Looking at and Listening to Byzantium

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The visual and verbal communicated very differently in the medieval East Roman Empire, which we normally now call Byzantium. While most images were based on verbal or written narratives (for example, the Bible), they virtually always changed the textual message and often actively subverted the written story. Both words and images were often sacred, but the audience for verbal and visual sacrality was differently composed. Words were the preserve of the elite who could read and afford books; images, unlike the written word, were usually available to all and valued by elite and non-elite alike. There is considerable tension between the two media: words about images were usually actually about something else entirely, and textual forgery was an acknowledged ‘cottage industry’ in the Byzantine world while there is very little evidence of art forgery by the Byzantines.¹ In what follows I will contrast the ways the Byzantine saw and the ways they heard and consider what the tensions between the two can reveal.²

Image as Text

The Byzantines talked about relationship between words and images, which, as they explained it, took a number of forms, from the basic to the complex (intertextual and intervisual commentary). Unsurprisingly, the more complex the relationship, the fewer discussions of the association were provided by Byzantine authors; so I will start with the most basic linkage of word and image, where we have abundant documentation of Byzantine awareness of the process, before I move into more speculative arenas. This most basic linkage is fusion—the idea that word and image could have identical roles in furthering the narrative—and one of the most eloquent voices to explain to us how this worked belongs to St. Basil of Caesarea.

In the middle of the fourth century, St. Basil wrote a number of sermons honouring martyrs, including the martyr Gordios (homily 18) and the forty martyrs of Sebasteia (homily 19). In the latter, Basil provided a grisly description of freezing to death in the course of which he equated writing and painting, concluding that “what the spoken narrative presents through

¹ See Brubaker 1999:49–51.
² Earlier versions of parts of this paper have appeared in Brubaker 2004:63–90 and 2009:93–100.
hearing, this silent painting shows through imitation.” In other words, Basil equated the narrative potential of word and image.

Basil went on: “Both painters of words and painters of pictures illustrate valour in battle, the former by the art of rhetoric, the latter by clever use of the brush, and both encourage everyone to be brave. A spoken account edifies the ear, while a silent picture induces imitation.” For Basil, then, the narrative provided by words and images was particularly important as a didactic tool: writers and painters provide models for imitation. Finally, Basil linked both of these ideas to memory: “When we expound [the] memory [of the forty martyrs] in the midst of all, we make them helpful for the living, showing the holiness of these men for an example to all, as in a picture.” He addressed many of these same issues in his earlier homily on the martyr Gordios, and here he concluded that “when we see the sun, we are always filled with wonder. So also when we have his [Gordios’s] memory before our eyes [as an image], it will always remain fresh.” Basil proceeded logically: he equated words and images; indicated the value of both as didactic tools; and, especially, valued narrative—and particularly visual narrative—as a way to keep memory “fresh.”

Basil’s understanding of the relationship between words, images, and memory was not forgotten by later Greek authors. Most specifically, all of the passages quoted above were enshrined in writings of the eighth and ninth centuries and continued to be remembered during the middle and late Byzantine periods, when Basil’s sermon on the forty martyrs inspired homiletic and artisanal representations of them that have been preserved from the tenth century onwards.

The idea of images as memory also runs through many Byzantine texts, and here the relationship between word and image develops slightly differently: the significance of the textual record is superseded by the role of images. Four hundred years after Basil, in the mid-eighth century, John of Damascus wrote: “Things which have already taken place are

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[1]{PG 31:508C–509A; discussion and trans. in Maguire 1981:9.}
\footnotetext[2]{PG 31:508D–509A.}
\footnotetext[3]{PG 31:508C–D.}
\footnotetext[4]{PG 31:508A.}
\end{footnotes}
remembered by means of images.”

