



When Writing Prefigures Painting

Some Remarks on “Typology” within the Conception of the Byzantine Icon

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L’angel che venne in terra col decreto
 de la molt’anni lagrimata pace,
 ch’aperse il ciel del suo lungo divieto,
 dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace
 quivi intagliato in un atto soave,
 che non sembiava imagine che tace.
 Giurato si saria ch’el dicesse ’Ave!’;
 perché iv’era imaginata quella
 ch’ad aprir l’alto amor volse la chiave;
 e avea in atto impressa esta favella
 ’Ecce ancilla Deï’, propriamente
 come figura in cera si suggella.
 Dante, *Purgatorio* X, V. 34–45.

The idea of *figural interpretation/prophesy* — or to use the accepted modern term *typology*¹ — had an enormous influence on the medieval way of visual representation of the Old and New Testament in the West where the types of the Old Covenant within a dense web of relationships prefigure the antitypes of the New Testament in which they are fulfilled.

In modern scholarship the term *typology* is widely used for this artistic strategy of medieval representation, whereas the significance of the concept of *figural*

¹ The term did not become the denotation of a theological concept until the 16th century and was until the end of the 18th century also used as a classification term within natural sciences; cf. Strenge, Britta: “Typologie”. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie online*. Eds. Joachim Ritter – Karlfried Gründer – Gottfried Gabriel. Basel: Schwabe AG, <https://doi.org/10.24894/hwph.5503> (last viewed 21.10.2021).

prophecy for the medieval understanding of history, as Erich Auerbach and Friedrich Ohly had outlined in the 20th century,² is recently negligibly recognized within Art History.

My paper will argue that the concept of typology as a mode of historical perception as well as an approach to visuality deeply influenced the theological conception of the icon during the process of Byzantine Iconoclasm (ca. 730–845).³ I will further argue that typology itself is a genuinely visually oriented way of thinking which is rooted in a Greek classical tradition where the difference between writing and painting has always been fluid. In addition, I would like to demonstrate with regard to some exemplary passages in the orations of John of Damascus⁴ — one of the best known exponents of the Iconophile party, that during the 8th century, the deeply entrenched exegetical method of typology became a central tool for the argument in favor of images by showing that images were also accepted in the Old Testament and part of an unwritten tradition. Beyond that, as I hope to show, the conception of the icon itself followed the model of typology insofar that the person represented in the icon prefigures the real prototype. In Byzantine art typological representation never became as popular as it did in the West after Iconoclasm, and insofar marks the drift between the development of Byzantine and Western medieval art at the end of Late Antiquity in the 8th century. Whereas the period of late antique art can be characterised by a shared artistic culture from Rome to Constantinople, from Ravenna to Mount Sinai in which typology marks the beginning of monumental Christian representation the paths diverge after Iconoclasm.⁵ Typology as the juxtaposition of scenes of the

² Auerbach, Erich: "Figura". In: Erich Auerbach: *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, translated by Paolo Valesio. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 11–78 (first published in German, *Neue Dantestudien*, Istanbul 1944, pp. 11–71); Ohly, Friedrich: "The Spiritual Sense of Words in the Middle Ages", translated by David A. Wells. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Volume 41, Issue 1, January 2005, pp. 18–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqi002> (last viewed 21.10.2021); first published in German, "Vom geistigen Sinn des Wortes im Mittelalter", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 89 (1958), pp. 1–23).

³ For a recent survey of the history of Byzantine Iconoclasm cf. Brubaker, Leslie – John F. Haldon: *Byzantium in the Iconoclast eEra, c. 680–850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁴ Kotter, Bonifatius: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3 [*Patristische Texte und Studien* 17]. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/Cite?2934:005:0> (English translation by Andrew Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 2003).

⁵ For typology in Late Antique art Sabine Schrenk's study is fundamental; Schrenk, Sabine: *Typos und Antitypos in der christlichen Kunst, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*. Ergänzungsband 21. Münster 1995. Further Bloch, Peter: "Typologische Kunst". *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Bd. 6. (1969), pp. 127–142; Suntrup, Rudolf: "Präfigurationen des Messopfers in Text und Bild". *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984), pp. 468–528; Rickert, Franz: "Studien zum Ashburnham-Pentateuch", Diss. Bonn 1986; Elsner, Jaś: *Art and the Roman Viewer*. Cambridge 1995, especially pp. 247–287, who emphasizes the significance of typology in Late Antique art, whereas Schrenk is far more cautious concerning typology as a basic visual structure in Late Antique art and suggests that the typological sense has to be examined for every single representation; Schrenk,

Old and New Testament became one of the most popular representation strategies in Western medieval art, as the portable Altar of Stavelot or the Klosterneuburger Altar impressively show, and created also new image formulas in the West, for example “The Tree of Jesse”. In contrast to the Western affinity to typological representation similar examples in Byzantine art after the Iconoclastic controversy and the dogmatization of the icon in 843, which ended the conflict, cannot be found. Typological representation as can be found in late antique art and especially in Western art of the High Middle Ages had no relevance in Byzantine art after the end of Iconoclasm.⁶

The reason for that, as I hope to sketch out, lies in the conception of the Byzantine icon as a genuinely typological mode of representation which was pre-figured in the Old Testament and realised through the Incarnation of Christ but as a *typos* still enshrines the inaccessibility of the Divine. Thus the icon is a more precise representation of the divine realities but still shrouds these realities from being seen face to face, only being revealed after the Second Coming of Christ. In this respect, the following essay tries to contribute some new aspects to the conceptual genealogy of the icon, for which mainly Christological and Neo-Platonic arguments have acquired attention within scholarship.⁷ The result of this unique medieval theoretical process was the salvation relevant equivalence of script and image in Byzantium.

Visuality and the Historicity of Typology in Modern Discourses

The artistic strategy of typology, widely established in Medieval art throughout Europe in the 12th century,⁸ realises visually the much older exegetical tradition of typology essential to late antique Christian thinking. In the 20th century landmark contributions for the understanding of the idea of typology in terms of the Christian perception and understanding of history were made by the theologians

Typos und Antitypos, pp. 17–19.

⁶ The evidence is *ex negativo*: There are simply no examples for typological representations in Byzantine Art after Iconoclasm. References to the Old Testament in the monumental programs of cross-in-square-churches are only suggested by the row of Church Fathers and Prophets. I am thankful to Prof. Barbara Schellewald (University of Basel) who confirmed my observation that examples of typological representations in Byzantium after Iconoclasm are lacking.

⁷ For an overview of the Iconophile arguments cf. Parry, Kenneth: *Depicting the Word. Byzantine Iconophile Thought in the 8th and 9th Centuries*. Leiden/NewYork/Köln: Brill, 1996. Cf. further Barber, Charles: *Figure and Likeness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002; Elsner, Jaś: “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium”. *The Art Bulletin* (2012) 94:3, pp. 368–394, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2012.10786048> (last viewed 21.10.2021).

⁸ Cf. Suntrup, Rudolf: “Typology”. In: *Der Neue Pauly*. Eds. Hubert Cancik – Helmuth Schneider. Brill Reference Online (first published 2006), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e15306250 (last viewed 21.10.2021).

