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Forgetting the Heretic: the Emperor Heraclius in the Byzantine Liturgical Tradition*

With one figure

Abstract: On the basis of the analysis of the Byzantine and Medieval Western liturgical books this article investigates the role Heraclius (610–641) and his dynasty played in the development of the Byzantine feast of the Exaltation of the True Cross, as well as the evolution of the image of this emperor in the Byzantine liturgical tradition. The paper suggests that the restoration of the Cross by Heraclius in Jerusalem strongly influenced the Byzantine liturgical practice of the Exaltation feast, and that some references to this act were made during the rule of the Heraclian dynasty, but were later eliminated from the liturgical books because for political and religious reasons. By contrast, the Western liturgical tradition of the Exaltation feast conserved a stage of the liturgy before these changes were made which represented (until Vatican II) an element of the heritage of the Monothelete period.

The long and dramatic Byzantine-Persian war ended in 629. Persia was defeated, its king was overthrown and the relic of the True Cross (i.e. that upon which Jesus is believed to have died), which had previously been captured by the Persians, was returned to Jerusalem. The Christian empire was thought then to be the only great power left in the whole *oikoumene*—the way it must be at the end of the world, according to the prophesies. Clinging to these apocalyptic expectations and toying with the concept of the Last Emperor, the Emperor Heraclius came to Jerusalem and restored the True Cross to its proper place—the Church of Resurrection at Golgotha¹.

We possess quite a large number of descriptions of the event of the restoration of the cross in the narrative sources. The majority of the accounts are not Byzantine however, but of Western origin, and were written quite a while after the event. The Byzantine accounts—both the later chronicles and the contemporary authors—are mostly disappointing in terms of the precise historical information they give about the event: its date, exact place and circumstances. They either only briefly mention it, like the chroniclers Theophanes² or George the Monk³, or surround a passing mention with a huge number of rhetorical flourishes, stylistically vague expressions and lyrical digressions in a panegyric style, like George of Pisidia⁴ or the author of *Vita Anastasii Persae*⁵ or Ps.-Sebeos⁶.

The wide variety of Medieval Western accounts of Heraclius's deed is explained by the fact that most of them are dedicated or somehow related to the church feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, celebrated annually on 14th September. In Latin, even the names of the historical event and of the

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¹ See in general W. E. KAEGI, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*. Cambridge 2003, 205–210.

² Theophanes 328 (DE BOOR).

³ Georgius Monachus 672 (DE BOOR). The accounts of other later chroniclers are marked by the same scarcity of information, see Nicephori patriarchae Constantinopolitani, *Breviarium historicum* 18 (ed. C. MANGO [CFHB 13]. Washington, D.C. 1990, 66); Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae *Chronicon* 161 (ed. S. WAHLGREN, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae Chronicon* [CFHB 44]. Berlin – New York 2006); Ioannes Zonaras 211–212 (ed. M. PINDER – T. BÜTTNER-WOBST, *Ioannis Zonarae epitomae historiarum III*. Bonn 1897).

⁴ Georgius Pisides, *In restitutionem S. Crucis* (ed. A. PERTUSI, *Giorgio di Pisidia. Poemi, I. Panegirici epici*. Ettal 1959, 225–230).

⁵ *Vita Anastasii Persae* 99 (ed. B. FLUSIN, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIII^e siècle, I. Les textes*. Paris 1992).

⁶ Ps.-Sebeos 41 (ed. R. W. THOMSON, *The Armenian history attributed to Sebēos*. Liverpool 1999, 90).

feast are identical—*Exaltatio S. Crucis*⁷. The feast did not exist in the West before the 7th century, and the restoration of the Cross by Heraclius—modern scholarship agrees—must have strongly influenced its introduction in the West (though the exact date when it was introduced is disputed)⁸. In the Medieval East, by contrast, a feast with a deceptively similar name—ὑψωσις τοῦ τιμίου Σταυροῦ (Exaltation of the True Cross), also celebrated on 14th September⁹, is much older and has rather different origins and history.

This striking difference in the *Entstehungsgeschichte* of the Exaltation feasts in the Christian East and West, although not disregarded¹⁰, has not yet sparked enough interest in the academic community; the same can be said about the relation of Heraclius to both feasts. Both classical monographs on the subject, the recent one by Louis van Tongeren and the old one by Mikhail Skaballanovič, despite being extremely helpful regarding the liturgy of the feast (Van Tongeren specializing in the Western material and Skaballanovič covering the Eastern), fail to pay special attention to purely historical questions, such as whether Heraclius had something to do with the Eastern feast of Exaltation in his time and its subsequent development. It seems as if his figure is in the foreground when we speak about the development of the Exaltation feast in the West, but is completely ignored when we refer to the similar feast in the East. Advocating a more balanced approach, we will try to evaluate the role Heraclius and his dynasty actually played in the development of both feasts on the basis of the analysis of the known Byzantine and Western liturgical and narrative sources.

Another question that we will consider here that has not been addressed before is the question of the memory of Heraclius in the Byzantine liturgical tradition. Was the Emperor, who restored the True Cross and promoted what the later authors would call “heresy” (Monothelism¹¹), represented in the liturgical texts from the 7th century onwards, and, if so, how? We will examine the relevant sections of the Byzantine liturgical books and, by comparing them to their better-known Western counterparts, will try to trace the evolution of the image of this Emperor in the Byzantine liturgical tradition.

