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LEO VI AND THE NARTHEX
MOSAIC OF SAINT SOPHIA

NICOLAS OIKONOMIDES

THE imperial mosaics of Saint Sophia, beyond their artistic value, are of considerable historical importance. This preliminary statement is necessary in order to explain why a historian—not an art historian—decided to attempt an interpretation, and, in particular, an interpretation of certain puzzling features they contain. But before entering into the main part of my discussion, I would like to stress two very obvious and banal truths that should be kept in mind while reading the following pages.

First, mosaics were made in the hope that they would survive *ad saecula saeculorum*. Consequently, although representing a particular scene, or event, or idea that prevailed at the time of their composition, they were also supposed to bequeath their presumably understandable message to future generations.

Second, Saint Sophia was not a palace church, but the church of the adjacent patriarchate. The Great Church had its own administration, controlled by the patriarch of Constantinople. One may assume, therefore, that the decoration of the Church was mainly the patriarch's business, although the necessary funds were often—though not necessarily always—put at his disposal by a pious or pious-looking emperor. In other words, it is hard to believe that a mosaic would be placed in Saint Sophia except upon the command or at least with the assent of the patriarch, but one may suppose that the patriarch could, on his own initiative, have a mosaic put up, provided that it did not insult the reigning emperor or go against his expressed will.

The mosaic decorating the lunette over the Imperial Door of Saint Sophia (fig. 1), already known from the Fossati drawings, was cleaned and published by Thomas Whittemore in 1933;¹ further cleaning was done in 1959 and 1960 and the results, together with valuable technical observations, appeared in 1968. This established, among other things, that the existing mosaic replaced an earlier panel, presumably representing a cross, which was part of the original decoration of the time of Justinian.²

The scene depicted is most unusual—a *hapax* in Byzantine art. This unique character of the representation suggests already that one should look for a more or less unique interpretation of the scene.

The central figure is Christ, seated on a lyre-backed throne; his right hand is raised in front of him in blessing; resting on his left knee and supported by his left hand is an open book with the inscription Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. Ἐγὼ εἶμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (Peace to you; I am the Light of the world). To his right is a bearded

¹ T. Whittemore, *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul. Preliminary Report on the First Year's Work, 1931–1932. The Mosaics of the Narthex* (Oxford, 1933). Whittemore upheld his opinions again in "Mosaics of Aya Sofia," *BIA Bulg*, 10 (1936), 202–6, and in "The Narthex Mosaics of Sancta Sophia," *Atti del V Congresso intern. di studi bizantini*, II (= *SBN*, 6 [1940]), 214–23.

² E. J. W. Hawkins, "Further Observations on the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul," *DOP*, 22 (1958), 151–66.

emperor wearing ceremonial garments and a crown, who, in a prostrate position, raises his hands in supplication toward Christ. There is no counterpart of the emperor's figure to the left of the enthroned Christ, and this creates a certain lack of balance in the whole composition.³ In the upper field of the panel there is a medallion on each side of the throne: to Christ's right, over the prostrate emperor, a woman, presumably the Virgin Mary, raises her hands in prayer toward the Savior; on the other side, and as a pendant to the Virgin, is the medallion with a rather gloomy Angel (or Archangel) holding a scepter (or wand) and looking away from the scene to his right. There are no inscriptions explaining the subject of the panel or identifying the persons represented—and this lack of inscriptions accounts for the long arguments about this particular mosaic.⁴

Art historians who have studied the panel⁵ agree on its approximate dating to the second half of the ninth century or the beginning of the tenth, and I take their word for it, particularly since they are, for once, unanimous. But they disagree on three major issues: *a.* the meaning of the whole composition; *b.* the identity of the emperor represented at Christ's feet; and *c.* a more precise date to be attributed to the mosaic as a consequence of the solution of *a* and *b*. I shall consider these three problems separately, and place the making of the mosaic in its historical context.

The Meaning of the Composition. Whittemore, in his first publication of the mosaic, accepted the idea of "supplication" by the emperor and wrote: "... if it is difficult for us to determine the precise relation of these roundels [i.e., of the Virgin and of the Angel] to the main theme of the mosaic ... we may rest assured that our uncertainty was shared by the author of the work" (?). And, further on, he added that "the pictorial compilation of the central lunette cannot yet be considered incontrovertibly to be either a type of Deisis or an Annunciation, although it may present the personages of the Annunciation." Identifying the emperor of the mosaic as Leo VI, he preferred to interpret the Virgin and the Archangel as the Emperor's "constant lifelong protectors," using as a basis the Berlin ivory supposedly representing the coronation of Leo, where the Virgin and Saint Gabriel stand close to the young Emperor.⁶ And so the discussion began, and many an explanation has been proposed.

³ This lack of balance has probably inspired the hypothesis that, originally, the Patriarch Photius was represented prostrate to the left of the throne: A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin* (Paris, 1957), 211 note 3. But there is no evidence that this part of the mosaic has ever been modified.

⁴ Hawkins, *op. cit.*, 164, has established that the lunette panel had no inscription when it was made, and that it was only later, probably in the 11th century, that the sigla of Christ (IC XC) were inserted on both sides of his head.

⁵ An analysis of the various views concerning this panel and a detailed bibliography are given by V. N. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina* (Turin, 1967), 145–46, and 177 note 73; the bibliography is completed by A. Cutler, *Transfigurations. Studies in the Dynamics of Byzantine Iconography* (University Park, Pa., 1975), 5 note 2, who studies in detail two iconographic characteristics appearing on our panel: the lyre-backed throne (pp. 5–52), and the *proskynesis* (pp. 53–110). I am grateful to my friend Prof. Cutler for his help in art-historical matters.

⁶ Whittemore, *The Mosaics*, 20, 21, 22. On the Berlin ivory, see *infra*, p. 160, and fig. 31.

The composition would be a rare—but not unattested—Deisis, where the Virgin and the Archangel, in a scene related to the Annunciation, are interceding with Christ in favor of the Emperor.⁷ This theory has been rejected for the obvious reason that in the panel the Angel does not intercede at all—on the contrary, he is looking away.

Instead, it has been proposed that the Angel in the medallion is the warden-protector of the Church.⁸ It is hard for me⁹ to believe that one of the two symmetrical medallions has practically nothing to do with the rest of the composition, particularly since there was a lot of empty space under it, thus allowing the artist the possibility of a different treatment of the whole subject.

The placing of the mosaic over the main entrance from the narthex to the naos has been interpreted as meaning that the emperor represented was “a *ktetor* who had either repaired the church or contributed substantially to its decoration,”¹⁰ and this, of course, has important implications concerning the identification of the emperor. It should be noted, however, that the custom of representing the donor over the main entrance to the naos does not appear in the Byzantine tradition before the eleventh century, and that previously the *ktetor* was usually depicted inside the church.¹¹ This seems to have been the case in Saint Sophia itself, where donors’ portraits appear in the galleries. On the other hand, if the emperor of the lunette was a donor, one would rather expect him to be represented standing, holding in his hands an offering (the church, an *apokombion*) rather than prostrate with empty hands. And, last but not least, if the emperor was a donor who had himself depicted in order to commemorate his pious act, why would he omit an inscription with his name—space was available—so that future generations would know who he was? Even if we suppose that he was not the only donor and did not want to appropriate all the glory for himself, he could very easily have added the figure of at least one more donor to the right of Christ where there is, as we have seen, a conspicuous empty space.

I shall not insist on the symbolic interpretations which have been proposed and which, being vague, do not enlarge our understanding of the panel at all.¹²

⁷ Celina Osieczkowska, “La mosaïque de la porte royale de Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople et la litanie de tous les saints,” *Byzantion*, 9 (1934), 41–83. On the symbolism of the Annunciation, cf. *infra*, p. 160.

⁸ J. D. Stefanescu, “Sur la mosaïque de la porte impériale de Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople,” *Byzantion*, 9 (1934), 517–23; F. Dölger, “Justinians Engel an der Kaisertür der H. Sophia,” *Byzantion*, 10 (1935), 1–4; A. M. Schneider, “Der Kaiser des Mosaikbildes über dem Haupteingang der Sophienkirche zu Konstantinopel,” *OrChr*, 3, 10 (1935), 75–79.

⁹ This interpretation has already been contested by Ch. Martin; cf. R. Janin, *EO*, 38 (1939), 125 note 1.

¹⁰ Osieczkowska, *op. cit.*, 48ff., esp. 50–52; Schneider, *op. cit.*, 76; C. Mango, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington, D.C., 1962), 96.

¹¹ Cf. the examples listed by Osieczkowska, *op. cit.*, 48f.

¹² E.g., H. E. del Medico, “Les mosaïques du narthex de Sainte-Sophie. Contribution à l’iconographie de la Sagesse Divine,” *RA*, 12 (1938), 49–66 (cf. *BZ*, 39 [1939], 285): the three persons, Christ, the Virgin, and Saint Gabriel (why Gabriel?) would symbolize Faith, Hope, and Love. S. Bettini, “I mosaici di S. Sofia a Costantinopoli e un piccolo problema iconografico,” *FelRav*, fasc. 50–51 (1939), 5–25: the attitude of the emperor (Leo VI) should be related to the cult of the relics; he would hold in his hands the “velo della Madonna” (although in the mosaic he is obviously empty-handed); he would have commissioned this mosaic in order to thank God for healing his second wife Zoe.

But it must be stressed that, as has been pointed out, the theme of an emperor prostrating himself in front of Christ is very unusual in Byzantine imperial iconography; in fact, our panel may be the only relatively early example.¹³ Attempts to interpret it as a ceremonial scene, that of the emperor's *proskynesis* before entering the Church, seem unconvincing.¹⁴ There is no doubt in my mind that, if there is symbolism in this scene, it is the symbolism of extreme humiliation on the part of the emperor represented.¹⁵

Extreme humiliation or repentance? It is probably not a mere coincidence that two authors, a Greek from Istanbul and a Serb, both raised in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, have put forward the idea of a repentant emperor.¹⁶ I hasten to join them. This interpretation is supported by the position of the mosaic, which is outside the main naos, in the narthex, a place reserved from early times for those who were not yet baptized, for the excommunicated, or for the repentant.

Even better, in Byzantine and in Modern Greek, the expression that one would use to describe the emperor's attitude depicted in the panel would be *κάνει μετάνοια*. The initial meaning of the word *μετάνοια* is "repentance," but since early Byzantine times, the same term is currently used to mean "prostration," because prostration was—and still is, as far as acts of penance are concerned—the normal way of showing repentance. This is attested by several Byzantine texts¹⁷ and, more relevantly for our purposes, by ninth- and tenth-century miniatures of the Repentance of David,¹⁸ meant to illustrate the story

¹³ A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris, 1936), 98–106, and *L'iconoclasme byzantin*, 239–41. Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 55 f., 63–64 (literary evidence on 5th–8th-century images showing the genuflecting imperial figure). Cf. also *infra*, p. 158 note 24.

¹⁴ This interpretation has been proposed by Grabar, *L'empereur*, *loc. cit.* But, according to the *De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Bonn ed., the emperor first took off his crown (p. 14, line 15) and then proceeded to the triple *proskynesis*, during which he held the candles and did not prostrate himself (p. 14, lines 24–25, cf. p. 120, lines 19–21). The emperor of our mosaic wears his crown, is in fact prostrate, and does not hold candles. It could be added that the first 10th-century emperor who ever dared enter the church with his head covered seems to have been Leo's successor, Alexander (*Arethae archiepiscopi Caesariensis scripta minora*, ed. L. G. Westerink, 2 vols. [Leipzig, 1968, 1972] [hereafter, *Arethae scripta minora*], I, 90–91). Cf. also the remarks of Mirković in *Starinar*, 9–10 (see note 16, *infra*), and of C. Mango in H. Kähler, *Die Hagia Sophia* (Berlin, 1967), 57.