Jean Daniélou⁹ and Leonhard Goppelt,¹⁰ and the cultural philologists Friedrich Ohly¹¹ and Erich Auerbach.¹² The latter defined typology in his pivotal study “Figura” as “figural interpretation” (*Figuraldeutung*) characterizing it as a genuinely historical mode of exegesis:

“Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the Second Coming.”¹³

Although Friedrich Ohly prefers the denotation “allegorical sense” or allegory for what Auerbach defined as typology, i. e. figural interpretation, he indirectly answers Auerbach in his study “On the Spiritual sense of the Word in the Middle Ages” (first published in 1958) and states frankly:

“If the text is questioned as to the historical past, it responds with the historical literal sense. If the question is couched in terms of the significance of the text for Christian spiritual history (*Heilsgeschichte*), the response is at the level of the allegorical sense. In this case allegory means the same as the modern concept of typology, that is the relationship of meaning between prefiguration and fulfilment, as between the Old and the New Testament. This form of typological thought, rooted in the idea of Christian spiritual history (*Heilsgeschichte*), exerted a strong formative influence on the historical consciousness of the Middle Ages; [...]”¹⁴

Indeed, the concept of typology had tremendous consequences for the medieval perception of time itself. Whereas even the end of time is regarded to be fulfilled in God, the historical event is always incomplete and veiled and will only be fully understood after the end of earthly time.¹⁵

⁹ Daniélou, Jean: *From Shadows to Reality. Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. by Wulstan Hibberd. London: Burns and Oats, 1960 (first published in French, *Sacramentum Futuri: Etudes sur les Origines de la Typologie Biblique*. Paris: Beauschesne et ses Fils, 1950).

¹⁰ Goppelt, Leonhard: *Typos. The typological interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. by Donald H. Madwig. New York: Eerdmans, 1982 (first published in German, *Typos. Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1939).

¹¹ Auerbach 1984, pp. 11-78.

¹² Ohly 2005, pp. 18–42.

¹³ Auerbach 1984, p. 53.

¹⁴ Ohly 2005, p. 25. For Ohly’s approach in context of recent discussions on materiality within medieval Art History cf. Kumler, Aden – Christopher R. Lakey: “Res Et Significatio: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages”. *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669944> (last viewed 21.10.2021)

¹⁵ Cf. Auerbach 1984, p. 59: “Whereas in the modern view the event is always self-sufficient and secure, while the interpretation is fundamentally incomplete, in the figural interpretation the

In his study “Figura” Erich Auerbach stresses the possible synonymous meaning of the Latin term *figura* and one of his Greek equivalences¹⁶ *typos* (τύπος) as being only incidental. Auerbach remarks:

“[...] the original plastic sense [of *figura*] was not entirely lost, for *typos*, imprint, and *plasis*, *plasma*, plastic form, were often rendered by *figura* as the radical *fig-* suggested. From the meaning of *typos* developed the use of *figura* as imprint of the seal, a metaphor with a venerable history running from Aristotle [...] through Augustine [...] to Dante [...]. However, it was not only the plastic sense of *typos*, but also its inclination toward the universal, lawful, and exemplary [...] that exerted an influence on *figura*, and this in turn helped to efface the already faint dividing line with *forma*.”¹⁷

Auerbach’s aim was however more ambitious: In his article he wanted to show what deep impact the idea of *figura* in terms of the exegetical practice of figural prophecy had on the medieval conception of history:

“Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them; they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come, which will be the actual, real, and definitive event. [...] This is true not only of Old Testament prefiguration, which points forward to the incarnation and the proclamation of the gospel, but also of these latter events, for they too are not the ultimate fulfillment, but themselves a promise of the end of time and the true kingdom of God. Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains forever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation.”¹⁸

The central point of Auerbach’s considerations is to outline that the visibility of the historical Biblical events as *figurae* still conceal the divine reality only present and fulfilled in God. This idea has fundamental consequences also for the idea of visibility itself which is regarded as to be always and inherently insufficient. The concept of the general insufficiency of the visible in Christian thought can already be found in the New Testament, when Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

“For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For

fact is subordinated to an interpretation which is fully secured to begin with: the event is enacted according to an ideal model which is a prototype situated in the future and thus far only promised. This model situated in the future and imitated in the [...] recalls Platonic notions. [...] For every future model, though incomplete as history, is already fulfilled in God and has existed from all eternity in His providence.”

¹⁶ Auerbach stresses also *morphé*, *schema*, *eidōs plasis*; cf. Auerbach 1984, p. 14.

¹⁷ Auerbach 1984, p. 15.

¹⁸ Auerbach 1984, p. 58.

now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known..”¹⁹

An analysis of the Greek text shows the intertwining of understanding and seeing, stemming from Greek, especially (Neo-)Platonic philosophy, but radically undermined by a Christian eschatological reality which can only be unveiled to the participants of the heavenly kingdom of God and remains impervious to the faithful. The Greek original of Paul’s speech to the Corinthians nonetheless emphasizes the divine face as *prosopon* (πρόσωπον), which is genuinely to be seen as something which is in front of the viewer (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον).²⁰

Whereas Auerbach’s analysis of the Latin term *figura* traces back its various layers of meaning according to the whole range of its relations within the roots and traditions of Latin Christian exegesis, a similar study of the Greek term *typos* and its origin in Greek literature and its use in patristics was led by Jean Danielou,²¹ Leonhard Goppelt²² and most recently by Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer.²³ An in-depth study of typology in Byzantium has not yet been accomplished.²⁴ Because of the wide range of meanings for *typos* some general remarks concerning the philological history of *typos* in the context of the present paper may be desirable. The most respected dictionary of ancient Greek — the Liddell–Scott Lexicon — lists the not inconsiderable amount of ten different fields of meanings for *typos*.²⁵ Among others, these are: the effect of a blow or of pressure, impression, cast or replica made in a mould, carved figure/image, form/shape, archetype/pattern/model.

In the context of the present paper two aspects seem to be crucial defining the terminological range of *typos*: the idea of a figure/image/shape formed by impression as a marking or stamping and the function of *typos* as a model or pattern.

¹⁹ 1 Corinth.13,9-12, NRSV: “εἶτε δὲ προφητεῖαι, καταργηθήσονται εἴτε γλῶσσαι, παύσονται εἴτε γνώσις, καταργηθήσεται. ἐκ μέρους γὰρ γινώσκομεν καὶ ἐκ μέρους προφητεύομεν ὁ δὲ ἔλθῃ τὸ τέλειον, τὸ ἐκ μέρους καταργηθήσεται. ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιος, ἐλάλουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐφρόνουν ὡς νήπιος, ἐλογιζόμεθα ὡς νήπιος ὅτε γέγονα ἀνήρ, κατήρηκα τὰ τοῦ νηπίου. βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι’ ἐσόπτρου ἐν ἀνίχνισματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον.”

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+13&version=NRSV> (last viewed 13.10. 2021).

²⁰ For the complex cultural history of *prosopon*, which literally means “that which is in front of the eyes (of another person)” and can also mean “mask” or “person” cf. Weihe, Richard: *Die Paradoxie der Maske. Geschichte einer Form*. München: Fink, 2004.

²¹ Cf. Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality*.

²² Goppelt, *Typology*. Goppelt does not consider the use of *typos* in the Classic and Hellenistic literature, but rather focuses on typology in Late Judaism.

²³ Ostmeyer, Karl-Heinrich: *Taufe und Typos. Elemente und Theologie der Tauftypologien in 1 Korinther 10 und 1 Petrus 3*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000 (with a critical reading of Goppelt).

