

Theology in Verse: Middle Byzantine Hymnography

‘Glory to God in the highest’ (Lk 2:14), I hear from the bodiless ones in Bethlehem today, [as they sing] to him who was well pleased that there should be peace on earth. The Virgin is now wider than the heavens; light has shone upon those who are in darkness and has exalted the humble, who are singing like the angels, ‘Glory to God in the highest’.¹

Middle Byzantine hymns, which were sung either by cantors or choirs in churches throughout Constantinople, along with cities and provinces of the outlying empire, offer praise and thanksgiving to God. One of the predominant purposes of this genre, which includes texts and their musical settings, is to express joyful thanksgiving to God. As we see in the passage that opens this chapter, humanity joins the whole of creation in this activity: this is a cosmological event in which the divine and created realms are eternally joined in harmonious praise.² The Marian feasts, which were added to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar between about the middle of the sixth century and the beginning of the eighth, were adorned with hymns that celebrated the Virgin’s essential role in bringing about the new dispensation.³ Even her death, or dormition, offered hope to Christians since she was believed to have remained uncorrupted in her tomb for three days before being assumed bodily into heaven. A strong penitential strand also pervades Marian hymnography, however, especially in service books such as the *Triodion* and the *New Oktoechos* or *Parakletike*, which were probably compiled from the ninth century onward.⁴ This material, which emerged from a mainly monastic background, appealed

¹ John the Monk, *Sticheron for the Lity at Great Compline for Christmas*, Tone 1, *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 659 (my translation). Hymns are not listed according to their attributions or authors in the notes for this chapter, but according to liturgical books in the bibliography (Primary Sources).

² Kallistos of Diokleia 1990, esp. 8–11; Taft 2006.

³ On the addition of the Marian feasts to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar, see Introduction, 11–12; Cunningham 2008b, 19–28; Krausmüller 2011, 228–30.

⁴ *Triodion katanyktikon; Parakletike*; Krueger 2014, 130–221.

constantly to the Virgin as the merciful protector of Christians who could intercede on their behalf before her son, Jesus Christ.

Hymnography remained the most accessible way of teaching theology to Christian congregations throughout the Byzantine period. And Mary, the Mother of God, assumed a central position in liturgical services, including the offices and both ordinary and festal Divine Liturgies. Hymns in praise of the Virgin linked together the separate parts of liturgical services or stationary liturgies. They often appeared at the end of offices such as Vespers and the morning service (*Orthros* or Matins) – reflecting in song what congregants would have seen depicted in the apses of most middle Byzantine churches: the benevolent, but always solemn, image of the Theotokos, presiding over the holy space of the sanctuary.⁵ The reason for such centrality, which had evolved from about the fifth century onward, as we have seen in previous chapters, was primarily Christological. Mary represented the link between the divine and created realms of existence. She, as a human but also virginal mother, contained the uncontainable God within her womb. She was thus considered more holy even than the highest ranks of angelic beings, according to troparia that were regularly sung in the daily and festal offices and liturgies.⁶ Christ's incarnation, which brought new life and salvation to humankind, was signified in the person of his holy mother. This aspect of the Virgin's role in Byzantine hymnography outweighs that of her intercessory or protective power – although the latter is important too. Many hymns, such as the following theotokion (or short hymn in honour of the Virgin Mary), express both forms of praise; however, it is usually the Christological one that comes first:

You have contained, in your womb, O Virgin Mother, One of the Trinity, Christ the King, whose praises all creation sings and before whom the thrones on high tremble. O all venerable Lady, entreat him for the salvation of our souls.⁷

⁵ Evangelatou 2019.

⁶ See, for example, *Typikon of the Great Church*, vol. 1: 31 July, p. 354: Ἄγιωτέρα τῶν χερουβὶμ, ὑψηλοτέρα τῶν οὐρανῶν, πανύμνητε, Θεοτόκον σε ἐν ἀληθείᾳ ὁμολογοῦντες, ἔχοντες ἀμαρτωλοὶ προστασίαν καὶ εὐρίσκομεν ἐν καιρῷ σωτηρίαν ('more holy than the cherubim, higher than the heavens, all-praised one; we sinners hold you as our protection and look for salvation at the opportune time while confessing you truly as birth-giver of God').

⁷ Andrew of Crete, *Kanon for the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (8 Sept.)*, Ode Nine, Theotokion; *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 103; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 124 (with adjustments).

This chapter examines the various types of hymn that were composed in honour of the Virgin between c. 600 and 1000 in Byzantium, taking into account their positions within the various services and feasts of the Christian church year. It should be stated at the outset that, for reasons both of space and expertise, I have chosen to focus on texts but not on their musical settings.⁸ Even with this limitation, however, it is impossible to include more than a small part of this vast body of literature. I will therefore look first at a selection of Marian feasts and their appointed texts, which are found in the *Menaia* (service books for the fixed liturgical year). Such hymnography celebrated events in the Virgin's life, whether these were attested in biblical or apocryphal texts. It often used particular types or images in relation to this subject matter; however, much intertextual – or interfeastal – reference is also visible in this material.⁹ I turn in the second part of the chapter to hymnographic texts that were composed for the daily or weekly offices according to service books including the *Oktoechos* or *Parakletike*, along with some that were intended for books that covered the moveable liturgical year, such as the *Triodion* and the *Pentekostarion*. It is possible, at least to some extent, to trace literary and theological developments in a diachronic way on the basis of these rich collections.¹⁰

Byzantine audiences assimilated hymnography, like some of the other literary forms, or genres, that are studied in this book, in more than one context. The most obvious place for hearing hymns was in church, where this condensed – and also musical – form of theological teaching pervaded the liturgical services throughout the year. However, some important kanons, including especially those that were attributed to the eighth-century theologians and melodists John of Damascus and Kosmas, were quoted, paraphrased and analysed (in the form of exegetical commentaries) both during and beyond the middle Byzantine period.¹¹ The earliest complete commentaries of eighth-century kanons appeared towards the end of the ninth

⁸ In doing so, I follow the example of some recent scholarship on Byzantine hymnography, including studies by Arentzen, Frank, Krueger and Mellas. For an innovative new study, which examines both texts and music in Marian hymnography for the feast of the Entrance into the Temple (21 November), see Olkinuora 2015.

⁹ Jaakko (now Fr Damaskinos) Olkinuora argues in fact for 'intermedial' reference between the separate Marian feasts. By this, he means that texts, images and music refer to each other; this methodology for the study of various art forms has recently been used widely in Scandinavian scholarship. See Olkinuora 2015, 19–22.

¹⁰ For a useful introduction to the Byzantine liturgical books, see Velkovska 1997.

¹¹ Skrekas 2008, xx–xxxiv.

century.¹² In the late eleventh century, Eustathios of Thessalonike composed one of the fullest and most erudite commentaries on an iambic kanon on Pentecost that is attributed to John of Damascus; it is likely that this was intended for a teacher who needed help in deciphering the meaning of this complicated hymn.¹³ There is evidence that kanons were used as teaching tools in eleventh- and twelfth-century schools in major cities such as Thessalonike and Constantinople.¹⁴ Hymns thus fulfilled not only a liturgical function in the Byzantine Church, but also assisted theological teaching in non-liturgical settings. I shall return to this question, which concerns the reception of hymnography, towards the end of this chapter, after considering the content and rhetorical style of the various hymn forms that were composed in honour of the Theotokos during the middle Byzantine period.

The field of Byzantine hymnography, perhaps even more than homiletics, presents numerous problems for researchers. Most of the texts that are published in modern service books for the Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches lack critical editions.¹⁵ They also reflect choices that were made in the eleventh and twelfth centuries following a move to standardise the structure and content of liturgical services. Certain hymns were selected for the official collections: the process continued in the late Byzantine period and was more or less completed by the printing of liturgical books in Venice in the sixteenth century.¹⁶ Behind this unified front lie numerous unpublished hymns which, like the published ones that await critical editions, need scholarly attention. Another problem in dealing with this material is that attributions to individual hymnographers are often tenuous: a text that is ascribed to a certain author in one manuscript may be attributed to another elsewhere. Reliable modern catalogues and compilations of Byzantine hymns are also lacking.¹⁷ Fortunately, the field has been opening up in recent years, thanks to scholars' increasing interest in

¹² Glosses on iambic kanons attributed to John of Damascus written by one Theodosios (or Theodoros) are preserved in Cod. Paris. Coislin. 345 (ninth–tenth century); see Skrekas 2008, xxi, n. 60.

¹³ Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Exegesis*. This text is now available in a critical edition; see Cesaretti and Ronchey 2014; review in Lauxtermann 2015; cf. Skrekas 2008, xxviii–xxxi.

¹⁴ Demetracopoulos 1979; Skrekas 2008, xxix.

¹⁵ Olkinuora 2015, 2–3; Simić 2017, 8–9. To note one exception to this rule, a recent critical edition of the iambic kanons of John of Damascus appears in Skrekas 2008.

¹⁶ Frøyshov 2013, 'Byzantine Rite'.

¹⁷ Researchers may nevertheless consult the dated, but still useful, compilations that include the *Anthologia graeca carmina*, ed. Christ and Paranikas 1871; Follieri 1960–6; Szövérfy 1978–9; *Analecta hymnica graeca*, ed. Gonzato and Schirò 1966–80.

both liturgical and hymnographic studies. Although the work of comparing liturgical manuscripts, providing critical editions of individual hymns and distinguishing the styles of individual hymnographers will take many years, it is already underway on an international basis.¹⁸

In spite of the many gaps in our knowledge that remain, there is much that can be said about the Marian hymns according to the Byzantine rite. Following the example of most other scholars,¹⁹ I have chosen to rely on the published service books that are still used in modern Orthodox churches.²⁰ If we accept that hymnography, even more than homiletics, assumed a conventional – even formulaic – style during the middle Byzantine centuries, then attribution to individual authors becomes less important.²¹ Like holy icons, Marian hymns were intended to convey the incarnational theology that prevailed after the Council of Chalcedon, followed by the Christological debates of the sixth through to the mid ninth centuries. It was especially after the ‘Triumph of Orthodoxy’, or the restoration of icons in 843, that Mary’s place as the chief signifier of the incarnation took hold in both images and texts.²² This theology is expressed in hymns with the help of prophecy, typology and other forms of biblical exegesis. In fact, as Archimandrite Ephrem Lash has suggested, the words of scripture are ‘woven into the fabric of the Church’s prayers and hymns, many of which are in fact little more than mosaics of biblical words and phrases’.²³ This is a distinctive message, which differs from homiletics in its poetic, but precise, definition of the Virgin’s central place in God’s dispensation. We also find here a more urgent appeal to her intercessory power, which hymnographers express on behalf of their congregations. The two strands are woven seamlessly together in many hymns, including especially the various forms of theotokion, which suggests that hymnographers did not attempt to distinguish between the Christological and intercessory aspects of their compositions.²⁴

¹⁸ For example, Gigante 1964; Antonopoulou 2004; Afentoulidou 2008; Skrekas 2008; Simić 2017. It is worth noting, however, that Simić proposes a different approach in his recent study of the hymns that are attributed to the early eighth-century hymnographer Germanos of Constantinople. He suggests that ‘date and authorship are not always of crucial importance’. It is possible to study hymnography on a thematic basis, recognising that texts that are intended for congregational use are in a sense ‘timeless’; see Simić 2017, 11.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Olkinuora 2015; Krueger 2014.

²⁰ For a good introduction to these books, see Getcha 2012.

²¹ On problems relating to Byzantine authorship, see Krueger 2004; Papaioannou 2013; Pizzone 2014.

²² Kalavrezou 1990; Tsironis 2000; Koutrakou 2005; Evangelatou 2019. ²³ Lash 2008, 35.

²⁴ In fact the two elements are closely linked; see Koutrakou 2005, 81.