Returning to the first question, let us first consider the day and month¹² when Heraclius actually restored the relic of the True Cross to Jerusalem. A scholarly consensus exists on this, since we have

⁷ In the Medieval West since 6th–7th cent. (datings vary) a similar feast existed, *Inventio S. Crucis*, celebrated on 3rd May annually, but this one was dedicated exclusively to the event of the finding of the Cross by Helena and was not connected to Heraclius (see B. CORNET, *La Fête de la Croix du 3 mai. Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 30 [1952] 837–848). In the 5th–6th century East, in the absence of an *Inventio S. Crucis* feast, it was the Exaltation feast that commemorated the finding of the Cross, and it was also the Exaltation feast that later underwent some transformations that will be discussed below.

⁸ P. JOUNEL, *Le culte de la Croix dans la liturgie romaine. La Maison-Dieu: cahiers de pastorale liturgique* 75 (1963) 70, 75–76; L. van TONGEREN, *Exaltation of the Cross. Toward the Origins of the Feast of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross and the Meaning of the Cross in the Early Medieval Liturgy (Liturgia condenda* 11). Leuven 2000, 57–59; C. MÉNAGER, *La fête de la Croix: unité du culte, pluralité des fêtes. Questes* 31 (2015) 72–74.

⁹ Although in the modern Russian, Serbian, Georgian and some other Orthodox churches using the Julian calendar this feast falls on the 27th September according to the Gregorian calendar.

¹⁰ Van TONGEREN, *Exaltation of the Cross* 276; M. SKABALLANOVIČ, *Vozdviženie Čestnogo i Životvorjaščego Kresta Gospodnja*. Kiev 1915, 199–200 (reprint 2004).

¹¹ On Monothelism see in general: V. GRUMEL, *Recherches sur l'histoire du monothélisme. EO* 153 (1929) 19–34; W. FREND, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement. Chapters in the history of the Church in the fifth and sixth centuries*. Cambridge 1972, 316–354; F. WINKELMANN, *Der monergetisch-monothelische Streit (Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten* 6). Frankfurt 2001; C. LANGE, *Mia Energeia. Untersuchungen zur Einigungspolitik des Kaisers Heraclius und des Patriarchen Sergius von Konstantinopel*. Tübingen 2012, 531–623.

¹² The year is hotly debated: a majority of the scholars are advocating for 630, while there are also adherents of 629 and 631, see P. SPECK, *Zum Datum der Translation der Kreuzreliquien nach Konstantinopel*, in: *Varia* 7 (*Poikila Byzantina* 18). Bonn 2000, 167–179; H. A. KLEIN, *Niketas und das wahre Kreuz: kritische Anmerkungen zum Chronicon Paschale ad annum 614. BZ* 94 (2001) 580–587 (in favour of 629); A. FROLOW, *La Vraie Croix et les expéditions d'Héraclius en Perse. REB* 11 (1953) 99; B. FLUSIN, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VIIe siècle, II. Commentaire*. Paris 1992,

some exact and trustworthy data from the earliest sources: the contemporary “Notitia vivificae et venerabilis Crucis” ascribed to Antiochos Strategos¹³ and a poem by George of Pisidia, who both agree on 21st March¹⁴. No source, including the Western ones, has ever stated that the event took place on the 14th September, the date of the Exaltation feasts. Never did the Medieval hagiographers, preachers, church writers like Ps.-Hrabanus Maurus or Jacobus de Varagine see a connection between the event and the feast on formal, “date-based” grounds¹⁵.

They instead believe in a more subtle, essence-related connection. In a wide number of Latin chronicles dating from the XII–XV centuries, a direct parallel is drawn between the restoration of the Cross by Heraclius and the feast of Exaltation: Heraclius, having returned and restored the Cross after the successful end of the war, *celebritatem exaltationis eius annuatim dedicavit*¹⁶. The Latin homiletic tradition, which was crucial for shaping the feast as we know it, is quite explicit about its meaning. Beginning with the seventh-century anonymous homily, and ending with a homily included in the post-tridentine *Breviarium romanum* (1568) that became the standard for the Catholic Church for the next four centuries, these texts are pretty much wholly devoted to the deeds of Heraclius, his Persian campaigns (depicted in a massively folklorized and heroized manner) crowned by the glorious restoration of the True Cross. It is worth mentioning the famous legend about the entrance of Heraclius into Jerusalem which is to be found in all of these sources¹⁷.

The legend says that, having deposed the Persian king and brought back the True Cross, Heraclius carried it to Jerusalem, wearing his imperial robes and his golden crown. At the gates of the city he was stopped by some obstacle (some texts say that stones of the gate fell and made a wall), and an angel appeared to him. “How dare you enter the City so solemnly—the City where Our Lord suffered

300–306; J. W. DRIJVERS, Heraclius and the Restitutio Crucis: Notes on Symbolism and Ideology, in: *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. G. J. Reinink – B. H. Stolte. Groningen 2002, 178 (in favour of 630); V. GRUMEL, *La Reposition de la vraie Croix à Jérusalem par Héraclius. Le Jour et l’Année. BF 1* (1966) 149 (in favour of 631).

