



Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies

ICONOPHILIA

**POLITICS, RELIGION, PREACHING, AND THE
USE OF IMAGES IN ROME, c.680–880**

Francesca Dell'Acqua

Iconophilia

Between the late seventh and the mid-ninth centuries, a debate about sacred images – conventionally addressed as ‘Byzantine iconoclasm’ – engaged monks, emperors, and popes in the Mediterranean area and on the European continent. The importance of this debate cannot be overstated; it challenged the relation between image, text, and belief. A series of popes staunchly in favour of sacred images acted consistently during this period in displaying a remarkable *iconophilia* or ‘love for images’. Their multifaceted reaction involved not only council resolutions and diplomatic exchanges, but also public religious festivals, liturgy, preaching, and visual arts – the mass media of the time. Embracing these tools, the popes especially promoted themes related to the Incarnation of God – which justified the production and veneration of sacred images – and extolled the role and the figure of the Virgin Mary.

Despite their profound influence over Byzantine and western cultures of later centuries, the political, theological, and artistic interactions between the East and the West during this period have not yet been investigated in studies combining textual *and* material evidence. By drawing evidence from texts and material culture – some of which have yet to be discussed against the background of the iconoclastic controversy – and by considering the role of oral exchange, *Iconophilia* assesses the impact of the debate on sacred images and of coeval theological controversies in Rome and central Italy.

By looking at intersecting textual, liturgical, and pictorial images which had at their core the Incarnate God and his human mother Mary, the book demonstrates that between c.680–880, by unremittingly maintaining the importance of the visual for nurturing beliefs and mediating personal and communal salvation, the popes ensured that the status of sacred images would remain unchallenged, at least until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century.

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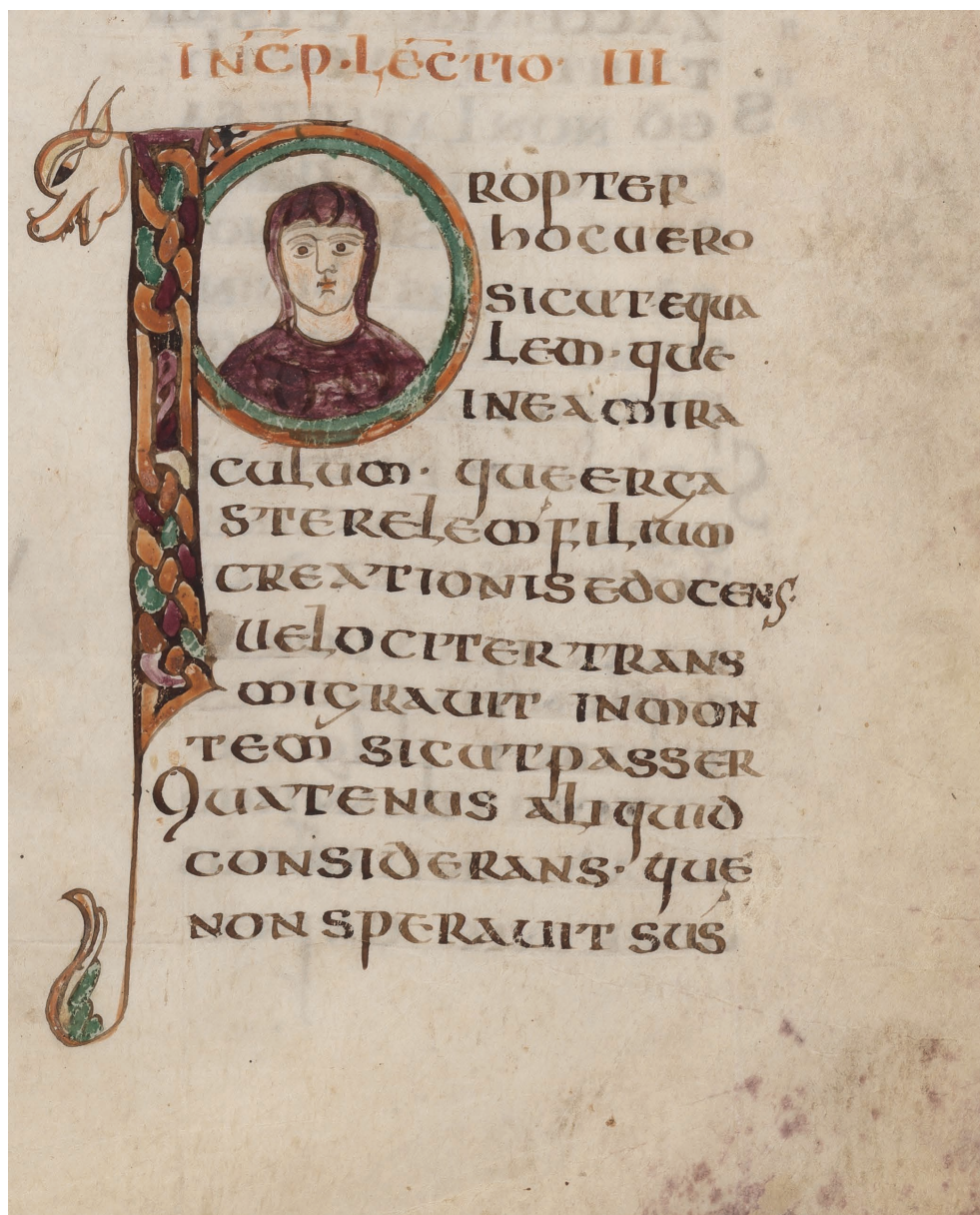
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Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies
University of Birmingham



Frontispiece: The bust of the Virgin Mary, pigments on parchment, Homiliary of Agimundus, Rome, c.800, Rome, BAV, Vat. lat. 3836, fol. 64r, detail.

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It is the way of those who are consumed with love for something to have it
always on their tongue, to have an image of it in their mind night and day

John of Damascus, *Homily on the Dormition III, I* (730–40s)

I've been looking so long at these pictures of you
That I almost believe that they're real
I've been living so long with my pictures of you
That I almost believe that the pictures are
All I can feel

The Cure, *Pictures of You* (1989)*

In memory of my beloved father Giovanni (1922–2014). That his intellectual
curiosity, unconquered dignity, spiritual strength, and political engagement
may be 'living images' for my children.

