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# **Incorporating a Name in an Image and an Image in a Name. Comparison between Byzantine and Latin Inscriptions**

Estelle Ingrand-Varenne

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**STUDIES IN BYZANTINE EPIGRAPHY 1**

# STUDIES IN BYZANTINE EPIGRAPHY

VOLUME 1

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# Studies in Byzantine Epigraphy 1

*Edited by*

ANDREAS RHOBY

IDA TOTH

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Cover illustration:  
Orchomos, Greece, church of the monastery of Skripou, inscription in  
the exterior (9th c.) Photograph: Brad Hostetler

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b>	13
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	15
<b>Editors' Note</b>	17
<b>Byzantine Epigraphy: Whence and Whither?</b> Andreas RHOBY – Ida TOTH	19
<b>Space Oddity? A <i>Praepositus</i> Inscribing Power and Appropriating Cityscapes in Theodosian Constantinople</b> Arkadiy AVDOKHIN	25
<b>Der Kaiser als Schutzwall</b> <b>Epigraphische und topographische Untersuchungen zum Basileios-Epigramm aus Thessaloniki (AP IX 686) und zum spätantiken Kaiserbildnis</b> Christoph BEGASS	55
<b>Epigrafia e società nella Sardegna bizantina (VII–XI secolo)</b> <b>Alcune osservazioni</b> Salvatore COSENTINO	71
<b>Incorporating a Name in an Image and an Image in a Name: Comparison between Byzantine and Latin Traditions</b> Estelle INGRAND-VARENNE	93
<b>Language, Identity, and Otherness in Medieval Greece</b> <b>The Epigraphic Evidence</b> Sophia KALOPISSI-VERTI	113
<b>Greek Letters as <i>scriptura franca</i>: Writing in Local Languages on the Northern Periphery of the Byzantine World</b> Denis KASHTANOV – Maksim KOROBV – Vadim PONARYADOV – Andrey VINOGRADOV	151

<b>Word and Image in the Church of the Ascension in Nessebär: The Role of Inscriptions for the Reconstruction of the Iconographic Programme of 1609</b>	169
Emmanuel MOUTAFOV	
<b>Texts and Their Audiences: Some Thoughts on the Addressees of Inscriptions in Middle Byzantine Churches in Greece</b>	191
Giorgos PALLIS	
<b>Die Mosaikinschrift in Dara/Anastasiupolis aus dem Jahr 514 n. Chr.</b>	203
Mustafa H. SAYAR (unter Mitarbeit von Andreas RHOBY)	
<b>An Epigram for the Everyman? Strategies of Commemoration at a Cappadocian Tomb</b>	213
Anna M. SITZ	
<b>Post-Byzantine Inscriptions, Traditions and Legends: Authentic or Fabricated?</b>	251
Christos STAVRAKOS – Dimitrios LIAKOS	



# List of Illustrations

## Arkadiy Avdokhin

Fig. 1.	Current state of obelisk base, angle view; photo author	48
Fig. 2.	Inscribed remains of wide side of obelisk base; photo author	49
Fig. 3.	Latin inscription on wider side; photo author	50
Fig. 4.	Greek inscription on wide side; photo author	51
Fig. 5.	Greek inscription on narrow side; photo author	52
Fig. 6.	Location of Capitolium and obelisk with cross in Late Antique Constantinople; from Berger, <i>Untersuchungen</i> , p. 347	53

## Christoph Begass

Abb. 1.	AP IX 686: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. Gr. 23, fol. 473, © Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg	69
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## Salvatore Cosentino

Fig. 1a.	Insediamenti e viabilità della Sardegna tardoantica, © Claudia Lamanna Salvatore Cosentino	84
Fig. 1b.	Iscrizioni greche di età bizantina trovate in Sardegna, © Claudia Lamanna Salvatore Cosentino	85
Fig. 2.	Iscrizione trionfale di <i>Turris Libisonis</i> . Da: Fiori, <i>Costantino hypatos</i> , tav. I	86
Fig. 3a.	Iscrizione di Grekas. Da: Martorelli, 'L'epigrafe di Grecà', p. 131, fig. 3	86
Fig. 3b.	Sarcofago di Grekas. Da: Martorelli, 'L'epigrafe di Grecà', p. 130, fig. 1	86
Fig. 4.	Frammento di iscrizione, San Nicola di Donori. Da: Guillou, <i>Recueil des inscriptions</i> , nr. 217, p. 237, pl. 201	87
Fig. 5.	Frammento di iscrizione, San Nicola di Donori. Da: Guillou, <i>Recueil des inscriptions</i> , nr. 220, p. 238, pl. 202	87
Fig. 6.	Frammento di iscrizione, San Nicola di Donori. Da: Guillou, <i>Recueil des inscriptions</i> , nr. 221, pl. 203	87
Fig. 7.	Frammento di iscrizione, San Nicola di Donori. Da: Guillou, <i>Recueil des inscriptions</i> , nr. 222, pl. 204	88
Fig. 8.	Iscrizione celebrativa del restauro delle mura marittime da parte del <i>magistros</i> Bardas. Da: Van Milligen, <i>Byzantine Constantinople</i> , p. 185	88
Fig. 9.	Iscrizione celebrativa del restauro di una torre a Nicea sotto Michele III. Da: Şahin, <i>Katalog</i> , nr. 463	89
Fig. 10.	Frammento di iscrizione di Theopemptos, Roma, S. Giorgio al Velabro. Da: Guillou, <i>Recueil des inscriptions</i> , nr. 118, pl. 116	89

- Fig. 11a e 11 b. Iscrizione di Torchitorio, Salusio e Orzokor, vicinanze di Villasor, chiesa (forse) di S. Sofia (ora al Museo Archeologico di Cagliari). Da: Guillou, *Recueil des inscriptions*, nr. 223, pl. 205 90
- Fig. 12. Iscrizione di Torchitorio e Getit[e], Assemini, chiesa di S. Giovanni Battista. Da: Boscolo, *La Sardegna bizantina*, tav. X 90
- Fig. 13. Parte iniziale della iscrizione di Torchitorio, Salusio e Nispella. Da: Guillou, *Recueil des inscriptions*, nr. 231, pl. 214 90
- Fig. 14. Sigilli degli arconti Torchitorio e Salusio. Da: Manno, 'Sopra alcuni piombi' (riprodotto in Cosentino, 'Re-analysing') 91
- Fig. 15. Sigillo di Zerkis, arconte di Arborea, conservato presso l'Antiquarium Arborense. Da: Spanu, Zucca, *I sigilli bizantini*, nr. 77, p. 145 91
- Fig. 16. Pilastrino con croce e iscrizione, Dolianova, chiesa di S. Biagio. Da: Coroneo, 'Epigrafia greca', nr. 21, p. 359 92