Greek authors continued to articulate the same concept until the end of the empire. Four hundred years after John, in the twelfth century, for example, Eustathios of Thessalonike noted with satisfaction that Stephen Nemanja looked closely at images representing the feats of Manuel I Komnenos, which had been “cunningly wrought for the sake of remembrance”⁹; and toward the end of the thirteenth century George Pachymeres tells us that Michael VIII had scenes painted in the palace because he wished “these deeds to be immortalized.”¹⁰

All the men I have just quoted—Basil of Caesarea, John of Damascus, Eustathios of Thessalonike, and George Pachymeres—were erudite literati who read widely and wrote extensively. All were very familiar with, or themselves wrote, history. Yet all four of them claim that the past was articulated (remembered) as well, or better, through images as through texts. These four men are representative of a larger picture: across the Byzantine era, images were celebrated consistently as historical memory. While to modern minds texts are the prime reporters of history, Byzantine authors made many more references to images as records of the past than to texts in that same role.

**Intervisuality**

One example of how this process worked is provided by the well-known mosaic above the entrance to the Chora monastery (also known as the Kariye Camii) in Constantinople, decorated between 1316 and 1321, which portrays Theodore Metochites dedicating the monastery to Christ.¹¹ The lopsided composition and location above the entrance portal to the church is a visual quote from the imperial door into Hagia Sophia, set four hundred years earlier (ca. 900), showing the emperor in *proskynesis* before Christ.¹² Theodore was evidently attempting to ensure that his memory was linked to imperial status, and this endeavour was buttressed by the scallop pattern formed by the mosaic cubes of the background, which finds its only roughly contemporary parallel in the Deesis mosaic installed by Michael VIII.

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¹⁰ Mango 1972:246.
Palaiologos, probably to commemorate his triumphal return to Constantinople in 1261. Like Byzantine texts that copy and paraphrase each other (and the Bible) knowingly, so too pictures rely on their audiences’ knowledge of other images to score points and amplify their meanings.

**Image as Metaphor**

Images can be used this way because, as is clear from both the preserved written sources and the nuanced changes made to images that signaled shifting social policy, the Byzantines were acutely aware of visual communication. This is perhaps not surprising in a society which was largely illiterate, but it is also apparent in written products of the literate elite. One example of this is provided by the frequent use of visual metaphors. The authors who we have just considered—Basil of Caesarea, John of Damascus, Eustathios of Thessalonike and George Pachymeres—were historians and theologians, to whom texts were a given; precisely because pictures were not ‘their media,’ our historians apparently felt free to use them metaphorically. The tension between the word-men and the images that they write about is almost palpable at times, and it was obviously useful to the writers, who were able to exploit words about images to talk about all sorts of issues. Basil, for example, used artisanal copying of saintly portraits as a model for Christian behaviour: good Christians should study and imitate saintly acts in the same way a painter studied and imitated saintly imagery. He actually wrote “As the painters when they paint icons from [other] icons, looking closely at the model, are eager to transfer the character of the icon to their own masterpiece, so must he who strives to perfect himself in all branches of virtue look at the lives of the saints as if to living and moving images and make their virtue his own by imitation.” This was such a popular trope that it surfaced in numerous later sources, including the ninth-century *Sacra Parallela*, where it was duly illustrated with an image of a painter copying an icon—but Basil’s theme was Christian

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14 This is not because the Byzantines unquestioningly accepted the truth-value of texts; in fact, textual forgery was rampant, and recognized, throughout much of the Byzantine period, while forged pictures were almost unknown.
15 PG 32:229A.
16 *Epistle* II 3: PG 32:229; English trans. from Weitzmann 1979:213.
behaviour, not the practice of painting. Here, words about images are not really ‘about’ images at all, they are what one might call a metaphor. Images are, in this case, good to think with, to use as a pivot around which to spin other ideas.