¹⁵ This is how the panel is understood by J. Scharf, "Der Kaiser in Proskynese. Bemerkungen zur Deutung des Kaisermosaiks im Narthex der Hagia Sophia von Konstantinopel," *Festschrift P. E. Schramm zu seinem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, I (Wiesbaden, 1965), 27–35; and by D. I. Pallas, "Sur la chronologie de la mosaïque représentant la Vierge entourée de Justinien et de Constantin à Sainte Sophie de Constantinople," *Ἀρχαιολογικά Ἀνάλεκτα ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν*, 1 (1968), 91.

¹⁶ C. A. Karabias-Gribas, *Τὶς ὁ ἐν τῷ μωσαϊκῷ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας εἰκονιζόμενος γουσιπετῆς αὐτοκράτωρ*, in *Ὁρθοδοξία*, 15 (1940), 217–26, 256–59; criticized unfavorably by the metropolitan of Heliopolis Gennadios, *ibid.*, 304–10; a second article by K.-Gribas was not available to me, *Τὸ μωσαϊκὸν τοῦ νόβου τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας*, in *Τέχνη*, 4 (Istanbul, 1949), no. 41 (cf. *BZ*, 43 [1950], 469). L. Mirković, "Mozaik iznad carskih vrata u narteksu crkve Sv. Sofije u Carigradu," *SpomSAN*, 96 (1948), 45–50; *idem*, "Das Mosaik der Kaisertür im Narthex der Kirche der Hl. Sophia in Konstantinopel," *Atti dell' VIII Congr. di studi bizantini* (1951), II (= *SBN*, 8 [1953]), 206–17; *idem*, "Οἱ ἱκονογραφίαι μοσαϊκῶν ἱζνὰδ carskih vrata u narteksu crkve Sv. Sofije u Carigradu," *Starinar*, N. S., 9–10 (1958–59), 89–96.

¹⁷ Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμὸς*, II, 1 (Athens, 1948), 103.

¹⁸ This resemblance has already been pointed out. See, e.g., H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter* (London, 1938), 28, and the comprehensive study of the *proskynesis* in Byzantine art by Cutler, *Transfigurations* (as in note 5 *supra*), 53–110. According to Cutler, prostration in general could mean: (a) salutation and veneration; (b) oblation and dedication; (c) entreaty, repentance, and prayer; (d) fear in front of the revelation of the will or the glory of God; and (e) relationship to the

in II Kings 12:1–15. King David sent to certain death his general Uriah in order to take to himself Uriah's beautiful wife Bath-Sheba. Criticized and threatened by the God-inspired prophet Nathan for this act, he recognizes his sin, repents, and asks for God's pardon, which is granted by Nathan. On this occasion he wrote the wonderful fifty-first Psalm, the Psalm of Repentance. Yet, he is punished: his first child by Bath-Sheba dies soon after its birth; but his second son, Solomon, succeeds him on the throne, thanks to Nathan's help.

The Byzantine iconography of the Repentance of David has been studied in detail. We are usually shown Nathan's admonition to the King and then David's repentance: the King, prostrate, recognizes his sin (sometimes the phrase ἡμάρτηκα τῷ Κυρίῳ is written above his head) and raises his hands asking for forgiveness from God, or from Nathan; the personification of Metanoia (Repentance) is also sometimes depicted. David's attitude is very similar to that of the emperor in our mosaic, as can be shown from the following selected miniatures:

Figure 2a, the Paris Gregory (codex Paris. gr. 510, fol. 143^v), illustrated between A.D. 880 and 883.¹⁹ David has risen from his throne and, prostrate, implores Nathan to pardon him. An angel, holding a wand, is also present, and presumably alarms him by his presence and his gesture.

Figure 2b, the Paris Psalter (codex Paris. gr. 139, fol. 136^v), illustrated in the second half of the tenth century. To the left, David, still seated on his throne, is admonished by Nathan. It is assumed that originally, behind the seated David, an Angel was probably depicted, but any such figure has been cut out by some vandal. To the right, David, prostrate, repents under the gaze of the personification of Repentance.²⁰

Figure 2c, the Marciana Psalter (codex Marc. gr. 17, fol. IV^v), illustrated in the reign of Basil II (976–1025), most probably at the beginning of the eleventh century.²¹ Once again, David has risen from his throne and implores Nathan's pardon, while from the top of a building an Angel threatens him with a spear.

Figure 2d, the Vatican Book of Kings (codex Vat. gr. 333, fol. 50^v), illustrated in the eleventh century.²² To the left, Nathan admonishes David, who is seated on his throne while being threatened by an Angel. To the right, a prostrate David implores the pardon of God, whose hand appears in the upper right corner.

Resurrection. As far as our mosaic is concerned, one could safely exclude interpretations (b) (the emperor is empty-handed) and (e) (Resurrection is not implied here); of the three other possible interpretations, which are not easy to distinguish in the absence of texts explaining the scene, I shall retain (c).

¹⁹ H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1929), pl. xxxiii; for the date, see S. Der Nersessian, "The Illustrations of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, Paris. gr. 510," *DOP*, 16 (1962), 197.

²⁰ Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*, 22–28 and pl. viii; cf. K. Weitzmann, *Illustrations in Roll and Codex*, Studies in Manuscript Illumination, II (Princeton, 1947), 107, and Cutler, *op. cit.*, 85.

²¹ A. Cutler, "The Psalter of Basil II," to appear in *ArtVen*.

²² J. Lassus, *L'illustration byzantine du Livre des Rois, Vaticanus Graecus 333* (Paris, 1973), 75, and pl. xxvii, fig. 92.

It seems to me that the comparison of our mosaic with pictures of the Repentance of David (a standard representation, described in detail in the Byzantine Painter's Manual) speaks for itself.

There is only one detail which must be added here. In most of the illustrations of David Repentant an Angel is also present, either behind David's throne, or in front of the King when he is prostrate, or on a building above him. He is the Avenging Angel.²³ And we shall see that it is precisely this Avenging Angel who appears also in the medallion in our mosaic. It should be noted, for the time being, that in the miniature of the Paris Gregory, which is the closest in time to our mosaic, the Angel holds, as in the mosaic, his usual wand (or scepter) and presumably alarms David by his mere presence, while in the eleventh-century miniatures, the Angel holds a spear and openly menaces the King who has sinned.

So, we conclude in favor of a repentant emperor.²⁴ But who is he?

The Identity of the Prostrate Emperor. The main element we have to assist us in the identification of the emperor of the panel is its approximate dating, based on stylistic criteria, to the decades that preceded or followed the year 900. Lengthy discussion of this problem has naturally concentrated around two candidates, Basil I (867–86) and Leo VI (886–912), but none of the arguments put forward in favor of either of them carries complete conviction.

Scholars who assumed that the emperor was a *ktetor* have maintained that he must be Basil I, who, as we know from the *Vita Basilii*, had contributed substantially to the decoration of Saint Sophia.²⁵ But it has since been shown that Leo VI could also have carried out important work in the Church.²⁶

²³ Cf. Af. Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina* (Moscow, 1893), 283. I am indebted for this reference to Prof. I. Ševčenko.

²⁴ Whittemore, "The Narthex Mosaics" (as in note 1 *supra*), 218–19, and Mirković (articles referred to in note 16) have thought that an epigram of John Mauropous, the 11th-century metropolitan of Euchaita, might refer to our mosaic. This is not the case. The epigram, or, rather, the epigrams (*Ioannis Euchaitorum metropolitae quae in cod. Vatic. gr. 676 supersunt*, ed. P. Lagarde [Göttingen, 1882], 38–39, nos. 75–79) are found in Vat. 676 under the title, Εἰς δέησιν, ὑπὸ τοῦς πόδας τοῦ Χριστοῦ κεμένου τοῦ βασιλέως, which should be translated "To a Deisis, the emperor being prostrated under Christ's feet." Five epigrams follow: nos. 1 and 5 are addressed to Christ "as if by the emperor," in thanks for the favors that he enjoyed on earth and begging for remission of his sins and admission to the "true life"; nos. 2 and 3 are also addressed to Christ "as if by" the Virgin and St. John Prodromos, and beg for forgiveness of the emperor's sins on the grounds of his profound faith; no. 4 is the answer, "as if by Christ"; the respect for his Mother and the prayer of his friend have convinced him to grant pardon to his "faithful servant" who is now invited to "the joy of his Lord." It is obvious that the epigrams refer to a normal Deisis, where Christ stands with the Virgin and St. John Prodromos on either side interceding in favor of the emperor prostrated at Christ's feet. This composition, entirely different from our panel and situated in an unspecified place, probably dates to the time of Mauropous, since the name of the emperor is not mentioned, being obvious to the author of the epigrams as well as to his contemporaries. One might speculate that this is a representation of the Emperor Michael IV (1034–1041), who was an epileptic and who probably suffered remorse for the presumably violent elimination of his predecessor Romanus III. Michael's constant prayers for delivery from epilepsy—and, possibly, for pardon for the assassination of Romanus—as well as his becoming a monk shortly before his death, struck the imagination of his contemporaries: Michel Psellos, *Chronographie*, ed. E. Renauld, I (Paris, 1926), 62–64, 71–76, 83–84; *Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis Historiarum*, ed. I. Thurn (Berlin-New York, 1973), 393, 395, 405, 408, 415; E. Kurtz, *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (Leipzig, 1903), 49.

²⁵ Schneider, "Der Kaiser des Mosaikbildes" (as in note 8 *supra*), 78–79.

²⁶ Cf. Mango, *Mosaics* (as in note 10 *supra*), 96–97.

And, in any case, we have seen that the mosaic is not likely to portray a donor.

The iconographical type of Christ seated has been identified with the enthroned Christ who appears on coins of both Basil I²⁷ and Leo VI.²⁸ However, this is of no assistance toward the solution of our problem, since the same type of Christ appears in both reigns as well as on later coins (e.g., of Alexander and of Constantine VII); and, moreover, there are substantial differences between the Christ of the mosaic with his right hand raised in blessing in front of his chest and holding the open book, and the one on the coins (hand raised outward; book closed): cf. figures 3a–e.²⁹

The physical appearance of the emperor (cf. figs. 3f–l): Supporters of the identification with Basil I claim that the prostrate emperor of the mosaic is the very portrait of the “Byzantine Hercules” that was their choice.³⁰ For my part, I do not see any “herculean” features in this figure. On the contrary, in my opinion the physical appearance of our emperor rather excludes Basil I, and for two reasons: first, we know from literary sources³¹ and from the miniatures in Paris. gr. 510³² (cf. fig. 3k) that Basil had a rather large head; so large that when he first went to work in Constantinople he was given the nickname *kephalas*—a characteristic hardly applicable to the emperor of the mosaic. One might argue, however, that the artist might have tended to avoid stressing a physical shortcoming in his imperial patron. Second, it seems to me that there is no likeness between the prostrate emperor and the undoubtedly authentic portrait of Basil in Paris. gr. 510, made between 880 and 883; again, this statement could be contested on the grounds of less successful portraiture in mosaic.