### Estelle Ingrand-Varenne

- Fig. 1. Saint Austremoire on the Saint Calminius Reliquary, twelfth-century chasse-form reliquary, treasury of Mozac Abbey. Image: Photothèque of the CESC-M-Leonet-Bastien 104
- Fig. 2. The Christ Pantocrator of the Deesis mosaic (1261), in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne 105
- Fig. 3. Stained glass from Canterbury Cathedral at the Met Cloisters (1178–1180) depicting Noah. Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne 106
- Fig. 4. Lamb of God painted in the crypt of Notre-Dame-la-Grande at Poitiers at the end of the eleventh century. Image: Jean-Pierre Brouard/CIFM-CESC-M 107
- Fig. 5. Mosaic in the southwest vestibule of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul representing Mary and Christ, Justinian and Constantine (10<sup>th</sup> c.). Image: Andreas Rhoby 107
- Fig. 6. Detail of the Limburg staurotheca (10<sup>th</sup> c.). Image: Andreas Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Fresken*, fig. 26 108
- Fig. 7a and 7b. Saint Vincent painted on a column in the Nativity church of Bethlehem with his name in Greek and in Latin (third quarter of the twelfth century). Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne 109
- Fig. 8. John the Baptist painted on a pillar in the Hospitaller church of Abu Gosh in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (c. 1170). Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne 110
- Fig. 9. The Virgin Mary on the Saint Calminius Reliquary, twelfth-century chasse-form reliquary, treasury of Mozac Abbey. Image: Photothèque of the CESC-M-Leonet-Bastien 111

### Sophia Kalopissi-Verti

- Fig. 1. Basilica of St Gabriel in Psalidi, Kos. Arabic inscriptions carved on columns (716–718/19). (Photo: S. Kalopissi-Verti) 145
- Fig. 2. Dominican basilica of St Mary's (St Paraskevi), Chalkis, Euboea, northeastern chapel. Funerary inscription of Petrus Lippamano,



	councilor of Negroponte (1398). (Photo: I. M. Perrakis, © Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Euboea)	146
Fig. 3.	Castle of Chlemoutsi, museum, funerary relief slab of Agnes/Anna Komnene Doukaina, wife of the prince of Achaia William II Villehardouin (1286). (© Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Ilia – Chlemoutzi Castle, Archaeological Receipts Fund, HA584)	147
Fig. 4.	Mystras, museum, epistylion, monograms in Greek and coat of arms of Isabelle de Lousignan. (© Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Laconia)	147
Fig. 5.	Mt Athos, Hilandar Monastery, katholikon. Emperor Andronikos II, King Milutin and St Stephen the Protomartyr, c. 1320–1321. (After Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić and Dragan Vojvodić, ‘The Model of Empire – The Idea and Image of Authority in Serbia (1200–1371)’, in <i>Byzantine Heritage and Serbian Art II. Sacral Art of the Serbian Lands in the Middle Ages</i> , ed. Dragan Vojvodić and Danica Popović (Belgrade: The Serbian National Committee of Byzantine Studies, Institute for Byzantine Studies, Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, 2016), 303, fig. 238)	148
Fig. 6.	Church of St Athanasios tou Mouzaki in Kastoria. Dedicatory inscription of the Albanian brothers and patrons Stoias and Theodore Mouzaki (1383/84). (Photo: S. Kalopissi-Verti)	148
Fig. 7.	Church of Saint George in Prasteia near Siderounda, Chios. Dedicatory inscription of the Genoese nobleman Battista Giustiniani da Campi and his wife Bigota (1415). (Photo: Charis Koilakou)	149
Fig. 8.	Tower of the exterior defensive wall of the citadel in Chora, Samothrace. Metrical inscription of Palamede Gattilusio (1431/32). (© Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Evros)	149
Fig. 9.	Tower of the interior defensive wall of the citadel in Chora, Samothrace. Bilingual (Latin-Greek) inscription of Palamede Gattilusio (1431). (© Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of Evros)	149
Fig. 10.	City walls of Rhodes, close to St John’s gate. Bilingual (Italian–Greek) inscription of the master builder Manuel Kountes (1457). (© Ministry of Culture & Sports, Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese)	150
<b>Denis Kashtanov – Maksim Korobov – Vadim Ponaryadov – Andrey Vinogradov</b>		
	Map of the monuments mentioned in the article (based on Google Maps)	164
Fig. 1.	Zelenchuk inscription, three copies of the original drawing (redrawn by D. Kashtanov)	165
Fig. 2.	Khumara inscription, drawing (after Roderich von Erckert, <i>Der Kaukasus und seine Völker</i> )	166
Fig. 3.	MS St Petersburg, BAN gr. Q.12, f. 109v (after Alexander Lubotsky, <i>Alanic Marginal Notes in a Greek Liturgical Manuscript</i> )	166

- Fig. 4. MS St Petersburg, RNB, Ф. 946, оп. 1, д. 1093 (courtesy of Russian National Library, St Petersburg) 167
- Fig. 5. Mangup Gothic graffito I.1, the lower part (photo by A. Vinogradov) 168
- Fig. 6. Bakhchisaray Gothic graffito (courtesy of S. Kharitonov) 168

### **Emmanuel Moutafov**

- Fig. 1. Architectural plan of the church of the Ascension, Nessebär, Bulgaria, scheme: Daniel Netchev 185
- Fig. 2. View from the west of the interior of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Ivan Vanev 186
- Fig. 3. Holy Mandylion, Sts Constantine and Helen, Christ Emmanuel: south wall of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Ivan Vanev 186
- Fig. 4. General view of the decoration of the northern wall of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Ivan Vanev 187
- Fig. 5. St Mercurius and St Menas the Egyptian, fragment of the fresco decoration of the church of St George the Younger, first decade of seventeenth century, Nessebär, Bulgaria, exhibited in the Crypt of St Alexander Nevski Church, Sofia, photo: Ivan Vanev 187
- Fig. 6. Sts Ignatius, Silvester, and Constantine the Great, south wall of the church of St Stephen (New Metropolitan Cathedral), decorated in 1598/99, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Emmanuel Moutafov 188
- Fig. 7. The Vision of St Peter of Alexandria, north wall of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Emmanuel Moutafov 188
- Fig. 8. Donor's inscription on the west wall of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Emmanuel Moutafov 189
- Fig. 9. Detail of the donor's inscription with the cryptograph of Nikolaos on the west wall of the church of the Ascension, with frescoes from 1609, Nessebär, Bulgaria, photo: Emmanuel Moutafov 189
- Fig. 10. Signature of the hieromonk Anthimos from 1843 in the Mesembrian Chronicle, now in the National Library of Bulgaria, НБКМ-БИА, col. 25, a. e. 1, (IIA 7690), f. 79/ p. 81, Sofia, Bulgaria, photo: Emmanuel Moutafov 190

### **Giorgos Pallis**

- Fig. 1. Panagia Skripou at Orchomenos, dedicatory inscription, 873/4 (cliché: author) 199
- Fig. 2. Corinth, Archaeological Museum, detail of the underside of a templon architrave with an inscribed roundel, ninth c. (cliché: author) 200
- Fig. 3. Agios Niketas at Kepoula, Mani, inscribed altar, eleventh c. (cliché: Sh. E. Gerstel) 200



- Fig. 4. Agios Demetrios, Boeotia, chapel of Agios Georgios, imperial letter IG VII 2870a, 155 AD ( cliché: Y. Kalliontzis) 201

**Mustafa H. Sayar (unter Mitarbeit von Andreas Rhoby)**

- Abb. 1. Karte Kleinasiens und des Vorderen Orients. Aus: *Historischer Atlas der antiken Welt (Der Neue Pauly, Supplemente 3)* (Stuttgart – Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2012) 209
- Abb. 2. Mosaikfußboden © Şehrigül Yeşil-Erdek 210
- Abb. 3. Inschrift © Şehrigül Yeşil-Erdek 211