*Words and music by Paul Thompson, Robert Smith, Boris Williams, Laurence
Tolhurst, Roger O' Donnell and Simon Gallup. © Copyright 1989 Fiction Songs
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Abbreviations

ACO	Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum
ActaIRNorv	Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia, Institutum Romanum Norvegiae
<i>Ads</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Sermo de Adsumptione</i>
AK	<i>Aachener Kunstblätter</i>
AM	<i>Archeologia medievale</i>
<i>Ap</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Expositio in Apocalypsin</i>
<i>Ap, Ep</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Epistola ad Stephanum papam</i>
<i>ArtB</i>	<i>Art Bulletin</i>
<i>ArteM</i>	<i>Arte medievale</i>
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome
BHG	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
<i>BollGrott</i>	<i>Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata</i>
<i>ByzF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CahArch</i>	<i>Cahiers archéologiques</i>
<i>CahCM</i>	<i>Cahiers de civilisation médiévale, X^e – XII^e siècles</i>
CC <i>Excerpta</i>	Corpus Christianorum <i>Excerpta</i> in usum scholarum seorsum edita
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCCOGD	Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CDL	<i>Codice diplomatico longobardo</i>
CF	<i>Chronicon Farfense</i>
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
<i>ChHist</i>	<i>Church History</i>
Co	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Libellus de conflictu vitiorum et virtutum</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Christianorum
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>

CSLMA	<i>Auctores Galliae Clavis Scriptorum Latinorum Medii Aevi: Auctores Galliae</i>
CSSL	Corpus Scriptorum Series Latina
<i>Cu</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Sermo de Cupiditate</i>
CV	<i>Chronicon Vulturense</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DOS	Dumbarton Oaks Studies
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
EO	<i>Échos d'Orient</i>
<i>Ep</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Epistola ad Stephanum papam</i>
<i>EphL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Liturgicae</i>
ForschKA	Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie
FS	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HL	<i>Historia Langobardorum</i>
JbAC	Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LC	<i>Libri Carolini or Opus Caroli Magni contra Synodum</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LP	<i>Liber Pontificalis</i>
Mansi	G.D. Mansi, <i>Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova Amplissima Collectio</i> , 31 vols. (Florence, Venice, 1759–1798).
<i>MélRome</i>	<i>Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, École française de Rome</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
–, Auct. Ant.	Auctores antiquissimi
–, Capit.	Capitularia regum Francorum
–, Conc.	Concilia
–, DD Kar.	Diplomata Karolinorum
–, EMKA	Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi
–, EMKA, EL	Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi, Epistolae Langobardicae collectae
–, EMKA, CC	Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi, Codex Carolinus
–, EK	Epistolae Karolini Aevi
–, Leges	Leges
–, PLAK	Poetae Latini Aevi Karolini
–, SRL	Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum saec. VI–IX
–, SRM	Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum
–, SS	Scriptores
–, SS rer. Germ	Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
MNIR	<i>Mededelingen van het Nederlands historisch instituut te Rome</i>
OCTs	Oxford Classical Texts or <i>Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis</i>
OrA	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Oratio contra septem vitia. Recensio A</i>
OrB	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Oratio contra septem vitia. Recensio B</i>
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>

PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PPS	Popular Patristics Series
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
<i>Pu</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Homilia de Purificatione</i>
<i>RBén</i>	<i>Revue bénédictine</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
<i>RendPontAcc</i>	<i>Atti della Pontificia accademia romana di archeologia, Rendiconti</i>
<i>RIASA</i>	<i>Rivista dell'Istituto nazionale d'archeologia e storia dell'arte</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und für Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>Tr</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Homilia de transfiguratione Domini</i>
<i>RF</i>	<i>Regestum Farfense</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>Regesta Pontificum Romanorum</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
Settimane	Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo
ST	Studi e Testi
<i>StMed</i>	<i>Studi medievali</i>
StP	Studia Patristica
VChrSupp	<i>Vigiliae Christianae Supplements</i>
<i>Vi</i>	Ambrose Autpert, <i>Vita sanctorum patrum Paldonis Tatonis et Tasonis</i>
<i>ZKunstg</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte</i>

A note on translations, names, and place names

Unless otherwise stated, translations from Latin and Greek are my own. When existing, and when reliable, I have quoted published translations, which I have listed in the bibliography after the modern edition of the text. The Bible has been quoted following the New International Version.

Latin spelling follows the conventions adopted in the various editions. Standard anglicised versions of Greek and Latin names and place names have been preferred when in common use; otherwise their original Latin or Greek version has been preferred.

Popes

Mid-seventh to late ninth century

Theodore I	(626–49)	Hadrian I	(772–95)
Martin I	(649–53)	Leo III	(795–816)
Eugene I	(654–7)	Stephen IV	(816–7)
Vitalian	(657–72)	Paschal I	(817–24)
Adeodatus II	(672–6)	Eugene II	(824–7)
Donus	(676–8)	Valentine	(827)
Agatho	(678–81)	Gregory IV	(827–44)
Leo II	(682–3)	Sergius II	(844–7)
Benedict II	(684–5)	Leo IV	(847–55)
John V	(685–6)	Benedict III	(855–8)
Conon	(686–7)	Nicholas I	(858–67)
Sergius I	(687–701)	Hadrian II	(867–72)
John VI	(701–5)	John VIII	(872–82)
John VII	(705–7)	Marinus I	(882–4)
Sisinnius	(708)	Hadrian III	(884–5)
Constantine	(708–15)	Stephen V	(885–91)
Gregory II	(715–31)	Formosus	(891–6)
Gregory III	(731–41)	Boniface VI	(896)
Zacharias	(741–52)	Stephen VI	(896–7)
Stephen II	(752–7)	Romanus	(897)
Paul I	(757–67)	Theodore II	(897)
Constantine II	(767–8)	John IX	(898–900)
Stephen III	(768–72)		



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Introduction

Sacred images have for different reasons inspired devotion or spurred violent reactions and cultural opposition world-wide and often in human history. In the period between the late seventh and the mid-ninth centuries a bitter debate on the cult of sacred images – conventionally called ‘Byzantine iconoclasm’ for the period *c.*720–843 – engaged monks, emperors, and popes on both sides of the Mediterranean and on the European continent. Its importance in the history of the early medieval period cannot be overstated in that it challenged the relation between image, text, and belief.¹ The reaction of the popes is fundamental to this picture. They were staunchly in favour of sacred images, as well as of thinking and talking of the divine through images, and unremittingly maintained their importance for instructing, nurturing beliefs, and mediating personal and communal salvation. In sum, they deemed images an essential aspect of the housekeeping of the Catholic Church. This book will focus on *iconophilia*, that is a favourable attitude to sacred images on the part of the popes between *c.*680–880. The development of the iconophile attitude of the popes in this period cannot be separated from their wider intention to assert the traditions and the doctrinal and ecclesiastical authority of the Church of Rome, while seeking its political independence. Embracing the tools of visual media and public liturgy rather than producing learned treatises for savants, the popes were able to reach a vast, multicultural audience, promote Rome as the *caput Ecclesiae*, that is the head of the entire Christian community, and defend the role of sacred images.² As a matter of fact, the status of sacred images remained unchallenged until the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Even today, visibility and the power of images deeply characterises the culture of the western world.³

1 McCormick, 1994, 96, only mentions texts and images. The venerable tradition of venerating sacred images is also an important factor according to eighth- and ninth-century sources.

2 Le Goff, 1974, 92: ‘Mass media were the favoured vehicles and matrices of mentalities: the sermon, the painted or sculptured image were, in the days before the Gutenberg galaxy, the nebulae from which mentalities crystallized’. On the attentively devised use of media by Christianity, the following remark by Pohl, 2018, 23, is particularly neat: ‘Late ancient and early medieval Christianity was perhaps the most ambitious experiment of social engineering that the world had seen to date, a massive effort to change peoples’ lives using all available media: preaching and writing, images and light, ritual and architecture, dress and music, detailed norms for behaviour and punishment’. On the value of material forms as media in historical contexts, see also a recent review of the concept of ‘objectification’ in Tilley, 2006, 61–2, who remarks that material forms do not simply mirror ideas, ‘they are instead the very medium through which these values, ideas . . . are constantly reproduced and legitimized, or transformed’, and also that ‘Material forms complement what can be communicated in language. . . . The non-verbal materiality of the medium is thus of central importance’.