Those who favor the identification with Leo VI have followed similar lines.³³ In the first place, the prostrate emperor resembles Leo VI as he is represented on coins—a remark which, though true (cf. figs. 3g, h), is not necessarily conclusive, since we have no coin with a realistic portrait of Basil I; also, a very similar head appears on coins of Leo’s son, Constantine VII, struck after 945 (cf. figs. 3i, j);³⁴ this latter date, however, would be too late for our

²⁷ J. D. Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II (685–695, 705–711 A.D.)* (New York, 1959), 48–52; A. Vegler, “The Date of the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul,” *Numismatic Circular*, 79 (1971), 100–2; *idem*, “More about the Narthex Mosaic in St. Sophia at Istanbul,” *Numismatic Circular*, 81 (1973), 42–43.

²⁸ A. R. Bellinger, “Byzantine Notes,” *The American Numismatic Society. Museum Notes*, 13 (1967), 152–53.

²⁹ Cf. Ph. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, III, 2: *Basil I to Nicephorus III (867–1081)* (Washington, D.C., 1973) (hereafter, Grierson, *Catalogue*), 508–9. The coins reproduced in our plate come from this same publication, pls. xxx, xxxiv, xxxv, xxxvi. Christ’s throne is also different on the coins, as has been pointed out by Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 22, note 84.

³⁰ Schneider, “Der Kaiser des Mosaikbildes,” 79; Scharf, “Der Kaiser in Proskynese” (as in note 15 *supra*), 35.

³¹ Symeon Magister, Bonn ed., 656; Georgius Monachus, Bonn ed., 820; Gy. Moravcsik, *Studia Byzantina* (Amsterdam, 1967), 209.

³² Omont, *Miniatures* (as in note 19 *supra*), pls. xvii, xix.

³³ Cf. Whittemore’s publications listed *supra*, note 1; Bettini, “I mosaici” (as in note 12 *supra*), 13–14.

³⁴ Cf. Grierson, *Catalogue*, pls. xxxiv and xxxvi.

mosaic; so the resemblance might be due to a certain "air de famille." Secondly, it has been pointed out that, as far as the emperor's features and the entire composition are concerned, our mosaic resembles a Berlin ivory, presumably of the year 886, in which the Emperor Leo (VI?) is crowned by the Virgin in the presence of the Archangel Gabriel (cf. fig. 31). Admittedly, there is a slight resemblance between the Leo of the ivory, who would then have been twenty years old, and the emperor of the mosaic, who is considerably older. It must be added, however, that the date and identification of this ivory, although probable, are not indisputable.³⁵ In my view, the physical appearance of the emperor in the lunette provides some argument, though not conclusive, in favor of Leo VI.

Texts written or pronounced by either of the two candidates might be used in the interpretation of the panel. Basil I, having been originally an uncultured Macedonian peasant, left no writings of his own. But in a speech that he read before the Eighth Ecumenical Council on 25 October 869 he expressed his feeling that there is no shame in prostrating oneself before God and added that he would be first to throw himself to the ground in *proskynesis*, regardless of his purple and his diadem.³⁶ This statement revealing his humility before God, by no means revolutionary in medieval thought, as well as other information concerning the not unusual piety of Basil I, has been considered the source of inspiration for the panel.³⁷ But if the Emperor wanted to publicize his humility by means of a mosaic over the central door of Saint Sophia, why did he not add an inscription with his name so as to be remembered and cited as an example *ad saecula saeculorum*? Moreover, how can one explain the fact that such a significant mosaic was not mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenetos in his *Vita Basilii*?

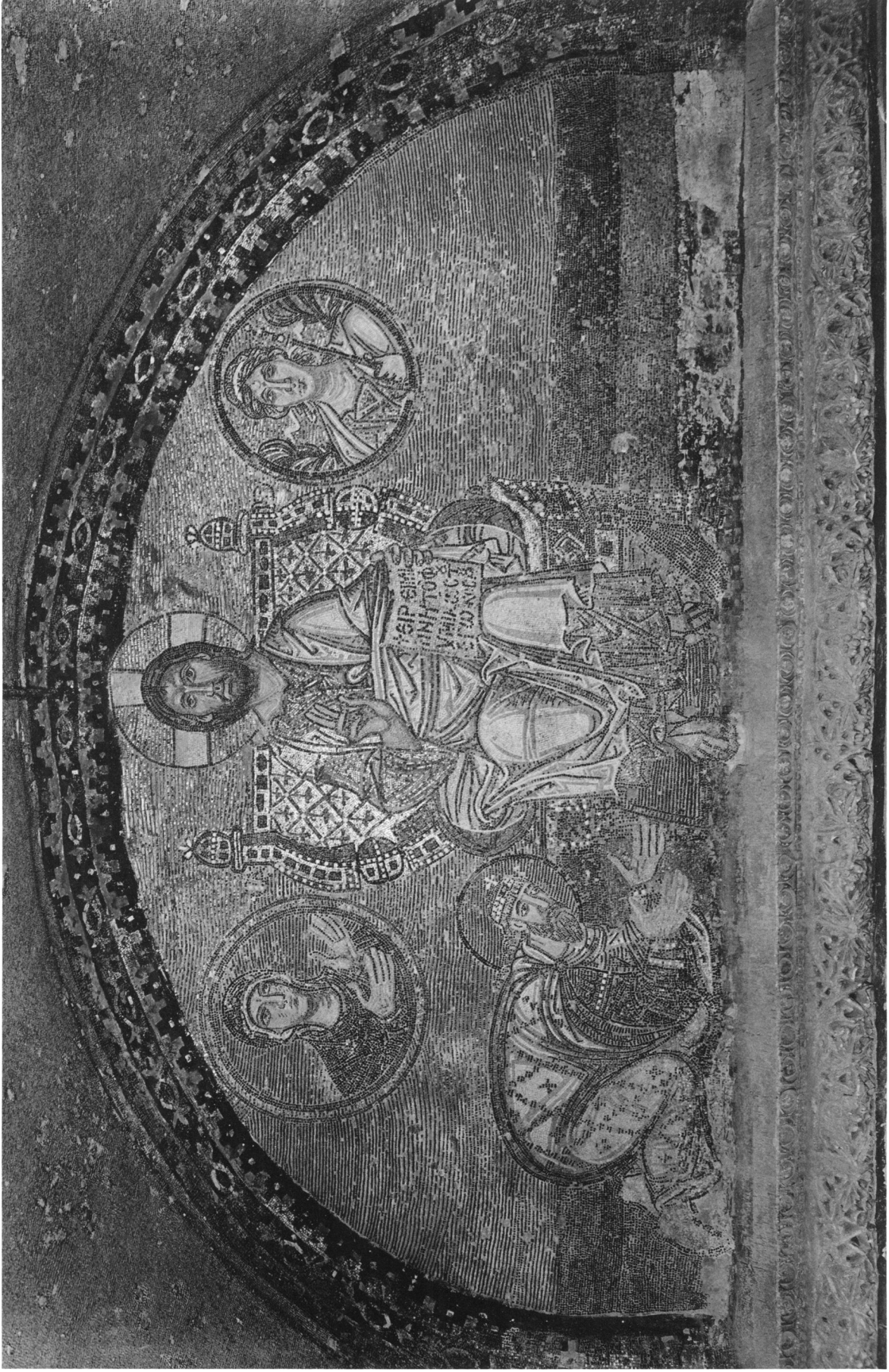
Leo VI, a prolific writer, offers the opportunity of interpreting the mosaic by means of the various texts he wrote. His Third Oration on the Annunciation has been considered as the source of inspiration for the presence of the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel in the medallions of the panel;³⁸ consequently, the prostrate emperor has been identified with Leo VI. I am more than skeptical about this argument: Leo's considerations in his Oration are not original or especially related to this panel; the idea of an Annunciation scene depicted at either side of a fully adult Christ seems to me somewhat inappropriate—and in my opinion, most Byzantines would have felt the same way. Last but not least, the homily on the Annunciation was written at the

³⁵ W. F. Volbach, *Die Bildwerke des Deutschen Museums*, I. *Die Elfenbeinwerke* (Berlin-Leipzig, 1923), no. 2006, pp. 6–7, pl. 7; A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*, II (Berlin, 1934), no. 88, p. 52–53, pl. xxxv. K. Weitzmann, "Ivory Sculpture of the Macedonian Renaissance," *Kolloquium über spätantike und mittelalterliche Skulptur*, ed. V. Milošević, II (Mainz am Rhein, 1970), 10–11, tends to attribute this ivory to Leo V (I am indebted for this reference to Prof. E. Kitzinger).

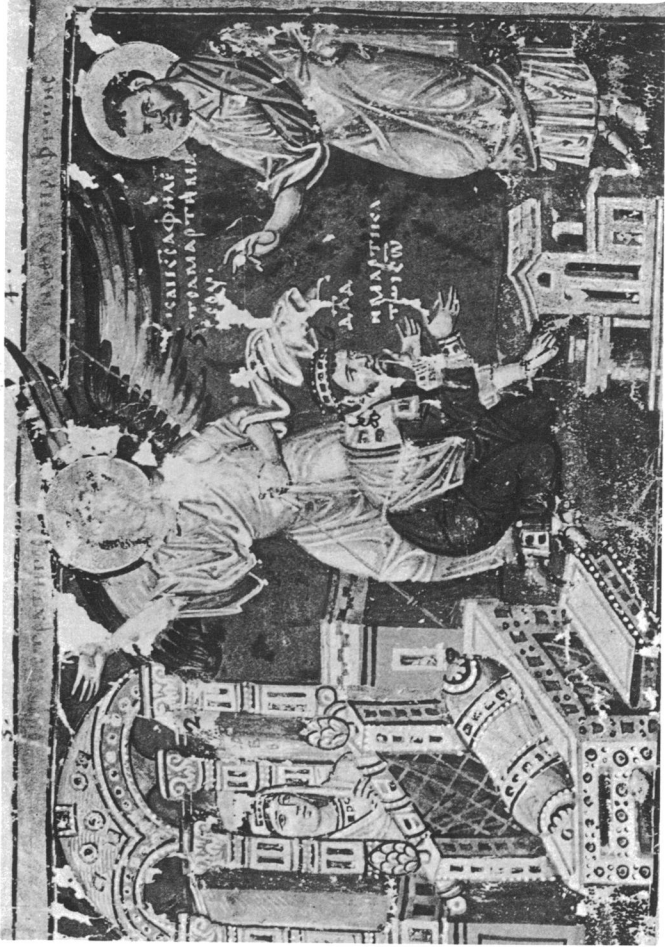
³⁶ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. XVI, cols. 94A and 356D.

³⁷ Scharf, "Der Kaiser in Proskynese" (as in note 15 *supra*).

³⁸ The theme has been studied first by Osieczkowska, "La mosaïque de la porte royale" (as in note 7 *supra*), 80f., and developed by Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin*, 240–41, followed by Lazarev, *Storia* (as in note 5 *supra*), 145. The interpretation relating the scene to the Annunciation has been opposed, among others, by Mirković, "O ikonografiji" (as in note 16 *supra*).