**Anna M. Sitz**

- Fig. 1. Exterior of the Eđri Taş church complex (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Robert Ousterhout 244
- Fig. 2. The arcosolium of Theognostos in the Eđri Taş crypt (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Anna M. Sitz 244
- Fig. 3. Elaborately painted cross in the burial annex, Eđri Taş Kilisesi (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Anna M. Sitz 245
- Fig. 4. Crypt, Eđri Taş complex (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Theognostos's tomb is marked with an arrow. Note the carved recess where a wooden floor previously separated the church above from the crypt. Photo: Anna M. Sitz 246
- Fig. 5. The ΟΡΩΝ text, painted in light salmon pink, with some later re-tracing in a blackish pigment. Rear wall of Theognostos's arcosolium, upper portion. Eđri Taş complex (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Anna M. Sitz 246
- Fig. 6. The ΕΝΘΑ ΚΑΤΑΚΗΤΕ epitaph, painted in a blackish-grey pigment. Rear wall of Theognostos's arcosolium, lower right. Note the name of Leon painted in salmon (re-traced in black) at bottom. Eđri Taş complex (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Anna M. Sitz 247
- Fig. 7. The ΜΗΔΙΣ ΤΥΦΟΥΣ[Θ]Ω gnostic text, painted in a blackish-grey pigment. Rear wall of Theognostos's arcosolium, lower left. Eđri Taş complex (Ihlara valley, Cappadocia). Photo: Anna M. Sitz 248
- Fig. 8. *Christ in Glory*, apse of the Pancarlık Kilise (near Ürgüp, Cappadocia). The paired pentameter 'great fear' text is painted on the base of Christ's throne. Sketch: Anna M. Sitz 249

**Christos Stavrakos – Dimitrios Liakos**

- Fig. 1. The Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Molybdoskepastos (Konitsa, Epirus), private photo archive of Christos Stavrakos 260
- Fig. 2. The *katholikon* of the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Molybdoskepastos (Konitsa, Epirus), private photo archive of Christos Stavrakos 261
- Fig. 3. The donor inscription of the *katholikon* of the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Molybdoskepastos (1521), private photo archive of Christos Stavrakos 262

Fig. 4.	The donor portraits at the <i>katholikon</i> of the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Molybdoskepastos (1521), private photo archive of Christos Stavrakos	263
Fig. 5.	Vatopedi Monastery; <i>katholikon</i> ; <i>exo-narthex</i> ; the legendary patrons; wall-painting, nineteenth c., private photo archive of Dimitrios Liakos	264
Fig. 6.	Xeropotamou Monastery; belfry; marble sculpture; portrait of the legendary patron <i>hosios</i> Paul, private photo archive of Dimitrios Liakos	265
Fig. 7.	Xeropotamou Monastery; belfry; marble sculpture; portrait of the legendary patron Poulcheria, private photo archive of Dimitrios Liakos	266
Fig. 8.	Zographou Monastery; the marble funeral monument of the twenty-six monks, private photo archive of Dimitrios Liakos	267



# Abbreviations

<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>PLP</i>	<i>Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit</i>
<i>PmbZ</i>	<i>Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>

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## Editors' Note

It is well known and widely acknowledged that many aspects of ancient and medieval civilization can be accessed only through inscriptional source material. Administrative and legislative actions, acts of beneficence, commemoration and thanksgiving all depended for their wider promulgation on publically displayed and highly visible epigraphs. Such traditions continued throughout Late Antiquity, a time, during which inscriptions still functioned as official announcements as well as becoming the most effective means of confessing, expressing, and spreading the new religion endorsed by the Roman State – Christianity. Even after Late Antiquity (c. AD 600), inscriptions persisted as regular features of Byzantine written culture until the fall of the Empire in 1453. Although the production of stone and mosaic inscriptions decreased, new epigraphic forms were employed, such as, for example, monumental fresco inscriptions in churches and epigrams on movable objects. Yet, in spite of the striking abundance of surviving evidence, the modern academic discipline of Byzantine Epigraphy remains uncodified and underexplored.

In 2011, the Commission for Byzantine Epigraphy was set up under the aegis of the *Association Internationale des Études Byzantines*, with Peter Schreiner as its Chair. Since its foundation, the Commission spearheaded several major epigraphy-related projects and, more recently, it has instigated the idea of creating a publication platform for presenting and examining Byzantine inscriptions. This idea was realised when the Commission established the series *Studies in Byzantine Epigraphy* with Peter Schreiner as its founder and Andreas Rhoby and Ida Toth as co-editors. *Brepols Publishers* have provided a welcoming home for this series and have pledged their support in promoting excellence and innovation in the modern scholarship of Byzantine Epigraphy.

The *Studies in Byzantine Epigraphy* is envisioned as a scholarly hub for a wide range of publications: editions of Byzantine inscriptional material, monographs on specific aspects of Byzantine epigraphic culture, and collective volumes with contributions to individual epigraphic themes. In our capacity as editors, we will strive to create an outstanding academic resource exploring new avenues of research and setting agendas for the future of the discipline. Our ambition is to open the field to scholars in related disciplines, such as history, art history, and literature, and to reach out to a wider readership in classical, medieval, and early modern studies.

Vienna and Oxford, May 2022  
Andreas Rhoby and Ida Toth

# Incorporating a Name in an Image and an Image in a Name

## *Comparison between Byzantine and Latin Traditions*

Writing a holy figure's name near its representation seems very simple and obvious. Yet that is far from being the case. The status of an image, of writing, and of language in relation to the view of the represented body and the medium in which it has been executed are all at issue in such inscriptions. The articulation of all these elements has semantic implications. My aim in this article is to consider the compositional arrangement of name-bearing inscriptions on religious iconography, specifically when they are divided and distributed on each side of a figure.

Already practiced in Late Antiquity, this form flourished in the written culture of the Western world, particularly during the high medieval period,<sup>1</sup> and in the Byzantine world<sup>2</sup> after the iconoclastic period. In the Christian West, it reappeared concomitantly with the so-called “inflation of the name”: representations and names of saints multiplied, and, similarly, the individual attributes — that is, the accessories used to identify a figure in a picture — became more numerous in a systematic and effective way at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This practice is aptly illustrated by the inscription naming Austremonne on the twelfth-century Saint Calminius reliquary in the treasury of Mozac Abbey<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 1] and the Christ Pantocrator of the *deesis* mosaic in Hagia Sophia (1261) [Fig. 2] — to give two different examples, Latin and Greek, on object and monument in this period. The persistent use of this compositional arrangement and its proliferation in the Middle Ages suggest that it was typical of medieval culture and mentality, even if its significance at times differed across different periods and regions.

I would like to explore the meanings conveyed by this manner of name representation. I wish to stress that this habit is in no way connected to the issue of space economy; the placement of inscriptions conveys deliberate choices and well-attested habits, rather than being dependent on (and necessitated by) the amount of available space. This phenomenon

- 
- 1 See Vincent Debiais, *La croisée des signes: l'écriture et les images médiévales, 800–1200* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2017).
  - 2 On inscriptions and images in Byzantium, see the analysis of Catherine Jolivet-Lévy in her article, ‘Inscriptions et images dans les églises byzantines de Cappadoce: Visibilité/lisibilité, interactions et fonctions’, in *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésial. Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, ed. Sulamith Brodbeck and Anne-Orange Poilpré (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2019), pp. 379–408; also the bibliography listed in the first footnote of the article.
  - 3 *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale* [hereafter referred to as *CIFM*], 18, Allier, Cantal, Loire, Haute-Loire, Puy-de-Dôme, ed. Robert Favreau et al. (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1995), n° 74, p. 227.