²⁴ For the specific understanding of *typos* by the Iconoclastic party within the controversy cf. Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, pp. 83–105. Barber translates *typos* simply as “figure” and does not refer to the term with respect to the concept of figural interpretation. For a short summary of the use of typology in Iconophile thought cf. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, pp. 125–132.

²⁵ For the whole LSL lexicon entry see <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=108890> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

The first aspect links *typos* inherently not only to the image, but also to the practice of writing, where the form or shape of the letter is regarded as *typos* or *character* (χαρακτήρ) as a figure of an impress and in this regard the draft of a document or letter can also be named *typos*. This amalgamation of figure and letter within *typos* mirrors a characteristic in Ancient Greek which as well does not differ between writing and painting by language: the Greek Noun *graphè* (γραφή) derivates from the Verb *graphein* (γράφειν, to write/to inscribe)²⁶, and is conceived as “representation by means of lines” and can hence refer to both, a text and a picture (i. e. a drawing or painting).²⁷ Furthermore the term *character* (χαρακτήρ) mentioned above according to its overall meaning “mark engraved or impressed” can reference the imprint of a letter or an image.²⁸ No matter whether *typos* denotes a letter, a figure or an image the term contains the idea of impression; in other words the notion of a contact with somebody or something else whereby the *typos* is initially formed. In this respect *typos* describes a genuinely ontological deficient phenomenon because it immanently and always implicates the reference to its external origin.

In the light of this, the second semantic, more abstract level of *typos* as model or pattern seems to be slightly inconsistent but may be explained by the exactitude of a copy as the exact outline of an impression made, for example, by a seal or a stamp.

An interesting suggestion to solve this inconsistency, which he regards as misleading, was made by Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer: he proposes to understand *typos* first of all as something which makes something other visible. According to the ontological weakness of *typos* mentioned above Ostmeyer states, that *typos* does not express an ontological status but always a relation (between the *typos* and the idea, thing, person which is made visible through the *typos*).²⁹

However, *typos* as a model or archetype was eventually defined more precisely in post Classical times as *archetypion* (ἀρχέτυπος) or *prototypos* (προτότυπος)³⁰ and would become one of the key concepts in Byzantine Iconoclasm.

²⁶ For the whole LSL lexicon entry see <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=23614> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

²⁷ For the whole LSL lexicon entry see <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=23603> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

²⁸ For the whole LSL lexicon entry see <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=23603> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

²⁹ I would not follow Ostmeyer in the consequences he draws from this definition: For Ostmeyer *typos* is never to be understood as form, picture or copy (*Abbild*), but only as the instrument or instance which gives form or makes visible. But from the perspective of the beholder the *typos* figuring something other appears as form, picture or copy. I would therefore not suspend this level of meaning.

³⁰ Cf. Strenge. For an outline of the use of the term “prototype” in Iconophile thought cf. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, pp. 22–33.

The semantic fields of *typos* can be conclusively outlined in the following way: on the one hand the more concrete sense of a form or a figure made by impression and touch which can relate to the shape of a letter, figure or picture, on the other hand the more abstract idea of *typos* as something which makes something visible which is not identical with itself. Both semantic properties describe *typos* as a visual phenomenon which is ontologically insufficient. Furthermore, ontological insufficiency is a feature of images which condenses the difference of what they represent with what they are.³¹ In this respect *typos* cements its place within the long, vastly and ambiguously connotated list of Greek image terms.³²

Moreover, *typos* gave a fundamental exegetical Christian practice its modern name: typology. In contrast to the relatively young term typology, which was coined in the 18th century,³³ the exegetical practice of figural interpretation/prophecy/*(Figuraldeutung)* is already present in the New Testament. In John 3, 14–15 it says: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”³⁴ John’s example illustrates the exegetical method of typology unambiguously as an analogous relation, which shows that in the Old Testament the divine plan of salvation is present but veiled. The relation between *typos* (the serpent) and *antitypos* (Christ) is precisely not an antithesis, but an organic one within salvation history whose ultimate promised ending — the *parousia* — has yet to come.

To be clear: Christian typology was used from its very inception as an instrument of apology to demonstrate the supremacy of the Christian faith over Judaism. Typology consists of the following threefold stage model: The Old Testament (*sub lege*) is the time when the divine revelations were veiled as *typoi*, the New Testament and the Church mark the beginning of an eschatological time (*sub gratia*), when the faithful due to the Incarnation are allowed to see more clearly but still shrouded the images of the things to come (εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων; Hebr. 10, 1), and finally the *parousia* when the divine things will be revealed³⁵ (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον), as promised by Paul. The problem of the hermeneutical method of typology is that it provides a circular argument. As Konrad

³¹ Cf. Mondzain, Marie-José: *Bild, Ikone, Ökonomie. Die byzantinischen Quellen des zeitgenössischen Imaginären*. Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2011, pp. 83–136 (first published in French: *Image, Icône, Économie. Les Sources Byzantines de l’imaginaire Contemporain*. Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1996).

³² Cf. Donohue, Alice A.: “Image II”. In: *Brill’s New Pauly online*. Eds. Hubert Cancik – Helmuth Schneider, https://doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e217080 (last viewed 19.04.2022).

³³ See Pollmann, Karla: “Typology”. In: *Brill’s New Pauly online*. Eds. Hubert Cancik – Helmuth Schneider, https://doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_dnp_e1223670 (last viewed 21.10.2021).

³⁴ John 3, 14–15, NRSV: “Καὶ καθὼς Μωϋσῆς ὕψωσεν τὸν ὄφιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οὕτως ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.” <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3&version=NRSV> (last viewed 21.10.2021)

³⁵ Cf. Strenge.

Eberlein pithily observes in his essay on the *interpretatio christiana*, the Christian typological interpretation of the Classical canon:

“Pauline allegorical interpretation is determined by the belief that Christ had ushered in the eschatological age, and that the Old Testament contains testimony to its reality which are now visible, just as the lamb in Revelations 5 opens the book with seven seals. But what was intended on the original level of meaning as a juxtaposition in historical-factual terms also offered the possibility of moving on to an evaluative differentiation. The passing of time between the type and the antitype, and the presumption that in a kind of circular argument [5, 141] only the belief in Christ makes the recognition of the connection possible, automatically moves the authority in the interpretation toward Christianity. From the non-evaluative connection with Jewish transmission there emerged a methodology which placed that Jewish transmission into a secondary role.”³⁶

In this respect Christian typology was harshly criticized repeatedly from theologians, art historians, political scientists and others over the last 150 years.³⁷ However, from a historical perspective the suspension of typology as a Christian mindset is not an option because as a way of interpretation of history it informed medieval thinking profoundly. Furthermore, as Bernd Mohnhaupt remarks, refusing typology means to deny the Old Testament as an immanent part of the New.³⁸

The whole discussion came up recently in 2015 when theologians and religious studies scholars addressed detailed criticism to the Berlin Protestant theologian Notger Slenczka. Slenczka in an article that was already published in 2013 had proposed — referring to a position already elaborated by Adolf von Harnack in 1921³⁹ — to withdraw the Old Testament from the Christian canon because the Old Testament does not address Christians but was exclusively written for the people of Israel.⁴⁰ Slenczka’s account was prominently criticized by Christoph Marksches, Micha Brumlik, Jan Assmann and other scholars as being “anti-judaistic” and for denominating Judaism as “Stammesreligion” (tribal religion).⁴¹ The discussion gained public attention beyond scholarship and the debate pursued in the feature sections of several German-speaking newspapers.⁴² Again, the

³⁶ Eberlein, Johann Konrad: “Interpretatio Christiana”. In: *Brill’s New Pauly online*. Eds. Hubert Cancik – Helmuth Schneider, https://doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1406540 (last viewed 21.10.2021).