¹³ The Greek original of the Notitia is lost; it survived only in the Georgian and Arabic versions together with the sermon most likely written by the monk Strategios from the St. Savva’s Laura in Palestine. The text of the Notitia is poorly studied; we know only that it must have been written in Palestine after 630, see FLUSIN, *Saint Anastase le Perse II* 133–134; J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*. Oxford 2010, 167.

¹⁴ The Notitia is very explicit about the date: *Et ut intravit ille [i. e. Heraclius] in Ierusalem, restituit gloriosum et venerabile lignum crucis in ipso loco suo, mense Martio vicesima prima, sigillatum eodem modo in capsula, sicut ablata erat*. Antiochus Strategus 55 (ed. G. GARITTE, *La prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614 [CSCO 203. Scriptores Iberici 12]*. Louvain 1960). Pisides instead spoke in a less direct manner about the news of the restoration of the Cross which reached Constantinople on the Lazarus Saturday (31 March): Georgius Pisides, *In restitutionem S. Crucis* 101–113 (229 PERTUSI). For more detailed analysis see FLUSIN, *Saint Anastase le Perse II* 298–300.

¹⁵ *Sermo de exaltatione sanctae crucis* 192–201 (ed. S. BORGEHAMMAR, *Heraclius Learns Humility: Two Early Latin Accounts Composed for the Celebration of Exaltatio Crucis. Mill 6* [2009] 192–201); *Legenda aurea* 137 (ed. B. W. HÄUPTLI, *Jacobus de Voragine. Legenda aurea – Goldene Legende. Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, 1778–1792*).

¹⁶ *Sigebert of Gembloux* 323 (ed. D. L. BETHMANN, *Sigeberti Gemblacensis chronica cum continuationibus*, in: *Chronica et annales aevi Salici*, ed. G. H. Pertz [MGH *Scriptores* 6]. Hannover 1844, 323). See also e.g. *Otto of Freising* 219 (ed. R. WILMANS, *Chronicon Ottonis Frisingensis*, in: *Supplementa tomorum I, V, VI, XII. Chronica aevi Suevici*, ed. G. H. Pertz [MGH *Scriptores* 20]. Hannover 1868, 219); *Godfrey of Viterbo* 196 (ed. G. WAITZ, *Gotifredi Viterbiensis pantheon*, in: *Historici Germaniae saec. XII.*, ed. G. H. Pertz [MGH *Scriptores* 22]. Hannover 1872, 196); *Martin of Opava* 457 (ed. L. WEILAND, *Martini Oppaviensis chronicon pontificum et imperatorum*, in: *Historici Germaniae saec. XII.*, ed. G. H. Pertz [MGH *Scriptores* 22]. Hannover 1972, 457); *Sermo de exaltatione sanctae crucis* 200 (BORGEHAMMAR [as note 15]). The important seventh-century *Chronicle of Fredegar*, however, though knowing many different aspects of Heraclius’ reign, does not pay any attention to the story of the True Cross and does not mention its Restoration (*Fredegarius IV* 64–66 [ed. B. KRUSCH, *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica (MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 2)*. Hannover 1888, 152–153]).

¹⁷ *Reversio sanctae crucis* 180–191, ed. BORGEHAMMAR, *Heraclius Learns Humility; Sermo de exaltatione sanctae crucis* 192–201 (BORGEHAMMAR); *Legenda aurea* 137 (1778–1792 HÄUPTLI); *Breviarium romanum* 286–287, ed. Catholic Church, *Breviarium Romanum ex decreto sacrosancti concilii Tridentini constitutum. Editio prima post typicam. Pars autumnalis*. Ratisbonae, Neo Eboraci et Cincinnati 1888, 286–287.

in flesh?” the angel says. Heraclius repents, takes off all his insignia, and, barefooted, wearing only a shirt, managed to come in and restore the Cross.

This story of pride and fall, majesty and humility, together with its moralistic message, became extremely popular in the medieval West¹⁸; it was also reproduced in the literary works dedicated to Heraclius in Western-European languages other than Latin¹⁹. The name of Heraclius became inseparable from the feast; it was his deed that was celebrated, and no other emperor or historical figure is discussed in the relevant homilies, not even Constantine and Helena; the seventh-century anonymous homilist briefly mentions their efforts in finding the cross²⁰, but does so only as an introductory remark to his main story, that of Heraclius.

Let us now consider when the Exaltation feast appeared in the West. In the 8th century it was already an established feast, since it appears, accompanied by a set of relevant orations, in the well-known liturgical collections of the time—Sacramentarium Gelasianum, Sacramentarium Gregorianum Hadrianum and Sacramentarium Gregorianum Anianense²¹—written in Italy or France. On its date, 14th September, it is, however, accompanied by another (older) feast of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian. Then, the Liber Pontificalis mentions that during the papacy of Sergius I (687–701) a relic of the True Cross was venerated by the whole community in the Lateran basilica in Rome²². We have earlier evidence from ca. 663 (when, according to the editor of Sacramentarium Gregorianum, its Paduan version was composed²³): on 14th September the usual feast of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian was celebrated in Rome (as it was until the 7th century), but an additional prayer or ritual was added in honor of the Cross, *ad crucem salutandam in sancto Petro*²⁴. Some even older liturgical documents, dating back to ca. 645, more precisely the manuscripts of type II of Capitularia evangeliorum²⁵, all of

