

*From Theotokos to Intercessor: The Early Homiletic Witness (c. 400–600)*

Early homilies on Mary, the Theotokos, seem remarkably well developed when they burst into view at about the beginning of the fifth century.<sup>1</sup> Many of these works were composed in honour of a new feast in memory of the Virgin. This was celebrated throughout the eastern territories of the Christian Roman empire either on 15 August (in Jerusalem) in connection with the feast of Christ's Nativity, either on a Sunday before or the day after 25 December, in Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> Judging by the content of the homilies that were written in honour of this feast – some of which will be studied below – it was an occasion on which Mary's role in the incarnation was recognised. She helped to inaugurate a new creation by means of her virginal conception and birth of Christ, the Son and Word of God. Mary is praised in exalted terms in the surviving orations, which were composed and delivered in Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and other cities and parishes in the Eastern Roman empire. However, her role as protector and intercessor of believing Christians would not be celebrated for another century. That element of Marian devotion seems to have developed more slowly than did the Christological emphasis. This is not to say that individual Christians did not yet venerate the Theotokos as a figure of power in her own right.<sup>3</sup> It is possible either that Church leaders viewed this aspect of her cult as unsuitable for festal preaching or that they sought to rein in the burgeoning cult. To put this in another way, early Byzantine bishops and presbyters channelled popular devotion to the Virgin into

<sup>1</sup> A useful assessment of the fifth-century and later Greek homilies that deal with the Virgin Mary can be found in Caro 1971–3. For studies of individual preachers who delivered sermons on the Theotokos, see Leroy 1967; Aubineau 1969; Aubineau 1978; Aubineau 1988; Constan 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, 9 and n. 38; Jugie 1923b; Jugie 1944, 172–212, esp. 175–7; Capelle 1943; Leroy 1967, 66; Constan 2003, 135.

<sup>3</sup> Shoemaker 2015; Shoemaker 2016a; Kateusz 2019. Although I do not agree with all of the claims of both scholars, they offer much food for thought regarding the early cult of the Virgin. See further discussion in Introduction, 6–8.

a doctrinal framework that received further endorsement at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, in 431 and 451, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

Festal homilies from this period onward adopted a form that was closely related to the great theological orations of Gregory Nazianzen in the fourth century.<sup>5</sup> The basic structure of such orations includes an opening section (*exordium* or prologue) in which the preacher alludes to the event that is being honoured on this day. In Proklos of Constantinople's first homily on 'the holy Virgin Theotokos', for example, he begins by inviting his audience to 'the Virgin's festival', which 'has benefits to bestow on those who assemble to keep it'.<sup>6</sup> This is followed by development of the theme of the festival, which in this case is the incarnation of Christ in the womb of the Virgin. Much of the text, as in so many other festal orations, adopts a hymnic style, with short 'Asiatic' phrases,<sup>7</sup> rhythmic patterns and an array of metaphorical and typological imagery to describe the Virgin Mary. The preacher ends with a short section (the *conclusio*) in which he sometimes propounds ethical teachings or, in later Marian homilies, appeals to her intercessory power on behalf of the congregation.

We know more about the delivery and reception of homilies in these early centuries than we do for the middle Byzantine period.<sup>8</sup> Scholars including Ramsay MacMullen, Pauline Allen, Wendy Mayer and Jan Barkhuizen have studied the liturgical contexts for which homilies were intended and what kinds of people attended church in Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Both internal and external evidence can be employed in order to build up a picture of such reception. Preachers such as John Chrysostom (who delivered many exegetical and festal homilies – but none that focused specifically on the Virgin Mary) recorded the reactions of their audiences, which included clapping, cheering, or

<sup>4</sup> Extensive scholarly literature exists on the relationship between the Council of Ephesus and Mary's growing importance in Christian doctrine and devotion. See, for example, McGuckin 1994 (2004); Conostas 1995; Price 2004. In his latest study, however, Richard Price casts doubt on the centrality of Mary, as 'Theotokos', in the Acts of the Council of Ephesus; see Price 2019. Studies that posit political influence, and especially that of the empress Pulcheria, on the proceedings at Ephesus include Holum 1982; Limberis 1994; Cooper 1998; McGuckin 2001b.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory's festal orations cover certain feasts such as Theophany (Christmas) and Pascha, but they also provide a wealth of Trinitarian teaching. See Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations*, ed. Bernardi 1978, Moreschini 1990, trans. Vinson 2003; Daley 2006; Harrison 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily I*, ed. and trans. Conostas 2003, 136–7. For a useful discussion of Proklos of Constantinople's festal orations, see Barkhuizen 2001, 12–13.

<sup>7</sup> On the Asiatic style in Greek rhetoric, see Kennedy 1994, 95–6.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent introduction to early Byzantine homiletics, see Mayer 2008. Further bibliography on early Christian preaching includes Cunningham 1990; Olivar 1991; Allen and Cunningham 1998; Stewart-Sykes 2001; Harrison 2013, 133–68.

<sup>9</sup> MacMullen 1989; Allen 1998; Mayer 1998; Barkhuizen 1998.

expressing boredom or disapproval.<sup>10</sup> Proklos of Constantinople also referred to people in the congregation, identifying different groups, genders or ages.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not always clear whether such references are rhetorical or real: remarks *ad hominem*, especially in polemical contexts, were common in early Christian homiletics.<sup>12</sup>

As for the location in which homilies were delivered, we again have some information for particular preachers or orations. We know, for example, that Hesychios of Jerusalem delivered homilies both at the church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem and at the site of the Kathisma, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in the early fifth century.<sup>13</sup> Proklos' first homily, *On the Holy Virgin Theotokos*, was delivered in the Great Church of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia, on the feast of the Memory of the Virgin, 430.<sup>14</sup> The current patriarch Nestorios, who disagreed with Proklos' use of the epithet 'Theotokos', is known to have been present; thus this highly ornate panegyric sermon must have been received with enthusiasm by some members of the congregation, but disapproval by others – along with their bishop. Some of the homilies of the sixth-century bishop of Antioch, Severos, are also documented as to time and place of delivery, which helps us to assess their possible impact on congregations that might have been urban or rural, large or small, and so on.<sup>15</sup> Many of the surviving homilies of this period remain mysterious, however, not only with regard to their place and time of delivery, but even to their authorship and date. We can only hypothesise about the place of such works, which include (ps-)Basil of Seleucia's *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, in the history of Marian doctrine and devotion.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter examines a selection of Marian homilies that date between the early fifth and the sixth centuries. It would be impossible to cover every example that survives, many of which still lack critical editions and secure attributions; however, those that I have chosen all demonstrate growing interest in the Virgin during this period. As in the case of hymnography, there is a slow shift from purely doctrinal to more devotional content between about the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century. The difficulties of dating some homilies makes it impossible to chart this process exactly; however, a trend is broadly visible. Aside from this, it is

<sup>10</sup> MacMullen 1989; Mayer 1998; Harrison 2013, 144–6.

<sup>11</sup> Barkhuizen 1998; Barkhuizen 2001, 35–41. <sup>12</sup> Uthemann 1998; Harrison 2013, 159–60.

<sup>13</sup> See below, n. 19. <sup>14</sup> Constatas 2003, 135; Barkhuizen 2001, 4, n. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Allen 1996; Allen 1998, 218–20; Allen and Hayward 2004, 49–52, 107–8; for the Marian homilies, see especially Allen 2011, 72–3.

<sup>16</sup> For extensive discussion of this homily, see Peltomaa 2001, 77–85.

fruitful to examine the ways in which these preachers praise the Theotokos, teach the paradoxical doctrine of the incarnation in which she played such a vital role and call on their audiences to participate in the liturgical celebrations. This was an experience that involved both the intellect and the emotions, as scholars including Carol Harrison, Derek Krueger, Andrew Mellas and Robert Taft have shown.<sup>17</sup> Preachers were aware of their rhetorical power and used it to full effect, attempting to place the Virgin Mary, along with Christ, at the centre of the Christian narrative.