³⁷ Cf. Mohnhaupt, Bernd: *Beziehungsgeflechte. Typologische Kunst des Mittelalters*. Bern/Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 33–35.

³⁸ Mohnhaupt, *Beziehungsgeflechte*, p. 35.

³⁹ von Harnack, Adolf: *Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*. Leipzig 1924 (2. Auflage, ND Darmstadt 1996).

⁴⁰ Slenczka, Notger: “Die Kirche und das Alte Testament”. In: *Das Alte Testament in der Theologie*. Ed. Elisabeth Gräb-Schmidt, Leipzig 2013, S. 83–119.

⁴¹ Brumlik, Micha: “Antijudaismus in neuem Gewand?”. *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 20. 04. 2016, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/religion/antijudaismus-in-neuem-gewand/> (last viewed 08.10.2021).; Assmann, Jan: “Die Fremdheit des Alten Testaments. Bemerkungen zu einer These von Notger Slenczka”. *FAZ*, 01. 07. 2015.

⁴² It is not the place here to reconstruct the course of the entire public discussion, which seems

relation of the Old and New Testament was at stake, which includes eventually the Christian attitude towards Judaism. Whereas Slenczka tried to show that the aim of his argumentation was to avoid the Christian usurpation of the Old Testament⁴³ the vast majority of scholars argued for its fundamental relevance for Christian thinking and the indisputable nexus of the Old and New Testament from a Christian perspective.⁴⁴

Against the background of this discursive and methodological complexity Auerbach's proposal of the term *figural interpretation/prophecy* (*Figuraldeutung/Figuralprophetie*) should gain new attention. Besides its critical distance to the problematic term typology, as I outlined above, *figural interpretation* benefits from the fact that it eludes the redundant discussion about the difference between typological and allegorical interpretation, which is a construct of a modern theological discourse⁴⁵ and was not of interest for the late antique and medieval Christian exegesis.

to be still ongoing. Below a short selection of the commentaries in the German-speaking press: Bingener, Reinhard: "Der Gott des Gemetzels". *FAZ*, 21. 04. 2015 https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/berlin-professor-fordert-abschaffung-des-alten-testaments-13549027-p2.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2 (last viewed 08.10.2021); Graf, Friedrich Wilhelm: "Hiobs Botschaft". *FAS*, 27. 04. 2015 <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/kann-man-das-alte-testament-einfach-streichen-13558589.html> (last viewed 08.10.2021); Prösser, Claudia: "Das Alte, das Neue und das Fremde". In: *taz*, 23. 04. 2015 <https://taz.de/Bibel-Streit-an-der-Humboldt-Uni/!5011093/> (last viewed 08.10.2021); Tück, Jan-Heiner: "Christentum ohne Wurzel?". *NZZ*, 21. 06. 2015 <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/christentum-ohne-wurzel-1.18565646?reduced=true> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

⁴³ Slenczka, Notger: "Differenz tut Not. Systematische Erwägungen zum Neuen Testament". In: *Zeitzeichen* 6/2015, pp. 8–12.

https://www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/stellen/st/AT/zeitzeichen_at_debatte.pdf (last viewed 08.10.2021); id., "Was soll die These: Das AT hat in der Kirche keine kanonische Geltung mehr?", Vortrag, <https://www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/stellen/st/was-soll-die-these.pdf> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

⁴⁴ Cf. <https://www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/stellen/st/stellungnahme-zu-den-aeusserungen-von-herrn-slenczka-1.pdf> (last viewed 08.10.2021). <https://www.deutscher-koordinierungsrat.de/dkr-home-Stellungnahme-Theologieprofessor-will-Altes-Testament-verbannen> (last viewed 08.10.2021).

⁴⁵ "Among the Church Fathers and most medieval exegetes, the fact that Paul (Gal 4:24) used *allegoria* typologically led to the coexistence of concepts like *typus*, *figura*, *praefiguratio* and *allegoria*, and to the inclusion of typology within Allegoresis."; Suntrup, Rudolf: "Typology". In: *Brill's New Pauly online*. Eds. Hubert Cancik – Helmuth Schneider, dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e15306250 (last viewed 21.10.2021). Erich Auerbach represents the modern position according to which typology and allegory must be distinguished. For a critic of this suggestion by Protestant theologians cf. Curtius, Ernst Robert: "Gustav Gröber und die romanische Philologie". *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 67 (1951), pp. 225–288; Jauss, Hans-Robert: "Form und Auffassung der Allegorie in der Tradition der 'Psychomachia'". In: *Medium Aevum vivum. Festschrift für Walter Bulst*. Ed. Hans-Robert Jauss. Heidelberg: Winter 1960, pp. 179–206; cf. Meier, Christian: "Überlegungen zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Allegorie-Forschung. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Mischformen". In: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*. 10 (1976) 1–70 (especially pp. 34–41). For a distinction from a Catholic point of view cf. Jean Daniélou: "Traversée de la mer Rouge et baptême aux premiers siècles". *Recherches de science religieuse* 33 (1946), pp. 402–430; idem. 1950. Critical is de Lubac, Henri: "'Typologie' et 'Allegorisme'". *Recherches de science religieuse* 34 (1947), pp. 180–226; idem, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de*

Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Problem of the Unwritten Tradition

The idea of typology as the core of Christian representation in Late Antiquity was tremendously challenged by the landmark study of Sabine Schrenk⁴⁶: Schrenk was able to show that only certain representations can be regarded as typological on the basis of a close study of objects and monuments such as the Brescia casket, the Melchizedek mosaic of San Vitale, and others. Furthermore, Schrenk demonstrated that typological representation in Late Antique art does not necessarily need the visual representation of an antitype but can also point to this antitype in terms of image structure or the placement of the image in the church.⁴⁷ Schrenk identified the semantic field of early Christian typology as exclusively applying to the realm of sacrifice (*Opfertypologie*),⁴⁸ namely the Eucharist and the Passion.

When it came to the Iconoclastic controversy in Byzantium in the second quarter of the 8th century⁴⁹ the possibility of a Christian image was essentially questioned. The Iconoclast party brought the argument of the impossibility of depiction of Christ according to his two natures forward⁵⁰ bolstered by the prohibition of images in the Old Testament tradition. Within a theological landscape where all innovation means heresy the prohibition of images was more than an arbitrary argument in favor of the Iconoclastic cause.

The Iconophiles had to prove that the use of images was rooted in Christian tradition and had therefore to undermine the Mosaic commandment, which clearly prohibits images of God.⁵¹

For this reason, figural interpretation/typology was “(t)he most common kind of scriptural exegesis used by iconophile writers.”⁵² In doing so, the Iconophile theologians pursued two objectives which reveal the problems of this exegetical method from the modern perspective mentioned above: In a first step the Iconophiles professed themselves to the relevance of the Old Testament in terms of the prefiguration of the New, just to demonstrate that it was eventually overcome by the Incarnation and the Christian faith.

l'écriture, Paris: Aubier, 1959, pp. 352f.