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can be qualified as a *dispositif*, to use Michel Foucault's term, developed and explained by Daniel Russo as "a concept that allows for an understanding of the relationships established by the writing of words on images [...] within a historically situated graphic system at the heart of which the chosen medium, the material used and the working technique also appear as important means".<sup>4</sup>

Analysis of the *dispositif* of the divided name in medieval French epigraphic material shows four distinct features. First, it concerns only names or equivalent expressions; more precisely, it relates almost exclusively to personal names, consequently proper nouns. It is also employed in a few cases for the names of vices and virtues, months, zodiac signs, or generic names of characters in allegorical personifications. These are inscribed alone and not in a sentence. Second, most of these names in an epigraphic context pertain to the sphere of the sacred: they denote the Virgin Mary, the apostles, saints, and biblical characters. As far as I know, this setting is never used for historical figures in France. Third, it is generally employed for portraits consisting of full- or half-length standing figures, and rarely occurs in narrative scenes. Fourth, the defining feature of this convention is the division of the word.<sup>5</sup>

Taking as the starting point Western traditions, this study wishes to put forward a methodology that has been productively used in the study of medieval Latin epigraphy, and propose that it can be usefully applied to Byzantine material. Although Byzantine epigraphy arises from a very different set of practices to those of the Latin West, examining Byzantine epigraphical traditions serves to enhance this enquiry. If the portraits of saints, depicted according to strict iconographic codes, are almost invariably identified by a name after the ninth century, for pragmatic or theological reasons,<sup>6</sup> we must ask how the name was inscribed. How was it laid out spatially? What do comparisons of this form of onomastic inscriptions in Byzantine and Latin art reveal about the semantic, syntactic, and symbolic relations at stake, in this shared approach to the writing of names in medieval Christian culture?<sup>7</sup>

This contribution is intended as a preliminary study, and, as such, it does not offer exhaustive coverage of all extant material. In what follows, my analysis will focus on a selection of tenth- to thirteenth-century inscriptions in the West, in Byzantium, and

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- 4 Daniel Russo, 'Des lettres sur l'image dans l'art du Moyen Âge. Pour une nouvelle articulation du textuel et du visuel', in *Qu'est-ce que nommer? L'image légendée entre monde monastique et pensée scolastique*, ed. Christian Heck (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), p. 129. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2007); Giorgio Agamben traces a summary genealogy of this term, first within Foucault's work and then in a broader historical context.
- 5 See Estelle Ingrand-Varenne, 'Nommer, couper, incorporer: Quand le nom rencontre le corps de l'image', *Les Mots au Moyen Âge – Words in the Middle Ages*, ed. Victoria Turner and Vincent Debiais (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), pp. 185–204.
- 6 Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies. Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), in particular chapter 3, 'Naming and Individuality', pp. 100–145; Karen Boston, 'The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts', in *Icon and Words. The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies presented to Robin Cormack*, ed. Anthony Eastmond and Liz James (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 35–57; J. Cotsonis, 'The contribution of Byzantine lead seals to the study of the cult of the saints (sixth-twelfth centuries)', *Byzantion*, 75 (2005), 383–497.
- 7 See Vincent Debiais, 'La tentation de Byzance. Réflexions sur les inscriptions byzantines vues de la Latinité', in *Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond. Methods – Projects – Case Studies*, ed. Andreas Rhoby (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), pp. 39–49.

Syria-Palestine, with the intention of understanding the deeper meaning of this particular *dispositif*. This paper is part of a larger investigation of the “mise en scène”, the iconic character of the inscriptions,<sup>8</sup> and the modalities of writing a name.<sup>9</sup>

## Proximity and Distance between Name and Body

The verb usually employed in English to describe the name placement and its relation to the figure is “to flank”. The text of the name “flanks” the portrait, so to speak. This figurative meaning connects directly with the body and evokes the text’s proximity to the pictured body. Indeed, making an intimate connection between name and body is certainly the essential point of this *dispositif*. But if we follow the etymology (the flanks are the sides of an animal or a person between the ribs and hip), the limitations of this verb become apparent. “Flank” is misleading, because, although in the case of saint Austremoine [Fig. 1] the name flanks the holy body, because it is centrally located at the midpoint of the mandorla, this is not the most common layout. Analysis of the 26 volumes of the *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale* shows that the head is the most usual contact point (74%), followed by the trunk (shoulders or the middle of the body: 15%) and the lower half of the body (in particular the knees: 6%). Other cases involve an unspecified location or a more general location, including the entire figure (5%).

French epigraphists prefer another term borrowed from poetic vocabulary: “caesura”.<sup>10</sup> This choice, rather than the word “cut”, “division” or “split”, implies a pause in a line. It is not a true rupture but a temporary break or a suspension in the graphic line of text, and one that also supports iconographic continuity. This change of word is also a change of gaze, which shifts the focus from the image to that of the text. If the image is indeed first in the process of artistic realization, and the name added afterwards, the result produced creates neither hierarchy nor temporal succession. The names of the biblical figures in the stained glass from Canterbury Cathedral (1178–1180) at the Met Cloisters are inscribed near their head or their shoulders. In the Noah window, his name, *No/e*, is in white letters, the same colour as his tunic, and forms a complete compositional unit with his flesh-coloured hair and face, and, more generally, with his entire body against the blue background [Fig. 3].

The position of the text in the image is particularly important for the viewer. Writing the name over the figure’s head or under the feet anticipates a top-down or bottom-up movement of the eyes, whereas placing the inscription near the head positions the words

8 To give a few examples: *Viewing inscriptions in the late antique and medieval world*, ed. Anthony Eastmond (New York: Cambridge University press, 2015); Debais, *La croisée des signes; Sign and Design: Script as Image in a Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*, ed. Brigitte Myriam Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016).

9 See the international French-Dutch project: MEDNAME: Inscribing Names in Medieval Sacred Spaces, joint project between University of Poitiers (CESCM) and Utrecht University, with the publication of the book, *Writing Names in Medieval Sacred Spaces. Inscriptions in the West, from the Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, dir. Janneke Raaijmakers (+), Elisa Pallottini and Estelle Ingrand-Varenne (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022).

10 This term appears in the 23<sup>rd</sup> volume of the *CIFM*, published in 2008 (e.g. n° 68, 69, 134). Vincent Debais was the first to use the expression.



in ostensive relation to the face, which is the mirror of the soul,<sup>11</sup> as well as the seat of identity and the self. The positioning of the text also places emphasis on the sensory organs, including the eyes and the mouth, which project the gaze and the voice. It is as if the saint, whose name is written, himself says, “I am he”, and as if the viewer in his or her turn invokes the saint saying, “It is he” whose name I see.<sup>12</sup> This proximity of the name to the face finds precedents in the writings of iconophile theologians. According to Nikephoros I, Patriarch of Constantinople at the beginning of the ninth century, in his refutation of a writing by the Emperor Constantine Copronymus on images, “the inscription seals the authenticity, advertising to us that the form and the person (πρόσωπον) are truly the ones of the model.”<sup>13</sup> The Greek word *prosopon*, a technical term in Christian theology signifying person, originally simply meant “face”.