### Mary as Theotokos: Early Fifth-Century Homilies

According to the ninth-century chronicler Theophanes, a monk and presbyter called Hesychios was active as a preacher in Jerusalem at least a decade before Nestorios became bishop of Constantinople in 428.<sup>18</sup> Four homilies that focus especially on the Virgin Mary survive, including two on the feast of the *Hypapante* ('Meeting' or Presentation of Christ in the temple), celebrated in Jerusalem during this period on 14 February (forty days after the Nativity celebration on 6 January), and two which were probably intended for the main feast-day on which Mary was commemorated in this region during the fifth century, namely, 15 August. The association of that date with the Virgin's 'dormition' (or 'falling asleep' – a euphemism for death) would only come a century or two later. The feast at this time, which was celebrated with a synaxis at the site of the Kathisma, a rock three miles from Bethlehem where Mary was believed to have rested on her way to register for the census and give birth in that city, was concerned with her virginity and divine motherhood. According to Michel Aubineau, the two homilies on the *Hypapante* were preached in the church of the martyrrium in Jerusalem during the early years of Hesychios' presbyterate. All but one of the homilies may therefore predate the Council of Ephesus; the latter (*Homily V*) has a more 'triumphal' quality, which may indicate the deposition and condemnation of Nestorios in 431.<sup>19</sup>

Hesychios of Jerusalem explored the role of the Virgin Mary in relation to her divine Son, Christ, especially in the two homilies that were dedicated to her feast. He described her most often as 'Virgin' (*parthenos*), but he also

<sup>17</sup> Taft 2006, 79–87; Harrison 2013, 133–68; Krueger 2014; Mellas 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronicle*, ed. De Boor 1963, 83, trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 129; Aubineau 1978, xv.

<sup>19</sup> Aubineau 1978, LXII–LXVI.

used the more technical term ‘God-bearer’ (Theotokos) seven times – especially in *Homily V* which may have been pronounced after the conclusion of the Council of Ephesus.<sup>20</sup> Hesychios employed a rhythmic ‘Asiatic’ rhetorical style, displaying a fondness for devices such as *anaphora*, *antithesis*, *exclamatio* and others. Hesychios also described Mary by means of poetic metaphor and biblical typology, most of which expressed her virginal fecundity – as we see in the epithets ‘unseeded, fertile, and uncultivated garden’, ‘lamp without an orifice’, ‘ark of life’ and others.<sup>21</sup> Aubineau has noted possible influence from Cyril of Alexandria and Proklos of Constantinople – especially after the crucial period of the early 430s – in *Homily V*, on the Theotokos.<sup>22</sup> Hesychios expressed a Christology that was close to the Alexandrian, as opposed to the Antiochene, tradition, celebrating the conception and birth of the Logos who condescended to take flesh from a pure virgin while remaining consubstantial and co-eternal with God the Father. Like Proklos and Cyril, he linked Mary’s virginity with Christ’s divinity, declaring, for example, ‘If you had known a man, you would not have given birth to God.’<sup>23</sup>

It is likely that congregations in Jerusalem were able to appreciate at least the rhythmic and poetic flow of Hesychios’ preaching – even if they did not understand every word of his elevated koine Greek. Variations between discursive, dialogic and exclamatory passages would also have helped to retain their attention. It is noticeable that Hesychios frequently focused on the importance of the Virgin Mary for female Christians in his homilies. She was ‘a Virgin who surpassed all women’ but who also ‘enveloped the sisters of her race in joyful light’.<sup>24</sup> We seek in vain, however, for references to the Virgin’s intercessory power in these homilies; nor is her maternal stance with regard to her divine son emphasised in any way that is not Christological. Hesychios of Jerusalem’s Marian homilies thus reflect the theological importance of this subject – at least in festal preaching – at the beginning of the fifth century. Such restraint is also visible in the even more

<sup>20</sup> Aubineau 1978, XLIV.

<sup>21</sup> See especially Hesychios of Jerusalem, *Homily V, On the Theotokos Mary* 1, ed. and trans. Aubineau 1978, 158–61.

<sup>22</sup> Aubineau 1978, 145–7.

<sup>23</sup> Hesychios of Jerusalem, *Homily V, On the Theotokos Mary* 5.12–13, ed. and trans. Aubineau 1978, 166–7.

<sup>24</sup> Hesychios of Jerusalem, *Homily VI, On the Theotokos Mary* 1.5–6, 19, ed. Aubineau 1978, 194–5: παρθένου . . . ἥτις τοσοῦτον ὑπέβηκε πάσης . . . ; καὶ τῆς χαρᾶς τὰς ὁμοφύλους περιστραφεῖ φῶτα . . .

acclaimed homilies of his contemporaries, Proklos of Constantinople and Cyril of Alexandria, to whom I turn next.

Nicholas (Fr Maximos) Constas has traced the controversial circumstances in which Proklos of Constantinople preached his celebrated first homily, which was widely disseminated later and acquired almost canonical status.<sup>25</sup> This oration was probably delivered in the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople on the day after Christmas in 430. Preaching in the presence of his main theological opponent, the archbishop Nestorios, Proklos, who was then titular bishop of Kyzikos, presented an extravaganza of poetic metaphors and biblical types in order to demonstrate Mary's role as virginal 'birth-giver' of Christ. The point of such rhetoric is to illustrate the way in which divinity came to reside physically in the created world, as we see in the following passage:

She who called us here today is the Holy Mary; the untarnished vessel of virginity; the spiritual paradise of the second Adam (cf. Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:21–2, 45–9); the workshop for the union of natures; the market-place of the contract of salvation; the bridal chamber in which the Word took the flesh in marriage; the living bush of human nature, which the fire of a divine birth-pang did not consume (Ex 3:2); the veritable swift cloud (Is 19:1) who carried in her body the one who rides upon the cherubim; the purest fleece drenched with the rain which came down from heaven (Judg 6:37–8), whereby the shepherd clothed himself with the sheep (cf. Jn 10:11); handmaid and mother (cf. Lk 1:38, 43), virgin and heaven, the only bridge for God to mankind; the awesome loom of the divine economy upon which the robe (Jn 19:23) of union was ineffably woven. The loom-worker was the Holy Spirit; the wool-worker the overshadowing power from on high (Lk 1:35). The wool was the ancient fleece of Adam; the interlocking thread the spotless flesh of the Virgin. The weaver's shuttle was propelled by the immeasurable grace of him who wore the robe; the artisan was the Word who entered in through her sense of hearing.<sup>26</sup>

This rich array of imagery, which is inspired by both biblical and nonbiblical sources, builds on a tradition of Marian praise that had already been established by Hesychios of Jerusalem, Attikos of Constantinople and others. However, Proklos went further in his poetic exploration of the paradoxical mystery, always emphasising Mary's central role in the joining of the divine and human natures in Christ. Four other homilies, which were probably all intended either for the single Marian feast that was celebrated in Constantinople in this period (26 December) or for

<sup>25</sup> Constas 2003, 56–71, 128.

<sup>26</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily 1.1*, ed. and trans. Constas 2003, 137. 15–31.

Christmas itself,<sup>27</sup> and which were delivered in the course of four or five years before and after the Council of Ephesus in 431, display similar didactic and rhetorical methods.

It is likely that controversy surrounding the Virgin Mary's growing importance in the lives of Constantinopolitan Christians began well before the Council of Ephesus – and perhaps even before Nestorios was appointed to this archiepiscopal see in 428. Constanas suggests that debate may have arisen around the establishment of the new feast, probably celebrated on 26 December, which focused especially on Mary's role as virginal mother of Christ.<sup>28</sup> The rise of a female figure within a celestial hierarchy that was by this time visualised in masculine terms may have shocked some bishops within the Eastern Church.<sup>29</sup> Proklos defended the Virgin's holy status especially in his fifth homily, which may have been delivered several years before the Council of Ephesus, perhaps during the episcopate of Attikos of Constantinople (406–25).<sup>30</sup> The oration opens by describing the splendour of the stars, saints, relics and other created entities, which reflect the glory of God that permeates the universe. Proklos goes on to declare that

... there is nothing as exalted as Mary the Theotokos, for the [same] one whom all [the prophets] beheld enigmatically in their visions, she carried incarnate in her womb.<sup>31</sup>

The preacher then celebrates the paradoxical nature of the incarnation, contrasting the swelling and changing of Mary's belly with the unchanging nature of God the Word, the pollution that is normally associated with childbirth with the incorruptibility of both Christ and the Virgin, and so on.<sup>32</sup> Such emphasis recalls a standard Christian response to perceived Jewish criticism of the incarnation on the grounds of impurity, an example of which may be found in Proklos' second homily, 'On the Incarnation and on the Lampstand of Zechariah':

<sup>27</sup> Constanas 2003, 135, 160, 193–5, 214, 247–8.

<sup>28</sup> Proklos' first homily on the Theotokos may in fact represent the earliest witness to the existence of this feast in Constantinople. See Constanas 2003, 57. For shifting scholarly views on the exact date when it was celebrated, but wide current consensus that it fell on the day after Christmas (26 December), see Introduction above, n. 38. In fifth-century Palestine, the commemoration of Mary occurred on 15 August. The feast was celebrated at Mary's place of rest ('kathisma') between Jerusalem and Bethlehem; it was not originally associated with the dormition or death of the Virgin. See Shoemaker 2002, 79–98; Avner 1999; Avner 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily I.1*, ed. and trans. Constanas 2003, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Constanas 2003, 248.

<sup>31</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily V.2*, ed. and trans. Constanas 2003, 259, 47–9.