¹⁸ See L. KRETZENBACHER, Kreuzholzlegenden zwischen Byzanz und dem Abendlande: byzantinisch-griechische Kreuzholzlegenden vor und um Basileios Herakleios und ihr Fortleben im lateinischen Westen bis zum Zweiten Vaticanum (*Bayer. Akad. Wissenschaften, Sitzungsberichte, philosoph.-hist. Klasse* 1995/3). München 1995, 34–93; B. BAERT, Exaltatio Crucis: de byzantijnse keizer Heraclius (610–641) en het middeleeuwse Westen. *Bijdragen, tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 60 (1999) 147–172; EADEM, A Heritage of Holy Wood. The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image (*Cultures, beliefs and traditions* 22). Leiden – Boston 2004, 194–288, 350–452.

¹⁹ Kaiserchronik 11323–11332 (ed. E. SCHRÖDER, Kaiserchronik eines Regensburger Geistlichen, in: *Deutsche Chroniken und andere Geschichtsbücher des Mittelalters [MGH Scriptores. Deutsche Chroniken 1]*. Hannover 1895, 288); Gautier d’Arras 6079–6443 (ed. K. PRATT, Gautier d’Arras. Eracle. London 2007, 182–193); Meister Otte 4945–5008 (ed. H. MASSMANN, Eraclius: deutsches und französisches Gedicht des 12. Jahrhunderts [jenes von Otte, dieses von Gautier von Arras]. Quedlinburg – Leipzig 1842, 109–110); cf. W. FREY, Der Eraclius des Otto. Kettwig 1990.

²⁰ Reversio sanctae crucis 180 (BORGEHAMMAR)

²¹ Sacramentarium Gelasianum 181 (ed. C. MOHLBERG, Das fränkische Sacramentarium Gelasianum in alamannischer Überlieferung [*Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen* 1/2]. Münster 1918). Concerning the Exaltation feast in the Sacramentarium Gelasianum see: A. CHAVASSE, Le sacramentaire gélasien (Vaticanus Reginensis 316): Sacramentaire presbytéral en usage dans les titres romains au VII^e siècle. Paris 1958, 357–367. Sacramentarium Gregorianum Hadrianum 271 (ed. J. DESHUSSES, Le sacramentaire grégorien: Ses principales formes d’après les plus anciens manuscrits, I. Fribourg 1971); Sacramentarium Gregorianum Aniansens (ed. DESHUSSES, Le sacramentaire grégorien I 549). See also BORGEHAMMAR, Heraclius Learns Humility 154–157.

²² Liber pontificalis I 374 (DUCHESNE): *Qui [i. e. reliquiarium cum cruce Domini] etiam ex die illo pro salute humani generis ab omni populo christiano, die Exaltationis sanctae Crucis, in basilicam Salvatoris quae appellatur Constantiniana osculatur ac adoratur*. Some scholars (see JOUNEL, Le culte de la Croix 70–71, 74–75; MÉNAGER, La fête de la Croix 73) consider this as a proof that the feast of Exaltation of the Cross was first introduced in the West by Sergius I. However the passage only says, as was rightfully pointed out by van TONGEREN, Exaltation of the Cross 41–42, that since that time the Cross was venerated in Rome *die Exaltationis sanctae Crucis*, which means that this special day has to have existed previously.

²³ J. DESHUSSES, Le sacramentaire grégorien: Ses principales formes d’après les plus anciens manuscrits, III. Fribourg 1982, 80–81.

²⁴ Sacramentarium Gregorianum Paduense 659 (I DESHUSSES).

²⁵ The dating, made by the editor, is based on the fact that the type II of the Capitularium mentions only one of the three feasts introduced during the pontificate of Theodore I (642–649) and, therefore, has to be composed during his pontificate (see T. KLAUSER, Das römische Capitulare evangeliorum: Texte und Untersuchungen zu seiner ältesten Geschichte, I: Typen. Münster 1935, 184–185).

them of Frankish origin, state that on the 14th September the memory of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian is to be celebrated and, as an addition, one may (*si velis / si vis*) also celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross²⁶. It may be assumed, following Borgehammar²⁷, that it was somehow unusual to celebrate the Exaltation feast in Rome in ca. 645, and, therefore, it must have been introduced not long before that.

Louis van Tongeren even placed the introduction of the feast in the time of Pope Honorius I (625–638), a contemporary of Heraclius; leaning on the fact that the prayer *ad crucem salutandam in sancto Petro*, to be found in quite a different form from other Paduan and Tridentine versions of the Sacramentarium Gregorianum, has to “go back to what is termed the primitive Gregorianum”²⁸, which was, according to Jean Deshusses, edited during the pontificate of Honorius²⁹. It is quite plausibly the earliest possible dating, but is rather theoretical; therefore we would prefer to agree with Borgehammar who did not find convincing “the reference to a hypothetically dated hypothetical liturgical book”, as he put it³⁰.

The sacramentaries composed before the seventh century do not know of the Exaltation feast (e.g., the sixth-century Leonianum / Veronese); 14th September is exclusively the day of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian³¹. So, the only possible timespan for the introduction of the Exaltation feast in Rome must be between the spread of the news of Heraclius’ restoration of the Cross and the first mention of the Exaltation feast in the liturgical sources, i.e. the period of ca. 630 – ca. 645; a narrower dating now seems not possible.

