasts were sown with the death of Paul, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in 784. His replacement with Tarasios, who was a staunch iconophile, was approved by Irene. For Irene to erect a monumental cross in the apse of Hagia Eirene at this moment would provide a superb introduction for her new Patriarch and make a grand statement connecting her with the very foundations of Constantinople. Not only did Hagia Eirene share Irene's name, but it was one of the churches that Constantine the Great originally founded in his new capital. The

¹⁵Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 454. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 627.

¹⁶Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 457. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 631.

¹⁷Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London, 1989) 123. Also Theodoridou, K., *Architecture of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki* (Oxford, 1988) 162.

significance of Irene restoring the Church of Holy Peace would have been considerable at a time when she was making peaceful gestures towards the Arabs and the Franks, funding the reconstruction of Thrace, as well as quelling the violence of the iconoclastic movement. The fact that Irene named one of the towns that she rebuilt in Thrace Irenopolis shows that she sought to promote her patronage by associating it with her name. Therefore, her funding of the apse in Hagia Eirene would be consistent with her other activities.

The distinctive form of the two apse mosaic programs in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki and Hagia Eirene, Constantinople suggests a purposefully unified building program. Compared with the three iconoclast Emperors preceding her, Irene was an ambitious patron of ecclesiastical architecture and decoration. Her iconoclast predecessors' building activities were primarily secular. Irene, however, was the patron of the churches of St. Anastasius, St. Luke, St. Euphemia, St. Eustathios and the Virgin of the Spring.¹⁸ Her support of monasticism is attested by the founding of many monasteries during her reign, some attributed to her and some to her associates.¹⁹ She built the monastery on Prinkipo and founded the monastery *ta* Libadia.²⁰ To embark upon a consistent and cohesive program of church decoration that focused on the triumphant symbol of the cross²¹ and to make symbolic use of her name would have been invaluable propaganda in her effort to publicize her desire to establish tranquility in the Empire.

¹⁸*Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, ed. Preger, T. (Leipzig, 1901) III, ch. 17, 85, 9, 154 and 142.

¹⁹In Ruggieri, V., *Byzantine Religious Architecture (582-867)* (Rome, 1991) some examples are: the monastery of ton Despoion founded by Constantine VI's wife Maria (190), the monastery of Pikridion (195), the monastery of the Theotokos of Psicha (199), and possibly the monastery of Tarasios (202-3).

²⁰*Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, ed. Preger, T. (Leipzig, 1901) III, ch. 77.

²¹The association of the cross with victory both military and spiritual springs from Christ's triumph on the cross and Constantine the Great's vision of the cross before the battle of the Milvian bridge in which it was revealed to him that he would conquer with the aid of the symbol of the cross. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* (London, 1874) 3.

The theme of unification in Irene's policies emerges also from her consistent attempts to re-connect the powers of the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire. While the iconoclasts had been antagonistic to the Pope in Rome, Irene courted the Pope's approval for her church council and entertained his emissaries, who participated.²² She arranged for Constantine VI to marry Charlemagne's daughter, Rotrude,²³ and, after that failed, opened negotiations for her own marriage to Charlemagne.²⁴ Her attempts to heal the internal divisions of the Byzantine Empire are revealed in her cessation of monastic persecution, restoration of monastic institutions, recall of iconophiles from exile, and her dissolution of the iconoclast doctrine, which had created a schism inside the Byzantine Empire and prompted a negative reaction from the Western half of the Roman Empire. With a definition of the Orthodox faith signed by bishops from throughout the Empire (including representatives from all of the apostolic sees, something that the iconoclast councils lacked), and a widespread program of church decoration to promote her initiatives, Irene was strategically restoring stability to the Byzantine Empire.

²²Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 460-1. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 634.

²³Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 455. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 628.

²⁴Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 475. Mango, C. And Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 654.

V

CROSS-EXAMINING THE MOSAICS

The strongest argument for dating the apse mosaic of Hagia Eirene to the reign of Constantine V is based upon the occurrence of the earthquake in Constantinople in 740, just before the beginning of Constantine V's sole reign, and the dendrochronological analysis of the wooden tie-beams employed in the reconstruction of the aisles. The dendrochronological evidence, though, does not securely date the apse mosaic because the reconstruction of the church and the installation of the tie-beam system could have been carried out separately from the execution of the extant apse mosaic. The stronger evidence for the attribution of the apse mosaic to the Empress Irene's patronage is the distinct similarity in the apse mosaic programs in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki and in Hagia Eirene, Constantinople. What remains to be done in this thesis is to establish the precise degree of similarity between these two mosaics, and to discuss other examples of similar Byzantine cross decoration in mosaic.