⁴⁶ Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos*.

⁴⁷ Schrenk summarizes this evidence as “typologische Verknüpfungen ohne eigenes Bildfeld”; Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos*, p. 178.

⁴⁸ Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos*, p. 187: “Der Begriff ‘Opfertypologie’ [...] charakterisiert frühchristliche typologische Darstellungen insgesamt.”

⁴⁹ For a detailed survey of the historical events cf. Brubaker – Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, pp. 69–155.

⁵⁰ Cf. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, pp. 99–113.

⁵¹ Ex. 20, 4–5: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God [...].”

⁵² Parry, *Depicting the Word*, p. 125.

A quotation of the florilegium⁵³ on the *First Oration on the Divine Images*⁵⁴ by John of Damascus⁵⁵, one of the most prominent exponents of the Iconophile party, may illustrate this twofold strategy. Melchizedek, the legendary priest-king of Salem, who brought wine and bread to Abram (fig. 1),⁵⁶ was already in the Epistle to the Hebrews identified as a *typos* of Christ.⁵⁷ John of Damascus quotes Saint John Chrysostom⁵⁸ from his interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews:

“In a certain way the first is an image of the second (εἰκὼν τοῦ δευτέρου τὸ πρῶτον), Melchizedek [an image, SS] of Christ, just as one might say that a sketch of a picture (τὸ πρὸ ταύτης σκίασμα τοῦ γραφέως) is a shadow of the picture in colors (σκιὰν τῆς γραφῆς τῆς ἐν χρώμασι), therefore [time of the, SS] law is called a shadow, [the time of, SS] grace is called truth, and reality of what to come (πράγματα τὰ μέλλοντα). So the law and Melchizedek are preparatory sketches [foreshadow] of the picture in colors (Μελχισεδέκ

⁵³ For me there is no doubt that the florilegium of the First Oration and especially the scholia are authentic being the role model for the florilegia of Oration II and III as Kotter has shown; Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes*, pp. 24–33. Cf. further the thoughtful study by Alexakis, Alexander: *Codex Parisinus Graecus 1115 and its Archetype*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35, 1996.

⁵⁴ Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes*, pp. 63–200. English translation by Louth, Andrew, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2003. On the genesis of the orations cf. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes*, pp. 1–63. The dating of John’s three defenses is still part of controversial debate: whereas Kotter in the 1970s has argued for an origin in the 730s, the most recent suggestions antedate the work in the forties; cf. Louth, Andrew: *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 204, respectively on the eve of the Council of Hiereia (754), Speck, Paul: *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren*. ΠΟΙΚΙΛΑ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ 2, Bonn 1981, pp. 179–243. It is obvious, that John’s treatises and the Horos of Hiereia (754) refer to the same biblical and patristic sources, and the fourfold anathema of John at the end of the Horos is definitely a strong hint, that John was the main theological opponent for the argumentation of the Horos. But, in my opinion, this does not help to decide whether the treatises were written in the 40s or the 50s of the eighth century but does only coincide a date before Hiereia. Concerning Hiereia cf. most recently: Krannich, Torsten – Christoph Schubert – Claudia Sode: *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754. Einleitung, Text. Übersetzung und Kommentar ihres Horos*. Tübingen 2002.

⁵⁵ On the life and work of John of Damascus cf. Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene*. Louth characterizes John’s theological position within the Iconoclastic discourse as follows: “John’s defense of icons and their veneration is both far-reaching and fundamental: it makes the icon part of the fundamental fabric of Christian belief, and argues that iconoclasm is more than simply objection to an isolated devotional, threatens to undermine Christianity itself”; Louth, *St. John Damascene*, p. 219. To what extent John, who was born in Damascus and was raised in a world dominated by the Islamic Umayyad dynasty, and his arguments in favor of images were also triggered by the prohibition of images in his Islamic environment is part of scholarly discussion; Louth, *St. John Damascene*, pp. 4–14, pp. 220–222.

⁵⁶ Gen. 14, 18–20: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: and he was [is] the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, ‘Blessed be Abram to the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.’ And he gave him tithe from all.”

⁵⁷ Hebr. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21. See for example Hebr. 7:11–12: “If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

⁵⁸ The passage by Saint John Chrysostom is unidentified; Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes*, p. 28.

προσκίασμα τῆς ἐν χρώμασι γραφῆς), (the time of) grace shows the truth in a colored painting (ἢ ἐν χρώμασι γραφή), while reality belongs to the ages to come; just as the Old Testament is the *typos* of *typos* (a figure of something which will make something other visible, τύπου τύπον), as the New Testament is the *typos* (makes visible by not being identical with it) the reality [i. e. the things to come] (τῶν πραγμάτων τύπον).⁵⁹

This excerpt is absolutely notable in the context of the present paper because it shows the sublime intertwining of multilayered image terms which the ancient Greek language provides. Speaking of the painting/image John uses consequently the term ἐν χρώμασι γραφή (verbatim: a *graphè* in colors), a term, as shown above, which operates at the interface between image and script, painting and writing. This is by no means accidental but part of John's strategy to converge script and image to prove that they belong to the same semantic field. In doing so John strengthened the Iconophile argument that the image is part of a Christian unwritten tradition. The passage cited finds its climax in the use of *typos* and demonstrated the rich semantic range of the word: the formula τύπου τύπον used to describe the Old Covenant only makes sense when the two different semantic levels — the concrete, figurative one and the abstract one — are both taken into account. The proposed translation as “a figure of something which will make something other visible” shows how John is able to formulate the concept of figural interpretation concisely with only two words due to the complex semantics of *typos*.

Such a reading of the figure of Melchizedek is already present in the mosaic of the Offering of Melchizedek in the south side of the clerestory cycle in the nave in Santa Maria Maggiore from the first half of the 5th century (fig.1): Christ presides over the scene from heaven and points directly to the figure of Melchizedek who as high-priest-king is outside the Levitical order *typos Christi*. I would not follow Schrenk's interpretation of the mosaic; she suggests that the figure in heaven be read as God the Father. Aside from the fact that this would be the only representation of God the Father in Late Antique art, the typological context of Melchizedek offering bread and wine makes perfectly clear that the mosaic does not only refer to the Eucharist but also represents the fulfilment of Melchizedek's offering through the Incarnation of Christ. This becomes even more evident by the placement of the mosaic as the first of the clerestory cycle of the south side,

⁵⁹ John Damasc., *Orat. I*, 53: “καί πως εἰκὼν τοῦ δευτέρου τὸ πρῶτον, ὁ Μελχισεδέκ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς περ ἂν τις εἴποι σκιάν τῆς γραφῆς τῆς ἐν χρώμασι τὸ πρὸ ταύτης σκίασμα τοῦ γραφέως· διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ νόμος καλεῖται σκιά, ἢ δὲ χάρις ἀλήθεια, πράγματα δὲ τὰ μέλλοντα. Ὡστε ὁ μὲν νόμος καὶ ὁ Μελχισεδέκ προσκίασμα τῆς ἐν χρώμασι γραφῆς, ἢ δὲ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἢ ἐν χρώμασι γραφή, τὰ δὲ πράγματα τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, ὡς εἶναι τὴν παλαιὰν τύπου τύπον καὶ τὴν νέαν τῶν πραγμάτων τύπον.” Translation by SS. The translation by Parry, *Depicting the Word*, p. 127 is misleading and does not regard the complexity of the different image formulas. Cf. John Damascene: *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*. Trans. by Andrew Louth. New York: St. Vladimir's Press 2003, pp. 48–49.