The Power of Sight

Sometimes, however, texts and images were explicitly compared, and—perhaps because images were far more ubiquitous in Byzantium than texts were—writers often promoted the value of pictures above the value of words. At the seventh ecumenical council, held in Nicaea in 787, Epiphanius the Deacon quoted the passages from St. Basil with which we began, and then told his audience that when we hear or read words about saints “we are reminded of their zeal,” but that in “looking at their sufferings, we come to remember their bravery and their life inspired by God.” A century later (ca. 870), Photios wrote: “Martyrs have suffered . . . and their memory is contained in books. These deeds they are also seen performing in pictures, and painting presents the martyrdom of those blessed men more vividly to our knowledge . . . . These things are conveyed both by stories and by pictures, but it is the spectators rather than the hearers who are drawn to emulation . . . the comprehension that comes about through sight is shown to be far superior.” In a passage that has been quoted often, he continued: “indeed much greater is the power of sight . . . it sends the essence of the thing seen on to the mind, letting it be conveyed from there to the memory for the concentration of unfailing knowledge. Has the mind seen? Has it grasped? Has it visualized? Then it has effortlessly transmitted the forms to the memory.” It would be hard to express a more comprehensive promotion of the power of images over texts as aids to memory.

Image in Dialogue with Words

Another way we can see how visual communication superseded the written word appears when the two are joined up in manuscripts. Probably the most famous example of image as

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17 Paris.gr.923, f. 328v: Weitzmann 1979, fig. 569; for a later paraphrase of the same text, see the thirteenth-century Lincoln College typikon: A.-M. Talbot 2000:1531.
part of a dialogue with words is a miniature in the Khludov Psalter, a manuscript produced in Constantinople in the 840s, immediately after the end of the great struggle about images in Byzantium (what we call iconoclasm, but which the Byzantines called iconomachy, ‘the image struggle’). Here we see the crucifixion of Christ above an image of iconoclasts whitewashing an image of Christ. The text is Psalm 68, which does not describe either event. Verse 22, however, prompted the upper scene. It reads: “They gave me also gall for my food, and made me drink vinegar for my thirst.” This reminded Byzantine commentators of Christ’s crucifixion, as described in the New Testament. So here we see Christ’s tormentors, one of whom offers him the sponge soaked in vinegar and gall described in the Gospels, inscribed “they [mixed] vinegar and gall,” thus verbally tying together the Old Testament psalm verse and the New Testament image. In other words, the image of the crucifixion provided a commentary on the psalm verse and, at the same time, supplied the Christian audience of the (originally Jewish) psalter with a picture relevant to their religious concerns. This chain of associations, intent on taking an ancient text and making it significant to a modern audience, continues with the lower scene, which shows two iconoclasts whitewashing an icon of Christ. The inscription next to the iconoclasts verbalises the connection between the two images as “and they mixed water and lime on his face.” The point here, as expressed in a slightly earlier anti-iconoclast broadsheet, is that “formerly the impious put to the lips of Jesus a mixture of vinegar and gall; in our day, mixing water and lime and fixing a sponge to a pole, they applied it to the icon and besmeared it. . . . They have perpetrated the work of the Jews and have given themselves over to the devil.”

21 What the miniature is suggesting is that dishonour to images is equivalent to dishonour to the person represented; whitewashing an icon of Christ is the same as denying his incarnation, thus effectively wiping him out.22 The text itself is simply a spur to the image, which conveys the real message of this page: the destruction of images of Christ meant the destruction of Christ.

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21 See the discussion, with additional bibliography, in Corrigan 1992:30–31.

22 Basil’s formulation (honour to the image bestows honour on its archetype), which was applied by him to imperial portraits (PG 32:149; English trans. in Mango 1972:47), was adapted for iconophile use in the eighth century by, amongst others, John of Damascus Against Those who Attack the Divine Images I 21, 51 (= II 47) and esp. I 35-36 (= II 31-32); Kotter 1975:108, 147–149, 154; trans. Anderson 1980:29, 36–37, 40. Discussion in Brubaker 1998:1226.
The Khludov Psalter page provides an excellent example of how words and images communicate differently, and in fact can never communicate even the same message in the same way. In illuminated manuscripts, the text ultimately generates the image. But the miniatures, as here, at the very least translate and transform the message. Often they transcend it entirely, and provide a visual commentary on the words, based on a set of intervisual and/or intertextual cues which are totally independent of the accompanying text. Miniatures construct and authorise a particular interpretation of the words that they accompany, and in so doing they shape and guide the reader’s understanding of the words. There is inevitably a tension—never expressed, and often creative—when words and images meet in Byzantine manuscripts. Some messages could be visualised in images but could not be said in words, and others could be said but not shown.