The greater the similarities between the apse mosaics of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki and Hagia Eirene in Constantinople, the more likely it is that these two mosaics are related in terms of their patronage. Additionally, the more precisely the two mosaics resemble one another in their formal qualities, materials and construction technique, the more likely it is that both mosaics were the product of a single workshop. Careful on-site investigations of the two mosaics in which their form, materials, and construction are compared would result in the most reliable assessment of their technical

similarity, but this paper is limited by access only to the reproductions, descriptions and observations published by earlier scholars.

The cross of the apse in Constantinople is surrounded by a field of gold tesserae. George noted the random interspersions of silver tesserae throughout the gold field.¹ This procedure was, presumably, to alter the effect of the light reflected by the field of gold tesserae and George added: "This use of silver tesserae in a golden ground does not seem to have been recorded elsewhere..."² Hence it was not a commonplace technique, even though, Mango and Hawkins subsequently observed that the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople had utilized the same technique.³

The cross of the apse in Thessaloniki was also surrounded by a field of gold tesserae. Cormack did not observe the interspersions of silver tesserae in the golden field here but he did note the presence of silver tesserae interspersed within the work that had been done to replace the original cross.⁴ Cormack also noted that his observations needed the corroboration of a closer examination, as he had not used scaffolding in order to more closely record the data.⁵ The precise form of the no longer extant monumental cross in the apse of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki was identical to the one still extant in the apse of Hagia Eirene, Constantinople. The outlines of the horizontal arms of the crosses were adjusted by the mosaicist to appear as if they were perfectly perpendicular to the vertical arms when seen from ground level. The detail of the cross arms flaring and terminating in two tear-drop shapes is noted in the horizontal arms of the cross in Thessalonike but

¹George, W. S., *Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 47.

²George, W. S., *Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 47.

³Mango, C. and Hawkins, E. J., 'The apse mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Report on work carried out in 1964', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 19 (1965) 141.

⁴Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 131.

⁵Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 130.

the evidence from the vertical arms is obscured by the installation of the Theotokos and Christ child.⁶ This alteration has also obscured the evidence for the three-stepped base upon which the cross may have rested. It would be helpful to closely examine the tesserae of the Thessaloniki mosaic to determine whether any trace of the original cross mosaic has been preserved in the tesserae of the Theotokos and Christ child. A closer examination would also be necessary to compare with the minute data compiled by George regarding the tesserae of the Hagia Eirene apse mosaic. Some significant details that George recorded in his study of the Hagia Eirene apse mosaic which could be compared with information that would be gathered from further study of the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki are: the deliberate pitching of the gold tesserae surrounding the inscription from the plane of the wall in order to affect the reflection of light; the thickness of the joints between the gold tesserae in the golden field; the different sizes of the gold and colored tesserae; the composition and thickness of the bed in which the tesserae are set; the presence of traces of brick dust on the gold tesserae; and the setting of the colored tesserae with the fractured face towards the viewer.⁷ If these technical aspects of the two works were found to coincide, it would lend further support to the notion that Irene was patron of both works and commissioned the same workers to execute both mosaic programs. Conversely, if these technical details were found to be dissimilar, it would increase the odds against the mosaics being executed by the same workshop but would not necessarily controvert the theory that Irene was the patron of both mosaics. The multitude of details that are the same in both mosaic programs is still suggestive of her connection with both works.

⁶Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 118.

⁷George, W. S., *Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 47 and 51-3.

The field of gold tesserae in both the Constantinople and the Thessaloniki mosaics (Figures 2 and 1 respectively) extends up and outward to the ornamental borders that arch over each apse, and extends down to the first register of green. In both mosaics, a lighter register of tesserae is placed below the darker register above, of the same width as the upper register. Below these two registers in both mosaics is a third register of the same width. The register in Constantinople contains a pattern of diamonds and equal-armed crosses with arms terminating in trefoils. The corresponding register in Thessaloniki contains an inscription that Cormack identifies as “a conflation from various phrases also used in the encaenia [dedication] ceremony.”⁸ The three registers form the bottom border of the mosaic in Constantinople but the mosaic in Thessaloniki has another thin band upon which the throne of the Theotokos and Christ child now rests. Below that is another register about two times broader than the first three registers, containing a swirling vine scroll motif with heart shaped and trefoil flourishes.

Arching over the cross in both mosaics are alternating registers of ornamental patterning and inscription. The registers of inscription in both mosaics contain a gold background and black lettering. The Constantinople mosaic contains seven registers: five of ornamental patterning and two inscriptions. The Thessaloniki mosaic has three registers: two of ornamental patterning and one of inscription. The greater number of registers and lengthier inscriptions found in Hagia Eirene are probably due to the fact that the apse mosaic is roughly twice the size of the one executed in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki.⁹ The inscription in the Thessaloniki mosaic can be seen letter for letter in

⁸Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 119.