Fig. 1: *Offering of Melchizedek*, detail of the mosaics of north side of the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, 432–440. From: Joachim Poeschke: *Mosaiken in Italien 300–1300*. München: Hirmer, 2009, p. 86

and hence being the image closest to the altar on the south side of the nave, the place of the Eucharist. This visual relation of the Melchizedek mosaic to the altar was not made accidentally, as Schrenk emphasized by showing that the placement of the mosaic eventually disrupts the chronological order of the biblical narration and was therefore chosen on purpose.⁶⁰

Although the Old Testament had only the epiphanic realization of a shadow, the prohibition of images could not be swept aside easily. Because of that John adopted a further argument by pointing out that in the period under the law (*sub lege*) images existed and were even commissioned by God himself.

At the beginning of this passage in his First Oration John addresses the alleged contradiction between the prohibition of images and images made by divine commission such as the cherubim on the Ark and at the curtains of the tabernacle directly to demonstrate that there is no general prohibition of image-making in the Old Testament:

“Answer me this question. Is God one God? Yes, you say, as it seems to me, one lawgiver. Why then does He decree what is contradictory? For the cherubim are not outside creation. Why then does he prescribe carved cherubim fashioned by human hand to overshadow the mercy seat? It is clear that it is impossible to make an image of God or of anything like God, since he is uncircumscribable (ἀπεριγράπτου) and unimaginable, lest the creation be venerated in worship as God. Since the cherubim are circumscribable (περιγραπτῶν), He prescribes the making of an image of them prostrate before the divine throne, to overshadow the mercy seat; for it was fitting that the *image of the heavenly ministers* (τῆ εἰκόνι τῶν οὐρανίων λειτουργῶν) *should shadow (prefigure, σκιάζεσθαι) the image of the divine mysteries* (τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν θεῶν μυστηρίων). And what do you say about the ark, the jar and the mercy seat? Were they not handmade? Not the work of human hands? Were they not fashioned, as you put it, from unworthy matter? What of the whole tabernacle? Was it not an image (Οὐχὶ εἰκὼν ἦν)? Not a shadow (σκιά) and a copy (ὑπόδειγμα)? Therefore the divine apostle says about the sacred things made in accordance with the law: These things serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tabernacle, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain (πάντα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τὸν δειχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει).⁶¹ But the law was not an image, but a foreshadowing of an image (εἰκόνοσ προσκίασμα); therefore, the same apostle says, For the law having a shadow of the good things to come (Σκιά τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν), not being itself the image of realities (οὐκ τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων).⁶² If then the law prohibits

⁶⁰ Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos*, pp. 51–55. For the entire Old Testament cycle in Santa Maria Maggiore see Deckers, Johannes G.: *Der alttestamentliche Zyklus von Santa Maria Maggiore in Rom. Studien zur Bildgeschichte* (Habelts Dissertationsdrucke. Reihe Klassische Archäologie 8), Bonn: Habelt, 1976.

⁶¹ Hebr. 8:5.

⁶² Hebr. 10:1.

images, while being itself *an outline* (προχάραγμα) of *an image* (εἰκόνας) in advance, what shall we say? If then tabernacle is a shadow and a *typos of typos* [a figure of something which will make something other visible] (τύπου τύπον), how then can the law command that images be not drawn/*written* (εἰκονογραφεῖν)? But these things are not so, not at all. Rather, there is a season for everything.⁶³⁶⁴

Aside from the fact that the passage demonstrates how John uses a wide range of image terms with aplomb it is remarkable that he defines the whole historical model of figural interpretation by means of different degrees of visibility as a three step development towards salvation: The Old Testament provides the figure/outline/shadow of the images which will point to the heavenly realities and the New Testament represents the colored images indicating the divine things to come whereas the faithful still have to wait to see the divine realities completely unveiled (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον). Hence it becomes obvious that the mental contortion of figural interpretation which explains salvation history is also a genuinely visual way of thinking. If the Old Testament allows access to the figures of the images in the New Testament which will introduce the more precise images of the divine realities yet to come the entire Scripture is not only a written document but itself an expression of different forms of visual ascertainments leading from the veiled (the abstract figure of the Old Testament) to the more concrete (the colored image of the New Testament) to the revelation of the divine realities in the *parousia*. For John, defending the Christian image against the accusation of not being part of the written tradition of the Scripture, this discursive, twofold strategy is instrumental in proving that the prohibition of images on the one hand is only addressed to the Jews suspected of idolatry but never was intended to be binding for Christians who — in contrast to the Jews — can read the veiled meaning of the Old Testament properly. On the other hand, according to this line of

⁶³ Eccles. 3.1.

⁶⁴ John Damasc., *Orat. I. 15* (trans. by Andrew Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, p. 29): “Λέγε μοι ἐρωτῶντι· Εἷς θεὸς ὁ θεός; Ναί, φήσεις, ὡς ἐμοίγε δοκεῖ, εἷς νομοθέτης. Οὐ γὰρ ἔξω τῆς κτίσεως τὰ χερουβίμ. Τί οὖν προστάττει χερουβίμ γλυπτὰ ἀνθρώπων χερσὶν τεκταινόμενα σκιάζειν τὸ ἱλαστήριον; Ἦ δὴλον, ὡς θεοῦ μὲν ὡς ἀπεριγράπτου καὶ ἀνεικάστου ποιεῖν εἰκόνα ἀμήχανον ἢ τινος ὡς θεοῦ, ἵνα μὴ ὡς θεὸς λατρευομένη προσκυνῆται ἢ κτίσις. Τῶν δὲ χερουβίμ ὡς περιγραπτῶν καὶ τῷ θεῷ θρόνῳ δουλοπρεπῶς παρεστῶτων τὴν εἰκόνα προστάττει ποιεῖν δουλοπρεπῶς σκιάζουσιν τὸ ἱλαστήριον ποιεῖν δουλοπρεπῶς σκιάζουσιν τὸ ἱλαστήριον· ἔπρεπε γὰρ τῇ εἰκόνι τῶν οὐρανίων λειτουργῶν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν θείων μυστηρίων σκιάζεσθαι. Τί δὲ φῆς τὴν κιβωτὸν, τὴν στάμνον, τὸ ἱλαστήριον; Οὐ χειρότεκτα; Οὐκ ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων; Οὐκ ἐξ ἀτίμου, ὡς σὺ φῆς, ὕλης κατεσκευασμένα; Τί δὲ ἡ σκηνὴ ἅπασα; Οὐχὶ εἰκὼν ἦν; Οὐ σκιά καὶ ὑπόδειγμα; Φησὶ τοιγαροῦν ὁ θεὸς ἀπόστολος περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον ἱερέων διεξιῶν· Οἵτινες ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιά λατρεύουσι τῶν ἐπουρανίων, καθὼς κεκηρμάτισται Μωσῆς μέλλων ἐπιτελεῖν τὴν σκηνήν. Ὅρα γὰρ φησι, ποιήσεις πάντα κατὰ τὸν τύπον τὸν δειχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει.» Ἄλλ’ οὐδὲ εἰκὼν ἦν ὁ νόμος, ἀλλ’ εἰκόνας προσκίασμα· φησὶ γοῦν ὁ αὐτὸς ἀπόστολος· «Σκιά γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν πραγμάτων.» Εἰ οὖν ὁ νόμος εἰκόνας ἀπαγορεύει, αὐτὸς δὲ εἰκόνας ἐστὶ προχάραγμα, τί φήσομεν; Εἰ ἡ σκηνὴ σκιά καὶ τύπου τύπος, πῶς μὴ εἰκονογραφεῖν ὁ νόμος διακελεύεται; Ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐστὶν οὕτω ταῦτα, οὐκ ἐστι· καιρὸς δὲ μᾶλλον τῷ παντὶ ταῦτα, οὐκ ἐστὶ· καιρὸς δὲ μᾶλλον τῷ παντὶ πράγματι.”; suggestions in italics by the author.

