Byzantine Art

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Historical Background

Centred on Greek speaking Christian community in Constantinople.

Overcoming of iconoclasm leads to veneration of icons by kissing.

CE 330 – 1453, when Constantinople passed to the Turks.

CE 330, Byzantium renamed Constantinople to become an imperial residence, a Rome in the east.

Orthodox Church split from Latin Church 1054, main differences re liturgy and veneration of icons.

Constantinople captured by Crusaders 1204, who were expelled 1261.

Largest and grandest city in the Middle Ages.

Hagia Sophia, built 360, rebuilt 532-7, St. Peters, Rome, 329.

Figural art banned by Leo III, early C8th. Iconoclasm c.726 – 843.

Thessaloniki developed as a harbour by Constantine.

Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt, pilgrimage site of Justinian.

Characteristics

Remains a living art.

Importance of relics.

Rejection of classicism.

Style intended to be beyond the temporal and individual.

Gold conveys heavenly light and elevates human figures to the heavenly world.

Prayers and veneration pass through icons to beyond.

Church a place of beauty as well as truth.

Style established between Constantine and Justinian (527-65).

Artistic conformity = comfort of familiarity and unchanging truth

Glossary

Katholicon: Main church of a monastery dedicated to is patron saint.

Iconostasis: Altar screen displaying tiers of saints, from C14th especially in Russia. Can be used as portable altar.

Anastasis: Resurrection where Christ breaks down the gates of Hell.

Ciborium: Decorative covering for altar or tomb.

Hodegetria: Virgin and Child with Mary pointing at the Child. This is the way.

Theotokos: Mother of God.

Proskynesis: Reverent prostration.

Deisis: Christ with Virgin on one side and John Baptist on the other, sometimes with more saints.

Pantocrator: Christ as Master of the Universe and Judge.

Martyrium: Building to commemorate a martyr or an episode from life of Christ.