**The Tension between the Verbal and the Visual**

But it is not only in manuscripts that we find an explicit tension between the visual and the verbal. We see this clearly in the sixth-century mosaics commissioned for the church of Hagios Demetrios by the wealthy inhabitants of Thessalonike to commemorate their patron saint Demetrios, his holy companions, and themselves.23 The panels have been interpreted as ex voto images, made to thank Demetrios and the other holy figures pictured for some previous intervention on the donor’s behalf.24 In most cases, neither the saints nor the donors are named; we can, however, rest assured that any individual or family who could afford to commission a panel recording Demetrios’s favour was sufficiently wealthy (and socially significant) to be counted amongst the élite.25

There are two sequences of mosaics, one—most of which was destroyed by fire early in the twentieth century, but recorded in photographs and accurate watercolours by W.S. George—in the north arcade, probably dates to the mid-sixth century; the other, on the piers in front of the apse, is usually dated to the second quarter of the seventh century. The earlier sequence

23 Colour reproductions of most surviving panels appear in Mauropoulou-Tsioume 1993:76–79. The most recent study of Demetrios, his church and his cult, is Skedros 1999.
shows mothers and/or fathers presenting their children to Demetrios or the Virgin in order to be healed. In contrast, the later sequence shows Demetrios with urban and church officials.

The mosaics at Hagios Demetrios track changes in the way that élite identity was represented in Byzantium: as Demetrios was transformed from a healing saint into a focus of urban identity,26 his élite clients changed from individuals and families to representatives of civic authority.27 Our knowledge of how this process worked is partially informed by the textual record associated with the church, the Miracles of St. Demetrios.

The first collection of miracles—the Miracula associated by Paul Lemerle with bishop John, and dated to ca. 610—was probably compiled after the first sequence of mosaics had been installed, but before the second.28 Significantly, however, it makes no mention whatsoever of any mosaic decoration inside the church, and indeed scarcely refers to representational imagery of any sort.29 Instead, the Miracula make it clear that the focus of the St. Demetrios’s cult was a silver kiborion. This apparently included a portrait of the saint—the first miracle in John’s collection mentions ‘the divine effigy of the holy victorious [one]’ in the kiborion30—but that portrait is never itself credited with any activity. The author of the Miracula assumes that portraits of the saint exist, but their only role is to allow people to identify a figure seen in a vision as St. Demetrios himself: in the eighth miracle, Demetrios appears to the boat captain Stephanos “dressed [or posed] as one sees him in images”;31 in the tenth, the saint appears to a well-born man, who sees Demetrios seated in his kiborion “in the dress [or pose] in which one sees him in images”;32 and in miracle fifteen, another “man of good birth” sees Demetrios open the door of his kiborion “looking like he did in the old images.”33 In the second, late-seventh-century collection of miracles, a variant on the same formula appears: the African bishop

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26 See Skedros 1999, esp. 70–82, 100–102, 115–120.
27 For a detailed discussion of this process, see Brubaker 2004.
29 Nor do the passions associated with Demetrios mention portraits of the saint.
31 Lemerle 1979:102, line 9 (VIII 70).
32 Lemerle 1979:115, lines 16–17 (X 89).
33 Lemerle 1979:162, line 17 (XV 167).
Cyprian is able to identify the man who rescued him from captivity as Demetrios when he sees his portrait. These are the only specific references to portraits of the saint in the Miracula.