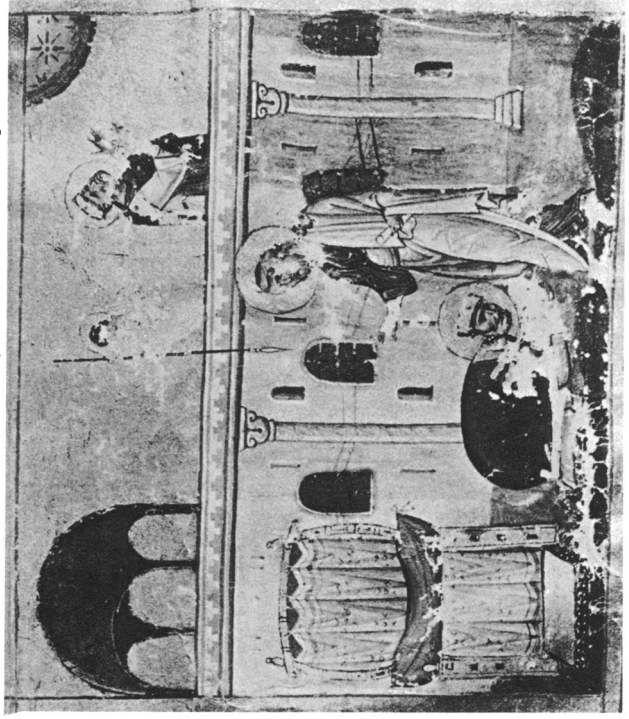
1. Saint Sophia. Narthex Mosaic



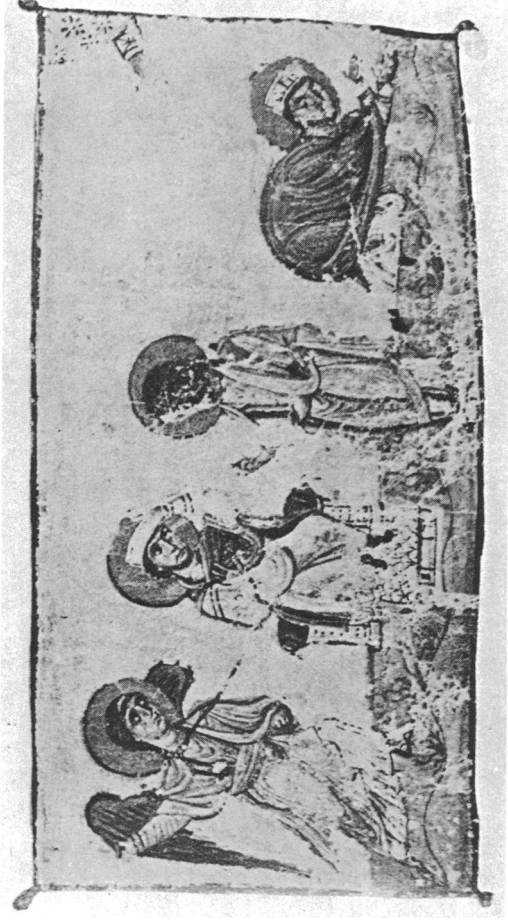
a. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. gr. 510, fol. 143v



b. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. gr. 139, fol. 136v



c. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, cod. gr. 17, fol. IVv



d. Vatican Library, cod. gr. 333, fol. 50v

2. The Penitence of David



a.



b. Basil I



c. Leo VI



d. Alexander



e. Constantine VII

3a-e. The Enthroned Christ



f.



g. Leo VI



h. Leo VI



i. Constantine VII



j. Constantine VII

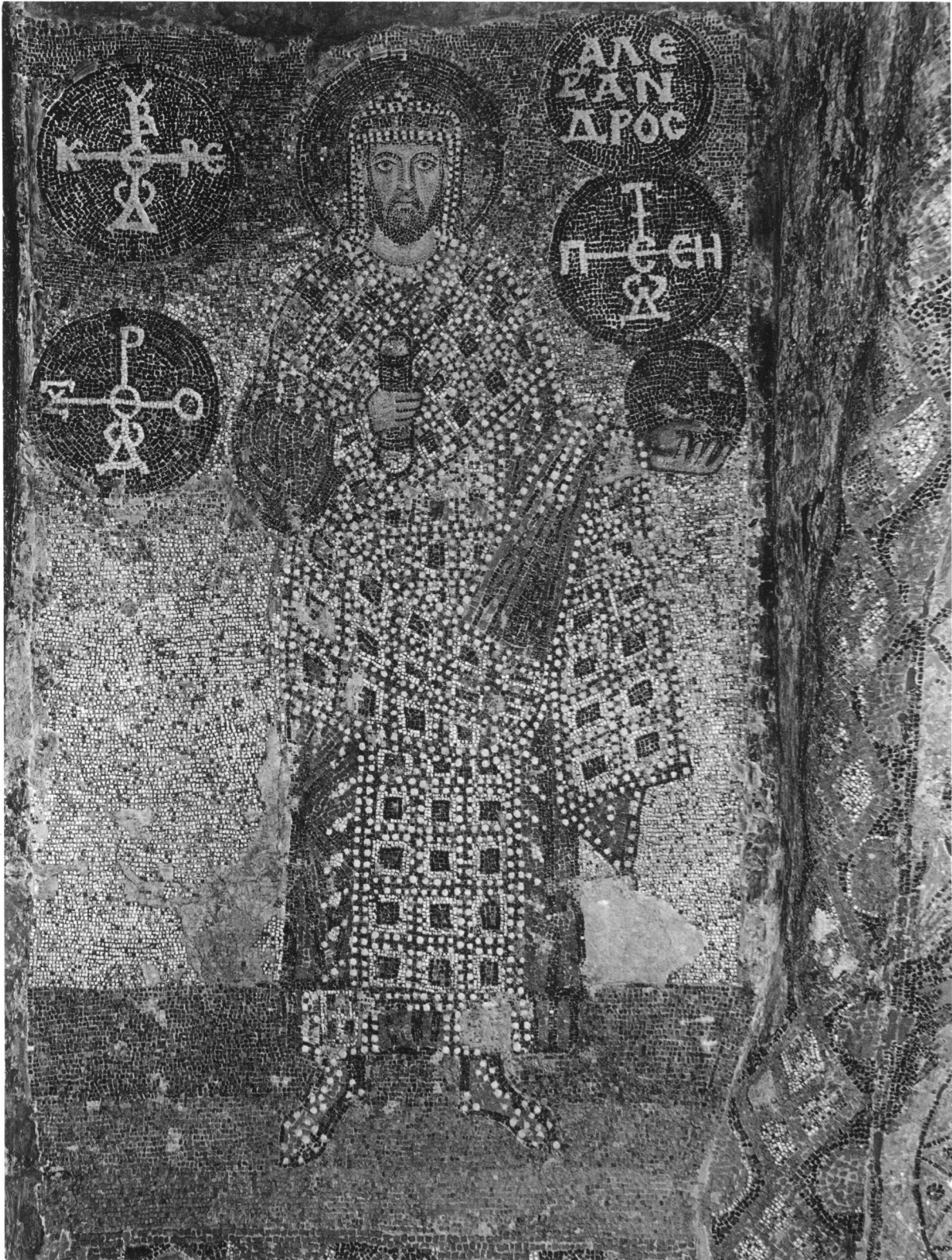


k. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. gr. 510, fol. B^v, Basil I

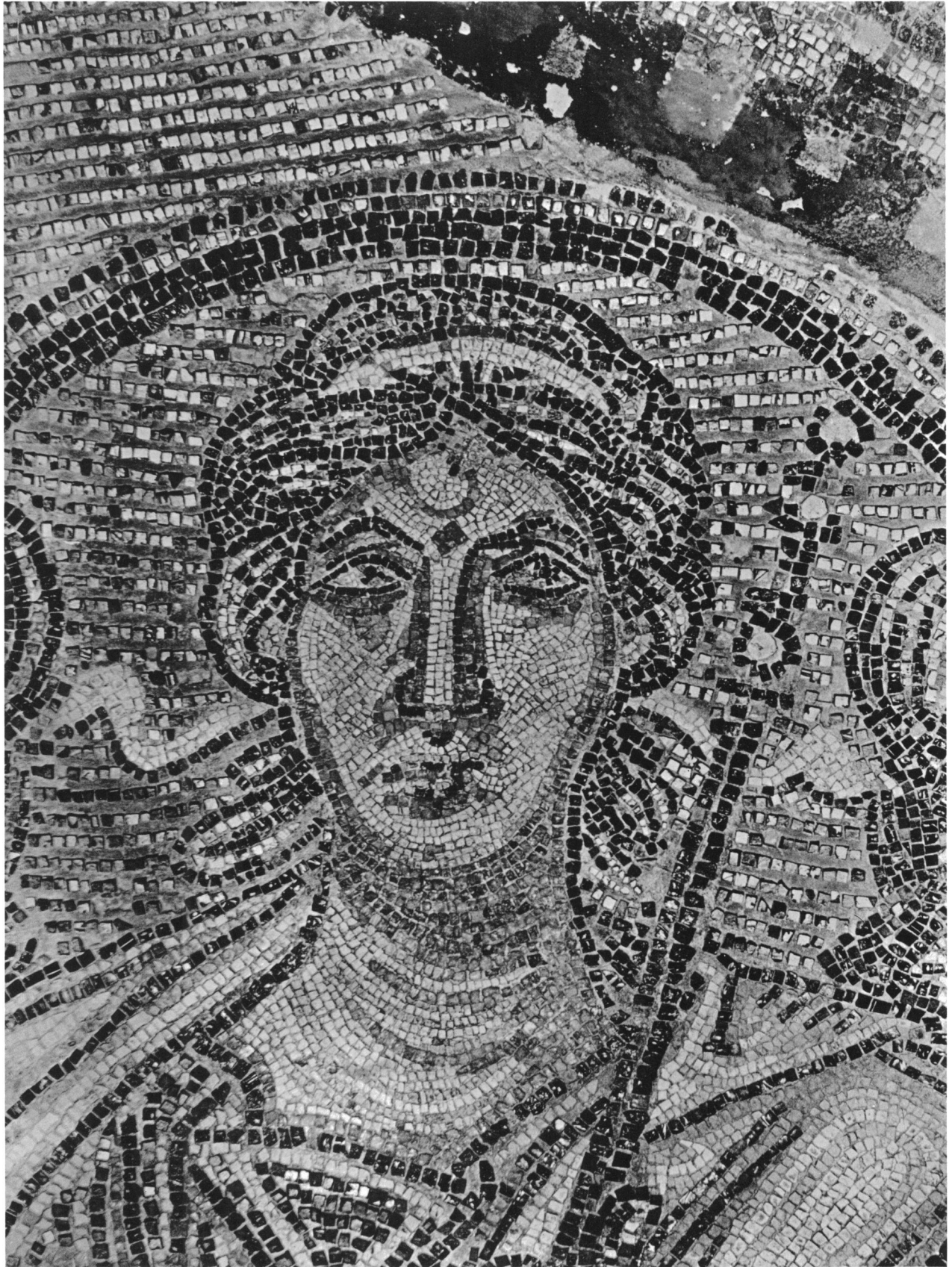


l. Berlin, Staatliche Museen. Ivory, Coronation of Leo (VI?)

3f-l. The Face of the Emperor



4. Saint Sophia, North Gallery. Alexander Panel



5. Saint Sophia. Narthex Mosaic, detail, Gloomy Angel

very beginning of Leo's reign,³⁹ when he was little more than twenty years of age; why should he have waited until he was a middle-aged man—as he appears to be portrayed in the panel—before illustrating his homily?