The relationship between a sacred name and its image in this *dispositif* are different in the Byzantine East and the Latin West. In Western epigraphy, it is not enough for the image to be near the name, it has to touch it. In the Lamb of God painted in the crypt of Notre-Dame-la-Grande at Poitiers at the end of the eleventh century,<sup>14</sup> the names are very close to the halo, which encompasses the entire divine figure. Moreover, the caesura is not between the two words, but both words, *Agnus* and *Dei*, have been divided and distributed on each side (*Ag/nus De/i*) [Fig. 4]. In Byzantine epigraphy, however, it seems that the name does not need to be so close; it may even be graphically isolated. In the mosaic in the southwest vestibule of Hagia Sophia (Istanbul, tenth c.), representing Justinian offering a model of Hagia Sophia, Mary holding the Christ-child in her lap, and Constantine presenting the city of Constantinople, each word of the name of the Virgin Theotokos, *MP ΘΥ* for *M(ήτη)ρ Θ(εο)ῦ*, is distant from the figure and placed in a medallion, mirroring the halo of her head.<sup>15</sup> [Fig. 5] Each word is autonomous. The fact that her monograms resemble her halo reinforces this link between the name and the “face” of the person depicted.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the question of proximity and distance between name and body can be developed to include proxemic relationships of words in their spatial, iconographic, and material contexts. I borrow this terminology from Edward Hall, an American anthropologist who defined it in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, published in 1966, as relating to the observations and theories regarding the human use of space. For Hall, the hidden dimension is the cultural dimension. Hall’s study of nonverbal communication

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- 11 To quote Cicero, *De Oratore*, III, 22 (on Cicero and the invention of visual communication, see Fernand Delarue, ‘Cicéron et l’invention du regard’, *L’information littéraire*, 56 (2004), 32–41; on the activation of the senses during the performance of the liturgy in the Middle Ages, see Éric Palazzo, *L’invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l’art au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 2014).
- 12 See Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et peindre: essai sur le portrait iconique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 68–69.
- 13 Nikephoros I, *Antirrheticí*, I, 38, in *Patrologia Graeca* 100, col. 293.
- 14 *CIFM I-1, Poitou-Charentes: Ville de Poitiers*, ed. Robert Favreau and Jean Michaud (Poitiers-Paris: CESC, 1974) n° 18, pp. 17–18, pl. XII, fig. 20–22; *CIFM Hors-Série II, Inscriptions de Poitiers: Les inscriptions de Poitiers (fin VII<sup>e</sup>-début XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Une source pour l’histoire de la ville et de ses monuments, ed. Robert Favreau et al. (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2017) n° 52, pp. 81–82.
- 15 Robert S. Nelson, ‘Image and Inscription. Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion’, in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Liz James (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100–119 (pp. 102–103).
- 16 I would like to thank Brad Hostetler for this remark.

also concerns the effects of population density on behavior, communication, and social interaction. I believe that this concept can be fruitfully applied to medieval writing, as is demonstrated in three articles written by Brad Hostetler on the location of names on reliquaries.<sup>17</sup>

## The Break and the Weld

The fact that the name or the nominal expression has to be broken in the mosaic composition from St Sophia shows that the inscription is not merely an added layer, external to the image and exogenous, but shares the same surface, the golden background of the picture. Writing is a “composite medium”, which partakes of the image’s pictoriality and gesturality;<sup>18</sup> this shared nature can be seen in the ambiguity of the Greek verb “graphein,” meaning both to write and to draw, as some early Byzantine authors had noted.<sup>19</sup> Just as word and image both participate in the meaning of “graphein,” so too the labelling text and the labelled image are bound together in this medieval *dispositif* of the surface, which itself provides background for both writing and representation. The existence and character of the common background show that this kind of onomastic *dispositif*, when applied to flat images or relief sculptures, cannot be understood as being independent from the background. During their apogee in the Western world, these naming inscriptions were especially common in three media: gold and silver items, wall paintings, and stained-glass windows. I have found very few examples in sculpture from the same period, no doubt because the eleventh-thirteenth centuries are a period in which statuary was developing, with forms breaking away from the background, where the name would have been commonly engraved.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, from a graphical point, it was also during this period that the approach to writing in manuscripts evolved considerably, with new layouts and new paratextual tools (paragraph division, margin notes, index, tables, etc.). Works were divided, distinguished, segmented into units of meaning by means of visual devices, and this new organization of

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- 17 Brad Hostetler, ‘The Iconography of Text: The Placement of an Inscription on a Middle Byzantine Reliquary’, *Eastern Christian Art* 8 (2011), 49–55; Brad Hostetler, ‘The Limburg Staurotheke: A Reassessment’, *Anthanos* 30 (2012), 7–13; Brad Hostetler, ‘Towards a Typology for the Placement of Names on Works of Art’, in *Inscribing Texts in Byzantium: continuities and transformations: papers from the Forty-Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Ida Toth and Marc D. Lauxtermann (London/New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), pp. 267–290.
- 18 Anne-Marie Christin, *L’invention de la figure* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), p. 28. In her studies, Anne-Marie Christin focuses on the iconicity of script, with the idea that writing should be emancipated from its subjection to speech: she argues that the legible originated from the visible, not from a linguistic mode of communication. See Anne-Marie Christin, *L’Image écrite ou la déraison graphique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009; first edition 1995).
- 19 For instance, a seventh-century author, Stephanus of Bosra, in a passage inspired by John Damascene, plays on the ambivalence of the verb *graphein* when he writes: *Eikṓn autḗ ēstīn ὄνομα καὶ ἐστίν τοῦ ἐν αὐτῇ ὁμοίωσις* (The icon indeed is the name and likeness of the one inscribed therein) (*Patrologia Graeca* 94, 1376 B), quoted by Dagron, *Décrire et peindre*, p. 67; see also Gilbert Dagron, ‘Mots, images, icônes’, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 44 (1991), 151–168, (p. 160).
- 20 On the difference in the understanding of the background in Romanesque and Gothic sculpture, see Jean-Claude Bonne, *L’art roman de face et de profil. Le tympan de Conques* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1985), p. 145.



reading replaced the *ruminatio* of the early Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the writing was no longer *scriptio continua*; words were now being separated by spacing.<sup>22</sup> Instead of blank space, the inscriptions marked the boundaries of words or graphic sequences with punctuation marks (such as one, two, three vertical dots), which were used as word-dividers to increase the legibility of the text. The appearance of this kind of graphic sequence can be dated to the period between the eleventh century and the first half of the twelfth century. This punctuation habit then took off in the second half of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> The word was thus clearly thought of as a distinct unit of writing, an atomic nucleus, unbreakable; the fact that it is found divided in epigraphic contexts is therefore all the more important.<sup>24</sup>