There are, however, also two references to images associated with miracles. One appears in the later edition of the miracles, which claims that Demetrios’s salvation of the city is represented at his sanctuary “in wood.” While this is significant as an example of a votive image recording civic gratitude, my main interest here is in a mosaic described as on the outside wall of Hagios Demetrios itself. This appears in the first miracle of John’s collection, which concerns the eparch Marianos. Marianos was struck with paralysis by the devil; after refusing the help of a magic amulet, he dreamt that his friend Demetrios—an important man at court—told him to come to his house to be healed. One of the eparch’s servants, inspired by God, realised that the church of Hagios Demetrios was meant. Marianos was carried there, and in a dream-vision saw St. Demetrios, who said to him “Christ our Lord returns your strength, he who heals those in need.” On awakening, Marianos repeated this phrase and was instantly cured. He gave thanks to the saint, and many gifts to the church. The account concludes that if anyone doubts this story, they should examine the mosaic on the outside of the church, on the wall facing the stadium (?), and they will be convinced.

The Miracula description raises two issues. The first is the correlation of the text account and the visual record: the Miracula mentions a mosaic on the outer wall of the building, and such an image—though not the one noted in the Miracula—still exists. To judge by the fragmentary inscription, the existing mosaic is an ex voto, a visual prayer in the name of a man and his wife. Presumably, the Marianos mosaic was also votive, though whether it recorded the narrative described in the Miracula or simply showed Marianos giving thanks to Demetrios is not clear; the latter is perhaps more likely, given the other evidence preserved at Hagios Demetrios. Be that as it may, written and visual evidence together indicate that the exterior as well as the interior of the church acted as a frame for votive imagery.

34 Lemerle 1979: I 239, lines 5–7 (II.VI 311).
35 Lemerle interprets this to mean a second sanctuary dedicated to Demetrios, in the forest: 1979:179, lines 18–19; see also 174n19. It could equally indicate a wooden image, possibly three dimensional.
A second issue raised by the *Miracula* account of the healing of Marianos concerns the use and role of images in the text. Bishop John cited the mosaic as a witness to his words: he had not made the story up, for he had an independent testimony of Marianos’s healing in the mosaic. The image here confirmed the truth of John’s words, just as the portraits of the saint confirmed that the man who appeared to the ship captain Stephanos, the well-born man, and later the African bishop Cyprian was Demetrios himself. The images in the *Miracula* validate the spoken and written word. Throughout the *Miracula*, in both the early and the later collections, images are agents of commemoration and authorisation.

Nothing in the *Miracula* texts nor in the panels themselves suggests that the mosaics at Hagios Demetrios were made as objects of devotion; there is no indication that they are ‘icons’ in the later Byzantine sense of the term; no evidence suggests that they are meant to be understood as mediating between the saint in heaven and his worshippers on earth. Instead, as the inscriptions that still accompany some of the panels attest, they are ‘prayers’ to the saint. Apart from two later inscriptions, which commemorate both the restorers of the building and the saint, all of the other preserved legends from Hagios Demetrios are prayers of thanks for Demetrios’s previous intercession or prayers in hope of future blessings. Two of the four inscriptions associated with the earlier panels simply read “a prayer for one whose name God knows,” one fragment addressed the Virgin, and one invoked Demetrios. Those attached to the later panels are more extensive but repeat the same sentiments. The invocation “a prayer for one whose name God knows” recurs; as do the more civically-orientated prayers “for the world” and for “citizens and outsiders”; one inscription specifically gives thanks.

But while most of the inscriptions insist on the anonymity of the donor, the images do not. Donors are omitted from only four of the eighteen compositions preserved at or recorded from the church, and two of these are so damaged that the omission or presence of a donor is beyond recall. Though the damaged state of the mosaics makes categorical distinctions

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37 Cormack 1969, nos. 30 and 42.
40 The northeast sanctuary pier panel of the Virgin with St. Theodore, and the southeast pier panel of St. Sergios are well preserved and could never have included images of donors. Two other mosaics now omit donor portraits, but both are fragmentary. The north arcade mosaics
impossible, we can at least conclude that most of the mosaics depicting Demetrios included portraits of supplicant-donors. The texts insist on humble anonymity; the images portray the commissioning family, often in full.