Marian Hymns and Their Place in Liturgical Practice

The liturgical services that were celebrated in the Constantinopolitan churches of the middle Byzantine period reflected a synthesis of two main sources, called the ‘Palestinian’ (or sometimes ‘Jerusalem’ or ‘hagio-polite’) and ‘Constantinopolitan’ rites. The former, which included more elaborate hymnody for the daily offices, probably reached the imperial city in the course of the seventh century and began to be used in many Constantinopolitan churches and monasteries from that time onward.²⁵ The *Psalter* was the basis for both collective and private worship in the early Church.²⁶ Hymnography originated, especially in Palestinian churches and monasteries, as a set of responses to the reading or chanting of separate verses of the Psalms or of the biblical canticles.²⁷ Various hymn forms originated in the Palestinian setting but became part of the Byzantine synthesis; most of these, such as the ‘stichera’, were refrains that were sung in response to verses of Psalms such as ‘Lord, I have cried’ (Ps 140 [141]) that were read in the course of the daily or festal offices.²⁸ Such hymnography continued to be composed and added to the liturgical books that were in use in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, as well as in smaller churches and monasteries in Constantinople and its environs in the course of the middle Byzantine centuries. The most important forms, for our purposes, were the *kanon* (a long hymn that was sung primarily in *Orthros*, the morning office) and the *theotokion* (a short troparion that was dedicated specifically to the Mother of God). I will therefore focus for the most part in this chapter on these two genres – not forgetting, however, that *stichera*, *aposticha* and other forms of hymnography also dealt frequently with Mary’s place in the divine dispensation.²⁹

The *kanon* replaced the singing of the biblical canticles in liturgical offices such as *Orthros*. Although it used to be thought that this hymn form emerged from a monastic context in Palestine, Georgian liturgical manuscripts that were discovered at the Monastery of St Catherine on Sinai in 1975 suggest that it developed in the cathedral of Jerusalem (known as the ‘Anastasis’), with its surrounding churches and shrines.³⁰ The *kanon* was based on nine biblical odes, beginning with Moses’ song of victory

²⁵ Frøyshov 2013, ‘Byzantine Rite’; Frøyshov 2020. ²⁶ Frøyshov 2007a, 200–1; Parpulov 2010.

²⁷ Taft 1986, 31–56; Taft 2005; Frøyshov 2007a; Krueger 2014, 5–6.

²⁸ Taft 1986, 75–91, 273–91.

²⁹ For orientation on the various forms of Byzantine hymnography, see Wellesz 1961, esp. 171–245; Conomos 1984, 1–25.

³⁰ Frøyshov 2013, ‘Rite of Jerusalem’, citing the tenth-century manuscript, Sinai Georgian O.34; Xevsuriani 1978; Frøyshov 2020, 355.

following the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1–9) and ending either with the Magnificat (Lk 1:46–55) or the prayer of Zacharias (Lk 1:68–79). The second ode (Deut 32:1–43) began to be omitted from most kanons after about the middle of the eighth century; however, it was often included before that (as in the case of works composed by Andrew of Crete and Germanos of Constantinople).³¹ Some kanons, especially the later ones, included theotokia after each ode. Scholars have recently noticed that these short troparia do not always reflect the subject matter of the kanons in which they are found; this may mean that they were sometimes added later, either by the original hymnographers or by scribes.³² Nevertheless, the presence of both theotokia and the ninth ode (which is usually dedicated to praise of Mary) in kanons for both daily and festal use points to her importance both as Theotokos and as intercessor in the middle Byzantine period.

Festal Hymnography

As we have seen in previous chapters, four main feasts (the Nativity, Entrance into the Temple, Annunciation and Dormition of the Virgin) were probably in place – at least in Constantinople – by about the middle of the eighth century.³³ In addition to these, the commemoration of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna (9 September), her Conception (9 December), and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple or *Hypapante* (2 February) can be classed as Marian (or in the case of the latter, partly Marian) feasts. The relics of the Mother of God, that is, her robe and belt, were honoured on the dates of their supposed translations to Constantinople, that is, 2 July and 31 August, respectively. Scholars continue to debate the dates at which all of these feast-days originated, along with the extent to which they may have been celebrated in various parts of the remaining Eastern Roman empire; however, they mostly appear in the eighth-century Morcelli calendar and are all found in the tenth-century *Typikon of the Great Church*.³⁴

The hymnography that was composed for these Marian feasts focused, as in the case of homiletics, on the important role that the Virgin Mary

³¹ Frøyshov 2013, 'Byzantine Rite'; Jeffery 1991, 58; Nikiforova 2013, 174–5.

³² Cunningham 2012 (unpublished); cf. Krueger 2019, however, who offers an exception to this rule in the work of a ninth-century hymnographer named 'Christopher'.

³³ See Introduction, 11–12.

³⁴ The Morcelli Calendar, which reflects Constantinopolitan liturgical practices in the early eighth century, omits the feasts of the Entrance into the Temple and the Conception; see Morcelli 1788, vol. 1, 19, 38, 47, 49, 66. For the *Typikon of the Great Church*, see Mateos 1962, vol. 1, 18–23, 110–11, 220–5, 252–9, 328–31, 368–73, 386–7.

played in providing Christ with his human nature and thus helping to bring about the new dispensation of salvation for humanity. She was also, thanks to the gift of free will, the 'Second Eve', who reversed the disastrous choice of the first Eve by accepting God's dispensation at the moment of the annunciation. Liturgical writers, including preachers and hymnographers (who were often the same people), expressed this joyous message by means of narrative, which could often include dramatic monologue or dialogue, and exegetical teaching that employed more typological than allegorical imagery. These writers also used intertextual methods with regard not only to the biblical and apocryphal (or paracanonical) sources for the events that were being celebrated, but also to liturgical texts that belonged to other feasts in the Marian calendar.³⁵ In the following section, we will examine the theological, stational and intercessory content of the hymns that were composed in honour of the main Marian feasts, aiming to discover what is distinctive about each feast and how the various hymnographers chose to celebrate them. As in Chapter 3, on middle Byzantine homiletics, feasts are treated (as in Byzantine liturgical books) in order of their place in the fixed liturgical year, beginning on 1 September.

The Nativity of the Virgin Mary (8 September)

Hymnography, like homiletics, celebrated the feast of Mary's Nativity as a pivotal event in the history of God's dispensation for salvation, regardless of the fact that it is recorded only in the *Protevangelion of James* and not in the canonical Gospels.³⁶ Short hymns, or stichera, for the offices of Vespers and Matins remind congregations repeatedly of the importance of this turning point in history. Prophecy, in the form of Old Testament signs and types, was fulfilled in this birth: a hymn for Vespers, for example, alludes to the root and rod of Jesse (Is 11:1) from which salvation (the Theotokos) sprouted.³⁷ It is Mary, the daughter of a barren mother, Anna, who initiated salvation:

³⁵ J. Olkinuora has recently shown that in addition to such literary parallels, there were musical and iconographical correspondences between the feasts that helped to link them all together; see Olkinuora 2015.

³⁶ *Protevangelion of James* 5.2, trans. Elliott 1993, 59. The vigil for the feast was celebrated in the church of the Chalkoprateia in Constantinople; see the *Typikon of the Great Church*, ed. Mateos 1962, 18–21; Janin 1953, 249.

³⁷ Sticheron for 'Lord I have cried', Vespers, 8 Sept., *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 87; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 98.

The soil which formerly was barren gives birth to fertile ground and nourishes with milk the holy fruit sprung from her sterile womb. Dread wonder: she who sustains our life, who received within her body the Bread of Heaven, feeds at her mother's breast.³⁸

The anonymous hymnographer uses metaphorical language that suggests the Virgin's connection with the earth out of which God created the first human being (Gen 2:7), while also implying that the old, fallen or sterile, order has been replaced by the fertile one of the new dispensation. The reference to Anna's breast-feeding of the newborn Mary also provides a vivid picture of human motherhood. While thus emphasising Mary's humanity, this short hymn simultaneously reminds the congregation of her God-bearing capacity: she is the one who will '[sustain] our life . . . [and receive] within her body the Bread of Heaven', that is, Christ.³⁹

Two kanons, which are attributed to the early eighth-century hymnographers John 'the Monk' (probably also of Damascus) and Andrew of Crete, were sung in the morning office.⁴⁰ These help to establish the links between Old Testament events and the birth of the Virgin, which herald the new dispensation, by their structured use of the biblical canticles. Both kanons also employ spoken and typological prophecy in order to reinforce such continuity. Whereas many later kanons allude only indirectly to the canticles on which each ode is based, these early examples are more explicit. John of Damascus, for example, echoes the language of the first canticle in his call to the faithful to 'honour in hymns the ever-Virgin maiden, who has come forth today from a barren woman for the salvation of mortal men'.⁴¹ Following a first stanza in which the congregation is reminded that the same God who 'shattered the enemy with his mighty arm and made

³⁸ Sticheron for 'Lord I have cried', Vespers, 8 Sept., *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 87; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 99.

³⁹ On breast-feeding as a symbol both of humanity and of eucharistic nourishment, see Bolman 2005.

⁴⁰ Scholars have expressed doubts concerning the attribution of some kanons to John of Damascus; among the hymns attributed to him are a few that were in fact written by John Mauropous (late eleventh century); Wellesz 1961, 237. For further evaluation of the authenticity of hymns attributed to John of Damascus, see Louth 2002, 253; Eustratiades 1931–3. The iambic kanon on Pentecost, on which Eustathios of Thessalonike and others commented (see above, n. 13), is variously attributed by commentators to John of Damascus, John the Monk and John Arklas; see Skrekas 2008, esp. xxxv–xxxvi; Cesaretti and Ronchey 2014, 40*–44*. For the purposes of this study, I use the name of this author, assuming that this particular kanon was composed by the eighth-century poet and theologian – until it is proved otherwise. It is also worth noting that other kanons, including one that is attributed to Germanos I of Constantinople, survive in manuscripts but are not included in modern Orthodox service books. Kosta Simić (2017, 45–55) provides analysis of a kanon on the Nativity of the Virgin that is ascribed to Germanos.

⁴¹ John of Damascus, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Tone Two, Ode One, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 94.

Israel pass through the Red Sea' has now initiated a new creation, Andrew of Crete then calls on everyone – not just humanity – to rejoice:

Let all creation dance for joy and let David also be glad; for of his tribe and seed has come forth a rod that bears as a flower the Lord and Deliverer of all.⁴²

Such emphasis on the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, as stages in God's plan for salvation, is characteristic of festal hymnography. The method of exegesis, which hymnographers inherited from early apologists and commentators such as Irenaeus of Lyons, is both historical and allegorical, as we shall see below. In liturgical contexts, both prophecy and typology remain grounded in literal readings of the Old Testament even as they lift events, such as those described in Exodus, out of their narrative contexts and show their prophetic meaning.

It is also worth noting that Andrew twice mixes references to the Virgin's infancy in the temple with his celebration of her birth. He writes, for example, in the first ode of his *kanon*, as follows:

The Holy of Holies is placed as an infant in the holy sanctuary, to be reared by the hands of an angel. Let us all feast with faith the day of her nativity.⁴³

Another reference to that event occurs in a stanza of the sixth ode:

Your wise parents, O undefiled one, brought you, who are the Holy of Holies, as an offering to the house of the Lord, there to be reared in holiness and made ready to become his mother.⁴⁴

These allusions to the Entrance into the Temple, which had been established as a separate feast on 21 November at least by the time that the *Typikon of the Great Church* was compiled in the tenth century, suggest that it was lacking in the order of service that Andrew was following – either in Constantinople or on Crete – in the early eighth. They also confirm the early date of this *kanon*, thus strengthening the likelihood that it was composed by the famous hymnographer from Jerusalem.

Both John and Andrew use numerous biblical types when invoking the Mother of God in their *kanons* on her Nativity. It is worth taking time to discuss this method of biblical exegesis, since it assumes such a prominent

⁴² Andrew of Crete, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Tone Eight, Ode One, *Menaion* vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 94; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969 (with adjustments), 111.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Andrew of Crete, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Ode Six, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 99; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969 (with adjustments), 118.

role in both hymnography and homiletics of the middle Byzantine period. Typology is a method of interpretation that establishes links between Old Testament and New Testament events, objects or people.⁴⁵ As Frances Young suggests in her important contribution to this subject, typology goes beyond the historical correlation between type and antitype. Following Sebastian Brock's interpretation of the way in which the fourth-century Syriac poet Ephrem employs it, Young suggests that typology indicates 'a universal or eternal truth played out in time, time and again'.⁴⁶ Typology thus has an historical basis but, when sung in the context of a liturgical service, it is lifted out of that concept of time and into an eternal, or eschatological, present. Types and antitypes allow a more prophetic understanding of scripture, with types such as the burning bush representing a 'mimetic impress' of their antitype, the Virgin Mary. The early Fathers read the Old Testament with a view to finding the impression of Mary, the Theotokos, embedded in its narrative. As Andrew of Crete wrote in the eighth century:

For there is not, indeed there is not, anywhere throughout the whole of the God-inspired Scripture where, on passing through, one does not see signs of [the Virgin Mary] scattered about in diverse ways; [signs] which, if you should disclose them for yourself in your industrious study of the words, you will find that a more distinct meaning has encapsulated so much glory before God.⁴⁷

Numerous Marian types appear in the hymnography not only of the *Menaion*, but also in other service books such as the *Parakletike*, the *Triodion* and the *Pentekostarion*. They include well-known objects in the Old Testament such as Jacob's ladder (Gen 28:10–17), the burning bush (Ex 3:1–6), the east gate of the temple (Ezek 44:1–3), the dark, shaded, curdled or uncut mountain (Ex 19:18; Hab 3:3; Ps 67:16 [68:15]);⁴⁸ Dan 2:34), the fleece drenched with dew (Judg 6:37–40), and those which were associated either with the tabernacle or the temple (Ex 25–40; 3 Kgs 6–7 [1 Kgs 6–7], etc.).⁴⁹ The latter include not only the holy structures

⁴⁵ As Frances Young points out, 'typology' is a modern construct. Patristic and Byzantine exegetes did not distinguish between typology and allegory, although they mostly used them for distinct purposes and in different settings; see Young 1997, 152. For modern studies of typology, see Daniélou 1960; Frye 1981; Goppelt 1982; Cunningham 2004.