⁹The Hagia Eirene apse mosaic measures about 30' high and 50' wide. The Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki apse mosaic measures about 14' high and 30' wide.

the first half of the innermost inscription of the Constantinople mosaic and is quoted from Psalms 64:5: “Harken to us, O God our saviour; the hope of all ends of the earth, and of them afar off at sea.”¹⁰ The form of the letters in each mosaic appears from the reproductions to match exactly. Cormack observed that the epigraphical evidence from the two mosaics connects these two churches to their foundation at the time of the apse mosaic’s dedication.¹¹ Similarly, “Professor van Millingen points out that the two inscriptions from S. Eirene may be compared with the beautiful collect still used in the Orthodox Eastern Church at the consecration of a building.”¹² Both churches were cathedrals served by their city’s bishop. The two mosaics therefore exhibited both an ideological and visual resemblance. They focused on the hopes for a blessing of the newly decorated and dedicated churches. As Cormack noted, the inscriptions suggest that the mosaics date from the time of the churches’ foundation.¹³ It is also possible, and may be more likely, that the churches were re-dedicated when they were redecorated, such as in the previously noted example of Michael III and Theodora’s rededication and redecoration of Constantine V’s Pharos Chapel.

Other Byzantine cross mosaics exist in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. They are of the same form as the one in Hagia Eirene but on a far smaller scale. Some of the crosses in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople have been connected with the Patriarch Niketas activities (766-7) in the small sekreton. According to Theophanes,

“In the same year the false patriarch Niketas scraped off the images in the small secretum of the Patriarchate, which were of mosaic, and those in the vault of the big secretum, which were in paint, he removed and plastered the faces of the other

¹⁰George’s translation in: George, W. S., *Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 51.

¹¹Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 119.

¹²George, W. S., *Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (Oxford, 1912) 51.

¹³Cormack, R., *Byzantine Eye* (London: 1989) 119.

images. He did the same in the Abramiaion.”¹⁴

Nikephoros also recorded these events in his *Short History*,

“Niketas, the bishop of the City, restored certain structures of the cathedral church that had fallen into decay with [the passage of] time. He also scraped off the images of the Savior and of the saints done in golden mosaic and in encaustic that were in the ceremonial halls that stand there (these are called *secreta* by the Romans), both in the small one and in the big one.”¹⁵

The reason the cross mosaics are connected with these passages is that the two extant crosses apparently replaced portraits with identifying inscriptions. This has been determined because a portion of the inscription naming the subject of the portrait can still be detected in the arrangement of the tesserae surrounding the cross in the roundel (Figure 6). Even though this is a remarkable example of the intersection of textual and archaeological evidence, it remains uncertain when the crosses were erected in place of the saints’ images. The textual sources plainly state that Niketas scraped off the mosaic images of the saints but the chroniclers do not mention that he replaced them with crosses. Theophanes’s report that Niketas “plastered the faces of the other images” indicates that the Patriarch was concerned with the removal of icons from Hagia Sophia and not redecorating. Nikephoros’ description of the action also suggests that Niketas only destroyed the icons without replacing the decoration. He contrasts Niketas restoring the “structure of the church” (presumably masonry and timber) with his act of iconoclasm, highlighting the contradictory nature of his work. It is also evident that a portion of the inscription accompanying the saint’s icon was extant when the roundel crosses were executed. The dark tesserae of the inscription were picked out and replaced

¹⁴Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* (Leipzig, 1883, 1885) I, 443. Mango, C. and Scott, R. trans., *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997) 611.

¹⁵Nikephoros, *Breviarum* ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1880) 76, 1-8. Mango, C. trans. *Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History* (Washington, D. C., 1990) 161-2.

with gold tesserae to match the rest of the gold ground and this process is what left the shape of the letters. It is apparent that there were two distinct actions taken. One which destroyed the portraits and most of the evidence of the inscription (Niketas's iconoclasm), and another when the crosses were erected, the gap filled in where the inscription had been scraped off and what was left of the inscription was carefully integrated into the gold ground. From this it is evident that the insertion of the roundel crosses was a separate act from Niketas's iconoclasm: if the roundel crosses were intended to have been executed immediately after the icons were removed, the inscription would have received a uniform treatment, leaving no trace of lettering. However, the mosaic shows evidence of being partially scraped and partially picked out, leaving the shape of the letters. The current appearance of the mosaic suggests that Niketas destroyed an icon in a roundel and the central portion of the accompanying inscription. He left the gold ground, the beginning and end of the inscription, and areas of bare wall where the icon and inscription had been destroyed. This conclusion is consonant with both the textual and archeological evidence. Later, when the cross mosaics were erected, the gap of the inscription was filled in with gold tesserae to match the background and the dark tesserae that remained of the inscription were picked out and integrated with the gold background. A likely patron for this work in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople is Irene. She began her reign by restoring a crown to Hagia Sophia and this action would have been another exemplary act of Irene restoring what an iconoclast had inappropriately taken away from the church. The cross in the sekreta has the same form as the work she commissioned in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki as well as the cross in Hagia Eirene, Constantinople. It is also likely that Irene would have commissioned these crosses early in her reign, when

there was still a ban on icons, thereby establishing her beneficent attitude toward the churches in contrast with the iconoclasts' destitution.