<sup>32</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily V.2*, ed. and trans. Constanas 2003, 259–61.

Let then the children of the Jews be ashamed, those who disparage the virgin birth saying: 'If a virgin gave birth she is no longer a virgin.' You miserable wretch! Adam was brought into the world and labour did not disgrace his birth, but when God was born according to the flesh his birth was subject to corruption:<sup>33</sup>

By distancing both the birth of Christ, along with his 'birth-giver', from the normal process of conception and childbirth,<sup>34</sup> the preacher describes a unique mystery while also exalting its instrument or receptacle, that is, the Virgin Mary. She is thus revealed as a figure who is greater and holier than all other created beings, including patriarchs, prophets, and saints, because she, a female human being, contained the God who is uncontainable.

It is interesting to note, not only in the five homilies that are attributed to Proklos, but also as we saw earlier in those of Hesychios, a consistent emphasis on women and virgins as recipients of Mary's redemptive power. Proklos writes, for example, in his fourth homily, as follows:

Let women come running, for a woman has brought forth, not the flower of death, but has given birth to the fruit of life. Let virgins also come running, for a virgin has given birth, not by disgracing her virginity, but by sealing her incorruptibility. For the child came forth without ruffling the bed-chambers of the womb; leaving behind, as he grew in grace, the workshop of nature just as he found it. Let mothers come running, for through the Tree of Life a virgin mother has set aright the tree of disobedience. Let daughters also come running, for the obedience of a daughter has avenged the offence of maternal disobedience.<sup>35</sup>

Passages such as this could be interpreted as having little to do with preachers' awareness or interaction with contemporary women, since they usually develop the long-standing theological juxtaposition of Eve and Mary, as female initiator and healer, respectively, of the original Fall from grace. Such invocation of all women in fact became a *topos* in later

<sup>33</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily II.4*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 169. 78–82. Cf. *Homily II.9*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 171–3; *Homily IV.3*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 233.

<sup>34</sup> Rather oddly, however, Proklos frequently refers to Mary's 'birth-pangs' (ἡ ὥδιον) in his homilies. See *Homily I.3*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 138.40; 152 (note); *Homily II.4*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 166. 40–1; *Homily IV.1*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 226.12. Most Patristic and Byzantine theologians denied Mary the normal process or pangs of birth; see, for example, John of Damascus, *On Orthodox Faith* IV.14, ed. Kotter 1973, vol. 2, 201.75–84; trans. Chase 1958, 364–5. Early exceptions to this rule (probably in order to counter Gnostic or docetic ideas about Christ's birth) include the Latin writers, Tertullian and (possibly) Hilary of Poitiers. See Graef 1963 (2009), 33–4, 43. For thoughtful reflection on Patristic nuance with regard to this subject, see Frost 2019, 38–42.

<sup>35</sup> Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily IV.2*, ed. and trans. Constan 2003, 229. 31–8.



Byzantine homilies and hymns – to the extent that any reference to real women in congregations is difficult to discern. Nevertheless, early fifth-century preachers such as Hesychios and Proklos consistently mentioned women, especially mothers and virgins, in their sermons, suggesting that, thanks to Mary, they were blessed and fulfilled as Christian believers.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that ordinary women, along with powerful ones such as the empress Pulcheria, were perceived as playing an important (albeit non-clerical) role in the Church in this period; the association of such prestige with growing devotion to the Virgin remains to be fully explored.

It is noteworthy too that Proklos, like Hesychios, did not invoke the Theotokos as intercessor anywhere in his surviving sermons. Although he praised her in exalted language, employing a wealth of typological and metaphorical imagery, as we have seen, this was always linked to the role of the Theotokos in the Christological mystery. The emphasis in these orations, whether poetic or discursive, remained on Mary's association with creation, holy spaces or passages to the divine world, and human nature; she was rarely described as 'queen' or mistress of heaven. Proklos, like other bishops who preached in defence of the Virgin's role as Theotokos before, during or just after the Council of Ephesus, wished to defend the Alexandrian understanding of the incarnation, according to which the Logos and Son of God assumed human flesh while remaining fully divine.

One other important theologian and preacher of this period, Cyril of Alexandria, should be mentioned in association with the growth of Marian praise around the time of the Council of Ephesus. Cyril, who joined Proklos in opposing the teachings of Nestorios and who played a key role in the latter's deposition, delivered a sermon at the church of St Mary at Ephesus during the same summer that the Council took place.<sup>37</sup> This work was another landmark in the history of rhetorical praise of the Virgin Mary, as we see in the following famous extract of the homily:

We hail you, O Mary Mother of God (Θεοτόκε), venerable treasure of the entire world, inextinguishable lamp, crown of virginity, scepter of orthodoxy, imperishable temple, container of him who cannot be contained, Mother (μήτηρ) and Virgin, through whom it is said in the holy Gospels: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Mt 21: 9).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Constan 2003, 247.

<sup>37</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily IV, On the Virgin Mary* (CPG 5248). Quasten calls this 'the most famous Marian sermon of antiquity' in Quasten 1994, vol. 3, 131. See also seven others, all delivered in Ephesus in the summer of the Council (431), according to Quasten. Further bibliography includes Caro 1972, vol. 2, 269–83; Santer 1975; Peltomaa 2001, 68–71.

<sup>38</sup> ACO I. I. 2, 102; trans. Gambero 1999, 247–8.

Cyril, like Proklos, sought to convey a precise theological message, namely, that God, the Word, had taken flesh in Mary's womb while remaining eternally of one substance with the Father. The implications of this teaching for the Virgin, who 'contained the uncontainable' from the moment of his conception, were immense, both for her and for the rest of humanity. In an earlier (second) letter to Nestorios, dated to February 430, Cyril had elaborated this position more fully:

Scripture, after all, has not asserted that the Word united a man's role (ἀνθρώπου πρόσωπον) to himself but that he has become flesh. But the Word's 'becoming flesh' is just the fact that he shared flesh and blood like us, made our body his own and issued as man from woman without abandoning his being God and his being begotten of God the Father but remaining what he was when he assumed flesh as well . . . This is the key to the holy fathers' thinking. This is why they dare to call the holy Virgin 'Theotokos' – not because the Word's nature, his Godhead, originated from the holy Virgin but because his holy body, endowed with life and reason, was born from her and the Word was 'born' in flesh because [he was] united to this body substantially (καθ' ὑπόστασιν).<sup>39</sup>

Several other fifth-century bishops or presbyters appear to have delivered homilies in praise of the Theotokos. These include Theodotos of Ankyra<sup>40</sup> and Chrysippos of Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> Some variation in the theological and poetic treatment of the Theotokos is visible in this period,<sup>42</sup> but her place, as the link between God and his creation, is mostly expressed throughout these liturgical texts by means of a rich array of typological and metaphorical images. The most significant shared feature of these homilies, which serves to distinguish them from works composed about a century later, is their lack of focus either on Mary's human qualities – as revealed, for example, in her maternal care for the infant Christ – or on her intercessory power.<sup>43</sup> From Jerusalem to Constantinople, as the surviving

<sup>39</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Second Letter to Nestorios* 7, ed. ACO I.I.1, 28.12–22, trans. Wickham 1983, 9–11, repr. Russell 2000, 37 (with one adjustment).

<sup>40</sup> CPG 6128, BHG 1966, PG 77, 1389–1412. See also Aubineau 1969, 7–8; CPG 6136, BHG 1143g, ed. Jugie 1925 (1990), 318–35; Aubineau 1969, 8.

<sup>41</sup> CPG 6705, BHG 1144n, ed. Jugie 1925 (1990), 336–43.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Chrysippos states in his homily on the Theotokos that she will rise on the final day of judgement with everyone else from the fallen state that she shares with the rest of humanity. See Jugie 1925, 338. 28–9.

<sup>43</sup> Exceptions to this rule, especially with regard to the former category, can of course be found in the fifth-century corpus. Chrysippos, for example, writes about Mary's motherhood of Jesus in the following passage – which has as its primary emphasis the antithetical contrast between Christ's vulnerability as a baby and his power as God: ' . . . she became a mother without losing her virginity; she produced milk, without having experienced marriage; she nursed the infant, and there was no

homilies of Hesychios and Proklos testify, fifth-century preachers emphasised the Christological importance of the Theotokos. Such preoccupation with doctrine, as opposed to Marian devotion, does not necessarily indicate the absence of such feeling among fifth-century Christians; it is possible that church leaders avoided open veneration of the Virgin in their sermons so as to promote a theological message that had gained prominence during the controversies that led up to the Council of Ephesus. These preachers thus succeeded in channelling Marian devotion towards a more intellectual – or mystical – understanding of the Virgin's central role in the incarnation of Christ.