The earlier mosaics along the north arcade, and that on the south side of the west wall, portray or portrayed a range of supplicants, many of whom are young. This is not true of the later mosaics on the sanctuary piers and tribelon wall, where only one panel—that closest to the north arcade sequence, on the west face of the northeast pier—includes children, and where the compositions record not supplications but Demetrios’s protection. I do not think that this can be simply an accident of survival. The difference between the earlier and later mosaics suggests a changed role for mosaic decoration: the Hagios Demetrios panels appear to document the transformation of ideas about votive imagery between roughly the mid-sixth century and the mid-seventh. Though other distinctions between the earlier and later mosaics can be made, a major shift at Hagios Demetrios involves the identity of the ‘appropriate’ donor, another involves a change in the way those donors interact with the saint, and still another—most pertinent here—involves the relationship between texts about St. Demetrios and the images commemorating his help.

**Text and Image in Conflict?**

The earlier compositions are more complex than the later panels, with more elaborate settings that include architectural features, landscape elements, and medallion portraits of a battalion of saints to assist the main protagonists, the Virgin and, especially, St. Demetrios. Of the nine votive compositions—two centred on the Virgin, seven on Demetrios—just over half involve a child, presented to Demetrios or the Virgin by an adult (or adults), usually the mother. This pattern finds no match in the miracle collections associated with St. Demetrios, which are on the whole more concerned with Demetrios’s civil responsibilities and his interaction with high status individuals, and which include only four healings, one of the eparch Marianos, one of an official in the prefecture, one of a possessed soldier, and one of unspecified victims of the

show that the portraits of supplicants were sometimes diminutive, and the damaged east face of the northeast sanctuary pier could just possibly have included one in the area no longer preserved; so too the west wall mosaic of Demetrios and the angels.
plague.\footnote{Miracles 1–4: Lemerle 1979:57–67, 69–71, 75–82, 84–86.} It does, however, find parallels in other collections of miracles, notably the \textit{Miracles of St. Artemios}, the core of which was written in Constantinople between 658 and 668.\footnote{Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1909:1–75; on the date see Haldon 1997, esp. 33–35.} Here, nine of the forty-five miracles involve mothers and their children (normally sons).\footnote{Miracles 10–12, 28, 31, 36, 42–43, 45: Crisafulli and Nesbitt 1997:94–101, 154–157, 162–165, 188–193, 216–219, 222–225.} The healings follow a set pattern: Artemios appears to the mother in a dream-vision, touches the ailing child or makes the sign of the cross over it, and explains that the child is healed through Christ.\footnote{Discussion in Brubaker 1998:1236–1237.} This formula is of particular interest in regard to the Hagios Demetrios mosaics because of its reference to the healing sign of the cross,\footnote{In miracle 10, Artemios makes the sign of the cross “all over [the child’s] body”; in miracle 31, he makes the sign of the cross over the child’s diseased testicles: Crisafulli and Nesbitt 1997:96, 164 (see n42 above).} as visualised by the children marked with crosses in the mosaics of the north arcade, and its insistence that the saint heals through Christ, a concept apparently represented in the north arcade mosaics (spandrel D), where Demetrios gestures toward Christ, who in turn extends his arm out from his medallion and down toward the child held in its mother’s arms. The comparison suggests that the earlier Hagios Demetrios votive panels fit into a larger context, and record cures or supplications of a type familiar elsewhere in the early Byzantine world, where the ‘appropriate’ supplicants were often families, and especially mothers on behalf of their children, rather than representatives of officialdom. At Hagios Demetrios these are families who were able to record their gratitude to the patron saint of the city, and to memorialise their special relationship with him; but they nonetheless fit into a pattern that, if we may generalise from the \textit{Miracles of Artemios}, seems to have crossed class and status boundaries. But these visual records of thanksgiving find little in common with the textual records of Demetrios’s miracles, which focus on the saint’s civic beneficence with, usually, high status dignitaries. While the authors of the \textit{Miracula} were intent on promoting Demetrios’s civic cult, the citizens of Thessaloniki were more interested in promoting his interest in their well-being.
The later mosaics resolve the clash between what it was considered appropriate to show, and what it was considered appropriate to record in writing. Three of panels on the sanctuary piers, tribelon wall and north arcade no longer include donors, though two incorporate prayer inscriptions. Only the portrait of St. Sergios on the west face of the southeast pier lacks both supplicant-donors and a supplicant-inscription, and his pendant on the west face of the northeast pier is the only saint in this later group to be associated with children. The remaining four compositions all show St. Demetrios with officials of the church or of the city. On the piers and tribelon wall, the saint is shown in direct physical contact with the donors: he rests his arms on the shoulders of two (now faceless) bishops in the tribelon panel, of a bishop and a secular official on the north face of the southeast pier, and of a deacon on the east face of that pier. By the middle of the seventh century, the votive mosaics have resolutely shifted their focus from families to officials; and the accompanying inscriptions respond to this shift of emphasis by being more civically inclined than the earlier prayers. In their emphasis on the well-born and illustrious, the later mosaics at Hagios Demetrios also conform much more closely with the seventh-century Miracula texts—both versions—than do the earlier panels.