The poetic works of Leo, particularly those in which he asks that his sins be forgiven, have also been taken as a source of inspiration of the panel by those who understood it to represent a repentant emperor.⁴⁰ And, of course, the whole scene has been related to the tetragamy quarrel and the mosaic dated between 907 and 912—a date that would better fit the physical appearance of the prostrate emperor, who would then have been in his early forties. Nevertheless, I still find it hard to believe that Leo, faced with a strong reaction from some of the clergy because of his fourth marriage and the problems connected with it, would choose to advertize his contested action by commissioning a mosaic which showed that he was at fault and needed to ask for forgiveness from Christ. Even if he had so decided, why did he not add an inscription with his name? His show of apparent humility, undoubtedly embarrassing in his lifetime, might assure him a very good reputation for future generations.

The evidence discussed so far is not conclusive. The only argument, admittedly weak, which we have retained in favor of Leo VI is based on the physical appearance of the prostrate emperor. Yet, the entire composition and its interpretation as an image of repentance suggest that the anonymous emperor of the mosaic is, in fact, Leo VI, who, because of his fourth marriage and its consequences, had good reason to ask for God's forgiveness.⁴¹ It is necessary, therefore, to draw up an outline of the tetragamy quarrel in order to see by whom, when, and why our mosaic panel may have been made.

Historical Context: the Tetragamy Quarrel. The problem created within the Byzantine Church because of Leo VI's fourth marriage was extremely complex:⁴² initially a disciplinary question of Canon Law, it could have been

³⁹ Grabar, *L'iconoclisme byzantin*, 241.

⁴⁰ See the publications cited in note 16, particularly those of Karabias-Gribas. The main text brought forth is Leo's *ῥῥῆριον κατασκευτικόν* (PG, 107, cols. 309–14).

⁴¹ Basil I, too, was not above reproach: he himself had arranged the assassination of his coemperor Michael III. But it is hardly conceivable that he—or any of his descendants and successors—would have publicly confessed this crime; the more so because the murder of an emperor, although reprehensible, could also have been considered an unpleasant but necessary step taken in order to replace a ruler by one who, once acclaimed and crowned, became the instrument of God's will upon earth. This debatable concept was—understandably—publicized during Basil's reign: Genesios, Bonn ed., 113; S. G. Mercati, in *SBN*, 3 (1931), 294–95, reprinted in *idem, Collectanea Byzantina*, I (Rome, 1970), 452–53.

⁴² The scanty information on the tetragamy given us by the chroniclers is generously supplemented by other sources related to the protagonists of the whole affair: mainly the Life of the Patriarch Euthymius (907–12) and the writings of the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos, of the archbishop of Caesarea Arethas, of Nicetas the Paphlagonian, etc. A comprehensive survey of the story can be found in the introduction and in the valuable commentary of Patricia Karlin-Hayter, editor of *Vita Euthymii, patriarchae CP* (Brussels, 1970) (hereafter, *Vita Euthymii*), where one will also find the voluminous bibliography relevant to the topic (pp. 245–54, esp. pp. 249–50, for R. J. H. Jenkins, Karlin-Hayter, and A. P. Kazdan). It should be added that there are now new critical editions of the other important texts: *Arethae scripta minora* (as in note 14); *Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink, DOT, 2 (Washington, D.C., 1973) (hereafter, *Nicholas I, Letters*); and that a doctoral dissertation (still in typewritten form) on the tetragamy quarrel was submitted in 1973 to the Department of History at Fordham University, New York, by N. Itsines, *Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos and the Fourth Marriage of Leo VI the Wise*.

solved quickly by negotiation, an arrangement that almost all parties wanted. But matters did not proceed in that fashion: stubbornness and errors in assessing and handling the situation turned the affair into a major schism and into a direct confrontation between Church and State, tainted with strong political overtones and complicated by the intervention of pontifical legates in Constantinople. Old passions came to the surface⁴³ and mingled with new ones; and beside the disciplinary problem, which had never been forgotten, another, more important "constitutional" issue was at stake: namely, to what extent had the emperor the right to defy ecclesiastical law and intervene in Church affairs? Although everybody agreed on the basic principles, all, for theoretical, practical, and important personal reasons, strongly disagreed on their application at this particular moment.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a detailed account of this typically Byzantine tetragamy quarrel. A simple outline will suffice in order to explain the general situation and bring out the elements that are of some interest to our present research.

In the ecclesiastical tradition of the Eastern Church, the second marriage of an individual was tolerated very reluctantly. Unquestionable authorities like St. Basil (can. 4, 50, 80) declared that a third marriage was to be considered as "polygamy and fornication"; and a further one as "bestial polygamy," as a "way of living befitting swine and contrary to human nature," as a "sin worse than fornication." It is hard to imagine a more colorful and explicit way of forbidding consecutive marriages, especially since penances of four to five years were established for those persons who might dare perform such inconceivable acts (cf. *infra*, p. 175f.). In his youth, Leo VI himself had issued a law (novella 90) condemning third marriages.

As a husband Leo had little luck. His first wife, Theophano, was imposed on him and was so pious that after her death, in 896 or 897, she was declared a saint; conceivably, their marriage was not a happy one. His second wife and former mistress, Zoe Zaoutzaina, died at the end of 899, leaving no male offspring. In spite of the disciplinary problems that arose with the second marriage,⁴⁴ in spite of the canonical prohibitions and of the opposition on the part of some of the clergy, Leo obtained a dispensation and married the beautiful Eudocia Baiana in the year 900; in 901 she died while giving birth

⁴³ Essentially the 9th-century quarrel between the Patriarchs Ignatius (847-858, 867-877) and Photius (858-867, 877-886), both of whom had been deposed by emperors and had had to face the intervention of the Roman Church, hostile for Photius and friendly but embarrassing for Ignatius. The Photian schism was mended by the time of the tetragamy quarrel but the passions survived, as a scholiast of Arethas noted (*Arethae scripta minora*, vol. II, p. 132, line 15). I think that Mrs. Karlin-Hayter is right in saying (with proof) that in the 10th century the division in the Church was not the result of a power struggle between two "parties" but rather expressed the constant opposition between the two tendencies of "conservatism" and "liberalism," to which individuals adhered—often by changing sides—according to their personal choice of the moment: see P. Karlin-Hayter, "Le synode à Constantinople de 886 à 912 et le rôle de Nicolas le Mystique dans l'affaire de la Tétragamie," *JÖB*, 19 (1970), 90f.

⁴⁴ The priest who celebrated this marriage had been deposed: Theophanes Continuatus, p. 361; Symeon Magister, p. 703; Georgius Monachus, pp. 856-57.

to a boy who did not survive either.⁴⁵ So, at the age of thirty-five, Leo had contracted three marriages and still had no wife and no male heir. Then, he took a mistress, Zoe Carbounopsina, whose eyes were "black as coal."

On 3 September 905 Zoe gave birth to the long-awaited son,⁴⁶ the future Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, and the problem arose of how to legalize the boy's position and ensure the succession. The Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos, who not only knew all about Leo's concubine, but had also blessed her pregnancy and prayed for the Emperor's male heir,⁴⁷ found himself in a very difficult position when the boy was born. A fourth marriage of Leo was naturally out of the question; and concubinage could not be tolerated openly. An arrangement (*oikonomia*) was made, according to which the Emperor expelled Zoe from the palace and in return the Patriarch solemnly christened the baby in Saint Sophia on 6 January 906. But three days later Leo brought Zoe back to the palace, had his marriage to her celebrated by a palace priest and she was proclaimed—although not crowned—Empress of the Romans. Amid the general indignation expressed by the clergy, the Patriarch forbade Leo to enter the church.

This was but the beginning. At that time, the situation was not yet beyond repair. In trying to avert an outright confrontation with the state, or a schism within the Church, Nicholas Mystikos adopted a conciliatory—and often contradictory—policy, which, as things turned out, only complicated the problem.

The first period of the quarrel extends from the time of Leo's fourth marriage to February 907. During that period, the Emperor was constantly denied the right to enter the church as long as he refused to repudiate his fourth wife. But, at the same time, the Patriarch tried by all means to find some acceptable way out of the difficulty and to grant him a partial dispensation. Ambassadors had been sent to ask the opinions of the four other patriarchates, in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem;⁴⁸ and all kinds of pressures were used—

⁴⁵ *De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, p. 643, lines 19–20 (the infant was christened Basil); Theophanes Continuatus, p. 361; Symeon Magister, p. 704; Georgius Monachus, p. 860; *Vita Euthymii*, 63. The political reasons for which a dispensation for Leo's third marriage was granted are exposed in *Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 32, 218–20.

⁴⁶ Grierson, *Catalogue*, 506 and note 2.

⁴⁷ *Vita Euthymii*, 81.

⁴⁸ There is no doubt in my mind that Nicholas Mystikos initiated the idea of a council with participation of representatives of the other patriarchs in order to find a solution to the problem created by Leo's fourth marriage; but he also wanted Leo to be separated from his wife until a final decision was reached by this prospective council. This last condition being rejected by the Emperor (*Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 32, p. 222), Nicholas changed his mind and sincerely tried to find an *oikonomia* by obtaining the unanimous vote of his own metropolitans. I believe that, at the beginning, he wanted to prevent being accused by the other patriarchs of tolerating the tetragamy; but when the Emperor rejected his conditions, he changed course and tried to avoid any solution that might come from outside, especially from Rome: the Photian schism and its animosities were certainly not forgotten in 906 (cf. note 43 *supra*). Consequently, it seems to me that Leo did not appeal to the Pope over his own Patriarch's head; on the contrary, he acted on the advice, and probably with a certain support, of Nicholas Mystikos himself. This should be taken into consideration when trying to assess why not only the Pope but also the three Oriental patriarchs (who had never claimed supremacy over Constantinople) granted the dispensation. That Leo, too, tried up to the last minute to avoid a solution imposed from Rome can be deduced from the fact that on February 1st he summoned to the palace the Constantinopolitan Synod *without* the Roman legates and tried to end their resistance—and when he failed, he exiled them (cf. *infra*, p. 165).

the stick and the carrot—in order to create unanimity among the Constantinopolitan high clergy in favor of this dispensation. But while the other patriarchs eventually gave their permission, inside the church at Constantinople unanimity could not be achieved. The implacable opponents of the fourth marriage turned against their own Patriarch, whom they called, among other things, “rapist of the Church”⁴⁹ because of his leniency in the matter. And they continued to give advice to the Emperor. Having themselves no interest in women—at least, not officially—they were unable to imagine that Leo might want to keep his wife *per se*; they thought he did so because she had given him a son and they could not understand why he insisted on continuing to live with her. As one of them wrote in a letter to the Emperor: “Why can you not now dismiss with thanks the woman who has given you the child you desired, as we dismiss a ship when her cargo is discharged or throw away the husk which has brought the fruit to maturity?”⁵⁰

Leo did not dismiss his wife; growing impatient, he counter-attacked by allowing the rumor to spread that he was about to bring charges of high treason against the Patriarch, who was thus caught between two stools; he faced an open schism within his Church and was fearful that external intervention, especially from Rome, might worsen considerably this wretched situation. He fought back by obtaining from his metropolitans a written guarantee, confirmed later by oath, that they would staunchly support him on the tetragamy issue.⁵¹

On Christmas Day 906, the Emperor, following the usual ceremony, arrived with great pomp at the central door of Saint Sophia, and was denied entrance by the Patriarch. He accepted this public insult, but returned on the feast of the Epiphany, on 6 January 907. Once again, he was met by the Patriarch at the door, who refused him the right of entry, declaring that if he entered by force, “I and those who are here with me will immediately leave the place.” The Emperor was furious and uttered some barely veiled threats. Then, according to a contemporary source, “he cast himself on the ground and, having wept a long time, rose up again and said to the Patriarch: ‘Go in, my Lord, absolutely without hindrance from me. For, for the multitude of my unmeasured trespasses, rightly and justly am I suffering.’” And he obeyed.⁵² It should be emphasized for our purposes that this dramatic scene of public humiliation took place in front of the “Imperial Door” (τῶν βασιλικῶν πυλῶν) of Saint Sophia, that is, the very door over which our mosaic now stands.