3 On the importance of the visual in contemporary culture, see for example Kemp, 2012.

I A word on words

The word ‘iconoclasm’ undoubtedly has a sinister connotation, leading the modern mind to think about past and recent ideological destructions of images, monuments, and even of human beings. It should be noted that the word ‘iconoclasm’ was not used in the medieval period. In fact, it derives from the Latin *iconoclastus*, a term which did not appear before the sixteenth century and that was not associated with the history of Byzantium until the mid-twentieth century. The Byzantines called this controversy ‘iconomachy’, that is the ‘image struggle’.⁴

Nor was the term *iconophilia* used at the time of the controversy; actually that term is not attested before the eighteenth century.⁵ Recently, *iconophilia* has been used by scholars of nineteenth-century visual arts and literature for its etymological root of ‘love for images’, be they immaterial (mental, textual, liturgical) or material (based on tangible media).⁶ Since this book approaches the period and the consequences of the Byzantine image struggle from the Italian side of the Mediterranean and from the point of view of a favourable attitude to sacred images,⁷ the word *iconophilia* seems appropriate for its title. The adjective and noun iconophile (‘one who loves images’) will be used instead of iconodule (from the Greek *εἰκονόδουλος*, that is ‘one who serves images’). To name their opponents, the term *eikonomachoi* (*εἰκονομάχοι*) or ‘contesters of icons’ will be favoured over ‘iconoclasts’, since the latter term implies the destruction of images, which was rarely the case during the image controversy. The adjective iconoclastic will be used to indicate this group of people or their position.

Although there was never more than one legitimate pope at any given time, I have to make clear that I shall often refer to ‘the popes’ in the period under examination.⁸ Indeed, until the ninth century, those elected to the papal throne, whatever their ethnic origins or geographical backgrounds, belonged to the Roman clergy, had followed a specific *cursus honorum*, and thereby had embraced the interests of the Church of Rome.⁹ Their remarkable consistency, at least in artistic patronage, is proudly recalled by Pope Hadrian I (772–95) in a famous letter to Charlemagne.¹⁰

4 Brubaker, 2012, 3–4.

5 It is attested in Holland in the eighteenth century, where it was used, as the adjectival noun ‘iconophilus’, to sign an anonymous article; see Iconophilus, 1761. As adjectival noun, it is used in the title of a book published in Paris, see Duchesne, 1834. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* one can find ‘iconophile’ to stand for ‘a connoisseur of pictures, engravings book illustrations, and the like’, and ‘iconophily’ as ‘the taste for these objects’, and both are attested in the late nineteenth-century English prose.

6 Elliott, 2012, 220, 299; Hedley, 2009, 27. See Ó Carragáin, 2013, for ‘liturgical images’.

7 I shall not consider the Byzantine territories in Italy, such as the Duchy of Naples or Ravenna. In Naples the eventual impact of iconoclasm should be further explored; see Schreiner, 1988, 365–8; Sansterre, 2002, 1016, n. 69, for further bibliography. On Ravenna, see Mauskopf Deliyannis, 1996.

8 Dealing with the same period, other scholars also refer to ‘the popes’, for example: Noble, 1984, 1995; Delogu, 2000; Dey, 2011.

9 The exceptions are Fabianus (236–50), on which see Paravicini Bagliani, 2013, 4, 11, and later Constantine II (767–8), whose vicissitudes have been recently examined by McKitterick, 2018. On the *cursus honorum* in the Roman church, defined in the late fourth century, see Dunn, 2013. On papal consistency of action between the seventh and the ninth centuries, see Noble, 1984, 186–7, 2000, 61–73; Del Buono, 2010.

10 *Hadrianum*, MGH, EK 3, 2, 49–50, esp. 50, on which see Chapter 2.

2 The standpoints

Byzantine iconoclasm and its written sources have been the object of unparalleled scholarly attention over the last century. This has produced ‘a crisis of over-explanation’, in the words of Peter Brown.¹¹ All the same, many questions still remain open or not even tackled. For example, scholars have focussed more on the rise of the cult of icons rather than on the origins of Byzantine iconoclasm itself, which remain blurred. Also, the modalities in which theological ideas and religious attitudes travelled and were disseminated, and the specific effects they eventually had on western religious approaches and on the production of literary and visual imagery, have rarely been addressed. This is surprising, considering that the way in which cult images stimulate reactions, are perceived, venerated, and chosen as mediators with the divine was radically shaped by the intense period of the Byzantine image struggle.

With the aim of offering an innovative perspective on the historical phase of the image controversy, the present book will adopt alternative standpoints in terms of attitude, geography, sources, objectives that go across the grain of historiography, and across the borders of disciplines. Rather than concentrating on the rise or actual implementation of iconoclasm in Byzantium, the present study will deal with *iconophilia*, that is the favourable attitude to sacred images held by popes, monks, clerics, and kings living on the western side of the Mediterranean. In fact, as for geography, the standpoint of scholars has largely remained in Byzantium, although more than forty years ago Brown blamed a ‘parochial’ attitude for preventing scholars from dealing with the West in relation to the image controversy, a question wrongly seen as exclusively pertaining to Byzantium.¹² In fact, few have approached the period and the question of the image controversy from the point of view of the West, despite far more abundant evidence, both textual and material, official and private. Among the few who have is Jean-Marie Sansterre, who has been studying for decades the role of images in devotional practices and miracles in the medieval East and West and is currently re-assessing his thoughts on this vast body of material.¹³ Another exception is Thomas Noble.¹⁴ His impressively documented monograph on the western response to Byzantine iconoclasm is the only one so far to offer a thorough account of the papal and Carolingian reactions to the controversial and inconsistent Byzantine policies on sacred images. Noble carefully and critically combed through textual evidence, especially focussing on the contents of dogmatic texts, East–West diplomatic exchanges, resolutions of Church councils, and Greek and Latin collections of authoritative quotations. He left out non-official texts, as well as the discussion and the illustration of specific sacred images. However, this choice is to be expected from a scholar with an expertise in textual documents and Church history, and, therefore, should in no way be considered a weakness in his very important study.

11 Brown, 1973, 3. The impressive bibliography on Byzantine iconoclasm has been discussed by Brubaker, Haldon, 2001, 2011; however, it is still growing due to an increasing interest in the historical and contemporary iconoclasm.

12 Brown, 1973, 4.

13 Sansterre, 2002, forthcoming. I thank Sansterre for sharing parts of his yet unpublished manuscript that provides a wide analysis of texts, relics, and images in the West, bearing in mind Byzantium.

14 Noble, 2009, 2, mentions Brown, 1973, 3, to emphasise the uniqueness of his own study.

As noted by John Osborne, one of the most eminent scholars of early medieval Rome, with regards to published studies, ‘some sense of the larger context’ of how the controversy impacted the city, and the West generally, is still lacking.¹⁵ The papal city and central Italy are particularly important in this picture, as they functioned as ‘charnière des deux mondes’, East and West, as Sansterre put it.¹⁶ However, Osborne notes that although apparently ‘a new wave of Byzantine thinking about the art washed over Italy in the decades immediately prior to the onset of iconoclasm in Constantinople, very little is known about the specifics of that process’.¹⁷ To tell the truth, no explicit source tells us how ‘Byzantine thinking about art’ or a positive attitude towards sacred images and the visual in general eventually reached Italy.¹⁸ Moreover, the lack of a papal theory of images does not help.