The final example of a Byzantine cross mosaic that will be examined is the evidence from the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea (Figure 6). Superficially the photographic reproductions of this church's non-extant apse mosaic resemble the apse of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, but it has been determined that a monumental cross was not the original decoration of the apse in the Church of the Dormition.¹⁶ Underwood deduced from his analysis of the seams in the field of tesserae that the cross replaced the original decoration, probably the Virgin and Child, and therefore the cross was the work of the iconoclasts. This evidence strengthens the argument against Constantine V's patronage of the apse in Hagia Eirene because the apse in Nicaea contained some definite evidence of monumental iconoclast decoration and its removal. The iconoclasts' monumental cross differed essentially from Irene's in Thessaloniki in two major ways. The cross in Nicaea did not have the tear-drop shaped seraphs at the flared ends of the cross arms like the three previously mentioned mosaic crosses, and the mosaicist of the Nicaea cross did not compensate for the effect of the curvature of the apse's semi-dome.¹⁷ When viewed from ground level, the horizontal arms of the cross bent upward, which is not the case with the apse mosaics in Constantinople and Thessaloniki. Adjusting the mosaic to compensate for this effect took considerable skill; the iconoclastic work did not make this effort, which indicates that the iconoclasts were pre-occupied with the removal

¹⁶See Underwood, P. A., 'Evidence of restorations in the sanctuary mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959) 235-44 for meticulous examination of photographic evidence.

¹⁷Underwood, P. A., 'Evidence of restorations in the sanctuary mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959) 239.

of images and not with the quality of their replacement. One further point that can be deduced from the photographs of the Nicaea mosaic as compared to the Hagia Eirene apse mosaic: it showed definite evidence of the erasure of an iconoclastic monument. That this cross was targeted for removal, but the cross in the apse of Hagia Eirene was not, suggests that there was a reason for retaining the monumental cross in Hagia Eirene. The association of the mosaic with Irene, and her convocation of the Seventh Ecumenical Council which restored harmony to the Orthodox church, would be an outstanding reason for it to remain.

VI

CONCLUSIONS

After the defeat of the iconoclasts, there was an attempt by the Orthodox to totally discredit iconoclast works, which included the destruction of their writings and their commissioned artworks. This censure extended especially to Constantine V for a number of reasons. He was an emperor, writer, and a patron of art. Moreover, he was the longest reigning iconoclast emperor since Justinian (527-565). Permitting the survival of his works could have invited Byzantine emperors to return to his iconoclastic policy and ideology. There is tacit proof that the iconophiles anticipated this potential problem because they decreed that the iconoclasts' works be destroyed. This conclusion militates, especially with a lack of evidence to the contrary, against the argument that Constantine V was the patron of the current apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene.

Evidence for the Empress Irene's patronage of this apse mosaic includes her commission of practically the same mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki, and the intentional preservation of Hagia Eirene's apse mosaic for more than eleven centuries up to the present day. It could be seen as the lasting stamp of her rule of the Byzantine Empire. A decisive factor in favor of Irene's patronage may be that it is certain that Hagia Eirene served an important function to the citizens of Constantinople as a part of the "Great Church" alongside Hagia Sophia (Constantinople). It would only make sense for Hagia Eirene's apse to be decorated with a mosaic of fitting significance. The apse mosaic's association with Irene and the Seventh Ecumenical Council makes it a perfect

complement to the mosaic which survives in the nearby apse of Hagia Sophia.

Figure 1. Apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki.

Source: divinebalance.org/photo_gallery

Figure 2. Apse mosaic in Hagia Eirene, Constantinople.

Source:

<http://campus.belmont.edu/honors/HagiaSophia/ConstHagIreneApseCross.gif>

Figure 3. Kluge's photograph of the apse mosaic in Church of the Dormition, Nicaea.

Source: Underwood, P. A., 'Evidence of restorations in the sanctuary mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959).

Figure 4. Apse Mosaic in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople.

Source: www.orthodoxtech.com

Figure 5. Gold coin of Irene and Constantine VI obverse (right) and reverse (left).

Source: Herrin, J., *Women in Purple* (Princeton, 2001)

Figure 6. Cross mosaic in small sekreton of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople.

Source: www.orthodoxtech.com

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