The arrival of the Roman legates bearing the dispensation reinforced the

⁴⁹ *Arethae scripta minora*, II, 169 (Nicetas Paphlagon).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 67–68. I quote the English summary of Arethas’ argument by R. J. H. Jenkins in ‘Ελληνικά, 14 (1955), 354.

⁵¹ It must be said, however, that Nicholas did not discontinue his efforts to create a unanimous decision in favor of the dispensation. His endeavors persisted, even on the evening of Christmas Day 906: *Arethae scripta minora*, II, no. 87. And every time he had to confront the Emperor, his repeated explanation (as reported in the *Vita Euthymii*) was that his metropolitans could not reach a unanimous decision.

⁵² Events described in the *Vita Euthymii*, 75–79 (I quote from the English translation by P. Karlin-Hayter).

Emperor's position.⁵³ On February 1 he made a last-minute effort to force the Constantinopolitan hierarchy to admit him to the church, before any public intervention by the Romans took place. His ultimatum having been rejected, he immediately exiled Nicholas Mystikos and all the metropolitans.⁵⁴

The second part of the quarrel went on from February 907 to May 912. After the confusion that followed the Emperor's coup many of the exiled metropolitans did an about-face and rejoined the Emperor. Nicholas Mystikos was forced to resign, and a new patriarch, Euthymius, the devout monk and *synkellos* of the patriarchate was appointed, with the inept support of the Roman legates.⁵⁵ The schism inside the Church continued, however, for the followers of Nicholas Mystikos refused to recognize the new regime and were, therefore, persecuted.

⁵³ *Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 32, p. 222, states that the Roman legates arrived in Constantinople before the first of February 907. The *Vita Euthymii*, 87 and 101, implies that they arrived some days after February 1, and this point of view is defended by Karlin-Hayter, "Le synode à Constantinople," 86–89; but her arguments derived from other sources do not prove much. The letters of Nicetas Paphlagon and Leo Choirospaktes concern only the legates of the Oriental patriarchs, and the only chronological information they contain is that their impending arrival was known to the Patriarch on 25 December 906. The text of Arethas (*Arethae scripta minora*, I, 318) must be investigated further: sometime after February 907, Arethas, back in Constantinople and in contact with Euthymius, writes to his friend and pupil Nicetas Paphlagon, who had accused him of changing sides. He admits that what he had done was not altogether correct and describes the penance that he will propose for Leo. If his terms are accepted, he will stay; but if an arrangement is made by which Nicholas, now in exile, is reinstated to the patriarchal throne, then he will go to Rome together with Epiphanius of Laodicea (cf. *ibid.*, 315), whose opinion will be necessary before any *oikonomia* is reached concerning the fate of Zoe (γνώμη τοῦτου on p. 318, line 13, refers undoubtedly to the κοινῶς τῶν πατριάρχων mentioned in the previous line, not to the Pope who does not even appear in this text). In other words, Arethas knowing that the dispensation was granted to Leo by Rome and fearing that Nicholas, if reinstated, might exceed the legates in leniency, states his intention of going to Rome to explain matters. In any case, this text does not prove at all, in my view, that the legates were not in Constantinople when it was written. On the other hand, Nicholas' statement concerning the arrival of the legates before February 1 should be believed for the following reasons: (a) It is contained in a letter addressed to the Pope (not to 20th-century historians) in 912; are we to believe that he tried to convince his Roman counterpart with such a barefaced lie? It must be remembered that the legates of 907 were presumably at the Roman court by 912. (b) In this part of his letter, Nicholas defends himself against the accusation of having refused to meet the Roman legates in private; he explains his refusal on the basis of the opposition of certain metropolitans, and adds that he had made a counter-proposal to meet them in a council to be held in the palace (we understand that in this way he would control the majority of the votes); but all these explanations would have been useless if he were already in exile when the legates arrived in Constantinople. (c) It is difficult to believe that Leo VI, who already had many problems, would have dared to act as he did on February first, had the dispensation not definitely reached Constantinople, and had he not been assured of the legates' support. (d) The author of the *Vita Euthymii* (who, incidentally, "forgot" even to mention the fourth marriage) had every reason to misrepresent the facts in order to avoid giving the impression that his hero had usurped the patriarchate with the support of Rome; to do this, he had to place the arrival of the legates after the events of February first. Since certainly this arrival was not generally known in 907, and since he was writing between 920 and 925 (?) in Euthymius' monastery of Psamathia, he could easily alter the sequence of days so as better to convince his already convinced readers.

⁵⁴ Leo's measure was obviously intended for—and eventually succeeded in—preparing the ground for defections in the metropolitans' ranks (he ordered the hierarchs to stay "by themselves and isolated": *Vita Euthymii*, p. 87, line 29). But while waiting to be banished, the Patriarch and his metropolitans once more reaffirmed their common stand and declared that any decision in this matter must be unanimous (*Arethae scripta minora*, II, p. 117).

⁵⁵ The *Vita Euthymii* tries to show that Euthymius agreed to become patriarch very reluctantly and only after strong pressure; it is certain that before accepting he fixed certain conditions (cf. *infra*, p. 181). But he was already the *synkellos*, that is, the prospective heir to the patriarchate; moreover, we know that by Christmas 906 he was the recognized head of those ecclesiastics who were in favor of the dispensation, thus taking a stand in opposition to the attitude of the Synod (*Arethae scripta minora*, II, p. 173, line 29).

The new Patriarch granted the Emperor a partial dispensation and agreed to crown his son Constantine coemperor (15 May 908). But, on the other hand, he forced Leo to issue a law in 907 which not only prohibited any future fourth marriages but also stipulated that they should be forcefully dissolved (cf. p. 175 f.). Moreover, Euthymius never missed an occasion to underline the fact that he had no intention of sanctioning the Emperor's fourth marriage: he had simply wished to show indulgence by granting a dispensation.⁵⁶ Throughout his last five years, Leo was admitted to the church as a penitent—a public humiliation that he accepted as long as he was not required to get rid of his wife.⁵⁷ After all, he was a pious man; although he had defied ecclesiastical law for the love of Zoe, he could not but be conscious of his sinful situation.⁵⁸

Leo died on 11 May 912, when his son Constantine was only seven years old. During his last days, a change of attitude occurred. He appointed as tutor to his son his own brother and coemperor, Alexander—although throughout his lifetime he had never allowed Alexander to share in the government and constantly suspected him of plotting against him.⁵⁹ Moreover, he wrote, or dictated, a last will (α μετάνοια) condemning his fourth marriage, beseeching God's forgiveness, and ordering Nicholas Mystikos restored to the patriarchal throne. A copy of this document is preserved;⁶⁰ its existence is mentioned in a letter of Nicholas Mystikos dating from the second part of 912 as well as in later sources.⁶¹ Modern scholars have contested its authenticity, considering it to be a falsification made immediately after Leo's death—a theory that has not been proved (and certainly cannot be proved now, ten centuries after the death of Leo and of every possible witness). Besides, this is of very little

⁵⁶ *Vita Euthymii*, p. 109, lines 29–30. All five known documents issued by Euthymius are related, and hostile, to the tetragamy: V. Grumel, *Les registres des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople*, I, 2 (Istanbul, 1936), nos. 625–29.

⁵⁷ *Vita Euthymii*, p. 109, lines 21–23. Leo was admitted into the church, not beyond the ἱεροὶ κληῖδες, that is, he was not admitted to the sanctuary, which the Byzantine emperors entered every time they attended a service officially (*De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Bonn ed., 14). He was also deprived of the right to sit during the service (ἑστῶς), although he spent a considerable part of it in a small room nearby, known as the *metatorion* (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 376; Symeon Magister, p. 712; Georgius Monachus, p. 869). But no spectacular penance was imposed on him, such as that advocated by Arethas in 907: "we shall set him (Leo VI) by the door of the church, the duration of a service, on his knees, to entreat those who go in" (*Arethae scripta minora*, I, 317; English translation by P. Karlin-Hayter in *Byzantion*, 28 [1958], 387).

⁵⁸ Πλύνεται τοῦ μιάσματος ρεύμασι τῶν δακρύων: I. Ševčenko, "Poems on the Deaths of Leo VI and Constantine VII in the Madrid Manuscript of Scylitzes," *DOP*, 23–24 (1969–70), 185–228, see p. 202, line 48. Arethas also often speaks of Leo's feeling of guilt. Cf. also *infra*, note 63.

⁵⁹ Cf. P. Karlin-Hayter, "The Emperor Alexander's Bad Name," *Speculum*, 44 (1969), 585–96. Cf. also Ševčenko, *op. cit.*, 199–200, 209–10, 223 note 75. An interesting aspect of the "persecution" that Alexander's memory suffered in the 10th century is put forth by J. Grosdidier de Matons, "Trois études sur Léon VI," *TM*, 5 (1973), 181–242, esp. 229–42 ("Les Constitutions tactiques et la *damnatio memoriae* de l'empereur Alexandre").

⁶⁰ N. Oikonomidès, "La dernière volonté de Léon VI au sujet de la tétragamie," *BZ*, 56 (1963), 46–52 (from the *Codex Hierosolymitanus Sancti Sepulcri*, no. 24, fol. 12), and "La préhistoire de la dernière volonté de Léon VI au sujet de la tétragamie," *ibid.*, 265–70.