⁴⁶ Young 1997, 154; cf. Brock 1985, esp. 53–84.

⁴⁷ Andrew of Crete, *Homily IV on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary*, PG 97, 868B–C; trans. Cunningham 2008b, 47 (the same translator's version differs slightly at *ibid.*, 127).

⁴⁸ On the type of the 'curdled mountain', see Lash 1990, 70–2.

⁴⁹ On the use of the Old Testament (which was usually read in separate books according to the version of the Greek Septuagint [LXX]), see Magdalino and Nelson 2010, 1–38.

themselves, which God inhabited, but also their furniture, including the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies, the table, the jar of manna, the candlestand and other items. Such types express in allegorical terms the manner in which God inhabited or made himself felt in his own creation; whereas the places or objects were lifeless in the old dispensation, they were fulfilled in the living body of a virginal woman in the new one.

It is worth asking why typology, which is usually employed without any commentary throughout Byzantine hymnography and homiletics, came to be applied so extensively to the Virgin Mary. It is possible that her virginal conception and birth of Christ naturally evoked such theological treatment. Liturgical writers felt less able to express this paradoxical event in discursive terms and thus resorted to more poetic or typological methods. And, although typology 'is only distantly related to metaphor', as Hannick suggests,⁵⁰ it does evoke images of a deified creation – that is, a world in which God has made his presence felt. Mary, as a mortal human being, was embedded in that creation; she could thus be pictured as a shaded or curdled mountain, Gideon's fleece, or the temple in which God lived. The metaphors taken from daily life that fifth-century preachers such as Proklos of Constantinople and Hesychios of Jerusalem employed were largely replaced in the middle Byzantine period by biblical images. Typology was rich in the sense that it portrayed the Mother of God in both prophetic and poetic ways; it could also evoke more than one biblical reference, thus furnishing layers of meaning for theological reflection – at least for those singers and listeners who were able to assimilate hymns quickly.

The kanons by John of Damascus and Andrew of Crete employ types that refer more to Mary's future role as birth-giver of God than to the event that is being celebrated. She is thus invoked as the branch of the root of Jesse,⁵¹ holy table (Ex 25:22–9),⁵² and throne (Is 6:1; Ezek 1:26; Dan 7:9),⁵³ along with other types. In some cases, as in Ode Seven, which is inspired by the song of the three children in the fiery furnace (Dan 3:26–90 [LXX]), we find a direct correlation between the chosen type and this subject matter. Both John and Andrew cite the prefiguration of the Virgin Mary in the burning bush (Ex 3:1–6). This type, involving a flame that left a thorny bush intact, foreshadowed the way in which 'the flower of [Mary's] virginity was not withered by giving

⁵⁰ Hannick 2005, 73.

⁵¹ Andrew of Crete, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Ode Three, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 95; *ibid.*, Ode Four, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 97, etc.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Ode Five, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 98.

⁵³ John of Damascus, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Ode Five, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 98.

birth'.⁵⁴ Other types, such as the tabernacle or temple, were more appropriate to feasts that referred both to the historical second temple of Jerusalem (as in the cases of Mary's Entrance into the Temple and Christ's Presentation) and to the idea that God came to inhabit a holy space, first in human-made (or lifeless) structures and second in the womb of a living woman.⁵⁵

It is also noteworthy that John of Damascus departs from the usual, more telegraphic, style of typological referencing to explain this symbol to his audience. He writes on the subject as follows:

The bush on the mountain that was not consumed by fire, and the Chaldean furnace that brought refreshment as the dew, plainly prefigured you, O bride of God. For in a material womb, unconsumed, you have received the divine and immaterial fire . . .⁵⁶

Such discursive explanation of this well-known type is unusual in Byzantine hymnography. It may reflect the didactic approach that John sometimes adopted in his liturgical poetry. He also revealed in this way the connection between the subject matter of the seventh ode (the furnace in which the Chaldean children were placed) and the Marian type of the burning bush. Both Old Testament objects prefigured the Virgin's miraculous conception of the divine Word since, as the hymnographer stated in the following stanza, Moses (like contemporary Christians) 'was taught through symbols not to think earthly thoughts'.⁵⁷

Invocation of the Mother of God as intercessor appears infrequently in the hymns for the feast of her Nativity; this is again typical of festal hymnography as a genre. Feasts, as opposed to ordinary days of the week, were primarily occasions for joy and thanksgiving, as I suggested at the beginning of this section. Nevertheless, the common litanies and prayers that interspersed the 'proper' verses for the day included invocations of the Virgin and the saints. And some hymnographers, such as the early eighth-century patriarch Germanos, supplied short hymns of supplication, as we see in the aposticha that are attributed to him in the office of Great Vespers for this feast:

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 11.19, ed. Mülenberg and Maspero at <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/gregorii-nysseni-opera>; ed. and trans. Daniélou 1955, 116–19; trans. Malherbe and Ferguson 1978, 59.

⁵⁵ For further discussion of the assignment of types to individual feasts, see Ladouceur 2006.

⁵⁶ John of Damascus, *Kanon for the Nativity of the Virgin*, Ode Seven, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 100; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969 (with adjustments), 119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The joy of all the world has shone forth upon us, the far-famed Virgin sprung from righteous Joachim and Anna. On account of her exceeding goodness she is become the living temple of God, and is in truth acknowledged as the only Theotokos. *At her prayers, O Christ our God, send down peace upon the world and on our souls great mercy.*

As foretold by the angel, you have today come forth, O Virgin, the all-holy offspring of righteous Joachim and Anna. You are a heaven and the throne of God, and a vessel of purity, proclaiming joy to all the world, O Protector of our life. You destroy the curse and give blessing in its place. Therefore on this feast of your birth, O maiden called by God, *intercede that our souls may be given peace and great mercy.*⁵⁸

Such verses, if they are indeed the work of this important liturgical writer, reflect the presence of intercessory content in both hymnography and homiletics by at least the middle of the eighth century. Its presence or absence in festal hymnography thus reveals the overall aim of this poetry for any given day or hour of the year. Another slot, which typically although not always contains intercessory prayer, are the theotokia that follow the odes of the kanons in Matins. Thus John of Damascus praises Mary as ‘Theotokos, protector and helper of us all’ in the theotokion following Ode Three,⁵⁹ and declares that he is ‘absolved of sin by your supplications’, after Ode Four.⁶⁰ There are also numerous references to the Virgin Mary’s role as mediator, or ‘deliverer from the sharp punishment of old’, which, as I suggested in the Introduction, represents a more theological concept than the practical job of supplication or intercession before Christ.⁶¹ Andrew of Crete remains aloof throughout his canon from the latter; this may reflect his tendency, according to Kazhdan, to adopt an ‘impersonal and rational’ tone in his liturgical writing.⁶²

The Entrance into the Temple (21 November)

Hymns for this feast, which is also based on the narrative in the *Protevangelion of James*, focus on the theological meaning of Mary’s sojourn between the ages of three and twelve in the holy precincts of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In historical terms, this would have been

⁵⁸ Germanos of Constantinople, *Aposticha*, Tone Four, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 91–2; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 106 (with adjustments and italicisations to show the intercessory content). For further discussion of these verses, see Simić 2017, 45.

⁵⁹ John of Damascus, *Kanon on the Nativity*, Ode Three, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 95; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 112.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Ode Four, *Menaion*, vol. 1 (Sept.–Oct.), 96; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 114.

⁶¹ See Introduction, 15; Reynolds 2012, 152–3. ⁶² Kazhdan 1999, 53–4.

the second temple that Herod renovated in the intertestamental period but which the Romans destroyed in 70 CE.⁶³ The story of the Virgin Mary was in any case legendary. Byzantine hymnographers, preachers and hagiographers thus tended either to refer to the first temple of Solomon or to visualise it as a Christian church.⁶⁴ The innermost space, known as the 'holy of holies', could be imagined as the sanctuary of a middle Byzantine church. A screen (or curtain) separated it from the nave in which lay Christians were allowed to stand.⁶⁵ Unlike other human beings – and especially females – the juvenile Mary was received into this holiest of spaces as preparation for her own forthcoming role as the holy space that God would inhabit.⁶⁶ The hymns for the offices of the feast of the Entrance celebrate the event with the help of the same rhetorical and didactic devices that preachers used.⁶⁷ However, middle Byzantine hymnographers refined such methods so as to deliver precise theological teaching about this feast to their audiences.

The instruction that is delivered on the feast of the Entrance into the Temple includes various themes. One of these is Joachim's and Anna's offering of this female child as an 'acceptable sacrifice' to the high priest Zacharias.⁶⁸ Another such offering to the Jewish temple appears in the feast of Christ's Presentation or Meeting (*Hypapante*) on 2 February.⁶⁹ The narrative helps to reinforce continuity between the Old and New Testaments (cf. 1 Kgs 1:24–8 [1 Sam 1:24–8]); however, it may also imply Mary's eventual sacrifice at the loss of her son, Christ, at the cross. The ceremonious nature of this dedication is underlined by the procession of virgins that accompanies Mary and her parents to the temple – a scene that is vividly illustrated in the twelfth-century manuscripts of the homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos.⁷⁰ A sticheron that was sung at Vespers for the feast describes it as follows:

⁶³ Hayward 1996, 1–6; Edelman 2014.

⁶⁴ They visualised it, for example, with its furniture (including the ark of the covenant) in place, whereas these items did not survive in the second temple of Jerusalem. See Hamblin and Seely 2007, 48; Cunningham 2016, 153–4.

⁶⁵ Demus 1948, 14–22; Gerstel 1999, 5–14.

⁶⁶ On the location of girls and women in Byzantine churches, see Mathews 1971, 130–3; Taft 1998.

⁶⁷ Olkinuora 2015, 208–32.

⁶⁸ Sticheron for 'Lord I have cried', Tone One, Small Vespers; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 216; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 164.

⁶⁹ *Menaion*, vol. 3 (Jan.–Feb.), 468–89.

⁷⁰ Cod. Paris. Gr. 1208, fols. 80, 86; Cod. Vatic. Gr. 1162, fols. 59v, 62v. These two illustrated manuscripts are discussed in Omont 1928; Hutter and Canard 1991; Linardou 2004; Linardou 2007. They can be accessed online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55013447b/f171.image> and https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1162, respectively.

The young girls rejoice today. With their lamps in hand, they reverently precede the spiritual Lamp, as she enters the holy of holies. They foreshadow the indescribable brightness that will shine forth from her and give light by the Spirit to those who sit in the darkness of ignorance (Is 9:2).⁷¹

There is a double, or intertextual, scriptural reference in this image of the processing virgins holding torches: first, and most importantly, it refers to Psalm 44 [45], which has special significance in relation to the Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Temple. Mary, according to patristic and Byzantine commentators, is the ‘princess [who] is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes . . . behind her the virgins, her companions, follow’. She is taken to ‘the palace of the king’ in order to be his bride (Ps 44:12–15 [45:12–15]). Such nuptial imagery has echoes with the Song of Songs and, when the psalm is interpreted allegorically, the princess, or Mary, stands for all Christians who await the Bridegroom, Christ. The second potential meaning of the procession, however, belongs to the New Testament. One unpublished *kanon* for the forefeast of the Entrance associates the Virgin Mary’s companions with the parable of the ten wise and foolish virgins (Mt 25:1–13).⁷² This story would also remind congregations of the eschatological significance of this feast, in the sense that Christian believers await their Bridegroom, Christ, who will return at the Second Coming.

Hymnographers further suggest that the Virgin, on entering the holy precincts of the temple, is being prepared to contain Christ, the Word of God. Thus the material temple will be superseded by the living, human, one, as the following verse suggests: ‘The holy of holies [that is, the Theotokos] was worthily brought to live in the holy places . . .’⁷³ This concept of a pure and holy container or space, which God is pleased to inhabit, finds expression in a whole range of biblical types for the Mother of God. The hymnography for the feast of the Entrance tends to prefer those that involve the tabernacle, the temple, as well as furniture or objects that are contained within these spaces. Such types may be characterised as ‘container’ images, although a few, including the gate of the temple through which only the Lord could pass (Ezek 44:1–3), have to do with the passage from one realm (created) to another (divine). Paul Ladouceur has shown that the feast of the Entrance includes more references to Mary as temple than do the other feasts.⁷⁴ The following example

⁷¹ Sticheron for ‘Lord I have cried’, Tone Four, Great Vespers; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 218.