But the impact on theological controversies should not be measured by sifting exclusively through official and outspoken texts. Walter Pohl suggests that in order to reconstruct the meanings even of outspoken texts one needs to take into account indirect references to unwritten things.¹⁹ On this note, it has to be admitted that methodological problems have hindered a wider understanding of the image controversy in the West: firstly, there is the usual separation of medieval from Byzantine studies, and secondly the separation of textual, from visual, and liturgical studies. The analysis of ‘visual’, ‘material’, or ‘textual’ sources, in isolation from each other, can only offer a partial view.

This long preamble is to justify my choice of certain sources used in the present book. I have included eastern and western liturgical texts and practices, devotional objects and practices, not always explicitly related to the image controversy. They have nonetheless left traces of an enduring, often implicit iconophile attitude before, during, and after the image controversy. I have tried to uncover and describe a network of beliefs in the mediatory agency of sacred images and visual thinking on what remains a largely untracked field, one where liturgy, devotion, material culture, and religious mentalities intersect.²⁰ That these elements intersected in people’s minds and memories – and therefore should not be studied separately – is already attested in the Christian culture that predated the period under consideration. One of the most influential Christian authors, Augustine, recognised three types of vision: one mediated through the physical eyes, one through the spirit, which can also imagine things it does not know, and one through the mind, in which even absent things and immaterial concepts are visualised.²¹ He also added that what the mind’s eye can see is infinitely superior to what the physical eye can catch in the immanent world. While an analysis of Augustine’s thought would exceed the scope of the present book, it suffices to recall that his classification of memory within the operations of the mind is of

15 Osborne, 2014, 333.

16 Sansterre, forthcoming.

17 Osborne, 2014, 333.

18 On the impact of iconoclasm and the doctrine of the icon on the Byzantine ‘iconic thought’ and ‘imaginary’ (a set of images, be they conscious, unconscious, perceived, imagined), see Mondzain, 2005.

19 Pohl, 2001, 351–2.

20 An exception is Ó Carragáin, 2011, 2013.

21 *De Genesi ad litteram* 12, 6, CSEL 28/1, 386–7; cf. Noble, 2009, 37.

pivotal importance to an understanding of how images were assimilated, remembered, altered, and used as memory aids and creative tools.²²

All in all, in the present study I have tried to gather a wider picture of the period by incorporating eastern ideas and materials, but essentially remaining focussed on how the image controversy affected western Catholic thinking (especially papal thinking), image production and consumption, and daily devotional and liturgical practices. As a consequence of this examination, it has been possible to shed new light on the rise to prominence of the Virgin Mary within the religious context of Rome and central Italy, where she took centre stage as a banner of correct faith and as the principal intercessor for humankind.²³

3 A question of method

For the purposes of this book, I tried to ‘recapture the talk’ that accompanied certain choices in papal and monastic *iconophilia* – a ‘talk’ that is not usually recorded in official documents.²⁴ Traces of controversial matters dealing with *iconophilia* and the image controversy emerged in overlooked corners of documents, historical records, and narrative,²⁵ as well as in the lines of liturgical hymns, homilies, prayers, and attested practices of private devotion. Side by side with this varied array of sources, the examination of material culture against the background of the image controversy has offered new insights.

In a famous article on iconoclasm published in 1973, Peter Brown mindfully observed that archaeologists and art historians can produce ‘irrefutable surprises’ that may change the course of historical interpretation.²⁶ However, even in recent collections of essays written by the most distinguished scholars of the early medieval period, the analysis of visual and material culture is entirely absent.²⁷ One must conclude that its contribution is implicitly deemed as merely ‘decorative’ and not ‘structural’ in shaping stories or ‘history’. Occasionally, works of art produced in Rome between the late seventh and the ninth centuries have been singled out as visual responses to Byzantine ‘heresies’, such as monotheletism (the doctrine of a single ‘will’ in Christ) and iconoclasm.²⁸ But generally speaking, material culture has rarely been incorporated into a wider narrative of Byzantine iconoclasm; notable exceptions are the

22 Carruthers, 1998, 2008, 2009, 2012.

23 On the centrality of Mary in western culture, and her ‘rise from a modest ancillary to a global icon’, see Rubin, 2009. On Mary as mediator and intercessor in Christian culture, see Reynolds, 2012; Arentzen, 2017, 137–40, noted that these roles appear prominent in the liturgical hymns of Romanos the Melode (c.560), and this may suggest that an official cult of Mary had been established in sixth-century Constantinople. Costambeys, 2007, 85, lamented the lack of studies on the devotion to, and cult of, Mary in early medieval central Italy.

24 I owe this expression to Henry Mayr-Harting; see Dell’Acqua, 2018, 44, n. 58.

25 Similar is the approach of Costambeys, Leyser, 2007, esp. 279, with regards to early medieval monasteries of Rome. Since they lack traditional sources such as rules or charters, the authors suggest that their specific monastic identities can be reconstructed by using narratives of martyr cults as ‘a lens through which to view other evidence for papal patronage of Roman monasticism’.

26 Brown, 1973, 10.

27 Gasparri, ed., 2008; Gantner, McKitterick, Meeder, eds., 2015.

28 To quote only a few studies, see Melograni, 1990; Bolgia, 2006; Ballardini, 2007; McClendon, 2013.

studies by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, and, recently, by Daniel Reynolds.²⁹ While the analysis of material culture has established roots in the field of ‘Mediterranean history’,³⁰ visual images and material objects are still considered a lower-ranking kind of evidence when compared to texts or inscriptions in the study of other areas of the past.³¹ As for material culture, it should also be noted that the scarcity of figural arts and objects from pre-iconoclastic and iconoclastic Byzantium has sometimes led scholars to treat western material, especially from Rome, as a proxy for Byzantine art. This tendency has on the one hand drawn attention to the fertile exchange of ideas, materials, and objects that took place between East and West,³² but on the other, it has often led commentators to discount the particular developments of figural arts and culture in central and southern Italy as merely ‘reflections’ of Byzantium.³³

Visual images are indeed powerful tools, as they help to organise and stimulate thought, strengthen ideas, and disseminate them.³⁴ They may have an implied meaning following the intention of the patron or maker, but this meaning is subject to interpretation: images impact on different audiences at different times in different ways. Therefore, a few words about their ‘reception’ are in place here. Although the question of the reception of images was clearly already uppermost in the minds of pioneers in the study and effects of visual arts such as Aby Warburg (d. 1929), art historical studies specifically focussing on their reception have only appeared since the 1970s–1980s.³⁵ Reception studies seek to go beyond iconographic studies, which compare images with contemporary texts, and beyond phenomenological approaches, which appeal to supposedly universal patterns of reception. However, no clear theoretical framework, nor definite *modus operandi*, has been established for reception studies in the field of art history. With regard to the audience of medieval sermons and homilies, it has been noted that ‘our reconstruction of audience reception is impeded by our ignorance of audiences’ mental furniture’.³⁶ This applies very well also to audiences of pictorial imagery. An assessment published during the last decade concluded by suggesting a return to the materiality of the object and to avoid a purely text-based approach in exploring how the art of the past was seen and understood.³⁷ In the absence of explicit textual references, which are, in fact, rare before the late medieval period, it is difficult

29 Brubaker, Haldon, 2001, 2011; Reynolds, 2018, on iconoclasm in Palestine under early Islamic rule.

30 Starting from Ferdinand Braudel, 1949, English trans. 1972, to the recent revision of his approach involving human agency, see Abulafia, 2003, 2011.