The most important difference between the Byzantine and Latin examples of these labeling inscriptions is in the direction of the writing, which has consequences for the perception of the whole. The West preferred text laid out horizontally, whereas Byzantium preferred vertical lines of text. As Cyril Mango explained, “in the religious sphere, i.e. in church decorations and icons, the device of writing names in vertical columns (*kionedon*), possibly inspired by Syriac, comes into use by the sixth century (and remains standard thereafter).”<sup>25</sup> The tenth-century Limburg *staurotheca*, specifically the sliding lid of the box, is a good example with subtle variations.<sup>26</sup> Covered in gilded silver and lavishly decorated with gemstones, it features nine enamel panels. The top and bottom panels portray the twelve apostles, arranged two by two. The article *ho* and the adjective *hagios* are inscribed vertically to the left of each figure; the name is inscribed in the same way to the right side. Some characters appear together in the same line (for instance: *PI* in *hagios*, *TP* in *Petros*, etc.), and the adjective *hagios* is occasionally abbreviated when the saint has an epithet. In the middle panel is Christ, accompanied by John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary, themselves surrounded by Gabriel and Michael. The names of Christ and Mary are inscribed horizontally with the *nomina sacra*. The names of the archangels are given without adjective, in a mix of horizontal and vertical inscriptions. [Fig. 6]

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- 21 Dominique Poirel, ‘*Machina universitatis*: les mutations du texte aux XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles’, in *Qu’est-ce que nommer?*, pp. 41–53; Pierre Chastang, ‘L’archéologie du texte médiéval. Autour de travaux récents sur l’écrit au Moyen Âge’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 63, n° 2 (2008), 245–269; Jacqueline Hamesse, ‘Le modèle scolastique de la lecture’, in *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Paris: Seuil, 1997), pp. 125–145.
- 22 See the pioneering research of Malcolm B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect. An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar press, 1992), and Paul Saenger, *Space between Words. The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- 23 Estelle Ingrand-Varenne, ‘Trois petits points: L’interponctuation dans les inscriptions médiévales’, in *Ponctuer l’œuvre médiévale: des signes au sens*, ed. Valérie Fasseur et al. (Genève: Droz, 2016), pp. 215–232.
- 24 On the delimitation of words and the sequencing of the writing line, see Nina Catach, ‘Les signes graphiques du mot à travers l’histoire’, *Langue française*, 119 (1998), 10–23.
- 25 Cyril Mango, ‘Byzantine Epigraphy (4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries)’, in *Paleographia e Codicologia Greca: atti del II colloquio internazionale (Berlino-Wolfenbüttel, 17–21 ottobre 1983)*, ed. Dieter Harlfinger et al. (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’orso, 1991), I, 235–249, p. 243.
- 26 This reliquary of the True Cross is currently housed in the cathedral treasury of Limburg an der Lahn in Germany. It was produced between 968 and 985. See Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung. II, Byzantinische Epigramme auf Ikonen und Objekten der Kleinkunst. Nebst Addenda zu Band I “Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken”* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 163–165 (with further bibliography).

In the twelfth-century decoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the column paintings represent twenty-nine figures of saints (biblical figures, apostles and evangelists, bishops, deacons, soldier-saints, ascetics), each standing in its own frame, reflecting the medieval concept of the saint as a pillar of the church.<sup>27</sup> The twelfth-century inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and even Syriac on the wall-mosaics and the painted marble columns are an almost unique case showing the close co-operation between the Byzantine authorities (Manuel I Komnenos, emperor 1143–1180), Latin rulers (Amalric, king of Jerusalem 1163–1174), and the bishop of Bethlehem (Ralph, 1154–1174), reflecting a desire for better unity between the churches. In this “Byzantine-Latin joint venture” to use Michele Bacci’s expression,<sup>28</sup> most of the representations have bilingual inscriptions: names appear in both Greek and Latin, with various layouts. The name of saint Vincent shows clearly the shared requirement for the broken name (the adjective ‘saint’ to the left of the halo, and the name ‘Vincent’ to the right), and at the same time two different ways of writing it. [Fig. 7a et b] Nevertheless, this Greek format was also at times employed with the Latin alphabet, for example for the names of the 144 saints in the mosaics of the Monreale Cathedral (Sicily, twelfth century), where the mosaics themselves combine Eastern and Western traditions.<sup>29</sup>

A further case of Greek names featuring in a Latin context can be found in the Hospitaller church of Abu Gosh in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. This church preserves the most complete set of wall paintings to survive from the Latin Kingdom. Commissioned by the Hospitallers from Byzantine artists, these paintings must have been executed in the last two decades of the reign of Manuel I Komnenos. Inscriptions are in Latin and Greek, as in the name of St John the Baptist painted on a pillar next to the saint’s representation: Ὁ ἅ(γιος) Ἰω(άννης) ὁ Προδρόμος.<sup>30</sup> Horizontal pairs of letters organized in vertical columns (for example, the *nomina sacra* Jesus Christ and Mother of God) are also employed in Latin inscriptions [Fig. 8]. The writing direction (from top to bottom or from left to right) may lead to different relationships to the image and different visual perceptions. For example, horizontal and vertical texts meet perpendicularly and form a cross, as in the examples of the Saint Calminius [Fig. 1] reliquary and the stained glass from Canterbury Cathedral [Fig. 3]. The vertical text and the image of the figure are parallel, as in the Limburg staurotheca. The columnar text, inscribed along each side of the columnar body, seems to frame the picture literally and figuratively, in order to structure the viewer’s reception. The figure embodies the meaning of the name, alleviating anonymity, cultivating familiarity

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- 27 Gustav Kühnel, *Wall painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1988), p. 9.
- 28 Michele Bacci, *The mystic cave: a history of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem* (Brno: Masaryk University, Roma: Viella, 2017), p. 136; Bianca and Gustav Kühnel, *The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem: the crusader lining of an early Christian basilica* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2019).
- 29 See Ernst Kitzinger, *I mosaici di Monreale* (Palermo: Flaccovio Editore, 1991); Sulamith Brodbeck, *Les saints de la cathédrale de Monreale en Sicile. Iconographie, hagiographie et pouvoir royal à la fin du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2010).
- 30 On these paintings, see: *L’église d’Abu Gosh: 850 ans de regards sur les fresques d’une église franque en Terre sainte*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Delzant (Paris: Tohubohu éditions/Archimbaud éditeur, 2018); Rachel Ouizemann, ‘Between conservation and restoration: the wall paintings in the church of the Crusaders in Abu Gosh and the authentication of the site as Emmaus’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 112 (2019), 935–958; and Gil Fishhof, ‘The Meanings of Byzantium: The Church of Abu-Ghosh (Emmaus) and the Meanings of Byzantine Pictorial Language in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem’, *Convivium*, 7, iss. 2 (2020), 15–34.



and intimacy with the viewer, and giving form and expression to the thoughts and the prayers of the believer.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the orientation of text and image, both Latin and Greek inscriptions connect with the image in the *dispositif* of the surface. This intersection or frame forms a new iconic unit: a “mixtio”, to quote Vincent Debiais.<sup>32</sup> After the break comes the weld. The proximity of text to the body, particularly to the sacred body, adds a special texture and a corporeal dimension to the name, even if the point of contact of text and image is precisely localized. The name embraces the body in a general way and verbally incorporates the figure represented. This dismembering bisection of the name text is paradoxically the means of its attachment to the image that asserts the indivisibility of the two. This recalls the thinking of Theodore of Stoudios, a Byzantine iconophile author, who stressed that one could not separate the veneration of the inscription and the image, just as one could not distinguish between a man and his name.<sup>33</sup>