The later mosaics record a changed attitude toward the saint. Demetrios is no longer the object of supplication, nor is he anymore presented as larger-than-life: he is instead shown offering protection to figures depicted in the same scale as himself. This change in attitude is accompanied by a change in accoutrements. In the later mosaics, the silver kiborion is no longer represented, and countryside and architectural fantasies have given way to solid walls (representative of the city walls that Demetrios protects so well?). Demetrios has been transformed from a healing figure to a protective figure, of unique importance to Thessalonike as its urban defender; his clientele has changed from individuals and families to representatives of the city; their attitude toward him has changed from supplication to affiliation.

46 Skedros 1999:100–102, thinks that Demetrios is being “universalised,” that his power is here “more pervasive and civic” (101); I am not, however, convinced that the shift to civic officials expands the saint’s powers.
47 For the subsequent development of the iconography of Demetrios as a military saint, see e.g. Xyngopoulos 1970; Walter 1973:157–178.
This shift finds parallels elsewhere in the empire. It is precisely in the period between the two mosaic campaigns at Hagios Demetrios that a belief in holy figures as urban protectors surfaces. Sometime between 550 and 590, the image of Christ not-made-by-human-hands (acheiropoieton) was first credited with the protection of Edessa; shortly after 626, the Virgin was recognised as the protectress of Constantinople, responsible for the retreat of the Avars. The Miracula texts claimed this role for Demetrios in Thessalonike, and while the earlier programme of mosaics deviated from this written agenda to insist on Demetrios’s role as a healer of everyday families, the second programme of mosaics toes the textual line.

Conclusion

The tension between words and images can be summarised briefly as ‘words describe; images show.” But we can go beyond this simple declaration. As we have seen, talking about pictures often has little to do with images themselves; and the relationship between what was shown and what was said or written is often tenuous. While images often authorise or validate an interpretation of a text, they also sometimes—as in the early mosaics at Hagios Demetrios—present a completely different message from that conveyed by the textual record most directly relevant to them. Byzantium was very visually orientated: while we cannot know the level of literacy, it is unlikely to have been very high, and while most preserved texts were written by urban elite males, images have been preserved from all over the empire, from the humblest rural church to the imperial palace. It is perhaps not surprising that the messages conveyed by texts and those conveyed by images do not always correspond. From the point of view of the modern historian, this is all to the good, for the tension created between recorded words and recorded vision can be profitably exploited, as I hope to have shown here.

Bibliography


49 See Cameron 1979:3–35.