31 There are naturally exceptions. For the early medieval West, for example, the work of the historian Celia Chazelle.

32 This is attested by a specific iconographic theme, the *Anastasis*, to name but one; Kartsonis, 1986; Mackie, 1989; Labatt, 2012 (I have been unable to consult Labatt, 2019).

33 This is often the case with studies in Byzantine art that make use of the enamelled *staurotheca* or of the mosaics promoted by Pope Paschal I, to give just a couple of examples.

34 On figural images, memory and thought, see Carruthers, 1998, 2008, 2009, 2012.

35 Among art historical studies specifically focussed on the reception of visual images, see for example Kemp, 1987, who used the term ‘sermo corporeus’ to describe how medieval stained glass was used as a medium for preaching and how preachers mediated the comprehension of the figural image for their audience. For a lucid summary on the ‘reception theory’ in art history, see DaCosta Kaufmann, 1996.

36 Thompson, 2002, 20.

37 On art and medieval audiences, and the relative rarity of a theoretical debate in art history, see Caviness, 2006, who seems to suggest that “medieval reception” might include viewers up to Protestantism and the Reformation.

to reconstruct how pictorial images were understood by, or impacted on, a specific audience. Unfortunately, there is no written testimony that explains how specific pictorial images were received in the period analysed in this book. In early medieval Rome, with a population that was multi-ethnic and multicultural, even among Christians there was considerable diversity.³⁸ However, they had in common a faith, which, since its origins, had the ambition to be ‘universal’ in its values and scope. In early medieval Rome, ‘Christendom, with its universal horizon’ had been ‘harnessed to the cause of one city [Rome]’, where a set of Christian values managed to supersede those linked to the imperial *romanitas* (‘Romanness’) and become widely shared.³⁹ This said, we can only assume that by commissioning mosaics, mural painting, and liturgical furnishings, the popes ideally aimed to address as wide a sector as possible of their varied flock. They may also have used such commissions in order to respond to their political opponents, and may have employed them in association with preaching, which could have helped fine-tune papal messages related to specific circumstances.

In trying to assess the reception and impact of literary and pictorial images in Rome and central Italy in the period preceding, coinciding with, and following the iconoclastic controversy, I have followed a double-stranded research path. On the one hand, I have examined the writings of Ambrose Autpert (d. 784), one of the very few authors from eighth-century Italy for whom we have records. Autpert was a monk, preacher, and theologian; he was active in one of the main monasteries of central Italy and appears to have been aligned with the ‘orthodoxy’ of the popes of his time. His writings suggest that visual thinking and images were pervasive in the Christian discourse of his time. On the other hand, I have examined the testimony offered by references in the figural realm. In fact, the persistence, adaptation, or dissemination of specific images can also be taken as an index of their impact or effectiveness among people with a shared set of values or interests. Therefore, in the second half of the book, I will refer to how images created, or re-interpreted, in the period under examination became in some cases ‘standard’ ways of representing Christ and the Virgin that would last for centuries, while in other cases they were abandoned.

While I do not intend to offer a comprehensive census of works of art that are possibly related to the image controversy,⁴⁰ nor catalogue those produced in Rome in that period, nor defend their ‘Byzantine’ or ‘Roman’ origins in a world that was more connected to the East than we concede, I will demonstrate how material objects and the visual in general were essential tools in conveying, buttressing, or changing ideas. Fully embracing the lesson of Aby Warburg about objects, pictorial images, and their migration as ‘cultural capsules’, but not renouncing a comparative–formalistic

38 Gombrich, 1961, rejected the idea of ‘an innocent eye’, because individuals perceive the visual differently according to various factors which change according to social and historical contexts. The notion of ‘visual literacy’, once defined as a set of visual competencies or cognitive skills and strategies one needs to make sense of visual images (Fransecky, Debes, 1972, 70), more recently has been seen as pertaining to social practices as much as to an individual ability; for a recent appraisal, see Serafini, 2017.

39 Pohl, 2014, 414; who adds at 416: ‘When the western Roman empire disintegrated, Roman identity . . . had two strong foci. One was the city of Rome, recharged by its Christian symbolic capital. The other was Byzantine Romanness’.

40 McClendon, 2013, has collected visual evidence as for St Peter’s and other churches refurbished by eighth- and ninth-century popes.

approach in their analysis,⁴¹ I shall treat objects and images, along with texts and liturgical practices, as primary sources. In this, I subscribe to the manifesto on early medieval Rome that John Osborne proposed at a *Settimana* in Spoleto. He remarked on the necessity to consider material culture ‘less as documents for the history of art, and more as documents of history, including political, economic and cultural history’, and to widen the geographic perspective of its investigation in order to highlight connections.⁴²

4 The objectives

The present book has a twofold objective: first, to gather more evidence about the papal and central Italian monastic attitude to the visual and its importance in papal communication strategy between c.680–880; second, demonstrate that in this process the Virgin Mary gained a greater importance in the religious landscape of Rome and central Italy.

It goes without saying that Mary was important from an early period in the religious landscape of Rome – as she was in Constantinople.⁴³ This is well manifested, if only by the unusual number of devotional images painted on wood still preserved.⁴⁴ During theological controversies about the natures of Christ and the visibility of God, the ‘system of values’ represented by the Virgin was used to regulate the debate, with the result that her theological framing, official cult, and private devotion were enhanced.⁴⁵ Noting the establishment of Marian processions in Rome, Osborne posited that the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680–1), that reaffirmed the doctrine of the two natures and two wills of Christ against the doctrine of monothelitism, ‘may also have served as a catalyst for the burgeoning cult of Mary’ in the papal city.⁴⁶ Soon afterwards Pope John VII (705–7), followed by Gregory III (731–41), and Paul I (757–67), dedicated oratories to the Virgin in the basilica of St Peter in which they would be buried. These oratories were strategically positioned along the conventional route taken by visitors in the basilica, clearly for intercepting their prayers. The dedication to Mary of these oratories reveals the intention of their patrons to entrust their souls to her intercession.⁴⁷ In a period in which the popes styled St Peter’s as a ‘symbol

41 See a recent re-assessment of the comparative approach in Elsner, ed., 2017.

42 Osborne, 2001, 706–8. For a critical assessment of the cultural-historical approach to (material) culture, of which Aby Warburg has been a promoter, see Ginzburg, 1966; Diers, 1995; and the recent collaborative project ‘Bilderfahrzeuge – Aby Warburg’s Legacy and the Future of Iconology’, at <https://iconology.hypotheses.org/uber>, consulted on 17 January 2018.

43 On Mary in Constantinople, the literature is vast; see Mango, 2000, and also Arentzen, 2017 for a recent and stimulating study. He argues that the public cult of Mary was already in place in the fifth century, when her main feasts were introduced, and that it cannot be clearly distinguished from private devotion, which was widely practised.