⁷² Cod. Sinait. Gr. 570; see Olkinuora 2015, 103.

⁷³ Sticheron for ‘Lord I have cried’, Tone One, Small Vespers; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 216.

⁷⁴ Ladouceur 2006, 10.

shows how not only Ezekiel's gate, but also other types, may be combined in one verse:

The Law prefigured you most wonderfully as tabernacle, jar of manna, strange ark, veil of the temple, rod of Aaron, temple never to be destroyed, and gate of God; and so it teaches us to cry to you: O pure Virgin, you are truly highest among all.⁷⁵

Typology helps to illustrate the meeting of the old and new dispensations in the person of the Virgin Mary. She simultaneously represents the holy spaces that God, or Christ, comes to inhabit (tabernacle, jar, ark and temple), but also the place of transition – or passageway – from the created to the divine realm (veil and gate).

It is also worth looking briefly at the way in which some hymnographers incorporate dialogic elements into their songs for this feast.⁷⁶ Although this rhetorical method is used more sparingly here than in festal homilies, it is still present – perhaps in imitation of the longer passages of dialogue that appear in the spoken genre. Two kanons are sung in the morning service, which are attributed to the ninth-century hymnographers George of Nikomedia and Basil the Monk. Both alternate between panegyric and narrative approaches to the feast in their kanons, using a variety of rhetorical devices including *exclamatio*, *prosopopoiia* and *ethopoiia*.⁷⁷ Basil, for example, addresses Joachim and Anna directly, exhorting them to rejoice as they present their daughter as 'a three-year old victim of sacrifice, holy and utterly without spot'.⁷⁸ And, in his fourth ode, the same hymnographer calls on the prophets Habakkuk and Isaiah, the virgins of Psalm 44 [45], Joachim and Anna, and finally the 'holy of holies' (or Virgin Mary) herself. All are reminded of their various roles in the story (to prophesy, accompany, offer, or live in the temple) and urged to celebrate the feast.⁷⁹ George of Nikomedia provides some dialogue in sections of his canon, which may reflect homiletic treatment of the theme. In Ode Eight, for example, he invents a dialogue between Anna and Zacharias, as the former leads her child into the temple:

⁷⁵ George of Nikomedia, *Kanon for the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple*, Tone Four, Ode Nine; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 233–4; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 191 (with adjustments).

⁷⁶ Olkinuora 2015, 229–32. For background on dramatic dialogue in Syriac and Byzantine homilies and hymns, see Brock 1983; Brock 1987; Cunningham 2003; Arentzen 2019.

⁷⁷ Kennedy 1994, 202–8; Rowe 1997, 143–4 (under 'affective' figures).

⁷⁸ Basil the Monk, *Kanon on the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple*, Tone One, Ode Three; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 225; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 177.

⁷⁹ Basil the Monk, *Kanon on the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple*, Ode Four; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 226–7; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 180.

As Anna led the undefiled temple into the house of God, she cried aloud and said with faith to the priest, ‘Take the child that was given to me by God and lead her into the temple of your Creator, and sing to him with joy: “All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord”’.

When he saw Anna, Zacharias said to her in spirit, ‘You are leading the true Mother of life here, whom the prophets heralded from afar as the Theotokos. And how will the temple contain her? Therefore I cry in wonder, “O all you works of the Lord, bless the Lord”’.⁸⁰

The dialogue continues, with Anna expressing her sense of renewed faith and Zacharias his recognition of the importance of this event. It is interesting to note the presence of a refrain in this ode, which may have been intended for audience participation.⁸¹

The hymnography for the feast of the Entrance into the Temple thus portrays this event as a point of transition between the old and new covenants. The Jewish temple stands for the law-givers and prophets who awaited the coming of the Lord into his own creation. It will be fulfilled in the person of the Theotokos, who is being prepared as the holy space that will contain God. Elizabeth Theokritoff sums up this feast, on the basis of its hymnography, as follows:

The whole point of this feast is that [Mary] fulfills the meaning of the temple: ‘The living temple of the holy glory of Christ is offered in the temple of the Law’ (Lord, I have cried, 3). She is to be brought up in the tabernacle, in the place of propitiation, in order to become the ‘tabernacle’ – the dwelling place of him who was begotten of the Father before all ages, for the salvation of our souls (cf. Vespers, Lity, 1) . . . The three-year-old Mary, then, is being prepared to be the starting point for the fulfilment of this whole process of God’s covenant with his people.⁸²

Prophecy, typology and even dramatic narrative pervade the hymns for the offices and vigil of the feast. In spite of its apocryphal, rather than biblical, basis, this event was viewed as an important stage in the history of God’s dispensation for salvation.

⁸⁰ George of Nikomedia, *Kanon on the Entrance of the Virgin into the Temple*, Ode Eight; *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 231–2; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 187–8 (with adjustments).

⁸¹ On the singing of refrains by congregations, see Frank 2006, 63; Taft 2006, 60–7; Krueger 2014, 19; Arentzen 2016; Arentzen 2017, 13; Frank 2019.

⁸² In a footnote to this passage, Theokritoff adds that elsewhere in the hymnography for the feast, Mary is called ‘the immaculate heifer who has conceived the divine calf’ (Basil the Monk, *Kanon*, Ode 5.3); ‘cf. the parable of the prodigal son. She is a sacrifice preparing the way for greater sacrifice’; Theokritoff 2005, 82, 87, n. 20.

The Annunciation (25 March)

If the Nativity of the Virgin Mary was interpreted by hymnographers as inaugurating a new creation, then the Annunciation celebrated this event to an even greater degree. This day, as both melodists and preachers proclaimed, recalled – but also re-enacted – the moment at which Christ, the Word of God, became incarnate in Mary’s womb. Although it celebrated the Virgin’s role in this process, the Annunciation was primarily a Christological feast.⁸³ Liturgical writers celebrated the mystery that lies at the heart of Christian doctrine, namely, the entrance of God into his own creation as the incarnate Christ. Elizabeth Briere (Theokritoff) suggests that whereas Christmas, or the Nativity of Christ, ‘is the feast of Nicene dogma, the Annunciation is the feast of the dogma of Ephesus. Christmas stresses that the Virgin’s newborn child is the Father’s uncreated Son, while Annunciation stresses that this same Son entered the Virgin’s womb.’⁸⁴ As I indicated in earlier chapters of this book, the feast of the Annunciation was added to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar in the middle of the sixth century; however, homilies and hymns that celebrate this event survive from at least a century earlier.⁸⁵ Early Christian liturgical writers thus saw the story of the archangel Gabriel’s appearance to Mary and her acceptance of his message (Lk 1:26–38) as a significant moment in the story of the new dispensation well before this event came to be celebrated in a separate feast.

The feast of the Annunciation is based on a biblical, as opposed to an apocryphal, narrative, which is dramatic in its very nature.⁸⁶ Both hymnographers and preachers (as we have already seen) elaborated the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary that appears in the Gospel of Luke, sometimes also adding an additional (and imagined) dialogue between Mary and Joseph.⁸⁷ Although this device is developed further in homiletics, it also plays a part in hymns that were composed for the offices of the Annunciation, including especially the kanon that was sung in the morning service.⁸⁸ Another important element in hymns (just as in homilies)

⁸³ Briere 1983, 181; but contrast Pauline Allen’s view that homilies on the Annunciation assumed a more Mariological character, especially after the work of Sophronios of Jerusalem in the early seventh century: see Allen 2011, 74–8.

⁸⁴ Briere 1983, 181. ⁸⁵ See above, 12, 78–9, n. 53.

⁸⁶ See Luke 1:26–38, but also the *Protevangelion of James* II, which provides an abbreviated narrative; trans. Elliott 1993 (2004), 61.

⁸⁷ Significant examples of homilies containing both dialogues are (ps-)Proklos, *Homily VI, On the Theotokos*, and Germanos I of Constantinople, *Homily on the Annunciation*.

⁸⁸ *Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 176–81. Individual odes in the kanon are attributed variously to John the Monk (probably the Damascene) and Theophanes Graptos; see M. Mary and Ware 1969, 448, n. 2. According to Kosta Simić, several other eight- and nine-ode kanons for this feast survive,

that were written for this feast is the extensive use of typology and poetic epithets for the Virgin Mary. This often takes the form of salutations, based on the archangel's greeting, 'Hail' or 'Rejoice' (*Chaire*), as recorded in Luke (Lk 1:28). Although the long sequences of salutations in some hymns and homilies might appear to have a lyrical purpose, they in fact express precise theological teaching. Biblical types, such as those discussed above, proclaim the Virgin's role as container of or gateway to divinity while poetic images, which are usually drawn from earlier texts such as the *Akathistos Hymn*, perform a similar function. A further aspect of this feast, which made it a complicated affair to organise in liturgical terms, was that it usually took place during the period of Lent – but sometimes during Holy Week or even over Easter.⁸⁹ The Byzantine *typika* explain in detail how the fixed and moveable elements for the day should be intercalated; however, the hymnography for the Annunciation usually took precedence (except if it coincided with Easter itself) over that of the moveable calendar. According to the *Typikon of the Great Church*, the vigil of the Annunciation was celebrated in Hagia Sophia, followed by a procession to the forum and then to the church of the Chalkoprateia, where the Divine Liturgy took place.⁹⁰

As I suggested above, the hymnography for all of the offices for the Annunciation has a dialogic aspect; this reflects a long-standing dramatic tendency in the liturgical treatment of this feast. Stichera, aposticha and other hymns refer immediately to the encounter between the archangel Gabriel and Mary, assuming knowledge of this story on the part of Byzantine congregations:

Taking pity on that which he has made and bending down in his great mercy, the Maker hastens to dwell in the womb of a maiden, the child of God. To her the great archangel came, saying to her: 'Hail, favoured one; the Lord is with you. Do not be afraid of me, the chief commander of the armies of the King. For you have found the grace that your mother Eve once lost; and you will conceive and bring forth him who is of one substance with the Father.'

but are not included in the published *Menaion*. The various kanons are attributed to Andrew of Crete, Germanos I of Constantinople, George of Nikomedia and Theophilos; see Simić 2017, 59–76, who also provides detailed analysis of the kanon that is attributed to Germanos.

⁸⁹ See the instructions for how to celebrate the feast according to the day on which it falls in the lunar (or moveable) calendar in the *Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 146–70; *Typikon of the Great Church*, ed. Mateos 1962, vol. 1, 256–9.

⁹⁰ *Typikon of the Great Church*, ed. Mateos 1962, vol. 1, 252–5; cf. Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Book of Ceremonies* I. 35, ed. Vogt 1935, vol. 1, 172–3 (Bk 1. 44), trans. Moffatt and Tall 2012, 184–5.

Mary said to the angel, 'Your speech is strange, as is your appearance; your words and disclosures are also strange. I am a maiden, uninitiated into marriage; do not lead me astray. You say that I will conceive him who remains uncircumscribed; how will my womb contain the One whom the wide spaces of heaven cannot contain?' 'O Virgin, let the tent of Abraham that once contained God teach you: for it prefigured your womb, which now receives the Godhead.'⁹¹

Details of this scene that are familiar from earlier or possibly contemporary hymns and homilies are immediately visible. Mary is described as a 'maiden' (ἡ κόρη); she is thus the timid and virginal girl whom we also encounter in Syriac dialogue hymns, Romanos the Melodist's kontakion on the Annunciation and Germanos of Constantinople's famous homily for the same feast.⁹² The archangel is 'chief commander of the armies of the King' – a formidable and even frightening figure who suddenly bursts in on the girl. The Virgin's reaction to this appearance is also typical of earlier liturgical treatments of the scene. She is taken aback and finds this male intruder 'strange'; she uses the same adjective to describe his message and manner of speech. But above all, it takes Mary time to assimilate the theological significance of the event that is about to take (or indeed has already taken) place. She needs to receive some additional teaching, which comes in the form of a typological reference – in this case (rather unusually) the tent from which Abraham entertained three 'men' or angels, who were understood in Byzantine tradition to represent the Trinity (Gen 18:1–16).⁹³

As we saw above, the dialogic kanon that is sung in the morning office is attributed, according to the *Menaion*, to John the Monk, although some service books ascribe only its eighth and ninth odes to John and the remainder to Theophanes 'Graptos'.⁹⁴ John 'the Monk' is in this case assumed to be John of Damascus, although this epithet sometimes refers to the eleventh-century bishop of Euchaita John Mauropous.⁹⁵ The kanon opens with praise not of Mary the 'maiden' but of the 'queen and

⁹¹ Stichera in Tone Four for 'Lord I have cried', Small Vespers for the Annunciation, *Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 145 (my own translation, based on M. Mary and Ware 1969, 437).