⁶¹ *Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 32, p. 242: Nicholas refers to Leo's *metanoia* in order to explain why the deceased Emperor should not be anathematized. See also the Annals of the Patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius in PG, 111, col. 1150 D; and the list of the Constantinopolitan patriarchs published by F. Fischer, "De Patriarcharum Constantinopolitanorum catalogis," *Commentationes philologicae Ienenses*, 3 (1884), 292.

importance for our purpose.⁶² What is important—and incontestable—is that in 912 the official version of both the palace and the patriarchate was that Leo VI had repented before his death; consequently, he was no more liable to the spiritual punishments that his fourth marriage entailed and his soul could be saved.⁶³ Pardon was granted to him by Nicholas Mystikos in 912 and was later confirmed by the unanimous vote of the Council of 920.⁶⁴

With Leo's death began the third phase of the tetragamy quarrel, which continued until the year 920. Nicholas Mystikos, reestablished as patriarch in 912 with full powers in Church affairs, began to settle old scores. Euthymius and his friends, the metropolitans who had forsaken him in 907, were more or less brutally deposed or persecuted. Even the terrible word anathema was pronounced, though without much conviction. The Emperor Alexander fully supported his Patriarch in his passionate revenge, and it is this attitude which may account for the fact that his mosaic portrait (fig. 4) was placed in the north gallery of Saint Sophia.⁶⁵ In this mosaic, Alexander displays the title—unusual

⁶² Even before the publication of Leo's *metanoia*, scholarly opinion was divided on this issue: see I. Konstantinides, Νικόλαος Α' ὁ Μυστικός (Athens, 1967), 57–58 (add: R. J. H. Jenkins, "A Note on the 'Letter to the Emir' of Nicholas Mysticus," *DOP*, 17 [1963], 399–401, and A. Každan, *Dve vizantijskie hroniki desjatogo veka* [Moscow, 1959], 128). The authenticity of the *metanoia* itself has been contested by P. Karlin-Hayter, "La 'préhistoire' de la dernière volonté de Léon VI," *Byzantion*, 33 (1963), 482–86, cf. p. 511; and, again, *idem*, "Le synode à Constantinople," 97–99. I must repeat that I do not by any means believe that this about-face by Leo during his last moments is impossible, especially if he was—and indeed he was—a pious man; he died after a long illness, fully conscious that his end was near, and knowing perfectly well that he had imposed an arrangement on his church and had never received complete absolution. How can we now assess how much he feared for the fate of his soul? On the other hand, the arguments put forth by Karlin-Hayter do not disprove, in my view, the authenticity of the *metanoia*. (a) I do not see how anyone can expect to find any kind of style in a document of sixteen lines, written, or dictated by a dying man. (b) The relative similarity of the *metanoia* to the related passage in Nicholas Mystikos' Letter 32 may well be due to the fact that the Patriarch had in front of him—as he should have had—the text of the *metanoia* when he wrote his letter. (c) I know of not a single piece of evidence suggesting that the authenticity of Leo's *metanoia* was contested in 912; Arethas, after 912, questions the authenticity of a letter of Leo written in 907, not the authenticity of the *metanoia*. (d) The silence of the other sources on this subject has the value of any *argumentum ex silentio*, which cuts both ways; the same thing may be said of Nicholas' Letter no. 79 in which he announces to his friends his return to the patriarchate, attributing it to God's intervention without naming the emperor who reinstated him (neither Leo, nor Alexander). Finally, we should not exaggerate the importance of Nicholas' resignations in 907. In reading them carefully one realizes that Nicholas, although acting under duress, carefully introduced a clause which says that he is resigning from the patriarchal throne but is not giving up his episcopal rank (cf. Karlin-Hayter in *Vita Euthymii*, 214).

⁶³ Repentance before death naturally was considered an all-important condition to the pardoning of a person's sins by anyone, including a council. A case similar to ours arose in 843: the Patriarch Methodius and the iconodule Council granted absolution to the iconoclastic Emperor Theophilus who, according to his wife's testimony, allegedly repented during the last hours of his life. Several unbelievable legends have been invented to support the theory of the deathbed conversion of an Emperor who, throughout his life, firmly believed that Iconoclasm was the only true faith (Cf. Grumel, *Regestes* [as in note 56], nos. 414, 415). No such effort has been made to explain Leo's "last minute conversion," since everyone knew that the conscience of the defunct Emperor was far from clear because of his fourth marriage. Cf. Ševčenko, "Poems" (as in note 58), 197, lines 31, 38–39: a 10th-century poet imagines Leo on his deathbed addressing his son Constantine with the phrase *υἱέ, δι' ὃν μακρύνουμαι πατρός τοῦ οὐρανόυ, and asking that on his tomb the following words be inscribed: Λέων ἐνθάδε κείται, ὁ μόνος ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων τὸν Θεὸν παροργίσας.*

⁶⁴ Preface by Constantine Porphyrogenetos to the *Tomus Unionis* (cf. *infra*, note 71): Zepos, *Jus*, I (Athens, 1931), p. 193, lines 22–23.

⁶⁵ P. A. Underwood and E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Mosaics of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul. The Portrait of the Emperor Alexander," *DOP*, 15 (1961), 187–217; Mango, *Mosaics*, 46–47, 97–98; L. Budde, "Das Alexandermosaik der Ayasofya," *Deutsch-türkische Gesellschaft e.V. Bonn, Mitteilungen*, Heft 50 (March 1963), 1–7. There is no reason to subscribe to the hypothesis of Vegler (*Numismatic Circular*,

at that time—of “orthodox ruler,” intended to stress the correctness of his ecclesiastical policy and, perhaps, to hint at the dubious orthodoxy of the Emperor who had preceded him.⁶⁶

Alexander died in 913 (6 June) and the six years that followed his death were marked by a fierce struggle for power between Nicholas Mystikos and the widow of Leo VI, the Empress Zoe, while at the same time, the Bulgarian armies of Czar Symeon were threatening the very existence of the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁷ Deprived of all political power in February 914, the Patriarch had to face the rising opposition of the Euthymians, who reappeared to contest his leadership and, with the support of the lay authorities, weakened his grip on what remained of the deeply divided Church.

This situation came to an end when the chief admiral of the imperial fleet (*droungarios tou ploimou*), the ambitious Romanus Lecapenus, staged a successful coup on 25 March 919. This new “strongman” soon arranged the marriage of his daughter Helen to Constantine VII and, in return, was appointed to the highest of all administrative offices, that of *basileopator*, or “tutor” to the Emperor.⁶⁸ In the name of his son-in-law he assumed the very extensive powers that he took away from Zoe.⁶⁹ Also, he pushed both sides hard in order

81 [1973], 43) that this mosaic should date from the joint reign of Leo and Alexander (886–912); his argument that the Emperor does not use the title αὐτοκράτωρ, which he was in fact the first to adopt on some of his coins, seems too weak: the title *despotes* that appears on the mosaic was currently used by emperors before and after 912/13; and Alexander used the title *autokratōr* only on his silver coins, not on the gold ones. Cf. Grierson, *Catalogue*, 524–25. It should be noted that Alexander certainly enjoyed special privileges in the church during the year 912–913 (cf. *supra*, note 14).

⁶⁶ As has been pointed out (Underwood and Hawkins, *op. cit.*, 192 note 13), this inscription presents certain irregularities. It is contained in four roundels, three of which display cruciform monograms and one a regular inscription with the Emperor’s name, written in characters considerably thicker than those of the monograms. The initial invocation, Κύριε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ (upper left monogram), should be followed by the name (certainly not the titles) in the dative; but the name, Ἀλέξανδρος, is written in the nominative (upper right) and is followed by two other monograms in the dative: ὀρθόδοξῳ (lower left) and δεσπότη (with a spelling mistake—there is no omicron—which cannot be corrected if one follows the possible reading of this monogram by the editors as πιστῷ δεσπ(ό)τῳ). Such mistakes are not unheard of in Byzantine imperial inscriptions: see, e.g., B. Meyer-Plath and A. M. Schneider, *Die Landmauer von Konstantinopel*, II (Berlin, 1943), p. 123, no. 1; but they are hard to accept when they occur on such sumptuous works as the Alexander panel. One might suspect that we are here in front of a change (an usurpation?), but no archaeological evidence, for the time being, supports such a hypothesis. For the use of the title ὀρθόδοξος δεσπότης by Byzantine emperors, especially on 11th-century coins, and its possible relationship with the schism of 1054, see Grierson, *Catalogue*, 755 (with bibliographic indications). Is it a mere coincidence that this same title appeared on an official monument already in 912/13, at a time when the ecclesiastical relations between Constantinople and Rome were, to say the least, strained?

⁶⁷ Zoe was expelled from the palace by Alexander (Theophanes Continuatus, p. 386; Symeon Magister, p. 721; Georgius Monachus, p. 878; *Arethae scripta minora* ([as in note 14], I, 90) probably as soon as he assumed power. After Alexander’s death she returned to the palace only to be expelled once again by the regent Nicholas Mystikos, who also deprived her of all imperial prerogatives. Yet she returned once more in October 913, and although forced to take the veil, she managed to stage a successful coup and recover her imperial position in February 914: *Vita Euthymii*, p. 131, line 10; p. 133. For the events of the years 913–19, see also Aikaterine Christophilopoulou, Ἡ ἀντιβασιλεία εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον, in Σύμμεικτα (Κέντρον Βυζαντινῶν Ἑρευνῶν), 2 (1970), 43–61.

⁶⁸ Cf. N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de présence byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972), 307.

⁶⁹ Zoe was deprived of all power after 23 March 919, when a first coup brought Nicholas Mystikos back to the palace as main counselor of Constantine VII. Her situation does not seem to have changed under Romanus Lecapenus; she is not even mentioned in the title of the *Tomus Unionis* (cf. note 71, *infra*). So, Arethas of Caesarea, a contemporary, asserts that the joint reign of Constantine VII and Zoe lasted five years, i. e., the period between February 914 (cf. *supra*, note 67) and March 919: L. G. Westerink, “Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek Ms. 231,” *Byzantion*, 42 (1972), 242.

to put an end to the tetragamy quarrel, in which the superstitious saw an explanation for the repeated defeats of the Byzantine armies.⁷⁰

As was to be expected, he succeeded, especially because both factions were anxious to end the schism and neither possessed the political power to resist him. In 920 a council was summoned in Constantinople, in which followers of both Nicholas and Euthymius participated. On July 9, the famous document known as *Tomus Unionis* (Τόμος Ἐνώσεως) was published; it was to become the standard legislation of the Eastern Church concerning the matter of the right of individuals to remarry. Carefully worded, this document is the result of a compromise: a second marriage is allowed; a third may also be allowed under certain circumstances but must be followed by an act of penance. A fourth is out of the question (ὡς ἀλλότριον τῆς χριστιανικῆς πολιτείας ἀποκηρύττομεν): whoever contracts a fourth marriage will not be admitted in church as long as he does not repudiate his partner.⁷¹

As far as fourth marriages are concerned, the *Tomus Unionis* does not contain any significant innovation by pronouncing excommunication on the offenders. This was just a confirmation—admittedly clearer—of traditional canonical legislation (St. Basil, etc.) as it was understood by nearly everyone in the tenth century. Moreover, Leo's legislation of 907 had already provided a definite answer to the problem, since it ordered the dissolution by civil power of any fourth marriage. Consequently, on this particular point, the solemn condemnation contained in the *Tomus* may also be understood to mean confirmation of the law already enacted by Leo, and as a further guarantee that it would not be rescinded. After all, the problem being one of Church discipline, canon law could not but have the final word, thus establishing its supremacy over all, including the emperor.

The *Tomus Unionis*, which ended the turmoil in the Church and later was also subscribed to by the Roman legates,⁷² was a great personal triumph for Nicholas Mystikos, since it clearly ratified the righteousness of his acts when he had refused Leo VI the right of entering the church as long as he did not separate from Zoe. But this "pacification" of the Church, combined with an outright moral condemnation of the fourth marriage, was also a blow to the reigning dynasty and served its planner, Romanus Lecapenus, in his ambitions. One month after the publication of the *Tomus*, in August 920, the Empress Zoe was deposed and relegated to a monastery; in September Romanus Lecapenus was made Caesar and in December was crowned Emperor, thus com-

⁷⁰ Cf. *Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 75.