### A Transitional Phase: Focus on Mary as 'Mediator' in Late Fifth- and Early Sixth-Century Greek Homiletics

One of the greatest problems in assessing the homiletic and hymnographic traditions of late antiquity and Byzantium lies in our inability to date or place many texts – sometimes even within several centuries. Pauline Allen, Theodora Antonopoulou and other scholars have repeatedly alerted us to this problem;<sup>44</sup> it is unlikely ever to be fully resolved, owing to the wealth of material (both published and unpublished) and lack of scholarly personnel and resources that would be necessary to tackle it. For the period between about the middle of the fifth and the end of the sixth century, there exist a number of pseudonymous or wrongly attributed homilies.<sup>45</sup> Roberto Caro has gone some way towards untangling this complicated tradition, but the attribution and dating of many works remain controversial.<sup>46</sup> In the discussion that follows, I intend to apply certain criteria which have been noted so far in this chapter, including the portrayal of Mary as a remote theological or more personal – indeed

father for the infant on earth.' See Chrysippos of Jerusalem, *Homily on the Holy Theotokos Mary* 3, ed. Jugie 1925 (1990), 341. 4–7.

<sup>44</sup> Allen 1998, 202; Allen 2011, 70–1; Antonopoulou 2013, 186.

<sup>45</sup> Cunningham 1996; Allen 1998; Allen 2011; *CPG*, vol. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Caro 1971–3; but see also Marx 1940; Allen 1998. Other sixth-century (or possibly late fifth-century) preachers who focused on the Theotokos in their sermons include Anastasios of Antioch (d. 599; *CPG* 6948–9 [on the Annunciation], 6950 [on the Hypapante]); various pseudonymous authors including (ps-)Gregory Thaumaturgos (*CPG* 1775–6 [on the Annunciation]); (ps-)John Chrysostom (*CPG* 4519 [on the Annunciation]); (ps-)Athanasios (*CPG* 2268 [on the Annunciation]); (ps-)Gregory of Nyssa (*CPG* 3214) [on the Annunciation]; and Theoteknos of Livias, who may have flourished in Palestine sometime between 550 and 650 (see Wenger 1955, 96–110; *CPG* 7418). I am unable, for reasons of space, to deal with all of these writers in detail in the present study; Theoteknos' homily on the Dormition will be treated in Chapter 6 along with other early and middle Byzantine orations on this subject.

maternal – figure, in order to argue a late fifth- or sixth-century date for two controversial but important works, namely, (ps-)Basil of Seleucia's *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*<sup>47</sup> and (ps-)Proklos of Constantinople's *Homily VI, On the Theotokos*.<sup>48</sup> Scholarly debate concerning the dating and attribution of problematic homilies has previously focused largely on their Christological content; this ignores the larger question of literary and theological emphasis on the Virgin Mary as a figure of importance in her own right. I believe that Mariological developments did occur between approximately the end of the fifth century and the middle of the sixth and that these may help to situate disputed works. Other considerations, such as the literary form – and especially the use of dramatic dialogue in connection with, for example, the Annunciation scene – may also play a part in this process. Although such dating remains hypothetical (and risks circular argumentation), I suggest that it helps us to sketch the broader picture of a developing Marian cult in the course of the early Byzantine centuries.

(Ps-)Basil of Seleucia's *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation* has attracted considerable notice in recent years, partly because its acclamations of the Theotokos resemble some of those that appear in the *Akathistos Hymn*.<sup>49</sup> Arguments concerning the authenticity of this oration have focused mainly on the possible circumstances of its delivery, Christological content and rhetorical style.<sup>50</sup> Whereas B. Marx argued against Basil's authorship of the homily, mainly because its theological content and style are uncharacteristic of this bishop's Antiochene background and homiletic oeuvre, suggesting that it might instead have been composed by Proklos, Caro defended its authenticity. The association of the homily with the feast of the Annunciation, which was not added to the liturgical calendar until 560,<sup>51</sup> has long been ruled out;<sup>52</sup> a number of early homilies were composed on this theme, owing to its

<sup>47</sup> CPG 6656. 39, BHG III2p, PG 85, 425–52.

<sup>48</sup> CPG 5805, BHGa III0, BHGn III26e, ed. Leroy 1967, 298–324.

<sup>49</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation* (CPG 6656. 39). L.-M. Peltomaa (2001, 77–85) provides an excellent analysis of the homily; cf. Caro 1972, vol. 2, 285–308. For the *Akathistos Hymn*, see Chapter 1, 53–8. Whereas most scholars believe that the (ps-)Basil homily influenced the *Akathistos Hymn*, Peltomaa argues the reverse.

<sup>50</sup> B. Marx (1940, 84–9) argued that the homily was composed by Proklos of Constantinople. This view is followed by J. Quaston, G. Godet, A. Kreuz, R. Laurentin and F. Diekamp; see Peltomaa 2001, 78, n. 145. Caro, however, challenges this attribution, reaffirming Basil of Seleucia as the author of the homily; see Caro 1972, vol. 2, 288–305.

<sup>51</sup> van Esbroeck 1968–9; Allen 2011, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Lenain de Tillemont argued against the early date (and authenticity) of this homily on these grounds, but later scholars, including especially Marx, have since pointed out that preachers and hymnographers celebrated the Annunciation as a theme long before the feast had been added to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar. Such celebrations usually took place in association with the

importance in the biblical account of Christ's incarnation.<sup>53</sup> However, there are features which suggest that it belongs not to the middle of the fifth century, as has previously been argued, but rather to the later part of this century or even to the early sixth. Before discussing this possibility, however, it is worth briefly describing the work and highlighting its importance as a link between the primarily Christological material that was associated with the Council of Ephesus or its immediate aftermath and the more devotional – although still highly theological – homilies that appeared slightly later.

The homily begins with protestations of humility, which are in line with the rhetorical conventions of the genre and thus reveal little about the orator.<sup>54</sup> After an excursus in which discovery of Mary's role in the incarnation is compared with Moses' journey out of Egypt and up Mt Sinai, as the purified Christian believer begins to take in the mystery of this exalted subject, the oration proceeds to unfold its Christological message. Scholars have noted a careful use of theological language in the work, which avoids both the extreme Apollinarian and Nestorian positions.<sup>55</sup> The term 'Theotokos' is used nine times in the homily, although Mary is also called 'all-holy Virgin' and 'holy Mother of the Lord'. On the basis of its discursive theological passages and choice of epithets for the Virgin, we may conclude that the homily on the Annunciation displays a primarily Alexandrian Christological position. Some anomalies, such as the statements that the Logos 'puts on flesh' (περιβάλλεται σάρκα) and that 'he truly bore an ensouled body' (σάρκα . . . ἀληθῶς ἐψυχωμένην ἐφόρεσε),<sup>56</sup> evoke a more Antiochene understanding of theology; overall, however, this work expresses a high Christological position, with regard to both the Son of God and his mother.<sup>57</sup>

feast of the Nativity of Christ. See Lenain de Tillemont 1637–98, vol. 15, 344–7; Marx 1940, 85; Caro 1972, vol. 2, 288.

<sup>53</sup> See Caro 1971, vol. 1, 241–55 (Antipater of Bostra); Caro 1972, vol. 2, 285–308 ([ps-]Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX*); 309–44 ([ps-]Proklos of Constantinople, *Homily VI*); 468–577 (numerous other writers).

<sup>54</sup> This has not prevented some scholars from drawing conclusions about the homily's authorship on this basis; whereas Marx, who wishes to assign the work to Proklos of Constantinople, argues that the author's modesty reflects his unfamiliarity with the congregation at Ephesus, in or just before 431 CE, L. M. Peltomaa responds that such a humble attitude does not fit with Proklos' well-known reputation as a panegyrist of the Virgin Mary; see Marx 1940, 86; Peltomaa 2001, 82.

<sup>55</sup> Caro 1972, vol. 2, 292–3, 298–308; Peltomaa 2001, 78.

<sup>56</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, PG 85, 432C, 433B, 445C (τὴν ὁμοούσιον ἐμοὶ σάρκα περιβαλλόμενος); 437C–D (σάρκα . . . ἀληθῶς ἐψυχωμένην ἐφόρεσε). Cf. Peltomaa 2001, 79.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, the following passage: 'For the One born was not merely human but God the Logos, made incarnate of a virgin and assuming flesh of the same essence as me, so that he might save like by means of like', PG 85, 445C; quoted and translated by Peltomaa 2001, 81.