## The Meaning of the Divided Name

In Byzantium, the name/image *dispositif* is not a new scheme invented after Iconoclasm. It had been used for sixth–seventh-century inscriptions. Its origin may be found in the placement of the Greek letters alpha and omega in Christian Antiquity. These symbols accompanied the Chrismon (Chi-Rho) on oil lamps and in representations of Christ in the fourth-century catacombs in Rome (for example, in the Catacombs of Commodilla they flank the bearded Christ).<sup>34</sup> Alpha and Omega are not names, but in the Book of Revelation (1.8; 21.6; 22.13), they metaphorize the nature and identity of Christ, as the beginning and the end of all things. The incorporation of these letters in the Chrismon, merging them with Christ’s monogram, demonstrates that they participate onomastically in the definition of Christ’s complex nature.<sup>35</sup>

The “interrupted” format for split naming inscriptions appears to have originated in religious culture. This is especially pertinent to the theological argument that developed in Byzantine culture about the function of the name on the icon. From the eighth century, the idea spread that the images of saints are sanctified by their names, which united them under a prototype: the designation of the image by its holy name made it

31 On the other hand, the anonymity of a representation could increase its ‘operativity’, because the worshipper invoked several saints. See Henry Maguire, ‘Eufrosius and friends. On Names and Their Absence in Byzantine Art’, in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Liz James (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 139–160.

32 Debiais, *La croisée des signes*, pp. 250–254.

33 Theodore of Stoudios, *Antirrhētikos* I, 14, in *Patrologia Graeca* 99, col. 345; see the translation by C. P. Roth: *St Theodore the Studite, On the holy icons* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981), pp. 34–35.

34 We can see others examples in the wall paintings of the catacombs of Marcellinus and Peter. See *Les catacombes chrétiennes de Rome: Origine, développement, décor, inscriptions*, ed. Vincenzo Ficocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti, Danilo Mazzoleni (Regensburg: Schnell und Steiner, 1999).

35 See Vincent Debiais, ‘From Christ’s Monogram to God’s Presence. An Epigraphic Contribution to the Study of Chrismons in Romanesque Sculpture’, in *Sign and Design: Script as Image in a Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*, ed. Brigitte Myriam Bedos-Rezak and Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016), pp. 135–151; Peter Scott Brown, ‘The Chrismon and the Liturgy of Dedication in Romanesque Sculpture’, *Gesta*, 56.2 (2017), 199–223.

sacred, rendering a prayer of consecration unnecessary.<sup>36</sup> The name inscribed on a cult image is a *nomen sacrum*; it has an intrinsic sacredness. While I do not claim that this consecration is present explicitly in the format of the divided name, it is beyond doubt that the inscription participates in its visibility. To a certain extent, it is a new formulation of the “*nomina sacra*” (here extended to the saints), not characterized by abbreviation but by the same intention to express religious reverence by visually setting the words apart by the way that they are written.<sup>37</sup> We must also bear in mind the status of the name in Christian thought during the Middle Ages. The act of naming was crucial in making something exist, as seen in one of the foundational linguistic events: the naming of animals by Adam as recounted in Genesis 2.19–20. Within this rich biblical tradition, as well as in Greek theological thought, the name was considered to be a sign, an index and an emblem; it had the capacity to designate, to show, to represent, and, at times, to replace what it referred to.<sup>38</sup>

How to split the name? A study of the different divisions of Mary’s name in French inscriptions has demonstrated that the solutions vary: SC/A MARIA,<sup>39</sup> SCA/MARIA,<sup>40</sup> S MA/RIA or MA/RIA<sup>41</sup> (the most frequently used); S MAR/IA,<sup>42</sup> S/MA RI/A.<sup>43</sup> [Fig. 9] Even if the syllabic distribution is recurring, the break can be almost anywhere in the word. It seems to be mainly a question of graphic balance and not a linguistic problem. But as we saw in the case of the Limburg *staurotheca*, the division of the inscribed names emphasizes human and divine aspects. The adjective *hagios/hagia*, saint, on one side of the image, specifies the figure’s celestial aspect, and the name on the other side refers to his/her earthly identity and life. The signs indicating Christ translate the inseparable union of natural, human and divine, in the Incarnation; *IC* refers to the visible hypostasis,

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- 36 For Epiphanius the Deacon, “Many of the sacred things which we have at our disposal do not need a prayer of sanctification, since their name itself says that they are all-sacred and full of grace ... In the same way, when we signify an icon with a name, we transfer the honor (*sic*) to the prototype; and by embracing it and offering to it the veneration of honor, we share in the sanctification” (Mansi, *Collectio*, vol. 13, 269; translation in D. J. Sahas, *Icon and logos: sources in eighth-century iconoclasm: an annotated translation of the sixth session of the seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicea, 787), containing the definition of the Council of Constantinople (754) and its refutation, and the definition of the seven ecumenical council* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 99. The images are sanctified by the signification of the name that unites them to the prototype. This function of the inscription is confirmed just after 815 by the Patriarch Nikephoros: *Antirrheticus* III, 54, in *Patrologia Graeca* 100, col. 477D–480A). See the analysis of Jean-Marie Santerre, ‘La parole, le texte et l’image selon les auteurs byzantins des époques iconoclaste et posticonoclaste’, *Testo e immagine nell’alto Medioevo* (Spolète: Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo 41, 1994), pp. 202–203.
- 37 Larry W. Hurtado, ‘The Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*: A Proposal’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117 no. 4 (1998), 655–673; Ludwig Traube, *Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung* (München: Beck, 1907).
- 38 See *Writing Names in Medieval Sacred Spaces*, dir. Janneke Raaijmakers (†) et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022).
- 39 *CIFM* 24, 196, pp. 205–206 (stained glass with the miracles of the Virgin, Mans Cathedral, c. 1235).
- 40 *CIFM* 17, Isère 18, pp. 44–45, pl. XIV, fig. 29–31 (tympanum of the church Saint-Alban-du-Rhône, first half of the twelfth c.).
- 41 *CIFM* II, Haute-Vienne 3, p. 91, pl. XX, fig. 39–40 (enamelled casket in the church of Bellac, c. 1200); *CIFM* 23, 134, pp. 132–133 (wall paintings with the story of the Virgin Mary in the church Notre-Dame de Pouzauges, Vendée); *CIFM* 18, Puy-de-Dôme 74, pp. 224–228, pl. CXX–CXXVI, fig. 257–270 (reliquary of Saint-Calmine in the church Saint-Pierre de Mozac, end of the twelfth c.).
- 42 Metropolitan Museum, Prov: Made in Meuse Valley, Netherlands, champlevé enamel.
- 43 *L’Œuvre de Limoges. Émaux limousins du Moyen Âge*, ed. Élisabeth Taburet-Delahaye et al. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995), n° 1, pp. 68–70 (portable altar of Conques abbey).



XC indicates the presence of the divinity.<sup>44</sup> As Vincent Debiais explained in his study of inscriptions and images, the name allows for the articulation. It is one of its two functions: distinction (it separates from the rest) and articulation (it allows for a double verbalisation with the creator and the rest of the creatures).<sup>45</sup> Anthropological studies on the proper name have indeed shown that naming has a distinctive and classifying function, while at the same time being an individual marker made for collective purposes.<sup>46</sup> In this way, the inscribed name binds the icon to the prototype.