What has not been questioned and discussed by the scholars who touched on this subject is that the Exaltation feast must have been introduced in Rome at a time when the Roman church did not especially oppose the Monothelete doctrine and was quite loyal to the empire (with some exceptions), and that it grew to become an established feast (at least, in Italy and France) in this very period when Monotheletism was a state doctrine. In order to better understand this special context, we would like to include a brief summary of the quite well-known history of the relations between the papal throne and the Monothelete empire.

Honorius, Roman Pope for most of the period of the Monothelete controversy under Heraclius, supported the Emperor’s religious policy, openly confessing in his letter to Sergius, Monothelete Patriarch of Constantinople (610–638), his belief in “the one will of Our Lord Jesus Christ”³². The Pope was later condemned as a heretic at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–681) in Constantinople, along with Sergius, Pyrrhus and other supporters of Monotheletism.

Severinus (640) and John IV (640–642) were supporters of the Orthodox doctrine of two wills³³ and condemned Heraclius’ Ecthesis (a Monothelete declaration of faith)³⁴, but their short reigns fell in the shaky period of the last year of Heraclius’ reign (when he regretted his support of Monotheletism and distanced himself from it³⁵) as well as the period of *coup d’états* in Constantinople.

²⁶ Capitularium evangeliorum 38 (KLAUSER).

²⁷ BORGEHAMMAR, Heraclius Learns Humility 153.

²⁸ VAN TONGEREN, Exaltation of the Cross 54.

²⁹ DESHUSSES, Le sacramentaire grégorien I 50.

³⁰ BORGEHAMMAR, Heraclius Learns Humility 158.

³¹ Sacramentarium Leonianum 103–104 (ed. C. FELTOE, Sacramentarium Leonianum. Edited, with introduction, notes, and three photographs. Cambridge 1896).

³² ἐν θέλημα ὁμολογοῦμεν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ: Concilium Constantinopolitanum Tertium 537–540 (ed. R. RIEDINGER, Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum Tertium. Pars 2: Concilii actiones XII–XVIII, epistulae, indices [ACO Series Secunda 2, 2]. Berlin 1992, 550). The Latin original of Honorius’ letter is lost, but we possess an old Greek translation of it which was included in the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

³³ A. J. EKONOMOU, Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes: Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590–752. Lanham – Boulder – New York 2007, 95.

³⁴ LANGE, Mia Energeia 606–616.

³⁵ EKONOMOU, Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes 95.

Theodore I (642–649) and Martin I (649–653) were strong opponents of the empire which turned back to Monotheletism under Constans II (641–668), grandson of Heraclius. Constans released the Typos in 648, an imperial edict which forbade any discussion on the matter of the number of wills in Christ, but the Popes still resisted. The famous Lateran Council was convened in Rome in 649 by Pope Martin, proclaiming the doctrine of the two wills and anathematized all the prominent bishops who supported Monotheletism, including Sergius, Pyrrhus and the current Patriarch Paul³⁶. This act was definitely a “Kampfansage”³⁷ to the empire, which reacted accordingly. Pope Martin was arrested by the Exarch of Ravenna, brought to Constantinople, accused of high treason³⁸, defrocked and exiled to Crimea, where he soon died. He is venerated as a saint by both the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Martin I’s successors on the papal throne were quite tolerant of imperial Monotheletism, obviously not willing to enter into an open conflict with the emperor³⁹. Pope Vitalian (657–672) was in full communion with the church of Constantinople and has good relations with the Monothelete emperor Constans II, whom he received with great honor on his visit to Rome (663)⁴⁰. Peace in the Church was only established in 681, when the Sixth Ecumenical Council, summoned by a new emperor, condemned Monotheletism and all its supporters.

It is quite clear from this brief overview that the conciliatory policy towards Monotheletism of most of the seventh-century Popes, except Theodore I and Martin I, could have contributed to the emergence and spread of the feast, devoted as it was to the deed of the emperor who founded the dynasty that reigned during this period and was the main promoter of the religious policy that dominated during this time as well.

Let us now look into the development of the Exaltation (ὑψωσις τοῦ τιμίου Σταυροῦ) feast in the East. It seems to originate from the older feast of the Dedication of the sacred sites on Golgotha – the Martyrium church and the Anastasis (Resurrection) rotunda⁴¹. The Western pilgrim Egeria, visiting Jerusalem in the late 4th century, was the first to describe this Dedication feast in detail: the celebrations began on 13th September and lasted eight days, the particular solemnity and length of the feast being connected to the fact that the True Cross of the Lord was found on this day⁴². According to the fifth- and sixth-century sources reflecting the liturgical practice in Jerusalem, on the second day of the celebrations, i.e. on 14th September, the Cross was solemnly raised / displayed to the whole community which gathered at the Martyrium church⁴³. As time went by, this ritual obviously began

³⁶ Except for Pope Honorius, perhaps because of Pope Martin’s unwillingness to directly condemn one of his own predecessors (Concilium Lateranense 1157 [ed. R. RIEDINGER, *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum (ACO Series Secunda 1)*. Berlin 1984, 380]). However, the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681), borrowing the “anathematical” formulas of the Lateran acts sometimes verbatim, nevertheless included also the name of Honorius among the names of other heretics (Concilium Tertium Constantinopolitanum 620–621 [ed. RIEDINGER, *Concilium Universale Constantinopolitanum Tertium. Pars 2: Concilii actiones XII–XVIII, Epistulae, Indices (ACO Series Secunda 2, 2)*. Berlin 1992, 702, 704]).