⁹² *Bride of Light; Dialogue Poems on Mary*; Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakia I–II on the Annunciation*, ed. Maas and Tripanis 1963, 280–93; Germanos I of Constantinople, *Homily on the Annunciation*.

⁹³ Earlier Greek fathers were somewhat slow to make this connection, preferring to view at least two of the young men as angels; see *ACCS*, vol. 2 (Gen 12–50), 60–6. The idea that one of the three men was Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, appears in Eusebios of Caesarea's *Proof of the Gospel* V.9, ed. Heikel 1913, 232; this text is excerpted in John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* 111, ed. Kotter 1975, 171; trans. Louth 2003, 121.

⁹⁴ See above, n. 88.

⁹⁵ Wellesz 1961, 237. For further evaluation of the authenticity of hymns attributed to John of Damascus, see Louth 2002, 253; Eustratiades 1931–3.

mother'.⁹⁶ As Thomas Arentzen has recently shown, regal epithets for the Mother of God had become commonplace by the middle of the sixth century when Romanos composed his *kontakion* on the Annunciation. Although it may not have featured in Byzantine iconography, such imagery was used in both homilies and hymns to express the high status that Mary enjoyed in the celestial hierarchy.⁹⁷ And, as with many other aspects of the Virgin's multifaceted nature, this could be juxtaposed with her image as a humble girl; the paradox reflected that of Christ's divine and human natures in the incarnation.

The dialogue between Gabriel and the Virgin Mary in John's *kanon* is somewhat compressed in comparison with those provided in Romanos the Melodist's *kontakion* and Germanos of Constantinople's homily on the Annunciation. And, since it is embedded in a *kanon*, it loosely follows the structure of the odes and their basis in the biblical canticles. The hymnographer, using his own voice on behalf of the congregation, sings praises either to Christ or to his mother in the first stanza of each ode, with dialogic stanzas following these salutations. Although there is some dramatic play on Mary's transition from doubt and fear to acceptance of the archangel's message, such dialogue also provides an opportunity for theological teaching. Mary asks Gabriel to explain the meaning of Old Testament prophecy or typology that foretold the virgin birth. In Ode Four, for example, she asks the following question:

I have learned from the prophet, who foretold in times of old the coming of Emmanuel, that a certain holy Virgin would bear a child (Is 7:14). But I long to know how the nature of mortal men will undergo union with the Godhead.⁹⁸

The archangel proceeds to explain this mystery, using types including the burning bush and Gideon's fleece as illustrations. The transition from doubt to faith, which appears to occur in association with the conception itself, is thus a process more of learning theology than of emotional development for Mary in this *kanon*. This contrasts with the dramatic dialogues that appear in the homily and *kontakion* by Germanos and Romanos, respectively, on which various scholars have commented.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ John the Monk, *Kanon on the Annunciation*, Tone Four, Ode One; *Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 176; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 448–9.

⁹⁷ Arentzen 2019, 167–9, with commentary on Herrin 2000.

⁹⁸ John the Monk, *Kanon for the Annunciation*, Ode Four; *Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 177; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 451.

⁹⁹ Arentzen 2019, 167–9; Cunningham 2003, 110–12; Kazhdan 1999, 61–4.

The kontakion that appears after Ode Six is in fact a stanza of the *Akathistos Hymn*, which hails Mary's role as Second Eve 'through whom the creation is made new'.¹⁰⁰ More epithets and types follow, with both Gabriel and the Virgin herself describing her role in poetic, but theologically precise, terms. Here, as in earlier examples of homilies and hymns on the Annunciation, there is no interest in Mary's *fiat*, that is, the free choice that caused her to accept God's will and conceive Christ. The hymnographer sees her instead as destined to bear the Word of God in her womb. Thus the exact moment at which this world-changing event took place is unimportant – although it is understood to have taken place at some point during the conversation between Gabriel and the Virgin Mary.¹⁰¹

In view of the emphasis that hymnographers and other liturgical writers placed on Mary's role as mediator of salvation, it is perhaps to be expected that appeals to her intercessory role occur infrequently in the hymnography for the feast of the Annunciation.¹⁰² There are a few exceptions to this rule, however, as in an apostichon for the lity (procession) in the vigil, which is ascribed to Andrew of Crete. After describing once again the story of the Annunciation in which 'things below are joined to things above',¹⁰³ Andrew concludes with a prayer:

We are saved in him and through him; let us cry aloud with Gabriel to the Virgin, 'Hail favoured one, the Lord is with you.' Christ our God, who is our salvation, has taken human nature from you and raised it up to himself. Pray to him that our souls may be saved.¹⁰⁴

It is the theological content that predominates in this hymnography, however, including even in the ninth ode of John the Monk's *kanon*. The initiation of Mary's role as Mother of God is too important a subject for melodists to waste time seeking her assistance on behalf of Christian congregations.

¹⁰⁰ John the Monk, *Kanon for the Annunciation, Kontakion; Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 179; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 454; cf. *Akathistos Hymn*, stanza 1, trans. Peltomaa 2001, 4–5.

¹⁰¹ For an excellent discussion of patristic and Byzantine treatment of the Virgin Mary's conception of Christ *through her ear*, see Constan 2003, 273–313 ('The Poetics of Sound').

¹⁰² For the distinction between the Virgin's role as mediator and intercessor, see Introduction, 8–9; Reynolds 2012, 152–3.

¹⁰³ This phrase is typical of Andrew's thought, which is influenced by that of Gregory Nazianzen. Compare, for example, his homily on the Nativity of the Virgin in which he writes: 'She mediates between the height of divinity and the humility of flesh . . .', PG 97, 808C; trans. Cunningham 2008b, 73.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew of Crete, *Apostichon in Tone Four at the Lity, Menaion*, vol. 4 (March–April), 174 (my own translation).

The Dormition (*Koimesis*)

This feast, which was probably established in the late sixth or early seventh century by the emperor Maurice (582–602), is one of the great Marian celebrations in the Byzantine liturgical calendar.¹⁰⁵ Its hymnography, not all of which is precisely dated, addresses the Virgin with such extravagant epithets as ‘queen’, ‘throne of heaven’ and ‘source of life’. The stichera, aposticha, kanons and other hymns include some narrative concerning the translation of the apostles to Mary’s tomb, her death, burial and assumption into heaven; however, they devote more space to theological expressions of praise for this holy person. Like the preachers whose orations we examined in the previous chapter, hymnographers focus their attention on the paradox that Mary presents: she is a fully human being who, as a virgin, gave birth to God; she thus truly died, but must also have remained incorruptible.¹⁰⁶ As in the case of the other festal hymns that we have so far examined, moral exhortation is absent and intercessory content is minimal. However, there are allusions to the Virgin Mary’s presence at the right hand of Christ, following her dormition and assumption, and to her ability to intercede on behalf of faithful Christians before the Righteous Judge and King.

In the discussion that follows, I will focus on two kanons that were composed for the feast of the Dormition which are ascribed to Kosmas the Melodist and John of Damascus. If these attributions are correct, the two works are thus examples of canon writing from the first half of the eighth century.¹⁰⁷ They both show signs of such early composition: for example, the kanons both refer explicitly to the canticles on which each ode is based – a quality that is not present in every later composition. Since the kanons are entirely devoted to the subject of the Mother of God, it is

¹⁰⁵ According to the fourteenth-century historian, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, the feast was added to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar, as 15 August, by the emperor Maurice (582–602): *Ecclesiastical History* 17.28, PG 147, 292B. This institution reflected the commemoration of the Theotokos on that date in Jerusalem since about the middle of the fifth century; see van Esbroeck 1988a; Shoemaker 2002, 78–141.

¹⁰⁶ There has been much scholarly coverage of the theological meaning of the death and assumption of the Virgin Mary, both for Eastern and Western medieval Christendom. See especially Jugie 1944; Wenger 1955; Mimouni 1995; Van Esbroeck 1995; Shoemaker 2002. As regards the actual death, but bodily incorruption, of the Virgin Mary, there has been some variation of scholarly opinion; such ambiguity also characterises the papal pronouncement, called the ‘Munificentissimus Deus’, which was issued on 1 November 1950. See Boss 2007, 281–3. For further discussion, see Chapter 3, 116–29.

¹⁰⁷ The kanons were intended for the morning office (*Orthros*) and appear in the *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 412–19. Andrew Louth, following Nikodemus the Hagiorite, provides commentary on the canon that is ascribed to John of Damascus in Louth 2002, 274–82.

difficult to distinguish theotokia that stand out from the other stanzas of each ode. They each combine some narrative elements with passages of eulogy or invocation. And little distinction between the thought or style of the two melodists can be detected; these hymns belong already to a well-established genre in which structure to some extent dictates the content of each ode. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern original – or striking – elements that may reflect the separate approaches of the two Palestinian hymnographers.

As in all other festal hymnography, time collapses in the context of the present celebration. Kosmas therefore begins with a reference to the ‘spiritual hosts’, along with the ‘multitude of apostles, coming together suddenly from the ends of the earth’, that attended the deathbed of the Theotokos. In the next stanza, however, he celebrates her abode in heaven where she lives eternally with her son.¹⁰⁸ John of Damascus, after uttering praise throughout his first ode to the ‘Queen and Mother’ who now stands beside Christ, describes in the final stanza of the third ode how the apostles were miraculously taken to Zion in order to assist at the Virgin’s burial.¹⁰⁹ Narrative passages thus mix with panegyrics throughout both kanons. The rhetorical intention was to transport congregations simultaneously to the Virgin’s bed-chamber in the house on Zion, the tomb at Gethsemane and (at least obliquely) her final throne in heaven.

Both hymnographers also provide concise theological teaching concerning the death and assumption of the Virgin. Kosmas, for example, expresses the paradox in a stanza that is addressed directly to the Theotokos:

O pure Virgin, you have won the honour of victory over nature by bringing forth God; yet, like your son and Creator, you have submitted to the laws of nature in a manner above nature. Therefore, in dying, you have risen to live eternally with your Son.¹¹⁰

In what way did this death, which occurred ‘in a manner above nature’, take place? The melodist provides further explanation in Ode Six:

The Lord and God of all gave you, as your portion, the things that are above nature. For just as he preserved you as a virgin in childbirth, so did he

¹⁰⁸ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Tone One, Ode One; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 412–13; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 514–15.

¹⁰⁹ John of Damascus, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Tone Four, Odes One and Three; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 413–14; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 515–16.

¹¹⁰ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Ode One; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 413; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 515.

preserve your body incorrupt in the tomb; and he glorified you by a divine translation, showing you honour as a son to a mother.¹¹¹

We find here the juxtaposition between Mary's virginal birth and her preservation from corruption in the tomb that is also made in contemporary homilies on this subject.¹¹² In both cases, however, liturgical writers stress the idea that this holy woman, like Christ, did indeed die. The language that refers to 'incorruption' thus means merely that her body was not submitted to the normal process of decay that affects all other human beings. As for the process by which the Theotokos reached her position on a 'throne' at the right hand of Christ in heaven, the hymnographers are reticent. They, like preachers, speak metaphorically of this process, with expressions such as 'divine translation' (θεία μεταστροφή),¹¹³ departure to 'the heavenly mansions' (εἰς οὐρανίους θαλάμους)¹¹⁴ and others.

Typology abounds in Kosmas the Melodist's *kanon* and it always conveys precise theological meaning. References to the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the temple are frequent since Mary's body, which had contained God and remained incorruptible in death, fulfilled both prophetic types. A more metaphorical link exists between Mary's womb and the tomb in which she was laid, both of which are antitypes for the containers described in the Old Testament. Their incorruptible qualities are ascribed to Christ, as we see in the following verse:

The Lord and God of all gave you, as your portion, the things that are above nature. For just as he kept you a virgin in childbirth, so did he preserve your body incorrupt in the tomb . . .¹¹⁵

There are also frequent references to Mary as the antitype of the queen or princess in Psalm 44 [45] in the hymns for the feast of the Dormition. This probably reflects her exalted position in heaven, following the assumption. A *sticheron* that is sung at the beginning of Vespers suggests that Mary, the Queen, will be accompanied to heaven by virgins; although this may refer metaphorically to all faithful Christians who have died and been

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 415; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 519.

¹¹² For example, Andrew of Crete, *Homily I on the Dormition*, PG 97, 1081D; trans. Daley 1998, 110: 'For as her womb was not corrupted in giving birth, so her flesh did not perish in dying. What a miracle!'

¹¹³ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Ode Six; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 415; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 519.

¹¹⁴ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Ode Nine; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 419; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 524.