44 The literature on the icons of Rome is abundant; see Wolf, 1990, 2002; Andaloro, 2002; Pace, 2004b; Leone, ed., 2012. I shall not treat the icons of Rome since their imagery is traditional and static and do not reflect the specific theological preoccupations of the late seventh–mid-ninth centuries.

45 Iogna-Prat, Palazzo, Russo, 1996, 5–12; Mimouni, 2011, 321–2; Arentzen, 2017, 36, wrote that since the fifth- and the sixth-century Christological controversies, the human Mother of God got ‘more clearly interlaced into the weave’, that is integrated into the discourse of the divine economy of salvation.

46 *LP I*, 376; trans. Davis, 2010, 84; see Osborne, 2014, 334.

47 See Gem, 2008, 9–19 for the pilgrims’ route in the basilica; McKitterick, 2013b, 105–14, on the creation of a papal necropolis in St Peter’s from the time of Leo I (440–61).

of orthodoxy' as noted by Charles McClendon,⁴⁸ crucially, the Virgin Mary was staged, through her pictorial depictions, as the physical threshold between earth and heaven. Indeed, in the medieval period the depiction of Mary appears situated at the centre of a political-religious history in which the defence of 'orthodoxy' was one of the main issues.⁴⁹

The rise and consolidation of the cult of Mary in the West has never been specifically discussed against the background of the 'image struggle' and other theological controversies. Moreover, her position in Byzantium is not clear yet, despite a growing attention on the part of Byzantinists in the past decades. Recent investigations suggest that, in Byzantium, the importance of Mary became more perspicuous only *after* iconoclasm.⁵⁰ A few years ago, Averil Cameron, one of the most notable scholars of Mary in Byzantium, noted however that 'it would be a mistake to be too firmly wedded to this schema' essentially for three reasons. First is that the evidence on which this assumption is based, especially from the point of view of art history, is in most cases the output of elite patronage, while objects of lesser importance offer testimony to an *earlier* importance of Mary in her role of intercessor in the daily life of the Christians. Second is that liturgical literature between the sixth and the eighth centuries bears witness to a continuity of themes in praise of Mary, and that in the eighth century this literature appears to be a response to the fear that iconoclastic emperors would also target the devotion to Mary. Third is that 'some of the most striking writings' about Mary in this period were composed by the main defenders of images.⁵¹ Although the centrality of her figure in private veneration, public liturgy, and debates over sacred images during iconoclasm in Byzantium and in the West should be evident at this point, nevertheless, the connection between Mary and the iconophile stance is supported only by a few commentators.⁵² It is my intention to explore this connection and to offer further materials for consideration. The contesters of icons did pay respect to the Mother of God.⁵³ However, the devotion towards her almost equalled *iconophilia*, or love for images: she made God visible, hence there could not be any image of God, his angels, martyrs, and saints without the woman through whom he became incarnate. Since the early phase of the image controversy, between the late 720s and the 750s, the Incarnation had been the main argument used by eastern iconophiles to justify the production and veneration of sacred images,⁵⁴ and the doctrine of the Incarnation would remain central in medieval Christianity and its approach to physicality

48 McClendon, 2013, 215 (quoting an oral statement of Rosamond McKitterick), and 228.

49 Russo, 1996, 175.

50 Kalavrezou, 1990; Brubaker, Cunningham, eds., 2011.

51 Cameron, 2004, 18–20.

52 Tsironis, 2000; Krausmüller, 2015.

53 This assumption is however debated especially with regards to Emperor Constantine V (741–75); see for a recent appraisal Krausmüller, 2015.

54 For example, in the first phase of the controversy, see John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 8 (= III, 8), PTS 17, 80–3; trans. Louth, 2003, 24–5. Vasiliu, 2010, 181–7, 299–328, contests that the Incarnation served as justification to the veneration of figural images in the iconophile discourse, since in her view it is the 'value of revelation' that images grant to any material of divine creation that justifies them.

and materiality.⁵⁵ As we shall see, the Incarnate God and his Mother are the protagonists of the papal visual strategy against the ‘heresies’ and controversies that vexed the Church between the seventh and the ninth centuries. It is on these considerations that I based my decision to discuss themes related to the Virgin Mary in her capacity of Mother of God.

The results of my analyses reveal that the development of Mariology – the theology, veneration, and visual representations of Mary – was immensely boosted in the West between the late seventh and the mid-ninth centuries, coincident with the theological–political controversies including Byzantine iconoclasm. There is much evidence to suggest that this development had ‘Greek’ roots, as I shall indicate throughout the book.

5 The outline

My arguments are articulated in the following six chapters, in which I analyse intersecting textual, liturgical, and pictorial images produced between the late seventh and the late ninth-century. These images had at their core the Incarnate God and his Mother and were intended to promote the idea that the visual could uplift the mind and therefore lead to spiritual salvation. In this sense, these images manifested an iconophile attitude on the part of their patrons.

Before offering an outline of the book, I wish to state immediately that, in my treatment of pictorial images, the notion of artistic ‘style’ will not have much space. In fact, if not otherwise documented, what the term ‘style’ may suggest could be misleading. Having acknowledged its importance as a category of investigation in visual arts, we should be wary of using ‘style’ for the purpose of defining chronologies until we understand better what it meant to people in the early medieval period.⁵⁶ In fact, in the study of the early Middle Ages, when the idea of authorship was not yet fully defined, it is wiser to think in terms of cultural affinities among objects or texts.⁵⁷

The first two chapters illustrate, in chronological order, the controversial relationship the papacy had with Byzantium and the Carolingians in matters of faith, doctrine, and images in the period between the late seventh and the mid-ninth centuries. The third chapter’s central subject is an author active in central Italy in the mid- to late eighth century, whose writings reflect an iconophile attitude – that is an attitude which favours thinking of and appealing to God, his Mother, and his saints through images. With the fourth chapter, the focus moves to a consideration of three pictorial and textual case studies which revolve around the Incarnate God and his Mother; the Incarnation being one of the key arguments for justifying the production and veneration of sacred images. In particular, the case studies I have selected are Christ as Redeeming Light, the Presentation of the Christ Child in the Temple, and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The first and the last were prominently illustrated in the apses of Roman

55 Bynum, 2011, 33, and 35, remarks that the importance of physicality and materiality in medieval Christian culture did not depend entirely on the doctrine of the Incarnation, but also on a wider discourse on how the material can manifest God.

56 This is the line of thought also of Osborne, 2001, 704–6, on early medieval Rome.

57 For overviews on the idea of authorship in the visual arts of the medieval period, Castelnovo, ed., 2004; in the written culture, Ziolkowski, 2009; D’Angelo, Ziolkowski, eds., 2014.

churches, while the other was illustrated on objects of devotion. All of them had an eschatological dimension, in that they were related to the question of the final destiny of humankind, and to the possibility of salvation offered by the Incarnate God, and they are often referred to in contemporary homilies. They all manifested the idea that visual images were essential tools in personal devotion and liturgical ceremonies, and that they could stimulate the beholder to practise good deeds, and thus seek salvation. While mostly centred on Rome and on the pontificates of Leo III (795–816) and Paschal I (817–24), occasionally, the exposition will include works of art produced earlier or later, and from further afield, because they make useful comparisons. I will clarify if, and how, the imagery formulated in words and pictures in the period between the early eighth and the late ninth centuries differed from what came earlier in order to make manifest specific theological positions, including the iconophile agenda. I will note when this imagery was either abandoned or continued after the period of iconoclasm, and if it exerted a long-lasting impact on the visual arts and the religious mentality of the medieval West.