In my view, the convention of the divided name in Latin epigraphy constitutes a graphical means of showing that the name contains the being. Understood in this way, it is a graphical translation or a materialization of an etymological thought. Etymology here is not to be understood in the postmodern sense, as a search for the origin of words in the sense of following the evolution of a word from its oldest attested case, or filiations. According to Claude Buridant, the concept of etymology in the Middle Ages presents a broad spectrum and can be defined by two fundamental layers of meaning: the first is the philological or grammatical, that of onomastic or translational interpretation, derivation and composition; the second is the ontological, more precisely rhetorical: that of interpretation.<sup>47</sup> This ontological etymology, which reveals the fundamental connection between signs and things or beings, becomes the etymology itself. For Isidore of Seville and his *Etymologiae* at the beginning of the seventh century, merging antique and biblical thought, etymology is a hermeneutics of the reality, leading from linguistics to ontology, from word to existence. This concept describes precisely the graphic, syntactic, and symbolic functions of the *dispositif* of the divided name. In the etymological method, as in the etymologies of saintly names in the *Golden Legend*,<sup>48</sup> the name is, in a sense, broken into parts, in order to understand what is inside. It is the same thing here. The broken name goes beyond the question of identification or even of identity. At its heart is the notion of being, thus we can speak of it as an ontological device.

## Conclusion

In all written cultures, it seems that a person's name is distinguished from other names by visual specificities particular to writing: graphic capitalisation (the use of capital letters in alphabetic culture), or spatial isotopies (inscription of the name in privileged margins of

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44 But for theologians — iconophiles and iconoclasts — the name Christ signifies the presence of both the divine and human natures in Jesus. So it is not a real distinction. See Boston, 'The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts', p. 41; Charles Barber, 'Neophytus Prodromenus on epigraphy', in *Theologisches Wissen und die Kunst: Festschrift Martin Büchsel*, ed. R. Müller et al. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2015), pp. 211–225.

45 See Debiais, *La croisée des signes*, p. 27.

46 *L'écriture du nom propre*, ed. Anne-Marie Christin (Paris/Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1998), in particular the contribution by Anne-Marie Christin, pp. 7–8.

47 Claude Buridant, 'Les paramètres de l'étymologie médiévale', *L'étymologie de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, ed. Claude Buridant et al. (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), pp. 18–20.

48 Each legend begins with an etymology evoking the relationship between the name of the saint and their extraordinary destiny. See: Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea*, edizione critica a cura di Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, 2a edizione rivista dall'autore, (Firenze: Sismel/Ed. del Galluzzo, 1998).

the text, in its line spacing, such as the “surname”).<sup>49</sup> The hybrid production of the name’s positioning on each side of a figure is one of these graphical specificities, which shows the generative power of the letter as a graphic entity with spatial and plastic potential. The pervasive convention of the divided name in medieval epigraphy constitutes “nonverbal visual evidence,” — to use the expression of Anthony Eastmond<sup>50</sup> — that carries meanings beyond those conveyed by its content. The foundational act of naming in medieval thought is enhanced and extended by the graphic format of the inscription, which aims toward a kind of semiotic summary of the signified. Most frequently, the convention pertains only to holy names, and it was a privileged means of expressing visually and materially the sanctity or the divinity of its subject. The name is no longer juxtaposed to or co-existing with the image, but part of the sign that results from their union in an articulation of the sacred.

This short study of a common *dispositif* has also pointed to connections between Byzantine and Latin epigraphy, even if the status of the name and image differed between the two worlds. This overview invites further graphical comparisons between the Western and Byzantine worlds, in order to explore the contacts, interactions, and possible competition between writing traditions of the different cultures,<sup>51</sup> especially in the shared space of the Holy Land.<sup>52</sup>

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49 *L'écriture du nom propre*, in particular the presentation of Anne-Marie Christin, p. 15.

50 Eastmond, *Viewing inscriptions in the late antique and medieval world*, Introduction pp. 1–9.

51 See e.g. the recent dissertation of Desi Marangon, ‘Scrivere alla greca a Venezia: alfabeti ibridi e identità a confronto (secoli XI–XV)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova, 2020).

52 This aspect will be one of the goals of an ERC Starting Grant project: GRAPH-EAST, Latin as an Alien Script in the Medieval Latin East (2021–2026), led by E. Ingrand-Varenne.



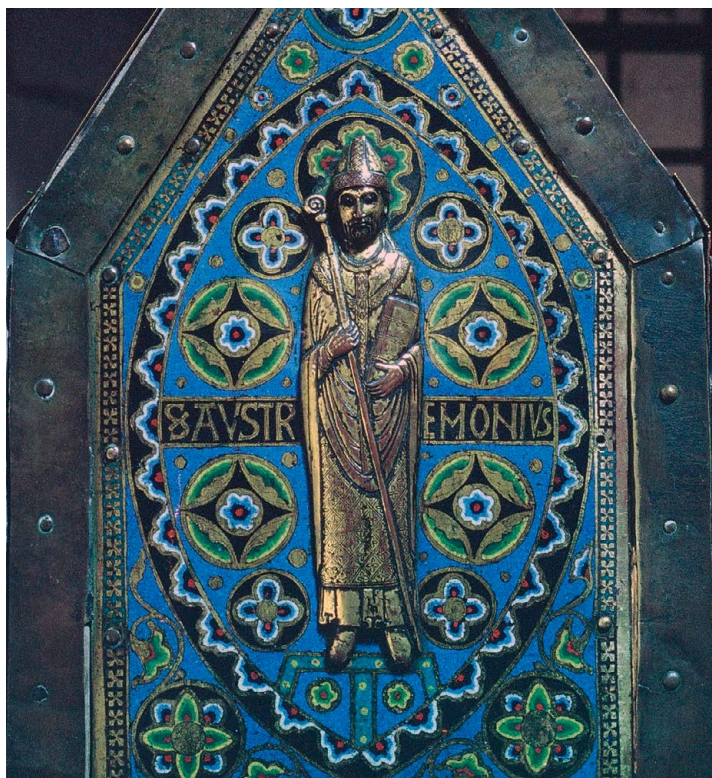


Fig. 1. Saint Austremonius on the Saint Calminius Reliquary, twelfth-century chasse-form reliquary, treasury of Mozac Abbey. Image: Photothèque of the CESC-M-Leonet-Bastien



Fig. 2. The Christ Pantocrator of the deesis mosaic (1261), in the upper south gallery of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne





Fig. 3. Stained glass from Canterbury Cathedral at the Met Cloisters (1178–1180) depicting Noah. Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne



Fig. 4. Lamb of God painted in the crypt of Notre-Dame-la-Grande at Poitiers at the end of the eleventh century. Image: Jean-Pierre Brouard/CIFM-CESCM



Fig. 5. Mosaic in the southwest vestibule of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul representing Mary and Christ, Justinian and Constantine (10<sup>th</sup> c.). Image: Andreas Rhoby





Fig. 6. Detail of the Limburg staurotheca (10<sup>th</sup> c.). Image: Andreas Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Fresken*, fig. 26



Fig. 7a and 7b. Saint Vincent painted on a column in the Nativity church of Bethlehem with his name in Greek and in Latin (third quarter of the twelfth century). Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne





Fig. 8. John the Baptist painted on a pillar in the Hospitaller church of Abu Gosh in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (c. 1170). Image: Estelle Ingrand-Varenne



Fig. 9. The Virgin Mary on the Saint Calminius Reliquary, twelfth-century chasse-form reliquary, treasury of Mozac Abbey. Image: Photothèque of the CESCO-Leonet-Bastien