¹¹⁵ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Ode Six; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 415; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 519.

transported to heaven, it also evokes the virgins of the Psalm.¹¹⁶ A third example is the 'holy mountain of the Lord', which Kosmas uses in the fourth ode with reference to its canticle, the prayer of Habakkuk (Hab 3:1–19). Kosmas calls to his listeners, as follows:

Come, O people, and gaze in wonder: for the holy mountain of the Lord, in the sight of all, is exalted above the hills of heaven. The earthly heaven takes up her dwelling in a heavenly and imperishable land.¹¹⁷

The type of the mountain, which is based on the biblical verse, 'God will come out of Temen, and the Holy One from a shady, densely wooded mountain' (Hab 3:3), has associations with other mountains in the Old Testament (Ex 19:18; Ps 67:16 [68:15], Dan 2:34). All of these suggest in different ways the manner in which Christ emerged mysteriously, or without rupture, from a fully human mother. In the case of Habakkuk, the mountain is covered with a storm cloud. This 'overshadowing' cloud refers to the way in which the 'power of the Most High [overshadowed]' the Virgin according to Luke (Lk 1:35).¹¹⁸ The various biblical references, which also have metaphorical value in that they suggest Mary's human qualities by associating her with physical creation, add layers of meaning to individual types such as this. Composers such as Kosmas employed a well-known stock of types and images but combined them in new ways in their festal hymns.

References to contemporary audiences, along with their collective or personal relationships with the Virgin Mary, are less easy to find in festal hymnography. A few examples can be found, however, as in the hypakoe that follows the third ode of the second kanon:

From all generations we call you blessed, O Virgin Theotokos, for Christ our God who cannot be contained was pleased to be contained in you. Blessed also are we in having you as our help. For you intercede for us by day and by night, and the sceptres of kings are strengthened by your supplications. Therefore, singing your praises, we cry aloud to you: 'Hail, favoured one, the Lord is with you.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Sticheron for 'Lord I have Cried', Great Vespers, Tone One; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 406; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 506.

¹¹⁷ Kosmas the Melodist, *Kanon on the Dormition of the Virgin*, Ode Four; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 414; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 517.

¹¹⁸ Ladouceur 2006, 34.

¹¹⁹ *Hypakoe after the third ode*, Tone Five, Matins for the Dormition of the Virgin; *Menaion*, vol. 6 (July–Aug.), 414; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1969, 516 (with adjustments).

It is possible that the congregation would have joined in with the final verse (which is of course Gabriel's salutation to the Virgin in Luke 1:28). There are further supplications to the Mother of God, combined again with the *chairetismos*, in the stichera for Psalm 140 [141] in Vespers. However, the emphasis in most hymns for the offices that made up the vigil for this feast remains Christological.

Hymnographers of the middle Byzantine period thus drew on an accepted body of biblical interpretation, which included literal and typological (but not allegorical) methods, in order to express the manner in which Mary, the Mother of God, enabled God to fulfil his saving dispensation. She symbolised the physical creation that he inhabited and from which he took his human nature in the incarnation. Feasts including the Nativity of the Virgin, the Entrance into the Temple and the Annunciation were celebrated as events that initiated this dispensation. They also helped to reveal the doctrine of two natures that had been defined at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon: Mary was the 'workshop' in which the two natures were woven together.¹²⁰ The feast of the Dormition revealed both the humanity and the divine holiness of this virginal mother. The pure body that had contained and given birth to God died a real death but remained uncorrupted in the tomb. And, as a premonition of the resurrection that good Christians would experience after the Final Day, Mary was assumed bodily into heaven and allowed to sit at the right hand of her Son. It is somewhat surprising that the hymnography for this feast does not celebrate her consequent influence as intercessor to a greater extent; however, the melodists preferred to emphasise Christological teaching at the expense of supplication to the Mother of God.

Daily Services: the *Oktoechos* or *Parakletike*

Turning from festal to daily hymnography, it is necessary to introduce another service book, which came into existence at an early date. The *Oktoechos*, whose composition has traditionally (and mistakenly) been ascribed to the eighth-century theologian John of Damascus,¹²¹ was replete with hymnography for the eight-week cycle of tones on which the fixed liturgical year was based. It contained the basic services for the daily offices,

¹²⁰ The classic expression of this metaphor, as we saw in Chapter 2, occurs in Proklos of Constantinople's *Homily I*; see Constan 2003, 136–7.

¹²¹ See Louth 2002, 252–3.

beginning each day with Vespers, providing different texts (along with their musical settings according to the tones) for each of the eight weeks in the cycle. The *Oktoechos* was already in use by the early sixth century but continued to grow with contributions from famous hymnographers including Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus. Ninth-century monastic hymnographers, and especially Joseph the Hymnographer, expanded the book further, providing kanons for each day of the week according to the eight tones.¹²² Hereafter it came to be called the *New* or *Great Oktoechos* or, more commonly, the *Parakletike*.¹²³ Particular honour was paid to the Theotokos, along with the cross, in the more penitential services for Wednesdays and Fridays. This is the context in which we find a rich collection of stavrotheotokia (hymns that honour Mary's lament at the foot of the cross) to which I shall turn shortly. It is possible that such emphasis reflects the monastic contexts in which much of this hymnography was composed.

The Virgin Mary plays a central role throughout the other daily services, however, not only in kanons and their theotokia, but also in other short hymns or prayers. We have only to look at the beginning of the *Parakletike*, for example, to find the dogmatic theotokion that is sung at Great Vespers for Sunday:

Let us sing in praise of Mary the Virgin, the glory of the whole world, who was made from human seed and bore the Master, [she] who was the gate of heaven, the song of the bodiless ones, and the adornment of the faithful. For she was revealed as heaven and temple of the Godhead. Having torn down the wall of enmity, she substituted peace and opened up the Kingdom. Holding fast therefore to her, as the anchor of faith, we have as our defender the Lord who was born from her. Let the people of God then take courage, take courage!¹²⁴

The hymnographer praises the Virgin as the vehicle of salvation. She is described in typological terms, with images such as gate (Ezek 44:1–3) and temple (3 Kgs 6–7 [1 Kgs 6–7]). However, praise of Mary leads to celebration of Christ, who defends his people from both external and internal enemies. Since it links this section of the office (the singing of Ps 140 [141]) with the next (the entrance of the bishop or priest from the sanctuary, followed by the singing of the evening hymn known as *Phos Hilaron* or

¹²² For discussion of Joseph the Hymnographer's role in the production of the 'Nea Oktoechos' or *Parakletike*, see Ševčenko 1998 (2013), 110; *Parakletike*, trans. Guillaume 1977, 5–18.

¹²³ Wellesz 1961, 139–40.

¹²⁴ Theotokion for Great Vespers on Saturday in Tone One, following 'Lord I have cried', *Parakletike*, 3 (my translation).

‘Joyful Light’), the placement of this theotokion perhaps reflects, in liturgical terms, the Mother of God’s role as ‘gate of heaven’.

The offices that follow, including those for midnight and for the morning (*Orthros*), each contain two – or sometimes three – kanons. Thus the *Parakletike* offers at least four different kanons for each day of the year in an eight-weekly cycle; these would be accompanied by the kanons for both the fixed and movable years that appear in other liturgical books including the *Menaion*, the *Triodion* or the *Pentekostarion*.¹²⁵ As we contemplate this group of kanons (not to mention all of the other hymnodic forms that appear in the various liturgical books), we are struck by their sheer quantity. Nancy Ševčenko is probably correct in suggesting that this material was intended mainly for monastic audiences.¹²⁶ She writes that the intercessory kanons of the *Parakletike* are ‘especially penitential and personal . . . [the poet] appeals to the saint both to rescue him now from various sorts of troubles, the troubles of daily life, and to intercede for him at the end of time’.¹²⁷

If we choose the kanons for Sunday Matins in the *Parakletike* in the first tone, for example, we find that the Theotokos features especially in the theotokia that follow each ode, and to some extent also in the ninth ode. The theme for Sunday is the resurrection of Christ whereas other days of the week focus in turn on the archangels (Monday), John the Baptist (Tuesday), the cross and the Theotokos (Wednesday and Friday), the apostles and St Nicholas (Thursday), and the martyrs (Saturday). The kanons for Sunday are carefully structured, using heirmoi (the opening verses, along with their melodies, for each ode) that evoke the canticles on which they are based. The two kanons that are assigned for this day, according to Tone One, are attributed to John of Damascus and Kosmas the Melodist. Interspersed with these is an anonymous ‘kanon of the Theotokos’, which focuses exclusively on the Christological and intercessory importance of the Virgin Mary.¹²⁸ The odes of the other two kanons

¹²⁵ Such liturgical books might be combined in the Byzantine period, as they were in the earlier centuries, according to the needs of individual churches or monasteries. The earliest surviving liturgical book, of Palestinian origin, is called the *Old Tropologion*, Cod. Sinai gr NE/ΜΓ (ninth century). See Nikiforova 2012; Nikiforova 2013; Smelova 2011, 118–19.

¹²⁶ Note, however, that monastic preoccupations and goals could easily transfer themselves to lay devotional contexts. Byzantine lay people regularly attended monastic offices and liturgies in Constantinople and the provinces. They also frequently turned to monastic leaders, instead of the secular clergy, for spiritual direction. See Morris 1995, 90–119.

¹²⁷ Ševčenko 1998 (2013), 112–13.

¹²⁸ For background on such kanons to the Theotokos, which could be collected in separate manuscripts known as ‘theotokaria’, see Winkley 1973a.

also end with theotokia, which amplify these themes. Mary's intercessory role is invoked, for example, in the theotokion that follows the fifth ode in the first kanon:

Do not overlook the prayers of those who pray faithfully, all-praised one, but accept these and present them, O undefiled one, to your Son, the only benevolent God. For we have you as our protector.¹²⁹

Rather surprisingly, the two kanons that are ascribed to John and to Kosmas do not devote praise exclusively to the Virgin Mary in their ninth odes. They focus instead on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, probably in accordance with the celebration of the latter on the Sunday of every week. The 'kanon of the Theotokos', however, fills this gap: after alluding to the type of the burning bush (Ex 3:1–8), the hymnographer praises Mary's role in the fulfilment of prophecy and the miracle of her virginal birth-giving.¹³⁰ There are no allusions in this ode to Mary's intercessory power.

Turning to the kanons for Wednesday according to the *Parakletike* (Tone One), the themes of the cross and the Theotokos are dominant. It is in this context that we see the penitential – and probably monastic – element becoming more visible. The author of the second kanon (who is named as John of Damascus) dwells constantly on sin and the need for redemption; he blames evil thoughts and passions for distracting him from a pious life, as we see in the third stanza of the first ode:

As one who is constantly falling down in judgement and being seduced by evil thoughts, having become madly ensnared and wholly available to my enemies – do not despise me, O Lady!¹³¹

The tendency to sin, which brings despair to individual monks and nuns, is balanced by the proximity of a merciful Virgin who is constantly invoked in daily prayer. A polarity is also visible here: the deeper the depths to which the sinner has fallen, the greater is his or her dependence on the Mother of God – and beyond her, Christ her son.

The Triodion

The penitential character of this liturgical book reflects its use during the moveable calendar year, extending between the Sunday of the Publican

¹²⁹ John of Damascus, Kanon in Tone One for *Orthros* on Sunday, Ode Five, Theotokion, 15 (my translation).

¹³⁰ Kanon of the Theotokos in Tone One, *Orthros* on Sunday, Ode Nine, *Parakletike*, 20.

¹³¹ John of Damascus, Kanon for *Orthros* on Wednesday, Ode One, *Parakletike*, 52 (my translation).

and the Pharisee (four weeks before the beginning of Lent) and Holy and Great Saturday, that is, the night before Easter Sunday.¹³² The *Triodion* probably originated at the Monastery of Stoudios, with Theodore and his brother Joseph (later archbishop of Thessalonike) initiating the project during the first half of the ninth century.¹³³ The compilers drew on earlier hymnographic compositions, including especially the kanons of Palestinian melodists such as Andrew of Crete, Kosmas the Melodist and John of Damascus, but also added to this collection. The *Triodion* continued to expand in the course of the ninth century, with Constantinopolitan poets including Klement, Kassia and the prolific Joseph the Hymnographer contributing to its content.¹³⁴ During its earlier phases, different versions of the *Triodion* included longer or shorter versions of the Lenten period; according to manuscript evidence, it arrived approximately at its final form by about the twelfth century.¹³⁵

The *Triodion* offers penitential hymnody for the offices that are celebrated throughout the Lenten period, as well as for Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and the whole of Holy Week. In comparison with the typological approach of most festal hymnography, there is more emphasis here on ethical and allegorical readings of scripture.¹³⁶ And, since much of the *Triodion* is penitential in character, it is not surprising to find supplication to the Mother of God, along with holy figures such as St Mary of Egypt, to intercede on behalf of sinful humanity. As in the case of hymnography of the *Oktoechos* or *Parakletike*, such pleas for intercession often possess a more personal quality than do the hymns for the fixed services of the *Menaion*. They are usually expressed through the voice of the hymnographer, who speaks for the entire congregation – whether this is monastic or lay.¹³⁷

Hymnography that honours or addresses Mary, the Theotokos, appears throughout the *Triodion*, as in other service books, especially in theotokia and kanons. Andrew of Crete's *Great Kanon* is no exception to this rule.¹³⁸

¹³² *Triodion katanyktikon*; trans. M. Mary and Ware 1978. ¹³³ Krueger 2014, 170.