What follows is a more detailed treatment of the book's themes. Chapter One addresses the early phase of the iconoclastic controversy,⁵⁸ and highlights how in Italy popes, monks, and sovereigns reacted to it. It introduces new evidence in favour of an early reception of the image controversy in Lombard Italy – as early as the 730s. However, the popes did not write theological treatises to combat what they perceived and condemned as a 'heresy'.⁵⁹ In their staunch defence of 'sacred' images, they essentially had recourse to two arguments: the tradition of the Church, and the authority of the Fathers. More importantly, in order to reach a wider and multilingual audience, they deployed public liturgy and a visual strategy, which ultimately projected Rome as head of the Catholic Church. Public processions established in honour of Mary in the late seventh century, in particular, seem to have contributed to a reinforcement of the political and religious identity of the Christian populace of Rome under the aegis of the Mother of God. She would become pivotal in the papal iconophile defence of 'orthodoxy' against heresies, including the image controversy.

Chapter 2 follows the reactions of the popes to the iconoclastic Council of Hieria (754) and examines the resolutions they made in the light of the image controversy in the second half of the eighth century, until the Synod of Frankfurt (794) summoned by Charlemagne. As mentioned, the main papal arguments in favour of the production and veneration of sacred images were based on the tradition of the Church and the authority of the Fathers, without venturing into complex theoretical justifications. The chapter also shows that in the decades preceding and following the Council of Hieria, early eastern champions of *iconophilia*, magnified by iconophile partisan literature in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, already enjoyed reverence in Rome. The city, indeed, became a centre of anti-iconoclastic resistance, where eastern clerics contributed to dossiers of written testimonies in favour of sacred images, but also

58 For an effective summary on Byzantine iconoclasm in the West, see Louth, 2007, 82–91.

59 I cannot agree with Mauskopf Deliyannis, 1996, 560, who holds that 'In the West images had not become such a central part of Christian practice as they had in the East, and therefore the status of image worship was not such a pressing concern' in the eighth and ninth centuries, although iconoclasm was debated and rebuked. Sacred images were long since part of western devotional and liturgical practices; see Sansterre, 2002 and forthcoming.

voiced their dissent through liturgical texts. An example can be found in the appendix to the Latin translation of the *Akathistos*, the most famous Greek hymn in honour of Mary. Soon after Hiereia, Pope Paul I (757–67) promoted a pictorial programme in S. Maria Antiqua which responded through images to the iconoclastic resolution of that council and projected Rome as the centre of the Christian *oecumene*, and Mary as the main intercessor for the faithful.

Since only dry accounts were left in the official papal chronicle of how the popes perceived the on-going image controversy, probably to downplay it, in Chapter 3 I use the works of the monk, preacher, and theologian Ambrose Autpert as a mirror of Catholic attitudes towards visual thinking and images. He was active at the important monastery of S. Vincenzo al Volturno, in the Lombard Duchy of Benevento, not far from the southern border of the Carolingian domains in central Italy. A distinguished heir to the tradition of the Church Fathers, he seems particularly aligned with the ‘orthodox’ mentality of the popes, whose help he sought to defend his intellectual independence against his own brethren. He speaks *through* and *of* images in his vivid theological commentaries and homilies – images which he developed in his mind and which were probably inspired by real-life experience, as well as by Greek liturgical literature, especially authored by iconophiles of the first phase of the image controversy.

Autpert is particularly articulate when he speaks of the role of the Virgin Mary in the divine economy. Because of their efficacy, I refer to his literary images as ‘textual icons’. They were absorbed into the liturgy and the visual arts, and therefore indelibly shaped the subsequent perception of the Mother of God in western Christian mentality and imagination.⁶⁰ The expression ‘textual icons’, that gives the chapter its title, epitomises the process through which Mary finally took centre stage in the religious life and practices of the medieval western Church.

The importance attributed to liturgical writings in this chapter arises from a consideration of how liturgy and prayer connected official theology and policies with devotion, beliefs, and with daily life. Notwithstanding the fact that the writings of Autpert are never explicit about iconoclasm, they seem to take the side of papal orthodoxy, and at the same time verbalise the attention given by the popes to Mary as Mother of God. In other words, Autpert’s writings can be seen as ‘symptomatic’ of an ‘orthodox’ iconophile mentality developed in central Italy in the mid- and late eighth century, which is otherwise unrecorded. The relation between Greek iconophile thinking, the focus on Mary, and the work of Autpert is also a core topic in the chapter. The relation between texts and images, largely intended as mental, textual, liturgical, and pictorial, is another.

With Chapter 4, I introduce the first of three case studies chosen to illustrate if and how pictorial imagery was used to offer a response to Byzantine iconoclasm and other theological controversies of the same period. As mentioned, these case studies all have an eschatological dimension, and highlight the agency of pictorial imagery in the economy of salvation that accords with an iconophile attitude. The chapter is centred on the theological, pictorial, and liturgical image of Christ as Redeeming Light. Developed on the figural scheme of late antique theophanies, the Christ–Light in mosaics commissioned by

60 On the impact of Byzantine iconoclasm on the contemporary imagination or ‘imaginary’, that is a set of conscious, unconscious, perceived, and imagined images, defined with this term in psychoanalytic theory, see Mondzain, 2005.

three popes in the first half of early ninth century marked a change in the development of medieval imagery. These depictions, like earlier theophanies, recalled the unprecedented light and splendour experienced by the apostles during Christ's Transfiguration on the mountain, which also clearly revealed his combined divine and human natures. Like recent texts offering a reading of the Transfiguration, these mosaics also suggest that his light on Tabor was giving to the apostles a foretaste of his splendour on the day of his Second Coming. But in the mosaics, the saints, martyrs, and donors depicted, as well as the beholder, partake of this light, which reminds the faithful of the Second Coming and nurtures hope in salvation. Thus, these mosaics appear to be promoting a firm belief in the mediatory power of pictorial images. Such beliefs were not held by Carolingian and Byzantine sovereigns and theologians. This chapter also contextualises the endeavours of papal artistic patronage in the decades between the reinstatement of iconoclasm in Byzantium (815), the Carolingian Synod of Paris (825), and their aftermath, coinciding with the pontificates of Leo III, Paschal I, Eugene II, and Gregory IV. Among them, Paschal I was the one who put into writing an image theory in a letter addressed to a Byzantine emperor. The theologians who wrote in his name, articulated the papal image theory along the lines of Greek *iconophilia*, thereby finally replacing the relatively simplistic arguments of the 'traditions' of the Church and the 'authority' of its Fathers in defending sacred images on which his predecessors had relied.