³⁷ WINKELMANN, *Der monoenergetisch-monotheletische Streit* 40.

³⁸ The main accusation against Martin at the trial was officially, however, not his opposition to the state Monotheletism, but supporting the insurrection of Olympius, the Exarch of Ravenna. See W. BRANDES, “Juristische” Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Martin I. und Maximus Homologites. *FM* 10 (1998) 168–173; *PmbZ* I 4851.

³⁹ J. MEYENDORFF, *Imperial unity and Christian divisions: the Church 450–680 AD*. New York 1989, 367–369.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem* 367. *PmbZ* I 3691.

⁴¹ Van TONGEREN, *Exaltation of the Cross* 17.

⁴² *Harum ergo ecclesiarum sanctarum encenia cum summo honore celebrantur, quoniam crux Domini inventa est ipsa die*. *Itinerarium Egeriae XLVIII* (ed. P. MARAVALL – M. C. DIAZ, *Égérie. Journal de voyage [Itinéraire]* [SC 296]. Paris 1982, 48).

⁴³ *Lectionarium armeniacum LXVIII* (ed. A. RENOUX, *Le Codex arménien Jérusalem 121 [lectionnaire arménien]*. Edition comparée du texte et de deux autres manuscrits [PO 36.2]. Turnhout 1971, 363); Theodosius, *De situ terrae sanctae* 31 (ed. P. GEYER – O. CUNTZ – A. FRANCHESCHINI, *Itineraria et alia geographica, vol. 1. Itineraria Hierosolymitana. Itineraria Romana [CC Series Latina 175]*. Turnhout 1965, 124).

to displace the Dedication feast itself, so that by the sixth-century the homily of Alexander the Monk, the Exaltation of the Cross (ὑψώσις τοῦ τιμίου Σταυροῦ), is mentioned as a separate feast, accompanied on the day of 14th September by the obviously less significant Dedication feast⁴⁴. In later sources the Dedication feast disappears (either completely, or stays on the 13th September, as a προεόρτιον to the Exaltation⁴⁵), so that 14th September is devoted to the Exaltation feast only.

The reason for both the dedication of the churches on Golgotha and for the solemn display (exaltation) of the Cross was the finding of the True Cross by the Empress Helena in the time of Constantine I. In short, it was actually the finding of the True Cross that the Exaltation feast was about. In contrast to the early Medieval West, where the Exaltation and the Finding of the Cross feasts established themselves as separate feasts, celebrated accordingly on 14th September and 3rd May⁴⁶, in the early Medieval East the Exaltation feast was *ab initio* linked to the historical event of the finding of the True Cross, performed by Helena. What had been two feasts in the West since at least the 6th century, constituted in the East at the same time one single event.

Unfortunately we have to look to the late 9th century for our next available source on the development of the Exaltation feast dates. According to the Typikon of the Great Church (Hagia Sophia of Constantinople), the Exaltation was already one of the great feasts of the Church: it is preceded by four days of the veneration of the Cross, separate from the veneration at vespers, matins and liturgy⁴⁷. During the matins a solemn elevation of the Cross is prescribed, to be repeated three times⁴⁸, and it is depicted in a miniature from the Menologion of Basil II dedicated to the feast (fig. 1). A similar celebration is to be found in the later typika of Constantinopolitan or Jerusalem provenance – the Typikon of the patriarch Alexios I. Studites (preserved in an early Slavonic translation)⁴⁹ and the Jerusalem Typikon, composed in the Holy Lavra of St. Savas⁵⁰.

What made this Byzantine feast special was of course its historical message, conveyed in the readings and sermons of the day. Most influential in this context were the short descriptions of the feast, included in the famous tenth-century hagiographical collections—the Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum and the Menologion of Basil II. Both fragments⁵¹ retell the old legend about the Empress Helena, her search for the True Cross and its glorious finding. According to the legend, Helena found the place where Jesus was crucified with the help of some divine sign. She destroyed the temple of Venus that was built upon the place and began the excavations. Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem,

⁴⁴ Τὴν δὲ σεβάσιμον ἡμέραν τῆς ὑψώσεως τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ, καὶ τῶν ἐγκαινίων ὥρισαντο οἱ Πατέρες μετὰ βασιλικοῦ προστάγματος τελεῖσθαι ἀνὰ ἔτος ἕκαστον τῆ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάτῃ τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου μηνὸς. Alexander Monachus, *Inventio Crucis* 4072 (PG 87/3, 4072).

⁴⁵ P. BERNARDAKIS, *Le culte de la Croix chez les Grecs*. *EO* 5.4 (1902) 199; H. LECLERQ, *Croix (invention de la)*, in: *DACL* III / 2. Paris 1914, 3139. Both the Russian and Greek Orthodox churches nowadays celebrate on 13th September (which falls however on 26th September in the case of the Russian church using the Julian calendar) the Dedication feast and προεόρτιον to the Exaltation feast.