Although most scholars have dated the homily to the mid fifth century, sometime between the first and second Councils of Ephesus (431 and 449) on the basis of its highly Christological content, it contains a few elements which cause me, as noted above, to suspect a slightly later date. To deal with the Christological question first, it seems likely on the basis of homilies that can securely be dated to the sixth century (such as those of Severos of Antioch) that such preoccupations did not cease after the conciliar debates of the first half of the fifth – in fact preachers continued to emphasise this aspect of Marian devotion throughout the sixth and subsequent centuries, as we shall see in the course of this book. Controversy concerning the Chalcedonian definition may indeed have caused preachers including Severos to employ Mary as a means of proving their theological position: whereas her virginity proved the divinity of Christ, her humanity demonstrated the reality of his incarnation. Thus the highly Christological content of (ps-)Basil's homily does not, to my mind, necessarily indicate an Ephesine context for its delivery; that it fails to employ specifically Chalcedonian vocabulary may reflect a conciliatory position that is also visible in the *Akathistos Hymn* – assuming, as I do, that this important work was also composed in the late fifth or early sixth century.<sup>58</sup>

More telling, in my view, are various features in the (ps-)Basil homily that do not correlate with the works of Hesychios, Proklos and other early fifth-century Marian preachers. First, and most importantly, it is worth noting this homilist's focus on Mary as his primary subject of praise or, as he puts it, as 'the great mystery of the Theotokos that is above understanding and language'.<sup>59</sup> Although this author's predecessors praised the Virgin in exalted language, they were always careful to place her within a Christological context.<sup>60</sup> (Ps-)Basil incorporates such didactic considerations, as we have seen, but he also – unlike his homiletic forerunners – includes some elements that appear to be new. For example, as noted already by Peltomaa and others, this preacher describes the Virgin as one who 'mediates between God and humans' (μεσιτεύουσα Θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις).<sup>61</sup> He further reveals his belief in Mary's exalted position in relation to Christ when he instructs his congregation later in the homily to

<sup>58</sup> N. Constatas also adopts this argument in his criticism of Peltomaa's early dating of the *Akathistos Hymn*, suggesting that 'the language of Chalcedon was deliberately avoided in the interest of church unity' during the period following its promulgation; see Constatas 2005, 358.

<sup>59</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, PG 85, 429B. <sup>60</sup> See above, 70–7.

<sup>61</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, PG 85, 444B; Caro 1972, vol. 2, 307; Peltomaa 2001, 80–1.

pray to the 'all-holy Virgin' that she may lead them towards a merciful reception at the Throne of Judgement.<sup>62</sup> Such a vision of Mary's intercessory role at the Last Judgement does not appear anywhere in the earlier fifth-century liturgical works that I have surveyed; it also seems likely that it reflects the various apocryphal traditions on her dormition that were circulating in the Greek-speaking world by about the end of the fifth or early sixth century.<sup>63</sup>

One other aspect of this homily deserves comment, namely, its focus on Mary as a human mother in a passage that follows a brief dialogic treatment of the Annunciation. The preacher visualises the Virgin holding the infant Christ in her arms, inventing a monologue in which she addresses him with some bemusement, as follows:

'What then shall I do for you? Shall I nurse you or shall I theologise? Shall I care for you as a mother or shall I worship you as a servant? Shall I embrace you as a son or shall I pray to you as God? Shall I give milk or offer incense . . . ?'<sup>64</sup>

Such dramatic treatment of this subject, which foreshadows that which Romanos the Melodist would employ in relation to various biblical scenes and characters, gives the audience a glimpse into Mary's thoughts and emotions on giving birth to a divine son. However, it also plays an important didactic role, using antithetical statements in order to demonstrate Christ's divine and human natures. Above all, however, such vivid portrayal of the scene, with the help of the rhetorical device of *ethopoia*, changes the Theotokos from the 'flat', or primarily theological, treatment of earlier fifth-century liturgical texts to a fully human character with whom congregations – and perhaps particularly women – could identify.<sup>65</sup>

Taken together, these theological and literary preoccupations seem to indicate a late fifth- or early sixth-century date for this pseudonymous homily. Although I am inclined, for the reasons stated above, to place the work somewhat later than has so far been suggested,<sup>66</sup> it is also possible to establish a *terminus ante quem*. On the grounds that the preacher cites only the 'Memory of Mary' as the occasion for his oration, with the

<sup>62</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, PG 85, 452B; Caro 1972, vol. 2, 307–8.

<sup>63</sup> Shoemaker 2002, 26–7.

<sup>64</sup> (ps-)Basil of Seleucia, *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*, PG 85, 448B (my translation).

<sup>65</sup> Here I differ from Peltomaa, who uses the adjective 'flat' to describe the portrayal of the Virgin Mary in this homily, as in other authentic works of the period of Ephesus; see Peltomaa 2001, 82.

<sup>66</sup> Caro 1972, vol. 2, esp. 300–5; Peltomaa 2001, 82 (who concludes first that the homily was influenced by the *Akathistos Hymn*, rather than vice versa, and second, that it was delivered after the Council of Ephesus).

Annunciation being a thematic rather than a festal preoccupation, it is likely that he delivered it before the latter feast was added to the Constantinopolitan liturgical calendar in 560.<sup>67</sup> It remains impossible to determine exactly where and when the homily was first composed and delivered, but it thus contains elements both of more ancient Marian panegyrics (in its lack of festal or 'biographical' content) and of post-fifth-century preoccupations, such as emphasis on the Virgin's intercessory power and human response to the archangel Gabriel's message.

Another oration, which has attracted considerable scholarly attention with respect to its attribution and date, is (ps-)Proklos' *Homily VI* entitled 'An *Enkomion* on the Theotokos'.<sup>68</sup> This is a long and complex work, which includes sections of panegyric prose that frame two alphabetical acrostic dialogues: the first is between Joseph and Mary, while the second embroiders Luke's dramatic account of the encounter between Mary and the archangel Gabriel. Scholars including La Piana, Marx, Leroy (who produced a critical edition of the text), Aubineau and Caro have debated not only the authenticity of this homily, but also whether it is actually a composite work consisting of an early fifth-century core to which the dialogic sections were later added.<sup>69</sup> There is not space here to summarise all of these arguments in detail; suffice it to say that the strongest case against Proklian authorship lies in the structure of the homily. First, it is much longer than any of the fifth-century bishop's other orations and second, the dramatic dialogues do not belong to his normal style of homiletic delivery.<sup>70</sup> Leaving aside the question whether the work is composite (which may never be definitively proved), the dialogues suggest at least a late fifth- or sixth-century date, but the lack of reference to Mary's intercessory function or personal qualities, as a human being who is capable of intellectual and emotional transformation, seem to predate either the *Akathistos Hymn* or the kontakia of Romanos. It is worth adding that the highly theological and rhetorical nature of the entire text suggests

<sup>67</sup> For discussion of six early homilies that address the theme, rather than the feast, of the Annunciation, see Allen 2011, 72–4.

<sup>68</sup> CPG 5805, (ps-)Proklos, *Homily VI, On the Theotokos*, ed. Leroy 1967, 298–324 (see above, n. 48).

<sup>69</sup> La Piana 1912 (1971), 128–52; Marx 1940, 90–3; Leroy 1967, 273–92; Aubineau 1972, 589–92; Caro 1972, vol. 2, 308–44.

<sup>70</sup> Leroy, who defends the authenticity of the homily, argues that although other examples of dialogue do not appear in contemporary Greek homiletics, Proklos might have derived the idea from Syriac dialogue homilies (*soghyatha*). Aubineau dismisses this idea as too hypothetical; it is worth adding that Sebastian Brock dates most Syriac *soghyatha* to the fifth or sixth centuries. Whether mutual influence might have taken place in the early fifth century thus remains open to question. See Leroy 1967, 275–6; Aubineau 1972, 590–1; Brock 1994 (2010), 12–13.



that it was composed for a well-educated audience. Leroy, along with other scholars including La Piana, noted some peculiar – possibly early fifth-century – exegetical elements, including references to death and the Devil (as important protagonists in the playing out of God's dispensation for salvation) and emphasis on Joseph's doubt, which threatened (if an angel had not intervened) to persist until the actual birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary.<sup>71</sup>

Owing to the fact that dramatic dialogues came to feature so importantly in later Byzantine homilies and hymns on the Annunciation, it is worth briefly considering the ones that appear in this (ps-)Proklian homily. As in the case of the later examples, both sections of the oration present these dialogues in direct speech, although the preacher occasionally interjects extradiegetical remarks (which depart from the alphabetical acrostic that governs the speeches of the two protagonists).<sup>72</sup> The purpose of both dialogues is primarily theological. In the first dialogue, Mary responds gently to Joseph's opening accusations by invoking the prophets, testifying to the miraculousness of Christ's conception, and urging her betrothed husband to believe and thereby participate in the promised salvation. This dialogue, which is expressed in rhyming iambic couplets, thus resembles a lawsuit: the Virgin asks for a chance to plead her defence (*apologia*), but only secures Joseph's promise to wait and see at the birth of the infant. Following Matthew's account (Mt 1:20–1), the preacher then explains that Joseph was satisfied of the truth of Mary's story after he received a visitation from an angel. A string of antithetical statements follows, in which the Virgin's suspected shamelessness is contrasted with her actual purity and holiness. The second dialogue begins with Mary expressing her disbelief and lack of understanding of the miracle, on the basis of her speech in Luke 1:34. In the ensuing conversation, Gabriel instructs the Virgin about the paradoxical event that is taking place in her womb: Christ remains eternal, majestic and divine even as he assumes the earthly state of human nature. Although she asks for reassurance, Mary does not experience the intellectual and emotional transformation that is described by later liturgical writers such as Romanos or Germanos of Constantinople. There is a static quality to this dialogue, which helps to emphasise the theological

<sup>71</sup> Leroy 1967, 279–81.