¹³⁴ Krueger 2014, 171; on Klement, see Kazhdan 1992; on Kassia, see Tsironis 2002; Simić 2009; on Joseph the Hymnographer, see Ševčenko 1998 (2013).

¹³⁵ Krueger notes, however, that 'later poets continued to write additional selections; copyists made substitutions' even after this period. See Krueger 2014, 169–72, esp. 172.

¹³⁶ Theokritoff 2005, 83–6.

¹³⁷ On the construction of a 'liturgical self' with the help of such hymnography, see Krueger 2014, esp. 164–96.

¹³⁸ Andrew of Crete, *Great Kanon*. For an important recent study, see Krueger 2014, 130–63. Previous secondary work on the *Great Kanon* includes Schirò 1961–2; Wellesz 1961, 204–6; Kazhdan 1999, 46–52.

This long hymn, which consists of nine odes that are divided into 250 stanzas or troparia, is sung in sections during the services of Compline in the first week of Lent and in its entirety on Thursday of the fifth week. In the course of identifying himself with many biblical characters, beginning with Adam and Eve, who sinned against God, the hymnographer turns for help to the Mother of God in the theotokia that round off each ode of the kanon as we see in the following example, which follows the first ode:

O Theotokos, the hope and protection of those who sing your praises, take from me the heavy yoke of sin and, as a pure Lady, accept me in repentance.¹³⁹

At the end of his long composition during which, according to Derek Krueger, the hymnographer ‘dramatizes the recognition of the self’ in a ‘Foucaultian’ manner,¹⁴⁰ the focus shifts back to the Virgin Mary as chief defender of Constantinople. In the final theotokion following the ninth ode, Andrew writes:

Guard your city, O undefiled Progenitor of God; for while ruling faithfully through you, [the city] is made strong by means of your [help]. She is victorious, putting to flight every temptation, despoiling the enemies, and ruling over her subjects.¹⁴¹

It is not clear whether verses such as this reflect topical concerns for Andrew of Crete. He certainly lived in Constantinople during parts of his life and experienced Muslim invasions on the island of Crete;¹⁴² however, the theotokion may represent a conventional trope in its appeal to the protective powers of the Theotokos. It does not coincide with the more personal or inward-looking tone of the kanon as a whole, so may represent a scribal addition at a later date.

¹³⁹ Andrew of Crete, *Great Kanon*, Ode One, Theotokion: Θεοτόκε, ἡ ἑλπίς, καὶ προστασία τῶν σὲ ὑμνοῦντων· ἄρον τὸν κλοιὸν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τὸν βαρύν, τὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας, καὶ ὡς Δέσποινα ἀγνή, μετανοοῦντα δέξαι με, PG 97, 1336C. In the absence of contemporary manuscripts containing the *Great Kanon*, it is impossible to determine whether Andrew himself added these theotokia to each ode of the work. It is likely that once this element had become standard in Byzantine kanons, a later scribe or compiler added appropriate stanzas to the original text. However, a tenth-century manuscript of the *Triodion*, Sinai gr. 735, shows the theotokia firmly in place and written in the same hand – although they are signalled in the margins by the letter Θ. I am grateful to Derek Krueger for alerting me to this manuscript, which is now available online (thanks to the microfilm collection at the Library of Congress) at: www.loc.gov/item/00271075583-ms/.

¹⁴⁰ Krueger 2014, 134.

¹⁴¹ Andrew of Crete, *Great Kanon*, Ode Nine, Theotokion, PG 97, 1385D.

¹⁴² For discussion of the likely place of the *Great Kanon* in the context of Andrew of Crete’s life, see Krueger 2014, 133.

The *Triodion* as a whole, like the *Parakletike*, emerged from a primarily monastic background. This, along with its liturgical setting of Great Lent, may account for its personal and penitential aspect, leading to a greater preponderance of theotokia with an intercessory purpose.¹⁴³ However, as liturgical scholars have repeatedly shown, monastic books soon became part of the cathedral and parish liturgical repertoire.¹⁴⁴ The *Great Kanon*, along with other hymns that were originally intended for the monastic office of *Orthros*, began to be chanted – either chorally or as solo performances – in churches that were attended by lay, as well as monastic, Christians. This suggests that the ascetic values that belonged properly to monasticism transferred themselves to lay Christians both in Constantinople and in the Byzantine provinces. Supplication to Mary, the Mother of God, also became more personal and intercessory, thus supplementing the primarily Christological hymnography that we have noted in both daily and festal service books earlier in this chapter.

Theotokia and Stavrotheotokia

The short troparia that are known as theotokia appear in numerous settings throughout the divine offices.¹⁴⁵ As mentioned above, they featured – at least by the beginning of the eighth century – at the end of each ode of most kanons, thus completing that section of the hymn and reminding congregations of the salvation that was inaugurated by Mary's birth-giving. Theotokia could also be sung after stichera (responses) or ainoi ('praises') that were sung after the chanting of Psalm verses in Vespers and the Morning Office, following the final doxology ('Glory . . . now and ever . . .') in each section – as well as at numerous other points in liturgical celebration.¹⁴⁶ There are different types of theotokia, including those that describe or address the Mother of God, using typology and allegory, poetic imagery and intercessory prayer; the stavrotheotokia, which are devoted to Mary's lament at the crucifixion; and the dogmatika, which elaborate her importance in Christological doctrine.¹⁴⁷ The latter are considered to be

¹⁴³ For exploration of the penitential and monastic nature of the *Triodion*, see Mellas 2017; Mellas 2020.

¹⁴⁴ Taft 1986, 273–83; Taft 1992, 52–66; Krueger 2014, 132–3.

¹⁴⁵ For useful introductions to this form of hymnography, see Smelova 2011; Hannick 2005; Eustratiades 1930; Baumstark 1920.

¹⁴⁶ Frøyshov 2013, 'Rite of Jerusalem'.

¹⁴⁷ According to Hannick, the dogmatic theotokia belong to the category of hymns known as *idiomela*; they are thus also preserved in a separate book called the *Sticherarion*, whose earliest witnesses date to the tenth or eleventh century; he also calls them 'works of incomparable exegetical value' on account of their rich use of typology and allegory; see Hannick 2005, 71–6.

the work of John of Damascus,¹⁴⁸ although they were probably revised and expanded by later hymnographers.

To begin with dogmatic theotokia, which are used especially in the office of Vespers before Sunday, we find various methods of exegetical teaching with regard to the Virgin Mary. These include historical or literal, typological and allegorical forms of biblical interpretation. An example of a theotokion which expresses a richly typological account of Mary's role in Christ's incarnation is that which is sung at the end of Vespers for the Sundays of Tone Five:

The prophecies concerning you have been fulfilled, pure Virgin; for one of the prophets foretold you as the gate in Eden facing towards the East through which none had passed, except your Creator, for the sake of the whole world. Another saw you as a bush aflame with fire, because in you there dwelt the fire of the Godhead and you remained unburned. Another as a holy mountain from which was hewn without human hand a cornerstone and it crushed the image of the spiritual Nebuchanezar. Truly great is the mystery that is in you, Mother of God! Therefore we glorify you, for through you has come the salvation of our souls.¹⁴⁹

We find a different form of dogmatikon, this time following the stichera for Psalm 140 [141] in the Vespers service preceding Sundays in the sixth tone. Here the hymnographer omits any typological references, preferring to teach Christological doctrine in a more discursive way while addressing himself directly to the Virgin:

Who will not call you blessed, all-holy Virgin? Who will not hymn your birth-giving without labour? For the only-begotten Son, who shone from the Father beyond time, came forth from you, pure maiden, ineffably incarnate. By nature he is God, by nature he became man for our sakes, not divided in a duality of persons, but known without confusion in a duality of natures. O honoured and all-blessed, implore him to have mercy on our souls.¹⁵⁰

There is a chiasmic structure to this dogmatikon, which helps to emphasise its main dogmatic point.¹⁵¹ The hymn begins with invocation of the Virgin

¹⁴⁸ Hannick supports this thesis by citing the unusual vocabulary that appears in some dogmatika, including οὐθυσπάρκτως ('existent in itself') and Φρικτὸν καὶ ἄρρητον ὄντως ('terrible and inexpressible indeed') (both describing the incarnation), found in the *Paraklitike*, 533; see Hannick 2005, 72.

¹⁴⁹ Theotokion following the aposticha in Vespers on Saturday, Tone Five; *Paraklitike*, 362; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (with adjustments) at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160305063629/http://anastasis.org.uk/>

¹⁵⁰ Dogmatikon for Vespers on Saturday, Tone Six, *Paraklitike*, 451; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (with adjustments) (for internet link to the resource, see above, n. 149).

¹⁵¹ I am grateful to Elizabeth Theokritoff for making me aware of the chiasmic structure of many hymns. See also Breck 2008.

Mary. The following lines lead from her miraculous birth-giving to the two natures of Christ that are embodied in one Person, with allusion to the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. Then the hymnographer ends by calling again on the Theotokos, appealing to her as intercessor before the God-man, Christ.

Turning now to the intercessory content of many theotokia, we again find abundant evidence. Supplication to the Mother of God, with appeals to her role as intercessor before Christ and protector of the faithful, may fill whole theotokia or else be confined to their closing phrases. A theotokion that focuses entirely on intercessory prayer reads as follows:

Look upon the supplication of your servants, O all-unblemished one, bringing to an end the dread assaults that beset us and calming all our distress; for we have only you as safe and sure anchor, and we have obtained your protection. Sovereign Lady, may we who entreat you not be put to shame; make haste to hear the supplication of us who cry to you with faith: Hail, Sovereign Lady, help, joy, and protection of all, and salvation of our souls.¹⁵²

In contrast to this, we find Christological and intercessory themes combined in another theotokion:

Pure Virgin, you alone were declared the dwelling of the Light which shone out from the Father; therefore I cry to you: make bright my soul, darkened by the passions, with the light of the virtues, and make her dwell in tents of light on the day of judgement, O immaculate one!¹⁵³

In addition to showing how the separate strands of invocation may or may not be combined in one short hymn, these examples (which are chosen almost at random from the *Parakletike*) reveal the difference between collective and personal prayer to the Virgin. The first of the two theotokia appeals to her on behalf of the whole congregation whereas the second assumes the voice of a solitary supplicant. It is tempting to assume, as in the case of so much of the hymnographic material in the *Parakletike*, that the hymnographers are praying on behalf not only of themselves but also of a largely monastic congregation. The frequent references to passions, demonic assaults and other forces that impede spiritual growth seem to

¹⁵² Theotokion following the resurrection stichera of the aposticha, Great Vespers on Saturday, Tone Four; *Parakletike*, 274; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (with adjustments) (for internet link to the resource, see above, n. 149).

¹⁵³ Theotokion for Vespers following 'Lord I have cried', on Monday, Tone One; *Parakletike*, 36–7; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (with adjustments) (for internet link to the resource, see above, n. 149).

reflect the preoccupations of such a background. Although it must be borne in mind that the affect which pervades some hymns in the *Parakletike* is rhetorical, it reflects the penitential spirit that would have been encouraged especially in monasteries not only during Lent but also in the weekday offices throughout the liturgical years. The monastic hymnographers cry out both to Christ and to the Mother of God to save them from 'drowning' in the passions and offences that afflict them in their wretched states.

This tendency appears most vividly in the stavrotheotokia that are sung especially in the offices for Wednesday and Friday each week. These short hymns reflect a strand of hymnography that goes back to Romanos the Melodist and perhaps beyond.¹⁵⁴ Romanos elaborates the story of Mary's lament in his kontakion on this subject, inventing a dramatic dialogue between her and her suffering son as he was being dragged towards the cross.¹⁵⁵ Whereas the Virgin is portrayed as suffering and crying out from 'deep grief and great sorrow' (ἐκ λύπης βαρείας καὶ ἐκ θλίψεως πολλῆς),¹⁵⁶ Christ himself remains stoic in the face of his torments. He tells his mother to stop grieving since she will be the first to witness his resurrection. In the course of this dialogue, much theological teaching is provided, mostly in the voice of Christ, as he goes through the story of God's dispensation for salvation, beginning with his incarnation as the 'second Adam' and being fulfilled in his crucifixion and resurrection. The kontakion ends with the hymnographer's invocation of the Saviour, along with an allusion to Mary's 'freedom of speech' (*parresia*), which allows her to act as intercessor for the rest of humanity.¹⁵⁷

The stavrotheotokia expand further the theme of Mary's heartfelt grief at the sight of her son dying on the cross. As Niki Tsironis has suggested, a growing theological emphasis on the reality of the incarnation (which could be conveyed in both lyrical and discursive terms) from about the late seventh century onward found expression in various homilies of this period.¹⁵⁸ It is possible that these texts influenced the writers of the stavrotheotokia that were produced in such quantities for the *Parakletike*, the *Triodion* and other service books. I suggest again that the frequency

¹⁵⁴ Tsironis 1998. For further discussion of stavrotheotokia, see Constan 2016, esp. 11–14, 17–21.