⁴⁶ Regarding the 3rd May feast, *Inventio sanctae crucis*, see above, note 6. Three earlier feasts which are somehow related to the True Cross exist in the (post-)Byzantine liturgical tradition: 1) that dedicated to the Holy Wood of the Cross, Ἡ Πρόοδος τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ (1/08); 2) Σταυροπροσκύνησις, on the third week of Lent; 3) as for the one dedicated to the appearance of the sign of the Cross in the sky over Jerusalem in 351 (7/05)—there was still no “*Inventio Crucis*” feast, whose role was obviously taken by the Exaltation feast.

⁴⁷ *Typicon Magnae Ecclesiae* 24–33 (ed. J. ΜΑΤΕΪΟΣ, *Le Typicon de la Grande Église*, I. Le cycle des douze mois [OCA 165]. Roma 1962).

⁴⁸ *Ibidem* 31.

⁴⁹ *Typicon Alexii Studiti* 282–284 (ed. A. PENTKOVSKIJ, *Typikon patriarcha Alexeja Studita v Vizantii i na Rusi*. Moskva 2001).

⁵⁰ *Typicon sabaiticum* 18–21 (Τυπικὸν τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἀκολουθίας, τῆς Ἱεροσολύμοις Ἀγίας Λαύρας. Ἐδιορθώθει ἐπιμελεία Μάρκου ἱερέως Μαρῶ τοῦ Κρητός. Venice 1685). Cf. M. LÜSTRAETEN, *Die handschriftlichen arabischen Übersetzungen des byzantinischen Typikons (Jerusalem theologisches Forum* 31). Münster 2017, 126–131 with n. 10, 450, 829.

⁵¹ *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum* 43–46 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice sirmondiano*. Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum novembris). Brussels 1902; *Menologium Basilianum*. PG 117, 48B–C.

helped her. Three crosses were found there, and the right one was discovered through a miracle: a sick man was healed after touching the Cross (or a dead man was resurrected by it)⁵². Giving thanks to God, Helena built churches on Golgotha, left one part of the Cross in Jerusalem, and took another one with her to Constantinople, where the relic was handed over to the bishop of the city, “so that the manifestation and exaltation of the True Cross would be celebrated with annual remembrance in the whole world”⁵³.

Most surprising in this legend is the absence of any mention of the restoration of the True Cross, performed by Heraclius in Jerusalem—the restoration that has, by contrast, shaped the Exaltation feast in the West. Given the fact that we cannot reconstruct the content of the church service in the age of Heraclius and his dynasty without any Greek liturgical sources from this period, we can still suggest a hypothesis about how it might have looked, based on the above-mentioned Western material and the historical context.

If the news of the Restoration of the Cross by Heraclius, combined with the pressure exerted by the imperial religious unification policy, were indeed strong enough to result in the introduction of the Exaltation feast in Rome before ca. 645, celebrating Heraclius’ exaltation, and in its development over the course of the seventh century into a commonly acknowledged feast in the West, it is highly likely that it was a particular consequence of the Byzantine feast of ὕψωσις at the time, freshly reinterpreted so as to also glorify the deed of Heraclius, the founder of the ruling dynasty. In other words, the Byzantine Exaltation feast in the age of Heraclius and his Monothelete successors must have been a result of merging the old 14th September feast (which, though bearing the name of Exaltation, was actually linked to the Finding of the Cross) with the most recent interpretative strategy that saw in Heraclius’ recovery and restoration of the Cross a new Finding as well as a new Exaltation. And it must have been this new interpretative strategy that was then so omnipresent in the empire that it managed to result in the introduction of a completely new Heraclius-related feast in its western part.

The narrative which devoted so much attention to the story of the True Cross was extremely popular in seventh-century Byzantium, and was mentioned in several poems by Sophronius of Jerusalem, George of Pisidia and the apocalyptic literature. Moreover, the earliest seventh-century Latin homily, *Reversio sanctae crucis*, which was so influential among the writings dedicated to the feast in the West⁵⁴, is full of influences of eastern origin and was quite rightfully supposed to have had some Greek or Syrian prototype or source⁵⁵. Additionally, elements of the Byzantine imperial ideology were quite successfully promoted through liturgical texts, and the Exaltation feast was no exception: its hymns, beginning with the famous *kontakion*, were quite explicit in mentioning the emperors and their special role⁵⁶. It is hard to imagine that in a context that so encouraged the religionization of politics, absolutely no references would be made to the restoration of the True Cross by Heraclius, both a religious and political triumph, which placed the one who undertook it in topological relation to Constantine, the finder of the Cross, as well as to the One who first carried it to Golgotha.

⁵² On the versions of the legend see J. W. DRIJVERS, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross*. Leiden – New York 1991, 181–183.

⁵³ ὡς ἂν ἐνιαυτοῖς μνημαῖς ἐορτάζηται ἡ ἀνάδειξις καὶ ἀνύψωσις τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ παγκοσμίως. *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum* 45 (DELEHAYE).

⁵⁴ The comparative analysis of this homily and the relevant fragment from the famous *Legenda aurea* shows their great similarity: some episodes, for example the entrance of Heraclius in Jerusalem, were copied or retold by Jacobus de Varagine very near to the original. *Reversio sanctae crucis* 186, 188 (BORGHAMMAR); *Legenda aurea* 137 (1782 HÄUPTLI).