<sup>72</sup> The terms 'intradiegetical' and 'extradiegetical' refer to the direct speech which may be used either between characters who exist within the narrative framework of a homily or hymn or to that which the preacher or hymnographer directs to his own audience; for further discussion of these terms, see Cunningham 2003 (where the terms 'intratextual and extratextual' are used for the same phenomena); Eriksen 2013, esp. 100–8.

rather than personal drama of the Annunciation scene. As in earlier homilies, such as the genuine works of Proklos, the preacher implies that the incarnation took place at the time that Mary heard Gabriel's greeting. He also stresses, like most patristic writers, her passive role in this event; addressing the Virgin himself at the end of the dialogue, (ps-)Proklos instructs her to 'cast off doubt and eagerly accept the greeting'. For she does not know about the divine plan that lies behind the event or the meaning of Gabriel's name, that is, 'man of God'.<sup>73</sup>

Whereas the use of dialogues, for dramatic and didactic effect, may suggest a somewhat later date for this homily than the early or middle part of the fifth century, it remains firmly in line with the primarily theological approach to the Theotokos that characterised the liturgical sermons of that period. Unlike (ps-)Basil's *Homily XXXIX, On the Annunciation*,<sup>74</sup> there are no allusions here to Mary's intercessory power or human qualities. A number of other homilies, some of which also became associated with the feast of the Annunciation (although in fact they only dealt with this thematically in connection with their celebration of Christ's incarnation), remain uncertain in their attributions and dates.<sup>75</sup> These include a lively homily that is attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgos, but which more probably belongs to the late fifth or early sixth century.<sup>76</sup> Its celebration of a feast, ostensibly the Annunciation but more likely the Nativity of Christ, suggests a date before the former feast was adopted by Justinian in 560.<sup>77</sup> Caro has also pointed to its use of unusual vocabulary in relation to Christ's incarnation, which may suggest Arian influence or else a provincial lack of awareness with regard to the Christological definitions of Chalcedon.<sup>78</sup> Various other homilies, some of which were also associated with the Annunciation, remain to be studied carefully with respect not only to their dogmatic content, but also their place in the Marian homiletic tradition.<sup>79</sup> The lack of intercessory invocation, combined with apparent unawareness of individual Marian feasts or allusions to apocryphal texts concerning her infancy and death, suggest that they belong to an intermediate period between the first burst of her liturgical celebration

<sup>73</sup> (ps-)Proklos, *Homily VI, On the Theotokos* XI.1, ed. Leroy 1967, 313. In the next line, the author tells Mary to 'lay aside feminine humility and to assume a manly purpose'; see my comments on the ambiguity of gender categories with regard to the Virgin in the Introduction, 25–34.

<sup>74</sup> See above, n. 49. <sup>75</sup> See Caro 1972, vol. 2, esp. 345–577.

<sup>76</sup> (ps-)Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Homily I, On the Annunciation*, PG 10, 1145–56.

<sup>77</sup> Although the homily begins by celebrating the Annunciation, even including a short dialogic section in the middle, it ends with praise of the Nativity of Christ, juxtaposing in a rather unusual way the manger in which the infant's body lay with the altar on which the heavenly bread would be placed in the eucharistic offering. See *ibid.*, PG 10, 1153C.

<sup>78</sup> Caro 1972, vol. 2, 487–91. <sup>79</sup> See Caro 1972, vol. 2, 468–577.

and the more devotional and festal praise that would develop from about the middle of the sixth century onward – especially in the kontakia of Romanos the Melodist. Further studies, to complement the work of Roberto Caro and others, however, will help to situate these important homiletic texts. In my view, one other text, the *Akathistos Hymn*, may also be dated to this transitional period on the basis both of its unique formulation of Marian imagery and its use of mediatory and intercessory language.<sup>80</sup> With regard to the latter category, however, the *Akathistos Hymn* seems to reflect a later stage than do some of the homilies that I have just been discussing. Could this indicate an even later date of composition than theirs – perhaps during the first decades of the sixth century?

### Sixth-Century Developments: Severos of Antioch and Other Preachers

We turn now to the sixth-century liturgical texts, which reflect an exceptionally creative phase of Marian liturgical expression. Pauline Allen has identified and analysed most of the surviving Byzantine Marian homilies of the sixth century.<sup>81</sup> Her various studies help to situate these works within the larger tradition; in line with my own conclusions, Allen sees this as a period in which preachers' focus shifted gradually from purely Christological considerations to more Mariological praise and devotion. Even if we take into account the problems of date and attribution, which afflict this corpus as much as any other in the Byzantine homiletic tradition,<sup>82</sup> we are left with some remarkable examples of Marian preaching by figures including Severos of Antioch and Abraham of Ephesus. Such preachers flourished not only in Constantinople, but also in Asia Minor and Palestine. Their works display an ongoing preoccupation with Christological controversies, especially between adherents of Chalcedon and those who opposed it because they upheld 'one nature' in Christ, but also growing attention to Mary as a figure of importance in her own right. It is also possible to trace in these homilies the addition of feasts such as the Annunciation and the Dormition in the course of the sixth century. Whereas Severos preached on the subject of the Annunciation in the context of the pre-Nativity celebrations that were still observed in Antioch at the beginning of the century,<sup>83</sup> Abraham mentioned the recent institution of the feast of the Annunciation in a homily that may have been

<sup>80</sup> Pace Peltomaa 2001. <sup>81</sup> See Allen 1996; Allen 1998; Allen 2011. <sup>82</sup> See Chapter 3, n. 13.

<sup>83</sup> Allen 2011, 72.

delivered between 560 and 563.<sup>84</sup> Although many sixth-century preachers directed panegyric praise towards the Theotokos, it is also noticeable that some, such as Leontios of Constantinople, appear to have ignored her in their festal or exegetical homilies.<sup>85</sup> In evaluating the contributions of those homilists who did compose orations in honour of Mary, I will begin with the important proponent of one-nature Christology who also became patriarch of Antioch, Severos.

Severos of Antioch was a prolific writer whose oeuvre includes 125 cathedral homilies, as well as nearly 300 letters.<sup>86</sup> The most important sermons for our purposes are those on the Annunciation (mentioned above), the Nativity of Christ and two on the memory of the Virgin Mary.<sup>87</sup> One of the remarkable aspects of Severos' homiletic works, as opposed to those of most Byzantine preachers, is that these can sometimes be dated and even placed with regard to the circumstances of their delivery. *Homily XIV*, 'In memory of the holy Mother of God', for example, is known to have been delivered in the church of the Theotokos in Antioch on 2 or 3 February 513 on the feast of the *Hypapante*.<sup>88</sup> Severos delivered his homilies in churches in and around Antioch when he served as the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of that city between 512 and 518.<sup>89</sup> Following the death of the Miaphysite emperor Anastasios in 518, the patriarch Severos was condemned and expelled from his seat; however, he managed to escape and spent most of the rest of his life in Egypt.<sup>90</sup> His surviving homilies, which were originally delivered in Greek, survive only in Syriac translations that were produced by a contemporary bishop, Paul of Callinicum, and revised by Jacob of Edessa in 701 CE.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Abraham of Ephesus, *Homily on the Annunciation*, ed. Jugie 1922 (2003), 443.2.14–20. On the date of the feast's introduction into the liturgical calendar of Constantinople, see Introduction, n. 57.

<sup>85</sup> Leontios of Constantinople, *Homilies*, trans. Allen with Datema 1991, 10. According to Allen and Datema, the Virgin Mary features only rarely in Leontios' homilies. She is called 'Virgin', 'Virgin Mary' or 'Mary', but never 'Theotokos'. It is also noteworthy that there are no surviving homilies by Leontios on feasts or themes related to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>86</sup> Allen and Hayward 2004, 39–55.

<sup>87</sup> Severos of Antioch, *Homily II, On the Annunciation*, ed. Brière and Graffin 1976, PO 38.2, 272–91; *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos*, ed. Brière and Graffin 1976, 400–15; *Homily XXXVI, On the Nativity of Christ*, ed. Brière, Graffin and Lash 1972, PO 36.3, 458–73; *Homily LXVII, On the Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin*, ed. Brière 1912, PO 8.2, 349–67.