¹⁵⁵ Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion on Mary at the Cross*, ed. Maas and Trypanis 1963, 142–9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, stanza 4, Maas and Trypanis 1963, 143.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, stanza 17, Maas and Trypanis 1963, 148–9. For further discussion of Romanos' kontakion on Mary at the cross, see Chapter 1, 63–5.

¹⁵⁸ Tsironis cites John of Damascus, *Homily on Holy Saturday*, (ps-)Germanos of Constantinople, *Homily on the Burial of the Lord's Body*, and Theodore of Studios, *On Holy Easter* as possible sources for the stavrotheotokia; see Tsironis 1998, 220–30. Beck ascribes the *Homily on the Burial of the Lord's Body* to Germanos II, not Germanos I; see Beck 1959, 668.

with which Mary's lament is evoked throughout the liturgical year may be associated with the monastic themes of sin and compunction. By identifying their own pain with that of the Mother of God at the foot of the cross, hymnographers urged their audiences to pray for healing and forgiveness from the suffering Christ.

Among the many stavrotheotokia that are sung in Vespers before Wednesday each week, we find, for example, the following juxtaposition between the situation of the hymnographer (who sings on behalf of a monastic audience) and Mary at the foot of the cross:

Wretch that I am, since I am bowed down beneath dreadful passions, and I have done wholly profligate deeds of shame, whose base images and fantasies even now batter, confuse, and turn me to sensual enjoyment of them in the sensations of my heart. But do you, O pure one, save me.

My life has become full of many temptations, O all-pure one, from the many evils with which I have offended; but ransom me from both and give me both a mind and a life that are without offence and a sober reason, that in faith I may call you blessed and glorify your godly name . . .

. . . The Virgin, when she saw your unjust slaughter, O Christ, cried out to you in bitter grief, 'My sweetest Child, how are you suffering unjustly? How hanging on the tree, you that hung the whole earth on the waters? Do not, compassionate Benefactor, leave me alone, your mother and your servant.'¹⁵⁹

Such a connection, which is set out here in the ordering of the troparia, is unequivocal. Monastic worshippers (and by extension all Christians) are urged to face and experience the depths of grief that Mary felt at the foot of the cross. This state, which involves a sense of complete abandonment, leads to greater dependence on God. It is also prompted by the selfless love that belongs above all to grieving mothers. In the case of Mary, such pain also represents the fulfilment of Symeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk 2:35), as we see in the following stavrotheotokion:

A sword passed through your heart, O all-pure one, when you looked towards your Son on the cross and you cried out, 'Do not leave me childless, my Son and my God, who kept me a virgin after childbirth!'¹⁶⁰

Fr Maximos Constas has provided a vivid assessment of Mary's position in liturgical texts that deal with her lament at the foot of the cross:

¹⁵⁹ Sticheron after 'Lord I have cried', Vespers on Tuesday, Tone One; *Parakletike*, 49; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (for internet link to the resource, see above, n. 149).

¹⁶⁰ Stavrotheotokion after 'Lord I have cried' in Vespers on Tuesday, Tone Three; *Parakletike*, 50; trans. Archimandrite Ephrem (for internet link to the resource, see above, n. 149).

Mary, both virgin and mother, is a paradoxical figure. In a single moment, in the very form of her being, she embodies all the inviolability of virginity and all the pain of motherhood. In her virginity she is a 'sealed book that no man may open' (cf. Is 29:11-12). Yet in the experience of mourning for her lost son, the seals of her being are torn apart, rent like the veil of the temple, for this is her real childbirth, in which her hair is loose, her eyes leak, and midwives anxiously attend to her. In her pain she is one with the wounded Christ: she is porous, poured out, kenotic . . .¹⁶¹

Paradox thus lies at the heart of the incarnation; it manifests itself not only in Christ's birth, death and resurrection, but also in the Virgin Mary's place within these events. Hymnographers deliberately contrasted Mary's virginal conception and birth of Christ, which occurred entirely without rupture or pain, with her vulnerability and 'porousness' at the foot of the cross. The two events revealed her simultaneous closeness to God and human nature: the Theotokos remained inviolate but was vulnerable to pain and suffering. This reflected – and helped to reveal – the two natures, divine and human, of her son, Jesus Christ.

Both homiletic and hymnographic evocations of this doctrine express historical, moral and spiritual layers of meaning. Although the lay and monastic faithful may have assimilated such messages to varying degrees, it is possible that their daily exposure to hymnography allowed them gradually to gain better theological understanding. The typological references may be complex, but rhetorical devices including vivid description (*ekphrasis*), exclamation (*exclamatio*) and character portrayal (*ethopoiia*) would have allowed congregations to enter into the kind of emotional state that engenders real spiritual growth.

Conclusions

I have surveyed in the course of this chapter the hymnography in praise of Mary, the Theotokos, that survives in various Byzantine service books for both the fixed and moveable liturgical years. Although some hymns offered innovative teaching of Marian theology, the majority provided concise and formulaic approaches to their holy subject. Hymnographers, like icon painters, sought to convey well-established exegetical teaching, which could be expressed best by the use of accepted phrases, prophecy and typology. Although these elements might be combined in different ways, they reappeared constantly in both festal and daily hymnography.

¹⁶¹ Conostas 2014, 127–9.

Congregations, including both lay and monastic Christians, would have recognised and understood the biblical references to the Theotokos – and would perhaps also have appreciated the variety of ways in which she was described or invoked, according to the different feasts and ordinary days of the year. The emphasis in most hymns, as I have suggested throughout this chapter, was Christological; however, both daily and Lenten services consistently provided suitable occasions for penitential and intercessory prayer to the Virgin Mary.

Like homiletics, hymnography employed a range of rhetorical tools in its teaching of Christological doctrine. In addition to invoking and praising the Mother of God with the help of a huge range of biblical types and metaphors, hymnographers used *ekphrasis* (vivid description), *diegesis* (narrative), *ethopoia* (the painting of character by means of dramatic monologue or dialogue) and many other persuasive tools that helped to bring alive this biblical, but also legendary, character. Scholars have noted the overlap between homilies and hymns while also pointing out their unique characteristics.¹⁶² The question whether either genre inspired or influenced the other is rendered more difficult because many writers, such as Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus and George of Nikomedia, wrote both homilies and hymns. These preachers and melodists were masters at condensing complex Christological teaching into poetic praise and narrative. Such a message is transmitted more directly in hymnography than in homiletics, owing to the metrical limitations of the former liturgical genre; whereas preaching may have offered a more discursive, and therefore experimental, opportunity for teaching of this kind, the composition of hymns was focused and deliberate. It is likely therefore that hymnographers drew on the theological inspiration of both patristic and contemporary preachers – even when they were themselves involved in both processes.

In addition to listening to well-known hymns on a daily basis, congregations may have participated in singing their refrains.¹⁶³ Music, in the form of the well-known tonal melodies that were used in the Byzantine Church, would also have helped the assimilation of theological teaching. The liturgical services, which took place both inside and outside churches and in which every class from emperors to ordinary men and women played a role, taught incarnational theology with the help not only of words, but also of music, incense and images.¹⁶⁴ The Virgin Mary played a central role in this theology since

¹⁶² Hannick 2005; Tsironis 2005. ¹⁶³ See above, n. 81.

¹⁶⁴ For a recent and evocative treatment of the sensory power of the Byzantine liturgy, see Pentcheva 2010.

she symbolised the receptive creation, or body, which the divine Son of God chose to enter. It is this message above all that the dogmatic theotokia and other Marian hymns emphasised.

That hymnography was valued for its didactic as well as its devotional function is revealed by the glosses and commentaries – especially on the poetic kanons that were attributed to John of Damascus – which began to appear from the end of the ninth century onward.¹⁶⁵ This literary process, which has been receiving increasing scholarly attention, opens up an entirely different context for the reception of Byzantine hymnography.¹⁶⁶ Photios Demetracopoulos and Dimitris Skrekas have shown that some, mainly eighth-century, hymns that were considered to contain the most sophisticated theological teaching and poetry became teaching tools in Byzantine schools especially in the twelfth century. Indeed this phenomenon continued in the later and even post-Byzantine period.¹⁶⁷ It is worth emphasising here that only certain hymns received such treatment.¹⁶⁸ They included the iambic kanons that were attributed to John of Damascus, as well as some by his colleague and possibly adopted brother, Kosmas. The works of writers including Romanos the Melodist, Joseph, Theophanes Graptos and George of Nikomedia were meanwhile considered clear enough in meaning not to need exegetical commentaries.¹⁶⁹ There were two main settings in which the iambic kanons might be explained. First, they appear to have been used in private, or more closed, settings in which the audience might be expected to have a high standard of rhetorical and philosophical learning. This context is suggested by statements by the authors of commentaries, such as Gregory Pardos of Corinth, Theodore Prodromos or Eustathios, that their work has been requested – or is offered to – scholars and philomatheis ('lovers of learning').¹⁷⁰ Second, however, internal evidence suggests that the same commentaries were delivered to students in the Patriarchal or other theological schools in Constantinople.¹⁷¹ In addition to exegetical lectures on the kanons, which might subsequently be published by the commentators, teaching in these settings included schedography, or the

¹⁶⁵ Skrekas 2008, xx–xxxi.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, the excellent critical edition of an iambic hymn for Pentecost that is attributed to John of Damascus in Eustathios of Thessalonike, *Exegesis*.

¹⁶⁷ Demetracopoulos 1979; Skrekas 2008, xx–xxxiv.

¹⁶⁸ The corpus included the religious poetry of Gregory Nazianzen, along with some other selected works. See Krumbacher 1897, 679–80; Demetracopoulos 1979, 143–6.

¹⁶⁹ Demetracopoulos 1979, 148. ¹⁷⁰ Demetracopoulos 1979, 140, n. 34.

¹⁷¹ Demetracopoulos 1979, 150–2. On the Patriarchal School in Constantinople, see Browning 1962.

imitation of short poetic pieces by students.¹⁷² Above all, this evidence suggests that the theological content of religious poetry (which included the more sophisticated hymnography of John of Damascus and Kosmas the Melodist) was taken seriously by such highly educated figures as Theodore Prodromos and Eustathios of Thessalonike. It could be discussed and elucidated in the more sophisticated setting of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchal School while also being sung at the appropriate liturgical moment in churches throughout the empire.

Much work remains to be done not only on Marian but also other forms of Byzantine hymnography. Although this lies beyond the scope of the present study, texts should be considered along with their musical settings: hymnographers were also musicians who composed – or re-used – the melodies to which they set their verses. Their compositions offered congregations a harmonious form of theological teaching that was expressed not only in words, but also in music. It should also be recognised that this vast body of material represents one of the most important surviving sources of official teaching on the theological place of the Virgin Mary in Christian doctrine. Hymnography is not as easy to access as homiletics or theological treatises for the many reasons that I set out at the beginning of this chapter; however, this literary and musical genre probably reached the church-going public in a way that more refined or technical texts did not. The melodists and the singers who performed their works sought to inspire joy, understanding and penitence in the Byzantine faithful, depending on the time or day of the year that was appropriate for each state of mind. Whether they were clerical, lay or monastic worshippers, those who heard these hymns would have understood their didactic message. The Mother of God occupied a central place in the services of the Church that were celebrated throughout the year; after all, ‘she who was more spacious than the heavens’¹⁷³ ‘[gave] birth to the Maker of all things’.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² ‘Besides the iambic canons, other religious poems were also used in schedography, as the Ἐπιτῆ of Gregory Nazianzus, students and teachers σχεδογράφοι imitated ecclesiastical poems, “ἰαμβίζοντες” in dodecasyllabic verses, and even parodies of canons were written’; Demetracopoulos 1979, 145–6 (see also nn. 15–19).

¹⁷³ John the Monk, Sticheron at the Lity, Vespers for Christmas Day, *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 659.

¹⁷⁴ Germanos of Constantinople, Sticheron at the Lity, Vespers for Christmas Day, *Menaion*, vol. 2 (Nov.–Dec.), 659.