⁵⁵ BORGHAMMAR, *Heraclius Learns Humility* 147–148.

⁵⁶ A. SPANOS, *Political approaches to Byzantine liturgical texts*, in: *Approaches to the Text: From Pre-Gospel to Post-Baroque*, ed. R. Eriksen – P. Young. Pisa – Roma 2014, 70–71.

In conclusion, there must have been some reference to Heraclius' restoration made in the church service during the Exaltation feast, most likely in the readings during matins, but they then disappeared completely from the relevant *synaxaria*, so that the later Byzantine hagiographical collections do not include any reference to the act of Heraclius in the Exaltation feast. This *damnatio memoriae* could only have happened after the significant watershed in the history of reception of the Emperor Heraclius – that is, after the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681), when anathema was proclaimed to “everyone who supported heresy”⁵⁷. In the West, by contrast, the references to Heraclius, which were an integral part of the church service during the Exaltation feast until the Second Vatican Council, seem to have been Monothelete-period heritage, and were not doomed to disappear (as in the East) due to the political independence of the papacy from Byzantium (a process which began in ca. 680 and ended around 775/776⁵⁸) and some independence in liturgical questions even before that.

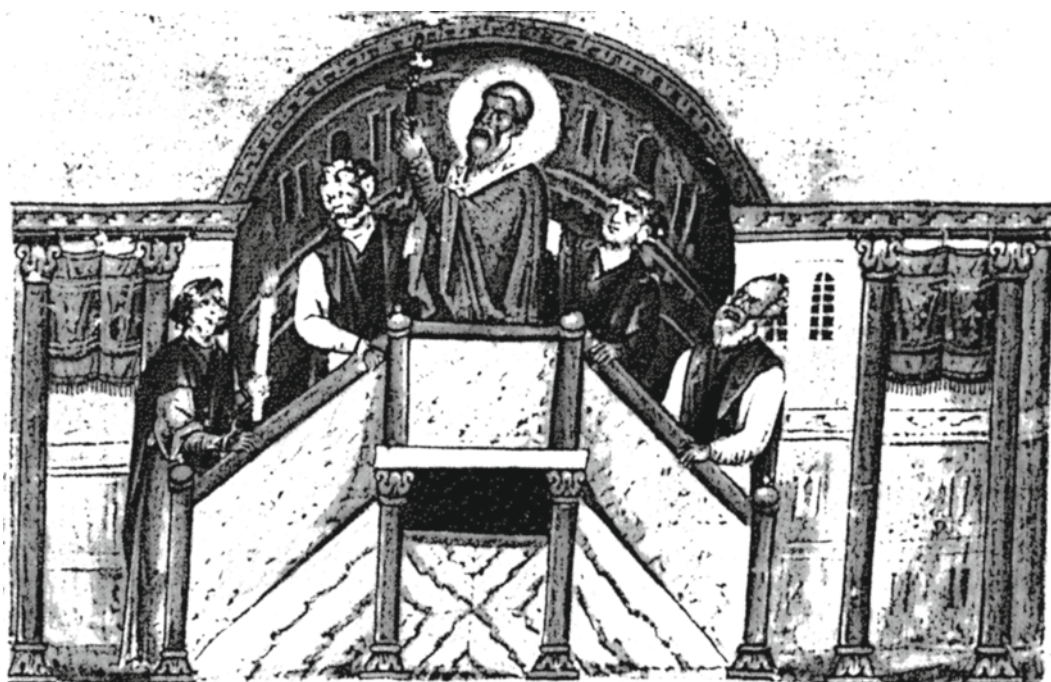


Fig. 1: Exaltation of the True Cross (central figure—St. Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem ca. 312–335). Miniature from the Menologion of Basil II, manuscript Vat. gr. 1613, fol. 35, late 10 – early 11 cent., Vatican library, Rome.

⁵⁷ Concilium Tertium Constantinopolitanum 621 (704 RIEDINGER).

⁵⁸ Just a few years after the peace-establishing Sixth Ecumenical Council, with the accession to the imperial throne of Justinian II (685–695, 705–711), relations began to worsen again, due to the Pope's unwillingness to sign the canons of the Quinisext church council (692). There followed an even more serious conflict between the Papal and imperial thrones, caused by the Iconoclast religious policy of the Emperors Leo III (717–741) and Constantine V (741–775). It ended with the final fall of the Ravenna exarchate in 750/751 (which made it easier for the Papal throne to escape the ambit of imperial control), and with the long-term alliance of the Popes with the Frankish kings. See T. F. X. NOBLE, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680–825*. Philadelphia 1984, 15–138; P. CLASSEN, *Italien zwischen Byzanz und dem Frankenreich*, in: *Nascita dell' Europa ed Europa carolingia: un'equazione da verificare (Settimane di studio del Cento italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 27)*. Spoleto 1981, 919–971; F. HARTMANN, *Hadrian I. (772–795): frühmittelalterliches Adelspapsttum und die Lösung Roms vom byzantinischen Kaiser*. Stuttgart 2006, 157–196; O. BERTOLINI, *Roma di fronte a Bisanzio e ai Longobardi*. Bologna 1941, 337–698.