figural interpretation, the text of the Scripture becomes itself a form of visual representation, not metaphorically but as a definite outline of God's design, whereas the different gradations of visibility — from the veiled to the more concrete to the revealed — mark distinct historical stages within salvation history. As John puts it:

“[...] there are said to be images of the future, describing the things to come in shadowy enigmas.”⁶⁵

Additionally, John uses the ambiguity of *graphein* between writing and painting again intentionally speaking of the writing of images (εικονογραφεῖν) with the objective to level the relevance of the Mosaic commandment of the prohibition of images.⁶⁶ Another important aspect of John's and the Iconophile argumentation in general is the fact that they acknowledge the written (the Gospels, the Church Fathers, the Councils etc.) and the unwritten tradition (the Christian practice of image making) as “a single source of truth and revelation.”⁶⁷ In fundamental opposition to the Iconoclast position, which emphasized the sole validity of the written word and the written tradition, John states:

“Not only has the ordinance of the Church been handed down in writings, but also in unwritten traditions.”⁶⁸

As mentioned before, one of the main efforts of the Iconophile party was to prove that the Christian image was no innovation. By integrating the unwritten tradition into the ecclesiastical canon the Christian image could be understood as part of a traditional Christian practice.

Figural interpretation and the idea of *typos* was eventually also prevalent within the Iconophile conception between the relation of the image (icon) and its prototype (Christ, or a saint). John writes regarding this pictorial relationship:

“[...] if the divine Scripture (ἡ θεία γραφή) bestows on God figures (τύπους) that seem to be bodily, as shapes (σχήματα) are seen, yet they are in a way incorporeal; for they were seen, not with bodily, but intellectual eyes, by the prophets to whom they were revealed, for they

⁶⁵ John Damasc., *Orat. I*, 12 (trans. Louth, *Three Treatises*, p. 27): “Πάλιν εικὼν λέγεται τῶν ἐσομένων αἰνιγματωδῶς σκιαγραφοῦσα τὰ μέλλοντα [...]”

⁶⁶ This discursive strategy can be found throughout Iconophile literature; cf. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, pp. 131–132.

⁶⁷ Parry, *Depicting the Word*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ John Damasc., *Orat. I*, 23 (Louth, *Three Treatises*, p. 37): “Οὐ μόνον γράμμασι τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν θεσμοθεσίαν παρέδωκαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀγράφοις τισὶ παραδόσεσι.” Similar Theodorus Studites in his second Oration, cf. Theod. Stud., *Orat. II*. 6–7 (trans. Roth, *On the Holy Icons*, p.46): “Heretic [i. e. Iconoclast, SS]: But since it is not written that Christ is the prototype of His image, your statement cannot be accepted, because it is not included in the traditional confession of our faith. Orthodox [i. e. Iconophile]: Many teachings which are not written in many words but have equal force with the written teachings”; “Ἄλλ’ ἠνίκα μὴ γέγραπται εἶναι Χριστὸν πρωτότυπον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ εἰκότος, ἀπαράδεκτος ὁ λόγος· μὴ παραλαμβανόμενος ἡμῶν τῆ κατὰ πίστιν ὁμολογία. ΟΡΘ. Πολλὰ δὲ ἃ οὐ γέγραπται λέξεσιν αὐταῖς, ἰσοδυναμεῖ δὲ τοῖς γεγραμμένοι [...].”

were not seen by all. To put it simply: we can make images of everything with a visible shape (εικόνας πάντων τῶν σχημάτων); we understand these things, just as they are seen. For it is from words that we understand shapes, but from what we have seen we also come to an understanding of these things, so it is also with each of the senses, from what we smell or taste or touch, we come to understand these things through words. [...] For God is by nature completely incorporeal; angels and souls and demons; in comparison with the alone incomparable God, are bodily, therefor, not wishing that we should be completely ignorant of the incorporeal beings, bestowed in them figures and shapes and images that bear some analogy with our nature, bodily shapes seen by the immaterial sight of the intellect and we depict these beings and give them shapes, just as the cherubim were depicted and given shapes. But Scripture has shapes and images of God, too. (Ἀλλὰ καὶ θεοῦ σχήματα καὶ εικόνας ἢ γραφὴ ἔχει).⁶⁹

This passage of John’s third oration impressively illustrates the fundamental influence the mental process of figural interpretation had for the Iconophile conceptualisation of the icon by means of Scripture itself. In this regard script and image, writing and painting, hearing and reading are of the same educational and truth revealing relevance:

“ [...] we also long to see and to hear and to be blessed. They [the apostles, SS] saw face-to-face, since to them he was bodily present; in our case, however, since he is not bodily present, even as we hear his word through books and are sanctified in our hearing and through it we are blessed in our souls, and venerate and honor the books, through which we hear his words, so also through the depiction of images we behold the form of his bodily character and the miracles and all that he endured, and we are sanctified and assured, and we rejoice and are blessed, and we revere and honor and venerate his bodily character.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ John. Damasc., *Orat. III*, 24–25 (trans. Louth, *Three Treatises*, pp. 100–101): “ εἰ καὶ ἡ θεία γραφὴ τύπους θεῶ περιτίθησι τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν σωματικούς, ὥστε σχήματα ὁρᾶσθαι, καὶ αὐτοὺς δὲ ἀσωμάτους οὐ γὰρ σωματικοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς, ἀλλὰ νοεροῖς ἐωρῶντο τοῖς προφήταις καὶ οἷς ἀπεκαλύπτοντο, οὐ γὰρ πᾶσιν ἐωρῶντο. Ἀπλῶ δὲ λόγῳ εἰπεῖν, δυνάμεθα ποιεῖν εικόνας πάντων τῶν σχημάτων, ὧν εἶδομεν νοοῦμεν δὲ ταῦτα, καθὼς ὥράθη. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων ἔσθ’ ὅτε κατανοοῦμεν σχήματα, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ὧν εἶδομεν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν τούτων ἐρχόμεθα κατανόησιν. Οὕτω καὶ ἐφ’ ἐκάστης αἰσθήσεως, ἐξ ὧν ὡσφράνθημεν ἢ ἐγευσάμεθα ἢ αἰσθήσεως, ἐξ ὧν ὡσφράνθημεν ἢ ἐγευσάμεθα ἢ ἠψάμεθα, διὰ λόγων ἐπὶ τὴν τούτων ἐρχόμεθα κατανόησιν. [...] Ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεὸς φύσει καὶ παντελῶς ἀσώματος· ἄγγελος δὲ καὶ ψυχὴ καὶ δαίμων πρὸς μὲν θεὸν συγκρινόμενοι τὸν μόνον ἀσύγκριτον σώματά εἰσι, πρὸς δὲ τὰ ὑλικά σώματα ἀσώματοι. Μὴ θέλων οὖν ὁ θεὸς παντελῶς ἀγνοεῖν ἡμᾶς τὰ ἀσώματα περιέθη-κεν αὐτοῖς τύπους καὶ σχήματα καὶ εικόνας κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν σχήματα σωματικὰ ἐν ἀύλῳ ὁράσει νοδὸς ὁρώμενα, καὶ ταῦτα σχη-ματίζομεν καὶ εἰκονίζομεν, ἐπεὶ πως ἐσχηματίσθη καὶ εἰκονίσθη τὰ χερουβίμ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ θεοῦ σχήματα καὶ εικόνας ἢ γραφὴ ἔχει.”