<sup>88</sup> Downey 1961, 659; Allen and Hayward 2004, 107. <sup>89</sup> Allen and Hayward 2004, 4–5.

<sup>90</sup> Allen and Hayward 2004, 24–30. After about 530, Justinian and Theodora attempted reconciliation with exiled anti-Chalcedonian bishops, including Severos; however, such progress was rescinded in 536 at a synod in Constantinople and Severos was again condemned.

<sup>91</sup> Fragments of the original Greek versions survive in *catenae* (chains of quotations), *Homily LXXVII* (transmitted under the name of Gregory of Nyssa or Hesychios of Jerusalem), or in writings of Severos' opponents. See Allen and Hayward 2004, 31.

Although Pauline Allen has already treated Severos of Antioch's Mariological homilies in several wider studies, it is possible to add a few observations to her findings.<sup>92</sup> First, it is noticeable that the early sixth-century patriarch tends to avoid the poetic imagery and typology that was so widely used in fifth-century Greek homilies on the Theotokos. He refers to her for the most part as 'Virgin' or 'Theotokos' – branching out in his *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos*, to describe her also (and with careful justification) as 'prophetess', 'apostle' and 'martyr'.<sup>93</sup> In general, Severos prefers discursive to poetic methods of teaching Christological theology. He devotes large sections of each homily to expounding the doctrine of Christ's incarnation, as we see somewhat later in the same work:

Therefore the one who was born was also named Emmanuel, since he is one indivisible and without confusion, out of two natures, both divinity and humanity. This one who, since he possesses all the unique and indivisible qualities, namely, his incorporeal generation from the Father and the very same divinity (for he alone was begotten of the only One, even God from God) and his birth from the Virgin (for he alone was born in the flesh of a woman not joined in marriage and the only one of her kind), did not violate his mother's virginity – how was this one, after the inexpressible union, prepared to be divided and broken by the duality of the natures, as the Synod of Chalcedon has taught since it followed the foolish teachings of Nestorius? But he is in all respects one and unique . . .<sup>94</sup>

Severos stresses here and elsewhere in his homilies that Christ, although condescending to be born of the flesh of a virginal woman and thus assuming human nature, remained fully divine, in one hypostasis, one person and one nature (out of two, the divine and the human).<sup>95</sup> Such teaching is also frequently combined with polemical invective against the Council of Chalcedon and its supporters, as we also see in the passage quoted above.

The implications of Severos' one-nature doctrine for Mary, the Theotokos, are significant, but it is noticeable that he does not focus on her – even in the homilies that were delivered largely in her honour – to the same extent as did Proklos of Constantinople or Hesybios of Jerusalem.

<sup>92</sup> Allen 1996, esp. 165–70; Allen 1998, 207–8; Allen 2011, esp. 72–3.

<sup>93</sup> Severos of Antioch, *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos* 3, ed. Brière and Graffin 1976, PO 38.3, 400; trans. Allen and Hayward 2004, 112; cf. Allen 1996, 168.

<sup>94</sup> Severos of Antioch, *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos* 17, trans. Allen and Hayward 2004, 116–17.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Severos of Antioch, *Homily II, On the Annunciation* 6, ed. Brière and Graffin (with Lash and Sauger) 1976, PO 38.2, 274–5.

Nevertheless, we do find a few references to her role as mediator in these homilies, in contrast to the more theological focus of the fifth-century works. Following the didactic Christological section that we just noted in his *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos*, Severos writes as follows about Mary:

This is why we honour also the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary with honours which are surpassing great, inasmuch as she is the one who is able, more than all the other saints, to offer up supplications on our behalf, and since we too make our boast of her as having acquired her as the adornment of our race – the rational earth from whom the second Adam, who is neither fashioned nor made, fashioned himself in flesh (cf. 1 Cor 15:44–5) – the plant of virginity from which Christ the heavenly ladder was prepared in flesh by the Spirit, so that we ourselves might be able to ascend to heaven when we fix our footsteps firmly upon it (cf. Is 9:36) . . .<sup>96</sup>

It is also worth highlighting Severos' treatment of the Annunciation, in which he adds to a growing tradition of elaborating rhetorically the dialogue between the Virgin and the archangel Gabriel, as recounted in Luke 1:26–38. Like most patristic commentators, the patriarch allows Mary only a minor role in accepting, or even understanding, her miraculous virginal conception.<sup>97</sup> He explains that the incarnation occurred in 'this brief instant and in this indivisible space of time' during which 'the word of the archangel was proffered and the Word of God was found in Mary's womb'.<sup>98</sup> Although the Virgin doubts and is persuaded only gradually by the archangel's arguments, it is clear that she has little say over the outcome of this interview. We also find scant interest in Mary's inner feelings or thoughts in this homily, compared with later treatments of the subject, for example, in Romanos the Melodist's kontakia or the eighth-century dialogic homily on the Annunciation by Germanos of Constantinople.

Severos of Antioch thus occupies a transitional position between the more theological orations of the fifth century, in which Mary was celebrated above all as the all-pure Bearer of God, and those of the mid sixth, when she became intercessor and human mother. His cathedral homilies offered opportunities for the teaching of Christological faith, expression of

<sup>96</sup> Severos of Antioch, *Homily XIV, On the Memory of the Theotokos* 18, trans. Allen and Hayward 2004, 117.

<sup>97</sup> For comprehensive discussion of this issue, see Constan 2003, 273–313.

<sup>98</sup> Severos of Antioch, *Homily II, On the Annunciation* 11, ed. Brière and Graffin (with Lash and Sauget) 1976, PO 38.2, 278–9. Allen comments that this notion of an instantaneous conception, which was shared in most patristic exegesis on this subject, may have derived from anti-Origenist polemic; see Allen 2011, 72.

praise to God, his mother and his saints, and ethical direction. There is some invocation of the mediating role of the Theotokos here, as we have seen, but this does not take centre stage. One other aspect, which I have not yet mentioned, is the preacher's apparent lack of awareness of major feasts. This is surprising in some cases, such as that of the *Hypapante* which had been observed in Jerusalem since at least the late fourth century; on at least one of these occasions, as we have seen, Severos chose to deliver an *enkomyion* on the Theotokos without any clear reference to the event of Christ's Presentation in the Temple. As for the Annunciation, Severos treated this topic from a thematic rather than a festal point of view. As mentioned above, the feast was not officially added to the Byzantine liturgical calendar until 560 CE – long after Severos delivered his homily during the period leading up to the Nativity of Christ.<sup>99</sup> Finally, it is noticeable that Severos of Antioch only rarely celebrates the Theotokos as a figure of importance in her own right. He mentions the Virgin Mary in his homilies most often in connection with her role as birth-giver of Christ, the Son and Word of God.

In the decades that followed Severos' deposition from the patriarchate of Antioch in 518, during which the emperors Justin I and Justinian embraced Chalcedonian rather than Miaphysite Christological doctrine, we see a steady growth in the cult of the Virgin Mary. Pauline Allen suggests that this was a period in which two separate but parallel paths, of doctrine and liturgy, began to converge in the Mariological tradition.<sup>100</sup> Not only did Justinian (527–65) institute important new liturgical feasts in which Mary played a central role (including the *Hypapante*, the Annunciation and possibly her Nativity),<sup>101</sup> but he also dedicated new churches to her throughout the empire.<sup>102</sup> Cyril Mango argues that belief in the Virgin's role as protector of Constantinople was already flourishing during the reign of Justinian, with her main relic, a robe, being celebrated in literary texts from either the sixth or early eighth century onward.<sup>103</sup> The Virgin's cult

<sup>99</sup> According to Allen, the homily was delivered between 18 November and 16 December 512; this was therefore one of the earliest of Severos' episcopal homilies. See Allen 2011, 72.

<sup>100</sup> Allen 1996, 169. <sup>101</sup> See Introduction, 11–12.

<sup>102</sup> Prokopios, *Buildings*; for a list of precise references, see Introduction, n. 55; cf. Peltomaa 2015, 136, n. 66.