⁷¹ Zepos, *Jus*, I, 192–97 = Grumel, *Regestes*, no. 669. On Constantine VII's Preface to the *Tomus*, see Karlin-Hayter, in *Vita Euthymii*, 53–56. It must be added that hard-core Euthymians did not participate in the Council of 920: see the Preface to the *Tomus* (Zepos, *Jus*, I, p. 194, lines 10, 30–31), where mention is made of those who πρὸς τὴν παραχώρησιν τοῦ δαίμονος προαίρεσιν ἀποκλίνουσιν and of those who refused to come because ἑαυτοῖς—ἐὼ γὰρ εἰπεῖν ἄλλοις (i.e., Zoe and her party)—ἀρέσκειν ἠγάπησαν. The tetragamy quarrel lasted, much toned down, until the nineties of the 10th century: Grumel, *Regestes*, nos. 803 and 813; H. Grégoire and P. Orgels, in *Byzantion*, 24 (1954), 168; and *Aveithae scripta minora*, II, 132, scholion.

⁷² Grumel, *Regestes*, no. 712 = *Nicholas I, Letters*, no. 28.

mencing his persistent and promising, but ultimately unsuccessful, efforts to establish his own dynasty at the expense of Constantine VII.⁷³

In this context one understands better the unequaled solemnity that has been conferred on the *Tomus Unionis* since 920. Issued by a council, this document was signed by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos.⁷⁴ From then on, it was granted the exceptional privilege of being read every year, on the second Sunday in July, from the ambo of every church,⁷⁵ and of being commemorated with a religious procession between the churches of Saint Sophia and Saint Irene in which both the emperor and the patriarch actively participated.⁷⁶ However, the main theme of these celebrations was undoubtedly the restoration of peace within the Church. The preface to the *Tomus Unionis* begins with the announcement that peace is the exceptional legacy left by Jesus Christ, and is completely dominated by this idea: suffice to say that the words εἰρήνη and εἰρηνεύω are repeated thirteen times in this preface. One may assume that this idea was also stressed in the ceremonial of the commemorative procession which, significantly, was required to visit the church of Ἁγία Εἰρήνη.

Date and Meaning of the Lunette Mosaic. We may now return to the mosaic of the prostrate emperor, and state that it represents Leo VI and dates from around the year 920 for the following reasons:

As I have already pointed out, the mosaic is placed over the main door of Saint Sophia in front of which Leo VI had twice been forced by his Patriarch to turn back—on Christmas Day 906 and on the feast of the Epiphany 907. On the latter occasion, he himself had drawn attention to his own humiliation, by casting himself on the ground and admitting publicly that he was suffering because of his own sins. This dramatic scene, reported by a trustworthy eyewitness, namely the author of the *Vita Euthymii*, who was an opponent of Nicholas Mystikos, could not but make a deep impression in the year 907 and remind everyone of a famous precedent: that of St. Ambrose of Milan refusing the Emperor Theodosius the right to enter a church and imposing upon him a public penance. The story was certainly well known to the Byzantines from the Ecclesiastical Histories of Sozomen (VIII, 25) and of Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus (V, 17–18); in fact, several contemporaries, on speaking of the penance to be imposed upon Leo VI, referred to this precedent.⁷⁷

Leo, however, did not repent in 907. He repented, according to the official version, in 912, shortly before his death, presumably out of fear for the fate

⁷³ Detailed chronology established by Grierson, *Catalogue*, 527–28.

⁷⁴ Κατησφαλισμένος τῇ συνήθει τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπογραφῆ: *Const. Armenopuli Manuale Legum sive Hexabiblos*, ed. G. E. Heimbach (Leipzig, 1851), 532. This is why some authors go as far as to call it a novella of this Emperor: PG, 158, col. 953 (νεαρά); *VizVrem*, 2 (1895), 506 (νεαρός τῆς ἐνώσεως τόμος), 510 (νεαρόν θέσπισμα). In spite of these texts, the *Tomus Unionis* is not mentioned in F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, 5 vols. (Munich-Berlin, 1924–1965).

⁷⁵ Attested by Theodore Balsamon (12th cent.) and Matthaios Blastares (14th cent.). See A. Pavlov, "Sinodal'noe postanovlenie Konstantinopolskago patriarha Haritona (1177–1178 g.) o tretjem brake, redaktirovannoe Theodorom Val'samonom," *VizVrem*, 2 (1895), 506; and G. Rhalles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θεῶν καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, VI (Athens, 1859), 159. For the exact day of the feast, see Grumel, *Regestes*, 170 (Chronologie).

⁷⁶ *De caerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, 186–87.

⁷⁷ E.g., *Arethae scripta minora*, p. 17, line 27; p. 318, lines 1–4.

of his soul. His contemporaries believed, in fact, that in his last hours he had a vision of the "grim inquirers" who had arrived to examine his "past deeds."⁷⁸ This is naturally a reference to the common belief of the Byzantines that at the time of death an angel—the guardian angel—comes, takes the soul of the individual, and deals with it according to his sins.⁷⁹ St. Basil, who, incidentally, had also forbidden a fourth marriage, describes the death of a sinner in these terms: "A gloomy angel will arrive; he will take by force and drag your soul, chained by the sins, trying all the time to return to this world and weeping with no voice . . .";⁸⁰ this nightmarish scene was common knowledge to the Byzantines.⁸¹

But Leo repented before dying, and his contemporaries imagined that he did what everyone else would have done in his place: beseech the Virgin Mary to intercede on his behalf with Christ.⁸² Since pardon had been granted to him, first by the Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos in 912, then by the Council of 920, he is represented in our mosaic to the right of Christ, in the place of those who are saved, below the Virgin Mary who intercedes on his behalf, while St. Basil's "gloomy angel," still present on the other side, looks away (cf. fig. 5).⁸³

The fact that Leo is represented in the place of the "saved" already suggests that our mosaic was made after his death and, most probably, after a definitive absolution had been granted to him by the Council of 920 whose members were considered, as in all councils, to be inspired by the Holy Spirit itself. The historical background of the tetragamy quarrel also argues in favor of such a late dating: Leo's reign (907-912), as well as Zoe's (914-919), can be safely excluded; it can be assumed—although with no absolute certainty—that a mosaic publicly proclaiming Leo's repentance would not have been acceptable during Alexander's reign, when passions ran high and Leo's death was still too close. On the other hand, a panel designed to throw some discredit upon a member of the Macedonian dynasty is easily conceivable in the course of the ascension of Romanus Lecapenus to power.

One more element in our mosaic strongly suggests its dating after 920: this is the inscription on the Gospel which Christ holds on His left knee. It reads: "Peace to you. I am the Light of the World." It is composed of two independent passages from the Gospel of John (20:19, 26 and 8:12), which are here combined for the first and only time in Byzantine art.⁸⁴ They have been interpreted

⁷⁸ Ševčenko, "Poems," 196, line 11.

⁷⁹ Ph. Koukoules, *Βυζαντινῶν Βίος καὶ Πολιτισμὸς*, IV (Athens, 1951), 152. The Angel who takes away the dying man's soul appears already in the Gospel (Luke 16:22, cf. 12:20).

⁸⁰ PG, 32, col. 1229 (*De poenitentia*, 8, § 6): "Ἦξει ἄγγελος κατηφής, ἀπάγων βιαίως καὶ σύρων σου τὴν ψυχὴν δεδεμένην ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις, πυκνὰ μεταστροφόμενην πρὸς τὰ ῥοδὲ καὶ ὀδυρομένην ἄνευ φωνῆς . . ."

⁸¹ This text is also used by later writers as, for instance, Georgius Monachus in the 9th century: *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, ed. C. de Boor, II (Leipzig, 1904), 696.

⁸² Ševčenko, "Poems," 197, line 26.

⁸³ Not being an art historian myself, I shall not try to reconcile this interpretation with that proposed by Grabar for the use of the *imagines clipeatae* "pour rapprocher des personnages et événements qui ne sont pas contemporains": A. Grabar, *L'art de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen-Age*, I (Paris, 1968), 607-13 ("L'imago clipeata chrétienne"). But there is no doubt in my mind that the Virgin's gesture shows that she is participating in the scene.

⁸⁴ Grabar, *L'empereur* (as in note 13 *supra*), 103.

as putting forth the ideas of "Peace" and of "Light," "Peace" being related by some scholars to the *Pax Romana*.⁸⁵ But in the historical and ideological context of the year 920, the combination of these two passages has a very clear and obvious meaning. The Council of 920 put an end to a schism that had tormented the Byzantine Church for thirteen years; it had been summoned in order to reestablish peace, the exceptional legacy left by Jesus Christ. This legacy of Christ, the peace recently recovered, is the first idea emphasized on Christ's open book. The second quotation, "I am the Light of the World," common in representations of Christ, was also quite fitting, since it stressed that the *Rex regnantium* was the source of all things, including the power of human rulers. Appearing on this mosaic, it could also be understood as suggesting the invincibility of ecclesiastical law in respect to any lay power: the prostrate Emperor was an eloquent testimony to the truth of this concept. We know, do we not, that, after 843, *proskynesis* had become the most effective demonstration of adherence to the official doctrine of the Church?⁸⁶

Our mosaic, therefore, should also be considered a monument of the triumph of Nicholas Mystikos over the Emperor; even more, it is a picture of the subjection of the earthly ruler to the Eternal Ruler's commands as carried out by the latter's representatives. Inspired by the historical event of Leo's humiliation on 6 January 907, it expresses a much broader idea, that of "the repentance of the emperor," and is thus related to the famous precedent of the repentance of King David,⁸⁷ as well as that of Theodosius I in Milan. If the Western Middle Ages had known the way from Milan to Canossa,⁸⁸ one could also add that an offshoot of it led to the central door of the narthex of Saint Sophia.

Our mosaic is a symbol, and the range of its content would only have been restricted by the tactless addition of an inscription with the deceased Emperor's name. It can also be taken as a warning. Future emperors would have to pass through that door every time they went to Saint Sophia. The panel over it would remind them of the misfortunes of one of their predecessors and warn them that they should be careful. After all, the place of the damned, to Christ's left, below the gloomy angel, is empty. . . .

⁸⁵ E.g., Ch. Diehl, *Constantinople* (Paris, 1935), 57; Grabar, *L'empereur*, 103, and *L'iconoclasme byzantin* (as in note 3 *supra*), 239-40; Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography* (as in note 27 *supra*), 50. Mirković (as in note 16 *supra*) proposed a different interpretation, rightly rejected by Cutler, *Transfigurations* (as in note 5 *supra*), 109-10.

⁸⁶ A. Grabar, "Un manuscrit des homélies de Saint Jean Chrysostome de la Bibliothèque Nationale d'Athènes," *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, 5 (1932), 280; supported by Cutler, *Transfigurations*, 64.

⁸⁷ One could draw several parallels, unimportant in my view, between the case of King David and that of Leo VI (carnal sin; reprimand by a mortal, Nathan and Nicholas Mystikos; intervention of an Angel; both rulers lose a first son, their second sons, King Solomon and Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, succeed to the throne with the support of those who reprimanded their fathers, etc.). But I think that even without these specific similarities the already established iconography of the Repentance of David was an obvious source of inspiration for a composition of a repentant emperor. It is now well established that monumental paintings were, in fact, reproduced in miniatures and vice versa: K. Weitzmann, W. C. Loerke, E. Kitzinger, H. Buchthal, *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art* (Princeton, 1975), esp. pp. 61-97 (W. C. Loerke, "The Monumental Miniature") and pp. 99-142 (E. Kitzinger, "The Role of Miniature Painting in Mural Decoration").

⁸⁸ Cf. R. Schiffer, "Von Mailand nach Canossa. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der christlichen Herrscherbusse von Theodosius d. Gr. bis zu Heinrich IV.," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 28 (1972), 333-70.