⁷⁰ John Damasc., *Orat. III*. 12 (trans. Louth, *Three Treatises*, p. 93): “καὶ ἡμεῖς ἰδεῖν καὶ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ μακαρισθῆναι. Εἶδον ἐκεῖνοι πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, ἐπειδὴ παρῆν σωματικῶς ἡμεῖς δέ, ἐπειδὴ σωματικῶς οὐ πάρεστιν, ὥσπερ διὰ βιβλίων ἀκούο σωματικῶς οὐ πάρεστιν, ὥσπερ διὰ βιβλίων ἀκούομεν τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀγιαζόμεθα τὴν ἀκοὴν καὶ δι’ αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μακαριζόμεθα καὶ προσκυνοῦμεν τιμῶντες τὰς βίβλους, δι’ ὧν ἀκούομεν τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ, οὕτως καὶ διὰ γραφῆς εἰκόνων θεωροῦμεν τὸ ἐκτύπωμα τοῦ σωματικοῦ χαρακτήρος αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν θαυμάτων καὶ τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀγιαζόμεθα καὶ πληροφοροῦμεθα καὶ χαίρομεν καὶ μακαριζόμεθα καὶ

The Iconophile doctrine of the icon is yet mainly considered with regard to its Christological conception or its origins within classical philosophical tradition.⁷¹ The aim of this paper was to add to the discussion of the theologising of the Christian image the aspect of *figural interpretation*, which was an important instrument for the apology in favor of the image as prefigured and provided by Scripture as a central tool to outline that the Second Commandment was not binding for Christians.

The conceptualisation of the image was examined profoundly within the discourse of Byzantine Iconoclasm for the first time in the course of Christian thinking and resulted in the equivalence of script and image within the Orthodox church, both equally relevant for salvation; an exceptional case for a religion to be ostensibly based on a holy text. But as I hope to have shown in my arguments the Christian exegesis was genuinely affected by the idea of different stages of visibility which shaped the exegetical method of *figural interpretation* and prepared due to the terminological intertwining of script and image, writing and painting as present in the Greek terms *graphie* and *typos* the theoretical background of the theological acclamation of the Christian image.

The salvation-relevant augmentation of the image was officially decreed in the Horos of the Second Council of Nicaea in 787,⁷² which was tolerated by Pope Hadrian II., but was effectively never accepted in the West, where the primacy of the Scripture was never questioned seriously.⁷³ The Horos of Nicaea II decrees:

“We preserve without innovation all the traditions of the church that have been laid down for us whether written or unwritten. One of these is reproduction in painted images, as something that is in harmony with the narration of the gospel message for the confirming of the real and in no way phantasmal incarnation of God the Word, and which serves us by conferring the same benefit. For these two things [the Icons and the Gospels; my note] provide indisputable proof of each other and give expression to each other.”⁷⁴

σέβωμεν καὶ τιμῶμεν καὶ προσκυνῶμεν τὸν χαρακτῆρα αὐτοῦ τὸν σωματικόν.”

⁷¹ Cf. Anagnostopoulos, Thalia: “Aristotle and Byzantine Iconoclasm». In: *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013), pp. 763–790.

⁷² For the Horos of Nicaea II cf. Price, Richard: *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787)*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018, vol. II., pp. 561–578.

⁷³ For the Western reactions to the Byzantine image controversy cf. Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

⁷⁴ Trans. Price: *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787)*, vol. II., p. 564. “πάσας τὰς ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἐγράφως καὶ ἀγράφως τεθεσπισμένας ἡμῖν παραδόσεις ἀκαινοτομήτως φυλλάτομεν· ὧν μία ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ τῆς εἰκονικῆς ἀναζωγραφήσεως ἐκτύπωσις ὡς τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ κηρύγματος συνάδουσα πρὸς πίστωσιν τῆς ἀληθινῆς καὶ οὐ κατὰ φαντασίαν τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου ἐνανθρωπήσεως καὶ εἰς ὁμοίαν λυσιτέλειαν ἡμῖν χρησιμεύουσα· τὰ γὰρ ἀλλήλων δηλωτικὰ ἀναμφιβόλως καὶ τὰς ἀλλήλων ἔχουσιν ἐμφάσει.” A recent analysis of the Horos of Nicaea II offers Mathews, Thomas F.: *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications 2016, pp. 211–215. Mathews reads the Horos especially as an instruction for cult practices but is not interested in the relation of script and image the Horos particularly refers to.

It stands to reason that the specific development of the rise of the Byzantine icon as a result of the triumph of the Iconophile party was substantially prefigured by a Christian exegetical tradition which was inherently visual, figurative, and imaginistically oriented by enshrining at the same time the visual inaccessibility of the divine realities which will only be seen *revelata facie* (πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον) after the Second Coming of Christ. In this respect, it may be argued, the icon is a colored image of the Holy as the New Testament is the colored *typos* of the prototype operating on the interface of the past and future of God's plan for salvation making visible the historic grace of the Incarnation and the promise of future redemption in the *parousia*. Furthermore, the icon as an entirely typological mode of representation always preserves its relational, ontological indigence which desires the prototype and is therefore incapable of being an idol.

This may be the reason, as I would suggest with respect to the posed aspects in this article, that in Byzantium typology as a mode of visual representation, as a dense web of pictorial juxtapositions of scenes and persons of the Old and New Testament was never as popular as it was in the West after the dogmatization of the icon, because it eventually became redundant: as it was conceptualized in the course of Byzantine Iconoclasm the Byzantine icon is an intrinsically typological form of representation, which embodies the three fold model of the Christian approach to visibility as an artificial object which can be seen and touched by the faithful and hence is able to make visible the different stages of salvation history within a single image.

Nevertheless, one may legitimately question to what degree this typological conception of the Christian image affected Christian image practices in Byzantium. It seems by no means particularly in a society where it became common custom to kiss the icons, to drink mixed particles taken from the icon and where prominent icons were regarded as agents. But this contradiction of theory and practice must be the focus of another discussion.

Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 1: *Offering of Melchizedek*, detail of the mosaics of north side of the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, 432–440. From: Joachim Poeschke: *Mosaiken in Italien 300–1300*. München: Hirmer, 2009, p. 86.