<sup>103</sup> Mango 2000, 19. On an early (either sixth- or early seventh-century) kontakion to the Holy Fathers which mentions the Virgin's 'garment' (*esthes*), see Mango 2000, 23. For other homilies that celebrated the robe and the belt, see below, 129–33. Another writer who mentions the Virgin's garment or 'mantle' is the late sixth-century Latin writer, Gregory of Tours. On Gregory's use of Byzantine sources, see Cameron 1975. I am grateful to Andrea Olsen Lam for reminding me of Gregory's narratives concerning the miraculous power of the Virgin's robe; see also Chapter 5, 182–3.

appears to have begun in association with healing shrines that were located within or just outside the imperial city; although such shrines often had modest origins, they attracted increasing imperial or aristocratic patronage in the course of the sixth century. It is also worth mentioning the use of an image of the Theotokos, who replaced that of the goddess Victory ('Nike'), on imperial lead seals during the last years of Justinian's successor, Justin II (565–78).<sup>104</sup> This may reflect, as Mango has also argued, the Virgin's secure position in this era both as guarantor of imperial victory and defender of Chalcedonian Christological doctrine.<sup>105</sup>

There was no lack of theological justification for Byzantine emperors who wished for political and ecclesiastical reasons to endorse an already flourishing popular cult of the Virgin Mary. From being affirmed as 'Theotokos' at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon (431 and 451, respectively), Mary came to be viewed as the guarantor of Christ's simultaneous humanity and divinity. Such focus on the human, but also pure and virginal, body of the Theotokos led to interest not only in her birth and way of life, but also the manner of her death. Accounts of the Virgin's dormition and assumption into heaven began to circulate, first in Syriac and then in Greek, around the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century. Such a role was as important to Chalcedonian – and Neo-Chalcedonian – theologians as it was to those who endorsed one nature in Christ. While it may be an overstatement to argue that the two parties could agree on the importance of the Theotokos (along with aspects of her cult including feasts, relics and intercession) – and thus came to view her as a point of unity in the midst of real or potential schism – it does seem clear that she played a key part in the Christology of both factions.

Scholars continue to debate the relationship between popular devotion and doctrinal affirmation of the Virgin Mary, searching for the origins of both in the history of the universal Church, as well as for the impact of each aspect of the Marian cult on the other.<sup>106</sup> Although, as I argued in the Introduction, devotion to the Virgin existed well before the Council of Ephesus, it is likely that the affirmation of her role as Theotokos in that context gave impetus to the development of her cult. What appears to have

<sup>104</sup> Seibt 1987, 36–7.

<sup>105</sup> Whereas Mango suggests these explanations for the imagery of Justin II's seals as alternative models, I see no reason why both could not have been operative; see Mango 2000, 21. The theological model is also argued tentatively in Mango 1993–4, 168.

<sup>106</sup> It is worth remembering here what P. Allen calls the 'caveats in the secondary literature' with regard to the term 'popular': we are referring to 'phenomena with wide appeal, rather than to those which were prevalent among the illiterate masses'; see Allen 1996, 164. Cf. Momigliano 1972; Cameron 1979a.



occurred from the second half of the fifth century onward – but to have gathered pace especially in the course of the sixth – was the imperial and ecclesial acceptance of Mary, not only as theological symbol, but also as protector of the imperial capital, Constantinople, mediator for Christians before Christ, and defender of the faith. We find evidence of this development not only in the proliferation of Marian churches and shrines and official imagery, as mentioned above, but also in the many homilies and hymns that can be securely dated to this period. In contrast to the highly Christological liturgical texts of the previous century, which, as we have seen, contained little or no intercessory invocation of the Virgin, some sixth-century homilies and hymns appealed for her help and protection.

Abraham of Ephesus was a Chalcedonian bishop who lived during the reign of Justinian. His two surviving homilies, on the Annunciation and the *Hypapante*,<sup>107</sup> reflect both a more developed liturgical calendar and possibly a higher Mariology. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Abraham considered himself the first Byzantine preacher to mention – and celebrate – the newly instituted feast of the Annunciation on 25 March.<sup>108</sup> Since we know (thanks to a letter written by Justinian I which was published in 560) that the feast was added to the calendar at about this time,<sup>109</sup> it is possible to place Abraham's homiletic compositions soon after that date. Pauline Allen has again provided us with some analysis of Abraham's two homilies; she notes that his homily on the Annunciation, while strong on Chalcedonian doctrine and polemical attacks on various heresies as well as Judaism, focuses only minimally on the Virgin's response to Gabriel's message.<sup>110</sup> Like most of his predecessors, including Severos, Abraham envisions the conception of Christ as an instantaneous event that took place as soon as the archangel uttered his greeting to the unsuspecting girl.<sup>111</sup> The homily on the *Hypapante*, which is faithful to the Lukan narrative of Christ's presentation in the Temple, provides more extensive celebration of the Theotokos in its second half. Allen, following Jugie, states that this hymn of praise is 'so high-flown in contrast to the rest of the sober piece that it has to be a later addition'. She also notes that Mary is addressed as intercessor in this section of the homily; again, this may be part of the later interpolation.<sup>112</sup> Here we encounter once again the difficulty of tracing a clear line of development in Marian devotion in the course of the sixth century. If Jugie and Allen are correct in asserting that

<sup>107</sup> CPG 7380–1; ed. Jugie 1922 (2003), 442–54. <sup>108</sup> See above, n. 84.

<sup>109</sup> van Esbroeck 1968–9. <sup>110</sup> Allen 2011, 73.

<sup>111</sup> Abraham of Ephesus, *Homily on the Annunciation* 4, ed. Jugie 1922 (2003), 445, lines 24–30.

<sup>112</sup> Allen 2011, 81; cf. Jugie 1922 (2003), 433.

this section of Abraham's homily is inauthentic, then this preacher may be described as a traditionalist who aligned himself with the more theological approaches to the subject that were characteristic of fifth- and early sixth-century Marian homiletics. If, however, the homily was transmitted in its original form, then we see in its final paragraph a precursor of the full-fledged Marian praise that would appear in homilies and hymns from the early seventh century onward. The passage also includes a clear allusion to Mary's intercessory power, as the preacher appeals to her 'not to stop mediating (πρεσβεύουσα) on behalf of all of us' before Christ 'who was well pleased to be born and made flesh from you'.<sup>113</sup>

### Conclusion

I have attempted to trace in the course of this chapter a developing homiletic tradition in honour of Mary, the Theotokos, in the fifth and sixth centuries, which received stimulus both from Christological debates and from growing popular devotion. The relationship between these two forces is difficult to determine; it is possibly even misleading to disentangle them since they were closely related. What is clear, however, is that the universal Church, in both East and West, effectively harnessed this movement by placing Mary, the Theotokos, at the heart of the Christological mystery. She became the link whereby God became man or, to adopt the poetic and typological imagery that fifth-century liturgical writers favoured, the place, or receptacle, in creation that God entered and transfigured. As Christ himself inexorably – and even after Chalcedon – became more divine on the basis of Cyril of Alexandria's influential vision, Mary's role as mediator and intercessor grew more essential.

The developments that we have seen between early fifth-century and mid-sixth-century homilies seem clear, even if some (especially dubious) works remain difficult to categorise. We noted in the earliest period, in the works of Hesychios of Jerusalem and Proklos of Constantinople for example, a tendency to celebrate Mary in purely Christological terms. She is certainly a figure of importance in this period, but is viewed more as a theological symbol than as a human woman. By about the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century – and here the dating of liturgical works including (ps-)Basil of Seleucia's homily on the Annunciation becomes problematic – we see an increase in allusions to Mary as mediator, although she remains a rather two-dimensional figure. It is finally in the

<sup>113</sup> Abraham of Ephesus, *Homily on the Annunciation* 9, ed. Jugie 1922 (2003), 454, lines 19–21.

kontakia of Romanos the Melodist, as we saw in the previous chapter, that a more personal characterisation of the Virgin begins fully to appear. Her Christological role remains important, but she is also, as scholars have recently stressed, protector of Constantinopolitan Christians, intercessor and mother.<sup>114</sup> These various aspects of the Theotokos could be experienced by ordinary Christians by means of civic and liturgical celebration, devotion at holy sites and healing shrines, and with the help of narrative or panegyric texts and images.

The sixth century thus represents, as both Mango and Cameron have argued, an important stage in the developing Byzantine cult of the Virgin Mary.<sup>115</sup> Most elements of this cult were in place by the end of Justinian's reign in 565, having been promoted by an active policy of church building, the addition of Marian feasts to the liturgical calendar, and the composition of hymns and homilies for these feasts by writers such as Romanos and Abraham of Ephesus. Further stimulus would be provided in the seventh through to the ninth centuries, partly in response to external challenges such as Persian or Avar invasions, as we shall see in subsequent chapters. However, the depiction of Mary as a fully human – and motherly – figure in the kontakia of Romanos during this period can scarcely be described as an aberration in a literary tradition that would only reach fruition in response to Iconoclasm in the course of the eighth and ninth centuries. It is important to acknowledge that such emphasis on Mary's human qualities, which was interpreted in accordance with Chalcedonian Christology, had surfaced by the fifth century in the Syriac liturgical tradition and was fully explored by Romanos the Melodist in the sixth. This background was fundamental to the development of Marian festal homilies from the late sixth century onward, as well as to that of hagiography and miracle stories, which also began to circulate in the middle Byzantine centuries.

<sup>114</sup> Gador-Whyte 2013; Arentzen 2017. <sup>115</sup> Cameron 1978; Cameron 1979a; Mango 2000.