Chapter 5 deals with images of, and writings about, the official Presentation of the new-born Christ Child to the community of Israelites in the Temple of Jerusalem and its relevance to the period coinciding with the monothelete and iconoclastic controversies. Many themes are involved: the presentation of the new-born child in the Temple, the purification of the mother from having given birth, the offering brought by the parents in thanksgiving, and the prophecy of Simeon and his death after having recognised Christ as the Saviour. As a result, the event was interpreted in different ways, as attested by texts and visual artefacts. I will demonstrate how these various interpretations reflected substantial changes in religious mentalities between the seventh and the ninth centuries. However, the theme which became focal in the late eighth and the early ninth centuries was the Presentation of the Child as a prefiguration of his sacrifice on the Cross for the deliverance of humankind. Likely reflecting the on-going theological debate, the earliest Latin homilies for the feast, imbued with eastern thinking, placed great emphasis on the symbolic sacrifice of Christ the Lamb (John 1, 29; 1, 36). This emphasis produced a new understanding and a new mental vision of the Presentation, which led to an important iconographic innovation. In the early ninth century, in objects associated with iconophile circles in the West and in the East, the Infant was depicted above an altar over which he is held reverently by Mary. This imagery was a powerful reminder of the physicality of the Incarnate God: as an infant he was symbolically offered on the altar of the Temple, as an adult his life was sacrificed on the Cross for the redemption of humankind according to his Father's will. Henceforth the altar became a central element in the pictorial images of the Presentation, as many late medieval examples attest.

Finally, Chapter 6 analyses how Mary came to be perceived, celebrated, and depicted as the main intercessor for humankind, namely as the ladder to heaven, during the period of the iconoclastic controversy, affecting thereafter her theological and visual imagery. Mary's role as main intercessor for humankind was seen as being inextricably

related to her exceptional role in the Incarnation. Because of it, she was spared bodily corruption and was granted an exceptional transition to the afterlife, that is her Assumption into heaven in body and spirit. In heaven, she eternally sits in glory at the side of her Son and Bridegroom and receives the prayers of the faithful. While there is no mention of Mary's transition to the afterlife in the Sacred Scriptures, there is a rich apocryphal tradition. Hence, its celebration was questioned under the Carolingians. In the period of the image controversy, the illustration of Mary's transition to the afterlife was meant to stimulate belief in her intercession before God and elicit hope of future resurrection. Between the eighth and the ninth centuries, her intercessory role acquired once she entered in heaven is visualised in images commissioned by the popes and others in iconophile circles. The main case studies in this chapter are images of the Virgin, in various media, in the oratory of Pope John VII in St Peter's, in a Roman homiliary, in the apse of S. Maria in Domnica commissioned by Pope Paschal I, and in the lower church of S. Clemente at the time of Pope Leo IV (847–55). These have never before been read in the light of Mary's Assumption into heaven. The earliest Latin homilies on the feast of the Assumption offer useful elements to help reframe these images. It will become clear that Mary's image as queen of heaven, ready to intercede for the faithful, was consolidated during the period of the image controversy in order to make a powerful iconophile statement.

In sum, this book explores how the Incarnate God and his Mother were presented and extolled in visual depictions, liturgical texts and practices produced under the aegis of the popes – directly or indirectly – in the period c.680–880. This exploration is meaningful for one simple reason: in some cases, the figural imagery and thinking which resulted from this period would become standard, characterising for centuries Christian theology, visual arts, and devotional practices. The end date of this book, c.880, was chosen so that images produced in the late ninth century could also be discussed. However, I have not ventured into an analysis of written testimonies about *iconophilia* in Italy or in other western regions after the death of Pope Paschal I (824) and the Synod of Paris (825), that essentially would have confirmed a firm papal belief in the agency of sacred images in mediating the divine, and their perfect integration in devotional and liturgical practices. A longer chronological approach, treating earlier and later periods, is to be found in Jean-Marie Sansterre's forthcoming book.⁶¹

6 A final remark

The place accorded to images – mental, visual, and textual – in this book has essentially to do with an indisputable consideration: images shape the way we think, remember, perceive, feel, dream, plan, act, and are the fabric of memory, thought, and creation. As noted by Marina Warner in a thought-provoking book on the Virgin Mary published in the 1970s, it can never be stressed enough that, for most of the last two thousand years since the Christian religion was established, the faithful were generally illiterate, and therefore images of all sorts – visual and verbal – were the principal way of instruction and communication.⁶²

61 Sansterre, forthcoming.

62 Warner, 1976, XXIV.

Although the Carolingians came to think differently, believing in the superiority of the Scriptures and of the written and spoken word in general above visual images, in practice texts and images were not in competition, as images and sermons served the same purpose. This is how a *scholion* to the sermons on the holy images of John of Damascus puts it: ‘Do you see how the function of image and word [‘εἰκόνας καὶ λόγου’] are one?’, with Basil of Caesarea ideally responding to the rhetorical question ‘As in a picture [γραφῆ] . . . we demonstrate by word’.⁶³ In the present book, I show that the struggle involving holy images in the eighth and ninth centuries was not simply an art-historical question, but rather a wider issue that contributed to the shaping of western religious and lay attitudes towards any kind of pictorial image for centuries to come.

63 John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, I, 45 = I, 41 *scholion*, PTS 17, 151; trans. Louth, 2003, 45. The same attitude was later maintained during the second phase of the iconoclastic controversy by the iconophile Patriarch Nikephoros, *Apologeticus maior*, PG 100, 748; *Antirrhethici tres adversus Constantinum Copronymum*, 3, PG 100, 380; see Brubaker, 1989, 33, 1995, 14–16.

Before iconoclasm and its early echoes (680s–750s)

Intending to retrace and discuss how the popes first reacted to the new ‘heresy’ of iconoclasm, this chapter also analyses the decades preceding this controversy and argues that their response to major theological and political controversies was inextricably intertwined with their promotion of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate God.

The first part of the chapter will deal with events occurring between the 680s–720s which appear relevant to the developments of the image controversy. These events include the papal reaction to Church councils convened by Byzantine emperors in Constantinople, during which the place of the visual in Christian belief and practices was addressed. They will also include the papal response to the last outbreak of the imperially backed ‘heresies’ of monoergism (the doctrine of the single operation in Christ) and monotheletism (the doctrine of the single will in Christ). The chapter will reveal how the popes saw themselves as champions of ‘orthodox’ faith and practices – which involved a favourable attitude to images – and supreme doctrinal authorities and spiritual leaders in the Christian *oecumene*. They soon adopted the Mother of God as their emblem of wisdom, solid foundation of faith, and orthodoxy. The establishment of four annual processions in honour of the Mother of God in the late seventh-century Rome will be examined in this light.

The second part of the chapter will examine well-known as well as overlooked evidence to analyse when and how the West perceived the rising controversy over sacred images. The contours of this controversy in its early stages were blurred, but it nonetheless instilled fears of a schism within the Church, as attested by an inscription from a Lombard court dating to c.730 which has never until now been discussed in relation to the iconoclastic controversy.

The last section will reprise the theme of urban processions by looking at an instance dating to 753. In a critical moment for the history of papal Rome, the pope, in line with what emperors and earlier rulers had done in the streets of Rome and other cities in the Mediterranean,¹ had recourse to a spectacular public ceremony. His aim was not only to reinforce his bond with the populace of the city, his immediate supporters,² but also to offer a public, multimedia response to doctrinal and political

1 See Dey, 2015 on public ceremonies held by rulers in late antique and early medieval cities in the Mediterranean to reinforce their authority and bond with their subjects. These ceremonies, ultimately, contributed to keeping cities alive.

2 Paravicini Bagliani, 2013, 11, refers to the *Traditio Apostolica* of c.215 which states that the pope is elected by the entire populace of Rome (‘ab omni populo’, ed. Geerlings, 1991, 214–18). Until the late